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BENVENUTO CELLINI'S *VITA*:
THE ART OF CASTING A RENAISSANCE MAN

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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In examining Benvenuto Cellini's *Vita*, it was my objective to demonstrate that the artist resolutely set out to 'cast' his own life as the model of the consummate Renaissance man. An essential goal of Cellini's literary self-portrait was to create a demonstration piece of the artist's proficiency as a *letterato*. Previous studies of Cellini's autobiography have generally accepted at face value the author's claim to have dictated the *Vita* to a young boy while working in his *bottega*. Acceptance of this declaration has led to an underestimation of the author's level of preparation and inventiveness. It was concluded that Cellini's dictation claim was part of a narrative strategy with at least two objectives: 1) to demonstrate mastery of the Castiglionesque art of *sprezzatura* by depicting the artist as one who could nonchalantly recount the story of his life while simultaneously creating works of art; and 2) to circumvent the harsh criticism of those, like Vincenzo Borghini, who publicly derided him for his efforts to prove himself as a *letterato*.

Using an interdisciplinary approach that included the studies of Renaissance historians, art historians and literary critics, this study found that Cellini incorporated many of the same attributes ascribed to Castiglione's *perfetto cortegiano* in the

fashioning of his own Renaissance man in the *Vita*. It was also concluded that Benedetto Varchi's *Lezzioni* of 1547, particularly his treatment of the *ottimo artista*, played a significant role both in shaping Cellini's ideas about his artistic identity, as well as in encouraging the artist to prove his skills as a writer.

This study also examined some of the adaptations of Cellini's *Vita* in order to determine which qualities of the original made it so attractive to playwrights and film directors who decided to remake Cellini's autobiography for the stage and screen. It was determined that the adaptations that sought to exploit the comic elements of Cellini's *Vita* tended to be the most successful. These American adaptations of the 1920's and 1930's also benefited from the popular fascination with the Italian Renaissance that is revealed in the travel writing of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

DEDICATION

For Rich and Emma

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I.

GENESIS AND INTRIGUE SURROUNDING A TROUBLED *VITA***I.1 Constructing a New Identity: The Artist as *letterato***

In the recent past, Cellini scholarship has been greatly enriched by the dozens of papers that have been presented at conferences held in Europe and the United States to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the artist's birth on November 3rd, 2000.¹ The crowning moment of this renewed interest was the unveiling of Cellini's restored bronze masterpiece, the *Perseus*, in the Loggia dei Lanzi in the summer of 2000. Uncertain whether his *Vita* would ever be published after his death, Cellini would have marveled at all of the international attention being paid to a work that, not unlike its author, had experienced its own *vita travagliata*.² Cellini would have been no doubt equally surprised to learn that it took close to 300 years since the book's publication for someone to question the author's assertion that he dictated his *Vita* to a young boy while creating other works of art in his shop. Paolo Rossi offers a very convincing argument that both the sheer magnitude of the work and the relatively pristine condition of the original manuscript with respect to significant marginal corrections to the text leave little room for doubt that the original manuscript in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana was the

¹ The resurgence of Cellini scholarship had already begun several decades earlier with the studies that commemorated the 400th anniversary of Cellini's death in 1971. Notable among these studies is the meticulous study of Maria Luisa Altieri Biagi, "La *Vita* del Cellini. Temi, termini, sintagmi," in *Convegno sul tema: Benvenuto Cellini artista e scrittore* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1972) 61-163; the essay of Nino Borsellino, "Cellini scrittore," in *Convegno sul tema* 17-31; and the monograph by Dino S. Cervigni, *The Vita of Benvenuto Cellini: Literary Tradition and Genre* (Ravenna: Longo, 1979), the first of its kind in English to situate Cellini's *Vita* in the context of Italian literary traditions.

² For a detailed account of the mysterious history of the *Vita* from the original manuscript to the *editio princeps* in 1728, see Orazio Bacci, *Vita di Benvenuto Cellini. Testo critico con introduzione e note storiche* (Florence: Sansoni, 1901) ix-lxxxi. An as yet unpublished paper delivered by Thomas Willette at the *Renaissance Society of America* conference held in Florence in 2000 argues for an original publication date in Naples in 1730.

copy intended for the printer, the final draft or *bella copia*.³ According to Rossi, there likely would have been at least one other lost or destroyed draft that the artist worked on before having it transcribed by the boy after the author's corrections had been incorporated into the manuscript. In short, by creating the image of Cellini-artist as the consummate multi-tasker,⁴ capable of forging a remarkable literary work while he chiseled away at various figurative works of art in his shop, Cellini-narrator successfully embodies the art of *sprezzatura* with his ostensibly dictated *Vita*.⁵

Once we accept the use of dictation as a narrative strategy that the author employs rather than his actual writing method, the question of the *Vita*'s literariness takes on another new dimension. In keeping with those scholars who have advanced the study of Cellini as a self-reflective writer rooted in literary tradition,⁶ as opposed to the intriguing and enduring 18th and 19th century view of the artist as one who "ha prima scritto che pensato,"⁷ the present study examines the artist as a *letterato* who very deliberately and painstakingly set out to forge a portrait of himself as the quintessential Renaissance Man.

³ See Paolo L. Rossi, "Sprezzatura, Patronage, and Fate: Benvenuto Cellini and the World of Words" in *Vasari's Florence, Artists and Literati at the Medicean Court*, ed. Philip Jacks (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 1998) 55-69, especially 57.

⁴ For an earlier example of a 'multi-tasker' who dictated while doing other things, see Plutarch, *The Life of Julius Caesar*, (London, 1919), *Bill Thayer's Web Site*, ed. Bill Thayer, Dec. 2008, U of Chicago, 5 Dec. 2008 <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Caesar*.html>. For further discussion of Julius Caesar's "amazing abilities" in dictating and a detailed examination of dictation in antiquity, see E. Randolph Richards, "Secretaries in the First-Century World," *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004) 59-93.

⁵ See Rossi 57-59. Altieri Biagi had already challenged the perception of apparent spontaneity in the *Vita* 25 years earlier, especially 61-2. Victoria Gardner Coates also discusses the perceived spontaneity issue in "Cellini's *Bust of Cosimo I* and *Vita*: Parallels Between Renaissance Artistic and Literary Portraiture," *Benvenuto Cellini: Sculptor, Goldsmith, Writer*, eds. Margaret A. Gallucci and Paolo L. Rossi (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 2004) 148-168, especially 159.

⁶ For this view with emphasis on varying traditions, see esp. Cervigni, Altieri Biagi, Borsellino, Mario Pomilio, "Gusto episodico e coscienza letteraria nella *Vita* di Benvenuto Cellini," *Convivium* 5 (1951): 667-725; Bruno Maier, *Umanità e stile di Benvenuto Cellini scrittore* (Milano: Trevisini, 1952); Jonathan Goldberg, "Cellini's *Vita* and the conventions of early autobiography," *Modern Language Notes* 89 (1974): 71-83; Marziano Guglielminetti, *Memoria e Scrittura: L'autobiografia da Dante a Cellini* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977) and Enrico Carrara, "Manierismo letterario in Benvenuto Cellini," *Studj romanzi* 19 (1928): 171-200.

⁷ See Giuseppe Baretti in *La Frusta Letteraria*, No. 8, January 15, 1764, as quoted in Altieri Biagi 62, n. 4.

Admittedly, the use of this rather hackneyed term these days is analogous to walking through a minefield.⁸ But to take pains to avoid its use seems unnecessarily apologetic given that the group of artists generally accepted as the most prominent representatives of this expression remains unchanged for over five centuries, in large measure due to the tales told about them by Giorgio Vasari.⁹ And while it is important to recognize the fictional elements that inhabit both the *Vite* of Vasari and the *Vita* of Cellini, it is equally important to acknowledge that both of these works represent a “lively and faithful representation” of the artists and their times.¹⁰ There has been a tendency in Cellini scholarship to overextend (alla Cellini?) one’s position regarding the relative verisimilitude or fictiveness of the autobiography; to view the *Vita* as either “a factual record punctuated by passages of fantasy”¹¹ or as a prototype of the modern novel, “a creative and fictional work in that the author is not bound by objective truth, but can

⁸ Randolph Starn, “A Postmodern Renaissance,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 60 (2007): 1-24, especially 3 and 19: “It is true that academic books, reviews, and articles with *Renaissance* in their titles regularly disavow or ignore the “R-word” altogether. [...] We have our work cut out for us these days, when Donald Trump is supposed to be a Renaissance man and Paris Hilton a Renaissance woman.”

⁹ See Rona Goffen, *Renaissance Rivals: Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian* (2002; New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2005) 25: “If sixteenth-century Italians were to come back to life today, they would discover that history has vindicated their judgment. We still venerate the same masters as they did, notably Leonardo, Raphael, Titian, and Michelangelo. We still rely on the same source for much of our information, namely, Vasari’s *Lives*. And we still call their era by the name that they themselves used: Renaissance, *Rinascita* in Italian, that is, “rebirth,” alluding to the rebirth of classical civilization.”

¹⁰ See Thomas F. Mayer and D.R. Woolf, introduction, *The Rhetorics of Life-Writing in Early Modern Europe: Forms of Biography from Cassandra Fedele to Louis XIV*, eds. Thomas F. Mayer and D.R. Woolf (Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 1995) 1-37. Mayer and Woolf cite Francis Bacon’s *De augmentis scientiarum* in their framing of their Introduction to this collection of essays: “Lives, if they be well and carefully written (for I do not speak of elegies and barren commemorations of that sort), propounding to themselves a single person as their subject, in whom actions both trifling and important, great and small, public and private, must needs be united and mingled, certainly contain a more lively and faithful representation of things [than in chronicles], and one which you may more safely and happily take for example in another case.” (1) Particularly in the last ten to twenty years, critical interest in autobiography and other forms of “life-writing” has led to a reframing of the “fact vs. fiction” debate in the study of this genre. See also Kathleen Comerford, rev. of *The Rhetorics of Life-Writing in Early Modern Europe: Forms of Biography from Cassandra Fedele to Louis IV*, eds. Thomas F. Mayer and D.R. Woolf, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27 (1996): 943-946: “Now that historians recognize this dimension of fiction in biography, the essays tell the reader, they must find new ways, or at least modified ways, of using narratives as historical sources. Rather than assume that lives are compromised and cannot be used to establish names, dates, and places, historians should instead use them differently, as something between history and novel.” (943)

¹¹ See John Pope-Hennessy in *Cellini* (New York: Abbeville, 1985) 13.

rearrange, dramatize, and select his life events.”¹² It is one of the aims of this study to demonstrate that the truth lies somewhere in the middle of these two camps, in the area delineated by Angelo Mazzocco:

I believe that Cellini conceived of the history of his life in much the same fashion as the historians of the Renaissance construed the history of Florence. He selected those facts which accentuated his bravura just as Renaissance historians utilized only those things which they considered worthy of the honor of Florence. Like Renaissance historians, Cellini dramatized and sometimes even altered historical facts. He thus produced an autobiographical account which, like the histories of the Renaissance, is partial and exaggerated but which, like those histories, is nevertheless rooted in historical reality.¹³

In support of Mazzocco’s contention regarding the *Vita*’s affinity with Renaissance historiography are Cellini’s own references to texts like Giovanni Villani’s *Cronache* in the *Vita*.¹⁴ Even more telling are the artist’s protestations during various digressions that his purpose is *not* to write a chronicle.¹⁵ But the process of “self-idealization” at work in Cellini’s *Vita*¹⁶ is also influenced by Renaissance artistic principles; in particular, the art of using “alcuna discrezione,” which derives from classical sources:

¹² Cervigni 88-89.

¹³ Angelo Mazzocco, rev. of *The “Vita” of Benvenuto Cellini: Literary Tradition and Genre*, by Dino S. Cervigni, *Italica* 59 (1982): 350-354. Mazzocco maintains that “Cervigni’s emphasis on the novelistic character of the *Vita* causes him to misconstrue the nature of Renaissance historiography.” And while Cervigni acknowledges the concept that Renaissance historians viewed history as a branch of rhetoric and that this concept can also be applied to autobiography, Mazzocco argues that the “emphasis on rhetorical devices does not make their histories empty rhetorical accounts laden with fictional overtones.” (353)

¹⁴ Benvenuto Cellini, *La Vita*, ed. Lorenzo Bellotto (Parma: Guanda, 1996) 10 and 422. I will be using Bellotto’s new critical edition for all quotations taken from the *Vita*. I have chosen to follow Bellotto’s edition when citing the *Vita*, without modifying what would be considered grammatical or spelling errors according to 20th or 21st century usage. I have substituted a space for Bellotto’s raised dot in order to avoid unwanted mutations in the conversion process (es.: ‘a-ffare’ becomes ‘a ffare’). I have also added “[sic]” in certain instances to indicate a Cellinian spelling as opposed to a typographical error, except in frequently repeated cases such as the masculine plural possessive ‘mia’ for ‘miei’ or ‘dua’ for ‘due.’

¹⁵ Cellini 584 (II, xLi): “E perché io non mi voglio curare di scrivere in questa mia Vita cose che s’appartengono a quelli che scrivano le cronache, però ho lasciato indietro la venuta dello Imperadore con il suo grande esercito, et il Re con tutto il suo sforzo armato.”

¹⁶ Mazzocco 351-352.

E per dichiarare più ampiamente questa materia, devemo sapere che i dipintori, se bene nel ritrarre dal naturale debbono imitare la natura e sprimere il vero quanto più sanno, possono nondimeno, anzi debbono, come ancora i poeti, usare *alcuna discrezione*; onde molto fu lodata la prudenza d'Apelle, il quale, devendo ritrarre Antigono, che era cieco da uno occhio, diede tal sito alla figura, che ascose quell'occhio di maniera che non si poteva vedere; la qual cosa non arebbe potuto fare uno scultore in tutto rilievo. E quelli che dipinsero Pericle, perché egli aveva il capo aguzzo e, come noi diciamo, alla genovese, lo dipignevano coll'elmetto in testa, il che arebbero potuto fare gli scultori medesimamente. [...] Le quali discrezioni, accortezze, industrie et accidenti sono comuni, come ne mostrano gli esempi, così agli scultori come a' pittori.¹⁷

Whether we choose to use the term 'self-idealization,' 'self-fashioning' or 'self-aggrandizement,' Cellini's aim of representing himself as an ideal or an exemplum is fundamental to the *Vita*, notwithstanding the fact that Cellini's model is not steeped in exactly the same classical terms as the ideal self of Petrarch or Alberti.¹⁸ Mazzocco argues for a greater affinity between the respective *Vita*'s of Cellini and Alberti than Cervigni's reading will allow.¹⁹ Yet, at the same time, his assessment of the cultural formation of Cellini vastly underestimates the artist's appreciation and knowledge of the classics in much the same way that the time-honored Romantic view has done.²⁰ "A

¹⁷ See Benedetto Varchi, "In che siano simili et in che differenti i poeti et i pittori" in *Scritti d'Arte del Cinquecento*, vol. 1, ed. Paola Barocchi (Milano: Ricciardi, 1971) 265-266. Barocchi's introductory note to this lecture informs us that "è la Disputa terza e ultima della *Lezzione...della maggioranza delle arti*, letta all'Accademia Fiorentina nel 1547 (263).

¹⁸ See Guido Guarino, rev. of *The "Vita" of Benvenuto Cellini: Literary Tradition and Genre*, by Dino S. Cervigni, *Renaissance Quarterly* 33 (1980): 755-758: "While in both Petrarch and Alberti we have the idealization of the self, the portrayal of perfection, in Cellini we have the struggle for life and the joy of living set in a realistic environment. Excess replaces the goal of harmony and moderation. Not that idealization is lacking, at least in regards to Cellini's professional life, but his concern for living is expressed at all levels, with low-realistic not the least." (757)

¹⁹ Cervigni 69-81.

²⁰ See Altieri Biagi 61: "Baciato in fronte dalla sua ignoranza e dalla sua incultura, dotato di un certo estro, munito soltanto della ricchezza nativa del suo parlar fiorentino, il Cellini avrebbe 'cicalato' della sua vita, magari a veglia, fra un colpo di scalpello e l'altro. Questa è l'immagine che sta alla base di etichette ottundenti come 'la spontaneità' e la 'popolarità' dell'arte e della lingua del Cellini. Etichette che, variamente rinvergate, rimbalzano da critico a critico: dall' 'egli ha prima scritto che pensato' del Baretto, allo 'scrivendo sembra parlare' del Giordani, allo 'scrive come parla' del Plon, al 'prosatore senza saperlo' del Bacci, al 'tutto dice come vien viene' del De Amicis alla 'spontaneità meravigliosa' del Chini, al trittico 'antiletterarietà-spontaneità-immediatezza' del Marletta, al vossleriano 'schreibt die Sprache so wie er sie im Ohr hat', al crociano 'effondeva ciò che dentro dettava' e alle molte sempre più sbiadite, formule degli epigoni del Croce."

crude, amoral individual, unschooled in classical culture, Cellini derives his notion of self-idealization from popular lore rather than classical ideology.”²¹

Despite his lack of a formal classical education, Cellini was well versed in the theoretical issues of the day, particularly those found in the treatises on art relating to his profession. In one of Cellini’s own treatises, *Della architettura*, he demonstrates familiarity with the works of authors ranging from Vitruvius to Leon Battista Alberti and Leonardo da Vinci, and several other contemporaries like Daniele Barbaro e Sebastiano Serlio.²² Of particular importance was the classical ideology that was conveyed to Cellini through his friend Benedetto Varchi.²³ And while there is certainly a difference between ‘reading the book’ and ‘seeing the movie,’ Varchi’s *Lezzioni* to the *Accademia Fiorentina* in 1547 could hardly be considered the intellectual equivalent of ‘seeing the movie.’

Varchi’s *Lezzioni* clearly demonstrate the participation of practicing painters and sculptors in the theoretical exercises of the Academy [the Accademia Fiorentina]. Exposed to a weekly exegesis of Dante and Petrarch as well as readings of sonnets and recitations of their own invention, the artists, too, were trained in the art of symbol, metaphor and allegory. In spite of the “public” nature of some of the lectures, they contained numerous “private” allusions, intended for the *conoscenti* only. The techniques of multilevel readings demonstrated by lecturers and expected of their listeners was extended by patrons and artists to the interpretation of those images painted or sculpted by and for the same audience. It

²¹ Mazzocco 352.

²² See Pomilio 695: “Questi passi [from *Dell’architettura*] bastano a dimostrare come il Cellini avesse più o meno diretta nozione di molte prose sull’arte e, anche se non lesse tutte quelle che viene elencando, si può senza tema sospettare che ne avesse lette anche altre che non gli accade di citare.”

²³ See Mendelsohn in *Paragoni: Benedetto Varchi’s Due Lezzioni and Cinquecento Art Theory* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research P, 1982) 31-32: “Varchi was on good terms with Cellini and served as a sort of literary advisor to the artist in a partnership which was mutually beneficial. Since Cellini considered himself to be equally talented as a writer and sculptor, the relationship was not strictly advisory but often collaborative. A sonnet in praise of Varchi which appeared in Cellini’s *Sonetti Spirituali* was subsequently revised by Varchi himself. Soon after Cellini’s return to Florence from France, Varchi composed the four couplets inscribed on the base of the Perseus. A reference to a statue of Perseus in the first *Lezzione* alludes to this work.” Mendelsohn also points out that the friendship between Cellini and Varchi was maintained during the latter’s exile. In note 21 to the cited passage, there is a reference to a letter to Varchi from Luigi Alamanni in Rome, dated December 8, 1538, conveying Cellini’s regards to Varchi.

would therefore only be natural for artists to apply these literary techniques to their visual works.²⁴

Well before this period in Cellini's life, though, the artist had already demonstrated a dedication to studying the classical art of antiquity and a desire to participate in the circles of the "grandissim[i] litterat[i]" while he was as an artist in Rome.²⁵ These were the years surrounding the publication of Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, a literary work that has been conspicuously and consistently overlooked as having helped to shape Cellini's concept of his ideal self.²⁶ And while Cellini does not offer us the kind of direct evidence of having read *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, as he does for Villani's *Cronache* and Dante's *Commedia*,²⁷ the influence of Castiglione's work resonates throughout the *Vita*, albeit filtered through the lens of Varchi's definition of the "*ottimo artista*."²⁸ Whether Cellini's protagonist succeeds in embodying all aspects of that ideal is of secondary importance. What matters is that Cellini-author sets out to depict himself as *the ottimo artista* of his generation—the ideal man who, by Varchian definition, personifies the primary attributes ascribed to Castiglione's perfect courtier.²⁹

²⁴ Mendelsohn 29.

²⁵ Cellini 179-180 (I, xLvi). See also Maier 31.

²⁶ There are a few exceptions to this, but those scholars who mention Castiglione in relationship to Cellini's writing do so in a very limited way. Altieri Biagi mentions Castiglione in a footnote with respect to the "codificazione trattatistica del 'motto' nel Cinquecento," but she asserts that these witticisms were so endemic to Tuscan life that there were many other models that Cellini could have been familiar with (96-7). Cervigni mentions Castiglione only in a very general sense with respect to his commonality with "Cellini's quest for self-idealization beyond any confines" (79). Coates includes Castiglione at the end of her list of literary models for Cellini, the most important of which, according to her view, is Vasari's *Vite*. Her reading of Castiglione as a model for Cellini is, like Rossi's, limited to the common narrative technique of apparent spontaneity/informality which serves both authors as a literary demonstration of *sprezzatura*. Coates's assertion that "all the preceding authors are Tuscans" (161) when referring to Ghiberti, Alberti, Vasari, Dante and Castiglione as models for the *Vita* lends credence to Mendelsohn's argument that many theories which were traditionally believed to originate in Tuscany were actually transported from northern Italy to central Italy through Benedetto Varchi, Castiglione's included. (15).

²⁷ See Cellini 301 and 542 (I, Lxxxiv and II, xxvii) for direct references to Dante.

²⁸ See Mendelsohn 51-52 and 57 Varchi's first lecture was ostensibly about Michelangelo's poem "Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto," but Mendelsohn demonstrates how he uses this topic to put forth "a theory of the visual arts through an extension of the comparison with love." (91)

²⁹ Mendelsohn 57.

As Castiglione underscores in his letter to Don Michel de Silva: “se con tutto questo non potran conseguir quella perfezion, qual che ella si sia, ch’io mi son sforzato d’esprimere, più se le avvicinarà sarà il più perfetto, come di molti arcieri che tirano ad un bersaglio, quando niuno è che dia nella brocca, quello che più se le accosta senza dubbio è miglior degli altri.”³⁰ The lack of critical acknowledgement of Cellini’s connection to Castiglione is analogous to the relationship Dain Trafton describes between Castiglione and Machiavelli: “Because his affinity with Machiavelli has not been understood, the originality and vigor of Castiglione’s allegiance to tradition have also been missed.”³¹ The points of influence and intersection between Cellini and Castiglione will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

Much critical attention has been given to how Vasari’s *Le vite de’ più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani* served as a model for Cellini’s embodiment of the artist as hero.³² It is a commonplace in Cellini scholarship that the artist wrote his *Vita* to rectify Vasari’s grievous sin of omission in having left out Cellini in the first edition of his *Vite*.³³ But Cellini’s aspirations for his life story were more ambitious and far-reaching than that. In fact, I would argue that Cellini conceived the idea of writing his life story even before Vasari published his first edition of the *Vite* in 1550, notwithstanding what Cellini says about his age when he began writing it:

³⁰ Baldassar Castiglione, *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, ed. Amedeo Quondam (Milan: Garzanti, 1987) 11 (I,iii.).

³¹ Dain A. Trafton, “Politics and the Praise of Women: Political Doctrine in the *Courtier’s* Third Book” in *Castiglione. The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Robert W. Hanning and David Rosand (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1983) 31.

³² Coates 160. See also Coates in “*Homines non nascuntur, sed figuntur*: Benvenuto Cellini’s *Vita* and Self-Presentation of the Renaissance Artist,” *The Sixteenth-Century Journal* 28 (1997): 447-65. Altieri Biagi provides an extensive analysis of the various *topoi* and themes used by Vasari that reappear in Cellini’s *Vita*, especially 95. See also Pomilio 696-700.

³³ See Bellotto’s Introduction xxviii: “Il testo celliniano, inteso come biografia artistica, viene così a configurarsi come integrazione di quel capitolo che il Vasari, nel suo monumentale disegno storico, gli aveva negato (almeno nella prima edizione delle *Vite* del 1550, lacuna cui ovviò nella seconda del 1568 inserendo un breve ritratto dell’artista, per altro assai benevolo, nel capitolo sugli *Accademici del disegno*). Grande dovette essere il desiderio di rivalsa dopo lo scorno subito [...]”

Tutti gli uomini d'ogni sorte, che hanno fatto qualche cosa che sia virtuosa, o sì veramente che le virtù somigli, doverieno, essendo veritieri e da bene, di lor propria mano descrivere la loro vita; ma non si doverrebbe cominciare una tal bella impresa prima che passato l'età de' quaranta anni. Avedutomi d'una tal cosa, ora che io cammino sopra la mia età de' cinquantotto anni finiti, et sendo in Fiorenze patria mia, sovenendomi di molte perversità che avengono a chi vive; essendo con manco di esse perversità, che io sia mai stato insino a questa età, anzi mi pare di essere con maggior mio contento d'animo e di sanità di corpo che io sia mai stato per lo adietro; e ricordandomi di alcuni piacevoli beni et di alcuni inistimabili mali, li quali, volgendomi indrieto, mi spaventano di maraviglia che io sia arrivato insino a questa età di 58 anni, con la quali tanto felicemente io, mediante la grazia di Dio, cammino innanzi.³⁴

The traditionally accepted timeline for the composition of the *Vita* is between 1558 and 1566. Once again, Cellini-narrator has always been taken at his word on the question of his age at the outset of this project. And this has led to many misguided theories about his motivations for writing his autobiography, the least persuasive of which is that Cellini wrote his *Vita* as a kind of legal defense in response to his conviction for sodomy in 1557.³⁵ And although Paolo Rossi convincingly postulates that “a lost first draft existed,”³⁶ he does not pursue his hypothesis further to question when this first draft might have been written and whether we can trust that Cellini necessarily began drafting it in the period beginning in 1558.³⁷ We can assume that he redacted it or had it transcribed in this period and in this sense, Cellini cannot be accused of not being *veritiero*. But the state of relative serenity and well-being expressed in the author's words

³⁴ Cellini 7-8 (I,i).

³⁵ See Margaret A. Gallucci, *Benvenuto Cellini: Sexuality, Masculinity, and Artistic Identity in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Palgrave, 2003). On page 30, Gallucci asserts that “Cellini's trial provoked a confession, albeit a literary one. At the same time in which Cellini was under house arrest for the sodomy conviction, he began writing his autobiography. This helps explain why the text is written in a defensive posture. [...] Rather than using confession as a redeeming strategy for conversion, Cellini instead displays a bold shamelessness and arrogance, neither apologizing for his actions nor asking the reader for forgiveness, but rather appealing to the reader as witness, almost as juror.”

³⁶ Rossi 58.

³⁷ Coates in “Cellini's Bust of Cosimo” also concurs with Rossi's assessment about the surviving manuscript of the *Vita* being a “prepublication copy,” but does not pursue the idea of when a lost draft or drafts might have been written (161).

above (directly following the *Proemio*) does not correspond to the image of the author Rossi describes: “It was in this state of deep personal religious crisis, compounded by professional disappointment, disillusionment, and disgrace, that Cellini commenced on the *Vita*.”³⁸

One could reasonably object that if we cannot take Cellini at his word regarding the issues of dictation or when he actually started to draft his autobiography, then we cannot accept as true what he says about his physical and psychological state at the time he was writing. I would argue that from the artist’s point of view, only the final redaction of his ‘sculpture forged with words’ could be considered the ‘casting’ of the work. The previous draft or drafts were like his wax models that would be modified and reworked several times before a plaster model and then a bronze model was created and later cast into the final work or art. From this standpoint, Cellini is not lying when he tells us that he was 58 when he finally ‘cast’ his *Vita*. But if we could see those earlier drafts that more than likely existed and were deliberately destroyed, we would probably find that the author’s alleged age is different from the one in the final manuscript. It was not uncommon for artists like Cellini and Michelangelo to destroy their drawings for their plastic works of art in order to give the appearance of greater virtuosity in execution and less dependency upon advance preparation.³⁹ This same practice, when applied to Cellini’s *Vita*, certainly would have added to the overall sense of *sprezzatura* and virtuosity in the work’s execution since it gave the appearance of having been executed “not only with the greatest possible rapidity, but also with incredible facility and without

³⁸ Rossi 60.

³⁹ See Anthony Blunt in *Artistic Theory in Italy*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford UP, 1963) 95: “Any trace of laboriousness, any evidence that the artist has sweated over his work will destroy the grace of a painting, and will give it what in Vasari’s judgement is the fatal quality of dryness.”

effort.”⁴⁰ As for why it was important to Cellini to create the impression of spontaneity and effortless execution in the execution of his autobiography, there was more to it than the obvious desire to demonstrate his skills as a writer and to distinguish himself from Vasari.⁴¹ Another important motivation behind the author’s adoption of the ingenious narrative strategy of dictation, in all likelihood years after having written most of his *Vita*,⁴² lies in the realm of politics and the social status of the artist at the time Cellini was writing.

Having successfully reconstituted their image as ingenious creators of beauty as opposed to dexterous craftsmen, many artists of the 16th century were aspiring to achieve even greater status by becoming *letterati*.⁴³ Cosimo I’s campaign to restore Florence to her former greatness as an intellectual and cultural center had involved a “systematic search for talent” and efforts to repatriate Florentine intellectuals and artists in exile.⁴⁴ The establishment of the *Accademia Fiorentina* in 1542 and Cosimo’s successful

⁴⁰ Vasari as quoted by Blunt 95. Coates points out that when it came to Vasari’s literary work, in contrast to his plastic works, the artist “emphasizes his years of hard work, both collecting his material and trying to present it in a polished manner.” (Gallucci-Rossi 168).

⁴¹ Coates suggests that “Cellini’s aggressively casual prose may well have been designed to avoid any comparison with Vasari’s polished academic style, with which Cellini could not compete.” (Gallucci-Rossi 160)

⁴² Rossi 58: “The *Proemio* itself has a curious relationship with the rest of the *Vita*. It announces Cellini’s working method, his decision to dictate to the boy after having started writing it himself, and his hopes to continue to put down what he can remember. Therefore, while the *Proemio* comes first in order of presentation, it was in fact written after the main body of the text was underway though not yet finished. Three explanations may be offered: one, that the *Proemio* and the main body of the text were copied out or dictated from a lost first draft; alternatively, that the *Proemio* was added later to the verso of an endpaper; and third, that the sheet might have been tipped in at a later date and bound into the text. An examination of the paper, however, seems to indicate that this sheet belongs to the same batch of paper as the pages bound in sequence—identical in color, weight and lack of watermark.”

⁴³ See Margot and Rudolf Wittkower in *Born Under Saturn: The Character and Conduct of Artists, A Documented History from Antiquity to the French Revolution* (1963; New York: Random; New York: New York Review of Books, 2007) 1-16. See also Martin Wackernagel in *The World of the Florentine Renaissance Artist: Projects and Patrons, Workshop and Art Market*, trans. Alison Luchs (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1981) 348-370; Peter Burke in *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999) 43-88; and Eric Cochrane in *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries 1527-1800: A History of Florence and the Florentines in the Age of the Grand Dukes* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1973) 79.

⁴⁴ Cochrane 67-73.

recruitment of Benedetto Varchi to return to Florence from exile helped to set the stage for the “New Rome” that Cellini would find upon his return to Florence from France in 1545.⁴⁵

The unity of the Florentine cultural and intellectual community was such that it managed to cut right across class and professional barriers. It brought together artisans like Gelli and patricians like Vettori, men of humble birth like Bronzino and men of ancient families like Bernardo Segni. [...] The unity of Florentine culture cut right across fields of specialization, too. Indeed, the attempt to separate the amateurs from the serious philologists of the Accademia Fiorentina in the late 1540’s soon had to be given up, for it was impossible to distinguish one from the other. Artists, in conversations of the time, were expected to talk intelligently about poetry: Bronzino, for one, wrote plays and sonnets and claimed to know the whole *Divine Comedy* by heart. Poets, in turn, were expected to talk authoritatively about art, as did Varchi in arbitrating between painters and sculptors in their argument about whose form of expression was best.⁴⁶

In addition to his assignment of giving two lectures on a weekly basis at the *Accademia*, Varchi was also given the task of promoting the “Tuscan vernacular through translations of classical texts and through original works composed in that language.”⁴⁷ And despite the relative freedom that Florentine artists and intellectuals enjoyed during this period,⁴⁸ Varchi himself could attest to the harsh consequences that resulted when he decided to leave Florence in 1544 to serve Girolamo Sauli, the Archbishop of Bari.⁴⁹ Evidently, the decision of any former *sbandito* to return to serve under Cosimo I was not rescindable. When Varchi came back to Florence for a visit the following summer, he was imprisoned

⁴⁵ Cochrane 68-70 and 86: “To others, like Nerli, some four centuries of political development in the “New Rome” (Florence), had at last ended in the perfect government of the “New Augustus” (Cosimo), who happened, as everyone knew, to have been born under the same constellation as his more famous, but, according to Adriani, less fortunate predecessor.” See also Deana Basile, “Fasseli gratia per poetessa” in *The Cultural Politics of Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Aldershot, Eng.: Ashgate, 2001) 135: “In recent years, scholars have outlined Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici’s appropriation of the original literary Florentine academy, the Accademia degli Umidi, and the subsequent transformation of the informal group into an official ducal institute directed toward the fulfillment of Cosimo’s ‘cultural politics.’”

⁴⁶ Cochrane 79.

⁴⁷ Basile 137.

⁴⁸ Cochrane 78.

⁴⁹ Basile 138.

on charges of having raped a young girl. It seems that Varchi had been set up by his enemies with the possible aid of Cosimo himself.⁵⁰ Cellini would find himself in similar circumstances when he tried to seek patronage outside of Cosimo's realm, as we shall see later on.

Mendelsohn points out that "through the Academy, Cosimo thus controlled the oral intellectual tradition, the press, the system of patronage and the artists who executed the commissions."⁵¹ This control would come to be exerted ever more forcefully over time until a series of rule changes regarding literary requirements made it much more difficult for artists to qualify for membership in the Academy. It was at this point (1562) that Vasari proposed setting up a new organization with the ostensible purpose of freeing the artists "altogether from restrictions of guilds and obtain[ing] a raised social status."⁵² In January, 1563, the *Accademia del Disegno* was formed,⁵³ but not all artists were granted admission. Membership was restricted to "a select group who enjoyed Medici patronage; and initially, that patronage was their only common bond."⁵⁴ Barzman views Cosimo's interest in this new Academy as largely based on the political necessity of maintaining stability in a regime that was still potentially tenuous.⁵⁵ Mendelsohn, citing Michel Plaisance, concurs that the evolution of the *Accademia Fiorentina* reflected

⁵⁰ Basile 138 and Cochrane 73.

⁵¹ Mendelsohn 29.

⁵² This is Mendelsohn's translation of Vasari from the 1568 version of his *Vite*, published by Milanesi in 1906. See 209, note 83 in Mendelsohn. See also Rossi 61: "Although the original idea for this new academy was thought up by the sculptor and Servite monk Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli along with Zaccaria Faldossi [...], the project was finally master-minded by Vasari and Vincenzo Borghini."

⁵³ Karen-edis Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State: The Discipline of Disegno* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 2000) 34.

⁵⁴ Karen-edis Barzman, "The Accademia del Disegno and Fellowships of Discourse" in *The Cultural Politics of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici* 178.

⁵⁵ Barzman, "Accademia" 178.

“changes in the political regime.”⁵⁶ The selection of Vincenzo Borghini as the first *luogotenente* of the *Accademia del Disegno*⁵⁷ was indicative of a coordinated effort to ‘de-universalize’ those artists who had reveled in the competition to best exemplify the Albertian *uomo universale* with their knowledge of poetry and their dexterity in debating art theory. Indeed, Borghini christened the new institution as “un’Accademia di FARE et non di RAGIONARE.”⁵⁸ As Rossi points out, this powerful position allowed Borghini, who had been an advisor to Cosimo, to act on the Duke’s behalf in the organization. Borghini made no attempt to mask his contempt for what he perceived as presumptuousness on the part of artists who dared to venture out of their field of specialization and into the world of words. He launched a particularly contemptuous and calculating attack on Cellini following the artist’s public denunciation of his decision not to favor sculpture in the arrangement of allegorical figures on the catafalque to honor Michelangelo at his funeral proceedings.⁵⁹ Borghini decided to become “mezzo dottorato” in the subject of Varchi’s lectures so that he could refute the artists, Cellini in particular, and put an end to their debates concerning the “maggioranza delle arti”⁶⁰ by essentially putting the artists ‘in their place’:

Veduto uno scultore et un legnaiuolo, vediamo di grazia quel che ne dice un orafo: e venga in campo maestro Benvenuto.

⁵⁶ Mendelsohn 26 and note 79 (208): “L’institution academique ...fonctionne de plus en plus sur les memes bases et dans le meme esprit que le regime de Côme dont elle est a la fois le produit, l’image et le moule.” (Michel Plaisance, *Les écrivains*, 2, p.228)

⁵⁷ Rossi 61.

⁵⁸ Zygmunt Wazbinski, “Leonardo da Vinci’s *Trattato della pittura* and the Accademia del Disegno in Florence: The Origins of an Academic Art Handbook” in *Center 25: Record of Activities and Research Reports, June 2004-May 2005* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, 2005) 165. See also Anthony Hughes, “‘An Academy for Doing’ I: The Accademia del Disegno, the Guilds and the Principate in Sixteenth-Century Florence,” *Oxford Art Journal* 9.1 (1986): 9. The emphasis seems to have been Borghini’s since both authors use all capitals for FARE and RAGIONARE.

⁵⁹ Hughes 9.

⁶⁰ Barocchi, *Scritti* 470-471.

Dice che la scultura è maggior sette volte. Cagna! Costui va per abbaco; ma vedreno un po' se le saprà ritrovare. E' dice la ragione, che è mirabile: perché una statua di scultura de' avere otto vedute e conviene che le sieno tutte d'ugual bontà. Io non mi vanterei d'indovinare; massimamente con un cervello che non lo apposterebbe una carta da navigare; pure proviamo un poco. [...] Prima io vorrei sapere da lui donde e' cava queste otto vedute così per l'appunto e che le non sieno né più né meno. Dico così, perché questo è un cervello da sua possa et ha filosofie che non ne vendono gli speciali dall'insegna d'Aristotile o di Platone.[...]

Ma lasciando per ora questo, io vorrei pur vedere donde e' pruova che la scultura è maggior sette volte e con che argomenti. *Verbum nullum*. [...] E' dice che per sperienza si vede che, disegnando in carta una sola colonna o un vaso, con quel disegno non si farà mai buona cosa; e così dice però che non s'intende, o sia scoretta la stampa o pur sia un suo parlare a quel modo. Basta che dice che a far il disegno con modello senza disegnare in carta, diviene graziosissimo. In verità io non so se vuole il Marguttino la baia. Che sciochezze son queste? gli staran freschi io non dico i maestri, ma gli scarpellini, se a fare una colonna che si fa con le squadre e con le seste, bisognerà loro un modello di terra o cera, basta, di rilievo! Oh poveretto lui, che non avendo disegno, né sapendo adoperar la penna, *dico in disegnando*, crede con questa burla mostrar che il disegno in carta sia nocivo e cattivo.⁶¹

Even more injurious than the ridiculing of the substance of Cellini's position is the sarcasm and the condescending tone that Borghini employs to dismiss entirely Cellini's credibility as a thinker and a writer. His deliberate qualification, "dico in disegnando," is intended to draw attention to what Borghini declines to declare explicitly: that Cellini is 'out of his league' when it comes to literary matters because he does not know how to "adoperar la penna." No wonder, then, that in this climate of harsh criticism and reluctant courtly recognition of the artist-*letterato*, Cellini ingeniously employed the '*trucco*' of dictation as a way of circumventing the set of rules that would have been used to judge his *Vita* had he presented his work in the way that Borghini's friend Vasari had

⁶¹ Vincenzo Borghini, "Sulle lettere del Tribolo, del Tasso, del Cellini e di Michelangelo," in *Selva di Notizie*, ed. Paola Barocchi *Pittura e Scultura nel Cinquecento* (Livorno: Sillabe, 1998) 91-93. Emphasis is mine.

done with his *Vite*—as the result of great “fatica” and “diligenza.”⁶² The image Cellini creates of the artist nonchalantly recounting his life story while working in his shop is a two-fold narrative strategy designed to portray the effortless and *sprezzatura* involved in his literary endeavors, as well as an attempt to exempt the author from the adverse criticism of courtly *letterati* like Vincenzo Borghini.

This strategy also creates a kind of frame for the *Vita* in the way that it invites the reader to assume the role of the enraptured amanuensis as he listens diligently to his master’s story while it is being dictated to him. In so doing, Cellini-author adopts the mask of Cellini-storyteller in order to lower the expectations of his audience—the lower the expectations, the greater the resulting “maraviglia.”⁶³ It is a strategy not unlike the one employed by Castiglione in what John Bernard calls “the author’s sublime self-erasure from the text, which lends the Urbino conversations the air of an invitation to an invisible voyeur.”⁶⁴ Interesting to note in this regard is the painstaking care taken by Castiglione at the beginning of his *Il Libro del Cortegiano* in addressing those who would criticize him for his choice of models to imitate, his decision to imitate or not, his choice of language, and his decision to write about his subject at all. Despite having recourse in his claim to have written *Il Cortegiano* “in pochi giorni,”⁶⁵ Castiglione still felt the need to justify his style of apparent spontaneity given that his subject matter was nothing less than establishing a “regula universalissima” for courtly communication and

⁶² Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de’ più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani, da Cimabue, insino a’ tempi nostri nell’edizione per i tipi di Lorenzo Torrentino, Firenze 1550*, eds. Luciano Bellosi e Aldo Rossi, 3rd ed. (Turin: Einaudi, 1998) 4.

⁶³ The word appears 24 times as a noun and 146 times in various other verbal, adjectival and adverbial forms in the *Vita*. See Benvenuto Cellini, *La Vita di Benvenuto Cellini*, ed. Guido Davico Bonino (Turin: Einaudi, 1973), *Èulogos* 2007. *Intratext Digital Library*. 29 Sept. 2008
<<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1130/FAD.HTM>>

⁶⁴ John Bernard, “‘Formiamo un cortegian’: Castiglione and the Aims of Writing,” *Modern Language Notes* 115 (2000): 34.

⁶⁵ Castiglione 3 (I,i).

comportment. As Amedeo Quondam points out, in order to “formar con parole un perfetto cortegiano,” one also needed to use the perfect words.⁶⁶ In contrast to Cellini’s social status as an aspiring artist-*letterato*, Castiglione’s status as courtier-*letterato*, not to mention his role as a courtier-diplomat, demanded a greater adherence to “una forma pienamente cortigiana.”⁶⁷

Having accepted the claim of dictation as a two-fold narrative strategy and the age of 58-66 as the period in which the final casting and ‘chasing’⁶⁸ of the *Vita* begins to take place after an earlier period of drafting and modeling, we can return to the question of the timeline. Why does it matter so much *when* Cellini began to draft his autobiography? The issue of *when* is important because it allows us to dispense with some of the aforementioned cause and effect hypotheses which view Cellini’s decision to write his *Vita* in the overly simplistic light of a reaction to specific events in his life such as the first publication of Vasari’s *Vite* in 1550 which left out Cellini, purportedly engendering the need of the artist to rectify this omission;⁶⁹ and the sodomy conviction in 1557 which

⁶⁶ Castiglione 35 (I,xii) and Introduction xli-xlii. In his Introduction, Quondam points out the contradictions between Castiglione’s “posizione enunciativa—la critica delle proposte bembiane, di affermazione del primato dell’uso e dell’impossibilità di sopprimere del tutto—malgrado ogni restauro—la voce materna, il suo essere “lombardo”—e la pratica linguistica del testo: affidato alla cura del Bembo per l’edizione aldina del 1528.” (xlii) According to the more recent information offered by Hanning and Rosand in their chronology in *The Ideal and the Real*, Castiglione sent the second redaction to Bembo for review, but the last reviser of the third redaction (“l’edizione aldina”) was Giovan Francesco Valerio, not Bembo, as commonly believed (xxiii).

⁶⁷ Quondam, Introduction xlii.

⁶⁸ For an in-depth look at the art of chasing with illustrations of the tools used and the imprints they leave, see Edilberto Formigli, “Ghiberti and the Art of Chasing” in *The Gates of Paradise: Lorenzo Ghiberti’s Renaissance Masterpiece*, ed. Gary Radke (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2007) 118-133: “Chasing (the hammering, carving, detailing, and polishing of cast bronze) represents an extremely important treatment in terms of the final appearance of bronze relief sculpture. The process requires an intense material and creative commitment occupying a large part of the entire project. While greater artistic value may be placed on the process of wax modeling used to create the various perspectival planes on which figures are inserted in full relief against a natural landscape or architectonic background, what lends a work its refinement of style is in large part the result of incisions and meaningful lines made with chasing tools, which [...] are particularly evident in four of the ten relief panels of Ghiberti’s Gates of Paradise” (119).

⁶⁹ See Victoria Gardner Coates for a slightly different version of this theory in ““*Ut vita scultura*””: Cellini’s *Perseus* and the self-fashioning of artistic identity” in *Fashioning Identities in Renaissance Art*,

supposedly left Cellini disgraced and in a “state of deep personal religious crisis”⁷⁰ such that he not only took religious orders in 1558, but he also decided to write his life story as a sort of redemptive confessional/defense.⁷¹ The corollary to the conviction theory is that the status of being under house arrest afforded the artist the time needed to write his *Vita*. Cellini himself offers his own explanation of when and why he decided to write his life story in his treatise *Dell’oreficeria*:⁷²

Passato che fu dua giorni, io viddi turbato il mio signore senza mai avergliene dato causa nessuna; e se bene io gli ho domandato molte volte licenzia, egli non me l’ha data, nè manco m’ha comandato nulla: per la qual cosa io non ho potuto servire nè lui nè altri, nè manco ho saputo mai la causa di questo mio gran male. Se non che, standomi così disperato, ho reputato che questo mio male venissi da gli influssi celesti che ci predominano; però io mi messi a scrivere tutta la mia vita, e l’origine mio [*sic*], e tutte le cose che io avevo fatto al mondo: e così scrissi tutti gli anni che io avevo servito questo mio glorioso signore duca Cosimo. Ma considerato poi quanto e principi grandi hanno per male che un lor servo dolendosi dica la verità delle sue ragioni, io rimediai a questo; e tutti gli anni che io avevo servito il mio signore duca Cosimo, quelli con gran passione, e non senza lacrime, io gli stracciai e gitta’gli al fuoco, con salda intenzione di non mai più scrivergli. Solo per giovare al mondo, e per essere lasciato da quello scioperato, veduto che m’è impedito il fare, essendo desideroso di render grazie a Dio in qualche modo dell’essere io nato uomo, da poi che m’è impedito il fare, così io mi son messo a dire.⁷³

The period described is the one immediately following the unveiling of Cellini’s *Perseus* in the Loggia dei Lanzi, the period that could rightfully be called the defining moment in the artist’s career. Cellini had now proven himself to be a masterful sculptor of monumental works, not just an exceptionally talented goldsmith. He had now arrived

ed. Mary Rogers (Aldershot, Eng.: Ashgate, 2000) 150: “Benvenuto’s police record and his personal unpopularity, combined with his fears of mistreatment at Vasari’s hands [in the second edition of his *Vite*], prompted him to record his own version of events designed to establish himself as the greatest artist of the Florentine school as illustrated by the accounts of his great works of art.”

⁷⁰ Rossi 60.

⁷¹ See notes 35 and 38 above.

⁷² For a history of both versions of the treatises, see Dario Trento in *Benvenuto Cellini: Opere non esposte e documenti notarili* (Florence: Museo Nazionale del Bargello, 1984) 52-56. See also Paolo Rossi “Parrem Uno e Pur Saremo Dua” in *Benvenuto Cellini: Sculptor, Goldsmith, Writer*, 171-198.

⁷³ Benvenuto Cellini, *I trattati dell’oreficeria e della scultura di Benvenuto Cellini*, ed. Carlo Milanese (Florence: Le Monnier, 1857) 89.

on the same '*campo di battaglia*' as Donatello and the 'divin Michelangelo' among whose works his *Perseus* was proudly displayed. The many sonnets of praise that were posted around his statue left no doubt that the artist was finally being given the recognition that he had always felt he deserved.⁷⁴ It is likely that in this same time period, from shortly after the unveiling of the *Perseus* in 1554, until 1567,⁷⁵ Cellini was involved in drafting and redacting his literary masterpiece, the *Vita*. Exactly how much writing he had completed by May of 1559 is not known, but we know that this is when Cellini sent his manuscript to Benedetto Varchi for his comments and potential revisions.⁷⁶ If, as is commonly accepted, Cellini began writing his *Vita* when he was 58 years old (in 1558), this would have meant that he was a very different type of artist with words than he was with metal—an expeditious one. His birthday being November 3, this would have meant that the bulk of his autobiography was written in only 6 months! The letter that Cellini wrote to Varchi requesting his *book* back (not his *bozze* or *carte*) gives us a good indication that what he had sent to his friend for review was sizeable (conceivably all of the material up to the 99th chapter of the *Libro Secondo* if we refer to the chapter divisions employed by Bellotto⁷⁷): "Da' poi che vostra signoria Mi dice, che cotesto semplice discorso della vita mia piú soddisfa in cotesto puro modo che essendo rilimato e ritocco da altrui, [...] Io mando il mio servitore acciò che voi gli diate la mia bisaccia e il

⁷⁴ Cellini 707-8 (II, xc). Many of these sonnets are published with the *Trattati* in Milanese, 401-414.

⁷⁵ Cellini 722 (II, xcvi) and accompanying note 18. Cellini makes a specific reference to when he is writing at a certain point near the end of the *Vita*: "che siamo vicini alla fine dell'anno 1566." Bellotto points out that the Florentine calendar had as its year's end the 24th of March, hence, Cellini was really referring to 1567 by our calendar system.

⁷⁶ See Angelo Cicchetti "*La Vita* di Benvenuto di M^o Giovanni Cellini fiorentino scritta (per lui medesimo) in Firenze," *Letteratura italiana. Umanesimo e Rinascimento, Le opere 1530-1580*, ed. Alberto Asor Rosa, 2nd ed. 17 vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 2007) 632.

⁷⁷ Bellotto 731n.1. We know from the Bacci edition that there were no book or chapter divisions in the original manuscript (Bacci xli). Cicchetti points out that "la partizione attualmente adottata fa riferimento all'edizione curata da Brunone Bianchi (Firenze 1852), che offre la migliore lezione del testo raggiunta prima dell'edizione critica (635 and note 10).

libro, e perché io penso che voi non harete potuto finir di leggere tutto, sí per non vi affaticare in così bassa cosa, e perché quel che io desideravo da voi l'ò havuto, e ne sono satisfattissimo, e con tutto il quor mio ve ne ringratio.”⁷⁸ The short time span of six months adds further support to my claim that Cellini had already been working on his *book* for several years when he sent it to his trusted friend for review.

The cited passage from the treatise *Dell'oreficeria* is artful itself in the way Cellini masterfully both clarifies and obscures the genesis of his *Vita* while employing the same language of casting that the artist uses to describe his bronze creations—“gitta'gli al fuoco”—to refer to the fate of the pages that dealt with the artist's years of service to Cosimo.⁷⁹ Scholarly glosses to this passage are quick to transform *anni* into *carte* or pages. But Cellini's decision to leave the metonymic “tutti gli anni” without any further elaboration seems calculating because in fact, the passages in the *Vita* describing the years and the difficulties associated with Cellini's service to Cosimo remain in the *Vita*, albeit with obvious indications of auto-censorship.⁸⁰ The juxtaposition of the author's “salda *intenzione* di non mai più scrivergli” with the big adversative ‘*ma*’ that follows with “Solo per giovare al mondo,” is carefully worded so as not to violate Cellini's commitment to telling the truth (it was his firm *intention* not to ever rewrite those pages, but not what he, in fact, *did*). But this last sentence that ends with “mi sono messo a dire” could also be referring to the writing of the treatises, not the *Vita*. It is artfully ambiguous. By the time Cellini writes this passage in the *Trattati* in 1567, he had

⁷⁸ Bacci Lxxxiii-Lxxxiv.

⁷⁹ Cellini 633, 672, 675, etc. (II, Lxiii, Lxxvii, Lxxviii).

⁸⁰ One example of this is the part of the manuscript in which Cellini refers to the Duke as having “più modo di mercatante che di duca” (II, Liii) and the rewriting of that passage. Note 19 to page 610 of the Bellotto edition says: “queste parole nel manoscritto sono fortemente cassate e sostituite, pare dal secondo copista, con le seguenti: *gran desiderio di far grandissime imprese*”—an obvious attempt to make the text more politically correct.

already learned the hard way that “ [i] principi grandi hanno per male che un lor servo dolendosi dica la verità delle sue ragioni.”⁸¹ He had felt the weight of Cosimo’s displeasure through the verbal public flogging he had received from Borghini. Evidently, Ottaviano Fregoso’s *ragionamenti* in Book IV of the *Cortegiano* were easier preached than practiced: the idea that a courtier should always tell the truth to one’s prince, even at the risk of offending him, was a dangerous business.⁸²

It is possible that Cellini destroyed, then rewrote some or all of the potentially compromising Cosimo passages in question, but it seems unlikely given the carefully-constructed passage in question which Maier believes was designed to appease Cellini’s censors at the Medici court.⁸³ A more plausible interpretation of this passage is that it served as a kind of advertisement for a work that Cellini had nearly completed by this time in 1567 (the *Vita*), but which he suspected would not be publishable precisely because he had never excised the episodes that described how he, pitted against the “furore di fortuna” and the “perverse stelle,”⁸⁴ succeeded in surpassing the artists of his day, even while being challenged at every turn by one of his most difficult patrons. But who was the intended audience for this bit of publicity? Dario Trento argues persuasively

⁸¹ Milanese 89.

⁸² See Castiglione 368-369 (IV, v): “Il fin adunque del perfetto cortegiano, del quale insino a qui non s’è parlato, estimo io che sia il guadagnarsi per mezzo delle condizioni attribuitegli da questi signori talmente la benivolentia e l’animo di quel principe a cui serve, *che possa dirgli e sempre gli dica la verità di ogni cosa* che ad esso convenga sapere, senza timor o periculo di despiacergli; e conoscendo la mente di quello inclinata a far cosa non conveniente, ardisca di contradirgli, e con gentil modo valersi della grazia acquistata con le sue bone qualità per rimuoverlo da ogni intenzion viciosa ed indurlo al camin della virtù.” Italics are mine. See also Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. J. Singleton, ed. Daniel Javitch (New York: Norton, 2002); Claudio Scarpati, *Dire la verità al principe: ricerche sulla letteratura del Rinascimento* (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 1987) and Hanning and Rosand cited in note 31 above.

⁸³ See Maier 83-84, note 127. Maier suggests that the cited passage from the treatise contains “una lieve inesattezza.” He goes on to describe this lack of precision as Cellini’s desire to demonstrate compliance with “una verisimile ingiunzione medicea” to remove the passages that portrayed the Duke in a negative light. He hypothesizes that either all of the compromising passages were taken out and rewritten in the form in which the manuscript now exists, or that Cellini deleted the section at the end of the book, thereby explaining the abrupt ending. Maier favors the second hypothesis, but neither of them is convincing.

⁸⁴ Cellini 684 (II, Lxxxii).

that one of the ways Cellini used the *Trattati* was to put pressure on the Medici Court to re-enlist him in the ranks of commissioned artists.⁸⁵ In choosing an ostensibly neutral format for his writings, the treatise, Cellini could continue to promote himself on the basis of his sharing “i bellissimi segreti e mirabili modi che sono in nella grand’arte della Oreficeria,” while also denouncing the wrongs done to him by the intended recipient’s father.⁸⁶ And there was also that persistent problem of getting paid for works performed. Trento makes the case that the threat of publishing the *Trattati* (before their ‘sanitization’) was also used to help Cellini receive the final payment of “cinquecento scudi d’oro”⁸⁷ that he was still owed for the *Perseus*. Cellini received the final payment on March 8, 1567, not long after the *Trattati* were presented to Francesco I.⁸⁸

The same theory, Trento argues, can also be applied to the *Vita*. In sending his *Vita* to Benedetto Varchi, Cellini not only sought the valued advice of a respected friend, but he also intended to spread the news of its contents. In so doing, Cosimo would be put on notice that Cellini intended to make his views public.⁸⁹ It was also during this same time period in 1559 that Cellini was competing for the commission for the statue of Neptune in the Piazza della Signoria. This commission meant a great deal to the artist because if had he won it, it would have afforded him the opportunity to solidify his status as an accomplished sculptor of monumental works given that the medium was marble,

⁸⁵ Trento 50-53.

⁸⁶ Milanesi 5. Trento points out that when the *Trattati* were published in 1568 (while Cosimo was still alive), they had undergone radical changes: “Tra il manoscritto che Cellini dona a Francesco I e il testo che esce a stampa nella primavera del 1568 intervengono delle modificazioni che trasformano un testo profondamente segnato autobiograficamente e giocato per influire nella situazione contingente dell’artista in un testo precettistico neutro se non addirittura encomiastico nei confronti della casa principesca cui è dedicato” (56).

⁸⁷ Cellini 722 (II, xcvi).

⁸⁸ Trento 52. Trento cites the written fragment of Cellini’s from the Codice Riccardiano no. 2728 (also published in Milanesi, xlii-xliii) which specifically refers to the year as being 1567 when he gave the *Trattati* to Francesco I.

⁸⁹ Trento 50.

not bronze. His detractors, Bandinelli in particular, had tried to make the case that Cellini, being more accustomed to working with metals, did not have the knowledge or experience to execute as skillfully in marble as he had done in bronze with the *Perseus*.⁹⁰ Ammannati eventually won the commission, but this does not disprove Trento's argument about Cellini having attempted to use his *Vita* as an "arma di pressione presso la corte fiorentina" in that period.⁹¹ It seems that Cosimo had already made up his mind about who should receive the Neptune commission (originally Bandinelli, then Ammannati when Bandinelli died),⁹² and that he was not greatly troubled by whatever pressure Cellini may have hoped to put on him by 'leaking' the existence of his unflattering portrayal of the Medici court in his autobiography. Nonetheless, the existence of Cellini's *Vita* certainly became known and we have testimony of this in the second edition of Vasari's *Vite* in 1568:

Ora se bene potrei molto più allargarmi nell'opera di Benvenuto, il quale è stato in tutte le sue cose animoso, fiero, vivace, prontissimo e terribilissimo, e persona che ha saputo pur troppo dire il fatto suo con i principi, non meno le mani e l'ingegno adoperare nelle cose dell'arti, non ne dirò qui altro, *atteso che egli stesso ha scritto la vita e l'opere sue, ed un trattato dell'oreficeria e del fondere e gettar di metallo, e della scultura* con molta più eloquenza ed ordine che io per avventura non saprei fare.⁹³

Vasari's statement does more than acknowledge the existence of Cellini's *Vita*. It expresses the expectation that Cellini's autobiography and treatises would also be published, something that Vasari uses as a justification for not going into further detail

⁹⁰ See Dimitrios Zikos, "Il busto di Bindo Altoviti realizzato da Benvenuto Cellini e i suoi antecedenti," *Ritratto di un banchiere del Rinascimento: Bindo Altoviti tra Raffaello e Cellini*, eds. Alan Chong, Donatella Pegazzano and Dimitrios Zikos (Milan: Electa, 2004) 149 and 160.

⁹¹ Trento 50.

⁹² See John Pope-Hennessy in *Italian High Renaissance & Baroque Sculpture*, 4th ed. vol. 3 (London: Phaidon, 1996) 225.

⁹³ Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. Paola Barocchi, 1999, *Scuola normale superiore di Pisa / Accademia della Crusca*, 30 Oct. 2008 <<http://biblio.cribecu.sns.it/vasari/consultazione/index.html>>. Italics are mine.

about the artist's accomplishments.⁹⁴ Whether or not Cellini *also* sought to use his autobiography as a political tool in an attempt to secure additional commissions from the Florentine court, the *Vita* was first and foremost intended as a demonstration piece of the artist's virtuosity as a *letterato*.⁹⁵ The prospect of secondary political uses of the *Vita* increased after a number of years of not producing "una nuova opera importante su commissione del duca,"⁹⁶ when the artist's frustration level at being "scioperato" had increased significantly. Borsellino compares Cellini's situation to Machiavelli's of about forty years earlier: "Il piacere di raccontare è fuori dubbio; ma si tratta pur sempre di un 'badalucco dispettoso e strano' come quelli che ancora Machiavelli si prendeva non sapendo 'dove voltare il viso' per non poter mostrare con altre imprese la sua virtù."⁹⁷ And while it is true that both Machiavelli and Cellini find themselves similarly *impediti* by the Medici Court, there is clearly more than just a "piacere di raccontare" on the part of Cellini. There is an overriding desire to compete with (and surpass) other artists of his day, Michelangelo in particular,⁹⁸ on *all* levels, including the literary. So while writing may not have been Cellini's preferred medium for demonstrating his *virtù*, he certainly did not consider it an unworthy pursuit that was foreign to his interests. On the contrary,

⁹⁴ See Piero Calamandrei in *Scritti e inediti celliniani*, ed. Carlo Cordié (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1971) 100: "Qualcuno suppose che il Vasari, per poter conservare tanta imparzialità di giudizio, dovesse non aver conosciuto le malignità scritte contro di lui da Benvenuto; ma questo sembra poco verosimile, anche perché il Vasari, nella seconda edizione delle *Vite* che è nel 1568, mostra di aver notizia dell'autobiografia celliniana, che già da qualche anno circolava in manoscritto; e le maldicenze, in quel mondo fiorentino di artisti invidiosi e di ciarlieri cortigiani, è da pensare che non dovessero tardare molto a giungere al segno [...]."

⁹⁵ For a good example of a demonstration piece see Mendelsohn 151: "The completed portion of Bronzino's letter does not contain the painter's answer to the question of how many sides of the same figure can be shown in one painting. Perhaps it was the difficulty of answering this which caused him to leave the letter unfinished? It has in fact been suggested that Bronzino attempted to challenge this ability of sculpture in paint rather than words, by means of a demonstration piece."

⁹⁶ Trento 47.

⁹⁷ Borsellino 28. Borsellino's references are to Machiavelli's famous letter to Francesco Vettori of December 10, 1513.

⁹⁸ See Coates in *Homines* 455: "Cellini's self-presentation depends on his reader's identifying him with Michelangelo, and then recognizing Cellini's superiority."

writing was a requirement for the exceptional artists of the Cinquecento who wished to be considered ‘*uomini universali*.’⁹⁹

The problem, of course, is that Cellini believed that he should not have been left with writing as his *only* means of demonstrating his superiority as an artist. The Cellini who, at the outset of the *Vita*, reflects on his preceding years “con la quali [*sic*] tanto felicemente io, mediante la grazia di Dio, cammino innanzi,” could never have imagined that the artist who had just received such clamorous public acclaim for the *Perseus* would remain “impedito” from receiving additional commissions for so long. The frequently quoted “da poi che m’è impedito il fare, così io mi son messo a dire” of the treatise *Dell’oreficeria* (1567) is not the protest of a reluctant writer, but rather, the disillusioned and defiant lament of an artist who had already been sidelined from competing seriously with other artists for commissions. Disillusioned because Cellini had been marginalized from participating competitively in his primary mode of artistic expression for at least eight years. Defiant because in writing about his predicament, Cellini was going against Borghini’s mandate to the artists of the *Accademia del Disegno* that they be an academy for *doing*, not *talking*. When Borghini made this declaration (1564), Cellini had already completed most of his *Vita*. It is not the same voice as Cellini-narrator who set out boldly to surpass the other artist-*letterati* of the day by writing the story of his life in the period shortly after the unveiling of the *Perseus*. It is the dejected voice of an artist who had not only been cut off from the atmosphere of competition in the visual arts, but who had also been publicly derided and humiliated by Vincenzo Borghini in his attacks on ‘*il*

⁹⁹ Wittkower and Wittkower 15-16; Burke 62 and Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, 3rd ed., vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 1999) 70. See also Rossi 60 and Maier 30.

boschereccio'¹⁰⁰ both in written form, as well as in his farewell lecture to the *Accademia del Disegno* in October of 1564 before his retirement as its *luogotenente*.¹⁰¹

During the earlier drafting stages of the *Vita*, well before his humiliation at the hands of Borghini, Cellini's desire to prove himself as *letterato* had been fueled by Benedetto Varchi's famous *Lezzioni* to the Accademia Fiorentina in 1547 at which Michelangelo was anointed the new Dante by Varchi.¹⁰² The proverbial gauntlet had been thrown down during those lectures and Cellini, like Vasari,¹⁰³ was anxious to take up the challenge of who could surpass Michelangelo's mastery of Dante, both in the figurative arts as well as in the literary. Cellini was in the middle of working on his *Perseus* at the time when the lectures were held, but he participated in the *paragone* debates along with seven other artists who were asked by Varchi to give their opinion (in *writing*) as to the primacy of painting versus sculpture.¹⁰⁴ These letters were printed together with Varchi's *Due Lezzioni* in 1550,¹⁰⁵ so Cellini was already published by the time of the unveiling of his *Perseus*. Interesting to note is how Cellini opens his letter to Varchi: "Molto meglio saprei dir le ragione [*sic*] di tanta valorosa arte a bocca che a scriverle, *sì per essere male*

¹⁰⁰ *Il Boschereccio* is the epithet that Cellini gave to himself when he engaged in *tenzoni* with other artists and poets of the day. See *Opere di Benvenuto Cellini*, ed. Giuseppe Guido Ferrero (Turin: UTET, 1980) 841 and accompanying note: "così il Cellini denominò se stesso, alludendo alla sua poesia e alla sua filosofia che egli chiamò argutamente 'boscherecce'; cioè, rustiche, semplici." Maier, citing lyrics from the *Canzoniere*, credits Petrarca with being Cellini's inspiration for this nickname based on the fact that the former "il quale, si sa, ostentava il timore—squisitamente umanistico e proprio dell'artefice raffinato—che le sue liriche fossero rozze e senza ornamenti." (25)

¹⁰¹ See Hughes 9.

¹⁰² *Scritti d'Arte* 267-269.

¹⁰³ See Mendelsohn xx: "Delivered in 1547 before the Florentine Academy and published in 1550, the same year as Vasari's momentous *Lives of the Artists*, by the same printer and for the same patron, Cosimo de' Medici I, Varchi's lectures provide the source for many of Vasari's theoretical statements."

¹⁰⁴ See Mendelsohn xx: "A word of explanation must be given about the meaning of the term *paragone*. *Paragone*, or "comparison," refers to the debate on the relative superiority of the arts. The most famous example, from which it takes its name, is found in Leonardo da Vinci's *Treatise on Painting*, where he argues for the superior rank of painting with respect to sculpture and poetry as well as music."

¹⁰⁵ Mendelsohn xxiii: "The letters [...] assert the artist's prerogative to express his opinion on the subject and his qualifications to do so."

dittatore e peggio scrittore. E pur quale sono, eccomi.”¹⁰⁶ Notwithstanding the customary modesty that all of the artists used at the beginning of their letters,¹⁰⁷ Cellini’s choice of words is revealing for one who, as Mendelsohn observes, “considered himself to be equally talented as a writer and sculptor.”¹⁰⁸ Rather than cloaking his modesty in words that speak to a lack of qualifications to discuss theoretical issues, as some of the other artists did,¹⁰⁹ Cellini immediately offers an apology for his writing *style*, not its *content*, adopting a similar strategy to the one he later used with his *Vita* when he exempted himself from criticism by claiming that the work was dictated. In a sense, he is testing the terrain here for the narrative strategy he will adopt with the *Vita* in much the same way that he had done with the bust of Cosimo in preparation for the *Perseus*: “per fare sperienza delle terre da gittar il bronzo.”¹¹⁰ The comments of Julius Schlosser regarding the style of Cellini’s letter could just as easily be applied to his *Vita*:

La lettera del Cellini scritta in pretto vernacolo fiorentino è . . . la più vivace di tutte. Egli entra a piè pari nell’argomento e prende subito un’attitudine combattiva . . . È una professione di fede del tempo in cui s’inizia il nuovo stile, con un accenno al comodo ed arretrato maestro che si accontenta delle due visioni principali, professione che ha ben diritto d’esser presa in considerazione.¹¹¹

By ostensibly criticizing his own writing capabilities at the outset, Cellini is actually setting the stage to have them affirmed by lowering the reader’s expectations. After offering his argument for the superiority of sculpture, invoking Michelangelo’s

¹⁰⁶ *Scritti d’Arte* 519. Italics are mine.

¹⁰⁷ All of the letters are published in *Scritti d’Arte* 493-523. See also Maier 24: “In verità, a me pare che tale improvviso disprezzo delle proprie facoltà letterarie sia non solo una compiaciuta esagerazione del Cellini, da connettersi al suo tipico gusto dell’iperbole, ravvisabile e nell’accentuare e nello sminuire fuor di misura i toni; sia non solo, dunque, una posa d’artista, ma anche a soprattutto una forma d’ossequio verso quel *buon* dittatore e *migliore* scrittore che era, allora, Benedetto Varchi.” Italics are Maier’s.

¹⁰⁸ Mendelsohn 32.

¹⁰⁹ See especially the letters of Michelangelo, Tribolo and Sangallo (522, 518 and 509).

¹¹⁰ Cellini 633 (II, Lxiii).

¹¹¹ Cited in *Scritti d’Arte* 519-520, note 3.

name three times in the process, Cellini puts forth the standards that must be upheld by one who wishes to practice that “maravigliosa arte dello statuare”:

Ancora dico che questa maravigliosa arte dello statuare non si può fare, se lo statuario non ha buona cognizione di *tutte* le nobilissime arte; perché, volendo figurare un milito, con quelle qualità e bravure che se gli appartiene, convien che il detto maestro sia bravissimo, con buona cognizione dell’arme: e volendo figurare uno oratore, convien che sia eloquentissimo e abbia cognizione della buona scienza delle lettere; volendo figurare un musico, convien che il detto abbia musica diversa, perché sappia alla sua statua ben collocare in mano uno sonoro instrumento, che gli sia di necessità l’esser poeta.”¹¹²

Clearly, Cellini is confident that he upholds these standards, even though his published letter was written seven years prior to the public acknowledgement of his virtuosity as a sculptor that would come with completion of the *Perseus*. The interesting thing about this list of requirements is that it mirrors the primary qualities that will later come to life in the figure of Cellini-protagonist in the *Vita*.¹¹³ And while Cellini’s critics may question his skills as an orator, Cellini-protagonist is quite proud of his way with words, as demonstrated by the fact that he was able to entertain the Emperor Charles V for “una mez’ora intera, parlando di molte diverse cose tutte virtuose e piacevole [*sic*].”¹¹⁴ In relating this story in the *Vita*, Cellini-author confirms the credentials of his protagonist who, a few pages later in the narrative, will be asked by none other than Pietro Bembo to do his portrait.¹¹⁵ It is precisely this passage of Cellini’s letter that became central to

¹¹² *Scritti d’Arte* 521-522. Italics are mine.

¹¹³ See Maier 30: “Il Cellini appare così, veramente, l’uomo universale del Rinascimento, l’uomo che intende assommare in sè tutte le arti: come Michelangelo.”

¹¹⁴ Cellini 329 (I, xci).

¹¹⁵ Cellini 342-345 (I, xciv). Photos of Cellini’s medal bust of Bembo are published in Trento, 26-29. Although the attribution to Cellini has been questioned, Pope-Hennessy believes that the “single struck version in silver in the Bargello [...] seems likely to be Cellini’s work.” See *Cellini* 79-80 and 301, note 21. See also Zikos 154.

Borghini's attack on the artist in his *Selva di notizie* of 1564 when he decided that he must put an end to the "pretesa universalità dello scultore."¹¹⁶

Inanzi ch'io torni a pparlar delle vedute, mi piace considerare un bel punto della filosofia boschereccia [of Cellini]. Dice ch'uno statuario ha aver buona cognizione di tutte le nobilissime arti, e che, volendo figurare un milito con quelle qualità e bravure che se gl'appartiene, conviene che detto maestro sia bravissimo, e volendo figurar un oratore, convien che sia eloquentissimo et abbia cognizione della buona scienza delle lettere, volendo figurare un musico, conviene che abbia musica diversa etc.

Tutte queste sono parole formali. Or non bisognerebbe qui gridare: *Proh divum numina sancta!* che sia un sì pazzo che dica cose sì stravaganti e che le si stampino? Prassitele, quando fece quel cavallo ch'oggi è nelle Esquilie con quel di Fidia, che perciò si dice Montecavallo, dovette esser un bravo cavallo; et ora intendo quel che volse dire un valentuomo che mi disse già che quel Perillo che fece quell'animale di rame a Falari fu un gran bue.¹¹⁷

At the time when the letters were published in 1550, artists in the *Accademia Fiorentina* were freely debating these topics and Cellini had just successfully cast his *Perseus*. So while Cellini was primarily focused on his first public monumental sculpture in this period (1547-50), the evidence of a burgeoning literary identity was already present. In fact, it is possible that Cellini had already begun to piece together the first part of his *Vita* from notes, *ricordi* and poems that he had written during his many travels, not to mention prison stays, and from previous letters he had written, like the one he was asked to write to Francis I in 1545 as an accounting for all that he had done for the King before his abrupt departure from his position at the French court.¹¹⁸

Messomi a scrivere, empie' nove fogli di carta ordinaria; e in quegli narrai tritamente tutte le opere che io avevo fatte et tutti gli accidenti che io avevo àuti in esse, e tutta la quantità de' danari che s'erano ispesi in dette

¹¹⁶ See Barocchi, *Pittura* 111-113 for Borghini's line of attack on Cellini and the entire *paragone* debate in general.

¹¹⁷ Barocchi, *Pittura* 111.

¹¹⁸ Trento 48. Trento refers to this letter of Cellini's (which has never been found) as a "primo anticipo" of what will become the *Vita*. See also Pomilio 704: "Si tratta, come chiaramente appare, di procedimenti che riprovano l'origine letteraria della *Vita*, opera sostenuta da una meditazione fantastica lontana e preparata da prove e tentativi di varia natura. L'autobiografia celliniana non sbocciò così d'un tratto, ma fu il frutto d'una remota, anche se confusa, esperienza stilistica e sentimentale."

opere, i quali tutti s'erano dati per mano di dua notari e d'un suo tesauriere, e sottoscritti da tutti quelli proprii uomini che gli avevano àuti, i quali alcuno aveva dato delle robe sue e gli altri le sue fatiche; e che di essi danari io non m'ero messo un sol quattrino in borsa, e che delle opere mie finite io non avevo àuto nulla al mondo; solo me ne avevo portato in Italia alcuni favori e promesse realissime, degne veramente di Sua Maestà. E se bene io non mi potevo vantare d'aver tratto nulla altro delle mie opere, che certi salari ordinatimi da Sua Maestà per mio trattenimento, et di quelli anche restavo d'avere più di settecento scudi d'oro, i quali apposta io lasciai, perché mi fussino mandati per il mio buon ritorno: "Però conosciuto che alcuni maligni per propria invidia hanno fatto qualche male ufizio, la verità ha star sempre di sopra: io mi glorio di Sua Maestà cristianissima, e non mi muove l'avarizia. Se bene io cognosco d'avere attenuto molto più a Sua Maestà di quello che io mi offersi di fare: e se bene a me non è conseguito il cambio promissomi, d'altro non mi curo al mondo, se non di restare, nel concetto di Sua Maestà, uomo da bene e netto, tal quale io fui sempre. E se nessun dubbio di questo fussi in Vostra Maestà, a un minimo cenno verrò volando a render conto di me, con la propria vita: ma vedendo tener così poco conto di me, non sono voluto tornare a offerirmi, saputo che a me sempre avanzerà del pane dovunque io vada: e quando io sia chiamato, sempre risponderò". Era in detta lettera molti altri particolari degni di quel maraviglioso Re e della salvazione dell'onor mio.¹¹⁹

The semantic slippage from indirect to direct discourse that occurs in the preceding passage (from Sua Maestà to Vostra Maestà) and at various other times in the *Vita*, lends support to the the idea that Cellini fashioned his life story with the help of various documents that he had written and maintained throughout the course of his life.

Si rilegga la pagina contenente la lettera al re di Francia (II, 59): in altre circostanze il Cellini cita direttamente i documenti, anzi una lettera del Cardinale di Ferrara inserita nella *Vita* (I,101) ci fa ritenere che il nostro scrittore mentre scriveva tenesse presente il proprio carteggio. In questo caso si ha appunto l'impressione che il Cellini, mentre dettava la *Vita*, avesse tra mano la propria lettera al re, e che, mentre di essa venne riassumendo brevemente, e in forma indiretta, la parte documentaria, tenne invece a riprodurre in forma diretta, anche se abbreviata, quelle pagine da cui meglio risaltava la sua energia e la dignità della risposta: ci troviamo cioè ancora una volta di fronte a un trapasso intenzionale e studiato in vista di precisi effetti artistici.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Cellini 623-4 (II, Lix).

¹²⁰ Pomilio 712.

Cellini's insistence on having related or narrated *everything* to the king—"narrai tritamente *tutte* le opere che io avevo fatte et *tutti* gli accidenti che io avevo àuti in esse, e *tutta* la quantità de' danari che s'erano ispesi in dette opere"—echoes the formulation used by the artist to characterize the genesis of his *Vita* in the *Trattato dell'oreficeria*: "mi messi a scrivere *tutta* la mia vita, e l'origine mio [*sic*], e *tutte* le cose che io avevo fatto al mondo: e così scrissi *tutti* gli anni che io avevo servito questo mio glorioso signore duca Cosimo." For Cellini, writing is clearly an 'all or nothing' proposition. Every time he picks up a pen or a "matton pesto," as in the case of the crude writing instrument Cellini created for himself while in prison, his need to recount and write everything that he remembers becomes all-consuming: "et quando scrivevo con quel matton pesto sopraditto; e cominciai un capitolo in lode della prigione, et in esso dicevo *tutti* quelli accidenti che da quella io avevo àuti; qual capitolo si scriverà poi al suo luogo."¹²¹

Piero Calamandrei, who uncovered 700 unpublished documents and records relating to Cellini's period of residence in Florence from 1545-1571, observed that "Il Cellini, infatti, per la delizia di chi volesse mettersi a illustrare coi documenti le sue vicende, fu, anche nelle scritture, abbondante ed espansivo: una specie di meticoloso grafomane che tra memorie e libri di conti e suppliche e contratti e testamenti, non passava giorno, si può dire, che non lasciasse ai posteri qualche testimonianza scritta della sua esuberante vitalità."¹²² Trento also points out that we know from references made by Cellini in the *Vita*, that the artist was already keeping record books as early as

¹²¹ Cellini 428 (I, cxix). The "capitolo" to which Cellini refers in this passage is the one that he dedicates to Luca Martini.

¹²² Calamandrei 55-56.

1529.¹²³ And he goes on to observe that the contents of Cellini's *libri* are not always strictly economical in nature: "Spesso l'artista rivela in scritti di tal genere le proprie idee sulle commissioni ricevute e sulla situazione delle arti a Firenze."¹²⁴ But the artist's fixation with his writing seems to indicate more than a compulsion to document his life's events in microscopic detail. There is a pervasive sense in his writings of "la certezza della propria predestinazione"¹²⁵ and this affects the way Cellini views the events of his life; hence, the inclination to document them.¹²⁶ Guglielminetti proposes a reading of the *Vita* as *un itinerarium ad Deum*,¹²⁷ but despite the presence of certain elements of spiritual autobiography, Cellini "mov[es] from providential insurance to personal insurance, including the self into a larger and encompassing design and registering that awareness in the very act of making poems."¹²⁸ Bruno Maier defines this larger driving force "la virile energia di un'esistenza tutta spesa in religiosa comunione con l'arte."¹²⁹ Not just *utile* as an exercise with which to hone his skills while documenting the events of his life, not just *dilettevole*; writing became inextricably linked to Cellini's passion for his art: "inmentre che io pigliavo il fiato, ingegnandomi di ricordarmi dell'arte mia, presi

¹²³ Trento 43-44.

¹²⁴ Trento 44.

¹²⁵ Trento 50.

¹²⁶ Stressing Cellini's interest in astrology, Paolo Rossi proposes a reading of the *Vita* based on how "malign stellar influences" condition his self-presentation (*Sprezzatura* 66-67). While it is true that Cellini refers frequently to "gli influssi celesti che ci predominano," he refers just as frequently to God and his belief in a "Dio che aiuta sempre la ragione" (556) and that "quello (Gesù) lo aiuterebbe se lui si aiutava" (601). See Ferrero 10 who cites Carrara with a qualifier: "Innegabilmente sincera e sofferta è la religiosità di Benvenuto, anche se la sua concezione della vita 'oscilla curiosamente tra la ortodossia cattolica, la superstizione astrologica e il fatalismo pagano.'" Ferrero's qualifier is pertinent: "Che è detto assai bene: ma si vorrebbe poter espungere quel *curiosamente*, non essendo cotesta religiosità, composita ed elementare insieme, cosa rara al tempo del Cellini; sicché riesce 'curiosa' soltanto se raffrontata con espressioni più alte, più meditate e coerenti, di religiosità: rare in ogni tempo, rarissime nel '500.'" (10-11)

¹²⁷ Guglielminetti 292-386, esp. 384.

¹²⁸ Goldberg 79. Goldberg is referring to the poems incorporated into the prison scene in the *Vita*.

¹²⁹ Maier 41.

grandissimo piacere di riscrivere questo soprascritto capitolo.”¹³⁰ Writing became the *atto chiarificatore* which afforded the artist a greater sense of awareness of his identity as *uomo universale*.

An autobiography is equally a work of art and life, for no one writes such a book until he has lived out the requisite years. During his life he remains uncertain of cause and effect, rarely sensing the full shape or continuity of experiences. But in writing his story he artfully defines, restricts, or shapes that life into a self-portrait—one far different from his original model, resembling life but actually composed and framed as an artful invention.¹³¹

Analogous to the *Perseus* both in the manner of its artful self-presentation and in its method of creation, the *Vita* was *not* a work produced in a single cast and during a single time period,¹³² but rather, the result of several different works fused together after having been ‘cast’ during different moments of the artist’s life. As Michael Cole points out with respect to the *Perseus*, “Cellini presented the achievement of his cast as one that happened *in a single gesture*, and thereby both likened his achievement to that of the greatest stonecutters, and set the standards for a different kind of figurative work.”¹³³ Cellini presents us with the ‘casting’ of his autobiography in a similar way by protesting a bit too much at the outset that he is 58 years old (twice in the same sentence) when he embarks on the project of telling his life story. Based on the work of Trento and Calamandrei with respect to the artist’s fastidious habit of record-keeping, it is not

¹³⁰ Cellini 465 (II, I).

¹³¹ See William Howarth in “Some Principles of Autobiography,” *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980) 86.

¹³² See Michael Cole in *Cellini and the Principles of Sculpture* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 2002) 49 and corresponding references. Cole describes how with his *Perseus*, Cellini imitates the “Michelangelesque marble sculptor” whose task it is to extract a form or forms from a single block of marble, even while not working in a carvable medium: “The act of metallic fusion, however, offered Cellini a way to emulate the accomplishment of a monumental piece without joins. Transposing the demand for material unity into a technical problem well-known to professional casters—that of managing the single pour—Cellini rejected the safer and more practical option of casting the *Perseus* in sections (as the casters of Donatello’s *Judith* and of his own *Nymph* had done), intentionally making the operation more difficult. When he came subsequently to describe his feat, he conveniently suppressed the fact that not only the blood from Medusa’s head, but also the wings on Perseus’s feet and head had been made separately.”

¹³³ Cole 49. Italics are mine.

unfounded to postulate that some of the narrative of the first part of his *Vita* was fashioned from the *ricordi* written in France during the period following Cellini's release from prison in Rome, a period in which the artist had begun to achieve the respect and recognition for his creative endeavors that he had long craved.¹³⁴ For Cellini, the fact of being addressed by the King of France as *mon ami* (not to mention being rewarded with a castle along with the same annual stipend awarded to Leonardo da Vinci), was proof that his *virtù* as an artist was finally being given its much-deserved appreciation. This, indeed, would have been something for the record books.

The juxtaposition of Cellini's newly-acquired status in the French court with the prison experience immediately preceding it, would have served to reinforce the artist's impulse to "ringraziar lo Dio della natura"¹³⁵ for his providential change in Fortune. Also significant in this regard is the fact that Cellini goes out of his way (in the same paragraph in which he tells us twice that he is 58 years old) to establish the age of 40 as the time when one can begin to think about such an undertaking as writing the story of one's life:¹³⁶ "ma non si doverrebbe cominciare una tal bella impresa prima che passato l'età de' quaranta anni."¹³⁷ This is exactly Cellini's age when he is about to be released from prison, the period in which he has purportedly composed his first sonnet.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ See Trento 43-44 for the books that Cellini kept during his stay in France (1540-45). Trento refers to Cellini's own mention of them in the *Vita*. See Cellini 544-545 (II, xxviii).

¹³⁵ Cellini 3 (*Proemio*).

¹³⁶ Bellotto, Introduction xxxvii: "Nell'esordio della *Vita*, Cellini fissa a 40 anni l'età prima della quale non si dovrebbe pensare di scrivere la propria autobiografia, indicazione che potrebbe sembrare arbitraria, se non vi interferisse da un lato il ricordo della *Commedia* dantesca (e forse anche quello del *Secretum* petrarchesco) e se dall'altro non ci riportasse all'episodio centrale della prigionia in Castel Sant'Angelo che si conclude quando Benvenuto ha da poco compiuto 40 anni (circostanza che egli non manca di sottolineare)."

¹³⁷ Cellini 7-8 (I,I).

¹³⁸ Cole 145-146 and notes 108 and 109. Cole observes that "[t]he only manuscript evidence of the poem is Cellini's *Vita*, which not only repeats its verses, but also claims that Cellini wrote them while recording, in wax, the vision that he had of the crucified Christ emerging from the molten sun." Pomilio maintains that the "capitolo, quattro sonetti, un madrigale e un madrigale a contrasto" were written during the period of

S'i' potessi, Signor, mostrarvi il vero
 del lume eterno, in questa bassa vita,
 qual ho da Dio, in voi vie più gradita
 saria mia fede, che d'ogni alto impero
 Ahi se 'l credessi il gran Pastor del clero,
 che Dio s'è mostro in sua gloria infinita,
 qual mai vide alma, prima che partita
 da questo basso regno, aspro e sincero;
 le porte di Iustizia sacre e sante
 sbarrar vedresti e 'l tristo impio furore
 cader legato, e al Ciel mandar le voce.
 S'i' avessi luce, ahi lasso, almen le piante
 sculpir del Ciel potessi il gran valore,
 non saria il mio gran mal sì greve croce.¹³⁹

Cole argues that “there is reason to believe that the whole event, including that of the poem’s composition, was retrospectively refashioned when Cellini penned the *Autobiography* in the late 1550’s.”¹⁴⁰ The ‘Dante challenge’ put forth implicitly by Varchi in his *Lezzione* of 1547¹⁴¹ tends to support the notion that the Dantean allusions in this sonnet (as well as the one at the beginning of the *Vita* referencing the acceptable age for writing about one’s life) may have been added after Varchi’s lectures. However, as with certain prose portions of Cellini’s *Vita*, it is likely that the *ossatura* of the sonnets was already conceived and written down in some form around the time of the events in question and that Cellini reworked and refined these verses many times before the final ‘casting’ of them in the *Vita* in the mid-to-late 1550’s. Citing the sonnet written to commemorate the death of Giovanni delle Bande Nere (1526), Pomilio asserts that

1538-39 during Cellini’s incarceration in Castel Sant’Angelo and that certain prose portions of the *Vita* written later were modeled after the poems (700-703).

¹³⁹ See Cellini 440-441 (I, cxxiii) and accompanying notes 5 and 6 in which Bellotto notes the Dantean influences both in the vision of the poem and in the opening verse: “S’i’ potessi, Signor, mostrarvi il vero” and *Paradiso* VIII 94-95: “S’io posso/ mostrarti un vero.”

¹⁴⁰ Cole 146.

¹⁴¹ *Scritti d’Arte* 267, note 6: “[...] Il Varchi fu tra i primi [...] a sostenere tra Michelangelo e Dante una profonda affinità, che non si esaurisce nel linguaggio poetico, ma include le invenzioni figurative.”

Cellini “cominciò assai presto a scrivere sonetti.”¹⁴² He goes on to declare that “le *Rime* vanno considerate una lontana preparazione letteraria dell’opera maggiore, e che lo scrittore le tenne molto spesso presenti durante la stesura di essa: la stessa loro natura direttamente autobiografica sta a provare come esse vadano considerate un antecedente psicologico della *Vita*.”¹⁴³

Of the various documents uncovered by Calamandrei, two are particularly significant in providing evidence for a potentially earlier timeline for the drafting of the *Vita* than the one traditionally accepted (1558-1566).¹⁴⁴ These are the two deeds of gift dated August 10th, 1555, which were drawn up in order to provide for Cellini’s illegitimate son, Iacopo Giovanni. As Calamandrei points out, Cellini provides very clear instructions regarding his wishes for burial in the church of Santa Maria Novella in these documents—instructions that allude unmistakably to the prison vision of 1539 recounted in Cellini’s *Vita*:

La rivelazione più preziosa è quella data dalla descrizione del tondo a bassorilievo: la quale costituisce veramente, per la storia del ‘mio bel Cristo’, la chiave di un mistero.

Vi è in proposito nell’atto di donazione una frase oscura, là dove, con allusione al Crocifisso in cera che doveva servire da modello a quello di marmo, è detto che il Cellini “*asseruit se illud fecisse non ad requisitionem alicuius nec spe alicuius premii inductus, sed quia talem similitudinem se cum oculis suis vidisse asseruit ubi et quando et quo modo ipse vivendo sperat apertius describere*”. Dunque lo stesso testatore lascia intendere vagamente che a ritrarre in cera questa figura egli si era indotto non per commissione né per speranza di guadagno, ma perché ne aveva avuto una visione in misteriose circostanze, che sperava di poter descrivere in altra occasione.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Pomilio 700.

¹⁴³ Pomilio 703.

¹⁴⁴ See Cicchetti 631: “Il proposito, qui espresso, di un più disteso racconto della visione, soprattutto se comparato al relativo episodio della *Vita*, confermerebbe la cronologia dell’ideazione dell’opera suggerita dal trattato *Dell’oreficeria*.”

¹⁴⁵ Calamandrei 72-73. Italics are Calamandrei’s.

The existence of this codicil and the detail it provides with respect to Cellini's plans for his own burial monument, which was originally planned to include his marble Crucifix, 'il mio bel Cristo,' suggests that one of the most dramatic scenes of Cellini's autobiography had already been 'blocked,' to use the stage director's term, at the time when Cellini was having these deeds drawn up. The words "*sperat apertius describere*" might allude to the fact that the scenic background of the prison vision already existed, just not in the completely scripted version that would later form the end of the 'first act' of Cellini's *Vita*. As Calamandrei points out, "la descrizione del bassorilievo contenuta nella donazione e nel testamento del 1555 preannunzia e prepara, *in nuce*, le più diffuse pagine colle quali, nella *Vita*, Benvenuto descrisse poi la visione miracolosa apparsagli nel 1539."¹⁴⁶

As has been demonstrated, it is important to distinguish between the earlier and later phases of the drafting of the *Vita* and the way in which these different phases affected the artist's relationship to his literary masterpiece and how this relationship affects the tone and structure of the narrative. I do not share Paolo Rossi's view that "the *Vita* is not one unified text but two separate books." He further argues that "the purpose and inspiration for each book are different as are the main themes." His view is predicated on the aforementioned assumption that the *Vita* (Book one, in particular) was written from a defensive, repentant posture as a response to Cellini's sodomy conviction and that the second book is focused on Cellini's artistic commissions and his courtly experiences.¹⁴⁷ Aside from the fact that the book and chapter divisions were not

¹⁴⁶ Calamandrei 74. Italics are Calamandrei's.

¹⁴⁷ Rossi, *Sprezzatura* 66-68.

established by Cellini, but by later editors of the *Vita*,¹⁴⁸ the first book has just as many stories as the second about Cellini's experiences as an artist of the papal court as he documents his professional development from goldsmith-craftsman to sculptor-*artista*. I maintain that the difference in tone arose from the previously discussed forced marginalization from his profession and the effect of that harsh reality as it remained unchanged over the course of many years. The "purpose and inspiration" remained the same, but the sense of bitterness and frustration had increased notably by the time Cellini was approaching the end of his *Vita*. I believe that the events surrounding the funeral arrangements for Michelangelo (1564) constituted a turning point because, as a consequence of the rekindled *paragone* debate and Cellini's public expression of his disagreement with Borghini's plans, the artist had to endure the public vilification of his credentials as an "ottimo artista." In other words, the very thing he had set out to prove in his *Vita* had been publicly denigrated before he had even finished his autobiography, much less published it. This helps to explain why Cellini then focused his attention on the *Trattati*. The perceived lack of unity in the *Vita* can be attributed to the fact that the work represents a kind of patchwork or fusing together of pieces crafted during different time periods, or as Cicchetti observed: "è condotta con una tecnica che fa pensare al mosaico, per cui, mentre si osserva l'immagine imponente del disegno, si possono riconoscere non solo i contorni delle singole tessere, ma anche le non trascurabili difformità di composizione di ciascuna."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Rossi argues that Cellini "divided the *Vita* into two parts by the insertion of a long poem"(66) but this insertion can also be interpreted simply as an appropriately-timed continuation of the *omaggio* to Dante during the otherworldly prison scene. As Bellotto points out, "la dedica (of this long *capitolo*) vuol forse essere un omaggio allo studioso di Dante [Luca Martini]." (453n.1)

¹⁴⁹ Cicchetti 638.

The issue of potential political objectives that Cellini may have envisioned for his autobiography seem to have become more likely, if, in fact, they were ever seriously contemplated, as time wore on and the prospects of winning new artistic commissions dwindled. Ettore Camesasca reads the *Vita* as politically motivated from the outset: “In effetti l’autobiografia celliniana è un dialogo fra Benvenuto e il duca Cosimo I, l’interlocutore da convincere; al quale il primo, nonostante l’accorta regia, mette in bocca più di una battuta inopportuna, e parecchie ne dice lui stesso o ne fa dire a personaggi di contorno.”¹⁵⁰ From this standpoint, Cellini’s *Vita* could be interpreted as a kind of handbook, or *Il Committente*, along the lines of Machiavelli’s *Il Principe*. And while the concept has a certain appeal, it would not be accurate to attribute this level of importance to Cosimo in the grand scheme of the *Vita* and the artist’s personal ambitions as *letterato*. Even if we were to approach the matter from a meticulously Cellinian accounting standpoint, the numbers do not add up. The *Vita* consists of 1,039 manuscript pages of which 20 or 22 are left blank.¹⁵¹ The episodes pertaining to Cellini’s dealings with Cosimo begin at manuscript page 441b. Since the pages are numbered only on the recto,¹⁵² this is really the 882nd page of the manuscript. After taking into account the approximately 20 blank pages that occur relatively early on in the manuscript (70a-79b), we are left with the Cosimo pages comprising only about 15% of the total manuscript. Of course, Camesasca’s argument could be interpreted from the perspective that the autobiography deals with Cellini’s conflicts with various patrons and that *all* of these are intended to provide Cosimo with a lesson on how the ideal patron should treat his artists.

¹⁵⁰ Benvenuto Cellini, *Vita*, ed. Ettore Camesasca, 2nd ed. (Milano: BUR, 1999) 19.

¹⁵¹ Rossi, *Sprezzatura* 57 and accompanying note 12. Rossi says that 22 pages are blank (69-80), but this contradicts the Bacci edition that indicates that leaves 70 through 79 are blank.

¹⁵² Rossi, *Sprezzatura* 264, note 12.

But this politically motivated Cosimo-directed reading is not supported by the many other literary allusions and episodes in the *Vita* that are clearly intended to showcase Cellini's qualifications as both *letterato* and consummate Renaissance man.

It seems more likely that rather than as an “arma di pressione presso la corte fiorentina” in an effort to garner additional commissions,¹⁵³ Cellini may have planned to use his autobiography as a ‘*rendiconto*’ to Cosimo for having fled his court, in the same way that he had done in the letter to his prior patron, King Francis I, cited earlier. Having resigned himself to the fact that he was, once again, in a state of irresolvable conflict with his patron, Duke Cosimo, Cellini looked for a solution to the problem in the same way that he had always done—by changing patrons.¹⁵⁴ No sooner had his recently cast *Perseus* begun to cool off when the idea of securing patronage from the newly installed papal court of Julius III became the foremost objective in the artist's mind.¹⁵⁵ Taking advantage of being (momentarily) in the Duke's good graces after the successful casting had taken place, Cellini could justify his trip in that jubilee year without revealing his underlying intentions to Cosimo. Having secured both Cosimo's permission to make the trip to Rome as well as some funds owed to him by Cosimo for his work on the *Ganimede* statue, Cellini set off to Rome in search of a more appreciative patron shortly after the new pope's coronation on February 22, 1550.¹⁵⁶

1.2 *Il Servitore di due Patroni*: The Bust of Bindo Altoviti and the Case of the Missing Bronze

¹⁵³ Trento 50.

¹⁵⁴ See Cicchetti 638: “E come il conflitto torna a ripetersi negli stessi termini, così si ripropone ogni volta lo stesso esito, che vede il protagonista da un lato cercare una risoluzione nella *fuga*, dall'altro, attraverso la scrittura, affidare la sua difesa *alla memoria*.” Italics are Cicchetti's.

¹⁵⁵ Cellini 681 (II, Lxxxi). See also Zikos 135.

¹⁵⁶ Zikos 138.

The episode in the *Vita* that recounts the details of Cellini's trip to Rome is filled with unanswered questions and ambiguous explanations for the reasons behind his trip.¹⁵⁷ From the outset, when Cellini sets the stage for the scene that is about to unfold, he is deliberately vague about precisely when the trip occurred: "et erano li primi anni di papa Iulio de' Monti."¹⁵⁸ Dimitrios Zikos points out that "Cellini non si recò a Roma nei 'primi anni di papa Iulio de' Monti,' ma nei primi *giorni* del nuovo pontificato."¹⁵⁹ As with the previous examples of the author protesting too much, Cellini's declaration that he is about to offer the reader a precise reason for his trip reveals a forced quality from the beginning:

¹⁵⁷ Part of the intrigue surrounding this whole episode is that Cellini changed his mind about which Altoviti story he wanted to recount at this point in the *Vita*. As Bacci points out, the original story was entirely crossed out, but legible in the original manuscript: "Io andai a Roma e lasciai de lavoranti che seguitavano di lavorare, la causa della mia gita di Roma fu la morte di Bindo di Antonio Altoviti, il quale per essersi fatto ribello, egli non mi voleva più dare la mia provisione de i quindici scudi d'oro innoro il mese come lui mi era ubbrigato; e sebene il Duca aveva dato ordine che e' mi fussi reso il mio Capitale, il quale era mille dugento scudi d'oro innoro, et mi rimetteva innel mio capitale libero, perché li detti danari erano in mano al detto Bindo a vita mia, et il Duca aveva dato commissione che e' mi fussino resi dandomi cento scudi il mese insino che io fussi finito di essere pagato, questo si era molto mio grande utile. Ma conosciuto che quei 15 scudi mi davano aiuto grandissimo et ancora temevo della mia *mala fortuna che io avevo con el duca*, che mi facieva pensare che le pessime invidie mi potrieno tanto offendere, che io tal volta arei potuto perdere l'uno et l'altro assegnamento, il quale si era, che dappoi la morte del detto Bindo la bontà de i sua dua figliuoli mi avevano fatto intendere che mi darebbono la mia solita provisione di 15 scudi et che mi pagherebbono di tutto 'l tempo che era passato, il quale montava più di trecento scudi d'oro. Considerato l'uno et l'altro caso e vedutomi senza figliuoli, io mi risolsi che e' fussi 'l mio meglio il pigliare la mia provisione e li detti 300 scudi." The words in italics are those that Bacci indicates were crossed out with special care. Bacci also posits that the reason for the cancelled passage is that Cellini "s'accorse d'aver anticipato di qualche anno il racconto: la morte di Bindo Altoviti non avvenne che nel 1556, ed altre cose si dovevano innanzi narrare." (368-369, note 8) Zikos concludes that Cellini was trying to (fraudulently) have it both ways by receiving payments from both Cosimo and the Altoviti heirs, but it seems more accurate to conclude that on account of his already proven history of "bad luck" with Cosimo, Cellini had good reason to mistrust that his contracts with the Duke regarding payback of his investment with Altoviti (as provided for by Florentine law pertaining to confiscated assets) would be honored; hence the decision to 'hedge his bets' and at least secure forward and back interest payments from Altoviti's heirs at the time of Altoviti's death in January of 1556. As it turned out, Cellini did receive the reimbursement of his entire investment with the Altoviti bank from Cosimo ten months after his trip to Rome following Bindo's death (142-143), but given his strained relationship with the Duke, he had no way of knowing that that would occur at the time of Altoviti's death.

¹⁵⁸ Cellini 677 (II, Lxxviii).

¹⁵⁹ Zikos 137: "La data approssimativa di questo viaggio è stata stabilita da Karl Frey attraverso la scoperta di una lettera che Benedetto Buonanni, un impiegato dell'ambasciata fiorentina a Roma, aveva inviato al segretario ducale Cristiano Pagni." Italics are Zikos's.

Inanzi che io mi partissi, detti ordine ai mia lavoranti che seguitassino sicondo 'l modo che io avevo lor mostro. *Et la cagione perché io andai si fu*, che avendo fatto a Bindo d'Antonio Altoviti un ritratto della sua testa, grande quanto 'l proprio vivo, di bronzo, et gnel'avevo mandato insino a Roma; questo suo ritratto egli l'aveva messo inn-un suo scrittoio, il quale era molto riccamente ornato di anticaglie et altre belle cose, ma il detto scrittoio nonn-era fatto per sculture, né manco per pitture, perché le finestre venivano sotto le dette belle opere, di sorte che, per avere quelle sculture et pitture i lumi al contrario, le non mostravano bene, in quel modo che le arebbono fatto se le avessino aùto i loro ragionevoli lumi. Un giorno si abbatté 'l detto Bindo a essere in su la sua porta, et passando Michelangelo Buonaroti, *scultore*, ei lo pregò che si degnassi di entrare in casa sua a vedere un suo scrittoio; et così lo menò. Subito entrato, et veduto, disse: “Chi è stato questo maestro che v'ha ritratto così bene et con sì bella maniera? E sappiate che quella testa mi piace come, et meglio qualcosa, che si faccino quelle antiche; et pur le sono delle buone che di loro si veggono; et se queste finestre fussino lor di sopra, come le sono lor di sotto, le mostrerrieno tanto meglio, che quel vostro ritratto infra queste tante belle opere si farebbe un grande onore.”¹⁶⁰

After explicitly announcing his intention to give us the “cagione” for his trip, Cellini proceeds to give us a meandering ‘*non cagione*’ which makes the reader wonder whether he had been summoned to Rome by Altoviti to offer his interior decorating skills in order to better display his masterfully executed bust in the home of the famous Florentine banker. The classic story-teller’s *spia narrativa*, “un giorno,” clues us in as to the real reason the Bindo Altoviti story is being told: “Il busto serve quindi da pretesto per introdurre l’elogio che Michelangelo fa di Benvenuto e delle sue doti di scultore.”¹⁶¹ As Zikos rightly points out, if Cellini’s intent had been to discuss another one of his artistic creations and the challenges involved in making it, as he had just done with the *Perseus* story in the chapters preceding this episode, there would have been a meticulous accounting of it. But Cellini offers us no details whatsoever about the execution of this beautiful bronze bust.¹⁶² It would seem logical that Cellini would have been conflicted

¹⁶⁰ Cellini 677-78 (II, Lxxix). Italics are mine.

¹⁶¹ Zikos 134.

¹⁶² Zikos 133.

about including a story that involved Bindo Altoviti's name at all. After all, the author had devoted a lot of time in the *Vita* to professing his family's loyalty to the Medici.¹⁶³ To enter into a discussion of his dealings with one of the most notorious anti-Medici *fuorusciti* would have raised the level of suspicion surrounding the artist's allegiance to Cosimo.¹⁶⁴ But by the time Cellini was actually writing about these events in his *Vita*, fifteen years had passed since the execution of the bust for Altoviti in 1549.¹⁶⁵ By then, the artist had already been excluded from receiving important commissions from the Duke for over ten years¹⁶⁶ and Altoviti was no longer a threat to Cosimo because he was dead. The significance for Cellini's reputation (and his ego) of including the Bindo Altoviti story at that point vastly outweighed any potential political consequences because there could be no more important story to tell in his *Vita* than the one involving Michelangelo's high praise for his work as a *sculptor* (as opposed to goldsmith).

Beyond its self-congratulatory function, the inclusion of Michelangelo's *elogio* at this point in Cellini's narrative is also significant in light of the events that were unfolding contemporaneously as the artist was crafting this episode. It was 1564, the aforementioned 'turning point' year in which the *Accademia del Disegno* was making

¹⁶³ Zikos 136 and accompanying notes.

¹⁶⁴ See David Alan Brown and Jane Van Nimmen, *Raphael and the Beautiful Banker: The Story of the Bindo Altoviti Portrait* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2005) 10-11 and accompanying notes: "Clement's illegitimate son Duke Alessandro de' Medici named the banker to public office in 1532. Bindo, nevertheless, opened both his palace and his coffers to Florentine exiles opposed to the Medici. And after Lorenzino de' Medici assassinated Duke Alessandro in 1537, Bindo sent him money and advised him on how to avoid arrest: apart from political considerations, the mother of the twenty-two-year-old assassin was Maria Soderini, Bindo's sister-in-law. Another sister of Fiammetta, Caterina Ginori, unwittingly served as the bait Lorenzino used to lure Alessandro into the final trap. [...] Duke Cosimo, Alessandro's successor, appointed Bindo Florentine consul in Rome, then senator in 1546, moves which in no way mitigated their mutual hatred. Bindo financed Piero Strozzi, who took up the family project to liberate Florence, outfitting five companies of troops, and sent his own son, Giovanni Battista Altoviti, at their head to join the Sienese rebels in the war with Florence. The armed opposition was definitively crushed on 2 August 1554 at the Battle of Marciano. As a reprisal for aiding the rebels, Duke Cosimo confiscated Bindo's Florentine property in 1554-55."

¹⁶⁵ Zikos 136 and 143.

¹⁶⁶ Trento 47.

funeral arrangements for Michelangelo, and Cellini was involved in the heated debate over the design program for the catafalque and the tomb's monument.¹⁶⁷ Borghini and Vasari wanted to give painting a position of prominence over sculpture in the configuration of funereal iconography and Cellini naturally felt that this arrangement would constitute a betrayal of the professional commitment of the '*divin*' Michelangelo.¹⁶⁸ The fact that Cellini adds the qualifier "scultore" alongside Michelangelo's name in the passage cited above (as if anyone was unaware of what Michelangelo was best-known for), serves as the artist's polemical reminder to those who found themselves on the other side of the debate, that Michelangelo was first and foremost a sculptor—a master of that art which confers upon the artist a god-like quality.¹⁶⁹

The episode can also be read as Cellini's attempt to compete with Vasari in the realm of Cosimo's diplomatic efforts to get Michelangelo to return to Florence.¹⁷⁰ Vasari was in Rome during the same period when Cellini was there, but he remained longer to work on important commissions he had received from the new pope (and his former patron), as well as from Bindo Altoviti.¹⁷¹ Vasari had met with Michelangelo in Rome in

¹⁶⁷ Zikos 136.

¹⁶⁸ See *Cellini's Disputa infra la scultura e la pittura avendo il nostro luogotenente, datoci da Sua Eccellenza Illustrissima, preso la parte dei pittori e nel mirabile essequio del gran Michelangelo di propria potenza posta la pittura a mano destra e la scultura a sinistra* in *Scritti* 594-599. See also Zikos 136: "Quindi, l'inclusione nel testo della lettera in cui Michelangelo elogiava il suo talento di scultore era destinata forse a dimostrare fino a che punto egli fosse vicino al Buonarroti; va comunque sottolineato che questo presunto elogio scritto appare singolare dal momento che, come è noto, Michelangelo non amava le sculture in bronzo."

¹⁶⁹ See Cellini 672 (II, Lxxvii) for the famous scene in the *Vita* in which the artist succeeds in regaining control of the casting process of the *Perseus*: "Or veduto di avere risucitato un morto, contro al credere di tutti quegli ignoranti, e' mi tornò tanto vigore, che io non mi avedevo se io avevo più febbre o più paura di morte." See also *Disputa* 594: "Tutte le opere, che si veggono fatte dallo Iddio della natura in cielo ed in terra, sono tutte di scultura."

¹⁷⁰ Zikos 140.

¹⁷¹ Zikos 138-140. See also Patricia Lee Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari, Art and History* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1995) 14.

June of 1550 and had attempted to persuade him to return to Florence and this news had likely made its way back to Cellini who had already returned home. Vasari also describes in his *Vite* how he had been ordered by the Duke to write to Michelangelo, to ask him to return to Florence in order to complete the famous staircase of the Biblioteca Laurenziana.¹⁷² Cellini's entire recounting of his trip to Rome in this period is centered upon casting himself as a respected friend of Michelangelo's—one who had not only received a letter of praise from his idol regarding the bust of Altoviti,¹⁷³ but who had then been asked by Cosimo (given this letter) to serve in the same diplomatic capacity as his rival, Vasari, in attempting to convince Michelangelo to come back to Florence:¹⁷⁴ “Il racconto del viaggio a Roma è una delle più irresistibili invenzioni retoriche della *Vita*. Nel segnalare che Cosimo lo aveva scelto per contattare Michelangelo, Cellini offre un'immagine molto lusinghiera di sé, delle sue qualità artistiche e della sua fedeltà politica, considerando che solo un vero scultore che fosse, al tempo stesso, un suddito leale poteva essere preso in considerazione per una missione di tale delicata natura.”¹⁷⁵

The question of just how loyal Cellini was must have always been of concern to Duke Cosimo. Despite the fact that Cellini goes out of his way to portray himself and his family as Medici loyalists in the *Vita*, he does not conceal his consistent associations with certain *fuorusciti* both in France and in Italy, even at the risk of exposing that he had been

¹⁷² Zikos 140.

¹⁷³ Zikos 134: “L'originale della lettera non ci è pervenuto e molti dubbi sono stati sollevati a proposito della sua autenticità. Non c'è però motivo di dubitare che Michelangelo abbia potuto ammirare il busto; vista l'amicizia che legava Bindo al Buonarroti, il banchiere avrebbe certo desiderato mostrare al più grande scultore del tempo il suo ritratto eseguito da un altro scultore fiorentino, che oltretutto era una vecchia conoscenza di entrambi.”

¹⁷⁴ Zikos 134 and 140.

¹⁷⁵ Zikos 137.

in violation of Cosimo's laws forbidding contact with Florentine exiles.¹⁷⁶ On the contrary, Cellini uses his autobiography to advertise his associations with the 'Who's Who' list of Cosimo's 'most wanted.' Of course, Cellini's associations did not have to be advertised in the *Vita* for Cosimo to have come to know about them. He would have been kept well informed in 'real time' by a vast network of spies and informers,¹⁷⁷ particularly in the case of Lorenzino de' Medici, the assassin of Alessandro de' Medici, upon whose head Cosimo had placed a bounty.¹⁷⁸ In one scene in the *Vita*, Cellini proudly relates that he had harbored this enemy of the Duke while he lived in France, and was later welcomed into Lorenzino's home in Venice as an old friend when the artist visited there in 1546.¹⁷⁹

L'altro giorno a presso io mi scontrai in misser Lorenzo de' Medici, il quale subito mi prese per mano con la maggior racoglienza che si possa veder al mondo, perché ci eramo cognosciuti in Firenze quando io facevo le monete al duca Lessandro, et dipoi in Parigi, quando io ero al servizio del Re. Egli si tratteneva in casa di misser Giuliano Buonacorsi, et per non aver dove andarsi a passar tempo altrove senza grandissimo suo pericolo, egli si stava più del tempo in casa mia, vedendomi lavorare grand'opere. Et sì come io dico, per questa passata conoscenza egli mi prese per mano et menòmi a casa sua, dove era il signor Priore delli Strozzi, fratello del signor Piero, et rallegrandosi, mi domandorno quanto io volevo soprastare in Venezia, credendosi che io me ne volessi ritornare in Francia. A' quali Signori io dissi che io mi ero partito di Fiorenze per una tale occasione sopra detta, et che fra dua o tre giorni io mi volevo ritornare a Fiorenze a servire il mio gran Duca. Quando io dissi queste parole, il signor Priore et misser Lorenzo mi si volsono con tanta rigidità, che io ebbi paura grandissima, et mi dissono: "Tu faresti il meglio a tornartene in Francia, dove tu sei ricco et

¹⁷⁶ See Mendelsohn 5 and note 16: "Varchi's correspondence reveals that during this entire period his ties with Florence and with other *fuorusciti* in Rome were never severed, even though legislation enacted in 1537 and 1539 (and as late as 1547) forbade communication between *fuorusciti* and loyal Florentines." In her footnote, Mendelsohn further explains that "lists of *fuorusciti* were published and contact carried a penalty of death to the next of kin in Florence. Among those on the list were Cardinal Ridolfi, Donato Giannotti and Bindo Altoviti (in Rome). (Ramsden-*Letters*, vol II. App.38)."

¹⁷⁷ See Domenico Zanrè "Ritual and Parody in Mid-Cinquecento Florence: Cosimo de' Medici and the Accademia del Piano," *The Cultural Politics of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Aldershot, Eng.: Ashgate, 2001) 198. See also Paolo Simoncelli, "Esuli fiorentini al tempo di Bindo Altoviti," *Ritratto di un banchiere* 309-312.

¹⁷⁸ Bellotto 631n.9.

¹⁷⁹ This was not just a 'pleasure trip' to Venice. Cellini decided to leave town in order to "dare un poco di luogo a quella diavoleria" after having been accused of sodomy. See Cellini 631 (II, Lxii).

conosciuto; che se tu torni a Firenze, tu perderai tutto quello che avevi guadagnato in Francia, et di Firenze non trarrai altro che dispiaceri.”¹⁸⁰

Cellini's interest in relating the story of this encounter with Lorenzino is multi-layered. On the surface, there is the artist's desire to provide a pretext for inserting the prophetic words of advice that foretold of Cellini's misfortune under Cosimo and recalled the artist's privileged status under King Francis I. The idea of following this advice and returning to France at the invitation of Caterina de' Medici, widow of King Henry II, was a real possibility in 1562, but one that could not be realized since Cosimo denied Cellini's request for permission to leave Florence, as he had also done in 1554.¹⁸¹ Whether or not Cellini contemplated a plan to flee Florence without Cosimo's permission, the inclusion of this admonishment to 'abandon all hope' under Cosimo's tutelage testifies to the artist's longing to return to the status and recognition he had enjoyed in France, and his deep sense of bitterness and regret at not having been permitted to do so.

The fact that Cellini openly declares that he had aided and abetted an enemy of Cosimo is revealing on several levels. On the one hand, it would seem to lay bare the political weakness of an artist who had nothing more to lose at this point in his career and could therefore afford to flaunt his disloyal behavior in Cosimo's face. On a more subtle level, however, the inclusion of this story in the *Vita* reveals the way in which the power dynamic functioned on *both* sides of the Cellini-Cosimo relationship. Cellini clearly knew that Cosimo's spies and informers were watching Lorenzino's every move, as evidenced by him saying that Lorenzino could not move freely “*sanza grandissimo suo pericolo*.” The artist therefore must have known that Cosimo had also been aware of *his* moves on account of his traitorous associations. But there is never any hint of guilt or

¹⁸⁰ Cellini 631-632 (II,Lxii).

¹⁸¹ Bellotto, *Notizie Biografiche* Lxix.

defensiveness in the way Cellini explains himself to the Duke upon his return from these *liaisons dangereuses*. Cosimo, for his part, plays along with Cellini's game of feigning innocence. While he oftentimes reveals his anger initially, he quickly reverts to an appearance of normalcy, demonstrating his adherence to the rule of 'keeping your friends close, but your enemies closer.'¹⁸² And Cellini, in turn, is fully aware of the reasons behind Cosimo's anger, but he pretends not to understand them, thus protecting his right to continue to claim loyalty to the Duke at every turn. Cellini's account of his exchange with Cosimo upon his return from Venice (and his supposedly happenstance meeting with Lorenzino) is illustrative of this delicate power play that is evocative of a scene in which the jealous lover confronts his or her wandering partner:

Et con la sua [Cosimo's] solita prudenzia et severità, io lo visitai senza alcuna cerimonia; stato alquanto con la detta severità, dipoi *piacevolmente* mi si volse et mi domandò dove io ero istato. Al quale io risposi che il cuor mio mai non si era scostato un ditto da Sua Eccellenza illustrissima, se bene per qualche occasioni e' mi era stato di necessità di menare un poco il mio corpo a zonzo. Allora faccendosi più piacevole, mi cominciò a domandar di Vinezia, et così ragionammo un pezzo; poi ultimamente mi disse che io attendessi a lavorare e che io li finissi il suo Perseo.¹⁸³

This tactic of feigning ignorance was used masterfully on both sides of the equation in Cosimo's regime. The *fuorusciti* were masters of it as they engaged in the "doppio gioco di molti, fintamente pronti ad ossequiar Cosimo" in the lead-up to the war as soldiers and money were being amassed to challenge Cosimo in Siena.¹⁸⁴ Bindo Altoviti employed the same tactic in order to maintain a relationship with the Duke, even though he was fully aware that Cosimo's informers were reporting back to the Duke

¹⁸² Pope-Hennessy in *Cellini* cites C. Dempsey: "Cosimo was a master of the art of nullifying potential sources of opposition by employing them, and rewarding them as well as he deemed it necessary for his working interests. The same purposes as for the Accademia Fiorentina obtain in Cosimo's creation of the Accademia del Disegno." (311, note 11)

¹⁸³ Cellini 633 (II, Lxii). Emphasis is mine.

¹⁸⁴ Simoncelli 314.

regarding his role as financier of the anti-Medici troops being raised. The Duke's network of spies and informers had been keeping a close watch on Bindo Altoviti's movements for years.¹⁸⁵ Cosimo played the same game with Bindo "machiavellicamente fingendo col diretto interessato di non sapere."¹⁸⁶ And Cellini could not possibly have thought that his stay at Bindo Altoviti's house while he was in Rome in 1550 (while under the Duke's employ) would have gone unnoticed by Cosimo. The scene in which Cosimo displays his displeasure with Cellini upon his return from this trip to Rome is yet another example of this '*gioco delle parti*' in which both Cellini and Cosimo feign ignorance at the underlying motivations behind the other's response.

Pochi giorni appresso mi fu dato comodità che io parlai al Duca, et ei mi fece certe carezze torbide et mi domandò quello che si faceva a Roma: così 'l meglio che io seppi appiccai ragionamento, et gli dissi della testa che io avevo fatta di bronzo a Bindo Altoviti, con tutto quel che era seguito. Io mi avidi che gli stava a 'scoltarmi con grande attenzione; et gli dissi similmente di Michelagnolo Buonaroti il tutto. Il quale mostrò alquanto sdegno [at Michelangelo's refusal to return to Florence]; et delle parole del suo Urbino, di quello 'scorticamento che gli aveva detto, forte se ne rise; poi disse: "Suo danno", et io mi parti'.¹⁸⁷

Zikos argues that Cosimo's cold reception of Cellini upon his return from Rome was due to the "estremo ritardo con il quale Cellini era rientrato a Firenze,"¹⁸⁸ but the more compelling explanation is to be found in the fact that Cosimo was not pleased with finding out that Cellini was a 'servant of two masters' in this period—two masters who could not have been more distrustful of each other. The fact that Cellini had been working on the Altoviti bust at the same time that he was working on the *Perseus* while on the ducal payroll would not have been lost on Cosimo.¹⁸⁹ The other issue that would

¹⁸⁵ Simoncelli 309-312.

¹⁸⁶ Simoncelli 311.

¹⁸⁷ Cellini 684 (II, Lxxxii).

¹⁸⁸ Zikos 138.

¹⁸⁹ Zikos 143.

have been reported back to Cosimo by his papal ambassador, Averardo Serristori, was the fact of Cellini's attempt to seek patronage under the new pope (while the *Perseus* remained unfinished back in Florence): "et perché io avevo mossi certi ragionamenti con el Papa, con e' quali io credo che facilmente mi sarei convenuto seco et volentieri mi sarei tornato a Roma per le gran difficoltà che io avevo a Firenze; ma 'l detto inbasciatore io mi avvidi che egli aveva operato in contrario."¹⁹⁰ For Cellini, the freedom to choose his 'master' or patron was of fundamental importance and he was not willing to allow his role as an artist of the ducal court to compromise his belief in those same rights to freedom that he had asserted as a young artist who had just begun working in Rome: "Dissi ch'io era nato libero, et così libero mi volevo vivere, et che di lui [the new master] non si poteva dolere; manco di me, restando aver da lui certi pochi scudi d'acordo [*sic*]; et come lavorante libero volevo andare dove mi piaceva, conosciuto non far torto a persona. [...] volevo essere mio et non di altri; et chi mi voleva mi chiedessi a me."¹⁹¹

The burgeoning new identity of the artist-courtiers who were no longer bound by the previous restrictions placed on the artist-craftsmen by the guilds or *arti* of which they were members, is the cultural climate which informs Cellini's impassioned defense of his liberty.¹⁹² But Cellini also makes it clear that he will not be bound by relationships of patronage either, whether they be contracted with popes, kings, dukes or private citizens. Pope-Hennessy remarks that Cellini would have "required the Duke's approval"¹⁹³ to do the bust of Bindo Altoviti, presumably because Cellini was receiving an annual stipend

¹⁹⁰ Cellini 681 (II, Lxxxix).

¹⁹¹ Cellini 52 (I, xiv).

¹⁹² Wittkower and Wittkower 9-16.

¹⁹³ Pope-Hennessy, *Cellini* 219.

from the Duke for his work on the *Perseus* at the time when he executed it.¹⁹⁴ But there is no indication that Cellini ever requested or received permission from Cosimo to do the bust of Bindo Altoviti. In fact, prior to the recounting of the bust in the *Vita* (well after its execution), there seems to have been a concerted effort on the part of the artist to keep the execution of the statue a secret. The “morass of doubt”¹⁹⁵ surrounding the commissioning and execution of the bust of Altoviti has recently been untangled by Dimitrios Zikos as a result of his thorough examination of the accounting books of Altoviti’s son-in-law, Giovanbattista Nerli. By ‘following the money trail,’ Zikos was able to pinpoint the period of time in which Altoviti posed for Cellini as well as the period in which the bust was cast.¹⁹⁶ The results of his findings yield not only a portrait of Cellini as a ‘servant of two masters’ in this period, but they also yield a portrait of an artist with an audaciously mischievous sense of irony.

Cellini quindi eseguì il ritratto del banchiere mentre lavorava al *Perseo*. In quel periodo, lo scultore disponeva di una sua fornace e aveva al suo servizio artigiani specializzati, in grado di aiutarlo a portare avanti con più rapidità il lavoro sul colosso. Persino una circostanza così accessoria e incomprensibile come l’impiego di due sbarre di ferro provenienti da uno dei possedimenti dell’Altoviti nella colata del *Perseo* trova così una sua precisa spiegazione nel quadro di quel periodo.

Cellini si lagna di aver perso nell’affare con Bindo il metallo usato per il getto del busto. Dal momento che nei libri contabili dello scultore sono abitualmente registrati tutti i materiali forniti per la realizzazione dei suoi lavori, ci si potrebbe aspettare di trovarvi anche l’annotazione relativa al bronzo usato per il busto: nelle scritture di quel periodo non è però menzionata nessuna fornitura di questo materiale. È probabile quindi che Cellini avesse impiegato a tal fine parte del metallo destinato al *Perseo*. In effetti, sappiamo che lo scultore si appropriò illecitamente di una porzione del bronzo ricevuto per la realizzazione del colosso: con questa accusa lo scultore dovette comparire davanti a una commissione d’inchiesta. È vero d’altronde che il *Perseo* e il busto di Bindo Altoviti sono simili dal punto di vista tecnico; in particolare la composizione della lega metallica utilizzata per realizzare la testa di Medusa è quasi identica a quella

¹⁹⁴ Trento 44 and 47.

¹⁹⁵ Pope-Hennessy, *Cellini* 218.

¹⁹⁶ Zikos 141-144.

impiegata per il getto della scultura [of Altoviti]. In effetti, da questo punto di vista il busto dell'Altoviti può essere considerato una costola del *Perseo*.¹⁹⁷

The discovery of the disappearance of some of his bronze was reason enough for Cosimo to be angry. The fact that it potentially had been used to pay tribute to one of his most hated enemies would have been adding insult to injury. If Cosimo suspected that the missing bronze earmarked for his *Perseus* had been used to create a monument to immortalize Bindo Altoviti, he did not explicitly reveal that suspicion. Interesting to note, however, is the timing of the delivery of the report by the *soprassindaci* to the Duke regarding the missing bronze: May 23, 1554.¹⁹⁸ This is the period a little over three weeks after the unveiling of the *Perseus*, the same period in which Cellini describes Cosimo as having become mysteriously “turbato” for some inexplicable reason. Camesasca argues that Cosimo’s *turbamento* with Cellini at that time was caused by his disappointment with the final result of the “statua ‘grande’ del complesso,” the *Perseus* itself.¹⁹⁹ He cites the fact that the Duke later bought Cellini’s Crucifix in 1565 for the chapel in the Palazzo Pitti as additional proof that “il ‘turbamento’ del duca dipendeva dal *Perseo* e non da altro.”²⁰⁰ But according to Cellini’s account of the sudden change of heart of the Duke, it did not occur immediately following the unveiling, but shortly after he had returned from his brief pilgrimage to Vallombrosa to give thanks for the clamorous success of his *Perseus*.²⁰¹ The artist leaves Florence “sempre cantando” after he listens to Sforza Almeni, the Duke’s valet, good-naturedly bid him to come home soon: “Queste formate parole mi disse la sera misser Sforza, ridendo et anche

¹⁹⁷ Zikos 143-44 and accompanying notes. Dario Trento is cited twice by Zikos in this passage. However, Trento discusses this “aspetto taciuto della vicenda del Perseo” without ever mentioning the possibility that the ‘missing bronze’ was used by Cellini to create the bust of Bindo Altoviti. See Trento 46-48.

¹⁹⁸ Trento 47.

¹⁹⁹ Camesasca 13-18.

²⁰⁰ Camesasca 17.

²⁰¹ Cellini 713-720 (II, xciii-xcvi).

maravigliandosi del gran favore che mi faceva 'l Duca; et piacevolmente mi disse: 'Va', Benvenuto, et torna, ché io te n'ho invidia.'",²⁰²

And there is no reason to think that Cellini would have resorted to misrepresenting Cosimo's initial reaction to his statue since if it had, in fact, been negative, the artist certainly had all of the other positive responses of congratulations and praise to point to as evidence that Cosimo's opinion was likely conditioned by the envious critique of a notorious enemy like Bandinelli.²⁰³ The fact that the Duke's sudden change of attitude does not occur immediately after the unveiling, but a short time after Cellini's return from his pilgrimage, makes it more likely that something other than disappointment with the *Perseus* was the cause. The discovery that Cellini had 'borrowed' some of Cosimo's bronze and the possibility that the artist had used it to carry out a commission for a man who was known to be financing the war against Cosimo²⁰⁴ would have, at the very least, constituted grounds for a reaction of *turbamento* and anger. Three days after the report concerning the missing bronze had been delivered to Cosimo, Bindo Altoviti was formally accused of sedition by the Florentine magistrature.²⁰⁵

All of these events—the unveiling of the *Perseus*, the sudden change in attitude of Cosimo towards Cellini, the discovery of the missing bronze, the raising of troops against Cosimo and the formal accusation against Altoviti—were happening in the three-month period leading up to the decisive Battle of Marciano on August 2nd, 1554 when Cosimo

²⁰² Cellini 714 (II, xciii).

²⁰³ See note 90 above.

²⁰⁴ Simoncelli 309-312.

²⁰⁵ Simoncelli 314: "Il 26 maggio '54 veniva finalmente presentata formale denuncia alla magistratura fiorentina degli Otto di guardia e balia contro Bindo Altoviti per "aver machinato contro Sua Excellentia Illustrissima et suo felicissimo Stato"; scaduti i tempi concessi per la presentazione dell'Altoviti a Firenze, la sua contumacia fu considerata prova di colpevolezza e fu pertanto emanato il bando di ribellione, il 5 luglio seguente, con confisca di tutti i suoi beni presenti nel territorio del ducato."

defeated the Sienese rebels and the Altoviti-financed troops led by Piero Strozzi.²⁰⁶ While there is no evidence that Cellini secretly supported the anti-Medici forces, it is noteworthy that he felt the need to, once again, profess his loyalty to Cosimo regarding the period in question by describing how he cut his pilgrimage short in order to rush back to inform the Duke of the potentially important military intelligence he had gathered while he was traveling near Arezzo. According to Cellini's account, the Duke was happy to receive the information and assured him that the "passo tanto scoperto" was being taken care of by the Duke of Urbino.²⁰⁷ Zikos suspects that Cellini's need to emphasize his loyalty at this juncture was also due to the fact that his nephew, Libradoro Libradori, had recently been accused by Averardo Serristori of supporting the *fuorusciti* who were plotting against Cosimo in Rome. Serristori expressed his concern for the Duke's safety in his letter to Cosimo (dated March 24, 1554), referencing the close relationship between Libradori and Cellini and the fact that the artist had easy access to the Duke given his position at the court. Serristori described Libradori as a "cervello strano" and Cellini as one who "ha un cervello della sorte che lei sa." In his response to Serristori three days later, Cosimo seemed unfazed by the purported threat and his description of Libradori explains why: "inquieto ... ma è debole." Nonetheless, he instructed Serristori to persuade Libradori to return to Florence where he could be kept under control.²⁰⁸ In so doing, Cosimo revealed yet again his strategy of "nullifying potential sources of opposition"²⁰⁹ by keeping the suspected individuals under close watch. It was this same policy, no doubt, that was behind Cosimo's refusal to grant permission to Cellini to leave

²⁰⁶ Simoncelli 314: "La notizia dunque era vera: ben due mila fanti e 200 cavalieri erano stati arruolati col concorso finanziario determinante degli Altoviti."

²⁰⁷ Cellini 715-717 (II, xciv).

²⁰⁸ Zikos 136.

²⁰⁹ See note 182 above.

Florence, both in 1554 and later in 1562. The other motivation for highlighting his loyalty to the Medici at this point in the writing of the *Vita* was attributable, once again, to the events surrounding Borghini's very public denunciation of Cellini in 1564. Given the close relationship between Cosimo and Borghini, Cellini had to believe that the attacks on him were sanctioned by Cosimo.

It is impossible to know exactly how many days had passed between the unveiling of the *Perseus* and Cosimo's *volte-face* because, as we have already seen with Cellini's trip to Rome in 1550, Cellini-narrator takes a certain amount of license when it comes to the chronology of events in question, especially when there appears to be a particular reason to obfuscate the timeline.²¹⁰ So when Cellini-narrator introduces the episode concerning Cosimo's change in attitude with the comment "L'altro giorno io mi feci vedere,"²¹¹ he could have intended just as easily "l'altra settimana." One conclusion, however, seems inescapable: that it is not a coincidence that Cosimo's abrupt change in attitude towards Cellini occurred right around the time of the delivery of the report regarding the missing bronze to Cosimo. The interconnectedness of these events seems even more obvious when one considers that the focal point of the ensuing *questione* with Cellini is centered upon the issue of money and deciding what '*premio*' the artist deserved for his bronze masterpiece. Small wonder then, that Cosimo abruptly changed

²¹⁰ Another example of this is when Cellini skips the events of several years and proceeds as if there has been no lapse in covering the significant events of his life. Bellotto points out that this occurs when Cellini proceeds to recount the events surrounding the Neptune commission with "In questo tempo" when, in reality, "le vicende qui narrate avvennero tre anni dopo quelle descritte nel capitolo precedente. Siamo dunque attorno al 1559; in questo lasso di tempo Cellini fu condannato per due volte a pene detentive." (731, note 1)

²¹¹ Cellini 717 (II, xciv).

his mind about handsomely rewarding the artist for his efforts, and instead wanted to know what Cellini was asking—“quel che tu dimandi”—for his *Perseus*.²¹²

The case against Cellini regarding the missing bronze was finally resolved with a judicial ruling in the Duke's favor on May 31st, 1559 but, as Trento points out, “la cosa doveva essere chiacchierata a Firenze se Vasari, che proprio in quegli anni stava scrivendo i suoi *Ragionamenti*, descrive il tondo della sala di Cosimo I in palazzo Vecchio dove il duca era ritratto circondato dagli artisti al suo servizio e dice che Benvenuto Cellini vi *contende con Francesco di ser Jacopo* (provider of bronze to Cosimo). In realtà nel dipinto Cellini *contende* con Bandinelli, ma proprio il ‘lapsus’ sembra mostrare in Vasari l'intenzione di alludere alla recente vicenda dell'artista.”²¹³ Thus when Cellini-narrator recounts the story of Cosimo's sudden displeasure with the artist in May of 1554, the self-portrayal of his being “ismarrito et maravigliato” at the Duke's abrupt change is likely yet another example of Cellini feigning incredulity at a reaction he suspected (for good reason) was provoked by the discovery of the artist's misappropriation of bronze—a discovery that had come to light at a most inopportune time, given the clamorous success of the *Perseus* and the desire of the artist to be rewarded appropriately for his efforts.

Of course, it is quite likely that Cosimo would have played a similar game with Cellini regarding payment for the *Perseus* even without the added discovery of the missing bronze, given the “rigid, penny-pinching world of Medicean patronage”²¹⁴ and the financial straits that the Duke found himself in at the time. The overall economic

²¹² Cellini 717 (II, xcv).

²¹³ Trento 47-48. Italics are Trento's.

²¹⁴ John Pope-Hennessy as cited in Jane Tylus, “The Merchant of Florence: Benvenuto Cellini, Cosimo de' Medici and the *Vita*,” *Writing and Vulnerability in the Late Renaissance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1993) 34.

situation had grown worse given the urgent need to finance impending battles and consequently, Cosimo would have had more meager means at his disposal to honor his commitment to Cellini.²¹⁵ In this scenario, Cosimo would have found fault with Cellini for some undisclosed reason so that he could pull back from his “mirabil promesse”²¹⁶ to compensate the artist handsomely for his great work. But Cellini made it unnecessary for Cosimo to resort to such dissembling in this case, given that he had unintentionally provided his patron with a justification for not maintaining his end of the original ‘bargain’—one that Cellini lamented not having put in writing.

Certamente che se io fussi stato astuto a llegare per contratto tutto quello che io avevo di bisogno in queste mie opere, io non arei àuto e’ gran travagli, che per mia causa mi son venuti: perché la volontà sua si vedeva grandissima sì in voler fare delle opere e sì nel dar buon ordine a esse. Però non conoscendo io che questo Signore aveva *più modo di mercatante che di duca*, liberalissimamente procedevo con Sua Eccellenza come duca [e non come mercatante].²¹⁷

It was precisely this idea of bargaining for compensation that was unacceptable to Cellini’s concept of the value of his artistic creations, which he viewed as *inestimabili* and, therefore, could not be valued as objects of the marketplace.²¹⁸ Having realized that he was no longer a part of the “symbolic economy” that he had enjoyed under the patronage of King Francis I,²¹⁹ Cellini bitterly and resentfully adapted to this vile relationship of ‘mercantile exchange’ patronage with Duke Cosimo I. Under Cosimo’s

²¹⁵ Simoncelli 309 and note 180: “per far fronte alle esigenze militari che ricadevano solo sulle sue spalle (la morte del suocero, vicerè di Napoli nel febbraio ’53, lo aveva privato di un essenziale appoggio presso la corte imperiale che da allora gli fu avara di tutto) dovette procedere ad un inasprimento fiscale senza precedenti: ‘messe un accatto universale a tutto il dominio—scrive il Segni—che arrivò a trecentomila scudi, e messe più di una gravezza nuova in su la carne di un quattrino per libbra, che si disse arrivava a scudi sessantamila, sotto nome di dover durare un solo anno per soddisfare ai mercanti francesi scudi trentamila di grani, ma non mai levata, come tutte le gravezze della città nostra...’”

²¹⁶ Cellini 713 (II, xciii).

²¹⁷ Cellini 609-610 (II, Liii) and accompanying notes 19 and 20. Italics mine. Bellotto points out that these italicized words were “fortemente cassate e sostituite, pare dal secondo copista, con le seguenti: *gran desiderio di far grandissime imprese*.” Bellotto further mentions that the bracketed words—“e non come mercatante”—were also crossed out by the second copyist.

²¹⁸ See Tylus 34.

²¹⁹ Tylus 39n.22. See also chapter two below for a discussion of Cellini’s lexicon of value.

rules of engagement, Cellini would devise ways of trying to beat “il mercatante” at his own game. The ‘pound of flesh’ that the artist exacted from Cosimo as recompense for his perceived exploitation was actually closer to 6,583 pounds of bronze.²²⁰

In Cellini’s dealings with Bindo Altoviti, the commodification of his artwork resulted in a similarly resentful pronouncement about ‘the Banker of Florence’:

Da poi che così male io avevo fatto la mia faccenda con Bindo Altoviti, col perdere la mia testa di bronzo et ’l dargli li mia danari a vita mia, io fui chiaro di che sorte si è la fede dei mercatanti, et così malcontento me ne ritornai a Firenze.²²¹

Cellini’s reaction in this case, however, is attenuated by the fact that it had been the artist’s idea and *not* Altoviti’s to link compensation for execution of the bust to an investment that Cellini had previously made in Altoviti’s bank.²²² In fact, it is Altoviti who becomes “ingrognato,” according to Cellini’s recounting of the events, when the artist returns the deposit Altoviti had made for the wax model of his bust with an alternative suggestion for payment: “A mme basta che quei mia dinari voi gli tegniate vivi; e che e’ mi guadagnino qualche cosa.”²²³ So while the Altoviti commission had not initially been contracted as an exchange of services, this is what it became as a result of the artist’s own suggestion: Cellini would earn a return in interest of 15% on his original investment of 1200 scudi in Altoviti’s bank for the duration of his life.²²⁴ In this case, Cellini’s expression of disappointment about the affair has little to do with his magnificent bust being linked to a business deal, and everything to do with the fact that he did not like Altoviti’s terms of acceptance of the deal: upon Cellini’s death, the

²²⁰ Trento 47. This number is actually larger than the one given in the original report cited above—5,115 pounds. Trento does not offer an explanation as to why the number in the final sentencing differs from the initial report of May 23, 1554.

²²¹ Cellini 682-683 (II, Lxxxii).

²²² Zikos 134, 141-142.

²²³ Cellini 680 (II, Lxxx).

²²⁴ Zikos 141-142. See also note 157 above.

principal amount he had invested in Altoviti's bank would then belong to Altoviti.²²⁵ Given the secrecy surrounding the execution of this bust on account of the identity of the patron, it is possible that Cellini conceived of this business arrangement from the outset as a way to conceal the existence of an overt commission by Altoviti.

Navigating a path for his artistic identity in the court of Cosimo I clearly presented Cellini with great challenges. According to his account of that struggle in the *Vita*, the issue that plagued the artist the most was his always having been “amicissimo della verità et nimico delle bugie” and his not knowing how to “fare lo adulatore.”²²⁶ Vasari confirms Cellini's self-evaluation in the second edition of his *Vite*: “il quale è stato in tutte le sue cose animoso, fiero, vivace, prontissimo e terribilissimo, e *persona che ha saputo pur troppo dire il fatto suo con i principi* [...]”²²⁷ Given his tendency to speak his mind with his patrons, the delicate dance of the artist-courtier that required feigning ignorance at critical moments with Cosimo (and others) reveals a level of Castiglionesque skillfulness that has often been missed or misread by critics. Camesasca's description of Cellini is a case in point:

Fra le doti del memorialista difetta il senso cortigiano; ma una colossale assenza di psicologia spicciola gli impedisce di rendersene conto, illudendolo anzi di averne a usura. Esempio: a una sortita di lui in presenza della corte, “I Duca e gli altri levarono un rumore delle maggior risa”[II,71]; il compiaciuto dicitore non si accorge che ridono alle spalle della sua sgangherata ipocrisia.²²⁸

What Camesasca fails to appreciate with this charge is that the episode in question offers a perfect example of Cellini's effort to demonstrate facility with Bibbiena's prescriptions for the proper use of *le facezie*. Bandinelli has just violated one of the

²²⁵ Zikos 141.

²²⁶ Cellini 687 and 739 (II, Lxxxiii and II, c).

²²⁷ Vasari, *Le vite*, ed. Paola Barocchi, 1999, 30 Oct. 2008

<<http://biblio.cribecu.sns.it/vasari/consultazione/index.html>>. Emphasis mine.

²²⁸ Camesasca 19-20.

cardinal rules of courtly behavior by publicly calling Cellini a *sodomitaccio*: “così in questo breve devesi guardare il cortegiano di non parer maligno e velenoso, e dir motti ed arguzie solamente per far dispetto e dar nel core.”²²⁹ Bandinelli’s breach of courtly decorum is acknowledged by the stern looks on everyone’s faces. And despite the fact that he feels mortally offended, Cellini is able to summon his resourcefulness in that moment of anger and humiliation to transport the scene from the brink of becoming a brawl to a moment of uncontrollable laughter.

Io, che mi senti’ così scelleratamente offendere, sforzato dal furore, et a un tratto, corsi al rimedio, et dissi: “O pazzo, tu esci dei termini, ma Iddio ’l volessi che io sapessi fare una così nobile arte, perché e’ si legge che e’ l’usò Giove con Ganimede in paradiso, et qui in terra e’ la usano i maggiori imperatori et i più gran re del mondo. Io sono un basso et umile uomiciattolo, il quale né potrei né saprei inpacciarmi d’una così mirabil cosa.” A questo nessuno non potette esser tanto continente, che ’l Duca et gli altri levorno un romore delle maggior risa, che immaginar si possa al mondo.²³⁰

There is no reason for any laughter behind the artist’s back in this moment because Cellini has provoked a genuinely comic response by masterfully taking what Bandinelli said and turning it on its head without ever having to affirm or deny the validity of his accuser’s attack. There is no hypocrisy to be mocked because Cellini is essentially bragging in his mock humility by calling himself a “umile uomiciattolo” who, by inference, is associated with the gods, emperors and kings through the practice of such a “nobile arte.” The irony in this juxtaposition is what creates the potential for laughter, but it is the quick delivery that ensures the result:

Nell’altro, delle arguzie, che po far l’arte? con ciò sia cosa che quel salso detto dee esser uscito ed aver dato in brocca, prima che paia che colui che lo dice v’abbia potuto pensare; altramente è freddo e non ha del bono. Però estimo che ’l tutto sia opera dell’ingegno e della natura.”²³¹

²²⁹ Castiglione 203 (II, Lvii).

²³⁰ Cellini 655 (II, Lxxi).

²³¹ Castiglione 184 (II, xLiii).

As for the arguments that could be raised concerning the seeming contradiction between Cellini's commitment to telling the truth vs. his successful employment of dissembling through feigned ignorance at critical moments, the same seeming contradictions have been leveled at Castiglione for the lack of continuity between the issue of the art of deception raised in the first three books, and the importance of telling the truth raised in Book IV of *Il Libro del Cortegiano*.²³² More will be said on this topic in the next chapter. For the purposes of this discussion regarding the '*gioco delle parti*' between patron and artist, it is clear from the power dynamics described above involving Duke Cosimo, Cellini, and Bindo Altoviti, that to accuse Cellini of "una colossale assenza di psicologia spicciola" is to vastly underestimate the artist's skills as a courtier. If he had been devoid of those skills, it would have been impossible for Cellini to negotiate major commissions with powerful popes, kings and dukes. These were the skills that permitted Cellini to convince Cosimo that he could execute a monumental work, even though all indications show that the Duke had intended to employ him more as a goldsmith than as a sculptor at the beginning.²³³ These were the skills that ensured that the *Perseus* would continue to stand proudly in the piazza even when Cosimo was of a mind to "getter[à] via il Perseo, e così si finiranno le differenze."²³⁴ They also allowed Cellini to come back later to speak the truth about why there should be a competition for the Neptune commission.²³⁵ By this point in the artist's career, Cosimo seems to have been determined that Cellini should not get the commission, but the artist was successful

²³² See Wayne Rebhorn "Ottaviano's Interruption: Book IV and the Problem of Unity in *Il Libro del Cortegiano*," *Modern Language Notes* 87 (1972): 37-59.

²³³ Trento 45-46.

²³⁴ Cellini 720 (II, xcvi).

²³⁵ Cellini 731-735 (II, xcix). See more on this topic in chapter two.

nonetheless in convincing Cosimo to follow his suggestion. Cellini's mastery of the Castiglionesque art "che nasconda l'arte" is what allowed the artist to serve two masters who were sworn enemies. It is what allowed the artist to produce two great works of art for the price of one—the *Perseus* and the bronze bust of Bindo Altoviti—and perhaps have the last laugh in the process. It is one of those scenes of Boccacesque humor that inspired Altieri Biagi to remark that the *Vita* is "una specie di *Decameron* in prima persona."²³⁶

²³⁶ See note 237 below.

II.

CELLINI'S *VITA*—"PRUOVE INISTIMABILE" OF THE ARTIST
AS *LETTERATO* ²³⁷

[...] la *Vita* del Cellini realizza la fusione di vari generi o, se vogliamo, di vari codici, in una formula quantitativamente e qualitativamente arditissima: la biografia artistica rimane, anche nelle dichiarazioni esplicite dell'autore, la griglia fondamentale, ma il personaggio è troppo eroe per rimaner compresso nello schema: mentre l'artista, orafo e scultore, esce a tutto tondo dalla "biografia", vi entrano l'avventuriero e il viaggiatore, il cavaliere errante (di quella cavalleria spesso degradata, alla Pulci), il buon compagno da osteria e il commensale recitatore di sonetti nelle "virtuose" cene, il parlatore "festivo" nei colloqui con i potenti, il motteggiatore arguto e spesso salace della botta e risposta popolare. La *Vita* dell'artista, non più e non solo scandita dal ritmo delle sue opere, diventa una specie di *Decameron* in prima persona, la cui unità non è più assicurata, come nella raccolta tradizionale di novelle, da una "cornice" esterna, ma è realizzata dall'interno, con l'onnipresenza di un personaggio fisso che schidiona tutti gli episodi sull'asse della sua presenza.²³⁸

II.1 Cellini's *Vita*: Just what kind of book is it? ²³⁹

When Maria Luisa Altieri Biagi delivered her richly documented *relazione* at the conference to commemorate the four-hundredth anniversary of Cellini's death back in 1971, she seems to have unwittingly set off a chain reaction of efforts to isolate the literary genre that would most accurately encompass all of the types of characters and narrative techniques that make up the artist's *Vita*. At the same conference, entitled *Benvenuto Cellini Artista e Scrittore*, Nino Borsellino made the case for viewing the *Vita*

²³⁷ Cellini 293 (I, Lxxxii): "Me ne andai a Roma e meco ne portai quel bellissimo archibuso a ruota che mi aveva donato il Duca [Alessandro], e con grandissimo mio piacere molte volte lo adoperai per via, faccendo con esso pruove inistimabile."

²³⁸ Altieri Biagi 101. Around twenty years earlier, Bruno Maier had also discussed the "boccaccismo" in Cellini's *Vita* in his *Umanità e Stile* 95-110.

²³⁹ I am using Rosalie Colie's "cognate translation" for genre here, "kind." See Rosalie Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1973) 1.

as a prototype for the modern novel along the lines of the picaresque models of *Lazzarillo de Tormes* and *Don Quixote*—the same argument that would be made a year later by Dino Cervigni.²⁴⁰ A few more years later, another scholar situated the *Vita* more firmly within the tradition of spiritual autobiography and the confessional—Marziano Guglielminetti in his *Memoria e Scrittura: L'autobiografia da Dante a Cellini* of 1977.²⁴¹ And still another critic, Jonathan Goldberg, highlighted the influence of spiritual biography while also finding many ‘unconscious’ elements of the picaresque in the *Vita*: “it is the mark of Cellini’s literary naiveté that he present himself as a *picaro* while thinking of himself as a saint.”²⁴² More recently, after Lorenzo Bellotto followed up on Altieri Biagi’s reference to the “cavaliere errante” by suggesting that “ulteriori indagini sui rapporti con la tradizione del romanzo cavalleresco e dei cantari potrebbero rivelarsi fruttuose,”²⁴³ Margaret Gallucci included a section on the “Mixture of Genres: Autobiography as Epic, Romance and Comedy”²⁴⁴ in her list of models for the *Vita*.

This brief overview, of course, is not meant to cover every genre that has been put forth as a container in which to hold the complexity of the *Vita*. It merely intends to underscore the fact that many studies have attempted to categorize what ‘kind’ of work the *Vita* is, while putting greater or lesser emphasis on a particular model or genre,

²⁴⁰ Borsellino 24-25. See also Cervigni, “Cellini’s *Vita* and Cervantes *Don Quijote*: An Inquiry into Prose Narrative and Genre,” *Hispano-Italie Studies* 2 (1972): 41-63. Both Borsellino and Cervigni cite the work of two Americans, Scholes and Kellogg, as being important in the formulation of their ideas on this subject. See Robert Scholes, James Phelan and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 2006) 233: “*Don Quixote*, the great progenitor of the form [the novel], is, in its plot, a compromise between the romantic quest pattern and the life-to-death pattern of historical biography.”

²⁴¹ See Guglielminetti 292-386.

²⁴² See Goldberg 71-83.

²⁴³ Bellotto, Introduction xxxiii.

²⁴⁴ Gallucci, *Sexuality* 82-91.

without answering or elaborating upon the more important question raised by Altieri Biagi:²⁴⁵

Piuttosto, ritornando al nostro argomento specifico, rimane da chiederci fino a che punto l'operazione del Cellini (la reinterpretazione delle tessere tipiche della autobiografia artistica e la composizione di queste con altre tessere "narrative") sia consapevole, coscientemente attuata.

Direi che l'operazione è, almeno in certa misura, cosciente: rientra nel gusto del Cellini, per sua esplicita e ripetuta dichiarazione, "imparare" una "professione" e riuscire a "farla meglio" di quanti in quella fossero già esperti.²⁴⁶

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that Cellini exercised an even greater literary self-consciousness than has previously been attributed to him. The issue of whether or not we hyphenate Cellini's "griglia fondamentale" of autobiography with other genres 'alla Shakespeare'—in the vein of the "comical-tragical-historical-pastoral" reference from *Hamlet*—, is of secondary importance.²⁴⁷ In fact, Rosalie Colie's argument for not wishing to assign a specific genre label to *The Book of the Courtier* is pertinent to the genre issue with respect to Cellini's *Vita*. If one chooses dialogue as the dominant "kind," Colie argues, then what role does *Institutio*, "a blueprint for education," play? And while Colie says that she would "put up a fight for *The Courtier* as an urban-pastoral dialogue," she also likens the way in which Castiglione uses metaphor to musical *institutio*, as a way to convey his central theme of *armonia*. Essential to an appreciation of this literary strategy, in Colie's view, is the reader's understanding that "*armonia* was a social and moral value as well as the physical and psychological result of certain sounds [...]."²⁴⁸

I am saying, I think, that in this long period, the Renaissance, the literary theory that underlies all other is *not* really expressed in its rich and varied

²⁴⁵ An exception to this is Paolo Rossi's investigation into the way in which Cellini composed his *Vita*. As has already been observed, Rossi questions the artist's insistence on having dictated his life story and situates this insistence as part of Cellini's conscious narrative strategy to demonstrate *sprezzatura* with his writing style. See "*Sprezzatura, Patronage and Fate*" 56-57.

²⁴⁶ Altieri Biagi 103.

²⁴⁷ Cited in Colie 115.

²⁴⁸ Colie 114.

criticism: namely, that a literary kind [genre] stands for a kind of subject, a kind of content, literary and intellectual; and also that some references to a subject or content may be taken as metaphors for a whole kind. I am not now talking about a rigid system of genres—which, really, never existed in practice and barely even in theory—by which each subject defined separately commands its and only its assigned form. [...] I am talking rather about a body of almost unexpressed assumptions, many of them versions of classical theory or practice, which took for granted certain basic rules of expression. A language of kind, made up, like the Greek and Roman pantheons, of different categories of kind—a language full of idioms. But as in language, it is the idioms which we must learn in order not to be caught out.²⁴⁹

This issue of familiarity with the idioms of a particular ‘kind’—the signposts²⁵⁰ of meaning that are taken for granted by the readers or observers of a particular work of art—are complicated by the fact that, in Cellini’s case, the first publication of the *Vita* occurred over one hundred and fifty years after the artist had written it. By the early 18th century, the language and idioms of Cellini’s *Vita*, both in the literal as well as the figurative sense expressed by Colie, had become part of an outmoded cultural paradigm. On the literal level, Cellini’s words and idioms could certainly be understood; but the “body of almost unexpressed assumptions” was a denser matter to have to sort out. Victoria Gardner Coates raised this issue in her article “Cellini’s *Bust of Cosimo I* and *Vita*”:

The deceptive realism, animation, and unprecedented scale of the *Vita* have all contributed to the general scholarly assessment of this project as an anomaly that demonstrates a rejection, rather than an embracing, of contemporary society. This interpretation would be both surprising and disappointing to Cellini, who wanted his readers to fall into his trap and suspend their disbelief as they marvel at his amazing tale, but then, on further reflection, to recognize the cleverness of that very trap and decipher his dense and allusive literary persona. Just as the viewer is to connect the *Cosimo* [the bust executed by Cellini] with classical and Renaissance precedents to the duke’s great glory, so the reader of the

²⁴⁹ Colie 114-115. Italics are Colie’s.

²⁵⁰ Colie also uses this term in reference to *Il Libro del Cortegiano*: “[...] one needn’t recapitulate all pastoral values in a dialogue set in Urbino the well-named, when one can show by various signposts that pastoral values are understood as part of this work’s urbanity.” (115)

Vita is intended to recognize Cellini's literary models so as to associate the author with the proper company.²⁵¹

Where I disagree with Coates's formulation is with the idea that Cellini is trying to set a "trap" for his readers to fall into by employing "deceptive realism." She cites the artist's use of the "Bismarkian [*sic*] technique of telling the truth in order to deceive"²⁵² as the key to understanding episodes like the one in which Cellini asserts that he had acquired a halo after his prison experience at Castel Sant'Angelo.²⁵³ According to Coates's argument, we should 'fall for' the halo as real because Cellini has previously provided us with "readily verifiable" facts regarding how he was released from prison. Despite crediting the artist with a "dense and allusive literary persona," Coates's reading does not seem to allow for Cellini's deliberately self-conscious use of symbols, metaphors, parody, irony or just plain playfulness in his *Vita*. This last area—playfulness—has been largely overlooked in Cellini scholarship. And yet, as Paul Barolsky points out, "satire, comedy, and wit pervade the literature written for Cosimo."²⁵⁴ Not only did the artists of Cosimo's court flaunt their wittiness and playfulness by inserting signposts of it into their figurative works of art, but they also did it in their writings. Barolsky uses Bronzino's famous *Portrait of a Young Man* as but one example of this in the visual arts.

The man portrayed by Bronzino is elegantly posed and aloof, the suave and graceful embodiment of the perfect Renaissance courtier. But despite the decorum of the painting, on the legs of the table next to the man there is an almost Michelangelesque cloth mask with a mocking expression on its face, and on the arm of the chair to the right is a grotesque animal head. We might ask why

²⁵¹ Coates, "Cellini's *Bust of Cosimo*" 160.

²⁵² Coates, "Cellini's *Bust of Cosimo*" 159.

²⁵³ Cellini 452 (I, cxxviii).

²⁵⁴ Paul Barolsky, *Infinite Jest: Wit and Humor in Italian Renaissance Art* (Columbia, Missouri: U of Missouri P, 1978) 140. See also Ranieri Varese, "L'immagine come gioco," *Passare il tempo: la letteratura del gioco e dell'intrattenimento dal XII al XVI secolo. Atti del Convegno di Pienza, 10-14 settembre 1991* 2 vols. (Roma: Salerno, 1993) 219-238.

Bronzino has included these grotesque elements in his dignified portrait. For all the portrait's seriousness, the witty grotesques create a tone that ironically runs counter to the overall tone of the painting. These coarse and bizarre elements suggest the ironic self-awareness of the courtier who poses or gestures so elegantly, both aware of their presence and aloof from them. This sense of irony relates to the keenly ironic viewpoint found in the writings of Castiglione, Machiavelli, and Michelangelo, and in the *Essays* of Montaigne, which acknowledge and scrutinize the dichotomy between outer appearances and inner realities.²⁵⁵

In addition to the elements of wit and irony that can be found in his paintings, Bronzino was also a poet of Petrarchan sonnets as well as “capitoli e sonetti di stampo bernesco.”²⁵⁶ Not to be outdone by his fellow artist-*letterati*, Cellini, too, composed Petrarchan sonnets as well as a *capitolo* that, at least in form, was reminiscent of the *Capitoli* of Francesco Berni.²⁵⁷ But the more important standard of comparison for Cellini was, of course, Michelangelo and he, too, composed poetry that poked fun at Petrarchanism in a way reminiscent of Berni.²⁵⁸ After demonstrating with countless examples (including many taken from Cellini's *Vita*) the way in which artists of the Cinquecento employed all types of wit, humor, parody and irony in both their figurative and literary works, Barolsky remarks that Cellini's use of these techniques in the *Vita* is done “perhaps in an unself-conscious way.”²⁵⁹ It is surprising that Cellini, who was part

²⁵⁵ Barolsky 141-142.

²⁵⁶ Bellotto, *Indice degli Artisti* 808.

²⁵⁷ Cellini 453-463 (I, cxxviii). This is the *capitolo* “fatto in prigione et in lode di detta prigione” (453) and dedicated to Cellini's “carissimo amico” and noted dantista, Luca Martini (313). See also Maier 70: “La prigionia era, infatti, per lo scrittore, una cosa troppo seria, una faccenda da non esser presa a gabbo. Per questo, se lo schema letterario è bernesco, lo spirito animatore del componimento è tutto celliniano [...]”

²⁵⁸ Barolsky 58: “Michelangelo himself, perhaps influenced by Berni's parody of a Petrarchan sonnet that was probably written by Bembo, wrote a delightful and amusing parody of Petrarch, “Tu ha 'l viso più dolce che la sapa.” Barolsky cites the work of Robert J. Clements, *The Poetry of Michelangelo* (New York: New York UP, 1963) for the relationship between Michelangelo's poetry and that of Berni. (259). See also Silvia Longhi, *Lusus: Il capitolo burlesco nel cinquecento* (Padua: Antenore, 1983).

²⁵⁹ Barolsky 70. Barolsky offers an explanation for this position in a footnote: “I appreciate that the concept of unwitting parody is a contradiction in terms, yet I know of no better way at present to approach the psychological complexity and ambiguity of Cellini's *Life*, which need further elucidation.”

of the same “circularità di ispirazione”²⁶⁰ as Michelangelo, Bronzino, Sebastiano del Piombo, Giuliano Romano, Annibale Caro, Benedetto Varchi, Luigi Alamanni, Antonio Allegretti, Luca Martini and others,²⁶¹ and who repeatedly demonstrated an acute sense of irony and comic timing in his *Vita*, is the one artist of this illustrious group of artist-*letterati* and courtier-*letterati* who critics tend to consider incapable of purposefully presenting the events of his life from a humorous perspective.²⁶² It would seem to suggest that Cellini’s *trucco* of apparent spontaneity worked a bit too well because scholars have tended to view the ‘fact’ of dictation as preclusive of the artist’s intentional use of literary devices such as irony, parody, symbolism and metaphor. It also indicates that the artist’s self-definition of being “per natura malinconico”²⁶³ has all too often been taken at face value as opposed to it being a well-known marker for the *topos* of the artist as creative genius.²⁶⁴ And while it would be a mistake to put Cellini’s use of these devices on the same level as Castiglione’s, Cellini was a much more deliberately facetious writer than the prevailing Cellini scholarship has acknowledged. In fact, it is in the artist’s experimentation, or “pruove inistimabile,” with various types of literary devices,

²⁶⁰ Altieri Biagi 97. Biagi uses this expression in reference to the intersection of literary and non-literary traditions and their influence on the “formula dinamica della biografia e dell’autobiografia artistiche.”

²⁶¹ See Cellini 64, 160, 179, 297, 305-306, 313 (I, xviii, xLi, xLvi Lxxxiii, Lxxxiv, Lxxxvi) . See also Maier 31.

²⁶² Ferrero asserts that “E cotesta comicità intermittente, e del tutto involontaria, del protagonista, che vorrebbe esser veduto sempre in figura di eroe, è una delle più gustose attrattive della *Vita* celliniana.” (26) Like Altieri Biagi, Enrico Carrara in his “Profilo della *Vita* Celliniana” in Ferrero’s *Opere* (33-40) views Cellini’s sense of humor as being almost a part of his genetic makeup: “Egli era infatti ‘malinconico per natura’ e sdegnoso; aveva inoltre l’arguzia del toscano di razza; perciò la visione del mondo gli si colorisce necessariamente in una luce di comicità.” See also Maier 95-99 and Elissa Tognozzi, “The Heterodoxy of Cellini: Emblematic Symbol of the Renaissance or Isolated Case of Excessive Indulgence,” diss., U of California, Los Angeles, 1993, 20: “Cellini is capable of humor, but his humor is involuntary. His wit is more instinctual than calculated.”

²⁶³ Cellini 95 (I, xxvii).

²⁶⁴ See Wittkower and Wittkower 102-104 and Altieri Biagi 92.

particularly *le facezie*,²⁶⁵ that one of the areas of influence and intersection between Castiglione and Cellini is evident.

II.2 “L’albergo dell’allegria” meets ‘*la bottega delle burle*.’²⁶⁶

As has been noted previously, we have no direct knowledge of Cellini having read Castiglione’s *Cortegiano*. What we do know, however, is that Cellini was a close friend of Giulio Romano, the favorite pupil of Raphael and designated inheritor of his commissions, in the period in which Romano came under the protection of Castiglione after the death of Raphael in 1520.²⁶⁷ It was in this same period that Castiglione began to negotiate on Romano’s behalf so that he could become the Gonzaga court painter in Mantua. In 1523, when Castiglione made his will, he named Romano to be the artist in charge of designing his family’s burial chapel.²⁶⁸ We also know from Castiglione himself that by the time he arrived in Spain (in early 1525) as apostolic nuncio to Emperor Charles V on behalf of Clement VII,²⁶⁹ the manuscript copy of *Il Libro del Cortegiano* that he had given to Vittoria Colonna had already been in large measure transcribed and that “quella parte del libro si ritrovava in Napoli in mano di molti; e, come sono gli omini

²⁶⁵ See Altieri Biagi 96-97. Even Altieri Biagi’s emphasis with regard to Cellini’s use of *facezie* is on the artist’s assimilation of pre-existing models and oral traditions—“quanto Boccaccio e quanto Sacchetti, quanto Pulci e quanto Berni, quante “burle” e quante “facezie”, [...] potremmo elencare come matrici immediate o mediate (attraverso la fervida tradizione orale) di episodi della *Vita* celliniana?”—as opposed to the artist actually delighting in the display of his own sense of humor and his desire to engage in a ‘war of wits’ with his fellow artists and *letterati*.

²⁶⁶ See Castiglione 21 (I, iv): “Quivi adunque i soavi ragionamenti e l’oneste facezie s’udivano, e nel viso di ciascuno dipinta si vedeva una gioconda ilarità, talmente che quella casa certo dir si poteva il proprio albergo della allegria [...]”

²⁶⁷ See page 812 of the *Indice degli Artisti* in Bellotto.

²⁶⁸ With the exception of what can be gleaned from Bellotto’s *Indice degli Artisti*, the biographical information regarding Giulio Romano and Castiglione is from Myron Laskin, Jr., “Giulio Romano and Baldassare Castiglione,” *The Burlington Magazine* 109 (1967): 300-303 and accompanying notes.

²⁶⁹ See Hanning and Rosand xxiii.

sempre cupidi di novità, pareva che quelli tali tentassero di farla imprimere.”²⁷⁰ Before Castiglione’s authorized third redaction was released to print in November of 1527,²⁷¹ the *Cortegiano* had already been widely circulated for roughly a decade or so.²⁷²

In early 1524 when Romano was still working in Rome under the stewardship of Castiglione, he and Cellini had direct and regular contact.²⁷³ Bellotto points out that besides being an “amico e protettore” to Romano, Castiglione “nel *Cortegiano* descrisse molti aspetti della poetica figurativa del Romano.”²⁷⁴ Given the attention that Castiglione devotes to the subject of the famous *paragone* debate in fashioning his perfect courtier and the close relationship that he had with Romano, it is unlikely that the ‘*lieta brigata*’²⁷⁵ of renowned artists who gathered together at least twice a week in Rome²⁷⁶ (including Cellini, Romano and Giovan Francesco Fattore, another disciple of Raphael), never discussed the treatment that Castiglione had given to a subject so near and dear to all of them; especially in light of the fact that Castiglione favored the side of *la pittura*.²⁷⁷ Romano certainly would have been aware of Castiglione’s ‘staging’ of the *paragone* debate in his *Cortegiano* and the fact that his former master, Raphael, as well as Michelangelo, had been named as the models of their profession.²⁷⁸ By the time Benedetto Varchi gave his famous second public *Lezzione* of 1547, “Quale sia più nobile,

²⁷⁰ Castiglione 4 (I, I). See also A. Quondam, *Questo povero cortegiano: Castiglione, il libro, la storia* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2000).

²⁷¹ Hanning and Rosand xxiii.

²⁷² Mendelsohn 57 and accompanying notes.

²⁷³ See Bellotto’s *Notizie Biografiche* Lxiv. By this time, Castiglione had completed the first version of the third redaction of the *Cortegiano*. See Hanning and Rosand xxiii.

²⁷⁴ Bellotto, *Indice degli Artisti* 812.

²⁷⁵ Bellotto, *Introduction* xxxii.

²⁷⁶ Cellini 105 (I,xxx).

²⁷⁷ Castiglione 104-110 (I, L-Liv). See also *Scritti d’Arte*, vol. I, 525; and Mendelsohn 57: “In these courtly texts, sculpture retains the anti-intellectual, manual and consequently plebeian character it had been given in Classical times by Lucian.”

²⁷⁸ Castiglione 105 (I,Li).

o la scultura o la pittura,”²⁷⁹ the *paragone* debate had been “revitalized and reinterpreted in the wake of new developments and criticism.”²⁸⁰ Moreover, the sculpture side of the debate had risen to a position of superiority, at least from the perspective of Varchi (and Cellini).²⁸¹ Notwithstanding their divergence of opinion regarding the question of relative superiority of the arts, Varchi relied upon Castiglione’s treatment of the subject from the outset of his lecture and he was “dependent on the *Courtier* throughout.”²⁸²

Contemporary clichés and Classical formulae clothe Varchi’s ideas in a pseudo-philosophical, rhetorical style. Nevertheless his presentation of the debate as a whole is not without merit. While his remarks contain few truly original statements, he was responsible for codifying contemporary attitudes toward the visual arts. [...] Each art is validated with the appropriate collection of authoritative statements, primarily Classical. Most frequent are Pliny, Seneca and Cicero. [...] Only two “modern” authors are mentioned: Alberti and Castiglione. Although Leonardo seems to be quoted at times, he is never mentioned by name and we cannot know whether those ideas were recognized as his by Varchi or as being those of his secondary source, e.g., Castiglione. It is not necessary to assume that Varchi had firsthand knowledge of any of Leonardo’s manuscripts—by mid-Cinquecento they would have become assimilated into an oral tradition—but it is possible.²⁸³

Even more important than Varchi’s codification of the prevailing viewpoints about the arts, was what his inclusionary approach did for elevating the status of the artist. By soliciting the ‘position papers’ of the most important artists of the day on the subject, Varchi raised the level of the debate and encouraged the artists to become theoreticians as well as practitioners. Mendelsohn points out that “there was a deliberate

²⁷⁹ *Scritti d’arte* 524.

²⁸⁰ Mendelsohn 117.

²⁸¹ Mendelsohn 118.

²⁸² Mendelsohn 57.

²⁸³ Mendelsohn 118. The passage Mendelsohn is referring to is in Barocchi, *Scritti d’Arte* 525: “E quanto all’ autorità, diciamo prima che ’l conte Baldassare da Castiglione mosse questa disputa presso la fine del primo libro del suo dottissimo e giudiziosissimo *Cortegiano*, et allegando molte ragioni per l’una parte e per l’altra, conchiuse finalmente che la pittura fosse più nobile. Medesimamente M. Leone Batista [*sic*] Alberti, uomo nobilissimo e dottissimo in molte scienze et arti, essendo stato et architetto e pittore grandissimo ne’ suoi tempi, tiene, nel libro ch’egli scrisse *della Pittura*, che ella sia più degna e più nobile della scultura.”

attempt to raise the discussion to the level of ‘philosophy.’ Thus, the artists are spoken of as philosophers and *artisti* rather than as *artigiani* or *artefici*, verbal distinctions made pointedly in the first lecture.”²⁸⁴ As we have seen earlier with Cellini’s letter of response, the artist had thoroughly embraced his identity as *artista* and *filosofo* in his echoing of one of the fundamental themes expressed by Varchi: “Ancora dico che questa maravigliosa arte dello statuare non si può fare, se lo statuario non ha buona cognizione di tutte le nobilissime arte [*sic*].”²⁸⁵ Varchi, in discussing Dante, states that “perciocché in lui [Dante], come si può vedere in Omero et in Vergilio nel modo e per le cagioni che avemo dichiarate altrove lungamente, si ricercano necessariamente tutte le scienze di tutte le cose [...]”²⁸⁶ For the humanists, this idea was not new, but for Cellini, who was intent upon elevating himself from the relatively inferior status of the goldsmith-*artigiano* to the status of ‘*ottimo artista*,’ these demonstrations of fluency in the realm of theory meant a great deal.

As with the case that Mendelsohn makes for Varchi and Leonardo da Vinci, it is not necessary to assume that Cellini had firsthand knowledge of *Il Libro del Cortegiano* for him to have acquired fluency with its ‘idioms’ and themes, given the fact that the text was practically considered ‘required reading’ by Cellini’s close friend and literary mentor, Varchi. Most important in this regard is the observation made by Altieri Biagi about Cellini’s stated desire to “‘imparare’ una ‘professione’ e riuscire a ‘farla meglio’ di quanti in quella fossero già esperti.”²⁸⁷ Certainly, if Cellini had first-hand knowledge of

²⁸⁴ Mendelsohn 117.

²⁸⁵ Barocchi 521. This quotation is taken from Cellini’s published letter, written in response to Varchi’s ‘questionnaire,’ previously cited in chapter one.

²⁸⁶ Barocchi 264. This is from Varchi’s third *disputa* (“In che siano simili et in che differenti i poeti et i pittori”)

²⁸⁷ Altieri Biagi 103.

the *Cortegiano*, though, one would think that he would have wanted to flaunt that literariness by mentioning it somewhere. But in this case, there is a mitigating factor that precluded bragging about familiarity with Castiglione's famous book, namely, Cellini's low opinion of many courtiers. Cellini's 'reading' of Castiglione, then, is likely dependent upon Varchi's refashioning of the *perfetto cortegiano* into the perfect artist of his lecture on Michelangelo's famous sonnet, "Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto." Using Renaissance love theory as the basis for his analysis,²⁸⁸ Varchi defines the perfect artist by connecting him to the art of Love.

But whether he is the most perfect in his art or the most perfect of all artists, Michelangelo's sculptor represents the ideal man. Moreover, Michelangelo's *ottimo artista* is synonymous with the Perfect Lover. As a "lover of wisdom," Michelangelo's sculptor corresponds to Aristotle's view of the artist as philosopher. For Cicero and Castiglione, as for Michelangelo and Varchi, the discipline with which their ideal artist is ultimately concerned is philosophy, the Art to which all others aspire, "mistress of all virtues," which Art imitates in its search for truth.²⁸⁹

Cellini's portrait of himself as the *ottimo artista* is, therefore, one that co-opts much of the content of the *perfetto cortegiano* without aligning itself explicitly with Castiglione's (self-)portrait. After all, to do so would seem to constitute a repudiation of Cellini's view that sculpture was superior to painting. And clearly there was also a feeling of resentment on the part of the artist toward those "cortigiani scannapagnotte"²⁹⁰ who seemed incapable of understanding the value of his work or worse, were intent upon

²⁸⁸ Mendelsohn 11: "In spite of a marked Aristotelian bent in his critical approach, Varchi never denied the essentially Platonic nature of his own theory of love, nor indicated that Platonism was unacceptable to him, especially when it pertained to *quistioni d'amore*. But the focus of Varchi's praise of Plato was style rather than content. [...] His assimilation of the 'courtly' stylistic aspects of Venetian theory, chiefly through Bembo, would have found sympathetic adherents in Florence, where Petrarchism still flourished. In his lectures the slightly artificial tone of Bembo's *Asolani* and Castiglione's *Cortegiano* coexists with the didactic pedantry of Paduan academic terminology and Aristotelian method."

²⁸⁹ Mendelsohn 52.

²⁹⁰ Cellini 497 (II, x). Bellotto offers this derivation of the word *scannapane*: "'malfattori'; per l'etimologia del vocabolo cfr. Battaglia, s. v.: l'espressione originariamente tedesca (*Snapphahn*) sarebbe giunta in Italia attraverso il francese *chenapan* ('predone')." (139n.19)

interfering with the creative control that Cellini wanted to exert over his commissions. One such courtier who incurred Cellini's wrath happened to have been a friend of Castiglione's—Latino Giovenale Manetti.²⁹¹ After Cellini had been asked by Pope Paul III for his advice on an appropriate gift with which to honor the arrival of Emperor Charles V in Rome, "misser Latino" intervened to try and overrule Cellini's idea.

Parve al detto misser Latino, che aveva una gran vena di pazo [*sic*], di volere dar nuova invenzione al Papa, la qual venisse da llui stietto: che egli disturbò tutto quello che si era ordinato, e la mattina, quando io pensai andare per li dinari, disse con quella sua bestial prosunzione: "*A noi tocca a essere gl'inventori, et a voi gli operatori.* Innanzi che io partissi la sera dal Papa, noi pensammo una cosa molto migliore." Alle qual prime parole, non lo lasciando andar più innanzi, gli dissi: "Né voi né il Papa non può mai pensare cosa migliore, che quelle dove e' s'interviene Cristo; sì che dite ora quante *pappolate cortigianesche* voi sapete."²⁹²

Whether it is with the courtiers who were perceived as ignorant because they did not understand his worth, or the condescending courtiers like Manetti who wanted to put the artist 'in his place,' or the sycophantish "cortigiano plebeo"²⁹³ who begged Cellini not to ask Clement VII for the gold necessary to complete his chalice so as not to upset the Pope; the artist's account of his relationship with courtiers in the *Vita* leaves the impression that Cellini viewed their 'perfectability' with some skepticism. There were exceptions, of course, like "il virtuosissimo misser Luigi Alamanni"²⁹⁴ who came to Cellini's defense when the artist had expressed his displeasure with the meager stipend that was originally proposed to him by Cardinal Ippolito d'Este on behalf of King Francis I: "Il Re non troverrà mai un par di costui; e questo nostro Cardinale lo vuole mercatare,

²⁹¹ Bellotto 266n.14.

²⁹² Cellini 324-325 (I, xc). Emphasis mine. The work in question (never completed) was a gold cross with the figure of Christ and the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity as ornaments at the base.

²⁹³ Cellini 219 (I, Lx).

²⁹⁴ Cellini 168 (I, xLiv).

come se ei fusse una soma di legne.”²⁹⁵ And there were other notable courtier-*letterati* who were greatly admired and respected by Cellini like Benedetto Varchi and Pietro Bembo. And while Cellini understood himself to be out of his depth when it came to expounding upon things like *Cinquecento* love theory as his friend Varchi had done, this did not prevent him from embracing Varchi’s exhortation to strive to embody all of the castiglionesque qualities that Varchi had incorporated into his definition of the *ottimo artista*.

When it came to Bibbiena and Bembo, Cellini was clearly more comfortable with donning the “lower face” of Mario Baratto’s “two faces of a single culture” that was portrayed in the *Courtier*.²⁹⁶ It is worth noting that despite Castiglione’s lengthy reasoning for why he did *not* imitate Boccaccio regarding the *questione della lingua*, Boccaccio’s name appears 19 times in the *Courtier* compared to 9 occurrences of Petrarca’s name.²⁹⁷ And just as Bibbiena was “not concerned with *piacevolezza* to the exclusion of *gravità*” in his *Calandria*,²⁹⁸ Cellini was not concerned with the trials and tribulations of his “vita travagliata”²⁹⁹ to the exclusion of *piacevolezza* in his autobiography. So when Cellini decided to create a verbal portrait of the weekly meetings

²⁹⁵ Cellini 497 (II, x).

²⁹⁶ Mario Baratto, as quoted by Louise George Clubb in “Castiglione’s Humanistic Art and Renaissance Drama” in Hanning and Rosand 191-192.

²⁹⁷ Castiglione 6-10 (I, ii). See the *IntraText CT* concordance for the occurrences of Boccaccio’s and Petrarca’s name: Baldassare Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, *Ēulogos* 2007. *Intratext Digital Library*. 29 Sept. 2008 <<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1702/JA.HTM>>. Also instructive in this regard are the observations made by Jean-Louis Fournel in his lecture at Princeton University, Princeton, NJ of 10 April 2006 entitled “Castiglione: *Savoir faire*, *savoir vivre* e mondanità. Le ambiguità del classicismo”: “è ormai pacifico che lui [Castiglione] non ha né sbembiato né bembizzato il proprio testo e che si è accontentato di rifiutare gli eccessi di ogni genere e di esistere accanto al sistema delle *Prose* senza adeguarvisi ma senza respingerlo—il testo violento della seconda parte della lettera dedicatoria non corrisponde alla pratica di scrittura di Castiglione, è principalmente reattivo, strumentale ad una potenziale—e forse avverata—polemica aperta contro il proprio scritto: è scritto più contro i bembiani che non contro Bembo.” (3-4) I am grateful to Prof. Fournel for his willingness to share the written text of his lecture with me.

²⁹⁸ Clubb 195.

²⁹⁹ Cellini 3, 117, 684 (*Proemio*, I,xxxii and II, Lxxxii).

of his “virtuosa compagnia” in Rome, he did not ‘stage’ his group of artist friends engaged in *ragionamenti* concerning current art theory of the day. Instead, he staged them in a way that would create a set piece demonstrating his mastery of Bibbiena’s art “che move il riso.”³⁰⁰

Di già era quasi cessata la peste, di modo che quelli che si ritrovavano vivi molto allegramente l’un l’altro si carezzavano. Da questo ne nacque una compagnia di pittori, scultori, orefici, li meglio che fussino in Roma; et il fondatore di questa compagnia si fu uno scultore domandato Michelagnolo. Questo Michelagnolo era sanese, et era molto valente uomo, tale che poteva comparire infra ogni altri di questa proffessione, ma sopra tutto era questo uomo il più piacevole et il più carnale che mai si cognoscessi al mondo. Di questa detta compagnia lui era il più vechio, ma sì bene il più giovane alla valitudine del corpo. Noi ci ritrovavamo spesso insieme; il manco si era due volte la settimana. Non mi voglio tacere che in questa nostra compagnia si era Giulio Romano pittore et Gian Francesco [il Penni], discepoli maravigliosi del gran Raffaello da Urbino. Essendoci trovati più e più volte insieme, parve a quella nostra buona guida che la domenica seguente noi ci ritrovassimo a cena a casa sua, et che ciascuno di noi fussi ubbrigato a menare la sua cornachia, ché tal nome aveva lor posto il ditto Michelagnolo; et chi non la menassi, fussi ubbrigato a pagare una cena a tutta la compagnia. [...] Avenga che l’ora si cominciava apressare di apresentarsi alla virtuosa compagnia, ciascuno con la sua cornachia, et io mi trovavo senza, et pur troppo mi pareva fare errore mancare di una sì paza cosa; et quel che più mi teneva si era che io non volevo menarvi sotto il mio lume, infra quelle virtù tali, qualche spennachiata cornachiuccia; pensai a una piacevoleza per acrescere alla lietitudine maggiore risa. Così risolutomi, chiamai un giovinetto de età di sedici anni, il quale stava accanto a me: era figliuolo di uno ottonaio spagnuolo.³⁰¹

It is not difficult to imagine what comes next after this boccacesque introduction to the episode. Maier has noted the “sapore boccacesco” particularly in Cellini’s description of Michelagnolo in the way that it employs the artist’s characteristic use of hyperbole: “il più piacevole et il più carnale che mai si cognoscessi al mondo.” He points to the symmetry between the two authors given Boccaccio’s similar penchant for

³⁰⁰ Castiglione 188 (II, xLv).

³⁰¹ Cellini 105-106 (I, xxx).

“l’esagerazione verbale.”³⁰² There is also a connection between Cellini and Boccaccio in their respective use of the *topos* of the convivial scene as a way to celebrate the triumph of life over the horror that was the plague.³⁰³ The well-constructed set-up to this scene in which the artist describes his own brush with death from the plague after having witnessed the deaths of “molti compagni,”³⁰⁴ highlights Cellini’s awareness of being part of a rich literary tradition with his decision to commemorate the return to life with “un incontro di base edonistica che celebra virtù liberali sociali ed intellettuali.”³⁰⁵ And there is no shortage of elements linking the *Vita* to the *tradizione novellistica*.³⁰⁶ But the level of playfulness and artistry demonstrated by Cellini in this episode also extends into the realm of theatrical comedy.³⁰⁷ Barolsky observes that “Cellini’s deception is also reminiscent of the ambiguities of sex in the Plautine comedies like Bibbiena’s *La Calandria* that was performed in Rome during the early Cinquencento.” He further highlights Cellini’s use of satire and irony in the scene that “turns out to be a travesty of

³⁰² Maier 100-101. Ser Ciappelletto is one such example cited by Maier: “il piggior uomo, forse, che mai nascesse.” (101)

³⁰³ See Laura S. White, *La scena conviviale e la sua funzione nel mondo del Boccaccio* (Florence: Olshki, 1983) 45: “Il convito appare infatti impiegato come lo sfondo ideale per la agnizione di una clamorosa rivelazione epifanica—come di un trapasso da morte a vita o di una differente identità—e, come conseguenza, per una celebrazione gioiosa dell’armonia ritrovata, della posizione sociale riacquistata, della felicità meritata [...]”

³⁰⁴ Cellini 100 (I, xxix).

³⁰⁵ White 5-6.

³⁰⁶ Altieri Biagi 96-101. See also Bellotto’s Introduction to the *Vita* xxx-xxxii for his comments on Cellini’s debt to Antonfrancesco Grazzini (il Lasca) and his *Cene*, particularly the “sesta novella della seconda *Cena*, nella quale il pittore Scheggia e l’architetto e scultore Pilucca si prendono gioco del battiloro Gasparri del Calandra.” (xxxii)

³⁰⁷ See Fiorenza Weinapple, “Imitazione e fraintendimento nel teatro comico rinascimentale,” in *Lettere italiane* 1 (1986): 69-85. In terms of the three types of structures of Renaissance theatrical comedy delineated by Weinapple, Cellini’s falls into the second category: “Commedie in cui uno o più personaggi vengono beffati o puniti con una conclusione in cui però tutti sanno quel che è successo (si potrebbe chiamarle commedie di punizione).” (69)

the church,” citing the moment when Michelagnolo falls to his knees in awe of Cellini’s “bella figura.”³⁰⁸

Levato lo sciugatoio di testa a quella mia bella figura, quel Michelagnolo—come altre volte ho detto, era il più faceto et il più piacevole che immaginar si possa—appiccatosi con tutte a dua le mane, una a Iulio et una a Gianfrancesco, quanto egli potette in quel tiro li fece abbassare, et lui con le ginocchia in terra gridava “misericordia”, et chiamava tutti e’ populi dicendo: “Mirate, mirate come son fatti gli Angeli del Paradiso! che con tutto che si chiamino Angeli, mirate che v’è ancora delle Angiole”, et gridando diceva:

“O Angiol bella, o Angiol degna,
tu mi salva, et tu mi segna.”

A queste parole la piacevol creatura ridendo alzò la mana destra, et gli dette una benedizion papale con molte piacevol parole. Allora rizadosi Michelagnolo, disse che al Papa si baciava i piedi et che agli Angeli si baciava le gote; et così fatto, grandemente arrossì il giovane, che per quella causa si accrebbe bellezza grandissima.³⁰⁹

One revealing aspect of this episode that has been overlooked by scholars is the significance of the name that Cellini gave to his “piacevol creatura”: Pomona. As Bellotto indicates in a footnote, Pomona is the Roman goddess of fruit and of orchards.³¹⁰ In Ovid’s tale, she is the beautiful nymph who had no interest in men but was very nurturing to her apple trees, from whence her name is derived: “Pomona feared the peasants’ brutish ways, / fenced off her orchards, and avoided men— / she never let them in.”³¹¹ Vertumnus, god of the seasons and of change, was the one who, after many attempts at guises, eventually succeeded in winning her heart after disguising himself as an old woman in order to gain access to her. We learn from Cellini that Diego, before being transformed into Pomona, “non praticava con persona” because, like Pomona’s

³⁰⁸ Barolsky 111-112. See also Gallucci, *Sexuality* 89-90. Gallucci cites the influence of the comedies of Annibale Caro and Anton Francesco Grazzini on Cellini.

³⁰⁹ Cellini 108-109 (I, xxx).

³¹⁰ See Bellotto 111n.41.

³¹¹ Ovid, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Harvest, 1995) 499-500.

dedication to her orchards, Diego “era innamorato dei suoi maravigliosi studi.”³¹² Playing the role of Vertumnus in Cellini’s reinterpretation of Ovid is Michelangelo who, like the disguised Vertumnus, is “il più vechio” of Pomona’s potential suitors (he was 53), but “il più giovine alla valitudine del corpo.”³¹³ Adding to the sexual ambiguity and playfulness of the scene is Cellini’s description of Diego before he has undergone his *travestimento*: “lo intaglio della testa era assai più bello che quello antico di Antino.”³¹⁴ In evoking the name of Antinous, Emperor Hadrian’s “bellissimo favorito,”³¹⁵ Cellini is intentionally inviting the theme of homoerotic desire into his staging of the Ovidian story; not that it is entirely lacking in the original—“That said, he kissed / Pomona as no true old woman would.”³¹⁶ For Cellini’s contemporaries, the parallel was well known: Antinous was to Hadrian what Ganymede was to Zeus. Cellini-*auctor* is having fun by reversing the roles of Ovid’s protagonists in having Pomona be disguised, rather than Vertumnus. And to make things even more interesting, and perhaps even more enticing depending upon one’s perspective, he anticipates the “maraviglia” of Pomona’s older admirer, upon discovering that the object of his desire is a sixteen-year-old boy. Of course, the objective of this *burla* is not only to “acrescere alla lietitudine maggiore risa,” it is to showcase the artist’s *arguzia*, erudition and inventiveness. Contrary to what Maier asserts, there is nothing “fosco e d’ipogeo” about Cellini’s interjecting of homoeroticism into the scene. If there had been, he would not have erected a signpost to Antinous at the outset—something that Maier overlooks entirely.

³¹² Cellini 107 (I, xxx).

³¹³ Cellini 105 (I, xxx).

³¹⁴ Cellini 107 (I,xxx).

³¹⁵ See Bellotto 107n.17.

³¹⁶ Mandelbaum 500.

Infatti, se leggiamo attentamente il passo celliniano, sentiamo, direi, qualcosa di fosco e d'ipogeo, che in esso cova e gorgoglia: la medesima contraffazione femminile del giovinetto, *anche se non possiede un aperto intendimento osceno*, è un tema che probabilmente avrebbe repugnato all'allegria e monellesca 'giollaria' del Boccaccio. Noi qui, naturalmente, non vogliamo entrare nello scabroso argomento della sodomia celliniana, ma la bizzarria dell'invenzione e la medesima configurazione dello scherzo non possono non rimandare, in certo senso, *alla trama secreta delle inclinazioni dello scrittore*.³¹⁷

Far from trying to avoid the appearance of injecting obscene references into his narrative in this episode, Cellini was knowingly competing with the burlesque proclivities of his Roman contemporaries when he worked to create a lasting tribute to the satiric and oftentimes vulgar sense of humor of his artist friends of that period, several decades later when most of them were dead.³¹⁸ As he was crafting this episode, Cellini must have recalled with *nostalgia* and a smile on his face, that the reason his friend Romano had left Rome for Mantua shortly after the period when the 'cornacchia party' allegedly took place, was because of the scandal created by the *Sonetti lussuriosi*. Romano "had designed a series of obscene figures, which Marcantonio Raimondi engraved, and Aretino illustrated by sixteen sonnets, describing and commenting upon the lewdness of each picture."³¹⁹ While it was not uncommon for the Roman prelates to enjoy burlesque humor in private, Symonds points out that they did not like the "scandal of publicity." Raimondi fared the worst since he was put in prison; Romano transferred to the court of

³¹⁷ Maier 102. Emphasis mine.

³¹⁸ By the mid-1550's, Romano, il Penni and Rosso were all dead. Although Cellini doesn't mention Rosso as being part of the group that convened regularly at Michelagnolo's, he had been part of Cellini's circle of artist friends in this Roman period. They had a subsequent falling out later in 1537 when Cellini was "malamente accolto dal Rosso" in France (Bellotto Lxvi). Barolsky discusses the injection of "phallic humor in Rosso's religious works" and observes that "the priapean allusions in Rosso's art are related in general to the phallic comedy that is ubiquitous in the art [...] and in secular Renaissance literature." (107 and 110).

³¹⁹ John Addington Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, vol. 2 (New York: Capricorn, 1964) 341. See also Giulio Romano e Pietro Aretino, *I modi ed i sonetti lussuriosi, secondo l'edizione stampata a Venezia nel 1527*, ed. Riccardo Braglia (Mantova: Sometti, 2000) and Bette Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999).

Mantua (with Castiglione's assistance, as we have seen) and Aretino "discreetly retired from Rome for a season."³²⁰ There is a certain symmetry, then, in Cellini's impulse to satirize the Church in this episode as he remembers the fate that had befallen his good friend Romano as a result of his 'sin' of having offended '*il publico pudore*' or, more precisely, of having offended the public image of the Roman curia. And it would seem not to be a coincidence that, in crafting this playfully satiric scene with his deceased friend in mind, it is Giulio's *cornacchia* who ends up being the first to discover the trick that Cellini has played on the group.

Fu domandata [Pomona] da quella femmina, che aveva menata Iulio, se lei si sentiva qualche fastidio. Disse che sì, et che si pensava d'esser grossa di qualche mese, et che si sentiva dar noia alla donna del corpo. Subito le due donne, che in mezo l'avevano, mossosi a pietà di Pomona, mettendogli le mane al corpo, trovorno che l'era mastio. Tirando presto le mani a loro con ingiuriose parole, quali si usano dire ai belli giovanetti, levatosi da tavola, subito le grida spartesi et con gran risa et con gran meraviglia, il fiero Michelagnolo chiese licenzia da tutti di poter darmi una penitenzia a suo modo. Avuto il sì, con grandissime gride mi levò di peso, dicendo: "Viva il Signore, viva il Signore!"; e disse che quella era la condannagione che io meritavo, aver fatto un così bel tratto. Così finì la piacevolissima cena et la giornata; et ugniun di noi ritornò alle case sue.³²¹

It would also seem that Cellini felt this was exactly the sort of "condannagione" his friend Giulio deserved for having created the lewd depictions for the *Sonetti lussuriosi* that had gotten him into trouble—congratulations, rather than censure.

As for Maier's comment about the "trama secreta delle inclinazioni dello scrittore," it is clear that he thinks Cellini has unintentionally revealed something "scabroso" about his sexuality in this episode that he would have preferred to hide. But Cellini speaks unabashedly in the *Vita* about his attraction for beauty, whether it be in the male or female form. And when the object of his desire happens to be of the same sex, he

³²⁰ Symonds, *Renaissance* 341-342.

³²¹ Cellini 111-112 (I, xxx).

often alludes to antique precedent for such attraction, as if to demonstrate that he is in good company, as he did with the allusion to Antinous when describing the beauty of Diego. Another such example is Cellini's description of Paulino, his young shop assistant during his early days in Rome. After describing the young boy's beauty and how he had become enamored of the "grande amore che lui portava a me," Cellini tells us that "per queste cause io gli posi tanto amore, quanto in un petto di uno uomo rinchiudere si possa. Questo sviscerato amore fu causa, che per vedere io più sovente rasserenare quel meraviglioso viso, che per natura sua onesto e maninconico si dimostrava; pure, quando io pigliavo il mio cornetto, subito moveva un riso tanto onesto et tanto bello, che io non mi maraviglio punto di quelle pappolate che scrivono e' Greci degli dèi del cielo."³²² The allusion in this case is to the myth of Ganymede and Zeus. Shortly before the description of Paulino in the *Vita*, Cellini creates a beautifully refined portrait of his courtly flirtation with the "bellissima gentildonna romana," Porzia Chigi.³²³ Maier aptly describes the episode as one in which "la figura di Benvenuto 'giovane da bene' emerge in tutta la sua nobiltà e squisitezza sentimentale. [...] È, questo, un primo timido, *stilnovistico* amore di Benvenuto?"³²⁴ But the language of attraction in both cases—Porzia and Paulino—is tinged with *stilnovismo*. Madonna Porzia is not only '*tanto gentile e tanto onesta*,' she's "gentile al possibile et oltramodo bella."³²⁵ Paulino's smile is "tanto onesto e tanto bello," and the boy is "il meglio creato, il più onesto et il più bello figliuolo che mai io vedessi

³²² Cellini 76 (I, xxiii). James Saslow points out that "Cellini's dismissal of classical mythology [as *pappolate*] is comically disingenuous; he was obviously familiar with its erotic content, and he himself illustrated three of these same "silly stories" about beautiful classical ephebes much like Paulino: Ganymede, Apollo and Hyacinthus, and Narcissus." See James M. Saslow in *Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1986) 157.

³²³ Cellini 66-68 (I, xix).

³²⁴ Maier 136.

³²⁵ Cellini 66 (I, xix).

alla vita mia.”³²⁶ The attempt here is not to analyze Cellini’s sexuality, but rather to demonstrate that not only was the artist *not* ashamed of what would be defined today as his ‘bisexuality’;³²⁷ he enjoyed playing with allusions to it in his *Vita*—further evidence that the *Vita* was *not* written from a defensive posture owing to the artist’s conviction for sodomy, as some scholars have claimed.³²⁸

Cellini also took great pleasure in playing with names. Altieri Biagi places him firmly in the literary tradition of those who wield the “nome ‘semantico’” to comic advantage: “Da questa letteratura popolare [novella, filone satirico-burlesco] il Cellini avrebbe potuto attingere il gusto per il gioco etimologico sui nomi che egli possiede molto spiccato.”³²⁹ Thus, even the name Pomona is a bawdy sexual signpost for male-male attraction in its reference to apples.

Jocular poets also found in the stereotype fertile ground for their imagination. They often contrasted the alleged attraction of the “great” to sodomy with the more “natural” sexual inclinations of common people. In a poem dedicated equivocally to a “sausage,” the writer Agnolo Firenzuola claimed that “roast and rump [in the burlesque code, both metaphors for sodomy] pertain above all to the great.” Later he again distinguished sexual tastes of the rich and cultured from those of the humble, citing an alleged theological authority “who reports the traditional opinion that figs [vagina] belong to commoners, but apples and peaches [buttocks] to the great masters.” This view was so common-place by the mid-sixteenth century, and not only in Florence, that someone like the sculptor Benvenuto Cellini, well known for his illicit sexual interests, could wittily turn it to his advantage to defend himself.³³⁰

³²⁶ Cellini 76 (I, xxiii).

³²⁷ While it would seem that ‘omnisexuality’ is a more appropriate description of Cellini’s sexuality, this term is also plagued by similar anachronistic problems as those discussed by Michael Rocke in his *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996) 124: “Some scholars, if they have not simply assumed that males who had sex with other males in this period were exclusively ‘homosexual,’ have adopted the seemingly more appropriate word ‘bisexuality’ to characterize Renaissance men’s interest in both sexes. But this anachronistic term is only a hybrid product of the sharply drawn contemporary categories ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual,’ which were lacking in this society, and it probably misrepresents the cultural specificity of late medieval and early modern understandings of erotic experience and sentiment.”

³²⁸ See pages 9-10, 17-18, and 37-38 of chapter one above.

³²⁹ Altieri Biagi 67.

³³⁰ Rocke 135-136. Rocke is referring to the episode from the *Vita* previously cited here in chapter one, page 60. See also N.S. Davidson, “Sodomy in early modern Venice,” *Sodomy in Early Modern Europe*, ed.

In addition to playing with names, Cellini also demonstrates literary inventiveness in this episode by playing with ekphrasis.³³¹ The artist's allusion to Ovid's Vertumnus and Pomona also recalls the story as it was playfully and seductively depicted in the fresco lunette of the same name executed by Jacopo Pontormo for the Medici villa of Poggio a Caiano between 1520-1521. As Larry J. Feinberg observes, the Ovidian scene in Pontormo's lunette plays on the function of the space in which it was frescoed: "a pleasurable retreat, where both diplomatic entertaining and family celebrations took place." It is a bucolic scene in which gardeners are depicted gathering leaves "for the lavish festoon they are making, evidently in preparation for an imminent celebration or the arrival of an important guest. [...] In fact, the actions and attitudes of virtually all of the figures can be understood as their varied responses to the unexpected or premature arrival of a guest to the Salone from a door at right."³³²

Thomas Betteridge (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester UP, 2002) 73: "One of the earliest Italian writers to discuss the legitimacy of sexual relations between men was a Siennese nobleman called Antonio Vignali in his dialogue *La cazzaria*, written in the mid-1520's and first published in Naples in c.1530. A Venetian edition appeared in 1531." See also Symonds's partial list of these "scandalous" texts of the period: "La Casa's *Capitolo* on the Oven; Molza's on Salad and the Fig; Firenzuola's on the Sausage and the Legno Santo; Bronzino's on the Paint-brush and the Radish; Aretino's on the Quartan Fever; Franzesi's on Carrots and Chestnuts; Varchi's on Hard Eggs and Fennel; Mauro's on Beans and Priapus; Dolce's on Spittle and Noses; Bini's on the *Mal Franzese*; Lori's on Apples; Ruscelli's on the Spindle [...] Figs, beans, peaches, apples, chestnuts acquired a new and scandalous significance." (*Renaissance* 320)

³³¹ Contrary to other instances in the *Vita* when Cellini describes his own works of art, in this instance, he is recalling the works of others in the way that Frederick de Armas attributes to Cervantes in his pastoral novel, *La Galatea*: "Instead of describing the painting, Cervantes sets it in motion as Galatea walks through the scene, attempting to avoid the lovesick shepherds. Thus, Cervantes creates a dramatic ekphrasis, which is a contradiction in terms. Rather than a static description of a work of art, we have a narrative filled with movement." See Frederick A. de Armas, "Simple Magic: Ekphrasis from Antiquity to the Age of Cervantes," *Ekphrasis in the Age of Cervantes*, ed. Frederick A. de Armas (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 2005) 17.

³³² Larry J. Feinberg, "Lesser Gods: Pontormo's fluid mind and engaging humour are revealed in two newly discovered drawings for decorative schemes commissioned by the Medici," *BNET.com* 8 Oct. 2008 <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0PAL/is_540_165/ai_n27152774>. See also Elizabeth Pilliod, "The influence of Michelangelo: Pontormo, Bronzino and Allori," *Reaction to the Master: Michelangelo's Effect on Art and Artists in the Sixteenth Century*, eds. Francis Ames-Lewis and Paul Joannides (Aldershot, Eng.: Ashgate, 2003) 31-52.

The work's lighthearted tone is underscored by the awkward relationship of the protagonists. Vertumnus, in the guise of an old reaper, looks longingly with moist eyes at Pomona, who responds to his silent romantic plea with head turned away, a defensive outstretched arm, and a pruning hook in hand. Conspicuously reinforcing the comedic nature of the scene is Pontormo's inscription from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (XIV, 668-69), held by the smiling *putto* at upper left, which reads "VTINAM!" (would that!), the key word of the tag line exclaimed by an exasperated Vertumnus, after failing to woo Pomona with various disguises [...] The informed viewer would know that the tale ultimately ends happily, and that Vertumnus's love will be requited when he reveals his true self to the goddess. Just a few years after the painting's completion, this charming myth inspired the comedic play *Pomona* (1524) by the Sienese writer Nicolo Alticozzi.³³³

Even if the viewer is not informed about how Ovid's story ends, Pontormo boldly hints at Pomona's eventual yielding to Vertumnus by symmetrically placing a male and female figure in seductive poses on the wall above the foreground where the protagonists are situated along with a male and female garland-maker. Pontormo invites the viewer to read the story vertically with the adult figures on the wall representing the moment when Vertumnus "showed Pomona all his splendor" and she, then "felt the same passion: love had pierced her through."³³⁴ The 'new' love-struck Pomona is wearing a red dress which is raised to the knee to expose her nude calf. The undisguised Vertumnus in "all his splendor" is completely nude and erotically posed as he leans back and reaches up to collect some leaves from the branch above him.³³⁵ And although Cellini does not explicitly refer to Pontormo's lunette in his Ovidian tableau, he incorporates several of the types of ekphrasis described by de Armas:

³³³ Feinberg, "Lesser Gods."

³³⁴ Mandelbaum 505.

³³⁵ See the entry for Pontormo by William B. MacGregor in *Gay Histories and Cultures*, ed. George E. Haggerty (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2000) 701: "A perceptible homoerotic sensibility seems to inform many of his academic studies and preparatory drawings featuring single and sometimes multiple male nude figures [...]. Pontormo favored extreme rotational poses that allow the viewer to savor simultaneously a figure's muscular chest, curving back, and (especially) buttocks, or else seated or recumbent positions that invariably privilege a crotch view." The undisguised Vertumnus on the wall is representative of the latter in this case. See also the "Studies for Vertumnus & Pomona" in Janet Cox-Rearick, *The Drawings of Pontormo* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1964).

In terms of pictorial models and how these are used, ekphrasis can be notional (based on an imagined work of art), or actual or true (based on a real work of art). It can also be combinatory (combining two or more works of art), transformative (changing some elements in the art work into others that can be connected to the original ones), metadescriptive (based on a textual description of a work of art which may or may not exist), or fragmented (using parts of a work). Ekphrasis can conform to the traditional pause in a narrative to describe an object (descriptive ekphrasis), or it can tell the story depicted in the art work—and even expand on the incidents (narrative ekphrasis). There is also the ekphrasis of an object that is being created, such as Vulcan’s forging Achilles’ shield—a shaping ekphrasis. Finally, an ekphrasis can be contained within another ekphrasis, creating a meta-ekphrasis such as the drawing of the battle with the Basque within the description of the discovered manuscript of don Quixote in chapter nine of the novel [...] Paradoxically, ekphrasis can also be dramatic, using the art object to construct a developing action—thus taking to an extreme, the narrative ekphrasis. And beyond this, the device can become an *ur-ekphrasis*, existing as a concept of ekphrasis in a character’s mind (as seen when don Quixote imagines giants out of the stones from which windmills are built), thus foregrounding the process of artistic creation.³³⁶

According to de Armas’s typology, I would argue that Cellini’s use of ekphrasis in the Pomona episode is dramatic, transformative, combinatory and fragmented. Whether it can be considered categorically “actual or true” is impossible to say since we have no unequivocal evidence that Cellini had Pontormo’s painting in mind when he choreographed this episode. We do know, however, that Cellini would have had occasion to admire Pontormo’s fresco when he went to pay his respects to Cosimo at Poggio a Caiano upon his arrival back in Florence in August of 1545.³³⁷ It was a visit that would become emblazoned in the artist’s memory because it was the day that Cosimo convinced Cellini that under his patronage, he would be rewarded much more handsomely for his efforts than he had been under the King of France. And Cellini, “*poverello isventurato*,” naturally jumped at the chance to further his career by proving that he was worthy of having his work displayed next to “*l’opere del gran Donatello e del maraviglioso*

³³⁶ de Armas 22-23.

³³⁷ Cellini 606 (II, Liii).

Michelagnolo.”³³⁸ Years later, Cellini would painfully regret not having drawn up a written contract for the execution of his “mal fortunato Perseo”³³⁹ because by then, he had learned that the Duke “aveva più modo di mercatante che di duca.”³⁴⁰ Pontormo was an artist greatly admired by Cellini, not only for his own talents; but, perhaps even more important, for his having recognized those of Cellini upon the unveiling of his Perseo.³⁴¹ The artistry of Pontormo’s lunette, particularly the “numerous paraphrases of Michelangelo’s [Sistine] ceiling and Medici tombs in the Vertumnus painting,”³⁴² would have held great interest for Cellini since he had spent many hours in his early days in Rome sketching in the Sistine Chapel as well as in the Palazzo Chigi (today, the Farnesina) where he could study the frescoes of Raphael and his disciples: “In questo tempo io andavo quando a disegnare in Capella di Michelagnolo, et quando alla casa di Agostino Chigi sanese, nella qual casa era molte opere bellissime di pittura di mano dello eccellentissimo Raffaello da Urbino [...]”³⁴³

Before returning to the dramatic and transformative aspects of Cellini’s use of ekphrasis in this episode, there is another fresco cycle that needs to be identified as part of the pictorial imagery that seems to have been recreated in the artist’s *cornacchia* dinner, the *Amore e Psiche* group at the Farnesina including *Il concilio degli dei* and *Il*

³³⁸ Cellini 607 and 609 (II, Liii).

³³⁹ Cellini 644 (II, Lxvi).

³⁴⁰ Cellini 609-610 (II, Liii).

³⁴¹ Cellini 708 (II, xc): “Ma quello che mi dava maggior contento con isperanza di maggior mia salute inverso ’l mio Duca, si era, che quegli dell’arte, cioè scultori et pittori, ancora loro facevano a ggara a chi meglio diceva [about his *Perseo*]. Et infra gli altri, quale io stimavo più, si era il valente pittore Iacopo da Pontorno, et più di lui il suo eccellente Bronzino, pittore, che non gli bastò ’l farvene appiccare parecchi [sonnets of praise] che egli me ne mandò per il suo Sandrino [...]”

³⁴² Larry J. Feinberg, “Lesser Gods.” See also Kathleen Weil-Garris Posner, “Comments on the Medici Chapel and Pontormo’s Lunette at Poggio a Caiano,” *Burlington Magazine* 115 (1973) 640-649: “There is no question that the fresco is based on the garland-bearing *Ignudi* flanking the bronze shields on the Sistine Ceiling, as Pontormo scholars agree, and that the Medici *Broncone* replaces the Rovere Oak.” (647)

³⁴³ Cellini 66 (I, xix). See also Bellotto’s note 15 to this page: “alla Farnesina Raffaello eseguì due opere murali: il *Trionfo di Galatea* (1511) e, con l’ausilio dei suoi assistenti, la raffigurazione del mito di *Amore e Psiche* (1517).”

banchetto degli dei (1517-1518) of Giulio Romano and Giovanni Francesco (il Penni). This was one of the group of paintings mentioned above that Cellini had seen and admired many times. In fact, it was because he went to study and sketch figures from these frescoes so frequently, that the wife of Sigismondo Chigi, Sulpicia (Cellini confused her name with her sister's and called her Madonna Porzia in the *Vita*), decided to have a closer look at both the artist and his drawings: "accostandosi un giorno a me, guardando li mia disegni, mi domandò se io ero scultore o pittore: alla cui donna io dissi che ero orefice. Disse lei che troppo ben disegnavo per orefice [...]"³⁴⁴ Cellini had total recall for those in his life who complimented him for his talents. We saw earlier how Cellini crafted an entire episode to showcase the praise he had received from Michelangelo for the bust of Bindo Altoviti. But his narratives are not solely concerned with self-congratulatory episodes to the exclusion of other intentions. Much has been said by critics about Cellini's vindictive side and his impulse to settle scores. But there is also a Cellini who wanted to demonstrate *gratitudine* to those who had shown him kindness. Giulio Romano and il Penni were two such individuals. We learn in the Madonna Porzia episode that il Penni had spoken very highly of Cellini with his friend, the Bishop of Salamanca, and, as a result, Cellini received many commissions from the Bishop and "guadagnav[a] molto bene."³⁴⁵ So too, Giulio Romano had sung Cellini's praises to the Duke of Mantua, Federico Gonzaga, to encourage the Duke to give his friend work when the artist arrived there to avoid the plague in Florence. Cellini makes a point of telling us that when the Duke asked Romano to create a *disegno* for a reliquary that he wanted Cellini to execute, Romano replied: "Signore, Benvenuto è un uomo che non ha bisogno

³⁴⁴ Cellini 66 (I, xix). See also Bellotto 67n.19 for Cellini's confusion of names.

³⁴⁵ Cellini 66 (I, xix).

delli disegni d'altrui, et questo Vostra Eccellenzia benissimo lo giudicherà, quando la vedrà il suo modello.”³⁴⁶ The *cornacchia* episode, then, is also a carefully crafted celebration of Cellini's friendship with these two artists and his way of 'returning the favor' through an encomiastic ekphrastic tribute to their excellence in their profession.³⁴⁷

In addition to staging a “travesty of the church,” as mentioned earlier, the dinner gathering of the “virtuosa compagna”³⁴⁸ at Michelagnolo's house also seems to be a recreation of the mock gathering of the gods inspired by the paintings that Cellini associated with two of the group's most illustrious *commensali*—*Il banchetto degli dei* and *Il concilio degli dei* of Giulio Romano and il Penni. The frescoes, in turn, were inspired by Apuleius's tale of Cupid and Psyche from his *Metamorphoses* (*The Golden Ass*).³⁴⁹

Raphael's frescoes are sensuous and convey a sense of [...] *voluptas* [...]. The beautiful nude figures, the sumptuous festoons of fruits, and the elaborate [fake] painted tapestries convey this effect. The predominantly spirited and playful tone in this work can be seen in the various *amorini* who fly across the painted sky. There is also a decisive element of satire in the narrative scenes [...].³⁵⁰

Alessandro Zuccari reminds us that “il rapporto dialettico tra pittura e letteratura era un vezzo culturale del Rinascimento.” Further, Zuccari cites Ludovico Dolce's *Dialogo della Pittura* (1557) with regard to a drawing of Raphael for the *Nozze di Alessandro e Rossane* inspired by a text of Lucian: “è così iscambievole che i pittori cavino spesso le loro invenzioni dai poeti, ed i poeti dai pittori.”³⁵¹ In this case, the process comes full

³⁴⁶ Cellini 153 (I, xL).

³⁴⁷ See Manlio Pastore Stocchi, “*Kairos, occasio*: Appunti su una celebre ecfrasi,” *Ecfrasi: modelli ed esempi fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, eds. Gianni Venturi and Monica Farnetti, 2 vols. (Rome: Bulzoni, 2004) 139-164.

³⁴⁸ Cellini 106 (I, xxx).

³⁴⁹ Barolsky 82.

³⁵⁰ Barolsky 82.

³⁵¹ Alessandro Zuccari, “Il ciclo di Amore e Psiche nella decorazione del Cinquecento,” *Raffaello e le dimore del Rinascimento. Art e Dossier* (Florence: Giunti, 1972) 49.

circle with the artist-*letterato* ‘drawing on’ (both literally and figuratively)³⁵² the paintings of his friends who had, in turn, drawn on a source from classical literature. In addition, by the time Cellini was writing this episode, he would have had a more recent re-exposure to these frescoes by way of Vasari’s description of them in his *Vita* of Raphael.³⁵³

In Cellini’s parodic version of the *Banchetto degli dei*, no official wedding announcement takes place, but Cellini combines characters from the two mythical tales for comic effect: the Apuleian Psiche, who is pregnant with “Voluttà,”³⁵⁴ and Pomona who is “grossa di qualche mese.”³⁵⁵ The role of Psiche’s lover, Amore, is fittingly given to Giulio Romano who seems the most enamored of all the male guests with Cellini’s “bella figura”: “Michelagnolo mio caro, quel vostro nome di cornachie oggi a costoro sta bene, benché le sieno qualche cosa manco belle che cornachie a presso a uno de’ più bei pagoni [pavoni] che immaginar so possa.”³⁵⁶ Even in Cellini’s description of the convocation of the “virtuosa compagnia” there is an echo of the Apuleian tale that inspired the program for the paintings:

[...] parve a quella nostra buona guida che la Domenica seguente noi ci ritrovassimo a cena in casa sua, et che ciascuno di noi fussi ubbrigato a menare la sua cornachia, [...] et chi non la menassi, fussi ubbrigato a pagare una cena a tutta la compagnia.³⁵⁷

Così parlò Giove, e diede ordine a Mercurio di convocare immediatamente in assemblea plenaria gli dei e di render noto ch’era comminata una multa di diecimila sesterzi per chi avesses disertato l’adunanza.³⁵⁸

³⁵² Cellini 68 (I, xix): “Soprastetti alquanto intorno al mio disegno che facevo, ritraendo certa figura di Iove di man di Raffaello da Urbino detto.” It is not clear which one of the many Jupiters depicted in the *Amore e Psiche* cycle Cellini was referring to.

³⁵³ Vasari, *Le vite*, eds. Bellosi and Rossi 636.

³⁵⁴ Lucio Apuleio, *L’asino d’oro*, cited in Zuccari 50-51.

³⁵⁵ Cellini 111 (I, xxx).

³⁵⁶ Cellini 109 (I, xxx).

³⁵⁷ Cellini 105-106 (I, xxx).

³⁵⁸ Apuleius in Zuccari 50.

The relationship between the *Amore and Psiche* cycle and the staging of Cellini's *cena* is dynamic; it "puts in motion" rather than describing the frescoes, albeit with transformations and in combination with another pictorial image—Pontormo's *Vertumnus and Pomona* lunette at Poggio a Caiano.³⁵⁹ The nymphs of Pontormo's lunette become *cornacchia*-goddesses and the gardeners become their consort-gods. Fragments are taken from each work and recombined in Cellini's playfully satiric re-creation of them. The satirical element is perhaps even closer in spirit to Apuleius's contemporary, Lucian, after whose *Lucius or The Ass* he likely modeled his *Metamorphoses*.³⁶⁰ Cellini also created a 'plastic' work of art within his ekphrastic scene; his constant references to Pomona as "la mia bella figura" and the praise he received from his colleagues for his work of art mirror the scenes of praise for his metalwork and sculptures. In this sense, the scene could also be described as meta-ekphrastic, according to de Armas's categories. All of these works of art—the paintings and Cellini's dramatic ekphrastic representation of them—are united by common elements: inventiveness, playfulness, sensuousness, satire and humor.

Cellini's use of dramatic ekphrasis in this episode was not unlike the technique employed by Vasari in his *Vite*. Barolsky refers to Vasari's techniques as "literary *inganni*, the tricks of his own art." In fact, he uses the example of Vasari's story about Raphael and these same Chigi frescoes to underscore his point.

³⁵⁹ de Armas 23: "In reality, the passage [...] is a dramatic ekphrasis, where the characters, the action, and the landscape put in motion what is perceived in the painting."

³⁶⁰ See David Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins: Humor and Humanism in the Early Renaissance* (Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 1998) 9 and 76-77: "A central comic feature of these works [*Dialogues of the Gods*], which paradoxically aroused the indignation of Christian readers, is Lucian's irreverent depiction of the gods, especially Zeus. The foibles of the Olympians should hardly have provoked such scandal. In fact, Lucian was merely exaggerating the tendency, already present, in Homer, to portray the gods as prey to human emotions."

Or take Rudolph and Margot Wittkower's literal reading, in *Born Under Saturn*, of Vasari's anecdote about Raphael refusing to paint in Agostino Chigi's villa unless the patron allowed him to bring his lover there to stay while he completed the work. The Wittkowers take no notice of the fact that Vasari's story of Raphael's passions is a variation on his earlier tale of Filippo Lippi's libidinous escapades, and that Vasari extrapolates Raphael's would-be sexual urges from the erotic subject of the frescoes in the Villa Farnesina, specifically the story of Eros and Psyche, thereby linking the painter's *voluptas* to the sensuousness of his art. [...] My purpose here is not to ridicule scholars for being fooled by Vasari's deceptions, but to celebrate the force of Vasari's literary *inganni*, the tricks of his own art.³⁶¹

So, too, Cellini linked the sensuousness of Romano's and Penni's art to the satirical recreation of it in the *cornaccia* episode. Cellini experimented with "literary *inganni*," like ekphrasis, just as Vasari did.³⁶² Gallucci has talked about Cellini's ekphrastic writing in the *Vita*, but only with respect to the artist's descriptions of his own works of art within his narrative.³⁶³ At a later point in his *Vita*, Cellini also engages in what de Armas calls "ur-ekphrasis" during the famous prison vision scene. In that scene, the artist foreshadows "the process of artistic creation"³⁶⁴ by describing in his vision what will later become the plan for his burial monument, including his '*bel Cristo*,' the magnificent marble cross that eventually ended up at the Escorial in Spain. His multifaceted use of ekphrasis in the *cornaccia* episode opens another window on the artist's level of inventiveness. This entire scene, then, is a demonstration piece of literary *invenzione* and mastery of one of the three kinds of *facezie* described by Bibbiena in the *Cortegiano*—

³⁶¹ Paul Barolsky, "The Trick of Art," *Vasari's Florence: Artists and Literati at the Medicean Court*, ed. Philip Jacks (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 1998) 25.

³⁶² See Rubin 275-276: "There were famous ekphraseis about painting known in the renaissance. The most pertinent to Vasari was the Elder Philostratus's *Imagines*, which purports to be a description of pictures in a Neapolitan collection. The setting and the paintings are a pretext for a demonstration of skill in evoking people, places and events in history and mythology. They are re-creations of the effect and associations of viewing, not a textual transcription of actual paintings. Vasari reversed this process: starting from extant works, he placed them in the mind's eye, seizing on and expounding upon details and episodes that made them compelling and lifelike. The narrative basis of such descriptions suited the dramatic intentions of pictured stories." See also Marsh 22-23 for the influence of Lucian's allegorical ekphrasis on Renaissance artists, particularly Alberti, Mantegna and Botticelli.

³⁶³ Gallucci, *Sexuality* 78-80

³⁶⁴ de Armas 22-23.

“‘*burle*’; nelle quali intervengon le narrazioni lunghe e i detti brevi ed ancor qualche operazione.”³⁶⁵ The episode is also a castiglionesque tribute to Cellini’s deceased artist friends portrayed in the re-enactment of the convivial scene.

II.3 *Perfetto cortegiano vs. ottimo artista*: Points of convergence between the two models

Beyond the singularly creative *burla* just described, Cellini was also a master of the other types of *facezie* outlined by Bibbiena in the *Cortegiano*: “quella urbana e piacevole narrazion continuata, che consiste nell’effetto d’una cosa; e della sùbita ed arguta prontezza, che consiste in un detto solo.”³⁶⁶ One of his most memorable *battute* is the one regarding the chalice commissioned by Clement VII. Cardinal Salviati, having been instructed to put pressure on Cellini to expedite the work while the Pope was away in Bologna, wasted no time in carrying out his duty:

Questo Cardinal bestia mandò per me in capo di otto dì, dicendomi che io portassi sù l’opera; a il quale io andai a llui senza l’opera. Giunto che io fui, questo Cardinale subito mi disse: “Dov’è questa tua cipollata? Ha’ la tu finita?” Al quale io risposi: “O Monsignor reverendissimo, io la mia cipollata non ho finita, et non la finirò, se voi non mi date delle cipolle per finirla.”³⁶⁷

Even though this type of witty retort is ‘telegraphed’ to the reader in the way it is set up—the reader sees it coming with the adjective “bestia”—, it still provokes laughter. In other instances, during the course of a “narrazion continuata,” Cellini succeeds in slipping in witty one-liners as if they were casual comments without any ulterior motivation.

Questo valente uomo, infra gli altri sua medicamenti, prese certe disperate cure di mali franzesi. Et perché questi mali in Roma sono molto amici de’ preti, massime

³⁶⁵ Castiglione 191 (II, xLviii).

³⁶⁶ Castiglione 191 (II, xLviii).

³⁶⁷ Cellini 209-210 (I, Lvii).

di quei più ricchi, fattosi conoscere questo valente uomo, per virtù di certi profumi mostrava di sanare maravigliosamente queste cotai infermità, ma voleva far patto prima che cominciassi a curare [...].³⁶⁸

These ‘one-liners,’ however, invariably serve as set-ups to subsequent scenes. For example, it is no accident that this *detto mordace* about the clergy’s ‘amicizia’ with sexually transmitted diseases directly precedes the episode in which Cellini contracts the plague and is visited by a rather unwilling doctor who happens to be the father of one of Cellini’s shop-boys. This doctor was in the service of Cardinal Iacobacci at the time and is clearly worried about exposing the cardinal to the plague.

“Venite, mio padre, a veder Benvenuto, il quali è con un poco di indisposizione a letto.” Non considerando quel che la indisposizione potessi essere, subito venne a me, et toccatomi il polso, vide e sentì quel che lui volsuto non arebbe. Subito vòlto al figliuolo, gli disse: “O figliuolo traditore, tu m’hai rovinato: come poss’io più andare innanzi al cardinale?” A cui il figliuol disse: “Molto più vale, mio padre, questo mio maestro, che quanti cardinali ha Roma.”³⁶⁹

This scene, in turn, directly precedes the “travesty of the church” that takes place in the *cornacchia* episode. Also worth mentioning is Cellini’s nod to Boccaccio which occurs not only with his ridicule of the clergy, but also with his remark “molte miglia avevo camminato”³⁷⁰ in reference to his sexual encounter with the young “servicella” which immediately preceded his “poco di indisposizione” of the plague. It is this kind of mindful preparation of the groundwork for subsequent scenes together with the timely introduction of characters and events that prompted Rossi to question the ‘fact’ of Cellini’s having dictated his *Vita*.

I would therefore question how anyone could dictate with such *sprezzatura* a narrative of the complexity of Cellini’s *Vita*, where the writer is in such control of his material that he can announce characters and events well in advance of their

³⁶⁸ Cellini 97-98 (I, xxviii).

³⁶⁹ Cellini 101 (I, xxix).

³⁷⁰ As Bellotto points out, this is a “metafora erotica di ascendenza boccacciana (cfr. *Decameron* III, i) (101n.7).

appearance, obviously having already thought out their effects on the course of his life and career. He also weaves into the text themes that control the direction of the narrative from beginning to end, particularly in the case of book one.³⁷¹

This same mindful attention exists in the artist's delineation of attributes that validate his portrayal of himself as the *ottimo artista*—the Varchian version of Castiglione's *perfetto cortegiano*. His mastery of the art of *facezie* alone is, of course, not sufficient evidence of a connection to Castiglione's model because, as several scholars have noted, this facility was “talmente endemic[a] nella ‘civiltas,’ letteraria e non letteraria, toscana che sarebbe perfino inutile insistere sull’argomento [...]”³⁷² It also should be noted that there was a certain formula derived from rhetoric manuals for the ordering of biographical material that Cellini was mindful in following at the beginning of the *Vita*.³⁷³ While he most likely did not read those manuals, Cellini was certainly familiar with the order to follow; if not from earlier models, at the very least from the sequence followed by Vasari in 1550. In describing Vasari's adherence to this “*sine qua non*” of Renaissance biography, Rubin points to the preface of Boccaccio's commentary on *The Divine Comedy* where he says “that he would write about the nobility of Dante's birth, his life, his studies, his behavior, his works.”³⁷⁴ The artist-biographers of the Cinquecento and Cellini, in particular, took the ancestry part of the description to a new level of “audacia genealogica.”³⁷⁵ Basing his information on Villani's *Cronache*, Cellini cites a courageous captain of Julius Caesar by the name of Fiorino as being both the origin of the name of his beloved city, Firenze, as well as the founder of his family. He

³⁷¹ See Rossi, *Sprezzatura* 57.

³⁷² Altieri Biagi 96. See also Rubin 159-160: “The short story and practical joke (*novella* and *beffa*) were indigenous forms, Boccaccio's *Decameron* providing an illustrious example combining both. Many of the quips, role reversals, and revealing antics in *The Lives* fit closely into the forms and figures of the Tuscan *novella*.” See also Carrara, note 262 above.

³⁷³ See Rubin 161 and Marsh 173.

³⁷⁴ Rubin 161 and accompanying note.

³⁷⁵ Altieri Biagi 64.

justifies the latter claim by stating that Fiorino came from the town of “Cellino” near Viterbo.³⁷⁶ By all accounts, Cellini invented this part of the story.³⁷⁷ The interesting part of the anecdote is that rather than tracing his lineage to a long line of creative artists, Cellini immediately emphasizes that he is a descendant of courageous fighters. First, there is Fiorino, “un suo [of Julius Caesar] primo e valoroso capitano.”³⁷⁸ But the emphasis on valiant men does not end with him.

Noi troviamo così, et così crediamo dipendere da uomo virtuoso. Dipoi troviamo essere de’ nostri Cellini in Ravenna, più antica città di Italia, e quivi è gran gentili uomini; ancora n’è in Pisa, et ne ho trovati in molti luoghi di Cristianità; et in questo Stato ancora n’è restato qualche casata, *pur dediti all’arme*; ché non sono molti anni da oggi che un giovane chiamato Luca Cellini, giovane senza barba, combatté con uno soldato pratico et valentissimo uomo che altre volte aveva combattuto in isteccato, chiamato Francesco da Vicorati. Questo Luca per propria virtù con l’arme in mano lo vinse et ammazzò con tanto valore et virtù, che fe’ maravigliare il mondo, che aspettava tutto il contrario: in modo che io mi glorio d’avere lo ascendente mio da uomini virtuosi.³⁷⁹

This depiction of his ancestry sets the stage for the episode that follows shortly thereafter in which Cellini’s younger brother Cecchino—“molto ardito e fierissimo”—is rescued by Benvenuto after he had been knocked to the ground by a slingshot to the head, launched by an angry mob of relatives of the man he was on the verge of defeating in a sword fight.³⁸⁰ Even more important, this initial establishment of linkage to valorous men sets the stage for his entire *Vita* and the importance Cellini gives to bravery and dexterity in the use of weapons. To the artist, expertise in the field of “l’arme” is to be taken just as seriously as his primary profession of being a goldsmith. In fact, during the famous battle

³⁷⁶ According to Bellotto, in the *Istorie fiorentine* (II,2), Machiavelli “ricorda un Fiorino fondatore della città. Che questi fosse originario di *Cellino*, l’odierna Celleno nei pressi di Montefiascone (Viterbo), non è però attestato da nessuna fonte.” (11n.16)

³⁷⁷ Bondanella and Bondanella 380n. 6.

³⁷⁸ Cellini 11 (I, ii).

³⁷⁹ Cellini 12-13 (I, ii). Emphasis is mine.

³⁸⁰ Cellini 30-31 (I, viii). Cellini also tells us that Cecchino “divenne dappoi de’ gran soldati che avessi la scuola del maraviglioso signor Giovannino de’ Medici [Giovanni delle Bande Nere], padre del duca Cosimo [...]” (30)

scene of the Sack of Rome after he allegedly killed the Duke of Bourbon, Cellini declares: “Io, che tal volta più ero inclinato a questa professione [le armi] che a quella che io tenevo per mia, la facevo tanto volentieri, che la mi veniva fatta meglio che la ditta [oreficeria].”³⁸¹

Castiglione’s point of departure for his *perfetto cortegiano* is also illustrious ancestry: “Voglio adunque che questo nostro cortegiano sia nato nobile e di generosa famiglia [...].”³⁸² But after a debate about the relative merits of being noble by birth or by merit, the “principale e vera profession” of the perfect courtier is defined.

Ma per venire a qualche particolarità, estimo che la principale e vera profession del cortegiano debba esser quella dell’arme; la qual sopra tutto voglio che egli faccia vivamente e sia conosciuto tra gli altri per ardito e sforzato e fidele a che serve. E ’l nome di queste bone condicioni si acquisterà facendone l’opere in ogni tempo e loco, imperò che non è licito in questo mancar mai, senza biasimo estremo; e come nelle donne la onestà, una volta macchiata, mai più ritorna al primo stato, così la fama d’un gentilom che porti l’arme, se una volta in un minimo punto si denigra per coardia o altro rimproccio, sempre resta vituperosa al mondo e piena d’ignominia. Quanto più adunque sarà eccellente il nostro cortegiano in questa arte, tanto più sarà degno di laude; bench’io non estimi esser in lui necessaria quella perfetta cognizion di cose e l’altre qualità, che ad un capitano si convengono; ché per esser questo troppo gran mare, ne contenteremo, come avemo detto, della integrità di fede e dell’animo invitto e che sempre si vegga esser tale: perché molte volte più nelle cose piccole che nelle grandi si conoscono i coraggiosi; e spesso ne’ pericoli d’importanzia, e dove son molti testimonii, si ritrovano alcuni li quali, benché abbiano il core morto nel corpo, pur spinti dalla vergogna o dalla compagnia, quasi ad occhi chiusi vanno inanzi e fanno il debito loro, e Dio sa come; e nelle cose che poco premono e dove par che possano senza esser notati restar di mettersi a pericolo, volentier si lasciano acconciare al sicuro. Ma quelli che ancor quando pensano non dover esser d’alcuno né mirati, né veduti, né conosciuti, mostrano ardire e non lascian passar cosa, per minima ch’ella sia, che possa loro esser carico, hanno quella virtù d’animo che noi richerchiamo nel nostro cortegiano. Il quale non volemo però che si mostri tanto fiero, che sempre stia in su le brave parole e dica aver tolto la corazza per moglie, e minacci con quelle fieri guardature che spesso avemo vedute fare a Berto [...].³⁸³

³⁸¹ Cellini 133 (I, xxxiv).

³⁸² Castiglione 39 (I, xiv).

³⁸³ Castiglione 44-46 (I, xvii).

With the exception of the last sentence, this passage could rightly be called the Cellinian manifesto. Particularly with respect to how the courtier should behave boldly and courageously in “ogni tempo e loco” and avoid at all costs any display of cowardice, there is a remarkable effort on the part of Cellini-*auctor* to prove that the protagonist of the *Vita* acquits himself admirably on every occasion, in conformity with these prescriptions. The question of honor, how to acquire it, and how to maintain it unblemished is a recurring theme in the *Vita*.³⁸⁴ Notwithstanding the discrepancies between his actual criminal record and what we learn about his various ‘adventures’ in the *Vita*,³⁸⁵ Cellini portrays himself as one who adheres to the rules of engagement when it comes to deploying one’s weapons.³⁸⁶ One notable example occurs in the company of many artist friends while they are celebrating the feast of their patron saint, John the Baptist, while in Rome. Upon hearing insults being hurled at the “nazione fiorentina” by a young Roman soldier (on this of all days), Cellini approaches the man to demand if it was he who had spoken the offensive words: “Subito disse: ‘Io son quello.’ Alle quale parole io alzai la mana dandogli in sul viso, et dissi: ‘Et io sono questo.’”³⁸⁷ Swords are drawn, but the fight is broken up immediately by the crowd who takes Cellini’s side because, naturally, he is in the right. In addition to proving his wittiness even in the heat

³⁸⁴ The word “onore” and “onor” combined appear 55 times in the *Vita*. See *IntraText CT* <<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1130/BX.HTM>>

³⁸⁵ See Paolo Rossi, “The writer and the man. Real crimes and mitigating circumstances: *Il caso Cellini*,” in *Crime, Society and the Law in Renaissance Italy*, eds. Trevor Dean and K.J.P. Lowe (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 1994) 157-183.

³⁸⁶ An exception is when Cellini decides to avenge his brother’s death, though, as the Bondanellas point out, “almost no one in Cellini’s society thought his act was reprehensible, including the Pope.” (405n. 90) Even the murder of his enemy, Pompeo, was viewed by most of his contemporaries as retribution for unacceptable offenses committed by Pompeo toward Cellini. See also Francesco Erspamer, *La biblioteca di don Ferrante: Duello e onore nella cultura del Cinquecento* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1982).

³⁸⁷ Cellini 89 (I, xxvi).

of the moment, Cellini informs us that after receiving a challenge to a duel by this same soldier, he decided to seek the advice of a friend.

[...] et subito me ne andai a parlare a un vechione chiamato Bevilacqua, il quale aveva nome d'essere stato la prima spada di Italia, perché s'era trovato più di venti volte ristretto in campo franco, e sempre ne era uscito a onore. Questo uomo da bene era molto mio amico, et conosciutomi per virtù della arte mia, et anche s'era intervenuto in certe terribil quistione infra me et altri. Per la qual cosa lui lietamente subito mi disse: "Benvenuto mio, se tu avessi da fare con Marte, io son certo che ne usciresti a onore, perché di tanti anni, quant'io ti conosco, non t'ho mai veduto pigliare nessuna briga a torto." Così prese la mia impresa, et conduttoci in luogo con l'arme in mano, senza insanguinarsi restando dal mio avversario, con molto onore uscì di tale impresa. Non dico altri particolari; che se bene sarebbero bellissimi da sentire in tal genere, voglio riserbare queste parole a parlare de l'arte mia, quale è quella che m'ha mosso a questo tale iscrivere; et in essa arò da dire pur troppo.³⁸⁸

It is unclear exactly how Cellini acquitted himself from his adversary since he decided to end the story without further details. Regardless of how he did it, he came away with "molto onore." As if to counter those who would criticize his hot-headedness, Cellini invokes the 'expert witness,' Bevilacqua, to come to his defense by saying that he is never in the wrong when he picks a fight. Apart from the namedropping aspect,³⁸⁹ the episode affords Cellini the opportunity to defend his reputation while demonstrating that he takes the "profession" of *le armi* seriously enough to seek out the counsel of "la prima spada di Italia" when the situation warrants it. He exercises the same caution and prudence in these situations prescribed to Castiglione's courtier.

Appresso bisogna che e per sé e per gli amici intenda le querele e differenze che possono occorrere, e sia avvertito nei vantaggi, in tutto mostrando sempre ed animo e prudenzia; né sia facile a questi combattimenti, se non quanto per l'onore fosse forzato; ché, oltre al gran pericolo che la dubbiosa sorte seco porta, chi in tai cose precipitosamente e senza urgente causa incorre, merita grandissimo biasimo, avvenga che ben gli succeda.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁸ Cellini 89-90 (I, xxvi).

³⁸⁹ Bellotto informs us that Bevilacqua was also mentioned by Aretino in his *Sei giornate* and Grazzini in *Le cene*. (89n.15)

³⁹⁰ Castiglione 52 (I, xxi).

The fact that Cellini intentionally expresses ambivalence on several occasions about which profession he is more drawn to—“tal volta più ero inclinato a questa professione [le armi] che a quella che io tenevo per mia”—, is another indication of a desire to portray himself in accordance with the terms defined by Castiglione’s model of perfection: “la principale e vera profession del cortegiano debba esser quella dell’arme [...]”³⁹¹ And, as with the Bevilacqua episode, Cellini makes sure to have his ‘membership’ in both professions confirmed by other ‘eye-witnesses,’ including Machiavelli’s brother-in-law, Francesco del Nero: “‘Come fidate voi, beatissimo Padre, tanto gran valor di gioie a un giovane, il quale è tutto fuoco, *et è più ne l’arme immerso che ne l’arte*, et non ha ancora trenta anni?’”³⁹² This ambivalence is also evident in the lexical preponderance of each term: “l’arte” occurs 141 times in the *Vita* and “l’arme” appears 62 times.³⁹³ Granted, there are 11 of these instances where “l’arme” is referring to a crest, or *stemma*; but if we include a couple of other words like “spada” and “pugnale” which occur 50 and 19 times, respectively, in the *Vita*,³⁹⁴ a case could be made for almost equal time devoted to both professions, despite Cellini’s frequent assurances to the reader that he wants to stick to talking about “l’arte mia,” as he did at the end of the Bevilacqua episode.

As for Cellini’s frequent violations of the last part of Canossa’s prescriptions—“non volemo però che si mostri tanto fiero, che sempre stia in su le brave parole”³⁹⁵—the

³⁹¹ Castiglione 44-45 (I, xvii).

³⁹² Cellini 198 (I, Liii) and Bellotto’s note 19 to this page. Emphasis mine.

³⁹³ See *IntraText CT* <<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1130/4E.HTM>> and <<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1130/9B.HTM>>. “Arme” occurs 91 times in the *Cortegiano*. See *IntraText CT* <<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1702/5D.HTM>>.

³⁹⁴ See *IntraText CT* <<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1130/B8.HTM>> and <<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1130/NO.HTM>>

³⁹⁵ Castiglione 46 (I, xvii).

artist offers an explanation early on in the *Vita* for his moments of “furore” and why, in his view, they are outside of his control. His explanation occurs after a description of his second run-in with the law following an attack on members of the Guasconti family.³⁹⁶

Qui si conosce quanto *le stelle non tanto ci inclinano, ma ci sforzano*. Conosciuto quanto grando obrigo questo Aniballe aveva alla casa mia, m’acrebbe tanto *collora* che, tirato tutto al male et anche *per natura alquanto collerico*, mi stetti aspettare che il detto ufizio degli Otto fussi ito a desinare; et restato quivi solo, veduto che nessuno della famiglia degli Otto più a me non guardava, *infiammato di collora*, uscito del Palazzo, corsi alla mia bottega, dove trovatovi un pugnalotto, saltai in casa delli mia avversari, che a casa e a bottega istavano.³⁹⁷

The scene continues with more self-descriptors like “furioso” and “come un toro invelenito” but miraculously, no one gets hurt. As Paolo Rossi has observed, “this is straight out of Ariosto. It is the *meraviglioso* where a furious battle takes place and none of the participants is injured.”³⁹⁸ It is a portrayal of the artist as epic hero—Benvenuto Furioso—³⁹⁹ carrying out knightly deeds to defend his honor while not gravely harming anyone. And as we have seen in the Bevilacqua episode, the reference to his old friend’s having been “ristretto in campo franco” more than twenty times is another allusion to the chivalric tradition.⁴⁰⁰ In reality, the story did not end quite so happily. Gherardo Guasconti was injured with serious knife wounds and the archives show that Cellini was declared a *bandito* and was sentenced to death. The *bando* was eventually lifted when

³⁹⁶ See Rossi “Real crimes” 161-165 for the discrepancies between archival documentation and Cellini’s version of the event in his *Vita*.

³⁹⁷ Cellini 59-60 (I, xvii). Emphasis mine.

³⁹⁸ Rossi “Real crimes” 162.

³⁹⁹ Paul Barolsky coined this and another epithet for Cellini (Benvenuto Buonarroti) in his *Michelangelo’s Nose: A Myth and Its Maker*, 2nd ed. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1997) 141-142. In the case of the *Furioso* soubriquet, however, Barolsky is referring to the fury with which Cellini fused his Perseus, not to Cellini’s debt to Ariosto from a self-consciously imitative (and sometimes parodic) epic-hero standpoint.

⁴⁰⁰ Bellotto reminds us that this expression, “campo franco,” is an “espressione del linguaggio cavalleresco che indicava il luogo in cui si potevano svolgere i duelli senza incorrere in alcuna pena (cfr. Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, xlvi, 58).” (90n.17)

peace was made with the Guasconti family.⁴⁰¹ But this episode establishes a narrative, one that will be repeated throughout the *Vita*, of the artist's heroic struggle in the face of adversity—the “maligno corso di stelle” and “la [sua] perversa fortuna”—,⁴⁰² and his triumphs owing to his *virtù* and the fact that “Dio [...] aiuta sempre la ragione.”⁴⁰³ Since it was believed that the stars determined temperament, according to the theory of humours,⁴⁰⁴ the artist's fiery, choleric disposition was not within his power to change.

[...] Cellini's travails are not imputable purely to exterior unlucky circumstances attributed to fickle fate, but also to an unfortunate horoscope that inclines him *naturally* to lust, rage, and murder, making life at court difficult. The soldier-artist's maleficent birth sign is Scorpio, a portion of the zodiac ruled by Mars, the planet that succumbs to Venus and the dangers of venereal vice and passion.⁴⁰⁵

So while Cellini's battles with Fortune allow more room for God and Providence to help those who demonstrate their *virtù*,⁴⁰⁶ the artist is nonetheless confronting the same cruel Fortune that Gasparo Pallavicino talks about when he makes his case against nobility of birth as a prerequisite for the *perfetto cortegiano*—a position Cellini certainly would have agreed with given his humble, yet virtuous origins.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰¹ See Rossi “Real crimes” 162-165.

⁴⁰² Cellini 257 and 549 (I, Lxxi and II, xxx).

⁴⁰³ Cellini 556 (II, xxxii).

⁴⁰⁴ Wittkower and Wittkower 103: “A man's temperament was determined by his planet: while men born under Jupiter are sanguine and men born under Mars are choleric, Saturn determines the melancholic temperament [...] Thus the copper-red planet was given the name of the warrior-god Mars; war, plunder, rape, and misery was his domain and those born under him were predestined to be soldiers and killers.” Cellini claims to have also been “per natura malinconico” (95), but was not born under Saturn. His wish to be perceived as “malinconico” was part of his desire to be associated with Michelangelo who had also used this term to cultivate his self-image. Originally an Aristotelian idea, melancholia associated with creativity was elaborated upon by Marsilio Ficino and “the Renaissance accepted Ficino's conclusion: only the melancholic temperament was capable of Plato's creative enthusiasm.” (Wittkower and Wittkower 102-103).

⁴⁰⁵ See Gwendolyn Trottein, “Battling Fortune in Sixteenth-Century Italy: Cellini and the Changing Faces of Fortuna,” *Artful Armies, Beautiful Battles: Art and Warfare in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Pia Cuneo (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2002) 226. Emphasis is Trottein's.

⁴⁰⁶ Trottein 221.

⁴⁰⁷ Interestingly, the lexical comparison of the word “fortuna” shows that it appears exactly 33 times in both texts—the *Vita* and the *Cortegiano*.⁴⁰⁷ See *IntraText CT* <<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1130/FS.HTM>> and <<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1702/C3.HTM>>, respectively.

E se è vero quello che voi diceste dianzi, cioè che in ogni cosa sia quella occulta forza del primo seme, noi tutti saremmo in una medesima condicione per aver avuto un medesimo principio, né più un che l'altro sarebbe nobile. Ma delle diversità nostre e gradi d'altezza e di bassezza credo io che siano molte altre cause: tra le quali estimo *la fortuna* esser precipua, perché in tutte le cose mondane la veggiamo dominare e quasi pigliarsi a gioco d'alzar spesso fin al cielo chi par a lei senza merito alcuno, e seppellir nell'abisso i più degni d'esser esaltati.⁴⁰⁸

Cellini makes a similar case for the fickleness of Fortune throughout the *Vita*, especially when dealing with his archrivals like Bandinelli whom he feels has been unfairly rewarded with commissions he did not deserve. He also makes a case not unlike Canossa's regarding the relative advantage of being of non-noble ancestry, given the lowered expectations. As with the account of his relative, Luca Cellini, Benvenuto's story generates that much more *stupore* for having been unexpected.⁴⁰⁹

Voglio adunque che questo nostro cortegiano sia nato nobile e di generosa famiglia; perché molto men si disdice ad un ignobile mancar di far operazioni virtuose, che ad uno nobile, il qual se desvia dal camino dei suoi antecessori, macula il nome della famiglia e non solamente non acquista, ma perde il già acquistato; perché la nobiltà è quasi una chiara lampa [...].⁴¹⁰

Ora quanto io m'abbia acquistato qualche onore alla casa mia, li quali a questo nostro vivere di oggi per le cause che si fanno, e per l'arte mia, quali non è materia da gran cose, al suo luogo io le dirò; gloriandomi molto più essendo nato umile et aver dato qualche onorato principio alla casa mia, che se io fussi nato di gran lignaggio, et colle mendace qualità io l'avessi macchiata o stinta. Per tanto darò principio come a Dio piacque che io nascessi.⁴¹¹

Cellini's rather convoluted construction at the opening of this passage has generated many conflicting interpretations, the most convincing of which is Bellotto's: "a suo luogo io racconterò di quanto lustro io ho dato alla mia casata attraverso i fatti oggi

⁴⁰⁸ Castiglione 42 (I,xv). Emphasis is mine.

⁴⁰⁹ See Bellotto, Introduction Liv-Lv: "[...] in molti casi può nascere il fondato sospetto che si tratti di abili messe in scena che attingono al repertorio di veri e propri *tópoi* delle biografie artistiche; basti rammentare, a tal proposito, il *tópos* dello *stupore*, ampiamente attestato nella 'terza età' delle *Vite* vasariane, suscitato dall'artista tutte le volte che supera, in virtù del suo ingegno e della sua straordinaria abilità esecutiva, ogni aspettativa di quanti si trovano dinnanzi alle sue creazioni."

⁴¹⁰ Castiglione 39 (I, xiv).

⁴¹¹ Cellini 13 (I, ii).

noti e la mia arte, cose che in questo momento (della narrazione) non offrono materia per grandi discorsi.”⁴¹² Of course it is this phrase, “quali non è materia da gran cose” which creates the problem because it seems to contradict Cellini’s tendency to brag about his accomplishments. But another explanation for it is that it occurs at a very early point in the narrative when Cellini is attempting to meticulously follow prescribed rhetorical conventions.⁴¹³ In a preceding passage where he justifies having written about himself, he tells the reader: “però in questo modo [writing one’s autobiography] ci si interviene un poco di boriosità di mondo, la quali ha più diversi capi.”⁴¹⁴ And despite the overall impression of being a braggadocio, Cellini is mindful in the *Vita* of trying to put the self-directed praise in the mouths of others. So the phrase in question could represent an acknowledgement that it is preferable to have others sing your praises, rather than doing it for yourself. Therefore, he will wait—“al suo luogo io le dirò”—until he can more discreetly work that self-praise into his narrative. Cellini-protagonist will make this same case later on to Jacopo Sansovino: “O misser Iacopo, li uomini da bene fanno le cose da uomini da bene, e quelli virtuosi, che fanno le belle opere e buone, si conoscono molto meglio quando sono lodati da altri, che a lodarsi così sicuramente da per loro medesimi.”⁴¹⁵ This, too, is a theme that gets raised early on in the *Cortegiano*.

Rispose il Conte: “Tra gli antichi scrittori non è ancor mancato chi l’abbia insegnato [how to praise oneself discreetly]; ma, al parer mio, il tutto consiste in dir cose di modo, che paia che non si dicano a quel fine, ma che caggiano talmente a proposito, che non si possa restar di dirle, e sempre mostrando fuggir le

⁴¹² Bellotto 13n.32.

⁴¹³ Bellotto, Introduction xx-xxi: “Sebbene Cellini avverta il bisogno di giustificare il suo progetto autobiografico—memore, probabilmente, sia dell’illustre modello dantesco (*Convivio*, I: 2), che degli esordi dei *Ricordi* di alcuni mercanti-scrittori, a lui più vicini, non solo nel tempo, ma anche per mentalità e radici culturali—, egli è consapevole che lo scriver di sé non va più considerato come un atto sconveniente, macchiato di presunzione (a patto che si rispettino determinate condizioni, che egli stesso si premura di definire nell’esordio), ma rappresenta, da tempo ormai, un costume diffuso anche tra gli artisti [...]”

⁴¹⁴ Cellini 9 (I, ii).

⁴¹⁵ Cellini 281 (I, Lxxviii).

proprie laudi, dirle pure; ma non di quella maniera che fanno questi bravi, che aprono bocca e lascian venir le parole alla ventura [...].”⁴¹⁶

Another important topic that links Castiglione’s *perfetto cortegiano* to Cellini’s portrait of the *ottimo artista* concerns the importance of always telling the truth to one’s prince or patron.

Il fin adunque del perfetto cortegiano, del quale insino a qui non s’è parlato, estimo io che sia il guadagnarsi per mezzo delle condicioni attribuitegli da questi signori talmente la benivolentia e l’animo di quel principe a cui serve, che possa dirgli e sempre gli dica la verità d’ogni cosa che ad esso convenga sapere, senza timor o periculo di despiacergli; e conoscendo la mente di quello inclinata a far cosa non conveniente, ardisca di contradirgli, e con gentil modo valersi della grazia acquistata con le sue bone qualità per rimuoverlo da ogni intenzion viciosa ed indurlo al camin della virtù [...].⁴¹⁷

Fournel discusses the importance of this theme for Castiglione, defining it as a revival of the ancient Greek *parrhēsia*, or outspokenness, as well as a way to counter the criticism of the court as being a place dominated by flattery and grandiose rhetoric.⁴¹⁸ He also notes that Castiglione posits the survival of an aspect of the feudal court system that was characterized by a personal bond of trust, or even love, between the courtier and his prince. At the same time, “la subordinazione delle competenze allo stabilimento di un rapporto di fiducia assoluta con il signore non porta con sé una subordinazione del sapere: se possiamo parlare dell’emergenza di una missione, nonostante il ricorso ad una strategia affettiva, è proprio perché la questione essenziale rimane qui quella di un sapere necessario e pratico da definire, tappa che precede la messa di tale sapere al servizio della verità e della sua enunciazione.”⁴¹⁹ While Cellini’s type of “sapere necessario” pertains to

⁴¹⁶ Castiglione 47-48 (I, xviii).

⁴¹⁷ Castiglione 368-369 (IV, v).

⁴¹⁸ See Fournel 14. See also Marsh 6: “One of Lucian’s most cherished literary ideals is that of *parrhēsia*, or outspokenness—a trait that links Lucian with two of the most outspoken humanists of the Renaissance, Lorenzo Valla and Desiderius Erasmus.” See also note 82 of chapter one above.

⁴¹⁹ Fournel 14.

his art rather than to matters of state, he nonetheless sees it as his duty to educate his princely patrons, even when they do not ask to be educated.

The commission for the statue of Neptune is a case in point. Duke Cosimo had decided, at the behest of his Duchess Eleonora, that the huge block of marble should go to Bandinelli without a competition. Cellini makes his argument to the Duke and Duchess, appealing to the Duke's memory of his great ancestors whose *concorsi* for the Duomo and the Baptistry doors had yielded such magnificent results. The Duchess, not appreciating the attempt to change her mind, tells Cellini that she does not want to hear him talk about it any further in her presence. Cellini, of course, does not let her "istizza" prevent him from making his case.

Dissi: "Addunche vi fo io dispiacere per volere essere procuratore di Vostre Eccellenzie, facendo ogni opera perché le sieno servite meglio? Considerate, Signora mia: se Vostre Eccellenzie illustrissime si contentano che ogniuno facci un modello di un Nettunno, se bene voi siate risoluti che l'abbia il Bandinello: questo sarà causa che 'l Bandinello per onor suo si metterà con maggiore studio a fare un bel modello, ch' e' non farà sapendo di non avere concorrenti; et in questo modo voi, Signori, sarete molto meglio serviti e non torrete l'animo alla virtuosa Scuola, et vedrete che si desta al bene: io dico al bel modo di questa mirabile arte; e mosterrete voi Signori di diletarvene et d'intendervene."⁴²⁰

To be sure, there is the element of self-interest at stake—Cellini was determined to win this competition because he wanted to silence his critics by proving that he was just as skilled at sculpting marble as he had been with the casting of his bronze *Perseus*. But if he had only been interested in self-promotion, he would have conducted his affairs more like his rival, Vasari, who reaped the benefits of being much more obsequious with the Duke. Moreover, Cellini-author gives us the sense that Duke Cosimo oftentimes (not always) appreciated the artist's outspokenness and unwillingness to be a flatterer, even if he did not initially welcome the challenge to his authority. Despite some negative

⁴²⁰ Cellini 733 (II, xcix).

comments about Cosimo—“aveva più modo di mercatante che di duca”⁴²¹—, Cellini portrays Cosimo as one who is at least open to dialogue and to reason.

Detto che ebbe la Duchessa, il Duca, che era sempre stato cheto, disse: “Gli è venti anni che io feci cavare quel bel marmo apposta per il Bandinello, et così io voglio che il Bandinello l’abbia, et sia suo.” Subito io mi volsi al Duca, et dissi: “Signor mio, io priego Vostra Eccellenzia illustrissima che mi faccia grazia che io dica a Vostra Eccellenzia quattro parole per suo servizio.” Il Duca mi disse che io dicessi tutto quello che io volevo, et che e’ mi ascolterebbe.⁴²²

After expounding upon the example of how Bandinello had destroyed another beautiful piece of marble and, with it, the reputation of Florence’s “virtuosa Scuola” with his *Hercules and Cacus*, Cellini again proposes the idea of a competition for the commission. Finally, the Duke acquiesces: “Ascoltato che il Duca m’ebbe benignissimamente, subito si levò da tavola et voltomisi, disse: ‘Va, Benvenuto mio, e fa’ un modello, et guadagnati quel bel marmo, *perché tu mi di’ il vero, et io lo conosco.*”⁴²³

Not only does the Duke listen to Benvenuto; he listens “benignissimamente.” And the affectionate mode of address is used reciprocally: “Signor mio” and “Benvenuto mio.”⁴²⁴ It is not quite the “*mon ami*” employed by King Francis with Benvenuto, but it is, nonetheless, expressive of a bond of trust and even affection.⁴²⁵ Cellini delineates his role as that of the faithful servant of the Duke with expressions like “per suo servizio” and “per voler essere procuratore di Vostre Eccellenzie.” While attempting to maintain the same type of quasi-feudal relationship to his ‘lord’ and protector that he had

⁴²¹ See Cellini 610 (II, Liii) and Bellotto’s note 19. This passage was heavily crossed out in the manuscript, as has been noted previously in chapter 1, note 217.

⁴²² Cellini 734 (II, xcix).

⁴²³ Cellini 735 (II, xcix). Emphasis is mine.

⁴²⁴ The frequency with which Cellini’s protagonist employs “Signor mio” and “valoroso mio Signore” in addressing Cosimo compared to Cosimo’s use of “Benvenuto mio” is an indication of the artist’s persistent attempts to convince Cosimo of his way of thinking. Cellini uses this mode of address 29 times compared to the 10 times that Cosimo uses it for Cellini. ⁴²⁴ See *IntraText CT* <<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1130/6G.HTM>> and <<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1130/2R.HTM>>, respectively.

⁴²⁵ Cellini 522, 531 and 592 (II, xix, xxii, and xLvi).

cultivated with the King of France,⁴²⁶ Cellini is continually frustrated by what he considers the deficient “fede dei mercatanti.”⁴²⁷ The Duke, however, is not willing to participate in the artist’s outmoded symbolic economy “which resists the commodification of the work of art.”⁴²⁸ Nevertheless, Cellini insists upon the value of his special knowledge, his “sapere necessario e pratico,”⁴²⁹ and maintains that it is his duty to speak the truth to Cosimo. As with Castiglione’s courtier who “ha vocazione a comunicarla [la verità], per essere ‘utile’ a chi potrà farne l’uso migliore nel governo,”⁴³⁰ so too, Cellini portrays himself as the “fidel servo” who abruptly suspends his pilgrimage after the unveiling of his *Perseus*, in order to rush back to the Duke with what he perceived to be very useful information regarding Piero Strozzi’s troop movements near Siena.⁴³¹ The problem is that Cellini never perfects Castiglione’s art of *how* to tell the truth to one’s prince: “come i cauti medici, li quali spesso, volendo dar a’ fanciulli infermi e troppo delicati medicina di sapore amaro, circondano l’orificio del vaso di qualche dolce liquore.”⁴³² In the end, this lack of courtly finesse will cost him dearly and he informs the reader that he is aware of the price he paid for not knowing how to be a flatterer.

Subito che io ebbi ditte queste parole, il Duca si ristinse nelle spalle, et aviatosi per andarsene, lo inbasciatore di Lucca disse al Duca: “Signore, questo vostro Benvenuto si è un un terribile uomo.” Il Duca disse: “Gli è molto più terribile che voi non dite, e buon per lui se e’ non fussi stato così terribile, perché gli arebbe àuto a quest’ora delle cose che e’ non ha àute.” Queste formate parole me le ridisse il medesimo inbasciatore, quasi riprendendomi che io non dovessi fare

⁴²⁶ See Tylus 39 and further discussion of this relationship below.

⁴²⁷ Cellini 683 (II, Lxxxii).

⁴²⁸ See Tylus 39 and accompanying note 22. Tylus cites Marcel Mauss’s *The Gift* in reference to her use of the phrase “symbolic economy” as it pertains to “economies within which gift-giving establishes the primary cycle of exchange.”

⁴²⁹ Fournel 14.

⁴³⁰ Fournel 15.

⁴³¹ Cellini 715-717 (II, xciv).

⁴³² Castiglione 374-375 (IV, x).

così. Al quale io dissi che io volevo bene al mio Signore, *come suo amorevol fidel servo*, e non sapevo fare lo adulatore.⁴³³

II.4 Cellini's lexicon of value: Signs of nostalgia for a bygone era

Before returning to Florence in 1545, Cellini had been in the service of King Francis I for several years. It was there, as well as in Rome, that he had experienced the type of artist-patron relationship that coincided with his own views regarding the value of his ingenuity and his works.

Sensitive to the depersonalized nature of an increasingly abstract market that paid a man for the material object of his work rather than for his labor, Cellini sought throughout his career to remove his work from the competitive marketplace. According to the narrative of the *Vita*, he was frequently successful in finding beneficent monarchs who enabled him to do just that. While the autobiographer declares at one moment in his text, “Servo chi mi paga” [...], this professed indifference to the source of patronage masks a profound desire to be “paid” *only* by those who viewed themselves as priceless. Cellini's *Vita* recounts his search for those who would find in him a suitably flattering mirror, or, as Francis I supposedly claimed, “a man after my own heart.” Once the monarch's narcissistic capacities fail him, however, the artist becomes vulnerable to the vagaries of the very system from which he desired to be immune.⁴³⁴

It is much earlier in his autobiography, however, that Cellini provides us with a very clear example of what he believed to be the ideal artist-patron relationship. It is not a coincidence that the elaboration of this ideal occurs in the same episode in which Bruno Maier perceived “un primo timido, *stilnovistico* amore di Benvenuto”⁴³⁵—the Madonna Porzia episode mentioned earlier. The significance of the scene—the only one in the *Vita* in which we see the protagonist transformed into ‘Benvenuto Innamorato’—, hinges on the verbs, *stimare* and *donare*, within the context of courtly love and service. The lovely young wife of Sigismondo Chigi—“gentile al possibile et oltramodo bella”—, upon

⁴³³ Cellini 739 (II, c). Emphasis is mine.

⁴³⁴ Tylus 34. Emphasis is Tylus's.

⁴³⁵ Maier 136.

learning that Cellini is a goldsmith, decides to show him a beautiful lily made of diamonds so that he can appraise it and perhaps reset it for her.

Disse lei che troppo ben disegnavo per orefice; et fattosi portare da una sua cameriera un giglio di bellissimi diamanti legati in oro, mostrandomegli, volse che io gli *stimassi*. Io gli *stimai* ottocento scudi. Allora lei disse che benissimo gli avevo *stimati*. A presso mi domandò se mi bastava l'animo di legargli bene: io dissi che molto volentieri, et alla presenza di lei ne feci un pochetto di disegno; et tanto meglio lo feci, quanto io pigliavo piacere di trattenermi con questa tale bellissima et piacevolissima gentildonna. Finito il disegno, sopraggiunse un'altra bellissima gentildonna romana, la quale era di sopra, et scesa a basso dimandò la detta madonna Porzia quel che lei quivi faceva: la quale sorridendo disse: "Io mi piglio piacere il vedere disegnare questo giovane da bene, il quale è buono et bello." Io, venuto in un poco di baldanza, pur mescolato un poco di onesta vergogna, divenni rosso et dissi: "*Quale io mi sia, sempre, madonna, io sarò paratissimo a servirvi.*" La gentildonna, anche lei arrossita alquanto, disse: "*Ben sai che io voglio che tu mi serva*"; et pòrtomi il giglio, disse che io me ne lo portassi; et di più mi diede venti scudi d'oro, che l'aveva nella tasca, et disse: "Legamelo in questo modo che disegnato me l'hai, et salvami questo oro vecchio in che legato egli è ora." La gentildonna romana allora disse: Se io fossi in quel giovane, volentieri io m'andrei con Dio." Madonna Porzia aggiunse che le virtù rare volte stanno con i vizii et che, se tal cosa io facessi, forte ingannerei quel bello aspetto che io dimostravo di uomo da bene; et voltasi, preso per mano la gentildonna romana, con piacevolissimo riso mi disse: "A Dio, Benvenuto."⁴³⁶

Needless to say, 'Benvenuto Innamorato' works diligently to create an exquisite piece of jewelry that is adorned with "mascherini, puttini, animali e benissimo smaltato."⁴³⁷ Meanwhile, the shop owner, Lucagnolo, in the *bottega* where Cellini is working at the time, ridicules him for spending so much time on such a trifling object that cannot possibly bring him the same kind of profit and *onore* as the large silver vases that Lucagnolo is making for Pope Clement VII. Cellini responds that opportunities to do the kind of work he is engaged in do not come often and that they present just as much of an occasion as the larger works to gain profit while enhancing one's reputation. Confident in his own abilities and in the courtly art of knowing how to show one's appreciation—"il

⁴³⁶ Cellini 66-68 (I, xix). Emphasis is mine.

⁴³⁷ Cellini 68 (I, xix).

saper dare,”⁴³⁸ Cellini proposes that they put their respective works to the test “perché alla fine di tale opere si vedrebbe chi di noi si ingannava.”⁴³⁹ After about ten days, each of the goldsmiths admires the other’s work, but Lucagnolo insists that his beautiful ornate vase will be rewarded much more handsomely by Pope Clement than Cellini’s piece of jewelry.

In questo mentre io portai l’opera mia alla ditta gentildonna madonna Porzia, la quali con molta maraviglia mi disse che di gran lunga io avevo trapassata la promessa fattagli; et poi aggiunse, dicendomi che io domandassi delle fatiche mie tutto quel che mi piaceva, perché gli pareva che io meritassi tanto, che *donandomi un castello*, a pena gli parrebbe d’avermi sadisfatto; ma perché lei questo non poteva fare, ridendo mi disse che io domandassi quel che lei poteva fare. Alla cui io dissi che il maggior *premio* delle mie fatiche desiderato, si era l’aver sadisfatto Sua Signoria. Così anch’io ridendo, fattogli reverenza, mi parti’, dicendo che io non volevo altro *premio* che quello. Allora madonna Porzia ditta si volse a quella gentildonna romana, et disse: “Vedete voi che la compagnia di quelle virtù che noi giudicammo in lui, son queste, e non sono i vizii?” Maravigliatosi l’una e l’altra, pure disse madonna Porzia: “Benvenuto mio, ha’ tu mai sentito dire che *quando il povero dona a il rico, il diavol se ne ride*?” Alla quale io dissi: “Et però di tanti sua dispiaceri questa volta lo voglio vedere ridere”; et partitomi, lei disse che non voleva per questa volta fargli cotal grazia.⁴⁴⁰

When Cellini returns to the shop, Lucagnolo immediately wants to compare his “premio” with the one received by his competitor. Cellini asks him to postpone the comparison for a day because he looked forward to showing him his reward, since he believed his work to be equally as beautiful as Lucagnolo’s. The word “premio” is used 5 times in this brief sequence of events between the conversation with Madonna Porzia and the one with Lucagnolo. The next day, madonna Porzia sends her *maggiordomo* to Cellini’s shop with a pouch full of money—all gold coins—and the message that “lei non

⁴³⁸ See White 127-128 for a discussion of “il saper dare” as it relates to Boccaccio’s tale of Federigo degli Alberighi: “Questa trasfusione di valori da una classe all’altra (il verbo *donare*, caratteristico del mondo cortese e impiegato precedentemente per descrivere il vivere del cavaliere [...], è esteso anche a descrivere l’azione dei fratelli) diventa vicendevole nell’assorbimento della virtù base della classe mercantile—la misura—da parte di Federigo. È il recupero del vecchio mondo che si innesta nella classe in ascesa ma filtrato attraverso nuovi valori e rimpinguato da patrimonio borghese.” (128)

⁴³⁹ Cellini 69 (I, xx).

⁴⁴⁰ Cellini 70-71 (I, xx). Emphasis is mine.

voleva che 'l diavolo se ne ridessi affatto; mostrando che quello che la mi mandava non era lo intero pagamento che meritavano le mie fatiche, con molte altre cortese parole degne di cotal signora.”⁴⁴¹ The shop is filled with over a dozen other workers and neighbors who want to see who has won the contest. Lucagnolo empties his pouch noisily as if to punctuate his presumed victory. His sum amounts to twenty-five *scudi di giuli*. Not to be out-staged by his colleague, Cellini lifts his pouch high over his head “il quale facev[a] versare a modo di una tramoggia di mulino.”⁴⁴² The ‘audience’ renders the verdict: “‘Lucagnolo, questi dinari di Benvenuto per essere oro, et per essere la metà più, fanno molto più bel vedere che li tua.’”⁴⁴³ Enraged and humiliated, Lucagnolo curses his art and vows that from that moment forward, “non voleva più fare quel’arte di grosseria; solo voleva attendere a fare di quelle bordellerie piccole, da poi che le erano così ben pagate.”⁴⁴⁴ The next day, Cellini returns to madonna Porzia to thank her and reminds her that “Sua Signoria aveva fatto il contrario di quel che la disse: che volendo io fare che 'l diavolo se ne ridessi, lei di nuovo l’aveva fatto rinnegare Iddio. Piacevolmente l’uno et l’altro ridemmo, et mi dette da fare altre opere belle et buone.”⁴⁴⁵ The fundamental difference between Cellini’s concept of his “premio” and Lucagnolo’s is that Cellini’s is rooted in the *mondo cortese* and the idea of his art as a gift.

⁴⁴¹ Cellini 71 (I, xxi).

⁴⁴² Cellini 72 (I, xxi). Howarth relates autobiography to self-portrait and he delineates three types: autobiography as oratory, autobiography as drama, and autobiography as poetry. Cellini, naturally, falls into the second category: “None of these writers has a thesis about his development; he assumes that he was and is essentially the same person, so his book depicts the past as a series of spontaneously ordered events. As an author he is unpretentious and impertinent, viewing life as a staged performance that he may attend, applaud, or attack, just as he pleases. Benvenuto Cellini exemplifies this strategy, in the company of James Boswell, Benjamin Franklin, Sean O’Casey, and William Carlos Williams. [...] Regardless of background or interests, all share a common preference for histrionics over dialectics, for acting instead of exhorting.” (96-98)

⁴⁴³ Cellini 72 (I, xxi).

⁴⁴⁴ Cellini 73 (I, xxi).

⁴⁴⁵ Cellini 73 (I, xxii).

L'esigenza di essere pagato generosamente (così si giustifica il rifiuto di mercanteggiare, per Michelangelo come per il Cellini) non è una manifestazione di "avarizia", ma dipende dalla consapevolezza che l'artista ha della sua eccellenza. L'opera d'arte non è pagabile: è un *dono* che l'artista fa al potente. Per equilibrare il valore dell'opera anche il pagamento deve configurarsi come "dono": del *dono* deve avere la spontaneità e la larghezza. Se il potente non paga, il lamento dell'artista non è quello dell'artigiano truffato, ma quello del genio misconosciuto e offeso. [...] In un mercato artistico senza tariffe, in cui chi paga lo fa "sforzato dalla virtù", l'artista ben pagato è l'artista di successo, quello che, con le buone o con le cattive, è in grado di imporre le sue condizioni a papi, re e principi.⁴⁴⁶

The lexical choice that figures most prominently as a signpost for Cellini's view of his art as *impagabile* is the adjective, *inestimabile*. Given the different amanuenses who helped to copy the *Vita*, the word appears with various spellings; the most frequent of which is "inistimabile." If we combine all of the various forms of the word, it appears 36 times in the *Vita*.⁴⁴⁷ And it is used in all types of contexts: "dispiacere inistimabile," "la peste inestimabile grande," "carezze inestimabile," "pruove inistimabile," "favori inistimabili," etc.⁴⁴⁸ Interesting to note is that this adjective does *not* figure prominently in Vasari's *Vite*. It appears only once in the 1550 edition and only 4 times in the 1568 edition.⁴⁴⁹ Nor does it appear in Castiglione's *Cortegiano*. It does, however, appear 12 times in Boccaccio's *Decameron*.⁴⁵⁰ Another frequently occurring adjective of similar meaning in the *Vita* is *smisurato* or *ismisurato*. It occurs 26 times in its various singular and plural adjectival forms as well as once in the superlative, "smisuratissime," and once as an adverb, "smisuratamente." Again, this adjective appears only twice in Vasari's *Vite*

⁴⁴⁶ Altieri Biagi 85-86. Emphasis is mine.

⁴⁴⁷ See *IntraText CT* <<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1130/N9.HTM>>. See also Tognozzi 110-111.

Tognozzi's observations regarding Cellini's use of the adjectives *inestimabile* and *smisurato*, "which by their very nature are hyperbolic" are limited to a discussion of hyperbole as representative of Cellini's personality—"a man who knew nothing of the meaning of half measures"—as opposed to their significance in the socio-economic context of Cellini's view of his art as *dono*.

⁴⁴⁸ See *IntraText CT* <<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1130/N9.HTM>> and <<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1130/40.HTM>>

⁴⁴⁹ Vasari, *Vite* <<http://biblio.cribecu.sns.it/vasari/consultazione/index.html>>.

⁴⁵⁰ See *IntraText CT* <<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA0271/1/JW.HTM>>.

in the 1568 edition and not at all in the 1550 edition.⁴⁵¹ It is not used in Castiglione's *Cortegiano*, but it occurs twice as an adjective and 3 times as an adverb in the *Decameron*.⁴⁵² Cellini's choice of a lexicon that emblemizes his view of a work of art as something that cannot be appraised on account of its incalculable value, is symptomatic of the artist's struggle against what Jane Tylus refers to as "a fall from a symbolic economy of nourishment and gift-giving, within which Cellini is protected by the shadows cast by Pope Clement VII and Francis I, into the *real* economy into which Cosimo's indifference and commercial heritage (for the Medici had once been a family of bankers) threatened to plunge the artist."⁴⁵³

The patronage Cellini enjoys in Rome and France until he arrives in Florence consists largely of withholding the artist from the marketplace and displacing him into an almost feudal relationship in which the patron is the "lord" or protector of his talented "vassal" (and it is as "divoto ed amorevole vassallo e servo" that Cellini continually addresses Cosimo in the course of his relentless pleas for compensation). Only within this relationship do the artist's labors have value. But in Cellini's case, this value comes to be as inestimable as that of the patron himself.⁴⁵⁴

Tylus maintains that in order for this type of relationship to work, there had to be a sense of equality between Cellini and the king: "Thanks to his own invaluable status, the king is capable of conferring upon his equal Cellini a similarly immeasurable value."⁴⁵⁵ Thus, Cellini is no ordinary 'vassal' under King Francis; he becomes a vassal with a castle (Petit Nesle), not to mention French citizenship—"una delle maggior dignità che si dessi a un forestiero."⁴⁵⁶ It is no wonder, then, that Cellini would later

⁴⁵¹ Vasari, *Vite* <<http://biblio.cribecu.sns.it/vasari/consultazione/index.html>>.

⁴⁵² See *IntraText CT* <<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA0271/3/XY.HTM>>.

⁴⁵³ Tylus 34. Emphasis is Tylus's.

⁴⁵⁴ Tylus 39.

⁴⁵⁵ Tylus 39.

⁴⁵⁶ Cellini 523 (II, xix): "Partitosi da me, tornato al Re, tutto riferì a Sua Maestà, il quale rise un pezzo, dipoi disse: 'Or voglio che sappia per quel che io gli ho mandato lettere di naturalità. Andate, e fatelo signore del castello del Piccolo Nello che lui abita, il quale è mio di patrimonio.'"

regret having relinquished these privileges when he returned to Florence and accepted the patronage of Duke Cosimo. Unlike the case of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, in Cellini's *Vita*, the aristocratic-chivalric world and the bourgeois-mercantile world do *not* coexist in a harmonious fashion.⁴⁵⁷ In fact, the fight to *make* them coexist constitutes one of the fundamental dramas of the *Vita*, even though Cellini-protagonist views his struggle as a fight against Fortune and malignant stars. While this other underlying struggle to remain outside of the contemporary marketplace is not explicitly declared, it is made manifest by the aforementioned lexical choices, as well as by the artist's evocation of a bygone era. What has been said of Boccaccio in this regard is also true for Cellini: "Come già Folgóre o Dante o cronachisti quali il Villani o il Compagni, l'autore rievoca con prospettiva nostalgica quel mondo di usanze cortesi codificato dalla tradizione letteraria."⁴⁵⁸

Indeed, the first quatrain of Cellini's opening sonnet immediately evokes an Ariostesque chivalric world of "audaci imprese" in its introduction to the tales of knightly deeds performed by 'Benvenuto Furioso.'

Questa mia Vita travagliata io scrivo
per ringraziar lo Dio della natura,
che mi diè l'alma e poi ne ha 'uto cura,
alte diverse 'mprese ho fatte e vivo.⁴⁵⁹

Cellini's "Vita travagliata" encompasses all of Ariosto's subject matter—"Le donne, i cavallier, l'arme, gli amori, / le cortesie, l'audaci imprese io canto,"⁴⁶⁰—with the obvious qualifications that Cellini's "cavaliere errante" is oftentimes more akin to "quella cavalleria spesso degradata, alla Pulci,"⁴⁶¹ and that his true "amori" are his works of art.

⁴⁵⁷ Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio Medievale*, cited in White 125. Emphasis is mine.

⁴⁵⁸ White 131.

⁴⁵⁹ Cellini 3 (*Proemio*).

⁴⁶⁰ Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, ed. Marcello Turchi, 11th ed. (Milan: Garzanti, 1990) 11 (I,1).

⁴⁶¹ Altieri Biagi 101.

But even Cellini-*auctor* creates his own Angelica for whom his protagonist “fec[e] pazzie inestimabile per ritrovarla.”⁴⁶² In these episodes, we find the artist’s parodic abridged version of Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, replete with a comic necromancy scene. That Cellini’s intention with these episodes is to self-consciously provoke laughter is evidenced, once again, by his playing with names. Not only is the object of his desire named Angelica; her mother is named Beatrice. Far from the lofty ideals of Dante’s Beatrice, Cellini’s Beatrice is a “vechia ribalda”⁴⁶³ who is, above all, concerned with profiting from her daughter’s relationship with Benvenuto. So while the overarching tone of the *Vita* tends to support Barolsky’s assertion that “Cellini seems to take himself seriously,”⁴⁶⁴ this claim does not preclude the artist’s many “pruove” to demonstrate his *arguzia* and his literariness by incorporating elements from contemporary and traditional sources in a comic or parodic way. As we shall see in the next chapter, it was precisely Cellini’s comic sensibility that captured the imagination of several twentieth-century writers and directors who successfully adapted his *Vita* for the stage and screen.

⁴⁶² Cellini 231 (I, Lxiii).

⁴⁶³ Cellini 251 (I, Lxix).

⁴⁶⁴ Barolsky 150.

III.

‘GO WEST, YOUNG MAN’: A *VITA* ‘MADE IN ITALY’
REMAKES ITS WAY TO HOLLYWOOD

Vain, ostentatious, self-laudatory, and self-engrossed as Cellini was, he never stopped to analyse himself. He attempted no artistic blending of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*; the word “confessions” could not have escaped his lips; a *Journal Intime* would have been incomprehensible to his fierce, virile spirit. His autobiography is the record of action and passion. Suffering, enjoying, enduring, working with restless activity; hating, loving, hovering from place to place as impulse moves him; the man presents himself dramatically by his deeds and spoken words, never by his ponderings or meditative broodings. It is this healthy externality which gives its great charm to Cellini’s self-portrayal and renders it an imperishable document for the student of human nature.

(John Addington Symonds, Introduction to *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini*)

III.1 The ‘fascino’ of Cellini’s *Vita*: “Prima europeo che italiano”?⁴⁶⁵

Several decades before a numerous array of adaptations of the *Vita* in a range of genres began to emerge on both sides of the Atlantic,⁴⁶⁶ John Addington Symonds attempted to define the universal appeal of Cellini’s autobiography in the Introduction to his very popular English translation of 1888.⁴⁶⁷ Various European translations of the *Vita* had already demonstrated a great deal of interest in the autobiography, most notably Goethe’s into German (1803), Nugent’s into English (1771), and Saint-Marcel’s into

⁴⁶⁵ Bellotto, Introduction xviii.

⁴⁶⁶ For a partial list of these adaptations, see Alan Chong, “La fortuna postuma del busto di Bindo Altoviti di Cellini” in *Ritratto di un banchiere* 258, note 18. See also Gallucci in “Benvenuto Cellini as Pop Icon,” *Benvenuto Cellini: Sculptor, Goldsmith, Writer* 201-221.

⁴⁶⁷ John Addington Symonds, introduction, *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini*, by Benvenuto Cellini, trans. John Addington Symonds, 5th ed. (New York: Scribner’s, 1903) x-xi. See also Chong in *Ritratto di un banchiere* 243: “Pubblicata per la prima volta nel 1888 in due eleganti volumi, la sua traduzione riscosse un sorprendente successo e fu ristampata per ben nove volte prima della fine del secolo.” While the Symonds translation has remained the most popular English translation and the most often reprinted, the translation of Robert Hobart Cust of 1910 is considered the most scholarly English translation. See the Bondanellas xxiii, note 1 and Michael Cole *Principles* 170, note 25. The Bondanellas’ translation of 2002 relied heavily on Cust’s “scholarly apparatus,” but it is based on Bellotto’s critical edition. It is certainly the translation that is most attuned to 21st-century American speakers of English.

French (1822).⁴⁶⁸ In fact, these successful translations created an “interesse che sin dalla prima traduzione [...] fu prima europeo che italiano.”⁴⁶⁹ The fact that an Englishman, Lord Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington, was the benefactor of the *princeps* published by Antonio Cocchi in 1728, is a testament to the international appeal that the *Vita* seemed destined to have from the moment of its delayed arrival on the scene of Italian literature.⁴⁷⁰ Gianmarco Gaspari has examined the question of why the initial publication of the *Vita* did not occur until over a hundred and fifty years after the artist’s death. While he does not view the Counter Reformation as the only reason for the “postuma rimozione di Benvenuto,” he points to the timing of Cellini’s death as being in the same year as the Battle of Lepanto (1571) and not long before the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of 1572. Moreover, Gaspari underscores the fact that “l’immagine dell’artista del Rinascimento che la Controriforma era disposta ad accettare mal poteva convivere con gli ‘esseri superiori’; e, men che meno, con gli ‘spiriti d’abisso’” [citing Goethe’s description of the two souls that existed simultaneously inside of Cellini].⁴⁷¹ In addition to the political and religious factors at work behind the ‘disappearance’ of the *Vita* for such a long time, there was also the issue of the ‘*questione della lingua*.’

Sino a che rimase valida la dottrina bembesca, la *Vita*, scritta in anni in cui il lettore di palato educato si volgeva a tutt’altro, al contemporaneo e antipodico *Galateo* di Monsignor della Casa, per esempio, pubblicata o no, la *Vita* non fu libro per gli italiani. [...] La storia della fortuna della *Vita* fuori d’Italia non costituirà quindi un ozioso esercizio di comparatistica, spero sia chiaro, quanto invece la prova speculare di una delle più clamorose rimozioni operate entro la storia della nostra letteratura. Ed è un vuoto di cui si è patito.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁸ Symonds xlviii. See also Gianmarco Gaspari, “La *Vita* del Cellini e le origini dell’autobiografia,” *Versants* 21 (1992): 103-117.

⁴⁶⁹ Bellotto, Introduction xvii-xviii.

⁴⁷⁰ Bellotto, Introduction xviii.

⁴⁷¹ Gaspari 111.

⁴⁷² Gaspari 112.

While I would agree that all of these factors played a part in the delayed publication of the *Vita*, it also seems that Gaspari overstates the case both for the Italians' adherence to the "dottrina bembesca," as well as for a certain foreign *fascino* for a less-refined image of the Italians—one which was much less interested in *galatei* than in "vendett[e] [...] grazie ai frequenti *grand tour* delle soldataglie, all'insidiosa scienza politica di un Machiavelli, alle oscenità dell'Aretino." In other words, they were fascinated by what Gaspari describes as Cellinian characteristics.⁴⁷³ Ironically, in the preface to the first English translation of the *Vita*, Thomas Nugent offers an explanation for his decision to publish the work which reflects the *raison d'être* of the *galatei* in its justification for why it is better to learn how *not* to behave from a book of this nature, rather than from first-hand experience.

It would give me some concern, were I to incur any censure, for having published the translation of a work, in which many actions are related of the author himself, or of his contemporaries, which seem to represent mankind in general in a very unfavourable light. Though I have a much better opinion of the human species than the author; yet I believe it will be allowed, that we should endeavour betimes to know human vices, as well as their virtues and perfections; and as wisdom in a great measure consists in avoiding those dangers, which too often take their rise from weakly believing in the goodness of the human heart; it is far preferable to divest ourselves early of this dangerous and ill-judged confidence, than to acquire our knowledge from a long experience of mankind, and from being hackneyed in the ways of the world. Should the following *history* contribute to this end, that is, *to promote the knowledge of human nature*, and to supply the place of experience, I shall think myself very happy. [...] *I flatter myself, that the perusal of this work will be in some measure conducive to the improvement of youth, by contributing to regulate their conduct and manners; it will excite them to give the preference to a mild and gentle behaviour, as best calculated to engage and conciliate the affections of mankind.*⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷³ Gaspari 112.

⁴⁷⁴ Benvenuto Cellini, *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini: A Florentine Artist. Containing a Variety of Curious and Interesting Particulars, Relative to Painting, Sculpture and Architecture; and the History of His Own Time. Written by Himself in the Tuscan Language and Translated from the Original by Thomas Nugent, L.L.D.F.S.A.*, trans. Thomas Nugent (London: T. Davies, 1771) viii-ix. Italics mine. I would like to thank the Special Collections/Rare Books Department at the Alexander Library of Rutgers University for their assistance in making this rare book available to me.

Whether or not the “improvement of youth” was foremost in his mind when making the decision to translate the *Vita*, Nugent’s fascination with the work is clearly centered upon its value as a “history of [its] own time,” as his title suggests. A couple of Nugent’s earlier translations are indicative of the types of books that captured his imagination: *The Spirit of Laws* by Charles de Secondat Montesquieu and *The Principles of Natural and Politic Law* by Jean Jacques Burlamaqui, both published in 1752.⁴⁷⁵ In addition, Nugent published the first major guidebook in 1749, aptly entitled *The Grand Tour*, a custom he defends in the preface to the second edition by observing that “those who first distinguished themselves in the republic of letters were all travellers, who owed their learning, name and reputation to different peregrinations.”⁴⁷⁶ Thus it was not a voyeuristic interest in the uncouth “particolare carattere”⁴⁷⁷ of Cellini that motivated Nugent to translate the *Vita*, but rather an interest in cataloguing the great variety of human experience embodied in the life and travels of the artist “with a view to the instruction and improvement of others [...]”⁴⁷⁸

Nugent’s defense of his translation of the *Vita* served as a kind of ‘pre-emptive strike’ against those detractors who would accuse him of corrupting the youth by exposing them to such questionable behavior. It was written almost two hundred years before Meyer A. Kaplan, the managing editor of *Classics Illustrated*, was forced to defend his comic books, which included *The Adventures of Cellini* (1947), when they

⁴⁷⁵ *The Online Books Page: Online Books by Thomas Nugent*, ed. John Mark Ockerbloom, 2008, 30 July 2008 <<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/lookupname?key=Nugent%2C%20Thomas>>.

⁴⁷⁶ Thomas Nugent, “The Grand Tour” in *Travel Writing, 1700-1830: An Anthology*, eds. Elizabeth A. Bohls and Ian Duncan (New York: Oxford UP, 2005) 15.

⁴⁷⁷ Gaspari 112.

⁴⁷⁸ Nugent v.

came under attack for the “psychological mutilation of children” because of the violence depicted in them.⁴⁷⁹

The taste for good literature and fine art must be cultivated slowly. He [the child] must be made to understand it before he can like it. By forcing him to read the truly heavy and none too easily understood language of the classics while still too young to appreciate it, a dislike for good reading will be cultivated rather than an interest. But a pictorial rendering of the great stories of the world which can be easily understood and therefore more readily liked would tend to cultivate that interest. Then, when he grows older, if he has any appetite at all for these things, he will want to know more fully those bookish treasures merely suggested in this, his first acquaintance with them. He will more eagerly read them in the original form because he will already have a mind’s eye picture of what the author was trying to portray in words. He will be able to visualize the protagonists: he will know how they looked and dressed and amidst what backgrounds and surroundings they worked, fought, loved and died. The names of d’Artagnan, Ivanhoe, Jean Valjean and other famous characters in the world of literature will be no strangers to him.⁴⁸⁰

Apart from the obvious parallels with more recent debates along the same lines, the interesting question for the purposes of this discussion is how and why Benvenuto Cellini came to be considered ‘classic’ enough in American culture by 1947 to warrant a comic book about him.⁴⁸¹ By that time, the Nugent translation had long since been supplanted by the popular translation by Symonds. And despite John Pope-Hennessy’s assertion that the work is “untranslatable,” that “it takes on, in any language other than Italian, a veneer of artificiality,”⁴⁸² the success of the earliest European translations served as inspiration for additional translations as well as for the many adaptations of the *Vita* into other

⁴⁷⁹ See William B. Jones, Jr., *Classics Illustrated: A Cultural History, with Illustrations* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002) 119. See also Gallucci’s survey of the history of Cellini as a comic book character in “Pop Icon” 209-213.

⁴⁸⁰ Jones 119: “The New York Legislature was so exercised by the threat to decency posed by comic books that it created a Joint Legislative Committee to Study the Publication of Comics, which held hearings in New York City in December 1951.” Kaplan made his remarks in front of this Committee.

⁴⁸¹ Gallucci proposes one hypothesis in “Pop Culture,” 209: “The popular Hollywood film starring Fredric March may have been inspiration for the comic book. Jones [William B. Jones, Jr.] believes that *The Affairs of Cellini* ‘was recent enough to have been part of the pop-culture gestalt of the Gilberton editorial board (Meyer Kaplan, Harry Adler, Ruth Roche),’ adding that ‘the comic-book title [*Adventures of...*] echoes the movie title [*The Affairs of...*].”

⁴⁸² Pope-Hennessy, *Cellini* 12.

genres. Even John Patrick Shanley's 2001 Off-Broadway play, *Cellini*, was inspired by a more recent edition of the Symonds translation of over a century earlier.⁴⁸³ The interesting phenomenon of the success of the various translations is not the focus here, however. The aim of this chapter is to examine several of the adaptations of the *Vita* into other genres, particularly, American adaptations in theatre and film, in order to better understand the nature of the regenerative 'classic' quality of the *Vita*, and how the process of self-identification with Cellini-*auctor* informed each artist's interpretation of the material. The reasons for the relative success or failure of each adaptation will also be examined.

III.2 Benvenuto Cellini: Star of Broadway's *The Firebrand*

One of the most successful adaptations of Cellini's *Vita* has been the 1924 play by Edwin Justus Mayer, *The Firebrand*.⁴⁸⁴ In its first theatrical run at New York's Morosco Theatre, opening on October 15th, 1924, the play was performed 269 times.⁴⁸⁵ To be sure, the top-name celebrity actors were a big audience draw: Joseph Schildkraut, Frank Morgan, Edward G. Robinson, Nana Bryant and Allyn Joslyn.⁴⁸⁶ But the primary reason for the play's success was the vibrantly witty and biting satiric writing of Edwin Justus Mayer's script. Mayer's subtitle for the play, "A Comedy in the Romantic Spirit," lends the play a certain light-hearted air, but there is more than typical romantic comedy

⁴⁸³ John Patrick Shanley, *Cellini* (New York: Dramatists Play Service Inc, 2002) cover and inside cover page.

⁴⁸⁴ Edwin Justus Mayer, *The Firebrand* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924).

⁴⁸⁵ Milton Bracker, "Return of a Playwright," *New York Times on the Web* 11 May 1958, 30 July 2008 <<http://select.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?res=F1061EF73A5F13728EDDA80994DD405B8889F1D3>>.

⁴⁸⁶ Stark Young, rev. of *The Firebrand* by Edwin Justus Mayer, *New York Times on the Web* 16 Oct. 1924, 30 July 2008 <<http://select.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?res=F70F17F63C5B12738DDDAF0994D8415B848EF1D3>>.

beneath this appellation. Mayer succeeds in faithfully embodying the spirit of that “record of action and passion”⁴⁸⁷ in a script which recreates the Boccaccesque quality of the *Vita*⁴⁸⁸ in its lampooning of the duplicity of human behavior at all levels. From the outset, Mayer informs us that his play is “inspirational rather than documental.”⁴⁸⁹ Since it would have been extremely difficult and theatrically untenable to attempt any kind of chronological ordering of the vast amount of material presented in the *Vita*, Mayer decided to conflate certain historical characters—Cosimo I with Alessandro de’Medici, Duchess Eleonora of Toledo with Duchess Margaret of Austria, Ottaviano de’Medici with Lorenzino de’ Medici, to list the primary ones—so that he could maintain the dramatic unities of time, place and action within the play; while at the same time, being able to incorporate references to other important events from the artist’s life, which are temporally outside of the very brief period dramatized in *The Firebrand* (roughly 24 hours).

Mayer also tells us in his prefatory note that the idea for the play came from Marion Spitzer who had suggested “that a play should be written about Cellini based on his love affair with one Angelica.”⁴⁹⁰ He goes on to cite specific passages from an English translation of the *Vita* that inspired his plot line without ever citing the translator by name. It is clear, though, upon examination of the three English translations most readily available to Mayer at the time—the ones by Symonds, Cust and MacDonnell—that he chose the one by Anne MacDonnell, first published in 1903.⁴⁹¹ All of the passages

⁴⁸⁷ Symonds xi.

⁴⁸⁸ See note 238 above.

⁴⁸⁹ Mayer, “Note” unnumbered page.

⁴⁹⁰ Mayer, “Note” unnumbered page.

⁴⁹¹ Benvenuto Cellini, *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini*, trans. Anne MacDonnell, 3rd ed. (1926; London: J.M. Dent; New York: E.P. Dutton, 1933) 98, 105-106. See also Benvenuto Cellini, *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini*, trans. Robert Hobart Cust, 2 vols. (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1910).

in question revolve around the Angelica episode and are taken *verbatim* from the MacDonnell translation.⁴⁹² It is unlikely that Mayer would have also read the *Vita* in Italian, given that his formal education ended when he was only 15 and he had to begin working.⁴⁹³ In any case, Mayer sets the stage for his audience in his “Note” by making it clear that the historical (“documental”) elements of Cellini’s *Vita* will play a secondary role in his play and that the plot is going to revolve around the fickle nature of those who fall “fatuously in love.”⁴⁹⁴

In this era of the post-war 1920’s which witnessed the fruits of the ‘first wave’ of feminism—women had just acquired the right to vote in 1920 and 1923 saw the proposal of the first equal rights amendment by the National Woman’s Party—,⁴⁹⁵ a ‘battle of the sexes’ romantic comedy ostensibly portraying the distant Renaissance past was the perfect vehicle for filtering the current state of male-female relations. Mayer presents the theme of blinding sexual desire from the perspective of its comic implications when the Duke and the Duchess attempt to betray each other with their respective *rendezvous*—the Duke with Cellini’s lover and model, Angela, and the Duchess with Cellini. And while Mayer takes liberties with Cellini’s text by inventing episodes like this that never happen in the *Vita*, he also demonstrates (as will be seen shortly in another instance) that he had

⁴⁹² The first passage offered by Mayer is the following: “By that time I had been giving myself up to all the pleasures imaginable, and I had taken another love, but only to extinguish this earlier flame.” (MacDonnell 98; I,Lxiii).

⁴⁹³ See Milton Bracker, “Return of a Playwright”: “His father died when he was a boy; he started working at 15, after no more schooling than was available at Public School 165, 109th Street east of Broadway. But he was a great reader.”

⁴⁹⁴ Mayer, “Note” unnumbered page. Mayer is again quoting a passage from the MacDonnell translation here.

⁴⁹⁵ Nina Baym, “What Did Women Want,” rev. of *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, by Nancy F. Cott, *New York Times on the Web* 10 Jan. 1988, 30 July 2008
<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=940DE6DF1038F933A25752C0A96E948260&scp=1&sq=Nina%20Baym&st=cse>.

done some additional research, however cursory, on his subject matter. The issue of Duke Alessandro's sexuality is one such example.

At least equally distressing to Florentines—at least to those who wrote about him—was his [Alessandro's] licentiousness. The duke apparently sought many sexual conquests among women of élite families (married and single), women of the lower classes and, rumour had it, among the presumed virgins of Florence's many convents, (but Ferrai argues that there is no hard proof that the duke despoiled the virginity of nuns in convents.)⁴⁹⁶

The prominent role that unbridled passion is going to have in the play is evident from the moment the curtain goes up. Ascanio, Cellini's apprentice, shows his 'affection' for Emilia, "the pretty serving wench of the house" by pouncing on her and "kiss[ing] her savagely before she is aware of his presence," according to the stage directions.⁴⁹⁷ It is the character of Ascanio who is delegated the task of representing the violent side of Cellini towards women of a certain social station. Without this reassignment of female-directed aggression away from the protagonist, this "comedy in the romantic spirit" would quickly lose its romantic (and comic) buoyancy. Emilia refers to the artist's aggressive nature, but Cellini only expresses it (towards women, anyway) when it involves his "old witch" of a potential mother-in-law, not when it involves the object of his desires, Angela.

Ascanio: If you would be kind to me I would be kind to you.

Emilia: I will never be kind to you.

Ascanio: Then I will kick you until you are kind to me.

Emilia: Kick me!

Ascanio [*Perplexed at this himself.*] Only because I love you...

⁴⁹⁶ John Brackett, "Race and rulership: Alessandro de' Medici, first Medici duke of Florence, 1529-1537," *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, eds. T.F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 2005) 303-325, esp. 321. Brackett's mention of Ferrai in this passage is in reference to L.A. Ferrai's *Lorenzino de' Medici e la società cortigiana del cinquecento* (Milan, 1891). He later refers to the historians writing about Alessandro at the time—Nardi, Segni and Varchi (324). While it is unlikely that Mayer had read Ferrai, there is a certain similarity between both the disapproving tone and content of Mayer's description of Duke Alessandro and the description of T. Adolphus Trollope in *A History of the Commonwealth of Florence* (London, 1865). See note 519 below.

⁴⁹⁷ Mayer 16.

Emilia: [*Increasingly indignant.*] Kick me! So!—you learned that from your master.

Ascanio: [*Changing his pitch again.*] Don't you dare say anything against my master.

Emilia: [*Impudently.*] Why not?

Ascanio: [After a moment's thought.] He is a great man.

Emilia: He is a great beast.

Ascanio: [*Moving towards her once more.*] Now I will certainly kick you.

Emilia: [*Seizing the wax model of a vase which is near her.*] If you come any closer I will throw this to the ground.

Ascanio: [*In a panic.*] Don't do that!

Emilia: Then get out of my way. [She circles about him successfully until she is in a direct line with the left front exit.]

Ascanio: [*In a sweat.*] In the name of God, put that down! If you drop it, I will be beaten, I will be killed.

Emilia: [*Still holding the vase.*] You like to beat, but you do not like to be beaten.⁴⁹⁸

Using this opening skirmish between the two lovers, Mayer prefigures the fiery temperament of his play's namesake both with Ascanio's passionate overtures towards Emilia, as well as with Ascanio's display of sheer terror at the thought of the potentially violent consequences of his master's wax model being destroyed. Mayer also reveals how the definition of greatness is gender-dependent when it comes to describing his Cellini. The antagonistic stances adopted by the two lovers are quickly diffused by Emilia's declaration that "we all say things we don't mean" and by quickly mollifying the tension through Ascanio's renewed attempts to hug and kiss her.⁴⁹⁹ The stage is now set for the boisterous entrance of Ascanio's master who has just murdered Maffio in a violent street altercation.⁵⁰⁰ The stage instructions for Cellini's entrance and the protagonist's opening

⁴⁹⁸ Mayer 18-20.

⁴⁹⁹ Mayer 21-22.

⁵⁰⁰ In the *Vita*, Cellini almost kills Maffio (Maffeo di Giovanni) who is the constable [*bargello*] of Rome at the time that Cellini's brother is killed (1529-1530). See Cellini 186 (I, xLix). The play is set in 1535 (Cellini is 35 years old), but as was mentioned earlier, Mayer makes no pretenses for historical accuracy in his telling of the story.

lines immediately paint him as the innocent victim of treacherous men who were out to get him: “**Cellini:** [*With his whole heart.*] Mother of God, the world is full of villains!”⁵⁰¹

As Cellini starts to recount his adventure to Ascanio, beginning with the artist’s enthusiastic “let me tell you all about it” as he “seats himself upon the table and begins his narrative with obvious enjoyment,”⁵⁰² the audience is clued in that it should take the story that is about to be told with the proverbial ‘grain of salt.’ The act of storytelling not only portrays Cellini as being enamored by the sound of his own voice, but it establishes storytelling as a theme in the play—a kind of ‘play within the play.’ It becomes part of a comic routine that gets repeated three times in the First Act as Cellini proceeds to tell the story of how the killing took place to anyone who will listen, embellishing the details with each telling. When Pier Landi, Cellini’s friend, challenges the veracity of the story, the result is a kind of comic reformulation of Castiglione’s treatment of the art of dissembling in *Il Libro del Cortegiano*:

Cellini: [*In anger.*] You doubt me?

Pier: No I disbelieve you.

Cellini: [*Hurt.*] You presume on my affection.

Pier: Not at all. You see, I happened to witness the fight.

Cellini: [*Collapsing.*] Then why did you let me make a fool of myself, just now?

Pier: Because there is a quality to your lies which should make you immortal. They are infinitely enjoyable, and make me realize again what a poor thing truth is.

Cellini: You mock me, but I *did* kill Maffio.

Pier: I saw it, and it was bravely done. Only, there were no others. He was alone. Besides, I know you of old.

Cellini: You are unjust to me. I am not a liar: I am a poet. A liar is a man who makes much out of nothing; but a poet is a man who makes more out of very little. I kill one man, and say that I have killed three. And why not?⁵⁰³

⁵⁰¹ Mayer 23.

⁵⁰² Mayer 25.

⁵⁰³ Mayer 49-50.

Pier Landi's defense of the "quality to [Cellini's] lies" and his acknowledgement of the relative poverty of truth make him a rather weak Gasparo Pallavicino to Cellini's Federico Gonzaga, but at least he calls a lie a lie. And Cellini's passionate defense of the poetry of his embellishment displays a certain affinity with Federico's defense of "una certa avvertita dissimulazione".⁵⁰⁴

Rispose allor il signor Gaspar Pallavicino: "Questa a me non par arte, ma vero inganno; né credo che si convenga, a chi vol esser omo da bene, mai lo ingannare." "Questo," disse messer Federico, "è più presto un ornamento, il quale accompagna quella cosa che lui fa, che inganno; e se pur è inganno, non è da biasimare."⁵⁰⁵

Even though Mayer was likely unaware of this kinship with *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, he was certainly cognizant of how he was engaging in a metatheatrical commentary on the art of stagecraft and how there was a certain "quality to [Mayer's] lies which should make [him] immortal"—the theatrical equivalent of *ut pictura poesis* transformed into *ut fabula poesis*.

Cellini's act of homicide is therefore diminished by his frequent exaggerations in the retelling of the tale. But Mayer remains faithful to the *Vita* in having his protagonist inform us that Maffio was "the scoundrel who killed [Cellini's] brother,"⁵⁰⁶ thereby justifying the murder as an act dictated by a code of honor. In the *Vita*, when Cellini returns to the service of Pope Clement after avenging his brother's death, the Pope is initially stern—"con i soli sguardi mi fece una paventosa bravata"—; but after he views the work the artist has done for him, he calmly tells Cellini: "Or che tu se' guarito, Benvenuto, attendi a vivere."⁵⁰⁷ Not even the Pope looked upon the 'settling of scores' in

⁵⁰⁴ Castiglione 180 (II, xL).

⁵⁰⁵ Castiglione 179-180 (II, xL).

⁵⁰⁶ Mayer 53.

⁵⁰⁷ Cellini 194 (I, Li).

this way as reprehensible in Cellini's day.⁵⁰⁸ In portraying Cellini's relationships with women, Mayer is less than faithful to the *Vita* for the reasons mentioned above. Mayer's Cellini is a lover, not a fighter, and he wants to court Angela with poetry, not with savagery: "You are the matin in the morning, and the angelus in the evening; the bell which awakens me and the bell which says rest."⁵⁰⁹ Angela has experienced many a beating, but not from Cellini. It is her mother who has regularly beaten her and "sold [her] to villains."⁵¹⁰ Cellini assumes the role of the protector of the abused Angela who timidly admits that she doesn't mind when her mother hits her.

Cellini: But you must learn to mind it. You go through life as if you were a dream in a dream. Life may be a dream, but you are real. You must learn to believe that.⁵¹¹

He intends to buy Angela from her wicked mother as an "honest man" befitting of such a prize, but not before hurling every manner of insult at his future mother-in-law, Beatrice.

Cellini: [*Losing his temper.*] What sort of mother are you?

Beatrice: See! You do it before my very face.

Cellini: Your face? That thing you wear cannot possibly be your face.

Beatrice: O that my son were here to strike you down!

Cellini: Your son? But he is busy seeking the name of his father.⁵¹²

The fact that Angela's mother is openly portrayed as a promiscuous woman who exploits her daughter by prostituting her "to villains," and who does not even know the identity of the father of her children, is just one of the many risqué topics that Mayer confronts in his satiric comedy. As with the conflating of the historical characters in *The Firebrand*, Angela and her mother represent the conflation of two mother-daughter pairings in the *Vita*—Angelica and Beatrice, and Caterina and her "franciosa ruffiana"

⁵⁰⁸ See Bondanella and Bondanella 405n. 90.

⁵⁰⁹ Mayer 36.

⁵¹⁰ Mayer 34.

⁵¹¹ Mayer 33.

⁵¹² Mayer 39.

mother.⁵¹³ The mercenary quality of both mothers is, in general, faithful to Cellini's portrayal of women in his autobiography,⁵¹⁴ but the physical abuse of Angela at the hands of her mother is an element added by Mayer. In the *Vita*, Caterina (the model for the Nymph of Fontainebleu) repeatedly (and laughingly) comes back to offer her 'services' to Cellini, both as a model and otherwise, after receiving ruthless beatings from him. Rather than sully the image of his leading man by delving into this part of the *Vita*'s narrative, Mayer decides to take on the subject of female submissiveness by offering a psychoanalytical explanation for Angela's ambivalence about the beatings she endures from her mother.⁵¹⁵ She is portrayed as someone who is so accustomed to such treatment as to have developed a cool air of detachment from her existence, as a means of survival.

Angela: Sometimes I do not seem real to myself, but like someone I hear passing the house...late at night. You must think me very foolish.⁵¹⁶

But Mayer makes sure to let us know that this is a woman who wears her scars inside as well; that despite her occasional aloofness, she suffers for what she has had to endure.

Angela: When I sing, I feel as if something were healing in me, while my heart is breaking.⁵¹⁷

There is an edginess to *The Firebrand* that surprises in its frank approach to dealing with controversial topics. For example, the issue of Duke Alessandro having been

⁵¹³ Cellini 547 (II, xxix).

⁵¹⁴ There are a few exceptions to this, namely, the Madonna Porzia episode discussed previously in chapter two.

⁵¹⁵ See Leslie Y. Rabkin in *Jewish-American History and Culture: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 1992) 388: "During its earliest phase, from the 'teens through the early 1930's, psychoanalysis in America was allied with the avant-garde movement in art and culture, and its adherents stressed Freud's psychological conceptions more than the clinical practice of psychoanalytical therapy." Mayer allied himself with the avant-garde socialists in Greenwich Village during the 1920's.

⁵¹⁶ Mayer 33.

⁵¹⁷ Mayer 96.

born illegitimately and of a multiracial background⁵¹⁸ is presented in the stage directions before the Duke makes his first entrance:

[... Among his own countrymen his swarthy skin has earned him the sobriquet of 'The Moor.' This base man, this bastard Medici who was no Medici, has features which are at once either sullen or childishly alive.]⁵¹⁹

While having a man of color play the part would not have been unprecedented,⁵²⁰ the theme of interracial relationships in a romantic comedy in 1924 would have perhaps pushed Mayer's already edgy play over the edge. Again, the theme was not without precedent in contemporary theatre. Leon Gordon's play, *White Cargo*, which opened in 1923, was an extremely successful play, despite the fact that it initially received poor reviews from the critics.⁵²¹ After over a year had passed since its opening, on March 23rd, 1925, *Time Magazine* put *White Cargo* on its list of "Best Plays" along with *The Firebrand*—both as "plays which, in the light of metropolitan criticism, seem most important." *Time* offered a brief synopsis of *White Cargo*: "Mulatto woman, white man, all alone in Africa. A sombre study in loneliness that has played in Manhattan for over a

⁵¹⁸ See Brackett, 303-325: "[...] his mother was a peasant woman (actually a freed slave [...]) living in the village of Colle Vecchio, near Rome. Remarkably, it was his mother's peasant status, rather than her Moorish or slave birth, which seems to have stoked the contempt of his critics. Based on the Florentine usage of the term 'slave' in the sixteenth century, I will argue that Alessandro's mother was a black African. The libel was directed at her status as a peasant who had previously been a slave, not at her 'race.' [...] There is substantial artistic evidence in several portraits of Alessandro to support the conclusion that his mother was a black African." (303 and 309) Neither MacDonnell nor Symonds nor Cust refer to the fact that Alessandro was called 'il Moro' by his contemporaries, so it appears that Mayer must have done some research on this, as mentioned earlier.

⁵¹⁹ Mayer 55. See Brackett for a revealing quote from Trollope by way of G.F. Young: "The portraits of this wretched youth [Alessandro] which hang on the walls of the Florentine gallery show the lowness of the type to which his organization belonged. The small, contracted features, the low forehead, and mean expression, are altogether unlike any of the Medici race, in whom, whatever else they might be, there was always manifestation of intellectual power." (309) Mayer's description of Alessandro bears a certain resemblance to Trollope's and seems to discount entirely Cellini-author's assertion that "it was fully believed [...] that Duke Alessandro was Pope Clement's son." (MacDonnell 135)

⁵²⁰ Eugene O'Neill's play, *The Emperor Jones*, was very well received by audiences in 1920 when a black actor, Charles Gilpin, was cast in the leading role. See Travis Bogard, *Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1988), 30 July 2008
<<http://www.eoneill.com/library/contour/amateursend/jones.htm>>.

⁵²¹ "White Cargo is Turgid," *New York Times on the Web*, 6 Nov. 1923, 30 July 2008
<<http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F30913FA3E5416738DDDAF0894D9415B838EF1D3>>.

year.”⁵²² *The Firebrand*, however, was Mayer’s very first play and it was a romantic comedy, not a “sombre study” nor a Shakespearian tragedy like *Othello*. Hence, the well-known comic actor, Frank Morgan (best known to later generations as the wizard in the *Wizard of Oz* of 1939), was selected to portray Alessandro as a buffoonish but lascivious Duke. The libidinous behavior of both the Duke and the Duchess is what gives the play its most farcical twists and turns as each of them tries to arrange for their respective *tête à tête* with the object of their desires in the Summer Palace—Duke Alessandro with Angela and the Duchess with Cellini. The Duchess’s aggressive attempts to seduce Cellini are (deliberately) portrayed to make Cellini’s efforts to court Angela seem innocent and noble by comparison. Once again, this episode is an invention’s of Mayer’s.

The Duchess: Benvenuto, are you afraid?

Cellini: Not at all, My Lady. Life is not easy: if we are lucky, we are offered, and perhaps only once, gifts so precious that not to take them seems blasphemous. Our blood leaps up, and our hands, our hearts, reach out...and there we must stop.

The Duchess: And pray, why, if not in fear?

Cellini: Because of that little part of our soul which we call, “honor.”

The Duchess: [*Indignantly.*] Honor, indeed! Your masculine metaphysics are enough to turn an honest woman’s stomach. Honor! that shining name which men use to cover their cowardice. Faugh! I am disappointed in you.

Cellini: What can I say that will atone?

The Duchess: Nothing. Your first love was a chisel and your last will be a hammer.

Cellini: My Lady, you wrong me. I am capable of great love.

The Duchess: You? Never! It is the tragedy of great ladies to discover that great men make poor lovers. They do not love women; they use them. That is why we generally marry half-wits.⁵²³

Putting an exclamation point on the already established context of role-reversal, Mayer has the Duchess reveal to Cellini that it is she who ‘wears the pants’ in the Medici court:

The Duchess: Do not be afraid. I will tell you a secret...

⁵²² “The Best Plays,” *Time Magazine Online*, 23 March 1925, 30 July 2008
<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,881459,00.html>>.

⁵²³ Mayer 91-92.

You think me the Duchess?

Cellini: My Lady, surely.

The Duchess: [*Charmingly.*] I am not. I am the Duke.⁵²⁴

It is clear throughout the play that the ‘first wave’ of feminism had invaded Mayer’s Medici court, since it is the Duchess who always maintains the upper hand. At every turn, though, whether it is with the characters in positions of power or not, Mayer seems to have a great deal of fun with unveiling the duplicity of human behavior by both genders and by all classes of society (it is Emilia, the “pretty serving wench,” who utters the words: “I don’t know why it is, but it is pleasant to be cruel to the man you love.”)⁵²⁵ But this is not simply a light and frothy farce whose sole aim is to garner lots of laughs. While that was the end result,⁵²⁶ Mayer was also intent upon testing the limits of how much lampooning ‘civil society’ of the 1920’s would accept. Just as Cellini-*auctor* tested the boundaries of how much truth could be told about the powerful people with whom he came in contact, so, too, Mayer experimented with how much social critiquing could be written into his script without running the risk of losing his audience. This is why I do not share Gallucci’s conclusion that “the originality of Mayer’s retelling lies [...] in his insistence on making his play a comedy.”⁵²⁷ Given the initial suggestion for the play that Mayer credits as having come from “Miss Marion Spitzer,”⁵²⁸ there can be little originality in the playwright’s decision to select the genre best-suited to the comic material taken directly from Anne MacDonnell’s translation of Cellini’s *Vita* and specifically suggested to him by Spitzer.

⁵²⁴ Mayer 142.

⁵²⁵ Mayer 100,

⁵²⁶ Stark Young, rev. of *The Firebrand*.

⁵²⁷ Gallucci, “Pop Icon” 206.

⁵²⁸ Mayer, “Note” unnumbered page.

Then her [Angelica's] mother, seeing us converse secretly together, came up to us and said, "Benvenuto, if you are going to take my Angelica away to Rome, leave me fifteen ducats to pay for my lying-in [*che io possa partorire*], and after that I'll follow you." I told the wicked old woman that I'd give her thirty with a good will, if she would be pleased to give up her Angelica to me. And so the bargain was struck. Angelica begged me to buy her a gown of black velvet, which was very cheap in Naples. I did all they asked me willingly; sent for the velvet, bargained for and paid it; but the old woman, who thought me fatuously in love [*più cotto che crudo*], demanded a gown of fine cloth for herself, would have me lay out a great deal on her sons, and begged for more money than I had offered her. At this I turned to her good-naturedly and said, "My dear Beatrice, didn't I offer you enough?" "No," said she. So I replied that what was not enough for her would suffice for me, and having kissed my Angelica, we parted, she with tears, I with a laugh, and in haste I took the road for Rome.⁵²⁹

Thus, Mayer's decision to go with comedy as the appropriate genre for his play was made for him by his choice of material. Mayer's originality consisted in writing a play that took full advantage of the witty and ribald elements in Cellini's autobiography in order to create a narrative that spoke to the social issues of the 1920's and, in particular, the "frank recognition of female sexuality."⁵³⁰ As Baym points out, "the term 'feminism,' coming into use around 1910, encompassed many issues besides suffrage—sexuality, marriage, the home, the workplace."⁵³¹ Mayer uses *The Firebrand* as a vehicle to take on some of these issues, while demonstrating in the process that he has assimilated Cellini's sense of irony as well as his dexterity in the art of *arguzia*.

Cellini: You have no idea the change in her! Yesterday she was mute; I had to drag the syllables from her, almost by force!

Pier: And today she chatters away like the teeth of a coward.

Cellini: How did you know?

Pier: Experience, my young friend, has taught me that love is quiet, and domestic life is noisy.⁵³²

⁵²⁹ MacDonnell 106. See also Cellini 251 (I, Lxix).

⁵³⁰ See Baym, note 495.

⁵³¹ See note 495 above.

⁵³² Mayer 176.

Stark Young's review of *The Firebrand* for the *New York Times* after opening night was generally enthusiastic, notwithstanding some critical comments, and it had to have been a welcome read for both Mayer and his actors. The element that seemed most bothersome to the critic is the fact that Mayer had created a kind of mixed-genre hybrid—it easily fell into the category of ‘comedy,’ but it was not entirely farcical.

In the drawing of characters especially this new playwright shines: the Duke and the Duchess are both amusingly, and sometimes sharply, drawn, and the portrait of the girl [Angela], snuggling up to any admiring bosom and wanting to be loved and to love, lazy, lovely and vaguely loose, is one of the best that I have seen of late. If to the rest of the abilities shown in *The Firebrand* Mr. Mayer in his second play could add a kind of brilliance of taste and could keep throughout the play more sharply to whatever key he chooses he will give us next time a golden farce indeed.⁵³³

While it is not entirely clear what Young's definition is for “brilliance of taste,” it is a term he associates with the concept of maintaining the same “key” throughout the entire play. But Mayer clearly did not intend to create a “golden farce” that was written in the same key for the duration of the play. He created what could be called (for lack of a better label) a socially conscious comedy with farcical elements. His overnight success with *The Firebrand*, at the age of twenty-seven, provoked an unidentified jealous acquaintance (“a friend of [Mayer's] father”) to belittle his achievement by offering a “biographical sketch” of the playwright to an anonymous gossip columnist for *The New York Times*. Employing a tone that drips with sarcasm, the author evidently hoped that his ‘Red Scare’ tactics would put a damper on the enthusiasm surrounding Mayer's first play.

[...] For a time—he was then either 17 or 18—he [Mayer] gave a course of lectures on English literature, with especial reference to early Elizabethan poetry, at West End Avenue homes. The lectures, which were made up completely of readings of poems as they might be and were obtained at public libraries, with a professorial preface limited to “We will now take up Hooziz,” were quite useless,

⁵³³ Young, rev. of *The Firebrand*.

for no one attended them. But they indicate his early active interest in literature, which is what I am driving at. And this early active interest in literature proceeded to drive him—as it did all similarly unemployed youths in 1916-17—to Greenwich Village. Here he came into first-hand contact with the actual creators of real literature. District reporters for *The Call* [a socialist newspaper] and dramatic editors of hardware monthlies were to be seen and talked to for the asking. Discussions on art and other things raged far into the night over tea cups. An American literature was about to be born. And so young Mayer became a reporter on *The Call*. Here he covered Socialist meetings and Socialist meetings and Socialist meetings and the thousand other things that go to make the reporter's life an endless round of novelty and interest. In between these big assignments he covered Socialist meetings.⁵³⁴

Notwithstanding the author's derision for Mayer's autodidactic literary background and his clear disapproval of Mayer's political associations, the article offers a window into the formative years of the young Mayer, especially his early interest in literature, despite his limited formal education, and his desire to engage in "discussions on art and other things [...] far into the night over tea cups."⁵³⁵ Mayer must have felt a sense of kinship with the Cellini of the *Vita* who also loved to be in the company of "persone litteratissime."⁵³⁶ Having written his own autobiography, *A Preface to a Life*,⁵³⁷ when he was only twenty-five years old, Mayer would have been particularly intrigued by the autobiography of a fellow artist who also considered himself a poet. And after having received some fairly strong criticism of his youthful autobiography,⁵³⁸ the

⁵³⁴ "The Man Who Wrote *The Firebrand*," *New York Times on the Web*, 2 Nov. 1924, 30 July 2008

<<http://select.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?res=F50914FB385D17738DDDAB0894D9415B848EF1D3>>

⁵³⁵ The biographical details of this anonymous article are corroborated by other sources; in particular, the signed articles in which Mayer was interviewed for *The New York Times* as well as his obituary. See Milton Bracker's article (11 May 1958). See also "Edwin Justus Mayer, 63, Dead; Playwright and Movie Scenarist," obituaries, *New York Times*, 12 Sept. 1960, 30 July 2008

<<http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F0091FFE3D551A7A93C0A81782D85F448685F9&scp=3&sq=%22Edwin%20Justus%20Mayer%22&st=cse>>. In his obituary, the playwright is quoted as once having said [after his overnight success with *The Firebrand* and his subsequent work as a screenwriter in Hollywood]: "It's hard being a Socialist with a \$1,500 weekly income."

⁵³⁶ Cellini 297 (I, Lxxxiii).

⁵³⁷ Edwin Justus Mayer, *A Preface to a Life* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1923).

⁵³⁸ Stanton A. Coblenz, "A Stripling in Search of His Youth," *New York Times on the Web* 28 Oct. 1923, 30 July 2008 (URL on following page)

playwright would have taken some measure of comfort in learning from Cellini that he had embarked on his autobiographical journey at least seventeen years too soon.⁵³⁹ Mayer and Cellini were kindred spirits in that they were both viewed by some members of their profession as ‘outsiders.’⁵⁴⁰ In an interview with Milton Bracker of the *New York Times* in 1958, Mayer revealed the character trait that had worked against him during the course of his career as a playwright. He proposed that his having been a “bad boy in the theatre [...] may have killed some of his chances.” When attempting to answer Bracker as to how he could be “virtually forgotten save as the author of a single historic smash [*The Firebrand*],” Mayer responds “I never gave up the stage, [...] the stage gave me up.”⁵⁴¹ The *leitmotif* of having been misunderstood and marginalized, not necessarily for the quality of his work, but for his difficult personality, resonates with the life of the artist Mayer chose to bring to life on the New York stage in 1924 (reminiscent of Cellini’s “da poi che m’è impedito il fare, così io mi son messo a dire”).⁵⁴² Outside of *The Firebrand* itself, we do not have direct testimony of what Mayer thought of Cellini as an artist-*letterato*. But his respect and admiration for the creator of the *Vita* is evident in Pier Landi’s response to Cellini in *The Firebrand*: “Because there is a quality to your lies which should make you immortal.”⁵⁴³

<<http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F10816FA3E5416738DDDA10A94D8415B838EF1D3&scp=7&sq=%22Edwin%20Justus%20Mayer%22&st=cse>>.

⁵³⁹ Cellini 7-8 (I, i).

⁵⁴⁰ In addition to being a self-professed “bad boy,” Mayer, as a Jewish-American playwright, also had to deal with the “anti-Semitic fervor” that accompanied the “strict immigration quotas imposed in the 1920’s.” See David Desser under “Movie Moguls” in *Jewish-American History and Culture* 407.

⁵⁴¹ Bracker, “Return of a Playwright.”

⁵⁴² Milanesi 89.

⁵⁴³ Mayer 49.

III.3 Cellini: A ‘classic’ for the 21st century?

Not remotely as successful as Mayer’s *The Firebrand* was the most recent theatrical adaptation of Cellini’s *Vita*, the Off-Broadway play, *Cellini*, written and directed by John Patrick Shanley. The play opened on February 12th, 2001 at the Second Stage Theatre in New York City and ran until March 4th of the same year. The play was scheduled for a short run from the outset, but one suspects that if the reviews had been better, the run would have been extended.⁵⁴⁴ Unlike Mayer’s two-week writing stint on the isle of Capri to create *The Firebrand*, Shanley’s *Cellini* was the result of six years’ worth of hard labor.⁵⁴⁵ Indeed, one of the criticisms leveled at Shanley’s play was that it “‘smells of the lamp,’ as the old Roman saying goes, suggesting that too many rewrites have sapped Shanley’s initial creative impulse to show how an artist can succeed despite himself.”⁵⁴⁶ More likely, though, the problem with the success of this adaptation is to be found elsewhere. When Mayer made his decision to create a play that was “inspirational rather than documental,” that decision gave him the freedom to capture the spirit of the *Vita* without remaining beholden to Cellini’s text. Shanley, on the other hand, tried to create a play that was both inspirational *and* documental. This proved to be a burden that outweighed even his prodigious skills as a playwright. John Simon’s review of the play for *New York Magazine* makes it easy to appreciate why such an ambitious undertaking would have experienced difficulty in succeeding.

⁵⁴⁴ Michael Sommers, “Shanley stretches and falls far short,” rev. of *Cellini*, by John Patrick Shanley, *The Star Ledger* 13 Feb. 2001: 39. I saw the play twice during its limited engagement and my observations are based on a reading of the script, as well as being an audience member on these two occasions.

⁵⁴⁵ See “With Hummel in the Antarctic,” *New York Times on the Web* 5 Nov. 1933, 30 July 2008 <<http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F50B1EFA3C5516738DDDAC0894D9415B838FF1D3&scp=130&sq=%22Edwin%20Justus%20Mayer%22&st=cse>> for Mayer’s use of Hummel’s home on the isle of Capri. See also See David Kaufman, “When the Author Insists on Directing the Play, Too,” *New York Times on the Web*, 11 Feb. 2001, 30 July 2008 <[http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A02EEDA1F3EF932A25751C\)A9679C8B63](http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A02EEDA1F3EF932A25751C)A9679C8B63)>.

⁵⁴⁶ Sommers 39.

A greater problem is how to convey a life as full, varied, and adventurous—as well as often on the wrong side of the law—as Cellini’s within the limited scope of a play. The more so if the protagonist is a controversial artist and you wish to present his artistic struggles. [...] Shanley, moreover, wants to write both a fairly straightforward, realistic comedy-drama and a hip, stylized, anti-naturalistic entertainment with absurdist choruses, dead men summoned back to life, lots of playing up to the audience—a tricky combination. And, as you might expect, no simple slavish adherence to the published *Life* but free authorial invention.⁵⁴⁷

Another factor that proved detrimental to Shanley’s play relates back to the qualities expounded upon by Symonds in his introduction to his 1888 translation—the qualities that went into making the *Vita* “an imperishable document for the student of human nature.”⁵⁴⁸ The most important of these qualities, according to Symonds, is to be found in how Cellini portrays himself to his readers: “the man presents himself dramatically by his deeds and spoken words, never by his ponderings or meditative broodings. It is this healthy externality which gives its great charm to Cellini’s self-portrayal [...].”⁵⁴⁹ Shanley’s Cellini, on the other hand, is given to self-reflective brooding, even if it is often portrayed in a dialogic form during the course of conversations with patrons or servants. In those moments, it’s as if Cellini’s interlocutors (and the chorus of “many voices”) become internal voices whose only purpose is to provide Shanley a foil for dramatizing the artist’s inner turmoil.

Duke. Perhaps it should be Perseus and no Medusa at all? Not the head or the body? (*Cellini is distracted.*)

Cellini. What? No. There has to be...the cost. At the center of an heroic act is a gush of blood. This do I know. As does the House of Medici.

Many Voices. *Omidicio.*

Clement. You did evil.

Cellini. I had no choice.

⁵⁴⁷ John Simon, “Brush With Fame,” rev. of *Cellini*, by John Patrick Shanley, *New York*, 19 Feb. 2001, 30 July 2008 <<http://nymag.com/nymetro/arts/theater/reviews/4390/>>.

⁵⁴⁸ Symonds, xi. Unfortunately, Symonds’s introduction has been eliminated in the more recent editions of the *Vita*. See Chong 243: “Tuttora in commercio, è però adesso privata delle illustrazioni e della lunga e meditata introduzione in cui l’autore tentava di analizzare le motivazioni psicologiche di Cellini.”

⁵⁴⁹ Symonds xi.

Clement. You have a will.

Cellini. It was insufficient to the task.

Clement. What is this excess in your nature?

Cellini. I don't know. I've had this rage since I was born. It creates and destroys with the same hand.

Clement. We are more than passion.

Cellini. Are we?

Clement. You can look in the mirror. You can see that other man. And you can step away. There are two figures. You must look in the mirror.

Cellini. (*To the Boy.*) You must look in the mirror. (*The Boy looks in the mirror, points at the image therein and then at himself. He is counting.*)⁵⁵⁰

The mirror becomes the symbol in the play for Cellini's struggle to overcome that "excess in [his] nature" to which Clement refers. Lest we miss its significance in establishing one of Shanley's main themes—"that passion must not be constrained from without but tempered from within"⁵⁵¹—the mirror is presented to us in two contiguous scenes; the one cited above and the one directly preceding it. In the preceding scene, Cellini has been forced to leave Florence after being accused of sodomy by the mother of the young boy who is Cellini's model for the Perseus.

Gambetta. I am going to the Maggiordomo (*Gambetta goes.*)

Boy. What should I do?

Cellini. You must never sleep here.

Boy. But you are innocent!

Cellini. No. The arguments of those that oppose me have merit. It is not Rightness I have on my side. I just will not be stopped.

Boy. How did you come to be this way? (*Cellini produces a small round mirror.*)

Cellini. With this. With this Perseus subdued the Medusa. Take it.

Boy. A mirror?

Cellini. It was his shield. Reflection. Study it in my absence.

Boy. But I can only see myself in this.

Cellini. That's you in there?

Boy. Yes.

Cellini. Then who's holding the mirror? [...] ⁵⁵²

⁵⁵⁰ Shanley 24-25.

⁵⁵¹ Bruce Weber, "When Rage and Pride Illuminate the Genius," rev. of *Cellini*, by John Patrick Shanley, *New York Times on the Web*, 14 Feb. 2001, 30 July 2008
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/02/14/arts/14CELL.html>>.

⁵⁵² Shanley 20-21.

The mirror, therefore, becomes the symbol of that which “creates and destroys with the same hand,” depending on which of the two competing interpretations for the multivalent mirror Shanley’s protagonist chooses to adopt—Socratic self-knowledge or Narcissistic self-love.⁵⁵³ Shanley’s Cellini is aware that it is self-love or self-indulgence which created the situation in which Cellini has to leave town to avoid being arrested; while it is the self-knowledge derived from reflection which allowed the artist to triumph over his baser desires in order to achieve his artistic aspirations (the creation of the *Perseus*). In portraying Cellini as a kind of Socrates, always encouraging his apprentices to “look in the mirror,” Shanley stresses the self-analytical quality of the protagonist.

Cellini. [...] I want to do what my enemies want me to do. I want to fuck that boy. But there are things I want more. The Perseus. Look how my desires lay out like a flight of stairs, starting low and rising to a height. The crudest hunger, unacted upon, changes its face again, again, again, up, up, up. And at the top, the Ideal, the Aspiration, the Want which, when met, brings satisfaction. A flight of stairs. Boy! Scribe! (*The Boy comes on with bloody hands.*)

Boy. Yes, Master! Here I am! At the ready.

Cellini. Your hands are bloody. (*The boy is reaching for the book.*)

Boy. I was gutting a rabbit.

Cellini. Don’t touch my life! With those. Wash.

Boy. Yes, Master. (*The Boy washes in a bucket.*)

Cellini. Everything you’ve so far written must be put to the side. I must go back. Down the stairs. Before the Perseus. You can make a mark, skip a page. I must forget the man I am, and remember the man I was.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵³ Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History*, trans. by Katharine H. Jewett (New York: Routledge, 2001) 106-107: “To know oneself, as the Delphic principle invites us to do, is to retreat from the sensory appearances of the common mirror—reflection, appearance, shadow, or phantasm—to one’s own soul. [...] The misfortune of Narcissus, whose story has been retold so often since Ovid, was to have chosen the lowest degree of knowledge, that of his reflection. He was punished by Nemesis for having scorned Echo’s love, for having refused the mediation of the other in the construction of the self. There was certainly not yet a psychological implication to the fable in antiquity, but only the passing of a moral judgment on a young man overtaken by madness and excess, confusing illusion with reality and making himself his own aim rather than investing himself in the polis. If well used, however, the mirror can aid moral mediation between man and himself. Socrates, we are told by Diogenes, urged young people to look at themselves in mirrors so that, if they were beautiful, they would become worthy of their beauty, and if they were ugly, they would know how to hide their disgrace through learning. The mirror, a tool by which to “know thyself,” invited man to *not* mistake himself for God, to avoid pride by knowing his limits, and to improve himself. His was thus not a passive mirror of imitation but an active mirror of transformation.”

⁵⁵⁴ Shanley 21-22.

While there is nothing inherently problematic with Shanley's decision to project 21st century angst and self-doubt into his protagonist, it is the way the writer-director decided to do it that created problems for the play. Shanley's *Cellini* is, at times, fraught with too much telling and not enough showing.⁵⁵⁵ The problem is less a product of interior monologues like the one above which serves to prefigure the flight of stairs in Cellini's prison scene vision; and more a consequence of the fact that Shanley's Cellini, as well as several other characters in the play, have 'double duty' as both narrators of their drama as well as actors in it. They pop in and out of scenes and out of character in order to keep the audience up-to-date on background information that the playwright feels we need to know. These intrusions, along with the insertion of mini-explications of Renaissance art theory from time to time (not to mention the actors speaking their lines in English with faux Italian accents), all make for a play which, like Narcissus, seems a bit too enamored with its own image at times. The consistent use of the audience as a reflecting pool for direct addresses by the actors wears thin over the course of the two-hour play.

Cellini. [...] (*The lights change, the Boy exits, and Cellini crosses downstage boldly; without missing a beat, he addresses the audience.*) And though I am dead, and all the Kings of France are dead and gone from the face of the earth, this salt-cellar still sits, in a magnificent room devoted to great Art! In Vienna. Go there. See what I have done! (*Fanfare. The lights change. The Duke and Duchess of Florence enter, full of good spirits. Cellini reacts and enters the scene.*)⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁵ I am using Wayne Booth's well-known discussion of telling and showing and dramatized narrators as a basis for understanding how the audience responded to Shanley's narrative strategy. See Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983) 3-20 and 211-240.

⁵⁵⁶ Shanley 44. One can only imagine what Shanley would have had Cellini say if the theft of his famous salt-cellar had occurred before the staging of the play. The theft occurred on May 11, 2003. See <<http://www/fbi.gov/hq/cid/arttheft/europe/austria/saliera/saliera.htm>>. It has since been recovered.

Having said this, it is perhaps not the asides to the audience in and of themselves that should shoulder all of the blame for the overwrought sense of self-awareness in the play. After all, Shakespeare's plays are filled with them, as Wayne Booth points out:

If we tried to purge Shakespeare of rhetorical impurities, would we not find ourselves objecting, for example, to all of the chanting and dancing performed by the witches in *Macbeth*, when no one else but the spectator is present? And what of the many soliloquies and asides? Many of these direct addresses to the spectator are radically "out of character." Iago's private statements, as many critics have recognized, are seriously misleading if taken as the realistic meditation of a consistent, thought-ridden melancholic. They make dramatic sense only as unapologetic explanations to the audience of motives, threats, and probabilities that could not easily be made clear in convincing dialogue.⁵⁵⁷

The main directorial problem is that in casting Reg Rogers in the dual role of both Cellini-artist and Cellini-narrator of his life story, Shanley created a real dilemma for his play. He created a relationship in which the audience is denied that essential complicity with the author: "There can be no dramatic irony, by definition, unless the author and audience can somehow share knowledge which the characters do not hold."⁵⁵⁸ The matter is complicated by the fact that the real author in this case is Shanley, but the playwright has created competition for his audience's complicity with Reg Rogers's impersonation of the implied author of the *Vita*.⁵⁵⁹ As will be seen shortly when the issue of Shanley's self-identification with Cellini is addressed, the playwright's own process of writing a play about Cellini is also being dramatized in the character of Cellini as implied author of

⁵⁵⁷ Booth 100.

⁵⁵⁸ Booth 175.

⁵⁵⁹ Booth's use of the term "implied author" seems especially relevant to how Cellini, the author of the *Vita*, viewed the act of writing as an *atto chiarificatore*: "To some novelists it has seemed, indeed, that they were discovering or creating themselves as they wrote. As Jessamyn West says, it is sometimes 'only by writing the story that the novelist can discover—not his story—but its writer, the official scribe, so to speak, for that narrative. Whether we call this implied author an 'official scribe,' or adopt the term recently revived by Kathleen Tillotson—the author's 'second self'—it is clear that the picture the reader gets of this presence is one of the author's most important effects." (71)

his own life story (“This is a play, in part, about playwriting [...]”).⁵⁶⁰ Thus, there is a problem of aesthetic distance⁵⁶¹ between the real author of the play (Shanley) and the implied author of the *Vita*; as well as between the character of the artist, Cellini, who struggles with his patrons, his lovers, his jealous colleagues and himself; and the character of the implied author, Cellini, who narrates his reactions to his life’s events during that moment of self-reflective clarity when he decides how he wants those events to be written down on paper. There is little space left where “the author and audience can somehow share knowledge which the characters do not hold.”

Cellini. First, I would like to say: I am happy that I was born.

Is it down on the paper?

Boy. It is.

Cellini. Is it legible?

Boy. To me.

Cellini. Very well. Continue. My father’s reaction to my birth was “He is welcome.” And so my name. Benvenuto. (*Thinks.*) I do not want to be verbose. You didn’t write that, did you?

Boy. You didn’t tell me not to write it!

Cellini. Oh, then leave it. How do I say my life? If I stand in one place and tell my history, what have I made? At best a fixed silhouette. And what is that? A painter’s achievement. God is not a painter. God is a sculptor. He works in clay. There’s the way. I will approach my life in the knowledge that it is a work of His. What is the first thing I notice?

Boy. About what?

Cellini. My life. The central scene is the casting of the Perseus. The rest of the composition turns on that.

Boy. Should I be writing this?

Cellini. No! Writing is flat. For sculpture, you must see in a circle. You must orbit one moment utterly, and so free yourself of Time. You must do sketches from a multitude of angles, create a coliseum of eyes with a single soul. How would you write that?

Boy. I don’t know. I just learned to spell.

Cellini. It’s impossible! And I can do it because it is how I see the world regardless of the materials I use. The story falls in two. First, how I was created. Second, how I returned the favor. [...] ⁵⁶²

⁵⁶⁰ Bruce Weber, “When Rage and Pride Illuminate the Genius.”

⁵⁶¹ Booth 121-123 and 154-159.

⁵⁶² Shanley 8-9.

Some critics saw the root of the problem in Shanley's insistence on directing the play that he wrote.⁵⁶³ Apropos of the distance question are Shanley's reasons for directing his own work: "If anybody else tried to direct this play, I would kill them. [...] I've been working on it for six years, and nobody is going to get between me and this thing I'm chasing down."⁵⁶⁴ Of course, this "get[ting] between" is sometimes exactly what is needed.

"Writers already know—or think they know—where the emphasis should lie," he [Craig Lucas] said. "They know where the meat is in their words and narrative, so they can't have a different point of view from their own. And that's what you want in a good director and in good actors: a point of view other than your own. A good director will find something particular to himself inside the story, and that additional side view can give the play another depth."⁵⁶⁵

Beyond the issue of directing his own work, though, I would argue that Shanley's play would have benefited by having a different actor play the part of the implied author of the *Vita*; a character who would stand at a distance from the tumultuous action of the play and reflect upon the events as they unfold. This directorial strategy would have permitted the character of Cellini-artist to retain the "healthy externality" of the *Vita* that Symonds praised, while also allowing for a 21st century version of Cellini's 'second self' to reflect and analyze the artist's struggles from a more distanced vantage point. It could have even taken the form of a narrator who did not necessarily portray Cellini as implied author, but

⁵⁶³ See David Kaufman, "When the Author Insists." See also Elyse Sommer, rev. of *Cellini, CurtainUp* Feb. 2001, 30 July 2008 <<http://www.curtainup.com/cellini.html>> and Bruce Weber, "When Rage and Pride Illuminate." Edwin Justus Mayer did not direct *The Firebrand*. Arthur Hurley and David Burton directed it.

⁵⁶⁴ Kaufman, "When the Author Insists."

⁵⁶⁵ Craig Lucas, ("a dramatist who has directed plays by other writers") interviewed by Kaufman for "When the Author Insists."

one who would be in a position to understand the protagonist's life and art. One such example is Peter Shaffer's Salieri in the theatrical version of *Amadeus*.⁵⁶⁶

If Shanley's *Cellini* had been a film, there would have been recourse to cinematic techniques like the voice-over of the narrator, the artistically arranged montage of Cellini's artwork, and carefully sequenced flashbacks of relevant events from Cellini's *Vita* to fill in the blanks for the audience. In fact, John Simon declares from the outset in his review of the play that "though it would have been better as a movie (Shanley also writes screenplays, e.g., *Moonstruck*), the result is not boring, merely a letdown. This Shanley *Cellini* makes me yearn for what a Fellini *Cellini* might have been."⁵⁶⁷ To his credit, Shanley demonstrates remarkable skill in the theatrical use of flashback and scene overlapping as his drama alternates from Florence to France to Rome; back to France, then back again to Florence. The transitions work seamlessly even when there are simultaneous conversations taking place from completely different time periods between Cellini and Duke Cosimo, and Cellini and Pope Clement. Shanley's play does not observe the theatrical unities adhered to by Mayer, but the *leitmotif* of the artist-patron relationship creates the thread that weaves the scenes together. Shanley's obvious personal identification with the plight of the artist was, for the most part, credited favorably by the critics as being at the heart of the brilliance of the scene between Pope Clement and Cellini (cited partially above in reference to the mirror as symbol):

The scene between Clement and Cellini is a marvelous one, touching and funny, dramatically pivotal, thematically crucial—Mr. Shanley has lessons to impart

⁵⁶⁶ See "Peter Shaffer's 'Amadeus' Chicago Shakespeare: Sept 6," Chicago News Desk for *BroadwayWorld.com*, 15 Aug. 2008, 30 July 2008
<<http://www.broadwayworld.com/viewcolumn.cfm?colid=30586>>

⁵⁶⁷ John Simon, "Brush With Fame."

about the propriety of arts patronage—and full of the highfalutin sentiment that Mr. Shanley, at his best, deploys with moving eloquence.⁵⁶⁸

Unlike the case with Mayer, however, one does not need to rely exclusively on the play's script for direct evidence of the playwright's identification with his subject. In Shanley's case, his self-identification with Cellini has been declared openly on various occasions: "I love the autobiography and the Symonds translation because I feel it's, in many ways, the birth of the New York voice. Cellini speaks in cadences I knew in the Bronx as a child. And his madness as an artist is unsettlingly familiar to me."⁵⁶⁹ In fact, the play is dedicated "to New York City, my Florence."⁵⁷⁰ One can only imagine how much stronger that sense of affinity with Cellini's "cadences" would have been if Shanley had read the Bondanellas' recent translation as opposed to Symonds's translation which, while it underwent many reprintings, did not change significantly from the Victorian-era version of 1888. Shanley had already been working on adapting the Symonds translation of the *Vita* well before the Bondanellas' *My Life* was published in 2002. Just to cite one example where the Bondanellas' translation more closely reflects the *arguzia* of Cellini's original is the comic necromancy scene. The entire episode turns on the use of scatological references and humor, hence, Cellini's consistent reference to the Coliseum as the Culiseo.⁵⁷¹ None of the widely used English translations (neither Symonds, nor Cust, nor MacDonnell, nor Bull) attempted to replicate Cellini's word play in this episode. It took over two hundred and fifty years for an English translation to

⁵⁶⁸ Weber, "When Rage and Pride Illuminate." See also Elyse Sommer: "The popes, kings and dukes who were the tastemakers of the Renaissance and held the purse strings that controlled the artists' output weren't too different from producers and grant givers in the year 2001. Cellini's confrontation with Pope Clement (David Chandler) is a priceless interchange during which the [*sic*] Clement asks Cellini to explain his ambition."

⁵⁶⁹ John Patrick Shanley, e-mail to author, 7 July 2008.

⁵⁷⁰ Shanley 3.

⁵⁷¹ Cellini 232-238 (I, Lxiv). In note 9 to page 232, Bellotto also observes that "*culiseo* nel significato di 'deretano' è attestato ad es. nelle *Sei giornate* dell' Aretino."

faithfully mirror Cellini's punning by using the name Culosseum, as the Bondanellas did.⁵⁷² As for Shanley's identification with Cellini's "madness," one gets the sense that Shanley is using this term in much the same way that Vasari used '*terribilità*' to describe the artistic fervor of Filippo Brunelleschi: "Molti sono creati dalla natura piccoli di persona e di fattezze, che hanno l'animo pieno di tanta grandezza et il cuore di sì smisurata terribilità, che se non cominciano cose difficili e quasi impossibili, e quelle non rendono finite con maraviglia di chi le vede, mai non danno requie alla vita loro [...]."⁵⁷³ Certainly the idea of remaking Cellini's *Vita* as "a fairly straightforward, realistic comedy-drama and a hip, stylized, anti-naturalistic entertainment with absurdist choruses, dead men summoned back to life, lots of playing up to the audience"⁵⁷⁴ qualifies as something difficult, and some might argue, almost impossible.

John Simon's characterization alone would be enough to answer the question regarding the novelty of Shanley's *Cellini*, but there is another area of originality for which the playwright deserves credit. Shanley goes a long way with the theatrical dramatization of the process of writing the story of one's life. As mentioned earlier, his decision to stage the creative process of writing prompted Shanley to create dual roles for Reg Rogers—the role of Cellini-artist and the role of Cellini-implicit author. And this is where the play experienced its greatest challenges. But the concept of theatricalizing the specularity that characterizes the act of writing was a bold and unique idea of Shanley's. Whether the 'mirror episode' of Cellini's autobiography was the inspiration for Shanley's use of it as symbol is uncertain. Although the mirror does not appear repeatedly in the *Vita* as it does in Shanley's play, there is a certain symmetry between the way Cellini

⁵⁷² See Bondanellas 109-112 and their explanatory note regarding this usage on 408.

⁵⁷³ Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite*, 30 Oct. 2008 <<http://biblio.cribecu.sns.it/vasari/consultazione/index.html>>.

⁵⁷⁴ Simon, "Brush With Fame."

uses it to tell a story about his father's desire to pursue his passion for music (a story that allegedly took place before the artist was even born)⁵⁷⁵ and the way Cellini later recounts his own struggles with the capricious "wheel of Fortune."

Lorenzo de' Medici and Piero his son, who had a great liking for him, perceived later on that he [Cellini's father] was devoting himself wholly to the fife, and was neglecting his fine engineering talent and his beautiful art. So they had him removed from that post. My father took this very ill, and it seemed to him that they had done him a great despite. Yet he immediately resumed his art, and fashioned a mirror, about a cubit in diameter, out of bone and ivory, with figures and foliage of great finish and design. The mirror was in the form of a wheel. In the middle was the looking-glass; around it were seven circular pieces, on which were the Seven Virtues, carved and joined of ivory and black bone. The whole mirror, together with the Virtues, was placed in equilibrium, so that when the wheel turned, all the Virtues moved, and they had weights at their feet which kept them upright. Possessing some acquaintance with the Latin tongue, he put a legend in Latin round his looking-glass, to this effect—"Whithersoever the wheel of Fortune turns, Virtue stands firm upon her feet:" *Rota sum: semper, quoquo me verto, stat Virtus*. A little while after this he obtained his place again among the fifers.⁵⁷⁶

Just as Benvenuto finds a way to channel his talents by writing when he found himself "impedito" from practicing his art by Cosimo, so, too, Cellini's father finds a way to make his own virtue stand "firm upon her feet," when he felt unjustly prevented from practicing his true calling of music by Lorenzo 'il Magnifico.' It is no coincidence that a "looking-glass" was at the center of Giovanni Cellini's beautiful invention since it was a common allegorical symbol of the times.⁵⁷⁷ For Shanley, as we have seen, the mirror takes on the Socratic symbolism of promoting self-knowledge in his protagonist.

⁵⁷⁵ Cellini 25 (I, v): "Se bene alcune di queste cose furno innanzi ch'io nascessi, ricordandomi d'esse, non l'ho volute lasciare indietro."

⁵⁷⁶ Symonds 7-8. I have chosen the Symonds translation here since this is the one that Shanley used for his adaptation.

⁵⁷⁷ See Melchior-Bonnet 136: "In Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, a guide to allegorical symbols used in art, architecture, and books that was first published in 1593, the mirror accompanied allegories of wisdom, prudence, and truth according to customs of usage more than a century old. The personification of sight, the exact perception of reality, also carried a mirror, which was becoming a symbol of the intellect, and sometimes a compass to indicate the operations of geometry. In Italy and in Spain, the figure of Philosophy was represented holding a mirror, an allusion to the Socratic slogan, the reflection of the mirror thus designating the mental process of reflection."

Clement tells Cellini that he “can look in the mirror” and “see that other man” as a way to recognize and “step away” from that which is destructive in his life. Cellini then immediately commands the Boy, his scribe, to “look in the mirror.”⁵⁷⁸ The Boy, as the one who is committing Cellini’s life to paper, asks questions of clarification as he writes: “Were you [a liar]?”⁵⁷⁹ And Cellini answers “Yes!” to him after just having said the opposite to Clement in the Boy’s presence. Shanley’s scribe represents a living mirror who holds Cellini’s reflection up to him as the artist formulates how he wants to portray his life. The Boy symbolizes the protagonist’s process of self-reflection and self-judgment personified. The Boy is the true mirror.

Man, according to Plato, must care for the soul that constitutes his essence. Like the eye, the soul must have a reflection in order to see itself. Like the eye, the soul cannot see itself unaided. To study himself, Alcibiades couldn’t be satisfied with the mirror that Cratylus, the follower of Heracleitus in Plato’s dialogues, used, where only a replica appears—a substitute for his forms and colors, but lacking both voice and thought. Thus the true mirror, loyal, constant, alive, is the one presented by the lover or friend who offers his eyes and his own soul as mirrors. Socrates and Alcibiades constitute living mirrors for each other, mirrors in which they discover much more than the mirror image of Cratylus could have told them.⁵⁸⁰

It is through this multi-layered game of specularity that Shanley captured the act of writing on stage. Considering the subject matter, it was almost impossible *not* to have the play appear to be a bit too image-conscious.

III.4 Benvenuto goes to Hollywood: *The Affairs of Cellini*

It is the Sixteenth Century ~ Florence, fairest of all Italian cities, the hotbed of intrigue, passion, despotism and murder. Yet, in this poisoned, perfumed atmosphere, Art and Romance flourished ~

⁵⁷⁸ Shanley 25.

⁵⁷⁹ Shanley 23.

⁵⁸⁰ Melchior-Bonnet 105- 106.

*A de' Medici is on the throne ~ the blood stained crown rests on the head of Alessandro Duke of Florence, Monarch of all he surveys ~*⁵⁸¹

With trumpet flourishes and alternating musical sequences—romantic and sentimental as background for the first frame caption above; magisterial and slightly foreboding as accompaniment for the second—Gregory La Cava's 1934 film, *The Affairs of Cellini*, opens with an air of *gravitas* that invites the audience to believe that they are about to witness a piece of Renaissance history. For those who did not already know that the movie was based on Mayer's comic play, *The Firebrand*, any illusions about historical verisimilitude are quickly dispelled by the comic visual non sequitur that immediately follows their having read the two captions above. Our first glimpse of Duke Alessandro, "monarch of all he surveys," finds the Duke preening in a small mirror after enjoying several fragrant whiffs from a perfume stick, a brief glimpse of what will become a constant ridiculing of the courtly fixation on appearances. His costume is regal and elegant but 'l'abito non fa il monaco' since it is Frank Morgan, once again, who was chosen to reprise his very successful Broadway role as Duke Alessandro. And even though *The Affairs of Cellini* was considered the "film transcription" of Mayer's play, La Cava clearly had some ideas of his own about how he wanted to modify Mayer's script in order to heighten the comic effect and give the film his own interpretation.⁵⁸² The director's previous work with W.C. Fields in a pair of films made him no stranger to

⁵⁸¹ *The Affairs of Cellini*, dir. Gregory La Cava, perf. Fredric March, Constance Bennett, Frank Morgan, and Fay Wray, Twentieth Century Fox, 1934. These two frames appear immediately following the opening credits and before the opening scene of the film.

⁵⁸² Bess Meredyth is listed in the opening credits of *The Affairs of Cellini* as having written the screenplay, immediately followed by the words: "from the play by Edwin Justus Mayer." See also Mordaunt Hall, rev. of *The Affairs of Cellini*, by Gregory La Cava, *New York Times*, 6 Sept. 1934, 30 July 2008 <<http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=980CE2DA103EE53ABC4E53DFBF66838F629EDE>>.

comedy and John Gillett credits La Cava's background as a cartoonist with "the prevalence of sight gags and beautifully timed visual 'business'."⁵⁸³

Rather than beginning the film with the somewhat playful scene between the two lovers, as in *The Firebrand*, La Cava opts for immediately establishing the buffoonery of the Duke and the hypocrisy of the courtly world where appearances reign supreme. The Council is in session and the Court secretary is reading a long list of those to be hanged as the Duke listens disinterestedly.

Duke. Yeah,uh...Bring me the list. There's not enough rope in all of Florence to dispose of these villains. We'll declare a holiday and hang them in the piazza. (*As he looks at the names of those to be hanged.*) Bronzio...Bronzio. Is that the Borgian welp? Uhmmm. We cannot hang a Borgia.

Polverino. There are other means...

Duke. Yes, so there are, Polverino. We'll put hot eggs under his armpits. We'll soak his feet in salt water and allow the goats to lick them, after which his ears will be severed. If he survives our hospitality, there are other pleasures with which we can regale him. (*To the court page.*) You have our permission to withdraw. (*He signs the official decree to hang the individuals whose names have just been read and hands the list to Ottaviano.*) There, Ottaviano, are some necks for you to play with. (*To the Council.*) The Council is dismissed.

Court secretary. There are other matters, your Excellency.

Duke. What other matters?

Court secretary. The case of Benvenuto Cellini.

Duke. What, Cellini again? What's he done now?

Ottaviano. Another murder your Excellency.

Duke. Who is it this time?

Ottaviano. A nobleman in Venice.

Duke. Venice? Why does he have to kill Venetians? Haven't we got enough people right here? This time he must be punished.

Ottaviano. There's only one punishment for him, your Excellency.

Duke. (*Irritated.*) Don't prompt me! I know what I'm doing. Just because you happen to have a personal grievance against the man.

Ottaviano. Oh, this isn't a personal matter, your Excellency.

Duke. Oh, I know...Because he's been clever enough to outwit you at times. You, you, you, you, eh...(*Unable to remember what he meant to*

⁵⁸³ See *World Film Directors*, ed. John Wakeman, vol. 1 (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1987), reprinted in *The Buffalo Film Seminars*, 7 Sept. 2004, 30 July 2008 <<http://csac.buffalo.edu/godfrey.pdf>>.

say.) Why doesn't he tend to his own business? After all, there's no artist like him. Why does he have to go around murdering people?

Ottaviano. There's only one punishment for him, your Excellency.

Duke. (*Angrily.*) There you go again! Am I the Duke of Florence or am I not the Duke of Florence? Are you the Duke of Florence or is Cellini the Duke of Florence? Who is the Duke of Florence? I'd like to know.

(*Banging his staff on the floor for emphasis.*)

Page. (*Trumpet flourishes as he announces loudly to the Court.*) His Excellency, the Duchess of Florence! His Excellency, the Duchess of Florence! His Excellency, the Duchess of Florence! (*The Duchess makes her grand entrance in the Court amidst a flourish of trumpets and triumphant magisterial music.*)⁵⁸⁴

The question of who is in charge in this de' Medici Court is thus defined before the Duchess even opens her mouth. Apart from her beautifully timed entrance, she is dressed as if the costume designer (Gwen Wakeling) had used Bronzino's famous portrait of Duchess Eleonora of Toledo to outfit her. Constance Bennett, who plays the part of the Duchess, proudly wears a pearl necklace that is strikingly similar to the one featured prominently in Bronzino's portrait, *Duchess Eleonora with One of Her Sons*, as well as in Cellini's *Vita*.⁵⁸⁵ Following the example of *The Firebrand*, the movie conflates several historical characters into one. The real Duke Alessandro's wife, Margaret of Austria, was only about fourteen years of age when they were married, so she would have been perceived as too young to represent the kind of strong, seductive woman that La Cava wanted to portray. The director's duchess is, therefore, simply called "The Duchess" or "my Lady" in *The Affairs of Cellini*, without any reference to her name, and she is paired with Duke Alessandro. The desire to have the 'leading man' (Fredric March) be

⁵⁸⁴ I have transcribed these lines, as well as all subsequent dialogue from the movie, directly from a copy of the film, *The Affairs of Cellini*; the stage directions are also from my own transcription, not from a published screenplay. La Cava was also notorious for working without a script. See Gary Morris, "Forgotten Master: The Career of Gregory La Cava," *Bright Lights Film Journal* May 2004, 30 July 2008 <<http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/44/lacava.htm>>.

⁵⁸⁵ See Pope-Hennessy, *Cellini* 223-224 for several images of the portrait as well as Pope-Hennessy's discussion of the 'pearl episode' from the *Vita*: "This is probably the large pearl necklace reaching down over the chest that is shown in Bronzino's portrait of Eleonora of Toledo in the Uffizi." (224)

portrayed in his prime (age 35), dictated that Alessandro, not Cosimo, be the Duke *du jour*, as in the play, since portraying Cellini's relationship with Cosimo would have shifted his age to 45.

La Cava's opening scene skillfully sets up the romantic intrigue between the Duchess and Cellini by having her become enamored with the artist before she has even seen him—a consequence of hearing the story of another woman's infatuation with him. The Duchess insists on being present to hear the complaint of an offense “more grievous than murder” lodged against the artist by a Venetian nobleman, Cavalier Bodini, who acts as the representative for the “youngest daughter of the House of Baci” (pun intended). The young woman is brought in to the Court by her emissary to describe how she was seduced by the artist “with words such as only Venus and Adonis might have spoken on their bridal night.” Once again, Cellini is portrayed as a poet with the ladies, as he was in Mayer's *The Firebrand*. As the young woman recounts her experience, the camera alternates between her face, as she relives the pleasure of the event in its retelling, and that of the Duchess who listens with an equally enraptured expression. Cavalier Bodini's demand for an apology is retracted when the young woman abruptly changes her mind and decides that she has been forced into telling her story and that “it's [her] affair” and that Cellini “can come over [her] garden wall any time he wants to.” Bodini apologizes for the intrusion and the two leave in a hurry. The Duchess is left baffled by the fact that the “ugly squat little goldsmith” she presumed to be Cellini “holds such fascination for women.” When Ottaviano informs her that she's been dealing with Cellini's apprentice, not with the artist himself, this makes her both angry and curious to know exactly who this man Cellini is. The Duke decides that this incident constitutes the last straw and that

Cellini should be hanged. The Duchess ‘suggests’ to him, much to the dismay of Ottaviano, that “perhaps it would be better to temper justice with wisdom” and wait until Cellini has finished the golden service plates that he had promised the Duchess because they “wouldn’t want to be outshone by the Duchess of Milan” by not having the plates ready in time for her visit. The hanging can wait, in her view, because “after all, he’s murdered no one of great importance.” The Duke initially agrees with the Duchess’s ‘suggestion’—“Remember, Alessandro, you have made your decision!”—, but he changes his mind upon discovering that Cellini has had a street fight with his nephew, Maffio, and some of his cohorts. Rather than killing Maffio, though, in this version of *The Firebrand*, Cellini has reportedly shoved Maffio down into the filth of the street and then held his face in it while forcing him to “swallow two live flies” as punishment for having previously insulted Cellini by calling him a “detestable little fly.” The Duke is determined even more now to hang Cellini, “Duchess or no Duchess,” and he and his entourage prepare to go to Cellini’s workshop to arrest him.

La Cava’s modifications to the play’s opening scene not only heighten the suspense and intrigue of the first meeting between Cellini and the Duchess, but also place greater emphasis onto the theme of the hypocrisy of the Court, particularly its obsession with appearances. It is not clear whether these changes were written into the screenplay by Bess Meredyth because La Cava’s scripts “were subjected to considerable manipulation during shooting. Situations, lines of dialogue and gestures were freely invented with a view to creating very idiosyncratic characters.”⁵⁸⁶ Given his headstrong personality, one can safely assume that it was La Cava’s opinions on staging matters that

⁵⁸⁶ Roger McNiven, cited in *The Buffalo Film Seminars*. See note 583 above.

ruled the day.⁵⁸⁷ The other essential change introduced by La Cava's approach to Mayer's play is the greater emphasis placed on his version of the Duchess as the central character around which all the dramatic action revolves. In fact, if the movie had not been based on a very successful play (which in turn was based on a translation of Cellini's *Vita*), the title of the film could have just as easily been *The Affairs of the Duchess of Florence* (a fictitious Duchess, of course, given that the real Duchess Eleonora was not fond of Cellini.)⁵⁸⁸ Cellini's love interest in Angela is still present in the film, but it has become peripheral. La Cava is clearly more interested in the Duchess-Cellini pairing than the Cellini-Angela pairing. Even in the opening credits, it is Constance Bennett and Fredric March who get 'top billing' in larger type than Frank Morgan and Fay Wray (the Duke and Angela) at the bottom of the screen. Given La Cava's interest in strong female characters, it was clearly the role of the Duchess that attracted him as much, if not more, than the character of Cellini; notwithstanding the advertising on the film's dust jacket for "history's boldest lover...most daring swordsman!"⁵⁸⁹ This type of advertising was meant to capitalize on the enormous success of the 'cloak and dagger' movies of the same era. Douglas Fairbanks made a series of these films in the 1920's: *The Mark of Zorro* (1920), *The Three Musketeers* (1921), *Robin Hood* (1922), *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924) and *The Gaucho* (1927).⁵⁹⁰

Another reason these critics [disciples of *Cahiers* and of Sarris] misread La Cava is the fact that he is as much a "woman's director" as George Cukor, and many of his best films—*Bed of Roses*, *My Man Godfrey*, *Stage Door*, *Primrose Path*—show the woman (sometimes a group of women) as the emotional and

⁵⁸⁷ Gary Morris, "Forgotten Master."

⁵⁸⁸ Cellini 684-692 (II, Lxxxiii-Lxxxiv).

⁵⁸⁹ *The Affairs of Cellini*, dust jacket.

⁵⁹⁰ Mick LaSalle, *Dangerous Men: Pre-Code Hollywood and the Birth of the Modern Man* (New York: St. Martin's, 2002) 5.

often moral center, with callous or unevolved men having to be shown the way to feeling by the stronger woman.⁵⁹¹

In the case of *The Affairs of Cellini*, the Duchess is not the “moral center” of the film, but she is definitely the strong center of power. And she uses that power to satisfy sexual desires that make those of Cellini seem rather innocent by comparison. After the opening scene, La Cava follows the general plot lines of the play with the partner-swapping and farcical twists and turns of the original. But the movie expands the use of sexual double entendres, particularly by Ottaviano who is well aware of the Duchess’s efforts to make Cellini her latest conquest: “**Ottaviano.** (*To Cavalier Travigi from Milan in front of the Duke and the Duchess*) Perhaps the Cavalier Travigi is unacquainted with the fact my Lady is a patroness of all the arts. A great deal of Cellini’s work in the future is to be accomplished right here in the palace under my Lady’s supervision.”⁵⁹² Given that this movie was “one of the last Pre-Codes,”⁵⁹³ there was no censorship of the overtly sexual material. But it was likely considered one of the tamer movies of the era.

Conventional wisdom says that before the taboo-busting ‘60s, all deviance in American filmmaking was suppressed. No cussing, no whores, no queers. Anyone who’s looked a little harder at film history knows this is far from true. Until 1934, when church and women’s groups and other right-wing self-styled watchdogs forced the industry to codify moral do’s and don’t (the Hays code), Hollywood films were rife with left-wing sentiments, anti-capitalist rhetoric, images of the politicized poor, crime, sex, drugs, nudity, deviances of every description, and—yes—even the words “damn!” and “hell!”⁵⁹⁴

In keeping with this trend, La Cava could have introduced many additional risqué scenes from Cellini’s *Vita* if he had wanted to veer even further away from the script of *The*

⁵⁹¹ Gary Morris, “Forgotten Master.”

⁵⁹² *The Affairs of Cellini*, banquet scene.

⁵⁹³ LaSalle 181.

⁵⁹⁴ Gary Morris, “Public Enemy: Warner Bros. in the Pre-Code Era,” *Bright Lights Film Journal* Sept. 1996, 30 July 2008 <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/17/04b_warner.html>.

Firebrand.⁵⁹⁵ There is no nudity in *The Affairs of Cellini*, not even a passionate kiss on camera between any of the lovers, but there is a scene in which we are given to believe that the Duchess and Cellini have just consummated their passion. The camera cuts away to outside her door, then returns to find the Duchess lying back comfortably on her couch, with Cellini by her side. She now refers to Cellini as “my love” and makes it clear that since he is now ‘officially’ her lover, he can have no others.

Duchess. Benvenuto, my love, give me the book [his book of poetry]. You’ll have no further need of it. Henceforth, your readings shall be confined to me.

Cellini. Yes, my Lady.

Duchess. It’s just as well you know, my Benvenuto, that it is the Duchess of Florence who dismisses her loves; her loves never dismiss the Duchess of Florence. Bring me that urn, the silver one. (*Cellini goes to fetch the urn.*) Does my beloved know what is contained therein?

Cellini. It was designed for rose leaves, my Lady.

Duchess. A long time ago, there was a young and handsome soldier. He was as naughty as he was handsome. I have preserved his heart in there. You would never deceive me, would you, my Benvenuto?

Cellini. Would a man be fool enough to throw away a priceless jewel?⁵⁹⁶

La Cava’s Cellini is portrayed as a cunning braggadocio who is quick to fashion a tall tale for any occasion (especially to avoid his own hanging), and prone to waxing poetic whenever he attempts to woo the ladies. He carries his little gold-encrusted poetry book with him in case a propitious occasion should arise. And while the Duke complains about Cellini “murdering people,” there is never any indication that he is truly capable of such a deed. There is only one moment when we see Cellini get physical with anyone. It occurs right after the Duchess has provoked him by saying that “the tragedy of all great ladies is to discover that the men with the most exaggerated reputations make the poorest

⁵⁹⁵ See Gary Morris, “Forgotten Master”: “During the pre-Code era, La Cava—who never avoided controversial subjects—created some of the raciest tableaux of the time, particularly in *The Half-Naked Truth*, where Lupe Velez’s exposed flesh and bump-and-grind dancing represent a high point of comic vulgarity on the screen.”

⁵⁹⁶ *The Affairs of Cellini*, scene in the Duchess’s boudoir.

lovers.” Cellini has just gone to great lengths to get past the palace guards and scale the palace walls in order to have his *rendezvous* with the Duchess (at her instigation), only to be rebuffed with insults and the Duchess’s command that he “give [her] the key and go.” Cellini’s rage overcomes him and he slaps the Duchess. The Duchess swoons and Cellini carries her off to her bed, but she wakes up immediately upon hearing a loud crash in the adjoining room. Angela, who is having her tryst with the Duke (unbeknownst to the Duchess), has dropped a tray. We’re reminded immediately after Cellini’s slap that this is a ‘screwball comedy’ because the Duchess’s ever-jealous mind shifts immediately into high gear as she goes to find out what her husband is doing; thereby proving that her ‘swoon’ had been feigned for Cellini’s benefit. As the Duchess goes to spy on the Duke, both Angela and Cellini wind up encountering each other on the terrace since they’ve both been forced to hide there. Cellini seizes the opportunity to flee with Angela and take her to his mountain hideaway.

Screwball, (Screw-ball [skrue’bôl] Noun, Slang, meaning unbalanced, erratic, irrational, unconventional), became a popular slang word in the 1930s. It was applied to films where everything was a juxtaposition: educated and uneducated, rich and poor, intelligent and stupid, honest and dishonest, and most of all male and female. When two people fell in love, they did not simply surrender to their feelings, they battled it out. They lied to one another, often assuming indifferent personas toward each other. They often employed hideous tricks on each other, until finally after running out of inventions, fall into each others [*sic*] arms. It was fossilized comedy, physical and often painful, but mixed with the highest level of wit and sophistication, depending wholly on elegant and inventive writing.⁵⁹⁷

La Cava’s film had the advantage of a witty and sophisticated play on which to base its plot, characters and dialogue. But *The Affairs of Cellini* was made even wittier

⁵⁹⁷ Michael Mills, “Screwball Comedy,” *ModernTimes.com*, reprinted in *The Buffalo Film Seminars* (see note 581 above). See also David R. Shumway, “Screwball Comedies: Constructing Romance, Mystifying Marriage,” *Cinema Journal*, 30.4 (1991): 7-23. Shumway demonstrates “how screwball comedies typically construct the viewer as subject of their romance so that he or she must feel marriage as the thing desired.” (7)

and more sophisticated than the play by Bess Meredyth's screenplay (and La Cava's inevitable modifications to her script) and by the very funny and beautifully timed 'sight gags' which were La Cava's trademark. The film received four Academy Award Nominations including Best Actor for Frank Morgan.⁵⁹⁸ And while it is usually Frank Morgan who is credited with "the brunt of the comedy"⁵⁹⁹ on account of his over-the-top buffoonish portrayal of Duke Alessandro, it is Constance Bennett as the Duchess who is given the best comic lines and most acerbic wit of the film. In one scene, everyone is seated at a sumptuous banquet at the palace and a variety of foods is being brought in by the servants. At one point, a gelatin mold in the shape of a corpulent man is placed in front of the Duchess. As she eyes it with a knife in hand and a glimmer of mischief in her eyes, she says: "Mmmmm, jelly...How like the men of our time." She then proceeds to cut off the head and offer a piece to Cellini (who, supposedly, is about to have his head severed as well.)⁶⁰⁰ With a "half-wit" husband like Alessandro as "monarch of all he surveys," the Duchess is presented to us as justifiably cynical of the men around her. But La Cava is just as quick to point out her insensitivity and that she is capable of out-doing Cellini in the fickleness of her desires. When Cellini reminds the Duchess of their romantic interlude of the night before, the Duchess responds: "Because venison pleased one's palate the night before, it does not follow that it pleases one today." Roger McNiven's observations regarding La Cava's film, *Bed of Roses*, are also relevant to *The Affairs of Cellini*: "what could have been a trite tale of a bad girl's reputation became a scathing comedy of manners mocking every level of society. This is where La Cava's greatness lies: in balancing the absurdities of social extremes in comic and dramatic

⁵⁹⁸ *The Affairs of Cellini*, dust jacket.

⁵⁹⁹ Mordaunt Hall, review of *The Affairs of Cellini*.

⁶⁰⁰ *The Affairs of Cellini*, final scene.

contexts, with unexpected nuances of feeling.”⁶⁰¹ In the case of *The Affairs of Cellini*, however, the tale is expanded to include the reputation of both a ‘bad boy’ (Cellini) and a ‘bad girl’ (the Duchess). As in the case of *The Firebrand*, La Cava’s film is very loosely based on Cellini’s life story as a pretext for a ‘battle of the sexes’ comedy with particular emphasis on the theme of female sexuality.

Whether La Cava had any first-hand knowledge of Cellini’s *Vita* is uncertain. But the element of self-identification with the world of the artist is apparent in several of the director’s other films.⁶⁰² La Cava’s father was a musician from Calabria. And La Cava himself wanted to be a painter, having studied at both the Chicago Institute of Art and the New York Students’ League.⁶⁰³ Like Mayer, La Cava had a Cellinesque personality that made him very difficult to work with.

His personality was so powerful and his working methods so unusual that by all accounts he regularly alienated everyone from the script girl to the studio head. During the 1930s, he never made more than three films in a row at one studio. His strength and his downfall were in attacking with gusto the single most sacred object in the Hollywood production matrix: the script.⁶⁰⁴

Working without a script made producers and studio executives very nervous since it made it difficult to plan budgets and program schedules. La Cava “stuck to his off-the-cuff guns. Results: fewer and fewer film assignments for him—then none. [...] So he mixed his exotic fuels with more mundane spirits and brooded himself into oblivion. [...] La Cava was a man out of his time—a precursor of the New Wave directors of

⁶⁰¹ Cited in *Buffalo Film Seminars* (see note 583 above).

⁶⁰² See Gary Morris, “Forgotten Master”: “In *Stage Door*, it’s a community of equals, artistic temperaments bound by a sense of struggle with life, with self-expression, and each other. In *The Half-Naked Truth*, it’s another “artistic” environment—this time a broken-down circus, cheap and exciting, with the possibility of success always near but rarely realized, and again a creative community of equals: artists and performers.”

⁶⁰³ *The Buffalo Film Seminars* (see note 583 above).

⁶⁰⁴ Gary Morris, “Forgotten Master.”

Europe.”⁶⁰⁵ As with Cellini, the misunderstood, headstrong La Cava was gradually marginalized from his profession. He drowned his frustrations in alcohol and ended up spending time in sanitariums on several occasions. The creative method that the director employed with such positive results—a “fresh, spontaneous quality to [the actors’] performances”—was the same thing that made producers refuse to work with him after two or three films.⁶⁰⁶ Or to quote Shanley’s Cellini: “It create[d] and destroy[ed] with the same hand.” Unlike La Cava, however, Cellini did not become a “forgotten master.” Adaptations of his *Vita* continue to be performed and adapted into even newer variations on old themes.⁶⁰⁷ Whether this continued interest in Cellini is solely attributable to his *Vita* or not is a question that will be addressed in the next section.

III.5 Cellini as part of “The Italian Renaissance, Made in the USA”?⁶⁰⁸

The Affairs of Cellini is not the only cinematic adaptation of Cellini’s autobiography, but it was the most commercially successful.⁶⁰⁹ *Sei bambine ed il Perseo*, by Giovacchino Forzano as both writer and director, came out in 1940 with Augusto Di Giovanni playing the part of Cellini. The character of Cellini also managed to find his way into other films in which he played a supporting role, as opposed to the lead. But one gets the sense that the Hollywood fascination with Cellini had a hand in encouraging these other films as well. Guido Brignone’s *Lorenzino de’ Medici* of 1935 was released

⁶⁰⁵ Frank Capra quoted in *World Film Directors*, in *The Buffalo Film Seminars*.

⁶⁰⁶ Gary Morris, “Forgotten Master.”

⁶⁰⁷ The Metropolitan Opera of New York revived Hector Berlioz’s 1838 comic opera *Benvenuto Cellini* in December of 2003. And just last year, a futuristic version of Berlioz’s opera was staged to mixed reviews at the Salzburg Festival. See George Jahn, “Production of Benvenuto Cellini Shines,” *The Washington Post* 10 Aug. 2007, 30 July 2008 <<http://washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/08/10>>.

⁶⁰⁸ Anthony Molho, “The Italian Renaissance, Made in the USA,” *Imagined Histories: American historians interpret the past*, eds. Anthony Molho, Gordon S. Wood (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1998) 263-294.

⁶⁰⁹ See Gallucci, “Pop Culture” 204: “[...] *The Affairs of Cellini* was a commercial success. It was listed in *Fame: The Box Office Check-Up* as one of the top grossing box office pictures for the year 1934.”

internationally with the alternate title *Magnificent Rogue* in 1936 and was labeled “a credit to the rejuvenated Italian film industry” by the *New York Times*.⁶¹⁰ Alexander Moissi played the title role with Raimondo Van Riel playing the part of Cellini.⁶¹¹ Another such movie with Cellini providing comic relief in a supporting role was *Il Sacco di Roma* of 1953 (alternately titled *The Barbarians* and *The Pagans*).⁶¹² In the 1960’s, Cellini was again the lead in *Il Magnifico Avventuriero* (1963) with Brett Halsey playing the artist;⁶¹³ and more recently (1990), Cellini’s *Vita* was the subject of a three-part television miniseries (RAIDUE) directed by Giacomo Battiato, *Una vita scellerata*, which was later shortened to a feature-length film and re-released in Italian theatres.⁶¹⁴

Hoping to ride the wave of success of La Cava’s Hollywood film was also the Broadway operetta *The Firebrand of Florence* (1945).⁶¹⁵ With Mayer doing an adaptation of his play as a libretto, Kurt Weill’s musical score and Ira Gershwin’s lyrics, one would have imagined an instant success, but this adaptation was “staggeringly unsuccessful.”⁶¹⁶ Joel Galand makes a convincing case for the question of genre having played a significant role in the show’s failure.

⁶¹⁰ H.T.S., rev. of *Lorenzino de’ Medici*, dir. Guido Brignone. *New York Times on the Web*, 14 April 1936, 18 Aug. 2008

<<http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9B0CEED81430E13BBC4C52DFB266838D629EDE>>.

See also Hal Erickson, as quoted in the *New York Times* overview of the film, 18 Aug. 2008.

<<http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/235658/Lorenzino-de-Medici/overview>>.

⁶¹¹ *The Internet Movie Database*, 18 Aug. 2008 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0026648/>.

⁶¹² Hal Erickson, movie synopsis of *Il Sacco di Roma* at *All Movie Guide*, reprinted at *Amazon.com*

<<http://www.amazon.ca/Barbarians-Full-Screen-Ferruccio-Cerio/dp/product-description/B000065AZ8>>.

⁶¹³ *The Internet Movie Database*, 18 Aug. 2008 <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0057276/>>.

⁶¹⁴ *The British Film Institute*, 18 Aug. 2008 <<http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/413554>>.

⁶¹⁵ Gallucci, “Pop Culture,” 207.

⁶¹⁶ Joel Galand, “Reconstructing a Broadway Operetta: The Case of Kurt Weill’s *Firebrand of Florence*,” *Notes* 2nd ser. 56.2 (1999): 331-339. Before Weill and Gershwin had been given the assignment, a musical version of *The Firebrand* had been planned with Vernon Duke and John LaTouche as songwriters. See Sam Zolotow, “Plans *Firebrand* in Musical Form: Paul Feigay to Present Show at Easter—Duke, LaTouche to Supply the Songs,” *New York Times on the Web* 6 Oct. 1943, 18 Aug. 2008

<<http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=FA0717FB3F5C167B93C4A9178BD95F478485F9&scp=110&sq=%22Edwin%20Justus%20Mayer%22&st=cse>>.

Humor in *The Firebrand* derives largely from the deliberate anachronisms that Gershwin's lyrics and Edwin Mayer's book introduce into their tale of the Medicis. Critics—and presumably audiences as well—were confused by the juxtaposition of an operatically styled score, a historical book, and humor that ranged from subtle allusion to near slapstick. In the earlier Broadway costume operettas that *Firebrand* superficially resembles, such as *Rio Rita* (1927) and *The Vagabond King* (1925), the principal romantic plot was kept rigorously separate from those elements of comic relief furnished by the secondary dancing couple. *The Firebrand* subverts the generic expectations of an operetta audience. That may have contributed to its swift demise, although Mayer's adaptation of his 1924 comedy, despite some charming moments, proved a weak libretto. One expected better from the screenwriter for many a Lubitsch film.⁶¹⁷

According to the critics, the main problem was with Weill's wife, Lotte Lenya, who was miscast in the role of the Duchess, as well as the lackluster libretto.⁶¹⁸ But Galand's emphasis on “generic expectations” is significant, notwithstanding his reference to Mayer's play as an “historical book.” In fact, his assumption that Mayer's book *was* “historical” serves to bolster the argument for confused audience expectations. This remark also begs the question of whether Mayer went against the literary DNA of his original *Firebrand* of twenty years earlier by attempting to ‘historicize’ a text that had never been “documental” from the beginning, by adding ‘historical’ touches—a trial scene in the second act and a final scene set in Fontainebleau.⁶¹⁹ Similar to the problems inherent in the writer directing his own play (as in the case of Shanley), the adapter charged with adapting his own adaptation seems not to have been a prudent idea.

Viewed by many as part grave robber, part vulture, part vampire, fattening himself and his coffers on the works of his betters, the adapter is in a perilous position—for superficially there is some truth in all these charges. [...] The difference between a “translation” and an “adaptation” is really minimal, if there is a difference at all. Many “translators” add, subtract, or alter the original text. Many “adapters” are slavishly faithful to the original. In my judgment, the moment a “translator” begins to search for the right word in English—in *his opinion*—he is actually adapting. I pass over the self-evident requirement upon translator and adapter alike—that they

⁶¹⁷ Galand 332.

⁶¹⁸ Richard Traubner, *Operetta: A Theatrical History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003) 324.

⁶¹⁹ Galand 335-337.

be faithful to the style, intent and spirit of the original. For that is the obvious essence of such work. The purpose of adaptation is not to change the original but, rather to heighten, to render the original in its most effective form. Nevertheless, there is no question that most authors prefer the word “translator” because it suggests a kind of integrity, a faithfulness to the original whereas the word “adapter” admits that changes are being made.⁶²⁰

By not being “slavishly faithful to the original” with *The Firebrand* of 1924, Edwin Justus Mayer embodied that faithfulness to “the style, intent and spirit of the original” that his son, Paul Avila Mayer, would later proclaim as a “self-evident requirement” of the translator and adapter when he found himself defending his role as an adapter of Strindberg’s *The Dance of Death* for a Broadway revival in 1971 against the rewriting of the text by the stars, Viveca Lindfors and Rip Torn. The older Mayer had been clear and direct about his intentions from the outset: “Although I have endeavored to retain the spirit of Cellini and of his times, as revealed in his autobiography, *The Firebrand* is inspirational rather than documental.”⁶²¹ But this declaration of Mayer still does not address the question of whether the success of his adaptation was solely the fruit of his own creative self-identification with Cellini’s *Life*, or whether the play’s success also owed something to the audience’s own identification with Cellini in particular, and the Renaissance in general. We know that it was Marion Spitzer who suggested to Mayer that a play be written about Cellini’s relationship with “one Angelica,” and that Ann MacDonnell’s translation of the *Vita* had been used as the source for that episode; but was it recent circulation of translations of the *Vita*⁶²² and American interest in ‘all things Renaissance’ or simply the

⁶²⁰ Paul Avila Mayer, “Which One Had the Clout,” *New York Times on the Web* 9 May, 1971, 18 August 2008<<http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F20B13F6345F127A93CBA9178ED85F458785F9&scp=79&sq=%22Edwin%20Justus%20Mayer%22&st=cse>>. Italics are Mayer’s.

⁶²¹ Mayer, “Note” unnumbered page.

⁶²² In the “Translator’s Preface” to the third edition of his translation of the *Vita* (January, 1889), Symonds remarks that “two editions of [his] translation of Cellini’s Autobiography, both of them in two volumes, have been exhausted during the space of less than twelve months. The interest taken by the British and

creativity of the author that was responsible for making *The Firebrand* and *The Affairs of Cellini* such resounding successes?

Anthony Molho offers at least one answer to these questions in his insightful analysis of Renaissance studies in America, “The Italian Renaissance, Made in the USA”:

Since the nineteenth century, the Renaissance has held a place of special honor within the larger American view of European history. This view was deeply rooted in the tastes of a wider public, who had often grown attached to the culture of Italy in the Renaissance. For the past nearly two centuries, one of the axioms of historical wisdom in America has been the nexus between the Renaissance and modernity. Americans have always thought of themselves as being modern, their culture standing for change and innovation. For this reason, they have identified in the Renaissance a historical moment which was especially akin—in its tastes, values, and seemingly endless willingness to challenge the moral priorities of the past—to their own society and ideology. The success of Renaissance studies in North American universities—a much greater success than one finds in any postwar European academic tradition—is inexplicable unless one remembers this long-standing, nonscholarly interest.”⁶²³

Molho goes on to provide various examples of this popular identification with the Renaissance in American travel writing throughout the 19th century. One such example is taken from Mrs. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Notes in England and Italy*. The way she describes Florence as “My beautiful Florence! The flower of cities [...],” is not unlike the formulation presented to us in the caption at the beginning of La Cava’s *The Affairs of Cellini*: “Florence, fairest of all Italian cities [...],”⁶²⁴ And while this ‘Renaissance fever’ was not uniformly embraced in America, the ubiquitousness of its presence was even demonstrated by the refutations of it.

Others, in a tradition which extends from Hawthorne through Mark Twain to Henry James himself were more inclined to see the Renaissance as an expression of an oppressive, arbitrary, and tyrannical aristocratic rule. “Who is this Renaissance?” exclaimed Mark Twain, “Where did he come from? Who gave him permission to

American public in this work has induced the publisher to bring out a third edition in one volume and at a cheaper price, whereby it will be placed within the reach of a still larger circle of buyers.” (vii)

⁶²³ Molho 264.

⁶²⁴ Molho 265.

cram the republic with his execrable daubs?” But even in their denunciations, these writers made it clear that the Renaissance would occupy an important place in the American reflection on America’s European past.⁶²⁵

What becomes clear after reviewing the evidence provided by Molho, is that American interest in Cellini as an artifact of that “fairest of all Italian cities,” did not require the stamp of approval of Jacob Burckhardt to “[cement] Cellini’s fame as a thoroughly modern man when, in 1860, he selected the artist as ‘a significant type of the modern spirit.’”⁶²⁶ The process of identification with ideals perceived as being associated with the Italian Renaissance was already well underway in America before Burckhardt was placed on reading lists at American universities.⁶²⁷ And it was not just a phenomenon to be found in popular travel literature. Molho’s examination of the class notes of Charles Evans Hughes, later to become Chief Justice Hughes of the U.S. Supreme Court, offers an interesting look at how this Renaissance-centricity may have begun to inform the teaching of history in America during the late 1800’s.⁶²⁸

Twenty years later [in 1880], when J. L. Diman was teaching the course [on the History of Civilization at Brown University], and one of his prize pupils was Charles Evans Hughes, future chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, the Renaissance was conceived as the key, pivotal moment in the unfolding of that historical process which culminated in the creation of the United States. The “Italian Renaissance,” which in the architecture of Diman’s course occupied the

⁶²⁵ Molho 268.

⁶²⁶ Gallucci “Pop Culture,” 202. See also Molho 270: “But quite beyond and preceding this Burckhardtian, modernizing vision, American historians were also deeply influenced, already during the central decades of the nineteenth and well in to the first decades of the twentieth century, by the favorable, sympathetic assessment of the Renaissance prevalent in nonacademic culture.”

⁶²⁷ Molho 266: “By the 1830s, Dante had become one of the favorite poets of the Boston Brahmins. Angelina La Piana calculated that *The North American Review* from the year of its foundation in 1815 to 1850, and the *American Quarterly Review* (1827-37) published more essays, articles, and notes on Italian literature, art, and history than on those of France, Germany, or any other European country except England. By the 1890s, perhaps in coincidence with Columbus’s fourth centenary, this penchant reached a remarkable intensity.”

⁶²⁸ Molho 268: “A glance at the history of historical instruction in the nineteenth century helps to place this discussion in better perspective. If the experience of Brown University were not unique, it would seem that well before the establishment of the historical profession, and the invention of Western Civilization, the public’s predilections had ensured that the Renaissance would become an integral part of courses on the history of civilization.”

first substantial segment of the second semester, “implied not only revival of letters, but whole transition from medieval to modern times. It was period of a new birth, and hence revolutionary. Certain conditions were required for this change, partly social, and partly political, which were first brought together in Italy.” There followed suggestions for further reading, diligently noted by Hughes in his notebook: Sismondi on the Italian republics, Roscoe on Lorenzo de’ Medici, and, perhaps most remarkably, Burckhardt, available in English translation for less than a year.⁶²⁹

Edwin Justus Mayer, then, in selecting the popular period of the Italian Renaissance as an historical backdrop, succeeded in writing a play that embodied the very idea that Americans commonly associated both with themselves and with fifteenth and sixteenth-century Florence—modernity. At the same time, he “render[ed] the original in its most effective form”⁶³⁰ for the audience of his time by choosing a romantic comedy with farcical elements as a vehicle. Moreover, Mayer’s Cellini evoked a familiar Romantic image that would resonate with his audience—the figure of the anti-authoritarian artist-rebel. Also, in portraying Cellini (accurately) as someone who ‘lived to work’ he touched a chord with the American mindset. The added intrigue of a ‘battle of the sexes’ plot dynamic completed the process of specularity wherein the audience could easily see themselves in the drama of Mayer’s characters. La Cava took the essence of that winning combination and enriched it for the silver screen through his special aptitude for sight gags, his sharp satiric mind and spontaneous rewriting of the script to better suit his retelling of the story. To be sure, the American identification with and fascination for the Italian Renaissance as the birthplace of *their* modern culture played an important part in providing fertile ground for these adaptations of Cellini’s *Vita*. But the most important factor in explaining their success seems to be the degree to which the directors were able to exploit

⁶²⁹ Molho 268.

⁶³⁰ Paul Avila Mayer “Which One.”

both the proto-Romantic as well as the comic elements in the *Vita*, while at the same time, fine-tuning those elements to suit modern tastes and sensibilities.

The failure of Weill and Gershwin's operetta *The Firebrand of Florence* underscores the importance of the "made in the USA" part of Molho's argument regarding nonacademic American interest in the Italian Renaissance. The symbiosis between the two cultures worked as long as Americans could see themselves clearly in the mirror as the new Renaissance men and women. That image became obscured by Weill's attempts to mix typically American 'screwball comedy' with "a musical theatre that synthesized opera into something that retained a classical shape." It was masked even further by Austrian-born Lotte Lenya who "was too foreign-accented and mannered to deal with the role of the seductive countess."⁶³¹ So Galand's point about confusion related to generic expectations was compounded by the American audience's desire to see more of *their* Renaissance in the operetta. Anything that made it more 'foreign' or European was going to detract from the audience's identification with that cultural phenomenon *of theirs* called the Italian Renaissance.

A couple of years after *The Firebrand of Florence* closed, Cellini reappeared on the June, 1947 cover of the *Classics Illustrated* comic book series in an issue entitled *Adventures of Cellini*.⁶³² Unfortunately, the issue was discontinued because of complaints about "what were perceived as stern-faced Inquisitors in hooded, red robes"⁶³³ on the front cover. According to William B. Jones, Jr., the issue was "dropped because of a less-

⁶³¹ Richard Traubner, "Guide to Records for *The Firebrand of Florence*," *American Record Guide*, *AccessMyLibrary.com* 1 July 2004, 18 Aug. 2008
<http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-21801788_ITM>.

⁶³² Gallucci, "Pop Icon" 209.

⁶³³ Gallucci, "Pop Culture" 210.

than-flattering portrait it painted of the Renaissance Catholic Church.”⁶³⁴ August. M. Froelich, the artist for the issue, had depicted the scene in which Cellini had to go before “The Eight” magistrates in Florence after a fight with the Guascontis: “Era infra di loro alcuni arronzinati cappuccetti, che mossi dalle preghiere et male informazione delli mia avversari, per esser di quella fazione [*sic*] di fra Girolamo [Savonarola], mi arebbon voluto metter prigione et condannarmi a misura di carboni [...]”⁶³⁵ Leslie Katz, the writer-adaptor for this issue,⁶³⁶ describes the scene very simply: “I was called before the Eight Signors who ruled Florence...”⁶³⁷ With regards to these men, there is no mention whatsoever of religion in Katz’s text. The interesting point is the one on the top of some of the red hoods that Froelich depicted; he had paid close attention to detail and had clearly read a translation of Cellini’s *Vita*. Also interesting to note, in light of the objections of American Catholics to Froelich’s cover, is how these followers of Savonarola were depicted in one of the more popular English translations that Katz likely used (the same one that Mayer had used earlier): “Among the Eight were some Puritan fellows, with the tails of their hoods twisted up; and they, moved by the appeals and the lying tales of my enemies, and also because they were of Fra Girolamo’s faction [...]”⁶³⁸

The *Adventures of Cellini* was revised and reprinted by *Classics Illustrated* with a different artist and writer in 1961, but it lacked “the style, intent and spirit of the original.”⁶³⁹ The most endearing quality of the first version is how it begins and ends with the inclusion of conversations between Cellini and the young boy who has been

⁶³⁴ Jones 75.

⁶³⁵ Cellini 58 (I, xvii).

⁶³⁶ Jones 218.

⁶³⁷ Leslie Katz, *Adventures of Cellini, Classics Illustrated* 38 (New York: Gilberton, 1947) 4.

⁶³⁸ MacDonnell, *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini* 23. Ms. MacDonnell was English.

⁶³⁹ Paul Avila Mayer “Which One.”

entrusted with the job of transcribing his *Life*. This was, after all, a text aimed at young boys. That element is discarded in the 1961 version and the comic book opens with a picture of an aging Cellini sitting at a table with quill in hand, putting his thoughts and memories to paper by himself. A truncated version of the beginning of Symonds's *Life* is the first caption at the foot of the page: "All men of whatsoever quality they be, who have done anything of excellence, ought to describe their life with their own hand. [...]"⁶⁴⁰ Perhaps most revealing about how times had changed between the first and second versions of *Adventures* is the inclusion of three pages of a more 'scholarly' nature at the end of the comic book: biographical information on both Cellini and Michelangelo, as well as a page-long piece entitled "Waking the Dead" which was intended to provide young readers with an understanding of what the Renaissance was about.

The search for the lost learning of Greece and Rome led men to seek for themselves explanations of what was unknown. Because of this new quest for answers, the Renaissance is considered to mark the beginning of the modern world.⁶⁴¹

The other indicator that this version wanted to be considered a more 'scholarly' one is that underneath the title, printed in large bold type on the first page (*Adventures of Cellini*), is the exact title of the Symonds translation printed in smaller type in parentheses (*The Life of Benvenuto Cellini*).⁶⁴² Leslie Katz made no such attempt to associate his adaptation of 1947 with a particular translation. The issue of the scholarlyness of his adaptation (i.e. choosing Symonds over MacDonnell as a translation) was not an issue for him, as it was not for Edwin Justus Mayer back in 1924.

⁶⁴⁰ Alfred Sundel, *Adventures of Cellini, Classics Illustrated* 38, rev. ed. (New York: Gilberton, 1961) 1 (unnumbered).

⁶⁴¹ Sundel 47 (unnumbered).

⁶⁴² Sundel 1 (unnumbered).

The relevance of these differences between the two editions of *Adventures of Cellini* is that they reflect the changes that were unfolding in the field of Renaissance studies in the United States at the time. Molho discusses the transformation of Renaissance studies into a rigorous and “intensely cultivated field of historical scholarship” which began during the 1930’s in the United States when a large number of European, predominantly German, scholars fled Europe for North America.⁶⁴³ After tracing the ideological perspectives of these scholars, their methodologies and the questioning which led to the unraveling of that “basic article of faith”—the connection between the Renaissance and modernity—, the early 1990’s saw a situation in which the “Renaissance [had] lost its privileged position in the hierarchy of subjects worthy of study.”⁶⁴⁴ Despite the changes within the realm of professional scholars, though, Molho asserts that the “nonacademic interest survives to this day; perhaps it is even greater than ever before.” He cites the preponderance of Renaissance fairs, festivals and re-enactments as evidence of this interest, along with a general curiosity in stories “of condottieri, artists and their patrons, explorers and entrepreneurs, heroes who are made to express the proverbial “spirit” of the Renaissance age.⁶⁴⁵ While this nonscholarly interest is still alive, it, too, has necessarily been conditioned by the “heated scholarly *querelle*”⁶⁴⁶ in an age where scholarly information is readily available through the Internet. John Patrick Shanley’s adaptation of Cellini’s *Life* will most likely not be the last American attempt to retell Cellini’s story. But it is safe to say that the way Leslie Katz ended his *Adventures of Cellini* signals the end of a more passionate, visceral relationship to the

⁶⁴³ Molho 270-271.

⁶⁴⁴ Molho 284.

⁶⁴⁵ Molho 289.

⁶⁴⁶ Molho 264.

Renaissance that had not yet been turned into a full-fledged ‘profession’ in the United States.

Boy. You have accomplished more work and had more adventures than any ten men I know of, Master. The story of your life is now on paper, for all men to read. But why have you made no portrait of yourself, so that people in time to come will know how you looked!

Cellini. I have. Come with me and you shall see it. (*He brings the Boy to the statue of the Perseus.*)

Boy. But that is Perseus, not you!

Cellini. Yes, but let us go to the rear of the statue.

Boy. (*Cellini has hoisted him up to sit upon his shoulders.*) Ah, a picture of yourself hidden in the back of Perseus’s neck.

Narrative Caption. WHAT THE BOY SAW...(*A drawing of the back of Perseus’s helmet with the alleged self-portrait of Cellini is pictured.*)

Boy. You and your work will never be forgotten, Master Cellini!

Narrative Caption. THE BOY WAS RIGHT. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY CELLINI DICTATED IS TO THIS DAY ONE OF THE MOST THRILLING LIFE STORIES IN LITERATURE! *END.*⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁷ Katz 52.

IV.

CONCLUSION

IV.1 The *Perseus*: Cellini's 'seconda Vita'

With the unveiling of the *Perseus*, Cellini achieved the moment of public recognition of his artistic genius that he had been waiting for all his life. It was a moment of triumph and vindication, the execution of an artistic vendetta against all those who had doubted his creative abilities. Cellini describes the redemptive significance of his *Perseus* in the *Vita* in the moments directly following a cancelled attempt on the life of his enemy, Baccio Bandinelli. Having prevailed against a moment of “diabolico furore,” Cellini resolves to vanquish his enemies in another way:

Se Iddio mi dà tanto di grazia che io finisca la mia opera, spero con quella di ammazzare tutti i mia ribaldi nimici, dove io farò molte maggiori e più gloriose le mie vendette che se io mi fussi sfogato con un solo.⁶⁴⁸

After citing this passage, Bruno Maier goes on to say that “la *Vita* è la grande vendetta di Benvenuto, la ‘maggiore e più gloriosa’ delle sue vendette: è, in una parola, il suo secondo *Perseo*.”⁶⁴⁹ Having triumphed over his critics with the clamorous success of the *Perseus*, Cellini celebrated that achievement by creating a literary pendant to his statue with his *Vita*.⁶⁵⁰ But it can also be argued that the *Perseus* emblemizes the ‘seconda Vita’ of the artist. Having surpassed even his own expectations for how his artistic conceptions would translate into a monumental work, Cellini could now confidently proclaim himself to be an accomplished sculptor of monumental works as well as an

⁶⁴⁸ Cellini 645 (II, Lxvi).

⁶⁴⁹ Maier 41.

⁶⁵⁰ Coates discusses the parallels between the *Perseus* and the *Vita* in *Homines*, 464 and note 76: “The craft of the *Vita* should not be neglected any more than the technical expertise of the *Perseus*. The two images of the *Perseus* and the *Vita*, one visual and one literary, thus stand as Cellini’s coordinated tools in his public self-presentation of himself as a supremely talented creator.”

exceptional goldsmith and metalworker. From this standpoint—that of the artist’s *vita* with a lower-case ‘v’—, having mastered both the technical and creative aspects of his “*arte nuova*,”⁶⁵¹ Cellini successfully infused his own artistic identity with the same life-giving creative energy that he had used to save the *Perseus* when its life-blood, the bronze, had begun to turn to stone in Medusa-like compliance during the casting:

Allora io feci pigliare un mezzo pane di stagno, il quale pesava incirca a 60 libbre, et lo gittai in sul migliaccio dentro alla fornace, il quale cone gli altri aiuti e di legne e di stuzzicare or co’ ferri e or cone stanghe, in poco spazio di tempo e’ divenne liquido. Or veduto di avere risucitato un morto, contro al credere di tutti quegli ignoranti, e’ mi tornò tanto vigore, che io non mi avedevo se io avevo più febbre o più paura di morte.⁶⁵²

Casting the protagonist of the *Vita* at the center of his own Persean myth,⁶⁵³ our hero makes the bronze melt again so that the creative process can continue and he can infuse his artistic progeny with life.⁶⁵⁴ The dramatic representation of blood in Cellini’s *Perseus and Medusa* composition becomes the celebratory symbol of the artist’s triumph over that moment of death when the bronze—his statue’s blood—coagulated in his furnace; the moment when the artist’s *virtù* triumphed over *fortuna*.⁶⁵⁵ It is the moment

⁶⁵¹ Cellini 635 (II, Lxiii).

⁶⁵² Cellini 672 (II, Lxxvii). See Michael Cole, *Principles* 50 and accompanying notes for a discussion of this passage and Cellini’s subsequent use of ‘*risucitasti*’ and how they relate to Cole’s argument regarding the distinction between the bronze and the statue itself: “Much has been written on Cellini’s account of this revivification, but what has not been emphasized is that when Cellini says he has raised the dead, he is not speaking of his sculpture at all, but only of the bronze itself [...] The idea that bronze could be brought to life is not something Cellini made up. It draws on conceptions about metals that he would have understood as both ancient and contemporary, scientific assumptions about their nature, their origins, and their potential.”

⁶⁵³ See Coates in *Homines* 463 and Paul Barolsky, cited in Coates 463, who talks about the fusing together of these two narratives: “It is as if the heroic Cellini had become a modern triumphant demigod like Perseus himself.”

⁶⁵⁴ See Cole 11, 58, 67-8 and 154 for the significance of *infusione* in Cellini: “Cellini’s stories of casting are consistent with his poetry insofar as the marvel of Cellini’s *fusione* is its capacity for *infusione*. Once liquefied metals are understood as living, the pouring of them into the armed mold could reproduce the archetypal act of life-giving.” (58)

⁶⁵⁵ See Cole 48 and Maier 92 for the triumph of *virtù* over *fortuna* in the casting of the *Perseus*. See Cole 11 for a slightly different interpretation of the symbolic significance of the bronze’s hardening: “Both advertising the work’s condition as *infused*, and evoking the mythical hardening of liquid into coral, the

when Cellini revivifies his artistic life by creating for himself a *seconda vita: una vita nuova* as sculptor of monumental freestanding works. In one of the encomiastic sonnets written for the *Perseus*, the painter Bronzino applauds Cellini's work by describing its life-like quality, employing words that could also be used to describe the rebirth of the artist himself:

Giovin altier, ch' a Giove in aurea pioggia
ti veggio *nato*, alteramente ir puoi,
e più per gli alti e gloriosi tuoi
gesti, a cui fama altrui pari non poggia.

Ma ben pari o maggior fama s'appoggia
alle tue glorie, or che *rinato* a noi
per così dotta man ti scorgi, e poi
sopra tal riva, e 'n così ricca loggia
più che mai vivo; e se tal fosti in terra,
uopo non t'era d'altrui scudo o d'ali,
tal, con grazia e beltà, valor dimostri.

Ma deh! ricopri il vago agli occhi nostri
volto di lei, che già n'impetra e serra;
se no, chi fuggirà sì dolci mali?⁶⁵⁶

Lorenzo Bellotto argues convincingly that Cellini, in the opening sonnet of his *Vita*, borrows three of the attributes bestowed on his *Perseus* by Bronzino—*grazia*, *beltà* and *valor*—in such a way as to evoke that triumphant moment of the *Perseus's* unveiling in the opening presentation of his literary self-portrait.⁶⁵⁷

Questa mia Vita travagliata io scrivo
per ringraziar lo Dio della natura,
che mi diè l'alma e poi ne ha 'uto cura,
alte diverse 'mprese ho fatte e vivo.
Quel mio crudel Destin d'offes'ha privo;
vita or gloria e virtù più che misura,
grazia, valor, beltà, cotal figura,
che molti io passo, e chi mi passa arrivo.
Sol mi duol grandemente or ch'io cognosco

statue's blood emblemized the scene of casting in which the work originated." See Cole, 43-78; esp. 67-8 for the multi-layered significance of blood in Cellini's *Perseus and Medusa*.

⁶⁵⁶ Milanese 405. Italics are mine.

⁶⁵⁷ Bellotto, Introduction Li –Lii and accompanying notes 47 and 48.

quel caro tempo in vanità perduto:
 nostri fragil pensier sen porta 'l vento.
 Poiché 'l pentir non val, starò contento
 salendo qual'io scesi il Benvenuto
 nel fior di questo degno terren toscò.⁶⁵⁸

So, too, Cellini's choice of "cotal figura" echoes Bronzino's "Tal, con grazia e beltà, valor dimostri." The second quatrain has elicited various readings because of the ostensibly missing subject, but, as Bellotto points out in his paraphrasing of it, the subject clearly refers back to the "Dio della natura" of the first quatrain: "'(Iddio) ha reso inoffensivo quel mio crudele destino; ora dà gloria alla mia vita, e raffigura una virtù (nel senso di 'dono' naturale) smisurata, grazia, valore, bellezza, in modo tale che io supero molti e raggiungo chi mi supera.'"⁶⁵⁹ This last verse was the one that inspired Vittorio Alfieri to remark that "questo solo verso rivela che Benvenuto potea essere sommo poeta."⁶⁶⁰ And while Cellini has never been crowned with that title—"sommo poeta"—, he did not seem to think that such an accomplishment was outside of his grasp. In fact, even though the renowned verse in question is usually interpreted as a reference to Cellini's capacity to surpass others with his figurative works of art, it can also be read as a declaration of the author's literary aspirations. The key to that reading is found in the way that the verse echoes what Vasari had said about Leon Battista Alberti in his *Vite*.

Grandissima comoditate arrecano le lettere universalmente a tutti coloro che di quelle piglian diletto, ma molto maggiore la apportano elle senza alcuna comparazione a gli scultori, a' pittori et a gli architetti, abbellendo et assottigliando (come elle fanno) le invenzioni, che naturalmente nascono in quelli. [...] E che questo sia il vero, manifestamente si vede in Leonbatista Alberti fiorentino, il quale, per avere atteso alla lingua latina, e dato opera alla architettura, alla prospettiva et alla pittura, lasciò i suoi libri scritti in maniera che, per non essere stato fra gli artefici moderni chi le abbia saputo distendere con la scrittura, ancora che infiniti ne abbiamo avuti più eccellenti di lui nella pratica, e'

⁶⁵⁸ Cellini 3-4 (*Proemio*). Italics are mine.

⁶⁵⁹ Cellini 3 (*Proemio*).

⁶⁶⁰ Cited in Bellotto, Introduction xLiv.

si crede communemente (tanta forza hanno gli scritti suoi nelle bocche de' dotti) *che egli abbia avanzato tutti coloro che lo avanzarono con l'operare*. E vedesi per il vero quanto a lo accrescere la fama et il nome, che fra tutte le cose gli scritti sono e di maggior forza e di maggior vita; atteso che i libri agevolmente vanno per tutto, e per tutto si acquistan fede; purché e' siano veritieri e senza menzogne [...] Non è maraviglia dunque, se più che le opere manuali è conosciuto per le scritture il famoso Leone Batista [...].⁶⁶¹

Cellini was not content, therefore, to have engendered a *seconda vita* for his career in the figurative arts with the success of his *Perseus*. Despite believing that with this success he had surpassed the level of artistic achievement of his predecessor, Donatello, Cellini wanted to demonstrate that he was the embodiment of the Varchian *ottimo artista* who should also be “familiar with poets, rhetoricians and others equally well learned in letters.”⁶⁶² While the *Perseus* would stand proudly in the Loggia dei Lanzi and increase the artist’s “fama et il nome,” Cellini’s *Vita* would be “di maggior forza e di maggior vita” as it traveled everywhere, enhancing the artist’s reputation and ensuring him a lasting legacy. Both works, however, were demonstration pieces of literary prowess. In making the aforementioned allusions to his most celebrated work of art in the *Vita*’s opening sonnet, the author fuses not only the narrator with the narrated; he also fuses the literary with the figurative. Cellini employs the same technique throughout his *Vita*. He also employs the same deliberate fusion of the literary and the figurative in his bronze ‘book,’ the *Perseus*. It is not a coincidence that the artist refers to his *Perseus* as a “book” in one of his sonnets: “Feci Perseo, o Dio, com’ogni uom vede, / e piacque a chi io lo feci e a tutto ’l mondo: / e’ libri a tal virtù han questo pondo. / ... Gli occhi e la grazia e ’l dilicato volto / di quel libro a me tanto amato e caro, / legge oscura a chi mal

⁶⁶¹ *Le Vite* 354-355. Emphasis is mine.

⁶⁶² Alberti’s *Della Pittura* (1436) as cited in Wittkower and Wittkower (15) from the John Spencer translation.

iudizio adopra.”⁶⁶³ In addition to reflecting Varchi’s influence on the iconography and the statue’s allegorical significance in relation to its patron, Cosimo I,⁶⁶⁴ the *Perseus* is also a polemical work that promoted Cellini’s side of the well-known *paragone* debate—the side that espoused the primacy of sculpture over painting. It is the figurative representation of Cellini’s written response to Varchi’s questionnaire concerning his 1547 *Lezzioni* discussed earlier. And while it is not within the scope of this study to attempt a detailed analysis of the *Perseus*, it is worth noting one example of Cellini’s sense of humor and how he deployed it to convey a polemical message with this work.

In Cellini’s response to Varchi’s ‘call for papers’ from the artists, one of the main premises for Cellini’s argument that sculpture was superior to painting was that “una statua di scultura de’ avere otto vedute, e conviene che le sieno tutte di egual bontà.”⁶⁶⁵ This is a premise that Borghini would later forcefully deride after he had decided to put an end to these *ragionamenti*: “Dice che la scultura è maggior sette volte. Cagna! costui va per abbaco; ma vedreno un po’ se le saprà ritrovare.”⁶⁶⁶ It is also an idea that Cellini

⁶⁶³ See Cole, *Principles* 9 and accompanying note 40. Cited from Ferrero 948.

⁶⁶⁴ See Pope-Hennessy 174-175: “In a very real sense the base is the key to the *Perseus*. [...] The four inscriptions are due not to Cellini but to Benedetto Varchi [...]. Varchi seems also to have had a more general responsibility for the whole work. His *Lezzione sopra la Pittura*, which was written in 1547 and printed in 1549, contains an explicit reference to the *Perseus*, on the model for which Cellini was working at the time.” See also Sarah Blake McHam, “Public Sculpture in Renaissance Florence,” in *Looking at Italian Renaissance Sculpture*, ed. Sarah Blake McHam (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 1998) 170 and notes 68 and 69: “Cellini’s allegory of Cosimo I stands facing the piazza, symbolically warding evil away from Florence, following the model of Ovid’s description of Perseus’s defeat of Phineas, Andromeda’s other suitor, by confronting him with the head of Medusa and turning him to stone. The statue evokes not just the real historical event of Cosimo’s bloody triumph at Montemurlo, but more abstract meanings, drawn from political theory and Christianized interpretations of pagan mythology. Like Hercules, Perseus is a symbol of the wise prince, specifically of his establishment of concord in his kingdom. Alciati’s emblembook included a print of a prince’s sarcophagus, emblazoned with a Medusa’s head, to warn that death overtook not just subjects but also the unwise prince who did not keep the peace. [...] The underlying message is that Florence’s prominence is made possible by Cosimo I.” See also Corinne Mandel, “Perseus and the Medici,” *Storia dell’Arte* 87 (1996): 168-187.

⁶⁶⁵ *Scritti* 519-520.

⁶⁶⁶ Barocchi, *Pittura* 92.

dramatizes in the *Vita* in the episode when Cosimo asks Cellini to briefly reveal the front of the statue to the public “per vedere quel che ne dice ’l popolo.”⁶⁶⁷

Il mio Duca, con tutto che Sua Eccellenza avessi sentito questo favore che m’era stato fatto di quel poco della vista da questa eccellentissima Scuola, disse: “Io n’ho gran piacere che Benvenuto abbia aùto questo poco del contento, il quale sarà cagione che più presto et con più diligenza ei le darà la sua desiderata fine; ma non pensi che poi, quando la si vedrà tutta scoperta et che la si potrà vedere tutta all’intorno, che i popoli abbino a dire a questo modo; anzi gli sarà scoperto tutti i difetti che vi sono, et appostovene di molti di quei che non vi sono; sì che armisi di pazienza.”⁶⁶⁸

Cellini goes on to say that it was Bandinelli who, in envy of his rival, had put this idea in Cosimo’s head. In the statue itself, Cellini forges a figurative equivalent to the *motto arguto* in the form of what is believed to be the artist’s self-portrait in the Janus Mask at the back of *Perseus*’s helmet.⁶⁶⁹ It is as if the artist has positioned himself at the back of the work in such a way as to perpetually chastise those who had challenged his ability to make his *Perseus* beautiful “tutta all’intorno.” Cosimo had requested “solo un Perseo,” but Cellini had produced a much more ambitious “book.”⁶⁷⁰ From this standpoint—the *Perseus* as a *seconda Vita* with a capital ‘V’—, the monument must be read from all of its many sides, not the least of which was a self-tribute to the artist’s *seconda vita* as *letterato*.

IV.2 *Fare* vs. *Dire*: Forging a Lasting Legacy

As we have seen, Cellini’s decision to write his life story was motivated by much loftier aspirations than what the oft-repeated sentence from his *Trattato dell’oreficeria*

⁶⁶⁷ Cellini 706 (II, xc).

⁶⁶⁸ Cellini 708-709 (II, xci).

⁶⁶⁹ Pope-Hennessy 185.

⁶⁷⁰ Cellini 608 (II, Liii). See also Pope-Hennessy, *Cellini* 169: “The reason for the change is very plain. Whereas the Duke’s concern was the symbolism of the statue, Cellini’s was that of rivaling the *Judith* of Donatello. In the *Judith* the body of Holofernes was shown at Judith’s feet, and with the *Perseus* the body of Medusa had also to be portrayed.”

would imply: “da poi che m’è impedito il fare, così io mi son messo a dire”⁶⁷¹ The defensive tone of this declaration must be read in the context in which it was written—the period after the contemptuous public attacks on Cellini waged by Vincenzo Borghini in 1564.⁶⁷² It was in this same period that Borghini launched his polemic regarding the *Accademia del Disegno*’s mission to function as “un’Accademia di FARE et non di RAGIONARE.”⁶⁷³ With this background in mind, it is understandable that Cellini would have felt the need to justify his decision to ‘tell’ rather than to ‘do,’ both with the writing of the *Trattati*, as well as with the *Vita*. The era of Varchi’s *Lezzioni* and the promotion of the artist as *uomo universale* were coming to an end. Borghini’s attacks were not just leveled against Cellini (‘la Boschereccia’), but on the whole notion of “universalità,”⁶⁷⁴ including the idea as it was formulated by Castiglione’s model of the *perfetto cortegiano*.

Parmi degno di considerazione che queste arti hanno molte accompagnature e di molti corredi. E non parlando ora di quelli la Boschereccia voleva che avessi il suo scultore, che lo voleva musico, soldato et oratore etc. (che questo è vizio commune di tutte le arti, e *colui che formò il cortigiano lo voleva insino a pittore*, quel[li]’altro che fa l’oratore vuole che gl’abbia tutte le arti etc.), parliamo un poco di certi corredi più intrinsechi e più familiari, dove a me pare ch’altra cosa sia l’opera che si fa, et altro l’strumento con che si fa; come, verbigratia, una pittura et e pennelli e colori, una statua i martelli e scarpelli, un palazzo e gl’argani e palchi etc. Or dico che le cose che sono per istrumento o per aiuto d’un’arte, s’hanno a distinguere da quella e non vi s’hanno a comprendere sotto se non per accidente, se bene il maestro medesimo facessi l’uno e l’altro, ché bene spesso accadrà ch’un buon pittore si farà e pennelli da sé, e non solo s’ingesserà, ma si farà tutta di nuovo la tavola, e lo scultore si farà le subbie, gli scarpelli e le gradine et altri strumenti, e non però si chiameranno o legniaiuoli o fabbri, né si dirà quel[li]’arte contenersi sotto queste. Dico il medesimo de l’architetto, al quale danno molte cose per magnificarlo, che forse non son più sua che le sopradette; e se un architetto ha l’arte degl’argani e certe altre cose simili, che servono o posson servire ad altre arti, com’alla scultura un argano etc., io ho gran paura ch’artificiosamente, come dice Vitruvio, non faccia il suo architetto un tante tante cose, *come fece il Castiglione il suo cortigiano*, e che quando poi egli arà a restare

⁶⁷¹ Milanese 89.

⁶⁷² See pp. 14-16 of chapter one above.

⁶⁷³ Hughes 9.

⁶⁷⁴ Barocchi *Scritti* 473.

co' sua proprii panni e rendere quelli ch gl'ha tolti in presto, e' non rimanga (come quella cornacchia) mezo nudo. Questo si consideri bene.⁶⁷⁵

Borghini's message was clear: artists should know their place in society and leave the philosophizing and literary pursuits to those who are qualified to pursue them. Just as the painter or sculptor would not call himself a carpenter if he occasionally crafted his own paintbrushes or chisels; so, too, the artist should not profess to be a man of letters if he was occasionally crafty with words. To be sure, Borghini did not consider Cellini to be in the same social class as "colui che formò il cortigiano"; nonetheless, it is interesting that both Cellini and Castiglione are mentioned side by side in Borghini's attack on their respective adherence to the ideal of the *uomo universale*. Borghini's message was not limited to his writings in the *Selva di Notizie*. He also exerted great influence on the editing of the second edition of Vasari's *Vite* (1568).⁶⁷⁶ While the ostensible shift in the second edition is toward a more rigorous approach to the use of historical sources, Borghini's letters to Vasari regarding the purpose of his *Vite*, reveal a similar intention as that of the *Selva di Notizie* regarding the 'de-universalization' of artists.

The purpose of your hard work is not to write about the lives of the painters, nor whose sons they were, nor of their ordinary deeds, but only their works as painters, sculptors, and architects, because otherwise it matters little to us to know the life story of Baccio d'Agnolo or Pontormo. The writing of lives is suitable only in the case of princes and men who have practiced princely things and not of low people, but here you have only as your end the art and the works by their hand. Therefore stick to this as much as you can and be diligent, and see that every detail is in its place.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁵ Barocchi *Pittura e Scultura* 112-113 and accompanying notes. Emphasis is mine. Barocchi notes that "colui che formò il cortigiano" is obviously a reference to Castiglione, but she is not sure if the remark regarding "quell'altro che fa l'oratore" is a reference to Cicero's *De Oratore*, or to a "trattatista contemporaneo." The "cornacchia" is a reference to Horace, *Epistle* I, 3, 15-20.

⁶⁷⁶ See Rubin 190-197.

⁶⁷⁷ From K. Frey, *Der Literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris*, vol. II, cited and translated by Rubin 192.

Rubin observes that although Vasari's "self-esteem and his deep-rooted belief in the dignity of his profession prevented his full capitulation to Borghini's ideal, his revisions were heavily influenced by Borghini's criteria."⁶⁷⁸ Greater emphasis was now placed on the artist's technical area of specialty, rather than on the artist's success in embodying *virtù* in many different areas. It was in this context that Cellini began to turn his focus away from the *Vita* and toward writing about the "bellissimi segreti e mirabili modi che sono in nella grand' arte della Oreficeria; i quali non stava bene a scriverli né a filosafi, né ad altre sorte di uomini, se non a queglii che sono della stessa professione [...]."⁶⁷⁹ This shift represented an acknowledgement of the tastes and interests of his Medici patrons (the first edition of the *Trattati* was dedicated to Cosimo's son, Francesco I), interests that included goldsmithing and metallurgy.⁶⁸⁰ But it also represented a defeat for the artist, a retreat from the loftier goal of promoting his *Vita* as the model of the *ottimo artista*, the ideal Renaissance man. Twenty years earlier, Cellini had asserted that "questa maravigliosa arte dello statuare non si può fare, se lo statuario non ha buona cognizione di tutte le nobilissime arte [...]."⁶⁸¹ Now, he would have to assert his expert authority as a goldsmith and a sculptor against the "praticonacci" who professed to know something about everything, but "nulla che sia buono."⁶⁸² Autobiographical elements remained in the *Trattati*,⁶⁸³ but the emphasis was now on revealing the "bellissimi segreti" of his profession. Whether he planned to return to his *Vita* at a later date in order to get it published is impossible to determine. Cellini died in 1571. What is clear, though,

⁶⁷⁸ Rubin 192.

⁶⁷⁹ Milanesi 5.

⁶⁸⁰ Rossi, "Parrem Uno" 174-175.

⁶⁸¹ See 28n. 112 of chapter one above.

⁶⁸² Milanesi 6.

⁶⁸³ See 18n. 73 of chapter one above.

is that Cellini's decision to shift his focus to writing the *Trattati* indicates that his efforts to promote himself (during his lifetime) as a universal artist had been undercut, if not nullified, by Vincenzo Borghini.⁶⁸⁴ The artist likely suspected that if he had attempted to publish his *Vita*, he would have met with the same hostility and public derision that had greeted his public denunciation of Borghini's decision to prioritize painting over sculpture at the funeral proceedings for Michelangelo.⁶⁸⁵

The common critical consensus about the conclusion of Cellini's *Vita* is that it was left unfinished, that "one can almost hear a palpable sigh of relief when Cellini gave up writing the text almost in mid-sentence between 1566 and 1567."⁶⁸⁶ But despite the artist's shift in focus toward the *Trattati*, it is unlikely that he would have abruptly abandoned his own literary self-portrait after having invested so much time and energy in fashioning it. It seems more likely, given the overall political context described above, that Cellini slowly began to shift his attention, but that he maintained a commitment to finishing his life story. In his reading of the *Vita* as a prototype of the modern novel, Cervigni interprets Cellini's ending as a kind of *Don Quijote* conclusion "though in reverse."⁶⁸⁷

Here then are the two protagonists: on the one hand, Benvenuto who, in his lifelong pursuit of higher achievements, obtains true glory and yet at the very end refuses to accept defeat and to assume a less heroic role; on the other hand, the figure of the vanquished knight who returns home to die, defeated yet mentally sane, disenchanted yet wiser, less heroic yet closer to everyday reality. After paralleling each other for such a long span, the roads of the two heroes seem at the very end to diverge. By acquiescing to his downfall, don Quijote finds his true identity and assumes his only true role, the one of Alonso Quixano the Good—a role which is less encompassing, since it is not idealistic, and yet one which

⁶⁸⁴ See note 182 to page 48 of chapter one above.

⁶⁸⁵ *Scritti* 594-599.

⁶⁸⁶ Rossi, "Parrem Uno" 173. See also Maier cited in Cervigni 166-167n. 2: "termina o, piuttosto, si interrompe a questo punto l'autobiografia celliniana."

⁶⁸⁷ Cervigni 170.

comprises a broader sphere of human realities precisely because of its limitations. Benvenuto, on the other hand, after fighting true battles and obtaining genuine fame, seeks to hold on forever to his glorious vision of himself. Thus he sets himself apart from the human realm, causes his own disillusionment, and suffers greater ruin than that of the Spanish hidalgo.⁶⁸⁸

But if Cellini “suffers greater ruin,” it is because his life, though novel in nature, is real and its adventures documentable, even if the author uses “alcuna discrezione” in recounting them. As Mazzocco points out, “to say that the protagonist of the *Vita* should come to terms with reality is to imply that the many deeds recorded in the work are nothing more than figments of Cellini’s imagination much like the giants Don Quijote thought to recognize in the windmills of La Mancha. [...] To provide a well-rounded conclusion for a fictional work such as *Don Quijote* is feasible and aesthetically necessary, but this is not the case with an autobiographical work such as the *Vita*, which is by its very nature intrinsically connected with the flow of one’s life.”⁶⁸⁹

Indeed, it is precisely in this area of unwillingness to accept human limitations that we have seen Cellini define himself with his lexicon of value, best represented by the adjectives “inestimabile” and “ismisurato.” These lexical choices are both an expression of the artist’s sense of self-worth as defined by his *virtù*, as well as an expression of his longing for “a symbolic economy of nourishment and gift-giving.”⁶⁹⁰ And this is a theme that spans the entire arc of the *Vita*, right up until its conclusion. Even after a long period of being “scioperato” by Cosimo, Cellini does not abandon hope that such a relationship of nourishment between the artist and the Duke is still possible. In fact, in one of the last scenes of the *Vita*, Cellini paints an idyllic portrait of himself together with Duke Cosimo as they ride horseback along the seashore of Livorno.

⁶⁸⁸ Cervigni 171.

⁶⁸⁹ Mazzocco 353.

⁶⁹⁰ Tylus 34. See also chapter two above.

Trovandosi il Duca a Livorno, io lo andai a trovare, solo per chiedergli licenzia. Sentendomi ritornare le mie forze, et veduto che io non ero adoperato a nulla, e' m'incresceva di far tanto gran torto alli mia studii; di modo che, resolutomi, me n'andai a Livorno, et trova'vi il Duca che mi fece gratissima accoglienza. Et perché io vi stetti parecchi giorni, ogni giorno io cavalcavo con Sua Eccellenza, et avevo molto agio a poter dire tutto quello che io volevo, perché il Duca usciva fuor di Livorno et andava quattro miglia rasente 'l mare, dove egli faceva fare un poco di fortezza; et per nonn-essere molestato da troppe persone, e' gli aveva piacere che io ragionassi seco [...].⁶⁹¹

Cellini proceeds to recount his travails to the Duke (“non macchiando mai la verità con il falso”⁶⁹²) regarding a certain farmer, nicknamed Sbietta, from whom Cellini has bought a farm and by whom the artist believes himself to have been poisoned. Cosimo is sympathetic to Cellini’s plight in his dealings with Sbietta, but is not amenable to the idea of giving the artist “licenzia” to go and seek patronage elsewhere. He sends one of his secretaries the next day to inform Cellini that if he wants to leave, permission will be granted; but if he wants to work, he will be given commissions.

Io gli risposi che non desideravo altro che aver da lavorare, et maggiormente da Sua Eccellenza illustrissima più che da tutto il resto degli uomini del mondo, et fussino papa o inperatori o re; più volentieri io servirei Sua Eccellenza illustrissima per un soldo, che ogni altri per un ducato. Allora ei mi disse: “Se tu se’ di cotesto pensiero, voi siate d’accordo senza dire altro; sì che rirtornatene a Firenze e sta’ di buona voglia, perché il Duca ti vòl bene.” Così io mi ritornai a Firenze.⁶⁹³

What this episode and many other similar ones highlight is that Cellini’s quest for “gloria” is inextricably linked to his desire for approval from his patrons.⁶⁹⁴ To be sure, there is also a desire to be rewarded generously for his “fatiche.” But at the heart of this nostalgia for a quasi-feudal “symbolic economy” is a relationship of loyalty and

⁶⁹¹ Cellini 757 (II, cviii).

⁶⁹² Cellini 758 (II, cviii).

⁶⁹³ Cellini 759 (II, cviii).

⁶⁹⁴ See Charles Kligerman, “Notes on Benvenuto Cellini,” *The Annual of Psychoanalysis* 3 (1975): 409-421: “Throughout Cellini’s life, the expectation of a positive response from father surrogates was crucial to his psychic equilibrium.” As we have seen with the Madonna Porzia episode, though, this need for displays of approval through a gift-giving system was not limited to “father surrogates.”

affection. And this is another reason why Cellini does not end his *Vita* with the heroic act of the casting of the *Perseus*. The narrative goes on to depict “at length the artist’s unheroic haggling with the duke and his emissaries over the fee for the completed masterpiece.”⁶⁹⁵ From a psychoanalytical perspective, Cellini would be diagnosed as having a ‘repetition compulsion;’ that is, he continues to act out the same drama with Cosimo in the hope that the next time will finally yield the approval that he has been yearning for. From Cellini’s perspective, he must persist in his efforts to demonstrate his loyalty to the Duke in the hope that his faithfulness will someday be rewarded. There is a certain logic and symmetry, then, between the scene cited above and the way the *Vita* ends a few pages later with Cellini returning to be at the Duke’s side after he has just lost his wife and two sons.

In questo tempo il Duca se n’andò, con tutta la sua Corte et con tutti i sua figliuoli, dal Principe in fuori, il quale era inn-Ispagna: andorno per le maremme di Siena; et per quel viaggio si condusse a Pisa. Prese il veleno di quella cattiva aria il Cardinale prima degli altri: così dipoi pochi giorni l’assalì una febbre pestilenziale et in breve l’amazzò. Questo era l’occhio diritto del Duca: questo si era bello e buono, et ne fu grandissimo danno. Io lasciai passare parecchi giorni, tanto che io pensai che fussi rasciutte le lacrime: dappoi me n’andai a Pisa.⁶⁹⁶

This is not just the beginning of another picaresque journey for Cellini, as some critics have posited.⁶⁹⁷ It is the return of the faithful vassal to the service of his aggrieved lord. Not only was the portrayal of this return important from the standpoint of demonstrating the continued loyalty of the Cellini family to the Medici; it was also

⁶⁹⁵ Cervigni 167.

⁶⁹⁶ Cellini 767-768 (II, cxiii).

⁶⁹⁷ See Bondanella and Bondanella 462: “The abrupt ending of Cellini’s autobiography, referring as it does to a destination for one of his many journeys, reminds the reader that the work has many affinities with the picaresque genre.” A partial list of other critics who see Cellini as a *picaro* includes Cervigni, Borsellino, Barolsky and Goldberg. I agree with Mazzocco who does not read the *Vita* as part of the picaresque genre: “Indeed, the protagonist of the *Vita* has little in common with the *picaro*. The character of the *picaro* as it was formulated in *Lazarillo de Tormes*, and as it evolved in Mateo Alemán’s *El Guzmán de Alfarache* and in Quevedo’s *El Buscón*, is that of a self-degrading, parasitic, loutish, and spineless creature. By contrast, the protagonist of the *Vita* is self-assured, resourceful, dashing, and daring.” (352)

important to reinforce what the artist insisted was his reward in the relationship—to be in the good graces of his patron.⁶⁹⁸ Moreover, given the examples of punning that we have seen throughout the *Vita* and in his figurative works of art, it is not unreasonable to suspect that Cellini's ending could be the literary version of Michelangelo's famous “visual pun” in his signature to the *Pietà*—“*facieba*”—where he deliberately leaves off the ‘t’ to take the Plinian message of a work in progress to an even higher interpretive plane.⁶⁹⁹ Paying tribute to his only teacher and model, Michelangelo,⁷⁰⁰ Cellini uses the ‘*faciebat*’ signature on his Perseus,⁷⁰¹ but he also does Michelangelo one better, as Goffen would say, with his literary equivalent of *facieba[t]* with his “me ne andai a Pisa.” It is worth looking at the Pliny passage cited by Goffen because of its relevance in offering an alternative interpretation to the enduring critical consensus that reads Cellini's ending as an interruption or abandonment, or even as self-censorship in the case of Maier's reading mentioned earlier.⁷⁰²

I should like to be accepted on the lines of those founders of painting and sculpture who [...] used to inscribe their finished works, even the masterpieces [...], with a provisional title such as *Faciebat Apelles* or *Polyclitus*, as though art was always a thing in process and not completed, so that when faced by the vagaries of criticism the artist might have left him[self] a line of retreat to indulgence, by implying that he intended, if not interrupted, to correct any defect noted. Hence it is exceedingly modest of them to have inscribed all their works in a manner suggesting that they were their latest, and as though they had been snatched away from each of them by fate. Not more than three [...] are recorded

⁶⁹⁸ Cellini 719 (II, xcv): “A queste benigne parole io risposi come io non avevo mai chiesto altro maggior premio delle mie fatiche, che la buona grazia del Duca [...].”

⁶⁹⁹ Goffen 115 and note 149: “Omitting the final ‘t’ of the verb, Michelangelo went the ancients one better: the word itself is incomplete. His signature is a “visual pun,” the verb *facieba[t]* truncated to illustrate its meaning literally, graphically.” Goffen is quoting Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt with the concept of the “visual pun.” See also Gallucci, *Sexuality* 105: “Finally, was Cellini following Michelangelo's new standard of the *non finito*, the unfinished work, when he abruptly ended the story of his life?”

⁷⁰⁰ We know from the *Vita* that Cellini considered Michelangelo to be his only teacher: “Ma io mi fido tanto delli mia faticosi et disciplinati studii, che io mi prometto di guadagnarmi la palma, se bene e' ci fussi quel gran Michelagnolo Buonaroti, dal quale, *et non mai da altri*, io ho inparato tutto quel che io so.” (737) Emphasis is mine.

⁷⁰¹ Goffen 370.

⁷⁰² Maier 83-84 and note 127.

as having an inscription denoting completion—*Made by [Ille fecit]* so-and-so [. . .]; this made the artist appear to have assumed a supreme confidence in his art, and consequently all these works were very unpopular.⁷⁰³

Given the level of literary self-awareness demonstrated throughout the *Vita*, it is more likely that Cellini's ending was a deliberate choice, as opposed to a kind of forfeiture. After all, the decision to add the *Proemio* with the assertion about how the work had been dictated (after most of the *Vita* had already been written), was a masterful narrative strategy in itself. And even if we discount the *facieba* hypothesis entirely, the *Vita* ends with a re-articulation of the over-arching theme of the artist-patron relationship. Despite the immense tragedy that has just befallen Cosimo's family, there is a note of indefatigable hope that the kind of relationship of "nourishment and gift-giving" that had existed between Cellini and the King of France could still be instituted between the artist and Duke Cosimo.

⁷⁰³ Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. by H. Rackham, quoted in Goffen 114.

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