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

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Benvenuto Cellini’s *Vita*: The Art of Casting a Renaissance Man

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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 *Lezziioni* 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

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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

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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.⁴ 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,⁵ 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.⁶

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,⁷ as opposed to the intriguing and enduring 18th and 19th century view of the artist as one who “ha prima scritto che pensato,”⁸ 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.

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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

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\(^8\) 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 lead 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)

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 Vita16 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, xLiii): “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 Lezione...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.

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 Lezzone to the Accademia Fiorentina in 1547 could hardly be considered the intellectual equivalent of ‘seeing the movie.’

Varchi’s Lezzone 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 piú 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 Lezzone 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 Lezione 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

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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.” 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.”

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 di’ piú eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani* served as a model for Cellini’s embodiment of the artist as hero. 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*. 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:

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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 si 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 et di sanità di corpo che io sia mai stato per lo adietro; e ricordandomi di alcuni piacevoli beni et di alcuni inestimabili mali, li quali, volgendomi indietro, 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.*”

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. 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

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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.” As for why it was important to Cellini to create the impression of spontaneity and effortlessness 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. 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, 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. 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. The establishment of the Accademia Fiorentina in 1542 and Cosimo’s successful

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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.”
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.\footnote{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.’”}

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 \textit{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.\footnote{Cochrane 79.}

In addition to his assignment of giving two lectures on a weekly basis at the \textit{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.”\footnote{Basile 137.} And despite the relative freedom that Florentine artists and intellectuals enjoyed during this period,\footnote{Cochrane 78.} 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.\footnote{Basile 138.} Evidently, the decision of any former \textit{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
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.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{52} In January, 1563, the \textit{Accademia del Disegno} was formed,\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{55} Mendelsohn, citing Michel Plaisance, concurs that that the evolution of the \textit{Accademia Fiorentina} reflected

\textsuperscript{50} Basile 138 and Cochrane 73.
\textsuperscript{51} Mendelsohn 29.
\textsuperscript{52} This is Mendelsohn’s translation of Vasari from the 1568 version of his \textit{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.”
\textsuperscript{55} Barzman, “Accademia” 178.
“changes in the political regime.” The selection of Vincenzo Borghini as the first luogotenente of the Accademia del Disegno 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.” 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. 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” 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.

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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.
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 siano né più né meno. Dico così, perché questo è un cervello da sua possa et ha filosofie che non ne vendono gli speziali 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 fà 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 mostrare 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

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 effortlessness 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

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65 Castiglione 3 (1,1).
comportment. As Amedeo Quondam points out, in order to “formar con parole un perfetto cortegiano,” one also needed to use the perfect words.\(^\text{66}\) 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.”\(^\text{67}\)

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’\(^\text{68}\) 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;\(^\text{69}\) and the sodomy conviction in 1557 which

\(^\text{66}\) Castiglione 35 (Lxii) and Introduction xli-xlili. 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).

\(^\text{67}\) Quondam, Introduction xlii.

\(^\text{68}\) 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).

\(^\text{69}\) 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”\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Vita}. Cellini himself offers his own explanation of when and why he decided to write his life story in his treatise \textit{Dell’oreficeria}.\textsuperscript{72}

Passato che fu dua giorni, io vidi 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 rimedii 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.\textsuperscript{73}

The period described is the one immediately following the unveiling of Cellini’s \textit{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

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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 \textit{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.”
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\textsuperscript{70} Rossi 60.
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\textsuperscript{71} See notes 35 and 38 above.
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\textsuperscript{72} For a history of both versions of the treatises, see Dario Trento in \textit{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 \textit{Benvenuto Cellini: Sculptor, Goldsmith, Writer}, 171-198.
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\textsuperscript{73} Benvenuto Cellini, \textit{I trattati dell’oreficeria e della scultura di Benvenuto Cellini}, ed. Carlo Milanesi (Florence: Le Monnier, 1857) 89.
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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. It is likely that in this same time period, from shortly after the unveiling of the Perseus in 1554, until 1567, 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. 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 Bellotto): “Da’ poi che vostra signioria Mi dice, che cotesto simplice discorso della vita mia piú saddisfa 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
libro, e perché io penso che voi non harete potuto finir di leggere tutto, si per non vi affaticare in così bassa cosa, e perché quel che io desideravo da voi l’ò havuto, e ne sono sattisfattissimo, 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.” 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.

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. 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,” 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

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81 Milanesi 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 benvolenzia 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 pericolo 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 rimoverlo da ogni intenzion viciaosa 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, Lxxii).
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.\(^5\) 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.\(^6\) 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”\(^7\) 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.\(^8\)

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.\(^9\) 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,

\(^5\) Trento 50-53.
\(^6\) 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).
\(^7\) Cellini 722 (II, xcvi).
\(^8\) Trento 52. Trento cites the written fragment of Cellini’s from the Codice Riccardiano no. 2728 (also published in Milanesi, xlii-xlili) which specifically refers to the year as being 1567 when he gave the *Trattati* to Francesco I.
\(^9\) 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*.

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. It seems that Cosimo had already made up his mind about who should receive the Neptune commission (originally Bandinelli, then Ammannatti when Bandinelli died), 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.

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.

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91 Trento 50.


about the artist’s accomplishments. 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*. 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,” 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.” 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, 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,

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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 *Hominès* 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

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boschereccio 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.

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 Lezizioni to the Accademia Fiorentina in 1547 at which Michelangelo was anointed the new Dante by Varchi. The proverbial gauntlet had been thrown down during those lectures and Cellini, like Vasari, 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. These letters were printed together with Varchi’s Due Lezzioni in 1550, 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, si per essere male

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100 Il Boschereccio is the epithet that Cellini gave to himself when he engaged in tenzioni 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 ‘boschereccce’; cioè, rustiche, semplici.” Maier, citing lyrics from the Canzoniere, credits Petrarcha with being Cellini’s inspiration for this nickname based on the fact that the former “il quale, si sa, ostentava il timore—squisita mente 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.”\textsuperscript{106} Notwithstanding the customary modesty that all of the artists used at the beginning of their letters,\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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,\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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 \textit{Vita} in much the same way that he had done with the bust of Cosimo in preparation for the \textit{Perseus}: “per fare sperienzia delle terre da gittar il bronzo.”\textsuperscript{110} The comments of Julius Schlosser regarding the style of Cellini’s letter could just as easily be applied to his \textit{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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{106} Scritti d’Arte 519. Italics are mine.
\textsuperscript{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.
\textsuperscript{108} Mendelsohn 32.
\textsuperscript{109} See especially the letters of Michelangelo, Tribolo and Sangallo (522, 518 and 509).
\textsuperscript{110} Cellini 633 (II, Lxiii).
\textsuperscript{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.”

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. 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 mezz’ora intera, parlando di molte diverse cose tutte virtuose e piacevole [sic].” 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. It is precisely this passage of Cellini’s letter that became central to

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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 sé 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.”

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 musicò, conviene che abbia musica diversa etc.

Tutte queste sono parole formali. Or non bisognerebbe qui gridare: *Proh divum numina sancta!* che sia un si pazzo che dica cose si 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.

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:

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 aùti in esse, e tutta la quantità de’ danari che s’erano ispesi in dette

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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 aiuti, 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 autò 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 lasciav, 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 promisssomi, 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 aùti 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 aùti; qual capitolo si scriverrà poi al suo luogo.”

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.” 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

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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.\textsuperscript{123} And he goes on to observe that the contents of Cellini’s \textit{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.”\textsuperscript{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”\textsuperscript{125} and this affects the way Cellini views the events of his life; hence, the inclination to document them.\textsuperscript{126} Guglielminetti proposes a reading of the \textit{Vita} as \textit{un itinerarium ad Deum},\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{128} Bruno Maier defines this larger driving force “la virile energia di un’esistenza tutta spesa in religiosa comunione con l’arte.”\textsuperscript{129}

Not just \textit{utile} as an exercise with which to hone his skills while documenting the events of his life, not just \textit{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

\textsuperscript{123} Trento 43-44.  
\textsuperscript{124} Trento 44.  
\textsuperscript{125} Trento 50.  
\textsuperscript{126} Stressing Cellini’s interest in astrology, Paolo Rossi proposes a reading of the \textit{Vita} based on how “malign stellar influences” condition his self-presentation (\textit{Sprezzatura} 66-67). While it is true that Cellini refers frequently to “gli influissi 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 \textit{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)  
\textsuperscript{127} Guglielminetti 292-386, esp. 384.  
\textsuperscript{128} Goldberg 79. Goldberg is referring to the poems incorporated into the prison scene in the \textit{Vita}.  
\textsuperscript{129} Maier 41.
grandissimo piacere di riscrivere questo soprascritto capitolo.” 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 stoncutters, 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

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\(^{130}\) Cellini 465 (II, I).


\(^{132}\) 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.\textsuperscript{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”\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{136} “ma non si doverrebbe cominciare una tal bella impresa prima che passato l’età de’ quaranta anni.”\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{138}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{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).}
\footnotetext{135}{Cellini 3 (*Proemio*).}
\footnotetext{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).”}
\footnotetext{137}{Cellini 7-8 (I, I).}
\footnotetext{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...}
\end{footnotes}
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.  

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.” The ‘Dante challenge’ put forth implicitly by Varchi in his *Lezione* of 1547 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  

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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.”

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.”

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). 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 si militudinem 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.

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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.”

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. 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*, 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 differmità di composizione di ciascuna.”

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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.” 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. The episodes pertaining to Cellini’s dealings with Cosimo begin at manuscript page 441b. Since the pages are numbered only on the recto, 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.

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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. 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.” Dimitrios Zikos points out that “Cellini non si recò a Roma nei ‘primi anni di papa Julio de’ Monti,’ ma nei primi *giorni* del nuovo pontificato.” 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:

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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 innorlo 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 innorlo, 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 randomi 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 tenevo della mia *mala fortuna che io avevo con el duca*, che mi facieva pensare che le pessime invidie mi potrioni 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 suoi dua figliuoli mi avevano fatto intendere che mi sarebbono la mia solita provisione di 15 scudi et che mi pagherebbono di tutto l’anno che era passato, il quale montava più di trecento scudi d’oro. Considerato l’uno et l’altro caso et 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 ricamente ornato di anticaglie et altre belle cose, ma il detto scrittoio nonn-era fatto per sculture, né manco per piture, perché le finestre venivano sotto le dette belle opere, di sorte che, per avere quelle sculture et piture 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 menó. Subito entrato, et veduto, disse: “Chi è stato questo maestro che v’ha ritratto così bene et con si bella maniera? E sappiate che quella testa mi piace como, 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.”

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.”

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. It would seem logical that Cellini would have been conflicted.

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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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{165} By then, the artist had already been excluded from receiving important commissions from the Duke for over ten years\textsuperscript{166} 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

\textsuperscript{163} Zikos 136 and accompanying notes.
\textsuperscript{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.”  
\textsuperscript{165} Zikos 136 and 143.
\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{171} Vasari had met with Michelangelo in Rome in

\textsuperscript{167} Zikos 136.
\textsuperscript{168} See Cellini’s Disputa infra la scultura e la pittura avendo il nostro luogotenente, datoci da Sua Eccellenza Illustissima, preso la parte dei pittori e nel mirabile essequio del gran Michelangelo di propria potenzia 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.”

\textsuperscript{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.”

\textsuperscript{170} Zikos 140.

\textsuperscript{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. 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, 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: “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.”

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

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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 mostrarlo 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. 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, particularly in the case of Lorenzino de’ Medici, the assassin of Alessandro de’ Medici, upon whose head Cosimo had placed a bounty. 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:

L’altro giorno a presso io mi scontrai in misser Lorenzo de’ Medici, il quale subito mi prese per mano con la maggior raccolgienza 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 sanza 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 menò mi a casa sua, dove era il signor Priore della Strozzi, fratello del signor Piero, et rallegrandosi, mi domandorno quanto io volevo soprastrarre in Venezia, credendosi che io me ne volessi ritornare in Francia. A’ quali Signori io dissi che io mi ero partito di Firenze per una tale occasione sopra detta, et che fra dua o tre giorni io mi volevo ritornare a Firenze a servire il mio gran Duca. Quando io dissi queste parole, il signor Priore et misser Lorenzo mi si volsono con tanta rigiditá, 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).”


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.”

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. 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

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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.’ 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 occasione 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 atendessi 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

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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. Cosimo played the same game with Bindo “machiavellicamente fingendo col diretto interessato di non sapere.” 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.”

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’accordo [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.”

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. 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” to do the bust of Bindo Altoviti, presumably because Cellini was receiving an annual stipend.

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190 Cellini 681 (II, Lxxxi).
191 Cellini 52 (I, xiv).
192 Wittkower and Wittkower 9-16.
from the Duke for his work on the *Perseus* at the time when he executed it. 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” 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. 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 dei busti di Cellini.

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194 Trento 44 and 47.
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 tacito 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.”

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. 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 Cosimo 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.

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

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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. 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. 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 pursuade Libradori to return to Florence where he could be kept under control. In so doing, Cosimo revealed yet again his strategy of “nullifying potential sources of opposition” 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. So when Cellini-narrator introduces the episode concerning Cosimo’s change in attitude with the comment “L’altro giorno io mi feci vedere,” 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

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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, xcv).
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*.

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.”

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” and the financial straits that the Duke found himself in at the time. The overall economic

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212 Cellini 717 (II, xcv).
213 Trento 47-48. Italics are Trento’s.
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. In this scenario, Cosimo would have found fault with Cellini for some undisclosed reason so that he could pull back from his “mirabil promesse” 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 mia opere, io non arei avuto e’ gran travagli, che per mia causa mi son venuti: perché la volontà sua si vedeva grandissima si in voler fare delle opere e si nel dar buon ordine a esse. Però non conoscendo io che questo Signore aveva piu modo di mercatante che di duca, liberalissimamente procedevo con Sua Eccellenzia come duca [e non come mercatante].

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 inistimabili and, therefore, could not be valued as objects of the marketplace. Having realized that he was no longer a part of the “symbolic economy” that he had enjoyed under the patronage of King Francis I, 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, viceré 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 satisfare ai mercanti franzesi scudi trentamila di grani, ma non mai levata, come tutte le gravezze della città nostra…”
216 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.
217 See Tylus 34.
218 See 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.\footnote{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.\footnote{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.\footnote{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.”\footnote{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.\footnote{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

\footnote{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.}
\footnote{221 Cellini 682-683 (II, Lxxii).}
\footnote{222 Zikos 134, 141-142.}
\footnote{223 Cellini 680 (II, Lxxx).}
\footnote{224 Zikos 141-142. See also note 157 above.}
principal amount he had invested in Altoviti’s bank would then belong to Altoviti. 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.” 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 [...].” 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, “l’Duca e gli altri levorono un rumore delle maggior risa”[II,71]; il compiaciuto dicitore non si accorge che ridono alle spalle della sua sgangherata ipocrisia.

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

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225 Zikos 141.
226 Cellini 687 and 739 (II, Lxxxiii and II, c).
228 Camesasca 19-20.
cardinal rules of courtly behavior by publicly calling Cellini a *sodomitaccio*: “così in questo breve devei guardare il cortegiano di non parer maligno e velenoso, e dir motti ed arguzie solamente per far dispetto e dar nel core.” 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 uncontainable laughter.

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 uomicciattolo” 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; altamente è freddo e non ha del bono. Però estimo che ‘l tutto sia opera dell’ingegno e della natura.”

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229 Castiglione 203 (II, Lvi).
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*. 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. 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.” They also allowed Cellini to come back later to speak the truth about why there should be a competition for the Neptune commission. 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

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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 See note 237 below.
II.

CELLINI’S VITA—“PRUOVE INISTIMABILE” OF THE ARTIST AS LETTERATO

 [...] 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, orafa 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 parlato “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.

II.1 Cellini’s Vita: Just what kind of book is it?

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, Lxxii): “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, facendo con esso pruove inistimabile.”

238 Altieri Biagi 101. About twenty years earlier, Bruno Maier had also discussed the “boccaccismo” in Cellini’s Vita in his Umanità e Stile 95-110.

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. 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. 

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 naïveté that he present himself as a *picaro* while thinking of himself as a saint.” 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,” Margaret Gallucci included a section on the “Mixture of Genres: Autobiography as Epic, Romance and Comedy” 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,

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241 See Guglielminetti 292-386.

242 See Goldberg 71-83.

243 Bellotto, Introduction xxxii.

244 Gallucci, *Sexuality* 82-91.
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, consciamente 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.  

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. 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 […].”

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

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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.\textsuperscript{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”\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{254} Not only did the artists of Cosimo’s court flaunt their witiness 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

\textsuperscript{251} Coates, “Cellini’s Bust of Cosimo” 160.
\textsuperscript{252} Coates, “Cellini’s Bust of Cosimo” 159.
\textsuperscript{253} Cellini 452 (I, cxxviii).
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 […]”


\(^{259}\) 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 “circolarità di ispirazione”\footnote{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.”} as Michelangelo, Bronzino, Sebastiano del Piombo, Giuliano Romano, Annibale Caro, Benedetto Varchi, Luigi Alamanni, Antonio Allegretti, Luca Martini and others,\footnote{See Cellini 64, 160, 179, 297, 305-306, 313 (I, xviii, xLii, xLvi Lxxxiii, Lxxxiv, Lxxxvi) . See also Maier 31.} and who repeatedly demonstrated an acute sense of irony and comic timing in his \textit{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.\footnote{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 \textit{Vita celliniana}.” (26) Like Altieri Biagi, Enrico Carrara in his “Profilo della \textit{Vita Celliniana}” in Ferrero’s \textit{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 and 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.”} It would seem to suggest that Cellini’s \textit{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”\footnote{Cellini 95 (I, xxvii).} has all too often been taken at face value as opposed to it being a well-known marker for the \textit{topos} of the artist as creative genius.\footnote{See Wittkower and Wittkower 102-104 and Altieri Biagi 92.} 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,
particularly *le facezie*,\textsuperscript{265} that one of the areas of influence and intersection between Castiglione and Cellini is evident.

**II.2 “L’albergo dell’allegría” meets ‘la bottega delle burle’.*\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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,\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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 […]”

\textsuperscript{267} See page 812 of the Indice degli Artisti in Bellotto.

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{269} See Hanning and Rosand xxiii.
sempre cupidì di novità, parea 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 Lezione 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 (Lxxx).
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,” the paragone debate had been “revitalized and reinterpreted in the wake of new developments and criticism.” Moreover, the sculpture side of the debate had risen to a position of superiority, at least from the perspective of Varchi (and Cellini). 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.”

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.

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

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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, concluse 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.” 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].” 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 […]” 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.” Certainly, if Cellini had first-hand knowledge of

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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, 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.

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” who seemed incapable of understanding the value of his work or worse, were intent upon

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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 questioni 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 (Snappahn) 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. 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 sti: 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; si che dite ora quante pappolate cortigianesche voi sapete.”

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” 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” 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 troverà 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.” 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. 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. And just as Bibbiena was “not concerned with piacevolezza to the exclusion of gravità” in his Calandria, Cellini was not concerned with the trials and tribulations of his “vita travagliata” 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, Èulogos 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 sbembizzato 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 avvenuta—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.
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 carezavano. Da questo ne nacque una compagnia di pittori, scultori, orafi, 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 professione, 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 vecchio, ma si bene il più giovane alla valitudine del corpo. Noi ci ritrovavomo 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 presentarsi alla virtuosa compagnia, ciascuno con la sua cornachia, et io mi trovavo senza, et pur troppo mi pareva fare errore mancare di una si 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 cornachucci; pensai a una piacevoleza per acrescere alla lietitudine maggiore risa. Così risolutomi, chiamai un giovinett o 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 boccaccesque introduction to the episode. Maier has noted the “sapore boccaccesco” 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

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300 Castiglione 188 (II, xLv).
301 Cellini 105-106 (I, xxx).
“l’esagerazione verbale.” 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. 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,” 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.” And there is no shortage of elements linking the Vita to the tradizione novellistica. But the level of playfulness and artistry demonstrated by Cellini in this episode also extends into the realm of theatrical comedy. 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 peggior 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 Cena, 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 Michelangnolo falls to his knees in awe of Cellini’s “bella figura.”

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 inimaginar 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 ginochia 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 rizatosi Michelagnolo, disse che al Papa si baciava i piedi et che agli Angeli si baciava le gote; et così fatto, grandemente arross ì il giovane, che per quella causa si accrebbe bellezza grandissima.

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. 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.” 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

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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.
310 See Bellotto 111n.41.
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, che non possiede un aperto intendimento osceno, è un tema che probabilmente avrebbe repugnato all’allegra 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.

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. 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.” 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 faired the worst since he was put in prison; Romano transferred to the court of

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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).
Mantua (with Castiglione’s assistance, as we have seen) and Aretino “discreetly retired from Rome for a season.”\textsuperscript{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.

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

\textsuperscript{320} Symonds, Renaissance 341-342.
\textsuperscript{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 rinchiusere si possa.
Questo sviscerato amore fu causa, che per vedere io più sovente rasserenare quel
maraviglioso 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
nobilità 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 possible 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

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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
323 Cellini 66-68 (I, xix).
324 Maier 136.
325 Cellini 66 (I, xix).
alla vita mia.” 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’, 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.

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 spiccat.” 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.

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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. 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.”

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 Sienese 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 Frangese; Lori’s on Apples; Ruscelli’s on the Spindle [...] Figs, beans, peaches, apples, chestnuts acquired a new and scandalous significance.” (Renaissance 320)

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.

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:

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 artwork 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 artwork—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.” Years later, Cellini would painfully regret not having drawn up a written contract for the execution of his “mal fortunato Perseo” because by then, he had learned that the Duke “aveva più modo di mercatante che di duca.” 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.

The artistry of Pontormo’s lunette, particularly the “numerous paraphrases of Michelangelo’s [Sistine] ceiling and Medici tombs in the Vertumnus painting,” 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 [...]”

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 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 dissiche ero orefice. Disse lei che troppo ben disegnavo per orefice [...]” 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.” 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

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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.” 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.

In addition to staging a “travesty of the church,” as mentioned earlier, the dinner gathering of the “virtuosa compagnia” 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).

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 [...].

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.” In this case, the process comes full

346 Cellini 153 (I, xL).
348 Cellini 106 (I,xxx).
349 Barolsky 82.
350 Barolsky 82.
circle with the artist-letterato ‘drawing on’ (both literally and figuratively)\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Vita} of Raphael.\textsuperscript{353}

In Cellini’s parodic version of the \textit{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,”\textsuperscript{354} and Pomona who is “grossa di qualche mese.”\textsuperscript{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 inimaginor so possa.”\textsuperscript{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:

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

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 avesse disertato l’adunanza.\textsuperscript{358}

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

\textsuperscript{353} Vasari, \textit{Le vite}, eds. Bellosi and Rossi 636.

\textsuperscript{354} Lucio Apuleio, \textit{L’asino d’oro}, cited in Zuccari 50-51.

\textsuperscript{355} Cellini 111 (I, xxx).

\textsuperscript{356} Cellini 109 (I, xxx).

\textsuperscript{357} Cellini 105-106 (I,xxx).

\textsuperscript{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. 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*. 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.

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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 *cornacchia* 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*—

362 See Rubin 275-276: “There were famous ekphrasesis 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 di, 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, xLvi)ii).
366 Castiglione 191 (II, xLvi)ii).
367 Cellini 209-210 (I, Lvii).
di quei più ricchi, fattosi cognoircere questo valente uomo, per virtù di certi profumi mostrava di sanare maravigliosamente queste cotai infirmità, ma voleva far patto prima che cominciassi a curare [...].

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 senti 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.”

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” 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.  

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 […].” 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. 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.” The artist-biographers of the Cinquecento and Cellini, in particular, took the ancestry part of the description to a new level of “audacia genealogica.” 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.\footnote{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)} By all accounts, Cellini invented this part of the story.\footnote{Bondanella and Bondanella 380n. 6.} 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.”\footnote{Cellini 11 (I, ii).} But the emphasis on valiant men does not end with him.

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.\footnote{Cellini 12-13 (I, ii). Emphasis is mine.} 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
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].”

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 [...] 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 particularità, 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 licto 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 estimo esser in lui necessaria quella perfetta cognizion di cose e l’altra qualità, che ad un capitano si convengono; ché per esser questo troppo gran mare, ne contentaremo, 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’importanza, e dove son molti testimoni, 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 mostrì tanto fierio, 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 [...]
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.\textsuperscript{384} Notwithstanding the discrepancies between his actual criminal record and what we learn about his various ‘adventures’ in the Vita,\textsuperscript{385} Cellini portrays himself as one who adheres to the rules of engagement when it comes to deploying one’s weapons.\textsuperscript{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.’”\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{384} The word “onore” and “onor” combined appear 55 times in the Vita. See IntraText CT http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1130/BX.HTM
\textsuperscript{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 Erspermer, La biblioteca di don Ferrante: Duello e onore nella cultura del Cinquecento (Rome: Bulzoni, 1982).
\textsuperscript{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, sanza insanguinarsi restando dal mio avversario, con molto onore usci’ di tale impresa. Non dico altri particolari; che se bene sarebbono 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 differenzie 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’onor 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

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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 […].”

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 inmerso che ne l’arte, et non ha ancora trenta anni?’” 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. 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, 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 mostrì tanto fiero, che sempre stia in su le brave parole”—the

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391 Castiglione 44-45 (I, xvii).
392 Cellini 198 (I, Liii) and Bellotto’s note 19 to this page. Emphasis mine.
395 Castiglione 46 (I, xvii).
The 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 cognosce quanto le stelle non tanto ci inclinano, ma ci sforzano. Conosciuto quanto grando obiго questо 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 piu a me non guardava, infiammato di collora, uscito del Palazo, 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. 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”—, and his triumphs owing to his *virtù* and the fact that “Dio […] aiuta sempre la ragione.” Since it was believed that the stars determined temperament, according to the theory of humours, 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 maleficient 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.

So while Cellini’s battles with Fortune allow more room for God and Providence to help those who demonstrate their *virtù*, 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.

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).
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*. 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 condizione 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 sepellir nell’abisso i più degni d’esser esaltati.  

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.

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 cammino 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 [...].

Ora quanto io m’abbia acquistato qualche onore alla casa mia, li quali a questo nostro vivere di oggi per le cause che si sanno, 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.

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

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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 dinanzi 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."\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{414} And despite the overall impression of being a braggadocio, Cellini is mindful in the \textit{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 cognoscono molto meglio quando sono lodati da altri, che a lodarsi così sicuramente da per loro medesimi.”\textsuperscript{415} This, too, is a theme that gets raised early on in the \textit{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

\textsuperscript{412} Bellotto 13n.32.
\textsuperscript{413} Bellotto, Introduction xx-xxi: “Sebbene Cellini avverta il bisogno di giustificare il suo progetto autobiografico—memore, probabilmente, sia dell’illustre modello dantesco (\textit{Convivio}, I: 2), che degli esordi dei \textit{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 scrivere 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 […]”

\textsuperscript{414} Cellini 9 (I, ii).
\textsuperscript{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 [...].”

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.

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. 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.” While Cellini’s type of “sapere necessario” pertains to

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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 proccuratore di Vostre Eccellenzie, faccendo ogni opera perché le sieno servite meglio? Considerate, Signora mia: se Vostre Eccellenzie illustissime si contentano che ogniuno facci un modello di un Nettunno, se bene voi siate resoluti 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 dilletarvene et d’intendervene.”

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

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420 Cellini 733 (II, xcix).
comments about Cosimo—“aveva più modo di mercatante che di duca”\textsuperscript{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 Eccellenza illustissima che mi faccia grazia che io dica a Vostra Eccellenza quattro parole per suo servizio.” Il Duca mi disse che io dicesi tutto quello che io volevo, et che e’ mi ascolterebbe.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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, \textit{perché tu mi di’ il vero, et io lo conosco.”}\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{424} It is not quite the “\textit{mon ami}” employed by King Francis with Benvenuto, but it is, nonetheless, expressive of a bond of trust and even affection.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{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.
\textsuperscript{422} Cellini 734 (II, xcix).
\textsuperscript{423} Cellini 735 (II, xcix). Emphasis is mine.
\textsuperscript{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. \textsuperscript{424} See Intratext CT <http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1130/6G.HTM> and <http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1130/2R.HTM>, respectively.
\textsuperscript{425} Cellini 522, 531 and 592 (II, xix, xxii, and xLvi).
cultivated with the King of France, Cellini is continually frustrated by what he considers the deficient “fede dei mercatanti.” The Duke, however, is not willing to participate in the artist’s outmoded symbolic economy “which resists the commodification of the work of art.” Nevertheless, Cellini insists upon the value of his special knowledge, his “sapere necessario e pratico,” 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,” 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. 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.” 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 ristrinse nelle spalle, et aviatosi per andarsene, lo inbasciatore di Lucca disse al Duca: “Signore, questo vostro Benvenuto si è un un terrible 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 aùto a quest’ora delle cose che e’ non ha aùte.” 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, Lxxii).
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).
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, stilnovisticо 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, mostrandomigli, 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, sopragiunse 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: “Legamelio 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 fusi in quel giovane, volentieri io m’andrei con Dio.” Madonna Porzia agiunse 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.”

Needless to say, ‘Benvenuto Innamorato’ works diligently to create an exquisite piece of jewelry that is adorned with “mascherini, puttini, animali e benissimo smaltato.” 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

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436 Cellini 66-68 (I, xix). Emphasis is mine.
437 Cellini 68 (I, xix).
Cellini proposes that they put their respective works to the test “perché alla fine di tale opere si vedrebbe chi di noi si ingannava.” 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.

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
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.”

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[al] versare a modo di una tramoggia di mulino.” 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.’” 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.” 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.” 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*.
in the 1568 edition and not at all in the 1550 edition.\footnote{Vasari, \textit{Vite} \url{http://biblio.cribecu.sns.it/vasari/consultazione/index.html}.} It is not used in Castiglione’s \textit{Cortegiano}, but it occurs twice as an adjective and 3 times as an adverb in the \textit{Decameron}.\footnote{See \textit{IntraText CT} \url{http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA0271/3/XY.HTM}.} Cellini’s choice of a lexicon that emblematizes 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 \textit{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.”\footnote{Tylus 34. Emphasis is Tylus’s.}

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.\footnote{Tylus 39.}

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.”\footnote{Tylus 39.} 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 degnità che si dessi a un forestiero.”\footnote{Cellini 523 (II, xix): “Partitosi da me, tornato al Re, tutto riferi 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 fato signore del castello del Piccolo Nello che lui abita, il quale è mio di patrimonio.”} It is no wonder, then, that Cellini would later
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 Folgore 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.’

\begin{quote}
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.\(^{459}\)
\end{quote}

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.

\(^{458}\) White 131.
\(^{459}\) Cellini 3 (*Proemio*).
\(^{461}\) Altieri Biagi 101.
But even Cellini-auctor creates his own Angelica for whom his protagonist “fec[e] pazzie inistimabile per ritrovarla.” 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” 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,” 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).\textsuperscript{468} In fact, these successful translations created an “interesse che sin dalla prima traduzione […] fu prima europeo che italiano.”\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Vita} seemed destined to have from the moment of its delayed arrival on the scene of Italian literature.\textsuperscript{470} Gianmarco Gaspari has examined the question of why the initial publication of the \textit{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].\textsuperscript{471} In addition to the political and religious factors at work behind the ‘disappearance’ of the \textit{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 \textit{Vita}, scritta in anni in cui il lettore di palato educato si volgeva a tutt’altro, al contemporaneo e antipodico \textit{Galateo} di Monsignor della Casa, per esempio, pubblicata o no, la \textit{Vita} non fu libro per gli italiani. […] La storia della fortuna della \textit{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.\textsuperscript{472}

\textsuperscript{468} Symonds xlviii. See also Gianmarco Gaspari, “La \textit{Vita} del Cellini e le origini dell’autobiografia,” \textit{Versants} 21 (1992): 103-117.
\textsuperscript{469} Bellotto, Introduction xvii-xviii.
\textsuperscript{470} Bellotto, Introduction xviii.
\textsuperscript{471} Gaspari 111.
\textsuperscript{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’etre* 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. 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.” Thus it was not a voyeuristic interest in the uncouth “particolare carattere” 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 […].”

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

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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


\(^{480}\) 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 15\(^{th}\), 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 bitingly 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

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beneath this appellation. Mayer succeeds in faithfully embodying the spirit of that “record of action and passion” \(^{487}\) in a script which recreates the Boccaccio-Boccaccio 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.
in question revolve around the Angelica episode and are taken verbatim from the MacDonnell translation.\textsuperscript{492} It is unlikely that Mayer would have also read the \textit{Vita} in Italian, given that his formal education ended when he was only 15 and he had to begin working.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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.”\textsuperscript{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—,\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Vita}, he also demonstrates (as will be seen shortly in another instance) that he had

\textsuperscript{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).

\textsuperscript{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.”

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

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.)

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. 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…

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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. 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.” Angela has experienced many a beating, but not from Cellini. It is her mother who has regularly beaten her and “sold [her] to villains.” 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”

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508 See Bondanella and Bondanella 405n. 90.  
509 Mayer 36.  
510 Mayer 34.  
511 Mayer 33.  
512 Mayer 39.
The mercenary quality of both mothers is, in general, faithful to Cellini’s portrayal of women in his autobiography, 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 sullying 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. 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.

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.

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

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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 background\textsuperscript{518} is presented in the stage directions before the Duke makes his first entrance:

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[\ldots \textit{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.}]\textsuperscript{519}
\]

While having a man of color play the part would not have been unprecedented,\textsuperscript{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, \textit{White Cargo}, which opened in 1923, was an extremely successful play, despite the fact that it initially received poor reviews from the critics.\textsuperscript{521} After over a year had passed since its opening, on March 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 1925, \textit{Time Magazine} put \textit{White Cargo} on its list of “Best Plays” along with \textit{The Firebrand}—both as “plays which, in the light of metropolitan criticism, seem most important.” \textit{Time} offered a brief synopsis of \textit{White Cargo}: “Mulatto woman, white man, all alone in Africa. A sombre study in loneliness that has played in Manhattan for over a

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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)

\textsuperscript{520} Eugene O’Neill’s play, \textit{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, \textit{Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O’Neill}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1988), 30 July 2008 <http://www.eoneill.com/library/contour/amateursend/jones.htm>.

year.” 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…

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 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

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=F0091FFE3D551A793C0A81782D85F448685F9&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, Lxxiii).
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. 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.”

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”). 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.”

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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. 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. 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.” 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.


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.

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.)

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”—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? [...]
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 scoured 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 […]”). Thus, there is a problem of aesthetic distance 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

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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.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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 \textit{Vita} that Symonds praised, while also allowing for a 21\textsuperscript{st} 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


\textsuperscript{564} Kaufman, “When the Author Insists.”

\textsuperscript{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.*

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.”

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.

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<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.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{569} In fact, the play is dedicated “to New York City, my Florence.”\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Vita} well before the Bondanellas’ \textit{My Life} was published in 2002. Just to cite one example where the Bondanellas’ translation more closely reflects the \textit{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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{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.”

\textsuperscript{569} John Patrick Shanley, e-mail to author, 7 July 2008.

\textsuperscript{570} Shanley 3.

\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Sei giornate} dell’Aretino.”
faithfully mirror Cellini’s punning by using the name Culosseum, as the Bondanellas did.\footnote{See Bondanellas 109-112 and their explanatory note regarding this usage on 408.} 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 ‘\emph{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 dànno requie alla vita loro […].”\footnote{Giorgio Vasari, Le vite, 30 Oct. 2008 <http://biblio.cribeeu.sns.it/vasari/consultazione/index.html>.
} Certainly the idea of remaking Cellini’s \textit{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”\footnote{John Simon’s characterization alone would be enough to answer the question regarding the novelty of Shanley’s \textit{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-implied 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 \textit{Vita} as it does in Shanley’s play, there is a certain symmetry between the way Cellini} 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 \textit{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-implied 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 \textit{Vita} as it does in Shanley’s play, there is a certain symmetry between the way Cellini
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) 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
vertò, stat Virtus. A little while after this he obtained his place again among the
fifers.

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. For Shanley, as we have seen, the
mirror takes on the Socratic symbolism of promoting self-knowledge in his protagonist.

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575 Cellini 25 (I, v): “Se bene alcune di queste cose furono innanzi che’io nascesi, 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.” The Boy, as the one who is committing Cellini’s life to paper, asks questions of clarification as he writes: “Were you [a liar]?” 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.

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 ~

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578 Shanley 25.
579 Shanley 23.
580 Melchior-Bonnet 105-106.
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. The director’s previous work with W.C. Fields in a pair of films made him no stranger to

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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.
comedy and John Gillett credits La Cava’s background as a cartoonist with “the prevalence of sight gags and beautifully timed visual ‘business’.”

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, eh... *(Unable to remember what he meant to say.)*

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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.


(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.)

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. 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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Vita}), the title of the film could have just as easily been \textit{The Affairs of the Duchess of Florence} (a fictitious Duchess, of course, given that the real Duchess Eleonora was not fond of Cellini.)\textsuperscript{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!”\textsuperscript{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: \textit{The Mark of Zorro} (1920), \textit{The Three Musketeers} (1921), \textit{Robin Hood} (1922), \textit{The Thief of Bagdad} (1924) and \textit{The Gaucho} (1927).\textsuperscript{590}

Another reason these critics [disciples of \textit{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—\textit{Bed of Roses, My Man Godfrey, Stage Door, Primrose Path}—show the woman (sometimes a group of women) as the emotional and

\textsuperscript{587} Gary Morris, “Forgotten Master.”
\textsuperscript{588} Cellini 684-692 (II, Lxxiii-Lxxiv).
\textsuperscript{589} \textit{The Affairs of Cellini}, dust jacket.
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.
Firebrand.\footnote{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.”} 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?\footnote{The Affairs of Cellini, scene in the Duchess’s boudoir.}

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
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 [skru’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

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. And while it is usually Frank Morgan who is credited with “the brunt of the comedy” 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.) 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.”

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. 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. Like Mayer, La Cava had a Celliniesque 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.

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

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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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Vita} continue to be performed and adapted into even newer variations on old themes.\textsuperscript{607} Whether this continued interest in Cellini is solely attributable to his \textit{Vita} or not is a question that will be addressed in the next section.

\textbf{III.5 Cellini as part of “The Italian Renaissance, Made in the USA”?}\textsuperscript{608}

\textit{The Affairs of Cellini} is not the only cinematic adaptation of Cellini’s autobiography, but it was the most commercially successful.\textsuperscript{609} \textit{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 \textit{Lorenzino de’ Medici} of 1935 was released

\textsuperscript{605} Frank Capra quoted in \textit{World Film Directors}, in \textit{The Buffalo Film Seminars}.

\textsuperscript{606} Gary Morris, “Forgotten Master.”


\textsuperscript{609} See Gallucci, “Pop Culture” 204: “[…] \textit{The Affairs of Cellini} was a commercial success. It was listed in \textit{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.

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615 Gallucci, “Pop Culture,” 207.  
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

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617 Galand 332.
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

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.”

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 [...]” 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

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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...

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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.” 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.* Unfortunately, the issue was discontinued because of complaints about “what were perceived as stern-faced Inquisitors in hooded, red robes” on the front cover. According to William B. Jones, Jr., the issue was “dropped because of a less-

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632 Gallucci, “Pop Icon” 209.
than-flattering portrait it painted of the Renaissance Catholic Church.\footnote{Jones 75.}
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 fazzione [sic] di fra Girolamo [Savonarola], mi arebbon voluto metter prigione et condennarmi a misura di carboni […].”\footnote{Cellini 58 (I, xvii).} Leslie Katz, the writer-adapter for this issue,\footnote{Jones 218.} describes the scene very simply: “I was called before the Eight Signors who ruled Florence...”\footnote{Leslie Katz, \textit{Adventures of Cellini}, \textit{Classics Illustrated} 38 (New York: Gilberton, 1947) 4.} 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 \textit{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 [...].”\footnote{MacDonnell, \textit{The Life of Benvenuto Cellini} 23. Ms. MacDonnell was English.}

The \textit{Adventures of Cellini} was revised and reprinted by \textit{Classics Illustrated} with a different artist and writer in 1961, but it lacked “the style, intent and spirit of the original.”\footnote{Paul Avila Mayer “Which One.”} 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
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. […]”  

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.  

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*). Leslie Katz made no such attempt to associate his adaptation of 1947 with a particular translation. The issue of the scholarliness 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.

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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. 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.” 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. While this nonscholarly interest is still alive, it, too, has necessarily been conditioned by the “heated scholarly querelle” 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

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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 helmut 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!  

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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 piú gloriose le mie vendette che se io mi fusi 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* emblematizes 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

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\(^{648}\) 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,” 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
devine liquido. Or veduto di avere risucitato un morto, contro al credere di tutti
quelli ignoranti, e’ mi tornò tanto vigore, che io non mi avedevo se io avevo più
fabbre o più paura di morte.

Casting the protagonist of the Vita at the center of his own Persean myth, our
hero makes the bronze melt again so that the creative process can continue and he can
infuse his artistic progeny with life. 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. 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
sovra 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 fuggerà si 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

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656 Milanesi 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 tosco.\footnote{Cellini 3-4 \textit{(Proemio)}. Italics are mine.}

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.’\footnote{Cellini 3 \textit{(Proemio)}.}
This last verse was the one that inspired Vittorio Alfieri to remark that “questo solo verso rivela che Benvenuto potea essere sommo poeta.”\footnote{Cited in Bellotto, Introduction xLiv.}
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 \textit{Vite}.

Grandissima comoditade 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’
si crede comunemente (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 LeoneBatista […] 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

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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." In addition to reflecting Varchi’s influence on the iconography and the statue’s allegorical significance in relation to its patron, Cosimo I, 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.” 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.” It is also an idea that Cellini

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 Lezione 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.”

Il mio Duca, con tutto che Sua Eccellenzia 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 auto questo poco del contento, il quale
sarà cagione che più presto et con più diligenzia 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 dì molti di quei che non vi sono; sì che
armisi di pazienza.”

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. 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.” 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*

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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”\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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 Lezzi\textsuperscript{on}i 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,”\textsuperscript{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 musicò, 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[l]’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’instrumento 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[l]’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

\textsuperscript{671} Milanesi 89.
\textsuperscript{672} See pp. 14-16 of chapter one above.
\textsuperscript{673} Hughes 9.
\textsuperscript{674} Barocchi Scritti 473.
co’ sua proprie panni e rendere quelli ch’gl’ha tolto in presto, e’ non rimanga (come quella cornacchia) mezo nudo. Questo si consideri bene.  

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). 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.

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.
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.” 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 quegli che sono della stessa professione […]” 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. 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 […]” 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.” Autobiographical elements remained in the Trattati, 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’increseeva 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 Eccellenzia, 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 non-essere molestato da tropppe persone, e’ gli aveva piacere che io ragionassi seco [...].

Cellini proceeds to recount his travails to the Duke (“non macchiando mai la verità con il falso”) 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 Eccellenzia illustrissima più che da tutto il resto degli uomini del mondo, et fussino papa o inperato ri o re; più volentieri io servirei Sua Eccellenzia 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; si che rirortanetene a Firenze e sta’ di buona voglia, perché il Duca ti vòl bene.” Così io mi ritornai a Firenze.

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. 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

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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 Psycholanalysis* 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’assali 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

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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. 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. Paying tribute to his only teacher and model, Michelangelo, Cellini uses the
‘faciebat’ signature on his Perseus, but he also does Michelangelo one better, as
Goffen would say, with his literary equivalent of *faciebat* 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.

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

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698 Cellini 719 (II, xcv): “A queste beneigne 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 *faciebat* 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 della 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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CURRICULUM VITA

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