



---

Rhetoric and Art History in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque

Author(s): Carl Goldstein

Source: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 73, No. 4 (Dec., 1991), pp. 641-652

Published by: [College Art Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3045834>

Accessed: 05/11/2010 05:11

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=caa>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



*College Art Association* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Art Bulletin*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# Rhetoric and Art History in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque

Carl Goldstein

Renaissance art history began as civic history; it was an expression of civic pride. The first such history was Filippo Villani's *De origine civitatis Florentiae et eiusdem famosis civibus*, written about 1381–82. Florentine artists revived an art that was almost dead, Villani asserts, just as Dante had restored poetry after its decline in the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> The revival was begun by Cimabue and completed by Giotto, who equalled the ancient painters in fame and even surpassed them in skill and talent. After Giotto came his followers, Stefano, Taddeo Gaddi, and Maso, *uomini illustri* all, who, together with notable jurists, poets, musicians, theologians, physicians, orators, and others, made Florence the preeminent city of Italy.<sup>2</sup>

Cino Rinuccini, following Villani, published an honor-roll of Florence's famous men, among them, artists.<sup>3</sup> And Cristoforo Landino wrote in the same vein in a better known work that appeared in 1481; the Preface to his Commentary to the *Divine Comedy* contains a recapitulation of the painting of the classical world that is followed by a brief history of modern art, which is to say Florentine art, beginning with Cimabue and Giotto and enumerating the contributions of the masters of the quattrocento: Masaccio, Lippi, Castagno, Uccello, Fra Angelico, Brunelleschi, Donatello, Desiderio, Ghiberti, and the two Rossellini.<sup>4</sup>

Though in no sense a history, Alberti's *De pictura* of 1435–36, like these works, contains a list—a much abbreviated one—of great Florentine artists: Brunelleschi, Donatello, Luca della Robbia, Ghiberti, and Masaccio. And, more important, the list is part of an encomium similar in type to those mentioned: Brunelleschi, like Villani's Giotto, has equalled the ancients in fame and surpassed them in talent. For the promotion of talent, Brunelleschi's, Donatello's, and the others', Florence ("this most beautiful of cities") is without equal in modern Italy.<sup>5</sup>

These texts are among the handful that treat art in the early Florentine Renaissance and are, therefore, precious

testimony from the early years of Renaissance art history. While rare for being texts on art, they are of a type, however, that was common in Renaissance literature. They belong to a genre or category in which are found some of the most characteristic texts of Renaissance humanism. Other of the books in this category are by such writers as Brunni, Salutati, and Manetti, books with which all students of the Renaissance are familiar. They treat broad moral and philosophical issues, but, as in the accounts of visual art, only insofar as they concern the city of Florence. And scholars reasonably have asked why there was such a preoccupation with Florence at this time. One of those who did so was Hans Baron and his answer has been at the center of discussions of this question since the 1950s.<sup>6</sup>

Baron linked the focus on Florence during the years around 1400 to a struggle over Florentine independence that began in 1390 with a declaration of war by Milan and ended only in 1454, when Milan accepted the independent status of the Florentine Republic. These events, he proposed, explain the direction taken by Florentine political speculation at this time, particularly the stress on republican ideals of liberty and civic involvement; they gave rise to a distinctive type of humanism, rooted in "a new philosophy of political engagement and active life," and devoted to the celebration of Florence's republican liberties.<sup>7</sup>

Baron's argument led Frederick Hartt to stress the role of freedom in Florentine art, relating the key commissions of the early quattrocento such as the dome of the cathedral to the struggle for independence: "They [the commissions] functioned as soldiers in the continuing struggle against absorption and dictatorship in the sense that they galvanized popular support for the life-and-death struggle of Florence by means of their profoundly felt yet easily recognizable symbolic content."<sup>8</sup> There were other scholars, however, who remained unconvinced by Baron's thesis. The counter-

Some of the material included in this article was part of a paper read at the National Conference of the Renaissance Society of America, Tempe, Arizona, 12–14 March 1987. The present version profited from suggestions made by Donald Posner, John O'Malley, Walter Cahn, and two anonymous readers for *The Art Bulletin*.

<sup>1</sup> Villani repeats what Boccaccio had said about Dante, but stresses his ties to Florence; see C. A. Madrignani, "Di alcune biografie umanistiche di Dante e Petrarca," *Belragor*, xviii, 1963, 29–48, 31. I am grateful to James Weiss for recommending this article and providing me with a copy of it.

<sup>2</sup> See esp. Baxandall, 66–78; also C. Frey, *Il codice Maghabecciano*, Berlin, 1892, xxxii–viii; L. Venturi, "La critica d'arte alla fine del Trecento (Filippo Villani e Cennino Cennini)," *L'Arte*, xxviii, 1925, 233–244; E. Panofsky, *Renaissance and Resurrections in Western Art*, New York, 1969, 14–16; G. Tantarli, "Le biographie d'artisti prima del Vasari," *Il Vasari, storiografo e artista (Atti del Congresso Internazionale nel IV Centenario della Morte [1974])*, Florence, 1976, 275–298.

<sup>3</sup> Baron, 94–95.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 95–96; J. Schlosser Magnino, *La letteratura artistica*, Florence, 1956, 106–107; O. Morisani, "Art Historians and Art Critics, III: Cristoforo Landino," *Burlington Magazine*, LXXXV, 1953, 267–270.

<sup>5</sup> L.B. Alberti, *On Painting and on Sculpture*, ed. with intro. and notes C. Grayson, London, 1972, 33. A passage very similar to the famous one by Alberti celebrating Brunelleschi and his dome, also from the 1430s, is in the dialogues "On Civic Life" by Matteo Palmieri: "Every thoughtful person must thank God for having been permitted to be born into this new age, so full of hope and promise, which already rejoices in a greater array of nobly-gifted talents than the world has seen in the course of the previous thousand years." See *Della vita civile*, ed. F. Battaglia, in *Scrittori politici Italiani*, xiv, Bologna, 1944, 36–37; cited in Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 1, *The Renaissance*, Cambridge, 1978, 69. E. H. Gombrich has pointed out that Alberti's passage is based in part on the younger Pliny; "A Classical Topos in the Introduction to Alberti's *Della Pittura*," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, xx, 1957, 173.

<sup>6</sup> Baron.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of Baron's thesis, see Skinner (as in n. 5), 69–71.

<sup>8</sup> F. Hartt, *History of Italian Renaissance Art*, 3rd ed., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1987, 142. Hartt first applied Baron's thesis to Renaissance art in, "Art and Freedom in Quattrocento Florence," *Marsyas: Studies in the History of Art*, Suppl. 1: *Essays in Memory of Karl Lehmann*, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1964, 114–131.

arguments that they put forth, and Baron's further definition of his position, are well known and, ordinarily, would not need to be reviewed here. But the thesis itself, and discussions of it, all turn on a question of interpretation, and why it has been possible to view the evidence in such different ways does need to be examined.

Baron's argument centers on one work: Leonardo Bruni's *Eulogy of the City of Florence*, composed between 1403 and 1404.<sup>9</sup> That the work was written in imitation of a classical model, as had been noted earlier, Baron readily admits, and he indicates the size of Bruni's debt to his source. This was a work of Greek rhetoric in praise of Athens, and Bruni can be seen ascribing to Florentines all the virtues credited to ancient Athenians. More important, Baron states, is Bruni's reliance on his model for the conceptual structure of his argument, "the pattern and sequence of his questions which clearly follow the precedent" that he had chosen.<sup>10</sup> But if it is undeniable that Bruni modeled his eulogy after a work of classical rhetoric, he did so, Baron declares, because that work spoke directly to the recent experience of Florentines. Baron suggests, in other words, that what Athens had experienced in its struggle with Persia, Florence just had relived in its own fight with Milan. Insisting on the genuineness of the sentiment expressed by Bruni, Baron states: "The best that Bruni's panegyric had to say about Florence was not borrowed from any ancient or medieval precedent. It stemmed from the experiences and trends of his own day."<sup>11</sup>

Bruni was responding not to recent events in Florence, came the rejoinder, but rather to the form and structure of classical rhetoric, an example of which, Baron had admitted, Bruni had used as his model. In this view, Bruni's panegyric should be understood not as a statement of a new civic awareness but rather as a fairly standard performance by a professional rhetorician, more similar to than different from other such performances that preceded it.<sup>12</sup>

Baron and his critics were in agreement, then, about the importance of classical rhetoric for Bruni and, more generally, in the Early Renaissance. They differed, however, about how it was used. One of those who differed with Baron was Paul Oskar Kristeller, who insisted both on the centrality of rhetoric within Renaissance humanism and on its ties with its medieval past. As for this past, Kristeller has tried to show how Renaissance humanists as professional rhetoricians were following in the footsteps of medieval rhetoricians. They had similar training and occupied similar positions, acting as teachers of rhetoric or secretaries of princes or city governments. Their favorite literary forms and topics were ones

familiar from medieval rhetoric, such as the ideal of republican liberty. This point is essential and needs to be stressed: classical texts, particularly those of Cicero, establish the closest possible connection between rhetoric and civic life, assigning to rhetoric, as was done later in Florence, the responsibility for upholding liberty.<sup>13</sup> There were differences between medieval and Renaissance rhetoric, of course, the most important being the more systematic study of classical examples by Renaissance humanists, who thereby transformed the medieval *ars dictaminis* into the *studia humanitatis*. But if Petrarch was different from earlier rhetoricians and Bruni different from Petrarch, these were differences of degree rather than kind and the foundations of all were the same.<sup>14</sup>

The question answered so differently, then, by Baron and Kristeller, to put it once again, is of how these encomia to Florence and to her citizens, artists among them, are to be understood: are they statements of attitudes that had arisen in Florence during this period in her history, articulating the responses of Florentines to the life around them, or are they, first and foremost, rhetorical exercises expressive of the importance attached by the humanists to the Latin language and its literary forms? If the answer must be one or the other, the arguments of this paper will suggest, this may not have been the right question to ask.

### The Language of Early Renaissance Criticism

The modern study of Renaissance rhetoric gathered momentum in the period following the publication of Baron's book, so that in 1979 John O'Malley could confidently state: "If scholarship has proved a single point . . . it has proved that in one way or another Renaissance Humanism was intimately, even essentially, related to the revival of classical rhetoric. A 'humanist' who made no profession of rhetoric was no humanist at all."<sup>15</sup> One of the connections studied was between classical rhetoric and Renaissance art theory and criticism, a connection that by now has been firmly established. "The fundamental critical attitudes of Renaissance writers, both on painting and poetry," David Summers has written, "were defined by the tradition of rhetoric."<sup>16</sup> Summers was referring specifically to Alberti's *De pictura*, which, it is by now abundantly clear, resulted from the application of classical rhetoric to art theory.

Alberti applies a generally Ciceronian attitude to painting, urging the painter, as Cicero and Quintilian had urged the orator, to master the liberal arts, even while, in good rhetorical fashion, himself disclaiming eloquence.<sup>17</sup> The

<sup>9</sup> When it was published is important for the argument, and these dates are Baron's; see Baron, 83–93.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>12</sup> See esp. J. Seigel, "Civic 'Humanism' or Ciceronian Rhetoric?" *Past and Present*, xxxiv, 1966, 3–48; Baron responded in "Leonardo Bruni: 'Professional Rhetorician' or Civic Humanist," *Past and Present*, xxxvi, 1967, 21–37. For a review of the arguments and a balanced discussion of them, see now, A. Rabil, Jr., "The Significance of 'Civic Humanism' in the Interpretation of the Italian Renaissance," in *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy*, ed. A. Rabil, Jr., Philadelphia, 1988, 141–174.

<sup>13</sup> See Vickers, 6–8.

<sup>14</sup> See esp. P.O. Kristeller, "Humanism and Scholasticism in the Italian

Renaissance," in *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, Rome, 1956, 552–583.

<sup>15</sup> J. O'Malley, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome*, Durham, N.C., 1979, 5. For an overview of this research, see W.J. Bouwsma, *The Culture of Renaissance Humanism (American Historical Association Pamphlet, no. 401)*, Washington, D.C., 1973; and, most recently, with a useful bibliography, J. Monfasani, "Humanism and Rhetoric," in *Renaissance Humanism* (as in n. 12), 171–235.

<sup>16</sup> Summers, 88–89; see also *idem*, "Contrapposto: Style and Meaning in Renaissance Art," *Art Bulletin*, LIX, 1977, 336–361.

<sup>17</sup> See R. W. Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting*, New York, 1967, 17–18; J.R. Spencer, "Ut Rhetorica Pictura. A Study of Quattrocento Theory of Painting," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, xx, 1957, 26–44. Cf. the excellent summary, with commen-

organization of *De pictura* derives from classical rhetoric, namely from the isagogic or elementary treatises that first discuss the elements, then the art, and finally the artist; Alberti begins similarly with the elements (of optics), goes on to the branches of painting, and then treats the painter and his moral and professional conduct.<sup>18</sup> It is possible to be still more specific, for, as D.R.E. Wright recently has shown, Alberti's overall plan corresponds to the structure of Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*.<sup>19</sup>

Alberti's praise of painting uses the techniques of epideictic rhetoric, which is a discussion in terms of value and of praise and blame to demonstrate the speaker's skill; the *paragone* is such a discussion, declaring the superiority of one of the arts by praising it (*laus*) at the expense (*vituperatio*) of the others.<sup>20</sup> And many of his other distinctions and terms apply to painting the terms of grammar and rhetoric.<sup>21</sup>

What Alberti began was continued by the writers who followed him. "The range of later treatises applying rhetorical criteria is striking," Brian Vickers recently noted, citing, among others, Pino, Dolce, Danti, Commanini, and Lomazzo.<sup>22</sup> These writers, too, applied the rhetorical system to painting, with the use of terms and concepts corresponding to those of rhetoric, drawn from the original sources or from material from the sources found in Alberti's book.<sup>23</sup> It has been shown, then, that Renaissance art criticism owed a large debt to classical rhetoric. What has not been shown, or not with equal clarity, is how this language-based system is to be understood in relation to the visual arts it purports to define and evaluate.

The most notable attempt to so clarify this relationship was made by Michael Baxandall in his *Giotto and the Orators* (1971), a book that has become something of a minor classic without, however, full understanding of its significance for the study of Renaissance theory and criticism.<sup>24</sup> Baxandall

begins with a detailed analysis of the language of early humanist criticism, which he identifies as the language of epideictic rhetoric.<sup>25</sup> He then asks what these critical assertions tell us about the aesthetic preferences of the humanists. Petrarch's remarks on painting are among those he examines, showing them to be nothing more than an anthology of rhetorical commonplaces. They tell us nothing, Baxandall concludes, about Petrarch's actual critical judgments.<sup>26</sup> Villani's comments on painting are also reviewed. To cite them as new opinions about painting, as has been done, Baxandall states, is to fly in the face of the evidence, which clearly shows that these were well-known rhetorical formulas, used by Villani in other parts of his book as well, in discussions of, among other things, astronomy. They tell us no more than Petrarch's about what the early humanists may actually have thought of specific artists or works of art.<sup>27</sup> In words used in connection with Brunni but equally applicable to Villani, Baxandall asserts: "It is true that he would hardly have said these things if he had thought them obviously untrue, but they are something less than propositions springing direct from experience."<sup>28</sup>

These remarks do tell us, Baxandall nevertheless suggests, something about the awareness of the humanists of recent artistic activity; they tell us that the humanists were aware that this activity was noteworthy, that it constituted a "revival" of the arts that deserved to be extolled.<sup>29</sup> This in itself he finds a humanist achievement.

The importance of Baxandall's book cannot be exaggerated, and it consists in its demonstration of the workings of classical rhetoric in the field of Early Renaissance art criticism—as opposed to simply relating the terms and concepts of the one to the other. By tracing the remarks of the humanists back to their sources in the books of the ancients and showing how they were modernized, he very clearly demonstrates the conventionality of these remarks, issuing a warning against accepting them at face value.

He may, nevertheless, have underestimated the hold of rhetoric on the humanists. For, in an argument recalling that of Baron, the formulas of rhetoric are proposed to have been reanimated in direct response to recent events. If the claims made for individual Florentine artists are demonstrably conventional, they are still, we are told, expressive of the humanists' recognition of the historical importance of these artists. Yet, the whole purpose of the genre of panegyric, of which these claims are parts, is the celebration of a given subject. And the subject of the humanists of this discussion was neither painters nor painting as such but the city of Florence. For, as Quintilian puts it, cities can be "praised after the same fashion as men," for "the virtues and vices revealed by their deeds are the same as private individuals."<sup>30</sup> In such a rhetorical performance, therefore, conjuring up the virtues of Florence, this city would have had to have

tary, in Vickers, 340–360. For the humanist grounding of Alberti's theory, see also K. Borinski, *Die Antike in Poetik und Kunsttheorie, von Ausgang des klassischen Altertums bis auf Goethe und Wilhelm von Humboldt*, Darmstadt, 1965, I, 141–160.

<sup>18</sup> See C.E. Gilbert, "Antique Frameworks for Renaissance Art Theory: Alberti and Pino," *Marsyas*, III, 1946, 87–106; Vickers, 342.

<sup>19</sup> D.R.E. Wright, "Alberti's *De Pictura*: Its Literary Structure and Purpose," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, xxxvii, 1984, 52–71.

<sup>20</sup> Vickers, 343. On the epideictic, see T.C. Burgess, *Epideictic Literature (University of Chicago Studies in Classical Philology, III)*, Chicago, 1902, 89–261; V. Buchheit, *Untersuchungen zur Theorie des Genos epideiktikon von Gorgias bis Aristoteles*, Munich, 1960; O.B. Hardison, Jr., *The Enduring Monument: A Study of the Idea of Praise in Renaissance Literary Theory and Practice*, Chapel Hill, 1962; B. Vickers, "Epideictic and Epic in the Renaissance," *New Literary History*, xiv, 1982, 497–537.

<sup>21</sup> Baxandall, 121–139. Baxandall's discussion is examined by K. Patz, who attempts to clarify further Alberti's applications of rhetorical terms: "Zum Begriff der 'Historia' in L. B. Alberti's 'De Pictura,'" *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, xxxix, 3, 1986, 269–287. See also Wright (as in n. 19), 63–64; Vickers, 343–353; G. Kaufmann, "Sprache und bildende Kunst in der Renaissance," in A. Buck, ed., *Die Rezeption der Antike*, Hamburg, 1981, 237–279.

<sup>22</sup> Vickers, 353.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 353–359. On the rhetorical device known as *ekphrasis*, see S.L. Alpers, "Ekphrasis and Aesthetic Attitudes in Vasari's Lives," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, xxiii, 1960, 190–212; and D. Rosand, "Ekphrasis and the Renaissance of Painting: Observations on Alberti's Third Book," *Florilegium Colombianum: Essays in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. K.-L. Selig, R. Somerville, New York, 1987, 147–163.

<sup>24</sup> Baxandall

<sup>25</sup> See above n. 20.

<sup>26</sup> Baxandall, 51–66.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 72–78.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 76–78.

<sup>30</sup> *Institutio oratoria*, 3.7.26.

produced the best artists since antiquity, preeminent artists who "revived" art.

To be sure, Florence produced excellent artists in Cimabue and Giotto. But to be excellent is not the same thing as to "revive" art. The excellences of Cimabue and Giotto were, moreover, of different kinds: modern art historians routinely observe that Cimabue's art belongs not to a Renaissance "revival" but rather to the end of the Italo-Byzantine tradition.<sup>31</sup>

It is possible, of course, that the humanists did not see this difference and that they concluded, as Baxandall suggests, that there had been an ongoing "revival" of the arts. A "revival" is a rhetorical concept, however, and not a description of something, so that to speak of a "revival" of the arts was to put recent art history into the language of classical rhetoric; it was to impose a structure on this activity, and it was one that evidently fit some of the artists, most notably Giotto, better than others, such as Cimabue.

If this explanation seems reasonable, in the final analysis all that can be said with certainty about the humanists' critical statements and the historical framework in which they appear, is that the one, as the other, testifies to their belief in the centrality of classical rhetoric: Early Renaissance art criticism and rhetoric were so inextricably interwoven that it is difficult to determine where the one ends and the other begins. This was the critical legacy of the early humanists.

#### Vasari's *Lives*: The Contribution of Rhetoric

Vasari's *Lives*, to which we owe so many of our views of Renaissance art and artists, was composed, as has long been recognized, by consulting earlier chronicles such as Villani's and Landino's. Like these writers, Vasari has been judged guilty of a certain amount of "mythologizing." He wrote about artists selectively, we have been told, to illustrate facets of human nature, in the way this was done in the Italian novelistic tradition. But if his form drew inspiration from the *novelle*, his content has been understood as coming from more historically reliable sources: oral reports, family papers, etc.<sup>32</sup> The *Lives* has been understood, that is to say, as driven by a passion to record the casual details that distinguish history from fiction, to record, insofar as was possible at the time, *wie es eigentlich gewesen war*, in the manner of a modern history.

That Vasari placed his material in the service of a panegyric to Florence is too obvious to have escaped notice. The 1550 edition of the *Lives* opens with a letter of dedication to Duke Cosimo de' Medici in which Vasari states that the arts of *disegno*, having been extinct, were revived and nurtured until, in his day, they reached a height of beauty and majesty. It is fitting that the story of this ascent to perfection be told in the name of the duke, Vasari further states, since almost all of the artists who participated in it were Tuscans and the majority of them Florentines ("sono stati quasi tutti toscani, e la più parte Suoi fiorentini").<sup>33</sup>

Vasari had to make a case, then, just as Villani and Landino had, for the preeminent singularity of the artists of

Florence. That, in making his case, he consulted books of classical rhetoric has been no secret.<sup>34</sup> His debt to these books was far greater than has been realized, however, with hitherto unsuspected implications for the epistemological status of the *Lives*.

As for this debt, just as the humanists listed five parts of rhetoric, Vasari divided visual art into five parts—*regola*, *ordine*, *misura*, *disegno*, and *maniera*.<sup>35</sup> One of his highest forms of praise is that the figures in a work of art are so natural that they seem alive, one of the most recurrent of rhetorical commonplaces.<sup>36</sup> His "rebirth" of art is an evolutionary process that has behind it arguments of both Cicero and Quintilian.

This is a process unfolding in three phases or ages. The first deserves some praise, but was full of errors; the second, that of the fifteenth century, was better but lacked refinement and tended towards a dry style. What the second lacked, the third attained, reaching perfection in the art of the greatest (Florentine) artist of all: Michelangelo.<sup>37</sup>

Perfect style is, of course, what classical oratory is all about. And Cicero and Quintilian review the history of painting and sculpture while discussing the development of the art of speaking. They point out that orators create styles of their own, different one from another but good for their times. The same is true of painters and sculptors, who are admired for different points of excellence.

"We applaud Zeuxis, Polygnotus, Timanthes and others," writes Cicero, "who employed only four colors, for their designs and for their skill in the representation of details; but it is in Aetion, Nicomachus, Protogenes, and Apelles that we behold, at last, the complete fulfillment of our desires."<sup>38</sup> Quintilian writes similarly, of the rude beginnings of painting, with Polygnotus and Aglaophon; Zeuxis and Parrhasios came later, contributing much to the improvement of art, which flourished, with different species of excellence, in the art of Protogenes, Pamphilus, Apelles, and others. Sculpture, too, evolved according to Quintilian from a state of "hardness" to one of "softness," reaching perfection in the works of Phidias and Alcamenes.<sup>39</sup>

The lack of refinement in works by the artists of the second age was the result, says Vasari, of "too much study." Indeed, it is not surprising that they never achieved these elusive

ing a Medici Regime: The Funeral Oration of Marcello Virgilio Adriani for Giuliano de' Medici (1516)," *Renaissance Quarterly*, XLIV, 1991, 1–41.

<sup>34</sup> See esp. P. Rubin, "What Men Saw: Vasari's Life of Leonardo da Vinci and the Image of the Renaissance Artist," *Art History*, XIII, 1990, 34–46.

<sup>35</sup> Vasari-Barocchi/Bettarini, IV, 3; Goldstein, 171.

<sup>36</sup> E.g., Vasari-Barocchi/Bettarini, III, 124. It was a way of saying that the rhetorical requirement of *enargeia* has been satisfied, that things absent are presented with such vividness that "they seem actually to be before our very eyes"; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 6.2.29–30.

<sup>37</sup> See E. Panofsky, "The First Page of Giorgio Vasari's Libro," *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, New York, 1955, 169–225, esp. 216–217; J. Rouchette, *La Renaissance que nous à légué Vasari*, Bordeaux, 1959; E.H. Gombrich, "The Renaissance Conception of Artistic Progress and Its Consequences," *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, London, 1966, 1–10; M. Capucci, "Forme della biografia nel Vasari," *Il Vasari: Storiografo e artisti (Atti del Congresso Internazionale nel IV Centenario della Morte [1974])*, Florence, 1976, 299–320, esp. 300–301.

<sup>38</sup> *Brutus*, 18, cited by Vasari, Vasari-Barocchi/Bettarini, III, 8; cf. E. H. Gombrich, "Vasari's 'Lives' and Cicero's 'Brutus,'" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXIII, 309–311.

<sup>39</sup> *Institutio oratoria*, 12.10.1–9.

<sup>31</sup> Hartt (as in n. 8), 45.

<sup>32</sup> The essential study of the sources is still W. Kallab, *Vasarstudien: Quellenschriften für Kunstgeschichte und Kunsttechnik des Mittelalters*, xv, Vienna and Leipzig, 1908.

<sup>33</sup> Vasari-Barocchi/Bettarini, I, 1. For the identification of the Medici with Florence, see the important article by J. M. McManamon, "Market-

refinements, seeing that “excessive study or diligence tends to produce a dry style when it becomes an end in itself.”<sup>40</sup> Quintilian, in a passage discussing the study of the past, remarks: “There are two faults of taste against which boys should be guarded with the utmost care. Firstly, no teacher suffering from an excessive admiration of antiquity, should be allowed to cramp their minds by the study of Cato and the Gracchi and other similar authors. For such reading will give them a harsh and bloodless style, since they will as yet be unable to understand the force and vigor of these authors. . . .”<sup>41</sup>

Study of models is essential, however, the orators say, and so says Vasari. Cicero tells how the young Sulpicius Rufus improved his natural gifts for oratory by imitating Crassus. “Let this then be my first counsel,” he asserts, “that we show the student whom to copy, and to copy in such a way as to strive with all possible care to attain the most excellent qualities of his model. . . . But he who is to proceed aright must first be watchful in making his choice, and afterwards extremely careful in striving to attain the most excellent qualities of the model he has approved.”<sup>42</sup> Quintilian, in the same vein, adduces painting as an apology for imitating the works of others. We would still be in a state of savagery, he argues, if we did not use the works of our predecessors; “the whole conduct of life is based on the desire of doing ourselves that which we approve in others . . . thus musicians follow the voice of their teachers, painters look for models to the works of preceding painters. . . .”<sup>43</sup> Vasari’s Raphael is the most striking example of an artist who benefitted from the study of the best ancient and modern masters.<sup>44</sup> Michelangelo, on the other hand, had no need for models, says Vasari: supremely gifted, he was able to achieve perfection without them. This exemption, too, follows rhetorical precedent. Cicero has Antonius observe: “We see that there are many who copy no man, but gain their objects by natural aptitude, without resembling any model.”<sup>45</sup>

Vasari promises to deal with artists according to schools and styles and keeps this promise by including biographies of artists of schools other than the Florentine, particularly the Lombard and Venetian.<sup>46</sup> He treats these artists briefly, however, as lesser figures, and about Titian, who was to figure so prominently in later critical polemics, Vasari says only that he surpassed his teacher Giorgione, one of the most familiar of commonplaces.<sup>47</sup> This is in keeping with the

rhetoric of panegyric, in which the achievements of artists of other cities would necessarily have received minimal, if any, acknowledgement.

Vasari says that his intention in writing the *Lives* was not merely to compile lists but rather to provide instructive examples of the ways and means of exercising virtue. He is saying two things: that the *Lives* aims not just to record facts but to establish more general truths, and that it is an exercise in the rhetoric of praise and blame, that it is history as a rhetorical mode that, in his words, “fulfills its real purpose by making men prudent and showing them how to live.”<sup>48</sup> The arguments that he adapted from Cicero and Quintilian evidently articulated this sense of purpose and his recasting of them was perfectly in keeping with the practice of classical rhetoric.

Rhetoric teaches that to make a case one must examine the facts and, more important, seek to discover arguments that would win over an audience. These arguments were to be found in what Cicero called the “places” (*loci*), which are generally referred to as commonplaces. In theory one looked for “places” by asking questions of cause and effect, similarity and dissimilarity, definition and division, such questions as “what is it like?” “what are its parts?” etc. In practice, one found “places” by going to the classical sources and altering and renewing what was said in them.<sup>49</sup>

An argument is chosen for its proven effectiveness, with the narrative taking shape as such arguments are skillfully arranged. Indeed, as Cicero cautioned, if the narrative was ineptly constructed, the most scrupulous recitation of the facts could lack plausibility.<sup>50</sup> It must also be said that the “rules” are not firm. Quintilian, for example, devotes all of Book 7 of the *Instituto* to a careful discussion of the problems and techniques of prose structure, only to admit that this is a skill that cannot be taught by rule.<sup>51</sup>

Vasari understood history, then, as was usual at the time, as a form of classical rhetoric, and he composed his work in proper rhetorical fashion by adapting arguments from the ancient orators. It has been assumed that such borrowings were after the fact, as it were, that he looked to the classics to amplify arguments of his own prior devising or for help in presenting them stylishly. The recent literature of historiography suggests, however, that such a reading is too facile.

Many modern historians hold that the type of historical narrative used by an historian will influence not only the way he presents past events but what he will say about them and how he will place them in relation to one another; in question is not only the form of history but its content as well. According to this view, events in the real world do not necessarily occur in sequence or display the causal connections found in narrative accounts of them; these connections come rather from the narrative, in which they are discovered

<sup>40</sup> Vasari-Barocchi/Bettarini, IV, 6–7.

<sup>41</sup> *Instituto oratoria*, 2.5.21–22; trans. from *The Instituto oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. E. Butler, London and New York, 1933, 255.

<sup>42</sup> *De oratore*, 2.21.89; 22.92.

<sup>43</sup> *Instituto oratoria*, 10.2.2, 7–8, trans. E. Butler (as in n. 41).

<sup>44</sup> Vasari-Barocchi/Bettarini, IV, 158.

<sup>45</sup> *De oratore*, 2.23.98. Though most Renaissance humanists agreed with the ancients that the imitation of models is essential, they differed over how this was to be done. In a debate well known to Renaissance scholars, some humanists argued for a style based on Cicero alone, while others advised reading and copying a variety of the best authors. The latter position is taken by Vasari in his *Life* of Raphael, which is consistent with an eclectic or Quintilianist view. There were also humanists who argued, as Cicero had, for the possibility of an innate, personal style, free of imitation, such as Vasari ascribes to Michelangelo. See, most recently, P.F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300–1600*, Baltimore and London, 1989, 214–215.

<sup>46</sup> On the use of the term “school” by Vasari and others, see L. Grassi, *Teoria e storia della critica d’arte*, II: *L’età moderna: Il seicento*, Rome, 1973, 32.

<sup>47</sup> Vasari-Barocchi/Bettarini, IV, 47. It is also true that since Titian was alive, a full-scale biography would have been inappropriate, as Michelangelo was to be the only living artist included. See below, p. 647 and n. 61.

<sup>48</sup> Vasari-Barocchi/Bettarini, III, 3.

<sup>49</sup> See, e.g., D. L. Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education*, New York, 67–83; Vickers, 62–64.

<sup>50</sup> Cicero, *Ad Herennium*, 28–29.

<sup>51</sup> See N. F. Partner, “The New Cornificius: Medieval History and the Artifice of Words,” *Classical Rhetoric and Medieval Historiography*, ed. E. Breisach, Kalamazoo, Mich., 1985, 5–59, 16.

by the historian, who uses them to impose a shape on the past that it would not otherwise have.<sup>52</sup>

Classical rhetoric, with its definite but limited repertory of arguments, provides the basis for such a narrative of events, not only shaping reality but moralizing it as well. And Vasari's narrative structure, with its sense of ineluctability owed to an evolutionary model derived from the ancient orators, their ideas about imitation, etc., would seem to be just such an imposition of order, one that Vasari would not otherwise have perceived. Classical rhetoric provided the sense of necessity and of moral significance, in other words, that make the *Lives* more than a mere collection of facts.

If the historical and critical framework of the *Lives* was erected by looking to the rhetoric of praise and blame, even more heavily indebted to it are the biographies proper, that enormous collection of stories and depositions that became the fountainhead of Renaissance art history. These narratives have been viewed as having an altogether new, Renaissance character, reflecting an understanding of biography of the kind Burckhardt called "the discovery of man."<sup>53</sup> In this view, these biographies, like Renaissance biography more generally, aim to describe that which is most distinctive in a subject, whether in personal habits, appearance, or accomplishments, thereby bringing out his unique individuality. It has also been clear enough that Vasari's biographies are grounded in a distinctive literary form, and this form has been related to, as I noted, that of the Italian novelistic tradition.<sup>54</sup> But while personal "histories" and the novels of the time may have provided certain motifs taken separately, in neither does one find entire sets of events and connections between them indicative of "individuality" or future greatness. Such events and sequences are provided by the structure of an epideictic oration, which begins with the individual's nation, family, birth, and education, typically claiming noble lineage, miracles and portents at birth and other early signs of greatness, before describing exceptional physical attributes and outstanding qualities of character. The principal part of the oration is devoted to the subject's deeds,

which are to be described as demonstrations of virtue. The most reliable sources for such deeds were, of course, existing rhetorical narratives or others consistent with the purpose of the rhetoric of panegyric.

I am suggesting, then, as I have argued in the past, that Vasari's biographies belong to the genre of the epideictic rhetoric in its classical and Christianized forms, which means that Vasari was concerned more with the exemplary and universal than with the individual and, therefore, had much in common with the medieval biographer.<sup>55</sup> Both were practitioners of a type of rhetoric tracing its origins back to the ancients, for whom it had a serious ethical function: to provide models of virtue and incite to moral conduct. Attaching special importance to the exemplary and universal was, therefore, in conformity with classical practice.

In my previous discussion I noted that one very good reason why Renaissance biography was understood to be a type of rhetoric is that this was the understanding of the ancients. Stating the obvious, I remarked as well on the evident importance of Christian beliefs in the Renaissance and I tried to show how biographies such as Vasari's make use of classical form, but intermingled with Christian beliefs, as these beliefs were expressed in the most Christian of biographies, the *Lives* of saints.<sup>56</sup>

The classical biographer was expected to "heighten" reports, more deeply to move listeners. The hagiographer, too, understands a *Life* to be not a description of individual character but rather a demonstration of the intervention of supernatural power, according to accepted patterns of sanctity; this *Life* is reducible, therefore, perhaps even more clearly than a classical one, to a pattern or type. This is a pattern interweaving themes that are decidedly Christian with others more directly associated with classical rhetoric.<sup>57</sup> Vasari used such an existing pattern, I have suggested, in composing his *Lives*, in which one encounters themes recurrent in the *Lives* of saints; he was as interested as the hagiographers, in other words, in God's design. The same themes are not repeated, of course, in every *Life*. It is rather, a composite portrait that one recreates in tracing the themes of classical and Christian biographies through Vasari's *Lives*. Here, enlarging upon my earlier discussion, is this portrait:

1. There may be signs of the supernatural at his birth, as we are told of Michelangelo.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>52</sup> A seminal work is H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore, 1973; and, more recently, *idem*, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore, 1987. See also L. Gossman, "History and Literature," and L. O. Mink, "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument," both in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, ed. R.H. Canary and H. Kozicki, Madison, Wis., 1978. For the considerable bibliography on this cluster of questions, see *ibid.*, "Suggestions for Further Reading," 151–158. These authors speak, too, of "rhetoric," meaning the way a discourse is structured to produce certain effects on readers. Any discursive text may be so studied, in terms of its "tropological" strategies, whereas the word rhetoric in my discussion always refers to the theory and practice of classical rhetoric.

<sup>53</sup> *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, New York, 1954, Pt. IV; Burckhardt mentions Vasari only in passing but his argument is implicit in many discussions of the *Lives*, as, e.g., in E. Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance*, Chicago and London, 1981, 400–404.

<sup>54</sup> See above n. 32. Also, T.S.R. Boase, *Giorgio Vasari, the Man and the Book*, Princeton, 1979, 51; P. Barolsky, *Walter Pater's Renaissance*, University Park, Pa., and London, 1987, esp. 113–126. Much of the vast literature of the *Lives* is concerned with identifying the different threads weaving through it—philological, technical, stylistic, iconographic, etc.; see, e.g., P. Barocchi, "L'antibiografia del secondo Vasari," *Studi vasariani*, Turin, 1984, 157–170. My argument is that all this material was controlled by, and placed in the service of, the rhetoric of praise and blame.

<sup>55</sup> Goldstein, esp. 8–28. Renaissance art history and criticism are even more completely suffused with classical rhetoric, it now seems to me, than I realized when I wrote this book: hence the present article.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 17–18.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 18–28. See, in addition to the sources there cited, C. Sousloff, "Old Age and Old Age Style in the 'Lives' of Artists: Gianlorenzo Bernini," *Art Journal*, XLVI, 2, 1987, 115–121; W. Nelson, *Fact or Fiction: The Dilemma of the Renaissance Storyteller*, Cambridge, Mass., 1973. Other publications arguing for the essentially literary character of the *Lives* of artists have appeared since this article was accepted for publication: C.M. Sousloff, "Lives of Poets and Painters in the Renaissance," *Word and Image*, vi, 2, 1990, 154–162; P. Barolsky, *Michelangelo's Nose: A Myth and Its Maker*, University Park, Pa., and London, 1990; *idem*, *Why Mona Lisa Smiles and Other Tales by Vasari*, University Park, Pa., and London, 1991.

<sup>58</sup> Vasari-Bettarini/Barocchi, vi, 5. For the following, see esp. H. Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, New York, 1962; D. Weinstein and R.M. Bell, *Saints & Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000–1700*, Chicago and London, 1982; E. Kris and O. Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist*, New Haven and London, 1979.



2. He has outstanding personal qualities and may be spectacularly beautiful and good, as were Leonardo and Raphael, or, alternatively, in responding to his call he may come into conflict with his parents, as Michelangelo did.<sup>59</sup>

3. He shows that he possesses a gift at an early age—Cimabue, Giotto, Beccafumi, Filippo Lippi, Andrea Sansovino, Castagno, Leonardo, Raphael, Perino del Vaga, Michelangelo. . . .<sup>60</sup>

4. His education is, therefore, only a fine-tuning of that gift, recognized by his teacher, whom he early surpasses—Ghiberti, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian, Michelangelo. . . .<sup>61</sup>

5. More important than what he learns from any teacher are his own efforts, as he studies *disegno*, or the art of the ancients, or mathematics, etc.—Brunelleschi and Donatello, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Perino del Vaga, Leonardo, Michelangelo. . . .<sup>62</sup>

6. His first works show that he is a mature artist—Leonardo, Michelangelo. . . .<sup>63</sup>

7. Capable of harshness with lesser men, he is invariably generous to his friends—Donatello, Brunelleschi, Raphael, Michelangelo. . . .<sup>64</sup>

8. Indifferent to worldly goods, his mode of living is simple, bordering on the ascetic—Masaccio, Uccello, Brunelleschi, Luca della Robbia, Fra Bartolommeo, Michelangelo. . . .<sup>65</sup>

9. He is saved by his art from harm, which is to say that he is preserved by the will of God to which he owes his art—Filippo Lippi freed by the Moors who enslaved him; Parmigianino during the sack of Rome. . . .<sup>66</sup>

The more fabulous incidents reported in the *Lives* of saints do not, it should be noted, enter into Vasari's *Lives*, indicating that, to his mind, there was a clear difference between saints and artists, however gifted, so that certain features appropriate to biographies of the first would be inappropriate in biographies of the second. Vasari's choice of themes, in other words, was controlled by a standard of "realism," a desire not overly to strain credulity.

Contrasting with Vasari's images of supremely gifted artists are others in the *Lives*, of more ordinary or inferior artists. Some of his criticisms of these artists sound reasonable enough, such as that Uccello spent too much time on perspective.<sup>67</sup> There are reports that seem incredible and have, in fact, been proven false, for example of Castagno committing a murder.<sup>68</sup> Contrasting almost as strongly with the image of the artist as ascetic is the artist given to debauchery, for example, Puligo and Albertinelli and, most

of all, Sodoma, who thought "of nothing but pleasure, worked when he pleased and only cared about dressing himself like a mountebank."<sup>69</sup> What is so striking about these reports is their clear opposition to others, in the *Lives* of the exemplary artists, contrasting the virtue of the latter with one of the Seven Deadly Sins, such as Wrath, Lust, or Pride. Other of the criticisms also turn out to be polar opposites of the traits of those model artists. The most recurrent one, put in a somewhat different form each time, is that this was an artist who, lacking a natural gift, had to depend on study—the criticism made of Uccello—said about artists whom we consider among the most gifted of the Renaissance, for example, Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo and Verrocchio.<sup>70</sup> It would be difficult to account for these criticisms if one did not know of the other side of the rhetoric of praise and blame: the criticism of one man which intensifies the praise of another. Vasari's biographies recount events from childhood on to show that only certain artists—Michelangelo above all—were endowed with supernatural powers and so embodied the differences, ultimately, between the merely mortal and the "divine."

### Venice Responds

Vasari's *Lives* was a challenge thrown down before the cities of Italy. It made a case for the preeminence of the artists of Florence that was a model of rhetorical virtuosity, a case grounded in a more comprehensive critical system than any that had been devised in classical antiquity or earlier in the Renaissance, a system establishing a historical framework for the discussion of achievement in modern art. Its arguments begged to be countered, and in classical rhetoric this was achieved, as I have noted, by rephrasing existing arguments, which Vasari himself had done. But whereas he had to look to a variety of classical and Christian sources for his arguments, there was a pivotal text, closer at hand, that contained those that would lend themselves to a rebuttal: the *Lives* itself. The champions of Lombardy and Venice had the *Lives* to turn against Vasari and the Florentine school and soon did just this.

The response from Venice came first, in 1557, with the dialogue *L'Aretino* of Lodovico Dolce. It opens with a dedication answering Vasari's to Duke Cosimo, to Hieronimo Loredano and his family, one of the most illustrious of Venice, and consists of an exchange between a Florentine, Fabrini, and a Venetian, Aretino.<sup>71</sup> The Florentine restates the arguments of Florentine panegyricists, mentioning Vasari by name: Dante is the greatest modern writer, Michelangelo the greatest modern artist.<sup>72</sup> The Venetian counters by setting Petrarch against and above Dante, Raphael and Titian above Michelangelo. And he does this by reshaping Vasari's own arguments—just as Dolce echoes some of Vasari's most distinctive definitions and criteria.

Vasari's Michelangelo is distinguished by his drawing and foreshortening of the nude and so is Dolce's Michelangelo, but to his detriment: it is only in this one area that

<sup>59</sup> Vasari-Barocchi/Bettarini, iv, 16–17, 155; vi, 5.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 36; ii, 96; v, 165; iii, 328–329; iv, 272; iii, 353; iv, 18; iv, 157; v, 229; vi, 5.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 76; iv, 19; iv, 159; iv, 47, vi, 7.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 147–149; iii, 476; v, 106; iv, 17; vi, 7–8.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, iv, 17; vi, 8.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 211–212, 220; iii, 138; iv, 212; vi, 15, 61.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 125; iii, 62; iii, 138–139; iii, 49; iv, 89–90; vi, 108–109.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 329–330; iv, 538.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 61–62.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 361. Castagno died four years before his alleged victim; G. Milanese, "Le vite di alcuni artefici fiorentini scritte da Giorgio Vasari corrette ed accresciute coll'aiuto de'documenti," *Giornale storico degli archivi toscani*, iv, 1862, 1ff.

<sup>69</sup> Vasari-Barocchi/Bettarini, iv, 251–252; iv, 168; v, 381.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 499; iii, 533.

<sup>71</sup> M.W. Roskill, *Dolce's 'Aretino' and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento*, New York, 1968, 5–49.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 159. For a discussion of Dolce and rhetoric, see *ibid.*, 5–49.



Michelangelo excelled and, in fact, his nudes all look alike, whereas those of Raphael are more varied and beautiful.<sup>73</sup> And Titian is, at the very least, equal to Michelangelo and Raphael in invention and drawing and better in color, so that he is the most universal of the three; it is he, and not Michelangelo, who is "divine" and without equal in the realm of painting.<sup>74</sup> Titian is "divine," in other words, for bringing together all the excellences of painting but, most of all, for his "perfect" color: perfection in art comes from *colore* and not *disegno*. Dolce's answer to Vasari is that there are, indeed, differences between the Venetian and Florentine schools, clearer ones than had been indicated by Vasari in 1550, based on a selective development of different features, and that the heightened *colore* of Venice is superior to the heightened *disegno* of Florence.

Vasari proceeded to stress these differences further in the 1568 edition of the *Lives*, making the Florentine and Venetian approaches more truly polar. Using Dolce's material, as Dolce had used his, Vasari supplements the passing mention of Titian in the first edition with a full-scale *Life*, detailing his works and the method underlying them, the method declared inadequate, the artist's *colore* no match for Michelangelo's *disegno*.<sup>75</sup> That this was said in response to Dolce is clear and needs to be emphasized. Vasari had grouped all the arts under *disegno* in the 1550 edition and praised Florentine artists for their *disegno*. The term as defined by him is very abstract, however, takes in far more than the word "drawing," often used by modern art historians to render it, and was not used, as in the 1568 edition, against the Venetians.<sup>76</sup>

Scholars have asked why Vasari was so much more critical of the Venetian school in 1568 than in 1550 and have looked to his life for an answer; he must have been disappointed, they have suggested, by the reception of his work in Venice in 1541–42.<sup>77</sup> They have, similarly, asked about the reasons behind the hostility displayed by Dolce toward Michelangelo. Aretino, from whose mouth the words of criticism come,

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 171–179. For a discussion of Dolce's criticism of Michelangelo, see R.W. Lee (as in n. 17), 37–38. On Michelangelo's reputation, see P. Barocchi, "Schizzo di una storia della critica cinquecentesca sulla Sistina," *Atti e memorie dell'Accademia Toscana di Scienze e Lettere 'La Columbaria'*, XXI, n.s., 7, 1956, 177–212. In a recent article, Catherine Soussloff argues, as I do, for the predominantly literary and rhetorical character of Michelangelo polemics: "Imitatio Buonarroti," *16th Century Journal*, xx, 4, 1989, 581–602.

<sup>74</sup> Roskill (as in n. 71), 195.

<sup>75</sup> Vasari-Barocchi/Bettarini, vi, 155–174.

<sup>76</sup> Even as defined in the 1568 edition, *disegno* could just as easily have been used to praise, as to damn, the Venetians. For it is an abstraction, grounded, as Panofsky stressed, in the metaphysical *Idea*: "Design, the father of our three arts . . . derives a general judgment from many things: a form of all the things in nature, as it were, which in its proportions is exceedingly regular. So it is that design recognizes, not only in human and animal bodies but also in plants, buildings, sculptures and paintings, the proportion of the whole in relation to its parts as well as the proportion of the parts to one another and to the whole. And since from this recognition there arises a certain judgment, that forms in the mind the thing which later, formed by the hand, is called a design, one may conclude that this design is nothing but a visual expression and clarification of that concept which one has in the intellect, and that which one imagines in the mind and builds up in the idea . . ."; Vasari-Barocchi/Bettarini, i, 3, trans. in E. Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, Columbia, S.C., 1968, 60–63; cf. Summers, 229, 519; Roskill (as in n. 71). See also W. Kemp, "Disegno, Beiträge zur Geschichte des Begriffs zwischen 1547 und 1607," *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, xxix, 1974, 219–240.

<sup>77</sup> Roskill (as in n. 71), 47.

seems never actually to have been as disparaging as Dolce makes him in the Dialogue.<sup>78</sup> The answers to these questions are not to be found, however, in the tastes or personal experiences of the writers. For their books belong to a literary genre that distributes praise and blame, and how these will be apportioned follows from the purpose of the exercise.

An encomium to Florence must not only praise Florentine artists but declare their superiority to the artists of every other city, and the same for an encomium to Venice. When Vasari belittles Titian, or Dolce Michelangelo, therefore, should readers not have understood that these statements had been shaped by rhetoric and were not to be taken at face value? One would imagine that readers would so have understood. What may be puzzling to the modern reader, however, is that, in fact, readers of the time seem to have taken the critics at their word and to have found their assertions, for that reason, offensive.

This is the way the Carracci, for example, reacted to Vasari. In the copy of the *Lives* that they annotated, they wrote not in appreciation of the skillfulness of his arguments but in anger at what, on the face of it, he was claiming; "he lies" and "he lies through his teeth" are the most frequent responses.<sup>79</sup> Evidently, readers of sixteenth-century art history accepted the *Lives* as "history," even while knowing that it was deeply penetrated by classical rhetoric; they accepted as "true" statements that they must have known had been denatured by rhetoric. There is an explanation of this seeming paradox and it is that rhetoric requires a substratum or hard core of truth, the elaboration of which is the role of *inventio*. *Inventio*, as defined by Cicero, makes a case appear convincing by not straining credibility, "whether it be true or false." To the modern view of history, with its insistence on the factual authenticity of "events," *inventio* invalidates the claim of historical truthfulness. But clearly this was not the thinking of Renaissance readers, who, focusing on the truthful core of the argument, responded to it in its entirety not as elaborately rhetorical but rather as truly historical.<sup>80</sup>

One example of such a truthful core would be the real difference between Venetian painting, so striking in its heightened *colore*, and Central Italian painting, with its incisive *disegno*. Rhetorical invention played its part in turning this difference into a contest between two irreconcilable methods. Similarly, an evident truth is of the greatness of a Giotto or Michelangelo, evidenced in their earliest surviving works. But to attempt to elucidate these works by surrounding them with what Vasari says about the artists' lives—early childhood experiences, personal qualities, education, etc.—all, or the better part, of which are, demonstrably, inventions traceable back to rhetorical *topoi* is to dilute history—and biography—with rhetoric.

As history there was much in the 1568 edition to offend artists outside of Florence. They found the artists of their regions or schools disparaged for being weak in *disegno*, because of which they are said to have relied on the tints and charms of *colore*, which is inferior to *disegno*. The most

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>79</sup> Goldstein, 164–165.

<sup>80</sup> See A.J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography: Four Studies*, London and Sydney, 1988, esp. 70–101; cf. R.F. Atkinson, *Knowledge and Explanation in History*, Ithaca, N.Y., 1978, esp. 188–210.

striking case is that of Titian, wanting in *arte* and *disegno*, masterly only in coloring from nature and, therefore, falling far short of the beauty and perfection of Michelangelo. When the artists of Lombardy or Venice do better, it is, typically, because of what they have learned from the Florentines. Parmigianino is one such artist, whose Lombard naturalism is reinforced by Florentine *disegno*, which he learned from the works of Michelangelo and Raphael. (Vasari's Raphael, it should be noted, is a Florentine artist: his early style looks like the work of a different and inferior hand.)<sup>81</sup> Correggio went as far as a Lombard artist could without seeing "good modern work," which is to say works by Raphael and Michelangelo, the perfection of which he was unable, therefore, to attain, and so on.<sup>82</sup>

The admirers of, and successors to, these artists could not allow Vasari the last word. And, more important, the rhetoricians of Venice, Lombardy, and the other regions of Italy had been challenged; it was up to them to come to the defense of their artists, as of the places of their birth or adoption. The next chapter in the history of Italian art criticism is the story of how these writers, applying the rhetoric of praise and blame, answered this challenge.

### Rhetoric and Regionalism

Civic panegyrics on the whole intensified during the years after the publication of the second edition of the *Lives*. A few examples: Sansovino's *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare* appeared in 1581, Moriga's *Nobiltà di Milano* in 1595, and Mini's *Discorso sulla nobiltà di Firenze e dei Fiorentini* in 1593, the last work once again crediting Florence with the restoration of the three arts of *disegno*.<sup>83</sup> As for art criticism proper, if this criticism was the application of classical rhetoric, as I have been arguing, specifically of panegyric rhetoric, we should find critics of the seicento claiming that art was "reborn" not in Florence but in their own cities or regions and that perfection was achieved not by Michelangelo but rather by one or several artists of these other places. And this is precisely what we find.

Painting was thriving before and at the time of Cimabue's birth in Siena and Rome, writes the Sieneese Mancini in Rome (ca. 1620), citing Guido da Siena, Petrolino, and evidence of "many other excellent artists" whose names are lost.<sup>84</sup> Ridolfi's *Meraviglie* (1648) takes up and amplifies the arguments of Dolce's *Aretino*, using Vasari's *Lives* as its model and applying the Vasarian idea of "progress" to Venetian painting. Venice witnessed a rebirth of painting, building on its "Greek" tradition, before Florence, we read, as he traces the Venetian school from Jacobello del Fiore and Vivarini to its culmination in Giorgione and Titian.<sup>85</sup> Without mentioning Vasari by name, Ridolfi repeatedly alludes to the arguments of the *Lives*, but turning them against Vasari and praising the artists of Venice at the expense of the Florentines.<sup>86</sup> Boschini (1674)

argues the Venetian case further, claiming that imitation is impossible without chiaroscuro and *colore*, so that without *colore*, *disegno* itself is imperfect.<sup>87</sup>

The Genoese Soprani (1674) extols the virtues of medieval Genoa and of the painters of the later Genoese school, particularly Luca Cambiaso, who many people judged, he says, superior to Michelangelo.<sup>88</sup> And Malvasia (1678), too, makes a case for the artistic accomplishments of his city in the middle ages, during which time painting was reborn before it was in Florence; he goes on to discuss the development of Bolognese art in terms of Vasarian periods, adorned by such luminaries as Francia and the Carracci and reaching "perfection" in Reni.<sup>89</sup> The *Lives* of Baglione and Passeri are still further instances of the writing of art history and criticism in the seicento as civic panegyrics, and there were many others. To mention only two more that are little known: Lorenzo Legati's *Lives* of the Cremonese painters and Giuseppe (or Gioseffo) Montani's *Lives* of the painters of Pesaro.<sup>90</sup>

That this body of literature was inspired by Vasari's *Lives* has been remarked upon by all the scholars who have discussed it.<sup>91</sup> They have explained the phenomenon in two ways: first, that these were writers aiming to flesh out Vasari with material on artists he had omitted; second, that they exemplify a tendency at the time to view the world narrowly, in terms of local history (*campanilismo*).<sup>92</sup> In these ways, they have concluded, seicento writers were operating within the framework established by Vasari. But these same scholars also were on the lookout for differences between the seicento authors and Vasari. In the case of Malvasia, for one, these differences testify, we are told, to a whole different conception of history, most clearly discernible in his biographies, which mark "a decisive step towards a real history of art"; this new kind of history or biography discards literary style as such, replacing it with sound critical judgments, the facts of original documents, reports of reliable witnesses, and so on.<sup>93</sup> Yet to one familiar with classical and Christian rhetoric and with the biographies that Vasari wrote applying the precepts of rhetoric, Malvasia's biographies—as Soprani's and those of the other seicento biographers—seem very stylish; they seem to have been organized according to a definite literary style and pattern, of the same type as was used by Vasari and that I have attempted to reconstruct in describing a composite portrait of the artist of the *Lives*. Seicento biographies of artists were as closely controlled by classical and Christianized rhetoric, it can indeed be shown, as earlier art history and criticism more generally.

The biographies of the Carracci by Bellori and Malvasia were so controlled. They follow the same general pattern as

<sup>87</sup> M. Boschini, *Le ricche minere della pittura veneziana*, in M. Boschini, *La carta del navigar pitoresco*. . . , ed. A. Pallucchini, Venice-Rome, 1966, 752; cited in D. Rosand, "Titian and the Critical Tradition," *Titian: His World and His Legacy*, New York, 1982, 1–39, 23–25.

<sup>88</sup> Soprani, *Vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti Genovesi*, Genoa, 1674, 37; cf. C. Lorgues-Lapouge, "De Soprani à Vasari," *Revue de l'art*, LXXX, 1988, 61–63.

<sup>89</sup> Malvasia, 67–68.

<sup>90</sup> See G. Perini, "Carlo Cesare Malvasia's Florentine Letters: Insight into Conflicting Trends in Seventeenth-Century Historiography," *Art Bulletin*, LXX, 1988, 273–299, 278.

<sup>91</sup> E.g., *ibid.*, 273. Previtali, 43.

<sup>92</sup> G. Perini (as in n. 90), 273.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>81</sup> Vasari-Barocchi/Bettarini, iv, 537; iv, 162.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, iv, 50.

<sup>83</sup> Previtali, 44.

<sup>84</sup> G. Mancini, *Considerazioni sulla pittura*, 2 vols., ed. A. Marucchi and L. Salerno, Rome, 1956–57, I, 166–167; cited in Previtali, 49.

<sup>85</sup> C. Ridolfi, *Meraviglie dell'arte*, Venice, 1648, 23, 38, 68, 90, 103, 136–138, 141, 150–151; cf. Grassi (as in n. 46), 38–39; Previtali, 51.

<sup>86</sup> See L. Puppi, "La fortuna delle *Vite* nel Veneto dal Ridolfi al Temanze," in *Il Vasari* (as in n. 37), 405–437, esp. 412, n. 20.

those in Vasari's *Lives*, passages from which they at times reuse.<sup>94</sup> As for the pattern itself, we read how Bellori's Annibale—like Vasari's Cimabue, Giotto, Michelangelo, *et al.*—showed that he was “a force destined for painting” while still a boy; how he studied only briefly, with Ludovico, whom he soon surpassed—as Raphael surpassed Perugino, Titian Giorgione, etc.<sup>95</sup> More important than what he learned from his teacher was the course of study he set for himself, to learn the secrets of the art of the past,—as Donatello, Brunelleschi, and others had done.<sup>96</sup> One could go on to other parts of the pattern, to which, in all important respects, this *Life* conforms—as does Malvasia's *Life* of Ludovico, composed to show that it was he, and not Annibale, who was God's favorite. And the same pattern is found in the other biographies of both Bellori and Malvasia. One further example should suffice, Malvasia's *Life* of the “Bolognese Apelles,” Reni.<sup>97</sup>

Reni, too, gave evidence of his talent at an early age (“his tender age of nine”).<sup>98</sup> He had little to learn from his first teacher, Calvaert, and by the age of thirteen was a teacher himself, alongside Calvaert, instructing other pupils in the studio; upon his transfer to the Carracci Academy, his talent was acknowledged by all except Annibale, whom he quickly equalled and showed signs of surpassing. Indeed, all three Carracci admitted that Reni “was master of them all.”<sup>99</sup>

The *Life* goes on to detail Reni's dominion over all the artists of Bologna and even over Raphael, whose *Saint Cecilia* he improved upon in his copy.<sup>100</sup> The dominant artists of Rome, Annibale and Caravaggio, were alarmed by Reni's abundant talent when he arrived from Bologna.<sup>101</sup> Assaulted, verbally, by Caravaggio, Reni turned the attack back by admitting that he was “inferior to all.”<sup>102</sup> That he was, in fact, superior, he soon showed by eclipsing Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, Raphael's frescoes in the Farnesina, and Annibale's Farnese Gallery, which is to say that the art of Rome was completely overshadowed by that of Bologna.<sup>103</sup> His appearance and manner produced in everyone, even the greatest personages, an “unconscious veneration and respect.”<sup>104</sup> He was, in short, an exemplar of (saintly) virtue, industrious, devout, moderate in his appetites, an enemy of ostentation, and so on.<sup>105</sup>

As for Soprani, the exemplar of his *Lives* also demonstrated his talent while still a youth. We read how the young

<sup>94</sup> As in Malvasia's *Life* of Ludovico, which opens with words used by Vasari for Michelangelo; Malvasia, 230. Cf. Goldstein, 18, n. 69.

<sup>95</sup> Bellori, 1672, 33; cf. the outline described above, pp. 646–647.

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

<sup>97</sup> This comparison with Apelles is a recurrent commonplace; see Goldstein, esp. 26, n. 123.

<sup>98</sup> Malvasia, 340.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 340–341.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 348–349.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 387.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 388. Malvasia's Reni is, at times, rude and demanding of his patrons, his behavior the opposite, one would think, of “saintly.” Many of these reports very clearly parallel stories in Vasari's *Life* of Michelangelo, however, the one as the other intended to establish the superiority of the “divine” artist even to popes and princes, Malvasia saying this almost in so many words as he links the two artists. Malvasia describes behavior of a still more erratic kind: Reni addicted to gambling, fearful

Luca Cambiaso so astonished some visiting Florentine painters who observed him at work that they made the sign of the cross and affirmed that this was an artist who might one day surpass Michelangelo—the type of report made by Vasari about his exemplars, by Bellori about Annibale, Malvasia about Reni. . . .<sup>106</sup> And Soprani goes on to describe Cambiaso as the type of model artist whose virtue was translated into the virtue of his native Genoa.

As the rhetoric of praise and blame required, Soprani not only praises Cambiaso but criticizes Michelangelo. This is a feature of the tradition of artists' biographies on which I have commented, but about which more needs to be said, because such criticisms of, and even seeming antipathy toward, artists is one of the characteristics of this tradition. The most striking case may be Bellori, perhaps one third of whose *Lives* are devoted to artists for whom he apparently had little sympathy. At the top of the list is, of course, Caravaggio, who “suppressed the dignity of art”; Rubens is next, reproached for lacking good drawing and appealing only to the eye; Van Dyck is still another, castigated for being inadequate in drawing and composition.<sup>107</sup>

That Bellori included biographies of these artists has been seen as testimony to his critical acumen, his perception of the importance of artists whose styles he was unable wholeheartedly to endorse, crediting them for what he found good while noting what seemed to him bad. But within the rhetoric of praise and blame it is precisely the opportunity for vituperation that recommends certain subjects: Annibale appears that much more praiseworthy for being everything Caravaggio is not, as the achievements of Domenichino and Poussin also are elevated as those of Rubens and Van Dyck are depressed.

### Scanelli's *Microcosmo*: Rhetoric and the Human Body

Before Malvasia defended the honor of Lombardy, Scanelli had done so in his *Il microcosmo della pittura* (1657), a book of evident interest that has been identified as such by modern scholars, particularly by Mahon.<sup>108</sup> Yet this book never has been given the attention it was said to deserve, surely because its argument is developed around an image that is so bizarre within the world of art criticism that, in the final analysis, the book seems merely eccentric. This is an image and a model of argumentation that can be traced back directly to classical rhetoric.

of women, of being poisoned, etc. What he describes, in sum, is a man, as he says, of melancholic temperament. And the melancholic humor, which Annibale, too, is said to have manifested, was understood as indicative of a nature both artistic and holy. See esp. E. Panofsky and F. Saxl, *Dürer's "Melancholia I,"* Leipzig and Berlin, 1923, 32, 49. Malvasia's *Life* has always played an important role in discussions of Reni and it figures especially prominently in the most recent ones, in which key elements such as the comparison with Michelangelo are identified but which propose, nevertheless that the Reni of the *Life* is the historical Reni, the man himself imitating artists of earlier *Lives*, life, as it were, imitating art. See the essays of Scott Schaefer and Andrea Emiliani in *Guido Reni, 1575–1642*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1988. In the rhetoric of artists' biographies, literature—literary art, not life—imitates art.

<sup>106</sup> Soprani (as in n. 88); cf. above, p. 649.

<sup>107</sup> Bellori, 231, 267, 283–284. Excluding a major artist, as Bernini was excluded by Bellori, also may be understood as implied criticism of that artist. Catherine Soussloff has suggested that key comments on sculpture in Bellori's *Lives* are barely veiled allusions to, and reproaches of, Bernini; see Soussloff (as in n. 73).

<sup>108</sup> D. Mahon, “Eclecticism and the Carracci. Further Reflections on the Validity of a Label,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, xvi, 1953, 303–341; see also R. Enggass and J. Brown, *Italy and Spain, 1600–1750 (Sources and Documents)*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1970, 39–50.

A native of Forlì in the Romagna, Scanelli was a medical doctor and amateur of painting. He served the duke of Modena, who at the time was building one of the great art galleries of Italy; Scanelli played a part in the formation of the collection, acting on occasion as the duke's representative. The *Microcosmo* is dedicated to the duke and his gallery.<sup>109</sup>

Scanelli writes principally about artists from Raphael on—Michelangelo is merely a precursor of Raphael—discussing them within a framework on which he hangs three regional schools, the Roman, Venetian, and Lombard, headed, respectively, by Raphael, Titian, and Correggio. The purpose of the exercise, not surprisingly in a book dedicated to the duke of Modena, is to establish the preeminence of Correggio and Lombardy. It is an answer, therefore, to Vasari, whose arguments hover over Scanelli's.

Vasari's Correggio has the distinction of being the first artist in Lombardy to work in the modern style. He is inferior to the modernists of central Italy, however, for having remained in Lombardy; "if this accomplished painter had left Lombardy for Rome he would certainly have worked miracles," says Vasari.<sup>110</sup> Correggio's works are not less than perfect, Scanelli answers; he had no need to travel to Rome to study the antique and works of the modern Tuscan-Roman school to achieve perfection.<sup>111</sup> This perfection, Scanelli argues, was a bringing together of the strengths of Florence and Venice, a synthesis that served as a model for other Lombard artists; the school of Lombardy, following the lead of Correggio, combined the *disegno*—together with the *bella Idea*—of Tuscany with the *colore* and *naturalzza* of Venice, with the addition of delicacy and grace.<sup>112</sup> Correggio and Lombardy have gained the ascendancy over the schools declared preminent by Vasari and in post-Vasarian criticism, in the terms of Vasari's own argument.

Scanelli places a premium, then, on naturalism and also on inspiration, which is preferable to the elaborate preparation of *disegno*; Raphael's works, resulting from many preliminary drawings, are no match for those done more spontaneously by Correggio.<sup>113</sup>

On the evidence of such assertions, Scanelli has been called an anticlassicist; he had little taste, it has been concluded, for the whole classic-idealist tradition of Raphael.<sup>114</sup> The duke of Modena, one would gather, shared this taste and antipathy to classical art. Certainly there would seem to be no question about his sharing Scanelli's admiration for Correggio, several of whose masterpieces, including the *Notte*, the *Madonna and Child with Saint George*, and the *Madonna and Child with Saint Sebastian*, he had acquired shortly before the publication of the *Microcosmo*.<sup>115</sup> But his was a wholesale acquisition of works by the masters of the cinquecento; in addition to the examples by Correggio, he added to his collection works by, or attributed to, Titian,

Raphael, and Andrea del Sarto, among others.<sup>116</sup> The only artists for whose works he had a taste known to have been personal were several of his contemporaries, Velázquez and Bernini, both of whom did portraits of him, and Salvator Rosa, from whom he commissioned two landscapes with which he was so well pleased as to commission a third.<sup>117</sup> Nor, for that matter, should Scanelli's statements all be taken at face value, for he was arguing rhetorically, as is made very clear by the central image of his book.

The image is that of the human body, the microcosm of man transformed into the microcosm of painting, in which artists are assigned fixed places: Raphael is the liver, Titian the heart, Correggio the brain. (Michelangelo is the backbone, the Carracci the skin, etc.) The liver, Scanelli explains, is responsible for nourishment and the creation of the blood and is least noble; the heart, responsible for heat and life comes next; the brain, seat of the imagination and intelligence, is the most noble. Raphael is the liver for having drawn nourishment from mother antiquity and having himself nourished artists of the Tuscan-Roman school; Titian added heat and movement to the achievements of Raphael and his contemporaries; and Correggio took the contributions of Raphael and Titian, refining them into an "exquisite naturalness" ("esquisita naturalzza").<sup>118</sup>

Scanelli's image is bizarre and must seem particularly anomalous for a period that aestheticized bodily experience. Knowing that he was, before anything else, a medical doctor, does not make it less so. Yet it turns out to have been conventional enough within rhetoric, one of the basic requirements of which it satisfies, that of *memoria*.

*Memoria* involves the speaker memorizing a speech for delivery and of teaching through mnemonic images. It was based, in its most classic form, on the association of specific sounds, words, ideas, or arguments with a physical space divided into a matching number of compartments. The recurrent anecdote illustrating the importance of a trained memory was that of Simonides of Ceos, who left a banquet he had attended just before the roof collapsed, killing the remaining guests. Through the use of rhetorical *loci* Simonides was able to recall who had sat where, thereby allowing the relatives to identify the deceased for burial.<sup>119</sup>

Architectural images were not the only ones chosen, however, for memorizing the places. Cicero speaks of the power of certain images to awaken memory, which others will not do; among those that adhere longest in memory are images of exceptional beauty or ugliness, images that are ornamented or disfigured to make them more striking.<sup>120</sup> In the later rhetorical tradition, one such powerful image was the microcosm.

This image was studied by Frances Yates in her book on memory systems, in which attention is called to its use in the

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 192–248; also J. Southorn, *Power and Display in the Seventeenth Century—The Arts and Their Patrons in Modena and Ferrara*, Cambridge, 1988, 32–37.

<sup>117</sup> Venturi (as in n. 115), 202–204, 212–214, 218–221.

<sup>118</sup> Scanelli, 11–21. It is to be noted that Scanelli's was not the only *Microcosmo*. This was a familiar type of treatise ordinarily compiling information for the diagnosis and treatment of illnesses, mixed with discussions of physical and spiritual beauty. See G. Calvi, *Histories of a Plague Year*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989, 27.

<sup>119</sup> *De oratore*, 2. 86, 351ff.; *Ad. Her.*, 3.16. 28–24, 40; cited in Vickers, 65.

<sup>120</sup> *Ad. Her.*, III, 22.

<sup>109</sup> *Il microcosmo della pittura*, Cesena, 1657, dedication, n.p.

<sup>110</sup> Vasari-Barocchi/Bettarini, IV, 50.

<sup>111</sup> Scanelli, 274–286.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>114</sup> See e.g., Mahon (as in n. 108), 322–323; Enggass and Brown (as in n. 108), 39–42.

<sup>115</sup> A. Venturi, *La R. Galleria Estense in Modena*, Modena, 1882, 225–228.

occult or cabalistic tradition.<sup>121</sup> Certainly such an application of it would seem more in keeping with its character, since the whole point of the microcosm is of its relation to the macrocosm. And a memory system organized around the microcosm implies participation in the memory of God. But this is precisely the kind of value Scanelli attaches to visual art; his is a Neoplatonic system in which the end of art is the contemplation of God.<sup>122</sup> To be sure he was not alone in this. There was an important Neoplatonic thread weaving through sixteenth- and seventeenth-century criticism; and speculation concerning God played a far more active role on the whole in this fundamentally theological literary tradition than has been realized, so that readers should not have had unusual difficulty making sense of Scanelli's striking image.

### Rhetorical Figures Versus Historical Facts

The writing of art history and criticism in the Italian Renaissance tradition was a humanist endeavor that was stimulated, as other humanist activities, by a renewed interest in the Latin language and its literature. It was, then, part of the classical revival for which the Renaissance is known; it looked to ancient precedent, relying on the authority of classical usage and models. The model it found most applicable to the discussion of works of art was that of panegyric rhetoric, which provided the framework for art history and criticism from Villani and Vasari to Scanelli and Malvasia.<sup>123</sup>

The rhetoric of panegyric operates between the poles of praise and blame, praise of virtue, blame of vice; no matter what its subject, it subserves a higher, ethical purpose. Art history and criticism modeled after rhetoric share in this purpose, aiming to benefit morals by means of instruction and edification. This is a type of writing in which historical fact is tempered with moral instruction; it is founded on a view of history as moral and Christian, a view compatible with the *exemplum* of the Middle Ages.<sup>124</sup> It is a view of history, as well as art history, as a form of power and desire, affected by and capable of having an effect on, the social and political structures in which it is embedded.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>121</sup> F. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, London, 1966; H. Blum *Die Antike Mnemotechnik*, Hildesheim, 1969, calls into question some of Yates's suppositions.

<sup>122</sup> Scanelli, 11–21.

<sup>123</sup> This is not to suggest that the historiographic tradition, to which the writing of art history of course belonged, was static. It was, indeed, characterized by debate over its method, with the role of rhetoric figuring prominently in this debate and writers taking definite positions in relation to it. (See, e.g., Ernst Breisach, *Historiography, Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*, Chicago and London, 1983, esp. 153–195.) What I am arguing is that the terms of this debate, especially historical "truth," were understood differently from the way they are today and, most important, that no matter what writers say about method, in discussions of art and artists well into the 18th century the tropes and figures of rhetoric are as recognizable and central as in such writings at the beginning of the Renaissance. For some of the local implications of art criticism as rhetoric in 17th-century France and 18th-century England, see T. Puttfarcken, *Roger de Piles' Theory of Art*, New Haven and London, 1985, 57–75; J. Lichtenstein, "Eloquence du coloris rhétorique et mimésis dans les conceptions coloristes au 16e siècle en France," in *Symboles de la Renaissance*, II, ed. D. Arasse, Paris, 1982, 171–184; V.M. Bevilacqua, "Ut Rhetorica Pictura: Sir Joshua Reynolds' Rhetorical Conception of Art," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, xxxiv, 1970, 59–78. For the more global historiographical questions, see the literature cited above, n. 52.

<sup>124</sup> See esp. C. Brémond, J. LeGoff, and J.-C. Schmitt, *L'Exemplum*, pamphlet 40 in the series, *Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental*, ed. L. Génicot, R. Bultot, Turnhout, 1982.

<sup>125</sup> See T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Minneapolis, 1983, 194–217. I am grateful to Walter Beale for directing my attention to this book.

What is so peculiar about this literature is that even while repeating what was said about other things and subjects, thereby sacrificing the truth-value of historical statements for the sake of greater persuasiveness, it claims to contain only historical facts. And if this were not strange enough, readers of this literature familiar with its techniques nevertheless treat it as though the author means just what he says. What is important in history are basic truths, they evidently believe, those conducive to desired moral and social performance, and not random and seemingly meaningless aesthetic events.

Modern readers, with their contrasting view of history, have become accustomed to reading this literature critically and to using it selectively, accepting some reports while rejecting others, testing the assertions of a Vasari, on the whole placing greater trust in a Bellori than a Malvasia. The reasons for this trust in the "objectivity" of one or another of these writers have been, however, neither clear nor well founded. The important point is that texts in this critical and biographical tradition make use of rhetorical tropes and figures in their concern to be suasive. Clearly the relation of these rhetorical means to historical "facts" was complex and subject to alteration and even crisis. The only thing that can be said with certainty is that it cannot be assumed that because a text says something about a work of art it must be so. If knowing this causes renewed attention to be focused on the works themselves, its effect on the discipline of art history will be entirely salutary.

*Since the publication of his book on the Carracci (Cambridge, 1988), Carl Goldstein has published two further articles in a series on art theory and academies of art: one in Academies of Art, between Renaissance and Romanticism, Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek, v-vi (1986–87), 1989, the other in Antikenrezeption im Hochbarock, ed. H. Beck and S. Schulze, Berlin, 1989 [Dept. of Art, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, N.C. 27412].*

N.B. This article was accepted by Walter Cahn, the previous Editor-in-Chief, but it could not be published earlier because of space limitations imposed on *The Art Bulletin* last year.

## Frequently Cited Sources

Baron, H., *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, rev. ed., Princeton, 1966.

Baxandall, M., *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350–1450*, Oxford, 1971.

Bellori, G.P., *Le vite de' pittori, scultori et architetti moderni*, Rome, 1672. ed. E. Borea, intro. G. Previtali, Turin, 1976.

Goldstein, C., *Visual Fact over Verbal Fiction: A Study of the Carracci and the Criticism, Theory, and Practice of Painting in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, Cambridge, 1988.

Malvasia, C.C., *Felsma puttrice: Vite de' pittori Bolognesi* (Bologna, 1678), ed. M. Brascaglia, Bologna, 1971.

Previtali, G., *La fortuna dei primitivi*, Turin, 1964.

Scanelli, F., *Il microcosmo della pittura* (Cesena, 1657), rep., with bibliog., letters, and index G. Giubbini, Milan, 1966.

Summers, D., *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, Princeton, 1981.

Vasari, G., *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori, nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. R. Bettarini, P. Barocchi, 6 vols., Florence, 1966–87.

Vickers, B., *In Defense of Rhetoric*, Oxford, 1988.