

**IURI RUDNEV**

**SENSES AND PASSIONS IN BENVENUTO CELLINI'S *VITA*:**

**THE LIFE OF A NEOPLATONIC MANNERIST**

MA Thesis in Medieval Studies

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by

Iurii Rudnev

(Russia)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,  
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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External Reader

Budapest  
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# Abstract

This study is devoted to the emotional experience of the famous Renaissance sculptor, goldsmith, and writer, Benvenuto Cellini (1500–1571), as it is portrayed in his life writing, the *Vita*. Providing the variety of arguments on the connection between the artist and contemporary intellectuals, who attended the Florentine Academy (1540–1583) together, I demonstrate that Cellini’s literary production can be examined productively against the background of Neoplatonic thought. In particular, Marsilio Ficino’s *On Love*, first published in the vernacular Italian in 1544, helps to establish an explanation of what Cellini meant when he decided to play the cornet while falling in love simultaneously with a young boy and girl, or how he justified kicking or punching his servants, or why he did not kill his adversary, the artist Baccio Bandinelli, when he had the chance. These cases of radical affectivity are inscribed into Ficino’s concept of the “melancholy genius” manifesting melancholic madness. In Cellini’s *Vita*, the latter can not only turn humans almost into beast, literally (for example, in a bat); but, properly tempered by the means of music and poetry, as well as of individual and collective magic, it elevates one’s soul “on high,” which corresponds to the Neoplatonic concept of divine madness.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgments .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1. Benvenuto Cellini and the Florentine Academy .....</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1 Why did the Italian academies emerge?.....	12
1.2 Academic movement before the Florentine Academy .....	15
1.3 The Florentine Academy .....	17
1.4 Benvenuto Cellini’s writings in the context of the Florentine Academy .....	20
<b>Chapter 2. “<i>Essendo io per natura malinconico</i>”: Benvenuto Cellini and the Ficinian</b>	
<b>Legacy .....</b>	<b>26</b>
2.1 “Grand theories” and “grounded” early-modern artists .....	26
2.2 Marsilio Ficino’s <i>On Love</i> .....	30
2.3 “Melancholy genius” concept .....	32
2.4 (Neo)Platonic love.....	42
<b>Chapter 3. “<i>Tu ten sei gito a contemplar su ’n Cielo l’alto Fattore</i>”: Benvenuto Cellini</b>	
<b>Ascending on High .....</b>	<b>48</b>
3.1 Esoteric knowledge and censorship .....	48
3.2 “ <i>Furor divino</i> ” and “ <i>diabolico furore</i> ” .....	50
3.3 Different kinds of <i>furor divino</i> in the <i>Vita</i> .....	56
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>65</b>

# Introduction

All people of any sort and language are born as philosophers and poets. Which means, our renowned Signor, that, born as a human, I am a philosopher and poet too. Though, as these arts are of many sorts, mine is not so exquisite because I have not been trained in it; and understanding that difference, I have put the name “Savage” on my Philosophy and Poetry.<sup>1</sup>

With such *declaratio modestiae* Benvenuto Cellini (1500–1571) begins one of his two small philosophical and even esoteric writings, which are peculiar in their form and contents.<sup>2</sup> Created for a literary competition, they give an account of two “Dreams,” introduced by sonnets, where his authorial opinion on the hierarchy of arts, on the nature of dreams, and on some astrological matters is expressed. Out of his whole literary *œuvre*, quite ample for a Renaissance artist, these are the works where Cellini most comprehensively exhibits himself as a *litterato* (i.e., intellectual/humanist producing literary works) who participated in the Florentine intellectual life.

Despite its importance, the “Savage Philosophy,” the hallmark of Cellini’s intense learned activity (c. 1547), which evidently testifies his profound involvement in the contemporary academic discourse, has not been recalled until recently, in 2014.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, up to the end of the 1990s, any discussion about the erudition of this Renaissance sculptor, painter, goldsmith, and writer, was conducted in a very careful and even sometimes commiserating tone. This is not

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<sup>1</sup> “Nascono tutti gli huomini, di ogni qualità et di ogni lingua, per natura philosophi et poeti: però, eccellentissimo Signore, per essere io nato huomo, adunque son philosopho e poeta. Ma perché di queste grandi arti ne è di tutte le sorti, la mia non è di quelle finissima, per non mi essere esercitato in essa; et cognosciuta questa differenza, ho posto nome a la mia Philosophia et Poesia, Boschereccia...” (Benvenuto Cellini, *Rime*, ed. by Diletta Gamberini (Florence: 2014), 135)

<sup>2</sup> *Declaratio modestiae* – is the rhetorical figure that allows to an unprofessional to speak on behalf of the educated persons. (Ibid., lii–liii) In respect to the general Neoplatonic context, it may also refer to the popular image of Socrates-philosopher, who was neither ignorant, nor wise, according to his own judgement.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 135.



surprising, considering that, as late as at the end of the nineteenth-century, the famous physician, Cesare Lombroso, called Cellini *l'uomo delinquente*, which, according to his theory, literally meant a “psycho,” “maniac,” or “criminal.”<sup>4</sup> Not only did Lombroso adhere to this opinion, but so did many of Cellini’s readers as well: the image of a vicious rebel and a crazy man stuck to him firmly.

Up to a point, the author himself planted “the flowers of evil” by cramming doubtful stories into his famous life writing, the *Vita*, which was created between 1558 and c. 1567 under house arrest after his condemnation for sodomy.<sup>5</sup> Cellini’s *Life* had a duly tumultuous fate: its manuscript, first published in 1728, was introduced to the scholarly discourse in the Romantic period, and thence the spirit of the epoch predominantly stressed the troublesome traits of the author’s personality and seemingly natural but, in fact, artificial levity of his style.<sup>6</sup> As Mario Fubini concluded in 1965, Cellini “gave vent to his exuberant vitality,” which from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries onwards, was commonly agreed upon as “a natural spontaneity and forceful vivacity” of the *Vita*’s style.”<sup>7</sup> Evidently, Cellini’s untamed “masculinity,” amplified by

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<sup>4</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *L'uomo delinquente: in rapporto all'antropologia, alla giurisprudenza ed alle discipline carcerarie*, (Milan/Naples/Pisa: Hoepli, 1896), 96, 235.

<sup>5</sup> Full title: *La Vita di Benvenuto di Maestro Giovanni Cellini fiorentino, scritta, per lui medesimo, in Firenze* (Engl.: *The Life of Benvenuto, son of master Giovanni Cellini, written by himself in Florence*), or simply the *Life* or *Vita*. I prefer not using any theoretically biased concepts such as “autobiography,” “autofiction,” etc., as the Cellinian work radically differs from the autobiographical genre which appeared later, in the modern period. The *Vita* is better described by using the notions “spiritual exercises,” “techniques of the Self,” or “self-fashioning.” See further: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 3. The Care of the Self*, (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1986); Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>6</sup> Benvenuto Cellini, *Vita di Benvenuto Cellini orefice e scultore fiorentino da lui medesimo scritta*, (Cologne: P. Martello, 1728).

<sup>7</sup> Paolo Rossi brilliantly summarizes the historiography of Cellini as a writer in the beginning of his contribution Paolo Rossi, “*Sprezzatura*, Patronage, and Fate: Benvenuto Cellini and the World of Words,” in *Vasari’s Florence: Artists and Literati at the Medicean Court*, ed. P. Jacks, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 55–56. Quotations are taken in Rossi’s translation.

accusations of homosexuality and child molestation, provided a tasty bite to chew on by gender and literary studies over the 1990s.<sup>8</sup>

Thanks to the recent developments in intellectual and cultural histories that resulted in more careful studies of the individual biographies of “minor” authors, the view of Cellini as an evil superhero was gradually replaced by a more balanced and even intellectual character. As Diletta Gamberini who published a tremendous volume of Cellini’s lyrics, pertinently points out, his works for a long period have been residing “in limbo of subliterature,” yet now the general situation is more than favorable for a fundamental historiographical revision.<sup>9</sup>

In this vein, I would like to sketch the main developments over the last decades regarding Benvenuto Cellini’s image and writings. The truly groundbreaking work thus far is the collective monograph *Benvenuto Cellini: Sculptor, Goldsmith, Writer* (2004). As the editors objectively note in the introduction, it is “the first anthology in English of the great Italian Renaissance artist and autobiographer.”<sup>10</sup> Besides exploring in depth how his art was connected to his literary production, the authors analyze in detail the coherence of his writings.

Paolo Rossi, studying *The Genesis and Fate* of Cellini’s treatises on the technical art (*Trattati*), which have long been overshadowed by the *Vita*’s fame, draws profound conclusions from their manuscript and initial printed edition (1568). First, he demonstrates that, due to editing and self-censorship, they were to present the author as an artist of *virtù* and to attract patrons. Thence, second, as the content of both versions alludes to “the diversity of cultural activities at the court

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<sup>8</sup> Additionally, one can read in Cellini’s life writing about the real murders committed by the author—at least four of them.

<sup>9</sup> Cellini, *Rime*, ix.

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Gallucci and Paolo Rossi, eds., *Benvenuto Cellini: Sculptor, Goldsmith, Writer*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1. (Henceforth: *Benvenuto Cellini: Sculptor, Goldsmith, Writer*)

[of Medici],” Rossi concludes that Cellini’s “intention to refashion himself from sculptor/goldsmith into a courtly *erudito* is clear.”<sup>11</sup>

The latter idea is confirmed and developed further by Patricia Reilly, who examines Cellini’s unfinished work *On the Principles and Method of Learning the Art of Drawing*, written in the same period (c. 1565). As she argues, it should have become “a pedagogical program” for the *Accademia del disegno* on the subject of the human body.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, that treatise continued the debate about the prominence of either sculpture or painting in arts initiated by the lectures of Cellini’s close friend, humanist Benedetto Varchi; the sculptor contributed to the debate with his responses in the 1540s. The line of scholarship on the treatises continues with Michael Cole who argues that instead of a unique and personified way of bronze casting, in fact, Cellini relied on the help of many well-known contemporary masters. Thus, the *Trattati*, claiming to “introduce aristocratic dilettantes and a new academic audience to the activities of his shop” and to unveil “his tricks to inexperienced apprentices,” were rather a kind of self-promotion and rhetoric figure directed to the prospective patrons.<sup>13</sup>

As for Cellini’s *opus magnum*, the *Vita*, Paolo Rossi debunks the myth of its “natural simplicity” built upon the 1728 printed edition. Carefully studying the manuscripts—the “preprint,” or *bella copia*, and the penultimate version, that survived only on pages glued to the former—he concluded that, first, the original text was substantially revised many times, and second, that it was absolutely impossible to conceive it by spontaneous dictation as Cellini asserts. The *bella copia* consists of 1019 pages and has a very sophisticated structure, in addition it “is set out

<sup>11</sup> Paolo Rossi, “‘Parrem uno, e pur saremo dua.’ The Genesis and Fate of Benvenuto Cellini’s ‘Trattati,’” in *Benvenuto Cellini: Sculptor, Goldsmith, Writer*, 174, 188.

<sup>12</sup> Patricia Reilly, “Drawing the Line: On the Principles and Method of Learning the Art of Drawing,” in *Benvenuto Cellini: Sculptor, Goldsmith, Writer*, 26. Cellini was among the academy’s organizers in 1563.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Cole, “University, Professionalism, and the Workshop. Cellini in Florence, 1545–1562,” in *Benvenuto Cellini: Sculptor, Goldsmith, Writer*, 59.

neatly—with wide, even margins on each page—by hands that were quite definitely not working at speed.”<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Rossi points out the “deep personal religious crisis, compounded by professional disappointment, disillusionment, and disgrace” which intensified the process of writing.<sup>15</sup> That state surely impacted either Cellini’s life or its representation in the text: the author in the 1560s was impoverished, hence was able to acquire only relatively cheap marble, yet in his life writing he associates this work with self-improvement and increased freedom.<sup>16</sup>

According to Rossi, the *Vita*, thus, could be divided in two major parts separated by a long poem inserted by the author himself: “[t]he first part deals with his activities in Florence and at the papal court in Rome, the second part sets out his triumphs and failures at the courts of Francis I in France and Duke Cosimo I in Florence.”<sup>17</sup> As for the way of writing the *Vita*, more probably, Cellini composed it using his letters and notes resembling a diary (*ricordi*), which many artists kept in the course of their lives.

Summing up these crucial recent developments in scholarship, I argue that, approaching Cellini and his thought must always start with the assertion that he eagerly tried to be a court intellectual, *litterato*, in his literary works such as the *Vita*, various treatises and poetry. Thus, he should be treated accordingly—examining the variety of his intellectual connections and searching for the available readings and general humanist ideas which might have impacted his literary and artistic production. Partially, this enterprise has already begun: Benvenuto Cellini has re-emerged as a man of letters and an enlightened artist.

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<sup>14</sup> Paolo Rossi, “*Sprezzatura*, Patronage, and Fate: Benvenuto Cellini and the World of Words,” in *Vasari’s Florence: Artists and Literati at the Medicean Court*, ed. P. Jacks, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 59.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>16</sup> Cole, *University, Professionalism, and the Workshop*, 65.

<sup>17</sup> Rossi, *Parrem uno, e pur saremo dua*, 172.

In addition to his new perception, in this thesis I will demonstrate another, quite intricate element of his creative activity. I argue that Cellini's intellectual background included esoteric knowledge which influenced his views of the human body and soul—with respect to the affectivity and moral values of a person. For instance, I will explain what Cellini meant when he decided to play the cornet while falling in love simultaneously with a young boy and girl, or how he justified kicking or punching his servants, or why he did not kill his adversary, the artist Baccio Bandinelli, when he had the chance. The analysis of these cases of extreme affectivity against the background of the Neoplatonic thought will help take a further step in demystifying the Cellinian “dark genius,” as it can reveal the intellectual components that determined his capacity of passionate love or furious anger; furthermore, this study will develop several ideas of the Renaissance history of emotions through the example of the artist.

By analyzing the case of Cellini, I also contribute to the solution of the two crucial methodological problems that have been troubling scholars in art-history, history of medicine, and history of esotericism. The first one concerns the set of intellectual theories that influenced the imagination of a sixteenth-century Florentine artist. The second concerns how the Renaissance theories of affectivity could be related to the esoteric practices popular during the period (among them are magic, religious devotion, and astrology). The present thesis is structured around the quest for the successive solutions for these problems.

Thus, Chapter 1, “Benvenuto Cellini and the Florentine Academy,” will outline the intellectual connections existing between Benvenuto Cellini and contemporary Florentine humanists, among whom Benedetto Varchi occupies a prominent position. He was the backbone of the Florentine Academy, in which Cellini was a member. Therefore, the main intellectual framework of Cellini's thought may have been forged by the various intellectual activities of the academy, or

Varchi's theorizing on the senses and passions of the soul. Presuming an extensive influence of the Renaissance Neoplatonic philosophy on Cellini, I will introduce one of the sources that may have inspired Cellini's literary imagination.<sup>18</sup>

In Chapter 2, "*Essendo io per natura malinconico: Benvenuto Cellini and Ficinian Legacy*," I analyze several accounts of sensory experience and corresponding passions, excerpted from Cellini's *Vita*, and I will show how they correlate with some key-concepts of Marsilio Ficino's *On Love*. I state that the "emotional community" of the Florentine Academy shared the same understanding and interpretation of the senses and passions relying on the Neoplatonic philosophy.<sup>19</sup> In the center of Cellini's self-perception, there is a concept of melancholy genius used to describe the artistic complexion. It is connected to the *topos* of Platonic love, developed from Ficino by Bembo, Castiglione, and Varchi. I will demonstrate that, in accordance with the Renaissance Neoplatonism, the visual and auditory perception organizes the Cellinian discourse of senses. They both are contrasted with and opposed to the inferior passions and ensuing pleasures. From this point of view, it is possible to explain, for instance, why Cellini's love to his apprentices never was more than Platonic, or why he often emphasizes the visual way to contemplate the Divine.

The Chapter 3, "*Tu ten sei gito a contemplar su 'n Cielo l'alto Fattore: Benvenuto Cellini Ascending on High*," examines the occult practices of ascending to the Divine represented by

<sup>18</sup> I understand that the term "Neoplatonism" recently became debated, however, for the purposes of the present study it is useful as it is unproblematic and helps to stay concentrated exclusively on the subject.

<sup>19</sup> Eng.: "As I was by nature melancholy." (*Vita* 1.27) Here and after, I use Benvenuto Cellini, *My Life*, ed., tr. J. C. Bondanella and P. Bondanella, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), instead of the widely quoted but outdated Symonds's translation: Benvenuto Cellini, *The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*, tr. J. A. Symonds, (New York, NY: Collier&Son, 1910). Referring to the text, in brackets I provide the number of the *Vita*'s book and corresponding chapter. The concept of "emotional community" is taken from Barbara Rosenwein. She defines it as a group "in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value—or devalue—the same or related emotions." Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, (Cornell, IT: Cornell University Press, 2006), 2.

Cellini in his life writing.<sup>20</sup> Such mixture of magic, alchemy, and spiritual devotion results from applying Neoplatonic philosophy to the events of Cellini's life. I will demonstrate how the artist's spiritual exercises, on the one hand, tempered his melancholic genius and promoted it to the wider but initiated audience. On the other hand, it will be shown how Cellini's written discourse embodies his understanding of the esoteric knowledge spread in the circles of the Florentine Academy.

"Mannerism," the art historical term used in the title of the present study, refers to the significant social and cultural freedom which was allowed by the Medici rulers from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the c. 1560s. I suggest that because of this general atmosphere there existed an air of possible experiments—both literary and artistic—which was later normalized and constrained; Cellini is a prominent embodiment of the enterprise when philosophical developments, popular at the court, directly influenced art and literary production. To some extent, such creativity was encouraged by the governing "elites coping with this superabundance of information."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Eng.: "You have gone to contemplate in Heaven / The Creator [...]" (*Vita* 1. 84)

<sup>21</sup> Rossi, *Sprezzatura, Patronage, and Fate*, 63.

## Chapter 1.

# Benvenuto Cellini and the Florentine Academy

The Florentine *Marucelliana* library contains the manuscript entitled, *Annali degli Umidi, poi Fiorentina* (*Annals of the Umidi, later Fiorentina*), which documents the activity of the famous Florentine Academy, in the period between 1540 and 1583. On fol. 25r the annals record that on Thursday, April 23, 1545, the Academy's *consolo*, i.e., its temporary leader, Benedetto Varchi gave a private lecture on Petrarch's poetry, in particular, on the first of three *canzone* devoted to the appraisal of Laura's eyes.<sup>22</sup> "After that, there were nominated new academicians," among whom the name of Benvenuto Cellini is listed. It is known from other sources, that he had just come back from France having some issues with Francis I's mistress and, this year, he would also receive from Cosimo I de' Medici the most significant commission of his life, *Perseus*. In the following year he, not for the first time, was accused of sodomy, fled to Venice for a couple of months.

For his friend and the new leader of the Academy, humanist and philosopher Benedetto Varchi, life was also full of events in 1545: in February, he was accused of raping a girl which, allegedly, happened near his villa. Thanks to the support of some patrons and of another great humanist Pietro Bembo (1470–1547), he just "confessed to the crime, made a monetary restitution to the girl (as dowry for marriage or a convent) and obtained a pardon from Cosimo I on 25 March," which happened a few weeks before his *consolato* in the Academy.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Annali degli Umidi, poi Fiorentina*. Florence, Biblioteca Marucelliana, B. III, 53.

<sup>23</sup> Kenneth Kreitner, "Music in the Corpus Christi Procession of Fifteenth-century Barcelona," in *Early Music History. Vol. 18: Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Music*, ed. I. Fenlon, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 196.



In the previous year, 1544, in the circle of the Florentine academicians Marsilio Ficino's vulgarized work, *On Love*, was published for the first time.<sup>24</sup> So, as seeing the events of Varchi's and Cellini's lives during these years, the book's title was probably not a mere coincidence in the social and cultural situation of the day. Moreover, there are as many as its two exemplars in the posthumous *inventario* of Benedetto Varchi.<sup>25</sup> It is difficult to tell whether the humanist in the following year wanted to prove or, considering the homosexual nature of the *On Love*, rather refute Ficino's ideas with his aforementioned affair with the girl, yet, according to his lectures delivered to the academicians, he has been and would be quoting the philosopher quite frequently.<sup>26</sup>

Time and again, I will revisit to the connection between Varchi, Ficino's *On Love*, and Benvenuto Cellini, analyzing the variety of intertextual references in the *Vita*, but what other sources can be used to reconstruct Cellini's intellectual *milieu*?

Except studying the Varchian influence, an intellectual biography of Agnolo Bronzino (1503–1572), another Mannerist artist of Cosimo I's court, can be used to piece together the probable characteristics of Cellini's life.<sup>27</sup> Bronzino had joined the Florentine Academy in 1541 but was

<sup>24</sup> Thanks to Oskar Kristeller, it is now known how Ficino's works were vulgarized. See: Oskar Kristeller, "Marsilio Ficino as a Man of Letters and the Glosses Attributed to Him in the Caetani Codex of Dante," *Renaissance Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1983): 24ff. In addition, the complete description of the *On Love* editions and interpretations is given in Marsilio Ficino, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon*, ed. by R. Marcel, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1956).

<sup>25</sup> Partially, it is given in Benedetto Varchi, *L'Hercolano*, ed. A. Sorella, (Pescara: Libreria dell'Università Editrice, 1996), 98. (Original manuscript: *L'Inventario de' libri del Varchi* [The Inventory of Books of Benedetto Varchi]. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze [National Central Library of Florence], Filze Rinuccini, 11, 49: cc. 266r–343r, henceforth: *inventario* of Benedetto Varchi)

<sup>26</sup> In the dialogue *Della infinita d'Amore* (*On the infinity of Love*, 1547) of Varchi's student and writer Tullia d'Aragona (1510–1556), there is an interesting passage: "Tulia: Have you read Plato and *Convivio* of the maestro Marsilio Ficino? Varchi: Yes, madam. And they both, I think, are miraculous: but I like more Filo." Quoted in Kyunghee Jung, "La trattatistica d'amore del cinquecento e il "Dialogo dell'infinità d'Amore" di Tullia d'Aragona," PhD diss., (Università degli studi di Padova, 2008), 90.

<sup>27</sup> Agnolo Bronzino, because of many corresponding characteristics, could be seen as "a Neoplatonic Mannerist" as well, yet this statement, certainly, needs more evidence. So far, we have only a couple of studies interpreting his artworks against the background of the Neoplatonic thought and Marsilio Ficino's philosophy. See, for example: Zlatan Gruborovic, *Bronzino and the style (s) of Mannerism* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Bryn Mawr College, 2008); Paul

expelled from there in 1547 together with Cellini and some other artists, as they did not have the substantial literary production needed for participants according to the renewed set of rules. Benvenuto, in his *Life*, wrote the following about this painter, recounting the story of his *Perseus*'s reception in Florence (1554):

[A]mong these excellent men, who know this profession and are members of it [the School], the painter Bronzino has laboured and written me four sonnets, using the most well-chosen and glorious words possible; and because of this astonishing man, perhaps the entire city has been moved to such great excitement. (*Vita*, 2.97)

Finally, Cellini himself talks in passing about some activities of the Florentine Academy in the *Vita*, albeit calling it “*nobilissima/mirabile Scuola*.” The latter fact has seemingly escaped attention in historiography, at least I have not found any relevant reference to it so far. Thus, combining the descriptions given by the artist himself with the information known about Varchi and Bronzino, a complex picture of the relationships between Cellini and the academicians can be drawn up in the following.

Before the discussion of their relationship, a brief digression is in order to provide background both about the Florentine Academy and the academic movement in the Renaissance Italy. It will be shown what novelties academies had introduced into the *habitus* of intellectuals and in what respect they changed the tradition of learning among the *literati* and artists in the Medici's Florence.

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Barolsky, “Looking at Venus: A Brief History of Erotic Art,” *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 7, no. 2 (1999): 93–117. Moreover, Michelangelo Buonarroti certainly was well-acquainted with the philosophy of Neoplatonism.

## 1.1 Why did the Italian academies emerge?

As Jane Everson and Lisa Sampson observe, the Renaissance academies so far have been studied unsystematically and their historical role has usually been diminished, thus there exists a need “to demonstrate how deeply embedded these institutions were in the society, culture and intellectual outlook of the period.”<sup>28</sup> The now outdated historiographical view tended to present academies either as places where discussions on the scientific status of the Italian language began, or as frivolous pastime for intellectual elites. Yet now, using an interdisciplinary approach, that stereotype can be reconsidered on the basis of intellectual history, art-history, as well as urban and literary studies.

In order to answer the question why humanist environment underwent the transformations it did in the sixteenth century, inquiries of intellectual history may be enlisted. The word “academy” refers to the very first Platonic Academy that used to gather from the fourth century BCE to the fifth century CE to study and develop the philosophy of Plato. After the Medieval era, it was revived in the Renaissance by the famous humanist, Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), who first translated the extant works of Plato into Latin under the patronage of Cosimo de’ Medici (1389–1464). Ficino not only translated Plato’s dialogues but also commented on them in his own works. His *On Love* is the product of the philosophical reflection on Plato’s *Symposium*. Moreover, as noted previously, this large commentary was vulgarized (i.e., translated from Latin to vernacular Italian, *volgare*) to reach a more broad audience that included those members of Medici’s court who were not well-versed in Latin. It was commonly believed not only by the contemporaries but also by modern historians that Ficino established the earliest Renaissance

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<sup>28</sup> Jane Everson and Lisa Sampson, introduction to *The Italian academies 1525–1700: Networks of Culture, Innovation and Dissent*, eds. J. Everson and L. Sampson, (Oxford: Legenda, 2016), 3.

academy, and humanists always refer to him as to the precursor (equal to Plato) of the academic movement. John Hankins's analysis, however, proves that the first Florentine Academy was more a literary *topos* than real fact.<sup>29</sup>

The revival of Platonism in the intellectual circles of the fifteenth century led to the emergence of gatherings alternative to the universities, since the curricula of the latter were established on the basis of Aristotelian philosophy. The social-intellectual tension is visible on Raphael's "School of Athens" (1509–1511), in which the artist depicted different ancient philosophers in a modern way. In the center of composition stand Plato and Aristotle representing different approaches to knowledge, embodied in the books held by them. Plato holds the *Timaeus*, which sums up his general cosmology and which was reintroduced into the Renaissance philosophy exactly by Ficino.<sup>30</sup> Aristotle, on the other hand, carries *Ethics*, which was also significantly updated by humanists: they translated its most crucial part, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, to Latin and the vernacular. Benedetto Varchi even lectured on it in Padua in the 1530s, and whence composed his own commentary.<sup>31</sup>

Crystallized as a teaching canon, neither the "old" Aristotelian corpus nor the general design of universities allowed scholars to lecture on extracurricular matters—such as writings of Petrarch, Dante, Boccaccio, or more abstract subjects as beauty, love, or the nature of language. Thus, intellectuals found the way to supplement university studies in academies and develop new topics responding to recent cultural discourses; furthermore, here they agreed to lecture not in

<sup>29</sup> According to James Hankins, the word "academy" was used by Ficino either in reference to the *corpus platonicum* and its translation, or to his private gymnasium. See: James Hankins, "Cosimo de' Medici and the 'Platonic Academy'," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 53 (1990): 457.

<sup>30</sup> Valerie Shrimplin, *Sun-symbolism and Cosmology in Michelangelo's Last Judgment*, (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2000), 215–219.

<sup>31</sup> Lionel Devlieger, "Benedetto Varchi on the Birth of Artefacts: Architecture, Alchemy and Power in Late-Renaissance Florence," PhD diss., (Ghent: Universiteit Gent, 2005), cvi–cvii.

Latin, but in Italian.<sup>32</sup> One of the members of the Florentine Academy, Cosimo Bartoli, testifies that, at the public lectures, a number of listeners reached 2000.<sup>33</sup>

As Alison Brown notes, these intellectual gatherings “provided the ideal forum for the mixture of culture and contrarianism” which “was incorporated into the structure” and “combined written exercises with pro and contra debates.”<sup>34</sup> Along with prepared speeches, participants practiced the improvised composition of sonnets, madrigals and orations, often with musical accompaniment. However, in the course of historical development the element of orality gradually decreased.<sup>35</sup>

In the beginning, existing without an established agenda, academies fast became a shelter for emancipated and rebel ideas and personalities, yet later the rulers of Italian states, observing this dangerous situation, took measures to keep this activities under control, step by step transforming academies into means of self-popularization and intellectual support. Finally, as Brown states, the process had come to a bilateral result: on the one hand, academies “helped to create a new intellectual aristocracy which promoted a carefully-censored Tuscan culture,” on the other hand, they became “‘shadow theatres’ where political tensions could be worked out,” or “the most subversive critics” of the political system were hosted.<sup>36</sup> The latter tendency was nurtured by the peculiar culture of anonymity, as Déborah Blocker explains.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See: Richard Samuels, “Benedetto Varchi, the Accademia degli Infiammati, and the Origins of the Italian Academic Movement,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (1976): 610ff.

<sup>33</sup> Devlieger, *On the Birth of Artefacts*, 54.

<sup>34</sup> Alison Brown, “Defining the Place of Academies in Florentine Culture and Politics,” in *The Italian academies 1525–1700*, 28.

<sup>35</sup> See further: Judith Bryce, “The Oral World of the Early Accademia Fiorentina,” *Renaissance Studies* 9, no. 1 (1995): 77–103.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*: 22f.

<sup>37</sup> See further: Déborah Blocker, “S’affirmer par le secret: anonymat collectif, institutionnalisation et contreculture au sein de l’académie des Alterati,” *Littératures classiques* 80, no. 1 (2013): 167–190.

Summing up the main intellectual, social, political, and cultural processes connected to the emergence and evolution of the academy as a phenomenon of the Italian Renaissance, a definition can be formulated. In its fully developed form, such an institution was a gathering of intellectuals characterized by “learned discussions about the Italian language, political contrarianism, theatrical and musical productions—and feasting”<sup>38</sup>; academicians “were often based in the private home of a noble, intellectual or cleric, either as invited guests or as tenants, though they could also rent rooms in other public, private or religious buildings.”<sup>39</sup> The following chapter will take a closer look at various Italian academies in a historical perspective to understand in what relationship and sequence these functions appeared throughout their history.

## 1.2 Academic movement before the Florentine Academy

According to some scholars, in contrast with the preceding less formal gatherings, the first academy *sui generis*, was the Academy of the Dazed (*Accademia degli Intronati*) established in Siena in 1525.<sup>40</sup> It differed from its precursors in that it had a set-up structure of participants and a continuous curriculum. *Intronati* had a replaceable leader, “the *principe* or the *archintronato*, who served for a period of two months”; at the command of the *principe* there were two *consoli* and six censors, “to whom all original compositions were submitted before being presented to the assembled academy”; the meetings were held every Sunday, and the group had its own budget.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Brown, *Defining the Place of Academies*, 26.

<sup>39</sup> Everson and Sampson, *Introduction*, 4.

<sup>40</sup> David S. Chambers, “The ‘Earlier Academies’ in Italy,” in *Italian Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, eds. D. S. Chambers and F. Quiviger, (London: The Warburg Institute/University of London, 1995), 13.

<sup>41</sup> Samuels, *Benedetto Varchi, the Accademia degli Infiammati*, 609.

*Intronati* not only promoted their literary and dramatic works written in the vernacular, but also lectured on a variety of subjects. Among other, they analyzed Petrarchan poetry, *Canzoniere*, and Pietro Bembo's experiments based on it, read the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle, then still rather uncomfortable for the university culture. Linguistic work was focused on vulgarization, for instance, the *Aeneid* was translated into Tuscan in the circles of the academy.<sup>42</sup> Scholars also testify women's participation and foreign communication, particularly, with Spaniards.<sup>43</sup> The members of the Dazed migrated from city to city and from universities to other gatherings and academies, thus weaving the multiplicity of intellectual connections and the dissemination of the *Intronati*'s model.

In the next decade, around 1532, the Academy of Virtues (*Accademia della Virtù*) was established in Rome. Neither being equally famous, nor well documented or so strictly scholarly, it was able to reintroduce *brigate*, a significant lay tradition to the Renaissance intellectual culture originating from Boccaccio's *Decameron*. They wrote carnival songs and played feasts in a dramatic and improvised manner. Each feast-week a "king" was elected, who hosted in his house a banquet where "his vassals staged a competition by presenting original verse and mock orations in his honor."<sup>44</sup> The absurdity of this practice went further as the "vassals" had to present "a bizarre object and a composition."<sup>45</sup> As Annibale Caro (1507–1566) recalls it, they "have composed writings that are getting all Rome talking."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Germano Pallini, "Accademie senesi: tramonto e alba di una repubblica litteraria," in *The Italian academies 1525–1700*, 55.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Samuels, *Benedetto Varchi, the Accademia degli Infiammati*, 607.

<sup>45</sup> Ambra Moroncini, "The *Accademia della Virtù* and Religious Dissent," in *The Italian academies 1525–1700*, 89.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Such literary experiments were often of erotic content, seemingly, very obscene to a noble audience, however the tradition of *brigata* established itself very firmly in the humanist circles, and we can find evidence for it later on many occasions, including Cellini's *Vita*.

The next niche in the development of the Renaissance academies is occupied by the Academy of the Enflamed (*Accademia degli Infiammati*), founded in 1540 in Padua. The person who inspired this event was Benedetto Varchi who was exiled there at the time because of the political situation in Florence and who formerly participated in the Academy of Virtues.<sup>47</sup> The *Infiammati*'s most significant advancement was the introduction of the academy's chronicle which documented the frequency and content of the gatherings, and the continuous publishing process—both of the lectures of the participants and of translations of Greek and Latin sources to vernacular Italian.<sup>48</sup>

### 1.3 The Florentine Academy

The Florentine Academy (*Accademia fiorentina*), where this chapter started, appeared in Florence under the patronage of Cosimo I de' Medici by the end of 1540. During the first eighteen months it was called the Academy of the Wet Ones (*Accademia degli Umidi*) placing itself in opposition to the Academy of the Enflamed, however, the duke “in three months of its foundation... had taken control of the academy and gave it [later] the less reactionary, more civic-minded name,” *Accademia Fiorentina*.<sup>49</sup> Many of the Dazed lectured in the Florentine Academy: for instance, Benedetto Varchi appears here as the *censore*, who edited the texts of the participants; later on, he is elected as a *consolo*, i.e. takes the presidential role, which, due to the

<sup>47</sup> Samuels, *Benedetto Varchi, the Accademia degli Infiammati*, 607.

<sup>48</sup> Chambers, *The “Earlier Academies”*, 13.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Sherberg, “The Accademia Fiorentina and the question of the language: The politics of theory in Ducal Florence,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2003): 27.



ruling structure, was not called *principe* here. The ducal power left another impression on the *Fiorentina*'s history: first it used to gather in the house of one of its founders but under Cosimo's control it was relocated to the Pope's hall of the Santa Maria Novella Church and then to the ducal palace itself; moreover, the duke gave honors from the state to the academy's *consolo* and provided the facilities of his own publishing house.<sup>50</sup>

The latter event had dual significance: on the one hand, it was suppressing the culture of anonymity—as the most acute criticism usually appeared in letters and other manuscript forms, on the other hand, it provided the leading academicians with a very powerful medium to spread their word.<sup>51</sup> With respect to the promotion of Tuscan, Benedetto Varchi even developed a “publishing program” to win over his opponents: to prove the prominent position of the dialect, he decided to print not only the well-known major works of Petrarch, Dante, and Boccaccio, but also the “early Tuscan texts [...] explaining in the prefaces that [...] their language was good enough to serve as a model for the vernacular.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, the Florentine Academy could endorse on the institutional and even governmental level the topic of the Tuscan dialect as the main instrument of scholarly discussion. Due to this organized political-cultural activity, Michael Sherberg calls the ducal enterprise as “Cosimo's broader program of Florentine cultural promotion.”<sup>53</sup>

Among the variety of literary production, which appeared either in print or in manuscripts, there were also lectures by the *Fiorentina*'s representatives and annals documenting the formal side of its operation. From this kind of sources, the general design of the academy's activity can be

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Nosow, “The debate on song in the Accademia Fiorentina,” *Early Music History* 21 (2002): 175-221.

<sup>52</sup> “Publishing program” is a concept introduced by David Chambers in his introduction to *Italian Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, 7; on Varchi's “publishing program” see: Rick Scorza, “Borghini and Florentine Academies,” in *Italian Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, 140.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 31.

reconstructed.<sup>54</sup> The *Annals of the Umidi, later Fiorentina* clearly show that the Academy held two weekly sessions: *Lezione Privata* on Thursdays and *Lezione Pubblica* on Sundays, except for the Church feasts. During Varchi's *consolato* for six consecutive months from April 1545 onwards, the majority of public lectures was devoted to the reading of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, whereas the private lectures were on Petrarch's poetry, *Canzoniere*.<sup>55</sup> In addition, the *Annals* documented all newly admitted participants and the result of the *consolo*'s election. For example, the page testifying Cellini's admission also reveals that Varchi gave his inaugural lecture on 12 April and held a public lecture on Dante on 19 April, and a private lecture on the third of Petrarch's three *canzone*, devoted to Laura's eyes on 23 April, the day when the new members were inaugurated. Some of these and following lectures had been written down and then printed—for example, Varchi's lecture "On Painting and Sculpture," delivered in 1547, was published in 1549 including a letter of Cellini on the same topic. Others, for example, "On Love and Jealousy," given in 1540 at the Academy of the Enflamed, came out later, in 1560.<sup>56</sup> However, for the most part, Varchi's lectures remained unpublished until the mid-nineteenth century.

As for the oral and performative activity at the early stage of the *Fiorentina*, it can be concluded, that the vulgarization of knowledge went further and significantly penetrated the ranks of less noble people, the *plebei* (distinguished from the educated *dotti*). Some intense moments that occurred around the academy, were captured in a compendium entitled *I marmi* (1552), whose

<sup>54</sup> *Annali degli Umidi, poi Fiorentina* [Annals of the Umidi, later Fiorentina], (Florence, Biblioteca Marucelliana [Marucelliana Library]), B. III, 53; *Capitoli dell'Accademia Fiorentina* [Records of the Florentine Academy], (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze [National Central Library of Florence]), Magliabechiana, IX, 91.

<sup>55</sup> *Annali degli Umidi*, 25r.

<sup>56</sup> Benedetto Varchi, *Due lezioni di M. Benedetto Varchi nella prima delle quali si dichiara un Sonetto di M. Michelagnolo Buonarrotti. Nella seconda si disputa quale sia più nobile arte la Scultura, o la Pittura*, (Florence: Appresso Lorenzo Torrentino, 1549); Benedetto Varchi, *Due lezioni di M. Benedetto Varchi l'una d'amore e l'altra della Gelosia*, (Lion: Guglielmo Rovillio), 1560.

title refers to the marble steps of the cathedral.<sup>57</sup> These dialogues testify the half ironic, half serious nature of the popular reception of the lectures. For example, an account of this quasi-academic activity recounts the story of Domenico Barlacchi, who was close to the Florentine academic circles and once participated in a “debate” with some educated man he called “annoying pedant” (*pedante fastidioso*):

[W]here a “pedante fastidioso” was holding forth on the subject of the Tuscan language. Eventually Barlacchi went up to him and asked which sounded better in Tuscan, “prendetelo” or “pigliatelo.” “The former,” came the reply, whereupon Barlacchi broke wind loudly and enquired how that sounded.<sup>58</sup>

Such bodily “argument” equating the ill-sounding “*prendetelo*” with flatulence surprisingly coincides in its spirit with more “noble” discussions on language, which we can read, for example, in Benedetto Varchi’s *Ercolano*, the dialogue on the nature of the Tuscan language, mostly written in 1560–1565.<sup>59</sup>

## 1.4 Benvenuto Cellini’s writings in the context of the Florentine Academy

In the following paragraphs, I demonstrate how the significant elements of the discourse, characteristic to the academic movement and, in particular, to the Florentine academy in the 1540s–1560s, correspond to Cellini’s life writing.

In the first place, let us look closer at the representation of the Florentine academy, “the most wonderful School,” as it appears on the pages of Cellini’s *Vita*. He uses the term “*scuola*” for the first time at the beginning of the text, in the tenth chapter. There it is said that Cellini’s brother, Giovanfrancesco Cellini, became one of the first elected in “the school of that marvellous Lord

<sup>57</sup> Antonfrancesco Doni, *I marmi*, ed. P. Fanfani, (Florence: Editore G. Barbèra, 1863).

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Bryce, *Oral World*, 94.

<sup>59</sup> Varchi, *L’Ercolano*.

Giovannino de' Medici.” (*Vita* 1.10) Giovannino de' Medici, or Pope Leo X (1475–1521), is famous in history among other things as the founder of several musical *sodalities* in Rome, which were similar to academies but less formal, and as a promoter of the humanist activity.<sup>60</sup> Further, Cellini uses the term *scuola* in respect to Leonardo's works exhibited in Florence: “[o]ne of these two cartoons was in the Medici Palace, and the other in the rooms of the Pope.” (*Vita* 1.12) Finally, when the events come to 1545, he uses this word as “*Iscuola*,” with a capital letter, and, in this case, he clearly refers to the Florentine Academy, to where he was admitted the same year. Moreover, right in the same sentence he alludes, probably, to its skepticism about arts being inferior to sculpture, or to the 1547 reform, which had him expelled:

Poor, unlucky creature that I was, wanting to demonstrate to this wonderful School that, although I had been away from it, I was skilled in other crafts besides that branch which this School did not esteem very highly, I answered my Duke that I would most willingly execute for him, either in marble or in bronze, a large statue for that fine piazza of his. (*Vita* 2.53)<sup>61</sup>

As a result, he was commissioned to create *Perseus*. Later in the text, among other brief remarks, he refers again to the *scuola* talking about the sculptor Baccio Bandinelli, also admitted in 1545 and then Bronzino, in the passage on the appraisal of *Perseus*, quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

In another passage, Cellini becomes a commentator on Dante in quite an academic style realizing “what Dante meant to say when he went with Virgil, his master, inside the gates of Hell.” (*Vita*

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<sup>60</sup> See further: Anthony Cummings, “Informal Academies and Music in Pope Leo X's Rome,” *Italica* 86, no. 4 (2009): 583–601. Cellini also characterizes this school as a military one. This may be connected to the battle for Dante's body with Ravenna which Leo X had conducted around 1519, as well as other military actions. See: Brown, *Defining the Place of Academies*, 27. Moreover, later in his *Vita*, Cellini says that his brother had the “brilliant men of letters” as friends and they composed him an epitaph when he died “bringing the victory” during the sack of Rome, in 1529. (*Vita* 1.50)

<sup>61</sup> “Although I had been away from it, I was skilled in other crafts” may refer to his works for Francis I in Fontainebleau when Cellini began to cast from bronze. This time coincides with the initial years of the Florentine Academy (1540–1545).

2.27) Supporting this argument indirectly, it is notable that he also kept a manuscript with some fragments by Dante in his home library.<sup>62</sup>

Certainly, the most prominent case of Cellini copying academic discourse is his “Savage Philosophy” (1547) written in the form of two dreams. Comparing their structure, the same pattern of narrative emerges: it begins with a sonnet, which the “lecturer” then analyzes: first by providing a general philosophical model, and then explaining the meaning, verse by verse. For example, Cellini begins to analyze the second dream with the reference to the division of souls into vegetative, animal, and human; whence, he concludes what creatures can dream and what dreams are the most noble. A similar theoretical pattern can be detected in various Varchi’s lectures, which, moreover, also display careful attention to the soul and its characteristics, especially in 1543–1544.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, Varchi’s lecture *On Painting and Sculpture* (1547) contains a passage where it is explained how a man can receive knowledge of angelic or demonic nature while dreaming.<sup>64</sup> Cellini was certainly aware of the content of the lecture, as his answer to Benedetto Varchi on the subject was printed with his letter in 1549.

Concerning Cellini’s knowledge of the *brigata* tradition, in the *Vita* he recounts that in 1520, while living in Rome, he survived the plague and went later to feast in the company of “painters, sculptors, goldsmiths, the best who were in Rome, and the founder of this company was a sculptor named Michelangelo [not Buonarroti].” (*Vita*, 1.30) He describes how he took a “creature,” his beautiful apprentice disguised as a whore, because the “king” obliged them to appear in the company of a fallen woman. Then the participants improvised in singing and

<sup>62</sup> According to the posthumous *inventario* of Cellini. (Biblioteca Riccardiana di Firenze, codice 2787)

<sup>63</sup> Benedetto Varchi, “La lezione di Benedetto Varchi sul sonetto di Petrarca ‘Orso, e’ non furon mai...’,” ed. A. Andreoni, *Nuova Rivista di Letteratura Italiana* 1–2 (2008): 141–142; Benedetto Varchi, “La lezione su ‘Verdi panni, sanguigni, oscuri o persi’,” ed. M. T. Girardi, *Aevum* 3 (2005): 704–705.

<sup>64</sup> Benedetto Varchi, *Opere di Benedetto Varchi con le lettere*, ed. G. B. Busini, (Milan: Niccolò Bettoni, 1834), 122.

recited the poems in honor of whores. In the Italian text, the word “*ubbrigato*” is used, to describe the assignment, a term that evidently refers to *brigata* with a play on words: coining *ubbrigato* from the words *obbligato* (to be obliged) and *brigata*. Considering that the story nearly completely corresponds with the described activities of the Academy of Virtues and that Varchi and another of Cellini’s friends, Annibale Caro, participated in the latter, it can be inferred that Cellini draws this episode according to the gossips or friends’ testimonies. The artist specially emphasizes that the organizer of this *compagnia* was from Siena, where the Academy of Dazed first appeared. However, he could not have participated in the *Virtù* sodality, because it was not established until around 1532; it is also earlier than the Sienese academy’s foundation in 1525.

This episode, in addition, is full of literary references, typical of the contemporary academic canon: apart from alluding to Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, where the youths fled from the plague to the provinces telling each other funny stories to prevent contamination, it also recalls Plato’s *Symposium* and, partially, pagan mythology. Moreover, pulling Ficino’s *On Love* (1544) into this complex symbolic context, even more parallels can be drawn. Finally, Cellini, talking about pleasures in relation to intellectual activity, prefers the verb *pigliare* (over “*prendere*,” which also means “to take”) characteristic both of Boccaccio, Ficino, and many other academicians. Its significance for the Tuscan was clearly shown in the story of Domenico Barlacchi, who expelled gases to argue against an “annoying pedant.”<sup>65</sup>

To sum up, Cellini’s *Vita* and his different literary works were evidently influenced and structured by the type of knowledge propagated by the Florentine Academy. Moreover, his life

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<sup>65</sup> For the development of this argument see: Yuri Rudnev, “Renaissance Medicine, Magic, and Alchemy in Benvenuto Cellini’s ‘Vita’,” *Enthymema* 11 (2014): 25–43. (<http://dx.doi.org/10.13130/2037-2426/4566>)

writing might have been presented as a re-application to the Florentine Academy, especially comparing it with the intellectual biography of Bronzino, developed in parallel.<sup>66</sup> He was also close to Benedetto Varchi, and his poetry initially developed burlesque motives, characteristic to the general spirit of the academy. Later Bronzino refashioned the burlesque lyrics into a mock *Petrarchesco* style, which is found in Cellini's poetry as well.<sup>67</sup> Being admitted in 1541, Bronzino knew the founders well, so he addressed them in correspondence and poetry in a more familiar manner than Cellini, who stayed in France until 1545. Bronzino also participated in the discussion on "Painting and Sculpture" in 1547, but his response in the letter was not published in 1549 volume.<sup>68</sup> Finally, as noted above, both artists were dismissed from the Academy in 1547. Bronzino was re-elected in 1566, but Cellini was not; the question, of course, is whether he wanted to be re-elected at all.

Cellini began working on his *Vita* in 1558 and finished the text, according to Rossi, around 1567. The artist's account is quite inaccurate in the final part and underwent a great deal of self-censorship. In addition, there is evidence that he submitted it to Benedetto Varchi in the process of composition for corrections—the latter was a *censore* who edited the works of the Academy members. Varchi returned it with the comment that the author's language was so brilliant that he had not changed a word—Cellini's blatant lie to conceal the fact of a significant amount of later improvements. Varchi died in 1565. Cellini lost his famous friend and supporter, but Bronzino knew other founders from the beginning, so he had other ways of "vertical mobility." So, Cellini, impoverished, was incapable of publishing the 1019 page manuscript on his own, and left

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<sup>66</sup> Rossi also notes that *bella copia* of the *Vita* was aimed to be distributed among the intellectuals to receive their comments. Rossi, *Sprezzatura, Patronage, and Fate*, 58.

<sup>67</sup> Carla Chiummo, "Bronzino e l'Accademia Fiorentina," in *The Italian academies 1525–1700*, 260.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

without any intellectual protection, thus, he, most likely, decided to stay concentrated on the *Trattati* instead, which appeared in print as early as in 1568.<sup>69</sup>

Looking closer at the *post-mortem* fate of Cellini's and Bronzino's writings, a surprisingly different and even "corrected" picture emerges. The Florentine Academy since 1583 became the famous *Accademia della Crusca* which mainly focused its activity on questions of literature and the Italian language, thus it preserved both Cellini's *Vita* and Bronzino's poetry. They were used as literary examples of the lively Tuscan language to assemble the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (fourth edition, 1729–1738), which to this date is used as the primary reference in disambiguating the concepts of sixteenth-century Italian language.<sup>70</sup> Considering that Cellini's manuscript was more "voluminous" than Bronzino's poetic exercises and nearly all literary experiments of the others, it can be concluded that the author's creative genius had, in a sense, won the intellectual battle with other Renaissance artists striving to become *literati*.

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<sup>69</sup> Benvenuto Cellini, *Due Trattati. Uno intorno alle otto principali arti dell'Oreficeria. L'altro in materia dell'Arte della Scultura*, (Firenze: Panizzi e Peri, 1568). For Cellini's not so pleasant words addressed to the Medici and later self-censored, see: Diletta Gamberini, "Benvenuto Cellini, o del sapere 'pur troppo dire il fatto suo' a Cosimo de' Medici," *Annali d'Italianistica* 34 (2016): 199–218.

<sup>70</sup> *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, 4th edition, (Florence: Appresso Domenico Maria Manni, 1729–1738.)



## Chapter 2.

### “*Essendo io per natura malinconico*”: Benvenuto Cellini and the Ficinian Legacy

#### 2.1 “Grand theories” and “grounded” early-modern artists

Charles Hope, a former director of the Warburg Institute (2001 to 2010) and a specialist in the art history of *Cinquecento*, once said that “to read Marsilio Ficino is not for most people a pleasure... It is all in Latin, for a start. It is in quite difficult Latin. It is extremely long—if you have ever looked at the collected works of Ficino... And it is fairly technical. No artist in the Renaissance, that I am aware of, would ever read it.”<sup>71</sup> So, one may conclude that there could not have been any direct influence of the Ficinian texts on the artists.

Yet this statement is incorrect, as it does not take into the account the intellectual processes developing in sixteenth-century of Italy on the level of social networks producing and disseminating knowledge, for instance, in the Florentine academic movement, described in detail above. The artists could directly “read” ideas not only in boring treatises, by just showing up at the lectures of the academy, or leafing through the variety of other vulgarizations and literary improvisations inspired by them, or, less directly, by talking to their authors and participating in *brigata* or *marmi* conversations. It was a community highly saturated with ideas. Although, Hope is right that the reconstruction of these various intellectual influences, impacted the works of

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<sup>71</sup> Melvyn Bragg, Tom Healy, Charles Hope, and Evelyn Welch, “Paganism in the Renaissance,” *In Our Time*, BBC podcast, (June 16, 2005. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p003k9ct>). Transcript is mine; a similar position is held, for example, by Piers Britton: “There is no correspondingly clear evidence that Ficino’s work was known at first hand by those who wrote on the arts during the sixteenth century. Given its esoteric nature and the fact that it was available only in Latin, this is not particularly surprising.” Piers Britton, “‘Mio malinconico, o vero... mio pazzo’: Michelangelo, Vasari, and the Problem of Artists’ Melancholy in Sixteenth-Century Italy,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 34, no. 3 (2003): 658.

Renaissance artists, is a very difficult and necessarily incomplete undertaking due to the nature of the “sources” which remain everything but solid and indisputable.

In 2013, this problem was specifically addressed in *The Artist as Reader*. The main ambition of the book is to stay closer to the artists’ concepts and do not seek “a text reference behind every... detail,” as Panofsky used to do. Thence, the authors decided to reconsider “the mechanisms that link imagery and text, artists and books.”<sup>72</sup> As present study deals with Cellini’s writings, the improvements made in the “mechanisms” of the latter pair deserves a brief digression.

First of all, it is noted that, in this period, a well and widely educated artist (*pictor doctus*) was a rare case. This does not necessarily mean that the artists did not read books. Contrarily, there are cases when the artists knew by heart some author’s works or a number of books, and adhered to them very much: “Pontormo’s meagre diary entries give us a palpable impression of artists’ familiarity with certain classical literature,” and Bronzino “knew Dante entirely and Petrarch for the most part by heart.”<sup>73</sup> Both painters were close to Cellini and to the Florentine Academy.

The essay on the painter, portraitist, and Bronzino’s teacher, Jacopo Pontormo (1494–1557), entitled as *Scholarly Craftsman*, says that he knew Latin and was well-educated.<sup>74</sup> Although there is no remaining *inventario* of his goods, it is known that another of Cellini’s acquaintances from Pontormo’s workshop, Rosso Fiorentino (1495–1540), read *The Book of the Courtier* (*Il libro del Cortegiano*, 1528), a quite recent work written by Baldassare Castiglione, also significant for Ficino’s reception. In general, the artists kept at home no more than 100 books: for example, an erudite painter Antonio Sacchi owned 54, whereas Nicolas Poussin only 19.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Heiko Damm, Michael Thimann, and Claus Zittel, eds., *The Artist as Reader: On Education and Non-Education of Early Modern Artists*, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 28. (Henceforth: *The Artist as Reader*)

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>74</sup> Cecile Beuzelin, “Jacopo Pontormo: A Scholarly Craftsman,” in *The Artist as Reader*, 71–104.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 26.

Thus, Benvenuto Cellini is not exceptional with only 18 volumes in his possession, documented but not specified by the posthumous *inventario*.<sup>76</sup>

At the same time he could have borrowed books either from the library of San Marco convent, opened by Cosimo the Elder in 1457, or from the Santissima Annunziata. Moreover, a wide variety of manuscripts was constantly circulating among the artists.<sup>77</sup> Finally, not only patrons, but also humanists, clerics, and antiquarians, for example, a Benedectine monk Vincenzo Borghini, also close to the *Fiorentina*, welcomed artists in their private libraries.<sup>78</sup> In the analysis of artists' literary works, besides the direct intertextual references, it is very difficult to determine what sources could have influenced them: the artists did not exercise the universities' tradition of scholarly writing, neither did they possess many books, even if some were learnt by heart; moreover, their knowledge and lifeworld, in general, did not require a high level of precision in operating with the ideas and was even contrasted with *scientia*.

In connection to this problematic field, my work about Benvenuto Cellini's *Vita*, constantly revisited the question how my interpretation for some events of the artist's life can be proved more "tangibly" or rigorously. My answer can be summed up in the metaphorical reference to the concept of "thick description" elaborated by Clifford Geertz.<sup>79</sup> In Cellini's case, it is only possible to approximate contemporary theories that surrounded him, to the ideas and iconography expressed in his works, relying on the Occam's razor principle and using the heuristic tools provided by recent studies, such as *The Artist as a Reader*. No more, no less.

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<sup>76</sup> According to the *inventario* of Benvenuto Cellini.

<sup>77</sup> Beuzelin, *Jacopo Pontormo*, 9.

<sup>78</sup> On the connection of Borghini to the Florentine Academy see further: Diletta Gamberini, "Cellini, Borghini e la disputa sulle esequie di Michelangelo, fra questioni di 'paragone' e di 'committenza,'" in *Proceedings from the conference 'Intrecci virtuosi' (Cassino/Rome, October 2015)*, eds. C. Chiummo, A. Geremicca, and P. Tosini, (Rome: De Luca Editori d'Arte, 2017), 39–50.

<sup>79</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Thick description. Toward an interpretative theory of culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, ed. C. Geertz. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973), 3–32.

When some theory, for example the Renaissance Neoplatonism, is put in a very close relation to Cellini's language—both on the levels of ideas and of their social proximity—the rhetorical power of such “discursive” explanation can convincingly argue that the latter is correct and full.

So, for the following analysis, as the closest to Benvenuto Cellini source—both from the intellectual side, and that of his social *milieu*—I will enlist Marsilio Ficino's set of philosophical concepts, in particular, presented in the work *On Love*. I argue that Cellini did “read” its 1544 vulgarized version—either borrowing it from Varchi's or another library, hearing about its ideas in humanist's lectures, or discussing similar ideas with the friends-academicians, or, finally, absorbing them “performatively” —through a variety of Florentine social practices.

The question, why Varchi kept a copies of Ficino's *On Love*, both in the vernacular, has a few reasonable explanations: he included the material in his lectures, and, probably, lent a hand in its 1544 edition. In addition, it could have been loaned to future readers.<sup>80</sup> The latter might have included such academically oriented artists as Agnolo Bronzino, Jacopo Pontormo, or Benvenuto Cellini. Furthermore, they were already familiar with some passages from Varchi's lectures given in the *Fiorentina* on the Petrarchan poetry previous year, and will hear more about it, for example, in his lecturing course completely devoted to love.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> From Benedetto Varchi's *inventario* it is clear that 1) the remark of Antonio Sorella in the previously cited edition of *Ercolano*, according to whom Varchi kept three copies of the book, is wrong: there were only two books, but the *inventario* is doubled by the different scribes (cf. cc. 314v and 328v); 2) these editions differ in titles, namely, “Il commento di Marsilio Ficino sopra il convito di Platone” and “Marsilio Ficino sopra l'Amore, o convito di Platone.” If the latter clearly refers to the 1544 Florentine edition, the former is probably another 1544 edition, presenting Ercole Barbarasa's translation of the text from the Latin version. On the difference between these two texts see further: Maude Vangaelen, ““Cose di Platone fatte Toscane”: Language and Ideology in Two Vernacular Translations of Plato Printed by Francesco Priscianese,” *The Modern Language Review* 107, no. 4 (2012): 1082–1100.

<sup>81</sup> Varchi, *Opere di Benedetto Varchi*, 167–228.

## 2.2 Marsilio Ficino's *On Love*

As Bernard McGinn characterizes sixteenth-century Italy, “rarely in the history of European culture has so much yearning gushed forth so recklessly onto the printed page.”<sup>82</sup> Marsilio Ficino's work established the tradition of Renaissance sensitivity, particularly in respect to love; it was echoed in the subsequent amorous literature of Niccolò Machiavelli, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Leone Ebreo, Pietro Bembo, Francesco da Diacceto, Baldassare Castiglione, and many others, including the philosophical poetry of Lorenzo de' Medici and Girolamo Benivieni.<sup>83</sup> As indicated previously, Benedetto Varchi himself taught many lectures in the circles of the Florentine Academy, either on love itself or on the Petrarchan poetry, where he referred to Marsilio Ficino and where he used his theory for explanations.

Because the most recent version of the *On Love* was in the vernacular, the artists did not need to bother with “quite difficult Latin,” and moreover, compared to other Ficinian writings, it was not so “fairly technical” as, along with the Neoplatonic philosophy, the discourse of the fashionable philosophical topic of love determines the content. Furthermore, as its *Fiorentina*'s editor Cosimo Bartoli (1503–1572) says introducing the volume, the *On Love* can be used instead of Plato's original *Symposium*: “Ficino has provided the best interpretation of the dialogue, which is in strict conformity with Christian dogmas.”<sup>84</sup> This statement was not only very pragmatic but

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<sup>82</sup> Bernard McGinn, “Cosmic and Sexual Love in Renaissance Thought,” in *The Devil, Heresy and Witchcraft in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of Jefferey B. Russell*, eds. A. Ferreiro and J. B. Russell, (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 191.

<sup>83</sup> More complete list of the key-works on love from Ficino to the last years of the Florentine Academy is in Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Under the Mantle of Love: The Mystical Eroticisms of Marsilio Ficino and Giordano Bruno,” in *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, eds. W. J. Hanegraaff and J. J. Kripal, (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 175. Varchi's *inventario* contained such works as Machiavelli's *Mandragola*, Tassi's *Amori di Bernardo Tassi*, Tulia D'Aragona's *Dell' infinita d'Amore*, Boccaccio's *Amorosa visione*, etc.

<sup>84</sup> McGinn, *Cosmic and Sexual Love*, 195.

also, indulging to some extent: in Varchi's *inventario* there is only one original work of Plato, the *Timaeus*, more specifically, fragments thereof.<sup>85</sup>

As for the content and structure of Ficino's commentary, *On Love*, initially written in Latin c. 1469 and printed in 1484, it follows Plato's *Symposium*, consisting from seven "orations," or, simply, speeches. They, roughly, can be divided in two conceptual groups, nearly equal in the amount of text.<sup>86</sup> The first five orations are concentrated on the general, "cosmological" questions, whereas the next two bear quite practical sense, telling the story of love as a passion and of means to moderate it in the contemporary historical-cultural context.

In the treatise, Ficino summarizes the Neoplatonic vision of the universe, which, considering the first part, is written down in length in Platonic theology (eighteen volumes, 1469–1474) and, considering the second part, will be developed later in the medical-magical treatise *Three books on Life* (1489).<sup>87</sup> Thus, Ficino's meditation on love and magic is the most original and non-canonic in respect to Plato's philosophy over the whole body of his works.<sup>88</sup> Although being innovative and up-to date, it raised some suspicions of the church and other intellectuals because it had revitalized the pagan thought and images. Lorenzo de' Medici, his patron, even had to

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<sup>85</sup> *Inventario*, c. 294 v. In addition, studying his autographs, we can find some other Platonic works related to the esoteric tradition: Dionysius the Areopagite, Iamblichus, etc. See further: Anna Siekiera, "Benedetto Varchi," in *Autografi dei letterati italiani: Il Cinquecento*, ed. E. Russo, (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2009), 337–357.

<sup>86</sup> Later Ficino's translation to the vernacular Italian in 1474 differs from the Latin version only in minor corrections, which mainly play an explanatory role. I would point out that the second part had underwent more changes which could indicate the developing historical-cultural context and its growing role in it.

<sup>87</sup> Thus, if Cosimo Bartoli claims the *On Love* to be a summary of Plato's *Symposium*, it can be equally defined as a summary of Ficino's philosophical system.

<sup>88</sup> The several works which analyze thoroughly this idea may be listed here: the most notorious is, certainly, Ioan P. Culianu, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, (Chicago, MA: University of Chicago Press, 1987); among others are McGinn, *Cosmic and Sexual Love*; famous Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, (Muenster: University of Muenster, 1979), 254–276 (henceforth: *Saturn and Melancholy*); already mentioned Hanegraaff, *Under the Mantle of Love*, 175–207, etc.

publish a volume defending the philosopher.<sup>89</sup> In particular, the *On Love* claims that angels are the same as pagan gods or planets and are “good demons” (6.3); Venus appears as a patron-god of the Godly Love. (6.5–6) Also, in the “second part,” some vivid and ambiguous examples from the ancient history and mythology are given (e.g., a case of homoerotic relations of Phaedrus and Lysias). Ficino, using them, develops the topics of love between young and older, man and woman, and even provides the recipes of moderating the love fervor according to one’s temperament.

## 2.3 “Melancholy genius” concept

One of the cross cutting topics in Ficino’s *On Love* and in his other writings is the “melancholy genius” concept that could qualify as a “theory” due to its elaborate explanatory system that included the elements of medicine, natural magic, astrology, and the Neoplatonic doctrine. For the readers, it demonstrated how and why the most sensitive persons (e.g., thinkers, artists) being very fragile in physical state could conceive the world better than any others.

The connection between melancholy and intellectual activity has a very long history in Western thought; the first substantial scholarly contribution to the topic was the monograph *Saturn and Melancholy*, written by Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl.<sup>90</sup> Since then, it has become evident that the early modern understanding of this phenomenon had been formed by Marsilio Ficino and then spread to the literary- and artworks not only in Italy (e.g., Michelangelo and Vasari), but also in Northern Renaissance countries, such as England (e.g., Shakespeare and

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<sup>89</sup> Sears R. Jane, introduction to Marsilio Ficino. *Marsilio Ficino’s Commentary on Plato’s Symposium*, ed., transl. R. J. Sears, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 1944), 19. In further quotations from the *On Love* I use this translation providing some crucial concepts in Italian in square brackets and giving the number of oration and its chapter in simple brackets. Some alterations in the translation can be made on the basis of the original text; emphasis is mine.

<sup>90</sup> *Saturn and Melancholy*.

Burton), and Germany (e.g., Dürer). However, as Piers Britton points out, “the Italians’ reflections on the subject are particularly interesting because they are more pragmatic in orientation.”<sup>91</sup>

In this vein, Benvenuto Cellini’s example shows that these reflections were understood as the very practical formulae to moderate life for the intellectuals, in Ficino’s own words, for *viri studiosi, ingeniosi* and *literati*. In general, melancholics were believed to be greatly susceptible to both bad or good celestial influences, and more inclined in their affects towards madness, which in Ficino’s interpretation, is a genius itself.<sup>92</sup> So, as Carol Kaske and John Clark conclude, according to the philosopher, in creative work “it sometimes helps to be a little crazy.”<sup>93</sup>

**Medical explanation and evaluation.** Defining melancholy, Ficino inherits its understanding formed by Plato, Aristotle, Galen, Arab thinkers, and their translators in the eleventh-thirteenth centuries. According to this longstanding tradition, melancholy is one of the four essential humors (ead. biles, liquids) controlling human physiology and psychology. There is a corresponding type of a person’s complexion—which is melancholic.<sup>94</sup> As far as melancholy humour is characterized by cold and dry nature, related persons also represent such qualities in their character and behavior. In the humoral framework, even animals share the same destiny

<sup>91</sup> Britton, *Mio malinchonico*, 654.

<sup>92</sup> This interpretation is given in his work *Three Books on Life* (in Latin, *De vita libri tres*, or just *De vita*) especially in the first book. See: Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, ed., tr. C. V. Kaske and J. R. Clark, (Arizona, PHO: Arizona State University, 1998). As James Hankins aphoristically summarizes its content, “the *De vita* presents itself as a collection of cures for *viri studiosi, ingeniosi* and *literati* whose activity as thinkers makes them suffer from melancholia.” (James Hankins, “Monstrous Melancholy: Ficino and the Physiological Causes of Atheism,” in *Laus Platonici Philosophi: Marsilio Ficino and His Influence*, eds. S. Clucas, P. Forshaw, and V. Rees, (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2011), 41)

<sup>93</sup> Kaske and Clark, *Introduction*, 23.

<sup>94</sup> See further: “The Doctrine of the Four Humours” in *Saturn and Melancholy*, 3–15.



since they are living bodies: “[t]here arose choleric animals like the lion, phlegmatic ones like the pig, and melancholic ones like the ox,” and the cat.<sup>95</sup>

One of the most crucial distinctions is drawn between the natural and the acquired melancholy: evidently, natural melancholics are those people in whom black bile dominates among the other humours, yet the other complexions can also become melancholic: for example, eating some foods, or falling into the “vulgar love” (i.e., impure and physical). During the latter, “the clear and pure blood is used up, there remain only the impure, thick, dry, and black parts. Hence the body dries out and grows rough, and hence lovers become melancholy.” (*On Love* 6.9) Thus, the most eager and insane lovers are choleric and melancholics, as the nature of their prevailing humours coincides with the nature of love itself.

Such an intense form of a melancholic fervor, connected to love, has a quite long scholarship in the history of medicine. It originated from Constantine the African’s translation of some Arab treatises where the “*amor ereos*,” which is “[u]sually translated as ‘lovesickness’,” was understood as a species of melancholy.<sup>96</sup> We cannot say for sure whether *ereos* historically came from the root connected to *eros*, or *hero*: they both were mixed in the medical tradition.<sup>97</sup>

Melancholy, however, is not only limited to the intense feeling of love; while immoderate (becoming too hot or too cold), it also was believed to produce various funny effects either in one’s body or in mind and, thus, in soul.<sup>98</sup> “The most complete etiology of the illness is found in

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<sup>95</sup> This idea was developed by Albertus Magnus and William of Conches. See further: *ibid.*, 106, 119. In the *On Love*, Ficino adds that “in animals, a salutary complexion of humors provides an appearance pleasing both in shape and color.” (5.1)

<sup>96</sup> Marion Wells, *The Secret Wound: Love-Melancholy and Early Modern Romance*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 22; *Saturn and Melancholy*, 86.

<sup>97</sup> Culianu, *Eros and Magic*, 19.

<sup>98</sup> Moreover, it can affect separately either imagination, or rational thinking, or memory. See further: *Saturn and Melancholy*, 91ff.

...the *Lilium medicinale*” of the Montpellier University’s professor Bernard of Gordon, written in 1305. There we can read how melancholy becomes an intellectual insanity which is characterized by “thinking what should not be thought, considering good or honest what is not, setting oneself unreasonable or impossible goals, about which they have a wrong judgement. Another sign is seeing demons, black monks, dead people or other fantasies in dreams.”<sup>99</sup> Gordon’s description of the black bile effects is also significant as a cornerstone for the following “attribution of melancholy to the defenders of ideas that were seen as intellectual errors”: so, the phenomena of witchcraft, heresies, and, later, even Lutheranism and atheism became viewed as the consequences of the intemperate influence of this malicious humour.<sup>100</sup>

In respect to Ficino’s theory of the melancholy genius this historiographical information is significant in many ways. First and foremost, his interpretation differs from others as it presents melancholy as a beneficial phenomenon, peculiar to the intellectuals, in which bodily effects can influence the soul. Second, in his philosophy it becomes a means of connecting human’s soul to the Divine (via four escalating madnesses, or *furori*). Thence, third, Ficino lists various tools by which one can temperate and use melancholy in this way (e.g., music, rituals, religious devotion); such magic can be considered, partly, as demonic because it teaches how to call down and control the celestial powers, including planetary gods.<sup>101</sup> Finally, fourth, the avoidance to manage melancholy leads a human being to the insanity and turns one in a bestial state.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Sebastià Giralt, “The Melancholy of the Necromancer in Arnau de Vilanova’s Epistle against Demonic Magic,” in *Demons and Illness from Antiquity to the Early-Modern Period*, eds. S. Bhayro and C. Rider, (Boston/Leiden, Brill: 2017), 286. As it is pointed out in *Saturn and Melancholy*, the question of how melancholy relates to insanity is one of the most unclear especially in love lyrics, thus different authors answered variously on it. (*Saturn and Melancholy*, 218)

<sup>100</sup> Giralt, *The Melancholy of the Necromancer*, 286. See further: *Saturn and Melancholy*, 31ff.

<sup>101</sup> Cf.: “In Ficino and his successors [...] the whole art of healing was considered as nothing but a particular method of employing the general cosmic forces; and like the other sciences, it merged in the last resort with magic, which in turn was a kind of ‘applied cosmology’.” (*Saturn and Melancholy*, 97)

In the following, I will show how Benvenuto Cellini in the *Vita* depicts different effects which correspond to the Ficino's view of melancholy. The rest of the chapter is mostly concentrated on Cellini's management of its bodily manifestations, whereas the next chapter will be devoted to the spiritual practices representing the exaltation of the soul.

**Astrological context.** As it was said above, in the theory of the melancholy genius, the medical component was collated with the astrological views of the epoch: the humors were believed to be governed by the corresponding planets. Ficino's *On Love* draws a somewhat sketchy and mythological picture of that connection, yet in the following treatise *De Vita*, "Saturn's height above all planets [is] praised in these and other terms."<sup>102</sup> Ficino's peculiar treatment of the celestial influences grows out of his own horoscope: whereas "in traditional astrology, Mars and Saturn are the lesser and the greater "infortunes," i.e., bad planets," he argues that Saturn "bestows steadfastness and perseverance, Mars effective motions."<sup>103</sup> Moreover, their malicious influence is "still healthful in the same way as poisons can be."<sup>104</sup>

Even these seemingly distant and abstract influences are connected very materially to the human soul and body via spiritual "net."

According to Ficino, the space between the earth and heaven is filled in with daemons, one of them is Love; moreover, as it is a World Soul, this space consists of the twelve other souls (eight planets, i.e. gods, and four elements). (*On Love* 6.2–3) The souls of planets (in other words, gods) are daemons; Ficino mentions that Platonists associate with them certain good or bad emotions (*affecti*) of the soul. Daemons are divided in bad and good ones; the latter represent not

<sup>102</sup> Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, 22. Furthermore, the third book of the *De vita* consists of various recipes to manage the celestial influences via amulets, talismans, and dietetics. Some of them will be demonstrated on the Cellinian example in the next chapter of my master's thesis.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

only gods and the souls of spheres and stars, but also Angels. Meanwhile, “on earth there are two kinds of being, brute and rational.” (*On Love* 6.3) This Christian astrology is developing further: the God’s ideas “distribute their gifts to man through the medium of the gods and demons” and the Venerian daemons are responsible for the instinct of love. (*On Love* 6.4) Yet if the good Venerian daemon “raises us to the heights,” the other, which is the abused desire of procreation, can make human like beast. (*On Love* 6.8) Both Venerian daemons produce certain arrows which are transmitted from lover to beloved. (*On Love* 6.5) The mean by which the beautiful images (consisting of Platonic ideas, concepts, seeds, and shapes) are carried to our inner complexity is the rays of God’s “splendor” that reflects from the surfaces of the things and comes into our eyes. (*On Love* 2.3–4; 5.2; 6.2; 6.12)

Their material is *spiritus* which is a key for the Ficinian “physiology”: produced by the heat of blood, it is a very thin and warm air which measures the “vitality” of a particular body. If the latter becomes overheated because of the arousal and lack of sleep (which usually happens while loving, as it has been explained) the very intensive evaporation can make blood more cold, dry, and thick, i.e. containing more black bile (melancholy). (*On Love* 6.9)<sup>105</sup>

Gwendolyn Trottein demonstrates that Cellini does pay attention to the influence of the planets and gods representing them. “He casts himself as Mars battling Venus; then, during his enlightening incarceration in the pope’s prison, he becomes the decaying Saturn, before he literally sees the light and is transformed into the golden poet Apollo to assume, finally, after his

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<sup>105</sup> The chapter is one of the most extensive in the whole treatise which confirms the highest significance devoted by Ficino to the medical/physiological mechanics of love.

release from prison, the guise of Mercury.”<sup>106</sup> Trottein also adds that during his life Cellini tried to moderate the poisonous influences of these celestial bodies.

This rather contrived interpretation seems partially true in light of the fact that Cellini evidently admitted an enormous Saturnine influence on the events of his life along with promoting his own melancholic nature. In the sonnet, composed during the incarceration, he reads: “Already all the Saints, with Saturn and Jupiter / supported me: but now I am requesting your help, the Moon, / as you are on the sky that is the closest to us...”<sup>107</sup> Here, “all the Saints” stand alongside with the planets, which may refer to the Ficinian idea that angels, demons, and planets, who inhabit the World-Soul, are of the same nature.

It is not strange then that Benvenuto Cellini eagerly promotes himself as “being by nature melancholy” and simultaneously connects melancholy to the intellectual activity and madness (as in case of the men of letters Lorenzino de’ Medici who was “mad, melancholy philosopher”). (*Vita* 1.27; 1.88) For his potential readers, it simultaneously explains the two matters characterizing Cellini’s artistic personality: first, it provides a firm foundation for his supposedly great talent; second, it excuses some misfortunes taking place in his life because of melancholy, such as bloodshed or accusations of sodomy and child molestation. All of that took place because a melancholy intellectual is a very unstable creature, for instance, according to Ficino, “once trapped, they are never released” from love. (*On Love* 7.9) However, such precarious nature

<sup>106</sup> Gwendolyn Trottein, “Cellini as Iconographer,” in *Benvenuto Cellini: Sculptor, Goldsmith, Writer*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 136.

<sup>107</sup> “Già tutti i Santi, ancor Saturno e Giove / m’àn favorito: priegho te, Luna, adesso, / che se’ in questo cielo a nno’ più presso” Cellini, *Rime*, 47. This act of evocation of the Moon, considering that Cellini was imprisoned unjustly, may also represent his will for justice. Cf.: “Wherefore the Sun, Moon, and Earth; or Courage, Justice, and Temperance are rightly designated by the terms Male, BiSexual, and Female. In order to provide worthier titles for God, in Him we call these virtues Sun, Moon, and Earth...” (*On Love* 4.5) Such hypothesis becomes more substantial, considering that Cellini was asking “that if His Divine Majesty did not see fit to make [him] worthy of the sight of the sun at least in a dream, that by all His power and might He should at least make [him] worthy of knowing the cause of [his] punishment.” (*Vita* 1.122) Correspondingly, “the sight of the sun” may mean here God’s encouragement.

lends a person higher sensitivity and exceptional intellectual capacities: “[f]rom melancholic blood is always born fixed and profound thought.” (*On Love* 7.7) In his lecture on Dante, Benedetto Varchi also stresses this remarkable feature: “Nobody has reached more excellence in arts or sciences than a person by nature melancholy.”<sup>108</sup>

Scholars agree that Benvenuto Cellini forges here the image of Michelangelo Buonarroti, another outstanding Saturnine and melancholy genius, whom he undoubtedly tried to compete with and even triumph over in several aggrandized passages of his life writing.<sup>109</sup> Thus, it is also agreed on that the Cellinian melancholic nature is a direct appropriation of Michelangelo’s self-presentation, rather than his own invention.<sup>110</sup> However, I must question such downplay of Cellini’s creative activity. Accepting that he, more than simply “being melancholy by nature” *a la* Michelangelo, represented the coherent and complex image of a Neoplatonic artist, raises the question how this image corresponded to its paragon, the description of an exemplary “crazy genius,” in Ficino’s *On Love*:

Put the figure of Socrates before your eyes. You will see him “thin, dry, and squalid.” He was a man undoubtedly **melancholy by nature**, and rough, thin from fasting, badly groomed from carelessness... (7.2)

This description can be compared with the wider context of the aforementioned passage, where Cellini called on Saturn during his incarceration in Castel Sant’Angelo.<sup>111</sup> In 1.107–128 of the

<sup>108</sup> Benedetto Varchi, *Opere, ora per la prima volta raccolte*, ed. A. Racheli, Vol. 1, (Triest/Milan: Lloyd Austriaco, 1858–1859), 400. Here, Varchi refers to Pseudo-Aristotle’s *Problemata*, yet Ficino too builds his theory on it, as the Problem 30.1 can be called “a monograph on black bile.” (*Saturn and Melancholy*, 29) The most distinctive feature of Ficino’s concept is his positive contextualization of the melancholic condition. See further: Britton, *Mio malinchonico*, 657. Thus, Varchi, sharing the same interpretation, stays in the Ficinian and not Aristotelian vein.

<sup>109</sup> See for example: *Vita*, 1.28, 1.41–42; in 2.80, Cellini even ascribes to Michelangelo such words: “My dear Benvenuto, I have known you for many years as the greatest goldsmith we have ever heard of, and now I shall recognize you to be a sculptor of equal talent.”

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Trottein, *Cellini as Iconographer*; Jane Tylus, “Cellini, Michelangelo and the Myth of Inimitability,” in *Benvenuto Cellini: Sculptor, Goldsmith, Writer*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 7–25.

<sup>111</sup> A fortress in Rome, formerly a mausoleum of Emperor Hadrian. In the Renaissance period it was used as a prison.

*Vita*, the artist depicts himself as a prisoner gradually transformed into a monk who reads books extensively and writes poetry even in the absence of light; his nails growing uncontrolled, giving him a “great distress” and wounding him; “nor could [he] dress, because they turned inwards or outwards, causing ... great pain,” the “teeth also died in [his] mouth.” (*Vita* 1.119)<sup>112</sup> Cellini “lived on that mattress, which was soaking wet” and “made up [his] mind to endure that unbelievable discomfort for as long as [his] strength could stand it.” (*Vita* 1.118) Finally, he concludes that he believes to have been sentenced unjustly and that he preferred to die than to admit any crime.

Thus, Cellini has become one of “those men of enormous simplicity who, with such fervour, believed that God granted them all that they dreamed of,” and miraculously restored his health through prayers. (*Vita* 1.119) “I had dreamed so many times that angels came to heal me that after four months I had become as strong as if my leg had never been broken,” he comments. (*Vita* 1.120)

This image of an innocent prisoner not only reminds us of the story of Socrates’s incarceration well-known in the Renaissance both from Xenophon and from the *Apology* of Plato.<sup>113</sup> In the *On Love*, which is originally devoted to Socrates as the main protagonist of Plato’s *Symposium*, Ficino also comes up with a list of Socrates’s particular features: he was “always poor,” “homeless” and “without bed or covering,” thus able to sleep in any place, he himself made a house from stone. Socrates was also “bold and courageous,” “a trickster,” “a lover of wisdom all

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<sup>112</sup> Britton notes that such model of the “monkish melancholic” is also found in the works of Vasari, as well as in Vasari’s descriptions of Pontormo whom I employed earlier to clarify Cellini’s learnedness. Vasari visited Camaldoli monastery to cure his disease. (Britton, *Mio malinchorico*, 656ff.). Moreover, it is known that Cellini, as well as formerly Vasari, was going to spend some time in the hermitage at Camaldoli that, as Britton suggests, specialized in caring for melancholic artists.

<sup>113</sup> See, for example, James Hankins, “Socrates in the Italian Renaissance,” in *A companion to Socrates*, eds. S. Ahbel-Rappe and R. Kamtekar, (Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, 2009), 337–352.

his life,” thus he chose to die rather than to quit philosophizing. Finally, according to Ficino, Socrates was “a sorcerer, enchanter, magician, and sophist.” (*On Love* 7.2)<sup>114</sup> The latter is especially interesting, as Cellini describes miraculously curing himself twice, once during his incarceration and once during a plague epidemic. As Ficino writes in his “Advice against the Plague,” “one should live happily, as happiness strengthens the vital spirit [*spirito vitale*]; one should live moderately and sober, as moderateness and sobriety of life is the thing with only which the philosopher Socrates could save himself through the various extreme plagues which were in the city of Athens.”<sup>115</sup>

Benedetto Varchi characterizes Socrates in the same manner in his writings: he is “the best man in the world,” “the most saint and wisest man,” “who, while deformed and wretched bodily, was beautiful by his soul,” however, he suffered in incarceration because of envious people.<sup>116</sup>

The parallels between an exemplary melancholy genius, Socrates, and Benvenuto Cellini may seem far-fetched. The next subject, Platonic love, also closely related to being “gifted by Saturn,” will, however, underpin further important aspects of their commonalities. As Ficino says, “Socrates, whom Aristotle judged melancholy was as he himself avowed, more inclined to the art of love than other men.” (*On Love* 6.9)

<sup>114</sup> This is not the full list, although other points are comparable with the Cellinian personality as well.

<sup>115</sup> The treatise “Advice against the Plague,” written in vernacular, circulated in many copies until as late as the eighteenth century. (Marsilio Ficino, “Consilio contro la pestilentia,” in Teodoro Katinis, *Medicina e filosofia in Marsilio Ficino: Il Consilio contro la pestilentia*, (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2007), 206) As the later Italian author, Giulio Cesare Chiodini, summarizes the subject of melancholy, it is “the fountain of almost all other diseases.” Quoted in Angus Gowland, “The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy,” *Past & Present* 191, no. 1 (2006), 78. Cellini also uses often the notion of a vital spirit. During his incarceration, he composed a poem in which his intellectual spirits are persuading his body (i.e., vital spirits) to not give up. (*Vita* 1.119) Such “suicidal” inclinations can also be considered as a characteristic attribute of melancholy. (*Saturn and Melancholy*, 76)

<sup>116</sup> Cellini several times mentions that he had been imprisoned unjustly: he did not steal papal gold.



## 2.4 (Neo)Platonic love

I argue that the Cellinian representation of love was an accumulation of its Renaissance understanding, predominantly formed by Ficino, Benivieni, Pico della Mirandola, Bembo, Castiglione, and Varchi. Certainly, as an artist who allegedly did not read Latin and had limited access to written or printed sources, he was still acquainted with the ideas which were crystallized in the circles of the Florentine Academy.<sup>117</sup> As demonstrated above, he was familiar with Ficino presumably through Varchi's quotations and listened to the latter's lectures on love. Below, I will examine a couple of passages from Cellini's *Vita* where the author portrays himself in the context of amorous affairs. But first some historical background information is in order.

What changes did the concept of Platonic love undergo in the period between Ficino and Cellini? The central topic of Plato's dialogue *Symposium* (*Convivium* in Latin), which was translated and commented by Ficino, is the nature of *Eros*. The text is about Athenian aristocrats gathered in the house of a poet Agathon to discuss with food and drinks the theme of love, expressing their opinion in taking turns orations. Talking about the ambiguous nature of *Eros*, the patron-god of love, they hint that Socrates and Alcibiades are present *in situ* as the embodiment of higher and sacred passion, even though Alcibiades formerly thought that Socrates desired him only sexually. Whence, that topos was transferred to Ficino's *On Love*: he presents sacred love as homoerotic, developing in accordance with his philosophical views on the concept of beauty. As demonstrated previously, the physiological and psychological mechanics of the latter, in comparison to Plato's original, were updated according to the recent developments in natural philosophy in general, and of medicine and esoteric knowledge in particular. Moreover, Ficino

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<sup>117</sup> Cellini, certainly, knew Latin to some extent as he had to use it in the art. Moreover, he was in constant communication with humanists who both read and spoke Latin regularly.

reinvented the figure of Socrates in a Renaissance manner, so he appears in the last two orations (6–7) as a prominent intellectual, melancholy genius, and true lover, who via moderation of his affects, inspires his beloved and ascends to the Divine. *On Love* contains a number of sentences describing this effect, for example:

It was unanimously agreed that Socrates had loved most truly of all lovers. Since throughout his life he had served openly in the camps of Cupid with no deceit whatever, he had never been censured by anyone as having loved anyone less than honorably. [...] Come now, and recall to mind the picture of love. You will see pictured in it Socrates. [...] How great was his courage in military affairs Alcibiades explains most copiously in the Symposium. Socrates is said to have conceded to Alcibiades the victory at Potidea which he himself won. (7.2)

Pico della Mirandola, a student of Marsilio Ficino, indirectly disagrees with the predominantly homosexual nature of true love presented by his teacher. In the *De divino amore*, published only in 1516, he claims in a more ascetic way that only Christian love (*agape*) can count as the truly divine: “[it] is more excellent than anything pagans or their humanist followers understood.”<sup>118</sup> Concurrently, Bembo (in *Gli Asolani*, 1505) and, following him under the pressure of censure, Castiglione (in *Il libro del cortegiano*, 1528) generalized, abridged and to some extent simplified Ficinian ideas. According to them, “Love is nothing else than a certain longing to enjoy the beauty.”<sup>119</sup> In addition, they make the most crucial reconsideration that affected the tradition: through their discourse, woman, was transformed from the inferior thing, corresponding to bestial love, into a very object of beauty.

The socio-cultural changes affecting the concept of Platonic love during the first half of the sixteenth century, resulted in its literary displacement from theological and philosophical

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<sup>118</sup> Letitia Panizza, “Platonic Love on the Rocks,” in *Laus Platonici Philosophi*, 203.

<sup>119</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 205.

contexts to the secular spaces of *palazzi* and courts.<sup>120</sup> That very tendency Benvenuto Cellini, undoubtedly a *courtier*, captured in his life writing.

Returning to the passages of the Cellinian *Vita* again, it is important to note that the artist, although spending his time in court, always worked at home, in his workshop. Thus, he depicted the *topos* of Platonic love in the appropriate scenery:

This boy was about fourteen years of age [...] Paulino was the most well educated, the most honest, and the most handsome young fellow I had ever seen in my life, and because of his honest actions and habits, his enormous beauty, and the great love he bore for me, it happened that for these reasons I bore as much affection for him as it would be possible for the breast of a man to contain. This tender love was the reason why I wished to see his marvellous face, which was by his nature virtuous and **melancholic**, brighten up; especially, whenever I took up my cornett, there immediately arose a smile so honest and so beautiful that **I am not at all surprised by those foolish remarks that the Greeks write about the gods in the heavens.** (*Vita* 1.23)

In this passage Cellini evidently presents the classic depiction of Platonic lovers: there are two men, younger and elder one, who respectively bore affection for each other. They do not desire any kind of sexual pleasure but just want to be together, when a young melancholy boy listens to the cornett and Cellini just looks at his marvelous face pleased by music. Moreover, to elucidate this loving connection, it must be remembered that Cellini fashioned himself as melancholy too.

“In the blood, therefore, we rightly place the fever of love; that is to say, in the melancholic blood, as you have heard in the speech of Socrates.” (*On Love* 7.7) This sentence from Ficino explains why Cellini’s bosom was quite literally overfilled with affection, in other words, with feverish melancholy blood. Such love of two melancholics could become very dangerous:

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<sup>120</sup> On the one hand, in literature, the theme of love and its sceneries moved to palaces and courts; on the other hand, such literature became accessible to the wider audience inhabiting these spaces.

Perhaps someone may ask by whom especially and by what means lovers are entrapped, and how they are freed. [...] Melancholic people, in whom black bile dominates, are seldom caught, it is true, but once trapped, they are never released. (*On Love* 7.11)

As noted previously, the intemperate affectation, in other words, the boiling humour of melancholy, can produce the instability of the whole organism: either of its soul, or of the body. Thus, as Ficino advises in his *On Love*, music becomes a help and release:

[T]he whole soul is filled with discord and dissonance; therefore the first need is for the **poetic madness**, which through musical tones arouses what is sleeping, through harmonic sweetness calms what is in turmoil, and finally, through the blending of different things, quells dissonant discord and tempers the various parts of the soul. (7.14)

Thus, Cellini very much follows the recipe of a Neoplatonic philosopher to temper his soul in discord; he sublimates passions of both himself and the boy by the means of music. In this way, the earthly love, which in Ficino can lead to bestial madness, is transformed into its antipode, which is divine madness that further ascends to the divine love.<sup>121</sup> Certainly, in the Ficinian paradigm, all types of love support a man on his way to the divine.<sup>122</sup> Diotima's instruction, given to Socrates, accords with this idea:

I ask you, Socrates, to esteem other things with a definite limit and restriction; but you must worship God truly with infinite love, and let there be no limit to divine love. (*On Love* 6.18)

However, Benvenuto Cellini truncates this spiritual exercise, as can be inferred from his irony about the "foolish remarks" of Greeks. Obviously, it is the reference to Plato's *Symposium*, most likely in Ficino's interpretation, as it is full of coinciding elements previously pointed out. Thus,

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<sup>121</sup> See further Ficino's *On Love*, especially the chapters "On Bestial Love, Which is a Kind of Insanity," "Earthly Love is a Certain Bewitchment," and "How Useful is Divine Love and The Four Kinds of Divine Madness" (7.3; 7.4; and 7.13).

<sup>122</sup> In his *On Love*, Ficino says that man's ascension to the Divine is very material, as it is possible due to the exercises with the tangible matters of the body. He summarizes it as the following: "So that Socrates might avoid this death, Diotima led him from Body to Soul, from that to the Angelic Mind, and from that back to God." (6.17)

Cellini's idyllic depiction of the classic Platonic love drifted to a more modernized version, which includes a sister of the boy: a beautiful young girl "called Faustina who was even more beautiful, in [his] opinion, than the Faustina about whom the ancient books are always rattling on." (*Vita* 1.23) Cellini makes a bitter remark that her presence made him "play... music more than [he] had previously." Such frank and explicit picture demonstrates how in the artist's imagination the two traditions of Platonic love collated with each other: it combines both the homoerotic Ficinian model with the iteration of a new, courteous one, delivered with a sarcastic and "dirty" reference. Though in another passage where Cellini tells us about the other apprentice, he follows the Ficinian model further saying that not just music, but even his speech could heal a boy of some malady, presumably, melancholy.<sup>123</sup>

If a handful of passages from Cellini's *Vita* are sufficient to illustrate the blossoming of the Renaissance theme of love, the works of Benedetto Varchi appear to be rather modest. First of all, he, who for sure read Ficino's *On love*, introduced the further truncation of the homosexual component of Platonic love. According to him, "Plato's love for young boys was merely metaphorical."<sup>124</sup> Yet Varchi, leaving out this dubious Neoplatonic component, substitutes it with the manifold references to Petrarch and Laura as to the idyllic case of Platonic love.

Ascribing Platonism to Petrarch, he applies Ficino's psychological and physiological framework in the analysis of Petrarch's poetry. One of the most prominent elements here is the Ficinian hierarchy of senses with respect to the contemplation of a beloved woman. As a human being is

<sup>123</sup> *Vita*, "Proemio." Cf. "For Alcibiades said that the words of Socrates were sweeter and moved him more than the melody of the music of Marsyas and the wonderful Musicians of Olympus." (*On Love* 7.2)

<sup>124</sup> Panizza, *Platonic Love on the Rocks*, 217. The relevant passage is also cited here: "The spirits of Socrates and Plato were full of all goodness, overflowing with all learning [. . .] they wanted only to give birth to and generate beings similar to themselves [. . .]. And this is the true and real virtuous love which is more noble than the other bodily love, just as the body is less perfect than the soul."

endowed with the reason which “pursues the heavenly,” its senses are gradually organized towards it: more noble are located closer to the heavens.

Hence it also happens that touch, taste, and smell sense only what is very near them, and they are very much affected in the process of sensation, although the sense of smell does seem to detect things more remote than touch and taste.

Hearing, however, recognizes still more remote things and so it is not so limited. Sight perceives even farther than hearing and catches in a moment what the ear catches only with time, for lightning is seen long before the thunder is heard.

Reason catches the most remote things of all... (*On Love* 5.2)

For Benedetto Varchi, correspondingly, the first two out of the five exterior senses, i.e., sight and hearing, are the most noble ones, as they are placed on the top of our body. Thus, they are almost incorporeal and can perceive better the genuine beauty and reality. As Varchi explains further, because of that “Petrarch, a true Platonic poet and lover, desired more than anything first to see and then to hear his most beautiful and chaste Laura,” and on the contrary, “he was greatly displeased and tormented being deprived [...] of seeing her.”<sup>125</sup>

This correlation of sight and love was particularly meaningful in the new cultural space of the court where lovers often had to restrict their passions to the “games” of eye-contact. Cellini also emphasizes the sight and hearing among other senses in situations connected to the contemplation of beauty, however, as demonstrated in this chapter, his concept of love includes more truly Platonic (or even pagan) elements.

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<sup>125</sup> Benedetto Varchi, “La lezione di Benedetto Varchi sul sonetto di Petrarca ‘Orso, e’ non furon mai...’,” ed. A. Andreoni, *Nuova Rivista di Letteratura Italiana* 1–2 (2008), 147.

## Chapter 3.

### “*Tu ten sei gito a contemplar su ’n Cielo l’alto Fattore*”: Benvenuto Cellini Ascending on High

#### 3.1 Esoteric knowledge and censorship

I have already mentioned that Benedetto Varchi had in his home library two exemplars of Ficino’s *On Love*; but, in addition, he either held or commented on margins a number of works embodying esoteric tradition (magic, astrology, alchemy): for example, *Poimandres*, the Areopagite’s *De mystica theologia*, *De divinis nominibus*, Iamblichus’s *De mysteris Aegyptiorum*, *Chaldeorum*, *Assyriorum*, Psellus’s *Introductio in sex philosophiae modos* and *De Daemonibus*, Macrobius’s *Saturnalia*; Nostradamus’ *Orus Apollo*, various treatises of Ramon Llull, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, Girolamo Fracastoro, et al.<sup>126</sup> These works, which sometimes contained instructions on magic and demons, were enough to allow him to practice necromancy, or, at least, to impress the Church in a bad way. Why Varchi never revealed the genuine depth of his knowledge, still remains an unanswered question.

However, introducing the topic of esoteric knowledge in Benvenuto Cellini’s *Vita*, I will delineate some possible explanations of this silence connected to the general cultural politics of the Medicean court. As Michel Plaisance notes on the *Literature and Censorship in Florence at the End of the Sixteenth Century*, Florentines always tried to maintain and promote their culture and “sought to organize the publication of the great texts of Tuscan literature”: it is commonly known that the second Grand Duke, Cosimo I de’ Medici, wanted to be like his great

<sup>126</sup> *Inventario*; Siekiera, *Benedetto Varchi*, 343–348. The Ficinian translations of Iamblichus, Dionysius the Areopagite, Psellus, et al., which had been published by Aldus Manutius in the end of 1490s and appeared in Varchi’s library, are called “anthologia esoterica” in historiography. See also György E. Szőnyi, *John Dee’s Occultism: Magical Exaltation through Powerful Signs*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2004), 67.

predecessor, Lorenzo de' Medici, thanks to whom the Ficinian works emerged.<sup>127</sup> Pope Paul IV introduced the Index of Prohibited Books in 1559 though, and, from that time on, it became even more crucial to consult the bishop and inquisitor upon preparing manuscripts for print.

Such general intellectual anxiety led to the preventive self-editing which could be observed among other in the cases of Cellini's *Trattati* and even of the *Vita*. The primary difference between the *Trattati* and the life writing, however, was in the type of "arts" which they displayed: if the former were devoted to the conventional subjects of sculpture and goldsmithing, thus were to be corrected only in the critique of the government, the latter touched the subjects of necromancy, talismanic magic, miraculous visions, Platonic love, and even alchemy. Thence, the *Vita*, while being read by the bishop, might have attracted disagreeable attention, especially not wanted in the situation when its author just had been released from house arrest and was not favored by the Duke.

Benedetto Varchi observed this atmosphere very closely: he participated in the written discussion on the nature of the Tuscan dialect with Lodovico Castelvetro (1505–1571), the head of the Academy of Modena (*Accademia Modenese*), who was summoned by the inquisition in 1555: "not only was he condemned because of his contacts with those interested in Reform, but also because of his potentially dangerous ideas."<sup>128</sup> Varchi's friend, Annibale Caro, added fuel to the fire in pursuit of Castelvetro, saying that his literary approach coincided with the Lutheran ideas of *sola scriptura*, in addition, he claimed him to be "a sophist as well as a heretic."<sup>129</sup> Another Florentine academician, Antonfrancesco Grazzini, mocks Castelvetro in the letter to Varchi as a

<sup>127</sup> Michel Plaisance, *Florence in the Time of the Medici: Public Celebrations, Politics, and Literature in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 161.

<sup>128</sup> Stefano Jossa, "Exchanging Poetry with Theology: Ludovico Castelvetro between Humanism and Heresy," in *Beyond Catholicism: Heresy, Mysticism, and Apocalypse in Italian Culture*, eds. F. De Donno and S. Gilson, (New York, NY: Springer, 2013), 89.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 90ff.



“cabalist, sophist, and necromancer, who speaks in eight or ten languages.”<sup>130</sup> These accusations may have had a cumulative effect, but, obviously, it was not a good idea to show off as a master of the occult arts, to which some far-out Neoplatonic ideas could be attributed as well—especially for the well-known humanist and for Cellini, who felt out of grace.

Thus, it seems reasonable that Varchi in the course of time was increasingly reducing the Ficinian component in his lectures and writings, although the references to the philosopher still can be found in *Ercolano*, his ultimate work. Furthermore, the books from Ficino’s “anthologia esoterica,” read by Varchi, sometimes are postilled without the usual *ex libris*, mark of ownership, and have not been included in his *inventario*.<sup>131</sup> All of that could have corresponded to the self-censure processes strengthening during Cosimo I’s regime in connection to the intensified control of the Church. This piece of intellectual history in respect to “normalization” of the intellectuals was in parallel with the “medicalization” of the melancholic states which lead to inappropriate intellectual activity.

### 3.2 “*Furor divino*” and “*diabolico furore*”

In this vein, I will examine in more depth the concepts of “*diabolico furore*” and “*furor divino*” (“devilish madness” and “divine madness”) which are both present in Ficino and Cellini. Ficino was the first thinker “to give the Platonic notion of the four noble [divine] furors—itself restored to the West almost singlehandedly by Ficino—a medical basis in the melancholic humor or black bile.”<sup>132</sup> In the case of Cellini, these madnesses have the same melancholic origin. In further agreement with Ficino, they always lead to the delirious states where some effort is needed to

<sup>130</sup> Il Castelvetro, gentiluomo nato, / cabalista, sofista e negromante, / in otto o dieci lingue letterato. (Ibid., 92)

<sup>131</sup> E.g., Iamblichus’ *De mysteris Aegiptorum*. (Siekiera, *Benedetto Varchi*, 346)

<sup>132</sup> Kaske and Clark, *Introduction*, 23. However, this argument is slightly misleading because the authors refer to Ficino’s *De Vita* as to the work which re-introduced the concept of furors. However, already the *On Love*, written thirty years earlier, contained it.

calm down the soul and to direct it towards *virtù*, for instance, by the means of music, as it was demonstrated in respect to Cellini's love to a young boy and girl.

Although divine madness, induced by true love, or the daemon of Heavenly Venus, always has positive implications, the opposite type, devilish madness, leads to furious anger and uncontrollable behavior.

Michael Cole, concentrating his study on demonic madness in the early modern art, claims that "the figure of the painter provides a function for the demonic magician."<sup>133</sup> He impressively demonstrates how the different techniques of deceiving the beholder could correspond to the representations of the spirits, for instance in Cellini's art.<sup>134</sup> Even more, I agree that Cellini not once describes some manipulations with his works which are very likely refer to the rituals of the animation of statues: "there appears a figure that is simultaneously a demonstration of artistic virtuosity, a response to antique forms, and a representation of possession."<sup>135</sup>

However, Cole misses the point, arguing that in respect to the cases from the *Vita*, Cellini evaluates positively devilish madness or *diabolico furore*, understanding it as a premise for the work of genius, or divine madness. This mistake in interpretation perhaps derives from a misunderstanding of what these madnesses have in common and how the divine one emerges and operates on the bodily level, which includes human affectivity. As Marsilio Ficino is the most comprehensive source in studying "noble madnesses" in the Renaissance period, on the basis of his theory I will, first, draw the borderline between the devilish and divine madness, and, then show that many "arts," which Cellini used to practice, had in their origin exactly the latter, noble

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<sup>133</sup> Michael W. Cole, "The Demonic Arts and the Origin of the Medium," *The Art Bulletin* 84, no. 4 (2002), 621.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 632

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

kind. Opposed to that, devilish fury, connected to the uncontrollable anger, created for Cellini many problems, which he virtuously overcame.

Defining madness in general, Ficino says that it is “a distraction of the mind” that can be divided in two categories: one “comes from human weakness and the other from divine inspiration”; the former is “insanity” (*stoltitia*), while the latter is “divine madness” (*furore divino*). (*On Love* 7.3) The first type prevents people from their mind, ergo leaves them in an animal state; it may start either from brain or heart, because of an excess of melancholy. Being in brain, it induces a violent anger, “scream in a high tone of voice,” “extravagant laughter,” boasting behavior, “marvelous promises,” they “rush upon those they meet, and strike themselves and others”; whereas being in heart it produces nervousness and anxiety. (*Ibid.*) On the other hand, divine madness always starts from the pure impulse of love, usually arising in the heart; although, without a proper intellectual care, a human “can rush into madness and raging passion,” thus one “descends to the nature of a beast.” (*On Love* 7.12) In the Italian original, Ficino also characterizes these “most unhappy lovers” as “insane” (*stolti*). (*On Love* 7.11)

These two types of melancholic madness, as can be seen, are correspondingly “constructive” and “destructive.” In addition, the inferior one transforms a human being into an angry beast, as it is prevented of the desired thing and its mind is debilitated. Hence, from this acquired irrationality, it can be inferred that such person is possessed by the demon, which in Ficino is the Earthly Venus, and cannot control his/her own mind and body, being led by this demon. Though, if humans always are longing for the “truest Love,” how can hate arise? Ficino answers on that as a true Platonist: “man does not hate man, but only the vices of man.” (*On Love* 3.4)

Therefore, when Cellini encounters his arch-rival Baccio Bandinelli, and envisions killing him, the reader is well prepared to see an unvirtuous man: “with his usual presumption adorned by

ignorance,” “beastly Blockhead” carving “some ugly and monstrous works,” “causing [Cellini] difficulties over a good long period,” and a liar who made the artist pay for *Perseus* by himself. (*Vita* 1.45, 2.55, 2.58) In despair, Cellini cries and screams out of frenzy (*furore di pianto e strida*), and then decides to follow and kill Bandinelli:

Travelling toward Florence, when I arrived at the square of San Domenico, Bandinelli himself entered from the other side of the piazza. I decided at once to commit that bloody act and went up to him, but when I raised my eyes I saw him unarmed and mounted on a little mule that looked like a donkey, and he had with him a young boy of about the age of ten; as soon as he spotted me **he turned the colour of death and trembled from head to toe**. Realizing what a vile act it would be, I said: “Don’t be afraid, you filthy coward, for I don’t consider you worthy of my blows.” He looked at me **weakly** and said nothing. **Then I regained my fortitude** [la virtù] and thanked God, who through His **true virtue** [vera virtute] had not wanted me to commit such an **intemperate** act. So, set free from this **devilish fury** [diabolico furore], my **spirit** [animo] mounted and I said to myself: “If God grants me sufficient **grace** to finish my *Perseus*, I hope with this work to overcome all my rascally enemies: I shall, in this way, take much greater and more glorious revenge than if I had taken it out on one man alone.” (*Vita* 2.66)

This passage clearly demonstrates to the reader how devilish madness arises and then can be released. In essence, this description of the events is full of very much bodily details—both on the side of Cellini and Bandinelli. First, Cellini loses control over his melancholy, showing warning symptoms, listed by Ficino: he cries, screams “in high tone of voice,” and then rushes upon whom he meets. (Cf. *On Love* 7.3)

The artist is deprived of control over his body, yet Bandinelli loses it too. This is not strange, as, according to Ficino, the “*animo*,” that is usually an equivalent for the spirit and soul, can conduct its intemperate state (e.g., feverish love, infection, anger) from one person to another, which happens through the Cellini’s “evil” eyes. Whence, diabolic madness truly affects not only

Cellini himself, but also Bandinelli, being the recipient.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, the latter became white and trembling after looking closely at Cellini, because Cellini's feverish melancholy, passing on, "changed [him] into its own nature." (*On Love* 7.5) Nevertheless, the artist regained his normal state via the God's virtue which awoken the virtue of Cellini himself.

The concept of virtue is the key for deciphering the meaning put by the author in his words. First of all, the virtue is a "superstructure" which differentiates human being from animals. Only re-entering the sphere of ethics with the help of God Cellini could withdraw from his animal intentions and discovered another way of revenge—by the means of his art. Furthermore, in the original, the phrase "*vera virtute*" is used: St Augustine, for example, says, that having the true fortitude (*vera virtute*), "one should be neither too fearful nor too reckless."<sup>137</sup>

The following case, where Cellini uses the phrase *diabolico furore*, happens while casting the statue of *Perseus*. The artist was so involved in work and so dissatisfied with the unlucky events accompanying it that became "deadly ill." He began seeing visions of the death and could not control his affects:

As I was suffering these boundless tribulations, I saw a certain man entering my room; his body seemed to be as twisted as a capital S; and he began to speak in a particular tone of sorrow or affliction, like the men who give comfort to those who are condemned to death... [...] [T]o the servants, my shop-boy, and everyone who drew near to help me I gave either kicks or punches... (*Vita* 2.76)

Then, the next day, his servant brought him a lot of food, jokingly saying:

"Oh! Is this the man who felt like he was dying? I think those kicks and punches you gave us yesterday evening when you were in such **a fury** [infuriato], with that Devilish madness [diabolico furore] you showed [to bear], perhaps struck so

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<sup>136</sup> "That the light sent out from the eyes draws with itself a spiritual vapor, and the vapor draws with it the blood, we perceive from the fact that bleary and blood-shot eyes, by the emission of their own light, force the eyes of someone looking closely at them to suffer a similar illness." (*On Love* 7.4)

<sup>137</sup> Frank Diekstra, "The Wanderer 65b–72: The Passions of the Mind and the Cardinal Virtues," *Neophilologus* 55, no. 1 (1971), 81.

much terror into that **immoderate fever** [tanto smisurata febbre] that it took flight for fear of such a beating..." (Ibid.)

A man, entering the state of diabolic madness, therefore, looks like being possessed by demons or even by the Devil himself: he is prevented from the true way of reasoning and behaves like a furious beast. Accordingly, in these passages, *diabolico furore* induces in Cellini's body such fever that he nearly literally becomes wild. Moreover, his state is evidently characterized as an intemperate condition of the body, or immoderate fever, which can be relieved with sleep and good food: such recipes of dealing with melancholic insanity we may find again in Ficino.<sup>138</sup>

Given that, I argue that Cellini never ascribed any creative power to diabolic madness, conversely, he admitted its destructive powers and tried to calm them down upon the first appearance of the symptoms. Therefore, Michael Cole's conclusion that "to complete the task [*Perseus*' statue], he had entered into a 'diabolico furore'" and, furthermore, transferred this state to it, seem to be not accurate.<sup>139</sup> Cellini only "transferred" his devilish fury to the people from the workshop, whom he vigorously kicked and punched. Though, I agree that the magical art is involved here and that, in concern to the artist, "the work, to be expressive, must be possessed."<sup>140</sup>

On that account, I will give the proper explanation to and examination of such melancholic madness, which truly leads to the creative activity and in Ficino's *On Love* is called *furor divino*, or divine madness. The philosopher, as it can be expected, ascribes it to Socrates, who was "a sorcerer, enchanter, magician, and sophist." (*On Love* 7.2) His enchantment has two sides: that of "nature" and of "art." (*On Love* 6.10) Art has to help to the nature when the complete

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<sup>138</sup> In the *On Love* Ficino develops this subject scarcely—in contrast to the *De Vita*. (*On Love* 3.3, 6.9) "Natural" moderation of melancholy by the proper food is supposed by "the regulation of the six 'vital things' (air, food, drink, sleeping and walking, evacuation and retention, rest and movement)" characteristic to the Platonic tradition of curing melancholy. (*Saturn and Melancholy*, 85)

<sup>139</sup> Cole, *Demonic arts*, 631.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 635.

correspondence between the things cannot be established ordinarily: art “through vapors, numbers, and figures, supplies the appropriate qualities at appropriate times.” (Ibid.) This definition in the system of premodern knowledge relates not only to Ficino’s example of agriculture, but also to the art of music, painting and sculpture, as well as to medicine, engineering and even alchemy and magic.<sup>141</sup> In addition, Ficino says that such “art the ancients attributed to the daemons” and, therefore, some “philosophers are said to have been friends of the daemons,” for example, Socrates. (Ibid.) These demons appeared to them “in signs, voices, and portents when they were awake and in revelations and visions when they were asleep.” (Ibid.)

Socrates, according to Ficino, was a magus who communicated with demons and could appropriately canalize their energies, especially in the “art” of love. The latter, in a mystical way, is taught to him by Diotima in the last part of the *On Love* together with the divine *scientia*. Here the “nature” is, first, “body,” being “an undetermined multitude of parts and circumstances subject to motion and divided into substance, points, and moments,” and, then, human soul, often distracted by the senses and deluded by melancholy. (*On Love* 7.13) Accordingly, the “art,” capable of managing this disorder, is the spiritual practice based on the true love, being directed by the virtues: only it can transform devilish madness into the divine one. The later, in its turn, “raises the soul to the heights.” (Ibid.)

### 3.3 Different kinds of *furor divino* in the *Vita*

According to Ficino, “there are four kinds of divine madness. The first is the poetic madness, the second is that of the mysteries, the third is that of prophecy, and the fourth is that of love.” (*On*

<sup>141</sup> Roughly, if *scientia* was believed to be a pure knowledge, the *arts* by their meaning were closer to the modern concept of “technology.” See further: Pamela O. Long, *Openness, secrecy, authorship: technical arts and the culture of knowledge from antiquity to the Renaissance*, (Baltimore/London JHU Press, 2001), 2.

*Love* 7.14) The first kind has been demonstrated earlier, in the case where Cellini played the cornett to calm the turmoil in the souls of him and his beloved apprentice. Yet, for Ficino, there is an advanced kind of such “sound-therapy,” which I would put as a transitory to the mystery madness: “Alcibiades said that the words of Socrates were sweeter and moved him more than the melody of the music.” (*On Love* 7.2) This kind of divine madness is also can be found in Cellini: during his incarceration in Castel Sant’Angelo, he describes in details the similar type of discourse capable of not only harmonizing spiritual disorder, but even curing the insanity of his warden.

Every year this Castellan suffered from an illness that made him go out of his mind, and when it began to come on he talked a great deal, in a chattering manner; these humours of his were different every year, for on one occasion he thought he was a jar of oil... [...] This time he began to imagine he was a bat, and while he was out walking he sometimes squeaked as quietly as bats do.

This description again alludes to the melancholy delirium where a person receives some marvelous visions. However, such situation is even worse than described previously: Castellan not just lost his capacity of rational thinking, but dreamed awake, nearly literally transformed into a beast. The doctors were worthless and the relief came only while talking with Cellini:

[T]he poor man sometimes kept me for four or five entire hours without ever allowing me to stop speaking with him. [...] [B]ut in the midst of these discussions I managed to eat very well. The poor man neither ate nor slept, with the result that he wore me out, so that I could not go on any longer; and sometimes when I looked at him in the face I saw that the lights of his eyes [le luce degli occhi] were terrified, for one went in one direction and one in another. (*Vita* 1.107)

In this passage, the mechanism of spiritual contagion is demonstrated in detail. As Ficino says, “the eyes, with the help of a certain light of their own,” can stream “the image [...] flowing through the eyes into the soul of the other” together with evaporated spirits of blood. (*On Love* 5.4, 6.6) Thus, Cellini avoids the malicious gaze of Castellan, noting its defectiveness. In his



turn, the artist sends the true image (*fantasia*) of nature which could correct the disorder existing in the soul of his opponent, displacing corrupted humours:

He began to ask me if I had ever had a wish to fly [*fantasia di volare*]: to his question, I replied that [...] since the God of Nature had given me a body which was very suitable and fit for running and jumping... [...] I would be capable of flying [...], making myself a pair of wings from waxed Rheims linen. (*Vita* 1.107)

Such discourse, being both curative and magical, was described by the famous scholar Daniel Walker as an “imaginative magic” operating via “the spirit, which is the vehicle of the imagination,” or *vis imaginativa*.<sup>142</sup> Based on the “credulity both in the operator and the patient,” which Cellini established firmly, such magic can control not only the flow of spirits, but even the higher influences of planets and stars.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, here the artist demonstrates to the reader his acquaintance with the true “art,” because he describes how to strengthen his “nature” with such technological advancement as “a pair of wings.”<sup>144</sup>

Proceeding upstairs along the Ficinian “ladder” of divine furors, it is also possible to demonstrate that Cellini participated in the collective forms of magic, i.e. mysteries. The first case is obvious and well-known for historians, as it is one of the rare descriptions of the necromancy séance. Michael Cole uses it to testify Cellini’s deep connection with the demonic arts. In this passage, the artist with the support of “a certain Sicilian priest” comes to Colosseum to invoke demons,

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<sup>142</sup> Daniel P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic: From Ficino to Campanella*, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 78.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 107f.

<sup>144</sup> “This man began to ask me what means I would consider using: to this I answered that, judging from the animals that fly, and wishing to imitate with art what they possessed from Nature [*volendogl’imitare con l’arte quello che loro avevano dalla natura*], there was no animal that one could imitate except the bat.” (*Vita* 1.107)

using “precious perfumes,” pentacle kept by a young boy, and incantations—to call back a woman, who fled away from Cellini. (*Vita* 1.64–65)<sup>145</sup>

The other case is more subtle to identify as it documents genuinely sophisticated ritual that is the animation of the statue. It can be found in the *brigata* described above, in concern to Cellini’s alleged academic activities in Rome. Here, the artist as the true Socrates, who, according to Ficino, appears both as a “magician” and a “trickster,” takes a beautiful boy, disguised as a woman, to the feast. In the course of his narration accompanied by the musical and poetic improvisation of the participants, the beauty of his “crow” increased “to such an extent that it would be impossible to describe.” (*Vita* 1.30) Thus, the “creature” metaphorically becomes “a peacock,” then “an angel,” and later the goddess, Pomona. Finally, everybody discovers the real boy hiding in the garments, who is “much more beautiful than... Antinous,” the antique semi-god. (*Ibid.*)

Such metamorphoses correspond to the ritual, described by Hermes Trismegistus, Iamblichus, and their translator Ficino. It was believed, that calling demons or gods by their proper names, singing prayers to them and manipulating with their material representations (“creatures”), makes possible to bring down corresponding spirits from heavens and create “demon-souled statues that lived and spoke and worked wonders.”<sup>146</sup>

<sup>145</sup> I suppose that Cellini describes this episode with lots of irony, overtly mocking on the subject of “black magic.” For example, “Colosseum” and “pentacle” are called in the original as “*Culiseo*” and “*pentàculo*”, deriving from an Italian word “ass” (*culo*).

<sup>146</sup> See further: Brian Copenhaver, *Magic in Western Culture: From Antiquity to the Enlightenment*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 58–61 about the “living statues”. Also, I analyze the multilayered symbology of this passage more thoroughly in Rudnev, *Renaissance Medicine, Magic, and Alchemy*, 33–36.

As for the prophetic madness, there are many cases in which Cellini describes himself as predicting the future, or foreseeing it in dreams; once, he even tells about a halo arising above his head, which resulted from God's blessing:

[F]rom the time I experienced my vision there has remained over my head a brilliant splendour (a marvellous thing!); this is visible to every sort of man to whom I have been willing to show it, though they have been very few. This brilliant splendour may be seen above my shadow in the morning from sunrise until two hours after sunrise... (*Vita* 1.128)

Even the time, specified here, indicates that "the Sun through the Solar daemons gives... sensation and clarity of perception, whence comes prophecy" to all who agreed following him to the place. (*On Love* 6.4)

Finally, however, I would like to recall the situation where Cellini's vision transforms to the highest type of divine madness, which leads, according to the Neoplatonists, to the union with God, or "the sun, which is the heart of the universe," or the Love itself. (*On Love* 7.4) In this passage, which logically concluded the incarceration in Castel Sant'Angelo, proving Cellini's innocence and later resulting in halo, the artist draws very complex depiction of his vision of Christ and Madonna, appeared to him in the solar sphere:

I saw the entire force of those enormous rays cast itself to the left side of the sun when the sun was left clear, without its rays, I gazed upon it with the greatest delight; and it seemed a marvel that those rays had been removed in that way. I remained there, considering the divine grace that I had that morning from God, and I was crying out loudly: "O, how wonderful is Thy strength! O, how glorious is Thy power! [...]" (*Vita* 1.122)

Cellini was preparing to this contemplation far in advance. First, composing self-propaedeutic sonnets, he calmed down the bodily spirits which were calling him to the self-murder, as if he tried to temper melancholic attitudes towards suicide. (*Vita* 1.119) Then, he "was adoring a figure of God the Father surrounded by Angels" and Christ which he "had drawn on the walls

with a bit of charcoal,” and, as a result, he started seeing angels in his dreams. (*Vita* 1.120) The latter may be considered as a ritual, very close to the mystery animation of an “idol,” calling down Angels and leading to the prophetic visions. Therefore, the ultimate vision, that united previous steps of the ascension on high, reasonably provided him with the contemplation of Sun, “because just as the sun illuminates and warms the body, so God provides to our spirits the light of truth and the ardor of love.” (*On Love* 2.2)

All these quite detailed descriptions, given by Cellini, allude to the ideas and practices which were introduced in the Florentine intellectual culture by Marsilio Ficino’s works and translations. The design of Cellini’s narration, which corresponds consistently and coherently with the bodily mechanisms lying behind such “exercises” of the soul, testifies not only the artist’s acquaintance with the esoteric tradition, but also the deep understanding of its general principles.

It is difficult to conclude, whether he might have known the books of “anthologia esoterica,” being read, for example, by Benedetto Varchi, though it is clear that, first, the Neoplatonic and Hermetic ideas of Ficino’s *On Love* were a component of Cellini’s literary production, second, the latter was embedded both in the contemporary tradition of learning of the Florentine intellectuals and in their “emotional community,” and, third, the artist, proclaiming such knowledge overtly, already in the 1560s became vulnerable to the cultural-political and religious restraints. This might have caused Cellini’s choice to advertise himself as an *erudito* in the conventional arts of sculpture and goldsmithing, which he elaborates in the *Trattati*, rather than in the occult arts displayed in the *Vita*.

## Conclusion

This study shows that Benvenuto Cellini received substantial knowledge from Neoplatonic philosophy and, consequently, applied it both in the portrayal of the events of his *Vita* and of the spiritual practices fashioning the literary representation of himself.

I have argued that Cellini's interest to the concepts of "melancholy genius," "Socratic love," and to the different kinds of esoteric madresses, characteristic to Marsilio Ficino's works, originated from his intense involvement in the academic movement, particular to the Renaissance Italy in the sixteenth century. As I demonstrated, Cellini not only participated in the predominantly artistic Academy of the Arts of Drawing during the last seven years of his life. Already in 1545, with the support of his friend, the well-known humanist Benedetto Varchi, he entered the famous Florentine Academy, concerned with the broad literary scholarship. There, together with Agnolo Bronzino, the rival Baccio Bandinelli, and other artists, he attended the lectures on Petrarch, Dante and on the variety of humanist subjects. Deeply inspired by the attractive image of the "Academy," in the *Vita* Cellini described the Florentine Academy as a "*mirabile Scuola*" and even brought to life his perhaps fictional depiction of a Roman academy, where he participated in the 1520s.

Such intense intellectual activity irreversibly changed Cellini's writing and thinking: his poetry acquired the dimension of Petrarchism, he developed the "Savage Philosophy" which mirrored the academic lectures; he actively contributed to the debate on prominence of either sculpture or painting in arts with his commentary, published whereupon in Varchi's book in 1549. Thence, he synthesized the acquired knowledge in the fundamental later works, which are the *Vita* and *Trattati*. All these facts prove that Cellini had been conducting his literary activities as a true

*literato* who tried to speak with humanists at their own language, through that being immersed at the contemporary literary discourse.

Cellini's intellectual activity, developed on the level of local scholarship, became inscribed in the wider political-cultural processes affecting both humanists and other court *literati*. The latter encountered the various forms of opposition and normalization from the system supporting an old canon of knowledge. That fact is testified, first of all, by the high amount of self-censorship which was exercised upon the *Vita* and *Trattati*. Whereas the Medicean rulers would not want to hear Cellini's harsh critique written down in both writings and addressed to them because of the difficult social and economic situation, the Church would be surprised in a bad way due to the complex esoteric imagery which was carefully woven into the *Vita*'s narrative. The author's most voluminous work, as I suggest, avoid the publication exactly because of that reason.

Here, Cellini's accounts of events are permeated with the work of "melancholy genius" indulging by virtue of Socratic love the author's affectionate involvement with youngsters, or the desire to kill unvirtuous people standing between him and his self-realization because of *diabolico furore*. However, the artist demonstrates to the reader that he is informed upon his great powers and can properly canalize them. By the means of the Neoplatonic practices of the ascension on high, including poetic, demonic, and prophetic magic (or, in general, *furor divino*) he receives miraculous visions which, finally, unite him with the God.

As I demonstrated, Cellini's esoteric knowledge was based on the reading of Ficino's *On Love*. Thus, from the historiographical point of view, the case of the *Vita* shows us that the revitalization of Platonic ideas in the Florentine culture continued from the second half of the fifteenth century to the second half of the sixteenth century. This line of reception had been

amplified by the earlier works devoted to the topic of Platonic love (e.g., of Niccolò Machiavelli, Pietro Bembo, Baldassare Castiglione), which finally created the “emotional community” of the Florentine Academy. Thence, Cellini’s *Vita* provides us with the valuable information to study the development of the Renaissance Neoplatonism in the 1550s–1560s in the Florentine intellectual culture.

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