

## INTRODUCTION

After the Death of Raphael and his Scholars (for, as for Michelangelo, he made no School), Painting seemed to be decaying, and for some years there was hardly a Master of any Repute all over Italy. The two best at Rome were Joseph Arpino and Michel Angelo da Caravaggio, but both guilty of great Mistakes in their Art: the first followed purely his Fancy, or rather Humour, which was neither founded upon Nature nor Art, but had for Ground a certain Practical, Fantastical idea which he had framed to himself. The other was a pure Naturalist, copying Nature without distinction or discretion; he understood little of Composition or Decorum, but was an admirable Colourer. But, much about the same Time, the Caraches of Bologna came to Rome, and the two Brothers painted together the famous Gallery of the Pallazzo Farnese: Hannibal, the Youngest, was much the greatest Master, though his eldest Brother Augustin was likewise admirable; They renewed Raphael's Manner, and Hannibal particularly had an admirable Genius to make proper to himself any Manner he saw, as he did by Correggio, both as to his Colouring, Tenderness and Motions of the Figures: in a word, he was a most accomplished Painter both for Design, Invention, Composition, Colouring, and all parts of Painting, having a sovereign Genius which made him Master of a great school of the best Painters Italy has had.<sup>1</sup>

Thus did William Aglionby recount, in 1685, in *Painting illustrated in three dialogues*, the crisis and rebirth of Italian painting, events of nearly a hundred years earlier. If the English and a certain simplification can be ascribed entirely to Aglionby, the ideas and even the words were taken bodily from the *Vite de' pittori, scultori et architetti moderni* published thirteen years earlier by Giovan Pietro Bellori.

This work consisted of twelve biographies of artists of European level and fame but associated particularly with Rome, selected according to a precise historiographical perspective: nine painters (Annibale and Agostino Carracci, Federico Barocci, Caravaggio, Rubens, Van Dyck, Domenichino, Lanfranco, and Poussin), two sculptors (François Du Quesnoy and Alessandro Algardi), and one architect (Domenico Fontana). It had been immediately understood that Bellori had a “new way”<sup>2</sup> of writing about the figurative arts. In fact, for historical vision, interpretive acumen, cultural solidity, adherence to the figurative, and literary quality, nothing of the sort had been published since the time of the second edition of the *Lives* of Vasari (1568), in whose footsteps, precisely, Bellori intended to follow, albeit in a completely original manner.

Unlike Vasari, Bellori was not an artist; rather, he was known to antiquarians, philologists, numismatists, and men of letters throughout Europe as one of them, one of the most illustrious members of the Republic of Letters, a scholar who had already produced some notable publications on antique coins and gems, classical reliefs, and the poems of Tasso. During the months when the *Lives* came out, Bellori also

<sup>1</sup> I thank Marco Collareta and Maria Cristina Molinari for many exchanges of ideas, and the Principi Massimo for having opened their archive to me with exceptional generosity. To Paola Barocchi, Evelina Borea, and Francesco Caglioti I am profoundly grateful both for having discussed with me many of the ideas set forth in these pages and for having been so kind as to read them and react to them with crucial criticisms and suggestions. What began as a productive relationship of intellectual exchange with Alice and Hellmut Wohl has developed into a friendship that I consider an honor.

published one of the works for which he came to be best known: a study of the Column of Trajan. In subsequent years, the great majority of his books were mainly concerned with ancient monuments, objects, and texts.

Although Bellori was known throughout the nineteenth century almost exclusively as an important antiquarian, in the twentieth, strangely enough, he was celebrated, attacked, and debated for only one of his more than forty books: the *Lives*.<sup>3</sup> In fact, entire generations of artists, collectors, and art historians had accepted Bellori's judgment concerning the history of Italian painting, the same judgment that had fascinated and convinced William Aglionby and that still today – albeit with notable corrections – appears substantially valid. But, stranger yet, it was not for his lucidity and farsightedness as a historian that Bellori was considered “the most important historian of art not only in Rome but in all of Italy, even in Europe, in the seventeenth century” by Julius von Schlosser,<sup>4</sup> the founder of the history of art criticism as a scholarly discipline. In his eyes, Bellori was important not so much for his assessment of what had gone before him or for his function within seventeenth-century culture, as for his role as the “founder of the classicistic opinion of the eighteenth century which, just as the Renaissance had found the concept and epithet ‘Gothic’ offensive, now found the concept and epithet ‘baroque’ for the art of their own grandfathers equally so.”<sup>5</sup> Paradoxically, then, Bellori was of greater interest for what he had excluded from his *Lives* (Bernini, Cortona, the “baroque”) than he was for what he had covered and how he had covered it. He seemed important above all as a theorist of classicism, a “forerunner of Winckelmann.”<sup>6</sup>

In the same year as the publication of Schlosser's masterpiece, *Die Kunstliteratur* (1924), this interpretation, which was decidedly unbalanced philosophically and closely related to a view with a long history, was confirmed and expanded upon by Erwin Panofsky in *Idea: A Concept in Art History*.<sup>7</sup> In that extraordinarily brilliant and tendentious study, Bellori became the organizer and consecrator of the age-old theory of “ideal beauty”; Panofsky disregarded dozens and dozens of books by Bellori, and even the *Lives* themselves, to focus on the “Idea of the Painter, the Sculptor, and the Architect Chosen from the Beauties of Nature, Superior to Nature,” a brief lecture delivered at the Academy

of Saint Luke in Rome in May 1664 and then included as a preface to the biographies in 1672. As a result, that text came to be read as the “programmatic manifesto” of a “normative aesthetics.”<sup>8</sup> In essence, Bellori was considered to have brought to definitive maturation a complex aesthetic system to which he would then rigidly adhere in his qualitative and historical assessment of artists, thus arriving at his condemnation of Caravaggio and the exclusion of Pietro da Cortona or Borromini from his writings. Panofsky's Bellori sees contemporary art in terms of a dualism that unmistakably recalls the antithesis between classical and baroque, or between linear and pictorial, that was codified by Heinrich Wölfflin only two and a half centuries later.<sup>9</sup>

A crucial contribution to this interpretation came in 1947 from Denis Mahon's *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*. One of the principal objectives of this book, which remains indispensable today, was to introduce the figure and the writings of Giovan Battista Agucchi “as the precursor of Bellori, within the general scheme elaborated by Dr. Panofsky”;<sup>10</sup> however, it achieved its greatest influence by denouncing the eclectic interpretation of the Carracci reform of painting as a colossal historical falsehood, to be ascribed mainly to Bellori, his predecessor Agucchi, and his rival Malvasia. It was a matter of the natural development of a theme implicit in Panofsky's vision: the conviction that seventeenth-century classicism had been marked by a radical schism between theory and practice in art. For Mahon, the most important consequence of classicism had been the construction of a history of art that was literary in character and essentially insensitive to figurative values and that, in its failure to grasp the originality of the Carracci, had reduced them to a sum of local sixteenth-century pictorial traditions. Mahon called it “the Classic and Eclectic Misinterpretation of the Carracci.”<sup>11</sup>

The seventeenth-century sources, with Bellori in the forefront, were thus summarily put in the dock, or at least tacitly suspected of blindness and bookish pedantry. The coup de grâce came from Roberto Longhi. Already in 1934, in “Momenti della pittura bolognese,” he had attacked the “misguided rationalistic and mechanistic attempt to clarify the Carracci,” namely, “Malvasia's eclectic interpretation, and the classicistic one of Bellori”;<sup>12</sup> but it was in “Proposte per una critica d'arte” in 1950, that the great rediscoverer

of Caravaggesque painting launched his fatal attack on Bellori:

Bellori, Félibien, and their associates, the men who oppressed and despised all the great revolutionary founders of modern painting, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Velázquez and to an extent also Rubens, Bernini, Cortona, and Borromini, are these the men on whom the history of good criticism is to be founded? Because they have principles? Fine principles, the empty bags of the old Platonic idea allied now with Cartesian rationalism, the values of decorum, of invention which turns painting into a literary program, of composition in the abstract, and things of this sort. . . . The criticism of these men . . . is instead already the whole program of Neo-classicism full-blown. . . . In Rubens' gesture freeing the friars of the Scala of the serious nuisance of Caravaggio's *Death of the Virgin* there is more good criticism than in all of Bellori.<sup>13</sup>

Even though a large number (I suspect, indeed, the majority) of art historians may continue through inertia to regard Bellori through the eyes of Schlosser, Panofsky, Mahon, and Longhi – in other words, through the eyes of some of the most authoritative masters of our discipline – studies produced in the second half of the twentieth century have overturned this view.

The premises for this turnabout were laid by investigations that, beginning with Francis Haskell's *Patrons and Painters* (1963), reconstructed the material and intellectual context in which Bellori lived. The very category of classicism has not emerged unscathed by research in the field: Jennifer Montagu's exemplary monograph on one of Bellori's artists, Alessandro Algardi, opens by emphasizing "the obvious insufficiency of such broad classifications" and observing how "a close investigation of seventeenth-century art has shown the need for a category of baroque classicism. . . . It must be emphasized that these pigeonholes are the inventions of modern art historians anxious to define and impose some order on the styles of the past."<sup>14</sup>

As far as Bellori is concerned, the rewards of these studies were brilliantly reaped in the edition of the *Lives* published by Evelina Borea and Giovanni Previtali in

1976.<sup>15</sup> Previtali's introduction, still today the most important study devoted to Bellori, has the great merit of having at last historicized him, assigning him not only a place in the evolution of an aesthetic theory over the centuries but also a place in his own historical time. For the first time, the *Lives* were not evaluated on the basis of the *Idea*, which was demoted from "sole key to the interpretation of Bellori's entire critical discourse" to "a polemic linked to a specific phase in Roman artistic life."<sup>16</sup> The preferences and exclusions in the *Lives* were consequently connected with relations of power within artistic culture and society in Rome in the seventeenth century instead of the ancient doctrine of Ideal Beauty, and above all it was asserted that "Bellori was a true critic (beset with doubts, like every true critic, to a greater extent than is usually imagined) and at times a great one,"<sup>17</sup> which is to say, profoundly sensitive to the values of figurative language.

If the idea of Bellori as theorist of classicism began to waver, the question of the interpretation of the Carracci, and of the genesis of the eclectic interpretation, remained on the table, together with the poisonous corollary accusation that he betrayed artistic practice in the name of abstract and insensitive theory. This was dealt with and resolved in the 1980s. Elizabeth Cropper's studies of Pietro Testa showed that the distinction and opposition between theory and practice implicit in Panofsky's view would not stand up under close analysis of the historical situation in the seventeenth century.<sup>18</sup> In his studies, Charles Dempsey recognized the value and validity of the so-called eclectic explanation and restored to the Carracci the importance as "thinking" artists with which the early sources credited them, thus rehabilitating these sources, so to speak, and restoring their authority and credibility.<sup>19</sup> Then Giovanna Perini's edition of the writings of the Carracci made it possible to verify the truth of these new interpretations, absolving Malvasia and Bellori of ideological and material falsehoods.<sup>20</sup> From our point of view, the principal product of these gains has been Cropper's essay, "History and Style in Giovan Pietro Bellori's 'Lives,'" which is the most acute, articulate analysis of the *Lives*, understood at last in terms of its relations with Italian art-historical tradition on the one hand and contemporary works of art on the other. Previtali's sociohistorical recontextualization was now followed by a far-reaching cultural recontextualization in which Bellori's work was seen as

the natural and consistent consequence of the Carracci reform.<sup>21</sup>

One last, fundamental reconstruction, putting together Bellori the scholar of antiquity and Bellori the historian of modern art, is to be credited to the great Roman exhibition conceived and directed by Evelina Borea in 2000, one of the very few Italian exhibitions in recent years to spring from a real campaign of research.<sup>22</sup> The research in all areas that preceded the exhibition and is included in the catalogue demonstrated the originality and fertile variety of Bellori's historical and critical thought, the range of his critical tools (brought out in Paola Barocchi's essay),<sup>23</sup> and his real cult of artistic quality: at last, our perception of Bellori has begun to approach the perception that his contemporaries had of him.

If the exhibition made it possible for the great international public to come to know a "new" Bellori, some of the texts in the catalogue unwittingly showed how difficult it is to free oneself completely from mental schemes inherited from the first half of the twentieth century. The very title, dedicated precisely to the *Idea del bello*, the tendency to measure and appraise Bellori's critical freedom from theoretical schemes, which in reality were attributed to him by modern studies, and the presence of the classical-baroque antithesis operating below the surface revealed the fondness that art historians have for the old and facile interpretive formula.

Furthermore, it is important to note how the weighty criticisms of Mahon or Longhi are still at work, even in the most cautious specialists, and particularly when Bellori is considered as a dialectical foil in the critical reconstruction of contiguous personalities. The well-founded and punctilious reevaluation of Malvasia has led, for example, to statements such as Perini's that "Bellori's critical exercise" may be defined as "loquacious blindness" because it is characterized "by an unspeakable insensitivity to extra-literary pictorial values" and is in the end the appropriate product of "a superficial writer, incapable of comprehending the true values of art."<sup>24</sup> Elsewhere the accusations of antinaturalism and dogmatic classicism leveled at Agucchi are said to be the result of an interpretation of his text "through the lenses of Bellori," who is thus indicated as the instigator of the long misunderstanding of the Carracci that reached its peak in the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> In less prudent texts, then, one can still read that "Bellori con-

structs his work, crowning it with the *Idea*. . . . The manifesto of Italian classicism . . . acquires in its turn the value of a synthesis, a yardstick by which to measure the worth of artistic production,"<sup>26</sup> or hear of "Bellori's rigorously dogmatic disquisition within which the purified selectivity of neo-classicism, capable of establishing an ideal canon of beauty, was to end by definitively gaining supremacy"<sup>27</sup> or "a classicism that is normative and extremist."<sup>28</sup>

A rereading of the *Lives* would seem to be the best antidote to the temptation to fall into such abstract and antihistorical schemes, which have been laboriously transcended thanks to the studies of the past fifty years. William Aglionby was so convinced of the importance of the *Lives* as a work of history – of the history of art – as to undertake a complete English translation:<sup>29</sup> today, after three hundred years, the project has finally been realized, and another, vaster audience of readers will be able to approach the authentic Bellori.

## I. ITINERARY OF GIOVAN PIETRO BELLORI

Giovan Pietro Bellori was born in Rome on January 15, 1613. According to the registry of baptisms, his father was named Giacomo, and he was a small farmer from Lombardy, while his mother was Roman and her name was Artemisia Giannotti.<sup>30</sup> There is, however, reason to believe that this is not exactly the way it was.

We know from Bellori himself that his education was "from his tender years" entrusted to Francesco Angeloni, who was "like a most affectionate father" to him.<sup>31</sup> In fact, several documents confirm that at least from 1634 he lived in the house of this functionary of the Curia, who was a man of letters and an antiquarian, originally from Terni.<sup>32</sup> Beginning in 1650 many sources describe Bellori as Angeloni's "nephew," whereas the documents known thus far would seem to preclude such a connection.<sup>33</sup> But what then accounts for such a choice, how was such a rise in social class possible? The answer may be furnished by Angeloni's will, drawn up in 1652.<sup>34</sup> Here Bellori is named the universal heir, in preference to two brothers of Francesco's, on condition that he assume

together with his children, should God grant him any, and other descendents in perpetuity,

my surname Angeloni, and sign himself so on any document, private or public, and also on works composed by him and to be published, even while I live, and furthermore use my seal, with a red gryphon rampant, crowned, in a yellow field, as his device.<sup>35</sup>

From the will it is also clear that Giacomo Bellori and his wife, Artemisia, were still alive at that date and lived in a small house next to the large house in Via Orsina on the Pincio where their son lived with Angeloni. Francesco stipulates that they are to retain the right to live there even after his death, but he provides that in case of a dispute between them and Giovan Pietro, Giacomo is to receive nothing, while the mother is to be paid “thirty scudi in coin for every year while she lives, and this is in recognition of her merits and services performed for me, especially in my illnesses, leaving her also a devotional picture to remember me by, to be chosen from among those not included in the description of the museum.”<sup>36</sup>

Giacomo Bellori and his wife were evidently in the service of Angeloni, who was a bachelor. The tenor of the will and the circumstances examined thus far warrant the assumption that the master had a son by Artemisia, and that while he was unwilling and unable to acknowledge him (given his own role at the papal court, his possible aspirations as a prelate, and her marriage), he decided all the same to keep him close by: this impression is decisively reinforced by the fact that the name Giovan Pietro, not a common one, was the name of Angeloni’s father.<sup>37</sup> With the transfer of the surname as well as the material inheritance stipulated in the will, in the end Giovan Pietro would have been a repetition of his own natural grandfather, and he would have been recognized de facto. The court case brought and won by Francesco’s brothers, by stripping Giovan Pietro of the inheritance, doomed the project and preserved his legal surname.<sup>38</sup>

But what no one could take away from Bellori was the most genuine bequest he received from his probable father: his cultural inheritance. Having been secretary to Cardinal Ippolito Aldobrandini, Angeloni was a courtier at a court that had by now disappeared. At the height of the papacy of Urban VIII Barberini, he remained loyal to the Aldobrandini era,<sup>39</sup> not only in politics but also in art, faithfully preserving the memory, and thus fostering the cult, of the Carracci reform.

Angeloni had been the secretary and close friend of Giovan Battista Agucchi, he owned almost all Annibale Carracci’s drawings for the Farnese Gallery, and he was bound by “very great friendship”<sup>40</sup> to Domenichino. He belonged, in short, to the oldest circle of intellectuals close to the Carracci. In addition, Angeloni was an antiquarian, a scholar of antiquity who was completely integrated into the great milieu of European erudition. These two aspects of his cultural activity were reflected in the extraordinary collection that drew visitors, artists, and learned men to his house: the Museo Angelonio (as it was styled by the owner himself) comprised on the one hand a gallery of painting – works of the Carracci, their pupils, and above all Venetian masters of the Cinquecento, virtually tracing in reverse one of the main lines of the genealogy of the Carracci reform<sup>41</sup> – and on the other hand a collection of ancient objects in metal and an important series of Roman imperial coins.

In 1641 Angeloni published *La Historia Augusta da Giulio Cesare insino a Costantino Magno illustrata con la verità delle antiche medaglie*, a volume that in a way summed up the author’s twofold vocation as a collector. It was a study of antiquarian numismatics that made Angeloni’s collection public, but it also contained – singularly and against all expectations – a series of eulogies and notices pertaining to artists, from the great figures of the Cinquecento (Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian) to the three Carracci and their pupils, Domenichino, Reni, Lanfranco, and the young Poussin. If there were many intellectuals, in Rome and elsewhere, who pursued the simultaneous collecting of ancient objects and modern works (suffice it to recall Cassiano dal Pozzo), there was no one else who wished and was in a position to publish writings that included or combined these two lines of interest. It is precisely this double track of studies devoted to ancient and modern art contemporaneously and in conjunction that constitutes the true inheritance that Angeloni bequeathed to Bellori, who masterfully developed this twofold interest and made it his very reason for living.

But the Museo Angelonio was also for Bellori the place where he encountered ideas and people that were to remain with him always. Other than his contemporaries, such as the aristocratic connoisseur Camillo Massimo and the artists Giovan Angelo Canini and Charles Errard, he encountered Giovan Battista Agucchi there,<sup>42</sup> if not in person (he was nuncio in

Venice at the time), at least through the letters he sent to Angeloni. When Agucchi died in 1632, his secretary Giovanni Antonio Massani<sup>43</sup> returned to Rome bringing the prelate's papers with him: Bellori surely knew Massani already at that time, and later he was able to insert various texts from that archive into the *Lives*.<sup>44</sup>

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of this contact for Bellori's development. Agucchi, a Bolognese, had been a sort of participatory intellectual of the Carracci school of painting, whose values he was able to translate into history with unparalleled faithfulness and discernment. Aware that at the base of the Carracci reform lay a drastic critical reinterpretation of the Cinquecento pictorial tradition, Agucchi had begun to write a *Trattato della pittura*<sup>45</sup> in which for the first time Italian regional schools – Lombard, Venetian, Tuscan, and Roman – were identified on the basis of style. Even while basing himself on schemes of interpretation derived from the tradition of classical rhetoric and historiography (mainly Cicero and Pliny), Agucchi was able to outline accurately the stylistic and formal identities of each local tradition. At the same time, he made clear the reintegration on a national, Italian level that Annibale and his pupils achieved. This was in fact a history, albeit a cursory one, of *Italian* art, seen through the eyes of the Carracci. And in fact, during the papacy of Clement VIII Aldobrandini (the patron of Agucchi and Annibale), there was a move toward “an idea of modern Italy which intended, in politics, art history, geography, and local history, to unite the individual voices of the various regional areas under papal colors.”<sup>46</sup>

In addition to theory and historiography springing from the Carracci reform, Bellori had become familiar with practice through Angeloni. Sebastiano Resta, the great collector of drawings, who was his friend in middle age, testifies that Giovan Pietro “was a pupil of Domenico Zampieri in painting.”<sup>47</sup> In fact the earliest notice of his life documents him in the latter's studio as an apprentice painter and states that he formed a firm friendship there with a young colleague, Canini. Canini's apprenticeship (and both the sources and the chronology of his works confirm this) preceded the Bolognese artist's departure for Naples, which took place in November 1630. Evidently, then, at least from that year or even from the year before, in other words at the age of sixteen or seventeen, Bellori intended to become a painter. Faced with such an inclination,

Angeloni must have found it perfectly natural to direct him to his friend Zampieri, whom he perceived as a living “classic.” But what were the alternatives, and what significance did such a choice have?

In 1630, of the three “schools” into which Giulio Mancini had ten years earlier divided contemporary painting,<sup>48</sup> only that of the Carracci survived. What remained of Caravaggismo was by now unrecognizable, having been transfigured into an attenuated elegance, and the Mannerist tradition was virtually exhausted. On the other hand, some very brilliant thirty-year-olds who had metabolized the Carracci reform, developing it and transforming it in the direction of original and innovative results, had by now achieved their first success. Wishing to represent the extravagant variety and richness of alternate paths available to painting in the 1630s, another writer on art, Joachim von Sandrart, resorted to describing an exhibition of twelve paintings, more imaginary than real, taking place in Rome in 1631: next to the direct heirs of Annibale (Domenichino, Reni, and Lanfranco), the isolated, aged Arpino,<sup>49</sup> and the metamorphic Caravaggesque painters (Orazio Gentileschi, Valentin de Boulogne, and Massimo Stanzione) shone four new names: Guercino, Andrea Sacchi, Pietro da Cortona, and Poussin.<sup>50</sup>

This was the panorama that presented itself, around 1630, to the youthful Bellori who wished to become a painter. To choose Domenichino meant adhering to Annibale's school in its most institutionalized and approved form, following one of the most established and trustworthy voices, in order to avoid the original and fashionable interpretations put forth by younger artists, such as Sacchi or Cortona. It perhaps also meant preferring the humanistic model of the academy over the traditional one of the artist's workshop, which was being revived instead by someone like Cortona or by the already well-established Bernini. And finally, it signified a conscious and courageous adherence to a world of artistic and human values whose fortunes definitely appeared to be in decline: a loyalty in art comparable to Angeloni's loyalty, in politics, to the outdated Aldobrandini.

Actually, by about 1630, Domenichino's social and commercial success – after reaching its zenith during the papacy of the Bolognese Gregory XV Ludovisi (1621–1623), a true “Indian summer of Bolognese art,”<sup>51</sup> and having somehow survived during the first decade of the Tuscan Urban VIII Barberini – was showing serious

signs of crisis. Bellori arrived just in time to witness its definitive collapse. An episode that reinforced this sudden change, also symbolically, involved the nomination of the head of the Academy of Saint Luke for the year 1630. Domenichino had been elected in November 1629, but the following month Cassiano dal Pozzo<sup>52</sup> had let it be known that the cardinal protector of the Academy, the papal nephew Francesco Barberini, desired “that the Signor Cavalier Bernini be elected *principe* for the next year.”<sup>53</sup> Bellori himself was to refer to all this later on, when he wrote in the *Lives* that, after the death of Gregory XV, Zampieri was “overlooked in favor of younger painters who were promoting themselves.”<sup>54</sup> Domenichino was Bolognese and all too easily identifiable with the artistic policy of other papal families, from the Aldobrandini to the Ludovisi. Even if the artistic community was still disposed to show its esteem for him, it was clear that the Barberini required new artists, possibly Tuscan and their favorites, representing a different artistic language. This traumatic event was decisive for Domenichino’s departure for Naples. To the young Bellori, who presumably lived through it directly and with a pupil’s apprehensive participation, it must have been clear that the passage of a generation also meant the birth of a new style.

Domenichino’s pupils, left to themselves, saw Urban VIII’s Tuscans as artists with whom there would be a natural dialogue regarding issues of quality but also as competitors to be feared, and they did not manage to recognize the Carraccesque matrix of their brilliant stylistic development. This contradictory state of mind is perfectly summed up in the words in which another biographer, Giovan Battista Passeri – who himself had also been connected to Domenichino’s milieu in his youth – describes Canini’s hesitations:

Giovanni Angelo remained cut off from a master, and he stayed that way until he reached the age of complete discretion; but sometimes he allowed himself to be seen by Pietro da Cortona, more for show than because he actually wanted his precepts, for he demonstrated that he was very distant from that style of his, and inimical to it. And Pietro, who was aware of this, passed over it all with politeness.<sup>55</sup>

In the summer of 1634 – while Bernini was completing the Baldacchino in Saint Peter’s and Cortona

was working frantically on the great Barberini ceiling – Domenichino was fleeing from Naples, persecuted by the hatred of the local artists and the impositions of the viceroy, and returning to Rome “riding without respite”<sup>56</sup> for three days. Tormented by the idea of revealing his defeat before his younger and more brilliant colleagues and the new patrons, the Barberini, the artist did not want to enter the city, but stopped in Frascati, trusting to the “benefits of this air of Belvedere, accompanied by the kindness of the Aldobrandini family.”<sup>57</sup> Cardinal Ippolito was glad to receive him, and “on the Sunday he sent his secretary Angeloni to visit him in his name; as Domenico was on terms of very great friendship with Angeloni, he had written him a letter immediately upon his arrival, containing in a few lines the story of his misadventures.”<sup>58</sup> It has often been presumed that Angeloni was accompanied by Bellori; moreover, we know that a few weeks later Canini and the young Giovan Battista Passeri went to Frascati to assist the master in the decoration of the chapel of the Villa Belvedere. Passeri, in his biography of Domenichino, describes in detail the life of the little community that had found its master again and tells of the caricatures the master made in his idle moments, which were to end up in Bellori’s hands.<sup>59</sup> It is thus entirely probable that Bellori participated in the last reunions of the select circle of artists, intellectuals, and patrons who felt nostalgically estranged from the artistic, cultural, and political world of the Barberini and who tended to idealize in contrast the value of a private and secluded life, filled with friendships and philosophically free from the clamor of the papal court. In addition to this existential opposition, there was another, having to do with art. From a subsequent letter, written to Angeloni and later published by Bellori, we know that Domenichino criticized Pietro da Cortona’s great fresco in Palazzo Barberini, at least on the level of decorum.<sup>60</sup> It is not hard to imagine that already in 1634, in Frascati, much was said, and in highly critical tones, about the new generation of artists that was triumphing in the city. It is in this climate and this period that some of the most debated characteristics of Bellori’s *Lives* have their roots, such as suspicion and resentment of court life and opposition to the new generation of the Pietro da Cortonas and the Berninis. It was a divergence caused by generational or personal rivalries, and also by a sharp clash between different ideas about art and different styles, but most certainly

not by the formal or ideal antithesis between classicism and baroque that began to take shape with Missirini's neoclassical inventions concerning the Sacchi-Cortona debate and culminated in the mental adventures of the Idea in the early twentieth century.<sup>61</sup>

It is necessary to emphasize here the importance this conjunction had for Bellori at the age of little more than twenty, regarding his choice of career and the directions it would take. Domenichino's definitive departure for Naples in 1635 must have contributed to his decision to abandon a career in painting, in the awareness that "his studies of erudite subjects and the fine arts were diverting him from painting"<sup>62</sup> (to borrow Resta's words again), perhaps through the influence of his father's example. It must be recalled, however, that Giovan Pietro, who was inscribed in the Academy of Saint Luke as a painter from 1636,<sup>63</sup> never stopped painting. As late as 1665 the English traveler Philip Skippon noted that "sig. Bellori . . . draws pictures and makes good landskips."<sup>64</sup> Indeed, an unpublished letter of his friend Camillo Massimo attests that Bellori executed a series of landscapes at the palace of the Massimo at Roccasecca before 1662.<sup>65</sup> And as we shall see, a sensibility that approaches art entirely from within pervades the *Lives*.

Having given up a career in art, Bellori could try the various types of life open to a man of letters in Rome. The natural course seemed to be to work in one of the many private courts that constituted the great papal court: as secretary to a cardinal or prince (which was the case with Angeloni himself or Agucchi) or as a more or less official poet, a librarian, or an antiquarian. But Bellori never became a courtier, and he followed a completely atypical career, attaining a public role only in the last part of his life and by unusual routes. Some revenues allowed him to abstain from antiquarian and art business and to do without the protection of patrons that would have opened the way to a courtier's career or guaranteed him a steady salaried job. In fact, Bellori's life was entirely dedicated to study and to writing: a singular social situation, further accentuated by the decision neither to marry nor to undertake an ecclesiastical career.<sup>66</sup>

On the one hand, it was a matter, so to speak, of a natural evolution from the figures of Agucchi or Angeloni and their aspirations to a life in which material occupations left room only for the exercise of virtue (in the seventeenth-century sense, meaning eru-

dition, letters, study). On the other hand, the ideas of Nicolas Poussin must have carried a great deal of weight, for Poussin was an increasingly important point of reference for the young Bellori. The two had met, perhaps in Domenichino's studio, but certainly in Angeloni's house, which the Frenchman frequented as a draughtsman of antiquities in the service of Cassiano dal Pozzo.<sup>67</sup> The deep friendship and the dialogue that sprang up were to have a profound effect not only on Bellori's choices in life but also, as we shall see, on the genesis and very nature of the *Lives*. The distrustful attitude toward the Barberini court, and the ideals of sobriety and reserve that had distinguished the circle of Domenichino and Angeloni in the early 1630s found a natural fulfillment, both moral and existential, in Poussin's neo-Stoic vision "*à la mode de Michel de Montaigne*."<sup>68</sup> The network of relationships that the French artist had constructed was based not on patronage or a courtier's arts – indeed, in 1643 he renounced once and for all a dominant role at the French court – but on virtuous and philosophical friendship. Bellori's society of choice soon became, in the words of Giovanni Previtali, a restricted group of "‘worthy men,’ ‘private men’ who were also ‘civilized men,’ ‘refined and erudite intellects,’ ‘men of reason’ able to appreciate the values of art and learning and to look with detachment upon the intrigues and passions of politics and affairs."<sup>69</sup> One may interpret the character of some of Bellori's first publications in terms of this private condition. For years he studied intensively but published relatively little, and when he did, he used pseudonyms or limited himself to small contributions (more or less explicitly acknowledged) to books by friends. Bellori's first trial efforts were in fact included as parerga in several books that Angeloni published in the late 1630s and early 1640s: occasional poems and reflections on correspondence among princes.<sup>70</sup> In those years (probably not later than 1637<sup>71</sup>), a literary friend, Ottavio Tronsarelli, knowing Bellori's artistic inclinations and poetic abilities, proposed that he write a preface to the artists' biographies that an elderly Roman painter, Giovanni Baglione, had just completed with his assistance. Giovan Pietro accepted and wrote the canzone "Alla pittura". In the same period, Bellori dedicated himself assiduously to the study of ancient objects, and in 1641 he was consulted from Florence, along with the most famous antiquarians in Rome (such as Cassiano dal Pozzo and Lukas Holste), regarding the enigmatic

iconography of a statue that was believed to be antique but was in reality Donatello's *Atys*.<sup>72</sup> This was a sign of early widespread appreciation of Bellori among the community of scholars.<sup>73</sup>

In this dual dedication to ancient and modern art, inherited from Angeloni but destined for far more brilliant developments, all that is essential about Bellori's personality already appears in embryo. In 1645 Giovan Pietro published his first antiquarian work (a collection of engravings of ancient reliefs with brief captions in Latin). Prior to June of the same year, he had already written a first version of the biography of Caravaggio.<sup>74</sup>

If we except the death of Angeloni, which occurred in November 1659, and the consequent sad disputes related to the estate, which would in the end see Bellori remaining the owner of the house and some fragments of the collections,<sup>75</sup> the events of Bellori's life were, at least until 1670, intellectual in nature. The categories into which they fell seem to be mainly three: association and familiarity with artists, increasingly authoritative participation in the international community of learned men, and profound and painstaking study of the artistic heritage of Rome, ancient and modern, both public and private.

It is known that in addition to his friendship with Poussin, Bellori formed one with François Du Quesnoy, at least from the early 1640s, and that his close ties with Carlo Maratti date from the same period at the latest, while those with Carlo's master Andrea Sacchi were of longer standing. If his relationship with Francesco Albani remained at the level of correspondence, we know that he had personal relations with Giovanni Lanfranco and Alessandro Algardi, not to mention younger artists such as Giuseppe Chiari and Agostino Scilla. His acceptance into the world of Roman artists was furthered by his nomination as secretary of the Academy of Saint Luke for 1652, as well as the following year, and many other times thereafter.<sup>76</sup> This was the first public position assumed by Giovan Pietro and the only one until 1670. Contemporaneously Bellori connected himself by every means at his disposal to the Republic of Letters. Correspondence of increasing quality extending throughout Europe put him in communication with the most illustrious philologists, numismatists, and antiquarians, while the formation of a small but choice collection in his own house, based on the remains and the model of Angeloni's, put him in a position to receive them when

these men came to Rome. He himself undertook journeys of a scholarly nature in Lazio and in Campania, together with French friends.<sup>77</sup>

In the 1650s, in addition to continuing to draft the *Lives*, Bellori undertook various works on ancient gems and coins, as well as parallel projects dedicated to two of the greatest monuments of the modern pictorial tradition, the Stanze by Raphael in the Vatican and the Farnese Gallery by Annibale Carracci.<sup>78</sup> Owing to his twofold experience, Bellori was able to take the antiquarian's interpretive and editorial typology – that of a book employing both a text and some engraved images to illustrate a monument – and apply it to modern art. Although by now such an approach was common to enable the learned reader to verify a writer's assertions about an ancient medal or lamp on the basis of a print, this was not the case with modern paintings, frescoes, or statues. Bellori's *Argomento della Galleria Farnese dipinta da Annibale Carracci disegnata e intagliata da Carlo Cesio*, published in 1657, consists of a series of prints accompanied by a text. As Evelina Borea has noted, this was the first illustrated book of art history.<sup>79</sup> Bellori had in mind an analogous treatment for the masterpieces of Raphael in the Vatican, but a series of editorial difficulties obliged him to put off its realization for decades: in the end the *Descrizione delle immagini dipinte da Raffaello d'Urbino nelle camere del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano* appeared posthumously in 1696, without the prints.<sup>80</sup>

In 1664 two publications appeared, very different but closely related, which summed up Bellori's threefold experience of the previous twenty years and made it explicit. In that year the *Nota delli musei* came out anonymously; it is a small opus, seemingly dry and insignificant, but in reality of the greatest importance for understanding the intellectual figure of the author. This was the first guide to Rome to deal exclusively with its private patrimony: libraries, archives, collections of paintings, drawings, and medals, as well as gardens. On the one hand, the *Nota* reveals the painstaking research that Bellori conducted into the artistic patrimony of Rome with a view to writing the *Lives*; on the other hand, it gives clear evidence of the author's novel sensibility. While the modern Rome of the reigning Pope Alexander VII Chigi and the mature Bernini was triumphing in all its magniloquent splendor, and a highly studied production of city planning and architecture exalted a public city, composed of grand scenography,

façades, piazzas, fountains, and streets with long perspectives, Bellori focused on the contents of private places and overlooked the magnificence of the exteriors of Alexander's Rome to exhort the visitor to appreciate its exceedingly rich and more varied interiors.<sup>81</sup> Apparent here is the reserve that Bellori shared with Poussin; they both had a taste for the private enjoyment – comparable to reading – of a work of art, of a picture painted for a domestic setting. In addition to this, one of the cardinal points of Bellori's thought as it will be displayed later in the *Lives* emerges clearly for the first time: the historical centrality of Rome and the need to safeguard its patrimony. Providing visitors with a map of private collections, which are frequently subject to sales and unexpected displacements, meant casting light on realities that are often difficult of access and, at the same time, attempting to inhibit the dispersal of such collections. The criticism expressed in the address to the reader regarding those who “despise letters, the arts, and honored memories, alienate and despoil themselves of the ornaments of their forebears, and cause the glory and marvel of things to roam elsewhere”<sup>82</sup> seems perfectly clear when seen in this light.

During the same months of 1664, Bellori read a lecture before the artists meeting at the Academy of Saint Luke under the presidency of his friend Carlo Maratti: this was the “Idea of the Painter, the Sculptor, and the Architect Chosen from the Beauties of Nature, Superior to Nature.”<sup>83</sup> It consisted of a theoretical and historical analysis of the creative process of the artist. Drawing upon the venerable Platonic doctrine of ideas that had pervaded the whole Western tradition of aesthetics, Bellori stressed not the metaphysical, transcendent aspect of artistic creation, but – beginning with the title – its fundamental relationship to nature. Renewed attention to nature, which had been the very essence of the Carracci reform, was now echoed in theory in a structured manner. For Bellori the creative process is to be stripped of every trace of metaphysics: the artist, who is the true protagonist of the lecture, observes nature, emending it and integrating it with an example of beauty that does not come to him from a realm of ideas beyond the celestial spheres or from God, but that instead he creates in his own mind. But the really important aspect does not consist in theoretical innovations so much as it does in the literary and rhetorical quality of the discourse, in its true objectives. Faithfully

following the anthology of classical sources contained in Franciscus Junius' *De pictura veterum*, an extremely successful book published in Amsterdam in 1637, as well as drawing upon the theoretical tradition of the Academy of Saint Luke initiated by its founder Federico Zuccari and making connections with debates about the literary imagination that took place in Italy in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which had opposed Ariosto to Tasso,<sup>84</sup> Bellori skillfully outlines a tradition that begins with Plato and runs through the history of philosophy, rhetoric, and literature. He also includes the great artists, ancient and modern, from Leonardo to Raphael, up to Guido Reni. In the context of the lectures usually delivered at the Academy, Bellori's stood out for its conceptual profundity, but above all for its extremely high literary and intellectual quality, for which it rivaled the best of those read in the academies frequented by poets, philosophers, and historians in Rome. In it Bellori fully displayed his twofold experience, as the equal of artists on the one hand and as an antiquarian and man of letters on the other. The principal purpose of the lecture was to clarify to artists themselves the intellectual quality of their work, not denying but exalting their adherence to nature. Sifting whatever in nature they wish to imitate through the selective and speculative sieve of the inner idea, painters are like poets who exercise the imagination, and not like artisans who engage in a physical practice. With this attitude as a foundation, Bellori makes a polemical attack in the lecture on Caravaggio and Pieter van Laer: not using the intellect but limiting themselves to copying nature mechanically, they deprive painting of its status as an intellectual and liberal discipline and reduce it again to a mere manual exercise. His criticism of naturalism or of the Bamboccianti, in short, is based not on an alleged stylistic classicism but on the notion that the merely “practical” dimension of their painting puts the visual arts at risk of social exclusion. The very brief summary that the *Giornale de' letterati* devoted to the lecture shows that the message was clearly received: “from this discourse one gathers what the excellence and beauty of the said arts consist in”:<sup>85</sup> not so much, then, the locus of beauty within the figurative arts as the fact that they must be considered “excellent” and “beautiful,” which is to say, liberal and intellectual activities.

While Bellori was gathering the first fruits of a lengthy course of studies, reflections, and research, the