

GIOVAN PIETRO BELLORI

The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects

This is the first complete translation of the biographies of fifteen artists, including Annibale Carracci, Caravaggio, Rubens, Van Dyck, and Poussin, written by the seventeenth-century antiquarian Giovan Pietro Bellori. Originally conceived as a continuation of Vasari's famous *Lives*, it is a fundamental source for seventeenth-century Italian art and artistic theory, providing detailed descriptions of extant and lost works of art, while casting light on the cultural politics of contemporary Rome and the relations between Rome and France. The importance of Bellori's *Lives* lies in the scrupulous documentation of artists, many of whom he knew personally; the author's detailed descriptions of their works; and his exposition of the classicist theory of art in the introductory lecture, the *Idea*. This volume contains the twelve Lives published in the original edition of 1672 and three Lives (Guido Reni, Andrea Sacchi, and Carlo Maratti) that survive in manuscript form and that were published for the first time in 1942.

Alice Sedgwick Wohl is an independent scholar and translator. She has translated Ascanio Condivi, *Life of Michelangelo*.

Hellmut Wohl is Professor Emeritus of Art History at Boston University. He is the author of *The Paintings of Domenico Veneziano* and *The Aesthetics of Italian Renaissance Art*.

Tomaso Montanari is Professore associato di Storia dell'arte moderna at the Università di Roma Tor Vergata. He is the author of numerous publications on aspects of Italian baroque art.

GIOVAN PIETRO BELLORI

THE LIVES

OF

THE MODERN PAINTERS, SCULPTORS

AND ARCHITECTS

A New Translation and Critical Edition

TRANSLATED BY

ALICE SEDGWICK WOHL

NOTES BY

HELLMUT WOHL

INTRODUCTION BY

TOMASO MONTANARI



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Giovan Pietro Bellori

Frontmatter

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TO EVELINA BOREA
AND THE MEMORY OF
GIOVANNI PREVITALI

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>page ix</i>
Introduction	I
Note on the Illustrations	41
THE LIVES OF THE MODERN PAINTERS, SCULPTORS AND ARCHITECTS	
Dedication	44
To the Reader	49
Philostratus the Younger	53
The Idea of the Painter, the Sculptor and the Architect	55
Life of Annibale Carracci	69
Life of Agostino Carracci	115
Life of Domenico Fontana	139
Life of Federico Barocci	157
Life of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio	177
Life of Peter Paul Rubens	191
Life of Anthony van Dyck	213
Life of François Du Quesnoy	225
Life of Domenico Zampieri, il Domenichino	237
Life of Giovanni Lanfranco	279
Life of Alessandro Algardi	293
Life of Nicolas Poussin	307
Life of Guido Reni	345
Life of Andrea Sacchi	373
Life of Carlo Maratti	395
<i>Glossary</i>	
	441
<i>Chronology</i>	
	443
<i>Appendix 1: Biographical Notes</i>	
	445
<i>Appendix 2: Bellori's Accuracy</i>	
	455
<i>Appendix 3: Orientation in Bellori's Descriptions</i>	
	457
<i>Bibliography</i>	
	459
<i>Index</i>	
	465

Foreword

Bellori's *Vite de' pittori, scultori e architetti moderni*, its preface, "*L'idea del pittore, dello scultore, e dell'architetto*," and the three posthumously published Lives of Guido Reni, Andrea Sacchi, and Carlo Maratti are fundamental documents not only for the artists whose biographies are included but also for seventeenth-century art and aesthetics in general; yet despite the importance of the *Lives*, only the *Idea*¹ and a few individual biographies – those of the Carracci,² Barocci,³ Caravaggio,⁴ and Van Dyck⁵ – have been translated into English. Until now, there has not been a translation of the complete text into any language. This translation is intended to make Bellori's *Lives* available to the English-speaking public, both general readers and students and specialists. Our principal concern has been to render the text as scrupulously as possible and to elucidate it as simply and clearly as possible with the introduction and notes. In the Letter to the Reader, Bellori describes his own method:

It is a very bad thing to resort to one's own imagination, imputing to the figures meanings and passions that are not present in them. . . . I have therefore confined myself to the role of mere translator and have adopted the simplest and purest means, without adding to my words anything more than the forms themselves warrant.

This describes our method as well; we too have tried to adopt the plainest and most straightforward means.

THE TRANSLATION

The translation is based on Evelina Borea's magisterial Italian edition of the *Lives*,⁶ controlled against the *editio princeps* of 1672⁷ and Michelangelo Piacentini's

transcription⁸ of MS 2506 of the Bibliothèque Municipale of Rouen, one of two surviving manuscripts by different copyists, both datable to c.1700, of the Lives of Reni, Sacchi, and Maratti. Borea based her edition of the last three Lives on the manuscript now in the Fondation Custodia at the Institut Néerlandais in Paris (which was not known to Piacentini), comparing the Rouen manuscript and listing the variants in her notes. Her edition of the *Lives* is indispensable in every way and should be consulted by all readers, no matter how rudimentary their knowledge of Italian.

Bellori's style is sober and reserved, his language is plain, and his tone is generally unemphatic. However, as the observant reader will note, his "simplest and purest means" are carefully controlled: his words are charged with meaning, and his exposition is subtle; his control becomes most clear when he alters his style to suit his subject, as in the descriptions of Carracci's *Sleeping Venus* and Domenichino's *Hunt of Diana*. His sentences tend to be organized in strings of phrases and clauses reflecting a complete sequence of facts or events, without great emphasis on the most significant or dramatic element. Here, for instance, is his entire account of the crucial event in Caravaggio's life: "Thus when he got into a fight with a young friend of his during a tennis game, after they had fought with their racquets and their weapons were drawn, he killed the young man, remaining wounded himself as well." [*Venuto poi a rissa nel giuoco di palla a corda con un giovine suo amico, battutisi con le racchette e prese l'armi, uccise il giovine, restando anch'egli ferito.*] As this example shows, Bellori tends to treat his sentences as we would paragraphs, encompassing the subject at hand within them. This is so characteristic that rather than tease them out into shorter declarative sentences, I have reproduced them much as they are. In many cases, however, I have moved clauses around to make sentences easier to follow, and very occasionally I have divided a particularly interminable sentence into two.

Since this is a translation, I have tried to leave as few words as possible in Italian. Whenever a foreign word is given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* I have felt free to use it, and the same is true of meanings that are rare but perfectly comprehensible. For some crucial words, such as *ingegno* and *virtù*, I have had to use a variety of English words. Where there are English words similar to the Italian but with slightly altered meanings, I have used the English words whenever possible, hoping that the Italian sense would become clear from the context. Thus I have translated *invenzione* as “invention” and *favola* as “fable.” In a few cases where the meaning is not so obvious, I have kept the Italian. When *istoria*, which means both “history” and “story,” refers to a narrative painting or relief or its subject, I have used the Italian; otherwise, I have translated it as “narrative.” Conversely, there are terms that I have translated when the meaning is specific but have left in Italian when the meaning is abstract; thus for example, I have translated *disegno* as “drawing,” “draughtsmanship,” or “design” according to my sense of the context but have left it untranslated when it refers to the ideational faculty of the artist that underlies all the arts.

All untranslated words – terms for money and measurements, a certain number of art terms, and a few words lacking an English equivalent – can be found defined in the glossary at the end of the book. The reader will also find at the end a chronology of popes, emperors, kings, and rulers of the period of the *Lives*, and appendices containing brief biographical notes on some of the principal figures appearing the *Lives*, a note on the question of Bellori’s accuracy, and an account of patterns of orientation in Bellori’s descriptions.

The 1672 edition of the *Vite* conforms to the typographical conventions of its time, with the author’s text printed in roman, quoted texts in italics, and epigraphs and inscriptions in capitals. Titles of works of art are included as part of the author’s text, in roman, and treated as descriptive phrases set apart only by an initial capital letter; similarly, quoted speech is included in roman without quotation marks. With the sole exception of adding quotation marks around recorded speech, I have followed the same conventions; and for the sake of continuity, I have treated the unpublished *Lives* in the same way as the published ones. In the matter of punctuation, except regarding the use of quotation marks, I have largely followed the policies of Evelina Borea, omitting numerous commas, adding some semicolons

for clarity, substituting “and” for Bellori’s ubiquitous ampersands, and leaving his paragraphs as I found them. I have followed her in other ways as well: in the layout of the text, in substituting full names for Bellori’s abbreviations without mentioning the substitution in the notes, and in filling lacunae with suggested words in parentheses. In the main, I have simply translated her interpolations; but in the rare cases where my interpretation differs from hers, I have explained my reasons in the notes.

Regarding the translation of quoted material, in the cases of Latin and Greek I have included the original texts, followed by translations in brackets; but in dealing with quotations in Italian I have distinguished between those in prose (many of which are actually paraphrases), which I have translated, setting them apart in italics as in the Italian editions, and those in poetry, which I have given in the original language followed by prose translations. I have also retained the second person singular in poetry and inscriptions but not in prose.

Names, particularly names of foreigners, often presented a problem, and for simplicity’s sake I have used accepted modern English or vernacular forms for personal names and, in general, for place-names. Titles and honorific designations were another problem, and I have either imitated Bellori or translated him literally, making any needed corrections in the notes. Other kinds of corrections, together with clarifications of obscure references, are also to be found in the notes, although very occasionally and only where I considered it essential, I have added clarifications in brackets rather than directing the reader to the notes.

Our basic intention throughout is to try to give the reader an unencumbered sense of Bellori’s text. It is my great hope that all readers will find the translation readable and that students and specialists will find it reliable.

– ASW

NOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

The purpose of the endnotes is to elucidate Bellori’s text as clearly and concretely as possible. We have sought to identify his models and sources, writings by earlier or contemporary authors that he would have known or had access to, and persons, places, and events that he

mentions, as well as the locations of known works of art that he describes. Where the location of a work is not supplied, it is where he says it is. We have provided clarifications where the text is not self-explanatory and have also sought to provide corrections of such errors of fact, authorship, or identification of subjects of works of art as have been established by modern scholarship. The endnotes have benefited incalculably from Evelina Borea's notes in her edition of the *Lives*. Unlike Borea, however, we have not, with rare exceptions, cited the literature on artists, works of art, patronage, or artistic theory past the end of the seventeenth century; nor have we referred to debates on questions of chronology and attribution, except in a few cases where there is documentary evidence that has come to light since Bellori's time and when it appeared necessary in order to clarify the text. On all such matters discussed in the scholarly literature up to 1976, readers will find Borea's notes invaluable.

Our decision largely to exclude these matters was based on our sense that, first of all, the notes, already unwieldy enough because they are not at the foot of the page, would have been swelled to disproportionate lengths. Second, the material included would have had to be selective and subjectively so. Third, the conclusions of art-historical scholarship, subject as they are to new information as well as new approaches and strategies, are soon out of date. Finally, excellent sources are readily available, particularly Borea's edition of the *Lives*, the exhibition catalogue *L'Idée del Bello* (Rome, 2000), and bibliographic services such as the *Bibliography of the History of Art*.

By the same token, the bibliography includes only writings referred to in the introduction, endnotes, and appendices. A complete bibliography up to the year 2000, on artists, patrons, collectors, and other matters pertaining to Bellori can be found in *L'Idée del Bello*, and the comprehensive bibliographies in Borea's edition of the *Lives* remain extremely valuable.

– HW

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The idea of an English translation of Bellori's *Lives* was conceived when, as an editor at the *Bibliography of the History of Art*, I saw the need for it. My first debts of gratitude are to my colleagues at *BHA* for

their encouragement and support at the start and to Giovanna Perini, who participated in the early stages of the project and checked a part of the translation. The advice and indications I received from her have stood me in good stead throughout. The rest of the translation was checked by Mira Stille, whom I thank for her lively and enthusiastic collaboration. Most of the translations from Latin were kindly provided by Ellen Thomas, to whom I apologize for overriding her wishes and retaining the second person singular where I did. The phrases and passages in Greek were more problematic, and I thank Guy Hedreen and Joseph Day most sincerely for providing correct transcriptions and accurate translations. Then I would like particularly to express my gratitude to Christopher Ricks and his class at the Editorial Institute of Boston University in the fall of 2000 for extremely helpful discussion of some of the problems I faced, both in the translation and in preparing it for publication; to Christopher Stenbridge and Kathy Bosi for help solving the problem of Domenichino's harp; to Christine Huemer for producing a photograph that showed water buffalo drawing wagons loaded with building materials in the early twentieth century; to Thomas Willette for insightful discussion of art terms and other issues of language, and for many other kindnesses as well; to Ralph Lieberman for the excellent photographs from which the illustrations were made; to Craig Hugh Smyth for his support; to Ornella Francisci Osti, John Spike, and Diane Zervas for helpful advice; and to David Crofoot for supplying desperately needed technical advice and assistance often and with unfailing generosity and patience.

As some of the preceding acknowledgments suggest, the translation of a historical text calls for an unimaginable variety of specialized sources; thus my greatest debt is to the two extraordinary libraries where I have been privileged to work: the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute Library in Williamstown and the Biblioteca Berenson of The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies at Villa I Tatti in Florence. To these institutions and their staffs, I express my heartfelt thanks for years of hospitality and help.

This book is in all its aspects the product of a close and happy collaboration, and my gratitude to Tomaso Montanari and Hellmut Wohl is beyond measure. All three of us would like most particularly to thank Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey for their

encouragement and advice; Phyllis Wender for her sure and generous guidance along the way to publication; Fronia W. Simpson for the intelligent and painstaking care with which she reviewed the page proofs; Sara Black for her thoughtful copy-editing, which caught innumerable small errors and inconsistencies; Holly Johnson for her endless kindness and patient help in preparing the manuscript for production; and Beatrice Rehl and Cambridge University Press for bringing this book into existence.

– ASW

THE DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Evelina Borea and to the memory of Giovanni Previtali, on whose exemplary edition of the *Lives* (1976) all subsequent development of Bellori studies is based, including the realization of this English edition.

The dedication is intended above all as a token of affectionate gratitude, but also as explicit support for the scholarly ideals expressed by Previtali in the introduction to the 1976 edition:

The choice to make an edition, true and proper, with all the risks entailed, also means

reaffirming that the sources must be read and reread, not merely consulted. They must be read above all because it is only through the sources that it is possible, assisting and not forcing the interpretation (by nature ambiguous) of visual texts, to discover those relationships between the world of art and the world of the word, the interests and ideas that allow us to see a society of the past in a unified manner, apart from all aesthetic considerations, and to rediscover – and this is the essential thing – an organic unity through concrete mediations; not contenting ourselves simply with an abstract unity, predetermined and constructed by means of an arbitrary conjunction of data which merely because they are “synchronous” are not for this reason alone interrelated. The sources must be read, furthermore, to rediscover that “historiographical tradition” whose function lies, and not just recently, in signaling that the absolute power of modernizations of interpretation has definite limits.⁹

We will be happy if our work contributes toward a history of art built on these foundations and on these examples.

– TM, ASW, HW

NOTES

- 1 The *Idea* appears in English in Panofsky 1968, pp. 154–175 (trans. unattributed); Holt 1947, pp. 320–8 (trans. K. Donahue); and Holt 1958, II, pp. 94–106 (trans. K. Donahue).
- 2 Bellori 1968.
- 3 Pillsbury and Richards 1978, pp. 11–24; Turner 2000, pp. 175–191.
- 4 Friedlaender 1955, pp. 245–254; Hibbard 1983, pp. 361–374.
- 5 Brown 1991, pp. 17–23.
- 6 Bellori 1976.
- 7 Bellori 1672.
- 8 Bellori 1942.
- 9 Bellori 1976, pp. xi–xii.