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## MALVASIA'S ANTI-VASARIAN HISTORY OF ART: A TRADITION, NOT A REBIRTH

ELIZABETH CROPPER

In 1990, Giovanna Perini Folesani and Charles Dempsey joined forces in an extraordinary little book: *Gli scritti dei Carracci*, published by Nuova Alfa Editoriale in Bologna. The volume contains an introduction by Dempsey, followed by Perini Folesani's edition of the scattered and often fragmentary writings of the Carracci, together with a long critical note.<sup>1</sup> This compendium and subsequent independent studies by both contributors signal the vital role played in the 1980s and 1990s by Charles Dempsey's participation in The Johns Hopkins University's Villa Spelman program in Florence, through which he and Giovanna Perini also first met: without the Spelman seminars, the study of the Carracci and of Malvasia would have been much less vital in the last two decades of the twentieth century.

In a collection of essays dedicated to Charles Dempsey, it would then be redundant to rehearse old prejudices about the Conte Carlo Malvasia. Indeed, one enters any discussion of Malvasia in this company with some trepidation; and yet Malvasia's reputation still awaits rehabilitation in the larger sense. Most controversial among the texts published by Perini in the *Scritti*, and studied at some length by Dempsey, are the notes written by Annibale Carracci in his copy of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives*, notes in which he calls

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<sup>1</sup> This was the second of seven volumes in the Villa Spelman Colloquia Series, all published by Nuova Alfa in Bologna. The series flourished with support from the Robert Lehman Foundation and could not have come about without the creative energy of Francesco Solinas in particular. The Malvasia connection at the Villa Spelman also led to Giovanna Perini's appointment as a Visiting Associate at The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Her many articles on the Conte Carlo Malvasia remain fundamental for any treatment of the *Felsina pittrice*, and the essay that follows is no exception, though notes here are kept to a minimum.

Vasari "l'invidioso," "avarissimo," "maligno," and "ignorante," and laments his "coglioneria," and his "viso di cazzo."<sup>2</sup> Malvasia's own literary language is more moderate than Annibale's spontaneous outbursts, but his all-too-evident dislike for Vasari has been a major cause of his continuing disrepute.

The historiography of the history of art and the history of art itself are never more closely and significantly linked than in the case of the Italian Renaissance, itself both a historiographical and an artistic construct. The paradigmatic definition of the history and character of the art of the *rinascimento*, or renaissance, was provided by Giorgio Vasari, painter, architect, and courtier in his *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, published in Florence under the auspices of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici in 1550, and with a much expanded edition in 1568.<sup>3</sup> Vasari's view of history was directly attacked a century later by the Bolognese Count Carlo Cesare Malvasia in his *Felsina pittrice*, or *Lives of the Bolognese Artists*, first published in Bologna 1678 with a dedication to King Louis XIV of France, in a challenge that was on the one hand powerful and on the other ineffective. The most graphic way of presenting the legacy of this failed challenge in modern times is to compare the different fates of Florence and Bologna in 1944/45. Allied attacks and local defenses of the former were informed by a Vasarian view of history that demanded special protection for the city's monuments, though images of the effects of the devastating mining of Borgo San Iacopo by retreating German forces, for example, serve as a vivid reminder that this protection was by no means complete (Figs. 16.1 and 16.2). Devastation in Malvasia's native city was more widespread and less selective. The railway yards presented a special target, but some 45% of the city's historical buildings were damaged, including such ancient monuments as the Basilica of San Francesco, which was bombed twice in 1943, first on July 24, and again on September 25 (Figs. 16.3 and 16.4). The great Italian art historian Roberto Longhi lamented in the aftermath of this destruction that had nineteenth-century critics not destroyed the fame of local artists, "Who knows if Bologna would be weeping such bitter tears today?" "Art," he wrote, "by its nature mute

<sup>2</sup> For the notes to Vasari, see Perini, *Scritti*, 158–164, and Dempsey, in Perini, *Scritti*, 9–13. See further Dempsey, "The Carracci Postille," especially concerning the various hands involved.

<sup>3</sup> A more extensive discussion of relationships between Vasari's and Malvasia's views of history will appear in the author's introduction to the first volume (forthcoming) of the annotated translation and edition of the *Felsina pittrice*, a research project of the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

and without defense, can protect itself only by its fame, and fame needs an ever alert critical approach."<sup>4</sup> Even earlier, in his inaugural lecture at the University of Bologna in 1934, Longhi had lamented a different kind of neglect, pointing to the loss of so many early Bolognese decorative cycles and panel paintings over the past centuries and describing the Bolognese Trecento as "the last Lazarus forgotten in the tomb."<sup>5</sup> It was unimaginable, he wrote, that the Uffizi Gallery would lack a work by Giotto, or the Pinacoteca in Siena paintings by Duccio and Simone Martini, and yet the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna had at that time no authentic work by Vitale da Bologna, one of its greatest fourteenth-century artists. Although, as Longhi also saw, Malvasia's early campaign to promote the Bolognese Trecento had some negative results, notably the later falsification of signatures and dates and the reworking of whole paintings by creative restorers, it was Malvasia who first recorded for an interested public the accomplishments of such artists as Vitale (Fig. 16.5), of Simone dei Crocefissi, and Lippo di Dalmasio. That Malvasia nonetheless failed to prevent the loss of many works even in his own day and to persuade succeeding generations of critics, historians, and collectors of the merits of his local school (which he defined as his own modest goal) surely contributed to the devastation and loss of Bolognese art in the twentieth century. Success in all this would, however, have been far beyond any single historian, even one more eloquent and diplomatic than Malvasia.

If there is any common knowledge today about the history of art, then Vasari is surely part of it. The title "Father of Art History" is sometimes associated with Johann Joachim Winckelmann, sometimes with Heinrich Wölfflin, and sometimes with G. W. F. Hegel, but surely the best known "Father" is Giorgio Vasari. Few now read — or indeed ever read — Winckelmann (who dismissed Vasari's art history as anecdotal biography), Wölfflin, or Hegel for anything other than professional or academic reasons. By contrast, Vasari's account of the art of his own culture and times was not only widely read and debated in the decades after it was published, but it is even more widely read today than at any time in the past. The *Lives* have achieved the status of a popular classic (often in abridged form), despite the lack of a truly reliable English translation. Vasari succeeded in promoting the conservation

<sup>4</sup> Longhi, "Lettera," 17. On the destruction of Bologna, with important archival photographs, see Barbacci, *Monumenti*, and D'Ajutolo, *Bologna ferita*.

<sup>5</sup> Longhi, "Momenti," 189.

and understanding of Tuscan art through providing it with a compelling history founded on an originary myth of rebirth, or renaissance.

This is not to say that Vasari's paternal reputation is unblemished: he is now fully recognized as partisan in his celebration of the greatness of his Tuscan forebears and contemporaries, especially his hero Michelangelo, to the detriment of artists from other cities; his ekphrases, or vivid descriptions of works of art, have been identified as rhetorically embellished and even hyperbolic; finally, his reliability on the facts has been challenged, and with good reason, over the centuries. Yet the broad framework of Vasari's account of the history of art according to three ages of excellence, from what he defined as its rebirth, or *rinascita*, at the time of Cimabue, up to the perfection of his own day, has persisted, even as questions about the meaning and very existence of the Italian Renaissance continue to engage passionate debate. Himself a painter and the brilliant architect of the Uffizi, Vasari provided much personal and anecdotal information about fellow artists, giving an immediacy to his account of their lives. He also constructed a remarkable vernacular vocabulary for the definition and assessment of matters of style, naturalizing poetic and rhetorical terms like *grazia*, *leggiadria*, *vaghezza*, and *terribilità* into the critical language of art to describe the work of artists such as Leonardo and Michelangelo. Vasari's highly readable prose was doubtless not all his own work, benefiting from interventions by friendly editors, especially Vincenzo Borghini, but few modern critics have endorsed the polemical attack on his very authorship and credibility that was launched by Charles Hope in 1995 under the sensational heading "Can you trust Vasari?"<sup>6</sup>

Malvasia (1613–1693) holds no such familiar position in the history of art, and his *Felsina pittrice* is read with some difficulty even by specialists. His disjunctive style, elaborately constructed; his almost endless sentences;

<sup>6</sup> Though such criticism was already voiced in the seventeenth century by Giovanni Cinelli, who called the work a "musaico" in response to Baldinucci's attack on Malvasia. Stefano Bottari (1759–1760) felt the need to defend Vasari's authorship in the face of comments by Vasari's contemporary Giuliano de' Ricci and others: *Le Vite*, ed. Bettarini and Barocchi, 1, *Commento*, 6, and 106, n. 1. Hope's proposal in his review of Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, that the making of the *Vite* was a collaborative enterprise among *letterati* has been taken up, with special regard to the *proemi*, by Frangenberg, "Bartoli, Giambullari and the Prefaces to Vasari's *Lives* (1550)." In considering Malvasia's criticism of Vasari here, we will assume that "Vasari" was the official author of the *Lives*, without disputing that more than one hand and mind were at work. Such collaboration was less unusual in the sixteenth century than Hope implies, though see now Hope, "Le 'Vite' vasariane."

and his citations, both silent and overt, from other printed texts, documents, letters, and poems in both Italian and Latin, render every page dense and demanding.<sup>7</sup> Malvasia's four-part structure of the history of Bolognese painting begins with little-known artists in the twelfth century, even before Lippo di Dalmasio, followed by the generation of Francesco Francia, who, in his words, "opened to all the closed road of true and good painting," then expanding to the Carracci and their contemporaries; the fourth part opens up yet more widely to include Guido Reni, Domenichino, Albani, Guercino, and other Carracci followers. This structure is in part indebted to Vasari and has a good deal of logic to it.<sup>8</sup> Yet it has never taken hold as a paradigm for a more general historical explanation in the manner of Vasari's three ages of Tuscan/Roman style, with nods to Venice. The Carracci may indeed be seen as worthy successors to the masters of Vasari's *terza età*, but Francesco Francia has not displaced Raphael; nor, more to the point, has the paradigm of a renaissance canon that Raphael represents been displaced, despite much recent debate over the very idea of the Renaissance as such. Where Vasari's anecdotes and witticisms have been the subject of sympathetic study, Malvasia's stories have been dismissed as unworthy of a "modern" historian.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the question of fundamental trust, raised only quite recently in relation to Vasari, has been leveled against Malvasia for centuries. Vasari's reputation as the "Father" of art history has meant that although his biases and errors may have been scrutinized, his *Lives* have survived fundamentally unscathed. On the other hand, despite many detailed defenses, just about everything Malvasia wrote has been challenged, remaining suspect even today.

<sup>7</sup> Among the best of Giovanna Perini's excellent analyses of Malvasia's style appears in "Malvasia's Florentine Letters," 279, where she comments that in these texts "no noun is without a qualification or a determination, no sentence is constructed according to its natural order, but contains emphatic hyperbata and prolepses or anastrophes ... Each sentence is enriched by parallelisms, geminations, anaphorae, figurae etymologicae, litotes, and so on ..." See also Perini, "Natura ed espressione." Anne Summerscale's discussion of Malvasia as historian, critic, and writer, in *Malvasia's Life of the Carracci* provides a foundation for all work on the topic, including this essay.

<sup>8</sup> As described by Malvasia in *Felsina pittrice*, 1: preface (n.p.). The edition of 1841 will be cited throughout here because it is more readily available in anastatic reprint.

<sup>9</sup> As most recently expressed by John Shearman in his introduction to *Raphael in Early Modern Sources*, 1:17–19, and in commentaries on individual documents, especially those in 2:1279–1282, 1469–1474, 1476–1481, 1486–1487. Behind these criticisms lies the problem that Shearman had no wider view of Malvasia as a historian in his own right, other than that inherited in the Raphael scholarship.

Among modern art historians, attacks on Malvasia's veracity have focused in particular on what he had to say about the relationship between Francesco Francia and Raphael, and upon the status of several letters and poems by the Carracci that he published in the context of their biography.<sup>10</sup> In each case, Malvasia's truthfulness was challenged because his position went against prevailing modern views of the history of style. Even in the face of contradictory chronological evidence, Vasari was, for example, simply allowed to be wrong in his colorful account of how Francia died of shock and envy after seeing a work by Raphael for the first time (in fact, the *Saint Cecilia* still in Bologna). Malvasia, however, who set out to correct Vasari's account through reference to letters and other documents often in his own possession, was condemned as a forger of these very documents, especially by German art historians in the early years of the last century.<sup>11</sup> To such claims of outright forgery as opposed to editorial intervention (none of which have been substantiated) were added charges of *campanilismo*, or blind local pride, something that is quite paradoxical given Vasari's own undisguised sponsorship of the Tuscan tradition.<sup>12</sup> Again, these charges go back to early-twentieth-century German scholarship, subsequently expanded upon as a way of further undermining the credibility of Malvasia's documentary evidence. Quite perversely, Malvasia's evidence was discredited by such critics even where his criticism of Vasari was firmly founded in fact.

Malvasia was not the first critic of Vasari, though he was among the most vehement and systematic. After the publication of the second edition of Vasari's *Lives* in 1568, a host of writers throughout Italy set out to expand, emend, or even fundamentally challenge his account. Yet other early responses to Vasari, such as the unpublished criticisms of Giulio Mancini (1558–1630) or the published work of Francesco Scannelli (1657), Marco Boschini (1677), and Raffaello Soprani (1674), have tended to be forgotten or ignored, and this only in part because they were absorbed into revised versions of the history of Italian art.<sup>13</sup> A sense of decline in art, caused in part by the slavish imitation of

<sup>10</sup> For this history, see especially Dempsey, "Malvasia and the Problem of the Early Raphael," and Perini, "Nota Critica," in *Scritti*, 33–99.

<sup>11</sup> Dempsey, "Malvasia and the Problem of the Early Raphael," 58–60.

<sup>12</sup> On this question of *campanilismo*, and its anachronistic use by modern historians, see Dempsey, "National Expression."

<sup>13</sup> See the useful discussion by Grasman, *All'ombra del Vasari*, especially 21–66, which is based on his "La Controversia fra il Vasari e il Malvasia."

Vasari's hero Michelangelo by artists of Vasari's own generation, contributed to a productive re-evaluation of the future of painting, which for many was not to be found in Florence nor even in Rome.<sup>14</sup> Much seventeenth-century writing critical of Vasari was stimulated by this contemporary flourishing of regional schools and academies inspired by the need for artistic reform.

The need for an extensive response to Vasari was given special urgency by the republication of the 1568 edition of the *Lives* by Carlo Manolessi in Bologna in 1647. This is the edition, published in the city of the Carracci but with a dedication to Grand Duke Ferdinando II, that Malvasia cites when referring to Vasari in the *Felsina pittrice*, and as a production, it informed his overall project in many ways.<sup>15</sup> For example, Malvasia derived several of his woodcut portraits (such as that of Francia) from Manolessi's edition. These woodcuts were based on the very same blocks used by Vasari, and Manolessi stated in his preface that he had searched for them for six years, adding further portraits of artists not represented in 1568 (such as Giulio Clovio and Correggio).<sup>16</sup> A less obvious act of emulation, but just as important, was Malvasia's decision to publish the *Felsina pittrice* in two roughly equal volumes, with indices at the end. This is what Manolessi had done with his edition of the *Lives*, dividing the work into three more or less equal volumes and going to some lengths to provide useful indices, listing the portraits of the artists,

<sup>14</sup> On the effect of Vasari's model for future generations, see Cropper, "Tuscan History and Emilian Style."

<sup>15</sup> Arfelli, in Malvasia, *Vite di pittori*, xv, n. 9, points to Malvasia's use of this edition. The many page references throughout the "Scritti originali del Conte Carlo Malvasia spettanti alla sua Felsina pittrice," now in the Biblioteca Comunale di Bologna (B16, 17) and only partially published by Arfelli, are to this 1647 edition. These rough drafts will be published in the CASVA edition of Malvasia. The frontispiece to Manolessi's edition depicting the *Ara dell'Immortalità* betrays a Roman orientation: it was designed by Canini, engraved in Rome by Cornelis Bloemaert, and accompanied by a dedicatory ode by Giovan Pietro Bellori.

<sup>16</sup> In his letter to the reader prefacing the 1647 edition, Manolessi reports that after a six-year search he has in his hands the woodcut portraits, together with their ornamented frames, from the edition of 1568. Manolessi further states that the new portraits of Benvenuto Garofalo, Pietro Cavallini, Correggio, and Giulio Clovio conform as closely as possible to the older images. Malvasia in turn derived his woodcuts from Manolessi: the portrait of Francia, for example, appears in reverse, whereas its decorative frame comes from that surrounding the portrait of Perugino in the 1647 edition. For a critical discussion of Manolessi's edition, which went through several reprintings: Paola Barocchi, "Premessa," in Vasari, *Le Vite*, ed. Bettarini and Barocchi, 1, *Commento*: xi–xiii.

the places in which works were to be found, and, finally, "cose notabili," or important things for the teaching of painting, sculpture, and architecture, with the names and works of artists listed alphabetically, often in multiple entries. Like Malvasia's own indices, which they inspired, Manolesi's constituted an immense amount of editorial work.<sup>17</sup>

Malvasia's anti-Vasarian stance was polemical and deep, but by no means as purely dismissive, geographically biased, or *ad hominem* as is often claimed. Whereas the painter Annibale Carracci, as we have seen, writing private comments in the Carracci's copy of the 1568 edition, explodes with vituperative power about Vasari's ignorance and envy, his ambition and miserliness, in a veritable inventory of the weapons of artistic calumny, Malvasia's responses are more measured. Often he prefers not to call Vasari by name, referring to him simply as "lui" or "quello." But in several cases, such as the lives of Francesco Francia and Marcantonio Raimondi, the description of the works of Primaticcio, much of the life of Pellegrino Tibaldi, and sections of that of Bagnacavallo, Malvasia simply reprints large sections of text by his Tuscan adversary from the Manolesi edition. Remarkable in the case of these citations from Vasari is Malvasia's open acknowledgment of them, for he did not follow this practice systematically with other sources. He is explicit about his method of citation in the introduction to the *Felsina Pittrice*: "Of the authors," he writes, "I need only make a nice list, to confirm some witticism or saying, perhaps, and those few authorities that I will insert at random in a running narrative" — in other words, working these into his own prose.<sup>18</sup> This was his approach to incorporating passages and detailed examples from the Siennese Giulio Mancini's then unpublished Roman treatise of c. 1619–1621, in which criticism of Vasari was already vigorously voiced.<sup>19</sup> He tends to quote very briefly the Bolognese writers Ovidio Montalbani (Bumaldus), Francesco Cavazzoni, and Antonio Masini, among others, in support of his own arguments and often without specific references. Vasari, on the other hand, is in these cases quoted whole, and the inserted text identified immediately; critical corrections, as in the case of his dismissal of the story

<sup>17</sup> See Manolesi, "A' lettori," in Vasari, *Le Vite*, 1647, n.

<sup>18</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1: n.

<sup>19</sup> See Mancini, *Considerazioni*, 1:164–205, for an entire section titled "Considerazioni intorno ad alcune cose o tralasciate o non ben dette dal Vasari," which was of great importance in the formation of Malvasia's stance.

of Francia's death on seeing Raphael's *Saint Cecilia*, usually come at the end of the passage cited.

On his appropriation of Vasari's life of Marcantonio Raimondi, Malvasia states that this saved him from trying to "fish up" new information about a distant past, concerning which he had received conflicting information that he could not verify.<sup>20</sup> It is important to recognize such acknowledgment by Malvasia of the value of Vasari's labor in finding information about artists closer to his time. On the fifteenth-century artist Marco Zoppo, for example, he recognizes that for recorded memory of his work, we are as much in debt to Vasari "who says quite a bit about him in his *Life of Squarcione*, or more specifically in that of Mantegna, with whom he groups Squarcione, Dario of Treviso, Stefano Ferrarese, Nicolò Pizzolo, and Marco Zoppo, as we must lament about the old Bolognese writers, who preserved no record at all of our painters, always so numerous and so worthy, and wrote nothing down; paying no more attention to them than to their carpenters and stone workers."<sup>21</sup>

In other contexts, Malvasia is less tolerant of Vasari's work in finding and recording materials from the past. On his own account of the life of Lippo di Dalmasio, for example, Malvasia writes that "here, digested into a small compendium, is the equally little we know of Lippo's life from ancient tradition, and which was related in the same brief form by Bucci, by Zante, by Cavazzone, by Baldi, by Bumaldo, and by Masini. To be sure, that *someone* who lived one hundred and forty years ago, and was, as a consequence, so much closer to Dalmasio's times, could have written all this down more easily and at greater length, if he had fished up those bits of information, fresher and more available, that he was indeed able to dig up about Lippo Fiorentino, a contemporary of the Bolognese Lippo, and at the end of whose life he slipped in a few things about ours."<sup>22</sup> The offending paragraph from Vasari on Lippo di Dalmasio was then inserted.

<sup>20</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:57. Malvasia refers to traditional accounts that Marcantonio was a painter and that he was murdered by the original commissioner of the engraving of the *Massacre of the Innocents*.

<sup>21</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:39.

<sup>22</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:34. Although Malvasia was unaware of this, the life of "Lippo Fiorentino" provides an excellent example of Vasari's own muddling up of little-known artists from the Trecento. Commentators have pointed out that at least ten artists were recorded in Florence with the name Lippo in the fourteenth century, and that if this particular Lippo was indeed born in 1354, as Vasari claims, he could not, as Vasari also claims, have been a pupil of Giotto, who died in 1356. Several artists would appear to



Malvasia recognized, in other words, that Vasari, working a century before he set out to write the *Felsina pittrice*, was closer to the oral and written sources, and that his information was therefore valuable; but in all too many cases, he had neglected the opportunity to collect as much as he could. Similarly, writing about the work of Bolognese artists in the fresco decoration of Santa Maria di Mezzaratta, the most ambitious project of the Bolognese Trecento, Malvasia laments that Vasari wrote about these works only in a brief paragraph in the life of Niccolò Aretino, "bundling them all together, and bunching them up with the life of a sculptor whom they never had anything to do with; making them serve as a coda, and as an ending to the quite long, by contrast, and accurate narrative of his compatriot."<sup>23</sup> In a typical burst of frustration, Malvasia demands: "Could they then not have been compared to those Margaritones, Buffalmaccos, Lorenzettis, Starninas, and others, in describing the life and works of each one of whom he filled whole pages?" To give force to this observation about Vasari's dismal neglect of the Mezzaratta frescoes, Malvasia records that not only did even Primaticcio and Tibaldi (significantly, two of the modern Bolognese artists Vasari did consider worthy of attention) not disdain to study them, but that even more recently the "studious Carracci" used to call these works "erudite clumsinesses, as ready to destroy good taste, as they are ready to awaken the intellect."<sup>24</sup>

This line of criticism can indeed be seen as a Bolognese response to Vasari, but it is not simple local prejudice. We have seen that in part Malvasia's complaint was about a general loss of historical evidence that would have been more readily available, and so more perfectly preserved, if anyone had paid attention at the time, a point to which I will return. Malvasia's deeper disagreement with Vasari has less to do with the latter's neglect of Bolognese art and artists than with his approach to the interpretation of the history of Italian painting in general. This he rejected totally. On this fundamental question he is far more unyielding, calling Vasari a liar, and even comparing him

have been rolled into one identity: Vasari, *Le Vite*, ed. Bettarini and Barocchi, 2:297–300; and *Commento*: 707–712.

<sup>23</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:29.

<sup>24</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:29. Malvasia's lives of Primaticcio and Tibaldi incorporate texts from Vasari but contain no mention of the study by these artists of local Trecento art.

with Nanni of Viterbo, the "crafty friar" whose fallacies were revealed with benefit of time: "the great father of truth and severe inquisitor of lies."<sup>25</sup>

What exercised Malvasia's wrath was Vasari's claim that there was a rebirth, a *rinascita* or *rinascimento*, of painting in Florence at the time of Cimabue. In his famous opening phrase of the life of Cimabue, cited by Malvasia, Vasari writes:

Erano per l'infinito diluvio de' mali che avevano cacciato al disotto e affogata la misera Italia non solamente rovinata quelle che veramente fabbriche chiamar si potevano, ma — quello che importava più — spento affatto tutto il numero degl'artefici, quando, come Dio volle, nacque nella città di Fiorenza l'anno MCCXL, per dar e' primi lumi all'arte della pittura, Giovanni cognominato Cimabue, della nobil famiglia in que' tempi di Cimabui.<sup>26</sup>

(The tremendous deluge of disasters that had submerged and drowned unfortunate Italy had not only ruined such edifices as truly deserved this name, but also, and most important, expunged all the artists when, by the grace of God, there was born in 1240, in the city of Florence, destined to give the first lights ["i primi lumi"] to the art of painting, Giovanni Cimabue, from the Cimabue family, noble in those times.)

Vasari reinforced this account in the following paragraph by stating that the birth of Cimabue was most fortunately timed: "essendo chiamati in Firenze da chi allora governava la città alcuni pittori di Grecia, non per altro che per rimettere in Firenze la pittura più tosto perduta che smarrita ("for the government of Florence had summoned some Greek painters for no other purpose than to restore painting in the city, something that had disappeared,

<sup>25</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:22. On the forgeries of Giovanni Nanni, also known as Annius of Viterbo, see Curran, "Alexander VI, Pinturicchio, and Annius of Viterbo"; Rowland, *The Culture of the High Renaissance*, 53–57; and Grafton, *Defenders of the Text*, 76–103.

<sup>26</sup> Vasari, *Le Vite*, 1647, 1:1; cited from *Le Vite*, ed. Bettarini and Barocchi, 2: 35.

rather than being lost").<sup>27</sup> This was even stronger than the original statement in the edition of 1550, in which Vasari had written that the Greeks had been summoned to Florence because painting in Tuscany had been lost for a long time: "non per l'altro che per introdurvi l'arte della pittura, la quale in Toscana era stata smarrita molto tempo." This is what so outraged Malvasia, and on this issue, nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship joined his outcry, for just as there is no evidence for the call to the Greeks from Florence, there is ample support for Malvasia's insistence that painting in Florence and elsewhere had never stopped, far less disappeared completely. It was on precisely this issue that Malvasia's first critic, the Florentine Filippo Baldinucci, felt that he had to defend Vasari, writing that he never intended to claim that painting and painters had completely disappeared.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, even Erwin Panofsky, commenting on this "admittedly questionable" passage in 1960, wrote that Vasari was "not far from right in principle" in these matters.<sup>29</sup> His voice may stand for modern art history's general support for Vasari and the concomitant dismissal of critiques by Malvasia and others.

<sup>27</sup> Vasari, *Le Vite*, 1647, 1:1; cited from *Le Vite*, ed. Bettarini and Barocchi, 2: 36. Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, 1:22, quotes Vasari as follows: "per l'infinito diluvio de' mali, che avevano cacciato al disotto, ed affogata la misera Italia, la piuttosto perduta, che smarrita pittura rinascesse prima in Firenze, che altrove, ecc." By replacing Vasari's "rimettere" with "rinascesse" and adding "che altrove," he enhanced his hostile reading.

<sup>28</sup> Baldinucci's response to Malvasia in his *Apologia*, published in 1681, is an important early example of literary and historical criticism brought to bear against Malvasia, and with special reference to Dante. Tovey's "Baldinucci's *Apologia*" provides a useful summary of Baldinucci's position, though it is compromised by an unsympathetic reading of Malvasia. The Bolognese writer did not, for example, intend to "stand Vasari's *Le Vite* on its head and insist that Bologna, not Tuscany, was the true fount of artistic truth and beauty" (551) any more than he claimed in the preface to the *Pitture di Bologna*, as Tovey states, that "the revival of painting first took place in Bologna, no less than elsewhere" (558), itself a contradictory view.

<sup>29</sup> Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences*, 114–116. Panofsky was fully aware of Vasari's practice of fitting the facts to suit his case — especially in attempting to link painting, sculpture, and architecture (including the claim that Cimabue instructed Arnolfo in design, the redating of the Florence Cathedral, and the merging of Niccolò and Giovanni Pisano) — but respected his emphasis on innovation. Panofsky's defense was that modern art history was "thoroughly — perhaps too thoroughly — committed to the dogma of evolution." The critique of this aspect of Panofsky's thought is at the heart of Charles Dempsey's Berenson Lectures, delivered at Villa I Tatti in 2008, published by Harvard University Press (2012).

Malvasia's response to Vasari's claim that there was an *absolute* beginning to the revival of painting in Florence after its complete loss — a *rinascimento*, rebirth, or renaissance — is most fully expressed in the first part of the *Felsina* and its preface. Here he argues that painting recovered as quickly in Bologna after the expulsion of the barbarians as anywhere else. He lists works made in Bologna when painting picked up again in the twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries, works by the so-called p.f., by Guido, by Ventura, and by Ursone — works for which he had documentary evidence, but none of which survived. Not wishing to appear to boast that Bologna was especially privileged in this sense, he also lists the remains of works from the ninth through the twelfth centuries in Rome, including many mosaics (for which list he relied heavily on the unpublished text of Giulio Mancini), not to mention others (also in mosaic) in Ravenna, all of which could serve as models for painting. Suppressing Vasari's name, Malvasia laments, however, that "only those were recorded [i.e., by Vasari] that were painted after 1300, because the others, made before the beginnings of painting by Cimabue after 1260 were not believed in."<sup>30</sup> And he calls to his defense the testimony of other writers who had already criticized Vasari on this account. Giulio Mancini, he reports, had concluded that Vasari did not know enough about painting in Rome and had objected that painting was not reborn in Florence, with Cimabue serving as its father, for "there were paintings in Constantinople, and much better masters than Cimabue, even in Siena and in Rome."<sup>31</sup> Carlo Ridolfi had insisted that in modern times painting (again in mosaic) had been renewed (*rinovasse*) in Venice before it had been introduced in Florence; and, finally, he cites the French seventeenth-century critic André Félibien to the effect that at the time of Cimabue, painting was being practiced successfully over the Alps.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:23.

<sup>31</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:23, gives a slightly different version of Mancini's text from that published by Salerno in Mancini, *Considerazioni*, 1:29. The meaning remains the same, however: Cimabue did not lead the rebirth of painting.

<sup>32</sup> For Malvasia's reference to Carlo Ridolfi, see *Le maraviglie dell'arte*, 1:13. His quotation from André Félibien is from *Entretiens sur le vies et sur les ouvrages des plus excellents peintres anciens et modernes*, Entretien IV, first published in 1672. The *Entretiens* were originally published in five volumes, appearing between 1666 and 1688, with the first complete edition published only after the *Felsina pittrice* in 1685–1688. For convenience, the reference here is to the Trevoux edition of 1725, 2: 298–299.

Vasari's insistence that painting had not simply been lost, as in the sense of temporarily misplaced, but lost beyond recovery was conveyed by his deliberate opposition in the 1568 edition of the words "perduta" and "smarrita" in the opening lines of the life of Cimabue. The distinction was a highly charged one in sixteenth-century Florence, where the careful reading of and commentary on Dante's vernacular works flourished among artists and writers, from Michelangelo and Bronzino to Benedetto Varchi and other members of the Accademia Fiorentina. In the opening canto of *Inferno*, Dante finds himself in a dark wood, the true way being lost ("la diritta via era smarrita"): the remainder of the *Comedia* is about the poet's recovery of that true path. Had he been truly lost in perdition, this could not have happened. The line of demarcation between a loss that can be recovered and an utter loss that cannot is hard to plumb, though it clearly engages the possibilities of hope and faith. When Beatrice first appears in the *Comedia*, she tells Virgil that she hopes Dante is not yet so lost ("sì smarrito") that she cannot help him; his return to the true path then begins upon seeing those who, unlike him, were indeed truly lost ("la perduta gente").<sup>33</sup>

By so deliberately insisting upon utter loss, as opposed to temporary misplacement, Vasari both alluded to Dante's story and distanced his history from it. His account of the advance of the arts of *disegno* was not about finding the true way forward through a process of spiritual or existential recovery of what had been lost. It relied instead upon a classical theory of rebirth following a complete rupture, with the new beginning provided quite suddenly by nothing other than the divinely ordained, fortunate, and salvific appearance of Cimabue. Not only was this painter/savior sent by God at a moment when artists as a group had been extinguished, but his inspiration came not from a living or even arrested local tradition, but rather from those Greeks (by which he meant artists from Byzantium) who had been summoned to Florence. Their modern Greek manner was not perfect (indeed Vasari saw it as clumsy, or "goffo"), and Cimabue quickly overcame this. By the end of his life, furthermore, a second, greater light had appeared in the form of Giotto. Aided by nature and taught by Cimabue, Giotto overturned the clumsy *maniera greca* and revived a modern art of painting based on the natural depiction of living figures that had not been seen for more than two centuries.

<sup>33</sup> *Inferno* II, 64. In *Purgatorio* XXX, 138, Beatrice explains that Dante had fallen so low that she had to show him "le perdute genti," that is to say, those in hell.

The impulse from outside Florence, and even outside Italy, is crucial to Vasari's *rinascimento* in the arts of *disegno* in general and not just in painting, for it consolidated the principle of rupture with surviving tradition. According to Vasari, Nicola Pisano, for example, first worked under some Greek sculptors in the Duomo in Pisa, before tossing out that "old clumsy, ill-proportioned Greek manner"; the mosaicist Andrea Tafi went to Venice to learn from "some Greek painters" working in San Marco and brought back to Florence "master Apollonio, a Greek painter"; Gaddo Gaddi studied the *maniera greca* with that of Cimabue in making his own style. Although ancient remains lay spread before them after the destruction of Rome by the barbarians, modern artists simply had not been able to learn from either antiquity or nature until the providential arrival of Cimabue and his Greek masters as instruments of change.<sup>34</sup> Giotto's great light then put all of these predecessors in the shade by abandoning all traces of the Byzantine manner.

Malvasia's furious rejection of all this was not just in the service of local history. It followed from a very different understanding of the shape of history itself. In the first instance, Malvasia challenged Vasari's veracity: Cimabue quite simply did not bring about a rebirth of painting, for painting had never died, and there were records of painting in Bologna from at least 1115 to the present.<sup>35</sup> Admittedly, he writes, this painting was weak and rough until around 1200, but from then on it gained in drawing, color, invention, and expression, until it was reduced into an art. Malvasia insists that he does not wish to exalt these very early artists, finding their work "stupid and mistaken," merely following the simple instincts of nature: the significant point was that painting had gone on throughout the centuries without interruption. Malvasia then traces the contributions of the following generations in Bologna. The illuminator Franco Bolognese (by whom no works are certain) was celebrated by Dante himself as having surpassed Oderigo da Gubbio. Franco's pupils, according to Malvasia, were as famous throughout Romagna and Lombardy as were the pupils of Giotto in Tuscany, or those of Cavallini in Rome, or of Guariento in Venice.

Without embracing Vasari's point of view, we might at least, for example, want to consider the importance for these artists of the presence in Bologna of Giotto's polyptych of c. 1330 in Santa Maria degli Angeli. But the

<sup>34</sup> Vasari, *Le Vite*, ed. Bettarini and Barocchi, 2:60, 73, 81–82. On the inability of artists to learn from visible ancient remains before the time of Cimabue, 2:28–29.

<sup>35</sup> For what follows, see Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:25–26.



tracing of such artistic connections was not Malvasia's concern.<sup>36</sup> Not only did he not wish to trace the power of Florentine art and its style to travel and influence others, but he was not at all interested in emphasizing its innovations. Of the artists of Vitale da Bologna's and Simone dei Crocefissi's generation, he wrote that they painted "more from necessity than from ambition; for truth not for adulation, for the sincere taste of that pure and blessed century, not for the ingenious and sometimes perhaps too affected one of ours."<sup>37</sup> Rather than excellence and mastery — and here Malvasia takes a clear shot at Vasari's history of artistic progress, in which one virtuoso skill, such as foreshortening, perspective, or sfumato, followed upon another — these artists placed religion before advantage, and breathed veneration and modesty. Lippo di Dalmasio (documented 1377–1410), Vitale's student, was the model for this, and, writes Malvasia "no one could be considered a gentle and polite man who had not come to own a Madonna by Dalmasio."<sup>38</sup> Lippo, too, had strong Tuscan connections, but what mattered for Malvasia was his piety, his unique ability to express purity and gravity, and, finally, Vasari's failure to give him more than a mention. From Vasari's few lines on the painter, Malvasia extracted two important facts, nonetheless: that he was a master with a school, and that he worked in oil. To this we will return.

Lippo's pupils, according to Malvasia, fell into two camps: first, those like Michele di Matteo (1410–1469), who carried on his master's style, and like Marco Zoppo (1433–1478), who went even beyond his master in grasping the value of inventions from prints and from ancient reliefs and statues then being dug up; and, second, those like Pietro de' Lianori (documented 1428–1460), whose works he believed revealed a return to bad principles.<sup>39</sup> The recent catalogue of the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna also notes this quality, considering Lianori's work archaizing, and "neo-gothic," and suggesting an explanation based on local patronage and economic conditions.<sup>40</sup> Malvasia traces a more direct cause: at that time, he writes, "there began to pass from Constantinople into every city certain Madonnas, made there on panel

<sup>36</sup> For the signed Giotto panel in question, see Bellosi in *Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna*, 64–68.

<sup>37</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:33. On the devout style, see Dempsey, "The Carracci and the Devout Style." See further Previtali, *La fortuna dei primitivi*, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:33.

<sup>39</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:36–37.

<sup>40</sup> D'Amico in *Pinacoteca nazionale*, 19–200.

which, because foreign, were accepted with great esteem and held in highest veneration." These Madonnas were in the "gothic" style, "alla Greca, so to speak, surrounded by all those black contours."<sup>41</sup> Devotion for them grew, as did the market, and Malvasia claims that they were sold by the hundred, so that even poor people could buy them for pennies, and through the demand for these Madonnas, some painters were ruined.

Malvasia's account is again a response to Vasari. Whereas the latter claimed that it was the imported Greek painters who launched Cimabue's new style, Malvasia insists that another influx of these Greek works set painting backward. That he was thinking very hard about Vasari in this context is made clear by his comparison of Pietro de' Lianori, who, he reports, left his black outlines uncovered and did not make eyes round, with Ugolino da Siena, who, according to "the learned Vasari," always kept his *maniera greca*, following Cimabue in this rather than Giotto. The word Vasari used of Ugolino in 1568 was *caparbità*, or obstinacy, and this is the unique occurrence of the word in the *Lives* in relation to an individual artist's work.<sup>42</sup> In adopting it, with an attribution to Vasari, in his discussion of Pietro de' Lianori, Malvasia signals his careful reading: not only did Pietro de' Lianori represent a retrograde step, but the possibility of such a stylistic step backward had already been realized, and in Tuscany no less.

Despite his observation about Lianori's failure to follow his teacher, Malvasia typically provides a list of his known works and their locations. His last example, the altarpiece from the Monterenzi chapel in San Francesco, was lamentable: "Today as I write this," says Malvasia, "I have found it together with others by the same painter piled up like rubbish at the top of the highest stairs, and in the vaults of the church and the convent of San Francesco, and God knows where they will end up."<sup>43</sup>

Such frustrated comments are frequent in Malvasia's account of the frescoes in Santa Maria di Mezzaratta. He insists that he is listing works only briefly, "touching only on those which are easiest to see, and which are more familiar, preserved on the walls that have not been destroyed, or remade"; he inventories those "panels not yet condemned to the country, or hidden in granaries to become the booty of dust and woodworm, like so many, many

<sup>41</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:36.

<sup>42</sup> Vasari, *Le Vite*, ed. Bettarini and Barocchi, 2:139.

<sup>43</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:37–38.

others.<sup>44</sup> Barely a few of Lippo's works could be recorded, saved from disaster, from luxury, and from the caprice of men, writes Malvasia.<sup>45</sup> Concerning works from the very earliest generation, Malvasia often lists paintings that have not survived because of construction (or, more accurately, destruction), and where they do survive he generally explains how they arrived at their current location. For example, his insistence that there was painting in Bologna in 1115 is based on a lost work recorded by Baldi in the old church of San Salvatore before it was razed.<sup>46</sup> A Madonna by Lippo di Dalmasio on the wall of the most ancient church of Sant' Agata had been damaged in the modern building campaign, to everyone's disgust, but the head of the Madonna was saved and taken care of by a devout man with due veneration.<sup>47</sup> Sometimes works were damaged as they were moved, sometimes they were covered up in a single daub by whitewashers, and sometimes they were simply shipped off to the country. All of these circumstances mattered to Malvasia as he not only inventoried the works of the Bolognese school, but as he also traced the continuing tradition of their creation and use by artists and public alike. His dislike of discard and loss was as strong as his rejection of the rupture and innovation championed by Vasari.

The handing on of tradition and the constant adaptation of old things to new use are crucial to Malvasia's thinking. These principles underlie his approach to the history of early Christian and ancient architecture, helping to explain, for example, his insistence on the tradition that Santo Stefano in Bologna was built over a temple of Isis and that the barbarians had preserved many Christian temples in Rome.<sup>48</sup> In the first part of the *Felsina pittrice*, which is my focus here, Malvasia's embrace of tradition and adaptation, as opposed to rupture and novelty, finds its most vivid expression in his vehement opposition to Vasari's claims about the primacy of Antonello da Messina in the introduction of oil painting into Italy, claims that epitomize Vasari's equally vehement enthusiasm for the new.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the Florentine was as

<sup>44</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:30.

<sup>45</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:35.

<sup>46</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:21. Baldi's manuscript has not been traced, but there is no reason to believe that it did not exist.

<sup>47</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:36.

<sup>48</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:18–19.

<sup>49</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:34–35.

insistent on the subject of Antonello and his introduction of oil painting as he was about Cimabue's reinvention of painting on the basis of Greek examples.

Vasari's brief life of Antonello begins by recalling Cimabue's initiation of painting on panel and canvas in tempera in 1250, once again attributing this to his contact with "que' Greci."<sup>50</sup> Cimabue's new art, he writes, which was then developed by Giotto, provided the model for centuries, even though subsequent painters were aware that their work lacked a certain gracefulness in blending colors together. In Vasari's view, the medium of oil first invented by Jan van Eyck of Bruges constituted something of a state secret, and in defining oil painting he describes how van Eyck sent examples of his work to various Italian courts. If the first light of painting had come from those Greeks working in Florence, the new light of oil painting in Italy also then came from outside, invented, in Vasari's formulation, through the sort of observational scientific process that we would now identify more closely with the interests of the Medici court in sixteenth-century Florence, rather than fifteenth-century Bruges. The fame of Jan van Eyck's invention (for it was nothing less, according to Vasari) spread, and his paintings were sought out everywhere. So impressed was Antonello da Messina by the work he saw in Naples that he went to Bruges to study with Van Eyck, after whose death he returned to Italy to share this "useful, beautiful, and convenient secret," settling in Venice, where the "novità" of his technique was especially appreciated. For Vasari, the utter novelty of this invention was such that it had likely never been understood by the ancients, and despite his caveat that "just as one never says something that has not been said before, so perhaps one never does anything that has not been done before," the moderns clearly have Vasari's sympathy here, as in other instances in the *Lives*.<sup>51</sup>

Hardly anything in Vasari's story about Antonello is true, though much of it had been invented by others before him. And everything about it runs counter to Malvasia's historical practice and position. He begins his dismissal of the account through a critical reading of Vasari's brief life of Lippo di Dalmasio, claiming, as mentioned above, that Vasari tacitly confessed that Dalmasio painted in oil long before Antonello, when he specified that certain

<sup>50</sup> Vasari, *Le Vite*, ed. Bettarini and Barocchi, 3:301–310. See also Vasari's more general discussion of the technique in *Le Vite*, 1:132–133. On this topic, see Galassi, "Aspects of Antonello da Messina's Technique," and Dunkerton, "North and South."

<sup>51</sup> Vasari, *Le Vite*, ed. Bettarini and Barocchi, 3:310.

of his outdoor works were in fresco: this implied that the others were in oil.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, Malvasia even challenges Vasari's accuracy in identifying different techniques, saying that the work mentioned by Vasari as a "fresco" by Lippo di Dalmasio above the door of San Procolo was in fact done in oil. He had both eyewitness and expert proof of this, for he and the painter Alessandro Tiarini had climbed up a ladder to check after questions had been raised: "It is in oil, this arch, and in oil is that other Virgin Mary below the portico of the Signori Bolognini in strada Stefano: that private one belonging to Signori Guidalotti, and other similar ones by the said Dalmasio, both public and private."<sup>53</sup> Malvasia then proceeds to attack Vasari on the chronological facts, proving the impossibility of Vasari's account in ways that are still valid.

Criticism of Vasari's story about Van Eyck and Antonello has been intense over the centuries, for this is indeed one of the most error-ridden claims for originality in the *Lives*. In 1821, Giuseppe Tambroni, the first editor of Cennino Cennini's handbook, in which the oil technique was described a century before Vasari, considered the latter's account a "romanzo."<sup>54</sup> Gaetano Milanesi, in his 1906 edition of the *Lives*, found himself having to defend Vasari against claims that the story was "one of the dreams of a feeble imagination."<sup>55</sup> He made a plea for steady progress in correcting Vasari's errors, like those of other historians, by moving from the known to the unknown in what he considered a "pious duty."<sup>56</sup> This is precisely the sort of steady correction based on moving from the known to the unknown that Malvasia's text has generally not been afforded. It is a historical irony that in this example he was among the very first to correct Vasari's error systematically.

The forensic approach Malvasia demonstrated here was based on his training and experience as both a lawyer and as a theologian. He established a careful historical chronology (even if approximate), deconstructed a text (in this case Vasari) to discover silent meaning, verified the facts of the case for himself (by climbing a ladder with an expert witness), and, of course, imputed motive.<sup>57</sup> But there was something more at stake for him, something

<sup>52</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:34.

<sup>53</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:35.

<sup>54</sup> In the words of Milanesi, "Commentario alla Vita," 575.

<sup>55</sup> Milanesi, "Commentario alla Vita," 587.

<sup>56</sup> Milanesi, "Commentario alla Vita," 587.

<sup>57</sup> On Malvasia's "lawyerly mode" of reasoning, see Summerscale, *Malvasia's Life of the Carracci*, 18, 46–47, 70–71; see further Perini, "Malvasia's Florentine Letters," and "Bio-

that Milanesi's request for patient corrective work did not address, and this was a view of time, of culture, and of history as shaped not by rupture or progress, but by tradition.

Tradition can mean many things to different groups, whether religious observants, cultural anthropologists, political theorists, or art historians, but the fundamental contrast with history, or even historical biography (Vasari's *métier*), helps to define its meaning in our context. In the last century, the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs defined memory as socially constructed, with history starting when social memory and continuous tradition stop functioning: history is for the few, collective memory for the larger community.<sup>58</sup> Inspired by Halbwachs and by Ernst Renan, Pierre Nora, in his magisterial *Lieux de mémoire* (1981), examined the memories of "living societies" in relation to the historical reconstruction of what is past, differentiating the *milieux* of living memory from the *lieux* of history that come into being when memory fails.<sup>59</sup> Notwithstanding much subsequent debate over relationships among memory (both cultural and collective), tradition, and history, this modern working distinction between tradition and history helps us to refine understanding of Malvasia's ultimate rejection of Vasari's view of history. Once alerted to it, we can identify such a distinction between tradition, or collective memory, and history at work in Malvasia's own words and thought.

At the very beginning of the *Felsina*, Malvasia insists that everything he writes will be based on the most secure and true foundations: either he will have witnessed something himself, or it will be reported by the person involved "or by his family or servant."<sup>60</sup> For the past, he relies on faithful reports and "unimpeachable memoirs" by those who were present and promises that all forms of conjecture will be based on the probable. He refers to his own work, therefore, not as history, but as "memoirs," and his point is that he is concerned with the sort of living tradition that, as would be restated in the

graphical Anecdotes," for discussion of Malvasia's method.

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Halbwachs, *La Mémoire Collective*.

<sup>59</sup> See Nora's succinct summary in "Between Memory and History." For a useful analysis of Nora's *Lieux de mémoire* (which he began to publish in 1981), see Ho Tai, "Remembered Realms."

<sup>60</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1: n.p. Perini deals with this question at some length in "Malvasia's Florentine Letters," though with a different emphasis; see esp. 284–296.

modern theories cited above, precedes history.<sup>61</sup> He is addressing a broader cultural condition, which, of course, was in his view superior to the sort of progressive perspective on the past provided by Vasari. In another often-noted statement, again in the first part of the *Felsina*, Malvasia insists that he prefers to trust reports recollected and passed on by many people "than I will a single one [and Vasari's name is implicit here] who, after the memory of events had ceased, took to writing them down entirely according to his own will and wishes. And what more than this oral history," he concludes with sarcasm, "to which we would not wish to adapt, does that written history have, in which we are supposed to believe so firmly, when nonetheless every day we see it being falsified in a Herodotus, in a Thucydides, and similar untrustworthy authors?"<sup>62</sup>

In Malvasia's view, the writer's duty was to preserve the knowledge of memory, to record living tradition, and it is on this account, for example, that he praises Antonio Bosio's descriptions and records of early Christian paintings and mosaics in Rome, published in his *Roma sotterranea*.<sup>63</sup> And this is surely why he found Giulio Mancini's careful inventorying of the remains of ancient and early Christian art in Rome to be so honourable. Vasari, by contrast, had failed to record many works he had actually seen because of his prejudice in favor of the advances made by Cimabue and Giotto, and the claim that they arrived providentially after a total rupture.

Malvasia had no illusions about the slight artistic merit of many of the artists he was recalling from the earliest days and whose works he also sought to preserve for posterity. His clear purpose was to commemorate the Bolognese tradition. That meant, in other words, the Bolognese school through which tradition was handed on — something for which Vasari's partisan, progressive, triumphal history of Florentine innovation did not allow. Malvasia himself proclaims that "When the world knows what a school there was, and that it is that of my fellow citizens ... then I will have obtained with my intent all that merit that could have been hoped for and claimed

<sup>61</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1: n.p. writes of his "Pittoriche Memorie."

<sup>62</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1:18.

<sup>63</sup> His references to Antonio Bosio (1576–1629) are frequent. Bosio's *Roma Sotterranea*, devoted to a description of the cemeteries, shrines, and catacombs he explored, was first published posthumously in Rome in 1632. Malvasia consulted the later Italian edition, Antonio Bosio, *Roma sotterranea* (Rome: Ludovico Grignani, 1650).

by my diligence and effort."<sup>64</sup> And he gives as testimony to this his decision not to encumber his text with learned notes and citations to the authors he quotes. The very texts he cites, whether published or unpublished, became part of tradition this way through their incorporation and appropriation in the *Felsina pittrice*.

Modern definitions of the respective qualities of history and memory or tradition may help us to understand the character of Malvasia's view of the past, but once the importance of this distinction is acknowledged, we also recognize that the debate over history and tradition is an old one and directly relevant to Malvasia's own position as a writer in the century of Catholic reform. He himself points this out to his reader. In signaling the many relics in Santo Stefano in Bologna that render it, in his words, the equal of the Sancta Sanctorum in Rome, or another Solomon's Temple, Malvasia anticipates skepticism on the part of those who believe (again a stab at Vasari) that everything old was destroyed by the barbarians.<sup>65</sup> His defense is that knowledge of such things has been ancient custom, and that even the law trusted in custom, *in antiquis*, when other proof was lacking. And here he cites the Early Christian apologist Chrysostom: "Traditio est? ne quaeras amplius," or "it is tradition; do not seek further," adding "why should I doubt what our ancestors have passed on to us from age to age. And why would I want to disagree," he concludes, "with *Ecclesiasticus*, when it is written: 'Let not the discourse of the ancients escape thee, for they have learned of their fathers; for of them thou shalt learn understanding, and to give an answer in time of need.'"<sup>66</sup> In other words, for Malvasia, doctor of canon and civil law, the notion of tradition was an ancient one that invoked both legal and ecclesiastical authority. *Traditio*, or *paradosis*, in Chrysostom's own Latin and Greek sources, had to

<sup>64</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1: n.

<sup>65</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1: 18.

<sup>66</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies*, 1988, 390 (Homily IV on 2 Thessalonians, ii, 15): "Per spicuum est quod non omnia Apostoli per Epistolas tradiderunt, sed multa etiam sine scriptis; atque vero haec et illa sunt fide digna; ergo et Traditionem Ecclesiae censeamus fide dignam: Traditio est, nihil ultra quaeras." (Hence it is manifest, that the Apostles did not deliver all things by Epistle, but many things also unwritten, and in like manner both the one and the other are worthy of credit. Therefore let us think the tradition of the Church of credit. It is a tradition, seek no further.) See also *Liber Ecclesiastici*, 8, 11, where the Latin text actually reads "Non te praetereat." Malvasia adapted this to apply to his own case. On the scrap of paper numbered "49" of the Schede Autografe (ms. B 1729), Malvasia wrote: "Ha da dire Ecclesiastico."

do with the handing on of knowledge. For Plato, education was such a handing on of tradition, and Cicero in *De Legibus* argues for the special truth of traditional fictions that preserve a deeper truth though time and space: *sic enim est traditum* is his motto.<sup>67</sup> Cicero even justifies the handing on of ideas from one author to the next by the idea of *tradition*, or the legal passing on of intellectual property, insisting furthermore upon the common ownership of the academy that cannot be taken over by any one individual.<sup>68</sup>

Chrysostom's adoption of the principle of tradition from the law to the notions of the *traditio apostolorum* or *traditio Christiana* continues to be cited in Catholic debate on the relationship between tradition and scripture, and it was imperative to Malvasia and his contemporaries three centuries ago in the face of Protestant reform.<sup>69</sup> *Traditio est: nihil ultra queras* was Chrysostom's response to the fact that not all Christian history or doctrine had been recorded by the apostles in their epistles. Many things were passed on without being written down, and yet these things were worthy of faith, as was also the tradition of the church. Scripture, the written document, is only part of the story: what is known instead by tradition and by faith has its own value.

All of these aspects of tradition mattered to Malvasia. Where he could find written documentation on works of art and on artists, he would use this. Where it did not exist, and sometimes even where it did, he also valued the knowledge gained from workshop gossip, from family descendants, and from writers who were closer in time. The tradition of Bolognese painting, like that of Cicero's academy, belonged to everyone, and it relied on the handing on of knowledge from generation to generation. Such respect for tradition is conspicuous in Malvasia's determination to preserve works from the past, even where they were of little note. Through tradition, such old images belonged to a living present and should not be consigned to the junk heap of history simply because no longer up-to-date, victims of the demand for novelties in the marketplace.

Not all acts of destruction in Malvasia's day were the work of those German students whose tombs and monuments he criticized for damaging the older works they concealed, and the defense of tradition was a constant battle against change, especially where wall paintings were concerned.<sup>70</sup> De-

<sup>67</sup> *De legibus*, 1.3.

<sup>68</sup> See the interesting discussion in Eden, *Friends Hold All Things in Common*.

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity, and History in Tridentine Italy*.

<sup>70</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, 1: 27.

votion to the handing on of tradition drove Malvasia to protect as much of the Bolognese heritage as he could and to celebrate the tradition of its school, so gloriously reinvigorated in the more recent past by the Carracci. In the process, he had to resist the cult of innovation that characterized the Medici court in Florence in both science and in art in the Cinquecento and which Vasari's text had celebrated a century before. Malvasia's motive was not then *campanilismo* so much as *pietas*: he sought to record collective memory in Bologna rather than the history of a modern idea of stylistic innovation.<sup>71</sup> The author of the *Felsina Pittrice* saw no need for a Renaissance, and Bologna, as Roberto Longhi lamented, would pay a price for this in modern times. Yet painting in Florence and Rome had run out of new ideas by the end of the sixteenth century, and it was, as the Carracci and Malvasia understood, from out of the traditions of Bologna and its academy that painting found ways to sustain itself, until another foreign coup de foudre from outside the academy or the rupture brought about by the brilliant new technique of Impressionism, would once again consign tradition to history.

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<sup>71</sup> On the vitality of this tension between *novità* and tradition in the seventeenth century, Cropper, *The Domenichino Affair*. Perini, "Biographical Anecdotes," 152–54, shows how Malvasia uses an anecdote about Guido Reni, Caravaggio, and Annibale Carracci to emphasize the values of competition and Annibale's classicism over those of novelty.



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