

Prologue

AN ESTABLISHED, WORLDLY ARTIST with a virtuosic command of numerous visual idioms repeatedly pummels, over a period of days, a model he has slept with. Another male artist with a notorious temper and a capacious imagination unleashes his pent-up fury by snubbing a man of repute who has access to enormous riches and deeply entrenched institutional support, and who has commissioned him to complete a work of art of tremendous size and inventive scope, the likes of which no one has ever envisioned before. A renowned writer presumably engages one of his many followers to attack, if not kill, a protégé who has irked him in countless ways. Yet another writer of the same pugilistic and narcissistic stripe makes every effort to humiliate a rival in print as he seeks to claw his way to recognition and, he hopes, fame—his vengeful, competitive nature knowing no bounds.

Surely all these instances can be construed as cases of glaring professional impropriety. And arguably that is what makes them in part so fascinating. We expect professional artists and writers to behave one way, ideally with polite restraint and a polished demeanor; but we are sometimes taken with them when they behave in another manner, outlandishly. Witness the plethora of tabloids, our contemporary hunger for sensationalism, our cult of naughty (if not criminal) celebrities. Bad behavior, in the end, is often more fun to read about than good manners. Consider Norman Mailer's lurid stabbing of his second wife, Adele Morales, with a penknife back in 1960, at the outset of a decade full of larger-than-life, eccentric, countercultural characters.

Yet interestingly enough the instances cited here are drawn not from the present or recent past but from a far more distant one—a past that is often lost to us today and that requires some effort of the imagination if we are to retrieve and appreciate it fully. They come from sixteenth-century Italy, more specifically from the lives of Benvenuto Cellini, Michelangelo Buonarroti, Pietro Aretino, and Anton Francesco Doni—from the likes of the men who furnished us with some of the masterpieces of Western culture, such as the

vault of the Sistine Chapel and the *Perscus* in the Loggia dei Lanzi in Florence, at the dawn of the early modern era.

Historically this is significant, for if the sixteenth century in Italy constitutes a period when professional propriety was being codified in an intense, accelerated, and often sophisticated manner in a number of widely printed and influential treatises written primarily by humanists to meet the demands of a society increasingly dominated by court culture, it also constitutes a period when male writers and visual artists seeking some measure of recognition from the cultural elite positioned themselves, or were positioned by others, as occasionally lacking professional propriety on the grand scale. More specifically, the Italian sixteenth century seems to be a period when people took a broad interest in the professional propriety *and* impropriety of its writers and visual artists. And some writers and visual artists seemed intent both to explore issues of decorum and to violate it in complex ways in their art and writings as a means of expressing selfhood in general and their own selfhood in particular. In concentrating on matters related to professional impropriety, this book explores modes of representation as reflecting primarily “attitudes” and “states of mind” about selfhood, not so much demonstrable “facts” about what people actually did or did not do. If this book maintains, for instance, that there was a rise in the representation of writers and visual artists lacking professional propriety in sixteenth-century Italy, it does not, for a host of reasons, seek to document (in the sense of reliably and systematically quantify) the rise of writers and visual artists *themselves* lacking professional propriety during the period.

Moreover, although this book claims that the sixteenth century in Italy provides us with more intense, widespread, and grandiose instances of writers and visual artists being represented or representing themselves as lacking professional propriety than in the earlier Renaissance, it does not claim that there existed a generational shift in representations of such violations of socially accepted norms of comportment. In this respect, this book, as it unfolds for the most part chronologically, addresses a period change in modes of representing selfhood in the context of notions about proper and improper conduct, but not incremental changes within the period itself. More locally, and personally, this book brings together two longstanding interests of mine, namely, professionalism and propriety, which I explored in *Doctors, Ambassadors, Secretaries: Humanism and Professions in Renaissance Italy* and *The Culture of Cleanliness in Renaissance Italy*. With this book I have at once telescoped and magnified these combined interests by concentrating on the sixteenth century, admittedly with some forays into the very end of the fifteenth century.

The landmark study that describes many of the sort of people I have in mind in this book, at least in the visual arts, is that of Rudolf and Margot

Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn: The Character and Conduct of Artists, a Documented History from Antiquity to the French Revolution*. As valuable as the Wittkowers' book has been for cultural history generally, I do not subscribe to their notion that the artists they identified as "eccentric" in the period emerged as a product of social alienation, first because I tend to associate the concept of social alienation with full-blown, advanced, open-market economies and I see no evidence for this in the Italian Renaissance; and second because I see no evidence that there was a pervasive, full-fledged, open "art market" operating at a significant economy of scale. Instead I see primarily guilds, workshops, and a vigorous patronage system at work for visual artists in the first three quarters of the sixteenth century in Italy, which is the period largely covered in this book. For much the same reason, I find untenable Arnold Hauser's reading of the underlying causes of the mannerist style, explored in his *Mannerism: The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art*. John Shearman, in his brief yet elegant *Mannerism*, is more descriptive than analytical about mannerism, which he encapsulates coyly as the "stylish style," so he does not attempt to account for its causes, as Hauser did by concentrating in a separate section of his book on "Alienation as the Key to Mannerism," for instance. But Sherman's reading of mannerism, at least as it seeks to capture the broad outlines of a visual style, is more universally viable, even if less intellectually daring in its scope.

In any event, the Renaissance sensibility of "eccentricity" that the Wittkowers found in a number of visual artists working primarily in sixteenth-century Italy, and that the Wittkowers attributed to the social "alienation" experienced on the part of the artists they discussed, bears little resemblance to the Romantic, modern, or postmodern notion of eccentricity in the arts, which is indebted in scholarly literature to the concept of social alienation, social critique, and social disembeddedness associated primarily with full-fledged open, impersonal, capitalist market systems of industrialized nation states and now with economic globalization, postcolonialism, and post-capitalism. More persuasive with respect to the sixteenth century, I believe, is the probing analysis offered by the eminent cultural historian Peter Burke in *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*, who argues that the behavior of the sort of eccentric visual artists identified by the Wittkowers in the period in question collectively bore "a social message." According to Burke, these eccentrics, whom he does not discuss as being socially alienated, sought to demonstrate through their behavior that they were truly "free"—a concept of self-determination, however, that we might label today an enabling illusion as we look back at the period and view with suspicion Burckhardian notions of "individualism" in the Italian Renaissance. Scholars today, including Burke, are more inclined to talk about degrees of "agency" instead of degrees of desire for freedom.

Furthermore, most of the writers and visual artists examined in the individual chapters of this book have been viewed as mannerist in one sense or another, and two of them, Baldassar Castiglione and Michelangelo, have been held up as paradigmatic figures of the High Renaissance. Yet this book makes no attempt to investigate any of the writers and visual artists discussed in it in the context of High Renaissance or mannerist styles in any programmatic way. And I make no apology for this. To engage in a discussion about how this or that writer or visual artist was or was not mannerist would seem to me to sidetrack the book, which already covers a great deal of disciplinary ground, into a number of debates and subissues, not the least of them being whether there was such a thing as mannerism, and by extension what the potential social and cultural causes of mannerism may have been. More to the point, mannerism—which I employ only as a descriptive term—is about a stylistic shift, *not* a behavioral one (even if the term derives from the literature of manners), and in this book I am above all interested in examining the connections among character, conduct, and creativity in sixteenth-century Italy. After all, High Renaissance and mannerist writers and visual artists could be deemed decorous and indecorous, seemly and unseemly, highly conformist and aggressively nonconformist. There is nothing, I contend, strictly High Renaissance or mannerist about “them,” only their “style” of writing or visual art. Vasari, for instance, was typically viewed as polite and well mannered in his own time, and Bandinelli sometimes brutish and ill mannered, if not a downright menace; but *both* Vasari and Bandinelli are usually designated today, at least by scholars who embrace the concept of mannerism, as mannerist artists. Neither of them strikes me as particularly “alienated” socially within the courts of sixteenth-century Italy, to which they were bound for most of their professional lives, or economically from the means of production of their art making, over which they wielded a great deal of control. For the purposes of this book, then, mannerism is an artistic *maniera*, not a manner of purportedly being in the world. Indeed, mannerist artists adopted arguably all sorts of manners of being in the world, as did Renaissance and baroque artists before and after them, from Masaccio to Caravaggio, Raphael to Bernini.

Additionally, in using the topic of *the conspicuous* thematically as an organizing principle in this book, my aim has been to focus on the basic Renaissance concern with “self-fashioning”—a concept about which I have something to say in the Introduction—by examining figures who stand in stark opposition to those who imagined it in terms of moderation, limitation, and discretion, as a matter of becoming part of an elitist, essentially court society in sixteenth-century Italy, where they had to stand out, but where their conspicuousness also had to be underplayed at all times. The heroes (or some might deem antiheroes) of this book are consequently those who ap-

pear to have violated such norms by promoting themselves aggressively, and by effectively using writing or the styling of visual artifacts to memorialize their assertiveness and intractable delight in parading themselves as transgressive and insubordinate on the grand scale within the dominant culture of their time. Hence, by focusing on writers and visual artists of this sort, I have sought to construct a version of the Italian Renaissance that is neither the luminous, balanced, suave, and elegant one of Castiglione's and Vasari's courts (which was once in scholarly fashion not so long ago in the academy) nor the dark, oppressive, conspiratorial, and traumatic one of Niccolò Machiavelli's and Francesco Guicciardini's princely states (which is far more in scholarly fashion now), but instead one that exists in the verbal and visual culture of the period and that defines the "self," which for many scholars is evolving in this period in a novel and forceful way, through its various habits of being aggressively conspicuous.

Lastly, the phrase "in your face," positioned boldly in the title, has no obvious equivalent in Italian during the period covered in this book; yet, despite being an anachronism, it seemed to capture the spirit of the sort of aggressive performative selves I discuss in it, so I have adopted it, albeit sparingly in the body of the book, as a way of expressing through modern idiomatic English a way of thinking globally about a variety of egregious styles of behavior in the past and how they were represented in a variety of venues, from treatises to biographies, autobiographies to letters, poems to prose satires. In sixteenth-century Italy other terms in the vernacular would have come to mind in verb, noun, or adjectival form: *bravare*, *gridare*, and *lamentare* for what it meant to make a noise to get one's way; *prepotenza*, *oltraggio*, *dispetto*, *scandalo*, *affronto*, *ingiuria*, *difamazione*, *insolenza*, *maldicenza*, and *vilipendio* for actions and behaviors that offended and pushed other folk around; *temere*, *terribile*, and *terribilità* for fierce, temperamental, and immoderate behavior and intensity; *paragonare* and *giostrare* for competitive activities in the arts; and *strano*, *astratto*, *pazzo*, *selvatico*, *stravagante*, *fantastico*, *bizzarro*, *capriccioso*, *bestialità*, *fantasticheria*, *stranezza*, and *bizzarria* for eccentric comportment and the sorts of people who exhibited such comportment, which could occasionally be taken, in the best of circumstances, as a sign of remarkable talent and genius, characterized respectively by the terms *ingegno* and *divino*.

Certainly Italians of the period possessed no shortage of ways of insulting one another, vigorously expressing disapproval, or using language as an assertive performative act, as Elizabeth Horodowich has most recently demonstrated in *Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice*; and as Peter Burke, Lauro Martines, Guido Ruggiero, Robert C. Davis, and Thomas and Elizabeth Cohen (among others) argued not too long ago. "In your face," however, seemed to me more broad-based and open-ended than anything else I could come up with as an all-encompassing catch phrase, and thus less

liable to lead the reader toward a single restrictive mode of what could be deemed improper. I am, in the end, concerned throughout this book with a plurality of professional improprieties and not any one in particular as the men discussed in it sought to express themselves and acquire, as best they could, status. As always, variety characterizes much of the Italian Renaissance. This is true with regard to the sort of larger-than-life personalities and their manifold, and indeed sometimes idiosyncratic, professional improprieties examined in the core chapters of this book. It is also true regarding how visual and verbal artists could express themselves, and potentially get in other people's faces, through a variety of means in distinctively verbal and visual forms and terms: in the case of writers through presentation manuscripts, pamphlets, letters, diatribes, harangues, burlesques, romances, novellas, pasquinades, poems, dramas, how-to books, encyclopedias, treatises, satires, commentaries, and the like; in the case of visual artists through paintings, goldsmithing, ceramics, sculpting, drawing, architecture, presentation drawings, portraiture, self-portraiture, and print, among so many other forms and modes of representation.

THIS BOOK COVERS A LOT OF GROUND and cuts through a number of disciplines, primarily literary studies, history, and art history, and I am grateful to several scholars for helping me work my way through them, though I, of course, take full responsibility for all mistakes and shortcomings. In particular I should single out at the outset a number of scholars from my home institution. First and foremost I thank (yet again) my long-time friend and colleague Wayne A. Rebhorn, who read an early draft of this manuscript—a draft that required a great deal of patience on his part to get through in its original cumbersome, rough-hewn state. I thank him, as always, for his time, perspicacious eye, and acumen. No one, it seems to me, is better at seeing the forest for the trees. My friend and colleague Louis A. Waldman provided much generous help, both in looking over the manuscript at an early stage and in talking to me about ideas that surfaced in connection to art history. Alison Frazier sharpened chapters with her knowledge about the history and manufacture of books, and Ann Johns intervened in just the right way in the chapter on Michelangelo. Daniela Bini came to my aid in trying to come up with the best translations possible, especially when it came to Doni's colorful prose, which often left me flummoxed.

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mented on the revised Introduction; he will find some of his salient observations plunked (agreeably so, I hope) wholesale into my text. Tom Willette gave his expert advice on two chapters, made all the difference in the world in my reconceptualizing the Introduction, supplied me with spades of information that I have done my best to incorporate wholesale into the text and notes, and urged me along as I poached on his field; I am especially grateful to him for helping me reframe the thesis and think my way through a number of thorny issues. Megan Holmes made superb suggestions for improving the Introduction and Michelangelo chapter, and I have incorporated them, word for word (and here with gratitude), directly into the body of my text. Paul F. Grendler read through the Introduction and the second and fifth chapters, offered important observations, and saved me from making a number of errors. Tom Cohen helped out greatly with the Introduction, and Giorgio Masi, a pioneer in Doni studies, generously furnished me with his most recent work on Doni's manuscripts, which allowed me to correct some of my datings in the appendix. Harald Hendrix cautioned me about overstating Doni's financial success, offered valuable insights into the complex problem of explaining why Doni turned to manuscript production in his later years, and furnished me with the information and wording for thinking about the circumstances that led Doni to abandon Venice in 1555.

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Finally, since this book focuses exclusively on men who were represented as extremely colorful characters in their own time, it seemed only fitting to me to dedicate it to two male companions in my life, neither of whom will probably read any of the words placed above or below this sentence, but who are certainly colorful characters in their own right: my brother, Tom, and my son, David. If I ever manage to write another book, it will be dedicated to my daughters, Simone, Erica, and Giulia, who have now all grown up into young adults, who at times endured over their early lives my own idiosyncratic ways of behaving, and who will always have a special place in my heart.