

# The Painter and the Scullery Boy: Pietro da Cortona in Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature\*

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Pietro Berrettini (1597-1669), called Pietro da Cortona, was one of the most influential artists in seventeenth-century Italy and was celebrated as the premier decorative painter of his generation, most notably for his ceiling in the Barberini Palace in Rome (1633-39). His reputation began to suffer soon after his death, however, due in large part to changing standards of taste that no longer tolerated the extravagances of the High Baroque style that he helped to develop and with which he is indelibly linked.<sup>1</sup> In 1692 the director of the French Academy in Rome, Matthieu de La Teulière, reported back to Paris that, 'Pietro da Cortona and his school have spread such great debauchery here, operating under the guise of virtuosity, [...] giving everything over to the whims of their imaginations,'<sup>2</sup> and made similar statements the following year, in which he charged Cortona, Bernini and Borromini with ruining the fine arts with their excess.<sup>3</sup> This view endured over the ensuing centuries and the trope of the Baroque as a diseased and cancerous style – with Cortona as one of its prime vectors of transmission – became commonplace in art-theoretical literature. Nearly a century after La Teulière, Francesco Milizia vilified the same trio of artists, saying that Cortona, along with Borromini and Bernini, 'represent a diseased taste – one that has infected a great number of artists'.<sup>4</sup> In London around the same time, James Barry singled Cortona out in a lecture for the Royal Academy of Arts, cautioning, 'It is to be regretted that truth obliges one to say so much of a man who has so greatly contributed to the perversion of the ... art[s], and whose

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<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Pietro Bellori, the leading art theorist of the late seventeenth century and champion of the "Classical" style exemplified by Carlo Maratta, revealed an antipathy for Cortona by simple virtue of omission, having excluded the painter from his collection of artists' *Vite* in 1672, thereby silently but tellingly damning the artist and his work.

<sup>2</sup> 'On ne saurait croire, Monsieur, à moins de le voir, le peu de bons peintres qu'il y a en Italie, particulièrement sur la correction du dessein. Pietro de Cortone et son école y a répandu un si grand libertinage, sous prétexte de donner du brillant, que la plupart de leurs ouvrages sont comme les clinquans des habits de Comédie, donnant tout au caprice de leur imagination, méprisant la sagesse et la solidité de l'Antique et de Raphaël'. *Correspondance des Directeurs de l'Académie de France à Rome avec les surintendants des Bâtimens (1666-1793)*, Paris, 1887-1912, vol. 1, 341.

<sup>3</sup> 'L'on peut dire que trois hommes, Bernin, Pietro de Cortone, Borromini, y ont entièrement ruiné les Beaux-Arts par les libertés qu'ils ont pris tous trois de donner beaucoup à leur goust particulier, ou, pou mieux dire, à leur caprice, chascun dans leur art', *Correspondance des Directeurs*, vol. 1, 381.

<sup>4</sup> 'Borromini in architettura, Bernini in scultura, Pietro da Cortona in pittura, il Cavalier Marini in poesia, sono peste del gusto. Peste ch' ha appestato un gran numero di artisti', Francesco Milizia, *Dizionario delle belle arti del disegno*, Bassano: 1797, vol. I, 114.

seducing works, if the student is not previously well grounded in the great essentials of design and expressive sentimental composition, it were certainly much better he should never see'.<sup>5</sup> Luigi Lanzi blamed Cortona and his followers for the downfall of Italian art in his seminal *Storia pittorica della Italia* of 1795-96,<sup>6</sup> while in the next century some went so far as to suggest that Cortona was at least coterminous with, if not partly responsible for, the downfall of Italy itself during the seventeenth century. In his 1837 *Handbuch der Geschichte der Malerei*, Franz Kugler claimed,

In the course of the seventeenth century a new mannerism hastened the decay of the now nearly extinct influence of the Eclectic school. The principal founder of this pernicious style, which chiefly aimed at filling space with the least cost of labor, was Pietro Berettini da Cortona... Contemporary with this corruption of art, we remark a general decline of Italian power in every department – politics, church, literature.<sup>7</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, the equation of the seventeenth century with decadence was so entrenched that the two had become synonymous. Cortona, the most notorious representative of the period, was referred to as a 'Decadent',<sup>8</sup> of belonging to 'the period of the decadence',<sup>9</sup> or, notably, 'l'illustre chef de la décadence romaine.'<sup>10</sup>

In light of the fact that the majority of eighteenth and nineteenth century critics characterized Cortona as a dangerous seducer who led artists with weak sensibilities down a path of decadence and corruption, it is all the more unexpected that beginning in the early nineteenth century stories featuring the artist appear in popular literature, primarily children's. I have discovered approximately two-dozen variations of a fable starring the young Pietro da Cortona in an array of formats and languages and ranging in date from the early nineteenth century well into the twentieth. Although famous in his own lifetime, Pietro da Cortona as an historical figure is not considered to have enjoyed the enduring popular celebrity that others such as Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, or even his contemporary, Poussin, did and so he seems a rather surprising choice of protagonist for these stories, even more so since critics at the time deemed his work 'decadent', 'diseased', and 'degenerate'. This substantial body of children's literature, however, presents a new chapter in Cortona historiography and suggests that his waning reputation in the eyes of critics was not necessarily shared by laymen. I present here a selection of the stories in chronological order to illustrate how the story morphed from an

<sup>5</sup> James Barry, 'Lecture VI: On Colouring', in Ralph N. Wornum, ed., *Lectures on Painting, by the Royal Academicians*, London: Harry G. Bohn, 1848, 223.

<sup>6</sup> Luigi Lanzi, *Storia pittorica della Italia dal Risorgimento delle belle arti fin presso al fine del XVIII secolo*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn., Pisa: N. Capurro, 1815-17, vol. 3, 242-83.

<sup>7</sup> The second edition of Part I of the *Handbuch* was first translated into English in 1851 by Lady Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake. This quotation comes from the 1869 edition, *Handbook of Painting: The Italian Schools, translated from the German of Kugler by A Lady*, ed. Sir Charles L. Eastlake, part II, London: John Murray, 1869, 502.

<sup>8</sup> Théophile Gautier, *Guide de l'amateur au Musée du Louvre, suivi de la vie et les oeuvres de quelques peintres*, Paris, 1882, 144.

<sup>9</sup> George Scharf, *A Descriptive and Historical Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures at Knowsley Hall*, London: Bradbury, Agnew & Co., 1875, 251.

<sup>10</sup> Léon Lagrange, *Pierre Puget: peintre, sculpteur, architecte, décorateur de Vaisseaux*, Paris, 1868, 11.

early nineteenth-century apocryphal biographical anecdote into full-length juvenile fiction. I argue that a number of cultural factors – textual, verbal, and visual – contributed to the evolution and endurance of the story throughout the nineteenth century, including the explosion of children's literature in general and a growing interest in the lives of artists in particular. The following analysis should be regarded as the preliminary results of an ongoing investigation, an endeavor that is particularly complicated by the rarity, variety, and diffusion of sources. Hypotheses and conclusions offered here are subject to modification, as I am certain there are variants still to be found since the tale appears to have been in wide circulation and was generally known throughout the Western world.

The fictional story of Cortona's youth first appears in *The Historic Gallery of Portraits and Paintings, and Biographical Review* (London, 1809).<sup>11</sup> Along with short descriptions of Cortona's *Jacob and Laban* (Paris, Louvre) and *Virgin and Child with Sta. Martina* (Rennes, Musée des Beaux-Arts, erroneously described as a *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*), the unknown author says of Cortona's inauspicious beginnings: 'Few artists, at the commencement of their career, had so many obstacles to surmount as Pietro da Cortona; of which the following anecdote, not generally known, affords ample testimony'. The story that follows is short, but lays out the essentials of the plot that are repeated with slight revisions in later editions: At a young age Pietro da Cortona set out on foot from Cortona to Florence, alone and penniless, for he had resolved to 'cultivate his inclination for painting'. He sought out the only person he knew, a poor boy from Cortona who had procured a position as a scullery boy in the service of Cardinal Sacchetti. His friend warmly welcomed him and secretly shared half his bed and scraps from the kitchen every day for two years so that Pietro could accomplish his goal to study and become an artist. Pietro returned his friend's kindness by giving him the drawings he made daily, which decorated the walls of their humble garret. While Pietro was staying in a nearby monastery copying a work of Raphael, Cardinal Sacchetti happened upon some of his drawings and was awestruck, even more so when he realized that such a young boy had been producing these marvels secretly in his own palace for years. Pietro was then 'conducted to the cardinal, who received him with great complacency, granted him a pension, and placed him in the school of one of the best painters in Rome ... [But] Pietro da Cortona did not forget that he was still more indebted to the poor cook, who was the first to rejoice at the great fortune which his friend eventually amassed'.

The story reappears in the April 1812 edition of *The Port Folio*, a monthly magazine published out of Philadelphia.<sup>12</sup> Founded in 1801, *The Port Folio* quickly became the most distinguished periodical in America during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Contributors included John Quincy Adams, who wrote upon the journal's inception that

<sup>11</sup> *Historic Gallery of Portraits and Painters and Biographical Review*, London: Vernor, Hood, and Sharpe, 1809, unpaginated.

<sup>12</sup> 'The Life of Pietro da Cortona', *The Port Folio*, 7: 4, April 1812, 357-63.

<sup>13</sup> The magazine began as a weekly newspaper in 1801 under the editorship of Joseph Dennie until his death in 1812. In 1809 it became a monthly magazine, running as such until 1827. The majority of articles were published pseudonymously, with initials only, or remained anonymous, as is the case with the author of the Cortona entry. See Randolph C. Randall, 'Authors of the *Port Folio* Revealed by the Hall Files', *American Literature*, 11: 4, January 1940, 379-416, and William C. Dowling, *Literary Federalism in the Age of Jefferson: Joseph Dennie and The Port Folio, 1801-12*, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999.

it promised to 'take off that foul stain of literary barbarism which has so long exposed our country to the reproach of strangers, and to the derision of her enemies'.<sup>14</sup> Marketed as a 'politico-literary miscellany' in its prospectus, the scope of the magazine covered not only political and literary developments both domestic and abroad, but also biography, fashion, and the fine arts. The latter is where we find the 'Life' of Pietro da Cortona. His biography is interwoven into a section outlining the genealogy of Italian painting, beginning with its restoration by Giotto, through Leonardo and Michelangelo who 'established the Florentine school', of which Cortona is considered a part.<sup>15</sup> The report of the artist's early life closely follows the text in the *History Gallery*, down to similarities in language and phrasing to describe Cortona's unlikely transcendence from pauper to prosperity.<sup>16</sup> Thereafter follows a brief review of his work that is overall true, yet peppered with inaccuracies.<sup>17</sup> The segment concludes with an explication of the lessons to be learned from Cortona's biography for both young and old: 'This outline, faint and imperfect as it is, may serve to encourage youthful genius to persevere, and never to despond ... It is further a warning to the opulent, not to slight the notice of imploring and indigent genius'.

Features of prestigious adult publications, these biographies have all the makings of a didactic, moralizing children's parable, and indeed historically much of what later evolved into children's literature was first written for adults. Beginning in the first half of the nineteenth century there was a surge in the publication of children's literature, not only fables and fairy tales, but historical primers and other edifying texts, corresponding to changes in educational curricula that emphasized that the study of history should be dramatic and inspiring, should 'feed the child's imagination', and instill a sense of ethical conduct.<sup>18</sup> The majority of the subsequent versions of the Cortona story that I have discovered were written expressly for children, as it came to operate as an inspirational story of overcoming adversity for young readers.<sup>19</sup> The earliest that I have located comes from Samuel G. Goodrich, a celebrated American author and publisher who wrote children's literature under the pseudonym Peter Parley.<sup>20</sup> His *Curiosities of Human Nature* (Boston, 1844) is a collection of 'curious biographies', the ostensible ambition of which is explained by the introductory quotation from Francis Bacon: 'It would much conduce to

<sup>14</sup> Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *The Writings of John Quincy Adams*, vol. 2, New York: Greenwood Press, 1913-17, 521.

<sup>15</sup> Giulio Romano is cited as the exponent of the Roman school in his biography in the subsequent pages.

<sup>16</sup> Many of the entries in the *Port Folio* were copied or reprinted from British periodicals, as is the case with several of the other texts under discussion. In fact, the liberal borrowing from one publication to another was so pervasive throughout the century that it is fair to assume a high degree of reciprocity across borders.

<sup>17</sup> The most glaring are the incorrect birth/death dates given (1580/1640), and the peculiar math that then allows the artist to have died 'in the fiftieth year of his age'. It is also incorrectly stated that, 'Cardinal Borghese employed Pietro to decorate the walls of his palace with his pencil'.

<sup>18</sup> George H. Callcott, 'History Enters the Schools', *American Quarterly*, 11: 4, Winter 1959, 470-83; Daniel T. Rodgers, 'Socializing Middle-Class Children: Institutions, Fables, and Work Values in Nineteenth-Century America', *Journal of Social History*, 13: 3, Spring 1980, 354-67.

<sup>19</sup> There are a few exceptions in which the story continues to appear in adult publications, discussed below.

<sup>20</sup> Goodrich was one of the most popular writers of antebellum children's books. His *Peter Parley Tales* were so popular, in fact, that they were widely plagiarized and imitated. In an effort to curtail the rampant plagiarism, Goodrich killed off his eponymous character in 1840, only to resurrect him a few years later. See Michael V. Belock, 'Spurious Peter Parley Books', *American Book Collector*, vol. 18, Summer 1968, 23-4.

the magnanimity and honor of man, if a collection were made of the extraordinaries of Human Nature, principally out of the reports of history'. From Goodrich's compilation, a child could learn about the precocious youths of luminaries such as Pascal, depicted on the frontispiece 'discovering' geometry, Sir Isaac Newton, Mozart, Robin Hood, Daniel Boone, and Pietro Berrettini. In three short pages, Goodrich retells the story almost exactly as it appeared initially in the 1809 *Historic Gallery*, concluding in a bootstrapping fashion typical of the time, '[Pietro's] history affords a striking example of native genius, overcoming all obstacles, and hewing its way to success in that pursuit for which nature had seemed to create it'.<sup>21</sup>

The number of stories increases around mid-century, as do the particulars of the storyline. In 1848 little Pietro appears in *Clever Boys and Other Stories*, issued out of Edinburgh by William and Robert Chambers as part of their *Chambers's Library for Young People*.<sup>22</sup> In an elaborated version of the story that includes dialogue rather than pure third-person narrative, Pietro is cast as a twelve-year-old shepherd who abandons his flock in Cortona so that he could study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence. He is aided by his Cortonese friend, now called Thomasso, the scullion in Cardinal Sacchetti's palace. With no money to buy paper or pencils, Pietro assiduously sets to work covering the white walls of the garret with sketches made from coal provided by his friend, until Thomasso gives him a bit of money he scraped together and the crude charcoal drawings are quickly replaced with highly finished paper ones. Pietro 'set off at the break of day, and went to study the pictures in the churches, the public monuments, and the landscapes in the environs of Florence', returning hungry in the evenings to find the dinner plate Thomasso had kept warm for him.

Two years later, the cardinal discovers the drawings while inspecting his palace for repair and believes Thomasso to be their creator. He tells the boy, 'You shall no longer be a scullion'. Thinking himself dismissed, Thomasso's first thought is of his friend, exclaiming, 'My Lord, what will become of my poor friend Pietro if you turn me away'? The mistake is clarified and the cardinal asks that Pietro be brought to him. Pietro, however, had disappeared to a nearby monastery to copy the painting by Raphael in its cloister. Returning two weeks later, a new life begins for him: 'He was brought back to the cardinal's house, who received him most kindly, and placed him in the school of one of the best painters of Rome, where the study of the works of the great masters raised him to eminence in his art'. Pietro remains thankful to Thomasso and fifty years later the two old men 'were living together, like brothers, in one of the handsomest private habitations of Florence. Of one it was said, "There goes the greatest painter of our age": of the other, "There goes a model of friendship for every age"'. Although it is uncertain that the

<sup>21</sup> Samuel G. Goodrich, 'Berrettini', in *Curiosities of Human Nature (by the author of Peter Parley's Tales)*, Boston: Bradbury, Soden & Co., 1844, 93-5.

<sup>22</sup> William and Robert Chambers, 'Pietro du Cortona', in *Clever Boys and Other Stories*, Edinburgh: W & R Chambers, 1848, 85-92. The brothers founded the publishing house, W. & R. Chambers, Ltd., in 1832, the same year they launched the *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, a weekly magazine with stories on history, science and literature, many written by Robert himself. Robert is today best known as the author of the controversial *Vestiges of Natural History and Creation* (London, 1844), but he was also a prolific writer of biographical dictionaries, reference books and encyclopaedias, written for both adults and children. By century's end their firm was one of the largest English-language publishers and had tremendous impact on educational publishing both at home and in America.

Chambers' edition is the first manifestation of this particular adaptation of the fable, it is the one that is repeated most frequently in English.<sup>23</sup>

As one of the most illustrious sons of Italy, it is curious that the Cortona story appears primarily in English literature in the first half of the century and seems to have been a British invention, although less so when we consider that Italy lagged behind the rest of Europe and America in the production of books and magazines aimed at young readers.<sup>24</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that the first Italian interpretation that I have found was written by Pietro Thouar, widely considered the father of Italian children's literature.<sup>25</sup> Thouar was the creator of *Letture di famiglia e scritti per fanciulli* (Florence, 1849-60), into which the Pietro fable was incorporated in the January 1853 edition in a story about a contemporary boy named Ascanio.<sup>26</sup> Ascanio was loved by his parents and had every advantage, but although 'he had talent, he lacked the courage to set about overcoming even the most trifling obstacles, and he lacked perseverance when it came to studying'. One day he was given a book, in which he found the story of little Pietro da Cortona. In this incarnation Pietro is no longer a shepherd, but still poor and hungry, when he sets out on foot at age twelve to teach himself from the paintings in Florence. Again with the help of his scullion friend in Cardinal Sacchetti's palace, the indefatigable young artist copies the works in Florentine churches over and over, making rapid progress 'senza maestro'. Setting his sights beyond the city itself, he ventures with paper in hand into the country to draw in the churches in which he had heard Giotto and other famous masters had worked. While away, the cardinal's cook discovers Pietro's drawings in the attic. Rumors circulate amongst the kitchen staff, making their way to the cardinal who demands to meet the young genius who created them. Fifteen days later Pietro is retrieved from the monastery where he had been copying after Raphael. Once again the cardinal greets him warmly, gives him a salary, and sends him to Rome. Pietro quickly became one of the best artists of his time but never forgot his indebtedness to his lowly friend. Pietro's value as a role model is spelled out in Thouar's concluding paragraph: 'For Ascanio, reading this story did a lot of good. Thinking of Pietro, tormented by

<sup>23</sup> This version – Pietro as a twelve-year-old shepherd assisted by his friend, Thomasso/Thomas – is recounted in roughly half of the later iterations, indicated with [\*] in subsequent notes. Because there are so many, it is not possible nor necessary to discuss them all in the text, but they nevertheless warrant citation: Michel Masson, 'Pietre de Cortone', in *Les enfants célèbres, ou, Histoire des enfants*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed., Paris: Didier, 1838, 380-4, later translated by Anna Christian Burke as 'Peter of Cortona', in *Celebrated Children of All Ages and Nations*, London: George Routledge & Co., 1853, 370-5; Richard Green Parker and James Madison Watson, 'Peter of Cortona', *The National Fourth Reader*, New York/Chicago: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1864, 61-5, reprinted in the 1869-1870 revised editions, 73-7; 'Peter of Cortona', in *The Christian Brothers' Advanced Reader, Specially Prepared to Elicit Thought and to Facilitate Literary Composition*, New York: Christian Bros. Depository, 1893, 195-98; Hannah Twitchell, 'Pietro da Cortona', in *Famous Children Who Have Gained Renown in the Past*, Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1903, 105-09, reprinted in E. Hershey Sneath, et al., *The Golden Door Book*, New York: Macmillan, 1913, 87-92; The Brothers of the Christian Schools, eds, 'Peter of Cortona', in *De La Salle Fifth Reader*, Glencoe, MO, revised edition La Salle Institute, 1922, 40.

<sup>24</sup> Remo Cesarini and Elena Salibra, 'Popular Literature in Nineteenth-Century Italy: *Letteratura amena*', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 9: 3, September 1982, 361-82. According to the authors, 'in the first half of the century Italians read very little... owing to those well-known enemies of books, poverty and illiteracy', 375.

<sup>25</sup> For Thouar, see Francesco Alterocca, *Pietro Thouar, educatore e artista*, Fabriano: Gentile, 1894.

<sup>26</sup> Pietro Thouar, 'Pietro da Cortona Fanciullo', *Scritti per fanciulli: uniti alle Letture di famiglia*, 1: 6, January 1853, 335-8.

hunger and cold but still so full of courage to excel at his calling, he forever cured himself of his pusillanimity and laziness'.<sup>27</sup>

The story appears at the same time in adult art magazines in London and New York, but both repeat with striking similarities the version offered in the Chambers' *Clever Boys*.<sup>28</sup> The legend resurfaces in children's literature in Paris in the July 1860 edition of the *Journal des Demoiselles*, accompanying a reproduction of the Louvre *Virgin and Child with Sta. Martina*.<sup>29</sup> The *Journal* was one of the leading and longest-lived French women's fashion journals, with entries on subjects from literature, theater and the arts, society gossip, to domestic advice. Its target audience was teenage girls. Claude Vignon, the *nom de plume* of the sculptress and critic Noémie Cadiot Rouvier,<sup>30</sup> tells her readers in the 'Artistic Matters' section of the *Journal* that although Cortona is no longer as greatly admired as he once was, 'his history is a true fairy tale'. She even goes so far as to begin with, 'Once upon a time ...'. Her story, now aimed at young women, is a bit different from the others. It begins in Florence in 1608 in the studio of Andrea Commodi, where a twelve-year-old, penniless, talentless and patronless Pietro dreams of becoming a famous painter. He walks on foot to Rome to study with Baccio Ciampi and to learn from the monuments of the past, all the while waiting for guidance from his godmother, the fairy Propicia. In the meantime, he is offered shelter and a bed of marble and straw in the palace of Cardinal Sacchetti by one of the *palafrenieri*. His modest success engenders the resentment of an aggressive and jealous kitchen boy who conspires against him, news of which makes its way to the cardinal who wanted to meet the little painter. Impressed by the boy's drawings, the cardinal becomes his protector and patron and the artist's career takes off. Little Pietro is sure that the nasty scullery boy was in fact his fairy godmother in disguise, orchestrating events on his behalf. From that moment on, his life was 'a long series of triumphs', and the author details, extremely accurately, the many works Cortona executed over his lifetime. Except for the fairy godmother aspect, her biography is the closest to historical truth, for example correctly identifying Cortona's teachers as Commodi and Ciampi. Vignon's tale, at once the most outlandish and the most accurate, is an interesting *mélange* of historical fact and improvised fictional legend and suggests that the author was more familiar with Cortona's biographers than were other writers.

In 1882 Cesare Cantù, an eminent journalist and historian who later in life wrote for children, included the story of Pietro in his *Buon senso e buon cuore*, an historical primer

<sup>27</sup> Thouar's essay, minus the bracketing narrative of Ascanio, was republished later in the century by Francesco Berlan in his compilation of *Fanciulli celebre d'Italia*, Milan: Agnelli, 1875, 113-15, which is cited in the first monograph on Cortona by Narciso Fabbrini. Fabbrini states that, despite the story told by Berlan, there is no evidence for the artist having made a trip to Florence before arriving in Rome in the early 1610s. *Vita del Cav. Pietro Berrettini da Cortona, Pittore ed Architetto*, Cortona: R. Bimbi e Fratello, 1896, 3.

<sup>28</sup> 'Pietro de Cortona', in *The Works of Eminent Master of Painting, Sculpture and Decorative Art, Vol. 1*, London: John Cassell, 1854, 188-90\* and 'Pietro de Cortona', in *The Illustrated Magazine of Art, Vol. 3*, New York: Alexander Montgomery, 1854, 124-6\*. The two are, in fact, identical reprints of one another, again testifying to the free exchange between British and American publications.

<sup>29</sup> Claude Vignon, 'Pietà de Cortone et les artistes de la décadence', *Journal des Demoiselles*, vol. 28, July 1860, 193-8.

<sup>30</sup> Gen Doy, *Women and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century France 1800-1852*, London: Leicester University Press, 1998, 143-4 and 185-7. I would like to thank Karen Leader for directing me to this reference.

for young adults published in Milan.<sup>31</sup> The basic scenario as it appeared at the beginning of the century in the *Historic Gallery* is offered in a single paragraph on 'Difficulty, Genius, Perseverance'. In America the same year, Mary Carleton included the fable in her contribution to the eighth volume of *Our Young Folks*, a fairly short-lived but influential periodical intended to include the best writing and illustration for children.<sup>32</sup> In her collection of 'Little Heroes', young Pietro is given only two pages, but the story strongly recalls the preceding versions, except Vignon's.<sup>33</sup> The only significant change in Carleton's story – and one that will be important later in this analysis – is that Pietro is again cast as the son of a poor Tuscan shepherd, but one who, with no pencil or paper, would draw on rocks and trace images in the earth while tending his goats, as depicted in the accompanying engraving by Émile-Antoine Bayard [Fig. 1].<sup>34</sup> The narrative of Pietro's journey to Florence and the kindness of the Cortonese scullery boy remain the same, as does the magnanimity of Cardinal Sacchetti upon seeing the boy's drawings and Pietro's gratitude toward his poor friend. Like many writers before her, Carleton extracts a heartening moral from the story in the conclusion to the next month's 'Little Heroes': 'Ah, boys! It takes more courage, to my mind, to keep a hopeful heart and struggle bravely on to the end in view, with such discouragements as ... [Pietro] had, than to stand up and fight forty pitched battles'.<sup>35</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, the story had been adapted to other formats and was elaborated and expanded. In 1874, Carolina C. Luzzatto, an accomplished writer from the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, turned it into a three-act play, *Pietro da Cortona o Il Pittore ed il Guattero*.<sup>36</sup> Published in a collection of theatrical scripts, Luzzatto's historical comedy is followed by a two-act play on the youth of the humanist Angelo Poliziano. Hers are the only texts written for children included in the volume and it is noted that they are 'produzioni ad uso delle case d'educazione'. Irene Piazzoni has recently demonstrated that the production of theatrical writings for children swelled in post-Risorgimento Italy and points out that this new genre was particularly valuable

<sup>31</sup> Cesare Cantù, *Buon senso e buon cuore*, Milan: Tipografia Giacomo Agnelli, 1872, 260. For Cantù, see Franco Della Peruta, et al., eds., *Cesare Cantù nella vita italiana dell'Ottocento*, Milan: Mazzotta, 1985.

<sup>32</sup> The monthly series, which ran from 1865-1873, is a veritable who's-who of famous children's authors, including Luisa May Alcott and Harriet Beecher Stowe, and many of the illustrations were by great artists such as Winslow Homer. See Cornelia Meigs, et al., *A Critical History of Children's Literature*, New York: Macmillan, 1953, 277-8.

<sup>33</sup> Mary Carleton, 'Little Heroes I', *Our Young Folks*, 8: 5, May 1872, 282-3.\*

<sup>34</sup> All of the engravings of 'Little Heroes' are by Bayard, who illustrated Eugène Muller's *La Jeunesse des Hommes Célèbres*, Paris: Hetzel, 1867, to which Carleton admits being 'largely indebted in the preparation of these sketches', *Our Young Folks*, 279. It can be reasonably assumed that the Cortona story and engraving are faithfully copied from the French, which was reprinted many times, but I have been unable to consult Muller's text directly.

<sup>35</sup> Mary Carleton, 'Little Heroes II', *Our Young Folks*, 8: 6, June 1872, 389. In 1873 *Our Young Folks* was absorbed into *St. Nicholas*, the most prestigious and sophisticated juvenile magazine in America until the second World War, where the Cortona fable makes a reappearance the next year in Charlotte Adams's, 'The Boy Who Took a Boarder', *St. Nicholas*, 1: 10, August 1874, 565-6.\* Adams's story was later reprinted in *The Growing World: Or Progress of Civilization, and the Wonders of Nature, Science, Literature and Art*, Philadelphia/Chicago: W.M. Patterson & Co, 1885, 374.\* Her redaction differs from Carleton's, resembling more closely the Chambers' version noted above, with 'Thomas' as the scullion who takes in 'Peter' as his boarder in the Sacchetti palace.

<sup>36</sup> Carolina C. Luzzatto, *Pietro da Cortona, o il pittore ed il guattero* in *Galleria Teatrale*, Milan: C. Barbini, 1874. For Luzzatto, see Marua Bozzini La Stella, *Carolina Coen Luzzatto*, Friuli Edizioni della Laguna, 1995, and Diego Redivo, 'Tra ebraismo e irredentismo. A proposito di una recente biografia di Carolina Luzzatto', *Quaderni Giuliani di Storia*, 19: 1, 1998, 155-63.



pedagogically since the audience was spread across all social strata, not just those in the upper classes who could afford magazine subscriptions.<sup>37</sup> Not only did recitation aid with skills such as memorization and elocution, it also helped to promulgate societal expectations across a wide swath of the population. In both Luzzatto's play and that by Attilio Bario, discussed below, values such as charity, self-sacrifice and obedience, as well as faith in Providence, are solidly preached.



Fig. 1. Émile-Antoine Bayard, *Pietro Sketching on the Rocks*. From *Our Young Folks*, vol. 8, May 1872, p. 283. (The Fales Library & Special Collections, New York University)

<sup>37</sup> The texts were designed to be used not only in primary schools, but also halfway houses and orphanages. Irene Piazzoni, 'Bambini in scena: L'editoria teatrale per l'infanzia tra otto e novecento', *Memoria e ricerca*, vol. 29, Sept. – Dec. 2008, 83-102.

Again set in 1608, Luzzatto's play features a twelve-year-old Pietro, although he begins even worse off – an orphan instead of the son of a poor shepherd. After escaping the violence of his cobbler caretaker he flees to the palace of Cardinal Sacchetti in Florence, where he is taken in by his friend the scullion, Giovanni. The boys dream of rising up from their lowly stations, and Giovanni convinces Pietro that he must develop his divinely inspired talent while secretly sharing Giovanni's room in the attic of the palace. Pietro diligently sets to work studying the masterpieces in Florentine churches, and soon the walls of Giovanni's room are covered with exquisite drawings.

The most noticeable modification is that the part of the helpful friend is greatly amplified in the play. Giovanni serves as an important vehicle for additional didactic moralizing. Pure and industrious, he eschews the fancies of the other servant boys who aspire to nothing, spending their days scheming and their nights drinking and carousing, and he earns the respect of the cardinal's trusted staff.<sup>38</sup> When given the opportunity to work with the cardinal's secretary, however, Giovanni declines the position because it would mean giving up his room. He recognizes that without his help, Pietro would never develop into the famous artist Giovanni knows he will become, and thus sacrifices the opportunity to improve his own life for the sake of his friend. Ultimately their secret is found out and the boys are rewarded for their talent and integrity. The curtain closes after Cardinal Sacchetti insists Pietro go to Rome, prophesying that some day the whole world will speak his name with admiration.

A little more than a decade later, Attilio Bario, the pen-name of Gaetano Barbieri, a prolific writer of juvenile theater, published another educational play based on the Cortona legend, *Pietro da Cortona: commedia in due atti per fanciulli*, which he dedicated to the director of the orphanage for boys in Milan.<sup>39</sup> Again, in Bario's play the subsidiary characters take on a more significant role, but his lengthy adaptation differs the most from the others except in the very basics. In it, the now eight-year-old Cortona is again an orphan and self-taught prodigy who walks to Florence alone in 1608, is smuggled into the palace of Cardinal Sacchetti by his similarly orphaned Cortonese friend, Gaddo, shares his friend's bed and food and repays him with drawings, as in the other stories. The quirky part of Bario's tale is that Pietro's rise to prominence is more of a subplot in the farce, as the author tailored the story to appeal more directly to his audience, the young boys of the orphanage. The bulk of the storyline tells of how the plucky and pious orphans thwart the plans of the evil and science-loving astrologer, Bruno, and his child-hating minion, Baccio, the cardinal's cook. Bruno is being hunted by the Inquisition and is hidden by Baccio in the Sacchetti palace, where the two hatch a scheme to steal the cardinal's jewels and procure a stone that bestows immortality. With the crafty intervention of the servant boys, however, they end up instead in the Bargello.

<sup>38</sup> The perils of immoderate drinking are frequently addressed, from the squandering of hard-earned wages to the perpetuation of alcoholism from seeing family members drink. The two other teenage scullions, Lorenzo and Maso, appear as drunken fools at the conclusion of the first act, for which Luzzatto wrote an alternate ending that downplays their drunkenness should the boys playing those characters feel uncomfortable or unable to act inebriated, or if the directors judge it best for the boys not to adopt such a guise.

<sup>39</sup> Attilio Bario, *Pietro da Cortona: commedia in due atti per fanciulli*, Milan: Tipografia Giacomo Agnelli, 1888. The orphanage was renovated in 1884/5 and several writers seem to have contributed theatrical scripts for the boys in subsequent years, for example Emilio De Marchi's *1848: Dramma in tre atti: composto per il teatro dell'Orfanotrofio Maschile di Milano*, Milan: Colombo & Borgonovo, 1929.

Afterwards, the cardinal recognizes Pietro's talent and agrees to take him under his protection and sponsor his professional training, for it was clear to all that Pietro would become one of the most famous artists in Italy.

By the early twentieth century the tale was again a highlight of adult literature. It seems appropriate that one of the latest redactions of the fable reflects backward, and one can imagine that the author had been familiar with the story since her own childhood. Eleanor Gray's 1909 poem, 'Peter of Cortona', is a fanciful retelling by the old Pietro and Thomaso, who, as in several of the previous renderings, were said to have lived together like brothers in one of the most splendid houses in Florence in their old age.<sup>40</sup> The two men wistfully reminisce about the events from the fateful day Pietro abandoned his flock in Cortona to when the cardinal and his architect discovered his drawings in the attic and tracked him to the monastery where he was copying the Raphael fifty years earlier. The overarching theme of the poem is that of enduring friendship, with Pietro concluding:

When He shall call us, Thomaso,  
Thou shalt be crown'd, the beauty see of that  
Thou gav'st so freely, sympathy, the joys  
Of fellowship, all made my work worthwhile.

Although the elemental children's story was reprinted well into the twentieth century, Gray's poem is one of the last original adaptations of the fable before it recedes from the literary landscape.

The purpose of enumerating the various plots is to highlight the dominant characteristics and themes that are consistent throughout, while also demonstrating that despite their evident similarities it is clear that there is no direct, linear thread between the versions so far located. Each author took his or her own creative liberties in adapting the plot revolving around Pietro da Cortona to suit his or her particular rhetorical purpose aimed at a specific target audience. The repetition of the story in various lengths, formats and languages, penned by some of the most preeminent literary figures on both sides of the Atlantic, shows that the legend was malleable and enjoyed such wide circulation that it became part of the collective international imagination for over a century. That numerous versions were known is indicated by an entry in the 'Letter Box' section of the July 1872 edition of *Our Young Folks*, in which the editors responded to questions from readers, one of which presumably asked about the different versions of the Cortona story. The editor replied: 'We are unable to explain the discrepancy in the accounts of Pietro da Cortona's youth, to which you allude. Probably what was obscure in his early history has been colored with romance'.<sup>41</sup>

To be sure, the details of Cortona's life before his arrival in Rome in c. 1612 remain obscure. Yet coexisting with these highly fictional accounts were numerous publications of historical accuracy regarding the artist's life, which included the few known facts about his family and early years. Unlike Michelangelo or Bernini, tales about whose prodigious

<sup>40</sup> Eleanor Gray, 'Peter of Cortona', in *Peter of Cortona and Other Poems*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1909, 1-10.

<sup>41</sup> *Our Young Folks*, 8: 7, July 1872, 445.

youths were recorded by contemporary writers and subsequently became a prominent part of their biographies and legend, the young Pietro da Cortona of myth does not stem from biographical or historical accounts, of which there were many readily accessible from the seventeenth century onward.<sup>42</sup> Not one betrays a hint of romanticism. Cortona's biographers are clear and straightforward in detailing the facts of his less-than-astonishing artistic beginnings. He was neither an orphan nor son of a shepherd; he came from a family of stonemasons in Cortona. By no account was he a self-taught prodigy. Quite the contrary – his biographers plainly state that he trained initially with Andrea Commodi and later in Rome with Baccio Ciarpi, as Vignon indicated, but his development was anything but precocious.<sup>43</sup> In fact, his Roman peers nicknamed him 'Testa d'Asino' for his slowness to learn.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, although Cardinal Giulio Sacchetti's family was of Tuscan origin, his palace was in Rome, not in Florence, and Cortona only befriended the cardinal in his twenties.<sup>45</sup> A great number of the standard academic sources, for example the 1907 entry on Cortona in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, get the majority of the facts straight,<sup>46</sup> and Samuel Goodrich has a brief but accurate description of Cortona's real life in his *Popular Biography* of 1831, acknowledging Ciarpi as Cortona's teacher and recounting the story of his painful early reception in Rome and unfortunate nickname.<sup>47</sup> The facts of his life were available, but were glossed over for the sake of the story.

Since the myth is not rooted in Cortona's contemporary biographies, though, precisely where and how the story developed remains a mystery. I have not yet been able to determine the *locus classicus* of the folktale, and since some of the stories are more historically accurate than others, pinpointing where each author got his or her information proves elusive. Literary historians recognize that a great number of fables simply preserved what had until that point been transmitted orally, and it is possible that

<sup>42</sup> His principal biographers were: Giovanni Battista Passeri, *Vite de' pittori, scultori ed architetti che hanno lavorato in Roma, morti dal 1641 fino al 1673* (MS., 1679; Rome, 1722), ed. J. Hess, Leipzig: H. Keller, 1934; Nicola Pio, *Le vite de pittori, scultori e architetti* (MS., 1724), ed. with intro. by C. and R. Enggass, Rome: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1977; Francesco Baldinucci, *Vite di artisti dei secoli XVII–XVIII* (MS., c. 1725–30), ed. A. Matteoli in *Raccolta di fonti per la storia dell'arte*, 2nd ser., iii, Rome: De Luca, 1975; and Lione Pascoli, *Vite de' pittori, scultori ed architetti moderni* (Rome, 1730–36), facs. edn., Amsterdam: B.M. Israel, 1965.

<sup>43</sup> Although all agree that Commodi was his first teacher, there is some variance as to where and under what circumstances the apprenticeship took place, discussed below. All acknowledge Ciarpi as the artist Cortona worked under after following Commodi to Rome and the latter's departure back to Florence in 1614.

<sup>44</sup> The story of Cortona being called 'Testa d'Asino' while in Ciarpi's studio was reported in 1674 by Luigi Scaramuccia, *Le finenze dei pennelli italiani*, ed. G. Giubbini, Milan: Edizioni Labor, 1965, 40, and was repeated by Malvasia in the *Vite* of the Carracci. This anecdote was also a favourite among nineteenth-century writers and was picked up by many to stress, either directly or indirectly, his having transcended his early difficulties. For Cortona's youth and rise to fame, see Jörg Martin Merz, *Pietro da Cortona: Der Aufstieg zum führenden Maler im barocken Rom*, Tübingen: E. Wasmuth, 1991.

<sup>45</sup> Lilian H. Zirpolo, *Ave Papa/Ave Papabile: The Sacchetti Family, Their Art Patronage and Political Aspirations*, Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2005.

<sup>46</sup> 'Pietro Berrettini', in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: Universal Knowledge Foundation, Inc., 1907, vol. 2, 516.

<sup>47</sup> Samuel G. Goodrich [Peter Parley], *Popular Biography*, New York: Leavitt & Allen, 1855, 196. The introductory note indicates that the current version is a reprint of the original written in 1831, substantially amended with 300 additional American names but only 'several' European additions. I have been unable to consult a first edition, but it seems logical that the Cortona story was likely to have been in the original version, since Goodrich's emphasis in the expanded second edition was American personalities.

this was a legend that had been passed around verbally before it was written down.<sup>48</sup> Many of the examples cited, however, reveal themselves to be a distortion of elements from Cortona's life story and betray a familiarity with several of his earlier chroniclers. Although there is no evidence for Cortona having stayed in Florence before settling in Rome in his teens, nearly all of his early biographers claim such a sojourn. Pio and Passeri assert that Cortona's father sent him to study with Comodi in Florence, where the older master worked intermittently in the early part of the century. Passeri further states that Comodi left Cortona there when he was called to Rome in 1611, but sent for the boy to join him shortly afterward.<sup>49</sup> Pascoli likewise says Cortona's father sent him to study with Comodi, whom he followed to Rome.<sup>50</sup> Baldinucci maintains that Cortona's uncle Filippo first recognized the boy's talent around eight years of age, but that it was Pietro who asked Comodi to take him on as a student during the latter's brief stay in Cortona. As one might expect from Baldinucci's Tuscan bias, he places greater emphasis on the importance of Florence in Cortona's creative development, claiming that Filippo took him there first, where the young painter sought to learn from the examples of great art and architecture to be found in the city, before depositing the boy with Comodi in Rome.<sup>51</sup>

Cortona's copy of a Raphael painting and his 'discovery' by a member of the Sacchetti household is also to be found in several of his early biographies, but again the details have been warped. Passeri claims that Cortona took it upon himself to copy Raphael's *Galatea* in the Villa Farnesina while he was still studying with Ciarpi. The painting, considered one of Cortona's first autonomous works and today in the Accademia di San Luca, was, according to Passeri, what first caught the eye of Marchese Marcello Sacchetti. Marcello was never made cardinal as was his brother Giulio, but they and their third brother, Matteo, were Cortona's most important early patrons and were instrumental in launching the artist's career in Rome. Passeri describes the fortuitous encounter between Marcello and Cortona at length, concluding with Sacchetti's purchase of the *Galatea* canvas, his taking the young painter under his protection and introducing him to Giulio.<sup>52</sup> Baldinucci and Pascoli relate a similar anecdote of Cortona having caught

<sup>48</sup> It is perhaps likely, considering the story first appears in English and French, that it was spread via Grand Tourists.

<sup>49</sup> Pio, *Le Vite*, 134: 'vedendo l'inclinazione del figlio alla pittura, lo mandò a Firenze e l'accomodò con Andrea Comodi pittore fiorentino'; Passeri, *Vite*, 373: 'vedendo Pietro inclinato con qualche fervore alla pittura lo mandò a Fiorenza et accomodollo con Andrea Comodi Pittore Fiorentino che in quel tempo era di qualche stima accioche sotto la sua direzione e disciplina s'incaminasse per la buona strada del disegno ... Nell' anno 1611 fu necessitato Andrea per propri interessi passare a Roma ... Lo chiamò a Roma, et allora Pietro poteva havere quattordici anni'.

<sup>50</sup> 'Imperocchè lasciata Firenze, e la scuola d' Andrea Comodi pittor Fiorentino, a cui raccomandato l'aveva il padre, si portò in Roma tutto pieno di volontà, e di desio d'imparare', Pascoli, *Vite*, 3.

<sup>51</sup> 'Filippo suo zio lo conducesse a Firenze, acciocché maggiormente si perfezionasse e nell'uno e nell'altro collo studio che averebbe fatto sopra l'opere dei maestri più rinomati che quivi in abbondanza si trovavano. Piacque questa risoluzione infinitamente a Pietro; e giunto in Firenze, si messe, con solito fervore e assiduità, a copiare statue e pitture sì antiche che moderne, e a misurare e disegnare quanto di bello in genere d'architettura si trova nella nostra città', Baldinucci, *Vite*, 113-14. Baldinucci's reliability on this account is somewhat suspect, since Filippo was not Cortona's uncle, but rather his cousin.

<sup>52</sup> 'Pietro che ne desiderava la congiuntura glie l'offerse rimettendone il prezzo alla sua cortesia, e ne ricevè da quel Signore sessanta scudi di moneta. Da quel denaro Pietro prese animo e si invigorì a proseguire nello studio, e tanto maggiormente che il Sig. Marcello oltre la compra di quel quadro prese caldezza a proteggerlo et a favorirlo, e la sua protezione benche avesse il principio da un atto scortese fu la cagione della sua prima

the attention of Marcello while painting little figures on stools in a gilder's shop.<sup>53</sup> The incident was repeated by Milizia in his *Le vite de' più celebri architetti antichi e moderni* (Rome, 1768) and included in the early nineteenth-century English translation: 'The marquess Sacchetti, seeing him in Rome at the shop of a gilder, painting some small figures on seats, was surprised at the ability of the lad, took him to his own house, and enabled him to pursue his studies; he thence became a painter of the highest class, and an architect'.<sup>54</sup> It is important to note that in all these episodes of 'discovery', none of the biographers gives the credit to Giulio, the lone cardinal in the family, and all are clear that the event took place in Rome.

Particulars aside, the overall story is strongly reminiscent of common narrative formulae that had been harnessed to artists since the earliest recorded art biographies, and there are a number of textual and visual parallels with other artists' lives that offer some clues as to the evolution and endurance, if not the precise genesis, of the Cortona fable. The leitmotif of the autodidact of humble origins abounds in biographies as far back as Pliny's account of young Lysippus, but the poor shepherd Pietro, as he is represented in almost half of the stories, resonates most strongly with the oft-repeated tale of Giotto's discovery as a child, the most famous account of which comes from Vasari. Giotto's father, a simple peasant, gave his son some sheep to watch over,

and while they wandered about the farm, grazing in one place or another, Giotto, led on by his natural inclination towards the art of drawing, would continually sketch something from the world of nature or something that he had imagined upon flat stones or upon the ground or sand. One day Cimabue ... came upon Giotto who, while his sheep were grazing, was sketching one of them in a lifelike way with a slightly pointed rock upon a smooth and polished stone without having learned how to draw it from anyone other than Nature. This caused Cimabue to stop in amazement, and he asked Giotto if he would like to come to work with him.<sup>55</sup>

The 'Discovery of Giotto' became one of the most frequently depicted subjects in nineteenth-century art [Fig. 2], reflecting the vogue for works that celebrated the lives of old master artists, particularly those chronicled by Vasari.<sup>56</sup> As Carleton's story illustrates,

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fortuna. Quel Signore havendogli preso affetto l'introdusse nella cognizione del fratello allora non Cardinale, alla quale dignità fu promosso dal Pontefice Urbano VIII, et egli sempre lo favorì e gli procurò occasioni conoscendolo abile ad ogni gloriosa riuscita', Passeri, *Vite*, 374-75.

<sup>53</sup> 'passando un giorno per certa strada fu da un indoratore pregato a volergli fare alcune figurine in alcuni sgabelli. Accettò Pietro il partito; e trattanto che le stava in bottega dipignendo, capitò il marchese Sacchetti, a cui piacque tanto il buon gusto del giovine, che gli disse che fosse andato a casa, che bramava di parlargli', Pascoli, *Vite*, 3-4. Baldinucci's description of the encounter is too long to transcribe, but can be found on pages 114-15 of the *Vite*.

<sup>54</sup> Francesco Milizia, *The Lives of Celebrated Architects, Ancient and Modern*, trans. Mrs. Edward Cresy [Eliza Taylor], London: J. Taylor, 1826, vol. 2, 173.

<sup>55</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. Julia Conaway and Peter Bondanella, London: Oxford University Press, 1998, 15-16.

<sup>56</sup> Jennifer Abraham, 'Frederic Leighton's *Cimabue's Celebrated Madonna*: A Study in 19<sup>th</sup>-century representations of the Renaissance', *The British Art Journal*, 6: 3, Winter 2005, 59-71; Marc Gotlieb, 'The Painter's Secret: Invention and Rivalry from Vasari to Balzac', *The Art Bulletin*, 84: 3, Sept. 2002, 469-90; Francis

there is a visual parallel between the artists' 'biographies' as well a literary one, for were it not for the caption beneath Bayard's engraving, it could easily be mistaken as representing the young Giotto [Fig. 1].<sup>57</sup>



Fig. 2. Francesco Paolo Priolo, *Cimabue and the Young Giotto*, Watercolor and gouache over graphite, 29.1 x 24.5 cm. The Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford [WA1963.103]

Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz noted that the discovery of the young shepherd artist is 'the most common theme in the biographical "childhood histories" of artists',<sup>58</sup> but

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Haskell, 'The Old Masters in Nineteenth-Century French Painting', *The Art Quarterly*, 34: 1, Spring 1971, 55-85. Haskell describes a painting by Charpentier from 1834 showing the young Cortona 'amazing the ladies of the Sacchetti household by the precocity of his talents' (73), but does not reveal the location of the work. The visual tradition of the story is somewhat beyond the scope of this paper, but it is clear that the fable informed pictorial production as well.

<sup>57</sup> It is possible that Bayard originally conceived of it as a Giotto illustration and that it was appropriated for the Cortona story in Muller's text. According to Leonard S. Marcus, 'engravings for a book might be newly commissioned for the work. Or, as often happened, they might simply be recycled from the stock of engravings commissioned for earlier titles, purchased from another printer's inventory, or assembled from some combination of all these alternatives', *Minders of Make-Believe: Idealists, Entrepreneurs, and the Shaping of American Children's Literature*, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008, 15-16.

<sup>58</sup> Otto Kurz and Ernst Kris, *Legend, Myth and Magic in the Image of the Artist*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1979, 13-38.

aspects of the story accord with other tropes in artists' *Lives*, such as Matteo Bandello's account of the childhood of Filippo Lippi, who grew up an orphan in a monastery and 'spent the whole day covering paper and walls' until he was discovered.<sup>59</sup> A similar story is repeated by Ridolfi to describe the young Tintoretto:

When he was still a child, he used to draw on walls, using charcoal and his father's dye-colors... Seeing his natural inclination, his parents thought it ought to be encouraged so they placed him with Titian... Not long after Tintoretto arrived there, Titian went into the pupils' studio and there saw, scattered at the foot of a bench, some pieces of paper, upon which were drawn certain figures. He asked who had done them. Jacopo, who was responsible, and fearing that he had erred, timidly admitted that they were his.<sup>60</sup>

Titian does not prove to be as generous as Cimabue, since, according to Ridolfi, he sent the young painter home for fear that the pupil would surpass the master, but the young Ribera, Cortona's Spanish-born contemporary, is said by Palomino to have found a more benevolent protector on the streets of Rome:

He was very poor and kept himself through his own industry, and scraps from the draughtsmen of the Academy [of St. Luke]. He had no other support or protection. One day, when he was drawing after one of those paintings that adorn the streets of Rome, a cardinal who was passing in his carriage happened to see him. Inspired by pious and noble thoughts he looked at this boy, so absorbed in his drawing and so neglected by Fortune that he barely had a rag to cover him, called him over and sent him to his house ...<sup>61</sup>.

One can see how closely all of the Pietro da Cortona stories echo these tales of 'discovery' to varying degrees. Pietro, either parentless or the son of a humble father, teaches himself by sketching the goats in his care or by covering walls with his drawings. He is then discovered by a benevolent patron who provides for his training, and goes on

<sup>59</sup> 'In luogo d'imparar lettere, tutto il dì ad imbrattar carte e mura, facendo qualche schizzo di pittura; il che veduto dal priore, e conosciuta l'inclinazione del fanciullo, gli diede comodità di darsi alla pittura', Matteo Bandello, *Novelle*, Milan: Silvestri, 1813, Novella 58: 409. Vasari echoes Bandello's account in his 'Life' of Lippi.

<sup>60</sup> 'Ancor fanciullo si dava a disegnare coi carboni e coi colori del padre sopra i muri... Veduto ciò dai parenti, stimarono bene ch'egli coltivasse la natural inclinazione; onde il posero con Tiziano... Ma indi a non molti giorni venuto Tiziano a casa ed entrato nel luogo degli scolari, vide spuntare a' piè una banca alcuni carte, nelle quali scorgendo disegnate certe figure, dimandò chi fatte le avesse. Jacopo, che ne era l'autore, dubitando averle errate, timidamente disse quelle essere di sua mano', Carlo Ridolfi, *Le meraviglie dell' arte*, Venice, 1648, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Padua, 1837, vol. 2, 173-4.

<sup>61</sup> 'Pasaba con tanta miseria, que á fuerza de su industria, y las migajas de los dibuxantes de la Academia, se mantenía, sin mas arrimo, ni protección. Y estando un día dibuxando por una de aquellas pinturas, que adornan las calles de Roma, le vió, y miró con atención un Señor Cardenal, que casualmente pasaba en su carroza; y considerando con piadosa y noble reflexión aquella puerilidad, tan atenta á la especulación de sus dibuxos, y tan olvidada de la fortuna, que aun apenas tenia andrajos con que cubrir sus carnes, le llamó, y mandó ir á su casa ...', Antonio Palomino, *Museo pictórico y escala óptica*, Madrid, 1724, vol. 2, 480. This anecdote is frequently repeated in nineteenth-century literature on Ribera.



to revolutionize Italian painting. Modern scholars have shown that many of the longstanding apocryphal anecdotes in artistic biography have complex literary and rhetorical functions and cannot therefore be read as simple historical record.<sup>62</sup> Indeed what we have in all of the Cortona stories is a layering of fiction that has deep roots in the history of life writing, modified to the format of a relatively new genre of literature aimed at engaging and educating children. I would argue that the majority of nineteenth-century writers, not to mention readers, considered the story to be based in fact, even if doctored with a bit of fantasy along the way to make the story more palatable, enthralling, and enlightening. The kernels of truth at the heart of the story seem to be based on the general knowledge that after some initial struggle Cortona became one of the preferred artists of the Sacchetti, produced many of his most celebrated early works for their family palace, and rapidly ascended soon thereafter.

Over time, these factual seeds took root in the historical imagination and blossomed into a kind of revisionist history such that the fantasy eclipsed the truth, or at least blurred the lines of fact and fiction. As previously noted, the story has no basis in any tradition traceable to Cortona's lifetime, and is contradicted by most of what was known with certainty about his early life. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the story was so well established as a rags-to-riches tale that its veracity was never really in question. As Marc Gotlieb observed, 'Myths, legends, and similar cultural narratives need not be true for them to operate as being true: they merely need to be believed'.<sup>63</sup> A similar kind of mythmaking was at work when George Washington's biographer, 'Parson' Mason Locke Weems, invented the story of the young Washington and the cherry tree shortly after the president's death as a way to underscore his honesty.<sup>64</sup> This legend, also a popular subject for nineteenth century artists, has colored the image of Washington for generations of Americans. Although it may be acknowledged at a certain point to be a tall tale, every American knows the story of Washington and the cherry tree. So, too, the remarkable longevity and wide distribution of the Cortona legend indicates that many people in the nineteenth century would have heard of Pietro da Cortona and the scullery boy, even the majority of whom who were entirely unfamiliar with his work.<sup>65</sup> Even while some probably understood the apocryphal nature of the story, the prevailing perception was that Pietro da Cortona exemplified the mores and virtues central to that era – courage, faith, determination, loyalty, and industriousness – regardless of his critical reputation at the time as a creative libertine, a reputation that was, in fact, held by only a relatively small number of partisan elites.

<sup>62</sup> See Catherine M. Soussloff, *The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, especially pages 138-58.

<sup>63</sup> Gotlieb, 'The Painter's Secret', 486.

<sup>64</sup> His stories of Washington's life were entitled, *A History of the Life and Death, Virtues and Exploits, of General George Washington* (Philadelphia, 1800) and later *The Life of George Washington, with Curious Anecdotes Laudable to Himself and Exemplary to his Countrymen* (Augusta, GA, 1806).

<sup>65</sup> In fact, some young readers today may find themselves familiar with the legend without being aware of its history. In 1995 Dorothy Eaton Watts included a generalized and abbreviated account in *Friends for Keeps*, a junior devotional book with daily readings, each with a biblical verse and story to illustrate a message of friendship. The Cortona story retains its moralizing function, exemplifying Peter's injunction to 'cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay for the night' (1 Peter 4:9 TLB). Dorothy Eaton Watts, 'Thomas Shares', in *Friends for Keeps*, Hagerstown, MD: Review and Harold Publishing Association, 1995, 69.

While this type of examination sheds no light on Pietro da Cortona himself, it does offer insight into the complexities of the historiography of taste and reception. The preponderance of tales championing him as a role model for children modifies our understanding of Cortona's posthumous reputation and challenges the belief that he was universally condemned until the reversal of fortune of the Baroque as a whole in the twentieth century. This notion is derived purely from the theoretical literature. The recovery of these stories suggests that his reputation in the nineteenth century was more balanced and that the general population responded not so hostilely to his name as his critics would have us believe. The paradox between popular and critical reception indicates that Cortona's 'life' and work were considered two separate things; the former was worthy of emulation even if the latter was not. This is a notable departure from the conventional and expected conflation of biography and criticism, or filtering an artist's work through his life history by viewing it as an expression of his character. It is unlikely that most readers would have had even the vaguest familiarity with Cortona's work, let alone have any concept of what a controversial and unpopular figure he was amongst critics. As Sir Michael Levey noted in his survey of the theme of painters in paintings, 'By the nineteenth century, the possibilities for subject-matter are endless. It would be far easier to make a list of those painters who were not depicted than those who were; what seems striking in this connection is that the painters usually thought of as rediscovered during that century tend not to be popular as subjects for pictures. Few or no pictures feature Botticelli, Piero della Francesca, Ghirlandaio and so on; Fra Angelico is not common, nor is Jan van Eyck'.<sup>66</sup> The same can be said for the literature of the period. What becomes clear from the many plays, operas, novels, and even children's stories on artists as unexpected as Adriaen Brouwer and Alonso Cano that proliferated in the nineteenth century is that the canon of celebrated artists was broader than those who were acclaimed by critics armed with an aesthetic agenda. In most cases it was the drama of the artist's life that engaged interest far more than the works themselves, and in more relatable and straightforward human terms. The debates that raged in academic circles, although captivating for historians, were not particularly relevant to how an artist was perceived or appreciated by the population at large. The example of Pietro da Cortona demonstrates that artists could have multiple 'afterlives', existing concurrently but independently to serve a variety of needs that did not necessarily intersect or overlap.

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<sup>66</sup> Michael Levey, *The Painter Depicted: Painters as a Subject in Painting*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1981, 48-9.