
The Renaissance Academies between Science and the Humanities

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Abstract

The scientific academies of early modern Europe have long been recognized for their critical role in incubating and legitimating the Scientific Revolution. So also, academies dedicated to vernacular literature and language, opera and ballet, art and design, and speculative philosophy all contributed greatly to the emergence of new humanistic art forms. Rarely, though, have scholars asked whether a common institutional culture united the scientific and humanistic academies across disciplinary divides that “Renaissance men” famously refused to acknowledge. This essay, an interdisciplinary synthesis of existing scholarship, attempts just that, discerning a move toward practices of “objectivity” across the entire academy movement.

Introduction

Today, “the academy” is virtually synonymous with “the ivory tower,” a bastion of the scholarly establishment that is out of touch with common experience and, perhaps, common sense. To call a question “academic” is to dismiss its relevance to the real world. Nothing, however, could be further from the profile of the academies blanketing late Renaissance Italy.

1. Mario Biagioli, “Etiquette, Interdependence, and Sociability in Seventeenth-Century Science,” *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1996): 193–238; see also William Eamon, “Court, Academy, and Printing House: Patronage and Scientific Careers in Late Renaissance Italy,” in *Patronage and Institutions: Science, Technology, and Medicine at the European Court, 1500–1750*, ed. Bruce T. Moran (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1991), pp. 25–50.

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Taking shape in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, academies provided an alternative to the sometimes pedantic university world, one that was open to new people, new ideas, and new modes of intellectual expression. Academies might offer public lectures, stage plays, produce court festivals, experiment with new music, or sponsor poetry contests. Princes, merchants, professionals, and artisans gathered in them alongside poets and scholars. Academies used vernacular languages like Italian and French instead of the erudite Latin of the Church and of the professoriate. Rather than imparting textbook knowledge to callow students, they engaged the imaginations of mature men and, if rarely, women. Ranging widely over literature, music, art, and natural science, they burst the confines of the traditional university curriculum. Some aimed explicitly to rekindle a Platonic spirit, making all-encompassing knowledge the road to virtue. A few even channeled the Neoplatonic hunger for knowledge of nature's mysteries into organized "natural philosophy," the precursor to modern science. Giving the lonely Renaissance occultist a socially respectable outlet, academies made early science less prone to individual eccentricity and more inclined toward the collective, disciplined investigation of natural phenomena.

Propagating and validating the discoveries of the Scientific Revolution still assumes pride of place among the academy movement's collective achievements. In the seventeenth century, the Accademia dei Lincei published some of Galileo Galilei's most important work and openly defended his Copernicanism, and the Accademia del Cimento began conducting organized experiments to test the revolutionary implications of the "new science." North of the Alps, the London Royal Society, the Paris Académie des Sciences, and subsequently the Berlin Akademie der Wissenschaften acquired royal charters and international renown between 1660 and 1700, counting in their ranks such luminaries as Newton, Hooke, Boyle, Huyghens, Fontenelle, Leibniz, and Maupertuis. Boyle's famous air-pump experiments were conducted under the auspices of the Royal Society.

But academicians in Renaissance Italy began as humanists and only later folded in what we now know as science. Before that time, they compiled Europe's first dictionary of any modern language, the Tuscan *Vocabolario* of 1612. Its publisher, the Florentine Accademia della Crusca, is active to this day. European opera, too, arose at about the same time in the quasi-academic "Florentine Camerata." This group of musicians and music theorists included Galileo's father Vincenzo. Even natural science began as "natural magic" in academic practice, more a form of edifying, spectacular theater than empirical, experimental investigation.

In recent years, a deeper understanding of the specifically scientific academies has emerged in the work of Mario Biagioli, Steven Shapin, and Lorraine Daston. Biagioli anchors the emerging practices of modern science in the court culture of European absolutism, showing how protocols of courtly etiquette enabled early scientists to cope with profound disagreements on the interpretation of experimental results threatening to divide the early scientific world. As academies coalesced into durable corporate bodies, they emancipated themselves, institutionally and epistemologically, from princely patronage and the competition for princely favor.¹ Shapin anatomizes the new codes of civility prevailing among the now-independent gentlemen who conducted experimental natural philosophy. Writing on the Royal Society, he explains how face-to-face demonstrations were indispensable to the legitimation of new discoveries produced by experiments like the air pump. No one, in demonstrations of “facts” divorced from contentious “theories,” could gainsay the word of a gentleman, nor, by extension, doubt the collective testimony of gentlemen gathered to witness scientific experiments.²

Daston identifies the stakes of this enterprise. In collaboration with Katharine Park, she paints a world filled with wondrous phenomena that strained credulity. Amidst reports of two-headed goats and multiple moons in the skies over France, observers of nature had to cull the genuine breakthroughs and explore their implications. Academies functioned, in her account, to sift truth from error in the flood of “marvels,” “curiosities,” and outright deceptions populating the woolly imagination of the early modern world. They provided sites where fact was distinguished from fiction in the Republic of Letters—a task that printed and handwritten communication could not perform and universities were not ready to undertake. Ultimately, Daston concludes, the ideology of “objectivity” was first practiced in the European academy, not so much as a philosophical doctrine, but as a form of dispassionate investigation institutionalizing the detachment between academicians and the “nature” they collectively observed.³

2. Steven Shapin, “The House of Experiment in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Isis* 79:298 (1988): 373–404; idem, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England*, Science and Its Conceptual Foundations series (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

3. Lorraine Daston, “Baconian Facts, Academic Civility, and the Prehistory of Objectivity,” *Annals of Scholarship* 8 (1991): 337–363; idem, “The Academies and the Unity of Knowledge: The Disciplining of the Disciplines,” *Differences* 10:2 (1999): 67–86; idem and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), pp. 215–254.

None of this scholarship takes into account the precedent of the pre-scientific academies of the late Renaissance. Nor, with the signal exception of Frances Yates, does the literature on the humanistic academy engage the origins of modern science.⁴ Despite numerous overlaps between the humanistic and scientific worlds—the Galileis being the most striking example—the historiography on the early modern academy remains riven between the “two cultures” of *modern* academia. Such a division is one that Renaissance academicians themselves would have never acknowledged.

This prompts a series of questions: Did the humanistic academies bear any more than a nominal relationship to their scientific successors? Did a practical, engaged, worldly, or even proto-scientific impulse arise from within the academic movement or infect it from without? Did academies contribute to the early modern reorganization of knowledge, in other words, or just provide an institutional vessel for its realization? In particular, did the humanistic academies somehow anticipate the practice of “objectivity,” if not toward natural phenomena, then perhaps toward texts, artworks, and antiquities? Or did the rise of objectivity, with its emphasis on the sober, prosaic, disciplined accumulation of facts, extinguish the poetic, spiritual, pan-sophistic traditions of the earlier academies? If so, where did these “subjectivist” traditions take refuge institutionally? What follows is an interdisciplinary, synthetic essay of existing scholarship. It offers provisional answers to these questions and aims to rehabilitate an institution as ambitious in its scope as the university itself.

The Platonic Academy

The history of the Platonic Academy at Florence—the notional fount of the entire academy movement—has all the makings of a scholarly myth: the recovery of lost knowledge from the East; the gathering of Renaissance polymaths under the tutelage of enlightened princes; an interdisciplinarity embracing music, magic, and philosophy; and the quest for a syncretic faith combining knowledge with love and virtue. For all its limitations as myth, the story nonetheless illustrates a fascination with esoteric learning that would recur among academicians throughout the early modern period.

Marsilio Ficino (1433–99), the Florentine priest and physician, stood at the center of the Platonic Academy. His *Platonic Theology*

4. See Frances Yates, “The Italian Academies,” in *Renaissance and Reform: The Italian Contribution* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983 [1949]), pp. 6–29, together with her other works cited below.

reintroduced European Christendom to antiquity's richest transcendental philosophy. Another work, the *Three Books on Life*, described how magic, music, and astrology could help scholars improve their health and extend their lives. And it was Ficino who developed the concept of Platonic love and practiced it with his male associates. (Only later did sixteenth-century academicians, with their love sonnets and prose treatises, give it the connotations of chaste heterosexuality it has had ever since.⁵) All this suggests that Ficino aimed not merely to study, but also to revive in practice the spirit animating Plato's original Academy.⁶ Pico della Mirandola, whose "On the Dignity of Man" is the manifesto of Renaissance humanism, belonged to Ficino's circle. So also did a diverse group of lawyers, poets, musicians, and clergymen. The Medicis, Cosimo and Lorenzo, were his patrons. Cosimo himself gave Ficino his most important mission: to rescue Neoplatonism, together with other esoteric philosophies of the ancient world, from a decaying Byzantine Empire.

Cosimo had been impressed by the émigré scholars who in 1439 arrived at the Council of Florence to discuss a reconciliation between the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox churches. He thus commissioned Ficino to translate Plato's complete works into Latin from the Greek manuscripts the Byzantines had provided. Ficino also translated several Neoplatonists, notably Plotinus, who in the third century C.E. had elaborated Plato's original philosophy into a mystical, arcane system. First, however, acting at Cosimo's behest, Ficino set to work on the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the body of Egyptian wisdom attributed to the legendary Hermes Trismegistus. Revealed in 1614 as a fabrication of late antiquity, the Hermetic texts were regarded in Ficino's time as unfathomably ancient and therefore more authentic than Plato's own philosophy. Hermes (sometimes equated with the Egyptian god Thoth) counted as the first in a line of ancient sages, including Orpheus, Pythagoras, and Plato himself, all of them sacred adepts vouchsafed with divine wisdom centuries before Christ. Next to Hermes and Plato, Orpheus commanded the

5. Jill Krave, "The Transformation of Platonic Love in the Italian Renaissance," in *Platonism and the English Imagination*, ed. Anna P. Baldwin and Sarah Hutton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 76–85; on the *trattato d'amore*, see Nesca Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1935), pp. 176–211; and on the questions of love as topics of interest for sixteenth-century academies, see Thomas Crane, *Italian Social Customs of the Sixteenth Century, and Their Influence on the Literatures of Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1920), pp. 141–158.

6. D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, Studies of the Warburg Institute, vol. 22 (London: Warburg Institute, 1958), pp. 3ff.; Yates, "Italian Academies" (above, n. 4), pp. 10, 20.

most importance for Ficino, himself an amateur musician who performed the Orphic hymns and wrote of their inspirational powers. To him, as to the inventors of opera much later, Orpheus was a semi-divine being who channeled the harmonies of the celestial spheres—the source of musical “effects” that quite literally soothed the savage beast.⁷

Ficino and his followers sincerely regarded their rehabilitation of pagan spirituality as compatible with devout Christianity. Yet certain elements of their thought marked a profound departure both from the Christian belief in a remote, transcendent God and from the cut-and-dried categorizations of the scholastic, Aristotelian mind: namely, the pagan belief that nature is suffused with divinity; the Neoplatonic doctrine that imperfect humans can ascend out of the material world toward the perfection of divine One; the Pythagorean insight that all celestial and mundane phenomena are interconnected through relations of number, harmony, and music; and the Hermetic conviction that individuals could master and manipulate these connections through study and discipline. All these became core components of the Renaissance esotericism of which Ficino was but the most influential exponent. His Neoplatonism, along with Hermetic lore, Orphic music, the Jewish Kabbalah, Arabic astrology, Paracelsian medicine, practical alchemy, and European folk magic awakened in generations of scholars a penchant for the occult that only intensified as what we now call the Scientific Revolution gained momentum. This impulse peaked with the European Romantics and still reverberates in the practices of freemasonry, theosophy, and New Age spirituality.⁸

Scholarly disputes rage to this day about how best to characterize the academy that gathered around Ficino, his students, his patrons, and his followers during the 1460s. It would be convenient to claim that the Neoplatonic impulse found immediate and direct expression in an institution named after Plato’s original following and was destined, in turn, to seed the ground for all subsequent European academies. It seems, though, that when Ficino used the word “academy,” he meant something like an informal group of private stu-

7. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, pp. 3–59; Arthur M. Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 175–201; Manfred Lentzen, “Die Humanistische Akademiebewegung Des Quattrocento Und Die ‘Accademia Platonica’ in Florenz,” *Wolfenbütteler Renaissance Mitteilungen* 19:2 (1995): 58–78.

8. Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1973), pp. 141–196.

dents overlapping only partly with the scholars in Ficino's circle. For contemporaries, the term evoked Cicero's villa and the arts of humanist rhetoric as often as Plato's ancient grove and the arcana of metaphysics. James Hankins, in a series of painstaking philological researches, enumerates no fewer than seven distinct meanings of the word *accademia*.⁹ The notion of a specifically *Platonic* academy under Medici patronage and gathered around Ficino is an artifact of the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the very moment the Italian academic movement acquired a critical mass and began inventing its own historical traditions.¹⁰

Up to this time and beyond, Neoplatonism and its related currents remained pervasive yet weakly institutionalized, a form of "tacit knowledge" as common to Renaissance Europeans as Freudian psychology is to us today.¹¹ Its core ideas and fascinations were instead transmitted by learned treatises, by the theater, and by wandering philosophers like Giordano Bruno, the self-styled "academician of no academy" burned at the stake for heresy in 1600.¹² Wherever it resurfaced, though, it would inspire some of the academies' greatest breakthroughs in science and the arts.

Origins of the Literary Academies

When academies, ultimately nearly 400 of them, finally emerged en masse in the towns of sixteenth-century Italy, they bore only tenuous connections to Ficino's circle or to the handful of other fifteenth-century precedents at Venice, Naples, and Rome.¹³ Defined

9. James Hankins, "The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence," *Renaissance Quarterly* 44:3 (1991): 429–475; idem, "The Invention of the Platonic Academy of Florence," *Rinascimento* 41 (2001): 3–38.

10. Hankins, "Invention of the Platonic Academy," pp. 24–26.

11. Gary Tomlinson, "Pastoral and Musical Magic in the Birth of Opera," in *Opera and the Enlightenment*, ed. Thomas Bauman and Marita P. McClymonds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 13–17.

12. The quotation comes from the frontispiece of Bruno's comedy *Il candelaiò* (1582); see Ingrid Rowland, *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher / Heretic* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008).

13. David Chambers, "The Earlier 'Academies' in Italy," in *Italian Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. David Chambers and François Quiviger (London: Warburg Institute, 1995), pp. 1–14; Eric W. Cochrane, "The Renaissance Academies in Their Italian and European Setting," in *The Fairest Flower: The Emergence of Linguistic National Consciousness in Renaissance Europe*, ed. Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles (Florence: Presso l'Accademia della Crusca, 1985), pp. 21–40; Eric W. Cochrane, *Tradition and Enlightenment in the Tuscan Academies, 1690–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 1–34; Amedeo Quondam, "L'accademia," in *Letteratura Italiana I: Il Letterato E Le Istituzioni*, ed. Alberto Asor Rosa

by the desire to bring enthusiasts of knowledge together in a structured alternative to the university, academies proved hospitable to many intellectual orientations of which the Platonic variety was only the most notable. Not philosophical speculation, but literary cultivation stood at the core of their program, whether classical or modern writers, poetic performance or prose discourse, elite entertainment or serious scholarship was the order of the day. Their literary exercises were chock-full of “rescrambled Petrarchan conceits [and] boxfuls of refried Lucretian stanzas,” all generously larded with citations from scholarly authorities. These written compositions—dialogues, treatises, or sonnets, usually delivered orally—strike the modern observer as a blend of pedantry and frivolity. Sixteenth-century critics and twentieth-century scholars alike accused academicians of retreating from civic engagement into pomposity and irrelevance.¹⁴ The academies, though, undeniably gave literature a new mission after the collapse of Italy’s urban communes under French invasion, the subjugation of the war-ravaged peninsula to Spanish hegemony, and the displacement of republican citizenship by a more emasculated ethos of courtly etiquette between 1494 and 1530. Renaissance humanism, centered on reviving Ciceronian rhetoric, had in the previous century associated literary eloquence with active political leadership, and the academy emerged at just the moment that the study of literature seemingly lost this civic function.¹⁵

The first of the new academies was the Academy of the Dazed (*Accademia degli Intronati*) in Siena, founded in 1525 to practice Italian, Latin, and Greek poetry. With the crosstown Rustics (*Rozzi*), they staged comedies to impress local noblewomen. Through the migration of individual scholars and friendly competition among the principal northern Italian cities, the Dazed gave rise to the Enflamed (*Infiammati*) at Padua in 1540, whose ardor was immediately

(Turin: Einaudi, 1982), pp. 823–898, a digest and typology of the encyclopedic standard work by Michele Maylender, *Storia Delle Accademie D’Italia*, 5 vols. (Bologna: Cappelli, 1926–30).

14. See Cochrane, “Renaissance Academies,” pp. 23–25 (quote on p. 26), on twentieth-century scholarship; Paul F. Grendler, “The Rejection of Learning in Mid-Cinquecento Italy,” *Studies in the Renaissance* 13 (1966): 230–249, on the objections to academic humanism as practiced by the Siense *Intronato* Alessandro Piccolomini and others. For examples of literary exercises in sonnet form, see Robert Nosow, “The Debate on Song in the *Accademia Fiorentina*,” *Early Music History* 21 (2002): 175–221, esp. 196–204.

15. Eric W. Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries, 1527–1800: A History of Florence and the Florentines in the Age of the Grand Dukes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 116–139, evokes this condition especially well; see also Cochrane, *Tradition and Enlightenment* (above, n. 13), pp. 29–32.

dampened by the rival Academy of the Humid (Accademia degli Umidi) at Florence that same year.¹⁶ The fondness for comic names, whether self-mocking or mock-heroic—the Idle, the Olympian, the Somnolent, the Extravagant, the Confused, the Infatuated, the Frozen, the Transformed—is a hallmark of the Italian academies. Self-mocking names drew attention to the particular vices and defects academicians sought to remedy through their literary exercises, but that also contained the seeds of collective renewal. Thus the Dazed, beset by barbarian armies and civil strife, felt that their academy would provide refuge and refinement for their sensitive souls.¹⁷ The specifically elemental names (Enflamed, Humid, Frozen) hearkened back to Hermetic–Neoplatonic associations between (al)chemical transformation and moral perfection.¹⁸ The more grandiose monikers may have sprung from the desire to poke fun at the chivalric ethic already tamed in the courtly venues from which many academicians were implicitly seceding. In such cases, a canny political instinct may have dictated the adoption of ostentatiously unthreatening names.¹⁹

16. Richard S. Samuels, "Benedetto Varchi, the Accademia Degli Infiammati, and the Origins of the Italian Academic Movement," *Renaissance Quarterly* 29:4 (1976): 599–634. For an alternative set of linkages to the fifteenth-century Aldine academy, with Varchi again playing a key role, see Martin Lowry, "The Proving Ground: Venetian Academies of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," in *The Fairest Flower* (above, n. 13), pp. 41–52, revising an earlier stance against the Venetian academy's importance. On the Intronati, see Louise George Clubb and Robert Black, *Romance and Aretine Humanism in Siense Comedy, 1516: Pollastra's Parthenio at the Studio Di Siena* (Siena: Università degli studi di Siena, 1993), pp. 11–15, 31–37, 163–69.

17. Yates, "Italian Academies" (above, n. 4), p. 13; cf. Conor Fahy, "Women and Italian Cinquecento Literary Academies," in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2000), pp. 438–452, p. 440 on the origins of the Intronati. Individual academicians often used pseudonyms as well.

18. Leatrice Mendelsohn, *Paragoni: Benedetto Varchi's Due Lezioni and Cinquecento Art Theory* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982), pp. 19–23, also treating the Neoplatonic and mythological aspects of academic *imprese*.

19. Suggestive though inconclusive in this regard are Yates, "Italian Academies" (above, n. 4); Lowry, "Proving Ground" (above, n. 16), pp. 43–44, on the aristocratic *compagnie della calza*; Bodo Guthmüller, "Die Akademiebewegung Im Cinquecento," in *Europäische Sozietätsbewegung Und Demokratische Tradition: Die Europäischen Akademien Der Frühen Neuzeit Zwischen Frührenaissance Und Spätaufklärung*, ed. Klaus Garber and Heinz Wismann (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1996), pp. 238–270, on this same theme (p. 244) and on the dissatisfaction with court culture (p. 241); and Clubb and Black, *Romance and Aretine Humanism* (above, n. 16), pp. 12, 32, 164–169, on the playful, feminine, aristocratic culture of the Intronati. Without more synthetic social history on the Italian academies—sorely lacking in any language—it is hard to generalize about the motives of their founders or the origins of their appellations.

Formal statutes, a second innovation of the sixteenth-century academy, arose from the need to give motley memberships longevity and discipline outside court and university settings. The disintegration of earlier academies after the death or persecution of their charismatic founders illustrated the need to fix a corporate identity.²⁰ Statutes provided meeting schedules and elaborate procedures for electing officers and inducting members. Most prescribed punishments for nonattendance or, in the case of the Aldine Academy at Venice, mispronunciation of Greek. They often emphasized the depravity of man in his pre-academic state. Together with annual banquets, eulogies for retiring and deceased members, and the recruitment of members from different occupations and localities, statutes reveal the academy as the institutional descendant of Italy's lay confraternities. These religious mutual-aid societies contrasted, structurally, with the local intra-occupational guilds (*università*), of which the university was one example.²¹ Unlike confraternities, however, with their active charitable efforts, academies generally held themselves aloof from common society. Their use of formal written constitutions, outside of a political context, with neither economic nor charitable aims at heart, made them, as much as the guilds or the communes, the true progenitors of the European civil-society movement that came to fruition in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²² Later, freemasonic lodges in particular accentuated and institutionalized a division already implicit in the Italian academy: that between the profanity of the outer world and the need to withdraw to a quasi-sacred space where knowledge and virtue could thrive.²³

20. Aldo Manuzio's Academy at Venice exemplifies the former and Pomponius Leto's Roman Academy, persecuted by the pope in 1468, the latter; see, respectively, Lowry, "Proving Ground" (above, n. 16) and Ingrid D. Rowland, *The Culture of the High Renaissance: Ancients and Moderns in Sixteenth-Century Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 10–25. The Aldine is the oldest with surviving statutes and is intimately linked to Manuzio's publishing operations.

21. Lowry, "Proving Ground" (above, n. 16), pp. 42–43; Armand L. De Gaetano, "The Florentine Academy and the Advancement of Learning through the Vernacular: The Orti Oricellari and the Sacra Accademia," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et de renaissance* 30:1 (1968): 19–52, esp. p. 28; Judith Bryce, "The Oral World of the Early Accademia Fiorentina," *Renaissance Studies* 9:1 (1995): 77–103, esp. pp. 89–90 and the notes found there; on confraternities generally, see Christopher F. Black, *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

22. Cf., for example, Antony Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

23. See Margaret C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) on constitutions

One final peculiarity distinguishing the sixteenth-century academies from their predecessors was the adoption of emblems, or *imprese*, and the extreme philosophical importance assigned to their proper design. *Imprese* betokened an openness to the visual arts in an institution otherwise dominated by the written and spoken word. Academies employed artists to help in their design; academicians, in turn, offered their expertise in art history, mythology, and (in the case of Galileo) astronomy in designing emblems for festivals, tournaments, and other court functions.²⁴ An *impresa* resembles a knightly or aristocratic coat of arms, a heraldic device. Framed in a rectangle, it usually contains an image in the middle, with the academy motto on top and its name along the bottom, both beribboned. The *impresa* of the Florentine Accademia della Crusca (Bran) (fig. 1) features a sieve, signaling its members' intent to separate the wheat from the literary chaff. Its motto, "To pick the fairest flower," alludes to Petrarch, indicating the academy's program of preserving the best of Italy's vernacular literature.

The words, then, were intended to disambiguate the image. To contemporary theorists of *imprese*, words also retained priority over images in opening avenues to the mind and not just the senses. Images remained indispensable, however, in sparking imaginative access to the esoteric meanings veiled by the device. The cryptic iconography of *imprese* evokes the Platonic theory of forms: rough material objects, they gestured at a transcendental realm of ideas where hidden interconnections were clarified. Hung like "votive tablets" in meeting spaces, they reminded initiates of the gulf separating them from true knowledge and virtue.²⁵ Platonic or not, such

(pp. 41–51) and the sacred/profane distinction (pp. 120–128). The unabashed elitism of the sixteenth-century academies becomes more intelligible in this respect, in contrast to interpretations that see in the return of aristocracy and hierarchy merely a conservative reaction against the social openness of the early *cinquecento*; see Bryce, "Oral World" (above, n. 21), pp. 99–102, for amplification of this point.

24. Roberto Paolo Ciardi, "'A Knot of Words and Things': Some Clues for Interpreting the *Imprese* of Academies and Academicians," in *Italian Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (above, n. 13), pp. 37–60, esp. pp. 37–38; François Quiviger, "The Presence of Artists in Literary Academies," in *ibid.*, pp. 104–112; Mario Biagioli, "Galileo the Emblem Maker," *Isis* 81 (1990): 230–258.

25. Ciardi, "A Knot of Words and Things"; Quiviger, "Presence of Artists," p. 105, on the physical locations of *imprese*. See Yates, "Italian Academies" (above, n. 4), pp. 10–12, 14–15, 17–18, and p. 12 for the comparison to votive tablets, apparently a contemporary reference. Whereas Ciardi emphasizes the multivalence of the *impresa*, Yates argues for its Neoplatonic significance, following E. H. Gombrich, "*Icones Symbolicae: Philosophies of Symbolism and Their Bearing on Art*," in *Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 123–196.

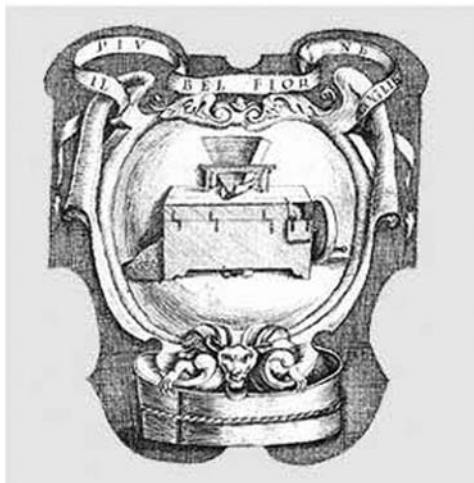


Figure 1. *Impresa* for the Accademia della Crusca.

devices functioned as symbolic condensations of an academy's mission. Like national flags or brand logos, they provided foci for collective identity, though they could always be interpreted in different ways by different people. *Imprese*, in short, introduced flexibility into academies' collective culture in the same measure that statutes took it away.²⁶

The move to name, codify, and symbolize sociability as a vehicle of self-improvement is a familiar part of the European voluntary association, one pioneered by the Italian literary academy. Names, statutes, and *impresa* each in a different way accentuated worldly imperfection, but equally the capacity to develop virtue through the collective discipline that academic life provided. Secular yet spiritual, engaged yet contemplative, academic culture could easily be assimilated to Ficino's Neoplatonic striving for perfection through reunion with the divine One. But it comported equally well with traditional Christian humility, the burlesque traditions of popular and elite entertainment, the aristocratic tenor of court life, and the local patriotism of times past. Like a stem cell, the academy was pluripotent, susceptible of many developmental paths depending on various external impulses.

26. See William B. Ashworth, "Natural History and the Emblematic World View," in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 303–332, on multiple interpretations of emblems.

Three such impulses—treated in succession below—caused the academy movement to splinter in the late sixteenth century, spawning new experiments in the study and performance of language, of music, and of natural philosophy. In all these guises, however, academies continued to provide ordinary gentlemen a forum to rehearse erudition, to imitate greatness, and to temper their characters. By learning to sort objective facts from subjective emotions whatever their specific interests, such groupings secured the academy's institutional legacy to later centuries.

The Vernacular Impulse

The academy is arguably Europe's first vernacular institution. It existed to transmit knowledge to a wider society than that encompassed by the Latin-speaking scholarly world. Comparisons to modern adult-education miss the mark only in overlooking the academy's specifically gentlemanly constituency. Here is a list of topics for public lectures offered in Italian at the Accademia Fiorentina during the sixteenth century:

The color of the eyes, anatomy and physiology, love, dreams, grammar, the soul, law and justice, free will, fortune, fate, the elements (earth, water, air, fire), friendship, envy and jealousy, Providence, beauty, honor, the spots on the moon, monsters, medicine (for and against), peace and concord, how the earth was inhabited, human and divine happiness, infinity, eternity, the sentiments and senses, ideas, divine and human intelligence, fame, eloquence, sculpture and painting, the Bible, nature, comets, predestination, nobility, size of the heavens, size of the earth, size of the planets, arms vs. law, arms vs. letters, the sea, rain, the tides, perfection of the universe, time, laughter, metaphors, cause and effect, affectations (attributes), the qualities of Hell, money.²⁷

Such a roster must have appealed especially to the secretaries, lawyers, ambassadors, and notaries who looked to the academies for serious—but not *too* serious—edification outside their professional lives. These were men for whom linguistic precision was a way of life in the increasingly bureaucratic world of Medicean absolutism, and herein lies a clue to understanding the evolution of the early literary academies into defenders of vernacular language.

The Accademia Fiorentina

The Accademia Fiorentina was the staid and more blandly descriptive name given to the Academy of the Humid by Cosimo I de'

27. Quoted from De Gaetano, "Florentine Academy" (above, n. 21), p. 44.

Medici just months after its founding in 1540. Cosimo's diverse motives in co-opting the institution under his patronage all centered on consolidating control over Florentine politics: he wanted to recall the magnanimity of his ancestor and namesake, Cosimo the Elder, Ficino's first patron; to restrict academicians from venturing into political topics; and to secure the Tuscan dialect's place as the leading language of Italy. Cosimo instituted the Fiorentina's public lectures to supplement its private meetings, allotted stipends to members and kept dossiers on them, and enjoined the academy to render "every science from every other language into our own."²⁸ Within ten years, this campaign to promote scholarly outreach had borne fruit—in a committee to codify Tuscan grammar. Establishing and regulating an Italian canon overtook the translation effort, soon becoming the official program of the Fiorentina and of its rival, the Crusca, famous for its lexicon.²⁹ Not only did their vigilance establish a model for other European language academies, but the evolution from vulgarizing knowledge to standardizing meanings produced a specifically gentlemanly objectivity later adopted by the scientific academies also.

Opening the floodgates of knowledge had raised questions of boundary maintenance, not just toward politics, but also toward women and the popular classes. Women stood to profit the most, intellectually, from the vernacular academies' intent to breach the male stronghold of Latin university learning. Although academies admitted only a few women, mainly poetesses and princesses, no woman received a university degree before the 1670s in Italy, nor elsewhere in Europe for a long time thereafter.³⁰ Women featured more prominently as objects of literary exercises, in the beginning at least. The Dazed in Siena addressed all their collectively authored

28. Ibid., pp. 29–34; Michael Sherberg, "The Accademia Fiorentina and the Question of the Language: The Politics of Theory in Ducal Florence," *Renaissance Quarterly* 56:1 (2003): 26–55, esp. pp. 27–28, 45, 50; Michel Plaisance, "Une Première Affirmation De La Politique Culturelle De Côme Ier: La Transformation De L'académie Des 'Humidi' En Académie Florentine (1540–1542)," in *Les Ecrivains Et Le Pouvoir En Italie a L'époque De La Renaissance*, ed. André Rochon (Paris, 1973), pp. 361–438; Robert J. Rodini, *Antonfrancesco Grazzini, Poet, Dramatist, and Novelliere, 1503–1584* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), pp. 3–27.

29. De Gaetano, "Florentine Academy" (above, n. 21), p. 45, on issuing a grammar. This continued the precedent set by the Paduan Infiammati, whose campaign to bring knowledge to the vernacular foundered when foreign university members began demanding instruction in Latin; see Samuels, "Benedetto Varchi" (above, n. 16), p. 630. Florence differed in having a larger population of interested laypeople and no real university.

30. Fahy, "Women and Italian Cinquecento Literary Academies" (above, n. 17), revises an earlier image of the academies as quite hospitable to women.

comedies to noblewomen; devotées of the burlesque, they also conducted *sacrifici d'amore* in which members cast into flames tokens of their unrequiting lovers—gloves, books, or flowers, for example—and then performed sonnets or madrigals in their honor.³¹

Such was not the culture of the Fiorentina. The division between public lectures (open to women) and private business meetings (closed) established it as an all-male preserve as far as the body's leadership and official direction were concerned.³² Serenaded sonnets yielded to dry declamations as Platonic love became an ideal debated rather than practiced in academic exercises.³³ The marginalization of women both fueled and reflected the vernacular academy's transformation from bohemian irreverence at Siena to serious scholarship at Florence. The gentle graces and genuine affections of mixed company receded, and academic life developed an agonistic, disputatious spirit redolent of other male scholarly venues.³⁴

Heated quarrels soon erupted on whether, say, to banish the letters *k* and *γ* from the Italian alphabet, or whether Tuscan descended via Etruscan from Aramaic, the language of Jesus Christ. Establishing literary standards ultimately devolved, though, on issues of class. On one side stood those who upheld fourteenth-century written Italian as the basis of a canon built around Boccaccio, Petrarch, and (after his rehabilitation) Dante;³⁵ on the other was a camp extolling

31. On these antics, see *ibid.*, pp. 441–442; Richard Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios: The Performance of Comedy in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 91–108.

32. Only one woman is known to have belonged to any Florentine academy, the Alterati: Eleonora of Toledo, Cosimo's wife and the subject, with her son, of Agnolo Bronzino's famous painting; see Michel Plaisance, "L'académie Florentine De 1541 À 1583: Permanence Et Changement," in *Italian Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (above, n. 13), pp. 127–135.

33. Claude V. Palisca, "The Alterati of Florence, Pioneers in the Theory of Dramatic Music," in *Studies in the History of Italian Music and Music Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 408–431, 412–413.

34. Here and elsewhere, there is little evidence that academicians succeeded in deliberately cultivating *civiltà* in the same measure as their seventeenth-century successors; see Bryce, "Oral World" (above, n. 21), pp. 94–95, echoing the work of Walter J. Ong. On seventeenth-century academic civility, see Biagioli, "Etiquette, Interdependence, and Sociability" (above, n. 1).

35. Rita Belladonna, "Some Linguistic Theories of the Accademia Senese and of the Accademia Degli Intronati of Siena: An Essay on Continuity," *Rinascimento* 18 (1978): 229–236; Robert Anderson Hall, *The Italian Question Della Lingua: An Interpretative Essay* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942); De Gaetano, "Florentine Academy" (above, n. 21). Dante had been "denigrated" by Bembo, but was reinstated to the canon by the Florentine academics; see Sherberg, "Accademia Fiorentina" (above, n. 28), p. 28.

the virtues of modern spoken Tuscan, which immediately raised the issue of who, to be exact, spoke for the Florentines. Giambattista Gelli, the hosier's son who rose to become president of the Fiorentina, emerged as the leading polemicist on behalf of the latter view. Gelli envisaged Florence as a great open-air academy constituted by fine speech, a much better place for non-Florentines to learn Italy's purest tongue than in the pages of the *Decameron*, whatever its own merits. Gelli explained, however, that such purity—such *urbanità*, as he called it—was to be only found among the city's "noble and qualified," and not among its "plebs" on the city streets.³⁶ Here, he betrayed the *arriviste's* characteristic snobbery toward those more recently embarked upon the social ladder than he. To realize their program in the face of the Latinate Establishment, the Gellists traded one form of elitism for another: the intellectual authority of Church and university for the social cultivation of court and *palazzo*. In this way, the Fiorentina could become an Establishment of its own.³⁷

The Accademia della Crusca

Canon formation had epistemological and not just social momentum, however. Even the rambunctious nonconformists who seceded to form the Crusca in 1582 succumbed to the rigidification of literary life. The Cruscans, sick of the Fiorentina's pomp and pedantry, strained to revive the jocosity of the first academies. Dissent reigned among the dissenters, though, until the new group rallied around a project more monumentally painstaking than anything the mother academy had attempted: the compilation of the *Vocabolario*, whose first edition took from 1591 to 1612 to complete.³⁸

Programmatically, the Crusca reversed the position of the Gellists in taking an unambiguous stance in favor of classical written Italian. But in a bow to spoken usage, it adopted phonetic rather than etymological spellings. This accentuated the distance between the Flo-

36. Sherberg, "Accademia Fiorentina" (above, n. 28), pp. 40–46; Armand L. De Gaetano, *Giambattista Gelli and the Florentine Academy: The Rebellion against Latin* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1976), pp. 137–160, 291–316. This attitude was shared by the Crusca's greatest critic, Beni; see Paul B. Diffley, "'Uncouth Words in Disarray': A Reassessment of Paolo Beni's Critique of the Vocabolario Della Crusca," *Studi Secenteschi* 40 (1999): 31–56, quote on p. 53.

37. Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries* (above, n. 15), pp. 117–118.

38. J. R. Woodhouse, "Borghini and the Foundation of the Accademia Della Crusca," in *Italian Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (above, n. 13), pp. 165–174; Robert Devereux, "The Crusca Academy and Its *Vocabolario*," *Italian Quarterly* 11:44 (1968): 67–86, 70–71; among these nonconformists were Lionardo Salviati and Antonfrancesco Grazzini, as well as the more aloof Vincenzo Borghini.

rentine vernacular and its Latin roots. Indeed, the Crusca's leading theorist, Lionardo Salviati, held the fourteenth century as a vernacular golden age from which his own century had lapsed in backsliding into Latinisms. His aim was thus modernist rather than archaizing: to restore Italian to a pristine condition from which it could resume an organic development unfettered by ancient authority.³⁹ This was impossible, though, without expanding the canon of "three crowns" (Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio) to encompass the past's fullest possible range of verbal expression. Hence the amateur lexicographers who carried on Salviati's legacy canvassed some 230 exemplary works, still mainly from the fourteenth century, for its dictionary entries. This effort made an entire milieu of literary greatness, and not merely the hallowed works of a few individual geniuses, available for future imitation. Rather than offering a mere concordance of literary models, the Cruscans reconstructed a purified, idealized language around its smallest constituent parts, the words themselves.

The *Vocabolario* could never lay debate to rest—Paolo Beni's *Anticrusca* appeared already in 1613—but it did establish an objective standard around which all subsequent debate would form.⁴⁰ The single-minded fixation on the meanings of words to the exclusion of grammar, syntax, rhetoric, orthography, pronunciation, and other aspects of language further constricted the wide-ranging schemes to legitimize vernacular learning entertained by the Crusca's predecessors.⁴¹ But it also focused the Cruscans on standardizing the meanings of words by establishing a fixed range of their acceptable usages in context (see figure 2, entry for "grembo," or womb). In this way, the *Vocabolario* incorporated a century of academic give-and-take on literary merit, entry by meticulous entry, and codified the Cruscans' own hard-won consensus. Acrimony among men had now been banished from academic culture, just as love toward

39. Peter Melville Brown, *Lionardo Salviati: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 188–195, 239–241.

40. Duffley, "Uncouth Words in Disarray" (above, n. 36); and Paul B. Duffley, *Paolo Beni: A Biographical and Critical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 98–103, 136–163; see also Bruno Migliorini and T. Gwynfor Griffith, *The Italian Language* (Boston: Faber & Faber, 1984), pp. 270–273, for a concise summary of debates subsequent to the *Vocabolario's* publication.

41. Yakov Malkiel, "Spontaneous Speech versus Academic Constraints in Medieval and Renaissance Europe," in *The Fairest Flower* (above, n. 13), pp. 9–20, esp. p. 11. By omitting grammar and syntax, the *Vocabolario's* lexical approach also avoided the danger of constructing an artificial language; the vitality and flexibility of the spoken language thus remained unthreatened, as the Gellists would have wished.

G R E M B O. Quella parte del corpo umano, dal bellico quasi infino al ginocchio, inquanto, o piegata, o sedendo, ell'è acconcia a riceuer che che si sia. Lat. *gremium*, *sinus*. Bocc. n. 36. 11. E lui, caduto, ritirandosi in grembo. Dan. Purg. c. 8. E dicea, ch'è sedette in grembo a Dido. E Inf. c. 12. Dicendo colui fessè in grembo a Dio, lo cuor, che su Tamigi ancor si cola [cioè in Chiesa] Petr. Son. 3 18. Verresti in grembo a questo sconfolato. E Son. 1 13. Fama nell'odorato, e ricco grembo D'Arabi monti [cioè nelle ualli di quei monti. ¶ Per grembiule, o lembo di uesta, piegato, e acconcio, per metterui dentro, e portare che che si sia. Bocc. n. 73. 14. Alzandosi i gheroni della gonnella, che all'Analda non era, e facendo di quegli ampio grembo, ec. non dopo molto gli empie. E di sopra. Fatto del mantello grembo, quello di pietre empie ..

Figure 2. *Vocabolario della Accademia della Crusca* (1612). Note the references to Bocc[acio], Dan[te's] *Purg[atorio]*, and so on.

women had been previously. What was left was an emotionless compendium of verbal facts to stand for the ages: the very repository of objectivity in prose.

The dictionary was a runaway success by the standards of 960-page tomes. Germans and Spaniards copied the *Crusca*, the London Royal Society flirted seriously with following its precedent, and its most famous offspring, Richelieu's *Académie Française*, crusades in our own day against Anglicisms like *le weekend* and *le hot-dog*.⁴² As despised as "academism" has become, the evolution of vernacular academies from popular to scholarly institutions established them as a bulwark against the shifting sands of spoken dialect. Later scientific academicians—foremost among them Galileo, himself made a *Cruscan* in 1605—built their claims to communicate with objective meaning on their efforts.

42. On England, see J. R. Woodhouse, "The Reluctant Academicals: Linguistic Individualism in England after the *Crusca*," in *The Fairest Flower* (above, n. 13), pp. 175–184; on the *Académie Française* and the *Crusca*, see Frances Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (London: Warburg Institute, 1947), pp. 290–297. Other imitators included the German *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* (1617–1680) and the Spanish *Real Academia Española* (1713–present).

The Orphic Impulse

In 1607, the Academy of the Infatuated (Invaghiti) in Mantua produced and premiered *Orfeo*, about the ancient musician who reclaims his beloved Eurydice from Hell, only to lose her again when he turns back to look at her. Monteverdi's opera, the first in the standard European repertory, marked the pinnacle of Renaissance musical humanism, two of whose epicenters were Paris and Florence. During the very decades that the official Florentine academies evolved to fix the objective meanings of words in dictionaries, this movement arose to unleash their subjective, emotional effects in song. In Paris, a chartered academy labored to reconcile a hothouse court amidst the strains of the French religious wars; in Florence, musical humanists straddled the academic world and the theater-going public in a by-then comfortably sensuous Catholic Italy.

Both groups sought to revive ancient Greek music—a synthesis of word and melody believed by Plato and others to exert a magical, soothing influence over both body and soul. Following Ficino, they viewed musical speech as the conduit of an ethereal *spiritus* (“breath” in Latin), the physical embodiment of sense (lexical meaning) as sensuousness (sound and rhythm).⁴³ That which the Crusicans would put asunder around 1600 in their dictionary, in other words, the musical humanists of the previous quarter-century sought to apprehend in its original supernatural potency. But no one in the sixteenth century knew exactly what ancient music sounded like; the absence of any reliable exemplars required academicians to seek out the most accomplished practitioners of modern music to innovate, and not just to imitate. Experiments with new ways to set words to music engaged the diverse talents of poets, philologists, instrument-makers, and mathematicians with a knowledge of harmony; in this way, an Orphic impulse ultimately derived from Ficino's Platonic Academy steered academicians' traditional literary skills into creative musical efforts.

The Académie de poésie et de musique

Founded in 1570 in Paris, the Académie de poésie et de musique came closer to resurrecting Ficino's Neoplatonism than any other Renaissance institution. It thrived under yet another de' Medici, Catherine, wife to one Valois king and mother to three more. The

43. See Gary Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic: Toward a Historiography of Others* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 101–145, on Ficino's magical songs; see also Dean T. Mace, “Pietro Bembo and the Literary Origins of the Italian Madrigal,” *The Musical Quarterly* 55 (1969): 65–86.

Académie's Letters Patent enjoined it to reproduce the music of antiquity for its profound moralizing effect on civic life. This promoted Catherine's quest to harmonize Protestants and Catholics in the months and years surrounding the infamous St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572.⁴⁴ The "measured" music produced by the Académie conformed to a rigid, even mathematical poetics requiring that short syllables be assigned quarter-notes and long syllables half-notes in a phonetically rewritten French. Catherine and her circle sincerely believed that the performance of such verse at Valois fêtes drew on unfailing correspondences between mundane music and cosmic harmony.⁴⁵ Together with the geometrically choreographed court dances anticipating modern ballet, musical poetry conferred the power not simply to overawe tense courtiers, but literally to orchestrate their heartfelt reconciliation.⁴⁶ An objective science of emotion realized in perfect music—the Pythagorean vision. A subjective language of feeling conveyed through dramatic song—the Orphic impulse. For France's first vernacular academy, as for others in Neoplatonism's thrall, the two were hardly distinguishable.⁴⁷

The Florentine Camerata

The informal group known as the Florentine Camerata provided a second point of contact between Neoplatonism and the academy during the 1570s and '80s. Its patron was Giovanni de' Bardi—aristocrat, polymath, devoted Platonist, and eminent Cruscan. As impresario for the Florentine de' Medici wedding celebrations of 1589, Bardi staged a series of lushly engineered *intermedi* as Platonic allegories, complete with figures of Doric Harmony and a presiding Jupiter, plus cosmological symbolism derived from the *Republic* and

44. Yates, *French Academies* (above, n. 42). See Yvonne Roberts, *Jean-Antoine De Baïf and the Valois Court* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), on the Académie's leader, and Roy C. Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals, 1450–1650* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 98–125, on the Medici–Valois court spectacles.

45. D. P. Walker, *Music, Spirit, and Language in the Renaissance*, ed. Penelope Gouk (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), article 2: "The Aims of Baïf's Académie de Poésie et de Musique"; on the role of mathematicians, see Natalie Zemon Davis, "Mathematicians in the Sixteenth-Century French Academies: Some Further Evidence," *Renaissance News* 11:1 (1958): 3–10.

46. See Carol Lee, *Ballet in Western Culture: A History of Its Origins and Evolution* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 37–48; Mark Franko, *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 32–51, esp. p. 35 on the relation of court ballet to the Académie and to Platonism.

47. See, in addition to the examples below, the treatment of the Venetian Accademia degli Uranici and Fabio Paolini in Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic* (above, n. 6), pp. 130–144.

the *Laws*.⁴⁸ *Intermedi*, as the name implies, interspersed conventional spoken theater with musical interludes, whereas the Renaissance understanding of ancient music increasingly demanded a synthesis of the two. *Dafne* (1597) and *Euridice* (1600), the musical dramas emerging from the Camerata, solved this problem innovatively in *recitative*, the distinctively operatic form of musical speech that makes continuously sung theater possible.⁴⁹ Their *dramatis personae* included legendary musicians—Apollo and Orpheus—who did not strain credulity in being seen to sing all their lines; instead, they fit neatly within the conventions of the Renaissance pastoral, a genre whose popularity helps explain the remarkable efflorescence of pagan mythology in an age of Counter-Reformation. In depicting a prelapsarian Arcadia of singing shepherds and dancing nymphs—an ideal world to which our own degraded one may re-ascend—pastoral drama acted as the principal legitimate conduit of vernacular Neoplatonism in sixteenth-century Italy.⁵⁰

Such experiments also revived a Ficinian tradition of Orphic singing that the official academies in Florence had failed to nurture. Ficino had held that a Platonic “divine furor” spontaneously possessed musicians in moments of rhapsody.⁵¹ Pietro Bembo, a follower of Ficino and an oft-cited authority in the Florentine academies, likewise spoke suggestively of an “occult power dwelling in every word” in his treatise on the vernacular. But debates on song held in the early days of the Accademia Fiorentina had marginalized the practice of oral performance by focusing instead on Bembo’s rules for *written* composition.⁵²

48. Strong, *Art and Power* (above, n. 44), pp. 133–141, esp. pp. 137–138; Nino Pirrotta, “Temperaments and Tendencies in the Florentine Camerata,” in *Music and Culture in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Baroque: A Collection of Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 217–234, esp. p. 222; Howard Mayer Brown, “Music—How Opera Began: An Introduction to Jacopo Peri’s *Euridice* (1600),” in *The Late Italian Renaissance, 1525–1630*, ed. Eric W. Cochrane (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 401–443, esp. pp. 414–415.

49. Brown, “Music—How Opera Began,” pp. 420–421; Claude V. Palisca, “The ‘Camerata Fiorentina’: A Reappraisal,” *Studi musicali* 1 (1972): 203–236, esp. pp. 221–222.

50. Richard Cody, *The Landscape of the Mind: Pastoralism and Platonic Theory in Tasso’s Aminta and Shakespeare’s Early Comedies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 1–80.

51. Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic* (above, n. 43), pp. 189–228; David Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, National Traditions of Opera series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 50, 65–66. See also Palisca, “Alterati of Florence” (above, n. 33), pp. 418–419, on the academic discussion of divine furor.

52. Nosow, “Debate on Song” (above, n. 14); see Mace, “Pietro Bembo” (above, n. 43), pp. 72–73, for the quotation from Bembo.

The Camerata's principal theorist, Vincenzo Galilei, explained how musical performance could reacquire the power to stir the emotions. In a famous 1581 *Dialogue*, Galilei argued that the ancient Greeks had practiced a much purer form of accompanied song, called monody, than the unaccompanied polyphony of the contemporary Italian madrigal. He denigrated polyphony for sacrificing emotional directness and immediacy beneath multiple, competing vocal lines. A lutenist, singer, and experimental acoustician, Galilei well understood instrumental music in its technical and especially mathematical dimensions.⁵³ Despite (or rather because of) this, he wished to detach it from the mathematical disciplines housed alongside music within the medieval *quadrivium*. Only in being realigned with the Renaissance arts of rhetoric and poetry could music be made subservient to words without submerging the human "affects" traditionally linked to the harmonies of the cosmic spheres. Only in being liberated from Platonic metaphysics could music become the imaginative, communicative art the Renaissance Neoplatonists had envisioned.

Opera Inside and Outside the Academies

The valorization of rhetoric and literary performance in the Italian literary academies had provided the crucial ingredient, lacking in France, catalyzing this artistic emancipation. Galilei's work segregated music as expressive art from music as exact science, hiving off the Orphic impulse from the Pythagorean vision. This cleared a space for musical drama to develop independently of the political and philosophical aims to which the Valois experiment in Paris had been subservient. In Italy, by contrast, the Orphic impulse, while it took root in the academies, only took flight outside of them, culminating in the entirely new institution of opera.

Bardi's Camerata, in fact, acted merely as the coordinating center of a network spanning formal academies on the one side and even more informal clusters on the other. For example, the Accademia degli Alterati (Altered), another challenger to the Fiorentina's monopoly on pedantry, overlapped in both personnel and program

53. Claude V. Palisca, "Was Galileo's Father an Experimental Scientist?" in *Number to Sound: The Musical Way to the Scientific Revolution*, ed. Paolo Gozza (Boston: Kluwer Academic, 2000), pp. 191–200.

54. Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries* (above, n. 15), pp. 116–139, offers an impressionistic but amusing account of the Alterati's pedantic culture. The Accademia Fiorentina was another source of Aristotelianism, especially through Girolamo Mei; see Barbara Russano Hanning, *Of Poetry and Music's Power: Humanism and the Creation of Opera* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980), pp. 28–37.

with the Camerata. While the Camerata channeled Neoplatonic impulses into musical humanism, the Alterati followed Aristotle in arguing for the role of passion, purgation, and catharsis in drama.⁵⁴ As an antidote to Plato's palliative ethics of cosmic harmony, this endowed opera with its characteristic range of emotional highs and lows. Among informal groups, while the Camerata revolved around aristocratic amateurs with ties to court culture—all of its known members except for Galilei contributed to the 1589 de' Medici festivals—the *palazzo* of Jacopo Corsi (a rival of Bardi's) provided a venue for instrumental and vocal experimentation free from the demands of courtly pomp and spectacle. *Dafne* was first performed there in 1597, and musicologist Claude Palisca credits Corsi's workshop of practicing musicians with introducing pastoral drama into opera's development.⁵⁵

Academies and academicians beyond Florence played key roles as well. Galilei's mentor Giuseffo Zarlino, associated with the Venetian academies, drew on the Pythagorean system to develop the mathematics of harmony.⁵⁶ The Roman philologist Girolamo Mei, Galilei's principal informant on Greek music, had been a charter member of the Accademia Fiorentina. The Florentine Academy of the Elevated (Elevati) helped transmit musical humanism to Mantua, home of the Infatuated and to Monteverdi's premiere of *Orfeo*. Starting with this performance, opera began increasingly to serve upper-class taste more than the theorists' designs. It soon spread to Venice, where it finally emerged from the domain of all-male experimentation and flourished in the mixed company of the commercial concert house.⁵⁷

The membership, aims, ideology, and contribution of the Florentine Camerata are today as hotly disputed as the status of Ficino's Platonic Academy.⁵⁸ The "greater" Camerata sketched above is best regarded not as an academy at all, but as the germ of a new institution:

55. Palisca, "Alterati of Florence" (above, n. 33), p. 422.

56. Gozza, *Number to Sound* (above, n. 53), p. 26; Iain Fenlon, "Zarlino and the Accademia Venetiana," in *Italian Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (above, n. 13), pp. 79–90.

57. See Iain Fenlon, "The Mantuan *Orfeo*," in *Claudio Monteverdi, Orfeo*, ed. John Whenham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 1–19, esp. pp. 3, 8, 11–12, 186n11, 187nn23–24 on the Elevati and the Invaghiti, and Kimbell, *Italian Opera* (above, n. 51), pp. 63–120, for an overview.

58. Touchstones of the debate include Palisca, "Camerata Fiorentina" (above, n. 49), and Pirrotta, "Temperaments and Tendencies" (above, n. 48); my interpretation derives in part from the innovative sociological perspective adopted by Ruth Katz, "Collective 'Problem-Solving' in the History of Music: The Case of the Camerata," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45:3 (1984): 361–377.

it was an opera company without an audience. What it gave to opera—and here it again built on the traditions of the literary academy—was aesthetic independence, a new form of subjectivity. Of all European art forms, opera demands most to be judged on its own terms; unlike painting, sculpture, architecture, or even conventional theater—each mimetic in its own way—opera builds on the apparent absurdity of a drama sung from start to finish. The Camerata identified this as a theoretical challenge, provided its practical solution in recitative, and elaborated a philosophical vision to underpin it all: what Louise Clubb terms “mimesis of invisible reality” and Gary Tomlinson, “supersensual verisimilitude.”⁵⁹ Imitation of the supernatural, the expansion of Aristotelian mimesis to encompass the transcendental realm of Platonic ideas, the use of familiar dramatic conventions to make musical mysticism accessible: this was the ultimate realization of the Orphic impulse in opera. That such an art form should so tidily reflect an academic synthesis of Plato and Aristotle mattered little, of course, to its devotees. But that is precisely the point: the “Ficinian subjectivity” that Tomlinson identifies as Renaissance opera’s greatest achievement was realized only outside of formal academic culture.⁶⁰

The Hermetic Impulse

Subjective experience, as in opera, varies in emotional content from person to person; objective meaning, as in dictionaries, rests on dispassionate consensus about what constitutes knowledge. Between the Crusca’s literary research and the Camerata’s musical experiments, academicians forged a working distinction between the two by focusing, as they always had, on words. All around them, meanwhile, the Italian Renaissance was moving beyond the text: men of learning, with mounting enthusiasm, collected material objects, from Roman coins to Mexican plants, and refined their observations of the natural world in microscopes and telescopes;⁶¹ investigations of marvels and wonders, cabinets of curiosities, treasuries of plant and animal specimens, museums of artworks and antiqui-

59. Tomlinson, “Pastoral and Musical Magic” (above, n. 11), p. 16, also citing Louise Clubb, “La mimesi della realtà invisibile nel dramma pastorale italiano e inglese del tardo rinascimento,” *Misure critiche* 4 (1974): 65–92.

60. Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera*, Princeton Studies in Opera series (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 7, 8, 14, 25–26, 35–38.

61. Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); idem, “Possessing the Past: The Material World of the Italian Renaissance,” *American Historical Review* 103:1 (1998): 83–114; Ashworth, “Natural History” (above, n. 26).

ties, and the apparatus of the new science all proliferated under courtly and mercantile patronage, but almost completely outside the ambit of the sixteenth-century academies. Most of the latter remained bound by their literary traditions. When Galileo Galilei went to the de' Medicis, it was because he needed their muscle to continue scrutinizing the night sky; when he went to the Accademia Fiorentina, it was to lecture on geometry in Dante.⁶²

The one specifically academic current sparking an engagement with the new science was Hermeticism. Hermetics recognized no distinction between subject and object, knowledge of self and knowledge of nature, the microcosmic individual and the macrocosmic universe; its brand of Neoplatonic spirituality all but propelled it into investigations of the material world.⁶³ For Ficino and others of an astrological bent, this had taken the form of stargazing: the physician-priest looked to the planets for clues of their influence over the scholar's body and soul. Others probed the secrets of terrestrial nature, especially through alchemy, whose search for the philosopher's stone posited occult linkages between human moral-medical states and the natural elements. Both an operative discipline of metallic transmutation and a speculative system of spiritual regeneration, alchemy bridged artisanal practice and scholarly discourse. It was, in Pamela Smith's words, "one of the few disciplines in which people worked both with texts and with their hands."⁶⁴ But in Florence, during the same decades that Ficino's *Corpus Hermeticum* lost its grip on the academic imagination, alchemy devolved within a few generations into a humble art: metallurgy. In 1544, the Florentine arch-academician Benedetto Varchi defended its use, but dismissed both its spiritual pretensions and grandiose claims to turn base metals into gold.⁶⁵ Were such a fragmented tradition to congeal into a Hermetic impulse, it would have to come from outside Florence.

62. See Mario Biagioli, *Galileo, Courtier: The Practice of Science in the Culture of Absolutism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 117–118, on this and on his even more literarily conformist presentations for the Crusca, probably in the 1590s. Galileo became consul of the Fiorentina in 1620.

63. This view is known as the "Yates thesis" when it is more specifically (and controversially) articulated as a contribution to the history of the Scientific Revolution; see Yates, *Giordano Bruno* (above, n. 8), pp. 144–156, and, more directly, Frances Yates, "The Hermetic Tradition in Renaissance Science," in *Ideas and Ideals in the North European Renaissance* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 227–246.

64. Pamela H. Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 142.

65. On Varchi's *Questiones sull'Alchimia* (1544), see William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princ-

The Accademia del Disegno

Contacts in Florence between the material world and the academy instead arose from the fine arts, with the movement to objectivize aesthetic judgments. The Accademia del Disegno (Design), founded in the 1560s, has been called the prototype of the modern state-sponsored arts academy. A hybrid academy, guild, confraternity, studio, and de' Medici culture ministry, it embraced architecture, painting, and sculpture under the interdisciplinary rubric of "design." Varchi, in two famous lectures at the Fiorentina, put these arts on a level with literature; and Giorgio Vasari, the great art historian and the academy's founder, followed him in articulating the principles of *disegno*.⁶⁶ Together, they identified draftsmanship as the geometric, abstracting, rational core of all the design arts, whatever the medium. Color, texture, and other surface attributes became, in this Aristotelian view, accidental qualities of matter next to the pure line bestowing form. The masterpieces stocking the Uffizi galleries gave this theory canonical exemplars ready at hand.

This meant that, whereas the Camerata had no specimens of ancient music to go by, the Disegno had no need to innovate; its creativity stymied at birth, it produced such aesthetically derivative, assembly-line "academic" art that Vasari himself disavowed it.⁶⁷ Innovators like Caravaggio, indifferent to draftsmanship though an unflinching realist, flouted academic style in producing the macabre history scenes that made him the great Baroque painter of emotional extremity. *Disegno* fit the demands, not of subjectivist, but of objectivist representation, building its stylization of visual reality on a canon of time-tested and academically sanctioned works, just as the Crusca would. Galileo was steeped in this tradition (he joined the Disegno in 1613) and famously used it to depict the craters of the moon. While others had equally powerful telescopes, only Galileo

eton University Press, 1994), p. 159, and Mendelsohn, *Paragoni* (above, n. 18), p. 23; see also Antonio Clericuzio and de Renzi, "Medicine, Alchemy, and Natural Philosophy," in *Italian Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (above, n. 13), pp. 175–194, at p. 187. On Varchi's influence, see Samuels, "Benedetto Varchi," and Lowry, "Proving Ground" (both above, n. 16).

66. Karen-edis Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State: The Discipline of Disegno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 23–33 (on Vasari) and pp. 146–151 (on Varchi and *disegno*), as well as Mendelsohn, *Paragoni* (above, n. 18), *passim*.

67. Indeed, the academy soon reverted to the hidebound ways of the guilds it was intended to supplant, ultimately becoming little more than a sophisticated instrument of the de' Medici's cultural program; see Cochrane, *The Late Italian Renaissance* (above, n. 48), pp. 66–67, on Vasari's disavowal of the Disegno.

had acquired from Florentine *disegno* the knowledge of shadow and perspective needed to show, in defiance of ancient wisdom, that the moon is not flat.⁶⁸ His lunar sketches have since become canonical in themselves. Still, his research would never have been conducted under the suffocating auspices of the design academy itself.

The "Secret" Scientific Academies

The earliest academies devoted specifically to study of the natural world were found in southern Italy as early as the 1540s. The Accademia Segreta, so called both because it studied nature's secrets and because it operated furtively (probably in Salerno), practiced a wide-ranging, medically tinged alchemy.⁶⁹ This it conceived in typical Hermetic fashion as a vehicle of natural knowledge, knowledge of self, and wider socio-religious reform. Giambattista Della Porta's similarly named Accademia dei Segreti carried on its traditions until the Inquisition shut it down in 1578, but his bestseller *Natural Magic* spread its secrets to a pan-European audience. *Natural Magic* aimed not to reform, but to delight and astonish, mingling chapters on changing metals and counterfeiting precious stones with discussions of monstrous births, women's beauty secrets, and the pinhole camera (*camera obscura*, famous in art history, which he invented). Other works showcased the ever-popular techniques of physiognomy, palm-reading, and other "sciences of surface" that granted access to the occult processes leaving "signatures" in the sensory realm.⁷⁰

Della Porta was not only Italy's most respected magus, but—significantly—its most famous comic playwright. He likened marvelous phenomena—the prodigies of a "joking, subtle, ingenious, and prodigious nature"—to the comedic poetry of antiquity and the virtuosic spectacles of contemporary court life. His own plays revolved around "*meraviglia*": outrageous plots, linguistic hyperbole, contrived complications, identity confusion, and other dramatic devices refined from the popular *commedia dell'arte* into learned meditations

68. Samuel Y. Edgerton, *The Heritage of Giotto's Geometry: Art and Science on the Eve of the Scientific Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 223–253.

69. Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature* (above, n. 65), pp. 147–161; William Eamon and Françoise Paheau, "The Accademia Segreta of Girolamo Ruscelli: A Sixteenth-Century Italian Scientific Society," *Isis* 75:277 (1984): 327–342.

70. On signatures and Neoplatonic correspondences, see Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature* (above, n. 65), pp. 213–215; see also David Freedberg, *The Eye of the Lynx: Galileo, His Friends, and the Beginnings of Modern Natural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 402, on "sciences of surface."

on social order.⁷¹ The link in Della Porta's work between theatrical legerdemain and the production of scientific marvels recalls Shakespeare's Prospero, for whom Della Porta may have provided a model. Renaissance occultists conflated science and art, magic and theater, object and subject; they operated in a Neoplatonic world of universal correspondences and hidden interconnections, whether probing natural phenomena as practiced alchemists or orchestrating spectators' emotions as ingenious dramaturges.

The Accademia dei Lincei

The first Renaissance academy to practice natural investigations approximating the standards of modern objectivity was the Academy of the Lynxes (Lincei). First active in Rome from 1603 to 1630, it serves today in revived form as Italy's national academy of science. The Lincei at once embraced the new science with, literally, Jesuitical fervor—the Society of Jesus was both an institutional model and local rival—and returned to the full-blown traditions of the sixteenth-century academy. Its cryptic name and *impresa* refer to the lynx's preternaturally keen eyesight, its Hermetic ability to penetrate and not merely observe the secrets of nature. Its statutes, a perpetual work-in-progress ultimately filling 242 manuscript pages, reverted to a Ficinian, all-male concept of Platonic love to segregate its membership from all carnal and profane distractions.⁷²

In other ways, however, the Lincei finally stripped Ficinian metaphysics from the Hermetic impulse and gave expression to a wide-ranging and proto-scientific empiricism. Federico Cesi, the Roman aristocrat who founded the academy at age 18, may have been an avid follower of horoscopes, but his ideal of academic conduct presupposed no avenues of occult insight. What he called "*lincealità*" was a purely subjective attitude, a passionate open-mindedness toward nature; only by being unclouded by metaphysical dogma could the lynx-eyed attain objective knowledge. The same mindset governed the first initiates to the Lincei, many of them émigrés from northern Europe. There, Hermetic alchemy still flourished though

71. Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature* (above, n. 65), pp. 225–229, quote on p. 217; Louise Clubb, *Giambattista Della Porta, Dramatist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 144–148.

72. See Mario Biagioli, "Knowledge, Freedom, and Brotherly Love: Homosociality and the Accademia Dei Lincei," *Configurations* 3:2 (1995): 139–166, esp. pp. 141–142, 157–158 on Ficino's Platonic Academy; Clericuzio and de Renzi, "Medicine, Alchemy, and Natural Philosophy" (above, n. 65), p. 193n97.

in the form of Paracelsian medicine, thus standing much closer to artisanal practices and empirical therapies.⁷³

In its objectification of the natural world, the Lincei reached its symbolic turning point between 1610, when it inducted Della Porta, and 1611, when Galileo joined. Florentine *disegno* intertwined with Neapolitan Hermeticism in the Lincei's dedication to natural history, which far overshadowed their engagement with astronomy. Their greatest collective achievement was the *Tesoro Messicano*, the vast collection of New World plants, animals, and minerals that the academicians subjected to microscopic scrutiny. David Freedberg's copiously illustrated analysis of the Lincei chronicles its failed struggle to depict the generic traits of these specimens without sacrificing a whit of each one's details.⁷⁴ Picture warred with diagram, maximal realism with schematic simplification, color and detail with the pure line, surface signatures with essential characteristics, and, ultimately, all that emerged was a vast trove of lavish drawings with little taxonomic value. If Galileo's renditions of moon craters represent the triumph of *disegno* as a paradigm of mimetic representation, the Lincei's natural history pictures depict the birth pains of a Hermeticism made more rigorously empirical: only an empiricist could muster the patience and discipline to observe nature's details uncontaminated by occultist presuppositions, but only a Hermetic could believe that the accumulation of sensory facts, when pursued so doggedly, would open the book of nature to deeper human understanding.

The Lincei's successor academies, starting with the Florentine Accademia del Cimento (Experiment), abandoned the passivity of mere observation, both celestial and terrestrial; instead, they upheld the contrivance of marvels as the royal road to objectivity—the “testing and retesting” of anomalous phenomena, in the Cimento's motto—that made them commonplace by repetition. Biagioli, Shapin, Daston, and others have shown how this new emphasis on experiment marked a great mid-seventeenth-century epistemologi-

73. Anna Maria Partini, “I Primi Lincei E L'ermetismo,” *Rendiconti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Classe di Scienze morali, stoiche e filologiche* 8:41 (1986): 59–83; Clericuzio and de Renzi, “Medicine, Alchemy, and Natural Philosophy” (above, n. 65), pp. 181, 186–187, 192; Pietro Redondi, *Galileo Heretic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 86–87. On Paracelsianism as a practical, artisanal strain of alchemy, see Smith, *Body of the Artisan* (above, n. 64), pp. 155–182.

74. See Freedberg, *Eye of the Lynx* (above, n. 70), pp. 245–274, on the Mexican Treasury, and also pp. 5–9, 349–351, 388–390, 397–416 for general conclusions. Freedberg does not explicitly link the Lincei's pictorial epistemology to *disegno*, but his treatment of diagram, geometry, and, especially, color implicitly invoke it.

cal divide.⁷⁵ But only the prior supposition of observers' objectivity could relieve their experimental theater from suspicions of Hermetic magic: by disciplining members to adhere to dispassionate standards enshrined in their statutes, mottoes, and mission, the Renaissance academy made a lasting institutional contribution to modern science.

Conclusion

By the seventeenth century, academicians had acquired the Midas touch: they bestowed upon everything within their purview the gold standard of objectivity, simultaneously depriving their subject matter of the life, spirit, and mystery with which Ficino's metaphysical quests had imbued it. Thus the Crusca drained sound, magic, and feeling from words and objectified them quite literally in the form of a dictionary; the Disegno managed to produce a sterile aesthetics in the very capital of Italian Renaissance art; the Lincei separated the human passion for knowledge from its expression in the disciplined, empirical study of natural objects; and the Camerata was the exception proving the rule: opera, though it originated as an academic experiment, only gained the ability to convey emotion as an independent, nonacademic art form.

In none of these cases was the court patronage emphasized by the historiography necessary for what amounted to self-sustaining academic endeavors, nor was it anywhere sufficient. Courtiers are, at worst, craven flatterers and, at best, credulous, enthusiastic dilettantes. In Catherine de' Medici's circle and in Ficino's gatherings, but most especially in the courts of Rudolf II's Prague and Elizabethan England, they were as likely to fan the flames of occultist speculation as to tamp them down. Adopting courtly etiquette may have helped academicians become the arbiters of the new science—later on, but it could also make them the custodians of a stultifying official taste that, in literature and the arts, often smothered creativity. Such was all too clearly the case with both the Fiorentina and Disegno. These official academies traded on the putative objectivity of "gentlemen," but did little to emancipate them from courtly dependence; the Fiorentina rose to influence by marginalizing women and commoners, the Disegno by co-opting artisans, but both ultimately served the de' Medicis.

Academies, like courts, were composed largely of second-tier intellects, men like Varchi, Salviati, Bardi, and Cesi—some of them earnest, others egotistical; some conformist, others eccentric. But as

75. See especially Daston, "Baconian Facts" (above, n. 3), p. 338.

an institution, the academy produced few, if any, geniuses. Monteverdi and Ficino each in different ways hovered on the edges of the academy movement. Galileo joined the Fiorentina, the Crusca, the Disegno, and the Lincei, but was not a “joiner” defined by his memberships; instead, he used academies as vehicles for other, greater purposes—they were indispensable to him as autonomous forums. The ability to sway an assemblage of mediocre though fiercely independent minds is one barometer of objective success, perhaps the best approximation of metaphysical certitude available to inherently subjective human witnesses. This was an ability that Della Porta, for all his popularity in the wider culture, evidently lacked, but that Galileo, steeped in the humanist rhetoric institutionalized by the literary academies, evidently possessed in abundance.

Neoplatonism, like genius, was a wild card, an antidote to ossification even among the mediocre. As Orphic impulse, it kept the performative, poetic, experimental culture of the early literary academies alive; as Hermetic impulse, it mediated a shift from words to things as privileged objects of knowledge. But Neoplatonism gave the academic movement its ideology from a position largely outside its institutions. Traditional humanist rhetoric could thus retain its superiority at the very moment the orchestration of emotion and the observation of nature became academic pursuits. Crucially to the dissemination of modern science, words triumphed over things by enveloping experimental findings in the *Saggi* of the Cimento and the *Transactions* of the Royal Society. In these and other published academic reports, verbal objectivity reigned supreme at the moment modern prose facticity itself displaced Renaissance rhetorical flourish.

Outside of science, those devoted to the pleasures and mysteries of the word began to look elsewhere. The culture of subjectivity, of Platonic love, of poetry and spirituality, of sacred mystery and profane enjoyment, survived in at least two places besides opera: Italy's Arcadian academies, dedicated to improvisational poetry, with cells all over the peninsula, reintroduced women into academic culture starting in the 1690s;⁷⁶ and during the same epoch, English freemasonry, whose statutes, Hermetic emblems and symbols, and “Mason Word” were exclusive to gentlemen, overlapped strikingly in its membership with the founders of the Royal Society.⁷⁷ If the Arcadia

76. Paola Giuli, “Women Poets and Improvisers: Cultural Assumptions and Literary Values in Arcadia,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 32 (2003): 69–92.

77. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment* (above, n. 23); David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century 1590–1710* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 77–189.

was the humanistic mirror image of the new science, freemasonry was its spiritual alter ego.

Meanwhile, in Bourbon France, royal academies completed the reorganization of knowledge prefigured in the Medicean establishments. After the Académie Française imitated the Crusca in 1635, painting and sculpture came next, in 1648, united as in the Disegno. Dance followed in 1661, the descendant of the ballets pioneered at the Valois courts. The Académie Royale de Musique, founded in 1669, was, significantly, none other than an official opera company. The most creative of the state academies, the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, was its clearest throwback; founded in 1663 to unearth classical and mythological allusions appropriate for royal occasions, it channeled the still-vital humanism of the Italian literary academy into the study of antiquities, numismatics, epigraphs, and non-European languages and cultures. By contrast, the famed Académie des Sciences (1666) merely embraced disciplines still lacking institutional homes elsewhere, notably the mathematical *science* of music. As influential as it became as a patron of natural philosophy, it began as a residual institution, a mere shadow of the encyclopedic academy envisioned by its first promoters.⁷⁸ If the French academies were thus largely unoriginal, one does find in them, for the first time, an institutional separation between science and the humanities.

The privilege science enjoys in our own time, both inside and outside academia, has long prevented the academies from being properly appreciated, not merely as precursors to modern objectivity, but as the Western tradition's most impressive alternative to the research university, with its equally all-encompassing brief. Already, by the time the academies first flourished, the "Renaissance man" was an ideal hopelessly outmoded by the accumulation of specialized knowledge; but in them, at least, the fusion of scholarly discipline and real-world engagement thrived in ways worth excavating now.

78. Yates, *French Academies* (above, n. 42), pp. 290–311; Albert Cohen, *Music in the French Royal Academy of Sciences: A Study in the Evolution of Musical Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981). An academy for architecture was established last, in 1671.