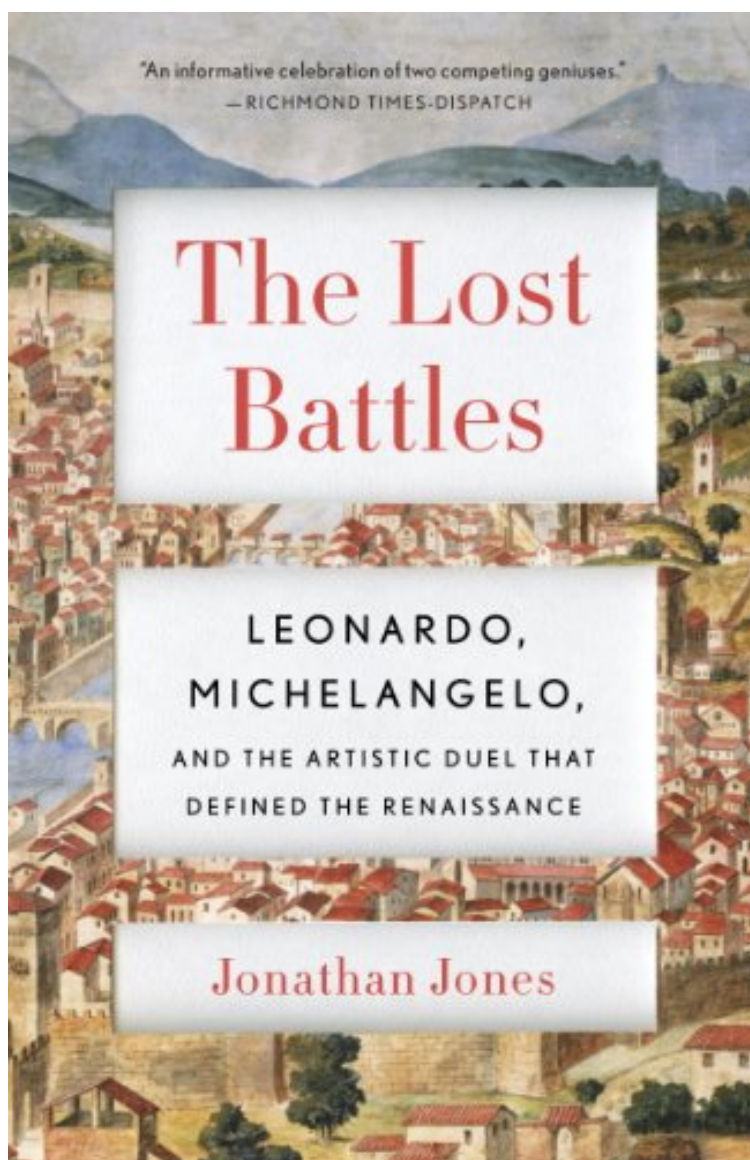


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# The Lost Battles: Leonardo, Michelangelo, and the Artistic Duel That Defined the Renaissance



*Par Jonathan Jones*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFrom one of Britains most respected and acclaimed art historians, art critic of The Guardianthe galvanizing story of a sixteenth-century clash of titans, the two greatest minds of the Renaissance, working side by side in the same room in a fierce competition: the master Leonardo da Vinci, commissioned by the Florentine Republic to paint a narrative fresco depicting a famous military victory on a

wall of the newly built Great Council Hall in the Palazzo Vecchio, and his implacable young rival, the thirty-year-old Michelangelo. We see Leonardo, having just completed *The Last Supper*, and being celebrated by all of Florence for his miraculous portrait of the wife of a textile manufacturer. That painting the Mona Lisa being called the most lifelike anyone had ever seen yet, more divine than human, was captivating the entire Florentine Republic. And Michelangelo, completing a commissioned statue of David, the first colossus of the Renaissance, the archetype hero for the Republic epitomizing the triumph of the weak over the strong, helping to reshape the public identity of the city of Florence and conquer its heart. In *The Lost Battles*, published in England to great acclaim (Superb *The Observer*; Beguilingly written *The Guardian*), Jonathan Jones brilliantly sets the scene of the time the politics; the world of art and artisans; and the shifting, agitated cultural landscape. We see Florence, a city freed from the oppressive reach of the Medicis, lurching from one crisis to another, trying to protect its liberty in an Italy descending into chaos, with the new head of the Republic in search of a metaphor that will make clear the glory that is Florence, and seeing in the commissioned paintings the expression of his vision. Jones reconstructs the paintings that Leonardo and Michelangelo undertook: Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*, a nightmare seen in the eyes of the warrior (it became the first modern depiction of the disenchantment of war) and Michelangelo's *Battle of Cascina*, a call to arms and the first great transfiguration of the erotic into art. Jones writes about the competition; how it unfolded and became the defining moment in the transformation of craftsman to artist; why the Florentine government began to fall out of love with one artist in favor of the other; and how and why in a competition that had no formal prize to clearly resolve the outcome, the battle became one for the hearts and minds of the Florentine Republic, with Michelangelo setting out to prove that his work, not Leonardo's, embodied the future of art. Finally, we see how the result of the competition went on to shape a generation of narrative paintings, beginning with those of Raphael. A riveting exploration into one of history's most resonant exchanges of ideas, a rich, fascinating book that gives us a whole new understanding of an age and those at its center.

Extrait Introduction The candles cast a flickering light on flayed skin and exposed sinews. Leonardo da Vinci takes his knife and scrapes away more flesh from the arm, trying to make sense of the chaos revealed by his knife. With his left hand he makes a rapid sketch. As dawn breaks, the first rays of the sun catch the waxen face of the dead man. Bells in the hospital chapel ring for early-morning mass. This is the image of his own life that Leonardo paints in a passage in his notebooks on the vocation of the anatomist. Introducing his subtle, tender, yet precise drawings based on his own dissections of human bodies, he declaims: And you, who say it would be better to watch an anatomical demonstration than to see these drawings, you would be right, if it were possible to see all the things the drawings demonstrate in the dissection of a single body, which with all your intelligence you will not see, nor get knowledge of more than a few veins . . . as one single body did not last long enough, it was necessary to proceed bit by bit with many bodies, until I had completed the research; which I did twice in order to see the differences. Beyond all these practical challenges lie emotional and psychological barriers: And if you should have a love of such things, you might be stopped by your disgust, and if that did not hinder you, then perhaps by the fear of spending the night hours in the company of those dead bodies, quartered and flayed and terrifying to behold. It is the last sentence that arrests the reader. Leonardo created his beautiful anatomical drawings under the most harrowing circumstances. He spent his nights among the dead, contemplating their eviscerated flesh, struggling with his own horror. How did he ever embark on such a strange adventure? Leonardo da Vinci had a lifelong interest in anatomy he had a lifelong interest in all aspects of human existence, and in all of nature but the great drawings he made of dissected bodies were begun in 1508 as work fizzled out on one of the most ambitious projects he ever undertook. If that project failed it then it gave life to what is in some ways Leonardo's greatest body of work. It is only necessary to compare his drawings of heart valves, facial muscles, the brain, and the sinews of an arm with the harsh, gory prints in the slightly later work of the first modern anatomist, Vesalius, to see how miraculous Leonardo's eye was. His studies of the human frame are at once scientifically meticulous and artistically exceptional: each pen stroke aches with wonder. On timeworn yellow and blue sheets of paper, he touches into rich life shades and nuances of bone and muscle. Veins hang like the roots of a plant; the interior of a heart resembles a cathedral. Profound love of creation pulses in these drawings. Out of his nights of horror, Leonardo reveals a deep poetic admiration for the human creature. At the same moment, another artist is daring just as much, for an equally magnificent reward. Michelangelo Buonarroti climbs a wooden ladder to the platform he has built on wooden rafters slotted just beneath the arched Gothic vaulting of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. It is 1508 and he is starting the commission of his life, to paint the soaring ceiling of the Popes personal place of worship. Within

months Michelangelo will dismiss most of his team of assistants and turn his labour in the chapel into a struggle to impose a personal vision of humanity's place in the cosmos onto this lofty interior. As Michelangelo plants his feet firmly on the wooden boards to start to fill the empty vault above him, he is just as conscious as Leonardo of his own heroism. His enterprise in the Sistine Chapel is a cruel physical trial. Only a young and fit man could take on such a thing while Leonardo da Vinci is fifty-six years old in 1508, Michelangelo is thirty-three. In the kind of coincidence the younger artist relished, it is the age of Christ when he endured the cross. As he forces his tired body to keep its balance day after day, raising his leaden arm to brush bright colours onto the fictional heavens above, Michelangelo comes to see his labour as a strange torture, a ritual of pain. In a poem he describes what it feels like to stand on the scaffolding with his head bent back, his arm raised and his face covered in paint: Beard to the sky, I feel my brain on my hump, I have the breast of a harpy, and the brush constantly above me makes, as it drips, a rich pavement of my face. It's tempting to speculate that he actually wrote these lines on the scaffolding, for as he looked down at the floor far below he would have found his image of a rich pavement—the chapel has a brightly coloured pavement of particoloured marbles, a kaleidoscopic mosaic like Michelangelo's own paint-spattered face. It was observed by a nineteenth-century art historian that Michelangelo portrayed creation no less than five times on the chapel's ceiling, as God divides light from darkness, makes the sun and moon, hovers over the waters, gives life to Adam, and creates Eve. It is as if the artist was depicting his own creative genius in the vault of the heavens. These two titanic talents were leaping to new heights of ambition and courage in 1508. They were working heroically, daring the dark, braving the heights. It is one of the great moments in cultural history, the epoch of the High Renaissance. In the hands of Leonardo and Michelangelo in the early sixteenth century, the art of the Italian Renaissance becomes fully conscious, lucid, and complete. The anatomical studies of Leonardo and the painted ceiling of Michelangelo could not seem more antithetical. As Leonardo draws tiny scientific images of dissected organs in fragile notebooks, Michelangelo paints huge figures on a vault at the heart of papal power. Yet a rivalry between the two artists lies just beneath the surface of these works. Leonardo in making the greatest drawings anyone has ever created of the dissected human form sets out to challenge Michelangelo's unequalled sculptures of the nude body to outdo the younger man's muscular nudes by looking deeper, exposing the inner fabric of muscles themselves. Meanwhile, on a colossal scale in the Sistine Chapel, his younger rival paints his answer to Leonardo's notebooks with their teeming imaginative wonders. The image of the book is unavoidable on the Sistine Ceiling. Michelangelo portrays prophets and sibyls opening gigantic tomes: with its many layers of fiction and decoration, his complex painting resembles a vast illuminated text. It is a history of the cosmos, the book of time. From a religious perspective that is the opposite of Leonardo's sceptical science, it sets out to eclipse the older man's intellect as well as his art. These rivalries and parallels come of intense mutual observation. When Leonardo and Michelangelo worked simultaneously on science and cosmology in the years just after 1508, they were rebounding from a competition that deeply affected both their lives. This book tells the story of that competition. The climax of the Italian Renaissance was not reached in a healthy dialogue of great minds. It was the outcome of savage, merciless rivalry. In the 1490s Leonardo and Michelangelo both, independently, developed a new kind of classical art, more lucid than any previous Italian attempt to revive the style of ancient Greece and Rome, and more eloquent in its capacity to make monumental statements. But what forged this new art into the full grandeur of the High Renaissance—the supreme age that lasted from 1504 to the 1520s, when Michelangelo designed his Laurentian Library in Florence—was a brutal confrontation between them. In 1503 Leonardo was commissioned to paint a mural of a famous historical episode, the Battle of Anghiari, in the Great Council Hall of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. In 1504, as he was planning his painting, his junior Michelangelo was invited to paint a rival work, The Battle of Cascina, in the same room. It became a competition to discover which of the two was in the words of Piero Soderini, the republican head of state who commissioned the pictures and launched the competition—the greatest artist in the world. The confrontation in the Great Council Hall made Florence, said an eyewitness, the school of the world. It was a spectacle that drew artists from all over Italy and beyond to admire the heights of ingenuity to which Leonardo and Michelangelo were driven by their rivalry. Out of it came a new idea of genius of the artist as an enigmatic original in which we still believe today. It was in this competition that artists were first fully and openly recognised, not as artisans doing a job of work, but as godlike creators of the new. The Renaissance is an important moment in history not just because it gave us so much beautiful art, so many fine works of literature, so many great buildings. It is important because, as the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt argued in 1860 in his classic work *The Civilisation of the Renaissance* in

Italy, this culture gave birth to the modern individual. The self striving for fulfilment is a Renaissance concept that still describes our lives. There is no clearer evidence of its genesis than the contest between Leonardo and Michelangelo. This drama takes us to Florence, cultural capital of the Renaissance world, to behold titanic egos in collision. It is a spectacle of sublime ambition and low cunning, of great minds and petty dislikes, of genius stepping off its plinth to live among the flawed passions of a city of flesh and blood. The newborn modern self is about to take the stage in all its agony and ecstasy. One

The Insult

In the autumn of 1504 Leonardo da Vinci made an inventory of his wardrobe. He had to leave Florence on a military mission, and so he stored some of his most precious possessions in two chests at a monastery, one of which contained his books. But if his reading material offers insights into his mind, his handwritten description of the contents of the other box gives us a uniquely intimate glimpse of his daily existence. Leonardo wrote his clothing inventory in a notebook (known today as Madrid Codex II) which he carried around with him from 1503 to 1505 and filled with notes that abound with insight into his life in Florence in those years. His inventory brings us disconcertingly close to the very skin of this Renaissance dandy: One gown of taffeta One lining of velvet that can be used as a gown One Arab cloak One gown of dusty rose One pink Catalan gown One dark purple cape, with big collar and hood of velvet One gown of Sala, laced la Franaise One cape la Franaise, that was Duke Valentinos, of Sala One Flemish gown, Salas One purple satin overcoat One overcoat of crimson satin, la Franaise Another overcoat of Sala, with cuffs of black velvet One dark purple camel-hair overcoat One pair of dark purple tights One pair of dusty-rose tights One pair of black tights Two pink caps One grain-coloured hat One shirt of Reims linen, worked la Franaise This is an exquisite costume chest. Not the least striking of its contents are four garments specified as di Sala meaning that Leonardos clothes were mixed up with those of his workshop assistant Sala. In the sixteenth century it was said this Sala was most attractive in grace and beauty, having beautiful hair, curly and bright, in which Leonardo delighted much. Sala first joined the workshop as an apprentice in 1490, when he was ten; his master was shocked to find the boy an accomplished thief, taking money out of his own and friends purses, and bitterly summed up the kids personality as thief, liar, obstinate, glutton. But by the early 1500s Sala whether or not his character had improved was the unquestioned leader of Leonardos workshop, and people who needed to speak to the absent-minded genius found themselves dealing with this young man whose curly hair and slightly podgy face make him look in drawings by Leonardo like a decadent young Roman emperor. The list of clothes reveals how close they were: theres even an alteration where di Sala was added later, as if there were some dispute over who owned what. Yet the garments ascribed to Sala are far more conventional than Leonardos own clothes. The coat with black velvet cuffs that belongs to the assistant could have come straight out of numerous sixteenth-century portraits of stylish young men, such as the disdainful individual in black portrayed by Lorenzo Lotto in 15068 against a white curtain that emphasises his severe dress. When Sala went around in clothes that were obviously expensive yet muted in hue, he showed fashionably restrained good taste. Leonardo by contrast dressed almost exclusively in pink and purple, a delicate palette that harmonised with his own paintings. It was as if he were a character escaped from a fresco. Surely this was a deliberate badge of professional identity wearing colours that might have been mixed in his own workshop. Leonardo believed in painting as a vocation, an ethos, a way of life. The painter, he exulted, sits in front of his work well-dressed and moves a very light brush with lovely colours, and is adorned with clothes as he pleases . . . He mentions the painters excellent clothes and freedom of dress twice in this passage, which also stresses that painting is the manipulation of colour. In fact Leonardos taste in dress was of a piece with his aspirations as a painter. From his very earliest works, one of his overriding fascinations is with how oil paints can reproduce the transparencies and opacities, folds and twists, brightness and darkness of textiles. Among the first drawings that can be ascribed to him are studies of drapery which convey not just the weight of cloth as it hangs in mountainous creases, the shadowy valleys between folds, but the very grain of woven fabric. In his youthful Annunciation, both Mary and the angel are decked out in garments of almost curdling richness and a colour range of great complexity and power. Mary has blue skirts which turn into a robe covering her right shoulder, a glow of gold satin at her elbow and over her midriff, and beneath all this, a red dress with pale purple belt and collar. The angel wears a white tunic tied at the arm with a violet ribbon, a drapery of green, and long, dark red robes. It is as if they were waiting patiently while Leonardo draped them according to his fantasy for Marys blue skirts are not really skirts at all but an enormous cloth he has arranged on her shoulder and legs, spreading it over a chair arm whose form becomes an enigmatic bulge. From the clinging dresses of goddesses carved on the pediment of the Parthenon in fifth-century-b.c. Athens to the precious work of Leonardos teacher Verrocchio with its ribbons fluttering in the

air, textiles swag the history of art. Yet no one has ever painted clothes quite as consummately as Leonardo. If he does have predecessors, they are the Gothic painters of fifteenth-century Germany and the Netherlands. The massive capaciousness of Leonardos draperies, the apparently arbitrary spread and redundant quantity of cloth, resembles the heavy fabrics of North European art. There are strange rewards for the curious eye in watching him pour deep shadows down valleys of satin, weaving mysterious daydreams and conjuring phantom forms in an art that begins by dwelling on powerfully coloured, ornately folded draperies and evolves to encompass the most gossamer of translucent gauzes. This evolution is apparent in the first and second versions of his composition *The Virgin of the Rocks*, which he first painted in the 1480s and then re-created in a picture still unfinished in 1506. The earlier version has an angel swathed in bright, bulky red and green satin; the angel in the later painting wears a sleeve whose gold-embroidered tracery floats on transparent layers of light-filled, colourless material gradually forming into a white creaminess. It is a stupefyingly intricate effect precisely the type of challenge Leonardo sought as a painter, although how much of this second version is by his own hand will never be certain. In *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne*, which he worked on more or less to the end of his life, he again gives the Virgin a semi-transparent filigree sleeve. Having learned from the Gothic-tinged training of his youth in 1460s and 70s Florence to depict draperies with a crisp attention to their folds, he became in his maturity obsessed with the ambiguous semi-transparency of gauzes and veils. That is how Leonardo hangs clothes on women and angels. Women appear in far more of his surviving paintings than men do: four portraits of women exist by him. Even Ginevra de Benci, who posed for one of his earliest and plainest paintings in about 1474, sports a black velvet scarf that contrasts sensually with her simple brown dress and pale skin. There is only one portrait of a man, a young musician whose costume isn't especially interesting or well preserved. There is, however, one painting by Leonardo that is full of male figures nobly robed. *The Last Supper* started to rot and flake the second he set down his brush for the last time in the monks canteen of the convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan in 1498. Restorations and repaintings over the centuries added layer on layer of glue and pigment to try and preserve what people thought long after living memory was lost the picture must have looked like. The most recent (perhaps quixotic) restoration pared away these later layers to get as close as possible to the original paint. The fragmented result is infinitely paler and drier than any of the artists better-preserved paintings, with scarcely a hint of the low-toned ambiguities he loved. While this makes it hard to interpret the appearance of the clothes, it is apparent that he arranged the mens robes as freely and sculpturally as he layered satins and gauzes on his female models. At the far end of the table on our left, Bartholomew stands up from his seat in shock at Christ's revelation that one of the disciples will shortly betray him; the heavy green robe over his thin blue tunic gathers in a bunch on his shoulder and hangs in the air, defying gravity as impossibly as the crinkly satin garments that float unsupported in Leonardos later *Virgin and Child with St. Anne*. Look again at the same disciple. What is the green drapery I've called a robe? It falls in a mass onto the table, bunches extravagantly on Bartholomews back, and is piled around his lower body. It is just as wilful and gratuitous as the voluminous skirts of the Virgin in his youthful *Annunciation*. In fact all the disciples at Leonardos table are just as artfully clad. What is the garment slung over one shoulder of the feminine-looking John, seated at Christ's right hand? It is simply a loose cloth, there at the painters whim and as pink as the clothes in his own wardrobe. Further along the table, James the Minors crinkly shift is also pink. Long before he painted this heroic and tragic scene, Leonardo drew the portrait of an executed criminal. He was still in his twenties when, in December 1479, he stood in the high, narrow courtyard of the Palace of the Podestto's Bargello Museum in Florence and recorded the appearance of a hanged man in a few perfect pen strokes. Bernardo di Bandino Baroncelli swings, in Leonardos drawing, from a rope that inclines, like his mirror-inverted writing, leftward on the page. The dead mans hands are tied behind his back and his legs hang limply. The terrible thing about him is his face. The eyes are deep dark voids, already looking like the empty sockets of a skull. The skin, Leonardo suggests in a couple of lines, is discoloured. There are clear signs of rot and postmortem decay on this face, the only part of Baroncellis body that is naked. The rest of his body may be equally emaciated and skeletal, but it looks more alive, more human, because every part of it except the face is concealed by clothes. Bernardo di Bandino Baroncelli was hanged in Florence in the last days of 1479 for his part in a conspiracy that had claimed the life of Giuliano de' Medici, brother to the citys ruler, Lorenzo the Magnificent. It was said that Baroncelli plunged the first dagger into the victim, but while his fellow conspirators rapidly suffered horrible retribution, he escaped to Constantinople. When he was finally dragged back from the Ottoman city, he was hanged still wearing the Turkish coat and slippers in which he had disguised himself. Leonardo dwells on the assassins exotic clothes, already a bit big for the

corpse that shrinks within their bulk. He captures with his pen the soft folds of a long coat, the distinctive bobble buttons on its collar, and its fringe of fur. He records the executed assassins slippers and skullcap and tights. In a note written as a column next to the swaying body he gives precise descriptions of each garment: A little tan cap A black satin doublet A black jerkin with a lining A Turkish jacket lined with foxes throat fur, and the collar of the jacket covered with velvet stippled black and red; Bernardo di Bandino Baroncelli; black tights. Although this was written a quarter of a century before Leonardo's inventory of his own clothes, the mature artist's list contains a peculiar echo of the youthful drawing, which lingers with fascination on the dress of a hanged criminal. Among the clothes Leonardo placed in a chest for safekeeping in 1504 he mentions one cape in French style, which belonged to Duke Valentino; of Sala. Duke Valentino was the name by which contemporaries knew Cesare Borgia son of the Pope and commander of the papal armies, who cut a terrifying path through central Italy in the first years of the sixteenth century as he conquered one small city-state after another in his drive to build an empire for his family. Borgia had menaced Florence itself; his men perpetrated atrocities in its countryside. To most Florentine citizens in 1504, his name was diabolical; a diarist called him this serpent. But for Leonardo, this murderous prince was apparently as darkly seductive as the hanged assassin had once been. Why else dress Sala in Valentino's old clothes? It is no small thing to be able to list the exact clothes a particular human being wore in everyday life half a millennium ago. The 1504 inventory of Leonardo's wardrobe is the next-best thing to possessing the clothes themselves. It is an archaeological fragment that allows us to reconstruct one part of his physical being, to see what he wore as he walked the streets of Florence. In fact his notebooks abound in odd physical details of his life. Sometimes there will be a list of groceries, or calculations of household expenses. All such glimpses delight. But the inventory of his clothes is special because it lends startling substance to one of the most amazing, even embarrassing, anecdotes that sixteenth-century gossips told about him. The book is a lovely thing to hold, like touching a pebble worn smooth by the sea. A creamy-white binding, flattened and honed by time, swings open to reveal paper whose yellowed edges and soft textures tell its age. It breathes out its four-and-a-half centuries (and more) when opened, as when an ancient attic is unlocked and the trespasser coughs on dust. The slippery, leathery paper leaves a smell on one's hands not unpleasant. Each page is printed in thick black type. The title page is designed like a fantastic window, with robed women supporting a marble pediment upon which play little winged boys, holding between them a shield emblazoned with six spheres. Through the window, beneath the shield, one can see a walled city in a hilly landscape, dominated by a vast cathedral dome and a formidable fortress. In the time-stained sky above the city framed by the window is the book's title and author: LA TERZA ET ULTIMA PARTE DELLE VITE DEGLI ARCHITETTI PITTORI ET SCULTORI DI GIORGIO VASARI ARETINO. It has been printed and reprinted many times in many languages; there are currently at least three rival popular editions in English, but this is how it first appeared in the world in 1550. The wondrous artefact were admiring in the rare-books room of a great library is the very first edition of the sixteenth-century artist Giorgio Vasari's extravagant, gargantuan literary masterpiece, *The Lives of the Architects, Painters, and Sculptors*. One of the most productive crafts in Renaissance Italy was storytelling. Before Spanish and English writers invented the novel, there were Italy's *novelle*—brief tales, tragic or comic, assembled in generous, expansive collections in a genre whose timeless classic is the fourteenth-century Florentine writer Giovanni Boccaccio's bawdy masterpiece the *Decameron*. Shakespeare was to get some of his most famous plots from these Italian story collections: *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* started their lives in Italian books of *novelle*. It is tempting to wonder what might have happened if, in addition to the tales of Matteo Bandello in which *Romeo and Juliet* can be found, Shakespeare had known Vasari's tales of murderous rivals and star-crossed lovers. Vasari's book is so rich in narrative that it sometimes seems less a history than a collection of *novelle*. Although it is full of brilliant descriptions of works of art and acute critical observations, and has a serious argument to make about the progress of culture, its facts are mixed with fiction to a riotous degree. Vasari's *Life of Leonardo da Vinci* is his most intoxicated, and intoxicating, parable of genius, a mythic tale whose hero is superhumanly intelligent. Vasari's tone is rhapsodic, the man he evokes magical, marvellous and celestial, *mirabile e celeste*, was this boy born in 1452 in the country town of Vinci, in the hills to the west of the great art capital that was Florence. One day when he was still a teenager, Vasari tells us, Leonardo was asked by his father, Ser Piero da Vinci, to turn a twisted piece of wood into a shield as a favour for a peasant who worked on the family estates. First Leonardo got the roughly shield-shaped wood smoothed to a convex disc. Then he went out into the countryside to collect the strangest-looking animals he could find: beetles and butterflies, lizards of all shapes and sizes, bats, crickets, and snakes. He killed these animals and took

them to his private room, where he started to dissect them and select components of their bodies: wing of bat, claw of lizard, belly of snake . . . Leonardo took no notice of the growing stench as he worked on these dead animals, stitching bits of them together to create a composite monster. He also added something extra, by means Vasari does not explain, for the monster he made poisoned with its breath and turned the air to fire. Once Leonardo had created his monster, he sat down to paint its portrait on the round shield. Finally, he invited his father to see the result. The painting was so realistic that when the door opened on the teenagers darkened room, it looked as if he had some hideous living creature in there that belched fire. Ser Piero was terrified; his son was delighted, for this was the desired effect. Vasari also tells how, after Leonardo completed his apprenticeship in Verrocchio's painting-and-sculpture workshop, the young genius went to Milan to play for its ruler Ludovico Sforza on a grotesque-looking lyre of his own invention. Later he relates how Leonardo made a robot lion to greet the king of France that walked forward, then opened to reveal a cargo of lilies; and how sometimes for fun he would inflate a pig's bladder like a balloon, pumping it up until it filled an entire room. One might take these to be tall tales. But Leonardo really did move from Florence to Milan in 1482, working there for Ludovico Sforza until 1499; he really did make a robot lion; and he wrote in his notebooks about how to create bizarre effects such as an explosion inside a room. Leonardo's death offers Vasari a final folkloric image of fame. Having left Italy to end his days as court painter to the French king, the old artist was visited on his deathbed by the monarch in 1519: A paroxysm came to him, the messenger of death; on account of which the King having got up and taken his head in his arms to help him and favour him, in order to ease his pain, his spirit, which was so divine, knowing it was not possible to have a greater honour, expired in the arms of that King, in his seventy-fifth year. If Vasari's image of the death of Leonardo is poignant, his explanation of how it was that such an eminent Florentine genius ended his days not just far from Florence but outside Italy itself is one of the most extravagant claims in his entire book. It seems that Leonardo had a potent enemy: their rivalry bordered on vendetta: There was very great disdain [sdegno grandissimo] between Michelangelo Buonarroti and him; because of which Michelangelo departed from Florence for the competition, with the permission of Duke Giuliano, having been called by the Pope for the facade of San Lorenzo. Leonardo understanding this departed, and went to France . . . Of all the anecdotes in Vasari's *Life of Leonardo*, this is the most tantalising. Vasari was not the first writer to tell tales about Leonardo's strained relationship with Michelangelo. Anecdotes about artists were part and parcel of the storytelling culture of Renaissance Italy. This goes back ultimately to the ancient Roman author Pliny the Elder, who included anecdotes about famous Greek artists in his *Natural History*. Boccaccio himself includes a funny story about the painter Giotto in the *Decameron*. One of the earliest accounts of Leonardo was written by the novelist Matteo Bandello, who, having as a novice monk at Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan in the 1490s witnessed the painting of *The Last Supper*, introduces Leonardo as a character in his *Novelle* and even has him narrate a tale of his own, about the amorous friar and painter Filippo Lippi. Rumours of some vicious, irreconcilable enmity between Leonardo and his younger contemporary started to circulate in Italy in the first half of the sixteenth century. Such a feud was bound to fascinate a culture in which ritualised vendetta was practised as readily by artists as by aristocrats. The autobiography of the Florentine sculptor Benvenuto Cellini is full of stories about his rivalries, grudges, and brutal acts of revenge. This was a fiercely competitive world and also one obsessed with honour, with the public image of a man and his family, which must not be sullied by insults or slights. Vasari tells tales in which artists do not merely try to outdo one another but even in one case commit murder out of professional jealousy. The story that the century's two greatest artists loathed each other found a ready audience. In the 1540s that is, before the publication of Vasari's *Lives* an anonymous Florentine author compiled a manuscript collection of reminiscences about artists that anticipates his comment on the geniuses' mutual disdain. This writer, known as the Anonimo Magliabechiano, tells how Leonardo was walking in Florence by the benches at Palazzo Spini, where there was a gathering of gentlemen debating a passage in Dante's poetry. They hailed Leonardo, asking him to explain it to them. "Leonardo's brilliance was, it would seem, well-known to Florentine citizens. But he passed on the compliment: It happened that just then Michelangelo passed by and one of them called him over. And Leonardo said: Michelangelo will explain it to you. It seemed to Michelangelo that Leonardo had said this to mock him. He replied angrily: You explain it yourself, you who designed a horse to be cast in bronze but couldn't cast it and abandoned it in shame. And having said this, he turned his back on them and left. Leonardo remained there, his face turning red. A precious clue testifies to the reliability of this tale: a striking, physical clue. It seems that the Anonimo's informant had an excellent visual memory of Leonardo, for his story of the insult at Palazzo Spini is preceded by a precise pen portrait of

Michelangelos victim in what must have been about 1504: [Leonardo] cut a fine figure, well-proportioned, pleasant and good looking. He wore a pink [rosato] cloak . . . That pink cloak is a startling detail. In the painters inventory of the clothes chest he left in the monastery, the predominant colours in his wardrobe are pink and purple. The colour terms rosa and rosato recur so often that its safe to say this was the colour you were most likely to remember Leonardo wearing if youd seen him around Florence. Among the items he mentioned were:Una gabanella di rosa seca [one dusty-rose-coloured gown]Un catelano rosato [one rose-pink Catalan cloak]Un pa di calze in rosa seca [one pair of rose-pink hose]Due berette rosate [two rose-pink caps]Leonardos rosy clothes were memorableso memorable that an eyewitness accurately recalled their hue forty years later, along with bitter words exchanged between famous men in the street.Revue de presseA Modern Art Notes Best Book of the YearAn informative celebration of two competing geniuses. Richmond Times-DispatchAn intricate plot . . . [with] provocative ideas. The Wall Street JournalThrilling . . . Written with a novelists sense of pace. The Independent (London)Fascinating, revelatory and often daring. . . . Jones makes a wonderful guide to this dramatic moment of history. Christian Science MonitorArt lovers, Renaissance junkies, and even travelers will love this book.Kirkus s (starred)Delightful. . . . Vibrant . . . Sparing neither the two artists, nor Florence, their quirks of character. They are flanked by a vivid parade of supporting characters. The American ScholarEnergetic, fast-paced . . . [and] dazzling. Publishers Weekly[Jones] recreates for us the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of 16th century Florence.... [And] compellingly creates the world the two antagonists inhabited, replete with a cast of interesting and colorful supporting characters. . . . That propels us as surely as any well written novel, straight through to the final page. New York Journal of BooksThere is sensuous finesse in Jones's descriptions. The ObserverThe Lost Battles . . . reanimates the giddy heights of the Renaissance through its evocation of a mighty scrap between Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. The Daily Telegraph