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The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini

Benvenuto Cellini · *1558–1563 · John Addington Symonds*

ALL men of whatsoever quality they be, who have done anything of excellence, or which may properly resemble excellence, ought, if they are persons of truth and honesty, to describe their life with their own hand—but not till they have passed the age of forty. Symonds's English of Cellini's Italian (1558–1563), Project Gutenberg #4028. For grades 11–12. Quote Cellini, not only the editor. Tact.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

How should a school read Cellini's life as he asked it to be read—truthfully, after forty, in Symonds's English—without turning later violence or boast into a spectacle?

"ALL men of whatsoever quality they be, who have done anything of excellence, or which may properly resemble excellence, ought, if they are persons of truth and honesty, to describe"
Book I, opening

Cellini opens by saying that a man of excellence and honesty ought to write his own life, and not until he has passed forty. He is past fifty-eight, in Florence, the city of his birth, when he takes up the duty. John Addington Symonds is the translator. Teach the goldsmith's craft, the family, and the costly demand of truth-telling. For grades 11–12. Later chapters need adult discretion; do not put gore or prurience on a school map. Quote Cellini, not only the prefatory matter.

KEY CHARACTERS

Benvenuto Cellini
Goldsmith and sculptor, past fifty-eight, writing his life in Florence as a duty of truth and honesty

Maestro Giovanni, and Madonna Elisabetta
His father and mother, both citizens of Florence

The Cellini kin of Val d'Ambra
Ancestors who lived like little lords, in retirement because of factions

John Addington Symonds
The translator of this hosted English; not the author of the life

HOW TO READ THIS LIFE IN A SCHOOL

> *"ALL men of whatsoever quality they be, who have done anything of excellence, or which may properly resemble excellence, ought, if they are persons of truth and honesty, to describe"*
> Book I, opening

> *"This duty occurs to my own mind now that I am travelling beyond the term of fifty-eight years, and am in Florence, the city of my birth."*
> Book I, opening

Grades 11–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

After Forty, in His Own Hand

BOOK I, OPENING

A man who has done anything of excellence, if he is truthful and honest, ought to describe his life himself—but not until he has passed forty. Cellini now feels that duty.

- Keep the exact opening, including "whatsoever quality they be."
- Symonds's English; do not modernize it.
- The claim is about honesty, not mere fame.
- 11–12. Tact in later books.

> *"ALL men of whatsoever quality they be, who have done anything of excellence, or which may properly resemble excellence, ought, if they are persons of truth and honesty, to describe"*
> Book I, opening

02

Florence, Past Fifty-Eight

BOOK I, OPENING

The duty comes to him now that he is travelling beyond fifty-eight years, and is in Florence, the city of his birth. The book is a late accounting, not a boy's diary.

- The age and the city are exact.
- He writes as a man looking back.
- Quote this English.
- Not a later film of Renaissance Rome.

> *"This duty occurs to my own mind now that I am travelling beyond the term of fifty-eight years, and am in Florence, the city of my birth."*
> Book I, opening

03

A Name, and Two Citizens of Florence

BOOK I

I am called Benvenuto Cellini, son of Maestro Giovanni... both parents citizens of Florence. He begins with a name, a father, a mother, and a city.

- Keep the parentage as he gives it.
- Florence is not a backdrop only.
- Teach the goldsmith's household before the courts and popes.
- 11–12.

> *"I am called Benvenuto Cellini, son of Maestro Giovanni, son of Andrea, son of Cristofano Cellini; my mother was Madonna"*
> Book I

04

The Val d'Ambra Folk

BOOK I

His ancestors dwelt in Val d'Ambra, with large estates, living like little lords, yet in retirement because of the then contending factions. The life starts in a family, not only at a papal bench.

- Keep "Val d' Ambra" as this file prints it.
- Factions already press on the house.
- Do not skip the family for the later courts.
- Quote Cellini, not a later biography.

> *"MY ancestors dwelt in Val d' Ambra, where they owned large estates, and lived like little lords, in retirement, however, on account of the"*
> Book I

05

Symonds's English, and Tact

THE EDITION

Project Gutenberg #4028 is John Addington Symonds's translation of the Italian life written 1558–1563. Introductions and notes stand around it; quote the life. Later chapters include violence and adult matter: tact, no gore or prurience on the map.

- Name Symonds.
- 11–12; later chapters need adult discretion.
- The hosted text is the life, not a digest.
- Brand: costly honesty, craft, and a city—not a slogan about "being human."

> *"ALL men of whatsoever quality they be, who have done anything of excellence, or which may properly resemble excellence, ought, if they are persons of truth and honesty, to describe"*
> Book I, opening

Truth-telling as a duty | A craft and a city | Family before the courts | Costly honesty after forty | Beauty made with the hands

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 11–12

1. The opening duty: write your life yourself, and not until after forty.
2. Florence, parentage, and the Val d'Ambra folk come before the later courts.
3. This is Symonds's English of the Italian life (1558–1563). Quote Cellini, not only the editor.
4. For grades 11–12. Later chapters need adult discretion; no gore or prurience on the map.

Quotations are verbatim from the John Addington Symonds, Project Gutenberg #4028, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/autobiography-of-benvenuto-cellini/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.