CHAPTER NINE

THE ACCADEMIA DEGLI ALTERATI AND CIVIC VIRTUE

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The Accademia degli Alterati was founded in Florence on 17 February 1569 by seven young Florentines of patrician stock.¹ The founders’

names were: Vincenzo Acciaiuoli, Antonio degli Albizzi, Giulio Del Bene, Alessandro Canigiani, Lorenzo Corbinelli, Tommaso del Nero and Renato de’ Pazzi. Except for Corbinelli, they were all members of the ‘official’ Florentine academy, the Accademia Fiorentina which had been founded by Duke Cosimo I in 1540. In his Fasti consolari, Salvino Salvini pointed to Tommaso Del Nero as the foremost instigator of the Alterati’s founding.² What would argue for this claim is that from the very beginning until Tommaso’s death, in 1572, the academicians gathered in his Florentine palazzo. However, it is one of the other founders, Giulio Del Bene, Del Nero’s brother-in-law, who, in hindsight, reveals something of the considerations that led to the founding act. Indeed, Del Bene is very frank when he writes:

When I was in the best and most blooming phase of my life and when I thought by myself how regretful it was to live in idleness and how laudable to exercise virtue, I regretted for myself having consumed the whole of my youth, without having occupied myself with either public or private affairs, or for that matter without having devoted myself alle scientie et alle buone lettere (to Learning and the bonae litterae), which would have made it possible for me to make my appearance with the men of letters and to speak with some judgement about those things which virtuosi tend to occupy themselves with [...].³

In other words, Del Bene wished to participate in the cultural discourse of those men who, different from what he himself had done so far, had given proof of their valour in either public government or in governing their own private affairs. Del Bene found an even more precise motive to establish the Academy degli Alterati in his wish to overcome his bashfulness to speak in public, an anxiety which for that matter, he shared with Tommaso Del Nero.⁴

³ “Essendo io nella migliore et più florita età della vita mia et pensando meco medesimo quanto disdicevole cosa fosse il vivere otiosamente et quanto fosse lodevole l’esercito virtuoso, mi doleva fra me stesso di havere consumato tutta la mia gioventù, senza havere atteso né al governo delle cose pubbliche e mono alle private, né haver tanto dato opera alle scientie et alle buone lettere ch’io potessi comparire con i letterati e di quelle cose con qualche ragione favellare che quelli che virtuosi si domandano sogiono ne i loro ragionamenti discorrere,” Rome, Biblioteca Vaticana, Fondo Rossiano, 901, fol. 2v, quoted by Plaisance, “Le accademie fiorentine,” 363–364.
⁴ “Et conoscendo che anch’io havesse qualche tempo atteso alle buone lettere. Fussi egli nondimeno per haver dismesso gli studi o per haver male apparato o