

The Unsympathetic Exemplar in Vasari's Life of Pontormo

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Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, first published in 1550, was constructed according to Renaissance conventions for biography, a genre inherited from the ancient Romans. Biography was a form of historical writing that allowed for the representation of lives of famous men as exemplary: the reader was meant to examine the deeds of famous men for the lessons they could teach him about proper and improper behavior. Vasari's great innovation was to apply this formula to the lives of visual artists, thus making the practice of art a heroic profession.¹ In the second edition of the *Lives* (1568), Vasari substantially revised many of the biographies, and added several new ones, mainly of artists who had died in the intervening years. Among these new biographies was the Life of Jacopo Carucci da Pontormo.

In his biography of Pontormo, as elsewhere, Vasari employs the rhetorical strategies of epideictic to assign the painter both praise and blame. He has considerable praise for Pontormo's style as a painter, especially in his earliest works. While he disapproves of some aspects of Pontormo's character (describing him, for example, as solitary and melancholy), the most important critical passages in the biography are directed instead at two contrasting stylistic phases in his painting career. The first of these phases began with a fresco cycle of scenes from Christ's Passion that Pontormo painted at the Certosa del Galluzzo, the Carthusian monastery outside Florence (1522-5, Figs. 2, 4), which Vasari says was heavily influenced by the German style of prints by Albrecht Dürer. The second comprises Pontormo's final fresco cycle, painted in the choir of the Florentine church of San Lorenzo (c. 1546-57).² The latter cycle, which included scenes from Genesis and the Resurrection of the Dead, was left unfinished at Pontormo's death, and was completed by his pupil Agnolo Bronzino. It was destroyed in 1742, but many of Pontormo's preparatory drawings survive (Figs. 5, 7), allowing a general reconstruction of the cycle's appearance and iconography.³

Since the early twentieth century, scholars have been intrigued by the painter's early interest in Dürer, and the relationship of the Certosa frescoes to the German's woodcuts and engravings has been examined in some detail.⁴ In recent publications, scholars have begun to look more closely and critically at what Vasari had to say in his biography of Pontormo, and have tried to assess his reasons for disparaging the artist's paintings. These scholars have, in general, tended to focus more on Vasari's vilification of the later San Lorenzo cycle in a passage (which will be examined in greater detail below) that one author has described as 'a crescendo of aggressiveness'.⁵ Unfortunately, they have not always examined the underlying themes of Vasari's biography (especially in light of the *Lives* as a whole), to explain why he criticizes Pontormo for certain artistic qualities but praises him for others.

Some believe that Vasari's critical remarks stem from his jealous desire to hold onto the reins of artistic power in the Florentine court of Duke Cosimo de' Medici, and to promote the new state-oriented artists' academy, the Accademia del Disegno, which he had helped to found in 1563. Thus, as Elizabeth Pilliod sees it, Vasari needed to 'undermine not only Pontormo's legacy, but also the strength of the independent *bottega* system'.⁶ Antonio Pinelli similarly ascribes Vasari's negative comments in part to his rancour toward Duke Cosimo's majordomo Pierfrancesco Riccio, a strong supporter of Pontormo, and in part to a clash of personalities between what he characterizes as Vasari the conformist and the restlessly inventive Pontormo.⁷ While Vasari's agenda for the Accademia del Disegno is pertinent to his explicit criticism of Pontormo, I do not think that his professional jealousy played more than a minor role. By 1568, Pontormo had been dead for eleven years, and Vasari's leading position as artist and artistic coordinator at the Medici court was well-established.

David Franklin has provided a more sympathetic explanation that is also closer to understanding Vasari's criteria for judgement: that Vasari was trying to promote in Florence a rapid workshop practice like that of Raphael in Rome. Hence he wanted the artists who worked with him, and those being trained in the Accademia del Disegno, to design and execute paintings without the painstaking graphic preparation evident in Pontormo's personal practice and that of the artists connected with him. Franklin argues that Vasari promoted Raphael as a stylistic

exemplar, on the basis of the gracefulness and variety in Raphael's work.⁸ He notes that Vasari's criticism of Pontormo is primarily levelled at two phases of his career – his work at the Certosa and his later work for the Medici including the frescoes at San Lorenzo – but does not discuss the close thematic parallels that can be found in these sections of the biography.

In his monograph on Pontormo, Philippe Costamagna does note the parallel nature of Vasari's criticisms of the two fresco cycles. He believes these passages are connected by Vasari's post-Tridentine aversion to the potentially heretical content of both cycles. In Costamagna's interpretation, Vasari criticizes Pontormo's style as a tactic to divert the reader's attention from the problematic content of the works.⁹

The problem of the iconography of the San Lorenzo cycle is a complex one, and while it is not my intention to revisit it for long, it may help to provide a brief summary of recent interpretations. In 1950, Charles de Tolnay discovered an engraving of the church's choir that contained sketchy outlines of Pontormo's frescoes, which, together with Vasari's description of the choir, aided him in reconstructing the overall scheme. The unusual treatment of the subject matter (for example, the absence of any figures of the damned in the scene of the resurrection of the dead with Christ in judgement) led him to conclude that the cycle was indebted to the reform theology of Juan de Valdés. Massimo Firpo has recently provided an exhaustive study of the possible Valdesian content of the frescoes in the context of Cosimo's court, and he, like Costamagna, thinks Vasari must have been aware of their heterodoxy. But Firpo realizes that the same argument cannot be applied to the Certosa Passion cycle, which contains nothing theologically out of the ordinary.¹⁰

In what follows, I would like to leave aside the question of the meaning of Pontormo's frescoes, as well his supposed religious heresy. Instead, I will examine what Vasari actually wrote about Pontormo's frescoes, to determine his purposes in censuring these two cycles. I believe that his criticisms must be understood in light of contemporary debates about literary and artistic imitation, whose themes pervade the *Lives*.¹¹ For Vasari, Pontormo's heresy, if such it was, was more a matter of his choice of artistic exemplar than his choice of spiritual path.¹² To elucidate this, it will be necessary first to outline the literary debates and Vasari's knowledge of

them, then to show how Vasari incorporates the theme of imitation into the *Lives* (especially in 1568). Finally, the Life of Pontormo will be examined in light of the polemic surrounding imitation and Vasari's response to it.

Vasari and the Imitation Debates

The nature of suitable stylistic exemplars and ideal methods of imitation were topics of hot debate in sixteenth-century Italy. In the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento, a series of epistolary exchanges between scholars centered around the issue of whether it was better, when developing one's own style in Latin, to imitate many different authors, or only one. This question had already been broached by ancient authors whose works formed the basis for the Latin revival, such as Seneca, Cicero and Quintilian.¹³ An exchange of letters at the end of the Quattrocento between Angelo Poliziano and Paolo Cortesi set up the terms of the sixteenth-century debates. Cortesi advocated strict imitation of a single exemplar, Cicero; Poliziano instead encouraged the absorption into one's own personality of writings by a variety of authors.¹⁴ In the second decade of the sixteenth century, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Pietro Bembo debated the issue in a series of letters written in Rome.¹⁵ Pico favoured studying the work of many masters, and from them forming a congenial personal style. Bembo's letter promoted a paradigm for imitation consisting of the selection of the best single model for copying (Virgil for poetry, Cicero for prose), imitation of that model as a means of attaining stylistic excellence, and finally, surpassing the model to define one's own uniqueness.

Bembo's publication of the *Prose della volgar lingua* in 1525 shifted the debate to the vernacular language. He proposed that the ideal models for an Italian vernacular were Trecento Tuscan texts by Petrarch (for poetry) and Boccaccio (for prose). Bembo thought that perfect literary style and skill in imitation were not given to everyone. Rather, very few men in each century were able to act as guides who should be followed by the multitude.¹⁶ Literary figures throughout Italy took up the new debate in a twofold manner: some advocated instead a language based on that used in Italian courts; and some, while supporting use of the Tuscan dialect, objected to Bembo's narrow range of exemplars.¹⁷ Several of the scholars participating in the

debates became close associates of Vasari. Comments he made on imitation in the two editions of the *Lives* reveal his interest in the debates and the influence they had upon him.

Vasari's early education and experiences, which included training in Latin grammar by Giovanni Lappoli (called Pollastra), and acting as court companion to Ippolito and Alessandro de' Medici, prepared him to be receptive to the discussions about imitation that he would later encounter.¹⁸ In 1532, when Vasari left Florence and joined the household of Ippolito de' Medici in Rome, he found friends and advocates in Paolo Giovio and Claudio Tolomei.¹⁹ He was therefore exposed to their interest in the question of imitation and related issues about the nature of style and expression. Both Giovio and Tolomei, who, like Bembo, had been members of the court of Leo X, were involved in the imitation debates from early in their careers. In *De viris illustribus*, Giovio took a position close to Pico's, recommending that students hoping to acquire a good style undergo a prolonged period of study, imitating the best masters 'with each following his own inclination, according to his own nature'.²⁰ He suggests that there are many potential great models, just as there are many praiseworthy styles in contemporary painting. Tolomei's dialogue *Il Cesano* condemns those who would impoverish the vernacular by restricting writers to the usage of Petrarch and Boccaccio.²¹ In a 1531 letter to Agnolo Firenzuola, Tolomei refers to a gathering of literary figures the previous year in Bologna during the coronation festivities for Charles V, when the *questione della lingua* had arisen. He complains that Bembo had come to be considered the sole guide to be followed in writing the vernacular: 'one loses such a lovely opportunity, since there is a great mass of gentle talents – I cite Priolo, Trissino, Molza, Guidiccione, Broccardo, and many others – who every day make themselves illustrious with the pen'.²²

The importance of the imitation debate is evident from its impact upon learned circles in which Vasari moved throughout the remainder of his career. In the 1540s in Florence, the literary Accademia Fiorentina instituted a series of public lectures designed to champion Tuscan as the vernacular. Many of the lecturers took issue with Bembo's exclusive support of Petrarch and Boccaccio, and his denigration of Dante as a model. Bembo had censured Dante for attempting to write of too lofty a subject and, in doing so, 'fall[ing] frequently into writing of the most base and

vile things'. In his opinion, Dante erred by not adhering, as Petrarch had, to a more graceful "middle" style between gravity and elegance.²³ Among the supporters of Dante were Vasari's friends and eventual editors, including Cosimo Bartoli and Pierfrancesco Giambullari, who delivered lectures on the *Divine Comedy* during the 1540s. In 1544, Vasari painted a panel of *Six Tuscan Poets* for Luca Martini, and in 1546 a variant for Paolo Giovio. The surviving version in Minneapolis, probably created for Martini, who was writing a commentary on Dante, shows Dante enthroned in the centre with Petrarch and Boccaccio among the lesser figures surrounding him. That exemplary models were of real importance to these scholars is confirmed by the substitution in Giovio's version of the poets Guittone d'Arezzo and Cino da Pistoia in place of Martini's Marsilio Ficino and Cristoforo Landino.²⁴ At the very least, Vasari's painting indicates his awareness of the Florentine debates, and the position of Dante at the center of his friends' interests. The dialogues and debates dealt with issues, such as imitation and decorum, closely related to the theory and practice of the visual arts. As in ancient texts on rhetoric, the visual arts were used by humanists to provide examples analogous to literary practice.

In 1547 the historian, poet and philologist Benedetto Varchi delivered two lectures to the Florentine Academy on the *paragone* (or, comparison between painting and sculpture to determine which was the superior art), an issue previously addressed by Leonardo in his planned treatise on painting.²⁵ The lectures, attended by artists as well as academicians, were based in part on letters Varchi had solicited from artists including Michelangelo, Pontormo, Bronzino and Vasari.²⁶ In the 1560s, Vasari's adviser Vincenzo Borghini, as lieutenant of the Accademia del Disegno, revisited this debate and discussed it with Vasari.²⁷ Thus Vasari was called into the arena of public debate while writing the first edition of the *Lives*, and had even more substantial experience of it before the second edition.

Vasari on Imitation

Vasari was not absolutely systematic in his writing. However, some generalizations can be made about the vocabulary he uses when discussing imitation of various kinds. The words he most frequently uses are *ritrarre*, *contraffare*, and *imitare*. Vasari often uses *ritrarre* for direct

copies of another artist's work: Fra Girolamo, for example, 'in a painting in oils *ritratto* the beautiful Last Supper that Leonardo da Vinci painted at S. Maria delle Grazie in Milan, *ritratto* so well, I say, that it amazed me'.²⁸ Even more frequently it is used, as its derivative *ritratto* (portrait) suggests, for the direct copying of nature. Thus Giotto revived painting by 'introducing the *ritrarre* of living people from nature'; he also '*ritraeva* a sheep from nature'.²⁹ Vasari uses *contraffare* for some of the same purposes, such as indicating a direct depiction of objects, but rarely for portrayals of people. So Leonardo was able to '*contraffare* very subtly all the minutiae of nature'; and in the *Last Supper*, the weave of the tablecloth is '*contraffato* in such a way that the linen itself would not look more real'.³⁰ This word is sometimes used when a craftsman copies another artist's work, as when Marcantonio Raimondi began in Venice to '*contrafare* those engravings of Dürer's'.³¹ Sometimes, as it may here, *contraffare* has a pejorative connotation, similar to the current usage of 'counterfeit'.

Imitare is used extensively by Vasari, and it is almost always tied to issues central to his historical vision in the *Lives*. In most cases, he uses it to refer to one artist's imitation, or following, of another's method of working or style. Pupils are often *imitatori* of their master's style.³² Here imitation forms part of Vasari's genealogy of art, providing a succession of masters imitated by pupils who later become masters in their own right. Rarely, Vasari applies the word to the imitation of nature. When he does so it is usually to indicate that the artist has broken with the practice of constantly imitating his masters, referring to nature as the ultimate model to be followed. Giotto, for example, 'not only equalled the manner of his master, but became so good an *imitatore* of nature that he completely banished that rude Greek manner'.³³ Giorgione 'would not put into his work anything that he had not *ritraesse* from the life; and he was so much the slave of nature and *imitando* her so continuously, that he not only acquired the name of having surpassed Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, but also of competing with those who worked in Tuscany and who were authors of the modern manner'.³⁴ As the Prefaces to Parts Two and Three of the *Lives* explain, the increasingly successful imitation of nature is the means by which art progresses over time.³⁵ *Imitare* sometimes implies a process by which an artist competes with another and surpasses him, but Vasari usually uses other vocabulary when referring to competition. In a few

cases, Vasari refers to *emulazione*, the manifestation of rivalry between artists, though he uses *concorrenza* in this sense more frequently: '*emulazione* and *concorrenza*, when men seek by honest endeavour to vanquish and surpass those greater than themselves to acquire glory and honour, are things worthy to be praised and held in esteem as necessary and useful to the world'.³⁶

Finally, sometimes Vasari refers vaguely to the process of imitation or quotation, using imprecise words like *tolto* (taken), *cavato* (extracted) or *servirsi* (to make use of), to describe one artist in some way deriving benefit from another's work. Thus he says that Brunelleschi 'made doors and windows in a manner *cavata* from the antique', that Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* contained some things '*tolte* in part from the inventions' of Luca Signorelli at Orvieto and that Jacopo Pontormo 'thought... to *servirsi* the inventions' in Dürer's prints.³⁷

Vasari's awareness of the terms of the debates about literary imitation is already apparent in the 1550 edition of the *Lives*. In the introduction to the Lives of Pesello and Francesco Peselli, he outlines a pattern for imitation of master by pupil that resembles Bembo's dedicated pursuit of the single model:

It rarely tends to happen that the disciples of exceptional masters, if they observe their precepts, fail to become very excellent, and, if they do not actually surpass them, they at least equal them and make themselves in every way like them, because the eager zeal of imitation with application in study has power to make them equal the *virtù* of those who show them the true method of working. As a result, the disciples become such that they then compete with their masters, and easily surpass them, because it is always little effort to add to what has been discovered by others.³⁸

But Vasari believed it was necessary, in order to surpass one's master, to do more than merely imitate him. There were dangers in becoming too closely attached to a single master's manner.

In the Life of Mino da Fiesole, he stated that

it is clearly evident that it rarely happens that one passes ahead who always follows behind, because the imitation of nature becomes fixed in the manner of that craftsman who has developed the manner out of long practice. For imitation is a definite art of making what you represent directly after the most beautiful things of nature, which you

must take openly without the manner of your master or that of others, who also reduce the things they take from nature to a manner...If this is so, it follows that only things taken from nature make paintings and sculptures perfect, and that if someone studies closely only the manner of other craftsmen, and not bodies and natural things, it is inevitable that he will make works inferior both to nature and to those of the man whose manner he adopts.³⁹

This passage evokes a maxim widely used in the debates on imitation: that 'he who follows others, can never get in front of them'. Vasari also credited this saying to Michelangelo.⁴⁰ The adage ultimately derives from the *Institutio oratoria* of Quintilian, who wrote: 'For the man whose aim is to prove himself better than another, even if he does not surpass him, may hope to equal him. But he can never hope to equal him, if he thinks it his duty merely to tread in his footsteps; for the mere follower must always lag behind'.⁴¹ Vasari knew Quintilian's handbook on rhetoric; John Shearman showed that a passage in the *Lives* describing the awkwardness of Byzantine figures was adapted from it, and other examples of his reliance on Quintilian will be discussed below.⁴²

In 1550, Vasari seems to have been of two minds on the central question of the imitation debates: whether it was better to imitate one model, or many. At the end of an adulatory description of the the Sistine Ceiling, Vasari exclaimed that all artists should 'give thanks to heaven...and strive to imitate Michelangelo in everything'.⁴³ Thus it might seem that he strongly advocated imitation of a single model: the greatest practitioner of all three arts, Michelangelo. But in the Preface to the Third Part of the *Lives*, Vasari claimed that Raphael surpassed many masters by selecting the best qualities of each for imitation: 'But the most graceful of all was Raphael of Urbino, who, studying the works of both ancient and modern masters, selected from all their best qualities, and by this means so enhanced the art of painting that it equalled the complete perfection of the figures painted in the ancient world by Apelles and Zeuxis, and might be said to surpass them were it possible to compare their works with that of this paragon'.⁴⁴ In Raphael's Life, he further claimed that 'it remains to those who come after him to imitate the good, or rather optimum, method that he left us as an example'.⁴⁵ This paradigm of the imitation

of a variety of models was proposed by several ancient authors, including Quintilian and Seneca.⁴⁶ It had been recently advocated by Poliziano, Pico and Baldassare Castiglione. In the *Courtier*, Count Ludovico di Canossa, who represents Castiglione's point of view, asserts that 'the courtier must acquire this grace from those who appear to possess it and take from each one the quality that seems most commendable'.⁴⁷ Vasari applied many of the other qualities of Castiglione's ideal courtier to Raphael in his Life, including gracefulness, charm and sweetness.

The publication of Vasari's *Lives* had an immediate impact, and sparked polemical responses, including a new biography of Michelangelo published in 1553 by Ascanio Condivi. Condivi argued that nature itself concentrates its efforts and endeavours in one man (by implication, Michelangelo), 'who is to be the example and norm in that faculty', so that that other artists should follow the course he sets.⁴⁸ By contrast, Lodovico Dolce's 1557 dialogue, *L'Aretino*, criticized Michelangelo's narrow focus on the male nude in difficult poses – an aspect of Michelangelo's paintings which Vasari had praised – and proposed that both Raphael and Titian were better exemplars for painters on account of their invention and ability with colour.⁴⁹ Both authors dealt with the issue of imitation, and Vasari clearly felt the need to respond to them. In 1568, he added many new comments on imitation, including a long passage in the Life of Raphael fully exploring, 'for the benefit of our artists', Raphael's selective method of imitation.

According to Vasari, Raphael first closely imitated the style of Perugino, so successfully that their work could not be told apart, finally surpassing his master in *disegno*, colouring and invention. Later he gradually abandoned what he had learned from Perugino, imitating Leonardo and surpassing him in sweetness and facility, though not in grandeur or sublimity. Having seen Michelangelo's works, he took up the study of anatomy, but was forced to realize his limitations: he could not surpass Michelangelo's nudes. He reflected 'like a man of very great judgement, that painting does not consist only in making nude men, but has a wider field...since he could not approach Michelangelo in that branch of art to which he had set his hand, Raphael resolved to equal, and perhaps surpass, him in these others'.⁵⁰ At last he turned to the art of Fra Bartolommeo, taking from him a 'middle style' in drawing and colouring, 'and to this he added various methods chosen from the finest works of other masters, forming from many different

styles a single one, which then became peculiarly his own, and which was and always will be admired by other artists'.⁵¹

Vasari's new passage combines a number of ideas from previous authors, revealing how carefully he had thought about the imitation of models while composing it. First, Raphael is shown to follow the path of Castiglione's perfect courtier, who 'must make a constant effort to imitate and, if possible, exactly reproduce his master. And when he feels he has made some progress it is very profitable for him to observe different kinds of courtiers and, ruled by the good judgement that must always be his guide, take various qualities now from one man and now from another'.⁵² Vasari carefully points out the things that Raphael learned from each master, looking to others for qualities that could not be found in a single artist's style. Here he echoes Quintilian, who comments that 'quite apart from the fact that a wise man should always, if possible, make whatever is best in each single author his own, we shall find that...those who fix their eyes on one model only will always find some one quality which it is impossible to acquire therefrom. Consequently...we shall do well to keep a number of different excellences before our eyes, so that different qualities from different authors may impress themselves on our minds, to be adopted for use in the place that becomes them best'.⁵³ Finally, Raphael combines all of these diverse qualities into a style uniquely his own, following a method advocated by Petrarch, that poet of the middle style: 'it is a sign of greater elegance and skill for us, in imitation of the bees, to produce in our own words thoughts borrowed from others. To repeat, let us write neither in the style of one or another writer, but in a style uniquely our own though gathered from a variety of sources'.⁵⁴

Vasari concludes the inserted passage with practical advice for the artist, advising that 'every man should be content with doing willingly that work to which he feels himself drawn by natural inclination, and should not seek, out of competition, to put his hand to that which has not been given to him by nature, in order not to labor in vain, and often to his shame and loss'.⁵⁵ This admonition too is based upon Quintilian's prescriptions.⁵⁶ Quintilian's advice was echoed by Pico, Giovio and Castiglione, all of whom stressed the necessity of guiding the pupil to models appropriate to his talents and inclinations.⁵⁷

Vasari further warns of the dangers of following a model beyond one's abilities, censuring artists who 'having determined to pursue the study of Michelangelo's works alone, have failed to imitate him and have not been able to attain such perfection'; had they instead followed Raphael's aim to attend to the other fields of art 'they would not have laboured in vain nor acquired a style that is very dry and full of difficulty, without charm, without colour, and weak in invention'.⁵⁸ This warning is also adapted from Quintilian, who counsels that 'we must consider what it is that we should set ourselves to imitate in the authors thus chosen. For even great authors have their blemishes....I only wish that imitators were more likely to improve on the good things than to exaggerate the blemishes of the authors they seek to copy....But this is just what happens to those who...not only fail absolutely to attain the force of style and invention possessed by the original, but as a rule degenerate into something worse, and achieve merely those faults which are hardest to distinguish from virtues'.⁵⁹ Vasari's emphasis in the 1568 Life of Raphael on imitation of a variety of masters, and his inclusion of a warning of the dangers of misunderstanding the style of a single exemplar and so imitating defects, may well have been included as a response to Condivi's insistence on Michelangelo's role as 'the example and norm', whose style was copied even by Raphael.⁶⁰

Michelangelo cultivated the myth that his own gifts had come naturally, without study and without imitation. In 1568, Vasari insisted on Michelangelo's training under Ghirlandaio, reinforcing what he had said in 1550; he also added allusions to Michelangelo's imitation of other artists, including Fra Filippo Lippi and Luca Signorelli.⁶¹ One suggestive passage is again a response to Condivi, who wrote that 'Michelangelo has a most retentive memory, so that, although he has painted all the thousands of figures that are to be seen, he has never made two alike or in the same pose'.⁶² Vasari adapted this to read: 'Michelangelo was a man of tenacious and profound memory, so that, on seeing the works of others only once, he remembered them perfectly, and could make use of them in such a manner that hardly anyone ever noticed it, nor did he make anything of his own resemble another thing he had made, because he remembered everything he had ever done'.⁶³ So insistent was Vasari on Michelangelo's imitation of others that he altered Michelangelo's adage about imitation to reflect it: 'He who follows others, can

never get in front of them, and he who cannot do good work on his own, cannot make good use of the work of others'.⁶⁴

In 1550, Vasari had provided very little advice about what constituted 'making good use of the work of others'. Rather, he had concentrated on the best way to imitate nature, using the commonplace advice, based on Cicero's story about Zeuxis and the maidens of Croton, to select the most beautiful parts from many beautiful things and combine them: '*Disegno* is the imitation of the most beautiful things in nature, used in all figures, sculpted as well as painted; this quality depends on the ability of the artist's hand and mind to reproduce all that he sees accurately and correctly onto a plane...The artist achieves the highest perfection of style by copying the most beautiful things in nature and combining the most perfect members, hands, head, torso and legs, to produce the finest possible figure and to use it as a model in every work for all the figures'.⁶⁵

It was commonly believed that ancient artists had so successfully practiced this selective imitation of nature that their works could serve as a shortcut for artists of later generations. For example, Dolce advises in *L'Aretino* that 'one should also imitate the lovely marble or bronze works by the ancient masters...For antique objects embody complete artistic perfection, and may serve as exemplars for the whole of beauty'.⁶⁶ In 1550, Vasari had praised artists like Brunelleschi for imitating the antique, and suggested that artists of the Third Age achieved perfection after having seen ancient works of sculpture whose exceptional grace enabled them to move beyond the dry, hard style of earlier artists.⁶⁷ But in 1568, possibly in response to Dolce, he added to the Life of Mantegna a warning about the dangers of imitating ancient statues too closely: because he had looked at marble statues and not at real bodies, Mantegna's manner became hardened.⁶⁸

What Andrea had done was, according to Vasari, what many of Michelangelo's followers did: he imitated his models so closely that he took on their defects. A related error, as Vasari pointed out in a passage added to the Life of Cronaca, was to copy things from other sources directly, without adapting them with good judgement to their new purpose. Here he accuses Baccio d'Agnolo of copying an ancient cornice with exact measurements and then, through lack of judgement, placing it over an inappropriately small façade: 'It is not enough for craftsmen, when

they have executed their works, to excuse themselves, as many do, by saying that they were taken with exact measurements from the antique and copied from good masters, seeing that good judgement and the eye play a greater part in all such matters than measuring with compasses'.⁶⁹

The concept of the *giudizio dell'occhio* was associated with Michelangelo, who was able to adapt forms and break the rules of measurement. In 1568 Vasari recorded that Michelangelo used to say 'it is necessary to have the compasses in the eyes and not in the hand, for the hands work but the eye judges'.⁷⁰ This concept is related to ideas of the freedom of the artist to embellish nature or a model with judgement (for example, in cases of optical correction), and also with his own inventions.⁷¹ Such judgement enabled an artist to be able to change what he took from others 'so that hardly anyone ever noticed it'. As we shall see, Vasari's criticisms of Pontormo's Certosa and San Lorenzo frescoes are unified by the theme of an artist whose personal style became so profoundly affected by that of his selected models that it was impossible for the viewer not to be painfully aware of what those models had been.

Imitation in Vasari's Biography of Pontormo

In his biography of Pontormo, Vasari states that when prints by Albrecht Dürer began to arrive in Florence in the 1510s, they caused a sensation among the city's artists, who 'all with one voice, in the common judgement and consensus, proclaimed the beauty of these prints and the excellence of Albrecht'.⁷² It was in this atmosphere that Pontormo, when he came to paint frescoes for the Certosa del Galluzzo (Figs. 2, 4), thought that he would make use of the inventions in Dürer's prints. Vasari writes:

Seeking therefore to imitate that manner [of Dürer], ...he captured it so thoroughly, that the charm of his early manner, which had been given to him by nature, all full of sweetness and grace, was changed by that new study and labour, and was so impaired through his stumbling upon the German manner, that in all these works, though they are all beautiful, one recognizes hardly anything of that excellence and grace that he had given up to that time to all his figures....Let no one think that Jacopo is to be blamed because he imitated Albrecht Dürer in inventions, for that is no error, and many painters

have done so and still do, but because he followed the strict German style in everything: in the draperies, the expressions of faces and postures, which he should have avoided, and made use only of the inventions, since he had with complete grace and beauty the modern manner.”⁷³

Vasari is correct to see the influence of Dürer's prints in the Certosa frescoes. Scholars have shown how Pontormo's designs, and even the graphic language of his preparatory drawings for the frescoes, reveal his particular interest in the Small Passion woodcuts.⁷⁴ As he clearly states here, Vasari was not opposed to artists borrowing imagery and inventive ideas from Dürer, for whose prints he had especially high praise. Andrea del Sarto had borrowed motifs from the German artist in his frescoes of the life of John the Baptist at the Chiostro dello Scalzo in Florence, but had laudably ‘rendered them in his own style’.⁷⁵ Vasari himself also borrowed liberally from Dürer in his own compositions.⁷⁶ Thus it seems unlikely that, as Costamagna maintains, Vasari criticized the Certosa frescoes because he associated German prints with heresy.⁷⁷ His objection is, instead, about what he saw as the slavish imitation of Dürer's style.

If Pontormo abandoned his own early style, then what were the elements, according to Vasari, of which it had been composed? Pontormo's earliest paintings were praised by Vasari for the liveliness and gracefulness of the figures, rendered in ‘great relief and made so well in terms of colour and in every other way, that it is not possible to praise them enough’.⁷⁸ Vasari thought that the figures in Pontormo's *Visitation* at SS. Annunziata (1514-16) had been ‘executed in fresco so softly and with such harmonious colours that it is a marvel’.⁷⁹ Vasari's criticism of Pontormo's later works shows that one of his primary criteria for judging a painting was the illusion of relief, or three-dimensionality. In describing Pontormo's paintings for the Capponi Chapel in Santa Felicita (1525-28), Vasari approved of the ceiling fresco (now destroyed) and the *tondi* of the Four Evangelists, but not the altarpiece, ‘made without shadows and with a colouring so bright and harmonious that one can hardly distinguish the light tones from intermediate shades, or intermediate shades from darkness’.⁸⁰ Throughout the *Lives*, artists are praised for rendering figures in strong relief, and in the 1568 version of Michelangelo's *Life* this is revealed to be the

very aim of painting: perfection in the art of *disegno* is obtained 'by delineation and by the use of contours, shadows and light, to give relief to things in painting'.⁸¹

One aspect of giving relief to figures is to render draperies so as to reveal the human form beneath. Donatello had also been praised for the ability to create masterly draperies that reveal the nude form, as the ancients had done.⁸² Francesco Salviati, too, 'understood the nude as well as any painter of his time. He had when depicting draperies a very graceful and gentle manner, always arranging them, where this was proper, to reveal the nude'.⁸³ The only criticism Vasari had of Pontormo's *Vertumnus and Pomona* lunette at the Medici villa in Poggio a Caiano (1519-21) was that the female figures were enveloped too fully in draperies; that is, the draperies did not articulate their nude form.⁸⁴

In general, Vasari also liked Pontormo's figures for their liveliness and the variety of their facial expressions. The Poggio a Caiano lunette is praised in these terms, as is the *Adoration of the Magi* (1519-20; Florence, Pitti).⁸⁵ Vasari considered the *Pucci Altarpiece* (1518) and *Joseph in Egypt* (1517-18, Fig. 1) the best panel paintings ever created by Pontormo; both are commended for liveliness of expression in the faces, and the varied attitudes of the figures. The *Joseph* panel wins additional praise for the arrangement of the figures in the composition and for the beauty of the inventions.⁸⁶

What Vasari objected to in the Passion frescoes is that Pontormo abandoned the gracefulness of his early manner while under the sway of Dürer's style. Unfortunately for the attempt to fully understand what Vasari meant, the frescoes are damaged. Pontormo painted part of them *a secco*, and, because they were outside in the cloister, the action of weather has eroded some of the paint. However, small copies on panel, now preserved in the museum at the Certosa, were made by Florentine painters, probably in the 1560s, and these help to give some idea of the original fine finish and detail of the frescoes.⁸⁷ Small areas of the frescoes have survived relatively intact; for example, the face of Christ in the *Deposition* reveals a careful modelling of form, achieved with a delicacy astonishing for fresco. Vasari is unlikely to have found fault with this aspect of the frescoes.

The *Agony in the Garden* was probably the first of the Certosa frescoes to be painted. Vasari says that it was done 'in a manner so similar to that of Dürer that it is a marvel'.⁸⁸ The grouping of Pontormo's foreground figures is loosely derived from Dürer's Small Passion woodcut of the same scene. But the actual postures of the Apostles are not as constricted as Dürer's, and what remains of their drapery suggests that it was carefully modelled. However, the figure of Christ is thin and insubstantial; his cloak falls in simple straight folds, failing to describe form. The frailty and incorporeality of the figures becomes accentuated in the later frescoes, such as *Christ Before Pilate* (Fig. 2). The figures are attenuated, and as in Dürer's prints (Fig. 3), their limbs are disproportionately long. Figures in other frescoes, such as the *Deposition* (Fig. 4), are of the same elongated, long-limbed type. Though Vasari does not expressly say so, it may partly have been this tendency in Pontormo's figures away from more compact masses that he found so Germanic.

Pontormo's Certosa figures also seem to have been robbed of energy, their poses suggesting the inertia of despair. The female figures in the *Deposition* make elaborate rhythmic gestures but do not seem to move, and there are similar gesturing, swaying male figures in *Christ before Pilate*. When Vasari says that the youth on the stairs in this scene 'is very beautiful and lively, having in him something of Jacopo's early style', it is because he displays the purposeful action and inherent gracefulness provided by *contrapposto*.⁸⁹ Similarly, though Vasari says the *Way to Calvary* was painted in the German style, he believes it came out better than the other scenes, presumably because the figures display more dramatic action and more potential movement than those in the other frescoes.

Vasari also objected to the Germanic faces of characters in the Passion frescoes. The soldiers in *Christ Before Pilate* are 'so characteristically German in the expressions on their faces and in their clothes, that someone not knowing by whose hand this work was, would believe it to have been done by Northerners'.⁹⁰ Of the *Agony in the Garden*, Vasari adds, 'Judas who is leading the Jews has a face so strange, just like the faces of all those soldiers in the German style with their weird expressions, that it moves anyone who looks at them to compassion for the simplicity of that man, who sought with all that patience and effort to learn what others flee and

seek to lose, and forsook that style that surpasses all others in quality...Didn't Pontormo know that the Germans and Flemings came to these parts to learn the Italian style, which he with so much effort sought to abandon as if it were bad?'⁹¹ Elsewhere, Vasari praises Dürer's prints, but laments that, being German, Dürer did not know how to draw the human figure.⁹²

So, when Vasari objects to Pontormo's so-called German style, he is responding to a number of diverse elements: first, the figures lack monumentality, mass, and correct proportion; second, they lack potential for movement; and third, their details lack elegance and decorum. These elements combined with 'that new study and effort' caused the loss of 'the charm of his early manner, which he had been given by nature, full of sweetness and grace'.⁹³

In Vasari's judgement, Pontormo never returned to the gracefulness of his early style, though in time the influence of Dürer's prints lessened. In Vasari's account, Pontormo then fell under the influence of Michelangelo. Between 1530-2 Pontormo was chosen to produce oil paintings after two of Michelangelo's cartoons. Vasari says that this 'aroused his spirit and he resolved in every way according to his ability to imitate and follow Michelangelo's style'.⁹⁴ In the *Ten Thousand Martyrs* (c.1530; Florence, Pitti), Pontormo's figures become bulkier and more complex in posture and movement, under the influence of Michelangelo's sculptures for the New Sacristy of San Lorenzo.⁹⁵ For several years afterward, his drawings reveal his attempts to assimilate the essence of Michelangelo's forms. Even his graphic technique becomes imitative of Michelangelo's – just as his drawings of the 1520s reveal his earlier attempt to recreate the linear devices of Dürer's woodcut prints.⁹⁶

The final outcome of Pontormo's efforts to imitate Michelangelo was the fresco cycle in the choir of San Lorenzo. The upper portion of the choir contained a *Christ in Glory with the Creation of Eve*, a study for which is at the Uffizi (Fig. 5). The compositional scheme for this drawing, and the figures of Christ and Adam, are related to a drawing of the *Pietà* made by Michelangelo for Vittoria Colonna (Fig. 6).⁹⁷ Pontormo may have seen this drawing in Rome, where it seems he might have traveled in the early 1540s, but engraved copies of the drawing were also in circulation.⁹⁸ He was apparently also familiar with Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, judging from the surviving drawings for the *Deluge* and the *Resurrection of the Dead*, situated

below the *Christ in Glory* on the side walls of the choir.⁹⁹ Our knowledge of the arrangement of the *Resurrection* is largely based on a drawn copy after part of the fresco, which shows it to be strikingly similar to Michelangelo's fresco, especially in the way in which nude figures, gigantic and yet powerless, are suspended in mid-air.¹⁰⁰ In the drawings for the *Deluge* (Fig. 7), the torsos of the nude figures – that aspect so emphasized in Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* nudes – become swollen, stretched and distended, with heads and limbs shrunken. Intentionally, Pontormo abandons all gracefulness and even all contact with the observer, since the figures are presented predominantly in back views.¹⁰¹

That the frescoes at San Lorenzo represented the culmination of Pontormo's struggle to come to terms with the art of Michelangelo was clear to Vasari, who disapprovingly wrote of them that

imagining then that in this work he had to surpass all the other painters, and even, as it has been said, Michelangelo, Jacopo painted in the upper part, in a number of scenes, the creation of Adam and Eve, their eating of the forbidden fruit and their expulsion from Paradise, the tilling of the earth, the sacrifice of Abel, the death of Cain, the blessing of the seed of Noah, and Noah designing the plan and the measurements of the ark. Next, on one of the walls below...he painted the inundation of the Flood, in which there is a mass of dead and drowned bodies, and Noah speaking with God. On the other wall is painted the universal Resurrection of the dead...with such variety and confusion, that the real resurrection will not perhaps be more confused...than Pontormo painted it...It does not seem to me that in any place at all did he observe compositional order, or measurement, or time, or variety in the heads, or changes in the flesh colours, or, in sum, any rule, proportion, or law of perspective; but everything is full of nudes with an order, *disegno*, invention, composition, colouring and painting done in his way, with so much melancholy and so little pleasure for whoever looks at this work....And although there may be seen in this work some bit of a torso with the back turned or facing forward and some joining of flanks, executed with marvellous study and much labour... nevertheless as a whole it is alien to his own manner and, as appears to almost everyone, without proper measurement,

consisting for the most part of huge torsos and small arms and legs; to say nothing of the heads, in which one can see nothing at all of the singular quality and grace he used to give to them....In sum, where he had thought in this work to surpass all the paintings in that art, he failed by a great measure to equal the things that he himself had made in the past; by which it is evident that he who seeks to do too much, and almost force nature, ruins the good qualities he may abundantly have been given by her.¹⁰²

Vasari's criticism of the San Lorenzo frescoes has been explained as his attempt, in the years following the Council of Trent, to deflect suspicion of heresy away from Pontormo and perhaps also his patron, Duke Cosimo I, by professing not to understand them.¹⁰³ But the confusion and dismay that Vasari expresses may have been widespread in Florence immediately after the unveiling of the frescoes in July of 1558. The sculptor Baccio Bandinelli maliciously noted in a letter to Duke Cosimo that the frescoes had been greeted with 'lo istrano grido'.¹⁰⁴ It seems to me essential to note the parallels between what Vasari says about the Passion cycle at the Certosa and what he says about the frescoes at San Lorenzo – namely, that Pontormo turned to an exemplar whose style was unsympathetic to his own talents and inherent style: first Dürer, then Michelangelo.

It has become a commonplace of the scholarship on Vasari that he idolized Michelangelo. This is undeniable. The first edition of the *Lives* began with God creating the universe, and ended with the Last Judgement as painted by Michelangelo: the culmination of art coinciding with the culmination of Christian history. Michelangelo's mastery of all three of the arts of *disegno* was, for Vasari, unsurpassable. But Michelangelo's very mastery and his *difficoltà* made him a dangerous exemplar. Caroline Elam has recently shown how Michelangelo's architectural license gave rise to debate in Florentine circles, causing Vasari to remark that architects who tried to imitate Michelangelo's license had given rise to 'new fantasies...that have more of the grotesque than of reason or rule in their ornamentation'.¹⁰⁵ The same hazards lay in wait for artists who too closely tried to imitate Michelangelo's style in painting. In the passage he inserted into Raphael's Life in 1568, outlining Raphael's method of imitating the best qualities of other artists and his decision to focus on aspects of painting beyond nude figures, Vasari concludes that Raphael's

approach was a wise one, for 'if the same had been done by many craftsmen of our own age, who, having determined to pursue the study of Michelangelo's works alone, have failed to imitate him and have not been able to attain to such perfection, they would not have labored in vain nor acquired a manner so hard, so full of difficulty, wanting in beauty and colouring, and poor in invention'.¹⁰⁶

This is exactly how Vasari characterises Pontormo's frescoes at San Lorenzo. As we have seen, Vasari further states in Raphael's Life that artists must create works of art according to the skills and the manner that nature accords them. Only in this way can they avoid the sort of disaster that he thought happened to Pontormo, whose imitation of the wrong models forced him to work in a manner alien to his own style:

Every man should be content with doing willingly that work to which he feels himself drawn by natural inclination, and should not seek, out of competition, to put his hand to that which has not been given to him by nature, in order not to labour in vain, and often to his shame and loss. Moreover, when an artist has done enough, he should not seek to do too much and surpass those who, with the great help of nature and the particular grace given to them by God, have produced or are producing miracles of art, because he who he is not suited to a thing, will not ever be able, no matter how he struggles, to arrive where another has easily gone. There was for example among the older painters Paolo Uccello, who struggled against his abilities to improve, but only slipped back. The same was done in our own time, and not long ago, by Jacopo Pontormo.¹⁰⁷

Though many artists attempted to imitate Michelangelo, they were less than successful because they lacked his profound knowledge of *disegno*. His works 'are almost inimitable; he gave to his things such art, grace, and a certain vitality...that he surpassed and vanquished the ancients, having known how to achieve difficult things so easily that they seem to have been made without effort, though anyone who tries to draw from his things discovers much effort in imitating them'.¹⁰⁸

In his own paintings, Vasari tried to avoid the potential pitfalls of imitating Michelangelo too closely. Describing his own composition of the *Conversion of St. Paul* for the Cappella De Monte in San Pietro in Montorio, Rome (1550), he explicitly says that he chose to show the young St. Paul before Ananias, in order 'to vary it from that which Buonarroti had executed in the Pauline Chapel'.¹⁰⁹ As some scholars have recently argued, in his own practice Vasari preferred a form of selective imitation modelled on that of Raphael. Indeed, his own paintings and drawings show considerably more direct influence from Raphael's works than from Michelangelo's, although, as Franklin says, Vasari 'for the most part...attempted to integrate his source material' into his own identifiable style.¹¹⁰ At least as early as 1540, when he painted an altarpiece of the *Deposition* for the monastery at Camaldoli, Vasari included a pointed quotation from Raphael when he introduced his own self-portrait into a figure based on that of St. Paul in Raphael's *St. Cecilia Altarpiece* (1514, Bologna, Pinacoteca Nazionale), which he had recently studied in Bologna.¹¹¹ One has the sense from Vasari's career that he had determined to pattern his very life on that of Raphael: like him, Vasari was sociable and friendly with learned men, he created large decorative schemes for learned patrons, and he ran a large shop with many able assistants to whom he was willing to allocate important tasks.¹¹² And, like Raphael, who realized that painting had a wider field than solely the representation of naked men, Vasari sought to incorporate the riches of the visual world into his own paintings: 'all the varieties of bodies, faces, vestments, costumes, visors, helmets, cuirasses, various headdresses, horses, caparisons, harnesses, artillery of every kind, navigations, tempests, rain and snowstorms'.¹¹³

In the first edition of the *Lives*, Vasari made some important comments about imitation but did not commit himself to a paradigm for the imitation of models. In 1568 he revisited the questions surrounding imitation, and came down firmly in favour of the selective imitation of many masters. In the second edition of the *Lives*, his theoretical statements are more closely allied with his own longstanding practice. There are many possible reasons for the changes to his text, including the necessity to reply to other treatises on art, such as those by Condivi and Dolce. Other factors included the fact that the artist Vasari most admired but feared to imitate,

Michelangelo, had died. This freed Vasari to criticize artists who by imitating Michelangelo too closely had created inferior works, and enabled him to champion Raphael more strongly.

While Vasari was rewriting the *Lives*, he came under the influence of Vincenzo Borghini, who had tried from the 1540s to mediate between the extreme positions of Bembo and his Florentine opponents on the imitation of vernacular exemplars. Borghini had in 1542 proposed a compromise position on the imitation question, suggesting that a writer should take his vocabulary from a wide range of authors, but his syntax or form from only one - the best master available.¹¹⁴ Later, as lieutenant of the Accademia del Disegno, Borghini re-examined debates from the 1540s on the *paragone*, making notes on the letters artists had written to Varchi. In his notes he criticized Michelangelo for his neglect of colour in painting, and admitted his own preference for Raphael's 'very graceful and divine *colorito*' over 'forced foreshortenings'.¹¹⁵

Vasari's textual changes concerning imitation were perhaps also a response to artists in Florence who persisted in imitating Michelangelo's example, especially those aspects of his work that Vasari saw as most inimitable. Pontormo's arrangement in the San Lorenzo choir of entangled nude figures in difficult postures was an important case in point, and it seems that Michelangelo's figural style was also championed by other artists close to Pontormo. Agnolo Bronzino's own fresco in San Lorenzo, of the *Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* (completed in 1569), replete with muscular nude figures in extravagantly agitated poses, has frequently been characterized as an aesthetically unsuccessful manifesto of the artist's filiation with Michelangelo, although Stephen Campbell has recently shown that Bronzino's imitation of Michelangelo was more thoughtful and complex – even more ironic – than is usually supposed.¹¹⁶ Bronzino, a poet and member of the Accademia Fiorentina, also wrote a satire in *terza rima* on the subject of artists' excuses, which, as Deborah Parker has argued, offers considerable insight into Bronzino's opinions about the theory and practice of art. In the poem, Bronzino asks: 'Do you want someone to say that Michelangelo's road is by now too steep, and that no one should think of attaining it? That this is bad advice is certain, because his work is a guide and a signpost to our true destination'.¹¹⁷ Thus the circle of Pontormo may have constituted a pro-Michelangelo faction in Florence that Vasari saw as undermining his own championing of the graceful style of Raphael.

Finally, many of the changes Vasari made to the *Lives* in 1568 must have been intended as pedagogical advice for the pupils being trained in the Accademia del Disegno. The comments that I have examined here suggest that Vasari's aim was in part to convince young artists that the imitation of multiple exemplars, in pursuit of developing one's own style, was the correct path to follow. The object lesson that Vasari wished to teach in Pontormo's Life is that obsessively following a single exemplar was a path fraught with danger, and often doomed to failure. In the words of Quintilian, whose handbook on rhetoric was paraphrased extensively by Vasari, the artist risks 'failing to obtain the force of style and invention possessed by the original, [achieving] merely those faults that are hardest to distinguish from virtues'.¹¹⁸ This was especially true when the artist was seduced, as Vasari thought Pontormo had been, by an alluring and compelling style, but one antithetical to his own talents – the style of an unsympathetic exemplar.

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¹ C. Goldstein, 'Rhetoric and Art History in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque', *Art Bulletin* 73 (1991), 641-52 and P. Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995). The two editions of Vasari's *Lives* are available for comparison in G. Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori nelle redazione del 1550 e 1568*, 6 vols., ed. R. Bettarini and P. Barocchi (Florence: Sansoni, 1966-87). All references will be to this edition, and all translations from Vasari are my own. Unless otherwise stated, quoted passages can be found in both editions.

² Life of Pontormo, Vasari, V, 319-22 and 331-3. These passages will be examined in detail below.

³ For a reconstruction of the frescoes' arrangement, see J. Cox-Rearick, *The Drawings of Pontormo* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), I, 318-27. Vasari says Bronzino completed the fresco

cycle; this has recently been confirmed by documents pertaining to Pontormo's estate: see S. Gregory, 'Pontormo's heir', *Burlington Magazine* 142 (2000), 630-3, and E. Pilliod, *Pontormo Bronzino Allori: A Genealogy of Florentine Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 113-44 and 221-31. The frescoes were destroyed, or at least whitewashed, in 1742.

⁴ For example, F.M. Clapp, *Jacopo Carucci da Pontormo: His Life and Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), 107-13; Cox-Rearick, *Drawings*, I, 52-5, 213-26; P. Costamagna, *Pontormo* (Milan: Electa, 1994), 61-4, 175; and I. Zupnick, 'Pontormo's Early Style', *Art Bulletin* 47 (1965), 345-53.

⁵ A. Pinelli, *La Bella Maniera: Artisti del Cinquecento tra regola e licenza* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), 11: 'uno stato d'animo agrodolce...che in un crescendo di aggressività...erompe nelle ultime pagine, quasi senza più ritegno, nella rovente requisitoria finale contro gli affreschi nel coro di San Lorenzo'.

⁶ Pilliod, *Pontormo Bronzino Allori*, 5 for quotation. See also Pilliod, 'Representation, Misrepresentation and Non-Representation: Vasari and His Competitors', in P. Jacks (ed.), *Vasari's Florence: Artists and Literati at the Medicean Court* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 30-52.

⁷ Pinelli, *Bella Maniera*, 16-24.

⁸ D. Franklin, *Painting in Renaissance Florence 1500-1550* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 197-211. A similar argument about the fast pace of Vasari's workshop versus Pontormo's slower execution is briefly made by Pinelli, *Bella Maniera*, 24.

⁹ The interpretation of Pontormo's San Lorenzo frescoes as containing potentially heretical ideas began with C. De Tolnay, 'Les fresques de Pontormo dans le chœur de San Lorenzo à Florence', *Critica d'arte* 9 (1950), 38-52. He has been followed by others, including K. Forster, *Pontormo* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1966), 91-8; Costamagna, *Pontormo*, 92-3, 252-66; and M. Firpo, *Gli affreschi di Pontormo a San Lorenzo: Eresia, politica e cultura nella Firenze di Cosimo I* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997). Other scholars who believe Vasari was attempting to deflect attention from heretical content in the frescoes include R. Corti, 'Pontormo a San Lorenzo: Un episodio figurativo dello 'spiritualismo' italiano', *Ricerche di storia dell'arte* 6 (1977), 5-47 and D. Trento, 'Pontormo e la corte di Cosimo I', in M. Cämmerer (ed.), *Kunst des Cinquecento in der Toskana* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1992), 139-45.

¹⁰ Firpo, *Affreschi di Pontormo*, 80-2. But, for a dissenting opinion on the heretical content of even the San Lorenzo frescoes, see F. Mozzetti, 'Review of Firpo, *Affreschi di Pontormo*', *Venezia Cinquecento* 8 (1998), 181-9.

¹¹ A. Payne, 'Architects and Academies: Architectural Theories of Imitatio and the Literary Debates on Language and Style', in G. Clarke and P. Crossley (eds.), *Architecture and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 118-37, has explored how the literary debates about imitation affected architectural theory in Florence, including Vasari's discussions of architecture. C. Hope, 'Can You Trust Vasari?', *The New York Review of Books*, 5 Oct. 1995, 10-13, proposed that Vasari relied much more than has been suspected on the help of his correspondents and editors, who may have written large blocks of the text of the *Lives*. T. Frangenberg, 'Bartoli, Giambullari and the Prefaces to Vasari's Lives (1550)', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 65 (2002), 244-58 argues that though Vasari may have written most of the biographies, his editors and advisers actually wrote the important prefaces that provide the theoretical framework. I believe the consistency of Vasari's comments on imitation (especially throughout the 1568 edition), and its concurrence with his own artistic practice, provides proof of his authorship of most of the book – though he certainly had assistance, and it is possible that Cosimo Bartoli wrote the Preface to the Whole Work.

¹² As Mozzetti, 'Review of Firpo', 182, comments, it is not clear how Vasari must inescapably have noticed the heterodox religious nature of the San Lorenzo frescoes (as Firpo argues, *Affreschi di Pontormo*, 151), when the Inquisition apparently did not, or chose to ignore it.

¹³ For the ancient texts and their ramifications for Renaissance rhetoricians, see T. M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 54-103, and G. W. Pigman III, 'Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance', *Renaissance Quarterly* 30 (1980), 1-32.

¹⁴ E. Garin (ed.), *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, vol. 8 (Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1952), 905-11. Poliziano listed a number of authors, advocating '[taking] from everywhere what we can use', in his *Oratorio super Fabio Quintiliano et Statii Sylvius*; see Pigman, 'Imitation,' 6.

¹⁵ For their letters (written 1513, published 1518), see G. Santangelo, *Le Epistole 'De Imitatione' di Giovanfrancesco Pico della Mirandola e di Pietro Bembo* (Florence: Olschki, 1954). For discussions of the debate, E. Battisti, 'Il concetto d'imitazione nel Cinquecento. I: Da Raffaello a Michelangelo', *Commentari* 7 (1956), 86-104; Greene, *Light in Troy*, pp. 171-81; I. Rowland, *The Culture of the High Renaissance: Ancients and Moderns in Sixteenth-Century Rome* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 193-215.

¹⁶ P. Bembo, *Prose della volgar lingua*, ed. M. Marti (Padua: Liviana, 1955), 70: 'Non é la moltitudine...che alla composizione di alcun secolo dona grido e autorità, ma sono pochissimi uomini di ciascun secolo, al giudizio de' quali, perciocché sono essi più dotti degli altri reputati, danno poi legente e la moltitudine fede, che per sola giudicare non sa direttamente'.

¹⁷ For a summary of the issues and authors joining the debate, see B. Migliorini, *The Italian Language*, trans. T. G. Griffith (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), 212-47.

¹⁸ Vasari gives details of his education in Arezzo in the Life of Salviati, Vasari, VI, 511-19. Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 62-74, examines what Vasari would have learned as a youth in Arezzo and Florence.

¹⁹ In a letter from Rome to Niccolò Vespucci in Florence, dated April 1532, Vasari calls Giovio and Tolomei his 'protectors'; see K. Frey and H.W. Frey, *Der literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris*, (Munich: Georg Müller, 1923-40), I, 2.

²⁰ T.C. Price Zimmerman, 'Paolo Giovio and the Evolution of Renaissance Art Criticism', in C.H. Clough (ed.), *Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance: Essays in Honour of Paul Oskar Kristeller* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1976), 411. The dialogue was written by 1528.

²¹ See Migliorini, *Italian Language*, 223. *Il Cesano* was written 1527-8, and published in 1555.

²² Letter of 8 November 1531, C. Tolomei, *De le lettere di M. Claudio Tolomei: Libri Sette* (Venice: Fabio & Agostino Zoppini, 1581), book iii, fol. 99v-100r: 'Ricordatevi Firenzuola di quel concilio? Quando noi per istrigar molti dubii della lingua nostra lo tentammo in Roma? Ma la malagevolezza di raccogliere molti huomini dotti, ch'erano sparsi per Italia, ce lo fece intralasciare. Qui hor di nuovo si pone inanzi, ch'essendoci venuto il Bembo guida, e maestro di questa lingua, non è ben: che si perda si bella occasione, ecci poi una selva di gentili ingegni, il Priolo dico, il Trissino, il Molsa, il Guidicione, il Broccardo, e molti altri, ch'ogni giorno con la lingua e la penna si fanno illustri.' Firenzuola, like Bembo, promoted Petrarch as a model.

²³ Bembo, *Prose*, I, 72-4.

²⁴ E.P. Bowron, 'Giorgio Vasari's Portrait of Six Tuscan Poets', *Minneapolis Institute of Arts Bulletin* 60 (1971-3), 43-53, and J. Nelson, 'Dante Portraits in Sixteenth-Century Florence', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 120 (1992), 59-77.

²⁵ For Leonardo's notes and the historical context, C. Farago, *Leonardo da Vinci's Paragone* (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1991).

²⁶ Varchi's 'Due lezioni', published in 1550, are reprinted in P. Barocchi (ed.), *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento fra manierismo e controriforma*, (Bari: Laterza, 1960-2), I, 1-82; their context is the subject of L. Mendelsohn, *Paragoni: Benedetto Varchi's Due Lezioni and Cinquecento Art Theory* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982).

²⁷ Letters of 5 and 14 August, 1564, in Frey, *Nachlass*, II, 93, 101: Borghini tells Vasari he has reread Varchi's 'Due lezioni' and the artists' letters, and has written 130 pages of commentary on them. Excerpts of his notes, discovered by Paola Barocchi, can be found in Barocchi, *Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento* (Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1971-77), I, 611-73.

²⁸ Life of Garofalo and Other Lombards, Vasari, V, 424: 'Nel medesimo luogo è di mano d'un frato Girolamo... in un quadro a olio ritratto il bellissimo Cenacolo che fece in Milano a Santa Maria delle Grazie Lionardo da Vinci, ritratto, dico, tanto bene, che io ne stupii'.

²⁹ Life of Giotto, Vasari, V, 97: 'risuscitò la moderna e buona arte della pittura, introducendo il ritrarre bene di naturale le persone vive' (1568 version, wording changed slightly from 1550); 96: 'ritraeva un pecora di naturale'.

³⁰ Preface to Part Three, Vasari, V, 8: Leonardo could 'contraffare sottilissimamente tutte le minuzie della natura'; Life of Leonardo, Vasari, IV, 25: 'nella tavola è contraffatto l'opera del tessuto, d'una maniera che la renna stessa non mostra il vero meglio'.

³¹ Life of Marcantonio, Vasari, V, 7: "cominciò a contraffare di quegli intagli d'Alberto". (Vasari's spelling is inconsistent).

³² Among many examples: Life of Taddeo Gaddi, Vasari, II, 205: Taddeo is an 'imitator della maniera di Giotto'; Life of Fra Filippo Lippi, Vasari, III, 338: Fra Filippo 'a Fra Diamante fece imparare l'arte della pittura, il quale...della maniera sua imitandola assai si fece onore'; Life of Raphael, Vasari, IV, 158: 'È cosa notabilissima che, studiando Raffaello la maniera di Pietro, la imitò appunto e in tutte le cose, che i suoi ritratti non si conoscevano dagli originali del maestro, e fra le cose sue e di Pietro non si sapeva certo discernere' (1568, slightly altered from 1550).

³³ Life of Giotto, Vasari, III, 97: 'non solo pareggiò il fanciullo la maniera del maestro suo, ma divenne così buono imitatore della natura che sbandì affatto quella goffa maniera greca'(1568, slightly altered from 1550).

³⁴ Life of Giorgione, Vasari, IV, p. 42: 'in quello la natura lo favorì sì forte, che egli...non voleva mettere in opera cosa che egli dal vivo non ritraesse; e tanto le fu soggetto e tanto andò imitandola, che non solo egli

acquistò nome di aver passato Gentile e Giovanni Bellini, ma di competere con coloro che lavoravano in Toscana et erano autori della maniera moderna’.

³⁵ Vasari, III, 3-19; IV, 3-13.

³⁶ Lives of Andrea del Castagno and Domenico Veneziano, Vasari, III, 351: ‘la emulazione e la concorrenza che virtuosamente operando cerca vincere e soverchiare i da più di sé per acquistarsi gloria et onore è cosa lodevole e da essere tenuta in pregio come necessario ed utile al mondo...’.

³⁷ Life of Brunelleschi, Vasari, III, 141: ‘fece e porte e finestre nella maniera cavata da lo antico’; Life of Signorelli, Vasari, III, 637: ‘in alcune cose del suo divino Giudizio...furono da lui gentilmente tolte in parte dall’invenzioni di Luca’ (1568); Life of Pontormo, Vasari, V, 320: ‘pensò Jacopo...di servirsi dell’invenzioni sopradette d’Alberto Duro’ (1568).

³⁸ Vasari, III, 371: ‘Rare volte suole avvenire che i discepoli de’ maestri rari, se osservano i documenti di quegli, non divenghino molto eccellenti, e che, se pure non se gli lasciano dopo le spalle, non gli parreggino almeno e si agguagliano a loro in tutto, perché il sollecito fervore della imitazione con la assiduità dello studio ha forza di pareggiare la virtù di chi gli dimostra il vero modo dell’operare. Laonde vengono i discepoli a farsi tali che e’ concorrono poi co’ maestri, e gli avanzano agevolmente, per esser sempre poca fatica lo aggiungere a quello che è stato da altri trovato’.

³⁹ Vasari, III, 405-6: ‘manifestissimamente si vede che rare volte passa inanzi chi camina sempre dietro; perché la imitazione della natura è ferma nella maniera di quello artefice che ha fatto la lunga pratica diventare maniera, con ciò sia che l’imitazione è una ferma arte di fare apunto quel che tu fai come sta il più bello delle cose della natura, pigliandola schietta senza la maniera del tuo maestro o d’altri, i quali ancora eglino riducono in maniera le cose che tolsono da la natura...E se questo è, ne segue che le cose tolte da lei fa le pitture e le sculture perfette, e chi studia strettamente le maniere degli artefici solamente, e non i corpi o le cose naturali, è necessario che facci l’opere sue e men buone della natura e di quelle di colui da chi si toglie la maniera’.

⁴⁰ Life of Michelangelo, Vasari, VI, 118: ‘Domandato da uno amico suo quel che gli paresse d’uno che aveva contraffatto di marmo figure antiche delle più celebrate, vantandosi lo immitatore che di gran lunga aveva superato gli antichi, rispose: “Chi va dietro altrui, mai non gli passa inanzi”’.

⁴¹ M.F. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler (London: Heinemann, 1921-22), X.11.9-10.

⁴² J. Shearman, *Mannerism* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1967), 84-5. Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 247-8, noted Vasari’s adaptation of Quintilian in his passage on Mino. Quintilian was frequently referred to

by Renaissance writers; Vasari's initial exposure to his text may have come through Giovio, whose *De viris illustribus* contains a survey of literature reminiscent of Quintilian's tenth book: see Price Zimmerman, 'Giovio and Art Criticism', 6.

⁴³ Life of Michelangelo, Vasari, VI, 49: 'Ringraziate di ciò dunque il cielo e sforzatevi d'imitare Michelagnolo in tutte le cose' (unchanged in 1568).

⁴⁴ Vasari, IV, 8: 'ma più di tutti il graziosissimo Raffaello di Urbino, il quale studiando le fatiche de' maestri vecchi e quelle de' moderni, prese da tutti il meglio, e fattone raccolta, arricchì l'arte della pittura di quella intera perfezione che ebbero anticamente le figure d'Apelle e di Zeusi, e più, se si potesse dire o mostrare l'opere di quelli a questo paragone' (unchanged in 1568).

⁴⁵ Ibid., 211: 'Ora a noi, che dopo lui siamo rimasi, resta imitare il buono, anzi ottimo modo da lui lasciatosi in esempio'.

⁴⁶ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, X.2.24: 'we shall do well to keep a number of different excellences before our eyes, so that different qualities from different authors may impress themselves on our minds'; Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, trans. R.M. Gummere (London: Heinemann, 1953), .84.5-7: 'we should follow...the example of the bees...and sift whatever we have gathered from a varied course of reading...; then... blend these several flavours into one delicious compound'.

⁴⁷ B. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. G. Bull (London: Penguin, 1976), 67 (I.26).

⁴⁸ A. Condivi, *The Life of Michelangelo*, trans. A.S. Wohl, ed. H. Wohl (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 93.

⁴⁹ M.W. Roskill, *Dolce's 'Aretino' and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento* (New York: New York University Press, 1968), 161-95.

⁵⁰ For the full passage, Vasari, IV, 204-07. Quotation, 206: 'come uomo di grandissimo giudizio considerò che la pittura non consiste solamente in fare uomini nudi, ma che ell'ha il campo largo...si risolve, non potendo aggiugnere Michelagnolo in quella parte dove egli aveva messo mano, di volervo in queste altre pareggiare e forse superarlo' (1568).

⁵¹ Ibid., 204-7, concluding: 'e mescolando col detto modo [of Fra Bartolommeo] alcuni altri scelte delle cose migliori d'altri maestri, fece di molte maniere una sola, che fu sempre tenuta sua propria, la quale fu e sarà sempre stimata dagl'artefici infinitamente' (1568).

⁵² Castiglione, *Courtier*, 66 (I.26).

⁵³ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, X.2.26.

⁵⁴ Letter to Tommaso da Messina, F. Petrarca, *Rerum familiarum libri I-VIII*, trans. A.S. Bernardo (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1975), 41-2 (I.8). Here Vasari also strengthens an association, already made in 1550, between Raphael and Petrarch: see Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 392-3.

⁵⁵ Vasari, IV, p. 207: 'doverebbe ciascuno contentarsi di fare volentieri quelle cose alle quali si sente naturale instincto inclinato, e non volere por mano, per gareggiare, a quello che non gli vien dato dalla natura, per non faticare invano e spesso con vergogna e danno' (1568).

⁵⁶ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, X.2.19.

⁵⁷ For Pico, see Santangelo, *Epistole*, 27; for Castiglione, see Castiglione, *Courtier*, 83 (I.37); for Giovio, Price Zimmerman, 'Giovio and Art Criticism,' 411.

⁵⁸ Life of Raphael, Vasari, IV, 206: Raphael 'si diede non ad imitare la maniera di [Michelangelo], per non perdervi vanamente il tempo, ma a farsi un ottimo universale...E se così avessero fatto molti artefici dell'età nostra, che per aver voluto seguitare lo studio solamente delle cose di Michelagnolo non hanno imitato lui né potuto aggiugnere a tanta perfezzione, eglino non arebbono faticato invano né fatto una maniera molto dura, tutta piena di difficoltà, senza vaghezza, senza colorito e povera d'invenzione' (1568).

⁵⁹ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, X.2.14-16. His advice is echoed by Castiglione, *Courtier*, 67 (I.26): 'There are many...who think they are marvellous if they can simply resemble a great man in some one thing; and often they seize on the only defect he has'; and by P. Giambullari, *De la lingua che si parla & scrive in Firenze* (Florence: Lorenzo Torrentino, 1549), 307: 'L'IMITAL' MALE...da Latini chiamata mala affectio, è un' difetto non piccolo commesso dal poco giudizio d'ello autore, che in luogo di imitare il buono de' buoni, imita solamente i difetti che vi son' dentro'.

⁶⁰ Condivi, *Michelangelo*, 94: 'Raphael of Urbino, however anxious he might be to compete with Michelangelo, often had occasion to say that he thanked God that he was born in Michelangelo's time, as he copied from him a style which was quite different from the one he learned from his father, who was a painter, or from his master Perugino'.

⁶¹ In 1568, Vasari published the document of indenture between Michelangelo's family and Ghirlandaio, in the Life of Michelangelo, Vasari, VI, 6. Life of Fra Filippo Lippi, Vasari, III, 338: 'Michelagnolo l'ha non pur celebrato sempre, ma imitato in molte cose' (1568); Life of Luca Signorelli, Vasari, III, 637: 'Onde io non mi maraviglio se l'opere di Luca furono da Michelagnolo sempre sommamente lodate, né se in alcune cose del suo divino Giudizio...furono da lui gentilmente tolte in parte dall' invenzioni di Luca, come sono angeli, demoni, l'ordine de' cieli e altre cose, nelle quali esso Michelagnolo immitò l'andar di Luca' (1568).

⁶² Condivi, *Michelangelo*, 107.

⁶³ Life of Michelangelo, Vasari, VI, 114: 'E stato Michelagnolo di una tenace e profonda memoria, che nel vedere le cose altrui una sola volta l'ha ritenute sì fattamente e servitosene in una maniera che nessuno se n'è mai quasi accorto; né ha mai fatto cosa nessuna delle sue che riscontri l'una con l'altra, perché si ricordava di tutto quello che aveva fatto' (1568).

⁶⁴ Ibid., 118: '...e chi non sa far bene da sé, non può servirsi bene delle cose d'altri' (1568).

⁶⁵ Preface to Part Three, Vasari, IV, 4: 'Il disegno fu lo imitare il più bello della natura in tutte le figure, così scolpite come dipinte, la qual parte viene dall aver e l'ingegno che rapporti tutto quello che vede l'occhio in sul piano...La maniera venne poi la più bella dell' aver messo in uso il frequente ritrarre le cose più belle; e del quel più bello o mani o teste o corpi o gambe aggiugnerle insieme; e far una figura di tutte quelle bellezze che più si poteva e metterla in uso in ogni opera per tutte le figure'. The Zeuxis model of imitation was referred to constantly by artists and writers; see D. Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 186-99.

⁶⁶ Roskill, *Dolce's 'Aretino'*, 139.

⁶⁷ Life of Bramante, Vasari, IV, 73: 'Di grandissimo giovamento alla architettura fu veramente il moderno operare di Filippo Brunelleschi, avendo egli contrafatto l'opere egregie de' più dotti e maravigliosi antichi, per esempio tolti da lui a questa nuova imitazione del buono et a conservazione del bello, ch'egli poi, seguitando l'edifici, mise a luce nell'opere sue' (1550); Preface to Part Three, Vasari, IV, 7: 'Bene le trovaron poi dopo loro gli altri, nel veder cavar fuori di terra certe anticaglie citate da Plinio...le quali nella lor dolcezza e nelle lor asprezze, con termini carnosì e cavati dalle maggior' bellezze del vivo...si mostrano con una graziosissima grazia, e furono cagione di levar via una certa maniera secca e cruda e tagliente...'

⁶⁸ Vasari, III, 549-50 (1568).

⁶⁹ Vasari, IV, 236: 'Non basta agl'artefici, come molto dicono, fatto ch'egli hanno l'opere, scusarsi con dire: elle sono misurate apunto dall'antico e sono cavate da buoni maestri, attesoche il buon giudizio e l'occhio più giuoca in tutte le cose che non fa la misura de le seste' (1568).

⁷⁰ Life of Michelangelo, Vasari, VI, 109: Michelangelo would sometimes make his figures nine or ten or twelve heads tall, saying that 'bisognava avere le seste negli occhi e non in mano, perché le mani operano e l'occhio giudica' (1568).

⁷¹ See Summers, *Language of Art*, 368-79.

⁷² Life of Pontormo, Vasari, V, 319-20: “Et essendo non molto innanzi dell’Allemagna venuto a Firenze un gran numero di carte stampate e molto sottilmente state intagliate col bulino da Alberto Duro, eccellentissimo pittore tedesco e raro intagliatore di stampe in rame e legno, e fra l’arte molte storie grande e piccole della Passione di Gesù Cristo – nelle quali era tutta quella perfezzione e bontà nell’intaglio di bulino che è possibile far mai, per bellezza, varietà d’abiti et invenzione -, penso Iacopo, avendo a fare ne’ canti di que’ chiostrì storie della Passione del Salvatore, di servirsi dell’invenzione sopradette d’Alberto Duro, con ferma credenza d’avere non solo a sodisfare a se stesso, ma alla maggior parte degl’artefici di Firenze, i quali tutti a una voce, di comune giudizio e consenso, predicavano la bellezza di queste stampe e l’eccellenza d’ Alberto’ (1568).

⁷³ Ibid., 320-22: ‘Messosi dunque Iacopo a imitare quella maniera...la prese tanto gagliardamente, che la vaghezza della sua prima maniera, la quale gli era stata data dalla natura tutta piena di dolcezza e di grazia, venne alterata da quel nuovo studio e fatica, e cotanto offesa dall’accidente di quella tedesca, che non si conosce in tutte quest’opere, comeché tutte sien belle, se non poco di quel buono e grazia che egli aveva insino allora dato a tutte le sue figure....Né creda niuno che Jacopo sia da biasimare perché egli imitasse Alberto Duro nell’invenzioni, perciò che questo non è errore, e l’hanno fatto e fanno continuamente molti pittori: ma perché egli tolse la maniera stietta tedesca in ogni cosa, ne’ panni, nell’aria delle teste e l’attitudini, il che doveva fuggire, e servirsi solo dell’invenzioni, avendo egli interamente con grazia e bellezza la maniera moderna’ (1568).

⁷⁴ See note 4 above. Cox-Rearick’s study of Pontormo’s drawings (*Drawings*) revealed that, though the Certosa frescoes themselves contain few direct quotations from Dürer’s prints, his drawings show he strove to understand the graphic language of the prints: for example, the curved parallel hatching lines of the woodcuts.

⁷⁵ Life of Andrea del Sarto, Vasari, IV, 360: ‘Andrea...adoperava, uscirono fuori alcune stampe intagliate in rame d’Alberto Duro, e...egli se ne servi e ne cavò alcune figure, riducendole alla maniera sua’ (1568).

⁷⁶ K. Herrmann-Fiore, ‘Sui rapporti fra l’opera artistica del Vasari e del Dürer’, in *Il Vasari Storiografo e Artista* (Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1976), 701-15, and S. Gregory, ‘Vasari, Prints and Imitation’ in S. Currie (ed.), *Drawing 1400-1600: Invention and Innovation* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 1998), 132-49

⁷⁷ Costamagna, *Pontormo*, 56-62, posits that Pontormo’s patron at the Certosa, Leonardo Buonafé, persuaded Pontormo to use Dürer’s prints in homage to Pope Adrian VI and to Erasmus, in hopes of uniting

reform factions within the Church, and that Vasari's negative comments show his aversion to their heretical content.

⁷⁸ Life of Pontormo, Vasari, V, 310: 'tutte le figure hanno rilievi grandissimo, e son fatte per colorito e per ogni altra cosa tali, che non si possono lodare a bastanza' (1568). The remains of the frescoes are reproduced in Costamagna, *Pontormo*, cat. no. 6.

⁷⁹ Life of Pontormo, Vasari, vol. 5, 314: 'le donne, i putti, i giovani e i vecchi sono fatti in fresco tanto morbidamente e con tanta unione di colorito che è cosa meravigliosa'. Reproduced in Costamagna, *Pontormo*, cat. no. 17.

⁸⁰ Life of Pontormo, Vasari, V, 323: 'la tavola...condusse senz'ombre e con un colorito chiaro e tanto unito, che a pena si conosce il lume dal mezzo et il mezzo dagli scuri' (1568). Reproductions of the chapel decorations in Costamagna, *Pontormo*, cat. nos. 50-53.

⁸¹ Vasari, VI, 3: 'a mostrare che cosa sia la perfezzione dell'arte del disegno nel lineare, dintornare, ombrare e lumeggiare, per dare rilèvo alle cose della pittura'.

⁸² Life of Donatello, Vasari, III, 203-04: in the *Annunciation* at Santa Croce 'dimostrò oltre questo Donato, ne' panni di essa Madonna e dell' Angelo, lo essere bene rigirati e maestrevolmente piegati; e col cercare l'ignudi delle figure come e' tentava di scoprire la bellezza degl'antichi, stata nascosa già cotanti anni'.

⁸³ Life of Salviati, Vasari, V, 532: 'possedeva gli ignudi bene quanto altro pittore de'tempi suoi. Ebbe nel fare de'panni una molto graziata e gentile maniera, acconciandogli in modo che si vedeva sempre, nelle parti dove sta bene, l'ignudo' (1568).

⁸⁴ Life of Pontormo, Vasari, V, 319: 'facendo Pomona e Diana con altre Dee, le avilupò forse troppo pienamente: nondimeno tutta l'opera è bella e molto lodata' (1568). Reproduced in Costamagna, *Pontormo*, cat. no. 34.

⁸⁵ Life of Pontormo, Vasari, V, 318-9 (1568). Costamagna, *Pontormo*, cat. no. 32.

⁸⁶ Life of Pontormo, Vasari, V, 315, 317 (1568). The Pucci altarpiece is reproduced in Costamagna, *Pontormo*, cat. no. 24.

⁸⁷ *Da Pontormo e per Pontormo: Novità alla Certosa*, (Florence: Centro Di, 1996), 49-61 discusses the recent restoration of the frescoes, and pls. XIV-XVIII are reproductions of the copies. Pontormo's frescoes are reproduced in Costamagna, *Pontormo*, cat. nos. 41-5.

⁸⁸ Life of Pontormo, Vasari, V, 320: 'di maniera tanto simile a quella di Duro che è una meraviglia' (1568).

⁸⁹ Ibid., 320-1: 'Bene è vero che nel lontana di questa storia è un coppieri di Pilato, il quale scende certe scale...e bellissimo e vivo, avendo in sè un certo che della vecchia maniera di Iacopo' (1568).

⁹⁰ Ibid., 320: 'Intorno a Pilato sono alcuni soldati, tanto propriamente, nell'aria de'volti e negl'abiti, tedeschi, che chi non sapesse di cui mano fusse quell'opera, la crederebbe veramente fatta da oltramontani' (1568).

⁹¹ Ibid.: 'Non lunga è Giuda che conduce i Giudei, di viso così strano anch'egli, sì come sono le cere di tutti que' soldati con arie stravaganti, ch'elle muovono a compassione chi le mira della semplicità di quell'uomo, che cercò con tanta piacenza e fatica di sapere quello che dagl'altri si fugge e si cerca di perdere per lasciar quella maniera che di bontà avanzava tutte l'altre e piaceva ad ognuno infinitamente. Or non sapeva il Pontormo che i tedeschi e ' fiamminghi vengono in queste parti per imparare la maniera italiana, che egli con tanta fatica cercò, come cattiva, d'abandonare?' (1568).

⁹² Life of Marcantonio Raimondi, Vasari, V, 4 (1568).

⁹³ See n. 73 above.

⁹⁴ Life of Pontormo, Vasari, V, 326: 'I quali disegni di Michelangelo furono cagione che considerando il Pontormo la maniera di quello artefice nobilissimo, se gli destasse l'animo e si risolvesse per ogni modo a volere secondo il suo sapere imitarla e seguirla' (1568). Pontormo's paintings may still survive: the *Noli me tangere* in a Milanese private collection, the *Venus and Cupid* at the Accademia in Florence; Costamagna, *Pontormo*, cat. nos. 69, 70.

⁹⁵ Cox-Rearick, *Drawings*, 67-68; Costamagna, *Pontormo*, cat. no. 65.

⁹⁶ Cox-Rearick, *Drawings*, 72, and 53-54. C. Falciani, *Pontormo: Disegni degli Uffizi* (Florence: Olschki, 1996), 63-77, connects Pontormo's rejection of Dürer and later adherence to Michelangelo's style in draughtsmanship directly to the literary debates and the desire to promote an exclusively Florentine graphic language.

⁹⁷ Cox-Rearick, *Drawings*, 88.

⁹⁸ One such engraving, by Nicholas Beatrizet, is dated 1547. For the possibility Pontormo visited Rome in the 1540s, see Cox-Rearick, *Drawings*, 333, n.37

⁹⁹ Ibid., 318-44; pls. 357-64.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 89; the copy (her pl. 371) is in London, Victoria and Albert Museum D.2154-1885.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 90.

¹⁰² Vasari, V, 332-3: 'Immaginandosi dunque in quest'opera di dovere avanzare tutti i pittori e forse, per quel che si disse, Michelangelo, fece nella parte di sopra in più istorie la creazione di Adamo et Eva, il loro mangiare del pomo vietato e l'essere scacciati di Paradiso, il zappare la terra, il sacrificio d'Abel, la morte di Caino, la benedizione del seme di Noè, e quando egli disegna la piñata e misure dell'Arca. In uno delle facciate di sotto...fece la inondazione del Diluvio, nella quale sono una massa di corpi morti e affogati, e Noè che parla con Dio. Nell'altra faccia è dipinta la Ressurrezione universale de'morti...con tanta e varia confusione, ch'ella non sarà maggiore da dovero per aventura né così viva...come l'ha dipinto il Puntormo....Non mi pare, anzi in niun luogo, osservato né ordine di storia, né misura, né tempo, né varietà di teste, non cangiamento di colori di carni, et insomma non alcuna regola né proporzione, né alcun ordine di prospettiva; ma pieno ogni cosa d'ignudi, con un ordine, disegno, invenzione, componimento, colorito e pittura fatta a suo modo, con tanta malinconia e con tanto poco piacere di chi guarda quell'opera...E se bene si vede in questa opera qualche pezzo di torso che volta le spalle o li dinanzi, et alcune apicatura di fianchi, fatte con meraviglioso studio e molta fatica da Iacopo...il tutto nondimeno è fuori della maniera sua, e, come pare quasi a ognuno, senza misura, essendo nella più parte i torsi grandi e le gambe e braccia piccole; per non dir nulla delle teste, nelle quali non si vede punto punto di quella bontà e grazia singolare che solea dar loro...Et insomma, dove egli aveva pensato di trapassare in questa tutte le pitture dell'arte, non arrivò a gran pezzo alle cose sue proprie fatte ne' tempi adietro; onde si vede che chi vuol strafare e quasi sforzare la natura, rovina il buono che da quella gli era stato largamente donato' (1568).

¹⁰³ Firpo, *Affreschi di Pontormo*, 153.

¹⁰⁴ L.A. Waldman, *Baccio Bandinelli and Art at the Medici Court: Corpus of Early Modern Sources* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2004), 739, document 1312, a letter probably of 1559: 'E quanto queste chose fate i' pubricho i' simili lati i[m]portano, V.^a E.^a ne pigli esenpro nel grido istrano che à la pitura di S.^{to} Lorenzo, da le quale dionestà mi sono guardato i' questo altare...'; and p. 740, paragraphs probably related to the same letter: 'E perché io desidero la grolia [sic] di V.^a E.^a se fusi possibile inanzi a la mia morte vorrei finirvi del tuto uno di questi lavori quale più li piacie di questi che sono lavori pubrichi, perché la vede di quanta i[m]portanza che sono, pe' lo istrano grido ch'è a le mura di S.^{to} Lorenzo. E io ne l'ò una grandissima fede nel vostro giudicio, richordandomi che già mi diciesti che 'l Pu[n]tormo farebe una pitura che no' piacerebe, che a sé chosì è riu[s]cito chome V.^a E.^a la profetò'.

¹⁰⁵ C. Elam, "'Tuscan dispositions": Michelangelo's Florentine architectural vocabulary and its reception,' *Renaissance Studies* 19 (2005), 60-82. Life of Michelangelo, Vasari, VI, 55: 'La quale licenzia ha dato

grande animo, a quelli che àno veduto il far suo, di mettersi a imitarlo, e nuove fantasie si sono vedute poi, alla grottesca più tosto che a ragione o regola, a' loro ornamenti'.

¹⁰⁶ Life of Raphael, Vasari, IV, 206 (1568).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 207-8: 'Aggiugnerò ancor questo, che dovrebbe ciascuno contentarsi di fare volentieri quelle cose alle quali si sente da naturale instinto inclinato, e non volere por mano, per gareggiare, a quello che non gli vien dato dalla natura, per non faticare invano e spesso con vergogna e danno. Oltre ciò, quando basta il fare, non si dee cercare di volere strafare per passare innanzi a coloro che, per grande aiuto di natura e per grazia particolare data loro da Dio, hanno fatto miracoli nell'arte: perciò che chi non è atto a una cosa, non potrà mai, et affaticarsi quanto vuole, arivare dove un altro con l'aiuto della natura è caminato agevolmente. E ci sia per esempio fra i vecchi Paolo Uc[c]ello, il quale affaticandosi contra quello che poteva per andare innanzi, tornò sempre indietro. Il medesimo ha fatto ai giorni nostri, e poco fa, Iacopo da Puntormo' (1568). J. Clifton, 'Vasari on Competition', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27 (1996), 38-41, argues that this passage in Raphael's Life was meant to persuade artists to eschew direct competition with Michelangelo, as such competition could not contribute to the perfection of art and could only lead to envy. This is certainly part – though not all – of Vasari's argument.

¹⁰⁸ Life of Michelangelo, Vasari, VI, 108: 'Per il che ha condotto le cose sue...che son quasi inimitabili, et ha dato...tanta arte, grazia, et una certa vivacità alle cose sue...che ha passato e vinto gli antichi, avendo saputo cavare della difficoltà tanto facilmente le cose, che non paion fatte con fatica, quantunque, che disegna poi le cose sue, la vi si trovi per imitarla' (1568).

¹⁰⁹ Description of the Works of Giorgio Vasari, Vasari, VI, 396: '...dove dipinsi la Conversione di San Paolo, ma per variare da quello che aveva fatto il Buonarruoto nella Paulina, feci San Paolo, come egli scrive, giovane, che già cascato da cavallo è condotto dai soldati ad Anania' (1568).

¹¹⁰ Franklin, *Painting in Florence*, 235; he additionally discusses Vasari's pro-Raphael stance, 197 and 240. See also Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 60-105, and Gregory, 'Vasari and Imitation,' for Vasari's stylistic models as a painter.

¹¹¹ Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 360-1 (she notes, n. 14, that Vasari also painted a self-portrait based on this figure in the *Nations Paying Homage to Pope Paul III in Rome*, Palazzo della Cancelleria, 1546); Gregory, 'Vasari and Imitation'.

¹¹² Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 361.

¹¹³ Description of the Works of Giorgio Vasari, Vasari, VI, 401-2: 'Et insomma ardirò dire, che ho avuto occasione di fare in detto palco quasi tutto quello che può credere pensiero e concetto d'uomo, varietà di corpi, visi, vestimenti, abbigliamenti, celate, elmi, corazze, acconciature di capi diverse, cavalli, fornamenti, barde, artiglierie d'ogni sorte, navigazioni, tempeste, piogge, nevate' (1568). Vasari here describes his paintings for the Ceiling of the Salone dei Cinquecento in Palazzo della Signoria, Florence. The list of things he included in the frescoes should be compared to the fields of art in which Raphael sought to equal or surpass Michelangelo, Life of Raphael, Vasari, IV, 206: 'abigliamenti di panni, calzari, celate, armadure, acconciature di femmine, capegli, barbe, vasi, alberi, grotte, sassi, fuochi, arie torbide e serene, nuvoli, piogge, saette, sereni, notte, lumi di luna, splendori di sole' (1568).

¹¹⁴ *De imitatione commentariolum*, in Barocchi, *Scritti*, II, 1537-50.

¹¹⁵ Barocchi, *Scritti*, I, 620-1.

¹¹⁶ For example, C. McCorquodale, *Bronzino* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 154, and Z. Wazbinski, *L'Accademia Medicea del Disegno a Firenze nel Cinquecento: Idea e Istituzione* (Florence: Olschki, 1987), I, 197-213. S. Campbell, 'Counter Reformation polemic and Mannerist counter-aesthetics: Bronzino's *Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* in San Lorenzo', *Res* 46 (2004), 98-119, argues that Bronzino's adherence to Michelangelo's style in this instance entailed a conscious and deliberate resistance to Rome's hegemony over Florence in the period of post-Tridentine reform, and a subtle resistance to Duke Cosimo's attempts to control the cultural and intellectual life of Florence. He shows how Bronzino embraces the very qualities for which Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* was most criticized, and uses Michelangelo's language 'to serve ends not finally congruent with the academic, the institutional, and the political'.

¹¹⁷ D. Parker, 'Bronzino and the Diligence of Art' *Artibus et historiae* no. 49 (2004), 170-2 for the section of Bronzino's *Il secondo delle scuse* that pertains to painters. Parker points out, 166-9, that one of Bronzino's key criticisms – that artists work too quickly and do not observe due diligence – is directed at Vasari, who painted quickly and argued that this was a virtue. She dates the poem to the late 1550s or early 1560s, 174 n.38. Given that Bronzino also clearly responds to Vasari's assessment of Michelangelo as too difficult an exemplar, the poem may date to as late as after the publication of the revised *Lives* in 1568.

¹¹⁸ See note 59 above.