

## Vasari, Prints and Imitation

‘I know that our art consists primarily in the imitation of nature but then, since it cannot by itself reach so high, in the imitation of those judged to be more accomplished artists.’ Thus wrote Giorgio Vasari in his Preface to the *Lives of the Artists*.<sup>1</sup> What then is this imitation? In seeking to respond to this question, the focus in this paper will be on the imitation by artists of other more accomplished masters, rather than on the problem of the imitation of nature, which is not in the essay’s scope.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Italy, the concept of imitation permeated many fields of endeavour. As an issue of debate it originated with the humanist scholars of the fourteenth century, who made attempts to reconstruct the Latin language as it was used in antiquity prior to what they viewed as the ‘degeneration’ that had occurred in the intervening years. One of the surest ways to recover that language was to read the ancient authors and, when writing Latin, to imitate them.<sup>2</sup> However, the problem of whether one should imitate many different authors or only one, which had been discussed in the ancient Roman texts themselves, became the central issue in Cinquecento debates between rhetoricians.<sup>3</sup> This issue will be returned to, but, as Vasari remarked, ‘theories...when separated from practice are generally of very little use.’<sup>4</sup> So at first it will be helpful to see what imitation looks like in the work of a single artist. For this I have chosen Vasari himself, and, in relation to his imitation of other masters, I have limited myself, more or less, to his use of images from copperplate engravings and woodcuts, the models most accessible to all artists in the sixteenth century, even those who did not travel.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Vasari, *Le Vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazione del 1550 e 1568*, ed. R. Bettarini and P. Barocchi, Florence 1966-1987. From the Preface to the *Lives*, 2, p. 12. All quotations from Vasari come from this edition (hereafter Vasari-B/B), which allows comparison between the texts of 1550 and 1568. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations appear in both editions. This paper has evolved from my Ph.D research, which has been generously funded by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom and by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I am grateful for the insightful advice offered by Dr. Patricia Rubin, and for suggestions made by Murray Gibson.

<sup>2</sup> See M. Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*, Oxford 1971, and also T.M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry*, New Haven and London 1982.

<sup>3</sup> For an introduction to the ancient texts and their impact on Renaissance rhetoricians, see Greene 1982, pp. 54-103, and G.W. Pigman, ‘Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance,’ *Renaissance Quarterly* 30, 1980, pp. 1-32.

<sup>4</sup> Life of Alberti, Vasari-B/B, 3, p. 283.

Imitation in an artist's work can be undertaken for varying purposes and can therefore take on a number of forms.<sup>5</sup> The simplest form is the type of quotation in which an artist refers to the work of a second artist in order to aid the expression of an idea in visual terms. In Vasari's 1544 painting, the *Presentation in the Temple* (Naples, Capodimonte),<sup>6</sup> the composition was influenced by Albrecht Dürer's woodcut of the *Presentation of the Virgin*.<sup>7</sup> In both works, one group of figures stands in front of columns to the left, while another group surges inwards from the right. Similarly, in both images, the columns and the cornice above recede towards the centre, where they meet a wall containing an open archway with sculptural decoration above. Vasari added Solomonic columns and altered other elements of Dürer's architecture the better to reflect classical usage. He also eliminated the area of sky at the top of Dürer's print. More concrete evidence for Vasari's reliance on Dürer's woodcut can be seen in his preparatory drawing for the Naples painting (Dijon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, T42),<sup>8</sup> in which Mary approaches the temple and stoops to kneel upon two rounded steps. In Dürer's woodcut, a column stands upon two similarly rounded steps, and behind it the young Virgin climbs the stairs to the temple. In Vasari's painting, however, the two steps have been squared off. The drawing also shows less elaborate embellishment of architectural features such as the arched doorway, but it reveals more space above the arch and a window through to the sky. Similar in effect to the woodcut is the sculptural motif above the door, which replaces the soldier in Dürer's image. In the history of printmaking inserted into the second edition of the *Lives*, Vasari was lavish in his praise of Dürer's prints. He specifically favoured the *Life of the Virgin* series for its inventiveness and for its composition of perspective views and buildings, and it is evident that he made use of Dürer's print for what it offered him in these respects<sup>9</sup>.

Though Vasari also praised Dürer's *disegno*, he denied the German's mastery in that field on account of what he saw as an inability to draw the nude. Describing the subject of

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<sup>5</sup> My analysis of types of imitation in the visual arts is partially based upon the discussion by J. Shearman, *Only Connect...Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance*, Princeton 1992, pp. 227-61.

<sup>6</sup> Reproduced in L. Corti, *Vasari: Catalogo completo dei dipinti*, Florence 1989, p. 53

<sup>7</sup> Reproduced in W.L. Strauss, ed., *The Illustrated Bartsch*, New York 1980, 10, *Albrecht Dürer*, p. 176, no. 81.

<sup>8</sup> Reproduced in C. Monbeig-Goguel and W. Vitzthum, 'Dessins inédits de Giorgio Vasari,' *Revue de l'Art* 1/2, 1968, pp. 89-93, pl. 5.

<sup>9</sup> The history of printmaking appears in the *Life of Marcantonio Raimondi and Other Engravers of Prints*, *Vasari-B/B*, 5, pp. 2-25. Several pages are devoted to Dürer; the *Life of the Virgin* series is discussed on p. 5.

one engraving, now thought to represent *Hercules at the Crossroads* (fig. 1), as ‘Diana beating a nymph,’ Vasari wrote:

In this sheet, Alberto wanted to show that he knew how to make nudes. But though these masters were praised at the time in their countries, in ours their works are commended only for the skill of the engraving. I am willing to believe that Alberto was not able to do better because, not having other models, he drew, when he had to make nudes, from one of his assistants, who must like most Germans have had ugly bodies, though one sees many men from those lands who are attractive when well clothed.<sup>10</sup>

Vasari insisted in the *Lives* that ‘*disegno* cannot have a good beginning unless it comes from continual practice in copying natural objects...but above all, the best thing is to draw men and women from the nude.’<sup>11</sup> Profound knowledge of the human figure was essential in *disegno*.

In taking elements from Dürer’s prints, Vasari often corrected them in such a way as to show his greater mastery in drawing the human figure. From the above-mentioned engraving he borrowed the figure that he identified as Diana for a figure descending the stairs in his small painting, the c. 1565 *Forge of Vulcan* (Florence, Uffizi). I reproduce here the *modello* (Paris, Louvre, 2161; fig. 2), which the painting closely follows.<sup>12</sup> In rendering the figure nude, and changing its sex to male, Vasari gave himself greater opportunity to reveal musculature and also, by increasing the *contrapposto* twist of the torso, to show greater animation and more forceful movement, more appropriate to masculine action. Here, Vasari can be seen to compete with Dürer, confident of his own victory in the difficult matter of rendering the figure in motion.

A similar situation arises in a drawing of *Doubting Thomas* (Steiner Collection, USA), thought to date from the 1550s.<sup>13</sup> Vasari’s only known painting of this subject (Florence, Santa Croce, Guidacci Chapel), generally dated c. 1569-72, is thus at least a decade later, and bears little resemblance to the drawing. Charles Saumarez-Smith pointed out the drawing’s unusual juxtaposition of St Peter and St Thomas,<sup>14</sup> but not its source in

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<sup>10</sup> Vasari-B/B, 5, p. 4. For the *Hercules at the Crossroads* engraving, see *The Illustrated Bartsch*, 10, p. 64, no. 73. For the iconography of the engraving, see the companion volume, 10, *Commentary*, p. 160.

<sup>11</sup> Introduction to the *Lives*, Vasari-B/B, 1, p. 114.

<sup>12</sup> For the painting, see Corti 1989, p. 111.

<sup>13</sup> Reproduced in K. Oberhuber, ed., *Renaissance and Baroque Drawings from the Collections of John and Alice Steiner*, Cambridge, Mass, 1977, cat. 35.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

Dürer's *Small Passion* woodcut of the same subject.<sup>15</sup> Other similarities occur in the cluster of subsidiary figures around the central trio, even to such specific details as the tilted head of the apostle at the upper left, who strains to see what is happening. But again Dürer's figures of Peter and Thomas are too static for Vasari, who therefore gives them greater animation through increased *contrapposto*. The same thing occurs with the figure of Christ, but here Vasari had yet another model in mind - an engraving of *Empedocles* by René Boyvin, after a design by Rosso Fiorentino.<sup>16</sup> Vasari's use of this print is made clear by similarities such as the knot in the loincloth and the treatment of the figure's hair and beard. Apart from rendering the figure of Christ nearly nude, and changing the position of the hands so that the wounds are emphasized, Vasari made few changes to the actual pose. For, in contrast to his opinion of Dürer, he credited Rosso with mastery of *contrapposto*. He also accorded extravagant praise to Rosso for his figures, which for him were simultaneously poetic and fiery, showing both grace and *terribilità*.<sup>17</sup> In this single drawing, then, there is evidence of Vasari's having used imitation as a means of both competing with and paying homage to other artists.

In another, more complex, type of imitation, an artist could show the extent of his erudition by referring to his primary source in a work by another artist, while also making reference to that artist's sources. Vasari did this in two paintings of the *Way to Calvary*, a subject which must have brought to most Italian artists' minds Raphael's c. 1520 version, known as *Lo Spasimo di Sicilia* (Madrid, Prado). Vasari praised this composition in the *Lives* - and I say 'this composition' because he could only have known the engraving after it, probably by Agostino Veneziano.<sup>18</sup> Raphael's own quotations from depictions of the subject by Northern artists have been discussed by others.<sup>19</sup> Briefly, he owed debts to Lucas van Leyden - in the position of Christ, evidently derived from an engraving of *Christ and*

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<sup>15</sup> Reproduced in *The Illustrated Bartsch*, 10, p. 144, no. 49.

<sup>16</sup> Reproduced in E.A. Carroll, *Rosso Fiorentino: Drawings, Prints, and Decorative Arts*, exh. cat., Washington DC (National Gallery of Art), 1987, cat. 110.

<sup>17</sup> Life of Rosso, Vasari-B/B, 4, p. 474.

<sup>18</sup> As far as we know, Vasari never travelled to Palermo, where the painting was located. The engraving, reproduced in K. Oberhuber, ed., *The Illustrated Bartsch* 26, *The Works of Marcantonio Raimondi and His School*, 1978, p. 44, no. 28, was attributed by Vasari to Marcantonio in the 1568 edition of the *Lives*: Vasari-B/B, 5, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> J. Polzer, 'Dürer et Raphaël,' *Nouvelles de l'estampe* 17, 1974, pp. 15-22; also R. Quednau, 'Raphael und "alcune stampe di maniera tedesca",' *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 46, 1983, pp. 167-70.

*Veronica*<sup>20</sup> - and also, of course, to Dürer, with whom he had even been in contact around 1515.<sup>21</sup> Though many correspondences between Dürer's Large Passion *Way to Calvary* and Raphael's image have been pointed out, I would like to add my own observation that Simon of Cyrene, who, in taking up the cross in Raphael's painting, almost appears to be the heroic protagonist of the composition, bears a more than passing resemblance, in his facial features and in the angle of his right arm and upper body, to Dürer's Christ.<sup>22</sup>

The first of the Vasarian painted versions of the subject (Lawrence, KS, University of Kansas, Spencer Museum of Art) is probably by a member of the workshop.<sup>23</sup> The presence of soldiers on horseback suggests Raphael more than any other source. As in Raphael's depiction, one soldier carries a Roman banner; in both images a soldier points a baton; and the foot of Christ in Vasari's painting appears to be derived from that of the woman who supports the Virgin in Raphael's panel. Knowing that Raphael had looked at Lucas's prints may have led Vasari to examine the Northern artist's engraved *Way to Calvary* as a potential source for his own design.<sup>24</sup> The proportion of architecture to open space is similar in the two images. Also similar is the manner in which Christ holds the cross with both hands. In the painting, and in Lucas's print, a man positioned above Christ's head whips him with a rope.

In Vasari's *Way to Calvary*, though not in Raphael's, Christ looks up at Veronica: this motif is derived from Dürer's woodcut. Veronica's hands and the position of her veil are similarly treated. In both images, the Virgin stands directly behind Veronica, with another woman's head squeezed in between the Virgin and the left edge. The soldier in the left foreground with his arm extended towards Christ performs the same compositional role in both images.

On the basis of Vasari's *Ricordanze*, which reveal that he and the workshop produced a number of paintings of this subject in 1553, the painting in Kansas has tentatively been

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<sup>20</sup> Reproduced in J. Marrow, W.L. Strauss, E.S. Jacobowitz and S.L. Stepanuk, eds., *The Illustrated Bartsch* 12, *Baldung, Springinklee, Van Leyden*, 1981, p. 204, no. 72.

<sup>21</sup> Vasari described an exchange of artworks between Raphael and Dürer in the Life of Raphael, Vasari-B/B, 4, pp. 189-90. Concerning a drawing sent in 1515 by Raphael to Dürer (Vienna, Albertina Bd.V 17575), see A. Nesselrath, 'Raphael's Gift to Dürer,' *Master Drawings* 31, 1993, pp. 376-89.

<sup>22</sup> Dürer's print is reproduced in *The Illustrated Bartsch* 10, p. 105, no. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Reproduced in Corti 1989, p. 84.

<sup>24</sup> Reproduced in *The Illustrated Bartsch* 12, p. 183, no. 51.

dated to that year.<sup>25</sup> However, I feel it must be closer in date to the second version of 1568-72 (Florence, Santa Croce, Cappella Buonarroti) because of a drawing sold at Christie's in 1982, which clearly represents a transitional stage between the two paintings, or rather a fluid continuation of the same thought.<sup>26</sup> Vasari seems to have intended that the new composition be slightly more complex, with the procession to Calvary shown winding its way back into the distance on the right. The Northern emphasis on cruelty - the man whipping Christ - is eliminated.

In the *modello* for the Santa Croce altarpiece (Florence, Uffizi, 1190E),<sup>27</sup> Vasari's figural grouping is even more varied, including on the left a depiction of the swooning Virgin, apparently derived from an engraving by Giulio Bonasone after a Raphael preparatory drawing for the Baglioni *Entombment* (Rome, Galleria Borghese).<sup>28</sup> In the painting itself, the resemblance is even closer, with St John, who replaces the standing female figure in the engraving, embracing the Virgin rather than simply clinging to her arm as he does in Vasari's *modello*. The soldier on the right now walks towards the right, but his torso twists back towards Christ, thus adding a *figura serpentinata* to the composition. Once again, this most elegant figure derives from an engraving after Rosso - *Saturn and Philyra* by Gian Jacopo Caraglio.<sup>29</sup> Vasari has reversed the figure and changed its sex, but the derivation is, I feel, unmistakable.

This figure had begun to assume importance for Vasari in about 1556, when he designed a small painting depicting *Jupiter and Io* for the Palazzo Vecchio. In the painting he used Rosso's Philyra for his own Io, although the rest of the composition was in fact based

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<sup>25</sup> Corti 1989, p. 84. For Vasari's *Ricordanze*, see K. Frey, *Der literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris*, 2, Munich 1930, pp. 870-1.

<sup>26</sup> See the sale catalogue for Christie's London, 6 July 1982, no. 26. Corti 1989, p. 143, would like to attribute the drawing to Naldini, but I think this unlikely. A number of its features share more with Vasari's drawing style: see for example the treatment of the heads and the ankle bones, in comparison with a drawing such as Louvre 2121r, for the vault of the Florentine Duomo (reproduced in C. Monbeig-Goguel, *Musée du Louvre. Inventaire général des dessins italiens*, 1, *Vasari et son temps*, Paris 1972, cat. 265).

<sup>27</sup> Reproduced in P. Barocchi, A. Bianchini, A. Forlani, and M. Fossi, *Gabinetto disegni e stampe degli Uffizi, XV. Mostra dei disegni dei Fondatori dell'Accademia delle Arti del Disegno*, Florence 1963, pl. 24.

<sup>28</sup> Reproduced in S. Boorsch and J. Spike, *The Illustrated Bartsch 28, Italian Masters of the Sixteenth Century*, p. 254, no. 50. The composition of the engraving is related to the swooning Virgin group in Raphael's Baglione *Entombment* (1507), though the poses differ significantly in the painting. The source for the print was probably a drawing (now lost) recording an early idea for the figures. See P. Pouncey and J. Gere, *Italian Drawings in the Department of Prints and Drawings of the British Museum: Raphael and His Circle*, 1, London, p. 35, cat. 39. The Baglione *Entombment* is reproduced in L. Dussler, *Raphael: A Critical Catalogue of His Pictures, Wall Paintings and Tapestries*, trans. S. Croft, London, pl. 67.

<sup>29</sup> From the *Loves of the Gods*; reproduced in *The Illustrated Bartsch 28*, p. 100, no. 23.

on another print designed by Perino del Vaga from the same series.<sup>30</sup> Once Vasari had made it his own in the *Way to Calvary*, by simply changing the figure's sex, he was able to use it again in his 1572-3 fresco of *Coligny Wounded* for the Sala Regia in the Vatican.<sup>31</sup>

There are many examples of such figures derived from prints after Rosso, but here one will suffice: Rosso's *Hercules and Cacus*, also engraved by Caraglio (fig. 3). Vasari was clearly attracted to the figure of Hercules, whose *contrapposto* is so extreme as to show both the front and back of the figure at the same time. David Summers has written about the importance of such figures to many of Vasari's compatriots, including Rosso, Jacopo Pontormo and Francesco Salviati.<sup>32</sup> On at least seven different occasions between 1539 and 1573, Vasari employed Rosso's figure with no essential change. In his *Apocalypse* scene of the *Four Avenging Angels*, painted for the Bolognese church of San Michele in Bosco (1539-40), he used the Hercules figure for one of the foreground angels.<sup>33</sup> The posture of this figure, as he grasps an adversary with his extended left arm while holding a weapon above the head with his right arm bent at the elbow, is identical to Rosso's. A figure in the same stance appears twice in the Vasari ceiling panels of the Sala di Leo X in the Palazzo Vecchio (1556-62). In both the corner panel of *Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici Escaping from Prison*, and the *modello* (Vienna, Albertina, 2534, fig. 4), the foreground soldier is based on Rosso's Hercules, although his posture has been slightly altered. However, in Vasari's earlier preparatory drawing for the entire ceiling (Paris, Louvre, 2175), the soldier's stance precisely echoes Rosso's figure.<sup>34</sup> The Louvre drawing's central scene, which shows the *Taking of Milan*, has no figure corresponding to Rosso's Hercules. But in a drawing which further develops the composition (Florence, Uffizi, 626F), Vasari inserted the figure into a group of soldiers defending the city walls. These soldiers, and the figure in question, appear in the

<sup>30</sup> The painting was executed by Vasari's assistant Cristofano Gherardi. The drawing (Louvre 2156) has been attributed to Gherardi by P. Barocchi, *Vasari pittore*, Milan 1964, p. 135. Monbeig-Goguel (1972, cat. 206) reattributed the drawing to Vasari, and noted that the composition was based on Perino del Vaga's design *Jupiter and Io*; reproduced in *The Illustrated Bartsch* 28, p. 86, no. 9. A. Ronen, 'Il Vasari e gli incisori del suo tempo,' *Commentari* 28, 1977, pp. 100-1, discovered that Vasari's Io was based upon Rosso's Philyra.

<sup>31</sup> Reproduced in Corti 1989, p. 145. The *modello* (see Barocchi 1964, pl. 98b) is in Vienna (Albertina, 518). For Vasari's reuse of designs made by him for other purposes, see A. Nova, 'Salviati, Vasari, and the Reuse of Drawings in their Working Practice,' *Master Drawings* 30, 1992, pp. 83-108.

<sup>32</sup> D. Summers, 'Contrapposto: Style and Meaning in Renaissance Art,' *Art Bulletin* 59, 1977, pp. 336-61. For the Hercules and Cacus engraving, see *The Illustrated Bartsch*, 28, p. 188, no. 49.

<sup>33</sup> Reproduced in Barocchi 1964, pl. 9.

<sup>34</sup> Reproduced in E. Allegri and A. Cecchi, *Palazzo Vecchio e i Medici: guida storica*, Florence 1980, pls. 27 (Louvre drawing for the ceiling), and 27.8 (the ceiling panel).

final painting.<sup>35</sup> The Hercules makes a further appearance at the Palazzo Vecchio in the Stanza di Penelope's *Blinding of Cyclops*, probably executed by Vasari's assistants, Giovanni Stradano and Francesco Morandini (Il Poppi).<sup>36</sup>

Among the many personal emblems adopted by Florence's Duke Cosimo de' Medici was the image of Hercules triumphant over Cacus (represented also in Baccio Bandinelli's monumental sculpted group). Thus the prevalence in the Palazzo Vecchio of figures by Vasari derived from a print of this subject may owe something to Cosimo's wishes. But this does not explain Vasari's continued use of the Hercules figure from Rosso's engraving in his works designed for other patrons. In 1569, Vasari and Poppi painted a *Martyrdom of St Peter Martyr* for the church of Santa Croce at Boscomarengo, in which Rosso's Hercules appears as the soldier in the foreground killing the saint.<sup>37</sup> The same figure returns in the extreme forefront of Vasari's 1572-3 *St Bartholomew's Day Massacre* fresco in the Vatican's Sala Regia.<sup>38</sup> The Hercules figure's final appearance in Vasari's designs is in a series of drawings for the Florence Cathedral vault. In two early sketches (Paris, Louvre, 2113 and 2140), the figure becomes a demon pushing souls into the reptilian mouth of Hell, and is still present in a more fully developed study (Louvre, 2146).<sup>39</sup> Presumably, it was intended that the figure would feature in the frescoes themselves but, following Vasari's death in 1574, the decoration was largely completed by Federico Zuccaro, who made many alterations to the design. Nevertheless, we have seen that the Hercules figure in Rosso's print acted as a continual inspiration for Vasari from an early stage in his career until its very end.

A distinction between *imitare* (imitating) and *ritrarre* (copying) was made by Vincenzo Danti in the First Book of his *Treatise on Perfect Proportion* (1567). According to Danti, Nature intends forms that are beautiful and perfect, but matter cannot always receive the forms perfectly. The difference between imitation and copying is that

the latter fashions perfect things as they are, and the former makes things perfect as they should be seen...But, as we turn to the works of art that can be imitated and copied, we see that those which have both perfection of art and matter must

<sup>35</sup> For the drawing, see *ibid.*, pl. 27.1a; for the painting, Barocchi 1964, pl. 65.

<sup>36</sup> Reproduced in P. Barocchi, 'Complementi al Vasari Pittore,' *Accademia toscana di scienze e lettere 'La Colombaria,' Atti e memorie* 28, 1963-4, pl. 101

<sup>37</sup> Reproduced in Barocchi 1964, pl. U.

<sup>38</sup> Reproduced in Corti 1989, p. 145.

<sup>39</sup> The drawings are reproduced in C. Acidini Luchinat, 'Federico Zuccari e la cultura fiorentina. Quattro singolari immagini nella cupola di Santa Maria del Fiore,' *Paragone* 467, 1989, pls. 20a,b (Louvre 2146, 2140r) and 21a (Louvre 2113).

be copied; and those which are deficient in some way must be imitated, giving them all the perfection that they require.<sup>40</sup>

This points to the reason behind the close resemblances between Vasari's figures and those of Rosso. The latter are perfect, or nearly so, and thus can be copied. On the other hand, Dürer's figures are good to use but must be perfected.

The major point in the Renaissance debates about rhetorical imitation centred around whether it was better to imitate one master alone, or to cull elements from several masters and combine them into something new. In the second decade of the sixteenth century, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Pietro Bembo locked horns over this precise issue.<sup>41</sup> Pico was in favour of studying the work of many masters, and from this eclectic reading forming a style congenial to one's own make-up, in accordance with the particularized Idea of eloquence that resides in the individual. Bembo denied the existence of an Idea of perfect eloquence, unless it was formed only after long study and much practice. He also thought that the confluence of various styles in a single work was an absurdity. The writer should form his taste by studying as intimately as possible the works of the best master and seek to emulate him alone, cultivating even his very temperament. Among the notables who entered into the debate during the century was Vasari's friend and adviser Vincenzo Borghini. In 1542, Borghini proposed a compromise which permitted the writer to take his vocabulary from a wide range of authors but his syntax or form from only one - the best master available.<sup>42</sup>

How did this debate affect Vasari? and what was his solution as an artist? In the definition of *disegno* added to the 1568 edition of the *Lives*, Vasari suggested that the Idea of perfect form comes to the individual artist from experience and long practice; the ability to discern the Idea and then the skill to represent it accurately are both essential for *disegno*:

Because *disegno*, the father of our three arts of architecture, sculpture, and painting, proceeding from the intellect, derives from many things a universal judgement, like a form or idea of all things in nature - which is most consistent in her measures - it happens that not only in human bodies and those of animals, but

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<sup>40</sup> In P. Barocchi, ed., *Scritti d' Arte del Cinquecento*, Milan and Naples 1973, 2, pp. 1573-4.

<sup>41</sup> For discussions of these debates, see: E. Battisti, 'Il concetto d'imitazione nel Cinquecento: da Raffaello a Michelangelo,' *Commentari* 7, 1956, pp. 86-104; Greene 1982, pp. 171-81.

<sup>42</sup> *De imitatione commentariolum*, in Barocchi *Scritti* 1973, 2, pp. 1537-50.

in plants as well and buildings and sculpture and paintings, *disegno* understands the proportion that the whole has to the parts and the parts to one another and to the whole. And because from this understanding there arises a certain notion and judgement which forms in the mind that which, when expressed with the hands, is called *disegno*, one may conclude that *disegno* is nothing other than a visible expression and declaration of that notion of the mind, or of that which others have imagined in their minds or given shape to in their idea... What *disegno* needs, when it has derived from the judgement the mental image of any thing, is that the hand, through the study and practice of many years, may be free and apt to draw and to express correctly, with the pen, the stylus, charcoal, chalk, or other instrument, whatever nature has created.<sup>43</sup>

The great master of *disegno* in Vasari's time was Michelangelo, because of his proficiency in that most difficult area of representing the human figure and because he had mastered all three of the arts born from *disegno*: painting, sculpture and architecture.<sup>44</sup> But Michelangelo's perfection was such that it was difficult to imitate him without actually copying him, and Vasari censured artists who by doing so had created 'a style that is very dry and full of difficulty, without charm, without colour, and weak in invention.'<sup>45</sup> Despite Michelangelo's perfection and his 'having shown us the way to facility in this art,'<sup>46</sup> an artist must 'be content with doing those things to which he feels inclined by natural instinct and never, merely to emulate others, desire to try his hand at something for which he has no natural gift.'<sup>47</sup>

In the second version of his *Life* of Raphael, Vasari said that Raphael had formed his own style by assiduously studying the work of many masters and assimilating the parts that suited his needs and inclinations.<sup>48</sup> Thus it would seem that, at least by 1568, Vasari, in essence, advocated the method of an artist learning from many masters what best suits his

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<sup>43</sup> Introduction to the *Lives*, Vasari-B/B, 2, p. 111.

<sup>44</sup> Concerning Michelangelo as master of *disegno*, see the insertions made by Vasari in his discussion of the *Last Judgement* in the Life of Michelangelo in the 1568 edition of the *Lives*, Vasari-B/B, 6, pp. 56-7.

<sup>45</sup> 1568 version of the Life of Raphael, Vasari-B/B, 4, p. 206.

<sup>46</sup> Life of Michelangelo (1568), Vasari-B/B, 6, p. 56.

<sup>47</sup> Life of Raphael (1568), Vasari-B/B, 4, p. 207. Vasari's own instincts evidently did not lead him often to imitate Michelangelo; in some cases, he deliberately avoided doing so. For example, when in the early 1570s he began to design a *Last Judgement* for the cupola of the Florentine Duomo, he at first avoided reference to Michelangelo's great fresco. Instead, his point of departure seems to have been Dürer's depiction of the scene (Bartsch no.52) from the *Small Passion*, to which there are many parallels in one of Vasari's sketches at the Louvre (n.2140r, reproduced in Monbeig-Goguel 1972, cat. 276).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 204-8, for Vasari's analysis of the process of successive emulation through which Raphael acquired his personal Roman style.

own Idea, which of itself must be formed by long study and much practice. Like Borghini, he proposed a sort of compromise position.<sup>49</sup>

In the discussion thus far, we have seen that in his own paintings and drawings, Vasari was prepared to make use of the work of a variety of masters. I would like to discuss one final image, Vasari's 1540 *Deposition* for the monastery at Camaldoli (fig. 7), which I believe to be something in the nature of an early manifesto on imitation by the artist. The *modello* for the altarpiece (Paris, Louvre, 2094) may have been completed in 1539, before Vasari was called to work in Bologna for a time.<sup>50</sup> The basic compositional structure of the Camaldoli *Deposition* owes a considerable debt to Rosso's Volterra altarpiece of the same subject, a painting to which Vasari had already made reference in his own 1536/37 *Deposition* altarpiece for the Church of San Domenico in Arezzo.<sup>51</sup> In the Louvre *modello*, the presence of the figure of Nicodemus behind the cross also makes evident Vasari's interest in Dürer. In Italian art, Nicodemus is normally shown as a younger, dark-bearded man, but Vasari represented him as an old man with a long white beard, as he appears in Dürer's *Lamentation* woodcut from the *Small Passion*.<sup>52</sup> In Vasari's *modello*, Nicodemus even holds his cylindrical lidded vessel in much the same way as his counterpart in Dürer's print: with his right arm bent at the elbow so that his bare right hand rests on top of the jar, while his left hand, covered with drapery, supports it from below. The Nicodemus figure was, however, eliminated in Vasari's actual painting. There are a few other changes that suggest the work of other masters who interested him. For instance, the figure on the ladder at the right has lost his hat and some of his clothing, and is given instead a rather spiky mass of hair and beard that may allude to similar workers in Filippino Lippi's *Crucifixion of St Philip* fresco (Florence, Santa Maria Novella, Cappella Strozzi);<sup>53</sup> or, perhaps, to one of the men lowering Christ's body in Rosso's *Deposition*. The body of Christ, arms outstretched, as in the drawing, resembles that in Fra Angelico's *Descent from the Cross* (Florence, Museo di San

<sup>49</sup> For the formulation of Vasari's thought on imitation as a route to one's own style, and for the influence upon him of Borghini, see R.J. Williams, 'Vincenzo Borghini and Vasari's *Lives*', Ph.D dissertation, Princeton 1988, pp. 177-85.

<sup>50</sup> Reproduced in Barocchi 1964, pl. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Rosso's painting (1521; Volterra, Pinacoteca) is reproduced in R.P Ciardi and A. Mugnaini, *Rosso Fiorentino: Catalogo completo dei dipinti*, Florence 1991, p. 65; for Vasari's Arezzo *Deposition* (1536-7; SS. Annunziata), see Corti 1989, p. 16.

<sup>52</sup> Reproduced in *The Illustrated Bartsch*, 10, p. 138, no. 43.

<sup>53</sup> Reproduced in A. Scharf, *Filippino Lippi*, Vienna 1950, pl. 125.

Marco)<sup>54</sup> although his hands have been changed to look very much like the extended hands of God and Adam from the *Creation of Adam* scene on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. The figure on the left of the painting, gazing back over his shoulder in a melancholy fashion, is entirely new. This single figure, which features in a Vasari drawing (Florence, Uffizi, 6494F, fig. 5), was to be reused by Vasari in two other paintings during the 1540s: the 1546 fresco of *Paul III Receiving the Homage of Nations* (Rome, Palazzo della Cancelleria) and the 1548 *Wedding Banquet of Esther and Ahasuerus* (Arezzo, Museo Statale di Arte Medievale e Moderna).<sup>55</sup> Janet Cox-Rearick has noted that this figure's facial features appear to age in each successive painting, and, on the basis of known portraits of Vasari, she has suggested that these images are self-portraits.<sup>56</sup>

The figure itself is based upon that of St Paul in Raphael's *St Cecilia Altarpiece* (Bologna, Pinacoteca; fig. 6), a painting with which Vasari became acquainted during his 1539-40 stay in Bologna.<sup>57</sup> Raphael's paintings had had a profound impact upon Vasari while he was in Rome in 1538, and indeed, as Sydney Freedberg among others has pointed out, a sense of Raphaelesque grace pervades Vasari's *Deposition*.<sup>58</sup> If the facial features of this figure are Vasari's own, then it is surely significant that the figure who bears them is derived from Raphael. One has the sense from Vasari's later career that he had determined to pattern his life on that of Raphael. Like Raphael, Vasari was sociable, friendly with learned men, created large decorative schemes for influential patrons, and ran a large shop with many able assistants to whom he was quite willing to allocate important tasks. We have also seen that Vasari studied Raphael's works so intently that he could even recognize the master's own sources.

The Camaldoli *Deposition* shows Vasari associating himself with a specific artistic lineage. It represents his intention to follow a particular tradition in painting, based on the creations of earlier great masters who had worked in Florence and Rome. This is why, in spite of the fact that Dürer's prints had already been of interest and use to Vasari - and indeed

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<sup>54</sup> Reproduced in W. Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco*, New Haven and London 1993, pl. 76.

<sup>55</sup> Nova 1992, figs. 7 and 8 respectively.

<sup>56</sup> J. Cox-Rearick, *Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art*, Princeton 1984, p. 110, n. 118.

<sup>57</sup> Noted by D. McTavish, 'Vasari and Parmigianino,' in *Giorgio Vasari: tra decorazione ambientale e storiografia artistica, convegno di studi Arezzo 1981*, Florence 1985, p. 138, n. 11.

<sup>58</sup> S.J. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy 1500-1600*, Harmondsworth 1975, p. 446.

would continue to be so throughout his career - the Düreresque figure of Nicodemus was eliminated from the altarpiece's final design.<sup>59</sup>

I have noted that by 1568, Vasari's position on imitation, as revealed in the second edition of the *Lives*, was in some respects similar to that of Vincenzo Borghini, who, in the 1550s, had become his adviser and close friend. But given the carefully constructed artistic genealogy that Vasari had associated himself with in the Camaldoli *Deposition*, it seems likely that he had already pondered the matter to some extent by 1540. The conclusions he reached show why he was later to find in Borghini a friend with whom he was so intellectually compatible. Vasari himself was ready to take individual figures and other inventions from the work of many artists as they suited him, but his syntax - his sense of form - came from a more select group of masters whose styles he found congenial. It has been one of the purposes of this paper to make this distinction, and to point to two masters from whom Vasari derived his personal syntax: Raphael and Rosso.

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<sup>59</sup> For Vasari's continuing interest in Dürer, see K. Herrmann-Fiore, 'Sui rapporti fra l'opera artistica del Vasari e del Dürer,' in *Il Vasari storiografo e artista, Atti del Congresso internazionale, Arezzo-Florence 1974*, Florence 1976, pp. 701-15; also S. Gregory, 'Vasari and Northern Prints: An Examination of Giorgio Vasari's Comments on, and Use of, Woodcuts and Engravings by Martin Schongauer, Albrecht Dürer and Lucas van Leyden,' MA thesis, Queen's University, Canada, 1992, pp. 103-60.