

of Cartari's subject matter was reprinted in Steven Batman's *Golden Booke of the Leaden Goddess* (London, 1577) and Abraham Fraunce's *The Third part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Ivychurch* (London 1592); yet since many early English poets such as Phillip Sidney, the Countess of Pembroke, Edmund Spenser, and their circle, as well as later poets such as Phineas Fletcher, Abraham Cowley, John Milton, Andrew Marvell, and John Dryden, doubtless had access to original or at least fuller versions of the Italian mythographers, scholars in this field can hardly afford not to have a copy of Cartari at hand. While not all of his discussions will prove immediately useful, all should be immensely entertaining to readers even moderately interested in the broader mythical tradition.

David Cast, ed. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Giorgio Vasari*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014. 337 pp. + 32 illus. £85.00. Review by MAUREEN PELTA, MOORE COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN.

Who exactly was Giorgio Vasari? Scholar or scoundrel? Historian or fabulist? Consummate courtier and artist of the "first rank" or shameless sycophant and second-rate mannerist? Increasingly problematized in late twentieth-century scholarship, Vasari has become a polarizing figure among scholars in the opening decades of the twenty-first. In the wake of Patricia Rubin's quintessential *Giorgio Vasari Art and History* (Yale, 1995), and recent celebrations honoring Vasari's fifth centenary in 2011, Vasari studies have arguably become their own academic industry and it is difficult to maintain a neutral position about Vasari and. To quote one contributor to Ashgate's new addition to the Vasari bookshelves, "We all ride our own hobby horses" (Barolsky, 121). Indeed.

Readers might reasonably expect a self-professed "Research Companion" to be comprehensive in scope. This was certainly the case with Marcia Hall's excellent *Companion to Raphael* (2005), along with its similarly indispensable sister-volumes from the same Cambridge University Press series (cf. Derbes and Sandona, 2004; Ahl, 2002), all of which presented their subjects as complex and multidimensional.

What binds together the sixteen essays in Ashgate's recent companion to Vasari, and the principle guiding their selection, seems rather more opaque. Beyond the clear expertise of each contribution, almost all address Vasari's authorship of the *Vite* (our shorthand for his sweeping *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*). With so little attention to his actual artistic production over the course of a dynamic career spanning nearly half a century, would Vasari—celebrated artist-architect, sought after in his time by princes and popes alike—find himself fully recognized in these pages? Perhaps only in Liana de Girolami Cheney's "Giorgio Vasari: Artist, Designer, Collector"—with its considered insight into Vasari's creative process and his fastidious self-fashioning through the art he made for himself, and collected—would this trusted advisor to the first Grand Duke of Tuscany apprehend his own image.

What the volume lacks in scope, however, it makes up in focused depth and detail. While this anthology was probably not designed to be read cover-to-cover, the reader who does so will be rewarded with a rich, prismatic experience of Vasari as author and *litterato*, particularly in terms of the evolution of his thinking between his influential text's initial publication by Torrentino in 1550 and the release of its enhanced second edition, published by the Giunti, in 1568. Despite some regrettable unevenness in style and tone—one wishes that David Cast had held his contributors to the same rigorous editorial standard of his own meticulous introduction—there are some true gems of contemporary scholarship to be found here.

In addition to Cast's excellent and thoughtful introduction, several essays concentrate on Vasari's language and its sources. Charles Hope continues to interrogate Vasari's authorial enterprise, contributing "Vasari's *Vite* as a Collaborative Project." Originally published in Italian in 2005, Hope's work has raised a host of new questions about humanism and visual culture, and is amplified here with updated citations in which he generously shares references to arguments *contra* his own. Robert Williams follows with "Vasari and Vincenzo Borghini," an account of Borghini's considerable involvement in both Vasari's life and *Lives*. Although Vasari seems reduced at times to visual mouthpiece, Williams concludes with a dazzling discussion of Borghini's influence on Vasari's 1568 re-conceptualization of "progress" in the

arts as “sustainable perfection” (38)—that historical development could culminate in a set of artistic practices and principles, i.e., an articulated language of art, that could be learned (and taught)—thus overcoming implications about the inevitable decline of art, a weakness inherent in the 1550 text. Essays by Sharon Gregory and Robert Gaston focus specifically on Vasari’s language. Gregory’s “Vasari on Imitation” skillfully demonstrates how Vasari’s profound engagement with the rhetoric of contemporary literary debates helped refine his ideas about the nature of imitation. While Gregory confronts head-on the recent questioning of Vasari’s authorship by concluding that Vasari’s language regarding imitation was singularly his own, Gaston’s “Vasari and the Rhetoric of Decorum” skirts the issue while reminding us throughout of Vasari’s “literary fluency in the vernacular”(248). Unpacking some of Vasari’s terms for decorum and appropriateness, Gaston argues that the language of the 1568 edition evinces a more mature comprehension of rhetoric.

As might be expected, several essays focus on the *Vite* of individual artists past or present: Vasari’s heroes (Giotto and Masaccio) and villains (Piero di Cosimo) as well as his contemporaries, friends (Salviati) or foes (Cellini), alike. “Vasari’s 1568 Life of Masaccio,” by Perri Lee Roberts argues that Vasari’s appropriation of Masaccio as an Aretine artist and placement within the *Vite*—after other artists from Arezzo but prior to Florentines Brunelleschi and Donatello—was coupled with a descriptive analysis of Masaccio’s style calculated to enhance the artist’s reputation, privileging both the art of painting and Vasari’s native Arezzo in the genesis of art’s “modern” manner. Norman Land and Karen Goodchild discuss Vasari’s literary sources. According to Land, Giotto’s *vita* is an amalgam of literary tropes drawn largely from Antiquity, while Goodchild’s charming “Bizarre Painters and Bohemian Poets: Poetic Imitation and Artistic Rivalry in Vasari’s Biography of Piero di Cosimo,” situates critical aspects of Piero’s *Life* and its language firmly within the tradition of the Renaissance Burlesque. Demonstrating how burlesque poetry functioned as a model for Vasari’s inversion of the artist/courtier ideal, she highlights linguistic similarities between Piero’s biography and those of Pontormo and Bronzino. She also suggests that Vasari may have “settled his scores,”

using his *Vite* to claim the final word on a group of “insiders” who excluded him.

Melinda Schlitt’s beautifully written and reasoned, “Giorgio Vasari and Francesco Salviati: Friendship and Art,” frames her discussion between an insightful analysis of two portraits: one sent to Vasari by Salviati as an overture to friendship; the other, the engraved portrait created to introduce Salviati’s biography in the 1568 *Vite*, which served as Vasari’s visual gloss on the verbal portrayal of the artist’s art and character. In doing so, Schlitt addresses Vasari’s general interest in portraiture and the meaning of portraits within constructs of friendship—real and ideal—that were highly important in Renaissance society. She reveals how directly Vasari associated Salviati’s critical fortunes with his own. In contrast, Virginia Coates offers a fresh perspective on Vasari’s relationship with one of his most vocal detractors. Her “Rivals with a Common Cause: Vasari, Cellini and the Literary Formulation of the Ideal Artist,” is a convincing reconsideration of the much-vaunted rivalry between these two men within the context of their mutually radical enterprise: to transform public perception of artists through the formulation of heroic biography and new professional organizations, like the *Accademia del Disegno*, established in 1563.

And then, of course, there’s Michelangelo, the only living artist whose biography was included in the 1550 edition and who died in 1564, four years prior to Vasari’s publication of the second. There are serious, thought-provoking pleasures to be had by reading William Wallace and Paul Barolsky in tandem. Readers familiar with Barolsky’s work know that he revels in Vasari’s “fictions,” which he views as an operation of the nuanced “historical imagination” (122) with which Vasari molds his readers’ perceptions of his artist/subjects. In “Vasari’s Literary Artifice and the Triumph of Michelangelo’s David,” Barolsky explores themes woven into Vasari’s 1568 account of this famous statue, by showing how carefully Vasari crafted his description of Michelangelo’s statue, and its making, into metaphors for the sculptor himself. David’s triumph over Goliath becomes Michelangelo’s own—over rivals and critics, the stone itself, and ultimately his own mortality. Michelangelo’s transcendence is also a construct crucial to Wallace’s “Who is the Author of Michelangelo’s Life?” as he tackles the challenge posed by his own title. This is much more than a comparative

analysis of Vasari's two versions of Michelangelo's *Vita* alongside the biography written Ascanio Condivi in 1553, in response and at the artist's own behest. Wallace offers a sensitive and sophisticated appraisal of Michelangelo's self-image: how the artist's pre-occupation with his family's heritage as descendants from the counts of Canossa, and his determination to be acknowledged as a member of the patrician class, may have impacted his business dealings with patrons but failed as an attempt to control his literary identity. Vasari's divine eccentric continues to triumph in the imagination of popular history.

One wonders to what extent Michelangelo's desire to shape his own legacy—and in Wallace's words, his conscious efforts “to redefine relations between artist and patron” (116)—determined Vasari's own. This question is central to the essays of Ann Huppert and Marjorie Och, who compare the two editions of the *Vite* as a means of interrogating Vasari's attitudes toward geographical place, here Siena and Venice respectively, within the context of Vasari's social place. Both authors maintain that textual changes in the 1568 edition of the *Vite* resulted from Vasari's rising stature and personal success in the Florentine court of Duke Cosimo I. In “Giorgio Vasari and the Art of Siena,” Huppert observes that Vasari's dismissal of Siennese art in the Renaissance, still an essential element of its master narrative, became even more pronounced in 1568. Given the successful annexation of Siena by the Medicean Grand Duchy in 1559, and the fact that Vasari was by that time deeply embedded in its Florentine court, Huppert suggests that Vasari's account may have been shaped by contemporary politics, and she offers a fine analysis of Baldassarre Peruzzi's successful career as a significant and cautionary corrective. Och's “Venice and the Perfection of the Arts,” argues that Vasari's second trip to Venice resulted in deeper appreciation of Venetian art, especially its architecture, as reflected in the highly detailed biographies of Fra Gioconda and Sansovino added in 1568. Yet here, rather strikingly, what Vasari appeared to find most compelling about Venice was its openness: that non-native artists could prosper there and that it became a haven for artists after the 1527 Sack of Rome, as well as Venice's ability to absorb influences from artistic cultures outside its own.

Lisa Pon and Hilary Fraser speak to attitudes toward Vasari among later generations of artists and authors. Pon's informative “Rewriting

Vasari,” shares some of the lively one-sided dialogues that developed within the margins of Vasari’s text. She draws attention to the important evidence that can be found in early, annotated versions of the *Lives*, some indicative of multiple readers’ presence within a single volume. Her discussion of Vasari’s riposte to Condivi both complements and augments Wallace’s work, discussed above, and Pon’s account of the appropriation of Sansovino’s *Vite* by the architect’s son and grandson is both compelling and instructive. Fraser’s elegant “Vasari’s *Lives* and the Victorians,” provides a fitting close to Cast’s anthology. Her lucid analysis of mid-nineteenth century British paintings that take episodes from the *Vite* as their subject, reveals how attentively British artists and critics read Vasari’s text and also underscores its fundamental import in defining the Italian Renaissance and its aesthetics in the Victorian period. Even more significantly, Fraser demonstrates how crucially Vasari’s *Lives* framed and informed all levels of discourse—academic, artistic, and popular—regarding the role of art and its practitioners in a modern society. *Viva Vasari!* The beat goes on...

Evelyn Lord. *The Great Plague: A People’s History*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014. xi + 173 pp. + 31 Illus. Review by LARRY BONDS, MCMURRY UNIVERSITY.

*The Great Plague: A People’s History* is Evelyn Lord’s compelling study of the effects of the bubonic plague on Cambridge during the outbreak of 1665-1666. Lord’s study is short, but full of interesting details about plague life and death. Drawing upon such sources as hearth-tax rolls, diaries, and letters, Lord introduces readers to Cambridge’s townspeople and then shows how they suffered through the outbreak. Lord’s study, as she says in the Preface, uses “faction,” in which the historian reports factual evidence that inspires fictional dialogue and situations for real-life people in “techniques reminiscent of docudrama” (x). Faction imbues the story of the Cambridge plague with riveting flesh-and-blood realism. *The Great Plague* has ten chapters of faction that presents two broad areas: introducing some of Cambridge’s plague-era residents so that readers care about these people and then showing how they suffered through the plague.