

*The Ashgate Research Companion to Giorgio Vasari*. David J. Cast, ed.  
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The *Ashgate Research Companion to Giorgio Vasari*, edited by David Cast, appears as an interesting document of the impasse that studies of Vasari have reached in the context of Anglo-American scholarship. Charles Hope's contribution ("Vasari's *Vite* as a Collaborative Project") pays homage to the theory of the *Vite*'s collective authorship, a theory once in fashion and perhaps already in decline, though Robert W. Gaston, in his contribution ("Vasari and the Rhetoric of Decorum"), still considers it seriously; but it is the textual, fictional features of the work that now engage most of the contributors, as they give up recognizing Vasari's *Lives* as a documentary source useful for the history of art. Vasari's Giotto (examined by Norman E. Land), Masaccio (Perri Lee Roberts), Piero di Cosimo (Karen Hope Goodchild), or Michelangelo (William E. Wallace and Paul Barolsky): all are invariably reduced to mere characters, just as the friendship between Vasari and Francesco Salviati (explored by Melinda Schlitt) and Giorgio's rivalry with Cellini (Victoria C. Gardner Coates) are reconfigured as narrative tools, thus disregarding their factual status. Similarly, in analyzing Vasari's treatment of artistic capitals such as Siena (Anne C. Huppert) and Venice (Marjorie Och), the authors seem to avoid taking into account the possibility that Vasari could offer a trustable historical testimony.

Much more attention is given instead to rhetorical strategies, to the influence of literary genres (for example, contemporary Florentine burlesque poetry in the case of Piero di Cosimo's *Life*, according to Hope Goodchild's brilliant hypothesis), or to self-fashioning, pursued by Vasari beyond the autobiography (as Salviati's *Life* shows). It is therefore extremely significant when Paul Barolsky claims: "I . . . prefer to read the *Lives* as a book rich in the art of storytelling, rich in literary associations, no matter where those stories came from" (121). In turn, we should be compelled to ask the editor and the authors what image of Vasari they intend to make this book a companion to — only the storyteller?

Fortunately, a more concrete rescue of Vasarian historicity is offered by the contributions that are focused on the relationship between Giorgio and Vincenzo Borghini, and on the reconsideration of the artist and writer's well-known houses in

Arezzo and Florence (in essays by Robert Williams and Liana de Girolami Cheney, respectively). As Williams writes, “Adapting his imagination to the awkward, eight-sided configuration of the vault, Borghini came up with an arrangement that obviously owes some of its compositional principles to the mosaics in the vault of the Baptistry of Florence, so that the frescoes celebrate the continuity of Florentine art while also demonstrating the process by which, in Florence, the arts had been revived and brought to perfection, the process that Vasari himself had chronicled in his great book” (33). De Girolami Cheney states in turn that “like the ancient painters, the Renaissance (in particular Cinquecento) artists also manifested in their art the collection of both ideas and visual forms; that is, their art is the visualization of ideas into images as well as the formation of images into conceits” (75). The attention dedicated to different aspects of the Vasarian theory and practice of *imitazione*, in an essay by Sharon Gregory, helps reinsert the text into more concrete dynamics peculiar to the history of Renaissance aesthetics. Thanks to these contributions, Vasari as a writer reacquires a stronger definition, and all his multiform activity now turns out to be deeply interwoven, constituting a real *Bildsystem*. Finally, Lisa Pon’s chapter (“Rewriting Vasari”), about marginalia in several copies of the *Vite*, reasserts the historically justified rights of the text to claim its own reliability, beyond mistakes, partialities, and stories.

It would have been highly appreciated if one of these essays had been devoted to the *fortuna* of Vasari’s *Lives* through the centuries up to the present, in radically opposed approaches and interpretations not solely published in English. But a moment relating this afterlife is nevertheless proposed at the end of the volume by Hilary Fraser, who shows to what extent Vasari’s work, in the Victorian age, played the role of a vital and operative model, well testified by paradigmatic paintings like Frederic Leighton’s *Cimabue’s Celebrated Madonna is Carried in Procession through the Streets of Florence* (1853–55).

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