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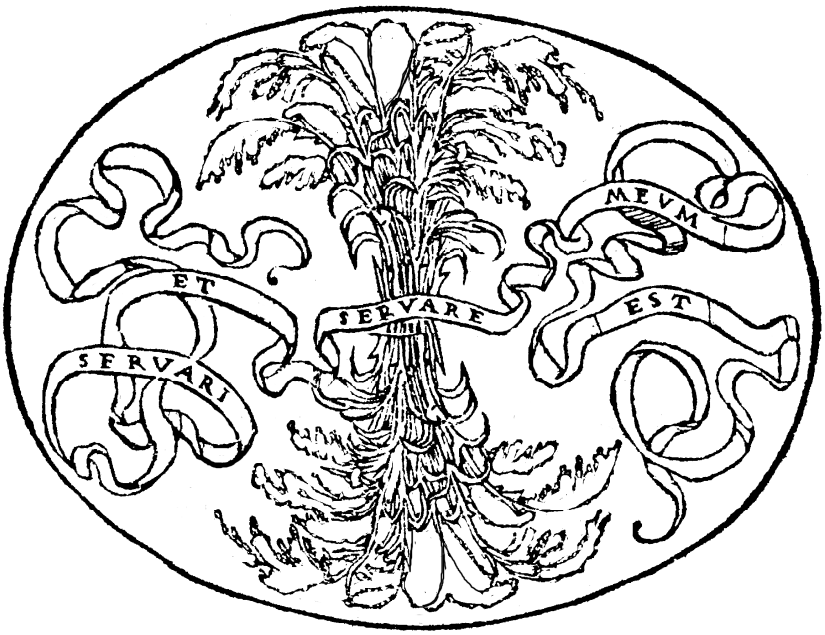

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AMOROUS PASSIONS: VASARI'S LEGEND OF FRA FILIPPO LIPPI IN THE ART AND POETRY OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In April 1914, three months before the outbreak of the First World War, the students of the Dundee School of Art gave a rousing performance of a stage play in seven scenes, complete with musical refrains, entitled «Fra Lippo Lippi, Painter of Florence»[1]. The play, which was widely reviewed at the time by the local press, was written by the Scottish author Joseph Lee, who went on to make his reputation as a war poet and chronicler of life in the trenches, and whose work was once acclaimed alongside that of the English war poets Wilfred Owen, Rupert Brooke and Siegfried Sassoon[2]. Before the more serious subject matter of the war claimed his attention, however, Lee's play evoked the pre-war delight in fashionable subjects concerning the Italian Renaissance. It tells the vivid story of the Florentine artist-monk Fra Filippo Lippi (c.1406-1469), whose legend revolved around his carnal appetites and his scandalous elopement with a nun, a circumstance which has not been disproved. Lippi was a genuine historical figure whose works could be seen in the major continental museums, and whose fresco cycles are still preserved in the cathedrals of Prato and Spoleto in Italy. It is a commonly recognised phenomenon that the nineteenth century saw a revival of interest in the art and artists of the quattrocento. In Lippi's case, his legacy became bound up in particular with the cultures of the Romantics, Orientalism, Renaissance revivalism and the Aesthetic Movement.

The most famous source for Lippi's story was Giorgio Vasari's sixteenth-century Lives of the Artists, an early modern text which itself underwent a significant revival in artistic circles on both sides of the English Channel during the course of the nineteenth century[3]. It was Francis Haskell who first explored this subject in an article for the *Art Quarterly* in 1971, an essay which still appears remarkably quirky and fresh. It was later republished in *Past and Present in Art and Taste* in 1987[4]. Haskell's focus was the growth in popularity of subjects drawn from Vasari's Lives among the painters of the French Salon in the first half of the nineteenth century. With its witty evocation of literal-minded representations, usually by long-forgotten French artists, of the great Italian painters in boyhood, at work in their studios, in the arms of a lover, or dead or dying, the essay marked a new interest in art's engagement with the artistic past. As Haskell suggested, it was the legend of the fourteenth-century Italian painter Giotto discovered by Cimabue sketching sheep which – along with the life of Raphael, the painter's painter *par excellence* in France – led the production of Vasari pictures at the Salon in the nineteenth century. The Giotto subject painting allowed artists to project their own fantasies about being discovered by a great patron or mentor onto this totemic figure from the past. There was also the opportunity to depict Giotto within a Romantic representation of the landscape, and to say something about the idea of a raw talent schooled by nature, uncorrupted by academic convention[5]. The representation of Giotto and Cimabue, as they appear in the anecdote first found in Ghiberti's *Commentaries* (about 1450) but made famous by

I am indebted to Dr Donato Esposito, Andrew W. Mellon Fellow at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2012-2013, for assisting in answering various queries about the French Salon; and to Dr Jody Patterson, Head of Department in Art History at Plymouth University, for commenting so expertly on an earlier draft of this article. I am grateful also to the anonymous readers of the essay on behalf of the editorial committee, for their helpful comments and suggestions.

[1] See LEE 1913.

[2] See, for example, LEE 1916 and URQUHART 2005, p. 15.

[3] FRASER 1992, pp. 43-47. Vasari's text is best known in the second edition of 1568.

[4] HASKELL 1971 and HASKELL 1987, pp. 90-115.

[5] See also STURGIS–CHISTIANSEN 2006, p. 74.

Vasari, became widespread, not only in France, but also in England, Germany and Italy (Fig. 1).

Lippi's appeal for the Romantics, however, was also acute. One of Vasari's most enduring of literary inventions, Lippi's legend tells the story of the wayward artist-friar who falls in love with his model, the nun Lucrezia Buti, whom he seduces and makes pregnant. Earlier in Vasari's tale, Lippi is kidnapped by pirates off the coast of Naples, and held captive for almost two years enslaved in Algiers. Lippi's antics were eagerly re-imagined by artists and writers who projected onto his image their own visions and fancies of burning love affairs with artists' models or exile in exotic climes. The story of Lippi falling in love with his model or his 'Oriental' moment in Algiers provided inspiration at the French Salon, but also for poets in the nineteenth century. The best-known example is that of Robert Browning (1812-1889), whose «Fra Lippo Lippi» of 1855, a dramatic monologue in blank verse form, remains a popular classic and a staple in the study of English Literature due to the sophistication with which it deals with large questions about morality and subjectivity, the purpose of art, and the figure of the artist, all presented in a life-like historical setting. Browning's monk was based closely on Vasari's Lippi, a libertine figure and frequenter of prostitutes whom we first encounter in Browning's poem in the back alleys of Florence, having a run in with the night watchman in the wee small hours[6]. Browning's Lippi was a figure who was both a rogue and a role model for the nineteenth century, decadently transgressive but also exemplary at the mid-century of the creative interplay between personal liberty and artistic freedom.

Rudyard Kipling and 'Fra Lippo Lippi'

By the end of the 1800s, Browning was as influential a source for Lippi's fame as Vasari was. The example of Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) is a case in point. In his autobiographical memoir *Something of Myself*, written at the end of the author's life and published in 1937, Kipling makes no less than five references to Lippi[7]. Kipling's identification with the figure of young Lippi, in particular, is a recurrent motif in the author's account of his own youth in England and of his early working life in India during the last decades of the nineteenth century. The influence is clearly Browning's and not Vasari, who is not mentioned at all, but whose Lives nonetheless provided the biographical details about Lippi that Browning used[8]. Kipling first encountered Browning's poem at school in the late 1870s[9], and the narrative aspects of Lippi's life as they were evoked by Browning evidently struck a chord with the author. Browning's poem, following Vasari, spoke of Lippi's childhood as an orphan who was placed into the care of the monks of the church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence. It was the orphaned Lippi to whom Kipling likened himself when he recalled the hardships of his early years spent in a suburb of Southsea, near Portsmouth, in the care of a woman who took in children whose parents were in India[10]. In thinking back to this unhappy time, Kipling was no doubt responding to Browning's exaggerated fiction of Lippi's cruel aunt who drags the youth off to the convent.

> Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand, (Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)[11].

[6] BROWNING/WOOLFORD–KARLIN–PHELAN 2007, p. 529.
[7] KIPLING/PINNEY 1990, pp. 11; 22; 25; 43; 83-84; and KNOEPFLMACHER 2012, pp. 606-607.
[8] For Browning and Vasari see BROWNING/WOOLFORD–KARLIN–PHELAN 2010, p. 406.
[9] KIPLING/PINNEY 1990, p. 22.
[10] KIPLING/PINNEY 1990, p. 5 and p. 11.
[11] BROWNING/WOOLFORD–KARLIN–PHELAN 2007, pp. 534-535; and KIPLING/PINNEY 1990, p. 11.

Describing his incarceration, Kipling dubbed the Southsea boarding house the House of Desolation. He quotes several lines from Browning that describe the young Lippi's watchfulness of his fellow men, when his «soul and sense of him grow sharp alike» and he «learns the look of things». So, writes Kipling of his wary and watchful time in the boarding house, it was with me[12].

If Kipling's first identification with Lippi was an almost stereotypically Victorian evocation of ambivalent masculinity in boyhood, with its Dickensian echoes, another reference to Browning's Lippi registers a quite different inflection of masculinity. In 1888, Kipling was in his early twenties and working in India as an editor on the English language newspaper *The Pioneer*. The author remembers this period in terms that suggest another aspect of Browning's «Fra Lippo Lippi», this time regarding the manliness or the virility of the creative spirit. Victorianists have written often about Browning's Lippi as a thrusting and liberated being who throws off his monkish habit for a life of art and patronage, very much in tune with a Victorian ideal of manly productiveness, commercial success and artistic potency[13]. So it is interesting to see how this notion transferred itself to Kipling as he came into his own as a staff writer. He likened his high-volume turning out of sometimes three or five thousand words a week on the newspaper to Lippi's delight in the blank walls of the monastery of the Carmine, which, as Vasari tells us, he covered with painted designs. «`Twas ask and have», recalled Kipling, quoting Browning, «'Choose for more's ready,' with a vengeance»[14].

The ease with which Kipling introduced references to Lippi into his memoirs, quoting lines from Browning as a shorthand for particular instances, is itself suggestive of a horizon of expectation then current regarding Browning and his painter poems that Kipling could take for granted in his audience[15]. Kipling himself grew up with a degree of artistic and visual literacy, as the nephew of the Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones and his wife Georgina, who was his mother's sister[16]. Kipling's father Lockyard Kipling was an art teacher and curator in Lahore in British India, who made the ten low-relief plaques in terracotta that were photographed as illustrations for Kipling's novel *Kim* around 1900. Here, too, Kipling remembers his father focusing in upon the detail of an Indian architectural motif for one of the plates, rubbing his beard, and quoting lines from Browning's «Fra Lippo Lippi». These lines themselves convey something of the Ruskinian and Pre-Raphaelite evangelising aesthetic of 'truth to nature': «If you get simple beauty and naught else, You get about the best thing God invents»[17].

Vasari's Lives and the Nineteenth Century

Although Kipling's example shows that Browning's poem found an audience for the character of Lippi that was independent of Vasari, Browning's poem contributed to Vasari's revival as well. Readers no doubt went back to the original source to learn more about Lippi as he was sketched out in Browning's piece, or about other artists described in the Lives. The newspaper reviews of Joseph Lee's play make it clear that the popular recognition of the two sources went hand in hand. The *Dundee Advertiser* noted the influence of Browning's «Bohemian monk, upon whose shoulders vows sat so easily» for example, but also that Lee,

[12] BROWNING/WOOLFORD–KARLIN–PHELAN 2007, p. 536; and KIPLING/PINNEY 1990, p. 11.
[13] SUSSMAN 1992, p. 187.
[14] KIPLING/PINNEY 1990, p. 43.
[15] Browning's other two painter poems which were influenced by Vasari's Lives are «Andrea del Sarto» and «Pictor Ignotus». See BROWNING/WOOLFORD–KARLIN–PHELAN 2010, pp. 385-403; and pp. 226-231.
[16] KIPLING/PINNEY 1990, p. ix.
[17] KIPLING/PINNEY 1990, p. 83.

like Browning, «went to Vasari for his material»[18]. Another newspaper feature even ran under the subheading «Vasari Legends»[19].

The occurrence of Lee's play just prior to the First World War is a reminder of the strength of the artistic cultures of the preceding century as they coalesced into a visibly zeitgeistian moment at that time. The play's example also reflects the rise of art history as a popular literary taste, which was helped along by the cult of Vasari as it grew over the period of the nineteenth century. Vasari was first translated into English in 1850 by Mrs Jonathan Foster, one of a number of noted women art writers and translators during the mid-1800s[20]. It appeared cheaply in five volumes for the publisher Henry Bohn's Standard Library, an aspect of Vasari's book history which itself signals the popular reach of the Lives[21]. Even before this translation, readers could find excerpts from Vasari in the art press in England and on the continent. Artists and connoisseurs with a grasp of other languages could read Vasari in the original, or in the German and French translations that were published during the 1830s and 1840s by Ludwig Schorn and Ernst Förster, and by Léopold Leclanché and Philippe-Auguste Jeanron, the curator of the Louvre[22]. The most commonly used Italian translations during the nineteenth century were the Passigli volumes edited by Giovanni Masselli, published between 1832 and 1838; the Le Monnier edition, published in Florence between 1846 and 1857; and the later version by Gaetano Milanesi, published between 1878 and 1885, which was based on extensive archival research, in keeping with the times[23]. And while English artists and writers certainly read Vasari in the original – we know that Browning used the Le Monnier edition, for example[24] – by the middle of the century, the groundwork had been laid for the wider dissemination of Vasari's reputation and for an English edition. Writers from Thomas Carlyle to Oscar Wilde, and of course John Ruskin, were quick to reference Vasari's Lives as part of their literary horizons.

Fra Filippo Lippi at the French Salon

The story of Lippi's rediscovery begins with the French Salon, which, as Haskell noted, included at least one painting after the lives of the old masters every year from the Salon of 1804 until the Salon of 1886. By the middle of the nineteenth century, as many as twenty examples of the genre could be seen in any one year[25]. These pictorial representations were often, but not always concerned with the lives of those Italians given special mention by Vasari – Giotto, Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo. As the tendency took hold, artists turned also to the life stories of Rubens, Rembrandt, David Teniers or Van Dyck[26]. One of the better-known works of the art-biographical genre, and one which was referenced *en passant* in Haskell's essay, happens also to be a Lippi picture. (Fig. 2) Paul Delaroche's *Filippo Lippi Falling in Love with his Model* (1822, Musée Magnin, Dijon), was exhibited at the Paris Salon in

[18] *FRA FILIPPO LIPPI* 1914, by kind permission of University of Dundee Archive Services.
[19] *FRA FILIPPO LIPPI* 1913, *ibidem*.
[20] VASARI/FOSTER 1850-1852. For other women art writers of the period see, for example, Lady Elizabeth Eastlake [née Rigby] (1809-1893), the wife of the first Director of the National Gallery in London, Sir Charles Eastlake (1793-1865). She translated several important continental art histories into English, including Johann David Passavant's *Tour of a German Artist in England* (1836) and Gustav Waagen's *Treasures of Art in Great Britain* (1854). See PASSAVANT 1836, WAAGEN 1854 and AVERY-QUASH–SHELDON 2011, pp. 58-59; and p. 128.
[21] For more on Mrs Foster's edition of Vasari, see RUBIN 2010.
[22] VASARI/SCHORN–FÖRSTER 1832-1849 and VASARI/LECLANCHÉ–JEANRON 1839-1842.
[23] VASARI/MASSELLI 1832-1838; VASARI/MARCHESE–MILANESI–PINI 1846-1857; and VASARI/MILANESI 1878-1885.
[24] BROWNING/WOOLFORD–KARLIN–PHELAN 2007, p. 525.
[25] HASKELL 1971, p. 58.
[26] *Ibidem*, p. 70.

1824 (no.456) under the full title, «Philippo Lippi chargé de peindre un tableau pour un couvent, devient amoureux de la religieuse qui lui servait de modèle» (Philippo Lippi, tasked with painting a picture for a convent, falls in love with the nun who serves as his model)[27].

Delaroche's painting takes its subject from that best-known of Vasari's Lippi anecdotes. According to the Lives, Lippi first encounters Lucrezia as the model for the figure of the Virgin Mary for the high altarpiece of the church of Santa Margherita in Prato. Vasari writes:

> […] Fra Filippo contrived to persuade the nuns to allow him to make a portrait of her for a figure of Our Lady in the work he was doing for them. With this opportunity he became even more enamoured of her, and then wrought upon her so mightily, what with one thing and another, that he stole her away from the nuns and took her off on the very day when she was going to see the Girdle of Our Lady, an honoured relic of that township, being exposed to view[28].

In Vasari's version of things, Lucrezia becomes pregnant and bears Lippi a son out of wedlock, the painter Filippino Lippi. Her father, says Vasari with his typical wryness, never smiled again.

Despite its merry treatment of the subject, Delaroche's painting supports Haskell's general point that pictures after the lives of the artists were also serious exercises in self-identification concerning the vocation of the painter. Although Delaroche shows a glimpse of the convent's chapel at the top of the painting, where the back view of a statue of the Virgin Mary can be seen, the draped curtain which divides the space effectively creates an anachronistically nineteenth-century *atelier* in which Delaroche's Lippi takes on a decidedly Romantic-period timbre. The *mis-en-scène* of the studio is notably un-Renaissance in character, with its modern-day artist's palette and oil paints, and with the artist's chest, and the portfolio of drawings in the right foreground. Furthermore, we know from Stephen Bann's work on Delaroche that the artist probably intended to make a very real reference to his own *milieu* in his Lippi picture. Bann suggests that the model for Lippi was Adolphe Roger (1800-1887), a friend and fellow pupil of Delaroche's in the studio of the French history painter Antoine-Jean Gros (1771-1835). In the painting, 'Lippi' wears a medal on a chain around his neck, which perhaps makes reference to the *médaille de deuxiéme classe* awarded to Roger at the Salon of 1822, the year in which Delaroche's picture was painted[29].

The way that Lippi and his model are depicted can also be identified with the particular time and the place, the epoch of Delaroche and his peers. Vasari tells us that Lippi's son was ten years old when Lippi died at the age of fifty-seven[30]. In Delaroche's picture, however, the figure of Lippi is a young suitor, not the worldly middle-aged monk of Vasari's story. The idea of youth is evidently a theme throughout, appropriately enough since Delaroche was only about twenty-five years old himself when he painted the work, which he signed «Delaroche j[eu]ne» across the cover of the painted portfolio at the bottom right of the picture. The depiction of the lovers combines a sweetly innocent propriety with an underlying suggestion of sexual awakening, which is nevertheless chaste and historic-looking in the manner of the so-called troubadour paintings which inspired it. The most influential of these was the painting by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867) of another pair of lovers from the Renaissance, his *Paolo and Francesca* (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Angers, 1819), which portrayed the couple as they are described in Dante's fourteenth-century Divine Comedy. The young lovers are trapped forever in a whirlwind, which is their punishment for becoming swept away

[27] *LES CATALOGUES DES SALONS* 1999, II, p. 90.
[28] VASARI/DE VERE 1996, I, p. 439.
[29] BANN 1997, p. 74.
[30] VASARI/DE VERE 1996, I, p. 442.

by lust. The theme of desire transposed to historic climes underpins both of the images by Ingres and Delaroche, and it had great appeal for the Romantics. Such paintings didn't always stick slavishly to the strictest historicism, however. As Stephen Bann observes, the «*galant*», suggestive protrusion of Lippi's sword handle from his tunic derives more from the age of Watteau and Fragonard than from the «annals of the Renaissance»[31].

Delaroche's was not the first Lippi painting to appear at the Salon. He may have taken inspiration from another work shown just a few years earlier, by the then-acknowledged master of the art-historical genre painting, Pierre-Nolasque Bergeret (1782-1863). Bergeret's *Philippe Lippi, peintre Florentin* (Fig. 3) is the earliest known picture after the life of Lippi, which appeared at the Salon of 1819 (no.56)[32]. Bergeret was a contemporary of Ingres, with whom he was a pupil in the studio of the neo-classical painter Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825). Bergeret's painting *Les Honneurs rendu à Raphael après sa mort* (Musée du Louvre, Paris) was a great success at the Salon of 1806, before Ingres became better known for his own Vasarian scenes, such as his *Francis I Receives the Last Breaths of Leonardo da Vinci* (1818, Musée du Petit Palais, Paris) or his *Raphael and his Mistress* (1814, Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass.)[33]. Bergeret's Lippi painting was accompanied by a companion piece at the Salon of 1819 (no.57), this time patriotically marking the honours paid in death to the French seventeenth-century classicist painter Poussin[34].

For his Lippi painting, Bergeret took his subject from a different Vasari anecdote. This was the one in which Lippi falls victim to Barbary pirates whilst characteristically «disporting himself» with his friends one day, in a pleasure boat off the coast of Naples[35]. Bergeret chose to depict Lippi's subsequent enslavement in Algiers. To be sure, the subject was more obscure, and Bergeret's painting was accompanied by some lines of explanatory text at the Salon, while Delaroche's was not[36]. However, the scene provided Bergeret with the opportunity to exploit the strongly Orientalist flavour of the anecdote at a time when French artists were fascinated by and producing works about the East, slaves and the harem. The mode intensified following Napoleon's campaigns in Egypt and Syria (1798-1801). These and other Eastern subjects were widely depicted by artists such as Anne-Louis Girodet (1767-1824) and Delaroche's teacher Antoine-Jean Gros, whose works emphasised the details of exotic plants, turbaned heads and glinting curved swords during the first decades of the nineteenth century when Bergeret was painting. The spread of Orientalism peaked during the 1820s with Delacroix's *The Death of Sardanapalus* of 1827 (Musée du Louvre, Paris), which was based on Byron's play of the same name, and with Victor Hugo's collection of poems inspired by the Greek War of Independence, *Les Orientales* (1829). There, Hugo declared that if the age of Louis XIV was the era of all things Greek and Roman, the nineteenth century was *de facto* the age of Orientalism[37].

Thus it makes sense that Bergeret's image was precise in the choice of the moment it depicts. Vasari's anecdote, in a characteristically grandiloquent and classically-inspired manner describes the moment when Lippi regains his freedom by drawing the perfect portrait of his Moorish captor upon a wall, using only a piece of charcoal plucked from the embers of the fire. Such anecdotes in Vasari have to do with the special power of art to amaze or to deceive the eye which can be found in the writings of Pliny the Elder and others. Truly glorious it was,

[31] BANN 1997, pp. 74-75.
[32] *LES CATALOGUES DES SALONS* 1999, I, p. 324.
[33] HASKELL 1971, pp. 58-60.
[34] *LES CATALOGUES DES SALONS* 1999, I, p. 324.
[35] VASARI/DE VERE 1996, I, p. 436.
[36] *LES CATALOGUES DES SALONS* 1999, II, p. 90.
[37] HUGO 1834, III, p. xiv.

says Vasari, that art, which seemed like a miracle to these foreigners, had the power to secure a man's freedom from those whose usual business was punishment and condemnation[38].

Bergeret's choice of subject is testament to how closely artists were reading Vasari's text during the first decades of the nineteenth century, when the French Romantics in particular were rediscovering the artistic treatises of the past[39]. Bergeret's depiction is faithful to Vasari's original, with its references to the full-length portrayal of Lippi's captor, dressed in his Moorish costume, upon the white wall, and to the manacle and chain around Lippi's wrist and ankle. The contemporary signs of Orientalism are there also, in Bergeret's addition of a young slave boy who holds an exotic fan made from peacock feathers, and the brightly coloured sunflower placed in a wine decanter to the right of the painting. The pink-streaked evening skies which can be seen through the brick-arched window opening are also suggestive of foreign lands. And, if modern art historians have identified a gendered erotic charge to such Orientalist images, in which the young male body, such as the one depicted in Jean-Léon Gérôme's painting *The Snake Charmer* (1879, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.) becomes the focus of a sexualised, colonizing gaze[40], Bergeret's Lippi evokes a similar mood. We know very little about how Bergeret's painting was received, but in spite of Lippi's Western identity as an Italian painter, Bergeret's picture trades on the powerful sensuality of Orientalism, representing Lippi in the familiar mode of the slave offered up for the voyeuristic pleasure of the French viewer. With his carefully represented physique and a posterior richly dressed in plush plum velvet, we might surmise that this Romantic iteration of Lippi appealed precisely because he was hardly dressed at all in the conventional sense, with his bohemian white shirt sleeves and bare legs and feet.

Making a case study of the Lippi paintings by Bergeret and Delaroche, then, serves to underline the importance of Vasari's appeal in the nineteenth century. We know that Delaroche's library contained many volumes on the lives of painters, including a rare copy of Vasari published at Florence in 1568, and the more recent edition of the Lives published in Milan in 1807[41]. Subjects of this sort that evoked the history of art appealed also to collectors – Delaroche's painting was bought by the Société des Amis des Arts for 1000 francs following its first display[42], while Bergeret's *Les Honneurs rendu à Raphael* was bought by Napoleon[43]. The significant number of Vasari subject pictures produced during the nineteenth century suggests that artists themselves were working in dialogue with one another as part of this trend. We can see this in the two Lippi pictures by Bergeret and Delaroche, in the way that both of them include red Turkish-style carpets that are noticeably similar in design. Stephen Bann notes, for example, that Delaroche's carpet is 'oriental'.[44] While the inclusion of an orientalising reference of this kind in Bergeret's painting is unstartling, its presence also in Delaroche's scene perhaps takes on new meaning in the context of Bergeret's representation, just a few years earlier, of Lippi's episode in Algiers.

Fra Filippo Lippi, Orientalism and the English Poets

It was Vasari's reference to Lippi's enslavement in foreign lands which captured the imagination of the English writer Walter Savage Landor (1775-1864), even before Browning

[38] VASARI/DE VERE 1996, I, p. 436.
[39] GOTLIEB 2002, pp. 473-474.
[40] NOCHLIN 1983, pp. 46-59.
[41] BANN 1997, p. 282, note 21. For the Milan edition of the Lives, see VASARI/S.T.C.I. 1807-1811.
[42] BANN 1997, p. 74.
[43] HASKELL 1971, p. 58.
[44] BANN 1997, p. 74.

wrote his Lippi poem. Landor is best known for his *Imaginary Conversations*, long prose pieces in which he invented vivid dialogues as they might have been overheard between the historical personalities of the past. Like Browning, Landor had lived in Florence, and he was part of the Renaissance revivalism that was growing in English literary and artistic circles in Italy and at home during the nineteenth century. In London, Landor knew the poet Leigh Hunt (1784-1859), who wrote impassioned odes to Italy («Enchantress Italy») and to Raphael and his mistress as she was described by Vasari[45]. In a similar vein, Landor added his dialogue between «Fra Filippo Lippi and Pope Eugenius the Fourth» to the second volume of his collected works in 1846[46], where it joined, among others, colloquies between Dante and Beatrice, and the Italian noblewoman and poet Vittoria Colonna and Michelangelo.

Landor's turn to Lippi during the 1840s can be contextualised by the general Vasari revival that was underway during that decade. The 1840s saw a number of popular retellings of Vasari in English book culture, chief among which was Anna Jameson's *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* of 1845. Jameson's account of Lippi's life in the Vasarian mode included the anecdote, for example, about his capture by pirates. According to Jameson, Lippi was

> […] restless, ardent, and abandoned to the pursuit of pleasure […] he at length broke from the convent and escaped to Ancona. The rest of his life is a romance. On an excursion to sea he was taken by the African pirates, sold as a slave in Barbary, and remained in captivity eighteen months. With a piece of charcoal he drew his master's picture on a wall, and so excited his admiration that he gave him his freedom, and dismissed him with presents[47].

While it was typical of the period that Landor's work would reflect the influence of the Italian Renaissance, what is more striking is the way that Lippi's life prompted an entire Orientalist fantasy for Landor, based upon just a few lines from Vasari. Lippi's adventure at the hands of a Moorish slave trader, Abdul the corsair, becomes the main topic of conversation between the artist and the Pope, a focus which is worked up into a rich dramatization, almost, of Lippi's sojourn amidst the *mis-en-scène* and sights and sounds of contemporary Tunis. Landor had been writing in the Orientalist mode since the 1790s when he produced his epic poem *Gebir* (1798)[48]. The development of his interest is reminiscent of Byron's Oriental romances, especially those based on Turkish folklore and customs.

The Pope is eager to hear about Lippi's travels and his time spent in the company of the Moors, the details of which he extracts from the artist with an obvious degree of prurience and fascination. Landor sets up a juxtaposition of Western propriety and the barbarous East in which the East is revealed to be a place of greater liberty and sexual freedom than the West, with its repressive and hypocritical constraints of the priesthood. Landor was vehemently anti-Catholic, so it is not surprising that the character of Lippi offered him such potential for a critique of the basic cultural prejudices of the church[49]. The Pope reveals himself to be narrow-minded and lacking in true civility – «Obstinate blind reprobates!», he jeers about the Moors, when he discovers their habit of bathing themselves every morning. To which Lippi replies, «More is the pity! for they are hospitable, frank and courteous»[50]. «Detestable rites!», the Pope continues, determined to win the moral high ground. «I venture to affirm that, in the whole of Italy and Spain no convent of monks or nuns contains a bath»![51]

[45] EDGECOMBE 1994, p. 186; and *LEIGH HUNT'S LONDON JOURNAL* 1834, p. 270.
[46] LANDOR 1846, II, pp. 81-90.
[47] JAMESON 1845, I, p. 112.
[48] LANDOR 1798, especially pp. 40-41.
[49] PLAMPIN 2004.
[50] LANDOR 1846, II, p. 86; and PLAMPIN, ibid.
[51] LANDOR 1846, II, p. 88.

Once Lippi's recollections shift to Eastern climes, Landor is able to fully develop the exotic detail of the Orientalist theme. There is much talk of strange foodstuffs, fine dried locusts and olives the size of eggs and the colour of bruises; of quails, honey and rice; or of songs about ladies with eyes like the curved scimitars of Damascus, whose eyebrows meet in the middle like two cudgels. The balance of the plot is reserved for the theme of women, a thread with which Landor embroiders considerably upon Vasari's original lines. First, there is an insinuation about the relationship between Lippi and the canon's niece, Donna Lisetta, Lippi's model for an angel in a «Holy Family» for the Pope. She was also, we hear, one of Lippi's party when the group was captured at sea. «The angel with the amethyst-coloured wing?», asks His Holiness. «I thought she looked wanton: we must pray for her release»[52]. There is also Almeida, a beautiful slave girl of Abdul's, who, somewhat like Vasari's corrupted Lucrezia, is a pious Catholic born in Biscay, who was journeying along the coast by sea to her confirmation when she was captured.

Vasari's basic plot and Landor's Orientalist retelling of it are brought together around the moment of Lippi drawing his master's portrait upon the wall. Here the anecdote receives some fictional revision whereby Abdul takes Lippi to a country estate some miles outside Tunis to be its keeper. This is a Romantic ruin at the centre of which there is a bathing pool and fountain that have fallen into disrepair. Lippi proceeds to draw his master's portrait upon a smooth, bricked up window arch in the ruined villa, but this time depicting him in the company of the alluring slave girl. In Landor's version of the portrait, Abdul's foot rests in the servant's lap as she dries his feet after bathing with the edge of her saffron-coloured robe. But how! demands the corsair in awe when he sees the work, has the monkish Lippi «seen above the sandal» to convey a woman's limbs so? Thus the astonishment which is reserved in Vasari's account for the wonder of Lippi's art, shifts in Landor's retelling to an open admiration not only of Lippi's artistic talents but of his worldliness and sexual confidence.

Like Landor, Browning eschewed a straightforward repeating of Vasari's story. Browning's Lippi is a free-living, fully sexualised man who is not so much a slave to his desires as an all-seeing harbinger of things to come, of a time when the creative spirit is freed from slavery to the church and its constraints, both moral and artistic. Browning took his cue from Landor, who was a personal acquaintance and whose dialogue on Lippi Browning would have known[53]. Most obvious is Browning's introduction of a cleric's niece who models for Lippi – «Take the prettiest face, The prior's niece» – a plot device which comes from Landor rather than Vasari. Browning also followed Landor's lead by choosing a single scene from Vasari's life of Lippi, on which he built his fully realised story in dramatic form. In Browning's case, this was the vividly-wrought moment whereby Lippi, tired of being locked up by his patron Cosimo de' Medici to deliver upon his commission, and, driven on by his «amorous – nay, beastly – passion», ties his bed-sheets together and lets himself down from a window to indulge himself with wine, women and song in the streets below. «[…] zooks, sir, flesh and blood, That's all I'm made of!», echoes Browning's poem.

> [...] Into shreds it went,
> Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
> All the bed-furniture – a dozen knots,
> There was a ladder![54]

[52] LANDOR 1846, II, p. 82.
[53] BROWNING/WOOLFORD–KARLIN–PHELAN 2010, p. 482.
[54] BROWNING/WOOLFORD–KARLIN–PHELAN 2007, p. 533.

Fra Filippo Lippi and the Nineteenth Century

Given the lively nature of Landor's and Browning's evocations of the character of Fra Filippo Lippi, and their faithfulness to Vasari's text, it is perhaps surprising that there are no known examples of English pictures after the life of Lippi during the nineteenth century. In 1855, the year Browning published his poem, the Vasari revival was at its height in England and on the continent. This was the year that Frederic Leighton showed his first major work at the Royal Academy, his vast art-historical subject painting, *Cimabue's Celebrated Madonna is Carried in Procession Through the Streets of Florence* (Fig. 5), a work which took its subject directly from Vasari and included the common pairing of Cimabue and his apprentice boy Giotto. Leighton's piece was painted in Italy, where the taste for paintings after the lives of the artists was felt more strongly in the continental academies than in England. It is not so well known that Italian as well as French artists made many works after the lives of painters during the nineteenth century. In 1855 the Italian artist Antonio Gualdi (1796-1865) painted a striking, purposeful and beautifully executed Lippi picture, his *Fra Filippo Lippi e Lucrezia Buti* (Fig. 6). Other Italian artists followed suit, most notably the academic painter Gabriele Castagnola (1828-1883), who made a name for himself almost entirely as a result of his many paintings of Lippi and Lucrezia (Figg. 7 and 8), which were painted in a sentimental and highly-finished style somewhat like that of the later English Pre-Raphaelites John Roddam Spencer Stanhope (1829-1908) or Arthur A. Dixon (1872-1959). Nor is it incidental that both Gualdi's and Castagnola's careers were built in Florence, where it was natural that artists would pay homage to their Tuscan predecessors as they were lauded by Vasari. Several of the versions of the subject painted by Castagnola make reference to a more specific sense of place still, by setting the lovers in the unmistakeable interior of Prato Cathedral, the town where Lippi and Lucrezia are supposed to have met, and the location of Lippi's fresco cycles of the lives of Saint Stephen and Saint John the Baptist in the cathedral choir.

In France, on the other hand, by comparison with England's case, artists continued to respond to Lippi's legacy throughout the nineteenth century. Artist-travellers from Ingres to Gustave Moreau made sketches in Italy after Lippi's works[55], while the painter and lithographer Achille Jacques-Jean-Marie Devéria (1800-1857) produced a pair of illustrations in the Romantic style of Dante's Paolo and Francesca and «Philippo-Lippi» sometime around the middle of the century[56]. As late as the Salon of 1884, a finely detailed plaque in low relief of Lippi and Lucrezia was shown by the female sculptor Marcelle Renée Lancelot (1884-1938), which is now in the museum at Troyes in Northern France (Fig. 9)[57].

Though there are no English equivalents of the Lippi responses by the French or Italian artists in the nineteenth century, it seems fitting, by way of a conclusion, to signal how a turn to a wider cultural landscape than the high arts of poetry and painting alone reveals a wider reception of Renaissance artists in British popular culture during the nineteenth century. As Lippi's name became modish he was referenced up and down the country in gallery notices, public lectures and gossiping editorials about art and literature. We learn from the pages of the *The Graphic*, for example, that Lippi and Lucrezia were included in a painted mural decoration in 1886, now demolished, in a sequence of celebrated lovers for the grand saloon of Eaton Hall in the north west of England, the seat of the first duke of Westminster[58]. In keeping with

[55] See, for example, Ingres's sketches after Lippi's frescoes at Spoleto: Musée Ingres, Montauban, INV. MI.867.4015; 33 F28 SP (Inventaire Cambon); 3578 (Inventaire Momméja); and INV. MI.867.4452 ; 9b F22 SV (Inventaire Cambon); and Gustave Moreau's line drawings after Lippi's *Novitiate Altarpiece* then in the Academy at Florence and now in the Uffizi: Musée Moreau, Paris, INV. Des.4770 and INV. Des.4402.
[56] See Christie's 1991, Sale 4403: *Prints*. London, 18 September, 1991, lot 87.
[57] See the Musées de Troyes, INV.891.10.2; RE. 9; and Figure 9.
[58] *EATON HALL* 1886, pp. 93-100; p.97.

the revivalist taste for Renaissance chivalry, the frieze also included Raphael and his mistress La Fornarina, Petrarch and Laura, and Dante and Beatrice. In 1892, the Victorian artist Edward Armitage RA (1817-1896), a former pupil of Delaroche and himself a well-known mural painter, was working on a figure illustration of «Fra Fillippo Lippi»[sic] for another decorative frieze, now unknown, commemorating the old masters[59].

The 1870s and 1880s saw a particular peak in the revival of Lippi's reputation, spurred on by the Aesthetic Movement and the cult of Botticelli. Aestheticism's emphasis on beauty and sensuousness in art, together with Walter Pater's well-regarded work of criticism *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) brought the finely detailed art of Botticelli, particularly his representation of women, to wider attention. The reputation of Lippi, as a Florentine painter of the same era, and one renowned as a sensualist to boot, received a natural boost. Even the proselytising Ruskin couldn't fail to come under the influence of Aestheticism on the matter of Lippi. No-one, he writes in *Ariadne Florentina* in 1876, not even Botticelli, painted lilies as well as Lippi[60].

It was during the 1880s that the title page to the Royal Academy exhibition catalogue for 1886 opened with a quotation from Browning's «Fra Lippo Lippi» – «we're made so that we love, First when we see them painted»[61]. Meanwhile the Ruskin Gallery in Sheffield, newly opened in 1883, prized among its exhibits a copy of Lippi's Uffizi Madonna (c.1455, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) which was made by Charles Fairfax Murray under Ruskin's sponsorship[62]. Across the Welsh border in Cardiff in 1884, members of the Naturalists' Society were educated on the subject of Lippi and other artists of the quattrocento in an evening lecture[63]. When the Turner House Gallery opened in the same city in 1888, a donor museum which was established with the social aim of providing broad public access to the arts on Sundays, it was the example of Browning's Lippi to whom the philanthropist James Pyke Thompson turned during his opening speech[64]. The idea of the 'aesthetic' Lippi was especially well conveyed by the *London Daily News* in 1887, which parodied «students' day» at the National Gallery to full effect. Among the scamps populating the Gallery's corridors, the piece describes «the aesthetic young student, who has tarried here till his hair has grown long, and who flits about like a butterfly from Botticelli to Lippo Lippi».[65] The following year, it was the newly reinstated middlebrow periodical *The Scots Magazine* which cited Lippi as a quintessential 'aesthetic' artist, «A soul sensitive to every line of beauty and every dash of colour»[66].

It is thus gratifying to note that the potential remains to make new rediscoveries regarding the realm of taste first brought to our attention by Haskell four decades ago. Paintings after the lives of the old masters, once such a part of the artistic sphere in the nineteenth century, are now more often than not relegated to the storerooms of the museum. Yet as Haskell argued, they tell us more than a little about the artistic preoccupations of the age that produced them. Haskell's contribution was to recognise that the canon is not fixed, nor bound to universalising or monolithic hierarchies, but mutable and ever changing. Moreover, his belief that shifts in taste are linked to knowable factors, to recoverable contexts, ties his contribution to a social history of art that is still fundamental to the discipline. With today's turn to a history of visual culture rather than a history of art, we are yet more attuned to the richness and the reach of changing artistic fashions. The brief reception history sketched here of Vasari's legend of Fra Filippo Lippi is testament to how far an artistic

[59] *A GLANCE THROUGH THE STUDIOS* 1892, p. 402.
[60] HOCH 2005, p. 68.
[61] *LITERARY AND ART NOTES* 1886, p. 6.
[62] *MR RUSKIN'S MUSEUM* 1883, p. 7.
[63] *DISTRICT NEWS, CARDIFF* 1884, p. 3.
[64] *"TURNER HOUSE" GALLERY AT PENARTH* 1888, p. 3.
[65] *STUDENTS' DAY IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY* 1887, p. 2.
[66] *MORALITY AND ART* 1888, p. 169.

mythology can travel, from Florence in the Renaissance to the regions of England, Scotland and Wales in the nineteenth century. From pageants and plays, to poems and newspaper punditry, the indexes of taste now recognised by the historian will only continue to expand the story of art's permeation into cultural life in the nineteenth century.

Fig. 1: Gaetano Sabatelli, *Cimabue observing the young Giotto drawing a goat on a rock*, 1847, Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Florence. Photograph © Bridgeman Images

Fig. 2: Paul Delaroche, *Fra Filippo Lippi falling in love with his model*, 1822, Musée Magnin, Dijon. Photograph © RMN-Grand Palais/Jean-Pierre Lagiewski.

Fig. 3: Pierre-Nolasque Bergeret, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 1819, Musée d'Art Thomas Henry, Cherbourg. Photograph © Giraudon/Bridgeman Images

Fig. 4: Details of the Turkish-style carpets in Bergeret's (left) and Delaroche's (right) Lippi paintings

Fig. 5: Frederic Lord Leighton, *Cimabue's celebrated Madonna is carried in procession through the streets of Florence*, 1855 © Her Majesty the Queen (on loan to the National Gallery, London)

Fig. 6: Antonio Gualdi, *Fra Filippo Lippi and Lucrezia Buti*, 1855, private collection. Photograph © Fausto Franzosi

Fig. 7: Gabriele Castagnola, *Filippo Lippi and the nun Lucrezia Buti*, 1860, Palazzo Pitti, Florence. Photograph © De Agostini Picture Library/Bardazzi/Bridgeman Images

Fig. 8: Gabriele Castagnola, *The embrace of Fra Filippo Lippi and Lucrezia Buti*, 1871, private collection. Photograph © Christie's Images/Bridgeman Images

Fig. 9: Marcelle-Renée Lancelot-Croce, *Fra Filippo Lippi et Lucrezia Buti*, 1884 © Les Musées de Troyes

Fig. 10: Cast photograph of the performance of Joseph Lee's play «Fra Filippo Lippi» at Dundee School of Art, April 1914 © University of Dundee/reproduced with the permission of University of Dundee Archive Services

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ABSTRACT

It has long been established that the Italian Renaissance was a major source of inspiration for poets and painters, writers and thinkers, during the nineteenth century. It is due to the legacy of Francis Haskell that scholars have turned to the cult of Vasari in the nineteenth century. This essay plots one strand of Vasari's rediscovery, the critical reception of the Florentine painter Fra Filippo Lippi (c.1406-1469), Vasari's wayward artist-friar who falls in love with his model, the nun Lucrezia Buti, whom he seduces and makes pregnant. Earlier in Vasari's tale, Lippi is kidnapped by pirates off the coast of Naples, and held captive enslaved in Algiers. It was the legend of Giotto discovered by Cimabue sketching sheep which dominated nineteenth-century receptions of Vasari. Yet the romance of Lippi's appeal was also acute. Lippi's story provided inspiration at the French Salon for the painters Pierre-Nolasque Bergeret (1819) and Paul Delaroche (1822), but also for the English poets Walter Savage Landor (1846), Robert Browning (1855) and Rudyard Kipling (1937). As Haskell argued, artistic responses of this kind tell us more than a little about the preoccupations of the age that produced them. Lippi's case sheds particular light on the influence of the Romantics, Orientalism, Renaissance revivalism and the Aesthetic Movement upon his rediscovery.

È ormai da lungo tempo riconosciuto che il Rinascimento italiano è stato una grande fonte di ispirazione per poeti e pittori, scrittori e pensatori, durante il XIX secolo. Grazie anche agli insegnamenti di Francis Haskell numerosi studiosi si sono rivolti in maniera del tutto nuova alla lettura dei testi di Giorgio Vasari pubblicati nel XIX secolo. Il presente saggio, proprio attraverso la rilettura di Vasari, tenta di ricostruire la ricezione critica del pittore fiorentino Filippo Lippi (c.1406-1469), il ribelle artista-frate che si innamora della sua modella, la monaca Lucrezia Buti, seducendola e avendo con lei un figlio. La storia vasariana include anche l'episodio del rapimento di Lippi da parte dei pirati al largo della costa di Napoli, e della conseguente prigionia ad Algeri. Sicuramente la leggenda di Giotto scoperto da Cimabue tra le pecore era al centro delle letture dei testi di Vasari nel diciannovesimo secolo, eppure la storia d'amore di Filippo Lippi era altrettanto nota. Sono proprio queste vicende a fornire l'ispirazione ai pittori Pierre-Nolasque Bergeret (1819) e Paul Delaroche (1822) al Salon francese, ma anche ai poeti inglesi Walter Savage Landor (1846), Robert Browning (1855) e Rudyard Kipling (1937). Come ha sostenuto Haskell, le risposte artistiche di questo genere sono espessione delle preoccupazioni dell'epoca che le ha prodotte. Il caso della ricezione delle vicende riguardanti Lippi getta una luce particolare sulle influenze culturali del Romanticismo, dell'Orientalismo, e in generale del revival rinascimentale e dell'Aesthetic Movement.