

## Giorgio Vasari's *A Bride with a Rake*: A Mythological Pun\*

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"I painted in humor a playful scene of a bride holding a rake."

—Giorgio Vasari, *Autobiography, Vite*.

Giorgio Vasari's educational background and association with Renaissance humanists engendered his familiarity with the texts and imagery of classical, emblematic, and mythographic traditions. Vasari's composition of images as a compendium of iconography for a decorative program was in the vein of the literary practices of Andrea Alciato (1482-1550), Pierio Valeriano (1477-1558), and Vincenzo Cartari (1531-1590), and followed Paolo Giovio's advice on how to depict an emblematic image or *impresa*<sup>1</sup> (Giovio, 1559, p. 9). For Giovio (1483-1552), an *impresa* or badge must contain a figure and motto, its meaning should be clear and precise, the imagery must be pleasant to look at, and the motto must be brief, inventive, and unambiguous. But sometimes Vasari did not follow his advice, relying more on the Renaissance Neoplatonic notion of a concept postulated by the Florentine philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499). In *De vita coelitus comparanda (How Life Should Be Arranged According to the Heavens)*<sup>2</sup> (Ficino, 1489; 1561-1563; 1996, pp. 7-19; Kerrigan & Braden, 1989, pp. 101-115). Ficino discusses the use and the magic potency of images by deliberating on the virtue of imagery, what power pertains to the figure in the Heavens and on Earth, which of the heavenly configurations are impressed on images by the ancients, and how the images are employed in antiquity<sup>3</sup> (Gombrich, 1972, p. 172; Chastel, 1996, pp. 81-89; Moore, 1990, p. 20, 137, 181; Bull, 2006, pp. 7-36). Vasari assimilated these concepts visually in the fresco painting of the *Bride with a Rake* (1548), located in one of the rooms in his house in Arezzo, the Chamber of Fortune (Chamber of Virtue), where he composed a paradoxical iconographic image—the subject of this essay. This essay is composed of two parts: an introduction to the location of

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<sup>1</sup> Paolo Giovio, *Dialogo delle imprese militari et amorose* (Lyon: Guglielmo Roviglio, 1559), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *De vita coelitus comparanda* (Florence, 1489), in Marsilio Ficino, *Opera omnia* (Basel: Oporinum, 1561-1563); Marsilio Ficino, *Meditation on the Soul: Selected Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. and ed. Clement Salaman (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1996), pp. vii-xix; William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden, "The Neoplatonic Individual of Marsilio Ficino," in *The Idea of Renaissance* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 101-115.

<sup>3</sup> E. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images* (London: Phaidon, 1972), p. 172; André Chastel, *Marsilio Ficino et L'Art* (Geneva: Droz, 1996), pp. 81-89; and Thomas Moore, *The Planets Within* (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1990), pp. 20, 137 and 181; and Malcolm Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods: Classical Mythology in Renaissance Art* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), pp. 7-36, on mythological sources that influenced Italian Renaissance imagery.

the painting in the Casa Vasari in Arezzo and an iconographical and iconological interpretation of the imagery.

*Keywords:* Renaissance iconography, Giorgio Vasari, Casa Vasari in Arezzo, rake emblems, Ceres's mythology

### Introduction

One indication of Giorgio Vasari's artistic professional status and success in the sixteenth century was his ability to purchase, design, and decorate his house. In October 1540, Vasari arranged to buy an unfinished house from the Aretine furnace-maker Jacopo Nannis de Canaceppis in the "track land" of San Borgo Vito in Arezzo, adjacent to land that Vasari and his family had previously purchased.<sup>4</sup> He finalized the bill of sale for his house on 7 September 1541. In his autobiography (*vita*) in the *Vite*, Vasari wrote: "I purchased a house at Arezzo, with a fine vegetable site, in the Borgo di San Vito, in the best area of the town."<sup>5</sup> (Bettarini & Barocchi, 1966-1976; Vasari, 1903; 1979). This house remains an artistic museum, a compendia of Vasari's *invenzioni*, visual conceits, and Maniera's delight in engaging and teasing the viewer (Figures 1a and 1b)<sup>6</sup> (Cheney, 1985a; 1985b, pp. 53-73; 1989, pp. 97-12; 2004, pp. 259-277; 2012; 2013, pp. 41-76; 2021, pp. 161-185; 2006; 2007; 2011; 2012; 2024).



Figure 1. Casa Vasari, Borgo San Vito, Arezzo, Exterior and Garden.

<sup>4</sup> Archivio di Stato Notarile Antecosimiano, Firenze, C655, per Guasparri Cornelli, Atti del 1541 al 1542, cc. 99 verso-100 verso).

<sup>5</sup> *Vite (Lives—Lives of the Most Excellent Architects, Painters and Sculptors of Italy, from Cimabue to the Present Time or Vite-Le Vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori e scultori italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostril)*, which was first published in 1550, followed in 1568 by an enlarged edition illustrated with woodcuts of artists' portraits. See Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi, eds, *Giorgio Vasari, Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori, nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, 6 vols. (Florence: S.P.E.S., 1966-1976), hereafter referred to as BB-Vasari, VI, p. 380:15; Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*, ed. Gaetano Milanesi, 9 vols. (Florence: G. C. Sansoni; 1903, reprint 1970-1974), hereafter noted as Milanesi-Vasari; and *Giorgio Vasari, Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, trans. Gaston Du C. de Vere, 3 vols. (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 1979), hereafter cited as DV-Vasari.

<sup>6</sup> I commenced discussing these ideas in the publication of my PhD doctoral dissertation in 1978, *The Paintings of the Casa Vasari* (New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1985a), and continued elaborating on them in subsequent publications in articles and books, including "Giorgio Vasari's Paintings of the Casa Vasari Arezzo," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* (Spring 1985b), pp. 53-73; "Vasari's Depiction of Pliny's Histories," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*, XV (December 1989), pp. 97-12; "Giorgio Vasari's Studio, Diligenza ed Amorevole Fatica," in *Reading Vasari*, eds. A. Barriault et al. (London: Philip Wilson, 2004), pp. 259-277; "Giorgio Vasari's Fine Arts: Neoplatonic Visualization of Invention, Imitation, and Beauty," ed. Luiz Marquez, in *Figura. Studi sull'immagine nella tradizione classica* (2012a) <https://econtents.bc.unicamp.br/inpec/index.php/figura/article/view/10198>; "Giorgio Vasari: Homeowner and Collector," in David Cast, ed. *Compendium on Giorgio Vasari* (London: Ashgate Publishers, 2013), pp. 41-76; "Giorgio Vasari's Fiery Putto: Artistic Armorial," *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, 11, 11 (December 2021), pp. 161-185; *The Homes of Giorgio Vasari* (London: Peter Lang Publishers, 2006); *Giorgio Vasari's Teachers: Sacred and Profane Art* (London: Peter Lang Publishers, 2007); *Giorgio Vasari: Artistic and Emblematic Manifestations* (Washington, DC: New Academia, 2011); *Giorgio Vasari: The Prefaces: Art and Theory* (London: Peter Lang Publishers, 2012b); and *Giorgio Vasari's Role of the Artist* (forthcoming 2024).

Vasari spent 12 years, from 1542 to 1554, off and on, painting the four rooms of the *piano nobile* of the Casa Vasari in Arezzo. The chambers or rooms are identified by the subjects depicted on their respective ceilings: Fame, Abraham, Apollo, and Fortune, painted in various media, fresco, oils, and tempera. In contrast to the house's other rooms, the Chamber of Fortune, recently called the Chamber of Virtue, is the only room with paintings on both the ceiling and walls, the ceiling in oils, and the walls on fresco (Figures 2a-2d). Ingeniously, Vasari illustrates the Italian Renaissance concept of the *camera picta* (totally painted room, ceiling, and walls) and advances the decorative motif of the *quadro riportato* (carried or transported painting) as part of the painted designs on the walls. This illusionistic painted motif, suggestive of a framed easel painting placed on a wall, is seen in the depiction of the Plinian stories on the lower sections of the chamber wall. This type of decoration (*quadro riportato*) became popular in Italian Baroque art with the Bolognese Carracci Brothers' *Loves of the Gods* (1597-1600), painted on the fresco ceiling of the Palazzo Farnese in Rome.<sup>7</sup>

Vasari's Chamber of Fortune, completed in 1548, features the most complex pictorial and iconographical program of all the rooms in the house. His program involves intricate philosophical, theological, and mythological conceits. More significantly, his inquisitive mind, passion, and artistic abilities allowed him to adopt a fresh approach to artistic representations. In his style, he expressed his love for his creative and literary mentors, admiration for antiquity, and appreciation for virtuosity. Vasari describes the paintings in this room in his autobiography:

After the completion of building my house in Arezzo, I returned home and created designs for painting the hall and three rooms.<sup>8</sup> Later, as a summer pastime in 1548, I painted only the hall's ceiling of the Chamber of Fortune. The woodwork of the hall was very rich, and I painted 13 large pictures on the ceiling containing the gods of heaven and the four seasons in the corners, depicted as nude. They are looking into the center of the ceiling, where I painted a large picture containing life-size paintings of Virtue and Envy, with Envy under Virtue's feet and both held by Fortune while she beat them. An exciting feature of the painting is that while moving around the room, Fortune seems above Envy and Virtue, and at another place, Virtue is above Envy and Fortune. This is often the case in real life.

On the room's walls, I painted [personifications of various virtues and concepts, including] Plenty, Liberality, Wisdom, Prudence, Toil, Honor, and other similar virtues. These figures were not mere decorations but symbols of my values. Below them, I depicted stories of the ancient painters Apelles, Zeuxis, Parrhasius, Protogenes, and others. I choose to omit other imageries and details... At the entrance to the room, I painted in humor a playful scene of a bride holding a rake, showing that she has been dragged as much as she can from her father's house. As she steps into her husband's house, she carries a lighted torch, symbolizing her intent to bring fire and consume everything in her path.<sup>9</sup> (Cheney, 2006)

<sup>7</sup> For the image, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Loves\\_of\\_the\\_Gods#/media/File:Farnese\\_Gallery\\_-\\_Annibale\\_Carracci\\_-\\_1597\\_-\\_Farnese\\_Gallery,\\_Rome.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Loves_of_the_Gods#/media/File:Farnese_Gallery_-_Annibale_Carracci_-_1597_-_Farnese_Gallery,_Rome.jpg).

<sup>8</sup> BB-Vasari, VI, pp. 391-392.

<sup>9</sup> BB-Vasari, VI, p. 392:15; Cheney, 2006, *The Homes of Giorgio Vasari*, Chapter 5.



**Figure 2.** Giorgio Vasari, Chamber of Fortune (Chamber of Virtue), 1548, East, South, and West Walls, fresco walls, oil ceiling. Casa Vasari, Arezzo.

Photo credit: Dr. Daniela Galoppi, Restorer, Fraternita dei Laci, Arezzo.



**Figure 2a.** Giorgio Vasari, Chamber of Fortune (Chamber of Virtue), West and North Walls, 1548, fresco walls, oil ceiling. Casa Vasari, Arezzo.

Photo credit: Dr. Daniela Galoppi, Restorer, Fraternita dei Laci, Arezzo.



Figure 2b. Giorgio Vasari, Chamber of Fortune (Chamber of Virtue), East and North Walls, 1548, fresco. Casa Vasari, Arezzo.  
Photo credit: Dr. Daniela Galoppi, Restorer, Fraternita dei Laci, Arezzo.

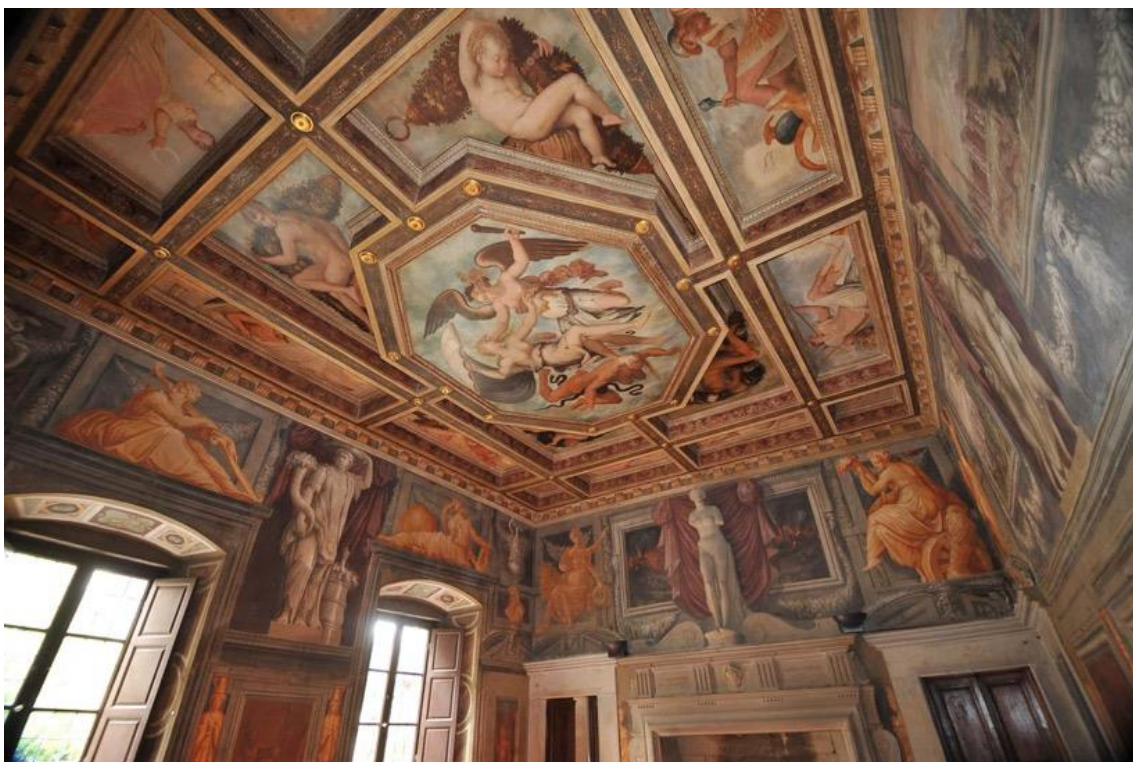


Figure 2c. Giorgio Vasari, *Fortune, Virtue and Envy*, 1548, fresco, ceiling (*palco*).  
Chamber of Fortune (Chamber of Virtue). Casa Vasari, Arezzo.  
Photo credit: Dr. Daniela Galoppi, Restorer, Fraternita dei Laci, Arezzo.



Figure 2d. Giorgio Vasari, Chamber of Fortune (Chamber of Virtue), East Wall, 1548, fresco. Casa Vasari, Arezzo.  
Photo credit: Dr. Daniela Galoppi, Restorer, Fraternita dei Laci, Arezzo.

The Chamber of Fortune is a parlor that receives guests in Vasari's house. Its decoration comprises three pictorial constructs: a ceiling called *palco*, painted in oils; wall decorations done in fresco; and a dado or basement, also in fresco (Figures 2a-2d). The octagonal *palco* contains painted scenes of the personifications of Envy, Fortune, and Virtue. Arrayed around this trio are the Four Seasons (depicted as the Four Ages of Life), holding various seasonal garlands of flowers, fruits, and vegetables. Encircling the *palco* are eight rectangles containing paintings of the celestial rulers, recognizable by their attributes and zodiac signs: Diana/Cancer; Apollo/Leo; Cupid/Taurus; Venus/Libra; Mercury/Gemini and Virgo; Mars/Aries and Scorpio; Saturn/Capricorn and Aquarius; and Jupiter/Sagittarius and Pisces. A flying *putto* carries Vasari's coat of arms in each corner of the ceiling.

The frescoed walls of the Chamber of Fortune are divided horizontally into two sections. The upper part contains three large personifications of the virtues and their identifying attributes. The dominant personification stands in the center and codes the wall's name. On the north wall is Artemis/Diana of Ephesus, symbolizing Nature; on the west wall is Charity, symbolizing Love and Religion; on the east wall is Abundance, symbolizing Earth; and on the south wall above the fireplace stands the statue of Venus, symbolizing Art and Beauty (Figures 2a-2d). The personification of each of the central figures is elevated on a pedestal simulating a statue, except for the south wall, which represents an actual limestone sculpture (Venus). Behind them, an illusionistic painted theatrical curtain or cloth of honor enhances their placement. Landscapes are depicted behind or next to the curtains as background areas. The landscape scenes are treated as easel paintings (*quadri riportati*) and are framed by garlands, mask motifs, or bucrania.

The lower parts of the walls display classical scenes from ancient paintings, represented as easel paintings (*quadri riportati*). This section also includes some illusionistic painted doors and windows, accompanied by real doors and windows, creating a sense of continuous and deep space throughout the room. The grisaille *dadi* of the walls offers a variety of exciting masks, festoons, corbel designs, and bucrania motifs.

On the east wall of the Chamber of Fortune, the focus of this essay, Vasari adjusted the decoration to account for the two windows in the room (Figures 2b and 2d). The prominent fresco figure between the windows represents the personification of Abundance, symbolizing Earth, framed by reclining figures of the personifications of Patience and Justice. Adjacent to them are Classical vases in *grisaille* coloration. Below the vases are portrait busts of Vasari's mentors, the ancient art historian Pliny the Elder and the renowned artist Michelangelo (Figures 2d and 3).

The *quadri riportati* in lower scenes are painted with a reddish tonality to imitate the ancient painters' frescoes wall painting technique. The scenes are based on Pliny the Elder's recount of the invention of the art of painting in *Natural History*, Book 35 (Figure 4)<sup>10</sup> (Jex-Blake & Sellers, 1968; Cheney, 1989, pp. 97-120; McHam, 2013). On the far left side of the wall, the scene depicts the artist Gyges of Lydia outlining his shadow, which is cast on the wall by the light from a fireplace behind him. For Vasari, Pliny the Elder considered Gyges the first artist to invent the art of drawing and shadows (Figure 5).<sup>11</sup> In his writings, Vasari highly praised the ability to draw well. He regarded drawing (*disegno*) as the foundation of creating a beautiful artistic form<sup>12</sup> (Cheney, 2017, pp. 140-178, 63-65). The next scene occurs in an artist's atelier (*bottega*). The classical narrative tells the story of two ancient painters, Zeuxis and Parrhasius, discussing a painting before them. The painting, sitting on an easel, depicts only a curtain. Pliny the Elder recounts the event, noting that earlier, Zeuxis had painted grapes on the same canvas that looked so realistic that some birds had attempted to eat them. Later, Zeuxis went to show Parrhasius the painting and asked for the curtain to be lifted so he could view the image of the grapes. However, Zeuxis soon realized that the curtain was Parrhasius's painting, concealing his painted grapes (Figure 6)<sup>13</sup> (Jex-Blake & Sellers, 1968, p. 111). Vasari referenced Pliny the Elder's account to emphasize the significance of illusionism in painting, artistic judgment, competition, and the pleasure of entertaining the viewer<sup>14</sup> (Cast, 2009). This was in preparation for the subsequent image on the wall, the *Bride with a Rake* (Figure 8).

As a typical Tuscan, Vasari added an element of delight and humor to his program. He described the painting at the far end of the wall, referring to its content as a joke or pun (*burla*) or *fantasia* and *invenzione*<sup>15</sup> (Barocchi, 1960-1962, pp. 386-387). In the same room, his humor was immediately evident in the *palco*. He cleverly played with the rotation of the ceiling decoration, highlighting its changing meaning as you looked around. He described

<sup>10</sup> *Pliny the Elder: The Natural History*, Book 35, trans. K. Jex-Blake and E. Sellers (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1968); Cheney, "Vasari's Depiction of Pliny's Histories," 1989, pp. 97-120; and Sarah Blake McHam, *Pliny and the Artistic Culture of the Italian Renaissance: The Legacy of the "Natural History"* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Milanese-Vasari, I, p. 218, Vasari citing Gyges of Lydia. In 1561, Vasari repeated the same motif in the *sala* of the house at 8 Borgo Santa Croce in Florence. Here, the difference is that Vasari uses candlelight, not a fireplace, to cast the shadow. For the image, see [https://www.pinterest.cl/pin/326229566748641231/?amp\\_client\\_id=CLIENT\\_ID%28\\_%29&mweb\\_unauth\\_id=&simplified=true](https://www.pinterest.cl/pin/326229566748641231/?amp_client_id=CLIENT_ID%28_%29&mweb_unauth_id=&simplified=true).

<sup>12</sup> BB-Vasari, I, pp. 31-172, esp. pp. 111-112, Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Giorgio Vasari's *Fine Arts* from the *Vite* of 1550: The Splendor of Creativity and Design," *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, 7, 2 (February 2017), pp. 140-178, and pp. 63-65.

<sup>13</sup> Jex-Blake and Sellers, trans, 1968, Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, p. 111, on Parrhasius.

<sup>14</sup> David Cast, *The Delight of Art. Giorgio Vasari and the Traditions of Humanist Discourse* (Philadelphia, PA: Penn State University Press, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Milanese-Vasari IV, pp. 135, 139; V, pp. 153, 373 411, 541, and VI, p. 153; and Paola Barocchi, ed. *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento*, 3 vols. (Bari: Laterza, 1960-1962), 2, pp. 386-387.

it by saying, “An exciting feature of the painting is that while moving around the room, Fortune seems above Envy and Virtue, and at another place, Virtue is above Envy and Fortune. This is often the case in real life.”<sup>16</sup>

In this visualization, Vasari incorporated his classical education and application of his artistic and humanistic conceits, which are displayed in the painting throughout the *camera picta*, about art (Beauty), spirituality (Religion), metaphysical (Nature), and physical nature (Earth), as well as artistic criteria for creating, imitating, and judging art. In addition, he revealed his conflicting views about marriage, contrasting with his love for agriculture. He used a *paragone* construct to embody his pun.

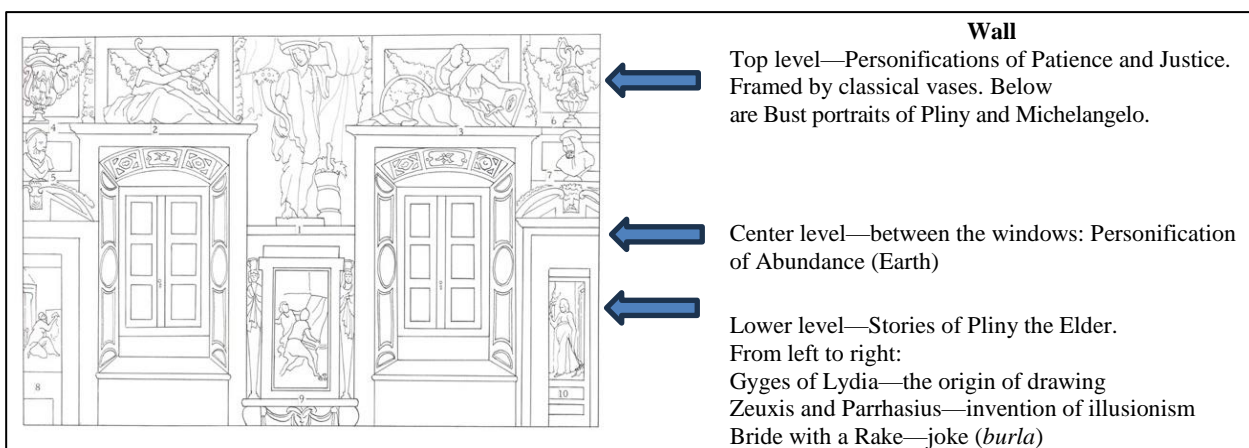


Figure 3. Cheney's drawing. East Wall Diagram.

Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.

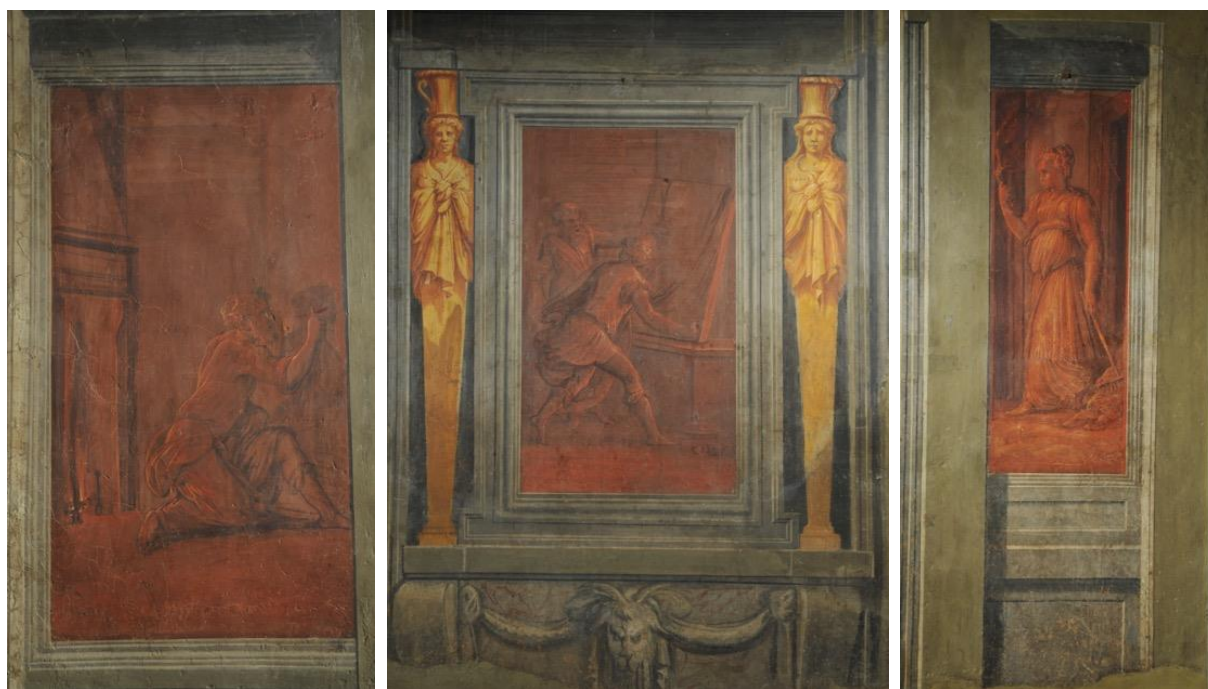


Figure 4. Giorgio Vasari, Stories of Pliny the Elder. From left to right: Gyges of Lydia; Center: Zeuxis and Parrhasius, and Bride with a Rake, 1548, fresco. East Wall, Chamber of Fortune, Casa Vasari, Arezzo.

<sup>16</sup> BB-Vasari, VI, p. 392:15.



Figure 5. Giorgio Vasari, *Gyges of Lydia (Man Outlining His Shadow)*, 1548, fresco. East Wall, Chamber of Fortune, Casa Vasari, Arezzo.

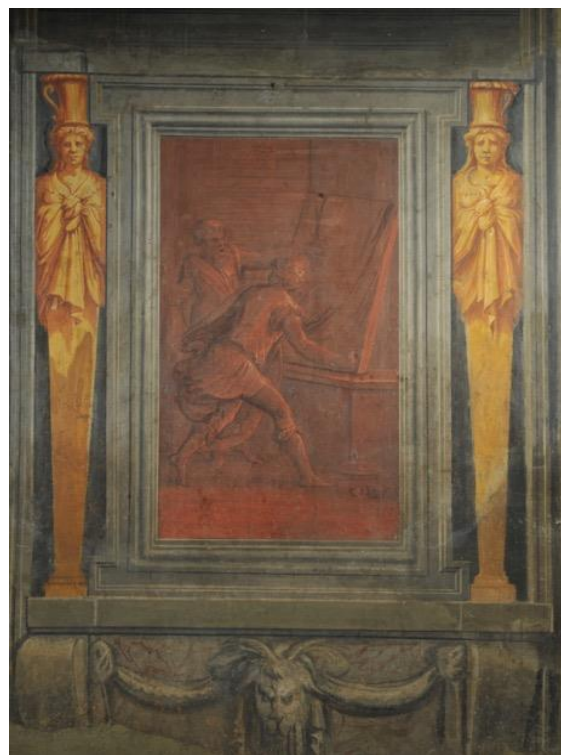


Figure 6. Giorgio Vasari, *Zeuxis and Parrhasius*, 1548, fresco. East Wall, Chamber of Fortune, Casa Vasari, Arezzo.



Figure 7. Giorgio Vasari, *Bride with a Rake*, 1548, fresco, East Wall, Chamber of Fortune, Casa Vasari, Arezzo.

### Interpretation of the *Bride with a Rake*

An elegantly dressed woman with a rake vigorously pulls objects into an interior room while holding a burning torch in her other hand (Figures 8a-8c). Vasari humorously described the image in his autobiography: “A bride holding a rake, indicating that she has taken all she can from her father’s house. Entering her husband’s house, she holds a light torch before her to indicate that she is bringing fire to consume everything.”<sup>17</sup> Vasari’s artistic programs and decorative displays contain an interplay between an art form’s physical and metaphysical concepts—a conceit of *paragone*. The physical deals with artistic application principles of art and design and references other creative sources, while the metaphysical deals with conceptual invention and interpretation of the subject matter.

This section delves into the link between the myth of Ceres as the creator of agriculture and Vasari’s artistic creation of the *Bride with a Rake*. Ceres’s symbolism includes physical and metaphysical iconography and iconology of fire and use of the rake, agricultural growth in nature, allusions to marriage, and the merging of the symbolism of a gardener’s agricultural actions with a painter’s art of creation. Thus, a comparison (*paragone*) between the skills is required in agriculture and art.

<sup>17</sup> BB-Vasari, VI, p. 392:15.



Figure 8a. Giorgio Vasari, *Bride with a Rake*, 1548, fresco. East Wall, Chamber of Fortune, Casa Vasari, Arezzo.



Figure 8b. Giorgio Vasari, *Chemise's hem, det.*, *Bride with a Rake*, 1548, fresco. East Wall, Chamber of Fortune, Casa Vasari, Arezzo.



Figure 8c. Giorgio Vasari, *Corona spicae*, det., *Bride with a Rake*, 1548, fresco. East Wall, Chamber of Fortune, Casa Vasari, Arezzo.



Figure 8d. Giorgio Vasari, *Rake*, det., *Bride with a Rake*, 1548, fresco. East Wall, Chamber of Fortune, Casa Vasari, Arezzo.

### The Myth of Ceres

There is more to this image in Vasari's painting than just a mischievous bride. Note that the image is on the same wall where the personification of Abundance (Earth) is depicted in the center of the wall (Figure 9). The standing figure, an allusion to a farmer or gardener, wearing peasant garb or rustic attire in a contrapposto stance, carries a large basket that functions as a *corona spicae*. She also holds the attributes associated with the richness of agriculture's cultivation, such as a Horn of Plenty, a cornucopia for nourishment, and a large wooden barrel filled with produce, flowers, and cereals. Years earlier, in 1545, for the ceiling of the Sacristy for the church of Santa Maria di Monteoliveto in Naples, now known as Sant'Anna dei Lombardi, Vasari finished a beautiful pencil drawing in brown ink, with brown wash, heightened with white, over black chalk, on blue paper, representing Abundance for the corresponding fresco image. The drawing is at the British Museum in London

(Figure 10)<sup>18</sup> (Cheney, 1994, pp. 135-177). For Vasari, the image of Abundance refers to two meanings: the physical labor (*fatica*) of a farmer working in the fields and, as a result, the products of cultivation. The second meaning is about the intellectual diligence, efforts, and *fatica* of an artist producing a work of art, as Vasari called it, the labor of creativity or the frenzy of art (*furor dell'arte*).<sup>19</sup>



Figure 9. Giorgio Vasari, *Abundance* (Earth), 1548, fresco, East wall, Chamber of Fortune, Casa Vasari, Arezzo.

<sup>18</sup> Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Vasari and Naples: The Monteoliveto Order," in *Papers in Art History, Studies in Iconography*, 15 (Spring 1994a), pp. 135-177. The Pennsylvania State University, V (1994), pp. 48-126.

<sup>19</sup> BB-Vasari III, *vita* of Luca della Robbia, p. 52.



Figure 10. Giorgio Vasari, *Abundance*, 1540, pencil drawing on blue paper. British Museum, London.

Photo credit: ©The Trustees of the British Museum.

In the lower area of the same wall where Abundance is painted, the figure of the bride is depicted in the *Bride with a Rake* (Figures 2d and 8a-8c). She is dressed in elegant clothes, contrasting with the farmer's attire of the personification of Abundance. The female figure wears sandals. Her attire combines Renaissance and classical garments, as her chiton (chemise) sleeves hold her mantle (himation) with a brooch on the shoulder. The edge of her chemise is decorated with fringes of wealth stalks or ears of corn. This design is repeated in her hairdo, which is decorated with ears of corn to form a *corona spicae* in her braided hair. These agricultural attributes suggest that the bride resembles or prefigures Ceres, the goddess of Agriculture, Fertility, and Harvest<sup>20</sup> (Evelyn-White, 1914). The bride also features a fiery torch, a visual aid when entering a dark area, whether a physical or metaphysical space. The torch is a significant symbol that illuminates the dark places of the Underworld, where Ceres's daughter, Proserpine, resides with her husband, Pluto, the god of Hades and Ceres's brother. This allusion can also be linked to the unknown aspects of the husband's house where the new bride will

<sup>20</sup> *Hesiod's Theogony. The Homeric Hymns and Homeric*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1914). Hesiod, *Theogony*, line 963, refers to Demeter (Ceres) cultivating the Earth. <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0130%3Acard%3D963>.

reside. The burning torch that the bride carries also causes smoke. In Ceres's ceremonies, smoke was considered a symbol of ritual purification. Perhaps the Vasarian bride also plans to "smoke out" or clean up her new home.

In his painting, Vasari appropriates the representations of Ceres from classical art, both Greek and Roman, found on vases, coins, and statues where Demeter or Ceres. The cult of Ceres was widespread in ancient Roman culture. She was honored with a majestic shrine on the Aventine Hill and in the countryside of the Roman dominion, such as Pompeii and Como. In one of his letters, Pliny the Younger expressed his wish to reconstruct the Temple of Ceres with porticos on land obtained from his uncle, Pliny the Elder<sup>21</sup> (Aldhouse-Greed, 2018, pp. 77-97).

These visual imageries of Ceres show attributes such as a crown, known as a *corona spicae*, holding a torch, and carrying different cereals or a sheaf of wheat. These items are similarly visualized in Vasari's imagery of the bride. For example, from the Greek colonies, the Apulian red-figure vase of *Plutus and Demeter (Ceres)*, 350 BCE in a private collection once at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu, California, represents Demeter (Ceres) is depicted sitting comfortably on pillows, wearing a beautiful gown and sandals, crowned with an ear of corn. She is carrying a torch, known as the Eleusinian torch due to its openings. Her son, Plutus, is represented nude, wearing a mantle on his shoulder. He holds a cornucopia filled with cereals, which is an attribute of his mother (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Plutus and Demeter (Ceres), Apulian red-figure vase, 350 BCE. Initially J. Paul. Getty Museum, Malibu, CA; now in a Private Collection. Photo courtesy: J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, CA.

Ancient Roman coins and statues represent Ceres with these attributes, as seen on the silver denarius of Diva Faustina The Elder, 139-141 CE (mint and date: Rome, after 147 CE), wherein on the obverse there is a Latin

<sup>21</sup> Miranda Aldhouse-Greed, *Sacred Britannia: The Gods and Rituals of Roman Britain* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2018), pp. 77-97.

inscription, DIVA FAVSTINA (Figure 12). The bust portrait shows Faustina in a profile view with an elaborate pearl crown on her hair. The reverse side of the coin bears a Latin inscription AVGV-STA with the image of the goddess Ceres standing tall, holding a torch in her left hand and ears of corn in her right hand. An Ancient Roman statuette of Ceres from the first century CE, made in bronze, now in the Miho Museum in Koka in Japan, shows Ceres crowned with a *corona spicae* and holding a torch and wheat stalks (Figure 13).



Figure 12. Roman coins of a silver denarius of Diva Faustina Senior, 139-141 CE. Obverse: DIVA FAVSTINA, portrait. Reverse: AVGV-STA with Ceres holding a torch and ears of corn.

Photo courtesy: Forum Ancient Coins.



Figure 13. Roman Statue of Ceres, first century CE, bronze. Miho Museum, Koka, Japan.

Photo Courtesy: Miho Museum, Japan.

The Vasarian bride imagery reveals another hidden image. As the bride enters through the doorway, an animal head is displayed in a niche as a trophy, revealed through the smoky torch light (compare Figures 14 and 8a). The animal head could be a deer or a pig (*porca*); both were sacred animals to Ceres (compare Figures 14 and 15a-b). In a passage from *On Agriculture*, the Roman historian Lucius Curtius Cato the Elder recounts the celebratory rituals dedicated to Ceres (*Cerealia*) before the harvest season as an offering of a pregnant female pig (*porca* or sow) along with the first cuttings of corn (*praecidaneae*)<sup>22</sup> (Hooper & Ash, 1934, p. 134; Valeriano, 1556, p. 69; Lindsay, 1913; Acciarino, 2016). According to Barbetta Stanley Spaeth, offering a pregnant pig to Ceres during harvest was a common practice. Followers made this gift to their goddess of fertility. They believed that the sacrifice of a pregnant animal would promote fertility on Earth for plants, animals, and humans through the principle of magic<sup>23</sup> (Spaeth, 1996, pp. 134-135).



Figure 14. Giorgio Vasari, Head of an animal, det., *Bride with a Rake*, 1548, fresco. East Wall, Chamber of Fortune, Casa Vasari, Arezzo.

Vasari was fascinated with the imagery of the goddess of Agriculture; he depicted this personification of Ceres several times in his decorative cycles. Intriguingly, a few years later, between 1553 and 1554, he painted a depiction of Ceres on the ceiling of a small corridor parallel to this Chamber of Fortune (Figure 16). The corridor

<sup>22</sup> *Cato and Varro On Agriculture*, trans. W. D. Hooper and Harrison Boyd Ash (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Loeb Classical Library, 1934), p. 134; Pierio Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica, sive, De Sacris Aegyptiorum literis commentarii* (Basel: Michael Isengrin, 1556), p. 69; Wallace Lindsay, ed., *Sextus Pompeius Festus Epitome of Verrius Flaccus's De verborum significatione libri XX* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubneris, 1913, reprint in Nabus Press, 2011), 423.1; Damiano Acciarino, "The Renaissance Editions of Festus: Fulvio Orsini's Version," *Acta Classica*, 59 (2016), pp. 1-22.

<sup>23</sup> Barbetta Stanley Spaeth, *The Roman goddess Ceres* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1996), pp. 134-135.

opens into the garden of the Aretine house. The painted ceiling is unfinished—only the center portion was painted in tempera and oils. Stylistically, the overall composition is sketchy. The scene flows freely across the picture plane in a shallow horizontal space. The figure's treatment is simplified, yet Ceres adopts a smiling, majestic attitude. The goddess of Agriculture is decorated with her traditional attributes. Also in 1553, Vasari designed and decorated the Roman palace of Bindo Altoviti (1491-1557), a Florentine banker working for the papacy who was a patron of the arts and an enthusiastic Vasarian patron<sup>24</sup> (Chong, Pegazzano, & Zikos, 2004, pp. 187-206; Avery, 1978, pp. 71-72; Grasso, 2003, pp. 47-63; Pegazzano, 2004, pp. 187-206; Misiani, 2004, pp. 263-284). In the ceiling loggia of the palace, Vasari painted in an oval design the *Tribute of Ceres*, the goddess of Harvest, surrounded by devotees, priests, women, and children who make offerings of vessels with milk and wooded baskets with crops, and extend honeycombs in their hands. With an expression of delight, the veiled Ceres receives these gifts while seated on a chariot framed by serpents and holding sheaves of wheat and a large cornucopia full of products cultivated on Earth.



Figure 15a. Vasari's animal head in niche or doorway.



Figure 15b. Real photo of heads of deer and sow (*porca*).

During the same year, Pope Julius III (Del Monte family, 1487-1555) commissioned Vasari and his assistants to decorate his loggia in Villa Giulia in Rome with the theme of *Cerealia*<sup>25</sup> (Barocchi, 1956, pp 187-

<sup>24</sup> Vasari-Milanesi, VII, p. 695; *Raphael, Cellini and A Renaissance Banker: The Patronage of Bindo Altoviti*, eds., Alan Chong, Donatella Pegazzano, and Dimitrios Zikos (Boston, MA: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2004), pp. 187-206. After the palace's destruction in 1888, the frescoes were eventually mounted onto a ceiling in Palazzo Venezia in Rome in 1929. Some paintings were saved and were installed in the Palazzo Venezia. See C. Avery, "Benvenuto Cellini's bronze Portrait of Bindo Altoviti," *Connoisseur* (1978), pp. 71-72; Monica Grasso, "Le storie di Cerere e il ciclo dei mesi," in Maria S. Sconci, ed. *La volta vasariana di Palazzo Venezia restaurata* (Rome: Retable Cultura, 2003), pp. 47-63; Donatella Pegazzano, "Vasari's Decoration for Bindo Altoviti's Palazzo and Villa," in *Raphael, Cellini and A Renaissance Banker*, pp. 187-206; and Paola Nicita Misiani, "Destruction and Preservation: The History of the Frescoes and Stucchi from Palazzo Altoviti," in *Raphael, Cellini and A Renaissance Banker*, pp. 263-284.

<sup>25</sup> Paola Barocchi, "Il Vasari Pittore," *Rinascimento*, 7 (1956), pp 187-212, esp. pp. 199-200, n. 3; Paola Barocchi, *Mostra di disegni del Vasari e della sua cerchia* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1964), pp. 25-26, Figure 10, for the description and commission of the drawings at the Uffizi N651F and N2905F, and at the Louvre 2192 and 2192bis; Uffizi drawing, N955E; and Florian Härb, *The Drawings of Giorgio Vasari, 1511-1574* (Rome: Ugo Bozzi, 2015), pp. 315-316 and 317-318.

212; 1964, pp. 25-26; Härb, 2015, pp. 315-316 and 317-318). The Roman classicist and poet Annibale Caro (1507-1566) was the humanist who composed this program for Pope Julius III in 1550. Caro describes the *invenzione* of Ceres as a female in matronly attire riding in a chariot pulled by serpents, crowned with corn and poppies and holding a bunch of the same in her hand. She is surrounded by priests and women dressed in white, who alike offer her milk, wine, and honey; other women with lamps and torches are searching for Proserpine. Enthusiastically, Vasari wrote a letter to Bishop Bernadetto Minerbetti (1538-1574), an Aretine advisor and friend of Vasari, describing Caro's interpretation of one of his preparatory cartoons for a painting in the Villa Giulia: "Ceres rides in a serpent-drawn chariot filled with crops; women, putti, and priests bring the goddess offerings and sacrifices of burning wheat."<sup>26</sup> (del Vita, 1938, pp. 308-309; Frey, 1923, p. 350; Barocchi, 1964, p. 25-26). Enamored of this theme, Vasari also appropriated Caro's *invenzione* for the imagery of Ceres in the corridor of his Aretine house.

Comparing the above descriptions with the actual representation in the ceiling of the Corridor of Ceres, one observes that Vasari combined and simplified it for the Casa Vasari. All that is depicted is Ceres, goddess of Agriculture, crowned with wheat stalks and riding in a floating chariot drawn by two flaming serpents. She is bare-breast and bare-foot, holding a cornucopia with ears of corn, cereals, fruits, and flowers and carrying a fiery torch whose smoke leads to the realm of the sky (compare Figures 16 and 17). In the upper right-hand corner of the ceiling, a half-hemispherical zodiacal band appears with a figure of Pluto, Ceres's brother, riding a chariot pulled by horses through a rainbow and disappearing. This detail recalls the story of the abducted daughter Proserpine by Ceres's brother, Pluto, and the Olympic courtly agreement for Ceres's daughter to spend half time in Hades with her husband and the other half time of the year on Earth with her mother, Ceres, hence creating the cycle of the seasons. In the depiction of Ceres for the Aretine corridor, Vasari follows the Central Italian stylistic tradition of presenting a deity in a chariot, as seen in a medal relief of the late fifteen century at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York,<sup>27</sup> and in fresco painting at the Sala di Galatea of the Roman Polidoro da Caravaggio (1492-1534) in the *salone* of the Villa Lante, where Vasari acquired the motif of an entwining serpent. The use of a male god riding his chariot through a rainbow created by zodiac signs reveals Vasari's knowledge of the Bolognese Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving of the *Judgment of Pari* of 1513, where the sun god is seen in the background, likewise riding through a zodiac band.<sup>28</sup>

Between 1555 and 1557, Vasari continued to portray images of Ceres in one of the rooms in Palazzo Vecchio for Cosimo de Medici, Duke of Florence. With his assistance, Vasari, under the iconographical guidance of the eminent humanist, art collector, and prelate Vincenzo Borghini (1515-1580), composed another painted ceiling depicting the myth of Ceres. In a dramatic evening scene, Ceres, dressed in classical garments, desperately seeks her daughter, Proserpine. She is holding a burning torch while standing and riding furiously on a chariot pulled by dragons. The eerie and somber flaming landscape denotes the emotional state of the goddess and the animals (Figure 18)<sup>29</sup> (Allegrì & Cecchi, 1980, pp. 74-79; Draper, 1973, pp. 154-167). In the Chamber of Fortune, the

<sup>26</sup> Alessandro del Vita, *Lo Zibaldone di Giorgio Vasari* (Rome: R. Istituto Archeologico e Storia dell'Arte, 1938), pp. 308-309; Karl Frey, ed., *Der literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris*, 2 vols. (Munich: Georg Müller, 1923), I, p. 350; and Barocchi, *Mostra di disegni del Vasari e della sua cerchia*, p. 25-26, citing Caro's comment.

<sup>27</sup> For the image, see <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/194506>.

<sup>28</sup> For the image, see a version <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/337058>.

<sup>29</sup> Milanese-Vasari, VII, pp. 240 and 422; Ettore Allegrì and Alessandro Cecchi, *Palazzo Vecchio e I Medici* (Florence: Studio per Edizioni Scelte, 1980), pp. 74-79; and J. L. Draper, *Vasari's Decoration in the Palazzo Vecchio. The Ragionamenti translated with an introduction and notes* (PhD Dissertation University of North Carolina, 1973), pp. 154-167.

wall imagery of Ceres differs from his other visual depictions, instead focusing on the celebratory *Cerealia*; here, he visualizes Ceres's persona as the bride.

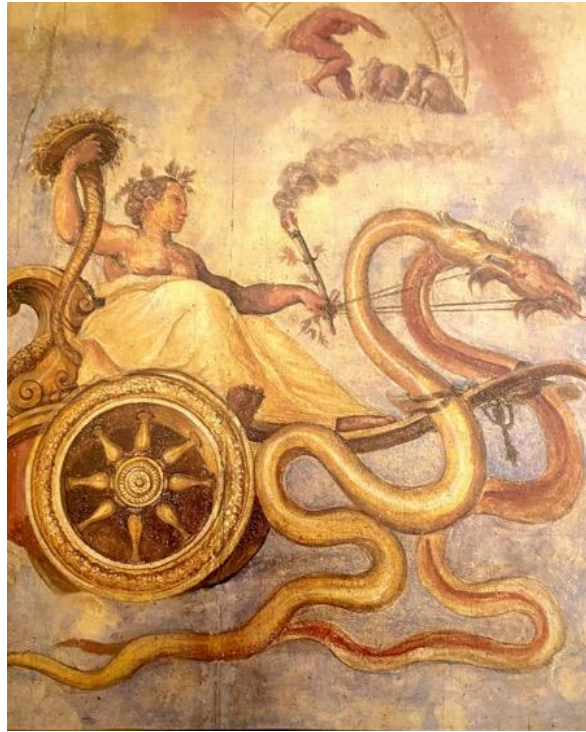


Figure 16. Giorgio Vasari, *Ceres*, 1553-554, unfinished, tempera and oils. Corridor, Casa Vasari, Arezzo.  
Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.



Figure 17. Giorgio Vasari, *Tribute to Ceres*, 1553, fresco. Initially, the ceiling of the loggia of Palazzo Altoviti, Rome.  
Now in the ceiling of Palazzo Corsini, Via della Lungara, Rome.



Figure 18. Giorgio Vasari and assistants, *Ceres*, 1555-1557, ceiling. Chamber of Ceres. Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.

### The Symbolism of the Element of Fire

Vasari makes symbolic associations to tease and instruct the viewer about the function of the fiery torch. Fire is a primary source for seeing, physically and metaphysically. Hence, there are two significant factors: the association of fire with an intellectual faculty, as in the Platonic and Neoplatonic concept of “*furor*”, which is an inspirational frenzy or creative frenzy or force to compose art, music, and poetry.<sup>30</sup> For Vasari, “creativity must be activated when the intellect wants to work, and when inspiration catches fire for then, one sees excellent and divine results and marvelous conceptions.”<sup>31</sup> This aspect is revealed in the Plinian story of Gyges of Lydia, who outlines his shadow and creates a drawing (Figure 5). The male figure depicts the artist, Vasari, outlining his shadow and emphasizing the significance of invention applied to a drawing.

Vasari not accidentally painted the scene with the bride holding a torch, recalling the myth of Ceres and the saga of the Burning of Troy. The bride scene is close to the fireplace on the adjacent south wall (Figures 2 and 19). Above the mantle is a limestone sculpture standing on a scalloped shell, representing Aphrodite/Venus as a personification of Art and Beauty. The goddess statue stands in front of a landscape depicting the burning of Troy (Figure 19). The landscape scene references the story of the Judgment of Paris. This saga is recounted in Homer’s *Odyssey*, an epic poem dating back to 1260 BCE. Paris, a handsome shepherd from Troy, gave Aphrodite a golden apple, affirming her as the most beautiful woman instead of selecting Athena or Hera. This decision triggered a series of events in Mount Olympus and Greece that led to the Trojan War.

<sup>30</sup> André Chastel, *Marsilio Ficino et L’Art* (Geneva: Droz, 1975), pp. 129-133, chapter on “*Furor divinus: L’inspiration*”; Michael J. B. Allen, *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 339-439; and Michael J. B. Allen, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 41-67.

<sup>31</sup> BB-Vasari, Preface Two, III, p. 62; Cheney, “Giorgio Vasari’s *Fine Arts*”, pp. 163-165.

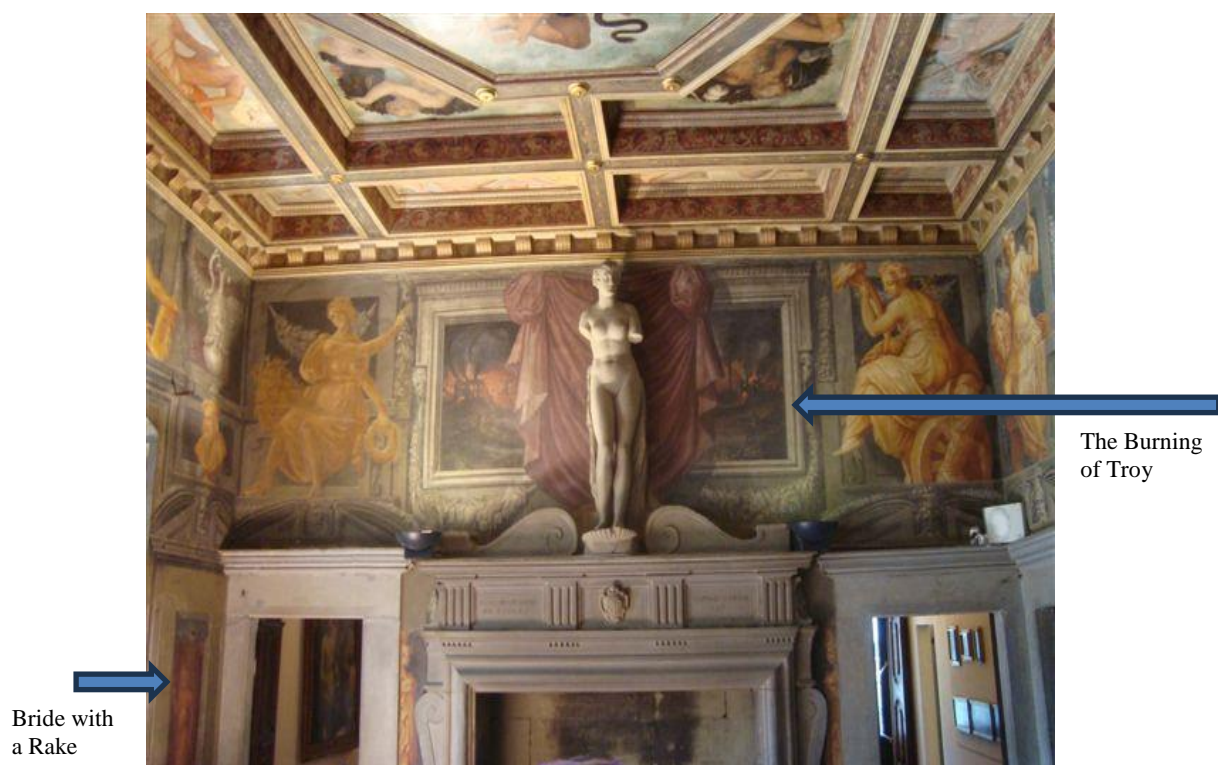


Figure 19. Giorgio Vasari, *Venus and Burning of Troy*, 1548, South Wall, fresco, Chamber of Fortune, Casa Vasari, Arezzo.  
Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.

The other, more practical aspects of fire are the physical components of fire as a combustion element, represented by a fireplace, a physical structure to burn elements. The fireplace provides an actual conflagration effect, and above it hangs a painting depicting a blazing fire, symbolically alluding to the impact of a burning fire, as seen in the painting of a city in flames (Troy). Vasari intentionally depicted the bride as a woman holding a burning torch; in jest, as an inexperienced bride, she will also use this torch to burn household objects and food while cooking. But Vasari also refers to another aspect of the fire: a visual guidance of the bride's new surroundings and an intellectual guidance to her new life experience, marriage.

In the *Bride with a Rake*, Vasari's composition for the standing female figure wielding a flaming torch derives from previous imagery depicting the personification of Peace holding a torch upside down, burning the weapons of war, in a fresco of 1546 in the Sala dei Cento Giorni, Palazzo della Cancelleria in Rome (compare Figures 7 and 20)<sup>32</sup> (Cheney, 2014, pp. 96-117). Not by accident, both scenes are depicted near a fireplace. Although both compositions—the personification of Peace and the Bride—are similar in design and deal with an extended arm that holds a long torch and addresses a pile of accumulated objects, their actions and the meanings of the imagery differ. The bride, like Peace, also holds a burning torch, but upwardly—not to burn but to see. With a similar hand gesture, Peace destroys the elements of firearms with a torch, while the bride gathers the objects using a rake.

<sup>32</sup> Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Sala dei Cento Giorni: A Farnese Celebration," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*, 40, 1-2 (Summer-Winter 2014), pp. 96-117.



Figure 20. Giorgio Vasari, *Peace between Charles V and Francis I*, det., 1546. fresco.  
Sala dei Cento Giorni, Palazzo della Cancelleria, Rome.  
Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.

### The Symbolism of the Rake

The other significant object in the painting is the rake. Vasari depicts the bride dragging all types of clothing (hats, belts) and household items (plates) with a rake from the entrance doorway of a house into a room. Curiously, she is pulling them, not raking them, which means she is not separating the objects. Vasari depicts the rake paradoxically: as a gardener's agricultural instrument to cultivate crops and harvest goods and as a bride's tool to gather her items for unity in her matrimonial bond.

Vasari was very interested in agriculture. He and his family owned farms in Arezzo. He bought Casa Vasari for its lush garden, numerous trees, and the potential for planting vegetables ("un sito da fare orti bellissimi").<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Milanesi-Vasari, VII, pp. 667-68.

He anticipated purchasing a new home for his marriage to Nicolosa Bacci, who was from an apothecary family in Arezzo (Figure 21)<sup>34</sup> (del Vita, 1938b, p. 86, 133; Frey, 1923, p. 228, 233, 242; Cheney, 1994, pp. 135-177). Furthermore, through his classical education, Vasari was well-versed in the classics, which are referenced many times in his writings (*Vite*), such as Vitruvius's *On Architecture*, Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, and particularly with the Roman poet Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro, 70-19 BCE), whom he could recite by heart. Virgil came from a family of agriculturalists. In *Georgics* (On Working the Earth, 37-29 BCE), he wrote instructions to gardeners and farmers on running a farm, raising crops and trees, cultivating the land, and using farm tools. The word rake is often used as a tool needed to perform a positive function in connection with the land, e.g., "rakes laboriously dig up the ground" (Virgil, *Georg.* 1, 94); "the rake is like the sledgehammer—a heavy hammer with a long handle—that breaks the inert" (Virgil, *Georg.* 1. 55); and humorously, "it useless for you to regularly rake the grass for insects" (Virgil, *Georg.* 1. 164)<sup>35</sup> (Angeli, 1997, pp. 893-908; Mackail, 1932, pp. 293-308).



Figure 21. Pastorino de' Pastorini (Pastorino da Siena), *Nicolosa Bacci*, 1555, bronze medal. Samuel H. Kress Collection. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Other Mannerist painters and printmakers, including Rosso Fiorentino (1494-1540), one of Vasari's mentors, found inspiration in Virgil's *Georgics* references to agriculture. The imagery is part of Rosso's depiction of Mythological Gods and Goddesses or Gods in Niches later engraved by Giovanni Jacopo Caraglio (1505-1565)

<sup>34</sup> Alessandro del Vita, *Inventario e Regesto dell' Archivio Vasariano* (Arezzo: Zelli, 1938b), pp. 86 and 133; Frey, ed., *Der literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris*, I, 1923, pp. 228, 233, and 242. After his marriage, Vasari painted the Chamber of Apollo, portraying his wife as several muses. See Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Vasari's Pictorial Musing on the Muses: The Chamber of Apollo of the Casa Vasari," *Studies in Iconography* (Spring 1994b), pp. 135-177. For the image, see: <https://www.meisterdrucke.it/stampe-d-arte/Giorgio-Vasari/148170/Muse%2C-Camera-di-Apollo-e-delle-Muse-.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Stefano de Angeli, "Ceres", in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (Zurich: Artemis, 1997), 4.1:893-908; *Virgil's Works, The Aeneid, Eclogues, Georgics*, trans. J. W. Mackail (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 1932), pp. 293-308, on Ceres. I am grateful to Prof. Damiano Acciarino of the Università Ca' Foscari in Venice for his assistance finding the Virgil quotations on the rake.

(Figure 22)<sup>36</sup> (von Bartsch, 1854-1878). They depicted mythological figures such as Ceres and cited Virgil, noting that Ceres was the inventor of the seasons and protector of agriculture. Caraglio's engraving after Rosso's *Ceres* (1526) represents the goddess as a robust nude female in a niche, crowned with ears of corns, holding a half-moon sickle in her right hand and a torch in her left hand, causing her shadow. At her feet, two snakes accompany Ceres's stressful journey searching for her daughter Proserpine in Hades. The edge of the niche contains a Virgilian inscription honoring the goddess for the fomentation of agriculture. The motto is partially cut off: "Alma Ceres docuit segtum spem credere suicis" ("The spirit of Ceres taught the grain of sperm to believe its own..." (Virgil, *Georgics* 1:32). Caraglio made several versions of his engravings on this theme; some are located at the British Museum in London, the Museum of Art in Budapest, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.



Figure 22. Rosso Fiorentino, *Ceres*, engraved by Giovanni Jacopo Caraglio, 1527, engraving. Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY.

Credit Line: The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1949.

<sup>36</sup> Adam von Bartsch, *Le Peintre graveur*, 21 vols. (Leipzig: J.A. Barth, 1854-1878), on *Mythological Gods and Goddesses or The Gods in Niches*, cat. no. XV. 78. 37, Plate 14, Ceres.

Historical visual representations indicate that women of the laboring class in Western art were traditionally associated with agricultural activities, laborious tasks each month, and seasonal doings. Specifically, during the summer months, in June, when the soil needed to be raked, such labor was predominantly done by women. For example, in the Middle Ages, in a book of illumination from 1190 entitled *Mirror of the Virgins* (*Speculum Virginum*), the German Benedictine painter Conrad of Hirsau depicted women harvesting. The central section of the illuminated page shows women laboring in the fields; one woman is raking to spread and collect grass during haymaking (Figure 23). In Northern Renaissance books of illumination, the depiction of the rake is also associated with the agricultural activities of the season and the occupation of labor by peasants, for example, as seen in the Limbourg Brothers's calendar page of June in the *Book of Hours of Duke du Berry* (*Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*) of 1410 at the Musée Condé in Chantilly (Figure 24). In the foreground of the page, a woman is raking the grass. Another French Renaissance example is the *Rouen Book of Hours* dating to the early sixteenth century (MS M.174 fol. 6r), at the Morgan Library and Museum in New York City (Figure 25). The *bas de page* of this flowery calendar page shows an agricultural scene where a man and woman labor the fields, likely a husband and his bride. The man is dressed in farmer's clothes, holding a scythe. He wears a cultivator's hat, and his stockings are rolled up to his knees. The woman is also dressed in farming clothes, an apron and a laborer's hat. She is working the soil with a rake. Both persons are working hard on the soil, preparing to plant seeds, symbolizing fertility for both the land and the couple. The moral message alludes to their combined efforts in labor, suggesting a solid marital bond and effectiveness in working together.

No doubt Vasari was familiar with the traditional associations of a woman with a rake, symbolizing domesticity, labor, and marriage in classical, medieval, and early Renaissance visual and textual traditions, particularly as seen in the Italian Renaissance fresco cycle of the Salone dei Mesi (Room of the Months), the main hall in the Palazzo Schifanoia at Ferrara, commissioned by Duke Borso d'Este between 1465 and 1470 to Cosmè Tura (1430-1495) and his assistants, including Gherardo da Vincenza (Gherardo di Andrea Fiorini, 1430-1495). As indicated above, these frescoes depict calendar illustrations often found in Northern European manuscripts. The fresco wall is divided into three zones in the month of August and is dedicated to Ceres. It features a triumphal cart of the ancient deity at the top, with the related zodiac signs in the middle and courtly activities and labors of cultivation at the bottom (Figure 26).



Figure 23. Conrad of Hirsau, *A Woman raking*, det., *Mirror of the Virgin* (*Speculum Virginum*), 1190, Book of Illumination. Musée National Rhénan, Germany.



Figure 24. Limbourg Brothers, *June*, calendar page, *Book of Hours of Duke du Berry* (*Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*), 1410-1416. Musée Condé, Chantilly.



Figure 25. June, calendar page, *Rouen Book of Hours*, France, early sixteenth century.

Photo courtesy: Morgan Library, New York.

Curiously, between 1555 and 1557, Vasari composed a drawing of *Ceres and Charon* for a lost tapestry, now in the Royal Library at Windsor (No. 906322, Figure 27)<sup>37</sup> (Allegri & Cecchi, 1980, p. 78). The drawing is in pen and ink with brown wash and white heightening on faded blue paper. Vasari composed this drawing for the second of six tapestries on the story of Ceres, to be woven for the Sala of Ceres, the Palazzo Vecchio, wherein the ceiling there had a depiction of a scene of Ceres in a chariot in search of her daughter (Figure 18). He describes the imagery of this drawing in his *I Ragionamenti (The Dialogues)*<sup>38</sup> (Draper, 1973, pp. 154-167). The composition depicts Ceres, in a rage after losing her daughter Proserpine, arriving at the river Styx on her way to Hades. She destroys all agricultural implements to ensure that the Earth will remain barren of crops until her daughter returns.

In the imagery of the beautiful Windsor drawing, Vasari conflated the symbolism of the rake with the burning torch or fire. He portrayed an infuriated Ceres raking the Earth, the agricultural instrument used to cultivate the fields. She raises one hand and holds a bent rake; in her other hand she carries a broken ax. Various agricultural tools—a hoe, a plowshare, a sickle, a spade, a yoke, a container of grains or seeds, and other objects—are broken and scattered on the ground before her. Behind her, a city is set on fire, a volcanic eruption. Vasari refers to the Eleusinian Mysteries, where Ceres visited Sicily to find her daughter. During the search, the culprit, Pluto, aware of Ceres's intentions, provoked Mount Etna to explode, emerging from this volcanic blast to intimidate her. In the background of the drawing, behind architectural edifices, the fiery flames and smoke are seen.

<sup>37</sup> Allegri and Cecchi, *Palazzo Vecchio e I Medici*, p. 78. I am grateful to Dr. Lauren Stark, Imager Officer of The Royal Collection Trust, for granting me permission to reproduce the image.

<sup>38</sup> Draper, *Vasari's Decoration in the Palazzo Vecchio. The Ragionamenti*, pp. 154-167; Härb, *The Drawings of Giorgio Vasari*, no. 222.



Figure 26. Cosmè Tura and Gherardo da Vicenza, *Allegory of August: Triumph of Ceres*, 1476-1484, fresco. The Hall of the Months, Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara.



Figure 27. Giorgio Vasari, attr. *Ceres and Charon*, 1555-1557, drawing. Royal Collection Trust Windsor, UK.  
Photo courtesy: ©Royal Collection Trust, Windsor, UK.

In the foreground, to the right of Ceres, the presence of a nude man navigating a small barge with his staff and wind-blown drapery suggests his swift movement is significant. He represents Charon, the ferryman who travels in the River Styx's trembling waters, transporting "dead souls" from Earth to Hades. With the design of this Herculean figure, Vasari honors his mentor Michelangelo's depiction of Charon on his boat at the bottom of the *Last Judgment* of 1541-1543, a fresco wall in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican. Charon will assist Ceres in fulfilling her oath by providing passage on his barge to cross the River Styx, allowing her to reach Hades and find her daughter. Ceres's oath is to stop all agricultural growth until her daughter is found. Her determination about her unbreakable vow is noted in her shattering of the instruments of cultivation.

This Vasarian composition of Ceres differs from previous depictions in which the goddess is celebrated, as at the Palaces of Altoviti and Pope Julius III. In the Windsor drawing, Vasari emphasizes Ceres's frustration with her brother Pluto for taking her daughter to Hades. In this image, the rake has a negative connotation as a symbol of destruction, just like the volcanic eruption. The emotional visual tone in this drawing differs from Vasari's earlier representation of Ceres as the bride in the Casa Vasari, where the rake was depicted as pulling without causing damage (compare Figures 7 and 27).

But as usual, Vasari adds a humorous twist to his private decorative programs. First, he includes an aspect of his persona, the love for agriculture, by depicting a seasonal time with the inclusion of the personification of the Goddess of Agriculture. Then, he visualizes Plinian's illusionistic recounts in these fresco stories where the allusion to the flaming torch is not just associated with the myth of Ceres but also with the artistic intellect: the

invention of drawing through the shadow created by fire (Gyges of Lydia), the illusionism in art in covering up a painted image through paint (Zeuxis and Parrhasius), and the *sotto voce* joke about the ardor of marriage through a burning torch (the Bride). But with the depiction of the rake, there is a further allusion.

In Vasari's painting, the bride uses a rake to drag various personal clothing items and household objects from the entrance of the house into a room. Interestingly, she is pulling the objects rather than raking them, indicating that she is not separating them. Vasari portrayed the rake as an agricultural tool related to the labor of women during the summer, which is associated with the myth of Ceres that traditionally considers the bond between grain and the soil to be metaphorically associated with the bond of marriage, Ceres being the goddess of fertility and protector of Earth, including animals, vegetation, and human beings<sup>39</sup> (Kapach, 2023; Lindsay, 1913; Bull, 2006, p. 138). It is also depicted as a paradoxical gathering element linked to the personification of matrimony, the marital bond or unity that the bride represents.

The rake in Vasari's joke might be a conflated symbol of *paragone*, adaptation, and transformation. The bride adapts to a new home and moves the things she has selected from her old home while attempting to see (burning torch) what her future would be in her new home.

However, there is a further allusion in the depiction of the *Bride with a Rake*. In this paradoxical scene, Vasari metaphorically parallels (*paragone*) the symbolic image of the bride with Ceres regarding artistic creativity, agricultural growth, and marriage. The etymology of the word Ceres derives from the Proto-Italic word *keres*, which means with grains or *ker*, meaning to grow. The Latin word Ceres is from the Latin root "cer", which means to grow as *crescere* (Virgil's *Georgics* 1.5-7). The Latin of the fifteenth century was associated with the word *crescere* (to be born, growth), and creates the meaning "to bring into being." (Lindsay, 1913; Seemann, 1877, pp. 137-138).<sup>40</sup> Hence, not by accident, the erudite and classical-learned Vasari linked the goddess's name, Ceres, meaning "good creator" (*creator bonus*), with the painter's role as an artistic creator.

Continuing with the association of Ceres as an agrarian protector and cultivator of crops, Vasari metaphorically parallels the labor of a human gardener or farmer with the painter. He refers to painting as a work of "fatica, lavoro e diligenza" on the artist's part, meaning the efforts, labor, and diligence undertaken by a painter. The selection of tools for a farmer, such as a rake, is comparable to a painter's choice of brushes. The farmer and the painter similarly use their tools, selecting and disregarding what is not applicable. Using a rake to gather and discard is analogous to a painter selecting colors with a brush. The farmer cultivates the soil, while the painter cultivates art. In gardening and painting, the goal is to achieve a well-maintained, tidy, and organized final product that evokes a sense of balance and harmony. Gardeners strive to create a visually appealing and well-balanced lawn. At the same time, painters use the principles of art to produce colorful and visually pleasing images that are harmonious with the viewer's eye.

The Casa Vasari contains a multifaceted iconographic and iconological decorative program, especially in the Chamber of Fortune. In *The Bride with a Rake*, although a small painted fresco, Vasari employs intriguing meanings for the imagery. In Vasari's painting, the metaphysical concepts of creation and growth are intentionally intertwined as symbolic transformations. For example, the bride personifies Ceres, the goddess of pastoral and human fertility;

<sup>39</sup> Avi Kapach, "Roman Goddess: Ceres," in *Mythopedia*, 23 August 2023, <https://mythopedia.com/topics/ceres>, citing in n. 39; Lindsay, ed., Festus, *Epitome of Verrius Flaccus* (M. Verrius Flaccus, ca. 55 BCE-ca. 20 CE), 77.2, on Ceres as a protector of marriage; and Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods*, p. 138, on Ceres as the goddess of Marriage as well as the personification of marriage or matrimony.

<sup>40</sup> Lindsay, ed., Festus, *Epitome of Verrius Flaccus*, 109.4; O. Seemann, *The Mythology of Greece and Rome*, trans. G. H. Bianchi (London: Marcus Ward & Co., 1877), pp. 137-138, considering Demeter (Ceres), the goddess of the Arts and Civilization.

she is also portrayed as a metaphor for a gardener with a rake, cultivating the new home's land. The female figure in the painting also serves as a metaphor for a painter creating his muse, the new bride, by using brushes and gathering colors. The personification of Ceres, as the protector of marriage, is included to connect the bride's imagery with the symbolism of marriage, considered the natural bond of a man and a woman. Vasari created the *Bride with the Rake* as a paradoxical image, a "conversation piece" for his friends to decipher and enjoy.

### Coda

At the beginning of my research, I thought there would be significant emblems, *imprese*, and devices on rakes from Italian emblematisers and mythographers such as Andrea Alciato, Pierio Valeriano, and Vincenzo Cartari. However, I needed clarification. I had great difficulty finding emblems during the Italian Renaissance. I thank emblematiser scholars Donato Mansueto, José Julio de Arraz, Sagrario Lopez Posa, and Michael Giordano for their assistance.

The result is that most emblems of the rake appear after the Italian iconographer Cesare Ripa's *figurazione* for the personification of *Agriculture* (Figure 28)<sup>41</sup> (Ripa, 1603/1630, p. 25). The *pictura* has a human figure and just a device or badge. *Agriculture* is represented by a female figure standing crowned with the *corona spicae*, embracing a flowering tree while holding a zodiac band, alluding to Ceres's predicament of the six months that her daughter will be in the Underworld and the other six months in the Earth, indirectly alluding to the creation of the seasons. At her feet are represented all the instruments needed to grow and care for the crops and vegetation: hoe, plow, rake, and shovel. In the representation of *Agriculture*, Ripa collected previous emblematic sources for his symbolic meanings of these agricultural tools, particularly for the signification of hoe and plow.



Figure 28. Cesare Ripa, *Agriculture*, woodcut from Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Padua: Donato Pasquardi, 1603/1630).

<sup>41</sup> Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Rome: Gio. Gigliotti, 1603; reprint, Padua: Donato Pasquardi, 1630), p. 25.

Ripa's intentions are benevolent regarding these tools assisting the betterment of the earth, and they bind together metaphorically for purposeful use. The meaning of the emblem is positive in Ripa's account. Hence, the rake gathers, perhaps similarly to how Vasari's rake pulls, but jointly, all the items, similar to the bride who "pulls" all her belongings from his father's house into her husband's home. Vasari undoubtedly anticipated the significance of Ripa's *Agriculture* to represent the symbolism of the rake in his house<sup>42</sup> (Cheney, 2008, pp. 35-45).



Figure 28. Cesare Ripa, *Agriculture*, woodcut from Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Padua: Donato Pasquardi, 1603/1630).



Figure 29. Paolo Giovio, *Impresa*, "Longo splendescit in usu. dom" (Long shines in use) from *Dialogo dell'impresie militari et amorose* (Lyon: Guglielmo Rovillio, 1559).

Ripa (1555-1622) follows the symbolic tradition of depicting agricultural tools for moral meanings. He appropriated the imagery from Paolo Giovio's *impresa* "Longo splendescit in usu. dom" (Long shine in use) in *Dialogo dell'impresie militari et amorose* of 1559 (Figure 29)<sup>43</sup> (Giovio, 1574, pp. 141-142). The metal blade (plowshare) is an iron farm tool used to till the soil. Giovio comments that the more the iron plow is used, the more it shines like silver. Giovio's *Impresa* features a plow with its motto aligning to the bright metallic coloration. The phrase compares the active use of a tool, the plow, in the soil with a person's active use of the human intellect. However, the emphasis in Giovio is not on the rake but on the plow, despite their similar function in preparing the soil for cultivation. The Spaniard Sebastian de Covarrubias Horozco's Emblema 71, *Ipsa utiles usu* (They have effective use) in *Emblemas morales*, is partially visually inspired by Giovio's *impresa*<sup>44</sup> (Horozco, 1610, pp. 171-172).

Ripa's *figurazione* of *Agriculture* was preceded by the description of the Italian humanist and mythographer Pierio Valeriano (1477-1560) on the plow as a successful tool for planting grains in *Hieroglyphica* of 1556<sup>45</sup> (Valeriano, 1625, p. 611, 640), and also by emblems of the French writer and emblem collector Claude Paradin

<sup>42</sup> Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Giorgio Vasari's and Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*: The Chamber of Fortune's Allegories of Virtues in the Casa Vasari," in *Exploration in Renaissance Culture* (Summer 2008), pp. 35-45.

<sup>43</sup> Giovio, S., 1574, *Dialogo dell'impresie militari et amorose*, pp. 141-142. Lyon: Guillaume Rouille.

<sup>44</sup> Sebastian de Covarrubias Horozco, *Emblemas morales* (Madrid: Louis Sanchez, Centuria II, 1610), pp. 171-172.

<sup>45</sup> Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, p. 354. Italian version Giovanni Pierio Valeriano, *I Ieroglifici overo Commentarii delle Occulte Significationi de gli'Egittij e altre Nationi* (Venice: Gio. Battista Combi, 1625), p. 611 and 640, on plow (*aratro*).

(1510-1573). His emblem on raking with the motto *Hac Virtutis Iter* (This is the way to virtue) in *Devises heroïques* of 1557 (Figure 30)<sup>46</sup> (Paradin, 1557, p. 7, 146, 1238), was duplicated with the same slogan *Hac Virtutis Iter* (This is the way to virtue) by the German poet and emblemist Gabrielis Rollenhagen (1593-1619) in his *Emblemata* of 1615 in an engraving (Figure 31)<sup>47</sup> (Rollenhagen, 1615, p. 26). The *pictura* of the landscape with a moral connotation recalls the visual medieval and Northern Renaissance tradition of harrowing the soil, that is to remove the dead straw and air the soil, as seen on another page in the *Book of Hours of Duke du Berry* of 1410 at the Musée Condé in Chantilly, representing the calendar page of the Month of October. The instrument used for agricultural labor shows a similar type of rake used in plowing, as described and visualized in the emblems (compare Figures 31, 32, and 34).

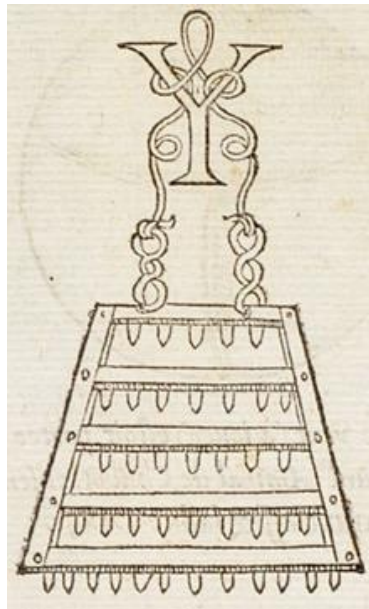


Figure 30. Claude Paradin, Emblem *Hac Virtutis Iter* (This is the way to virtue) engraving from *Devises heroïques* (Lyon: Jean de Tournes and Guillaume Gazeau, 1557).



Figure 31. Gabrielis Rollenhagen, Emblem *Hac Virtutis Iter* (This is the way to virtue) engraving from *Emblemata* (Arnhem: Zacharias Heyns, 1615).

<sup>46</sup> Claude Paradin, *Devises heroïques* (Lyon: Jean de Tournes and Guillaume Gazeau, 1557), p. 146b (p.7v, p. 1238).

<sup>47</sup> Gabrielis Rollenhagen, *Emblemata* (Arnhem: Zacharias Heyns, 1615), p. 26, designed by Ian Ianfzen.



Figure 32. Giovanni Ferro, Emblem Rake, *Evertit et acquit* (Extirpation and Acuity), engraving from *Teatro d'Imprese* (Venice: Giacomo Sarzina, 1623).

After the emblems of Paradin and Rollenhagen and Ripa's *figurazione* on plowing and raking, the Italian writer Giovanni Ferro (1582-1630) in the *Teatro d'Imprese* of 1623 represents an Emblem on *Rastrello* (Rake) with the Latin motto, *Evertit et acquit* (Extirpation and Acuity) referring to the rake that can pull up the rotten roots and plants to grow crops<sup>48</sup> (Ferro, 1623, pp. 304-305). Ferrero's comments about Pythagoras's notion of *Hac virtutis iter* (This is the way to virtue) was previously visualized by Paradin and Rollenhagen (compare Figures 30 and 31 with 32). The meaning of Ferrero's emblem reflects that virtue can be achieved through struggle or hard labor. With this tool, the farmer's instrument separates the straw, gathers the stones, breaks up the lumps, helps flatten the soil, and covers the planted seeds. Its two functions are to collect or gather, and to separate; in one way or another, the rake divides what has amassed or piled up. Ferrero's emblem is an adaptation of earlier emblems, such as Paradin's Emblem on *Hac Virtutis Iter* (This is the way to virtue) in *Devises heroïques* and Rollenhagen's Emblem *Hac Virtutis Iter* (This is the way to virtue) from *Emblematun*.

In *Devises et Emblemes* of 1691, the French emblemist Daniele de la Feuille (1640-1704) clearly illustrated a *pictura* of the rake as an emblem (Figure 34).<sup>49</sup> Feuille's motto, "It gathers that which was scattered," alludes to the rake's moral function of separating: preparing the soil for cultivation and removing unwanted weeds or other elements for the planting of seeds and cultivation. In the context of Vasari, the rake serves as a symbol of gathering and transporting goods, delivering a message of benevolent connection, and possibly foreshadowing the emblematic tradition (compare Figures 34 and 8d).

<sup>48</sup> Giovanni Ferro, *Teatro d'Imprese* (Venice: Giacomo Sarzina, 1623), pp. 304-305, Designed by Gaspard Grisपाल्दि.

<sup>49</sup> Daniele de la Feuille, Emblem, "It gathers that which was scattered," from engraving in *Devises et Emblemes* (Amsterdam: Heinrich Offelen, 1691), p. 12.



Figure 33. Limbourg Brothers, *The Month of October*, calendar page, Book of Hours of Duke du Berry (*Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*), 14102-1416. Musée Condé, Chantilly.



Figure 34. Daniele de la Feuille, Emblem, “It gathers that which was scattered,” from engraving in *Devises et Emblemes* (Amsterdam: Heinrich Offelen, 1691).

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