
Sala degli Elementi in Palazzo Vecchio: The Symbolism of Water

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“Simile cose non sone tutte della natura, nè tutte dell’arte, ma si hanno ambe due parte, aiutandosi l’una l’altra [come il corallo]” (Similar things are not all formed in nature or in art, but are formed by combining both parts, assisting one and the other [like the coral]).
Vincenzo Borghini, *Ragionamenti*^[1]

This essay examines how Giorgio Vasari created mythological paintings for private decorative cycles or *camera intellecta*,^[2] how he appropriated classical and emblematic imagery in his mythological paintings, and how he fused the humanistic and cultural pursuits of the sixteenth century. Vasari’s role in the redefinition of mythological paintings as history painting^[3] as part of the development of new formal conventions for secular decorative cycles is also discussed.

In his mythological paintings as well as in his writings, *Vite* and *I Ragionamenti* (Vasari, ed. Bettarini and Barocchi),^[4] Vasari relies on both visual and intellectual classical sources, revealing the influence of ancient writers such as Ovid, Pliny, and Vitruvius, as well as Renaissance writers such as Leon Battista Alberti, Giovanni Battista Adriani, Vincenzo Borghini, Annibale Caro, and Paolo Giovio. Moreover, Vasari’s assimilation of the classical tradition in mythological paintings derives from emblematic and mythographic sources such as Andrea Alciato, Vincenzo Cartari and Piero Valeriano, and his aesthetic theory is based on Marsilio Ficino’s Neoplatonic philosophy.

Vasari emerges as an artist with a profound humanistic interest. This is particularly true for his early decorative cycles, namely his house in Arezzo (1542-1554), which represents a prelude to Vasari’s later works, the decorative cycles for the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence (1555-1570). In his early decorative period, Vasari promotes artistic conventions by appropriating *all’antica* (emblematic, iconographical and artistic inventions), as

seen in the paintings of the Casa Vasari. Later, in his mature decorative period, Vasari expands on his earlier artistic conventions in a complex and fanciful visual and intellectual manner (Aakhus 185-206). With these artistic patterns in place, he transforms the concept of creating a mythological painting into a conceit depicting a history painting, as visualized in the *Sala degli Elementi* of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence.

In 1555, Cristofaro Gherardi assisted Vasari in designing and painting a mythological and cosmological theme in the *Sala degli Elementi*, an apartment of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici at Palazzo Vecchio (Fig. 1).



Figure 1: Giorgio Vasari, *Sala degli Elementi*, 1555, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence

The iconography, or program, for this room is such that the ceiling depiction relates to the *istorie* in the wall, which in turn relate to each other, forming not only a *camera picta* but also a *camera intellecta* with history paintings.

The *Sala degli Elementi*, or “Apartment of the Elements,” is dedicated to the four elements (air, earth, fire and water), which in antiquity were considered to be at the origin of the world or cosmos. Vasari personifies the four elements as a history painting theme, in the ceiling with oils and on the walls on fresco. The element of Air is found in a Venetian-like sunken ceiling, personified by several events. Its center is depicted with *Saturn Mutilating Heaven*; surrounding this scene are *The Chariots of the Sun and the Moon* and the images of *Day and Night*. In the corners of the ceiling reside the virtues of *Peace, Fame, Justice and Truth*.

On the walls of the chamber are personifications of the elements of Earth, Fire and Water. The frescoes on the left hand wall relate to the element of Earth. In the center of the scene, the first fruits of the Earth are offered to Saturn. On the adjacent wall above the fireplace is a scene relating to the element of Fire with the depiction of *Vulcan's Forge*. On the adjacent wall, the element of Water is symbolized with *The Birth of Venus*. And on the window wall are large niches containing simulated sculptures of Hermes-Mercury and Hades-Pluto, which thematically connect with the wall decoration of the elements and the pantheon of the gods in the ceiling and walls.

The frescoed wall decoration consists of an *istoria* placed in a rectangular format in the center of the wall. Adjacent to this rectangular format, two oval cartouches, heavily decorated in the *all'antica* manner, depict other stories associated with the *istoria* placed in the center of the wall. The bronze coloration of the cartouches and the gray colored ornamentation surrounding them are fictive recollections of ancient paintings. Below the rectangle format, a series of *dadi* contain narrations, connecting with the *istoria* in the center of the wall.

The focus of this essay is the history painting of one element in a wall of the room, The Element of Water or *The Birth of Venus* (Fig. 2).



Figure 2: Giorgio Vasari, *The Birth of Venus* (Element of Water), 1555, Sala degli Elementi, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence

This element faces the Element of Earth on the opposite wall, adjoins with The Element of Fire, and connects with the image of Mercury located opposite The Element of Fire. The connection of this frescoed wall (The Element of Water) and the wooden ceiling is noted by two depictions: *Saturn's Castration* (Fig. 3) in the center of the ceiling and *The Chariot of Diana* (Fig. 4), representing the Moon, in the sunken ceiling, just above *The Birth of Venus*.



Figure 3: Giorgio Vasari, *Saturn Mutilating Heaven*, 1555, Sala degli Elementi, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence



Figure 4: Giorgio Vasari, *The Chariot of Diana*, 1555, Sala degli Elementi, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence

In addition, framing *The Chariot of Diana*, the personifications of *Fame* and *Justice* reside in sunken octagonal frames in the corners of the ceiling.

Continuing with the classical and Renaissance tradition, Vasari appropriates for the female body as well as the scallop shell from the antique sources of Praxiteles' *Aphrodite*, Medici Venus and Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, whereas for the portrayal of Neptune and Thetis, both located at each extreme corners of the picture, Vasari relies on sarcophagi and mosaic imagery. It is of interest to note that Vasari is also adroitly recalling Cellini's salt shaker of 1560, for Francis I, King of France, which consists of the portrayal of the gods of the sea, Neptune and Amphitrite, who gift salt to human subjects. Amphitrite is a metaphor for the sea (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1:14). She is driving sea-horses (*hippocamps*), parading through the deep sea with fabulous creatures, such as Tritons and Nereids. In order to conquer her love, Neptune sends a Delphinus, her favorite sea creature, to entertain her, persuading

her to marry him. Victorious in this chore, Delphinus is awarded by Neptune when he requests from the Olympian gods his transformation into a constellation (Hyginus, *De Astronomia* and Hesiod, *Theogony* 240-43).

The Birth of Venus or *The Element of Water* reveals a complex symbolism of water associated with aquatic richness—fruits of the sea or “frutti di mare”—such as conches, corals, pearls and shells, which are the first offered by the sea gods to the newborn goddess, Venus (Draper, 20-2). The history painting of *The Birth of Venus* unveils its meaning in the following manner. In the center of the wall is the mythological *istoria* of the birth of Venus. The lateral oval cartouches framing the central *istoria* depict in an *all’antica* mode stories about the love between Venus and Adonis. Below the central wall, in the *dado* of the wall, inside the rectangular format are also *all’antica* designs depicting marine battles. The lintel below the central scene contains a dedicatory Latin inscription, acknowledging the patron: *Cosimo Medici, Floren. Dux.*

The symbolism reveals several levels of conceits associated not only with the political role of Cosimo I de’ Medici as Duke of Florence, then of Siena and ultimately of Tuscany, but also with the signification of his name, Cosimo as cosmos. Thus, these conceits are metaphors for the duke’s persona as a cosmic ruler (Rousseau, 124). The many levels of symbolism are connected with literary writings as well as *all’antica* imagery. Both manifestations reveal Vasari’s manner of, as well as Cinquecento’s taste for, combining mythology with alchemy and emblematic conceits in the pursuit of glorifying political power and aggrandizing artistic virtuosity.

Humanist writings of the time by Cosimo Bartoli, Alobrando Cerratini,^[5] and Vasari attest to this symbolic image of Cosimo I as cosmos, eulogizing and deifying the duke as the God Apollo, who rules the universe (van Veen, 31). The most significant primary source for decoding the meaning of the imagery is found in Vasari’s own writings, *I Ragionamenti*, as edited and published by Vincenzo Borghini, Cosimo Bartoli and Vasari’s nephew, after Vasari’s death in 1574.

In 1555, while writing *I Ragionamenti*, Vasari sought counsel from several humanists friends, all of whom were connected to the Medicean court of Cosimo I. Bartoli was a scholar on Boccaccio

and Dante, writing *I Ragionamenti accademici*, a critical commentary on Dante^[6] and instructing Vasari on the new Italian translation of Boccaccio's *Genealogie decorum gentilium* (*Della geneologia de degli Dei*).^[7] Borghini, a philologist, grammarian and historian as well as “spedalingo” of the Hospital of the Innocent, iconographically formulated most of the decorative cycles painted by Vasari in the Palazzo Vecchio. Adriani, a humanist, rhetorician and writer, was commissioned by Cosimo I to write a history of Florence (*Istoria dei suoi Tempi*) as a continuation of Guicciardini's historical view (Mazzucchelli 151). Adriani's knowledge of antiquity contributes to Vasari's *Vite* with an explanatory letter on the history of ancient art. These Cinquecento humanists and friends write extensive letters to Vasari projecting the iconographical program for many rooms in Palazzo Vecchio, in particular the *Sala degli Elementi*.^[8]

In *I Ragionamenti*, Vasari conceives of a new way to convey to his patrons and artists an explanation for the creation of his artistic programs and postulation of Cinquecento art theory. Using the Cinquecento dialogue format for articulating a fictive discourse between patron and artist, he provides a scenario in which he unveils the mystery of his program. In this dialogue, the patron is Francesco de' Medici, son of Cosimo I. The dialogue begins as Francesco de' Medici enters the *Sala degli Elementi* just as Vasari is resting from his painting labor (*fatica*): “They greet each other as friends, qualified by the natural distance of age and station.”^[9] *I Ragionamenti* is concerned with an explanation of the visual representation in the Palazzo Vecchio, and, in particular, Vasari's paintings. For Carden, “the Prince is made to ask a succession of perfectly inane questions in order that Giorgio, in answering them, may exhibit his knowledge” (Carden 133).

The explanations assist in decoding the complex literary, historical and symbolic nature of Vasari's imagery. Constructively and adroitly, Vasari engages the patron to entice the reasoning of questions not only about the imagery, but also about the *clavis interpretandi* of the image. The format is simple. First, there is brief description of the image by the painter, followed at times by a narrative comment from the artist or by an elaborate question from the patron. Then, the response to the patron's question further provides the meaning of the imagery by the artist. Thus, Vasari skillfully formulates his intentions about the creative history painting.

Vasari means by his *invenzione* a formulating the conceit of history paintings.^[10] The word *invenzione* encompasses the artist's conception or idea (conceit), which governs both the iconography and iconology of his work.^[11] Moreover, when Vasari uses *invenzione*, he means the intellectual and aesthetic innovation, either in formation of one image or a decorative cycle. Thus, in *I Ragionamenti*, Vasari explains the signification of the images, in particular, in the *Sala degli Elementi*.

In a short preamble before examining *I Ragionamenti* in connection with the *sala*, following Hesiod's *Theogony*, Vasari appropriately depicts in the ceiling of the *sala*, the Element of Air, revealing the castration of Saturn as a manifestation of the heavenly power and creation of the cosmos. These artistic conceits connect with the patron's persona, Cosimo, as an allusion of the duke's role in constructing a new Florence or a new Tuscany. Below in the wall, the Element of Water unveils the result of Saturn's divine action in the birth of Venus. This is another allusion to Cosimo's cosmic divine connection and earthly political aggrandizement.

In the composition depicting the element of Water or personifications of Water, Vasari conflates two mythological sagas associated with water: one is the birth of Venus, and the other is the governance of the sea by Neptune and Thetis. In the imagery, Neptune, son of Saturn, experiences a sea ceremony in honor of Venus' birth. The sea festivity is to celebrate Saturn's castration, which resulted in the creation of a beautiful "*frutto di mare*," Venus. Vasari depicts a sea ceremony where all the sea creatures manifest their joy for the arrival of Venus. Their rejoicing is expressed with multiple offerings of "*frutti di mare*," such as corals, pearls and conches, as well as lobsters, dolphins and other fish, in celebration of Venus's birth.

Vasari's description of the water's symbolism of the *Sala degli Elementi* in the *I Ragionamenti* assists in identifying the sea imagery in the fresco painting.^[12] In the dialogue, Vasari as the painter responds to the questions presented by the patron or prince:

Prince: What is this painting about?

G. I shall explain, Your Excellency. After the genitals of Father Heaven (Saturn) fell into the sea Venus was born. She stands on a seashell

and holds in both hands a veil that, blown by the wind, forms a circle over her head. The other woman who rises up on the sea in the rose chariot drawn by two horses is Dawn.

P. Who is the old man with the trident driving two sea horses?

G. That's Neptune, god of the sea. The nude female standing opposite Neptune is Thetis. The ones with their heads covered with weeds are the Tritons. Proteus, who is part horse and part fish, presents Venus with a shell full of pearls and coral. Glaucus offers her a dolphin and Palaemon brings coral and a lobster to her.

P. Who is the goddess with her back?

G. She is Galatea. Near her is Pistro, a very beautiful virgin, although a monster from the waist down. Leucotea is embraced by Pistro. While the Amphitrides offer shells, snail shells and mother of pearl to Venus. Further back are the Nereids, who are swimming to watch as all the sea gods and goddesses.

P. What ship is going by in the distance?

G. It is the ship Argus. On the shore the three Graces are waiting for Venus. On the water in the distance is the chariot of Venus, made ready by Amor and pulled by four white doves.

P. Now tell me what temple is that in the distance and who are those virgins and other people standing waiting and Watching on the shore?

G. These are the people of Cyprus waiting for the Goddess. The temple is the very rich and beautiful one at Paphos.

P. The only one left for you to explain is that large, rather disheveled figure, stretching out his arm in the front of the story.

G. He is the Terror of the Sea. Hearing the noise, he hurried over to see what was happening, and lifting his arm in sign of quiet, he commands the proud gods of the sea to be still while this goddess is born. (Vasari, ed. Milanesi, VIII)

Vasari further explains the symbolism of water in relation to this Medicean patron by stating

This whole interweaving of the elements of Water, it must be realized, pertains to the duke, who came in anticipation from heaven to the troubled waters of this sea of government and made them tranquil and quiet. He accomplished this difficult task by stilling the spirits of the populace, made so agitated by the winds of passion in their hearts, which were oppressed by their own selfish interests.^[13]

Vasari's *invenzione* in this *camera intellecta* on the symbolism of water through Venus' birth conflates as well several astral notions associated with alchemy and planetary and mythological references to the patron, Cosimo I Duke of Tuscany. Noting the duke's enthusiasm for alchemy, Vasari reveals in this *sala* a program that reflects not only the alchemical interests of the duke, but the duke's natal chart as well. The duke was born on June 12, 1519 at 9:00 p.m. under the zodiac sign of Gemini; this Mercurial astral influence is also accompanied by the planetary impact of Venus, a water element, and Saturn, an air element like Mercury. Although Mercury is Cosimo's astral birth sign and Gemini is his zodiac sign, the duke appropriates the sign of Capricorn to affiliate himself with the ancient Roman emperor Augustus and the present emperor Charles V, both of whom were born under the astral sign of Capricorn and the planetary governance of Saturn.

Vasari visualizes these astral combinations by depicting in the ceiling of the *sala* the mythological story of the Saturn's castration. Saturn is a personification of Air in the program as well as the creator of Venus, a personification of Water, seen in the wall below. Further, in another wall of the *sala*, Vasari depicts the image of Mercury. He attributes some of Mercury's virtues, such as shrewdness in commerce and medical power, to duke Cosimo I:

[Cosimo] who is very mercurial, for his ability in negotiating with eloquent men, for his knowledge like Mercury, of mineral wealth and of sophistry and for his delight in subtle talk and for the number of men with whom he has conversed. (Muccini & Cecchi 57)

Familiar with the writings of Pliny on gems and precious stones (Secondo 7-9), Vasari incorporates the rich display of aquatic minerals in his interpretation of the gifts or fruits of the sea from the marine gods to Venus on her birthday. Moreover, Vasari associates the symbolism of the "*frutti di mare*," the gems of the sea, such as corals and pearls, in the imagery of the Venus' birth,

with Mercurial divine and medicinal powers.^[14] Like the formation of Venus, Mercury, alchemically known as “liquid silver” because of the ability to amalgamate with metals, combines the bodily elements of blood, semen and water, which are essentially restorative and healing symbols of purification, heavenly blessings and spiritual energy (Drury 211). The gems of the sea, for example the pearl, also have medical powers connected with “the fortification of the living spirits that come from the heart” (Biedermann 260). In alchemy, the pearl is referred to as the “love pill” because it is produced from the foam of the sea (Biedermann 76). Like the coral, the pearl is a precious gem, because it is associated with the deity born from the sea, Venus, the Goddess of Love, the fairest of all divinities (Filipczak 117). The pearl is also associated with the sky because of its luster, luminosity and shape, and in particular the moon: it is not by accident that the Chariot of Diana is depicted above *The Birth of Venus*. Since antiquity the moon has been an attribute of the virgin goddess Diana (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XV, 196). This astral and nocturnal attribute is also connected to Venus, whose divine birth makes her the star of the sea, or *stella maris*.^[15] The coral as well is considered to be a precious gem. Coral, which is called the “tree of the sea” because of its twig- or vein-like shape (Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*), symbolizes the vividness of the marine world because of its red coloration. In alchemical texts, coral is viewed as *materia prima* because it forms from the ingredients of the sea including the foam, thus its colors of white or red (Biedermann 260).

The multilayer symbolism of water or sea as a mysterious element, a fluid, alludes to limitless of time and boundary in ancient symbolism. Alchemically, the element of water is the only substance on the planet that exists in “solid, liquid and gaseous states at the same time” (Bartlett 71). The symbolism of water is associated with the three aspects in the cosmos: source of life, purification and regeneration. Alchemically, these aspects are significant since they connect with the physical transformation of elements, e.g., water creates minerals, such as salts, pearls, and corals. In addition, the association of the water’s movements and natural aquatic changes are connected with the lunar aspect. In this alchemical manner, sea-water now is linked to the cosmic powers of the moon, transforming natural water into celestial water

(Bartlett 82). Vasari visually confirms this observation in the depiction of the *Chariot of Diana* above the *Element of Water*.

Furthermore, the movement of water and its substance allude to transformation and the emergence of a clean moral slate. Perhaps, indirectly, Vasari is alluding here to Cosimo's recent victory over Siena's prolonged and problematic war. With this conquest, Cosimo conquers the territory of Siena, which later will grant him the governance over Tuscany. Thus, at one level, the political level, the signification of the *Birth of Venus*' imagery alludes to the transformation, birth and expansion of Cosimo's governances in Tuscany. The "*frutti di mare*" are the fruits of the new political achievements and honors bestowed on him by Emperor Charles V. Thus, Vasari associates the influences and proclivities of the planets, such as Cosimo I's natal planets Saturn, Mercury (both considered elements of Air), and Venus (an element of Water), with his cosmic persona, destiny and role as a ruler.

In the imagery of *The Element of Water*, Vasari alludes as well to Ficino's Neoplatonic transformation of forms from descending to ascending mutations, from chaotic disorder to rational order, from substances to the metaphysical essence or inorganic matter to divine forms. The ascending movement starts from the *dado*, a chaotic realm, through the aquatic world, then a human realm, culminating a divine realm in the ceiling. In the *dado*, for example, in the bottom layer of the wall, Vasari visualizes the formation of chaos or low marine forms with the depiction of aquatic sea battles. Ascending a level, in the scene of Venus' birth, there are several layers of transformation, e.g., the sea monster and aquatic animals peacefully coexist while the marine gods do not battle, but provide the gifts of the sea such as corals and pearls, and dolphins and lobsters. Another level of mutation is the coexistence of the rulers of the sea, Neptune and Thetis. Concluding with the perfect mutation, Saturn's divine foam (sperm) that joins the sky and the sea with the bliss of a perfect form, Venus, the transformation from organic matter to divine essence is now complete. The last ascending level is the divine connection between Venus and Diana, the Moon Goddess, who provides celestial benefits to water through the oscillations and mutations of the moon.

These Neoplatonic mutations in and through the element of water allude to Cosimo I's psyche and persona as well as to his

sovereignty. In the painting, the duke's persona is under the influence of the Moon, Saturn, Mercury and Venus. These planetary gods guide his personal skills and attributes, and his successes are awarded by their astrological influence. Vasari visually parallels the duke's cosmic endeavors with the depiction the divine creation of Venus and her granted gifts by the deities. Cosimo I's ability to undertake the vicissitudes of his reign is manifested in the restoration of peace between Florence and Siena and his honorific appointment by Emperor Charles V as Duke of Tuscany. Vasari interprets these political actions visually, depicting how the planetary deities cast a favorable spell on the duke.

Scott Schaefer's extensive study on Vasari's iconology of the Francesco I's *Tesoretto* (1976), as expanded on by Valentina Conticelli (199-278), reveals the alchemical connection of the elements depicted in the *Studiolo* and *Tesoretto* at Palazzo Vecchio. In 1570, Vasari and his assistant paint this treasury room to house the gems, gold and other precious materials belonging to Francis I, Duke of Tuscany. Several years earlier, his father, Cosimo I, commissioned Vasari to paint the *Sala degli Elementi*, where the seeds for the iconography of the elements are established. Thus, the cosmological and magical qualities attributed to Mercury, Venus and Saturn are linked to Cosimo's persona as well as to his interests and pursuits in astrology, alchemy and gemology. In another dimension, Vasari's imagery attests to his *invenzione* for creating history paintings in a *camera intellecta* grounded in a Cinquecento culture.

Notes

1. A brief study on the symbolism of the coral was published in *Discovery* (1998): 2-5. A version of this essay was presented at the Sixteenth-Century Conference on Cinquecento Symbolism in Geneva, May 27, 2009. See Frey 2: 886-88, for Borghini's explanation of the iconographical program.

2. I coin the term “*camera intellecta*” to mean a room where walls and ceilings are populated with artistic, emblematic, mythological and philosophical conceits, a Cinquecento manifestation of invention (*invenzione*).

3. I define Vasari’s interpretation of “history painting” to mean a type of subject matter or visual representation emerging from Alberti’s *istoria* conceit and then fusing with Renaissance mythography, e.g., *The Allegory of Water* or *Birth of Venus* of the Sala degli Elementi in Palazzo Vecchio.

4. See Vasari, ed. Bettarini and Barocchi. See also, Vasari, ed. Milanese, vol 8. And in particular, Vasari, ed. Pecchiai, 3: 1022-1119.

5. For example, Vasari’s friend, Cosimo Bartoli, a humanist and advisor to Cosimo I, dedicates to the Duke *Ragionamenti Accademici* (Venice 1567). In the 1550s, the duke commissions Aldobrando Cerratini to translate into the Tuscan language Vergil’s *Aeneid*, where in Book IV, Anchises prophesies the reigns under the sign of Saturn in Latium and a Cosmo in the land of the Etruscan. See van Veen 31.

6. See Bartoli. cf. Bryce for an insight on this scholar’s life. See also Kliemann 157–208.

7. Giosepe Bettusi da Bassano translates Boccaccio’s Latin edition in 1553, which is published in Venice by F. Lorenzini da Turino.

8. See Frey I, for the content of five letters dating 1555-1556, including No. 220, which focuses on the ceiling decoration of the Sala degli Elementi, *The Castration of Father Heaven by Saturn*.

9. See Draper 19. The dialogue takes place in the palace, usually in front of the paintings. The dialogue’s tone is diplomatic and cordial. The artist always clarifies for the Prince the complex meaning of the paintings or program. At times, the dialogue focuses on recollections of historical events or stories about the

ancient gods. These recollections emphasize the symbolic content of the imagery.

[10.](#) See Alpers 190-215; Scorza 57-75, and Draper 21, for an interpretation of Vasari's concept of invention.

[11.](#) See Draper 21-22, who remarks, "*Invenzione* also implies the artist's way of expressing his idea, the design and composition of the image," as well as "The notion of interpretation is crucial since it involves symbolism, acknowledge of traditional images, and the cleverness of design so popular in Vasari's circle of artists and literati."

[12.](#) See Vasari, ed. Milanesi, VIII. The dialogue begins with recalling the death of Giorgio Vasari's assistant, Il Doceno, and ends with a thanksgiving for an enjoyable day:

Giorgio: These were painted by our Doceno dal Borgo. He excelled in this profession that, though dead, he deserves to be thought of as living by the world, since whoever knew him realizes that death stole him from this work too soon.

Prince: May God forgive him. His death is surely a loss. Now let's come to this wall standing Venus with a multitude of figures. I do not know that I have ever seen a more charming or better composed story. What is it about?...

Prince. Thanks to you, this is turning out to be a very pleasant day for me, because by hearing about and seeing these things, which are so lifelike and real, I can almost feel them in my hand. So much time would be needed to consider every detail but now proceed (if it is not tedious for you) to the wall with the fireplace, which is certainly very beautiful.

[13.](#) See Vasari, ed. Milanesi, VIII. Vasari's dialogue continues: My intention is not to appear to be trying to draw farfetched meanings about him in order to match the subject matter. For whoever understands, it is sufficient for me to point out only part of my invention since I am not trying to accommodate all the meanings appropriate to these stories.

Earlier, I have expressed the meanings openly. Below by the hunter Adonis and Venus, who contemplate and enjoy each other, we refer to the longing and love of their most illustrious Excellences, because never was there a lord who loved his lady more and who drove away more human beasts, full of vices, than this prince. And there are many other analogies that I omit in the interest of time.

[14.](#) Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* classifies the pearl among the products of the sea. Pliny 9. 53. On the generation of the pearl, see Pliny 9. 54.106-108.

[15.](#) I thank Dr. Brendan Cole, of Eton College, Windsor, England, for this suggestion.

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