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8. Crowe and Cavalcaselle on Botticelli: new results

Donata Levi

In a lecture on the 'Relation of Engraving to other Arts in Florence', given at Oxford in November 1872, Ruskin questions the very possibility of writing a history of painting in Italy:

Such a title is an absurdity on the face of it. For, first, you can no more write the history of painting in Italy than you can write the history of the south wind in Italy. The sirocco does indeed produce certain effects at Genoa, and others at Rome; but what would be the value of a treatise upon the winds which, for the honour of any country, assumed that every city of it had a native sirocco? But, further, – imagine what success would attend the meteorologist who should set himself to give an account of the south wind, but to take no notice of the north! And, finally, suppose an attempt to give you an account of either wind, but none of the seas, or mountain passes, by which they were nourished, or directed.¹

The target was Crowe and Cavalcaselle's *History of Painting in Italy*, a series of volumes published between 1864 and 1871² which, according to Ruskin, contained plenty of data of unequalled value, but was 'in fact only a dictionary of details relating to that history'. Ruskin was not alone in criticising Crowe and Cavalcaselle's works. Soon after the publication of these volumes a strong feeling arose against the historical-philological approach of the two scholars. Even more than from the connoisseurs (Giovanni Morelli and his friends and followers), the attack came from individuals, such as John Ruskin and Walter Pater who, thanks to their literary appeal, could address a larger audience.³

Again in 1875, in the third 'Morning in Florence', Ruskin criticised the 'rapturous' Crowe and the 'more cautious' Cavalcaselle for their scrupulous analysis of the state of conservation of Giotto's frescoes in the Bardi Chapel. To signal losses, interpolations and retouchings led to undermining the highly poetical and cultural meaning of the works. In Ruskin's view, actual authenticity differed from true authenticity, while a 'secure and wide knowledge of canvas, pigment, and tricks of touch' did not imply 'any knowledge whatever of the quality of the art itself'.⁴ In 1877, in his essay on *Giorgione and his School*, Pater dismissed the 'new

Vasari' for having 'scrutinized thread by thread' the painter's reputation: 'all is not done when the real and the traditional elements in what concerns him [Giorgione] have been discriminated; for, in what is connected with a great name, much that is not real is often very stimulating'.⁵

As Paul Tucker has remarked, in advancing his critique Ruskin was rather thinking of a history of art as 'a form of mythography, in which the art of the past is "retold" as moral deposition'⁶, while Pater inclined to interpret traditional imagery mythically in a sort of crystallisation of memory.⁷ However, both of them were opposed to Crowe and Cavalcaselle's painstaking collection of data based both on archival sources and on visual evidence – and to their constant, though implicit, effort to point out the complex web of influences between painters, thus eroding the Vasarian scheme of the lives.

Within this framework the case of Botticelli is paradigmatic. The somewhat troublesome presence of Crowe and Cavalcaselle's chapter on the artist is evident both in Pater's essay on Botticelli (published in 1870) and in the passages of Ruskin's works dealing with the painter, such as *Ariadne Florentina* and *Fors Clavigera*.⁸ Moreover, the mention in these texts of the *New History of Painting in Italy* is strictly connected with the *Lives*: for better or worse, Vasari and the so-called 'new Vasari' play an important and intertwined role in the new, mythological or evocative re-evaluations of Botticelli. For Ruskin, Vasari represents the apparent untruthfulness, but in reality, the deeper truth of the tradition (or myth), and for Pater Vasari's text is a sort of palimpsest or point of departure for further elaboration (for example on Botticelli and his illustrations of Dante, and on the famous painting by Francesco Botticini for Matteo Palmieri). For both writers Crowe and Cavalcaselle's new accounts of the painter, and of the history of painting in general, fail to penetrate into the real values of the artist's experience and so to make them either an emblem of a spiritual attitude or a source of a peculiar appreciation. Pater's opposition between 'general criticism' ('that sort of interpretation which adjusts the position of these men to general culture') and 'mere technical or antiquarian criticism' is transparent.⁹

Obviously, modern criticism has paid more attention to the innovative and much more evocative interpretations of Ruskin and Pater than to the apparently dry remarks of Crowe and Cavalcaselle. However, the latter constituted at the time the most detailed account of Botticelli ever published since Vasari. Before 1864 no analytic study of the painter existed, except for the comments and additions to Vasari's *Life* in the Le Monnier edition:¹⁰ in this some paintings not mentioned by Vasari had been added to the artist's catalogue¹¹ and one of the editors, Carlo Pini, had

corrected the erroneous attribution to Ghirlandaio of the Uffizi *Adoration* from the church of Santa Maria Novella.¹² Although (as Laurence Kanter has remarked) Crowe and Cavalcaselle ‘found it difficult to justify even the relative importance assigned to Botticelli by Vasari’ and clearly did not appreciate the artist’s ‘restless and disquieting poetry’,¹³ their account provided a narrative which included the results of new visual researches and provided the basis for successive art-historical studies.¹⁴

My aim here is first to go deeper into this account, searching for the sources used by the two scholars in their construction of Botticelli’s biography and pointing out, in general, how they read Vasari in comparison with the approaches of Ruskin and Pater. Then I will follow the revisions of Botticelli’s chapter, both in Crowe’s reworking of it for an article which was published in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in 1886¹⁵ and in Cavalcaselle’s Italian edition of the *History* (1894).¹⁶ The comparison will allow me to outline the two art historians’ reactions to the new evaluations of Botticelli’s work in contemporary art criticism, during a time span which is of peculiar importance for the assessment of the artist.

As far as the construction of the chapter on Botticelli is concerned, one can refer to the huge archives left by Cavalcaselle and Crowe, respectively to the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice¹⁷ and to the National Art Library in London. The latter has been recently greatly increased with new correspondence (mainly from Crowe to his publishers) and more than 20 boxes containing sketches, engravings, photographs, drafts, transcripts from various sources, biographical notes, letters, newspaper cuttings, pamphlets, etc.¹⁸ Given the way in which Crowe and Cavalcaselle worked together, the materials of the two archives complement one another. It is to be hoped that in future an integrated inventory will give easy access to documentation which, in addition to throwing new light on Crowe’s and Cavalcaselle’s activities as such, provides a comprehensive survey of the medieval and Renaissance art heritage in Europe between the 1850s and 1880s. Thanks to these working papers it is possible to trace the progressive accumulation of materials, and their elaboration with related doubts, hypotheses and approximations, which led to the composition of the chapter on Botticelli. Obviously I will limit myself to a few significant examples.

One case is provided by Cavalcaselle’s notes on the *Saint Sebastian* in the Berlin Gemäldegalerie, taken during his European journey of 1852 (fig.3.1).¹⁹ It may serve as an example of how their research proceeded. The painting had been attributed to Pollaiuolo, ‘Schüler des Andrea del Castagno’, according to Waagen’s *Verzeichniss* of 1845,²⁰ and Cavalcaselle diligently writes down inventory number and attribution, adding ‘*grande intelligenza anatomica*’ and singling out the details of the feet resting on the



Fig. 3.1 G. B. Cavalcaselle (1819–97), from S. Botticelli, *Saint Sebastian* (Berlin, Gemäldegalerie), Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, cod.It. IV 2037 (= 12278), notebook 15, c.80v. © Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice.

trunk. Later he added some remarks about the feet (*si angolare disegno alla Pollajuolo*) and a first reference to Botticelli regarding the *‘testa un poco alla Botticelli’*, a name which is a moment later denied: *‘ma non è Botticelli – svelto, bello nella mossa’*. Cavalcaselle then hazards a guess: *‘sia Castagno?’* Finally, possibly after having studied some paintings in the Accademia in Florence, either *Primavera* or the *Coronation of the Virgin*,²¹ but in any case following his return to Italy in 1857, he writes down decidedly the name of Botticelli.

It is curious, however, that in the *New History* this painting is not integrated into the narration of Botticelli’s early artistic life; it is mentioned only in the chapter on the Pollaiuolo, although with the right attribution and supported by a comparison with the *Fortitude*.²² Though Crowe and Cavalcaselle adopted, at least in the *New History*, a biographical scheme, they seemed much more interested in tracing connections and links between artists than in reconstructing an artistic personality.

The next example is taken from a notebook regarding Rome, most probably written in 1859. At that time Cavalcaselle had already returned to Italy, after his long exile in Great Britain. John Murray, the well-known London publisher, together with Charles Eastlake and Henry Layard, had asked him to update Vasari’s *Lives* and sent him to Italy to collect new materials. One port of call was Rome, where Cavalcaselle studied the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel. In this case he made no sketches, only notes: *‘Pieno di forza et di animazione’* was his comment on the *Destruction*

of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.²³ Rather more eloquent was the comment on the *Temptations of Christ*:

Very fine the group of around the priest – recalling Filippino Lippi in the Uffizi²⁴ – seated and standing figures and I see here a proof that the painting in the little room in the Uffizi which had first been given to Ghirlandaio²⁵ is by Botticelli. Some point of contact with Signorelli – in the arrangement of the hair and the clothes and even the types[...] One of Sandro's fine [works] – there is movement and animation – the finest by Botticelli here.²⁶

Just a fleeting, neutral note was devoted to the fresco representing *The Temptation of Moses* ('*dà da bere alla pecora*'; 'he is giving water to the sheep'), but not a single word on Zipporah, the figure who so greatly intrigued Ruskin and, through him, Proust.²⁷

As shown by these notes, Cavalcaselle was mainly interested in defining affinities of style and in detecting resemblances among different works in order to produce trustworthy catalogues of painters. In the process, simple hypotheses could be confirmed while single intuitions might later be rejected. This is the case of a painting representing *Tobit and three Archangels*, now at the Uffizi and attributed to Francesco Botticini. In the *New History of Painting*, Crowe and Cavalcaselle mentioned the work in a footnote in the chapter devoted to the Pollaiuolo, as a picture from their workshop 'of a rude and dull colour'.²⁸ By contrast, sketching the painting presumably at the beginning of the 1860s, Cavalcaselle had been very careful to signal the affinities with Botticelli in the '*ombre verdette*' and '*ombre scure*' of the faces of two of the Archangels, which apparently led him to the provisional conclusion: '*ecco da dove viene Botticelli*' (fig.3.2).²⁹

Through doubts, hypotheses and approximations, notebooks and single sheets show a systematic method of research that was carried on all over Italy and in many European museums and private collections. It involved every kind of painting, from celebrated works attested by Vasari down to workshop products: Botticelli 'filled the peninsula with productions originally feeble and now rendered more so by time and restoring', the two authors remarked.³⁰ The visual evidence was then matched with the literature on the artist in order to give shape to Botticelli's biography. Among the London papers, there is a short summary in Crowe's handwriting of the passages on the painter from Carl von Rumohr's *Italienische Forschungen* (1827). From this text he borrowed concepts such as 'vigour of expressing passions', 'effervescence of passions and unhesitating action', 'feeling for grace of position', the idea of the frequent repetition of types and themes, the

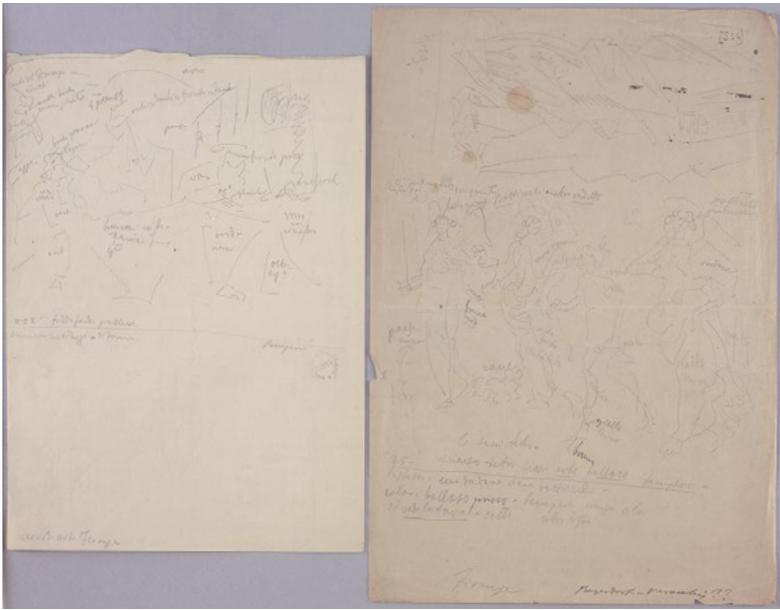


Fig.3.2 G. B. Cavalcaselle, from F. Botticini, *Tobit and three Archangels* (Florence, Uffizi), Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, cod.It. IV 2030 (= 12271), 16, c.334. © Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice.

‘fine cut of the eyes’, as well as the ‘vulgarity of form in the cheeks, chin and jaw’. All were concepts that nurtured the image of ‘vehemence’ and ‘activity’ which characterises Botticelli’s art, according to Crowe and Cavalcaselle.³¹

Along with this summary, there is a draft of the chapter on Botticelli, written by Crowe and commented on by Cavalcaselle;³² it is one of the main examples of their close collaboration. This draft is heavily based on Vasari’s *Life*, but at the same time shows a critical reading of that text and an attempt to translate it into a stylistic (or morphological or formalistic) discourse. For example, Crowe and Cavalcaselle commented on Vasari’s observation that Botticelli had been apprenticed in a goldsmith’s shop and noted (in a telling mixture of Italian and English languages) that there ‘was in this age a great domesticity & quasi continua pratica between orifici et painters’. The comment is then exploited so as to create a more general framework to fit Botticelli’s education:

We have spoken of influence of sculpture & orificeria, the latter even at a given time absorbing sculpture & we have the orificeria drew painting along with it into its shop. The results of this in Pollaiuoli & Verrocchio and we have said all the painters up to Ghirlandaio issue

from oraf. shops. In Pollaiuoli & Verrocchio painting was treated as a subordinate matter. We shall see that Botticelli in preference to sculpture and orficeria spent his time chiefly in painting.³³

This framework is then further enlarged to consider the 'exhaustion' on the part of Fra Filippo of the system (or 'technic', as Crowe writes) begun by Fra Angelico:

It became necessary for following men to seek out fresh branches to the path. We have seen the efforts made towards improvements of method & chemistry of art in Baldovinetti & Pollaiuoli. Donato Uccello etc. striving in perspective of form, each of them with their failings. Having this framework before us the tendency of the time and of art at the time of Botticelli's birth, it is natural that he a man of talent as we shall find a man of an impetuous vehement character should so to say personify the entire condition of the art at his time.³⁴

A critical and detailed reading is also given of Botticelli's apprenticeship with Filippo Lippi, whose influence is examined in Madonnas, such as the Madonna of the Magnificat at the Uffizi: 'Botticelli in part continued these subjects of Madonnas of Fra Filippo rendered in a new phase with a conjunction of the earth and the heavens. Maternity, affection in celestial scenes'.³⁵ Vasari is constantly on their desk, but his assumptions are made use of, scrutinised and also critically considered. For example, Crowe and Cavalcaselle discuss Vasari's praise of the cogitation and acute subtlety of the Ognissanti St. Augustine, but rather notice its:

vehemence impetuosity force boldness frankness of execution, life in all parts which are remarkable showing the stamp of the man the vulgarity amongst other which is in all Botticelli's works and which has something of the Castagno and Pollaiuolo & from which Verrocchio was not free.

But at the same time they also add: 'Vasari who looked at art in the direction of form may have been right because as art and metier Botticelli is more skilled and at that time was superior'.³⁶

The critical, balanced and sober reading of a historical text such as Vasari's is what mainly distinguishes Crowe and Cavalcaselle's method from the more ideological approaches of Ruskin and Pater. Crowe and Cavalcaselle were not accustomed to theorising. Their point of view is thus best expressed by a German art historian who can be considered as

their spokesman. Max Jordan, who undertook the German translation and edition of their volumes,³⁷ explained their attitude towards Vasari in what may be described as a pre-review of the *New History of Painting in Italy*. This piece was published in 1864, some months before the publication – and possibly in order to induce the reluctant John Murray to print the first two volumes on painting in Central Italy without waiting for the third, which was to deal with North Italy and was indeed published in 1871. Jordan's article, significantly entitled *Vasari der Andere*, was published in *Die Grenzboten* – a periodical that embodied the political and literary tendencies of German liberalism.³⁸ Jordan explained that, though the *Lives* had a limited value in an absolute sense, they had an important relative value (*'unersetzlichem Belang'*): 'every piece of historical research may gain an excellent corrective and a certain guarantee of accuracy when it can take its starting point from a source you know from the outset you need to examine with a sceptical attitude'.³⁹

Such a perspective, he added, was inherent in the significance of all historical sources, to the *'Literatur aller historischen Disciplinen'*. To stress a common approach to sources meant to assimilate art history to the other, more established, historical disciplines. Jordan considered Crowe and Cavalcaselle's history of painting to be an example of a non-instrumental, respectful, but sceptical approach to Vasari's *Lives*; he could therefore affirm the importance of a work which aimed to be a 'completion and fulfillment' (*'Vollendung und Erfüllung'*) of Vasari, a Vasari 'inspected, newly worked, established and enriched with amazing literary apparatus' (*'gesichtet, neu durchgearbeitet, festgestellt und mit erstaunlichem literarischen Apparat bereichert'*) on the basis of accurate examinations of the art objects themselves. While insisting on Crowe and Cavalcaselle's treatment of historical sources, Jordan pointed to the status of art history as a discipline: more than any other historical discipline, art history needed the 'police protection' (*'polizeilichen Schutzes'*) of a definite and accepted methodology. He therefore hoped for a new status for the art historian as a historian, to be contrasted with either an amateurish or a merely scholarly approach. This claim was fulfilled by Crowe and Cavalcaselle's work:

[...]certainly it deprives us of some cherished beloved illusions about alleged facts in the history of art and of the artists, but it enriches and deepens our knowledge, our intuition and our judgment to such an extent that all conventional complaints about 'disintegrating criticism' or 'sober intellectual tyranny', which similarly precise works tend to elicit, become childish chatter.⁴⁰

Crowe and Cavalcaselle's *New History* was soon translated into German and edited by Max Jordan. Some additions were included which, however, left the structure of Botticelli's biography unchanged. The volume was published in 1870, the same year in which Walter Pater's article on Botticelli strove to distil from the artist's oeuvre 'the peculiar sensation' and 'the peculiar quality of pleasure, which his work has the property of exciting in us, and which we cannot get elsewhere'.⁴¹

What were the reactions of the two art historians to the new evaluations of Botticelli's work in contemporary art criticism? In 1886 Crowe contributed an article on Botticelli for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* and in 1894 Cavalcaselle published the volume containing the chapter on Botticelli in the Italian revised edition of *A New History of Painting*. Both men tried, in different ways, to supplement their rather meagre 1864 account with a richer narrative framework. Crowe in particular begins his article by delineating, on the basis of a recent Italian publication,⁴² the contrast between Leonardo and Michelangelo: this was only a pretext for introducing Botticelli, who had been mentioned with equal deference by both artists.⁴³ Botticelli is now, according to Crowe, the painter who is capable of leading us into the 'atmosphere' of the Florentine court, in which the superb Lorenzo the Magnificent ambiguously protected both religious tradition and the free thinking of the Renaissance.

The main facts of Botticelli's activity and the main features of his style and technique are taken from the 1864 text in a slightly different order, but they are rendered in a more conversational, vivacious and light manner. Neither Ruskin nor Pater is ever mentioned. Only faint, indirect echoes of the new attitudes towards the painter can be detected and these remain on the surface or work at a general level, as a sort of inevitable patina of modernisation. A significant case may be cited, in relation to *The Birth of Venus* (fig. 1.0). In 1864, in spite of new appreciations already expressed by critics (the brothers de Goncourt) as well as by artists (Gustave Moreau and Edgar Degas),⁴⁴ Crowe and Cavalcaselle had disposed of the picture in few sentences:

Florence. Uffizi. First Corridor n.31. Allegory of the birth of Venus. The goddess issues from a shell which is driven to the shore by two flying allegories of the winds. Life size. The figures are a little out of balance. The picture originally belonged to the Medici and was painted for Cosimo's villa of Castello.⁴⁵

After Pater's deeply inspiring interpretation of the painting, Crowe felt obliged to give it a more detailed consideration which, however, is

based on academic criteria and a commonplace visual vocabulary. For example, he defines the *'formes'* of the goddess as *'sveltes et gracieuses, admirables dans le torse, les bras et les mains, trop grêles dans les chevilles et les pieds'* ('slender and graceful features, praiseworthy in the torso, arms and hands, too spindly in the ankles and feet') and criticises the promontories in the background for their lack of perspective. Pater's 'thin lines of foam' with their related image of the sea 'showing his teeth' become *'des méandres angulaires d'un parti pris tout à fait arbitraire'* ('angular twists of an arbitrary choice') by which *'le clapotement des vagues est bizarrement indiqué'* ('the lapping of the waves is oddly depicted').⁴⁶ Crowe's final remark on the similarity of types between Venus and the Madonnas and between *Primavera* and the angels of some Annunciation reminds us of Walter Pater's observation of the recurrence of the same figure types in Botticelli's paintings. However, it is totally devoid of the exemplary meaning it had for Pater as emblematic of Botticelli's peculiar character.

If Crowe was somewhat susceptible to the suggestions of the new trend, Cavalcaselle's rigorous and painstaking work to expand and refine Botticelli's catalogue is evidence of his essential indifference to the contemporary debate, and of his enduring effort to develop a 'positivistic' historical method in art history. Thirty years had elapsed since the publication of the *New History of Painting* and the figure of Botticelli had changed considerably in common opinion. In his *Introduction* to the 1908 monograph on Botticelli Herbert Horne referred to a peculiarly English cult of Botticelli, adding that around the 1880s Botticelli 'grew to be a catch-word among persons for whom early Italian art could never possess any real significance'.⁴⁷ Yet the taste for the Florentine artist does not seem to have affected the general interpretation of him offered in Cavalcaselle's Italian edition of the *New History*. The scheme remained essentially the same as in 1864, but the connoisseur systematically added a great number of paintings which he classified as works executed in the shop or under Botticelli's influence. He enriched the footnotes with references to recent publications, to historical sources other than Vasari, such as Albertini, and to archival documents (mainly from Gaetano Milanesi). Above all, he paid much attention to technical issues and to conservation, pointing out restorations and retouchings.

In the Italian milieu this apparently outdated approach appeared to Cavalcaselle to be instrumental for strengthening both the status of art history as a discipline and its role in the preservation of the national art heritage. Therefore, it is with a deep sense of loss that he mentioned the acquisition of the Villa Lemmi frescoes by the Louvre in 1882. They

had been discovered in 1873 and Cavalcaselle had seen them before they were cut out of the wall by Stefano Bardini, restorer and art dealer, who later sold them to Pierre-Paul Both De Tauzia. Cavalcaselle regretted not only the export of the frescoes from Italy, but also the material deterioration caused by their detachment from the wall and the loss of their original setting.⁴⁸ He seems to echo both Ruskin, who in one of the lectures in *The Art of England* (1883) had denounced the damage caused by the transport and subsequent repainting of the figures,⁴⁹ and Vernon Lee, who had expressed her annoyance and disapproval concerning this removal of the frescoes from their original site.⁵⁰ However, it is unlikely that Cavalcaselle knew their writings. On the one hand, the accurate observation of the state of conservation of the paintings had been a constant feature of his studies since the beginning of his career. On the other, the rule of not removing works of art from their original site was among the guidelines he himself had contributed during his time at the Ministry of Public Education.

Cavalcaselle, especially in the last year of his life, appears to have been an isolated figure. He was unaffected even by the harsh attacks launched against him and Crowe by Giovanni Morelli. In the particular case of Botticelli, in the *Storia* Cavalcaselle seemed not to care about Morelli's criticism;⁵¹ he generally confirmed his previous attributions, ignored Morelli's opinions and simply added to Botticelli's catalogue those few paintings that his rival had discovered. The Madonna Chigi had gone unnoticed in the *New History*, but, after Morelli's brief mention of it in his studies on the Borghese and Doria Pamphili collections,⁵² Cavalcaselle described it at length in the *Storia* for the first time.⁵³ It is possible that psychological motives led Cavalcaselle to avoid sparring with so able a polemicist as Morelli. However, his behaviour was also in tune with a different approach to connoisseurship:⁵⁴ an approach which did not aim at apodictic opinions, cloaked by so-called 'scientific' evidence, but was based on hypotheses, constantly questioned and verified, and framed by an embryonic awareness that, as in the case of Vasari's text, sources (including visual ones) had to be scrutinised sceptically.

A final example may be useful to demonstrate the complexity of the factors that came together to delineate Botticelli's artistic personality, in the context of developments at play in the last years of the nineteenth century: the practice of connoisseurship, the reception of Vasari and the role of historical tradition, the new aestheticism, the intellectual dialogue among scholars. The painting in question is *The Assumption of the Virgin* painted for Matteo Palmieri, now in the National Gallery, London and attributed to Francesco Botticini.⁵⁵ Described at length by Vasari as a work

by Botticelli, it had found no place in the *New History* because Crowe and Cavalcaselle had not yet seen the painting, then in the collection of the Duke of Hamilton.⁵⁶ A year after the publication of the *New History*, on his visit to Scotland in 1865, Cavalcaselle studied the picture and made a rough sketch of its composition (fig.3.3).⁵⁷ It was inserted in the German edition of 1870 as one of the ‘*lebenvollsten und hervorragendsten seiner Gemälde*’ (‘liveliest and most outstanding of his paintings’).⁵⁸

In that same year the *Assumption*, together with the illustrations to Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and *The Birth of Venus*, was to be the cornerstone on which Pater erected his image of Botticelli. In 1886 Crowe, too, hastened to insert a description of the painting, which had in the meantime been purchased by the National Gallery, in his article for the *Gazette*. However, also in 1886 Wilhelm Bode put forward his doubts about the authorship of the Palmieri painting and proposed to attribute it to the so-called ‘Meister des Rossi Altars’.⁵⁹ In the Italian edition of the *New History* Cavalcaselle quoted Vasari’s passage at length; he added a plain, objective description of the representation without comment or appraisal, but also did not mention Bode’s new attribution.⁶⁰ In my opinion he did not know of

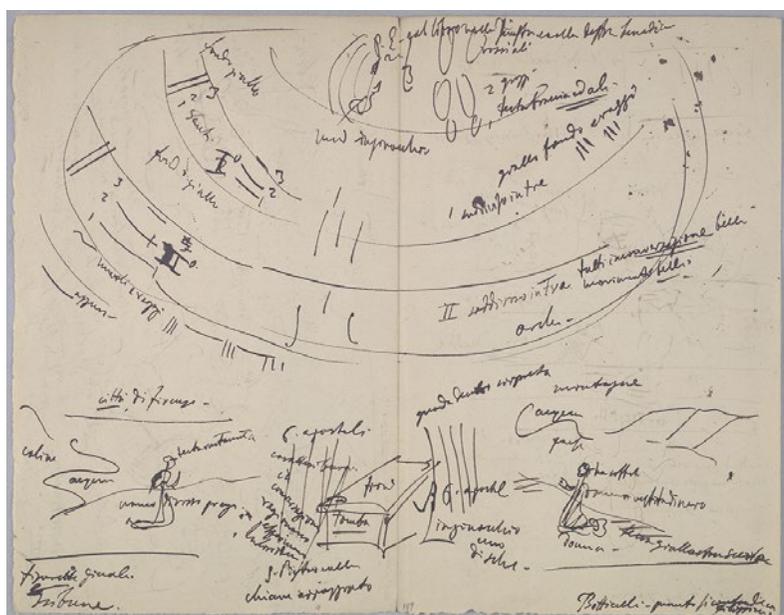


Fig.3.3 G. B. Cavalcaselle, from F. Botticini, *The Assumption of the Virgin* (London, National Gallery), Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, cod.It. IV 2033 (=12274), XXII, cc.186v–187r. © Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice.

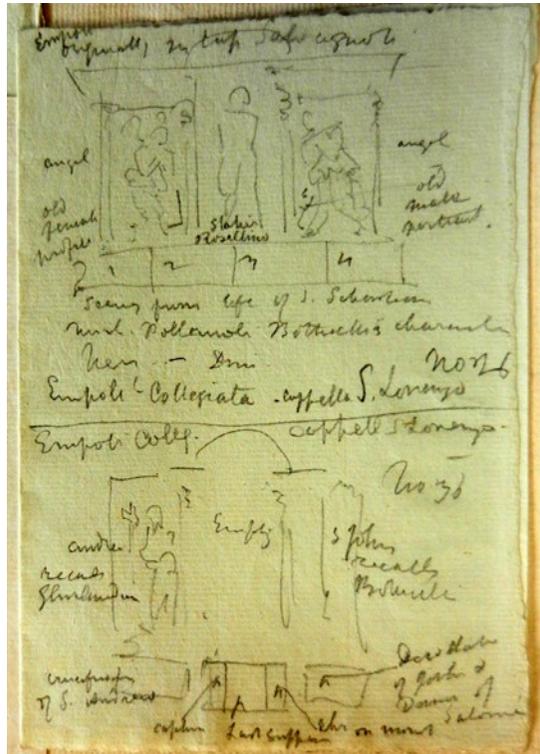


Fig.3.4 J. A. Crowe (1825–96), from F. Botticini, *Tabernacle of St Sebastian* (Empoli, Museo della Collegiata), London, National Art Library, 86.ZZ.33, box 1. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Bode's article,⁶¹ and he was perhaps too inclined towards Vasari (and – through Crowe – too intimidated by Pater's success) to exclude the painting from Botticelli's oeuvre; but it is also possible that he and Crowe were moving towards a different solution.

Their rough sketches and notes in the London and Venetian archives, presumably made during the 1880s, are evidence of the pair's never-ending interest in what in 1864 they had defined as that 'series of pictures of more or less merit whose character proclaims them to have issued from the hands of men subordinate to Filippino Lippi and Botticelli, who may have been of a wandering class of assistants assuming the style of their temporary masters without possessing talent sufficient to entitle them to an independent position as first rate artists'.⁶² On that occasion Cavalcaselle and Crowe had listed the two tabernacles of St Sebastian and of the Sacrament and the Annunciation in the Museo della Collegiata of Empoli. After repeated visits and further studies on the spot in 1883

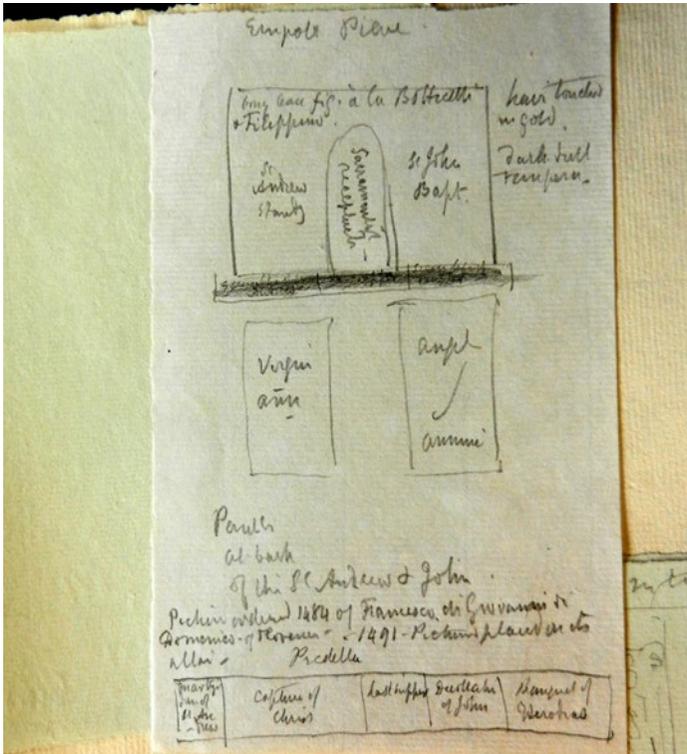


Fig.3.5 J. A. Crowe, from F. Botticini, *Tabernacle of the Sacrament and Annunciation* (Empoli, Museo della Collegiata), London, National Art Library, 86.ZZ.33, box 1. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

and 1886 (figs 3.4 and 3.5),⁶³ and thanks to the new archival documents published by Gaetano Milanesi,⁶⁴ they succeeded in giving a name to the author of these paintings: it was that of Francesco Botticini,⁶⁵ to whom the Palmieri *Assumption* was also attributed shortly afterwards by August Schmarsow.⁶⁶ Through the researches of a host of connoisseurs, one of the cornerstones of Pater's interpretation of Botticelli had thus been pulled down. But, as Pater himself had written, 'in what is connected with a great name, much that is not real is often very stimulating'. And in 1908 Herbert Horne was ready to admit that, in spite of the mistaken attribution of the Palmieri altarpiece, Pater's essay 'remains the subtlest and most suggestive appreciation of Botticelli, in a personal way, which has yet been written'.⁶⁷ To paraphrase Aby Warburg, the contrast between an 'unremitting feeling for documentary evidence' – to which one should also add visual evidence – and 'an element of scholarly imagination' or fantasy remains a methodological issue up until our own days.⁶⁸

Notes

- 1 Published as separate issue in December 1873 and with the other 1872 Michaelmas term lectures under the title *Ariadne Florentina* in 1876; now Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, ed., *The Works of John Ruskin XXII* (London: George Allen, 1906), 337–8. The subject of the course had been announced as ‘Sandro Botticelli and the Florentine Schools of Engraving’.
- 2 Joseph Archer Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, *A New History of Painting in Italy from the Second to the Sixteenth Century* (London: John Murray, 1864–6) and *A History of Painting in North Italy* (London: John Murray, 1871). For a general overview of Cavalcaselle and Crowe see Donata Levi, *Cavalcaselle. Il pioniere della conservazione dell'arte italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1988).
- 3 See especially Ivan Lermolieff [G. Morelli], *Die Werke italienischer Meister in den Galerien von München, Dresden und Berlin. Ein kritischer Versuch von Ivan Lermolieff. Aus dem Russischen übersetzt von Dr. Johannes Schwarze* (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1880). On Morelli's circle see Jaynie Anderson, ‘Dietro lo pseudonimo’, in Giovanni Morelli, *Della pittura italiana. Studi storici-critici. Le Gallerie Borghese e Doria Pamphilj in Roma*, ed. Jaynie Anderson (Milan: Adelphi Edizioni, 1991), 493–578, *passim* and Donata Levi, ‘Fortuna di Morelli: appunti sui rapporti tra storiografia artistica tedesca e inglese’, in *La figura e l'opera di Giovanni Morelli. Studi e ricerche II* (Bergamo: Biblioteca Civica Angelo Mai, 1987), 19–54. For Ruskin see [notes 1](#) and [4](#).
- 4 Cook and Wedderburn, *The Works of John Ruskin XXIII*, 337–8 and 410. See Donata Levi, ‘Esigenze di autenticità fra dichiarazioni di principio e pratica di intervento: Cavalcaselle ad Assisi’, *Studi di Memofonte* 7 (2011): 1–13, especially 1–3.
- 5 Walter Pater, ‘The School of Giorgione’, *Fortnightly Review* 22 (October 1877): 526–38, then included in the third edition of *The Renaissance. Studies in Art and Poetry* (1880). Quoted from Walter Pater, *The Renaissance. Studies in Art and Poetry*, with an Introduction and Notes by Kenneth Clark (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1961), 139.
- 6 Paul Tucker, ‘“Reanimate Greek”. Ruskin and Pater on Botticelli’, in *Walter Pater. Transparencies of Desire*, ed. Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins and Carolyn Williams (Greensboro: ELT Press, 2002), 119–32, quotation at 121.
- 7 Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, 139: ‘Giorgione thus becomes a sort of impersonation of Venice itself, its projected reflex or ideal, all that was intense or desirable in it crystallising about the memory of this wonderful young man’.
- 8 Tucker, ‘“Reanimate Greek”’, 129–31.
- 9 Pater, *The Renaissance*, 77.
- 10 Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti*, (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1849), vol.V, 110–27.
- 11 Vasari, *Le Vite*, V, 123–7. However, some of these paintings were erroneously attributed to Botticelli, such as the series of the *Triumphs* by Jacopo del Sellaio (Fiesole, Museo Bandini).
- 12 Vasari, *Le Vite*, V, 116.
- 13 Laurence Kanter, ‘Alessandro Filipepi, called Botticelli’, in *Botticelli's Witness: Changing Style in a Changing Florence*, exh. cat., ed. Laurence Kanter, Hilliard T. Goldfarb, James Hankins (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1997), 21–7, quotation at 22.
- 14 Herbert Horne (*Alessandro Filipepi commonly called Botticelli Painter of Florence* [London: George Bell & Sons, 1908; repr. Florence: Spes, 1986–7], xx) admitted that ‘although the chapter on Botticelli added much to our knowledge of the painter, it is not one of the more fortunate portions of the book’.
- 15 Joseph Archer Crowe, ‘Sandro Botticelli’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* XXXIV (1886): 177–87 and 466–75.
- 16 Joseph Archer Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, *Storia della pittura in Italia dal secolo II al secolo XVI, V: Pittori fiorentini fin poco dopo la prima metà del secolo XV* (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1894), 203–310.
- 17 A selection of sketches was exhibited in Venice in 1973 (Lino Moretti, *G. B. Cavalcaselle. Disegni da antichi maestri*, with a preface of Rodolfo Pallucchini (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1973). See also Donata Levi, ‘Per un progetto di pubblicazione della versione italiana della “History of Painting in North Italy”’, in Anna Chiara Tommasi, ed., *Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle conoscitore e conservatore* (Venice: Marsilio, 1998), 11–21.
- 18 London, National Art Library, 86.ZZ.198 (Crowe family: papers and correspondence), 86.ZZ.19–29 (Manuscripts of *A New History of Painting in Italy* and of the *History of Painting in*

- North Italy), 86.ZZ.30–3 and 40–1 (Notes on pictures in continental collections), 86.ZZ.42–3, 49 and II. RC.H.18–23 (Notes on Raphael and manuscript of *Raphael, his Life and Works*), 86.ZZ.44 and 47–8 (Manuscripts of Titian, *his Life and Times*), 86.ZZ.45–6 (Notes on the Italian schools of painting, chiefly medieval and upon the early Christian and medieval mosaics in Italy), 86.ZZ.50 (Notes on pictures in the National Gallery, South Kensington Museum, and provincial galleries), 86.ZZ.51–5 (Notes on Italian Painters), 86.ZZ.56 (Notes on Dutch and Flemish, and a few German and French Painters).
- 19 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, cod.It. IV 2037 (= 12278), notebook 15, c.80v.
 - 20 Gustav Friedrich Waagen, *Verzeichniss der Gemälde-sammlung des königlichen Museums zu Berlin* (Berlin: W. Moeser und Kühn, 1845), 361.
 - 21 Both of them are now in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence.
 - 22 Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *A New History*, 396.
 - 23 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, cod.It. IV 2036 (= 12277), notebook 13, c.61v.
 - 24 Either the *Adoration of the Magi* (1496) or 'Pala degli Otto' (1486), most probably the former.
 - 25 The reference is to the Uffizi *Adoration*.
 - 26 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, cod.It. IV 2036 (= 12277), notebook 13, c.62r.: 'Bellissimo il gruppo attorno il sacerdote – ricorda Filippino Lippi agli Uffizi – figure sedute ed in piedi e qui vedo la prova che il quadro nello Stanzino degli Uffizi è di Botticelli che prima era dato a Ghirlandaio. Qualche punto di contatto con Luca Signorelli – nelle acconciature di cappelli ed abiti ed anche tipi ... Uno dei belli di Sandro – vi è movimento ed animazione – la più bella qui di Botticelli.'
 - 27 Cynthia J. Gamble, 'Zipporah: a Ruskinian enigma appropriated by Marcel Proust', *Word & Image* 15.4 (Oct.–Dec. 1999): 381–94.
 - 28 Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *A New History*, 397.
 - 29 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, cod.It. IV 2030 (= 12271), 16, c.334.
 - 30 Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *A New History*, 423.
 - 31 London, National Art Library, 86.ZZ.46, c.1593; C. F. von Rumohr, *Italienische Forschungen II* (Berlin und Stettin: Nicolai'schen Buchhandlung, 1827), 272–3.
 - 32 London, National Art Library, 86.ZZ.46, cc.1569–99.
 - 33 London, National Art Library, 86.ZZ.46, c.1569.
 - 34 London, National Art Library, 86.ZZ.46, c.1570.
 - 35 London, National Art Library, 86.ZZ.46, c.1572.
 - 36 London, National Art Library, 86.ZZ.46, c.1571.
 - 37 Joseph Archer Crowe, Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, *Geschichte der Italienischen Malerei*. Deutsche Original-Ausgabe besorgt von M. Jordan (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1869–76).
 - 38 Max Jordan, 'Vasari der Andere', *Die Grenzboten. Zeitschrift für Politik und Literatur* XXIII, 3 (1864): 481–95 and XXIII, 4 (1864): 18–32.
 - 39 Jordan, 'Vasari der Andere', 481 ('Denn es giebt jeder historischen Forschung ein treffliches Correctiv und eine gewisse Gewähr der Richtigkeit, wenn sie ihren Ausgangspunkt von einer Quelle nehmen kann, zu welcher sie sich von vorn herein skeptisch verhalten zu müssen weiß').
 - 40 Jordan, 'Vasari der Andere', 483–4 ('freilich entzieht es uns manche mit Vorliebe gehegte Illusion über angeblichen Sachverhalt in der Geschichte der Kunst und der Künstler, aber es bereichert und verschärft unsre Kenntniß, unsre Anschauung und unser Urtheil in solchem Maße, daß alle herkömmlichen Lamentos von "zersetzender Kritik" oder "nüchterner Verstandestyrannie", wie sie derartigen exacten Arbeiten zu begegnen pflegen, zum kindischen Geschwätz werden').
 - 41 Pater, *The Renaissance*, 77.
 - 42 Camillo Boito, *Leonardo e Michelangelo. Studio d'arte* (Milan, Naples and Pisa: Ulrico Hoepli, 1879).
 - 43 Interestingly Pater too had introduced his essay on Botticelli with a reference to Leonardo's mention of the Florentine painter.
 - 44 See the following contributions to *Botticelli Reimagined*, exh. cat. (London: V&A Publishing, 2016): Ruben Rebmann, 'Botticelli Enters the Museum: The Rediscovery of a Painter and the Invention of the Public Art Museum', 50–5, esp. 54, and Gabriel Montua, 'Botticelli's Path to Modernity: Continental Reception 1850–1930'. On the appreciation of Botticelli on the part of British artists, such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones, see Susanna Avery-Quash, 'Botticelli and Victorian Art Collecting', 68–74, esp. 70, and Elizabeth Prettejohn, 'Botticelli and the Pre-Raphaelites', 76–81.
 - 45 Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *A New History*, 423. In the draft quoted above (c.1581) they had even described one of the figures as 'out of balance'.
 - 46 Crowe, 'Sandro Botticelli', 184–6.
 - 47 Horne, *Alessandro Filipepi*, xix.

- 48 Cavalcaselle and Crowe, *Storia della pittura* V, 262: Lorenzo Orsini, *Per un catalogo critico degli affreschi staccati da e per Stefano Bardini* (unpublished MA thesis), University of Florence, 2017-18, 79-83.
- 49 Cook and Wedderburn, *The Works of John Ruskin* XXXIII, 313-14.
- 50 Vernon Lee, 'Botticelli at the Villa Lemmi', *The Cornhill Magazine* XLVI (July-Dec. 1882):159-73.
- 51 Ivan Lermolieff [Giovanni Morelli], *Kunstkritische Studien über Italienische Malerei. Die Galerien Borghese und Doria Panfili in Rom* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1890), 107-12.
- 52 Lermolieff, *Kunstkritische Studien*, 106.
- 53 Cavalcaselle and Crowe, *Storia della pittura* V, 285.
- 54 Donata Levi, review of 'I taccuini manoscritti di Giovanni Morelli by Jaynie Anderson', *The Burlington Magazine* CXLIV, 1188 (March 2002): 170-1.
- 55 Jennifer Sliwka, *Visions of Paradise. Botticini's Palmieri Altarpiece* (London: National Gallery Company, 2015).
- 56 Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *A New History of Painting*, 429.
- 57 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, cod.It. IV 2033 (=12274), XXII, c.3.
- 58 Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *Geschichte der Italienischen Malerei*, 166.
- 59 Wilhelm Bode, 'Die Ausbeute aus den Magazinen der K. Gemäldegalerie zu Berlin', *Jahrbuch der königlich preussischen Kunstsammlungen* VII (1886): 226-43, quotation at 233-4.
- 60 Cavalcaselle and Crowe, *Storia della pittura* V, 209-11.
- 61 Cavalcaselle still considers Lorenzo Dugolino de' Rossi as the author, not as the patron, of the Rossi Altarpiece in Berlin which had been examined in Bode's article (Cavalcaselle and Crowe, *Storia della pittura* VII, 130).
- 62 Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *A New History of Painting*, 452-3.
- 63 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, cod.It. IV 2032 (=12273), XXI and National Art Library, 86.ZZ.33, box 1.
- 64 Vasari, *Le Vite*, IV, 245-50; the documents were also published in *Il Buonarroti*, s. III, II, 10 (1887), 333 and in Gaetano Milanesi, *Nuovi documenti per la storia dell'arte toscana dal XII al XV secolo per servire d'aggiunta all'edizione del Vasari edita da Sansoni nel 1885* (Florence: G. Dotti, 1901).
- 65 Cavalcaselle and Crowe, *Storia della pittura* VII, 114-20.
- 66 August Schmarsow, *Italienische Malerschulen in der Londoner Nationalgalerie*, in *Festschrift zu Ehren des Kunsthistorischen Instituts in Florenz, dargebracht vom Kunsthistorischen Institut der Universität Leipzig* (Leipzig: Verlag von A. G. Liebeskind, 1897), 122-42, especially 125-6; the article had published in *Nationalzeitung*, Berlin, 19-26 August 1887 (see also Hermann Ulmann, *Sandro Botticelli* (Munich: Verlaganstalt für Kunst und Wissenschaft, vormals Friedrich Bruckmann, [1893]), 75-6.
- 67 Horne, *Alessandro Filipepi*, xix.
- 68 Caroline Elam, 'Herbert Horne's Botticelli', in *Botticelli Reimagined*, 94-100, esp. 100.