

# 'Creations of the professor's fertile mind' – August Hagen's artists' novels

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## Introduction

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, the genre of artists' novels and theatre plays was flourishing in Germany. The ground for romantic admiration of artists had been prepared by programmatic publications like Heinrich Wilhelm Wackenroder's *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* [Outpourings of an art-loving friar] (1797) and Ludwig Tieck's *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* [Franz Sternbald's Journeying Years] (1798).<sup>1</sup> Both Wackenroder and Tieck became acquainted with the Vasarian tradition of artist *vite* while studying at Göttingen university under Johann Domenico Fiorillo, the first ever professor of the history of art in Germany. Their studies in Fiorillo's private seminars took place in 1794 – a moment in time that has been described as the initial point for early German Romanticism in literature.<sup>2</sup> At first influenced by a romantic reading and understanding of Giorgio Vasari's *Vite*, artists' novels soon developed into a popular medium for introducing the history of art and its latest findings to a wider public. One of the most prolific authors in this field was August Hagen (1797–1880), one of the earliest professors of the history of art and aesthetics at Königsberg University, who published a series of popular historical novels on the subject of artists' lives. He re-wrote and novelised the biographies of famous artists like Albrecht Dürer, Lorenzo Ghiberti, Michelangelo Buonarroti and Giorgio Vasari himself, but also of their lesser known contemporaries. In the process of writing, he resorted to the same sources he would have consulted in his profession as an art historian – yet embellished them with his blooming fantasy. Between 1829 and 1869, the Prussian professor published five artists' novels or *Künstler-Geschichten* [Artist-Stories], as he called them. While his first and most successful novel *Norica, das sind Nürnbergische Novellen aus alter Zeit* [Norica: or tales of Nürnberg from the olden time] (1829)<sup>3</sup> describes the city and artists of Nuremberg in the times of Albrecht Dürer, all his other novels are set in Italy: *Die Chronik seiner Vaterstadt vom Florentiner Lorenz*

<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck, *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*, Berlin: Johann Friedrich Unger, 1797; Ludwig Tieck, *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen. Eine altdeutsche Geschichte herausgegeben von Ludwig Tieck*, 2 vols, Berlin: Johann Friedrich Unger, 1798.

<sup>2</sup> See Silvio Vietta, 'Die Entstehung der Romantik aus dem Geist der Göttinger Universität', in *Renaissance in der Romantik. Johann Dominicus Fiorillo, Italienische Kunst und die Georgia Augusta. Druckgraphik und Handzeichnungen aus der Kunstsammlung der Universität Göttingen*, Manfred Boetzkes, Gerd Unverfehrt and Silvio Vietta, eds, Hildesheim: Römer Museum, 1993, 12–7.

<sup>3</sup> August Hagen, *Norica, das sind Nürnbergische Novellen aus alter Zeit. Nach einer Handschrift des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols., Breslau: Josef Max und Komp., 1829.

*Ghiberti* [The chronicle of his hometown by the Florentine Lorenzo Ghiberti] (1833)<sup>4</sup> gives insight into occurrences in fifteenth-century Florence, *Wunder der h. Katharina von Siena* [Miracles of St Catherine of Siena] (1840)<sup>5</sup> is a portrait of sixteenth-century Siena, featuring artists like Sodoma, Baldassare Peruzzi, Domenico Beccafumi, Bartolomeo Neroni and Giacomo Pachiarotti, while the last two novels, *Leonhard da Vinci in Mailand* [Leonardo da Vinci in Milan] (1840)<sup>6</sup> and *Acht Jahre aus dem Leben Michael Angelo Bonarroti's* [Eight years from the life of Michelangelo Buonarroti] (1869)<sup>7</sup> are set in the social and artistic environment of those great artists, however without making them the protagonists of the plot.

The first two *Künstler-Geschichten* had been written in a time still imbued with a romantic admiration of the artist's personality, and praised by critics as a romantic approach to their times and lives. At the same time, the history of art as an academic discipline evolved and underwent fundamental changes. Carl Friedrich von Rumohr (1785–1843) set new standards for the modern history of art scholarship with his three volumes of *Italienische Forschungen*, published between 1827 and 1831 and based on archival studies and the critical evaluation of documents.<sup>8</sup> When Ludwig Schorn (1793–1842) and Ernst Förster (1800–1885) published the first annotated translation of Vasari into German between 1832 and 1849, the Italian father of art history became accessible to a wider public.<sup>9</sup> In the foreword to the first volume, Schorn pays tribute to Rumohr's *Italienische Forschungen*, as they had helped solve important questions concerning Italian art history: Rumohr 'has been the first to demonstrate the only correct way that history of art can be redeemed from errors and preconceived opinions'.<sup>10</sup> In Italy, Luigi Lanzi wrote the *Storia pittorica dell'Italia* that was translated and reissued several times throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> While over the intervening years, art historical knowledge thus slowly became accessible to a growing audience, disapproval of Hagen's romantic novels rose. This paper follows the genesis and reception of Hagen's *Künstler-Geschichten* that had been written, read and reviewed against the background of changes and developments in the history of art as a discipline.

<sup>4</sup> August Hagen, *Die Chronik seiner Vaterstadt vom Florentiner Lorenz Ghiberti, dem berühmtesten Bildgießer des fünfzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols., Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1833.

<sup>5</sup> August Hagen, *Die Wunder der h. Katharina von Siena*, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1840.

<sup>6</sup> August Hagen, *Leonhard da Vinci in Mailand*, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1840.

<sup>7</sup> August Hagen, *Acht Jahre aus dem Leben Michael Angelo Bonarroti's nach Berichten von Georg Vasari*, Berlin: Guttentag, 1869.

<sup>8</sup> Carl Friedrich von Rumohr, *Italienische Forschungen*, 3 vols. Berlin/Stettin: Nicolai, 1827–31.

<sup>9</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Leben der berühmtesten Maler, Bildhauer und Baumeister von Cimabue bis zum Jahr 1567*, 6 vols, Ludwig Schorn and Ernst Förster, eds, Stuttgart and Tübingen: Cotta, 1832–49.

<sup>10</sup> Ludwig Schorn, 'Vorrede des Herausgebers', Vasari, *Leben*, vol. 1, XVI: '[...] welches eine Reihe der wichtigsten Fragen der italienischen Kunstgeschichte durch urkundliche Forschungen erörtert und zuerst den einzig richtigen Weg gezeigt hat, wie eine von Irrthümern und vorgefaßten Meinungen gereinigte Kunstgeschichte zu Stande gebracht werden könne'.

<sup>11</sup> Luigi Lanzi, *Storia pittorica della Italia dal risorgimento delle belle arti fin presso al fine del XVIII secolo*, 3 vols (in 2), Bassano: Remondini, 1795–96.

## The Prussian Professor



Figure 1 *Ernst August Hagen* (1797–1880), ca. 1870, photo/carte de visite, taken at Königsberg. (photo: bpk/H. Prothmann)

Even though almost forgotten today, August Hagen [fig. 1], born in 1797, held one of the first chairs in the history of art in Germany, at the Prussian university at Königsberg. His literary ambitions showed early: while still a student, he had already published the romantic poem *Olfried und Lisena*, that found Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's approval.<sup>12</sup> Later he built connections with the romantic poet Ludwig Tieck at Dresden and Friedrich Wilhelm Thiersch at Munich.<sup>13</sup> Together with Thiersch, he had been travelling in Italy between 1822 and 1823. The journey brought him to Florence and Rome, where he stayed for some time and joined the Prussian circles of the historian Barthold Georg Niebuhr and diplomat Christian Karl Josias von Bunsen and met numerous artists and scholars. This period of travelling had a great impact on his academic as well as on his literary career, considering that he did not return to Italy again.<sup>14</sup> In 1824 he started lecturing on the history of art, aesthetics and literature at Königsberg university, being appointed to *Extraordinarius* in 1825 and full professorship (*Ordinarius*) in 1831. Hagen was well connected and maintained close contact with other art historians such as Franz Kugler at Berlin and Carl Schnaase at Düsseldorf, and became friends

<sup>12</sup> August Hagen, *Olfried und Lisena. Ein romantisches Gedicht in zehn Gesängen*, Königsberg: Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1820. On Hagen's biography, see N., 'Hagen, Ernst August', *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, 55, 1910, 770–1 and Christiane Fork, 'Hagen, Ernst August', in *Metzler Kunsthistoriker Lexikon. Zweihundert Porträts deutschsprachiger Autoren aus vier Jahrhunderten*, Peter Betthausen, Peter H. Heist and Christiane Fork, eds, Stuttgart and Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 1999, 139–40.

<sup>13</sup> Ernst Heinrich von Hagen, *August Hagen. Eine Gedächtnisschrift zu seinem hundertsten Geburtstag 12. April 1897*, Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn, 1897, 69–74, 79.

<sup>14</sup> Hagen, *Eine Gedächtnisschrift*, 79–100.

with Wilhelm Schadow, artist and director of the Düsseldorf academy. Hagen tried to establish the still very young discipline of art history at his university, though the town was feared to be too remote to be attractive for students and scholars.<sup>15</sup> Far from being discouraged by the circumstances, he continued promoting and supporting the arts at Königsberg by, amongst other initiatives, founding the university's print collection and organizing exhibitions of paintings by contemporary artists like Eduard Bendemann, Carl Blechen, Caspar David Friedrich, Julius Hübner and Wilhelm Schadow.

Hagen published an impressive number of papers and studies as an art historian, cautiously avoiding the subjects of his novels. For his research, he had access to the university's library as well as to a large and well-assorted private library that contained a formidable number of volumes on history, theatre, literature and history of art.<sup>16</sup> His repertoire ranged from studies on the history of theatre in Prussia to equestrian statues and monuments as well as paintings by Cranach and German nineteenth-century art.<sup>17</sup> He spoke about the Italian artists of the Renaissance only in his public lectures. These talks were mainly attended by artists and women (rarely by any students) and took place in the university's print room, using the collection for illustration. Contemporaries described these lectures as vivid oral sequels to his *Künstler-Geschichten*.<sup>18</sup>

## The first novels

According to its foreword, Hagen's first novel, the *Norica*, was supposed to be a carefully modernised transliteration of a manuscript, recently discovered at the library of Königsberg University in the handwritten journal of merchant Jacob

<sup>15</sup> Heinrich Dilly, 'Ernst August Hagens Sinecure', in *Konzert und Konkurrenz: die Künste und ihre Wissenschaften im 19. Jahrhundert*, Christian Scholl, Sandra Richter and Oliver Huck, eds, Göttingen: Universitätsverlag, 2010, 71–91, 73, 87.

<sup>16</sup> Hagen's library was sold at Stargardt/Berlin in 1881: *Bibliothek des geh. Reg.-Raths August Hagen, weiland Professor an der Universität Königsberg*, sales catalogue, 3 vols, Berlin: J. A. Stargardt, 1881. The volumes allow the reconstruction of the major part of his library.

<sup>17</sup> August Hagen, *Geschichte des Theaters in Preußen: vornämlich der Bühnen in Königsberg und Danzig von ihren ersten Anfängen bis zu den Gastspielen J. Fischer's und L. Devrient's*, Königsberg: Dalkowski, 1854; August Hagen, *Ueber Reiterstatuen in Bezug auf das in Königsberg zu setzende Denkmal Friedrich Wilhelms III. Eine Vorlesung, in der K. deutschen Gesellschaft gehalten*, Königsberg: Voigt, 1844; August Hagen, *Ueber eine Composition: Gesetz und Gnade von Lucas Cranach dem älteren. Zum Andenken an den vor 300 Jahren am 16. October 1553 in Weimar verstorbenen Meister. In einer öffentlichen Versammlung in Königsberg vorgetragen*, Königsberg: Gebrüder Bornträger, 1853; August Hagen, *Die deutsche Kunst in unserem Jahrhundert. Eine Reihe von Vorlesungen mit erläuternden Beischriften*, 2 vols, Berlin: Schindler, 1857.

<sup>18</sup> 'Von allen Lehrern an unserer Albertina erfreute August Hagen sich der größten Popularität durch seine publice in der akademischen Kupferstichsammlung Jahr aus Jahr ein gehaltenen und hauptsächlich von der Damenwelt sehr besuchten, gediegenen Vorträge über hervorragende Maler und Bildhauer der klassischen, italienischen Periode, eine vom Munde zum Ohre gepflegte, fortlebende Fortsetzung seiner oben angeführten *Künstler-Geschichten*'; from the obituary in the *Königsberger Allgemeinen Zeitung*, 43: 20, January 1880, cited after Hagen, *Eine Gedächtnisschrift*, 237.

Heller from Frankfurt, contemporary to Albrecht Dürer and patron of the so-called Heller-altarpiece (1507–1509).<sup>19</sup> In the alleged journal, Jacob Heller describes his journey to and sojourn at Nuremberg in the early sixteenth century. On the first day of his stay he attends the procession for Saint Sebaldus, where he catches sight of a fair blonde girl and immediately falls in love with her. Soon he finds out that she is a poor orphan, called Maria Rosenthalerin. Later she turns out to be the foster daughter of sculptor Veit Stoß and illegitimate daughter of Willibald Pirckheimer. This love story serves as a narrative thread through the book, where Heller meets everybody of note in the arts in Nuremberg during Dürer's lifetime. The *Norica* was highly successful throughout the nineteenth century with seven editions between 1830 and 1897 and several more in the early twentieth century. The book was also translated into English and published by John Chapman in London in 1851<sup>20</sup> – with mixed reactions: the reviewer from *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* called it

(...) a mass of rather trashy German stories, prosy legends concerning uninteresting saints, and overwrought eulogiums on the virtues of certain builders, carvers, modellers, and artists with very unpronounceable names, in whose society Jacob Heller revelled intensely, and whose presence seems to him to convert Nürnberg into paradise. (...) The mixture of fact and fiction in such a work as this is not well judged. Every word relating to the greatest of German painters should be true, in order to rivet the attention of real lovers of scientific research.<sup>21</sup>

Contemporary artists read and drew inspiration from the *Norica*, as proven by a small painting by the Nuremberg artist Johann Andreas Engelhart (1802–1858). In 1833, Engelhart painted a small panel, depicting the workshop of Albrecht Dürer [fig. 2].<sup>22</sup> While the long-haired artist is working on the painting of the *Assumption of the Virgin* for the Heller-altarpiece, a shy blonde maiden is acting as his model. Journeymen follow their duties in an adjoining room, visible through an open door. A young and elegantly dressed nobleman is standing almost intimately close to Dürer, looking over the artist's shoulder. It is not clear, however, if he is looking at the unfinished painting or if he has more an eye for the girl, who seems embarrassed by the stranger's gaze. Even though the constellation of characters is quite self-explanatory, its literary or legendary source has not been identified until

<sup>19</sup> The central panel of the *Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin* was lost in a fire in 1729, a copy by Jobst Harrich from 1615 today at the Historisches Museum Frankfurt am Main, Inv. B 265. See Jochen Sander and Johann Schulz, '»Wil ich noch etwaß machen, das nit viel leut khönnen machen.« Dürer und der Heller-Altar', in *Dürer. Kunst – Künstler – Kontext*, Jochen Sander, ed., Frankfurt am Main: Prestel, 2013, 218–33, cat. 8.

<sup>20</sup> August Hagen, *Norica: or tales of Nürnberg from the olden time. After a ms. of the sixteenth century*, London: John Chapman, 1851.

<sup>21</sup> N.N., 'Norica; or, Tales of Nürnberg from the Olden Time (...) (review), *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, May 1852, 312; another review on the English translation: N.N., 'Norica; or, Tales of Nürnberg' (review), *The Westminster Review*, January 1852, 153.

<sup>22</sup> Johann Andreas Engelhart, *Albrecht Dürer in his workshop (Jacob Heller visiting Dürer in his workshop)*, 1833, oil on wood, 28,5 x 33 cm, Kunstmuseen Krefeld, Inv. GV 1929/175.



Figure 2 Johann Andreas Engelhart, *Albrecht Dürer's workshop at Nuremberg (Jacob Heller visiting Dürer in his workshop)*, 1833, oil on wood, 28,5 x 33 cm, Kunstmuseen Krefeld (photo: Krefeld, Kunstmuseen Krefeld)

recently.<sup>23</sup> The young man is wearing a sword, the privilege of noblemen, and should therefore not be interpreted as another artist or one of the pupils. He can be identified as Jacob Heller, the protagonist of Hagen's novel. The whole setting of the painting is an almost literal interpretation of the author's prose. Hagen describes the scene, depicted in this little painting, at length. Heller pays a visit to Dürer to check on the progress of his panel. He is shown around the house and finally led into the studio, where he is overwhelmed to see that his beloved girl is acting as a model for his *Virgin of the Assumption*:

So we went downstairs; and when Dürer politely opened the door for me, my eyes were arrested, not by the picture, but by the Rosenthalerin herself. She cast her eyes modestly down, and greeted me so respectfully, that my heart warmed towards her. Dürer, to my sorrow, led me away on one side to the picture, and asked me, whether the head and the attitude of the Virgin were not improved, as he had that day worked them over again from the maiden who served him as a model. (...) But how could I admire the copy in the painting, when the original stood before me? I quickly turned back to the beautiful maiden, and thanked her that she allowed her beauty to be immortalised in my picture, and said many flattering things to her, which caused her much embarrassment. I should now have told her all that was in my heart, and have put an end to my pain, had not Dürer, who thought himself bound to protect the silent young thing, said "My good Herr Heller,

<sup>23</sup> The painting's subject has first been identified by the author. See Michael Thimann and Christine Hübner, eds, *Sterbliche Götter. Raffael und Dürer in der Kunst der deutschen Romantik*, exhib. cat., Kunstsammlung der Universität Göttingen, Göttingen, 19 April 2015–19 July 2015, Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2015, 284–7, cat. 60 (Christine Hübner).

do not make the maiden blush. Now dear, go home; and give my greeting to your old father".<sup>24</sup>

In this episode, Dürer is not acting as the leading character. He seems to be playing the minor part of the fatherly and kind friend to Jacob Heller, anxious about the emotional distress of the girl. In large parts of the story, Hagen had been weaving in biographical details and well-known anecdotes. In the seventh chapter of the second volume, Jacob Heller is present at Dürer's house during the visit of Tommaso di Bologna, a pupil of the Italian painter Raphael.<sup>25</sup> The stranger delivers a letter, engravings and drawings as gifts from his master. By this invention, Hagen is able to introduce not only first-person narratives of Dürer's travel to Venice and the famous forgery-case involving Marcantonio Raimondi, but also Raphael's *certa-idea*-letter, which in the novel is not addressed to Baldassare Castiglione but to the Nuremberg Master himself:

You will herewith receive, among other things, the head of a Madonna, which I have made use of in an altarpiece for the church of St. Sixtus at Piacenza [= the Sistine Madonna, today in Dresden]. As good hints and beautiful women are alike rare, I follow a certain idea which pervades my mind. Whether this is in any degree answer to the elevation of art, I know not. Cease not to love me, as I with my whole heart love you. Your devoted Raphael Sanzio.<sup>26</sup>

By letting Raphael mention the *certa idea* ('certain idea') in close connection to a drawing of the head of the Sistine Madonna, Hagen reveals himself as somebody who has internalised the romantic ideas, established by Wackenroder in the *Herzensergießungen*. In the latter's narration of *Raphael's Vision*, the quotation 'I follow a certain idea which pervades my mind' is coupled with the tale of the Virgin appearing to the artist in his dream. Raphael, who has seen the face of the Madonna is thereby capable of painting the 'truth' in his heavenly beautiful Virgins. The allusion to the visionary Sistine Madonna had been visualized several times by the Rome-based artist-brothers Franz and Johannes Riepenhausen [fig. 3]. Hagen might have been able to see either one of the paintings or drawings during the time of his Roman sojourn.<sup>27</sup> The reference to the *Herzensergießungen* is all the more obvious as

<sup>24</sup> Hagen, *Norica, or tales of Nürnberg*, 166–7.

<sup>25</sup> Chapter VII. Dürer receives a visit from Thomas of Bologna, a pupil of Raphael. Hagen, *Norica, or tales of Nürnberg*, 311–51. Tommaso di Bologna (or: Tommaso Vincidor) is mentioned in Dürer's journal of his travels to the Netherlands in 1521. Dürer, who calls him by the name Thomas Polonius, records having met him there in the year after Raphael's death. Dürer's journal was one of the primary sources Friedrich Campe published on the occasion of the festivities celebrating the third centenary of Dürer's death in 1828 in the small volume *Reliquien von Albrecht Dürer seinen Verehrern geweiht*, Friedrich Campe, ed., Nürnberg: Campe, 1828. On the significance of the *Reliquien von Albrecht Dürer*, see Thimann and Hübner, *Sterbliche Götter*, 254–5, cat. 53 (Christine Hübner).

<sup>26</sup> Hagen, *Norica, or tales of Nürnberg*, 317.

<sup>27</sup> 'Raphaels Erscheinung', Wackenroder and Tieck, *Herzensergießungen*, 11–22. On Raphael's 'certain idea' and the Riepenhausen brothers' interpretation of Raphael's dream, see Michael



Hagen's Dürer repeatedly calls the Italian painter 'the divine Raphael', thereby referring to the frontispiece of the key text for the romantic cult of artists [fig. 4].<sup>28</sup>



Figure 3 Johannes Riepenhausen (?), *The Virgin and Child Reveal to Raphael in his Dream*, 1821, watercolour on paper, 48 x 50 cm, Copenhagen, Thorvaldsens Museum (photo: Copenhagen, Thorvaldsens Museum/www.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk)



Figure 4 Friedrich Wilhelm Bollinger, *The divine Raphael*, 1797, frontispiece and title-page of the *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*, stipple engraving, Göttingen, Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek (photo: Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen)

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Thimann, 'Raffael und Dürer. Ursprung, Wachstum und Verschwinden einer Idee in der Deutschen Romantik', Thimann und Hübner, *Sterbliche Götter*, 8–41, 18–22. Hagen may also have had access to the first series of printed scenes of the *Leben Raphael Sanzio's von Urbino (...)* by the Riepenhausen brothers, published first in 1816. On this and the second series, see: Thimann and Hübner, *Sterbliche Götter*, 124–45, cat. 8, 9 (Steven Reiss).

<sup>28</sup> Hagen, *Norica, or tales of Nürnberg*, 313, 315.



## Forging art(ists') history

Hagen had deliberately decided to pass his first two novels, the *Norica* (1829) and the *Chroniken seiner Vaterstadt* (1833) for transliterations of newly-discovered or -translated historical sources. As will become apparent, this was always meant to be a literary and stylistic device, and not written with fraudulent intent. In his second and critically acclaimed novel *Die Chronik seiner Vaterstadt vom Florentiner Bildgießer Lorenz Ghiberti* (1833), Hagen again introduced the book as the translation of an authentic manuscript – this time of the *Commentarii* of Florentine artist Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378–1455). Vasari had called the *Commentarii* 'a book in the vulgar tongue, wherein he treated of many diverse matters, but in such wise that little profit can be drawn from it'. The 'only good thing in it' was the 'brief mention of Cimabue, Giotto, and many others of those times (...)'.<sup>29</sup> Ghiberti's manuscript, preserved in the transliteration by Cosimo Bartoli (the very same manuscript Vasari has used), had been published by Leopoldo Cicognara in the second volume of the *Storia della Scultura* (1816), almost two decades prior to Hagen's novel.<sup>30</sup>

In the introduction to *Die Chronik seiner Vaterstadt*, Hagen claims to have taken the text from a manuscript he found at the Biblioteca Magliabecchiana at Florence and cordially thanks the librarian Abate Follini for his help. The preface duly showcases numerous quotations and annotations. For the average reader there was little doubt that the Prussian professor must be a sincere and highly credible scholar and author. Hagen quotes Vasari, refers to the formation of the *Lives* and even mentions that Cicognara had 'pointed to Ghiberti's comments twice in the History of Sculpture'.<sup>31</sup> Somebody speaking Italian and curious to consult Cicognaras *Storia della Scultura* would wonder, however, why Hagen did not, as announced, edit the *Commentarii*, but Cicognara's preface to the text. For his introduction, Hagen has translated this very passage word by word, appropriating even the acknowledgements to librarian Abate Follini.<sup>32</sup>

The narration of *Die Chronik seiner Vaterstadt* has hardly any relation to its alleged source. Throughout the twenty-six chapters, Hagen narrates various episodes from fifteenth-century Florence. As in the *Norica*, he again took the freedom of enriching history for the benefit of suspense and storylines. Academic

<sup>29</sup> From the 'Live of Lorenzo Ghiberti', Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the most eminent painters, sculptors & architects*, 10 vols, trans. Gaston du C. de Vere, London: Philip Lee Warner, 1912–1915, vol. 2, 161.

<sup>30</sup> Leopoldo Cicognara, *Storia della scultura dal suo risorgimento in Italia sino al secolo di Napoleone per servire di continuazione alle opere di Winckelmann e di D'Agincourt*, 3 vols, Venezia: Picotti, 1813–18. The 'commentario inedito di Lorenzo Ghiberti' in vol. 2, 99–108.

<sup>31</sup> Hagen, *Die Chronik seiner Vaterstadt*, vol. 1, XI, XXIII: 'Es ist wichtig für den Gelehrten und Wißbegierigen, sagt Cicognara, der zweimal in seiner "Geschichte der Bildnerkunst" auf Ghiberti's Kommentar Rücksicht nimmt, ihn mit allen Fehlern zu kennen ...' Hagen does not mention the publication of the *commentarii* in Cicognara's volume in particular. All translations from German texts are by the author.

<sup>32</sup> Hagen, *Die Chronik seiner Vaterstadt*, vol. 1, XVIII–XXIV is the literal translation of the comment in Cicognara, *Storia della scultura*, vol. 2, 108 (starting from the second sentence 'Importa ai dotti ( ...)').

readers such as art historian Franz Kugler criticized the easily recognisable anachronisms and fictionalisation:

The author repeatedly violates historic accuracy, which, as we believe, should be respected even in the case of a more poetic depiction of the past. The author makes artists appear as contemporaries, who did not live nor were at the prime of their artistic lives simultaneously (...) Piero di Cosimo, his [Cosimo Rosselli's] pupil and by then an advanced artist is made into the rival of Filippo Lippi (not in art but in love), even though he was up to thirty or forty years younger; and he even has to die at the same time as his opponent, not considering his death was not due for another fifty years. Leonardo da Vinci is present as a grownup young man, watching Masaccio paint the Brancacci Chapel – even though he was only born about nine years after the death of the latter.<sup>33</sup>

As Kugler wrote in his review of the novel, a great part of the story had been taken from Vasari – a rather obvious strategy, as Vasari, 'in his more or less novelistic approach to constructing artist-biographies provides perfect material for such an undertaking'.<sup>34</sup> Hagen, on the other hand, accused Vasari of plundering Ghiberti's *Commentarii* 'with the long claws of his dirty hands', so that hardly any new information could be gained from this source.<sup>35</sup> It seems that the professor used

<sup>33</sup> Franz Kugler, 'Künstler-Geschichten, mitgetheilt von August Hagen [...]' (review, published first in *Museum*, 23, 1834), cited after the reissue in Franz Kugler, *Kleine Schriften und Studien zur Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 1, Stuttgart: Ebner & Seubert, 1853, 245–8. 246–247: 'Dies sind nämlich verschiedene Verstösse des Verfassers gegen die geschichtliche Treue, welche, wie wir glauben, auch bei einer solchen, mehr dichterischen Darstellung der Geschichte nicht unberücksichtigt bleiben darf. Der Verfasser lässt Künstler als gleichzeitig mit anderen auftreten, deren Existenz und Blüthe ungleich später fällt ( ... ) So wird ebenfalls Piero di Cosimo, der Schüler des ebengenannten und ein in der Technik bereits sehr vorgeschrittener Künstler, zu einem Nebenbuhler des Filippo Lippi gemacht (nämlich nicht in der Kunst, sondern in der Liebe) während er gleichwohl dreissig bis vierzig Jahre jünger ist; und er muss gleichzeitig mit jenem sterben, während sein Tod über funfzig Jahre später erfolgt ist. So schaut Leonardo da Vinci dem Masaccio bei seinen Arbeiten in der Kapelle Brancacci als ein schon erwachsener Jüngling zu, während er erst etwa neun Jahre nach dessen Tode geboren wurde'. Apart from anachronistic storytelling, Kugler criticizes Hagen for doing injustice to the reputation of certain artists by over-exaggerating their traits of character and adding crimes to their curriculum vitae. Piero di Cosimo, characterized by Vasari as antisocial and eccentric, becomes a triple murderer, who kills his own offspring as he cannot bear the sound of children's cries and administers the poison that is said to have caused the deaths of Masaccio and Filippo Lippi. See Kugler, 'Künstler-Geschichten' (review), 247. For a critical account on Vasari's biography of Piero di Cosimo see Louis Alexander Waldmann, 'Fact, Fiction, Hearsay: Notes on Vasari's Life of Piero di Cosimo', *The Art Bulletin*, 82, 2000, 171–9.

<sup>34</sup> Kugler, 'Künstler-Geschichten' (review), 245: 'Die Hauptquelle, daraus der Verfasser geschöpft ist, [...] das bekannte Werk des Vasari, welches, in der mehr oder minder novellistischen Anlage der einzelnen Künstler-Biographien den trefflichsten Stoff zu solcher Arbeit enthält'.

<sup>35</sup> 'Daß man aus Ghiberti's Schrift wenig Nutzen ziehen könne, sollte wenigstens Vasari nicht aussprechen. Mit den langen Krallen seiner unsauberen Hände, wie ihn Benvenuto Cellini

these accusations as a strategy of distraction and to strengthen the credibility of his background story. The allegations continue, and Hagen also claims that Vasari – again, greedily and without even mentioning his source – had appropriated the *Vita inedita* by Comolli for his *Life of Raphael*.<sup>36</sup>

This statement is highly remarkable in two ways. On the one side, Hagen is accusing Vasari of the same 'malpractices' he himself is accountable for in his own novels: exploiting sources without giving due credit. With the *Vita Inedita* by Comolli however, Hagen is referring to a publication that had first been doubted as authentic by Luigi Lanzi in 1824, a suspicion confirmed by the research of Johann David Passavant in 1839.<sup>37</sup> It is hard to tell whether Hagen suspected that the *Vita Inedita* was a forgery – if so he nevertheless had no qualms in adopting Comolli's framework for his own narrations. In the preface, Comolli describes how he was given the manuscript of a previously unknown description of the life of Raphael by C. R. Riccio, who had found these pages that he assumed to be from the hand of Paolo Giovio. The manuscript pages were allegedly hidden in a codex of the sixteenth century from the Certosa of Pavia, amongst several other poetic, historical and literary texts.<sup>38</sup> This background story shows a resemblance to the one Hagen was using in his first two novels: a previously unknown manuscript falls into the hands of a scholar, who decides to edit and publish the newly discovered primary source for the sake of the broader public.

For the second edition of the *Chroniken seiner Vaterstadt* in 1861, Hagen added a second foreword, responding to critics who had accused him of not observing historical accuracy or read the novel as the edition of a primary source text. In doing so he admits to having used the background story as a stylistic device, but at the same time blames his readers for being naïve and unable to recognize poetic fiction:

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schildert, fiel er über sie her und plünderte sie dermaßen aus, daß durch die Entdeckung des Commentars nur wenig für die Kunstgeschichte gewonnen wurde'. Hagen, *Die Chronik seiner Vaterstadt*, vol. 1, XX.

<sup>36</sup> 'So hat das Leben Rafaels von einem Gleichzeitigen, das Comolli herausgab, ebenfalls kein Licht verbreitet, weil Vasari, ohne es unter seinen Quellen zu nennen, es ganz in seinem bekannten Buche aufgenommen.' Hagen, *Die Chronik seiner Vaterstadt*, vol. 1, XX–XXI. Hagen is referring to Angelo Comolli, *Vita inedita di Raffaello da Urbino illustrate con note*, Roma: Il Salvioni, 1790. However, he seems to be using the title of the German translation: Maximilian Prokop Freiherr von Freyberg, *Das Leben Raphaels von einem unbekanntem Gleichzeitigen*, München: Hübschmann, 1817.

<sup>37</sup> Lanzi, *Storia Pittorica*, vol. 2, 48. In 1839, Johann David Passavant was able to prove, that the *Vita inedita* was based on the second edition of Vasari in 1568. Johann David Passavant, *Rafael von Urbino und sein Vater Giovanni Santi*, 3 vols., 1 vol. of plates, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1839–58, vol. 1, XI. For the deconstruction of the *Vita inedita* and the line of argumentation, demonstrating that the *Vita inedita* must have been written in the eighteenth century, using Bottari's edition of Vasari from 1759, see Anton Springer, 'Die Echtheit des Anonymus Comolli's', *Repertorium für Kunstgeschichte*, 5, 1882, 357–63. Springer observed that 'For all intents and purposes almost every sentence of the anonymous can be aligned with a corresponding quotation from Vasari. (...) However, certain sentences by Vasari have been expanded substantially; yet all these amplifications concern only the parts of the biography that are anecdotal' (358–59).

<sup>38</sup> Comolli, *Vita inedita*, III.

When the last paragraph of the introduction to the first edition was taken in good faith as the statement of the German author rather than the translation from Cicognara, then all those who willingly accepted being misled have taken everything for translated that indeed has to be considered independent poetic fiction. The form and the way everything was displayed in the novel should have been evidence enough against the accusation of intentional deception. If the artists' novels are quoted as a primary source, like in the first edition of the renowned "Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte", the narrator can hardly be made accountable for it. (...) Who is searching for truth in the artists' novels, will not be able to see the real truth that lies therein.<sup>39</sup>

For the following volumes of the *Künstler-Geschichten*, Hagen decided against the 'stylistic device' of pretending authenticity. In *Die Wunder der h. Katharina von Siena* (1840), immediate memories of Siena are evoked via the author's visit to a cathedral at the Baltic sea; in *Leonhard da Vinci in Mailand* (1840), Hagen's framing narrative gives a short and factual reference to Carlo Torre's *Il ritratto di Milano*,<sup>40</sup> serving as a guide through historical Milan, and in his final novel *Acht Jahre aus dem Leben Michael Angelo Bonarrotis* (1869) he dives right into the story that does not follow Michelangelo, but Giorgio Vasari as its main protagonist.

### **Episodes of love and crime – vivid fantasies of an art historian**

As evident from the examples taken from the *Norica* and *Chroniken seiner Vaterstadt*, Hagen's *Künstler-Geschichten* are based on the sources of the art historian but enriched by the vivid fantasy of the novelist. The smallest suggestion in the sources served Hagen as the initial point for his storylines. Hagen's technique for composing and arranging his novels can be illustrated by two episodes from *Die Wunder der h. Katharina von Siena*, published in 1840.<sup>41</sup>

The novel is based on Giorgio Vasari's *Vite* of Sieneese artists, including Sodoma and Beccafumi, as well as on recently published sources such as Guglielmo

<sup>39</sup> August Hagen, *Die Chronik seiner Vaterstadt von Lorenz Ghiberti*, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1861, XVII–XIX: 'Wenn der letzte Abschnitt des Vorberichts zur ersten Auflage auf guten Glauben für eine Erklärung des deutschen Schriftstellers genommen ist und nicht für eine Übersetzung aus Cicognara, so ist umgekehrt von denen, die sich wollen irre führen lassen, alles für Uebersetzung gehalten, was als selbständig dichterische Arbeit betrachtet werden muß. Die Darstellungsweise ist als eingeständliches Zeugnis anzusehen gegen den erhobenen Vorwurf beabsichtigter Täuschung. Wenn die "Künstler-Geschichten" als Quelle angeführt wurden, wie in der ersten Ausgabe des bekannten "Lehrbuchs der Kirchengeschichte", so hat es der Erzähler kaum zu verantworten. (...) Wer in der Art in den "Künstler-Geschichte" Wahrheit sucht, dem ist für das eigentlich Wahre der gegebenen Schilderungen der rechte Blick gänzlich versagt.'

<sup>40</sup> Carlo Torre, *Il Ritratto di Milano, Diviso In Tre Libri, Nel quale vengono descritte tutte le Antichità, e Modernità, che vedevansi, e che si vedono nella Città di Milano, sì di sontuose Fabbriche, quanto di Pittura, e di Scultura. Con varie Narrazioni Istoriche appartenenti á Gesti de Principi, Duchi, e Cittadini (...)*, Milano: Agnelli, 1674.

<sup>41</sup> Hagen, *Die Wunder der h. Katharina*.

Della Valle's *Lettere Senesi*.<sup>42</sup> According to Vasari, Bartolomeo Neroni, il Riccio, had been married to the daughter of Sodoma, who himself had left the mother of the girl even though they were married.<sup>43</sup> Hagen takes up Vasari's rather factual hint and turns it into the central love story that at first seems to be doomed from the outset. Here too Neroni falls in love with the daughter of Sodoma. However, the girl's mother does not want her child to marry an artist. She is bitter about what her husband Sodoma had done to her and thus denies Neroni any future contact with the girl. Neroni takes the consequences, gives up painting and starts studying. Even so, in the end it is his artistic talent, that changes the future mother-in-law's mind, so that the love story and the novel have a happy ending.

For the Sienese painter Giacomo Pacchiarotti, who is mentioned by Vasari in not more than half a sentence, Hagen invented a venturesome jailbreak and a nerve-racking premature burial.<sup>44</sup> The origin of this idea lies in Della Valle's *Lettere Senesi*, where it is reported that Pacchiarotti had been persecuted for political agitation. When on the run, the artist is said to have hidden himself in an open tomb behind a dead body before being able to escape.<sup>45</sup>

In Hagen's novel, Pacchiarotti is brought to a dungeon, where he and his accomplice Crispino wait for their execution. When Crispino commits suicide, a friend plots Pacchiarotti's escape. With the dead body arranged as the sleeping artist, Pacchiarotti climbs into the coffin and is carried out of the dungeon. The reader follows Pacchiarotti into the coffin and shares his fears, first of being discovered and then of being buried alive – a fear that finally comes true. Right in the moment of deepest despair and horror, when earth, maggots and worms start filling the coffin and breathing becomes problematic, Pacchiarotti is rescued at the last minute, when handymen are looking for fresh corpses for a secret anatomical theatre.<sup>46</sup>

Hagen is combining well- and lesser-known anecdotes with elements of popular fiction and romance. Each of Hagen's novels contains episodes of love and crime, extremes of human passion and despair. Introducing and promoting relatively unknown artists like Neroni and Pacchiarotti granted him scope to build up storylines and create new anecdotes where there were no anecdotes told by Vasari.

<sup>42</sup> Guglielmo della Valle, *Lettere senesi sopra le belle arti di un socio dell'Accademia di Fossano*, 3 vols, Venezia: Pasquali, 1782–1786. Reasonable suspicion that in this edition della Valle had declared the research of others as his own had already been expressed by Ludwig Schorn in 1832. Schorn, 'Vorrede des Herausgebers', Vasari, *Leben*, vol. 1, XII–XIII.

<sup>43</sup> The episode is mentioned in the 'Life of Giovanni Antonio Bazzi, called il Sodoma', in Vasari, *Lives of the most eminent painters, sculptors & architects*, trans. Gaston du C. de Vere, London: Philip Lee Warner, 1912–15, vol. 7, 257.

<sup>44</sup> Giacomo Pacchiarotti (1474–1540) is briefly mentioned by Vasari in the 'life of Giovanni Antonio Bazzi, called Il Sodoma' as 'Girolamo de Pacchia': Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the most eminent painters, sculptors & architects*, vol. 7, 252.

<sup>45</sup> Della Valle, *Lettere senesi*, vol. 3, 317, who refers to the manuscript of the *Historie di Siena* by Giugurta Tommasi on the year 1535 as a main source. Another possible source for Hagen is Luigi de Angelis, *Elogio storico di Giacomo Pacchiarotti pittor sanese del secolo decimo sesto*, Siena: Rossi, 1821, where the burial scene is also mentioned (26).

<sup>46</sup> Hagen, *Die Wunder der h. Katharina*, 262–72 (imprisonment and Crispino's suicide), 273–86 (escape, burial and salvation).

## The readers

Even though Hagen undoubtedly brought some thrill into artists' lives, neither of his 'Italian' novels had been as successful as the *Norica*. However, artists and art historians always paid attention to them, as Hagen possessed the authority of a renowned scholar. As the example of Engelhart's painting [fig. 2] has demonstrated, artists read the books and drew inspiration from what they found there. But proof for artists as readers of the novels is still limited. The *Festschrift* published by Hagen's son on the occasion of his father's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, describes a meeting between artists, academics and the Prussian professor that took place at Dresden in 1839. On this occasion, archaeologist Emil Braun reported that German artists at Rome appreciated the novels that brought back memories of the author's visit to Rome. Hagen, described by Braun as 'a dear friend to all artists and art lovers' perceived this speech as the 'most pleasant compliment', suggesting that artists were his favourite audience.<sup>47</sup> It is not known, who these artists from Rome were; the book was widely available and Braun may have referred to a copy of the *Künstler-Geschichten* at the library of the *Künstlerverein* in Rome.<sup>48</sup> Art critic Franz Kugler suggested that the novels should be read aloud while studying reproductive prints of the works mentioned, thereby promoting education in the history of art. Even at the end of the nineteenth century, Hagen's books were still of some relevance and present in the libraries of artists and scholars. Painter Carl Gehrts (1853–1898) got hold of a copy of the first edition of the *Norica* in 1895.<sup>49</sup> The Italian edition *Lorenzo Ghiberti. Cronaca del Secolo XV* (1845) had been acquired for the library of Aby Warburg prior to 1905, whereas the German edition of *Die Chroniken seiner Vaterstadt* as well as *Die Wunder der h. Katharina* and *Leonhard da Vinci in Mailand* were registered there in 1906.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Hagen, *Eine Gedächtnisschrift*, 170: 'In einer großen Künstlergesellschaft erhob sich Dr. Braun und sagte, er fühle sich in diesem Kreis gedrungen, auszusprechen, daß Hagens Künstlernovellen von den Künstlern in Rom dankbar aufgenommen wären. Des Verfassers Andenken sei durch die Novellen in Rom aufgefrischt, er bäte "den warmen Freund aller Künstler und Kunstfreunde", bald nach Rom zu kommen, um den Dank derselben entgegenzunehmen. Es war diese die "wohlthuedste" Anerkennung, die Hagen bis jetzt geworden'.

<sup>48</sup> During his stay at Rome, Hagen donated copies of *Olfrid und Lisena* and a collection of his poems to the *Bibliothek der Deutschen*. The library of the *Künstlerverein* held a copy of the *Künstler-Geschichten* (sign. G 26–9), probably a collection of Hagen's artists' novels apart from the *Norica*, that was given to the library by the publisher in an edition from 1855 (sign. B 193). This information was kindly provided by Dr. Ulf Dingerdissen who studied the library and archive of the *Deutscher Künstlerverein* in the context of a research project, financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). The library today is located at the Casa di Goethe, Rome.

<sup>49</sup> Copy of the *Norica* in property of the author, signed 'Carl Gehrts. Rath b. Düsseldf. / 1895'.

<sup>50</sup> The title page of the Warburg Institute Library copy of Hagen, *Lorenzo Ghiberti Cronaca* (NAC 1180.H13) has no accession number but clear signs for an accession prior to 1905; the German second edition of August Hagen, *Die Chronik seiner Vaterstadt*, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1861 (NAC 1180.H13) as well as Hagen, *Die Wunder der h. Katharina* (NAC 1180.H13) and

## The oldest history of art in the Christian world is a novel – walking in Vasari's shoes

Apart from a minor scandal that occurred when the *Norica* was unmasked as forgery shortly after its publication, Hagen's early novels received mainly positive reviews from art critics.<sup>51</sup>

The *Norica* and *Chroniken seiner Vaterstadt* had been written, read and judged under the influence of early romantic readings of Vasari as a literary source, associated with an admiration for artists and great interest in artists' lives. Two reviews, the one already mentioned by Franz Kugler in the journal *Museum* in 1833 and one in the *Kunstblatt* in 1834 illustrate the strong impact and romantic understanding of Vasari in an era contemporary with the publication of the first volumes of Schorn's and Förster's translation of the *Vite*.<sup>52</sup> Both reviewers complimented the novels for being an attractive approach to artists' lives. Hagen gave life to a subject that in historical studies sometimes appeared to be a 'dead mash-up of fragmented information on events and situations from the past'. The professor, however, succeeded at creating a living picture, elaborating inter-relations and animating the scenes with 'poetical divination'.<sup>53</sup> The protagonists in his novels were acting, feeling and speaking like nineteenth-century contemporaries, a fact that reviewers back then honoured with approval.

Hagen's artists' novels were paralleled to and discussed with reference to Vasari's *Vite*. The most elaborated comparison between Hagen and Vasari was published in the *Kunstblatt* – no surprise as its editor Ludwig Schorn had been the very person responsible for the first translation of Vasari into German. The review of Hagen's *Norica* and the *Chroniken seiner Vaterstadt* in fact starts with an introduction to the nature of Vasari's *Vite*:

The oldest History of Art in the Christian world is a novel. In the preface to the second edition of the *Vite*, Vasari openly admitted to blending truth and fiction and occasionally inventing stories. The rigorous new generation of

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*Leonhard da Vinci in Mailand* (NAC 1180.H13) all share the accession number 06/417, indicating that they were acquired by the KBW as a bundle in 1906.

<sup>51</sup> On the exposure of the *Norica*-forgery, see Klaus Graf, 'August Hagens Novellen *Norica* (1829)', *Archivalia*, March 4, 2014 [<https://archivalia.hypotheses.org/4958>], who provides a collection of links to digitalized editions of the *Norica* and reviews in nineteenth-century journals.

<sup>52</sup> Kugler, 'Künstler-Geschichten' (review), 245–248; N.N., 'Kunsliteratur. *Norica*, das sind Nürnbergische Novellen aus alter Zeit (...) / Künstlergeschichten. Die Chronik seiner Vaterstadt vom Florentiner Lorenz Ghiberti (...) ' (review), *Kunst-Blatt*, 93, 20 November 1834, 369–371; 94, 25 November 1834, 373–5; 95, 27 November 1834, 378–9.

<sup>53</sup> Kugler, 'Künstler-Geschichten' (review), 245: 'Selten findet es sich, dass das Studium der Geschichte anders denn als ein todtes Zusammenwürfeln fragmentarischer Nachrichten von Ereignissen und Zuständen der Vergangenheit betrieben, dass der Faden erkannt wird, welcher sich durch die Fragmente hindurchschlingt und ihren Zusammenhang nachweist; ungleich seltener jedoch, dass dieselben, mit poetischer Divination belebt, sich zu einem Ganzen zusammenfügen und ein lebendiges Bild zu unmittelbaren Anschauung bringen'.



scholars has revealed his minor and major defaults and even accused him of inventing the existence and personality of the highly amusing painter Buffalmacco. However, Vasari is still regarded as one of the most pleasing characters of early modern art history. He may not be held accountable for the accuracy of each single historical fact, but as far as the description of the artists' characters and creations is concerned, his work holds inner truth.<sup>54</sup>

In what follows, the very same criteria are applied to Hagen's novels, with inner truth of action and *dramatis personae* esteemed higher than accuracy in detail. Just like the author of the *Kunstblatt*, art critic and historian Franz Kugler put Hagen in close relation to Vasari. In his previously mentioned review of *Die Chroniken seiner Vaterstadt*, Kugler even stated, that in some passages, Hagen outperformed Vasari by bringing more life into the same story. Flesh, blood and superb characterisations in the professor's prose were put in opposition to Vasari's short and sometimes dry narration.<sup>55</sup>

However, both reviewers didn't hesitate to criticize Hagen for his anachronisms and inaccuracies that were too easily detected and therefore considered avoidable. For Franz Kugler, Hagen would have been able to accomplish a highly esteemed creation, if only he had combined his literary talents with higher awareness for historical facts.<sup>56</sup>

Artists' novels were still considered a popular and legitimate medium for introducing art history and its latest findings in research to the general public – if due respect was being paid to historical facts and circumstances. A paradigmatic text is a novel published by Carl Friedrich von Rumohr in 1840. In the second volume of the anthology *Italia*, Rumohr, renowned representative of the modern history of art, had published a short novel, the *Lehr- und Wanderjahre des Raphael Santi von Urbino* [The Journeyman years of Raphael Santi of Urbino].<sup>57</sup> The tale was based on some recent findings on Raphael that Rumohr had presented in the third volume of the *Italienische Forschungen* in 1831. According to the scholar, the painter Andrea d'Assisi, called l'Ingenio, must have played a previously unnoticed yet important role in Raphael's early formation.<sup>58</sup> Almost a decade later, Rumohr

<sup>54</sup> *Kunstblatt*, 93, 20 November 1834, 369: 'Die älteste Kunstgeschichte der christlichen Welt ist Novelle. Vasari hat in der Vorrede zu der zweiten Ausgabe seiner Lebensbeschreibungen nur zu deutlich selbst es eingestanden, daß er Dichtung mit Wahrheit gemischt, und daß seine Erzählungen häufig Erfindung sey. Von der strengen Kritik neuerer Forscher wird ihm bald hier bald dort Einzelnes als unbegründet, wird ihm sogar Ganzes, wie z.B. die Existenz und Persönlichkeit des lustigen Malers Buffalmacco, als aus der Luft gegriffen nachgewiesen. Aber demunerachtet ist Vasari nicht bloß als der angenehmste Darsteller der mittleren Kunstgeschichte angesehen, sondern es kann ihm auch das Zeugnis der Wahrheit nicht entstehen, zwar nicht jenes der historischen Genauigkeit, aber dasjenige der innern Treue in Zeichnung des Charakters der Künstler und ihrer Werke.'

<sup>55</sup> Kugler, 'Künstler-Geschichten' (review), 246.

<sup>56</sup> Kugler, 'Künstler-Geschichten' (review), 247–8.

<sup>57</sup> Carl Friedrich von Rumohr, 'Lehr und Wanderjahre des Raphael Santi von Urbino. Maler-Novelle', in Alfred Reumont, ed., *Italia*, Berlin: Alexander Duncker, 1840, vol. 2, 41–69.

August Hagen himself has contributed to the first volume of *Italia* with a literary study: 'Orpheus. Ein dramatisches Festspiel des Angelo Poliziano', 35–64.

<sup>58</sup> Rumohr, *Italienische Forschungen*, vol. 3, 29–34.

decided to turn the discovery, crucial for Raphael's stylistic development, into prose and thereby cautiously wove it into the narration of the artist's life, a life full of romantic *topoi* and Vasarian anecdotes.<sup>59</sup> Unlike Hagen, Rumohr was taking care that the literary fiction of the novel conscientiously incorporated the art historical findings. The novel was accompanied by an illustration by August Hopfgarten, depicting a teenage Raphael climbing up the scaffolding, where Andrea d'Assisi is working on the painting of the Madonna [fig. 5].

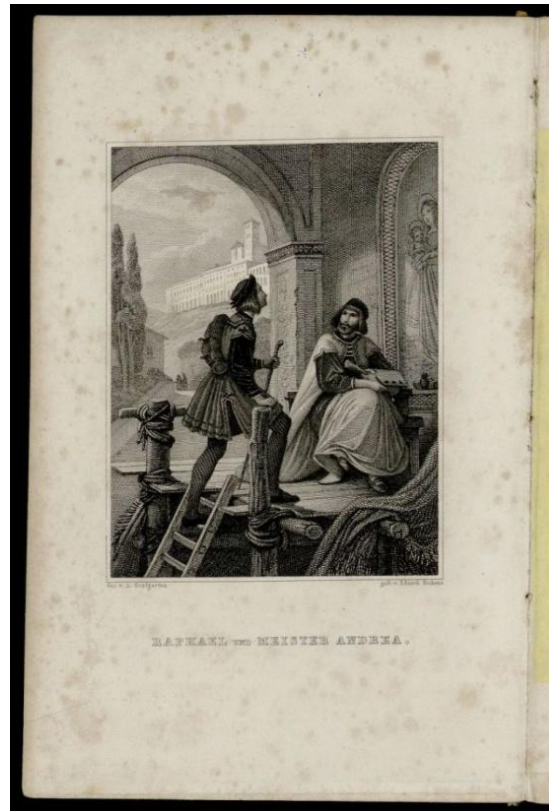


Figure 5 Eduard Eichens after August Ferdinand Hopfgarten, *Raphael und Meister Andrea*, 1840. Frontispiece from *Italia*, copper engraving, 18 x 11,5 cm (page), Göttingen, Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek (photo: Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek)

Over the following decades, the way Hagen's novels were read changed; disapproval of their hybrid character rose. They contained too many art historical details for being light fiction; art historians, on the other hand, missed reliability and retraceable information. They demanded to know the sources where Hagen drew his alleged knowledge from. In 1869, the book on Michelangelo was perceived as out of time, obsolete and highly questionable. In a review, the anonymous author retrospectively tried to explain the success of the earlier novels, particularly *Die Chroniken seiner Vaterstadt*, which had been published 'when time and the audience's mood were still favourable' and

Italian history of art was still an exclusive field of the small group of experts that Rumohr's publications aimed at. And even though Lanzi's smart book

<sup>59</sup> On the novel, see Thimann and Hübner, *Sterbliche Götter*, 114–5, cat. 4b, c (Michael Thimann).

had been made accessible in Germany by the translation of A. Wagner and Quandt, with its dry monotony and forest of names it did not appeal to a large audience. Vasari was unknown to the general public: the first volume of Schorn's translation had only seen the light of the day in 1832. The novelistic character of many of the early artists' biographies by Vasari may have been interpreted as an encouragement to embellish romantic elements that had been predominant and sought-after in art, or to be precise, in the history of art. (...) Circumstances then were favourable to Hagen's *Künstler-Geschichten*. They were already less favourable to similar representations from the lives of S. Catharina of Siena and Leonardo da Vinci that followed in 1840.<sup>60</sup>

The reviewer from the *Beilage zur Allgemeinen Zeitung* seemed quite bewildered that Hagen once again had tried to romanticize and novelize art historical subjects in 1869. In the years that had passed since the publication of the *Künstler-Geschichten*, Michelangelo and his life had become common knowledge and famous even with a broad audience. Trying to include pre-eminent historical personalities like Michelangelo into fictional settings suddenly seemed 'questionable' and destined to fail.<sup>61</sup> The reviewer referred to Herman Grimm's two-volume monograph on the *Life of Michelangelo (Michelangelo's Leben)*, published between 1860 and 1863, as an example for a felicitous combination of historical accuracy and vivid narration – the paradigmatic proof that art historical writing did not have to be boring, antiquarian or critical. 'The historical Michelangelo needs neither glitter nor tinsel!'<sup>62</sup>

The reception of Hagen's novels, published between 1829 and 1869, allows us to retrace the moment when enthusiasm for romantic artists' novels slowly trickled away and changed into demand for rationality and precision. Hagen and his first two novels had gained the highest recognition simultaneously with the publication of the first volume of Schorn's and Förster's German edition of Vasari. The increasing interest in and growing understanding of Vasari's *Vite* resulted in

<sup>60</sup> N.N., 'August Hagens Michelangelo' (review), *Beilage zur Allgemeinen Zeitung*, 210, 29 July 1869, 3237–8, 3237: 'Zeit und Stimmung waren günstig. Die italienische Kunstgeschichte fand sich fast noch auf die engeren Kreise beschränkt für welche Rumohrs Forschungen bestimmt waren. Lanzi's sonst tüchtiges Buch, durch A. Wagner und Quandt Deutschland zugänglich gemacht, war bei seiner trockenen Eintönigkeit und mit seinem Walde von Namen wenig geeignet für das größere Publicum. Vasari war demselben so zu sagen unbekannt: von der Schorn'schen Uebertragung hatte das Jahr 1832 den ersten Band ans Licht gefördert. Das Novellenartige vieler der ältern Vasari'schen Biographien konnte sogar wie eine Art Aufforderung zu ausschmückender Entwicklung des romantischen Elements erscheinen, welches man längere Zeit hindurch in der Kunst oder, richtiger, Künstlergeschichte vorzugsweise suchte und pflegte. (...) Die Umstände waren somit den Hagen'schen 'Künstlergeschichten' günstig. Sie waren es schon nicht mehr in gleichem Maß als ähnliche Darstellungen aus dem Leben der h. Katharina von Siena und Leonardo's da Vinci im Jahr 1840 den ersten nachfolgten.'

<sup>61</sup> N.N., 'August Hagens Michelangelo' (review), 3237–8.

<sup>62</sup> 'August Hagens Michelangelo' (review), 3238: 'Der historische Michelangelo ist eine Figur, die man ohne Flitterstaat lassen sollte.' Herman Grimm, *Leben Michelangelo's*, 2 vols, Hannover: Rümpler, 1860–63.

reviewer's being observant of parallels in Hagen's prose. Only a few years later, Hagen's *Künstler-Geschichten* – neither purely fictional novels nor non-fictional accounts from the field of art history – had lost their significance. However, the Prussian professor proved himself to be conservative. He seems to belong to a different era, keeping his devotion to the romantic narration of artists' lives alive and refusing to adapt his style and storytelling to the demands of an increasingly critical and educated audience. In the final scene of Hagen's last novel *Acht Jahre aus dem Leben Michael Angelo Bonarroti's*, Vasari is being commissioned to write about art and artists in his times.<sup>63</sup> The birth of the *Vite* ironically marks the end of August Hagen's literary career.

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<sup>63</sup> Hagen, *Michael Angelo Bonarroti*, 264.