

E. H. Gombrich, Dark Varnishes: Variations on a Theme from Pliny, The Burlington Magazine, Feb., Vol. 104, No. 707, 1962, pp.51-55 [Trapp no.1962G.1]

I may be wrong, but I am firmly convinced that the treasures of our old paintings are too precious to subject them to controversial experiments, however much an individual may be persuaded of their usefulness. For in the theory of restoration there can be no authorities. Here there can and must only be learners.

MAX DOERNER, *Malmaterial*, Munich, 1922, p.339

DEFENDERS of the National Gallery's cleaning policy are fond of reminding us that it has all been said and answered before. It is indeed true that in this country at least, the controversy has a long history. One still hears echoes of Hogarth's sneers against the dealers in dark pictures, of Constable's impatience with grime-loving connoisseurs and of C. R. Leslie's gallant defence of the National Gallery's restorers which he inserted in his *Hand-book for young painters* of 1855:

The attacks that have been so unsparingly directed against the cleaning of pictures in the National Gallery have been generally founded on the assumption that the tone of a fine picture is always imparted to it by a general glazing, and that, in the removal of this, its most valuable quality is destroyed. But it is so far from being true that the best colourists finished their pictures with a general glaze, that I believe the cases in which they have done so have been exceptional. Reynolds sometimes, but not always, did this; and it appears, by his own account, to have been the invariable practice of Mr Haydon: but I know it was not the practice of Turner, of Etty, of Constable, or of Wilkie, and I feel confident (my italics) it was not of Paul Veronese, Rubens, Claude, the Poussins, or Cannalotti.[1]

Leslie goes on to attack the practice of toning down old paintings and draws attention to the passage in *The Vicar of Wakefield* where a would-be connoisseur 'after giving his opinion that the colouring of a picture was not mellow enough ... took a brush with brown varnish ... and rubbed it over the piece.'

These spirited and justified polemics may have been salutary in their time. But the very fact that they were polemics should prevent us from accepting them as dogma. It was this dogma which Cesare Brandi ventured to question some thirteen years ago in the pages of this Journal.[2] He received the official reply that 'there is no evidence that ... easily soluble spirit varnishes were ever tinted (*i.e.*, pigmented), by the original artist until much later times ... nor is there evidence that tinted oil varnishes were used as general surface coatings'.[3] Against this categorical statement, I reminded readers of this Journal [4] of a famous passage in Pliny which provides precisely this evidence, albeit about a painter none of whose works have been preserved : speaking of Apelles, Pliny writes of his inimitable invention:

He used to give his pictures when finished a dark coating so thinly spread that, by reflecting, it enhanced the brilliance of the colour while, at the same time, it afforded protection from dust and dirt and was not itself visible except at close quarters. One main purpose was to prevent the brilliance of the colours from offending the eye, since it gave the impression as if the beholder were seeing them through a window of talc, so that he gave from a distance an imperceptible touch of severity to excessively rich colours.[5]

Was it likely, I asked, that a practice attributed to the proverbial Great Painter of antiquity was never imitated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? Is every dark varnish we find on these paintings either discoloured varnish or a later addition? Can we be sure, in other words, that Professor Brandi may not be right after all and that we may not go counter to the painter's intention when stripping his work completely of its old varnish?

Having received no reply to these questions, I ventured to raise the matter again in a wider context, in my book *Art and Illusion*.^[6] In the September number of the *British Journal of Aesthetics* Mr Helmut Ruhemann, whose views count so much with the National Gallery, has at last reacted to this argument. The context, unfortunately, in which he inserted this reply does not inspire confidence in his willingness to accept evidence. I am glad to be able to spare the reader of this Journal this embarrassing demonstration, since it will be published in the same Journal where Mr Ruhemann opened the discussion on the meaning of the word *sfumato*.^[7] Here I am only concerned with his views on the Pliny passage. He does his best to discredit it in a note in which he throws doubt on Pliny's credibility and claims that the account is contradictory. Moreover, he says in the text:

... there is no evidence for anything so inherently improbable as that a great old master should cover his whole picture with a 'toning down layer'. The only indication which has ever been found for such a practice is a statement by Pliny ... Gombrich has remarked ... that it is unlikely no master of the sixteenth or seventeenth century was induced to act on Pliny's report ... We cannot of course say that no old master did this. But artists in general follow practical studio traditions of techniques rather than historians' hints and if any painters were influenced by Pliny, they were certainly exceptions. If their black glazing was done with resin paint, it would be most unlikely to have survived earlier cleaning practices. If it was done in a more solid medium and would still be present on any painting, the skilled and conscientious cleaner would be more likely to recognize it as original and leave it than to remove it inadvertently or wantonly.^[8]

One cannot help being reminded of the defence of the man accused of having chipped a precious jug he had borrowed: he had never borrowed the jug, he had returned it intact, and it was chipped when he took it.

I should like to discuss Mr Ruhemann's points in turn, not to refute them, but rather to examine their relevance to the question of dark or darkening varnishes. The first question, then, what were Pliny's sources and how far he knew what he was talking about, is not very relevant to this discussion, nor am I competent to decide it. As a matter of fact, I mentioned the possibility in my original letter that the passage may be corrupt and yet have influenced Renaissance painters. It so happens, however, that A. P. Laurie, in his book on *Greek and Roman Methods of Painting* (Cambridge, 1910), found no difficulty in making sense of Pliny's story:

A varnish in which bitumen was dissolved in a pine balsam like Venetian turpentine would fulfil all the conditions laid down in Pliny's description.^[8]

Whether or not it is likely that many Renaissance and Baroque painters were influenced by Pliny is not altogether relevant either. Nobody has ever claimed that all such paintings or even the majority of them were treated in this way. It would be quite sufficient as a warning signal if we knew that one important masterpiece was. I cannot prove this, but I can document the attention which was given to Pliny's story and the way it was interpreted between the sixteenth and eighteenth century.

It is a mistake, of course, to think of Pliny merely in terms of a learned historian. His *Natural History* was one of the most frequently printed books and fulfilled the function of a household encyclopaedia. But even painters who would not read Pliny in the original or in translation would have access to this account if they possessed Vasari. For the second and all subsequent editions of the *Vite* includes the paraphrase of Pliny by Giovambatista Adriani. Adriani describes Apelles' invention as 'a brown colour, or rather varnish' which enabled Apelles 'judiciously to temper his colours with more or less, as he deemed it appropriate'.^[9]

In 1638, Junius made the story available to English readers in his book on *The Painting of the Ancients*:

Apelles ... who was wont to be very moderate in all things that concerned the Art, because he would not offend the eyes of the spectators with too much cheerefulness of gay and flourishing colours, did by an inimitable invention anoint his finished workes with such a thinne kinde of inke or vernish, that it did not onely breake and darken the clearnesse of the glaring colours, but it did likewise preserve them from dust and filth ... [p.285]

In 1691, Filippo Baldinucci gave a lecture in the Accademia della Crusca on the subject of ancient and modern painting within the context of the quarrel between the Ancients and Moderns. One of the points in favour of the moderns was, for him, the invention of oil painting, and one of his arguments to prove that the ancients lacked this technique was precisely Pliny's story. His point is that this technique of toning down excessively luxuriant colours was precisely the one used by Italian Trecento painters who worked in tempera:

... they spread a varnish over their panels which was a certain mixture that gave their pallid paintings a certain effect of greater depth and greater strength and, toning down the bright surface a little, brought it closer to natural appearance.. .

It might be argued that modern painters also use such varnish on their oil paintings, but I would reply that this usage, which only few adopt, does not serve to counteract any shortcomings of oil paintings as such, that is, to give depth to the darks and to tone down the lights more delicately, for oil painting does not stand in need of such aids. It is used rather to remedy some accidental mishap that sometimes occurs because of the priming, mastic or other, which is applied to the canvas, or that originates in the panel or canvas itself, that is, when it attracts the liquid of the oil so strongly that it almost draws it out of the colours and dries them up in some places to such an extent that this accident alters their appearance on the surface. It is then that by use of another fatty substance, that is, by means of the varnish applied where there is too little oil on the surface, one is able to bring out (and this is the salient point) what is already in the oil painting rather than something that is not there at all—which was precisely the effect that the varnish of Apelles achieved to some very small extent.^[10] There is nothing in this description of the oil painters' practice of bringing out a passage that had 'sunk in', which would refute Mr Ruhemann's contentions. It merely shows how difficult it is to make a hard and fast division between paint and varnish.

An early eighteenth-century comment amuses by its typical rococo bias. It comes in the *Histoire de la Peinture ancienne*, London 1725:

[Apelles] *adoucissoit beaucoup son ouvrage, et donnoit d ses teintes ce ton moëlleux, qui fait tant de plaisir dans la Peinture: d'autant plus que nos yeus, pour l'ordinaire, ébloüs de la force et de la l'ariété des couleurs gives, ne sont pas si en état de se prêter au spectacle et d'en*

juger comme il faut: or chacun scait qu'il n'y a Tien qui tempere plus les choses, que de les regarder avec un verre, dans un certain éloignement; et c'etoit justement l' effect que produisoit le Vernis d'Apelle.[11]

Finally, there is Reynolds in his notes to Du Fresnoy:

This passage [by Pliny on Apelles], tho' it may possibly perplex the critics, is a true and an artist-like description of the effect of Glazing or Stumbling, such as was practised by Titian and the rest of the Venetian Painters; this custom or mode of operation, implies at least a true taste of what the excellence of colouring consists, which does not proceed from fine colours, but true colours; from breaking down these fine colours which would appear too raw, to a deep-toned brightness. Perhaps the manner in which Correggio practised the art of Glazing was still more like that of Apelles, which was only perceptible to those who looked close to the picture ... whereas in Titian, and still more in Bassan and others his imitators, it was apparent on the slightest inspection: Artists who may not approve of Glazing, must still acknowledge, that this practice is not that of ignorance.[12]

Here, it is obvious, Reynolds alludes to the polemics of which we have already caught a glimpse. Indeed Hogarth had made scathing remarks about:

the lame excuse writers on painting have made for the many great masters that have fail'd in this particular [of colouring] ... that they purposely deaden'd their colours, and kept them, what they affectedly call'd chaste that the correctness of their outlines might be seen to greater advantage. Whereas colours cannot be too brilliant if properly disposed ...[13]

It was Hogarth's creed, not that of Reynolds, that won, and as lovers of modern painting we may be grateful for the blaze of colours that culminated in the palette of the Fauves. But the more we share this bias, the more we must check our reaction when we make the wish the father to the thought and interpret the earlier masters accordingly.

For there is no denying that to earlier generations a predilection for bright colours was a sign of an uneducated taste. There is a passage in Baldinucci's *Vocabulario* of 1681 which actually connects this taste with the practice of bad restorers. I quote it all the more willingly as it is likely to please both sides in the present controversy: the radical restorers because it confirms their case that pictures were frequently flayed and repainted in the past; their critics because their apprehensions can rarely have been put more vigorously:

Riforire [to `freshen up'] : A most vulgar term by which the lower classes want to express that insufferable stupidity of theirs, to have an old painting occasionally covered with fresh paint even by an inexperienced hand, because it has been slightly blackened by the process of time. This action not only deprives the painting of its beauty, but also of its air of antiquity. One might call restoration ... or repair that readjustment which is sometimes done to a small part of a painting, even of an outstanding master, when it has flaked off or otherwise come to harm in any place; for this can easily be achieved by a skilled hand. And it looks as if no more was taken from the painting than that defect which, however small it may appear, still tends to disgrace and discredit it. There have been many, however, who were by no means totally inexperienced in matters of art and who held that the best paintings should never be retouched, either much or little, by whoever it may be. For it was difficult for the restoration, be it small or large, not to show up sooner or later, however small it may have been, and it is also true that a

painting that is not untouched is always very much discredited.

By the term *rifiorire* the ignorant also mean the washing of old paintings, which they sometimes do with such lack of caution as if they were scouring a rough block of marble. They fail to consider that one frequently does not know the composition of the mastics and primings and what pigments the artists used (for natural earth colours can stand the lye or other less strong solvents better than artificial ones). And so they run the risk of removing from these paintings during the process of cleaning the veilings, the middle tones and also the retouchings, which are the last brushstrokes in which the greater part of their perfection consists. They even risk their coming off entirely at one go — something I remember happening to a beautiful self-portrait by Giovanni da San Giovanni in oil on canvas which was presented to the Illustrious Cardinal Leopold for his famous Gallery of Self Portraits ... When this portrait was entrusted to an experienced gilder, probably to have it framed, he also wanted to wash it in the same way, as he had done it in his time with many other paintings. Having washed it, the priming and the colour immediately became detached and whatever was on the canvas crumbled and fell to the ground in minute fragments, nothing remaining of the fine picture but the canvas and the stretcher.[14]

Reading this account, and the even more hilarious ones which Julius Ibbetson tells against restorers of his time,[15] one must admit that it is only too likely that such dark varnishes in resin paint as may have existed on old masters, would scarcely have survived to the present day, at least on paintings frequently moved and sold.

But clearly Mr Ruhemann himself is not too happy with his evidence which is always brought forward in the company of such phrases as 'inherently improbable', 'certainly exceptions', 'most unlikely'. Least of all can one feel reassured by his final surmise that a black glazing in a more solid medium would be 'likely' to be recognized by a skilled cleaner. The trouble is moreover that the hard and fast distinction which we are asked to accept, between glazings which are solid and spirit varnishes, which must long have been destroyed by earlier cleanings, is not wholly convincing. It is admitted by Messrs MacLaren and Werner who insist on this difference, that 'it is difficult to make a chemical analysis of media used in glazes — or, indeed, of old varnishes.' In the end it is hard to avoid the suspicion of a circular argument: what resisted our solvents must have been a glaze, what dissolved was evidently only a varnish.

But suppose we concede even this point to the advocates of radical cleaning and agree that it is possible they have never themselves violated that delicate veil that an artist may have wanted to lay over his finished painting. What about the paintings where this veil was torn, but replaced? Lest there be an outcry at this suggestion that we may have to respect later accretions, let me remind the reader that restorers of buildings must always do this. If we removed all bricks and buttresses from an old fabric, which are in fact later replacements, the structure would obviously collapse. Some of us feel that this has happened with some paintings in the National Gallery.

I come here to the central problem of the so-called cleaning controversy which should rather be called the conservation controversy. For 'cleaning' itself is rather a question-begging term, loaded with all sorts of emotional overtones. Could we not get rid of these Aunt Sallies and look at the restorer's difficult task detached from the battle of tastes? Surely when many independent observers agree that certain paintings now look stripped, harsh or incoherent, after 'cleaning' it is not sufficient to reply or imply that since none of the original pigments can be shown to have been removed these critics must obviously be enamoured of dirt. The Director of the National Gallery, in a recent broadcast," has

contrasted 'likes and dislikes' with what he calls 'visual facts'. The word is hardly happily chosen, for 'visual facts' differ from chemical facts.

When the French Gobelin Manufacturers received complaints in the early nineteenth century that certain of their products were inferior in colouring to others, the authority in charge did not simply reply that both categories were demonstrably dyed with the same stuff. For the director of their dye works was a true scientist, M. E. Chevreul, who soon discovered that he had to investigate 'two absolutely distinct subjects', the chemistry of dyes and the appearance of colours in context, where he first formulated the laws of simultaneous contrasts." One suspects that tough-minded people tend to regard these and similar effects as rather marginal. If there are still any who take this view they are advised to study *An Introduction to Color*, by Ralph M. Evans, a really tough-minded scientist and head of the Colour Control Department of the Eastman Kodak Company. To him it is a matter of course that the system of colours that can be plotted on the scientist's colour charts has 'little relationship' with the interpretation of these colours by the observer in changing contexts.¹⁸ In fact these psychological facts are so startling, so manifold and partly still so mysterious that the arguments from chemistry are much eclipsed in their relevance. Ruskin was far from overstating his case when he told the beginner in painting that 'every hue throughout your work is altered by every touch that you add in other places'.^[19] The reverse, of course, is also true. The production of a photograph intended to demonstrate that a passage which looks different after cleaning was never touched, does not, in fact, dispose of the complaint. The altered effect may stem from somewhere else, but it is still a very real effect, a 'visual fact' rather than a matter of 'like or dislike'.

Let no one say that Renaissance masters were not aware of these visual facts. Signor Brandi has quoted evidence from Paolo Pini and others, but the most striking formulation comes from Vasari who is so often falsely accused of a purely naturalistic aesthetic:

A sallow colour makes another which is placed beside it appear the more lively, and melancholy and pallid colours make those near them very cheerful and almost of a certain flaming beauty ... In the same manner the colours should be employed with such unity that a dark and light should not be left unpleasantly shaded or lit to create a discordant and unpleasant lack of unity, except in the case of projections, that is the shadows thrown by the figures on each other, when a single light strikes a foreground figure which puts another into the shade. And even these, when they occur, must be painted with softness and unity for whoever disturbs that order will find that his painting looks more like a coloured carpet or a hand of playing cards than unified flesh or soft drapery or other feathery, delicate, and soft things. For as the ear is offended by music that is noisy, dissonant or harsh, except in certain passages and contexts, as I said of the projections, so the eyes are offended by colours which are too exaggerated or crude. As the excessively luminous mars the design, so the dim, sallow, flat and excessively soft looks quenched, old and sooty. But the unified that derives from the fiery and the flat is most perfect and delights the eye no less than a unified and subtle music delights the ear. Certain parts of the figures must lose themselves in the shadows and in the distance of the painting for if they appeared too vivid and fiery they would create confusion, but remaining dark and toned down like a background they give greater force to those in front ...^[20]

The official statement of policy regards it as common ground that 'the aim of those entrusted with the care of paintings is to present them as nearly as possible in the state in which the artist intended them to be seen'.^[21] One should have thought it is common ground that Titian is dead and that we cannot ask him what his intention was. What we do know is surely that he meant the appearance of his

paintings to result from ever richer and subtler networks of interacting relationships. It is also common ground, I trust, that these relationships have been affected, in the course of centuries, by mechanical damage, chemical changes, dirt, and deliberate interference. As a matter of fact, as Evans reminds us, this process of change starts even earlier, at the moment when the painting leaves the artist's workshop.

When the artist paints his picture he sees his paints with the surface relations dictated by the illumination conditions he is using. He can vary the saturation of his colours by the nature of the surface which he produces with his brush and by the angle at which he places the various small areas. Under any other conditions it is not the same picture and not what he intended to paint. Areas of different texture and angle will have different saturation relations from those he saw when he applied the colours, unless he paints the whole picture smooth and flat, perhaps ending with a thick coat of varnish. Even then, however, the saturations of all colours, and particularly of the dark ones, will change if the painting is placed in a room lighted quite differently from the artist's studio.[22]

Facts like these could make one despair, were it not for two consoling factors : the relative stability of interlocking relationships under varying conditions, and the marvellous capacity of the human mind to pick out and hold on to these constant elements in a world of flux. This capacity is partly inborn, partly learned. It enables us to make allowance for known changes of illumination and to take hints from minimal cues. While Hogarth was declaiming against dark canvases Liotard, with greater sensitivity, admitted that objectively speaking the ignorant layman is right when he finds the Raphaels in the Louvre ugly, but the painter is also right when his trained eye looks through the masking brown and perceives all the truth and beauty of a masterpiece.[23] Actually Hogarth's propaganda was not specifically directed against dark varnishes but against the predilection for Old Masters which threatened the livelihood of English painters. No one, therefore, was more emphatic than he was in stressing the instability of painting, the impossibility of genuine restoration:

When colours change at all it must be ... that one changes darker, another lighter, one quite to a different colour, whilst another, as ultramarine, will keep its natural brightness even in the fire. Therefore how is it possible that such different materials, ever variously changing ... should accidentally coincide with the artist's intention ... ? [24]

Hogarth may well have exaggerated the chemical changes to which pigments are subject. But since we know that even slight changes may affect the totality of relationships his argument retains its force. Strangely enough neither he nor, to my knowledge, anybody else ever asked the question whether the two facts to which he mainly objected were not causally connected: whether the increasing use of dark varnishes by picture restorers and dealers was not a reaction against the inevitable effects of chemical disruption of intended harmonies ? I am not arguing that this reaction would always be justified. Clearly the whole problem of how we should cope with these shifts in relationships is one of baffling complexity. What I want to argue against is only the simpliste denial that there is anything problematic in radical 'cleaning'. Psychologically this attitude is only too understandable. Official bias will always favour 'objective' rules of procedure which exempt the restorer and his employers from the responsibility of agonizing decisions. It is easy to demand that all the remaining pigments on the canvas should be laid bare and their relationships left to look after themselves. But pictorial unity is just as much a visual fact as is the colour of a particular mark. Unfortunately there can be no objective or scientific guidance in the dilemma which of the two was more relevant to the artist's intention, least of all, of course, the appearance of a half-stripped painting.

Max J. Friedlander was certainly right when he called the restorer's task the most thankless of all.[25] He has to choose between various known and even unknown evils. His only consolation must be that he is not alone in this plight among those who are concerned with the evanescent art of the past. The Shakespearian actor faced with a rhymed couplet which no longer rhymes because language changed, the musician confronted with orchestras in which a genuine harpsichord hopes to blend with violinists using modern bows, the translator of a libretto or the restorer of ancient buildings, each of them has to decide from case to case which of the necessary transpositions will do least harm to what he considers the intended totality of relationships. The case for conservatism is quite simply that the slow inevitable changes of time are perhaps less disruptive of this precious interaction than any violent interference can be. Of course where the structure as such is threatened with extinction we must intervene and save what can be saved from the ruin. When varnish goes blind it has to be removed. But should it not be common ground that the aim must be the conservation of our heritage as long as possible rather than the restoration of a condition which is beyond human recall? The 'restored' Cathedrals of England, France, and Germany are sufficient reminders of what can happen when renowned experts claim to know the intentions of bygone ages. Today few scientists, historians, and indeed restorers still need convincing that our evidence is always incomplete and our interpretations always fallible. Only one thing is quite sure, as the American road sign warned: 'Death is so permanent'.

1 *Loc. cit.*, p.218.

2 CESARE BRANDI: 'The Cleaning of Pictures in Relation to Patina, Varnish and Glazes', THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE, XCI [July 1949].

3 NEIL MACLAREN and ANTHONY WERNER: 'Some Factual Observations about Varnishes and Glazes', THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE, XCII [July 1950].

4 THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE, XCII [1950], p.298.

5 *'Inventa eius et caeteris profuere in arte. Unum imitari nemo potuit, quod absoluta opera atramento illinebat ita tenui, ut idipsum percussu claritates colorum ezcicaret, custodiretque a pulvere et sordibus, ad manum intuenti demum appareret. Sed et turn ration magna, ne colorum claritas oculorum aciem ofenderet, velati per lapidem specularem intuentibus e longinquo et eadem res nimisfiridis coloribus austeritatem occulte claret.'* Hist. Nat., XXXV, 97. (Having quoted the modern text in the letter referred to above, I have here inserted the wording known to the sixteenth century.)

6 New York and London [1960], p.57 and note.

7 HELMUT RUHEMANN: 'Leonardo's Use of Sfumato'. See my forthcoming rejoinder 'Blurred Images and the Unvarnished Truth' in the Spring number of the same Journal.

8 *Loc. cit.*, pp. 34-5.

9 *'... fu un color bruno, o vernice che si debba chiamare, il quale egli sottilmente distendeva sopra l'opre già finite; il quale con la sua riverberazione destava la chiarezza in alcuni dei colori e li difendeva dalla polvere, e non appariva se non da chi ben presso il mirava; e ciò faceva con isquisita ragione, acciochè la chiarezza d'alcuni accesi colori meno offendesse la vista di chi da lontano, come per vetro, li riguardasse, temperando ciò col più e col meno, secondo giudicava convenirsi.'* VASARI-MILANESI, I, p.38.

10`.. , che è tutto quello appunto, che facevano i nostri Pittori del 1300, avanti al ritrovamento della tempera coil 'olio, cioè, che davano sopra le tavole una vernice, che era una certa mestura, che alla loro dilavata pittura un certo che di più profondo, e di forza maggiore aggiungeva, ed il soverchio chiaro alquanto smorzando, riduceva a maggior somiglianza del naturale .. .

Se poi sarà detto, che i moderni pittori usano anch'essi talvolta vernice sopra le for pitture a olio, io rispondo, che tale usanza (ch'è di pochi) non è per supplire al mancamento della pittura a olio, cioè, per render più profondi gli scuri, e i chiari più mortificati e più carnosì, cose tutte, delle quali la pittura a olio non ha bisogno, ma bensì per rimediare ad un' accidental disgrazia, che occorre talora a cagione dell'imprimitura, mestica o altro che dassi sopra le tele o tavole, o pure proviene dalle medesime tele o tavole, cioè, d'attrarre così forte il liquido dell'olio, quasi rubandolo al colore, ch'e' venga in qualche luogo prosciugato per modo, ch'e' non possa farsi vedere in superficie per tutto egualmente, com'egli avrebbe fatto col cessare di tale accidente; con che per mezzo d'un'altra cosa untuosa, che è la vernice data dove l'olio in superficie mancò, fossi apparire (e questo è il punto stretto e forte) con che fossi apparire lo scuro, che già nella pittura fatta a olio veramente è, non quello che non v'è; che era appunto l'effetto, che in qualche piccolissima parte faceva alle sue pitture la vernice d'Apelle.' *Opere di Filippo Baldinucci*, III, Milan [1809], pp.317-19.

For a modern description of this process and its effects see W. OSTWALD: *Malerbriefe*, Leipzig [1904], pp.112-3.

11 *Loc. cit.*, p.77.

12 *The Art of Painting of Charles Alphonse Du Fresnoy, with annotations by Sir Joshua Reynolds*, York [1783]. I am indebted for this and other references to Dr Otto Kurz.

13 *The Analysis of Beauty*, ed. Joseph Burke, Oxford [1955], pp.132-3.

14 'Rifiorire. Quasi di nuovo fiorire; termine volgarissimo, con che usa la minuta gente esprimere quella sua insopportabile sciocchezza, di far talvolta ricoprir di nuovo colore, anche per mano di Maestro imperito, qualche antica pittura, che in processo di tempo sia alquanto annerita, con che toglie, non solo il bello della Pittura, ma eziandio l'apprezzabile dell'antichità. Direbbesi restaurare o resarcire, o ridurre a bene essere, il raccomandare che si fa qualche volta alcuna piccola parte di pittura anche d'eccellente Maestro, che in alcun luogo fusse scrostata o altrimenti guasta, perchè riesce facile a maestra mano; e alla pittura non pare che altro si tolga che quel difetto, che quantunque piccolo, par che le dia molta disgrazia e discredito. Molti però non del tutto imperiti dell'arte, sono stati di parere, che l'ottime pitture nè punto nè poco si rittocchino, anche da chi si sia; perchè, essendo assai difficile, che o poco o molto, o subito o in tempo, non si riconosca la restaurazione per piccola che sia; è anche vero che la pittura che non è schietta, va sempre accompagnata con gran discredito.

Sotto questo termine rifiorire, intendono anche gl'ignoranti, il lavare l'antiche pitture; il che fanno alcuna volta con tanta indiscretezza, che più non farebbono nel dirozzare un marmo; e non considerano, che non sapendosi bene spesso qual sia il composto delle mestiche o imprimiture, e quali siano i colori adoprati dagli Artefici (perchè più assai sopportano il ranno, o altra materia men forte le terre naturali, che i colori artificiali) non solo mettono esse pitture in pericolo di mandar dietro alla lavatura, i velamenti, le mezze tinte, e ancora i ritocchi, che sono gli ultimi colpi, ove consiste gran parte di for perfezione; ma anche di scrostarsi tutte a un tratto: ciò ch'io mi ricordo essere avvenuto ad un bel ritratto di sè medesimo fatto da Giovanni da San Giovanni, di sua propria mano a olio sopra tela, che fu dato alla G.M. del Serenissimo Cardinale Leopoldo per darle luogo fra gli altri ritratti de 'famosi Pittori ... Questo ritratto adunque venuto prima alle mani d'un ben pratico Doratore, forse per accomodarlo nel suo ornamento, lo volle lavare, nel modo che aveva fatto a'suoi giorni a molti altri

quadri; e ciò fatto, quasi subito si spicco e mistica, e colore, e quanto era sopra la tela accartocciato in minuti pezzi andò in terra, senza che altro del bel quadro rimanesse che la tela e' telajo.'
Vocabolario Toscano del Arte del Disegno, Florence [1681], s.v. *Rifiorire*. I quote from the Milan edition as under Note 10.

15 *An Accidence or Gamut of Painting in Oil or Watercolours*, London [1803]. Ibbetson's diatribes culminate in a cautionary tale worthy of M. R. James' *Ghost Stories*. He tells with gusto how one M. Colliveau set to work on an exquisite Dutch painting, with a chateau of brick in the distance as minutely finished as a Vanderheyden. 'He began with the most delicate pumice stone, and very soon got into the wall of the building, but was astonished to find the appearance of bricks and mortar still, although not quite so neat; he soon cleared away the wall on discovering a room beyond and pictures, furniture, etc...' Scouring away he finds a bed with curtains drawn and underneath, of course, a lady asleep. Underneath some gilding appeared and finally an inscription 'Now Caitiff, meditate on the havoc thou hast made throughout thy life, and go hang thyself. In this picture, wretch! thou hast destroyed what to the end of the world can never be replaced.'

16 SIR PHILIP HENDY: 'On Cleaning an Old Master', *The Listener* [31st August 1961].

17 *De la Loi du Contraste Simultané*, Paris [1839], Preface.

18 New York, London [1948], p.115.

19 *The Elements of Drawing* [1857], Letter III, 152.

20 *'un colore più smorto fa parere più vivo l'altro che gli è posto accanto, ed i colori maninconici e pallidi fanno parere più allegri quelli che li sono accanto, e quasi d'una certa bellezza fiammegianti.... nella pittura si debbono adoperare i colori con tanta unione, che e'non si lasci uno scuro, ed un chiaro si spiacevolmente ombrato e lumeggiato, che e'si faccia una discordanza e una disunione spiacevole; salvochè negli sbattimenti, che sono quell'ombre, che fanno le figure addosso l'una all'altra, quando un lume solo percuote addosso a una prima figura, che viene ad ombrare col suo sbattimento la seconda. E questi ancora quando accaggiono, voglion esser dipinti con dolcezza, ed unitamente; perchè, chi gli disordina, viene a fare che quella pittura par più presto un tapetto colorito, o un paro di carte da giuocare, che carne unita o panni morbidi o altre cose piumose, delicate e dolci. Chè siccome gli orecchi restano offesi da una musica, che fa strepito o dissonanza o durezza; (salvo però in certi luoghi, e a'tempi, siccome io dissi degli sbattimenti); così restano offesi gli occhi da' colori troppo carichi o crudi. Conciossiachè il troppo acceso offende il disegno; e lo abbacinato, smorto, abbagliato, e troppo dolce, pare una cosa spenta, vecchia, ed affumicata: Ma lo unito che tenga in fra lo acceso e lo abbagliato, è perfettissimo e diletta l'occhio, come una musica unita ed arguta diletta l'orecchio. Debboni perdere negli scuri certe parti delle figure, e nella lontananza della istoria; perchè, oltre che, se elle fussono nello apparire troppo vive ed accese, confonderebbono le figure; elle danno ancora, restando scure, ed abbagliate, quasi come campo, maggior forza alle altre, che vi sono innanzi.* VASARI-MILANESI, I, pp.179-81. I have based my translation on that of LOUISA S. MACLEHOSE in *Vasari on Technique* edited by G. Baldwin Brown, London [1907], pp.219-20.

21 MACLAREN AND WERNER, *loc. cit.*, p.189.

22 *Loc. cit.*, p.298.

23 J. E. LIOTARD: *Traité des Principes et des Règles de la Peinture* [1781], p.152 of the reprint, Geneva [1945].

24 *Ed. cit.*, p.130.

25 *Von Kunst und Kennerschaft*, Oxford, Zurich [1946], p.243. See also the chapter 'Life and Death of Paintings' in ETIENNE GILSON: *Painting and Reality*, New York and London [1957], pp.91-103 with many relevant references.