

# I TATTI STUDIES

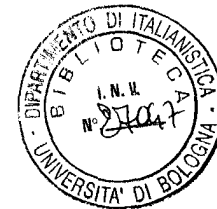
## ESSAYS IN THE RENAISSANCE



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LUCRETIIUS AND THE EPICUREANS  
IN THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT  
OF RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

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The story of the recovery of Lucretius in the fifteenth century is familiar and can be briefly told. After a short Carolingian renaissance, Lucretius apparently "went underground" for about five hundred years before being unearthed by Poggio Bracciolini in 1417.<sup>1</sup> Poggio gave the manuscript he had discovered in Germany to his friend Niccolò Niccoli to copy. Then there is silence again for more than a decade, broken only by the voice of Poggio asking Niccoli with increasing urgency to return his Lucretius: "You have already kept Lucretius for twelve years", he wrote to him in 1429, repeating in the following year: "I want to read Lucretius [...] surely you don't want to keep him for another ten years?"<sup>2</sup> Perhaps Poggio's

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This paper originated as my Inaugural Lecture at Royal Holloway, University of London, and I would like to acknowledge here my debt both to London University, my *alma mater*, and to Villa I Tatti for nourishing and supporting my work over many years. Among the many friends who have helped and advised me in preparing it for publication, I would particularly like to thank David Marsh, John Najemy and Jonathan Nelson, as well as Caroline Elam, Bill Kent and David Quint, to all of whom I am indebted for their valuable suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> See L. D. REYNOLDS, *Texts and Transmissions. A Survey of the Latin Classics*, Oxford, 1982, p. 220; M. D. REEVE, "The Italian Tradition of Lucretius", *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 23, 1980, pp. 27-46; W. B. FLEISCHMANN in P. O. KRISTELLER-F. E. CRANZ (eds.), *Catalogus translationum et commentariorum*, I, Washington, D. C., 1971, pp. 349-365; G. D. HADZSITS, *Lucretius and his Influence*, London, 1935, pp. 248-283 (on Murbach in Germany as the probable library where Poggio discovered Lucretius, p. 252); C. P. GODDARD, "Epicureanism and the Poetry of Lucretius in the Renaissance", Doctoral diss., Cambridge University, 1991, esp. the introduction and ch. 1, pp. 1-33, which I was kindly allowed by the author to read on microfilm. There is a useful summary of the Italian reception of Lucretius by F. LA BRASCA, "Hinc mel, hinc venenum": l'édiction commentée du *De rerum natura* par Giovanni Nardi (1647)" in *Présence de Lucrèce*, ed. R. POIGNAULT, Tours, 1999, pp. 381-398, and now by U. PIZZANI (note 19 below).

<sup>2</sup> POGGIO BRACCIOLINI, *Lettere*, ed. H. HARTH, I, Florence, 1984, pp. 89 (no. 34, 13 Dec. 1429: 'Tenuisti iam Lucretium duodecim annis') and 103 (no. 38, 27 May 1430: "Cu-

appetite was whetted by the growing scholarly interest in Epicurus in these years, but there seems to be little overt evidence that Lucretius himself was read or cited – at least in Florence – before the 1450s. Yet after the middle of the century, to judge from the fifty or so extant manuscripts and the repeated printed editions of *De rerum natura*, the poem was being read by increasing numbers of people.<sup>3</sup> In Florence, nine manuscripts survive in the Medici library alone while in Rome and Naples interest in Lucretius is associated with the academies of Pomponio Leto, Antonio Panormita and Giovanni Pontano.<sup>4</sup> It seemed that the text would never again be at risk. Yet it remained a risky text. In 1517, exactly one hundred years after Poggio re-discovered *De rerum natura*, Lucretius was prohibited as “reading in our schools” by the Florentine synod, because it was “a lascivious and wicked work, in which every effort is used to demonstrate the mortality of the soul”.<sup>5</sup>

pio legere Lucretium [...] nunquid etiam illum decennium tenere velis?”). His appeals for the return of Lucretius began in 1425, see pp. 144 (no. 51, 12 May 1425), 149 (no. 53, 14 June 1425), 172 (no. 65, 14 Sept. 1426), 142 (no. 50, 14 Apr. 1427: “Rogo te, mittas mihi Lucretium”) and 187 (no. 73, 17 May 1427).

<sup>3</sup> For example, in Florence Sigismondo della Stufa, Ufficiale dello Studio 1485-1486, owned a Lucretius (ASF Ufficio de' Pupilli 179, 366r, the reference to which I owe to Jonathan Davies). REEVE, *loc. cit.* (see note 1), pp. 27-28, lists 51 mostly fifteenth-century manuscripts (plus two printed editions), to which should now be added Berlin Lat.2<sup>o</sup> 544 and Madrid Nac. 2885. First printed in Brescia in ca. 1473, there were at least three further editions in Venice and Verona before the Giuntine Florentine edition of 1512, C. GORDON, *A Bibliography of Lucretius*, London, 1962 (listed on pp. 29-44). Identified readers listed by Reeve are Poggio, Niccoli, Pontano, Pomponio Leto, Poliziano, Machiavelli and Marullo, also Filelfo, Panormita, Guarino and Valla, pp. 27 and note 10 on 42-43.

<sup>4</sup> One of the MSS. in the Biblioteca Laurenziana (35, 30) is Niccoli's copy of Poggio's original; another belonged to and is annotated by Angelo Poliziano (35, 29), and another (35, 28) belonged to Francesco Sassetti, copied by Bartolomeo Fonzio in the 1470s, see A. C. DE LA MARE, “The Library of Francesco Sassetti (1421-1490)” in C. H. CLOUGH (ed.), *Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance*, Manchester, 1976, p. 178; S. BERTELLI, “Noterelle Machiavelliane. Un codice di Lucrezio e di Terenzio”, *Rivista storica italiana*, 73, 1961, pp. 549-550. On MSS. in Rome and Naples, see GODDARD, *op. cit.* (see note 1).

<sup>5</sup> FLEISCHMANN, *op. cit.* (see note 1), p. 352: “opera lasciva et impia, quale est Lucretii poema, ubi animae mortalitatem totis viribus ostendere nititur”. Although the Commissary General of the Inquisition, Michele Ghislieri, included Lucretius and Lucian among the many pagan books to be read as fables and not taken seriously, like Ariosto's *Orlando* or the *Cento nouvelle*, Lucretius (who, unlike Lucian, was not listed by name in the Roman *Index* of that year), would have been included generically in the prohibition against “Libri omnes quicunque a catholicis episcopis vel universitatibus vel inquisitoribus [...] in diocesisibus

So we are presented with an enigma, a text that multiplied more than fifty-fold in the course of the fifteenth century and yet whose readers and motives for reading Lucretius remain largely unknown. The popularity of the text seems confirmed by the need to prohibit it from being read in school, but thanks to the danger that it presented, it is as difficult to discover how Lucretius was read as it is to discover who read him. Because he was a pupil of Epicurus, whom he extols in his poem as “our father, the discoverer of truths”, “a god”, “an oracle, whose glory is now exalted to the skies”,<sup>6</sup> he was tainted with Epicurus's posthumous reputation for hedonism and materialism – a reputation that Epicurus retained throughout the Middle Ages, despite a few countervailing voices intent on keeping his historical persona alive.<sup>7</sup> In view of Epicurus's beliefs about the world and man – uncaring gods, multiple worlds created not by design but by the chance clash of atoms within empty space, the human mind and spirit co-terminous with the body and dying with it – he threatened the entire structure of the Christian universe and its underpinning, belief in providence and an after-life that rewarded the good and punished the bad.<sup>8</sup> It is not surprising, then, that in *The Divine Comedy* we find the Epicureans buried apart from the other heretics, since they alone believe “that man's soul, when his

[...] prohibiti fuerint”, *Index des livres interdits*, ed. J. M. DE BUJANDA, VIII, Geneva, 1990, no. 00147, pp. 32, 245.

<sup>6</sup> LUCRETIUS III, 1-30 at 9: “tu pater es, rerum inventor”; V, 8-10: “deus ille fuit, deus”; VI, 5-8: “virum [...] omnia veridico qui quondam ex ore profudit; cuius [...] ad caelum gloria fertur”; cf. I, 62-79.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Seneca and even the critical Cicero, whose dialogues *in utramque partem* always present his arguments before refuting them. On Epicurus's reputation in the Middle Ages and earlier, see M. R. PAGNONI, “Prime note sulla tradizione medioevale ed umanistica di Epicuro”, *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, s. 3, 4<sup>o</sup>, 1974, pp. 1143-1177 (citing, for example, the positive evaluation of THOMAS AQUINAS, *In X libros Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum expositio*, I.1.5); A. MURRAY, “The Epicureans”, in P. BOITANI-A. TORTI (eds.), *Intellectuals and Writers in Fourteenth-Century Europe*, Cambridge (Brewer), 1986, pp. 138-163; and R. FUBINI, “Note su Lorenzo Valla e la composizione del ‘De voluptate’”, in *I Classici nel Medioevo e nell'Umanesimo. Miscellanea filologica*, Genoa, 1975, esp. pp. 30-43 (discussing Cicero's *De finibus* as a source for reevaluating Epicurus on pp. 25, 35); cf. CICERO, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, III, xx, 46, that Epicurus spoke “multa severe, multa praclare”.

<sup>8</sup> Reflected in LUCRETIUS II, 180-1: “nequaquam nobis divinitus esse creatam / naturam mundi”; III, 161-2: “naturam animi atque animai / corpoream docet esse”; 470: “quare animum quoque dissolui fateare necessest”.

body does, will die", and this, as Cristoforo Landino explained in his 1481 *Commentary* on Dante, "removes every basis for right living in civil society and for true religion".<sup>9</sup> (Fig. 1)

Despite the threat Epicureanism posed to the structure of society, signs of interest in the historical Epicurus did begin to emerge in the early fifteenth century. Initially he was discussed in humanist debates about virtue and the ancient philosophical sects, for example in Leonardo Bruni's *Isagogicon* (1424-1426), and shortly afterwards in writings like Cosma Raimondi's "robustly hedonistic" *Defence of Epicurus* (ca. 1429) and Lorenzo Valla's better-known treatise *On pleasure* (*De voluptate*), the first version of which was completed two years later.<sup>10</sup> Another new source recovered at this time was Diogenes Laertius's biography of Epicurus in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, which was brought from Constantinople in 1416 and translated by the monk Ambrogio Traversari for Cosimo de' Medici in the 1420s and early 1430s.<sup>11</sup> Since this was exactly the moment when Poggio was clamouring for the return of his Lucretius from Niccolò Niccoli, it is tempting to see the late 1420s as a *tournant* in attitudes to Epicurus and Lucretius, the beginnings of "radical naturalism" and the "new vision of the world" that traditionally marks the Renaissance period: new ideas introduced by the recovery of ancient texts.<sup>12</sup> For despite Traversari's painstaking attempt to

<sup>9</sup> DANTE, *Divine Comedy*, X, 1-15: "da questa parte hanno / con Epicuro tutti i suoi seguaci, / che l'anima col corpo morta fanno"; LANDINO, *Commentary*, Florence, Niccolò di Lorenzo, 1481, fol. g6r: "Imperoché chi pone l'anima mortale toglie ogni fondamento al giusto vivere civile et alla vera religione".

<sup>10</sup> M. DAVIES, "Cosma Raimondi's Defence of Epicurus", *Rinascimento*, 27, 1987, p. 124, where he notes the absence of any sign in him of either Lucretius or Diogenes Laertius; cf. FUBINI, *loc. cit.* (see note 7), pp. 35-45 and M. LORCH, "The Epicurean in Lorenzo Valla's *On Pleasure*", in M. J. OSLER (ed.), *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquillity. Epicurean and Stoic Themes in European Thought*, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 89-114. BRUNI'S *Isagogicon* is edited by H. BARON, *Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften*, Leipzig-Berlin, 1928, pp. 24-25, English transl. in G. GRIFFITHS-J. HANKINS-D. THOMPSON (eds.), *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, Binghamton, 1987, at p. 270.

<sup>11</sup> It was presented to Cosimo in 1433 (note 44 below) and PAGNONI, *loc. cit.* (see note 7), pp. 1457-1460. 48 fifteenth-century manuscripts are listed by A. SOTTILE, "Il Laerzio latino e greco e altri autografi di Ambrogio Traversari", in R. AVESANI *et al.* (eds.), *Vestigia. Studi in onore di Giuseppe Billanovich*, II, Rome, 1984, pp. 704-707 and note 21, and Pagnoni lists seven different printed editions from 1472 to 1497, p. 1459, note 74.

<sup>12</sup> E. GARIN, "Ricerche sull'Epicureismo del Quattrocento" in *Id.*, *La Cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano*, Florence, 1979, pp. 72-84: "un motivo fortemente in-

justify his translation on the grounds that Christian and pagan philosophers shared much in common, the impact of the "new and revolutionary" *Lives* of Diogenes Laertius cannot be denied, which not only influenced humanists like Valla but also transformed the ideas about Epicureanism of so influential a philosopher as Niccolò da Cusano.<sup>13</sup>

Nowadays, however, far from being regarded as free-thinking and open to new influences, the fifteenth century is called a period of "marked clericalization" when it was no more possible to be an "unbeliever" than it was – according to Lucien Febvre – in the sixteenth-century.<sup>14</sup> The new ideas, we are told, were treated as aids to being "a good Christian" and not as a threat to the Church's hegemony.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the Church provided a career structure for nearly all Renaissance scholars, encouraging if not conformity at least no overt challenge from them to its authority. Thus Poggio Bracciolini, who worked in the papal curia as an apostolic writer, was careful to warn Panormita, after reading his *Hermaphroditus*, that "the same licence, you know, is not given to us Christians as was given to

novatore", "una posizione di radicale naturalismo", "la nuova visione del mondo" (75, 77, 85-86).

<sup>13</sup> According to PAGNONI, *loc. cit.* (see note 7), p. 1457, this "nuovo e rivoluzionario documento", as well as influencing Valla, also explains "la ancor più solida ricostituzione dell'Epicuro storico in Filippo Buonaccorsi e Paolo Giustiniani"; and on CUSANO, *ibid.*, p. 1459, note 73; cf. M. GIGANTE, "Ambrogio Traversari interprete di Diogene Laerzio", in G. C. GARFAGNINI (ed.), *Ambrogio Traversari nel VI centenario della nascita*, Florence, 1988, pp. 367-459, esp. 394-404; nevertheless, where Christians and pagans disagreed, Traversari said he preferred the evidence of "fanciulli infanti e fanciulle, ogni età, ogni sesso" who discuss these doctrines and assert "l'immortalità dell'anima, che i filosofi pur sudando mai conobbero limpidamente" (p. 403).

<sup>14</sup> L. FEBVRE, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais* (1942, transl. Cambridge, Mass., 1982); discussed by D. WOOTTON, "New Histories of Atheism", in M. HUNTER-D. WOOTTON (eds.), *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, Oxford, 1992, pp. 16-17. On unbelief, see also J. C. A. GASKIN (ed.), *Varieties of Unbelief from Epicurus to Sartre*, New York, 1989, introduction, pp. 1-26; cf. MURRAY, *loc. cit.* (see note 7), *Id.*, "Piety and Impiety" (see note 32), and S. REYNOLDS, "Social Mentalities" (see note 33). The phrase "marked clericalization" is R. FUBINI's, "Ficino e i Medici all'avvento di Lorenzo il Magnifico", *Rinascimento*, 24, 1984, p. 13: "un'epoca di già spiccata clericalizzazione della cultura".

<sup>15</sup> By T. VERDON in his introduction to T. VERDON-J. HENDERSON (eds.), *Christianity and the Renaissance*, Syracuse, 1990, pp. 2-3. He describes the attempt of Italian Renaissance humanists "to wed Greco-Roman learning with the truths revealed in Christ" as "perhaps the most optimistic venture in Western intellectual history" (p. 28).

the poets of old who did not know God".<sup>16</sup> Another scholar interested in Epicurean *voluptas* was Leon Battista Alberti, and he too was a cleric in the papal curia and also prior of the church of San Martino at Gangalandi near Florence.<sup>17</sup> Two other humanists interested in Lucretius, Marsilio Ficino and Angelo Poliziano, both possessed benefices with the cure of souls. Although Ficino enjoyed a burst of hedonism in his twenties when he wrote a commentary on Lucretius as well as a treatise *On pleasure*, it is now said that even as a young man he was always a Christian, well before becoming a priest and a dedicated Platonist in the 1470s. Subsequently, he attacked Lucretius's ideas wherever they conflicted with his own beliefs, disowning to Poliziano the "Aristippean and partly Lucretian rather than Platonic" letters which were circulating in his name, and declaring in 1492 that he had burnt his youthful Lucretian commentary.<sup>18</sup> And thanks to Ficino's instruction, Poliziano, too, re-

<sup>16</sup> See E. O'CONNOR, "Panormita's Reply to his Critics: the *Hermaphroditus* and the Literary Defense", *Renaissance Quarterly*, 50, 1997, p. 997: "Scis enim non licere idem nobis, qui Christiani sumus, quod olim poetis qui Deum ignorabant". Traversari's scruples about translating Diogenes Laertius and his means of resolving them are discussed by GIGANTE, *loc. cit.* (see note 13).

<sup>17</sup> I am indebted to John Najemy for suggesting to me Lucretius's influence on Alberti's view of love, first discussed in a paper given at the Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America in Florence, 2000. Other common themes are an interest in nature and animals, the nature of the gods, man's weak beginnings and the origins of cities; but with the exception of one citation from Lucretius about old age (III, 451-454, in Italian in *Theogonius, Opere volgari*, ed. C. GRAYSON, Bari, 1966, II, p. 101) and the comparisons cited by Najemy, Alberti's epicureanism seems to derive more obviously from Diogenes Laertius than from *De rerum natura* (see, e.g., note 38 below). However see now S. GAMBINO, "Alberti Lettore di Lucrezio. Motivi lucreziani nel Theogonius", *Albertiana*, 4, 2001, pp. 69-84, the reference to which I owe to Luca Boschetto. On Alberti's benefice at Gangalandi, see L. BOSCHETTO, *Leon Battista Alberti e Firenze: biografia, storia, letteratura*, Florence, 2000, esp. pp. 102-127 at 114 and 120; on *voluptas*, pp. 85-86.

<sup>18</sup> P. O. KRISTELLER, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, Rome, 1969, p. 204: "egli non è mai stato pagano nemmeno nei commenti a Lucrezio, ma sempre cristiano", although see the comments of R. FUBINI, *loc. cit.* (see note 14), p. 12, note 20. On his *Commentariola in Lucretium*, which he said in 1492 he had burnt ("Vulcano dedi"), KRISTELLER, *Supplementum ficinianum*, Florence, 1937, I, p. CLXIII; his two 1457 letters quoting Lucretius, *ibid.*, II, pp. 81-84, his treatise *De voluptate*, and his letter to Poliziano denouncing the "epistolae quaedam quasi Aristippice et quadam ex parte Lucretianae potiusquam Platonicae", are in his *Opera omnia*, I, repr. Turin, 1962, pp. 1041-1042, II, p. 648; cf. S. GENTILE, "Poliziano, Ficino, Andronico Callisto e la traduzione del 'Carmide' Platonico", in V. FERA-M. MARTELLI (eds.), *Angelo Poliziano, poeta, scrittore, filologo*, Florence, 1998, pp. 376, 377. For his later condemnation of Lucretius in his *Theologia platonica* (ed.

jected the errors of Epicurus as well as "the impious theories of Lucretius, who had lost his reason", henceforth – as a devoted member of Lorenzo il Magnifico's circle and a cleric – limiting his interest in Lucretius to textual criticism that contributed to the Giuntine edition of 1512 but not to unorthodoxy.<sup>19</sup>

Naples was no less orthodox than Florence, according to Charlotte Goddard, who has provided the fullest account of the influence of Lucretius in that city. After Antonio Panormita took his copy of Poggio's manuscript there, Naples became the centre of another network of Lucretian scholars. One was Lorenzo Bonincontri, a Tuscan who joined Panormita's academy in Naples after being exiled from Florence and wrote a scientific poem *De rebus naturalibus et divinis*. Another was Giovanni Pontano, a royal secretary and successor to Panormita as head of the academy, whose more famous scientific poem *Urania* was read by the Florentine humanist Pietro Crinito during his stay in Naples in 1495-1496. And a third was Michele Marullo, author of Lucretian *Hymni naturales*, who also joined the academy in Naples – and, briefly, the Roman academy of Pomponio

R. MARCEL, *Théologie platonicienne*, Paris, 1964), see his "Obiectio Lucretii et responsio. Quod mens potest absque corpore operari" and "Obiectio Epicuri et responsio. Quod Deus non facit mentem nisi ex seipso et per seipsum", II, bk. 10, chs. 6 and 7; cf. I, bk. 2, ch. 13, pp. 122-124, bk. 8, p. 291 and II, bk. 9, ch. 5, pp. 42-43. Cristoforo Landino, too, though not a cleric, also condemned Epicureanism because of his Platonic standpoint in the *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, as he explains in his Commentary on Dante, (see note 9, fols. g5v-g6r).

<sup>19</sup> See I. MAIER, *Ange Politien. La formation d'un poète humaniste (1469-1480)*, Geneva, 1966, p. 75 quoting what Poliziano told Bartolomeo Fonzio concerning his early instruction on the universe from Ficino, lines 130-179, esp. 173-174, and 428; GENTILE, *loc. cit.* (see note 18), p. 378: "Impia non sani turbat modo dicta Lucreti Imminet erratis nunc, Epicure, tuis"; on his emendations to Pomponio Leto's copy of *De rerum natura* which he borrowed in the late 1480s, see MAIER, p. 378, FLEISHMANN, *op. cit.* (see note 1), p. 352, REEVE, *loc. cit.* (see note 1), pp. 39-40. On his possible Lucretian contribution to Botticelli's *Primavera*, however, see notes 23 and 24 below. As this paper was going to press, Salvatore Camporeale kindly lent me a very recent publication, *Rapporti e scambi tra umanesimo italiano ed umanesimo europeo* (L. TARUGI [ed.], Milan 2001), which contains two relevant articles on Lucretius: U. PIZZANI, "Lucrezio nell'umanesimo italiano e nei giudizi dei primi commentatori d'Oltralpe" (pp. 515-538) and G. BOCCUTO, "Riprese Lucretiane nel Marullo e nel Poliziano" (pp. 705-716), the latter usefully analysing Lucretian influences in Poliziano's *Nutricia* and in Marullo's *Hymni*, with the conclusion that while in Poliziano they have "un valore prevalentemente, se non esclusivamente, letterario", in Marullo "superano l'ambito formale per acquistare importanza decisiva a livello di contenuto e di posizioni di pensiero" (p. 716).

Leto, owner of another manuscript of *De rerum natura* – before going to Florence in 1489. According to Goddard, however, all these writings equally exploited Epicureanism “by recalling Lucretius and then by deliberately rejecting Epicurean arguments to reinforce their own Christian positions”<sup>20</sup>

If we rely on the textual route to understanding Lucretius in the fifteenth century, we evidently have to agree that his influence was minimal, restricted to a group of scholars who liked the medium of his poetry but not his message.<sup>21</sup> But was this really how the fifteenth century responded to the bold and imaginative Lucretius, who wrote so movingly about love, mental fear (*terror animi*) and that “hidden power” (*vis abdita quaedam*) that grinds down humanity?<sup>22</sup> Nothing illustrates the problem of interpreting Lucretius

<sup>20</sup> GODDARD, *op. cit.* (see note 1), p. 3. This offers an extremely detailed and meticulous analysis of five Renaissance poets influenced by Lucretius in the Renaissance, based on their use of Lucretian language and ideas, although not attempting to study their writings in a wider context; chs. 2-4 discuss the work of these three authors, ch. 7 commentaries on Lucretius. Cf. EAD., “Pontano’s use of the didactic genre: rhetoric, irony and the manipulation of Lucretius in *Urania*”, *Renaissance Studies*, V, 1991, p. 257; also J. KRAYE on Epicureanism in “Moral philosophy”, C. B. SCHMITT-Q. SKINNER (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, Cambridge, 1988, p. 377: “Scholars frequently gave high praise to Lucretius’ Latin style while denouncing his philosophical views or passing over them in silence”. On Crinito, who was a friend of Scala as well as Marullo, see his *De Honestis Disciplinis*, ed. C. ANGELESI, Rome, 1955, pp. 14-15 and note 31 (quoting Lucretius on pp. 113, 311-312, 453); G. PARENTI, “Una testimonianza parziale della ‘Forma Crinito’ dell’*Urania* nel MS. Magliabechiano VII. 1183”, *Rinascimento*, 2<sup>a</sup> ser., 18, 1978, p. 276.

<sup>21</sup> Slightly later exceptions can be found both in Florence and Bologna, however. In Bologna the 1511 commentary on Lucretius by Giovan Battista Pio contextualises Lucretius by citing the Bolognese earthquakes and plague of 1504 and 1505, “peiorque motu fuit timor ipse motus”; V. DEL NERO, “Filosofia e teologia nel commento di Giovan Battista Pio a Lucrezio”, *Interpres*, 6, 1985-6, p. 159, cf. U. PIZZANI, *loc. cit.* (see note 19), pp. 528-530; while in Florence there seems to be a link, still to be investigated, between Marullo and his Florentine followers, such as Tommaso Soderini, who was dedicatee both of Piero Candido’s Giuntine commentary praising Marullo (Florence, 1512, London, British Library, 11375 aa. 20 at a2r-v) and also R. FRANCESCHI’S, *In Lucretium Paraphrasis cum appendice de animi immortalitate* (Bologna, 1504, BNF Postillati 101); on Franceschi, a popular and evidently unbelieving university teacher at Pisa, who was described on his death as a “Lucretian philosopher”, see A. VERDE, “Il secondo periodo de Lo Studio Fiorentino (1504-1528)”, in P. RENZI (ed.) *L’Università e la sua storia*, Arezzo, 1998, pp. 8, 17-19, esp. 18, note 35, the knowledge of which I owe to Jonathan Davies.

<sup>22</sup> LUCRETIVS I, 146-8: “Hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necesses / non radii solis neque lucida tela diei / discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque”, and V, 1233-4 “res humanas vis abdita quaedam / obterit”, translated by C. SEGAL as “a certain dark force”,

better than the controversy that surrounds Botticelli’s *Primavera*. While Aby Warburg more than a century ago acknowledged Lucretius, as well as Poliziano, as among the sources of this celebration of nature and the power of love, Ernst Gombrich in the mid 1940s told us instead that the painting had the sober pedagogical purpose of instructing the young Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici in the moral virtues.<sup>23</sup> Within the last decade, however, a series of writers (encouraged by a new inventory and re-dating of the painting) have re-acknowledged *De rerum natura* as one of its sources, with its description of “Spring and Venus, and Venus’s winged harbinger marching before, with Zephyr and mother Flora a pace behind him strewing the whole path in front with brilliant colours and scents” – and what more appropriate theme for a wedding gift (if, as it has more recently been suggested, it was related to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco’s marriage to Semiramide d’Appiano in 1482) than Lucretius’s opening lines celebrating Spring, with Zephyr and “Sweet Venus” striking “Into all hearts [...] your lure of love”.<sup>24</sup> These re-interpretations depended heavily on the discovery of new documentary records, letters and inventories, as well as on changing historical fashions. So is it possible to know how fifteenth-century readers read Lucretius?

*Lucretius on Death and Anxiety. Poetry and Philosophy in De rerum natura*, Princeton, 1990, p. 227, and on the fear of death to which Lucretius offered a therapy, pp. 19-25.

<sup>23</sup> A. WARBURG, “Sandro Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus and Spring*” (1893), now translated in ID., *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, Los Angeles, 1999, pp. 129-130, 420-421, pointing to Poliziano’s *Rusticus* (written in 1483) and his *Stanze*, I, 68-70 as among Botticelli’s sources. E. GOMBRICH attacked the “spell” exercised by Poliziano’s *Stanze* and the romantic myth of Simonetta Vespucci in his famous article, “Botticelli’s Mythologies”, first published in 1945 and reprinted, with a new introduction, in *Symbolic Images. Studies in the Art of the Renaissance II*, 2nd edition, London, 1978, pp. 37-64; it is fully discussed by C. DEMPSEY in *The Portrayal of Love. Botticelli’s ‘Primavera’ and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent*, Princeton, 1992, pp. 120-121.

<sup>24</sup> LUCRETIVS V, 737-40, cf. I, 2-19; R. LIGHTBOWN (*Botticelli. Life and Work*, New York, 1989, pp. 137-139); C. DEMPSEY, *op. cit.* (see note 23), pp. 30, 46-47, 50-51, and H. BREDEKAMP (*Sandro Botticelli. La Primavera, Florenz als Garten der Venus*, Frankfurt am Main, 1988, pp. 60-64) all revert to Lucretius as a source for *Primavera*, possibly mediated through Poliziano’s *Rusticus* and his *Stanze* as Aby Warburg suggested (in 1893, first English translation in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity* in 1999, pp. 129-130, 420-421; see DEMPSEY, above, pp. 35-36; N. RUBINSTEIN, “Youth and Spring and Botticelli’s *Primavera*”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 60, 1997, p. 248). On Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco’s wedding, planned for May but postponed until August 1482, LIGHTBOWN, pp. 122 and 142-143; DEMPSEY, p. 23; BREDEKAMP, pp. 20-21 (who now however proposes a date “around 1485”; ID., “The Medici, Sixtus IV and Savonarola: conflict-

In what follows, I propose to follow the trail of Lucretius by another route, one that approaches him through his relevance to contemporary concerns and not through texts alone. Lucretius contains many "clusters of ideas" that would have had resonance at the time, especially his central concern with death and the fear instilled by religion about the afterlife, the force and dangers of love, the role of chance in the creation of the world, man's evolution and his changing relationship to animals, whom he first competed with for survival, then domesticated, and finally re-brutalised – ideas that, interestingly, are nearly all picked out for comment in the copy of Lucretius belonging to the Medici's banker, Francesco Sassetti.<sup>25</sup> The themes of religion and evolution are not necessarily linked to each other, but they became associated by the events in Florence in the 1490s, when a combination of revolution and famine gave reality to Lucretius's ideas about primitive society and the faltering, chancy growth of civilisation – ideas that were reflected in paintings at the time, as well as in humanist writings. Nearly all these ideas can be found in other classical writers, but Lucretius's personal oscillation between hope and fear, love and misogyny, primitivism and civility, makes his thought distinctive, with resonances – when we find them – that can only come from him. Bartolomeo Scala is one writer in whom such resonances can be found, another is his successor as chancellor, Marcello Adriani, who in turn leads us to Niccolò Machiavelli, the most famous representative of the revolution in thinking about law, politics and religion at the beginning of the early modern period. Among artists, Piero di Cosimo is the most obvious among several other Florentines to reflect these ideas. In differing

ing strands in Botticelli's Life and Work' in *Sandro Botticelli. The Drawings for Dante's Divine Comedy*, London, 2000, pp. 296 and 346, note 24).

<sup>25</sup> See Laur. pl. 35, 28 (note 4 above, copied by the humanist Bartolomeo Fonzio), fols. 62v-63v, commenting "Superstitio" [...] "Vanam quae de inferis traduntur", "vere et graviter", at Lucr. III, 980-981, 1011-1013, 1045-1060; 85r-87r: "Elegantissima de amore et venera re descriptio", "Remedia contra amorem", "Optimo comparatio", "Evitandum esse amorem", etc. at IV, 1030, 1063-1081, 1097-1104, 1146-1149; 108v-109r: "De primo hominum genere et quam incultum et agreste fuerit" at V, 925-975 (cf. V, 1041-1043, "putare aliquem tum nomina distribuiss/Rebus et inde homines didiciss vocabula prima/Desiperest", which receives the only marginal comment in Piero di Cosimo de' Medici's Lucretius, Laur. pl. 35, 27, fol. 123v: "vocabula non ratione inventa sed casu"). On the approach through "clusters of ideas", see P. HOWARD, "The Preacher and the Holy in Renaissance Florence", in B. M. KIENZLE *et al.* (eds.), *Models of Holiness in Medieval Sermons*, Louvain-la Neuve, 1996, pp. 355-356.

ways, these ideas did, I think, reflect contemporary concerns and helped to articulate them, thereby giving them more concreteness in a fifteenth-century context than is currently acknowledged.

### *Fear and death*

More important than *De rerum natura's* opening theme of love is its central concern with death and the fear of death, which Lucretius strove to dispel by arguing that there is no after-life. To fifteenth-century readers, surely the poem's most immediate relevance lay in its attempt to demonstrate the irrationality of "trembling, in the light of day, at what is no more terrible than what little boys shiver at in the dark, imagining what is about to happen".<sup>26</sup> As Jean Delumeau has famously demonstrated, sin and fear were dominant themes in late medieval and Renaissance society, fuelled by Mendicant sermons and repeated cycles of plague.<sup>27</sup> This was especially true of Florence, where its merchants were vulnerable to an additional "malaise of soul" – as Peter Howard has called it – due to their dubious entrepreneurial activities and noted unwillingness to enter a church. It was in Florence that the ecumenical Church Council of 1439 chose to reiterate the decree of a much earlier Council, that "Those souls who die in the state of Deadly Sin, or with the sole Original Sin, will go down into Hell" – its promise that there they would "nonetheless be punished with differing penalties" surely less a source of comfort than a further worry about how to address these differentials.<sup>28</sup> The same must also have been true of Mendicant sermons, especially the sermons and writings that Savonarola addressed to Florentines on "the art of dying well", which urged them to "go

<sup>26</sup> LUCRETIVS II, 55-8: "Nam veluti pueri trepidant atque omnia caecis / in tenebris metuunt, sic nos in luce timemus / interdum nilo quae sunt metuenda magis quam / quae pueri in tenebris pavitant finguntque futura" (in translating Lucretius I use the Loeb translation of ROUSE-SMITH, London, 1982, and also that of A. M. ESOLEN, Baltimore, 1995).

<sup>27</sup> J. DELUMEAU, *Sin and Fear: the Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th-18th Centuries*, 1983, transl. London, 1990.

<sup>28</sup> P. HOWARD, "Entrepreneurial Ne'er-do-wells: Sin and Fear in Renaissance Florence", *Memorie Domenicane*, n.s., 25, 1994, pp. 246 and 248, where he quotes Delumeau (*op. cit.* [see note 27], p. 276) on the decree and the preceding Council of Lyon in 1274.

often to see the dead being buried, go often to burials, observe often those who are dying" and "take pleasure, if you know that a relative or friend or some other person is dying, in watching him die and afterwards in going to see him being buried".<sup>29</sup> For although the "explosion of masses" in Florence and elsewhere in the later fifteenth century demonstrates the success of Savonarola's and the Mendicants' campaign to save souls, it is also evidence of heightened anxiety about death – like that of a young married woman on her deathbed in the 1480s, who admitted that despite putting all her hope in God, "yet I fear fear itself, because I don't know where I am going".<sup>30</sup> Since Lucretius's poem articulated fear of death and the unknown, it may well have resonated with even devout Christians, especially the merchants and humanist intellectuals who were its early readers. Is it possible to go farther than this, and say that even the unbelief of Lucretius and Epicurus had more appeal than churchmen and moralists would like us to believe?

We know that people were sceptical about ideas that ran counter to their everyday experience and commonsense, such as the resurrection of the body. It was not only the country peasants of Montaillou who joked about the possibility of dead souls returning "one day in the same bones as were theirs before" and "coming to life again with this flesh and these bones": "what an idea, I don't believe it!"<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> In his popular printed manual *On the Art of Dying Well*, cited and translated by L. POLIZZOTTO, "The Piagnone Way of Death, 1494-1545", *I Tatti Studies*, 3, 1989, p. 27; D. WEINSTEIN, "The Art of Dying Well and Popular Piety in the Preaching and Thought of Girolamo Savonarola", in M. TETEL-R. WITT-R. GOFFEN (eds.), *Life and Death in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, Durham, N. C., 1989, pp. 88-104.

<sup>30</sup> She was the wife of the Bolognese humanist, Sabbadino degli Arienti, cited by C. JAMES, *Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti: a Literary Career*, Florence, 1996, p. 70: "tutta la mia speranza è in Dio ma io ho pur paura de la paura perché non so dove me vada". On the question of whether late medieval religion functioned to console or "foster [...] debilitating anxiety", P. MARSHALL, "Fear, purgatory and polemic in Reformation England", in W. G. NAPHY-P. ROBERTS (eds.), *Fear in Early Modern Society*, Manchester, 1997, p. 150 (who evidently did not know of Francesca degli Arienti when describing Roosevelt's famous assurance that "we have nothing to fear but fear itself" as "preposterous, even blasphemous to the Tudor mind", pp. 159-160). Cf. DELUMEAU, *op. cit.* (see note 27), pp. 60-64; and on the "heightened sense of spiritual anxiety" in the later fifteenth century, S. STROCCHIA, *Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence*, Baltimore, 1992, pp. 204, 208.

<sup>31</sup> E. LE ROY LADURIE, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French village, 1294-1324* (tr. B. BRAY), London, 1978, p. 320. See also J. DUVERNOY, *Inquisition à Pamiers: Cathares, Juifs, Lépreux... devant leurs juges*, Toulouse, 1966, repr. 1986, pp. 125: "il me

Italian city dwellers, among whom Catharism was also prevalent, were equally sceptical about bodily resurrection – and hence, as St Anthony of Padua complained, about Christ's resurrection from the dead.<sup>32</sup> This, of course, is not the same as denying God altogether, but as Susan Reynolds has argued, it may be just as serious in its implications, in implying the possibility of unbelief.<sup>33</sup> And what was true of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries is also true of the fifteenth. Among the heresies that Cristoforo Landino lists as alive in his day, in his 1481 *Dante Commentary*, is the belief of the Patarines that "our bodies won't rise again", that it is "a mortal sin to kill any animal excepting fish, fleas and lice", and that "usury is not a sin if done without fraud" – suggesting perhaps some continuity between the early Catharism of merchant and banking families in Florence like the Pulci, and the heretical views of the Medici poet Luigi Pulci in the fifteenth century, who was deprived of a Christian burial *ob scripta prophana prophano in loco*, that is, for decrying miracles and describing the soul as "no more than a pine nut in hot white bread".<sup>34</sup> We are also told that the chancellor Carlo

semble que le corps humain se dissout et se transforme en terre; c'est pourquoi je n'ai jamais pu croire, et je ne crois toujours pas, qu'un tel corps puisse jamais ressusciter", 127 (inquisition of Guillaume Fort).

<sup>32</sup> A. MURRAY, "Piety and Impiety in Thirteenth-Century Italy", *Studies in Church History*, 8, 1972, p. 101; J. STEPHENS, "Heresy in Medieval and Renaissance Florence", *Past and Present*, 54, 1972, pp. 25-60, esp. 26-36, 59; C. LANSING, *Power and Purity: Cathar Heresy in Medieval Italy*, New York, 1998, esp. pp. 96-105. On the heresy in 1299 of a businessman of Tuscan origin who denied the possibility of resurrection, MURRAY, *loc. cit.* (see note 7), pp. 149-150. Murray also cites a sermon in Florence cathedral in 1305 in which a Dominican preacher claimed people no longer believed either Paradise or Hell, "Piety and Impiety", p. 101.

<sup>33</sup> S. REYNOLDS, "Social Mentalities and the Case of Medieval Scepticism", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, ser. 6, 1, 1991, pp. 21-41: "if medieval people said that they, or others, did not believe in important doctrines of Christianity, then unbelief was not impossible for them even if their grounds for doubting were not the same as those of, for instance, Lucien Febvre" (p. 36).

<sup>34</sup> LANDINO, *op. cit.* (see note 9), fol. g3v; L. PULCI-M. FRANCO, *Il "Libro dei sonetti"*, ed. G. DOLCI, Milan, 1933, nos. CXLIV-CXLVI, pp. 123-161, although the third poem is not attributed by ORVIETO to Bartolomeo Dei, "forse ricorrendo alla consulenza poetica del Pulci", in "A proposito del Sonetto *Costor che fan si gran disputazione* e dei sonetti responsivi", *Interpres*, 4, 1981-1982, pp. 400-413, correcting his earlier *Pulci medievale: studio sulla poesia volgare fiorentina del Quattrocento*, Rome, 1978; cf. L. BÖNINGER, "Notes on the last years of Luigi Pulci (1477-1484)", *Rinascimento*, 27, 1987, pp. 261, 271; C. JORDAN, *Pulci's Morgante: Poetry and History in Fifteenth-century Florence*, Washington, D. C.,



Marsuppini died in 1453 "without confessing and communion and not as a good Christian". This, Francesco Giovanni wrote in his diary, made it difficult to record anything about "the matter of his soul", especially since he also left no instructions about "the distribution of his possessions"; that someone could be "so far-sighted in life and then so totally blind when he came to die" was a cause for amazement among the people, Giovanni commented: "May God let him rest in peace if it pleases him to do so".<sup>35</sup>

Neither Marsuppini nor Pulci typify popular unbelief in Florence, since one was a learned humanist and the other an irreverent parodist of the recondite debates in Medici circles in the 1470s about the soul, "where it enters and where it leaves". Yet Pulci belongs to the tradition of versifying represented by Burchiello that does throw light on popular attitudes to religion. The lines in Pulci's *Morgante*, for instance, "But what rises, in the end descends [...] while one rises, another falls, as perhaps happens with Christianity" are reflected in the verse, or *frottola*, with which a printed pamphlet attacking Savonarola in 1496 ends: "he who hasn't too much faith doesn't sin or fail too much, when dead he returns afloat; who is dead goes to the bottom, and this is what happens in the world".<sup>36</sup>

1986, pp. 38-42 esp. 41. On the Pulci and Catharism in Florence, see LANSING, *op. cit.* (see note 32), pp. 71-78. DEI's *Cronica* is edited by R. BARDUCCI, Florence, 1984 (and on Dei, see also Böninger, above).

<sup>35</sup> "Dio l'abia honorato in Cielo, se l'à meritato, che non si stima perché morì senza confessione e comunione, e non come buono christiano", G. CAMBI, *Istorie*, in *Delizie degli eruditi toscani*, ed. I. DI SAN LUIGI, XX, Florence, 1785, p. 311: "Circha il fatto dell'anima pocha memoria si può farne et per lo simile nessuno ordine lasciò circa la 'stributione di sue sustanze. Delle quali cose admiratione maxime dette al popolo, essendo si anti-veduto [sic] in vita et poi si accicato in tutto in morte. Idio lo ripose in pace se è suo piacere [...]" FRANCESCO DI TOMMASO GIOVANNI, *Ricordanze*, ASF Strozzi. ser. 2, 16 bis, c. 16v (cited with variants by D. MARZI, *La cancelleria della repubblica Fiorentina*, Rocca S. Casciano, 1910, p. 216; cf. A. BROWN, *Bartolomeo Scala, Chancellor of Florence, 1430-1497*, Princeton, 1979, p. 260, note 11).

<sup>36</sup> LUIGI PULCI, *Il Morgante*, XXVI, 31, ed. D. DE ROBERTIS, Florence, 1962, p. 785: "Ma ciò che sale, alfin vien poi in bassezza [...] mentre l'una sormonta, un'altra cade: così fia forse di cristianitate" cited by G. SASSO, *Machiavelli e gli antichi e altri saggi*, I, Milan, 1987, p. 173; *Epistola consolatoria de' Caldi, Freddi & Tiepidi & una frottola insieme*, Florence, 1496: "chi non ha troppa fede / troppo non pecca o falla / morto ritorna a ghalla / chi morto è ito al fondo / così interviene al mondo", Cambridge University Library, 2427 [4529] Pet. G.7.10 [Lorenzo Morgiani, 1496] cit. in A. BROWN, "Ideology and faction in Savonarolan Florence", in S. FLETCHER-C. SHAW (eds.), *The World of Savonarola. Italian elites and perceptions of crisis*, Aldershot, 2000, pp. 38-39. On Pulci's "sperimento lette-

The same popular fatalism is also documented by Bartolomeo Cerretani in his 1520 *Dialogo della mutatione di Firenze* in which the character Girolamo states that nearly everyone goes to church from shame and fear and the prelates minister to them, but neither people nor prelates "believe in God, in the incarnation of his son, etc., but instead that the world has always existed, exists and will exist [...] and that once dead, everything is over for man".<sup>37</sup> The idea that "once dead, everything is over for man" is, of course, also the view of Lucretius and Epicurus, who believed that "Death is nothing to us", for "when we are present, death isn't, and when death is present, we aren't".<sup>38</sup> So among the church-goers there may have lurked not only fear but a vein of scepticism that would have made these beliefs more relevant than we have been led to believe.

When we turn to the earliest citations of *De rerum natura* in Florence, we find that the removal of fear was what Marsilio Ficino regarded as a key to understanding "all the rest". Asked by his friends in 1457 to explain Lucretius's philosophy to them, Ficino chose passages describing Lucretius's desire to remove pain from the body, so that the mind "can enjoy the sense of pleasure far removed from care or fear", and also passages describing his admiration for Epicurus in "putting a limit to desire and fear" by showing us the strait and narrow path to the highest good that we all desire.<sup>39</sup> At the end of that

rario in senso parodico [...] in un ben preciso filone burchiellesco", ORVIETO, *Pulci medievale*, *op. cit.* (see note 34), p. 227.

<sup>37</sup> BARTOLOMEO CERRETANI, *Dialogo della mutatione di Firenze*, ed. G. BERTI, Florence, 1993, p. 16 (Girolamo): "quasi tutti li huomini di questi tempi visitano e templi per vergogna et per timore, e prelati li officiano [...] ma non già che né l'una né l'altra specie creda che sia Idio, che il figliuolo venisse a incarnare, ecetera, ma che il mondo sia sempre stato, sia et habbia a essere con questa corrutione di tutte le forme e generatione [...] et che morto questo huomo sia finita ogni cosa per lui", cit. A. PROSPERI, "Intelletuali e Chiesa all'inizio dell'età moderna", in C. VIVANTI (ed.), *Storia d'Italia. Annali IV*, Turin, 1981, p. 179.

<sup>38</sup> LUCRETIIUS III, 830: "Nil igitur mors est ad nos"; cf. Epicurus in DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, X, 139, tr. AMBROGIO TRAVERSARI (quoting from the Nicolaus Jenson edition, Venice, 1475, B. L. 167.d.5, fol. 178r, in preference to the earlier but less reliable Rome (1472?) edition, B. L. 167.d.6): "nihil ad nos, quoniam cum nos sumus, mors non est, cum vero mors adest, nos iam non sumus" (listed as Maxim 2 in the Loeb edition, II, London, 1965); cited by ALBERTI, *Theogonius*, *op. cit.* (see note 17), p. 102: "Argomentava qui l'Epicuro filosofo in questo modo: [...] la morte, quando noi siamo, ella non v'è, quando ella sarà, noi restaremo d'essere".

<sup>39</sup> In his letters to Michele Mercato, ed. KRISTELLER, *Supplementum*, *op. cit.* (see note 18), II, pp. 81-82 (15 Oct. 1457), quoting LUCRETIIUS I, 402-9, beginning (402-403): "Verum



We know that Epicurus and Lucretius remained central to Scala's thinking – even if not applauded by him – from a poem he wrote at this time in praise of pope Pius II, in which he questioned the morality of carefree gods who treat the good and bad indifferently. Quoting Lucretius, he concluded that it was much better for the world to be governed by reason, as the Stoics believed, than by fortuitous atoms.<sup>46</sup> It is in his next major writing, the *Dialogue of Consolation* written on the death of Cosimo's son Giovanni in 1463, that Scala engaged most clearly with the Stoic-Epicurean debate in the area that I suggested was closest to contemporary concerns, fear and death. In it, Cosimo is made to adopt a more favourable view of the Epicurean doctrine of pleasure when he hears that the Epicureans regard grief as the worst of evils and much less tolerable than it is for the Stoics – despite the dangerous public implications of their morality: "Would you set fire to your country and burn the sacred buildings and temples of the gods to escape grief? Surely not!"<sup>47</sup> But it is the passages quoted by Cosimo from Lucretius that best illustrate how Lucretius was seen to be relevant to him and to the argument of the *Dialogue*. Countering Scala's attempt to assuage his grief with Stoic arguments, Cosimo exclaims, "with Lucretius" (in the passage already quoted by Ficino in his treatise *De voluptate*), "O pitiable minds of men and blinded hearts! In what gloom and darkness life, such as it is, is spent". In going on to quote Lucretius's additional observation that sickness and fear are undeterred by gold, fine raiment and status, he makes the argument all the more *ad hominem*, for Cosimo was of course a man whose wealth and position not only did nothing to assuage his grief but were in themselves

completed around 1460; although the theme of evolution is not immediately apparent – perhaps because the medallions are based on ancient gems – they do reflect some Lucretian topics. I am grateful to Rudolph Muls for his help in interpreting this article.

<sup>46</sup> *Elegia in laudem Pii II Pontificis Maximi* [1459-60], ll. 61-74, SCALA, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), pp. 413-414 quoting Lucretius II, 646: "Omnis enim per se divum natura necessest". Pius II's two epitaphs on Epicurus, for and against him: *Enee Silvii Piccolomini. Carmina*, ed. A. VAN HECK, Città del Vaticano, 1994, pp. 109-110, cf. p. 109, note 1.

<sup>47</sup> SCALA, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), pp. 286-287: "Nam et Epicurei, qui etsi mihi penitus improbandi videntur, tamen audio a quibusdam non omnino contemni, dum voluptati faventes, dolorem dicunt non solum malum sed etiam summum, minus etiam quam Stoici tolerabilia videntur afferre [...]. Utrum tandem, Epicure, ut dolorem fugias, incendia patriam sacrasque aedes et templa Dei profanabis? [...]. Non facies, arbitror".

a cause for fear and worry.<sup>48</sup> According to his biographer, Vespasiano da Bisticci, Cosimo's conscience was burdened with guilt not only about his illicit wealth but also about his political activities and ambition.<sup>49</sup>

Since Scala spent time in the Medici palace reading to Cosimo in the year before Cosimo died in August 1464, the *Dialogue* may well reflect the drift of the two men's conversations – including a discussion of man's ascent from primitivism with which the *Dialogue* surprisingly begins. For instead of opening with conventional words of Christian consolation, Scala begins by discoursing on the immortal gods' gifts to man – and especially to Cosimo. Man, Scala tells Cosimo, was created by the gods in their image, not from mud or stones, as Ovid and the myths of Pandora, Pyrrha and Deucalion would have us believe; for when the poets said that man was made out of hard wood and trunks, they surely intended to describe primitive man's emergence, "nude and hairy", from the protective shelter of tree trunks in the early days when he lived without hearth or home, wandering freely through the woods. But although Scala alludes to Ovid, in fact his account of early man – perhaps reflecting the theme of the courtyard medallions – is drawn more obviously from Lucretius and the hard primitivists, who unlike Ovid regarded this first stage of human life as far from golden.<sup>50</sup>

As a public official, chancellor of the Guelph Party and soon to be

<sup>48</sup> SCALA, *Dialogus de consolatione*, in SCALA, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), pp. 294, 290-291 quoting Lucretius II, 14-16, 34-6, 48-52. These passages are not in Ficino's treatise or letters. The *Dialogue* was sent to Lorenzo de' Medici in December 1463, ed. BROWN, p. 10 (letter 13).

<sup>49</sup> VESPASIANO DA BISTICCI, *Le vite*, ed. A. GRECO, II, Florence, 1976, p. 177: "non poteva essere ch'egli non vi avessi messo assai della coscienza, come fanno i più di quegli che governano gli stati et vogliono essere inanzi agli altri [...] allui pareva avere danari di non molto buono acquisto".

<sup>50</sup> SCALA, *Dialogus de consolatione*, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), p. 276: "incultam olim eorum vitam sine lare, sine domo, per silvas passim significare voluisset. Ita cum e truncis [...] nudi aliquando et horridi egrederecentur, causam dedisse Graecis scriptoribus confingendi fabulas". Cf. Lucretius V, 932 ("volgivoغو citam tractabant more ferrarum"), 955-957 ("sed nemora atque cavos montis silvasque colebant, et frutices inter condebant squalida membra verbera ventorum vitare imbrisque coacti"). Cf. Ovid, *Met.* I, 83, 89 ("Aurea prima sata est aetas"), and Virgil, *Georg.* I, 61-3. On the distinction between "hard" and "soft" primitivism, see A. O. LOVEJOY-G. BOAS, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, Baltimore, 1935, repr. 1997, esp. pp. 9-11. On Scala reading to Cosimo in 1463, see BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 35), p. 36.

appointed first chancellor of Florence, Scala was careful to point out the threat that Lucretius and Epicurus posed to public morality, in removing with the after-life the principal sanction for civil obedience. Yet he was clearly attracted to both writers by the early 1460s. Some of the writings of Epicurus he called "divine", and the same was true for Lucretius. We can still read the first five lines of *De rerum natura* that Scala transcribed in his own hand on a page of his notebook, and we also know that by the 1480s he had written a poem, *De rebus naturalibus*, which "was modelled on Lucretius".<sup>51</sup> Moreover, unlike Ficino and Poliziano, who also read Lucretius, Scala was never constrained by taking holy orders. This meant that he and others like him could – and indeed should, according to Bartolomeo Fonzio – publish their early secular writings, "impeded by no religion", whereas "we ministers of God" faced a moral dilemma about whether to publish them or not.<sup>52</sup> So whereas Ficino burnt his youthful commentary on Lucretius, Scala's early writings survive as useful guides to his mature thinking.

If not for their doctrine of pleasure, what attracted him to Epicurus and Lucretius? He was attracted, I think, by both of the themes. I have already outlined, to do with fear and death, and man's evolution. Not only did they engage his interest as a student but, as we shall see, they continued to influence his mature writings as chancellor, especially his 1483 *Dialogue on Laws and Legal Judgements* and his 1496 defence of Savonarola, the *Defence against the Critics of Florence*, in which he worked out the wider implications of Epicurean ethics and the theory of evolution for a new public morality. However, it is his intimate fables as well as his late poem *On trees*

<sup>51</sup> "instar Lucretii", shown to Michele Verino (who died 1487) by Antonio Geraldini, see BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 35), pp. 209-210, note 49. The lines of *De rerum natura*, headed "Lucretius", are written in the margin of fol. 20v, Modena, Bibl. Estense, Raccolta Campori Appendice 235 (Gamma P.2.5), which contains one early poem (1458-60) and one later sonnet. Interestingly, atoms appear as expressions of minimalism in Scala's chancery letters and mandates from 1465, e.g. ASF Legazioni e Commissarie 16, fol. 7v, 1 Aug. 1465: "una minima particella"; Minutarii 12, fol. 318r, 13 June 1482: "uno athomo di tempo".

<sup>52</sup> BARTOLOMEO FONZIO, *Epistolarum libri III*, ed. L. JUHASZ, Budapest, 1931, p. 49 (to Gianfrancesco Zeffio, 11 September 1510), cit. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 35), p. 321: "qui dare in lucem quae poterant etiam debebant, nulla religione impediende. Nos vero ministri Dei possumus quidem sed nescio quae saeculares adhuc lusinus an salva conscientia debeamus". Along with Scala, he lists Landino, Pico, Nesi and Crinito.

that reveal how pervasive the influence of Epicurus and Lucretius was not simply on his public philosophy but also on his personal outlook on life.

It is probably no coincidence that Scala used the ambiguous genre of fables to discuss these potentially dangerous ideas, since, like his dialogues, they allow veiled and multiple readings. Superstition (*religio*) and the fear of death are recurring themes in these fables, which he began to write in the 1480s and continued to write, as "annual tribute" to the Medici, until 1492.<sup>53</sup> In the fable *Religio*, for example, we are told that the origin of most gods can be ascribed to fear, *timor*, an argument which he attributes to Lucretius in his 1483 *Dialogue on Laws and Legal Judgements*, where Lucretius is cited to demonstrate that one meaning of religion derives from *religare*, to bind, from whose knots Lucretius sought to free us.<sup>54</sup> The association of fear and death recurs in his second collection of fables in *Death*, in which a traveller is amazed to encounter people with bandaged eyes fleeing the onslaught of Death, portrayed as a wild beast mounted on a black horse striking out at random: "How needlessly they fear (*quam temere timent*) and bind their eyes, if this is living, isn't it better to die?"<sup>55</sup>

Death is also the subject of Scala's two last fables which he sent to Piero de' Medici on the first All Souls Day after the death of his father, Lorenzo il Magnifico, in 1492. In the first, the shades are prevented by law from returning to earth except on this day, so that the living will not lose their fear of them through familiarity; but they then flock in such numbers to visit the living, moved by longing for the light of day, that the rulers are left almost alone – whereupon

<sup>53</sup> As he explained to Piero de' Medici in 1492, see SCALA, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), letter no. 211, p. 170. Scala sent two collections of one hundred *Apologi* to Lorenzo de' Medici in 1481 and [1488?], as well as two fables to his son Piero in 1492, *ibid.*, pp. 305-337, 364-393.

<sup>54</sup> *Apologi centum* (Scala's first collection of fables, completed in 1481), I, 22, 'Religio', ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), pp. 312-313: "An nescitis plerosque etiam deorum referre suas origines in timorem?"; *De legibus et iudiciis dialogus* (1483), *ibid.*, pp. 362-363, transl. in D. MARSH, *Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts*, II, p. 193, citing Lucretius I, 931-2, IV, 7. Cicero, by contrast (as Scala notes) distinguished superstition and religion, which he thought came from *relegere*, to retrace ancient ritual, *De nat. deor.* II, 28, 71-2.

<sup>55</sup> *Apologi* II, no. 20, "Mors", ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), p. 371.

they repeal this concession, for, as Minos explains, nature was quite right to confine the dead in darkness in order to retain the fear of mortals for the shades of the dead. In the second fable, when a persistent shade eventually wins Pluto's permission to visit the living on All Souls Day and encounters a living man, their conversation turns to whether it is better to live in continual fear of death or to lack the good things of life. "The good things of life!", the shade exclaims with gales of laughter, "What is generally believed about you among us is true. You with your possessions are more dead than the dead themselves".<sup>56</sup> The shades, of course, are pagan, but by playing on the correspondence between Halloween and All Souls Day and by emphasising the close connection between fear and death – fear of material loss and fear of the afterlife which feeds religion – the moral of these fables is widely applicable to Christians as well as to non-believers.

Perhaps not surprisingly in this Aesopian genre, humans in Scala's fables are poor creatures, much weaker than animals. In one fable on *Man*, a wolf laughs at the lion for being scared of man: "Are you, our king, frightened of spectres? If you flee, man is bold; if you act, he flees. Man isn't man, he only seems to be a man". In another, Diogenes the Cynic, surveying the activities of humankind, suddenly sees men as though they were animals in an 'Animal Farm' – as pigs, foxes, wolves and harpies according to their various professions, belying their claim to be superior to animals. This idea is repeated in the fable *Monster*, in which the Cynic comments that humans are just as 'monstrous' as the strange animals that amaze people as monsters, since man is equally multiform with the head of a serpent and a human face, the throat of a dog, hands of Harpies, bent and deformed with nails: "Tell me, if you will, what is a monster if you aren't monsters?"<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> *Apologi* II, Appendix 3, 101, "Inferorum regnum", 102, "Vivi mortui": "Bona vitae! risit. 'Et quae apud nos', inquit, 'de vobis vulgo fertur sententia vera est: vos his bonis quam mortui magis estis mortui'", ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), p. 393. See also the fable *Mortui* (II, 47, ed. BROWN, p. 379), which ends – playing on the same words: "Nam non mortui modo mortui, sed vivi mortui", perhaps contrasting pagan with Christian immortality, in describing Icarus's fall from the heavens and burial in a tomb, where he was immortalised by the Muses ("Vivit in tumulto" according to the epigram inscribed on it); but the door dropped off, "For corpses are not dead now, but corpses are alive".

<sup>57</sup> *Apologi* II, 24 (*Homo* III): "Neque iam homo homo est: videtur homo"; II, 1

It is difficult to know how seriously to take Scala's mocking and sceptical approach to superstition, religion and man's fearful nature, for which Lucian must have provided him with a model as well as Epicurus. In the fable *Gods*, the atheist Diagoras wins his case against the charge of impiety, because "who can believe they are gods that have morals like these?", whereas Epicureans tend to have the best of the debate in his fables when they discuss morality and death with sceptics or Christians.<sup>58</sup> In the fable *Moral Values*, a Cynic, after dining intemperately with an Epicurean, describes his post-prandial dream of an upside-down world, fish swimming on dry land and horses carried by men, to which the Epicurean replies that the one marvel missing from his list is that grief and hard work are preferred to pleasure, and cares and worries to leisure and a tranquil life: "you weren't dreaming, believe me, life is lived with upside-down morals".<sup>59</sup> And in the fable *Immortality*, which comments on problems created by the idea of purgatory and the soul's immortality, a human soul, still without a fixed abode, is wandering about pondering the penalties of his impure life. Encountering an Epicurean, the human soul tells him that he, the Christian, is immortal and that "those fables of yours, which have completely taken hold everywhere" cannot change his nature or the truth. To which the Epicurean smilingly replies: "Be which ever of the gods you like while you are wandering around and being punished". Is it significant that Scala deleted the last line, 'But I am immortal', the human soul said, 'and I haven't died', leaving the last word with the Epicurean, whose beliefs "have completely taken hold everywhere?"<sup>60</sup> Did Scala believe in Christian immortality?

([*Homo*]); II, 10 ("Monstrum"): "Dic, sodes, quid tandem monstrum est, si vos non estis monstra?", ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), pp. 372, 365-366, 368.

<sup>58</sup> *Dii*, I, 72, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), p. 329: "qui credat tamen esse deos hisce moribus?" On the influence of Lucian, see D. MARSH, *Lucian and the Latins. Humor and Humanism in the early Renaissance*, Ann Arbor, 1998, especially ch. 2, pp. 42-67 discussing Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead* and *Menippus* which are also reflected in the *Intercentales* of Leon Battista Alberti (especially *Cynicus* and *Defunctus*, transl. MARSH, *Dinner Pieces*, Binghamton, 1987, pp. 74-80, 98-125; D. MARSH's forthcoming *Aesopic Prose by Leon Battista Alberti, etc.* (MRTS) will include a discussion and translation of Scala's fables.

<sup>59</sup> *Mores*, *Apologi* II, 37, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), p. 378: "Mihi crede, vivitur enim sic iam inversis moribus".

<sup>60</sup> *Apologi* II, 80, ed. BROWN, *ibid.*, p. 387: "sum vero immortalis neque illae nos ve-

We cannot know, of course. Unusually, he made no religious bequests in his will and “didn’t trouble himself about funeral rites” (as Epicurus also commended), leaving it to his son to institute masses for him and his wife after his death. A contemporary account of the miracles of the Virgin at SS. Annunziata suggests that he owed his escape from death in 1474 solely to the pious intercession of his mother-in-law, without which his life, “which he himself had so intemperately neglected” would have come to an end. Writing to Lorenzo de’ Medici in the 1470s, he explained that he believed letters – by which he meant the discipline of the liberal arts consisting of the study of human and divine affairs – were far more immortal than other human activities. For, he wrote, everything we do eventually perishes and nothing lasts for long, yet “we are accustomed to speak in this way and to honour whatever is lasting with the name of immortality, which is peculiar to divine things”.<sup>61</sup> As the son of a provincial miller, he may have shared the popular fatalism that Cerretani described and responded positively to these newly-discovered pagan philosophers.<sup>62</sup>

It is Scala’s *Dialogue on Laws and Legal Judgements* that most clearly shows the naturalistic direction of his more public thinking

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strae, quibus omnia completis, fabulae aut naturam nostram veritatemque immutant”. “Esto vero vel deorum aliqua dummodo sic circumagere plectarisque. [“At sum immortalis”, Anima inquit, “nec interii” del.]

<sup>61</sup> I discuss Scala’s religious belief in *Scala, op. cit.* (see note 35), pp. 319-323; cf. Diog. Laert. X, 118, transl. TRAVERSARI, *op. cit.* (see note 38), fol. 177r: “neque Sepulturae curam habiturum”; the relevant extract from COSIMO FAVILLA’s “De origine” (knowledge of which I owe to Paula Clarke) is in SCALA, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), Document 9, p. 483: “de vita Bartholomei, quam ipse tam intemperanter neglexerat, omnino actum fuisset”. His letter to Lorenzo de’ Medici [April-May 1474], is *ibid.*, no. 47, pp. 41-2: “Etsi enim occidunt cuncta nostra tandem et diu nihil extat, tamen solemus ita loqui et quae diuturniora sunt immortalitatis quae sua est rerum divinarum nomine honestare” (I owe this translation to David Marsh).

<sup>62</sup> It is also interesting, if coincidental, that Scala combined his urban villa with a *hortus*, as Epicurus had done, which, though ridiculed by Poliziano, was described approvingly by Ficino as the “hortos Pythios [the seat of Apollo as oracle], quos hodie Pinthios Florentini nominant” (*Apologus de apologo, Opera I*, Turin, 1962, p. 877) where Giovanni Pico della Mirandola delivered an oration on friendship, another very Epicurean thing to do; on Scala’s garden and Pico’s *Oration*, see BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 35), p. 228, and SCALA, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), p. 392, note; on Epicurus’s garden, Pliny, *N.H.* XIX, 50-51, cf. C. and A. SMALL, “John Evelyn and the Garden of Epicurus”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 60, 1997, pp. 194-214.

about law and morality in the 1480s, as well as about evolution and the origin of language. The argument of the dialogue is presented in the form of a debate between Scala and Bernardo Machiavelli, Niccolò’s father. In it, “Scala” presents the argument for the existence of a universal law of nature “common to animals as well as to all mankind”, even to uncivilised and primitive nations who are incapable of speech and reason.<sup>63</sup> The basis of this law is mutual self-interest, according to “the sign” that Nature has set before us: “Do nothing to another person”, nature says, ‘that you do not wish to be done to you’. The biblical source of this law is obvious, and Scala himself goes on to allude to it in saying that “Our Saviour teaches us the same thing”. But a clue to his possible first source is provided by his use of the word “sign”, since this is the word used by Epicurus (in Traversari’s translation) to describe his Law of Nature as “a sign of expedience, that you shouldn’t harm another or be harmed”. So Scala may have been drawing on Epicurus as well as the Bible, Epicurus’s list of natural precepts or maxims (as listed by Diogenes Laertius) being comparable to those of Christ in the Gospels.<sup>64</sup> When Scala returned to discuss religion in his last official writing, his 1496 *Defence* of Savonarola, he described it entirely in naturalistic and anthropological terms, as something common to all peoples, “however barbarous and savage, who lack religion altogether, in so far as it is born (*innascatur*) in our bodies together with our soul and grows together with it”. And similarly, the gift of prophecy – or what Scala calls “prescience of future things”, which is also common to almost all peoples. A religion that is “born in our bodies together with our soul”, common to barbarians as well as Christians, recalls Lucretius’s concept of our mind or spirit being

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<sup>63</sup> SCALA, *De legibus*, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), pp. 352, 360, transl. MARSH, *op. cit.* (see note 54) pp. 185, 191: “naturae ius [...] de quo paulo ante tam multa, quod et ipsum non hominis modo sed omnium quoque animantium commune est”, “Nam quod multas existimas incultas et rudes nationes etiam litteris carere, nedom legibus”.

<sup>64</sup> SCALA, *De legibus*, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), p. 344: “nisi signum natura proposuisset [...] quod in te nolis (inquit natura) in alium ne feceris”; transl. MARSH, *op. cit.* (see note 54), p. 179; Diog. Laert. X, 150, tr. Traversari, fol. 138r: “Naturae ius utilitatis est signum, ut neque se invicem laedant neque laedantur” (Maxim no. 31 in Loeb edition); cf. Lucretius, on the early growth of communities eager “inter se nec laedere nec violari”, V, 1020. When Scala refers to Lucretius in his dialogue, it is to quote his view of religion as a tight bondage, p. 363, quoting Lucretius I, 931-932: “et artis religionum animos nodis exsolvere pergo”.

born, growing and dying with the body, or as he puts it, "the nature of the mind and spirit is corporeal".<sup>65</sup>

It was at the beginning of this *Defence* that Scala embarked on a disquisition on the power of fortune in life that demonstrates even more directly the continuing influence of Lucretius on his thinking at this time – which is as surprising in this context as his unexpected Lucretian opening on man's primitive origins was in his 1463 *Dialogue of Consolation* to Cosimo. Digressing with "a few words about fortune, which they say overturns all mortal affairs according to her will and pleasure", Scala went on in the *Defence* to attribute to "that admirable poet Lucretius" (whom Virgil himself, "the king, so to speak, of Latin poets, did not blush to insert whole into his poem") the view that the world originated in "the fortuitous clash of invisible atoms". Although he said he was not "totally convinced" by this view of the power of fortune, he was equally sceptical about those "who remove fortune totally from human affairs", acknowledging that no discipline was so exact that – without God's dispensation – it could deflect nature's impetus when it raged against us, "as has clearly happened to us now" (after Florence's loss of Montepulciano and Pisa).<sup>66</sup>

The similarity of these views about religion and the power of fortune to Niccolò Machiavelli's will be discussed at a later stage. What is notable here is how much this religious naturalism also owed to

<sup>65</sup> *Apologia*, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), pp. 407-410: "Neque ulli usquam populi gentesve adeo barbarae immanesque leguntur quae omni penitus religione privarentur, utputa quae cum anima simul innascatur in corpus et cum aetate inolescat simul" (p. 407); "Prophetæ ergo nomen [...] nos vel divinatores vel vates, qui futura prædicunt possumus (ut arbitror) appellare [...]. Apud omnes ferme gentes (nisi fallor) semper fuit opinio aliqua præscientiæ rerum futurarum" (p. 408). Cf. LUCRETIUS III, 161-162 ("Haec eadem ratio naturam animi atque animai corpoream docet esse"), 445-446 ("gigni pariter cum corpore et una crescere sentimus pariterque senescere mentem").

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 395-396: "si de fortuna prius, quae (ut aiunt) versat suo arbitratu res mortalium hisque gaudet, breviter pauca percurrerem. Sunt igitur qui existiment regi a fortuna omnia quae etiam produxerit, utputa qui principia quoque creaturarum rerum fortuitae cuiusdam concursionis indivisibilium minorum tradiderint [...]. Et Lucretius poeta admirandus, cuius etiam carmina rex ipse, ut ita dicam, Latinorum Virgilius, suo inserere operi integra non erubuit, hanc naturae partem versibus est elegantissimis prosecutus"; pp. 396-397: "tamen haudquaquam id mihi omnino persuadent [...] sed nullam tamen adeo esse exactam naturae disciplinam, nisi Deus aliter indulerit, ut [...] omnes declinare fortunae impetus, si ipsa suo more quandoque desaevit, ut nobis modo contigisse manifestum est". Cf. pp. 28 above and, on Machiavelli, 58 below. On Virgil and Lucretius, see note 96 below.

the voyages of travel and exploration in which the Florentines were heavily involved at the time. Scala based his argument for the existence of a natural law on legal practice in Turkey, as reported by Italian merchants who traded there, and on the discovery by King John of Portugal of "new islands and hitherto unknown peoples" in Africa.<sup>67</sup> The fact that these people were able to live without a written language or laws provided Scala with evidence not only of the existence of an unwritten natural law but also of the evolutionary development of language. For although it was Bernardo Machiavelli in the *Dialogue* who attacked Scala's idea of an illiterate people with the argument that even uncivilised peoples use "signs as a sort of alphabet" – just as birds and animals use signs to communicate with each other – in fact the argument comes from Lucretius and serves to support the idea of natural evolution. For it was Lucretius who argued against Aristotle that language developed from animal-like cries and was not, as Aristotle believed, an innate faculty which distinguished men from animals.<sup>68</sup>

#### *Primitivism and evolution*

As Scala's 1483 *Dialogue* suggests, Lucretius's evolutionary account of the growth of civilisation is a second theme that had particular relevance in the fifteenth century, especially in Florence, where merchants and scholars were actively involved in the discovery of new lands and peoples in Africa and the New World. The city's importance as a centre of scholarly interest in voyages of exploration was evident from the excitement aroused by Ptolemy's *Geography*

<sup>67</sup> *De legibus*, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), pp. 343-344, transl. MARSH, *op. cit.* (see note 54), p. 178.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, "exleges penitus ac naturae ferum quoque more obtemperantes", 360 ("notas quasi litteras constituisse"), tr. MARSH, p. 191; cf. Lucretius V, 1056-1061, 1087-1090: "Ergo si varii sensus animalia cogunt, muta tamen cum sint, varias emittere voces, quanto mortalibus magis aequumst tum potuisse dissimilis alia atque alia res voce notare!", and Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a. 10: "man alone of the animals is furnished with the faculty of language". Cf. the marginal note in Laur. 35, 27 described in note 25 above, "vocalia non ratione inventa sed casu". Distinctions between primitive accounts of the origin of language are discussed by A. T. COLE, *Democritus and the sources of Greek Anthropology*, Ann Arbor, 1967, ch. 4, pp. 60-69 (discussing Lucretius at p. 61).

there at the very beginning of the fifteenth century. For after Manuel Chrysoloras introduced Ptolemy as a teaching text in Florence in 1400, it excited not only humanists but also merchants and cartographers, who helped to make Florence a centre of "cartographic and geographic study", patronised not only by the Portuguese royal family but also by French cardinals. It was there in 1482 that the Florentine scholar Francesco Berlinghieri printed a treatise on Ptolemy whose significance for the early history of cartography "is difficult to overestimate".<sup>69</sup>

The interest in foreign places and peoples fostered by this climate is illustrated by the almost anthropological response of the humanist Poggio Bracciolini to far-flung travellers to the Church Council held in Florence in 1439. The Council brought to the city a Venetian merchant home from India, a northern Indian (understood through an Armenian interpreter), and some Ethiopians, who came "from almost outside the world itself" and who reported the existence of peoples beyond the limits of the world recognised by Ptolemy. They were all interviewed by Poggio, who found Conti's account of his journey "to such remote peoples, where they were sited, their different customs, and especially about their animals and trees" so gripping and so credible that he decided to record what he had heard as "worthy of being known".<sup>70</sup> Poggio was also, of course, the discoverer of Lucretius, with whom he shared a sceptical approach to religion as well as an interest in people and their customs. Although he apparently never quoted directly from *De rerum natura*, his writings nevertheless reveal traces of its influence, such as the misery of children from the time of their birth and the hardships

<sup>69</sup> According to J. BROTTON, *Trading Territories*, London, 1997, pp. 87, 93-94, 23; the treatise was dedicated to Sultan Mehmet I. On Ptolemy's *Geography*, see S. J. EDGERTON, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective*, New York, 1976, pp. 97-99, and BROTTON, pp. 31-37.

<sup>70</sup> S. GENTILE (ed.), *Firenze e la scoperta dell'America. Umanesimo e geografia nel '400 Fiorentino*, Florence, 1992, nos. 81, pp. 168-170 ("pene extra ipsum orbem positam incolumis Ethiopie regionem"), 82, pp. 170-173. Poggio's report of Niccolò Conti's voyage in India, and of the other visitors to the Council, is included in book IV of his *De varietate fortunae*, in *Opera Omnia* (Basel, 1538), repr. ed. R. FUBINI, II, Turin, 1966, pp. 628-654: "Hunc [Niccolò Conti] ego audiendi cupidus [...] ut memoriae et literis traderentur. Nam de itinere ad tam remotas gentes, de Indorum situ, ac moribus variis, praeterea animantibus atque arboribus [...] scite graviterque disseruit, ut non fingere, sed vera referre appareret" (p. 628), and "digna scitu visa sunt, quae litteris mandarentur" (p. 651).

imposed by "the earth, which is called our mother", his attack on superstition and the religious.<sup>71</sup>

Scala, who later succeeded Poggio as first chancellor of Florence, shared Poggio's interests and approach. He had been chancellor of the Guef Party when it was responsible for maritime affairs, from 1459 to 1465, involving him early on in the voyages of Florentine merchants abroad that stimulated his maturer thinking about primitivism. As we have seen, it was the travels of merchants to Turkey and the recent discovery by the Portuguese in Africa of "previously unknown peoples who live completely without laws, like beasts obeying nature" that encouraged his new thinking about natural law and the origin of language in his 1483 *Dialogue on Laws and Legal Judgements*. The excitement in Florence about the Portuguese exploration of Africa is also documented by a letter read out in the main square of the city three years later, in 1486, which reported the "splendid and great news" just arrived from Portugal: a great lord of Ghinea had been baptized and the king of Portugal had sent experts to teach the natives Portuguese and "train them in good behaviour [...] [in order to] introduce them to a human and not a bestial life".<sup>72</sup> For Scala, however, the interest of these lawless peoples lay not in their conversion to a civilised and Christian life but in the fact that they were able to live peaceably as "beasts, obeying nature", employing "signs as a sort of alphabet".<sup>73</sup>

In this social and intellectual context, it was perhaps not surprising that Epicurus sprang to Amerigo Vespucci's mind when describing the similarly lawless natives he encountered on his voyages to

<sup>71</sup> According to M. DAVIES, *loc. cit.* (see note 10), p. 124, note 7, Poggio "never quotes Lucretius". But as Riccardo Fubini points out, Poggio nevertheless betrays some "schicchi motivi epicurei" ("Il teatro del mondo' nelle prospettive morali e storico-politiche di Poggio Bracciolini", in *Poggio Bracciolini, 1380-1980 nel VI centenario della nascita*, Florence, 1982, esp. pp. 26-27). See POGGIO BRACCIOLINI, *De miseria conditionis humanae*, in *Opera Omnia, op. cit.* (see note 70), I, Turin, 1964, pp. 93, 110 ("terra quae nostra dicitur mater"), 101-102; cf. Lucretius V, 222-227, II, 598-599, V, 821-822.

<sup>72</sup> Lorenzo di Giovanni Tornabuoni to Benedetto Dei, 4 Nov. 1486, ed. A. VERDE, *Lo Studio fiorentino, 1473-1503. Ricerche e Documenti*, III, i, Pistoia, 1977 p. 576: "Io udi istamane, sendo in piazza [...] che 'l re v'è mandato molti huomini experti a insegnare loro el linguaggio di Portogallo e amaestrarli in costumi [...] a parte a ridurli alla vita humana et non bestiale", "et è tenuta in questa città una bella e una magna nuova".

<sup>73</sup> See note 68 above, citing *De legibus*, pp. 344, 360.



Brazil and the coast of south America. Amerigo was a nephew of Giorgio Antonio Vespucci, a learned scholar who owned a map of Ptolemy and was tutor to both Amerigo and his patron Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici.<sup>74</sup> So, as a merchant and explorer, Amerigo, too, reflects the close relationship between exploration and humanist culture in Florence. The letter he wrote to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco after his first voyage to south America in 1498 shows the same "anthropological" interest as Poggio did in the customs of other peoples, describing in detail the life of the natives, their barbarity in not eating at fixed times and without tablecloths, their love of pleasure and unwonted sexual practices – as well as the absence of the sanctions of law and religion. For, he wrote, "these people, as far as we could see, employed no laws [...] nor did they even keep houses of prayer: their life I judge to be Epicurean".<sup>75</sup> Vespucci, like Scala, evidently found in Epicurus and Lucretius a useful interpretative model to explain the mores of these happy naturalists, who seemed to live in peace without the visible constraints of law and threats of the after-life.

Beasts who "obeyed their nature" represented the worst side of man's nature according to traditional Christian and classical morality, as the image of the Centaur, half-man, half-animal, demonstrates. The Centaur was portrayed negatively by Dante and his commentators, as a bellicose and tyrannical man dominated by animal passions: the very opposite of man created in God's image. For as Landino explained in his *Commentary on Dante*, Chiron was "half man, half horse because he was a bellicose man, brutalised by his ambition and lust to dominate, although not totally lacking in learning or

<sup>74</sup> On Giorgio Antonio Vespucci, who later became a Dominican friar in San Marco, GOMBRICH, "Botticelli's Mythologies" *loc. cit.* (see note 23), pp. 43, 65, 80-81; A. M. BANDINI, *Vita di Amerigo Vespucci*, ed. G. UZIELLI, Florence, 1898; and GENTILE (ed.), *op. cit.* (see note 70), no. 96, pp. 193-195.

<sup>75</sup> *Mundus novus*, Rome, 1502?, repr. in *Lettera di Amerigo Vespucci delle isole nuovamente trovate in quattro suoi viaggi*, Florence, 1505?, fol. a4v (and in *Prime relazioni di navigatori italiani sulla scoperta dell'America*, Turin, 1966), transl. in *Cosmographica Introductio*, 1607, repr. New York, 1969, p. 95: "In queste gente non conoscemmo che tenessino legge alchuna [...] nec etiam non tenevono casa di oratione, la loro vita giudico essere Epicurea". Cf. TRIBALDO DE' ROSSI's description in March 1494 of the natives discovered in the West Indies by Columbus, "huomini done assai, engniudi tutti, certe frasche intorno ala natura e non altro; e mai vidono più cristiani loro", *Ricordanze*, in *Delizie degli eruditi toscani*, XXIII, Florence, 1786, p. 281.

reason".<sup>76</sup> The contrast between this view of centaurs and Machiavelli's in the early sixteenth century is striking. Far from condemning man's bestiality, Machiavelli proposed the centaur Chiron as a model for princes because he believed man's bestial qualities were as important as his human rationality for survival.<sup>77</sup>

Centaur were, of course, mythical beasts, and although they were apparently a familiar sight in Florence, where they "roamed the streets" during patronal festivities, Lucretius did not believe in them – "never did such an animal exist!" Nevertheless, he did accept the reality of their image, which he explained was created by superimposing the images of man and horse, meeting by accident. By explaining them as a double image, he lent support to the symbolic interpretation of the dual attributes of man's nature that was so familiar to Florentines, thanks to writers like Dante, Landino and Machiavelli and to the artists who illustrated their ideas<sup>78</sup> (Figs. 2 and 3).

More than centaurs, however, it was Lucretius's description of man's early life and development that helped to narrow the gap between the species. Far from being created in God's image, primitive man, according to Lucretius, lived "the vagrant life of wild animals", which he hunted and was hunted by in turn. Civilisation developed when men tired of living in violence and agreed to submit to laws, which were

<sup>76</sup> LANDINO, *Commentary on Dante, op. cit.* (see note 9), fol. h5r: "Fu decto mezo cavallo perché fu huomo bellicoso. Imperoché el cavallo è animale apto a guerra. Onde Achille huomo bellicoso è decto suo discepulo. Adunque per chostui intenderemo quello animo el quale benché sia efferato nell'ambitione et nella cupidità del signoreggiare, nientedimeno non è sanza alchuna doctrina et ragione et qualche iustitia et civile chostume"; cf. R. WITTKOWER, "Transformations of Minerva in Renaissance Imagery", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 2, 1938-9, p. 200. The Renaissance view of man is typified by L. B. ALBERTI, *I libri della famiglia*, ed. C. GRAYSON, Bari, 1960, p. 168, discussed by J. NAJEMY, "The Republic's Two Bodies", in A. BROWN (ed.), *Language and Images in Renaissance Italy*, Oxford, 1995, p. 255: "come uno carriuolo sul quale si muova l'anima".

<sup>77</sup> Discussed more fully below at note 122 below.

<sup>78</sup> See P. VENTRONE, *Gli araldi della commedia. Teatro a Firenze nel Rinascimento*, Pisa, 1993, p. 46 note 85: "vagantur et simulati gigantes et fauni per urbem, atque centauri"; LUCRETIIUS IV, 732, 739-42: "nulla fuit quoniam talis natura animalis; / verum ubi equi atque hominis casu convenit imago, / haerescit facile extemplo" (740-742, tr. Esolen), cf. V, 878-91. Here it is interesting to contrast Botticelli's moralising painting of *Camilla* [or *Pallas*] and the *Centaur*, painted for the Medici in the early 1480s, and his naturalistic centaurs illustrating the *Divine Comedy*, drawn probably in the 1490s for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco (Figs. 3 and 2); see also note 107 below.

upheld by fear of punishment and their guarantee of security, to “provide support and material prosperity”, as Epicurus put it.<sup>79</sup> But this was not necessarily a mark of progress, for increased domestication not only made men “soft” in pitying the weak instead of admiring the strong, but – “quite unbelievably”, Lucretius said, – it made them re-brutalise the very animals they had domesticated by making them engines of war. This, as Saylor has suggested, serves to reinforce Lucretius’s argument that it was man who allowed the good instinctual drives he shared with animals to be perverted by his growing sophistication, which recoiled against himself in the same way that the re-trained animals turned against their owners.<sup>80</sup>

This account of man’s development was followed by Scala and Machiavelli, both of whom adopted a primitivist explanation of man’s early life – and, interestingly, it is one of the themes picked out in Fon-zio’s copy of Lucretius for Francesco Sassetti, which notes in the margin “on the first kind of man and how wild and uncultivated he was”.<sup>81</sup> A more distinctive – and much less discussed – aspect of Lucretius’s influence on them, however, is his account of the complicated and changing relationship between men and animals. This, too, I would argue, also left its mark on them, particularly on Scala and the panels with which he illustrated the courtyard of his “urban villa” in Borgo Pinti. These panels, as Alessandro Parronchi pointed out some time ago, are based on his fables, in which the relationship between men and animals is an important theme. In the courtyard of Scala’s home in Borgo Pinti animals are portrayed in four panels, one, *Ma-*

<sup>79</sup> LUCRETIVS V, 932: “volgigavo vitam tractabant more ferarum”, followed by Scala in his *Dialogus de consolatione* and in his poem *De arboribus*, quoted in notes 50 above and 100 below; MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, I, 2, in *Il Principe e Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, ed. BERTELLI, Milan, 1968, p. 131: “vissono un tempo dispersi a similitudine delle bestie”, discussed more fully below. On the growth of civilisation, LUCRETIVS V, 1145-1151; Epicurus in DIOG. LAERT. X, 143 cited in notes 120 and 121 below.

<sup>80</sup> LUCRETIVS V, 1014: “tum genus humanum primum mollescere coepit”, 1022-1023: “vobiscum et gestu cum balbe significarent imbecillorum esse aequum misererier omnis”; 1308-1341: “Si fuit ut facerent, sed vix adducor”. This last passage is discussed very effectively by C. F. SAYLOR, “Man, Animal and the Bestial in Lucretius”, *Classical Journal*, 67, 1971-1972, pp. 306-316, esp. 310-315; and more recently by SEGAL, *op. cit.* (see note 22), pp. 188-207.

<sup>81</sup> See note 25 above. LOVEJOY-BOAS, *op. cit.* (see note 50); cf. E. PANOFKY, “The Early History of Man in Two Cycles of Paintings by Piero di Cosimo”, in *Id.*, *Studies in Iconology*, 1939, repr., New York, 1962, pp. 33-68.

*gnanimity* (*Magnanimitas*), in the centre of the north wall, and three on the west wall which faces the entrance: *Drunkenness* (*Ebrietas*), in which centaurs dismember and devour animals who are being stuffed into a cauldron (the only panel not based on one of his fables, in which, in fact, centaurs never appear); *Battle* (*Praelium*), depicting a battle scene of enmeshed men and animals, some mounted and others free-standing; and *Sovereignty* (*Regnum*), another violent scene of men and animals locked in conflict after the animals decide in a council of war to throw off their long-standing yoke of servitude to men<sup>82</sup> (Fig. 4).

It has been suggested by James Draper that overall the frieze represents “a movement from the depths of bestiality, represented by the rampaging centaurs and the destructive influences of war among men and between men and animals [...] towards more civilizing influences”, a programme generalised enough to reconcile the neoplatonism popular in Lorenzo de’ Medici’s cultural circle with the Lucretian direction of Scala’s own thought.<sup>83</sup> But so simplified a reading

<sup>82</sup> A. PARRONCHI, “The Language of Humanism and the Language of Sculpture”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 27, 1964, pp. 108-136 (repr. in Italian as “Il Latino di Bartolomeo Scala e Quello di Bertoldo”, in *Id.*, *Lorenzo e dintorni*, Florence, 1992, pp. 63-105); the relevant fables and their English translations are on pp. 113-114, 116-117 (*Bellum*, “War” or “Praelium” in the courtyard, *Regnum*, “Sovereignty”, and *Magnanimitas* or *Mitas*; *Ebrietas* has no corresponding fable), SCALA, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), pp. 324-325, 329-330, 323 (apologues I, nos. 60, 76, 54), summarised in Italian, with excellent illustrations, by C. ACIDINI LUCHINAT, “Di Bertoldo e d’altri artisti: I rilievi di Bertoldo nel cortile”, in A. BELLINAZZI (ed.), *La Casa del Cancelliere. Documenti e Studi sul Palazzo di Bartolomeo Scala a Firenze*, Florence, 1998, pp. 95-96, figs. 50-76. When I discussed the frieze in *Bartolomeo Scala*, *op. cit.* (see note 35), p. 317, I suggested Aristotle’s *Politics* as a possible explanation of the opposing panels of peace and war, business and leisure, but, as SEGAL says, *op. cit.* (see note 22), p. 211: “contrasting tableaux of war and peace” are also to be found in *De rerum natura*, serving “as the emblems of the divergent paths human life can take”.

<sup>83</sup> J. DRAPER, *Bertoldo di Giovanni*, Columbia-London, 1992, pp. 220-253, now repeated by ACIDINI LUCHINAT, *loc. cit.* (see note 82), p. 94, who combines its theme of the ascent of a self-made man with “un progresso – per quanto discontinuo e contorto – dell’umanità dal vizio verso la virtù”. Acidini Luchinat, too, wants to progress from left to right but she begins, not with *Drunkenness*, the first panel on the west wall facing the entrance, but with *Negligence*, the last panel on the south wall. Although Draper claims his left to right reading is based on Alessandro Parronchi, in fact Parronchi (*loc. cit.* [see note 82], p. 124-125) suggests a more complicated reading of contrasting south-north and west-east walls, the lateral panels of each converging on the central panel to attain “a central equilibrium”. According to A. CHASTEL (*Art et Humanisme à Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique*, Paris, 1959, p. 277), the panels (which he misorientates, as does Acidini Luchinat in her description of plates 51-54) represent a “psychomachie” or conflict between the rational and the irrational parts of the soul.

surely fails to do justice to the subtlety of his ideas and the strong vein of irony in both the fables and the frieze. Although Scala tells us in *Sovereignty* that "sovereignty stood firm on the side of virtue", the quiet animal council of war to the right of the panel makes it by no means clear that he intended to represent (as Parronchi has suggested) a victory for "human virtue" against "the alliance of animal forces",<sup>84</sup> or that the programme as a whole represents progress towards civilisation (Fig. 5). The courtyard frieze, as well as Scala's other fables, indicates that his target was not animal bestiality but man's misuse of animals and misuse of his own animal passions, through drunkenness, excessive love and bellicosity – all of which are also criticised by Lucretius – civilisation being at best a mixed blessing.<sup>85</sup> In the panel *Magnanimity* a bull is savaged by a lion – but not before the sight of a hare, safely sheltering from hounds between the lion's paws, gives him hope that he too may be saved (Fig. 6). The moral of Scala's fable – that "it's often better to be a weak suppliant than to resist boldly" – anticipates the argument of Machiavelli's *The Golden Ass*, that animals are kinder to each other and more virtuous than men. Were both Scala and Machiavelli giving expression to the Lucretian idea that it was man who was responsible for violence? For by allowing his instinctual drives to be perverted by his growing sophistication, he not only rebrutalised the animals he had domesticated but, as Lucretius suggested, also himself.

Scala's fables themselves do not allow us to answer this question. Nor do the panels, which were influenced not only by Scala's texts but also by the fashionable artistic models of the day, Bertoldo's bronze battle relief of ca. 1476 from the palace of Lorenzo the Magnificent and Pollaiuolo's probably earlier and widely diffused engraving, *Battle of Nude Men*.<sup>86</sup> To do so, we have to move to the

<sup>84</sup> PARRONCHI, *loc. cit.* (see note 82), p. 125 does however acknowledge the "elegiac irony" of the east wall, cf. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 35), pp. 234-235, 317-318.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, the panels *Amor, Iurgium* and *Neglegentia*, apologues I, 83, 40, 36, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), pp. 331-332, 318, 317, ACIDINI-LUCHINAT, *loc. cit.* (see note 82), pp. 94-96, figs. 59, 61, 55; cf. LUCRETIIUS III, 476-85, 1051 (on drunkenness), IV, 1141-1287 (on love and marriage) and V, 1297-1340 (on animals and fighting, cf. note 80 above). *Neglegentia* also illustrates the autobiographical theme of escape from poverty by hard work. Cf. PARRONCHI, *loc. cit.* (see note 82), p. 125.

<sup>86</sup> DRAPER, *op. cit.* (see note 83), pp. 133-145, 225, 229-235 (on the bronze relief, cat. 11, fig. 83; on the engraving, fig. 114, pp. 225, 233); but see now P. RUBIN-A. WRIGHT, *Re-*

years following the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent in 1492 and the overthrow of the Medici regime two years later. Then, for the first time, the themes of fear, death and man's evolution coalesce and find expression in the politics, art and literature of the day.

#### *Lucretian ideology in Florence after 1494*

The years from 1494 to 1498 were a time not only of political innovation and economic hardship but also of cultural innovation. Lucretian ideology had never been overt during the years of Lorenzo il Magnifico's hegemony which had favoured a contrasting neoplatonic culture.<sup>87</sup> Compared with the hierarchical elitism and cosmic determinism favoured by Lorenzo's Golden Age ideology, Lucretius represented a counter-culture that emphasised primitivism, natural evolution and the role of chance in life. Now, however, Lucretius's primitivism was not only topical but it was favoured by the men who enjoyed power in Florence, especially Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici and his circle of friends. Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco returned from exile with his brother Giovanni on the expulsion of his cousins, the children of Lorenzo il Magnifico, in November 1494 and briefly re-entered Florentine political life as Lorenzo Popolano.<sup>88</sup> One

*naissance Florence. Art in the 1470s*, London, 1999, pp. 41 (fig. 20) and 257-265 (catalogue entries 53-56 and fig. 114, dating the engraving 1469-1470). See, too, Michelangelo's *Battle of the Centaurs*, dated 1491-1492, in M. HIRST-J. DUNKERTON, *The Young Michelangelo*, London, 1994, p. 16 and pl. 8; D. SUMMERS, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, Princeton, 1981, p. 242 (quoting Condivi, who said that Poliziano suggested to Michelangelo as a subject "the Rape of Deianira, explaining the whole story to him, part by part").

<sup>87</sup> On its cult of the ruler as wise man above the stars, fostered by Lorenzo in semi-public, semi-private plays and debates on the nature of sin and grace, see M. MARTELLI, "La cultura letteraria nell'età di Lorenzo", in G. C. GARFAGNINI (ed.), *Lorenzo il Magnifico e il suo tempo*, Florence, 1992, esp. pp. 78-79; A. BROWN, "Platonism in Fifteenth-Century Florence", repr. in EAD., *The Medici in Florence: the Exercise and Language of Power*, Florence, 1992, pp. 229-234, and on these themes in the frieze at Poggio a Caiano, see J. COX-REARICK, "Themes of Time and Rule at Poggio a Caiano", *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 26, 1982, pp. 167-210, and EAD., *Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art*, Princeton, 1984, pp. 65-86; F. LANDI, *Le temps revient. Il fregio di Poggio a Caiano*, San Giovanni Val d'Arno, 1986.

<sup>88</sup> I have discussed Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco's role as the centre of an opposition group before 1494 in "Pierfrancesco de' Medici, 1430-1476: a radical alternative to elder

member of his circle, as we have seen, was Amerigo Vespucci, a business colleague and neighbour in Trebbio who dedicated his *Mundus Novus* to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco. Another was the Greek poet and soldier Michele Marullo, who is said to have read a few verses of Lucretius every night before going to bed and reputedly died by drowning in the Cecina with Lucretius in his pocket. He probably developed his love of Lucretius in Rome and Naples in the 1480s, dedicating his Lucretian *Hymni naturales* to his exiled Neapolitan patron, Antonello da Sanseverino, prince of Salerno. But when he came to Florence in 1489, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco became his patron – and Bartolomeo Scala his friend, later to become his father-in-law. Together, Marullo, Sanseverino and Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco plotted the overthrow of the political regimes of Florence and Naples and so were actively involved in the revolution that transformed the cultural climate in Florence.<sup>89</sup>

The revolution also coincided with the appointment of a new university teacher, Marcello Adriani, who broke entirely with the old philological tradition of Poliziano and turned towards a new interest in natural history – as Peter Godman has recently demonstrated.<sup>90</sup> The proslution to his first year's lectures on poetry and oratory was given on 24 October 1494, just before the collapse of the old regime. In it, Lucretius was mentioned early on as one of the ancient writers who used poetry to describe the universe, but although – in the days just before the regime fell – Adriani was careful to voice his disapproval of Lucretius's "useless heresy about atoms", this and subsequent lectures show how well he knew *De rerum natura* and

Medicean supremacy?", revised in *The Medici in Florence*, *op. cit.* (see note 87), pp. 100-101; and more recently in EAD., "The Revolution of 1494 in Florence and its Aftermath: A Reassessment", in J. EVERSON-D. ZANCANI (eds.), *Culture in Crisis: Italy in the 1490s*, Oxford (Legenda), 2000, pp. 13-40. See also J. NELSON, "Filippino Lippi's *Allegory of Discord*: A Warning about Families and Politics", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 128, 1996, pp. 244-248.

<sup>89</sup> On Marullo, see C. KIDWELL, *Marullus Soldier Poet of the Renaissance*, London, 1989, esp. pp. 56-66, 145-157; S. BERTELLI, "Noterelle Machiavelliane. Ancora su Lucrezio e Machiavelli", *Rivista storica italiana*, 76, 1964, p. 776, note 5; and on his role in the French invasion, BROWN, "The Revolution of 1494" *loc. cit.* (see note 88).

<sup>90</sup> P. GODMAN, *From Poliziano to Machiavelli. Florentine Humanism in the High Renaissance*, Princeton, 1998, pp. 144-150. On Adriani, see also A. F. VERDE, *Lo studio fiorentino, 1473-1503. Ricerche e documenti*, IV, 3, Florence, 1985, pp. 1160-1163, 1205-1208, 1261-1264, 1309-1320, 1340-1345, and W. RÜDIGER, *Marcellus Adrianus aus Florenz. Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis seines Lebens und seines Werkes*, Halle, 1889.

how relevant he found Lucretius's account of early society to the new political scene after the Medici's fall.<sup>91</sup> So we find Lucretius being quoted in Adriani's opening proslution to the academic year 1495-1496 to describe the self-interested free-for-all that developed after 1494, during the early chaotic months of the new popular government. This was like the time, Adriani told his audience, "before the founding of cities, in that first newness of the world when men, as Lucretius said [quoting him], 'could not recognize the common good. They knew no binding customs, used no laws. Every man, wise in staying strong, surviving, kept for himself the spoils that fortune offered'."<sup>92</sup>

It was evidently in response to Adriani's early lectures on ancient rhetoric and philosophy that Savonarola spent time in his Lenten sermons in 1496 ridiculing the early philosophers who "said the maddest things about the natural world you've ever heard", among whom it was the atomists he attacked most, inviting the women in his audience to listen and laugh at the idea that the world "was made with atoms, that is, with those tiniest of particles that fly through the air".<sup>93</sup> That Adriani felt himself to be the butt of Savonarola's ridicule is clear from his reference in 1497 to the attacks of those who thought his teaching was impious and harmful to his students,

<sup>91</sup> GODMAN, *op. cit.* (see note 90), p. 154, "vanam de atomis heresim" (Florence, Bibl. Riccardiana MS. 811 [Ric 811], fol. 2r). This proslution (which quotes 11 lines of Lucretius, I, 936-48, on fol. 3r), is also discussed by VERDE, *op. cit.* (see note 90), pp. 1160-1163; on its date, *Id.*, *Studio*, II, (Florence, 1973), pp. 476-477. In what follows, I cite Ric. 811 as the principal source for Adriani's proslutions, this and other MS sources being fully discussed by B. RICHARDSON, "A Manuscript of Biagio Buonaccorsi", *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 36, 1974, pp. 593-595. According to Godman, there is "no external evidence" to support the idea that Machiavelli's Lucretius was copied for Adriani (Vat. Ross. 884, see GODMAN, p. 149, note 105), but Adriani was certainly very familiar with all the text, as his proslutions demonstrate.

<sup>92</sup> Ric. 811, fol. 8v: "Verisimile itaque est ante conditas urbes prima illa novitate mundi, quo tempore ut Lucretius ait, 'Nec commune bonum poterant spectare, neque ullis / moribus inter se scibant nec legibus uti. / quod cuique obtulerat praedae fortuna, ferebat / sponte sua sibi quisque valere et vivere doctus'", quoting Lucretius V, 958-61 (transl. ESOLEN). The proslution is discussed by GODMAN, pp. 156-159 (*op. cit.* see note 90), VERDE, *Studio*, IV, 3, *op. cit.* (see note 90), pp. 1205-1208, RICHARDSON, *loc. cit.* (see note 91), p. 593.

<sup>93</sup> Quoting Savonarola's 3rd sermon on *Amos e Zaccaria*, 19 Feb. 1496, ed. P. GHIGLIERI, Rome, 1971, I, pp. 79-81: "Udite donne. E' dicevano che questo mondo era stato fatto di atomi, idest di quelli minimi corpicini che volano per l'aria" (p. 80), "ora ridete, donne, delli studii di questi savi" (p. 81), cf. GODMAN, *op. cit.* (see note 90), p. 140.

and during the next two years he confined his teaching to the subjects of grammar and the utility of the liberal arts.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless Lucretius remained for him a key text, sometimes to be quoted openly, more often (after Savonarola's attack) by implication. So in his pro- lusion at the start of the 1496-1497 academic year, Lucretius was un- named but he provided both Adriani's opening description of the "shipwrecks" and storms that for the last two years had "tossed us asunder" and his later discussion of language. As teacher of gram- mar, Adriani explained his task was to perfect the way humans and animals – like dogs and horses, and especially birds – used language for different purposes. Although he thought that men had much more complicated vocal systems than animals, to express their more com- plicated thoughts, it was clearly Lucretius, rather than "Maro" whom he cited, who provided him with his imagery as well as with his description of the utilitarian origin of language when men first began to live together.<sup>95</sup>

The same use of Lucretius can be seen in his pro- lusion at the be- ginning of the following academic year, 1497-1498. In it, instead of addressing himself to Virgil and Aristophanes (as planned), he talked instead about the utility of the liberal arts in the straitened circumstances of this year of war and famine. The pro- lusion has been described in great detail and clarity by Armando Verde for

<sup>94</sup> "inutile nos et impium et iuvenum animis noxium tractare opus credunt ob falsas rerum opiniones", RICHARDSON, *loc. cit.* (see note 91), p. 594.

<sup>95</sup> Ric. 811, fols. 12r (1496): "Post naufragia illa reipublicae, quibus abhinc biennium disiecti tantam fecimus et nos adhuc facimus studiorum nostrorum iacturam" (12r), cf. LU- CRETIUS II, 552-553: "Sed quasi naufragiis magnis multisque coortis / disiectare solet ma- gnum mare"; 14r-v, esp. "Nonne et Maro etiam dixit alia voce corvos imbres alia ventos vocare [...]. Nonne Cornix sicca pluviam vocat improba voce", Lucretius V, 1084-1086: "cor- nicum ut saecla vetusta / corvorumque greges ubi aquam dicuntur et imbris / poscere et interdum ventos aurasque vocare" (cf. 1063-1077); "coeuntes in cetus homines utilitateque rerum cognita et usu singulis singulas appellationes distribuerunt [...] seu infantes aut muti admovere illi manum semper cogerentur [...] ut digito quae sint presentia monstret"; cf. Lu- cretius V, 1029-1032: "et utilitas expressit nomina rerum, / non alia longe ratione atque ipsa videtur / protrahere ad gestum pueros infantia linguae, / cum facit ut digito quae sint prae- sentia monstret". On this pro- lusion in general, GODMAN, *op. cit.* (see note 90), pp. 159-162; VERDE, *Studio*, IV, 3, *op. cit.* (see note 90), pp. 1261-1264; RICHARDSON, *loc. cit.* (see note 91), pp. 593-594. Verde speculates that Savonarola's attack of 13 Feb. 97 on logic, philosophy and rhetoric being opposed to divine truth, "quando non è ordinata a essa", may have been aimed at the pro- lusions of university professors like Adriani and Bartolomeo Fonzio, IV, 3, p. 1278.



Figs. 1-2. BOTTICELLI, drawings for the 1481 *editio princeps* of Landino's *Commentary on The Divine Comedy*, Inf. X, 13-15, and XII, 56-57. Rome, Vatican Library.



Fig. 3. BOTTICELLI, *Camilla and the Centaur*. Florence, Uffizi.



Fig. 6. Detail of the panel *Magnanimitas*.



Fig. 5. Detail of the panel *Regnum*.

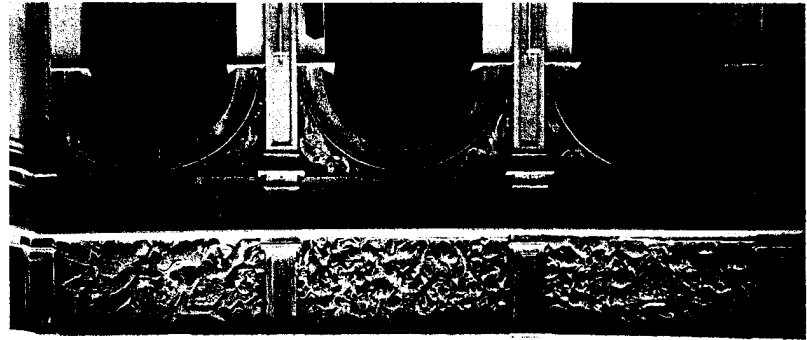


Fig. 4. BERTOLDO, frieze: *Ebrietas, Præcium, Regnum*. Florence, Bartolomeo Scala's palace, north wall.



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Fig. 7. PIERO DI COSIMO, *The Hunt*. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 8. PIERO DI COSIMO, *The Return from the Hunt*. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 9. PIERO DI COSIMO, *The Forest Fire*. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum.



Fig. 10. PIERO DI COSIMO, *The Lapiths and the Centaurs*, detail. London, National Gallery.

its importance as a vindication of the study of “pagan” authors in response to Savonarola’s attack, and although Lucretius is never cited or openly referred to among the many classical authors who are used to illustrate what Verde calls this “formulation of theology in a lay version” (any more than he is by Verde or Godman in discussing the prolusion), Lucretius is nevertheless ever present. He contributes to the idea of constant change in affairs and our need to be mobile and adjustable. He contributes to Adriani’s description of the “three craftsmen of all things, fortune, nature and God”, which should all be understood for what they were and not a source of fear and wonder – especially God, who was “not like us” and should not be superstitiously cultivated and propitiated as a projection of our own fantasies. Most of all, he contributes to Adriani’s long account of the superstitious origins of religion and the need to overcome wonder and fear, “which makes children frightened of the dark”, by understanding “the causes of things and the number of events”. For as he explains, it is only novelties like comets and thunderstorms that frighten us, whereas the more familiar miracles of nature – such as the rising of the sun, the waxing and waning of the moon, rain, hail, frost, snow and the ever-changing colours and shapes of clouds – give us pleasure rather than fear and lead to a life of happy poverty instead of unhappy riches and political ambition. Even here Lucretius is not mentioned by name, but we know that he is present *in absentia* when Adriani declares that “They are indeed happy beyond measure who do not wonder at the majesty of nature because they know its causes” – paraphrasing Virgil’s famous lines alluding to Lucretius, “Happy is he who has succeeded in knowing the causes of things, stamping underfoot all fear and inexorable fate”.<sup>96</sup> But

<sup>96</sup> Ric. 811, fols. 18r-26r, discussed by VERDE, *Studio*, IV, 3, *op. cit.* (see note 90), pp. 1309-1318; GODMAN, *op. cit.* (see note 90), pp. 162-167; RICHARDSON, *loc. cit.* (see note 91), p. 594. I quote from fols. 19r-v (“rerum omnium mutationem et necessariam in nostris animi mobilitatem”); 20r (“habemus omnium eventuum tres auctores: Fortunam, Naturam et Deum [...]. Deumque non tam ob magnitudinem imperii superstitiose colere [...] quam intelligamus non esse eum similem nobis”); 20v-21v (“Sic nos etiam ex quo cognovimus infelicitatis nostre unicam esse causam admirationem quae ex ignorantia fiat ad beatitudinem nostram profecto operam dabimus quo pacto nihil admiremus [...]. Neque enim potest audacia illa reprimi aut inertia suscitari nisi cause rerum et eventuum numerus estimetur”); 22v (“ea que pueri in tenebris pavitant”, Lucretius in note 26 above); 24r: “Felices profecto nimium quibus ex cognitione causarum maiestatem naturae contingit non admirari”, cf. Virg. *Georg.* II, 458, 490-492 (and on Virgil’s contrast in this passage between Lucretius the



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Figs. 11-12. FILIPPINO LIPPI, *Wounded Centaur* and detail. Oxford, Christ Church.



although unnamed among the profusion of classical writers whom Adriani cites, it was nevertheless Lucretius who provided the critical underpinning to his powerful riposte to Savonarola on the contribution of pagan philosophy to a new understanding of God.

Lucretius remained as relevant to the political situation in 1497, when Adriani delivered this prolusion, as he had been two years earlier. It was in early November 1497 that a student of Adriani's described the situation in Florence exactly as the free-for-all that Adriani had quoted Lucretius to describe in 1495: in the city, Roberto Acciaiuoli wrote, ravaged by discord, war, famine and plague, "we live as we please".<sup>97</sup> This was also the context of Bartolomeo Scala's long 40-page poem *On trees* which he was in the middle of writing when he died in July 1497, to be succeeded as first chancellor by Adriani early the next year. As its title suggests, this is not his lost Lucretian poem *De rebus naturalibus* that Michele Verino was shown in the 1480s; instead, it is an agriculturalist poem influenced by Theophrastus and the changing direction of Florentine humanism from philology towards empirical science.<sup>98</sup> For this reason, it is easy to overlook its debt to Lucretius and Epicurus in its description of primitivism and the growth of civilisation. After an opening

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scientific intellect and himself as country lover, R. JENKYNs, *Virgil's Experience: Nature and History: Times, Names and Places*, Oxford, 1998, p. 278). On man's initial wonder at nature, Adriani, fol. 24r; Lucretius II, 1026-1042. Lucretius was also quoted, unnamed, as "the greatest of our poets" in Adriani's [1512] prolusion, Ric. 811, fol. 41v (GODMAN, pp. 198-199; RICHARDSON, pp. 594-595), LUCRETIIUS II, 1-5, in order to illustrate the philosophy of Democritus, who with Epicurus was also one of Lucretius's heroes, Lucretius III, 371, V, 622; III, 1039-1044 and note 6 above.

<sup>97</sup> Roberto di Donato Acciaiuoli, letter of 4 Nov. 1497 to Adriani, quoted by VERDE, *Studio*, IV, 3, *op. cit.* (see note 90), p. 1261: "Nam hac tempestate seu temporum angustiis [...] infirma civitate et discordiis civilibus, bello, fame, civium strage pesteque defatigata [...]. Ad libitum vivimus". See also the *ricordanze* of TOMMASO GINORI (ASF Carte Bagni 65, scaffale 43.III, fol. 189 left), recording how in 1496 and part of 1497, he saw and experienced as vicar in Val d'Elsa, "i cristiani mangiavano l'erbe come le bestie et assai numero morivano di fame".

<sup>98</sup> Cf. GODMAN, *op. cit.* (see note 90), pp. 199-200. It is interesting that in the prolusion to his 1495-6 lectures, Adriani refers to poems praising trees as a "novum genus laudis" (Ric. 811, fols. 10v-11r). On Scala and Theophrastus, see his letter to Marco Giannarini in 1496, "ingenia quoque suum sequi caelum, non plantas modo, ut ait Theophrastus" reflecting line 60 in the poem, "Namque ut non virtus caeli regionibus una est", SCALA, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), letter 224, p. 186 and *De arboribus*, *ibid.*, p. 427, l. 60; on *De rebus naturalibus*, note 51 above. Cf. M. AMBROSOLI, *The Wild and the Sown: Botany and Agriculture in Western Europe, 1350-1850*, Cambridge, 1997, esp. pp. 1-68.

invocation to Bacchus and his patron, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco (as Lucretius had invoked Venus and his patron Memmius), the poem then describes the everchanging Empedoclean conflict between opposing "seeds of the world", hot fighting with cold and moist with dry, before Jupiter imposed his law and divided the world into two solstices and different seasons.<sup>99</sup> Before then, men were cave-dwellers, "mythically born from earth or trunks" – as Scala had already told us in his *Dialogue of Consolation* – slaying and devouring "whatever inhabits the earth, sky and sea" and considering nothing unclean, for hunger meant death. So without seeking harm, "we waged unremitting and continual war with wild animals", eating their flesh and their blood ("flesh was stored under flesh and our blood is brutish blood").<sup>100</sup> Fire provided by Vulcan, or by lightning hurled down by Jupiter, transformed life by the many different uses to which it was put, thanks to the woods that contain fire – and Scala went on to describe the many domestic and sacral uses to which fire and trees were put, including the provision of more and cheaper printed books.<sup>101</sup> As in *De rerum natura*, however, technological

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<sup>99</sup> *De arboribus*, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), p. 426, ll. 12-15: "Principio varia est rebus natura creatis: Frigida nam certant calidis atque humida siccis Commutantque vices contraria semina mundi Bellanturque simul vicuntque et victa residunt"; cf. Adriani's later discussion of Empedocles and his theory of alternating "sympathiam" and "antipathiam", or consensus and discord, as formative principles of nature, associating with him "is qui fortuito concursu atomorum omnia construebat", Laur. 90 Sup 39, fol. 96r-v. Although Ovid (*Met.* 1.19) describes the conflict between the elements, his ensuing Golden Age is not Scala's model (cf. note 50 above), whereas Lucretius, though critical of old myths about conflict between the elements (and of Jupiter's role) and admitting that there is no "simplex et recta" explanation of the solstices, the seasons and later evolution, does refer to the *semina* of the four elements as contributing to change, *De rerum natura* V, 380-415 (cf. I, 713-762), 614-620, etc.; VI, 444, 507, 788-90, 841-842, 876. On Bacchus and Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, *De arboribus*, ll. 1-11 and 770-795 (Bk. II, incomplete, describing Bacchus's shipwreck while sailing to Naxos), ed. BROWN, pp. 426, 445. It is interesting that Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco owned a painting of this subject, now lost, which is listed in his town house in the 1499 Inventory (and in 1516) as "Uno panno lino depinctoni l'istoria di Bacho, apicatone intorno ale mura", ed. J. SHEARMAN, "The Collections", (note 107 below) no. 40, pp. 25, 27, cf. 20, the reference to which I owe to Jonathan Nelson.

<sup>100</sup> *De arboribus*, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), p. 427-428, ll. 69-86: "Quam dum primi vitam coluere sub antris, Gens hominum ficta ex terra seu robore nata [...]. Nos bellum assidue gerimus cum gente ferarum Nec requies datur ulla mali, sub viscere viscus Conditur et noster bruto est de sanguine sanguis". Cf. note 97 above.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 428, ll. 105-112: "Inde ignis vitae multos traductus in usus" (l. 112); 433, ll. 296-301: "sic nunc impressa legantur Graia quoque et nostris opera invigilata Latinis (Unde expensa minor librorum et copia maior)" (ll. 299-301).

progress brought its own penalties, including the plague and famine that ravaged Italy as Scala wrote, just as it had ravaged Athens. In both poems, fear of death is a predominant theme, based on the reality of these events. But Scala's description of how people were reduced by famine to "eating grasses" and even "devouring unclean food" before collapsing by the wayside serves to demonstrate the re-brutalisation that accompanied the growing sophistication of men's lives.<sup>102</sup> Despite the strange ending of the poem, perhaps reflecting Scala's own impending death, we can see how effectively it grounds the primitivist themes of his earlier writings in the context of Florence at the time he was writing.

The same is true of the paintings by Piero di Cosimo that Erwin Panofsky sixty years ago associated with Lucretius's account of evolution, consisting of two panels depicting a primitive hunt and another panel depicting a forest fire. Associating these panels with other cycles of paintings, especially the Vulcan series, Panofsky commented on Piero di Cosimo's "extraordinary preoccupation with the circumstances and emotions of primordial existence", which is "practically ubiquitous in his paintings, regardless of subject, patron and destination".<sup>103</sup> Although the Hunt panels follow Lucretius most accurately, with their portrayal of men and animals slaughtering for self-defence and being slaughtered before both are eventually domesticated, the Forest Fire also shows the fear implied by the advance of civilisation and domestication (Figs. 7-9), while other paintings – for example, *The Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs* in the National Gallery in London – demonstrate an emotional narrowing of the gap between humans and animals that goes beyond the strictly

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 431, ll. 229-240: "[...] ab herbis Nutrimenta petunt [...] quaecumque immunda vorantur [...]. Perque vias vacuasque cadunt moritura per aedes Corpora [...]". On the hardship of these years, see BROWN, "The Revolution of 1494 in Florence", *loc. cit.* (see note 88), notes 70 and 71. On a growing interest in cannibalism after the discovery of the New World, see Leonardo da Vinci's fables discussed below, and J. SAWDAY, *The Body Emblazoned. Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*, London, 1995, pp. 24-25, 94-95.

<sup>103</sup> PANOFSKY, *loc. cit.* (see note 81), p. 58. As well as the *Hunt* panels and the *Forest Fire* (in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, and the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford), he also discusses the Vulcan paintings (in the Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, CT, and the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa) on pp. 34-57, which he associates with the Prometheus and Epimetheus cassone panels in Munich and Strasburg; and *The Discovery of Honey* and *The Misfortunes of Silenus* (in the Art Museum, Worcester, and Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass.). See also S. FERMOR, *Piero di Cosimo. Fiction, invention and fantasia*, London, 1993, pls. 16-23, 28-33 and C. WHISTLER-D. BOMFORD, *The Forest Fire by Piero di Cosimo*, Oxford, 1999.

textual, as the extraordinary pathos of the dying Centaur cradled in the arms of his lover demonstrates: how different it is from the moralising centaur that Botticelli painted in the early 1480s to illustrate the triumph of Chastity over Lust, and how much more like the naturalistic centaurs that populated Botticelli's later illustrations of Dante<sup>104</sup> (Figs. 10, 1, 2). So although it is now suggested, in reaction to Panofsky's earlier views, that only the Hunt panels follow Lucretius with any accuracy and that it is misleading to ascribe to the series as a whole a political or ideological meaning,<sup>105</sup> it is surely impossible to interpret them without referring to the cultural context we have been exploring. Since they were produced in the same period as Adriani's lectures and Scala's poem *On Trees*, their interest in primitivism cannot be confined to the details of a single passage or text; and although Vasari found Piero's paintings of animals and his landscapes with trees and caves "bizarre" and his way of life "more bestial than human" (in not pruning his garden and eating only hard-boiled eggs, which he cooked fifty at a time), we can with hindsight see that they may well have reflected belief in a natural life-style – such as Epicurus advocated – that later critics have failed to understand.<sup>106</sup>

Nor was interest in primitivism and wild landscapes confined to Piero di Cosimo at this time. Filippino Lippi, too, exhibited the same invention and "strange fancies" that Vasari found in Piero – as can be seen in his *Wounded Centaur* in Christ Church, Oxford. For although the ostensible subject of the painting is the Centaur's

<sup>104</sup> Illustrated in FERMOR, *op. cit.* (see note 103), pls. 32, 33, 28-31, 12-13 and 6; on Botticelli's *Camilla [Pallas]* and *the Centaur*, see note 107 below. *The Battle of the Centaurs* was based on Ovid and Lucian, who suggested the subject of a female Centaur lying on some soft grass, suckling her young, as a daring experiment (Lucian, *Satirical Sketches*, tr. P. TURNER, Bloomington, 1990, p. 31).

<sup>105</sup> By FERMOR, *op. cit.* (see note 103), pp. 77-81, and note 106 following.

<sup>106</sup> GIORGIO VASARI, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*, ed. R. BETTARINI-P. BAROCCHI, IV, Verona, 1976, pp. 65 (describing the *Incarnation with Saints*, see FERMOR, *op. cit.* (see note 103), pp. 181, 183, pl. 88-89) "vi fece un paese bizzarro e per gli alberi strani e per alcune grotte"; pp. 61-62: "uomo più tosto bestiale che umano e non voleva che si zappasse o potasse i frutti dell'orto [...] anzi si contentava veder salvatico ogni cosa come la sua natura"; p. 69: "e si riduceva a mangiar continuamente ova sode, che [...] le cocceva [...] non sei o otto per volta ma una cinquantina". FERMOR, for instance, concludes (p. 195) that it is "both misleading and a gross over-simplification" to see Piero's landscapes as reflections of his own interests and "supposedly primitive nature".

wound, caused by Cupid's arrow, the almost incidental and obscure detail of his young family in a cave in the distant hillside points to its probable meaning: that (to quote Jonathan Nelson) "the painful arrow of love can lead even a half animal to establish a family, the basis of civilization" (Figs. 11, 12). Like Piero di Cosimo's *Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs*, this domestic scene may have been inspired by Lucian but it also reflects Lucretius's account of civilisation in which it was the sight of their offspring that first helped to soften the human race.<sup>107</sup>

Leonardo da Vinci was another Florentine artist who narrowed the evolutionary gap between men and animals in his paintings, especially in his grotesque paintings of faces and his detailed studies of plants, animals and storms. Of all his drawings of the forces of nature, vortices and storms, his "Hurricane over Horsemen and Trees" has been called the most extraordinary in the elements of fantasy that combine with "visionary naturalism".<sup>108</sup> Describing what he calls the "Epicurean atomism" of Leonardo's studies of motion, drawn by watching atoms of dust in the circular rays of the sun, Martin Kemp thinks Isidore of Seville a more likely source for these studies than Lucretius. Yet Lucretius is far more evocative in describing how "the sun's rays [...] pour their light through a dark room", enabling us to see "many minute particles mingling in many

<sup>107</sup> See J. K. NELSON in *Filippino Lippi e i contesti della pittura a Firenze e Roma (1488-1504)*, Milan, 2001 (vol. II, P. ZAMBRANO-J. K. Nelson, *Filippino Lippi. Catalogo completo*), which he kindly let me see and quote from before publication; see also his contribution to the catalogue, G. R. GOLDNER-C. BAMBACH, *The Drawings of Filippino Lippi and His Circle*, New York, 1998, p. 13. On the subject of the painting, cf. H. LLOYD-JONES, "Filippino Lippi's Wounded Centaur", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 32, 1969, p. 390, and the bibliography cited by Nelson. On Piero di Cosimo's *Lapiths and Centaurs*, see also A. GIULIANO, "La famiglia dei centauri: ricerca su un tema iconografico", in *Studi di storia dell'arte in onore di Valerio Mariani*, Naples, 1971, pp. 123-124 and 129, note 8. The Botticelli painting known as "*Camilla [or Pallas] and the Centaur*" does not belong to this primitivist tradition but to the moral platonising tradition associated with Lorenzo il Magnifico's circle that exemplified Camilla (or Pallas) as a moral restraint on our bestial instincts; although inventoried in Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco's palace in 1496, it was not securely fixed there and may, John Shearman suggests, "hang as a trophy [...] thus painted for Lorenzo il Magnifico after all" ("The Collections of the Younger Branch of the Medici", *The Burlington Magazine* 117, 1975, pp. 17-19, 21).

<sup>108</sup> By M. KEMP, in his catalogue of the Hayward Gallery exhibition, *Leonardo da Vinci*, London, 1989, entry no. 64, pp. 134-135; cf. chs. 5 and 6, pp. 118-40 (on "The Vortex" and "The Forces of Destruction"), and pls. 12, 28, 38, 46-7, 63-66.

ways throughout the void in the light itself of the rays". This is even more true of his extraordinary description of nature's forces, more than a hundred lines describing how "the vortex of wind enwraps itself in clouds [...] vomiting forth a prodigious violence of whirlwind and storm", which could have provided a powerful source of images for Leonardo's equally dramatic drawings of whirlwinds and storms.<sup>109</sup> We do not know whether Leonardo read Lucretius or whether he was motivated by Lucretius's desire to remove people's terror of the gods, but the two men certainly shared the same desire to penetrate the natural laws underlying the phenomena men attributed to the gods, studying storms in great detail in order to explain them scientifically. We also know from Leonardo's fables how closely the anthropomorphic subjects of his paintings reflect his own deeply-felt attitude to nature.

These fables and prophecies illustrate many of the "clusters of ideas" we have been exploring as aspects of Florentine primitivism, encouraged – like the new thinking we have been investigating – by the discoveries of new worlds and political change, as well as by the apocalyptic ideas that circulated towards the end of the century. So Leonardo, too, described men as bestial and cannibalistic in eating not only animals but their own kind, chasing and eating men "on the islands of others": "does not nature produce enough simple [vegetarian] things for you to satisfy yourself?" He also talked about trees anthropomorphically, describing nuts, olives, acorns, and chestnuts as their offspring, who were "snatched by cruel thrashings from the very arms of their mothers and flung on the ground, crushed", and how the walnut-trees who had done their best would be the most beaten – a notion that recalls Scala's description, in his poem *On trees*, of the walnut tree in his garden close to the road as a prey to "boys who attacked the pregnant mother and her foetus and happily ran off with the nuts they had shaken down".<sup>110</sup> And

<sup>109</sup> M. KEMP, *Leonardo da Vinci. The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man*, London, 1981, p. 304, referring to Isidore's *Etymologiae* 13,ii,i, but see also Lucretius ll. 114-120; on storms, VI, 423-534, at 443, 446-7: "Fit quoque ut involvat venti se nubibus ipse vertex [...] se in terras demisit dissolutique, turbinis inmanem vim provomit atque procellae".

<sup>110</sup> *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. J. P. RICHTER, 3rd. edition, London, 1970, ii, pp. 104, no. 843 ("or, non produce la natura tanti semplici che tu ti possa soddisfare?"; the editor quotes here Amerigo Vespucci's second letter from the New World, describing cannibalism on the Canary Isles); pp. 292 and 306, nos. 1293 and 1303 (cf. *De*

Leonardo also talked about the soul, or spirit, and the body as separate but complementary to each other – using the unexpected analogy of the body and soul as an organ whose sound is created by air, but “without the organic instruments of that body, it can neither act nor feel anything”.<sup>111</sup> We know, too, that he was compared by a contemporary to “the Guzzarati, who don’t feed on anything which contains blood and will not permit each other to harm any animate thing”<sup>112</sup> – suggesting, perhaps, that the new primitivism entailed an element of vegetarianism that was shared by Piero di Cosimo (with his diet of hard-boiled eggs) as well as by Leonardo da Vinci.

It is not my argument that all these artists necessarily read Lucretius but rather that the cultural climate after 1494 encouraged the diffusion of his Epicurean naturalism. After Marcello Adriani had delivered his annual inaugural lectures – proclaiming that Florence in the mid-90s was like “that first newness of the world” when, as Lucretius had described, men used no laws and only the toughest survived, keeping “for himself the spoils that fortune offered” – these ideas were widely disseminated among the populace. For in this highly vocal society that exchanged ideas in piazzas, in shops and on street corners, non-Latinists and even the illiterate could have picked up their gist and understood their relevance to the present situation.<sup>113</sup>

One Florentine who was certainly influenced by these ideas was Niccolò Machiavelli. As the son of Scala’s friend Bernardo Machiavelli (Scala’s disputant in his *Dialogue of laws and legal judgements*) and a student of Marcello Adriani’s, later his assistant in the chan-

*arboribus*, ed. BROWN, *op. cit.* (see note 41), p. 436, ll. 440-441: “Et pueri gravidam matrem foetumque lacessunt Decussasque nuces laeti rapiuntque feruntque”). See also the prophecy “On the cruelty of man” describing animals constantly fighting each other and destroying vast forests in their ambition, *ibid.*, p. 302 no. 1296; and on grafted trees, which delight in their stepchildren more than in their own, p. 308, no. 1310.

<sup>111</sup> *Literary Works*, *op. cit.* (see note 110), ii, p. 238 nos. 1141-1143; cf. p. 297: “I corpi sanz’anima ci daranno con lor sententie precietti utili al ben morire”.

<sup>112</sup> Andrea Corsali to Giuliano de’ Medici, cited by KEMP, *op. cit.* (see note 108), p. 94: “like our Leonardo da Vinci”.

<sup>113</sup> Savonarola, for example, addressed the Florentines as “tu [che] vai cicalando, tu vai mormorando per le piazze, per le strade, per li ponti, per le botteghe e per tutto”, *Prediche sopra Ruth e Michea*, ed. V. ROMANO, Rome, 1962, II, p. 41 (3 July 1496); cf. *Prediche sopra Amos e Zaccaria*, ed. P. GHIGLIERI, I, Rome, 1971, p. 44 (17 February 1496).

cery, Machiavelli was closely connected to two of the humanists known to have been keen readers of Lucretius in the fifteenth century. He also transcribed a copy of Lucretius, whose influence on his thinking is only now beginning to be recognised – though without reference to fifteenth-century precedents.<sup>114</sup> From the perspective of the fifteenth century, we can now see how much both Machiavelli’s attitude to religion and his view of natural evolution owed to the developments we have been discussing.

We know from his role in Luigi Guicciardini’s dialogue, “On free will”, that Machiavelli was regarded as a sceptic who systematically ran circles round his Christian disputants – or, as Luigi explained to his brother Francesco in 1533, as “someone who found it difficult to believe the things that had to be believed, not to mention those to be made fun of”.<sup>115</sup> Although the dialogue may exaggerate Machiavelli’s position as a non-believer, there is sufficient evidence in his own writings to suggest that he adopted what John Najemy has called “a comparative and almost anthropological approach to religion”. Even if his approach was not Lucretius’s – being more interested in religion for its political value to rulers than as a bogey from whose stranglehold men needed to be liberated – like Lucretius, he recognised that the power of religion was based on fear and reflected the social customs of the people who believed in it.<sup>116</sup> It was this fear that made religion a useful tool in the hands

<sup>114</sup> The manuscript is Biblioteca Vaticana, MS. Ross. 884; BERTELLI, *loc. cit.* (see note 4), pp. 544-553 and REEVE, *loc. cit.* (see note 1), p. 45; cf. GODMAN, *op. cit.* (see note 90), p. 149, note 105, who says there is no “external evidence” that Machiavelli copied it for Adriani (note 91 above). Lucretius’s influence on Machiavelli is discussed by G. SASSO, “L’Epicureismo e sopra tutto, Lucrezio” in *Id.*, *Machiavelli e gli Antichi e altri Saggi*, I, Milan-Naples, 1987, pp. 202-216; E. CUTINELLI-RÉNDINA, *Chiesa e religione in Machiavelli*, Pisa-Rome, 1998, pp. 165n, 245, 259n, 271; J. NAJEMY, “Papirius and the Chickens, or Machiavelli on the Necessity of Interpreting in Religion”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 60, 1999, pp. 659-681.

<sup>115</sup> “Del Libero arbitrio”, Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS. Magl. VIII, 1422, fols. 59r-68v, esp. 60r-v, 63r, 65v, 67v, discussed and cited by F. GILBERT, “Machiavelli in an unknown contemporary dialogue”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, I, 1938, pp. 163-166 with the relevant extract from Luigi’s letter on 163: “per dipignere uno che con difficultà credessi le cose da credere, non che quelle da ridersene”. An edition of this dialogue is now being prepared by Urara Taguchi. On Machiavelli’s view of the stars, see A. J. PAREL, *The Machiavellian Cosmos*, London, 1992, esp. pp. 26-27.

<sup>116</sup> J. NAJEMY, *loc. cit.* (see note 114), p. 668; CUTINELLI-RÉNDINA, *op. cit.* (see note 114), pp. 165-167, esp. note 275; LUCRETIVS I, 931-932, V, 1161-1168, 1218-1240;

of rulers to ensure obedience, no legislator ever failing "to have recourse to God" when introducing extraordinary laws; since fear – as Machiavelli famously wrote in *The Prince* – "is sustained by a fear of punishment that never ever leaves you".<sup>117</sup> Pagan, not Christian, Rome was Machiavelli's model, and the fact that he treated religion in terms of its social and political function, not its a priori truth, suggests that his Lucretian and "anthropological" attitude to religion was not dissimilar to that of his predecessors in the chancery, Bartolomeo Scala and Marcello Adriani.

The same is true of the power they attributed to fortune, whose impetus we are powerless to deflect without God's dispensation, as Scala put it, Machiavelli agreeing that such was the power of fortune and God that men were incapable of changing the affairs of the world through their prudence, "indeed they have no remedy at all", especially in the Italy of his day, "which is a country without banks and without any defence": hence fortune's power as "arbiter of half of our actions".<sup>118</sup> Their definition of justice was also closely derived from Lucretius. Although Polybius is usually cited as the

MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi* I, 11, ed. BERTELLI, *op. cit.* (see note 79), pp. 160-163: "timore di Dio"; I, 12, ed. BERTELLI, p. 163: "perché ogni religione ha il fondamento della vita sua in su qualche principale ordine suo"; cf. *Id.*, *Istorie fiorentine*, I, 5, ed. F. GAETA, Milan, 1962, pp. 81-2: "portavano descritto negli occhi lo spavento dello animo loro perché [...] mancava buona parte di loro di potere rifuggire allo aiuto di Dio, nel quale tutti i miseri sogliono sperare", cited by John Najemy, *loc. cit.* (see note 114), (p. 667), who suggests that here Machiavelli may have been inspired by Lucretius's critique of the emotions.

<sup>117</sup> *Discorsi*, I, 11, ed. S. BERTELLI, *op. cit.* (see note 79), p. 161; *Il principe*, ch. 17, *ibid.* "il timore è tenuto da una paura di pena che non ti abbandona mai". CUTINELLI-RÈNDINA (*op. cit.* [see note 114] pp. 167-170) discusses the power of the oath in providing "una potente connessione tra l'intima paura di un dio e un pubblico impegno di rilevanza politica"; cf. NAJEMY, *loc. cit.* (see note 114), pp. 667-676. Cutinelli-Rèndina reminds us that other sources like Polybius and Averroes contributed to Machiavelli's religion as well as Lucretius, and that apart from the contribution of these ancient materialists and more modern philosophers, it reflected "un atteggiamento più propriamente personale, meno culturalmente mediato", CUTINELLI-RÈNDINA, *op. cit.* (see note 114), pp. 165 notes 273 and 271, the latter being equally true of Bartolomeo Scala's attitude to religion.

<sup>118</sup> MACHIAVELLI, *Il Principe*, ch. 25, ed. BERTELLI, *op. cit.* (see note 79), pp. 98-99: "le cose del mondo sieno in modo governate dalla fortuna e da Dio, che gli uomini con la prudenzia loro non possono correggerle, anzi non vi abbinno rimedio alcuno [...] iudico potere esser vero che la fortuna sia arbitra della metà delle azioni nostre [...]. E se voi considerrete l'Italia [...] vedrete essere una campagna senza argini e senza alcuno riparo". For Scala and Adriani, notes 66 and 96 above.

source of Machiavelli's account of the origin of society, as Gennaro Sasso points out there is "a precise echo" of Lucretius in Machiavelli (as in Scala) that is lacking in Polybius: that is, Lucretius's description of how early men passed their lives "wandering about like wild beasts", or "scattered like beasts" as Machiavelli put it, in contrast to Polybius, who supposed the existence of some rudimentary form of society.<sup>119</sup> Machiavelli and Scala also followed Lucretius and Epicurus in stressing the importance of security and self-protection – the desire "neither to inflict nor suffer hurt", in Lucretius's words – as important motives for forming communities from which the concept of justice develops; since justice "is nothing in itself" but is based on contracts of mutual self-interest "not to hurt or be hurt".<sup>120</sup> And although in this context Machiavelli did not follow Epicurus in describing economic prosperity as a motive for seeking security, he did define it as an essential condition of a happy way of life later in the *Discourses* – arguing (as Niccolò) in Luigi Guicciardini's *Dialogue* that the desire to escape from poverty is the motivating force of all human activity.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>119</sup> LUCRETIVS V, 932: "volgivago vitam tractabant more ferrarum"; MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi* I, 2, ed. BERTELLI, *op. cit.* (see note 79), p. 131: "vissono dispersi a similitudine delle bestie", in SASSO, *Machiavelli e gli antichi*, *op. cit.* (see note 114), I, "I detrattori di Roma", p. 469; cf. POLYBIUS, *Hist.*, VI. 5. 5-6. As Sasso argues in "De aeternitate mundi" (*ibid.*, pp. 208, 215), the difference between Machiavelli and the Epicureans on the question of the eternity of the world "è [...] netta, profonda, non componibile", though Machiavelli may well have been influenced by Lucretius's account of the periodic upheavals that destroy generations of men, cf. LUCRETIVS V, 340, and *Discorsi*, II, 5, ed. BERTELLI, p. 293.

<sup>120</sup> Compare DIOGENES LAERTIVS, X, 143, tr. TRAVERSARI, (see note 38), fol. 181r ("naturae ius utilitatis est signum, ut neque se invicem laedant neque laedantur [...]. Iustitia nihil per sese esset, verum in contractibus mutuis quibuslibet locis id foedus initur: ut non laedamus neque laedamur"), and LUCRETIVS, V, 1019-1020, 1120-1122 with MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi* I, 2, ed. BERTELLI, *op. cit.* (see note 79), p. 131: "per potersi meglio difendere [...] e pensando ancora che quelle medesime ingiurie potevano essere fatte a loro, per fuggire simile male si riducevano a fare leggi [...] donde venne la cognizione della giustizia"; for Scala, see note 64 above.

<sup>121</sup> DIOGENES LAERTIVS X, 143, tr. TRAVERSARI, (see note 38), fol. 180v: "Cum humana securitas fuerit usque ad aliquid virtusque innixa et purissima fecunditas sit que ex quiete et que a multis recedendo securitas provenit"; MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, II, 2, ed. BERTELLI, *op. cit.* (see note 79), p. 284: "[in un vivere libero] veggonvisi le ricchezze moltiplicare in maggiore numero [...] Perché ciascuno volentieri moltiplica in quella cosa e cerca di acquistare quei beni che crede acquistati potersi godere"; LUIGI GUICCIARDINI, "Del libero arbitrio" (see note 115), fol. 67v: "ogni particolare homo non tende ad altro fine [...] che uscire della povertà", see GILBERT, *loc. cit.* (see note 115), p. 164.

The relativism implied by these theories of justice and religion was in turn reflected in new thinking about man's relationship to animals, which is closely related to primitivism and the theory of evolution. Here too, Machiavelli, like Scala, adopted a more positive attitude to animals and their merits than was traditional. He most famously broke with tradition in admiring the bestial qualities of the centaur Chiron in *The Prince*, which, as Ezio Raimondi has already pointed out, deserts the Platonic-Christian approach to the centaur myth for Xenophon and a "taste for the primitive and the 'savage' of a broadly Lucretian inspiration".<sup>122</sup> But "the beast" that the prince must know how to use is very different from the animals in his fable *The Golden Ass* who are "closer friends" to Nature and more philanthropic to each other than man is. They can hardly represent a nostalgic longing for a lost Golden Age which would have been inconsistent with Machiavelli's primitivism, but equally they are surely more than "zoomorphic projections" of purely human attitudes as has been suggested.<sup>123</sup> Some themes are specifically Lucretian – such as man alone being born nude and helpless, his life beginning in tears – while others reflect the growing interest in the natural behaviour of animals, based on observations that often highlight animals' superior life-skills.<sup>124</sup> The argument that unlike men, animals know without instruction what food is good or bad for them, for instance, recurs in an unpublished dialogue by Luigi Guicciardini, "On bees and spiders", which is full of observations based on personal

<sup>122</sup> E. RAIMONDI, "The Politician and the Centaur", in *Politica e commedia dal Beroaldo al Machiavelli*, Bologna, 1972, pp. 265-286, repr. in *Machiavelli and the Discourse of Literature*, eds. A. ASCOLI-V. KAHN, Ithaca, 1993, pp. 155-156; on Chiron, *Il principe*, ed. BERTELLI, *op. cit.* (see note 79), 1983, ch. 18, p. 72.

<sup>123</sup> By G. INGLESE, "Proposte per l'Asino", *La Cultura* 23, 1985, p. 236 (commenting on Gian Mario Anselmi and Paolo Fazio, *Machiavelli, L'Asino e le Bestie*, Bologna, 1982), both discussing the poem as a satire. On the virtues of animals in MACHIAVELLI'S, *Dell'asino d'oro*, see esp. bk. VIII, *Il Teatro e tutti gli scritti letterari*, ed. F. GAETA, Milan, 1965, pp. 298-302: "Noi a natura siam maggiori amici" (l. 106); "non dà l'un porco a l'altro porco doglia, l'un cervo a l'altro: solamente l'uomo l'altr'uom amazza, crocifigge e spoglia" (ll. 142-144).

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, "Ogni animal tra noi nasce vestito [...]. Sol nasce l'uom d'ogni difesa ignudo [...]. Dal pianto il viver suo comincia quello" (p. 302, ll. 118, 121, 124, cf. LUCRETIVS V, 222-226: "Tum porro puer [...] nudus humi iacet, infans [...] vagituque locum lugubri complet"); "Qual è quel precettor che ci dimostra l'erba qual sia o benigna o cattiva? Non studio alcun, non l'ignoranza vostra" (p. 300, ll. 46-48).

experience or first-hand reports of animal behaviour.<sup>125</sup> From the perspective of the fifteenth century, Machiavelli was not simply a skilful satirist but reflected the new thinking about nature and society in the cultural circles in which he moved.

This new thinking was stimulated by travel and exploration as well as by the re-discovery of unfamiliar classical texts. Nearly all the ideas that Lucretius and Epicurus helped to re-introduce in the fifteenth century – the chance creation of the world, the absence of an after-life, an all-powerful Nature that generated and destroyed, evolution – conflicted directly with the prevailing religious and political orthodoxy. This makes them difficult to detect, hence the need to approach them indirectly, through their "relevance to contemporary concerns" instead of through the texts alone. There are of course multiple sources for many of these ideas, since humanists borrowed promiscuously from a wide range of available sources. Man's origin was discussed by nearly all ancient writers and, as we have seen, words and phrases were borrowed from authors whose overall argument was very different from that of the text in which they were being quoted. So in citing Lucretius and Epicurus so often, I am aware they are not the only possible sources for the ideas I have been discussing. Nevertheless, they are distinctive for the combination of ideas they express, and they are quoted in remarkably consistent way within a relevant context, as we have seen.

These two writers are also distinctive as members of a group of philosophers influenced by the atomist Democritus, the philosopher who began to be in vogue at the end of this period. Sharing what has been called a "hard" and technological approach to primitivism, they contrast strikingly with writers like Plato and Aristotle who envisage a higher, more intellectual end for human development. From this point of view, the clusters of ideas I have been discussing all belong to the Democritan tradition and contrast with the Aristotelian and neoplatonic philosophy favoured by the ruling elite in Florence before 1494. This, too, gives them a cultural significance that goes

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII, ll. 46-8, ed. GAETA, p. 300; LUIGI GUICCIARDINI, "Dialogo delle pecchie e ragnateli" (edition by Urara Taguchi forthcoming), MS. Magl. VIII, 1422, (see note 115), cit., fols. 69r-108v at 75r: "Et quello che più la infelicità nostra dimonstra è che li animali bruti dalla benigna a loro natura amaestrati et instructi sanno et truovono facilmente i rimedi alle loro infirmità proprii et adequati".

beyond the individual texts themselves. The extent to which they formed a counter-tradition in Florence can be seen from their brief flowering in the later 1490s, when they became the prevailing ideology of the new republican regime – only to be suppressed when the restored Mediceans reverted to the neoplatonic Golden Age ideology that Lorenzo il Magnifico had favoured.<sup>126</sup> Undervalued because of their danger and because they enjoyed such a brief flowering, the ideas I have been discussing nevertheless helped to transform Renaissance thinking in unacknowledged ways. They encouraged a new anthropological and functional view of religion that influenced not only Machiavelli but also later thinkers like Hobbes, thereby reducing the role of the divine in temporal life. They emphasised the importance of chance and fortune in life, encouraging later atomism. Most of all, they encouraged a new view of nature as a dynamic and “immense physical machine”: ideas that all provided an important bridge to later revolutionary thinking about the universe as well as a more protean view of man.



<sup>126</sup> On Golden Age mythology (already being revived by Piero Soderini as life-long Head of State from 1502), see H. BUTTERS, “Piero Soderini and the Golden Age”, *Italian Studies* 33, 1978, pp. 56-71), see note 87 above. It was “implicitly denied” by Lucretian realism, as JENKYNs says in his chapters on Lucretius’s “revolution”, *op. cit.* (see note 96), pp. 211-293, at 238. On what follows, and especially the importance of Lucretius in encouraging a new view of nature as a dynamic and “immense physical machine”, *ibid.*, esp. pp. 214 and 264.

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## PANDOLFO COLLENUCCIO'S *SPECCHIO D'ESOP* AND THE PORTRAIT OF THE COURTIER

GIANCARLO FIORENZA

The ancient fables of Aesop figure prominently in Giovanni Boccaccio's defense of fictional discourse included in his *Genealogie deorum gentilium*: a fourteenth-century mythographic text which generated extensive commentary. In book fourteen, Boccaccio advocates the fables as indispensable pedagogical tools, especially important to the intellectual development and leadership potential of a prince. In order to provide an illustrative example, Boccaccio relates how King Robert of Sicily, as a boy,

was so dull that it took the utmost skill and patience of his master to teach him the mere elements of letters. When all his friends were nearly in despair of his doing anything, his master, by the most subtle skill, as it were, lured his mind with the fables of Aesop into so grand a passion for study and knowledge, that in a brief time he was not only learned in the Liberal Arts familiar to Italy, but also entered with wonderful keenness of mind into the very inner mysteries of sacred philosophy. In short, he made himself a king whose superior learning men have not seen since Solomon.<sup>1</sup>

Boccaccio considers Aesop's fables prime examples of incredible fiction (*fabula*), or discourse, “which, under the guise of invention, illustrates or proves an idea; and, as its superficial aspect is removed, the meaning of the author is clear”.<sup>2</sup> His definition relies in part on

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<sup>1</sup> *Boccaccio on Poetry*, trans. C. OSGOOD, Indianapolis-New York, 1956, p. 51. I have made a few minor adjustments to Osgood's translation for clarity.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48. Boccaccio continues: “The first [kind of fiction] superficially lacks all appearance of truth; for example, when brutes or inanimate things converse. Aesop, an ancient Greek, grave and venerable, was past master in this form; and though it is a common