

PETER GODMAN

# From Poliziano to Machiavelli

*Florentine Humanism in the  
High Renaissance*



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**FROM POLIZIANO TO  
MACHIABELLI**



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FLORENTINE HUMANISM IN THE  
HIGH RENAISSANCE

*Peter Godman*

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

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PUBLISHED BY PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 41 WILLIAM STREET,  
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY 08540  
IN THE UNITED KINGDOM: PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS,  
CHICHESTER, WEST SUSSEX  
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***LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA***

GODMAN, PETER  
FROM POLIZIANO TO MACHIAVELLI : FLORENTINE HUMANISM IN  
THE HIGH RENAISSANCE / PETER GODMAN  
P. CM.  
INCLUDES BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES AND INDEX  
ISBN 0-691-01746-8 (CLOTH : ALK. PAPER)  
1. HUMANISM—ITALY—FLORENCE—HISTORY. 2. FLORENCE (ITALY)—  
HISTORY—1421–1737. 3. RENAISSANCE—ITALY—FLORENCE  
4 ITALIAN LITERATURE—ITALY—FLORENCE—HISTORY AND  
CRITICISM. 5 ITALIAN LITERATURE—15TH CENTURY—  
HISTORY AND CRITICISM I TITLE.

DG737 55.G63 1998 945' 51—DC21 97-44320

THIS BOOK HAS BEEN COMPOSED IN BEMBO  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS BOOKS ARE PRINTED  
ON ACID-FREE PAPER AND MEET THE GUIDELINES FOR  
PERMANENCE AND DURABILITY OF THE COMMITTEE ON  
PRODUCTION GUIDELINES FOR BOOK LONGEVITY  
OF THE COUNCIL ON LIBRARY RESOURCES

[HTTP://PUP.PRINCETON.EDU](http://pup.princeton.edu)

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Princeton University Press edition 2019  
Paperback ISBN: 978-0-691-65528-4  
Hardcover ISBN: 978-0-691-65670-0

SEBASTIANO FLORENTINO  
AMICISQUE TUBINGENSIBUS



Perché non essendo dalla natura concesso alle mondane cose il fermarsi, come le arrivano alla loro ultima perfezione, non avendo più da salire, conviene che scendino; e similmente, scese che le sono, e per li disordini ad ultima bassezza pervenute, di necessità, non potendo più scendere, conviene che salghino.

(Machiavelli *Istorie fiorentine* 5.1)





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## PREFACE

IN 1494 Angelo Poliziano, the most revered (and reviled) scholar-poet of the Italian Quattrocento, followed his patron, Lorenzo de' Medici, to the grave. Four years later Niccolò Machiavelli became Second Chancellor of the Florentine Republic. Dismissed from that post in 1512, imprisoned and tortured, he then set about writing the works that have made him famous. Between Poliziano's death and Machiavelli's maturity, Florentine humanism changed. How and why are the questions asked in this book.

It has no hero. Which may raise eyebrows, given the celebrities who frame its title. Their juxtaposition is intended to pose a problem. Of Poliziano, his works and their character, there are many excellent studies. Of Machiavelli and his "moment," there are more. Yet seldom the twain do meet and, between the distinct perspectives of these competing specialisms, issues common to them both are lost from sight. One such issue is the response of Machiavelli's generation to the intellectual legacy of Poliziano and his peers.

If that response has seldom been considered, it is because studies of this period, concentrated on two individuals, pay less attention to the culture that they shared. Poliziano and Machiavelli are viewed as the instigators of a method, a movement, an ideology; the focus is trained rather on their influence than on the milieu in which they moved; and the vista is still seen through an optic formed by the hagiography of scholarship and the praise of great men.

Many are the accounts of the rise of "critical philology" in Poliziano's *Miscellanea*. Nowhere is it noted that, in the city of their origin, the approach that they had developed was disowned as soon as their author had passed away. Amid scandal and obloquy, Poliziano was laid to rest at San Marco, clad in the habit of a Dominican *frate*, on Savonarola's command. That imperative yet enlightened champion of scholastic thought is often miscast as a fanatic, a retrograde enemy of the humanism with which Machiavelli has been linked. What kind of humanism? No adequate definition has been offered—nor can it be, until we understand more about the humanists with whom, for a lengthy and formative part of his career, Machiavelli worked. So it is that he, like Poliziano, appears more isolated than he in fact was. The lesser luminaries that surrounded them have been eclipsed by these stars in the Florentine firmament.

Its configuration, during the late Quattro- and early Cinquecento, altered rapidly. The internal politics of the Republic and the external stimulus provided by other Italian centers of learning transformed intellectual life at this original but receptive capital of Renaissance culture. From Ferrara and Venice, from Rome and Milan came new impulses to which Florentine thinkers reacted. Some of them, less known but more representative than

their eminent contemporaries, perceived change as a crisis that they sought to resolve from positions that Poliziano, dependent on the Medici, and Machiavelli, reliant for his limited influence on Pier Soderini, never achieved. By one of them, in particular, no account of Florentine humanism in the High Renaissance can afford to pass: Marcello di Messer Virgilio di Andrea di Berto Adriani.

Not, in the present state of scholarship, a name with which to conjure. The history of classical philology leaps from the Poliziano of the 1490s to Pier Vettori in the second quarter of the sixteenth century, leaving a lacuna in which Marcello Virgilio languishes. Political history assigns him a marginal role on the stage where Machiavelli takes the limelight. And Marcello Virgilio scarcely exists for the history of humanism, because it has its own teleology, which, in the case of Florence, culminates with the year 1494—and comes to a dead end. So dead, that posterity conflates this forgotten figure with his homonymous grandson.

Yet Marcello Virgilio has a claim to attention. He was Poliziano's successor in his Chair at the Studio and the First Chancellor of Florence when Machiavelli was the Second. Unlike his predecessor, who died at the tender age of forty, and his colleague, who lost his office upon the restoration of the Medici, Marcello Virgilio possessed a talent for survival. Throughout Savonarola's ascendancy and fall, during the "popular" Republic, after the return of Lorenzo's dynasty, Marcello Virgilio lived on, retaining his dual function, publishing little, and founding a family of professors.

A man for all seasons? An assiduous opportunist? A "mediocrity, embellished by survival and seniority, [which] gains respect among colleagues, if not always in the wider world," as a historian of Oxford (R. Syme, *Some Arval Brethren* [Oxford, 1980], p. 115) shrewdly observes? Perhaps. Or perhaps not, if we are willing to renounce the comforting simplifications offered by models of greatness and decline. For at "the heart of the city"—to use a phrase recorded by Marcello Virgilio in his protocol of one of the earliest meetings of Florence's ruling elite that he attended—he stood, observing and commenting on the course of events with the authority of a spokesman. His voice—now engaged and direct, now studiously ambiguous—has not been heard, because most of his works are unpublished.

A sample, analyzed in this book, is set in the context of Florentine intellectual history during his lifetime. The accent is placed rather on the period—its thought, culture, and politics—than on the individual. An edition with commentary of Marcello Virgilio's *inedita* is to follow in a sequel. It will deal more fully with biographical and paleographical problems, with his work at the Chancery, and with further details of his official—not "civic"—and philological humanism. The material is many-sided, instructive, and (it seems to me) entertaining. It invites, and enables, us to look afresh at a culture that admitted few saints and no heroes.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

IN 1752 Angelo Maria Bandini published, at Arezzo, his *Collectio veterum aliquot monimentorum ad historiam praecipue litterariam pertinentium*, which was promptly denounced to the Inquisition. Hilarity was not remarked in the Holy Office, although the *Collectio* is an amusing book. Taken together with his *De florentina luntarum typographia eiusque censoribus annales* of 1791, it both offers a panorama of Florentine culture during Machiavelli's lifetime that remains unsurpassed and presents a challenge to orthodoxy, by stationing him in the company of humanists whose names are unfamiliar and whose works are unread today. To the modern inquisitors of Machiavellian scholarship, guardians of the doctrine that he stands alone, the *Collectio* might still exude an odor of heresy.

The world knows the depth and originality of Bandini's scholarship; it is perhaps less aware that he had a sense of humor. Often, when I thought that I had discovered a document in the Florentine libraries and archives, it was to find that he had printed it, in whole or in extract, two-and-a-half centuries before me; and as I pondered his selection of sources, it became apparent that he was alive to the multiple ironies of this subject. Bandini has been my guide and companion, and I have tried to write a book that might have made him smile.

What kind of smile, may be left to the readers' better judgment. They should be in no doubt about my debt to Paul Oskar Kristeller's *Iter Italicum*. If what I owe to that monumental work is emphasized in this place, it is because borrowings from Kristeller are more common than acknowledgments of him; and I do not wish to participate in what seems to me to have become a conspiracy of silent plunder.

A book of this kind, which draws on unpublished and rare sources, would have been impossible to write without periods of research in Italy, assisted by travel subventions from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and the Volkswagen Stiftung, to which I record my gratitude. I thank, with warmth, the librarians in Florence, several of them friends, who went out of their way to assist me—in particular Gustavo Bertoli, Rosaria D'Alfonso, Adriana Di Domenico, Gianna Rao, and Isabella Trucci. The wit and urbanity of Father Leonard Boyle made the manuscript room of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana a *locus amoenus*. To the courtesy of His Eminence Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Monsignor Joseph Clemens, and Monsignor Alejandro Cifres Gimenez, I owe access, granted at short notice, to the archives of the Roman Inquisition and Congregation of the Index. Some of the results—provisional and preliminary to forthcoming studies—are considered in the Appendix.

The ideas that lie behind this book initially took form in German, when I had the pleasure to teach Florentine humanism to a group of gifted stu-

dents at Tübingen. I am much indebted to the stimulus of Frank Bezner, Jens Brandt, John Frymire, Tobias Leuker, Uwe Neumahr, and Michael Rupp. The patient intelligence of John Frymire proved invaluable, not only in the technical organization of my work. I have profited, in many conversations, from the openness and insight of Riccardo Fubini. Other colleagues and friends have commented on parts of previous drafts, and I am grateful for the help and criticism of Robert Black, Alison Brown, Daniela Mugnai Carrara, Jill Kraye, Lilly Morgese, Vivian Nutton, Brian Richardson, and Donald Weinstein. Preparatory studies have appeared in *Arcadia*, *Interpres*, and *Rinascimento*. I thank the editors of these journals for permission to draw on my earlier writings. To the kindness of Alessandro Cecchi I owe the photographs, from the Galleria degli Uffizi, that appear on the cover. It is timely to draw attention to the splendid catalogue, *L'officina della maniera: Varietà e fierezza nell'arte del Cinquecento fra le due repubbliche, 1494–1530* (Venice, 1996), that illuminates Florentine art of the period studied in the pages that follow.

To Sebastiano Timpanaro, with admiration and affection, and to my friends in Tübingen, with love for Italy and its culture, the dedication of this book indicates what its author cannot express:

E quanto l'arte intra sé non comprende  
la mente, imaginando, chiaro intende.

(*Stanze* 119.7–8)

## ILLUSTRATIONS

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## SIGLA AND ABBREVIATIONS

### SIGLA

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| G             | Garin, <i>Prosatori</i> , pp. 886–901.      |
| L             | BMLF, Pluteo 90, sup. 39.                   |
| N             | BNCF, II.V.78.                              |
| $n^1$ , $n^2$ | Variants/corrections in N.                  |
| P             | BMLF, Pluteo 90, sup. 37.                   |
| $P^1$         | Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris), Ital. 1543. |
| R             | BRF, 811.                                   |
| S             | BMLF, Strozzi 106.                          |

### ABBREVIATIONS

|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| ACDF                           | Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della<br>Fede (Vatican City).  |
| ASF                            | Archivio di Stato (Florence).   |
| ASI                            | <i>Archivio Storico Italiano</i> .  |
| Bandini, <i>Annales</i>        | A. M. Bandini, <i>De florentina luntarum typographia e<br/>eiusque censoribus annales</i> , 2 vols. (Lucca, 1791).                                    |
| BMF                            | Biblioteca Marucelliana (Florence).   |
| BMLF                           | Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana (Florence).  |
| BNCF                           | Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale (Florence).   |
| BRF                            | Biblioteca Riccardiana (Florence).  |
| Curtius, <i>ELLM</i>           | E. R. Curtius, <i>European Literature and the Latin Middle<br/>Ages</i> , trans. W. R. Trask, with a new afterword by<br>P. Godman (Princeton, 1990). |
| DBI                            | <i>Dizionario biografico degli Italiani</i> (Rome, 1960–)   |
| IMU                            | <i>Italia medioevale e umanistica</i> .   |
| Machiavelli, <i>Opere</i>      | Niccolò Machiavelli, <i>Tutte le opere</i> , edited by M.<br>Martelli (Florence, 1992).   |
| Pico, Poliziano, e l'umanesimo | P. Viti, ed., <i>Pico, Poliziano e l'umanesimo di fine Quat-<br/>trocento</i> (Florence, 1994).   |
| Politiani Opera                | <i>Angeli Politiani Opera</i> , 3 vols. (Lyons, 1533).  |
| TLL                            | <i>Thesaurus linguae Latinae</i> (Munich, 1900–).   |



**FROM POLIZIANO TO  
MACHIAVELLI**



# I

## AT LORENZO'S DEATHBED

FROM THE HILLS of Fiesole, in the country retreat presented to him by his patron, Angelo Poliziano on 18 May 1492 wrote to his friend at Milan, Iacopo Antiquario, about the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent. His letter, a masterpiece of Renaissance Latin prose, offers us an insight into Florentine humanism during the last years of this Medicean house-philologist and his master:<sup>1</sup>

It is common practice (*vulgare*) for one who replies rather late to a friend's letter to excuse himself with the pressure of excessive business. I, however, cannot attribute my delay in writing back to you less swiftly than I should have wished so much to the things I had to do (although there was no lack of them) as to the bitter grief caused me by the death of that man thanks to whose patronage I was until recently considered, and indeed was, by far the most fortunate of all professors of literature. With the demise of him, the sole instigator of my scholarship, my passion for writing has perished too, and almost all my enthusiasm for my past studies has faded away.<sup>2</sup>

*Vulgare*: there is nothing popular or common about Poliziano's letter. He was aware that he was writing in one of the most sophisticated genres of Renaissance literature,<sup>3</sup> about the classical theory and practice of which he had lectured during his first year (1480–81) as professor of poetry and oratory

<sup>1</sup> G has been collated with the following manuscripts: *P* fols. 23<sup>v</sup>–31<sup>v</sup>; *S* fols. 134<sup>v</sup>–140<sup>v</sup>; and *P*<sup>1</sup> fols. 57<sup>r</sup>–61<sup>v</sup>. For bibliography, see *Pico, Poliziano, e l'umanesimo*, pp. 105 (no. 33) and 121–23 (no. 41). All translations, here and elsewhere, are my own.

<sup>2</sup> “Vulgare est ut, qui serius paulo ad amicorum litteras respondeant, nimias occupationes [*G*, *P*<sup>1</sup>, *S*: excusationes *P*] suas excusent. Ego vero quo minus mature ad te rescripserim, non tam culpam refero [*P*<sup>1</sup>: confero *G*, *P*, *S*] in occupationes, quamquam ne ipsae quidem defuerint [*P*: defuerunt *G*, *P*<sup>1</sup>, *S*], quam in acerbissimum potius hunc dolorem, quem mihi eius viri obitus attulit, cuius patrocinio nuper unus ex omnibus litterarum professoribus et eram fortunatissimus et habebam. Illo igitur nunc extincto, qui fuerat unicus auctor eruditi laboris, videlicet ardor etiam scribendi noster extinctus est, omnisque [*G*, *P*, *S*: omnis *P*<sup>1</sup>] prope veterum studiorum alacritas elanguit.”

<sup>3</sup> On Renaissance letters, see Najemy, *Between Friends*, pp. 19–57 with further bibliography; and C. H. Clough, “The Cult of Antiquity: Letters and Letter Collections,” in *Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance: Essays in Honor of P. O. Kristeller* (New York, 1976), pp. 33–67.

at the Florentine Studio,<sup>4</sup> in a course on the *Sylvae* of Statius.<sup>5</sup> Drawing on Cicero and, particularly, Demetrius of Phalerum, Poliziano distinguished between the types of letter, humorous or serious, and the kinds of subject appropriate to the genre.<sup>6</sup> More personal than an oration and less pedantic than a treatise, the *epistola* should cultivate a gay and relaxed tone, unless it deals with philosophy and politics. Distinct from the dialogue, with its extemporaneous and colloquial character, the letter is to derive its style from eclectic imitation<sup>7</sup> and draw its substance from all branches of learning: "No part of this republic of men of letters (as it were) should be neglected by me; determined attention must be paid to every aspect."<sup>8</sup>

Two concepts central to Poliziano's thought are united in this sentence: the notion that an individual mode of expression, based on multiple models that it freely adapts, can emulate in its variety and equal or surpass through its independence the example set by the classics, together with the ideal of the unity of learning, centered on the study of letters and language, known since antiquity as *enkyklios paideia*.<sup>9</sup> Poliziano styles himself, in the opening paragraph, a professor of literature and refers to scholarship. These terms, in the uncharacteristically modest but revealing usage of his later years, amount to a partial retreat from the lofty aim that he had set himself in the first *Centuria* of his *Miscellanea* (1489). There, combining exaltation of himself, Lorenzo de' Medici, and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola with denigration of his enemies, the ambitious philologist had cast this triumvirate as partners in the enterprise of reconstructing a comprehensive culture.<sup>10</sup> Now, in 1492, the alliance is diminished, and he is reduced to the level of a client, bereft of his patron. The wider world should share his grief. Lorenzo's death was of concern not only to Angelo Poliziano and Iacopo Antiquario, but also to the entire "republic of men of letters."

Antiquario, himself a man of letters, courtier, and diplomat, had been on cordial terms with Lorenzo de' Medici.<sup>11</sup> He had the ear of the Sforza, rulers

<sup>4</sup> For Poliziano's lectures, see L. Cesarini Martinelli, "Poliziano professore allo Studio fiorentino," in *La Toscana al tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, 2:463–81.

<sup>5</sup> *Commento inedito alle Selve di Stazio* (ed. Cesarini Martinelli). See below, pp. 66ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15–23, with Najemy, *Between Friends*, pp. 48ff.

<sup>7</sup> On the theory of imitation in Poliziano and its antecedents, see M. L. McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Literary Imitation from Dante to Bembo* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 187ff. See further below, pp. 45ff.

<sup>8</sup> "Nulla mihi huius veluti litteratorum rei publicae neglegenda pars est, sed universis pro virili parte consulendum." *Commento inedito alle Selve di Stazio* (ed. Cesarini Martinelli), p. 20, ll. 10–12.

<sup>9</sup> For the concept and bibliography, see I. Hadot, *Arts libéraux et philosophie dans la pensée antique* (Paris, 1984), pp. 263–93; and G. Rechenauer in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, vol. 2 (Tübingen, 1994), cols. 1160–85. See further below, pp. 81ff.

<sup>10</sup> See further below, pp. 85ff.

<sup>11</sup> See E. Bigi in *DBI* 3 (Rome, 1965), pp. 470–72. Still useful is G. B. Vermighoni, *Memo-*

of Milan,<sup>12</sup> prime targets of Florentine foreign policy. And he acted, through his numerous contacts and voluminous correspondence with scholars, as an intermediary, a mediator, and an agent of these self-appointed guardians of high culture. A letter to him, in the month following Lorenzo's death, was more than a private communication. It had a public and political aim, serving to reassure Milan and other Italian centers of learning, with their humanist-servants as attentive as Poliziano or Antiquario to the interests of their masters, that power had transferred smoothly (without the murmurs of dissent or misgiving recorded by less partisan sources<sup>13</sup>) from Lorenzo the Magnificent to Piero, his heir.

The same purpose, which shaped the epistolary collection that Poliziano intended to dedicate to Piero de' Medici,<sup>14</sup> was reflected in the swift manuscript diffusion<sup>15</sup> and the rapid publication of this letter. Long reluctant to venture into print, Poliziano had recently made the acquaintance of that egregious entrepreneur of scholarship, Alessandro Sarti.<sup>16</sup> On a journey to visit Italian libraries, made in the company of Pico between 4 and 9 June 1491, he had halted at Bologna, and had been brought, by Sarti, into contact with the printer Platone Benedetti.<sup>17</sup> When, on 25 June 1492, this letter issued from Benedetti's press, it formed part of an undertaking to publish or reprint selected works by its author and to inform a broader readership than Iacopo Antiquario how, at Florence, the Medici wished Lorenzo to be commemorated.

Commemoration, mingling the public with the personal, is the objective that shapes Poliziano's style. The initiative for writing, as he presents it, was not taken by him, but by Antiquario, to whose request he acceded, fulfilling the duties of friendship:

"But since you, with great affection, wish to learn about the disaster that has befallen us" and to know what part that great man played in life's final act, de-

---

*rie di Iacopo Antiquario e degli studi di amena letteratura esercitati in Perugia nel secolo xv . . .* (Perugia, 1813).

<sup>12</sup> Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, p. 261; and cf. F. Catalano, "Il ducato di Milano nella politica dell'equilibrio," in *Storia di Milano*, vol. 7, *L'età sforzesca, 1450-1500* (Milan, 1956), pp. 227ff., and *Milano dell'età di Ludovico il Moro*, Atti del convegno internazionale 28 February-4 March 1983, 2 vols. (Milan, 1983).

<sup>13</sup> E.g., Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, pp. 23ff.; and see further below, pp. 18ff.

<sup>14</sup> See M. Martelli, "Il 'Libro delle Epistole,'" in idem, *Angelo Poliziano*, pp. 205-65.

<sup>15</sup> See below, pp. 26ff.

<sup>16</sup> See J. Hill Cotton, "Alessandro Sarti e il Poliziano," *La Bibliofilia* 64 (1992): 225-46; P. de Nolhac, "Etudes aldines III: Alde Manuce et Ange Politien," *Revue des bibliothèques* 6 (1896): 311; and Branca, *Poliziano*, pp. 2-9, 234-36.

<sup>17</sup> P. Veneziani, "Platone Benedetti e la prima edizione degli 'Opera' del Poliziano," *Gutenberg Jahrbuch* 85 (1988): 95-107; and cf. Godman, "Poliziano's Poetics," pp. 115ff. The manuscript P<sup>1</sup> was Benedetti's exemplar.



spite my tears and my deep aversion from recalling and (as it were) reliving the sorrow, I will grant your request, irresistible because it is so well-meaning, for neither do I desire to fall short of the standards of friendship established between us nor am I capable of doing so. Indeed, I am also convinced that it would be both too uncivilized and too discourteous, were I to presume to deny anything at all to you or to that towering figure who wished me so well. Nonetheless, because it is in the nature of the subject about which you ask me to write that it can be grasped more readily by silent reflection and meditation than expressed by either words or letters, I now qualify my obedience to your wish with this strict condition: that I do not promise what I cannot deliver and that, if I can do anything for your sake, I on no account refuse it.<sup>18</sup>

The modesty, conventional in such a context, is qualified by the ambiguous language of obligation. Ambiguous because, emphasizing his deference to Antiquario and his debts to Lorenzo, Poliziano brings himself to the fore. His waning enthusiasm for *studia* contrasts with his patron's steadfast devotion to him (*mei tam studioso*). "That towering figure," in his final act on life's stage,<sup>19</sup> had all the composure of an ancient philosopher, looking down on the vanity of human striving, including his own. Not only Platonism but other schools of pagan thought, blended with Christianity, interested Lorenzo<sup>20</sup> and contributed to form his image.<sup>21</sup> Syncretic and dramatic, this client's letter reflects both the sacred and the profane culture of his master.

<sup>18</sup> "Sed si tantus amor casus cognoscere nostros' [*Aeneid* 2.10] et qualem se ille vir in extremo quasi vitae actu gesserit audire, quamquam et fletu impediatur et a recordatione ipsa quaque retractatione doloris abhorret animus ac resilit, obtemperabo tamen tuae tantae ac tam honestae voluntati, cui deesse pro instituta inter nos amicitia neque volo neque possum. Nam profecto ipsemet mihi nimium [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: om. P] et incivilis viderer [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: videre P] et inhumanus, si tibi et tali viro et mei tam studioso rem ausim prorsus ullam [P<sup>1</sup>, S: nullam G] denegare. Ceterum quoniam de quo tibi a nobis scribi postulas, id eiusmodi est, ut facilius sensu quodam animi tacito et cogitatione comprehendatur, quam aut verbis aut litteris exprimi possit, hac lege tibi iam nunc obsequium nostrum astringimus, ut neque id polliceamur quod implere non possumus, et si quid tamen possumus [P<sup>1</sup>, S: possumus . . . possumus P: et si quid tamen possumus om. G], tua certe causa non recusemus."

<sup>19</sup> For the metaphor, see Curtius, *ELLMA*, pp. 138ff.; A. Demandt, *Metaphern für Geschichte: Sprachbilder und Gleichnisse im historisch-politischen Denken* (Munich, 1978), pp. 332ff.; and L. Cesarini Martinelli, "Metafore teatrali in Leon Battista Alberti," *Rinascimento* 29 (1989): 3–52.

<sup>20</sup> See Hankins, "Lorenzo de' Medici as Patron of Philosophy," pp. 15–53; J. Kraye, "Lorenzo and the Philosophers," in Mallett and Mann, eds., *Lorenzo the Magnificent*, pp. 151–66; and A. Brown, "Platonism in Fifteenth-Century Florence and Its Contribution to Early Modern Political Thought," in eadem, *The Medici in Florence*, pp. 215–45.

<sup>21</sup> On the image of Lorenzo, cf. Rubinstein, "Lorenzo's Image in Europe," pp. 297–312, and "Formation of the Posthumous Image," pp. 94–106; E. Gusberty, "Un mito del Cinquecento: Lorenzo il Magnifico," *Bullettino dell'istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo* 91 (1984): 187ff.; Bullard, *Lorenzo il Magnifico*, pp. 3–132; and the exhibition catalogue *Lorenzo dopo Lorenzo*.

A "mirror for princes" composed about a "non-prince,"<sup>22</sup> its silences and omissions are no less notable than its explicit eloquence.

His subject, declares the professor of oratory, is beyond the compass of rhetoric. With the contemplation accorded to the study of spiritual texts, he ruminates on his theme.<sup>23</sup> Feigning speechlessness before the ineffable, Poliziano recommends a *meditatio mortis*. Then begins the graphic narrative:

For almost two months Lorenzo de' Medici suffered from those pains which, because they attack the cartilage of the internal organs, are aptly called hypochondriac. They are rightly considered very trying because they are most painful, although they never prove fatal in their violence. But in Lorenzo's case—I should say by the will of fate or through the ignorance and negligence of his doctors—it came to pass that, while his suffering was being treated, he contracted an extremely dangerous fever that gradually penetrated not (as is usual) into his arteries and veins but into his limbs, internal organs, muscles, bones, and marrow. Because it crept into his system subtly and secretly—as it were, with a light tread—it was hardly observed at first; then, when it had given clear signs of its ominous presence, it was treated less carefully than it should have been, and it so totally weakened and afflicted Lorenzo that not only did his physical forces disintegrate but also almost his entire body was consumed and wasted away. So it was that, on the day before he gave up the ghost, as he lay ill in his villa at Careggi, there occurred a complete breakdown that left no hope of recovery. With his customary wisdom, Lorenzo understood this. His first priority was to summon a doctor for his soul in order to confess to him the sins of his whole life according to Christian custom. Afterwards, at close quarters, I heard that confessor marveling as he related that he had never seen anything greater or more wondrous than the way in which Lorenzo, constant and prepared for death, with not the slightest sign of fear, remembered the past and provided for the present, thinking ahead to the future in the same spirit of deep faith and wisdom. And then, in the middle of the night, as he rested and meditated, it was announced that the priest had arrived with the sacrament. Lorenzo, at that moment, was truly shaken, saying: "Far be it from me to make Jesus, my creator and redeemer, come to this bedroom. I ask you to carry me immediately; carry me to meet the Lord." As he said this, he lifted himself up as far as he could and, counterbalancing his physical weakness with his strength of mind, went to the hall, leaning on the arms of members of his household, to meet the old man, before whose feet Lorenzo fell in tearful supplication. "Most gentle Jesus," he said, "will you deign to visit this most wicked servant

<sup>22</sup> See below, pp. 13ff.

<sup>23</sup> For the term and the mode of reading, cf. J. Hamesse, "Il modello della lettura nell'età della scolastica," in *Storia della lettura nel mondo occidentale*, ed. G. Cavallo and R. Chartier (Rome, 1995), pp. 92ff.

of yours? But why have I said servant? I am rather your enemy and a most ungrateful one at that. For you have heaped upon me so many favors and I have never listened to your words, so often committing high treason against you. In the name of that love with which you embrace the whole human race—which brought you down from heaven to us on earth and arrayed you in the dark vestments of our humanity; which compelled you to suffer hunger, thirst, cold, heat, travails, mockery, slander, beatings and blows and finally even death on the cross—I humbly implore you, Jesus my savior, to turn your gaze from my sins, so that when I stand before your tribunal, to which I have long felt myself plainly summoned, my transgressions and wrong-doings will not be punished but forgiven through your good deeds on the cross. Let your most precious blood intercede on my behalf—that blood which you shed in order to liberate men on the lofty altar of our redemption!” As he said these and other things, Lorenzo wept; and all those who were present wept with him. Eventually the priest ordered him to be lifted up and carried to his little bed so that the sacrament could be administered more comfortably. For a while Lorenzo refused but, not wishing to disobey a man older than himself, he allowed himself to be persuaded after expressing almost the same opinion, and received the body and blood of the Lord filled with the Holy Spirit and in awe of God’s majesty.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> “Laboraverat igitur circiter menses duos Laurentius Medices e doloribus iis [G: his P<sup>1</sup>, S] qui, quoniam viscerum cartilagini inhaereant, ex argumento hypochondrii appellantur. Hi tametsi neminem sua quidem vi iugulant, quoniam tamen acutissimi sunt, etiam iure molestissimi perhibentur. Sed enim in Laurentio—fatone dixerim an [G, P S: ac P<sup>1</sup>] inscitia incuriaque medentium—id evenit ut, dum curatio doloribus adhibetur, febris una omnium insidiosissima contracta sit, quae sensim illapsa, non quidem in arterias aut venas, sicuti ceterae solent, sed in artus, in viscera, in nervos, in ossa quoque et medullas incubuerit. Ea vero, quod subtiliter ac latenter—quasiue lenibus vestigiis—irrepererat parum primo animadversa; dein vero cum satis magnam sui significationem dedisset, non tamen pro eo ac debuit diligenter curata, sic hominem debilitaverat prorsus atque affligerat, ut non viribus modo, sed corpore etiam paene [G, P S: paene etiam P<sup>1</sup>] omni amisso et consumpto distabesceret. Quare pridie quam naturae satisfaceret, cum quidem in villa Caregia cubaret aeger, ita repente concidit totus, nullam ut iam suae salutis spem reliquam ostenderet. Quod homo, ut semper cautissimus intelligens, nihil prius habuit quam ut animae medicum arcesseret [P P<sup>1</sup>, S: accerseret G], cui de contractis tota vita noxiis Christiano ritu confiteretur. Quem ego hominem postea mirabundum sic prope audivi narrantem [G, P S: Quem . . . narrantem om. P<sup>1</sup>] nihil sibi unquam neque maius neque incredibilius visum, quam quomodo Laurentius constans paratusque adversus mortem atque imperterritus et praeteritorum meminisset et praesentia dispensasset et de futuris item religiosissime prudentissimeque cavisset. Nocte dein media quiescenti meditanteque sacerdos adesse cum sacramento nunciatur; ibi vero excussus sibi [P: om. G, P<sup>1</sup>, S]: ‘Procul,’ inquit, ‘a me hoc absit, patiar ut Iesum meum, qui me finxit, qui me redemit, ad usque cubiculum hoc venire. Tollite hinc obsecro me quam primum, tollite ut Domino occurram!’ Et cum dicto sublevans ipse se [G, P S: sese P<sup>1</sup>] quantum poterat atque animo corporis imbecillitatem sustentans, inter familiarium manus obviam seniori ad aulam usque procedit, cuius ad genua prorepens supplexque ac lacrymans: ‘Tune,’ inquit, ‘mitissime Iesu, tu nequissimum hunc servum tuum dignaris invisere? At quid [G, P: quod P<sup>1</sup>: quondam S] dixi servum? Immo

Lorenzo's illness<sup>25</sup> is the only medical phenomenon observed and recorded by Poliziano. About fever, he had created in his youth a poetic myth no less allusive, refined, and distant from reality than his other literary works,<sup>26</sup> the utility of which was now being questioned. The purple prose and elegant verse that had sufficed to make a reputation in the 1470s were gradually being supplanted, in the changing intellectual atmosphere of the late Quattrocento, by different and more serious pursuits. Doubt was being cast, at the time when Poliziano wrote, on the role of "men of letters"—nowhere more searchingly than at Ferrara, whose medical humanists decried as ornamental the erudition practiced by *grammatici* such as him, contested the self-sufficiency of philological research, and sought to apply classical scholarship to issues of life and death.<sup>27</sup> Did Poliziano understand the disease that he recounted with such urbanity? Was he capable, on the basis of the Greek physicians whom he studied, of prescribing a cure? Or was this stylish writing a mere exercise in rhetoric—as polished, elementary, and superficial as the Latin composition practiced in the schools?

An echo of that controversy, which struck at the very foundations of the edifice of *enkyklios paideia* that Poliziano wished to construct, is audible in his polemic against "the ignorance and negligence of . . . doctors." More actual and personal than a cliché of the bereaved and the sick, it voiced resentment at a profession that was gaining, within humanist circles, a lucrative prestige denied to the traditional *grammaticus*. Placed on a lower rung in the academic hierarchy, and recently worsted by a leading medical human-

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vero [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: om. P] hostem potius, et quidem ingratisimum, qui tantis abs te cumulatus [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: cumulatis P] beneficiis nec tibi dicto unquam audiens fuerim et tuam totiens maiestatem laeserim. Quod ego te per illam, qua genus omne hominum complecteris, charitatem, quaeque te caelitus ad nos in terram deduxit, nostraeque humanitatis induit involucris, quae famem, quae sitim, quae frigus, aestus [P<sup>1</sup>: aestum G, P, S], labores, irrisus, contumelias, flagella et verbera, quae postremo etiam mortem crucemque subire te compulit; per hanc ego [P, P<sup>1</sup>, S: om. G] te, salutifer Iesu, quaeso obtestorque avertas faciem a peccatis meis, ut cum ante tribunal tuum constitero, quo me iam dudum citari plane [P, P<sup>1</sup>, S: plene G] sentio, non mea fraus, non culpa plectatur, sed tuae crucis meritis condonetur. Valeat, valeat in causa mea sanguis ille tuus, Iesu, preciosissimus, quem pro asserendis [P, P<sup>1</sup>, S: afferendis G] in libertatem hominibus in ara illa sublimi nostrae redemptionis effudisti! Haec atque alia cum diceret lacrymans ipse lacrymantibusque, qui aderant, universis. Iubet eum tandem sacerdos attolli atque in lectulum [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: lectum P] suum, quo sacramentum commodius administraretur, referri. Quod ille cum aliquandiu facturum negasset, tamen ne seniori suo minus foret [P: foret minus G, P<sup>1</sup>, S] obsequens, exorari se passus, iteratis eiusdem ferme sententiae verbis, corpus ac sanguinem dominicum plenus iam sanctitatis et divina quadam maiestate verendus accepit."

<sup>25</sup> See A. Costa and G. Weber, "Le alterazioni morbose del sistema scheletrico in Cosimo dei Medici il Vecchio, in Piero il Gottoso, in Lorenzo il Magnifico, in Giuliano Duca di Nemours," *Archivio di Vecchi* 33 (1955): 55ff., to which little is added by E. Panconesi and L. Marri Malacrida, *Lorenzo il Magnifico in salute e in malattia* (Florence, 1992), pp. 39ff.

<sup>26</sup> *Angeli Politiani, Sylva in scabiem* (ed. Perosa). See Perosa, "Febris: A Poetic Myth," pp. 74–95.

<sup>27</sup> See further below, pp. 96ff.

ist, this professor of literature took his revenge by slights on the competence of physicians. Here as elsewhere, Poliziano's abuse sustained an old-fashioned tone, recalling the low invective of Petrarch, another "man of letters" with upward aspirations.<sup>28</sup>

Ineffectual physicians of the body are temporarily replaced, by the pre-scient Lorenzo, with "a doctor for the soul." The distinction, ultimately derived from Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1102a), was to become fundamental in Florentine culture of the late Quattro- and early Cinquecento.<sup>29</sup> Again like an antique sage, "that great man" foresees the end, and provides for the present, past, and future. These are not only the attributes of a philosopher but also the qualities of a prophet—the role claimed by Girolamo Savonarola (soon to arrive on the scene), and by his antitype of the next generation, Niccolò Machiavelli.<sup>30</sup> The division between the secular and spiritual realms, obscured by Savonarola's political influence and reasserted by Florentine humanism after 1494,<sup>31</sup> is here bridged by the conduct of Lorenzo, who displays all the humility, piety, and humanity of a Christian prince formed by the preaching of the friars.<sup>32</sup>

*Pietas* toward God and his servants is matched by Lorenzo's concern for his heir and for the state. The private virtues of the ruler complement his sense of public responsibility:

Next he began to console his son when the others were absent, urging him to bear the hardships that had to be with equanimity, admonishing him that heaven's protection, which had never failed him among so many changes of fortune and circumstance, would not abandon Piero; that he should pursue the path of virtue in a good frame of mind, for what has been well pondered is conducive to favorable results. After this Lorenzo remained absorbed in meditation for a time and then, after sending the others away, he called the same son to himself, admonishing, instructing, and teaching him many, many things that had never been known publicly but that were, as we have heard, all full of sin—

<sup>28</sup> See K. Bergdolt, *Arzt, Krankheit, und Therapie bei Petrarca*. Cf. B. Martinelli, "Il Petrarca e la medicina," in Petrarca, *Invective contra medicum* (ed. Ricci), pp. 205–49.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Symposium* 1.2: "Verum episcopus et medicus, alter ad animorum, alter ad corporum curam abire coacti," in Ficino, *Opera omnia* 2.2:1321. See further below, pp. 292ff.

<sup>30</sup> See below, pp. 269ff.

<sup>31</sup> See Chapters IV and V.

<sup>32</sup> See D. d'Avray, *Death and the Prince: Memorial Preaching before 1350* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 117ff. The prayers and contrition of Lorenzo reflect the prescriptions of the *Arte del bene morire*, which circulated widely in Florence and was attributed to Domenico Capranica, cardinal of Fermo (on whom see A. Stenad in *DBI* 19 [Rome, 1976], pp. 147–53). Cf. *Arte del bene morire* (Florence, 1472) [= BRE, B.R. 175], biiiiff., diiff.; on the ascription, see R. Rudolf, "Der Verfasser des 'Speculum artis bene moriendi,'" *Anzeiger der phil.-hist. Klasse der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 88 (1951): 387–98.

gular sanctity and wisdom. One of these precepts, however, that I was privileged to learn, I shall record. "The citizens," said Lorenzo, "will undoubtedly recognize you as my successor. I have no fear that you will command the same authority in this Republic that we [Medici] have possessed up to this day. But since every city is, as they say, a body with many heads and it is impossible to satisfy each individual, remember in crises of this kind to follow that counsel which you understand to be the most honorable and pay more attention to the common good than to particular interests." And Lorenzo commanded that his funeral, following the example set by his grandfather Cosimo, should be conducted within the limits suitable for a private citizen.

Then there arrived from Pavia your friend Lazzaro, a doctor of great expertise—as it seemed—who, however, was summoned too late in the day. Not wishing to leave anything untried, he attempted to concoct a very costly medicine out of gems of all kinds and pearls crushed together. To this Lorenzo reacted by asking the members of his household (a few of us had by now been admitted) what that doctor was doing, what on earth he was up to. When I replied that he was preparing a poultice to warm the vitals, Lorenzo, recognizing my voice at once and gazing at me with his usual look of good humor, said: "Look, Angelo, look!" Barely able to raise his arms, which were drained of energy, he clasped both my hands very tightly. Sighs and sobs took hold of me and I tried to hide them by hanging my head, but he remained serene, never ceasing to hold fast my hands. When Lorenzo realized that I was still prevented by my sorrow from attending to him, he released them from his grasp little by little, as if feigning not to do so. I threw myself to the ground again and again in the antechamber of his bedroom, weeping and giving rein (so to speak) to my tearful grief. Presently, however, I returned, having dried my eyes, as far as I could.

When Lorenzo saw me—and he saw me immediately—he called me to him again and asked very gently what his friend Pico della Mirandola was doing. I replied that he was staying in the city because he feared that he would be a nuisance to Lorenzo if he came. "But were I not afraid," he replied, "that the journey here would be a nuisance to Pico, I should avidly wish to see and speak to him for the last time before I pass away." "Do you want him to be summoned?" I asked. "Indeed I do," said Lorenzo, "as soon as possible." So it was that I followed his wish. Pico came, sat down, and I kept watch at Lorenzo's knees, in order to hear my patron more easily as he spoke in a faint voice that was beginning to fail. Good God, with what courtesy and kindness—I would almost say with what charm—he received Pico! Lorenzo asked him first to forgive him for having caused him this bother, attributing it to his love and goodwill toward him, and saying that he would more willingly give up his soul if he had first feasted his eyes, as he died, on the sight of a man whom he loved dearly. Then he turned to conversation that was, as usual, urbane and intimate. Furthermore, he joked with us a good deal, and then, gazing at Pico and me, said:

"I only wish that I could put off the time of my death to the day when I should have completed your library."<sup>33</sup>

The advice that Lorenzo gives to his son had recently been imparted to Piero by a Chancery official, Filippo Redditi. His *Exhortatio ad Petrum Medicem* of

<sup>33</sup> "Tum consolari Petrum filium—nam reliqui aberant—exorsus, ferret aequo animo vim [G, P, S: cum P<sup>1</sup>] necessitatis admonebat, non defuturum caelitus patrocinium, quod ne sibi quidem unquam in tantis rerum fortunaequae varietatibus defuisset, virtutem modo et bonam mentem coleret, bene consulta bonos [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: bonus P] eventus paritura. Post illa contemplabundus aliquandiu quievit; exclusis dein [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: deinde P] ceteris, eundem ad se natum vocat, multa monet, multa praecipit, multa edocet [G, P, S: docet P<sup>1</sup>], quae nondum foras eminarunt, plena omnia tamen, sicuti audivimus [G, P: audimus P<sup>1</sup>, S], et sapientiae singularis et [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: et singularis et P] sanctimoniae: quorum tamen unum, quod scire nobis [P, P<sup>1</sup>, S: nobis scire G] quidem licuerit [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: licuit P], adscribam. 'Cives,' inquit, 'mi Petre, successorem te meum haud dubie agnoscent. Nec autem vereor, ne [G, P, S: nec P<sup>1</sup>] non eadem futurus auctoritate in hac republica sis, qua nos ipsi ad hanc diem fuerimus. Sed quoniam civitas omnis corpus est, quod aiunt, multorum caput, neque mos geri singulis potest, memento in eiusmodi varietatibus id consilium sequi semper, quod esse quam honestissimum intelliges [G, P, P<sup>1</sup>: intelligis S], magisque universitatis quam seorsum cuiusque rationem habeto.' Mandavit et de funere, ut scilicet avi Cosmi exemplo iusta [G, P<sup>1</sup>: iuxta P, corr., S] sibi fierent intra modum videlicet eum, qui privato conveniat.

"Venit dein [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: deinde P] Ticino Lazarus vester medicus—ut quidem visum est—experientissimus, qui tamen sero advocatus, ne quid inexpertum relinqueret, pretiosissima quaedam gemmis omne genus margaritisque conterendis medicamenta temptabat [G, P, P<sup>1</sup>: tentabat G]. Quaerit ibi tum ex familiaribus Laurentius (iam enim admissi aliquot fueramus) quid ille agitare medicus, quid moliretur. Cui cum ego respondiissem epithema [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: epichema P] eum concinnare, quo praecordia foverentur, agnita ille statim voce ac me hilare intuens, ut semper solitus: 'Heus,' inquit, 'heus, Angele!'; simul brachia iam exhausta viribus aegre attollens [G, P, S: attollens aegre P<sup>1</sup>], manus ambas arctissime prehendit. Me vero singultus lacrymaequae cum occupavissent, quas celare [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: clare P] tamen reiecta cervice conabar, nihilo ille [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: illo P] commotior, etiam atque etiam [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: etiamque etiam P] manus retentabat. Ubi autem persensit fletu adhuc praepediri me, quominus ei operam darem, sensim scilicet eas quasque dissimulanter omisit. Ego me autem continuo in penetrabile thalami concilio flentem atque habenas, ut ita dicam, dolori et lacrymis laxo. Mox tamen reverter eodem siccatis, quantum licebat, oculis.

"Ille ubi me vidit—vidit autem statim [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: om. P]—vocat ad se rursum, quaeritque perblande quid Picus Mirandula suus ageret. Respondeo manere eum in urbe, quod vereatur, ne illo, si veniat, molestiae [S: molestior G, P, P<sup>1</sup>] sit. 'At ego,' inquit vicissim, 'ni verear, ne molestum sit ei hoc iter, videre atque alloqui extremum exoptem [G, P, S: exopto P<sup>1</sup>], priusquam plane a vobis emigro. 'Vin tu,' inquam [G, P, S: igitur P<sup>1</sup>], 'acressatur [P, S: accersatur G: accessatur P<sup>1</sup>]?' 'Ego vero,' ait ille, 'quam primum.' Ita sane facio; venerat iam, assederat, atque ego quoque iuxta genibus incubueram, quo loquentem patronum facilius utpote defecta iam vocula exaudirem. Bone Deus! qua ille hunc hominem comitate, qua humanitate, quibus etiam quasi blanditiis exceptit [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: excipit P]! Rogavit primo [P, P<sup>1</sup>, S: primum G] ignosceret quod ei laborem hunc iniunxisset, amoris hoc tamen et benivolentiae in illum suae adscriberet, libentius [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: liberior P] sese animam editurum [P, S: editurus G, P<sup>1</sup>], si prius amicissimi hominis aspectu morientes oculos satiasset. Tum sermones iniecit urbanos, ut solebat, et familiares. Nonnihil etiam tunc quoque iocatus nobiscum, quoniam utrosque intuens nos: 'Vellem,' ait, 'distulisset me saltem mors haec ad eum diem, quo vestram plane bibliothecam absolvissem.'"

1489 is an indirect panegyric on *il Magnifico*, continuing a tradition of praising the father while addressing the son begun by partisans of the Medici shortly after Cosimo's death in 1464.<sup>34</sup> Poliziano, extolled as Piero's tutor in Redditi's work,<sup>35</sup> had been shown it with anxiety: "I tremble in fear at the thought of submitting my little book to Poliziano's critical judgment, just as if I were to hold out a stick to an elephant in a Roman amphitheater."<sup>36</sup> Both the analogies and the trepidation were well founded. Critic and scourge of others' productions, Poliziano counted among his own an unpublished chapter on elephants.<sup>37</sup> Expert in the art of literary emulation, he took Redditi's oblique panegyric on Lorenzo to a direct conclusion, and attributed to the father words of wisdom that his predecessor as encomiast had offered to the son.

Redditi surpassed, and his work consigned to the shelf (where it remained for 250 years),<sup>38</sup> Poliziano concentrated on two related topics that affected him intimately: his own position and that of the dynasty. During this deathbed dialogue, from which others had been excluded, confidential advice had been given to Piero by Lorenzo;<sup>39</sup> and if Poliziano proposed to initiate his readers into one of its secrets, it followed that his source could only have been father or son. Privileged access to the great suggested flattering complicity with those less favored, but what was revealed to them amounted to no secret at all: the necessity for a first citizen, without the title and status of prince, to consider the common good rather than particular interests, and to consult with "the most honorable"—meaning other members of the optimate oligarchy at Florence. This, an adaption of precepts by Cicero (drawing on Plato), was a commonplace of Medicean encomium, on which Redditi had already played the changes.<sup>40</sup> In the same spirit, Lorenzo himself had warned Piero, before his departure for Rome on 26 November 1484 with the sons of the Florentine ambassadors, that "although you are my son, you are no more than a citizen of Florence, like them."<sup>41</sup> Not a lord but a *civis*

<sup>34</sup> See Benivieni, *Ἐγκώμιον Cosmi ad Laurentium Medicem*. See further below.

<sup>35</sup> Ed. Viti, pp. 23, 508–11.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 92, 23–25: "Ad acrem tamen Politiani censuram meum pervenire libellum non aliter pertimesco, quam si in Romano theatro stipem elephanto essem porrecturus."

<sup>37</sup> See pp. 106ff. (criticism); 111ff. (elephants).

<sup>38</sup> The *editio princeps*, by Giovanni Lami, was published in 1742.

<sup>39</sup> A Medicean genre: writing to Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici about their deceased grandfather Cosimo, Bartolomeo Scala (on whom see below, pp. 126ff.) recorded the advice that the dying patriarch had given to his son Piero. See BNCF, Magl. VIII, 1439, fols. 74<sup>v</sup>ff.

<sup>40</sup> Cicero *De officiis* 1.85; Plato *Republic* 342e and 420b; Redditi, *Exhortatio* (ed. Viti), pp. 8, ll. 90ff.; 9, ll. 110ff.; 12, ll. 207ff.; 24, ll. 10ff. On Lorenzo's constitutional position, fundamental are Rubinstein, *Government of Florence*, esp. pp. 228ff.; Kent, "Lorenzo . . . Amico," pp. 43–60; and Brown, "Lorenzo and Public Opinion," pp. 61–85.

<sup>41</sup> "Poiché per esser mio figliuolo, non sei però altro che cittadino di Firenze, come sono ancor loro." L. de Medici, *Scritti scelti* (ed. E. Bigi), p. 637. Often quoted, the advice is best analyzed by Kent, "Lorenzo . . . Amico," p. 50.



with the personal authority to which, in an echo of one of his own letters, the Lorenzo of Poliziano's alludes,<sup>42</sup> *il Magnifico* wished his heir to understand that the primacy of the Medici depended on the support of their allies and partisans. That lesson was meant as a reassurance to the adherents (and opponents) of the house. By Lorenzo's successor, less receptive to his father's example than to the divisive conduct of his tutor,<sup>43</sup> it was promptly ignored. The price was paid two-and-a-half years after Poliziano's letter, when the Medici were exiled from Florence.<sup>44</sup>

The title *pater patriae* bestowed on Cosimo was not conferred on Lorenzo. Urged by his father's encomiasts to follow his example,<sup>45</sup> that son, shrewder than Piero, emulated it not only in the simplicity of his "private citizen's" funeral, but also in his collection of books and patronage of scholars.<sup>46</sup> They—or rather, the select group of two headed by Poliziano—are contrasted with the doctor Lazzaro, at whose dubious fame and expensive remedies Lorenzo pokes fun. Humor gives way to pathos when, in the midst of his suffering, the dying man requests Pico's attendance. The count sits by his side, the client-scholar at his knees. Not with the peremptoriness of a prince but with the courtesy of a friend, Lorenzo exemplifies the paradox of his apparent equality and innate superiority. His power is intrinsic, requiring neither submission nor show; his urbanity is apparent, even on the brink of death; and the Socratic wit of this philosopher-ruler, as lively as Cosimo's,<sup>47</sup> is directed at his famous but unfinished library.

Its construction, as reported by Poliziano, had been undertaken for himself and Pico. Redditi had made a similar point, when he extolled Lorenzo as "the unique hope and refuge of men of learning"<sup>48</sup> and praised, more generally and conventionally, his subvention of scholarship. Poliziano was more

<sup>42</sup> "Io non sono signore di Firenze, ma cittadino con qualche auctorità, la quale mi bisogna usare con temperanza et iustificazione." L. de' Medici, *Lettere* 6 (1481–82), ed. M. Mallet (Florence, 1990), p. 100 [= 525], quoted by Kent, "*Lorenzo . . . Amico*," p. 52.

<sup>43</sup> See below, pp. 125ff.

<sup>44</sup> See N. Rubinstein, "Machiavelli and Florentine Republican Experience," in Bock, Skinner, and Viroli, *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, p. 15.

<sup>45</sup> A. Brown, "The Humanist Portrait of Cosimo de' Medici, *Pater Patriae*," in eadem, *The Medici in Florence*, pp. 3–52; and cf. Bartolomeo Scala's letter to Bartolomeo Platina of 1474, edited and discussed by Brown, "Scala, Platina and Lorenzo de' Medici in 1474," in *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of P. O. Kristeller*, ed. J. Hankins et al. (Binghamton, N.Y., 1987), pp. 137–44. On Platina's *De optimo cive* (ed. F. Battaglia [Bologna, 1944]), Cosimo, and Lorenzo, see Rubinstein, "Cosimo *optimus civis*," p. 55 (with further bibliography).

<sup>46</sup> See J. Hankins, "Cosimo de' Medici as a Patron of Humanistic Literature," in Ames-Lewis, *Cosimo "il Vecchio"*, pp. 69–94; and A. de la Mare, "Cosimo and His Books," in *ibid.*, pp. 115–56. On Lorenzo's funeral, see S.T.S. Strocchia, *Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore, 1992), p. 215ff.

<sup>47</sup> A. Brown, "Cosimo de' Medici's Wit and Wisdom," in Ames-Lewis, *Cosimo "il Vecchio"*, pp. 95–114 (= eadem, *The Medici in Florence*, pp. 53–72).

<sup>48</sup> Ed. Viti, pp. 20–21, ll. 440–468, and cf. pp. 25–26.

personal. He referred not to the Medicean books available to "the public" at San Marco but to the private collection in Lorenzo's palace in the Via Larga—to a heritage of which he and Pico are represented, by their benefactor's last words, as heirs.<sup>49</sup> No rivals were admitted, not even those men of learning once closest to Cosimo. A process of exclusion is detectable in this letter, qualified by a later and partial attempt at reconciliation.<sup>50</sup> Conspicuous by his absence from the scene is Ficino, whose several accounts of Lorenzo's father on his deathbed are motivated by a desire to emphasize his own proximity as favorite. "Come and bring with you your translation of Plato *On the Highest Good*," Ficino was requested by the expiring Cosimo, having been commanded to render into Latin Xenocrates' *On Death*.<sup>51</sup> That parallel was in Poliziano's mind when he stressed his own and Pico's intimacy with Lorenzo, while relegating Ficino to the wings of his drama.

A new character is introduced, more forceful than the absent Ficino and less affectionate than the departing Pico:

To be brief: Pico had barely left when Girolamo Savonarola of Ferrara, a man distinguished for his learning and saintliness and an excellent preacher of heaven's teaching, entered the bedroom and urged him not to waver in his faith. Lorenzo said that it was unshaken; Savonarola told him to live in the future with absolute purity, and Lorenzo replied that he firmly intended to do so. Savonarola admonished him to bear his death, if need be, in a calm state of mind. "There is nothing more agreeable," Lorenzo declared, "if God has so decreed." Savonarola was making to leave when Lorenzo said to him, "Father! Wait! Give me your blessing before you go." Hanging his head, with a humble expression and an aspect of unqualified piety, he promptly repeated Savonarola's words and prayers duly and correctly, not moved in the slightest by the grief of his loved ones, so evident that it could no longer be concealed. You would have said that everyone stood on the verge of death, except Lorenzo.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> See Piccolomini, *Intorno alle condizioni*; E. B. Fryde, *Greek Manuscripts in the Private Library of the Medici*, 2 vols. (Aberystwyth, 1996); idem, "The Library of Lorenzo de' Medici, in idem, *Studies in Humanism and Renaissance Historiography* (London, 1983), pp. 159ff.; Branca, *Poliziano*, pp. 108–56; S. Gentile, "Lorenzo e Giano Lascaris: Il fondo greco della Biblioteca Medicea Privata," in Garfagnini, *Lorenzo il Magnifico*, pp. 177–94. See further below.

<sup>50</sup> See below, pp. 22ff.

<sup>51</sup> See Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 1:267ff.

<sup>52</sup> "Ne multis: abierat vixdum Picus, cum Ferrariensis Hieronymus, insignis et doctrina et sanctimonia vir, caelestisque doctrinae praedicator egregius cubiculum ingreditur, hortatur ut fidem teneat; ille vero tenere se ait inconcussam; ut quam emendatissime posthac vivere destinet: scilicet facturum obnixè respondit; ut mortem denique, si necesse sit, aequo animo tolleret [G, P<sup>1</sup>: tolleret P, S]. 'Nihil vero,' inquit ille, 'iucundius, si quidem ita Deo decretum sit.' Recedebat homo iam, cum Laurentius: 'Heus!' inquit, 'benedictionem, pater, priusquam a nobis proficisceris.' Simul demisso capite vultuque et in omnem pia religionis imaginem formatus, subinde ad verba illius et preces rite ac memoriter responsitabat, ne tantillum quidem familiarium luctu aperto iam neque se ulterius dissimulante commotus. Diceret [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: diceris P] indictam ceteris, uno excepto Laurentio, mortem."

This visit was the homage due, by the prior of San Marco, to the patron who had secured his election to an office that was in the gift of the Medici.<sup>53</sup> If Savonarola, not yet the prophet of redemption he was to become,<sup>54</sup> says nothing directly, his reported words contain no hint of censure. Absolution, already granted by the priest who preceded him, had not been requested; and the focus is trained on Lorenzo's wish for benediction.<sup>55</sup> The blessing of Savonarola, sought as a tribute to his growing influence, underlines his harmonious relations with the Medici. The thought is less that of a tyrant admonished than that of the lowly exalted (Luke 1:52). Through his meekness, *il Magnifico* reveals his grandeur. In his abasement, he displays his authority—submitting to the “excellent preacher of heaven's teaching.” The inversions that establish his singularity are completed in the delicate understatement of the final sentence: “You would have said that everyone stood on the verge of death, except Lorenzo.”

Indifferent to grief and superior to suffering, this model of Aristotelian virtue combines temperance (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1118a–b) and greatness of spirit (*ibid.*, 1123bff.) with the wit of a gentleman (*ibid.*, 1128a). All the more cogent, therefore, is the support that Lorenzo lends to Poliziano's polemic against doctors:

He alone among the throng showed no sign of pain, agitation, or sorrow, until his last breath maintaining his usual firmness of mind, steadiness, even temper, and greatness of spirit. Nonetheless, the doctors continued to press their attentions upon him, not wishing to seem to do nothing, tormenting him with their busy officiousness; but he did not refuse or oppose anything that they thrust on him—not because he had the faintest hope of holding on to sweet life but in order to avoid giving the slightest offense to anyone while dying. He endured all with such strength, up to the very last moment, that he made several jokes about his own death. Thus, when someone offered him food and asked how it pleased him, Lorenzo replied: “As much as is usual for a man passing away.” After that he gently embraced each individual and humbly sought forgiveness if, on account of his various illnesses, he had been too severe or trying. Then Lorenzo concentrated all his attention on the extreme unction and commendation of his departing soul. There followed the recitation of the Gospels, in which the crucifixion inflicted on Christ is described. Lorenzo indicated his almost complete understanding of the words and the sense at times by moving his lips in silence, at times by raising his weary eyes, occasionally by

<sup>53</sup> For Savonarola's position in 1492, see Martelli, “La politica culturale del ultimo Lorenzo,” drawing on Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence*. Cf. G. C. Garfagnini, “Firenze tra Lorenzo il Magnifico e Savonarola,” *Critica storica* 18 (1991): 9–30.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. G. C. Garfagnini, “Pico e Savonarola,” in *Pico, Poliziano, e l'umanesimo*, pp. 149–57; and cf. below, pp. 134ff.

<sup>55</sup> For the controversy over the interpretation of this scene, see Ridolfi, *Studi savonaroliani*, pp. 115ff. and 265ff., and *idem*, *Vita di Savonarola*, pp. 75ff.

a movement of the fingers. And finally, with his gaze continually fixed on a small crucifix made of silver and magnificently adorned with pearls and jewels, which he repeatedly kissed, Lorenzo de' Medici passed away.<sup>56</sup>

With the intrusive bustle of the physicians is contrasted the calm equanimity of the sage. Once again, Lorenzo does not make the others the butt of his wit; the joke is at his own expense. Preserving the courtesy that distinguished his summons to Pico and the obedience that marked his conduct with Savonarola, he submits to their pointless ministrations and begs pardon from his entourage. Passing from this world in serene splendor, he is qualified for equal eminence in the next. Heady with incense, the image of Lorenzo de' Medici held up for veneration by this canon of Florence's cathedral<sup>57</sup> is nothing less than the icon of a secular saint.

The sacred and the profane, the ancient and contemporary elements in Poliziano's portrait, are blended in the summary that follows:

He was a man born to every form of greatness, who against the alternating, repeated buffets of fortune continually trimmed his sails, so that you would not have been able to tell whether he was more constant in favorable circumstances or more calm and temperate in adverse conditions. His intelligence was so great, so versatile, and so perceptive that, where others consider it of tremendous moment to excel in a specialized field, he was of equal distinction in them all. Indeed, I think that there is no one who is unaware that in this manner probity, justice, faith, and holiness found in the heart and mind of Lorenzo de' Medici their favorite abode and altar-piece. How compelling his graciousness, kindness, and affability were, is demonstrated by the goodwill toward him of the whole people and absolutely every order of society. Yet among all his gifts, liberality and magnificence were the most splendid, raising him in almost im-

<sup>56</sup> "Sic scilicet unus ex omnibus ipse nullam doloris, nullam perturbationis, nullam tristitiae significationem dabat; consuetumque animi rigorem, constantiam, aequabilitatem [G, P: aequalitatem P<sup>1</sup>, S], magnitudinem ad extremum usque spiritum producebat. Instabant medici adhuc tamen, et ne [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: om. P] nihil agere viderentur, officiosissime hominem vexabant, nihil ipse [P: ille G, P<sup>1</sup>, S] tamen aspernari, nihil aversari, quod illi modo obtulissent [G, P, S: attulissent P<sup>1</sup>], non quidem quoniam spe [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: spem P] vitae blandientis illiceretur [G, P, P<sup>1</sup>: alliceretur S], sed ne quem forte moriens vel levissime perstringeret. Adeoque fortis ad extremum perstitit, ut de sua quoque ipsius [G, P<sup>1</sup>, S: om. P] morte nonnihil cavillaretur; sicuti cum porrigenti cuidam cibum rogantique mox quam placuisset respondit: 'Quam solet morienti.' Post id blande singulos amplexatus petitaque suppliciter venia, si cui gravior forte, si molestior morbi vitio fuisset, totum se post illa perunctioni summae demigrantisque animae commendationi dedit. Recitari dein evangelica historia coepta est, qua scilicet irrogati Christo cruciatus explicantur, cuius ille agnoscere se verba et [G, P, S: verbaque P<sup>1</sup>] sententias prope omnis [P, P<sup>1</sup>: omnes G, S], modo labra tacitus movens, modo languentis [P, P<sup>1</sup>, S: languentes G] oculos erigens, interdum etiam digitorum gestu significabat. Postremo sigillum crucifixi argenteum margaritis gemmisque magnifice adornatum defixis usquequaque oculis intuens identidemque deosculans expiravit."

<sup>57</sup> See Pico, Poliziano, *e l'umanesimo*, pp. 346–47 (no. 146).

mortal glory to the ranks of the gods, for he did nothing simply in the interests of fame and renown but everything for love of virtue. His concern for men of letters; the vast respect—even reverence—that he showed each of them; the huge expenditure of effort and application that he devoted to seeking out all over the world, and buying, volumes in Greek and Latin; the enormous sums that he spent on this enterprise will make not only the present age or century but even posterity itself understand that, at the death of Lorenzo, it suffered an immense loss!<sup>58</sup>

Constancy in the face of Fortune's changes was not only an Aristotelian virtue (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1100b) that characterized the wise man of several philosophical schools, notably the Stoics; it had also been a key theme of encomia on Cosimo de' Medici.<sup>59</sup> Lapo da Castiglionchio, in the preface to his translation of Plutarch's *Life of Themistocles*, had employed the metaphors used by Poliziano,<sup>60</sup> and Vespasiano da Bisticci, among others, had referred to the all-round excellence of Lorenzo's father.<sup>61</sup> Poliziano, bent on making his patron an embodiment of the ideal of *enkyklios paideia*, continues the process with an admiration not shared by all Lorenzo's contemporaries. They noted, and resented, his hunger for glory, even in petty matters—his jealousy, rages, and *prepotenza*.<sup>62</sup> With the probity and justice, the affability and graciousness that the panegyrist extols, they contrasted the sharp financial practices, the

<sup>58</sup> "Vir ad omnia summa natus, et qui flantem reflantemque totiens fortunam usque adeo sit alterna velificatione moderatus, ut nescias utrum secundis rebus constantior an adversis aequior ac temperantior apparuerit. Ingenio vero tanto ac tam facili et perspicaci, ut quibus in singulis excellere [*P*, *P*<sup>1</sup>, *S*: excedere *G*] alii magnum putant, ille in [*P*, *P*<sup>1</sup>, *S*: om. *G*] universis pariter emeretur. Nam probitatem, iustitiam, fidem, sanctitatem [*P*: om. *G*, *P*<sup>1</sup>, *S*] nemo, arbitrator, nescit, ita sibi Laurentii Medicis pectus atque animum quasi gratissimum aliquod domicilium templumque delegisse. Iam comitas, humanitas, affabilitas quanta fuerit, eximia quaedam in eum totius populi atque omnium plane ordinum benivolentia declaratur. Sed enim inter haec omnia liberalitas [*G*, *P*, *P*<sup>1</sup>: libertas *S*] tamen et magnificentia explendescibat, quae illum paene immortalis quadam gloria ad deos usque provexerat; cum interim nihil ille famae dumtaxat causa et nominis, omnia vero virtutis amore persequeretur. Quanto autem litteratos [*amore P* erased: om. *G*, *P*<sup>1</sup>, *S*] homines studio complectebatur, quantum honoris, quantum etiam reverentiae [*G*, *P*, *S*: reverentia *P*<sup>1</sup>] omnibus exhibebat, quantum denique operae industriaeque suae conquirendis toto orbe terrarum coemendisque linguae utriusque voluminibus posuit, quantosque in ea re quam immanes sumptus fecit, ut non aetas modo haec aut hoc saeculum, sed posteritas etiam ipsa maximam in huius hominis interitu iacturam fecerit!"

<sup>59</sup> See Brown, "Humanist Portrait," pp. 7ff. (cited in note 45).

<sup>60</sup> *Vitae* (Rome, 1470), fol. 81v. The common source is Cicero *De officiis* 2.19 (cf. 1.90). For its use in the language of diplomacy, cf. the Milanese ambassador, Sacromoro: "Tropo alza le vele per bonanza," "Molto alza le sue vele quando gli pare havere vento prospero," cited by Brown, *Bartolomeo Scala*, p. 61n; and cf. Bullard, *Lorenzo*, p. 24.

<sup>61</sup> *Vitae*, vol. 2, ed. A. Greco (Florence, 1976), pp. 168 and 193. For Lorenzo's "ingegno universale" in the post-restoration panegyrics of Francesco Guicciardini and Niccolò Valori, cf. Rubinstein, "Formation of the Posthumous Image," pp. 99 and 100.

<sup>62</sup> See Kent, "The Young Lorenzo, 1449–69," in Mallett and Mann, eds., *Lorenzo the Magnificent*, pp. 4ff.; and Brown, "Lorenzo and Public Opinion," pp. 67ff.

manipulated elections, and—after the Pazzi conspiracy of 1478—the authoritarian style of a party boss accompanied in the streets by a band of armed thugs.<sup>63</sup> And although Poliziano was not alone in attributing divine qualities to his secular saint,<sup>64</sup> Lorenzo's mercifulness to the people and munificence to the church could also be construed as the political and economic tactics of a would-be *signore*.

Liberality and magnificence, the Aristotelian attributes of the great-minded that Cosimo had possessed,<sup>65</sup> are presented as manifestations of the selfless *virtus* that Vasari, in his famous portrait, was to highlight.<sup>66</sup> Aristotle's ethical categories had long influenced memorial preaching on the prince;<sup>67</sup> and Savonarola, in his *Arte del ben morire* of 1496, was to celebrate disinterested *virtù*.<sup>68</sup> The altruism of Lorenzo, as depicted by Poliziano, found expression in support for "men of letters," upon whom and whose libraries he lavished "enormous sums." The benefits were reciprocal. Grateful admiration of the learned guaranteed the ruler's immortality. Praising Lorenzo's merits, natural and inherited, Poliziano stresses continuity—in particular, a continuity of patronage reaching from grandfather to father and, by implication, to the son and heir. Now Piero, by a logical progression of self-interest, enters the scene:

Yet we are now consoled in our profoundest sorrow by his children, most worthy of so distinguished a father. The eldest of whom, Piero, barely twenty-one years old, bears with great responsibility, prudence, and authority the heavy burden of the entire Republic, so that it is thought that his father Lorenzo has forthwith returned to life in him. The other son is the eighteen-year-old Giovanni, both a splendid cardinal at an age in which no one has ever attained such a rank, and a legate appointed by the supreme pontiff with jurisdiction not only over the patrimony of the Church but also over his fatherland. He proves himself to be of such character and stature in his conduct of, and excellence in, complex affairs that he will attract the attention of everyone and arouse unbe-

<sup>63</sup> Kent, "Lorenzo . . . Amico," pp. 59ff.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp. 46 and 57. Cf. Scala (BNCF, Magl. VIII, 1439, fol. 76<sup>r</sup>): "Civitates, quarum rectores et principes . . . vicarii putantur in terris deorum."

<sup>65</sup> Nicomachean Ethics 1122b. Cf. A. B. Fraser Jenkins, "Cosimo de' Medici's Patronage of Architecture and the Theory of Magnificence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970): 162–70.

<sup>66</sup> See P. Rubin, "Vasari, Lorenzo, and the Myth of Magnificence," in Garfagnini, ed., *Lorenzo il Magnifico*, pp. 427ff. with fig. 1. Cf. Rubinstein, "Formation of the Posthumous Image," p. 104.

<sup>67</sup> D'Avray, *Death and the Prince*, pp. 136ff.

<sup>68</sup> (Florence, 1496), reprinted with an introduction by E. v. Rath (Berlin, 1926). See D. Weinstein, "The Art of Dying Well and Popular Piety in the Preaching and Teaching of Girolamo Savonarola," in *Life and Death in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, ed. M. Tefel, R. G. Witt, and R. Gotten (Durham, N.C., 1989), pp. 88–104. Cf. A. Tenenti, *Il senso della morte e l'amore della vita nel Rinascimento (Francia e Italia)* (Turin, 1957), pp. 112–14, 329–31.

lievably high expectations, which he will satisfy to the full. The third son then is Giuliano, a stripling with sensitivity and good looks, whose marvelous sweet temperament, combined with uprightness and intelligence, has entranced the entire city. Even though I shall say nothing about the others for the moment, on the subject of Piero I cannot restrain myself from noting a testimony from his father that is of recent date.

About two months before his death, sitting in his study, Lorenzo (as was his wont) mused with us about philosophy and literature. He said that he intended to spend the rest of his life in these studies with me, Ficino, and Pico della Mirandola, far from the bustle of the city. I said that the citizens would never allow this, for they appeared to need his authoritative guidance more and more every day. Smiling, Lorenzo replied: "But presently I shall give up my role to your pupil and place on his shoulders this heavy burden." When I asked whether he detected in Piero, who is still a young man, such strength that we could rely on him with good faith, Lorenzo said: "I see such a great and solid foundation that I expect with full confidence that he will be able to bear anything I wish to build upon it. Do not think, Angelo, that any Medici before Piero has had such character as he displays. In consequence I hopefully predict that—unless a number of tests of his intelligence which I have made deceive me—he will yield to none of his ancestors."

Indeed, Piero promptly gave ample and clear signs of the validity of his father's wise prediction by being constantly at his side when he was ill and attending himself to almost everything, even the lowliest of tasks, showing great patience at sleepless nights and missed meals, never stirring from Lorenzo's bedside except for urgent affairs of state. Although a wondrous sense of filial duty was apparent on his features, nonetheless, he avoided increasing Lorenzo's suffering during the illness by revealing his own grief, swallowing (as it were) all his groans and tears with incredible steadfastness. So it was that, in this saddest of moments, we witnessed a most entrancing spectacle (so to speak), for Piero's father, in his turn, improvised to avoid making his son gloomier by his own sorrow, pretending to be in a different mood, and held back his tears for Piero's sake, never seeming either disturbed or broken in spirit as long as he was present. In this way both of them struggled with their feelings and sought to conceal their delicate sentiments with considerate delicacy.

When Lorenzo passed away, the courtesy and dignity with which our Piero received all his citizens who thronged to his house can scarcely be described; nor can the appropriateness, variety, and gentleness of his responses to their grief, consolations of the hour, and promises of support. Scarcely expressible, too, is the immense skill that Piero showed in organizing the family's affairs, in making good all the damage done by this grievous blow to its vital interests; receiving, encouraging, and giving heart to even the most insignificant retainer of the Medici who was downcast and depressed at the adverse circumstances; never faltering in his service to the Republic at any time or place, never failing