Salvator Rosa’s Democritus and L’Umana Fragilità
Author(s): Richard W. Wallace
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Salvator Rosa never put into practice his frequently expressed and precociously romantic yearnings for a life of solitude and hermit simplicity, but these feelings did affect his choice of subject matter considerably, so that he was perhaps most famous in later periods for his landscapes with "savage banditti" and "solitary hermits." There are many examples of his work in this vein; among the most interesting are his St. Paul the Hermit, a painting now in the Brera, Milan, in which the saint is depicted as a shaggy, white-bearded cave dweller in a gloomy forest, and the two large etchings of the hermit St. William and his companion Albert, who are shown bound to trees in uncomfortably penitent positions in the midst of a wilderness. For Rosa, a painter of Neapolitan origin who had studied in the Ribera circle, the hermit saint tradition was an especially vivid one, and the Riberesque motive of the isolated figure with a skull often appears in his art, as seen in a drawing now in the British Museum (Fig. 1), in his Self-Portrait with a Skull in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 2), and in the Portrait of Mr. Altham as a Hermit in the Bankes Collection at Kingston Lacy (Fig. 3).

The drawing is a traditional handling of the hermit saint theme, closely dependent on Riberesque prototypes, but the portraits are more complex and have the erudite embellishments favored by Rosa, who liked to think of himself chiefly as a painter of learned and philosophically profound subjects. The Self-Portrait has the skull, books, pen, and paper so often seen in paintings of St. Jerome as a solitary, scholarly penitent, and the inscription on the piece of paper declares that it was painted "nell'Eremo," in the retreat or hermitage, for Rosa's friend Giovanni Battista Ricciardi. The way in which the skull is held and contemplated is also reminiscent of Domenico Fetti's painting and Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione's etching of Melancholy, the latter of which was known to Rosa at the time the Self-Portrait was executed, and it is especially relevant to this discussion that both of these artists made their figures look like penitent Magdalenes (Figs. 4, 5). In addition, it seems likely that Rosa was here influenced by the well-established tradition of the portrait with a skull. Although examples of this portrait type are found in Italian Renaissance and Baroque art, they tend to be rather rare compared to their great popularity in Northern sixteenth and seventeenth century art, and it therefore seems quite possible that Northern models may have helped to shape Rosa's concetto.

If the inscription he writes on the skull, ἡμῖν νο̂ι πορτε—"Be-


NB A bibliography of frequently cited sources, given short titles in the footnotes, will be found at the end of this article.

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1 A characteristic expression of these sentiments is found in a letter from Rosa to his friend Giovanni Battista Ricciardi dated December, 1671: "... ma per dirvela, così nauseato d'ogn'altra cosa, che più d'una volta sono stato tentato di fiscarmi in una Certosa, per non uscir mai più d'una di quelle celle. O Dio, e quanto sono divenuto impaziente e stufo di veder più imagine humana!" (De Rinaldis, Lettere inedite, 237, No. 198). See also R. W. Wallace, "Salvator Rosa's Justice Appearing to the Peasants," JWarb, 4, 1967, 431–34.

2 Salerno, Rosa, 126, No. 52; Bartsch 1, Salerno, Rosa, 149, illustrated in A. Pettorelli, Salvator Rosa, pittore, incisore, musicista, poeta, Turin, 1924, pl. 47; and Bartsch 2, Salerno, Rosa, 138, No. 99, respectively. See also M. Mahoney, "Salvator Rosa's Saint Humphrey," The Minneapolis Institute of Arts Bulletin, 53, No. 3, 1964, 55–67.

3 Crackerode Fr. 2–175; 18.5 x 12cm.

4 Accession No. 21.105: 39" x 31.5." Salerno, Rosa, 123, No. 40, who gives it a probable date of 1659. See also Oertel, "Vergänglichkeit," 106f.

5 2.35 x 1.63m; traditionally dated 1665. Salerno, Rosa, 123, No. 38; and Italian Art and Britain, 20f., No. 15. I am very grateful to Mr. H. J. R. Bankes for permission to publish this picture.


7 There are also a number of Rosa drawings that are much like the Self-Portrait with a Skull. Two in the Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, Inv. No. 9730v and v (see J. Bean, Dessins romains du XVIIe siècle,

Artistes italiens contemporains de Poussin, XXIII° Exposition du Cabinet des Dessins, Musée du Louvre, Paris, 1959, 37, No. 63) and in another in the Teyler Museum, Haarlem, t. 31, shows a youthful standing figure contemplating a skull. A drawing of a man seated with a skull in his lap (W. Vitzthum, in Master Drawings, 1, No. 4, 1963, 59, fig. 1). A drawing in the Uffizi, Florence, 12093r, is closest to the painting and shows a youth standing in front of a tomb and writing on a skull. Except for the Haarlem drawing, the figures all wear crowns of cypress. For a discussion of the skull as a symbol of death and its association with hermit saints, especially St. Jerome, see Johnson, "Putto," 423–32.

8 Fetti's Melancholy exists in a number of versions, two of which are generally accepted as autograph; one in the Louvre, Paris, the other (Fig. 4) in the Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, No. 671. The print, Bartsch 26, is not dated, but A. Blunt, The Drawings of G. B. Castiglione and Stefano della Bella, in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle, London, 1954, 12, gives 1648 as the most likely date on stylistic grounds. As will be discussed below, Rosa used this etching as a model for his Democritus, which is earlier in date than the Self-Portrait with a Skull.

9 A. Figler, Barockthemen, Budapest-Berlin, 1956, ii, 577–80. Oertel, "Vergänglichkeit," 108, also sees a connection to Northern portraits of this type. The closest parallel to Rosa's picture I have found is a drawing by Hendrick Goltzius in the Pierpont Morgan Library, Inv. ii, 145, in which a youth, shown bust length, holds a skull with a tulip against it much as Rosa's figure holds the pen to the skull; E. K. J. Reznick, Die Zeichnungen von Hendrick Goltzius, Utrecht, 1961, i, 399f., No. 332, ii, pl. 443.
hold, Whither, When”—has the ambiguity usually associated with such declarations, the *memento mori* significance of the skull itself is perfectly clear, and is reinforced by the crown of funerary cypress that garlands his head. It would also seem that Rosa originally intended to refer to his own Stoicism, showing himself contemplating the death’s head with Stoic calm and resignation, since the book upon which the skull rests has “Seneca” written on its spine, the letters now only faintly visible.

Rosa’s *Mr. Altham as a Hermit* (Fig. 3), a family portrait in the Bankes Collection, is a similar and even more ambitious attempt at moralizing portraiture. Mr. Altham, a visitor to Italy in the later seventeenth century and possibly a student of Rosa’s, is shown standing in dark and gloomy solitude garbed in a hermit’s rough gray robe. He tramples on a book labeled “Epicu . . . re . . .” (clearly a reference to Epicurus) and its accompanying scroll which bears the words *Postmortem nulla voluptas* (“There is no pleasure after death”); he gazes contemplatively at a still life group composed of a skull, the Gospels (the end of the book’s title is screened by the skull’s jaw, producing “Evangel . . .”), and another scroll which piously answers Epicurus with *Postmortem summa voluptas* (“The greatest pleasure is after death”). The thistle plant that flourishes in the right foreground is probably used here as a symbol of evanescence, as will be discussed in greater detail below with reference to Rosa’s *L’Umana Fragilità*. The relief, which shows a winged old man with scythe gawing at the Belvedere torso, has been interpreted as “Time devouring Strength.” A modification of this explanation can be offered, however, since Rosa unmistakably copied the frontispiece of François Perrier’s seventeenth century publication of engravings after famous antique statues, *One Hundred Roman Statues Spared by the Envious Tooth of Time* (Fig. 6). There is no particular reason, therefore, to identify the Belvedere torso specifically as a symbol of strength, although the basic *vanitas* implication of this interpretation is clearly the point of the relief as Rosa uses it.

The hermit saint tradition was also of general importance to one of Rosa’s largest and most ambitious pictures, the *Democritus in Meditation* now in the Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen (Fig. 7). In addition, it can be shown that the *Democritus* is specifically dependent on a pictorial and iconographic tradition that received its decisive formation with Albrecht Dürer’s *Melencolia I*. Dürer’s subtle and complex print engendered two major responses in Italy that led in turn to Rosa’s painting. The earlier and most important reaction was Domenico Fetti’s *Melancholy* (Fig. 4) which, like the Dürer, shows a brooding female figure sunk in melancholic inaction and surrounded by implements symbolizing human activities, practical and theoretical. Fetti departs from his model in adding brushes, a palette, and a sculpture as specific references to artistic activities and, most important, he also gives his Magdalene-like Melancholy a skull as a *memento mori*, thus making his picture unmistakably an allegory of *vanitas*. As Panofsky and Saxl have observed, that which had been with Dürer only a dark, barely conscious doubt whether human works and thought were really significant in the face of eternity here condenses itself into a clearly put question, which is answered with a resolute and unequivocal “no.”


11 For other examples of Rosa’s use of funerary cypress see Wallace, “Genius,” 475. Oertel, “Vergänglichkeit,” 108, also notes this symbolic intent.

12 A brief discussion of Rosa’s Stoicism is found in Wallace, “Genius,” 474.


17 R.M., Inv. No. 4112: 3.44 x 2.14m; signed. Its companion piece, *Diogenes Throwing Away His Bowl*, is also in the Copenhagen Museum. See H. Olsen, *Italian Paintings and Sculpture in Denmark*, Copenhagen, 1961, 85f.; S. A. Altham, *Rosa*, 110, No. xii, 29, 49, 43f. (and 121, No. 31 for the Diogenes). Both Olsen and Salerno state that the picture was painted in 1650 and exhibited at the Pantheon in March, 1651. However, a letter of March 10, 1651, indicates that Rosa also worked on the picture early in 1651, before exhibiting it. See U. Limantani, *Poesie e lettere inedite di Salvatore Rosa*, Florence, 1950, 72, No. V, and 24. See also De Rinaldis, *Lettere inedite*, 18f., No. 8.

18 In my discussion of Domenico Fetti’s and G. B. Castiglione’s interpretations of *Melancholy* and their relation to the Dürer print, I have relied heavily on E. Panofsky and F. Saxl’s classic *Dürers Melencolia I*, Leipzig-Berlin, 1923, especially 151–54 (also found in R. Klíbansky, E. Panofsky, and F. Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, New York, 1964, 388–90). The authors state that the Fetti was no doubt the most important work of art to arise under the influence of the Dürer print and that the Castiglione etching is dependent on both the Dürer and the Fetti. They also discuss the *memento mori*, *vanitas*, and moralizing qualities of the two later works. See also R. Bernheimer, “Some Drawings by Benedetto Castiglione,” *AB*, 33, 1951, 50, fig. 4, for a Castiglione drawing much like the etching.

19 Panofsky-Saxl, *Dürers Melencolia I*, 154, mention the figure’s strong connection to a penitent Magdalene type and point out that the
The second major Italian response to Melencolia I was G. B. Castiglione’s etching of 1648, Melancholy (Fig. 5). In its fundamental conception it depends on the Dürer print, but also borrows many of its implements and symbols directly from the Fetti painting. Even more important, the etching has the memento mori and vanitas significance of the Fetti, and develops the moralizing character of the painting even further by the addition of an inscription, Ubi Inelabilitas ibi Virtus (“Where there is melancholy, there also is virtue”).

Rosa in turn used Castiglione’s etching as the basic model for the Democritus. His philosopher and Castiglione’s Melancholy are seated in very similar postures; she holds a scroll of music and a skull in her lap, he holds only a book but looks down at the macabre still life on the ground, which also contains a human skull as a memento mori. In both, the compositional format is very similar, crumbling overgrown ruins and fragments surrounding a central solitary figure. The picturesque setting and variations on antique urns, altars, and reliefs of the Democritus also show the influence of other Castiglione etchings, especially the Diogenes with its herm, urn, altar, owl, and large animal skull. Moreover, Rosa reproduced the Democritus almost exactly, some ten years later, in an etching that has clear technical and stylistic affinities with the Castiglione print (Fig. 8).

Important as these formal similarities are, the essential link between Castiglione’s Melancholy and Rosa’s Democritus is their agreement in basic theme, the melancholic contemplation of the fragility of human life and the vanity of human achievement. Nevertheless, there is an important difference of emphasis between the two. Castiglione accentuates man’s vain accomplishments by filling his composition with symbols of human activities, practical, theoretical, and artistic, but Rosa melodramatically emphasizes sheer death and mortality. He includes only a few symbols of human activities in the form of books, papers, and a warrior’s helmet in the painting, with the addition of a painter’s brush and stick in the right foreground of the etching, and even these are all but buried in piles of bones and skulls. A similar statement of despair is found in Rosa’s satire Tirreno: “And let Cleanthes’ lantern tell them that all of our works are short-lived and feeble; there is nothing here below that lasts forever. The colosseums crumble, the terme crumble, the world is dust, their poms a nothing, and human pride a smoke, a worm. In this comic fiction which attracts and beguiles us and which is called life, the cradle is for us the prologue to tragedy.”

His reference to Cleanthes, or to Seneca in the Self-Portrait with a Skull, are characteristic manifestations of Rosa’s definite, if rather self-conscious and ostentatious Stoic attitudes. It comes as no surprise that a professor of Stoic philosophy should paint a vanitas picture that stresses the futility of earthly pursuits and the inevitability of obliterating death, nor is it surprising that Rosa should clothe his vanitas allegory in antique dress, as R. Oertel puts it, since he took great pride in his erudition, including his knowledge of ancient literature and philosophy. But it is rather remarkable that Rosa chose Democritus, best known as a philosopher of great learning and as the “laughing philosopher,” for his gloomy protagonist.

Two particular literary sources have been suggested for this choice of subject, neither of which is an adequate explanation by itself. Pigler proposes as a possible source a dialogue of

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21 Oertel, “Vergänglichkeit,” 110, states that Rosa definitely modeled his painting on the print. Blunt, Drawings of Castiglione and Della Bella, 13, makes a general association of the Democritus with the grim, picturesque phase of Castiglione’s work, which includes the Melancholy, and says that in a number of compositions, among them the Democritus, Rosa borrowed freely from Castiglione. It is noteworthy in this context that Rosa’s allegorical etching Genius is based on the Castiglione print of the same subject (Wallace, “Genius,” 475), and that the seated woman in Rosa’s La Filosofia, now in the Enzenberg Collection, Palazzo Enzenberg, Caldaro, Bolzano, repeats the pose of Dürer’s Melencolia I figure almost exactly. See W. Arslan, “Sul secento napoletano,” Le Arti, Aug.-Dec., 1943, 257-60, fig. 1; Salerno, Rosa, 139, who dates it a little before 1649; Wallace, “Genius,” 478.

22 Panofsky-Saxl, Dürer Melencolia I, 154.


24 Bartsch 7; 46.5 x 27.5cm; datable to 1661-62. See Salerno, Rosa, 97, 52; De Rinaldis, Lettere inedite, 131-33, No. 100 bis, March 11, 1662; Oertel, “Vergänglichkeit,” 118 n. 31. There are also three separate etching studies of the skulls by Rosa, impressions of which are found in the collection of the Department of Prints, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. See G. K. Nagler, Die Monogrammisten, Munich, 1879, v, “S.R.,” Nos. 108-10.

25 Cesareo, Poesie e lettere, 1, 380, vv. 316-24: “E sapin pur di Cleantea Lucerna / Tutte l’opre di noi caduce e inferme; / Cosa non v’è qua più che duri Eterna. / Muoiono i Colossei, moun le Terme, / Son polve i Mondi, le sue pompe un Nulla / E l’humana allegria un fumo, un Verme, / In questa che ci alleita, e ci trastulla / Comic fonzion che nome ha Vita / Prologo di Tragedia è a noi la Culla.” U. Limentani, La satira nel seicento, Milan-Naples, 1961, 236-38, dates Tirreno to the last years of the artist’s life.

See Wallace, “Genius,” 474. Cleanthes was successor to Zeno as head of the Stoic school, from 263 to 232 B.C. “Lucerna” probably refers to the fact that he worked at night in order to support his daytime studies.

Lucian’s in which Democritus is described as having shut himself up in a tomb with his studies, only to be disturbed by boys who dress themselves in skeleton costumes and try, without success, to frighten him.30 Since the pranksters are not present in Rosa’s works, it is clear that Lucian’s anecdote cannot be considered his immediate source.

The more commonly accepted interpretation of Rosa’s picture and etching is that they relate to the story of Hippocrates’ visit to Democritus as told in the apocryphal letters of Hippocrates, which were known in a number of Latin translations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.31 This text relates that Hippocrates was called in by Democritus’ fellow citizens of Abdera because, seeing the philosopher off by himself and surrounded by his books and the bodies of dissected animals that he was studying, they mistook his scholarly absorption and odd behavior for insanity. The physician found Democritus strange in appearance and preoccupied with his research, but sane, hospitable, and wise. As in the case of Lucian’s dialogue, the absence of any reference in the painting and etching to the essential elements of Hippocrates’ visit, together with the complete lack of any vanitas significance in the apocryphal letters, rule them out as a specific literary source. However, it is possible that Rosa may have known and been influenced by a painting, print, or drawing of Hippocrates’ visit to Democritus, several Northern examples of which are known.32

These two accounts are, however, clear reflections of Democritus’ reputation in classical literature. He was known chiefly as the great atomist,33 and also as a philosopher of immense erudition, wide experience, and great productivity; the author of works on ethics, astronomy, physics, agriculture, mathematics, literature, music, and medicine, to give only the broadest categories.34 He was also thought of as a magician and predictor of the future,35 and one anecdote about him relates that he foresaw his own death but postponed it for three days by breathing the fumes of hot loaves in order not to die during a festival and inconvenience his sister.36 In addition, he was known as a solitary scholar, as the sources discussed above mention, and even as a frequenter of tombs.37 Thus Democritus, when encountered in the context of Rosa’s painting and etching, is the lonely master of great knowledge that extends even into the realm of the supernatural, who nevertheless dares of it all and sits brooding over the wreckage of mortality.

However, the decisive factor in Rosa’s choice of subject matter was his familiarity with the well-developed pictorial tradition of the paired philosophers, the laughing Democritus and the weeping Heraclitus.38 This dichotomy, already well established in ancient literature,39 was especially popular in the Northern countries during the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Like the portrait with a skull, it was a relatively unusual subject in Italian art prior to Rosa, and suggests that he may have been influenced by a Northern model on this occasion as well.40 One Italian example is a painting of the pair by Rosa himself, now lost, which Baldinucci describes as “a tondo with half length figures in natural size.”41 In addition, the Teyler Museum, Haarlem, has in its collection a Rosa drawing which shows a seated and foolishly grinning man looking at the bright side of a globe while a standing man leans on the shaded side, hands clenched and face hidden in despair (Fig.

30 Pigler, Barockthemen, II, 296; Lucian The Lover of Lies, or the Doubter 32 (A. M. Harmon, Lucian, London-Cambridge, Mass. [Loeb Classical Library], 1947, m, 369f.).
31 Olsen, Italian Paintings, 86, mentions the letters as a probable source for Rosa’s interpretation; Salerno, Rosa, 110, No. xiii, 44, accepts them as the definite source. W. Stechow, “Zwei Darstellungen aus Hippokrates in der holländischen Malerei,” Oudheidkundig Jaarboek, 4, 1924, 34–38, has shown that this text was used as the basis for paintings by the Dutch artists Moevart and Berchem and has pointed out that Latin translations of the apocryphal letters appeared in editions as early as 1544 in Paris, 1579 in Basel, and 1588 in Venice. He reproduces (pp. 37ff.) the most important parts of the description of Hippocrates’ visit to Democritus from the Latin Geneva edition of 1657. The association of this account with Rosa’s picture seems to have been made originally by O. Jørgensen, cited by E. Zahle, “Tilvækst af Italiensk Barok,” Kunstmuseets Aarskrift, 24, 1937, 150.
32 Using similar arguments, Oertel, “Vergänglichkeit,” 120, finds it very unlikely that Rosa referred directly to the text for his Democritus, but thinks he may have been influenced by a pictorial prototype. As he points out, paintings by Jan Lieveens and Jakob Adriaensz Backer of Hippocrates’ visit to Democritus are now known in addition to the examples discussed by Stechow, and they show Democritus absorbed in his studies and surrounded by books and animals, dead and alive, with Hippocrates standing near or approaching. Stechow, “Zwei Darstellungen,” 37, also proposes a Stammbaum of this pictorial type, including a lost painting by Pieter Lastman in addition to those by Moevart and Berchem, which may go back to the circle of Elsheimer. As Oertel says, this would increase the likelihood of pictorial examples being known in Italy. However, it should be observed that not only is the Castiglione print a much more direct model for the Democritus, but Rosa was also fond of painting animals, skeletons, skulls, and bones anyway. Nevertheless, the way he places the dead animals around his philosopher is reminiscent of these Northern examples, and is a persuasive, if not conclusive, argument in favor of Rosa’s knowledge of such a model. See also Robert Burton (“Democritus Junior”), The Anatomy of Melancholy, Oxford, 1621 and later editions, for an interesting variation on the story of Hippocrates’ visit to Democritus.
33 In the satire Invidia Rosa says: “Altro camin non ho che la finestra, / Dove al foco del sol mi fà Democrito / Un pan grattato d'Atomi in minestra.” A marginal note by Rosa himself says: “S'allude all'opinione di Democrito ch'il tutto diceva esser fatto d'atomi.” (Cesareo, Poesie e lettere, 1, 293, vv. 241–43)
34 Diogenes Laertius Lives of Eminent Philosophers 9, 46–49.
The drawing is quite clearly a traditional treatment of Democritus laughing at the world and Heraclitus weeping over it. There can be no doubt that Rosa’s Democritus etching, because of its inscription—*Democritus omnium derisor in omnium fine defigitur* (“Democritus, the mocker of all things, is [here] stopped by the end of all things”)—has its source in this tradition, and it seems reasonable to think that Rosa had this idea in mind when he first conceived of the painting as well, some ten years before the etching.48 But by showing the laughing philosopher in Heraclitus’ posture of despair, Rosa imaginatively twisted this traditional theme and gave it a new poignancy.44

The *Democritus* was painted in the years 1650–1651, shortly after Rosa returned to Rome from a more than eight-year stay in Florence. His contact with the art of Rome at this time seems to have been an important stimulus in his general stylistic development away from landscapes, harbor scenes, and paintings with small figures toward more grand and monumental compositions with large figures, learned subject matter, and reduced landscape settings. The *Democritus* is one of the earliest and most successful of these large figure pictures, and shows the artist exploiting his characteristically picturesque handling of formal means to achieve a mood of disturbing uneasiness appropriate to the subject matter. The colors are somber, the raking light produces gloomy and mysterious shadows, and the dark tomb and jagged trees behind the philosopher are dramatically silhouetted against a stormy sky. He is the center of a menacing composition; broken trees push through crumbling ruins and loom ominously over him, and a jumble of grisly wreckage crowds in upon him. Many of these implements and objects have symbolic value in addition to their picturesque grimness, and some of them can be traced to particular sources and have rather special meanings.

Democritus stares down at a strikingly and beautifully painted *vanitas* still life composed of a human skull, animal skulls and skeletons, bones, a helmet, crumpled books, and tattered papers. The painting has a volute-like architectural fragment, a dead rat in front of the human skull, and a scroll next to the rat, which are not found in the etching, and the etching has a stone plaque next to the philosopher and a painter’s brush and stick in the right foreground not present in the painting. As has been discussed earlier, these objects are symbolic of death, evanescence, and the vanity of man’s literary, artistic, and military achievements, and this significance is heightened by their battered disorder and negligent clutter, a method of handling often used in *vanitas* still-life paintings.45

Although it hardly seems necessary to consult literary sources to discover the significance of the dead rat as used in this context, it is possible to connect it with several rather specific symbolic traditions. Most commonly the mouse or rat is used as a symbol of all-devouring time, disappearance, and destruction, a meaning that fits Rosa’s usage quite well.46 It is noteworthy, however, that Rosa goes a step beyond the usual symbolic treatment, which makes use of destructively alive rodents, and shows his rat as dead. It seems likely that the best explanation is found in Piero Valeriano’s *Hieroglyphica*, an iconographic handbook that was one of Rosa’s favorites and which he specifically used in this picture for the leaning obelisk with its relief carvings at the extreme right (cf. Fig. 11). According to Valeriano, a dead rat signifies weakness and help-
lessness, *Imbecillitas*, because the rat is an especially fragile creature that is easily killed and generally has the briefest of lives.

The artist also introduced a personal note into the *vanitas* still life of the *Democritus* by signing the scroll next to the rat with his name. In my opinion, this can be interpreted as a general reference to his own literary activities and is reminiscent of the *vanitas* of the arts still life in his large painting * Fortune*, now in the collection of the Duke of Beaufort (Fig. 10), which shows brute beasts spurning and trampling on a palette and brushes, a laurel branch, papers, and a volume signed with Rosa’s monogram. The pig sniffs at pearls and steps on a rose blossom, the latter an additional reference to Rosa’s name. The same floral symbolism may also be present in the still life of the *Democritus*, since there seem to be rose leaves and faint traces of a pink rose bud and white blossom near the architectural fragment. However, this is difficult to establish definitively because of darkening and loss in that area.

Finally, the scrap of paper beneath the scroll bears the Greek letter omega, which as the last letter of the alphabet is frequently used to symbolize the end and death, and is often seen on tombs.

On the other side of the composition the head of a pig, an animal that invariably stands for stupidity, gluttony, and intractability, seems to jeer at the philosopher, while thistle flourishes and grape leaves wither, and the eagle, the symbol of noble, lofty thought and imperial power, is toppled. In the painting only the skull and antler remain of a stag, an animal often used as a symbol of longevity because its large antlers display its great age. Trees crowd in menacingly around the elaborately carved tomb, ruined wall, urn, and two obelisks, the latter symbolic of the glory of princes. One is already overthrown, and both are scarred and cracked, just as the reliefs of the urn and the block Democritus leans on are battered and worn. The human skeleton in its moldering coffin has an obvious significance, and is closely related in meaning to the toppled obelisk immediately behind it. This obelisk not only symbolizes fallen glory in general terms, but because of its relief decorations also has a very particular meaning which can be understood only by reference to an illustration and explanation in Valeriano’s *Hieroglyphica* (Fig. 11).

According to that author, the obelisk stands for *Humanae Vitae Conditionis* (“The condition of human life”), and the reliefs refer to human fragility, the baby’s head above the old man’s showing the cycle of the decline from infancy to old age and return again to childhood, the falcon representing God and that which is divine in man, the fish symbolizing hatred and death, and the hippopotamus denoting shamelessness, violence, discord, and consequent death. In the tree above, an owl, the bird of night, bad augury, and death, broods over these grim remains.

Next to Democritus and in front of another tomb and fallen

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47 Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 100r, *Imbecillitas*. For other examples of Rosa’s use of this text see Wallace, “Genius,” 475f. The obelisk will be discussed below.

48 1.98 x 1.33m; exhibited at the Pantheon in August, 1659; Salerno, Rosa, 122, No. 36, and 45. F. Haskell, *Patrons and Painters*, New York, 1963, 153f., discusses the picture’s satirical implications at some length.

49 Although it would appear that the artist did not explicitly make a connection between his name and the rose in his writings, the appropriateness and probable currency of the conceit in Rosa’s time was clearly expressed by one of his acquaintances, Francesco Melosi, who in a poem entitled *Capitolo a Salvatore Rosa* wrote: “Ed in ciò ‘l vostro nome co l’effetto / S’accorda ben, poiché, dando qual rosa / Aspre ponture, havete odor perfetto.” (U. Limentani, “Salvatore Rosa nuovi studi e ricerche,” *Italian Studies*, 8, 1953, 48) Oertel, “Vergänglichkeit,” 108, also mentions the association of the artist’s name with the flower in connection with what may be a portrait of Rosa in the Museum of Fine Arts, Dallas, Texas.

50 Although it was not necessary for Rosa to consult a learned text for this symbolism, it is nevertheless of interest that according to Ripa, *Iconologia*, pt. 1, 151, 159, 300, 369, 397, pt. 2, 123f., the pig is always a symbol of bad qualities and never of good ones. Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 63r–70v, has equally unkind words for the pig, using him in most cases to stand for bad things, among them *Pernicios* and *Senuus Maximus Brutos* (63v), *Profanus* (65r–69v), and *Indicilias* (69v–66v), and finding him most agreeable when sacrificed. The pig in Rosa’s *Fortune* has the same significance. See also Boas, *Horapollo*, Bk. ii, 92, No. 37.

51 Once again, the association of these qualities with the eagle seems to have been so widely accepted in the Renaissance and Baroque that Rosa need not have consulted a particular source in this case either. The strength of this tradition of meaning is reflected in Ripa, for whom the eagle is always a symbol of nobility, loftiness, and high-mindedness, and is never associated with disagreeable qualities (Ripa, *Iconologia*, pt. 1, 88, 362f., pt. 2, 6f., 21, 30f., 140, 186, 204, 223). Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, 137r–143v, who by the nature of his study was much more concerned with animals and their various meanings than Ripa, agrees with the latter in the main, citing the eagle as a symbol of *Imperator Maiestas* (138v–139r), *Benignitas* (139v), *Ingenium Velox* and *Alta Cognitatio* (141v), but also mentions the eagle as a bird of prey and a symbol of capacity and related characteristics. It is in the latter sense that Rosa uses the live eagle in the *Fortune*.


54 See note 10 above.


SALVATOR ROSA


3. *Mr. Altham as a Hermit*. Kingston Lacy, Wimborne, Dorset, Bankes Collection (Courtesy of Mr. H. J. R. Bankes)


6. Frontispiece from François Perrier, *Segmenta nobilium signorum et statuarum quae temporis dentem invidiium evasere*, Rome, 1638
7. Democritus in Meditation. Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst

8. Democritus in Meditation, etching. Rome, Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe


obelisk appears Terminus, the god of boundaries, the end, and also of death.\footnote{57} He appropriately wears a crown of funerary cypress similar to the one seen in the Self-Portrait with a Skull. It is noteworthy in that the etching his bandoleer includes ivy, a symbol of decay and ruin (among other things) because it creeps over old walls, buildings, and trees and helps to destroy them.\footnote{58} The smoking tripod at the extreme left of the painting is well suited to the macabre setting and calls to mind the verses quoted earlier, “the worlds are dust, their pomp a nothing, and human pride a smoke, a worm.”\footnote{59}

The etching contains an addition that is of considerable importance, a stone plaque next to Democritus which is incised with a large omega and several smaller M’s. Once again, its basic explanation can be found in Valeriano, who describes and illustrates a pyramid of ten M’s as a symbol of Finis (Fig. 12).\footnote{60} Valeriano states that ten M’s represent ten thousand, which is the perfect, finished number, the product of the multiplication of the dimensions of the pyramid of Egypt, which he says is one hundred feet on each side. The omega repeats the omega of the painting’s scroll and has, as the last letter of the alphabet, the same significance. Although Rosa could certainly have made the association of the M’s with an omega without referring to a particular source, it seems more likely that he knew and used the later editions of Cesare Ripa’s Iconologia, which describe and illustrate “Fine” (Fig. 13) as a seated old man who holds a pyramid of ten M’s in his right hand (Valeriano is properly cited and quoted almost verbatim in the Ripa explanation) and a rectangle with an omega in his left hand, both as symbols of “fine.”\footnote{61} He stands for the end and death, among other things, and corresponds nicely with the “fine” of the etching’s inscription. It is noteworthy that Ripa has him wear a crown of ivy as a symbol of age and ruin.

Another of Rosa’s ambitious figure pictures, L’Umana Fragilità in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (Fig. 14),\footnote{62} is close to the Democritus in style and in theme, and like it makes use of a variety of objects and props symbolic of death and evanescence. The close association of the two paintings is seen especially in the repetition of the owl, cypress-crowned Terminus, and carved obelisk in L’Umana Fragilità, where they have essentially the same iconographical significance as they did in the Democritus.

Furthermore, L’Umana Fragilità also shows strong and even more direct connections to Dürer’s Melencolia I, as seen most convincingly in a preparatory drawing for the painting now in the Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig (Fig. 15).\footnote{63} The drawing is clearly a variation on Rosa’s earlier painting La Filosofia, now in the Enzenberg Collection, Palazzo Enzenberg, Caldaro, Bolzano, for which no good photograph is available.\footnote{64} Not only does the seated woman in La Filosofia repeat Dürer’s figure almost exactly, but the putto who sits next to her and holds a book is also a repetition, albeit a freer one, of the scribbling putto in Melencolia I. The Leipzig drawing in turn follows the composition of La Filosofia very closely. The winged skeleton repeats almost exactly the posture and gesture of the old philosopher in the painting, and they both

\textsuperscript{57} Because of the context in which this figure is placed, its cypress crown, and its repetition as a symbol in the painting L’Umana Fragilità, it is clear that Rosa intended it as more than a decorative herm. A Terminus figure very similar to the one in the painting is illustrated in Andrea Alciati, Emblemata, Lyons, 1593, 561, Emblemata cxxii, and discussed at some length as a symbol of death (pp. 561–63). See E. Wind, “Aenigma Terminii,” JWarb, 1, 1937–38, 66–69, for a study of Erasmus’ use of Terminus as a personal emblem, and its association with death symbolism. See also W. Stechow, “Homo Bulla,” AB, 20, 1938, 228; Bialostocki, “Rembrandt’s Terminus,” 49–60.

\textsuperscript{58} This significance is mentioned by Ripa, Iconologia, pt. 1, 22, “Ambitione,” 377, “Ingratitudine,” and is discussed at length by Valeriano, Hieroglyphica, 377v–378r. Rosa himself made a specific reference to this symbolism in the satire Tirreno: “A che d’Ellere, e Allor cinceri il crine? / Si amaro è il Lauro? e l’Ederè pudiche / Han si gran simpatia con le rovine?” (Cesareo, Poesie e lettere, 1, 374, vv. 220–22) As a plant sacred to Bacchus, ivy is most frequently used as a poetic crown, a tradition Rosa here refers to. In addition, it is often a symbol of tenacity and diligence because of its persistent creeping and climbing, a meaning with which the destructive quality of the plant is usually closely associated. See Alciati, Emblemata, 704–7, Emblemata cxxiii; Ripa, Iconologia, pt. 1, 52, 257r; pt. 2, 77, 145, 299; Wallace, “Genius,” 480.

\textsuperscript{59} See note 26 above. Smoke as a symbol of evanescence will be discussed in greater detail below in connection with the painting L’Umana Fragilità.

\textsuperscript{60} Valeriano, Hieroglyphica, 291v–291v.

\textsuperscript{61} I use the 1625 Padua edition, La novissima Iconologia di Cesare Ripa Perugino, 249–52. The text and illustration are repeated exactly in the 1630 Padua edition, 265–68. The illustrator has shown only eight of the ten M’s specifically mentioned by Ripa, apparently because of space limitations.

\textsuperscript{62} 1.99 x 1.33m; signed with the monogram SR on the knife blade. Salerno, Rosa, 110f., No. xv, 44f., 50f.; Italian Art and Britain, 164f., No. 404, catalogue entry by D. Mahon. A drawing with very slight differences from the painting is now in the collection of Mr. F. H. M. Fitzroy Newdegate, Arbury Hall, Warwickshire, exhibited Neapolitan Baroque and Rococo Painting, Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, County Durham, 1962, No. 49.

\textsuperscript{63} 7457.66; 20 x 17.2cm; inscribed at the lower left, “a Chigl.” I owe my knowledge of this drawing to M. Mahoney, “The Drawings of Salvator Rosa,” unpubl. diss., Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1965, 290f., No. 48.1.

\textsuperscript{64} See note 22 above.
stand in precisely the same relation to the seated woman. Her pose in the drawing has been altered slightly by raising her head and changing the position of her hands, making her a more extroverted figure. The Dürer-like putto who holds a book in La Filosofia is shifted to the other side of the composition in the drawing and is reversed so that he faces back into the center. However, the drawing also has several features which suggest that Rosa may have taken a fresh look at Melencolia I in doing this preparatory study for L'Umana Fragilità. The posture of the putto seems closer in the drawing to that of Dürer's putto than it does in La Filosofia, and the hourglass, not seen in the painting, suggests a direct connection with the Dürer print as well.

Without the intermediaries of Rosa's Leipzig drawing and La Filosofia, a connection between Melencolia I and L'Umana Fragilità would be difficult to establish. But even in its finished state Rosa's painting shows definite reminiscences of the Dürer print, especially in the seated woman with her prominent floral crown and the writing child, who moreover needs help with his letters just as Dürer's putto is incapable of more than aimless scribbling. It is also tempting to see a connection between Dürer's sphere and Rosa's, and between the knife in the foreground of L'Umana Fragilità and the saw in a similar position in the Dürer print.

Like the Democritus, L'Umana Fragilità transforms Dürer's unique, complex, and subtle artistic and philosophical statement into a typically Baroque vanitas painting that stresses evanescence and death. It also has somber and disturbing light effects appropriate to this subject matter, but is less ruggedly picturesque and more classically restrained than the Democritus. The artist concentrates on his figures to the exclusion of a landscape setting, arranges them in a shallow space in a frieze-like grouping parallel to the picture plane, and stresses horizontal and especially vertical elements in the composition.66 Unlike the Democritus, many of the picture's colors are light and delicate, tending toward pastels. The seated woman has a lovely light blue skirt touched with white, a white blouse that matches the wrappings of the child she holds, an orange-red scarf of a light texture that trails over her shoulder, and a crown of pink roses. The putto blowing bubbles wears a gauzy loin cloth of blue, his companion wears a light shirt of white, and the thistle plant in front of them has a light purple bud and a white blossom. Despite this range of colors, the picture is as solemn as the Democritus, and the loveliness of the hues is threatened and made to seem sickly by the grimness of the setting in which they are placed. The chief menace is of course the winged figure of Death, whose gray-brown wings and brown skull and skeleton stand out eerily in the raking light, which gives them glistening highlights. Browns and grays are also predominant in the ground and in the objects against which the figures are foiled, the cradle, the obelisk, the Termi-

The complexity of the picture's iconography so intrigued Baldinucci that it moved him to write a rather detailed and extremely helpful explanation of the painting's meaning:

Cardinal Chigi had one of his pictures, larger than eight palmi, where Human Frailty is represented, a lovely damsel garlanded with roses and sitting on a globe of glass, and she holds a child seated on her knees. There is Death with be-dragged wings who makes the child write the constitution of human life, that is the words Nasci poena, vita labor, necesse mori; a conceit expressed by his great friend Giovanni Bat-

66 Baldinucci, Delle notizie, 13. I can offer no plausible explanation for Baldinucci's use of the word Jole.
67 As Professor F. Wormald has discovered (cited in Italian Art and Britain, 164), the lines are an exact quotation from a poem known as “Epitaphe d'Adam.” According to L. Gautier, Œuvres poétiques d'Adam de Saint-Victor, 3rd ed., Paris, 1894, 229–31, it was not originally intended by the author as an epitaph but was used as such after his death, and only the first ten of the poem's fourteen lines are without doubt by Adam himself (Rosa's quotation is from lines three and four). Gautier points out that the poem was reproduced in a number of manuscripts and printed books, including Les recherches de la France of Estienne Pasquier. This very popular book was published in no fewer than fifteen editions between 1560 and 1643. See D. Thickett, Bibliographie des œuvres d'Estienne Pasquier (Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, xxi), Geneva, 1956, 32–44.
68 Cesareo, Poesie e lettere, 11, 143. Rosa thanked his friend for the poem, which had not yet reached him, in a letter of July 6, 1652 (De Rinaldis, Lettere inedita, 37, No. 22). Salerno, Rosa, 110f., No. xv, is not certain that Ricciardi's poem itself was Rosa's source, and Oertel, “Gänglichlichkeit,” 119 n. 36, thinks that the poem was written about the picture and states that the question of whether or not Ricciardi suggested the phrase to Rosa must remain open. Mahon, in Italian Art and Britain, 164f., No. 404, feels that Ricciardi had probably discovered the basic text and used it for his poem, thereby transmitting the concept to Rosa. The latter seems to be the most reasonable view, not only because the scholar Ricciardi would have been much more likely than Rosa to come upon the poetry of Adam of Saint-Victor, but also because of chronological considerations. It has usually been thought that the picture was done about 1652, the year Ricciardi sent his poem to Rosa, and that the cardinal to whom Baldinucci refers is Fabio Chigi, who was elected Pope Alexander VII in 1655. However, the iconography of the picture suggests that it may have been done after 1655, since Baldinucci is correct in associating the putto who burns tow fastened to a distaff with a ceremony repeated three times during the coronation of a new pope, in which tow fastened to the top of a silver staff is ignited while the words Pater sancte, sic transit
tisti Ricciardi in a moralizing poem dedicated to Rosa in these verses: "Rosa, being born is pain, living is toil, and dying a fatal necessity." At the feet of the damsel is seen a cradle where there are two children, one raising himself up, the other leaning on the edge of the cradle: the latter blowing into a little reed sends out soap bubbles, while the other sets fire to some tow which hangs from a distaff, a ceremony customary at the investiture of a new pope. There is finally a pyramid with various hieroglyphics, a Jole, a rocket or firecracker, along with other symbols, all alluding to Human Frailty. 66

The picture announces its theme with the inscription cited, not quite completely, by Baldinucci. The scroll on which the child writes says Conceptio Culpa, Nasci Pena, Labor Vita, Necesse Mori ("Conception is sin, birth is pain, life is toil, death inevitable"), a phrase that has its origin in what would seem to be a rather out-of-the-way source for Rosa, the writings of the twelfth century poet Adam of Saint-Victor (d. 1192). 67 It was in all likelihood brought to Rosa's attention by the learned Ricciardi, who in fact used a very similar passage in a canzone dedicated to Rosa that contains the verses, also mentioned by Baldinucci, "Rosa, il nascere è pena, / Il vi- vere è fatica, / Et il morir necessità fatale" ("Rosa, being born is pain, living is toil, and dying a fatal necessity"). 68

The presiding genius of the picture is Death, shown as a winged skeleton whose grinning and malevolent mixing in the affairs of mankind calls to mind prints of the Dance of Death, especially Holbein's woodcuts. He forms a grim contrast to the innocence of the mother and child and the playful putti, and dictates the despairing theme of the picture by guiding the child's writing hand. Rosa's pictorial interpretation of Death expresses his own strong interest in macabre imagery as seen in the Democritus and other paintings, and can also be generally associated with established sepulchral symbolism. 69 In addition, his use of an active, winged skeleton is strongly reminiscent of Bernini's funerary monuments, especially the Tomb of Urban VIII, where, as R. Wittkower says, "Bernini even turned the old impersonal symbol of the skull, used on countless tombs of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, into an active personification of Death writing Urban's name into a large book." 70

The mother, the helpless child's only protection and security, is seated, ironically, on the unstable sphere of Fortune. 71 The theme of fickle and hostile Fortune, so popular in the troubled and unsettled seventeenth century, was also in great favor with Rosa, who seems to have been naturally inclined toward protest and complaint. The subject appears frequently in his writings and was treated in two of his paintings. One of them, perhaps the most famous, or notorious, of all his works, was the pictorial satire mentioned earlier, which shows Fortune seated on a sphere pouring out symbols of wealth and position before animals (Fig. 10). The other painting is now known only through an anonymous engraving, in which Fortune is shown seated on a rolling sphere accompanied by three putti, in a composition that is quite similar to that of L'Umana Fragilità. 72 To emphasize further the fragility of the mother's seat, the sphere is made of glass, calling to mind aspects of the iconography of "Miseria mondana" (Earthly Misery), described by Ripa as a woman with her head inside a sphere of glass that symbolizes the vanity and fragility of life and worldly aspirations and achievements. Rosa's use of this conceit here is also reminiscent of several verses from the same Ricciardi poem cited earlier in connection with the inscription: "The steps of Life move in the wake of the hearse, beat-

gloria mundi are chanted (Enciclopedia cattolica, Vatican, 1951, vi, 3781). In view of this rather unusual and very particular symbolic feature, it seems extremely probable that Rosa intended the painting for the Chigi family and meant it to have a specific reference to the family's leading member, Pope Alexander VII. If this is the case, Baldinucci's Cardinal Chigi could not have been Fabio, and in fact Salerno, Rosa, 110f., No. xv, suggests that the picture belonged instead to Fabio's nephew, Cardinal Flavio Chigi, and has discovered that a picture called La Vita Umana is listed as part of Flavo's collection in an inventory begun in 1658. It therefore seems very likely that the picture was done after 1655 and followed, rather than inspired, Ricciardi's Canzone morale of 1652. I am very grateful to Prof. George Williams of the Harvard Divinity School for his advice on the question of papal ceremony discussed here.

69 Bones and skeletons appear prominently in Rosa's Witch Scene in the collection of the Earl Spencer, Althorp, Northampton, and Saul and the Witch of Endor in the Louvre (Salerno, Rosa, 109, Nos. x, xi, and 113, No. xxi respectively); the Witch Scene in the Galleria Corsini, Florence, and the Temptation of St. Anthony in the Galleria Pitti, Florence (both cited by Salerno, Rosa, 142). See also note 10 above.

70 R. Wittkower, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 2nd ed., London, 1966, 21, also 22, 198f., No. 30, pl. 49, and esp. pl. 58. For other examples of Bernini's use of active winged skeletons as Death see 21of., No. 43, figs. 54f., the Tomb of Alessandro Valtrini and the Memorial to Ippolito Merenda; 259f., No. 77, pls. 122, 126, and 22f., the Tomb of Alexander VII.


72 Gabinetto Nazionale dei Disegni e delle Stampe, Rome, Colloc. 40-H-33, Inv. No. 51728. Published by L. Ozzola, "Pitture di Salvator Rosa sconosciute o inedite," BDA, 5, 1925–26, 29, fig. 3. As Ozzola points out, the engraving agrees very closely with Baldinucci's description of the original (Delle notizie, 28). See also Salerno, Rosa, 151.
The roses that garland the woman’s head can be interpreted as the flowers of Venus, symbols of youth, love, and graciousness, and also—of chief importance in this context—as emblems of fragility and “vita breve” because they blossom and begin to fade in the same day.\(^74\) It also seems quite possible that Rosa here intended the roses to be a general reference to his own name, a practice discussed earlier in relation to the painting Fortune.\(^75\)

The crown of roses finds both a contrast and a complement in the wreath of funerary cypress worn by the Terminus. In addition, while the roses wither, a thistle with starchy spiky leaves flourishes and puts forth a light purple bud and a white blossom. The thistle is also found in the Democritus and Mr. Altham as a Hermit, and is generally thought of as a disagreeable plant often associated with decay and ruin. But its use by Rosa can probably be best explained by reference, once again, to Valeriano, who lists Imbecillitas Humana (“human weakness”) as its first meaning in his discussion of the plant.\(^78\) He says that this is because as soon as the thistle puts forth its purple flower in the midst of its spines, the blossom turns white and dry and any puff of wind can blow it away, just as our hopes flee us and are vain, and the slightest cause can cost men their lives.

This symbol of evanescence is echoed in the bubbles blown by the putto, who wears, ironically, a miniature laurel crown, a well-known symbol of immortal fame.\(^77\) His companion ignites a bunch of tow fastened to a distaff which, like the rocket at the woman’s feet, flares briefly only to die out immediately, an image that calls to mind the words of Isaiah 43:17, “they are extinct, they are quenched as tow,” and also the phrase used in the papal coronation ceremony mentioned by Baldinucci and discussed above, Pater sancte, sic transit gloria mundi.\(^78\) Rosa’s use of fleeting smoke here as a sign of evanescence is also reminiscent of the smoking pipes, candles, and lamps frequently used in vanitas paintings, and is seen in the smoking tripod of the Democritus as well.

The putto stands in a somber cradle, bringing to mind a verse from the satire Poesia, “Indeed, he will have cradle and tomb, in a single day,” and the verses from Tirreno already quoted: “In this comic fiction which attracts and beguiles us and which is called life, the cradle is for us the prologue to tragedy.”\(^79\)

The butterflies fluttering above the crib and next to the knee of Death are almost lost in the complexities of the picture, but are nevertheless of central importance. They are, of course, well-known symbols of the soul, a traditional significance referred to by Rosa in several verses from the satire Invidia: “But at last emerging from the horrid vale, I saw a bright splendor around which all great souls would fain be butterflies.”\(^80\)

The knife that lies in the center foreground quite naturally evokes ideas of violence, pain, and death. Like the rocket, it is intriguing because it seems to be a rather rare iconographical implement. The only reference to a knife used as a symbol I have found in the sources generally used by Rosa is in Ripa’s Iconologia, where it is used as an attribute of “Morte,” death, a meaning that fits the picture perfectly.\(^81\) In addition, the knife here is signed on the blade with Rosa’s monogram, and

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73 Ripa, Iconologia, pt. 2, 46. In addition, Ripa’s personification of “Fragilità” holds a large glass vase suspended on a thread (pt. 1, 253). Ricciardi’s poem in found in Cesareo, Poesie e lettere, ii, 138: “Nel sentier del Feretro / Muove di vita il passo / E della tomba al sasso / Batte, nè resta mai, con pié di vetro. / Muore alle fine . . . “ (see note 68 above).

74 Not only were flowers in general frequently used as symbols of evanescence in the 17th century and earlier (see Bergström, Dutch Still-Life Painting, esp. 154f., 214; K. Bauch, “Zur Iconographie von Caravaggios Frühwerken,” in Kunstgeschichtliche Studien für Hans Kauffmann, Berlin, 1956, 255–59; idem, Der Fräule Rembrandt, 21), but in addition, the rose was considered to be especially important as a symbol of fragility because of the blossom’s great beauty but very short life (Ripa, Iconologia, pt. 2, 360–64, “Vita Breve”; Valeriano, Hieroglyphica, 399–403, Imbecillitas Humana; Bergström, Dutch Still-Life Painting, 154; Weber, Aspects of Death, 533–34). Salerno, Rosa, 44, and Oertel, “Vergänglichkeit,” 110f., 108, note this symbolic significance of the woman’s crown.

75 See note 49 above.

76 Valeriano, Hieroglyphica, 403f.


78 See note 68 above.

79 Cesareo, Poesie e lettere, i, 201, v, 379, “Anzi havrà Cuna e tomba, in un sol giorno,” and 380, vv. 323ff., respectively. See note 26 above.


81 Ripa, Iconologia, pt. 2, 70.

82 Salerno, Rosa, 110f., No. xv, 44f., 50f.

83 See Johann Heinrich Schönfeld, Bilder, Zeichnungen, Graphik (exhib. cat.), Ulm, 1967, 39f., No. 52, pl. 53 for the painting; 99, No. 191, pl. 196 for the etching (A. Andresen, Der deutsche Peintre-graveur, Leipzig, 1878, v, 74f., No. 2); and 80, No. 138, pl. 142 for a related drawing. This source dates Schönfeld’s painting about contemporary with his etching, and notes that both were inspired by Rosa’s painting. I am very grateful to Miss Eleanor A. Sayre of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, for her help in identifying this important source.
it may be that the artist intended it as a personal reference. Salerno has suggested that the knife may symbolize violent separation from a loved one, specifically Rosa’s son Rosalvo, and Rosa’s brother, who both died of the plague in 1656, shortly before, in Salerno’s opinion, the picture was painted.82

The somber moodiness and macabre picturesqueness seen in these works by Rosa are among the most distinctive and original aspects of his style, and were of great interest to later generations, especially in England. The *Democritus* was particularly influential, not only because it was widely known as an etching, but also because it is as startlingly dramatic as any work in Rosa’s oeuvre. Johann Heinrich Schönfeld responded to Rosa’s painting almost immediately, and well before Rosa’s etching was done, with his own painting of the same subject, now in the Georg Schäfer Collection, Schweinfurt, and with a very similar etching dated 1654 (Fig. 16), both of which are markedly dependent on Rosa’s *Democritus* in theme, composition, and macabre symbolism.83 Another early reaction is found in a *vanitas* painting by the Dutch artist Matthias Withoos (1627–1703), now in a Stockholm private collection, which omits the figure of Democritus but borrows the general setting and a number of specific details from Rosa’s composition, and has something of the same mood.84

Perhaps the most interesting response to Rosa’s *Democritus* is seen in the splendid *Scherzi di Fantasia* etching series of Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. The influence of Castiglione’s etchings on those of Tiepolo has been pointed out,85 and Rosa has also been mentioned in very general terms as a possible source for the bizarre subject matter of the *Scherzi*.86 The association with Rosa can be made much more specific, however, since *Scherzo No. 5, A Seated Magician Looking at Skulls* (Fig. 17),87 is much like Rosa’s etching *Democritus* (Fig. 8), not only in its general composition and picturesque setting, but also in such particulars as the still-life group with a book and large skulls almost identical with Rosa’s, a very similar owl, who moreover perches on what seems to be a human skull, the projecting bone on top of the large round monument which is much like the bone protruding from the urn in the *Democritus*, and the small animal skull on the monument which is very similar to the skull behind the fish skeleton in the Rosa print. Furthermore, *Scherzo No. 22, Two Magicians and a Boy*, shows a resemblance to the *Democritus* (albeit more general than that seen in *Scherzo No. 5*), and repeats the cow skull, the large inverted animal skull, the owl in the tree, the fish skeleton, and the small proximate animal skull of the Rosa etching almost exactly.88

Finally, Joseph Wright of Derby’s interest in Rosa’s work is well known, and his *A Grotto in the Kingdom of Naples with Banditti: a Sunset* demonstrates his enthusiasm for the romance of Rosa’s landscapes and for Rosa’s native Naples.89 Wright of Derby’s *Democritus Studying Anatomy* (Fig. 18) now in the Derby Museum and Art Gallery is a further reflection of this interest, and almost certainly depends in large measure on Rosa’s etching.90 Wright’s picture gives full expression to the romanticism implicit in Rosa’s *Democritus*, and it occupies an important place in the beginnings of the romantic period, when—because of such works as the *Democritus, L’Umana Fragilità*, and *Mr. Altham as a Hermit*—Salvator Rosa was to have his greatest fame.

Wellesley College

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84 Bergström, *Dutch Still-Life Painting*, 184–87, ill. 186. This author feels that Witchoos was probably influenced by the painting more than the etching, and points out that he was in Italy when the *Democritus* was exhibited at the Pantheon in 1651. Oertel, “Ver- gänglichkeit,” 118 n. 33, and A. P. de Mirimonde, “Mors Omnia Vincit de Mathieu Witchoos,” *Oud Holland*, 73, 1958, 111, think that Withoos could have seen the painting but probably relied chiefly on the etching, an opinion that I share.


87 A. De Vesme, *Le peintre-graveur italien*, Milan, 1906, 386, No. 17; Pignatti, *Acqueforti*, xvi. See also Knox, *Tiepolo Drawings*, 64, Nos. 124, 123, and 23, 26. The original *Democritus* painting was also in Venice at the time Tiepolo did the *Scherzi*, owned by the descendants of Niccolò Sagreda, the original purchaser. Olsen, *Italian Paintings*, 85f.; Salerno, *Rosa*, 110, No. XIII.

88 De Vesme, *Peintre-graveur*, 391, No. 34; Pignatti, *Acqueforti*, xxxiv;

89 B. Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby* (exhib. cat.), London, 1958, 22–24, No. 16, pl. vi. Nicolson notes the close connection of this picture to Rosa’s work (citing C. E. Buckley, “An English Landscape by Joseph Wright of Derby,” *AQ*, 18, 1955, 266), and points out that Wright actually saw two paintings of *Banditti* by Rosa in Naples and mentioned them with approval in his Italian diary. It is noteworthy that the figures in the Grotto are very close to Rosa types in general appearance and feeling, and the seated central figure and the dramatically pointing figure seated on his right seem to be based specifically on Rosa’s etching *The Dream of Aeneas*, Bartsch 23, illustrated in Salerno, *Rosa*, 130, No. 67c.

90 Nicolson, *Wright of Derby*, 18f., No. 11, pl. vii, dates it 1771–73, and observes that it was done before the Rosa painting arrived in England (it was there from approximately 1806 to 1935) but says that Rosa’s etching “has too many points in common with Wright’s picture for the resemblance to be brushed aside as fortuitous.” See also B. Nicolson, “Joseph Wright’s Early Subject Pictures,” *Burlington Magazine*, 96, 1954, 79; R. Rosenblum, “Wright of Derby: Gothick Realist,” *Art News*, 59, March, 1960, 27, 54.
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