

VITTORE BRANCA

BOCCACCIO
The Man and His Works

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CHAPTER 3

The Mercantile Epic

Boccaccio pictures the very sumptuous mercantile life of Italian civilization at the end of the Middle Ages in a series of daring and spirited tales comprising the *Decameron*. This society was led by a handful of men bent on the conquest of Europe and the East. They were men of initiative and perseverance, who, having been misunderstood and distorted by Sombart, are only now being revealed as men of exceptional stature.¹

Furthermore, they were disdained by Dante as "la gente nova e i subiti guadagni"—upstarts and profiteers. They were ignored as being inferior or alien to the refinements Petrarch represented. Compagni mentioned them very little in his historical works, nor were they considered in the stylized narrations of the *Novellino*. Boccaccio was just the writer to recognize the mercantile society in the "human comedy" of his *Decameron*. The life of this society dominates the whole work with an exuberant vitality. Boccaccio did not use the mercantile class merely to provide the themes, backgrounds, characters, and customs that color more than half the novellas, but because of its exemplary significance in both a human and artistic sense. That is, the presence of this social class in the narrative is an irreplaceable necessity in the development of the *Decameron*.

No other class could be used to portray the measure which man can give of his endowments and his capacities when confronting the great forces which seem to dominate humanity—Fortune, Love, Ingenuity—Boccaccio could not find examples in that age of a more powerful and more overpowering representative eloquence. After the era of the knights of the sword, henceforth cherished only in memory and tinged with a subtle nostalgia, it is the world of the Italian merchants which, in the late Duecento and the early Trecento, provides the most vital, aggressive champions in the struggle against those superhuman forces.² It is in that world, to quote Stendhal, that the "plant, man," was then growing most vigorously. Those people were traveling all over the known world, always endeavoring to avoid the ambushes of Fortune, always tensed to overcome with their own ingenuity the initiatives and the pitfalls of other men's ingenuity, and always ready to prove their readiness in the most varied adventures of love.

These were the real pioneers of the waning medieval civilization: pioneers—to quote the most authoritative student of their period—"with open minds, with ready intelligence, with a solid culture, with aspirations which verged on ambition and on pride, tenacious and persistent." They imposed everywhere "such a personality as invited the flattery of princes and aroused populations to rancor; pioneers who returned home laden with experiences and riches, both of which were devoted to further their political ambitions" and to sublime creations of art in the splendid private and public palaces, in the churches and the temples which have preserved the civilization of that century for future generations.

The very description of the sumptuous life of the Bardi and Peruzzi has almost the colors of a golden legend.³

The Italian society of the time was resounding with this magnificent and eventful undertaking which was centered in Florence and based on the strength of the florin, which had supplanted the Byzantine hyperper and the Arabic dinar.⁴ During this time, in the very heart of his own family, Boccaccio had lived through the earliest and most dazzling and enthralling episodes of his existence. His family served as agents in their own right and as *fattori* [bailiff-farmers] of one of the most powerful "companies," that of the Bardi

family—who with their allies the Peruzzi and Acciaiuoli constituted the “pillars of Christianity” as Villani called them. Boccaccio’s father and uncles for more than forty years had traveled the highways of European traffic, between Florence, Naples, Paris, and the great French fairs. In his Latin works Boccaccio recalls with emotion the tales his father had told him of his own adventurous and often fearsome experiences during these travels.⁵ And Giovanni himself, having become a skilled computer with the abacus at an early age, had begun work in Naples, in the shadow of the Bardi bank. He worked next door to the warehouse of the Frescobaldi family in that zone of commercial transactions which he was to use as the bewitching background of the picaresque nocturne of Andreuccio. He spent these years in the bank, receiving its customers, having the “exchange,” and keeping the books: ledgers, cash, drafts, and letters of change, and real estate, which he bought and sold. He drew up “audits of the books” to be used in “settling the accounts,” that is, arriving at the final balance sheet for the *compagni*. Those were years spent in all the other tasks proper to an “apprentice” such as he. Boccaccio lived and tried to forget the weariness and the risk of that existence devoted to shrewd deals, daring moves, and pitfalls,⁶ for he was given a chance to enjoy a singularly close contact with the mercantile world. Boccaccio constantly made new contacts with men from the most diverse countries who met in the warehouse, not only to talk business but to await messengers bringing news of the various markets to be compared and discussed. The colorful and fabulous tales told by friends and relatives were nourished and given substance by direct experience, that is, by a firm truth which made them humanly and imaginatively real and definite.

The fascination of the mercantile tales of the *Decameron* lies in their sharp outlines and clear references based on Boccaccio’s personal knowledge of the business world. Because of his experiences in the mercantile adventures of his time, Boccaccio was able to develop and “bring alive” the business world to a point that it almost became a character itself. Ciappelletto’s cold, calculated impiety dominates Boccaccio’s description of impartial and mercantile pitilessness which, to judge from historically documented customs, governs the actions of Musciatto Franzesi and his usurious brothers.

The frustrated ingenuousness of Andreuccio, which begins the fantasmagorical sequence of increasingly romantic events, is arrested in an imprudent but customary gesture, in that same Neapolitan market place which was one of the most animated and famous centers of the horse trade. Boccaccio describes the rapid alternation of the fortunes of Landolfo and Martuccio, which flashes the more stormily and suddenly against the background of the seafaring custom of the “mude” (that is, of convoys), and of the facility with which the most casual traders and merchant adventurers indulged in piracy, as documents attest for the men of Lipari, such as Martuccio. The poetry of the theme of love and death in the figures of Simona and Silvestra is dominated by the environment of the merchants. Boccaccio places his tale in a humble world of labor and of affections, imaginatively depicted and defined through the action of “masters,” “agents,” and “apprentices.” The story takes place amidst “disciples” (who like Boccaccio, go abroad “to perform the duties they had learned”), “shop boys,” “artisans,” “spinners” (Simona is the first elegiac spinner in Italian literature!). Boccaccio could develop the mocking, roguish rhythm of the web of deceits between Salabaetto and the fair Sicilian with unerring certainty only because he had a minutely detailed knowledge, or rather direct experience, of the mechanisms used in the ports for deposits, warranties, and advance payments.⁷

Boccaccio fuses all the elements together with his mobile, shifting narration. In turn, through his narratives, Boccaccio made this mercantile world seem alive and present as no other writers were ever again to do in Italian narrative literature. From Sercambi on down to the story-tellers of the sixteenth century narrative was reduced merely to imitating the many literary paradigms inherited from the dazzling example of the *Decameron*.

His mercantile experience had allowed Boccaccio to observe contemporary life, but life as it was beyond the commune, the region, beyond Italy itself, over civilized Europe, and over the eventful Mediterranean. Nevertheless, Tuscany and Florence (and Siena and Pisa) are always at the center of the ideal geography of the *Decameron*, as they also were of commerce and finance. However, he used other locations as well. He described Piedmont (I, 6; X, 10),

on the edge of Italy, which was still tightly enclosed in an archaic feudal life amidst a mountain austerity (except for Asti). It is delineated almost as though it were part of a fairy tale. He describes Friuli at the other end of the Alps, as "a rather cold land, joyous with beautiful mountains, many rivers and clear springs." It is colored with the impressions of merchants who were fellow townsmen (and perhaps relatives of Boccaccio), Lapo and Lodarigo from Certaldo (X, 5).⁸ Boccaccio becomes more complete and more precise when he describes the regions which participated more actively in European traffic, sometimes in sharp and direct competition with the Florentine and Siense companies. Naturally there are echoes of these rivalries and of the opposing alliances (often projected on the political plane) which give light and shade to these environmental glimpses. Boccaccio describes Venice, noisy with trade, suspicious, and jealous of the Florentines, through a veil of scornful animosity with the usual "blazon" of corruption, of treachery, and of talkative frivolity current in Tuscan commercial circles and undoubtedly confirmed by Boccaccio's friends in Romagna (IV, 2; VI, 4 and even II, 1).⁹ Boccaccio represents the great rival of Florence, Genoa (whose friendship in the enduring struggles with Pisa was one of the pillars of Florentine politics in the fourteenth century), by a gallery of hard-working, tenacious merchants, stubborn to the point of stinginess but open to more generous impulses, and faithful to the ancient, invincible honesty, which is matched by the exalted virtue of their womenfolk (I, 8; II, 8 and 9; II, 10).¹⁰ Boccaccio broadens his descriptions even more when he writes about the two great republics: on the one hand the courtly life of the cultured cities of the Venetian sphere from Treviso to Verona (I, 4; II, 1), and on the other the harsh beauty of the eastern and western Rivas studded with castles, with busy towns, with lands cultivated by the merchants themselves (Mulazzo, Lerici, Finale, Albenga, Monaco: I, 4; II, 6, 8, 9 and 10; VIII, 10). Boccaccio does not describe Lombardy and Milan to so great an extent, probably because their financial and commercial activities were not yet powerfully developed. Furthermore, he may not have held so great a sympathy for these towns for their trade was directed toward lands such as Switzerland and Germany, somewhat outside the prevailing interests of the Florentine companies, and because Florentine politics

of those years were particularly suspicious of, even hostile to, that region and its rulers. Boccaccio, however—in addition to other, fleeting mentions (III, 5; VII, 3; X, 9)—does make Milan the background of a tale involving a German and one of those Lombard moneylenders famous throughout Europe (VIII, 1). He uses Pavia as the setting for the story of Teodolinda, as well as for a tale describing the loftiest and noblest idealization of merchant life and contacts between Christian kindness and Arab generosity (X, 9). (The Brescian background of the novella of Andreuola stems from another origin.) Boccaccio uses other locations in the Po River basin—which are still Lombardian in the more common meaning of the term¹¹—to portray the ambitious Emilian partners, "companions," and their rich and active cities, each so vital in its characteristic life. He describes Piacenza which had launched its men into France in competition with the Florentines and which appears in all its sanguine vitality through the impartial arrogance of Ambrogiuolo (II, 9).¹² He portrays Modena and Bologna, rich in commercial transactions, learned and aristocratic (I, 10; II, 2; VII, 7; VIII, 9; X, 4). He describes Ferrara, which in the eleventh century had been a marketing center for the silks imported from the Orient and which in Boccaccio's time was a point of departure toward the Venetian lands, notwithstanding the troubles of wars and the insecurities of the roads (II, 2; also VIII, 10). He mentions Faenza, Forlì, Ravenna, Imola, Rimini, and other minor towns, and the lands of Romagna so dear to the Florentines and so familiar at first hand to Boccaccio himself (IV, 2; V, 4, 5, 8; VII, 5; III, 7).¹³

Even the regions left more in shadow by history do not escape the close observation of the author of the *Decameron*, just as they did not escape penetration by the Florentine companies. The Marches and Abruzzi which were strategic strongholds for the Acciaiuoli, the Peruzzi, the Bardi (who had branches in Ancona and Aquila, see III, 7; IX, 4), as well as for those who operated between Florence and Naples,¹⁴ appear dimly, half way between fable and mockery, in the speeches of Maso del Saggio and Frate Cipolla purposefully farcical deformations of commercial echoes (VIII, 3; VI, 10; III, 7; V, 5; VIII, 5; IX, 4). But Boccaccio's memories of the other areas of central Italy are more directly tied to mercantile customs, such as Perugia, which

furnished messengers and drovers to the kingdom of Naples. Perugia is the home town of "Andreuccio the horse dealer"; its piazza is sketched as the background of the incredible adventures of the Vinciolos, governors in Terra d'Abruzzo by designation of the Acciaiuoli company (II, 5; V, 10). Rome and Latium, upset and abandoned during the period of the Avignon Captivity, are brought to life in the desolate glimpses of them in the story of l' Agnoletta and the livid portrayal of the Roman Campania, full of ambushes and surprises for the Florentine merchants who crossed it on their way to Naples (V, 3; of course all recollections of Rome as the Papal See are considered separately, from I, 2 to X, 2).¹⁵

Just as in the activity of the Florentine companies and in Boccaccio's own life, so in the *Decameron* the kingdom of Naples is certainly, after Tuscany, the part of Italy whose life and presence is most felt by the reader. Boccaccio reserves his sparkling, almost fairy-tale-like evocations of knights and princes especially for "The Kingdom." But the vitality and the same concrete aspects of the portrayal of those ambiances go back, on the contrary, to the customary impassioning experiences of commerce. Boccaccio describes the thronged fairs of wine-rich Puglia in the tales of Landolfo Rufolo and Donno Gianni (II, 4; IX, 10). His description of landscapes and environments is based on his experience when he lived there as an "apprentice" of the Bardi company.¹⁶ From impoverished and deserted Calabria there comes only the fearsome echo of the terror caused by pirates (V, 6). But, as is natural, the two centers Boccaccio gravitates toward—concerning both the mercantile life and the novellas—are on the one hand Naples and the Campania and on the other, Sicily. Besides his amazingly precise reconstruction of the activities around the port of Naples in the novella of Andreuccio (and in other aspects, in that of Catella and Peronella), in the halo of the ancient commercial prosperity there lies the whole "coast of Amalfi, full of little cities, of gardens and fountains, of rich and industrious men engaged in mercantile pursuits" (II, 4). There are the dreamy gulfs of Salerno, of Naples and Gaeta, with their islands: Ischia, Procida, Ponza; with their fairs (that of Salerno being famous: VIII, 10); with their lively cities, from Ravello to Capua,¹⁷ which unfold fresh beauty over a whole series of novellas (II, 4 and 6; IV, 1 and 10;

V, 6; VIII, 10; X, 5 and so on). And Sicily, dominated by Florentine merchants at Palermo and Messina, at Trapani and Catania, looms up with the enchanting visages of these and other cities and with its harsh and sun-baked isles: Ustica and Lipari. It dazzles like a rich, familiar land stretching out toward the feared and fabulous countries of Barbary (II, 5 and 6; IV, 4 and 5; V, 2 and 6 and 7; VIII, 10; X 7; and so on). Even the other great Italian island, Sardinia—where the Bardi company had agents and factors specializing in the grain trade—peers out of the pages of the *Decameron*, although veiled in a rather indefinite and legendary aura, as an obligatory point of navigation in the western Mediterranean, between Africa and the ports of Provence and Catalonia (II, 7; IV, 4; also III, 8; VI, 10).

It might be said that wherever the initiative of Italian businessmen was directed, there too the imagination of Boccaccio, nourished by direct or indirect mercantile experiences, wished to tarry and to sketch persons, environments, and landscapes. And this he did with such exactitude and such evident knowledge, such experience of the men and the affairs of the most active section of the middle class, as to become himself the subject of many Italian legends. The legends relate his adventures in those very places of which he writes, from Udine to Ravenna, from Ferrara to Palermo, and they are so vast, so bizarre, so fanciful and enduring, that they are comparable only to those of Dante.¹⁸

But that vast European and Mediterranean background on which is embroidered the adventure, or rather the heroic *quête* of the merchants, widens the horizons of landscapes and environments to an extent unprecedented in Italian literature. They begin beyond the Alps with the visual description of the Italian regions, the vastness of the fields and the riches of the cities of France, of Provence, of Burgundy and Flanders (I, 1, 2, 5; II, 3, 8 and 9; III, 9; IV, 2, 3, 8 and 9; VII, 7; X, 2, and so on). Boccaccio tells of exploits across the Channel, in England and even in Scotland and Ireland (II, 3 and 8). That is, he includes all the lands of conquest of the Italian companies—and particularly those of the Bardi and Peruzzi families—lands of rapid, rich and inexorable conquest. By exposing the pitiless cupidity of the Franzesi and the calculating coldness of Ciappelletto and the usurious brothers, Boccaccio projects a livid light upon the mercantile

affairs in these countries (I, 1). The arrogant and laughing chatter of the merchants gathered in the famous Parisian inn or the alternating vicissitudes of the Lamberti give a rhythm of unprejudiced and ever-fresh enterprise to the picture of this region (II, 9 and II, 3). The courtesy of young Alessandro or the dreamy amiability of Lodovico unexpectedly illuminate this fierce and expeditious world with the light of that magnanimity and courtliness which were the leaven of the great civilized and artistic prosperity born of that prodigious economic vitality (II, 3; VII, 7). Boccaccio also includes the faithful customers of the Italian moneylenders (VIII, 1; II, 1): Spain and Catalonia (II, 7; IV, 3; X, 1), obligatory points of trading and dangerous for navigation (and where the Peruzzi were the dominant leaders), and Germany, still somewhat shut in and as violent as her mercenaries.

But the truly broad field opened to Boccaccio by his Neapolitan experiences and by a famous voyage of the Acciaiuoli, is the sea of Greece, with its famous ports of the Morea,¹⁹ and the eastern Mediterranean, dotted with islands, whipped by gales, beset by wars, by pirates and by the most varied happenings and acts of violence. He was familiar with the great sea power of Constantinople, clearing center for all the Levantine trade, which stretched toward the Black Sea and the wealthy port of Caffa (II, 4 and 7; III, 7; V, 1; VIII, 10). He knew the western Mediterranean in detail through the regular commercial relations with Provence, Catalonia and the Balearic Islands (where the Bardi company had branches, and the Angevins important interests: II, 7; III, 9; IV, 3 and 9; X, 7). In addition to European centers, Boccaccio was familiar with Africa, mysterious and feared, from which Tunis and Alexandria emerge as Meccas of the Italian "companies" (IV, 4; V, 2; I, 3; II, 6, 7 and 9; VIII, 2; X, 9) and with the distant Orient of the Crusades, of Saladin. There the great hope or, often, illusion, of Italian commerce developed along the still fresh tracks of the Crusaders, and the merchants were more successful than the Crusaders in dominating those precious outposts of Asia. They had business interests in Rhodes, Crete, Chios, Smyrna, Acre, Antioch, and especially in Laiassus where, as Marco Polo writes, "all the drugs and all the cloths of silk and of gold from the interior with all the precious merchandise, and the merchants . . . of

every country come." Laiassus was an emporium at the crossroads of Syria and Egypt, of Persia and Armenia, and the Bardi concluded advantageous agreements with its king through the intermediary of Francesco Pegolotti. (See I, 9; X, 4 and 7; V, 1; X, 9; II, 7; II, 9; X, 9; V, 7; IX, 9 and so on.)²⁰

It is a geographic penchant (confirmed from the *De Canaria* to the *De Montibus*) which answers, in its own personal and original way, the rush of Italian merchants in the thirteenth century toward unknown lands and new markets. There is not, one may say, any land marked by the exploits and achievements of these persistent and daring conquistadores of the late Middle Ages which does not elicit a precise testimony and a vivid narrative transfiguration in the *Decameron*, in this marvelous "book of merchants' navigation."

To this new unlimited broadening of geographical horizons there corresponds a widening of human perspectives equally rich and audacious. In the sprightly series of tales in which Boccaccio exemplified the ideal theme of his "comedy," those intrepid merchant figures have a central place as protagonists. In order to present witnesses, living and authoritative—in either a positive or a negative sense—of the great human truths on which the *Decameron* is built, it was natural for the writer to turn to the representatives of that humanity which, to repeat Renan, gave "la plus grande leçon d'énergie et de volonté de l'histoire."

In the bitter reproof of vices on the first day, Boccaccio uses the pitiless cupidity of the Franzesi, the calculated impiety of Ciappelletto, the mean avarice of Erminio Grimaldi to give greater depth to the harshly polemic portrayal of the "greats" of the century. By contrast the subtle and lightning-flash shrewdness of Melchisedech or of Abram and the good-humored wisdom of Giannotto or the merchant persecuted by the Inquisitor put into relief the cupidity of the mighty. Boccaccio shows these men to be masters of crafty prudence and subtle polemics, and through their art, capable of eluding the traps set by the greedy mercantile giants. After this *quasi* prelude, in which the most striking and unforgettable figures come straight from the world of commerce, there follows the quickly-moving diptych of Fortune, dominating or dominated (second and third days), in a world crowded with these pioneers of the Italian

economic seignory. From free-and-easy Sandro Agolanti who keeps a tight grip on commerce in Treviso, to the cluster of Italian merchants cleverly sketched in their after-dinner jocundity at the inn, there is a whole gallery of powerful and colorful portraits, of ambiances, minutely studied and impressionistically painted, which on the second day constitutes a magnificent, action-filled mercantile sequence. There is Rinaldo d'Esti, a rather ingenuous but pious trader plying between Emilia and Venetia who, after the most unexpected misfortunes, receives from his Saint Julian the grace of a pleasant hospitality. There is the rapid alternation of failures and unhopèd-for luck of the Lamberti, always galloping between Florence and England. There are the comic vicissitudes and happy endings of imprudent and frustrated youths such as Landolfo and Andreuccio. There is the smiling, astute awareness of the merchants who sagely complete the incredible, sorrowful pilgrimage to Alatiel. There is, finally, the rapid, merry picture of Monaco, free port of pirates and Calvary of merchants (see also VIII, 10). If all the novellas of the second day, except the eighth, bear a mercantile stamp, on the third day also this mercantile epic develops in the subtle scornful contrast between the lady of high lineage and the *nouveau riche* woolens merchant to whom she has been given in marriage (III, 3), in the cautious shrewdness of Zima who profits from the niggardliness of the noble Vergellesi, in the Oriental adventure in which a Florentine patrician, Tedaldo Alisei, tries to forget love. It is almost as though Boccaccio wishes to illuminate the conflict between human ingenuity and Fortune with a light allusive to the antithesis so dear to him: the antithesis of fortuitous nobility and nobility won in the continuous struggles of an existence constantly exposed to the most sudden and serious risks, made always taut by decisive and total commitment. That the characters of the drama between man and Fortune were chosen from the bourgeois and merchant classes reveals a new, impassioned attention to that society. For medieval literature traditionally evoked kings, princes, knights, with their battles and their military, political and civil vicissitudes to show that antithesis. Boccaccio himself followed the medieval conventions in *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*.

The influential force of the mercantile world on Boccaccio's

imagination is even more clearly revealed in the diptych concerning Love, the supreme proof of the nobility or the baseness of men (fourth and fifth days). If Boccaccio's use of figures from the mercantile world in the tales concerning Fortune seems natural despite contrary medieval traditions, his use of bourgeois characters for the diptych on Love is entirely gratuitous. And yet it is almost always families or persons of the middle class who carry the action during the fourth and fifth days. For example, there are the Balducci, agents of the Bardi, protagonists of the famous apologue in the introduction to the fourth day; the great Venetian "mercatanti" "di ca' Quirino," who trade with Flanders; the "Civada" of Provence "of splendid faith," who travel through Spain; the Florentine Sighieri or the men of Lipari given to piracy; and the Sicilians and Genovese in the novellas of Gianni and of Teodoro. Indeed, whether in the great symphony of love and death of the fourth day or in the festive lightness of the musical comedies of the fifth, the noblest, the most impassioned heroines, those most caressed by the imagination of Boccaccio, belong to that very world still ignored by the "sweet new style" and by Petrarch. Lisabetta is shut up in her silent grief until death; Simona, girlishly unwitting, throws her life like a flower on the grave of her beloved; Girolamo and Silvestra are bound indissolubly by love in childhood and then, later, by sudden death; Gostanza is timid and trembling as she faces the unknown and yet does not draw back from the desperate amorous "inquiry." All these unforgettable figures of lovers seem illumined by a more fearful fascination as they stand so very fragile and slender, outlined against the dark background of a world dominated by money, by greed, by the inexorable pitilessness of economic expediency. In their unadorned, almost weary beauty they exercise a power of seduction more subtle than that of the begemmed and haughty feudal ladies, and they are certainly not a whit inferior to them in the nobility and heroism of their sentiments.

The exposition of mercantile life is brought to its fullest development in that vast triptych of "Ingegno" (wit, ingenuity) of the sixth, seventh and eighth days. Again, instead of drawing on traditional medieval sources, Boccaccio turns to bourgeois society for his characters. In the beginning of the triptych, for example,

Boccaccio presents Cisti, a humble trader, who, by virtue of the prudent keenness of his wit, rises above the nobles and grandees. The mercantile world continues to dominate through the eighth day, which evokes the unscrupulous and knavish world surrounding Salabaetto and Canigiani. It would be tiresome to elaborate the examples of the dominance of mercantile characters and themes because they are too obvious and because the point has been made enough times, although with different connotations. It will suffice to recall the powerful mock-heroic resolution of the contrast between nobles and merchants that occurs in the center of the triptych. In the grotesqueness of the invective of a mother-in-law directed at a "petty trader of asses' dung" there seems to be a plebeian transcription of Dante's scorn for one who "cambia e merca" (VII, 8).

Thus, after the pause of the ninth day—when the refined and wealthy world of the Florentine companies is contrasted with the wretchedness and misery of the traders Apulia (IX, 8 and 10)—Boccaccio imparts to the idealized portrayals of the middle class the same literary dignity that medieval tradition gave to nobility. After the lordly prudence and subtle weariness of Gilberto, after the sorrowing blazing profile of Lisa in the novella of Torello, there emerges a most aristocratic depiction of the figure of the merchants, "sage and eloquent."

So from one extreme to the other of the precise and carefully calibrated Gothic structure of the *Decameron*, along the great double or triple arcades which develop it organically and complete it coherently, this mercantile "constant" is revealed as continuous and necessary in the dynamics and in the very values of that carefully planned architecture. Without this urging of a world new to literature, without this highly original life of a social class portrayed and described in its own technical or, rather, expressive language,²¹ the *Decameron* would have neither its driving "exemplary" force nor its eloquent, multiform human richness. It could not be *the* poem of the autumn of the Middle Ages in Italy were it not also the epic of the men who have stamped its civilization most powerfully, carrying it to the center of European life.

The mercantile "constant" in the *Decameron* opens unexpected perspectives in the imaginative structure of many of the novellas. It is

an invitation to a new reading of this rich and mobile comedy of mankind.

We have already seen this influence in the picaresque tales, like those of Andreuccio da Perugia or Salabaetto (II, 5 and VIII, 10). The flavor of the mercantile society is also apparent, although in a different way, in the adventurous enterprise of the Lamberti (who were closely allied to the Bardi) in England which ended in a fairy-tale apotheosis (II, 3).²² We also see it in the colorful and emotional portrayal of an unbiased circle of merchants, always—as witness the creation of the *Universitates Mercatorum*—both solidary yet inimical, always present and always competing at the great French fairs, in the rich Italian cities, or in the legendary emporiums of the Orient (II, 9). This mercantile world is also portrayed in the humiliating life of wretchedness and snares of the petty traders of Apulia, the real human dregs of this powerful and enterprising class (IX, 10). But beyond these sequences (and so many others which we have simply pointed to) in which the reflections of that commercial civilization now appear evident to us, the reading "in a mercantile key" reveals in an exemplary way its validity and its power of suggestion when it is applied to famous texts traditionally illuminated by other lights.

The poetry of the elegiac, amorous raving of Lisabetta of Messina, silent unto death in her mourning, palpitates so timorously and so pitifully for the very reason that it rises like a fragile flower of goodness in the pitiless environment of Tuscan merchants.²³ Lisabetta's brothers are brutally absorbed in their trafficking and their money and have neither a glance nor a thought for their sister. They abandon her quiet awaiting of a love, and give not a thought to the heart-breaking dreams of a girl already become "matura virgo," or a care for the needless fading away of her youth. Between the sentiments of the heart and these reasons of narrow self-interest, of stubborn pursuit of gain, there is no possibility of mutual understanding. The brothers in their boundless strength cannot but suffocate the trembling heartbeats of Lisabetta. The pitifully tragic and elegiac rhythm of the novella arises precisely from this antithesis, which is all the more grave because this love of a woman of the class of the partners, the "soci," for a poor apprentice lad seems to aim at

sweeping away the implacable laws which govern the life of the "companies." Scandal is a threat to mercantile reputation which may compromise deals: therefore the elimination of Lorenzo is rapidly decided, as a necessary mercantile operation ("... after long discussion, they decided to pass over the matter in silence... until such time as without damage or disgrace to themselves they could remove him from their sight"). The brothers show no concern for their sister, but only for "the damage or disgrace to themselves." And in fact the crime is hastily executed as an unpleasant but necessary business, without a shadow of hesitation ("they took Lorenzo with them and, having reached a very solitary and remote spot, seeing a propitious opportunity... they killed Lorenzo and buried him in such wise that no one was aware of their act"). After the murder, the brothers opposed an impenetrable wall of silence to the anxious queries of their sister, who "very often and solicitously" inquired as to the whereabouts of Lorenzo: a wall that echoed darkly an obscure threat ("if you ask us about him any more we will give you the answer you deserve"). Repulsed into the iciness of her anguish and her solitude, Lisabetta takes refuge in her world of anxious fantasies, of obsessive visions, even to the heroism of that macabre and loving gesture ("from that torso she plucked the head... then took a fine large flower pot... and put it therein wrapped in a fine cloth; and having thrown earth upon it she planted there some clumps of lovely Salernitan basil, and thereafter never did she sprinkle them with any water other than dew or orange water or her very own tears"), until—like a Shakespearian Ophelia—she failed, in a calm and disconsolate raving of which death would be only the final, conclusive episode. But this final elegy of love and death, abandoned and very gentle, fearful, the more chaste and enchanting because it too is projected on the background of the brutal self-interest of the brothers, who have no eyes to see the crescendo of Lisabetta's tender madness until their mercantile interests are threatened ("whereat they were greatly astonished and feared lest the matter become known; and [Lorenzo's head] being buried, with no more words, cautiously leaving Messina and having made arrangements how to extricate their business, they departed to Naples"). The only thing that they worry about is the ordering of their business: henceforth

their sister is removed forever from their world and is abandoned to her fate because she has put herself outside of the inexorable laws of their life. The theme of the novella is really the piteous, disconsolate withering of the flower of love and its death in ground hardened by the absolute domination of the "ragion di mercatura."

This is the newest aspect which Boccaccio so acutely portrays in his presentation of this powerful and industrious class: a society in which feelings, passions, and the moral, civil and political laws themselves risk being subordinated to and dominated by this "ragion di mercatura," as implacable and inexorable as two centuries later the "ragion di stato" was to be. It is the great, immeasurable force of these men for whom the laws "constituted... only providential screens behind which and under cover of which they could carry on any activity which would lead them to their goal." It is the force of these men who, "when in spite of everything, they perchance encountered in the law a real obstacle, even though this law was of their own creation, and to hide or justify its violation appeared absolutely impossible, they audaciously and unscrupulously suppressed the hindrance."²⁴

To illuminate this world where the "ragion di mercatura" is absolute, Boccaccio opens the *Decameron* with the tale of Ser Ciappelletto. Too often and too exclusively critics have considered this tale to be an impious mockery of the cult of the saints or a portrait in high relief of a hypocrite of exceptional rascality. Thus it has gone unnoticed that the narrative starts with an exasperated portrayal of the extremely hard life of merchants and contractors in France. It pictures the life of jailers continually watched with hatred by the populace, or the life of *conquistadores* encamped in foreign lands, subject to pitfalls and snares amid people always ready to break out in revolt and rioting. In the appalled dismay of the two Florentine usurers (I, 1, 26) there is at work that unrelenting circle of deep-seated malice and hostility which surrounds and threatens them. The fires of pogroms and the massacres during the persecutions which took place in France (1277, 1299, 1308, 1311, 1312, 1329 and so on) emit fearsome flashes, while in that sharp-edged epithet of scorn, "these Lombard dogs," there seem to echo and reëcho the curses and the jests which were the constant counterpoint to the name of "Italian

merchants" in everyday speech, in songs and chronicles ("The Lombards are very crooked men . . . traitors they are and full of guile . . . they devour and lay waste . . . not only men and beasts, but also mills and castles, lands, fields, woods and forests . . . they bring . . . only a piece of paper in one hand and a pen in the other and thus clip the wool from off the inhabitants' backs and pay them taxes with the natives' own money . . . they are fat to bursting at the expense of the needy and are like wolves devouring the people . . ."). Only after this introductory narrative does the absolute law which determines the action of the characters in the novella become intelligible: whatever the cost, they cannot and must not permit that their inexorable tyranny suffer the smallest crack, lest they suffer a total collapse of their power and the loss of their very lives. It is this iron law of trade which colors their portraits with sinister power: Musciatto Frañzesi, a selfish man "of great cunning" (Compagni), does not hesitate to jeopardize the life of his old friend, unemployed and ill, for the sake of strengthening his own power in Burgundy and of keeping a curb on those "Burgundians . . . full of deceit . . . intractable" about paying the heavy tribute. The Florentine usurers who take Ciappelletto into their house are concerned only with the harm which might befall their business and have not the slightest thought for the illness, the death, or the damnation of the soul of their guest (remember the inhuman concluding words after the sacrilegious confession: "seeing that he would be received into a church for burial, they had no care concerning the rest"). An extreme example of man's subjugation to the "ragion di mercatura" is Ciappelletto himself, who chooses to damn his soul for eternity rather than to endanger the domination of the Italian bankers in Burgundy. It is this "reason" which leads him, a believer (and not a sceptic as has been alleged), to the sacrilegious confession at death's door (22-28). This is the motif for the admiration of the usurious brothers for Ciappelletto's incredible impiety, akin to that of Capaneo [one of the seven against Thebes; see *Inferno* XIV, 46-71; XXV, 15] and for his superhuman (or rather, inhuman) strength ("What manner of man is this, whom neither old age nor infirmity nor fear of the death which he sees approaching, nor even fear of God before whose judgment seat he expects shortly to stand, have been unable to deter?"). And then, too, the famous sinister

portrait of Ciappelletto which opens the story with its dark unpromising lines and gloomy sharp-edged enumerations does not appear to be an oratorical delay nor a piece of bravura, but rather a coherent and necessary premise to the enormous, calculated impiety which is the heart of the novella and which is portended in the shudder of the words which end the sinister profile with the echo of the evangelical horror for Judas ("Bonum erat ei si non esset natus homo ille"). The entire sacrilegious confession obeys this premise: even the satisfaction of Ser Ciappelletto, fully engrossed at a certain point in his mocking and impious game, is but the full development of those motives presaged in the introduction. This confession also ends on two notes of horror: the quoted words of the brothers, and the vision of him "in the hands of the devil in perdition."

The portrait of Ciappelletto is sinister because at the center of Boccaccio's attitude there is a certain hesitation. As he extolls this new mercantile epic, Boccaccio also calls attention to its limits or rather, to the inhuman aspects of this powerful civilization. The figures of Musciatto and Ser Ciappelletto, for example, are tinged with gloom and blame. Boccaccio's hesitation and dismay may recall similar feelings in Dante, which Boccaccio emphasized (*Esposizioni* V, I, 177 ff.), and they are occasioned by sinners such as Paolo and Francesca, for example, and by the strength of the passions and influences which brought them to damnation ("When I heard those wounded souls . . ."). Boccaccio's awareness of the destructive aspects of the "ragion di mercatura" allows him a certain detachment and prevents his writing a passionless eulogy or panegyric. This consciousness, although perhaps painful for Boccaccio permits him to present the mercantile world in all its contrasts, in the merciless harshness and the ineluctable necessities on which the European empire of that handful of invincible men was founded. To this end, side by side with the splendid fairy-tale adventures of the Lamberti in England and of Tedaldo and Torello in the East (adventures softened in the courtly light of great love), side by side with the generous daring of the undertakings of Martuccio and Landolfo (illuminated perhaps by the creation of unforgettable works of art),²⁵ side by side with the subtle *trouvailles* and wit of Melchisedech, Cisti, Salabaetto, and Piero Canigiani, Boccaccio sets down the livid finales of actions

dominated by the monstrous "ragion di mercatura." And in order to present this harder and cruder aspect Boccaccio follows the directives and the inspiration of his narrative art (see Chapter IV, pp. 312 ff.) He chooses exemplary figures; for example the Franzesi brothers (and their agents, collectors of tithes and tribute in France), who are the prototypes—for public opinion and for Florentine historiography itself—of mercantile origin, from Compagni to Villani. They are prototypes of speculators risen to the summits of power by trampling every scruple, every civil and moral law, going so far as to falsify the coinage and betray the traditional solidarity between Italian merchants.²⁶ That youthful unscrupulousness, that boldness in pioneering, that expeditious daring, so often admired and colorfully portrayed with warmest sympathy, are caught here in their shady, cruel deformation and degeneration, in an inhuman if not Satanic extreme, whose enormity may dumbfound but cannot attract—as is true of certain Dantean figures, from Capaneo to Vanni Fucci. Ser Ciappelletto himself, who with a maximum of impiety brings a life of rascality to a close, seems to be depicted as an example, as a dark and fearsome stand-in for the traditional portrait of the wise and wary merchant who—like those presented in various other novellas of the *Decameron* (I, 2; II, 7; X, 3)—reached the end of a difficult life serene on his deathbed, with the most humble and pious utterances, leaving most generous legacies.²⁷ The end of the agent of the Franzesi seems the diabolical caricature of the end of a great champion of the early felicitous mercantile dynamism: of Scaglia Tifi, who also enjoyed the confidence of emperors and the king of France, and who was also a true ruler of finance and commerce in Burgundy. Just like Ser Ciappelletto, gravely ill and having dictated a pious testament, Tifi had himself carried into the Church of the Holy Spirit in Besançon and laid naked on the bare earth, like Saint Francis; and, surrounded by the praying monks, his hands joined together to form a cross upon his breast and his gaze fixed on heaven, he serenely awaited death.

One might indeed say that in those sinister portraits and those inhuman extremes, Boccaccio somehow foresees the limitations of that great movement which started the capitalistic organization of society. He sees them clearly just when, for that Odyssean spirit of research and conquest of new spaces, there is substituted as sole

mover and sole law the search for the greatest and quickest possible profit. The epic and imposing *quête* of the Italian merchants setting forth on the conquest of East and West, who had been able to subordinate their personal gains to the common good and to a greater solidarity, to the point of sacrificing their lives for the great ideals of the fatherland and the Crusades,²⁸ seems then to fall miserably into the mortifying circle of cupidity and avarice. Boccaccio had pointed scornfully to this as the most total negation of every dignity and every virtue of mankind in the *Filocolo* (IV, 106) and the *Filostrato* (III, 38), and later in the *Comedia* (XXXV, 31 ff.) and the *Amorosa Visione* (XII ff.). Indeed, in the *Decameron*, his constant and meditative contemplation of human truths and abilities seems to have nourished with a substance distilled from his own sufferings that scorn which in his youthful works was in large part merely literary. The novellas most polemical in this sense—from that about Erminio Avarizia (I, 8) to the episodes of Vergellesi, Diego della Ratta, Gulfardo and so on (III, 5; VI, 3; VIII, 1)—are vibrant with the realization that mean, unbridled cupidity constituted one of the perils which were degrading contemporary society. It was perilous because, as we read in the correspondence of one of the great merchants of the time, Francesco di Marco Datini, "God wants measure in every thing and no immoderate thing ever pleased that eternal equity."²⁹ It is a conviction which takes on deeper moralistic and deprecatory tones in the *Corbaccio*, in the letters to Nelli and Maghinardo, and in *De Casibus* (III, 1), and which is affirmed more systematically in some pages of the *Esposizioni* in which it is easy to hear an echo of the epic sung in the *Decameron*.³⁰

But already in the *Decameron*, even before the sinister portrayal of the "ragion di mercatura" in the Franzesi brothers and Ciappelletto, it might be said that this conscience is present in the appalling picture of the plague "... sent by the just wrath of God upon mortals for our castigation because of our iniquities. . . ." With these words Boccaccio gives literary expression to a widespread conviction reëchoed by experienced merchants turned chroniclers, such as Stefani and Villani.³¹ And again, taking statements from the same surroundings and the same writers, Boccaccio does not hesitate to stress, among all those iniquities, the explosion "of avarice" and every

"most cruel sentiment" scornful of the most sacred values of friendship, family, and religion.

Indeed, in the grave and dignified gesture which concludes that triumph of death and divine wrath, in the sadness for the end of so many "great palaces . . . fine houses . . . memorable families . . . rich inheritances . . . famous treasures," an elegiac regret palpitates and trembles, a mournful and most human emotion, reminiscent of Tasso, for the eclipse of a rich and stately civilization; that of the first generation of the great Italian merchants whose decadence, already begun in the crises and difficulties of the preceding years, seems to have been inexorably hastened by the terrible scourge of 1348.³² It is the conclusion of the pioneering period which in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries had started the great Italian mercantile expansion in the civilized countries of Europe and the Mediterranean, east and west. It is the twilight of the splendid epic enterprise into which the best representatives of the new middle class had thrown themselves, looking for profit to be sure, but with a broad spirit of adventure and human generosity—as Boccaccio notes fondly in a letter (see below, pp. 326f.). They were men who truly had spread civilization and opened the way to progress, without arms, without violence, adopting as the supreme law of their activities not a "ragion di mercatura" which had become quite inhuman, but the lofty, very humane standard which stands at the beginning of their statute: "No enterprise, however small, can have beginning nor end without these three things: that is, without *potere*, without *sapere* and without *con amore volere*."³³ From this generous class went forth the avantgarde of the new European and Mediterranean unity; the genial evaluators of global situations and economies, ready to embrace even the most complex and remote opportunities, like those offered by the Crusaders and by the great Mongol migrations, in order to expand their commerce and bring to a higher level of efficiency the civil life of their communes;³⁴ the champions of that invincible initiative, of that insatiable curiosity about men and countries, champions who might bear such names as Marco Polo, Guido and Ugolino Vivaldi, or Niccolò Acciaiuoli.

Just in the sunset of this society which at the end of the Middle Ages had created the presuppositions of the new civil and social way

of life, just when a more cautious and systematic organization was on the point of replacing the adventurous and heroic impetus of the pioneers, Boccaccio created his multiform and very human "comedy," with a feeling for the values and limitations of that grandiose movement, an alert and vigorous feeling which, however, does not diminish his admiration and nostalgic longing for the vital energy of those exceptional men. In the *Decameron*, Boccaccio is the enthusiastic rhapsodist, the inspired *trouvère* of those first heroes, whose confidence in the strength and destiny of their society compelled them toward new horizons, "foursquare to the blows of fate." In the *Decameron*, the epic of the autumn of the Middle Ages in Italy, the boldest precursors of modern society could not be absent; the *chanson de geste* of the paladins of commerce could not be wanting.³⁵

NOTES

1. The great adventure of Italy's merchants has been amply documented and explained in the last decades by Armando Sapori in a series of studies, of which I shall mention only the most important: *La crisi delle compagnie mercantili dei Bardi e dei Peruzzi*, Florence, 1926; *Una compagnia di Calimala ai primi del Trecento*, Florence, 1932; *I libri di commercio dei Peruzzi*, edited by A. Sapori, Milan, 1934; *Mercatores*, Milan, 1931; *Studi di storia economica medievale*, Florence, 1956; *I libri della ragione bancaria dei Gianfigliuzzi*, edited by A. Sapori, Milan, 1946; *Le marchand italien au Moyen Age*, Paris, 1952 (with ample bibliographies). For all references to the mercantile and economic life of that century, to the customs and the prevailing practices, I have made much use of these volumes based directly on the study of the Tuscan "companies" which were central to Boccaccio's experiences, without of course neglecting other general treatises: for example, A. Doren, *Storia economica d'Italia nel Medioevo* (1914), Italian translation by G. Luzzatto, Padua, 1937; G. Luzzatto, *Storia del Commercio*, Florence, 1915; A. Segre, *Storia del commercio*, Turin, 1923; M. Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur sozial-und-Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, Tübingen, 1924; J. M. Kulischer, *Allgemeine Wirtschaftsgeschichte des Mittelalters und Neuzeit*, Berlin, 1928 (translated by G. Luzzatto, Florence, 1955); Y. Renouard, *Les hommes d'affaires italiens du Moyen Age*, Paris, 1949 (and also "Le compagnie commerciali fiorentine del Trecento," *Archivio Storico Italiano*, XCVI, 1938). In particular Luzzatto's studies (and the one in *Nuova Rivista Storica* V, 1922) and those of

- Sapori confute the thesis of Sombart which, based on data taken from the commerce of German cities, reduces the activities of Italian merchants to petty enterprises of scant importance (*Der Moderne Kapitalismus*, Munich, 1922; Italian translation by G. Luzzatto, Florence, 1925). A broad and precious panorama of the diverse problems of the economy at the end of the Middle Ages has recently been traced by R. S. Lopez, Ch. E. Perrin, M. Mollat, P. Johansen, M. Postan, A. Sapori, Ch. Verlinden in the 3rd and 6th volumes of the *Reports of the 10th International Congress of Historical Sciences*, Rome, September 4-11, 1955, published by the Ed. Sansoni, Florence, 1955. In view of the literary character and content of this essay, from now on I shall refrain almost entirely from specific quotations or documentation of economic history, implying reference to the above mentioned works.
- Of course using the term "mercante" (merchant) I allude always to the figure of the "mercator" (dealer) or "mercantante" (merchant) which are much more complex than that which the language of today indicates with the noun "mercante." In that not yet specialized or differentiated economy the merchant, it is known, engaged in several lines of activity: that of lender and banker, of merchant and trader, of treasurer, of contractor and so on. Indeed by engaging in one activity he was necessarily forced to assume others: to collect taxes and credits in England, for example, he was led into involvement in the trade and then the industry of wool. "The members of the Bardi and Peruzzi families who engaged in huge foreign lending operations, at any rate banking, accepting deposits by third parties ('arte del cambio'), then invested interest and deposits to acquire woolens which they sold in various markets and had wools made up in their own warehouses ('arte della lana'), and invested also in the purchase of foreign unbleached cloths which they dyed in their own dyeing establishments, decorated, stretched and dried in their own 'tiratoi' or stretching plants ('arte di Calimala'), and they did not disdain trafficking also in 'spices,' which term included drugs and chemicals, especially raw materials for dyes, as well as a wide range of other associated articles ('arte dei medici e speziali'). Thus the famous escutcheon of the 'pears,' emblem of the Peruzzi, and that based on the rhombus, the 'lozenges' boasted by the Bardi, hung in the streets of Calimala above warehouses crammed with scarlet goods from Ypres; serges from Caen; arras, draperies from Arras (tapestries); and in via Santa Cecilia shops packed with more modest goods woven in Florence; they were

- hoisted like a banner over the fair banks in Champagne, where money changing and the sale of currencies were carried on; they loomed over the great mansions at whose doors there came knocking the ministers of an Edward III of England, of a Philip of France, of a Rupert of Anjou who was lord of Naples, to provide for the expenses of the royal houses and even the wars" (Sapori, *Mercatores*, op. cit., p. 6).
- See Sapori, *Studi*, p. 1098 and *Le Marchand*, p. xxxv. See also the interesting and significant *Dit des Marchands* by Gilles li Muisis.
 - For this splendid event which made the florin—rather than the Venetian ducat—the monetary basis of commerce, the real dollar of the Middle Ages, see especially C. M. Cipolla, *Money, Prices and Civilization*, Princeton, 1955.
 - Concerning information on the family and the youth of Boccaccio, to which I refer on this page, see the references in Part I of this volume. From 1327 to July 1, 1328, while in Naples, Boccaccio's father received the annual salary of 145 lire (Sapori, *La crisi*, p. 259). Concerning the paternal recollections mentioned by Boccaccio, I allude particularly to the Parisian and Neapolitan tales in the *De Casibus* IX, 21, and IX, 26.
 - In addition to the works referred to in note 5 above, see in particular for the duties of the beginner, Sapori, *Studi*, pp. 695 ff.; and for the correspondences between the places in the novella of Andreuccio and those familiar to Boccaccio in his mercantile activities as a youth, see my notes on the novella itself (II, 5). In the "Ruga Cambiorum," "juxta Petra Piscium," King Carlo II had assigned free of cost to the Bardi, next to the Frescobaldi, "unus ex cambiis suis . . . absque iure pensionis seu quocumque diricto" (De Blasiis, "La dimora di G. Boccaccio a Napoli," *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane*, VIII, 1882, p. 93).
 - I shall not pause, as a rule, to give bibliographical documents or references to confirm the real or allusive data here passed over rapidly, since I have pointed them out for the individual novellas in my commentary on the *Decameron*. I refer my readers to it for this study as well as the other studies in Part I of this volume.
 - On this interesting detail see in general A. Battistella, *I Toscani in Friuli*, Bologna, 1898 and Udine, 1903; P. S. Leight, "Note sull'economia friulana del secolo XIII," *Memorie Storiche Forogiuliesi*, XXXIII-XXXIV, 1937-1938; and especially A. Hortis, *G. Boccaccio ambasciatore*, Trieste, 1875; idem, *Studi sulle opere latine del Boccaccio*, Trieste, 1879, pp.

- 237 and 948. Also G. Bini in "Atti della Società Colombaria" 1908-1909, and P. A. Medin in "Atti Istituto Veneto" LXXXII 1922-1923 for documents on Tuscan merchants—some from Certaldo itself in Friuli and Veneto.
9. For the Venetians the escutcheon of bad faith was of Genovese origin. For all this, in addition to the notes to the novellas cited, see B. Chiurlo, "Per Chichibio 'bergolo viniziano' e per 'i vinziani tutti bergoli,'" *Atti Ist. Veneto*, XCVIII (1939); V. Branca, "Boccaccio e i veneziani bergoli," *Lingua nostra*, III, 1941; and *Esposizioni*, XIV, 1, 59.
 10. It should be remembered that, as I point out in the notes to I, 8, Boccaccio was sent by the Florentine Signoria on a mission to the Doge of Genoa on behalf of Genoese merchants who had acted against the Pisans, in concert with the Florentines. Also, the slave trade carried on by the Genoese is mentioned (II, 8; V, 7), but not condemned, by Boccaccio because it was accepted in those centuries; see also R. Livi, *La schiavitù domestica nei tempi di mezzo e nei moderni*, Padua, 1928; A. Damia, *Schiavitù romana e servitù medievale*, Milano, 1931; L. Tria, "La schiavitù in Liguria," *Atti della Soc. Ligure di Storia Patria*, LXX, 1947; Ch. Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale*, Bruges, 1955.
 11. As is known, the terms Lombard and Lombardy in the fourteenth century still had a geographical meaning covering a greater territory than now; Boccaccio himself indicates this (see commentary on *Amorosa Visione*, XL, 40 ff.; *Eclogue*, XVI, 79). The generic term "Lombards" is excluded from the foregoing; on the other side of the Alps it was applied to the lenders (A. Segre, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 215 ff.; G. Piton, *Les Lombards en France et à Paris*, Paris, 1892-1893), as is also proved by the *Decameron* (I, 1, 26 "These Lombard dogs . . ." said of the two Florentine brothers who were usurers).
 12. In the last decades of the thirteenth century there were at least thirty-seven merchants from Piacenza at the Lagny fair; in 1278 it is a native of Piacenza who as "capitaneus universitatis mercatorum lumbardorum et tuscanorum" confers with the French sovereign concerning the return to Nîmes of the expelled merchants (F. Bourquelot, *Etudes sur les foires . . .*, Paris, 1865, I, pp. 164 ff., 185; A. Saporì, *Mercatores*, p. 99).
 13. For Boccaccio's experiences and residences in Romagna—even during the time of the composition of the *Decameron* (between 1345 and 1350) especially at Ravenna and Forlì—and for the relations of these lands with Florence and Tuscany, in addition to the works cited in note 5

- above, see: A. Hortis, *Cenni di G. Boccaccio attorno a Tito Livio*, Trieste, 1887; C. Ricci, "I Boccacci e il Boccaccio a Ravenna," *Miscellanea Hortis*, Trieste, 1910; idem "I Boccacci di Romagna," *Miscellanea Storica della Valdelsa*, XXI, 1913; F. Torraca, "Cose di Romagna in tre egloghe del Boccaccio," *Atti e Memorie della R. Dep. di Storia Patria per le Romagne*, S. IV, II, 1912; G. Billanovich, *Petrarca letterato*, pp. 86, 181, 201, 208 ff.
14. In addition to the general works already mentioned, see the numerous indications in the three volumes of E. Léonard, *Histoire de Jeanne I*, Munich-Paris 1932-1936 (in index). In L'Aquila or Sulmona we find one of the oldest copies of the *Decameron* sent by agents of the Acciaiuoli (see pp. 3 ff. and *La prima diffusione*, *op. cit.*); we find a great friend of Boccaccio and Petrarch, Barbato of Sulmona, making use of the continuous passage of couriers and merchants between Naples and Florence for his correspondence (M. Vattasso, *Del Petrarca e di alcuni suoi amici*, Roma, 1904, p. 14; A. Foresti, *Aneddoti della vita di F. Petrarca*, Brescia, 1928, p. 400; Billanovich, *Petrarca letterato*, pp. 251 ff.); right in Abruzzo Niccolò Acciaiuoli was to hold a very important meeting of his friends (Vattasso, *op. cit.*, pp. 404 ff.; Branca, *art. cit.*, p. 26).
 15. See the references and quotations in this regard from Boccaccio's own works, on pp. 312 f.
 16. The direct experiences of Boccaccio show especially in the description of particular usages of Apulia in the *Comedia* (XXVI, 70); and in the detailed knowledge which one of his letters (IV) reveals about the factions and the struggles taking place in Barletta, the city of Donno Gianni and the principal branch of the Bardi and Peruzzi companies, near Trani (II, 4), formerly a great emporium but in complete decadence in the fourteenth century.
 17. Boccaccio had several friends at Ravello, among them Angelo da Ravello "summus magister grammaticae" (F. Torraca, "G. Quatrario," *Arch. Stor. per le Prov. Napoletane*, XXXVII, 1913); at Capua he engaged directly in financial activity, with the rental of the property of San Lorenzo in Croce: see *Relazione della Commissione Conservatrice dei Monumenti e oggetti di Antichità e Belle Arti di Caserta—Verbale della tornata del 6 luglio 1891*, pp. 419 ff.
 18. The reconstruction of this "legend" would be truly informative, as testimony not only of the tremendous success and popularity of Boccaccio even in the natural deformations from which his work suffered, but also in a singular and instructive burgeoning of fantasy, partly erudite, partly popular. And so, beyond any document, we would see

Boccaccio, like a new Rinaldo d'Este, "in a journey from Ferrara to Verona" spend a pleasant night at Castelguglielmo "in an old house belonging to the Castle, which still today is visible" and pointed out (P. Mazzucchi, *Memorie storiche di Castelguglielmo*, Badia Polesine, 1903, p. 7; because of the extreme anthropogeographical exactness of the references to roads, canals, and the adherence to the historical reality of the desolation of the zone during the Polesine war under Azzo VIII—all this in II, 2); we would witness his unsuccessful love affairs in Ravenna and his literary arrows consequent thereto (V, 8; see Borgognoni, in *Domenica letteraria*, III, 1881, n. 13); we would enjoy his pranks and vendettas in Perugia, with none other than Pietro di Vinciolo (V, 10; see Manni, *op. cit.* pp. 638 ff.) and so on.

This strength of fantasy in the location of places has also called forth a legend, similar but in a different direction: that is to say, the identification or the creation of places or details or figures which are at the center of certain novellas: such for example as the secular tradition which, influenced by the Aretine novella (VII, 4) gave the name "of Tonfano" to a well in Arezzo in via dell'Orto, opposite the so-called house of Petrarch (A. del Vita, *Guida d'Arezzo*, Arezzo, 1923, p. 57; U. Tavanti, *Arezzo in una giornata*, Arezzo, 1928, p. 106; A. Chiari, "Una novella aretina del Decameron," *Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia Petrarca*, N. S. XX, 1936), or that which since the fifteenth century, based on hints of Boccaccio (VI, 2), indicated the location of the oven of Cisti near the Florentine church of Santa Maria degli Ughi (Richa, *Notizie storiche delle Chiese fiorentine*, Florence, 1754, III, pp. 182 ff.; Manni, *Istoria, op. cit.*, p. 392) or the pleasant tissue of notes and fantasies which was, for example, around popular and grotesque heroes of the mirthful novellas of the *Decameron* such as Caladrino and Guccio (one need only, for example, see the lives outlined by Manni, *Veglie piacevoli*, Florence, 1815, I, pp. 11 ff.; II, pp. 3 ff.). And along a similar line of ideas and research one might consider also the ample series of novellas which were used and related as events or actually as historical documents by the most diverse writers and scholars: from commentators on Dante to chroniclers, from learned men of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries down to more modern historians (see, for example, the novellas II, 1 and 6; V, 4; VI, 6, 7 and 9; VII, 3, 6 and 9; VIII, 3, 4, 5 and 8; X, 2 and 6, together with the pertinent notes in my commentary).

19. A single example must suffice, in order not to weigh down these rapid notes: the eventful wanderings of Alatiel (II, 7) seem to be developed on the slender and fanciful filigree of the vicissitudes of the Angevin

- princes in Morea, and the adventurous voyage of Niccolò Acciaiuoli between 1338 and 1341, hailed by Boccaccio himself in an epistle (V). When the action of the novella, after the first phrases, shifts to the eastern Mediterranean, the fixed ports of call are: first, the great emporium of Chiarenza (33) frequented by Genoese, Venetians, Florentines—where after its conquest by the princes of Majorca, closely bound to the Angevins—there took place the wedding of two august personages of princely rank celebrated by Boccaccio, Ferdinand of Majorca (brother of Sancha, the wife of King Robert) and Isabella of Ibelin (sung in the *Amorosa Visione*, XLIV, 1 ff., cousin of Hugh of Cyprus, to whom *Genealogia* was dedicated: Rodd, *The Princes of Achaia*, London, 1907, pp. 136 ff.), and where Acciaiuoli embarked for his return to Naples, after his great undertaking (Léonard, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 98 ff., 185, 327; II, p. 121; III, p. 6); then the Morea (44 ff.) where Acciaiuoli's expedition took place, when he was accompanying Robert and Luigi of Taranto to take possession of the principality. These two princes were not esteemed by Boccaccio and were quite effeminate, just like that "prince of Morea" who gets Alatiel in his power (*Egloghe*, III and IV; Villani, XII, 52; Rodd, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 180 ff.; Léonard, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 100 ff.; then Athens and its duke (49 ff.), with probable allusion to Walter VI of Brienne, duke of Athens and lord of Florence in 1343, exactly—as is said in the novella (49)—"friend and relative of the prince" of Morea, he too occupied with continual expeditions in Achaia (see *De Casibus*, IX, 24); immediately afterward Constantinople (63 ff.) with Costanzio and Manovello, respectively son and nephew of the emperor, just as Constantius and Manuel were of Andronicus, emperor in the first years of the fourteenth century, and not alien to those Angevin aspirations and undertakings; then Chios (75), one of the most usual ports of call of Italian merchants in those seas; and finally (76 ff.) Asia Minor, under the great shadow of Ozbek, khan of the Golden Horde, who in those very years (1313 to 1340) favored the Genoese on the Black Sea and in Crimea, and was extolled by the associated Florentine and Neapolitan circles (R. Lopez, *Le colonie genovesi nel Mediterraneo*, Bologna, 1938, pp. 299 ff.); leaving aside the imaginary figure of Basano (78 ff.) in which it would be possible to see a souvenir of Basano, faithful associate of King Andrea and enemy of Robert and Luigi Taranto-Achaia (Léonard, *op. cit.*, *passim*; see index).
20. For all this see W. Heyd, *Storia del commercio del Levante nel Medioevo*, Turin, 1913; J. Hatzfeld, *Trafiants italiens dans l'Orient hellénique*, Paris, 1919; G. M. Monti, *Le crociate e i rapporti fra Oriente mediterraneo e Occidente*

- transferred from Messina in mid-fourteenth century to Naples, as Lisabetta's brothers, or rather as was probably a natural custom (see *Nel VI centenario della nascita di G. Boccaccio*, Poggibonsi, 1913).
24. Saponi, *Studi*, p. xix; and the following quotations of songs and chronicles are taken from Saponi, *Mercatores*, p. 97.
 25. I allude to the magnificent Arabo-Sicilian palace of the Rufolo family at Ravello, and to the tradition which attributes the splendid ambo of the cathedral and the allusive mosaic to Landolfo.
 26. Compagni, II, 4; Villani, VII, 147 and VIII, 56. It is said that Musciatto was the man who persuaded Philippe le Bel (Philip IV) to debase the currency and to plunder the Italian merchants; later most likely he was the evil genius of Charles de Valois in his undertaking against Florence. See in general the study of F. Boch, "Musciatto dei Franzesi," *Deutsches Archiv*, 1943.
 27. See Saponi, *Mercatores*, pp. 113 ff.; idem, *Studi*, pp. 839 ff., 101 ff. (also for the end and the will of Scaglia Tifi).
 28. See the ample and eloquent documentation supplied by Saponi, *Le Marchand Italien*, pp. xii ff., xlix ff.
 29. Lapo Mazzei, *Lettere d'un notaro a un mercante del secolo XIV*, edited by Cesare Guasti, Florence, 1880, II, p. 142.
 30. "There are some, then, who, without being in need, become so inflamed with the desire to become rich, that crossing the Alps and the mountains and the rivers and to reach foreign nations by sea, seems a mere trifle to them, despising entirely what Seneca writes to Lucilius about these labors, where he says: *Magnae divitiae sunt, lege nature, composita paupertas. Lex autem illa nature scis quos terminos nobis statuat . . .*" "And if these men were satisfied when they have reached some respectable end, or if they were satisfied to reach this objective with honest labor and laudable profit, perhaps some excuse could be found for the natural appetite which is innate with us: but because we are unable to put some moderation in this, all of us exceed in the wretched vice, that is to say, in inordinate wishing for more than is proper." *Esposizioni*, VII, 2, 58 ff.; and also III, 2, 25 ff. and *Lettera a Pino*, p. 179.
 31. Marchionne Stefani, *Cronaca*, in R.R. II. SS², XXX, 1; G. Villani, XII, 84; M. Villani, I, 2. And, in general, for merchants who became writers, see C. Bec, *Les Marchands écrivains*, Paris, 1967.
 32. For this, see the important conclusions of Ch. Verlinden, "La grande peste de 1348 en Espagne: contribution à l'étude de ses conséquences économiques et sociales," *Revue belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, XVII, 1938; Y. Renouard, "Conséquences et intérêts démographiques de la

- Peste Noire en 1348," *Population*, III, 1948; E. Perroy, "A l'origine d'une économie contractée. Les crises du XIV siècle," *Annales d'Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, II, 1949; C. M. Cipolla, I. Dhont, M. M. Postan, Ph. Wolff, *Rapport au IX Congrès International des Sciences Historiques*: section I: Anthropologie et Démographie, Paris, 1950.
33. See Saponi, *Mercatores*, p. 533 and especially pp. 155 ff., 619 ff., 1013 ff., for the above-mentioned passage from one to the other of the two "moments" of the mercantile economy.
 34. This is the vision on which Renouard was particularly insistent, and more recently in the article "Le rôle des hommes d'affaires italiens dans la Méditerranée," *Revue de la Méditerranée*, XV, 1955.
 35. For a Marxist interpretation of this mercantile epic which I have pointed out, see: Z. Rózsa and G. Sallay, articles in the volume of miscellany *Renaissance Tenülmáyok*, Budapest, 1957; and for an acute historical point of view: G. Getto, *Letteratura e critica nel tempo*, Milano, 1968, pp. 359 ff. And see also the volume of the *Cambridge Economic History* (ed. M. M. Postan and H. J. Habakkuk) entitled *Economic Organization and Policies in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, 1963. For the voyages of the merchants: J. P. Roux, *Les explorateurs au Moyen Age*, Paris, 1961; V. Bertoloni, "Le carte geografiche nel Filocolo," in *Studi sul Boccaccio*, V, 1969 (concerning the geografic-mercantile culture of Boccaccio and the possibility that he knew the maps of Marin Sanudo).