

EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE LEGEND OF THE  
MONTAGUES AND THE CAPULETS

If it be admitted that the *Montecchi* and the *Cappelletti* existed as unrelated political factions, some of the currently accepted views regarding the origins of the legend of Romeo and Juliet will have to be revised. It will be impossible to admit, for instance, the view of Cino Chiarini who says, following Todeschini, that the *Montecchi* and the *Cappelletti* were two different wings of the Ghibelline party.<sup>1</sup> The *Cappelletti*, as we have seen, were followers of the Pope, not of the Emperor, while the *Montecchi* did not become Ghibellines until 1232.<sup>2</sup> Naturally, we shall have to reject at the same time the very widely accepted opinion of J. J. Munro who, translating Cino Chiarini almost literally, says: "Dante's *Capulets* and *Montagues* were both component parts of the same Ghibelline party . . ." Nor will it be possible to allow the statement (later revised somewhat) of G. Brognoligo that the *Montecchi* and the *Cappelletti* were a "coppia di famiglie."<sup>4</sup>

In fact, when we come to trace the literary tradition of the *Montecchi* and the *Cappelletti*, we shall be confronted by a new problem, similar to that presented in the historical evolution of the *Montecchi*. It will be our task to determine at what stage of the development the idea arose that both the *Montecchi* and the *Cappelletti* were families, rather than political factions.

<sup>1</sup>"I Montecchi e i Cappelletti nominati da Dante . . . rappresentano . . . due delle diverse frazioni del partito ghibellino."—Chiarini, Cino. *Romeo e Giulietta*. Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1906, p. xiv. See Chapter I, note 32, of the present study, especially the quotation from the "Annales Placentini Gibellini," showing that the *Cappelletti* leader Amadinus de Amatis fought *per episcopatum Cremonae*, and had been banished with his troops from Cremona by the Emperor.

<sup>2</sup>See Gioachino Brognoligo, *Studi di storia letteraria*, Rome and Milan, 1904, p. 171, note 1.

<sup>3</sup>Munro, J. J. *Brooke's 'Romeo and Juliet'*. London: Chatto and Windus; New York: Duffield and Co., 1908, p. xxvi.

<sup>4</sup>Brognoligo, Gioachino. "Montecchi e Cappelletti nella Divina Commedia." Bologna, 1893. Reprinted from *Il Propugnatore, Nuova Serie*, VI, Parte I, Fasc. 31-32, p. 8 and *passim*. Cf. Brognoligo's *Studi di storia letteraria*, *op. cit.*, pp. 164, 165 and *passim*. Probably under the influence of R. Davidsohn's article on the origins of the *Cappelletti*, Brognoligo in his later study alters his statement that the *Cappelletti* were a family, but makes no such correction regarding the *Montecchi*. (*Ibid.*, pp. 181 and 193-94.)

To answer this question, for which no satisfactory solution has yet been offered by literary critics, it will be necessary to begin at the source, and trace the early development step by step, and particularly from one Dante commentator to another. To be sure, the interrelation of these commentators has already been so ably studied by Gioachino Brognoligo<sup>5</sup> that further discussion would at first glance seem superfluous. Unfortunately, however, Brognoligo does not clarify the essential question which we have to consider: the determination of the exact moment when the *Montecchi* and *Cappelletti* factions began to be mistaken for families.

Moreover, there is another problem to which Brognoligo gives only a partial answer: Just when did the notion of hostility between the *Montecchi* and the *Cappelletti* first manifest itself and how did it manifest itself?

The earliest apparent association of the terms *Montecchi* and *Cappelletti* occurs in an oft-cited passage in the sixth canto of the *Purgatorio*. Here Dante, inspired by the stately presence of the troubadour Sordello, pronounced a bitter apostrophe to Italy, in which he invoked the aid of Albert of Hapsburg. He earnestly besought the emperor, who was so indifferent to Italian affairs that he neglected to be crowned in Italy, to come and behold the civil strife which was demoralizing the country:

Vieni a veder Montecchi e Cappelletti,  
 Monaldi e Filippeschi, uom senza cura;  
 Color già tristi, e questi con sospetti.<sup>6</sup>

With his characteristic symmetry, Dante balanced the names of the *Montecchi* and *Cappelletti*, factions which had destroyed themselves in past strife (*color già tristi*) with the contemporary and better known parties—the Monaldi and Filippeschi of Orvieto<sup>7</sup>—who were in a dubious situation because of their dissensions (*e questi con sospetti*).<sup>8</sup>

This interpretation of the disputed passage in the *Purgatorio*, as we shall see presently, is in substantial accord with that of the Dante commentator Peter Alighieri, on whose testimony G. Bro-

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, especially p. 9, note 1; p. 10, note 1; p. 11, notes 1 and 3; and p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Dante Alighieri. *Purgatorio*, VI, vv. 106-8, from *La Divina Commedia*, C. H. Grandgent, ed., Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1933.

<sup>7</sup> Orvieto was in the province of Ancona. See Brognoligo, "Montecchi e Cappelletti nella Divina Commedia," *op. cit.*, p. 14, and note 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

gnoligo also relies.<sup>9</sup> Fausto Ghisalberti objects, however, that Sordello would hardly have reminded the Hapsburg emperor of the *Montecchi* and the *Cappelletti* if these names had stood for political factions long since dissolved.<sup>10</sup> To this dangerously subjective argument it might be replied that the learned Dante habitually remembered not only Italian political factions long after their dissolution, but also factional leaders long after their death. Farinata degli Uberti, the Ghibelline leader who figures in Canto X of the *Inferno*, died in 1264, or three years<sup>11</sup> before the *Cappelletti* ceased to be active. If Dante makes Sordello mention the *Montecchi*, he also has a Centaur easily identify Azzolino (= Ezzelino da Romano), notorious chieftain of the *Montecchi*,<sup>12</sup> while Dante's Virgil can lead the way readily to Mosca de' Lamberti, who precipitated a Florentine feud in 1215.<sup>13</sup> It might be noted also in passing that even as late as the fourteenth century a none too reliable chronicler includes the *Montecchi* in a list of old Vicenza "families" which had been lost to sight.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, the fact remains that by the end of the thirteenth century the *Montecchi* and the *Cappelletti* had almost passed from popular recollection. Moreover, Dante referred to them in somewhat cryptic language, as was customary when he assumed the role of high priest. As a consequence, a series of misinterpretations arose, which became crystallized into one of the most famous legends of literature.

<sup>9</sup> "A me il significato del passo par dunque chiaro così: vieni a veder, uom senza cura, i Montecchi di Verona e i Cappelletti di Cremona, i Monaldi, o Monaldeschi, e i Filippeschi d'Orvieto, quelli tristi per le passate discordie, questi sospettosi per le presenti . . ."—*Ibid.*, p. 31. For discussion of Pietro di Dante, cf. especially p. 11 and note 3. Similarly in the *Studi di storia letteraria*, *op. cit.*, p. 181, where, however, Brognoligo, perhaps under the influence of R. Davidsohn's article which had appeared the year before, adds a notation that the *Cappelletti* were a faction, not a family: "[I Montecchi di Verona e i Cappelletti,—nome di fazione, si noti, e non di famiglia—, di Cremona, . . .]" (Brognoligo cites Davidsohn's article on p. 194, note 1.)

<sup>10</sup> Ghisalberti, Fausto. Review of Moore's "The Origins of the Legend of Romeo and Juliet," (*Speculum*, V [1930], pp. 264-77), in *Studi Danteschi*, XVI (1932), p. 200.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Chapter I of the present study, note 39.

<sup>12</sup> Dante Alighieri. *Inferno*. XII, v. 110.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, XXVIII, v. 107.

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix to "Antonii Godi Nobilis Vicentini Chronica," in L. A. Muratori *Rever. Italicarum Scriptores*, Milan: Typographia Societatis palatinae, 1727, VIII, cols. 91, 92: "Hae sunt familiae, quae in Civitate nostra Nobiles erant, et ita extinctae ut de eis vix maneant memoria." Among these "families" were mentioned the *Comites Monticuli Praecalini*, who were given as ancestors not only for the *Montecchi* of Verona, but also for their bitter rivals, the Counts of S. Bonifacio: "Comites Monticuli Praecalini, ex quibus nati sunt Comites de Sancto Bonifacio, et Domus Monticulorum qui potens fuit Veronae."

Let us now examine, in chronological order, some of the early comments upon the *Purgatorio* passage in question.

(a) *Jacopo della Lana*

1323-28.—According to Jacopo della Lana, who obviously undertakes little more than a paraphrase of the text of Dante at this point, the *Montecchi* and the *Cappelletti* were a party in Cremona, while the *Monaldi* and *Filippeschi* were a party in Ancona.<sup>16</sup> Apparently the first-named factions were allies, in his opinion, although they might have been taken to be enemies.<sup>16</sup>

(b) *Ottimo Commento*

1334.—The *Ottimo Commento* here follows literally Jacopo della Lana.<sup>17</sup>

(c) *Peter Alighieri*

1340-41.—The first commentator furnishing accurate information regarding the political situation in Verona and Cremona during the thirteenth century was Dante's son Peter Alighieri. According to him, there were two parties in Verona, that of the *Montecchi* and that of the "Counts." In Cremona, the *Cappelletti* were opposed by the *Troncaciuffi*. In Orvieto, the rivals of the *Monaldi* faction were the *Filippeschi*.<sup>18</sup>

By the party of the "Counts," Peter Alighieri doubtless means the faction of the Count of S. Bonifacio, which was also called the "party of the marquis," because one of its leaders was the Marquis of Este. The name *Troncaciuffi*, as has been observed, was an alternative form for *Barbarasi*.

(d) *Codice Cassinese*

*Middle of fourteenth century.*—The author of the *Codice Cassinese* follows closely the commentary of Peter Alighieri.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> "Qui per digressione noma parte di Cremona per principio di Lombardia, e parte d'Ancona per principio della Marca Anconitana."—Jacopo della Lana. *Comedia di Dante degli Allagherii col Commento di Jacopo della Lana Bolognese*. Luciano Scarabelli, ed., in the "Collezione di Opere Inedite o Rare dei Primi Tre Secoli della Lingua," Bologna, 1866, II, p. 72. Scarabelli changes the reading Cremona, given by all the codices, to Verona.

<sup>17</sup> See Brognoligo, *Studi di storia letteraria, op. cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>18</sup> *Ottimo. L'Ottimo Commento della Divina Commedia*. Pisa, 1828, II, pp. 83-84.

<sup>19</sup> "De quo secunum est quod in Verona est facta pars Montecchia et pars Comitum; in Cremona Cappelletti et Troncaciuffi; in Urbeveteri pars Monaldeschia et Philippesca; et sic de aliis."—Alighieri, Peter. *Petri Allegherii Super Dantis Ipsius Genitaris Comœdiam Commentarium*. Vincenzo Nannucci, ed., Florence: Guglielmo Piatti, 1845, pp. 332-33. See Brognoligo, "Montecchi e Cappelletti . . ." *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> "Nam Verona divisa est in duas partes • scilicet • in partem montechiorum et partem comitum de sancto Bonifacio cremone civitatis in alias • duas partes • videlicet • in cappellectos et troncaciuffos Urbs vetus in alias duas • videlicet • in Monaldis et Phylipescos."—Cassinese. *Il Codice Cassinese della Divina Commedia*. Monaci Benedettini, ed., Monte Cassino: Tipografia di Monte Cassino, 1865, pp. 220-21.

For paleographical reasons, the editors date the commentary about the middle of the fourteenth century (*ibid.*, pp. xviii and xl).

(e) *Giovanni Villani*

1348.—The chronicler Giovanni Villani does not mention the *Montecchi* and *Cappelletti*, but describes the Guelph *Monaldi* and the Ghibelline *Filippeschi* as families which were active rivals in the city of Orvieto during the early part of the fourteenth century. In 1312 the *Monaldi* succeeded in expelling the *Filippeschi* from Orvieto, almost under the nose of the Emperor himself. In 1337, after a period of tyrannical rule, the *Monaldi* were themselves driven out by the indignant citizens of Orvieto.<sup>20</sup>

(f) *Benvenuto da Imola*

1379.—Benvenuto da Imola, for the passage in question, utilizes several sources. Like Giovanni Villani, he asserts that the *Monaldi* and *Filippeschi* were noble houses of Orvieto, but goes a step further, in being the first Dante commentator to state that the *Montecchi* and the *Cappelletti* were families also, both residing at Verona.

Benvenuto gives an account of the alliance of the *Montecchi* with Ezzelino da Romano and of their struggle against Azzo Marquis of Este, who had succeeded in returning to Verona, through the support of the Count of S. Bonifacio. As John M. Gitterman pointed out, Benvenuto here follows in general the "Monachi Patavini Chronicon" or "Annales S. Iustinae Patavini" which, as has been noted, are based on the version of Rolandino.<sup>21</sup> Gitterman failed to note, however, that Benvenuto differs from the chroniclers by representing the *Cappelletti* and the *Montecchi* as allied and neighboring "families," a notion which he may have derived from Jacopo della Lana.<sup>22</sup>

(g) *Francesco da Buti*

1380.—Probably influenced by Jacopo della Lana, Francesco da Buti

<sup>20</sup> "i Filippeschi d'Orbivieto col loro seguito di ghibellini cominciarono battaglia nella città contro a' Monaldeschi e gli altri guelfi d'Orbivieto, per dare la terra allo 'mperadore.'—Villani, Giovanni. *Cronica*. Florence, 1823, IV, Bk. ix, Chap. xl, p. 34; cf. VI, Bk. xi, Chap. lxxv, p. 153.

<sup>21</sup> See John M. Gittermann, *Ezzelin von Romano. I. Teil: Die Gründung der Signoria (1194-1244)*. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1890, p. 94. Cf. "Annales S. Iustinae Patavini," *Monumenta Germaniae Historica (Scriptores)*, G. H. Pertz, ed., Hanover, 1841-1902, XIX, p. 149: "Anno itaque Domini 1207, cum vir illustris Azo marchio Estensis de voluntate partium, comitis videlicet Sancti Bonifacii et Monticulorum, civitatis Verone regimen suscepisset et prudenter in suo regimine se haberet, Monticuli favore Ecelini de Romano, qui vitam terminavit in heretica pravitate, facta coniuratione contra eum, de Verona ipsum subito eiecerunt. At ille . . . in manu valida ivit Veronam, parte comitis prebente sibi auxilium et favorem . . . Ex tunc marchio et comes Bonifacius toto tempore vite sue Verone dominium habuerunt."

<sup>22</sup> "Dicit ergo: *Vieni a veder Montecchi e Cappelletti*. Ista fuerunt duae clarae familiae Veronae, maxime Monticuli, quae habuerunt diu bellum cum alia nobilissima familia, scilicet, cum comitibus de Sancto Bonifacio. Nam Monticuli comites cum favore Ecirrini de Romano eiecerunt Azonem II, marchionem estensem, rectorem illius civitatis; sed ipse in manu forti cum comite Huberto Sancti Bonifacii, Monticulis acie debellatis, reintravit Veronam, ubi finem vitae feliciter terminavit."—Benvenuto de Rambaldi da Imola. *Comentum super Danis Aldigherij Comoediam*. William Warren Vernon, ed., Florence, 1887, III.

places both the *Montecchi* and the *Cappelletti* in Cremona. He is the first writer to mention hostilities between the two parties, having perhaps some inkling of their difference in political faith.<sup>28</sup>

(h) *Comento MS Tratto da Varj Chiosatori* (Barberiana de Roma)

*Fourteenth century*[?].—The above-mentioned commentary, which is cited by Alessandro Torri, represents the *Montecchi* and *Cappelletti* as hostile factions, after the manner of Francesco da Buti. The author makes the *Montecchi* Guelfs, and the *Cappelletti* Ghibellines.<sup>24</sup>

(i) *Anonimo Fiorentino*

*Late fourteenth or early fifteenth century*.—The *Anonimo Fiorentino*, abridging the commentary of Benvenuto da Imola, asserts that the *Montecchi* and *Cappelletti* were families allied against the Marquis of Este in Verona.<sup>25</sup>

(j) *Edizione Nidobeatina*

1478.—According to G. Brognoligo, the author of the *Edizione Nidobeatina* follows Peter Alighieri closely for the passage in question.<sup>26</sup> He seems influenced also by the language of Jacopo della Lana, as the following comparisons will show:

Qui . . . noma parte di Cremona per principio di Lombardia e parte d'Ancona per principio della Marca Anconitana.—Jacopo della Lana.<sup>27</sup>

Qui . . . Capelletti noma per parte di Cremona per principio di Lombardia. Monaldi e filippeschi noma in Orvieto per principio della marcha anconitana.—*Edizione Nidobeatina*.<sup>28</sup>

. . . in Cremona Cappelletti et Troncaciuffi; in Urbeveteri pars Monaldeschia et Philippesca; . . . —Peter Alighieri.<sup>29</sup>

(k) *Christoforo Landino*

1481.—For the passage under consideration, Christoforo Landino abridges the commentary of Benvenuto da Imola.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>24</sup> "In questi quattro ternari lo nostro autore seguendo la sua invettiva contra Alberto suddetto, particolarmente tocca li mali d'Italia, dicendo: *Viene a veder Montecchi e Cappelletti*: queste funno due parti così nominate le quali funno in Lombardia in Cremona, che tanto si inimiconno insieme che si redusseno a disfacimento, *Monaldi e Filippeschi*: queste funno due parti così nominate in de la Marca; cioè in Ancona, le quali al tempo de l'autore viveano in grande sospetto."—Da Buti, Francesco. *Comento di Francesco da Buti sopra la Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri*. Crescentino Giannini, ed., Pisa, 1860, II, p. 138.

<sup>25</sup> Cited by Alessandro Torri in his *Giulietta e Romeo*, Pisa, 1831, p. xviii.

<sup>26</sup> "*Montecchi e Cappelletti*. Furono due famiglie di Verona, che lungamente ebbono briga co' marchesi da Esti, et prima cacciarono loro di Verona et distecionli."—Anonimo Fiorentino. *Comento alla Divina Commedia d'Anonimo Fiorentino del Secolo XIV*. Pietro Fanfani, ed., Bologna, 1866-74, II, p. 107.

<sup>27</sup> Brognoligo, "Montecchi e Cappelletti . . ." *op. cit.*, p. 11, note 3. Cf. Brognoligo's *Studi di storia letteraria*, *op. cit.*, pp. 164, 167.

<sup>28</sup> Jacopo della Lana, *loc. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> *Edizione Nidobeatina*. *Alighieri Commedia con Commento*. Milan, 1478, fo. 97<sup>r</sup>. Cf. Brognoligo, *Studi*, *op. cit.*, p. 167 and note 3.

<sup>30</sup> Alighieri, Peter, *loc. cit.*

<sup>31</sup> "QUESTE furon due famiglie . . . lequali cacciarono Azzo Secondo Marchese di Ferrara, Governorator di Verona. Ma egli con favore de' Conti di San Bonifacio vinse, & ritornò in Verona. Monaldi' & Filippeschi due contrarie famiglie in Orvieto . . ."—

(l) *Alessandro Vellutello*

1544.—Alessandro Vellutello, as usual, repeats the statements of Christoforo Landino.<sup>81</sup>

(m) *Bernardino Daniello*

1568.—Following Benvenuto da Imola, Bernardino Daniello represents the *Montecchi* and *Cappelletti* as being allied families. He is the second commentator to speak of the *Cappelletti* as Ghibellines.<sup>82</sup>

We have now reviewed the early stages of the development of our legend, and the results may be summarized as follows:

The traditional conception of the *Montecchi* and the *Cappelletti* really begins with an obscure passage in Dante's *Purgatorio*, where, in one verse, the names of the factions are found for the first time in juxtaposition. In the verse immediately following, the poet places the names of the *Monaldi* and the *Filippeschi*, rival factions in Orvieto, in the province of Ancona.

Three interpretations for the passage presented themselves:

(a) The *Montecchi* and *Cappelletti* were allies, and probably Ghibellines, because they were described as *già tristi*, and hence were proper subjects for the Emperor's solicitude.

(b) The *Montecchi* of Verona and the *Cappelletti* of Cremona were early thirteenth-century examples of civil dissension, while the *Monaldi* and *Filippeschi* were early fourteenth-century examples of the same evil.

(c) The *Montecchi* and *Cappelletti* were hostile factions—or perhaps families—just as the *Monaldi* and *Filippeschi* were said by Villani to be rival families.

The conception of the *Montecchi* and *Cappelletti* as allies, first apparently suggested by Jacopo della Lana, was developed by Benvenuto da Imola, who originated the statement that the names in question belonged to families both residing in Verona. Benvenuto also drew from Paduan chronicles details of the conflict between Ezzelino de Romano and the Este family. His ideas were later adopted by Anonimo Fiorentino, Christoforo Landino, Alessandro Vellutello, and Bernardino Daniello.

Peter Alighieri was the first commentator to explain that the *Montecchi* were a faction at Verona, while the *Cappelletti* were a party at Cremona. The author of the *Codice Cassinese* copied

Landino, Christoforo. *Dante con l'Esposizione di Christoforo Landino e d'Alessandro Vellutello*. Francesco Sansovino Fiorentino, ed., Venice, 1596, p. 186.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>82</sup> Daniello, Bernardino. *Dante con l'Esposizione di M. Bernardino Daniello da Lucca*. Venice, 1568, p. 274.

him, while the author of the *Edizione Nidobeatina* amplified his statements, adopting at the same time some of the language of Jacopo della Lana. Peter Alighieri's explanation, although historically correct, proved the least popular of all.

The idea of hostility between the *Montecchi* and the *Cappelletti*, first suggested by Francesco da Buti, is found also in the *Comento MS Tratto da Varj Chiosatori*.

The foregoing summary is at variance with the views of previous writers, notably G. Brognoligo, in the following details which were of vital importance in the later development of the legend:

(a) The influential Benvenuto da Imola was the first Dante commentator to speak of the *Montecchi* and the *Cappelletti* as families, both residing at Verona.

(b) The notion of enmity between the *Montecchi* and the *Cappelletti* seems to have originated with Francesco da Buti.

In any case, it is notable that the commentators' misunderstandings regarding the *Montecchi* and the *Cappelletti* were all directly traceable to written sources, rather than to folklore.