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. The Cappelletti, as we have seen, were followers of the Pope, not of the Emperor, while the Montecchi did not become Ghibellines until 1232. 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.”

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.

1 “I Montecchi e i Cappelletti nominati da Dante... rappresentano... due delle diverse frazioni del partito ghibellino.” — Chiarini, Cino. Roma e Giulietta. Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1906, p. xiv. See Chapter I, note 33, 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.

2 Sec Gioachino Brognoligo, Studi di storia letteraria, Rome and Milan, 1904, p. 171, note 1.


4 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\(^5\) 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.\(^6\)

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\(^7\)—who were in a dubious situation because of their dissensions (e questi con sospetti).\(^8\)

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-

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\(^5\)Ibid., especially p. 9, note 1; p. 10, note 1; p. 11, notes 1 and 3; and p. 12.


\(^7\)Orvieto was in the province of Ancona. See Brognoligo, “Montecchi e Cappelletti nella Divina Commedia,” op. cit., p. 14, and note 3.

\(^8\)Ibid.
gnoligo also relies. 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. 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 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, while Dante's Virgil can lead the way readily to Mosca de' Lamberti, who precipitated a Florentine feud in 1215. 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.

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.

"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...


Ghisalberti cites Brognoligo's article on p. 194, note 1.)

9 Brognoligo cites Davidsohn's article on p. 194, note 1.)


11 Ibid., XXVIII, v. 109.

12 See Appendix to "Antonii Godi Nobilis Vicentini Chronica," in L. A. Muratori Rerum Italicarum Scriptores, Milan: Typographia Societatis palatinae, 1727, VIII, cols. 91, 92: "Hae sunt familiae, quae in Civitate nostra Nobilis erami, et iia extinciae ut de eis vis mancat memoria." Among these "families" were mentioned the Comites Monticuli Praecalcini, 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 Praecalcini, ex quibus nati sunt Comites de Sancto Bonifacio, et Domus Monticulorum qui potest 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. Apparently the first-named factions were allies, in his opinion, although they might have been taken to be enemies.

(b) **Ottimo Commento**

1334.—The *Ottimo Commento* here follows literally Jacopo della Lana.

(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.

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 Barbaras.

(d) **Codice Cassinese**

Middle of fourteenth century.—The author of the *Codice Cassinese* follows closely the commentary of Peter Alighieri.

**Footnotes**

16 "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 Allegheeri 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.

17 See Brognoligo, *Studi di storia letteraria*, op. cit., p. 167.


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 Guelf 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.\(^{20}\)

(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.\(^{21}\) 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.\(^{22}\)

(g) Francesco da Buti

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

\(^{20}\) "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 'impératore.'—Villani, Giovanni. Cronica. Florence, 1823, IV, Bk. ix, Chap. xl, p. 34; cf. VI, Bk. xi, Chap. xxxv, p. 153.


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.  

(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.

(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.

(j) Edizione Nidobeatina  

1478.—According to G. Brognoligo, the author of the Edizione Nidobeatina follows Peter Alighieri closely for the passage in question. 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.

Qui . . . Capelletti noma per parte di Cremona per principio di Lombardia. Monaldi e Filippeschi noma in Orvieto per principio della marcha anchonitana.—Edizione Nidobeatina.

. . . in Cremona Cappelletti et Troncaciuffi; in Urbveterei pars Monaldeschia et Filippesca; . . . —Peter Alighieri.

(k) Christoforo Landino  

1481.—For the passage under consideration, Christoforo Landino abridges the commentary of Benvenuto da Imola.


24 Cited by Alessandro Torri in his Giulietta e Romeo, Pisa, 1831, p. xviii.


27 Jacopo della Lana, loc cit.


29 Alighieri, Peter, loc. cit.

30 "QUESTE furon due famiglie . . . lequali cacciarono Azzo Secondo Marchese di Ferrara, Governator di Verona. Ma egli con favore de' Conti di San Bonifacio vinse, & ritornò in Verona. Monaldi & Filippeschi due contrarie famiglie in Orvieto . . . "—
EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

(1) Alessandro Vellutello
1544.—Alessandro Vellutello, as usual, repeats the statements of Christoforo Landino.\(^8\)

\(m\) 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.\(^9\)

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

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\(^9\) Ibid., p. 187.
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.