Giovanni Boccaccio is by consent one of the outstanding factors in the development of our legend. Critics tend to distinguish, however, between his dominant stylistic influence, which was exerted directly, and his supposedly vaguer influence on the Romeo plot which, it is alleged, was exerted indirectly.

Let us first examine very briefly the matter of stylistic influence, about which there is no disagreement. Typical is the remark of the late Henri Hauvette who said, in describing the style of Luigi da Porto, the first novelliere to mention the Montecchi and Cappelletti: "sa prose . . . dérive en droite ligne de Boccace." In similar vein, J. J. Munro commented upon the direct imprint of Boccaccio upon the prose of all the novellieri treating the Romeo and Juliet theme.

We may turn now to the consideration of Boccaccio’s influence on the Romeo plot, which, in the so far unchallenged opinion of J. J. Munro, was exerted in a roundabout manner and disappeared from sight for a time like a lost river. To avoid possible misunderstanding, I am quoting verbatim Munro’s conclusion, reached after summarizing at length first the Filostrato, or Troilus and Cressida story, and then Boccaccio’s earlier romance, the Filocolo.

It seems probable that these two stories, told by Boccaccio, passed, with others, into popular tales and gave rise to the legends which culminated in Romeo, and which, in their literary expression, came again under the direct influence of Boccaccio. Similar popular stories, which must have abounded in mediaeval Italy, were widely circulated in different forms by such people as the archer Pellegrino of Da Porto, and such evidence as we have tends to show that at an early date the Romeo legend was widespread in Italy.

The emphasis which Munro thus lays upon shadowy and as
yet undiscovered “popular stories” indicates that, like many of his contemporaries, he was still under the spell of the primitivism of Herder. I hope to show, in the first place, that Boccaccio’s influence on the *Romeo* legend was generally as direct for plot devices as it was for “literary expression.” In the second place, I shall try to demonstrate that this influence came principally from the *Decameron*, which Munro treats in a footnote, rather than from the *Filocolo*, and least of all from the *Filostrato*. For the present, however, nothing more will be attempted than to dispose briefly of the *Filostrato*, which I regard as unimportant for our purpose, and to make short introductory analyses of the plots of the *Filocolo* and of certain *novelle* in the *Decameron*.

Regarding the *Filostrato* Munro states: “The parallelism between this story and *Romeo* is too apparent to require pointing out.” Nevertheless, aside from the fact that both the *Filostrato* and the *Romeo* story may be classed as “separation romances,” it is difficult to detect much resemblance between them. To be sure, in the *Filostrato* there is parental interference with the union of the lovers, but this hindrance comes only from one side—from Calchas, father of the heroine Griseida—and does not even cause, directly or indirectly, the final estrangement of the lovers. An even more striking divergence from the *Romeo* plot is that when the parting moment arrives, it is Troilus, the hero, not Griseida, who is really afraid that Calchas will marry his daughter to another man. In fact, the fickle Griseida soon falls in love with Diomedes, and thus bears no resemblance whatever to Giulietta, who tells Fra Lorenzo that in order to be faithful to Romeo, and avoid marriage with the Conte di Lodrone (Shakespeare’s County Paris), she would fearlessly pass through Hell.

We may turn now to Boccaccio’s first novel, *Il Filocolo*, which is the tale of Florio and Biancofiore, derived from the French *Floire et Blanchefleur* story, of which the *chantefable Aucassin et Nicolette* is a variant. Florio and Biancofiore fall in love at Marmorina (Verona), and are parted as a result of the interfer-
ence of the hero's father, the pagan king Felice. In a second attempt to separate the lovers, Felice sells Biancofiore to the "admiral" of the Sultan of Babylonia, telling Florio that she is dead. When Florio, blinded by grief, wishes to follow his beloved into the tomb, his mother confesses the cruel hoax which has been perpetrated upon him. After much difficulty, he is reunited with Biancofiore in Alexandria.

Elements of this story which were destined to reappear in later versions were the parental opposition to the marriage of the lovers; the false report of the death of the heroine; the hero's impulse to commit suicide; trips by the lovers to Alexandria; and, curiously, their childhood spent in Verona. Yet it must be admitted that all these elements, except perhaps the last, might well have been taken not from the *Filocolo*, but from some of the earlier stories.

The *Filocolo*, however, contains within its framework a tale of premature burial which, because of its literary expression and also because of certain details, has a much more obvious connection with the *Romeo* legend. We read that Florio, during his long journey to Alexandria in search of Biancofiore, is forced by a tempest to stop at Naples. Outside the city, he finds a chosen band in a garden, who amuse themselves by propounding and answering thirteen questions concerning love, usually beginning with an illustrative anecdote. The *novella* preceding the thirteenth question may be summarized thus:

A wealthy gentleman has married a young and very beautiful woman. She is loved by a knight residing in the same city, but does not reciprocate his affection. Discouraged, he departs, but a messenger informs him that the lady has died in childbirth. He resolves to steal from her dead body the kiss which she refused him while she yet lived. Returning to the city, he waits for nightfall, and then goes in the darkness to the lady's tomb, accompanied by a faithful servant. Opening the sepulcher, he enters, and as he takes the supposedly dead woman into his arms, he feels a weak movement of her pulse. The knight is so frightened that he leaves the sepulcher open, but manages to take the woman to his mother's house. There, by the aid of a great fire, circulation is restored in the benumbed limbs of the heroine. Another effective restorative is a great bath, to which powerful herbs are added. The heroine, reviving as a result of this skillful care, is told to be of good cheer, as she is in a safe place. She gives birth to a son.

After the narration of this novella, the absurd question follows: Which was greater, the loyalty of the knight, or the joy of the husband on recovering the wife and son, whom he had given up for dead?21

The same story reappears in the Decameron, the style being notably improved, and the insipid question being omitted. The Decameron version presents the following alterations: Names are given to the principal characters, the anonymous knight being called Messer Gentil de' Carisendi, the lady becoming Madonna Catalina (= Caterina), while her husband is Nicoluccio Caccianiinico. The “city” is identified as Bologna.22 Omitted are some, but not all, of the pornographic details found in the Filocolo version, as well as the reference to the numerous medicinal herbs added to the restorative bath, not to mention a number of other details.23 The Decameron version is not only more concise in places, but also more vivid. We may compare, for instance, the indirect discourse used in the Filocolo to report the heroine’s words uttered when she recovers consciousness24 with the direct discourse employed in the Decameron.25

Boccaccio’s tale of Madonna Catalina and Gentil Carisendi seems to have been directly imitated to some extent by Luigi da Porto, and to a much greater degree by Da Porto’s model, Masuccio Salernitano. Boccaccio also helped to popularize the premature burial motif by his farcical story of Rinuccio Palermini and Alessandro Chiarmontesi, lovers of Madonna Francesca de’ Lazzari.26 This tale, however, does not appear to have had any direct connection with the Romeo plot.

Not only premature burials, but also sleeping potions, form the subjects of a number of tales in the Decameron. Notable is the story of Ferondo, to whom an abbot administers a powder in a glass of wine. Almost immediately after drinking this potion, and while still standing, Ferondo becomes drowsy, and soon falls

21 Ibid., p. 117.
23 Boccaccio, Il Decamerone, op. cit., p. 353.
25 “. . . onde la donna risentendosi cominciò a chiamare la madre di lei, doman­ dando ove ella fosse.” —Ibid.
27 Ibid., Ninth Day, First Tale.
to the ground, remaining apparently dead for three days. Features of this story which reappear in the Thirty-Third Tale of Masuccio’s Novellino are the nature of the potion, which is a powder rather than a beverage; the exact duration of the semblance of death—three days; the instant action of the drug; and the character of the vicious priest who plans the whole affair, and removes the body of the victim by night, aided by a companion.

Munro lists the clandestine entrance of Romeo into Juliet’s chamber by means of a ladder as an episode “probably foreign” to the main sources of the legend. By way of comparison, he mentions the “ladder incidents” in Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso (Ginevra episode), Canto V, and Matteo Bandello’s novella of Timbreo di Cardona and Fenicia Lionata. Yet as we shall see later, the “ladder incident” in Romeo and Juliet is derived not from Ariosto, but goes back to the anonymous author of the story of Ippolito e Leonora—who in turn was probably influenced by Boccaccio’s tale of Ricciardo Manardi—who reaches the balcony of Caterina da Valbona “collo ajuto d’una scala.”

One of the most important elements in the Romeo legend is the heroine who expires on the body of her lover, who has already committed suicide because of frustrated love. As G. Brognoligo pointed out, this element is found in Boccaccio’s tale of Girolamo, the lover of Salvestra. Girolamo’s mother and sole surviving parent is opposed, for financial reasons, to his betrothal to Sal-
vestra. He is therefore sent away to Paris; when he finally is allowed to return, he discovers that Salvestra has married during his absence. At last being convinced that Salvestra no longer loves him, Girolamo heroically commits suicide by holding his breath. At the church funeral, Salvestra falls dead on his body.\footnote{Boccaccio, \textit{Il Decamerone}, op. cit., Fourth Day, Eighth Tale. Cf. Brognoligo, \textit{Studi di storia letteraria}, Rome and Milan, 1904, p. 71 and note 1; cf. also Rotunda, \textit{op. cit.}, T81.3.}

Somewhat similar is the tale of the wife of Messer Guiglielmo Rossiglione, who commits suicide as soon as she learns that her lover, Guiglielmo Guadastagno, has been killed.\footnote{Boccaccio, \textit{Il Decamerone}, op. cit., Fourth Day, Ninth Tale.}

For convenience, the principal passages in the \textit{Filocolo} and the \textit{Decameron} to which reference has been made are here placed together:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{(a)} ... ma poichè così è avvenuto, quello che Amore nella vita di lei non mi volle concedere ora ch'elP è morta non mi potrà negare, che certo, s'io dovesi morire, la faccia che io tanto viva amai ora morta converrà che io baci.\footnote{Boccaccio \textit{II Filocolo}, op. cit., p. 113.}
  \item \textit{(b)} ... io, mentre che vivesti, mai un solo sguardo da te aver non potei: per che ora, che difender non ti potrai, convien per certo che, così morta come tu se', io alcun bacio ti tolga.\footnote{Boccaccio, \textit{Il Decamerone}, op. cit., II, p. 354.}
  \item \textit{(c)} ... e con pietoso pianto dolendosi cominciò a baciare la donna, e a recarlosi in braccio: ... e ... con debile movimento sentì li debili polsi muoversi alquanto.\footnote{Boccaccio, \textit{Il Filocolo}, loc. cit.}
  \item \textit{(d)} ... e più volte con molte lagrime piangendo il baciò ... gli parve sentire alcuna cosa battere il cuore a costei.\footnote{Boccaccio, \textit{Il Decamerone}, loc. cit.}
  \item \textit{(e)} ... egli e il compagno a casa della madre di lui tacitamente la ne portarono, ... a quivi fatti accendere grandissimi fuochi, i freddi membri venne riconfortando, a’ quali però non debitamente tornavano le perdute forze: per la qual cosa egli forse in ciò discreto fece un solenne bagno apparecchiare, nel quale molte e virtuose erbe fece mettere, ... \footnote{Boccaccio, \textit{Il Filocolo}, loc. cit.}
  \item \textit{(f)} ... con un suo famigliare montato a cavallo, ... Era quivi la madre di lui ... la qual, ... di pietà mossà, chetamente con grandissimi fuochi e con alcun bagno in costei rivocò la smarrita vita.\footnote{Boccaccio, \textit{Il Decamerone}, op. cit., II, pp. 354-55.}
  \item \textit{(g)} ... cominciò a chiamare la madre di lei, domandando ove ella fosse, ... \footnote{Boccaccio, \textit{Il Filocolo}, loc. cit.}
\end{itemize}
27

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(h) ... gittò un gran sospiro e disse: Oimè! ora ove sono io?  
(i) ... e ritrovata una polvere di maravigliosa virtù, ...  
(j) ... e di questa tanta presane che a fare dormir tre giorni sufficiente fosse, ...  

(k) Il quale non durò guari che, lavorando la polvere, a costui venne un sonno subito e fiero nella testa, tale che stando ancora in piè s’addormentò, e addormentato cadde.  

(l) Ricciardo ... collo ajuto d’una scala salì sopra un muro, e poi d’in su quel muro appiccadossì a certe morse d’un altro muro, con gran fatica e pericolo, se caduto fosse, pervenne in su’l verone, dove chetamente con grandissima festa dalla giovane fu ricevuto; ...  

(m) ... deliberò di più non vivere; e ristretti in sè gli spiriti, senza alcun motto fare, chiuse le pugna, allato a lei si morì ...  

83 Ibid., I, p. 277.  
84 Ibid.  
85 Ibid.  
87 Ibid., I, p. 365.