IV

THE NOVELLA OF "IPPOLITO E LEONORA"

It has been observed that Francesco da Buti, whose com­mentary appeared in 1380, seems to have made the first clear reference to the supposed hostility between the Montecchi and the Cappelletti. With possibly one other exception—the obscure Comento MS Tratto da Varj Chiosatori—no further mention of such a feud is found until 1530, the date of the first edition of Luigi da Porto’s "Giulietta e Romeo."

On the other hand, factional disturbances were of frequent occurrence in Italian cities during the latter part of the Middle Ages, and often received literary treatment. It is therefore not surprising that the legend of the Montecchi and the Cappelletti should eventually have become confused with the more or less authentic accounts of family quarrels, of the sort that any Italian city could furnish. 1

Both in history and in legend, the Buondelmonte family was especially noted for chronic clan warfare. The story of their quarrel with the Amidei, to which Dante refers twice, 2 is vouched for by Giovanni Villani, and placed first among the novelle of Matteo Bandello. 3 In 1200, the Buondelmonti clashed with the powerful Ubaldini family. 4 Some of the Buondelmonti are also mentioned as being arrayed against the Giandonati, while all of them seem to have joined forces against the Cavalcanti. 5 Somewhat later, according to the story of Ippolito e Leonora, their chief antagonists were—or had become—the famous house of Bardi. 6


2 Dante Alighieri. La Divina Comedia. Paradiso, XVI, vv. 136-47; Inferno, XXVIII, vv. 103-11, especially 106-8.


6 Members of the Bardi family were reputed to have been successful bankers as early
The "Istorietta Amorosa fra Leonora de' Bardi e Ippolito Buondelmonte" is an anonymous fifteenth-century novella.6

As the story goes, so great is the hostility between the Bardi and the Buondelmonti that the chiefs of each faction always go accompanied by 300 armed men. The eighteen-year-old Ippolito Buondelmonte and the fifteen-year-old Leonora de' Bardi see each other at a fête, and fall in love at sight. Ippolito, who follows Leonora at a respectful distance, learns that she is a daughter of the Bardi.

Leonora, when she enters her house, gives Ippolito an amorous nod, as a Parthian shot. Watching him from her window, she then learns of his identity from a neighbor. With laments over her bad fortune, she bewails the ancient discord between the two families.9

Ippolito, even more disconsolate than Leonora, loses sleep and appetite. Formerly a handsome, witty, carefree Florentine youth, he becomes in a short time a melancholy, pale, thin creature, more dead than alive. In desperation, his mother demands a confession from him, invoking his filial gratitude.10 He obstinately refuses to reveal his secret.11 As a last resort, she threatens him with her malediction, and he breaks down.12

Signora dei Buondelmonti, although deploring her son's choice, is above all other things a mother. She promises to promote a meeting of the lovers. To that end, she calls on the mother superior of the convent of Monticelli, who is the maternal aunt of Leonora. The sympathetic abbess allows Ippolito to visit her Sunday evening, and invites a number of girls to be present, among whom is her niece Leonora.18

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6 Published with the "Opere Minor" of Leon Battista Alberti, Anicio Bonucci, ed., Florence, 1845, III, pp. 275-94.
7 See my article entitled, "Did L. B. Alberti Write the Istorietta Amorosa fra Leonora de' Bardi e Ippolito Buondelmonte?" Italicca, XIX (1942), pp. 49-51.
9 Ibid., ed., op. cit., p. 279.
12 Ibid., p. 283.
At the reception, the abbess arranges a tryst for the lovers. The following night, on promise of good conduct, Ippolito is to be permitted to conceal himself behind a curtain in the room of the unwitting Leonora. At the appointed hour Leonora, believing herself alone, confesses aloud her love for Ippolito. When she falls asleep at last, she dreams that she is embracing him, and calls to him in her slumber. Ippolito, forgetting his pledge, kisses her. She awakens, badly frightened. He says that he will die if she screams, offering her a dagger with which to stab him, if she so desires.

They fall into each other’s arms. Leonora declares that her father would kill her if he knew that she loved Ippolito. As a public marriage ceremony is out of the question, she suggests that she visit secretly in her room, at the Bardi house. Friday night he is to place a rope ladder at the foot of her window, which opens on the street. She will drop a string, to which Ippolito can attach the rope ladder. She will then pull the apparatus up to her room, and tie it to an iron bar.

Before granting this rendezvous, she insists upon carrying out an improvised wedding, in which without priest or witnesses, they swear mutual fidelity.

Friday evening Ippolito, placing his rope ladder in a large cap, goes punctually to meet Leonora. Unfortunately, his actions arouse the suspicions of a passing constable, who follows him. Ippolito flees, but his cap falls from his head, and the presence of the telltale rope ladder is revealed. The constable, who is now convinced that Ippolito is a thief, demands an explanation of his conduct. Ippolito, to protect Leonora’s good name, admits that robbery has been his motive. He is brought before the podesta who, although favorably impressed by the youth’s good looks and gentlemanly demeanor, is obliged to detain him.

Leonora waits in vain. Her worst fears are confirmed when she hears her father, Messer Amerigo de’ Bardi, tell of Ippolito’s arrest for robbery.

By order of the podesta, Ippolito’s father is summoned. The young man stoutly refuses to answer his parent’s questions, lest he betray Leonora. Reluctantly the podesta is compelled to order the execution bell rung.

As a final concession, Ippolito is allowed to pass before the Bardi house, ostensibly to apologize for his attempted crime. When Leonora catches sight of him, she descends a ladder, seizes the reins of the constable’s horse, and declares that Ippolito is not to be executed while

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14 Ibid., p. 287. For the rope-ladder motif, see Rotunda, op. cit., K1348.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., p. 291. This bell, in the Torre di S. Apollinare, annexed to the Bargello, or Palazzo del Podestà, was completed in 1381. It served, among other purposes, to announce public executions, and has not been in use since 1849.
she lives. With hair disheveled, she throws her arms around Ippolito's neck.

The lovers are now brought before the Signori, and Leonora announces that Ippolito is her rightful husband, who was merely paying her a conjugal visit.

Ippolito is acquitted, and a reconciliation of the Bardi and Buondelmonti follows.\textsuperscript{18}

There was also an anonymous verse redaction of this popular Italian prose tale, entitled \textit{Il Pietoso Caso d'Ippolito e Dianora}.\textsuperscript{19}

Features of the tale of \textit{Ippolito e Leonora} which seem consequential in the later development of the Romeo and Juliet legend are the following: The rival families have armed factional followers; the youthful lovers meet at a \textit{fête}, and fall in love at sight; they lament inconsolably after learning each other's identity; Ippolito loses sleep, appetite, and good looks; his solicitous mother is unable at first to elicit an answer regarding his secret affair; a conniving abbess, replacing the corrupt friar in other versions, aids the lovers; Ippolito overhears a confession of love by Leonora; the heroine invites Ippolito to climb to her bedchamber by means of a rope ladder, perhaps suggested by the ladder used by Boccaccio's hero Ricciardo Manardi;\textsuperscript{20} there is a secret wedding, not only without witnesses as in other versions, but in this case also without a priest; the hero, attempting to see the heroine, arouses suspicion and is arrested as a thief; he is brought before the podesta and condemned to death; the rival families are reconciled.

\textit{(a)} . . . parti ricchissime e . . . nella inimicizia vecchia assai crudelmente insanguinate, per modo che nè messer Amerigo nè messer Buondelmonte ardivano d'andare con manco di trecento persone ben armate, . . . \textsuperscript{21}

\textit{(b)} Di che essendo già Leonora d'anni quindici, e andando il dì di Santo Giovanni a vedere la festa, e trovandosi Ippolito il quale era d'anni diciotto ancora lui in Santo Giovanni, gli venne risguardata la fanciulla la quale per ventura guardava lui. È siccome si scontraro con gli occhi, . . . l'uno dell'altro fortemente s'innamorò.\textsuperscript{22}

\textit{(c)} . . . Ippolito la seguitava assai onestamente un poco di lontano; intanto che lui conobbe lei essere figliuola del loro capitale nemico. La
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fanciulla...fattasi alla finestra, vedendo Ippolito, domandò una vicina che lui fusse. Intese come lui era figliuolo di messer Buondelmonte Buondelmonti, della qual cosa ella assai ne fu dolente e grama;...

(d) (Lament of Leonora): "O iniqua e crudelissima fortuna nemica d'ogni piacere, come sofferisci tu che tante pene in me alberghi e riposil...Oh dispietata sorte!...perchè tanta asprezza, perchè tanta crudeltà ne' cuori dell' nostri padri!..."

(e) E già essendogli venuto a noia il cibo, si mutò tutto di compassione in modo, che dove egli era il più allegro, festivo, lieto, giocondo, faceto Giovane di Firenze, più bello più fresco e universale, in breve tempo divenne melanconico, magro, solitario, pallido doloroso e saturnino più che altro della città. E in fine, mancandogli li sentimenti naturali, divenia di giorno in giorno più simile ad uomo morto che vivo;...

(f) Ippolito essendo dietro alla cortina, vedeva e udìa ogni cosa;...

(g) E perchè tu non creda che io amì te con manco vigore che tu me, sappi che io sto in una camera, sola, la quale ha una finestra che risponde sopra la strada. E perchè altro partito non c'è al nostro amore, tu verrai venerdì notte alle cinque ore con una scala di corda a piè della finestra, e attaccherai la scala a quel filo che tu troverai pendere della finestra, ed io tirerò su'il capo della scala e appiccherò al ferro della finestra, e tu allora sicuramente te ne verrai su per la scala in camera,

(h) Ma prima che di qui partiamo, voglio che a fede l'uno dell'altro ci promettiamo di non torre altra mogliera o marito.

(i) ...la maladetta fortuna gli apparecchiò uno strano caso, e questo fu che il Cavaliere del Podestà,...vedendo Ippolito, cominciò a seguitarlo. E fuggendo lui, la berretta gli cadde, dove'l Cavaliere veduta la scala, cominciò più volenteroso a seguitarlo dubitando che non fusse qualche ladro;...

(j) E'l Podestà...volentieri non arebbe voluto che gli fusse capitato alle mani, vedendo la sua umanitate, bellezza e infinita gentilezza.

(k) ...lui sarà giustiziato come rubatore.