

ARTISTS AND AUTHORS IN SACCHETTI'S NOVELLE

The immense richness of the themes and different motifs that alternate in an uncontrolled and absolutely unpredictable manner throughout Franco Sacchetti's *Trecentonovelle*, making it extremely difficult to group them together in terms of theme, correspond to a great variety of different characters, each with his or her own individuality, united only by the common characteristics of an unassuming personality, without grand ideals or passions, trying to live from day to day and moved by interests that are eminently practical.

Sacchetti himself makes reference to this particular category of characters in the *Proemio* (Preface), when he warns the reader that in his short tales (*novelle*) "si tratterà di diverse condizioni di genti, come di 're e principi e' marchesi e conti e cavalieri, e di 'uomeni' grandi e piccoli, e così di grandi donne, mezzane e minori e d'ogni altra generazione" ("we are going to talk about different kinds of people and their status, like kings and princes, marquises, earls and knights; and about men, great men and common men, and about women, great or common women belonging to every condition of life")¹ [*Trecentonovelle*,1].

Thus, the author makes it very clear that all the contemporary social strata appear or are represented in his work. However, the immense majority of anonymous people that are dealt with, sometimes naive and sometimes shrewd, sceptical and superstitious, alert and absent-minded, form a part of a well-defined social class of which Sacchetti makes himself the interpreter and faithful narrator. What Massimo Miglio defines as the "choral presence of an urban multitude" (Miglio, 184) represents the multifarious reality of Tuscan society in the second half of the *Trecento*; each character has a distinct role as protagonist, co-protagonist or simple extra within a municipal reality for which the Florentine writer makes himself the spokesman and distinguishes his work from that of his master, Boccaccio. Any psychological dimension is totally absent in Sacchetti's characters, all of whom lack any complex or profound psychological profile. Not one has survived in the memory of the reader, and the critics have always preferred to discuss "types" rather than true protagonists. As Muscetta points out, we are facing a

¹All citations in English are my translation.

carousel of anonymous, unknown figures who are nothing more than shadows (Muscetta, 513).

In spite of this, the presence of certain social categories which Sacchetti characterizes with special care and attention is observed: figures pertaining to artistic and literary circles are dealt with, acquiring a special importance within the narrative. If Sacchetti's interest in the second of these groups is, as seems obvious, due to the fact that he includes himself within the same category, it is also certain that the position he assumes in the field of the artistic world is equally important, although undoubtedly not as well-known. In the period when he writes his compilation of *novelle*, Sacchetti is involved actively with the production of important symbolic works, both religious and lay.² According to Simon, since Dante, the figure of the artistic-artisan, and above all of the painter, slowly becomes the object of interest of Florentine literature and gives birth to a biographic-artistic literature that is best represented in the fourteenth century in the city of Florence. This fortunate literary genre begins with Filippo Villani, nephew of Giovanni, who in his work *De origine civitatis Florentia et eiusdem famosis civibus* mentions, among the most eminent Florentine citizens, famous painters such as Giotto y Cimabue and their disciples Maso, Stefano and Taddeo (Simon, 452).

Nevertheless, the interest in symbolic art is not only reflected in the vast literary production of the principal chroniclers of the period but also in the pages of the great writers such as Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, as well as in the work of Sacchetti himself.³ Through these writers, the place that artists of the magnitude of Giotto occupy can be observed in the literary panorama of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, and above all, in the advanced urban context as seen in the Florentine society. As Castelnovo observes in his Introduction to the work of Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, this new taste for symbolic art is developed thanks to an important phenomenon of secularization by which this art may satisfy objectives that are no longer exclusively religious and magical (Kris & Kurz, IX). Moreover, the fact that in the *novelle* of the *Decameron* the representations of the great painters such as Giotto and Buffalmacco in the role of protagonist is an important indicator of an awakening popular interest in these artists.

Yet, in the *Trecentonovelle*, a slightly different posture towards the

²See Lucia Battaglia Ricci's interesting book *Palazzo Vecchio e dintorni. Studio su Franco Sacchetti e le fabbriche di Firenze*, listed in Works cited. Concerning Sacchetti's artistic interests and his active role within the painting world see also Anita Simon, 443-479.

³For some observations concerning the presence of the figurative arts in Tuscan literature see also Laura Carlucci's article, listed in Works cited.

representation of the painters can be appreciated if we compare them with that of Boccaccio in the *Decameron*. Unlike the author of Certaldo, it does not seem to interest Sacchetti to stress importance and fame, and all of the painters who appear in the *Trecentonovelle*, including such great names as Giotto, Buffalmacco, and Cimabue, stand out much more for their inventiveness and wit than for their recognized artistic ability.⁴

"Che maledetto sia chi mai maritò nessuna femina ad alcuno dipintore, che siete tutti fantastichi e lunatichi, e sempre andate inebbriando e non vi vergognate!" ("A curse upon anyone who gave a woman in marriage to a painter, as they all have such a strong and moody temperament and they all live in such a condition of alienation and pleasure without feeling ashamed of it!") [*Trecentonovelle*, LXXXIV, 171]. This brief eulogy is uttered by the wife of Mino, the painter of crucifixes, who is known for his portraits of ever-drunken lunatics. Sacchetti opts for converting these "fantastic and lunatic" men into the protagonists of his various *novelle*, especially the *novelle* of *beffa* (tricks) and of *motto*, where they often play the role of *beffatore* and stand out for their verbal skills in using ingenious phrases to their best advantage.

Another example of the inventiveness which characterizes all of the painters is found in the *novella* CLXX, where the painter Bartolo Goggi, described in the same way as most of them as a "new man" and a great drinker, quarrels with a client over the decor of a room. Confronting the dissatisfaction and anger of the client, he closes the argument with an ingenious response that manages to justify the limited presence of the birds painted round the trees,⁵ playing with the "magical" duplicity that is created between the painted image on the wall and reality.

The immense, multicoloured group of characters portrayed in this composition of Florentine society during the last decades of the fourteenth century are described in the *Trecentonovelle* and great painters such as Giotto and Buffalmacco, whose many and renowned frescos are conserved in the churches of Florence, among them. To them Sacchetti dedicates numerous *novelle*, the majority of which are openly comical

⁴The only exception found in the *novella* CXXXVI, whose theme is one of the most common in medieval literature: a woman's vanity and her fictitious beauty. To criticize the feminine attitude Sacchetti invents a meeting of the grand figures of pictorial art of his period, as Andrea Ocagna and Taddeo Gaddi, that argue over who could be the best Tuscan painter after Giotto. In the end, they all will agree to assert that the best women painters of all times are Florentine women.

⁵According to Simon's information, a fashionable custom existed during the period, according to which the bedrooms were painted to decorate them, above the wallpaper, with some leafy trees surrounded by multicoloured birds. See Anita Simon, 455.

and tend to highlight the sense of humour and wit that characterizes these painters.

This is the theme of *novella* LXIII, which focuses on the commission by a modest artisan and given to Giotto to paint a coat of arms with his insignia. The painter, and through him the author too, decides to punish the presumptuousness of this little man who aspires to boast with imaginary heraldic symbols as if he were to be treated like the King of France, and paints absurd and ludicrous objects on the coat of arms: iron gauntlets, a pair of cuirasses, a pair of bracers, a sword, a lance, a knife, etc. The artisan sues Giotto, but he is acquitted thanks to a shrewd speech that succeeds in convincing the judge of his innocence. A similar motive is also found in *novella* LXXV, where Giotto's responses provoke laughter in all of his friends. Sacchetti himself concludes the *novella* reminiscing about Giotto's witty sayings "uomo virtuoso e maestro d'ogni cosa" ("a great man with many virtues") which are recounted for quite a long period of time in the city.

The other great painter portrayed in the compilation is Buffalmacco, already present in the numerous *novelle* of the *Decameron* (VIII 3, 6, 9 and IX 3, 5) where he was responsible for many a bad joke at other peoples' expense, and who here appears as the protagonist of four *novelle* (CLXI, CLXIX, CXCI, CXCII). Once again, we are referring to a small group of short stories that appear in discontinuous form within the work. Consequently, at the beginning of *novella* CXCI Sacchetti justifies his decision to reintroduce a character who appeared previously (CXCI, 434). The writer considers the character of Buffalmacco too important to condense all of his merits in just one *novella* and feels the need to explain to his readers the reason behind his decision, in accordance with his will to establish a continuous dialogue between himself and his audience.

However, among the "new things" and the merits of this "new man" the author refers to, very few have anything to do with the prestige and artistic fame of Buffalmacco. Now, the reference to the Florentine painter's abilities are limited to a succinct initial presentation where Sacchetti defines him as "grandissimo maestro e buono artista della sua arte" ("a great master and a talented artist"). In fact, what emerges from an attentive reading of the four *novella*, whose arguments appear to be some of the most original and amusing, is the image of an astute, intelligent man who loathes ignorance and is prone to pay those who try to swindle him with the same coin. In short, we are confronted with the prototype of the perfect *beffatore*. There are many ruses and jokes, both good and bad, with which Buffalmacco tries to punish those who, in his opinion, deserve punishing: an overly clever bishop (CLXI), the entire community of Perugia for their ignorance (CLXIX), a far too demanding master (CXCI) and, finally, a female neighbour who is too noisy (CXCII).

The subject matter of the first two *novelle* is the same: the fame a painter makes for himself when the bishop commissions him to paint the chapel of Arezzo, and when the people of Perugia send him to paint a crown of laurels on the head of Saint Ercolano, the patron saint of the city (CLXIX). The high-handed and ignorant attitude of the two clients will bring Buffalmacco to punish them by playing a dirty trick, employing in both cases the same tactic and the only weapon of vengeance that he possesses: his painter's brush. Both narrative development and the end of the two *novelle* are identical: an astute painter completely screens off his work with a partition, only allowing the work to be seen when he has finished. Thus, the two clients find themselves standing in front of paintings that are totally different to those they had commissioned, and the initial shock gives way to outrage and then to carrying out the order to have Buffalmacco banished from the city. Both cases concern two extremely offensive jokes that oppose the political and religious beliefs of those commissioning Buffalmacco. In the first case, Buffalmacco paints a lion (the symbol of the Guelphs) that is devouring an eagle (the symbol of the Hohenstaufens), knowing that the bishop belonged to the latter of the two factions. In the second *novella*, the devoted saint of the city of Perugia is portrayed wearing a garland of fish on his head. In the last two *novelle* dedicated to Buffalmacco, apart from his characteristic craftiness and cleverness, Sacchetti highlights another aspect of the character that has nothing to do with his artistic prowess: the artist's extreme laziness. With subtle, carefully set up and extremely comical tricks, played on an overly demanding master who tries to keep his disciple (Buffalmacco himself) painting through the night, and an unfortunate woman from the neighbourhood who makes a lot of noise every night at her spinning wheel, Buffalmacco will obtain the desired effect and will be able to fulfil his desire to sleep. As an example, not only of the shrewdness of the character, but also of Sacchetti's great narrative and descriptive ability, we want to pause momentarily on the first of the two *novelle*, number CXCI.

Buffalmacco must devise a plan to avoid fulfilling his master Tafo's wishes for him to wake up during the night in order to paint. The trick consists of fastening small candles to the backs of cockroaches so that at night they would scare the ingenuous Tafo, who would interpret them as signs of a demon. Behind this prank, brilliantly engineered by Buffalmacco, the sharp and rational explanation of the reason for such strange phenomena will convince his master never again to oblige him to paint throughout the night. Unlike other pranks present in the *Trecentonovelle*, whose development is limited to the essential, the *beffa* devised by Buffalmacco are really ingenious, as are all of those invented by this character. The painter knows how to carry the joke subtly to its end and Sacchetti describes the jokes in minute detail, pausing over

each gesture, each word, as a demonstration of the extreme lucidity and intelligence of his protagonist, who is capable of dominating the situation at every moment⁶ and converting himself into one of the most successful of Sacchetti's characters.

Clearly, we can now affirm that in the immense majority of cases the Florentine writer assigns the familiar painters a specific role in the *novelle*: witty and joking, due to the peculiar characteristics with which each are portrayed in the *Trecentonovelle*, the sense of humour, the gift of speech that often allows them to dominate a difficult situation by means of an opportune phrase, and above all, their great wit and inventiveness.

Consequently, we note that in the Sacchetti collection not only does the character of the artist-painter incarnate the form of the perfect *beffatore*, but he also shows characteristics of other popular literary figures: the buffoon and the man at court. In this context, it is interesting to note the curious detail that serves to confirm this point: in the famous work of the chronicler Filippo Villani, information about the Florentine painters was included along with that of the musicians and buffoons (Villani: 1997, 34-36).

The second social category that stands out among the multitude of distinct types in the pages of the *Trecentonovelle*, is that of the writers. We must begin with Sacchetti himself, whose presence is arrogantly felt after the Preface when he informs his readers that he will be the author of the compilation of *novelle*. Furthermore, still in the Preface and in reference to the stories to come, Sacchetti indicates that he will deal with "vicende che io vidi, e fui presente" ("I saw what happened, because I was there").

Throughout the *Trecentonovelle* the presence of the author as author and narrator, becomes constant and demonstrates the heavy responsibility that he feels towards his audience in his role as a witness to events. All of which is conveyed in the frequent use of phrases such as "io scrittore fui presente" ("I was there, as a writer") (XXI); "io scrittore già vidi" ("I had seen it already, as a writer") (CLXVI); "io scrittore trovandomi a Bologna" ("I was in Bologna, as a writer") (XXXVIII); "se

⁶The first step in devising the joke consists of finding the necessary objects: thirty cockroaches, needles and candles. The extreme care demonstrated in the choice of the necessary "material" to the execution of the plan is indicated by Sacchetti through the employment of diminutive forms, which contribute to emphasizing the precision of the operation carried out by Buffalmacco: "e trovato modo di avere certe agora [needles] sottile e piccole, e ancora certe candeluzze di cera, nella camera sua in una piccolo cassetina l'ebbe condotte" ("and after he managed to find such little, thin needles and then such little candles, he took the cockroaches to his room and put them in a drawer") [CXCI, 434].

io scrittore dico il vero, guardisi l'esempio" ("consider the example to see if I tell the truth, as a writer") (CXCII); "yo scrittore ne potrei far prova" ("I could give you some evidence, as a writer") (CXXIV); "fu ai miei dí, e io il conobbi" ("It was in my days, when I met him") (XCI), among others. The frequent use of these phrases becomes a true "rhetorical device" that, as Testa recalls, has its origin in the exemplary literature, where the formula for the *adestatio rei vise* guaranteed the authenticity of the deeds, adding credibility and authority and, consequently, filling the narrative with exemplary values.⁷

Throughout the *novelle* Sacchetti's voice is so repetitious and extensive that it becomes the backbone of the entire piece. It is a voice that unites one *novella* with another, which indicates the line of the text and the interpretation of the artistic signatures, and which very often intervenes with personal judgements. The constant presence of this voice, at times enjoyable, ironic, severe or sententious, dominates and controls the perfection of the mosaic of heterogeneous narrative that is the structure of the *Trecentonovelle*.

Sacchetti, the author, intends to reduce to a minimum the distance between himself and his readers, in the same way that the distance between himself and his characters is minimized when the author-narrator directly participates in the events he himself describes. In fact, sometimes the author's participation in the events he is narrating and his firm intention to involve himself in the first person brings him to identify completely with his characters. For example, this happens at the end of *novella* CXI, when his words are aimed at specifying his membership of a social category, that of authors, which until then he had only referred to in a very general way.⁸

The same responsibility that the author feels towards his readers, to which we have made a number of references, continues to exist between him and the characters in his *novelle*. The spatial proximity (Florence and the Tuscany region), temporal proximity (end of the 14th century) and environmental proximity (the municipal Florentine society) binds the writer to the small, anonymous "heroes" of his work, and this con-

⁷Testa makes mention, among others, of the Preface of the *Tractatus de Habundantia Exemplorum* by Humbert de Romans, where the religious affirm that a good *exemplum* has to have an authority (*auctoritas*) derived from the written sources, or from the unarguable honesty of their protagonists. However, another form so that the narrated episodes by the preachers acquired authority was through the demonstration of having been direct witnesses of said episodes. See Bruno Testa, 288.

⁸See Franco Sacchetti, 226. The syntactic error is only apparent, because the change in number of verbs (singular-plural) implies the identification of the character with the category.

tinuous communication is confirmed by Sacchetti himself in two undoubtedly significant exordia that demonstrate the responsibility with which the writer is invested: "Antonio Pucci, piacevole fiorentino, dicitore di molte cose in rima, m'ha pregato che io il descriva qui in una sua *novella*" ("Antonio Pucci, a fine man from Florence, who was able to say many things in rhyme, asked me to describe him and one of his jokes") [*Trecentonovelle*, CLXXV, 391]; "Uno contadino di Francia mi si fa innanzi a volere che io lo descriva in un suo sottile accorgimento" ("A farmer from France comes to me and asks me to talk about him") [*Trecentonovelle*, CXCIV, 447].

To transform himself into the protagonist of the *novella*, the author-narrator coincides with the actor in the story, occupying a preferential position within the narrative without relinquishing the pursuit of his moralistic purpose, through his continual presence in the exordia and epilogues of the *novelle*. Sacchetti takes the role of protagonist on four occasions (LXXI, CIV, CXII, CLI), which demonstrates all of his oratorical skills.

In *novelle* in which dialogue forms a major part, the intrusions of the author within the narrative are always manifested through phrases that serve to introduce the accredited opinion with which he manages to convince the rest of the listeners: "e io dissi", "e io risposi", "e io contraddicendo" ("and I said", "and I answered", "and I replied"). Once more making clear the great value that the writer attributes to the power of words, although his superiority is manifested here with some variants: assuming the role of the serious defender of reason (LXXI, CLI), or that of the narrator of stories that are so incredible they appear to be jokes (CIV), or even stories of a reveller, as in *novella* CXII where Sacchetti emphatically affirms that a person becomes fatter as a result of practicing sexual acts more often. His point of view is contrary to his colleagues who insist on the harmful effects of sleeping with women frequently. Despite dealing with different arguments, the four *novelle*, focus on the same motif: the taste for and pleasure of, conversation. On the other hand the gathering of the *piacevolezze* (pleasantries) constituted, without a doubt, a much appreciated pastime in its day.

Another illustrious writer it is necessary to mention is Giovanni Boccaccio, the exemplary writer recalled by Sacchetti in the Preface of the compilation: "e riguardando, in fine allo eccellente poeta fiorentino messer Giovanni Boccacci, il quale descrivendo il libro delle Cento *Novelle* [...], quanto al nobile suo ingegno quello è divulgato e richiesto per modo che infino in Francia e in Inghilterra l'hanno ridotto alla lor lingua" ("and looking at the magnificent poet from Florence, Giovanni Boccaccio, who created such a masterpiece with his book *Cento Novelle* [...], a great example of remarkable structure, complexity and thematic variety that was even translated into French and English") [*Trecentonovelle*, *Proemio*, 1].

The words that refer to the brilliant narrative success of Boccaccio must not deceive us. In fact, contrary to what we might expect after these affirmations, throughout the work we do not encounter either an explicit or implicit reference to the celebrated writer of Certaldo, although we do find a reference to his most famous work.

In *novella* XLIX, a judge who plays the secondary role in the development of the story is identified by Sacchetti as the brother of *messer* Nicola da San Lupino. Messer Nicola da San Lupino himself is another judge who appears in Boccaccio's book and whose underwear is removed by the buffoon Ribi (VIII, 5). In *novella* LXVII another reference to the eighth day of the *Decameron* appears, although this time he deals with a better known *novella* than the previous one (VIII, 3). Sacchetti's anecdote tells the story of how Messer Valore de Buondelmonti wanted to pose a riddle to a group of people he was conversing with, asking them which was the most precious stone in existence. Some said it was the ruby, others the sapphire, and others Calan-drino's heliotrope.⁹ This same character returns to be remembered at the end of *novella* LXXXIV, in the amusing scene where Mino's wife is hitting her husband and threatens to give him a worse beating than that which Calandrino's wife gave hers: "io ti concerò peggio che la Tessa non acconciò a Calandrino" ("I will give you a worse beating than that which Tessa gave Calandrino"), directly alluding to the *novella* of the *Decameron* (IX, 5).

We know that Sacchetti has no intention of imitating the style of Boccaccio, nor does he intend to utilize the same narrative material as his master, despite being familiar with the *Decameron*, as the references to the previous *novelle* would be recognized, but also the motifs and arguments of the *Decameron* that constitute the most immediate, nearest source of some of Sacchetti's *novelle*, as do the presence of some Boccaccio's characters. However, it seems easier to demonstrate that the limited interest that the disciple dedicates to Boccaccio's form is reflected in his decision not to include it in any of his *novelle*. In all probability, his mention in the *Proemio* represents just one form of expressing admiration for his illustrious predecessor, who had been converted into an obligatory point of reference not only for Sacchetti, but also for two other Tuscan *novellieri* from the end of the century: Giovanni Fiorentino and Giovanni Sercambi.

Another grand Florentine poet who, in contrast, receives a totally different treatment in the *Trecentonovelle*, is Dante Alighieri. Beyond the

⁹Calandrino was the Florentine painter Giovannozzo de Pierino's nickname. His exclusion from the section which we have dedicated to the painter's characters simply is due to the fact that, unlike the *Decameron*, he is the protagonist of numerous adventures along with his inseparable friends Bruno and Buffalmacco, in the work of Sacchetti his name appears only on this occasion.

classic phrases of circumstance, the numerous expressions of admiration on Sacchetti's part, as well as the quotes taken directly from the verses of the *Divine Comedy* that we find in the *novelle*¹⁰ demonstrate the great consideration and respect that Sacchetti felt for the "supreme poet". The character of Dante, furthermore, transforms into the protagonist of four *novelle* (VIII, CXIV, CXV, CXXI).

In the first of the *novelle*, the gift of speech and the wisdom of the Tuscan poet, whose "piacevole risposta" leaves a Genovese scientist satisfied that he had asked for advice about how to behave correctly with his beloved. This leads to a clever, wise response, as occurs with the *beffa* and the *motto*, and is transformed into the indicative expression of a specific feature of the protagonist.

Novelle CXIV and CXV are in the category of anecdotes and represent Sacchetti's explicit condemnation of all forms of ignorance. Both have the same narrative structure and are constructed around the same motif: the indignant and partly violent reaction of the poet towards those who ruin his verses. In the first, Dante destroys the workshop of a blacksmith, while in *novella* CXV he manages to hit a mule driver who is so ignorant that "non sapeva né chi fosse Dante" ("he did not even know who Dante was").

Undoubtedly, Sacchetti's decision to associate certain significant gestures with a character of the fame of Dante, whom Sacchetti considers an "honoured and strict" man, invests the story with a special value; more precisely, the conscience of the Florentine poet with respect to the importance of his profession, as well as the sensation of seeing his very own rights as an author trampled, transforms him into the most adequate character for the development of the anecdotes and the moral considerations that form the closure of the two *novelle*.

In the last *novella* dedicated to the author of the *Divine Comedy*, Sacchetti introduces the form of another man of literature, Antonio da Ferrara, one of the best court poets of the Italian *Trecento*. The motif is again that of the demonstration of the fame and admiration that Dante enjoyed among writers of the period, although in this case Sacchetti's narration verges on heresy. In the city of Ravenna, Antonio da Ferrara enters the church where the mortal remains of the "great poets" are conserved. Seeing a crucifix surrounded by a great number of candles, the poet picks them all up and leaves them at the feet of Dante's tomb, considering this to be more worthy than so much devotion to Christ. Interrogated in front of the archbishop concerning his heretical conduct,

¹⁰The references to the incomparable art of Dante, as well as to some of the characters in the *Divine Comedy* and to the verses of the work that Sacchetti decides to reproduce faithfully, or to paraphrase, appear in the *novelle* IV, XV, CLXXV, CXCIII, CCVIII, and CCX.

Antonio da Ferrara does not repent and continues defending his behaviour, providing reasons that will leave the archbishop himself perplexed:

“io gli levai quelli lumi e puosigli al sepulcro de Dante, il quale mi pareva che gli meriti più di lui; e se non mi credete, veggansi le scritture dell'uno e dell'altro. Voi giudicherete quelle di Dante esser meravigliose sopra natura a intelletto umano, e le cose evangeliche essere grosse e se pur ve n'avesse dell'altre e meravigliose, non è gran cosa che colui che vede il tutto e ha il tutto dimostri nelle scritture parte del tutto. Ma la gran cosa è che un uomo minimo come Dante, non avendo, non che il tutto, ma alcuna parte del tutto, ha veduto il tutto e ha scritto il tutto; e però mi pare che sia più degno di lui di quella luminaria, e a lui da quinci innanzi mi voglio raccomandare” (“I took the candles off the crucifix and put them in front of Dante's grave, as I thought he deserved them more; and if you do not believe me, compare the different literary productions of both. You will realise that Dante's is something beyond anything else written before, the highest expression of culture. The most important thing is that a common man like Dante managed to see everything through his own eyes, so that what he wrote was about what he saw, which means everything. And that is why I believe he deserves my full attention in order to commemorate such magnificence”). [*Trecentonovelle*, CXXI, 245].

Finally, we conclude by affirming that all of the details that are referred to in the Florentine poet's figure, the details that Sacchetti directly contributes as much as those that can be deduced from the *novelle* in which Dante plays the part of the protagonist, are intended to illustrate several other characteristics of the character, categorized within the well determined social group of the writers. As always occurs in the *Trecentonovelle*, what interests Sacchetti is not so much the individual himself but the category to which he belongs.

Nevertheless, if we took the works of some of the great biographers and chroniclers of the period as a point of reference, we would discover that not all shared praise along with the fame, sensibility and other talents with which Sacchetti characterizes Dante in his *novelle*. Taking a case in point, in the famous *Chronicles* of Giovanni Villani, which represent the oldest of the Dantesque biographies as Sacchetti very probably knew, Dante is depicted as a taciturn, presumptuous man who disdains ignorant people: “Questo Dante per lo suo saper fu alquanto presuntuoso e schifo e isdegnoso, e quasi a guisa di filosofo mal gizioso non bene sapea conversare co' laici” (“This man called Dante was rather presumptuous and was spreading his knowledge and his religious imagination around, in a way as if he posed as a philosopher who was not able to talk with laymen”) (Villani: 1991, 337)¹¹. This is one charac-

¹¹On this subject see also Marziano Guglielminetti's article, listed in Works cited.

terization that without a doubt leaves much to be desired if compared with Sacchetti's assessment of Dante as an "eccellentissimo poeta volgare, la cui fama in perpetuo non verrà meno" ("an excellent vernacular poet, whose popularity will last forever") [*Trecentonovelle*, CXIV, 231].

Therefore, given that Sacchetti's compilation is essentially based on the historic accuracy of the narrative and that one of the keys for the audience consists of knowing that the *novelle* reflect real characters and events that have actually occurred, we could ask ourselves to what extent the difference between the two characterizations is due to so illustrious and well-known a character as Dante. The answer, as noted by Saverio Bellomo, lies in the relationship between the biographical detail and the *novella*. The critic sketches the line that separates the biographer from the *novelliere* and underlines the major interest that the first feels towards the individual, which always represents the centre of his attention unlike the second, who is more interested in an exemplary case than in the character, as occurs with our writers and above all with Sacchetti.

At first sight, this affirmation could lead us to suppose that the author of the *novelle* is permitted to have a lax relationship with reality and that, therefore, his words would not have to reflect reality rigorously. However, Bellomo sustains that historical reality does not have to coincide with the truth, and to demonstrate his affirmation he cites Boccaccio's significant example, which narrates some aspects of Dante's and Petrarch's lives that do not exactly correspond with reality. The critic recalls that biography, above all medieval biography, is often based on details that are demonstrated not to be historical, but that this was "institutionally and honestly" accepted (Bellomo, 151-162). From this perspective, the different features that characterize Dante's character turn out to be perfectly justified. To put it more simply, two writers' different points of view which want to call attention to definite profiles of the characters they deal with and permit them to illustrate so many other characteristics of the Dantesque personality.

Other famous writers such as Guido Cavalcanti (LXVIII) and Antonio Pucci (CLXXV) who, together with Sacchetti,¹² were the principal exponents of Florentine municipal literature of the 14th century, and Matteo di Landozzo desli Albizi (CXXXIX, CXCIV) are transformed into protagonists in the *novelle*. The latter, less well-known, was the author of love poems inspired by Petrarch. However, in the *novelle* which Sacchetti dedicates to him, Sacchetti does not properly distinguish him for his poetic sensibility. All of the characters are character-

¹²Lanza shows that Sacchetti maintained an intense poetic correspondence with Pucci, compiled in the *Libro delle Rime*. See Franco Sacchetti, 685.

ized by their inventiveness, and all of the *novelle* they appear in belong to the category which we have described as sharp and clever.

Brief anecdotes tend to underline the ingenuity of the writers and the ease of speech with which the protagonists manage to avenge themselves for wrongs they have suffered, as in Antonio Pucci's *novella*, in which we encounter an interesting case of *controbeffa* (counter-trick) where the poet brings a clever investigation to its end to discover the authors of the prank that has caused the destruction of his orchard. In *novella* CXXXIX, in which the main character succeeds in exiting gracefully from an initially awkward situation, Sacchetti demonstrates his reluctance to renounce the endless source of humour caused by allusion to the character's sexual attributes. The anecdote is very simple: Matteo di Landozzo degli Albizi, poet and "new man", is discovered in prison, sharing a cot with a judge. During the night the poet grips the judge's member and begins to fidget with it in an unmistakable manner, believing it to be his own. The elevated comical effect is produced by the description of the embarrassing situation in which the two men are found and magnified by the involuntary blunderbuss of a Latin phrase with which Matteo tries to pardon himself in front of the judge. In this *novella* we are faced with a clear example of Sacchetti's descriptive capacity and of his inclination to attribute a special force to the use of words, searching for a way of entertaining an audience of readers especially prone to happiness. This is one comic scene that the distinguished scholar Letterio Di Francia did not appreciate, refusing to comment on the *novella* considering it so obscene that the narrative thread was lost.¹³

In the second *novella*, the comical tone of the narrative is abandoned and Matteo di Landozzo degli Albizi's cleverness and wisdom is stressed, denouncing a neighbour's avarice, resorting to three reasons (*tre belle ragioni*) that, according to Sacchetti, were successively spread throughout the world, making themselves more famous than if they had been pronounced by Plato himself.¹⁴

The only exception to this positive characterization of writers is represented by Guido Cavalcanti, who in Sacchetti's *novella* assumes the role of *beffato* and allows a child with "sottil malizia", to cheat him; ridiculing him in front of everyone. Cavalcanti's character, as we remember him, already appeared in a *novella* of the *Decameron* (VI, 9), where in one brief anecdote which he creates he is presented as an "ideal logician and philosopher, amusing and courteous and eloquent" who manages to insult a group of Florentines who wish to play a joke on him, thanks to his sharp, polite, and very clever answer.

¹³See Letterio Di Francia, 207.

¹⁴See Franco Sacchetti, 447.

In the *Trecentonovelle*, this elegant image of the great poet and intellectual *stilnovista* is degraded. We observe that Sacchetti does not hesitate to portray this character, as he does not hesitate with other Decameronian characters, in a form different from that of Boccaccio. Evidence of a more limited interest is dealt with, which Sacchetti demonstrates towards the model of the writer of Certaldo, from whom he distances himself significantly.

In general terms, the features which characterize and are common to the characters of famous writers and painters that Sacchetti includes in the complex structure of the *Trecentonovelle* are: the inventive, the sense of humour, the skilful and attentive use of witty comments and clever words, the capacity to devise funny and subtle jokes, and many other comical resources typical of a third social category that occupies a significant place in Sacchetti's *novelle*: the buffoons. It would be useless and wrong to consider them individually as each of them belongs to their social group and embodies their most outstanding characteristics.

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