

Svetko Tedeschi

**Some Recent Opinions about the Possible Influence of
Boccaccio's "Decameron" on Chaucer's
"Canterbury Tales"**

Ever since the fifteenth century i. e. a century after the appearance of Geoffrey Chaucer and his works, thousands of books, articles and numerous dissertations have been written about all the aspects of his life and work. It is sufficient to look up any recent bibliography of Chaucer to realize how immense is the number of publications which make up Chauceriana, or how futile is even an attempt — however small — to make any new contribution to it.

Among the various scholars dealing with Chaucer about those whom Mario Praz calls "source-hunters", who want by all means to find out the sources of all Chaucer's works, and to prove — although sometimes without any clear evidence — that Chaucer was largely indebted — in a particular work of his — to this or that writer. "One need not go very far in looking up Chauceriana in either German or American philological reviews, to become convinced that most source-hunters possess to an extreme degree the Canon's ability to turn upside down the road upon which they are riding, and, no less than the painstaking baffled Alchemist, they fall short of paving it, again with silver and gold".¹ Mario Praz mockingly remarks that "if Chaucer could only have guessed the treatment he was going to receive at the hands of modern scholars... he would have added another character to the immortal gallery of the pilgrims: the character of the source-hunter".² Although this opinion of the eminent Italian scholar may sound rather exaggerated — if used without any distinction — it is in many respects true, especially in regard to *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer's great-

¹ Mario Praz, *The Flaming Heart*, Garden City, New York, Doubleday Anchor Books, Doubleday and Company, 1958, p. 30.

² *Ib.*

est and most original work. Nobody, namely, denies that Chaucer's minor works, prior to *The Canterbury Tales*, were partly written under French and Italian influence; the problem arises only when we come to *The Canterbury Tales*, his masterpiece and his chief claim to fame. Here again we shall not be speaking of the other possible influences like e. g. that of Dante's *Divina Commedia* on Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, which according to Prof. J. L. Lowes is "deep . . . and widespread" but only of "a fragmentary character",³ because the two masterpieces are so different in spirit that there is little connexion between them. In this respect we can only speak of the alleged influence of Boccaccio's *Decameron* on Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, which is theoretically more plausible — because the two works are in some respects very similar.

In his article "Boccaccios Werke als Quelle Chaucers"⁴ W. F. Schirmer⁵ points out the similar motives between some of the tales of Boccaccio's *Decameron* and those of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and mentions in this respect five tales i. e. *The Merchant's Tale*, *The Shipman's Tale*, *The Reeve's Tale*, *The Franklin's Tale* and *The Clerk's Tale*. In the latest edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*⁶ only *The Reeve's Tale*, *The Clerk's Tale*, *The Franklin's Tale* and *The Shipman's Tale* are referred to as being connected with *The Decameron*. J. S. P. Tatlock⁷ as well as F. N. Robinson⁸ leave out *The Reeve's Tale* but add *The Merchant's Tale* to the list mentioned above. While T. H. McNeal considers *The Decameron* as a possible source of *The Man of Law's Tale*⁹ and H. M. Cummings¹⁰ lists only *The Clerk's Tale* and *The Franklin's Tale* as derived from *The Decameron* — Richard Stephen Guerin in his dissertation on *The Canterbury Tales and Il Decamerone*¹¹ discusses the

³ *Ib.*, p. 58.

⁴ *Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift*, XII, 1924, pp. 289, 291—293.

⁵ His article — according to Mario Praz — represents "a revision of previous opinions".

⁶ Paul Harvey, *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, IV Edition, Oxford, At the Clarendon Press, 1967, pp. 140—142.

⁷ J. S. P. Tatlock, *The Mind and Art of Chaucer*, Syracuse, 1950, p. 91.

⁸ F. N. Robinson, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, II Edition, London, Oxford University Press, 1957. In "Explanatory Notes", pp. 710, 713, 721, 732—733.

⁹ *Modern Language Notes*, LII (April, 1938), pp. 257—258.

¹⁰ H. M. Cummings, *The Indebtedness of Chaucer's Works to the Italian Works of Boccaccio*, Princeton University Dissertations, 1914, Collegiate Press, Menasha, Wisconsin, 1916, pp. 178, 179.

¹¹ Richard Stephen Guerin, *The Canterbury Tales and Il Decamerone*, Unpublished Doctor's Dissertation, University of Colorado, 1966. I express my thanks to the University of Colorado for kindly sending me

possible influence of Boccaccio's masterpiece on six tales of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (namely he excludes from Schirmer's list *The Merchant's Tale* but adds to it *The Miller's Tale* and *The Man of Law's Tale*) and he also takes into consideration for possible influence of Boccaccio's *Decameron: The Wife of Bath's Prologue*. As Dr. Guerin's dissertation is — as far as I know — the latest contribution to the subject, I shall follow in my paper his list of tales, with due consideration of *The Merchant's Tale* he omits.

THE MILLER'S TALE

In his dissertation Guerin first compares *The Miller's Tale* to a *Novella* of Boccaccio's (D. III, N. 4), in which a monk called Don Felice teaches Puccio di Rinieri, a rich and pious gentleman and husband of beautiful Monna Isabetta, how he will come to heaven by doing penance the whole night, and in the meantime sleeps with his wife.

Although in *The Miller's Tale* we have partly a similar motive of the deception of a husband (this time an old carpenter — through the false prediction of a second flood — by an Oxford student, who lives in the carpenter's house, and is deeply in love with his beautiful wife) — the differences between the two stories are great and numerous. In Boccaccio's tale, as Guerin admits "there is no mention of the flood . . . the duped husband is not a carpenter . . . the episode of the additional lover and the misdirected kiss is missing, as is the vengeance of the hot iron",¹² so that the analogy between the two tales is very slight. At the end, Guerin's main proof for Chaucer's indebtedness to Boccaccio — in this case — becomes the word "*gnof*", which Chaucer uses in the description of the carpenter. Namely, Monna Isabetta while in bed with her lover, makes too much noise and asked by her husband, who makes penance in the next room, to explain the reason for the noise — wittily replies: "Gnaffe, marito mio, io mi dimeno quanto io posso . . ." "In truth, my husband, I am tossing about as much as I am able".¹³ The husband is not satisfied with her answer but she persuades him that she is tossing in bed because she hasn't eaten anything for supper.

Dr. Guerin's dissertation, which has proved in many points to be of great and valuable help in the writing of my paper — in spite of my frequent disagreement with his judgements and opinions.

¹² *Ib.*, p. 15

¹³ This and all the subsequent translations from Boccaccio are Guerin's.

If Chaucer had read Boccaccio's tale — remarks Guerin "he could hardly have forgotten this hilarious passage. Could then this memory have suggested to him the unusual word *gnof* etymologically unrelated either to *gnaffe* or *gnaffa* with which the poet characterizes the Miller in the second line of the tale, and which he uses nowhere else in the entire canon".¹⁴ F. N. Robinson on the other hand gives — in my opinion — a better explanation for the word *gnof*. He says that *gnof* means *churl*, fellow, and that "Skeat took it from Hebrew '*ganāv*', thief (Ex. XXII, 1), but the N E D would connect it rather with the Germanic root represented by East Fris. '*knufe*' lump, '*gnuffig*', coarse, rough, etc."¹⁵ So we can conclude that even "*gnof*" is no sure proof at all that Chaucer knew Boccaccio's *novella*.

If we compare the two tales altogether we must admit that Chaucer's story is much better than Boccaccio's — in many respects. It is longer, more vivid, more funny and more dramatic. It is enough to compare the description of Monna Isabetta, who is said to be "giovane ancora di ventotto in trenta anni, fresca e bella e ritondetta che pareva una mela casolana"¹⁶ — with that of Chaucer's Alison to see the difference. Alison is namely described in 38 lines with a painter's gusto.

Chaucer depicts her as a pretty creature, fair and tender, with a slender weasel's body. She used to wear a pleated apron, white as morning milk, and a white smock. Her dress was usually of silk and her collar was embroidered. Her girdle was of striped silk and her ribbons were made to match her collar. She was more beautiful than a flower on a cherry-tree, but her eyes were lecherous. Her body was very soft and her complexion was ruddy and bright. She could sing like a swallow on a tree, play like a kid and skip like a calf. She was as gay as a colt. Her small mouth was as sweet as honey. Chaucer ends her description in the following way:

She was a prymerole, a piggesnye,
For any lord to leggen in his bedde,
Or yet for good yeman to wedde.¹⁷

Moreover, the dramatic and comic situation of Chaucer's tale, which comes to a head — when the duped husband, sleeping in a tub for the fear of flood, is awoken by the shouts of the branded lover asking for water, which he mistakes for the sign

¹⁴ O. c., note 11 pp. 21, 22.

¹⁵ F. N. Robinson, o.c., note 8, p. 684.

¹⁶ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Il Decamerone*, Quinta edizione integra, con prefazione e glossario di Angelo Ottolini, Milano, Ulrico Hoepli, 1948, Giornata Tereza, Novella Quarta, p. 185.

¹⁷ F. N. Robinson, o. c., note 8, p. 49,1. 3268—3270.

of the coming flood, is rarely surpassed in the other tales of Chaucer's masterpiece, and has no connexion with Boccaccio's *novella*.

THE REEVE'S TALE

If we examine *The Reeve's Tale*, which figures next on Guerin's list of possible borrowings from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the problem that faces us — concerning its source — is much more difficult to solve than in *The Miller's Tale*. Namely similar stories had been widely spread in Europe, so that H. Varnhagen (Engl. Stud. IX, 240) was able to trace their various migrations. F. N. Robinson thinks that *The Reeve's Tale* "is probably derived from a lost fabliau", and says that "Several analogues have been found, the closest being a French fabliau preserved in two versions . . .".¹⁸ W. F. Schirmer¹⁹ notes that the versions of the story used by Chaucer and Boccaccio are very different. Guerin on the other hand considers *The Reeve's Tale* to be "Another example of a similar process of memorial borrowings"²⁰ from *The Decameron* (D. IX, 6. N.).

Chaucer's tale tells us of two clerks who have been robbed by a miller of part of their flour, and who revenge themselves on the miller's wife and daughter by sleeping with them, and at the end also regain their stolen flour.

Although the theme of Boccaccio's story is similar to that of Chaucer's tale, there are also obvious differences between the two: "the first part of Boccaccio's tale is almost entirely unlike Chaucer's: the girl's father is in no way involved with a mill, he is not introduced as a cheat and a pompous braggart, the episode of the runaway horse is missing, and nothing about stolen grain is mentioned. Similarly the endings do not agree: Boccaccio's tale ends amicably, thanks to the good wife's *subito avvedimento*; the Reeve's Tale ends in furious uproar".²¹ The situation is still more complicated by the fact that at the beginning and at the end of *The Reeve's Tale*, as Guerin says, the plot most closely resembles the French fabliau, *Le Meunier et Les II. Clercs*.²² However — he remarks — that "middle-section of the Reeve's Tale, the account of the events of the night, seems at least in part more closely related to certain passages in the *Decameron* than the parallel section in the fabliau, and suggests

¹⁸ *Ib.*, p. 687.

¹⁹ *O. c.*, note 4, p. 292.

²⁰ *O. c.*, note 11, p. 43.

²¹ *O. c.*, note 11, pp. 43, 44.

²² Germaine Dempster, "On the Source of the Reeve's Tale", *J E G P*, XXIX, pp. 473—488. See also Guerin, *o. c.*, note 11, p. 44.

the possibility of source material other than the French analogue".²³

Owing to the fact that besides Boccaccio's and Chaucer's there existed several French versions and a German one of *The Reeve's Tale* (which Chaucer might also have known) — the conclusion that Chaucer knew and used just Boccaccio's version in the writing of his tale, is at least rather doubtful. The same can be said of a verbal parallel (between Chaucer's tale and Boccaccio's story), which is found in *The Reeve's Prologue* (A, 3878—79) "where the proverb 'to have an hoor heed and a grene tayl, as hath a leek' is supposed (by Chiarini, for instance) to echo Boccaccio's *perché il porro abbia il capo bianco . . . la coda è verde* (Introduction to Day IV)".²⁴ Praz rightly remarks that the quotation of a proverb could not be traced to a definitive source. Prof. Robinson also thinks that the saying used both by Boccaccio and Chaucer "was doubtless proverbial".

If we leave aside the question of possible borrowings from Boccaccio — which are even in this case very doubtful and compare the two stories, we must again admit that Chaucer's tale is an improved version of Boccaccio's *novella*. It is in any case better motivated. The two Oxford clerks — whose flour was partly stolen by the miller and whose horse was set free on purpose by him — had many reasons to take their revenge on him, and their subsequent behaviour seems logical. On the contrary, in Boccaccio's *novella* the only reason — for the misbehaviour of the two young men — is that one of them is in love with the daughter of the poor innkeeper. The girl's father is here depicted with great sympathy as "un buon uomo il quale a' viandanti dava pe' loro denari mangiare e bere . . ." — so that we are sorry for him, and Boccaccio wants to spare him, and because of that his wife — at the end — manages to persuade him that nothing has happened. The situation is completely different in the case of Chaucer's miller. He is not only a notorious cheat but a pompous braggart and a proud bully. It is enough to quote some lines of his description to realize how the shame and the damage he suffered (and of which by the way he was made fully aware) — were well-deserved, and because of that more comic.

Here are the lines:

A thief he was for sothe of corn and mele,
And that a sly, and usaunt for to stele.
His name was hoote deynous Symkyn.
A wyf he hadde, yeomen of noble kyn;

²³ O. c., note 11, p. 44.

²⁴ Mario Praz, o. c., note 1, p. 69.

The person of the toun hir fader was.
 With hire he yaf ful many a panne of bras,
 For that Symkyn sholde in his blood allye.
 She was yfostred in a nonnerye;
 For Symkyn wolde no wyf, as he sayde,
 But she were wel ynorissed and a mayde,
 To saven his estaat of yomanrye.
 And she was proud, and peert as is a pye.
 A ful fair sighte was it upon hem two;
 On halydayes biforn hire wolde he go
 With his tytet bounden aboute his heed,
 And she cam after in a gyte of reed;
 And Symkyn hadde hosen of the same.
 Ther dorste no wight clepen hire but »dame«;
 Was noon so hardy that wente by the weye
 That with hire dorste rage or ones pleye,
 But if he wolde be slayn of Symkyn
 With panade, or with knyf, or boidekyn.²⁵

THE MAN OF LAW'S TALE

It is interesting to notice that none of the critics we have mentioned at the beginning of this paper — except McNeal and Guerin — consider *The Decameron* as a possible source of *The Man of Law's Tale*, in which we are told the story of Constance, daughter of a Christian emperor (who married to the Soldan on condition that he shall become a Christian, and by the Soldan's mother cast adrift on the sea — goes through many adventures and undergoes many trials).

According to Guerin "Two of Boccaccio's *novelle* suggest a possible distant relationship with the *Mannes Tale of Lawe*: II, 7 and V, 2. Both Italian stories tell of a maiden adrift on the sea, both describe her tribulations in strange lands, and both see her safe return home".²⁶ But all this is very vague, because there are many stories in the world literature that tell us of a maiden adrift on the sea, and this cannot be taken into consideration as a proof — that Chaucer borrowed his story from Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

If we examine more closely Boccaccio's two *novelle* mentioned by Guerin, we must admit that they are in many respects completely different from Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*. The first *novella* (II, 7), which is one of the most free and loose of Boccaccio's stories, tells us of the adventures of Alatiel, the beautiful daughter of the Sultan of Babylon, who was sent on a ship by her father to marry the king of Garbo. But her ship was wrecked on a unknown shore, and there, found and saved by a warden of a castle, she became his

²⁵ O. c., note 8, p. 56, l. 3939—3960.

²⁶ O. c., note 11, p. 72.

mistress. During the following four years she was either mistress or wife to eight different men, and at the end being returned to her father as a "virgin" she was sent again to marry the king of Garbo. What a difference between the voluptuous Moslem girl, who in spite of all her misfortunes enjoyed being with her lovers, and the "blissful maiden" of Chaucer, who was almost a Christian saint, worthy — because of her goodness and beauty — to be the queen of all Europe.

Constance is described in the following way:

In hire is heigh beautee, withoute pride,
Yowthe, withoute grenehede or folye;
To alle hire workes vertu is hir gyde;
Humblesse hath slayn in hire al tirannye.
She is mirour of alle curteisye;
Hir herte is verray chambre of hoolynesse,
Hir hand, ministre of fredam for almesse.²⁷

The spirit, the tone and the atmosphere of Boccaccio's *novella* (II, 7) and those of Chaucer's tale are completely different. The same can be partly said also about Boccaccio's other story (V, 2), which is a typical one of Boccaccio's love stories — with a happy end. In it we are told how

Gostanza loves Martuccio Gomito and hearing that he is dead, embarks in despair alone in a boat, which is carried by the wind to Susa. Finding her lover alive in Tunis she reveals herself to him and he, greatly favored by the king for his good counsel, marries her and returns wealthy with her to Lipari.²⁸

Although this story is more similar to that of Boccaccio, there are also considerable differences between them. Chaucer's story is at least twice as long as that of Boccaccio, it is a Christian legend — in which Constance, a Christian heroine, is several times miraculously saved by the direct intervention of Christ and the Virgin Mary. In Boccaccio's story there is nothing supernatural and nothing especially Christian. Only a young man and a girl, who love each other, and who undergo different trials — to be happily united at the end — thanks to their tenacity and good luck.

According to Professor Robinson the primary source of *The Man of Law's Tale* "is in the Anglo-Norman Chronicle of Nicholas Trivet, written about 1335 This was also the source of Gower's version of the story in the *Confessio Amantis*."

²⁷ O. c., note 8, p. 64, l. 162—168.

²⁸ O. c., note 11, p. 90.

It seems probable . . . that Chaucer made some use of Gower's tale . . . But on this point there is difference of opinion".²⁹

Nothing is therefore sure about the primary source of Chaucer's tale, but it does not seem very likely that that was Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

THE CLERK'S TALE

"*The Clerk's Tale* which the poet states he learnt from Petrarch, was translated by the latter into Latin from the *Decameron*, D. X, N. 10. It tells how the marquis of Saluces married the humble Griselda and of her virtues and patience under trials".³⁰ This is the least original of Chaucer's tales — because in this case Chaucer follows so closely Petrarch's Latin version of Boccaccio's story that — as Professor Robinson says — "he is generally held to have followed the Latin text". Yet even in this case there are many speculations about Chaucer's direct drawing on the *Decameron* original. Guerin points out different opinions in regard to this problem. So while Professor J. Burke Severs³¹ thinks that the evidence that Chaucer drew on the *Decameron* original is slight, W. E. Farnham³² has made six parallels between Chaucer's story of Griselda and *The Clerk's Tale*, absent in Petrarch, by which he wants to assume that Chaucer's basic source was Petrarch's Translation but that Chaucer also made minor borrowings in a direct way from Boccaccio. "Severs however proves otherwise, and offers indisputable evidence of Chaucer's simultaneous use of both Petrarch's original and an anonymous French prose translation *Le Livre Griseldis*"³³ — because he says that ". . . in the French version occur as well many of the source passages lacking in Petrarch that Farnham attributes to Chaucer's possible borrowing from the Italian original".³⁴

Guerin on his side points out the changes Chaucer introduced into the tale of Griselda. He quotes the words of Professor Severs who says that "Chaucer made significant changes in characterizations, in narrative techniques, and in the whole tone and spirit which informs the tale. Walter, for instance, emerges in Chaucer's version as more obstinately wilful, more

²⁹ O. c., note 8, p. 692.

³⁰ O. c., note 6, p. 141.

³¹ J. Burke Severs, *The Literary Relationship of Chaucer's Clerkes Tale*, New Haven, 1942., see also Guerin, note 11, p. 118.

³² W. E. Farnham, "Chaucer's Clerk's Tale," *Modern Language Notes*, XXXIII, 1918, 194. See also Guerin, note 11, p. 119.

³³ O. c., note 11, p. 120.

³⁴ *Ib.*

heartlessly cruel than he had been in either the Latin or the French; and Chaucer cannot refrain from adding outspoken and vehement condemnation of the marquis and of the people who condoned the repudiation of Griselda. In this respect Chaucer more nearly approaches the attitude of Boccaccio than of Petrarch. . . ."³⁵ Summing everything up, Guerin — in accordance with his theory that Chaucer might have known *Il Decamerone*, or at least have read it while in Italy — wonders whether it would not seem altogether impossible "that Chaucer might have read the Latin, then the French, remembered the Italian and then written the English".³⁶ He then proceeds as follows: "Would this process not possibly better explain the albeit somewhat nebulous correspondence between the *Tale* and the *novella* . . . than would the attribution of these similarities to chance, to similarity of interest or philosophical or moral bias, to similar artistic attitudes?"³⁷ On the other hand — we may wonder — why not take into consideration the other possibility or other explanation — that "Two imaginative artists, each focussing his attention upon the identical situation, might very likely be impelled to the creation of a similar detail or two . . .".³⁸ Professor Robinson while discussing the problem also concludes without hesitation, that "At all events, neither these parallels nor those noted in other tales suffice to prove that Chaucer was acquainted with the *Decameron*".³⁹ We cannot but agree with this.

THE FRANKLIN'S TALE

In Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* we are told the story "of a woman, Dorigen wife of Arveragus, who to escape the assiduity of her lover, the squire Aurelius, makes her consent depend upon an impossible condition, that all the rocks on the coast of Brittany be removed. When this condition is realized by the aid of a magician, the lover from a generous remorse, releases her from her promise. Chaucer states that the tale is taken from a 'British Lay', but this is lost. Similar stories are found in Boccaccio's *Filocolo*, B. v, and *Decameron*, D. x, N. 5."⁴⁰ Guerin remarks that "Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* offers yet another seemingly unresolved problem in the matter of

³⁵ *Ib.*, pp. 121, 122.

³⁶ *Ib.*, p. 124.

³⁷ *Ib.*, pp. 124, 125.

³⁸ See Severs, o. c., note 31, p. 129., or Guerin, o. c. note 11, p. 120.

³⁹ O. c., note 8, p. 709.

⁴⁰ O. c., note 6, p. 141.

sources".⁴¹ He discusses different opinions about the source of Chaucer's tale, and singles out one of them — which says that "It is highly probable that Chaucer used as main source the story of Menedon in Boccaccio's *Filocolo* . . . combined it with elements found in the *Historia regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey Monmouth and gave his tale a Breton background in imitation of the lays . . .".⁴² The story in *Il Filocolo* is pretty similar to that of Chaucer's tale. There we have a group of young men and women — sitting in a garden and passing their time by telling stories — which include various questions concerning love. One of the young men called Menedon tells the story — in which we have again a virtuous and faithful lady, loved by a young man — who by the help of a Greek magician accomplishes the impossible thing asked by the lady — but at the end all concerned become generous: the young lover releases the lady from her obligation and the magician on his side releases the young man from his promise to pay him etc.

Guerin admits that there is "near — unanimous acceptance of the *Il Filocolo* story as a possible source" for Chaucer's tale, but in spite of that — faithful to his theory of Chaucer's borrowings from the *Decameron*, he tries to find by all means the analogous elements between Chaucer's tale and Boccaccio's story (D. X, N. 5), while lightly passing over their obvious differences. E. g. in Boccaccio's story in the *Decameron* — the husband urges his wife to keep the promise to her would-be lover not only because he is an honourable man, but also because he is afraid of the vengeance of the magician the lover has hired. This important element is lacking both in Chaucer's tale and in *Il Filocolo*. Mario Praz also thinks that Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* — although similar to that in the *Decameron*, X, 5 — "is rather to be compared with the earlier version of that story in *Filocolo*".⁴³

He finds the difference between Chaucer's and Boccaccio's moral outlook in the story, and says that "in Boccaccio the problem of loyalty is, if at all, very crudely formulated . . . Very much has been written about the difference of the condition set by 'the wife' in Boccaccio's story and in Chaucer's, but nowhere did I find stress laid on the fact that while the wife in Boccaccio merely mentioned an arbitrary impossibility (a blossoming garden in midwinter), in Chaucer she really utters a sort of vow, in connection with the return of her husband. Chaucer similarly as in the case of *Criseyde*, was here anxious to justify the woman, to conciliate her binding herself to a —

⁴¹ O. c., note 11, p. 160.

⁴² *Ib.*, pp. 162, 163.

⁴³ O. c., note 1, p. 82.

however impossible — condition, with her loyalty to her husband: her condition will therefore be such as to lead — if fulfilled, to her husband's safety. It is a vow. Dorigen . . . is 'of love so trewe' as to be ready to sacrifice herself for her husband's sake. Possibly this desire to change the capricious condition into a logical one led Chaucer to alter the setting of Boccaccio's in the *Filocolo*: hence the scene laid on a sea-coast notoriously dangerous to sailors, hence the fiction of a Briton lay, introduced to make the story appear more authoritative".⁴⁴

If we take all this into consideration we cannot accept Guerin's final speculation — by means of which he wants to explain how Chaucer might have used as a source for his tale both the story from *Il Filocolo* and that from the *Decameron*. He namely says that "since the *Franklin's Tale* seems more than usually faithful to its supposed source, one reason for this might be that Chaucer had read two analogous versions of his story of the lover's rash promise, and had the plot implanted all the more firmly in his memory simply because he had come upon it more than one time in the past and was therefore all the more able to recall in detail not only the important elements of the plot but also many minor details of the original, or originals".⁴⁵

There is one important point here — besides those arguments mentioned before — and that is that we have had so far no clear evidence that Chaucer knew *Il Decamerone*, while we are almost sure that he knew Boccaccio's minor works. Because of that we are almost convinced that Chaucer might have used only *Il Filocolo* as the source for his *Franklin's Tale*, owing to the fact — as Professor Robinson says — that "The *Filocolo* version affords striking parallels to the *Franklin's*, and the Italian work as a whole was almost certainly known to Chaucer".⁴⁶

So we have come to the last of the tales — mentioned by Guerin — whose source might have been Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

THE SHIPMAN'S TALE

In *The Shipman's Tale* we are told how "the wife of a niggardly merchant asks the loan of a hundred francs from a priest to buy finery. The priest borrows the sum from the merchant and hands it to the wife, and the wife grants him her favours. On the merchant's return from a journey, the

⁴⁴ *Ib.*, pp. 82, 83.

⁴⁵ *O. c.*, note 11, p. 171.

⁴⁶ *O. c.*, note 8, p. 721.

priest tells him that he has repaid the sum to the wife, who cannot deny receiving it".⁴⁷

"Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale* ... would seem to be based upon and to follow rather closely a direct source. At any rate, two analogues are extant which bear marked similarities to Chaucer's tale, and which were written by contemporaries of the English writer some years before he began work on the *Canterbury Tales*: the tale numbered either XXXI or XIX . . . of Giovanni Sercambi's *Novelle*,⁴⁸ and the *Decameron*, VIII, 1. An additional analogue is to be found in the *Decameron*, VIII, 2, though here the similarities are somewhat remote, save in certain particulars.⁴⁹

Both stories — narrated in Sercambi's *novella* and in the *Decameron*, VIII, 1, are very similar to that of Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale*. In Sercambi's *novella* the lover is a German soldier, and the lady in question asks 200 florins before she grants her favours. In Boccaccio's *novella*, VIII, 1., the lover is also a German soldier and the sum of money is identical. In the second of Boccaccio's *novelle* (VIII, 2) the lover is a parish priest (in Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale*, the lover is a monk), and the woman in question asks only five *lire* (which she doesn't get).

Robert Pratt mentions certain striking similarities between Chaucer's and Sercambi's versions, that do not exist between *The Shipman's Tale* and the *Decameron*, VIII, 1. For instance, in both Sercambi's *novella* and Chaucer's tale the wife will take her lover *on the following Sunday*. In Boccaccio's story she will send for him when her husband is away. In Sercambi's *novella* and Chaucer's tale the husband goes away the *next day*, in Boccaccio's *novella* after a few days. In both Sercambi's *novella* and Chaucer's tale the lovers spend *the day and the night together*, in Boccaccio's *novella* they spend many nights together. On the other hand Guerin gives also several examples of similarity which exist only between Chaucer's tale and the *Decameron novella*, VIII, 1., which are absent altogether in Sercambi: e. g. both in Boccaccio's and Chaucer's story there existed a close relation or friendship between the lover and the husband — prior to the action of the story, which is missing in Sercambi's version. "Further in the *Decameron* story the wife insists on two things from the lover: the sum of money

⁴⁷ O. c., note 6, p. 141.

⁴⁸ Giovanni Sercambi (1347—1424) was a soldier, diplomat, writer and man of affairs from Lucca, Italy — and a contemporary of Chaucer.

⁴⁹ *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales,"* Chicago, 1941., pp. 213—217. See also Guerin p. 205.

and absolute secrecy. And in Chaucer's version, the monk similarly pledges secrecy. Sercambi's story makes no mention of the importance of secrecy; indeed Sercambi's woman, though married, is a prostitute, and apparently few people in Florence are unaware of this save her husband".⁵⁰ But in addition to this, Guerin finds some similarities between Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale* and Boccaccio's second *novella*, i. e. VIII, 2, dealing with a similar subject, of which I shall mention only one. In this *novella* the lover is a parish priest (in Chaucer's story he is a monk) "and while this may seem but a minor point, both stories gain much in comic tone . . . from the additional implications of comic sexual behaviour on the part of an allegedly celibate cleric . . .".⁵¹ In his conclusion Guerin admits that — in spite of all the mentioned similarities between Sercambi's *novella* and two of Boccaccio's stories on one side — and Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale* on the other side — there is no definite proof that Chaucer used any of them as the source of his tale, but he continues "it seems not unreasonable to assume that Chaucer knew all three of the analogues. Probably reading them in Italy, he remembered parts of them and made use thereof in his *Shipman's Tale*, and if he made use of an additional source, the ubiquitous 'lost French source', he seemingly did so while at the same time borrowing rather heavily from late medieval Italian literature".⁵²

But there are also other opinions concerning the possible source of Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale*, so e. g. John Webster Spargo while speaking in *Sources and Analogues of the Shipman's Tale* remarks that "In the absence of an authentic source, the likeliest thing that can be said is that, if we had one, it would probably be an Old French Fabliau very similar to the *Shipman's Tale* of which the atmosphere is all French . . .".⁵³

And really — if we cast a glance at *The Shipman's Tale* — we can find several examples which are in favour of Spargo's opinion, that the source of Chaucer's tale was a French fabliau.

E. g. Chaucer's tale begins with

A marchant whilom dwelled at Seint-Denys,⁵⁴

⁵⁰ O. c., note 11, pp. 212, 213.

⁵¹ *Ib.*, p. 214.

⁵² *Ib.*, p. 217.

⁵³ *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales"*, Chicago, 1941., p. 439. See also Guerin, o. c., note, pp. 204—205.

⁵⁴ See F. N. Robinson, o. c., note 8, p. 156., 1. 1.

(Chaucer means here St. Denis near Paris)
In the lines 53—55 we are told that

But so bifel, this marchant on a day
Shoop hym to make redy his array
Toward the toun of Brugges for to fare,

(So while the merchant lives at St. Denis, it seems quite natural for him as a Frenchman to travel to — and to get his wares from — Bruges in Belgium).

In the lines 116, 117 — while referring to the unhappiness of the merchant's wife in love — Chaucer tells us that

In al the reawme of France is ther no wyf
That lasse lust hath to that sory pley.

One could rightly wonder why the action of *The Shipman's Tale* did not take place in Italy — as it did in all its alleged Italian sources?

But we have also a stronger proof — that Chaucer's tale might have had a French source — in the line 214, in which Chaucer used two French words, which is quite unusual for him. Namely when the merchant's wife goes to call her husband to dinner he asks — from his room — in French "Who is there?" — or as Chaucer says:

"Quy la?" quod he. "Peter it am I"
Quod she;

(By the way, couldn't "it am I" remind one of the French "c'est moi").

In conclusion, I think, we could agree with Prof. Robinson — who referring to the possible sources of Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale* — says: "The story belongs to a familiar group of folk-tales, which have in common the motif of the 'Lover's Gift Regained'. Similar anecdotes are still current in the United States, told at the expense of nationalities proverbially famed for parsimony or shrewdness. Chaucer's exact source is unknown. It can hardly have been Decameron, VIII, 1, or VIII, 2, both of which have features in common with the Shipman's story. The setting and the French phrase in l. 214 make it seem probable that Chaucer was following a French *fabliau*".⁵⁵

And so we have come to the last of the parallels that Guerin sets up between *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Decameron*, i. e. to *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*.

⁵⁵ F. N. Robinson, o. c., note 8, p. 732.

THE WIFE OF BATH'S PROLOGUE

The Wife of Bath's Tale is preceded by a long *prologue*, "in which Chaucer places in her mouth a condemnation of celibacy in the form of an account of her life with her five successive husbands".⁵⁶ Mario Praz considers the monologue of *The Wife of Bath* to be "a confession of feminine wantonness".⁵⁷

Guerin thinks that "Chaucer's Wife of Bath is undoubtedly second only to Falstaff as a great comic creation . . .".⁵⁸ Then he proceeds in the following way: "Chaucer must first of all, like Shakespeare, have had a sharp ear for a sharp tongue — the Wyf often reminds us, almost simultaneously, of Beatrice and Mistress Quickly; in addition she is of course an encyclopedia of medical knowledge: her *Prologue* borrows heavily from St. Jerome, Walter Map and probably a host of other sources now impossible to determine".⁵⁹ Among other possible sources Guerin includes the portions of the seventh tale of the sixth day of the *Decameron*, in which we are told how Madonna Filippa caught with her lover by her husband — was taken before a magistrate to be tried for adultery — which meant according to the Statute of Prato, that she was going to be burnt alive, but thanks to a quick and witty retort, she managed not only to escape punishment but made the Statute change in favour of women. The lady namely — when questioned by the magistrate replied to him in the following way: "Messer, it is true that Rinaldo is my husband. It is also true that last night he found me in the arms of Lazzarino, where I have been many times before this because of the perfect love I have for him; I do not deny this. But I am certain that you are aware that laws should fairly apply to everyone, and should be enforced only with the consent of all those affected by them. That is not what we find in this instance, for this law applies only to women, who are able to provide satisfaction for many more than men can. Furthermore, no woman was asked about this law, nor did any woman consent to it. It may therefore not be called a just law".⁶⁰

Guerin then quotes the following lines — by which he wants to suggest that Chaucer knew — and was influenced by — Boccaccio's tale in his *Wife of Bath's Prologue*.

⁵⁶ O. c., note 6, p. 141.

⁵⁷ O. c., note 1, p. 74.

⁵⁸ O. c., note 11, p. 100.

⁵⁹ *Ib.*, pp. 100, 101.

⁶⁰ *Il Decamerone* di Giovanni Boccaccio, Milano, Ulrico Hoepli, 1948, VI, 7, p. 393, Translation into English done by Guerin.

For trusteth wel, it is an impossible
 That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,
 But if it be of hooly seintes lyves,
 Ne of noon oother womman never the mo.
 Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?
 By God! if wommen hadde written stories,
 As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,
 They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse
 Than al the mark of Adam may redresse.
 The children of Mercurie and of Venus
 Been in hir wirkyng ful contrarius;
 Mercurie loveth wysdam and science,
 And Venus loveth ryot and dispence.
 And, for hire diverse disposicioun,
 Ech falleth in otheres exaltacioun.
 And thus, God woot, Mercurie is desolat
 In Pisces, wher Venus is exaltat;
 And Venus falleth ther Mercurie is reysed.
 Therefore no womman of no clerk is preysed.
 The clerk, whan he is oold, and may noght do
 Of Venus werkes worth his olde sho,
 Thanne sit he doun, and writ in his dotage
 That wommen kan nat kepe hir mariage!⁶¹

Although we cannot deny that in this and some other points there is a general similarity of principles announced both by the Wyfe of Bath and Madonna Filippa da Prato, in which they "seek to point up the injustices of moral precepts which discriminate against their sex and for which male moralists are primarily responsible"⁶² — we must also be aware of the fact that these principles are too general and too common to conclude anything from them. Besides, we must not forget that all the defence of Madonna Filippa is found on less than a page of text — while the "philippic" of the Wife of Bath is approximately at least 16 times longer. Can any real comparison be drawn between this "oxymoron in the flesh, this overpowering shrewish mistress of the art of love" as Bartlett J. Whiting calls her — who

Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde fyve,
 Withouten oother compaignye in youthe, —

and who by her behaviour practically caused the death and the ruin of almost all her husbands — with Madonna Filippa da Prato, who was married only once, and against whom her husband (as well as the people of Prato) had had no complaints to make — until she was caught with her lover. Boccaccio describes her in the most positive way. She is said to be "una gentile

⁶¹ O. c., note 8, pp. 82, 83, 1. 688—710.

⁶² O. c., note 11, p. 106.

donna e bella et oltre ad ogni altra innamorata . . . di gran cuore . . . di maniere laudevole . . . di grande animo . . . famosa".⁶³

If we take all this into consideration we must agree with Prof. Robinson who — speaking about the possible sources of *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* — says: "*The Wife's Prologue* is derived from no single source. Like the *General Prologue* and that of the *Pardoner*, it is highly original in its conception and structure. But it shows the influence of a whole series of satires against women. Whether, as Ten Brink suggests, the *Wife of Bath* was a proverbial character before Chaucer treated her, is not definitely known. Some elements in his description of her are undoubtedly derived from the account of *La Vieille* and from the speeches of the jealous husband, *Le Jaloux*, in the *Roman de la Rose*, and the influence of that work is apparent in many passages throughout her *Prologue*. Chaucer drew further, for the material of his discussion, upon the *Miroir de Mariage* of Eustache Deschamps, the *Epistola Adversus Jovinianum* of St. Jerome . . . Parallels from the works named, and from others, are cited . . ., but it is not to be assumed that they represent Chaucer's actual sources. Much of the *Wife's* discourse was common talk, and need not be traced to any literary origin".⁶⁴

THE MERCHANT'S TALE

In *The Merchant's Tale* we are told a story "of an old man and his young wife. The old man becomes blind; the wife and her lover take advantage of this in a pear-tree. Pluto suddenly restores the husband's sight but Proserpine enables the wife to outwit it. The precise source of the story has not been traced".⁶⁵

Schirmer⁶⁶ says that both *The Merchant's Tale* and a *novella* of Boccaccio's (*Decameron* VII, 9) have as their common theme the story of the Pear-Tree. He notes that this subject-matter, which deals with trials of man's patience is very widely spread in the world literature, and that it is also found in Italian and French literature.

If we compare Chaucer's tale and Boccaccio's story we must admit that although they are similar in a general way, there exist many differences between them. Chaucer's tale is longer than Boccaccio's story, because in the former is also included a long treatise on marriage, which is missing from

⁶³ O. c., note 60, VI, 7, pp. 392, 393.

⁶⁴ O. c., note 8, p. 698.

⁶⁵ O. c., note 6, p. 141.

⁶⁶ Cf. Schirmer, o. c., note 4, p. 291.

the latter. Boccaccio's lover Pirro at first rejects his mistress's proposals to meet — because he does not trust the lady, and he demands from her to fulfil three difficult conditions before complying with her wishes. Nothing of the kind is found in Chaucer's tale. Here the lover woos the lady on his own initiative. In *The Merchant's Tale* the husband goes blind, but by the intervention of *Pluto* his sight is restored — just at the most critical moment — when his wife is with her lover on the pear-tree, while Proserpine helps the lady to persuade her husband that nothing has happened. Almost all these details are missing in Boccaccio's story, so that we can agree with Prof. Robinson, who says: "The story of January and May is one of the most original of Chaucer's narratives. For the earlier part of the poem he drew on his own *Melibee*, from which he took a number of passages. For the trick played at the end on the old dotard he used a jest — the so-called Pear-Tree episode — current in many popular tales. His exact source is unknown, but close parallels are afforded by an Italian tale and a German poem both printed by Holthausen, Eng. Stud. XVIII, 168 ff. The figure of the aged or feeble lover is so frequent in literature that it is not necessary to multiply references on the subject. It appears in the *Shipman's Tale* and the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, but Chaucer's most noteworthy treatment of it is here in the *Merchant's Tale*. No particular model has been pointed out for the character of January".⁶⁷

FRAMEWORK

While comparing the various tales from *The Canterbury Tales* with their alleged originals from the *Decameron* we have seen that there is no clear evidence (in them) — that Boccaccio's masterpiece was known and imitated by Chaucer. We also think that it is very difficult to prove that Chaucer was influenced by the *Decameron* in the construction of the framework for his tales. Guerin admits that "... most modern authorities maintain that the possibility that Chaucer might have been familiar with Boccaccio's *Decameron* is extremely remote. With few exceptions, scholars seem generally to agree with Eleanor Prescott Hammond's contention that 'No direct contact of the *Canterbury Tales* with the *Decameron* has been shown; the resemblances are the facts that both are sets of stories in a framework...'"⁶⁸

⁶⁷ O. c., note 8, pp. 712, 713.

⁶⁸ O. c., note 11, pp. 8, 9; for the last part of the quotation see also: Eleanor Prescott Hammond, *A Bibliographical Manual*, New York, 1908, p. 80.

Two kinds of evidences have been mentioned by scholars — while discussing the connexion between the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Decameron* — concerning their framework — external evidence and internal evidence.

W. E. Farnham in his paper "England's Discovery of the Decameron" in PMLA XXXIX, 123 ff. is — as Guerin remarks — most emphatic about external evidence of borrowing. Namely he says that he has searched all the manuscripts in the British Museum and in the Bibliothèque Nationale and that he has not found any proof that the *Decameron* was known in Chaucer's England. He even doubts that Chaucer could have become acquainted with it while in Italy, because the *Decameron* was thought immoral, and the Italians did not want to discuss it with a foreign poet. But the mere fact that no known copy of *Il Decamerone* existed in England until the XVth century — does not prove anything, because — as Guerin rightly notes — "the same thing is true of all the other works of Boccaccio that Chaucer used so freely . . . *Il Filostrato*, *Il Filocolo* . . . *De Casibus Virorum* and to assert that Chaucer could not have known the *Decameron* because no copy was available to him in England is to suggest that Chaucer was not familiar with Boccaccio's other works as well".⁶⁹ — and that is not questionable at all. The other problem is whether Chaucer got acquainted with *Il Decamerone* while in Italy. Here again we have different opinions. Guerin thinks that "in spite of the regrettable lack of substantial evidence the friend of Gower and Scogan might have been interested in meeting Giovanni Sercambi, whose *novelle* relate to a group of pilgrims, and Giovanni Boccaccio, whose *Hundred Tales* follow a similar pattern, and who was doubtless a man so nearly like Chaucer in interests and character as to make the possibility of their meeting a delight to the imagination".⁷⁰ If this opinion were accepted Guerin could prove that his theory of Chaucer's memorial borrowing from the *Decameron* is not completely without foundations. But many scholars discard this possibility for various reasons. So Mario Praz mentions among others two reasons why this is not likely to have happened. The first is the late date when Chaucer decided to write the *Canterbury Tales*. Scholars agree that that happened from 1386. or 1387. onwards. Mario Praz proceeds in the following way: "If Chaucer had at all to become acquainted with the *Decameron* it stands to reason to suppose that he should have heard of it or seen it in connexion with his missions to Italy: not later, then, than in 1378, because the probability of his coming across that book

⁶⁹ See Guerin, o.c., note 11, p. 272.

⁷⁰ *Ib.*, p. 4.

is considerably less in the succeeding period of unbroken residence in England. But if Chaucer became acquainted with the *Decameron* in the seventies, is it not strange that he should not have been affected by it in the least for the years immediately following; To say that the influence of the *Decameron* remained latent and dormant for so many years, and then late in the eighties, it dawned upon Chaucer in the shape of a profoundly altered idea of a narrative framework, is tantamount to attributing to Chaucer's mind the merit of the plan of the tales".⁷¹ Praz mentions also the other reason and says — referring to Chaucer — that "Had he taken the hint for the frame from the *Decameron*, he would have represented his story-tellers as people belonging to the same class, bound to show a uniformity of taste and language, as Boccaccio's story-tellers do only too strikingly".⁷²

"H. M. Cummings writing . . . in a study that has since come to be considered a most authoritative analysis of Chaucer's literary indebtedness to Boccaccio tells us that the internal evidence for Chaucer's knowing the *Decameron* may briefly and inconclusively be summed up:

1) There are some general similarities in the framework of the *Canterbury Tales* and that of the *Decameron*. 2) There is something of likeness in certain 'apologies' contained in the links or the frame-work of the two works".⁷³

Guerin readily accepts this opinion and expands it in the following way:

"Of particular and compelling interest . . . is the link between the (5th) and (6th) days . . . In this passage the 'Queen' Elissa, feels called upon to restrain what appears to be a slightly intoxicated enthusiasm on Dioneo's part for singing what seem to be . . . we can only guess, the songs are sadly lacking in the text save for the first lines — lewd songs".⁷⁴

Here are some of the lines translated into English:

Madonna, if I had a cembalo I might sing
Raise up Your Skirts, Mistress Burdoch,
or
"Under the Olive Lies the Grass."⁷⁵

⁷¹ O. c., note 1, p. 74.

⁷² *Ib.*, p. 76.

⁷³ O. c., note 11, p. For the second part of the quotation see also: Hubertis M. Cummings, *The Indebtedness of Chaucer's Works to the Italian Works of Boccaccio*, Princeton Univ. Dissertation, 1914, The Collegiate Press, Menasha, Wisconsin, 1916, p. 176.

⁷⁴ O. c., note 11, pp. 256—258.

⁷⁵ *Il Decamerone*, V. Chiusa.

Then Guerin continues: "Admittedly, one hears but faint echoes here of the good Harry Bailey putting quiet to the more ribald and also usually more inebriated of his company, yet the suggestion of similarity would seem as nearly compelling as remote. Indeed just as the *Miller's Tale* moves along in so delightfully prurient a manner, should not his music also have reflected a Dioneo's cast of mind? And, too, some elements of similarity would seem to derive even from the fact that music is an important part of the framing of the *Decameron* as well as the *Canterbury Tales*, where we encounter the miller's songs, his pipes, the squire's musical ability and the occasional singing during the pilgrimage".⁷⁶

I think that this passage represents the weakest piece of evidence — Guerin has used so far — in furthering his views. 1) I do not remember to have come across the similar lines — as mentioned above — in the *Canterbury Tales*. 2) Any comparison between Chaucer's *Host*, an able but plain and vulgar innkeeper, and a drunken churl like the Miller, on one side — with Boccaccio's kings and queens (including Dioneo), who belong to Florentine gentry, and who — in spite of everything — behave like refined gentlemen and ladies — on the other side — is impossible. The fact that in both cases the leaders of the groups control and check the misbehaviour of their members — is to be expected and does not prove anything; and 3) the mere fact that in both cases we encounter music and songs cannot offer any evidence that Chaucer imitated Boccaccio in this respect, just as we cannot see any connexion between the Miller's piping and Dioneo's "cast of mind".

Guerin mentions also other points of similarities between the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales*. He finds e. g. a point of similarity in the introduction of new characters into the frame-tales, "a feature not paralleled in the other analogues. In Chaucer's story the Canon and the Canon's Yeoman overtake the pilgrims; in the *Decamerone* two servants in the kitchen create a disturbance and are haled before the company, and so brought into the story".⁷⁷ The dispute was between Licisca, a very passionate and self-willed maid-servant, and Tindaro, a manservant, whether Sicofante's wife was a virgin or not when she married Sicofante. After being informed of the source of the dispute and after much laughter of the company — Elissa who happened to be the queen on that day — ordered the servants away, and the incident was over. Guerin thinks that "This disturbance in the *Decameron* may have provided the

⁷⁶ O. c., note 11, pp. 258, 259.

⁷⁷ *Ib.*, p. 263.

embryo idea for the dramatic break in the narrative of the *Canterbury Tales*".⁷⁸

If we compare these two "introductions of new characters", we can see that they have nothing in common but the mere fact of their appearance in the midst of two works. In the *Decameron* — the introduction of Licisca and Tindaro occupies less than two pages of the text, and it is by all means of a quite accidental character. Even Guerin admits that "Licisca's appearance is very brief, and her character at best is sketchy; and Tindaro is a mere phantom".⁷⁹ In the *Canterbury Tales* on the other hand — the description of the characters of the Canon and his Yeoman is fully given in almost more than 500 lines of *The Canon's Yeoman's Prologue*, and also *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*. Besides, the Canon's Yeoman tells a regular tale (comprising more than 500 lines) like all the other pilgrims of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and in this respect he could be compared only to Boccaccio's story-tellers — and not to the sketchy and quite accidental figures of the two servants.

If we review briefly all we have said about the alleged influence of Boccaccio's *Decameron* on the framework of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, we may conclude that — neither by external nor by internal evidence — have we any clear proof of its real existence. As we have seen, the same can be said about the alleged influence of various stories of the *Decameron* on the tales of Chaucer's master-piece. Even Guerin admits that "Boccaccio's frame seems slight when compared with the powerful dramatic structure and continuing character delineation of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*".⁸⁰ And Mario Praz — while speaking of Troilus — remarks that "The relation of Troilus to the *Filostrato* is not infrequently, that of a drama to a story. Boccaccio is more interested in the story itself, in its development and conclusion; for Chaucer on the other hand, the characters overgrow the story".⁸¹ Schirmer points out that the frame is more important for Chaucer than the stories included in it. And really the Prologue — in which we are given a skilful delineation of the characters of the pilgrims — is by all means the most important and the most valuable part of Chaucer's masterpiece. The tales — adapted to the different characters and tastes of the pilgrims — serve only to finish up the painting of their portraits. Boccaccio and Chaucer, as writers, were really different in many ways. Scholars — as Schirmer points out — have paid too much attention to the existing

⁷⁸ *Ib.*

⁷⁹ *Ib.*, p. 262.

⁸⁰ *Ib.*, pp. 255, 256.

⁸¹ *O. c.*, note 1, p. 79.

similarities between Chaucer and Boccaccio and have overlooked their too many differences. Boccaccio's *Decameron* comprises a 100 stories and Chaucer allegedly knew or imitated only 6 or 7 of them. What about the other 93? We have no traces of them in the *Canterbury Tales*. So it seems very probable that he knew none of the *Decameron's* stories at all. If we take all this into consideration, we cannot but agree with "the generally held scholarly belief that Chaucer did not know the *Decameron*".⁸² Chaucer's genius — as Schirmer notes — was not shaped by that of Boccaccio — at least as regards his *Canterbury Tales*. And as his way was not that of Boccaccio — he would have followed it even without him. With that the question of Boccaccio's alleged influence on Chaucer's masterpiece — becomes a question of secondary importance.

⁸² O. c., note 11, p. V.