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# Sociology of the *Brigata*: Gendered Groups in Dante, Forese, Folgore, Boccaccio — From ‘Guido, i’ vorrei’ to Griselda

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This paper considers social and group dynamics in early Italian authors — in particular Forese Donati, Dante, Folgore da San Gimignano, and Boccaccio — in order to extrapolate a ‘sociology of the *brigata*’: not a sociology of the real *brigata* as experienced in the urban milieu of medieval Italy and as described by chroniclers and social historians, but a sociology of the literary *brigata* that resides in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century literary imagination. The literary *brigata* is distinguished from its real counterpart by the ways in which it can allude to both genders and can even bring together the genders in social groups, creating a non-normative and highly provocative discursive space.

**KEYWORDS** Forese Donati, Dante, Folgore da San Gimignano, Boccaccio, *brigata*, gender

The methodology I have used in the past for developing a ‘gendered history’ of the early centuries of Italian literature is founded on the assignment of female agency — a female agency that is implied in the paternalistic and moralistic instruction doled out by Guittone d’Arezzo and Dante and mocked by Cecco d’Ascoli.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I

<sup>1</sup> See the essays ‘Notes toward a Gendered History of Italian Literature, with a Discussion of Dante’s *Beatrix loquax*’ and ‘*Sotto benda*: Gender in the Lyrics of Dante and Guittone d’Arezzo (With a Brief Excursus on Cecco d’Ascoli)’, in Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 333–78. See also my articles ‘Dante Alighieri’ and ‘Italian Literature’ in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Margaret Schaus (New York and London: Routledge, 2006). This essay originated as a lecture written for the 2008 NYU conference ‘Toward a Gendered History of Italian Literature’; an earlier version, containing more methodology and gender and less history, may be found, in Italian, in the volume of conference proceedings, *Verso una storia di genere della letteratura italiana: percorsi critici e gender studies*, ed. by Virginia Cox and Chiara Ferrari (Bologna: Il mulino, 2012), pp. 33–57.

will test a different vantage for observing the treatment of gender in early Italian authors, adopting the lens of social and group dynamics in order to extrapolate a ‘sociology of the *brigata*’: not a sociology of the real *brigata* as experienced in the urban milieu of medieval Italy but a sociology of the literary *brigata* that resides in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century literary imagination, distinguished from its real counterpart by the ways in which it can allude to both genders and can even bring together the genders in social groups.

Much of the inspiration for this essay came from the contrast between literary and historical representations of social life in early modern Florence. The unequivocally male *brigata* found in the accounts of historians Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Franco Cardini, Carol Lansing, and Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan afforded a fresh vantage for thinking about the use of the word ‘brigata’ and the representation of the *brigata* in literary texts of the period. The bleak and powerful account of Florentine patriarchy given by Klapisch-Zuber made the literary texts — and their sometimes very different perspective — come alive for me in new ways.<sup>2</sup> In the Florence portrayed by Klapisch-Zuber a group of unmarried men and women would not have been able to meet in Santa Maria Novella and then leave the city together: the mixed-gender *brigata* of the *Decameron* frame story is a veritable impossibility. The deeply negative image of immoderate and dissipative young men conjured by Crouzet-Pavan from her texts (chronicles, criminal archives, the sermons of Bernardino da Siena, sumptuary laws)<sup>3</sup> offered as well a useful counterpoint to Boccaccio’s ‘onesta brigata’ (*Decameron*, Proemio. 13).<sup>4</sup> Indeed, when Crouzet-Pavan invokes Boccaccio it is solely as a depicter of male youthful profligacy in line with the negative views of religious and lay authorities, whereas the judicious and moderate behaviour of some of the youthful protagonists of the *Decameron*, most notably those of the frame tale, goes unmentioned.<sup>5</sup> The *brigata* of the social historian — and of the chronicler Dino Compagni (c. 1255–1324), cited by the social historian — is thus very different from the most famous literary *brigata* that has come down to us:

It is also the case that groups of idle young men, some of them trained in the military and most of them left with few responsibilities, were breeding grounds for violence. Youth from particular lineages, together with friends and clients, formed *brigate*, or bands, perhaps even related to the societies described in Boncompagno’s formulary. Dino

<sup>2</sup> See Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> See Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, ‘Un fiore del male: i giovani nelle società urbane italiane (secoli XIV–XV)’, in *Storia dei giovani*, ed. by Giovanni Levi and Jean-Claude Schmitt, 2 vols (Bari: Laterza, 1994), 1. *Dall’antichità all’età moderna*, 211–77. Crouzet-Pavan writes of ‘la cupa definizione dei giovani riflessa nei diversi testi della fine del Medioevo italiano, che associa la gioventù non tanto a una funzione o a dei ruoli, quanto a comportamenti in larga misura condannabili’ (p. 213).

<sup>4</sup> The *Decameron* is cited in the edition of Vittore Branca (Turin: Einaudi, 1980).

<sup>5</sup> With respect to the *Decameron* Crouzet-Pavan writes: ‘Se il padre muore troppo presto, i figli vivono con ancora maggiore intemperanza gli eccessi della giovinezza. Senza guida, senza freno, senza ritegno, rincorrono unicamente il piacere e i loro appetiti giovanili. Attraverso la descrizione di uno splendore ancora signorile — cani, cavalli, falconi, giostre, riunioni cortesi, prodigalità — Boccaccio mostra come si possa dissipare il patrimonio’ (pp. 220–21).

Compagni referred to distinct *brigata* attached to major lineages, describing them as groups of youth who rode together. These bands were easily provoked to violence.<sup>6</sup>

Social history helps us to see that the *brigata* of the literary imagination is capable of engaging in quite different behaviours from the *brigata* of socio-historical accounts. The consideration of this divergence may in turn lead us to evaluate differently the stakes involved in the depiction of the literary *brigata*. Thus, read in isolation, the *Decameron* reaffirms the patriarchy as that to which the *brigata* returns when it returns to Santa Maria Novella. Read in historical context, the text's failure to emancipate the *brigata* from reality does not diminish the liberating power of its imaginative license, a license that restores the women and men of the *brigata* so that they are able to return to reality — to the reality of death as well as that of the patriarchy — strengthened: 'O costor non saranno dalla morte vinti o ella gli ucciderà lieti' (*Dec.*, ix. Intro. 4). Indeed, the *Decameron*'s stubborn connection to reality only enhances the power of the questions that Boccaccio poses to that reality — questions whose existence is important, in historical terms, even if the answers given to them are disappointing to us.<sup>7</sup> There is power in the text's ability to imagine a different social order from that which it can ultimately predict or endorse.

When scholars of Italian literature use the word 'brigata', we think automatically of the group of unmarried men and women who are the protagonists of the frame story of the *Decameron*. But this group, of mixed gender, while not absolutely anomalous, is in fact far from typical of what a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century writer would have expected to evoke in the mind of the contemporary reader by using the word 'brigata', as we can see from the materials offered by the website *Tesoro della lingua italiana delle origini* (TLIO).<sup>8</sup> More predictive than the *onestà brigata* of the *Decameron* with respect to the real social life of groups at the time is the division of labour and human activity along gendered lines from the *Decameron*'s Proemio: the activities that Boccaccio codes as male in the Proemio — 'uccellare, cacciare, pescare, cavalcare, giuocare o mercatare' (12)<sup>9</sup> — have a long history of association with all-male social groups.

<sup>6</sup> Carol Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates: Lineage and Faction in a Medieval Commune* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 188. Similarly, Franco Cardini sustains the continued political and military functions of the *brigata*: 'è proprio all'indomani di quella pace che — e alludiamo soprattutto alla "brigata" organizzata da Stoldo Giacoppi de' Rossi — manifestano, nel loro riorganizzarsi come ben ha notato il Davidsohn, il loro carattere politico'; see *L'acciare de' cavalieri: studi sulla cavalleria nel mondo toscano e italico (secc. XII–XV)* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1997), p. 94. Cardini does not scruple to adduce both real and literary *brigate* in his discussion; his comments on the *brigata* of *Decameron*, vi. 9 point to the convergence of chivalric and political functions: 'bisogna chiederci se non sia il caso di vedere, in queste cortesi "brigate" a capo delle quali troviamo regolarmente dei capifazione, e non certo fra quelli più moderati, quanto meno degli espedienti d'organizzazione politica di forze e di consensi' (p. 95).

<sup>7</sup> This disappointment is a thread in recent readings of gender issues in the *Decameron*; see for instance Marilyn Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) and Michael Sherberg, *The Governance of Friendship: Law and Gender in the Decameron* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> See *Tesoro della lingua italiana delle origini* available on-line at <<http://tlio.ovi.cnr.it/TLIO/>> [accessed 21 November 2011]. And see the search feature at Opera del Vocabolario Italiano, the ARTEL Project: <<http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/ovi/>> [accessed 21 November 2011].

<sup>9</sup> For Boccaccio's gendered division of human activity in the Proemio, and its imprinting through figurative language onto the sexual poetics of the *Decameron*, see my '*Le parole son donne e i fatti son maschi*': Toward a Sexual Poetics of the *Decameron* (*Dec.*, II. 9, II. 10, V. 10)', 1993, reprinted in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, pp. 281–303.

The first meaning of ‘brigata’ in *TLIO*, ‘gruppo di persone che stanno assieme per diporto’, offers textual examples that refer to groups of men, with significant focus on a key constituent of maleness in society: economic prowess and viability. On the one hand, lack of economic means is a cause for denigration, as in the *tenzone* between Dante and Forese Donati. On the other, economic strength is aggressively and perhaps wishfully asserted, as in the sonnets of Folgore da San Gimignano. The latter insistence is perhaps related to what social historians diagnose as one of the social ills that fed into the formation of bands of violent young men, namely their lack of access to power or money in a ‘gerontocracy’.<sup>10</sup> These bands of violent young men are clearly attested by the use of ‘brigata’ in Dino Compagni’s *Cronica delle cose occorrenti nei tempi suoi*, as cited in *Opera del Vocabolario Italiano (OVI)*. Writing about the youth culture of the Florentine magnates, Lansing notes: ‘Marriage and inheritance were postponed until the death or at least the dotage of the father. Unless these young men were emancipated, there is little evidence that they were allowed an adult economic role.’<sup>11</sup>

The first attestation of ‘brigata’ offered by *TLIO/OVI* is from Brunetto Latini’s *Tesoretto* (Brunetto died in 1294 or 1295), and is remarkably apt at suggesting the proper context for understanding the term’s contemporary connotations. The young male interlocutor (‘Amico’) receives instruction on how to choose companions with the requisite spending habits and financial profile. He should not frequent those richer than he, since he will either be their *giullare* or he will be driven to spend as much as they; rather he should frequent those who are about equal to him in spending ability:

Amico, e guarda bene,  
con più ricco di tene  
non ti caglia d’usare,  
ch’o starai per giullare  
o spenderai quant’essi:  
che se tu no’l facessi,  
sarebbe villania;  
e pensa tuttavia  
che larga inconincianza  
sì vuol perseveranza.  
Dunque déi provvedere,  
se ’l porta tuo podere,  
che ’l facci apertamente;  
se non, sì poni mente  
di non far tanta spesa  
che poscia sia ripresa;  
ma prendi usanz’ a tale  
che sia con teco iguale;  
e s’avanzasse un poco,  
non ti smagar di loco,

<sup>10</sup> This is a theme in the historical literature. See Crouzet-Pavan who refers to ‘il sistema istituzionalmente gerontocratico della Repubblica fiorentina’ (p. 218).

<sup>11</sup> Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates*, p. 162.

ma spendi di paraggio:  
 non prendere vantaggio.<sup>12</sup>  
 (*Tesoretto*, 1671–1692)

And he should always remember that if there is a man in his group — here is the use of ‘brigata’ — who is less able to spend than the others, this man should not be forced beyond his comfort level,<sup>13</sup> because discredit and shame will ensue to those who pressure him:

E pensa ogne fiata,  
 se nella tua *brigata*  
 ha omo al tu’ parere  
 men potente d’avere,  
 per Dio no’llo sforzare  
 più che non posse fare:  
 che se per tu’ conforto  
 il su’ dispende a torto  
 e torna in basso stato,  
 tu ne sarai biasmato.  
 (*Tesoretto*, 1693–1702; my italics)

The word ‘brigata’ is deeply interwoven with issues of masculinity, social status, and economic power, as witnessed by another early use of the term: after the *Tesoretto* it shows up in one of Forese Donati’s sonnets to Dante from the scurrilous and mutually demeaning *tenzone* of poems exchanged by the two men before Forese’s death in 1296.<sup>14</sup> In the first sonnet, ‘Chi udisse tossir’, Dante attacks Forese’s manhood and virility directly, impugning him as a husband who leaves his wife uncovered in bed, unable therefore — by implication — to maintain a lineage, a bloodline. The theme of marital negligence becomes explicitly economic only toward the end of this sonnet, when Dante imagines Forese’s mother-in-law lamenting that for a minimal dowry she could have married her daughter instead into the noble family of Count Guido. In his second attack, ‘Ben ti faranno’, Dante sharpens the economic focus, first accusing Forese of being a bastard, the son of a dishonoured mother (thus returning to the question of virility and lineage), and then a glutton who has incurred ruinous debt in order to support his expensive eating habits: the partridge breasts and loins of mutton of verses 2–3. Gluttony and the debt incurred by expensive food is a key theme running through the literature on male pursuits and social organizations, and it will recur in Dante’s own indictment of the Sienese *brigata spendereccia* in *Inferno* xxix, a group of idle young men who, like Forese, are

<sup>12</sup> *Tesoretto*, ed. by Gianfranco Contini, *Poeti del Duecento*, 2 vols (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960), II, verses 1671–92 (pp. 234–35).

<sup>13</sup> Crouzet Pavan writes of the pressures to spend, ‘la solidarietà del gruppo è ancora rafforzata dalle pratiche di ospitalità e di liberalità dei giovani più ricchi’ (‘Un fiore del male’, p. 221), and of how the head of a *brigata* owed his position to his willingness to spend beyond his family’s resources: ‘Mediante tali liberalità, eccessive se rapportate alle risorse della sua famiglia, il capo della società prova e giustifica la sua distinzione’ (‘Un fiore del male’, p. 247).

<sup>14</sup> On the social context of the *tenzone* see Susan Noakes, ‘Virility, Nobility, and Banking: The Crossing of Discourses in the *Tenzone* with Forese’, in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. by Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), pp. 241–58.

addicted to ruinously expensive eating, along with other spendthrift behaviours. Replete with male social behaviour and the lexicon of male interaction (including nicknames) as these sonnets are, it is not surprising to find the word ‘brigata’, used by Forese to warn Dante of the unsavoury company of his own bloodline, in the form of his impoverished paternal uncle Bello di Bellincione or ‘Belluzzo’: ‘che col Belluzzo tu non stia in brigata’ (‘Va’ rivesti San Gal’, l. 11).<sup>15</sup>

The ‘mal boccone’ that ruins Forese according to Dante in ‘Ben ti faranno’ (l. 7) will continue to stimulate Dante to indictments of high-class male pursuits, first in the canzone ‘Poscia ch’Amor’, and ultimately in the *Commedia*. The canzone ‘Poscia ch’Amor’ is a paean to the courtly virtue of *leggiadria* that approaches the definition of *leggiadria* by explaining what it is not. Thus, true courtly grace does not consist of throwing away one’s material wealth in prodigal waste: such throwing away of one’s belongings — ‘gittar via loro avere’ (‘Poscia ch’Amor’, l. 20) — might masquerade as courtly largesse but it is not; it is lack of temperance. Dante is here doing his best to distinguish extravagance — the precise kinds of extravagance that social historians associate with the demands of *cavalleria* and with the *societates juvenum*<sup>16</sup> — from liberality and munificence. Following the prodigal throwing away (‘gittar via’) of wealth, the canzone ‘Poscia ch’Amor’ indicts as moral failings the extravagant consumption of food, sex, and personal ornamentation: ‘divorar cibo ed a lussuria intendere, | ornarsi’ (‘Poscia ch’Amor’, ll. 33–34). The ‘divorar cibo’ of ‘Poscia ch’Amor’ echoes the charge of gluttony fuelled by prodigality levelled by Dante at Forese in the *tenzone* and forecasts *Inferno* XXIX, where Dante sketches the lineaments of the Sieneese spendthrifts who ‘devoured’ or ‘consumed’ their resources.

Before moving on to the two uses of ‘brigata’ in the *Commedia*, one *in malo* of *Inferno* XXIX and one *in bono* of *Purgatorio* XIV, we should note that the *brigata* as a socio-economic feature of Italian life is tied to an ethical conflict between two value-systems that emerges in Dante’s thought and that is reflected in his attempt in ‘Poscia ch’Amor’ to distinguish extravagance and prodigality from ‘true’ liberality. The courtly value of liberality — *largesse* in spending — is difficult to square with the Aristotelian virtue of temperance, precisely because it comes dangerously close to prodigality. For Aristotle, temperance is at the mean, and is flanked by the vices of avarice and prodigality. In a society, however, in which prodigality is in some ways mandated in the upper class,<sup>17</sup> temperance is not always sought or prized. On the other hand, for the religious and lay authorities, dissolute spending is at the origin of all other criminal abuses laid at the door of young men.<sup>18</sup> (This last point serves as a

<sup>15</sup> Dante’s lyrics are cited from the edition of Domenico De Robertis, *Rime* (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Folgore da San Gimignano’s introductory sonnet in his cycle ‘Sonetti per l’armamento di un cavaliere’ succinctly expresses the economic demands of becoming a knight: ‘Ora si fa un donzello cavalieri; | e’ vuoi si far novellamente degno, | e pon sue terre e sue castell’ a pegno | per ben fornirsi di ciò ch’è mistieri’ (verses 1–4); on this cycle see the essay by Maria Pont, ‘Sonetti per l’armamento di un cavaliere’, in *Il giuoco della vita bella, Folgore da San Gimignano: studi e testi*, ed. by Michelangelo Picone (San Gimignano: Nencini Poggibonsi, 1988), pp. 51–63. See also Franco Cardini, *Quell’antica festa crudele: guerra e cultura della guerra dall’età feudale alla Grande Rivoluzione* (Milan: Mondadori, 1982), who writes: ‘i cavalieri sono un ceto alla ricerca perenne di risorse economiche le quali vengono a loro volta, poi, immediatamente prosciugate’ (p. 50).

<sup>17</sup> Crouzet-Pavan writes of ‘tradizione signorile di prodigalità necessarie e consentite’ (‘Un fiore del male’, p. 233).

<sup>18</sup> Crouzet-Pavan: ‘Tale dissolutezza è all’origine di tutti gli altri eccessi, abusi e crimini: la lussuria, l’adulterio, la sodomia, la violenza’ (‘Un fiore del male’, p. 256).

reminder that Dante's charge that Forese turned to thievery to satisfy his prodigal tastes may not have been, to his contemporaries, simple rhetorical jest and hyperbole; whether or not true, it would resonate in a cultural climate in which prodigality was viewed as the root of other social ills.) Dante is more thoughtful and complex than either of these two camps: profoundly attuned to the values of *cortesia* but also an Aristotelian, he finds himself conflicted on the subject of 'wealth management', both condemning prodigality and praising the 'pregio della borsa' of the noble Malaspina family (*Purg.*, VIII. 129).<sup>19</sup>

The *brigata spendereccia* of Sieneſe spendthrifts conjured by Dante in *Inferno* XXIX has entered social and lexical history.<sup>20</sup> This is Dante's brief and pungent description:

Tra'mene Stricca  
che ſeppe far le temperate ſpeſe,  
e Niccolò che la coſtuma ricca  
del garofano prima diſcoverſe  
ne l'orto dove tal ſeme ſ'appicca;  
e tra'ne la *brigata* in che diſperſe  
Caccia d'Ascian la vigna e la gran fonda,  
e l'Abbagliato ſuo ſenno proferſe.  
(*Inf.*, XXIX. 125–32; my italics)

In *Inferno* XXIX Dante ſets the *brigata spendereccia* within a ſocio-economic meditation that has many commonalities with the *tenzone* with Foreſe — including a male family relation, Geri del Bello, named in the early part of the canto<sup>21</sup>: in common are the male names, extravagant eating habits, ſquandering of reſources, and ſarcaſtic language. *Inferno* XXIX's vignette of the *brigata spendereccia* is focused on exceſſ consumption, a ſocial and economic ill that is given immediate ethical focus through the ſarcaſtic reference to Stricca's 'temperate ſpeſe' in verſe 126,<sup>22</sup> and is then linked

<sup>19</sup> In a perceptive footnote, Cardini notes 'È importante inſiſtere ſu queſto tema della prodigalità, come diſmiſura in certo modo collegata però alla *largitas*, vizio ſul piano etico criſtiano tradizionale ma divenuta virtù ſu quello del *Tugendsystem* cavallereſco' (*L'acciar de' cavalieri*, p. 93, note 67). Cardini does not factor in the further complication of Ariſtotelian ethics, to whoſe ſystem prodigality belongs as well. See Teodolinda Barolini, 'Ariſtotle's "Mezzo", Courtly "Miſura", and Dante's Canzone "Le dolci rime": Humanism, Ethics, and Social Anxiety', in *Dante and the Greeks*, ed. by Jan Ziolkowski, forthcoming.

<sup>20</sup> On the lexical ſide, *TLIO* offers, ſub voce *brigata*, a ſubcategory of meaning 1 that is devoted to the *brigata spendereccia*: 'gruppo di perſone citato da Dante in *Inf.* XXIX, che formarono una brigata a Siena, dilapidando per divertiri tutti i propri averi'. On the ſocial ſide, ſee Cardini, *L'acciar de' cavalieri*, p. 139, and Crouzet-Pavan, who writes: 'Senza dubbio la "brigata spendereccia" ſeneſe coſtituiſce l'eſempio più perfetto di queſta diſtribuzione delle ricchezze fatta all'unico ſcopo di godere e far godere' ('Un fiore del male', p. 247).

<sup>21</sup> *Inferno* XXIX features Geri del Bello (named in verſe 27), coſin of Dante's father, and therefore alſo coſin of the 'Belluzzo' of the *tenzone* with Foreſe; Geri is conjured in a context redolent of male ſhame and honour and the culture of the violent *brigata* of the Florentine ſtreets.

<sup>22</sup> Francesco da Buti writes that 'Queſto Stricca fu uno giovane ſaneſe, molto ricco lo quale fu della brigata spendereccia la quale ſi fe in Siena; nella qual brigata queſto Stricca conſumò tutto lo ſuo grande avere' and continues about the group as a whole in a way that is reminiscent of 'Poſcia ch'Amor': 'Queſta brigata vivette molto luſſurioſamente e prodigalmente, ſtando in cene et in deſinari, ſempre cavalcando belliffimi cavalli ferrati con ferri d'ariento, veſtendo belliffime robe, tenendo famigli veſtiti a taglia e ſpenditori, facendo ſempre più e più vivande e di grande ſpeſa'; ſee *Commento di Francesco da Buti ſopra la Divina Comedia di Dante Allighieri*, ed. by Crescentino Giannini, 3 vols (Pisa: Nistri, 1858-62), I, 753.

to trade as a promoter of immoderate social habits through the discovery of ‘la costuma ricca | del garofano’ (127–28). In crediting Niccolò de’ Salimbeni with the introduction of the expensive custom of the use of cloves to flavour roasts of meat, Francesco da Buti waxes lyrical regarding the sumptuous and unusual foods eaten by the *brigata spendereccia*:

questo messer Nicolò fu della detta brigata, e perchè ciascuno pensava pur di trovare vivande suntuose e ghiotte, in tanto che allora si dicono essere trovati i bramangieri e le frittelle ubaldine et altre simil cose, sì che delle vivande il lor cuoco fece uno libro; e pensando di trovare qualche vivande disusata, fece mettere nelli fagiani e starne et altri uccelli arrosto li gherofani et altre speziarie sì, che tale usanza fu chiamata *la costuma ricca del gherofano*, et elli fu lo primo che la trovò.<sup>23</sup>

With his usual concision Dante evokes the male-male interactions of the *brigata* through their names — Niccolò, Caccia d’Ascian, l’Abbagliato — and isolates a key feature of the male social club, namely its devotion to extravagant eating and ‘la cucina’.

In the *Commedia* Dante does not cast the term ‘brigata’ in only a negative light; we find it again in *Purgatorio* XIV, where it is featured in a nostalgic reminiscence for a lost world of feudal customs and courtly values:

Questi è Rinier; questi è ’l pregio e l’onore  
de la casa da Calboli, ove nullo  
fatto s’è reda poi del suo valore.

E non pur lo suo sangue è fatto brullo,  
tra ’l Po e ’l monte e la marina e ’l Reno,  
del ben richesto al vero e al trastullo;

ché dentro a questi termini è ripieno  
di venenosi sterpi, sì che tardi  
per coltivare omai verrebber meno.

Ov’è ’l buon Lizio e Arrigo Mainardi?  
Pier Traversaro e Guido di Carpigna?  
Oh Romagnuoli tornati in bastardi!

Quando in Bologna un Fabbro si ralligna?  
quando in Faenza un Bernardin di Fosco,  
verga gentil di picciola gramigna?

Non ti maravigliar s’io piango, Tosco,  
quando rimembro con Guido da Prata,  
Ugolin d’Azzo che vivette nosco,

Federigo Tignoso e sua *brigata*,  
la casa Traversara e li Anastagi  
(e l’una gente e l’altra è diretata),

le donne e ’ cavalier, li affanni e li agi

<sup>23</sup> For Michelangelo Picone, Niccolò ‘non fa propriamente parte’ of Dante’s *brigata spendereccia*, whereas Caccia d’Ascian and l’Abbagliato are ‘i due personaggi che veramente fanno parte della “brigata” senese di Dante’; see Picone, ‘La brigata di Folgore fra Dante e Boccaccio’, in *Il giuoco della vita bella*, pp. 25–40, citation p. 38. The early commentators such as Francesco da Buti include all three men. Picone argues that Dante’s *brigata spendereccia* be viewed as a polemical response to the *brigata* of Folgore da San Gimignano’s *Mesi* cycle.



che ne 'nvogliava amore e cortesia  
 là dove i cuor son fatti sì malvagi.  
 (*Purg.*, XIV. 88–111; my italics)

This passage thematizes the ‘casa’ (‘l’ pregio e l’onore | de la casa da Calboli’ [88–89]), in the sense of the patriline, and presents a densely conceived social ideology in which the heir of a bloodline ideally inherits his father’s values along with his *casa*. Dante sees bloodlines that have become corrupted (‘Oh Romagnuoli tornati in bastardi!’ (99)) or are without heirs (‘e l’una gente e l’altra è diretata’ (108)). This nostalgic paean to a lost world of those ‘donne e ’ cavalier’ that inspired ‘amore e cortesia’ (109–10) contains the reference to ‘Federigo Tignoso e sua brigata’ (106), glossed by the early commentators with the information that Federigo is from Rimini. Benvenuto adds that Dante describes Federigo on the basis of the society he keeps, which was entirely laudable: ‘ideo Dantes describit ipsum a societate sua, quae erat tota laudabilis.’<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps the best-known literary celebration of a *brigata*, other than that found in the *Decameron*, is to be found in the sonnet cycle on the months of Folgore da San Gimignano (whose dates of *c.* 1270–*c.* 1332 make him a contemporary of Dante). Folgore produced three sonnet cycles: the ‘due corone maggiori’, ‘Sonetti della Semana e dei Mesi’, and a ‘minore’, ‘Sonetti per l’armamento di un cavaliere’.<sup>25</sup> In the sonnets of the *Semana* cycle Folgore celebrates the days of the week in the life of a young *donzello* (a youth preparing to be a knight); in the sonnets of the *Mesi* he similarly ritualizes the months of the year as moments in the life of a ‘brigata nobile e cortese’ (‘Dedica alla brigata’, l. 1). The ‘brigata nobile e cortese’ is also called ‘la brigata franca’ (‘Di gennaio’, l. 14) — that is, an economically well-endowed, financially emancipated, and therefore self-evidently all-male *brigata*.<sup>26</sup> While amorous play is one of the sports in which Folgore’s *brigata* participates,<sup>27</sup> and while the *donzello* of the *Semana* cycle enjoys the company of ladies at Wednesday’s banquet, having his wounds bandaged by ladies after the joust on Thursday, sending game to his lady after a hunt on Friday, and ‘ragionare con quella che più ama’ on Sunday,<sup>28</sup> the *brigata* itself is exclusively male. Their male names, including patronymics, are on display in the *Mesi* cycle — ‘Tingoccio e Min di Tingo e Ancaiano, | Bartolo e

<sup>24</sup> *Comentum super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam*, ed. by J. F. Lacaita, 5 vols (Florence: Barbèra, 1887), III, 391.

<sup>25</sup> The labels ‘due corone maggiori’ and ‘la minore’ are Michelangelo Picone’s; see *Il giuoco della vita bella*, p. 11. The text is from this volume as well; see ‘Le due corone: sonetti della *Semana* e dei *Mesi* con il commento di Michelangelo Picone’, pp. 79–125. On ‘Sonetti per l’armamento di un cavaliere’, see note 16 above.

<sup>26</sup> In the gloss of Michelangelo Picone, ‘brigata franca’ = ‘libera cioè da ogni preoccupazione economica’; see *Il giuoco della vita bella*, p. 101. In *Commiato*, the adjective modifying the word ‘brigata’ is ‘lieta’ (‘ché senza lui non è lieta brigata’ (11)). This *brigata* cannot be ‘lieta’ if it is not ‘franca’.

<sup>27</sup> Amorous play includes: throwing snow at young ladies, ‘gittando della neve bella e bianca | alle donzelle che saran d’attorno’ (‘Di gennaio’, ll. 10–11); dancing ‘alla provenzalesca’ (‘D’aprile’, l. 7); kissing and amorous conversation, ‘e pulzelle e giovani garzoni | baciarsi nella bocca e nelle guance; | d’amor e di goder vi si ragioni’ (‘Di maggio’, ll. 12–14).

<sup>28</sup> The *ragionamento* with ‘donne e donzelle’ enjoyed by the *donzello* on Wednesday, like the ‘ragionare con quella che più ama’ on Sunday, recall Dante’s ‘Guido, i’ vorrei’, to which we will return. See *Giovedie* for coming home to the ladies after jousting, ‘E poi tornare a casa alle lor vaghe’ (l. 9), and having the ladies assist the doctors in bandaging wounds, ‘e’ medici fasciar percosse e piaghe, | e le donne aitar con le lor mani’ (ll. 11–12); and *Venerdie* for sending game to one’s lady after a hunt: ‘E poi raccogliere i cani e la gente, | e dicer “L’amor meo manda a cotale”’ (ll. 9–10).

Mugàvero e Fainotto' ('Dedica alla brigata', ll. 9–10) — which presents a crowned king, Nicolò, who is called the flower of Siennese youth: 'in questo regno Nicolò incorono, | perch'elli è 'l fior della città sanese' ('Dedica alla brigata', ll. 7–8). These men are equipped with key masculine accoutrements: 'cani e uccelli e danari per ispese' ('Dedica alla brigata', l. 4). Proceeding chronologically through the months, they indulge in hunting ('Di febbraio'), fishing ('Di marzo'), jousting ('Di maggio'), and gaming ('Di dicembre') — as well as plenty of eating together.

Whether the men of the *Mesi* cycle are in the mountains in August or at the baths in November, the common denominator of their social encounters is their full purses: 'quando con altra gente rincontrando, | le vostre borse sempre acconce a spendere' ('Di settembre', ll. 12–13). The *donzello* of the *Semana* cycle too is lavish in his spending: 'ma spende più che 'l marchese lombardo' ('Dedica', *Semana*, l. 14). In line with the values of *cavalleria*, Folgore's *brigata* fears the shame of stinginess, not the shame of prodigality: 'e le borse fornite di danari, | ad onta degli scarsi e degli avari' ('Di febbraio', ll. 6–7); 'le vostre borse sempre acconce a spendere, | e tutti abbiate l'avarizia in bando' ('Di settembre', ll. 13–14); 'e beffe far de' tristi cattivelli, | de' miseri dolenti sciagurati | avari: non vogliate usar con elli' ('Di dicembre', ll. 12–14). Indeed, Folgore seems to mirror quite closely one extreme of the contemporary conflict in ethical values outlined above, in that he worries about miserliness but not prodigality, and he spurns the Church, whose representatives (especially preachers, cited by Crouzet-Pavan) were savage in criticizing prodigal youth: 'Chiesa non v'abbia mai né monistero: | lasciate predicar i preti pazzi, | ché hanno assai bugie e poco vero' ('Di marzo', ll. 12–14). Like the expensive 'costuma ricca | del garofano' (*Inf.*, xxix. 127–28) that comes from the east to Siena for the enjoyment of the *brigata spendereccia*, so too the world from Europe to the Orient exists to furnish extravagant pleasures and delights for the men of Folgore's *brigata*: 'destrier di Spagna, | e gente costumata alla francesca | cantar, danzar alla provenzalesca | con istormenti nuovi d'Alemagna [. . .] di pietre preziose, le più fini | c'ha 'l Presto Gianni o 'l re di Babilonia' ('D'aprile', ll. 5–8, 13–14). Trade and commerce are the engines that fuel the *brigata's* gluttony and prodigality.

The pleasures of these men centre around eating together, as a male group that convenes multiple times in one day: 'e man e sera mangiare in brigata' ('Di luglio', l. 4). They take avid interest in food, giving precise instructions to the cook: 'E poi tornare a casa e dire al cuoco: | "To' queste cose e acconcia per dimane, | e pela, taglia, assetta e metti a fuoco; | ed abbie fino vino e bianco pane, | ch'e' s'apparecchia di far festa e giuoco: | fa che le tue cucine non sien vane!"' ('Sabato die', ll. 9–14).<sup>29</sup> Very important is the specification that Folgore's *brigata* gathers for convivial repasts without a wife who functions as 'castaldo' (supervisor/manager): 'e non voler la moglie per castaldo' ('Di luglio', l. 14). The supervision of family accounts by the *moglie/castaldo* is intended to guarantee *spese temperate*; free of such supervision the men are more likely to engage in excessive repasts such as 'gelatina ismisurata' ('Di luglio', l. 5).<sup>30</sup> Eating together in a group of men, emancipated from female thrift and family economies, is a major social indicator of masculine prestige. We remember

<sup>29</sup> The vignette of 'Sabato die' whereby a crane (the 'grue' of verse 3) is given to the cook with detailed instructions for preparation is reminiscent of the story of Chichibio in the *Decameron* (vi. 4).

<sup>30</sup> Clothing also offers opportunities for lack of *misura*: 'cappucci fini e smisurati' ('Di dicembre', l. 11).

that Bruno and Buffalmacco are able to steal for an extravagant male feast the annual pig that Calandrino salts for his family ('Videro costoro il porco esser bellissimo e da Calandrino intesero che per la famiglia sua il voleva salare' (*Dec.*, VIII. 6. 7)), because that year monna Tessa is sick and unable to go to the countryside for the pig butchering. *Decameron*, VIII. 6 is thus a gloss on Folgore's 'e non voler la moglie per castaldo': Boccaccio ties Calandrino's wife into the story as an economic factor from the beginning, specifying that Calandrino's annual pig comes to him from the property that he received in dowry from his wife ('aveva un suo poderetto non guari lontan da Firenze, che in dote aveva avuto dalla moglie' (*Dec.*, VIII. 6. 4)) and indicating that had Tessa — the family administrator or 'castaldo' — been present, then Bruno and Buffalmacco would not have even attempted to execute their scheme. At a deep level *Decameron*, VIII. 6 relates the transfer of wealth from the female Tessa to the male social club led by Bruno and Buffalmacco. And indeed the multiple *novelle* portraying Calandrino with his friends are stories that portray a male *brigata*.

The importance of dining for these social clubs is further attested in Day VIII by story 9, the story of how Bruno and Buffalmacco entice Maestro Simone to want to become a member of their club: Bruno's description of life in this invented *brigata* begins with the 'sala dove mangiamo e le tavole messe alla reale' (*Dec.*, VIII. 9. 20). This novella, the only one to carry the word 'brigata' emblazoned in its rubric and boasting eleven uses of the word in all (by far more than any other novella in the *Decameron*<sup>31</sup>), offers an oblique handbook on the practices of male social clubs: this one is composed of twenty-five men ('ordinarono una brigata forse di venticinque uomini' (19)), a new member has to be proposed and accepted ('s'accese di volere essere in questa brigata ricevuto' (31)), the club has officers who rotate every six months ('Noi sì abbiamo a questa nostra brigata sempre un capitano con due consiglieri, li quali di sei in sei mesi si mutano' (37)), and formal dress is required for the first presentation of a candidate for membership ('acciò che voi per la prima volta compariate orrevole dinanzi alla brigata' (81)).<sup>32</sup>

While *Decameron*, VIII. 9 depicts the aggressive attempts of a social interloper to enter an imagined *brigata*, *Decameron*, VI. 9 tells of the aggressive attempts of a historical *brigata* to recruit a resistant Guido Cavalcanti.<sup>33</sup> Brunelleschi's *brigata* cares little for Guido's intellectual brilliance but is dazzled by his social accomplishments, high status, and great wealth: 'sì fu egli leggiadrissimo e costumato e parlante uom molto e ogni cosa che far volle e a gentile uom pertene seppe meglio che altro uom fare; e con questo era ricchissimo' (*Dec.*, VI. 9. 8). Brunelleschi's *brigata*, whose customs, carefully listed by Boccaccio, include the honouring of strangers and of citizens, dressing alike at least once a year, and riding through the city and occasional jousting, especially on holidays or to celebrate good tidings like a military victory (*Dec.*, VI. 9. 5–6), has as its chief custom dining together. Consequently they are looking for members who can bear the costs of the rotating dinners that members

<sup>31</sup> Seventeen novelle feature the *brigata* of the frame story. Of the lexical *brigata* encountered in these seventeen novelle, thirteen are all-male. The references to male *brigata* may be found in: I. 6; II. 5; V. 3; VI. 7; VI. 6; VI. 9; VI. 10; VIII. 4; VIII. 6; VIII. 9; IX. 5; IX. 8; X. 2. This lexical tally does not include all the male *brigata* present in the text; for instance, Calandrino and his friends are sometimes referred to as a *brigata*, and sometimes not. There is much more material on the male *brigata* to be extracted from the *Decameron*.

<sup>32</sup> On the regulations of the Florentine *brigata*, see Cardini, *L'acciar de' cavalieri*, pp. 129–30.

<sup>33</sup> Cardini includes the *brigata* of *Decameron*, VI. 9 in his discussion of historical *brigata*; see *L'acciar de' cavalieri*, p. 95.

must offer each other: ‘facevano lor brigate di certo numero, guardando di mettervi tali che comportare potessono acconciamente le spese, e oggi l’uno, doman l’altro, e così per ordine tutti mettevano tavola, ciascuno il suo dì, a tutta la brigata’ (*Dec.*, vi. 9. 5). But money is not all that matters: Guido’s social graces and the ability to entertain with speech and storytelling are also important.<sup>34</sup>

Non-literary textual uses of the word ‘brigata’ confirm that this social grouping is primarily a vehicle for male interaction and socialization, as we see in the chronicles of Dino Compagni and Giovanni Villani (c. 1276 or 1280–1348).<sup>35</sup> *Brigata* of women are less common but not non-existent. Antonio da Tempo refers to a *brigata* of female personifications,<sup>36</sup> St Catherine uses the word adverbially in the sense of ‘tutte assieme’ for a group of women — ‘Or oltre, carissime figliuole: tutte di bella brigata corriamo’ (*TLIO*) — and Boccaccio in the *Decameron* twice refers to *brigata* of women, having conjured such *brigata* previously in the *Caccia di Diana* and *Ninfale fiesolano*<sup>37</sup>: Ricciardo ‘nella brigata delle donne di Catella fu ricevuto’ (*Dec.*, iii. 6. 9);<sup>38</sup> Filippo Balducci’s son is entranced by ‘una brigata di belle giovani donne e ornate’ who — just as happens in the *Vita nuova*, although Dante of course does not use the word ‘brigata’ in the *libello*<sup>39</sup> — ‘da un paio di nozze venieno’ (*Dec.*, iv. Intro. 20). But the mixed male/female *brigata* is hard to find: Boccaccio himself, after a reference in the *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta*,<sup>40</sup> offers only two instances in the

<sup>34</sup> Michele Scalza is similarly sought after by young Florentines for their *brigata*: he is ‘il più piacevole e il più sollazzevole uomo del mondo e le più nuove novelle aveva per le mani; per la qual cosa i giovani fiorentini avevan molto caro, quando in brigata si trovavano, di poter aver lui’ (*Dec.*, vi. 6. 4).

<sup>35</sup> Describing Florentine celebrations after a victory over Arezzo (Boccaccio too, we recall, mentioned the enthusiasm of Florentine *brigata* on receiving ‘alcuna lieta novella di vittoria’ (*Dec.*, vi. 9. 6)), Villani segregates the citizenry by gender, retaining the word ‘brigata’ for the young men: ‘E per allegrezza e buono stato ogni anno per calen di maggio si faceano le brigate e compagnie di genti giovani vestiti di nuovo, e facendo corti coperte di zendadi e di drappi, e chiuse di legname in più parti della città; e simile di donne e di pulcelle, andando per la terra ballando con ordine, e signore accoppiati, cogli stromenti e colle ghirlande di fiori in capo, stando in giuochi e in allegrezze, e in desinari e cene’; see *Nuova cronica*, ed. by Giovanni Porta, 3 vols (Parma: Ugo Guanda Editore, 1991), 1, 606 (Libro 8, cap. 132).

<sup>36</sup> ‘I son Speranza con questa brigata | Per cui la mia persona vien guardata: | Modestia, Penitenzia, ed Allegrezza . . .’ (*TLIO*).

<sup>37</sup> This social configuration seems to have interested Boccaccio. The *Caccia di Diana* might indeed be defined as a work devoted to the idea of the female *brigata*, while the *Ninfale* affords Boccaccio the opportunity to indulge in depicting bands of virginal nymphs: ‘vi vo’ contar della bella brigata | delle vergini sue’ (st. 9); ‘Quivi trasse di ninfe gran brigata’ (st. 216). Boccaccio’s *Rime* too offer an example of a *brigata* of women.

<sup>38</sup> The passage in *Dec.*, iii. 6 is a rich one, analogous to that in vi. 9. While the passage in vi. 9 purports to be a history of the *brigata* and its customs in Florence, the passage in iii. 6 tells of the customs of the Neapolitan gentry: ‘essendo il tempo caldo e molte brigate di donne e di cavalieri, secondo l’usanza de’ napoletani, andassero a diportarsi a’ liti del mare e a desinarvi e a cenarvi’ (9). Despite the ambiguity of ‘molte brigate di donne e di cavalieri’, I think that Boccaccio is here referring to separate groups of men and women, because he continues: ‘Ricciardo, sapendo Catella con sua brigata esservi andata, similmente con sua compagnia v’andò e nella brigata delle donne di Catella fu ricevuto’ (9; my italics).

<sup>39</sup> In the prose of the *Vita nuova*, and in the sonnets ‘Vede perfettamente ogni salute’ and ‘Di donne io vidi una gentil schiera’, Dante effectively sketches a *brigata delle donne*; see my commentary to these poems in *Rime giovanili e della Vita nuova*, ed. and comm. by Teodolinda Barolini with notes by Manuele Gragnolati (Milan: Rizzoli, 2009). He sketches a *brigata* of men in ‘Volgete gli occhi’, and mixed-gender *brigata* in ‘Guido, i’ vorrei’ and ‘Amore e monna Lagia e Guido ed io’.

<sup>40</sup> See *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta*, Capitolo v. 26: ‘ora qua e ora là, ora questa brigata di donne e di giovani, e ora quell’altra’ (4); ‘Niuno lito, niuno scoglio, niuna grotta da me non cercata vi rimaneva, né ancora alcuna brigata’ (15). The key precursor to the *Decameron* is the mixed-gender group that discusses the *questioni d’amore* in Book iv of the *Filocolo*, for which Boccaccio does not use the word *brigata*.

*novelle*, and neither involves unmarried and unsupervised young people staying alone in country houses, but rather brief and necessary travel to reach a destination. The examples belong to *Dec.*, II. 6 and VI. 1. In *Dec.*, II. 6, after Guasparrino gives his daughter in marriage to Giuffredi, the entire wedding party, including Currado's ambassador and the faithful nurse, travels to Lerici in a *brigata*: 'dove, ricevuto da Currado, con tutta sua brigata n'andò a un castel di Currado non molto di quivi lontano' (II. 6. 75). The *brigata* of *Dec.*, VI. 1 poses a more complex problem, since VI. 1 in itself constitutes a *mise-en-abyme* of storytelling as a life-sustaining activity, and the analogy with the *Decameron* frame-*brigata* is made explicit with the words 'come noi siamo':

la quale [madonna Oretta] per avventura essendo in contado, *come noi siamo*, e da un luogo a un altro andando per via di diporto insieme con donne e con cavalieri, li quali a casa sua il di avuti aveva a desinare, e essendo forse la via lunghetta di là onde si partivano a colà dove tutti a piè d'andare intendevano, disse uno de' cavalieri della *brigata*. (VI. 1. 6; my italics)

Despite the deep connection between madonna Oretta's correction of her companion's bad *novellare* as life-threatening and the ideology of the frame-*brigata* that motivates the *Decameron* as a whole, Boccaccio carefully circumscribes the situation in which madonna Oretta finds herself: unlike the frame-characters who live together in each others' *ville*, madonna Oretta is only casually and briefly in a *brigata* with the knight ('da un luogo a un altro andando per via di diporto insieme con donne e con cavalieri').

The mixed male/female *brigata*, then, was not a commonplace in Tuscan society, nor in its literature. In Fazio degli Uberti's *Dittamondo*, Ethiopians are criticized for the mingling of men and women in a common *brigata*, something we are told that 'fra noi' only 'le mondane' do: 'Io vedea per tutto andare a piede | *uomini e femine e stare in brigata*, | come fra noi le mondane si vede' (Libro 5, cap. 22. 40–42; my italics).<sup>41</sup> The mixing of gender in *brigata* triggers an indictment of the general lewdness of Ethiopian society, in which — in the worst nightmare of a patrilineal society like that of Florence — children do not know their fathers: 'Guata | questa gente bestiale e senza legge | come al piacer di Venere s'è data. | E sappi che di quante se ne legge, | non truovi schiatta di questa più vile: | niun conosce il padre, ben ch'el vegge' (43–48).

The life of the all-male *brigata* of Folgore da San Gimignano may have been idealized, in terms of the luxury of their appointments and their never diminishing spending power, but it is realistic enough in terms of its composition and activities: when St Catherine wants to condemn a rogue priest she writes that 'egli sta in giuoco e in sollazzo con le sue dimonie e va *brigitando* co' secolari, cacciando e uccellando come se fusse uno secolare e uno signore di corte' (my italics).<sup>42</sup> The 'signore di corte' who wants to spend all his time hunting and fowling, and doesn't want to be saddled with a wife any more than do the members of Folgore's *brigata* — who are characterized by their 'non voler la moglie per castaldo' ('Di luglio', l. 14) — is a figure that fits Boccaccio's description of the Marchese di Saluzzo, the man who marries Griselda but who had not wanted to marry at all. Gualtieri wants to spend his time like the

<sup>41</sup> Fazio degli Uberti, *Il 'Dittamondo' e le rime*, ed. by Giuseppe Corsi (Bari: Laterza, 1952).

<sup>42</sup> See *Libro della divina dottrina*, ed. by Matilde Fiorilli (Bari: Laterza, 1928), cap. 130, p. 283.

members of Folgore's brigata: 'essendo senza moglie e senza figliuoli, in niuna altra cosa il suo tempo spendeva che in uccellare e in cacciare, né di prender moglie né d'aver figliuoli alcun pensiero avea' (*Dec.*, x. 10. 4). For him taking a wife is literally a form of restraint, of being tied up in chains: 'Ma poi che pure in queste catene vi piace d'annodarmi' (x. 10. 8). He is obliged to take on these chains by his men, who want to ensure the lineage and the social order: 'La qual cosa a' suoi uomini non piaccendo, più volte il pregaron che moglie prendesse, acciò che egli senza erede né essi senza signor rimanessero' (x. 10. 5). Refashioned by Petrarch into a tale *De insigni obedientia et fide uxoria* and since then read as Griselda's tale, in the *Decameron* rubric Boccaccio presents x. 10 as dealing with the male on male power struggles between lord and vassals in a feudal society, in effect a story that engages the 'sociology of the *brigata*': 'Il marchese di Sanluzzo da' prieghi de' suoi uomini costretto di pigliar moglie' (x. 10. 1).<sup>43</sup>

Boccaccio's Gualtieri is a man accustomed to rule who encounters the limits of his freedom and the obligations rather than the perquisites of his high social status when his subjects insist that he marry in order to produce an heir. He responds by reasserting his will, accepting his duty to the patriline but requiring absolute freedom in the choice of wife and then using this liberty to choose someone so low in station that he will have complete dominion over her — and also over the whole situation, meaning that he will not be caught up in the social dynamic of carefully scripted interactions that accompanied marital alliances (well described by Klapisch-Zuber), a dynamic that offers a woman's family ample opportunity to critique a man's behaviour. Griselda comes into the marriage without a dowry, whose 'regulating force' in society is described thus by Klapisch-Zuber:

From the top of Tuscan society to the bottom, families ran to the notary to establish a dowry, and a marriage without a dowry seemed more blameworthy than a union un-blessed by the Church. The dowry penetrated to the very heart of the social ideology of the time. It was what guaranteed honor and the share of respect due each individual: it ensured the nubile girl and the widow a marriage that respected the taboos concerning feminine purity; it conferred and proclaimed before all the social rank of the marrying couple and their families. It was therefore a regulating force in society.<sup>44</sup>

By choosing as wife the daughter of the shepherd, a woman without a dowry, Gualtieri evades the very regulation that his vassals have sought to impose and guarantees that he will remain unfettered by the 'catene' of marriage. He seeks a marriage of 'quiete' and 'consolazione', in other words one that will pose no challenge to his liberty. He explains to Griselda that his goal in testing her was to teach her to be a wife and to give birth to 'perpetua quiete' for himself as long as he lives with her: 'e a me partorire perpetua quiete mentre teco a vivere avessi' (x. 10. 61). He further says that he will reinstate her as his wife because never in word or in deed has she deviated from his will, thus giving him the 'consolazione' that he desired from her: 'E però che io mai non mi sono accorto che in parola né in fatto dal mio piacere partita ti sii, parendo a me aver di te quella consolazione che io desiderava' (x. 10. 62).

<sup>43</sup> Michael Sherberg's perceptive treatment of Day x as the 'triumph of the homosocial' (p. 192), which I read after writing this essay, may be found in *The Governance of Friendship*, chapter 5.

<sup>44</sup> Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, 'The Griselda Complex', in *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, p. 214.

I cannot here fully unpack the reading of *Decameron*, x. 10 that is built into this extraordinary pairing of *quiete* and *consolazione*, words that come from a religious matrix (we remember *quies* at the end of the *Confessions*) and that mutate from secular into sexual consolation in Boccaccio's hands.<sup>45</sup> In *Decameron*, x. 10 — the story that registers the most concentrated presence of *consolazione/consolato* in the *Decameron* — *consolazione* takes on the cynical glint of self-satisfied power. The pairing of *quiete* and *consolazione* occurs only in two other passages in the *Decameron*, both connected to the status of women, and most recently in ix. 9, where, as a preface to a story that advocates wife-beating, the narrator suggests humility, patience, and obedience — Griselda's virtues — to any woman who '*quiete, consolazione e riposo vuole con quegli uomini avere a' quali s'appartiene*' (ix. 9. 3). Gualtieri achieves what still today we call 'peace and quiet' (and in fact Griselda barely speaks in Boccaccio's version), and at the end of his story we learn that '*lungamente e consolato visse*' (x. 10. 67). This use of *consolato* is a tellingly recalibrated version of the beautiful formulae that seal the marriages of mutual love and partnership of Day v, in which a man achieves consolation *with* his wife — '*con lei lungamente in pace e in consolazione*' (v. 4. 49) — and in which the couples, rather than the man alone, live '*insieme in pace e in riposo*' (v. 2. 48).<sup>46</sup>

The real bonds in *Decameron*, x. 10 are, as Sherberg notes, between Gualtieri and his men.<sup>47</sup> This is part of a pattern visible throughout Day x, a Day committed to reinserting the frame-*brigata*, whose ladies tested the limits of their emancipation in the *Valle delle Donne*, back into reality<sup>48</sup> — in other words, back into the patriarchy. This is a Day in which men make display of women to other men, and sometimes even make gifts of them, as most scandalously Gisippus makes a gift of his wife Sofronia to his friend Titus, as part of a homosocial code of one man honouring another man through the use of women.<sup>49</sup> Such behaviour is theorized by the protagonist of *Decameron*, x. 4, Gentile de' Carisendi, who rescues the pregnant Catalina from the grave, and eventually restores her with her male child (which he names after himself) to her husband. In the carefully choreographed ceremony of restitution, Gentile refers to the 'Persian' custom of showing honour by displaying that which one holds most dear ('*io voglio onorar voi alla persesca, mostrandovi la*

<sup>45</sup> Boccaccio already uses 'consolato' to refer to sexual contentment in *Ninfale fiesolano*, octave 299. For Dante's use of *consolare*, see my commentary to 'Ne le man vostre', 'Donna pietosa', 'Li occhi dolenti', and the sonnets to the *donna gentile* in *Rime giovanili e della 'Vita Nuova'*. On Boccaccio and consolation see Stephen J. Milner, 'Coming Together: Consolation and the Rhetoric of Insinuation in Boccaccio's *Decameron*', in *The Erotics of Consolation: Desire and Distance in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. by Catherine E. Légü and Stephen J. Milner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 95–113.

<sup>46</sup> See also: '*lungamente in piacere e in goia poi vissero insieme*' (v. 6. 42). A marriage of mutual love and respect is a rare commodity in Boccaccio's world, achieved in its highest form not only in some of the tales of Day v but also — albeit in the more tempered form suitable to Day x — in the novella of messer Torello (x. 9). The rounded marital love between Torello and Adalietta is the context that Boccaccio provides for interpreting the one-sided relationship of Gualtieri and Griselda, in which all power resides in Gualtieri.

<sup>47</sup> Of x. 10 Sherberg writes: 'The homosocial here finds its expression in the relationship between Gualtieri and his vassals' (*The Governance of Friendship*, p. 224).

<sup>48</sup> For the *brigata*'s return to Santa Maria Novella as a return to reality, see Barolini, 'The Wheel of the *Decameron*', 1983, reprinted in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, pp. 224–44.

<sup>49</sup> On the exchange of women in Day x, and for x. 4 in particular, see Nelson Moe, 'Not a Love Story: Sexual Aggression, Law and Order in *Decameron* x. 4', *Romanic Review*, 86 (1996), 623–38.

più cara cosa che io abbia nel mondo o che io debba aver mai' (*Dec.*, x. 4. 25)); the honour shown is to other men, while Catalina is — as Nelson Moe has shown — reduced to 'thingness'.<sup>50</sup> In the following tale, Dianora is forced by her husband Gilberto to comply with the unwelcome suit of her would-be lover, Ansaldo, in order to fulfill a promise she made in error, and it is the dynamic between the male suitor and the male husband — the former moved by the latter's liberality in donating his wife — that resolves the story: Ansaldo is moved to compassion by the 'tanta cortesia' shown him by Gilberto, and determines to treat Dianora as a sister, 'non altramenti che se mia sorella foste' (x. 5. 22), as in the previous story Gentile had determined to treat Catalina 'come cara sorella' (x. 4. 17). In other words, he decides to realign himself as a guardian of Dianora's honour *on behalf of* her husband rather than as a 'guastatore' of her honour and her husband's adversary (x. 5. 22).

Boccaccio here sums up the situation of a woman in the real world he lived in: a man was either the protector of a woman's honour or a threat to her honour, and on her fell the responsibility of assessing all social encounters and of making sure that her honour — that is, the honour of her father, husband, and brothers — could not be impugned. In such an exhausting context we can better appreciate Piccarda's appetite for the 'dolce chiostra' (*Par.*, III. 107) from which she was abducted by her brother Corso and his men, a place where she was relieved of the constant pressure of having to negotiate threats to her family's honour.<sup>51</sup>

The extraordinary aspects of these tales — the garden that Dianora's unwanted lover is able to commission from a magician in the dead of Friulian winter — only highlight the fundamentally accurate portrayal of the social structure: Ansaldo and Gilberto become fast friends ('di che strettissima e leale amistà lui e messer Ansaldo congiunse' (x. 5. 23)), and the male magician, on seeing the liberality of Gilberto in giving Dianora to Ansaldo and of Ansaldo in not accepting the prize, refuses to accept payment, with the result being a crescendo of male-male courtesy in which the only member of the group whose courtesy is not praised is Dianora, the 'preda' (x. 5. 26) whose agency is utterly elided. The fantastic aspects of this story do not hide its misogynist core, in the same way that the classical setting of x. 8 does not hide that Titus and Gisippus exchange Sofronia without ever giving her even the opportunity to voice a desire or preference, and that Titus is never concerned about what Sofronia wants, but only about a breach of his fraternal bond with Gisippus, reprimanding himself that he should revere Sofronia as a sister rather than desire her as a wife. In x. 8, as in x. 4 and x. 5, the word 'sorella' is used to reconfigure the female's identity as effectively as if it were a form of physical cover; she is shifted from the category of object of desire to the category of object of taboo as a way of replacing male threat with male alliance.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> 'It is this "thingness", this lack of agency, that renders her such an effective object of exchange between Carisendi and Catalina's husband' (Moe, p. 633).

<sup>51</sup> There were cases of women who did not want to marry. Klapisch-Zuber, citing an employment contract in which a girl is engaged for domestic service 'because she does not in any manner want a husband', discusses the possibility that domestic service might be 'analogous, in the popular classes, to the entry into a convent among rich girls' (*Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, p. 165) — in other words, domestic service is a lower class way to avoid marriage without loss of honour.

<sup>52</sup> See Moe, 'Not a Love Story', for the ways in which the *comparatico* is used by Gentile to ensure 'his new "sisterly" ties to Catalina' (p. 637), and Sherberg, *The Governance of Friendship*, p. 196.



We discussed previously the all-male *brigade* of the *Decameron* that prepare us for the homosociality of Day x. For all the variety of class and behaviour that Boccaccio depicts in these all-male groups — from the plebeian Calandrino to the haughty Cavalcanti — it is important to note that these *brigade* are fundamentally normative. More fantastic than the garden in winter, more remarkable than the magic carpet that whisks Torello home to Adalietta, truly non-normative and truly transgressive, is the Boccaccian invention that we take quite for granted: the *brigata* of seven women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-eight, all of noble blood ('di sangue nobile' (1. Intro. 49)), all connected to each other either as friends, neighbours, or kin ('tutte l'una all'altra o per amistà o per vicinanza o per parentado congiunte' (1. Intro. 49)), and three young men, none younger than twenty-five years, who meet by chance in the very real church of Santa Maria Novella and then decide to leave Florence together, staying as a group — *in brigata* — in various villas in the Tuscan countryside with their servants. They meet in a church because a church is one of the few places where men and women could come into regular social contact; Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio all describe seeing their ladies for the first time in churches because churches offer one of the best spaces available for male-female interactions. None is married — the women are old to be unmarried (Klapisch-Zuber discusses the suspicions that accrued to unmarried women and notes that 'among the "best people", therefore, families did not include females over twenty years of age who were not married'<sup>53</sup>) — and the men, who are related as kin to some of the ladies, are romantically attached to three of them.<sup>54</sup> Yet never in the frame story do the men who are kin take offense at the behaviour of the men who are romantically attached to the ladies. Never do they feel the need to sequester or restrict their female kin, keeping them out of the company of their lovers for instance, as occurs in so many of the *novelle*.

Boccaccio does not let us in on the secret of which members of the *brigata* are couples. There is quite a lot of explicit sexualized banter between members of the *brigata* as the *Decameron* progresses, and Boccaccio also overtly thematizes the question of the *brigata*'s own moral compass, stressing from the beginning their honour and virtue or *onestà*, and then testing the pressure he can put on their honour and virtue and still consider it intact.<sup>55</sup> There is much defensiveness with regard to the honourable behaviour of the *brigata* in the *Decameron* frame-story, and with good reason, from a historical perspective. If, in the Florence depicted by Klapisch-Zuber, 'any woman alone was suspect. An unmarried woman was considered incapable of living alone or in the absence of masculine protection without falling into sin',<sup>56</sup> then Boccaccio is acknowledging reality by having Filomena challenge Pampinea's original plan — a plan that he has nonetheless inserted into the cultural imaginary. In fact,

<sup>53</sup> Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, p. 119.

<sup>54</sup> The first use of the word *consolazione*, in Boccaccio's usage a signifier of romantic attachment, occurs in the context of the men's search for their ladies: 'andavan cercando per loro somma consolazione, in tanta turbazione di cose, di vedere le lor donne' (1. Intro. 79).

<sup>55</sup> The adjective first attached to the *brigata* is 'onesta': 'una onesta brigata di sette donne e di tre giovani' (Proemio. 13). The pressure placed on the *brigata* comes close to becoming unmanageable when the ladies refuse Dioneo's theme for Day VII, forcing Dioneo to defend his theme in the same way that Boccaccio defends his book.

<sup>56</sup> Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, p. 119.

in the society in which Boccaccio lived — which was nothing like the great feudal courts of Occitania where ‘women could and did rule as territorial lords’,<sup>57</sup> and where such ladies had men in their entourages at court — men and women were quite segregated: when priggish old Ricciardo wants to offer his bored young wife Bartolomea the consolation of fishing in *Dec.*, II. 10 (‘per darle alcuna consolazione fece un giorno pescare’ (l. 12)), he carefully segregates the ladies, placing them in one boat, and the fishermen and himself in a second. In this context Boccaccio’s frame story with its uniting of the sexes in discursive and social space was surely more significant to his early readers than it has been to us.

The *brigata* of the *Decameron* deviates profoundly from Folgore’s, which — however stylized in terms of the fantasy of *cavalleria* in Siena — is normative in that it is devoted to the life of men in a group. Moreover, this group of men has a king, and Folgore begins and ends his *Mesi* cycle with extravagant praise of the ‘king’ Nicolò di Nisi (who in the ‘Commiato’ is deemed worthy of ‘imperial ricchezza’ (7)). Indeed, the happiness of Folgore’s *brigata*, its very existence, is said to depend upon its king: ‘ché senza lui non è lieta brigata’ (‘Commiato’, l. 11). Boccaccio’s invention of a society that can tolerate — and indeed which promotes — female monarchs along with male monarchs is of a profoundly different order from what we find in Folgore’s fantasy.<sup>58</sup> While a reading of the *Decameron* in isolation may well insist on the limits that Boccaccio places on female autonomy and agency, a reading of the *Decameron* in historical context is obliged to highlight the importance of Boccaccio’s creation of a *brigata* that contains women who become rulers as well as men.

Other than Boccaccio himself, who began to experiment with the mixed-gender *brigata* in the *questioni d’amore* episode of Book IV of the *Filocolo*, what are the immediate precedents for the group of the *Decameron*? We come back to Dante, who in his youth wrote sonnets that relate to our theme: an implicit *brigata* of men is evoked in the sonnet ‘Volgete gli occhi’, as well as in the hunt scene of ‘Sonar bracchetti’, reminiscent of Folgore’s hunts; the mixed-gender *brigata* is evoked in ‘Guido, i’ vorrei’ and ‘Amore e monna Lagia e Guido ed io’. In ‘Sonar bracchetti’ Dante takes Folgore’s privileged male space of the hunt and inserts ideological complexity around the issue of gender, depicting female and male as the poles around which two divergent life-styles and ideologies crystallize: the masculine and out-door world of the hunt (marked by the verbs of motion associated with men in *Decameron* Proemio), versus the introspective, indoor, and feminine world of courtly love. One of the poet’s amorous thoughts intrudes onto his consciousness and upbraids him for abandoning the courtly world of women and love for the ‘selvaggia diletanza’ of the hunt: ‘Or ecco leggiadria di gentil core, | per una sì selvaggia diletanza | lasciar le donne e lor gaia sembianza!’ (ll. 10–12). In a dichotomy never imagined by Folgore, because in his world the women are only ornaments for the

<sup>57</sup> Fredric L. Cheyette, ‘Women, Poets, and Politics in Occitania’, in *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France*, ed. by Theodore Evergates (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 138–233 (p. 176).

<sup>58</sup> I disagree with Picone’s assessment that the ‘*Decameron* recepisce il modello di “brigata” folgoriano al livello della cornice (solo correggendolo in senso intellettuale)’: Picone does not include gender as a category in discussing the members of the *brigata*. See ‘La brigata di Folgore fra Dante e Boccaccio’, in *Il giuoco della vita bella*, p. 10.

male *brigata*, courtliness and the world of women are constructed as ideologically opposed to the male world of the hunt.

The gendered dichotomy of ‘Sonar bracchetti’ is sutured by Dante in his sonnet ‘Guido, i’ vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io’, the famous sonnet of friendship in which Dante imagines himself sailing off on a boat with his friends Guido and Lapo.<sup>59</sup> He also imagines that their ladies join them on the boat: one boat. The enchanter puts the male lover-poets of ‘Guido, i’ vorrei’ and their ladies ‘in *un* vassel’ (l. 3); there is no Ricciardo here to mandate ‘due barchette’, one for the ladies and one for the men, as in *Decameron*, II. 10. Whereas the formal dichotomy of the sonnet marks the divergence of male and female in ‘Sonar bracchetti’ (the octave for the hunt, the sextet for the opposed courtly world), ‘Guido, i’ vorrei’ uses the octave/sextet division to suggest accretion; the octave shows us the men, and the tercets add the ladies to the poet’s dream of togetherness:

E monna Vanna e monna Lagia poi  
con quella ch’è sul numer de le trenta  
con noi ponesse il buono incantatore:  
e quivi ragionar sempre d’amore,  
e ciascuna di lor fosse contenta  
sì come credo che sarémo noi.  
(‘Guido, i’ vorrei’, 9–14)

Here the women are added to the men, while in the *Decameron* the men are added to the women. We could say that Boccaccio crosses Folgore’s male *brigata* with Dante’s young men and women discoursing together. From Folgore Boccaccio takes the courtly patina, and a willingness to concede that economic happiness is part of happiness *tout court*; from ‘Guido, i’ vorrei’, Boccaccio takes the transgressive idea of gender-mixing, made more transgressive by the conservation of some verisimilitude in his *brigata*’s living conditions.

In ‘Guido, i’ vorrei’ Dante brings the ladies into the charmed circle of language, imagining that they join the men, that they are literally in the same boat with the men — discursive comrades who will ‘quivi ragionar sempre d’amore’ (‘Guido, i’ vorrei’, l. 12). Dante and Boccaccio are able to imagine men and women joined together to engage in *ragionare*: not the poet’s solipsistic conversation with his dead lady, as in Petrarca’s *Canzoniere*, but a group of living men and women who discourse, and who so doing set the stage for the future.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> The limitation of ‘Guido, i’ vorrei’ is its acknowledged appertaining to non-reality: ‘Se nel nostro sonetto non c’è bisogno delle continue difese dell’onestà delle donne della brigata che troviamo nella cornice del *Decameron*, è perché si tratta di uno stato esplicitamente irreal, magico: le donne sono poste nel vascello dal mago (‘con noi ponesse il buono incantatore’ (11)). È indubbiamente significativo che Dante, immaginando la perfezione, includa le donne’; citation from my commentary to ‘Guido, i’ vorrei’ in *Rime giovanili e della ‘Vita nuova’*, p. 188.

<sup>60</sup> Of course, I refer to a distant future. Francesco Furlan writes about the fifteenth century: ‘si osserverà come in una cultura così ostentatamente dialogica quale quella umanistica del Quattrocento, in cui i più pressanti problemi culturali vengono di norma dibattuti [...] non sia dato di trovare alcun dialogo in cui venga data la parola alle donne, alla donna’ (‘*Verba non manent*: la donna nella cultura toscana fra Tre e Quattrocento’, *Intersezioni*, 16 (1996), 259–74 (pp. 271–72)). Going on to the sixteenth century, Alexandra Collier argues for the more liberal approach of one Siennese academy; see ‘The Siennese Accademia degli Intronati and its Female Interlocutors’, *The Italianist*, 26 (2006), 223–46.