

SUMMARY

The aim of the following P.h.D thesis is to analyse the concept of merchant ethos presented in the 15th century Benedetto Cotrugli's tractate *Il libro dell'arte di mercatura*. The purpose is to show that in the work of Benedetto Cotrugli, ideas intrinsic to the ideological lines of civic Humanism are present. The thesis defines the rules of the merchant work ethic through the analysis of *Il libro dell'arte di mercatura* in reference to the works of other merchant writers and humanists. In the second place, analysing the norms of comportments of the honest merchant, to whom the tractate is dedicated, the author of the thesis describes qualities typical for the merchant morality of that age, related to both the Christian faith and lay traditions. The dissonance between these values characteristics instead of the medieval mentality and the willingness to gain profit is less and less dramatic, and the figure of the merchant, based on the perspective of the other members of society, is less ambivalent morally. Commerce, i.e., the art of dealings, becomes the value in her self because it is useful for all of the citizens, and the merchant's practices become appreciated if made according to the professional ethic. Benedetto Cotrugli's work *Il libro dell'arte di mercatura* puts in the center of interest the merchant, which becomes an emblematic figure for a social group faced by their own identity and position in society. He also represents a human being coherent in each of his expressions. *Il libro dell'arte di mercatura* is another voice in the discussion on the necessity to impose upon society, forming some models and virtues to follow. The image of the merchant presented by Benedetto Cotrugli represents the point of reference for every citizen. The book's character, therefore, is an idealized expression of the merchant of this time, and moral e professional virtues are identified with him. The first level of analysis presented in the following thesis concerns the merchant's professional activity and familiar and civil life. On the other hand, the second concerns merchandise as a lifestyle and mentality, and the third examines the connection between them.

The research method used in the dissertation is based on both hermeneutical and philological (*textual cultures*) concepts, investigating cultural and historical aspects of Cotrugli's work intended as an effect of negotiation. The notion of the history of mentalities is introduced to the analyse of the literary text along with the comparative method according to which a text should be considered together with all its implications with the culture and society. In that respect, in this dissertation, the texts of merchant writers are taken as a reference, such as Paolo da Certaldo, Giovanni Morelli, e Leon Battista Alberti, to illustrate the connection between *Il libro dell'arte di mercatura* and the merchant culture of that time at the level of *textual cultures*. On the other hand, to focus on the literary and ideological links between the tractate and civic Humanism, the works of authors such as Francesco Barbaro, Gianozzo Manetti, and Matteo Palmieri are considered. The aim is to free

Cotrugli's work from strictly economic reading and to show how the literary vision of the perfect merchant interacts with the image of the ideal society coined by the civic humanists.

To define merchant work ethics, in the first part of the thesis, *Il libro dell'arte di mercatura* is placed in the historical and literal perspective. In the first place, the Ph.D. thesis goes through the critic's reception of Cotrugli's work to outline the existing research lines to show the dissertation's novelty points. To this end, elements of the pedagogical literature, both in merchant and civic humanism culture, are defined to face the langue and literary genre problem in Cotrugli's work. *Il libro dell'arte di mercatura* is only apparently a technical manual that codifies the rules of commercial activities. It becomes a form filled in with elements belonging to other literary genres such as *exempla*, *proverbia*, *specula*, and pedagogical tractates. The humanistic culture is deeply anchored in the mentality and identity of Benedetto Cotrugli, creating an amalgam that situates the merchant writer from Ragusa at the turn of authors writing merchant manuals and humanists. Moreover, Cotrugli abandons Latin to reach a wider audience in the spirit of the pedagogical aim of the tractate.

The focal point of the tractate's structure is the citation of *auctoritas* from the past, such as Cicero, Aristoteles, or Saint Thomas. These voices, together with examples from everyday life, are the bases of the merchant ethics of work. Consequently, the thesis proposes an overview of a vision of the ethics of work from the historical and literary perspective. It starts from Aristoteles's system of virtues and vices and the topic of dignity in Cicero's *De officiis*. Given that in the late Middle Ages, the ethics of economics was largely treated and related to theological issues, such as just price, the development of mendicant orders, the concept of Christian *societas*, usury, and theories proposed by scholastic philosophy, the thesis goes through issues related to the ethic of work in the teachings Fathers' of Church. However, the main aim of the thesis is not to present the history of the ethics of work but to analyse merchant ethics in the context of both merchant and civil Humanism literary traditions.

The central part of the thesis is dedicated to three main topics of merchant literature: *ragion di mercatura*, *ragion di famiglia*, and *ragion di Stato*, which correspond to three nuclei around the structure of the tractate is built. In the chapter dedicated to *ragion di famiglia*, the literary image of the merchant family is analysed from the perspective of an ethic of work. Cotrugli's portrait of the merchant family is also confronted with the following works: Francesco Barabro *De re uxoria*, Giovanni Morelli *Ricordi* e di Leon Battista Alberti *I libri della famiglia*. The merchant family is the foundation on which the social group is built in the first place, and in the broader context, also the State. The family structure is based on a series of pre-established figures and concepts. The analysis starts with the merchant's wife, a figure of great importance for the family cell. In Cotrugli's work, her description finds a series of similarities with Francesco Barbaro's image of the women described

in *De re uxoria*. On the other hand, Cotrugli's point of view fits the discussion of civic Humanism on the perfect citizen from the family perspective. The second part of the analysis is dedicated to the children which accurately educated become the ideal generation. The type of education they receive is a practical, ethical, and cultural one, as a base for the merchant ethic of work.

The chapter *Ragion di mercatura* analyses the merchant himself. The work ethic in this context is considered a forming component of the civic society marked by the rising bourgeois mentality. Moreover, the transitory characteristics of *Il libro dell'arte di mercatura* are defined, both in the literary and intellectual sense. Paolo da Certaldo's *Il libro di buoni costumi* is used as a reference, an example of a middle ages merchant work. Significantly, the ethics rules described by Cotrugli are based on particular morality, which does not contradict the desire for profit. *Il libro dell'arte di mercatura* presents itself as an example of *specula* for merchants. The thesis points out that exercising virtue is essential in forming merchant ethos.

The relationship between the merchant and the State, or better commonwealth, is the third nucleus of the thesis. The chapter dedicated to the *ragion di Stato* considers the work ethic presented in *Il libro dell'arte di mercatura* as an integral part of forming civil society. Benedetto Cotrugli feels related to the State, which he names a commonwealth belonging to all citizens. Its wellbeing depends on merchants full of virtue and glory, nerves of the Republic. Moreover, the merchandising utility is treated with the concept of a commonwealth. In this context, *Il libro dell'arte di mercatura* is confronted with Matteo Palmieri's *Vita civile*.