

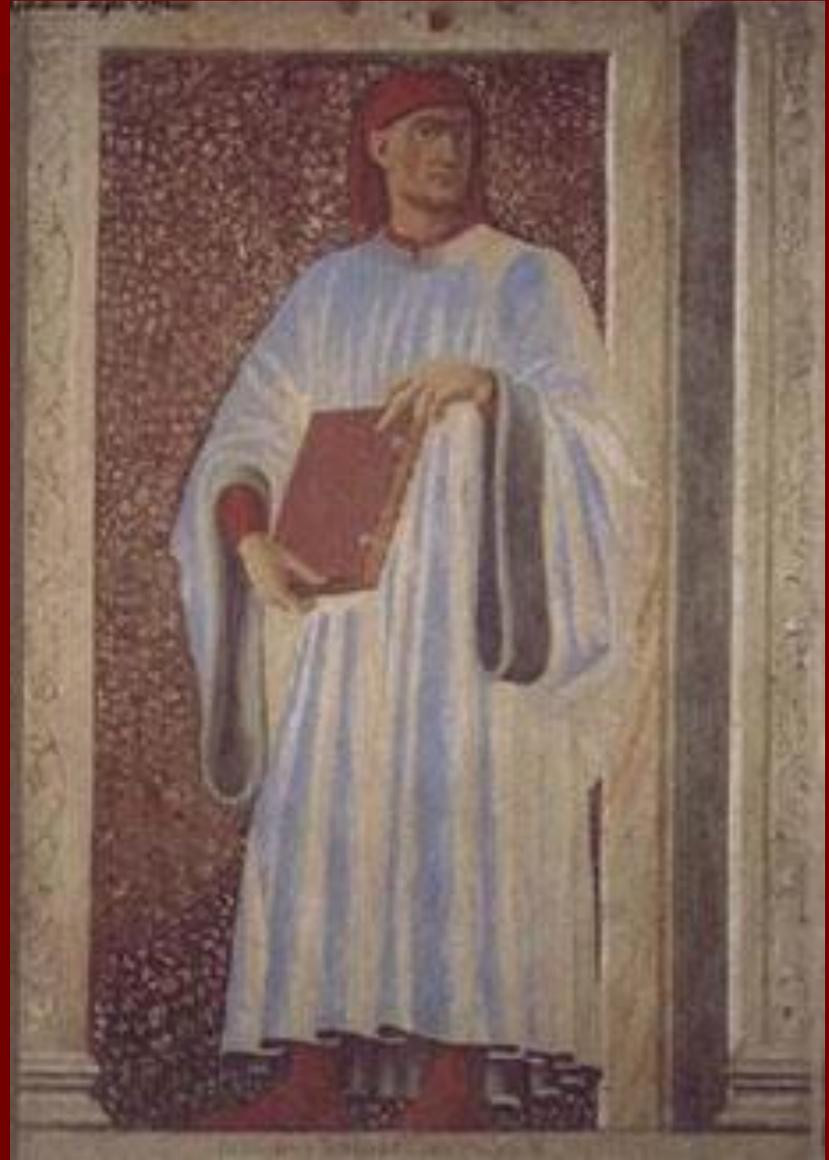
Boccaccio's *Decameron*

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Please Silence Cell Phones

Giovanni Boccaccio

- 1313-1375; Born in Florence; illegitimate son of a wealthy merchant
- 1332; Moved to Paris
- 1333; Exposed to Petrarch's poetry
- Wrote many works in Latin
- 1348: Lived through the Plague in Florence
- 1349-51; Decameron, written in vernacular
- 1350; Met Petrarch



Boccaccio's Introduction: Social Response

- Civil Order Disintegrates; Parents and Children abandon each other
 - Infected Homes are shunned
 - Profiteering: Doctors, servants, Priests (last rites and burial), body carriers
 - Homes and businesses abandoned
 - Bodies buried in mass graves, often without proper rites
 - Massive reallocation of wealth
- 1) Epicurean Communities
 - 2) Hedonism
 - 3) Moderate living
 - 4) Flight



Prologue

- Dedicated to women: objective is to provide them with diversion, delight, and advice
- Recalls his own lady Love and how she inspired him
- Gender roles defined: men are free to express love and have diversions for when it goes badly. Women's lives are more restricted.

Decameron

- 10 stories for 10 days told by 10 people (7 women and 3 men); One of these Epicurean communities: Good food and wine and no discussion of the Plague
- Aristocratic, female audience
- Focus on the Third Day stories: Fortune and “tales of those who have acquired by their wits something that they wanted or recovered something that they had lost.”

How to Live?

- **Moderate** living—enjoying food and drink
- **Dissolute** living—enjoying the pleasures of life to excess
- **Inhuman avoidance** and isolation—people abandoned family and friends
- The impact on human society described
- The group who form the Decameron are an **Epicurean** group who will enjoy food, wine, and stories, but avoid the excess of those who give themselves up to hedonistic living

Story 1

- Nuto, a gardener at a convent, leaves; bad pay
- Massetto, a handsome young man, goes and pretends to be a deaf-mute
- Two Nuns think they can take advantage of him
- Soon he is 'working the garden' for all the nuns except the Abbess
- The Abbess "sees" him outside; uses him
- He is so tired he speaks to Abbess and tells her everything
- His speech is 'restored by prayers of the nuns and the patron Saint
- Massetto's "labors were shared out" so that "he begot a large quantity of little nuns..."
- He ends up rich and happy and "he often used to say that he had treated Christ to such a fashion that he had put many a horn on His head."
- **Sacrilegious; no sense of moral judgement**

Story 2

- Groom of the King loves the Queen
- King and Queen sleep separately
- Disguises himself as King and goes to her chambers
- The king arrives after to be amorous with her
- She is surprised that he is back for more
- King keeps silent; seeks for the man; feels the hearts of his beating servants; cuts his hair
- Groom cuts all the servants hair
- Groom got what he wanted; wisely kept silent
- **Virtue of Discretion**

Third Story

- “I intend to tell you of a trick played by a fair woman on a stupid friar, which will be the more pleasing to laymen since most of these monks are fools and men unpracticed in manners; yet they think that they are better.”
- Noble lady despised her merchant husband; she loved a gentlemen who did not notice her
- Goes to Friar for advice: a man is looking at her
- He warns the man who reads it as a sign
- He sends her gifts
- He climbed into her garden and looked in her window
- She lets him into her chamber; she says “many thanks to master Friar who showed you so well how to get here.”
- **Clergy is ridiculed as foolish and out of touch; Women are seen as not only objects, but also agents of Love.**

Fourth Story

- “Madonna, there are many people who strive to go to Heaven, and without meaning to, send others there.”
- Puccio di Rinieri, a wealthy man, joins third order of St. Francis; his young, beautiful wife is ignored too much
- A monk, Don Felice, tells Puccio how to ensure easy passage to heaven, saving time from Purgatory
- Penance: tied on a bed like Christ, looking at sky, saying prayers all night
- While Puccio is doing Penance to earn Heaven, Don Felice enjoys heaven with Puccio’s wife.
- **Clergymen can be clever too; Sacrilegious use of the concepts of penance and Heaven**

Seventh Tale

- Tedaldo loves a married woman, Mona Erminilla; and “on account of his eminent virtues he fully deserved to enjoy his desires.”
- She had been charmed by him; but one day refused to see him; he goes to seek his fortune as a merchant
- He returns; discovers his brothers mourning him; he is thought to be dead, killed by the woman’s husband
- He goes to her in disguise as a wise pilgrim
- Claims that her sins toward Tedaldo caused the misfortune; he can help her free her husband and bring T. back to life! Criticizes the Friar who advised her to spurn T.
- Reveals himself; makes love to her; then proves her husband did not kill him

Eighth Tale

- Abbott of a monastery near Florence loves a woman
- Wife confesses to Abbott: Foolish husband Ferondo is too jealous
- “If we want to cure him of his jealousy, it is necessary that he go to Purgatory.”
- Abbott wants her love in return for his help
- “Sanctity is not diminished by this, because sanctity resides in the soul, and this is a sin of the body.”
- Sleeping powder; husband is put in a cell and tortured as though in Purgatory, because of jealousy
- 10 months later wife is pregnant; husband returns from Purgatory and is never a jealous husband again!

Ninth Tale

- Daughter of a doctor loves a gentleman; He becomes ward of the King; King gets an illness
- She promises to cure the king in return for a wish; she wants to marry whomever she chooses;
- The gentleman disdains her low birth
- He won't behave as her husband until she possesses his ring and holds his son
- Husband in Florence loves a poor young woman; Wife, as a pilgrim, goes to her and makes a deal with mother; Pretends to be the girl; demands the ring as a gift; sleeps with her own Husband; gets pregnant
- He returns home to find his demands are met; despite her low birth they live happily together
- **One of the few tales in the Third Day where the object that is desired is marital**
- **Shows how class was still a barrier**

Summary

- Setting of Plague: **biting satire**
- Avaricious and Lusty clergy; dishonorable Aristocracy are objects of Satire
- **Religion and Societal Norms are questioned:** religious belief and holy office are manipulated to achieve illicit love affairs; Belief in an Omnipotent God who controls all events—it is **people's cleverness that determines events**
- **Renaissance Individualism** and Humanism are evident
- **Women are shown as equal** to men both in cleverness and in their sexual appetite

Conclusion

- Petrarch and Boccaccio herald the literary Renaissance in 14th century Italy.
- They are Humanists; they are deeply concerned about human issues and concerns: Love, Social Justice, Humane Treatment in Marriage
- Write in Vernacular
- Classical Allusions
- Social Criticism
- Reflect a more secular point of view