

**Carleton University
Fall 2015
Department of English**

**English 3003A: Literatures in Translation
Giovanni Boccaccio, Master Raconteur
Select Tales from the *Decameron***

Tuesdays and Thursdays 8:30-10:00
Location: Southam Hall, Rm. 403 – Please confirm location on Carleton Central

Instructor: D.A. Beecher
E-mail: donald_beecher@carleton.ca
Office: 1908 Dunton Tower
Office hours: Tuesdays: 10:00-11:00

Ah, Boccaccio, what a voice. The *Decameron* is a world-class masterpiece, a collection of 100 tales, quips, and racy novelle assembled for circulation in Florence in the mid-fourteenth century. It became a trend-setter for centuries after, and was employed throughout Italy and the rest of Europe through borrowing, translation, and imitation. Even Chaucer knew him and relied upon him in profound ways. Ten well-heeled young people, to escape the 1348 plague, take to the hills above the city for refuge and there they while their time away in telling stories on various topics. There are tales of amusement, seduction, foolery, wish-fulfilment, smart aleck replies, and memorable exploits, in many instances collected from the folk, but often retold as true events and histories to give them spice and relevance. The collection becomes the perfect focal point for considering the birth of “modern” realism, the humanist inspired refinement of narrative, the use of stories in social gatherings, the art of narrative *tout court*, and the uses of fiction, some of it flippant, often far from politically correct, yet often promoting utility and propitious learning. Our discussions will inevitably go in all these directions. Boccaccio lived in the heart of the late middle ages, yet is identified with the Renaissance as one of the early leading humanists. That debate is always good for orienting us in his work and times.

The reading schedule will be far from onerous. We’ll do a new story for each class, their lengths ranging from 6 to 12 pages. Can you handle it? Help us if you can’t. Which means that there are no obstacles to being there every time with fresh reading in mind, digested and open for reflection. And as one of the characters says, if you’re not up for this kind of pleasure, you must be a donkey. (The way she said it was a lot more insulting than that!) But this is all very serious too, and I’ll be making it so from time to time. Bear with me; I’m an academic; have no illusions.

The course assignment is one term paper, up to 13 pages long, and at least 9, which tackles a significant question pertaining to these imaginative creations, where they come from, how they are conceived, how they work as literary objects, what they say, and how they generate both meaning and purpose. These matters all pertain to literary-philosophical questions, in the long run, because nothing from the world of the imagination passes through our interpretive faculties without implicit operations of evaluation and judgement, and the more we bring these

procedures and assumptions under open investigation, the more valid and valuable the enquiry. That is just another way of saying, good papers tackle important and well-defined questions, approach them through informed critical methods, organize them in logical and problem-solving sequences, and deliver real conclusions at the end which bring problems to resolution, arguments to fulfilment, and wisdom to new plateaus. Alternatively, you may wish to consider the offer of writing two shorter papers, spreading your interests over two distinct problems, creating a portfolio basket with two eggs. These should be conceived to accommodate a 5-8 page range for each, less ambitious, perhaps, but still concerned with finding serious issues, pursued with sound methodical and bibliographical support.

The use of secondary critical sources is not ultra-obligatory, but highly recommended. Supporting your voice with the wisdom and insight of others, or debating their points, or letting them help you focus and define your problem is the way most serious scholarship is conducted, and it is never too early to get in some practice. We are now well beyond the formulaic in terms of quotations per page or numbers of authors. Read to inform, use as benefits your purposes, and beware not to get hi-jacked by their thinking. Always keep your argument as your own and show me your mind at work, not theirs, because not all of them out there get A's from me, but all of you can, with good points, sound methods, effective writing, and significant conclusions. That pudding always has its proof; there are no rights or wrongs, but there are better and worse arguments and more and less credible conclusions, believe me! In a larger sense, writing about literature is about reading accurately, reflecting critically, and writing cogently—operations not unlike those called for by all enquiries into the nature of things social or creative across the gamut of university disciplines. Keep back-up copies of your work in the event a paper gets lost, and always hand in paper copies; never submit them to me as e-mail attachments. These will count for 60% of your final grade.

The other 40% will be based on a final exam, a fun 3 hour one, in which I intend to give you the chance to fire up all your informed enthusiasm for Boccaccio. The questions will pertain to stories, their implicit problems, and their respective implications for the study of (Renaissance) literature. They will give you a chance to think about point of view, narrators, narrative itself, plot, thumbnail characterizations and caricatures, about style and the perils of translation, Boccaccian humour, social issues then and now, and the way in which stories generate their meanings and diverse interpretations. I'll be grading the exams, but you'll be having all the fun in writing them, because by then you'll have plenty to say about the *Decameron* and how to read it for pleasure and profit. Why we read fiction is why we're here.

The textbook to be ordered for the course through the Carleton Bookstore is *Decameron*, Giovanni Boccaccio, Trans. Wayne Rebhorn. N.Y.: Norton, 2013. \$16.95 Can., but maybe a couple more now, given the dollar situation.

The reading schedule will go like this:

Sept. 3	Introduction to the course
Sept. 8	Boccaccio's Introduction to Story 1, Author's Preface and The Plague
Sept. 10	II.5
Sept. 15	II.7
Sept. 17	III.1
Sept. 22	III.8
Sept. 24	III.9
Sept. 29	III.10
Oct. 1	IV.1
Oct. 6	V.8
Oct. 8	IV.8
Oct. 13	IV.9 (guest professor as lecturer or discussion leader)
Oct. 15	IV.2 (guest professor as lecturer or discussion leader)
Oct. 20	V.9
Oct. 22	X.10
Oct. 26 – 30	Fall break - No Classes
Nov. 3	VI.1, 7, 9
Nov. 5	V.1, 8
Nov. 10	I.1, 4, 5, 10
Nov. 12	VI.6, 10
Nov. 17	VII.1 and 2
Nov. 19	VII.4 and 8
Nov. 24	VIII.7
Nov. 26	VIII.6, IX.2
Dec. 1	IX.10
Dec. 3	X.3, 5

The university guidelines follow concerning accommodation and student services. Also note the policy on plagiarism. It doesn't make sense, anyway, for a serious student, either to misrepresent the work of others intentionally, or to avoid meeting the writing process on your own. This is a precious opportunity to practice honing your brain and your life skills with thoughtful feedback. The grade results are hollow, anyway, and will likely be bankrupted by the exam grade. At this point, plagiarism is not about insulting scholars by ripping them off—they will endure. But it is about cheating yourself in the talent pool of life. That's nuts!

Copies of written work submitted

Always retain for yourself a copy of all essays, term papers, written assignments or take-home tests submitted in your courses.

PLAGIARISM

The University Senate defines plagiarism as "*presenting, whether intentional or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one's own.*" This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another's data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in "*substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.*"

Plagiarism is a serious offence which cannot be resolved directly with the course's instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of "F" for the course. For more information please go to: <http://www2.carleton.ca/studentaffairs/academic-integrity>

GRADING SYSTEM

Letter grades assigned in this course will have the following percentage equivalents:

A+ = 90-100 (12) B = 73-76 (8) C - = 60-62 (4)

A = 85-89 (11) B- = 70-72 (7) D+ = 57-59 (3)

A- = 80-84 (10) C+ = 67-69 (6) D = 53-56 (2)

B+ = 77-79 (9) C = 63-66 (5) D - = 50-52 (1)

F Failure. Assigned 0.0 grade points

ABS Absent from final examination, equivalent to F

DEF Official deferral (see "Petitions to Defer")

FND Failure with no deferred exam allowed -- assigned only when the student has failed the course on the basis of inadequate term work as specified in the course outline.

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean.

WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT ACADEMIC PENALTY

The last date to withdraw from **FALL TERM** courses is **DEC. 8, 2014**. The last day to withdraw from **FALL/WINTER (Full Term)** and **WINTER** term courses is **APRIL 8, 2015**.

REQUESTS FOR ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term because of disability, pregnancy or religious obligations. Please review the course outline promptly and write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. You can visit the Equity Services website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at:

carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/

Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations in this course must register with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) for a formal evaluation of

disability-related needs. Documented disabilities could include but not limited to mobility/physical impairments, specific Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/psychological disabilities, sensory disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and chronic medical conditions. Registered PMC students are required to contact the PMC, 613-520-6608, every term to ensure that your Instructor receives your Letter of Accommodation, no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due or the first in-class test/midterm requiring accommodations. If you only require accommodations for your formally scheduled exam(s) in this course, please submit your request for accommodations to PMC by **Nov. 7, 2014** for the Fall term and **March 6, 2015** for the Winter term. For more details visit the Equity Services website: carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/

PETITIONS TO DEFER

If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a **FINAL** assignment by the due date because of circumstances beyond your control, you may apply a deferral of examination/assignment. If you are applying for a deferral due to illness you will be required to see a physician in order to confirm illness and obtain a medical certificate dated no later than one working day after the examination or assignment deadline. This supporting documentation must specify the date of onset of the illness, the degree of incapacitation, and the expected date of recovery. If you are applying for a deferral for reasons other than personal illness, please contact the Registrar's Office directly for information on other forms of documentation that we accept. Deferrals of assignments must be supported by confirmation of the assignment due date, for example a copy of the course outline specifying the due date and any documented extensions from the course instructor. Deferral applications for examination or assignments must be submitted within **5 working days** of the original final exam.

ADDRESSES: (Area Code 613)

College of the Humanities 520-2809 300 Paterson
Greek and Roman Studies Office 520-2809 300 Paterson
Religion Office 520-2100 2A39 Paterson
Registrar's Office 520-3500 300 Tory
Student Academic Success Centre 520-7850 302 Tory
Paul Menton Centre 520-6608/TTY 520-3937 501 Uni-Centre
Writing Tutorial Service 520-2600 Ext. 1125 4th Floor Library
Learning Support Service 520-2600 Ext 1125 4th Floor Library