

**Carleton University
Winter 2017
Department of English**

ENGL 3003A: Literatures in Translation

Giovanni Boccaccio: Selected Tales from the *Decameron*

***Prerequisite:* third year standing**

Tuesdays and Thursdays: 1:00-2:30

Mackenzie Building, 4332

Instructor: Donald Beecher

E-mail: donald.beecher@carleton.ca

Phone: 520 2600 ex. 2305 (use e-mail!)

Office: 1908 Dunton Tower

Office Hours: Tuesdays: 2:45-3:45

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? Which means that there are no obstacles to being there every time with fresh reading in mind, digested, and ready for comment. 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. Oh, and one more thing. When you do make comments or pose questions—and I hope you all do—make certain that you speak clearly and boldly, in complete sentences, with a clearly announced topical idea or question—for my sake, please! It’s also good practice as a life skill in formulating and articulating ideas in the most successful and cogent of ways. Ineffective communication means time lost and audiences struggling.

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 paper(s) will count for 60% of your final grade. Get started early and draft carefully, and for as many times as it takes to get it into gem condition. (I write a lot, yet it still takes me several drafts!)

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:

Jan.	5	Introduction to the course
Jan.	10	Boccaccio's Introduction to Story 1, Author's Preface and The Plague
Jan.	12	II.5
Jan.	17	II.7
Jan.	19	III.1
Jan.	24	III.8
Jan.	26	III.9
Jan.	31	III.6, 10
Feb.	2	IV.Intro., IV.1
Feb.	7	IV.2
Feb.	9	IV.5
Feb.	14	IV.8
Feb.	16	IV.2
Feb.	20-24	Study Week
Feb.	28	V.1, 4
Mar.	2	VI.1, 4, 7, 9 (short)
Mar.	7	VII.2, 6
Mar.	9	VIII.3
Mar.	14	VIII.7
Mar.	16	IX.5
Mar.	21	IX.6, 10
Mar.	23	X.3, 5
Mar.	28	X.8
Mar.	30	X.10
Aprl.	4	I.1, 2, 3, 5 (all short!)
Aprl.	6	Author's Conclusion, Closing remarks, and Exam strategies.

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

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.

REQUEST FOR ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: 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. For more details see the [Student Guide](#).

Religious obligation: 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. For more details see the [Student Guide](#).

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). Requests made within two weeks will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website (www.carleton.ca/pmc) for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

ADDRESSES:

Department of English: 613-520-2310, 1812 DT

Registrar's Office: 613-520-3500, 300 Tory

Academic Advising Centre: 613-520-7850, 302 Tory

Paul Menton Centre: 613-520-6608/TTY 613-520-3937, 501 Uni-Centre

Centre for Student Academic Support: 613-520-2600 Ext. 1125, 4th Floor Library