

The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio: Prince Galehaut

The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio



*A Collection of Novellas by the
14th-Century Italian Author*

A Collection of Novellas by the 14th-Century Italian Author The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio Prince Galehaut Translated by John Payne In Italy during the time of the Black Death, a group of seven young women and three young men flee from plague-ridden Florence to a deserted villa in the countryside of Fiesole for two weeks. To pass the evenings, every member of the party tells a story each night, except for one day per week for chores, and the holy days in which they do no work at all, resulting in ten nights of storytelling over the course of two weeks. Thus, by the end of the fortnight they have told 100 stories. The Decameron, subtitled Prince Galehaut, is a collection of novellas by the 14th-century Italian author Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375). The book is structured as a frame story containing 100 tales told by a group of seven young women and three young men sheltering in a secluded villa just outside Florence to escape the Black Death, which was afflicting the city. Boccaccio probably conceived the Decameron after the epidemic of 1348, and completed it by 1353. The various tales of love in The Decameron range from the erotic to the tragic. Tales of wit, practical jokes, and life lessons contribute to the mosaic. In addition to its literary value and widespread influence (for example on Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales), it provides a document of life at the time. Written in the vernacular of the Florentine language, it is considered a masterpiece of classical early Italian prose. Contents Each of the ten characters is charged as King or Queen of the company for one of the ten days in turn. This charge extends to choosing the theme of the stories for that day, and all but two days have topics assigned: examples of the power of fortune; examples of the power of human will; love tales that end tragically; love tales that end happily; clever replies that

save the speaker; tricks that women play on men; tricks that people play on each other in general; examples of virtue. Only Dioneo, who usually tells the tenth tale each day, has the right to tell a tale on any topic he wishes, due to his wit. Many authors have argued that Dioneo expresses the views of Boccaccio himself. Each day also includes a short introduction and conclusion to continue the frame of the tales by describing other daily activities besides story-telling. These frame tale interludes frequently include transcriptions of Italian folk songs. The interactions among tales in a day, or across days, as Boccaccio spins variations and reversals of previous material, forms a whole and not just a collection of stories. The basic plots of the stories including mocking the lust and greed of the clergy; tensions in Italian society between the new wealthy commercial class and noble families; the perils and adventures of traveling merchants. Most noble damsels, for whose solace I have addressed myself to so long a labour, I have now, methinketh, with the aid of the Divine favour, (vouchsafed me, as I deem, for your pious prayers and not for my proper merits,) thoroughly accomplished that which I engaged, at the beginning of this present work, to do; wherefore, returning thanks first to God and after to you, it behoveth to give rest to my pen and to my tired hand. Which ere I accord them, I purpose briefly to reply, as to objections tacitly broached, to certain small matters that may peradventure be alleged by some one of you or by others, since meseemeth very certain that these stories have no especial privilege more than other things; nay, I mind me to have shown, at the beginning of the fourth day, that they have none such.

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