Giovanni Boccaccio

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Giovanni Boccaccio[1][2][3] (/bɒˈkɑːtʃiˌoʊ/;[4] 21 December 1313) was an Italian writer, poet, humanist, and a prolific and important Renaissance humanist. Born in the town of Certaldo, he became so well known as a writer that he was sometimes simply known as **Boccaccio**.[5] He was one of the most important figures in the European literary pantheon of the fourteenth century. Some scholars have described Boccaccio's importance to be a model of Italian prose in the sixteenth century. Boccaccio wrote his imaginative literature mostly in Tuscan vernacular, as well as other works in Latin, and is particularly noted for his realistic dialogue that differed from that of his contemporaries, courtly Italian writers who usually followed formulaic models for character and plot. The influence of Boccaccio's works was not limited to the Italian cultural scene but extended to the rest of Europe, earning influence on authors such as Geoffrey Chaucer,[6] a key figure in English literature, and the later writers Miguel de Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and classical theatre in Spain.

Boccaccio is considered one of the "Three Crowns" of Italian literature along with Dante Alighieri and Petrarch.[7] He is remembered for being one of the precursors of humanism, of which he helped lay the foundations in the city of Florence, in conjunction with the activity of his friend and teacher Petrarch. He was the one who initiated Dante's criticism and philology. Boccaccio devoted himself to copying codices of the Divine Comedy and was a promoter of Dante's work and figure.

Posthumous portrait by Andrea del Castagno, c. 1450

Born	16 June 1313 Certaldo, Republic of Florence
Died	21 December 1375 (aged 62) Certaldo, Republic of Florence
Occupation	Poet, writer
Language	Italian (Tuscan and Florentine dialect), Latin
Period	Early Renaissance Epic poem · lyric poem · sonnet · pastoral · novella · chronicle · biography · correspondence
Literary movement	Italian Renaissance
Years active	1341–1375
Notable works	The Decameron
Parent	Boccaccino da Chellino (father)

16th-century portrait of Boccaccio

In the twentieth century, Boccaccio was the subject of critical-philological studies by Vittore Branca and Giuseppe Billanovich, and his Decameron was transposed to the big screen by the Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini.

Biography [edit]

Childhood and youth, 1313–1330 [edit]

The details of Boccaccio's birth are uncertain. He was born in Florence or in a village near Certaldo where his family was from:[8][9] he was the son of Florentine merchant Boccaccino di Chellino and an unknown woman; he was likely born out of wedlock.[10] Boccaccio's stepmother was called Margherita de' Mardoli.[11]

Boccaccio grew up in Florence. His father worked for the Compagnia dei Bardi and, in the 1330s, married Margherita dei Mardoli, who was of a well-to-do family. Boccaccio may have been tutored by Giovanni Mazzuoli and received from him an early introduction to the works of Dante.[12] In 1326, his father was appointed head of a bank and moved with his family to Naples. Boccaccio was an apprentice at the bank, but disliked the banking profession. He persuaded his father to let him study "canon law, civil law, the pagan poets and theology" at Naples, where he studied canon law for the next six years. He also pursued his interest in vernacular literary studies.[13]

His father introduced him to the Neapolitan nobility and the French-influenced court of Robert the Wise (King Roberto di Napoli) in the 1330s. Boccaccio became a friend of fellow Florentine Niccolò Acciaiuoli, and benefited from Acciaiuoli's influence with Catherine of Valois-Courtenay, wife of Philip I of Taranto. Acciaiuoli later became a counselor to Queen Joanna I of Naples, and eventually, became her Grand Seneschal.

It seems that Boccaccio's youngest years in Naples were happy, as he obtained from the opportunity to study widely and make good contacts with fellow scholars. His early influences included Paolo da Perugia (a curator and author of a collection of myths called the Collezione), humanists Barlaàm da Solmona and Giovanni Barrili, and theologian Dionigi di Borgo San Sepolcro.

Adult years [edit]

In Naples, Boccaccio began what he considered his true vocation of poetry. Works produced in this period include *I Filostrato* and *Teseida* (the sources for Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and the Knight's Tale, respectively), the *Filocolo* (a prose version of an existing French romance), and La caccia di Diana (a poem in terza rima telling Neapolitan women).[14] The period became considered formal innovation, including possibly the introduction of the Sicilian octave, where it influenced Petrarch.

Boccaccio returned to Florence in the early 1340s, avoiding the plague of 1340 in the city, but missing the visit of Petrarch to Naples in 1341. He had left Naples due to tensions between the Angevin king and Florence. His father had returned to Florence in 1338, where he had gone bankrupt. His mother may have died shortly afterward.[15][16] Boccaccio continued to work, although dissatisfied with his return to Florence, producing *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* in 1341 (also known as *Ninfale*, a mix of prose and poetry, inspired by the Fiammetta elegiacal poem *Amorosa visione* in 1342, and *The Elegy of Lady Fiammetta*[17] in 1343. The pastoral romance "Ninfale fiesolano" probably dates from this period. In 1343, Boccaccio's father remarried, to Bice del Bostichi. The other children by his father's first marriage had all died, but his father had another son named Boccaccino, who was born in 1344.

1545 statue of Boccaccio in Florence's Uffizi Gallery

Boccaccio and others flee the Black Death, illustration from an edition of the Decameron (c. 1480)

In Florence, the overthrow of Walter of Brienne brought about the government of popolo minuto ("small people", workers). It diminished the influence of the nobility and the wealthier merchant classes and contributed to the relative decline of Florence. The city was hurt further in 1348 by the Black Death, which killed some three-quarters of the city population and was later represented in Boccaccio's work The Decameron.

From 1347, Boccaccio spent much time in Ravenna, seeking new patronage and, despite his claims, it is not certain whether he was present in plague-ravaged Florence. His father died during the epidemic and his father was also involved with the government efforts as minister of supply in the city. His father died in 1349 and Boccaccio was forced into a more active role as head of the family.

Boccaccio began work on The Decameron[18][19] around 1349. It is probable that the structures of many of the tales date from earlier in his career, but the choice of a human table and the frame story dating all three men and seven women dates from this time. The work was largely complete by 1352. It was Boccaccio's final effort in literature for a time, as he was drawn into diplomatic service. The work was translated into Latin as Collectio Laidorum in the 1360s. Boccaccio revised and rewrote The Decameron in 1370–1371. This manuscript has survived to the present day.

Cover illustration of one of the Decameron's tales, an imagination of 1348 famous woman, De Claris Mulieribus, by Boccaccio – from a Flemish translation of 1401

From 1350, Boccaccio became closely involved with Italian humanism (although less of a scholar) and also with the Florentine government. His first official mission was to Romagna in late 1350. He revisited that city-state twice and also was sent to Bradenburg, Milan, and Avignon. He also pushed for the return of Dante, housing Lizettina Poltra, and encouraging his tentative translations of works by Homer, Euripides, and Aristotle. In these years he also took minor orders.[20]

In October 1350, he was delegated to greet Francesco Petrarch as he entered Florence and also to have Petrarch as guest at Boccaccio's home. Boccaccio's day trip. The meeting between the two was extremely fruitful and they were friends from then on. Boccaccio calling Petrarch his teacher and magister. Petrarch at that time encouraged Boccaccio to study classical Greek and Latin literature. They met again in Padua in 1351. Boccaccio on an official mission to persuade Petrarch to take a chair at the University in Florence. Although unsuccessful, the discussions between the two were instrumental in Boccaccio writing the Genealogia deorum gentilium, the first edition was completed in 1360 and this remained one of the key reference works on classical mythology for more than 400 years. It served as a source of inspiration for the studies of ancient literature and thought. Despite the Pagan beliefs at its core, Boccaccio believed that much could be learned from antiquity. Thus, he challenged the arguments of clerical intellectuals who wished to limit access to classical sources to prevent any moral harm to Christian readers. The revised edition of the work was completed in 1371 and was dedicated to Hugo IV of Cyprus. The importance of ancient literature was an essential requirement for its development.[21] The discussions also formulated Boccaccio's poetic ideas. Certain sources also see a connection of Boccaccio to Petrarch from the open humanist of Petrarch to Boccaccio's more ascetic style, closer to the dominant fourteenth-century ethos. For example, he followed Petrarch and Dante in the unsuccessful championing of an ethical and deeply allusive form of Latin poetry. In 1355, following a meeting with Pope Innocent VI and further meetings with Petrarch, it is probable that Boccaccio was given the opportunity to resume. There is a persistent (but unsupported) tale that he republished his earlier works as profane in 1361, including The Decameron.

Genealogia deorum gentilium, 1532 [22]

In 1360, Boccaccio began work on De mulieribus claris ("On famous women"), a book offering biographies of 106 famous women, that he completed in 1374. The publication also illustrated and included depictions of women he featured, some as they were performing their renown skills in his contemporary community, such as fine art painting.[23]

A number of Boccaccio's close friends and other acquaintances were executed or exiled in the Florentine Revolution of 1360 (the Ciompi revolt),[24] which had strongly linked to the conspiracy. In that year Boccaccio left Florence to reside in Certaldo, where he became less involved in government affairs. He did undertake further missions to Florence until 1363, and he travelled to Naples and then on to Padua and Venice, where he met up with Petrarch. A great style at Francesco Novello, Petrarch's residence as well as the location of Petrarch's library. Boccaccio later returned to Certaldo; he met Petrarch only one more time, in 1368, again in Padua. Upon hearing of the death of Petrarch in July 1374, he wrote a commemorative poem, including it in his collection of lyric poems, the Rime.

He returned to work for the Florentine government in 1365, undertaking a mission to Pope Urban V. The papacy returned to Rome from Avignon in 1367, and Boccaccio was sent to Urban, offering congratulations. He also undertook diplomatic missions to Venice and Naples.

Of his later works, the monastic biographies gathered as De casibus virorum illustrium (1355–74) and the multivolume chronicle (1341–1375) were the most significant.[25] Other works include a dictionary of geographical allusions in classical literature, De montibus, silvis, fontibus, lacubus, flumiribus, stagnis seu paludibus, et de nominibus maris (literal: He gave a series of lectures in Dante at the Santa Stefano church in 1373 and these resulted in his final major work, the detailed Esposizione sopra la Commedia di Dante.[26] Boccaccio and Petrarch were also two of the most educated people in early Renaissance regarding the field of archaeology.[27]

Petrarch had offered to purchase Boccaccio's library, so that it would become part of Petrarch's library. However, upon Boccaccio's death, his entire collection was given to the monastery of Santo Spirito, in Florence, where it still resides.[28]

Boccaccio's final years were troubled by illnesses, some relating to obesity and what often is described as dropsy, severe edema that would be described today as congestive heart failure. He died on 21 December 1375 in Certaldo, where he is buried.

Works [edit]

Alphabetical listing of selected works

- Amorosa visione (1342)
- Buccolicum carmen (1367–1369)
- Caccia di Diana (1334–1337)
- Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine (Ninfale d'Ameto, 1341–1342)
- Corbaccio (around 1365, this date is disputed)
- De Caracia (within 1341–1345)
- De Casibus Virorum Illustrium (c. 1360, revised through early 1373; Facsimile of 1520 first ed., 1962, Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, ISBN 978-0-8201-1505-8)
- De mulieribus claris (1361, revised up to 1375)
- The Decameron (1349–52, revised 1370–1371)
- Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta (1343–1344)
- Esposizioni sopra la Commedia di Dante (1373–1374)
- Filocolo (1336–1339)
- Filostrato (1335 or 1340)
- Genealogia deorum gentilium libri (1360, revised up to 1374)
- Ninfale fiesolano (within 1344–46, this date is disputed)
- Rime (revised 1374)
- Teseida delle nozze di Emilia (before 1341)
- Trattatello in laude di Dante (1357, title revised to De origine vita studiis et moribus viri clarissimi Dantis Alagerii Florentini poetae illustris et de operibus compositis ac editis)
- Zibaldone Magliabechiano (within 1351–1356)

See Cornell's bibliography for an exhaustive listing.[29]

See also [edit]

- Influence of Italian humanism on Chaucer

Notes [edit]

a ^ English: UK: /bɒˈkɑːtʃiˌoʊ/ US: /boʊˈkɑːtʃiˌoʊ/; Italian: /bokˈkattʃo/; Italian: Ital. /bokˈkattʃo/ ⓘ.

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2. ^ Wood, Mike, p. 168: "Although he was known by the name of his origin, this is an except from an Italian language grammar in German, which describes in short this term as follows: "Boccaccio, Giovanni, Dichter und Humanist, eigentlich Boccaccino di Chellino, der von Certaldo (Boccaccio)."
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- Works by Giovanni Boccaccio in eBook form[7] at Standard Ebooks
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- Works by Giovanni Boccaccio at at Faded Page (Canada)
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- Works by Giovanni Boccaccio[1] at LibriVox (public domain audiobooks) ●
- Da carta incunabolo Decameron[2] Italian[3] Free Book and Special Collections Division[4] at the Library of Congress
- Genealogia deorum gentilium Giovanni Boccaccio de Certaldo liber 2[5] at Bomm[6]
- De mulieribus claris[7] at Bomm[8]

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