

Classic Poetry Series

Giovanni Boccaccio
- poems -

Publication Date:
2012

Publisher:
Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Giovanni Boccaccio(1313 – 21 December 1375)

Giovanni Boccaccio was an Italian author and poet, a friend, student, and correspondent of [Petrarch](http://www.poemhunter.com/francesco-petrarch/), an important Renaissance humanist and the author of a number of notable works including the Decameron, On Famous Women, and his poetry in the Italian vernacular. Boccaccio is particularly notable for his dialogue, of which it has been said that it surpasses in verisimilitude that of virtually all of his contemporaries, since they were medieval writers and often followed formulaic models for character and plot.

Biography

The exact details of his birth are uncertain. The majority of sources state that he was born either in Florence or in a village near Certaldo where his family was nni Villani, a contemporary of Boccaccio and chronicler, states that he was born in Paris as a consequence of an illicit relation but others denounce this as a romanticism by the earliest biographers. He was the son of a Florentine merchant and an unknown woman, and almost certainly born illegitimate.

Early life

Boccaccio grew up in Florence. His father worked for the Compagnia dei Bardi and in the 1320s married Margherita dei Mardoli, of an illustrious family. It is believed Boccaccio was tutored by Giovanni Mazzuoli and received from him an early introduction to the works of Dante. In 1326 Boccaccio moved to Naples with the family when his father was appointed to head the Neapolitan branch of his bank. Boccaccio was apprenticed to the bank, but it was a trade for which he had no affinity. He eventually persuaded his father to let him study law at the Studium in the the next six years Boccaccio studied canon law there. From there he pursued his interest in scientific and literary studies.

His father introduced him to the Neapolitan nobility and the French-influenced court of Robert the Wise in the 1330s. At this time he fell in love with a married daughter of King Robert of Naples (known as Robert the Wise) and she is immortalized as the character "Fiammetta" in many of Boccaccio's prose romances, particularly *Il Filocolo* (1338). Boccaccio became a friend of fellow Florentine Niccolò Acciaiuoli, and benefited from his influence as the administrator, and perhaps the lover, of Catherine of Valois-Courtenay, widow of Philip I of Taranto. Acciaiuoli later became counsellor to Queen Joan I of Naples and, eventually, her Grand Seneschal.

It seems Boccaccio enjoyed law no more than banking, but his studies allowed him 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, the *Collectiones*), the humanists Barbato da Sulmona and Giovanni Barrili, and the theologian Dionigi di Borgo San Sepolcro.

Mature Years

In Naples, Boccaccio began what he considered his true vocation, poetry. Works produced in this period include *Filostrato* and *Teseida* (the sources for [Chaucer](http://www.poemhunter.com/geoffrey-chaucer/) *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Knight's Tale*, respectively), *Filocolo*, a prose version of an existing French romance, and *La caccia di Diana*, a poem in terza rima listing Neapolitan women. The period featured considerable formal innovation, including possibly the introduction of the Sicilian octave to Florence, where it influenced Petrarch.

Boccaccio returned to Florence in early 1341, avoiding the plague in that city of 1340, but also 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 died shortly afterward. Although dissatisfied with his return to Florence, Boccaccio continued to work, producing *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* (also known as *Ameto*) a mix of prose and poems, in 1341, completing the fifty canto allegorical poem *Amorosa visione* in 1342, and *Fiammetta* in 1343. The pastoral piece *Ninfale fiesolano* probably dates from this time also. In 1343, Boccaccio's father remarried, to Bice del Bostichi. His children by his first marriage had all died (except Boccaccio) but he had another son, Iacopo, in 1344.

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 assisted in the relative decline of Florence. The city was hurt further, in 1348, by the Black Death, which killed some three-quarters of the city's population, later represented in 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 stepmother died during the epidemic and his father, as Minister of Supply in the city was closely associated with the government efforts. His father died in 1349 and as head of the family Boccaccio was forced into a more active role.

Boccaccio began work on the *Decameron* around 1349. It is probable that the

structures of many of the tales date from earlier in his career, but the choice of a hundred tales and the frame-story lieta brigata of three men and seven women dates from this time. The work was largely complete by 1352. It was Boccaccio's final effort in literature and one of his last works in Italian, the only other substantial work was Corbaccio (dated to either 1355 or 1365). Boccaccio revised and rewrote the Decameron in 1370-1371. This manuscript has survived to the present day.

From 1350, Boccaccio, although less of a scholar, became closely involved with Italian humanism 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 Brandenburg, Milan, and Avignon. He also pushed for the study of Greek, housing Barlaam of Calabria, and encouraging his tentative translations of works by [Homer](http://www.poemhunter.com/homer/), [Euripides](http://www.poemhunter.com/euripides/), and [Aristotle](http://www.poemhunter.com/aristotle/).

In October 1350, he was delegated to greet Francesco Petrarch as he entered Florence and also to have the great man as a guest at his home during his stay. 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 invite 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 would remain one of the key reference works on classical mythology for over 400 years. It served as an extended defense 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 wanted to limit access to classical sources to prevent any moral harm to Christian readers. In that the revival of classical antiquity became necessary to the achievement of the Renaissance, his defense of the importance of ancient literature was an essential requirement for its development. The discussions also formalized Boccaccio's poetic ideas. Certain sources also see a conversion of Boccaccio by Petrarch from the open humanist of the Decameron to a more ascetic style, closer to the dominant fourteenth century ethos. For example, he followed Petrarch (and [Dante](http://www.poemhunter.com/dante-alighieri/)) in the unsuccessful championing of an archaic and deeply allusive form of Latin poetry. In 1359 following a meeting with Pope Innocent VI and further meetings with Petrarch it is probable that Boccaccio took some kind of religious mantle. There is a persistent, but unsupported, tale that he

repudiated his earlier works, including the Decameron, in 1362, as profane.

In 1360, Boccaccio began work on *De mulieribus claris*, a book offering biographies of one hundred and six famous women, that he completed in 1374.

Following the failed coup of 1361, a number of Boccaccio's close friends and other acquaintances were executed or exiled in the subsequent purge. Although not directly linked to the conspiracy, it was in this year that Boccaccio left Florence to reside in Certaldo, and became less involved in government affairs. He did not undertake further missions for Florence until 1365, and traveled to Naples and then on to Padua and Venice, where he met up with Petrarch in grand style at Palazzo Molina, Petrarch's residence as well as the place of Petrarch's library. He later then returned to Certaldo. He met Petrarch only once again, in Padua in 1368. Upon hearing of the death of Petrarch (July 19, 1374), Boccaccio 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. When the papacy returned to Rome from Avignon in 1367, Boccaccio was again sent to Urban, offering congratulations. He also undertook diplomatic missions to Venice and Naples.

Of his later works the moralistic biographies gathered as *De casibus virorum illustrium* (1355–74) and *De mulieribus claris* (1361–1375) were most significant. Other works include a dictionary of geographical allusions in classical literature, *De montibus, silvis, fontibus, lacubus, fluminibus, stagnis seu paludibus, et de nominibus maris liber* (a title desperate for the coining of the word "geography"). He gave a series of lectures on Dante at the Santo Stefano church in 1373 and these resulted in his final major work, the detailed *Esposizioni sopra la Commedia di ccio* and Petrarch were also two of the most educated people in early Renaissance in the field of archaeology.

Boccaccio's change in writing style in the 1350s was not due just to meeting with Petrarch. It was mostly due to poor health and a premature weakening of his physical strength. It also was due to disappointments in love. Some such disappointment could explain why Boccaccio, having previously written always in praise of women and love, came suddenly to write in a bitter Corbaccio style. Petrarch describes how Pietro Petrone (a Carthusian monk) on Boccaccio's death bed sent another Carthusian (Gioacchino Ciani) to urge him to renounce his worldly studies. Petrarch then dissuaded Boccaccio from burning his own works and selling off his personal library, letters, books, and manuscripts. Petrarch even 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.

His 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 at the age of sixty-two on 21 December 1375 in Certaldo, where he is buried.

Children

Boccaccio married Margherita di Gian Donato de' Martoli in 1314 who bore him a legitimate son, Francesco. He also had three other children. Mario and Giulio were born in the 1330s. In the 1340s, Violente was born in Ravenna, where Boccaccio was a guest of Ostasio I da Polenta from about 1345 through 1346.

Balleta

I AM young and fain to sing
In this happy tide of spring
Of love and many a gentle thing,
 I wander through green meadows dight
With blossoms gold and red and white;
Rose by the thorn and lily fair,
Both one and all I do compare
With him who, worshipping my charms,
For aye would fold me in his arms
As one unto his service sworn.

 Then, when I find a flower that seems
Like to the object of my dreams,
I gather it and kiss it there,
I flatter it in accents fair,
My heart outpour, my soul stoop down,
Then weave it in a fragrant crown
Among my flaxen locks to wear.

 The rapture nature's floweret gay
Awakes in me doth last alway,
As if I tarried face to face
With him whose true love is my grace;
Thoughts which its fragranciness inspires
I cannot frame to my desires,
My sighs their pilgrimage do trace.

 My sights are neither harsh nor sad
As other women's are, but glad
And tender; in so fond a wise
They seek my love that he replies
By coming hither, and so gives
Delight to her who in him lives
Yet almost wept: "Come, for hope dies."

Giovanni Boccaccio

Proem

Beginneth here the book called Decameron, otherwise Prince Galeotto, wherein are contained one hundred novels told in ten days by seven ladies and three young men.

PROEM.

[Voice: author]

'Tis humane to have compassion on the afflicted; and as it shews well in all, so it is especially demanded of those who have had need of comfort and have found it in others: among whom, if any had ever need thereof or found it precious or delectable, I may be numbered; seeing that from my early youth even to the present I was beyond measure aflame with a most aspiring and noble love more perhaps than, were I to enlarge upon it, would seem to accord with my lowly condition. Whereby, among people of discernment to whose knowledge it had come, I had much praise and high esteem, but nevertheless extreme discomfort and suffering, not indeed by reason of cruelty on the part of the beloved lady, but through superabundant ardour engendered in the soul by ill-bridled desire; the which, as it allowed me no reasonable period of quiescence, frequently occasioned me an inordinate distress.

In which distress so much relief was afforded me by the delectable discourse of a friend and his commendable consolations, that I entertain a very solid conviction that to them I owe it that I am not dead.

But, as it pleased Him, who, being infinite, has assigned by immutable law an end to all things mundane, my love, beyond all other fervent, and neither to be broken nor bent by any force of determination, or counsel of prudence, or fear of manifest shame or ensuing danger, did nevertheless in course of time abate of its own accord, in such wise that it has now left nought of itself in my mind but that pleasure which it is wont to afford to him who does not adventure too far out in navigating its deep seas; so that, whereas it was used to be grievous, now, all discomfort being done away, I find that which remains to be delightful. But the cessation of the pain has not banished the memory of the kind offices done me by those who shared by sympathy the burden of my griefs; nor will it ever, I believe, pass from me except by death.

And as among the virtues gratitude is in my judgment most especially to be commended, and ingratitude in equal measure to be censured, therefore, that I show myself not ungrateful, I have resolved, now that I may call myself free, to endeavour, in return for what I have received, to afford, so far as in me lies, some solace, if not to those who succoured me, and who, perchance, by reason of their good sense or good fortune, need it not, at least to such as may be apt

to receive it.

[Voice: author]

And though my support or comfort, so to say, may be of little avail to the needy, nevertheless it seems to me meet to offer it most readily where the need is most apparent, because it will there be most serviceable and also most kindly received.

Who will deny, that it should be given, for all that it may be worth, to gentle ladies much rather than to men?

Within their soft bosoms, betwixt fear and shame, they harbour secret fires of love, and how much of strength concealment adds to those fires, they know who have proved it. Moreover, restrained by the will, the caprice, the commandment of fathers, mothers, brothers, and husbands, confined most part of their time within the narrow compass of their chambers, they live, so to say, a life of vacant ease, and, yearning and renouncing in the same moment, meditate divers matters which cannot all be cheerful.

If thereby a melancholy bred of amorous desire make entrance into their minds, it is like to tarry there to their sore distress, unless it be dispelled by a change of ideas. Besides which they have much less power to support such a weight than men. For, when men are enamoured, their case is very different, as we may readily perceive.

They, if they are afflicted by a melancholy and heaviness of mood, have many ways of relief and diversion; they may go where they will, may hear and see many things, may hawk, hunt, fish, ride, play or traffic. By which means all are able to compose their minds, either in whole or in part, and repair the ravage wrought by the dumpish mood, at least for some space of time; and shortly after, by one way or another, either solace ensues, or the dumps become less grievous.

Wherefore, in some measure to compensate the injustice of Fortune, which to those whose strength is least, as we see it to be in the delicate frames of ladies, has been most niggard of support, I, for the succour and diversion of such of them as love (for others may find sufficient solace in the needle and the spindle and the reel) , do intend to recount one hundred Novels or Fables or Parables or Stories, as we may please to call them, which were recounted in ten days by an honourable company of seven ladies and three young men in the time of the late mortal pestilence, as also some canzonets sung by the said ladies for their delectation. In which pleasant novels will be found some passages of love rudely crossed, with other courses of events of which the issues are felicitous, in times as well modern as ancient: from which stories the said ladies, who shall read them, may derive both pleasure from the entertaining matters set forth therein, and also good counsel, in that they may learn what to shun, and likewise what to pursue. Which cannot, I believe, come to pass, unless the dumps be banished by

diversion of mind.

And if it so happen (as God grant it may) let them give thanks to Love, who, liberating me from his fetters, has given me the power to devote myself to their gratification.

Giovanni Boccaccio

Sonetto

BESIDE a fountain in a little grove
That fresh green fronds and pretty flowers did grace,
Three maidens sat and talked methinks of love.
Mid golden locks, o'ershadowing each sweet face,
For coolness was entwined a leaf-green spray,
And all the while a gentle zephyr played
Through green and golden in a tender way,
Weaving a web of sunshine and of shade.

After a while, unto the other two
One spoke, and I could hear her words: "Think you
That if our lovers were to happen by
We would all run away for very fright?"
The others answered her: "From such delight
She were a little fool who'd wish to fly!"

Giovanni Boccaccio

Theodore and Honoria

Of all the cities in Romanian lands,
The chief and most renowned Ravenna stands;
Adorned in ancient times with arms and arts,
And rich inhabitants with generous hearts.
But Theodore the brave, above the rest,
With gifts of fortune and of nature blessed,
The foremost place for wealth and honour held,
And all in feats of chivalry excelled.

This noble youth to madness loved a dame
Of high degree, Honoria was her name;
Fair as the fairest, but of haughty mind,
And fiercer than became so soft a kind;
Proud of her birth (for equal she had none),
The rest she scorned, but hated him alone;
His gifts, his constant courtship, nothing gained;
For she, the more he loved, the more disdained,
He lived with all the pomp he could devise,
At tilts and tournaments obtained the prize,
But found no favour in his lady's eyes:
Relentless as a rock, the lofty maid
Turned all to poison that he did or said:
Nor prayers nor tears nor offered vows could move;
The work went backward; and the more he strove
To advance his suit, the farther from her love.

Wearied at length, and wanting remedy,
He doubted oft, and oft resolved to die.
But pride stood ready to prevent the blow,
For who would die to gratify a foe?
His generous mind disdained so mean a fate;
That passed, his next endeavour was to hate.
But vainer that relief than all the rest;
The less he hoped, with more desire possessed;
Love stood the siege, and would not yield his breast.

Change was the next, but change deceived his care;
He sought a fairer, but found none so fair.
He would have worn her out by slow degrees,

As men by fasting starve the untamed disease;
But present love required a present ease.
Looking, he feeds alone his famished eyes,
Feeds lingering death, but, looking not, he dies.
Yet still he chose the longest way to fate,
Wasting at once his life and his estate.

His friends beheld, and pitied him in vain.
For what advice can ease a lover's pain?
Absence, the best expedient they could find,
Might save the fortune, if not cure the mind:
This means they long proposed, but little gained,
Yet after much pursuit at length obtained.

Hard you may think it was to give consent,
But struggling with his own desires he went;
With large expense, and with a pompous train,
Provided as to visit Fraunce or Spain,
Or for some distant voyage o'er the main.
But Love had clipped his wings, and cut him short,
Confined within the purlieus of his court.
Three miles he went, nor farther could retreat;
His travels ended at his country seat:
To Chassi's pleasing plains he took his way,
There pitched his tents, and there resolved to stay.

The spring was in the prime, the neighbouring grove
Supplied with birds, the choristers of love;
Music unbought, that ministered delight
To morning walks, and lulled his cares by night:
There he discharged his friends, but not the expense
Of frequent treats and proud magnificence.
He lived as kings retire, though more at large
From public business, yet with equal charge;
With house and heart still open to receive;
As well content as love would give him leave:
He would have lived more free; but many a guest,
Who could forsake the friend, pursued the feast.

It happed one morning, as his fancy led,
Before his usual hour he left his bed,
To walk within a lonely lawn, that stood

On every side surrounded by the wood:
Alone he walked, to please his pensive mind,
And sought the deepest solitude to find;
'Twas in a grove of spreading pines he strayed;
The winds within the quivering branches played,
And dancing trees a mournful music made;
The place it self was suiting to his care,
Uncouth and savage as the cruel fair.
He wandered on, unknowing where he went,
Lost in the wood, and all on love intent:
The day already half his race had run,
And summoned him to due repast at noon,
But Love could feel no hunger but his own.

While listening to the murmuring leaves he stood,
More than a mile immersed within the wood,
At once the wind was laid; the whispering sound
Was dumb; a rising earthquake rocked the ground;
With deeper brown the grove was overspread,
A sudden horror seized his giddy head,
And his ears tinkled, and his colour fled.
Nature was in alarm; some danger nigh
Seemed threatened, though unseen to mortal eye.
Unused to fear, he summoned all his soul,
And stood collected in him self - and whole;
Not long: for soon a whirlwind rose around,
And from afar he heard a screaming sound,
As of a dame distressed, who cried for aid,
And filled with loud laments the secret shade.

A thicket close beside the grove there stood,
With breers and brambles choked, and dwarfish wood;
From thence the noise, which now approaching near
With more distinguished notes invades his ear;
He raised his head, and saw a beauteous maid
With hair dishevelled issuing through the shade;
Stripped of her clothes, and e'en those parts revealed
Which modest nature keeps from sight concealed.
Her face, her hands, her naked limbs were torn,
With passing through the brakes and prickly thorn;
Two mastiffs gaunt and grim her flight pursued,
And oft their fastened fangs in blood imbrued:

Oft they came up, and pinched her tender side,
"Mercy, O mercy, Heaven,' she ran, and cried:
When Heaven was named, they loosed their hold again.
Then sprung she forth, they followed her amain.

Not far behind, a knight of swarthy face
High on a coal-black steed pursued the chace;
With flashing flames his ardent eyes were filled,
And in his hands a naked sword he held:
He cheered the dogs to follow her who fled,
And vowed revenge on her devoted head.

As Theodore was born of noble kind,
The brutal action roused his manly mind:
Moved with unworthy usage of the maid,
He, though unarmed, resolved to give her aid.
A saplin pine he wrenched from out the ground,
The readiest weapon that his fury found.
Thus, furnished for offence, he crossed the way
Betwixt the graceless villain and his prey.

The knight came thundering on, but, from afar,
Thus in imperious tone forbad the war:
"Cease, Theodore, to proffer vain relief,
"Nor stop the vengeance of so just a grief;
"But give me leave to seize my destined prey,
"And let eternal justice take the way:
"I but revenge my fate, disdained, betrayed,
"And suffering death for this ungrateful maid."

He said, at once dismounting from the steed;
For now the hell-hounds with superior speed
Had reached the dame, and, fastening on her side,
The ground with issuing streams of purple dyed.
Stood Theodore surprised in deadly fright,
With chattering teeth, and bristling hair upright;
Yet armed with inborn worth, - "Whate'er,' said he,
"Thou art, who knowst me better than I thee;
"Or prove thy rightful cause, or be defied."
The spectre fiercely staring, thus replied:

"Know, Theodore, thy ancestry I claim,

"And Guido Cavalcanti was my name.
"One common sire our fathers did beget,
"My name and story some remember yet;
"Thee, then a boy, within my arms I laid,
"When for my sins I loved this haughty maid;
"Not less adored in life, nor served by me,
"Than proud Honoria now is loved by thee.
"What did I not her stubborn heart to gain?
"But all my vows were answered with disdain:
"She scorned my sorrows, and despised my pain.
"Long time I dragged my days in fruitless care;
"Then loathing life, and plunged in deep despair,
"To finish my unhappy life I fell
"On this sharp sword, and now am damned in hell.

"Short was her joy; for soon the insulting maid
"By Heaven's decree in the cold grave was laid;
"And as in unrepenting sin she died,
"Doomed to the same bad place, is punished for her pride:
"Because she deemed I well deserved to die,
"And made a merit of her cruelty.
"There, then, we met; both tried, and both were cast,
"And this irrevocable sentence passed,
"That she, whom I so long pursued in vain,
"Should suffer from my hands a lingering pain:
"Renewed to life, that she might daily die,
"I daily doomed to follow, she to fly;
"No more a lover, but a mortal foe,
"I seek her life (for love is none below):
"As often as my dogs with better speed
"Arrest her flight, is she to death decreed:
"Then with this fatal sword, on which I died,
"I pierce her opened back or tender side,
"And tear that hardened heart from out her breast,
"Which with her entrails makes my hungry hounds a feast.
"Nor lies she long, but as her fates ordain,
"Springs up to life, and fresh to second pain,
"Is saved to-day, to-morrow to be slain."

This, versed in death, the infernal knight relates,
And then for proof fulfilled their common fates;
Her heart and bowels through her back he drew,

And fed the hounds that helped him to pursue.
Stern looked the fiend, as frustrate of his will,
Not half sufficed, and greedy yet to kill.
And now the soul, expiring through the wound,
Had left the body breathless on the ground,
When thus the grisly spectre spoke again:
"Behold the fruit of ill-rewarded pain!
"As many months as I sustained her hate,
"So many years is she condemned by Fate
"To daily death; and every several place
"Conscious of her disdain and my disgrace,
"Must witness her just punishment, and be
"A scene of triumph and revenge to me.
"As in this grove I took my last farewell,
"As on this very spot of earth I fell,
"As Friday saw me die, so she my prey
"Becomes even here, on this revolving day."

Thus while he spoke, the virgin from the ground
Upstarted fresh, already closed the wound,
And unconcerned for all she felt before,
Precipitates her flight along the shore:
The hell-hounds, as ungorged with flesh and blood,
Pursue their prey, and seek their wonted food:
The fiend remounts his courser, mends his pace,
And all the vision vanished from the place.

Long stood the noble youth oppressed with awe
And stupid at the wondrous things he saw,
Surpassing common faith, transgressing Nature's law:
He would have been asleep, and wished to wake,
But dreams, he knew, no long impression make,
Though strong at first; if vision, to what end,
But such as must his future state portend,
His love the damsel, and himself the fiend?
But yet reflecting that it could not be
From Heaven, which cannot impious acts decree,
Resolved within him self to shun the snare
Which hell for his destruction did prepare;
And as his better genius should direct,
From an ill cause to draw a good effect.

Inspired from Heaven he homeward took his way,
Nor palled his new design with long delay;
But of his train a trusty servant sent
To call his friends together at his tent.
They came, and, usual salutations paid,
With words premeditated thus he said:
"What you have often counselled, to remove
"My vain pursuit of unregarded love,
"By thrift my sinking fortune to repair,
"Though late, yet is at last become my care:
"My heart shall be my own; my vast expense
"Reduced to bounds by timely providence:
"This only I require; invite for me
"Honorina, with her father's family,
"Her friends and mine; the cause I shall display,
"On Friday next, for that's the appointed day."

Well pleased were all his friends, the task was light,
The father, mother, daughter they invite;
Hardly the dame was drawn to this repast;
But yet resolved, because it was the last.
The day was come, the guests invited came,
And with the rest the inexorable dame:
A feast prepared with riotous expense,
Much cost, more care, and most magnificence.
The place ordained was in that haunted grove
Where the revenging ghost pursued his love:
The tables in a proud pavilion spread,
With flowers below, and tissue overhead;
The rest in rank, Honorina, chief in place,
Was artfully contrived to set her face
To front the thicket and behold the chace.
The feast was served, the time so well forecast,
That just when the dessert and fruits were placed,
The fiend's alarm began; the hollow sound
Sung in the leaves, the forest shook around,
Air blackened, rolled the thunder, groaned the ground.

Nor long before the loud laments arise,
Of one distressed, and mastiffs' mingled cries;
And first the dame came rushing through the wood,
And next the famished hounds that sought their food,

And griped her flanks, and oft essayed their jaws in blood.
Last came the felon on the sable steed,
Armed with his naked sword, and urged his dogs to speed.
She ran, and cried, her flight directly bent
(A guest unbidden) to the fatal tent,
The scene of death, and place ordained for punishment.
Loud was the noise, aghast was every guest,
The woman shrieked, the men forsook the feast;
The hounds at nearer distance hoarsely bayed;
The hunter close pursued the visionary maid,
She rent the heaven with loud laments, imploring aid.

The gallants, to protect the lady's right,
Their fauchions brandished at the grisly spright;
High on his stirrups he provoked the fight.
Then on the crowd he cast a furious look,
And withered all their strength before he strook:
"Back on your lives! let be,' said he, "my prey,
"And let my vengeance take the destined way:
"Vain are your arms, and vainer your defence,
"Against the eternal doom of Providence:
"Mine is the ungrateful maid by Heaven designed:
"Mercy she would not give, nor mercy shall she find."
At this the former tale again he told
With thundering tone, and dreadful to behold:
Sunk were their hearts with horror of the crime,
Nor needed to be warned a second time,
But bore each other back; some knew the face,
And all had heard the much lamented case
Of him who fell for love, and this the fatal place.

And now the infernal minister advanced,
Seized the due victim, and with fury lanced
Her back, and piercing through her inmost heart,
Drew backward as before the offending part.
The recking entrails next he tore away,
And to his meagre mastiffs made a prey.
The pale assistants on each other stared,
With gaping mouths for issuing words prepared;
The stillborn sounds upon the palate hung,
And died imperfect on the faltering tongue.
The fright was general; but the female band,

A helpless train, in more confusion stand:
With horror shuddering, on a heap they run,
Sick at the sight of hateful justice done;
For conscience rung the alarm, and made the case their own.

So spread upon a lake, with upward eye,
A plump of fowl behold their foe on high;
They close their trembling troop; and all attend
On whom the sowsing eagle will descend.

But most the proud Honoria feared the event,
And thought to her alone the vision sent.
Her guilt presents to her distracted mind
Heaven's justice, Theodore's revengeful kind,
And the same fate to the same sin assigned;
Already sees her self the monster's prey,
And feels her heart and entrails torn away.
'Twas a mute scene of sorrow, mixed with fear;
Still on the table lay the unfinished cheer:
The knight and hungry mastiffs stood around,
The mangled dame lay breathless on the ground;
When on a sudden, re-inspired with breath,
Again she rose, again to suffer death;
Nor stayed the hell-hounds, nor the hunter stayed,
But followed, as before, the flying maid:
The avenger took from earth the avenging sword,
And mounting light as air his sable steed he spurred:
The clouds dispelled, the sky resumed her light,
And Nature stood recovered of her fright.

But fear, the last of ills, remained behind,
And horror heavy sat on every mind.
Nor Theodore encouraged more his feast,
But sternly looked, as hatching in his breast
Some deep design, which when Honoria viewed
The fresh impulse her former fright renewed:
She thought her self the trembling dame who fled,
And him the grisly ghost that spurred the infernal steed:
The more dismayed, for when the guests withdrew,
Their courteous host saluting all the crew,
Regardless passed her o'er, nor graced with kind adieu.
That sting infix'd within her haughty mind,

The downfall of her empire she divined;
And her proud heart with secret sorrow pined.
Home as they went, the sad discourse renewed,
Of the relentless dame to death pursued,
And of the sight obscene so lately viewed;
None durst arraign the righteous doom she bore,
Even they who pitied most yet blamed her more:
The parallel they needed not to name,
But in the dead they damned the living dame.

At every little noise she looked behind,
For still the knight was present to her mind:
And anxious oft she started on the way,
And thought the horseman-ghost came thundering for his prey.
Returned, she took her bed with little rest,
But in short slumbers dreamt the funeral feast;
Awaked, she turned her side, and slept again;
The same black vapours mounted in her brain,
And the same dreams returned with double pain.

Now forced to wake, because afraid to sleep,
Her blood all fevered, with a furious leap
She sprung from bed, distracted in her mind,
And feared, at every step, a twitching spright behind.
Darkling and desperate, with a staggering pace,
Of death afraid, and conscious of disgrace,
Fear, pride, remorse, at once her heart assailed;
Pride put remorse to flight, but fear prevailed.
Friday, the fatal day, when next it came,
Her soul forethought the fiend would change his game,
And her pursue, or Theodore be slain,
And two ghosts join their packs to hunt her o'er the plain.

This dreadful image so possessed her mind,
That, desperate any succour else to find,
She ceased all farther hope; and now began
To make reflection on the unhappy man.
Rich, brave, and young, who past expression loved,
Proof to disdain, and not to be removed:
Of all the men respected and admired,
Of all the dames, except her self, desired:
Why not of her? preferred above the rest

By him with knightly deeds, and open love professed?
So had another been, where he his vows addressed.
This quelled her pride, yet other doubts remained,
That once disdain, she might be disdained.
The fear was just, but greater fear prevailed,
Fear of her life by hellish hounds assailed:
He took a lowering leave; but who can tell
What outward hate might inward love conceal?
Her sex's arts she knew, and why not then
Might deep dissembling have a place in men?
Here hope began to dawn; resolved to try,
She fixed on this her utmost remedy;
Death was behind, but hard it was to die:
'Twas time enough at last on death to call;
The precipice in sight, a shrub was all
That kindly stood betwixt to break the fatal fall.

One maid she had, beloved above the rest:
Secure of her, the secret she confessed;
And now the cheerful light her fears dispelled,
She with no winding turns the truth concealed,
But put the woman off, and stood revealed:
With faults confessed, commissioned her to go,
If pity yet had place, and reconcile her foe.
The welcome message made was soon received;
'Twas what he wished and hoped, but scarce believed:
Fate seemed a fair occasion to present,
He knew the sex, and feared she might repent
Should he delay the moment of consent.
There yet remained to gain her friends (a care
The modesty of maidens well might spare):
But she with such a zeal the cause embraced,
(As women, where they will, are all in haste,)
The father, mother, and the kin beside,
Were overborne by fury of the tide;
With full consent of all she changed her state;
Resistless in her love, as in her hate.

By her example warned, the rest beware;
More easy, less imperious, were the fair;
And that one hunting, which the devil designed
For one fair female, lost him half the kind.

Giovanni Boccaccio