

**BOCCACCIO AND HIS IMITATORS
IN GERMAN, ENGLISH,
FRENCH, SPANISH, AND ITALIAN
LITERATURE, "THE DECAMERON"**

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Boccaccio and His Imitators in German, English, French, Spanish, and Italian literature, "The Decameron" by Florence Nightingale Jones

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“THE DECAMERON”

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PREFACE

The following list of the imitations of the tales found in the *Decameron* is designed to give to the student of comparative literature some idea of the extent to which the novels of Boccaccio were used by later writers as material to be worked over into poems, dramas, and operas. These imitations are arranged chronologically and are grouped by countries. Germany is placed first as leading all the other countries of Europe in its adaptations of Boccaccio's stories. England comes next, and then the three Latin countries. In this list are included all the prose or poetical narratives or dramas which are commonly called imitations of Boccaccio. No attempt is made to discuss the sources of these stories, nor to settle disputed questions, such as whether an author imitated Boccaccio himself or some imitator of Boccaccio. It is enough that the plot in all its main features agrees with the *Decameron* story which was directly or indirectly its source.

Several attempts of this kind have been made before: Du Méril, in his *Histoire de la Poésie Scandinave* (1839), has a chapter entitled "Des Sources du *Décameron* et de ses imitations." Dunlop, in his *History of Prose Fiction* (1851), brings together a number of imitations; Zambrini's *Bibliografia Boccaccasca* (1875) is, as its subtitle indicates, a list of the "Edizioni delle opere di Giovanni Boccacci latine, volgari, tradotte et trasformate." Several studies upon separate stories of the *Decameron* have been published, such as that of Anschutz, *Novelle vom Falken und ihre Verbreitung in der Literatur*, and that of Schofield on the *Seventh Novel of the Seventh Day*. Koeppel has studied the influence of the Italian novel on the English literature of the sixteenth century and Bourland the history of the *Decameron* in Spain. Valuable as these contributions have been for the fuller understanding of the extent of Boccaccio's influence upon European literature, it is hoped that the results arrived at by those who have thus studied the subject in certain aspects, may be of increased value, by being brought into comparison with those reached by other students in the same field.

If the list of Boccaccio imitations which is here presented is a longer list than that given by Dunlop, Du Méril, and Zambrini, it is because within the last twenty-five or thirty years a number of studies on Boccaccio have appeared similar to those mentioned above, the results of which have been utilized in the following tables. Neither Dunlop nor Zambrini have given a chronologically arranged list sufficiently complete to furnish the student of comparative literature with the data which are necessary in

order to arrive at an adequate idea of the extent to which Boccaccio was imitated in a certain century, in a certain country, or by a certain author. A general view of the subject is often necessary to decide whether an author drew his inspiration from Boccaccio or from some other source. The fact that six stories in the *Canterbury Tales* resemble those of the *Decameron* would certainly indicate that Chaucer had some acquaintance with the book.

Over eight hundred imitations are here brought together, but the list does not include those found in Scandinavian literature, which would bring the number up to at least a thousand. It is hoped that the list will be found reasonably accurate, but in all probability errors will be found, since many of the works referred to could not be consulted and the so-called imitations had to be accepted upon the authority of those who have consulted them. A star placed before the date indicates that the imitation has been verified by reading of the author's work. In one case only does the star indicate second-hand knowledge of the story and that is in the case of several Spanish authors where the outline of the story is given so fully by Miss Bourland as to leave no doubt as to its similarity with the *Decameron* story. As to the dates, it is hoped that they are correct. In general, the date given is the one which is believed to be that of the first public appearance of the work in manuscript or in print. In the case of some collections like Von der Hagen's *Gesammtabenteuer* or Lami's *Novelle letterarie*, this rule has not been followed. Whether the stories in these collections antedated Boccaccio or not, their publication in the nineteenth century may fairly entitle them to be imitations of Boccaccio in the sense that they are thus brought before the modern reading public for a second time.

It has seemed best not to incur the following list with detailed references to the work in which the imitation occurs. The title, so far as it indicates the character of the story, has been given whenever possible, but references to editions, volumes, pages, would defeat the object aimed at, which is to bring together, in the smallest compass possible, the imitations of the *Decameron* in European literature. As for acknowledgment of indebtedness to others, the Bibliography gives the principal sources from which this list has been made up. Again the hope is expressed that the list is reasonably accurate, i. e., accurate enough for the purpose for which it was intended, to bring together in a sort of bird's-eye-view all of the reworkings of the stories of the *Decameron*, in prose or verse, which number nearly a thousand and which form no inconsiderable part of the literature of the six centuries which will soon have elapsed since the birth of Boccaccio.

BOCCACCIO AND HIS IMITATORS. "THE DECAMERON"

If a twentieth-century playwright were to sit down with the Bible and the *Decameron* before him from which to select plots to work over for the entertainment of the public, the very proximity of the two books would be considered sacrilegious. In the sixteenth century, however, no less pious a person than Hans Sachs drew almost equally from these two world-famed story-books for subjects for his poems and plays without shocking the good citizens of Nuremberg in the least. In England, there was the same feeling in regard to Boccaccio; Roger Ascham complains bitterly of the "Italianated Englishmen" of his time, "who make more account of a tale in Bocace than a story in the Bible." No jest-book of this period was complete without some stories from the *Decameron*, and Shakspeare, Greene, and Ben Jonson all drew upon the Italian story-tellers for plots. Spanish writers, too, used the *Decameron* freely. Lope de Vega was too prolific a writer not to seize upon all the available material of his time for plots, but the fact that he took eight of them from Boccaccio must not be attributed so much to lack of other material as to the great popularity which Boccaccio enjoyed in Spain.

In Italy, Ser Giovanni, Sercambi, and Sacchetti, whose collections of narratives all appeared before the close of the fourteenth century, retold many of the *Decameron* stories and from them the fashion spread to England where Chaucer was inspired to write his *Canterbury Tales* in imitation of the Italian novelists.

During the fifteenth century Boccaccio had few imitators. Antoine de la Sale, in his *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* (1456), imitated the framework and a few of the incidents of the *Decameron*, while a few stories like those of Griselda and Ghismonda were retold in every country of Europe. The beginning of the sixteenth century, however, saw a Boccaccio renaissance which appears to have been most flourishing in Germany under the leadership of Hans Sachs, who found in the *Decameron* material for more than sixty *Schwänke*, *Fastnachtspiele*, and *Meistergesänge*. In the latter part of the century Ayler also dramatized half a dozen or more of the stories. Numberless jest-books were compiled in imitation of the *Decameron* and contained many of its narratives, such as Pauli's *Schimpf und Ernst* (1522) early in the century and the five collections which appeared from about 1556 to 1566—Kirchhof's *Wendunmuth*, Lindener's *Rastbüchlein*, Wickram's *Rollwagen*, Schuman's *Nachbüchlein*, and Martin Montanus's *Garten-*

gesellschaft. Even Luther made use of some of these stories in his *Tischreden*. In England, Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* initiated a series of imitations of Boccaccio. This book, which among many other tales from the Italian novelists contains sixteen from the *Decameron*, ranks as more than a mere translation and greatly influenced the Elizabethan dramatists. It was followed in 1576 by Turberville's *Tragical Tales*, containing a number of poetical translations, and by that curious imitation of Boccaccio and Dante, *Tarleton's Neues out of Purgatorie*. In France, Nicolas de Troyes, whose *Grand Parangon de Nouvelles* was published in 1536, retold almost as many stories as Hans Sachs, but in prose form. Henri Estienne, in his *Apologie pour Hérodote* some years later, retells Boccaccio's tales in prose. The turn of France was to come in the following century when La Fontaine retold in poetical form twenty or more stories with such art that it is hard to tell which is the master and which is the pupil.

The Italian novelists of the sixteenth century are too numerous and too well known to need more than a passing mention. Parabosco, Cinthio, Grazzini, Bandello, Straparola, and Malespini—all of them included a few Boccaccio's stories in their own collections. The most bold-faced borrowing, however, was practiced by Sansovino, who included a large number of Boccaccio's stories in his *Cento Novelle Scelte* and then refused to acknowledge the debt. The importance of this collection, however, lies in the date when it was published (1566)—the same year in which Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* appeared in England, Timoneda's *Paltrafiuolo* and *Alivio de Caminantes* in Spain, Estienne's *Apologie pour Hérodote* in France, and, a few years before, of numerous jest-books in Germany. This year, then, may be said to mark the culmination of the revival of interest in Boccaccio in the sixteenth century. In the early part of the seventeenth century Lope de Vega wrote eight dramas based upon the *Decameron* and a few of the English dramatists of that time borrowed some of the incidents to furnish a scene or an act of a play, but the only imitator of Boccaccio in that century worthy of mention is La Fontaine, who himself became a second Boccaccio, so far as imitators are concerned. For a hundred years afterward the French stage echoed and re-echoed these twice-told tales in comedies and comic operas, all deriving their inspiration from La Fontaine, as is plainly indicated by the title of a work published by De Théis in 1773—*Le Singe de La Fontaine*, which contains a number of Boccaccio-La Fontaine imitations. The last quarter of the eighteenth century saw a renewal of interest in Boccaccio which was especially marked in Germany. Goethe in 1776 writes of a projected drama based upon the Falcon story; Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* (1779) immortalized the story of the three rings; Bürger,

in his *Lenardo und Blandine* (1776), retold the Ghismonda story in verse, and Langbein, in his *Schwänke* (1792), the "Seventh of the Seventh."

Paul Heyse versified the story of Cymon and Iphigenia in his *Brout von Cypern* (1856), while Bülow's *Novellenbuch, oder Hundert Novellen nach allen italienischen, spanischen, französischen, lateinischen, englischen und deutschen bearbeitet* (1836), besides its framework, owes one tale to Boccaccio, "Der Genius." This awakening of enthusiasm for Boccaccio had its parallel among the Romanticists of England and France. That only his premature death kept Keats from following up his "Isabella" (1819) with other romances from Boccaccio is shown by a letter of Reynolds in which this statement is made: "Two stories from Boccaccio, the 'Garden of Florence' and the 'Ladyc of Provence,' were to have been associated with tales from the same source, intended to have been written by a friend" (Keats). In 1819, Barry Cornwall anticipated Tennyson and Longfellow in his poem of the "Falcon," and Collier's *Poetical Decameron* (1820) reviews Lewicke's version of the ever-popular story of Titus and Gesippus. Toward the middle of the century the pre-Raphaelite painters, Holman Hunt and Millais, both painted pictures illustrating the tale of "Lorenzo and Isabella," and Millais painted "Cymon and Iphigenia," a subject treated later in 1884 by Sir Frederick Leighton. Tennyson's "Golden Supper" is imitated either from Turberville's *Tragical Tales* (1576) or from Boccaccio, and William Black, in his *Sabina Zembra* (1889) (Anschütz), gives a résumé of the falcon story taken either from Tennyson or Boccaccio. Strange to say, in this era of woman's rights, a number of versions of the Griselda narrative have appeared. Silvestre and Morand (1893) wrote a *mystère* entitled *Griselidis*, and Hauptman also has produced a *Griselda* drama.

Out of the hundred stories of the *Decameron* some have naturally been more popular than others. Several have been worked over in poetical or dramatic form as many as thirty or forty times, while others have been retold only once. That the popularity of these tales did not depend entirely upon Boccaccio's skill as a story-teller but upon the story itself is shown by the fact that those which in Landau's *Quellen des Decamerons* have the longest pedigree are generally such as have been most often imitated since Boccaccio's time. From the Orient to the Occident, the faithful friend, the patient wife, and the unhappy lover have always appealed to popular sympathy, while a joke which has in it enough of humor to render it forever laughable, such as the one-legged goose, although Boccaccio's version of it is not particularly well written, counts more than twenty imitations.

The narrative which leads in popularity in all the countries of Europe is the last story of the *Decameron*—that of Patient Griselda (X, 10). ✓