



THE ROGUE THEATRE 2010-2011 SEASON

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IN REHEARSAL AT THE ROGUE

THE DECAMERON

by Giovanni Boccaccio

Compassion. You feel it most when you've been hurt. And because, my child, women are by nature more compassionate than men, we honor those who delivered comfort, but who could not or would not join us on our flight from Florence.

~Pampinea



Including information about:

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GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO AND HIS CONTEXT (1313-1375)

Best known for *The Decameron*, Giovanni Boccaccio's writings vividly represent the transition between the medieval and the

early modern context. While *The Decameron* may not have far-reaching recognition or resonance in our cultural context, Boccaccio's tales had significant influence on the literary canon of the Renaissance and was adapted to other forms and genres by authors throughout Europe.

Boccaccio's Florence was a city of conflict and turmoil. Along with Paris, Venice, and Genoa, Florence was one of the largest urban centers in Europe at the time, with population estimates over 100,000. (As a point of reference, London's population was estimated at just over 50,000 at the time.) Florence served as a major port on trade routes between Europe and the East, and had a voluble, market-driven economy because of this. However, this volubility, combined with a number of political upheavals through the early part of the century, led to economic instability and the failure of some of the most significant noble banking houses—including those with which Boccaccio associated. Such instability, coupled with worker's riots, famine, and the devastating outbreak of Plague in 1348 that spread on the very trade route that were foundational to the Florentine culture, profoundly affected Boccaccio's world and his place in it.

Boccaccio wrote *The Decameron* shortly following the Plague's devastation of Florence, and framed his work within the construct of young noblemen and women sharing tales to pass the time while in self-imposed exile from the city.

Adaptation and Translation:

Adaptation and Translation: Patrick Baliani

Patrick Baliani once again brings his unique creative skills as a translator, adaptor, and playwright to The Rogue Theatre, having previously shaped the translation of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* for The Rogue's 2008-2009 season. As a member of the English and the Honors College faculties at the University of Arizona, Baliani teaches a wide range of courses from composition to literary analysis to modern drama at the same time he translates and adapts texts like *The Decameron* to the stage.

Baliani's work has been recognized locally and nationally; in 2005, Baliani received the Arizona Commission on the Arts Artist's Project Grant for his play, *Lie More Mountains*, having previously been awarded the Playwriting Fellowship from the Arizona Commission on the Arts in 1999. In addition, he received the 1998 National Play Award by the Los Angeles National Repertory Theatre Foundation for his play, *A Namib Spring*. He received a Collaborative Artists Grant from the Arizona Commission on the Arts in 1997 and was awarded the Tucson Pima Arts Council Playwriting Fellowship in 1996. He was selected by New York's Young Playwrights, Inc. to be their 1993 Southwest Resident Playwright. He received the 1991 Arizona Theatre Company Genesis New Play Award, for his play, *Figs and Red Wine*.

Patrick's plays have been performed in New York, Los Angeles, Seattle, Phoenix, Prescott, and Tucson, where he has collaborated with Arizona Theatre Company, Tucson Art Theatre, Third Street Kids, Actor's Gymnasium, Old Pueblo Playwrights, and *Ubi Sunt*. His one-act plays have been anthologized in *Play It Again: One-Act Plays for Acting Students*, Meriwether Publishing, and *Twenty-Three Plays from the New Play Development Series*, Mississippi State University.

rites of passage and religious parallels

Christianity was a significant point of reference for the cultural and social experiences of the people of Florence at the dawn of the Renaissance era, exerting a profound influence not just upon religious dogma, but on philosophy, politics, and art. Much of the 13th century religious context was focused on extracting the message of Christ from these concepts and forms in order to “hasten a spiritual and ethical regeneration,” closely aligning the spiritual and physical planes. The Western European political world aided the proliferation of these ideas and ideals through the series of Crusades launched in the 12th and 13th century to protect the Christian Byzantine Empire from the



advancements of the Muslim Turks.

By the 14th century, the uniform conceptualization of the world under Christian world had begun to erode both from issues within the Church, and from its political associations. Heresy was

a charge leveled not just on those that opposed the tenets of the faith, but against those politically opposed to the powerful. Salvation developed more complexity in 14th century Florence, as the Catholic concept met the political machinations both within the church and within the political power structure under the threat of mortality from famine and plague.

According to the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church of the era, heaven could be attained by fulfilling the seven sacraments: Baptism, Reconciliation (Confession), Holy Communion (The Eucharist), Confirmation, Marriage, Last Rites, and Holy Orders. Confession as an act of attrition and Communion as a metaphorical acknowledgement of Christ’s connection to the physical world were ongoing, repeated rituals undertaken by the faithful.

In contrast, Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage, Last Rites, and Holy Orders can all be seen as rites of passage—and operate as structural metaphors within The Rogue’s production of *The Decameron*. Each

Pope Eugenius IV

The first five sacraments are intended to secure the spiritual perfection of every man individually; the two last are ordained for the governance and increase of the Church. For through baptism we are born again of the spirit; through confirmation we grow in grace and are strengthened in the faith; and when we have been born again and strengthened we are fed by the divine food of the mass; but if, through sin, we bring sickness upon our souls, we are made spiritually whole by penance; and by extreme unction we are healed, both spiritually and corporeally, according as our souls have need; by ordination the Church is governed and multiplied spiritually; by matrimony it is materially increased.



Triptych (above left) and detail of *The Seven Sacraments*, Rogier van der Weyden (c. 1448)

of these sacraments mark different climactic moments in life, and may be personified or resonate in different characters throughout the story.

TO WHET THE APPETITE....

To undertake the translation, adaptation, and performance of a foundational literary work such as *The Decameron* is to both hearken to the past and to reach forward from the present to shape the future; to acknowledge what has come before as we face the unknown before us. In so many ways, this is the process we embrace whenever we create.

What follows are critical and historical snippets that whet the appetite of your imagination—to serve as jumping off points, or points of

"The Decameron could be pictured as a wheel—Fortune's wheel, the wheel of life—on which the [characters] turn, coming back transformed to the point of departure."

~T. Barolini

departure. Embrace them, argue with them...set them aside, and see what rises in the road to meet you on this journey.



Language, in its ambiguity, can be made to veil or to reveal, and the negotiation of the balance is in the hands of the storyteller. Boccaccio, in his defense, takes the ambiguity of language and stories even further, thus burdening his audience with the last, decisive test: "Like all other things in this world, stories, whatever their nature, may be harmful or useful, *depending upon the listener...* Who will deny that fire is exceedingly useful, not to say vital, to man? Are we to conclude, because it burns down houses and villages and whole cities, that therefore it is pernicious?"

~Guido Almansi

"...no story is so unseemly as to prevent anyone from telling it, *provided it is told in seemly language*, and this I believe I may reasonably claim to have done."

~Boccaccio

In which circumstances, not to speak of many others of a similar or even graver complexion, divers apprehensions and imaginations were engendered in the minds of such as were left alive, inclining almost all of them to the same harsh resolution, to wit, to shun and abhor all contact with the sick and all that belonged to them, thinking thereby to make each his own health secure. Among whom there were those who thought that to live temperately and avoid all excess would count for much as a preservative against seizures of this kind. Wherefore they banded together, and dissociating themselves from all others, formed communities in houses where there were no sick, and lived a separate and secluded life, which they regulated with the utmost care, avoiding every kind of luxury, but eating and drinking moderately of the most delicate viands and the finest wines, holding converse with none but one another, lest tidings of sickness or death should reach them, and diverting their minds with music and such other delights as they could devise.

~Boccaccio



“Beneath all human events, when the chaff of time and individual variation is blown away, certain primeval patterns, “stories,” are found, by which these events form and reform in great repeating pulses.”

~ Bruno Schulz

HEED THESE STORIES.

BE FORTUNATE.

FURTHER RESOURCES

The Decameron Web, a resource of the Virtual Humanities Lab, Brown University
http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/index.php

Almansi, Guido. *The Writer as Liar. Narrative Technique in The Decameron*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975.

Barolini, Teodolinda. "The Wheel of the *Decameron*." *Romance Philology* 36.4 (May 1983): 521-539.

Cioffari, Vincezo. "The Conception of Fortune in the Decameron." *Italica* 17.4 (December 1940): 129-137.

Cottino-Jones, Marga. "Desire and the Fantastic in the Decameron: The Third Day." *Italica* (Spring 1993): 1-18.

Falvo, Joseph. "Ritual and Ceremony in Boccaccio's 'Decameron'." *MLN* 114.1 (January 1999): 143-156.

Levenstein, Jessica. "Out of Bounds: Passion and the Plague in Boccaccio's Decameron." *Italica* 73.3 (Autumn, 1996): 313-335.

"In his multitude of characters, from ridiculous fools to noble and resolute figures, from all times and social conditions, Boccaccio depicts human nature in its weakness and heroic virtue, particularly as revealed in comic or dramatic situations. There is an emphasis on human intelligence and a kind of worldly prudence with which characters overcome difficult situations, be they noble or ignoble. Boccaccio presents life from an earthly point of view, with a complete absence of moral intentions. If nothing is sacred, if a corrupt clergy is shown in all its greed and vanity, this offers stuff for amusement but never satire. And so, though the Decameron is not licentious, it is not moral either."

(Encyclopedia of World Biography, 1998)