

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

Giovanni Boccaccio was born in 1313 in Certaldo, a village near Florence. While still a boy, his father took him to Florence and then to Naples to study banking. He persuaded his father to allow him to go to Il Studium to study law. He didn't enjoy that either, and eventually turned his interests to literature. He read Greek and Latin, Dante and Petrarca and frequented the Neapolitan nobility. In 1336, he began his life as a writer, composing works in prose and poetry. He fell in love with Maria d'Aquino, who later featured in his works in the name of Fiammetta, particularly *Il Filocolo* (1338). At the age of 27, he left Naples and returned to Florence where he wrote *Comedie delle ninfe fiorentine*, *Amorosa*, *Fiammetta* and *Ninfale fiesolano*. He also went to Ravenna, seeking new patronage from the nobility.

The Black Death, in 1348, hit Florence hard, killing three-quarters of the population. Boccaccio fled to the hills to escape the plague, along with a group of three men and seven women. There he wrote his most famous work *The Decameron*. (See below). In 1350, he met Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch), another famous Italian poet, and the two became life-long friends.

In 1362, Boccaccio was visited by a monk, Gioacchino Ciani, who tried to persuade him to abandon his poetry and to dedicate his life to religion. Boccaccio wanted to burn his vulgar works but Petrarca dissuaded him and invited him to stay at his home; he even offered to buy all his works and keep them in his own library. Boccaccio went to Venice and stayed with Petrarca for three months but then returned to the tranquility of his home in Certaldo where in 1375, at the age of 62, he died in poverty and is buried.

Dante's work *The Divine Comedy* was originally named *La Commedia*. It was Boccaccio who renamed it *La Divina Commedia* as it is still known today.

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THE DECAMERON

In 1348, Florence was hit by the plague; thousands of people died from the disease. Ten young people from rich families left the city and escaped to a villa in Fiesole, in the Florentine hills. There were 3 men and 7 women and to relieve their boredom, each one narrated a story each night for 10 nights, hence the name *Decameron* from the Greek meaning a ten-day event. In all, 100 stories were told. The tales were of love, from the erotic to the tragic, of wit, practical jokes, often making fun of political characters and the less fortunate, and generally, life lessons of 14th century Italy. Many of the names used were weird and quirky, such as: Chichibio, Gianfigliuzzi, Frate Cipolla, Calandrino and Buffalmacco.