

NAXOS
AudioBooks

CLASSIC
FICTION



Boccaccio
Selections from
**The
Decameron**

Read by

Stephen Thorne
Nickie Rainsford
Alison Pettit
Teresa Gallagher
Polly Hayes
Siri O'Neal
Jonathan Keeble
Daniel Philpott
James Goode

NA438012D

The first day

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| 1 | 1348, Florence. The Plague | 9:50 |
| 2 | The funeral customs are abandoned | 6:20 |
| 3 | Seven young women in the church of Santa Maria Novella | 8:25 |
| 4 | Three young men come into the church and Pampinea proposes | 6:43 |

The first day: the fourth tale

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| 5 | Dioneo's tale of a young monk attracted by a pretty girl, and is espied by the Abbot | 6:55 |
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The second day: the seventh tale

- | | | |
|----|--|------|
| 6 | Panfilo's tale of the misfortunes of a beautiful Saracen girl, whose beauty caused her to lie with no fewer than nine men in the space of four years | 6:51 |
| 7 | Pericone became daily more ardent | 6:14 |
| 8 | Alatiel courted by Prince of the Morea in Corinth | 6:25 |
| 9 | War became more imminent | 6:12 |
| 10 | Antiocho and his merchant friend, and Antigonio of Famagusta | 8:58 |
| 11 | Alatiel tells her father of her adventures | 5:46 |

12 The company moves on 5:48

The third day: the second tale

13 Pampinea's tale of Agilulf, King of the Lombards,
his Queen Theodilinda and the groom... 10:15

The fourth day: the first tale

14 Fiammetta tells a tragic tale of the rage of Tancred,
Prince of Salerno spent on Ghismonda and her lover Guiscardo 14:01

15 The Prince gives the command to kill 6:26

The fourth day: the second tale

16 Pampinea lightens the mood of the party with a story of
a monkish seduction 12:17

17 Gossip gains control 7:13

The fourth day: the fifth tale

18 Filomena tells a tale of unswerving love 8:37

	The fifth day: the third tale	
19	Eliza tells of pure and honest love of Angolella and Pietro	14:01
	The fifth day: the fourth tale	
20	Filistrato recounts the balcony consummation of the love of Ricciardo and Caterina	12:26
	The fifth day: the tenth tale	
21	Dioneo reports on a wife consigned to a marriage to a man who prefers men	15:10
	The sixth day: the seventh tale	
22	Filistrato on the rights of women	5:27
23	Dioneo becomes king and leads the party to a new home	1:19
	The seventh day: the second tale	
24	Filistrato with the story of the wine butt	7:48
	The seventh day: the seventh tale	
25	Filomena tells a knightly tale of love	12:21

The eighth day: the eighth tale

- 26 Fiammetta enjoys the revenge of one friend upon another 7:48

The eighth day: the ninth tale

- 27 Emilia shows how easily a doctor can be a fool for all his learning 9:44
28 The doctor asks to join the club 13:13
29 The doctor goes to the tombs 6:00

The ninth day: the sixth tale

- 30 Panfilo imagines a busy night at an inn on the road 8:31

The tenth day: the tenth tale

- 31 Dioneo tells of patient Griselda and her testing husband Gualtieri 7:41
32 Gualtieri sends his daughter away 6:27
33 Gualtieri announces he will marry again 7:08
34 The story telling is at an end, and the company part 2:31

Total time: 4:41:13

Boccaccio
Selections from
The Decameron

The Cast

Narrator	Stephen Thorne
Pampinea	Nickie Rainsford
Filomena	Alison Pettit
Elisa	Teresa Gallagher
Emilia	Polly Hayes
Fiammetta	Siri O'Neal
Dioneo	Jonathan Keeble
Panfilo	Daniel Philpott
Filistrato	James Goode

Boccaccio

Selections from

The Decameron

The Decameron is one of the greatest literary works of the late Middle Ages, and perhaps of all time. Its influence even within Boccaccio's own lifetime was immense, extending (for example) as far as Chaucer in England, and it was not long before his reputation rivalled that of his sublime predecessor in Italian vernacular writing, Dante himself: indeed, it is a critical commonplace to regard *the Decameron* as a kind of prose secular equivalent of the *Divina Commedia* – where Dante chose to set human life in the context of eternity, Boccaccio sought to celebrate the pleasures of this world.

The Decameron, as its name suggests, is a collection of one hundred prose tales, many of them only a few pages long but including a small number of more substantial and sometimes serious narratives. Boccaccio provides a framework for the telling of these tales by imagining a situation in which ten young people find themselves together for a period of ten days, and agree to pass the time by each recounting one story on each

day. What lends this simple framing device such extraordinary power, however, is the context out of which this situation arises: Boccaccio had himself witnessed the terrifying effects of the Black Death on Florence, which it visited in 1348, and he begins *the Decameron* with a justly famous description of his city withering under the onslaught of the disease. The details are spelt out with a masterly blend of objective reportage and restrained compassion, and at the end of this introduction he brings in his seven young ladies. They meet in the church of Santa Maria Novella and agree to leave Florence for a stay in the countryside – itself not spared by the plague, but at least offering a change of air and a respite from the claustrophobic terrors of the city. By chance, three young men with whom the women are acquainted enter the church, and the women propose to them that they should join them on their rural sojourn. The plan meets with general approval, and so the mechanism of the narrative(s) is set in motion. One might note at this juncture the

scrupulous care with which Boccaccio insists on the propriety of relations between the young people: this is particularly amusing when one considers the extreme, even obscene, directness of many of the tales told by these impeccably brought up young people. This tension between seamliness and bawdiness creates a delightful *frisson* as the work unfolds.

When the young people arrive at the first of the idyllic places in which they stay – they move their residence twice more during the ten days – they agree to the story-telling scheme, and appoint a Queen or King to direct them on each day. Each day, too, will have a theme to which the tellers must adhere – the theme for Day Three, for example, concerns ‘people who, by virtue of their own efforts, have achieved an object they greatly desired, or have recovered a thing previously lost.’

Listeners will probably discover here tales that they are already familiar with in another form – lovers of Keats’ work, for instance, will know the story of Isabella, or the Pot of Basil, and will find it here as the Fifth Tale of the Fourth Day. Chaucer uses in *The Canterbury Tales* the last story of *the Decameron* as The Clerk’s Tale, while The Reeve’s Tale is very similar to the Sixth Tale of the Ninth Day. We should not be surprised by

this: throughout the Middle Ages and well into the Renaissance, writers were accustomed to reshaping other writers’ material, or borrowing from the rich tradition of folk tales.

What Boccaccio’s stories have in common is an extraordinary zest for life as it is lived on the physical level: morality is not exactly absent, but it almost always plays second fiddle to a joyous acceptance of life and appetite. Life is transitory and fragile, and had best be seized upon with gusto, ingenuity and humour. Boccaccio is also splendidly on the side of inherent quality rather than snobbish regard for class and ‘breeding’: one has only to listen to the First Tale of the Fourth Day, in which an incestuously jealous father has his daughter’s supposedly ‘inferior’ lover put to death, to realise the energy with which Boccaccio exposes the cruel folly of judging our fellows by caste. Feminists will also be delighted by the feisty Madonna Filippa’s brilliant and successful defence of a woman’s sexual rights in the Seventh Tale of the Sixth Day. There is, then, something startlingly modern about *The Decameron*, even as it also paints a brilliantly vivid picture of late medieval life in Italy.

Giovanni Boccaccio was born in Florence in 1313. Well educated, he worked for a time for his father, a successful merchant, but his real love was literature. This he developed during his time in Naples. He returned to Florence in 1340, where he witnessed the horrors of the Black Death in 1348. He first met Petrarch in 1350, and became both his friend and, by his own admission, his disciple. Among his works other than the *Decameron* are: *Filostrato*, a treatment of the story of Troilus and Cressida; *Teseida*, a poem on the story of Theseus, Palamon and Arcite (see Chaucer's Knight's Tale); and the *Amorosa Visione*, an unfinished allegory. Boccaccio died in 1375.



Stephen Thorne has made over 2,000 broadcasts for BBC Radio as well as theatre and television appearances. He has recorded over 100 Audio Books, mostly unabridged, including *The Sheep Pig* and all the *Brother Cadfael* novels and works by Dickens and Hardy. He received Talkies award 1996 for best unabridged novel – *Enigma* by Robert Harris.



Teresa Gallagher has performed in many leading roles in both plays and musicals across the country, London's West End, and Off Broadway. In addition, she is a well-known voice to listeners of BBC Radio Drama. Her work on film includes *The Misadventures of Margaret* and Mike Leigh's *Topsy-Turvy*. She has also recorded *The Treasure Seekers* and *The Wouldbegoods* for Naxos AudioBooks



James Goode's theatre credits include *The Wind in the Willows* and *The White Devil* (Royal National Theatre), several world tours of celebrated productions of Shakespeare and Chekhov as well as numerous plays at theatres throughout Britain. Television credits include *Shelley*, *South of the Border* and a spell as a presenter on the successful children's programme *Watch*. He has also appeared in countless radio plays and voice-overs.



Polly Hayes trained at LAMDA, the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center, Connecticut, USA and York University. She has appeared in regional theatres, and on national tours in a variety of plays. She played Eveline in Ken Campbell's revival of *The Warp*. She tours and performs a one-woman children's show of *Barbar the Elephant*. On TV, she has appeared in *Big Women*, *For Amusement Only* and in many commercials.



Jonathan Keeble After training at the Central School of Speech and Drama, Jonathan appeared at many leading repertory theatres including Coventry, Liverpool, and a season at Manchester's Royal Exchange. Now an established voice actor, he has narrated several books and performed over 150 radio plays for the BBC. He also performs The Devil in Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* on Naxos.



Siri O'Neal has appeared on stage across the country in various roles including Jean in *The Entertainer*, Hilde in *The Master Builder*, and Tess in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. She has been seen on TV in *Sharpe's Battle*, *The Cloning of Joanna May* and *Masterclass* and her film credits include *Waterland* and *The Rachel Papers*.



Alison Pettit has been a member of the BBC Radio Drama twice. Her work there included Sonya in *War and Peace*, Lorna in *Lorna Doone* and Cecile in *Les Liasons Dangereuses*. Her theatre work has included the *Sugar Plum Fairy*.



Daniel Philpott trained at LAMDA and following success in the BBC Carleton Hobbs awards has recorded for BBC Radio Drama, independent radio drama and other broadcast work. He has made many recordings for Naxos AudioBooks, including Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* and Dumas' *The Lady of the Camelias*, as well as unabridged novels, including Garland's *The Beach* for RNIB and other companies.



Nickie Rainsford's stage work has centred mainly on new writing from experimental theatre touring the UK and South America, to Tom Stoppard's *Indian Ink* in London's West End. She has also appeared in many radio plays for BBC Radio. TV appearances include Kate in *Tiger Bay* (BBC) and Edeka, Queen of the Huns in *Attila* (American TV networks).

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Cover picture: *Giovanni Boccaccio* (1313-75) by Castagno.
Courtesy: The Bridgeman Art Library, London.

Boccaccio

The Decameron

Read by **Stephen Thorne, Nickie Rainsford, Alison Pettit, Teresa Gallagher, Polly Hayes, Siri O'Neal, Jonathan Keeble, Daniel Philpott** and **James Goode**

Here are 16 tales from one of the great works of the Middle Ages. Ten young people have fled for a while the terrible effects of the Black Death in Florence and, in an idyllic setting, tell a series of brilliant stories, by turns humorous, bawdy, tragic and provocative. This celebration of physical and sexual vitality is Boccaccio's answer to the sublime other-worldliness of Dante's Divine Comedy.

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