*Highlights of European Literature:* ***Boccaccio***

**Main Focus of Lecture:**

**14th Century Italy**

* Italian Renaissance
  + First Renaissance in Europe (Climax in 16th Century for EU, but Italy early to it)
  + “Italy” has young country that is relatively young. In 14th century, it was split up differently (Papal States, Naples, Republic of Venice etc.)
* South: Kingdom of Naples
  + Aristocracy under Angevin Kings
* Central: Papal States (700-1870)
  + Popes in Avignon, government by local despots
* North: Maritime Republics (republican city states)
  + Florence
    - Origin of modern banking (florin)
    - Wealthy banking families
    - Governed by ‘signoria’ (feudal System)
    - Extensive middle class (guilds)
    - Plague kills approximately 1/3 of population
    - Literature in Tuscan dialect, NOT Latin (Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio)
* Society in Transition
  + From feudal to early modern society
  + Emergence of the secular nation state (mercantilism)
  + Rise of middle or trading classes (bourgeoisie)
  + International Trade and Financing System
    - “Florin” 🡪 first gold coin struck in different quantities. Almost a forerunner to the Euro
  + From medieval to early modern Europe

**Introduction to Francesco Petrarch (1304-1373)**

* Humanism
  + One of the first Humanists
  + Rediscovers Cicero’s letters: “Start of Italian Renaissance”
* Wrote in Latin, but poetry in Vernacular
* *Africa*
  + Epic Poem in Latin Hexameters on the invasion of North Africa by Roman general Africanus
  + European Celebrity, mainly known for his *Canzoniere (Rime Sparse)*
* *Canzoniere (Rime Sparse)*
  + 366 poems in vernacular
  + 317 sonnets
  + Written 1327-1368
  + Addressed to Laura
  + Love as paradox: Desire/Pain

**Introduction to Dante Alighieri**

* *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (1302-1305)
  + Written in Latin but defends the use of Tuscan Dialect
* Divina Commedia (1308-1320)
  + Narrative Poem in first person
  + First Italian work in Vernacular (NOT Latin); In Tuscan Dialect
    - Causes major shift in European Literature
  + Journey through Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso
  + Allegorical Account of the Soul’s ascension to God
  + Theology of Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica*
  + “Comedy” 🡪 in “Low Language” and happy ending
    - Just the opposite of Tragedy, essentially
  + “Divine” 🡪 Later added by Boccaccio
  + Terza Rima: interlocking three-line rhyme scheme (aba, bcb, cdc, …)

**Introduction To Boccaccio (Timeline)**

* Why study this figure?
  + Mediates between feudal and Early modern societies
  + Founder of Secular, Realist, Middle class (“Bourgeois”) Literature
* Key Innovator of European Literature
  + Linguistically (Vernacular)
  + Generically (Ex: Novella)
  + Narratologically (Ex: Frame Narrative)
* Background:
  + 1313: Born in Florence out of Wedlock
    - Son of Florentine Merchant
  + 1326: Moves with father to Naples
    - Apprentice at Bank
  + 1326-1332: Studies Canon Law
    - Creates in own network (in banks, law, and with humanists)
  + 1330: Neapolitan Nobility
  + 1335-1340?: *Il Fiolstrato*
  + 1335-1336: *Il Fiocolo*
  + 1340: Climax of Plague
  + 1341: Returns to Florence (Father dies)
  + 1343-1344: (*Elegia di Madonna) Fiametta*
  + 1347: Plague in Florence
  + 1349-1352: *Decameron*
  + From 1350: Diplomatic Missions for Florentine Government
    - Meets Petrarch in Naples 🡪 Close Friendship and Mentorship
    - Encourages Boccaccio to read Latin and Greek writers
  + 1360: *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*
  + 1360-1374: *De Mulieribus Claris*

**Introduction To Boccaccio (Important Works)**

* *Il Fiolstrato* (1335-1340?)
  + Based on Benoit de Saint-Meure’s *Le Roman de Troie* (1155-1160)
  + Story of Troilus and Criseida
    - Inspiration for Chaucer, Shakespeare)
* *Il Fiocolo* (1335-1336)
  + Florio and Biancifiore
  + “First Italian Novel”
  + Basis for Chaucer’s “The Franklin’s Tale”
  + Prefigure frame Narrative of *Decameron*
* *(Elegia di Madonna) Fiametta* (1343-1344)
  + First-person confessional monologue
  + First “psychological novel” in European Literature
    - Enter psychological state of characters
* *Decameron* (1349-1352)
  + One of the last vernacular works he writes (Petrarch tells him to switch)
  + Revised in 1370-1371
* *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium* (1360)
  + *On the Genealogy of the Gods of the Gentiles*
  + One of the key reference works on classic mythology for over 400 years
  + Written in Latin
  + Encyclopedic compilation of the genealogy of classical pantheons of Ancient Greece and Rome in 15 books
  + Also does some tentative translations of works by Homer, Euripides, and Aristotle at this time
* *De Mulieribus Claris* (1360-1374)
  + “On Famous Women”
  + 106 biographies of historical and mythological women
  + First known collection of biographies of women in European Literature
  + Also written in Latin

**PowerPoint Notes**

* Frame Narrative
  + Frame Narratives have a long history.
  + Vishnu Sharma, *Panchatantra* (3rd century BC)
    - See an Indian collection of animal fables in Sanskrit
    - Frame Story: Vishnu Sharma instructs three princes into “wise conduct of life”
    - Translated into Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Spanish in 12-13th century
    - Today still most translated Indian literary text
  + *The Book of Sinbad* (3rd century BC)
    - Originally in Arabic
    - Frame story: 7 wise men tell stories to the King to postpone to the execution of his falsely accused son
    - Basis of *Thousand and One Nights* (9th century)
    - Translated in Greek in 11th Century and Latin in 12th century
* Frame Narrative of Decameron
  + Audience: Addresses female middle-class readership
  + Metafictional gesture: Illusion of realism
  + Context: Plague 🡪 Circulation through social contact + property ; anarchy ; dissolution of social contracts
  + Extradiegetic Narrator

**PowerPoint Notes**

* The Preface
  + Note Boccaccio appears as the author, setting the first layer of the frame narrative.
  + Says it is to provide “amusement” and “comfort”
  + Addressed to women, but it also explicitly begins a level of misogyny that will appear other places in the text
    - “Women are restricted by the authority of fathers, mothers, brothers, husbands. They spend most of their time shut up in the narrow circuit of their rooms, sitting in almost complete idleness, wanting and not wanting a thing in the same hour, turning over different thoughts which cannot always be gay ones.”
    - It is “new discourses” that help free women from despair (What the *Decameron* will allegedly provide)
    - Women have “much less endurance than men” While men can rid themselves of their sadness or avoid them, women cannot.
    - “As an aid and comfort to women in love” he writes the stories
    - Offers women “delight” as well as “useful advice”

**PowerPoint Notes**

* The Novella
  + Fictional narrative prose
  + Longer than short story, shorter than novel
  + “piece of news”
  + Usually focuses on one day, event, character
  + Major Genre from 19th century onwards
  + Boccaccio: Main model of the genre (but based on existing genres)

**PowerPoint Notes**

* Frame Narrative of Decameron: Pampinea
  + Pampinea suggests the group should flee moral and physical degeneration and retreat into nature
  + Egalitarian community in idyllic setting + isolate themselves from established society (form their own “new community”)
  + This is what establishes the series of intradiegetic narrators that make the frame narrative
  + Redoubles audience and interpretive frameworks: Decrentralization of authorial and interpretive authority: socio-political critique
  + Storytelling as community building and solace
* Structure:
  + Every member tells a tale each of the 10 night: 100 tales

**PowerPoint Notes**

* Day 1, Story 1: Saint Ciapolletto
  + Historical Setting: Illusion of realism
  + religious (friar, countryside people) vs. mercantile ethics (Florentine brothers, Ser Ceparello (notary))
  + urban wit vs. countryside stupidity
  + metafictional dimension: power of fiction (vs religion)
  + opening story vs. concluding story of Griselda

**PowerPoint Notes**

* Day 10, Story 10: Griselda
  + 100th tale, told by Dioneo (most bawdy, sexually explicit tales, promotes sexual freedom of women)
  + Class
  + brutal return to non-idyllic society
  + *reductio ad absurdum* of institution of marriage: ironic staging of ‘ideal wife’ who would obey her husband and erase her own sexual desires, as critical reaction to the derogatory response to his licentious tales by the women of the *brigata.* Dioneo as more feminist than female members of the *brigatai*
  + downright misogyny
  + retold by Petrarch as moral exemplum: husband’s cruelty as Providential test of Christian patience, Griselda as Job) and Chaucer (‘The Clerk’s Tale’)

**PowerPoint Notes**

* Day 2, Story 7:
  + theme of day 2: reversal of fortune, emphasis on chance events
  + sexual odyssey of Alatiel
  + absence of verbal communication/mediation vs direct physical action
  + Alatiel: loss of individuality (named only twice)
  + sexual desire as destructive of human contracts (brotherhood, business partnership, political alliance, marriage, feudal loyalties, friendship)
  + turnaround: storytelling as restorative of social relations and order (cfr. ‘Proem’ and frame narrative)
  + Alatiel as wife and Queen, not through Fortune, but through fiction and wit

**Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King* (1859-85)**

* What is this?
  + 12 Narrative Poems
  + Reinterprets Arthurian Legend for Victorian audience
  + Dedicated to Albert, Prince Consort
  + Arthur as embodiment of Victorian Ideals who fails to lift his Knights at Camelot to the same ideal level (betrayals of Lancelot and Mordred)
  + Gothic, Dark, Lost World

**Thomas Malory’s *Morte Dartur* (1469)**

* Background
  + Thomas Malory was a Solider (knighted in 1441) and member of parliament (1443)
  + Negative Side: Thief, Kidnapper, and Rapist who was imprisoned in 1452
  + Writes *Morte Dartur* while in Newgate Prison (1469-1470)
* From Manuscript to Print (*The Death of Arthur)*
  + Instead of being written in verse, Malory reworks some of the most famous Arthurian tales into prose
  + Includes translations/interpretations from the *Vulgate Cycle*
  + Supplemented by Malory’s own original material (the Gareth Story)
  + Best-known work of English-language Arthurian literature today
* William Caxton
  + Publisher (possibly the one to have introduced the printing press in England in 1476)
  + 1485 – one of the first gooks published by him is Malory’s text)
* Style
  + Historical Fantasy
  + Historicity questioned
* Popularity wanes until 19th century
  + 1816: *Morte Dartur* reprinted for first time since 1634