Joke 54: About the man who wounded Ridolfo (II da Varano di Camerino) with an arrow
Facetia LIV: De Quodam Qui Redolphum Sagittando Vulneravit

Text Information
Author | Poggio Bracciolini
Language | Latin
Period | 15th Century
Genre | Humor
Source | Bracciolini, Scripta in editione Basilensi anno 1538 collata
Collection | Facetiae: Jokes from the Italian Renaissance
URL | sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/bracciolini_joke_54/

Translation and introduction by Robin Wahlsten Böckerman.

Introduction to the Text
Gian Francesco Poggio Bracciolini (commonly referred to as simply Poggio Bracciolini) was born in Terranuova (Tuscany) in 1380. He died in Florence in 1459 at the age of seventy-nine. During his long life this early and important humanist had an equally long career at the Papal curia. In the service of a sequence of popes he lived in Rome, travelled with the papal court all across Italy and the rest of Europe.

Poggio produced a wide range of writing during his career (his collected works span four substantial volumes). He often worked in the dialogue form or wrote speeches, but he also wrote history. He was an avid book hunter and a skilled scribe.

Through his texts we also meet a very polemical man, who seems to get into fights with many of his contemporaries, the most famous of which is his conflict with another of the humanist greats, Lorenzo Valla. The collections of jokes and stories known today as the *Facetiae*, but which Poggio himself preferred to refer to as Conversations (*Confabulationes*), certainly contains a polemical edge. While Poggio's invectives are violently polemical and often personal, his *Facetiae* are more mildly polemical in the satirical tradition. The *Facetiae* as it is preserved consists of 273 jokes/stories ranging from just a few lines to a page in length. The collection also has an introduction and a type of conclusion. The short selection presented here contains a few rowdy jokes that poke fun at crude people and priests or monks, and another few stories with witty remarks from historical or contemporary characters. For readers interested in the obscene elements in the *Facetiae*, Poggio's work can be compared to Beccadelli's The Hermaphrodite, which offers another contemporary source of obscenity, but one based on very clear ancient models (among others Catullus). The selection shows that Poggio seems to have put his main focus on witticism when writing the stories; whether rude tales or short adventures of cooks, soldiers or even the famous Dante, the punchline seems almost always to be some sort of turn of phrase or wry observation (although this might not always be completely obvious to a modern reader).

This joke represents a category of stories in the collection, which are closer to aphorisms than jokes.

Introduction to the Source
The *Facetiae* seems to have had immediate success. The collection as we now know it was composed between 1452-53, but Poggio had by then been working on versions of it (some of which had been in circulation) from as early as 1438. Over fifty manuscripts containing the text are preserved to this day. The *Facetiae* was also printed early and repeatedly, first appearing in this form around 1470. Another testimony to the popularity of the text is the fact that Poggio's jokes or 'conversations' were translated to several other languages, either the entire collection (to Italian and French at the end of the fifteenth century) or individual stories, which were mixed into the different Aesop collections circulating during this period. Herein lies somewhat of an irony, since Poggio himself in the introduction to the *Facetiae* seems to indicate that the object of writing them is to write stories in Latin that are usually told in the vernacular languages.

About this Edition

The translation is based on the text as it appears in the Basel 1538 edition of Poggio's collected work available on Google books, with a slight update to punctuation and orthography (for instance, ij is represented as ii). No emendations or other corrections have been made by the translator. Older versions of the text contain a few variants and some obvious errors, but in general the tradition seems quite stable (see for example an early print from 1471; or the fifteenth-century manuscript in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Latin 8770A.

Further Reading

Kallendorf, Craig. "Poggio Bracciolini" in Oxford Bibliographies: DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780195399301-0095.

- *Craig Kallendorf's article in Oxford Bibliographies is a good starting point for researching Poggio. The article contains information about relevant editions, translations, and research.*

Pittaluga, Stefano, ed. *Facéties = Confabulationes: Édition bilingue*. Translated by Etienne Wolff. Bibliothèque italienne. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2005.

- *The most recent critical edition of the Facetiae.*

Beccadelli, Antonio. *The Hermaphrodite*. Edited and translated by Holt Parke, I Tatti Renaissance Library 42, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.

- *Another example of obscene elements in Renaissance Latin (also contains letters exchanged between Beccadelli and Bracciolini).*

Gordon, Phyllis W. G., ed. *Two Renaissance Book Hunters: The Letters of Poggius Bracciolini to Nicolaus de Niccolis*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1974.

- *This letter exchange shows the scholarly side of Poggio.*

Bracciolini, Poggio. *The Facetiae of Giovanni Francesco Poggio Bracciolini*. Translated by Bernhardt J. Hurwood. New York: Award Books, 1968.

- *This is apparently an earlier translation of the Facetiae (I was not, however, able to consult this book for the present translation).*

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Facetia LIV

Viri nonnulli Camerinenses extra urbem exercitii causa sagittando tempus terebant. Cum quispiam sagittam incautius emisisset, astantem procul Redolphum leviter vulneravit. Capto illo, cum variae de poena inferenda sententiae dicerentur, et, ut quisque acerrime sentiret, ita se maxime Principi gratificaturum putaret, unus censuit manum illi esse amputandum, ne amplius arcu uteretur. Redolphus liberum hominem dimitti iussit, dicens, illam futuram fuisse utilem sententiam, si id ante acceptum vulnus consilium dedisset. Plena prudentiae et humanitatis responsio.

Joke 54

Some men from Camerino were passing the time outside of the city by practicing archery. When one of them fired an arrow carelessly, it happened to lightly wound Ridolfo, who was standing nearby. The man was captured and different punishments were discussed, some thought it had to be very harsh so that it would be most pleasing to the prince, and one man even thought that the archer's hand should be amputated so that he could never use a bow again. But Ridolfo ordered the archer to be set free and said that this would have been a useful punishment, if the man had given the advice before he was wounded. An answer full of wisdom and humanity.