

# Term paper on literature chaucer and boccaccio

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

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1. [Introduction:](#) \n \t
2. [Comparisons to The Decameron by Boccaccio](#) \n \t
3. [Art - Giotto and devotional realism and portraiture](#) \n \t
4. [The rise of the Italian Renaissance](#) \n \t
5. [Works Cited:](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Discuss the fourteenth century as a period of transition from the medieval to early modern culture (Renaissance). Include historical events, literature, and art.

## **Introduction:**

The 14th century was an extremely important phase in the history of art and culture since it brought about major historical changes both in the way society changed but also in the way which art was perceived and how this was distributed amongst the population in general. Several events also affected the development of the general population but most notably one has to list The Black Death, the Hundred Years War as well as the decline of the Church due to the schism when the Ppacy ended up in Rome and Avignon. There was also a flowering of new authors in the literary scene such as Bocaccio with his ' Decameron' and Chaucer's Nunn Priest and Canterbury Tales which went down to the levels of bawdiness that had not been seen before. In the art field the vision and inspiration of Giotto was among the first of artists who would branch out into new styles which predicted the

Renaissance period.

The Hundred Years War was important for many reasons since it impacted the map of Europe especially concerning England and France for several centuries. It was a series of wars waged between 1337 and 1453 for the actual control of the French throne. The roots of the conflict go back to a disagreement between William the Conqueror and the Duchy of Normandy in France. The conflict began when Edward III refused to pay homage to Philip VI of France which eventually led to the confiscation of the former's lands in the duchy of Aquitaine.

The Church began to decline in the 14th century largely through the growth of heretics who influenced religion with their outlandish ways. This eventually led to schisms in the church such as Martin Luther and of course Henry VIII although the latter was not directly related to cultural influences. The Medici were an incredibly powerful family who ruled the roost in Northern Italy and who involved themselves considerably in the social and political events of the day. They were also instrumental in choosing Popes and came up with several grandiose schemes on a cultural level which immortalised their massive influence in the cultural scene of the day.

The 14th century was also the birthplace of Classical Humanism which sprouted up after the end of the Black Death due to the fact that the human person was viewed as being important to society in general and not just a number or an animal as was the general worldview.

Petrarch who invented the sonnet also wrote extensively about humanism in his poetry. The same could be said of Christine de Pizan who was an important writer in the courts of several French Kings in the 14th century.

She brought about a new way of thinking on several topics and aspects. She was actually known as the first official woman author

Undoubtedly the event which changed the way society lived was The Black Death. This titanic event practically destroyed most of the populations in Western Europe where millions of people perished in terrible circumstances. This mean that the whole social fabric of Europe was to change and one also has to take into account the way Religion was perceived after such an incredible mass slaughter. The Black Death was brought into several European countries by trade and maritime transport leading to practically the decimation of entire populations. The Black Death obviously changed the social landscape of Europe and heralded the beginning of humanism with all its destruction. One must also add The Hundred Years war between Britain and France which was effectively coming to an end by now and which also had its own social and political effects on those countries and the ones around it. The Great Schism between the Catholic Church was also of huge effect on the social fabric of the day with two Popes installed in Rome and Avignon preaching different doctrines and thus creating rival factions and severe infighting in the church. The rise of anticlericalism and at the same time devotional piety was also of some importance.

Geoffrey Chaucer is certainly known to be someone who knew how to write a good story and especially in the Nunn Priests Tale and other similar recounts he espouses on the subject of love quite often. However he tended to see love rather lightly and in some cases, there is also an element of bawdiness and eroticism in his works especially where women are concerned.

The Parliament of Fools is also an important work in the Chaucer canon as it

shows how he would be treating politicians who are of the ilk full of stupidity. This compares well with the Canterbury Tales where the pilgrims make merry and love one another with raucous bawdiness full of erotic allusions and almost pornographic similes.

The Nunn Priests Tale is perhaps one of the finest exponents of love and tawdry bawdiness in the whole of Chaucer's canon. He is consistently demonstrating how women feign to attract attention and when they get it, they are disappointed and look for something else. The question of man's love for another woman is also tackled extensively here and this also means that life which can be hard hearted for some will also turn a full page if love is encountered accordingly. Chaucer's almost philosophical observations move that one step forward accordingly. Priests who are also very bawdy in their tendencies to attract other women are intrinsically part and parcel of proceedings as they create a certain sense of joie de vivre about love which is occasionally absent from their lives. The women in the story also demonstrate Chaucer's penchant for doing things with an element of irony and interest which culminate in tales that are highly enticing and intriguing.

### **Comparisons to The Decameron by Boccaccio**

Chaucer was not alone in depicting bawdiness as something to do with love and games as Boccaccio was also pretty much prevalent in this area.

Notwithstanding all this the comparisons end there as there are areas where the language overlaps. Boccaccio is quite rowdy and erotic in some of his tales and these also have to do with pilgrims which also have their own tales to tell. Somehow one feels that the Chaucer of The Canterbury Tales is in some ways similar to Boccaccio's Decameron where the erotic terms are

concerned but even in certain stages these may tend to fall apart when read properly and convincingly.

In *The Parliament of Fowles* one can observe that love is in rather short supply although one may also feel that this is intrinsically part and parcel of the whole procedure in the sense that life is not always a bed of roses.

Chaucer compares the role of lovers in *The Parliament of Fowles* with that of the *Decameron* where occasionally life is not the same and what goes on in parliament is certainly not something which goes on in real life.

Boccaccio's *Decameron* is also perhaps written in more classic Italian than the English which Chaucer writes in and this is perhaps part and parcel of everything which comes before it. The language of love is an important stylistic reference where Chaucer is concerned and all comes together accordingly when the narratives are taken into account. The *Decameron* includes a hilarious number of encounters between the ruling classes and the poorer classes who are imbued with wit and colourful dignity all around. Yet again one marvels at the way Boccaccio manages to use phrases and elements of style to come up with ideas which are strikingly innovative and avant garde for their time.

Chaucer's personal relationships are also put under the spotlight especially in *The Canterbury Tales*. One asks the question what is love with a certain amount of temerity and dexterity but basically it is the relationship between a man and a woman which comes across as intrinsic love accordingly.

However Chaucer does not only examine these relationships accordingly but he also focuses on what may be achieved when there is love between two siblings for example. These allusions are very powerful especially in *The*

Parliament of Fowles and in The Canterbury Tales where life is obviously not always a bed of roses in this sense. However life can also be beautiful in the sense of appreciating love which is part and parcel of the whole game of the books Chaucer wrote. Yet we may also seem to abhor certain elements of love and some people may even want to be alone without love.

Finally Chaucer looks at the problem of love with an open mind demonstrating that if this is not taken too seriously then life moves forward just the same. He attempts to throw an element of light heartedness and touches upon this word which man calls love with alacrity and an amount of insecurity also.

### **Art – Giotto and devotional realism and portraiture**

The artist who probably embodies the spirit of the Renaissance is Giotto. His methodical and almost spiritual canvases demonstrate the esteem in which he was held especially with regards to his religious works. He developed an innovative brushwork and his use of colours was also extremely bright and spiritual. Other artists who developed the elements of spiritualism and portraiture include Luca Della Robbia who was very well regarded as a portrait painter as well as Paolo Uccello who developed landscape and portraiture to a hitherto unheard of level. The same goes for Lorenzo Ghiberti who was described by the art historian Vasari as a highly diligent person, extremely devoted to his art.

### **The rise of the Italian Renaissance**

Italy was obviously seen as the most important centre in terms of the rise of the Renaissance. Amongst other factors was the rise of Italian city states

such as Venice and Florence which were in them a hotbed of ideas and confrontations. The rise of poetry was personified by Petrarch who invented the sonnet and whose influence continued to grow with other literary figures particularly Shakespeare a century later. Finally one of the greatest masters of politics was also prominent later on in the 14th century and he was called Machiavelli - he definitely left a huge imprint on the world of politics which is still felt to this day.

On the woman's rights note the figure of Lucrezia Marinelli is also important as she was the first campaigner in this field long before it really became effective. She was certainly influential in the field of civic humanism which also demonstrated growth in the late 14th and early 15th centuries.

Giovanni Castiglione was also extremely important in the Church and in the manner in which he shaped ecclesiastical proceedings which were not always just but which left a huge imprint on everything including the daily lives of the common man. Things were changing very fast and the 14th century could be viewed as an important period for the revival of the classical humanist philosophy which was perfected several centuries later by philosophers such as Voltaire and Kant.

### **Works Cited:**

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