

In the Footsteps of Giovanni Boccaccio

by Michele Steinberg

On Jan. 11, 2006, Lyndon LaRouche gave an international webcast in Washington, D.C., “Rebuild a Looted U.S. Economy.” Three years later, the situation is far worse—the leaders of the world did not act as LaRouche prescribed, and we now stand on the precipice of a New Dark Age. In some regions it has already happened. But in that webcast, LaRouche provided the key to the puzzle of how to uplift the population, when all leaders have failed, and the people themselves must take the responsibility: the understanding of history with great irony, through the eyes, or in the footsteps, of such great figures as Italy’s Giovanni Boccaccio, Spain’s Miguel de Cervantes, and France’s François Rabelais.

Boccaccio lived from 1313 to 1375. In the middle of his life, the Venetian-controlled Lombard banking houses collapsed, because of which, coupled with the spread of the Bubonic Plague, Europe was plunged into a



Giovanni Boccaccio's Decameron, written as the city of Florence was overcome by the Black Death in the mid-14th Century, is a caution for us today, as we face a similar collapse of civilization.

Dark Age of nearly a century. In 1353, Boccaccio completed the *Decameron*, which opens on a hillside overlooking the once-prosperous Florence, ravaged by an unending collapse. In the book, 100 tales are told, over a ten-day period. It is a warning that few, outside of Lyndon LaRouche and his collaborators, understand today. However, unlike what Boccaccio faced in the mid-14th Century, today, there is still time to prevent the needless extermination of one-third to one-half of the population.

For citizens of all nations, we provide here a translation of an excerpt from the Introduction to the *Decameron*. But to situate this work, first listen to the wise words of LaRouche from that January 2006 webcast:

In Grim Times, Use Irony

“These are grim times.

“Now, in grim times, people tend to become desperate, and frightened, and become incom-

petent, incapable of responding to the situation in a rational way. This has often happened in history. And there are certain people who have understood how to deal with this kind of problem.

“One of them was a fellow called Boccaccio. He comes from Florence, the area of Florence. And the events that he refers to occurred during the period of the Black Death, a period of a great financial crisis, like the one threatening the world today, in which one-third of the population of Europe was wiped out. Half of the cities, these parishes, in Europe, were wiped out. And roving bands of mad people, went from place to place, looting, in great mobs; they were called the Flagellants; they would whip each other, and go out in mobs and loot—that’s the way they would live.

“So, this happened: the Black Death. And Helga and I sat, one evening, back in the 1980s, on a hillside, across the Arno from Florence, in the same place that Boccaccio and his companions had sat, when he wrote the *Decameron*. And think of the content of the *Decameron*: Here they are, people who are outside the plague area, sitting on a hillside, looking across the River Arno, down into the city of Florence, where bodies are being dropped in the street, from this epidemic.

“This kind of thing is potentially going to happen here, in a depression. And the case we refer to here, in the case of what’s happened in Baltimore, Maryland,¹ is an example of how that can happen: These are grim times. And they require what Boccaccio did, which was to present this situation with irony. Not with slapstick humor, but with irony. And the fact that people could see the irony of the situation, enabled him, with the aid of the *Decameron*, to pick up the spirits of some of the people of that time. And they mustered the courage to go on to create what became known as the 15th-Century Renaissance, which was the beginning of modern European civilization.

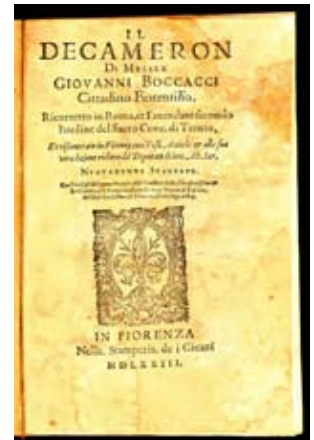
“So, sometimes when you face grim times, as now, you must reach deeply into your sense of humor, to lift people up to, in a sense, laugh at the ugliness of fate. And in laughing at such fate, to find the strength in yourself to see clearly what can be done, rather than whimpering, and whining, and screaming, about how awful the situation is.”

1. The once heavily industrialized and economically thriving city of Baltimore, had fallen into desperate conditions, and seen a total collapse of public health, characterized by the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The 14th-Century Dark Age

Boccaccio’s Classic Tale of the Plague

This selection from The Decameron by Giovanni Boccaccio, written ca. 1350-53, during the height of the Black Death in Europe, is taken from a translation by J.M. Rigg, London, 1921 (first printed 1903).



First Day: Introduction

Beginneth here the first day of the Decameron, in which, when the author has set forth, how it came to pass that the persons, who appear hereafter, met together for interchange of discourse, they, under the rule of Pampinea, discourse of such matters as most commend themselves to each in turn.

As often, most gracious ladies, as I bethink me, how compassionate you are by nature one and all, I do not disguise from myself that the present work must seem to you to have but a heavy and distressful prelude, in that it bears upon its very front what must needs revive the sorrowful memory of the late mortal pestilence, the course whereof was grievous not merely to eyewitnesses but to all who in any other wise had cognisance of it. But I would have you know, that you need not therefore be fearful to read further, as if your reading were ever to be accompanied by sighs and tears. This horrid beginning will be to you even such as to wayfarers is a steep and rugged mountain, beyond which stretches a plain most fair and delectable, which the toil of the ascent and descent does but serve to render more agreeable to them; for, as the last degree of joy brings with it sorrow, so misery has ever its sequel of happiness. To this brief exordium of woe—brief, I say, inasmuch as it can be put within the compass of a few letters—succeed forthwith the sweets and delights which