



0. PEOPLE FLEE - Story Preface

1. HUMAN DEVASTATION

2. WHAT IS BUBONIC PLAGUE?

3. WHAT IS BLACK DEATH?

4. WHERE DID IT ORIGINATE?

5. MEDIEVAL EUROPEANS

6. MEDIEVAL PROFESSIONALS

**7. PEOPLE FLEE**

8. SOCIETY BREAKS DOWN

9. SCAPEGOATS

10. LIFE GOES ON

11. WAS IT JUST THE RATS?

"The Triumph of Death," a painting (c. 1562) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder depicting life at the time of "The Plague," is currently maintained at the Prado Museum in Madrid.

While the plague had hold of cities and countryside, people saw death everywhere. Some thought living apart from everyone else would keep the contagion way. Boccaccio's Introduction to the *Decameron* provides a first-hand account:

*There were some people who thought that living moderately and avoiding all superfluity might help a great deal in resisting this disease, and so, they gathered in small groups and lived entirely apart from everyone else.*

Not everyone agreed with this approach. Boccaccio continues:

*Others thought the opposite: they believed that drinking too much, enjoying life, going about singing and celebrating, satisfying in every way the appetites as best one could, laughing, and making light of everything that happened was the best medicine for such a disease; so they practiced to the fullest what they believed by going from one tavern to another all day and night, drinking to excess, and often they would make merry in private homes, doing everything that pleased or amused them the most.*

Why did people decide to ignore their responsibilities?

*This they were able to do easily, for everyone felt he was doomed to die and, as a result, abandoned his property, so that most of the houses had become common property, and any stranger who came upon them used them as if he were their rightful owner. In addition to this bestial behavior, they always managed to avoid the sick as best they could.*

Was there anyone to enforce the laws?

*And in this great affliction and misery of our city [i.e. Florence] the revered authority of the laws, both divine and human, had fallen and almost completely disappeared, for, like other men, the ministers and executors of the laws were either dead or sick or so short of help that it was impossible for them to fulfill their duties; as a result, everybody was free to do as he pleased.*

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/PEOPLE-FLEE-Black-Death>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/PEOPLE-FLEE-Black-Death>

## The Triumph of Death by Pieter Bruegel the Elder

Pieter Bruegel the Elder—a 16th-century Dutch painter—created this oil-on-panel in approximately 1562. Its title—*The Triumph of Death*—captures the time of plague which Bruegel was attempting to illustrate.



The painting includes scenes of everyday life in the mid-16th century, such as:

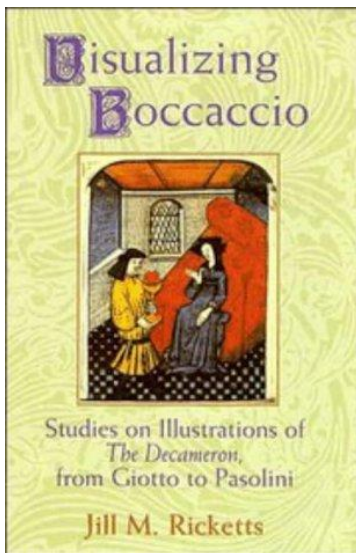
- People of various social backgrounds (including peasants, nobles, soldiers, a king and a cardinal from the Catholic Church)
- A backgammon board
- Playing cards
- Wine flasks
- Musical instruments (such as a lute)
- A mechanical clock
- A funeral service
- Execution instruments (such as gallows and the breaking wheel)

The painting—which measures 46 x 63.8 inches (117 x 162 centimeters)—also depicts people trying to flee the "Pestilence."

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## Visualizing Boccaccio

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