

The Decameron Study Guide

The Decameron by Giovanni Boccaccio

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Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The story begins with the narrator stating that human beings are nothing without the grace of God. While man may try to embrace God's ways, he is unable to see beyond the realm of mortals and therefore unable to understand God's divine ways. Due to this fact, it is possible that man may choose an advocate who seems holy but may be destined for damnation.

Musciatto Franzesi is a famous French merchant who has many businesses and is knighted for his duty. Franzesi is summoned to Tuscany at the behest of Pope Boniface and must find a way to deal with business while he is away. Ser Ciappelletto is a notary who is often presented with the task of handling another's business as well as drawing up legal contracts. Ser Ciappelletto is the man Franzesi chooses to handle debts and trade because Ciappelletto is a worldly man and Franzesi fears the unscrupulous behavior of the Burgundians. Ciappelletto accepts Franzesi's offer and leaves for Burgundy. While in Burgundy, Ciappelletto lodges with two Florentine brothers who are in the business of lending money at very high rates. The brothers treat Ciappelletto well and soon discover that their guest is not only a shrewd businessman but a dishonest one as well. It seems that nothing will keep Ciappelletto from gaining anything he wants from the people and although the brothers' business is unsavory, there is concern that the guest will further tarnish their already precarious reputations.

Ser Ciappelletto falls ill while in Burgundy and nothing seems to help the man recover. As Ciappelletto worsens, the brothers are conflicted about what to do. They cannot turn a sick man out into the street and no priest would ever absolve a man as evil as Ciappelletto. Ciappelletto overhears the conversation and convinces the brothers that his confession to a priest will be granted and as a result, Ciappelletto will be absolved, casting no shadow on the brothers. A friar comes to Ciappelletto's bedside to hear the dying man's confession. Ciappelletto follows through with his plan and lies about every event in his entire life. The man is careful to confess some sins, although they are so small as to be almost completely insignificant. The friar is amazed that a man should be so holy. Ciappelletto is absolved and the friar arranges for burial at the monastery. The tale of Ciappelletto's piousness spreads quickly throughout the region. As the evil man lies intestate, mourners tear away Ciappelletto's clothes, sure that they will be blessed from the garments of this holy man. Ciappelletto becomes a martyr and is later canonized.

Giannotto di Civigni is concerned about his good friend Abraham, who is a Jew. Giannotto is convinced that unless Abraham converts to Christianity, he is sure to go to hell. Abraham listens intently to Giannotto's plea and explanation of the Christian faith. Abraham takes it all in and says he will consider conversion only after he makes a trip to Rome to see firsthand the methods and customs of the Pope and Cardinals. Giannotto tries to talk Abraham out of the trip, knowing that the wickedness of the clergy will



dissuade Abraham from converting from Judaism. Abraham insists and goes to Rome where he spends many days observing the clergy. Abraham sees everything Giannotto wishes he would not—greed, lust, lechery, and many other things that a man of God should not be a part of. Abraham returns from the trip and Giannotto listens with dread while Abraham recounts the trip. Giannotto is shocked when Abraham decides to convert, saying that the foundation of the church is true and that if Christians can maintain the faith in light of the actions of the clergy, it is a strong religion that will surely survive.

Saladin, the Sultan of Babylon, finds that his kingdom's treasury no longer has any money. Seeing no alternative, Saladin goes to Melchisedech, a man who lends money but charges very high interest. Saladin has a plan to trick Melchisedech into giving him the money by asking the man which holy law contains the most truth—the law of the Jews, Saracens, or Christians. Melchisedech is a shrewd man and suspects the trap. The man says that all contain the same amount of truth, thereby avoiding Saladin's trap. Saladin borrows the money anyway and is so impressed by Melchisedech that he takes him to the court of Babylon where the man is much favored.

A monk sees a beautiful woman near the monastery and cannot control the urges of the flesh. Although it is against the rules, the monk takes the woman to his cell where they indulge in carnal pleasures. During this time, the abbot discovers what is happening in the monk's cell and plans a severe punishment. The monk hears the abbot, however, and plans a way to keep out of trouble. The monk leaves the cell and the woman remains. The abbot returns to find the woman. They also indulge in each other. When the abbot approaches the monk about his indiscretions, the monk reveals that he knows about the abbot, as well. No punishment is ever given and the woman never returns to the monastery.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The story of Ser Ciappelletto proves that while one can have an impression of someone, that impression may not be true. Ciappelletto makes his living by cheating people and exists in complete defiance of God's law. However, when the man has the chance to go to Burgundy, the opportunity to swindle a new region presents itself and Ciappelletto cannot resist. Although no one in Burgundy knows Ciappelletto, it is not long before the Florentine brothers know the man's true character. While the brothers are not honest, their actions are almost saintly compared to those of their guest. The brothers become worried about Ciappelletto when he falls ill, concerned that the man's reputation will destroy the reputation of their business as well. The men are amazed when Ciappelletto asks for a priest so that he may confess his sins and gain absolution. The brothers think the request is utterly absurd since no priest will absolve a man who is so evil and unrepentant. The brothers locate a friar and ask the monk to attend to Ciappelletto. The friar agrees and spends a great deal of time listening to an amazing pack of outrageous lies delivered by Ciappelletto. The end result of Ciappelletto being canonized shows how rumor can change fiction into fact and how often people take the word of another to support the things in which they want to believe.



Giannotto is truly concerned for Abraham, who is a close friend. Abraham is happy with Judaism and needs to be convinced that there is law greater than that of his people. Giannotto's fears about Abraham witnessing the wickedness of the clergy come about and despite the hypocrisy involved, Abraham converts, saying that there must be great truth in Christianity if people can overlook the wickedness in their religious officials to maintain their faith.

Saladin is a clever man who intends to trick Melchisedech into giving the kingdom enough money to survive. Saladin underestimates the man, however, and although Saladin must repay the money, he is so impressed with Melchisedech that the man is taken to the king's court and favored endlessly by the king's servants.

The monk who has an affair with the beautiful woman is a humorous look at being prepared to find a way out of a jam. Keeping silent about the activities in the cell leads the abbot to believe that the monk does not know he has been caught. The monk returning to the cell to catch the abbot is very clever. Although blackmail is certainly frowned upon at the monastery, the abbot cannot take the chance that he will be caught as well. No more is ever said about the incident.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Andreuccio di Pietro is a famous merchant known for buying and selling horses. Pietro hears that there are many horses to be bought at low prices in Naples and sets out for the city. While Pietro is on the street, a prostitute sees him and decides to take Pietro's money. The prostitute is in the company of an older woman who knows Pietro and seeks an introduction. The older woman takes the opportunity to visit Pietro and invites him to her home. The prostitute is at the house and after a long discussion convinces Pietro that she is a sister who had been abandoned in Palermo by Pietro's father. Pietro does not sense the trickery and is coerced into staying for dinner and then spending the night. Pietro is attended by a servant who instructs him in how to go to the bathroom. Pietro falls through the floor into sewage and ends up being locked outside. Suddenly, Pietro realizes that his clothing and belongings are inside and that he has been tricked. Despite pounding on the door and yelling, Pietro cannot get inside and is eventually threatened by the woman's pimp. Pietro later discovers that there is no recourse and that the pimp is the head of the local mafia.

Pietro wanders the streets and eventually winds up with two men. The men have a plan to recoup Pietro's money by robbing the grave of a newly interred archbishop. After the men are unsuccessful at abandoning Pietro, the trio locates the mausoleum. Pietro devises a plan to keep part of the treasure for himself, a ruby ring that is worth more than the money that was stolen by the prostitute. The plan works and Pietro returns to the inn where he is told to flee Naples at once.

Beminedab is the sultan of Babylon. The sultan has had a very fortunate life and is blessed with many children. Among those children is Alatiel, a stunning daughter. Alatiel is betrothed to the king of Algarve and sets off to sea to be with her future husband. Along the way there is a great storm and all of the sailors aboard the great ship are killed. After spending much time at sea, Alatiel and her ladies in waiting land on the island of Majorca. A man spots the women and takes them to safety. The man, whose name is Pericone, falls for Alatiel and seduces her, an act in which Alatiel eagerly participates. Pericone's brother, Marato, becomes jealous and wants Alatiel for himself. Pericone is murdered and Marato takes Alatiel. Having robbed Pericone, Marato takes Alatiel and flees on a ship. The two owners of the ship fall in love with Alatiel and eventually kill Marato by throwing the man overboard. Alatiel is devastated, more over her misfortune than the loss of another lover. The two sailors fight over Alatiel and one dies. Alatiel goes ashore with the other and they move to an inn.

The sailor who survived finds out that the prince has become smitten with Alatiel and in hopes of gaining favor with the kingdom allows the prince to take his lover. The prince and Alatiel are happy although there is already a princess. The prince's cousin, a duke, falls for Alatiel and arranges for the prince to be murdered so that the duke can have Alatiel as his own. The duke takes Alatiel and flees to Athens. Since the duke is married,



Alatiel is kept in a villa outside the city. The prince's body is discovered and the kingdom mourns. The prince's brother takes his place and is encouraged to seek revenge on the duke. The duke becomes aware of his cousin's vengeance and prepares for war. Among those who come to the duke's aid is Costanzo, son of the Emperor Constantinople and sister to the duke's wife. As with every other man who lays eyes upon Alatiel, Costanzo falls madly in love.

The duke and his men march off to fight the prince. Costanzo can think of nothing but Alatiel and fakes illness to return to the house of the duke. The duchess confides to Costanzo that she is distraught because the duke has a mistress in their home. Costanzo offers to spare his sister pain and indignation by taking Alatiel away. Alatiel is once again anguished over her misfortune. The pair sails to Turkey and live in luxury for some time. The king of the Turks hears that Costanzo, an enemy, is living well and is unprotected. The king invades Costanzo's home and nearly everyone, including Costanzo, is murdered. During this time, the king finds Alatiel, falls instantaneously in love, and marries her. The king becomes involved in a war, dies, and Alatiel is left to a friend. The friend dies and Alatiel is bequeathed to another friend.

After Alatiel has been passed around some more, she meets the King of Cyprus. The king recognizes Alatiel and is relieved to discover that the sultan's daughter did not die at sea as the kingdom had feared. Alatiel reveals much of her adventure since leaving home and the king determines that since Alatiel had never revealed her identity in all the years she was gone, that no one should ever know about all the men and unfortunate circumstances.

Alatiel's father, the sultan, is thrilled to have his daughter back home. After much discussion, it is determined that Alatiel lived a pious life while she was away from home and that the king of Algarve still wishes to marry her. Alatiel becomes queen, having convinced the king of Algarve that she is still a virgin.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Pietro's experiences in Naples show that while the man may be a savvy merchant in his own town, he is no match for the cunning people of the city. The thought of purchasing horses at the market is thrilling to Pietro and the excitement is only increased when he sees the old woman. Pietro follows social custom and accepts the invitation to the old woman's home. Surprised to see the beautiful young woman there, Pietro is even more surprised to learn that the woman is his sister. This is a scheme of course but the woman is thoroughly convincing. The old woman has coached the prostitute so that she can speak to Pietro about his family in such a manner that Pietro would believe the story.

Pietro gives in to the prostitute's wishes and stays for dinner, then accepts a room for the night. Pietro does not realize that he has been tricked until he has fallen into the sewer and is locked out of the house. The shock turns to rage and embarrassment for Pietro and only upon receiving death threats will he leave the house.



The stench surrounding Pietro attracts the attention of two men who listen to the story. The prostitute works for the head of the mafia, the one who threatened Pietro. Pretending to feel sorry for Pietro, the men suggest robbing a rich archbishop's grave to recoup the stolen money. Pietro is unsure of the plan but agrees to go along with it. After the men attempt to abandon Pietro and devise a plan to cheat him does Pietro finally lose his naivete and take the biggest part of the treasure for himself.

Alatiel is most likely the most unfortunate woman who has ever lived. The sultan is a good man who wants the best for his daughter and arranges a marriage with the king of Algarve. This is undoubtedly a political marriage as well, cementing good relations between the two sovereignties. Alatiel's misadventures are extreme enough to be called ridiculous. While it is possible to believe that men would commit heinous acts for a beautiful woman, it is absurd to believe that a woman of noble birth would allow herself to be passed around like a common prostitute, particularly to men of the same station who treat her as a common mistress.

Although all the men treat Alatiel well, there are a couple of men who treat Alatiel with the respect she deserves. This is seen most in the meeting with the king of Cyprus who arranges for Alatiel to go home. The story Alatiel tells everyone in Babylon is certainly not believed by the sultan. However, there are so many people who do believe it that the story is accepted. Alatiel finally makes it to Algarve where she reigns as queen.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Nuto is a man who has returned home to Lamporecchio after working as a gardener at a convent tended to by eight nuns and an abbess. Nuto could not live on the small salary the nuns were able to pay and was driven crazy by the nun's conflicting orders. Nuto shares his story with Masetto, a handsome young worker who desires to work at the convent and to indulge in the many freedoms to be had there. Masetto knows that he must not reveal the plan to Nuto and worries about how he might gain employment at the convent. Nuto had promised to send a replacement but has no intention of doing so to a friend. Masetto knows that he has the gardening ability to do the job well but worries that he is too handsome and may distract the nuns. Masetto decides that if he pretends to be a deaf-mute that the nuns will feel sorry for him and offer up the job.

Masetto dresses in rags and goes to the convent, pretending to be deaf-mute and very hungry. The steward feeds Masetto and has the man perform many chores, even those that Nuto was unable to perform. The abbess finds out about the man and after conversing with the steward, agrees that Masetto should be kept on for his great contributions to the convent. Masetto is pleased and begins to work.

The nuns, thinking that Masetto is deaf, take every opportunity to poke fun at the man. The nuns call Masetto vile and terrible names, surmising that a man without a tongue must also be impotent in other ways. One day two of the nuns have a conversation in the orchard about Masetto. One of the nuns says that since Masetto is a deaf-mute they should take advantage of it and find out what sex is like. The other nun objects and reminds her sister of the vow of celibacy. The nuns rationalize the action and lead Masetto to a small hut where each nun has a turn with the handsome young gardener. This goes on for some time and the secret gets out. Soon, all eight of the nuns are having sex with Masetto. Masetto, who is worn out from all the activity, falls asleep in the orchard. The abbess stumbles upon Masetto and admires his toned body. The abbess falls into lust as well and stakes a claim on Masetto. The abbess keeps Masetto in her room for several days, spending as much time as possible with the man. Finally, Masetto speaks and tells the abbess that he cannot possibly continue to service all nine women. The abbess did not know about the nuns but soon, the whole truth is out.

The abbess asks Masetto how he can speak since the man is supposed to be mute. Masetto explains that he was struck dumb by illness and God has restored his good health. The abbess and nuns present Masetto to the village as a miracle of God and keep him at the convent for many years. During those years, Masetto enjoys the company of the nine nuns and fathers many children. After the death of the abbess, Masetto leaves the convent with a good amount of money and returns to Lamporecchio, celebrating his victorious life at the convent.



A young girl named Alibech seeks to serve God and sets off to find one who can teach the ways of the Lord. Foolishly, Alibech goes alone to explore the Egyptian desert. Alibech eventually finds a holy man who lives in a hut. The man is taken with the girl and cannot trust himself around her. So Alibech is sent to another holy man who is supposedly more learned than the first. Alibech has the same result at the second hut and is sent on her way. At last, Alibech meets a monk named Rustico, a man who is eager to test his willpower against the beauty of the young girl. Alibech is taken to Rustico's cell where she sleeps on the floor. Rustico soon realizes that he has overestimated the power of his will and cannot stay away from Alibech.

Rustico explains to Alibech that in order to serve God, she must follow his actions. Rustico strips off all his clothes and Alibech does the same. Rustico explains that the best way to serve God is to put the Devil back into hell. Rustico explains that his penis is the Devil and Alibech possesses hell. Rustico has his way with Alibech and both are very happy. Alibech believes that she is serving God and says that she finally understands why people find serving God so pleasurable. In fact, Alibech enjoys the activity so much that Rustico is completely worn out and can no longer satisfy the girl. During this time, there is a great fire and Alibech's entire family is killed. A man from Alibech's village sets out to find the girl to make sure she is able to collect her inheritance before it is seized by the government who thinks there are no heirs. The man takes Alibech back to her village and marries her. When the ladies of the village ask Alibech how she served God in the desert, Alibech explains, causing uproarious laughter. However, the ladies never tell Alibech any different and assure her that there are men in the village who will help her to serve God.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Both stories provide examples of men who are clever and deceitful when it comes to getting what they want. When Masetto hears Nuto's story of the nuns, the gardener develops a plan to live a life free of authority and too much work. Masetto is sure that he has the abilities to do the job and devises a way to make the nuns take pity on him because of his perceived infirmities. The steward immediately recognizes Masetto's worth and soon, Masetto has a job. The work is not easy but Masetto is rewarded and well fed. The nuns show a lack of devotion by making fun of Masetto and take it further when they decide to indulge in the man's flesh as well.

Masetto is surely living out a fantasy, albeit an exhausting one. It is nearly impossible to believe that Masetto is able to hide his ability to hear from the nuns but the women remain oblivious. When the abbess discovers Masetto can speak, she is all too willing to accept the fact that Masetto has been healed by God. In fact, it is apparent that the declaration will serve as a perfect ruse for keeping Masetto at the convent for years to come.

Alibech is a very young, foolish girl of fourteen. The willingness to travel to the desert to find a way to serve God is admirable but unwise, particularly since no one knows of the plan. The first two holy men are noble and send Alibech to Rustico, a monk who is sure



that his willpower can withstand the temptation presented by the girl. Rustico is soon proved to be wrong and devises a plan to seduce Alibech under the guise of service to God. Alibech is completely ignorant to the ways of the world and believes everything that Rustico says about putting the Devil back into hell. It is almost impossible to believe that Alibech never figures it out. Rustico becomes completely exhausted and finds that he is unable to satisfy Alibech's sexual appetite. Rustico is relieved when the man from the village wants to take Alibech to claim the inheritance. The man marries Alibech so that he may also inherit a large part of her father's fortune. The women of the village are undoubtedly amazed that Alibech is so naïve and take great delight in spreading the story far and wide.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Boccaccio devotes this section of the book to unhappy endings.

Tancredi is a kind, humane lord who, in his old age, is fortunate to have a daughter. The daughter, Ghismunda, is faithful to Tancredi and stays by his side long after the girl should have married. Finally, Tancredi allows Ghismunda to marry the son of a duke, who dies shortly after the wedding. Ghismunda returns home, and seeing that Tancredi has no intentions of marrying her off again, seeks out a lover.

Ghismunda settles on Guiscardo, a man of humble birth. Since Ghismunda is closely watched, she and Guiscardo must meet in secret. Ghismunda remembers a secret stairway that leads to a cave. The pair meets many times. One day Tancredi goes to see Ghismunda to chat and waiting for her, falls asleep. Ghismunda and Guiscardo sneak into her bedroom and spend the afternoon making love, not realizing that Tancredi is in the room. Tancredi is devastated and has Guiscardo seized by guards.

Tancredi decides to confront Ghismunda and the daughter will not deny or apologize for her actions. Guiscardo is murdered and his heart cut out. Tancredi sends the heart to Ghismunda who mixes it with poison herbs and after drinking it, dies.

Berto della Massa is an evil man who is known for lying so much that no one believes or trusts him. In order to make a fresh start, Berto travels to Venice and takes on the persona of Brother Alberto, a minor friar. Because Alberto is an accomplished liar, it is not difficult for him to convince everyone that he firmly believes in repentance and abstinence; that he obeys all of God's laws as well as his vows.

One day, during confession, Monna Lisetta comes to Brother Alberto to confess her sins. Lisetta is an extremely vain woman and soon Alberto cannot stand to hear her any more and admonishes the woman. Still, Alberto falls for Lisetta and devises a plan to sleep with her. Alberto goes to Lisetta to apologize for his rude behavior in church and says that he was severely punished by the angel Gabriel who is in love with her. In fact, Gabriel wants nothing more than to visit Lisetta in the night, if she is willing. Lisetta, whom Alberto also calls "Lady Halfwit", believes the entire story and invites Gabriel to attend to her. Alberto explains that Gabriel will appear in his body since he is of spirit. Alberto promises that his mind and soul will be elsewhere while inhabited by Gabriel.

Alberto goes to Lisetta and they lay together. This goes on for quite sometime, in secret, until Lisetta tells a neighbor about Gabriel's love. The neighbor shares the secret and soon the whole city of Venice knows about the affair and Lisetta's stupidity. Lisetta's in-laws plan to catch the couple in the act and hoping to uncover Gabriel's human identity, set it up. Alberto overhears the in-laws and jumps out the window into the Grand Canal, leaving behind his wings. Alberto swims well and seeks shelter at a man's home. The



man gives shelter and out on the street, hears the story of Gabriel. The man blackmails Alberto and then offers a way to get the man to safety. The man tells Alberto of a festival where people dress up as bears and wild men and congregate in St. Mark's Square. Alberto is disguised and led into the square where he is chained. The man pulls off Alberto's mask and reveals the treachery. At the last minute, Alberto is saved by the other monks, is imprisoned, and lives out the rest of his life in misery.

Isabetta and three brothers have inherited the family store after the death of their parents. The brothers are extremely protective of Isabetta and watch over her at all times. Isabetta falls in love with Lorenzo, the man who takes care of much of the family business. An affair begins. One of the brothers finds out about Isabetta and Lorenzo and tells the rest of the family. The brothers plan a fake business trip and take Lorenzo away from the city and kill him. Isabetta is upset that Lorenzo does not return with the brothers. After Lorenzo is gone for a long time, Isabetta becomes bitter and reclusive. Lorenzo appears to Isabetta in a dream and reveals the murder. Lorenzo tells Isabetta where he is buried and needing to know for sure, Isabetta digs up the body. Isabetta removes Lorenzo's head and buries it in a pot which she keeps in her room. In the pot Isabetta plants basil and because of so much love, the basil grows to be the most beautiful in the land. Isabetta becomes more reclusive and the neighbors comment to the brothers that the woman does nothing all day but weep over the basil. The brothers take the pot away and Isabetta lapses into illness. The brothers discover Lorenzo's head and bury it. When Isabetta discovers the head is gone, she dies.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Ghismunda is torn between honoring her father and tending to her own sexuality. Having been married, Ghismunda knows the pleasures of sex and is not willing to give them up even though widowed. Tancredi professes to love his daughter yet proves that his own pride and need for Ghismunda outweighs the need for her happiness. The plan to punish Ghismunda for the affair backfires when she drinks the poison and dies with Tancredi at her bedside.

Alberto believes that he is too clever to be caught at any of the fraudulent activities he devises. Run out of town, Alberto sees Venice as a fresh start and believes that posing as a friar will render his character unimpeachable. The plan to seduce Lisetta is clever and ridiculous, particularly when the woman believes that Gabriel will come to her through Alberto. Alberto knows that Lisetta is vain enough to believe the story and is not very bright. Although Lisetta promises to keep the secret, her vanity wins out and the story is told throughout the city.

The man who hides Alberto executes a perfect double cross and finally, Alberto must pay the piper for all his evil deeds.

Isabetta finally finds happiness in the arms of Lorenzo even though she knows that the brothers will not approve. The affair remains a secret for a long time until one of the brothers accidentally walks in on the lovers. Isabetta and Lorenzo have no idea the



secret has been revealed and continue to see each other. Since the brothers feel betrayed and believe that Lorenzo is beneath Isabetta's noble station, they plan to kill the man.

The murder would have gone unnoticed except for the dream in which Lorenzo appears to Isabetta. Isabetta does not reveal to anyone what she has found and is determined to spend the rest of her days in mourning. When the brothers take Lorenzo away once more for fear of being caught, Isabetta dies of a broken heart.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Messer Lizio di Valbona is a rich knight who has one daughter, named Caterina. Caterina falls in love with Ricciardo Manardi da Brettinoro, a friend of Lizio di Valbona. Caterina and Ricciardo cannot stay away from one another and begin an affair. Since Caterina is so closely watched, the only way for the couple to be together is if Caterina is able to sleep on the balcony outside her bedroom. After complaining mercilessly about the heat, Caterina is allowed to sleep outside. Ricciardo joins her and the couple spends the entire night making love. As dawn approaches, the couple falls asleep and is discovered by Lizio. At first Lizio is angry then amused to find the couple in such a compromising position, particularly since Caterina's hand is wrapped around the coveted "nightingale." Ricciardo awakes and realizes that he is trapped and doomed to die. Lizio steps forward and says that Ricciardo will not die if he marries Caterina. Still in bed, Caterina and Ricciardo marry.

Frederigo is a man of noble birth whose only passion is for a prize falcon. Frederigo falls in love with Monna Giovanna who is a married woman. Still, Frederigo is hopelessly in love and spends his entire fortune on jousts and other events that might please Monna Giovanna. The plan fails and Frederigo moves from the city back to his farm where it is possible to live cheaply.

Monna Giovanna's husband dies and she takes their son to the country where they will live close to Frederigo's farm. The son becomes friends with Frederigo and greatly admires the falcon. One day the boy becomes very ill. Monna asks her son what would make him better. The son replies that if he could only have Frederigo's falcon, the illness would go away. Monna is desperate to help the boy and goes to Frederigo's farm to request the falcon. First, Monna offers Frederigo money for all the trouble he has had in trying to please her over the years. Frederigo refuses. Monna and her friend invite themselves to dine with Frederigo, who has just realized how poor he has become. There is no food fit for Monna Giovanni and in desperation, Frederigo kills and serves the falcon. After dinner, Monna reveals her true reason for the visit and is devastated to learn that she had just eaten the very thing she desired.

The boy, hearing of the tale, soon dies. Monna is heartbroken and returns to the city. Friends and family beg Monna to remarry since she is a young rich woman with no heirs. Finally, Monna gives in but will not consider any man other than Frederigo.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Caterina is an impetuous girl who seems to get everything she wants. Caterina is lured by the danger involved with an affair with Ricciardo because he is a trusted friend of Lizio's and would never be suspected of treachery. Ricciardo is surprised to be so



captivated by Caterina and will do anything to be with the girl of his dreams. Caterina's complaints of being overheated and plagued with insomnia are clever and if the couple had not fallen asleep, they may have gotten away with sleeping together on the balcony. Lizio could have had Ricciardo killed but is secretly pleased at the outcome and is able to see Caterina get married.

Frederigo is a classic example of a man in love because he will do anything to gain the attention, and hopefully the affection, of Monna Giovanni. Monna never spares Frederigo a glance and because she is also rich, is not impressed by all of the elaborate schemes devised by the man. Frederigo spends his entire fortune and although dejected, still loves Monna more than anything. Frederigo dares not hope that Monna will someday belong to him. Befriending Monna's son is not a scheme for Frederigo and the pair spends much time hawking with the falcon. When Monna realizes that her son might die unless Frederigo surrenders the falcon, she takes advantage of Frederigo's love, a plan which backfires miserably. Frederigo is devastated on all counts, mostly because he cannot help Monna and the son dies.

Later, Monna gives into the pressure of family and friends and announces that she will remarry. When faced with choosing a husband, Monna says the only person she would ever marry is Frederigo, probably because of his lifelong devotion.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The Baronci family of Florence is legendary for their ugliness. Two other famous Florentines are also known for their less than pleasing countenances. Messer Forese da Rabatta is a master of civil law, known throughout the land for his expertise in jurisprudence. Giotto di Bondone is a famous painter and sculptor whose frescoes are well celebrated in Padua. The two men, although brilliant, are terribly ugly. One day, the two men happen to meet on the road to Florence. It starts to rain and the men seek shelter at a mutual friend's home. The rain keeps on and soon the men decide that they must continue on the journey to Florence regardless of the weather. Then men borrow clothes from the friend and dressed as penniless peasants, begin the trek home. Along the way, Rabatta jokes that no one would ever know by looking at Bondone that he is a master artist. Bondone, somewhat offended, replies that if one looked at Rabatta, one might think the man was too simple to know his alphabet.

Brother Onion is a monk at the monastery of St. Anthony. Once a year, Brother Onion journeys to a nearby town to collect alms from the residents. The residents know nothing of Brother Onion except what he says and are always glad to help the monks. During this trip, Brother Onion promises to address the village with a sermon and at the end, show the congregation a feather from the angel Gabriel's wing. Two men who know Brother Onion laugh because they know that the monk is trying to trick the people again. The men plan to sneak into Brother Onion's room and steal the feather. Brother Onion has a servant, however, who has been ordered not to leave the monk's belongings unguarded for any reason. This makes it difficult for the men to carry out the plan. Luckily, the servant spots a maid and takes enough interest in the woman that he abandons the monk's room. The men sneak in, steal the feather, and replace it with charcoal.

The next day, the men anxiously await Brother Onion's sermon. When it comes time to show Gabriel's feather, Brother Onion discovers the charcoal. Brother Onion quickly recovers his composure and explains that the feather and the charcoal are kept in similar boxes and he mistakenly picked up the wrong one. However, the mix up must be a sign from God because the St. Lorenzo festival is coming up in a couple of days and the charcoal is a relic from the fire used to burn the great saint. The crowd is thrilled and proceeds to give Brother Onion many donations.

The men confess to Brother Onion what they had done and all have a good laugh.



Chapter 6 Analysis

The story of the painter and the practitioner of civil law offers two classic morals. One is that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The second is that a book should not be judged by its cover.

Although the two men certainly know that their looks are distasteful, it does not stop either man from pursuing his career with zest. However, having one's image insulted by another, particularly one who is equally disadvantaged, is not acceptable.

Brother Onion is a man who has learned to think on his feet. Every year when Brother Onion goes to the village to collect alms that must last throughout the entire year, he takes with him stories of St. Anthony's and the other monks, including their good deeds and service to God. Brother Onion is also a dedicated and ruthless showman.

The stunt pulled by the two friends of Onion could have easily destroyed the entire portion of the sermon that was designed to create awe and encourage the crowd to give generously. The men meant no harm and knew that the trick would amuse and not unnerve Onion. The monk shows how unflappable he is when the story of the charcoal unfolds and in the end, everyone is happy.



Chapters 7 - 8

Chapters 7 - 8 Summary

These stories revolve around the art of deception, often ending in hilarity.

Peronella is a spinster of wool who has chosen to marry a man who makes his living as a stone mason. Soon after the marriage, Peronella takes a lover. Every day while the husband is at work, Peronella's lover stays with her. One day, the husband returns home midmorning while Peronella is with her lover. Thinking fast, Peronella tells her lover to jump into a barrel in the kitchen and hide. Once the husband comes into the small house, Peronella begins to scold him and yell about how she works all day long and he comes home instead of staying out there and earning a living. The husband quickly explains that he has found a way to make extra money by selling the barrel that has taken up so much room in the kitchen. There is a man outside who is offering to pay five silver coins for the useless vessel. Peronella quickly says that she has already sold the barrel to a man for seven pieces of silver and that he is currently inside the barrel examining its structure to make sure that the container is sound. The husband believes Peronella, sends the buyer away, and greets the lover as he exits the barrel. The lover says that he will take the barrel if it is properly cleaned. The husband sets about cleaning the barrel while Peronella leans over to supervise. Meanwhile, the lover takes advantage of Peronella's position to pleasure them both.

Tingoccio Mini and Meuccio di Tura are best friends. The men are similar in everyway from habits and opinions to the way they look. Among the bargains struck between the men is the promise that if one should die first, he will come back from the afterlife to tell the other of the experience and answer any and all questions.

One of the normal activities for the friends is to take the trip to visit a woman who is the mother of Tingoccio's godson. Tingoccio is quite friendly with the woman and eventually falls in love with her. In the absence of the woman's husband, Tingoccio and the godmother begin an affair. Meuccio has served as a beard for his friend's affair thus far but also falls madly in love with the godmother but out of respect for Tingoccio never reveals his true feelings toward the woman.

Tingoccio dies. One night, Tingoccio comes to Meuccio as promised. Meuccio explains that he is in purgatory, explaining away his sins. When it comes to the sin of having the affair with the godmother, Tingoccio is told that there are far greater sins in the world and there shall be no real punishment for the crime. Tingoccio reveals this to Meuccio who is surprised and then very pleased.

Calandrino, Bruno and Buffalmacco are three simpletons who work as painters. After hearing a story about a magical stone, the trio goes to the Mugnone River to search for the elusive heliotrope. All the men know is that the heliotrope is blackish in color and comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. Calandrino is convinced that he has found the



magic heliotrope and collects a great number of stones. After the men return home, Bruno and Buffalmacco decide to play a trick on their friend. The men have a lengthy discussion about the magic heliotrope and how they might be used. The powers are unknown. All this time, Calandrino is standing a few yards from the men and is suddenly convinced that he is invisible.

Calandrino goes home and is confronted by his wife who scolds him for being late. Calandrino, convinced that a woman has ruined yet another virtue in a man, takes to beating his wife. The two friends intervene. Calandrino is so devastated over the loss of magical powers and is left alone in his house with a pile of useless stones.

Chapters 7 - 8 Analysis

Peronella is a woman who works hard at her craft and yet finds time to take on a lover while her husband is out trying to make a living. When the husband returns home unexpectedly, Peronella has to think fast to avoid being caught in the throes. Peronella confronts the man with anger to catch him off guard while her lover hides inside the barrel. When the husband explains that he came home only to sell the barrel which has been taking up a lot of space in the kitchen, Peronella quickly devises a ridiculous story about another man who has the same interest and has chosen to go inside the barrel to make sure it is sound. Peronella's husband believes the lie and meets the lover as he exits the barrel. The husband asks the lover what he is doing and the lover having heard every word backs up Peronella's story. When the husband sets to cleaning the barrel both Peronella and the lover show great audacity by having sex within a few feet of the hard working husband. The lover solidifies his position when he buys the barrel and takes it home.

Tingoccio innocently falls in love with a woman who has been his friend for some time. The woman and her husband have entrusted their son to Tingoccio's care as a godparent, an act which means a great deal. Tingoccio, unable to help himself, falls in love with the woman and although he feels guilty, Tingoccio has an affair.

Meuccio shows restraint and loyalty by neither confessing his love nor acting upon it. Meuccio seems to have no plan to approach the woman until after hearing Tingoccio's speech. It is hard to believe that in purgatory there is no sin in adultery; however Tingoccio's story rings true. Meuccio takes this as permission and is very pleased.

Calandrino is a simpleton who is also a misogynist. Like many, Calandrino is excited at the prospect of gaining magical powers and feels uplifted by the discovery of the magic heliotrope. Bruno and Buffalmacco, also simple, decide to play a trick on Calandrino and are amazed that their friend has completely fallen for the joke. The men are amazed when they see that Calandrino has beaten his wife, blaming her for ruining his powers. Finally, Calandrino accepts his lot and is left with useless stones.



Chapters 9 - 10

Chapters 9 - 10 Summary

A man meets an abbess and falls in love with her. Although the relationship is forbidden, the man sneaks into the abbess' cell and spends the night with her. The nuns in the abbess' charge are unaware of the affair. One of the other nuns is having an affair as well and is caught by one of the sisters. The sister tells the other nuns about the break of the celibacy vow and knows she must tell the abbess. The nun goes to the abbess who will surely punish the nun for her indiscretion. The abbess, shocked at being interrupted in the middle of the night, searches in the dark for her veil. The abbess mistakenly grabs her lover's pants and puts them on her head. Remarkably, the nuns do not comment on the abbess' appearance. When the abbess confronts the other nun who is having an affair, her intention is to mete out stern punishment as well as a lecture. The nun is unrepentant and points out that the abbess is surely guilty as well since she is wearing a man's pants on her head. The abbess knows that she cannot punish the nun and the two go back to their respective lovers.

Don Gianni di Barolo and Pietro da Tresanti are businessmen who deal in trading goods. Gianni has a mare to transport his goods while Pietro uses a donkey. One day, Gianni visits Pietro who is very poor. There is no room in the house for Gianni since there is only one bed. Pietro's wife is a simple but kind woman who offers to sleep in the stable so that Gianni will have a place to sleep. Gianni thanks the woman but declines. Gianni invents an incredible tale, saying that at night he casts a spell over his mare that turns her into a beautiful woman. Gianni could not bear to leave her, even for one night. The wife is astounded by the story, and being simple, believes it. The wife tells Pietro about the mare and Pietro also believes it and immediately wishes to have a mare of his own to increase his business. The couple approaches Gianni and asks to have the spell cast over the wife. Gianni objects at first then seeing how much Pietro wants the mare, gives in to the request. Gianni tells Pietro that he must not speak or object during the spell casting or all will be ruined and no other chance can be granted. Pietro agrees.

The wife is told to shed her clothes and assume the position of a mare. Gianni caresses each part of the wife, coaxing her to become a mare. After this lengthy process, Gianni explains that the most important part of the spell comes in placing the tail. As Gianni places the tail into the wife, Pietro objects to the location of the tail. Gianni, having achieved his orgasm, tells Pietro that he has broken the rules by speaking and therefore the spell is ruined, never to be repeated.

Gualtieri is the son of a wealthy marquis in Saluzzo who spends his days hunting and hawking. Gualtieri has shown no interest in marriage and this does not please the marquis. Gualtieri finally agrees to choose a wife and decides to approach a peasant girl who has pleased him from afar. Gualtieri goes to the girl's home and announces that he chooses to marry the girl, whose name is Griselda. Griselda's father is ecstatic because the fortune of the marquis will mean a comfortable living for his family.



Gualtieri and Griselda have two children, a boy and a girl. After many years, Gualtieri decides that he must test the patience and loyalty of Griselda and develops a cruel plan. First, Griselda is told that her children must be killed by the order of her husband. Griselda says that her husband is lord and must be obeyed. Gualtieri secretly sends his children to Bologna to be raised by a relative. Later, Gualtieri announces that Griselda must leave because he no longer wishes to have her as a wife. Gualtieri turns Griselda out with nothing but a shift. Griselda returns to her father's home. Gualtieri continues his cruelty by bringing his daughter home from Bologna and tells Griselda that the beautiful young woman will be his new wife. Griselda is sad but only says that she hopes Gualtieri will be kinder to this wife than he was to her. Determining that Griselda has passed all tests, brings her home and honors her for the rest of her days.

Chapters 9 - 10 Analysis

The abbess is supposed to be the holiest of nuns and set a good example for her charges. It is amazing that the abbess has been able to keep her affair secret. When the nun discovers that her sister has a man in her cell, she is shocked by the blatant disregard of the vow of celibacy and the nerve of the woman to bring a man into the convent.

The abbess must have been terribly disoriented to mistake the man's pants for her veil. The other nuns show great restraint, perhaps due to reverence, when they make no comment about the abbess' head gear. The other nun who expects to be punished takes advantage of the situation and by pointing out the abbess' obvious indiscretion, gains permission to keep her lover. The men continue to visit the convent many times without anyone outside the convent finding out.

Gianni seems to be an honorable man until the visit to Pietro's home. Pietro is embarrassed by his poverty, as is his wife. The woman offers her bed to Gianni, resigning herself to sleep in the stable with the donkey and mare. Gianni invents a story on the spot about the mare being changed into a beautiful woman, much like Pietro's wife. Both Pietro and his wife are amazingly simple and believe the tale. Gianni structures the event so that he can have his way with Pietro's wife without interference. One questions the wife's motivation at the end when she is angry with Pietro for breaking the spell. Pietro is sad but apparently, none the wiser.

Gualtieri is a cruel man who believes that his station is so much higher than Griselda's that he can test her in such a deplorable way. Griselda, raised as a peasant, certainly knows her place in the young marquis' house and acquiesces to Gualtieri's every decision. Griselda shows great love and obedience when she allows the children to be taken away. The humiliation of being cast out in rags does not make Griselda bitter, for this is her station in life.

Gualtieri's final cruelty is to present Griselda with their twelve year old daughter, claiming that the girl will be his new wife. Gualtieri never has the intention of doing so and has nothing but fatherly intentions toward the girl. Griselda's reaction shocks the



marquis. It is then the marquis decides that Griselda is patient and faithful and also worthy of his love and honor. Gualtieri takes Griselda back home where she is lavished with honor and gifts. Gualtieri and Griselda's son is returned to them; Griselda's family is finally taken care of and everyone lives happily ever after.



Characters

Saint Ciappelletto appears in Chapter 1

Saint Ciappelletto is the main character in chapter one. The saint begins the story as Ser Cepparello, a notary who lives in France. Cepparello is a very dishonest man to the point that he is ashamed if any of his dealings are proven to be honest and true. However, because Cepparello is such an accomplished liar, the people of his village honor the man and entrust him with all their legal documents, business, and money. Therefore, it is not unusual when Musciatto Franzesi approaches Cepparello to handle his business in Burgundy while he travels to meet with Pope Boniface. Cepparello is delighted with the task of traveling to Burgundy to attend to Frazesi's business, surely making many opportunities for himself along the way.

Cepparello is pleased to take up residence with the two Florentine brothers whose reputation is not good in the town. However, they are not nearly as bad as Cepparello in their business. Being savvy men, the Florentines quickly understand Cepparello's character and become alarmed when the man falls ill. The brothers care for Cepparello and are distressed when the man's health continues to fail. It is almost guaranteed that when Cepparello dies, the village will uncover his wickedness and further tarnish the Florentines' business.

When Cepparello asks for a priest to absolve him of his sins, the brothers laugh in astonishment. There is no priest on earth who would absolve Cepparello of his countless sins. Cepparello assures the brothers that he can convince someone to absolve him and save their reputation. The brothers manage to find a monk to perform last rites and take Cepparello's contrived confession. Cepparello is so convincing and bold with his lies that the monk declares him holy and later Cepparello is canonized.

Andreuccio di Pietro appears in Chapter 2

Andreuccio di Pietro is a famous merchant known for buying and selling horses to the people in his village. When Pietro hears that there are many horses to be bought at low market prices in Naples and sets out for the city with hopes to make great bargains and increase his fortune. Pietro has never been to Naples and is somewhat naïve about the things that go on in larger cities, particularly the deception and crime.

While Pietro is walking through the city alone, disturbed because he has not yet located the great deals he is seeking, he is approached by an old woman. Pietro knows the woman and is glad to see her. Pietro is also intrigued by the beautiful young girl accompanying the old woman. When the woman visits Pietro at the inn, the man displays great courtesy and accepts the invitation to visit with the woman and her daughter. The visit is fine and Pietro is pressed into staying for dinner as well as the night. Pietro does not want to do this but feels obligated. Pietro's good nature is taken



advantage of by the young woman who claims to be his sister. Having been coached by the old woman, who knows Pietro's family, the younger woman convinces Pietro that she is his long lost sister. Pietro's naivete is shown when he is cast out and finally realizes that he has been robbed. Pietro is devastated, having lost his fortune while being completely humiliated.

Pietro regains his wits and, devising a plan as a criminal might, turns the tables on the two men who attempt to help him while actually planning to rob him after Pietro assists in robbing the archbishop's grave. Pietro recoups his losses, confides to his traveling companions and then flees the city.

Alatiel appears in Chapter 2

Alatiel is the daughter of the sultan of Babylon who is lost at sea and suffers great misfortune at the hands of many men.

Giannotto di Civignia appears in Chapter 1

Giannotto di Civigni is the friend of Abraham who is intent on converting the man to Christianity.

Masetto appears in Chapter 3

Masetto is the man who goes to work in the orchard at a convent and pretends to be deaf-mute.

Alibech appears in Chapter 3

Alibech is the young girl who goes into the Egyptian desert to find a way to serve God.

Brother Alberto appears in Chapter 4

Brother Alberto is the monk who convinces a woman that he is channeling the angel Gabriel.

Isabetta appears in Chapter 4

Isabetta is a woman who falls in love with a shopkeeper and then suffers a breakdown when he is murdered by her brothers.



Frederigo appears in Chapter 5

Frederigo is a nobleman who squanders his entire fortune trying to get the attention of a beautiful woman.

Brother Onion appears in Chapter 6

Brother Onion is a smooth talking monk who encourages the residents of a small village to support him and the monastery at St. Anthony.

Peronella appears in Chapter 7

Peronella is the housewife of a mason who takes on a lover, then tricks her husband when the couple is caught in the throes.

Don Gianni di Barolo appears in Chapter 9

Don Gianni di Barolo is a tradesman who convinces his friend and colleague that he is able to cast a magic spell to turn a woman into a horse.

Gualtieri appears in Chapter 10

Gualtieri is the son of a marquis who marries a peasant girl and then makes her prove her worth.

Griselda appears in Chapter 10

Griselda is Gualtieri's long suffering wife.



Objects/Places

Rome appears in Chapter 1

Rome is the cultural, religious and political center of Italy and in this book is considered to be both the center of civilization as well as the center of religious corruption. The residents of Italy have a great reverence for Rome and many make pilgrimages to the heavily populated city for cultural and religious reasons.

In the story of Abraham, the Jew who wishes to explore the tenets of Christianity, Rome is the place which is most likely to hold the answers to the man's questions. Gianotto, Abraham's friend and potential converter, is worried about Abraham's trip to Rome, fearing that the experience may taint his friend's tenuous position on the great religion. Abraham is adamant, however, and journeys to Rome to discover the basis of Gianotto's faith.

Abraham tells no one why he is in Rome and takes the opportunity to observe the goings on in the city. Abraham sees all that Gianotto wishes he would not. There are political figures indulging in lechery, drink, and deceit. In Abraham's estimation, nearly all of the commandments are being routinely broken by corrupt men who wield great power. Abraham is even more surprised to find that the clergy practice the same activities. Although the city and many of its officials are certainly corrupt, Abraham can still see the foundation on which it was built and agrees to convert.

Florence appears in Chapters 1, 6

Florence is a powerful city located on the Arno River, which also runs through Pisa. Florence is the capital city of the region of Tuscany and well known for its contributions to the art world. Florence is also the home of many wealthy merchants and celebrates a long history of notable people, including the famed Medici family. The Baronci family is also Florentine but of a less admired nature. The Baronci family is legendary for being tremendously ugly, a trait shared by the two main characters in chapter six.

In this book, Florence is the home to two real life characters, Forese da Rabatta and Giotto di Bondone. Rabatta was a brilliant man who lived in the first part of the 14th century. Rabatta spent his life practicing civil law and was known as the master of jurisprudence. Bondone lived in the 13th and 14th centuries and was also a man that made significant contributions to Florence and other Italian cities. Bondone was a painter, sculptor and architect celebrated for exquisite frescoes and credited with the creation of the bell tower situated next to Florence's Santa Maria del Fiore.



Paris appears in Chapters 1-2

Paris is the site of Notre Dame, the great cathedral in which Abraham wishes to be baptized as a Christian. It is also the home to Abraham and his friend Giannotto.

Venice appears in Chapter 2

Venice is the location Brother Alberto chooses to start life as a minor friar. While there, Alberto tricks a woman into believing that the angel Gabriel is in love with her.

Lunigiana appears in Chapter 1

Lunigiana is the site of the monastery in which the young monk has an affair with a woman and then tricks the abbot into doing the same in order to avoid punishment.

Naples appears in Chapter 2

Naples is the city where Andreuccio goes to find bargains on horses, only to be robbed by a prostitute posing as his sister.

Tuscany appears in Chapter 1

Tuscany is a mountainous region in Italy known for its wines.

Perugia appears in Chapter 2

Perugia is Andreuccio's hometown and the location of his business as a horse trader.

Malpertugio appears in Chapter 2

Malpertugio is an ill-famed district in Naples filled with prostitutes and criminals.

Babylon appears in Chapters 1, 2

Babylon is a rich kingdom and home to many sultans.

Sicily appears in Chapter 2

Sicily is located in the south of Italy, well known for its boot-like shape.



Burgundy appears in Chapter 1

Burgundy is the location chosen by Franzesi for several of his businesses and where Ciappelletto swindles the people.



Themes

Deception

Deception is a major theme that runs through most of the stories in *The Decameron*. Deception almost always takes place to benefit the deceiver and although the schemes are often ridiculous and quite funny, they always seem to work. One has to wonder if the ones being deceived are really as simple as portrayed or are so naïve and trusting that they will believe anything that seems even remotely possible. The stories are surely embellished to make them more like fables, however, there are characters in the book that are real and lived in Italy during the 13th and 14th centuries.

The most brilliant examples of deception regard Brother Alberto and Saint Ciappelletto. Both men begin life as wicked and arrogant thieves who delight in taking advantage of others. Brother Alberto sees an opportunity to disguise his misdeeds when he travels to Venice and ends up serving as a monk in a local monastery. Brother Alberto cannot help but try to deceive the vain woman who has come to him for confession. Brother Alberto's plan to become the angel Gabriel to engage in sex with the woman is brilliant and if the woman would have kept the secret, it is hard to tell how long it could have continued.

Saint Ciappelletto is even more cunning in hiding his true nature. The Burgundians do not pick up on Ciappelletto's dishonesty although it is apparent to the Florentine brothers. The brothers are amazed when Ciappelletto announces that he wishes to confess and be absolved for his sins. Ciappelletto does not care about absolution but rather chooses to confess to save the brothers' reputation. The brothers are beside themselves with laughter as Ciappelletto convinces the friar that he is most likely the holiest and most pious man in the land.

Lust

Nearly every deception in *The Decameron* is motivated by lust. While no woman is taken against her will, there is an alarming amount of coercion and adultery that takes place. Friends and lovers betray one another to gain the affections of another. Relationships are ruined and people die so that a man can possess a woman that for some reason he cannot resist.

One of the best examples of coercion and captivity revolves around Alatiel, the daughter of the Sultan of Babylon. Alatiel starts off across the sea to meet the King of Algarve to whom she will be a virgin bride. Fortune has other plans for Alatiel and for many years, the girl meets with one incredible mishap after another. Alatiel bewitches every man she meets, ends up in bed with most of them, and is continually passed around like a bottle among winos. Alatiel seems to be accepting of this and falls for one man after another. Finally, the man who treats her the best and truly loves her finds that he is dying and



takes Alatiel to the King of Cyprus so that she will be cared for after he is gone. The King of Cyprus has only good intentions and recognizing Alatiel, returns her to her family who thought she had been killed at sea.

The funniest story involving lust is the tale of Alibech, a fourteen year old girl who sets off to seek the pleasures of serving God. Fortunately for Alibech, the first two holy men she encounters are strong enough to send her away should lust get the better of them. Rustico, the monk who takes her in, is convinced that his willpower is stronger than lust. Rustico is wrong. Lust causes the monk to deceive Alibech and Rustico convinces the girl that "putting the Devil back into hell" is the best way to serve God. Rustico's plan backfires when Alibech's lust outshines his own and the monk can no longer perform.

Greed

Greed is the motivating factor behind many schemes for deception in *The Decameron*. Saint Ciappelletto is most likely the greediest man since the notary has spent his entire career, even his entire life, creating false documents, swindling money from clients and businessman, not to mention the gains he created in his personal life through lust for money and possessions. On the opposite end of the spectrum is Frederigo, who willingly gives up his entire fortune to please Monna, a woman who will not look his way until she has lost her family.

The two men who convince Andreuccio to rob the archbishop's grave are also good examples of greed. Andreuccio is in dire straits which is why he agrees to the plan. The men, however, know of the archbishop's riches and want them for their own. After convincing Andreuccio to steal the treasure, the men planned to abandon him. Unfortunately for the two men, they got much less than expected when Andreuccio turns the tables and took the ruby ring.

Greed also plays a small part when Griselda's father gives her in marriage to Gualtieri. The peasant family is hideously poor and the thought of sharing in the marquis' fortune is a deciding factor in the man's decision.

Style

Point of View

The point of view in *The Decameron* changes from first person to third person omniscient. In some parts, a person who may be Boccaccio addresses the readers as "Dear Ladies." Only in some places is the narrator announced by name, followed by the same type of introduction, such as the chapter that is devoted to unhappy endings.

The use of third person is the most effective in this case. The characters are such that the third person description adds weight and is able to reveal the characters' motives and idiosyncrasies. As with the first person narration, it is not clear who Boccaccio credits for the writing of the stories, although it is surely his own work.

The point of view as expressed by the author allows the readers to see the humor in some stories where it might be missed otherwise. The writing travels back and forth, from objective to slightly subjective, a technique which adds a great deal of richness and depth to the characters and their stories. A good example of this technique is the story in which Saint Ciappelletto announces his intentions to confess his sins to a priest. The author states only briefly Ciappelletto's sins and prefers to refer to him as the most evil man who ever lived and other equally scathing remarks concerning Ciappelletto's wickedness.

Setting

The settings of most of the stories in *The Decameron* are in Italy. The story of Abraham and Giannotto begins and ends in Paris, with a side trip to Rome. The story of Saint Ciappelletto takes place in France as well. Two stories are set in Babylon and the tale of Alatiel travels from Babylon to various places in the world. Also mentioned in the stories are Turkey, Majorca, and Egypt.

The stories are split between life and activities that take place in the largest and most famous cities in Italy. These include Florence, Venice, Naples, and Rome. The smaller towns and villages mentioned throughout the book tend to be centered in Tuscany, the region of which Florence is the capital.

Since many of the characters are of noble birth, there are sections which mention the houses of sultans, kings, dukes, and marquises. None of these is described in detail and Boccaccio must assume that the reader can imagine what such a house might look like.

There are some humble dwellings, like the homes of Peronella, Pietro, Griselda, and the farm owned by Frederigo.



All in all, the combination of settings lends an authentic air and feel of Italy at the time and includes the charm of Tuscany as well as the pitfalls that exist in the bigger cities such as Naples and Rome.

Language and Meaning

The Decameron was originally written in Italian and has been translated many times since it was first published and circulated.

The reader might find that some of the translations, while seemingly accurate, use a language with a consistently modern flair. That is, while there are many metaphors and euphemisms, particularly when the story involves sex, some of the language seems out of place when considering the time period in which it was written. If the reader can overlook the presumed modernization of the text, the stories hold up well and are undoubtedly as entertaining as they were in the original form.

The meaning of The Decameron may be deciphered in one of two ways. The reader may take the stories at face value and enjoy the tales that involve many humorous incidents as well as the recounting of misadventure. The stories themselves are designed to read much like any other fable, which will certainly delight many readers.

If one chooses to delve deeper into the meaning of the book, it is possible to do so. For those who prefer to deconstruct the tales, there are several underlying reasons for the characters' actions. For example, in the tale of the woman and the mare, one might simply look at it as a trick to allow Gianni to have sex with Pietro's wife. Others may see it as the conquering of innocence and humanity. As with many texts, meaning may be entirely subjective and left to the reader to decide.

Structure

The Decameron consists of ten stories supposedly told over ten days by a number of storytellers, both men and women. Although they have not been published in their entirety, the original text of The Decameron is an accounting of 100 days of storytelling, all performed by the same set of young people, with an intermittent interruption by Boccaccio.

The stories vary greatly in length. The shortest story is 2 pages; and the longest story is 16 pages. The average page length is 4 pages.

Although the stories are supposedly written by different people, the format and style remains the same. Occasionally, the storyteller will begin the story with an explanation and on some occasions, talk about a subject that is seemingly unrelated to the text altogether. Perhaps this is to give the reader the feeling that the storytellers are all sitting around a room, discussing various topics until a particular story must be told to the group. Fortunately, this technique is not terribly distracting nor does it detract from the text as a whole.

Each day has a theme that the storytellers must follow. For example, one day revolves around happiness after misfortune, another tells of deception between husbands and wives, and yet another recounts unhappy endings. The themes help to keep the reader focused and looking forward to the next day.



Quotes

"This pestilence was so powerful that it was communicated to the healthy by contact with the sick, the way a fire close to dry or oily things will set them aflame," Introduction, p. 4.

"How could you say such things and be a man of God?" First Day, First Story, p. 24.

"You should know, my dear companions, that just as stupidity can often remove one from the state of happiness and place him in the greatest misery, so, too, intelligence can rescue the wise man from the gravest of dangers and restore him to his secure state," First Day, Third Story, p. 32.

"There is no doubt I am coming to my end, and this grieves me for living has never pleased me so much as it does now," Second Day, Seventh Story, p. 58.

"If I thought you could keep a secret, I would tell you a thought that has passed through my mind many times, something which you might find profitable, too," Third Day, First Story, p. 66.

"This story was told and retold all over the city until it actually became a popular proverb, stating that the most pleasurable means of serving God was to put the Devil back into hell," Fourth Day, Prologue, pp. 72-73.

"Right then and there the father sensed that Nature had more power than his intelligence, and he was sorry for having brought his son to Florence," Fourth Day, Prologue, p. 76.

"There is no burial place more worthy for such a heart than one of gold; in this regard, my father has acted wisely," Fourth Day, First Story, p. 85.

"My brothers, I am well aware of what you say, but I would rather have a man who needs money than money who needs a man," Fifth Day, Ninth Story, p. 107.

"And after many words and a good deal of trouble, they managed to reconcile the weeping wife with him, leaving him in a melancholy mood with a house full of stones," Eighth Day, Third Story, p. 128.

"My friends you are urging me to do something that I was determined never to do, for you know how difficult it is to find a woman with a suitable character, and how plentiful is the opposite kind of woman, and what a wretched life a man would lead married to a wife that is not suitable to him," Tenth Day, Tenth Story, p. 134.

"What more can be said here, except that godlike spirits do sometimes rain down from heaven into poor homes, just as those more suited to governing pigs than to ruling over men make their appearances in royal palaces," Tenth Day, Tenth Story, p. 142.

Topics for Discussion

What might have happened if the people discovered Ciappelletto's wickedness after he had been canonized?

Do you think Gianotto's faith changed after Abraham's conversion? Explain.

What actions might have the Sultan taken if he had known the truth about Alatiel's misadventures? Would she have been sent to the King of Algarve?

Do you think the two grave robbers went back to the archbishop's tomb to search for the ruby ring? Why?

What punishment might the monk have received if the abbot decided to deny his own charges of lechery?

Melchisedech was shrewd about answering Saladin's question regarding the true religion. Of the three laws, which might Saladin have practiced?

Do you think Frederigo and Monna Giovanni would have ever come together under different circumstances? What if Monna's son had lived? Explain.

Would Lizio have felt the same about Caterina's marriage if Ricciardo was a stranger? Why?

What might have happened if Isabetta's brothers had been found guilty of murdering Lorenzo? Would Isabetta still be alive?

What might have happened to Alberto if the monks had not saved him from the mob in St. Mark's Square?