

Decameron by g.boccaccio

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

During the Renaissance, the new features and motifs appeared in art and literature, since medieval moral and religious dogmas by that time had become a burden or, more precisely, inhibitors of social progress. Giovanni Boccaccio, an Italian novelist, skillfully and satirically addressed the ridiculousness of social bonds and prejudices and was one of the main authors, contributing to the evolution and liberation of Renaissance literature from dictate.

The Decameron, in this sense, can be viewed in universal frames, since the issues discussed by the narrators can be successfully extrapolated onto the present day: humanism vs. mercantilism, human nature vs. traditional societal moral, true love, dominating over social stratification and biases. The essay focuses specifically on the first and the last novels of the Decameron, compares and contrasts them in terms of style, plot, motifs and symbols.

The first novel was narrated on the first day, by Panfilio. The young man tells about a criminal, who cheats at holy friar and positions himself as a pious and faultless man, whereas during his life course he has completely spoiled his image in God's eyes. " False witness he bore, solicited or unsolicited, with boundless delight; and, as oaths were in those days had in very great respect in France, he, scrupling not to forswear himself, corruptly carried the day in every case in which he was summoned faithfully to attest the truth" (Boccaccio, 2004, at stg. brown. edu, 012). In fact, the protagonist of the story possessed all qualities, necessary for a medieval villain of the ' genta nova', peculiar bourgeoisie of the Renaissance.

As a typical descendant of his social class, Ciappelletto disregards the norms and principles of social order and coexistence; in fact, he sees his survival only in crime or violence. Boccaccio, in portraying his character, illustrates Ciappelletto primarily as a person, engaged into medieval structural antagonism, challenging the tradition and signifying the contemporary social pathology. Importantly, the protagonist's last trip is aimed at opposing Burgundians, taking back Musciatto's credits and probably putting some additional taxation upon the subordinates of the affluent mercenary. The voyage therefore represents that although the protagonist anticipates that his death is approaching, he hasn't altered his outlook, views and behavior, as he is going to commit another crime.

Furthermore, Ciappelletto distorts the truth about his deeds when during the friar, intended as sincere conversation between a clergyman and a person from secular world. This means, the protagonist, even being prone to death, hasn't realized his life-long misdemeanor: " Father, it is my constant practice to be confessed at least once a week, and many a week I am confessed more often; but true it is, that, since I have been sick, now eight days, I have made no confession, so sore has been my affliction" (ibid, 033).

The protagonist noticeably converts his confession into the description of his illusionary virtues and finally achieves his goal: after his death, his body is buried on the cloister territory, but in my opinion, it doesn't matter for a person, who has passed away. To sum up, Ciappelletto primarily tricks himself, since he blocks his path to eternal peace and relief after the death.

The last novel, narrated on the tenth day by Dioneo, touches first and foremost family issues and the problems of cross-strata relationships. The

story demonstrates cruelty, anguish and absolution – it seems extremely sentimental, since affective component is described masterly and relevantly. The Marquis of Saluzzo decides to marry a peasant girl and therefore expects of her great patience and acceptance, since through misalliance he automatically raises her social position and authority. The woman, in turn, appears really righteous and honorable, but the marquis prefers probing her positive qualities by throwing his wife into increasingly greater adversity.

Firstly, he deprives the woman of her motherhood: the nobleman, obsessed by inhumane brutality (not by “ strange humor” (at stg. brown. edu, 2004, 030) as Boccaccio notes) ordered his servants to separate the mother and the infant child: “ Madam,” quoth he with a most dolorous mien, “ so I value my life, I must needs do my lord's bidding.

He has bidden me take your daughter and” (ibid, 031). Furthermore, Gualtieri arranges his son's life in analogous manner, questioning and challenging his sibling's submission and deference, but coming to wrong conclusion - “ And but that he had marked that she was most tenderly affectionate towards her children, while 'twas well pleasing to him, he had supposed that she was tired of them, whereas he knew that 'twas of her discretion that she so did” (ibid, 038)- the so-called aristocrat decides to continue his disregarding and disrespectful behavior towards his wife: his advancements in humiliation can probably be taken as an exemplar of domestic violence, as he finally divorces Griselda and marries a younger woman.

After the extensive psychological experiment over his wife, the protagonist finally realizes her uniqueness and positive qualities, and therefore reunifies

the family to its original state. Griselda accepts this innovation neutrally, since she is no longer capable of strong feelings of joy or sorrow – she unquestioningly follows her husband's whims and consequently appears much wiser and endurable than her 'humorous' spouse, whose entertainments are analogous to the actions of Gestapo soldiers towards their prisoners.

The two stories, as one can see, are incomparable: notwithstanding the common social context and the values shared by both narrators, the novels in reality appeal to completely dissimilar components of human nature. Whereas the first novel is aimed at mocking the existing clerical organization, the last one comprises unusually profound psychologism, the insight into 'upper-class' values and the true brilliance of human soul, regardless of social strata or origin.

The major social connotation of the first novel is the inappropriateness of religious dominance and the low effectiveness of 'spiritual' upbringing, promoted during the Middle Ages. As Barolini argues, "between the end of the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th, there arose the widely held conviction that the world, dominated by power struggles and corruption, could transform itself into a truly Christian community. This belief, however, was in conflict with the prevalent values of many who held political and church offices and tended to be interpreted by some as heresy or treason" (Barolini, 1983, p. 522).

Such high contextuality of Boccaccio's writing is represented primarily in the conflict between individual interests and universal religious values, to great extent demanding and unrealistic in the society, where corruption and

<https://assignbuster.com/decameron-by-gboccaccio/>

criminal activity are in blossom. Furthermore, in order to present religious dogmas in more comic light, the author illustrates the gullibility and naïveté of Catholic Church: due to the firm conviction in the frank confession in the face of death, clergymen overlook the possibility of deception in such circumstances.

The church therefore appears as inflexible institution in the state of stagnation, caused by the implementation of Christian traditionalism and fundamentalism, which tolerate no exceptions and pay no attention to each specific case. The practice of canonization is also addressed: Ciapeletto, a convinced and unchangeable criminal, is introduced as a holy person after his oral and unproven confession, so the representatives of clerical world even don't attempt to find and ascertain some facts, confirming the protagonist's righteous activities before upgrading his status.

The last novel, on the contrary, is oriented to depicting social inequality and stratification: the main character misunderstands and mistrusts his wife only because she originated from peasant circle. The whole meaning of love is reduced and put into narrow frames of social discrepancy, thus from the position of modern reader it is hard to believe in the genuineness of Gualtieri's feeling: " These are they, whom by thee and many another it has long been supposed that I did ruthlessly to death, and I am thy husband, that loves thee more dearly than aught else, deeming that other there is none that has the like good cause to be well content with his wife" (stg. brown. edu, 2004, 063).

Analyzing and interpreting the novel, I'm gradually coming to conclusion that love and family relationships were seen as separable issues during the <https://assignbuster.com/decameron-by-gboccaccio/>

Renaissance and that family roles were shaped to great extent in accordance with gender roles: females were supposed to remain patient and empathic in spite of male dominance (sometimes extremely aggressive and offensive, as the novel shows). The last novel thus operates in the totally different dimension, when comparing it to the first one: the principles of family dynamics and religious dogmas naturally refer to the same societal area, but the different narrators address these poles of social life in extremely narrow format.

Nevertheless, both novels either extrinsically or intrinsically mock the existing social system that breeds such obvious absurd as the canonization of an inveterate criminal or the distortion of family ideal through continuous probation and experiments over human virtuousness. Moreover, both tales in certain way manifest the ingenuity of human nature: Panfilio's narrative describes the absolute deviation, whereas Dioneo speaks primarily about the combination of perfect features in a single human-being, more importantly – in a woman, viewed by contemporary social norms as the creature with an inborn inclination to sinning.

Another common trend, apparent in both novels, is the representation of fortune as an immediate, momentous change of human fate. “ With the transition of 14th-century mercantile society toward a new, more " modern" set of attitudes and beliefs, Fortune undergoes a fundamental change: it no longer exclusively refers to a transcendental order, or preordained fate, a Providential divine will ruling over the incessant permutations of human affairs” (Barolini, 1983, p. 522).

In the first novel Fortune is depicted in quite an unusual way, since it makes considerable impact on the protagonist's image after his death, whereas in Dioneo's narrative, Fortune is embodied in the protagonist's momentary desires and superficial conclusions, resulting in the sudden hardships for his wife. The last novel fundamentally reveals that Fortune is two-faced and can bring absolute happiness and well-being or throw an individual into the dimension unbearable troubles, making them exposed to the harshness of the reality. The arousal of humanism in the period of Renaissance is reflected through depicting human nature as a contradictory issue: in the first novel, the chronic deviant is idealized, at least, in public consciousness, whereas the last novel shows that even the most notable human virtues can be questioned and misinterpreted.

To sum up, both Panfilio's and Dioneo's tales bring the reader into the realm, in which probability theory is completely powerless due to the indubitable rule of Fortune over human lives. On the other hand, individuals are not depicted as marionettes, but rather in terms of their adjustment to existing social and religious values, so the main field of the author's interest is human response to the whims of Fortune.