

An analysis of deception in the decameron

[Business](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In *The Decameron*, Boccaccio uses tales of deception to capture the merchant culture of quick wit and cleverness, which defies Christian morality and transcends the traditional social classes of the medieval era. In fact, one's success at deception is often depicted as a form of intelligence. Tricksters are either rewarded or face no significant consequence for their actions, whereas their victims are portrayed as gullible and weak.

In the opening story of *San Ciappelletto*, Boccaccio presents a man driven by complete wickedness who is “perhaps the worst man that ever was born” (Boccaccio 26). He lies, cheats, steals and commits virtually every sin in the Bible many times over. Yet, despite his life of utter corruption, *Ciappelletto* is memorialized as a good and “holy man” who lived a devout life (Boccaccio 34). Having succeeded in trickery throughout his career as a lawyer, *Ciappelletto* saves his ultimate ruse for his deathbed confession when he dupes a friar and is venerated as a saint. Thus *Ciappelletto* is rewarded for his deception. He succeeds in both preserving the memory of himself after death, however false this memory might be, and creating the ultimate mockery of the church, which he so deeply reviled during his life.

Here, Boccaccio shows the ease of deception through faith and religion. Very few people at that time would dispute a person's deathbed confession to a man of God, or for that matter the friar's re-telling of *Ciappelletto*'s story. Ultimately, because of his wit, *Ciappelletto* dies a satisfied man who escapes any earthly consequence for his deceptive ways. In the tale of *Andreuccio*, deception takes a slightly different form, yet it still leads to a positive end result. While *Andreuccio* is the ultimate deceiver in this story, he is not portrayed as such in the beginning.

Andreuccio is described as a man unfamiliar with the perils of Naples who “had never been away from home before” (Boccaccio 101). Boccaccio falsely leads the reader to believe that Andreuccio is gullible, weak, and perhaps a bit dimwitted. After a woman claiming to be his sister robs Andreuccio of his money when he falls into her cesspit, it seems as though he is clearly among The Decameron’s worst victims of deception. Yet, Andreuccio finally catches on to the game of deception and with some good fortune, tricks a group of thieves to leave Naples with a ring far more valuable than the orses he planned to purchase. With this story of luck, wit and deception, Boccaccio emphasizes the secular attitude toward gaining material wealth.

He uses the word “invested” rather than stole to summarize Andreuccio’s theft of the ring (Boccaccio 112). As in merchant capitalism, the cleverest person is rewarded. Boccaccio uses the story of Massetto and the nuns to mock the supposed morality of the Church and suggest that deception is often necessary for one to achieve his or her goals. Only through deception does Massetto reason he can gain sexual gratification from the nuns in the convent. Believing Massetto to be deaf and dumb, the nuns think they are taking advantage of him even though in reality it is the other way around.

One of the nuns proclaims, “he’s so simple, he’ll do whatever we want” (Boccaccio 190). In his portrayal of the nuns, Boccaccio shows that men are not the only ones who use deception to find success and satisfy their desires. Neither the nuns nor Massetto face any negative consequence for their sin. In fact, Massetto is rewarded with wealth and children “without the trouble or expense of rearing them” (Boccaccio 192). Even though he came from

peasant roots, Massetto, like a successful merchant, finds prosperity through guile and wit.

The tale of Peronella is another story in which Boccaccio shows that the art of deception is not limited by gender. Early on, the storyteller makes a point of saying that, “men may understand that if they can be shrewd, women for their part, are just as sharp” (Boccaccio 472). Multiple times Peronella uses trickery to assert herself as being more intelligent and business savvy than her husband. Not only does she engage in a sexual affair literally right behind his back, but she also deceives him into believing that she sold their wine barrel for more than he was able to procure. With her husband distracted by the pursuit of profit, through her cunningness, Peronella ensures the preservation of her relationship with her lover and builds trust with her gullible husband. Once again, Boccaccio shows that cleverness usually goes unpunished and enables one to transcend the traditional social order.

Through its stories of deception, The Decameron captures, for better or worse, the rise of a new merchant capitalism out of the chaos of the Plague. Boccaccio describes the declining influence of the traditional hierarchy of the Church in favor of a new culture that rewarded individuals who sought to shape their own fate. Work Cited Boccaccio, Giovanni. The Decameron. Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2005.

Print.