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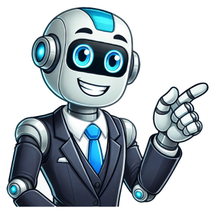

By Dr Oliver Tearle (Loughborough University)The Wife of Bath is one of the most famous characters in all of Chaucers poetry, and The Wife of Baths Tale remains a popular tale from The Canterbury Tales. But what can this tale tell us about medieval attitudes to women and marriage?You can read The Wife of Baths Tale in the original Middle English here before proceeding to our summary and analysis below. The Wife of Baths Tale: plot summaryThe Wife of Bath begins her tale with a long Prologue about herself, and her various marriages: she has had five husbands. She considers various peoples views of marriage but rejects all of them, drawing on her own experience to do so. The picture of her that emerges is a surprisingly spirited and independent woman for the fourteenth century: she has used her sexuality to earn money, and has clearly worn the trousers in many of her marriages, making her husbands lives difficult. She can clearly give as good as she has got where men are concerned, telling us that her fourth husband would lust after other women, but she cheated on him with a friends lodger. When the lecherous husband died, she married the lodger, but he beat her, calling her a wicked wife and using the authority of a conduct manual about good wifely behaviour to tell her off.One day, when he struck her, she pretended to lie down dead, as though he had killed her, and he immediately broke down and swore to be ruled by her if she would only recover. She promptly got up and made him destroy his conduct book. Thereafter, they enjoyed the perfect marriage together. Following this lengthy autobiographical preamble, the Wife of Bath gets around to telling her tale. It is set at the court of King Arthur. A young knight rapes a girl. Although he should be executed for his crime, the king lets the queen decide his fate. The queen gives the young man a year and a day to go and find out what it is women most desire; if he fails, he will be beheaded.The knight leaves the court and travels around for a year, but fails to discover the answer to the queens question. On his way back to the court, ready to submit to his fate and accept his execution, he comes across an old hag in a forest. She tells him that she can give him the answer, but only on condition that he accepts the first request she makes of him. The desperate knight agrees, and the two of them travel back to court together. The hag is presented before the king and queen, and answers the queens question: that what women most desire is to have sovereignty over their husbands and their lovers. The queen reveals that this is the correct answer to the question she posed to the knight, and his life is spared. But then the hag makes her request of him: that he must agree to marry her. He begs her to ask for something else, but she is having none of it. So they are married, and he must go to bed with her.As they prepare to consummate the marriage, the hag lectures the knight on the meaning of true nobility and honour. She then gives him a choice: he can either have a wife who is ugly but faithful, or beautiful but unfaithful. He lets her make the decision, and she is transformed into a beautiful woman who will also be faithful to him: the best of both worlds. Because he has submitted to her will and let her have sovereignty over him, his reward is a wife who is both beautiful and true to him. The Wife of Baths Tale: analysisThe Wife of Bath, when placed alongside Chaucers other female pilgrims and the women who feature in the other stories of The Canterbury Tales, may strike us as more iconoclastic and radical than she actually was. In truth, when Chaucer wrote The Wife of Baths Tale in the late fourteenth century there was already a burgeoning body of anti-marriage literature, whose authors put forward much the same views about women and marriage as the Wife of Bath espouses. Although some of the women in the other tales may seem meek and submissive, paragons of wifely virtue and patience, the Wife of Bath was not a complete outlier in Chaucers society. Rather, like his other pilgrims, she represents a certain type that was common in medieval English society, and embodies it thoroughly.Of course, modern feminist critics can easily detect some serious problems with the plot of The Wife of Baths Tale: a man violates a woman, is then spared death thanks to a woman (the queen), and is then provided with the means to clear himself of all charges thanks to another woman (the hag). He has to give up his freedom and submit to being married to a hideous aged woman whose very touch and appearance he recoils from, but we might well respond that that serves him right, and hes welcome to present his head beneath the executioners axe if he prefers. And in the end, simply by handing over his fate to the woman, he is rewarded with a beautiful and loyal wife. We can hardly view The Wife of Baths Tale as a cautionary tale against male violence towards women, when such a punishment is promised.However, through violating the woman, the knight essentially emasculates himself, so there is something more interesting going on in the gender power dynamics of this tale. In being caught having committed such a horrendous act, he has to submit to the kings judgment, but the queen is instead given the power to decide his fate. He is then dependent on a woman to rescue him and, in a sense, restore his masculinity but only on an even footing with his wife, rather than by having the upper hand. This is what makes The Wife of Baths Tale a startlingly modern tale for twenty-first-century readers: the Wife of Baths own life, and the tale she tells, both offer a vision of marriage in which men and women are given equal power rather than the husband having power over his wife. Subscribe to get the latest posts sent to your email. The Wife of Baths Prologue and Tale represent the conflicting forces of authority versus experience, medieval misogyny versus feminine sexuality, and the irony that arises from a character who seemingly justifies sexist accusations while embracing her independence and choice. As a woman who has been married five times, the Wife of Bath stands in opposition to clerical ideology that idolizes virginity and actively marginalizes women. However, her rather outlandish and almost comedic characterization makes the intent of the text ambiguous. Chaucer conveys the complexity of the Wife of Baths character through the contrast between her empowerment of women and female sexuality, and the usage of antifeminist language and assertions that permeate the tale.One of the dominant principles the Wife argues against is the exaltation of virginity by the Church and society more broadly. In doing so she not only illustrates the functionality and necessity of wives, but also empowers women through the agency and sexual freedom they are given by marriage. Early in the text, the Wife of Bath refutes the history of women being trodden upon by common Biblical stories and societal traditions in general, especially women who do not practice chastity:Lat hem be breed of pured whete seed,And lat us wives hote barly breedAnd yit with barly breed, Mark telle canOure Lord Jesu refresshed many a man.In swich estaat as God hath cleped usI wol persevere: I nam nat precious. (149-154)[1]In this passage the Wife asserts that she does not envy virgins, despite the pedestal they may be placed on. She says that, if virgins are pure wheat bread, then wives are barley: resilient and ubiquitous. She makes an allusion to the miracle of loaves and fishes, in which Jesus fed 5,000 people with loaves of bread and fish. Finally the Wife says that God has called her to this state, and she will persevere because she is not fastidious. Chaucers use of the word persevere is one of the earliest usages of this word, and it supports the idea that the Wife is someone who has endured much and values her experience. This scene is interesting because it rejects attitudes that measure a womans goodness by her virginity. Furthermore, she argues that God has called upon her to assume this position, not of a virgin but of a wife. This presents the idea that marriage is not necessarily an obligatory sin but rather an honorable duty. Additionally, the idea that women can have influence and power beyond their maidenhood is rather empowering during this time. The passage sets up her character within the narrative as someone who values independence, strength, and female agency. However, not long after this scene, included within the Wifes tale are moments in which she appears to be repeating common antifeminist ideals:Under that colour hadde I many a mirthe.For al swich wit is yiven us in oure birthe:Deceite, weeping, spinning God hath yiveTo wommen kindely whil they may live.And thus of oo thing I avaunte me:At ende I hadde the bet in eech degree (405-10)[2]In this section, the Wife of Bath explains the pretense by which she boasts joyfully: God has given her, and women in general, the powers of deception and dishonesty to help them survive. She asserts that At ende I hadde the bet in eech degree, meaning she is proud because she has frequently used trickery to get the better of her foes. Chaucers characterization of the Wife in this moment is ambiguous because she appears to be embracing misogynistic tropes of classic literature. The idea that women are deceitful, using their sexuality to trick men, is reminiscent of antifeminist narratives. However, the complexity of the Wifes character makes it unclear as to whether or not her analysis of women is to be read as sexist, or conversely, as empowering. She could very well be satirizing common stereotypes of women and thus exposing their superficiality. The idea that women are bestowed these characteristics whil they may live indicates that there is a sort of survival aspect to these skills. Women do not have the mobility or respect within society that men do, so they must use the traits God has given them. Nevertheless, Chaucers writing does not seem progressive, regardless of the feminist undertones that modern readers may detect. The Wifes commentary in these lines serves as another facet in the complexity of her character: she is both a liberated woman and beholden to a learned sexism of the time.Later on in the text, the Wife of Bath introduces her fifth marriage, a relationship that challenges her strength and fortitude in many ways. Nevertheless, she seems to persist, and creates a satisfying marriage from the violence she endures. One particularly conflicting scene is the fight, in which her husband beats her for tearing the pages out of his clerical book of wicked wives:That in oure fir he fil bakward adown.And up he sterte as dooth a wood leoun,And with his fist he smoot me on the heedThat in the floor I lay as I were deed. (799-802)[3]The Wife of Baths interactions with her fifth husband seem to be much more entrenched in the visceral and physical aspects of love, rather than contract. He is the most violent, and he laughs as he reads to her from his book of wicked wivesa cruel and spiteful action. This sort of brutal tension culminates in the fight between her and her husband in which he beats her to the point where she goes deaf in one ear. She describes him as a wood leonun, which translates to a raging lion. This image is interesting because lions often carry a certain majestic, or perhaps more fittingly, authoritative message. Despite her husband being much younger than she, he appears to wield great authority in their marriage. The Wife goes on to say that he strikes her so hard upon the head that she falls to the ground as if she were dying. While in a way the Wife initiated the altercation by fearlessly tearing the pages out of her husbands book, it seems at this moment that she has fallen victim to his masculine authority. As a character with unique statusa woman who has had five marriagesthe Wife of Bath seems to be distinguished by her ability to overcome traditional barriers of this time period. Yet, in this moment, granted that it is read as deeply serious, she appears rather vulnerable. Her resistance to misogynistic views, represented by her ripping out the book pages, has left her crumpled on the floor, nearly dead. This scene is then almost directly contradicted by the Wife reasserting her power in the relationship, which adds to Chaucers complex characterization:As help me God, I shal thee nevere smite.That I have doon, it is thyself to wite.Foryif it me, and that I thee biseeke.And yit eftsoones I hitte him on the cheeke,And saide, Thief, thus muchel am I wreke.Now wol I die: I may no longer speke. (811-16)[4]After her husband knocks her to the ground he seems to be genuinely worried that she has died. He even pleads with God that he may never smite her again, a word associated with rather violent religious imagery. She retaliates by striking him on the cheek and declaring that she has been avenged, and now she will die. In essence, the Wife is challenging the power dynamics of the previous scene by securing both the last word and the last punch. This scene is complex because it is unclear how Chaucer wants the reader to interpret the gravity of the violence and its implications. Is the tone entirely serious and the Wife is in fact weakened by the masculinity of her husband? Or is this another comical story in which she assumes an empowered yet outlandish role? The diction suggests that the latter question is present in some form. The Wifes final statement: Now wol I die: I may no longer speke is dramatic, and embellishes the scene as a sort of spectacle. However, there is an underlying darkness that derives from the horror of the scene. The Wife is lying nearly dead on the floor, struck so hard by this man she seems to love that she has gone deaf in one ear. Unlike previous stories the Wife has told, there is a harrowing aspect to this experience. And yet she emerges from the scene still carrying a sort of authority, and as she later attains, sovereignty.Chaucers The Wife of Bath is a consequential and complex tale that holds a unique place within the history of early English literature. To extol the tale as the progressive beginnings of feminist literature would be erranous; however, the Wife can still exist as a powerful heroine within a story of misogyny. She rejects stereotypes about women and sexuality perpetrated by religious men, yet falls victim to their allegations with her idiosyncratic behavior. Is she a creature to be laughed at? Or is she satirizing the shallow ideals of sexism through the use of ironic humor? Ultimately, it is unclear what Chaucers true intention was for The Wife of Bath, but it is clear that he created complexity within her character that makes past and present readers question what it means to be a sovereign woman. The Wife of Bath is dually a target of the conventions she attempts to rise above and a powerful symbol of the agency women are granted when they are given control over their own lives. [1] Geoffrey Chaucer, The Wife of Baths Prologue and Tale, in The Norton Anthology of English Literature, ed. Stephen Greenblatt. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2019), 241.[2] Geoffrey Chaucer, The Wife of Baths Prologue and Tale, in The Norton Anthology of English Literature, ed. Stephen Greenblatt. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2019), 247.[3] Geoffrey Chaucer, The Wife of Baths Prologue and Tale, in The Norton Anthology of English Literature, ed. Stephen Greenblatt. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2019), 256.[4] Geoffrey Chaucer, The Wife of Baths Prologue and Tale, in The Norton Anthology of English Literature, ed. Stephen Greenblatt. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2019), 256.0 ratings0% found this document useful (0 votes)80 viewsThis document contains a summary and analysis of the Wife of Bath's Prologue from Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales. It discusses how the Wife of Bath asserts her experience and justifSaveSave The Wife of Bath's Tale For Later0%0% found this document useful, undefinedGet 1 free answer with LitCharts AINew We're getting everything ready for you. The page is loading, and you'll be on your way in just a few moments. Thanks for your patience! Part of the Canterbury Tales"Wife of Bath" redirects here. For other uses, see Wife of Bath (disambiguation).The Wife of Bath's Tale in the Ellesmere manuscript of The Canterbury Tales, c.14051410."The Wife of Bath's Tale" (Middle English: The Tale of the Wyf of Bathe) is among the best-known of Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. It provides insight into the role of women in the Late Middle Ages and was probably of interest to Chaucer, himself, for the character is one of his most developed ones, with her Prologue twice as long as her Tale. He also goes so far as to describe two sets of clothing for her, in his General Prologue. She calls herself both Alyson and Alys in the prologue, but to confuse matters, these are also the names of her 'gossip' (a close friend or gossip), whom she mentions several times, as well as many female characters throughout The Canterbury Tales.Geoffrey Chaucer wrote the "Prologue of the Wife of Bath's Tale" during the fourteenth century, at a time when the social structure was rapidly evolving,[1] during the reign of Richard II; it was not until the late 1380s to mid-1390s, when Richard's subjects started to take notice of the way in which he was leaning toward bad counsel, causing criticism throughout his court.[2] It was evident that changes needed to be made, within the traditional hierarchy at the court of Richard II; feminist reading of the tale argues that Chaucer chose to address through "The Prologue of the Wife of Bath's Tale" the change in mores that he had noticed, in order to highlight the imbalance of power within a male-dominated society.[3] Women were identified not by their social status and occupations, but solely by their relations with men: a woman was defined as either a maiden, a spouse, or a widow capable only of child-bearing, cooking and other "women's work".[4]The tale is often regarded as the first of the so-called "marriage group" of tales, which includes the Clerk's, the Merchant's and Franklin's tales. But some scholars contest this grouping, first proposed by Chaucer scholar Eleanor Prescott Hammond and subsequently elaborated by George Lyman Kittredge, not least because the later tales of Melibee and the Nun's Priest also discuss this theme.[5] A separation between tales that deal with moral issues and ones that deal with magical issues, as the Wife of Bath's does, is favoured by some scholars.[citation needed]The tale is an example of the "loathly lady" motif, the oldest examples of which are the medieval Irish sovereignty myths such as that of Niall of the Nine Hostages. In the medieval poem, The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, Arthur's nephew, Gawain, goes on a nearly identical quest to discover what women truly want, after he errs in a land dispute, although, in contrast, he never stooped to despoliation or plunder, unlike the unnamed knight who raped the woman. By tradition, any knight or noble found guilty of such a transgression (abuse of power) might be stripped of his name, heraldic title and rights, and possibly even executed.Jodi-Anne George suggests that the Wife's tale may have been written to ease Chaucer's guilty conscience. It is recorded that in 1380, associates of Chaucer stood surety for an amount equal to half his yearly salary for a charge brought by Cecily Champaign for "de rapto, rape or abduction; the same view has been taken of his Legend of Good Women, which Chaucer, himself, describes as a penance.[6]Scholarly work reported in October 2022 refutes this, stating that the court documents from 1380 have been misinterpreted and that mention of "raptus" were related to a labor dispute in which Chaucer hired a Cecily Chaumpaigne, before she was released from her previous employer.[7][8]The Wife of Bath's Prologue is, by far, the longest in The Canterbury Tales and is twice as long as the actual story, showing the importance of the prologue to the significance of the overall tale. In the beginning, the wife expresses her views in which she believes the morals of women are not merely that they all solely desire "sovereignty, but that each individual woman should have the opportunity to make the decision. The Wife of Bath speaks against many of the typical customs of the time, and provides her assessment of the roles of women in society.[1]The Wife of Bath particularly speaks out in defence of those who, like her, have married multiple times. As a counterargument, she mentions many holy men who have had multiple wives:I woot wel Abraham was an holy man, And Iacob eek, as ferforth as I can; And ech of hem hadde wyves mo than two; And many another holy man also. Whan saugh ye ever, in any maner age, That hye God defended mariage By expres word? I pray you, telleth me; Or wher comanded he virginitee?I know well that Abraham was a holy man, and Jacob as well, as far as I know, and each of them had more than two wives, and many other holy men did as well. When have you seen that in any time great God forbade marriage explicitly? Tell me, I pray you, Or where did He order people to remain virgins?[9]In this extract, she addresses why society should not look down on her or any other woman who has wed to multiple men, throughout their life. The tale confronts the double standard and the social belief in the inherent inferiority of women and tries to establish a defense of secular women's sovereignty that opposes the conventions available to her.[10]The Wife of Bath's tale, spoken by one who had been married five times, argues that women are morally identical to men who have also had more than one spouse.[1] Double standards for men and women were common and deeply rooted in culture.A knight in King Arthur's time raped a fair young maiden. King Arthur issues a decree that the knight must be brought to justice. When the knight is captured, he is condemned to death, but Queen Guinevere intercedes, on his behalf, and she asks the King to allow her to pass judgment upon him. The Queen tells the knight that he will be spared his life, if he can discover, for her, what it is that women most desire, and she allots him a year and a day in which to roam wherever he pleases and return with an answer.Everywhere the knight goes, he explains his predicament to the women he meets and asks their opinion, but "No two of those he questioned answered the same." The answers range from fame and riches to play, or clothes, or sexual pleasure, or flattery, or freedom. When, at last, the time comes for him to return to the Court, he still lacks the answer he so desperately needs.Outside a castle in the woods, he sees twenty-four maidens dancing and singing, but when he approaches, they disappear, as if by magic, and all that is left is an old woman. The Knight explains the problem to the old woman, who is wise and may know the answer, and she forces him to promise to grant any favour she might ask of him, in return. With no other options left, the Knight agrees. Arriving at the court, he gives the answer that women most desire sovereignty over their husbands, which is unanimously agreed to be true by the women of the court who, accordingly, free the Knight.The old woman, then, explains to the court the deal she has struck with the Knight, and publicly requests his hand in marriage. Although aghast, he realizes he has no other choice and eventually agrees. On their wedding night, the old woman is upset that he is repulsed by her in bed. She reminds him that her looks can be an assetshe will be a virtuous wife to him, because no other men would desire her. She asks him which one he would preferan old and ugly wife who is true and loyal, or a beautiful and young woman, who may not be faithful. The Knight responds by saying that the choice is hers. Happy that she, now, has the ultimate power, he having taken to heart the lesson of sovereignty and relinquished control, rather than choosing for her, she promises him both beauty and fidelity. The Knight turns to look at the old woman, again, but now, he finds a young and lovely woman. The old woman makes "what women want most" and the answer that she gave true to him, sovereignty.[5]The Wife of Bath ends her tale by praying that Jesus Christ bless women with meek, young, and submissive husbands and the grace to break them.The Wife of Bath's Prologue simultaneously enumerates and critiques the long tradition of misogyny in ancient and medieval literature. As Cooper notes, the Wife of Bath's "materials are part of the vast medieval stock of antifeminism",[11] giving St. Jerome's Adversus Jovinianum, which was "written to refute the proposition put forward by one Jovinianus that virginity and marriage were of equal worth, as one of many examples.[11]As author Ruth Evans notes in her book, "Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: the Wife of Bath and All her Sect,[12] the Wife of Bath embodies the ideology of "sexual economics," wherein described as the "psychological effects of economic necessity, specifically on sexual mores."[12] The wife is described as a woman in the trade of textiles, she is neither upper-class or lower, strictly a middle-class woman living independently off her own profit. The Wife of Bath sees the economics of marriage as a profitable business endeavor, based solely on supply and demand: she sells her body, in marriage, and in return, she is given money in the form of titles and inheritance.[12] She is both the broker and commodity in this arrangement.The Wife of Bath's first marriage occurred at the age of twelve, which highlights the lack of control that girls and women had over their own bodies in medieval Europe, as children were often bartered, in marriage, to increase family status. By choosing her next husbands and subsequently "selling herself," she regains some semblance of control and ownership over her body, and the profit is solely hers to keep.[12]The simple fact that she is a widow who has remarried more than once radically defies medieval conventions. Further evidence of this can be found through her observation: "For hadde, God commanded maydenhede, / Thanne hadde he dampned weddyng with the dede."[13] She refutes Jerome's proposition, concerning virginity and marriage, by noting that God would have condemned marriage and procreation, if He had commanded virginity. Her decision to include God, as a defence for her lustful appetites, is significant, as it shows how well-read she is. By the same token, her interpretations of Scripture, such as Paul on marriage,[14] are tailored to suit her own purposes.[15] [clarification needed]While Chaucer's Wife of Bath is clearly familiar with the many ancient and medieval views on proper female behavior, she also boldly questions their validity. Her repeated acts of remarriage, for instance, are an example of how she mocks "clerical teaching concerning the remarriage of widows".[16] Furthermore, she adds, "a rich widow was considered to be a match equal to, or more desirable than, a match with a virgin of property",[16] illustrating this point by elaborating, at length, concerning her ability to remarry four times, and attract a much younger man.While she gleefully confesses to the many ways in which she falls short of conventional ideals for women, she also points out that it is men who constructed those ideals, in the first place.Who painted the lion, tell me who?By God, if women had written stories,As clerks have within their studies,They would have written of men more wickednessThan all the male sex could set right.[17]That does not, however, mean they are not correct, and after her critique she accepts their validity.[6][clarification needed]Both Carruthers and Cooper reflect on the way that Chaucer's Wife of Bath does not behave as society dictates, in any of her marriages. Through her nonconformity to the expectations of her role as a wife, the audience is shown what proper behaviour, in marriage, should be like. Carruthers' essay outlines the existence of deportment books, the purpose of which was to teach women how to be model wives. Carruthers notes how the Wife's behaviour in the first of her marriages "is almost everything the deportment-book writers say it should not be."[16] For example, she lies to her old husbands about them getting drunk and saying some regrettable things.[18] Yet, Carruthers does note that the Wife does do a decent job of upholding her husbands' public honour. Moreover, deportment books taught women that "the husband deserves control of the wife, because he controls the estate";[19] it is clear that the Wife is the one who controls certain aspects of her husband's behaviour in her various marriages.Cooper also notes that behaviour, in marriage, is a theme that emerges in the Wife of Bath's Prologue; neither the Wife nor her husbands conform to any conventional ideals of marriage. Cooper observes that the Wife's fifth husband, in particular, "cannot be taken as any principle of correct Christian marriage".[20] He, too, fails to exhibit behaviour conventionally expected within a marriage. This can, perhaps, be attributed to his young age and lack of experience in relationships, as he does change at the end, as does the Wife of Bath. Thus, through both the Wife's and her fifth and favorite husband's failure to conform to expected behaviour in marriage, the poem exposes the complexity of the institution of marriage and of relationships, more broadly.As Cooper argues, the tension between experience and textual authority is central to the Prologue. The Wife argues for the relevance of her own marital experience. For instance, she notes that:Unnethe myghte they the statut holde "unnethe" = not easilyIn which that they were bounden unto me. "woot" = knowYe woot wel what I meene of this, pardee! "pardee" = "by God", cf. French "par dieu"As help me God, I laughe when I thynkeHow pitously a-nyght I made hem swynke! (III.20408) "hem" = them; "swynke" = workThe Wife of Bath's first three husbands are depicted as subservient men who cater to her sexual appetites. Her characterisation as domineering is particularly evident in the following passage:Of tribulacion in mariage,Of which I am expert in al myn ageThis is to seyn, myself have been the whippe. (III.17981)The image of the whip underlines her dominant role as the partnership; she tells everyone that she is the one in charge in her household, especially in the bedroom, where she appears to have an insatiable thirst for sex; the result is a satirical, lascivious depiction of a woman, but also of feudal power arrangements.However, the end of both the Prologue and the Tale make evident that it is not dominance that she wishes to gain, in her relation with her husband, but a kind of equality.In the Prologue, she says: "God help me so, I was to him as kinde/ As any wyf from Denmark unto Inde,/ And also trewe, and so was he to me." In her Tale, the old woman tells her husband: "I prey to God that I mot sterven wood,/ But I to yow be also good and trewe/ As evere was wyf, sin that the world was newe."In both cases, the Wife says so to the husband, after she has been given "sovereyntee. She is handed over the control of all the property, along with the control of her husband's tongue. The old woman in the Wife of Bath's Tale is also given the freedom to choose which role he wishes her to play in the marriage.In her essay "The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions," Carruthers describes the relationship that existed between love and economics for both medieval men and women. Carruthers notes that it is the independence that the Wife's wealth provides for her that allows her to love freely.[21] This implies that autonomy is an important component in genuine love, and since autonomy can only be achieved through wealth, wealth, then, becomes the greatest component for true love. Love can, in essence, be bought: Chaucer makes reference to this notion, when he has the Wife tell one of her husbands:Is it for ye wolde have my queynte allone? "queynte" = a nice thing, cf. Latin quoniam, with obvious connotation of "cunt"Wy, taak it al! Lo, have it every deel! "deel" = "part"; plus, the implication of transactionPeter! I shrewe yow, but ye love it weel; "Peter" = St. Peter; "shrewe" = curse; hence: "I curse you if you don't love it well."For if I wolde selle my bele chose, "belle chose": another suggestion of female genitalia (her "lovely thing")I koude walke as fressh as is a rose;But I wol kepe it for youre owene tooth. (III.44449) "tooth" = taste, pleasureThe Wife appears to make reference to prostitution, whereby "love" in the form of sex is a "deal," bought and sold. The character's use of words, such as "dette (debt)"[22] and "paiement (payment)"[23] also portray love in economic terms, as did the medieval Church: sex was the debt women owed to the men that they married. Hence, while the point that Carruthers makes is that money is necessary for women to achieve sovereignty in marriage, a look at the text reveals that love is, among other things, an economic concept. This is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that her fifth husband gives up wealth, in return for love, honour, and respect.The Wife of Bath does take men seriously and wants them for more than just sexual pleasure and money.[24] When the Wife of Bath states, "but well I know, surely, God expressly instructed us to increase and multiply. I can well understand that noble text"[9] to bear fruit, not in children, but financially through marriage, land, and from inheritance when her husbands die;[25] Chaucer's Wife chose to interpret the meaning of the statement by clarifying that she has no interest in childbearing, as a means of showing fruitfulness, but the progression of her financial stability is her ideal way of proving success.While sexuality is a dominant theme in The Wife of Bath's Prologue, it is less obvious that her sexual behaviour can be associated with Lollardy. Critics such as Helen Cooper and Carolyn Dinshaw point to the link between sex and Lollardy. Both describe the Wife's knowledge and use of Scripture, in her justification of her sexual behaviour. When she states that "God bad us for to wexe and multiplye",[26] she appears to suggest that there is nothing wrong with sexual lust, because God wants humans to procreate. The Wife's "emphatic determination to recuperate sexual activity, within a Christian context, and on the authority of the Bible [on a number of occasions throughout the text] echoes one of the points made in the Lollard Twelve Conclusions of 1395".[27] The very fact that she remarries, after the death of her first husband, could be viewed as Chaucer's characterisation of the Wife as a supporter of Lollardy, if not necessarily a Lollard, herself, since Lollards advocated the remarriage of widows.[28]Author Alistair Minnis makes the assertion that the Wife of Bath is not a Lollard, at all, but was educated by her late husband, Jankyn, an Oxford-educated clerk, who translated and read aloud anti-feminist texts.[29] Jankyn gave her knowledge far beyond what was available to women of her status, which explains how she can hold her own, when justifying her sexual behavior to the Canterbury group. Further, Minnis explains that "being caught in possession of a woman's body, so to speak, was an offense, in itself, carrying the penalty of a life-sentence",[29] showing a perception that in medieval Europe, women could not hold priestly duties on the basis of their sex and no matter how flawless her moral status was, her body would always bar her from the ability to preach the word of God. Minnis goes on to say that "it might well be concluded that it was better to be a secret sinner than a woman,"[29] as a sinful man could always change his behavior and repent, but a woman could not change her sex.In an effort to assert women's equality with men, the Wife of Bath states that an equal balance of power is needed, in a functional society.[1] Wilks proposes that through the sovereignty theme, a reflection of women's integral role in governance compelled Chaucer's audience to associate the Wife's tale with the reign of Anne of Bohemia.[30] By questioning universal assumptions of male dominance, making demands in her own right, conducting negotiations within her marriages, and disregarding conventional feminine ideals, Chaucer's Wife of Bath was ahead of her time.The Wife of Bath's Tale reverses the medieval roles of men and women (especially regarding legal power), and it also suggests a theme of feminist coalition-building. Appointed as sovereign and judge over the convicted knight, the Queen holds a type of power given to men in the world outside the tale. She has power, as judge over the knight's life.[31] Author Emma Lipton writes that the Queen uses this power to move from a liberal court to an educational court.[32] In this sense, the court is moving beyond punishment for the offense, and it, now, puts a meaning behind the offense, tying it to consequences. In the tale, the Queen is a figurehead for a feminist movement, within a society that looks much like the misogynistic world in which the Canterbury Tales are told.[32] From this tale's feminist notion that the Queen leads, women are empowered, rather than objectified. The effect of feminist coalition-building can be seen through the knight. As a consequence for the knight's sexual assault against the maiden, when the old woman asks the Queen to allow the knight to marry her, the Queen grants it. This shows support for the broader female community's commitment to education in female values. In response to this fate, the knight begs the court and the Queen to undo his sentence, offering all his wealth and power: "Take all my goods, and let my body go,"[33] which the Queen does not allow. The knight's lack of agency, in this scene, demonstrates a role reversal, according to Carissa Harris, in juxtaposition to women's lack of agency in situations of rape.[34]Pasolini adapted the prologue of this tale in his film The Canterbury Tales.[35] Laura Betti plays the wife of Bath and Tom Baker plays her fifth husband.Zadie Smith adapted and updated the prologue and story for the Kiln Theatre in Kilburn in 2019 as The Wife of Willesden, a play which ran from November 2021 to January 2022.[35]Karen Brookes has written a book based on the tale, The Good Wife of Bath, as has Chaucer scholar Marion Turner in The Wife of Bath: A Biography.[35]Blaesilla, on whom the tale is partly based.Bacon in the fabliaux a figurative use of bacon echoed by Chaucer^ a b c d "Jonathan Blake. 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