**The Wife of Bath**

The wife of Bath is one of the several pilgrims going to Canterbury. She is introduced in the General Prologue to Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. The only piece of information the reader can have from the title is that she comes from Bath. He or She also understands her social status for the word “Wife”.

The woman’s characterisation is built up resorting to different aspects of her personality. In the present paragraph I’m going to illustrate the ways the narrator exploits in order to bring the woman to surface. The first reference plays on irony, since Chaucer immediately informs the reader that she is “somewhere deaf”. He also tells about her origins: she comes from Bath or the near about and besides he appreciates her skills in clothes making. He also adds that she could compete with the dress-makers from “Ypres and Ghent” to important towns famous for their clothes and materials in Finnish countries. The language used relies on a rhyming scheme that ties lines together that is the rhyming couplet. The reader’s attention is immediately drawn by the narrator’s choice of the typical incipit of fable, when he says “there was ...” also he exploits word order’s relation when he says “At making clothes, she had a skilful hand” which rimes with Ghent.

On a second moment the narrator indirectly underlines her ambition and vanity: he tells the reader that nobody in the parish dared to go and proceed in the provided in the offerings because if somebody did so, she would immediately get angry. Such behaviour shows the woman was not really interested in charity but she rather enjoyed always being in the front on the stage. The characterisation develops with reference to the way she dresses and the narrator focuses the reader’s attention on two aspects of her dressing style: the first one “her head dresses wear of finest wave and ground” highlights the fine quality of her style of wearing, but immediately after words he parodies it because he informs that “they weigh about ten pounds”. Farther more he makes it loud and clear that she use to doing this on Sunday, that is on the day when she went to mass ad this employs she wanted that everybody to look at her. In a way or another the narrator’s judgement unveils the double nature of the woman’s behaviour. Also when the narrator describes the stockings she would wear he insists on the colour red “the finest scarlet red” makes the effect exaggerated and therefore ridiculous. The colour is additional way to underline that whatever the woman did is in excess and therefore once again, the narrator wants to convey a rather critical point of view about the woman to whom he always refers with the noun of “Wife of Bath”. The intelligent reader wonders why a married woman should choose a dressing style just for the pleasure to focus everybody’s attention on her in the style of today’s velines, probably she was more interested in attracting men’s attention than any other possible matter. The idea is immediately confirmed by the narrator’s description of the way she wore her stockings, which he says were “tightly fastened”. He also insists on the money she uses to spend on her physical appearance which makes the lady daring and rich, this induces the intelligent reader to understand that the narrator sets the character among the Merchant, in the middle class, one that has risen consistently in that period.

Again the narrator plays on the woman’s personality in lines 460 since he speaks of her as “of a bold” and “fear” and this is the point of irony “red of view”.

The Wife of Bath is a woman of excesses even in marriage since she has already had five husbands. The narrator parodies the figure of the woman when he says “she has been respectable throughout her life” and even when he tells the reader that all her weddings had been religious ones “married in church”, he seems to suggest that as a man there is a high risk to court her. Irony is underline also when the narrator reinforces the woman’s worldly attitude adding “not counting other company in youth”. Irony is underline also when the narrator concludes his consideration about the Wife of Bath’s reputation saying that there is not even need to discuss about her behaviour.

The characterisation makes now reference to the woman’s passion for travelling.: she seems to be continually moving around two world, considered that she has been in Jerusalem, Rome, Boulogne, Saint James and Cologne, all places connected to the idea of religion in that they are all sites of pilgrimage. But no such spiritual bent comes out of Chaucer lines as for the Wife’s spirituality and therefore the intelligent reader may rightly suppose she has exchanged religious sites for touristic resources. The insistence in cataloguing pilgrimage’s sites adds to the narrator’s irony because it sounds rather improbable that a still young woman of the period could have visited all those places. The Wife’s desire to talk and talk with men in particular comes immediately to surface at line 469 when the narrator plays on her pleasure to tell of her wandering. The narrator does not hide the double-faced nature of the woman’s behaviour since he metaphorically parodies the way she sits on a horse, it looks more as a trophy. In addition the narrator focuses the reader’s attention on her exaggerated style of dressing even on a horse, he seems to ridicule the woman openly in lines 472-473 once again reinforcing the idea he had intended that in line 407 focusing on her being “gap tooth”.

The characterisation ends highlighting all of the woman’s wise attitude in giving advice on love matters and the conclusion sticks in the intelligent reader’s mind because Chaucer plays on repetitive double senses to let the reader known the Wife of Bath is not at all the respectable woman she professes to be.

After a careful reading activity of the Wife of Bath’s characterisation one can rightly assert that in order to make the character memorable the poet plays with different literary devices that ranged from the intentionally use of the rhyming couplet to the use of a metaphorical language to indirectly unveils aspects of the woman’s personality that were not openly excepted during the Middle Age. Indeed the Wife of Bath seems to exhibit all the features that would make men be afraid of women with straight forward methods. In Chaucer’s opinion such a woman from Bath was clearly object of desire that he rather portraits as a toy of pleasure.

Surely she did not at all represent the kind of woman approved on by the mentality of the time: a “gap tooth” quality, a “buttocks large”, her skill indeed “all dons” make her a memorable character.

**BONNY BARBARA ALLEN**

The title focuses the reader’s attention on her proper name: the one of the girl. It also relies on alliteration of the sound “B” (“Bonny Barbara”). The reader may be curious to find out why the poet decide to write a ballad about a young girl.

Considering the layout the intelligent reader realizes that the poem is arranged to the into 8 stanzas of 4 lines each that is of 8 quatrains. From the analysis he or she can realizes that the name Barbara Allen recourses/is repeated 5 times in 8 stanzas and therefore he or she may now realize that not only is Barbara Allen the focus of the text but this is also repeated like a refrain.

In addition, the reader notices that all the line 4 rhymed and therefore expects repetition is a significant figure of the poem. It recourses features of a song.

The ballad is set in Autumn and tells about Sir John’s love for Barbara Allen, a young lady living in the countryside. He is going to die and he wants to meet the girl one last time and that is why he sends his men to ask Barbara to go and visit him. The lady is reluctant to go but she accept to see him at last. Unfortunately she tells him that his death would be better for her, she reminds him one dinner they were together, when he drunk so much and he was probably poisoned. His head he said was going round and round. It doesn’t take long for him to die and therefore he says goodbye to all his friends and asks them to be kind with Barbara. As soon as he left Barbara started to realize/to be aware that she was sad for his death. The tragic atmosphere is highlighting by dead bell of the town where Sir John use to live. The bells need to cry Sir John.

A connotative analysis of the sounds of the text/level of sounds displays the poet has resorted to frequent sound’s devices to make the text memorable and to focus on the tragic atmosphere of the story. He managed to get this effect by means of frequent use of the refrain: Barbara Allen is repeated over and over again, so that the listener or the dancer cannot forget that the protagonist of the text and the keeper of Sir John’s love is a young girl who has also the symbolic name of Barbara because it is the reason why the aristocratic man of the town is on the point of dying, Barbara is not only Barbara, she is also bonny. The informed reader indeed knows also that bonny means both beautiful and nice at looking and vigorous and strong and to tell the truth Barbara will survive even if she will eventually suffer while Sir John despites all his possibilities been he among all the thing an aristocrat.

This explains for the ballad to be tragic love story. It conforms to all the convections of the Middle Ages. Both of the social and cultural level and on the literary level. According to the social standards of the time, it was always women the ones were cruel and guilty, if they didn’t follow men’s expectations. Indeed during the Middle Ages and even later as well you can’t find no literary words, which deals with women’s tragic pain.

If you consider the semantic level of the ballad you will easily realize it is written in a very simple language so that the common people may understand it, the ballad also displays the use of dialect and the Scottish dialect to be more precise. The tragic love story is deal set in Autumn, at “Martinmas time”.

The choice of using the expression/phrase “Martinmas time” returns to the reader the idea of the importance of the religious code in society. Also it underlines how ordinary life was ruled by the cycles of nature. In order to create the settings and with the aim to introduce the characters the narrator provides the reader with just a few scathe the tear anyway enough to suggest scene and the situation.

You can understand that if you consider that “at Martinmas time” (line 1) and line 2, suffice to create the seasonal background. As for the characters the narrator adopts the same style: one of the protagonist is simply Sir John Graeme in the West Country.

The ballad starts in a way similar a fable, thus drawing immediately the attention of the reader. Indeed “It was in and about ...” reminds the convectional “once upon time”. The idea to use simple language to reach the audience is functional to create a mind picture of the story told. Consider for example the following lexical idioms: “country” (line 3), “town” (line 5), “place” (line 6 and 10), they are all together words easy to remember and very clear in the minds of the listener. There is not descriptive intent here: what matters here is the story and therefore narration and situation. What the composer is looking for is to allow the listeners of the ballad to create a very clear idea of what is going on in society and to be more precise the society of two time, and where and when there was a rigid and strict/clear cut division in social classes. If they weren’t so there wouldn’t be no need for the narrator to use 3 words to refer to a character who is only sketched. In the same way the listener comes across Barbara Allen who is not simply Barbara.

**I FIND NO PEACE**

Right from the start the intelligent reader can hear that repetition of the sound “I”, that is an assonance in the title of the sonnet, which may recall the sound of a cry. I find no peace underlines the sound “I”. The reader is curious go to find out the reason why the speaking voice can find no peace. The title itself underlines the frustrated resource of peace of the speaking voice since there is an absolute negation: the poet doesn’t say he cannot find any peace rather he asserts means to stayed vigorously that there is no peace in his life. The question that might move the reader in reading the text.

The layout clearly shows that the text is a sonnet since it is organized into 4 stanzas: 2 quartets and 2 tercets. The typical structure of the Petrarchan sonnet. Therefore he respect he will discover about the poet’s complex situation in octave, that is in the first 2 stanzas (2 quatrains) and a possible solution in the two tercets. Indeed the sestet ends the poem which is of course a lyrical one: just looking at the text without even reading it, the reader will see the identity of the subject pronoun “I” and this is what makes him or she expects to read something lyrical, something personal, and private. In the first quatrain the speaking voice seems to have come to a sort of resignation after a long battle with himself in order to find peace . But it sound as if he hadn’t been able to. To tell the truth he says that he hopes burns and freezes, thus conveying contradictory emotions. He also say something that might sound absurd: he lies but he cannot rise. At the same time he says he has “naught” and “all the world he seizes on. After the denotation analysis of the first stanza the intelligent reader notes the all the lines are based on contrast as the organising principle: “find no peace” is in contrast with “war is done”, “fear” is in contrast with “hope” and “burn” and “freeze” are opposites. The principle he has chosen helps readers almost to feel the complex emotional situation the poet is living. In addition the poet relies on hyperbole both in lines 3-4 to make is mood more lively and involving: how can a person “fly above the wind” and at the same time being unable to “arise”. This is a paradox and the same paradox comes back again in line 4 where the language deviation “and naught I have” seems to be in total contradiction with the second part of the line where the speaking voice says “”all the world I size on”.

The analysis of the stanza perfectly helps understand the almost vivid emotional suffering of the speaking voice, in that the reader feels he can almost perceive the pain of the speaker. The stylistic choices based on contrast bring together opposing words and feelings that are typical of an inner struggle. Therefore the next step he or she wants to take is to find out what the matter is with him and he has to read on as far as line 11 to discover the mystery, since only there he will come across the reason of the tragic situation “I love another, and thus I hate myself”. The curiosity of the reader to be satisfied has to follow the climatic construction of the sonnet since it is only at line 11 that the poet unveils the reason and the mystery of his apparently contradictory feelings: one which all lovers may experiment.

**SONNET 18**

The sonnet I’m going to analyze is the sonnet 18. It was written by William Shakespeare and it belongs to a collection of sonnets. From a first reading you can immediately perceive/realize the speaking voice is addressing (si rivolge) to an unknown you (“thee”). The sonnet starts posing an immediate question: the speaker wonders whether he has to compare the unknown you to a Summer’s day. The intelligent reader would like to know the reason why the speaking voice asks the question and it is such curiosity that makes him or her go on reading to find out the identity of the addressee (destinatario) the reason for such comparison.

To satisfy his or her curiosity the reader goes on reading to find a possible answer and understands the sonnet exploits the Elizabethan or Shakespearean structure to send/to convey/to communicate its message.

Indeed, the sonnet is organized into 3 quatrains and a rhyming couplet and therefore he or she expects to discover the 3 different aspects of a problem or situation the poet is going to present in 3 quatrains and the possible solution the speaking voice is probably advancing in the final rhyming couplet.

The question the speaking voice asks is of course a rhetoric question since the speaker does not wait for an answer and therefore there is no communicate gap in the text. The answer immediately makes clear the addressee is better and superior to a Summer’s day because during the Summer temperature is often hot while the unknown you is “more lovely and more temperate” (line 2). Right from the very first line of the answer it appears that the speaking voice plays on the mysterious you’s superiority.: the repetition of more and more on one side present an addressee who is full of positive and pleasure values on the other creates a phonological parallelism thus highlighting the positive qualities of the unknown you, who is magnified right from the very beginning. The speaker has no doubt he is better than a season when nature is most. Indeed Summer has got its own natural cycle and therefore lasts for a short time, at the same time “rough winds do shake the darling buds of May”, while the relationship the poet referring to is more balanced.

Shakespeare exploits the semantic field of nature to develop his argumentation. He justified his rhetorical question in a long comparison where his beloved addressee always wins the competition “Summer”, “Winds”, “Buds”, “Summer”, “Heaven”, together create the background to which his beloved addressee is continually compared and whose destiny is always better.

The intelligent reader also realizes that the poet’s stylistic choice to employ the semantic field of nature on one side the field of time on the other (“day”, “More and more”, “May”, “Lease”, “Too short”, “A date”, “Sometimes”, “Often”, “Sometime”, “Declines”, “Eternal Summer”) helps and adds the development of the problematic situation is going to express.

**My Galley, Charged with Forgetfulness**

Right from the first line of the sonnet that coincides with the title, the reader expects to read about a sad situation, considered that the poet uses the verb “to charge” that carries a negative connotation. The verb “To charge” is generally connected to something heavy or price you have to pay. Also the contemporary reader wonders why the poet uses the justness opposition “galley” and “forgetfulness” since one word is a concrete word while “forgetfulness” connects to an abstract mental activity. Therefore the reader is mend tries to find out/to discover the reason for such associations of words. The reading process will unveil the mystery: the galley is a symbol for the speaking voice’s life, one particular difficult that is compared to the crossing of “sharp seas in winter nights”. The comparison underlines the difficult period the speaker is undergoing (attraversando) is a long one, since the poet uses the plural (“Nights”), the mood conveyed is negative, heavy and totally pessimistic, since the words closed always refer to a see that seems to be by a tempest. The semantic fields of the “sharp seas” and “Winter nights” is suitable to being to surface the private, inner and sad feelings of a speaking voice that seems hopeless and powerless, in front such environment. Most of Western literature exploits the image of the tempest or the shipwreck refer to difficult phases in people’s life. The first quatrain refers exactly to such a situation: there is an inner enemy, one inside the speaker that makes his life difficult and “heavy” without light (“Winter nights”) the voice of the quatrain seems to been asking for help in front of his enemy’s cruelness.

It goes without saying that justify the existence of the sonnet is the private conflict the man of the galley is fighting between “rock and rock” that is the impossibility of communication, it follows that the speaking voice is paradoxically one that cannot speak. He is not in control of himself “My lord steereth with cruelness”.

The second quatrain repeats the retrials the same feeling of uneasiness of the speaking voice that, again sounds obsessed by incessant thoughts about his enemy. In the line “Every oar a thought in readiness as doth that death”. The desperate mood of the speaker is almost tangible. A series of stylistic choices makes vivid such desperation. It is conveyed by means of hyperbolic description such as “Endless wind”, “tear the sail”, “Forced sighs” and “Treaty fearfulness”.

A careful analysis of the semantic choices makes clear/clarifies that there is a gradual linguistic transformation: from a concrete use of lexis the poet moves to the emotional sphere of the speaking voice with the purpose to have the reader feel exactly what the lines suggest.

Now the sonnet shows its “volta”, but it is not a positive one, indeed the sestet provides a totally tragic ending since the speaking voice does not seems to see any possibly way out to his personal situation, which is clearly asserted in the last line where the use of the verb “Remain despairing” seems to tie (legare) present and future without any credible solution.

The poet works intelligently on language relying on hyperbolic expressions/phrases like “a rain of tears”, thus attributed human qualities of a nature’s aspect as well as the expression “a cloud of dark disdain” underlines once again the obsession of the speaking voice. Alliteration of “R” sound and sound “D” makes all together such feelings almost concrete.

Even rhyme helps such suggestion since it connects “Eke with ignorance”, a word choice that was anticipated by the choice of “Error”. The speaker feels unable to cope with personal situation and this pessimistic mood and living justify the ending line.

Interesting is also to notice the association “The stars”, “Led me to this pain”. It underlines again that the speaking voice’s enemy is unreturned love, a lord (line 4) that drives his galley with cruelty, there is a perfect symmetry between the octave and the sestet as far as coherence. The syntactical deviation of the second line of the last tercet clearly expresses/makes visible the speaker’s obsession since the key position of the verb “drowned” brings even more to surface historical inability to use reason and since it cannot make a reason his leading stars he cannot even hope to reach his beloved lady’s heart, in short he “Remain despairing of the port”. The sonnet ends with a metaphor where “the port” becomes the symbol for the lady that has made him one whose life (“My galley”) is “charged with forgetfulness”.