**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.