**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 can also understand her social status from the word “wife”.

The woman 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 Geoffrey Chaucer immediately informs the reader that she is “somewhat deaf”. He also tells about her origin: she comes from bath or the near about. And besides he prizes her skill in clothes making. He also adds that she could compete with the dress-makers from “Ypres and Ghent”, two important towns famous for their clothes and materials in the Finnish countries.

The language used relies on a rhyme scheme that ties lines together that is the rhyming couplet. The reader’s attention is immediately drown by the narrator’s choice of the typical incipit of fables when he says “There was”. Also he exploits word order the reversal when he says “at making clothes she had a skilful hand” because this is not the ordinary word order. In this way the stressed part of the line is “had a skilful hand” which rhymes 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 precede her 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 to be in the front or on the floor/stage.

The characterisation proceeds/goes on/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 of finest woven ground”) highlights the ??? of her style of wearing but immediately after he parodies it because he informs that they weighed a good ten pound.

Furthermore he makes it loud and clear that she used to doing this on Sundays that is on the day when she went to mass and this implies that she wanted 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/presents her stocking she would wear he insists on the colour red: “the finest scarlet red” makes the effect exaggerated and therefore ridiculous.

The colour is an additional way to underline that whatever the woman did was in excess and therefore once again the narrator wants to convey a critical point of view about the woman to whom he always refers with the noun “The wife of”.

The intelligent reader wonders why a married woman should choose addressing style just under pleasure to focus everybody’s attention on her in the style of today’s “veline”.

Probably she was more interests in attracting men’s attention than in any other possible matter.

The idea is immediately confirmed by the narrator’s description of the way she wore stockings.

He also insists on the money she used to spend on her physical appearance which makes the lady daring and rich. This allows the intelligent reader to understand that the narrator sets the character among the merchants in the middle class, one that had risen constantly in that period.

Again the narrator plays on the woman’s personality since he speaks of her as of a “bold” and “fair”, and this is again the point of irony “red in hue”.

The Wife of Bath is a woman of excesses eve in marriage since she has already had five husbands.

The narrator paradises the figure of the woman when he says “she had 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 underlined also when the narrator reinforces the woman’s worldly attitude adding “not counting other company in youth”. The narrator concludes his consideration about “The Wife of Bath” 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 the world considered that she has been in Jerusalem, Rome, Boulogne, St James of Compostella and Cologne. All places connected with the idea of religion in that they’re all sites of pilgrimages. But not such spiritual bent comes out of Chaucer’s lines as for the wife spirituality and therefore the intelligent reader may rightly suppose she has exchanged religious sites for touristic resorts. The insistence of cataloguing pilgrimage sites adds to the narration irony, because it sounds rather impossible 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 479 when the narrator plays on her pleasure to tell other wondering. The narrator doesn’t hide the double-faced nature of the woman’s behaviour since he metaphorically paradises the way she sits on a horse. She 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 alluded at line 407 focusing on her being “gap-teeth”.

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

After a careful reading activity of the Wife of Bat’s characterisation one can rightly state that in order to make the character memorable the poet plays with different literary devices that range from the intentional rules of the rhyming couplet to the use of metaphorical language to indirectly unveil aspects of the woman’s personality that were not openly accepted during the middle ages.

Indeed the Wife of Bath seems to exhibit all the features that would make men be afraid of women with straight ???. In Chaucer’s opinion such a woman from Bath was clearly an object of desire that he rather present as a toy of pleasure.

Surely she did not at all represent the lend of woman approved of by the mentality of the time: her “gap-teeth” quality, her skill in the “old dance” make her a memorable character.