

## 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 could also understand her social status from the word "Wife".

The woman's characterization is built up resorting to different aspects of her personality. In this 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 she's "somewhat deaf". He also tells about her origin: she comes from Bath or near roundabout and precise 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 material in the Flemish countries.

The language used relies on a rhyming scheme that ties together the rhyming couplet. The reader's attention is immediately drawn by the narrator's choice of typical incipit of fable, when he says "There was...". Also he exploits word order deviation when he says "at making clothes she had a skillful hand" because this is not the ordinary word order. In this way the stressed part of this line is "had a skillful hand" that rhymes with "Ghent". In 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 her in the offerings because if somebody did so she was immediately get angry. Such behavior shows the woman was not really interested in charity, but she rather enjoyed always to be in the front of the stage. The characterization goes on 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 had-dresses were of the finest weave and ground") highlights the good quality of her point of wearing but immediately after words he parodies it because he informs that "they weighted about ten pounds". Further more, he makes it cloud and clear that she used doing this on Sunday that is on the day when she went to mess and this employes she want everyone loos at her. In a way or another the narrators judgment unveils the double matcher of the woman's behavior . Also when the narrator presents the stockings she would wear he insists on the color red:"the finest scarlet red" makes the effect exaggerated therefore ridiculous. The color is an additional way to underline that whatever the woman did was in excess and therefore once again the narrator wants to convey a rather critical point of view about the woman to whore always refers with the noun "The Wife of Bath". The intelligent reader wanders why a married woman should chose a dressing style just for the pleasure to focus everybody's attention on her in the style of today's veline. Probably she was more interested to attracting men 's attention than any other possible matter- The idea is immediately confirmed by the narrator's description on the way she wore her stockings which he says wear "tightly festered". He also insists on the money she used to spent 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 class in the middle clothes, one that had risen consistently in that period. Again the narrator plays on the woman's personality in lines 460 since he speaks of her as a "bold" and "fear" and this is again the point of irony ("red and hue"). The Wife of Bath is a woman of excess 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 once ("married in church"). He seems to suggest that as a man there is high risk to court. Irony is underlined also when the narrator reinforces the woman's worldly attitude adding "not counting other company in youth".

The characterization makes now reference to the woman's passion for traveling: she seems to be continually moving around to world, considered that she has been in Jerusalem, Rome, Boulogne, Santiago and Cologne, all places connected to the idea of religion, in that they're all sites of pilgrimage. But no such spiritual bent comes out of Chaucer's line as for the Wife's spirituality and therefore the intelligent reader may right suppose she has exchanged religious sites for touristic resorts. The insistence in cataloging pilgrimage sites that a still young woman of the period could

have visited all those places. The woman's desire to talk with men in particular comes immediately to surface at line 469 when the narrator places on her pleasure to tell of her wandering.

The narrator does not hide the double-faced nature of the woman's behavior since he metaphorically parodies the way she sits on a horse. She looks like a trophy. In addition the narrator focuses the reader's attention on her exaggerated style of dressing even on an horse. He seems to ridicule the woman openly in line 473 once again reinforcing the idea he had intended at line 467 focusing on her being "gap – toothed".

The characterization 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 places 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 on the Wife of Bath characterization one can rightly assert that in order to make the character memorable the poet places with different literary devices that range from the international use 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's strange forward manners.

In Chaucer's opinion such a woman from Bath was clearly an object of desire that he rather portrays as a toy of pleasure.

Surely she did not at all represent the kind of woman not approved by the time: her "gap – toothed" quality, her buttocks large, her skill in the "old dance" make her a memorable character.