

THE WIFE OF BATH LANGUAGE

- ★ It is a poetic narrative written in rhyming couplets of iambic pentameter.
- ★ The text is not really set in isolation but forms a tiny part of a much larger whole, 'The Canterbury Tales'.

MULTIPLE NARRATOR

- 👤 We see featuring an 'unreliable narrator'; one whose personal viewpoint means that the audience cannot accept or trust anything.
- 👤 There is also layers of narrative taking place. The issue is deciding how far Chaucer endorses the Wife's views and how far he is using her to represent views that are his own.

STRUCTURE:

- 🕒 The imbalance between the prologue and the tale makes it seem that the tale is a kind of exemplum that the Wife uses to reinforce her message.
- 🕒 There are also 2 immediate contexts; the first is the Wife speaking to other pilgrims on the journey and the second is the narrative being placed as just 1 part of a much wider examination of important themes.
- 🕒 At first glance the prologue seems unstructured and rambling. But it can be broken down into carefully crafted series of sections. It starts with her views on the nature of marriage and then builds upon with accounts of her husbands and culminating to the treatment of her last one.
- 🕒 The brief interruptions by other pilgrims emphasise the nature of the text and remind the audience that they are listening to a dramatic monologue.
- 🕒 The tale leads us to expect a courtly tale of knightly endeavour but expectation is instantly broken by the rape.
- 🕒 The 100 digression on 'gentillesse' which takes up a quarter of the tale may seem strange but it would have been commonplace for a medieval audience who would expect to hear moral 'sermoning'.

LANGUAGE IN THE VERSE:

- 📖 The meter is iambic pentameter.
- 📖 The key lines are arranged into pairs called heroic couplets
- 📖 'iambic' refers to the rhythm; a repeated pattern of 2 syllables with the first stressed and the second unstressed. 'Pentameter' means that 5 feet are joined together to make a 10-syllable regular line.
- 📖 Iambic rhythm is closest to natural speech.

THE WIFE'S LANGUAGE:

- 🗨️ She is fast-talking, breezy and chatty
- 🗨️ The illusion is created of an ordinary woman speaking conversationally, despite the rhyming couplet form.