

THE WIFE OF BATH NOTES

ANALOGUES

An analogue is a version of a story that is similar to another one.

However, in the Tale Chaucer deliberately changes crucial aspects that would be similar to normal tales:

1. The knight is a member of Arthur's court, and is never named. (leaving him anonymous diminishes him and makes him a representative male"
2. The knight rapes a young maiden. (This is the most explicit indicator of male dominance, and the fact it was committed by a knight makes it more heinous)
3. The queen intervenes to save the knight's life. (Power over the man's fate is placed in female hands)
4. The knight first encounters 24 beautiful dancing ladies. (It strengthens the suggestion that women have the power – 24 is a magical number)
5. The knight is not permitted to try other answers, only the hag's. (Choice is removed from the knight whereas, in the usual analogues of normal tales, whole books of answers are drawn up and tried before referring to the hag).
6. She accompanies him back to Arthur's court. (women is exerting further control)
7. The offer of a beautiful or ugly wife introduces a moral element, but a much sharper one than in the analogues.
8. There is no suggestion that the woman has been enchanted by a wicked stepmother (the hag is in command of her own destiny).

THEMES:

1. Experience rather than "authorities" (authorities) such as the Bible

- ✦ Authority is a key word in understanding medieval texts as medieval people had to upmost respect for authority, especially the authority of the bible.
- ✦ The choice of "experience" as the opening word in the prologue is significant as she states she does not need the back up of 'authorities'. Yet she then immediately starts to cite these authorities.
- ✦ The whole of the prologue and tale thus becomes a conflict between the traditional claims of authority and the practical claims of experience.

2. "Maistrie" – Mastery.

- Thematically, it is a constant obsession for the Wife in her prologue and the core of the tale.
- The concept of "maistrie" is used specifically in terms of the relationship between men and women and especially within marriage.

Charlie cooper

- She believes one of the partners must be dominated and sets out to prove that this should be the woman
- The word “maistrie” itself is used three times in the prologue and tale (lines 818, 1040, 1236)
- She first uses it at the end of her prologue and the other two at the end of her tale. These placements are significant as they act as conclusions to the Wife’s arguments.
- From an early stage she makes it clear that she seeks domination over her husbands, not equality. She revels in her sexual mastery over her first three husbands.
- Both Jankin and the knight eventually voluntarily submit which emphasises that the women’s “maistrie” is total.
- Medieval England was a Catholic Christian country and marriage was one of the central sacraments – the most holy state was chastity. The alternative was marriage. Sex outside marriage (adultery) was a sin and meant eternal damnation of the soul. Divorce was not permitted. Within the marriage, the man was the master and the wife promised obedience to him. Almost all rulers were also men. Women were often seen as weak; an attitude derived ultimately from the story of Adam and Eve.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE AUDIENCE IN CHAUCER’S TIME

- 🌟 It is important to remember that medieval audiences would have responded differently as their values and expectations would have been different. Essentially, the whole of the audience would have been Catholic.
- 🌟 The audience may have been amused by her outrageous and outspoken views, but they would have been in no doubt that she was flouting the morality of the church. Their views would have been conditioned by their views about the place and role of women in society; that women were inferior and subservient to men.
- 🌟 The audience would also have had different views about the nature and role of literature; almost all medieval literature was expected to have a purpose. It usually had a moral or direct religious purpose.
- 🌟 They would have seen the Wife as a representative figure who embodies all the kinds of vices and faults that so many medieval authorities ascribed to women.
- 🌟 Many of the women would have responded positively and enjoyed the comedy. Few may have gone on to wish for the reversal of male and female roles.