

## Summary of WIFE OF BATH TEXT ANALYSIS

- ✧ She was first married at 12 and got married inside the church which shows her wealth
- ✧ She understood that virginity was the most blessed state but felt it was better to marry than burn with passion
- ✧ She believed monogamous marriage was also good but questions where in the bible it states women should only marry once.
- ✧ Chaucer's audience would recognise the biblical references and the way the Wife has interpreted them her own way
- ✧ She argues that if there was no procreation there would be no virgins and that God told her to go fourth and multiply (however, ironically she has no children). She feels her sexual organs are there to be used (this is on dangerous grounds as the medieval church condemned sex for pleasure)
- ✧ She calls the male sexual organ his "sely instrument" – sely can mean blessed and the Wife could use this adjective to reject the notion that the sexual parts of the body are corrupting and shameful
- ✧ She says her husband owes her a debt and so they shall have sex whenever she says
- ✧ She clearly shows some of Chaucer's own knowledge because as a Wife of her status, she would not have had all the knowledge that she does
- ✧ The Pardoner interrupts and there is dramatic irony as the Pardoner, a gifted and fluent speaker, is silenced so quickly by a woman.
  
- ✧ Her first three husbands were "goode" because they were "riche and olde" → this enables the Wife to dominate them. They will soon die too, showing the Wife is only interested in the material gain from marriage
- ✧ The fact that she is proud of her behaviour perhaps shows that Chaucer wanted to criticise the Wife
- ✧ She lists all the ways men restrain women, especially because of their looks
- ✧ The only way she can gain independence is through her sexuality and selling her body – she can only gain wealth through marriage
- ✧ She references a Folk tale of the "tell-tale bird" where the woman is portrayed as scheming, but the Wife argues that wives should learn from this story.
- ✧ The Wife argues that as long as you have all you want you shouldn't care what others have and so her husband should allow her to have sex with others as long as she has it with him too.
- ✧ The achieved dominance over them by telling them things they said when they were drunk (like comparing a woman's love to hell) – she made it all up to make them feel guilty so they give her what she wants. She believed attack is the best form of defence.
- ✧ She states women's best qualities – deceit, weeping and spinning
  
- ✧ Her fourth husband was "badde" because he wasn't under her control and enjoyed himself with other women
- ✧ She got back at him by making him jealous by flirting
- ✧ She seems to contradict herself by stating that she enjoys the very things, such as drinking, that she condemned her first three husbands for
  
- ✧ Her fifth husband, Jankin, used to beat her, yet she loved him the most, probably because he was good in bed

- ✈ Jankin is young – there seems to be a reversal; he is the young and poor man marrying the ‘old’ and rich woman. He, in effect, does to her what she did to her other husbands.
- ✈ She agrees to marry him even while her 4<sup>th</sup> husband is still alive, but she will only wed him when her husband has widowed. (perhaps similar to Vittoria)
- ✈ She is ensuring she will always be provided for.
- ✈ She says her mother taught her to flirt and to make her husband feel guilty, is Chaucer presenting all women as being manipulative and deceitful?
- ✈ As she loved him she gives him control
- ✈ He cites from his misogynistic book which show women’s failings. However, the bible and any scholarly book would have been interpreted by men and so it is a prejudiced interpretation. Women also couldn’t publish books so it was only the male story told that became the perceived truth.
- ✈ She rips three leaves from the book. This is symbolic of not accepting male authority. We could see the Wife’s anger due to the prolonged bullying by her husband or we may see her embodying the exact vices that Jankin complains about.
- ✈ He hits her but this shifts the power in her favour. He bends to give her a kiss and she hits him back and then makes him burn his book – possibly this could be an attempt to destroy the patriarchal hold men have over women
- ✈ He tells her she can do what she wants now as long as she has mutual respect and does not embarrass him.

## TALE:

- There are friars around, whose Christianity, the Wife says, has driven the fairies and magic out. She says friars will seduce women.
- The crime is committed by a knight – highlighting the corruption of those higher up.
- The queen intervenes (Arthur submits to his wife’s will) and puts the knight at her disposal
- He has to discover “what thing is it that wommen moost desiren”
- The Wife contributes her own opinion saying a man will win our attention with flattery, attention, care and allowing up to do what we please without chastising us
- She says we wish to be clean of sin – this emphasises the idea of appearing and being as women are not actually clean of sin, as seen by the Wife herself, but they like to present themselves as being pure
- She argues than women can conceal nothing and this portrays women as being untrustworthy
- The Wife then puts the hag in complete command of the knights fate
- He finds that women desire “soverinetee” and “maistrie”
- Even though he agrees to marry her he is still rude to her, showing he was only polite to her earlier to get what he wanted. This gives the hag the moral high ground as she has really saved his life
- He raped a woman earlier and now is unwilling to sleep with his legitimate wife
- The hag argues true “gentillesse” has nothing to do with your class. However if so then the Wife should be able to behave like that, which she does not
- This speech on gentillesse limits the view that the hag is a mouthpiece for the Wife as the tone and sentiments expressed are not the Wife’s since it is preaching the qualities of humility and virtuous living. Moreover, the knowledge displayed is definitely Chaucers due to the references to Dante, boeth and senecca
- The hag claims poverty is not linked with immorality (this links to the The White Devil when Cornelia believes poverty can still encourage moral living)

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- The end shows how women are judged on their looks and are perceived as not being allowed to be both beautiful and chase – but maybe this is the man's fault for not being able to not pursue a beautiful woman.
- There are close parallels and pairing quotations between the ending of the tale and the ending of the prologue