

Cantermarry tales

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The Canterbury Tales is a novel of short tales written by Geoffrey Chaucer. Each tale is told by one of twenty-nine members on a pilgrimage to Canterbury. The members come from many different social classes and occupations including a knight, a monk, a prioress, a merchant, a squire, and more.

These tales provide an understanding of the corruption within the English Church and society at the time. Many of his tales include hypocrisy in the church, church members abusing their power, infidelity, perversion, adultery, and extramarital relations. One prominent theme in The Canterbury Tales is the theme of marriage. Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales displays the sacrament of marriage through the conquest of marriage " The Knight's Tale," marriage for power in " The Wife of Bath's Tale," infidelity in " The Miller's Tale," and total faithfulness in " The Clerk's Tale," proving that not all marriages are intended for the same reasons. " The Knight's Tale" shows the sacrament of marriage as a conquest to be won.

Theseus captures two young knights and keeps them in a tower. They both fall in love with Emilie whom they see in the garden and become enemies over who will marry her (Reisman 46). Emilie wants peace between the two men because she does not want to marry one. She prays for their love to be quenched or turned from her: " Syn thou art mayde and kepere of us alle, // My maydenhede thou kepe and wel conserve, // And whil I lyve, a mayde I wol thee serve" (Chaucer 163). She also prays to stay a virgin, which shows her aversion to marriage.

However, she feels drawn to marriage naturally (Brooks 163-164). Emilie reflects the typical reluctance toward marriage by young girls at the time: “ Though Emily’s story is set in the ancient world, her initial desire to remain a virgin would not have been improbable in a medieval setting... Young girls like Emilie, who was never given the opportunity to express an opinion about her own destiny, might have seen that saintly virgins were given choices” (Reisman 47). Arcite wins the battle for Emilie’s hand in marriage but is thrown off his horse and dies. Emilie mourns Arcite’s death and marries Palamon. Despite her feelings toward marriage, she and Palamon have a happy marriage and grow to love each other (Reisman 46). Chaucer shows through “ The Knight’s Tale” that marriage can be developed from a battle to be won to a loving relationship.

In the “ Wife of Bath,” Chaucer displays the theme of marriage used for power. In all of the pilgrimage, “ The Wife of Bath’s Tale is one of only three tales by women, and the only tale offering insight into the life and passions of a woman in the secular world” (Trudeau 2). Alisoun’s tale itself tells the story of a knight who rapes a woman. The queen tells him that he needs to learn what women truly desire. He is forced to marry an old, ugly woman, but when he learns that women desire control, his wife becomes beautiful (Trudeau 2). She believes that wives should have sovereignty over their husbands, and control is what she desires the most (Kittredge 94-95).

None of the members of the pilgrimage agree with Alisoun’s views on the sovereignty of women, for women were only supposed to be married and bear children. A woman’s status was dependent on her relationship with her husband; however, Alisoun is incapable of letting a man control her status

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(Crane 214). She married her first husband when she was twelve. She then married three older men and acquired all their land. She had trouble controlling her fifth husband, but she eventually outsmarted him and used his guilt to defeat him (Reisman 45).

To further explain her marriages, " She admitted that she had a healthy sexual appetite and alluded to the fact that she may quence those appetites outside of wedlock. Her fourth husband was young and lusty, and even kept a mistress. During this fourth marriage, Alisoun began courting Jankyn, a younger man without financial independence" (Trudeau 2). When she says, " Diverse scoles maken parfyt clerkes, // And diverse practyk in many sondry werkes // Maketh the werkman parfyt sekirly: // Of fyve husbondes scoleiynng am I. // Welcome the sixte, whan that evere he shall!" (Chaucer 47-51), Alisoun proclaims that she is proud of being married many times, and she will gladly be married more times. Through " The Wife of Bath's Tale," Chaucer shows Alisoun's use of marriage to gain power and control over men.

In addition, Chaucer shows the theme of infidelity in " The Miller's Tale" through Alisoun's disloyalty to her husband. Eighteen year old Alisoun is married to John, has a relationship with Nicholas, and is greatly admired by Absolon (Parry 1-2). Absolon is in love with her and will go above and beyond to make her happy: " This parish clerk, this joly Absolon Hath in his herte swich a love-longinge, That no wyf ne took he noon offringe; For curteisye, he seyde, he wolde noon" (Chaucer 245-248). Alisoun is young, so her actions are unpredictable. She also sees her relationships as a game. She is unimpressed with a man and then quickly changes to being submissive.

She does not fall for men easily, but she can be persuaded (Parry 1). Though Alisoun has three men after her who all suffer in some way, she pays no consequences for being sneaky (Parry 1). In other words, "Chaucer not only exempts Alisoun even from any consideration of accountability and change—despite her willing submission to Nicholas and her active participation in both the scheme and the adultery—but also excludes her from the kinds of interpretation we must pursue with her male admirers who rotate around her" (Parry 2). In "The Miller's Tale," Chaucer explores the ideas of infidelity in marriage. On the contrary, "The Clerk's Tale" exhibits the aspects of total faithfulness in marriage. The Clerk tells the tale of Griselda, a loyal peasant woman who marries the young King Walter.

He says that he will marry her only if she is completely obedient to whatever he says, even if it hurts her (Nelson 18). Griselda promises Walter that she will agree to his requests by saying, "Just as you wish, I will also wish" (Nelson 19). As time goes on, Griselda keeps her promise and has a daughter. To test his wife's loyalty, Walter tells Griselda that her daughter will be taken away, which she respected. After she passes that test, Walter tells her her son will be taken too and that he is getting remarried (Nelson 19).

She continues to be faithful to Walter despite his tests: "At this point, though her original marriage promise expressed a reluctance to die, Griselda now says that if she just had the prescience to know what he wished, she would obey without being told what he wanted—and even that she would gladly die if it would please him" (Nelson 20). Walter tells Griselda about the tests and returns her children, and they live a happy life together (Nelson <https://assignbuster.com/cantermarry-tales/>

20). Chaucer shows that Walter wanted total faithfulness from Griselda in “The Clerk’s Tale.” Throughout “The Knight’s Tale,” “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” “The Miller’s Tale,” and “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale,” Chaucer proves that not all marriages are for the same reasons. For example, the Wife of Bath is married to gain sovereignty over her husbands, whereas the Clerk tells a tale of a wife who is loyal to her husband regardless of the amount of power she holds in the marriage. While the Wife of Bath encourages women to use their sexuality as a tool to gain power in marriage, Griselda in “The Clerk’s Tale” epitomizes perfect loyalty in a marriage by repeatedly obeying her husband’s commands.

On the other hand, Alisoun in “The Miller’s Tale” is dissatisfied with the attention she gets from her husband, so she keeps other men in her life and portrays the theme of infidelity in marriage. Lastly, Emilie in “The Knight’s Tale” proves that another reason for marriage is not love but a trophy. Emilie does not want Arcite and Palamon to battle for her, but they see her hand in marriage as a prize to be won. However, she and Palamon grow to love each other despite her resentment toward marriage. In the modern world, women are breaking the stereotype of how a wife should be.

In fact, women today can be any one of the four wives mentioned. Geoffrey Chaucer offers many different illustrations of marriage within his tales proving that the sacrament of marriage is unique and can occur for numerous different reasons.