

"canterbury tales" by geoffrey chaucer essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



In *The Canterbury Tales*, by Geoffrey Chaucer, each character, such as the Pardoner, Wife of Bath, and the Franklin, epitomizes their spirit and reputation through the tales they tell. The Pardoner uses his tale as a gimmick to make money, because he is a greedy man. The way his tale illustrates each sin, every listener can relate to the three brothers and feel their guilt. The Wife of Bath's Tale expresses her own values in the way the Knight is given a second chance after raping the young virgin. This greatly undermines her idea of the value of women. Because the Wife of Bath is so sexual, and lacks respect for her self, the Knight's actions and forgiveness represent her own attitude on men versus women. Lastly, The Franklin's tale, because of its simplicity and honesty in the way the wife stayed true to her husband, is a direct representation of Franklin's trouble-free and joyful lifestyle. He prefers things without trouble or conflict, which is the tone of the story. Each character tells a tale that is an appropriate match to their persona.

The Pardoner's tale is appropriate because it targets every sin a person can commit. He does this to compel his audience to feel a connection and sense of guilt after the story is through. This is his elaborate technique to scam the people out of their money. " O cursed sin! O blackguardly excess! O treacherous homicide! O wickedness! O gluttony that lusted on and dived!" (256). This single phrase illustrates almost every one of the seven deadly sins, and the Pardoner does this intentionally. His goal is to make his listeners feel like sinners, and feel as though being pardoned is essential. The Pardoner's tale is a clear example of his persona not entirely because of the tale itself, but the way it is told. The tale is told in length and detail,

making certain he has pinpointed each sin, but when it is over, he quickly jumps to asking his listeners for money. " My holy pardon frees you all of this/ Provided that you make the right approaches,/ That is with sterling, rings, or silver brooches." (256). The way he states his business gimmick so quickly after the tale is complete, represents his eagerness to swindle his listeners and trick them into offering their money.

The tale is incredibly appropriate because the tale itself is used as the way for the Pardoner to feed his own insatiability, and the way he asks the people for their donations epitomizes his eagerness and desire for wealth. The Wife of Bath's tale is appropriate in the way it expresses the Wife's nonchalant outlook on marriage, and a slight disrespect of her own sex. In the tale, the queen, as well as the other ladies, beg the king to grant the knight a chance to save his own life, after raping an innocent woman. This action alone demonstrates how forgiving and infatuated with the male sex the Wife of Bath is. Women traditionally express no empathy for a rapist, but the Wife of Bath portrays a situation in which a woman fights for the life of a man of poor virtue. " By course of law. He was as good as dead./(It seems that then the statutes took that view)/ But that the queen, and other ladies too,/ Implored the king to exercise his grace/ So ceaselessly, he gave the queen the case/ And granted her his life, and she could choose/ Whether to show him mercy or refuse." (282).

The Wife of Bath uses her simple tale to show the strong faith she has in men. Because she has been married six times, one may think she is in it for money, or other unethical reasons, however, the Wife of Bath seeks safety,

comfort, and sex in her countless marriages. Her dependence on the male sex is expressed through her tale. The forgiveness for the rapist that all the women in the tale show exemplifies the Wife of Bath's respect for men, as well as the insolence she has for her own sex. The Wife of Bath's tale also demonstrates how important she thinks physical appearance is. Because, even after the knight's immoral behavior, he is granted with a beautiful, trusting wife in the end. It is, however, the woman's beauty that delights the knight, not her trustworthy manner.

" Cast up the certain, husband. Look at me!'/ And when indeed the knight had looked to see,/ Lo, she was young and lovely, rich in charms./ In ecstasy he caught her in his arms,/ His heart went bathing in a bath of blisses/ And melted in a hundred thousand kisses,/ And she responded in the fullest measure/ With all that could delight or give him pleasure. "(292). The unexpected, and somewhat undeserved ending for the knight, expressed how forgiving, and fond of men the Wife of Bath truly is. Her choice of fate for this Knight is what makes this tale so appropriate for the Wife of Bath. A woman less reliant on the male sex would choose a bleaker fate for such an immoral man.

The Franklin's tale is very appropriate for his character because of its pleasant tone and trusting values. The Franklin chooses to tell a tale about trust, joy and faithfulness towards one's lover. Although the poem contains conflict, the ending is positive, and the integrity the wife possesses shows how the Franklin has strong faith in the human race, as well as women. " Which to escape two ways alone disclose/ Themselves, death or dishonour,

one of those,/ And I must choose between them as a wife./ Yet I would rather render up my life/ Than to be faithless or endure a shame/ Upon my body, or to lose my name./ My death will quit me of a foolish vow;/ And has not many a noble wife ere now/ And many a virgin slain herself to win/ Her body from pollution and from sin?" (426). In nearly every tale throughout The Canterbury Tales, women are shown to be untrusting or traitorous.

In The Franklin's tale, however, the woman shows good morals and makes the noble choice to stay true to her husband, despite her promise. Because the Franklin chooses a lifestyle in which all things positive surround him, he chooses a somewhat lighthearted tale with a pleasant ending, as well as a positive tone. " So in the happiness that they had planned/ He took his wife home to his native land/ With joyful ease and reached his castle there/ By Penmarch Point, not far from Finisterre,/ And there they lived in amity unharried." (411). The overall tone of the tale illustrates the Franklin's ideals and beliefs. His hope for society and joyful outlook on life is expressed to the overall positivity of the tale itself, especially in the trusting behavior of the wife.

It is easy to gather that Geoffrey Chaucer made meticulous decisions upon which tales each character would tell, and how each tale would be told. The simple tales each character presents are used to further elongate each character prologue in itself. The stories told are direct representations of each character. The Pardoner is not only expressed through his tale in the way the men sin, but also in the way the tale is used as a money making scam. The Wife of Bath's attitude towards men and quick choice to forgive a

man for whatever he has done, is a perfect representation of her inner dependence on the sex itself. Lastly, the simple, positive, and trusting tone of the Franklin's tale is a direct example of how the Franklin wishes his life to be, simple, happy, and full of trust.