

How do bennett and chaucer present women in 'the outside dog' in 'talking heads 2...

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



The main female characters in these two texts are Alison in 'The Miller's Tale' and Marjory in 'The Outside Dog. ' However, it may also be possible to consider the prominent feminine qualities in Absolon, and also Tina, the dog in the Talking Heads 2' monologue. It can also be said that Stuart's victims are presumably female. Alison, in 'The Miller's Tale' is largely presented as the stereotypical young wife, which follows the genre of the tale itself.

The Miller says, 'fair was this yonge wyf,' so the reader immediately sees her as the attractive and beautiful stereotype, which is intensified by the fact that the Miller does not give her a name until line 258, effectively objectifying her as a character, giving her no individuality. Also, the repetition of this title reduces her own personality and makes her seem almost like the property of her husband. Alison's two-dimensional image is furthered by Chaucer's frequent references to colour, in this case, black and white.

The colours usually describe what she is wearing, for example, 'a bamcloth eek as whit as morne milk' and 'of col-black silk. ' Chaucer sees Alison, and possible women in general, as a contrast of black and white; the white of her apron is contrasted to the black of her hair and eyebrows. White is traditionally seen as a pure colour and black's a dark, mysterious colour. This shows that on the surface Alison may be beautiful, but she is not so pure and loyal to her husband at the end on the tale.

Chaucer may be generalising this to all women, suggesting they can 'put on a front' and be something they are not. However, the simple, plain nature of the two colours presents her as a two-dimensional character with little depth.

In the same way, the character of Marjory is presented as being quite weak and obedient towards her husband. It is obvious to Marjory that her husband is guilty for the murders, but she does not say anything to the police, and she hides his slacks, which would have been crucial evidence, 'I sneaked in and got a bin bag and fetched them inside. Marjory seems quite a passive wife, and accepts what her husband tells her, often without questioning him directly, 'He took the van over to Rawdon last night. Said it was Rawdon anyway. '

The distrust here is evident, but as she is not presented as a particularly strong character, this distrust is not voiced, or acted upon. This may suggest generally that women are the weaker, more passive sex, and should be obedient towards their husbands, in the same way that Marjory is. Marjory's obsession with cleaning says a lot about the 'role of women' in the home.

She is portrayed as the hardworking housewife, which seems to be her main and most important role, 'the police said not to touch anything but I wasn't having the place left upset like that so I set to and cleaned down... ' This is also emphasised by the way Stuart considers the role of his wife. He says, 'You're lucky I do it at all' when talking about washing his own clothes. Like in 'The Miller's tale,' the female character is presented as the typical wife, However, Marjory is the stereotypical obedient wife.

The physical description and physiognomy of the character of Alison is extensive, and Chaucer seems to be parodying poetic portraits of the subjects of courtly lovers. He uses similes to compare Alison to the domestic

and everyday where the courtly poets would have chosen exotic and valuable comparisons. For example, she is repeatedly compared to animals, such as 'Winsinge she was, as is a joly colt. ' These descriptions, although they sometimes express positive qualities, such as her liveliness, may also portray a negative image of the 'yonge wyf. ' For example, it may be inferred here that she is quite immature.

Alison's outward appearance is concentrated on, and as a reader we do not learn a lot about her personality and characteristics, suggesting that she has little more than her looks in her favour. For example, 'as any wezele hir body gent and small. ' This portrays Alison as being slim bodied in appearance. Chaucer presents women as being an object of sexuality, and the tale may be predominantly for the amusement of a male audience. This compares to Marjory and Stuart in 'The Outside Dog' as Marjory is used as a sexual 'object' by her husband, seen in the tone and language used, 'he wakes me up and he has another go. The tone here is quite dismissive, with no feeling involved, but Marjory also seems quite resentful of her husband, as she is treated like it is her duty as a wife to obey her husband.

She does not refer to Stuart by name, and by repeatedly using the pronoun 'he,' she shows him no recognition, intensifying her resentment of her husband, and the distant relationship the two characters have. Chaucer uses strong adjectives when presenting Alison as a sly lover, she is said to have a 'likerous ye' portraying her as being provocative and sexy. She is also described as a 'wench', which is a very uncomplimentary term for a woman.

This contrasts to her appearance and wealth. Her willingness to commit adultery is seen in her encounter with Nicholas and at first her seeming unwillingness to engage in any such behaviour with Nicholas, 'I will nat kisse thee, by my fey! ' However, within five lines of the tale, she has 'changed her mind' and has been persuaded by Nicholas. This portrays her as having few morals or determination, and almost 'teasing Nicholas. ' Overall, the character of Alison is not one in which a reader can sympathise with, as she is largely portrayed in a negative light.

However, I feel that a reader is more likely to sympathise with the character of Marjory, as Bennett does not portray her as being a particularly 'bad' or blameworthy character, and we may feel sorry for her because of the treatment she encounters by her husband. It also works in her favour that the text is written in the form of a monologue, therefore the reader is essentially encouraged to relate to the character, as she describes events from her own point of view. However, like with Alison, as a reader we do not really agree with her actions, and may feel that she should be more of an active, rather than passive character.

The character of Absolon is given very feminine qualities by Chaucer. His description is very precise and extensive in detail, for example, 'cruel was his heer, and as the gold it shoon. ' His description is rather unusual for a man, and strictly contrasts to the strong, manly portrait of the Miller. Absolon's character is largely mocked and treated as a figure of fun due to these effeminate qualities that he possesses. This again portrays femininity in a

bad light, diminishing the importance and status of women in society, particularly in the period in which Chaucer wrote the tales.

The fact that the dog in Bennett's monologue is female may also portray women in a negative manner. Dogs are typically viewed as being obedient towards their 'masters. ' This suggests that the master-servant relationship should be extended to the husband and wife, as Marjory is in competition with Tina for her husband's recognition, 'That dog's not inside is she? ' The victims in this monologue are also women, which again presents women as being 'helpless victims' and open to abuse from men. Again, the underlying theme of the passive nature of women is explored, as Stuart takes advantage of this.