

The wife of bath (canterbury tales paper) essay sample



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In *Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, the description of the Wife of Bath in the “General Prologue” seems to contradict her tale and prologue. In the “General Prologue”, The Wife of Bath is described as a very confident woman who is superior, socially speaking. But this portrayal is contradicted by her tale and prologue due to the fact that her independence results from other people, more specifically men. From this it can be derived that it is not true independence or confidence that the Wife of Bath embodies, but a false sense of the traits. The portrayal of a strong and confident woman that the “General Prologue” has set up for the Wife of Bath’s character is therefore shattered through the evidence of her insecurity and dependence on others.

The “General Prologue” describes the Wife of Bath as an extremely powerful woman who is valued highly in society and is above many on the social scale “In all the parish not a dame dared stir Towards the alter steps in front of her” (459-460). The Wife of Bath, here, is presented as an intimidating woman who lets no one come before her, leaving a sense of independence and confidence imprinted in the readers’ minds. But this confidence does not root from inside her as described by the “General Prologue”. This confidence roots from other sources as shown in her tale and prologue. These sources are men, and their impressions and thoughts of her, causing the independent air about her as mentioned in the “General Prologue” to be a false one. Another way in which her independent air is erased is the fact that the Wife of Bath has had five husbands, all of which she has described in her prologue. She tells readers of the relationships and what happened in them.

She said, “You say also that it displeases me Unless you praise and flatter my beauty, And save you gaze upon my face” (110). Without compliments

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from her man, she is displeased. This alone demonstrates insecurity and lack of confidence, which strays away from the original portrayal of the Wife of Bath as a strong, confident woman written in the "General Prologue".

Another example of her insecurity is the thought that haunts her mind constantly, aging. She feels as if she is getting old and ugly. She also feels that this is one of the worst things to happen to her. "But age, alas! That poisons every prime, Has taken away my beauty... The bran, as best as I may, must now I sell;" (114). She is convinced that she must sell herself now so that she has someone who will accept her in her old age, proving her dependence on men and their thoughts of her. She must woo a man quickly so that they will stay with her forever. Then she will have someone to compliment and support her even when she is old and ugly, exemplifying her lack of confidence and dependence on others' opinions. All of these exhibited traits are the exact opposite of how she is portrayed in the "General Prologue" changing her character's lasting impression completely.

Despite the woman of confidence that is presented in the "General Prologue", the truth comes out through the Wife of Bath's tale and prologue. The contradictory truth is that the Wife of Bath is not as confident in herself as readers are made to believe. Instead, she is a woman concerned and insecure about what men think of her and her looks. Her tale and prologue do not only reveal a new side of the Wife of Bath but also completely contradict and shatter the image portrayed of her originally.