

Chaucer's
trustworthy, women
were to be vain,
shallow



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Chaucer's skill in characterization as assuredly it is not, one might find that his all pervading humor is the key. Shakespeare is in a sense the least philosophical of the two poets, for the ideas seem to grow out of character and situation, and not action out of abstract ideas. Fortunate was he to live in a time when the poetic drama was the popular vehicle of expression it also gave him scope to the richness of his observations about life. Against change and man's frailty, Shakespeare sets only the power of enduring love.

Hence why the timing of the Elizabethan plays is one of the greatest differences from modern drama. In character the difference in Chaucer's case is how he uses stories rather than direct argument to raise the moral and ethical questions. Questions arise like "Does the Wife of Bath discourse allege that women are mercenary, or generous or profligate?" Chaucer's Wife of Bath explicitly advocates a policy of bodily largesse, she creates this by combining both ethical and moral discourse of liberality. The Wife of Bath sees herself using what she calls her "instrument" as "freely" as God has Given it (Cite). She is undeniably a spirited woman protesting her moral obligation to away whatever sexual surplus her husband is unable to respond to. The Twelfth Night comes as a masterpiece of gaiety, pace and lyrical charm, as well as satiric exposure to man's pretentiousness. Twelfth Night can be likened in the way its "meanings" ramify outward in unexpected and provocative directions to an elaborately developed metaphysical conceit.

It is in Shakespeare's judgement in the making that gives to the literature upon Twelfth Night the quality persuasive to the play. One can question first what exactly was feminism like during the Renaissance period? During the Renaissance period where men were supposed to be active, wise and

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trustworthy, women were to be vain, shallow the weaker gender. The Twelfth Night is to a certain level a feminist play as the female characters tend to be good and the male characters have flaws. The women in this play tend to be sacrificial. The character to be evaluated is Viola. Viola is a very practical, emotional, resourceful yet manipulative person.

As an orphan who encountered a shipwreck with no one to protect her, she had to resort to figuring out a means to protect herself even if it called for drastic changes like disguising as a boy. The captain tries to comfort Viola and tells her to not lose hope in her brother's survival from the shipwreck. He then tells her the story of Duke Orsino and Lady Olivia.

She takes a necessary chance in trusting her captain, and despite suffering from grief, she acts strong and wants to take action, again she exemplifies contrary belief to stereotypes this was ultimately the creation of the one character active in the intrigue. Viola chooses to impersonate Cesario. This aspect of her having to go to the extreme measure of disguising as a boy shows that women were truly indeed in danger and lacked the qualities of freedom and protection in their daily lives.

" I prithee, and I'll pay thee bounteously, conceal me what i am, and be my aid for such disguise as haply shall become, the form of my intent. I'll serve this duke". There is some level of gender inequality when we look into this action done by Viola. She has to hide her real gender to conform to the ideology of men being taken more serious and not as a joke. Viola showcases her ability to act contrary to labelled women characteristics. Because of her keen wit she is able to charm Orsino in a matter of three days and become

his right hand man. Because of her cleverness she strikes the eyes of Olivia and Olivia gets attracted to her.

Viola's use of words to convey Orsino to Olivia showcases the quality of high class, and it woes Olivia off her feet. "Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on". This shows just how Viola contradicts the stereotypical approach that women are shallow. In Shakespeare's Twelfth Night the typical love and fulfillment comedies he writes isn't exactly portrayed in this play, but instead we are introduced to a world in which the ruler is a lovesick Duke, individuals over thirty are drunkards, jokesters and gulls. Viola is seen to be quick-witted enough to evaluate her situation, sound smart enough to conceive a disguise and practical enough to go forth with this design. These qualities are what catch the eye of Duke Orsino, and also the qualities that cause Lady Olivia to immediately fall in love with her. Viola is seen to have a strong love for Orsino as she portrays a suffering woman and sacrificing her happiness for Orsino's happiness.

Her love for Orsino is silent as she states "Yet a bareful strife!, Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife".(Act 1, scene 4 page 2) It reveals her intense burning desire for Orsino. She is torn in the dilemma between helping Orsino get Olivia and while yet afraid of losing him.

Orsino's "love" is not sacrificial at all but instead infatuation while Viola is contrary to that. Wearing the disguise so well as Viola did leads me to question that if many women had resorted to go through the change and appear as their counterpart gender, how exactly would society have

functioned? It was evident her awkwardness in playing the double roles as male and female characters shine through but her willpower, in maintaining her disguise through all the events that transpired illustrate her strength and intellect. Chaucer is questioned by (Alcuin) as to " whether indeed his writings leave moral stereotyping of the feminine character." Agreeable are ' Alcuins' claims for it is partly why Chaucer can play off the Wife of Bath version of herself against a range of gendered expectations, including expectations of ownership of ' goods' (material and sexual) and ethical/moral commentary on the proper retention or disbursement of those goods. On the basis that misogyny was a form of indoctrination, leads me to conclude on these moves as reindoctrination. The Wife of Bath's Tale opens up with a prologue, that was longer than any of the other twenty-three Canterbury Tales, and also unusual in that her prologue is more indepth and lengthy than her tale. The Wife of Bath emerges as the pilgrim who is most fully depicted, over the autobiographical form of her Prologue, which has a fairness and affection that make her the most rounded character of them all.

" She has to hold her own as a woman without either the protection of a husband or inviolable sanctity of a religious calling." The Wife of Bath's female character portrays the belief that she didnt act according to stereotypes made of women during her time, but instead took stance in the belief that women too can hold situations on their own without the constant need of there being a presence of a male figure around them. The element i found dominant in Chaucer's prologue is vocation. The traditional three divisions of medieval society are represented: knights, clergy and labourers; the rulers and defenders, the spiritual leaders, and the cultivators of the

land. In addition there are representatives of the merchants, landowners and craftsmen who make up the majority of the rising middle class. There is an uprising question as to where the Wife of Bath fits in Chaucer's general theme? With the occupations of some of the other pilgrims who carry certain moral obligations, violations of which serve as pointers to their characters.

The Wife of Bath a cloth-maker is given only a mere passing mention in the General prologue. Instead the emphasis in the initial portrait of this pilgrim, as in her Prologue and her Tale is on marriage. It is in this question of marriage that we must look for understanding of the Wife's place in the scheme of The Canterbury Tales. In the midst of the lively and varied group of pilgrims assembled by Chaucer, she represents quite simply, Woman. "

She is medieval as a woman at her most eloquent and her most basic.

Despite her matrimonial score, she is essentially a conformist. Her behavior may seem spectacular, but her needs and aspirations are really quite middle-of-the-road: she likes men, and she does not like sleeping alone.

" (Cigman) Here we are given a detailed explanation of exactly who the Wife of Bath is, her mindset and viewpoint she lets to be controlled by herself only. Despite the fact that she has married up to five times, she still accepts the behavior and practice as she flirts and enjoys an easy familiarity with men but, whatever she may have done in her youth years, she is nowhere advocating sex outside of marriage. She remained faithful to each husband while they were alive. She has a habit of going on pilgrimages suggesting that she was a devout woman, her real reasons was for love of adventure, and social opportunities. In her first three marriages, the Wife has dominated her elder husbands, constantly attacking them for their unreasonable

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criticisms. The fourth husband who was closer in age, fought all her attempts to dominate him, her most bitter story had been her fifth husband, although she got the better of him.

Having inherited all her previous husbands wealth, she now is more choosy, in selecting a new partner. The Wife is defying convention in putting experience on a par with auctoritee as a teacher, in which of course she means her own experience. Both her sexual energy and unyielding hardnesse are evidence of the Wife's enormous vitality.