

Wife of bath's tale and the red lotus of chastity essay



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It is not usual for lovers of literature to consciously find a connection between Asian Literature and Anglo-Saxon Medieval Literature. However, it is always wise to remember the lessons that literature scholars have learned about the great Greek motivations: stories [literature] will always be similar to each other, no matter from what global territory that they may originate from, in the sense that the stories that people tend to love will either be about love, anger, revenge, war, conflicts about man vs. man, man vs. himself, man vs. nature, and patriotism (well, amongst many others, that is).

This paper is a comparative analysis between Geoffrey Chaucer's Wife of Bath's Tale (included in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales), and the story of The Red Lotus of Chastity (a story from India's Kartha Sarit Sagara)-a story which is also known as The Go-Between and the She-Dog. (Clouston : 1996) Chaucer's tale is similar to the Indian legend/fairy tale like story since they both focus on the topic of giving to one's wife the right to choose and how in a marriage one should expect fidelity and chastity from one's wife.

However, there are a few differences to be found between the two. In Chaucer's tale, the story is told in relation to the narrator, the Wife from Bath. The lead character is a knight [obviously very British) and the old hag in the story is an enchanted lady. It is written somewhere that stories are forms of " wish fulfillment" (Argilles: 2001) , and the Wife of Bath was wishing that her husband would be more like the knight in her tale.

The knight allowed his wife to make the choices in their marriage, while in her marriage, the Wife of Bath, was having a hard time achieving what she

desired the most: which is to gain control of her husband, Jenkins. In the Asian story [India] The Red Lotus of Chastity, the focus of the moral lesson in the end, is to show the empowerment of the female: that she is the one who acts as the pillar of strength in a marriage, meaning, without the necessary qualities of a good, excellent, and ideal wife, a marriage would merely literally break into pieces.

The wife of the merchant Guhasena, who is Devasmita, is the embodiment of the what Hindu literature acclaims, which is the female “ shakti” -female prowess and power. (Clouston: 1996) Devasmita, not only succeeds in proving that she is very loyal and faithful to her husband, but she also proves that she is a strong, intelligent, and powerful female character. Devasmita, brands the heads of the immoral merchants with the mark of a dog's foot on their foreheads, and she also makes them her “ slaves” at the end of the tale [for this is what she asks of the King].

Devasmita takes away the nose and ears of the evil “ ascetic” woman who connives with the merchants who want to prove Guhasena wrong. Meaning, since Guhasena takes pride in his wife's incomparable qualities, her famed loyalty and chastity, the no-good-doers, who are these merchants, want to ruin Guhasena's ideal world, by attempting to corrupt Devasmati.

In Devasmati's story, there is a stress placed on how the “ bad woman”/ villainess in the story told the faithful wife that she should use her five senses in many, many, ways, or else she will risk being reincarnated as a simple animal[like the dog who the villainess in the story fed with a bit of steak that was laced with pepper powder] so the dog would cry (she-dog)

and the villainess could try to dupe the faithful and strong wife into believing that the she-dog and the villainess were related in a past life.

Since it is tradition in the Hindu religion to believe in reincarnation, that people will have past and future lives. In *The Red Lotus of Charity* there is also the use of enchantment, meaning the ascetic lady was trying to convince Devasmati that the she-dog was a magical animal due to how it has been a lady before, and up until that day, could still be capable of human feeling. Ultimately, we can conclude that though continents apart in origin, the two tales extol the virtue of fidelity in marriage and love.

Although Chaucer weaves a tale wherein the readers have to imagine what happens after the old hag transforms into a good and beautiful woman who will be faithful to her husband, the Medieval knight, the Indian story gives us what the ideal and perfect marriage must be like. Because we are given a glimpse of the lives of Devasmati and Guhasena as a married couple already, whereas, the *Wife of Bath's* tale, recounts the beginning of the marriage of the knight and the enchanted lady.

If one has to choose an interesting take on the two stories, then one could choose to look at the two tales as a modern pop Hollywood movie and the other one would be the stuff which Indian Bollywood movies are made of. The *Wife of Bath's* tale can be the anti-thesis of the movie "Shrek", and *The Red Lotus of Charity* is, well one could just choose from the long, long, list of Indian epic movies. It is always enjoyable and morally uplifting to read or watch something that teaches us that physical beauty does not matter when it comes to love.

What matters more, is the intellect, the spirit of the people involved in the spiritual and romantic union. Since, all beauty fades, and youth is only temporary, In a world that is full of the mundane, young wives to be can always find the story of Devasmati as an inspiration and as an escape from the monotonous domestic life that is common nowadays. A wife can pretend to be someone who can ask a King for much-needed slaves and can dream of being strong and able enough to hurt those who try to get in the way [ruin] her “ match made in heaven.