

The wife of bath



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Wife of Bath Geoffrey Chaucer's, Wife of Bath is about a modern day feminist living in the male dominated 14th century.

Alisoun has advanced in both her business and personal life making her a contemporary to the woman of the 21st century. Although many think Alisoun, a crass character who says whatever she pleases, is constantly misquoting the bible, and constantly annoying those around her. She is an independent businesswoman who is able to provide an ideal life for herself, full of leisure and travel. Alisoun is a modern woman living in a time, when there was no model for women having a choice in their own futures.

Alisoun's personal life is one that many have studied, for mainly being that 14th century women, did not marry as often and to certainly not men lesser in age.

From today's standards the 'cougar' label, as we would call Alisoun, is very commonplace. But for Chaucer's time period the fact that Alisoun lived this lifestyle was not a social norm that people could accept, it could rather upset people. Alisoun finds a way around the fact that she has married five men by justifying herself with scripture quotes from the bible. Alisoun's first three husbands were much older than she was and knew more about life than she could ever know. She managed to take this knowledge from her previous husbands and use it to her advantage with her later two husbands. Alisoun's fourth husband was her peer and probably was attracted to her for her money.

Her fifth, and the husband that she is married to at the time of the journey was Jankyn, who was twenty years her junior and only in the marriage for the

wealth that Alisoun had accrued for herself. This marriage is a role reversal in a time where women were usually twenty years younger than the men that they married. Alisoun has been one of these women herself and therefore sees no problem with having a marriage to a younger man since marrying a younger woman is encouraged. With Alisoun's marriages she also has no problem talking about her sexual discretions. Alisoun believes that if God meant people to only have sexual relations for procreation, then he would not have made sex organs that people could use to enjoy themselves. In marriage I will use my equipment as freely as my maker sent it (Chaucer 189).

This is not only a radical, than nonexistent ideal at this time and would not become an actual practice for women until the 1960's, with the sexual revolution. Women were not suppose to enjoy sex, and are suppose to be chaste and shy when it comes to matters of intimacy. Alisoun was probably like this with her first husband as that was what she was brought up to believe about a woman's place.

As Alisoun progressed through husbands she not only found a taste for her sexual desires, but also a taste for diversity in the men that she marries. With her wealth she is able to marry someone of her own age and subsequently someone who is her junior. The reader can only assume that with her constant marriages there is a desire to be fulfilled sexually, that only a younger man can provide. Not only is Alisoun able to fulfill her sexual desires, she is able to do so without the burden of children. At a time when women's sole identities are as wives and mothers, Alisoun is living life the way that it seems to please her. Alisoun has managed to create a successful

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business for herself, which makes it possible for her to live in the fashion that she does.

Some of the money that she has accrued over the years, has been from her marriages, but this says plenty about her because property and wealth at that time were usually left to the closet male heir leaving the wife with practically nothing. ??? Thus she learns to value the wealth she has acquired, for she knows that while some men desire beautiful women, others lust for gold??? (Biebel, 65). Alisoun also realizes, that in a male dominated society, most men lust for money and she is able to use that greed to her advantage. Acquiring wealth is, not only a way for Alisoun to find another husband, but it is a way for her to be financially stable. ??? She had such a talent for making cloth that she surpassed the weavers of Ypres and Ghent??? (Chaucer 23). Alisoun owns a successful lace company that she was able to start for herself to provide supplemental income to the inheritance that she receives from her husband. She is not threatening to men with this type of business, because it is considered women??™s work.

But, she is threatening, because of the amount of money that she is able to make. Alisoun lives her life for herself and no one else. If she had lived today she would be one of the richest women on the planet, because she has been able to amass wealth for herself, in a male dominated society. Alisoun??™s journey on the Canterbury Tales is unusual because she has gone by herself. The travelers in the Canterbury Tales are predominantly men and the only women besides, Alisoun are Nuns who are traveling with the clergy. In the prologue of the Canterbury Tales, the description of Alisoun discusses the way the she rides her horse. Biebel believes this is for comfort in the

travel, ??? Alisoun puts aside the more ??? lady like??? style of riding for her own convenience while traveling the road to Canterbury??? (64). Alisoun doesn't view the constraints on her life as mandatory and does what she pleases.

Women of this time period were made to ride their horses on a sidesaddle so that their dress could hang over the side making it more ??? lady-like.??? It was also because society thought women could be ??? stimulated??? by riding a horse like a man. Alisoun believes that she has the right to feel comfortable over what the norms for a woman of her caliber should be. The Wife of Bath's Tale, is in its own way, a tale about female empowerment during a time when there was no such concept. The tale involves a Knight raping a young maiden and making her ??? damaged goods??? so that she will never make a proper wife. The punishment that King Arthur was going to give to the knight was death, until his wife steps in.

Guinevere asks that she be allowed to decide the fate of the rapist, which Arthur accepts and lets her do her bidding. ??? Because a rapist's motivations are linked to socially constructed notions of gender, the women in Alisoun's tale set out to rehabilitate the knight, who has been strongly influenced by his culture's definitions of masculinity and femininity??? (Biebel 73). In her tale, Alisoun is giving women the upper hand. The Knight has to go on a quest to find out, what it is that women desire the most. The only way that the young Knight is able to come up with this answer is to become indebted to and marry an old hag, who gives him the answer. This is the way that women would choose to rehabilitate a man who has committed

rape rather than to just to kill him. If there is no rehabilitation for the action than there is no progress for women and for men.

The Wife of Bath, is a woman who knows what she wants and she knows how to get it. This was an uncommon theme for women until the end of the last century. Women have always been subservient to their husbands and fathers acting as dutiful wives and daughters. Although a man wrote The Canterbury Tales, there are ideals applied to this ancient tale that are cutting edge and were appealing to women who have been taught to not question anything.

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