

The wife of bath feminist essay

[Family](#), [Marriage](#)



This essay will explain the feminist views voiced in her prologue and tale.

The Wife of Bath on the right to remarry The wife of bath admits that she has been married five times; and without shame she is looking for her sixth. “

Thanks be to God who is forever alive,/Of husbands at church door have I had five”(Chaucer, line 5-7). In comparison to women of the medieval times, the wife of bath is viewed as a promiscuous woman. The British Library explains women of the middle ages, “ The two main alternatives for a medieval woman were to marry, or to ‘ take the veil’ and become a nun.

2014) The wife of bath’s additional marriages after the first were viewed as a taboo. In the middle ages, widows were expected not to remarry and practice celibacy for the rest of their lives. According to the British Library, “ Once widowed, such women had legal independence and, in many instances, autonomy over considerable financial resources. ” (2014) I believe that this autonomy, and legal independence mixed with her personality and perception of women in the world gave the wife of bath courage to remarry not once but an additional four times. In the tale she explains, “ Forsooth, I’ll not keep chaste for good and all;/ When my good husband from the world is gone,/ Some Christian man shall marry me anon;/ For then , the apostle says that I am free TIT wed, in God’s name, where it pleases me. /He says that to be wedded is no sin;/Better to marry than to burn within.

” (Chaucer, lines 52-58) According to Rugby, “... The Wife does not just fail to live up to the standards imposed by male authority, she is profoundly problematic when judged against the moral standards of the most forthright

and systematic feminist thinker of the day. ” (peg. 9) However, such judgment did not bother the Wife of bath.

She knew people judged her, but she used her biblical knowledge and faith to prove that women had every right just as men did to remarry. In her prologue she lists many great men in the bible who had many wives. “ I know well Abraham was holy man,/And Jacob, too, as far as know I can;/And each of them had spouses more than two;/And many another holy man also. ” (Chaucer, lines 61-64) She also mentions the Samaritan woman and her many husbands. She tells the crowd that God did not put a limit on marriage for man or woman; but gave an order for humans to increase and multiply.

The Wife of Bath on women sovereignty The Wife of Bath believes that wives should govern their husbands. She gave many examples in her tale. In her tale, there was a knight that got in trouble for raping a young woman. He was taken to the Kings court for judgment. At the King’s court something odd happened; the Queen and other ladies begged for the knight to be shown grace. Chaucer wrote, “ He granted life, at last, in the law’s place,/And gave him to the queen, as she should will,” Whether she’d save him, or his blood should spill”.

Lines 902-903) The knight would have been beheaded, and all it took was a request from the queen to change the fate of the knight. Is this a example of sovereignty? The wife of Bath shows her that even a powerful King could be somewhat tamed by his wife. S. H. Rugby writes about medieval women. Rugby states that , “ Nevertheless, if Eve was not made from the head of Adam, which would have signified that woman would have signified that

woman should have superiority in marriage, neither was she made from Dam's foot, which would have signified that a wife should be held low in subjection. (peg.

144) This purport the Wife of Bath's view on companionship versus subordination. Continuing with the Wife of Bath's tale, the Queen grants the knight his life if he can find an answer to question. "What is it that women desire most?" The knight was sent on a journey to find the answer that would spare his life. Here in this part of the story too the Queen rules over the knight and has charge over him. Perhaps women seek sovereignty over all men? After a year of searching, the knight gives up. On his way back to the King's court, he finds an old woman that would change his fate. Yet another woman rules over the night, "Give me your promise here, hand in hand," said she, "That you will do, whatever it may be/The thing I ask if it lie in your might;" (Chaucer, lines 1015-1017) The knight agreed to do whatever the old woman wanted to spare his life.

She gave him the answer and later requested marriage. The knight had given the Old lady his word, so he did marry her as tormented as they action appeared to him. The knight was destroyed by the thought of being married to an old woman forever. Woman sovereignty appears again in the tale. The old lady give the knight two options: she could stay old and dutiful to the knight, or become beautiful and unruly. The knight answers, "My lady and my love, and wife so dear,/I put myself in your wise governing;/ Do you choose which may be the more pleadings bring most honor to you, and me

also” (Chaucer, lines 1237-1239). The old lady governed once again and chose to be both beautiful and loyal, and all ended well in the tale.

The Wife of Bath’s tale was mainly about wives having say so in the household alongside their husbands. That was not the way of the world in the middle ages. The Wife of Bath felt so strongly about her disposition that she prayed, I pray Jesus to cut short the lives/Of those who’ll not be governed by their wives;” (Chaucer, lines 1267-1268) Conclusion In the end you learn to appreciate the unapologetic nature of the Wife of Bath and all that comes with her all- knowing territory.

She believes that women should be given authority in the household too. She has biblical proof that supports her way of thinking and that is enough for her to continue living her life the way she does. Would other women be so quick to follow her during the middle ages? Perhaps she just spoke and lived what every other woman wanted to.

The wife of Bath was truly a feminist ahead of her time. Reference British Library (2014). Learning Medieval Realms: Women.