

Answer ONE question on your chosen text. Begin your answer on page 25.

**You must select a poem from the prescribed list for your studied collection.
The poems are listed in Section B of the source booklet on page 6.**

Medieval Poet: Geoffrey Chaucer

Prescribed text

The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, editor James Winny

EITHER

- 5** Explore how Chaucer presents the Wife's rebellion against voices of authority in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, by referring to lines 77-114 and **one** other extract of similar length. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

(Total for Question 5 = 30 marks)

OR

- 6** Explore how Chaucer presents the Wife's treatment of her husbands in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, by referring to lines 194-223 and **one** other extract of similar length. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

(Total for Question 6 = 30 marks)



5)

Chaucer constructs an extremely controversial character within the Wife of Bath, as she deliberately challenges and rebels against upheld literary authority of Medieval culture. Alison challenges the bible, as well as well-known figures within the male discourse, in her attempts to carve an image of support for her chosen life. However, whether this is a well-constructed iconoclastic challenge to Medieval perspectives of women and virginity, or whether Chaucer is constructing Alison as a source of humour through her ignorance is ambiguous.

Within lines 77-114, Alison rebels against the biblical stance upon the issue of virginity, to claim that the bible is not dictatorial upon this issue and is accepting of the decisions of individuals. Arguably, this can be interpreted as a well-constructed argument and a revealing of the capability of women to re-interpret the message of the bible. Alison's argument pivots around the single passage of Paul from Corinthians, that it is acceptable as a concession to marry if you cannot remain virginal, which Alison interprets as when the encouragement of Christians to live a life of virginity 'al nis but conseil'. Alison craftily uses Paul's words, placing before them a monosyllabic 'al nis but' which emphasises the belittling of virginity. As a consequence of Alison's biblical exegesis she perceives that Medieval society, which venerated virginity and led to the rise of the cult of the virgin, has no justification to criticise her decision

to marry, as she declaratively states, with a double negative, that 'nis it no reprove' to not be virginal. The aural audience may easily be swept into Alison's argument, as she reconsiders and quickly quotes in succession passages from across the bible, from Timothy to Corinthians, and therefore they have little opportunity to consider the flaws which may be within her rebellious logic. However, when Alison rebels to such an extent that she deviates from the religious text and instead finds justification in her own definition of 'fraletee' as 'he and she/wolde leden al hir lyf in chastitee' the audience are more likely to see fault in this extreme approach. In an almost blasphemous manner, Alison has completely dismissed the ideology of the whole bible, and placed her own opinion as worthy of the same integrity of the biblical foundations of society and morality, as the personal pronoun 'I' begins to become more prominent than the references to the bible. Consequently, Chaucer may present Alison as skillfully succeeding in challenging the ideology of the bible by interpreting in relation to her own life and opinions, as she accepts it is identifiable to 'hem that wolde live parfitly' but then exclaims with monosyllabic bluntness 'that am not I', emphatically placing 'I' at the end of the line. Alternatively, Alison's wilful ignorance and towing of the boundary between exegesis and redefining the bible may demonstrate how Chaucer is construing a more extreme image of Alison's rebellion as blasphemous and

immoral. Overall, the focus upon an individual response to the bible may enable Alison to both respond to the authority in a intelligent manner and rebel against its constricting ideology simultaneously.

Alternatively, Chaucer may not be presenting how an individual responds to the bible, but instead presenting Alison as an 'everywoman' figure, and therefore using Alison's rebellion as a method to satirise the image of women within society. Alison uses hyperbolic language, as she exaggerates the message of the bible, that 'nat every wight her should go selle/ al that he hadde', by using the all-inclusive adjectives 'al' and 'every'. This exaggeration may not be conveying how she is justly passionate and a skillful method of persuasion, but instead as Chaucer constructing a humorous image of the ridiculous extremity of women, which transcends logic, and therefore conforming humorously to anti-feminist stereotypes of women. Similarly, the long passage in which Alison attempts to echo the voices of the literary authority, using latinate polysyllabic language like 'perfeccion' and 'devocion', ultimately does not succeed to elevate her to their integrity, as Tasioulas states 'she does not sound like a saint. Instead the saints sound like ordinary people'. Alison's inability to imitate the saints prevails most effectively within the final line of this extract as she concludes her argument with 'I wol bistow the flour of al myn age/in the acts and fruit of marriage', as Alison summarises within

her comfortable semantic field of domestic imagery, by referring to 'flour'.

Also, Chaucer cleverly uses the homophone of 'flour' and 'flower', as the aural audience of the time may have interpreted it as either, and therefore the closing impression could have been the sexually euphemistic implications of 'flower' and therefore once again conformed to the anti-feminist stereotype as Alison is revealed to be a lustful woman. This is supported by the prevalence of subtle euphemistic jokes directed to the audience, as Alison interjects 'ye knowe whaat this ensample may resemble', conforming to the crude language typical of Chaucer's style of fabliau, which although not the genre of this prologue, is still influential. Arguably, therefore, beneath Alison's confidently orchestrated by her rebellion, Chaucer's voice can be heard mocking her ignorance, lack of ability to emulate intelligent authority and negative motivations of sexual desire. However, the humour may have a dual purpose, as the satire could extend from being a depiction of ignorant women, instead to be a satire of the approach of any exegete, not just a female. Alison's inability to interpret the bible's message effectively, may reflect Chaucer's Lollard sympathies, as he conversed with John Wycliffe through their mutual acquaintance of John of Gaunt, and therefore possibly shared the Lollard condemnation of the Medieval church's tendency to control society's perception of the bible, due to the inaccessibility of the Latin text to the

general illiterate public. Consequently, the revealing of how simple it is to re-interpret the bible to support any argument may question the integrity of the church's views. Overall, Chaucer may be representing the failures and humorously mocking Alison's attempts to rebel against the teachings of the bible, however whether this is to create humour through her conformity to the anti-feminist stereotype or if there is a greater underlying message about the integrity of biblical exegesis is debatable.

In contrast, within lines 266-292, Alison's rebellion against authority is no longer related to the bible, but instead she challenges the ideology taught by male scholars, as she rebukes her husband's for repeating this ideology to her, particularly Theophrastus within his text 'The Golden Book of Marriage'.

Arguably, through placing the argument of the church father Theophrastus within the mouth of a rebellious female figure, Chaucer ironically undermines Theophrastus' argument. The condescending tone of Alison throughout this passage, ironically surrounds the commonly accepted ideology of this authority figure, and therefore conveys it as non-sensical rather than logically integral.

Alison frequently cannot suppress her anger at the ridiculousness of this assertions as she exclaimatively refers to her husbands as 'lorel', 'olde dotard shrewe' and hyperbolically announces that she wished their 'nekke be to broke'. Consequently, Alison evidently condemns the ideology that women

are oppressions upon men, or that they morally corrupt them so that 'no man that entendeth unto heavene' should get married, as another church father St Jerome asserts that women are 'the road to iniquity'. The constant repetition of 'thow seist' throughout the text, as Alison presents this as a retelling of the statements of their husbands, engages the audience, as it creates the impression of a direct address to them, and therefore arguably Chaucer intimidates the audience by the strong presence of Alison and leads the audience to question their previously accepted perceptions. Alternatively, as Alison later reveals that 'al was fals', and her husbands did not say any of this, it can be interpreted that 'thow' is rather addressed directly to the authority that Alison is so directly quoting, and therefore she rebels deliberately against them. Consequently the disparaging reference to the anti-feminist statements about women as 'a proverbe of a shrewe' is a shockingly controversial rebellion and dismissal of the respected literature of the time. Overall, Alison is shockingly subversive as she ridicules and directly rejects the ideology of Theophrastus, and through constructing such a controversial figure Chaucer may be offering an alternative to the accepted ideology against women and therefore be endorsing this rebellion.

However, as Alison condemns and rebels against the ideology of the authority, she simultaneously humorously conforms to the anti-feminist ideology of

authority, and therefore ironically condemns herself. Alison ridicules the concept that 'wives maken men to flee/ out of hir owene hous', however he long polemic is conforming exactly to Theophrastus' concept of the 'curtain lecture' and therefore would lead a man to desire to escape the torment of a stereotypical nagging wife. Similarly, the animal imagery used throughout this passage, which the Medieval audience would connect with the Great Chain of Being, and therefore associate women within the inferior image of animals who are governed by physical not spiritual desires, is ironically accurate to the image of the passionate and sexual Alison. Alison is humorously identifiable with the image of a 'spaynel' who 'coveiteth every man' and 'on him lepe', as she announces with pride that she has married five men and seeks another. Even within this passage, the government of Alison by emotion rather than logic and spiritual guidance is evident, as her choleric nature, assigned to her within Medieval beliefs of astrology, is uncontrollable and she exclaims 'benedictee!', italicised within this edition to portray the overwhelming release of emotion. Also, the irregular rhythm throughout, especially prevalent within her threat that 'wilde thonder-dint and firy leve/ moote thy' results in an impression that Alison's outburst is uncontrolled and therefore not worthy of serious consideration. Consequently, although Alison's speech may be rebellious against the ideology of Medieval authority figures like Theophrastus,

the tone of her voice and the ironic accuracy of the chosen passages, reveals that Alison is ultimately incapable of rebelling against authority as their analysis of her is accurate.

Overall, the interpretation of the successfulness of Alison's rebellion against authority is dependent upon whether the Prologue is perceived as a reputable text which is imbued with integrity, or whether it is merely a source of humour, in which the audience should find entertainment within the accuracy of the anti-feminist texts and ignorance of her re-interpretation of the bible.

2)

'Two Trees' and 'Giuseppe' both explore unusual events, and the poems are engulfed within ambiguity and intrigue. Paterson explores a fantastically unusual event of a local legend, whereas Ford transforms something of universal understanding, a war scenario, and imbues it with unusual elements. However, prevalent within both of them is the concept of retelling stories, as these unusual events provoke interest which leads to the transference of the stories. In addition there is an element of poeticism and fantasy within both poems which results in them appearing unusual.

The conveyance of a retelling of an unusual event is constructed within both poems through the third-person narrative voices, and therefore the audience or reader of the poem is made aware of the response to the event as well as the event itself. Within 'Two Trees' there is a strong suggestion that this is a well-known and repeated tale which has been transformed into a local fable. The passing of time is signalled prevalently throughout, initiating with 'one morning' and continuing with 'for twelve months' and 'over the years', therefore there is a well-formed sense of chronology to the poem, conveying it as a well-constructed narrative poem. Similarly, the consistent rhythm, which mostly conforms to iambic pentameter and the simple rhyming couplets throughout create a melody and sense of flow to the narrative, which therefore conveys how the unusual event has been transformed into a pleasant story, and again alludes to a fairytale format which implies the event has been retold. In contrast, 'Giuseppe', although also a form of storytelling, as the uncle retells the events of 'Sicily in World War Two', there is no impression that this is a well-constructed retelling and implies rather a singular confession than an event to be retold over generations, as in 'Two Trees'. The use of free verse throughout and lack of a rhyme creates a colloquial tone, which contrasts the constructed style of 'Two Trees'. Also, the irregular stanza length implies a sporadicness and unpredictability to the poetic form, and therefore a

surprising element to the poem, extending upon the unexpectedness of the combining of a war setting and mermaids, within Ford's use of magic realism. The unpredictability creates an atmosphere of unease for the audience, and intruig to the narrative, in comforting and satsifying predictability of the rhyme that Paterson constructs. Whereas the storytelling is used within 'Two Trees' to create a distinct figure of 'Don Miguel', who 'had had no dream' and then transgressed and morphed into a figure of achievement and interest, storytelling is used with 'Giuseppe' as a technique to distance from the unusual events, rather than praise those involved. The repetition throughout of 'they'd said' and ambiguity until the end that Giuseppe was 'the aquarium keeper', conveys the purposeful use of 'they' rather than the more appropriate collective pronoun 'we' and therefore reveals how the uncle desires to distance himself from the brutal events, and therefore evade the guilt of these crimes. Ironically, however, it is Ford's poem that is named after the central figure 'Giuseppe', whereas Paterson's focusses upon the trees rather than Don Miguel, and therefore it is revealed how Giuseppe is incapable of avoiding the admittance of his association with this event. In addition to the focus upon the figure within the unusual event, through the event being manifested into a story, there is an equal focus upon the response of the listener. Within 'Two Trees', the response of the village is that of excitement, as 'not one kid in the

village didn't know/ the magic tree'. The interest surrounding the term 'magic' which implies an other-worldly power conveys how the unusual event was imbued with a mystery and provoked interest. In contrast, the nephew within Giuseppe is not excited but shocked by the revelation of the unusual and horrific events of the war. The title 'Gisueppe' lacks the personal pronoun which the poem begins with, and therefore conveys how the response, lack that of the uncle himself, is to attempt to distance yourself from the unusual event. Ford's closing image is that the nephew is grateful that his uncle 'couldn't look [him] in the eye'. Possibly this conveys how the nephew doesn't want to extend the interaction due to his repulsion, or it could convey his gratitude that the uncle is remorseful, and therefore Ford implies the nephew's critical and judgemental response to the actions contained within this unusual event. Overall, within both poems the unusual events are being retold, however the stark difference in the contents of these events, as Paterson relates a intriguing and inspiring plight of creation and Ford discusses destructive and horrific actions, result in the poems have very different tones and responses to the events.

Arguably, the unusual nature of these poems are a result of the poeticism of the retelling of them, which creates a liminal space in which the events are both realistic and surreal. Within 'Two Trees' it is the personification of the

trees which results in an air of fantasy surrounding them. The trees 'weep every spring', and the narrative voice alludes to them experiencing emotions as the lack of fruitfulness is 'from the shame or from the fright'. Consequent of possessing and responding to emotions the trees are portrayed as having an element of freewill, as the active verb 'put forth' portrays that the growth of fruit is an active choice rather than a natural occurrence. In contrast, the surrealism of 'Giuseppe' is not a consequence of personification, but instead of dehumanisation, as the figure of the mermaid can be interpreted as an active dehumanizing of the victim. The opening of the second stanza conveys the conflicted perception of the figure as both human and fish, with the accidental use of the pronoun 'she' before determining it's an 'it'. The emphatic positioning of this makes the reader hyper-aware of the liminal nature of a mermaid, which possesses both a human and fish half. The conceit used within 'Giuseppe', as the war and mermaid lexical cluster juxtapose throughout, lends the poem to an allegorical reading, in which the fantastical imagery of the mermaid may be a metaphor of the dehumanization of many victims of war. Therefore, whereas surreal imagery is used merely to extend the poeticism and interest of the story within 'Two Trees', there is a more integral and underlying message conveyed through this within 'Giuseppe'. In contrast, there is also a grounding of the poeticism in reality within both

poems, as the narrative voice is ultimately aware that the narrative has been fantasised. Paterson concludes 'Two Trees' with end-stopped declarative statements that 'trees don't weep or ache or shout/ and trees are all this poem is about', and therefore undercuts the magical imagery of the poem, through his syndetic and inclusive list which refers back to the exact verb 'weep' used within the poem. Similarly, there is an implication that the figure of the mermaid is really human, with the simile 'she screamed like a woman in terrible fear', which evokes the distinct image within the reader's mind of a human female. However, the use of figurative language, which is not seen throughout the rest of the poem, conveys a prevailing unwillingness to be honest and a maintaining of the pretence that she is only similar to a human and not in fact human. In addition to the surreal images of the central figures within the poems, the use or lack of poetic language within both poems are integral in how the unusual event is conveyed. Paterson's image of 'two lights in the dark leaves' although basically descriptive, evokes an image of hope through the connotations of 'light' and 'dark' and therefore creates a poetically uplifting description. Also, the soft consonance of 'light' and 'leaves' creates a soothing tone which aids the positive imagery. The detailed and evocative imagery is continued throughout as the 'intricate embrace' of the trees evokes affection and interdependence within the simple entanglement of branches. In

contrast, 'Giuseppe' doesn't contain any poeticism, instead there is a stark bluntness to Ford's description, which creates an unsettling incompatibility within the poem, which shrouds this unusual event with an dark foreboding. The monosyllabic, blunt description of 'put her head and hands/ in a box for burial', with harsh plosive alliteration of 'box' and 'burial' conveys a stark brutality to these actions, as the surreal imagery of the mermaid cannot disguise the reality of their actions. Equally, the initial impressions of the description of the mermaid as 'butchered' implies a use of hyperbole, and therefore a purposefully exaggerated and figurative description to increase interest in the unusual event, but the accuracy of this term when the decapitation and dividing of her body is revealed is shockingly repulsive. Therefore, within 'Two Trees' there is a harmonious use of both poetic imagery in the conveyance of the central image as well as the tone of the whole poem which creates interest in this unusual occurrence, whereas, within 'Giuseppe' it is the conflict between the fantastical central image of the mermaid and the overall lack of poeticism in description that makes the event appear so unusual.

Overall, both poems explore unusual events, which are both realistic and surreal, which leads them to be retold. However, the contents of the event, whether it is a horrific reveal of extreme events in 'Giuseppe' or a uplifting

narrative of an unusual success in 'Two Trees', dictates the overriding tone, use of poeticism and the response of the narrator and reader.