

Indicate which question you are answering by marking a cross in the box ☒. If you change your mind, put a line through the box ☒ and then indicate your new question with a cross ☒.

Chosen question number: Question 3 ☒ Question 4 ☒ Question 5 ☒
 Question 6 ☒ Question 7 ☒ Question 8 ☒
 Question 9 ☒ Question 10 ☒ Question 11 ☒
 Question 12 ☒ Question 13 ☒ Question 14 ☒
 Question 15 ☒ Question 16 ☒ Question 17 ☒
 Question 18 ☒ Question 19 ☒ Question 20 ☒
 Question 21 ☒ Question 22 ☒ Question 23 ☒
 Question 24 ☒ Question 25 ☒ Question 26 ☒

The wife of Bath sets out immediately her aim to preach on her views of marriage. She subverts the traditional view of medieval marriages by giving the previously silenced woman a voice, and demanding her right to power. She also presents inappropriate societal expectations views on marriage, such as the importance of sex and the freedom of multiple marriages, as something to be celebrated.

The wife begins by expressing her view that multiple marriages are something to be accepted. She challenges male Biblical authority that seeks to find passages that condemn her from marrying more than once. Responding to the male 'glossators', she glosses the Biblical texts herself and extrapolates examples that suit her cause: 'the wise king, dauid Salomon; I trowe he hadde niver no than oon'. The adjective 'wise' embeds her opinion of him, painting him as an authority to be trusted.



The wife has mimicked the act of the male glossators by forcing Biblical authority to fit her beliefs. Her views on multiple marriage are ones that can rarely be Biblically enforced, and so she purposely omits the fact that King Solomon goes on to turn from God. This creates a link between multiple marriage and blasphemy that she attempts to suppress. In the medieval period, marriage was seen as lasting a lifetime, with divorce only an option for infidelity or abjuring Christianity. In the wife's role as a widow, and one with multiple marriages behind her, she would be both a figure of fear and fascination. Widows had far more autonomy than wives, ^{having} ~~and had~~ economic independence, and were even able to live alone. This perhaps is what gives the wife the confidence to challenge male authority: 'he seith that to be wedded is no synne; / bet it to be wedded than to brynne'. The rhyming link of 'synne' and 'brynne' attempts to polarise ~~the~~ and distance marriage from sin, with the comparative 'better' highlighting the way the wife enforces her own position. She is referring to St Paul's teaching 'it is better to marry than to burn', in which he encourages believers to remain celibate like himself, but accepts that sex within marriage is the next best thing. The wife adopts this by using it to enforce her stance that multiple marriages still remain superior to fornication. She goes on to say: 'I nevere tullen in myn age / upon this



nombre 'difficultian'. The personal 'I' and 'my' sees the wife embed her voice within a phallogocentric discourse, highlighting how she parallels the importance of her subjective experience within marriage to what Biblical authorities may say about it. The ^{adjective} specific 'difficultian' sees her persist for specifics, and refers to how the Bible never gives an exact number of times one should marry. She is careful to never call the Bible wrong, but clearly uses questions and loaded statements to force the male authority to find an answer. She points out the hypocrisy in being turned religious authority on why she can't marry multiple times, yet that same texts fails to ^{specifics to} ever clarify its own claims.

At this point in which she challenges authority, the wife has embarked on a type of sermon. She loads Biblical quotations and examples to construct an argument, yet its emblematic content forms it to be a form of 'anti-sermon'. She clashes this with the framework of a confessional, as she begins to describe deeply personal elements of her sex life: 'to be regretted half so often as he!'. The verb 'regretted' connotes sex to be a celebration of pleasure, detailing her envy at Solomon's thriving sex life. Ending with 'he!', adds a sense of exclamation, highlighting her passion and excitement, and, moreover, how sex is clearly a huge aspect of marriage in her eyes. Contextually, sex



within marriage was seen as a form of transaction, called the 'conjugal debt'. Early Biblical authority had told wives to remain submissive, such as Ephesians which instructed 'wives, submit to your husbands'. 'Submit' suggests an inferiority and a subordination, but in medieval times, sex began to be (relatively) split more equally. The marital debt referred to an obligation on the part of both the wife and the husband to 'owe' each other sex. It was commonly stereotyped that the weak and feeble nature of the woman meant she was often too shy to ask for her 'payment'; St Aquinas went on to instruct men to cheer when his wife wanted her payment. This created a Biblical precedent for what was essentially marital rape, however, the wife presents the conjugal debt as something she can fully invest in: '~~what that~~ ~~from~~ which shall be borne my debtor and my moral'. The plural of 'both' adds a level playing field to the dynamic, adding her sexual desires to the importance in the marriage. Her views are unorthodox and her willingness to ask for sex in marriage invests traditional views of sex within marriage. Within the passage of lines 1219-1239, the wife also portrays another view of sex within marriage. This is the importance of youth and beauty ~~with~~ on the part of the woman in a marriage's sex life. The Old Hag gives the knight a choice: 'or elles ye wol han me yong and fair, /



And take your avenue of the repair'. The certainty of 'wo' shows the predictability of women, effectively negating them of multiplicity. The adjectives 'young' and 'fair' highlight the importance of aesthetics in a medieval marriage. The wife was very much aware that age and beauty ^{were} ~~are~~ largely ~~what~~ all a woman could bargain for with. Ovid, in his advice for women, said: 'let the beautiful woman offer herself to be seen'. This highlights the way a woman's looks were almost like a bargaining tool. This links to the conjugal debt, in the way the wife presents a marriage as little more than a sexual transaction: both the male and the female are constantly playing for power, and the wife makes this explicit in her celebration of her body and the control she can ~~omit~~ exert with it. The wife, ~~later~~ through allowing the flag to transform into a 'fair' and 'young' woman, is demonstrating her awareness of the importance of such characteristics in a medieval marriage. It is where her sermon on marriage contradicts: she preaches for the values and rights for wives, and yet her Tale caters to the very stereotype of women that she seeks to destroy, and the fact that a woman's role in marriage can ultimately only be boiled down to her looks.

The most controversial aspect of the wife's views on marriage, however, are her desires for power over the husband. Centuries of anti-feminist discourse had



rendered the female as powerless, and became inescapably embedded in tradition. Augustinian wrote in detail of the way Eve's act in The Fall have set a precedent for the slipperiness and deceitful-nature of women. Eve, in tempting Adam with her words, 'proved' to be why a female should remain silent, with male authority equating the penis with the tongue, resulting in the birth of phallogocentric discourse. Eve became an emblem of the dangers of female power, and was repeatedly referred to to justify gender oppression. ^{much} ~~many~~ of Chaucer's source material relates to Eve, with Walter Map's 'Advice from Valerius to Ruffinus', introducing Ruffinus not so much due to women's state as the 'spawn of disobedience', again referring to Eve's autonomous decision to disobey God. ~~later~~ ~~in her Prologue~~. The Wife is pushing against centuries worth of literature that seeks to oppress her voice and her power. The wife uses her language to rebut against it: 'I wol not kepe me chaunt in al'. The declarative monosyllables of 'I wol not', provide a forceful defence against ~~the~~ phallogocentric discourse. The simple defiance of it purposely contrasts to the eloquence, and vagueness, of the authorities that condemn her. ~~Now~~ Ending with 'in al' shows how, not only does she refuse to remain silent for much longer, but also has an air of continued defiance, and now her voice will continue to be heard. This relates to marriage because she attempts to



exert a control over her husband ~~that~~ ^{her} in the same vein that men have tried to control \wedge She makes no secret that 'maistrey and Sovereignty' are her aims in marriage, and one way she fights for dominance. // This fantasy is echoed exactly in lines 1219-1239, in which the wife forces the Knight to make his choice. Major plot devices, such as the old Hag resembling the leathery Lady, are changed: the ~~old~~ ^{leathery} Lady would ~~that would~~ always 'transform' into the beautiful woman before the Knight made his choice. The wife makes sure she doesn't, in order to grasp onto elements of control. Ultimately, with the Knight claiming: 'I put me in your wise governance', the wife gets her wish. Syntactically placing 'I me' as the object of the sentence, linguistically inverts the previous attempt to make the female passive. The adjectival 'wise' further makes the Knight acknowledge female intelligence, which would be ~~unusual~~ unusual in medieval marriage. The Tale's ending creates a problematic view of marriage, in that, ultimately, it creates a fairytale depiction of what the wife wants a marriage to be. It echoes the way she manipulates Jankyn to submit in her Prologue, and enforces that all she wants is power. The wife does not seek to equalise the playing field of power in marriage, but only to gain her own. Her desire for 'maistrey' sees her contradict everything she previously stood for: rendering her insults on male control as more of an influence on how she will ^{shape her later behaviour} ~~behave~~, rather than condemning



them as abhorrent.

Sex and power ultimately become what marriage boils down to for the wife of Bath. She makes great claim for the ~~for~~ female voice and makes somewhat valid arguments in her ^{earlier} ~~earlier~~ execution, but it soon becomes clear that she does it with the wrong intention. Her intense desire for power warps her stories, and leaves her marriages as nothing more than a loveless, economic weapon.

