Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in
Lingue e Letterature Europee e Americane
Classe LM-37

Tesi di Laurea

The Clerk, the Wife of Bath and the Merchant: perspectives on women in the Canterbury Tales

Relatrice
Prof. Alessandra Petrina

Laureanda
Valentina Bagliolid
n° matr.1207401 / LMLLA

Anno Accademico 2019 / 2020

Table of Contents

Foreword

When I studied Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* I found it interesting to consider how Chaucer depicts the society of his time through this work. In fact, in the General Prologue he lists people of different social classes: he starts from the Knight, the highest in status, and goes on by describing also ordinary people like the Miller. Different viewpoints regarding women in society can be seen among the characters of the pilgrims and the protagonists of the tales pilgrims tell. In particular, after reading the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale and the Clerk's Prologue and Tale, I noticed how Chaucer presents two opposite examples of the role of women in society. So, starting from this point, I decided to focus on the character of Griselda of the Clerk's Tale, the character of the Wife of Bath and the character of May, which is present in the Merchant's Tale. My aim is to present how Chaucer gives different viewpoints regarding women, focusing on the figure of the submissive wife (Griselda), on the figure of the independent woman (the Wife of Bath) and on the figure of the trickster (May), that is the wife who can easily deceive her husband.

To do this, I first focus on Chaucer's life and works, in particular on *The Canterbury Tales.* It is important to consider Chaucer's life since his acceptance into courtly household permitted him to have a foot in several worlds, that is the courtly, the mercantile and the literary. *The Canterbury Tales* is the work that Chaucer wrote during the last period of his life. It is an unfinished work and is composed of tales that speak to each other. The Ellesmere manuscript is considered to be the most complete and authoritative because its order is the one accepted by the majority of scholars.

After that, I analyse the Clerk's Tale. To do that, I first introduce the Marriage Group, which includes fragments D, E and F. The theme of the tales of this group is marriage and the Clerk's Prologue and Tale, the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale and the Merchant's Prologue and Tale are among that group. Then I analyse the Clerk's Tale and I focus on the main characters, namely Griselda and Walter; they can be considered the embodiments of medieval ideas on women and marriage. I decided to analyse Griselda because she can be considered the representation of

feminine virtue, being the example of a submissive, long-suffering wife. This analysis is followed by a comparison of the story of Griselda between the versions of Chaucer, Petrarch and Boccaccio, focusing on the possibility that Chaucer might have got in contact with Petrarch and Boccaccio and their works.

In the third chapter, I analyse the character that represents the opposite of Griselda, that is the Wife of Bath. She is a unique character since she does not represent a social class, but a critique of marriage. In this case, particular attention has to be given to the prologue to the tale, since it represents the Wife's autobiography where she establishes her authority. Then, I analyse the character of the Wife of Bath and the ones of Old Woman and the knight, who can be found in the Wife's Tale. This analysis is followed by a comparison between the Wife of Bath's Prologue and the speech of the Old Woman in Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*. Then, the Wife of Bath's Tale and its analogues (*The Marriage of Sir Gawaine, The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell, The Tale of Florent*) are also compared. Finally, I found it particularly interesting to highlight how some traits of the Wife of Bath can also be found in the women of Dunbar's *Treatis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo*; therefore, I have tried to show evidence regarding the fact that Dunbar was clearly influenced by Chaucer's works.

In the final chapter, I focus on the figure of May, the woman who is the protagonist of the Merchant's Tale. If the Wife of Bath and Griselda may be considered opposites, May is the perfect example of woman as a deceiver, who shares some traits with the Wife of Bath. Even in this case, an analysis of the Merchant's Tale is followed by a comparison of the tale with three analogues, that are two novellas from the Decameron (tenth novella of the second day and ninth novella of the seventh day) and the story of the pear-tree from *Il Novellino*.

All things considered, this work allows the reader to know more about analogues and sources of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and how the woman is presented in different ways among the tales, focusing in particular on the two opposites and on the figure of the wife as a deceiver.

1. Chaucer and *The Canterbury Tales*

1.1. Chaucer's life and works

Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1340-1400) was an English poet who lived in the fourteenth century. The historical background and the facts that characterise his life, especially his involvement in politics, are important to understand his works.

He was the son of John Chaucer, a wealthy wine merchant of London, and of his wife Agnes[1]. Since he wrote much on marriage and children, it is important to underline that he had legitimate parents, which meant to be blessed by luck, since at that time bastardy was quite common; family life, despite the Christian teaching about monogamy and fidelity, was brief because parents died young and the one who survived re-married quickly[2]. He began with a mercantile background, was educated in letters at an early age and then became a professional poet. His place in society could be defined as that of a gentleman because, despite his mercantile origins, he had a courtly upbringing[3]; his career had been made possible by the fact that he was accepted into courtly households[4]. In effect, in 1357 he first entered the household of Prince Lionel, who would become Duke of Clarence, and in 1359 he was in the prince's forces, since Prince Lionel was in the army that his father Edward III took to France. He may have studied law in the Inner Temple and may have visited Spain with John of Gaunt[5]. He married Philippa Roet in 1366 and their marriage lasted until about 1387, the year in which she possibly died. They probably had three children: Lewis, Thomas and a surviving daughter called Elizabeth[6]. From 1367 he worked as an esquire of the royal household of Edward III with a regular pension and then he went with the king's army in France in 1369 and later in Italy between 1372 and 1373. He also participated to

[1]Stapleton, Michael, *The Cambridge Guide to English Literature,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Newnes Books, 1983, p. 157.
[2]Du Boulay, F. R. H., "The Historical Chaucer" in Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Canterbury Tales,* London: Norton, 2005, pp. 484-485.
[3] Du Boulay, p. 476.
[4] Du Boulay, p. 485.
[5]Stapleton, p. 157.
[6]Du Boulay, p. 484.

diplomatic missions to Flanders and France in 1377 and to Milan in 1378[7]. In 1374 he was assigned the role of Controller of the wool custom in London, which was a job of high importance that involved the technicalities of the credit system. Chaucer's life progressed in the realm's affairs: from 1389 to 1391 he was Clerk of the King's Works with responsibilities in various royal residences and served as Justice of the Peace for Kent between 1385 and 1389. Then, he was elected to Parliament (he sat as knight of the shire for Kent) in 1386, which represents the last time in which Chaucer was part of public life[8]. In 1399, when Henry of Lancaster, John of Gaunt's son, supplanted Richard II, Chaucer's pension was doubled. He died on 25 October 1400 and was buried in Westminster Abbey. His resting place represents the beginning of Poets' Corner[9].

Undoubtedly, his career was made possible by his acceptance into courtly households since he had a foot in several worlds, that is the courtly, the mercantile and the literary[10]. The first work to be given a date is *The Book of the Duchess,* an elegy that Chaucer wrote for Blanche, duchess of Lancaster and the first wife of John of Gaunt, who died in 1369. In his early years he also translated a fragment of *Le Roman de la Rose,* a French verse romance. He was sent to Italy in 1372 because of his knowledge of Italian, even though it is not certain when he learnt this language. In general, Chaucer's literary career can be divided into three periods. The first sees him under the influence of French poetry and includes the works formerly mentioned: *The Book of the Duchess* and *The Romaunt of the Rose.* The second is the Italian period (1372-1386), influenced by Petrarch and Boccaccio as well as Dante: during this span of time he probably wrote *The Parlement of Foules, The Hous of Fame, Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Legende of the Good Women.* The last period, which goes on until his death, is considered to be the one in which he wrote *The Canterbury Tales*.

He surely learned both French and Latin from an early age[11]. In the fourteenth century English was progressing towards a standardised form: French was being forgotten and reading and

[7]Stapleton, p. 157.
[8]Du Boulay, pp. 486-489.
[9]Stapleton, pp. 157-158.
[10]Du Boulay, p. 485.
[11]Stapleton, p. 158.

writing in English were becoming more and more widespread among lay people. This variation in language and the possibility of its wider comprehension, since it covered a wider geographical area, are clearly indicated by Chaucer in a passage of *Troilus:*

> And for ther is so gret diversite
> In Englissh and in writing of oure tonge
> So prey I God that non miswrite the,
> Ne the mysmetre for defaute of tonge
> And red wherso thow be, or elles songe,
> That thow be understonde, God I biseche![12]
> (V, 1793-1798)

In these lines, Chaucer showed his real concern about language variation: in effect, even though he was not the first among English authors "to comment on linguistic diversity, […] he [was] the first to express concern about it"[13]. He was convinced that since language was used in order to communicate "across space and time", a standard variety was required. From the mid-fourteenth century onwards, early attempts to create a standardised form of English were based on London English[14]. Following this progress, in the 1360s English began to be used in London courts and parliaments[15].

Finally, it might be interesting to consider the description that Chaucer provides of himself in the Prologue of the Tale of Sir Thopas, one of the tales belonging to *The Canterbury Tales* told by Chaucer himself as one of the pilgrims on the road to Canterbury:

> And seyde thus: "What man artow?" quod he;
> "Thou lookest as thou woldest fynde an hare,
> For evere upon the ground I se thee stare.
> Approche neer and looke myrily.
> Now war yow, sires, and lat this man have place.
> He in the waast is shape as wel as I;
> This were a popet in an arm t'enbrace
> For any womman, smal and fair of face.
> He semeth elvyssh by his contenaunce,
> For unto no wight dooth he daliaunce.
> (695-704)

[12] The edition I use to quote Chaucer's works is: *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
[13] Turville-Petre, Thorlac, *Reading Middle English Literature*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2010, pp. 16-17.
[14] Turville-Petre, pp. 16-17.
[15] Du Boulay, pp. 476-477.

The host is here speaking to the pilgrim and asking him to lift his gaze (695-696). Then, the host starts a brief description: first, he affirms that they have the same shape of waist (700), implying the fact that they are both corpulent men. In fact, the host is described in the General Prologue as a "large man" (753). Then, he compares the pilgrim to a puppet, stressing his small shape (701) and he gives women's opinion of him, which is "small and fair of face" (702). Finally, the host describes his appearance as "elvish" (703). This description may seem contradictory, since being corpulent and having an elvish appearance can be perceived as opposites. In fact, the adjective "elvish" gives the idea of someone who is thin. However, this description is not contradictory if we consider the literal sense of the word: he seems an elf in his appearance in the sense of being "mysterious, from another world", since it refers to the realm of Fairies. The traits given in this description might be considered a consequence of the mood caused by the Prioress's Tale or the joke according to which Chaucer the pilgrim, following the host's mockery, presents Sir Thopas as a further parody[16]. This description differs from the first appearance of the narrator at the beginning of the General Prologue: in this case he affirms he is at the Tabard inn in Southwark to go on a pilgrimage to Canterbury, when a group of pilgrims arrive; the picture showed here is of a "friendly, tactful and gregarious Chaucer"[17], since he apparently wants to organise the company to go to Canterbury together[18]:

> And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste,
> So hadde I spoken with hem everichon
> That I was of hir felaweshipe anon,
> And made forward erly for to ryse,
> To take oure wey ther as I yow devyse.
> (30-34)

The fact of describing himself may be something interesting to underline, since he is introducing himself inside his own work, by giving not only a possible physical description but also different sides of his character according to the situation. Therefore, it can be considered the evolution of Chaucer the pilgrim throughout the work.

[16] Kimpel, Ben, "The Narrator of the Canterbury Tales", *ELH*, 20, 1953, p. 85.
[17] Kimpel, p. 79.
[18] Kimpel, pp. 78-79.

After this brief overview of Chaucer's life and works, I will present *The Canterbury Tales*, in particular its structure and the issue regarding the manuscripts.

1.2. *The Canterbury Tales*

It is considered the greatest work of Geoffrey Chaucer and critics like Stapleton believe its composition to have begun in 1386, the period in which Chaucer was living in Kent[19].

To begin with, it may be interesting to consider the structure of this work, in particular both the plan of *The Canterbury Tales* and the plan of the Canterbury pilgrimage. The plan of this work can be defined "an ingenious variation of a popular literary species"[20]. Therefore, the genre of the book can be identified in the story book and the motif that is followed is the one of the pilgrimage[21]. In this work the 29 pilgrims, who travel to Canterbury, provide a picture of fourteenth-century England[22]. This can be noticed from the beginning in the General Prologue, which represents the realisation of social satire[23]. This type of classification is an elastic one, since the general satire might be applied to single cases. For instance, the general satire upon the clergy possibly becomes a satire upon cardinals, monks and friars; or, in the case of the Wife of Bath, since she does not represent a specific class, she represents the satire of matrimony, which can be identified as one of the *états*. What is found here in the General Prologue, is a type that is well defined in pre-Chaucerian literature. An example might be the *Roman de carité* by Renclus de Mollien, that Kittredge affirms to be certainly known by Chaucer: it is a work that tells the allegorical trip of Carité who left France and Rome to shelter in Jerusalem. In order to find her, different social classes are visited[24]. Therefore, the *Roman de carité* is a book of travel like the *Canterbury Tales* with the difference that in the *Roman de carité* there is not a true pilgrimage to a destination on a

[19]Stapleton, p. 132.
[20] Jones, H.S.V., "The Plan of the 'Canterbury Tales'", *Modern Philology,* 13, 1915, p. 45
[21]Jones, p. 45.
[22]Stapleton, p. 132.
[23]Jones, p. 45.
[24] Online source: https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/reclus-de-molliens-barthelemy-dit-le/

map, but "the poet visits the estates of the world instead of traveling in their company" with "the uncertain abode of Charity"[25] as destination. Regarding the plan of the Canterbury pilgrimage, there are many theories on the number of days that the pilgrimage lasted. Critics like Tyrwhitt believe it to be a one-day journey, others suggest this to be a two-day journey and Dr. Furnivall affirms this to be a four-day journey. There is only one scholar, Dr John Koch, who supports the idea of a three-day journey[26]. Finally, critics like Edith Rickert, quoted in Owen, assume the pilgrims to have travelled thirty miles a day and that they would have taken the same span of time for going and returning. Following Rickert's assumption, the road from London to Canterbury and the return can be considered a four-day journey[27]. Finally, Owen suggests the possibility of a five-day journey: after having spent their first night at Dartford, they move to Ospringe on their second day and eventually reach Canterbury on the third day. Then, after the visit to the shrine of St. Thomas, they set off for the journey back on the morning of the fourth day. Finally, on the evening of the fifth day they approach the Tabard inn to have supper and listen to the announcement of the winner of the story-telling competition[28]. In general, the phases of the journey might be divided into five different moments. The first day shows the chivalric ideal in love and war, a theme which is then overturned by the Miller and Reeve: the former presents how men really love, the latter shows how they fight in two different ways. Then, the second day can be defined as literary, including "the parody of Sir Thopas, the Monk's definition of tragedy, the two interruptions, and the mock heroic *Nun's Priest's Tale* with his commentary on rhetoric". The third day they arrive at the shrine of St. Thomas and finally on the fourth and fifth days we make the return trip from Canterbury[29]. Even though this plan is among the most accredited, it is very simplistic, since some tales do not find a place. In effect, it is important to consider the distance between Southwark and Canterbury, which is of nearly ninety kilometres (sixty miles). At that time going on a pilgrimage might be dangerous

[25]Jones, p. 46.
[26] Quoted in Tatlock, J.S.P., "The Duration of the Canterbury Pilgrimage", *PMLA*, 21, 1906, p.478.
[27]Owen, C.A. Jr., "The Plan of the Canterbury Pilgrimage", *PMLA*, 66, 1951, p. 820.
[28]Owen, p. 821.
[29]Owen, p. 825.

because roads were not in as good conditions as today and pilgrims usually rode a horse or went on foot. This meant that going on a pilgrimage took quite a long time. The choice of lodging-places hypothesised by critics is supported by the fact that there are a few records about pilgrimages between the fourteenth and fifteenth century that affirm Dartford, Rochester and Ospringe to be used as lodging-places. By considering the distance between these places, it appears reasonable to assume that a first stop took place in Dartford, a second one in Rochester, the third one in Ospringe and then the arrival to Canterbury. Between these places there is a distance between 15 and 25 kilometres (10 and 17 miles), which could be considered a possible distance to be covered at that time by a group of pilgrims. By reading the *Canterbury Tales* we cannot be sure about the lodging-places Chaucer intended to insert, but throughout the tales various towns are named; there is the reference to Greenwich in the Prologue to the Reeve's Tale that indicates the fact that pilgrims are more or less at the beginning of their journey and the reference to Rochester in the Prologue to the Monk's Tale, even though in this last case it is also said that pilgrims do not stop there. Another possible theory can be a seven-day journey with Dartford, Rochester and Ospringe (or places nearby these towns) as lodging-places and considering a distance of an average of 20 kilometres (15 miles) per day. In this way, it could seem a more acceptable plan if we consider both the conditions of the road at the time and the stories that Chaucer intended to write as part of this work.

Then, another point to consider with regard to the *Canterbury Tales*' structure is that of the open endings. First, in manuscripts the end of the work may be marked quite clearly. Most of the times "Here endeth" appeared at the end as a counterpart to the "Here beginneth" that was present at the beginning of the manuscripts. For instance, at the end of Hengwrt MS and Ellesmere MS there is "Heere is ended the book of the tales of Canterbury", which is used to underline the end of the work. Second, concerning the tales, some of them ended with the common final word for religious texts "Amen"[30] (as in the Prioress' Tale) and there is also the presence of the epilogue as

[30] Sherman, William, H., "Terminal Paratext and the Birth of Print Culture", in *Renaissance Paratexts,* ed. Smith and Wilson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 68-77.

at the end of the Nun's Priest Tale. If some tales are highly finished within themselves, the links between tales show that the work is still in progress. There are some inconsistencies that suggest the absence of any authorial revision. The largest inconsistency is the tale-telling agreement itself, because most pilgrims tell just one tale and someone tells no tale[31]. The tale-telling agreement is explained at the end of the General Prologue. The Host presents the idea of a game between the pilgrims, that is the fact of organising a competition based on telling tales. Pilgrims have to tell four tales each:

> In this viage shal telle tales tweye
> To Caunterbury-ward, I mene it so,
> And homeward he shal tellen othere two"
> (792-794)

The Host also explains that the tales that the pilgrims are intended to tell have to be tales of both instruction ("sentence", 798) and delight ("solaas", 798). The prize of the competition is a supper on the last day of the pilgrimage when they return back to Southwark. Then, there is the beginning of the competition, since the whole group accepts to start the game. Among the tales, there are some that present a conventional ending: it is the case of the Knight's Tale, whose end is signalled with the word "Amen" (3107) and the Miller's Tale, whose end is given by saying that the tale is done (3854). Some tales are interrupted, as in the case of the Tale of Sir Thopas, or are not finished, like The Cook's Tale and the Squire's Tale. In the case of the Canon's Yeoman's Prologue, instead, there is an example of anticipation: the Canon responds to the Yeoman's story before it is narrated[32]. Connected to this, there is also the presence of unfinished narrative endings[33]. In general, Chaucer's closure focuses on the process of communication, in particular on the dynamics of social interaction. A relation between closure and poetic structure can be noticed, since closure creates a cessation and unity which is traditional of medieval poetic theory, inherited from classical theory.

[31] Online source: Windeatt, Barry, "Literary Structures in Chaucer" in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Boitani, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 214-232: https://search.proquest.com/docview/2137988957?accountid=13050.
[32] Grudin, Michaela Paashe, "Discourse and the Problem of the Closure in the Canterbury Tales", *PMLA*, 107, 1992, p. 1158-1161.
[33] Grudin, p. 1157.

The sense of incompleteness given by Chaucer might be a voluntary choice as imitation of reality[34]. The Clerk's Tale can be taken as example. It is a tale that goes on after its happy ending. In effect, the structural end that can be identified as the medieval habit of moralisation, is closed in terms of the narrative process. However, it is anti-closural because after the narrative, there are the different responses of the listeners that engage even readers in the dialogic discourse itself[35]. The whole collection of tales can be seen as a meta-tale, a tale of a pilgrimage during which some tales are told by pilgrims and are all connected: the Clerk's Tale might be seen as a response to the Wife of Bath's comments on clerks, while the Merchant's Tale can be considered a response to the previous tale, that is the Clerk's Tale[36]. Chaucer, by placing the Parson's Tale at the conclusion of the Canterbury Tales, puts an end to all endings and gives a sort of absolute truth which is people's ultimate end[37].

The issue of unfinished endings and unfinished tales is particularly relevant if we consider the manuscripts. First of all, Chaucer would have written in cursive in a legible way on loose sheets of vellum or paper; therefore, the creation of an original draft in an already bound volume would have been both a waste of time and expensive, taking into account the cost of vellum or paper at that time. As a consequence, it is possible that copies of parts of the work may have been rentable or purchasable, as happened with pieces of long Latin works. What is evident in all manuscripts is incompleteness, as well as the presence of contradictions and irrationalities: this could be seen as a proof of lack of revision. The cases that represent a source of discussion and signal the incompleteness as well as the presence of contradictions are mainly the "Host-Stanza" after the Clerk's Tale, the Nun's Priest endlink and the Man of Law's endlink. Concerning the "Host-Stanza", it occurs in the latest forms of the tale, but since Chaucer did not revise this work, it is not certain whether he would have removed it or not. Then, the same thing can be said regarding the

[34] Grudin, pp. 1158-1159.
[35]Grudin, p. 1160.
[36] Windeatt, pp. 214-232.
[37] Windeatt, pp. 214-232.

"Nun's Priest Epilogue": its presence or absence from certain manuscripts is due to the fact that it is an unrevised work. Finally, the endlink of the Man of Law's Tale may be the more complicated one because even though it is present in a lot of complete manuscripts, in some of them what follows is the Squire's Tale, in others there is the Summoner's Tale, in some there is the Merchant-Squire link or the Wife's Prologue. The contradictions might refer back to the lack of revision or to mistakes of scribes while copying, since the word "squire" and "summoner" could be confused[38]. Together with this, there is also an informal glossing that might be interesting to take into consideration. The extra-textual features, such as titles, headings and endings are not to be considered Chaucer's, even though he certainly left informal labels in order to guide scribes. In addition to them, there are also some Latin glosses to explain some difficult words and homonymous rhymes: they refer back to a time close to the poet and some were inserted by people who were informed and careful. For instance, Latin glosses were used in order to explain words like "veze" that can be found in the knight's tale and was explained with the word "impetus". Then, regarding homonymous rhymes, the word "here" was used in the Clerk's Prologue and in the Physician's Tale with two different meanings, that are "here" and "hear". In fact, the word was explained with the words "hic" and "audire"[39]. Despite these characteristics, that are incompleteness, contradictions and irrationalities, there are two matters that might suggest a partial publication of the *Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer: the former can be found in the fact that Chaucer asked his friend Bukton, who was marrying, to read the Wife of Bath's Tale; the latter are some lines from the Knight's Tale quoted in the opening of *The Book of Cupid* by Sir John Clanvowe, who may have learnt these lines through one of the different methods of divulgation, such as lending, reading aloud and printing. In effect, the *Canterbury Tales* was first printed in 1475 by William Caxton, who also tried to complete it by

[38] Tatlock, J.S.P, "The Canterbury Tales in 1400", *PMLA*, 50, 1935, pp.112-116.
[39] Tatlock, p.104.

writing a conclusion to this work. Following him, other people did the same thing in order to finish this work[40].

Since the *Canterbury Tales* is an unfinished work composed of tales that speak to each other, the presence of different manuscripts may be taken into account. This work appears in different manuscripts, including Hengwrt (or Peniarth MS 392 D) in the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth, Corpus 198 in Corpus Christi College in Oxford, Harley 7334 in the British Library in London, Lansdowne 851 in the British Library in London, Cambridge Dd.4.24 and Cambridge Gg.4.27 in the Cambridge University Library in Cambridge and finally Ellesmere (MS EL 26 C 9) in the Huntigton Library in San Marino, California[41]. Among these manuscripts, Harley 7334, Hengwrt and Ellesmere are considered the oldest[42]. Hengwrt seems the most archaic[43] and is full of irregularities of quiring, gaps and sometimes there are passages which are not clear, since the links between one tale and another are missing or unexpected. In other words, one tale does not coincide with that presented at the end of the previous one[44]. Ellesmere is considered the most complete and its order is the one accepted by the majority of scholars[45]. The choice of Ellesmere as the authoritative manuscript might refer to the fact that the *Canterbury Tales* is not a finished work, but "a collection of short stories to be read in any sequence, as a collection of unrelated or weakly related fragments, or as a book that, although obviously unfinished, is yet complete as an idea"[46]. The Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts present a different order of the fragments, which can be summarised as follows:

[40]Tatlock, J.S.P., pp. 101-107.
[41]Owen, Charles A. and Fisher, Jr. and John, "Early Chaucer Manuscripts", *PLMA*, 108, 1993, p. 542.
[42]Tatlock, p. 128.
[43]Tatlock, p. 122.
[44]Owen and Fisher, p. 543.
[45]Owen, Charles A. Jr, "The Alternative Reading of the Canterbury Tales: Chaucer's text and the Early Manuscripts", *PLMA*, 97, 1982, p. 237.
[46]Owen, Charles A., Dean Jr. and James, "Ordering the Canterbury Tales", *PLMA*, 101, 1986, p. 252.

Hengwrt Manuscript	A fragment: General Prologue, Knight, Miller, Reeve, Cook
	(D) fragment: Wife of Bath, Friar, Summoner
	B^1 fragment: Man of Law
	F^a fragment: Squire
	E^b fragment: Merchant
	F^b fragment: Franklin
	G^a fragment: Second Nun
	E^a fragment: Clerk
	C fragment: Physician, Pardoner
	B^2 fragment: Shipman, Prioress, Sir Thopas, Melibee, Monk, Nun's Priest
	H fragment: Manciple
	I fragment: Parson
	R: Retraction
	? G^b fragment: Canon's Yeoman

Ellesmere Manuscript	A fragment: General Prologue, Knight, Miller, Reeve, Cook
	B^1 fragment: Man of Law
	D fragment: Wife of Bath, Friar, Summoner
	E fragment: Clerk, Merchant
	F fragment: Squire, Franklin
	C fragment: Physician, Pardoner
	B^2 fragment: Shipman, Prioress, Sir Thopas, Melibee, Monk, Nun's Priest
	G fragment: Second Nun, Canon's Yeoman
	H fragment: Manciple
	I fragment: Parson
	R: Retraction

Interestingly, the chart shows that in the Hengwrt G^b is missing and D remains out of place since the ink is different and shows that it was written late and inserted in the position where the quire ending and fragment coincided. Moreover, one of the key problems is represented by groups E and F composed by the Tales of the Clerk, Merchant, Squire and Franklin. If in the Hengwrt manuscript the order is Squire-Merchant-Franklin, with the Second Nun's Tale between the Franklin's and Clerk's, in the Ellesmere manuscript the two groups are linked together with the order Clerk-

Merchant-Squire-Franklin[47]. The close relationship between these two manuscripts is proved by the presence of glosses and marginalia, which might be divided into three types: the index marginalia, the explanatory and the ones that clarify the relation between the two manuscripts and the extent to which the content can be attributed to Chaucer. Concerning the first type, these glosses point out rhetorical embellishments, vary from manuscript to manuscript and are more common in Ellesmere. The second type refers to "genuine glosses" that often appear in interlinear position and have the function of clarifying the content that seems to be ambiguous or obscure. They usually are in Latin, but they occur rarely in the manuscripts. Finally, the third type of glossing includes Latin commentary that provides sources, parallel passages and some background information. The theory that these glosses started in Hengwrt and then continued in Ellesmere is supported by the physical format of the manuscripts. Indeed, the commentary in Hengwrt is not well distributed on the page: it occupies the space not occupied by text, but often covers the longer lines. With Ellesmere the impression is completely different, since each page has vertical lines for the paragraph marks of the left-hand margin, but also for the paragraph marks of the marginalia[48].

Finally, together with the issue of the manuscripts, it is important to consider the issue of the scribe. Identifying an authoritative manuscript and a scribe is important when we consider an unfinished work like the *Canterbury Tales*, since it contributes to give authority to the sources we are using. Both Ellesmere and Hengwrt have been written by the same hand[49]. The scribe may be identified with Adam Pinkhurst from a signature "Adam Pynkhurst" made by his own hand in a document in the Scriveners' Company of London in 1392. He made a copy of *Boece* and of *Troilus and Cryseide* in the mid-1380 and Chaucer referred to him in one of his poems, namely "Chaucers Wordes unto Adam, His Owne Scriveyn"[50]:

> Adam scriveyn, if ever it thee bifalle
> Boece or Troylus for to wryten newe,

[47]Horobin, Simon, "Compiling the Canterbury Tales in Fifteenth-Century Manuscripts", *The Chaucer Review*, 47, 2013, p. 375.
[48]Owen, p. 242.
[49]Tatlock, p. 128.
[50]Mooney, Linne R., "Chaucer's Scribe", *Speculum*, 81, 2006, p. 98-103.

> Uunder thy long lokkes thoue most have the scalle
> But after my makyng thow wryte more trewe;
> So ofte adaye I mot thy werk renewe
> It to correcte and eke to rubbe and scrape,
> And al is thorugh thy negligence and rape.

In these lines Chaucer underlines the fact that Adam has already copied both *Boece* and *Troilus and Cryseide* under his supervision. What emerges here is Chaucer's warning to Adam to copy exactly what Chaucer wrote without mistakes due to "negligence" (carelessness) or "rape" (haste)[51]. The relationship between Chaucer and Pinkhurst might be connected with John Organ, a mercer who was the collector of the customs when Chaucer was controller from 1376 to 1386. His role as controller obliged Chaucer to keep records in his own hand, while Organ would have employed a deputy to keep his records and this deputy could have been Pinkhurst. This scribe, in this case, may have had the task to copy his accounts at the wool custom. This is supported by documents testifying to the fact that he copied one of the company's petitions between 1387 and 1388[52]. Alongside this connection to Organ, there is also the fact that the service of Pinkhurst and the service of Chaucer in the household of Edward III appeared to be in the same period. Furthermore, the presence of the various relationships among writers and scribes working in London and Westminster in the late 14th century might be underlined[53]. Having said that, Pinkhurst can be defined a "freelance copyist" who was assigned different tasks for different customers; Chaucer might have met Pinkhurst as "a writer of petitions" rather than a copyist[54]. Based on what is known of his career, the scribe may have been born in 1360 and then written the Mercers' petition in 1387. In his mid-twenties he would have been writing *Boece* and *Troilus* for Chaucer and in his early thirties the accounts of John Organ in the Mercers' account book in 1391-1393. Only in his late thirties or forties he is thought to have compiled the Hengwrt manuscript of Chaucer's *Canterbury*

[51]Mooney, p.103.
[52]Horobin, Simon, "Adam Pinkhurst. Geoffrey Chaucer, and the Hengwrt Manuscript of the Canterbury Tales", *The Chaucer Review,* 44, 2010, p. 352.
[53]Mooney, pp. 120-121.
[54]Horobin, p. 353.

Tales and he would have been older when compiling Ellesmere[55]. Lastly, considering the scribe's main problems in compiling the manuscripts, one of them can refer to the first attempt to create a single manuscript using some incomplete parts. Pinkhurst had no clear idea of Chaucer's project and he found it difficult especially in the moment in which he had to join the Squire's and Merchant's Tales and the Merchant's and Franklin's Tales. Since it was only later that he received the links to inserts as connection between the tales, he adopted the solution of changing the name of the pilgrims in the links to render in a logical way his arrangement of tales. There are also some gaps at the ends of the Man of Law's Tale and the Summoner's Tale to have the possibility to join other parts, but in this case it did not happen. Therefore, taking into account the fact that he received the material in parts and the incompleteness that characterises this work, leaving a gap was a possible precaution to take[56].

[55]Mooney, pp. 114-115.
[56]Horobin, pp. 357-359.

2. The Clerk's Tale

2.1. The Marriage Group

Before considering the main themes and the content of the Clerk's Tale, it is important to highlight the fact that it appears to be part of what is known as the "Marriage Group". If we consider the order of the fragments of the Ellesmere manuscript, the Marriage Group includes fragments D, E and F and it is composed of seven tales: the first is the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, whereas the last is the Franklin's Prologue and Tale. The theme is marriage and these characters discuss marriage from several points of view[57]. If we read the General Prologue we can consider these characters as types, since each of them represents an element of society. However, by reading the whole work, we can see that each character is characterised by "an individuality that goes much beyond the typical"[58]. Therefore, this is a human comedy: characters move and live and are not tale-puppets, so they do not exist for the sake of the stories but vice versa[59] and the relationship between narrator and tale is clear[60]. An instance can be the Merchant's Tale, which follows the Clerk's Tale: the Merchant starts his Prologue by speaking about his own situation with his wife. His tale about an unfaithful wife clearly reflects his marriage.

The marriage debate starts, as mentioned before, with the Wife of Bath's Prologue and the subject is marriage, particularly the question of sovereignty of either husband or wife. The solution to the problem is offered by the Franklin with his tale, where he argues that in true marriage there should be no sovereignty on either side. The Marriage Group in the *Canterbury Tales* is normally associated not only with tales that discuss several viewpoints on the question of sovereignty in marriage, but also with conflicting ideas representing the contribution of each pilgrim to the

[57]Kittredge, George Lyman, "The Marriage Group" in Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Canterbury Tales,* London: Norton, 2005, p. 539.
[58]Kittredge, George Lyman, "The Dramatic Principle of the *Canterbury Tales*" in Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Canterbury Tales,* London: Norton, 2005, p.537.
[59]Kittredge, "The Marriage Group", p.538.
[60] Lyons, Clifford P., "The Marriage Debate in the Canterbury Tales", *ELH*, 2, 1935, p. 255.

debate[61]. In particular, the Tales of the Wife of Bath, the Clerk, the Merchant and the Franklin are used by Chaucer to show conflicting ideas about conjugal sovereignty[62]. First, in the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, the theme is tribulation in marriage. The Wife of Bath is the dominant figure in the debate and she feels an expert, since she outlived five husbands and is ready to marry the sixth. She defends both her principles and practices[63]. Therefore, she underlines that chastity is not mandatory and that she does not accept the fact that a widow must not marry again: chastity is the ideal state, but it is not her ideal[64]. Therefore, if on the one hand there is this first heresy that consists in the refusal of the Church's teachings, on the other hand there is a second heresy when she affirms that she is the head of the house and husbands have to obey wives and cannot control marriage. Second, the Clerk's tale seems a reply to the Wife of Bath. The Clerk is scandalised by the Wife of Bath, especially when she attacks clerks by saying that:

> For trusteth wel, it is an impossible
> That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,
> But if be of hooly seintes lyves,
> Ne of noon oother womman never the mo.
> (688-691)

Her attack on clerks may refer to her fifth husband who is a clerk. In the Clerk's Tale an answer to the Wife of Bath can be found, since Walter in the Clerk's Tale speaks of sovereignty, which is the same word that the Wife used in her Prologue and Tale. The whole tale presented by the Clerk can be seen as the antithesis of the tale of the Wife: "he is reasserting the orthodox view in opposition to the heresy which she had expounded with such zest and with so many flings and jeers at the clerkly profession and character"[65]. The *Clerk's Envoy*, which follows the Clerk's Tale, is a song in honour of the Wife. It certainly is a mock encomium, an ironical comment upon what the Wife had just said, both on marriage and clerks[66]. Before this part, the direct connection between the Clerk's Tale

[61] Lyons, p. 253.
[62] Lyons, p. 254.
[63] Kittredge, "The Marriage Group", pp. 539-541.
[64] Kittredge, George Lyman, "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage", *Modern Philology,* 9, 1912, p. 439.
[65] Kittredge, "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage", pp.444-446.
[66] Kittredge, "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage", p.449.

and the Wife of Bath's Tale can be found in the last lines of the Clerk's Tale, which are also used as an introduction for the *Envoy*:

> For which here, for the Wyves love of Bathe –
> Whos lyf and al hire secte God mayntene
> In heigh maistrie, and elles were it scathe –
> I wol with lusty herte, fressh and grene,
> Seyn yow a song to glade yow, I wene;
> (1169-1174)

Undoubtedly, the *Envoy* after the Clerk's Tale is also fundamental in order to introduce the Merchant's Tale. In effect, the last words of the *Envoy* are "wepe, and wrynge, and waille!" (1212), while the Merchant's Tale starts with the same words "wepyng and waylyng" (1213)[67]. The Merchant is certainly suffering an emotional crisis and the fact that his tale follows the Clerk's shows irony: the story of the patient and devoted Griselda is the opposite of the wife of the Merchant. In fact, the Merchant says:

> I have a wyf, the worste that may be; (1218) […]
> Hir hye malice? She is a shrewe at al. (1222)

Even though the Merchant is invited to tell his own story, he tells another tale on marriage, because he does not want to tell about his own misery and vexed heart. The Merchant starts with an encomium that turns out to be ironical. This irony follows the Clerk's: on the one hand the irony of the Clerk can be seen as "the irony of the intellect and the ethical sense"[68], on the other hand the irony of the Merchant is "the irony of passion and personal experience"[69]. This is because the tale of the Merchant reflects his own life: the Merchant's folly mirrors January's in believing his wife's absurd explanation concerning her betrayal. Moreover, the end of the Merchant's Tale does not contribute to conclude the marriage debate in the *Canterbury Tales*: it is conversely the Franklin's Tale that provides an ultimate conclusion to it. In fact, Chaucer through the Franklin resumes the debate on marriage by carrying it to a "triumphant conclusion by solving the problem"[70]. He starts through an invocation to *gentillesse*, which also represents a link with the tale of the Squire that

[67] Hinckley, Henry Barrett, "The Debate on Marriage in the Canterbury Tales", *PMLA*, 32, 1917, pp. 299-300.
[68] Kittredge, "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage", p.452.
[69] Kittredge, "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage", p.452.
[70] Kittredge, "The Marriage Group", p. 545.

comes before the Franklin's[71]. *Gentillesse* is what has most impressed him in the tale that he has just heard; therefore, the tale he tells is a tale of *gentilesse*, which is both seen in Arveragus that wants Dorigen to keep her word and in Aurelius that decides to release her. Finally, there is also the clerk who shows *gentilesse* by releasing Aurelius. Furthermore, this tale is about a knight, a squire and a clerk; therefore, it is obviously related with the previous ones[72]. The Franklin's Tale is built following the tale of the Wife of Bath and regards both *love* and *gentillesse.* Arveragus is a knight: since he was obedient during the period of courtship, Dorigen consented to marry him; so, what is shown here is the orthodox doctrine regarding *love* that makes a husband, Arveragus, the lady's master. Happiness in their married life is assured by Dorigen, who promises obedience and fidelity if he will renounce his sovereign right for *gentilesse*. However, what the Franklin gives is a solution depending on both *love* and *gentilesse*, that is the presence of equality in marriage:

> Love wol nat been constreyned by maistrye.
> Whan maistrye comth, the God of Love anon
> Beteth his wynges, and farewel, he is gon!
> Love is a thyng as any spirit free.
> Women, of kynde, desiren libertee,
> And nat to been constreyned as a thral;
> And so doon men, if I sooth seyen shal.
> Looke who that is moost pacient in love,
> He is at his avantage al above.
> (764-772)

The debate on marriage concerns both the Wife's and the Merchant's discussion on matrimony, which is deliberately made by referring to their own life. Then, the Merchant refers to the Clerk too, since he does not talk only about marriage but also about the sincerity and worth of women. The Clerk is only interested in the type of matrimony which exemplifies the Christian life and finally, the Franklin discusses marriage as a form of partnership based on equality and love[73].

Lastly, an interesting thing to take into account is the fact that a connection may be found between the tales of the Marriage Group and the tales of Melibee and of the Nun's Priest. Concerning the tale of Melibee, the theme is of conjugal sovereignty: Prudence, Melibee's wife, is

[71] Kittredge, "The Marriage Group", pp.544-545.
[72] Kittredge, George Lyman, "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage", *Modern Philology,* 9, 1912 pp.459-460.
[73] Hinckley, pp.304-305.

able to help her husband and extricate him from his difficulties thanks to her skilled dialectic. He shows complete subjection to her authority[74]:

> And wyf, by cause of thy sweete words, and eek for I have assayed and preved thy grete sapience and thy grete trouthe, I wol governe me by thy conseil in alle thyng. (1114)

So, the recognition of woman's authority on man can be easily associated with the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale and represents the opposite of the views expressed through the Clerk's Tale and the Franklin's Tale. Regarding the Nun's Priest Tale, it presents the opposite of what is written in the tale of Melibee. It is also known as "the tale of the Cok and the Hen, Chauntecleer and Pertelote"; within the discussion about the significance of dreams there is the introduction of the discussion of marriage based on Chauntecleer's line *Mulier est hominis confusio*[75], which means that by putting confidence in the advice of the wife, the husband would come to grief[76].

In conclusion, it can be said that the tales of the Marriage Group present different viewpoints about marriage. In the following section, I will analyse more in depth the Clerk's Tale.

2.2. The Clerk's Tale: an analysis

The Clerk's Tale is divided into six parts. The first part starts at line 57 and finishes at line 196, the second from line 197 to 448, the third from line 449 to 609, the fourth from line 610 to 784, the fifth from line 785 to 938 and the last one from line 939 to 1176. The Tale is preceded by the Clerk's Prologue (lines 1-56), and followed by the *Envoy*. In the Prologue, the Host asks the Clerk to tell a "myrie tale" (9) and continues by arguing that people have to follow the rules since they are part of a game. He also asks the Clerk to speak "pleyn" (19), avoiding high style and devices of rhetoric:

> Speketh so pleyn at this tyme, we yow preye,

[74] Lawrence Witherle, William, "The Marriage Group in the 'Canterbury Tales'", *Modern Philology,* 11, 1913, pp. 252-254.
[75] Latin proverb: "Woman is man's ruin".
[76] Kenyon, John S., "Further Notes on the Marriage Group in the 'Canterbury Tales'", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 15, 1916, pp. 283-284.

That we may understonde what ye seye. (19-20)

The Clerk replies that the Host has the control over the company (23) and affirms he has learnt the story that he is going to tell, from a "worthy clerk" from Padua, that is Francis Petrarch:

Lerned at Padowe of a worthy clerk,
As preved by his wordes and his werk.
He is now deed and nayled in his cheste;
I prey to God so yevehis soule reste!
"Fraunceys Petrak, the lauriat poete,
(27-31)

He then praises Petrarch because of his rhetoric and poetry and informs the company that Petrarch wrote a poem in high style with a long foreword concerning the description of the Italian landscape of Piedmont and Saluzzo. The clerk does not include in his tale this description, since he considers it "a thyng impertinent" (54).

After that, there is the beginning of the tale. Part one introduces the tale by giving information about where the story develops, that is Saluzzo, in Italy, and about one of the main characters of the story, Walter the marquis. Walter is a young handsome man, who is not married and is presented through good qualities:

A fair persone, and strong, and yong of age,
And ful of honour and of curteisye;
Discreet ynogh his contree for to gye,
(73-75)

However, what follows represents the description of the things he has to be blamed for:

I blame hym thus: that he considered noght
In tyme comynge what myghte hym bityde,
But on his lust present al his thought,
As for to hauke and hunte on every syde.
Wel ny alle othere cures leet he slyde,
And eek he nolde – and that was worst of alle –
Wedde no wyf, for noght that may bifalle.
(79-84)

His subjects blame him since the marquis is mainly interested in hunting and leisure activities, rather than in finding a wife. Therefore, they are worried because of the absence of an heir for Saluzzo, which brings them to ask him to find a woman in order to marry. The subjects underline that they do not want a "straunge successour" (137) to take Walter's inheritance. Part one ends with the marquis' acceptance of his subjects' request by saying that he will choose his own wife and that

they have to accept his choice. Furthermore, he describes this choice as the end of his freedom and the beginning of his life as servitude:

> I me rejoysed of my liberte,
> That seelde tyme is founde in marriage;
> Ther I was free, I moot be in servage.
> (145-147)

Part two starts with the presentation of the characters of Janicula and Griselda: Janicula is a poor farmer, probably the poorest man of the village, and Griselda is his daughter. The description given here of Griselda is of a woman of "virtuous beautee" (211) and "oon the faireste" (212) raised in poverty. She is also young and a virgin, with a "rype and sad corage" (220), so with a mature and firm heart. When the marquis set his eye upon Griselda, he decides to marry her because she excels in virtue, appearance and goodness. When the day of the wedding arrives, Griselda is still unaware ("ful innocent", 274) of Walter's plan on her; indeed, the marquis goes to Griselda's house in order to ask Janicula, who is defined "faithful lige man" (310), for permission to marry his daughter. The farmer accepts. In part two, there is Griselda's promise not to disobey male authority; she starts by showing herself a submissive wife, by being great and humble by erasing herself:

> She seyde, "Lord, undigne and unworthy
> Am I to thilke honour that ye me beede,
> But as ye wole yourself, right so wol I.
> And here I swere that nevere willingly,
> In werk ne thought, I nyl yow disobeye,
> For to be deed, though me were looth to deye."
> (361-364)

After that, there is the first crucial point of the tale, in which there is the transformation of Griselda, presented as a parody of the investiture ceremony of a king or queen. She is undressed in front of all the people that are there in order to see Walter's wife and she is dressed as a queen. Women help her to dress with rich clothing; her hair is combed, she is adorned with a crown on her head and with great and small jewels. The moment of transformation is clearly defined in line 385: "whan she translated was in swich richesse." Then, there is the marriage: Walter highlights that he has married her since she is a virtuous woman, even though she is of low degree. Despite her humble origins she is able to manage political issues when her husband is away because she always has "so wise and

rype wordes" (438), as well as "juggementz of greet equitee" (439). Part two ends with the birth of their first daughter: even though Walter preferred a son, he is happy because Griselda is not sterile.

The third part of the tale starts with Walter, who manifests his desire to test Griselda's devotion:

> Whan this child had souked but a throwe,
> This markys in his herte longeth so
> To tempte his wyf, hir sadnesse for to knowe,
> That he ne myghte out of his herte throwe
> This merveillous desir his wyf t'assaye;
> (450-454)

This kind of desire is defined "merveillous", which means "strange" and because of that he becomes a man defined by characteristics that are the opposite of honour and courtesy, through which he had been presented at the beginning of the tale:

> But as for me, I seye that yvele it sit
> To assaye a wyf whan that it is no nede,
> And putten hire in angwyssh and in drede.
> (460-462)

The main aspect of Walter to be underlined is his cruelty ("yvele", 460). Then, he explains Griselda that he wants to test her devotion and she agrees by saying that both herself and their daughter are in his hands. Walter tells his will to a sergeant-at-law, who helps him in his plan; the sergeant goes to Griselda and says he was commanded to take the daughter. It is important to say that the sergeant-at-law does not say anything about killing the daughter: it is inferred by Griselda and by the readers/listeners because he pauses. The image of Griselda given here is the one of a lamb:

> Grisildis moot al suffer and al consente,
> And as a lamb she sitteth meke and stille,
> And leet this crueel sergeant doon his wille.
> (536-539)

The fact of comparing Griselda to a lamb means giving the idea of sacrifice. She suffers like an innocent lamb and is subjected to her husband's will: she is sitting and looking at the man who is doing what he wants with her daughter. Before the man could take her daughter away, she kisses her and asks him to bury her, so that beasts will not desecrate her little body. Griselda's reaction is astonishing since she does not weep or lament; she does not oppose what is happening

"conformynge hire to that the markys lyked" (546). The sergeant-at-law promises Walter not to talk about this secret plan on pain of beheading. However, the marquis does not kill his own daughter: he brings her to Bologna, where his sister lives. The aunt will pay attention to her upbringing and hide her from men. Part three ends with Griselda that does not say anything to Walter about what has just happened to her daughter: it is another proof of her submission to her husband's will.

After that, part four begins by introducing the birth of Griselda and Walter's son, four years after the "killing" of their daughter. The birth of the male child represents yet another occasion for Walter to test Griselda. As he had done with their daughter, he sends the sergeant-at-law to take the son. This scene develops in the same way as the previous one: the son is taken and Griselda does not oppose. She only kisses one last time her son and asks the sergeant to provide him with a proper burial place in order to protect him from beasts; the words Griselda uses are nearly the same used for her daughter. Obviously, the son is not killed and is brought to Bologna to the house of Walter's sister. At this point, the cruelty of Walter is underlined again since he is defined a cruel husband ("sturdy housbonde", 698), a man with a "crueel herte" (723) because of his testing Griselda in order to prove her devotion to him. Then, Walter decides to test his wife for the third and last time: he says that he will ask the Pope for a "dispensacion" (746) in order to have the permission to marry again. Part four ends with Walter writing a letter to Bologna to ask to her sister and the Earl of Panico to bring his daughter and son back home in Saluzzo.

Part five presents the development of the third test. One day in front of an audience he explains that his people want him to marry again and that his new wife is arriving in Saluzzo. Griselda's answer is an unexpected one, since she accepts Walter's decision by commenting on her inferior social status:

> I ne heeld me nevere digne in no manere
> To be youre wyf, no, ne youre chamberere.
> (818-819)

She explains that she feels lucky because she has been his wife, even though she has never been worthy of this since she is of a lower status. This point of the tale is particularly significant because

it shows one of the main characteristics of Griselda, that is the fact of being a submissive wife. What is shocking is the fact that she thanks God for the opportunity of having been Walter's "humble servant" (824) and not his wife. She also accepts to go back to her father's house, but she stresses the fact that she will always love Walter and she will always be his "trewe wyf" (838). Furthermore, since she arrived to the palace without a dowry, she asks Walter to keep something to cover her:

> "I cam, and naked moot I turne agayn.
> Al youre pleasance wol I folwen fayn;
> But yet I hope it be nat youre entente
> That I smoklees out of youre paleys wente.
> "Ye koude nat doon so dishonest a thyng,
> That thilke wombe in which youre children leye
> Sholde biforn the peple, in my walkyng,
> Be seyn al bare; wherefore I yow preye,
> Lat me nat lyk a worm go by the weye.
> Remembre yow, myn owene lord so deere,
> I was youre wyf, though I unworthy were.
> (872-882)

Here some of Griselda's emotions are shown: she gives importance to the fact that it would be "dishonest" to let other people see the womb that gave birth to their children. After that, she also reminds him of the virginity ("maydenhede", 883) that she gave to him: covering her and her womb would be the recompense for that. So, Walter lets her cover herself with a piece of cloth and she goes back to Janicula's house. Part five ends with Griselda at home and with her father that introduces a new idea of marriage; from the beginning, Janicula has been doubtful of this marriage. His doubts lie in the different social status; he is convinced that when the lord has fulfilled his desire, he will believe marriage to be a disgrace ("disparage", 908) and will get rid of his daughter (904-910). Despite the situation in which she is, Griselda continues being humble and patient as she was before.

Finally, part six concludes the tale. It starts with the arrival of Walter's daughter and son from Bologna. Clearly, the citizens are not aware that Walter's new wife is in fact the marquis' daughter, but they believe it is the day of the arrival of their lord's new wife. Walter's cruelty reaches its climax since he asks Griselda to help him by preparing the chambers and the whole

palace for the wedding. The moment of the arrival of the two children is very important, since it is the first time in which people see them. By seeing the daughter, people understand why Walter wants to marry again: she is "fairer" (988), "tender of age" (989), "moore plesant" because of "heigh lynage" (991). Griselda, despite this situation, receives the guests and prays Walter not to treat his new wife as he treated her:

> "O thyng biseke I yow, and warne also,
> That ye ne prikke with no tormentynge
> This tendre mayden, as ye han doon mo;
> For she is fostred in hire norissynge
> Moore tenderly, and, to my supposynge,
> She koude nat adversitee endure
> As koude a povre fostred creature"
> (1037-1043)

At this point, she is asking the marquis not to torment his new wife since she is rich and so she was raised tenderly; conversely, Griselda was able to face all events since she was poor and she had not a tender upbringing. What follows is the list of Griselda's characteristics that Walter had the possibility to see during these tests: she is patient ("hire pacience", 1044), she is firm ("sad", 1047) and "constant" (1047), innocent ("hire innocence", 1048) and finally also her "wyfly stedfastnesse" can be seen (1050). At this point, the marquis decides to stop this torment:

> "This is ynogh, Grisilde myn," quod he;
> "Be now namoore agast ne yvele apayed.
> I have thy feith and thy benygnytee,
> As wel as evere woman was, assayed,
> In greet estaat and povreliche arrayed.
> Now knowe I, dere wyf, thy stedfastnesse" –
> And hire in armes took gan hire kesse.
> (1051-1057)

He does not need other tests, since he has already had proof of his wife's faithfulness and benignity (1053) as well as her steadfastness (1056). Then, Walter reveals the truth: the woman who is supposed to be his new wife is their daughter and the boy is their son. He also says that they were "kept […] prively" (1069) in Bologna and then affirms the purpose of these tests:

> "And folk that ootherweys han seyd of me,
> I warne hem wel that I have doon this deede
> For no malice, no for crueltee,
> But for t'assaye in thee thy wommanheede,
> And nat to sleen my children – God forbeede! –
> But for to kepe hem pryvely and stille,

Til I thy purpos knewe and al thy wille."
(1072-1077)

He never acted because of "malice" or "crueltee" (1074), but only because he wanted to test Griselda's "wommanheede" (1075), so to test her qualities as both a woman and wife. As a consequence, she faints ("doun she falleth", 1079) because of joy and she embraces and kisses both her daughter and son. It is here in part six that we see Griselda transformed for the second time: she is adorned with "clooth of gold" (1117) and a "coroune of many a riche stoon" (1118). The tale ends happily with the daughter married with a lord, with Janicula spending the last years of his life in the palace and with the son, who marries and succeeds his father. From line 1141, the Clerk highlights once again that he learnt this story from Petrarch; he says that "this auctour" (1141) wrote that story because he wanted women to learn to be constant in adversity. The Clerk's Tale closes with the *Envoy*, which is also a link to the Merchant's Prologue and Tale, as previously said. In this last part it is written that Griselda is now dead, as well as her patience. There is also a warning for husbands: they should not try to test their wives' patience in order to find a woman like Griselda, because they will fail. Then, the *Envoy* continues by addressing to "O noble wyves" (1183) by advising them not to lie down in humility but to follow Echo that held no silence; women should control themselves and use the "arwes of thy crabbed eloquence" (1203) in order to pierce husbands' armour. The conclusion tells fair women to show off their good looks and ugly women to spend all their husbands' money.

2.2.1 Griselda and Walter

When we consider this tale, it may be important to take into account the role of men and women in the Middle Ages. The role of a woman was particularly important in the family, since she had to maintain peace among family members. Wives had to be loyal and show devotion towards their husbands. The loyalty and obedience that are seen towards the husband in marriage are present towards the father or brother before marriage. Therefore, male authority is what characterises

women's life and this was justified by considering the Bible: a man has to dominate a woman because it was the first to be created by God, so he is more perfect and stronger than a woman. In other words, husbands have a kind of natural authority over wives[77]. Wives were submitted to husbands and were often treated badly by them and wives' submission and obedience were the main rules in a family[78]. In fact, in the case of Griselda, she is presented "obedient as a daughter" and "submissive as a wife"[79].

Critics like Paris consider both Griselda and Walter embodiments of these medieval ideas about womanhood and marriage - which view seems to be excessive even from Chaucer's viewpoint -and also the relation between God and Christians. Griselda can be seen as the "archetypal submissive, long-suffering wife"[80], which is why this tale is also known as the story of the patient Griselda. Her character does not change throughout the story, since she is always presented as constant, humble, patient, firm, steadfast and innocent. Her social status is low and she marries a man of higher status. This seems strange, since at that time marriages were between people of the same social status. In fact, the marriage with Griselda is seen as the direct consequence of Walter's will to preserve his freedom: he saw marriage as threatening, so by marrying a woman of lower status he would not be forced to consider her own wishes and be careful not to offend her[81]. Griselda is also considered a model for feminine virtue because she does not disobey male authority, but she prefers to erase herself. In fact, her psychology is absent until the moment of the third test and finds her glory in the marriage with Walter, a person of higher status. Walter is first described as a good man, but his image changes during the story: he becomes cruel and has an obsessive behaviour. Then, the fact that the relation between Griselda and Walter can be allegorically interpreted as the one between God and his subjects has to be taken into

[77] Le Goff, Jacques, *L'uomo medievale*, Laterza: Bari, 1983, pp. 324-345.
[78] Duby, Georges and Perrot, Michelle, *Storia delle Donne in Occidente. Il Medioevo,* ed. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Laterza: Bari, 1990, pp. 341-344.
[79] Stadnik, Katarzyna, "Linguistic Modality and Female Identity in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*", *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, 51, 2016, p. 70.
[80] Paris, Bernard J., "The Clerk's Tale", in *Imagined Human Beings,* New York: NYU Press, 1997, p. 82.
[81] Paris, p. 83.

account. Griselda's submission and acceptance of events, of her culture's patriarchal view of marriage and Walter's testing upon her is compared to God's testing on subjects; God has the right to do what he wants with his creatures as well as Walter can do, since he is Griselda's husband[82].

There are also critics like Mitchell who believe the comparison between God and Walter to be possible, but they also affirm that it is also important to consider Walter's role as husband. At the same time Griselda is seen both as saintly and masochistic. Therefore, it can be said that the meaning of their behaviour can be defined as polarised between antithetical views[83]. In this relationship, Griselda displays the feminine virtues of patience and obedience, which Chaucer emphasises by saying that she is a "flour of wyfly pacience" (919). If she represents the virtue of wifehood, Walter is depicted as an immoral husband through epithets like "yvele" (460) and "crueel" (740). It may be argued that Chaucer wants to present a critique of the medieval idea of marriage, in which female submission is pushed to the logical limit. Reaction towards Griselda's behaviour, as Mitchell affirms, is not a positive one, since this kind of submission is difficult to accept, not only because of her being a kind of servant for her husband but also because she accepted to sacrifice her children. So, she may appear not only as a long-suffering and patient wife, but she even seems hard-hearted. Connected to this, if in this tale Griselda could be considered an *exemplum* because of her being loyal to her husband, it may be also thought as an *exemplum terrible* because of her total assent to Walter[84]. Connected with the comparison between Walter and God, there is also the possible comparison concerning Griselda's sacrifice of her children and the trial of Abraham. Derrida, quoted in Mitchell, refers to the story of Abraham and Isaac as something monstrous since Abraham had to show responsibility and total commitment through the sacrifice of his son[85]. Therefore, the same thing happens to Griselda, since she is tested in order to see her

[82] Paris, p.85.
[83] Mitchell, J. Allan, "Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* and the Question of Ethical Monstrosity", *Studies in Philology*, 102, 2005, p.3
[84] Mitchell, pp. 9-15.
[85] Mitchell, pp. 20-21.

loyalty and commitment as wife: as Abraham shows his loyalty to God, Griselda accepts to sacrifice her children to show her loyalty to Walter.

Furthermore, critics like Narinsky give importance to the mind of characters: throughout the tale different perspectives are presented. A perspective is represented by the social mind, which is the one of the Saluzzans; then, there is Walter's mind and Griselda's mind[86]. Regarding Saluzzans they are defined "social mind". In other words, they are considered like a unique character and the perception we may have is the one of a chorus. The fact of considering them as a unique character refers to Chaucer that highlights their capacity for shared thought as well as shared acting[87], while our perception of them as a chorus may be clearly seen at the beginning of the tale when the marquis is asked to marry. An example of that can be the moment in which all people agree on the fact that Walter had to marry a woman in order to give them an heir, or the opinion they have of Griselda, or of the woman who is to be Walter's new wife at the end of the tale. Even though Saluzzans prove to be a social mind, Narinsky points out that their mind is controlled by Walter. In effect, she affirms that the plot is advanced by Walter's manipulations of reality. Walter is represented in the tale through people's mind, both psychologically and physically: at the beginning the marquis' presentation is located in Saluzzans' minds and then "is enhanced as we get a sense of Walter's happiness only by observing the rejoicing of his people"[88]. Another characteristic of this social mind is the fact that Saluzzan society is not divided hierarchically or by gender. There are only three instances in the tale where gender is particularised. The first moment is when women undress Griselda (374-375). Then, the moment when women judge her rude clothes as unworthy considering her high social status (1114-1120); it is important to consider that women considered clothes unworthy because in their opinion her appearance has to reflect her positive qualities. Finally, the moment in which one of the Saluzzans, a man, speaks on the behalf of others (86). The moment of the tale which shows different viewpoints is the mock wedding. In fact, people observe

[86] Narinsky, Anna, "Anti-Dualism and Social Mind in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*", *Partial Answers*, 14, 2016, p. 190.
[87] Narinsky, pp. 194-195.
[88] Narinsky, p. 197.

what is happening and who the bride is, while Griselda finds in this occasion a way to display the constancy of her love and loyalty. What is interesting is that Walter is the one that has a diametrically opposite view[89]: he is the only one who knows the real situation of the mock wedding and, in this sense, he can be considered the creator of the story. Regarding Walter's mind is important to notice that it is not accessible to others; what Walter shows is what he wants others to know: people cannot understand Walter's intentions and behaviour. Then, concerning Griselda's mind, Narinsky underlines how it evolves in the tale: if at the beginning Griselda's mind is in a way associated with the Saluzzans' and Walter is able to see her virtues simply by looking at her, by the end of the tale her emotions are discovered. The closeness of her mind is underlined by the word "wal" (1047), which refers both to the constancy of her patience but also to her impenetrability[90].

Finally, critics like Normandin agree with Mitchell in saying that Chaucer brings to the illogical the loyalty of a wife through Griselda. Normandin underlines that Chaucer also tones down the patriarchal interpretation of Griselda's mind: Chaucer does not identify in an explicit way the will with the man, making the marriage more enigmatic. However, despite this ambiguity, it will be clear throughout the tale that Griselda does what her husband wants, as evidence of her loyalty and wifehood[91]. In addition to this, the patriarchal perspective is evident when she and her children are submitted to Walter's will. Griselda's behaviour can also be seen as obtuse rather than constant. What in the tale is seen as the symbol of constancy, wifehood and submission to husband, to us seems excessive; our reactions to Walter's tests and Griselda's behaviour is to consider them unacceptable. Walter underlines his wife's constancy throughout the tale, while at the end, through the Clerk's Envoy, Chaucer is able to give another image of Walter and Griselda, that is as reflections of the Wife of Bath. Griselda represents the behaviour that a clerk would expect from a

[89] Narinsky, pp. 195-200.
[90] Narinsky, pp. 204-209.
[91] Normandin, Shawn, "'Non intellegant': the Enigmas of the *Clerk's Tale"*, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 58, 2016, p. 196.

virtuous female of a low social status, while Walter represents a parody of the experience that the Wife supports[92].

All in all, Griselda and Walter, despite their bizarre behaviour, arise interest in readers and listeners, who recognise in them the embodiment of medieval ideas about womanhood and marriage, as well as the relation between God and Christians. Moreover, this tale was not Chaucer's invention, but rather he took inspiration from Petrarch's Griselda and, maybe, from Boccaccio's Griselda.

2.3. Petrarch, Boccaccio and Chaucer

2.3.1. The historical background: did Chaucer meet Petrarch and Boccaccio?

In the Prologue of the Clerk's Tale, Chaucer writes that the clerk was going to tell a tale that he learnt in Padua from a worthy clerk, namely Francis Petrarch. While reading this tale, we can see that the story is almost the same as Petrarch's Griselda and Boccaccio's tenth novella of the tenth day, since Petrarch's version is a translation of Boccaccio's Griselda (novella X.10) in the *Decameron*. What Chaucer writes in this Prologue can be considered his own experience: he might be the clerk who learnt the story in Padua. What is not certain is when Chaucer may have had the possibility to read Petrarch's Griselda, if he read Boccaccio's novella and if he ever met Petrarch. To begin with, it is important to consider Chaucer's knowledge of languages, which permitted him to be at the service of the king and to participate to different embassies, having the possibility to visit many countries, such as Italy. We know that Chaucer travelled to Italy twice, in 1372-3 and in 1378. However, it has been also hypothesised that Chaucer might have visited Italy in 1368: this first trip cannot be proven since we only have one piece of evidence, that is a warrant with the privy seal which granted Chaucer permission to pass Dover[93]. This warrant, a medieval equivalent of the passport, is dated 17 July 1368 at Windsor. It could have taken him to Milan where Chaucer's

[92] Normandin, pp.206-207.
[93] Rossiter, William T., *Chaucer and Petrarch*, Cambridge: Brewer, 2010, p.38.

former patron Lionel was celebrating his marriage with Violante, the daughter of Galeazzo Visconti, lord of Pavia. In this case, Chaucer would have had just the time to be at this marriage, since there is evidence that at the end of October he was surely back in England[94]. Regarding the two visits that he certainly made to Italy, the first one was in Genoa and Florence, the second one was in Milan. During his first visit in 1372-3, Chaucer went to Genoa due to a trade mission and to Florence probably because of Edward III's financial arrangements with the Bardi and other Florentine banking houses[95].

Chaucer got in contact with a political situation in Florence defined as "stato popolare, Guelfo e libero"[96]. In other words, he got to know a government that took the form of a Republican system. "Guelfo" is an important aspect to take into account: the fact that Florence declared itself Guelf may make people think of a complete obedience of the city of Florence to the Church. However, it did not imply a kind of "slavish obedience to Rome, or to Rome in Avignon". In effect, in 1375 Florence went to war with Pope Gregory XI[97]. In this war Florentines were allied with Bernabò Visconti. Interestingly, five years later this alliance became an opposition: Florence was a "stato libero", a Republic, while Milan was characterised by despotism. During his second visit in 1378, Chaucer went to Milan: he helped to negotiate the war and he had the possibility to listen to the other side of the debate, the one of the Visconti. At the Viscontian court, every act of Bernabò was acclaimed: the Visconti, as Italian *signoria*, were associated with peace. If Republic was associated with liberty, but a kind of liberty which could degenerate into chaos, a *signoria* like the one of Milan was preferred since it could assure peace (the Visconti had ruled since 1277). While Chaucer was in Milan, Galeazzo Visconti died and Bernabò gained a very powerful position. At the same time a popular revolt broke out in Florence[98]. Chaucer's "experience of the Florence-Milan conflict, and [the probable] reading of Boccaccio and Petrarch within the structure of this conflict,

[94] Pearsall, Derek, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, p.53.
[95] Rossiter, p.39.
[96] Wallace, David, "Whan She Translated was" in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1530*, ed. Lee Patterson, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, p. 166.
[97] Wallace, pp. 165-167.
[98] Wallace, pp. 168-169.

helped prepared him both as poet and political subject for English conflicts to come"[99]. In fact, a revolt like that broke out in England in 1381 and is normally known as the "English Rising". The opposition between freedom and oppression, between Republic and despotism that was seen in Italy between Florence and Milan, will be extremely important for Chaucer's England: the same opposition can be found in England where Chaucer witnessed the struggle between freedom and the tyranny that the king wanted to establish[100].

The way in which Petrarch, Boccaccio and Chaucer are connected together and possibly met is linked to Italy. It is not certain whether Chaucer met the Italian poets, but his meeting with Petrarch is more probable if we consider Chaucer's Prologue to the Clerk's Tale, where the name of Petrarch is written. However, we cannot rely on this prologue, since it does not provide sure information[101]. It has also to be considered that in a manuscript environment texts circulated and it is probable that he got in contact with both Petrarch's and Boccaccio's works[102]. Boccaccio's influence is evident, not only in the Griselda story that refers to the last novella of the tenth day: two instances can be the Monk's Tale that may be based on *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* (it is also seen in the opening of the Monk's Tale) and the Knight's Tale, which may be seen as a condensed version of Boccaccio's *Teseida.* What is certain is that Petrarch and Boccaccio met for the first time en route to Rome in 1350. Meetings between them were important since they had a powerful influence on Boccaccio's artistic development. Then, they also shared an interest in the civic and diplomatic affairs of Florence: Boccaccio was certainly in Florence in 1373, because he was asked to perform the world's first *lecturae Dantis* in public[103]. He also experienced courtly life and culture since he was a child, because he spent some time in Naples at the service of the Bardi family[104]. Regarding Petrarch, he arrived in Italy in 1353. He did not go to Florence first, but to Milan, even though he wanted to go to Mantua or Padua. Despite the fact that he was subdued and reduced to

[99] Wallace, pp. 170-171.
[100] Wallace, p. 170.
[101] Rossiter, p. 40.
[102] Rossiter, p. 48.
[103] Wallace, pp.180-181.
[104] Rossiter, pp.41-42.

silence because of the despotic government, he decided to stay in Milan since the Visconti could guarantee him the time and security for writing that he needed[105]. So, Petrarch experienced courtly culture and the same did Chaucer, as well as Boccaccio. Finally, we can say that it is not sure whether Chaucer met both Petrarch and Boccaccio, but certainly London and Westminster were not separated from Florence and Milan since these "sites were linked for Chaucer as part of a transnational nexus of capital, mercantile and military exchange"[106]. Because of that, two views have been elaborated: the first regards the figure of Chaucer the cosmopolite, the second refers to Chaucer the Londoner. Concerning the first one, it reflects Wallace's view who argues that Chaucer's experience of the English metropolis and mercantile sphere prepared him for the city states of northern Italy. The second view, which is the one offered by Ginsberg, who is quoted in Rossiter, claims the differences between the two cultures, naming Italy and places that Chaucer visited as *terra incognita*[107].

2.3.2. The Story of Griselda between Chaucer, Petrarch and Boccaccio

The story of Griselda was first written by Giovanni Boccaccio as the tenth novella of the tenth day of *Decameron*. It is also written by Petrarch in one of his letters to Boccaccio. As previously underlined, Petrarch and Boccaccio met for the first time in 1350 and then their friendship continued through letters. In particular, in the collection of *Seniles*, consisting of 128 letters, 18 are addressed to Boccaccio[108]. In *Seniles XVII.3* Petrarch states he has read *Decameron*, specifically the beginning and the end. In effect, he says that he only ran through the book since he was occupied with some serious business. The comparison that Petrarch draws here is between himself and a traveller who looks here and there, without pausing. He defines Boccaccio's work as a work for the

[105] Wallace, pp. 172-174.
[106] Rossiter, p. 42.
[107] Rossiter, p. 41.
[108] Wallace, David, "Griselde before Chaucer: Love between Men, Women, and Farewell Art" in *Through a Classical Eye: Transcultural and Transhistorical Visions in Medieval English, Italian and Latin Literature in Honour of Wetherbee Winthrop*, ed. Andrew Galloway and Robert F. Yeager, Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2009, p.207.

multitude, since it was written in prose. In particular, he appears to be delighted by the last novella, so much that he has learnt it by heart and decides to rewrite this story in "stilo alio". The term "alio" literally means "other" and it might be translated as "high style" because Petrarch decides to translate the novella in Latin, which is associated to an higher style if compared to Boccaccio's vernacular[109]. In other words, Petrarch rewrites the tenth novella of the tenth day of *Decameron* in Latin in order to make this accessible even to people who do not know the vernacular[110]. Since in Petrarch's version there are some words or details that have been changed, Petrarch justifies himself by saying that he has written according to his own language and that these changes would be certainly approved by Boccaccio because of their friendship, implying that he was only trying to improve an already superb work[111]. Furthermore, Petrarch underlines in the preface to his translation that Boccaccio is the only author[112]. In *Seniles XVII.4* he remarks that the responsibility of the story is Boccaccio's and then continues by saying that he gave the story to read to two of his friends, one from Padua and one from Verona. The first did not finish reading, started weeping and gave the story to one of his friends to finish. The second friend was able to read the story without stopping, since he believed Griselda's story to be an invention[113].

The other author to write a version of the story of Griselda is Chaucer, who was certainly in Italy during the second half of the fourteenth century and, as mentioned previously, probably got to know Petrarch's and Boccaccio's versions there[114]. Concerning Chaucer's version, we may say that he transforms a written source into an oral source; in other words, Chaucer retells the story of Griselda presented by Petrarch in the form of a dialogue, written to be read and not to be spoken[115]. These three versions tell the same story, but sometimes certain details are changed or some words

[109] Haywood, Eric, "De Insigni Obedientia et Fide Amiculi ? Griselda tra Petrarca e Boccaccio" in *Par estude ou par acoustumance*, ed. Laura Ramello, Alex Borio and Elisabetta Nicola, Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2016, pp. 351-353.
[110] Haywood, p. 352.
[111] Schwebel, Leah, "Redressing Griselda: Restoration through Translation in the Clerk's Tale", *The Chaucer's Review*, 47, 2013, p. 276.
[112] Schwebel, p. 276.
[113] Wallace, pp. 208-209.
[114] Schwebel, pp. 284-285.
[115] Hendrickson, G.L., "Chaucer and Petrarch: Two Notes on the 'Clerkes Tale'", *Modern Philology*, 4, 1906, pp.184-186.

are added or eliminated. What Petrarch changes with respect to Boccaccio's version is not only the language but also the readership of the tale, which is a male one and no longer female[116]. Then, in his version there is a preface before the beginning of the story, which is not present in Chaucer's and Boccaccio's versions. This extended geographical description is used by Petrarch in order to warn readers: the Alps represented a warning for Italians, since these mountains were there because of God's will[117]. Petrarch's description of this place is also important since it refers to Lombardy, the territory of the Visconti princes that Petrarch served; he gives the description as a positive and beautiful place, a *locus amoenus,* and uses hyperbolic language in order to remove historical reality from the place:

Est ad Italie latus occidum Vesullus ex Apennini iugis mons unus altissimus, qui, vertice nubila superans, liquido sese ingerit etheri ; mons suapte nobilis natura, Padi ortu nobilissimus, qui eius e latere […][118] (29)

Instances of hyperbolic language are "altissimus" (lofty), "superans" (to rise to a higher level) and "nobilissimus" (most notable)[119]. Then, there is the presentation of the marquis: Petrarch transforms Walter into a human being, a man who is subject to God's will like other people, but also a man who is also capable of cruel actions. The fact of being like other people can be seen in the expression "ut fit" (21), which means "as happens to everyone". It is used by Petrarch in order to underline that it is not only Gualtieri the husband who decides to test his wife's loyalty, but it is something that regards husbands in general[120]:

Cepit, ut fit, interim Valterium, cum iam ablactate esset infantula, mirabilis quedam – quam laudabilis doctiores iudicent – cupiditas sat expertam care fidem coniugis experiendi altiusm et iterum retentandi.[121]

---

[116] Schwebel, pp. 284-285.
[117] Haywood, p. 353.
[118] The edition I use to quote Petrarch's story of Griselda is: Boccaccio, Giovanni and Petrarca, Francesco, *Griselda,* ed. Luca Carlo Rossi, Palermo: Sellerio editore, 1991. The translation of Petrarch's work is taken from Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Canterbury Tales,* ed. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson, London: Norton, 2005: "In the chain of Apennines, in the west of Italy, stands Mount Viso, a very lofty mountain, whose summit towers above the clouds and rises into the bright upper air. It is the mountain notable in its own nature, but most notable as the source of the Po, which rises from […]".
[119] Rossiter, p. 146.
[120] Haywood, p. 356.
[121] In the meanwhile, it so happened, when his little daughter had been weaned, that Walter was seized with a desire more strange than laudable – so the more experienced may decide – to try more deeply the fidelity of his dear wife, which had been sufficiently made known by experience, and to test it again and again.

If the story of Petrarch starts with quite a long preface with the beautiful description of Saluzzo and where it is located, Chaucer gives only few details about the geographical position of Saluzzo and starts by underlining one of the main characters of the tale: Walter, the marquis. We may expect him to be the main character of the story, since he is the first to be described and named, but throughout the tale we will see that the story talks about events of Griselda's life. However, it is important to underline the fundamental role Walter plays in this story. Walter's image can reflect God's as he might be defined the creator of the story: he can be perceived as the one who controls the plot of the story, since the tale develops because of his decision to test his wife. Moreover, he plays a God-like role, since his power extends over his citizens and wife, as well as his children: he is the one who decides what other people have to do, and who has the power to transform the poor Griselda from a peasant to a queen. The power he uses on others permits him to affirm his authority. Obviously, this may also refer to the idea developed in Boccaccio's version, where Walter is defined a cruel and bestial tyrant, since he imposes his will. Connected to this idea of tyranny, it has to be considered the fact that both Boccaccio and, consequently, Petrarch's versions are subjected to historical reading: Chaucer may have recognised what he experienced in Florence and Milan and political events in England[122]. Moreover, critics like Wallace believe Walter to be a simple agent of God and that the comparison between the marquis and God cannot be made; Wallace believes Walter to be a tyrant who can be compared to the Black Death, since tyranny like a disease "runs out of control, feverishly devouring the body politic"[123]. Clearly, the idea of Walter as a tyrant can be applied in the moment in which he starts to test Griselda[124]. The image of the marquis provided by Chaucer evolves throughout the tale. If at the beginning Walter is described as a good man, who can only be blamed for his childish interest in hunting and in maintaining his freedom regardless of

[122] Wallace, pp. 190-191.
[123] Wallace, p.189.
[124] Rossiter, p. 153-154.

the need of his people, throughout the story his portrait evolves into that of a cruel man, a tyrant who does horrible things to his wife in order to test her patience.

Finally, regarding Boccaccio's version, he starts without a geographical description but presents Walter with his main characteristic, that is "matta bestialità"[125]. Boccaccio presents him as a selfish man who tortures his innocent wife for more than twelve years and behaves like a tyrant. So, Chaucer's way of presenting Walter in the end reflects Boccaccio's, since Walter is depicted as a cruel man[126]. Moreover, with regard to the comparison that may be made between Walter and God, even the character of Griselda may be associated with Christianity. Griselda may represent Christ, since she sacrifices herself and maintains her loyalty towards Walter. Because of her determination to sacrifice herself for her husband, we may have the perception that she values him above God: in effect, Griselda lives for Walter[127]. During the first test, Griselda is compared to a lamb, which is another way to give the idea of sacrifice connected to Christ: like an innocent lamb she suffers and is subjected to her husband's will.

The story in the three versions is the same, except for some details that are added or removed; the plot is maintained, as the story of Walter and Griselda with the three tests through which the marquis decides to verify her "wommanheede" (1075). However, three main differences may be detected among the versions. The first is at the beginning of the novel when citizens remind the marquis of the importance of having an heir for Saluzzo and advise him to marry. In Boccaccio's versions, the request is submitted by a group of people, while in Petrarch and Chaucer only one person among the group of citizens asks the marquis to marry. Petrarch's choice to make one man speak in front of the marquis may be explained through his will of finding the right person, who is able to converse with a prince. This person is here defined with characteristics of "auctoritas", "facundia", "familiaritas" and his being "maior", which reflect the importance of talking to a prince in order to convince him. This choice might be connected not only to Petrarch's

[125] Wallace, p. 211.
[126] Wallace, p. 188.
[127] Paris, p. 85.

experience at the service of Visconti and his role at the court[128] but also to his desire to ameliorate Boccaccio's Walter, in order to give a more humanistic version of the marquis[129]. The second is the moment of the transformation of Griselda. In both *Decameron* and the Clerk's Tale, Walter asks Janicula to marry Griselda and then she is publicly undressed outside her house and given beautiful and rich clothes; as previously mentioned, it may refer to a parody of the investiture ceremony of a queen. Moreover, Boccaccio divides the moments of undressing and dressing:

Allora Gualtieri, presala per mano, la menò fuori e in presenza di tutta la sua compagnia e d'ogni altra persona la fece spogliare ignuda: e fattisi quegli vestimenti che fatti aveva fare, prestamente la fece vestire e calzare e sopra i suoi capelli, così scarmigliati come erano, le fece mettere una corona; e appresso questo, maravigliandosi ogn'uomo di questa cosa, disse: "Signori, costei è colei la quale io intendo che mia moglie sia, dove elle me voglia per marito" (X 10,1237)[130]

Conversely, Petrarch changes some details of this transformation: in order to respect Griselda's sense of modesty, the undressing takes place in front of a public composed only by women. He also puts together the moment of the undressing and dressing:

Hinc ne quid reliquiarum fortune veteris novam inferret in domum, nudari eam iussit, et a calce ad verticem novis vestibus indui, quod a matronis circumstantibus ac certatim sinu illam gremioque foventibus verecunde ac celeriter adimpletum est.[131] (39)

Finally, the third element to be different is the conclusion. Petrarch concludes his translation by turning Griselda into an *exemplum* because he encourages women to follow Griselda's example, in terms of the constancy to face adversities. Boccaccio conversely underlines the importance of the cruelty of Walter and the behaviour of Griselda, both examples that should not be imitated. Finally, Chaucer refers to Griselda pointing at her singularity and says that she should not be an example to imitate; he also underlines the fact that it would be hard to find someone like Griselda.

---

[128] Haywood, p.358.
[129] Rossiter, p. 180.
[130] The edition I use to quote Boccaccio's *Decameron* is: Boccaccio, Giovanni, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca, Torino: Einaudi, 2014. The translation is taken from: https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/texts/DecShowText.php?myID=nov1010&lang=eng.
"Whereupon Gualtieri took her by the hand, led her forth, and before the eyes of all his company, and as many other folk as were there, caused her to strip naked, and let bring the garments that he had had fashioned for her, and had her forthwith arrayed therein, and upon her unkempt head let set a crown; and then, while all wondered: 'Gentlemen,' quoth he, 'this is she whom I purpose to make my wife, so she be minded to have me for husband.' "
[131] "Then, lest she carry into her new home any relic of her former fortune, he commanded her to be stripped, and clad from head to heel with new garments; and this was done, reverently and swiftly, by matrons who stood around her and who embraced her each in turn."

Furthermore, we can say that Chaucer by translating the story of Griselda from Latin to English restored, in a way, what Boccaccio did by using vernacular; in effect, a work in vernacular is more accessible than a work in Latin. Some similarities may be found between the Clerk's Tale and novella X.10; Harkins affirms that they might be based on the correspondence in different parts of the tale of the words "fortune", "dishonest", "arraye" and "yvele". Concerning the word "fortune", it is interestingly mentioned in the moment in which Griselda receives the news of the papal bull giving Walter dispensation to annul their marriage:

> But whan thise tidynges came to Grisildis,
> I deeme that hire herte was ful wo.
> But she, ylike sad for everemo,
> Disposed was, this humble creature,
> The adversitee of Fortune al t'endure,
> Abidynge evere his lust and his plesance,
> To whom that she was yeven herte and al,
> As to hire verray wordly suffisance.
> (752-759)

The same word "fortuna" can be found in Boccaccio's novella:

ella voleva tutto il suo bene, forte in se medesima si dolea; ma pur, come l'altre ingiurie della fortuna avea sostenute, così con fermo viso si dispose a questa dover sostenere. (X 10, 1242)[132]

In these two passages the correspondence is sentence-by-sentence: "hire herte was ful wo" corresponds to "in se medesima si dolea", as well as "disposed" is "dispose", "adversitee" is "ingiurie" and "t'endure" is "sostenere". The authors are here criticising fortune and the same thing happens in another passage, the one concerning the moment in which the marquis commands Griselda to return to her father's house. In Chaucer the passage appears to be:

> Be strong of herte, and voyde anon hir place;
> And thilke dowere that ye broghten me,
> Taak it agayn; I graunte it of my grace.
> Retourneth to youre fadres hous, quod he;
> «No man may alwey han prosperitee.
> With evene herte I rede yow t'endure
> The strook of Fortune or of aventure.»
> (806-812)

In Boccaccio the passage is:

si come far soleva, con forte animo sostenendo il fiero assalto della nemica fortuna. (X 10, 1244)[133]

[132] "to whom she was utterly devoted, engrossed by another woman, did inly bewail herself right sorely: but still with the same composed mien with which she had borne Fortune's former buffets, she set herself to endure this last outrage."
[133] "as she had been wont, enduring with fortitude this cruel visitation of adverse Fortune."

Even in this case a correspondence may be found with the words "fortune" and "fortuna", "t'endure" and "sostenendo", "strook" and "assalto", "evene herte" and "forte animo". Interestingly, in Chaucer the word "strook" has not the same emphatic force as the one given by Boccaccio by putting the adjective "fiero" before the noun "assalto"[134].

Regarding the word "dishonest", it can be found in Chaucer in the divorce scene:

> Ye koude nat doon so dishonest a thyng,
> That thilke wombe in which youre children leye
> Scholde biforn the peple, in my walkyng,
> Be seyn al bare.
> (872-879)

Walter has just informed Griselda that he is going to take a younger bride and Griselda manifests her desire to cover her body since she had no dowry, moving an implicit critique to the violation of her womb. The word "dishonest" strengthens the reference to Walter's honour: the same value is preserved in Boccaccio's novella, but he inverts the adjective, by using "onesto"[135]:

e se voi giudicate onesto che quel corpo nel quale io ho portato i figliuoli da voi generati sia da tutti veduto, io me n'andrò ignuda. (X 10, 1243)[136]

The word "arraye" refers to both clothing and manners in Chaucer. This word can be found in the moment after the marriage:

> And for the sought that under low degree
> Was ofte vertu hid, the peple hym heelde
> A prudent man, and that is seyn ful seelde.
> (425-427)

In this case Chaucer uses "low degree" as a synonym of "arraye" to point at the lower social status and poor clothing. Boccaccio uses two expressions in order to convey this meaning:

per ciò che niuno altro che egli avrebbe mai potuta conoscere l'alta vertù di costei nascosa sotto i poveri panni e sotto l'abito villesco. (X 10, 1238)[137]

[134] Harkins, Jessica, "Chaucer's Clerk's Tale and Boccaccio's Decameron X.10", *The Chaucer's Review*, 47, 2013, pp. 249-253.
[135] Harkins, pp. 254-256.
[136] "And if you deem it seemly that that body in which I have borne children, by you begotten, be beheld of all, naked will I depart; but yet, I pray you, be pleased, in guerdon of the virginity that I brought you and take not away, to suffer me to bear hence upon my back a single shift--I crave no more--besides my dowry."
[137] "for that, save to him, her noble qualities would ever have remained hidden under her sorry apparel and the garb of the peasant girl."

"Poveri panni" and "abito villesco" refer to her poor clothes and to low social status. Then, Chaucer uses the word "arraye" when Walter's divorce has taken place and Griselda has to arrange rooms for the new wedding:

> And she, the mooste servysable of alle,
> Hath every chambre arrayed amd his halle.
> (979-980)

In this case, the perfect correspondence can be found in Boccaccio, since he uses an expression with the same meaning, that is "to prepare and to dress the chambers"[138]:

e tu sai che io non ho in casa donne che mi sappiano acconciar le camere né fare molte cose che a così fatta festa si richeggiono. (X 10,1244)[139]

Lastly, the word "yvele" in Chaucer is used in order to describe Walter and criticise him:

> Ther fil, as it bifalleth tymes mo,
> When that this child had souked but a throwe
> The markys in his herte longeth so
> To tempte his wyf, hir sadnesse for to knowe,
> That he ne myghte out of his herte throwe
> This merveillous desir his wyf t'assaye;
> Nedelees , God woot, he thoghte hire for t'affraye.
> […]
> But as for me, I seye that yvele it sit
> To assaye a wyf when that it is no nede,
> And putten hire in angwyssh and in drede.
> (449-462)

The same thing happens in Boccaccio, even though there is not a specific correspondence to "yvele", but Boccaccio uses the expression "matta bestialità" at the beginning of the novella:

Ma poco appresso, entratogli un nuovo pensiero nell'animo, cioè di volere con lunga esperienza e con cose intollerabili provare la pazienzia di lei, è primariamente la punse con le parole… (X 10, 1239)[140]

"Cose intollerabili" cause a painful effect on Griselda, which consists of "angwyssh" and "drede". Then, "pazienzia" is what the marquis wants to test on Griselda, which Chaucer renders with the word "sadnesse". Going back to the expression "matta bestialità", Boccaccio refers back to it by describing Walter as "crudele e iniquo e bestiale" when the truth on testing is revealed. In the same

[138] Harkins, pp. 257-263
[139] "and thou knowest that women I have none in the house that know how to set chambers in due order, or attend to the many other matters that so joyful an event requires".
[140] "But, soon after, a strange humour took possession of him, to wit, to put her patience to the proof by prolonged and intolerable hard usage; wherefore he began by afflicting her with his gibes".

passage, Chaucer uses words like “yvele” (1052) and “malice” and “crueltee” (1074): there is no lexical similarity but the same connotative meaning[141].

Some glosses in the manuscripts can be used as additional evidence of the fact that Chaucer took inspiration directly from Petrarch’s Griselda; an example can be the Ellesmere in which a full apparatus of glosses can be found. Glosses are intended to be an integral part of the text and they mark important passages. First, glosses can be found in the passage regarding Griselda’s agreement with Walter:

> And here I swere that nevere willingly,
> In werk ne thought, I nyl yow disobeye,
> For to be deed, though me were looth to deye.
> (362-364)

Here the theme is marked by a gloss, which consists of the same passage of Petrarch’s version:

Nil ego vnquam sciens ne dum faciam sei eciam cogitabo quod contra animum tuum sit nec tu aliquid facies et si me mori jusseris quod moleste feram[142].

Another important passage which is marked by glosses is the moment of Griselda’s transformation:

> And for no thyng of hir olde geere
> She sholde brynge into his hous, he bad
> That women scholde dispoillen hire right there;
> (372-374)

The gloss which appears next to this passage is:

De hinc ne quid reliquiarum fortune veteris nouam inferat in domum nudari eam jussit.

Clearly, the presence of the gloss adds emphasis to this event. Although, as previously mentioned, there is a difference in the moment of the undressing, the correspondence in the same moment of narration of the presence of Griselda’s transformation, contributes to add a “symbolic weight”[143] to this event. Then, there is also the presence of important glosses marking the end of the tale, in particular from line 1142 to 1148. It is something intriguing since, in this case, the gloss is not the correct transcription of Petrarch’s story. In the source Petrarch refers to Griselda’s behaviour as

[141] Harkins, pp. 264-273
[142] All glosses are from: Farrell, Thomas J., “The Style of the *Clerk’s Tale* and the Functions of its Glosses”, *Studies in Philology*, 86, 1989. They are taken from the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts.
[143] Farrell, Thomas J., “The Style of the *Clerk’s Tale* and the Functions of its Glosses”, *Studies in Philology*, 86, 1989, p.293.

something to imitate by using the expression "vix imitabilis". Conversely, the gloss contains the opposite word, which is "inimitabilis". The presence of the opposite word may represent Chaucer's own thought, since he will carry further this viewpoint thanks to the word "inportable" (1144), which means intolerable[144]. Another change to take into account in the same passage is the word "heigh style" (1148). It reflects the expression "stilo alto" which can be found in the gloss. Interestingly, the expression used in the source is "stilo alio"; therefore, Chaucer's translation in "heigh style" might represent a reflection of a copying mistake, which can be seen in the words "stilo alto" of the gloss.

All in all, even though it is not sure whether Chaucer met Petrarch and Boccaccio in person, it can be safely assumed that he got in contact with Petrarch's version of the story of Griselda and possibly with Boccaccio's version. Certainly, as Finlayson states, Chaucer's originality is found in changes that he made throughout the story[145]; some details in Chaucer's version, which are different from Petrarch's story, might be seen as the influence of Boccaccio's version. However, since the meeting between Boccaccio and Chaucer is almost impossible and there is no evidence that he read Boccaccio's novella, it might also be argued that these changes represent a proof of Chaucer's own style. In effect, he may have changed some details of Petrarch's version without relying on Boccaccio's novella; Chaucer's irony and criticism, present in the Clerk's Tale, can also be found throughout the tales. In addition to this, something interesting to take into account is the fact that, at the end of the tale, the Clerk goes on with the *Envoy* by addressing the character that can be considered the opposite of Griselda, the Wife of Bath[146].

[144] Farrell, pp. 287-295.
[145] Finlayson, John, "Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale", Studies in Philology,* 2000, 97, p. 259.
[146] Schwebel, pp. 295-296.

3. The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale

3.1. An analysis of Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale

The character of the Wife of Bath can be considered the opposite of Griselda. In fact she is the perfect example of a woman who wants to have sovereignty over husbands. What is interesting is that the Wife of Bath's Prologue represents her autobiography, while her tale may be seen as an example of wives' sovereignty over husbands.

The Wife of Bath's Prologue starts with the word "experience" (1), which may be considered a keyword for this character; even though she has no authority to speak about woe in marriage, she can talk about it because of the experience she has gained from her various weddings. In fact, she first married at the age of twelve and now she is forty: during this span of time she got married five times at Church with "worthy men" (8). Then, she exposes the problem that concerns the fact that some Church Fathers affirm that she should have been married only once and by marrying five times she committed a sin. Church Fathers justified their position by saying that Christ went only once to a wedding, the one at Cana in Galilee. After that, she mentions the words that Jesus spoke to a Samaritan woman concerning the fact that her fifth husband was not her real husband. She underlines this episode in order to show her own view of Scripture and God's plan, that is the fact that men can only guess and interpret meaning since there is not something written regarding the number of husbands that a woman can have in her lifetime. She continues to support her viewpoint by pointing out that God asked people "to wexe and multiplye" (28), something that is not possible through one single marriage. In fact, it is important to say that at that time the high rate of mortality implied the necessity of marrying more than once in order to multiply as God says. Other figures of the Bible are also mentioned, such as Solomon, the Apostle Paul, Abraham and Jacob; Solomon, Abraham and Jacob are examples of wise men who had more than one wife, while the Apostle Paul is mentioned in relation to the concept of virginity. She admits that the importance

of virginity has been proclaimed by Fathers of the Church like St Paul, but she underlines the fact that virginity is not compulsory:

> Men may conseille a woman to been oon,
> But conseillyng is no comandement:
> He putte it in oure owene juggement;
> (66-68)

She continues by saying that if virginity had been commanded by God, he would have damned weddings; she also adds that someone must be procreating in order to create virgins. Then, she speaks about virginity, continence and devotion as qualities that represent perfection. However, these are characteristics that she does not have: in her opinion everyone has a gift that has to be used in the best way. Clearly, in her case, the gift she has to use is connected with sexual power; in fact, she refers to genitals, both male and female ("thynges smale", 121), in order to defend non-virginity and she refers to her own experience in life:

> I have the power durynge al my lyf
> Upon his proper body, and noght he.
> (158-159)

At this point, she is interrupted by the Pardoner (163): he is worried because he is going to marry and he does not want his body to be controlled by his wife. She answers him to be patient and to listen to the tale that she is going to tell, since she will reveal the truth about marriage. Once again, she underlines the importance of experience, in this case her experience "of tribulacion in marriage" (173), through which she establishes her authority.

After that, the Wife continues and finishes her prologue by telling the story of her life and her five husbands. The first three husbands were good, while the last two were bad. She describes the first three husbands as good, since they were rich, old and submissive. In fact, she underlines the fact that she had power over them and owned their lands and wealth; therefore she affirms:

> But sith I hadde hem hoolly in myn hond,
> And sith they hadde me yeven al hir lond,
> What sholde I taken keep hem for to plese,
> But it were for my profit and myn ese?
> (211-214)

Some lines later, she highlights that she governed them according to her own will (219) and she gives an example of a typical conversation she had with them, by explaining that a "wys wyf" (231) is a skilful wife who convinces her husband of her fidelity. It is interesting here how the adjective "wise" is used to indicate women who are able to swear and lie in order to deceive husbands; therefore, women are wise because they know how to speak. Normally, the Wife accuses her husbands of having affairs with other women or when the husband becomes suspicious about some situations, such as that regarding their apprentice Janekin (303), she will try to make the husband feel guilty. In the Wife's attempt to justify her affirmations, the use of Ptolemy's Almageste (324) can be seen as a way through which Chaucer mocks the Church Fathers, who use Scripture in order to justify their persuasions; in fact, the quotation she gives at lines 326-327 "Of alle men his wisdom is the hyeste that rekketh nevere who hath the world in honde" does not exist in Ptolemy's work. In addition to this, the Wife affirms that if her husband got drunk, she would deceive him, and made them feel guilty in order to obtain what she wanted. The worst thing she did to her husbands is refusing to give them full satisfaction in bed until they promised her money. What the Wife does is giving a general explanation about her first three husbands, since she chose them because of their wealth and age; in fact, the richer and older they were, the better for her.

The following lines of the Prologue are dedicated to her last two husbands, the bad ones. The fourth husband is described in few lines by the Wife with the term "revelour" (453), which means rioter. With this definition she presents the reason why she considers him a bad husband, which is the fact that he refused her sovereignty; in fact, he had a mistress, which means that, unlike her three previous husbands, she did not have control over his body. She does not say too much about him, except for underlining that she was angry because he had another woman and that she tormented him in many ways. Her fourth husband died when she returned from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and she highlights that it would have been a waste to bury him expensively. This might be considered some sort of vengeance for the treatment he reserved to her, that is refusing her sovereignty upon him. Then, she focuses on her fifth husband: he represents yet another example of

bad husband, in particular she describes him to be "the mooste shrewe" (505). Moreover, the Wife married him "for love, and no richesse" (526), since he was not a rich old man, but rather a young clerk of Oxford. They met when she was still married with her fourth husband and she saw him at the funeral. Her attention was on Jankyn, the clerk, in particular on his "paire of legges and of feet so clene and faire" (597-598). He was twenty years old when they got married and she was twenty years his senior. The Wife at this point of the story inserts a self-examination, by underlining that her appetite for love was influenced by Venus and her heart was influenced by Mars, being the cause of marital strife. She adds that she was born under the ascendant of Taurus. The combination of marks left on her by the influence of Venus, Mars and the ascendant sign of Taurus shaped her character but also reveals that it is more probable she will make her husband a cuckold[147]. She married Jankyn at the end of the month and she gave him her lands and properties, a decision she immediately regretted. In fact, Jankyn is interested mainly in reading and does not allow her to be free, having a violent behaviour towards her. For instance, she says that one day

> By God, he smoot me ones on the lyst,
> For that I rente out of his book a leef,
> That of the strook myn ere wax al deef.
> (634-636)

He supports his claim that she could not go everywhere she wants by giving an account of some old Roman stories; in these tales husbands abandoned their wives because they were out without advance warning or permission. After that, she swears she will tell the truth regarding the cause of Jankyn's violent behaviour, which she named some lines before. She explains that he was accustomed to read a book that was a collection of stories about "wikked wyves" (685). Then, she continues by explaining her idea regarding clerks: they cannot speak or write something good with reference to women, since according to them, women are unable to keep their marriage vows. Therefore, she maintains that the viewpoint regarding women in that book was bad because it was written by a clerk; she explains this through line 692:

[147] Curry, Walter Clyde, "More about Chaucer's Wife of Bath", *PMLA,*37, 1922, p. 40.

Who pyntede the leon, tel me who? (692)

Chaucer here refers to the *Fables* of Marie de France, in which a peasant shows a lion a painting of a lion being killed by a peasant. The lion asked who the author of the painting was, a man or a lion[148]. In other words, as the lion underlines that man's superiority in the painting refers to the fact that it is a man who painted it not a lion, in the book women are wicked because it is written by clerks, not by women. Therefore, the point of view presented depends on the authority.

What follows is a list of wicked wives, whose stories are contained in the book that the clerk was reading. The first is Eve, because she is considered the cause of "the los of al mankynde" (720). The second is Sampson's lover, who cut Sampson's hair with her shears, so that Sampson was blinded. The third woman is Deianira who caused Hercules to set himself on fire, while the fourth example consists of two women, that are Socrates's two wives, who caused him woe. The fifth example is Pasiphae, the queen of Crete, who loved a bull and gave birth to the Minotaur. The sixth is Clytemnestra, who murdered her husband Agamemnon in order to keep Aegisthus, her lover. The seventh, Amphiaraus' wife, persuaded him into battle and during that battle in Athens he lost his life. Then, there are two wives who poisoned their husbands: Livia who poisoned her husband Drusus and Lucilia, Lucretius' wife, who poisoned him through a love potion meant to increase his amorousness. Finally, the three wives of Latumius, who had so much malice in their hearts to hang themselves on a tree. The Wife names these characters one by one, underlining through accumulation the violence of her reaction. They represent women who, through their behaviour and freedom, brought woe and suffering to their husbands. The clerk criticises these women and the Wife is unable to tolerate this. As a consequence, she tears three pages from the book:

Al sodeynly thre leves have I plyght
Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke
I with my fest so took hym on the cheke
That in oure fyr he fil bakward adoun.
And he up stirte as dooth a wood leoun,
And with his fest he smoot me on the heed
That in the floor I lay as I were deed.
(790-796)

[148] Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Canterbury Tales,* ed. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson, London: Norton, 2005, p. 118.

In order to underline the strength through which the clerk beats her, Chaucer compares Jankyn to a mad lion. It is through pretending to be dead that the Wife gains sovereignty even over her fifth husband: they make an agreement and the book is burnt. Moreover, she remains a true and faithful wife until the day he dies. Interestingly, wife's sovereignty by agreement recurs then at the end of the tale when the husband leaves his wife the possibility to choose.

Before the beginning of the tale, there is a brief conversation between the Friar and the Summoner. The passage shows the Friar's sense of humour since he laughs and says that the introduction to the tale has been very long. The Summoner intervenes by affirming that Friars always have to give their opinion and then they start quarrelling. They are interrupted by the host who asks the Wife to continue and tell her tale.

The tale that the Wife tells is short if compared to the length of her prologue. Furthermore, the tale is used in order to highlight once more the sovereignty of wives over husbands. Interestingly, the tale starts with an introduction regarding an Arthurian environment. King Arthur is associated with the pre Christian era; there is also a reference to fairies and elves (fayerye, 859). Then, a sense of nostalgia is underlined because "now kan no man se none elves mo" (864): friars have substituted them. The great number of friars is given through the metaphor of the sunbeam (868): they are as numerous as the motes you can see in a sunbeam. Women can go safely around because there are no more incubi there, no more demonic creatures who rape women (880). However, what follows is the beginning of the events at King Arthur's court: the first situation we are introduced to is a rape. A "lusty bacheler" (883), which means a young knight, rapes a woman; the act of rape is here defined by Chaucer as "oppressioun" (889).

In the Middle Ages it was difficult to find a complete definition of "rape". The Middle English Dictionary defines the word "oppressioun" as "blows and beating", "smothering" and "rape", which is given as third meaning. Regarding Chaucer, he was accused of the "raptus" of Cecily Chaumpaigne, which was then annulled by the woman on the May 4, 1380; therefore, it was

an issue that may have concerned him, even though it is not clear whether the role of rape in Chaucer's poetics depends on this event or not[149]. The meaning of the term was and is still obscure; in fact, Cannon underlines that the term "raptus" in the fourteenth century might be associated with two meanings, "abduction" and "elopement". Abduction refers to a person who is taken away by force, while elopement regards a woman who escapes without her parents' consent and commits adultery. Modern definitions of rape may be associated with both consent and the victim's will: if there is consent, no crime is committed. However, in the Middle Ages women could not choose for themselves. If we consider the Statute of Rapes of 1382, it can be seen that not only was the rapist condemned but also the woman; in fact, the woman was considered as guilty as the rapist since she consented the adultery to take place[150]. If we consider the fact that Chaucer was accused to be a rapist, we may recognise Chaucer in the figure of the knight.

Returning to the tale, the knight is brought in front of King Arthur's court in order to be sentenced. King Arthur sentences him to death by decapitation. However, the queen prays the king to let her and her ladies decide the knight's fate. King Arthur consents and the queen says to the knight:

> "Thou standest yet," quod she, "in swich array
> That of thy lyf yet hastow no suretee.
> I grante thee lyf, if thou kanst tellen me
> What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren.
> Be war, and keep thy nekke-boon from iren!
> And if thou kanst nat tellen it anon,
> Yet wol I yeve thee leve for to gon
> A twelf-month and a day, to seche and leere
> An answere suffisant in this mateere;
> And suretee wol I han, er that thou pace,
> Thy body for to yelden in this place.
> (902-912)

Therefore, the knight knows that he has not been saved by the queen, she only has given him the possibility to save his own life. When he hears the words of the queen, the knight feels full of woe and sorrow and decides to leave, trusting in God's help to find the answer. The knight goes to every

[149] Cannon, Cristopher, "Chaucer and Rape: Uncertainty's Certainties" in *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature,* ed. E. Robinson et al, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001 p. 256.
[150] Cannon, pp. 255-262.

house and place but he is unable to find two people agreeing on the same answer to the question, "what women most desire?". Chaucer lists some answers given by women: some claim that wealth is what women most desire, other affirm it to be honour, gaiety or clothing, some others believe it to be lust, to be widow or wedded, whereas some others think that being flattered, given attention and solicitude is what pleases them most. Some women reply it to be when they are free, when they can do what pleases them, when men do not reproach them with vices, but believe them to be wise and not silly. There are women who believe that they most desire to be considered steadfast and to be able to keep secrets. This last point is refuted by telling Ovid's story of Midas's ears; this story occupies thirty lines (952-982) and is unfinished: the Wife asks the reader to look for the end of the tale if he is interested in it. In the story that the Wife tells, Midas has big ears and tries to hide them under his hair. There is only one person who knows his secret, his wife, who swears she will never tell anyone. However, she feels the necessity to tell someone the secret, so she decides to reveal it to water. It is important to take into account that Chaucer changes Ovid's story according to his relevant purpose, that is demonstrating that women are unable to keep secrets; in fact, in Ovid's original version, it is the barber who reveals Midas's secret[151]. After this short digression, the Wife continues with her tale. The knight after these few answers feels sorrowful since he is unable to find what could save his life. While he is going home, he sees in a forest twenty-four women dancing and thinks about asking them if they knew the answer. However, as soon as he arrives, they disappear. In their place, he finds an old woman under a tree. She is not only old but also ugly. She asks the knight what he is looking for and he says that he is looking for what women most desire. The old womanasks the knight to grant her request, whatever it may be, in return for the right answer::

> "Plight me thy trouthe heere in myn hand," quod she,
> "The nexte thyng that I requere thee,
> Thou shalt it do, if it lye in thy myght,

[151] Stillinger, Thomas C., "New Science, Old Dance: The Clerk and the Wife of Bath at Philology" in *Through a Classical Eye: Transcultural and Transhistorical Visions in Medieval English, Italian and Latin Literature in Honour of Wetherbee Winthrop*, ed. Andrew Galloway and Robert F. Yeager, Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2009, p. 232.

And I wol telle it yow er it be nyght."
(1009-1012)

The knight accepts and the woman whispers the answer in the knight's ear. After that, he goes back to the court in order to reveal the answer and have his life saved. When he arrives at the court, silence is commanded and he is asked to say what he found out. The knight affirms:

"My lige lady, generally," quod he,
"Wommen desiren to have sovereynetee
As wel over hir housbond as hir love,
And for to been in maistrie hym above.
This is youre mooste desir, thogh ye me kille.
Dooth as yow list; I am heer at youre wille."
(1037-1042)

None of the women taking part in the assembly can disagree with what the knight says. He is worthy to have his life spared, but at that point the old lady claims her reward:

"Mercy," quod she, "my sovereyn lady queene!
Er that youre court departe, do me right.
I taughte this answere unto the knyght;
For which he plighte me his trouthe there,
The firste thyng that I wolde hym require
He wolde it do, if it lay in his myghte.
Bifore the court thanne preye I thee, sir knyght,"
Quod she, "that thou me take unto thy wyf,
For wel thou woost that I have kept thy lyf.
If I seye fals, sey nay, upon thy fey!"
(1048-1057)

The knight has made a promise and has to keep it. Even though she is old, ugly and poor he has to marry her. The wedding is celebrated and the feast is characterised by "hevynesse and muche sorwe" (1079). This feeling persists in the knight's thoughts: he is full of woe since he is lying in bed with an old and ugly woman. When he is asked by the woman whether she is the cause of his woe, he replies that it is so, because

Thou art so loothly, and so oold also,
And therto comen of so lough a kynde,
That litel wonder is thogh I walwe and wynde.
So wolde God myn herte wolde breste!"
(1100-1103)

She answers by talking about "gentilesse". She first affirms that the nobility the knight affirms to possess is not related to "possessioun" (1147); on the contrary, it depends on each person and it is not related to one's lineage. In fact, true nobility comes from God, from grace and not from social

rank (1162-1164). Regarding her poverty, she affirms that it cannot harm people, but rather reveals true friends and it is compared to an eyeglass ("spectacle", 1203). Therefore, poverty is presented as something positive. Finally, the fact of being old and ugly is presented as a guarantee of her virtue, since he does not have to fear being cuckolded. At this point the woman presents a possible solution:

> "Chese now," quod she, "oon of thise thynges tweye:
> To han me foul and old til that I deye,
> And be to yow a trewe, humble wyf,
> And nevere yow displese in al my lyf,
> Or elles ye wol han me yong and fair,
> And take youre aventure of the repair
> That shal be to youre hous by cause of me,
> Or in som oother place, may wel be.
> Now chese yourselven, wheither that yow liketh."
> (1219-1227)

The knight finds himself in front of a choice, knowing the consequences in advance. He does not choose, but leaves her the freedom to make the choice. Therefore, the woman, who has now acquired "maistrie" (1236), decides to be young and beautiful. The tale ends happily and it is used by the Wife of Bath in order to prove that wives have to be more powerful than husbands; in fact, even in this story, the knight leaves the old woman to choose, leaves his wife free. In this way, the husband can live happily with his wife, but he is governed by her, he will be subjected to her sovereignty.

3.2. The Wife of Bath, the Old Woman and the Knight

The Wife of Bath is an interesting character, who appears to be not only a propagandist of love, but also a victim of her own need for love[152]; the Prologue to her tale is written as if it were a confession, with the Wife who relates her personal experience[153]. In several parts, while she is relating her experience, the Wife refers to her mother:

> I bar hym on honde he hadde enchanted me –
> My dame taughte me that soutiltee –

[152] Palomo, Dolores, "The Fate of the Wife of Bath's 'Bad Husbands' ", *The Chaucer Review*, 9, 1975, p. 318.
[153] Mead, William E., "The Prologue of the Wife of Bath's Tale", *PMLA*, 16, 1901, pp. 388-389.

And eek I seyde I mette of hym al nyght,
He wolde han slayn me as I lay upright,
And al my bed was ful of verray blood;
`But yet I hope that ye shal do me good,
For blood bitokeneth gold, as me was taught.'
And al was fals; I dremed of it right naught,
But as I folwed ay my dames loore,
As wel of this as of othere thynges moore.
(575-584)

Her mother, "my dame" (576), is presented as "a teacher of female lore"[154], in particular, she is the one who taught her how to treat husbands in order to gain power over them. The fact of naming her mother is a way for her to praise the source of her expertise and to present a female authority; then, she speaks to a female audience and tries to share her knowledge and power with them. Regarding the future, she hopes to expand her female community by passing her lore, even to the reader. In other words, the intended audience is not only the group of pilgrims whom she is addressing, but the reader as well[155]. The Wife appears to live in a book-dominated world, where she embodies the qualities of Jankyn's wicked wives[156]; in fact, like the wives described in the clerk's book, the Wife used to deceive her husbands and to have sovereignty over them. In addition to this, it is important to underline that the works she uses to support her thesis demonstrate that her behaviour is not wrong or reprehensible; she shows her knowledge about the written tradition, so that she can establish herself as an authority regarding marriage[157]. Chaucer's description of the Wife is quite interesting, since, as previously mentioned, she is influenced both by Venus and Mars. Her dominant star is Venus, whose influence concerns her attitude towards love. The good influence of Venus, as well of Taurus, her ascendant, is vitiated by the presence of Mars, which represents the evil side. Therefore, her contradictory nature is defined by both Venus and Mars and justifies her appetite for love as well as the way in which she mistreats her husbands[158]. Chaucer also uses

[154] Sturges, Robert S., " 'The Canterbury Tales'' Women Narrators: Three Traditions of Female Authority", *Modern Language Studies*, 13, 1983, p. 43.
[155] Sturges, p. 44.
[156] Arnell, Carla, "Chaucer's Wife of Bath and John Fowles's Quaker Maid: Tale-Telling and the Trial of Personal Experience and Written Authority", *The Modern Language Review*, 102, 2007, p. 939.
[157] Arnell, p. 938.
[158] Curry, pp. 31-32.

astrology to describe clerks: they are associated to the god Mercury. This god is a complex figure, since he is the god of eloquence, deceit, medicine, commerce, decoding, interpretation and hermeneutics[159]. The Wife, in her Prologue and Tale, inserts four digressions. The first is the Wife's introduction through which she sets the tale in King Arthur's time. According to Lipton, this introduction marks an historical change between a past characterised by the presence of elves and a present in which magical creatures have been replaced by friars[160]. The second consists of Ovid's story of Midas's ears, which is the only digression inside the Prologue. As previously said, the Wife modifies Ovid's version in order to prove that wives are unable to keep secrets. The third is the old woman's talk about "gentilesse" addressed to the knight in the last part of the tale; finally, there is the prayer of the Wife at the end of the tale. This prayer follows the knight's experience of "gentilesse" and prays for young husbands, asks women to outlive them and Jesus to shorten the lives of those husbands who do not accept their wives' sovereignty. Finally, she also asks for a plague on husbands who are stingy and do not share their wealth[161]. The character of the Wife and her story are connected with what we find in the tale; in effect, even though the tale appears detached from the Wife's life, there is something in common. The Wife's confession of her own experience in life as well as the tale show how wives possess sovereignty over their husbands.

Regarding the tale, it opens with a rape, which Malone affirms to be a story-telling device that Chaucer uses in order to get the hero into trouble and let him undertake the quest[162]. This quest takes the knight and the reader to discover the figure of the loathly lady. The old woman may be seen as a key character in this story because she gives the knight the right answer and, consequently, the possibility to survive. Despite the fact that both the experience of the Wife and the tale she tells refer to wives' sovereignty, a difference can be detected between the Wife and the old woman of the tale. The Wife, in her prologue, presents some of her tactics before and after

[159] Stillinger, pp. 228-229.
[160] Lipton, Emma, "Contracts, Activist Feminism, and the Wife of Bath's Tale", *The Chaucer Review,* 54, 2019, p. 337.
[161] Holland, Norman N., "Meaning as Transformation: The Wife of Bath's Tale", *College English*, 28, 1967, pp. 283-285.
[162] Malone, Kemp, "The Wife of Bath's Tale", *The Modern Language Review*, 57, 1962, pp. 487-489.

marriage. Before marriage she was careful to assure herself a new husband while the old husband was still alive; in this way, when the husband died, she would have another one ready to marry and take his place. Regarding her tactics after marriage, we can see a change. She affirms that she married her first three husbands because of their money and describes how she tortured them because of her shrewishness; she reduced them to submission and obedience to her rules. She also tells what happened with her fifth husband and how she succeeded in imposing her sovereignty. Concerning the old woman, she uses different methods if compared to the Wife of Bath's. She gives the knight the possibility to choose between death and marrying her. Through her wisdom and goodness, the loathly lady is able to convince the knight to submit to her authority through "a process of enlightenment"[163]. The woman gives a long lecture on the true meaning of "gentilesse" in order to educate him, change him and satisfy her own desires. The end of the tale shows that the solution that the loathly lady proposes is the right one: when the knight gives her the possibility to choose whether to be faithful or fair, she becomes both. In her speech, the old woman cites different authorities, such as Valerius Maximus, Seneca and Boethius in order to support her claim that social mobility is possible. She also cites Dante and Christ to support her claim that nobility concerns every person and cannot be claimed on the basis of ancestors[164]. Before looking at the character of the knight, it may be important to underline the importance of the power of women, which is also stressed at the end of the tale:

> "Thanne have I gete of yow maistrie," quod she,
> "Syn I may chese and governe as me lest?"
> "Ye, certes, wyf," quod he, "I holde it best."
> (1236-1238)

This power can be easily seen in the two courtroom scenes. The first is when the knight is taken in front of King Arthur in order to be judged. In this case the empowerment of women is clearly perceivable in the fact that the King leaves to the Queen and her ladies the power to pass a sentence upon the knight's life. The second is when the knight comes back with the answer given by the

[163] Malone, p. 489.
[164] Lipton, pp. 346-347.

loathly lady and in this case "the full spectrum of the female community"[165] is presented: wives, maids and widows express their opinion regarding the knight's life, affirming that he could live[166].

Concerning the figure of the knight, it may be considered another key character: the alleged hero is the person who commits the rape. Furthermore, this accident allows the development of the story. Roppolo describes the knight as the character who represents the major problem of the tale, since he finds three views through which the knight is perceived[167]. He affirms that there are critics who show complete disregard for him, other who make generalisations concerning him and finally another group who analyses the role of the knight when he appears in the tale. Critics like Lowes, Chute, Maynadier, Root, Legouis and Schlauch show complete disregard for the knight and believe the loathly lady and the Wife to be the main characters, since the issue of sovereignty in marriage is illustrated by them, while the knight is merely used as a means through which to reach the point. Then, critics like Lounsbury, Tupper, Kittredge, Patch, Curry and Mrs. Dempster make generalisations concerning the knight; in fact, they do not describe the knight's character or actions, but they put emphasis on the Wife and the old woman. Finally, there are critics like Kenyon, Coffman and Huppé, who give a brief analysis of the character of the knight. For instance, considering the old woman's speech about "gentilesse", the knight is the direct addressee of this talk; in addition to this, an evolution in the knight's character can be seen, since, by the end of the tale, he leaves the old woman the freedom to choose[168].

To conclude, in the prologue the Wife of Bath describes her life and the choices she made in her life. Clearly, she represents a key character in Chaucer's work, since she does not represent the stereotype of the woman of the Middle Ages, but rather a woman who marries various times because she is interested in acquiring wealth and lands. She is not afraid of affirming it: she states that her behaviour is correct and has to be followed. She supports her ideas through her own

[165] Lipton, p.345.
[166] Lipton, pp. 341-345.
[167] Roppolo, Joseph P., "The Converted Knight in Chaucer's 'Wife of Bath's Tale' ", *College English*, 12, 1951 p.263.
[168] Roppolo, pp. 263-265.

experience, so she establishes herself as the authority. In doing that, she is also proud of saying that she learnt how to behave thanks to her mother. Her main belief regarding the sovereignty of wives over husbands recurs in the tale she tells. The tale, in fact, is another way to support her viewpoints, in particular the fact of gaining sovereignty over the husband through an agreement with him, as happened to the Wife of Bath with her fifth husband. In addition to this, even though the story's main theme is wives' sovereignty over husbands, the knight is an important character: the rape that he commits, permits the development of events. His behaviour impresses the reader, since he expects a knight to save women, not to rape them. Moreover, the knight is involved in a process of education, which happens through the discourse on "gentilesse" of the lady. What is important at the end of the story is perceiving the change in the knight's character and behaviour: he is no more a rapist, but he leaves the decision to his wife. In this way, giving sovereignty to her, he lives a happy life.

All in all, the character of the Wife is used by Chaucer in order to show the role of women in marriage, a role which is the opposite of the one normally associated with the woman during the Middle Ages (as in the case of Griselda). Moreover, the role of the loathly lady and of the knight are also important, since they are used in order to reiterate the thesis of wives' sovereignty over husbands that the Wife tried to argue in her long prologue.

3.3. Sources and analogues of the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale

3.3.1. La Vieille's speech: a source of the Wife of Bath's Prologue

Many of the Wife of Bath's traits derive from the speech of the Old Woman in Jean de Meun's part of the *Roman de la Rose*. The Old Woman is here addressing a young lady and is giving her some advice on how to deal with men; she addresses a "son", namely Bel Accueil, who is a personification of the lady's psyche[169].

[169] Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Canterbury Tales,* ed. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson, London: Norton, 2005, p. 348.

The Old Woman begins her speech by saying that she is now old and cannot hold herself up without a stick. What she wants to do with her speech is advising the lady on how to behave with men; in fact she says:

> Bien sai, le brandon sentirés,
> Si vous lo que vous atirés
> Ains que là vous allés baignier,
> Si cum vous m'orrés enseignier.
> Car périlleusement s'i baigne
> Jones bonis qui n'a qui l'enseigne;
> IMès se mon conseil ensivés,
> A bon port estes arrivés[170].
> (13694-13701)

The Old Woman starts by saying that, when she was young, everyone knew her because of her beauty. She had a lot of men and what she is now able to teach about them depends on her past experience:

> Expériment m'en ont fait sage,
> Que j'ai hanté tout mon aage.
> Or en sai jusqu'à la bataille.
> Si n'est pas drois que ge vous faille
> Des biens aprendre que ge sai,
> Puis que tant esprové les ai[171]
> (13746-13751)

Therefore, the Old Woman is establishing her authority through her experience and knowledge. The same happens in the Wife of Bath's Prologue, where the Wife's first word is "experience" (1): she is trying to show the importance of wives' sovereignty over husbands by telling her own experience. The Old Woman is talking about her past, when she was still young and deceived many men. What she advises is that women should not be generous and affirms that "doner est grant folie"[172] (13991) because, she maintains, it is worth giving something only as far as something greater can be obtained. Moreover, she says that it is important to choose rich men, the ones that are not stingy; the same idea is shown by the Wife of Bath, since she underlines in her prologue the

[170]The edition I use to quote *Le Roman de la Rose* is https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_TXw-w1_hvyUC/page/n73/mode/2up/search/Ha. The translation is taken from https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/20442244.pdf: "I know that you will feel the torch; now I advise you to prepare yourself, before you go bathing there, according to my teaching, because a young man bathes there at great risk when he has nobody to teach him. But if you follow my advice you will arrive at good port."
[171] "Experience has made me wise, which I acquired throughout all my life; now I know all about its unpleasantness, so it would not be right if I failed to teach you the good things that I know, since I have so much experience of them."
[172] "Giving is a great folly"

importance of the wealth of her first three husbands, who, despite their old age, assured her money and lands. The Old Woman also underlines the importance of having more than one lover; she gives some examples of women who felt pain and sorrow since they loved only one man. This list of women may remind the reader of the wicked wives that the Wife of Bath lists in her Prologue when she is speaking about her fifth husband. On the one hand, in the *Roman de la Rose*, the Old Woman needs to list the names of such women in order to support her idea regarding the necessity of having more than one man in order to accumulate wealth and avoid sufferings. On the other hand, in the Wife of Bath's Prologue the list of wicked wives (711-764) is necessary in order to present the reason that led to the establishment of the Wife's sovereignty even over her fifth husband, the young Jankyn. The instances that the Old Woman gives are Dido (14116), the Queen of Carthage, who committed suicide because she was deceived by Aeneas, Phyllis (14152) who waited for Demophon for so long that she hanged herself, Oenone (14156) who was deceived by Paris, since her love for him was greater than his love for her and finally Medea (14170), who was deceived by Jason. Moreover, the Old Woman supports her idea regarding the necessity to deceive men by saying:

> Briément, tuit les lobent et trichent,
> Tuit sunt ribaut, partout se liclicnt :
> Si les doit-l'en ausiuc trichier.
> Non pas son cuer en un fichier.[173]
> (14206-14209)

After establishing her authority through her experience and explaining why men should be deceived, the Old Woman explains how a woman should be. She affirms elegance to be necessary (14214) as well as the knowledge of games and songs (14220). A woman should stay away from troubles and quarrels (14221) and dress up elegantly. Concerning the dressing up, the Old Woman gives a lot of details, explaining that hair should be combed and the dress should be chosen according to the woman's body, in order to enhance the body. The breath should be good and if a woman laughs, she must do it wisely and prettily by covering her teeth (14292-14299). Then, even

[173] "To summarize, all men deceive and cheat [women], all are scoundrels, gad-abouts, this is why one must also cheat them, and not put one's heart in one place."

weeping is something that women should do in a proper way: women "Tousjors out-eles lermes prestes"[174] (14313) and they have to be sure not to reveal their real intentions. The Old Woman continues talking about table manners: women should manage to be seen throughout the house, do the carving in front of the others, be careful not to wet their fingers in the sauce and drink carefully ("Ains boive petit et sovent"[175], 14378). They should also be sure not to get drunk or fall asleep at the table, since in this way they would be vulnerable. In this description of table manners, it may be important to underline that a reference to the General Prologue of the *Canterbury Tales* can be found; when Chaucer presents the Prioress, Madame Eglentyne (121), he underlines her good behaviour at the table, concerning both eating and drinking, using almost the same words of the *Roman de la Rose*:

> And she was cleped madame Eglentyne.
> Ful weel she soong the service dyvyne,
> Entuned in hir nose ful semely;
> And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly,
> After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,
> For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe.
> At mete wel ytaught was she with alle;
> She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle,
> Ne wette hir fyngres in hir sauce depe;
> Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe
> That no drope ne fille upon hire brest.
> In curteisie was set ful muchel hir lest.
> Hir over-lippe wyped she so clene
> That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene
> Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte.
> Ful semely after hir mete she raughte.
> (121-136)

The Old Woman stresses the importance of searching the pleasures of love when young: according to her, wise women will do that. She addresses "sages" (14433) women, because she is sure that those who are wise will believe her. The same is done by the Wife of Bath in the prologue to her tale, since she addresses wise wives by saying "Ye wise wyves, that kan understonde" (225). In fact, wise wives are those who are able to understand what is good for them and deceive husbands in order to obtain what they want.

[174] "They always have tears ready."
[175] "Rather she should take little sips often."

Another aspect that can be found both in the Old Woman's speech and in the Wife of Bath's Prologue is the importance given to the participation in social events, such as pilgrimages, feasts, processions and weddings. In fact, the Old Woman affirms that it is necessary to go to such events, so that women can show their beauty; those events are defined as the places where the God and Goddess of Love act (14468-14469). The same idea is presented by the Wife of Bath, who went out to pilgrimages, preaching and marriages (555-559); for instance, when her fourth husband was not at home, she usually went out and, during one of these occasions, she met Jankyn the clerk who would become her fifth husband. The Old Woman continues by giving importance to appearance, reiterating what she previously said regarding one's dress, feet, hair, elegance and movements. She also reiterates the importance of loving rich men (14558-14559) because they can give many gifts, a consideration which is also supported by the Wife of Bath's viewpoint, but the Old Woman also adds that it would be better to keep lovers in suspense.

After that, the Old Woman affirms that women can have more than one lover because they are free to decide about their lives. She claims that this freedom derives from Nature and Nature is stronger than education (14978-14979). In order to explain this, she gives the example of Venus, who was Vulcan's wife. Venus betrayed Vulcan with Mars, since Vulcan was very ugly, and Vulcan discovered them. This betrayal is explained through Venus's desire for freedom that persists even after the marriage with Vulcan (14917-14919). In fact, she says:

> Aiusinc Nature nous justise.
> Qui nos cuers à délit atise.
> Par quoi Vénus de Mars amer
> A mains déservi à blasmer. [176]
> (15098-15101)

The Old Woman also explains how to deal with a jealous husband, how to deceive him in order to have the chance to have more than one man; she presents the possibility to get the husband drunk and create a plan in order to go undiscovered. The end of the Old woman's speech reiterates that a woman should not be generous, since her generosity brought her to misery. In fact, she says:

[176] "Thus does Nature rule us, who enflames our hearts with pleasure; which is why Venus deserved a lot less blame for loving Mars."

> Ha, lasse! ainsinc n'ai-ge pas fait,
> Or sui povre par mon fol fait.[177]
> (15398-15399).

Thus, her misery is a consequence of the mistakes she committed because no one taught her how to behave: her speech is made in order to avoid other women's mistakes.

To conclude, the main ideas expressed by the Old Woman reflect the Wife of Bath's main traits; both women wanted to offer a guide for wise women in order to deceive men and not to be deceived. Both the Wife and the Old Woman present themselves as authorities because of their wide experience with men; great importance is given to beauty and manners, especially by the Old Woman who devotes a large part of her discourse to that. However, the Wife does not explain in detail the way a woman should be dressed, but rather gives more importance to the choice of the husband: he should be rich. In this case, as the Old Woman does, the Wife affirms the necessity of giving only if something greater can be received: women do not show generosity, but interest in what they can obtain. For instance, the Wife accepts to satisfy her husband's sexual desire only when she is sure to get something in exchange, in other words, when she is sure to obtain money or lands. In addition to this, the Old Woman justifies the behaviour of women as deceivers of men as a consequence of men's behaviour. Therefore, in the Old Woman's opinion, women deceive men in order not to be deceived by them. In fact, in the Old Woman's current condition, the result of mistakes she committed can be seen: misery is what characterises her life. Concerning the Wife of Bath, she is in the opposite situation: she lives her life happily and behaves as a faithful wife with her fifth husband. So, unlikethe Old Woman, the Wife succeeds in gaining the sovereignty even over her fifth husband Jankyn; the Wife does not live in a condition of misery.

[177] "Ha! Alas! This is not the way I did it, now I am poor because of my unfortunate doing."

3.3.2. Analogues to the Wife of Bath's Tale

The Wife of Bath's tale may find analogues in other Middle English versions of the same tale. However, we have to be aware that these versions are different from what Chaucer offers us, since some changes can be noticed.

One of these versions is *The Marriage of Sir Gawaine.* Even though some parts are missing, the story is understandable. Arthur must redeem his honour and save his life by offering a ransom to a baron in order to avoid a fight. Arthur has to find the answer to the baron's question "what women most desire". He is unable to discover the answer, but he encounters a loathly lady on his way back to hold the appointment with the baron. She is a monstrously ugly lady, dressed in scarlet and was sitting in a forest[178]. When Arthur is told that she has the answer to his question, he offers her Gawain as a spouse. This agreement is made before Arthur is given the answer and Gawain later will fulfil his duty[179]. In this manuscript there is a gap regarding the lady's response, but it is evidently a satisfactory answer, since Arthur is then in front of the court. Arthur describes his meeting with this lady and gives the answer regarding women's sovereignty. The baron is angry, not only because it is the right answer, but also because this lady was in fact his sister. As previously said, Gawain accepts to marry the loathly lady. Although there is another gap in the text after the scene in which Gawain is seen alone with the old woman, the dilemma is present. This dilemma consists of having her "in this liknesse in the night or else in the day"[180] (153-154). What follows is Gawain's answer, in which he gives her the possibility to choose. Thanks to that, she will keep the shape she has during the night, in other words she will be young and beautiful. Finally, the woman explains that her shape has been caused by one of her stepmother's enchantments. The tale ends with King Arthur thanking God because of the action of Gawain, the gentle knight[181].

---

[178] Wurtele, Douglas J., "Chaucer's Wife of Bath and her Distorted Arthurian Motifs", *Arthurian Interpretations*, 2, 1987, p. 48.
[179] Glasser, Marc, "He Nedes Moste Hire Wedde: the Forced Marriage in the Wife of Bath's Tale and Its Middle English Analogues", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 85, 1984, p.239.
[180] This extract of *The Marriage of Sir Gawain* is taken from https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/hahn-sir-gawain-marriage-of-sir-gawain.
[181] Wurtele, p. 49.

Another version of the tale is *The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell*, which Glasser affirms to be clearer on the foregoing consent to marry[182]. Arthur in this poem is under the power of Sir Gromer Somer Joure and has to find the answer to Gromer's question "what women most desire" in the usual one year's time. Gawain in this version learns the details about Arthur's jeopardy and starts a separate search for the answer. Even in this version Arthur meets an old and ugly woman and, in order to obtain the answer, he grants her Gawain in marriage. Arthur then goes back to Carlisle and informs Gawain about the lady's price. Gawain consents to wed anyone for the king's sake. Arthur goes back to Dame Ragnell, the loathly lady, and informs her of Gawain's promise. As a consequence, he receives the correct answer concerning women's sovereignty on everything. Once Arthur repeats this answer to the offended knight, he is free and Gawain's wedding takes place. There is a lacuna in the manuscript, which is followed by the description of the nuptial bedchamber. At this point, Gawain faces the dilemma regarding the woman's physical appearance, that is to be fair at night and foul by day, or fair in the daytime "and on nyghtes on the fowlyst wyfe"[183] (662). Since Gawain leaves the choice to his wife, she will be fair both by day and by night. As in *The Marriage of Sir Gawaine,* even here we find the woman lamenting her changing of shape as being caused by her stepmother who practiced black magic on her and the text ends with King Arthur thanking God because of the action of Gawain, the gentle knight[184].

These two analogues present a story which is similar to the one told by the Wife of Bath, but there are some points which are different. First, in these two analogues the person who must redeem himself is Arthur, while in the Wife of Bath's Tale the name of the knight who stands in jeopardy is not specified and it is King Arthur who has to decide regarding the knight's fate. Second, in these two analogues the cause of the woman's enchantment is explained, that is the stepmother's use of black magic. This detail is also present in *The Tale of Florent* by John Gower, which constitutes the

[182] Glasser, p. 240.
[183] This extract of *The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell* is taken from https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/hahn-sir-gawain-wedding-of-sir-gawain-and-dame-ragnelle.
[184] Wurtele, pp. 50-51.

closest analogue to the Wife of Bath's Tale. A further detail which may be interesting to consider is the character of the loathly lady in *The Marriage of Sir Gawaine*: in this text the woman is in fact the sister of the baron, the man to whom Arthur has to offer a ransom in order to avoid the fight.

As previously said, the version which provides the closest analogue to the Wife of Bath's Tale is *The Tale of Florent*, which is part of John Gower's work *Confessio Amantis.* This tale occupies lines 1407-1871 and talks about a worthy knight, Florent, who kills Branchus. Branchus's parents bring Florent to their castle to revenge their son's death. However, they decide not to kill him since he is the nephew of the emperor. It is Branchus's grandmother who decides Florent's fate: the knight will be free if he is able to find the answer to the question "what women most desire". Branchus's grandmother is the first old woman of the story, who is described as the "slyheste"[185] (1442), "old" (1443) and "grantdame" (1444)[186]. Florent is unable to find the correct answer: he learns a variety of them, but none correct. However, at one point in the story he finds "a lothly wommannysch figure" (1530) in a forest, under a tree. In this version, it is the woman who calls the knight, since Gower's loathly lady already knows of Florent's perilous state. Florent asks her advice and the lady replies that she will give the answer only if he promises to reward her with whatever she asks, warning him in advance that she wants him to marry her. Florent accepts and the loathly lady reveals that the answer is

> That alle wommen lievest wolde
> Be soverein of mannes love;
> For what womman is so above,
> Sche hath, as who seith, al hire wille;
> (1608-1611)

Florent expresses in front of the court the answer the lady gave him and it is accepted. Then, he returns to the place where he found the loathly lady and her detailed description is given: she is painted as a horrible creature. The knight takes the loathly lady to the castle, where she is dressed by women; the wedding ceremony takes place and the two go to the bedchamber. Florent turns to

[185] The extracts of *The Tale of Florent* are taken from Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Canterbury Tales,* ed. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson, London: Norton, 2005.
[186] Feinstein, Sandy, "Longevity and the Loathly Ladies in Three Medieval Romances", *Arthuriana*, 21, 2011 p. 27.

the other side, since he is unable to set his eyes on her. The woman asks her to turn towards her by reminding him of his marriage vows. What follows is the scene in which Florent finds a lady of eighteen near him; she propounds the same dilemma as the other versions and the knight decides that the choice shall be hers. In this version the lady explains she is the daughter of the king of Sicily and was transformed by her stepmother into an ugly woman; the enchantment would last until the moment in which a knight would offer her love and also sovereignty.

Regarding the figure of the loathly woman, what we found both in the analogues and in the Wife of Bath's version is the question "what women most desire". However, there are also some differences. To begin with, in the analogues the old woman is found alone in a wood, while in the Wife of Bath's Tale she is in a green place beside a forest with twenty-four dancing ladies who disappear instantly from sight. Moreover, in the tale of the Wife, the old woman does not already know in advance what the problem of the questing knight is and accompanies him to King Arthur's court, standing by his side while he informs the queen of the answer he found. The reader is not informed of the woman's age when she transformed, and the cause of the woman's ugly appearance is not explained. What represents the major addition to the Wife of Bath's version is the pillow sermon, which is the discourse on "gentilesse" that the woman addresses to the knight; in fact, it is not present in other versions[187]. Finally, the beginning of the story might be taken into account. The version of the Wife is the only one who starts with a rape, since in other versions it is King Arthur himself or a knight, as in the case of Florent, who stands in jeopardy because of an offence committed towards a baron or another knight[188].

[187] Wurtele, pp. 54-57.
[188] Carter, Susan, "Coupling the Beastly Bride and the Hunter Hunted: What Lies behind Chaucer's 'Wife of Bath's Tale'", *The Chaucer Review*, 37, p. 332.

3.4. The Women in Dunbar's *Treatis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo*

The Treatis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo is a work written at the end of the fifteenth century by John Dunbar, one of the most important among Scottish medieval poets, and it can be considered a treatise on the condition of women in the Middle Ages, when chivalry and courtly love were disappearing and the erotic aspect was beginning to be emphasised. This work was first published in 1508 in Scotland, but only a little part of this version reached us (only 103 lines). The whole poem has survived in a manuscript dated 1570-86, namely the Maitland Folio now at Cambridge University. The text is written in Middle Scots, a variety of English used in Scotland in the late Middle Ages. The image of the woman given through courtly love is overturned by Dunbar's women: their goal is the satisfaction of both sexual and material desires. The theme of sexuality intertwines with the theme of economic power; for instance, the widow was rich because her two husbands were merchants, so she chose them according to their wealth[189]. Because of this, aspects treated by the Wife of Bath in her prologue and tale can be recognised.

Dunbar starts by applying to his story the traditional device of the hidden poet who records an amorous dialogue: from the beginning we can see how a device related to chivalry and courtly love is applied to an uncourtly conversation, developing a comic contrast between a conventional form and a new theme[190]. The *Tretis* can be described as a debate on love. The poet discovers three ladies in a beautiful garden, while they are celebrating the festival of Midsummer Eve[191]. The time in which is set the beginning of the poem is important, since it is normally associated to "a time for revelry and for turning topsy-turvy the properties and ceremonies of everyday life"[192]. The poet is hiding behind a bush and decides to listen to their conversation. First, we find a description of the three ladies as beautiful and good women:

[189] Dunbar, John, *Il Trattato delle Due Donne Maritate e della Vedova*, ed. Ermanno Barisone, Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1999, pp. 5-8.
[190] Kinsley, James, "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo", *Medium AEvum,* 23, 1954, p. 31.
[191] Kinsley, p. 32.
[192] Ebin, Lois, "Dunbar's Bawdy", *The Chaucer Review*, 14, 1980, p. 282.

I saw thre gay ladeis sit in ane grein arbeir,
All grathit into garlandis of fresche gudlie flouris.
So glitterit as the gold wer thair glorius gilt tressis,
Quhill all the gressis did gleme of the glaid hewis;
Kemmit war thair cleir hair and curiouslie sched,
Attour thair schulderis doun schyre schyning full bricht,
With curches cassin thair abone of kirsp cleir and thin.
Thair mantillis grein war as the gres that grew in May sessoun,
Fetrit with thair quhyt fingaris about thair fair sydis.
Of ferliful fyne favour war thair faceis meik,
All full of flurist fairheid as flouris in June -
Quhyt, seimlie, and soft as the sweit lillies,
Now upspred upon spray, as new spynist rose;
Arrayit ryallie about with mony riche vardour,
That nature full nobillie annamalit with flouris,
Of alkin hewis under hevin that ony heynd knew,
Fragrant, all full of fresche odour, fynest of smell.
(17-33)[193]

This description, together with the choice of using the alliterative metre, leads us to expect a romance or an elegant dream vision[194]. However, what follows is the opposite of what we can expect. Two of the ladies are married and the third is a widow. The widow starts the conversation by asking the married women to tell "Quhat mirth ye fand in maryage sen ye war menis wyffis" (42), in other words the widow asks women if they are satisfied with their marriage and husband.

The first wife is married with an old man and defines marriage as the source of unhappiness and great pain (51). In fact, she desires to have the possibility of changing partner every year, as birds do. Here, a first reference to the Wife of Bath can be found: the two women share the same ideas regarding the hate towards their husbands and the absence of love. Then, a second reference can be found to another of Chaucer's works, which is *Parliament of Fowls*: in this work, Chaucer describes the birds' annual choice of their partner. In effect, what is underlined by the first wife is the possibility of having the freedom to choose a different partner every year throughout her life. She continues affirming that she would like to show her beauty in places, such as "fairis" (70), "playis" (71), "preichingis" (71) and "pilgrimages" (71), where she can search for a lover. Another reference here can be found to the Wife of Bath, since she goes to such places with the same aim, when her fourth husband is not at home. In fact, the Wife meets Jankyn, the clerk who will become

[193] The edition I use to quote *The Treatis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo* is Dunbar, John, *Il Trattato delle Due Donne Maritate e della Vedova*, ed. Ermanno Barisone, Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1999.
[194] Ebin, p. 282.

her fifth husband, during one of such events. Then, Dunbar presents the image of marriage as a yoke by comparing the husband to a pack animal:

> And quhen I gottin and ane grome ganest of uther,
> Yaip, and ying, in the yok ane yeir for to draw;
> (78-79)

She addresses her husband with pejorative epithets, such as "wallidrag" (89), "worme" (89), "auld wobat carle" (89), "bumbart" (90) and "bag full of flewme" (90). Through these epithets she wants to underline the disgust that he provoked her, as well as his sterility. The husband is also compared to a devil, through such epithets as "auld sathane" (102) and "Belyebud" (112). The last point that the first wife underlines is the husband's jealousy and the fact that she does not give him sexual satisfaction unless "his purse pays richely in recompense efter" (136). The same thing can be found in the Wife of Bath, since she does not satisfy her husband in bed unless he promises her presents. Therefore, the main ideas expressed by the Wife of Bath can be found in Dunbar's first Wife.

It is the turn of the second wife, who affirms she will tell the truth since there are no spies there. By writing this, Dunbar is clearly referring in an ironical way to the poet hiding behind the bush. The second wife refers to her husband as "a hur maister the hugeast in erd" (168); she laments that he is unable to satisfy her from the sexual point of view and that he found him committing adultery even after being married. She also demonstrates her hate towards him by underlining that he is impotent, even though he tries to appear still vigorous and able to satisfy women's sexual desires. Then, she also says that having an old husband is something positive because he cannot hide anything; conversely, she has a young husband and he does not meet her expectations, in fact she affirms:

> I wend I josit a geme and I haif geit gottin;
> He had the glemyng of gold and wes bot glase fundin.
> (201-202)

The same reference to the freedom of birds that made the first wife is reiterated here, with the mention of Saint Valentine's Day, as the period in which birds are free; even at this point a reference to the *Parliament of Fowls* can be found. The freedom the second wife desires, like the

previous one, is that of having the possibility of changing partner whenever she wants. She continues with "chastite adew!" (208) and with an attack to the feudal practice of forced marriage by saying:

> Warian oft my wekit kyn, that me away cast
> To sic a craudoune but curage, that knyt my cler bewte,
> And ther so mony kene kynghtis this kenrik within.
> (241-216)

Finally, she concludes by saying that she deceives her husband with sweet words: this represents another aspect which can be referred to the Wife of Bath's behaviour.

At this point, the widow tells her experience to her "sisteris in schrift" (251). The first thing she highlights is that she is a quarrelsome person but she dresses well and seems an innocent; therefore, she has only "a sanctis liknes" (234). The widow asks the other two women to listen to her in order to learn to be as wise as she is; in other words, she wants to teach them how to deceive men. This may be connected to the Wife of Bath's desire to teach other wives to be wise in deceiving husbands, as well as to the Wife of Bath's mother who is mentioned as her daughter's teacher. She advises them to

> Be dragonis baith and dowis, ay in double forme,
> And quhen it nedis yow, onone, note baith ther strenthis;
> Be amyable with humble face, as angellis apperand,
> And with a terrebill tail be stangand as edderis;
> (263-266)

As a consequence of this behaviour, the husband will pay for everything the wife wants. The widow explains that she has had two husbands and that they loved her, but she clearly despised them. The two husbands were merchants, an essential characteristic since wealth is what women want in exchange for sexual satisfaction, which is emphasised at line 364. The widow, as well as the two wives, refers to her husbands with bad terms, such as "hair hogeart" (272) or "mad fader" (274) concerning the first husband and "fule" (300) regarding the second one. If the first wife compares her husband to a pack animal, the widow uses her techniques to deceive her second husband in order to "lerit" (318) him; in other words her aim is to train him as if her husband was an animal.

The widow, like the Wife of Bath, stresses how she is satisfied to control her husband completely and only when she is sure of having sovereignty over him, she starts mocking him in the worst ways. She also confesses she has cuckolded him, when he ran out of money because he spent everything he had to satisfy her. In effect, since the husband had nothing to offer her, she affirms she has despised him more and more: he was important only because of his wealth. She appears to be happy because the husband died and she is at ease now since she is a widow; even though she dresses in mourning, she continues looking at other men. The widow ends her speech by affirming that being faithful is a good quality, but hypocrisy is what is more useful: everyone considers her a holy woman, but actually she is the opposite. In fact, she affirms:

> Bot yit me think the best bourd, quhen baronis and knychtis
> And othir bachilleris, blith blumyng in youth,
> And all my luffaris lele, my lugeing persewis
> And fyllis me wyne wantonly with weilfair and joy:
> Sum rownis; and sum ralyeis; and sum redis ballatis,
> Sum raiffis furght rudly with riatus speche;
> Sum plenis, and sum prayis; sum prasis mi bewte;
> Sum kissis me; sum clappis me; sum kyndnes me proferis;
> Sum kerffis to me curtasli; sum me the cop giffis;
> Sum stalwardly steppis ben, with a stout curage
> And a stif standand thing staiffis in my neiff;
> And mony blenkis ben ovr, that but full fer sittis,
> That mai, for the thik thrang, nought thrid as thai wald.
> Bot, with my fair calling, I comfort thaim all:
> For he that sittis me nixt, I nip on his finger;
> I serf him on the tothir syde on the samin fasson;
> And he that behind me sittis, I hard on him lene,
> And him befor, with my fut fast on his I tramp;
> And to the bernis far but sueit blenkis I cast:
> (476-494)

She concludes by saying that her behaviour is a good one, since she feels pity for everyone and this will be the reason why God will save her innocent soul. The tale ends with the poet's ironical question "Quhilk wald ye waill to your wif, gif ye suld wed one?" (530).

In general, all three ladies have "a hot vitality both in imagination and in expression"[195], so that they are defined as "cummeries"[196]. According to Kinsley, Dunbar draws a satirical contrast between their external beauty and delicacy, and their real nature, which can be seen only through

[195] Kinsley, p. 34.
[196] Kinsley, p. 34.

the poem. Therefore, the contrast between appearance and reality can be seen as the contrast between the courtly world and reality, that is how women behave and think[197]. The same idea is the one supported by Ebin, who highlights bawdy language as a device through which it is possible to define the thematic opposition of the poem, which is the opposition between what people appear to be and what they actually are. Interestingly the bawdy which is present in the two wives' speeches is defined into a system by the widow. In fact, like the Wife of Bath, she teaches women to take advantage of the disparity between appearance and reality[198].

To conclude, Dunbar's women in the poem have something in common with Chaucer's Wife of Bath, namely the importance given to wives' sovereignty over husbands, to the fact of taking advantage of their ability to deceive men and even the bawdy language. This last point is particularly evident in Dunbar's poem: the beginning of the poem shows a setting which is thought to be related to courtly love, but the real nature of women presented by the poet surprises us and highlights the opposition between appearance and reality, enhanced by the use of bawdy.

[197] Kinsley, p. 35.
[198] Ebin, pp. 283-284.

4. The Merchant's Prologue and Tale

4.1. An analysis of the Merchant's Prologue and Tale

The Merchant's Prologue and Tale are placed after the Clerk's Prologue and Tale. The Merchant's Prologue is very short if compared with the one of the Clerk or the one of the Wife of Bath. The Merchant is replying to what the Clerk has previously said through his tale regarding wives. He refers to himself and says that, despite the fact that he married only two months before, he can already affirm he has the worst wife a husband could have; in fact, he defines her a "shrewe" (1222) and affirms that a great difference can be noticed between the patience of Griselda and the cruelty of his wife (1224-1225). The Merchant is asked by the Host to tell his own experience regarding marriage, but this request is rejected: the Merchant decides to tell a tale regarding the same theme, but not his own. Therefore, he has a cynical view of marriage and he presents it by telling a story which seems to praise the role of the wife. However, such praise seems more sarcastic and ironical towards the role of the wife rather than praising it.

The Tale opens with January, a wealthy old knight who, at the age of sixty, decides to marry. During his life, he has always followed his bodily desires, but now he wants to fulfil God's desire, that is the marriage of men and women (1265). At line 1253, we find an example of irony: the Merchant, in fact, explains that it is not clear whether January wants to marry "for hoolynesse or for dotage", but what is evident is his great desire to marry. The fact of taking a wife is seen by January as the best part of his wealth. In particular, he specifies that he desires a young and fair wife (1271), who can give him an heir (1273), as well as joy and pleasure (1274). The idea of marriage as something positive is present also in the lines that come after, but we understand that the tone is ironical, since marriage is defined as a yoke (1285). The same idea is also present, as mentioned in the previous chapter, in Dunbar's poem while the first wife is talking. January's intent to have a wife mainly concerns his will to find a beautiful young woman who can take care of him and satisfy his desires. The Merchant at this point mentions Theophrastus (1294), a clerk who wrote a satirical

book regarding marriage, who supports the opposite view. Theophrastus advises not to take wife, since a wife only wants to have the husband's wealth; he also adds that true friends or servants are able to take care of him better than a wife, because by taking a wife there is also the possibility of being a cuckold. After mentioning this author, the Merchant underlines the fact that readers do not have to pay attention to Theophrastus's ideas, but to what he is telling them. In fact he says:

> Mariage is a ful greet sacrement.
> He which that hath no wyf, I holde hym shent;
> He lyveth helplees and al desolate
> I speke of folk in seculer estaat.
> (1319-1322)

Connected to this, in order to support the fact that the woman has been created by God to help the man, he gives the example of Adam and Eve (1325-1336). God has created the woman from man in order to give man a helper; for this reason, they must live in unity. Therefore, a woman has to be submissive, good and virtuous. What follows is a list of biblical examples regarding women as good advisers, through which women's virtues are underlined. Rebecca (1363) advised her son Jacob and helped him to earn his father's blessing; Judith (1366) saved God's people because she killed Holofernes; Abigail (1369) saved her husband Nabal; Ester (1371) freed God's people by giving good advice. In addition to this, the Merchant affirms that there is nothing better than a humble wife by referring to Seneca and saying that the wife is the keeper of domestic affairs.

At this point, January's story follows. January, one day, decides to explain to his friends his intention to marry. He says:

> "Freendes, I am hoor and oold,
> And almoost, God woot, on my pittes brynke;
> Upon my soule somwhat moste I thynke.
> I have my body folily despended;
> Blessed be God that it shal been amended!
> For I wol be, certeyn, a wedded man,
> And that anoon in al the haste I kan.
> (1400-1406)

He affirms to be old and ill and that he wants a woman no older than twenty, so that she can give him pleasure and have not much cunning, as widows have. Some friends give him various suggestions regarding marriage: some of them praise it, some argue against it. This discussion

continues all day. The main argument is the one between Placebo and Justinus. On the one hand, Placebo starts speaking and cites Solomon's words:

> `Wirk alle thyng by conseil,' thus seyde he,
> `And thanne shaltow nat repente thee.'
> (1485-1486)

He advises January that it would be good to marry a young wife; therefore, he affirms that the right thing to do is what he wants to do. On the other hand, Justinus cites Seneca and believes that it is necessary to be more careful and thoughtful before taking a wife. In fact, Justinus underlines that it is more probable for an old husband to be a cuckold if he takes a young wife. January replies agreeing with Placebo and asks his friends not to make any arguments against what he has decided to do. However, January continues by asking to solve one concern:

> "I have," quod he, "herd seyd, ful yoore ago,
> Ther may no man han parfite blisses two --
> This is to seye, in erthe and eek in hevene.
> For though he kepe hym fro the synnes sevene,
> And eek from every branche of thilke tree,
> Yet is ther so parfit felicitee
> And so greet ese and lust in mariage
> That evere I am agast now in myn age
> That I shal lede now so myrie a lyf,
> So delicat, withouten wo and stryf,
> That I shal have myn hevene in erthe heere.
> For sith that verray hevene is boght so deere
> With tribulacion and greet penaunce,
> How sholde I thanne, that lyve in swich plesaunce
> As alle wedded men doon with hire wyvys,
> Come to the blisse ther Crist eterne on lyve ys?
> This is my drede, and ye, my bretheren tweye,
> Assoilleth me this question, I preye."
> (1637-1654)

What he is asking is whether one person must choose between one kind of perfect happiness and another. Justinus replies to January: he is furious because of what he has just heard and affirms that a married man has more possibilities to repent and, as a consequence, to go to heaven (1665-1667). He also adds that marriage might be January's "purgatorie" (1670). Interestingly, at line 1685, there is also a reference to the Wife of Bath made by the Merchant, who intervenes in order to underline that the Wife has already talked about what marriage is. After that, January starts to prepare for the wedding; he chooses only one woman form the many available to him:

> They wroghten so, by sly and wys tretee,

That she, this mayden which that Mayus highte,
As hastily as evere that she myghte
Shal wedded be unto this Januarie.
(1692-1695)

The ceremony of marriage is not described in detail, but there is a reference to a prayer in the medieval marriage ceremony[199]: here the priest asks the wife to be as wise as Rebecca and as faithful as Sarah, makes the sign of the cross over the married couple and asks God to bless them. What follows is the feast, in which also Venus participates: January has now become one of her knights (1724). May is described as "fulfild of alle beautee and plesaunce" (1749), where beauty is compared to the bright morning of May (1748). By looking at her, January is in a state of "traunce" (1750) and what he desires is the end of the feast, in order to satisfy his sexual desires. Everyone is full of joy, except for the knight's squire, Damian. Clearly, it is due to the fact that he loves May, he is "ny wood" (1775) which means almost crazy because of his love for May. This ends with Damian weeping and complaining in his bed. The Merchant goes on with the narration by talking about January and May in the bedchamber. Before taking his wife in his arms, January drinks "ypocras, clarree, and vernage" (1807) in order to increase his strenght; he kisses her and scratches her skin with his bristly beard (1824). In order to clarify this concept, the skin is compared to a shark's and the sharpness is compared to a brier (1825). January apologises for what he is going to do to her, an offense; however, he affirms that legally he can do whatever he wants with her, since they are married (1841). In this case the description of marriage as a yoke (1837) is repeated. Unlike Dunbar's first wife, in the Merchant's tale the yoke is described as blessed, since it is marriage that permits January to do what he wants with a young woman like May. The two have then sex until day comes: January at this point wakes up, drinks some wine, sings and sits in his bed. May is thinking about what happened and her viewpoint regarding January's love-making is "worth a bene" (1854), which means that she thinks that it has been a useless effort.

The narration at this point goes back to the woeful Damian. He is sick and full of woe because the fire of Venus is burning inside him. He writes a love letter to May and puts it in a silk

[199] Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Canterbury Tales,* ed. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson, London: Norton, 2005, p. 195

purse in the place near his heart. Since Damian is not attending to January, pretending to be sick, January decides to send May to visit his gentle squire Damian in order to tell him that he will visit him soon. The woman goes to visit Damian and on this occasion he gives her the letter where

> wroot he al his sorwe,
> in manere of a compleynt or a lay,
> Unto his faire, fresshe lady May;
> (1880-1882)

He slips it secretly into her hands. The letter, which contains all his sorrow, is like a poetic lament or a song. May hides the letter, reads it later and tears it up in pieces; then, she hides it in the toilet, a place where surely it will not be discovered. May, who feels pity for Damian, decides to write him a letter in which she "graunteth hym hire verray grace" (1997). She decides to take the letter to Damian's bedroom and puts it under his pillow. Damian wakes up the next morning and he does not feel sick or sorry: he returns to serve January in a humble way, as he has always done.

The Merchant at this point continues to tell the story, focusing on January's house; there is a beautiful garden. It is so beautiful that only January possesses the key and in that garden there are Pluto and Proserpina, the king and queen of fairies with all their court. In order to underline the magnificence of this place, the narrator says that even the author of the *Romance de la Rose* could not describe its beauty, nor could Priapus, a phallic god of gardens, fruitfulness and fecundity, describe its art. The garden is used by January and May as the place where they can satisfy their sexual desires. Suddenly, January becomes blind and, despite the fact that the two spouses have lived good times together, he becomes more and more possessive of his wife. This causes both Damian and May grief: January is always in her company. However, through private letters and signs she understands what Damian's intent is. At this point the narrator intervenes by saying that in the case of January the fact of ignoring what is happening is a relief. In fact, May through warm wax is able to make an imprint of the key of the garden and Damian copies it secretly. The narrator gives also an example regarding Piramus and Thisbe, since they succeeded in communicating through a wall (2128-2130). At the beginning of the month of July, January shows his interest to satisfy his sexual desires with his wife in the garden. In this situation, May

On Damyan a signe made she,
That he sholde go biforn with his cliket.
This Damyan thanne hath opened the wyket,
And in he stirte, and that in swich manere
That no wight myghte it se neither yheere,
And stille he sit under a bussh anon.
(2150-2155)

January, taking May's hand, asks her to be a faithful wife since he chose her because of love and not greed; May replies by saying that he would never do something that could ruin both her and her family's reputation. At this point she signals Damian to climb up a tree nearby that is full of fruit (2210). The Merchant here stops with the supposed realism of narration to explain the long argument about marriage between Pluto and Proserpina. Pluto, the king of fairies, affirms women are usually unfaithful:

"My wyf," quod he, "ther may no wight seye nay;
Th' experience so preveth every day
The tresons whiche that wommen doon to man.
Ten hondred thousand [tales] tellen I kan
Notable of youre untrouthe and brotilnesse.
(2237-2241)

The king of fairies supports his arguments by citing King Solomon and Jesus, Syrach's son. What Pluto wants to do is to show January that he is a cuckold, by restoring his sight: in this way he could see Damian who is on the tree. Proserpina does not agree with her husband Pluto, because she supports the idea that the sources Pluto cites do not consider the evil that men performed, but only evil concerning women. Proserpina wants May to satisfy her sexual desires with Damian and affirms that she will suggest the right answer in order to justify her behaviour.

January and May continue walking in the garden when they arrive to the pear-tree where Damian is hiding. May at this point asks her husband to help her because she wants to eat a pear. She stands on January's back and climbs up into the tree with Damian; the Merchant describes what happens between Damian and May:

Ladyes, I prey yow that ye be nat wrooth;
I kan nat glose, I am a rude man -
And sodeynly anon this Damyan
Gan pullen up the smok, and in he throng.
(2350-2353)

The Merchant excuses himself because he is an unlearned man and this is the reason why he is unable to say through metaphors that Damian pulls up her dress and begins to have a sex with her. When Pluto sees what is happening, decides to restore January's sight. Even in this case the Merchant intervenes: he decides not to explain in a detailed way what May and Damian are doing:

> And saugh that Damyan his wyf had dressed
> In swich manere it may nat been expressed,
> But if I wolde speke uncurteisly;
> (2361-2363)

Seeing his cuckoldry, January's reaction is "a roryng and a cry" (2364) and asks his wife what she is doing there. Without ado, May replies:

> And she answerde, "Sire, what eyleth yow?
> Have pacience and resoun in youre mynde.
> I have yow holpe on bothe youre eyen blynde.
> Up peril of my soule, I shal nat lyen,
> As me was taught, to heele with youre eyen,
> Was no thyng bet, to make yow to see,
> Than strugle with a man upon a tree.
> God woot, I dide it in ful good entente."
> (2368-2375)

Clearly, January affirms that he has seen what they were doing, underlining that they were having sex and not struggling. May continues by maintaining that January, in effect, is able to see now and she persuades him that she was not having sex with Damian. January in the end agrees with May and asks her to descend from the tree. The woman highlights that he has seen something wrong because he has been blind for a long period of time. At the end of the tale, the two go back to their castle.

The tale is followed by an epilogue, in which the host reiterates the idea of women as unfaithful and deceitful. The Host compares them to bees:

> In wommen been! For ay as bisy as bees
> Been they, us sely men for to deceyve,
> And from the soothe evere wol they weyve;
> By this Marchauntes tale it preveth weel.
> (2422-2425)

However, he underlines that his wife, despite the vices she has, is not like the one described in the Merchant's tale.

Critics divide between two main views concerning this tale: some find the tale to be "an embittered, poisonous, mordant revelation of an ill-humored narrator", others find the tale to be "a spirited, extravagantly ironic satire in which the traditional *senex amans* is the subject"[200]. Stevens presents some of these viewpoints; for instance, Kittredge believes this tale to be an example of cynical satire and Tatlock affirms it to be a repugnant tale. There are critics like Craik and Bronson who support the fact that the tale must be read as separated from the prologue, while others like Harrington believe that prologue and tale are linked, since they constitute a unified narrative point of view that at the end appears to be comic. In general, almost all critics have linked the prologue with the tale, since it can be considered a tale of self-revelation, as Lumiansky affirms, because the Merchant reveals a disastrous marriage which can be compared to his own. Clearly, the marriage between January and May is not the same as the Merchant's, but permits to speculate about the Merchant's marriage: the prologue, in fact, does not give any further description of the Merchant but concerns his unfortunate marriage[201]. The climax of the tale is found in the garden scene with the encounter in the pear-tree. In this case, there is also the presence of the two deities, Pluto and Proserpina. Pluto is the king of the underworld, while Proserpina is the spirit of spring, whose embodiment is May[202]. The pear-tree is an important element, since this tree in such a garden may echo the paradise of Eden: the pear-tree in the Merchant's Tale, like the tree from which Adam and Eve ate the fruit causing man's first sin, represents the beginning of the sin, since in this situation May satisfies her sexual desires with Damian[203].

Together with the association to Christianity, Dalbey underlines that there is considerable evidence that Chaucer used parts of the *Ovide moralilsé* in his work[204]. The *Ovide Moralisé*, whose author has not been identified, is an adaptation of Ovid's Metamorphosis written at the beginning of

[200] Stevens, Martin, "And Venus Laugheth: An interpretation of the 'Merchant's Tale'", *The Chaucer Review*, 7, 1972, p. 118.
[201] Stevens, pp. 118-122.
[202] Stevens, pp. 127-128.
[203] Burnley, J. D., "The Morality of the 'Merchant's Tale'", *The Yearbook of English Studies,* 6, 1976, pp.23-24.
[204] Dalbey, Marcia A., "The Devil in the Garden: Pluto and Proserpine in Chaucer's 'Merchant's Tale'", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 75, 1974, p. 410.

the XIV century in Old French[205]. The author of this work gives an allegorical interpretation of Pluto, "as the Devil who reigns in the hearts of obstinate sinners"[206]. Then, the author also allegorises the rape by stressing Proserpina's responsibility for the act. What is important regarding the Merchant's Tale is the fact that Venus instigates Pluto's seizure of Proserpina; clearly Venus represents lust rather than love, and the same thing can be seen in the relationship between January, May and Damian. January and May are both guilty of the sin of lust: January's sin refers to his lustful marriage, since he wants a young wife at any cost and his main interest is satisfying his sexual desires. Concerning May, she commits this sin because she behaves in an adulterous way, having an affair with Damian. The marriage between January and May is deliberately presented with irony: the husband is a disgusting old man, the wife commits adultery and has an affair with her husband's squire. Even the marriage ceremony is presented as a distortion of the sacrament: it is an empty ritual with Venus as the presiding deity. Therefore, Venus can be considered the real controller of the whole story: she has the power to control human characters as she did with Pluto and Proserpina. In particular, the affair between May and Damian mocks the ritual of courtly love; it is only lust and Chaucer specifies it[207]:

> This sike Damyan in Venus fyr
> So brenneth that he dyeth for desyr,
> For which he putte his lyf in aventure.
> (1875-1877)

Another aspect that Tatlock considers is the way in which Chaucer describes the characters of this tale. Concerning January, Tatlock says that he is a "repulsive and fatuous husband"[208]. May is scarcely described and the traits that we know, can only be inferred: she is defined by Tatlock as "a good actress"[209] during this story. Considering this, it is obvious that their relationship is not a love story. In addition to January, May and Damian, the love triangle, other two important characters may be considered: Placebo and Justinus. Tatlock highlights that their names show their

[205] https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27Ovide_moralis%C3%A9
[206] Dalbey, p.410.
[207] Dalbey, pp. 411-414.
[208] Tatlock, J. S. P., "Chaucer's 'Merchant's Tale'", *Modern Philology*, 33, 1936, p. 370.
[209] Tatlock, p. 370.

personalities. The former is the man who agrees in order to serve his own ends by giving advice that corresponds to the patron's desires. The latter is the man who gives the wisest advice[210]. Placebo is the man who affirms that January does not need advice from anyone; he tells January to ignore Solomon's words regarding the fact that it is best to act upon advice that one has asked. He represents the figure of the pleasing courtier: he supports January and does not debate against him. Justinus, conversely, is the man who gives the possibility to create a debate. Justinus underlines the permanent nature of marriage: in fact, he gives importance to the exchange of vows regarding care and fidelity and to the fact that the relationship is sanctified in front of God. Therefore, marriage represents something good. These two conflicting views of marriage can be seen in their names; as Tatlock underlines the importance of their names as representations of their personality, it can be said that their names can also show the conflicting views about marriage. In fact, Placebo does not give a view based on honesty and justice as Justinus does.

In addition to this, even though the majority thinks that there is a connection between the Merchant and the tale he tells, some others support the theory regarding the fact that the original teller of the Merchant's tale is yet another. In fact, some believe that the teller originally conceived by Chaucer was a member of the clergy, since a discussion about marriage is here presented. The person who is thought to have been the teller is the Friar, because he is the one that can be associated with the biting irony that is found in the tale. Chaucer may have changed idea when he conceived the Friar-Summoner quarrel[211].

All in all, this tale opens with the description of a worthy knight, which does not permit to the reader to expect the events he is going to read. January chooses May, despite her low origins, because he wants a young wife in order to have an heir and satisfy his sexual desires. At the beginning we believe January to be the worst character, since he is depicted as an old lecherous man who is interested in having sex. However, during the tale, May shows her intelligence, since she is

[210] Tatlock, pp. 371-372.
[211] Dempster, Germaine, "The Original Teller of the 'Merchant's Tale'", *Modern Philology,* 39, 1938, pp. 1-8.

able to deceive her husband in order to have a sexual affair with Damian. The unexpected implication lies in the fact that May is able to convince January of her innocence, even though he sees her with Damian on the tree while they are having sex. Once again, in this tale the image of the woman is of a men's deceiver, who follows her own interests. It is interesting how this tale presents the characteristics of a woman, which can be recognised in the ones of the Merchant's wife but are also connected to the Wife of Bath's traits. Concerning the Merchant's wife we do not have much information, but it is clear that, even though he married only two months earlier, his marriage is tormented since he defines her a cruel shrew. The marriage between January and May can be recognised in the words of the Wife of Bath, when she talks about her first three husbands; in fact, they were old and rich and the Wife was young. She deceived them, as May does with January, and the marriage is not the result of real love, but of the importance of lust and wealth.

Clearly, it is not easy to say whether the prologue and the tale of the Merchant are surely connected. What is sure in this case is that the Merchant's Prologue does not constitute an affirmation of authority; conversely, in the case of the Clerk, the authority is affirmed through Petrarch or in the case of the Wife of Bath, she establishes her authority and connects this to what she will tell throughout prologue and tale. Then, the story that the Merchant tells, has not the same moral relevance as the Clerk's: the prologue seems a later addition, as if Chaucer decided to allot the story to the Merchant only after having written the tale of January and May. In fact, the characteristics of unicity and individuality, which can be referred to the Wife of Bath, cannot be perceived in this case. The Prologue can be connected to the tale on the basis of the *topos* of the cuckold, by considering that it is the linchpin between the Merchant's own life and the story he tells. The outcome is different: the Merchant suffers because of the behaviour of the shrew he married, while January and May's story has an ironical but happy ending, since January believes May's apologies.

4.2 Three analogues of the Merchant's Tale

The tenth novella of the second day of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the ninth novella of the seventh day of the *Decameron* and the tale of the woman and the pear-tree taken from *Il Novellino*, a collection of stories of the fourteenth century, are considered analogues of the Merchant's Tale.

4.2.1 The tenth novella of the second day of the *Decameron*

Beginning with the tenth novella of the second day of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, it may be important to consider the plot in order to understand the analogies with the Merchant's Tale; this because the story is different from the tale in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The novella regards the judge Ricciardo di Chinzica, the pirate Paganino da Monaco and a young and beautiful woman, Bartolomea Gualandi. The novella opens with Ricciardo di Chinzica, a rich old judge who wants to marry a young and beautiful woman. Interestingly, the age of the judge can be inferred by the expression "più che di corporal forza dotato d'ingegno" (II 10, 304), which means "better endowed with mental than with physical vigour". Together with this expression, the old age of Ricciardo can be understood by thinking about his job: judges are supposed to be old and wise people. In the other novella and in the Merchant's Tale the age of the husband is explicitly mentioned; Chaucer even specifies that January is over sixty years old. Messer Lotato Gualandi offers his own daughter Bartolomea as wife to Ricciardo, who accepts. The marriage is celebrated ("nozze belle e magnifiche", II 10, 305) in a sumptuous way but at this point there is a problem:

Per la prima notte incappò una volta per consumare il matrimonio a toccarla e di poco fallò che egli quella una non fece tavola (II 10, 305)[212]

The limited vitality due to the judge's age is reiterated by underlining that Ricciardo is "magro e secco e di poco spirito" (II 10, 305) [213]. The judge is not a good husband: he does not devote his time to his wife, but he gives more importance to teaching her a religious calendar:

[212] "the very first night to serve her so as to consummate the marriage he made a false move, and drew the game much to his own disadvantage".
[213] "lean, withered and scarce animate frame".

Niun dì era che non solamente una festa ma molte non ne fossero, a reverenza delle quali per diverse cagioni mostrava l'uomo e la donna doversi abstenere da così fatti congiungimenti, sopra questi aggiugnendo digiuni e quarto tempora e vigilie d'apostoli e di mille altri santi e venerdì e sabati e la domenica del Signore e la quaresima tutta, e certi punti della luna e altre eccezion molte, avvisandosi forse che così feria far si convenisse con le donne nel letto, come egli faceva talvolta piatendo alle civili. (II 10, 305)[214]

This causes Bartolomea's grief: she cannot satisfy her sexual desires with her husband since they have to follow this calendar. In addition to this, she is also controlled by him: he wants to watch her because he is afraid that his wife could find another man that could teach her a calendar without those feasts. The breakthrough of this story can be found in the tour he organises to go fishing; there are two boats, one with Ricciardo and the fishermen and another with Bartolomea and some women. What happens is that when they reach a point in the sea which is far from the shore, they find the boat of Paganino, a pirate. The pirate notices the boat of the women, he seizes Bartolomea and goes away. Ricciardo goes back to Pisa and, since he is very jealous, he starts looking for his wife; at the same time Bartolomea passes her time weeping, for an entire month. She is in Monaco, the place where the headquarter of the pirates is. However, the situation changes:

A Paganino, veggendola così bella, parve star bene; e non avendo moglie, si pensò di sempre tenersi costei, e lei che forte piagnea cominciò dolcemente a confortare. (II 10, 307)[215]

Paganino represents Ricciardo's biggest fear; he is the man who teaches Bartolomea a calendar without feasts ("essendo a lui il calendario caduto dalla cintola", II 10, 307[216]). In fact, Bartolomea is supported by Paganino: she forgets about Ricciardo and her life in Pisa and "cominciò a viver più lietamente del mondo con Paganino" (II 10, 307)[217]. Paganino treats her as his own wife. However, when Ricciardo finds out where Bartolomea is, he goes to Monaco in order to take her home under any conditions, even if he has to pay a ransom. The judge tells Paganino that Bartolomea is his wife

[214] " there was not a day in the year but was sacred, not to one saint only, but to many; in honour of whom for divers reasons it behoved men and women to abstain from carnal intercourse; whereto he added fast-days, Ember-days, vigils of Apostles and other saints, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, the whole of Lent, certain lunar mansions, and many other exceptions, arguing perchance, that the practice of men with women abed should have its times of vacation no less than the administration of the law."

[215] "Paganino, meanwhile, deemed himself lucky to have gotten so beautiful a prize; and being unmarried, he was minded never to part with her, and addressed himself by soft words to soothe the sorrow which kept her in a flood of tears".

[216] "the calendar had slipped from his girdle".

[217] "had begun to live with Paganino as merrily as might be".

and asks the pirate to give her back to him. Paganino answers that a young woman lives with him and that he does not know whether she is Ricciardo's wife or not. He also adds:

Se voi siete suo marito, come voi dite, io, per ciò che piacevol gentile uom mi parete, vi menerò da lei, e son certo che ella vi conoscerà bene. Se essa dice che così sia come voi dite e vogliasene con voi venire, per amor della vostra piacevolezza quello che voi medesimo vorrete per riscatto di lei mi darete; ove così non fosse, voi fareste villania a volerlami torre, per ciò che io son giovane uomo e posso così come un altro tenere una femina, e spezialmente lei che è la più piacevole che io vidi mai (II 10, 308)[218]

Ricciardo accepts what Paganino offers him, since he is sure that, as soon as Bartolomea sees him, she "gitterà incontanente al collo" (II 10, 308)[219]. The judge's expectations go unmet; when Paganino asks Bartolomea to come, she only shows indifference. Ricciardo finds the reason of Bartolomea's behaviour in the grief she felt during the period spent with Paganino. Then, Ricciardo explains to the woman that he wants to bring her home in Pisa, underlining that he will pay any amount of money in order to achieve his aim. One more time, Bartolomea says that she does not know him:

Guardate che voi non m'abbiate colta in iscambio, ché, quanto è io, non mi ricordo che io vi vedessi giammai. (II 10, 309)[220]

The judge cannot trust the woman's words and tries to convince her to acknowledge that he is her husband. However, what the woman reiterates is the same answer: she does not recognise him and says that he is foreigner to her. Ricciardo cannot find a reason to explain Bartolomea's behaviour. Lastly, he thinks the presence of Paganino is the problem. The pirate consents to leave the two alone, as Ricciardo asks him; so, Paganino commands the woman and the judge to go to her room. Once again, Ricciardo asks her the reason why she is unable to recognise him. Neither Ricciardo nor the reader could expect Bartolomea's answer. In fact, she laughs and starts to explain the reason of her behaviour:

[218] "If, as you say, you are her husband, why, as you seem to me to be a pleasant gentleman, I will even take you to her, and I doubt not she will know you well; if she says that it is even as you say, and is minded to go with you, you shall give me just what you like by way of ransom, so pleasant have I found you; otherwise 'twill be churlish in you to think of taking her from me, who am a young man, and as fit to keep a woman as another, and moreover never knew any woman so agreeable".
[219] "she will throw her arms about my neck".
[220] "Bethink you that you may have mistaken me for another, for I, for my part, do not remember ever to have seen you".

Ben sapete che io non sono sì smemorata, che io non conosca che voi siete messer Ricciardo di Chinzica mio marito; ma voi, mentre che io fui con voi, mostraste assai male di conoscere me. Per ciò che se voi eravate savio o sete, come volete esser tenuto, dovavate bene avere tanto conoscimento, che voi dovavate quando io era giovane e fresca e gagliarda, e per conseguente cognoscere quello che alle giovani donne, oltre al vestire e al mangiare, benchè elle per vergogna nol dicano, si richiede: il che come voi il faciavate, voi il vi sapete. E se egli v'era più a grado lo studio delle leggi che la moglie, voi non dovavate pigliarla; benchè a me non parve mai che voi giudice foste, anzi mi paravate un banditor di sagre e feste, sì ben le sapavate, e le digiune e le vigilie. (II 10, 310-311)[221]

She continues by saying that he gave more importance to God and feasts related to religion than to his wife. What Bartolomea wants to do is staying with Paganino, since he gives importance to her and he does not follow the calendar; then she adds that she wants to work during her youth and to follow the calendar of feasts when she will be old. Ricciardo cannot believe what Bartolomea is saying and tries to convince her to change her mind, by promising to change and improve as a husband; he also adds that her behaviour will compromise the honour of her family. However, the woman does not change her view and continues living with Paganino. Since Ricciardo understands that he cannot do anything to regain his wife, he goes back to Pisa. He continues living with an obsession: when someone asks him something he always answers that a young woman is unable to respect religious traditions. He gets sick and dies. Finally, Paganino marries Bartolomea and they continue their life together, without respecting any type of religious calendar.

Clearly, the plot of this novella is not the same as the one of January and May. However, even though it may seem a completely different plot without any connection with Chaucer, some analogies can be found between the characters of January and Ricciardo. In fact, both are presented as old and rich men, who believe money will allow them to get whatever they want. Both married a young woman and in both cases the result is not what they expected. However, if the tale of January ends in a positive way since May is able to deceive her husband and convince him that she was not betraying him with Damian on the tree, in the case of Paganino the woman declares what the problem is and what she wants to do. As in the case of January, the difference of age is the key in

[221] "Rest assured that my memory is not so short but that I know you for what you are, my husband, Messer Ricciardo di Chinzica; but far enough you shewed yourself to be, while I was with you, from knowing me for what I was, young, lusty, lively; which, had you been the wise man you would fain be reputed, you would not have ignored, nor by consequence that which, besides food and clothing, it behoves men to give young ladies, albeit for shame they demand it not; which in what sort you gave, you know. You should not have taken a wife if she was to be less to you than the study of the law, albeit 'twas never as a judge that I regarded you, but rather as a bellman of encænia and saints' days, so well you knew them all, and fasts and vigils".

order to understand the reason of May and Bartolomea's behaviour: they are not satisfied by their husbands and in the case of Bartolomea this situation does not depend only on the age of Ricciardo, but also on the fact that he wants to follow the religious calendar, with no exception.

4.2.2 The ninth novella of the seventh day of the *Decameron*

Concerning the ninth novella of the seventh day, the story reflects more closely the tale of the Merchant. The novella opens with three characters: Nicostrato, the old and rich husband, Lidia, the young and beautiful wife and Pirro, Nicostrato's young and handsome servant. The beginning of the story suggests a first connection with the Merchant's Tale, since the triangle of January, May and Damian is reflected in the three protagonists of this novella. Lidia falls in love with Pirro and she asks her servant Lusca to help her, justifying her love for Pirro by saying:

Come tu vedi, Lusca, io son giovane e fresca donna e piena e copiosa di tutte quelle cose che alcuna può disiderare, e brievemente fuor che d'una non mi posso ramaricare: e questa è che gli anni del mio marito son troppi se co' miei si misurano, per la qual cosa di quello che le giovani donne prendono più piacere io vivo poco contenta. E pur come l'altre disiderandolo, è buona pezza che io diliberai meco di non volere, se la fortuna m'è stata poco amica in darmi così vecchio marito, essere io nimica di me medesima in non saper trovar modo a' miei diletti e alla mia salute. (VII 9, 863)[222]

She also asks Lusca to tell Pirro what she feels for him and to ask him to go visit her. Pirro's reaction is not what Lidia expected, since he does not believe Lusca and underlines the fact that he does not want to offend Nicostrato. Pirro, in fact, fears that his loyalty to his master is being tested and refuses to accept what Lusca tells him. Lusca goes back to Lidia, who does not accept Pirro's refusal and asks her servant to return to Pirro and tell him that she will die if he refuses her once more. At this point, Pirro decides to test Lidia in three ways:

[222] "Thou seest, Lusca, that I am in the prime of my youth and lustihead, and have neither lack nor stint of all such things as folk desire, save only, to be brief, that I have one cause to repine, to wit, that my husband's years so far outnumber my own. Wherefore with that wherein young ladies take most pleasure I am but ill provided, and, as my desire is no less than theirs, 'tis now some while since I determined that, if Fortune has shewn herself so little friendly to me by giving me a husband so advanced in years, at least I will not be mine own enemy by sparing to devise the means whereby my happiness and health may be assured;"

Primieramente che in presenzia di Nicostrato ella uccida il suo buono sparviere, appresso che ella mi mandi una ciocchetta della barba di Nicostrato, e ultimamente un dente di quegli di lui medesimo, de' migliori. (VII 9, 867)[223]

Lidia does what Pirro asks her to do: she kills the sparrow-hawk in front of other people, then she tears a lock of Nicostrato's beard and sends it to him and finally, through a lie, she is able to pull off one of her husband's teeth. The turning point of the story can be found, as in the Merchant's Tale, when the spouses are in the garden. Lidia pretends to be ill in order to ask Nicostrato and Pirro to carry her into the garden as a diversion. In this story, both husband and wife are aware of the presence of Pirro, while in the tale of January and May, January is not aware of the presence of Damian, who is hiding under a bush and then up the pear-tree. Interestingly, in both stories the tree used in order to deceive the husband is a specific type of tree, a pear-tree. Because of that, the pear-tree, even in this story, may be compared to the tree of the first sin, which is also present in the Garden of Eden. In fact, the tree is used by Pirro and Lidia in order to deceive Nicostrato, to be able to satisfy their desires. To do that, Lidia asks Pirro to go up the pear-tree and take a pear for her. When Pirro is standing on the tree, he asks the reason why Lidia and Nicostrato are having sex in his presence. Nicostrato says that it is not true and, at this point, he wants to see if the pear-tree is responsible for what Pirro has just seen. So, Pirro descends and Nicostrato climbs the tree. In the meanwhile, Pirro and Lidia "s'incominciarono a sollazzare" (VII 9, 873)[224]. The husband is now on the pear-tree and sees his wife and his servant, who are having sex. Therefore, he immediately climbs down the tree and accuses the two. However, Pirro and Lidia have already returned to their original position, so that Pirro explains that what he has just seen is the same thing he had seen before. Nicostrato decides to cut down the tree. The story ends with Nicostrato, Lidia and Pirro going back to the palace. At this point Nicostrato is defined as "misero marito schernito" (VII 9, 875)[225], since his wife Lidia and Pirro deceived him and will continue to deceive him many more times.

[223] "first, let her in Nicostratus' presence kill his fine sparrow-hawk: then she must send me a lock of Nicostratus' beard, and lastly one of his best teeth."
[224] "fell to disporting them"
[225] "poor duped husband".

As previously said, this novella has more points in common with the Merchant's Tale as compared to the other. Nicostrato can be associated with the figure of January, Lidia with May and Pirro with Damian. Therefore, the love triangle that we find in Chaucer can also be found here. Nicostrato is an old rich man who believes he is enough for every woman of every age. The presence of Pirro is necessary: he completes the triangle and tests Lidia. These three tests may also remind us of the trials Walter created to test his wife's loyalty, since Pirro tests in three different ways Lidia's feelings. The pear-tree is the key element of the story: in the Merchant's Tale it is the place where May and Damian satisfy their sexual desires and even in the novella it is necessary for Pirro and Lidia. In fact, it is used by the two lovers in order to deceive Nicostrato. What is interesting is that in Boccaccio, the husband's blindness is given through the pear-tree: Pirro is able to convince Nicostrato that it is the pear-tree which makes people see something that is not true. Finally, the image given at the end of the tale is significant, since it is the same given at the end of the Merchant's Tale, the one of the old rich but deceived husband with a young and beautiful unfaithful wife, who continue living together despite her infidelity. The pear-tree is the element which is present both in Chaucer and in Boccaccio, as well as in the story from *Il Novellino.* It may be supposed that *Il Novellino* has been used by both Chaucer and Boccaccio as a source in order to write the tale and the novella. This because it is not sure whether Chaucer read Boccaccio's works or some of Boccaccio's stories which circulated in manuscripts or listened to them during public readings. Therefore, it may be argued that Boccaccio's novella represents an analogue to Chaucer's tale and that *Il Novellino* represents a source both for Chaucer and Boccaccio.

4.2.3 The Story of the Woman and the Pear-Tree in *Il Novellino*

The story of the woman and the pear-tree represents the best analogue if we consider the main events, which happen in the garden and on the pear-tree. This story opens by presenting the spouses who are the protagonists of this brief tale:

A uno tenpo era uno riccho homo, ed avea una molto bella donna per molglie; et questo homo le volea tutto il suo bene, ed erane molto geloso.[226]

Even in this story we have the husband who is rich and jealous of his wife and the wife who is young and beautiful. There is one difference between this story and the other novellas: here the husband is jealous both before and after his blindness; in fact, after his blindness his jealousy increases. After that, the illness of the husband is introduced: he becomes suddenly blind and keeps his wife with him, since he is afraid that she could cuckold him. At this point of the story, a third character is introduced, to meet the requirements of the love triangle. The man is in love with the wife, but there is an obstacle: the husband is always with her. However, the woman finds a way to deceive her husband:

Ora fecie fare uno chanone di canna lungho, et puoselo a l'orecchie di questo gentile homo, et favelolli in questo modo, però che non volea che 'l marito l'odisse: et disse a questo gentile homo: Di te m'increscе, e però oe pensato di servirti: vattine nel giardino nostro, et sali in su 'n uno pero che v'àe molte belle pere, et aspettami là suso, ed io veròe là sùe a te.[227]

One day, the woman goes into the garden with her husband. When she arrives to the pear-tree, she declares she wishes to eat a pear. When the husband advises her to ask someone to take a pear for her, she says she will do it alone. The woman climbs the tree, where the man is waiting for her. The woman and the man satisfy their desires and, because of their weight, the tree "si menava tutto, sì che le pere chadevano in terra a dosso al marito"[228]. Therefore, the husband asks his wife what she is doing with those pears and she explains that it is the only way in order to get all of the pears from one branch of the tree. What comes after is the brief discussion between Domenedio and San Piero, which can be compared to the one between Pluto and Proserpina in the Merchant's Tale. In fact, they are expressing their opinions about what the woman and the man are doing on the tree. San

[226] The edition I use to quote the story of the woman and the pear-tree from *Il Novellino* is: Correale, Robert M. and Hamel, Mary, *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales II*, D.S. Brewer: Cambridge, 2005, p. 519. The translation is taken from Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Canterbury Tales,* ed. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson, London: Norton, 2005: "There was once a rich man who had a very beautiful woman as his wife; he loved her ardently and was very jealous of her".
[227] "She had a long tube made from a reed, and put it to the ear of this man, and by that means spoke to him so that her husband could not hear. She said to the gentleman, 'I am sorry for you, and have thought of a way of helping you. Go into the garden and climb up a pear-tree that has many fine pears, and wait for me there, and I will climb up to you'".
[228] "Shook with their weight, and the pears fell down on top of the husband".

Piero, like Pluto, does not agree with the wife's behaviour and hopes the husband's sight will be soon restored; in this way, he could see his wife's unfaithfulness. Domenedio replies:

Io ti dicho, San Piero, che sì tosto chome elli vedrà lume, la donna averà trovata la chagione, cioè la schusa, e però volglio che vega lume, et vedrai quello ch'ella dirae.[229]

This answer seems like the answer Proserpina gives Pluto in the Merchant's Tale. In fact, Proserpina affirms she will suggest May the right answer if January's sight is restored; here, Domenedio underlines women's ability to find out a suitable explanation for everything. The story ends with the husband's sight which is restored and the woman who is able to excuse herself by explaining that what she has just done, represents the only solution to his blindness.

An interesting view on these three texts is offered by Beidler. He finds in these texts three analogues to the Merchant's Tale. In particular, in the tale of Nicostrato he finds the element of blindness, which is not present in the other novella but can be found in the story taken from *Il Novellino*. Nicostrato's blindness is mental and not physical, like January's. Nicostrato's blindness is the consequence of the ability of Pirro and Lidia to deceive him and convince him of the supernatural power of the pear-tree[230]. Then, the marriage between Nicostrato and Lidia is defined a "marriage of convenience"[231]: the old husband's wealth is what is necessary to win the hand of a young and beautiful wife, there is no love[232]. Then, the character through whom the wife cuckolds her husband is a trusted member of the household, both in Boccaccio and in Chaucer; in fact, in both cases the loyalty to the master is mentioned. In addition to this, only in this novella and in Chaucer, the women are not only able to deceive their husbands but also good at pretending to be ill[233]. Beidler also underlines how Ricciardo, the protagonist of the tenth novella of the second day, has many traits in common with January. The first is the fact of being old and rich, which allows them to find and obtain a young and beautiful wife; the second is the jealousy of Ricciardo who

[229] "'I tell you, Saint Peter, no sooner will he see the light than the woman will find an explanation – an excuse. And so I will make the light return to his eyes, and you shall see what she will say'".
[230] Beidler, Peter G., "Chaucer's Merchant's Tale and the Decameron", *Italica*, 50, 1973, pp. 276-278.
[231] Beidler, p. 271.
[232] Beidler, p.271.
[233] Beidler, p. 273.

carefully guards Bartolomea as well as the jealous January, who pays attention to May's movements and never lets her alone. Third, they both appeal to the sense of honour of the two wives when the two women are asked to be true regarding what just happened with Pirro and Damian. Finally, there is what Beidler defines "sorry lovemaking": both husbands after a magnificent wedding show themselves "physically unexciting to [their] fresh young [wives]"[234].

To conclude, if in the novella of Ricciardo and Bartolomea we can notice the analogy of the old rich man married with a young and beautiful woman and the behaviour of the husband causing the wife's bad behaviour, in the novella of Nicostrato and Lidia we find more points in common, which are the old and rich husband and the young and beautiful wife, the presence of a young handsome man who is one of the husband's servants and the wife's lover, the turning point related to the pear-tree and the end of the story that shows the deceived husband who believes in the innocence of his wife and servant. Finally, the story of the woman and the pear-tree taken form *Il Novellino* represents the closest analogue to the tale told by Chaucer.

[234] Beidler, p. 281.

5. Conclusion

The Clerk's Tale, the Wife of Bath's Tale and the Merchant's Tale are part of the marriage group. The views presented on marriage are different: the views presented by the Clerk and the Wife of Bath are opposite. The Clerk's Tale is the tale of Griselda and Walter, which presents the image of the wife as submissive and obedient. She is humble and patient and despite her low social status marries a man of high social status. Walter is the example of husband who controls his wife and decides what she can or cannot do. In fact, the model of feminine virtue that Griselda presents to the readers is the one of a wife who does not disobey male authority, but she annihilates herself in order to do what Walter wants.

The opposite image of the woman is given by Chaucer through the Wife of Bath. She is a woman who decides her own life: at the beginning she establishes herself as the authority on the basis of her experience. She does what she wants, not what her husbands want her to do. She has many husbands, she deceives them and she chooses them depending on their wealth and lands. In fact, she accepts to satisfy their sexual desires only after they promised her money. Ironically, only a clerk, that is her fifth husband, at the beginning is able to impose his rules over her. However, at the end, the Wife is able to gain sovereignty even over him. In this case, her prologue to the tale is necessary since it is through the prologue that the Wife presents herself and explains her views about marriage, while the tale represents an example which supports the Wife's opinions.

If these two women may be considered opposites, the one presented by the Merchant is yet another type. The Merchant starts with a short prologue, is focused on his wife, defined as a shrew. Regarding the tale, May may be defined a trickster, since she is able to deceive her husband in order to satisfy her sexual desires with a young and handsome servant. The ability to deceive husbands is shared by the Wife of Bath. This situation may have been presented by Chaucer in order to outline a possible scenario of those years; it could happen to have old men married with young women. In this case, it might be a consequence of the high mortality rate of women in childbirth and the

necessity to have an heir for men; even in the case of children it was necessary to have a great number of children, because it was not sure whether all of them could survive and face adulthood. It is interesting to notice how Chaucer gives the image of these women, since in his tales he inserts his opinion with his ironical tone or thoughts. A clear instance can be found at the end of the Clerk's Tale in the Envoy; here he underlines the impossibility to find a woman like Griselda.

All in all, these three women might be considered the representation of three types of women in the society in which Chaucer's lived: Griselda is the submissive wife, the Wife of Bath is the representation of an independent woman, while May is the one who can deceive her husband and find a good excuse to justify her behaviour.

Riassunto

Geoffrey Chaucer è un poeta inglese vissuto durante il quattordicesimo secolo. Era figlio di un mercante, fin da piccolo gli fu insegnata la letteratura e diventò un poeta di professione. La sua carriera fu resa possibile dal fatto che aveva esperienza in mondi differenti, quello della corte, quello mercantile e infine quello letterario. In generale, la carriera letteraria di Chaucer può essere divisa in tre periodi principali. Il primo periodo è influenzato dalla poesia francese. Il secondo periodo invece è conosciuto come periodo italiano, durante il quale è influenzato da Petrarca, Boccaccio e Dante. L'ultimo periodo è quello durante il quale ha scritto *I Racconti di Canterbury.* Sicuramente imparò francese e latino quando era piccolo e in quel periodo l'inglese stava sviluppando la sua forma standard; il francese perdeva sempre più terreno e il leggere e lo scrivere in inglese si stava diffondendo sempre più al di fuori dell'ambiente ecclesiastico.

Focalizzando l'attenzione sulla sua opera *I Racconti di Canterbury*, si può notare che include anche una sua descrizione in quanto lo stesso Chaucer si pone tra i pellegrini. Questa descrizione è presente nel prologo del racconto di Sir Thopas e sembra presentare il poeta sotto aspetti differenti rispetto a quelli presenti nel General Prologue. Potrebbe rappresentare la sua volontà di mostrare un'evoluzione di Chaucer pellegrino attraverso il racconto. In generale, *I Racconti di Canterbury* è una raccolta di storie il cui tema è un pellegrinaggio al quale partecipano 29 pellegrini che hanno come meta Canterbury. È difficile affermare con certezza la durata del pellegrinaggio: ci sono diverse teorie che mostrano come la durata possa essere di un solo giorno (anche se poco affidabile) o arrivare anche a quattro o cinque giorni. In più, bisogna ricordare che si tratta di un'opera non finita: questo può essere principalmente notato se si pensa all'accordo proposto dall'oste e accettato dai pellegrini: avrebbero dovuto raccontare quattro storie ciascuno, due all'andata e due al ritorno. Inoltre, alcune storie non sono completamente terminate e alcuni collegamenti tra le stesse mostrano mancanza di revisione. Questa incompletezza può essere notata anche osservando i manoscritti che presentano alcuni errori e contraddizioni. Il manoscritto che

viene considerato il più completo ed è accettato dalla maggior parte degli studiosi è Ellesmere (MS EL 26 C 9) che si trova nell'Huntington Library di San Marino in California. È importante avere un manoscritto di riferimento se si considera un'opera come *I Racconti di Canterbury*, ossia un'opera non finita costituita da una serie di racconti che potrebbero essere letti in qualsiasi sequenza. Il manoscritto Hengwrt (o Peniarth MS 392 D), che sembra il manoscritto più antico, possiede molte somiglianze con Ellesmere. Questo viene ricondotto alla scoperta di Linne Mooney, la quale identificò in Adam Pinkurst il realizzatore di entrambe i manoscritti. Ciò contribuisce a dare autorità alle fonti che si usano.

In quest'opera di Chaucer, i racconti che fanno parte dei frammenti D, E e F hanno come tema il matrimonio e discutono il matrimonio secondo diversi punti di vista. Questi racconti infatti vengono definiti come componenti del "Marriage Group". Il dibattito riguardo il matrimonio inizia con la Donna di Bath e termina con il racconto dell'allodiere, il quale offre una soluzione al dibattito, dicendo che la sovranità nel matrimonio non deve essere presente né dalla parte della moglie né dell'uomo. In particolare, la Donna di Bath, il chierico di Oxford, il mercante e l'allodiere presentano idee diverse riguardo la sovranità coniugale. La figura dominante è la Donna di Bath che si presenta come l'esperta per eccellenza che difende i suoi principi e le sue pratiche, definendo la castità come non obbligatoria e affermando che lei è la persona che comanda e controlla il suo matrimonio. Il racconto del chierico sembra essere una risposta alla Donna di Bath; ciò è particolarmente visibile nell'Envoy presente alla fine del racconto. Si tratta di un commento ironico verso ciò che la Donna di Bath aveva appena affermato riguardo chierici e mogli. L'Envoy è anche il diretto collegamento con il racconto del mercante, in quanto il racconto inizia con le stesse parole con cui l'Envoy termina. Egli narra un altro racconto sul matrimonio che rispecchia in realtà la sua stessa situazione matrimoniale.

Il primo dei racconti presi in considerazione che propongono uno specifico punto di vista riguardo il matrimonio è il racconto del chierico di Oxford. Nel prologo specifica che si tratta di una storia che era stata raccontata da Petrarca; si tratta della storia di una donna di umili origini,

Griselda, che sposa Walter, il marchese di Saluzzo. Il marchese testa la sua fedeltà attraverso tre prove: l'omicidio della figlia, del figlio e la volontà di sposarsi con un'altra donna più giovane e bella. Chiaramente Griselda e il popolo di Saluzzo non sono a conoscenza che si tratta solamente di prove, ma credono che questi siano fatti reali. Infine, le qualità e virtù di Griselda, ossia la sua pazienza, umiltà, innocenza e fedeltà sono dimostrate e il racconto termina con un lieto fine. L'Envoy che segue il lieto fine si presenta non solo come collegamento con il racconto del mercante, ma anche come avvertimento per i mariti, in quanto trovare mogli pazienti quanto Griselda risulta impossibile. Inoltre, Chaucer si rivolge anche alle mogli, chiedendo di non mentire e di controllare se stesse, concludendo che le belle donne si vantano per la loro bellezza e quelle brutte invece spendono i soldi dei mariti. In generale, Griselda e Walter rappresentano il ruolo della moglie e marito nel Medioevo. La donna era sottomessa al volere del marito: fedeltà e obbedienza erano le caratteristiche fondamentali in una buona moglie. La sovranità del marito era giustificata perché l'uomo era stato creato per primo da Dio, quindi aveva una sorta di autorità per natura sulla donna. Alcuni critici vedono nella relazione tra Griselda e Walter la stessa relazione che esiste tra Dio e i fedeli: come Walter testa Griselda e ha il completo controllo non solo su di lei ma anche sui suoi sudditi, allo stesso modo Dio decide riguardo il destino delle sue creature. Il personaggio di Griselda in generale è un personaggio che non presenta un'evoluzione nel corso della storia, mostrando le sue emozioni solo nel momento della terza prova a cui viene sottoposta. Nel caso di Walter invece, si tratta di un personaggio che si evolve: all'inizio è presentato come un uomo bello, giovane e buono, mentre quando inizia a testare la moglie ciò che lo contraddistingue è la crudeltà. Walter è considerato anche il creatore della storia, dal momento che è lui l'unico a conoscere la verità e a sapere che ciò che stava accadendo riguardo al matrimonio e ai figli non rispecchiava la realtà.

La storia di Griselda è stata raccontata da Chaucer nel racconto del chierico, ma è stata raccontata anche da Petrarca e da Boccaccio. Petrarca tradusse in latino la decima novella della decima giornata del *Decameron* di Boccaccio e spedì allo stesso Boccaccio la sua versione in una

lettera. Le versioni dei tre autori presentano la stessa trama ma alcuni particolari sono stati cambiati. Per esempio, all'inizio della storia quando i sudditi chiedono al marchese di avere un erede per Saluzzo, a differenza di Boccaccio e Chaucer, in Petrarca c'è solamente uno dei sudditi che parla direttamente al marchese. Inoltre, al momento della trasformazione di Griselda, la vestizione avviene di fronte a tutti in Boccaccio e Chaucer, mentre in Petrarca Griselda viene coperta dalle donne. Infine, la conclusione presenta delle differenze: Petrarca trasforma Griselda in un esempio attraverso cui incoraggiare le donne, in termini di fronteggiare le avversità attraverso la costanza. Boccaccio sottolinea invece la crudeltà di Walter e il comportamento di Griselda, che non devono essere imitati. Per quanto riguarda Chaucer invece si riferisce a Griselda come un esempio da non imitare e che nella realtà è difficile trovare. Non si può essere certi che l'incontro di Chaucer con Petrarca e Boccaccio sia effettivamente avvenuto, ma si può dire che Chaucer sia sicuramente entrato in contatto con la versione di Petrarca della storia di Griselda e che invece non sia certo che lui abbia letto la versione di Boccaccio.

Il secondo racconto preso in considerazione è quello della Donna di Bath, la quale rappresenta l'opposto di Griselda. Si tratta del perfetto esempio di donna che vuole avere la sovranità sul marito e attraverso il prologo del suo racconto presenta la sua autobiografia. Infatti, la prima parola del prologo è proprio "experience", cioè esperienza. Spiega come secondo lei ognuno possieda dei doni, il suo chiaramente connesso alla sfera sessuale. Spiega come la castità non sia necessaria, ma una scelta e che avere più mariti nella vita non sia un peccato. Infatti, lei si è sposata cinque volte in chiesa: i primi tre mariti erano buoni, gli ultimi due cattivi. I primi tre, infatti, li ha scelti vecchi e ricchi, in quanto la sua principale preoccupazione risiedeva nell'accumulare terre e ricchezza; non si concedeva a loro finché non le promettevano denaro o terre in cambio. Per quanto riguarda gli ultimi due mariti, invece, la situazione era diversa. Il quarto marito è descritto in poche righe, nelle quali la Donna di Bath spiega che non era riuscita ad imporre il suo controllo in quanto lui aveva un amante con cui la tradiva. Per questo, lei lo tormentò in diversi modi. Per quanto riguarda il quinto marito, invece, si tratta del peggiore: lui aveva vent'anni e lei quaranta.

Quest'ultimo era un chierico che amava leggere, soprattutto un libro che raccoglieva racconti riguardanti mogli malvagie. La Donna di Bath possedeva infatti le caratteristiche di queste donne. L'episodio che si svolge attorno alla lettura di questo libro è quello cruciale, in quanto quando il marito la colpisce con il libro e lei si finge morta, riesce a stabilire il controllo su di lui, giungendo ad un accordo. Vissero così una vita felice e lei rimase fedele a lui. Interessante è il prologo che è molto più lungo della storia che poi racconta. La storia serve a sottolineare i concetti già espressi nel prologo. Il racconto inizia introducendo uno scenario arturiano in cui un cavaliere stupra una donna. Al cavaliere, condotto alla corte di Re Artù, viene concessa la possibilità di salvare la propria vita, a patto che in un anno riesca a trovare la risposta alla domanda "cosa le donne desiderano di più". Al termine del tempo a disposizione, quando aveva perso le speranze, una vecchia donna gli suggerisce la risposta corretta: lei gli salva così la vita e lui deve mantenere la promessa di sposarla. Quando, dopo il matrimonio, la vecchia donna pone il cavaliere di fronte alla scelta di averla vecchia, brutta e fedele oppure bella e giovane ma infedele, lui lascia a lei la scelta. In questo modo, la moglie può stabilire il controllo sul marito e decide di essere bella, giovane e fedele. Con il suo racconto, la Donna di Bath mostra come la sovranità della moglie sia necessaria.

I personaggi principali del racconto della Donna di Bath sono la vecchia donna e il cavaliere. Quest'ultimo occupa un ruolo importante perché è lui che commette lo stupro e grazie al suo comportamento viene mostrata l'importanza e la necessità della sovranità della moglie. Per quanto riguarda il prologo della Donna di Bath, un analogo può essere trovato nel discorso della vecchia donna del *Roman de la Rose* di Jean de Meun. Sia la Donna di Bath che la vecchia donna dell'analogo offrono una guida per ingannare gli uomini e non essere ingannate, si presentano come autorità per la loro esperienza con gli uomini e grande importanza viene data alla bellezza e al dare solo in cambio di qualcosa. Per quanto riguarda invece gli analoghi della storia raccontata dalla Donna di Bath, si tratta di altre versioni della stessa storia, malgrado cambi qualche particolare. Quello che risulta più simile al racconto è *The Tale of Florent* che fa parte dell'opera *Confessio Amantis* di John Gower. Centrale è la figura della vecchia donna che nel caso dell'analogo è già a

conoscenza di ciò che il cavaliere sta cercando. Inoltre, alla fine rivela essere la figlia del re di Sicilia, trasformata dalla matrigna in una donna vecchia e brutta. Lo stesso tema dell'incantesimo da parte della matrigna è presente anche negli altri due analoghi ma non nel racconto della Donna di Bath. Chaucer invece aggiunge il discorso che la vecchia donna fa al cavaliere per educarlo e fargli capire l'importanza e la necessità del controllo da parte della moglie.

Infine, una comparazione può avvenire tra il prologo e racconto della Donna di Bath e *The Treatis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo*, un trattato scritto dallo scozzese Dunbar nel sedicesimo secolo. Tratta di due donne sposate e di una vedova che parlano della loro vita matrimoniale, discutendo riguardo i loro mariti. Il tema principale non è solo quello della sessualità ma anche quello che riguarda il potere economico. Per esempio, un aspetto da prendere in considerazione riguarda la ricchezza della vedova, che deriva dal fatto che i due suoi mariti erano due mercanti. Perciò come la Donna di Bath lei li ha scelti in base alla loro ricchezza. In generale, le due opere sono accomunate dall'importanza data alla sovranità delle mogli sui mariti e all'abilità di approfittarsi dei mariti.

Il terzo ed ultimo racconto analizzato, invece, è il racconto del mercante. È preceduto da un prologo molto breve, dove si presenta la situazione sentimentale dello stesso mercante: è sposato da soli due mesi e afferma che la sua sposa è una bisbetica. L'immagine quindi della moglie del mercante è l'opposto di quella offerta dal chierico tramite il personaggio di Griselda. Il mercante decide di raccontare una storia sullo stesso tema, quindi di raccontare una storia riguardante una donna che assomigli a sua moglie, ma non la sua storia personale. Nel racconto del mercante ci sono tre personaggi principali: January, il marito, May, la moglie e Damian, il servitore. January, ormai anziano, aveva il grande desiderio di sposarsi con una donna giovane e bella. Questo perché aveva bisogno di una persona che si prendesse cura di lui, che soddisfacesse i suoi desideri sessuali e che non fosse furba, come invece lo sono le vedove. Alcuni suoi amici appoggiano il suo desiderio, altri non sono d'accordo. I due punti di vista vengono sintetizzati attraverso l'inserimento della discussione tra i due amici Placebus e Justinus. Il mercante prosegue raccontando che January

sposa una giovane donna, May; al loro matrimonio partecipa anche Venere, la cui presenza indica bellezza, piacere e desiderio sessuale. Tutti sono felici, eccetto Damian, il servitore di January, che era segretamente innamorato di May. Damian, triste e senza forze, resta nelle sue stanze; May gli fa visita e da quell'occasione avviene uno scambio di lettere, sguardi e segnali che rappresenta l'inizio della relazione tra i due. Nel frattempo, January e May continuano il loro matrimonio e possiedono un giardino in cui potevano soddisfare i loro desideri sessuali. Improvvisamente però January diventa cieco e di conseguenza sempre più geloso nei confronti della moglie. Damian e May avevano provveduto a fare una copia della chiave di quel giardino che solo January possedeva e un giorno, quando January e May si recano nel giardino, la donna dice a Damian di entrare e nascondersi. Damian si nasconde su un albero di pere e quando May arriva col marito in prossimità dell'albero, dice al marito che aveva voglia proprio di una pera. Allora May sale sull'albero e ha un rapporto con Damian. Il tutto è detto esplicitamente dal mercante che si scusa per la sua schiettezza dovuta alla sua incapacità di parlare per metafore. January riacquista la vista e vede cosa sta succedendo. Si arrabbia e urla, ma la moglie riesce a convincerlo che non stava facendo nulla di male e che quello era l'unico modo per fargli riacquistare la vista. Il racconto termina quindi con January e May che continuano la loro vita felici, anche se la moglie lo aveva ingannato. Il punto centrale della storia è da ritrovare proprio nell'episodio dell'albero delle pere, in quanto da quel momento la visione della donna cambia: May non è più la giovane e bella moglie sposata con un marito molto più vecchio di lei, ma riflette la figura della moglie che inganna il marito. Data la presenza della discussione riguardante il matrimonio, alcuni sostengono che questo racconto potesse essere stato scritto inizialmente da Chaucer per un altro personaggio, uno che facesse parte del clero, come il Frate.

Ci sono tre testi che possono essere considerati analoghi si questo racconto. I primi due sono due novelle del *Decameron* di Boccaccio. La decima novella del secondo giorno, racconta la storia del giudice Ricciardo di Chinzica, del pirata Paganino da Monaco e della moglie del giudice, Bartolomea. La trama non riflette quella del racconto del mercante, ma il tema del matrimonio tra

un uomo molto più vecchio della moglie si trova in questa novella. Ricciardo infatti ha molti punti in comune con January: entrambi si sposano con una donna più giovane, ma nessuno dei due dà alla moglie l'attenzione che merita. Ricciardo infatti dà molta più importanza al suo lavoro e all'osservanza di un calendario che riguardava le feste religiose e regolava la loro vita sessuale e matrimoniale. Durante una gita di pesca, Bartolomea viene rapita da un pirata e dopo un primo mese di pianti, si abitua alla vita con Paganino. Il pirata la tratta come sua moglie e non si preoccupa di insegnarle un calendario. Infatti, quando Ricciardo scopre dove si trova la moglie e la va a prendere, lei non tornerà a casa con lui.

Per quanto riguarda invece il secondo analogo, si tratta della nona novella del settimo giorno ed è la storia di Nicostrato, il marito, Lidia, la moglie e Pirro, il servitore. Qui invece si ritrova in parte il racconto del mercante, in quanto il triangolo amoroso è presente come anche l'episodio dell'albero delle pere. L'elemento della cecità però qui è dato attraverso l'episodio dell'albero, convincendo Nicostrato del fatto che l'albero fosse incantato. La novella termina comunque con i tre che tornano al palazzo felici anche se Nicostrato continuerà ad essere ingannato dalla moglie anche in futuro.

L'ultimo analogo, il quale potrebbe essere stato usato come fonte sia da Boccaccio che da Chaucer, è la storia tratta da *Il Novellino*, la storia della donna e dell'albero delle pere. La cecità in questa storia è presente fin dall'inizio e la storia si svolge attorno a ciò che accade sull'albero delle pere. Anche in questo caso, come in tutte le versioni prese in considerazione della storia, la gelosia contraddistingue il marito, il quale teme di essere tradito dalla giovane moglie. Anche in questo caso è presente un triangolo amoroso costituito da moglie, marito e servitore; il marito guarisce e la moglie riesce a trovare delle scuse per giustificarsi. Nella storia tratta da *Il Novellino* la cecità è di tipo fisico, come anche in Chaucer, mentre nella novella di Boccaccio, Nicostrato è caratterizzato da una cecità mentale causata dall'albero di pere. Quest'ultimo analogo tratto da *Il Novellino* può essere considerato quello più vicino al racconto del mercante.

In conclusione, i racconti tratti da *I Racconti di Canterbury* che sono stati considerati, ossia, il prologo e racconto del chierico di Oxford, il prologo e il racconto della Donna di Bath e il prologo e il racconto del mercante offrono delle visioni differenti riguardo il matrimonio e la figura della donna. Il chierico presenta Griselda come la donna perfetta, in quanto paziente e obbediente. Allo stesso tempo però viene sottolineato come questo modello di virtù femminile possa essere visto come assurdo. Questo perché lei annichilisce se stessa per fare quello che Walter vuole. La Donna di Bath invece presenta se stessa come autorità, basandosi sulla propria esperienza. È proprio lei il personaggio che sorprende maggiormente, in quanto Chaucer in questo modo presenta una donna indipendente. Lei riesce a controllare i suoi mariti e pone la castità come qualcosa di non obbligatorio, ma come una scelta personale. Infine, May, la moglie di January nel racconto del mercante è l'esempio di donna che come la Donna di Bath sa ingannare il marito per soddisfare i propri desideri sessuali con il servitore che era molto più giovane e bello del marito.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Boccaccio, Giovanni, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca, Torino: Einaudi, 2014.

Boccaccio, Giovanni and Petrarca, Francesco, *Griselda,* ed. Luca Carlo Rossi, Palermo: Sellerio editore, 1991.

Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Canterbury Tales,* ed. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson, London: Norton, 2005.

Correale, Robert M. and Hamel, Mary, *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales II*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005.

Dunbar, John, *Il Trattato delle Due Donne Maritate e della Vedova*, ed. Ermanno Barisone, Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1999.

The Riverside Chaucer, ed. F.N. Robinson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Secondary Sources

Arnell, Carla, "Chaucer's Wife of Bath and John Fowles's Quaker Maid: Tale-Telling and the Trial of Personal Experience and Written Authority", *The Modern Language Review*, 102, 2007, pp. 933-946.

Astell, Ann W., "Chaucer's 'Literature Group' and the Medieval Causes of Books", *ELH*, 59, 1992, pp. 269-287.

Beidler, Peter G., "Chaucer's Merchant's Tale and the Decameron", *Italica*, 50, 1973, pp. 266-284.

Burnley, J. D., "The Morality of the 'Merchant's Tale'", *The Yearbook of English Studies,* 6, 1976, pp.16-24.

Brown, Carleton, "The Evolution of the Canterbury 'Marriage Group'", *PMLA*, 48, 1933, pp. 1041-1059.

Brunetti, Giuseppe, *Sui Canterbury Tales*, Padova: Unipress,1988.

Cannon, Cristopher, "Chaucer and Rape: Uncertainty's Certainties" in *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature,* ed. E. Robinson et al, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, pp. 255-279.

Carter, Susan, "Coupling the Beastly Bride and the Hunter Hunted: What Lies behind Chaucer's 'Wife of Bath's Tale'", *The Chaucer Review*, 37, 2003, pp. 329-345.

Child, Clarence G., "Chaucer's Legend of Good Women and Boccaccio's Genealogia Deorum", *Modern Language Notes*, 11, 1896, pp. 238-245.

Clarke, K. P., *Chaucer and Italian Textuality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Coffman, George R., “Another Analogue for the Violation of the Maiden in the ‘Wife of Bath’s Tale’”, *Modern Language Notes*, 59, 1944, pp. 271-274.

Coffman, George R., “Chaucer and Courtly Love Once More – ‘The Wife of Bath’s Tale’”, *Speculum,* 20, 1945, pp. 43-50.

Curry, Clyde, Walter, “More about Chaucer’s Wife of Bath”, *PMLA*, 37, 1922, pp. 30-51.

Dalbey, Marcia A., “The Devil in the Garden: Pluto and Proserpine in Chaucer’s ‘Merchant’s Tale’”, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 75, 1974, pp. 408-415.

Dane, Joseph A., “The Wife of Bath’s Shipman’s Tale and the Invention of Chaucerian Fabliaux”, *The Modern Language Review,* 99, 2004, pp. 287-300.

Dean, James M., “Chaucer’s Open Books: Resistance to Closure in Medieval Discourse”, *JPEG*, 98, 1999, pp. 556-558.

Dempster, Germaine, “The Original Teller of the ‘Merchant’s Tale’”, *Modern Philology,* 39, 1938, pp. 1-8.

Dobson, E. J. and Ingham, Patricia, “Three Notes on Dunbar’s ‘The Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo’”, *Medium AEvum*, 36, 1967, pp. 38-39.

Du Boulay, F. R. H., “The Historical Chaucer” in Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Canterbury Tales,* ed. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson, London: Norton, 2005, pp. 473-492.

Duby, Georges and Perrot, Michelle, *Storia delle Donne in Occidente. Il Medioevo,* ed. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Laterza: Bari, 1990.

Ebin, Lois, “Dunbar’s Bawdy”, *The Chaucer Review*, 14, 1980, pp. 278-286.

Farrell, Thomas J., “The Style of the *Clerk’s Tale* and the Functions of its Glosses”, *Studies in Philology*, 86, 1989, pp. 286-309.

Feinstein, Sandy, “Longevity and the Loathly Ladies in Three Medieval Romances”, *Arthuriana*, 21, 2011, pp. 23-48.

Ficara, Giorgio, “The Perfect Woman in Boccaccio and Petrarch” in *Petrarch and Boccaccio*, ed. Igor Candido, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018, pp. 286-312.

Finlayson, John, “Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Chaucer’s *Clerk’s Tale”, Studies in Philology,* 97, 2000, pp. 255-275.

Flannery, Mary C., “A Bloody Shame: Chaucer’s Honourable Women”, *The Review of English Studies*, 62, 2011, pp. 337-357.

Glasser, Marc, “He Nedes Moste Hire Wedde: the Forced Marriage in the Wife of Bath's Tale and Its Middle English Analogues”, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 85, 1984, pp.239-241.

Grudin, Michaela Paasche, “Discourse and the Problem of Closure in the Canterbury Tales”, *PMLA*, 107, 1992, pp. 1157-1167.

Harkins, Jessica, “Chaucer’s Clerk’s Tale and Boccaccio’s Decameron X.10”, *The Chaucer’s Review*, 47, 2013, pp. 247-273.

Haywood, Eric, “De Insigni Obedientia et Fide Amiculi ? Griselda tra Petrarca e Boccaccio” in *Par estude ou par acoustumance*, ed. Laura Ramello, Alex Borio and Elisabetta Nicola, Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 2016, pp. 351-365.

Hendrickson, G.L., “Chaucer and Petrarch: Two Notes on the ‘Clerkes Tale’”, *Modern Philology*, 4, 1906, pp.179-192.

Hinckley, Henry Barrett, “The Debate on Marriage in the Canterbury Tales”, *PMLA*, 32, 1917, pp. 292-305.

Holland, Norman N., “Meaning as Transformation: The Wife of Bath’s Tale”, *College English*, 28, 1967, pp. 279-290.

Horobin, Simon, “Adam Pinkhurst, Geoffrey Chaucer, and the Hengwrt Manuscript of the Canterbury Tales”, *The Chaucer Review*, 44, 2010, pp.351-367.

Horobin, Simon, “Compiling the Canterbury Tales in Fifteenth-Century Manuscripts”, *The Chuacer’s Review*, 47, 2013, pp. 372-389.

Huppè, Bernard F. “Rape and Woman’s Sovereignty in the Wife of Bath’s Tale”, *Modern Language Notes,* 63, 1948, pp. 378-381.

Jones, H.S.V., “The Plan of the ‘Canterbury Tales’”, *Modern Philology*, 13, 1915, pp. 45-48.

Kenyon, John S., Further Notes on the Marriage Group in the ‘Canterbury Tales’”, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 15, 1916, pp. 282-288.

Kimpel, Ben, “The Narrator of the Canterbury Tales”, *ELH*, 20, 1953, pp.77-86.

Kinsley, James, “The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo”, *Medium AEvum,* 23, 1954, pp. 31-35.

Kittredge, G.L., “Chaucer’s Discussion of Marriage”, *Modern Philology,* 9, 1912, pp. 435-467.

Lank, C.T. and Wayne, FT., “Chaucer”, *Educational Weekly,* 2, 1884, p.6.

Lawrence Witherle, William, “The Marriage Group in the ‘Canterbury Tales’”, *Modern Philology,* 11, 1913, pp. 247-258.

Le Goff, Jacques, *L’uomo medievale (L’Homme Médiéval)*, Laterza: Bari, 1983.

Lipton, Emma, “Contracts, Activist Feminism, and the Wife of Bath’s Tale”, *The Chaucer Review,* 54, 2019, pp. 335-351.

Lumiansky, R.M., “Aspects of the Relationship of Boccaccio’s ‘Il Filostrato’ with Benoit’s ‘Roman de Troie’ and Chaucer’s Wife of Bath’s Tale”, *Italica,* 31, 1954, pp. 1-7.

Lyons, Clifford P., “The Marriage Debate in the Canterbury Tales”, *ELH*, 2, 1935, pp. 252-262.
Malone, Kemp, “The Wife of Bath’s Tale”, *The Modern Language Review*, 57, 1962, pp. 481-491.

Mead, William E., “The Prologue of the Wife of Bath’s Tale”, *PMLA*, 16, 1901, pp. 388-404.

Miller, Robert P., “The Wife of Bath’s Tale and Medieval Exempla”, *ELH*, 32, 1965, pp. 442-456.

Mitchell, J. Allan, “Chaucer’s *Clerk’s Tale* and the Question of Ethical Monstrosity”, *Studies in Philology*, 102, 2005, pp. 1-26.

Mooney, Linne R., “Chaucer’s Scribe”, *Speculum*, 81, 2006, pp.97-138.

Murtagh, Daniel M. “Women and Geoffrey Chaucer”, *ELH,* 38, 1971, pp. 473-492.

Nakley, Susan, “‘Rowned She a Pistel’: National Institutions and Identities According to Chaucer’s Wife of Bath”, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 114, 2015, pp. 61-87.
Narinsky, Anna, Anti-Dualism and Social Mind in Chaucer’s *Clerk’s Tale*”, *Partial Answers*, 14, 2016, pp. 187-216.

Normandin, Shawn, “‘Non intellegant’: the Enigmas of the *Clerk’s Tale”*, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 58, 2016, pp. 189-223.

Owen, Charles A. Jr, “The Plan of Canterbury Pilgrimage”, *PMLA,* 66, 1951, pp. 820-826.

Owen, Charles A. Jr., “The Alternative Reading of The Canterbury Tales: Chaucer’s Text and the Early Manuscripts”, *PMLA*, 97, 1982, pp. 237-250.

Owen, Charles A. Jr. and Dean, James, “Ordering the Canterbury Tales”, *PMLA*, 101, 1986, pp. 251-253.

Owen, Charles A. Jr. and Fisher, John H., “Early Chaucer Manuscripts”, *PMLA*, 108, 1993, pp. 542-544.

Palomo, Dolores, “The Fate of the Wife of Bath’s ‘Bad Husbands’ ”, *The Chaucer Review*, 9, 1975, pp. 303-319.
Paris, Bernard J., *Imagined Human Beings,* New York: NYU Press, 1997.

Pearcy, Roy J, “The Genre of William Dunbar’s Treatis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo”, *Speculum*, 55, 1980, pp. 58-74.

Pearsall, Derek, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

Radcliff-Umstead, Douglas, “Boccaccio’s Adaptation of Some Latin Sources for the Decameron”, *Italica*, 45, 1968, pp. 171-194.

Roppolo, Joseph P., “The Converted Knight in Chaucer’s ‘Wife of Bath’s Tale’ ”, *College English*, 12, 1951, pp. 263-269.

Rossiter, William T., *Chaucer and Petrarch*, Cambridge: Brewer, 2010.

Eddy, Elizabeth Roth, “Sir Thopas Norny: Romance Parody in Chaucer and Dunbar”, *The Review of English Studies*, 22, 1971, pp. 401-409.

Schlauch, Margaret, “The Marital Dilemma in the Wife of Bath’s Tale”, *PMLA*, 61, 1946, pp. 416-430.

Schwebel, Leah, “Redressing Griselda: Restoration through Translation in the Clerk’s Tale”, *The Chaucer’s Review*, 47, 2013, pp. 274-299.

Sherman, William, H., “Terminal Paratext and the Birth of Print Culture”, in *Renaissance Paratexts,* ed. Helen Smith and Louise Wilson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 68-77.

Stadnik, Katarzyna, “Linguistic Modality and Female Identity in Chaucer’s *Clerk’s Tale*”, *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, 51, 2016, pp. 45-76.

Stapleton, Michael, *The Cambridge Guide to English Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Newnes Books,1983.

Stevens, Martin, “And Venus Laugheth: An Interpretation of the ‘Merchant’s Tale’”, *The Chaucer Review*, 7, 1972, pp. 118-131.

Stillinger, Thomas C., “New Science, Old Dance: The Clerk and the Wife of Bath at Philology” in *Through a Classical Eye: Transcultural and Transhistorical Visions in Medieval English, Italian and Latin Literature in Honour of Wetherbee Winthrop*, ed. Andrew Galloway and Robert F. Yeager, Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2009, pp. 223-238.

Sturges, Robert S., “ ‘The Canterbury Tales’’ Women Narrators: Three Traditions of Female Authority”, *Modern Language Studies*, 13, 1983, pp. 41-51.

Tatlock, J.S.P., “Chaucer’s ‘Merchant’s Tale’”, *Modern Philology*, 33, 1936, pp. 367-381.

Tatlock, J.S.P., “The Canterbury Tales in 1400”, *PMLA*, 50, 1935, pp. 100-139.
Turville-Petre, Thorlac, *Reading Middle English Literature*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2010.

Wallace, David, “Whan She Translated was” in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1530*, ed. Lee Patterson, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, pp. 156-215.

Wallace, David, “Griselde before Chaucer: Love between Men, Women, and Farewell Art” in *Through a Classical Eye: Transcultural and Transhistorical Visions in Medieval English, Italian and Latin Literature in Honour of Wetherbee Winthrop*, ed. Andrew Galloway and Robert F. Yeager, Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2009.

Waugh, Robin, “A Woman in the Mind’s Eye (and not); Narrators and Gazes in Chaucer’s Clerk’s Tale and in Two Analogues”, *Philological Quarterly*, 79, 2000, pp.1-18.

Williams, Tara, “The Host, His Wife, and Their Communities in the ‘Canterbury Tales’”, *The Chaucer’s Review,* 42, 2008, pp. 383-408.
Windeatt, Barry, “Literary Structures in Chaucer” in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Piero Boitani, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 214-232.

Wurtele, Douglas J., “Chaucer's Wife of Bath and her Distorted Arthurian Motifs”, *Arthurian Interpretations*, 2, 1987, pp. 47-61.

Online sources

Decameron, English translation: https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/texts/DecShowText.php?myID=nov1010&lang=eng

Jean de Meun: http://www.columbia.edu/dlc/garland/deweever/JK/jeandeme.htm

Ovide Moralisé: https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27Ovide_moralis%C3%A9

Roman de Carité by Reclus de Molliens : https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/reclus-de-molliens-barthelemy-dit-le/

Roman de la Rose : https://ia800405.us.archive.org/27/items/bub_gb_TXw-w1_hvyUC/bub_gb_TXw-w1_hvyUC.pdf

The Marriage of Sir Gawain: https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/hahn-sir-gawain-marriage-of-sir-gawain

The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle: https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/hahn-sir-gawain-wedding-of-sir-gawain-and-dame-ragnelle