

The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale

Geoffrey Chaucer - *The
Canterbury Tales*

English Literature I

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The Prologue: Authority Through Experience

Central Questions for Analysis:

- How does she establish credibility as a speaker on marriage?
- What relationship exists between her public persona and private feelings?
- How does her narrative strategy serve her larger argument?
- Why does medieval society both condemn and celebrate her?

Core Tension: Personal experience versus institutional authority

The Wife of Bath's Portrait in the General Prologue: Physical and Social Markers

- **Gap-toothed:** Medieval sign of lustfulness and travel
- **Red face and stockings:** Sanguine temperament, passionate nature
- **Sharp spurs:** Aggressive, controlling personality
- **Shield-like hat:** Prepared for metaphorical "battle"



The Wife of Bath's Portrait in the General Prologue: Physical and Social Markers

Social Position:

- **Cloth-maker from Bath:**
Successful businesswoman in emerging merchant class
- **Five marriages:** Claims expertise through accumulated experience
- **Extensive pilgrimage travel:**
Worldly knowledge beyond typical women



Prólogo da A Mulher de Bath (Trad. Paulo Vizioli)

Ainda que neste mundo não existissem os **ensinamentos da autoridade**, a mim bastaria a experiência para falar dos males do matrimônio: e isso, cavalheiros, porque desde os meus doze anos de idade (louvado seja Deus, que tem a vida eterna, por ter-me permitido casar-me tantas vezes) tive já cinco maridos à porta da igreja — e todos homens de bem, à sua maneira.

Excerpt 1: Establishing Authority (Lines 1-18)

"Ainda que neste mundo não existissem os ensinamentos da autoridade, a mim bastaria a experiência para falar dos males do matrimônio..."

Experience, though noon auctoritee
Were in this world, is right ynogh for me
To speke of wo that is in mariage

- Deliberately rejects medieval scholarly tradition
- Claims female experience over male textual knowledge
- Establishes herself as teacher, not student

Prólogo da A Mulher de Bath (Trad. Paulo Vizioli)

Não faz muito, entretanto, disseram-me que, como Cristo só compareceu uma vez a um casamento — às bodas de Caná da Galileia —, quis ensinar-me com essa atitude que eu só deveria casar-me uma vez. Pensem também nas palavras duras que a esse propósito proferiu junto da fonte Jesus, homem e Deus, ao repreender a mulher samaritana: 'Tiveste cinco maridos', disse ele, 'e o homem com quem vives não é teu marido'. Foram essas as suas palavras. Mas não faço a menor ideia do que querem dizer, pois não entendo por que motivo o quinto homem não era marido da samaritana. Quantos, afinal, ela podia desposar? Até hoje, pelo que eu saiba, ninguém definiu esse número. Por isso, deixo que os outros façam as suas suposições e as suas interpretações; quanto a mim, o que sei é que Deus, expressamente e sem mentira, ordenou-nos claramente isto: 'Crescei e multiplicai-vos!'. E esse texto gentil entendo muito bem.

Age	Husband	Power Dynamic	Knowledge Acquired
12	Rich old man #1	Powerless child bride	Marriage as economic transaction
Teens	Rich old men #2-3	Learning manipulation	How to exploit male weakness
Young woman	Unfaithful husband #4	Experienced betrayal	Emotional vulnerability of love
40	Young clerk #5 (Jankyn)	Found love, lost power	True intimacy requires equality
Present	Seeking husband #6	Master of marriage theory	Ready to teach accumulated wisdom

O Vendedor de Indulgências a Interrompe (linhas 163-92) (Trad. Paulo Vizioli)

Nesse ponto, o Vendedor de Indulgências a interrompeu: “Por Deus e por São João! Que grande pregadora a senhora está se revelando a respeito desse tema! Eu mesmo estava para casar-me; mas então pensei — ai! por que pagar tão alto preço, com meu próprio corpo? E decidi assim ficar solteiro”.

“Um momento”, disse ela, “ainda nem comecei a minha história. Não, se não esperar que eu continue, provavelmente irá beber de outro barril, mais amargo que a cerveja escura. Só quando eu concluir o meu relato de como o matrimônio é um flagelo (e disso posso falar de cátedra, porque o flagelo tenho sido eu mesma), é que você saberá se convém ou não provar do barril de que ora estou tratando. De qualquer forma, tome cuidado antes de chegar perto, pois vou dar mais de uma dezena de exemplos. ‘Quem não aprende com os outros, com ele os outros aprenderão’: são essas as sábias palavras que Ptolomeu escreveu em seu Almagesto, onde poderá encontrá-las.”

O Vendedor de Indulgências a Interrompe (Trad. Paulo Vizioli)

“Senhora”, prosseguiu o Vendedor de Indulgências, “se não fizer objeções, rogo-lhe que continue a narração de seus casos, sem poupar a quem quer que seja, instruindo a nós, jovens inexperientes, com sua prática.”

“Com prazer”, respondeu ela, “se for de seu agrado. Antes, porém, peço a todos os companheiros que, como sempre falo o que me vem à cabeça, não levem a mal minhas palavras. Mesmo porque meu único propósito é divertir-los.

Prólogo da A Mulher de Bath (Trad. Paulo Vizioli)

... estávamos a passear pelos campos, quando comecei a brincar com esse estudante; e, por precaução, cheguei-me a ele e disse-lhe que, se ficasse viúva, era com ele que eu queria casar-me. De fato, sou muito prevenida — tanto nessa questão de casamento como em outras coisas —, pois sempre achei que **o rato que só tem um buraco para esconder-se está perdido**: se falha aquele, acabou-se a brincadeira. Eu o fiz acreditar então que estava caidinha por ele (foi minha mãe quem me ensinou esse truque), contando-lhe que havia sonhado com ele a noite inteira: eu estava deitada de costas e ele queria me estripar, e minha cama ficou toda coberta de sangue... “Mas espero que seja um bom sinal, porque me disseram que o sangue significa ouro.” É claro que era tudo mentira, eu não tinha sonhado com ele coisa nenhuma; era só que, nisso e em outras coisas mais, eu gostava de seguir os conselhos de minha mãe. E foi então, cavalheiros... vejamos, o que é mesmo que eu ia dizer?

Mouse Metaphor (Lines 530-535)

"...pois sempre achei que o rato que só tem um buraco para esconder-se está perdido: se falha aquele, acabou-se a brincadeira."

I holde a mouses herte nat worth a leek
That hath but oon hole for to sterte to,
And if that faille, thanne is al ydo

- Reduces human relationships to survival instinct
- Reveals calculating, pragmatical approach to emotional security
- Moment of brutal honesty about her methods

Prólogo da A Mulher de Bath (Trad. Paulo Vizioli)

Calculo que ele devia ter uns vinte anos; e eu quarenta, se não minto... Mas meu apetite sempre foi de jovem. Não é à toa que tenho esta janela entre os dentes, que é considerada a marca e o selo da Sagrada Vênus. Deus me valha, que sempre fui muito sensual... além de bonita, rica, jovem, bem situada, e (como não se cansavam de dizer os meus maridos) dona da melhor cona que existe. A realidade é que, no sentimento, sou toda venusina, enquanto meu coração é marciano; Vênus me deu o desejo, a lascívia; e Marte, a teimosa persistência. Meu ascendente no horóscopo estava em Touro, com a presença do planeta Marte... Ai, ai, por que o amor tinha que ser pecado? Sempre segui a inclinação imposta por meu signo: por conseguinte, nunca fui capaz de negar minha câmara de Vênus a um rapaz atraente. Por outro lado, trago o sinal de Marte impresso em minhas faces — e também em outra parte mais íntima. O resultado, Deus me perdoe, é que nunca amei com moderação, entregando-me completamente a meus impulsos, fosse o homem baixo ou alto, escuro ou claro.

Astrological Self-Defense and Contradictions (Lines 609-626)

"A realidade é que, no sentimento, sou toda venusina, enquanto meu coração é marciano; Vênus me deu o desejo, a lascívia; e Marte, a teimosa persistência."

I am al Venerian in feelynge
And myn herte is Marcien...
I folwed ay myn inclinacioun
By vertu of my constellacioun

- **Venus:** Love, sensuality, beauty, emotional responsiveness
- **Mars:** War, aggression, dominance, strategic thinking
- **Planetary Conflict:** Explains internal contradictions in personality

Prólogo da A Mulher de Bath (Trad. Paulo Vizioli)

Depois disso, o que posso dizer é que, ao cabo de um mês, o alegre Janekin, que era tão encantador, já havia me desposado, em meio a grande pompa. E a ele confiei todos os meus bens e minhas terras, tudo o que amealhara em meus casamentos anteriores... Coisa de que mais tarde me arrependi amargamente, porque ele então resolveu não mais deixar-me fazer nada do meu jeito. Por Deus, uma vez, só porque eu rasguei uma folha de seu livro, ele me deu uma bofetada com tanta força que acabei ficando surda de um ouvido. Eu, porém, era teimosa como uma leoa e tinha um língua que era uma matraca, de modo que, apesar da proibição dele, continuei a proceder como sempre, andando de casa em casa. E ele, para domar-me, punha-se a pregar e a contar histórias de Roma antiga, lembrando como um tal de Simplício Galo deixou a esposa e a abandonou pelo resto da vida só porque um dia a viu espiar porta afora com a cabeça descoberta.

Prólogo da A Mulher de Bath (Trad. Paulo Vizioli)

Por isso, quando percebi que ele pretendia passar a noite inteira lendo aquele maldito volume, num impulso repentino arranquei-lhe três folhas do livro, enquanto ele ainda lia, e desferi-lhe tal soco no rosto que ele perdeu o equilíbrio e caiu de costas no fogo. Levantou-se então de um salto, como um leão endoidecido, e, com o punho, bateu-me com tanta violência na cabeça que vim ao chão desfalecida. Ao ver que eu não me mexia, ficou horrorizado, julgando-me morta; e teria fugido dali se eu, finalmente, não tivesse recobrado os sentidos: "Oh, você me matou, ladrão traiçoeiro?", gemi; "foi por causa de minhas terras que você me assassinou? Assim mesmo, antes que eu morra, quero dar-lhe um beijo". Ao ouvir isso, ele se aproximou e se ajoelhou junto a mim, dizendo: "Alice [Alys], minha querida, Deus me ajude, nunca mais vou bater em você. Se fiz isso, foi por sua culpa. Perdoe-me, eu lhe suplico!". Aproveitei-me de sua proximidade e dei-lhe outro soco no rosto, gritando: "Bandido, estou vingada. Agora posso morrer; não preciso dizer mais nada".

The Fight (Lines 788-810)

"Por isso, quando percebi que ele pretendia passar a noite inteira lendo aquele maldito volume, num impulso repentino arranquei-lhe três folhas do livro..."

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

- Book represents institutional misogyny and male textual authority
- Physical attack on misogynist literature
- Victory achieved through emotional manipulation, not physical strength

The Ideal Marriage (Lines 811-825)

"E a partir do momento em que, graças à minha habilidade, recuperrei o comando...
nunca mais houve briga entre nós dois."

After that day we hadden never debaat.
God helpe me so, I was to hym as kynde
As any wyf from Denmark unto Ynde

- Woman receives decision-making authority: **sovereynetee**
- Man demonstrates confidence in her judgment
- Woman becomes loving and supportive
- Both partners achieve satisfaction

Does this represent genuine partnership or strategic female dominance (**sovereynetee**)
through **maistrye** ?

The Tale: Theory Applied Through Fantasy

Narrative Structure and Thematic Purpose:

The Crime (Lines 882-888): Knight commits rape - ultimate expression of male
maistrye

The Quest: Must discover what women most desire - education in female perspective

The Answer (Lines 1038-1043): Women want sovereynetee - validation of Wife's central thesis

The Resolution: Male submission leads to mutual happiness - fairy tale proof of her theory

Literary Genres in the Wife of Bath's Tale

- **Breton Lai:** Short medieval poems from Brittany featuring Celtic folklore, supernatural transformations, and concentrated love stories that combine magic with moral lessons.
- **Arthurian Romance:** Stories set in King Arthur's court that explore idealized medieval values like chivalry, courtly love, and knightly quests in a world of noble adventures.
- **Exemplum:** A narrative technique where stories serve as illustrative examples to prove a specific moral or philosophical point, commonly used in medieval debates and sermons.
- **How They Combine:** The Wife uses Arthurian setting and Breton lai magic to create an exemplum that "proves" her argument about women's desire for sovereignty in marriage.

The Tale: Introduction (857-873)

In the old days of King Arthur,
Of whom Britons speak great honor,
This land was all filled full of supernatural creatures.
The elf-queen, with her jolly company,
Danced very often in many a green mead.
This was the old belief, as I read;
I speak of many hundred years ago.
But now no man can see any more elves,
For now the great charity and prayers
Of licensed beggars and other holy friars,
That overrun every land and every stream,
As thick as specks of dust in the sun-beam,
Blessing halls, chambers, kitchens, bedrooms,
Cities, towns, castles, high towers,
Villages, barns, stables, dairies --
This makes it that there are no fairies.
For where an elf was accustomed to walk

The Tale: The Attack (873-888)

There walks now the licensed begging friar himself
In late mornings and in early mornings,
And says his morning prayers and his holy things
As he goes in his assigned district.
Women may go safely up and down.
In every bush or under every tree
There is no other evil spirit but he,
And he will not do them any harm except dishonor.

And so it happened that this king Arthur
Had in his house a lusty bachelor,
That on one day came riding from hawking,
And it happened that, alone as he was born,
He saw a maiden walking before him,
Of which maiden straightway, despite all she could do,
By utter force, he took away her maidenhead;

The Tale: The Court (889-898)

For which wrong was such clamor
And such demand for justice unto king Arthur
That this knight was condemned to be dead,
By course of law, and should have lost his head --
Perhaps such was the statute then --
Except that the queen and other ladies as well
So long prayed the king for grace
Until he granted him his life right there,
And gave him to the queen, all at her will,
To choose whether she would him save or put to death.

The Tale: The Sentence (899-918)

The queen thanks the king with all her might,
And after this she spoke thus to the knight,
When she saw her time, upon a day:
"Thou standest yet," she said, "in such condition,
That of thy life yet thou hast no assurance
I grant thee life, if thou canst tell me
What thing it is that women most desire.
Beware, and keep thy neck-bone from iron (axe)!
And if thou canst not tell it right now,
Yet I will give thee leave to go
A twelvemonth and a day, to seek to learn
A satisfactory answer in this matter;
And I will have, before thou go, a pledge
To surrender thy body in this place."

Woe was this knight, and sorrowfully he sighs;
But what! He can not do all as he pleases.
And at the last he chose to leave
And come again, exactly at the year's end,
With such answer as God would provide him;
And takes his leave, and goes forth on his way.

The Tale: The Quest (919-934)

He seeks every house and every place
Where he hopes to have the luck
To learn what thing women love most,
But he could not arrive in any region
Where he might find in this matter
Two creatures agreeing together.
Some said women love riches best,
Some said honor, some said gaiety,
Some rich clothing, some said lust in bed,
And frequently to be widow and wedded.
Some said that our hearts are most eased
When we are flattered and pleased.
He goes very near the truth, I will not lie.
A man shall win us best with flattery,
And with attentions and with solicitude
We are caught, every one of us.

The Tale: What do women want? (935-944)

And some say that we love best
To be free and do just as we please,
And that no man reprove us for our vices,
But say that we are wise and not at all silly.
For truly there is not one of us all,
If any one will scratch us on the sore spot,
That we will not kick back, because he tells us the truth.
Try it, and whoever so does shall find it true;
For, be we never so vicious within,
We want to be considered wise and clean of sin.

The Tale: The Secret (945-951)

And some say that we have great delight
To be considered steadfast, and also (able to keep a) secret,
And in one purpose steadfastly to remain,
And not reveal things that men tell us.
But that tale is not worth a rake handle.
By God, we women can hide nothing;
Witness on Midas -- will you hear the tale?

The Tale: The Old Hag (983-1004)

This knight, of whom my tale is in particular,
When he saw he might not come to that --
This is to say, what women love most --
Within his breast very sorrowful was the spirit.
But home he goes; he could not linger;
The day was come that homeward he must turn.
And in his way he happened to ride,
In all this care, near a forest side,
Where he saw upon a dance go
Ladies four and twenty, and yet more;
Toward the which dance he drew very eagerly,
In hope that he should learn some wisdom.
But certainly, before he came fully there,
Vanished was this dance, he knew not where.
He saw no creature that bore life,
Save on the green he saw sitting a woman --
There can no man imagine an uglier creature.
At the knight's coming this old wife did rise,
And said, "Sir knight, there lies no road out of here.
Tell me what you seek, by your faith!
Perhaps it may be the better;
These old folk know many things," she said.

The Tale: The Pledge (1005-1022)

"My dear mother," said this knight, "certainly
I am as good as dead unless I can say
What thing it is that women most desire.
If you could teach me, I would well repay you."

"Pledge me thy word here in my hand," she said,
"The next thing that I require of thee,
Thou shalt do it, if it lies in thy power,
And I will tell it to you before it is night."
"Have here my pledged word," said the knight, "I agree."
"Then," she said, "I dare me well boast
Thy life is safe, for I will stand thereby;
Upon my life, the queen will say as I.
Let's see which is the proudest of them all
That wears a kerchief or a hairnet
That dares say `nay' of what I shall teach thee.
Let us go forth without longer speech."
Then she whispered a message in his ear,
And commanded him to be glad and have no fear.

The Tale: Back to the Court (1023-1036)

When they are come to the court, this knight
Said he had held his day, as he had promised,
And his answer was ready, as he said.
Very many a noble wife, and many a maid,
And many a widow, because they are wise,
The queen herself sitting as a justice,
Are assembled, to hear his answer;
And afterward this knight was commanded to appear.

Silence was commanded to every person,
And that the knight should tell in open court
What thing (it is) that worldly women love best.
This knight stood not silent as does a beast,
But to his question straightway answered
With manly voice, so that all the court heard it:

The Tale: The Answer (1037-1057)

"My liege lady, without exception," he said,
"Women desire to have sovereignty
As well over her husband as her love,
And to be in mastery above him.
This is your greatest desire, though you kill me.
Do as you please; I am here subject to your will."
In all the court there was not wife, nor maid,
Nor widow that denied what he said,
But said that he was worthy to have his life.
And with that word up sprang the old woman,
Whom the knight saw sitting on the green:
"Mercy," she said, "my sovereign lady queen!
Before your court departs, do me justice.
I taught this answer to the knight;
For which he pledged me his word there,
The first thing that I would ask of him
He would do, if it lay in his power.
Before the court then I pray thee, sir knight,"
Said she, "that thou take me as thy wife,
For well thou know that I have saved thy life.
If I say false, say 'nay', upon thy faith!"

The Tale: Marriage (1058-1072)

This knight answered, "Alas and woe is me!
I know right well that such was my promise.
For God's love, choose a new request!
Take all my goods and let my body go."

"Nay, then," she said, "I curse both of us two!
For though I am ugly, and old, and poor
I would not for all the metal, nor for ore
That under earth is buried or lies above,
Have anything except that I were thy wife, and also thy love."

"My love?" he said, "nay, my damnation!
Alas, that any of my family
Should ever be so foully degraded!"
But all for naught; the end is this, that he
Constrained was; he must by necessity wed her,
And takes his old wife, and goes to bed.

The Tale: Knight is Upset (1083-1097)

Great was the woe the knight had in his thought,
When he was brought to bed with his wife;
He wallows and he turns to and fro.
His old wife lay smiling evermore,
And said, "O dear husband, bless me!
Does every knight behave thus with his wife as you do?
Is this the law of king Arthur's house?
Is every knight of his so aloof?
I am your own love and your wife;
I am she who has saved your life,
And, certainly, I did you never wrong yet;
Why behave you thus with me this first night?
You act like a man who had lost his wit.
What is my offense? For God's love, tell it,
And it shall be amended, if I can."

The Tale: Gentillesse (1109-1124)

"But, since you speak of such nobility [gentillesse]
As is descended out of old riches,
That therefore you should be noble men,
Such arrogance is not worth a hen.
Look who is most virtuous always,
In private and public, and most intends ever
To do the noble deeds that he can;
Take him for the greatest noble man.
Christ wants us to claim our nobility from him,
Not from our ancestors for their old riches.
For though they give us all their heritage,
For which we claim to be of noble lineage,
Yet they can not bequeath by any means
To any of us their virtuous living,
That made them be called noble men,
And commanded us to follow them in such matters.

The Tale: Gentillesse (1146-1164)

"Here may you see well that nobility
Is not joined with possession,
Since folk not do behave as they should
Always, as does the fire, lo, in its nature.
For, God knows it, men may well often find
A lord's son doing shame and dishonor;
And he who will have praise for his noble birth,
Because he was born of a noble house
And had his noble and virtuous ancestors,
And will not himself do any noble deeds
Nor follow his noble ancestry that is dead,
He is not noble, be he duke or earl,
For churlish sinful deeds make a churl.
For nobility is nothing but renown
Of thy ancestors, for their great goodness,
Which is a thing not naturally part of thy person.
Thy nobility comes from God alone.
Then our true nobility comes from grace ;
It was not at all bequeathed to us with our social rank.

The Tale: Poverty (1177-1190)

"And whereas you reprove me for poverty,
The high God, on whom we believe,
In voluntary poverty chose to live his life.
And certainly every man, maiden, or woman
Can understand that Jesus, heaven's king,
Would not choose a vicious form of living.
Glad poverty is an honest thing, certain;
This will Seneca and other clerks say.
Whoever considers himself satisfied with his poverty,
I consider him rich, although he had not a shirt.
He who covets is a poor person,
For he would have that which is not in his power;
But he who has nothing, nor covets to have anything,
Is rich, although you consider him but a knave.

The Tale: Poverty (1195-1206)

Poverty is a hateful good and, as I guess,
A very great remover of cares;
A great amender also of wisdom
To him that takes it in patience.
Poverty is this, although it may seem miserable:
A possession that no one will challenge.
Poverty very often, when a man is low,
Makes him know his God and also himself.
Poverty is an eye glass, as it seems to me,
Through which one may see his true friends.
And therefore, sir, since I do not injure you,
You (should) no longer reprove me for my poverty.

The Tale: Old Age (1207-1218)

"Now, sir, of old age you reprove me;
And certainly, sir, though no authority
Were in any book, you gentlefolk of honor
Say that men should be courteous to an old person
And call him father, because of your nobility;
And authors shall I find, as I guess.

"Now where you say that I am ugly and old,
Than do not fear to be a cuckold;
For filth and old age, as I may prosper,
Are great guardians of chastity.
But nonetheless, since I know your delight,
I shall fulfill your worldly appetite.

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The Tale: The Choice (1219-1227)

"Choose now," she said, "one of these two things:
To have me ugly and old until I die,
And be to you a true, humble wife,
And never displease you in all my life,
Or else you will have me young and fair,
And take your chances of the crowd
That shall be at your house because of me,
Or in some other place, as it may well be.
Now choose yourself, whichever you please."

The Tale: Maystrie (1228-1238)

This knight deliberates and painfully sighs,
But at the last he said in this manner:
"My lady and my love, and wife so dear,
I put me in your wise governance;
Choose yourself which may be most pleasure
And most honor to you and me also.
I do not care which of the two,
For as it pleases you, is enough for me."

"Then have I gotten mastery [maistrye] of you," she said,
"Since I may choose and govern as I please?"

"Yes, certainly, wife," he said, "I consider it best."

The Tale: Kiss and Make Up (1239-1249)

"Kiss me," she said, "we are no longer angry,
For, by my troth, I will be to you both --
This is to say, yes, both fair and good.
I pray to God that I may die insane
Unless I to you be as good and true
As ever was wife, since the world was new.
And unless I am tomorrow morning as fair to be seen
As any lady, empress, or queen,
That is between the east and also the west,
Do with my life and death right as you please.
Cast up the curtain, look how it is."

The Tale: Happy Ending (1250-1264)

And when the knight saw truly all this,
That she so was beautiful, and so young moreover,
For joy he clasped her in his two arms.
His heart bathed in a bath of bliss.
A thousand time in a row he did her kiss,
And she obeyed him in every thing
That might do him pleasure or enjoyment.

And thus they live unto their lives' end
In perfect joy; and Jesus Christ us send
Husbands meek, young, and vigorous in bed,
And grace to outlive them whom we wed;
And also I pray Jesus shorten their lives
That will not be governed by their wives;
And old and angry misers in spending,
God send them soon the very pestilence!

What do Women Want?

Wommen desiren to have sovereynetee
As wel over hir housbond as hir love,
And for to been in maistrie hym above

"Women desire to have supreme authority over both their husbands and their lovers, and to hold mastery over them"

- Does this answer reflect universal female desire or the Wife's personal agenda?
- How does **sovereynetee** differ from **maistrye** in the Wife's vocabulary?
- What evidence from the Prologue supports or contradicts this claim?

Comparative Analysis: Prologue vs. Tale

Prologue	Tale (Fantasy)
Multiple marriages with varied outcomes	Single magical transformation
Years of struggle and gradual learning	Instant education and resolution
Partial victories with ongoing challenges	Complete success and perfect ending
Aging problem remains unsolved	Beauty magically restored
Complex psychological realism	Simplified moral allegory
Experience validates theory	Fantasy proves theory

The Tale represents wish fulfillment rather than realistic relationship advice

Three Central Themes

Theme 1: Marriage as Institution vs. Personal Experience

Marriage as Legal vs. Religious Institution:

- The Wife argues against the traditional view that marriage is a holy contract for life
- Widows and widowers should remain single according to Church teaching
- Her argument becomes confused as she uses Solomon (who had many wives simultaneously) to justify bigamye (having several spouses in succession)

Theme 1: Marriage as Institution vs. Personal Experience

Chaucer uses the same attitudes and proverbs reiterated by different voices in different contexts:

- The Wife's reporting of her old husbands' complaints
- Jankyn's actual misogynist preaching
- Her own internalized prejudices

Você diz que a goteira, a fumaça e a mulher rabugenta são as três coisas que espantam o homem de sua casa. Ah, ouça-me Deus! Que bicho o mordeu, para o velho resmungar assim?

“É melhor”, dizia, “viver com um leão ou com um dragão horrendo do que com uma mulher que ralha o tempo todo”

Theme 2: Maistrye or Dominance

- Maistrye means the dominating, aggressive attitude the Wife cultivates to gain soveraynetee over her husbands. It's born from her materialistic attitude that marriage is a battle for property and supremacy.
- **Her Philosophy:** Oon of us two moste bowen, doutelees (One of us two must submit, without doubt)

Strategies:

- Best defense is attack (lines 379-94)
- Exploit every weakness for profit (lines 409-11)
- Systematically betray husband's faults to public ridicule (lines 534-42)

Theme 2: Maistrye or Dominance

- The fight with Jankyn: Even in the climax of desperate struggle, she uses his remorse cynically, tempting him within range for vengeful retaliation. This demonstrates that maistrye means determination to battle without respite until victory.

Question:

- How can a physically weaker person achieve maistrye ?

Answer:

- Through indomitable will. She presents impossible choices—either unending strife and misery, or utter submission. The old hag's final choice in the Tale represents this: either death or surrender.

Theme 3: **Gentillesse** True Nobility vs. Inherited Status

Traditional Medieval View:

- **Gentillesse** was inherited through noble bloodlines
- Higher birth = greater nobility and virtue
- Fixed social hierarchy ordained by divine law

The Wife's Progressive View (through the old hag):

- **Gentillesse** is virtue that anyone may demonstrate
- People who are moost vertuous alway, / Pryvee and apert, and moost entendeth ay / To do the gentil dedes that he kan
- Noble ancestors had virtuous lyvynge that made them noble—not the reverse

The Concept of **Gentillesse**

Traditional View (Medieval):

Nobility derives from noble birth and inheritance

Progressive View (Promoted by Wife of Bath):

Gentillesse represents a quality of noble goodness demonstrated through virtuous living

Inherited Nobility	Earned Nobility
Based on family lineage	Based on virtuous actions
Fixed social hierarchy	Democratic merit system
Divine right to rule	Personal moral choices
Aristocratic privilege	Universal human potential

Contradictions

This emphasis on virtue and gentilesse creates sharp contrast with the Wife's:

- Promiscuity
- Unchristian, remorseless self-interest called maistrye
- Commercial approach to relationships

Analysis: The introduction of gentillesse presents an irreconcilable contradiction in the Wife's overall statement. The two themes—maistrye and gentillesse—represent opposed moral frameworks.

- Why does Chaucer include this contradiction?
- Does this represent the Wife's "hidden" better nature?