

# On the Matrimonial Discourse in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*

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## Abstract

Who is the listener, who the teller of tale? Can we believe the Wife of Bath? Can the woman speak? In the Middle Ages, it is not possible for woman to be an orator in public; however, the Wife of Bath, “woman warrior,” “master of all the courtly conventions,” breaks up the conventional trammel because she is “able to make a living by her pen.” As an active narrator who develops her matrimonial discourse (The Prologue) and accurately practices her oration (The Tale), the Wife of Bath adopts her rhetorical power by her reconfiguration of the close relationship with her five husbands. By her writing, the Wife of Bath proclaims that “‘Marriage is no excuse for not loving’ is the first of the rule of love.” In fact, the Wife of Bath’s concept of “marriage” is quite different with others because by her “law” she is “aligned with the new order of things.” As a delicate artwork of “the marriage group,” firstly, the Wife of Bath narrates that her Prologue, the “form of a literary confession,” is a fabliau related to the ‘bodily desire’ for the lower class. Secondly, her Tale, a romance, purports to “tell not something new, novel, but an old ‘storie,’ a true history of events remote in time and after in place, which the romancer has learned from some reliable ‘auctor’ or ancient tradition.” Thirdly, as a storyteller (The Prologue) and a narrator (The Tale), the Wife of Bath by her narrative power reshapes and combines her outlook with her own story together. In public the Wife of Bath reiterates her matrimonial discourse because she is capable of unifying her interpretation and interpellation as a whole. From her matrimonial discourse, we learn that the Wife of Bath, an “incurable romantic,” is a practitioner of pre-feminist even she has married five husbands but still welcomes her sixth husband. Thus, based on its social and cultural situation, I am going to discuss her matrimonial discourse and the model of her matrimonial discourse, which confirm that the Wife of Bath is a pioneer of anti-patrilinealism.

**Keyword:** *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, woman warrior, the matrimonial discourse, fabliau, romance

# 喬叟《巴斯太太的序言及故事》中之婚姻論述

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## 中文摘要

巴斯太太之言可信？女性有發言權？中古世紀，女性是無法成爲發言人。「女戰士」，「 官廷傳統代言人」，巴斯太太解除傳統束縛而以筆創造生活。身兼敘述者及實踐者，巴斯太太運用修辭權詮釋其婚姻觀。藉由書寫，「婚姻對不愛者是無理由」係愛情之首要法規。然而，其婚姻觀與同時代女性卻是迥異。藉由其法，巴斯太太稱《序言》爲粗鄙故事以探討低下階層的身體慾望。《故事》爲羅曼史以呈現「不告知新事件，小說，而是舊故事… 浪漫者從古訓或部份可信賴的角色學習經驗」。第三、巴斯太太以其論述付之行動。是此，「無可救藥浪漫者」、「女性主義先驅實踐者」、巴斯太太雖經歷 5 任丈夫，卻仍堅信第 6 任丈夫會更好。故本文將從中古世紀社會與文化觀點探討巴斯太太的婚姻論述及範例以證明巴斯太太係爲反父權體制之先鋒。

**關鍵詞：**《巴斯太太的序言及故事》，婚姻論述，女戰士，羅曼史，粗俗故事

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Chaucer employs a narrative technique common in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, one of Chaucer's favorite sources: that of dramatic juxtaposition of difference in theme and in tone. (McKinley 361)

The Wife of Bath will fill in this space positively, illustrating both the space to speak that self that has been opened up by confessional practice and the subversive potential of the confessional hermeneutic. (Root 255)

## I. Introduction

Who is the listener, who the teller of tale? Can we believe the Wife of Bath? Can the woman speak?<sup>1</sup> In *The Canterbury Tale* these answers are very obvious and assured. In the Middle Ages, it is not possible for woman to be an orator in public. However, *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* written by Geoffrey Chaucer creates a new model, pro-feminist and woman warrior who subverts the conventional female image because this new woman, the Wife of Bath whose appearance is not a beautiful blonde western woman, asserts her own feminine oration in public. The Wife of Bath perhaps proudly announces this way: 'I am not a beauty; however, I have something to say.' In fact, the Wife of Bath is a new model of modern women who proclaims that woman can speak and execute her female privileges under the male-dominated society. By her authoritative rhetorical power, the image of the Wife of Bath converts the conventional standpoint of woman in the patriarchal society: man is the center whereas woman is the margin. As a female writer and handywoman, the Wife of Bath believes that a woman has privileges to choose her marriage partner, since she records her story and writes her history by her pen, by her law. Eileen Power puts the Wife of Bath's rhetoric authority this way: "There appears a woman writer determined and able to plead for her sex and to take a stand against the prevalent denigration of women" (4). From her matrimonial discourses, the Wife of Bath opines that her body would tell a tale when she "makes the private public and transforms the confessional murmur into public scandal" (Root 263).

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<sup>1</sup> It is certain that in the Middle Ages women's voices are hardly to be heard. For example, Eileen Power's statement proves the social situation of women in the Middle Age this way: "We hardly ever hear of women's views of themselves" (4). However, even though women belong to the minority groups and the male author Chaucer writes *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, it is very ironic that we can hear the Wife of Bath's complaint about her matrimonial situation in public. Thus, based on such counter standpoint, I would like to borrow Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's term—"Can the subaltern speak?", but I change this term into "can the woman speak?" to state my arguments about the Wife of Bath's matrimonial discourses. Eileen Power, "Chapter 1: Medieval ideas about women," *Medieval Women*, Ed. M. M. Postan, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995, 4.

Hence, we learn that *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* intersperses the illustrative contents with the powerful evidences when the Wife of Bath, Alison, “a master of all the courtly conventions,” is able “to make a living by her pen” (Power 5). As a best paradigm of female protagonist, the Wife of Bath is not only an eminent pro-feminist but also a great orator who dares to announce her arguments in public. As a subaltern woman whose name is not a “frailty,” the Wife of Bath is not a “no name woman” and is not in ‘subjection to man’ as well as others. Therefore, some critics assert that her name, Alison, which emerges for three times in “The Miller’s Tale,” “The Reeve’s Tale,” and “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” embodies a typical bawdy and lascivious woman. In fact, by his writing, Chaucer attempts to formalize the “Alison” (The Tale) as a word warrior who has possessed with some kinds of masculine temperaments while she attempts to maintain her female privileges. “The woman is in subjection, but the subjection is very imperfectly maintained, and the henpecked husband is a suspiciously favorite theme” (Power 3). As a delicate artwork of “the marriage group,” firstly, the Wife of Bath narrates that her Prologue is a fabliau related to the ‘bodily desire’ for the lower class. Nevertheless, in relation to ‘bodily desire,’ Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, *The Miller’s Tale* and *The Reeve’s Tale* have been categorized as the genre of fabliaux, which function that “the woman of fabliaux, odious as she is, shows something of middle classes” (Power 3). Secondly, her Tale, a romance, purports to “tell not something new, novel, but an old ‘storie,’ a true history of events remote in time and after in place, which the romancer has learned from some reliable ‘auctor’ or ancient tradition” (Burgess 7). But why does the Wife of Bath tell us a romance? Tison Pugh declares that to tell a romance is for good reason: “The narratives preceding her tale establish the expectation that she will tell a tale suited to her social class and vocation” (115). Actually, while telling a story, the speakers will choose a story which appropriately reflects her/his social status and character. Too, Pugh asserts his statement this way very well: “In the majority of the tales, the speaker’s economic class or vocation relates at least peripherally to the genre of his/her tale” (115). Her [The Wife of Bath] / his [Geoffrey Chaucer] story indeed performs the way of her/his ethnic thoughts and living: “The conventions of the romance genre require that there be such a final moment of revelation, of inner understanding, ‘purchased with suffering’” (McKinley 360). As the class of “marriage group” as well as *The Franklin’s Tale*, *The Squire’s Tale*, and *The Merchant’s Tale*, her Prologue and Tale deal with the problem of the truth because her Prologue is the “form of a literary confession” (Burgess 11). In “General Prologue,” Chaucer portrays Alison’s incredible appearance this way: the Wife of Bath, an earthy woman, woman warrior, pro-feminist, “breaks from her socio-economic position to tell a romance rather than a fabliau” (Pugh 115). As a storyteller (The Prologue) and a narrator (The Tale), the Wife of Bath by her narrative power reshapes and combines her outlook with her own story together. However, who is the Wife of Bath? What is her role-play? Ostensibly, Chaucer in *General Prologue* subtly details that the Wife of Bath is almost deaf, wears the beautiful clothes, goes to Jerusalem for three times and marries for five times: “Yblessed be God that I have wedded fyve!” (l. 44). What a wonderful woman the Wife of Bath is! Indeed, what she has done is not possible for others in her era. From the depiction of her wearing, readers can confirm Chaucer’s intention: he attempts to draw a *vulgar* image of Alison who behaves not like a

noble lady but a common girl. For example, her dressing—‘the linen coverings for head is almost ten pounds’—appropriately reflects her social status, not higher but lower. With her marriage experience for several times, the Wife of Bath construes that woman, a sovereign, has privileges to speak her private talk in public. “She was a worthy woman al hir lyve: / Housbondes at chieche dore she hadde five, / Withouten oother compaignye in youthe-- / But thereof nedeth nat to speke as nowthe” (l. 459-462). By telling the romance, the Wife of Bath undermines the patriarchal ideology because she acquires the narrative power to reconfigure her relationship with her five husbands. “‘By changing the sex of fatherly authority, the Wife of Bath reverses the usual order of things in the pathetic fiction of her gentle romance; in this way, she puts herself and all women on top in a more seriously subversive way’” (qtd. in Pugh 119). It clearly figures that the Wife of Bath, a female pioneer who challenges the male authority, executes her own law by her practices and pen. When people in the Middle Ages are educated and cultivated by the Church and the aristocracy, the Wife of Bath is not the one who follows the traditional rules. Actually, the Wife of Bath is the one who attempts to subvert the conventional bounds and customs. Therefore, based on such a wonderful contradiction, in this paper I am going to discuss her matrimonial discourse and the model of her matrimonial discourse, which confirm that the Wife of Bath is a pioneer of anti-patrilinealism.

## II. The Wife of Bath’s Matrimonial Discourses

The Wife of Bath speaks out her matrimonial discourse in public because she is capable of unifying her interpretation and interpellation as a whole. From her matrimonial discourse, we learn that the Wife of Bath, an “incurable romantic,” is a practicer of pre-feminist even though she has been married for five husbands but still welcomes her sixth husband. From her discourse, we know that her marriage decrees provide a safe space for her to support some parts of her ideological codes of sexual life. While dealing with her marriage “business,”<sup>1</sup> the Wife of Bath, a defender and expert of marriage, executes her matrimonial discourses very well. For example, at the beginning of her Prologue, the Wife of Bath, Alison, proudly purports that she is a well-experienced marriage expert: “Experience, though noon auctoritee / Were in this world, is right ynogh for me / To speke of wo that is in marriage” (l. 1-3). As a deemed well-experienced marriage expert, the Wife of Bath opines that marriage implicates the substitutes of a flower and a fruit, which embellish the fertile vegetation and a kind of birth: “I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age / In the actes and in fruyt of mariage” (l. 113-114). To her, love is not the central principle: “‘Marriage is no excuse for not loving’ is the first of the rules of love” (Power 15). As a bawdy woman who is always eager to the fulfillment of her sexual appetites, the Wife of Bath insists that the purpose of marriage is to give birth of baby and nurture the next generation. Also, the Wife of Bath

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<sup>1</sup> When reading its contents, I would like to interrogate the purpose of the Wife of Bath’s marriage because I consider that to the Wife of Bath marriage is just like an implement to achieve her higher social position. Even though the Wife of Bath undergoes several times of marriage experiences with her five husbands, she doesn’t care about her husbands’ sensation toward her, but she seriously cares about how many prosperity and dowry she can inherit after her husbands die. Thus, from her point of view of “money marriage system,” I would like to say the Wife of Bath’s marriage is just like the execution of her business affairs.

regards that her marriage is a way to execute the biological nature or science: “Chaucer appears to be preparing Alison to narrate a tale matching her own lascivious lifestyle” (Pugh 116).

Trusteth right wel, they were nat maad for noght.  
Glose whoso wole, and seye bothe up and down,  
That they were maked for purgacioun  
Of uryne, and oure bothe thynges smale  
Were eek to knowe a femele from a male,  
And for noon oother cause, -- say ye no?  
The experience woot wel it is noght so. (l. 118-124)

On her nuptial bed, the Wife of Bath acquires the higher climax of physical desire when she “delights in sexual favor men provide, . . . , as part of an ideological code of sexual behaviors, attempts to construct her sexual identity as illicit” (Pugh 117). As a matter of fact, in the male-dominated society during Chaucer’s era, the sexual intercourse is man’s implement because by the physical contact man can ‘control’ woman. The method for man to ‘control’ woman is skillfully to use the spermatic fluid; therefore, her man can express his manliness very well. “Thanne were they maad upon a creature / To purge uryne, and eek for engendrure” (l. 133-134). The Wife of Bath states that on the nuptial bed when a man stretches his hands to a woman, a man is desirable to express his manpower to the woman. To man, this is his physical authoritative power to ‘control’ his woman. The close complete union between husband and wife is an obligation of a man who can present his unspeakable love to his wife. Hence, the Wife of Bath asserts that her sexual relationships with her five husbands are her greater concerns. From her own theory, the Wife of Bath tells her listeners that man on the nuptial bed must pay their marital debts. “Why sholde men elles in hir bookes sette / That man shal yelde to his wyf hire dette? (l. 129-130). But what is her equipment when she attempts to ‘control’ her man? The Wife of Bath details that the best quality of her ‘control theories’ are deceit, weeping and weaving: “Deceite, wepyng, spynnyng God hath yive / To wommen kyndely, whil that they may lyve” (l. 401-402). But for these three strategies of ‘control theories,’ she also admits that the sexual intercourse and the sweet talk are the best quality instruments for her to conquer her five husbands. “In wyfhod I wol use myn instrument / As frely as my makere hath it sent” (l. 149-150). However, even though the Wife of Bath is a handywoman and skillful weaver of love, she always complains that some of her husbands cannot execute their manliness. Due to their sexual impotence, the Wife of Bath often teases and humiliates them when some of her husbands are incapable of executing their sexual obligation to her.

The thre were goode men, and riche, and olde;  
Unnethe myghte they the statut holde  
In which that they were bounden unto me.  
Ye woot wel what I meene of this, pardee!  
As help me god, I laughe whan I thynke  
How pitously a-nyght I made hem swynke! (l. 197-202)

In her Prologue while telling her husbands' sexual impotence, the Wife of Bath does not agree that the sexuality is man's privileges, as her Prologue, a fabliau, metaphorically aims at the woman's desires and privileges of sexuality. For example, Tison Pugh expounds, "In the fabliau world of Alison's 'Prologue,' the genre has been so thoroughly queered that male sexual agency shrivels and dies" (125). More important, her sexual economy is her expression of physical desire, as from her discourse we learn that her rhetorical strategy exposes her disdain for rarefied vision of love. From her Prologue, she reiterates that her five submissive husbands do not belong to the group of dominators but the group of maverick. Hence, by chance she gets her power to control her husbands and her rhetorical power to tell her wonderful stories. This contrary situation between two sexes indicates that whereas her husbands are in the margin, the Wife of Bath, the marriage expert, is at the center.

They had me yeven hir lond and hir tresoor;  
 Me neded nat do lenger diligence  
 To wynne hir love, or doon hem reverence.  
 They loved me so wel, by God above,  
 That I ne tolde no deyntee of hir love!  
 A wys womman wol bisye hire evere in oon  
 To gete hire love, ye, ther as she hath noon. (l. 204-210)

As a victor who wins her five husbands' love, the Wife of Bath proudly proclaims that her "private talk" in public and the female enchantment are the best strategies to control her men. Of course by her strategy, she wins the dominated power and really becomes a sovereign. "For thogh he looked as a wood leon, / Yet sholde he faille of his conclusion." (l. 429-430). Nevertheless, it doesn't mean that they would win her love as a return-gift. To her, instead of her love return, she just concerns with her economic profits and how many prosperities she could inherit after her husbands die. The Wife of Bath believes that she possesses with the supreme powers to control her husbands' bodies when they are "tied to a man's paying of his martial debt, a sexual" (Pugh 126). "I have the power duryng al my lyf / Upon his propre body, and nocht he. / Right thus the apostel tolde it unto me; / And bad oure housbondes for to love us weel" (l. 158-161). Definitely, it can be confirmed that the Wife of Bath, whose "speech articulates the phallogocentric conditions of the discourse within which she and her readership are constituted, and provides a critique of these patriarchal foundations of language" (qtd. in Pugh 120), is a successful practitioner of anti-patrilinealism. As a woman warrior who plots against the male's power and kingdom, the Wife of Bath wins her husbands' bodies, since "the price of the phallus is the rest of the body" (qtd. in Carter 340). When she wins her husbands' love, we realize that the organ of phallus, a symbol of the male power, is castrated by her female femininity. In her Prologue, for instance, her fourth and fifth husbands finally become her subalterns. At the rudimentary relationship of marriage, her two husbands dominate the whole situation and possess with the whole prosperity. By contrast, instead of her husbands' manpower, the Wife of Bath becomes a powerful medium by her rhetoric discourse. In the meantime, she is really a handywoman who can seduce the man whom she wants to hunt. She commands that the masculine nature is her feminine temperaments. While her husbands transform into the submissive

creatures, not only the Wife of Bath can freely speak about the joys of sex and the limitation of love, but also can reconstruct a feminine disposition to control her men. From her Prologue, love, marriage, gentleness, virtue, “what does woman want,” and quest for true love are apparently represented. Among these represented issues, we know that the Wife of Bath’s rhetoric “allows her to deflate the pretense of romance in the light of her own experiences with male/female sexual relationships” (Pugh 120-121). When asserting her discourses on the ‘fabliau’ in her Prologue, the Wife of Bath mentions her represented zodiac astrology. As a representative of Venus whose perfect skill is to hunt for the men she wants, the Wife of Bath from her appearance is to be known as a “sexually active and her will must be done” (Carter 340). In her Tale, the knight, the victim of the old hag, is not only a subaltern but also a part of redemption under the female dominant. While aligning herself with Venus and Mars, the Wife of Bath explicates that the lusty Venus and the violent Mars would converge. From her female qualities, the Wife of Bath really possesses some kinds of fabliaux spirits. “For certes, I am al venerien / In feelynge, and myn herte is marcién. / Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse, / And mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse” (l. 609-612). From the alliance between Venus’s unchecked sexuality and Mars’s aggression, we learn that the Wife of Bath “mocks the pretensions of romance while zealously pursuing her own sexual agenda” (qtd. in Pugh 121). In all of many husbands, Alison (the Wife of Bath in her Prologue) loves Jankyn so much: “I trowe I loved hym best, for that he [Jankyn] / Was of his love daungerous to me.” (l. 513-514). However, even if Jankyn is a misogynist whose zodiac sign relates to Mars: “Myn ascendent was taur, and mars therinne” (l. 613), the Wife of Bath misses and loves him from her deep mind. However, it is very ironic that Jankyn always fights against her, quarrels with her and finally causes her deaf. On her nuptial bed, the Wife of Bath really enjoys and expresses her sexual pleasure after Jankyn transforms his masculine powers into femininity and loses his privileges of male subject. After her subversion of male’s status, the Wife of Bath becomes the subjectivity from the objectivity. Thus, she can proceed to “describe her egalitarian nature in the pursuit of men” (Pugh 127). At any rate, the Wife of Bath at this moment doesn’t represent the sacrificial goat anymore. Actually, the Wife of Bath is a real woman warrior who controls and dominates her men. Her female image is not the Eva who allures Adam to eat the Fruit of Knowledge and brings about the degradation of man: “Of Eva first, that for hir wikkednesse / Was al mankynde broght to wrecchednesse” (l. 715-716). Too, her image is not a second Eva because she eventually breaks up the traditional image of woman. Unfortunately, from Jankyn’s point of view, no matter how the Wife of Bath is a dominator, she still possesses with the images of evil and sin: “O leeve sire shrewe, jhesu shorte thy lyf! / Yet prechestow and seyst and hateful wyf / Yrekened is for oon of these meschances” (l. 365-367). From her case, it figures that a woman can be a master in marriage life when having her own rhetoric power; a woman does not belong to a part of a man; a woman is not a subaltern at all: “It is a great grace to be a woman: more women are saved than men” (qtd. in Power 6). For woman, even though the conventional trauma performs that a woman is a part of a man, the independent woman has her privileges to change the swing of pendulum. The woman is not a fated, destined.



### III. The Wife of Bath As A Pioneer of Anti-patrilinealism

The woman has been shaped as a voiceless object in the Middle Ages; however, Chaucer converts such conventional bound and gives it a new shape of life. In his writing, Chaucer introduces that the Wife of Bath whose voice is so loud and strong has been defined as a counter traditional character in the canonical literature. When stating her marriage condition, the Wife of Bath is an active and aggressive pro-feminist. Amazingly, she says that Paul gives wives authority over their husbands.

I have the power duryng al my lyf  
Upon his propre body, and noght he.  
Right thus the apostel tolde it unto me;  
And badoure housbondes for to love us weel.  
Al this sentence me liketh every deel --. (l. 158-162)

Under the patriarchal society, a woman is taught to be a tender wife; to the contrary, the Wife of Bath, a violent executor and female pioneer who fights against the patrilinealism ideology, converts the traditional discipline in reality. The Wife of Bath is aligned with the legal profession in terms of her use of similar rhetorical strategies: “Legal argument has a certain mechanical quality, once one begins to identify its characteristic operations. Language seems to be ‘speaking the subject, . . .’” (qtd. in Thomas 259). In fact, the Wife of Bath not only dominates her five husbands by means of her superior privileges, but also seizes the rhetorical authority in “her mastery of masculine modes of argument” (qtd. in Thomas 257). “I have the power duryng al my lyf / Upon his propre body, and noght he. / Right thus the apostel tolde it unto me; / And badoure housbondes for to love us weel. / Al this sentence me liketh every deel--”(l. 158-162). As a word warrior who obtains her privileges and becomes a sovereign, the Wife of Bath executes her rhetorical power of matrimonial discourses very well when she surely creates a very safe space for women. According to Tison Pugh, the Wife of Bath gains “power both as a member of the story-telling audience and as a teller in her own right through the rhetorical force of genre” (118). The Wife of Bath insists that although Jesus Christ is the holiest Father and dominator, she should still have her own free will as her marriage attitudes.

Virginittee is greet perfeccion,  
And continence eek with devocion,  
But crist, that of perfeccion is welle,  
Bad nat every wight he sholde go selle  
Al that he hadde, and gyve it to the poore  
And in swich wise folwe hym and his foore.  
He spak to hem that wolde lyve parfitly;  
And lordynges, by youre leve, that am nat I.  
I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age  
In the actes and in fruyt of mariage. (l. 105-114)

In the conventional patriarchal society, Jesus Christ, the Holy God, the Creator of man, administers His people by means of His authoritative power. Nevertheless, even though God is a great One, the Wife of Bath reinforces that in her marriage life she has established her own kingdom by her own matrimonial discourses. She claims that she can create her marriage history and story by her own pen, by her matrimonial discourses and by her beliefs. “The Wife of Bath meditates between the written laws of marriage found in the New Testament and the ‘custom’ of marriage established by experience” (Thomas 261). While stating her relationship with her five husbands, the Wife of Bath says that even if she has been married for five times, she is always a sovereign because she is “presenting one side of a battle of words” (Thomas 261). The violent quarrel between Alison and Jankyn causes her deaf after she tears one page of his misogynist book: “For that I rente out of his book a leef, / That of the strook myn ere wax al deaf” (l. 635-636). As her fifth husband and prominent misogynist, Jankyn insists that the fall of Adam is due to Eve’s seduction of eating ‘Adam’s apple.’ “‘Woman is to be preferred to man, to wit in material: Adam made from clay and Eve from side of Adam; in place: Adam made outside paradise and Eve win; in conception: a woman conceived God which a man did not do’” (qtd. in Power 6). Based on his theory of misogynist, Jankyn, “a clerk of Oxenford” (l. 156), never praises woman: “For trusteth wel, it is an impossible / That any clerk wol speke good of wyves, / But if it be of hooly seintes lyves, / Ne of noon oother womman never the mo” (l. 688-691). As a pioneer of chauvinism, Jankyn opines that woman is the spring of evil and sin. Jankyn believes that a man prefers the vicious animals to the wicked wives in house: “‘Bet is,’ quod he, ‘hye in the roof abyde, / Than with an angry wyf down in the hous” (l. 778-779). Surprisingly, after their intense quarrel, Jankyn submits himself to her instruments: “‘deere suster Alisoun, / As help me God, I shal thee nevere smyte! / That I have doon, it is thyself to wyte. / Foryeve it me, and that I thee biseke!’” (l. 804-807). After Jankyn reads “her a case history of wicked wives, and she quites him by tearing ‘thre leves’ out of the book and making him later ‘brenne his book’” (Thomas 268), the Wife of Bath still seizes the authoritative rhetorical power to control her husband. She has authority over her own and subverts male’s status as the dominator. Susanne Sara Thomas eulogizes that “she [the Wife of Bath] is on the side of the unwritten law” (268). As a good weaver who executes her rhetorical power, the Wife of Bath actively handles her sexual relationship with her husbands and knows what men’s desire very well. In her Prologue, her words has collaborated that she really has her dominated power both in her oral rhetoric and her experiment of marriage. When having her power, she freely talks about her matrimonial discourses to public. The above-mentioned examples prove that the Wife of Bath executes her theory of marriage. Doubtless she has been deemed as a marriage expert who controls her husbands very well. In order to prove what she says is true, she in her Tale exemplifies that the Arthurian knight who deflowers a young lady’s virginity is the best model of ‘cleped hende man.’ The Arthurian knight, due to his unforgivable behavior, is punished to exile by the loyal Arthurian king. In his lingering lifetime, the Arthurian knight must confess his guilt after he starts his adventure to search for the queen’s inquiry. Strikingly, in her Prologue and Tale, her husbands, the knight and the Arthur king become the submissive men whereas she, the loathly hag and the queen are the representatives of the supreme masters.

#### IV. The Wife of Bath's Example of Matrimonial Discourses

In her Prologue, she clearly explicates her marriage concepts. Man is a subaltern while woman is a dominator. The rapist knight is a good surrogate practitioner of her matrimonial discourses. The Wife of Bath, a representative of the loathly hag, is almost like her author. "Of pilgrims she is closet to Chaucer. Like her creator, she criticises through comedy, she weighs experience against authority, she is aware of the sexuality within textuality and she jokingly subverts the conventions of male authorship" (qtd. in Carter 340). Firstly, her Prologue is a kind of literary confession. When trying to discover her true love, she exposes her maintenance of matrimonial discourses. "The Wife of Bath's Prologue has the form of a literary confession, a dramatic monologue in which the speaker explains, and often defends, his or her sinful way of life" (Burgess 11). As a marriage expert, the Wife of Bath proclaims her experiences can make her conquer her husbands. As a speaker and representative of the loathly hag, she constructs her masculine temperaments of a woman whose character is almost akin to her author and herself. Secondly, her Tale is a story of execution of her matrimonial discourses because the loathly hag shows the double functions into the nuptial bed of heterosexuality. Susan Carter puts it very well: "The central motif of her tale—the loathly hag—has an active sexuality that somehow wriggles free of the Christian yoke of heterosexual relations and of authorial censure, offering to heterosexuality the lesson that gender roles are not the only option, and that female sovereignty may bring happiness" (239). The Wife of Bath, a pioneer, defender and warrior, attempts to teach us a lesson that woman should be an active dominator in marriage life. "Alison is a defender of marriage, providing she rules, and, far from bitter, she has an infectious optimism" (Burgess 11). It easily figures that her narrative schema on her Tale is "tale-in-tale." In her "tale-in-tale," after deflowering a young maiden's virginity, the Arthurian knight is punished to exile for twelve months so that in his lingering lifetime he could confess his awful guilt. The narrator is actually the queen, the knight and the older lady, because they express their opinions about the knight's disloyalty. Through Alison's storytelling, Chaucer states that "The Wife of Bath's Tale," a brief romance, is a "version of the tale of the loathly hag" (Burgess 11), which goes back to the day of King Arthur. Wonderfully, the loathly hag's original identity is a fair princess but she transforms herself into an ugly creature. The purpose of her transformation is to test the rapist knight and exemplify the "main theme of Alison's prologue, that women should be sovereign in marriage" (Burgess 11). After his deflowering a young maiden's virginity, the rapist knight must start his adventure to search for the queen's interpellation: "What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren" (l. 905). The central motif of the knight's journey is to exploit what woman's desire suited with the theme of romance, because in romance the knight should confess his guilt and then start his adventure. If so, in romance, the theme of courtly love appropriated with Eileen Power's illustration could emerge clearly: "Great ladies were the main beneficiaries as well as the main clientele of the literature and art inspired by courtly love" (15).

At the closing of "The Wife of Bath's Tale," the loathly hag can be released from her spell by her submissive husband's kiss after she quotes: "Kys me, . . . , we be no lenger wrothe; / For, by my trouthe, I wol be to yow bothe, / This is to seyn, ye, bothe fair and good" (l. 1239-1241). From the Arthurian knight's sincere confession, we see clearly that "The Wife of Bath's Tale" subverts the traditional fairy

tale, 'The Frog Prince.' As a matter of fact, 'The Frog Prince' is a kind of feminine version of the popular fairy story because the female femininity can conquer her stubborn husband in the patriarchal society.

I put me in youre wise governance;  
Cheseth youreself which may be moost plesance,  
And moost honour to yow and me also.  
I do no fors the wheither of the two;  
For as yow liketh, it suffiseth me.  
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. (l. 1231-1238)

After the knight rapes a virtuous maiden, he starts his journey, and what his hunt is "transposed to the rape of the 'mayde walkynge him befor'—like a stalker he approaches from behind—in keeping with Chaucer's more significant relocation: the placing of sovereignty within the personal power politics of marriage" (Carter 334). The purpose of the knight's journey is to discover the queen's interrogation: "What thyng that worldly wommen loven best" (l. 1033). Twelve months later the knight loudly expounds what he has obtained from the old loathly hag. "Wommen desiren to have sovereynetee / As wel over his 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" (l. 1038-1042). When knowing the knight's guilty behavior, the queen who gives the rapist knight's penalty begs the king for interrogating his crime. "The queene thanketh the kyng with al hir myght, / And after this thus spak she to the knyght, / Whan that she saugh hir tyme, upon a day: / Thou standest yet, quod she, in swich array / That of thy lyf yet hastow no suretee." (l. 899-903). When receiving the king's supreme privileges judged the knight's criminal behavior, the queen is "authorized to take over the king's power as ultimate judge" (Carter 335). As a surrogate speaker of the legitimate power, the queen in court possesses her privileges and her feminine jury will help her to decide the knight's destiny. "Yet wol I yeve thee leve for to gon / A twelf-month and a day, to seche and leere / An answeere suffisant in this mateere; / And suretee wol I han, er that thou pace, / Thy body for to yelden in this place" (l. 908-913). Above cases clearly show that man must listen to woman's suggestion, and the rapist knight, the executor of 'the literary confession,' should sincerely confess his guilt by his gentleness behavior. If the rapist knight really accepts his confession of guilt, he could find and win his true love. "This is to seyn, ye, bothe fair and good. / I prey to God that I moote sterven wood, / But I to yow be also good and trewe / As evere was wyf, syn that the world was newe" (l. 1241-1244). The rapist knight who learns a lesson from the loathly hag must choose one of the hag's decisions after the old hag instructs him a good answer: a woman wants to have a submissive husband.

I put me in youre wise governance;  
Cheseth youreself which may be moost plesance,  
And moost honour to yow and me also.  
I do no fors the wheither of the two;  
For as yow liketh, it suffiseth me.  
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. (l. 1231-1238)

Because of his submissive reaction to the old hag, everyone in court listens to his words. Until the rapist knight answers the queen's question, "what is woman most desire," everyone accepts his interpretation, "woman wants to have an obedient husband." Everyone in court accepts his explanation and gives him applause. When the rapist knight finishes his task, the old hag asks that the knight should execute his promise, "what she say he should obey." Thanks to the witness of their wedding ceremony, the knight marries the old hag. At the first night of their marriage, the rapist knight is unwilling to accept the old hag as his wife; however, after her moral dedication, the rapist knight converts his attitudes. After the old hag's moral education and his transformation, the knight sincerely accepts the old hag as his wife. Thus, the knight executes his "promise" to his ugly wife because he keeps his words to her and finally becomes her submissive husband. Of course after the knight's sincere confession, "The Wife of Bath's Tale" ends with a happy conclusion: 'Transformation invites celebration.' The function of the old hag is to help the knight to be a best model of the Wife of Bath's matrimonial discourses. "And thys they lyve unto hir lyves ende / In parfit joye; and jhesu crist us sende / Housbondes meeke, yonge, and fressh abedde, / And grace t' overbyde hem that we wedde" (l. 1257-1260). What's more, from this happy conclusion, the Wife of Bath not only establishes her own kingdom but also proclaims her authoritative rhetorical power. Without a doubt, the old hag is a 'rite of passage.' The knight learns how to be a faithful and submissive husband by the old hag's instruction. Actually, at the first night of his newly marriage, the knight considers that the hag's body represents a sign of ambivalence.

For the knight who began as a rapist, the experience of women is both loathly and lovely. His acquired lesson about giving women sovereignty has been loathly; once he has learned it, he will be rewarded with the lovely. The loathly bride offers the knight a choice . . . , of two possible limitations on her performance as wife. (Carter 338)

After their arguments, the knight totally accepts the old hag's suggestion and kisses her. After his practice of 'promise,' the old hag executes her "promise" to him. Hence, the old hag suddenly transforms herself into a second Cinderella: 'an ugly girl becomes a fair blonde princess.' From the old hag's moral instruction, the knight's response of his guilty behavior is a 'part of the tale's redemption.' Only through his sincere confession, the knight fulfills the Wife of Bath's matrimonial discourses. As a best model of the Wife of Bath's story, the rapist knight transforms into a submissive husband, but he still possesses his rights to decide his destiny. Wonderfully, through the Wife of Bath's storytelling, we clearly read that there are two transformation—the first one is the old hag's shape-shifting, and the second one is the knight's changing to be a submissive husband. At any rate, no matter what had happened before, everyone in the final denouement is happy.

## V. Conclusion

The tale of romance always offers the happy ending as a return gift. In her Prologue, as a major narrator and storyteller, the Wife of Bath tells us her matrimonial discourses and her sexual ideology toward men, even if she has been married five husbands, but still welcomes her sixth husband. “Welcome the sixte, whan that evere he shal” (l. 45). After illustrating her amazing examples, the Wife of Bath, whose Prologue corroborates “the fabliau vision of female supremacy blossoms from momentary fun to lasting vision” (Pugh 134), could freely gloss her amorous standpoints. Furthermore, although her Tale is a romance that exposes the theme of male’s submissiveness, the loathly hag in relation to Alison’s marriage notes the very similarity of narrative paradigm between “the two and the suitability of the tale’s motif to the Wife as tale teller” (Carter 329). After reading her romance through her fabliau spirit, we realize that the instance of Chaucer’s Arthurian romance is a very ironic issue as well as her queering of masculine identity. In her matrimonial discourses, the Wife of Bath exactly authenticates her rhetorical authority. Through her emphasis of marriage by “her law,” the Wife of Bath can write her story and history so that she is capable of being a part of new order of things. From one point, both in Prologue and Tale, the Wife of Bath in public loudly speaks that she is able to unify her interpretation and interpellation as a whole. From other point, by Chaucer’s depiction, the authorial voice seems to embrace the Wife of Bath, although she is not a blonde beauty but a new independent woman. Thus, as a woman warrior and female orator, the Wife of Bath can speak in public; if so, everyone can believe her oration.

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