

KARADENİZ TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY * THE INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF WESTERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE

MASTER'S PROGRAM IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS

**THE FEMALE REBELLION THROUGH LANGUAGE: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE
ANALYSIS OF THE WIFE OF BATH'S PROLOGUE AND TALE**

MASTER'S THESIS

Mehmet KAMMAN

FEBRUARY - 2025

TRABZON

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Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nazan YILDIZ ÇİÇEKÇİ

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APPROVAL

Upon the submission of the dissertation, **Mehmet KAMMAN** has defended the study “**The Female Rebellion through Language: A Critical Discourse Analysis of *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale***” in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master’s Program In Applied Linguistics at Karadeniz Technical University, and the study has been found fully adequate in scope and quality as a thesis by **unanimous / majority** on **25.03.2025**.

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Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	V
ÖZET.....	VII
ABSTRACT	VIII
LIST OF TABLES	IX
LIST OF FIGURES	X
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	XI

CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1-6
1.1. Introduction.....	1
1.2. Background of the Study.....	1
1.3. Significance of the Study	3
1.4. Limitations of the Study.....	4
1.5. Purpose of the Study	4
1.6. Statement of the Problem	4
1.7. Research Questions	5
1.8. Hypotheses	5
1.9. Outline of the Thesis	5

CHAPTER TWO

2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7-26
2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis.....	7
2.2. Gender Studies and CDA	9
2.3. Women in The Middle Ages	12
2.4. Women in Medieval Literature	15
2.5. Geoffrey Chaucer	16
2.6. Geoffrey Chaucer as A Literary Figure.....	17
2.7. <i>The Canterbury Tales</i>	18
2.8. The Portrait of the Wife of Bath	19

2.9. <i>The Prologue of the Wife of Bath</i>	20
2.10. <i>The Tale of the Wife of Bath</i>	22
2.11. Previous Studies on the Wife of Bath	23

CHAPTER THREE

3. METHODOLOGY	27-60
CHAPTER FOUR	32
4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	32
4.1. Findings of <i>The Wife of Bath's Prologue</i>	32
4.1.1. <i>The Wife of Bath's Prologue</i> : Synopsis and Commentary	33
4.1.2. Marriage, Sex and Biblical Discourse.....	33
4.1.3. Sexuality	39
4.1.4. Challenging and Subverting Religious Doctrine	41
4.2. Findings of <i>The Wife of Bath's Tale</i>	44
4.2.1. <i>The Wife of Bath's Tale</i> : Synopsis and Commentary	44
4.2.2. Marriage.....	45
4.2.3. Victimization.....	46
4.2.4. Liberation and Autonomy	46
4.2.5. Subverting the Established Conventions.....	47
4.3. The Frequency of the Gendered Words Used by The Wife of Bath	48
4.3.1. Gendered Terms.....	49
4.3.2. Religious References and Narrative Control	53
4.3.3. Authority and Marriage.....	54
4.3.4. Power and Control	55
4.4. Discussion	56

CHAPTER FIVE

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	61-61
REFERENCES	62
CURRICULUM VITAE	70

ÖZET

Geoffrey Chaucer'ın *Canterbury Hikayeleri* Orta Çağ toplumunu her yönüyle tasvir ederek okuyuculara zamanının sosyal, ekonomik ve politik bir panoramasını sunmaktadır. Metinde 14. yüzyılın sonlarındaki İngiliz toplumundaki sosyal normlar ve beklentilerle iç içe geçmiş bir şekilde toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin tasviri ise özellikle dikkat çekmektedir. Karakterlerin önsözleriyle birlikte 24 hikâyeden oluşan metinde erkekler genellikle otorite, bilgi, özgüven ve fiziksel güçle ilişkilendirilirken, kadınlar ise daha çok tevazu, zayıflık, teslimiyet ve annelikle özdeşleştirilmektedir. Anlatı, genel hatlarıyla, Hristiyanlığın etkisi dolayısıyla kadın düşmanlığıyla nam salmış Orta Çağ'da tanımlayıcı bir özellik olarak boy gösteren kadınların kısıtlı eylemliliğini yansıtmaktadır. Edebiyatın feminist ikonu olarak kabul edilen Bath'lı Kadın karakterinin önsözü ve hikayesi ise, Orta Çağ kadınlarını ikinci plana atan geleneksel cinsiyet rollerini büyük ölçüde altüst etmektedir. Bath'lı Kadın karakteri, cinsiyetler arasındaki eşitsizliklerin eleştirel bir incelemesini sunmaktadır. Bath'lı Kadın evlilikte kadının otoritesini savunup, dini anlatılara kadın bakış açısıyla yeni bir yorum getirmesiyle Orta Çağ cinsiyet normlarına ve ataerkil hegemonyaya karşı gelir. Bath'lı Kadın karakterinin bu sıra dışı ve asi temsili, feminist literatürde edebi anlamda geniş çapta incelenmiş fakat dilbilimsel olarak incelenmesi yapılmamıştır. Bu çalışma, Bath'lı Kadın karakterinin Önsöz ve Hikayesini Eleştirel Söylem Analizi yoluyla analiz ederek bu büyük boşluğu doldurmayı hedeflemektedir. Metinlerin Eleştirel Söylem Analizi (CDA) yapılarak yürütülen ve nitel analizi dayanan bu çalışma, Bath'lı Kadın karakterinin kullandığı dilsel ve retorik yapıların Orta Çağ cinsiyet geleneklerini ve kadınlara otoriteden uzakta aşağı bir konum veren dini kaynakları nasıl altüst ettiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Disiplinler arası bir çalışma olan ve günümüz toplumsal cinsiyet çalışmalarına da ışık tutan bu tez, feminist bir edebiyat ikonunun dili ve söylemi üzerinden Orta Çağ toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine ilişkin bulgularıyla hem dilbilim hem de edebiyat çalışmalarına katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Geoffrey Chaucer, *Bath'lı Kadının Önsözü ve Hikayesi*, Eleştirel Söylem Analizi, Patriyarka, toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri

ABSTRACT

Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* delineates every facet of medieval society, providing readers with a social, economic and political panorama of his times. The depiction of gender roles of the late 14th-century English society in the text is specifically distinguished, entwined with the social norms and expectations. Within the text, which consists of 24 tales along with the characters' prologues, men are generally associated with authority, knowledge, self-confidence and physical strength, women, by contrast, are more identified with modesty, weakness, submission and motherhood. The narrative in general terms reflects the restricted agency of women, which emerged as a defining feature in medieval times, notorious for misogyny, with the influence of Christianity. The portrait and the tale of the Wife of Bath, acknowledged as a feminist icon of literature, radically subverts the traditional gender roles, putting medieval women in a secondary position. The Wife of Bath offers a critical examination of the disparities between the sexes. She opposes medieval gender norms and patriarchal hegemony by defending women's authority in marriage and offering fresh perspectives on religious narratives from a female point of view. This unconventional and rebellious illustration of the Wife of Bath has been widely studied in a literary sense within feminist literature, but it has not been examined in a linguistic sense. This study aims to fill this huge gap by analysing *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *Tale* through critical discourse analysis (CDA). By qualitative analysis of the texts in line with CDA, the study reveals how the Wife of Bath's linguistic and rhetorical structures deconstruct the medieval gender conventions and religious sources assigning women an inferior position away from authority. As an interdisciplinary study, the thesis aims to contribute to both linguistics and literature studies by its findings on medieval gender roles as they are depicted in the language and discourse of a feminist literary icon, which also sheds light on current gender studies.

Keywords: Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *Tale*, Critical Discourse Analysis, patriarchy, gender roles

LIST OF TABLES

Table No	Table Name	Page Nr.
1	Total words in The Wife's Prologue Corpus and The Wife's Tale Corpus.....	30
2	The Frequency of the Gendered Words Used by The Wife of Bath.....	48
3	Gendered Terms.....	49
4	Religious References and Narrative Control	53
5	Authority and Marriage	54
6	Power and Control	55

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure No	Figure Name	Page Nr.
1	Critical Discourse Analysis Framework.....	8
2	A Theoretical Model Based On Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Theory.....	8
3	Gender Differences.....	9
4	Traditional Gender Stereotypes	10
5	Gender Inequality	11
6	Women as The Fourth Estate.....	14
7	The Wife of Bath in the Ellesmere Manuscript	20
8	: View of the Concordance Tool Showing the Use of 'man'	50
9	View of the Concordance Tool Showing the Use of 'wife'	52
10	View of the Concordance Tool Showing the Use of 'chaste'	53
11	View of the Concordance Tool Showing the Use of 'Apostle'	54
12	View of the Concordance Tool Showing the Use of 'marriage'	55
13	View of the Concordance Tool Showing the Use of 'wise'	56

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDA : Critical Discourse Analysis
CL : Critical Linguistics



CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

In English literature, *The Canterbury Tales*, a medieval work by Geoffrey Chaucer, has long been considered a milestone as it contributed to the era with its narrative depth and vibrant characters. Chaucer's Wife of Bath keeps a high profile with a robust character among other pilgrims due to her nonconforming gender attributes, such as her defiance, outspokenness, autonomy, and wit. She defies accepted notions and rules of patriarchal power structures. Her prologue and tale give her a chance to raise her voice by challenging preconceived notions and rules of a male-dominated society hence, the language she uses makes her a perfect candidate for critical discourse analysis studies. Therefore, as a character, the Wife of Bath has drawn the attention of scholars for centuries as she embodies a rich tapestry of discourse. Many scholars have studied the vivid characters of *The Canterbury Tales* in a literary sense, but their investigation did not include a linguistic approach, and the linguistic analysis of the characters was largely neglected. By conducting critical discourse analysis to fill the gap, this study aims to investigate how the Wife of Bath constructs her narrative to represent a female authority figure in a male-dominated medieval context. Through analyzing her narrative style, rhetorical questions, use of language and linguistic strategies, this thesis examines the Wife of Bath's constructive process of an authoritative identity. Critical Discourse Analysis will provide us with a lens through which we can observe language, power and ideology within the discourse of the Wife of Bath.

1.2. Background of the Study

"Men are from Mars and women are from Venus" is a frequently used expression which elucidates the gender differences in the ways both genders feel, think, or act. This expression pinpoints the notion that men and women originated from different planets and represent opposite poles (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005: 633; Ellemers, 2018: 275). Moreover, it suggests that men and women have congenital differences that beget gender inequality and gender bias (Alba, 2018, p. 185). In fact, the concept of gender, taking part in Plato's Symposium, too, has been a major topic of discussion since the dawn of humanity. Today, the concept of gender is generally examined in relation to gender and its roles. As McClure states, the two acknowledged genders, male and female, and the social roles associated with them were culturally determined and socially constructed

categories in ancient times (2002, p. 1). Today, it is seen that these circumstances have not changed much and that these roles have negative effects, especially on women. Therefore, the criticism of gender roles is mostly directed towards women. Similarly, Connell accentuates that modern research on gender was triggered by the women's movement for gender equality, and attributes this to the fact that in most gender systems in the world, men are the privileged and women are the disadvantaged (2009, p. 11). This brings forth the concept of the "woman question", which refers to the place and role of women in society. Connell states that this problem was especially studied by the sciences of sociology and psychology after the 1920s. However, the main line of academic thought took a different path in the 1930s with the spread of the concept of "social role". The concept of a socially provided script for individual behaviour, first learned and then acted out, is easily applied to gender. By the 1940s, the terms "male role" and "female role" were in use (pp. 29-32).

In the Middle Ages, notorious for its misogyny, the roles assigned to men and women were clearly defined and women were relegated to a secondary position. As stated by Bennett (1996), Chaucer's period was under the influence of male-dominated structures and women were subjugated to undertake the stereotypical roles cast by patriarchy (p. 55). In the medieval age, there was a significant inequality between men and women resulting from the power of the patriarchy and religious structures, which compelled women to be submissive. Therefore, women could not exceed the restraints imposed by patriarchal structures. (Butler, 1988, p. 526). However, Dinshaw (1989) points out that the prologue and the tale of the Wife of Bath in *the Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer epitomize a mutual interaction between the discourse and ideological rhetoric. Through her manipulative skills and intellect, the Wife of Bath establishes her identity as a liberated woman. The Wife of Bath's discursive strategies and distortion of the religious scripture against patriarchal structures, such as the church, highlight her ability to defy rules and conventions (pp. 73–74). Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, a renowned medieval narrative, has for centuries been considered a foundational work since it pioneered literary innovation with engaging plots and vibrant character portrayals in the context of English literature. The Wife of Bath holds a central role with a powerful and outspoken personality in Chaucer's work, standing out from the other pilgrims for her defiance of expected gender behaviors. In this respect, the Wife of Bath stands out as an assertive figure who challenges male-oriented restrictions. The language she employs makes her a great candidate for critical discourse analysis studies since her prologue and tale allow her an opportunity to speak up by questioning stereotypes and the norms of a male-dominated medieval society. Therefore, as a character, the Wife of Bath drew the attention of copious scholars for centuries as she embodies a feminist rebellion against male hegemony. In this sense, her assertive status, which shows a correlation with her narratives, puts her in a unique position for Critical Discourse Analysis. As the thesis suggests, critical discourse analysis will facilitate uncovering the ideology, language, and power relations residing in the narratives of the Wife of Bath and contribute to both linguistics and literary studies as well as to feminist studies.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) emerged at the beginning of the 1990s (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 5). It generally focuses on hegemony, injustice, social inequality, power abuse, power relations, and racism through examining linguistic patterns of discourse and discursive structures. CDA is a cross-disciplinary methodological approach that embodies various approaches from different disciplines and branches, aiming to survey the link between society and language. It investigates social problems by analysing political and social roles in which language establishes determined power, equality, and social ideologies. CDA introduces different models presented by prominent linguists such as Van Dijk, Wodak, and Fairclough, who built the foundations of CDA (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258).

This thesis addresses the issue that discursive and narrative dimensions of the Wife of Bath's discourse are not given due significance and relevant literature is deprived of the appropriate methodological approaches to one of the most autonomous female characters of the literature. Moreover, this study bestows on the understanding of Chaucer's great work and modern debates on gender inequality and female representation in the literary realm. Therefore, this study aspires to fill the gap that has occurred between linguistic and literary disciplines, eliciting the significance of CDA in revealing the language, power, and gender relationships in *The Canterbury Tales*. CDA will assist this study in investigating how the Wife of Bath constructs her narrative to represent a female authority figure. Through analysing her narrative style, rhetorical questions, use of language, and linguistic strategies, this thesis scrutinises the character's constructive process of an authoritative female identity. CDA will provide us with a lens through which we can observe language, power, and ideology within the discourse of the Wife of Bath, reflecting upon medieval gender roles and male and religious hegemony of the period.

1.3. Significance of the Study

While there has been extensive research on literary works in relation to gender through critical discourse analysis, there has been no study on Chaucer's The Wife of Bath, who is a pioneer of feminism, a master of rhetoric, and a virtuoso of verbal expression. This study provides valuable insights into literary scholarship through the layered analysis of how the Wife of Bath employs language and its features to construct her autonomous and defiant identity. Conducting this sort of analysis will give credit to Geoffrey Chaucer as a distinguished writer, and it will also facilitate the audience's understanding of gender dynamics steering the medieval society. The Wife of Bath's challenge to the rules of patriarchal structures of the medieval era places this study on modern discussions regarding gender inequalities. Moreover, this study emphasizes the importance of Critical Discourse Analysis as a methodological approach to literary and linguistic studies and the correlation between language and literature. CDA functions as a significant instrument to reveal the discourse of Chaucer's vividly drawn character. This analysis will uncover how the depiction of the character manoeuvres and criticizes the socio-cultural ideologies of Chaucer's time. Aside from its

importance, this research contains cultural allusions and will serve as a bridge between the medieval age and modern issues of society. In conclusion, this study not only deepens our understanding of Chaucer's character but also reflects timeless and universal themes.

1.4. Limitations of the Study

In the critical discourse analysis of the linguistic choices, biblical sources, and rhetorical patterns of the *Prologue* and the *Tale of the Wife of Bath* regarding the gender roles and assertion of female authority, there can naturally be limitations that must be acknowledged. First of all, the analytical reach of this research is restricted to the *Prologue* and the *Tale of the Wife of Bath*. Hence, there is little scope for drawing connections with the other characters of *The Canterbury Tales*. Correspondingly, it does not allow the researcher to examine, compare, and contrast the language and discourse of the other characters, particularly female ones. Second, the motives behind Chaucer's unique creation of the Wife of Bath are uncertain and her portrait can be interpreted as a woman's autonomy or an ironic overstatement. Therefore, the exact nature behind the text remains inconclusive and this ambiguity prevents a conclusive interpretation. Furthermore, in this thesis, rather than the original text written in Middle English, the modern English version of *The Canterbury Tales* is used since it is not a pure literature thesis but a linguistic one. Despite attempts made to preserve the original linguistic framework and to sustain the authenticity of the text, the rhetorical and syntactic nuances of Middle English may not be completely transmitted through translation.

1.5. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine *The Prologue* and *The Tale of the Wife of Bath* in the *Canterbury Tales* through Critical Discourse Analysis, mainly focusing on gender roles. This study predominantly deals with investigating how the Wife of Bath asserts her autonomy and standing as a female authority figure through her language and discourse. Though analysing the link between language and power regarding gender roles in the prologue and the tale of the Wife of Bath, this study aspires to elicit the language used by the Wife of Bath, an iconic feminist character. Consequently, this research aims to provide a fresh perspective regarding the Wife of Bath's linguistic choices, which enable her to reinstate her authority within a male-dominated medieval society.

1.6. Statement of the Problem

Although there have been abundant studies about the Wife of Bath focusing on her radical feminist stance as a medieval character, literature is deprived of studies that investigate her identity construction and female rebellion through rhetorical strategies and language use. Hence, there exists a gap in identifying how the author uses discursive patterns of language to criticize the male-

dominated society and the social commentary the Wife of Bath presents, as most scholars have approached the issue from a literary perspective. Concerning this, as a methodological approach, CDA constitutes a viable option to fill this research gap. Presently, this study intends to fill this gap by applying CDA to the narratives, the prologue and the tale of the Wife of Bath.

1.7. Research Questions

1. What kind of grammatical structures and rhetorical strategies does the Wife of Bath use in her prologue and tale to establish her defiant and autonomous status?
2. How do linguistic and narrative features in the Wife of Bath's discourse project her negotiation of power and resistance to the male-dominated conventions of society?
3. What is the role of the Wife of Bath's use of biblical and male-dominated narratives in strengthening her authority?

1.8. Hypotheses

This study lays its foundations on the hypothesis that the Wife of Bath, through the use of rhetorical strategies, biblical references, and other linguistic features, asserts her autonomy and authority and gains power over the narrative. As an authority figure, she defies the patriarchal rules and conventions of the medieval era and religious structures, primarily the church and the Bible. This study hypothesizes that discursive strategies, allusions, and subverting biblical sources reinforce the Wife of Bath's female authority. This study, through conducting Critical Discourse Analysis, reveals language patterns and rhetorical strategies that facilitate the Wife of Bath to resist the male-dominated society and to exceed the limits created by power structures. Therefore, the language used in both the Wife of Bath's prologue and tale enables her to stand as an authority figure and exert her sovereignty within the realms of medieval patriarchy.

1.9. Outline of the Thesis

This thesis aims to examine the language and discourse of the Wife of Bath in *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer by analysing her prologue and tale through critical discourse analysis with a focus on how the character constructs her autonomous and defiant identity against established gender roles and male and religious dominated medieval society through the use of language structures.

This thesis is composed of five chapters laid out under the titles of introduction, literature review, methodology, findings and discussion, and conclusions and recommendations. In the introduction chapter, the substructure of the research, the examination of the character of the Wife of Bath through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis, and the research questions are presented.

The purpose of conducting this research is elucidated in the background of the study. This section of the study is followed by the statement of the purpose and the significance of the study. Key term definitions used in this study are provided and the last section embodies the summary of the whole chapter.

The second chapter of the thesis presents the literature review that is relevant to the study. This section starts with a brief introduction to the chapter surveying existing literature on the portrayal of the Wife of Bath, following a brief piece of information on Critical Discourse Analysis, Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and The Wife of Bath, accompanied by the previous studies of scholars.

The third chapter provides the theoretical framework and methodology of the present study. The principles of Critical Discourse Analysis and how it is used to analyse the discourse of the Wife of Bath are explained in detail. This section includes the methods regarding the power, ideology, and language, which consist of the constructed narratives of the character.

The fourth chapter presents the findings of both the prologue and the tale of The Wife of Bath and a discussion section with a frequency table. This core chapter applies Critical Discourse Analysis to the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale. The character's defiant and autonomous status is examined through this methodological approach. Her subversion of biblical sources and nonconformity to the patriarchal stereotypes regarding language use are explained. It also includes a discussion that clarifies the issues addressed within the chapter of findings and synthesizes the results.

The final chapter, the conclusion, embodies a summary of the results and findings of the study. Moreover, this section provides implications and suggestions ending with recommendations for further studies.

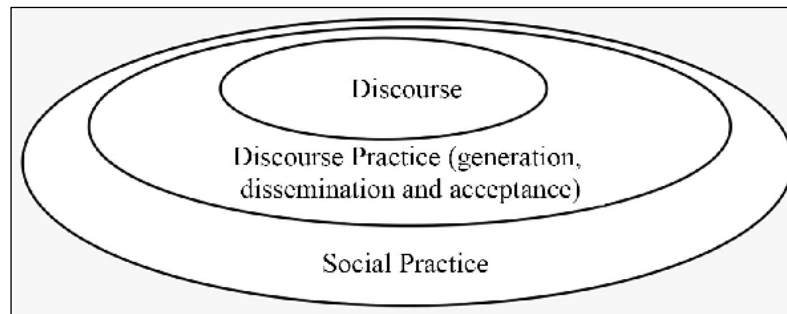
CHAPTER TWO

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

The primary goal of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is to examine how ideology, society, and discourse interact and to highlight how words may be utilized to convey ideas, sway people's opinions, and increase audience acceptance and comprehension (Chen, J. S., Cao, Y., & Zhang, R. H, 2017, p. 38). The origins of Critical Discourse Analysis are diverse, extending from Frankfurt School critical theory to Hallidayan systemic-functional linguistics (Huckin, Andrus, & Clary-Lemon, 2012, p. 108). Critical Discourse Analysis surfaced in the late 1980s as a systematic progression in European discourse and textual and rhetorical analysis were pioneered by Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk, Ruth Wodak, and others. Since that moment, it has progressed into one of the most significant and widely recognized areas of discourse analysis (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 447). Among an array of interdisciplinary theorists maintaining a lasting impact on the discipline are Bourdieu, Gramsci, Foucault, Habermas, and Giddens. Critical Linguistics was the foundational predecessor of CDA, a predominantly linguistic methodology for textual analysis shaped by academic developments in Britain by Bob Hodge, Gunther Kress, Roger Fowler, and along with other scholars mentored by M.A.K. Halliday in the 1970s. The evolution of CDA extended past CL, influenced by social, cognitive, and rhetorical theory which has extended the analytical framework. Critical discourse was first proposed by the British linguist Fowler in *Language and Control* (1979). Norman Fairclough's publication *Language and Power* in 1989 stands as a key intellectual landmark of this era followed by his *Critical Discourse Analysis* published in 1995 along with the institutionalization of the leading journal *Discourse and Society* in 1990, and an inaugural symposium bringing together the pioneers of the field (Teun van Dijk, Fairclough, Wodak, and Theo van Leeuwen) in Amsterdam in January 1991 (Huckin, Andrus, & Clary-Lemon, 2012, p. 108). As seen in Figure 1, Fairclough put out a framework for critical discourse analysis that focuses on the generation, dissemination, and acceptance of discourse. This paradigm demonstrates how social practice, or discourse practice, produces discourse. The nature of social practice can be reflected in discourse analysis (Liu, 2012, p. 249). Critical discourse analysis proposes that "a close analysis of texts should be a significant part of social scientific analysis of a whole range of social and cultural practices and processes" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 185) which is also in line with the purpose of this study.

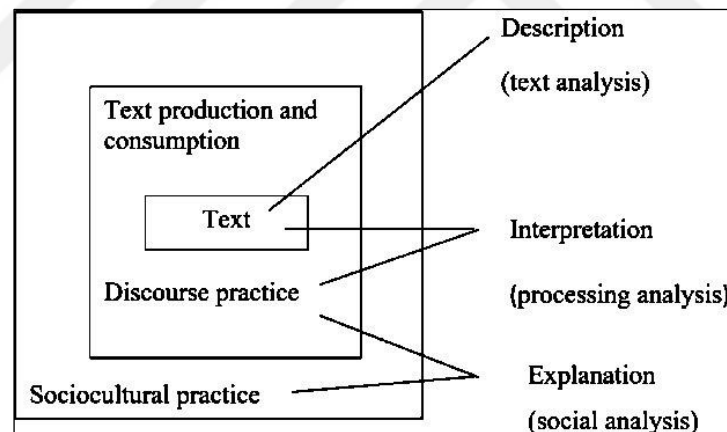
Figure 1: Critical Discourse Analysis Framework



Fairclough, N. L. (1995). Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language

Fairclough, as seen in Figure 2, prescribes three interrelated processes of analysis of a literary or textual discourse that is text analysis (description), process analysis (interpretation), and social analysis (explanation). In order to study social issues and produce findings that are relevant to the social, political, and cultural context, CDA's methodology is essential (Sameen, Farid, & Hussain, 2021, p.109).

Figure 2: A Theoretical Model Based On Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Theory



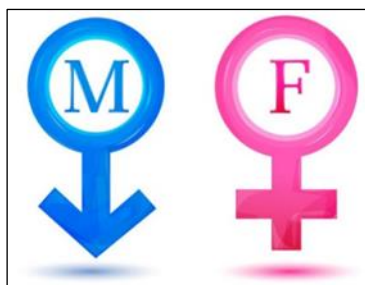
The principal function of CDA is to investigate “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language” (Wodak, 1995, p. 204). To be more precise, in Wodak’s words, CDA studies are “real, and often extended, instances of social interaction which take (particularly) linguistic form. The critical approach is distinctive in its view of (a) the relationship between language and society, and (b) the relationship between analysis and the practices analysed” (1997, p. 173). Through multiple methodologies, CDA can be applied in the analysis and evaluation of social disparities, the framework through which we analyse the questions regarding the significance of discourse by concentrating on both the reinforcement and deconstruction of dominance. From this perspective, dominance is conceptualized as the exertion of societal influence on privileged figures, structures, or communities that leads to

social stratification encompassing inequalities related to politics, culture, class, ethnicity, race, and gender. This pattern of reproduction may encompass distinct frameworks of discourse-power connections as the explicit or implicit endorsement of the implementation, depiction, justification, dismissal, reduction, or suppression of dominance among other instances. Delving deeper, critical discourse methodologists seek to identify the patterns, mechanisms, textual, discursive features, oral interaction or communicative practices that function as key factors in sustaining these systems of reproduction (Van Dijk, 1993, pp. 249-250).

2.2. Gender Studies and CDA

Sex and gender are different in that “gender” designates “our cultural programming as feminine or masculine” while “sex” describes “our biological constitution as female, male, or intersex” (Tyson p. 73). According to R. W. Connell, men and women have different traits, including “temperaments, characters, outlooks and opinions, abilities, even whole structures of personality” (*Gender and Power* p.167) which fall into femininity and masculinity. The biological distinctness of men and women provides the basis for the distinction between masculine and feminine, although it is also influenced by “the social or psychological difference that corresponds to that divide, builds on it or is caused by it” (Connell, *Gender in World Perspective*, p. 9). In accordance with the relationships that are socially and culturally formed for women and men, gender roles refer to the social construction of men’s and women’s roles within a particular culture. That is, the roles that men and women play, which are shaped by society, are referred to as gender. The gender of an individual is established at birth and remains consistent throughout their life. However, cultural differences may result in distinct gender roles. People learn the gender roles that are appropriate for them based on the society to which they belong, and these roles serve them well throughout their lifetimes. Thus, “how to be a boy and how to be a girl are communicated through social institutions” (Holmes p. 50). Gender roles are expectations defined by ideas of masculinity and femininity that are established by culture and society as summed up in Simone de Beauvoir’s famous statement “One is not born a woman; one becomes one” (1956, p. 273) which is the same for men as well.

Figure 3: Gender Differences



Source: Zlatan Krizan, “Genderroles”<https://www.news.iastate.edu/news/2015/01/29/genderdifferences>

To Mandy Boehnke (2011), gender roles are “shared expectations that apply to individuals on the basis of their socially identified gender” (p. 2). The expected behaviours concerning gender roles evolve with time, yet always assign men with strong and primary traits and women as secondary and weak characteristics. Because traditional gender roles characterize men as providers by nature and women as more home-oriented, they assign duties based on the idea that women are biologically inferior. Men should be rational, powerful, protective, and dominant, but women should be sentimental, nurturing, and subservient due to their feeble nature. Therefore, men should continue to fulfil the duty of provider in every way while women are occupied with children and home duties. In the Middle Ages, for example, women were categorized as either Eve or the Virgin Mary. The Church Fathers created the two opposing representations of women during the Middle Ages and the female gender was portrayed as the source of original sin and wickedness, and they were expected to be meek, subservient, and passive in every sense. Therefore, as Eileen Power emphasizes (1975, p.9), a male-dominated culture that viewed women as inferior to men affected women’s living environments during the Middle Ages. Medieval women did not have their own free area in accordance with the lifestyle that the Church created. Similarly, Barbara A. Hanawalt notes that medieval female dignity rested on their capacity to maintain the socially acceptable space that was allotted to them (1998, p.19).

Figure 4: Traditional Gender Stereotypes

<i>Traditional Gender Stereotypes.</i>	
<i>Feminine.</i>	<i>Masculine.</i>
<i>Not aggressive.</i>	<i>Aggressive.</i>
<i>Dependent.</i>	<i>Independent.</i>
<i>Easily influenced.</i>	<i>Not easily influenced.</i>
<i>Submissive.</i>	<i>Dominant.</i>
<i>Passive.</i>	<i>Active.</i>
<i>Home-oriented.</i>	<i>Worldly.</i>
<i>Easily hurt emotionally.</i>	<i>Not easily hurt emotionally.</i>
<i>Indecisive.</i>	<i>Decisive.</i>
<i>Talkative.</i>	<i>Not at all talkative.</i>
<i>Gentle.</i>	<i>Tough.</i>
<i>Sensitive to other's feelings.</i>	<i>Less sensitive to other's feelings.</i>
<i>Very desirous of security.</i>	<i>Not very desirous of security.</i>
<i>Cries a lot.</i>	<i>Rarely cries.</i>
<i>Emotional.</i>	<i>Logical.</i>
<i>Verbal.</i>	<i>Analytical.</i>
<i>Kind.</i>	<i>Cruel.</i>
<i>Tactful.</i>	<i>Blunt.</i>
<i>Nurturing.</i>	<i>Not nurturing.</i>

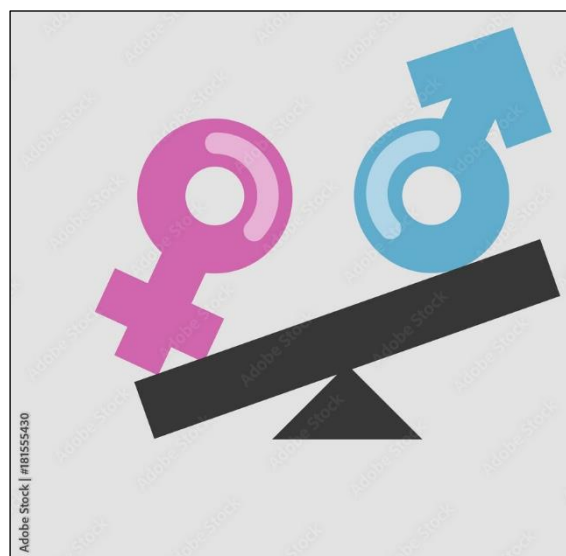
Source: “Role of family in the social construction of gender”
<https://eduindex.org/2021/06/28/role-of-family-in-the-social-construction-of-gender/>

Studies on language and gender started to emerge between the 1960s and 1970s in the United States of America and spread to Western Europe, North America, and Australasia. That period was directly associated with the liberation movement of women including frameworks regarding non-discriminatory language use in bureaucracies (Wodak, 2015, p. 698) The discourse uttered by women

is considered to project their prestige awareness, conservatism, attachment, tender-heartedness, sentimentality, and men's discourse appears to show firmness, insensitiveness, ambition, autonomy, adequacy, supremacy, and leadership (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p. 90). The notion 'sexism' was coined in the 1960s. It represents a dichotomization within the boundaries of a social system based on gender. The term sexism enabled women to classify themselves as a repressed, marginalized group that strives to gain equal rights and acceptance in a male-dominated society. Analogously, language serves a vital part in allowing these marginalized groups to identify themselves as a distinct social group (Wodak, 2015, pp. 700-701). However, gender notions have changed over time due to various reasons.

As indicated by Kolthoff (2010), social constructionism reformed notions related to gender and how gender was perceived. From this perspective, gender is not considered an inherent attribution or something harboured; conversely, it is formed through language, discourse, writing and socialization. It is emphasized that current research centres upon the dichotomization and complexity of gender involving paradigms such as ethnicity and hierarchy (p. 39). In a similar vein, Wodak (2015) states that gender is not composed of a range of static qualities but rather is constructed by society. This notion sheds light on the formation of norms created by male-dominated society structures through investigating daily interactions. In research, the notion of 'doing gender' supersedes the preconceived interpretations of the term gender. According to this concept, the arguments which consider gender as a static and inherent collection of qualities are overlooked and it is identified as a socially constructed performative act (p. 703). That is, unlike sex, gender is a social construct and people are classified as male or female based on a set of accepted societal features.

Figure 5: Gender Inequality



Source: "Clippart Library" <https://clippart-library.com/clippart/clip-feminism-5.htm>

Gender-language research relies upon the author's disguised presumptions about methodology, sexuality, gender, and patterns used. To illustrate, according to some studies, the language used by women is rather standard compared to men since women are inclined to adapt themselves to social conventions (Trudgill, 1974, p. 272). Correspondingly, several differences exist as they rely upon cultural variations, and this should be taken into consideration. Language behaviour has been mostly overlooked in the studies, and gender has been examined solely by determining biological sex (Wodak and Benke, 1996, p. 128). In feminist language studies, distinctions to be analysed can be observed within the subheadings such as syntax, voice, lexicon, intonation, pronunciation, language choice, and conversational and interactional behaviour. The distinctions resulting from gender within the use of language are not handled as different instruments accompanying each other. Owing to male-dominated society representations of distinctions identified hold social and political significance (cited in Wodak 2015, p.701). Correlatively, feminists consider language as "a symbolical reflection of androcentric structures" (Günthner and Kotthoff, 1991, p. 7). As the studies merely centre upon biological sex, all women are regarded as homogenous and demonstrate dichotomies compared to men. However, in the case of the Wife of Bath, contrary to medieval women, discourse appears to bear no female characteristics, but male ones embodied in authority and power.

2.3. Women in The Middle Ages

The Middle Ages are the era between the Roman Empire and the Renaissance (Sager, 2002, p.137). Italian scholars introduced the term 'Middle Ages' prosaic signification solicitously. Humanistic philosophers required the regeneration of conventional values and culture. They considered this age as obscure and unconscious, separating it from the humanistic approach of the Roman and Greek world. In one respect, the 'Middle Ages' was coined to discriminate the Middle Ages from the Roman and Greek world (Thompson, 1996, p. 29).

The two essential elements of the medieval hierarchical society were feudalism and the three estates system. The clergy, nobles, and commoners made up the three estates that constituted medieval society in accordance with the three-estate framework. Those who pray for those who battle and work made up the clergy. Understandably, the clergy made up the first estate given that it was a clerical formation, reflecting the elevated status of religion in medieval society. The clergy, who made up 1% of the populace, were in charge of ensuring the spiritual health of the community. The nobility, comprised of those who fought and ruled, and protected those who worked and prayed, was the second estate. About 1% of the population was likely made up of the nobility, which included the King and his vassals, including dukes, earls, barons, and knights (feudal lords) (Forgeng, 2009, pp. 21- 27). The commoners, who worked for those who prayed and fought, made up the third estate. The remaining 98 % of the population was made up of commoners. The majority of "those who worked" were rural peasants who produced the food, flax, and wool needed to feed and clothe

everyone. Instead of owning their land, the common people “held” or rented it from a landlord, who could have been a knight, a baron, a bishop, a college, or a monastic house (Coulton, 1961, p. 95). As a result, they all made contributions to society overall (Mortimer, 2009, p. 40). Like the three estates, feudalism served as the structural glue that held medieval society as a whole together in a hierarchical structure. It outlined each person’s role and relationships with both higher and lower-ranking individuals. Feudalism was a political, social, and economic system and it was, in fact, primarily a land-based economic system that outlined a man’s civil rights as well as its political and social facets. The king, or overlord, had social, economic, and political dominance under feudalism (Bishop, 1971, p. 109).

In the Middle Ages, women were regarded as the transmigration of the soul of the Virgin Mary or Eve. That is the role or social identity of medieval women was framed by the image of the Virgin Mary and of Eve. In both scenarios, they needed to be restricted by their husbands or fathers to protect harmful effects of the outside world. They also had to be protected from harming their own eternal soul, including the souls surrounding them. The most proper way of protection was to enter a monastery, which also ensured spiritual salvation (Zimmerman, 2014, p. 55). The reference to Eve’s creation in the second chapter of Genesis, which defines her role in the fall and her creation, which is not in God’s image, unlike man, was the main reason why the Christian Church perpetuated the stereotyped division of women. Tertullian’s (c.155 – c. 220 AD), the first theologian to write in Latin and called “the father of Latin Christianity”, theses on women summarize the Church’s views of women:

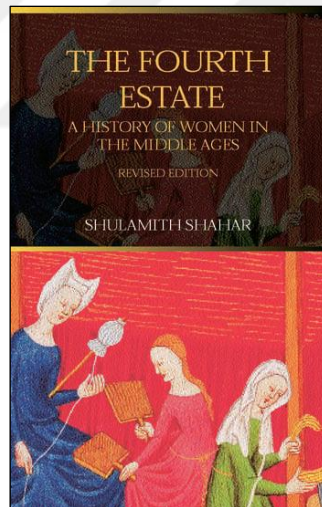
You are the devil’s gateway [...] you are the first deserter of the divine law; you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God’s image, man. On account of your desert—that is, death—even the Son of God had to die. (Katharine M. Rogers, 1966, p. 15).

Accordingly, women had to play certain roles in the medieval period. They undertook the roles of mother, spouse, daughter, craftsman, religious enthusiast, and labourer. The image of women and representation of them in the medieval period shifted in many ways due to the fact that there were various factors that affected female roles in the social hierarchy (Shahar, 2003, p.11). As the portrayal of women was constructed and determined by Christianity in the European Middle Ages, it affected their social status in society (Mushtaq, 2019, p.222).

In the firmly hierarchical medieval society, by law and custom, women had no share in the governance of the kingdom and society. They were not permitted to serve as public officials, and they were also not authorized to occupy a governmental position (Shahar, 2003, p.11). Women were not permitted to testify in court, and they needed to find a spokesperson inclined to perform this task for them, which would cost (Zimmerman, 2014, p. 55). In a similar vein, women were not only prohibited from holding judicial office or a position as a lawyer, but they were not even permitted to

appear in court as representatives of other persons (Shahar, 2003, p. 14). Women could appear in court as the representative of another person, as her husband's wife (Auerbach, 2013, p.120). They were never invited to take part in congregations, and they were not permitted to participate in town councils (Shahar, 2003, p.13). Most of the single women and widows were engaged in feudal assemblies but they were not allowed to serve in positions (Jarret, 1926, p. 13). As British jurist Glanville stated, they were not allowed to serve the king in the army and royal service (Hacker, 1970, p. 29). It is clearly stated in line with the medieval three-estate structure: "Women must be kept out of all public office. They must devote themselves to their feminine and domestic occupations" (Shahar, 2003, p.12). Moreover, it was considered that marriage could not be dissolved although there were various grounds upon which marriage can be dissolved. The Church regarded it as a holy sacrament and did not simply permit marriage to be dissolved. Nevertheless, some influential men paved the way for divorce or disposal of disregarded wives (Zimmerman, 2014, p. 56). Women were even classified as a "fourth estate" in medieval society by some scholars, as delineated in, among others, Shulamith Shahar's well-received *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages* (2003).¹

Figure 6: Women as The Fourth Estate



As the religious structures and kingdom justified the dismissal of women's rights with explicit elucidations and rationales, it can be argued that the attitude of the medieval civilization was determined by an unconscious ideology (Huizinga, 1999, p. 146). Women were not permitted to occupy a political status by Orthodox Catholicism and elicited the Church's authority over women restricting their participation. Certain women were able to achieve esteem from men as well as other

¹ In this extensive research, Shulamith Shahar explores the diverse perspectives on women and their roles in Western Europe from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. She creates a unified depiction of women across various groups, including nuns, married women, peasants, noblewomen, urban women, and those engaged in heretical practices and witchcraft. *The Fourth Estate* has attained classic status in the examination of women's experiences during the Middle Ages.

women, including a handful of powerful women, but the substantial majority of the female population was not among them. However, most of the women in distinguished positions had little control over the course of their lives. Moreover, Queens were not able to become renowned figures even after the death of the King (Mushtaq, 2019, p.222). With the possible exception of Joan of Arc, there were few female figures publicly known by name in the twenty-first century. Joan of Arc was extraordinary for a female soldier to undertake the role of a man and lift the siege of Orleans in 1429. Popes, kings, scholars, and philosophers were more inclined to be remembered than women living in seclusion, queens, and writers (Feinberg, 1996, p. 35).

The ignorance of females stems from the subjugation of medieval women and how they were represented and considered by the religious structures of the period. According to the church and the canons, the hagiographical conventions also played a part in the formation of this concept of women. The enduring interest in social dynamics of the past and gender, which started from the second half of the century to the modern age, gave rise to the notion that women attract more attention at the present day (Shaus, 2006, p.308). In conclusion, it can be discussed that in no social status, the exclusive rights of women were equal to their male peers, which was a negative common factor for women of all social classes of the medieval period (Mushtaq, 2019, p.222).

2.4. Women in Medieval Literature

“Again, as between the sexes, the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the male ruler and the female subject and the same must also necessarily apply in the case of mankind as a whole” (Aristotle, 1999, p. 1254b). This Aristotelian quote, extracted from *Poetics*, justifies the arguments regarding the idea that women were not regarded as equals compared to their male counterparts, parallels the medieval women and their plight. As stated by Nain (2022), the portrayal of women in medieval literature has been a topic of intense discussion between historians and philosophers for centuries. Medieval literature corresponding to the period between the 5th and 15th centuries constantly projects the conservative and traditional gender norms of the social structure. Female characters in medieval literature are repeatedly represented as pious and devout or siren-like figures bewitching men (p. 93) in accordance with the two opposite roles assigned to them between the image of the Virgin Mary and Eve. In the Medieval period, as opposed to fashionable Victorian romances and highly regarded stereotypes, women did not merely emerge as star-crossed damsels waiting to be saved by a knight (Cohen, 2012). As indicated by Deitrich (2001), the star-crossed Damsel, a devout maiden, obedient wife, and the mistress of the estate, facilitated an opportunity for the hero to act gallantly. In both epics and romances of Medieval literature, a symbiotic relationship between these characters exists. A chivalric hero, in other words heroic man, is defined by his true self, his identity, his missions, and his triumphs; on the other hand damsel is determined by prescribed by societal standards and cultural values (p. 1).

Accompanied by its narratives, including sacred devotion, courtly love, and chivalry, medieval literature offers a prism through which traditional medieval thinking can be seen. Women serve in a core but complex position in the literary world. They are depicted as symbols of passion, key strategists, holy figures, and figures of misfortune (Nain, 2022, p. 93). One of the notable themes is the idealization of women who were portrayed as saintly and devout figures in line with the image of the Virgin Mary. 'The Virgin Mary' shines amongst others as the powerful symbol aligned with this ideal. The Virgin Mary's chastity, modesty and unyielding devotion created a model imitated by women (Kelly, 1984, p. 37) which stereotyped medieval women in the image of Eve and the Virgin Mary. Following the image of the Virgin Mary, in medieval literature, there are examples where male characters were portrayed as assertive, fierce, and aggressive while the female characters were depicted as figures of modesty, piety, and righteousness (Kay, 2013, p. 37). Bennet and Karras (2013), for example, analyse the paradox in which the courtly love theme idealizes female characters and how *Roman de la Rose* projected women as objects of male attraction and unreachable muses (p.3). Unlike the Virgin Mary image, women in the image of Eve are the source of sin and wickedness in medieval literature. As Pınar Taşdelen foregrounds, women in Middle English romances, for instance, are "stereotypically presented as jealous, uncaring, false accusers, adulterous, blinded with desire for power, pretending innocence" (2014, p. 206). Witches are portrayed in romances as the source of evil, upsetting the idyllic romantic world with their cunning plans. Such literary works function as insightful materials for comprehending how medieval women were represented within two opposite roles and suppressed. Literary sources can bestow a lens through which the beholder can witness the agency and behaviour of women (Williams, 2011, p. 3). Furthermore, only a handful of women writers existed in medieval times and those who wrote were predominantly engaged in religious institutions. Especially, in the early part of the Medieval period, societal roles of women within civilization and in literature were extremely confined (Dietrich, 2001, p. 1). In conclusion, investigating the depiction of women in medieval literary sources unveils a meticulously crafted mosaic paved with theological principles. In medieval literature, the depiction of women is multidimensional which demonstrates restrictions and rebellion against gender norms (Nain, 2022, p. 105). Undoubtedly, this bipolar depiction of medieval women, without any attribution of identity far from individuality, has led feminists to focus on the place of medieval women in society and literature.

2.5. Geoffrey Chaucer

It would be delightful to start with the year of birth of Chaucer unfortunately determining such a date is not an easy task which most probably falls into 1340-43. Chaucer's birth date lacks conclusive evidence as the issue started with the verdict passed by him on 15th October 1386 (Crow, 1966, p. 370). Characterized by Dryden in 1700 as 'the Father of English poetry', Geoffrey Chaucer's status as the literary mastermind endured without any significant change over the course of history. For the readers, Chaucer is mainly the creator of *The Canterbury Tales*, his masterpiece. He received

praise for his nuanced voices, irony, a flair for painting character and caricature, and his boundless intellect. Chaucer is depicted in historical accounts as a distinct character, a noble attendant, a page, a public official, and a revenue collector who ventures beyond the kingdom's borders for confidential royal affairs (Rude, 2005, p. 1). The life of Chaucer was beyond the ordinary. He was born as the son of a vintner in London a few years before the outbreak of the plague (Turner, 2018). As Chaucer was the son of a vine merchant, he probably spent his childhood in the realistic environment of London's vintry. Granted many privileges, regarding education, his father's financial resources ensured his well-being and he socialized routinely among the members of the lower classes and peasants. Moreover, Chaucer was sent to serve as a page in the majestic estates of the nobility in England during his early adolescence. He developed strong connections with the noble rulers of the realm and his more influential brother John of Gaunt (Sokhanvar, 2003, p. 41). He was imprisoned by France and the release fee was paid by the king. When rebel forces laid siege on London in 1381, journeyed to Italy, France, and Spain, and became a legislative member in a court filled with turbulence (Turner, 2018, para. 1). He was also regularly summoned for unpaid dues, lived in London and Kent, was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey when he died in 1400, and then relocated to the 'Poet's Corner' where he became the first poet entombed. Chaucer lived in a chaotic era in which the Hundred Wars with France and the onset of the Wars of the Roses, the Revolt of the commoners and the Black Death erupted. However, a minor portion of these happenings can be seen in his writings (Rude, 2005, p. 1). Given his background in commerce and the court, Chaucer was one of the most important middle-class figures in medieval England throughout the fourteenth century. His standing as esquire questioned "the traditional distinction between gentle and non-gentle status. [Hence], "Chaucer himself was ambiguously situated", as Swanson notes (2000, p. 403), and his own life was an example of social fluidity (Dillon, 1993, p. 252). That is why Yıldız discusses Chaucer as a medieval hybrid "caught in between the fixed identities" of the three estates of the late fourteenth century (2014, p. 49).

2.6. Geoffrey Chaucer as A Literary Figure

Geoffrey Chaucer is frequently regarded as the father of English history, English poetry, and English literature (Spearing, 1985, p. 34). The fatherly role of the literary heritage is a striking figurative expression associated with the concepts of national identity, chivalric manhood, and its effect on poetic style. Thomas Hoccleve, Chaucer's successor, was the person who initially put into words "father figure". He utters a requiem for the soul of Chaucer in a number of stanzas in his *Regiment of Princes*, "maister deere and fadir reverent" which stands for 'Dear master and reverent father' in Modern English (Hoccleve, 1999, l. 1961).

Chaucer's proficiency in synthesizing aristocratic refinement and public folklore made him uniquely suited to appeal to an audience spanning different backgrounds (Benson, 1987, p. 72). As

indicated by Brewer (1978), Chaucer's resolve to produce literary works in Middle English made a noteworthy contribution to consistency in language use and uniformity (p. 45).

Despite seeming preoccupied, Chaucer substantiated that he was a persistent composer of poetry. Alas, only a handful of his poems can be chronologically pinpointed, as some of them weren't preserved. The translation of *Roman de la Rose*, a French poem written in the 13th century, exerted substantial influence over Chaucer's literary creations. The poem consists of a mosaic of contrasting pieces, a blend of diverse elements which he was able to integrate into his own literary creations, the chivalric sentimentality of Guillaume and didactic, mostly satirizing detachment of Jean (Sokhanvar, 2003, pp.42-43).

Chaucer's most distinguishable facility and profound influence on literature is his artistry in crafting verse. As stated by Spearing (1992), Chaucer's utilization of iambic pentameter forged the path of further evolution of English poetry, which encompasses Shakespeare (p. 184). In a similar vein, Fisher (1996) points out that Shakespeare's following the poetic conventions of rhyme royal and epic couplets left a lasting impact on poets across eras (p.201). Spurgeon (1925) examines analogous elements comparing *Teseida* by Boccaccio with Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and pinpoints that Chaucer absorbed and reinterpreted Italian storytelling methods in order to present to readers in medieval England (p. 89). A similar study by Fisher (1996) analyses the implementation of allegorical motifs and uncovers the narrative parallels and resemblances between *The Divine Comedy* by Dante and *The House of Fame* (p.201). It is also known that Chaucer's interaction with Italian literature, primarily the literary products of Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Dante, refined and moulded poetic conventions. With the rise of new critical interpretations and with modern eyes reinterpreting the past, Chaucer's permanent mark on narrative tradition as a literary narrator, a critic of social norms, and an architect of poetic tradition sustains its intellectual and literary importance.

2.7. The Canterbury Tales

Though Chaucer's artistry spans numerous works, his name is enshrined in literary history for *The Canterbury Tales* (1386-1400) (Ford, 1954, p. 23). It is a gathered selection of tales presented as narratives from a varied cross-section of medieval English society embarking on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral. Remained incomplete upon Chaucer's passing, this collection features a prologue and twenty-four tales exhibiting variation in length (Ruud, 2006, p. 107). *The Canterbury Tales* presents us with a vibrant portrayal of a wide range of characters both by the main narrator's depiction of each pilgrim in *The General Prologue* and by tales narrated by each pilgrim (Atasoy, 2021, p. 236) along with the socially constructed nature of gender roles Chaucer's pilgrims exemplifies the different social strata of medieval society which consist of the nobility, the clergy, and the commoners. These various depictions of characters uncover the author's purpose to exhibit the portrayal of a versatile society. The structure of society presented by Chaucer

involves good and bad characters along with the mistreatments and corruptions maintained by society. However, first and foremost, the existence of three female characters, the Prioress, the Second Nun, and the Wife of Bath, among mostly male pilgrims who are allowed to contribute as a narrator (Chao 2007, p. 76).

The Canterbury Tales manages to project a microcosm of medieval society through pilgrims belonging to different walks of society. Due to the fact that these characters have to tell two tales on the way out and two tales on the way home, their narrative is centred around the themes of courtly love, piety and knighthood, besides the interactions between men and women, giving us invaluable insights into gender roles. These tales have their origins in romance, the courtly love tradition, saints' legend, and fabliau. *The Canterbury Tales* contains, for example, *The Franklin's Tale* (a romance or Breton lay), and *The Physician's Tale* and *The Man of Law's Tale* (both rooted in saint's legends) which mirrors particularly how women were perceived in terms of religious and cultural context in the eyes of the society (Atasoy, 2021, pp. 236-237). It serves as a distinguished collection of multiple genres involving, the allegorical romance traditions or aristocratic love narratives, quests of the aristocracy, the fabliaux, amusing narratives about ordinary folk engaged in debauched affairs, theological narratives, dramatic misfortunes, metaphorical tales, spiritual reflections, personal testimonies (Ruud, 2006, p. 109).

In the closing lines of *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer departs from his narrative guise as a pilgrim to embrace his identity as a poet (Benson, 1987, p. 1081). Stepping away from his poetic creation, he references St. Paul's writings as a statement on the nature and objective of literary composition: "Al that is written is written for our doctrine." Because Chaucer's stated objective adheres to this framework of didacticism, he repudiates the vain and materialistic elements of his texts (Laird, 2000, p. 289).

2.8. The Portrait of the Wife of Bath

It can be argued that Chaucer broke new ground with his Wife of Bath in the Middle Ages when misogynist approaches were prevalent and women were given a second-class role. The Wife of Bath, married at the age of twelve, became rich through the weaving profession, gained social position and authority, declared her independence and reversed gender roles. When Chaucer begins to describe the Wife of Bath in *The General Prologue*, he begins by talking about how skilled she is in the weaving profession: "There was a good Wife of beside Bath, /² But she was somewhat deaf, and that was a pity./ She had such a skill in cloth-making/ She surpassed them of Ypres and of

² For the quotes from the primary text, *The Canterbury Tales* published by Penguin Classics in 2003 was used throughout the thesis.

Ghent.” (*The General Prologue*, 2003, lines 445-48).³ The Wife of Bath, Alison, is known for her gaping front teeth, her large hat, her deafness, her red socks, and for claiming that she is experienced enough to cure lovers’ troubles. This experience comes from her five marriages. The Wife, a man hunter, is after her sixth husband. In line with her authoritarian position, the Wife tells in her story that women should have a say in marriage through the story of a knight, one of the important male figures of the Middle Ages.

Figure 7: The Wife of Bath in the Ellesmere Manuscript



The Wife of Bath in the Ellesmere manuscript. San Marino, Huntington Library, MS EL 26 C 9, fol. 72

2.9. The Prologue of the Wife of Bath

As narrated in the Wife of Bath’s prologue, Alisoun wed for the first time when she was twelve years old, has entered matrimony five times, and stands as a widow now, which, as she accentuates throughout her prologue, renders her a very experienced and authoritative figure in marriage against male authority. Accordingly, *The Prologue of the Wife of Bath* begins as follows: “Experience, though no written authority/ Were in this world, is good enough for me/ To speak of the woe that is in marriage;/For, gentlemen, since I was twelve years of age, /Thanked be God who is eternally alive, /I have had five husbands at the church door” (*The Prologue of the Wife of Bath*, lines 1-6). Alison specifically addresses men and points out that she has as much authority and knowledge as educated men due to her marriages. Later, she challenges even the church authorities by asking how many times a woman is allowed to marry and defends the superiority of women in marriage. Thus, she reverses the gender roles by claiming her independence and authority in marriage. She even equates

³ The original language of *The Canterbury Tales* is Middle English and the very first lines of the portrait of the Wife of Bath reads: “A good WIF was ther of biside Bathe, / But she was somdel deaf, and that was scathe./ Of clooth-makynge she hadde swich an haunt/ She passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt” (*The General Prologue*, 1957, Lines 445-48).

herself with men mentioned in the Bible, such as Solomon and Abraham, and begins to tell of her five husbands. The Wife's first three spouses were kind, wealthy, and elderly and they lack a defined characterization. Her fourth partner was notorious for his fondness for entertainment and vice and he was involved in an extramarital affair for which the Wife of Bath ensured he paid a heavy price. Jankyn, the fifth of her spouses is identified as the husband she favoured most, and she also states that her marriage was driven by genuine emotion. His hand was the heaviest upon her heart among all and mocked her with tales of troublesome wives taken from literary works (Rudd, 2001, p.77). In *The Prologue to the Wife of Bath*, the Wife challenges the patriarchal rules dictated by societal expectations and structures. The Wife who seals her own story with her own unique language and discourse, as accentuated by Yıldız, goes beyond the space that the male-dominated medieval society deemed appropriate for her and virtually breaks new ground for her time:

Autonomous and uncontrollable, the Wife of Bath has the power to step out of the attic provided for her. She writes her own story and asks for a say in her own life. Moulded by her intelligence and experience, her *Prologue* is a revolutionary document for the age in which it was written. (2013, p. 117)

Numerous academics acknowledge the Wife as a character who undermines established patriarchal norms. As indicated by Dinshaw (1999), the Wife regains authority over her own narrative by utilizing marital relationships and interactions to defy discourse shaped by patriarchal authority (p. 85). According to Hansen (1992), the discursive techniques and rhetorical frameworks associated with male authority she used render her both a defiant figure and a reflection of the very structure she criticizes (p. 78). In this sense, Chaucer utilizes the Wife of Bath as an instrument of critiquing while supporting the patriarchal order of the medieval period and through this, he turns the Wife of Bath into a complex and conflicting figure in the narrative (Patterson, 1991, p, 114).

The Canterbury Tales is as much about its narrators as it is about their stories. Each pilgrim's tale mirrors their character and disposition. As stated by Hazelton (1981), one may be drawn to the conclusion that it manifests most prominently in *The Prologue to the Wife of Bath*, particularly because it echoes with the tones of self-reflection, such as autobiography, a narrative rooted in reality. However, it would be more appropriate to assert that the power that gives life to her Prologue arises less from her subjective self-perception as a storyteller shaping her own tale, resulting from her acknowledgment of the disparity (p. 40).

As is the case with most of Chaucer's pilgrims, the Wife of Bath's presence is marked by title rather than identity. However, differing from her peers who are introduced primarily through their rank in society, occupation, or craft, she is identified as a weaver only as a secondary aspect of her persona. She is recognized first and foremost for her matrimonial history, and the perception of her worth does not stem from her proficiency in cloth-making; instead, her worth is measured by the number of marriages she has had at the church door. Alongside this argument, it is necessary to recall

that this is the established practice in a male-centred society to determine a woman's social identity through her marriage status (Penn, 1985, p. 204).

Through the lens of Foucauldian theory, the rhetorical structure of the confession underpins the very discursive formation of *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*. In a style more reflective of Chaucer's work, we would benefit from considering "space to speke" the opportunity to speak that has been granted to the Wife of Bath. In the context of personal testimony, a style of speech, identity construction that the Church had been striving diligently to embed in society for over two hundred years (Root, 1994, p. 252).

2.10. *The Tale of the Wife of Bath*

Chaucer portrays the Wife of Bath as a shrewd and adept, authoritative bourgeois woman with a notable inclination toward romantic entanglements. Her prologue and tale reinforce this inclination and unveil her sharing affinities with Margery Kempe, her living counterpart (Coffman, 1945, p. 43). In *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, a knight perpetrates an act of sexual violence and is condemned to execution under the prevailing law of the realm. He is spared by the Queen's intervention, who charges the knight with the quest of answering a riddle. The author posits that what initially seems like a narrative inconsistency or drawback reveals itself to be a deliberate narrative construct that enriches its interpretation and defines the central framework of Chaucer's storytelling (Huppé, 1948, p. 379).

The Wife of Bath deliberately undermines established patriarchal structures, utilizing her prologue and tale to endorse women's supremacy in love and marriage (Hansen, 1992, p. 29). Nonetheless, researchers, including Aers (1986), advocate the view that the Wife of Bath's perspective seems ahead of its time. They eventually support prevailing gender hierarchies by depicting female authority as scheming rather than advocating independence (p. 74). In fact, scholars, with few dissenting voices, have approached the narrative presented by the Wife of Bath as solely a supernatural fantasy, an instructive narrative intended to demonstrate the Wife's viewpoints that marital contentment may be accomplished only when the wife is granted autonomy. In studies approached from this angle, attention is naturally drawn to the loathly woman. The tale is historically recognized as the story of the Loathly Lady. Nevertheless, Chaucer may seem to be constructing two parallel stories, two interwoven plots that share common surface features. Yet they part ways in their didactic messages. It is not solely a narrative about an exceptionally unappealing lady whose appearance is magically altered into loveliness; it is, in addition, a story of metamorphosis. (Roppolo, 1951, p. 263). As pointed out by Mann (2002) the tale diverges significantly from its previous versions by positioning the act of rape as the driving force behind the knight's quest. This reconfigures the ethical structure of the story and moral paradigm within the narrative (p. 98).

The final section of *the Tale* fails to demonstrate justice in action but may rather be interpreted as a plea for social action. As opposed to being penalized for violating a maiden at the beginning of the tale, the knight is granted clemency from beheading. Subsequently, he is dispatched on a quest to uncover the response to the question “what is it that women most desire?” when he offers the old woman a choice between loyalty and beauty.

2.11. Previous Studies on the Wife of Bath

The most thought-provoking mind among all the voices in *The Canterbury Tales* is strikingly not possessed by ecclesiastical authority but by the Wife of Bath. Throughout the Wife of Bath’s narrative, Chaucer has crafted a distinctive character who, among the entire cast of figures in the literature of the Middle Ages, is undoubtedly among the most intricate that contemporary readers may come across. Through an in-depth examination of her introspective prologue, we can observe that she not only perceives her own identity, but she can also accurately exhibit to others her own intellect and identity (Masi, 1992, p.65). By providing the Wife of Bath a section within the tales of the book, Chaucer produced a narrative which reflects the character’s straightforwardness and subversive interpretations of the male-dominated structures of society. Through this narrative, the Wife of Bath negotiates for female autonomy and expostulates preconceived notions created by patriarchal power structures (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 1984, p. 79).

Sexual intercourse is regarded as taboo by most societies, though it plays a significant role in daily life. In a similar vein, sex was attached to great importance in medieval society as it is seen as an instrument to fulfil God’s command to “increase and multiply and fill the earth” in Genesis 9:1 (Arias, 2022, p. 2). In a contrasting manner, the Wife of Bath explicitly discusses sexuality. For example, Oğütcü (2024) examines the prologue and the tale of the Wife of Bath in terms of the association between sexuality and the food and drink imagery. According to Oğütcü (2024), food and drink, beyond serving as material and symbolic indicators of religious practices and socio-economic status, have also been associated with feminine sexuality. This connection is constructed and transmitted through the use of food and drink references in the prologue and the tale of the Wife of Bath (p.1). Hansen (1992) posits that The Wife of Bath’s repeated distortions of religious scriptures and proverbial expressions also serve as a disguised form of rebellion, enabling her to reinterpret biblical doctrine through her unique lens to advocate for her sexual independence (p. 24).

The complex structure of *The Canterbury Tales* bestows upon a peerless opportunity to discover the motives behind the Wife of Bath, who strives for dominance in her pleasure and sexual experience. Moreover, comprehending the Wife of Bath’s euphemism holds importance as these figures of speech place women into the centre of the performance of sex and this contradicts conventional norms related to sexuality in the Middle Ages. The character uses euphemisms to transmit assertive perspectives regarding female autonomy and intelligence. Hence, she practices her

free will to gain sexual dominance, and through this, the Wife defies the patriarchal structures of the time and the accepted notion that men should be pleased during sexual activity (Arias, 2022, p. 2).

The utterances related to food and drink can be considered as material discursive practices that furnish the Wife of Bath's controversial ideas about female sexuality both materially and discursively. These discussions regarding female sexuality are projected through food and drink allusions that orchestrate the Wife of Bath's readers into a signification process in the fictive world of Canterbury and her middle-aged and contemporary readers (Öğütcü, 2024, p.2). Extending these arguments, O'Hara and Wheatley (2023) delve into how the Wife of Bath's allusions to drinking and banquets function as a metaphor for her desire for indulgence and authority, representing sexuality as an aspect to embrace rather than suppress (pp. 18-20). Therefore, the alignment of the Wife of Bath's body with food and drink instantiates the semantic power of the feminine body. The Wife of Bath's utterances about drink and food bestow privilege upon her arguments both materially and discursively. The character's statements regarding female sexuality manipulate the attendees to a fantasy world of pilgrimage (Öğütcü, 2024, p.2). Reinforcing this claim, Patterson (1987) assesses The Wife's skilful application of nuanced and multi-layered phrasing in her references to drinking and feasting to evoke intimate relations while preserving a sense of decorum (p. 57). Moreover, as stated by Karras (2010), the Wife of Bath argues about the significance of women and their bodies during sexual intercourse. The character's satisfaction, dissatisfaction and sexual desires indicate her supremacy and power in her sexual life. This looms large as it centralizes the female voice during sexual intercourse which contradicts the notion that women should play a passive feminine role while men play an active partner role.

Öğütcü (2024) suggests that food and drink allusions discovered within *the Prologue of the Wife of Bath* exemplify the material and discursive activities which form poetry and politics regarding eating and drinking and reveal the character's perspective on female sexuality (p.2). As though sex is considered to have a taboo nature, the Wife of Bath in both *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *Tale* acknowledges her lust willingly. The Wife of Bath employs euphemisms to argue about the female bodies and roles in terms of sexual desires and control in the course of sex. Chaucer elicits never-shifting fears of humans through 31 characters. (Arias 2022, p. 2)

Moreover, the research of Öğütcü (2024) elicits the Wife of Bath's subversion of religious texts. Consumption metaphor and food and drink imagery allow Chaucer to invoke the Nurturing Mother image. Distorting the nurturing mother image may appear as an objectification of the character's body due to the fact that her body is compared to a nutrient that is to be eaten or drunk by the opposite gender. Nevertheless, if the Wife of Bath's body is objectified in this way, aligning with the material-discursive images of food and drink and linking to religious and social connotations, the primary concern of the female character is to take her husband under the influence (p.16). Keiser (1980) further develops this argument by analysing how the Wife of Bath's strategic

use of food-based allegory reinforces her position as an economically independent figure. He highlights that, in the same manner as she wields power over her financial affairs, she governs her bodily autonomy by strategically manoeuvring marital relationships (pp. 278-280).

Lohia (2020) emphasizes that the Wife's outspoken demeanour in addressing sexuality through metaphorical language resonates with contemporary feminist strategies of reasserting women's sexual agency and pleasure (p. 78). Turner (2023) elaborates on this claim by outlining the ways in which the Wife of Bath's character has shaped modern feminist literature and mass media, portraying her as an icon of sexuality and rebellion (p. 192). The bread, bran, ale, mill, and barrel images of the Wife of Bath enable her to compete with the Nurturing Mother image. Relevant imagery enables her to subvert the material-discursive food and drink lore to assert feminine sexuality. In this way, she sabotages misogynistic discourse regarding the sexuality and body of women and defies it through the use of the Nurturing Mother image (Öğütçü, 2024, p.18). Correspondingly, McGowan (1999) points out that the food and drink imagery of the Wife of Bath unveils the semantics of food and drink as unarbitrary but rather goal-directed (p.9).

In similar research conducted by Arias (2022), the Wife of Bath compares men to "pure wheat-seed" and women to "barley-bread". Barley flares is depicted as flaring open and the wheat grain as long and has no opening and the describe vagina and penis. Besides employing grains to depict sexual organs, the imagery is projected through euphemism. This clarifies the Wife of Bath's attitude towards sexuality, and she elicits the necessity of sexuality. Moreover, the Wife of Bath discusses that vagina is the more significant sexual organ (p. 3). The use of noun 'instrument' by the Wife of Bath implies that the vagina is practical and complex such as a musical instrument. Therefore, in the text strength is attributed to her vagina (pp. 4-5).

In *The Franklin's Tale*, the opinion that women are required to be obedient in marital affairs is conveyed. The moment Dorigen and Aurelius come together she says "Unto the gardyn, as myn housbonde bad, My trouthe for to holde—allas, alas!" (Chaucer, 1957, Lines 1512-13). As the lines suggest, Dorigen does not query the order of Arveragus; she solely reconciles to the situation. Hence, within this context, men are expected to be praised, not women, considering the gender roles (Atasoy 2021, p. 239). In Chaucer's work, we witness the reversal of power structures as women's autonomy is strengthened. Delany (1976) discussed the projection of female philosophy due to the fact that matriarchal influence is not only legitimized but also essential in association in relationships. The old woman in the tale of the Wife of Bath modifies herself into a young woman and this illustrates the subversion of the patriarchal structures, and women are centralized in the narrative work (p.23).

In conclusion, *The Canterbury Tales* demonstrates to us a microcosm of Chaucer's society and touches on a broad array of key issues. As the ecclesiastical laws constructed social norms and conventions, gender discrimination in the Middle Ages was noticeable. These patriarchal rules

compelled women to adopt certain stereotypical roles in which they had to accept the supremacy of men. Women could not push the boundaries of the male-dominated society and exceed the limitations placed upon them further (Butler, 1988, p. 526). As the relevant studies suggest, certain tactics of language are employed in the narrative to influence the power structures and subvert them. The Wife of Bath uses rhetorical strategies and biblical sources extensively to exert power and claim authority in her discourse, through which she subverts gender roles and disrupts male authority endorsed by religious discourse.



CHAPTER THREE

3. METHODOLOGY

It is a broadly accepted notion in academic institutions specializing in language studies that literary studies and linguistics represent different academic disciplines and that their integration in scholarly discourse is restricted. However, such a claim would lack justification to ascribe this separation to a growing sentiment of academic competition, insecurity, or scepticism. Rather, these two disciplines have historically demonstrated fundamental distinctions in their foundational understanding, and academic orientations that build direct interaction have been challenging merely due to the lack of immediate interaction between the two disciplines (de Beaugrande, 1993, p. 423). As indicated by Rosalind Gill (1995), language has become a focal point not just for linguists but scholars across multiple disciplines such as sociology, literary criticism, history, philosophy, and social psychology. Language has moved beyond being a minor or specialized area of research but a major area of interest for academics across multiple disciplines. This change emerged as a consequence of the significant influence of the poststructuralist theory (p. 166). Poststructuralism presents an analytical framework offering a perspective to assess and investigate subjectivity and epistemology (Miller, 1998, p. 220). Traditionally, poststructuralist scholarship applies discourse analysis to uncover underlying significations in language to illustrate the processes by which knowledge is constructed and the ramifications for individuals and their subjective experiences (Gavey, 1989, p. 459).

Debates surrounding textual analysis and interpretation certainly are not new and have remained central to academic study and non-academic observers who have strived to interpret and explain verbal, textual, and visual narratives along with their conveyed meanings with any possible objective in mind. Centuries-long traditions of Western and Eastern philosophy, the fields of religious, and literary scholarship, rhetorical and stylistic analysis, linguistics and translation research along with psychoanalytic and anthropological perspectives have engaged with textual and discursive meanings (Wodak, 2011, p. 624). Wodak (2011) draws attention to the integrative examination of how meanings are created and conveyed across disciplines. Throughout history, these disciplines conceptualized and expanded their theoretical and methodological repertoire (p. 624). The interdisciplinary “linguistic turn” is predominantly oriented toward discourse, the study of broader linguistic units as they function in discourse, rather than individual sounds, words, or syntactically isolated structures. The growing acceptance of this method produced competing variations of feminist discourse analysis built upon assumptions which appear fundamentally incompatible and

interpretations of the concept of discourse (Cameron, 1998, p. 947). The popularity and practical aspects of CDA, its extensiveness, and its convenience to examine feminist discourse are emphasized.

As Van Dijk (1993) stated, though there are multiple perspectives to consider within the analysis and criticism of social imbalances, the lens through which we examine these inquiries and dimensions is accomplished by concentrating on the function of discourse in the re-creation and defying hegemonic power. Dominance, in this framework, is conceptualized as the hegemonic influence within the society of privileged figures, governing mechanisms, and communities that lead to social inequality. This systemic reproduction may encompass various forms of discourse-power connections as either direct or overt support, implementation, depiction, validation, repudiation, reduction, or suppression of dominance. Critical discourse analysts are particularly interested in exploring other linguistic features of text, discourse, interpersonal dialogue, or discursive events that serve a significant function in these reproduction modes (249-250). This statement validates that Critical Discourse Analysis is one of the instruments to analyse the Wife of Bath as her assertive status influences her dominant narrative. Postl (1991) states that the notion that language operates as an autonomous system that embodies lexical components, morphological, and syntactic rules that already include gender-based biases operates under the principle that “as a result of their longstanding position in public, decision-making men not only play a decisive role in the economic, political, and social framework of society, additionally they exert influence over the dynamics and semantic framework of each language” (Postl, 1991, p. 89).

Originating in the late 1980s, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), also known as Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), has evolved into a recognized and firmly established field in social science research (Van Dijk, 2012). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a methodological and theoretical research approach that scrutinizes the intricate relationship between discourse and social contexts. In particular, CDA is a methodological framework within discourse analysis and investigates how social inequality, identity, and ideology are constructed through discourse embedded in social and political environments. (Van Dijk, 2001: 352). Language plays a fundamental role in the development and reinforcement of ideologies that hold a significant position in shaping and sustaining social roles and stratifications (Wodak, 2001, p. 10). Within this context, CDA encompasses various frameworks of analysis which highlight dialectical methods for examining power associations and how they are shaped through discursive practices (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 23), which aptly fits the Wife of Bath’s stance in the medieval male-dominated realm reflected in her language and discourse.

Analytical frameworks for discourse analysis engage with social issues by recognizing how discourse is utilized within the intersection of historical, social, and cultural contexts (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, 258). In exploring the structure and meaning of narratives, scholars of literary theory and, to a lesser extent, critics have applied linguistic insights to their theoretical frameworks. A deep

exploration of the linguistic elements shaping discourse and extending beyond individual sentence structures has been widely disregarded by academics seeking to explore the framework of literary narrative discourse, except for a few isolated instances of analyses of the roles of tense and deixis. Discourse analysis encompasses a significantly broader range of analytical tools which may and should be practically integrated into the theoretical exploration of literary narrative discourse both in the construction of theories and in the critical engagement with these theories in practice (Tolliver, 1990, p. 266).

Literary narratives constitute a broader classification of texts constructed through the use of language and discursive practices. Dialogic storytelling and structured literary narratives reflect analogous structural features (Tolliver, 1990, p. 266). The author presents a conceptual argument by addressing the core principles of literary discourse. This argument deconstructs the conceptual and linguistic dimensions of literary storytelling. Moreover, Tolliver (1990) draws attention to the overlapping characteristics of oral and written narratives. This assertion further supports and validates the notion that storytelling, irrespective of its form, whether in spoken discourse or written literature, functions as a primary method of cognitive and social tools for framing and exchanging experiences. The inquiry, “Are there differences in how men and women use language?” contributed significantly to the rise of feminist sociolinguistic studies more than twenty years in the past and it continues to influence particularly since there is consensus among researchers that the answer is a clear yes (Cameron, 1998, p. 947).

Critical Discourse Analysis is an interdisciplinary research approach focused on discourse that explores the ways through which power abuse and social disparity are perpetuated, reproduced, justified, and resisted by written and spoken discourse within social and political settings (Van Dijk, 2012). Power abuse is reflected in medieval history and literary works written in that period. Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* reveals power abuse in most of its sections, focused on the three-estate structure. Moreover, the patriarchal system and its suppression of women in medieval society exemplify power abuse perpetrated by dominant male agents and its reflections in the portrait and tale of the Wife of Bath can be clearly observed.

Manipulation is a frequently used manoeuvre by the Wife of Bath to construct her defiant identity in a male-oriented medieval society. Moreover, through manipulation, she gains dominance over the narrative text and uses this strategy to subvert the patriarchal rules. As illustrated by Van Dijk (2001), there is a wide range of core concepts within Critical Discourse Analysis that require focused analysis since they indicate misuse and manipulation of discourse in power relations. Manipulation represents one of those core concepts. However, this notion is frequently utilized in a more impressionistic way, there is no theoretical framework for these structures and the systematic functions embedded in manipulation (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 95). To investigate manipulative agencies, Critical Discourse Analysis provides significant opportunities for the researcher. This is directly

related to identity construction, power language relations and ideology of the text. Van Dijk (2006) states that a method of discourse analysis is appropriate since the majority of manipulative practices occur via oral and textual discourse. Secondly, individuals subjected to manipulation are members of society, and this takes place via the manipulation of their thoughts and perceptions, enabling a cognitive framework to contribute to an understanding of the manipulation process. Thirdly, manipulation functions as a form of communicative interaction as it involves both power and abuse, a sociological is also essential for analysis (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 360).

As the last word, Critical Discourse Analysis allows for a deeper understanding of the creative techniques used by esteemed literary minds and it serves as a valuable tool for uncovering the distinct rhetorical and linguistic patterns. Scholars have utilized Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate the literary techniques of a particular author. Critical Discourse Analysis is utilized in this study to investigate the linguistic patterns and rhetorical strategies that construct the defiant and autonomous status of the Wife of Bath within her prologue and the tale. By employing Critical Discourse Analysis, the structural and linguistic elements that contribute to the stylistic signature of an author can also be deconstructed. This study uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as an analytical framework to analyse the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. The core intention is to investigate how the Wife of Bath's linguistic style reveals narratives of feminine defiance, autonomy, and gendered power structures in a medieval setting. To address the research goal, a corpus-driven analysis is applied, which facilitates the methodical analysis of linguistic elements in the text via corpus analysis tools. This framework yields a systematic, less-subjective, and empirically grounded analysis. Various corpus analyses are undertaken using Sketch Engine as the central analytical tool. To assist the discourse analysis of the female authority aspects of the Wife of Bath's language in *The Canterbury Tales*, two corpora were created: The Wife's Prologue Corpus and The Wife's Tale Corpus.

Table 1: Total words in The Wife's Prologue Corpus and The Wife's Tale Corpus

Corpus	Chapters	# of Words
The Wife's Prologue Corpus	The Wife Of Bath's Prologue	3329
The Wife's Tale Corpus	The Wife of Bath's Tale	6873
TOTAL		10202

The analysis of the Wife of Bath's language within Sketch Engine is carried out using a concordance tool. Concordance lines are generated to observe how key lexical items are situated within patterns of gendered or rhetorical expression. This allows the researcher to examine the semantic prosody and evaluative connotations attached to specific lexical items, illuminating the rhetorical devices that underpin the Wife of Bath's rebellious discourse and mapping the evolution of her ideological voice within the context of contested gender power relations. Through synthesizing

data-driven corpus methods with interpretive CDA approaches, this study enriches scholarly knowledge of the ways female rebellion is articulated in medieval narratives.



CHAPTER FOUR

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Findings of *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*

The Wife of Bath, Alisoun, is an icon in feminist literature since, as the literature review italicises, she is the subject of multiple studies that explore her as a rebellious character who challenges gender roles and male dominance in the misogynistic Middle Ages. To what degree, nevertheless, this ground-breaking character's radical stance is mirrored in her language and discourse has not yet been the subject of any linguistic study. This thesis aims to close this gap and employ critical discourse analysis to examine the language used in the prologue and the tale of the Wife of Bath to document the parallels between The Wife's feminist cause and her language and discourse.

As indicated by Ruth Wodak (2008, 2011) from a feminist perspective, language can be associated with androcentrism, which disseminates misogyny and a worldview that is persistently male. Language functions as one of the tools to oppress and degrade women and ignore their presence (p. 700). As an example, to many feminists, using the pronoun "he" to refer to everyone upholds a "habit of seeing" or perspective on life that utilizes the male experience as the yardstick by which all other people's experiences are judged. To put it another way, the use of the pronoun "he" to refer to everyone stems from a deeply ingrained cultural mindset that disregards the experiences and viewpoints of women (Tyson, p. 71). Hélène Cixous, for example, contends that language exposes what she refers to as a patriarchal binary thought, which is the idea that the world is composed of opposites, with one being superior to the other. Head/heart, father/mother, culture/nature, intelligible/palpable, sun/moon, and activity/passivity are a few examples of hierarchical binary oppositions. These kinds of oppositions structure our thought processes, and Cixous poses the question, "Where is [the woman]?" (p. 91) for each opposition. In other words, which side of this binary opposition is thought to characterize a feature of the female? It is obvious that, following patriarchal thinking, the woman resides on the right side of each of these oppositions, viewed as inferior and passive by patriarchy and the male is defined by the left side of each opposition, viewed as superior and active by patriarchy. In this sense, language projects the norms and traditions of society, pointing to a male-dominated society. Hence, the structure and use of the language naturally reveal the power dynamics of the male-dominant society and ensure its maintenance. By subverting gender roles through the language and discourse she uses in her prologue and tale, the Wife of Bath

challenges male dominance and traditionally acknowledged female traits during the Middle Ages, as this thesis seeks to demonstrate through a critical discourse analysis.

4.1.1. *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*: Synopsis and Commentary

One distinctive feature of the portrait of the Wife of Bath is its prologue, which is longer than the story itself. The Wife gives a prologue outlining her background and experiences before starting her story. The prologue of *The Wife* introduces the idea she depicts in her story and explains the rationale for her views regarding experience versus authority. The Wife feels qualified to talk because she has had five husbands and, in the prologue, she describes how she gained the upper hand in marriage. The Wife declares at the start of her long prologue that she has always acted on experience rather than authority. She has had five spouses “at the church door” (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, line 6), so she has enough life experience to be considered a specialist. She cannot comprehend Jesus’ scolding of the woman at the well, who also had five husbands, and she finds nothing wrong with having five husbands. She would rather follow the biblical call to “go forth and multiply” (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, line 28). The Wife uses St. Paul’s warning that it is better to marry than to burn and King Solomon’s numerous wives to support her claims. She invites everyone to prove to her that God mandated virginity after demonstrating her familiarity with the Bible. After telling stories about her previous spouses, the Wife explains how she obtained “sovereignty” over them. Regretfully, one of her spouses passes away right after she achieves total control over him. She then goes on to describe how she managed to control her fifth spouse.

The Wife admires a young clerk called Jankyn, and she cannot take her eyes off her at the funeral of her fourth husband. Even though she is twice his age, she and Jankyn are married. She is upset to discover that Jankyn often reads from a selection of texts that denigrate women, starting with the tale of Eve. The Wife, unable to stand these tales any longer, snatches up the book and slams Jankyn so hard that he crashes backward into the fire. He leaps to his feet and strikes her with his hand. She collapses on the ground and feigns death. He offers her anything if she survives, since he is so distraught. She acquires “sovereignty” over her fifth spouse in this way. She is a trustworthy and devoted wife to him from that day till his death. Her story, following the prologue, reaffirms her conviction that Marital happiness is achieved when the wife holds authority. That is how *The Wife's Prologue* presents a powerful female figure, unrestricted by conventional gender norms, who embraces power, love, and sex diverging from the expected norms of medieval feminine

4.1.2. Marriage, Sex and Biblical Discourse

Men unquestionably dominated medieval society, and after marriage, a woman’s identity was mostly characterized in line with her husband’s identity. In connection with the gender disparity,

women were also called the daughter, servant or wife of the head of the household (Ward, 1995, p. 5; Murray, 2004, p. 2). Indeed, since marriage was regarded as an inferior alternative to a life of chastity, two predominant paths were available for women in medieval society: Choosing between matrimony or a spiritual life through monasticism. Women typically married men two times their own age, except those pursuing monastic vows (Bennett, 1974, p. 90; Power, 2000, p. 78). The notion of marriage, which suggested male dominance during the Middle Ages, is torn apart by the Wife of Bath in both her prologue and her story. In her prologue, she expresses her defiance, particularly through the use of biblical language and convictions. Therefore, the Wife defies the patriarchal mindset, which is also evident in the Bible, the “most totalitarian” and “patriarchal” text and “the most unquestionable history of all” (Onega, 1996, p.140).

To begin with, critics widely agree that the Wife of Bath claims authority over males in her prologue. Elaine Robertson (2008), for instance, provides a feminist reading of The Wife of Bath’s Prologue with a particular focus on authority and autonomy, which the Wife endeavours to gain, particularly in her marriage by means of sex. Robertson asserts that the high profile and defiance of patriarchal gender norms of the Wife place her as an iconic female figure of authority, defying the patriarchal structures (p. 589). He discusses that the Wife possesses the upper hand in marriage and she is sexually independent, disregarding traditional gender stereotypes, which constitute a portrayal of female authority in Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (p. 101). Robertson’s (2008) claim might be traced in the lines: “In wifhood I will use my instrument/As freely as my Maker me it sent.” (*The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, lines 149–150). The Wife employs biblical discourse, ‘God’, to justify her sexuality and claim that her body and libido are divinely given to defend herself from patriarchal agents, which is related to power. The Wife claims her right to enjoy her sexuality in marriage, claiming she would utilize her body as God intended. The Wife of Bath disputes the conviction that women should be docile or embarrassed about their sexuality. With her directness and strong views on marriage and gender responsibilities, the Wife sparks a passionate conversation about power dynamics and gender roles. She states that she should be allowed to enjoy her sexuality freely in marriage as God intended. She uses the word ‘instrument’ to challenge patriarchal sexuality norms for women. The adverb ‘freely’ also refers to the capability and assertiveness of the speaker. This emphasizes autonomy and power as well as control of the discourse. Since power and authority were associated with the Church in the Middle Ages, it is highly noteworthy that the Wife resisted male dominance by utilizing the language of God and the Bible. In the Middle Ages, when sexuality was accepted only for reproduction and was otherwise considered a sin, the Wife finds nothing wrong with enjoying her sexuality and having five husbands. She makes use of King Solomon’s numerous wives mentioned in the Bible to endorse her claims:

‘Take wise King Solomon of long ago;
We hear he had a thousand wives or so.
And would to God it were allowed to me

To be refreshed, aye, half so much as he!
He must have had a gift of God for wives,
No one to match him in a world of lives!
This noble king, one may as well admit,
On the first night threw many a merry fit
With each of them, he was so much alive.
Blessed be God that I have wedded five!
Welcome the sixth, whenever he appears.
I can't keep continent for years and years.
No sooner than one husband's dead and gone
Some other Christian man shall take me on,
For then, so says the Apostle, I am free
To wed, o' God's name, where it pleases me.
Wedding's no sin, so far as I can learn.
Better it is to marry than to burn. (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, lines 37–44)

The Wife of Bath's reference to King Solomon suggests that women should not be confined to a monogamous lifestyle. She uses imperative form and first-person plural pronouns to amplify the significance of this citation. She defies canon law and the conventions of male-dominated society by stating that women should be granted equal marital privileges and the same liberties as men. The Wife's use of language parallels Foucault's views on sex, too. According to Foucault (1976), if a person speaks explicitly about sex in a certain sense, s/he subverts the established conventional rules and steps outside social norms in the hope of freedom (p. 6). Foucault is eliciting the discourse involving sex as not a mere utterance but rather disregarding social conventions and a desire to be liberated. For Foucault, the debates about sexuality are not idly embedded within the power structures, and the discourse related to sex is defined by the social conventions and organizations such as law and education. In relation to this, we can assume that ecclesiastical law was one of the patriarchal structures in the medieval era. Therefore, producing an unconventional discourse about sexuality can uncover a desire to subvert patriarchal rules and conventions. This argument aligns with the discourse in which the Wife of Bath uses the pejorative plural noun 'lechers' in the lines "Of wives of later date he also read, / How some had killed their husbands when in bed, / Then night-long with their lechers played the whore, / While the poor corpse lay fresh upon the floor." (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, lines 765-768).

Moreover, the attentive attitude of women is transmitted through the active verbs 'killed' and 'played'; therefore, these conflict with the idea that women are meek and submissive. These verses imply hypocrisy regarding the double standards between genders. The subordinate clause "While the poor corpse lay fresh upon the floor" contrasts the wives' defiance with society's grieving and traditional values of the society. The language choice made by the Wife paves the way for her to

disregard the accepted social conventions. These linguistic patterns in the lines serve the Wife as rhetorical instruments to display her authority on narration. Moreover, their structures help her to reinforce her feminine independence. In Chaucer's storytelling, the Wife of Bath utilizes subordinate clauses and indirect speech to establish her authority, particularly in marriage and sex.

What is more, according to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992), the discourse uttered by women is largely aligned with emotional status, vulnerability, compassion, attachment, collaboration and empathy for others (p. 90). Contrary to this valid statement, the Wife of Bath uses an assertive tone as in the lines: "We women hide our faults but let them show/Once we are safely married, so you say. /There's a fine proverb for a popinjay!" (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, lines 833–835). Thus, her discourse exhibits inconsistency with the meek and submissive nature of women. The opening line starts with the use of first-person plural pronouns. This phrase increases female authority, referring to solidarity among women. In the first line, the active voice "hide our faults but let them show" is used to pinpoint female autonomy and authority. In the opening line, the conjunction 'but' forms a defiance against gender stereotypes and a conflict between men and women. The rhetorical phrase provides the Wife of Bath a basis to criticise the power dynamics of society. Moreover, her directness and assertiveness are reinforced by the phrase 'so you say'. Hence, the language she uses serves the purpose of subverting the gender norms dictated by patriarchy.

The Wife of Bath's statements "But no one ever tries a woman out/Until he's married her; old dotard crow!" (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, lines 847–848) embodies an assertive, sharp and direct tone, too. The use of the conjunction 'but' adds contrast to discourse and highlights the negative tone of the Wife of Bath. The negative remark 'no one ever' promotes the idea that women are accurately judged after their marriage. The directness and decisiveness are conveyed via the negative sentence "no one ever tries a woman out". This specific use of language elicits the Wife's power and feminine nature. The adjective clause "old dotard crow" strengthens her status as a brave speaker who questions male-dominated society and patriarchal agents.

Another critic, Francesca Riddy (1986) examines the women's voices and authority in *the Canterbury Tales* by focusing on the Wife of Bath. Riddy's (1986) study explicitly demonstrates the Wife of Bath's directness and assertiveness in her own narrative, which reinforces her authority (p. 643). Her analysis enables us to see the Wife as a symbol of individual power through feminist lenses. The Wife claims this power mainly due to her experience in marriage, and throughout her story, she puts her experience against the authority identified with men. To give an example, in the lines "That is to say he kept a paramour. /Young, strong and stubborn, I was full of rage" (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, lines 738–739), the Wife uses the statement "That is to say he kept a paramour" as a domination tool in her marriage to gain dominance within the discourse. The noun 'paramour' signifies infidelity and cheating in her marriage; therefore, this serves as a tool to reinforce female authority. Chaucer's use of vivid adjectives such as 'young', 'strong' and 'stubborn' reflects female

control and autonomy. 'Stubborn' represents her dominant and defiant status in marriage. Combined with all these linguistic features and word choices, the narrative control of the Wife increases immensely. The past tense sentence 'I was full of rage' shows her emotions and the adjective 'anger' contrasts with the patriarchal idealized woman definition. Throughout this part, accusative statements are employed by the Wife to reinforce her authority and control in discourse.

In line with her rebellious nature, the Wife of Bath's Prologue evokes a despise for men. She displays a rejecting attitude towards her husband as he tends to have control over her. Derogatory language use "A man who seeks to build his house of swallows, /A man who spurs a blind horse over fallows, /Or lets his wife make pilgrimage to Hallows, /Is worthy to be hanged upon the gallows. /But all for naught. I didn't give a hen/For all his proverbs and his wise old men. /Nor would I take rebuke at any price;/I hate a man who points me out my vice, /And so, God knows, do many more than I." (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, lines 906–914) exhibits the character's disregarding the gender norms, hence she ignores a spouse who has urges to dominate her. Moreover, the first-person narrative "I didn't give a hen", demonstrates her underestimation of the patriarchal society. This negative sentence expresses her defiance against patriarchal agents. Her disregard for the criticism made by men signifies her reluctance to accept male authority and her desire for autonomy. The line "[a]bout that book and why I tore the page" (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, line 637) demonstrates the most obvious example in the text of the Wife's rejection of the criticism directed at women by men. The fact that her young husband Jankin, reads the book containing stories that humiliate women out loud to her every day is a warning that she must accept male authority and superiority:

Upon a night Jankin, that was master of our house,
Read on his book, as he sat by the fire,
Of Eve first, how for her wickedness
All mankind was brought to wretchedness,
For which Jesus Christ himself was slain,
Who bought us back with his heart's blood.
Lo, here clearly of woman you may find
That woman was the cause of the loss of all mankind.
(*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, lines 713-720)

As an indication of her rejection of male authority, the Wife rips her husband's book and throws it into the fire. After this rebellion, the Wife becomes the master of the house: "We made an agreement between our two selves. / He gave me all the control in my hand, / To have the governance of house and land," (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, lines 812-814). Another negative phrase, "Nor would I take rebuke at any price" represents evidence that she doesn't meekly accept male supremacy. The Wife's anger is transmitted through the verb 'hate'. A woman's discontent doesn't conform to the idealized image of women in medieval society. The grammatical framework of this

passage enables the Wife to strengthen her feminist standpoint against the male authority and assert her independence, ignoring stereotypical gender roles created by society.

In the following lines, the Wife of Bath warns that an angry woman can be more deadly than a dragon or a tiger: “With lion, dragon, or abomination/Than with a woman given to reproof. /Better,” says he, “take refuge on the roof/Than with an angry wife, down in the house;/They are so wicked and cantankerous” (*The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, lines 930–934). Comparing women to deadly beasts shows a desire to uphold patriarchal dominance and a dread of female autonomy. The usage of similes like “lion,” “dragon,” and “abomination,” provides a negative picture of women using reverse psychology. She embraces the negative criticism through male-dominated narrative to establish her authority and independence. Therefore, this can constitute a manoeuvre flipping the narrative to her advantage.

Mary Carruthers (1990) is another scholar who discusses gender, power and sexuality in relation to the Wife of Bath’s rejection to conform to the patriarchal conventions of medieval society and italicises her self-reliance, which relocates her agency and status in the society (p. 210). To Carruthers, “Alisoun has often been characterized as attempting to do away with authority altogether, as setting up a heterodox doctrine of marriage based on female supremacy to replace the traditional medieval view, sanctioned by the church fathers and by common law, that wives should be humble, obedient, and submissive to their husbands in all things” (p. 210). Carruthers’ statement exemplifies the Wife of Bath’s rejection of conforming to the rules of the male-dominated society. In a similar vein, Paul Strohm (1996) examines the Wife of Bath’s position as a female authority figure in medieval society and points out that autonomy and the assertiveness of the Wife of Bath exhibit distortions within the power dynamics and defy male-dominated hierarchies (p. 32). Parallel to what Carruthers and Strohm foreground, the lines “A woman always casts her shame away/When she casts off her smock, and that’s in haste. /A pretty woman, if she isn’t chaste, /Is like a golden ring in a sow’s snout.” (*The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, lines 935–938) contrast with the stereotypical female behaviour and expected social conventions. The word ‘A woman’ stands out as a generalization and amplifies women’s resilience and disposition to endure difficult situations. This statement additionally demonstrates female supremacy and resistance compared to men. The Wife of Bath, with the help of a simile, “Like a golden ring in a sow’s snout” displays the prejudiced attitudes of the patriarchal agents and society. This tactic is used many times by the Wife of Bath as a victimization instrument to strengthen her authority and power. A derogatory metaphor, “sow’s snout” is used to refer to men. This lexical choice illustrates the Wife of Bath’s attempt to gain control and strengthen her authority within the discourse.

Elaine Nellman (1993) explores the authorial voice of the Wife of Bath and reflections on female authority within the text. Nellman states that the Wife’s control over the discourse and her assertive tone contradict conventional notions of a passive female (p. 423). The Wife’s burning of

her husband's book "Valerie and Theofraste" and restoring authority in her marriage is expressed through "I made him burn that book upon the spot./And when I'd mastered him, and out of deadlock/Secured myself the sovereignty in wedlock,/And when he said, "My own and truest wife," (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, lines 949–952). This scene can be interpreted as disregarding the gender norms, too, as it indicates that the Wife represents an authority figure and seizes power in her spousal relations. This part of the story, from a feminist perspective, demonstrates the speaker's autonomy and her violation of the patriarchal conventions through discourse. The Wife of Bath's causative statement "I made him burn that book upon the spot" reveals the power and her supremacy in her marriage and represents an unprecedented position regarding the power dynamics in matrimony. Her direct and assertive voice in language use accommodates her authority. Another linguistic feature which is associated with power includes a past perfect tense sentence: "And when I'd mastered him". This statement indicates a growth in the Wife's authority. The linguistic choice in these lines reflects the notion that the Wife gradually reinforces her authority. Considering the societal norms and conventions, "And when he said, 'My own and truest wife'" subverts the power dynamics and relations in marriage. Through the use of a compound sentence structure, the Wife enables her husband to accept her assertive authority. The last line contains a reported speech uttered by her husband and the possessive pronoun 'My' demonstrates a submissiveness and a mastership regarding the yielding of her husband. It is crystal clear that this methodical tactic indicates a power transfer in marriage, and it has a great influence on power dynamics. This transfer immensely disrupts traditional gender roles and conventions. To sum up, the grammatical structures such as first-person pronouns, compound sentences, causative sentences and past perfect tense strengthen the Wife of Bath's female authority and suggest a feminist standpoint.

4.1.3. Sexuality

Social conventions and church doctrine influenced attitudes about sexuality during the Middle Ages. Church fathers like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas stressed the necessity to repress bodily cravings in favour of spiritual development, viewing lust as a result of the Fall of Man. The Church Fathers, including Tertullian (c. 155-255), Cyprian (c. 200-258 AD), Jerome (c. 347-419), Augustine (354-430), Clement of Alexander (c. 150-215), and Origen (c. 185-254), agreed that women were responsible for sin as the root of all evil (Lerner, 1993, pp. 140- 143) mainly drawing on the story of Adam and Eve, who, by the agency of Eve, were barred from the Garden of Eden. In Georges Duby's words, as the daughters of deceitful Eve, to medieval people, women were "bearers of evil" (1998, p. 4). This perspective shaped moral ideas and created a general scepticism of sexuality and women. These concepts were adopted by moral sermons and books of penance, which developed guidelines and standards for sexual conduct. Sexuality was regarded as normal and essential for reproduction inside marriage and under specific circumstances. Ecclesiastical doctrine asserted that the primary function of sexual relations within marriage was reproduction. The intention was to improve the probability of pregnancy by timing sexual activity according to the woman's most fertile period.

After marriage, A woman's honour and her acknowledgment of male authority over her sexuality were strongly linked to the notion of marital fidelity. (Bennett, 1989, p. 176).

The Wife of Bath's defence of sexual freedom, discussion of her sexual experiences, and using her experience in sexuality to obtain dominance are therefore blatant acts of rebellion against the Church and the male-dominated medieval society. Examining the words of the Wife over sexuality shows us the discourse through judgemental and moralistic lenses as in the lines "A lecherous mouth begets a lecherous tail. /A woman in her cups has no defence, /As lechers know from long experience." (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, lines 923–925). The lines start with a proverb, "A lecherous mouth begets a lecherous tail," which points out sagacity and practical knowledge. This remark refers to a timeless reality and asserts power and dominance. The proverb involves a pejorative noun phrase "a lecherous mouth" emphasizing the relation between the 'mouth' and 'tail'. The negative sentence "A woman in her cups has no defence" highlights the weak and susceptible nature of women. 'A woman' is a generalization and foregrounds the victimization of women which contributes to the female authority of the Wife of Bath. Moreover, stereotypical representation of women is expressed through the words "A lecherous mouth" and "A woman in her cups". The noun 'lecher' is used by the Wife to demonstrate that women are highly vulnerable when intoxicated. This functions as a self-justification for the Wife of Bath and with the phrases 'lechers know', 'begets' and 'has no defiance', she challenges gender roles and conventions. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1976) points out the idea that people's desire to talk about sex results from their defying preconceived notions and social power dynamics. To Foucault, speaking about sex evokes enlightenment, liberation and happiness (p. 7). Foucault provides an analysis of discourse related to sexuality and suggests that the longing to speak about sex arises from a challenge against established norms of society and power structures. Therefore, 'liberation' can also be associated with The Wife of Bath's autonomous behaviours or her quest for independence, which can be traced through her language and discourse. Foucault's arguments (1976) throw light on the Wife of Bath's desire to speak explicitly about sex:

If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom (p. 6).

This excerpt analyses deeply the tension between contrasting elements of power structures, imposed limitations, and challenges to authority, within the scope of sexual discourse. That is regulated by social norms, indicating that it is regulated, silenced, or regarded as taboo in public discourse. When someone engages in discussions about private or intimate experiences and sexual expression transparently, it may be considered as a deliberate act of defiance against authority, A subversion of established norms and a resistance to imposed limitations.

4.1.4. Challenging and Subverting Religious Doctrine

The Wife of Bath's autonomous status and subverting the biblical text can be examined through Foucault's analysis of power dynamics. Foucault (1976), in *The History of Sexuality*, discusses the notion of 'repression' and draws attention to the link between repression and knowledge, and power and sexuality that existed since the classical age. As claimed by Foucault, defying gender norms and conventions is challenging to practice, and it requires an irruption of speech (p. 5). Foucault uses the term an irruption of speech to refer to breaking taboos about sexuality and this can be directly linked to the assertiveness and boldness of The Wife of Bath as the character openly discusses the issues related to sexuality. Therefore, Foucault's "irruption of speech" parallels Chaucer's character in terms of her autonomous and independent status, which challenges the conventional gender norms entailing a power dynamic such as an assertive tone. This practice enables the Wife to establish dominance and control over the discourse as seen in these lines: "Had God commanded maidenhood to all / Marriage would be condemned beyond recall, / And certainly if seed were never sown, / How ever could virginity be grown?" (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, lines 146–149). The first two lines consist of a conditional sentence and indicate a degree of probability. The Wife criticizes the notion that everybody should be a virgin. This conditional statement creates a hypothetical scenario in which she defies the concept of virginity and theological doctrines. Stepping into the realm of religion and questioning conventional values strengthens her authority beyond measure. The seeking authority continues with the rhetorical question 'How ever could virginity be grown?'. This rhetorical manoeuvre facilitates her control and power over discourse regarding maidenhood and marriage issues. The noun 'seed' refers to the breeding function of women. Hence, the Wife invalidates and redefines the notions dictated upon women by male-dominated society.

Furthermore, as seen from the lines, "Lies, tears and spinning are the things God gives/By nature to a woman, while she lives." (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, lines 872–873), the Wife of Bath subverts the established norms and conventions to gain control over the discourse. The first line consists of a typical subject-verb object model and 'lies, tears and spinning' pinpoints unfavourable stereotypes. Each word selection represents stereotypical gender attributes of women under the influence of a male-dominated society. 'Lies' has multiple meanings, such as deceit; however, considering the broader context of the lines, it may refer to the gender roles placed upon women. Susceptibility of women is highlighted via the noun 'tears' and it is stated that female attributes like this were given by God to women. Together with all these words, women are portrayed as drama queens in the eyes of the male-dominated society. The noun 'spinning' signifies household duties imposed upon women by society. The noun 'god' adds a religious dimension to the discourse and indicates a divine justification. Linking these feminine traits to God, the Wife of Bath attempts to climb up the ladder within the male-dominated medieval society. The phrase 'by nature' demonstrates acceptance and adoption instead of admitting them as flaws. Therefore, the Wife's

assertive tone is amplified through these tactics. The rhyme in the lines ‘gives’ and ‘lives’ attaches a melodic rhythm to the text besides adding an assertive and persuasive tone to the Wife’s discourse.

A study presented by Erin Hansen (2003) provides an analysis of the Wife of Bath within the scope of disrupting gender power dynamics and conventional norms. Hansen (2003) discusses that challenging male-dominated dynamics inherent in the hegemonic system enables the Wife of Bath to emerge as a feminist autonomy symbol (p. 167). In the lines “And he would take the Bible up and search/For proverbs in Ecclesiasticus, /Particularly one that has it thus /Suffer no wicked woman to gad about. /And then would come the saying (need you doubt?)” (*The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, lines 742–746), the Wife of Bath employs the reported speech to display and subvert spousal behaviour and discourse patterns in traditional power dynamics. Male agents utter statements such as “Suffer no wicked woman to gad about” to restrict women’s autonomy and control. Concerning this, the imperative structure reveals control as the spouse places his assessments upon women. Biblical allusions provide the religious evidence to reinforce male authority. Furthermore, this reference demonstrates the exploitation of Ecclesiastical law and religious scripture. However, the Wife challenges these Biblical references by subverting the established norms of society. This reported speech constitutes an example of fortifying patriarchal notions, while the sarcastic phrase ‘need you doubt?’ indicates a sarcastic tone and an underestimation of her spouse’s status. This structure also functions as an imperative phrase. In this sense, these structures create inconsistency between two opposing forces. The Wife defies the social conventions and the power dynamics that try to enslave women.

Likewise, Susan Crane (1990) analyses the interaction between males and females in *The Canterbury Tales* and asserts that the Wife of Bath, through her valour and self-reliance, defies conventional power structures which place her at the centre of the text as a female authority (p. 35). In the following lines, the Wife, to gain authority, employs the word “By God,” which serves as an oath to increase the reliability and credibility of the discourse in the age of faith she lives in: “Who called the lion savage? Do you know? /By God, if women had but written stories/Like those the clergy keep in oratories, /More had been written of man’s wickedness/ Than all the sons of Adam could redress.” (*The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, lines 692-696). The lines start with a rhetorical question, which describes the lion as savage and this can be associated with the male dominance over the discourse. The use of the adjective ‘savage’ demonstrates the negative representation of women. Emphasizing this analogy, the Wife draws attention to the misrepresentation of women by male-dominated storytelling. By means of the phrase “By God”, the Wife endeavours to gain power and control over men. The conditional statement in the first line, ‘if women had but written stories,’ is presented as a distortion of reality and gender roles. Her narrative control is increased by defying established gender norms of society. This statement also draws attention to the nonexistence of men’s wickedness within the literary texts. The conditional sentence includes a past-tense structure to point out a missed opportunity. This conditional statement is also in the active voice therefore, it elicits

female control and authority. That is how the literary past is criticised by the Wife as it was created by patriarchal agents. Her powerful and assertive tone conflicts with the notion that women are submissive and meek.

By continuing to adhere to the discourse of the Bible, the Wife uses the subject pronoun 'I', to claim her authority: "People may guess or frame a supposition, /But I can say for certain, it's no lie, / God bade us all to wax and multiply. /That kindly text I well can understand." (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, lines 28-31). In contrast to the use of "I" emphasizing her claimed authority, 'people' may refer to males in the first sentence which strengthens her rebellion against the male order. That is how, through the way she uses language, the Wife of Bath defies gender standards. Moreover, the modal 'can' denotes her capacity to make bold comments that defy society. The word 'kindly' in the final sentence and her declaration of comprehension add to a feminine viewpoint as a competent authority. The first-person pronoun repetition in 'I can say for certain' and 'That kindly text I well can understand' is an anaphora that increases the Wife of Bath's control and power over the discourse. Likewise, the analysis of the Wife of Bath provided by Carolyn Dinshaw (1987) focuses on her authority over her own discourse. Dinshaw's analysis presents arguments about the Wife's manipulations of biblical texts to reinstate her dominance over the narratives. Furthermore, to Dinshaw, through subverting the biblical literature, the Wife defies male dominance and authority, which enables her a room to exert power and social dominance (pp. 45-46).

What is more, in the discourse of the Wife of Bath, grammar, pronouns, and rhetorical tactics support the female authority. Her language stresses assertiveness and feminine biblical interpretation, which entirely challenges male superiority and dominance. To exemplify, the verb 'multiply' refers to the reproductive abilities of women, and the noun 'God' is used to validate the choices made by the Wife of Bath and other women. Therefore, she uses the biblical account to gain authority over men and disrupt the social norms restricting women's freedom in a male-dominated circle. That is how, as suggested by Dinshaw (1987), the Wife of Bath's narrative discourse enables her to maintain an autonomous status, defy patriarchal power structures and exercise her control over her life (p, 47).

As indicated by Sandra Gilbert (1979), the Wife of Bath is represented in great detail as a feminist critique of male-dominated society. Within this context, Gilbert discusses the Wife of Bath's defiance, independence and sexual freedom and draws attention to her status as a female authority figure disregarding conventional gender norms. Gilbert's statement (1979) claims "With Chaucer's astute Wife of Bath, therefore, Anne might demand, "Who peynted the leoun, tel me who?" And, like the Wife's, her own answer to her own rhetorical question would emphasize our culture's historical confusion of literary authorship with patriarchal authority" (p. 22) This draws parallelism between the two characters in terms of their defiance against patriarchy. They criticize the historical silencing of women and their perspectives in traditional literary discourse.

The Wife's defiance can be observed in her defiance of religious authorities and male-dominated narratives. The Wife's words "For take my word for it, there is no libel/On women that the clergy will not paint, /Except when writing of a woman-saint, /But never good of other women, though." (*The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, lines 895–899) indicate the religious officials' employment of double standards and unfair treatment against women. The societal hypocrisy that the Wife criticizes has received significant attention from literary critics. For example, the ecclesiastical constraints imposed upon nuns were stricter than those on monks and they were regarded as subordinate. This partially stemmed from a result of the patriarchal construction of female identity as sensual and lecherous. In addition, although nuns belonged to the clergy, they did not have the same rights as monks because they were not allowed to become priests, their abbesses were not allowed to have a room in the House of Lords, and they were typically placed under a male clerical order (Lee pp. 160-61; Forgeng p. 30).

Concerning the inferior position of medieval women in the Church, Shahar points out that "[a] Christian woman could not officiate in church. She could not take the sacrament of the priestly order (*ordinatio*) and she was denied the right to preach" (p. 22). Excluding the woman saints reflects the notion that women should completely conform to the rules and idealized gender stereotypes created by patriarchal agents. In addition to this, restraining and strict statements fortify the gender notions of society. As indicated by the rejection of "there is no libel on women", this negative phrase highlights the categorical nature of the negative portrayals. The clergy's mistreatment of women is conveyed via this negative statement. This section of the story includes an exceptional clause, "except when writing of a woman-saint" and this demonstrates the hypocrisy of the religious officials. Within this context, we are introduced to another grammatical structure, a conditional phrase. "For take my word for it" pinpoints the Wife's supremacy and control as she is capable of uncovering the double standard implementations of the clergy class. Overall, these lines present the certainty of the negative portrayals that provide an opportunity to strengthen female authority and defy the religious officials' discourse. Combined with all these notions, this framework contributes to feminist criticism to a large extent. We can conclude that *The Wife* challenges and subverts religious doctrine as a defence and a gaining power strategy. That is, the Wife writes her own version of marriage by defying patriarchy and subverting the marriage discourse of the Bible which parallels male authority.

4.2. Findings of *The Wife of Bath's Tale*

4.2.1. *The Wife of Bath's Tale*: Synopsis and Commentary

In both *the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, the Wife of Bath stands out as a female authority figure challenging the conventional norms of society and her personality involves autonomy and outspokenness. She rediscovers her status in marital affairs regarding power dynamics. The main

theme of the Wife of Bath's tale circles around the question "What do women desire most?" and the answer is "sovereignty". Traditional male-dominated values and male supremacy are subverted throughout the Wife's Tale. The Wife, who recently married a man who is twenty years younger than her, tells a story about an elderly hag who gets control over her young husband and leads a life of contentment.

While riding through the woodland in Arthur's castle, a young knight spots a stunning girl and rapes her. The knight should be decapitated following the law: "That this knight was condemned to be dead, / By course of law, and should have lost his head" (*The Wife of Bath's Tale*, lines 891-892). However, King Arthur heeds his wife Guinevere's advice, and the queen promises to spare the knight's life if he can respond to the question of what women desire most within a year: "I grant thee life, if thou canst tell me/ What thing it is that women most desire." (*The Wife of Bath's Tale*, lines 904-905). While making his way through the countryside, burdened by grief, He seeks answers by questioning every woman he meets. The knight must make his way back to the royal court once more. As he passes through the woodland, he directs his question to a group of dancing women. However, the dancers disappear before he can get close, leaving behind a hag, an ugly elderly woman: "Save on the green he saw sitting a woman /There can no man imagine an uglier creature" (*The Wife of Bath's Tale*, lines 998-999). He asks her the question and says that if she can tell him what ladies want most, he will reward her. Yet, he must promise his life to the elderly woman for her to help him. She whispers the answer in the knight's ear after he agrees to marry her which saves the life of the knight.

The knight does not want to marry the old woman and he is given an option: She might stay unattractive but faithful and moral, or she could be gorgeous, but he would have to take the possibility that she would cheat on him. The old woman states that she will be both truthful and lovely since the knight grants her the freedom to make her own decisions and gets the mastery of the knight: "Then have I gotten mastery of you," she said, /Since I may choose and govern as I please?" (*The Wife of Bath's Tale*, lines 1236-1237). That is how the Wife turns the medieval world upside down by allowing the hag to make the decision, thereby disrupting the male's sovereignty in support of the woman's authority. At the end of the story, after telling the knight to kiss her, the hag changes into a young lady, and they lead a happy life together.

4.2.2. Marriage

The Wife of Bath's dominant status in her marriages is reflected in her tale and her desire for sovereignty aligns with the moral of her tale. To exemplify, the lines "A woman wants the self-same sovereignty /Over her husband as over her lover, /And master him; he must not be above her. /That is your greatest wish, whether you kill/Or spare me; please yourself. I wait your will" (*The Wife of Bath's Tale*, lines 117-121) indicates the Wife's desire to have control over both her husband and

lover. The words 'sovereignty' and 'master' are used as contributory tools to reinforce her authoritative status. The Wife rejects a relationship dominated by her husband; instead, she favours a collaborative power dynamic rather than one where her partner has dominance. The negative statement "He must not be above her" denounces the notion of spousal superiority. Furthermore, these remarks strengthen her opposition to reconciliation. The Wife's longing for authority contradicts traditional gender conventions of the male-dominated society. The Wife's preference for words combined with the linguistic features she used in the discourse deepens her assertive and imperious tone. The Wife's assertive and direct discourse continues with the correlative conjunction "whether you kill or spare me." Her steadiness and outspokenness against male-dominated society are transmitted through the line and she challenges gender stereotypes and male power systems. Additionally, this paves the way for her to criticize power dynamics and relations.

4.2.3. Victimization

Victimization is a frequently used manoeuvre by the Wife of Bath to reinstate her authority and move the yardsticks, bending the power dynamics. In the following lines, the Wife utters a violent act: "He saw a maiden walking all forlorn/Ahead of him, alone as she was born. /And of that maiden, spite of all she said, /By very force he took her maidenhead." (*The Wife of Bath's Tale*, lines 986–989). The bold statement 'By very force he took her maidenhood' elicits a brutal force peculiar to men, referring to sexual dominance. The noun 'force' indicates that the violent act is not allowed by the victim. It also refers to power dynamics regarding gender. The adjective 'alone' in the second verse demonstrates vulnerability and desperation as a consequence of power dynamics. The weakness and meekness of the woman are transmitted through a passive voice 'she was born'. The use of passive voice may be considered as an instrument to show that women are kind of sitting ducks and they lack the qualities that men have. Pinpointing the confinement of women's freedom and victimization gives the Wife Bath reasonable grounds to criticize male dominance, repulsiveness, and superiority of men. Therefore, this victimization enables her to run her show and demonstrate her assertive tone.

4.2.4. Liberation and Autonomy

The Wife of Bath utilizes her tale to project her desire for liberation to take control of her narrative. The lines "Freedom to do exactly as we please, /With no one to reprove our faults and lies, /Rather to have one call us good and wise. /Truly there's not a woman in ten score Who has a fault, and someone rubs the sore, /But she will kick if what he says is true" (*The Wife of Bath's Tale*, lines 994–999) reveals authority and control over the discourse, too. The Wife independently uses the statement 'to do exactly as we please' to demonstrate her assertiveness and signals a longing for autonomy. As indicated by the lines above, Chaucer's language highlights the Wife's desire to act autonomously as a woman living in a male-dominated society. Through the negative statement "With

no one to reprove our faults and lies”, the Wife tries to make an attempt to escape from the critique. From a linguistic perspective, this structure elicits her desire for freedom and her fear of being criticized. “Truly there’s not a woman in ten score” serves as a generalization which points out intense speculation about women regarding social conventions. Therefore, this hypothesis can trigger feminist ideas upon preconceived notions about gender. If clause “But she will kick if what he says is true” reveals reluctance to embrace her flaws and this conditional statement demonstrates the Wife’s half-heartedness about acknowledging mistakes. This conditional sentence reveals a desire to be free from judgment.

Basically, in the lines “What thing it was that women wanted most. /He stood not silent like a beast or post,” (*The Wife of Bath’s Tale*, lines 142–143), the use of the negative sentence “not silent like a beast or post” keynotes and suggests active participation of women to construct their own narratives. This demonstrates a tendency to eliminate gender norms and give women a voice in their yearnings. Moreover, through this negative statement, the Wife of Bath gives women a chance to be a voice, not an echo. Considering these two lines, it can be inferred that Chaucer’s woman character is not sitting back and waiting for destiny to happen. Alternatively, the Wife through her bold and assertive statement, paves a way to control her destiny and strengthen her status in male-dominated society. Moreover, the metaphor ‘the beast or post’ represents a challenge in disguise against gender norms. Active participation of women is illustrated through the line “Not silent like a beast or post”. The negative phrase, “not silent,” adequately removes the meekness and submissiveness of women. Within this context, this section of the story disaffirms preconceived opinions from a conceptual and

linguistic perspective. That is how the language Chaucer used in his work, serves as a reinforcement of women’s status.

4.2.5. Subverting the Established Conventions

The Wife of Bath’s Tale functions as a promotion of her female dominance in which she subverts the established conventions. The lines “We like to be thought wise and void of sin. /Others assert we women find it sweet/When we are thought dependable, discreet/And secret, firm of purpose and controlled, /Never betraying things that we are told. /But that’s not worth the handle of a rak /Women conceal a thing? For Heaven’s sake! /Remember Midas? Will you hear the tale?” (*The Wife of Bath’s Tale*, lines 1002–1009) combined with the grammatical structures function as a feminist standpoint. This section starts with the first-person plural pronoun “We” and signifies that women are pondering shared encounters and defying biases. Chaucer’s grammatical choice alludes to the unity of gender. The noun ‘sin’ is used to refute arguments related to religious doctrine. The statement “Others assert” draws attention to the subtle difference between the norms of society and the status of the speaker. Through this structure, the speaker is enabled to encounter and analyse stereotypical views of gender. The adjectives ‘dependable, discreet, secret and controlled’ and the noun ‘firm of

purpose' illustrate feminine characteristics which patriarchal society holds in high esteem. Chaucer's selection of words elicits the notion that the primary power is held by men and manifests the denial of women's power, privilege and dominance. Through these structures and autonomy and authority of the Wife of Bath is reinforced.

The Wife Bath utters a rhetorical question, "Women conceal a thing? For Heaven's sake!" and with this query, she conflicts with the notion that women are cunning by their very nature. This rhetorical manoeuvre indicates that she disregards the stereotypes based on gender. The rhetorical tactic continues with 'Remember Midas?' and this serves as an allusion which enables the Wife to make an analogy. Furthermore, with this manoeuvre, she reinforces her arguments.

In conclusion, the Wife of Bath is depicted in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* as one of the most autonomous female characters in literature. Within the consideration of the findings extracted from The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, she greets the eye by speaking explicitly about sex, her control over the narrative, her desire for liberation, her autonomous status in marital affairs, and defying the religious doctrine.

4.3. The Frequency of the Gendered Words Used by The Wife of Bath

Table 2: The Frequency of the Gendered Words Used by The Wife of Bath

	G. Prologue	Prologue	Tale	Whole book
Experience	0	3	0	11
Authority	0	1	0	17
Jesus	0	2	1	23
God/God's	5	45	11	483
Marriage(s)	1	7	0	33
Man	61	39	16	408
Judgement(s)	2	1	0	22
Chaste	0	2	0	18
Apostle (s, 's)	1	5	0	11
Virginity	0	8	0	15
Woman('s,ly)	2	19	5	111
Female	0	1	0	5
Male	0	2	0	4
Book(s)	3	11	1	91
Instrument(s)	0	2	0	15
Husband(s,'s)	1	31	6	102
Wife('s, ly)	0	31	16	292
Govern	2	2	1	15
Wise	4	5	4	63
Wisdom	3	1	1	30
Control	0	1	1	20

Table 2: (Continue)

	G. Prologue	Prologue	Tale	Whole book
Strong	5	2	0	45
Bible	1	3	0	12
Read	14	16	5	72
Sovereignty	0	1	1	5
Master	4	4	1	54
Mastery	0	0	1	3

Table 1 presents the frequency of the keywords that contextualize the findings regarding female authority, critical discourse analysis, and thematic elements within the Prologue and the Tale of the Wife of Bath and the whole book. The purpose of demonstrating this frequency table is to reinforce the hypothesis concerning female authority and to provide significant insights into gender dynamics, authority, and religious discourse in Chaucer's work. Through demonstrating the core elements, we can better understand the thematic structures and rhetorical strategies used by the Wife of Bath. As seen from the table, gender-related words highlight the idea that The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale is immensely centred upon the male-female power relations and marriage as an institution through which men control women and claim authority and superiority over them, which is subverted by the language and discourse of the Wife of Bath.

4.3.1. Gendered Terms

Table 3: Gendered Terms

Word	G. Prologue	Prologue	Tale	Whole Book
Man	61	39	16	408
Woman(*s, *ly)	2	19	5	111
Female	0	1	0	5
Male	0	2	0	4
Husband(*s)	1	31	6	102
Wife(*s, ly)	0	25	16	292
Virginity	0	8	0	15
Chaste	0	1	0	18

The most frequently used word is "Man" with the occurrence of 73 in the Prologue, 16 in the Tale, and 408 in the whole book. This indicates the Wife of Bath's deep relation with male authority since she discusses female dominance within marriage.

"Wife" is used 25 times in the Prologue, 16 in the Tale, and 292 in the whole book and it has a higher frequency than "husband" with the occurrence of 31 in the Prologue, 6 in the Tale, and 102 in the whole book. These frequencies demonstrate the Wife's self-definition through marital status.

Therefore, centring upon the word “Wife” instead of “husband” reflects parallelism with her attempt to assert dominance over men in marriage.

“Woman” appears 19 times in the Prologue, 5 times in the Tale, and 111 times in the whole book. However, “man” strengthens the Notion that men have more control over the narrative contrary to the low profile of the female voices.

“Male” and “Female” scarcely appear with 1 and 2 occurrences in the Prologue, and this highlights the idea that Chaucer’s text prefers to use status like “wife” and “husband” instead of gendered identifiers.

These frequencies of words prove that the Wife of Bath’s identity creation circles around discourse regarding gender relations. Her rhetorical preferences strengthen the assertions of female authority, particularly in marriage.

Figure 8: View of the Concordance Tool Showing the Use of ‘man’

1	doc#0 g the Samaritan Beside the well, Christ Jesus, God and man .</s><s>"Thou has had five men husband unto thee And
2	doc#0 Christ Jesus, God and man.</s><s>"Thou has had five men husband unto thee And he that even now thou hast," sa
3	doc#0 an one husband's dead and gone Some other Christian man shall take me on, For then, so says the Apostle, I am fre
4	doc#0 for his bigamy?</s><s>I know that Abraham was a holy man And Jacob too I speak as best I can – Yet each of ther
5	doc#0 n, we know, had severalbrides, Like many another holy man besides.</s><s>Show me a time or text where God disp
6	doc#0 bigamous in such a bed.</s><s>Though it were good a man should never touch A woman (meaning here in bed and
7	doc#0 Why else the proverb written down and set In books: "A man must yield his wife her debt"?</s><s>What means of pa
8	doc#0 3 for chastity.</s><s>Christ was a virgin, fashioned as a man , And many of his saints since time began Were ever pe
9	doc#0 an ten.</s><s>And those who won't be warned by other men , By other men shall suffer their correction, So Ptolemy
10	doc#0 And those who won't be warned by other men, By other men shall suffer their correction, So Ptolemy has said, in this
11	doc#0 is you began!</s><s>Tell us your tale, spare not for any man .</s><s>Instruct us younger men in your technique.'</s>
12	doc#0 tale, spare not for any man.</s><s>Instruct us younger men in your technique.'</s><s>'Gladly,' she said, 'if you will ɛ
13	doc#0 out of hand.</s><s>No one can be so bold – I mean no man –At lies and swearing as a woman can.</s><s>This is r
14	doc#0 I ask what likelihood will keep her straight With all those men who lie about in wait.</s><s>' "You say that some desire
15	doc#0 and if her looks are foul you say that she is hot for every man that she can see, Leaping upon them with a spaniel's ai
16	doc#0 .eaping upon them with a spaniel's airs Unti she finds a man to buy her wares.</s><s>Never was goose upon the lak
17	doc#0 / as you stump off to bed, You brute!</s><s>You say no man of sense would wed, That is, not if he wants to go to Hei
18	doc#0 id scolding women, are the three Things that will drive a man from home.</s><s>Dear me!</s><s>What ails the poor
19	doc#0 n home.</s><s>Dear me!</s><s>What ails the poor old man to grumble so?</s><s>' "We women hide our faults but
20	doc#0 3 when you buy them, Spoons, chairs and furnishings, a man can try them As he can try a suit of clothes, no doubt, Bi

Figure 8: (Continue)

21	doc#0 </s><s>Welike to be at large.</s><s>' "Above all other men may God confer His blessing on that wise astrologer Sir
22	doc#0 my who, in his Almagest, Has set this proverb down: 'Of men , the best And wisest care not who may have in hand Th
23	doc#0 ns right enough.</s><s>He's a mean fellow that lets no man handle His lantern when it's just to light a candle He has
24	doc#0 Misfortunes trouble earth, east, west and north, And no man living could endure a fourth.</s><s>My dear sir shrew, v
25	doc#0 tackle one for wenching, out of hand, Although so ill the man could hardly stand, Yet he felt flattered in his heart beca
26	doc#0 em do their nicety.</s><s>And so I tell this tale to every man , "It's all for sale and let him win who can."</s><s>No e
27	doc#0 ale and let him win who can."</s><s>No empty-handed man can lure a bird.</s><s>His pleasures were my profit; I c
28	doc#0 ɐ to have a quiet life.</s><s>One of us must be master, man or wife, And since a man's more reasonable, he Should
29	doc#0 <s>One of us must be master, man or wife, And since a man 's more reasonable, he Should be the patient one, you r
30	doc#0 ie patient one, you must agree.</s><s>' "What ails you, man , to grumble so and groan?</s><s>Just that you want m
31	doc#0 want my what-not all your own?</s><s>Why, take it all, man , take it, every bit!</s><s>St Peter, what a love you hav
32	doc#0 >And then would come the saying (need you doubt?) A man who seeks to build his house of shallows, A man who spu
33	doc#0 ubt?) A man who seeks to build his house of shallows, A man who spurs a blind horse over fallows, Or lets his wife ma
34	doc#0 >I didn't give a hen For all his proverbs and his wise old men .</s><s>Nor would I take rebuke at any price; I hate a n
35	doc#0 n.</s><s>Nor would I take rebuke at any price; I hate a man who points me out my vice, And so, God knows, do mar
36	doc#0 e the clergy keep in oratories, More had been written of man's wickedness Than all the sons of Adam could redress it
37	doc#0 And women therefore never can be praised By learned men , old scribes who cannot do The works of Venus more th
38	doc#0 .antippe poured a piss-pot on his head.</s><s>The silly man sat still, as he were dead, Wiping his head, but dared no
39	doc#0 nto her husband's brain While he was sleeping, and the man was slain; Others put poison in their husbands' drink.</s>

The concordance output for “man” in the Wife of Bath’s Prologue demonstrates its prominent role in discussions of patriarchal dominance and gender ideologies. Man operates as a symbol of patriarchal authority and dominance. Using irony, resistance, and comparison as rhetorical strategies, Man functions as a rhetorical contrast that magnifies the Wife of Bath’s assertion of gendered power. Moreover, this strengthens the Prologue’s core focus on feminine autonomy and discursive subversion.

Figure 9: View of the Concordance Tool Showing the Use of ‘wife’

1	doc#0	<s>The Wife of Bath's Prologue 'If there were no authority on earth E
2	doc#0	naritan?</s><s>How many might have had her, then, to wife ?</s><s>I've never heard an answer all my life To give t
3	doc#0	King Solomon of long ago; We hear he had a thousand wives or so.</s><s>And would to God it were allowed to me T
4	doc#0	much as he!</s><s>He must have had a gift of God for wives , No one to match him in a world of lives!</s><s>This n
5	doc#0	rb written down and set In books: "A man must yield his wife her debt"?</s><s>What means of paying her can he inv
6	doc#0	at them be pure wheat loaves of maidenhead Andlet us wives be known for barley-bread; Yet Mark can tell that barley
7	doc#0	ribulation to the grave Upon his flesh, as long as I'm his wife .</s><s>For mine shall be the power all his life Over his
8	doc#0	ing no one could surpass!</s><s>I was about to take a wife ; alas!</s><s>Am I to buy it on my flesh so dear?</s><s>
9	doc#0	tion in the married life In which I've been an expert as a wife , That is to say, myself have been the whip.</s><s>So p
10	doc#0	knowing ones, but to the misadvised.</s><s>A knowing wife if she is worth her salt Can always prove her husband is
11	doc#0	rd, what is that you say?</s><s>Why is my neighbour's wife so smart and gay?</s><s>She is respected everywhere
12	doc#0	as yours.</s><s>Do you want to make an idiot of your wife ?</s><s>Now, by the Lord that gave me souland life, Y
13	doc#0	:k me in your coffer!</s><s>'Go where you please, dear wife ,' you ought to offer, 'Amuse yourself!</s><s> shan't giv
14	doc#0	<s>I shan't give ear to malice, I know you for a virtuous wife , Dame Alice.'</s><s>We cannot love a husband who ta
15	doc#0	ort your life!</s><s>You preach away and say a hateful wife Is reckoned to be one of these misfortunes.</s><s>Is th
16	doc#0	our parables could condemn?</s><s>Must an unhappy wife be one of them?</s><s>' "Then you compared a woma
17	doc#0	be.</s><s>You say that just as worms destroy a tree A wife destroys her husband and contrives, As husbands know
18	doc#0	e a quiet life.</s><s>One of us must be master, man or wife , And since a man's more reasonable, he Should be the
19	doc#0	ok his woman's life For drinking wine— if I had been his wife He never would have daunted me from drink.</s><s>W
20	doc#0	at would have cost his life, To her and to another worthy wife And to my niece, because I loved her well, I'd have told
21	doc#0	r up from days of old, How one Simplicius Gallus left his wife , Deserting her completely all his life, Only for poking ou
22	doc#0	'Some other Roman – I forget his name – Because his wife went to a summer's game Without his knowledge, left h
23	doc#0	A man who spurs a blind horse over fallows, Or lets his wife make pilgrimage to Hallows, Is worthy to be hanged up
24	doc#0	but his pleasure, Which was to read this book of wicked wives ;He knew more legends of them and their lives Than th
25	doc#0	s>'He left out nothing of the miseries Occasioned by his wives to Socrates.</s><s>Xantippe poured a piss-pot on his f
26	doc#0	riaraus lost his life; My husband had a legend about his wife Eriphyle, who for a gaud in gold Went to the Greeks in s
27	doc#0	; That in his orchard-plot there grew a tree On which his wives had hanged themselves, all three, Or so he said, out of
28	doc#0	ad tree And planted in my garden it shall be!"</s><s>'Of wives of later date he also read, How some had killed their hu
29	doc#0	r," says he, "take refuge on the roof Than with an angry wife , down in the house; They are so wicked and cantanker
30	doc#0	ignty in wedlock, And when he said, "My own and truest wife , Do as you please for all the rest of life, But guard your
31	doc#0	ite.</s><s>So help me God I was as kind to him As any wife from Denmark to the rim Of India, and as true.</s><s>A

The concordance output for “wife” marks its integral role in establishing the speaker’s authoritative voice and gendered persona. Recurrently embedded in language through which the speaker asserts dominance and foregrounds her own experience.

Figure 10: View of the Concordance Tool Showing the Use of ‘chaste’

Details	Left context	KWIC	Right context
1 doc#0	., and that's in haste.</s><s>A pretty woman, if she isn't	chaste	, Is like a golden ring in a sow's snout."</s><s>'Who coo

Corpus-based concordance results focus on lexical items such as ‘chaste’ within the textual space of the Wife of Bath’s Prologue. The table illuminates the strategic use of language to construct meaning and authority. Through examination of the words directly preceding and following each term, linguistic consistencies emerge, offering insight into the Wife of Bath’s active contestation of dominant cultural ideologies aligned with traditional ideals of feminine chastity. The term chaste appears detached from conventional virtue discourse but rather within contexts marked by irony or critique that reveal the character’s subversion of patriarchal norms. Such contextual framing echoes the prevailing theme of female opposition to patriarchal norms. The Wife of Bath’s lexical strategies operate as mechanisms for challenging dominant gender ideologies.

4.3.2. Religious References and Narrative Control

Table 4: Religious References and Narrative Control

Word	G. Prologue	Prologue	Tale	Whole Book
God/God’s	5	45	11	483
Jesus	0	2	1	23
Apostle(*s, *s)	1	5	0	11
Bible	1	3	0	12
Book(*s)	3	11	1	91
Instrument(*s)	0	2	0	15
Judgement(*s)	2	1	0	22

“God” or “God’s” has an occurrence of 45 in the Prologue, 11 in the Tale, and 483 in the whole book. This frequency elicits the function of religious discourse in creating medieval conventions of gender roles. “Jesus” appears far less than “God” implying that Chaucer constructs Bath’s engagement with religious themes in relation to a holistic Christian worldview rather than particular ecclesiastical doctrines.

The presence of “Apostle” 5 times in the Prologue, 0 in the Tale, and 11 in the whole book strengthens the Wife of Bath’s arguments with explicit reference to St. Paul’s teachings on marriage, which she seeks to reinterpret in her favour. “Books” plays a significant role in the discourse since

the Wife of Bath's subverting the male-written narratives helps her gain dominance and defy misogynistic biblical sources. These findings suggest that the Wife of Bath is deeply involved in religious and textual authority, yet she twists traditional interpretations to justify her female agency and defy male-dominated society. Therefore, this argument is correlated with Critical Discourse Analysis, since it demonstrates the Wife of Bath's bending of the religious narrative to justify her own identity as a female authority figure.

Figure 11: View of the Concordance Tool Showing the Use of 'Apostle'

1	doc#0 Christian man shall take me on,For then, so says the Apostle , I am free To wed, o' God's name, where it pleases me
2	doc#0 :/s><s>I know as well as you do, never doubt it, All the Apostle Paul has said about it; He said that as for precepts he
3	doc#0 On whom God wills He lets His power fall.</s><s>The Apostle was a virgin, well I know; Nevertheless, though all his
4	doc#0 all his life Over his proper body, and not he, Thus the Apostle Paul has told it me, And bade our husbands they shou
5	doc#0 ad luck to you, start making free With Bible tags in the Apostle's name; 'And in like manner, chastely and with shame, Y

The concordance output for 'Apostle' in Chaucer's Wife of Bath's Prologue demonstrates that the term appears in theological contexts reconfigured to align with the Wife's narrative objectives. Rather than adhering to traditional apostolic teachings, she draws on biblical authority in a subversive and ironic fashion to support her argumentative goals. Moreover, the character reinterprets and critiques traditional ecclesiastical narratives that legitimize male dominance.

4.3.3. Authority and Marriage

Table 5: Authority and Marriage

Word	G. Prologue	Prologue	Tale	Whole Book
Experience	0	3	0	11
Authority	1	1	0	17
Marriage(*s)	1	7	0	33
Master	4	4	1	54
Mastery	0	0	1	3

"Marriage" is mentioned 8 times in the Prologue, 0 in the Tale, and 33 in the whole book and it stands out as a central theme within Chaucer's work. Marriage is accompanied by other words that are used to gain female authority. The nonexistence of "marriage" in the tale indicates that the tale extends beyond marriage as a social institution and rather centres on dominance and preference.

"Authority" appears once in the Prologue, 0 in the Tale, 17 in the whole book and it is rarely presented but its presence elicits the Wife's defiance to patriarchal and narrative dominance.

The presence of “Chaste” 2 times in the Prologue, 0 in the Tale, and 18 in the whole book and “Virginity” 8 in the Prologue, 0 in the tale, and 15 in the whole book, exhibits that the Prologue is deeply involved in the debate regarding the purity of female. The Wife of Bath refuses the virginity concept as a medieval quality tailored for women.

The Wife of Bath places herself against conventional notions of chastity and religious structures of authority and asserts her agency instead of textual learning. The clear distinction between “marriage” and “virginity” exhibits the Wife of Bath’s response to the idealized image of female purity.

Figure 12: View of the Concordance Tool Showing the Use of ‘marriage’

1	doc#0	worth. And that's enough for me, all goes to show That marriage is a misery and a woe; For let me say, if I may make s
2	doc#0	text where God disparages Or sets a prohibition upon marriages Expressly, let me have it!</s><s>Show it me!</s><s>/
3	doc#0	› do.</s><s>'Had God commanded maidenhood to all Marriage would be condemned beyond recall, And certainly if se
4	doc#0	Decrying maidenhood although preferred To frequent marriage ; there are those who mean To live in their virginity, as
5	doc#0	yourself whether you want to sip At that same cask of marriage I shall broach.</s><s>Be cautious before making the i
6	doc#0	ie carriages They use for plays and pageants, went to marriages , And always wore my gayest scarlet dress.</s><s>'Th
7	doc#0	ean to boast – I ever was more provident than most In marriage matters and in other such.</s><s>I never think a mou:

The concordance output for ‘marriage’ in the Wife of Bath’s Prologue highlights its pivotal role in shaping the speaker’s views on the negotiation of marital power and female independence. The term ‘Marriage’ is commonly embedded in contexts that redefine marriage tool for control rather than spiritual devotion. Marriage is reinterpreted by the Wife as a domain for exercising control and agency to establish authority in domestic dynamics and question male-centered societal roles. She repurposes the marital bond to legitimize her control and freedom. In this way, the institution of marriage is instrumentalized to support the Wife of Bath’s rhetorical agency through which she channels the narrative’s critique of patriarchy and assertion of women’s rhetorical strength.

4.3.4. Power and Control

Table 6: Power and Control

Word	G. Prologue	Prologue	Tale	Whole Book
Govern	2	2	1	15
Wisdom	3	1	1	30
Wise	4	4	4	63
Control	0	1	1	20
Strong	5	2	0	45
Sovereignty	1	1	1	5

“Govern” is mentioned 2 times in the Prologue, 1 in the Tale, and 15 in the whole book and this element asserts the argument about who is in charge of marital status and decision making.

“Judgement” appears once in the Prologue, 0 in the Tale, and 22 in the whole book. This low frequency suggests that the Wife of Bath structures her arguments through her own agency and practices in contrast to religious judgment. The Wife of Bath’s Prologue uses a core element regarding governance and judgment to pinpoint personal dominance in contrast to societal and ecclesiastical law.

As a whole, this table and the frequency of the words associated with religion, authority, gender, and marriage demonstrate that the Wife of Bath creates her defiant and assertive status. Moreover, the frequency list involving religious discourse, marital affairs, gender, and authority indicates that the Wife of Bath structures a narrative that subverts patriarchal conventions. The Wife of Bath’s discourse is framed around gender power dynamics. The use of religious words like “God”, “Jesus”, and “Apostle” contributes to the Wife of Bath’s narrative control. We can conclude that language is used as a tool to reinforce female authority in the prologue and tale of the Wife of Bath. The recurrence of “govern” and “judgment” cements her female authority and enables her to be a feminist icon.

Figure 13: View of the Concordance Tool Showing the Use of ‘wise’

1	doc#0	our faults and lies, Rather to have one call us good and wise .</s><s>Truly there's not a woman in ten score Who has
2	doc#0	However vicious we may be within We like to be thought wise and void of sin.</s><s>Others assert we women find it s
3	doc#0	.It bade us follow them as best we can.</s><s>'Thus the wise poet of the Florentines, Dante by name, has written in th
4	doc#0	and my love, my dearest wife, I leave the matter to your wise decision.</s><s>You make the choice yourself, for the p

Concordance-based Corpus findings for ‘wise’ illustrate its association with feminine wisdom and rhetorical power. The term is also aligned with the depiction of women as morally and intellectually authoritative. The word functions to portray the old woman as a figure of wisdom and ethical clarity. Wise functions to emphasize the narrative’s claim that women’s insight is key to achieving mutual understanding and balance in gender dynamics. It also exemplifies the tale’s valuation of feminine moral reasoning as essential to respect, renewal, and balance in marriage.

4.4. Discussion

As one of Chaucer’s most distinguished characters in *The Canterbury Tales*, the Wife of Bath does not hold qualifications regarding the meekness and submissiveness of stereotypical medieval women. Her resistance to patriarchal constraints, independent position, and audacious stance in

expressing sexual matters positions her as an authoritative voice and a nuanced figure who addresses plainly the constraints imposed upon women. Representing the Wife of Bath in this way encourages readers to discover how women's narrative plays a key role in challenging patriarchal ideologies and religious and social power structures.

The Wife of Bath exercises dominance over her husband by subverting conventional power dynamics within marriage. In the prologue, she reverses the rules and established conventions created by ecclesiastical authorities which consist of male clerics who compel women to accept stereotypical gender roles and confine women's autonomy. The Wife of Bath managed to practice her willpower in her five successful marriages.

The Wife of Bath's posing confident questions, playing a dominant role in marriage, autonomy, and narrative control over the discourse are reflected in the analyses of the findings of the study. Therefore, she represents a universal voice speaking in favour of all women; correspondingly she proves that she is not an echo of a stereotypical woman. The Wife of Bath successfully reverses prejudices and notions produced by the male-authored discourse.

Female virginity in the Middle Ages was attached to great importance as a bride was supposed to have her wedding bed untouched. Preconceived Christian teachings are defied by the Wife of Bath to begin with female subjugation, and notions regarding marriage, virginity, and sexuality. However, as shown in the analysis of both the prologue and the tale, Wife of Bath subverts the ecclesiastical and biblical texts related to religious doctrine. By reversing the biblical scripture, the Wife of Bath trivializes the clergy and conventions of the patriarchy, and these manoeuvres are reflected in the linguistic features of the language used.

In the Wife of Bath's marriages, there is no room for negotiation, and she does not recognize marriage as an institution but rather sees it as a wrestling ring. Through various strategies such as sexuality and manipulation embedded within the narrative, she achieves control over her husband. From the extracted lines, it can be seen that the Wife of Bath's tearing a page from his husband's book can be interpreted as a dominant status in marriage. The use of the elliptical clause is used to reinforce her dominance within the discourse.

As stated by Foucault (1976) explicit speaking of sexuality reveals a desire to disregard the social conventions of patriarchy (p. 6). Wife of Bath openly discusses sexual matters, indicating parallelism with Foucault's arguments about sexuality. The noun "God" is frequently used by the character within the discourse related to sexuality. Thus, the Wife of Bath functions to question why women were compelled to remain silent about sexuality and Chaucer enables her to express the things that any other woman could not explicitly utter.

The lexical choices of the Wife of Bath, her assertive tone of speaking, subverting the established norms, and biblical sources directly contribute to gaining her authority and autonomy within the male-dominated medieval society. Rhetorical manoeuvres and questions, pejorative adjectives, conditional statements, first-person nouns, and other grammatical features of the language are used to challenge the conventional rules and norms of the society and enable her to create her own feminine biblical interpretation to dominate the discourse and have a say in marriage which serves as a microcosm of medieval women's position and claim for authority at large. In general, these statements, combined with grammatical features such as opposing ideas, rhetorical queries, first-person plural pronouns, arguments, and cultural references, cement the speaker's arguments against male-dominated society and accepted societal norms. Additionally, these structures facilitate readers to explore the subtlety and perseverance of women contrary to stereotypes regarding gender.

The linguistic features used within the lines manifest a longing for independence and a lack of desire to embrace criticism. Chaucer's work evokes female autonomy, cultural oppression placed upon women and the right to be liberated. Taken as a whole, the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale mainly discuss the nonprivileged status of women and their desire to have autonomy. In Chaucer's depiction of medieval society, the Wife of Bath is mainly concerned with societal conventions and whether women embrace being prudent and trustworthy.

As the last word, the Wife of Bath's character shines through the other female characters in *the Canterbury Tales* as the capability to harbour the defiant nature to resist limitations imposed upon women. The Wife of Bath's desire for liberation, subverting the male-authored religious texts, considering marriage as a battlefield, manipulating her husbands, and explicitly speaking of sexuality and conveying these tactics through her language and grammatical structures allows her to stand out as a female authority figure. The discourse used by the Wife of Bath provides inestimable viewpoints to her authority and rebellious nature which can be traced in the following table, too.

The following research questions were asked in the study and answered as such after examining the prologue and tale of the Wife of Bath in accordance with the critical discourse analysis:

RQ.1. What kind of grammatical structures and rhetorical strategies does the Wife of Bath use in her prologue and tale to establish her defiant and autonomous status?

The Wife of Bath uses gendered words, vivid and pejorative adjectives, first-person pronouns, rhetorical questions, negative phrases and sentences, causative statements, compound sentence structures, similes, imagery, metaphors, imperative structures, conjunctions, passive and active verbs, conditional sentences, allusions, and biblical references in her prologue and tale to construct her rebellious and assertive identity and subvert the established conventions of the patriarchy and religious institutions.

RQ.2. How do linguistic and narrative features in the Wife of Bath's discourse project her negotiation of power and resistance to the male-dominated conventions of society?

Chaucer incorporates in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* a diverse set of stylistic and narrative techniques to challenge androcentric social norms. The Wife of Bath's reliance on first-person pronouns strengthens her authoritative voice and enables her to assert autonomy over the narrative. The Wife of Bath consistently utilizes personal pronouns to establish her self-driven perspective and dominance over the discourse of Chaucer's work. A dominant feature of the Wife's discourse is the repeated use of the first person, which spotlights and elevates her narrative as the core of her argument and as a source of power. Through self-narration, she articulates a bold rejection of conventional roles and challenges to the culturally prescribed roles of silence and obedience imposed on women in medieval texts. Through the use of "I," she maintains control over her personal agency and bodily autonomy. She repeatedly exerts dominance over her audience and male associates, imposing feminine authority. Her narrative demonstrates a purposeful selection of gendered expressions such as "woman," "man," "husband," and "wife." to expose the underlying politics of gender roles within matrimonial and social structures. Such nouns are regularly intensified with derogatory or vivid modifiers, such as "shrewd," "lusty," and "sovereign" which amplify the expressive force and moral complexity of Wife's depictions. The rhetorical question is another frequently used element of discourse by the Wife of Bath to challenge patriarchal agents and structures and spark a discussion. She strategically imitates and dismantles traditional modes of intellectual reasoning by crafting complex and layered sentence structures. Through satirical irony, she ridicules conventional male figures and their perspectives on femininity and gender roles. Her verbal expression serves as an act of rebellion that solidifies her status as one of the most self-sufficient and autonomous figures in *The Canterbury Tales*. She asserts the superiority of lived experience over patriarchal literary traditions. Imperative structures and direct interaction are strategically used to assert influence and confront traditional perspectives. The Wife modifies and subverts canonical religious and scholarly traditions through reinterpretation to frame the discussion in her favour.

RQ.3. What is the role of the Wife of Bath's use of biblical and male-dominated narratives in strengthening her authority?

In *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer presents the audience with a character who strategically utilizes, distorts, and reinvents biblical doctrines and androcentric traditions to exert her dominance and independence, and confront traditional gender roles. The Bible, universally acknowledged as the primary source of male superiority, traditional moral principles, and the social order of medieval society, was historically leveraged to regulate female behaviour and sexual purity. Yet, the Wife of Bath skilfully manipulates biblical references, deploying their messages to legitimize her agency in marriage and sexuality, specifically to justify her numerous matrimonial experiences. In this context,

she twists the meaning of Genesis 1:28, which was often referenced to emphasize the importance of fertility within the confines of a monogamous, lifelong union, to validate her arguments. She alters the meaning of the scripture to advocate for remarriage, affirming her belief that numerous marital bonds are not merely acceptable but also blessed by religious doctrine. By referencing King Solomon's multiple unions, the Wife of Bath deconstructs the belief that polygamous unions are limited to male privilege. Through alluding to King Solomon, the Wife of Bath proposes that women should be granted the same marital freedoms as men. She recognizes virginity as a religious virtue and accepts the theological significance of chastity, yet she actively defies it in her own experience. She emphasizes that a woman's value should not be measured by sexual purity. This empowers her to assert control over her self-governance, bodily independence, and personal freedoms.



CHAPTER FIVE

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examines *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *Tale* in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. It analyses the Wife of Bath's assertion of female authority and subversion of gender roles and male authority by disrupting male authority and biblical sources through critical discourse analysis. By an in-depth analysis of linguistic and rhetorical structures in the prologue and the tale, this study, within the context of gender roles, reveals how the Wife of Bath challenges and reinterprets the traditions, rules, and religious sources through the language use framed within the conceptual domains of marriage, victimization, liberation, autonomy, and subverting the established conventions. Critical discourse analysis uncovers that the Wife of Bath constructs her defiant and autonomous identity through rhetorical questions, manoeuvres, conditional sentences, adjective clauses, active voices, specific use of nouns and verbs, biblical discourse, similes, allusions, and causative statements. Her rhetoric integrates and reconstructs theological interpretations and arguments to assert her authority and her narrative dominance in the medieval realm.

The thesis answers three research questions with regard to the use of language to assert female authority claimed by the Wife of Bath in a medieval context notorious for misogyny and male hegemony. Firstly, the grammatical structures and rhetorical strategies used by the Wife of Bath in her prologue and tale to establish her defiant and autonomous status were presented in the findings and discussed in the next chapter. Secondly, how linguistic and narrative features in the Wife of Bath's discourse projected her negotiation of power and resistance to the male-dominated conventions of society was explained. Finally, the role of the Wife of Bath's use of biblical and male-dominated narratives to strengthen her authority was examined and presented within the findings.

The hypothesis of the study "The Wife of Bath, through the use of rhetoric strategies, biblical references, and other linguistic features, asserts her autonomy and authority and gains power over the narrative" was in line with the literature. This research ultimately foregrounds how CDA provides a powerful lens for analysing the interplay between gender-based hierarchies, textual authority, and ideological struggles. CDA uncovers hidden ideologies embedded in Chaucer's text and illuminates the intersections of language, power, and ideology. Consequently, this study exhibits how the Wife of Bath functions as a dynamic and evolving feminist and cultural archetype and reaffirms her enduring importance as both a literary character and a feminist icon through her use of language.

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