

**Film Title and Release Date:** *The Wife of Bath: An Independent Woman* (2014)

**Length of Film in Minutes:** 30 minutes

**Film Genre:** Documentary/Lecture

**Reviewer Name and Grade:** Stefano T. B., 9<sup>th</sup> Grade

**Date Reviewed:** May 30, 2022

In this episode, Doctor Shippey delves deep into the Wife of Bath's character and history. Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* are renowned for their very detailed characters, and Chaucer visibly spent much time on each pilgrim's story. Yet none are as developed as the Wife of Bath, who has been remodeled multiple times. She is fun, serious, scandalous, and traditional all at the same time! As Dr. Shippey explains, most characters have only two "perspectives": an introduction by Chaucer in the Prologue and a unique tale. The Wife of Bath, on the other hand, has *four* moments dedicated to her—the Prologue, her tale, a sort of autobiography, and the Shipman's tale. In addition, it seems as if Chaucer repeatedly changed his mind about her, borrowing events from other notable medieval texts. Shippey takes a look at a similar "walking tale" that Chaucer most certainly read: Boccaccio's *Decameron*. In the *Decameron*, there is a character very similar to the Wife of Bath, but she is not powerful; on the contrary, she is *powerless*. According to Shippey, Chaucer borrowed her character and the events surrounding her, but he added the unique twist of making her in control of all the men she married.

The most important link between the Wife of Bath and other medieval texts, however, can be traced back to the early Arthurian myths (prior to Sir Thomas Malory). In those legends, if a knight was found misbehaving, he would be put on trial. The goal of the knight was to discover what women desire the most. The answer is "sovereignty"; women desire to be in control of their share, rather than letting their husbands rule them. This is perfectly portrayed in the Wife of Bath's character, showing Chaucer's deep understanding of human nature and women. Thus, the goal of the Wife of Bath in *The Canterbury Tales* was to display independence, fun, and authority—the traits that women at the time sought.

*How did you find the film on Kanopy (by title search, subject search, casual browsing, etc.)?*

I found it as a recommendation after watching the *Beowulf* episode, and since I was reading *The Canterbury Tales*, I thought it would be interesting to see a documentary/lecture about it.

*Did the plot (for fictional movie) or presentation of information (for documentary) keep you interested?*

Yes, especially all of the comparisons to other concurrent works that showed Chaucer's mixing-and-matching of characters. Dr. Shippey's tone was also very fun.

*Was the pace of the film too fast, too slow, or just right?*

It was just right, as he spent enough time explaining her character while also advancing in the story.

*What grade level(s) is this film appropriate for?*

I think that this film is better suited for older students (around 9th grade and up).

*5 stars: I'm really glad I watched this film; it was awesome!*

I really enjoyed this film, since I learned so much about the Wife of Bath, her character, her history, and Chaucer's intentions. It showed multiple perspectives, even bringing in Boccaccio's *Decameron* to find the origins of the Wife of Bath. It was a lot of fun!

**Teen Film Reviewer Registration Form - Kanopy -**

Teen and Parent/Guardian must sign this form - Please write neatly.

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Student Signature Stefano T-B

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