

**A PROCESS OF GROWTH IN ALISOUN OF BATH**

by

**John Gilman Mackin, III, B.S.**

**THESIS**

**Presented to the Faculty of  
The University of Houston-Clear Lake  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-CLEAR LAKE**

**December, 1992**

**Copyright 1992, John Gilman Mackin, III  
All Rights Reserved**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**I should like to express gratitude to  
Professor Gretchen Mieszkowski.**

**John Mackin**

**A PROCESS OF GROWTH IN ALISOUN OF BATH**

by

**John Gilman Mackin, III**

**APPROVED BY THESIS COMMITTEE**

  
Gretchen Mieszkowski, Chair

  
Craig White, Committee Member

  
John Gorman, Committee Member

  
Carol Snyder, Associate Dean

  
Shirley Paolini, Dean

## ABSTRACT

### A PROCESS OF GROWTH IN ALISOUN OF BATH

John Gilman Mackin, III, M.A.  
The University of Houston-Clear Lake, 1992

Thesis Chair: Gretchen Mieszkowski

Traditionally, Chaucer's Alisoun of Bath has suffered from critical exegeses as the archetypical wicked wife. While critics have identified justification for her rebellious speech and behavior, they have not recognized or appreciated her as innocent in terms of both her society and self. This exegesis is important, however here it is used as a necessary premise to an even more alluminating idea: Alisoun is, textually, evolving, and in human terms she is growing. To grow she must be real, and therefore she must be motivated. Her motivation is to earnestly attack, by means of satiric irony, a tradition and official system oppressive to herself as wife and woman. Her emotions, body, and knowledge are human characteristics subject to growth and recognizable through her language in her Prologue for being compelled into constant change. By examining her language, I demonstrate the growth process within Alsioun which Chaucer ingeniously portrayed.

## TABEL OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
<b>Chapter</b>	
I.          ALISOUN THE INNOCENT WIFE.....	5
II.         EVIDENCE OF GROWTH.....	15
III.        THE TALE.....	36
IV.         REALISM AND GROWTH.....	46
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	51

## Introduction

Geoffrey Chaucer's Alisoun of Bath has suffered from traditional exegeses as the archetypical wicked wife. In 1915, George Lyman Kittredge wrote, for example, that Chaucer "... furnished her [Alisoun] with ... a monstrously heretical tenet as to the Subjection of Men" (171). Contemporary critics describe her as a "moral revolutionary" (Walter C. Long 282). They say she suffers from a "sociopathic personality disturbance" (Donald B. Sands 171). She is guilty of "willful heterodoxy" (James W. Cook 54), "perverseness" (T. L. Burton 47), or of being an "'upside-down,' inside-out product of his [Chaucer's] strumpet age" (Rodney Delasanta 233), and so on. The Wife of Bath, however, is, first and foremost, a child surviving as a victim of socialized pedophilia. She is also a victim of medieval marriage: a patriarchal, church-controlled institution in the service of men presented as a false goal and security for women. At the core of her characterization is the initial marital act performed upon her, the theft of her virginity at twelve years of age and her impressment into the marital economic game devised by the very patriarchy that condemned her.

These patriarchal, traditional readers of the text have, as a group, made one basic mistake. They have read Alisoun's irony literally. Chaucer's satiric irony, used

deftly by Alisoun to attack and thereby portray a patriarchal society's oppression of, and violence to, the physical, mental, and emotional woman, has generally been misinterpreted by modern readers. Instead of being acknowledged as the quintessential example of the barbarous role men have relegated to women, she is glossed as a quintessential example of why women should be relegated to a sub-human role in society. Critics ignore the message she communicates with satiric irony and instead they cling to her explicit language.

Alisoun is innocent, and here I demonstrate her innocence of the centuries-old charge of wicked wife. And by demonstrating her innocence, I demonstrate the guilt of a medieval patriarchy. Arguments for her innocence of the charge of adultery, for example, are necessary so that Chaucer may "...recuperate the sexualized hermeneutic that he recognizes as both pervasive in the medieval literary imagination and manifestly flawed" (Carolyn Dinshaw 117). To demonstrate the antifeminism, and to "acknowledge, in good faith, feminine desire" (Dinshaw 117), Alisoun must be innocent of the patriarchal charge. Otherwise, Chaucer's message would be lost. While she is a creation of Chaucer's, she must be real, not flawless, to be innocent, and she must be innocent for readers to identify with her so that the satiric irony in her Prologue may work.

She must be able to gain "...moral, social, religious, or political ascendancy by reasoned demonstration that its [Alisoun's] high targets really are what they have been from the start--low" (John Snyder 97).

Chaucer's achieving the subtle portrayal of a human being instead of a life-like character was necessary to make Alisoun-the-satirist work. And Alisoun-the-satirist could not possibly work unless Alisoun-the-wife was essentially human. So by demonstrating her reality I am able to illuminate a textual phenomenon, evidence of emotional, physical, and intellectual growth, or, in a textual sense, movement. Alisoun's life as we know it began at twelve when she was married off and inferentially raped. Alisoun, through natural processes grew. Most of her Prologue is about her growing. It is not, as it seems to be, about her relationships with her husbands, it is about her growth. Her life history is fluid; we then get a moving picture of a moving, growing, personality.

Alisoun's emotions, body, and knowledge are human characteristics subject to growth and they are recognizable through her language in her Prologue as characteristics compelled into constant change by the act of telling her life story. Here, as Derek Brewer so succinctly puts it, "Illusion and reality are no longer clearly divided" (8). Only as narrator of her Tale, or at the time of the telling,



is Alisoun complete, a grown woman.

## Chapter I

### ALISOUN THE INNOCENT WIFE

The subject of the Wife of Bath's Tale and Prologue is what Alisoun tells us they are about: To speke of wo that is in marriage" (3). The paradoxical characteristic of marriage is that it is the only natural and social event where men and women must be necessarily different even as they unite. And for this reason, in no other institution could more contrast or conflict develop between men and women. It is necessary that Chaucer use a woman as the catalyst of the debate between wives and husbands because men heretofore have dominated discourse on the subject; they have already spoken. When Alisoun speaks of woe that is in marriage she is speaking of woe that exists between the sexes. The two are inextricable.

Some of the stereotypical distortions of women that the Wife of Bath mentions are lust (466, 615-19), greed (211-14) deceitfulness (228, 401), and infidelity in marriage (710). The fact that she mentions these vices does not establish that she is guilty of them, though her misogynic critics seem to relish her guilt. For example, the critic Donald Sands claims that she is a "dangerous sociopath" characterized by "probably" and addiction to alcohol (171, 178). To say that she is probably addicted to alcohol

[because Alisoun says she enjoys drinking (459-63)] speciously implies a more than fifty percent probability. Sands' long inference is little more than a baseless extrapolation, and an exemplum of many others.

Alisoun was first married to an old man when she was only twelve years of age. "For, lordynges, sith I twelve year was of age, / Thonked be God that is eterne on lyve, / Housbondes at churche dore I have had fyve--" (4-6). And from what Alisoun tells us about her lack of taste for dried meat, "And yet in bacon hadde I nevere delit" (418), and her proclamation that "al is for to selle" (414), she was unwillingly commodified and sold. Mary Carruthers supports this idea and provides a compelling explanation: "Her [Alisoun's] parents married her off when she was twelve, an early enough age to suggest either notable greed or straitened financial circumstances on their part" (214).

It is at this point in Alisoun's life, the chronological beginning of her life as she reveals it to us, that is either overlooked or misvalued by many critics who thereby argue misguided interpretations from a faulty premise. The faulty premise occurs in one of two ways: either Alisoun's first marriage is added to the conglomeration of her first three marriages and is subsequently treated independently but the same as her

second and third marriages; or, her first marriage is added to the conglomeration of her first three marriages and is subsequently treated dependently as part of the group.

While Alisoun talks about her first three marriages as a group, reasoning dictates that her first marriage should be considered independent from her second and third marriages.

The importance of this distinction can best be illustrated by quoting from Barbara Gottfried, who cites Alisoun's "willingness to barter herself in exchange for possession of property ...."; and, "Nevertheless, she has married these men to empower herself; ...part of it is the deadly earnest of someone who has sold out ...." (213). Each of these comments is in reference to Alisoun's first three husbands with no distinctions between them. The error here is that Gottfried is saying, and then reasoning from the premise, that Alisoun married her first husband to "barter herself," or "empower herself." Common sense tells us that this is not accurate. It is likely that her parent received payment, that someone sold her, a twelve-year-old, into marriage. Being sold and selling one's self are quite different. Here, this means the difference between Alisoun's having been forced, against her will, into sexual intercourse and Alisoun's not having had sexual intercourse against her will; it means the difference between Alisoun's having been raped and not having been raped. As Carolyn

Dinshaw discerns: "Most penetratingly, as her Tale suggests in its narrative focus on a rapist, if the patriarchal economy of the trade of women proceeds without woman's necessary acquiescence, it is always potentially performing a rape" (115). Alisoun, then, entered marriage as a commodity, not much different from "oxen, asses, hors, and houndes" (285). This is the grisly fact that foreshadows the remainder of her life.

Having learned sometime after her first union at the church door, of her adversaries, her weapons, and the rules of "werre" (390), Alisoun countered to defend herself. It was a bitter, painful struggle, for nowhere is her language so malevolent as when she speaks, with curses and expletives, of her first three husbands: "Moote thy welked nekke be tobroke!" (277); "shrew!" (284); "olde dotard shrewe!" (291); "olde bareful of lyes!" (302); "maugree thyne eyen" (315); "olde dotard" (331); "sire shrewe" (355); "Sire olde fool" (357); "O leeve sire shrewe, Jhesu shorte thy lyf!" (365); and, "olde and angry nygardes of dispence, / God sende hem soone verray pestilence!" (1263-64). In defending herself she is condemned by her critics for learning and using the only weapons available to her--glossing authority, commodifying 'love,' and using physical and verbal coercion--the same weapons employed by her adversaries in their attempts to seize her body and spirit.

Peggy A. Knapp calls glossing authority "reappropriation of existing discourse," and claims it was notably successful (45).

However, Alisoun's reappropriation is successful only in the telling of the Prologue and Tale, not in the struggle about which she tells. Gottfried describes Alisoun's "tactics," or "weapons," as follows:

'Deceite, weeping, spinning' are God's natural gifts to women, the Wife of Bath claims, but her Prologue makes it apparent that they are, rather, the only tactics available to women in a patriarchal society, though they are nevertheless held against women by the very authorities who render those tactics necessary in the first place. (215)

Her struggle was one she did not want; her actions were defensive. If nothing else, the tone of her language tells us this, but it also rings loudly of bitterness and, thus, defeat. What else but defeat? In spite of how well and how hard she may have fought, her defeat was secured at the church door when she was twelve years old. Boasting to the other pilgrims of the shrewish treatment she claims to have leveled against her first three husbands is symptomatic of the paradigmatic struggle between a dominant, tyrannical patriarchy and women, and the pain and

defeat Alisoun endured.

The pain did not end with her fourth husband. "My fourthe housbande was a revelour-- / This is to seyn, he hadde a paramour" (453-54). The Wife of Bath introduces us to her fourth husband as a man with a paramour, as if having a paramour were his occupation. It indicates, however, Alisoun's preoccupation. She does not say that her fourth husband was either good, or rich, or old, but unlike the others, she describes him in terms of herself: "I saye, I hadde in herte greet despit / That he of any oother had delit" (481-82). Also unlike her treatment of the others, Alisoun recalls her fourth husband with benedictions not curses: "For which I hope his soule be in glorie" (490); "Lat hym fare wel, God yeve his soule reste" (501). After having endured three marriages to men she did not love (208), she finally married a man whom she loved but who was too busy reveling in London (550) to notice. How Alisoun reacted to this situation is a great point of critical controversy.

The controversy centers around Alisoun's dubious statement "I made hym of the same wode a croce--" (484). Immediately after introducing her fourth husband, Alisoun implies that she participated in revelry herself, but she explicitly says that she made him fry in his own grease with anger and jealousy (487-88) by appearing gay (486),

however, as she says, not of her body in any foul manner (485). Many critics interpret this to mean that Alisoun had a paramour of her own. There is really no evidence to support this conclusion. However, there is compelling evidence that Alisoun was caring of and faithful to her fourth, adulterous husband.

The most important evidence of Alisoun's fidelity is her own testimony: "Nat of my body, in no foul manere" (485). Nowhere does she explicitly belie this statement. Second, after long rhetorical meanderings into amorousness, Alisoun refers to illegitimate sex as something "foul" (485). "Foul" is a strong word, hardly a word a lover would use to describe her love affair. Third, as Burton says, "there is no motive for her to have made such a claim falsely" (40). And fourth, to borrow from Burton again, "It would obviously have been a more complete revenge (in her own judgement and in that of her listeners) . . . ." (40). And to these pieces of evidence the most obvious may be added: Alisoun is not temperate in her boasting. If she had the weight of a love affair to use here for persuasion, she would have used it. Finally, to dispell a common critical standby, Alisoun's statement "I made hym of the same wode a croce--" (484) in context explicitly conveys that she caused him to suffer from "anger" and "jealousy" (488). The wood that his cross is made of is anger and



jealousy. Alisoun is not such a fool that she would actually commit adultery against someone she love to merely arouse jealousy.

It seems that upon recalling her fourth husband, associated feelings of pain, perhaps momentarily intolerable, surface, causing Alisoun to mentally abort her thoughts. The outward reaction is a percipitous rhetorical digression to a more tolerable reminiscence (455). She then takes up her original thoughts, 25 lines later, with "Now wol I tellen of my fourthe housbonde / I saye I hadde in herte greet despit" (480-81). Alisoun is consciously masking pain here (Gloria Shapiro 130). However, the common perception of this rhetorical digression is that Alisoun is avoiding outright admission of adultery. This interpretation has little base; however, it fits the wicked wife stereotype.

By her fourth husband, Alisoun is again left a victim, deprived of perfect joy in marriage, suffering the loss of a husband she loved, and deeply hurt by his unfaithfulness. Nevertheless, she has now innocently emerged from marital slavery to become a woman of considerable wealth. Promptly after the death of her fourth husband, and twenty-eight years since her first marital encounter, the Wife of Bath marries her fifth, Jankyn.

By marrying the twenty-year-old clerk, Alisoun, a

wealthy forty-year-old, has placed herself in a situation not dissimilar in some respects to that of her first husband in marrying her. The image of young Jankyn, with no experience in matters of anything, having to contend with the powerful personality that Alisounis seems almost absurd. It is difficult even to imagine Alisoun unable to physically master Jankyn. Perhaps this is exactly the intent of Chaucer's juxtaposition of just such a reversal of traditional marital predicates; for here beneath the humor, often found in truth, lie ultimate realities concerning marriage.

However, one of the differences between Alisoun at twelve and Jankyn at twenty is that Alisoun's marriage was negotiated by someone other than herself. Jankyn's marriage to Alisoun was negotiated by himself and for himself.

Alisoun, suggesting the reversal of both gender and roles, and wise to the motives behind traditional patriarchal lion painters, refers to Aesop's fable in which a lion, shown a scene of a man killing a lion, points out that if it were a leonine artist the opposite may have been portrayed.

For trusteth wel, it is an inpossible  
 That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,  
 But if it be of hooly seintes lyves,

Ne of noon oother womman never the mo.  
 Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?  
 By God, if women hadde writen stories,  
 As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,  
 They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse  
 Than al the mark of Adam may redresse.

(688-96)

The Wife of Bath, growing intolerant of Jankyn's badgering with his book of "wikked wyves" (685), tore the book and punched the clerk in the face with such force that he fell into the fireplace (792-93). In so doing, the incarnation of antifeminism was struck down into the annealing, purifying fire of hell to arise transformed like a lion cast raging into the predicated role, the purgatory, he had painted for women. A struggle ensued from which Alisoun emerged "al deef" (636), finally, to the tyranny of deportment book writers.

After that day we hadden never debaat.  
 God helpe me so, Iwas to hym as kynde  
 As any wyf from Denmark unto Ynde,  
 And also trewe, and so was he to me.

(822-25)

Chapter II  
EVIDENCE OF GROWTH

The Wife's Prologue is autobiographical in that it imparts a succession of biographical facts concerning her own life. However, it is much more self-biographical in that Alisoun demonstrates her own knowledge and emotions that are characteristic of her at various points in her life beginning when she was first married at twelve.

"For, lordynges, sith I twelve yeer was of age, / Thonked be God that is eterne on lyve, / Housbonds at Chirchidore I have had fyve--" (4-6). The Prologue is, indeed, about her life experiences, but painful, "wo"-ful, experiences (3).

As much as Alisoun tries to hide the fact of her suffering the truth is seen at times because she tries too hard. Here she reassures her listeners when no reassurance is needed or called for:

And whan that I have toold thee forth my tale  
Of tribulacioun in mariage,  
Of which I am expert in al myn age--  
This is to seyn, myself have been the whippe--  
(172-75)

In reaction to the Pardoner's prompting, Alisoun loses her mask for a moment to show that she suffered much from the tribulation of marriage. That she is hiding her

feelings, her pain, is made clear. She is an expert perhaps not in marriage itself but in the pain that marriage can inflict, in "tribulacioun in mariage." She then attempts to hide her own suffering by claiming credit for being the "whippe" (175), the inflictor of pain, but not the recipient. Nevertheless, the facts should speak for themselves; having been sold into marriage at age twelve is the harbinger here to almost thirty years of undesirable wedlock.

After another interruption by the Pardoner, Alisoun warns her listeners to "taketh not agrief of that I seye, / For myn entente nys but for to pleye" (191-92). Then she continues with a promise to tell the truth, "sooth" (194), but then says "As thre of hem were goode, and two were badde. / The thre men were goode, and riche, and olde (196-97). Here "goode" could mean no more than that she felt emotionally indifferent towards her first three husbands, while "badde" means, we later learn, that she loved her fourth and fifth husbands who reciprocated her love with something that caused her pain.

She suggests that the first three husbands were good because they were rich and old. The implication is that they died soon leaving her money:

Unnethe myghte they the statut holde

In which that they were bounden unto me.

Ye woot wel what I meene of this, pardee.  
 As help me God, I laughe whan I thynke  
 How pitously a-nyght I made hem swynke!  
 And, by my fey, I tolde of it no stoor;  
 They had me yeven hir lond and hir tresoor.  
 Me neded nat do lenger diligence  
 To wyne hir love, or doon hem reverence.

(198-206)

However, when she asks Wilkin "What eyleth yow to grucche  
 thus and grone? / Is it for ye wolde have my queynte  
 allone?" (443-44), she is no longer being facetious. In  
 fact, her tone here has changed from the humor in lines  
 198-206 to contempt.

When Alisoun says of her first three husbands that  
 they were good, rich, old, that they were scarcely able to  
 keep the statute by which they were bound to her and that  
 she made them work pitiously at night (1978-202), she,  
 obviously, did not make them work at night either  
 "pitiously" or in any other way. And that they were barely  
 able to keep the statute is equally unlikely. They did,  
 after all, love her so well that they "preesse[d] on" her  
 "faste" (520).

The Wife of Bath's intent is to play, or at least with  
 the literal language she uses for the benefit of her  
 pilgrim audience, of men and nuns. However, she conveys

memories of painful experiences with mostly an artful gloss to affect humor and hide pain. This is gentle deceit, a courtesy, if it is deceit. Because she speaks she is condemned. As Priscilla Martin points out: "... women are not only wrong to speak but indecorous. It is unmannerly, unattractive, unbecoming to their sex. This is unjust yet, since we value courtesy, it also suggests some of the further complexities of the distribution of gender roles....But courtesy is important in that it can be expressive and symbolic of consideration in personal relationships" (222). Alisoun is condemned for both speaking and for not speaking. It is both courtesy and courage for her to remain silent about her pain and to pretend to the role of shrew to the delight of her company. Albeit, by her silence she conveys the all-important message that she, because she is a woman, is a victim, profoundly innocent.

Alisoun speaks of her first three husbands in the past tense until lines 235 through 450 where she begins her pretended dialogue with Wilkyn, her third husband. The question is, did she speak these words, or anything like them, to her third husband? If she is still hiding pain and affecting humor, then she certainly did not speak in this way to Wilkyn. There is no evidence that she stops attempting to hide pain. Therefore, we can assume that

these are words thought but not spoken. And further, as before, they suggest that for each of the specific issues there were reciprocating problems for Alisoun. Still, then, she seems to have been, not the whipper" (175), but the recipient of the whip. And so it goes throughout her Prologue.

What eyleth yow to grucche thus and grone?  
 Is it for ye wolde have my queynte allone?  
 Wy, taak it al--lo, have it every deel.  
 Peter, I shrewe yow, but ye love it weel.

(443-46)

Not only does this passage declare bitterness, but it shows her extreme closeness with the experience, as if the feelings behind the words were invoked only yesterday. It is at this point perhaps where her youth shows through. And why should it not? She speaks as if in a time when she was much younger. The emotions which compel her words are youthful emotions. Her role at this point is one of youthful wife speaking to old husband. And while her emotions may have been invoked at the telling, there must exist within her something to call forth. The emotions, the anger, the bitterness, are human. But, more importantly here, they are not the emotions of forty-year-old Alisoun. The passage consists of four terse, acetic, intensifying exclamations. They conclude



without explicit meaning but with pure emotion. She then continues with somewhat of a denouement of emotion with:

For if I wolde selle my bele chose,  
 I koude walke as fressh as is a rose,  
 But I wol kepe it for youre owene tooth.  
 Ye be to blame, by God, I sey yow sooth.

(447-50)

One of the questions presented by these words is why could she walk as fresh as a rose if she were to sell her bele chose? The implication is that she would be more innocent as a prostitute than as Wilkyn's wife--which, at first, seems somewhat of a paradox. But, when Alisoun says "Ye be to blame," she means men are to blame. Her first husband, her second husband, and her third are to blame for her adulterated feeling. And, perhaps, prostitution would have given her at least the dignity of being able to choose by whom she would be made impure. Perhaps, even, she is considering prostitution as better than something like rape. But, again, these are words of a deeply hurting person whose wounds are torn anew by recalling an experience. She feels as she did, and she expresses her feelings accordingly.

The lines "...if I wolde selle my bele chose, / I koude walke as fressh as is a rose ..." (447-48), compared with "That made me I koude nocht withdrawe / My chambre of

Venus from a goode felawe" (617-18) show that she has resigned herself to her situation. Is what she says true or is what she says merely the way she feels about herself? If the first line is only an expression of her painful emotions then, perhaps, the second line is too. The first line is a somewhat childish threat, but the second line reflects that she knows there is no one to threaten. The second line is an expression of despair. The difference in the two lines marks a change in Alisoun's emotions, sentiments, and maturity. One line is future perspective, while the other is a perspective of the past.

When she first speaks of her fourth husband she says that she was strong, jolly and full of passion:

Now wol I speken of my fourthe housbonde.

My fourthe housbonde was a revelour--

This is to seyn, he hadde a paramour,

And I was yong and ful of ragerye,

Stibourne and strong, and joly as a pye.

(453-56)

This indicates a time of youthfulness, but it also points to a belief that she may no longer have these qualities. More importantly, in their context these words indicate something about the way she handled the fact of her husband's having a paramour. The reality of jealousy was obviously present for her. For her to state that she was

"strong" but "joly" (456) shows that there was indeed emotional stress for her to be strong about, and a special need, or want, to feel jolly. After wedlock with three old men, it seems she had finally married someone she cared for, but to no avail. She obviously loved husband number four; this can be seen in her repeated digressions in her Prologue after raising the subject of her marriage to him. She strains to talk of him, but finally she admits that she " ....hadden in herte greet despit" over his infidelity (481). But in these lines (453-56) she is again hiding pain. She is angry, but her anger, though it is for a different reason, is expressed--or not expressed--in a different way from the anger she feels for her first three husbands. Her expression of the anger that she felt at the time of her fourth husband as compared to the expression of her anger felt against her third husband is different partly because she was a different person. These experiences occurred at very different times in her life. The pure emotions expressed in lines 453-56 are softened with age. Her pain is expressed in lines 453-56 with less ardor and more rationalization. In lines 453-56 Alisoun boasts of being stubborn and full of passion, "ragerye," while lines 447-50 explode with passion. This is not because in the first lines she is speaking to her third husband and in the second passage she is speaking about her

fourth. The differences can be seen throughout the Prologue, just as with the following passage one can see the relative lack of ardor, an almost resignation:

But, Lord Crist, whan that it remembreth me  
 Upon my yowthe and on my jolitee,  
 It tikleth me about myn herte roote.  
 Unto this day it dooth myn herte boote  
 That I have had my world as in my tyme.  
 But age, allas, that al wole envenyme,  
 Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith.  
 Lat go, farewel, the devel go therwith!  
 The flour is goon, ther is namoore to telle;  
 The bren, as I best kan, now moste I selle;  
 But yet to be right myrie wol I fonde.

(469-79)

She then says "Now wol I tellen of my fourthe housbonde" (480). But this is exactly what she has been doing. It is apparent she feels that part of her youth was somewhat spent through marriage with an unfaithful husband. By this we get a sense of chronology, a sense of physical and emotional maturing, and a sense of movement--of time in human terms, in Alisoun's life:

I seye, I hadde in herte greet despit  
 That he of any oother had delit.  
 But he was quit, by God and by Seint Joce.

I made hym of the same wode a croce--  
 Nat of my body, in no foul manere,  
 But certainly, I made folk swich cheere  
 That in his owene grece I made hym frye  
 For angre, and for verray jalousye.  
 By God, in erthe I was his purgatorie,  
 For which I hope his soule be in glorie.

(481-90)

As shown here, Alisoun finishes telling about her fourth husband with a benediction because she did love him, yes, but it demonstrates that she has grown to a level of understanding. Her statement "Nat of my body, in no foul manere ..." (484) serves as a modifier to her earlier suggestion of lasciviousness with "...A likerous mouth moste hana likerous tayl. / In wommen vinolent is no defence--" (466-67), which helps to expose her as having been a faithful wife incapable of adultery. But also, again, in context, line 484 demonstrates her acquired ability to restrain expression of emotion--a sign of maturity.

Now of my fifthe housbonde wol I telle.  
 God lete his soule nevere come in helle--  
 And yet was he to me the mooste shrewe;  
 That feele I on my ribbes al by rewe,  
 And evere shal unto myn endyng day.

But in oure bed he was so fresshe and gay,  
 And therwithal so wel koude he me glose,  
 Whan that he wolde han my bele chose,  
 That thogh he hadde me bet on every bon,  
 He koude wyne agayn my love anon.  
 I trowe I loved hym best for that he  
 Was of his love daungerous to me.

(503-14)

Alisoun here mentions for the first time in any detail Jankyn the "clerk of Oxenford" as her fifth husband (527). Because Jankyn is associated with the authority of the church, it is interesting that Alisoun "loved hym best" (513). But notice why she says she loves him best: "for that he / Was of his love daungerous to me" (513-14). Jankyn was "dangerous," aloof, and could "glose" her well. "Glose" here has three deliberately simultaneous meanings: beguile, have coitus with, and rape. The association between glossing and raping Alisoun, as I mentioned earlier, is allegorized in glossing the text (Dinshaw 117). The association of glossing and having coitus with Alisoun comes from the dubious lines "Glose whoso wole and seye bothe up and doun / That they were maked for purgacioun" (119-20). In context, "up and doun" used here to clarify "glose" is no accident (Knapp 115-16). And consider: "And for he [Jankyn] squiereth me bothe up and doun" (305).

The word "glose" in line 509 is placed directly above its rhyme "bele chose" (beautiful thing) in line 510. Here in the structure of the sentence Alisoun is given the predicated part. And finally, the literal meaning of "glose" here is beguile (Fisher 109). Therefore, for Alisoun, Jankyn represents simultaneously all three of these meanings of "glose". Jankyn as husband, personification of the church, and patriarchal society, represents the objects of Alisoun's most ardent love and contempt.

Not only in this instance but in every respect the Wife's fifth marriage dramatizes in human terms her lifelong struggle against authority. Jankyn represents authority in all three of its aspects: he is a man, a husband, and a clerk.

(David Alford 151-52)

On a personal level, Jankyn is the ideal husband for Alisoun; or, at least, he is as perfect as perfect could be at the time. It follows then that when she says "My fifthe housbonde--God his soule blesse-- / Which that I took for love and not richesse" (525-26) she means it-- that is, she means 'love' in more than only a sexual sense, and she means "God his soule blesse" in a heartfelt sense. And this, then, puts Alisoun as a wife--that is, in terms of her choice of Jankyn for her husband--on a much higher

emotional, intellectual and physical level than ever before in relation to husbands one through four.

In the following lines (515-24) Alisoun, interestingly expands on Jankyn's "daungerous"-ness, except that she describes it as a "queynte fantasye" (516) belonging to women--implying that it does not also belong to men:

We wommen han, if that I shal nat lye,  
 In this matere a queynte fantasye:  
 Wayte what thyng we may nat lightly have,  
 Thereafter wol we crie al day and crave.  
 Forbede us thyng, and that desiren we;  
 Preece on us faste, and thanne wol we fle.

(515-20)

Perhaps Alisoun's perception of Jankyn's aloofness or standoffishness (Fisher 115) towards her was measured in relation to husbands one through three (husband number four not included since he was not around to be aloof). After all, her first three husbands, her only references, account for the sum of her experience in the matter. If this is so then when she says "Preece on us faste, and thanne wol we fle," she could be thinking of her first three husbands: "They loved me so wel, by God above, / That I ne tolde no deyntee of hir love" (207-08). It seems quite possible that Jankyn only seemed aloof--Alisoun having only her first three "love"-ing (207) husbands to compare him with.



Therefore, her comment "I trowe I loved hym best for that he / Was of his love daungerous to me" (513-14) is not a mark of immaturity, as it may first appear, but in light of her past it is a distinguished mark of maturity. The comment about Jankyn in lines 513-514 contrasted with her coments about her first three husbands, "as help me God, I laughe whan I thynke / How pitously a-nyght I made hem swynke!" (201-02), illuminates the fact that she has not always been so distingushably mature.

Here, again, she is portrayed as thoroughly human and thoroughly gentle, although thoroughly caught in a no-win situation. If she were to be absolutely truthful in expressing her past, then she would surely be scorned by her fellow pilgrims for both her natural amative feelings at age forty and for her equally natural frigid feelings at age twelve.

Another example of her no-win situation is her desire to talk to her closest friend. However, again, this is typically used as yet more evidence to support the centuries old anti-Wife movement.

My fifthe housbonde--God his soule blesse--  
 Which that I took for love and no richesse,  
 He somtyme was a clerk of Oxenford,  
 And hadde left scole, and at hom to bord  
 With my gossib, dwellynge in oure toun--

God have hir soule--hir name was Alisoun;  
 She knew myn herte and eek my privetee  
 Bet than oure parisshe preest, so moot I thee!  
 To hire biwreyed I my conseil al.  
 For hadde myn housbonde pissed on a wal,  
 or doon a thyng that sholde han cost his lyf,  
 To hire, and to another worthy wyf,  
 And to my nece, which that I loved weel,  
 I wolde han toold his conseil every deel.  
 And so I dide ful often, God it woot,  
 That made his face ful often reed and hoot  
 For verray shame, and blamed hymself for he  
 Had toold to me so greet a pryvetee. (526-42)

Even contemporary critics continue to attack the  
 Wife of Bath for doing what -- all -- people do, for  
 doing what Catholic Church doctrine (James C. Gibbons  
 345-46), then and now, decrees, and for doing what the  
 apostle Paul made an exemplum of: confession of sin.  
 Sacramental Confession was introduced into the Church  
 in 1200 a.c.e. Yet, as the Archbishop of Baltimore,  
 Gibbons, says, "A merciful Lord will not require in this  
 conjuncture (apropos of confession) more than a hearty  
 sorrow for sin joined with a desire of having recourse as  
 as soon as practicable, to the tribunal of Penance; for  
 God's ordinances bind only such as are able to fulfil

them" (345). Further, as evidenced in the book of Acts with: "And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds" (Acts 19:18). I am not suggesting that (John Fisher 115) constitutes Sacramental Confession, but I am suggesting that when Alisoun speaks to her close friend it potentially constitutes a confession. Alisoun even suggests the idea of confession herself when she says, "She knew myn herte and eek my privetee / Bet thanoure parisshe preest, so moot I thee!" (531-32). Whether or not one is a member of the Church, as Archbishop Gibbons points out, God will not ask for more of a person than what one can give, including confession. Further, many people, including Alisoun, seem to have an innate need to confess. Nevertheless, considering Alisoun's enmity towards the Church and her pedophilic experience, it is quite understandable that she would prefer confessing to an intimate, female friend rather than to the parish, male priest. Therefore, Jankyn had no basis for a "faceful often reed and hoot" (540)--and neither do Alisoun's critics. Again, Alisoun demonstrates authenticity, humanness, and growth in both the now of the telling and the then of what she tells.

Her authenticity, however, does not end with the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual, but it includes the physical and chronological aspects of human life. Alisoun

has experienced something of a role change in terms of age in relation to her husbands. First, there is a discernible boundary between 'younger' Alisoun and 'older' Alisoun. The time when she married Jankyn, "And I was fourty, if I shal seye sooth" (601), marks the boundary of time that chronologically divides her life between younger and older Alisoun. And it is at this point that Alisoun most notably changes, though she is not yet the fully grown Alisoun who is telling the Tale and Prologue.

When she rhetorically affects the role of wicked wife for us in her discussion of her relationships with husbands one through three in lines 234-450, beginning with "But harkneth how I sayde" (234), notice how she is the one who, we are to believe, was doing all of the talking. She was the 'younger' Alisoun married to 'older' spouses. But in her marriage with Jankyn she claims in lines 713-785, beginning with "Upon a nyght Jankyn, that was oure sire, / Redde on his book, as he sat by the fire" (713-14), that he, Jankyn, was doing all of the talking. And conversly, with husband number five, she was the 'older' Alisoun married to the 'younger' spouse. It seems by this then that perhaps Alisoun, like Jankyn and her other husbands, was merely acting her chronological age. This is but one example of the differences in Alisoun in terms of the chronological division in her life.

When Alisoun speaks about her fourth husband she says "But, Lord Crist, whan that it remembereth me / Upon my yowthe and on my jolitee..." (469-70). Clearly, she considered herself still very youthful when she was married to husband number four. But when she speaks of her marriage to husband number five it is with language suggestive of an older, experienced person: "And whan that I hadde geten unto me / By maistrie al the soveraynetee" (817-18); "Do as thee lust the terme of al thy lyf" (820); and, "'Now wol I dye; I may no lenger speke'" (810).

There is a great leap in time from when Alisoun married Jankyn to the time of her telling. She was, the month that she married Jankyn, "faire and riche and yong and wel begon" (601). However, her age at the time of her telling her Tale seems, from her own description, to be much older than forty:

But, Lord Crist, whan that it remembreth me  
 Upon my yowthe and on my jolitee,  
 It tikleth me about myn herte roote.  
 Unto this day it dooth myn herte boote  
 That I have had my world as in my tyme.  
 But age, alas, that al wole envenyme,  
 Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith.  
 Lat go, farewell, the devel go therwith!  
 The flour is goon, ther is namoore to telle;

The bran, as I best kan, now moste I selle;

(469-78)

By her tale about the miracle transformation of the "fouler wight" (999) of an "olde wyf" (1000) into a wife " .... as fair to seene / As any lady, emperice, or queene, / That is bitwixe the est and eke the west" (1245-47), does Alisoun suggest her age and physical appearance at the time of the telling of her Tale. Is this her attempt to sell the bran as best she can (478)? Perhaps, and if she may not have the old wife's foul appearance, she certainly has her wisdom. And wisdom comes only by time:

But atte laste with muchel care and wo

We fille acorded by us selven two.

(811-12)

Geoffrey Shepherd discusses the "cake of custom[s]" (264) that seem always to thwart Alisoun's personal life, and her potential for happiness and for an existance without guilt:

A Wyclifite tract Oct in quibus seducuntur simplices Christiani examines in some detail the discrepancies between the actual and the ideal and explains how time and institutions have buried the reality of Christ's words under a cake of custom ....(263-64)

Shepherd also makes the profound observation that the

"Wife of Bath lived her life in a whirl of religious routine ..." (262-63). It seems that most of Alisoun's pain and suffering are attributable to this "cake of custom" that pervaded life in the middle ages. After she literally "made hym [Jankyn] brenne his booke anon right tho" (816) they "...hadden never debaat. / God helpe me so, I was to hym as kynde / As any wyf from Denmark unto Ynde, / And also trewe, and so was he to me" (822-25). She literally burned Jankyn's book of wicked wives, but symbolically, perhaps, she burned the 'cake,' too. From the "chirche dore" (6), when that she "twelve yeer was of age" (4), to the "lymytour hymself" (874), the "incubus" (880), the patriarchal 'church' seems to have been the bane of her life. She tries desperately to get at the truth of Christ's words, a life-long effort of digging herself out from within mountains of ecclesiastical dung piled upon her.

Since, like Wyclif, Alisoun objects to the accretion of authorized readings which limit her interpretive domain, her figure may be linked with the literate Lollard women, on the one hand, and with Margery Kempe, on the other, as they all participate in and prefigure the historical shift to a less authorized, more open style of exegesis, which looms on the horizon.

....

What qualifies her for the role of early (and troubled) feminist is the full consciousness she brings to the dilemma she faces.

(Knapp 116, 119)

The Wife of Bath manages to emancipate herself through the development of her own understanding. We see her understanding increase throughout her Prologue as a natural process that comes with experience. Evidence of this process is seen in the Tale where the character of the old wise woman demonstrates a life-time worth of empirical knowledge and wisdom.

The Wife of Bath tells us a life history in which we witness growth and not insincerity, marital fidelity and not lasciviousness, orthodoxy and not heresy, and, finally, charity and not malice. She serves us as a catalyst igniting the inherited conflict between women and men whereby we may also come to some understanding.



## Chapter III

### THE TALE

Throughout her life Alisoun learned from harsh reality as all people do, and from it she educed the empirical knowledge that is the complete body of wisdom she possesses at the time of her telling of her autobiographical Prologue. However, while her experiences are complete, up to the time of her telling, we see in her life as she relates it to us, not forty years of empirical knowledge, but--beginning at twelve years of age--a growing body of knowledge. The growth of her knowledge that we see in the unfolding of her life presents the illusion of a person who is inconsistent. Inconsistency does not necessarily signify insincerity. On the contrary, inconsistency in Alisoun's self-revelation is a mark of sincerity. Like all real people, Alisoun is an amorphous, franchised, and growing being, not an automaton with a "lifescrypt" (Sands 180). Therefore, whatever moral or other message Alisoun attempts to convey to us will be found in its entirety--containing the aggregate of her attitudes, prejudices, emotions, knowledge, her whole being--in the Tale she tells. In the Tale, then, rather than in the Prologue, one should also find Alisoun as she is. For only here is Alisoun whole and also free, through the discourse of story

telling, to express her age.

The perception of reality is varyingly different for each of us. John Alford says, "For Alice the official version of reality represents nothing more than the externalization of men's desire and self-intyerest" (128). While his statement is quite accurate, it is also a self-indictment of the clerkly-philosophically-logically controlled reality that is characterized by the "externalization of men's desire and self-interest." This is the reality into which Alisoun was born: she has not changed reality. The Tale is symbolic of Alisoun's own life marked by her perception of reality.

Most of the Wife of Bath's Prologue is about her intellectual and emotional progression. It is not about her relationships with her husbands, it is about Alisoun growing. Her life history here is fluid; we therefore get a moving picture of a moving, growing personality. Where we witness the end of this process of growth, both as a reflection of her life and structurally in the Prologue's plot, is at the point where Alisoun tares three pages from Jankyn's book (790-91). Also, it is at this point that the act of rape ends. Dinshaw discerns in the act of glossing the metaphor of rape:

Glossing is a gesture of appropriation; the glossa undertakes to speak the text, to assert

authority over it, to provide an interpretation, finally to limit or close it to the possibility of heterodox or unlimited significance. (117)

And where the text is "female corpus," the rapist is a "brash reader" (127-28). Alisoun's action in tearing the clerk's book and knocking him into the fire was the symbolic manifestation of the end of Alisoun's rape. Subsequently, Alisoun, as catalyst, forced the clerk's transformation from misogynist to "gentillesse," or, more accurately, a respecter of women.

The Tale is an allegory of the Wife of Bath's life. It is not so much a fairy tale, a myth, in that it represents all things made right for Alisoun, rather, it is symbolic of both the good and the bad in her life.

In th'olde dayes of the Kyng Arthor,  
Of which that Britons speken greet honour,  
Al was this land fulfild of fairye.

(857-59)

The Wife of Bath begins her Tale, appropriately, by mentioning that there was a time when the land was filled with jolly, harmless fairies. However, now the fairies are gone, run off by the limitors and other holy friars. The friars, the new incubus', not as harmless as magical fairies, are wherever people are found.

But now kan no man se none elves no,

For now the grete charitee and prayeres  
 Of lymytours and othere hooly freres,  
 That serchen every lond and evry strem  
 As thikke as motes in the sonne-beem,  
 Blessynge halles, chambres, kichenes, boures,  
 Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures,  
 Thropes, bernes, shipnes, dayeryes--  
 This maketh that ther been no fairyes.  
 For ther as wont to walken was an elf  
 Ther walketh now the lymytour himself,  
 In undermeles and in morwenynges,  
 And seyth his matyns and his hooly thynges  
 As he gooth in his lymytacioun.  
 Wommen may go now saufly upand doun;  
 In every bussh or under every tree  
 Ther is noon other incubus but he,  
 And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.

(864-81)

Alisoun sets a realistic tone for her Tale. It is interesting that she mentions that women can now walk safely, using the term "up and doun," her clue to read sex into the passage, because the only thing to fear is the raping/glossing friar. The sarcasm in "saufly" gives us a clear understanding of Alisoun's contempt for church authority, and the role it played in her life.

The fact that she begins the Tale with a world full of raping friars parallels her own life in that she began on her own in the world as a victim of church authority. Also, her attitude here towards friars parallels the strong sentiments she expresses with "But I wol kepe it for youre owene tooth. / Ye be to blame, by God, I sey yow sooth" (449-50). The only difference is that here her feelings are expressed with humor, while before they were with the anger of a younger Alisoun.

We are then introduced to the lusty knight who rapes the maid and whose life is saved only by the threat of death. The knight here represents the progression of all five of the Wife's husbands. He is first of all Alisoun's first husband who essentially raped her, the twelve-year-old virgin. And he also represents her fifth husband, the clerk with whom she had to employ violence against to force him into understanding.

And so bifel that this Kyng Arthor  
 Hadde in his hous a lusty bachelor  
 That on a day cam ridyng fro ryver,  
 And happed that, allone as he was born,  
 He saugh a mayde anon, maugree hir heed,  
 Of whiche mayde anon, maugree hir heed,  
 By verray force he rafte hire maydenhed;  
 For which oppressioun was swich clamour

And swich pursute unto the Kyng Arthour,  
 That dampned was this knyght for to be deed,  
 By cours of laws, and sholde han lost his heed--

(882-92)

The only difference between this Tale and the Wife of Bath's life is that in the Tale the act of rape is recognized by the "honour"-able King Arthur as a crime punishable by death, whereas, in real life Alisoun's rape is sanctified by the Church. Nevertheless, Arthur's Queen intervenes to give the knight a chance to save himself:

The queene thanketh the kyng with al hir myght,  
 And after this thus spak she to the knyght,  
 Whan that she saugh hir tyme upon a day,  
 'Thou standest yet,' quod she, 'in swich array  
 That of thy lyf if thou kanst tellen me ...  
 What thyng is it that women moost desiren.'

(899-905)

And after a year of searching for the answer to what women most desire, the knight came upon the old wyf, perhaps metempsychotically transformed, a progression of age for Alisoun's allegory, from the young maid. The old wife promised him the answer, and his life, if he would promise in return to marry her.

A fouler wight ther may no man devyse.  
 Agayn the knyght this olde wyf gan ryse.

(999-1000)

The knight agreed to the old wife's terms, and with this he was given the answer to the queen's question.

'Koude ye me wisse, I wolde wel quite youre  
hire.'

'Plight me thy trouthe heere in myn hand,'  
quod she,

'The next thyng that I requere thee  
Thou shalt it do, if it lye in thy myght,  
And I wol telleit yow er it be nyght.'

'Have heer my trouthe,' quod the knyght.

'I grante.'

'Thanne,' quod she, 'I dar me wel avante  
Thy lyf is sauf, for I wol stonde therby.  
Upon my lyf, the queene wol seye as I.'

(1008-16)

The knight gives the correct answer before the queen:

'My lige lady, generally,' quod he,  
'Wommen desiren to have sovereynetee  
As wel over hir housbond as hir love,  
And for to been in maistrie hym above.  
This is youre mooste desir thogh ye me kille.'

(1037-41)

The knight and the old wife are then married; however, because of the old wife's loathsome appearance the knight argues against consumating their marriage. The old wife, after giving him an in-bed lesson in gentillesse, offers him a choice between having her young and fair, but with the risk of her being assailed by lusting men, or old, humble and faithful. For the answer, the knight defers to the old wife's wisdom:

'My lady and my love, and wyf so deere,  
I put me in youre wise governance;  
Cheseth youreself which may be moost plesance  
And moost honour to yow and me also.'

(1230-33)

The old wife in turn offers him a miracle:

'Kys me,' quod she. 'We be no lenger  
wrothe,  
For, by my trouthe, I wol be to yow bothe--  
This is to seyn, ye, bothe fair and good.'

(1239-41)

The Tale transformed the knight from misogynist to a respecter of women, and the old wife changes back into the beautiful maid. "And thus they lyve unto hir lyves ende / In parfit joye ...." (1257-58).

This Tale is an allegory of Alisoun's life, her reality. She therefore must know herself, contrary to what



John Alford says: " ....she cannot hear, as we do, what she is saying" (122). She is acutely aware, and she knows that she is a victim of the glossarist. In her telling, with characteristic humor, as in the conclusion of the Tale when she says " ....and Jhesu Christ us sende / Housbondes meeke, yonge, and fressh abedde ...." (1258-59), or in the Prologue when she says "I ne loved nevere by no discrecioun" (622), Alisoun is satirically taking the male role as glossarist.

Alisoun resorts to empirical devices in the telling because she understands that "Whoso comth first to mille, first grynt" (389). Her enemy was first to the mill of "auctoritee," and therefore they have first "peyntede the leon." Therefore, Alisoun has no place to grind but at the mill of experience. However, with empiricism and her arsenal of rhetoric, she breaches the glossarist's ancient fortress.

She makes audible precisely what patriarchal discourse would keep silent, reveals the exclusion devalorization that patriarchal discourse performs. Speaking as the excluded Other, she explicitly and affirmatively assumes the place that patriarchal discourse accords the feminine. (Dinshaw 115)

....

For joye he hente hire in his armes two  
His herte bathed in a bath of blisse,  
A thousand tyme a-rewe he gan hire kisse,  
And she obeyed hym in every thyng  
That myghte doon hym plesance or likyng.  
And thus they lyve unto hir lyves ende  
In parfit joye. (1252-58)

The message of the Tale is that Alisoun knows by experience that for a husband and wife to live in perfect joy in marriage, the wife must have sovereignty over herself. The only mastery Alisoun wants is over her own person to yield as she chooses. Her amorousness, her histrionics, and her allusions to the ascendancy of her sexual desires are merely her rhetorical weapons used deftly to mock the egocentric male.

Chapter IV  
REALISM AND GROWTH

When one speaks or writes of acts, they become an experience by the assent of shared thoughts. Chasing a reality with words thereby creating a reality by mental conception, a verbal weaving, or textuality with or without the text, the author and reader, or speaker and listener, by th sharing of thoughts, transforms conceptual possibilities into physical, emotional and rational acts. These conceptual possibilities, then, become real acts, reality. Unknowingly, in a sense, the reader then becomes an active participant in the expression of the text. The text of Chaucer's Wife of Bath is real, though it is mostly a product of mental conception having only the physical characteristics of ink and paper. The text is more than sterile symbols representing images of the physical. It is organic life created and born; the text is seed that may be internalized by the reader to burgeon in the fertility of the mind.

On realism in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, Morton W. Bloomfield says: "The ironies are deep here, for the teller and the reader both know that the story is not true, in the sense of its having really happened, but that if the tale is to be told in a satisfying manner, they must both pretend together" (183). Bloomfield identifies

some of the techniques and traditions the writer, including Chaucer, employs in order to craft a narrative told in a "satisfying manner." First, a basic tenet of realism calls for an "air of truth or plausibility" in the narrative that is achieved through "authenticating" (181). Based, then, on this requirement to authenticate, Bloomfield identifies Chaucerian authenticating devices: the framing device of the pilgrimage to Canterbury; the use of 'I' by the narrator; the tone of the narrator; and, "details of background in the tale itself or in the outside of the inner tale--in the world of the frame or the world of the 'I' ...." (181-82). Certainly, Chaucer employs all of these techniques, but in the Wife of Bath particularly there is more.

'Growth' is not an element of any of these techniques, except perhaps the "details of background." While the details of a tale's background may include elements that give a sense of human growth, by itself it can hardly be credited with accomplishing such a subtle effect. A sense of human growth is not an effect that can be achieved singularly. In the Wife of Bath, Chaucer had such brilliance of skill in achieving realism, as Bloomfield describes it, that the sense of human growth, organic life, perceived in Alisoun of Bath is an un-deliberate, a phenomenon. The examples in chapter two of explicit

elements indicating human growth in Alisoun singularly do not give the reader the perception of growth; however, the explicit evidence collectively and necessarily with the interwoven conjunctive elements in the Prologue do achieve the effect or the sense of movement or human growth. The combination, then, of two known authorially deliberate elements, the explicit and the conjunctive, form a new, separate component, the perception of movement or growth. The process involved in creating this new component may not be identified except, possibly, as 'creative.' However, Chaucer's obviously acute understanding of the reader's perceptive qualities, knowing how the reader will interpret the text, is essential, it seems, to achieving this new component.

Perhaps because Alisoun is not merely telling her autobiography in the Prologue, but because she is also hiding pain, affecting a potentially misleading image, providing entertainment to the other pilgrims, and at the same time satirizing much that is offensive in a patriarchal society, a clear perception of her is difficult, to say the least. Nevertheless, as complex a textual character that Alisoun is, her human movement is clearly woven throughout her Prologue.

In terms of Alisoun as satirist, the need for realism and believability is essential; otherwise there could be

no reader identification and her use of irony would be absolutely unrecognizable.

A kind that is only a semigenre, satire after all works by being self-contradictory.

Something at the historical core of this genre accounts for this irony of satiric irony, as it is grotesquely evident in the satiric traditions, both literary and oral, of the oppressed. (John Snyder 96)

If Alisoun is both hiding pain and employing satiric irony, then she must be perceived as real. The consequence of falling short of this tall order would be confusion. Nevertheless, Chaucer fills the order. Perhaps the critical debate over the Wife of Bath's goodness or wickedness is proof of her success as satirist.

Finally, Bloomfield, while addressing the authenticating techniques generally used by Chaucer, seems to have had Chaucer's achievement with the Wife of Bath's Prologue in mind when he says: "However, the deliberate manipulation of the authenticating level to raise problems of perception and truth is largely a modern characteristic. In some cases we even find the absolute destruction or abolition of a narrator or even 'tone of voice'" (182). Chaucer seems to have manipulated Alisoun just short of destroying her.

In so far as there can be a process of growth, however the process may work, Alisoun does indeed grow in human terms, from the physical, emotional, and intellectual to the subtlest flaws discernable in human nature.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alford, John A. "The Wife of Bath Versus the Clerk of Oxford: What Their Rivalry Means." The Chaucer Review 21 (1986): 108-32.
- Alford, David. The Strumpet Muse. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1976.
- Bloomfield, Morton W. "Chaucerian Realism." The Cambridge Chaucer Companion. Ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987. 179-93.
- Burton, T.L. "The Wife of Bath's Fourth and Fifth Husbands and Her Ideal Sixth: The Growth of a Marital Philosophy." The Chaucer Review 13 (1978): 34-50.
- Carruthers, Mary. "The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions." PMLA 94 (1979): 209-22.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer. Ed. John H. Fisher. 2nd ed. New York: Holt, 1989.
- Cook, James W. "'That she was out of alle charitee': Point-Counterpoint in the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale." The Chaucer Review 13 (1978): 51-65.
- Delsanta, Rodney. "Alisoun and the Saved Harlots: A Cozening of Our Expectations." The Chaucer Review 12 (1978): 218-35.



- Dinshaw, Carolyn. Chaucer's Sexual Poetics. Madison Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin Press, 1989.
- Fisher, John H., ed. The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer. 2nd ed. New York: Holt, 1989.
- Gibbons, James Cardinal. The Faith of Our Fathers: Being a Plain Exposition and Vindication of the Church Founded by Our Lord Jesus Christ. New York: P.J. Kennedy, 1917.
- Gottfried, Barbara. "Conflict and Relationship, Sovereignty and Survival: Parables of Power in the Wife of Bath's Prologue." The Chaucer Review 19 (1985): 202-24.
- Kittredge, George Lyman. Chaucer and His Poetry. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1915.
- Knapp, Peggy A. "Alisoun of Bath and the Reappropriation of Tradition." The Chaucer Review 24 (1989): 45-52.
- Long, Walter C. "The Wife as Moral Revolutionary." The Chaucer Review 20 (1986): 273-85.
- Martin, Priscilla. Chaucer's Women: Nuns, Wives, and Amazons. Iowa City: U of Iowa Press, 1990.
- Sands, Donald B. "The Non-Comic, Non-Tragic Wife: Chaucer's Dame Alys as Sociopath." The Chaucer Review 12 (1978): 171-82.

Shapiro, Gloria K. "Dame Alice as Deceptive Narrator."

The Chaucer Review 6 (1971): 130-41.

Shepherd, Geoffrey. "Religion and Philosophy in Chaucer."

Writers and their Background: Geoffrey Chaucer. Ed.

Derek Brewer. Athens Ohio: Ohio UP, 1974. 262-89.

Snyder, John. Prospects of Power: Tragedy, Satire, the

Essay, and the Theory of Genre. Lexington KY: UP of

Kentucky, 1991.