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Alison's Antithesis in *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*

Kristin Bovaird-Abbo

THE MOTIF OF THE Loathly Lady pervades medieval romance, for rarely does a knight conclude his quest without encountering a grotesque hag along his travels. This beldame typically functions as a subtle test of the knight's chivalric prowess. On the surface level, she merely seems to fulfill the role of the archetypal helper-maiden by offering the knight some kind of assistance—most frequently information, as is the case in Geoffrey Chaucer's fourteenth-century romance *The Wife of Bath's Tale*.¹ In exchange for the information, the knight is obligated to fulfill the Loathly Lady's request, which may range from a kiss to sex to marriage with the knight. The test lies beneath the surface, for it is in the behavior of the knight when pressed to commit to the Loathly Lady's request that his true merit is revealed, and the sudden transformation of the hag from loathly to lovely ensures a happy ending for the protagonist.

Although a sizeable amount of scholarship devoted to the genre of the Loathly Lady exists, surprisingly little has been done with the fifteenth-century ballad *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*. Most often, scholarly references merely list *Marriage* as one of many Loathly Lady tales with no further commentary.² This may be, in part, due to the incomplete nature of the text itself, for it is one of many works found in the seventeenth-century Percy Folio manuscript with intermittently torn pages. Fortunately, several of the narrative gaps may be filled in through conjecture thanks to its close relationship with *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, a fifteenth-century romance found in a sixteenth-century manuscript.³ At the same time, too often scholars such as Thomas Hahn and Thomas Garbáty, in Stephanie Hollis's view, have tended to treat *Marriage* as a "simplified, inferior, version

of ‘Ragnelle,’” an assessment with which she disagrees.⁴ For example, Hahn argues that “*Marriage* presents a retelling bolder and balder than any of the [other Loathly Lady tales],” noting that it lacks the literary sophistication found in John Gower and Geoffrey Chaucer.⁵ Hahn’s implication is that because it belongs to the ballad genre, the poem exhibits a “fundamental simplicity.” Although Hahn acknowledges the vivacity of the poem when read aloud, the overall impression of his introduction to this specific poem suggests that it offers little to discuss.⁶

Assertions such as this have begun to be challenged in recent scholarship. Examining the ways in which the Loathly Ladies function as counselors, S. Elizabeth Passmore notes that while the Loathly Lady of *Marriage* is “subdued” compared to Dame Ragnelle in *Wedding*, *Marriage*’s female protagonist is nonetheless aggressive. However, Passmore limits her examination of the Loathly Lady to her advisory role, with no discussion of how the Loathly Lady herself is a unique construct.⁷ Hollis takes her analysis of *Marriage*’s relationship to *Wedding* further by drawing attention to the significant differences between the two texts, arguing that *Marriage* is an “economical and original recasting of the plot,” and I concur with her assessment.⁸ However, Hollis limits her discussion primarily to the wedding-night speech. Although this moment in the narrative is indeed unique among the analogues in terms of the “demonic conception of the enchantment” of the Loathly Lady, as well as her “associations with witchcraft and the demonic,” Hollis focuses on the nature of the enchantment and its resolution to the exclusion of other ways in which *Marriage* differs from *Wedding*.⁹

While I agree with Hollis that *Marriage* offers a complex variation on the Loathly Lady motif that is worth exploring independently of the other analogues, I am interested in exploring the relationship specifically between *Marriage*, *Wedding*, and Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath’s Tale* in terms of how each Loathly Lady is presented as a model of feminine behavior, particularly given that *Marriage*’s depiction of its Loathly Lady—both in terms of her appearance and her demeanor—differs significantly from the other analogues.¹⁰ In John Gower’s *Tale of Florent*, *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*, and *Wedding*, extreme age makes the Loathly Lady monstrous.¹¹ However, *Marriage* differs in that the Loathly Lady’s age no longer renders her repellant. Instead, her jutting

tusks and misaligned face do the trick. Furthermore, and perhaps more interestingly, this text offers a description of the hag's clothing, which is made of the fabric known as scarlet. This type of cloth and color appears prominently in Chaucer's portrait of the Wife of Bath in the *General Prologue* of *The Canterbury Tales*. In this paper, I argue that the Loathly Lady of *Marriage* evokes not only the hag of the Wife of Bath's tale, but also, more importantly, Chaucer's Wife of Bath—Alison herself. In the first half of this paper, then, I will discuss the implications of reading the nameless knight in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* as Gawain. While it may initially be disconcerting to readers for one to connect the paragon of chivalry with a knight who is also a rapist (and I will discuss Gawain's reputation in greater detail below), I argue that the Wife of Bath as narrator chooses Gawain not in an effort to blacken his character, but rather to place him in a situation where she is able to dominate him. Yet such a drastic revision of Arthurian knighthood cannot stand for later gentry audiences fond of Gawain, and so the second half of the paper will focus on establishing *Marriage's* invocation of Alison of Bath and the significant changes made to *Marriage's* Loathly Lady in an effort to rewrite the Loathly Lady of *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. Ultimately, the reshaping of both Gawain and the Loathly Lady in *Marriage* reveals a resistance to the depiction of female behavior as it appears in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*.¹² That is, whereas the Loathly Ladies of both *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and *Wedding* are aggressive figures seeking to dominate the males in their lives, the Loathly Lady of *Marriage* denies her own agency, placing herself willingly and firmly under the control of the males of the Arthurian court.

Before I continue, however, a brief summary of the two texts is needed. The plot of both centers around a question quest, for the protagonist's life depends upon the answer to the question "What do women desire?" In *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, the nameless knight has raped a maiden and has been offered the chance by King Arthur's queen to save his life by answering this question. In *Marriage*, King Arthur becomes separated from his knights during a hunt and encounters a churlish figure who demands Arthur's death or the answer to the same question. Arthur then recruits Sir Gawain to help him seek the correct answer. In both tales, when the questors seem to be on the verge of failure, they

encounter a lady who offers the correct answer in exchange for marriage—in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, she demands marriage to the nameless knight-rapist whereas in *Marriage*, Arthur offers Gawain in marriage to the Loathly Lady.

These two analogues, as well as *Wedding*, retain the question of women's desire and the threat of imminent death; however, whereas Gawain appears honorable from the start of the tale in *Wedding* and *Marriage*, Chaucer's protagonist is a rapist. Yet neither of the later analogues retain either the rape or the murder. Robert Shenk notes regarding the *Dame Ragnelle* romances that "[a]s in the parallel stories of Chaucer and Gower, this 'hero' is guilty of something. But while in those tales the offense is rape or murder, here it is a lesser affair, the imprudence of being enticed away from the knights with whom [Arthur] was hunting."¹³ In both of the later analogues, Arthur is far from a flawless character. However, the situation in which he finds himself is too dire given the threat of death that the churl offers.

Furthermore, both *Wedding* and *Marriage* explicitly identify the hero as Gawain. The presence of several Gawain romances in the later Middle Ages indicates that to the English imagination, Gawain was quite the popular character and usually portrayed in a favorable light. As B. J. Whiting notes, the French texts of "*Lanval* and *Yvain* do not call Gawain courteous, [while the English] *Sir Launfal* and *Ywaine* both do."¹⁴ According to Keith Busby, "it appears to have been impossible to write an Arthurian romance in the Middle Ages without including Gawain."¹⁵ It is significant that in these two later works, the anonymous knight of Chaucer's romance is split into two characters: Arthur is the knight who must answer the question to save his honor and his life (there is no rape involved), and Gawain is the one who is destined to marry the hag. Each of the later analogues—that is, *Wedding* and *Marriage*—glorifies Gawain, presenting him as the paragon of virtue. Whereas Florent and Chaucer's nameless knight attempt to avoid marriage to the Loathly Lady, in *Wedding*, Gawain assures his lord that "I shalle wed her and wed her agayn, / Thowghe she were a fend; / Thowghe she were as foulle as Belsabub" (343-45).¹⁶ Unfortunately, the pages in the Percy Folio manuscript containing the corresponding section of *Marriage* are missing. However, it seems likely that the author followed

a pattern similar to that found in *Wedding*, particularly since Gawain is consistently referred to as “gentle Gawain” (79), and he alone does not visibly recoil from the Loathly Lady’s appearance.¹⁷

Scholars have already noted the similarity between *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* and other Gawain romances, particularly the fourteenth-century alliterative romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.¹⁸ However, no one to date has suggested that the nameless knight is indeed Gawain. Phillip C. Boardman comes closest when he notes that the knight of *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* is “a repetition of Gawain,” but emphasizes that he is not Gawain because “the long speech on ‘gentilesse’ delivered by the hag on their wedding night would seem inappropriate addressed to the English exemplar of courtesy.”¹⁹ Yet I argue that the Wife of Bath, by means of her Loathly Lady, re-educates her knight by presenting a different perspective on “gentilesse,” or nobility; therefore, what better way to enact a culture-wide revolution than to go directly to the paragon of courtly tradition? The Wife of Bath centers her bourgeois critique and revision of courtesy on Gawain because he is the one most responsible for propagating the very behaviors and attitudes she is denied by both her estate and her gender.²⁰ I argue that the Wife of Bath’s nameless knight is Gawain, and Chaucer’s audience would have recognized this knight as such, even without his illustrious name. This is due to the unique amalgamation of defining characteristics: specifically, his association with courtesy and his adherence to his word, his close relationship with Queen Guinevere, his ability to move freely from one sexual partner to another without censure, and finally, his association with a fairy mistress.²¹

All of these characteristics are manifest in the Wife of Bath’s nameless knight. For example, we find evidence of his loyalty when his year of respite draws to a close, for he is compelled to uphold his word: “Withinne his brest ful sorweful was the goost. / But hoom he gooth; he myghte nat sojourne; / The day was come that homward moste he tourne” (3.986-88).²² Although he is reluctant to marry the Loathly Lady, he does so. In addition, the fact that the queen intercedes on his behalf and the Loathly Lady chooses to help him on his quest reflects his inner virtue, despite his act of violence against the maiden in the opening lines. More important, however, is his association with courtesy,

which in Chaucer's text becomes replaced by "gentillesse," and which the Wife of Bath has taught to him by her Loathly Lady. According to the *Middle English Dictionary Online (MED)*, "courteisie" refers to "refinement of manners; gentlemanly or courteous conduct; courtesy, politeness, etiquette;" not surprisingly, the *MED* lists a similar definition for "gentillesse"; although it primarily refers to nobility, this term can also indicate "generosity, kindness, gentleness, graciousness, etc.; also, good breeding."²³ Suffice it to say that the trappings of courtesy, with which Gawain is never without, are indeed present in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*.

Second, the queen intercedes on the knight's behalf in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, indicating that a close relationship exists between the queen and the knight which prompts her to exert so much energy that King Arthur is willing to overturn the law of the land at her behest:

But that the queene and other ladyes mo
So longe preyeden the kyng of grace
Til he his lyf hym graunted in the place,
And yaf hym to the queene, al at hir wille,
To chese wheither she wolde hym save or spille.
(3.894-98)

The knight has violated Arthur's law and has committed an act of violence against a maiden, so we expect a suitable punishment to be imposed upon the knight. Some scholars account for this surprising act on the part of the queen, noting, as Bernard F. Huppé does, that the raped maiden is a peasant woman; therefore, he argues, the queen intercedes to protect the guilty knight because "no lady of noble birth was involved." By "the 'statut' of Arthur's realm, the young man had committed a crime punishable by death. In the law of the Courts of Love he had committed at the most an indiscretion."²⁴ However, there is no indication that the raped maiden is a peasant woman; we are told that "He saugh a mayde walkynge hym biforn" (3.886). The word "mayde" generally denotes a young girl, usually a virgin. While Chaucer uses this word to signify a servant girl in the *Miller's Tale*, he also describes the daughter of Virginius in *The Physician's Tale* as a "mayde" (6.7), indicating her state of sexual purity rather than her social class. Furthermore, the response to

the rape seems inappropriate for a peasant girl. We are told that “For which oppressioun was swich clamour” throughout the land (3.888), yet when other lower-class women are taken by force, such as the women of the *Reeve’s Tale*, we do not hear a call for swift and severe punishment. There must be another explanation for the queen’s actions in *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*. I propose that her decision to intercede on the nameless knight’s behalf is due to the traditional close relationship between Gawain and the Queen, which I will explore below.

Another weakness in Huppé’s argument is the fact that the death sentence hangs over the knight’s head even after his fate is given to the queen to determine. She tells the knight that “I grante thee lyf, if thou kanst tellen me / What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren” (3.904-05). If this were indeed a mere “indiscretion” in the Courts of Love, the knight would not fear for his life; instead, the queen cautions the nameless knight to “Be war, and keep thy nekke-boon from iren!” (3.906). If we read the nameless knight as Gawain, however, the queen’s actions make sense because Gawain and Guinevere have a long history together. In some traditions their relationship is intimate yet platonic.²⁵ For example, in Chrétien’s *Conte du Graal*, Gawain summons a messenger to entreat Arthur’s presence at the duel with Guiromelant. However, in order to ensure that he has a sizeable showing, Gawain also sends a message to Guinevere:

“Likewise you will say to the queen
that she must come by the great faith
we bear one another,
for she is my lady and my friend;
.....
and tell her that for love of me
she must bring with her all the ladies
and maidens who are at court that day.”
(9076-84)²⁶

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, we are told that “There gode Gawan watz grayped Gwenore bisyde” (109); their close physical proximity suggests that Gawain has the queen’s confidence.²⁷ If, then, the nameless knight is Gawain, the queen would be most loathe to put her

favorite nephew to death. In addition, in the *Suite du Merlin*, Gawain accidentally beheads a woman when she throws herself across the body of her beloved—another woman later rebukes him and orders him to “carry the corpse back to court with the head tied about his neck by its tresses, and submit to whatever the penalty the queen and ladies of the court may impose for his crime.”²⁸ Not only does Gawain have a close relationship with Arthur’s queen; he also has a history of answering to her rather than to his liege lord, Arthur.

Throughout medieval romance, Whiting notes that Gawain’s “adventures and love affairs find their way into many others,” even when he is not the protagonist.²⁹ These include such texts as the aforementioned *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Yvain and Gawain*, and the Celtic texts of *The Mabinogion*, where he appears as Gwalchmei. In each of these tales, as Whiting notes, “Gawain is the casual, good-natured and well-mannered wooer of almost any available girl. If she acquiesces, good; if not, there is sure to be another pavilion or castle not far ahead.”³⁰ His function in these romances, as Hahn notes, generally is to reveal “the true or false chivalry of the various antagonists who test him.”³¹

However, the Wife of Bath alters the traditional story of Gawain so that he takes a maiden by force—behavior seemingly antithetical to Gawain, but, as I hope to demonstrate, not impossible—and his opponent takes the unexpected form of a haggard old woman rather than the beautiful young maidens Gawain typically succors.³² Although ambiguity may surround the historical case of *raptus* with which Geoffrey Chaucer was involved, the Wife of Bath as narrator leaves no room for questions, indicating of the male protagonist that “By verray force, he rafte hire maydenhed” (3.888); this is indeed rape.³³ A quick survey of a handful of Arthurian texts reveals that Gawain is indeed frequently involved in rape stories. As Peggy McCracken notes, “it seems that Gauvain’s reputation entitles him to love whether or not it is offered, and if the love he has earned is not freely given, Gauvain takes it by force.”³⁴ In the thirteenth-century Prose *Tristan*, for example, “Gawain openly commits rape and murder.”³⁵ Although Gawain’s behavior throughout the Prose *Lancelot* and the works of Chrétien de Troyes is typically above reproach, McCracken cites the *First Continuation* of Chrétien’s *Conte du Graal*, where “Gauvain claims to have raped the Demoiselle

de Lis” when recounting an adventure to King Arthur and his court.³⁶ However, as McCracken herself notes, the Demoiselle has heard of Gawain’s reputation and during the encounter “abandons her heart and her body to Gauvain.” There is no indication of physical violence; only mutual participation. His subsequent reshaping of the events through narrative can be explained as a desire to protect the Demoiselle from her male relatives.

Yet as Hahn notes in “Gawain and Popular Chivalric Romance in Britain,” Gawain became a target for “attacks on the volatility and solipsism of knighthood” in romances such as the *Queste de Saint Graal*, and Cory J. Rushton offers several examples from medieval romance which involve Gawain in questionable or outright villainous behavior.³⁷ Rushton draws upon theories of male sexuality to note that “the masculine impulse to rescue and the impulse to threaten are so closely linked as to be often indistinguishable.”³⁸ Consider the environment in which the rapist knight encounters the maiden in *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*: she is alone in the forest, separated from any masculine figure—whether father, brother, husband, *et cetera*—to protect her. In Sir Thomas Malory’s fifteenth-century *Morte Darthur*, when a maiden is isolated in such a way, she is typically subjected to attacks by knights like Sir Breunis Sans Pit , and Chaucer’s Wife of Bath herself hints at the beginning of her tale of the dangers that may be experienced by lone women (3.873-81).

Rushton draws upon the theoretical work of Richard Dyer, whose ideas regarding male sexuality in modern film connect readily to the rape scene of *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*. The conflict between the desires noted above that the nameless knight experiences upon seeing the lone maiden is compounded by the way in which the narrative introduces the maiden, for as Dyer notes, the viewer, and in this case, the reader, is “encouraged into the position of a rapist in relation to” the trapped woman. Dyer continues, “we can see her but she can’t see us . . . if she knew she could be seen, she’d be on her guard, she’d protect her body symbolically from our gaze with gestures and clothes.”³⁹ The way in which the rapist knight encounters the maiden in the opening of *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* suggests that, as in Dyer’s modern film scenarios, Chaucer’s male knight is placed in a voyeuristic position, one which prompts sexual, and in this case, violent action: “He saugh a mayde walkynge hym biforn” (3.886). As

Dyer notes, “the sight of [female flesh] can make him want to take it.”⁴⁰ I am in no way attempting to justify the knight’s rape of the maiden in Chaucer’s tale; rather, I want to emphasize that via the lens of theories pertaining to male sexuality, rape can be presented as an act of sexuality. As Dyer notes, “[s]ince sexuality is supposedly natural, acts that express it can be viewed as pre-social and irresponsible because they are beyond social or individual responsibility.”⁴¹ A persistent belief maintains that the penis drives males to commit the deed. Even a paragon of masculine excellence, such as Gawain, is not immune to such forces, as evidenced by the medieval romances surveyed by McCracken and Rushton.

In addition, the question of rescue or rape becomes a matter of perspective; that is, for aristocratic audiences enjoying wish-fulfilling tales of Gawain’s adventures, it may seem quite natural and desirable that a member of the nobility and a relative of Arthur himself is able to attract women with ease. It is difficult to imagine a woman capable of rejecting Gawain in these aristocratic romances; indeed, a woman is meant to be flattered by Gawain’s attentions. After all, this is the argument that the wife of Bertilak of Hautdesert uses in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. She invites Gawain’s attentions, telling him that “And syþen I haue in þis hous hym þat al lykez, / I schal ware my whyle wel, quyl hit lastez, / with tale” (1234-36). Those women who initially dismiss Gawain as a love interest, such as the *orgeluse* [haughty] damsel in Chrétien de Troyes’s *Conte du Graal*, are eventually worn down by Gawain’s persistence. What is perhaps unusual about *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* (particularly in light of the rape scene of Chaucer’s *Reeve’s Tale*) is the “swich clamour / And swich pursute unto the kyng Arthour” that follows the rape (3.889-90). As Laura Mulvey notes, “The determining male gaze projects its phantasy [*sic*] on to the female form.”⁴² However, Chaucer uses Alison of Bath to counter this male fantasy. The female in this case refuses to be the passive object of masculine desire.

We must also keep in mind the narrator to whom Chaucer has assigned this particular tale. Douglas J. Wurtele notes that whereas Arthurian romance portrays both sexes favorably, Alison of Bath aims at a more “realistic” view by placing the knight in the most demeaning position she can imagine.⁴³ To a member of the lower classes, however, particularly someone like Alison of Bath who technically is denied

ownership and control of her property while married through both common and canon law, rape becomes especially terrifying as it strips the female of any control or possession of her very body.⁴⁴ Alison makes it very clear that such control is important to her through her use of first-person pronouns when she says, “I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age / In the actes and in fruyt of mariage” (3.113-14). Just because Gawain may be presented in some texts as the paragon of courtesy and as a knight devoted to protecting females does not necessarily make him consistently so—or perpetually desirable. After all, as Alison of Bath notes in her prologue, she cares less for what written authorities tell her about the world, preferring instead to depend upon her experience: “Experience, though noon auctoritee / Were in this world, is right ynogh for me / To speke of wo that is in mariage” (3.1-3). To dominate a knight such as Gawain, then, is to retain the power of transformation (a power which is significantly stripped from later Loathly Ladies). But yet his role as touchstone of courtesy remains in that the inner nobility of the Loathly Lady is revealed through her sermon on “gentillesse.” Furthermore, our flower of chivalry must be taught courtesy by one whose appearance belies her qualifications. The implications of these changes will be discussed later.

A number of verbal clues within *The Canterbury Tales* also help to confirm Gawain’s presence in *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*. For example, the name “Gawain” is invoked by the pilgrim Squire in order to illustrate the strange knight who enters the hall of Cambuskán: “That Gawayn, with his olde curteisye, / Though he were comen ayeyn out of Fairye, / Ne koude hym nat amende with a word” (5.95-97) in Chaucer’s *Squire’s Tale*. Two things are important to note here. First, Gawain is linked in Chaucer’s mind with courtesy, which indicates that Chaucer is familiar with the character of Gawain—no other knight is as frequently associated with courtesy as Gawain in Middle English literature. Secondly, the Squire notes that Gawain “were comen ayeyn out of Fairye” (5.96). According to Whiting, “Gawain’s original mistress was a fairy, queen of the other world, and nameless.”⁴⁵ The Squire’s repetition of this traditional lore further emphasizes a familiarity with the Arthurian legend, particularly as it concerns Gawain. When we return to *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*, there are several indicators that the Loathly Lady is a denizen

of the Otherworld. We are told in the opening of the Wife's tale, for example, that the supernatural queen is identified with the forest, the color green, and dancing: "The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye / Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede" (3.860-61). As the dejected nameless knight prepares to return to Arthur's court, he finds himself in a forest "Wher as he saugh upon a daunce go / Of ladyes foure and twenty, and yet mo" (3.991-92). Indeed, we can only assume that this group of twenty-four ladies dancing is that "joly compaignye" of the elf queen to which we were introduced at the beginning of the tale. Their fairy nature is further established when the knight approaches: "But certainly, er he cam fully there, / Vanysshed was this daunce, he nyste where" (3.995-96). However, one remains: "No creature saugh he that bar lyf, / Save on the grene he saugh sittyng a wyf" (3.997-98). Once again, we have forest imagery, dancing, and the color green.

Yet why does Alison of Bath choose the most celebrated of Arthurian knights and the one most famous for his succoring of women, and why does she not name him? In addition to his complex history as a lover discussed above, there is yet another aspect of Gawain's nature that the Wife of Bath envies yet finds repulsive. No one criticizes Gawain for his sexual freedom, and although a wooed woman's brothers may come after him, as in the *Jeaste of Sir Gawain*, they are rarely, if ever, a match for him on the battlefield. On the other hand, the Wife of Bath feels compelled to justify her multiple marriages and lusty nature in her prologue. Although Gawain is popular in medieval Britain, occasional criticisms of him do exist. For example, as Whiting notes, Gower uses Gawain as a negative example in his *Traitié* for instruction of married lovers. For example, as Whiting notes, Gower uses Gawain as a negative example in his *Traitié* for instruction of married lovers.⁴⁶ Hahn notes that "In the thirteenth century, an anti-matrimonial satire frequently reproduced in university circles (*On Not Taking a Wife*) attached itself to Gawain's name in more than a dozen of the surviving copies."⁴⁷ Thus Gawain presents himself as a tempting target for the Wife to domesticate. If she is to be limited to one sexual partner, then so too is Gawain.

In addition, Esther C. Quinn has noted the reversal of power that takes place in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. In the initial episode, which contains the rape, we are told of the "wordless subjection of the maiden to

the knight's will," whereas in the final episode, "the woman establishes her superiority through speech."⁴⁸ Yet I would argue that the Wife of Bath's changes are much more pervasive and intricate. She does not simply want an exchange of power, nor a fantasy of wish-fulfillment where the old woman gets the virile young knight. If that were the case, she would grant the knight a name. What better way to enhance her own name than to prove that she possesses power over Gawain, the flower of chivalry and most celebrated of Arthur's knights!

As Whiting notes, Gawain is unique among Arthur's bevy of knights in that "Gawain does not conceal his name."⁴⁹ Even when doing so is not in his best interest, Gawain generally does not withhold his name—even from his greatest enemies. Thus the Wife of Bath symbolically rapes Gawain by refusing to give his name at any point in the narrative; that is, he becomes controlled textually by the female narrator. Keep in mind the importance of a knight's name in the Arthurian romances. Numerous knights arrive at Arthur's hall and remain nameless (either through their choice to withhold their name, as is the case of Gareth, or through ignorance, as is the case with Lancelot and Perceval) until they have achieved magnificent deeds. Without his name and reputation, a knight is nothing; he is a hollow shell. Once a knight loses his name, it is nearly impossible to regain it—just as a violated maiden is unable to regain her virginity.

When the Wife of Bath rewrites a positive male character as a negative one—thereby becoming the rapist rather than the raped by taking away his name and rendering him powerless—she erases Gawain's identity. Anne McTaggart comes to a similar conclusion, noting that "If rape constitutes the quintessential instance of female shame, then, for the Arthurian knight, the quintessence of shame is the loss of his name, what the knight here calls 'my nacioun,' in dishonor."⁵⁰ Although McTaggart is more interested in exploring how the rapist knight's movement from rapist to potential rape victim reflects Alison of Bath's own progress, the loss of his name is a fearful blow for any knight, especially one as highly esteemed as Gawain. Of course, this is not the first time that Gawain has suffered a loss of reputation, for as Busby notes, Gawain occasionally loses face due to a breach of etiquette, but such instances are temporally limited, and Gawain is restored to any former glory.⁵¹

The Wife of Bath's version is unique in that by the conclusion of the story, the nameless knight remains nameless—he does not regain his name. As a consequence, once he is stripped of his name, he is no longer desired by other women. The later analogues, however, place a limit on Gawain's time with his newly acquired wife. In *Wedding*, for example, although the story concludes happily, the narrator mentions that their joy is short-lived: "She lyvyd with Sir Gawen butt yerys five" (820). Despite his grief at her death, Gawain is free to pursue other women and to resume his life as a "lustly bachelor." Chaucer's Wife of Bath makes no such allowance, for in her tale, "thus they lyve unto hir lyves ende" (3.1257)—the nameless knight is forever connected to the Loathly Lady, as indicated by the pronoun "they" and the plural genitive determiner "hir."

As Wurtele suggests, the Wife of Bath seems determined to contradict the assumption that the men of Arthurian legend "are devoted to the maintenance of honor and the upholding of noble ideals."⁵² Quinn echoes this idea, arguing that Chaucer's rapist knight falls into a stereotyped view of the court; that the knight is nameless in order to create an "effect [which suggests] that he is not a particular Arthurian knight but any young knight connected with Arthur's court."⁵³ This resistance to linking the nameless knight to a specific figure may be due to Quinn's approach. She develops connections specifically between *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and Marie de France's *Lanval* and the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, two texts in which Gawain is presented in a favorable light and in which there is no direct association with a fairy mistress, much less violence against women via Gawain's hands. Yet given the specific narrator to whom Chaucer has given this tale, as well as the defining traits of his rapist knight, I would argue that in order to fully understand Chaucer's use of an Arthurian knight, we must cast our literary nets wider; after all, Chaucer himself read widely. Thus the Wife of Bath has constructed a tale which challenges the traditional view of Arthur's court as the center of chivalry and virtue, a view that might be problematic to a rising bourgeois class enamored with the Matter of Britain.⁵⁴

Through the Loathly Lady, then, the Wife of Bath re-educates her Arthurian knight as to what she sees as the true meaning of "gentillesse,"

for as the Loathly Lady tells the nameless knight, “For gentillesse nys but renomee / Of thyne auncestres, for hire heigh bountee / Which is a strange thyng to thy persone” (3.1159-61). The nameless knight has been stripped of that which previously has been of the greatest importance to him—his name—and which serves as a record of his ancestry and resultant nobility as defined in fourteenth-century England. While most characters are already impressed by Gawain’s deeds and mannerisms before they learn his name, they are willing to go to new heights to welcome Gawain once his identity is known. For example, in the *Conte du Graal*, when Tiebaut de Tintangel learns that the stranger knight who has championed his younger daughter is Gawain, “his heart was filled with joy” (5594).⁵⁵ Others seek out his companionship in order to learn from his example, as shown when Gawain first meets Perceval, again in the *Conte du Graal*. When they exchange names, we are told that “Perceval was overjoyed / and said: ‘My lord, I have heard / good things told of you in many places / and I have been very eager / for the two of us to become acquainted’” (4453-57).⁵⁶ But at the same time, there are numerous examples throughout medieval romance where Gawain does not live up to his name. Rushton notes Gawain’s failure to follow through on his promise to serve Lunette in Chretien’s *Yvain*.⁵⁷ But as the hag of *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* reminds the nameless rapist knight, there is another meaning to “gentillesse” which denies the artificial boundaries of gender and class: “Thy gentillesse cometh fro God alone” (3.1162). Whereas Gawain has been concerned with the form of the thing, the Wife of Bath, via the hag, reminds him that his inner nobility comes from within and not from his name.

Yet in the fifteenth-century Gawain texts of *Wedding* and *Marriage*, the hag is not a queen of Fairy and she does not set out to teach Gawain anything. Instead, she is a victim of a cruel stepmother. Following the Loathly Lady’s transformation from beast into beauty in *Wedding*, Gawain explains to King Arthur “Howe forshapen she was with her stepmoder / Tylle a knight had holpen her again” (773-74).⁵⁸ Chaucer intends something different by his Loathly Lady, for when she is granted sovereignty by the nameless knight, we are given no explanation for her miraculous transformation. We can only assume that the power to change her appearance lies within herself and has not been imposed upon

her by another. That these later anonymous authors choose to remove the rape and to glorify Gawain suggests a widespread resistance to the Wife of Bath's reading of Gawain as a rapist knight and to the possibility of female agency and female desire as the cause of masculine glory.

Both *Wedding* and *Marriage* follow in Gower's footsteps in that the Loathly Lady is, at the end, revealed to be the victim of a cruel stepmother and her subsequent curse which can only be broken through marriage to a worthy knight.⁵⁹ However, in *Marriage*, not only is the heroine the unfortunate victim; we are given additional details about the stepmother, absent in earlier versions, which evoke *The Wife of Bath's Tale*:

“My father was an old knight.
And yett it chanced soe
That he marryed a younge lady
That brought me to this wo.

Shee witched me, being a faire young lady,
To the greene forrest to dwell,
And there I must walke in womans liknesse,
Most like a feind of hell.”
(175-82)

In both *Marriage* and in *The Canterbury Tales*, the Loathly Lady resides in a similar green world. I would also note a major departure from *Wedding*, for the curse has a terminal point: she will remain bewitched *until* she meets a superlative knight. In *Marriage*, as evidenced by the quotation above, the curse is meant to be permanent; the denotation of the verb “dwell” suggests perpetuity, along with the use of the infinitive (as opposed to casting “dwell” as a tensed verb) and the use of present tense in “must.” While a page is missing immediately after line 183, it is unlikely that the Loathly Lady continues to elaborate on her situation, for she shifts the focus to her brother in line 183 suggesting that she has said all that pertains to her enchantment.⁶⁰

It is also in the best interest of a woman like Chaucer's Alison to enact a permanent enchantment. Consider the marriages of Chaucer's Wife of Bath pilgrim; in her prologue, she reveals that of her five husbands, “thre

were goode men, and riche, and olde” (3.197). Thus both the stepmother of *Marriage* and Alison of Bath have, at young ages, been joined to much older men (Alison’s first marriage was when she was twelve, as she reveals in the prologue to her tale). Both women are jealous of their position, removing any object (or person) who might distract their husbands from themselves, or, in the case of *Marriage* and *Wedding*, anyone who might provide competition for their children’s inheritance. It is on this point that *Marriage* differs significantly from *Wedding*, though, for in *Wedding*, the churl who threatens Arthur’s life is Gromer Somer Joure, brother to Dame Ragnelle. He is driven to reclaim lands seized by Arthur and then given to Gawain, and the text suggests that the stepmother who enchanted Dame Ragnelle did so in order to ensure Gromer’s success in regaining his lands (which ultimately pass to Ragnelle through her marriage to Gawain).⁶¹ In *Marriage*, although we do not see the Loathly Lady’s brother accost Arthur directly (due to yet another missing page), we are told by the Loathly Lady herself that the stepmother “witched my brother to a carlish B” (183). Although the text is damaged, enough remains to indicate that both children have been essentially cast out of society through the stepmother’s magic.⁶² Such self-interested behavior sounds very much like the Wife of Bath, who boasts of her numerous husbands that “They had me yeven hir lond and hir tresoor” (3.204), although there is no mention of children, despite her repeated comments about the necessity of sex for procreation.⁶³ Clearly the Wife of Bath has made a profession out of marriage.

By rewriting the Loathly Lady, therefore, the author of *Marriage* strips away the feminine autonomy which Alison holds most dear, for what Alison does to a knight of the Arthurian court in her tale is unthinkable. In order to cleanse the Arthurian atmosphere, the *Marriage* author replaces Chaucer’s nameless rapist knight with the paragon of Arthurian chivalry, Sir Gawain, a man who largely devotes his life to serving women rather than violating them—for after all, that is one of the primary responsibilities of Arthur’s Round Table. In addition, the anonymous author of *Marriage* introduces significant changes to his Loathly Lady, essentially inverting and thus damning Alison of Bath’s quest for female autonomy.

As noted earlier, the Loathly Lady in each of the analogues lives up to

her name—she is hideous. Chaucer does not go into much detail regarding her physical appearance; we are simply told that “A fouler wight ther may no man devyse” (3.999), and Chaucer repeats the idea, found also in Gower’s *Tale of Florent*, of great age and ugly features for the hag herself acknowledges that she is “foul, and oold, and poore” (3.1063). It is not surprising, given these details of the two fourteenth-century precedents, that *Wedding* follows Gower’s precedent, focusing on her lips, the folds of skin hanging from her face, and her hoary locks. There is no mention of clothing in *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*, and the anonymous author of *Wedding* follows Chaucer’s example in omitting descriptions of the hag’s original dress. Although we are told that the horse on which the Loathly Lady sits is “With gold besett and many a precious stone” (247), the narrator’s following comment that “To ryde so gayly, I you ensure, / Ytt was no reason ne ryghte” (250–51) indicates that the hag’s appearance is as ragged as her horse’s is rich.

The *Marriage* also comments on the Loathly Lady’s hideous appearance. However, whereas the other analogues rely on forces of nature—old age—to render her monstrous, the Loathly Lady of *Marriage* is physically deformed:

Then there as shold have stood her mouth,
Then there was sett her eye;
The other was in her forehead fast,

The way that she might see.
Her nose was crooked and turnd outward,
Her mouth stood foule awry.
(57–62)

The narrator’s last comment on her appearance is hardly an exaggeration: “A worse formed lady than shee was, / Never man saw with his eye” (63–64). Although each of these analogues is already closely linked in scholarship, I would argue that the author of *Marriage* not only constructs his Loathly Lady to evoke the corresponding female of Chaucer’s tale—his hag bears a striking resemblance to Alison of Bath herself.

This parallel occurs with the attention given to the Loathly Lady’s attire, for in *Marriage*, we are given information about her clothing;

specifically, she “was cladd in red scarlett” (56). The color red has been associated with the Loathly Lady in prior analogues; in *Wedding*, for example, we are told that “Her face was red” (231). Remember, too, that Alison of Bath, in the *General Prologue*, has a red face: “Boold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe” (1.458). Now, however, in *Marriage*, the color red is applied to a specific fabric—scarlet—and the phrase “she was clad in red scarlett” appears two more times, making this detail difficult to overlook. As the *MED* notes, “scarlett” is a kind of rich cloth. That the Loathly Lady wears this specific type of fabric is surprising in light of the earlier analogues’ emphasis on the lady’s poverty.

This is not the first time that we have encountered a woman whose costume consists of this type of cloth, for we must consider the person to whom Chaucer has assigned the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*. Alison of Bath is very fond of scarlet cloth.⁶⁴ While the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that the mention of “scarlett” in Chaucer’s *General Prologue* is an adjective describing a specific color, both the *MED* and the Manly-Rickert edition of *The Canterbury Tales* posit “scarlett” as a noun describing a type of cloth. As Laura F. Hodges has shown in her extensive studies of clothing and costume in Chaucer’s writings, Chaucer has a thorough knowledge of fabrics and often employs these details to express nuances about the pilgrims’ personalities. It is not surprising, therefore, that Chaucer uses both the adjective and the noun forms of “scarlet” consistently throughout the *Canterbury Tales*.⁶⁵

In the *General Prologue*, we are told by the narrator of Alison that “Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlett reed” (1.456).⁶⁶ Furthermore, the syntax is slightly different in that we have two adjectives grouped around a noun—that is, “fyn” and “reed” both modify “scarlett,” a syntactical order often found with nouns modified by more than one adjective in Middle English poetry. When we consider the personality of the Wife herself, Chaucer’s choice to identify her as wearing the fabric known as “scarlet” becomes clear. As George Fenwick Jones notes, “red hose symbolized the nobility.”⁶⁷ Although the Wife of Bath is clearly a member of the bourgeois class, rather than of the aristocratic set, she thinks quite highly of herself.⁶⁸ In fact, as the narrator notes in the *General Prologue*,

In al the parisshe wif ne was ther noon
That to the offrynge bifore hire sholde goon;
And if ther dide, certeyn so wrooth was she
That she was out of alle charitee.
(1.449-52)

Hodges notes regarding the Wife of Bath, “Her accessories highlight her pride in her material wealth while they proclaim her economic success.”⁶⁹ She will brook no competition with the other women of Bath; she must be first in everything. It is no surprise, then, that she chooses to attire herself in the most expensive fabric, for as Hodges’s study of fabric prices in medieval England reveals, “scarlets of any color and cloths dyed in grain are much more costly than worsted.”⁷⁰ As a highly skilled maker of clothes, she has easy access to these luxurious fabrics, and she does not hesitate to display her wealth through her clothing, for her hose are not the only opulent items that she wears. She reveals that when she goes about town, she “wered upon my gaye scarlet gytes” (3.559). Of course, here “scarlet” is an adjective, and with “gaye,” modifies the noun “gytes,” or robes. The adjectival meaning offered by the *MED*, “of cloth, a robe, an article of clothing, etc.: of fine material or quality, perhaps of scarlet color,” seems to be most appropriate given the Wife’s showy nature.⁷¹ After all, just a few lines earlier, she informs us that her purpose in these outings is “for to se, and eek for to be seye” (3.552)—she wants to be noticed, and what better way to be observed than to wear a vivid shade of red?

Yet whereas Alison and her Loathly Lady demand to be seen as well as to be heard, the Loathly Lady of *Marriage* is constructed quite differently, as will be discussed below. As Nicole D. Smith argues in *Sartorial Strategies* regarding the girdle of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, material objects can be “reinvested with new, spiritually sound meaning.”⁷² That is, while the girdle may originally represent pride due to its ornamentation, Gawain manages to shift its meaning to one which reminds him daily of his failures. I would argue that something similar occurs with the repetition of the scarlet cloth in both *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* and *Marriage*. While we may be tempted, as earlier scholars have been, to dismiss the later Loathly Lady as a simplified version, when we

examine the details of her construction—especially in light of how she differs from Chaucer’s Loathly Lady—it becomes difficult to dismiss the reappearance of the cloth as either mere coincidence or mimicry of Chaucer’s tale.⁷³ Rather, the use of red scarlet initially evokes the Wife of Bath, but I hope to show that as the narrative of *Marriage* progresses, this Loathly Lady redefines what it means to wear red scarlet. That is, it is no longer a fabric designed to display wealth or signify pride or to ensure that Alison stands out from all other women; rather, in *Marriage* scarlet is worn by one who enables her own transformation by yielding readily to masculine authority and by fading into the background while allowing others—namely Gawain—to shine.

Another way in which Alison of Bath and her female protagonist are made nearly interchangeable lies in the Loathly Lady’s behavior when she first encounters the male protagonist. Chaucer’s lady is aggressive physically as well as verbally, unlike the lady of *Marriage* who is very passive. For example, the Loathly Lady of *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* presents herself as a teacher, thus establishing a hierarchy in which she has power, in the form of knowledge, over the knight: “Koude ye me wise, I wolde wel quite youre hire.” (3.1008).⁷⁴ This emphasis on female instruction serves to create a stronger connection between Alison of Bath and her female protagonist, for Alison’s prologue reflects her interest in interpretation and teaching of scripture, actions which Walter Simons observes threatened the medieval church by “endangering male asceticism and undermining clerical leadership.”⁷⁵ As Roger A. Ladd notes, “this *Tale* seems far more tied to its teller than others of the *Canterbury Tales*,” and so it is not surprising that scholars such as Elizabeth Scala views the Loathly Lady as “a projection of the Wife’s ideal self-image.”⁷⁶

The lady of *Wedding* is also aggressively threatening to Arthur, albeit in a different way, for she initiates the conversation not only by speaking first but also by approaching him: “She rode to Arthoure and thus she sayd” (252). Like Chaucer’s Loathly Lady, Dame Ragnelle also establishes a position of power over Arthur, for in one sentence she uses the imperative to command Arthur, followed quickly by her insistence on her position as advisor, and concludes with a warning: “Speke with me, I rede, or thou goo, / For thy lyfe is in my hand, I warn the soo” (255-56).

The lady of *Marriage* uses language that is much less threatening and

which reinforces normative female behavior, for she uses the language of healing, rather than of teaching, when she addresses Arthur and includes an honorific title: “Yett I may happen, Sir Knight, shee said, / ‘To ease thee of thy paine” (75-76). In addition, her use of the auxiliary “may” suggests the potential nature of her help rather than certainty. Although the lady of *Marriage*, like the lady of *Wedding*, uses the imperative mood, she opens her address with a question which allows Arthur to control the conversation and predominantly refers to herself using object pronouns to suggest her lack of agency:

“What knight art thou,” the lady sayd,
“That will not speak to me?
Of me be thou nothing dismayd
Tho I be ugly to see.”
(69-72)

Her choice of “dismayd” here is significant as well, for she does not suggest that Arthur is frightened by her appearance. When Arthur responds, he demonstrates that he has power in the relationship because he chooses how he responds; that is, rather than answer her question of “What knight art thou,” Arthur is most interested in her offer of help, immediately offering her marriage to Gawain in return.

While all of the analogues offer the Loathly Lady as a spectacle to some extent, *Marriage* heightens her objectivity by repeatedly using the passive voice. For example, the narrator informs us that “She was cladd in red scarlett” (56), indicating that she does not even have control over how she is dressed. In addition, although we are told that “To halch upon him, King Arthur, / This lady was full faine” (65-66), the lady is not allowed to either move (unlike in *Wedding*) or speak (unlike in *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*) until the narrator accounts for Arthur’s silence: “Arthur had forgott his lesson, / What he shold say againe” (67-68).

That the Loathly Lady of *Marriage* is passive is surprising in light of her antecedents in *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* and *Wedding*. Dame Ragnelle insists on her equality with Arthur in *Wedding*, riding side-by-side with him *en route* to Camelot: “Into the courte she rode hym by” (518). She even repeatedly gives Arthur direct orders, either through using the subjunctive mood (“Thou must graunt me a knyght to wed: / His name

is Sir Gawen” [280-81] or direct imperatives (“Arthoure, Kyng, lett fetche me Sir Gaweyn” [525]). Chaucer’s Loathly Lady demonstrates her position by reminding the rapist knight of his debt to her: “I am she which that saved hath youre lyf” (Chaucer 3.1092). She also devotes 122 lines of verse to lecturing the rapist knight as they lie in bed on their wedding night (3.1106-1227).

This passivity on the part of the Loathly Lady in *Marriage* is an inversion of the power hierarchy in *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*. Whereas the two earlier analogues offer powerful models of female behavior in both the figures of the Loathly Lady and of Arthur’s queen, in *Marriage*, the power resides solely with the men. As Heidi Breuer notes regarding Chaucer’s tale, “[The] *Wife’s Tale* . . . presents a relatively passive knight saved purely by the intervention of female characters.”⁷⁷ Repeatedly in both *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* and *Wedding*, the ladies interact with other women, with the result that the males tend to fade somewhat into the background. For example, in *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*, while speaking to the rapist knight as they travel to Arthur’s court, the Loathly Lady reveals that she is in competition with other women—specifically, the women of Arthur’s court: “Lat se which is the proudeste of hem alle / That wereth on a coverchief or a calle / That dar seye nay of that I shal thee teche” (3.1017-19). Again, this behavior of Chaucer’s Loathly Lady evokes Alison of Bath and the narrator’s comment in the *General Prologue* that she must be the first woman to give the offering at the church. Another way in which the interactions between females is highlighted occurs when the rapist knight delivers the correct answer in the tale, for the Loathly Lady is quick to secure her rights to him. It is notable that she appeals directly to the queen, rather than to the knight or Arthur, thereby creating a very public spectacle by calling attention to the queen’s power as well as the presence of the entire court: “‘Mercy,’ quod she, ‘my sovereyn lady queene! / Er that youre court departe, do me right” (3.1048-49).

Wedding continues this idea of female empowerment, for although the question quest is established by a masculine figure, Arthur’s queen (called Gaynor in *Wedding* and Genever in *Marriage*, but presented without a name in *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*) continues to play a significant role. Notably this female autonomy disappears entirely in *Marriage*, but

in *Wedding* as in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, Gaynor's opinions clearly set the tone for the rest of the court, male and female alike, for once she utters her dismay at Gawain's fated loathly bride, the rest of the court echoes her sentiment:

“Alas!” then sayd Dame Gaynour;
So sayd alle the ladyes in her bower,
And wept for Sir Gawen.
“Alas!” then sayd bothe Kyng and knyght,
That evere he shold wed suche a wyghte.
(542-46)

Both the chronology of events and transitional words such as “then” show the ripple effect as the “Alas!” moves through the court, and it is significant that it moves first through the women before being picked up by the men. Here, too, is competition among women, for not only does Ragnelle demand a public wedding (much like Chaucer's lady's insistence on public recognition of the knight's debt to her), but she also commands the ladies of the land to attend: “Alle the ladyes nowe of the lond, / She lett kry to com to hand / To kepe that brydalle thorowe” (560-62).

We also see a power struggle between Dame Ragnelle and Gaynor in *Wedding*. Visually, Ragnelle is arrayed “More fressher than Dame Gaynour” (591) in preparation for the wedding ceremony. Of course, such a comparison functions on multiple levels here; the conventions of medieval romance require a new bride to appear as splendidly as possible. At the same time, the richness of Ragnelle's garb serves to highlight the discrepancy between the beautiful costume and the hideousness of her physical appearance.⁷⁸ Yet Ragnelle and Gaynor spar verbally as well, for the latter attempts to dissuade Dame Ragnelle from her insistence on creating spectacle: “The Queen prayd Dame Ragnelle sekerly / ‘To be maryed in the mornyng erly / As pryvaly as ye may’” (569-71). Although Gaynor here appears in the syntactic position of subject, the verb choice of “prayd” places the power in Ragnelle's hands.

Arthur's queen appears early in *Marriage*; in fact, she accompanies Arthur in the poem's opening lines, and the verb choice of *bath* and the emphasis placed solely on her beauty firmly objectify her in a manner reminiscent of the poem's treatment of the Loathly Lady: “And there

he hath with him Queene Genever / That bride soe bright of blee" (3-4). However, she is absent from the extant manuscript pages until the close of the poem, when the narrator notes that "King Arthur welcomed them there all, / And soe did Lady Genever his Queene" (206-7). In both instances, the queen is silent and secondary to her lord, appearing as either a grammatical object at the beginning, or merely echoing her husband's actions as at the conclusion. At no point does the queen directly address the Loathly Lady of *Marriage*, much less imply any sort of female autonomy or competition. In fact, women in general are excluded from the celebration at the end of the poem: "Soe did the knights, both more and lesse, / Rejoyced all that day" (214-15).

The lady of *Marriage* does not make requests—much less demands—of Arthur. Following her suggestion that she may be able to help, Arthur is the one to offer Gawain in marriage: "Thou shalt have gentle Gawaine, my cozen" (79). More importantly, though, the lady of *Marriage* becomes the object of the masculine public gaze. In a scene absent from the other analogues, Arthur brings several of his knights—Lancelot, Steven, Kay, Banier, Bors, Garrett, Tristram, and Gawain—with him to meet the Loathly Lady in the forest. In both Chaucer's tale and *Wedding*, the Loathly Lady's introduction to the court takes place within the civilized confines of either Carlisle or Camelot, and the Loathly Lady actively moves from one location to the other. In addition, the receiving courts of these analogues consist of both male and female observers. In *Marriage*, however, the Loathly Lady is the lone female, and often she is led by the men around her rather than moving independently.

In addition, the Loathly Lady of *Marriage* tends to be very static. For example, when Arthur first encounters her, the narrator notes that "Hee see a lady where shee sate / Betwixt an oke and a greene hollen" (54-55). This is identical to her physical location—by a holly tree—and seated position when Arthur brings his knights to find her following the conclusion of his encounter with the Baron, suggesting that she is incapable of independent movement: "Underneath a greene holly tree / Their sate that lady in red scarlet" (125-26). Once the knights arrive, they subject her to repeated examinations of her appearance. Most aggressive is the gaze of Sir Kay. Not only does the narrator repeat the verbs "beheld" and "looked," emphasizing the intensity of Kay's actions; Kay's

gaze also fragments her body into smaller pieces (moving from her face to her neck to her nose), all of which fail to meet his approval:

Sir Kay beheld this ladys face,
And looked upon her swire:
“Whosoever kisses this lady,” he sayes,
“Of his kisse he stands in feare.”

.....

Sir Kay beheld the lady againe,
And looked upon her snout:
“Whosoever kisses this lady,” he saies,
“Of his kisse he stands in doubt.”

(128-35)

In fact, Kay—via the narrator—dehumanizes the lady through the use of the word “snout,” a term typically used to describe the nose of an animal such as a boar or a dog.⁷⁹ Despite this repeated negative scrutiny of her body, the lady remains silent.

Because several pages are missing from the manuscript of *Marriage*, it is tempting to assume that those absent pages probably contain moments where the Loathly Lady speaks and either defends herself or insists on her autonomy. However, given the extant passages and the significant differences introduced to her character from the other analogues, as discussed above, the more compelling conclusion is that the Loathly Lady of *Marriage* is of a different ilk than the lady of *The Wife of Bath's Tale* or *Wedding*. This is most apparent in the bedroom scene, which is the next moment in which we hear the Loathly Lady speak in *Marriage*. The narrative picks up just as she offers Gawain the choice to have her beautiful either at night or during the day. The tone of their conversation is drastically different from that found in either *The Wife of Bath's Tale* or *Wedding*, where the Loathly Lady clearly has control of the conversation, and the rapist knight and Gawain can only complain about the difficulty of the choice.⁸⁰

In *Marriage*, however, Gawain takes on a teasing tone as he offers his decision. There is no hesitation, no bewailing his fate, no lament for his lost honor:

“Well I know what I wold say—
God grant it may be good!

To have thee fowle in the night
When I with thee shold play;
Yet I had rather, if I might,
Have thee fowle in the day.”
(157-62)

Whereas the other analogues draw out this moment, Gawain does not belabor his options here, indicating that he is in control of the situation. The lady's response, on the other hand, is fraught with emotion, indicating a lack of control on her part as well as a lack of awareness regarding Gawain's playful mood:

“What! When lords goe with ther feires,” shee said,
“Both to the ale and wine?
Alas! Then I must hyde my selfe,
I must not goe withinne.”
(163-66)

Her response indicates an acceptance of conventional female roles; she is aware that her physical appearance is meant to complement and augment the honor of her spouse, and if a lack of beauty will mar that honor, she comes to the realization that she will have to hide away. Her use of two interjections in close proximity followed by “Then” marks her grief as well as her passive acceptance of her fate.

That Gawain quickly reassures her continues to show that he has the upper hand in the situation: “Lady, thats but a skill” (168). It is interesting to note the difference in how Gawain structures his decision to give the power of choice to the lady. In *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, the knight reluctantly tells the Loathly Lady that “I put me in youre wise governance” (3.1231); the knight willingly yields his autonomy and is syntactically subsumed by the Loathly Lady. However, in *Marriage*, Gawain comments, “because thou art my owne lady, / Thou shalt have all thy will” (155-70). Gawain's use of the copula renames the lady as his own, and the pleonasm of “owne” emphasizes his ownership of her. Because Gawain possesses the lady, she can make the decision. As long

as she remains within Gawain's sphere of influence, she has power—but only what he gives her.

The lady speaks long enough to give the background of the curse, remaining silent for the remainder of the ballad. This is in sharp contrast to Dame Ragnelle of *Wedding*, who emphasizes her autonomy repeatedly; for example, the morning after the wedding and subsequent transformation, she, rather than Gawain, “told the Kyng fayre and welle / Howe Gawen gave her the sovereynté every delle” (775-76). She then offers Gawain a public promise of her obedience:

“Therefore, curteys Knyght and hend Gawen,
Shalle I nevere wrathe the serteyn,
That promyse nowe here I make.
Whilles that I lyve I shal be obaysaunt;”
(781-84)

While the fact that she swears her compliance in the presence of witnesses may signal a transference of power from the speaker to the intended addressee, at the same time, it remains significant that she is performing a speech act. This indicates that this is her choice, and, more importantly, that she is empowered to perform such an action. Her public performance is, in many ways, yet another example in which she flies in the face of social expectations regarding gender performance. As Theresa Tinkle notes in her discussion of *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, “Feminine speech per se—rather than particular theological or doctrinal errors—challenges the Pauline ideal of hierarchical order.”⁸¹ Dame Ragnelle, like Alison of Bath, continues to exert her influence on the men around her. Gawain astounds Arthur by preferring Ragnelle's company to jousting—“Theratt mervayld Arthoure the Kyng” (10)—and Ragnelle serves as advisor to Arthur: “She prayd the Kyng for his gentilnes, / ‘To be good lord to Sir Gromer” (811-12).

In *Marriage*, the lady continues to be objectified, further emphasizing that power is firmly held by the masculine community even when she is admitted into their social circle through marriage. Just as when the knights first encounter her in the forest, she is subjected to the male gaze and is presented in terms of masculine desire; that is, she is appreciated because she is beautiful to observe: “King Arthur beheld that lady faire”

(210). Now the knights do more than just look at her, though, for she is transformed into a material object that is to be passed from male to male: “Sir Gawaine tooke the lady by the one arme, / Sir Kay tooke her by the tother” (202-3). In addition, she is now something to be consumed, as suggested by Kay’s comment after he kisses her: “He swore, as he was trew knight, / The spice was never soe sweete” (192-93). There is no attempt to advise Arthur in his kingship, unlike *Wedding*, and no indication that Gawain and the lady have developed a mutually beneficial relationship, unlike *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*. Instead, the Loathly Lady of *Marriage* is subsumed into the narrative, possessed forever by Gawain.

As Mary Carruthers notes regarding Chaucer’s Wife of Bath, “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.”⁸² Yet the depiction of the Loathly Lady in *Marriage* seems to reject all that Alison of Bath stands for, arguing instead for a resumption of traditional medieval views regarding female behavior. After all, when power is given into the hands of women such as Alison of Bath, what results? Not only is Gawain vilified; the very fabric of the Arthurian world is threatened.

We must remember that, unlike the other Loathly Lady analogues, in *Marriage*, the brother too has been cursed by the stepmother; the Loathly Lady is not the only victim. When the Baron of *Marriage* challenges Arthur, there is no suggestion of wrongdoing on Arthur’s part.⁸³ Although the page containing the Baron’s encounter with Arthur is missing, Arthur’s later recollection of the moment to Gawain reveals no motivation on the Baron’s part other than to pick a fight:

“And he asked me wether I wold fight,
Or from him I shold begone—
Or else I must him a ransome pay
And soe depart him from.”
(36-39)

Based on the details of the text, it appears that the Baron accosts Arthur simply because the moment presents itself. Thus through the

stepmother's curse, both the stepdaughter and the stepson have been pushed to the margins of society and made monstrous in varying ways. The Baron is excessively aggressive and the Loathly Lady's appearance is physically warped.

Yet the perseverance of both Gawain and the Loathly Lady of *Marriage* reveals that the negative influence of malicious mothers can be overcome. The reader's perception of females in *Marriage* is challenged; while there are plenty of threatening, monstrous ones like the Wife of Bath and her descendants lurking in the forests and awaiting their chances to subvert gender roles, others emerge as victims. A grisly appearance cannot always be interpreted as containing an aggressive and autonomous female spirit. The lady of *Marriage* has been perjured by Alison and her descendants, but she finds that she is able to cast off the red scarlet wrapped about her by the Wife of Bath (and hence she can discard her ugly, repulsive appearance) by isolating herself from such malevolent female influences through the geographical space of the forest as well as by avoiding entering into competition with other females. Once she is brought into contact with the masculine Arthurian world, by adopting obedient and respectful behavior, this Loathly Lady is welcomed by all.

Ironically, it is through her refusal to challenge the masculine world of the Arthurian court that the Loathly Lady of *Marriage* is able to attain what Chaucer's Alison of Bath ultimately desires. As McTaggart notes, at the close of Alison's prologue, "Chaucer indicates that their relationship is now one marked by mutuality."⁸⁴ That is, as McTaggart demonstrates through her careful examination of Alison's conflict with Jankyn, Alison must learn that violence—whether in the form of physical violence or verbal domineering—only engenders more violence and destruction, leaving both parties unsatisfied.⁸⁵ Yet *Marriage's* Loathly Lady need undergo no such lesson to achieve her happy ending. The closing lines of the ballad reflect this idea, for now the Loathly Lady is linked firmly to Gawain through the use of alliteration, the conjunction "and," and the possessive modifying pronoun: "For the good chance that hapened was / To Sir Gawaine and his lady gay" (216-17). Perhaps even more importantly, both Gawain and his lady are equally objectified, at the whims of "good chance"; that is, both have behaved in a

manner sanctioned by medieval society, with the result that they are both rewarded for their efforts.

Furthermore, Gawain is restored to exemplary status through the changes introduced by both the poets of *Wedding* and *Marriage*, for by splitting the rapist knight into two distinct characters, any weakness can fall to Arthur's lot. The Wife of Bath's power over Gawain's name and reputation is rejected in these later analogues. Thus *Marriage* firmly delivers an end to Alison of Bath's linguistic power. Although both genders are temporarily afflicted by her insistence on female sovereignty—the Loathly Lady is isolated from courtly society in each of the analogues, and Gawain suffers a negative reputation at Alison's hands—both Gawain and the Loathly Lady emerge unscathed and even stronger than before. In fact, the explicit interweaving of Gawain into the Loathly Lady narrative provides vital enticement for the maintenance of traditional gender roles, for he becomes a reward for any woman, like the female protagonist—significantly unnamed so as to become universally appealing—of *Marriage*, who rejects the example set by the Wife of Bath through her flight as well as her subsequent obedience to masculine authority. Gawain is restored to his position as favored knight and is rewarded with an obedient and beautiful spouse. At the same time, the Loathly Lady gains a new community—one with greater prestige than what she most likely could have acquired had her stepmother not enchanted her. While little is known about the specific audiences for these texts, concerns over heredity are a predominant theme in many of the medieval popular romances. Raluca L. Radulescu also notes that these romances “favour family values confirmed by authority—whether in the form of the customs of lay society, the Church or the law.”⁸⁶ *Marriage*, through its presentation of a docile female who must rely upon masculine power for her salvation and who offers no challenge to masculine hegemony, certainly fits that mold. For the conventional audiences of the popular ballad, this truly was a happy ending.

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NOTE

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END NOTES

1. Sigmund Eisner, *A Tale of Wonder: A Source Study of The Wife of Bath's Tale* (New York: B. Franklin, 1969), offers the most comprehensive study of the Loathly Lady tales.

2. Stephanie Hollis, "The Marriage of Sir Gawain': Piecing the Fragments Together," in *The English "Loathly Lady" Tales: Boundaries, Traditions, Motifs*, ed. S. Elizabeth Passmore and Susan Carter (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 2007), 163-85, 163, indicates that the poem is dated "on linguistic grounds, to the mid- or late fifteenth century." S. Elizabeth Passmore, "Through the Counsel of a Lady: The Irish and English Loathly Lady Tales and the 'Mirror for Princes' Genre," in *The English "Loathly Lady" Tales*, ed. Passmore and Carter, 3-41, 23, suggests 1450 as a more approximate date. See, for example, Rebecca A. Davis, "More Evidence for Intertextuality and Humorous Intent in *The Weddyng of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell*," *Chaucer Review* 35, no. 4 (2001): 430-39, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25096145>; Manuel Aguirre, "The Riddle of Sovereignty," *Modern Language Review* 88, no. 2 (April 1993): 273-82, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3733757>; and Passmore, "Through the Counsel of a Lady." Eisner, *A Tale of Wonder*, focuses on seven motifs which set both the ballad and the romance apart from other loathly stories, but he is more interested in finding sources rather than analyzing the extant texts.

3. Scholarship exploring the relationship between Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale* and some of the other analogues already exists. Davis suggests that "the [*Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*]-poet borrowed from Chaucer to achieve some measure of his *Wife's* spirit in Ragnelle." "More Evidence for Intertextuality and Humorous Intent," 434. Stephen H. A. Shepherd, "No Poet has his Travesty Alone: *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*," in *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*, ed. Jennifer Fellows and Maldwyn Mills (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), 112-28, also explores parallels between Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale* and *Dame Ragnell*.

4. Quoted by Hollis, "The Marriage of Sir Gawain," 164.

5. Thomas Hahn, "The Marriage of Sir Gawain: Introduction," in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo, MI:

Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 359-61, 359. In his general introduction to the *Sir Gawain* collection, Hahn discusses the Gawain material in light of their medieval audiences, noting that “partisans of popular romance did not seek the novelty of plot, individualized character, verbal ambiguities, subtle allusion, or variation in theme and image so dear to Chaucer.” Hahn, “Introduction: Sir Gawain and Popular Chivalric Romance,” 1-40, 23.

6. In Hahn’s discussions of the other Gawain tales found in the Percy Folio manuscript (notably, *The Greene Knight*, *The Turke and Sir Gawain*, *The Carle of Carlisle*, and *King Arthur and King Cornwall*), he takes the time to outline the differences between these texts and their predecessors, emphasizing the additions to the later texts, whereas in his discussion of *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*, his focus is largely on what has been omitted from previous analogues (such as *Wedding*), with no indication that the text might be offering a different perspective on the loathly lady motif. Hollis comes to a conclusion similar to mine regarding Hahn’s attitude towards *Marriage* in “The Marriage of Sir Gawain,” 165.

7. Passmore, “Through the Counsel of a Lady,” 27.

8. Hollis, “The Marriage of Sir Gawain,” 164.

9. *Ibid.*, 167-68.

10. Others have explored the relationship between *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* and *Wedding*, but not *Marriage*. For example, see Robert Shenk, “The Liberation of the ‘Loathly Lady’ of Medieval Romance,” *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 2 (January 1981): 69-78, and Davis, “More Evidence for Intertextuality and Humorous Intent,” 430-39.

11. Sandy Feinstein, “Longevity and the Loathly Ladies in Three Medieval Romances,” *Arthuriana* 21, no. 3 (2011): 23-48 explores this topic in regards to Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, Gower’s *Tale of Florent*, and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*.

12. Gender issues in *The Wife of Bath* have long been a topic of debate among scholars. Most recently, Roger A. Ladd, “Selling Alys: Reading (with) the Wife of Bath,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 34 (2012): 141-71, 148, doi:10.1353/sac.2012.0030, suggests that Alison satirizes the depiction of London merchant women. Elizabeth Scala, “Desire in the *Canterbury Tales*: Sovereignty and Mastery Between the Wife and Clerk,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 31 (2009): 81-108, 85, juxtaposes Chaucer’s Wife with Chaucer’s Clerk, examining how their respective tales “sketch representations of female behavior dramatically at odds with each other.”

13. Shenk, “The Liberation of the ‘Loathly Lady,’” 71.

14. B. J. Whiting, "Gawain: His Reputation, His Courtesy and His Appearance in Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*," *Mediaeval Studies* 9 (1947): 189-234, 224n314, doi:10.1484/J.MS.2.306567. Of course, this is not to say that Gawain is not known for his courtesy in French texts. For example, William A. Nitze, "The Character of Gauvain in the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes," in *Gawain: A Casebook*, ed. Raymond H. Thompson and Keith Busby (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 103-115, 103, 106, comments on Gawain's prominence in these texts, despite the absence of his name from the titles, and on Gawain's connection with courtesy beginning with Wace's *Roman de Brut*.

15. Keith Busby, *Gauvain in Old French Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1980), 381.

16. *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* in Hahn, *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, 41-80. All future references to this work come from this edition and will be noted parenthetically by line numbers.

17. *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*, in Hahn, *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, 359-71. All future references to this work come from this edition and will be noted parenthetically by line numbers. Following Arthur's successful resolution of the contest with the churlish knight, Arthur brings several of his knights to find the loathly lady. While the other knights visually and verbally recoil from her appearance, Gawain responds calmly:

"Peace cozen Kay," then said Sir Gawaine,

"Amend thee of thy life.

For there is a knight amongst us all

That must marry her to his wife."

(136-39)

18. As Esther C. Quinn, "Chaucer's Arthurian Romance," *Chaucer Review* 18, no. 3 (1984): 211-20, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25093882>, notes, the heroes of both *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the *Wife of Bath's Tale* avoid beheading over the course of the story, and both tales share a similar pattern of development: an "act of violence at the beginning leads to the humbled hero at the end" (215). Of course, *The Wife of Bath's Tale* contains a number of Arthurian motifs which are not limited to the Gawain romances alone. Quinn argues that Chaucer was "familiar with numerous Arthurian works," and finds a number of parallels between the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, Marie de France's *Lanval*, and the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. For example, Quinn notes that these three romances "are set in the days of King Arthur, draw on fairy lore, and are testing romances." "Chaucer's Arthurian

Romance,” 211. Dolores Warwick Frese, “Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and the Arthurian Tradition: Thematic Transmission / Aesthetic Transpositions,” in *Actes du 14e Congrès International Arthurien*, ed. Charles Foulon et al. (Rennes: Presses Universitaires, 1985), 184-204, opposing the view offered by D. S. Brewer that Chaucer disdained Arthurian romance, notes that two Arthurian themes—the quest and amorous fatality—become transposed as pilgrimage and marriage in *The Canterbury Tales*.

19. Phillip C. Boardman, “Middle English Arthurian Romance: The Repetition and Reputation of Gawain,” in Thompson and Busby, 255-72, 264.

20. I am using the term “bourgeois” to denote, as per the *OED Online*, a “type of the mercantile or shopkeeping middle class of any country.” s.v. “bourgeois, n.1 and adj,” def. An1.1 (accessed February 21, 2013). For more discussion of the Wife of Bath as “bourgeois,” see Stewart Justman, “Trade As Pudendum: Chaucer’s Wife Of Bath,” *The Chaucer Review* 28, no. 4 (1994): 344-52, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25095858>, and Mary Carruthers, “The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions,” *PMLA* 94, no. 2 (1979): 209-222, doi:10.2307/461886.

21. While many other Arthurian knights possess several of the traits listed above, none possess them all. For example, while Marie de France’s Lanval may have a fairy mistress (who is his only amorous encounter), he does not enjoy an intimate relationship with Queen Guinevere. In a similar manner, Guinglain, Gawain’s son in Renaut de Bâgé’s *Le Bel Inconnu*, falls in love with the fey Pucelle aux Blanchés Mains, but marries Blonde Esmerée, largely out of duty and from the pressure levied by King Arthur. He does not come into any significant contact with Guinevere, and leaves his fairy mistress reluctantly, an action which suggests devotion to her. Once he marries Blonde Esmerée, he is loyal to her. Gawain, on the other hand, easily moves from one amorous encounter to another.

22. Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath’s Tale, The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). All future references to this work come from this edition and will be noted parenthetically by line numbers.

23. *Middle English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “courtesie,” n. def. 2a. (accessed 22 February 2013); s.v. “gentlesse,” n. def. 2a. (accessed 22 February 2013).

24. Bernard F. Huppé, “Rape and Woman’s Sovereignty in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*,” *Modern Language Notes* 63, no. 6 (June 1948): 378-81, 379, doi:10.2307/2910103.

25. Whiting, "Gawain: His Reputation, His Courtesy and His Appearance," 204.

26. All quotations and translations from Chrétien de Troyes, *The Story of the Grail (Li Contes del Graal), or Perceval*, ed. Rupert T. Pickens, trans. William W. Kibler (New York, NY: Garland, 1990); cited by line number parenthetically in the text. "Autel diras a la reine / Qu'ele I vaigne par la grant foi / Qui doit ester antre li et moi, / Que ele est ma dame et m'amie, / . . . / Et les dames et les puceles / Qui a sac ort seront le jor / l'amaint por la moie amor" (9076-84).

27. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, rev. Norman Davis, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

28. Whiting, "Gawain: His Reputation, His Courtesy and His Appearance," 199. Thomas Malory repeats this scene, with little variation, in his fifteenth-century *Le Morte Darthur*.

29. *Ibid.*, 195.

30. *Ibid.*, 203.

31. Hahn, "Introduction," 3.

32. Especially those readers most familiar with the depiction of Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

33. See, for example, Christopher Cannon's "Raptus in the Champaigne Release and a Newly Discovered Document Concerning the Life of Geoffrey Chaucer," *Speculum* 68, no. 1 (1993): 74-94, doi:10.2307/2863835.

34. Peggy McCracken, "Chaste Subjects: Gender, Heroism, and Desire in the Grail Quest," in *Queering the Middle Ages*, ed. Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2001), 124.

35. Thompson and Busby, "Introduction," *Gawain: A Casebook*, 1-36, 8.

36. McCracken, "Chaste Subjects," 124, 125.

37. Thomas Hahn, "Gawain and Popular Chivalric Romance in Britain," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 218-34, 220; Cory J. Rushton, "The Lady's Man: Gawain as Lover in Middle English Literature," in *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, ed. Amanda Hopkins and Cory J. Rushton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), 27-37.

38. Rushton, "Lady's Man," 31.

39. Richard Dyer, "Male Sexuality in the Media," in *The Sexuality of Men*, ed. Andy Metcalf and Martin Humphries (London: Pluto Press, 1985), 28-43, 38, 39.

40. *Ibid.*, 39.

41. *Ibid.*, 32.
42. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 5th ed. (1975; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 833-44, 837.
43. Douglas J. Wurtele, "Chaucer's Wife of Bath and Her Distorted Arthurian Motifs," *Arthurian Interpretations* 2, no. 1 (Fall 1987): 58, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27868628>.
44. Carruthers, "The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions," 210.
45. Whiting, "Gawain: His Reputation, His Courtesy and His Appearance," 203.
46. "Om le poet bien ressembler a Gawain, / Cortois d'amour, mais il fuist trop volage; / A un est une assetz en mariage." John Gower, *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1899-1902), 1, 390, xvii, 2, cited by Whiting, *ibid.*, 228.
47. Hahn, "Gawain and Popular Chivalric Romance in Britain," 219.
48. Quinn, "Chaucer's Arthurian Romance," 216.
49. Whiting, "Gawain: His Reputation, His Courtesy and His Appearance," 196.
50. Anne McTaggart, "What Women Want? Mimesis and Gender in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*," *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 19 (2012): 41-67, 56. doi 10.1353/ctn.2012.0000.
51. Keith Busby, "Diverging Traditions of Gauvain in Some of the Later Old French Verse Romances," in Thompson and Busby, *Gawain: A Casebook*, 139-55, 150.
52. Wurtele, "Chaucer's Wife of Bath," 58.
53. Quinn, "Chaucer's Arthurian Romance," 215.
54. Alison often appears as a challenge to traditional beliefs. For example, Theresa Tinkle, "Contested Authority: Jerome and the Wife of Bath on I Timothy 2," *Chaucer Review* 44, no. 3 (2010): 268-93, focuses on Alison's challenges to religious exegesis, describing Alison's "chameleon-like persona [which] functions as the poet's protective disguise, allowing [Chaucer] to engage the heated controversies circulating in his culture while distancing himself from "Alison's" subversive challenges to traditional authority" (284).
55. "Mout fu ses cuers de joie plains" (5594).
56. "Percevax mout s'an esjoï / Et dist: 'Sire, bien ai oï / De vos parler an plusors leus, / Et l'acointance de nos deus / Desirroie mout a avoir'" (4453-57).

57. Rushton, "The Lady's Man," 29.

58. *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, in Hahn, *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, 47-70. Gower's *Tale of Florent* also offers a stepmother as the cause for the enchantment: the former loathly lady tells her beau "That my Stepmoder for an hate, / [. . .] / Forschop me, til I hadde wonne / The love and sovereignete / of a valorous knight (lines 1844-47). *Confessio Amantis*, vol. 1, ed. Russell A. Peck, 2nd ed. (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006). However, Gower omits all references to Fairyland and the Arthurian court in the opening of his tale, preferring realistic details while retaining the "days of old" motif.

59. For example, following her transformation from beast into beauty at the end of Gower's *Tale of Florent*", the lady tells her beau:

That my Stepmoder for an hate,
.....
Forschop me, til I hadde wonne
The love and sovereignete
Of what knyht that in his degree
Alle othre passeth of good name.
(lines 1844-49)

60. Heidi Breuer, *Crafting the Witch: Gendering Magic in Medieval and Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 2009), believes that the conditions of the *Marriage's* loathly lady are identical to those in *Wedding* due to the manuscript damage, but I feel that the shift in the loathly lady's dialogue prior to the missing manuscript page provides the reader enough information to conclude that there is no clear terminus to *Marriage's* curse.

61. See Sheryl L. Forste-Grupp, "A Woman Circumvents the Laws of Primogeniture in 'The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell,'" *Studies in Philology* 99, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 105-122, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4174723>.

62. Breuer elaborates on this idea in *Wedding* in her chapter "From Rags to Riches, or The Step-Mother's Revenge," *Crafting the Witch*, 52-95.

63. When Alison marries Jankyn, her fifth husband, she inverts her typical behavior in that she gives him her property: "And to hym yaf I al the lond and fee / That evere was me yeven therbifoore. / But afterward repented me ful soore" (3.630-32). However, following their fight over Jankyn's book of wicked wives, she regains control over her property once more: "He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond, / To han the governance of hous and lond (3.813-14). Even though there are no children involved (unlike *Marriage* and

Wedding), Alison determines to retain control over her material goods. See also Carruthers's "The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions," 209-222. As Ladd notes, "even while married, such a wife [as Alison] might have had independent business interests"; in other words, Alison seeks independence in all avenues of her life, including financial ventures. "Selling Alys," 144.

64. There is another significant female figure in Middle English literature clothed in red scarlet: in William Langland's late fourteenth-century *Piers Plowman*, the dreamer meets Lady Mede, who wears a robe that is "ful riche of red scarlet engreyned" (2.15). William Langland, *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman*, ed. Walter W. Skeat, 10th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965). A number of scholars, including J. A. Burrow, connect Langland's Mede with the Whore of Babylon. See J.A. Burrow, "Lady Meed and the Power of Money," *Medium Aevum* 74 (2005): 113-18. However, as Gerald Morgan, "The Dignity of Langland's Meed," *The Modern Language Review* 104, no. 3 (July 2009): 623-639, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25674934>, has noted, Mede is a complex figure, and although she, like Chaucer's Wife of Bath, loves excess in dress, I do not see other aspects of her figure reflected in the Loathly Ladies of either *Wedding* or *Marriage*.

65. This word appears a total of four times, and the context in each instance clearly indicates that Chaucer knows the difference between the color and the fabric. For example, in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, the lusty rooster Chauntecleer tells his favorite that "Ye ben so scarlet reed aboute youre eyen" (7.3161). The meaning of "scarlet" here is clearly referring to the color, for a chicken has no need of fabric. Instead, "scarlet" functions as an adjective clarifying the exact shade of red about Pertelote's eyes.

66. The *OED Online* cites this line as an example for the adjectival meaning, "qualifying the name of a color," and when we consider that the exact phrase "scarlet reed" will be echoed later in *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, the meaning here seems to be that the Wife's hose is simply red in color. However, the meaning is not identical to that found in *The Nun's Priest's Tale*. Chaucer does not refer to the color, but rather the quality and type of fabric with which the Wife is adorned, and the *Middle English Dictionary Online* reinforces this idea.

67. George Fenwick Jones, "Sartorial Symbols in Mediaeval Literature," *Medium Aevum* 25 (1956): 63-70, 65.

68. Laura F. Hodges, "The Wife of Bath's Costumes: Reading the Subtexts," *Chaucer Review* 27.4 (1993): 359-76 notes, "The Wife of Bath might well have been able to afford scarlet hose, and wear them without being socially or legally presumptuous in England" (364).

69. Ibid., 359.

70. Laura F. Hodges, *Chaucer and Costume: The Secular Pilgrims in the General Prologue* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 147.

71. Nicole D. Smith, *Sartorial Strategies: Outfitting Aristocrats and Fashioning Conduct in Late Medieval Literature* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), notes that extravagant or rich pieces of clothing were believed by fourteenth-century clergy to “signif[y] pride in attire and investment in worldly goods” (99). Although she is directly discussing the girdle in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, her comments regarding the connection between pride and rich garments extend naturally to the situation of Alison of Bath.

72. Ibid., 99. Andrea Denny-Brown, *Fashioning Change: The Trope of Clothing in High- and Late-Medieval England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012), also explores the ways in which various medieval authors, including Chaucer, utilize the shifting symbolism of clothing. Denny-Brown devotes one chapter in particular to the clothing of Griselda in *The Clerk’s Tale*, but does not explore the clothing of Alison of Bath.

73. Hollis draws attention to the Loathly Lady’s attire, but only to note that the scarlet cloth denotes nobility and aligns her with the court rather than the world of faery in “The Marriage of Sir Gawain,” 169. While I agree with Hollis that the scarlet does signal these two things, I would add that the specific detail of “red scarlet” evokes Chaucer’s Wife of Bath directly. If the anonymous author of *Marriage* simply wanted to depict the Loathly Lady as courtly, there are numerous other ways that he or she could have described the Loathly Lady’s attire.

74. Chaucer’s Loathly Lady repeats this idea of teaching in line 3.1019: “That dar seye nay of that I shal thee teche.”

75. Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 24. Tinkle explores Alison’s rejection of First Timothy 2:12 (“But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence”), “Contested Authority,” 268-93. Andrew Higl, “The Wife of Bath Retold: From the Medieval to the Postmodern,” in *Inhabited by Stories: Critical Essays on Tales Retold*, ed. Nancy A. Barta-Smith and Danette DiMarco (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 294-313, 296, also comments on the threat that Alison poses to male sovereignty.

76. Ladd, “Selling Alys,” 160; Scala, “Desire in the *Canterbury Tales*,” 89. Scala is partially interested in the ways in which both Alison of Bath and her

Loathly Lady use argumentation as a vital component of constructing an “idealized representation of female behavior,” (85). McTaggart echoes this idea in “What Women Want,” 42. She also notes the problems that such a connection raises, especially given that the tale ends with the wife obedient to the spouse, and suggests that Alison identifies most firmly with the rapist knight instead. I touch upon McTaggart’s second point later in the paper.

77. Breuer, *Crafting the Witch*, 80.

78. Indeed, the narrator comments that “For alle her rayment, she bare the belle / Of fowlnesse” (595-96).

79. As the *Middle English Dictionary Online* notes, this term is derisive when applied to humans. s.v. “snout(e),” n. def. 2a. (accessed 24 February 2013).

80. For example, in *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*, the knight deliberates over the choice for some time: “This knyght avyseth hym and sore siketh” (3.1228). In *Wedding*, Gawain verbalizes his objections to either of the options offered:

“Alas!” sayd Gawen; “The choyse is hard.
To chese the best, itt is froward,
Wheder choyse that I chese:
To have you fayre on nyghtes and no more,
That wold greve my hartt ryghte sore,
And my worshypp shold I lese.
And yf I desyre on days to have you fayre,
Then on nyghtes I shold have a symple repayre.
(667-74)

81. Tinkle, “Contested Authority,” 271.

82. Carruthers, “The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions,” 209.

83. This is different from *Wedding*, for as Forste-Grupp notes, only Dame Ragnelle is enchanted in an attempt by the stemother to allow her son to be in a position where he can regain lands lost to Gawain by challenging Arthur. “A Woman Circumvents the Laws,” 105-22.

84. McTaggart, “What Women Want,” 53.

85. *Ibid.*, 52.

86. See, for example, Raluca L. Radulescu, “Genre and Classification,” in *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, ed. Raluca L. Radulescu and Cory James Rushton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), 31-48; 41, 43.