**COMPARING THE WHITE DEVIL AND THE WIFE OF BATH**

* Both texts examine the morality of sex, lust and marriage and mediate on laws of teaching of chastity and marriage in Christianity.
* Both show a strong, independent and intelligent woman whose voice is placed within a strong patriarchal society.
* They both considered relationships between men and women and consider jealousy
* Both use verse and rhetorical devices such as morality tales describing the actions of others to illustrate a point.
* In this society women can only define themselves through men; it is their only route to some limited power.
* Whether through marriage or more illicit means, women’s sexuality is their only means of social mobility
* What it means to be ‘noble’ is reconstructed
* Flamineo says what women do is an act as society dictates that women must not present themselves as sexual beings; he says they blush when sex is talked about yet are happy to engage in the act. The Wife of Bath clearly goes against societies norms about overtly sexual women.
* In the language of both there is a lot of double meanings and punning.
* The Knight’s rape demonstrates that is not only those in positions of religious power that can engage in corrupt behaviour. Both authors explore power in a way that suggests its unerring ability to corrupt.
* Monticelso paints a “whore” in a bad light – any woman who is overtly sexual is condemned. Similar to The Wife.
* In Canterbury tales Chaucer was motivated to produce a satire text in order to be able to whole up to scrutiny what he felt was the corruption in his society. This was similar to the white devil because even though it was set in Italy it could be applied to the court of James the first.
* Women were seen as manipulative and corruptive in both and learn to deceive at their mothers breast. Flamineo says that men learn to lie by sucking their mothers breast and in the wife of bath she states that mothers teach daughters to lie and deceive
* Vittoria is being elevated from whore to duchess when she marries Brachiano, this links with the wife of bath and the discuss on gentilesse and what makes someone noble. Yet in the white devil nobody has shown to be gentile, they’ve just all gained it through birth and in Vittoria’s case through marriage.

COMPARISONS:

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| The Wife of Bath | The White Devil |
| Written in the 15th century | Published in 1612 – 17th century |
| Poetry – aural – vivid descriptions to bring things to life | Drama – revenge tragedy – very metatheatrical |
| Catholic era. Both texts focus on denying yourself carnal pleasures in life, leading to eternal life and heaven | Post-reformation protestant England. The Reformation had severed all connections with the Catholic Church. |
| Alison reports on her husband’s jealousy | Brachiano is jealous of Vittoria |
| The Wife deals with her own story and the consequences it has had on her life | The play deals with morality through examining the consequences of a relationship on the wider society |
| Written in heroic couplets and iambic pentameter | Written largely in blank verse with no consistent rhyme scheme |
| Long, narrative poem meant to be read out | Meant to be performed so language is not the only element to it’s meaning |
| Uses continuous heroic couplets | Uses traditional dramatic five act’s |
| The Wife does not marry her first 4 husbands for love but because she is able to have maistrie over them | Brachiano and Vittoria do not marry their original spouses for love but rather for the furtherance of power and the influence of their families |
| Jankin has his little black book of the failings of women | Flamineo says “see the corrupted use some make of books” when referring to Monticelso’s blackbook |
| The knight thinks he is noble just because of his birth | The powerful and wealthy are able to do as they please without taking account of the law. The “great men”, such as Francisco and Monticelso, are noble by birth but very little separates them from the thugs like Lodovico and Flamineo. |
| Gain social status through marriage and owe elevation to sexual attractiveness | Gain social status through marriage and owe elevation to sexual attractiveness |
| Know all wife’s feeling | Vittoria given no soliloquys |
| Not too intelligent – misinterprets things. We feel it is chaucer’s knowledge not hers | Intelligent – knows Latin – turns her accusers’ arguments against them |
| The Wife has a dream of her husband stabbing her in order for him to feel bad and her to gain control | Vittoria has a dream of her husband dying. Flamineo interprets the dream as Vittoria coming up with it as an attempt to manipulate and urge Brachiano to kill their spouses – in this way we can see Vittoria using her dream manipulatively as the Wife did |
| Chaucer uses satire to distance the criticism he is speaking about | Webster sets it in Italy to distance the criticism from directly criticising England. |
| The Wife resented the restrictions imposed on her by her husband. Her final agreement with Jankin is that she is free to come and go as long as the husbands honour is sustained. | Flamineo tricks Camilo and advises him if he restricts his wife’s freedom it will inevitably drive her to having an affair. Both texts state that for a marriage to work there must be an element of trust but ironically Camillo is right not to trust |
| The Hag believes poverty does not mean you must act immorally. | Cornelia asks whether being poor means we must act immorally. Francisco’s says that social standing is simply a question of chance |
| The Wife believes attack is the best form of defence against the husbands accusations. | Brachiano accuses Isabella of stirring up her brother to war against him. He believes attack is the best form of defence by turning attack on the accuser. |
| No direct evidence that she’s had an affair with Jankin before – though there are hints. Never wants to admit to these potential faults | No direct evidence that she was involved in the murders, though at the end she admits to her faults |
| Women are defined in anti-feminist terms – Jankin’s book | Vittoria’s own layer calls her a “plague” highlight the thought that it is women’s fault for corrupting men. Some of her actions are similar to various wicked wives in the bible |
| The Wife uses ‘authoritees’ like the Bible to back up her claim and often misinterprets them | Vittoria uses a quote from *Ovid’s Amore’s* to back up her argument – the context of this quotation is not exactly right |
| The Wife makes up stories of what her first three husbands “said” to her when they were drunk to gain control over them and place them in the wrong | Francisco sends a letter to Vittoria as a plot to enrage Brachiano. This is not true and is made up to place Vittoria in the wrong |
| The hag says she can only be beautiful and potentially cheat or ugly and chaste | Brachiano believes that beautiful women are more likely to be unfaithful as he says “your beauty” when he is angry and accusing of Vittoria having an affair with Francisco. Brachiano says “woman to man is either a god or a wolf” |
| Friars are seen as immoral and driving out the magic in the tale | Lodovico and gasparo in the wedding scene disguise themselves as monks and friars and yet they’re corrupt |
| The Wife keeps sex within marriage | Vittoria does not and has an affair |
| The wife is born under mars and venus – indicating masculinity and femininity | Vittoria takes on masculine virtues during the trial scene |
| As Brachiano is dying, Lodovico suggests his dukedom (and thus power) be given to Vittoria | The Wife can only gain power through marriage |
| The Wife embodies the statement of Flamineo to never trust a women as even during her fourth marriage she was admiring Jankin’s leg. The Wife often seems to embody antifeminist qualities. | Flamineo warns ‘trust a women! Never” – also links with Jankin’s book (different times yet the same anti-feminist propaganda is still part of the fabric of society) |
| The Wife uses husbands for her own advancement | As Vittoria is given no soliloquy, it is unclear whether she really loves Brachiano or if she is using him for her own advancement. |
| Wife claims than an undesirable woman will leap on a man like a spaniel – female desire is likened to an animal following instinct without restraint. | Women are like “cursed dogs” – they are no better than bitches on heat, fulfilling their sexual desires without discernment. |
| Wife is in control of her first four husbands | Flamineo refers to Zanche saying “I do love her just as a man holds a wolf by the ears” – does he love her or fear her because of the hold she has over him? |
| Alison married her first four husbands as they were old and rich. | Camillo is probably married to Vittoria for love since Monticelso says he ‘received no dowry’. Camillo therefore comes across as a supped older man, taken in by an attractive, younger, impoverished woman. |
| Wife states sex should be used for procreation yet ironically she has no children | Isabella seems to have different ideas of marriage, she does have children |