

The Canterbury Tales, by Geoffrey Chaucer, from the Perspective of Bakhtinian Carnival: The Wife of Bath and the Subversion of Female Gender through the Profanation of Biblical Discourse / Os contos de Canterbury, de Geoffrey Chaucer, a partir do carnaval bakhtiniano: a esposa de Bath e a subversão de gênero feminino pela profanação do discurso bíblico

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyze the character Alison, the wife of Bath, in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. To do this, based on Bakhtin (1984a, 1984b), especially from the perspective of carnivalization, together with Butler's theory of gender performativity (1988, 1999), we intend to show how this character carnivalistically subverts certain biblical texts relating to the role of women in marriage. Thus, for the purposes of this study, we have taken the Wife of Bath's prologue from Chaucer's work, because in it she constructs her polemical more explicitly and the comic relationship with the Bible at the same time. From this analysis, we conclude that Bath's wife, in a carnivalized way, performs the feminine gender in the middle of the medieval period, showing herself to be subversive of the stereotypes of the time by profaning certain biblical guidelines, from both the Old and New Testaments, regarding what it means to be a woman and a wife.

KEYWORDS: *The Canterbury Tales*; The Wife of Bath; Carnivalization; Gender Performance; Profanation

RESUMO

O objetivo do artigo é proceder a uma análise da personagem Alison, esposa de Bath, na obra Os contos de Canterbury, de Geoffrey Chaucer. Para isso, com base em Bakhtin (2010, 2018), em particular a partir da perspectiva da carnavalização, somada à teoria da performatividade de gênero de Butler (1988, 2017), pretendemos mostrar como a referida personagem subverte, carnavalizadamente, certos textos bíblicos referentes ao papel da mulher no matrimônio. Dessa forma, nesse estudo, para efeito de análise, tomamos da obra chauceana o prólogo da esposa de Bath visto que nele a personagem elabora, de modo mais evidente, sua relação tensa e, ao mesmo tempo cômica, com a Bíblia. Da análise feita, concluímos, assim, que a esposa de Bath, de maneira carnavalizada, performatiza o gênero feminino em pleno período medieval, mostrando-se subversiva aos estereótipos da época ao profanar certas orientações bíblicas, tanto do Velho como do Novo Testamento, relativamente ao que é ser mulher e esposa.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Os contos de Canterbury; Esposa de Bath; Carnavalização; Performance de gênero; Profanação

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Introduction

A childless woman participates in a journey accompanied, mostly, by men. Although she is a widow, the character has already had five husbands, and announces to everyone around her that she is looking for the next one. She is irreverent, toothless, yet rich, having acquired her wealth through the textile trade and through her own widowhood; she rides a horse in pants as red as scarlet. Such a description can be seen as contrary to moral and social expectations for women even in modern times, and this is, most likely, one of the explanations why the Wife of Bath,¹ a character from Geoffrey Chaucer's medieval English literature, remains current and relevant, from pop culture to academic studies (Turner, 2023).

Chaucer, who was born around 1343 and died in 1400, contributed significantly to the development of English literature as we know it today. This is because, during his period as a writer, he played a crucial role in the consolidation and popularization of English as a literary language (Batkie, 2021). One of his main contributions was his most famous work, *The Canterbury Tales* ("The Canterbury Tales," as translated, in the bilingual edition we use here, by Paulo Vizioli), which consists of a set of stories told by pilgrims traveling from London to Canterbury to visit Thomas Becket's grave. The work is notable for its variety of characters, who represent a wide range of social classes and professions from medieval times, opening the space of the public square for the construction of a carnivalesque worldview (Bakhtin, 1984a;² 1984b).³

The Canterbury Tales, dating from around 1380, is a canonical work marked by diversity, and is symptomatic of the turbulent period of religious, political, and technological transformations of its time. The most famous manuscript of the work is also the oldest known – *The Ellesmere Manuscript*, and to this day it serves as a reference for the most respected modern editions of the work, such as the complete collection of Chaucer *The Riverside Chaucer* and the Brazilian translation by Paulo Vizioli, *The Canterbury Songs*. We will use these editions for the analysis proposed here, as they are

¹In the prologue of Chaucer's work, the character is referred to as a woman or wife of Bath (depending on the translation of the original "wife of Bath").

² BAKHTIN, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984a.

³ BAKHTIN, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Translated by Caryl Emerson. University of Minnesota Press, 1984b.

closer to the *Ellesmere manuscript*.⁴ In it, we find the work divided into two moments: the general prologue (where the main narrator introduces the characters to the reader); and the stories that each character tells, which are preceded by their own prologue. It is then that each character takes on the role of narrator, revealing their identity, their perspective on the world, their opinions, and values.

Yet it is worth noting that, in the prologues and narratives enunciated by the characters, there are only four women who take on the role of narrators. Furthermore, almost all of them have their position as enunciators legitimized by moralistic discourse or by their privileged social position provided by religion, such as nuns or prioresses – with the exception of the Wife of Bath. Thus, the very structure of the work assigns protagonism to the Wife of Bath, which is why we chose to focus this analysis on that character. In fact, although it appears in only one of the 24 stories that make up the total body of the text of *The Canterbury Tales*, the Wife of Bath offers ample space for the analysis of both the gender performance and the carnivalesque character of the work, as we will see later.⁵

In view of this, the objective of this article is to analyze the character Alison, or the Wife of Bath, in the light of Bakhtin's concept of carnivalization and Butler's theory of gender performativity, in order to understand how the subversion of the female gender through the profanation of biblical discourse happens in this literary space.

Thus, for the purpose of structuring the present article, in addition to this initial introductory section, which served us to contextualize our theme, and the conclusion section, which will fulfill the purpose of briefly rounding off what was discussed throughout the text, we elaborated four sections: in the first, we will show the place of the Bible and religious discourse in the historical and social context of Geoffrey Chaucer in 14th century England. Next, to consolidate our theoretical analysis, we will dedicate two other sections: the first will discuss the theory of carnivalization as proposed by Bakhtin,

⁴ Although the *Ellesmere manuscript* is not considered the first to publish *The Canterbury Tales*, it remains the most frequent reference to this work by Chaucer. There is currently no evidence of other manuscripts dating from the time of Chaucer, at the end of the 14th century, so that, with the *Ellesmere* dating from the beginning of the 15th century, it remains the oldest known copy of the complete work, now in the Huntington Library, in San Marino, California (Simpson, 2022).

⁵ It is important to highlight here that, although carnivalization in general, in its various aspects, helps in the construction of this character, given that this article intends to invest more in the idea of how the woman of Bath subverts the biblical religious text, we will focus our analysis mainly in the carnivalesque category of profanation, through which we can see how the unorthodox relationship that the character develops with the sacred Christian text takes place.

focusing especially on carnival profanation; second, we will discuss the theory of gender performativity according to the Butlerian orientation; all with the purpose of understanding the treatment given to the biblical speech by the Wife of Bath in the prologue of Chaucer's work. Finally, in the fourth section, we will analyze how, in her prologue, the character profanes the biblical text not because she directly contradicts it, but because she reinterprets it, from a carnivalesque worldview in regard to the role of the wife in marriage and female sexuality in a society where men enjoy privileges and rights over women.

1 The Bible and Religious Discourse in the English Middle Ages⁶

Although in the Middle Ages, the Bible was not popularized in the sense of reaching the most varied social strata, as suggested by the name *Vulgate* (as the translation of the Holy Scriptures into Latin made by Saint Geronimo became known), nevertheless, among intellectuals such as Chaucer, not only translations, but also different genres of texts about the Bible had become common in this period. Among such discursive genres, we can highlight, for example, reading aids, comments, books of biblical quotations by subject.⁷

Furthermore, according to Besserman (1998), the editions of the sacred text themselves had resources that helped readers and scholars find specific information, indexes, and references about the sacred texts. Thus, little by little, access to biblical discourse expanded, allowing different authors to have access to smaller and cheaper versions of the Bible. Besserman (1998), in this sense, states that it is likely that Chaucer had a smaller format of the Bible, or at least had free access to biblical reference books. This would possibly explain the richness of detail in the biblical narrative and its frequent

⁶ By "Middle Ages," we refer, in this article, to the period between 500 AD and 1500 AD. We emphasize, however, that the historical discussion we present here is intended to provide context to the text for the analysis of Chaucer's work about the Wife of Bath in *The Canterbury Tales*. Consequently, we focus on the end of the Middle Ages, or "Low Middle Ages" (the period between the 11th and 15th centuries), instead of the "High Middle Ages" (the period between the 5th and 10th centuries), according to the orientation of the historian Jacques Le Goff (2007).

⁷ Besserman (1998) mentions, among the genres derived from the biblical text, vernacular resources for reading the Bible (such as *gospel harmonies*, *distinctions* and *concordances*), as well as books derived from the Bible (for example, the *Bible moralisée*, *Biblia pauperum*, and *Speculum humanae salvationis*), making access to paraphrases, quotations and specific excerpts by subject more dynamic. For more details on such discursive genres, see Besserman (1998).

use of paraphrases and references to the biblical text that the English author explored not only in *The Canterbury Tales*, but also in previous works, such as *Troilus and Criseyde*.⁸

Furthermore, biblical discourse was almost ubiquitous in society in Chaucer's day. This means that its audience and readers had constant contact with Christian cosmology, whether through written genres, sermons and liturgy cultivated in the Catholic Church, as well as through art financed by ecclesiastical patronage.

In this way, biblical imagery was persistently used to confer authority and incontestability to the religious and political norms of the time. This included policing women's role, especially regarding their sexuality, in the sense of constraining their pleasure, their reproductive capabilities and their bodies. Garret (2013) states, in this regard, that the intellectual, legal and political discourse, in the medieval period, largely derived from religious rationale and was thus based on the biblical text to stigmatize women as an inferior being, inherently carnal and sinful, and, therefore, seen as a constant threat to the discipline and honor of Christian men.

In this scenario, while Christian discourse permeated the life of the medieval individual, contact with biblical literature expanded, which, consequently, provided ample opportunity for non-liturgical voices, including artists, to interact with the Bible through unorthodox approaches to the precepts of the Christian holy book. In fact, biblical texts and their commentaries are commonly used as textual and discursive resources to construct the work of Chaucer's predecessors, such as Dante, Boccaccio and Cervantes, whose works served as inspiration for the English writer.

However, Chaucer impregnated biblical discourse with humor and laughter and, at the same time, intertwined pagan narratives and beliefs with the sacred scriptures, therefore offering alternative and unorthodox interpretations of the biblical text.⁹ From this, Chaucer uses biblical authority to defend behaviors that were morally condemned in his time, as we will see in the analysis of the speech and action of the woman of Bath. It is through this strategy that the character's striking ambiguities flourish, who sometimes

⁸ *Troilus and Criseyde* (probably written 1381-1386) was Geoffrey Chaucer's longest poem. The work is an adaptation of *Il Filostrato*, by Giovanni Boccaccio, which tells the story of a tragic romance during the Trojan War. Troilus, a Trojan warrior prince who falls in love with Criseyde, daughter of a religious leader accused of treason against Troy. The poem is rich in references to biblical symbols and events, as explained in more detail by Besserman (2015).

⁹ As Minois (2003) points out, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, laughter can take on a diabolical character when it is understood as a "true insult to divine creation, a kind of revenge from the devil, a manifestation of contempt, pride, aggressiveness, of rejoicing in evil" (Minois, 2003, p. 13).

appears to be a proto-feminist revolutionary, and sometimes appears to act in a way that repeats the stereotypes of the image of women as male temptations that were so strongly cultivated in the medieval period. This ambivalence is also characteristic of a carnivalesque worldview in the Bakhtinian perspective, which, as we will explore later, allows the performance of Alison's subversive ways of being in her speech, that profanes certain biblical precepts.

Let us then move on to a brief discussion of what the carnival consists of from a Bakhtinian perspective, emphasizing its peculiarities that engineer the profanation of the Wife of Bath.

2 The Wife of Bath through the Lens of the Carnival Cosmivision

In *Rabelais and his World*,¹⁰ Bakhtin (1984a) focuses on the work of the 16th century French writer François Rabelais and examines the relationship between popular comic culture and literature, showing the multiple manifestations of such carnival culture in this period through in the forms of rites and spectacles that took place in the public square; of parodic works written in official and vulgar Latin; and of the countless forms and genres produced with familiar and coarse language, permeated by the vocabulary of centered around low corporeality.

The Russian thinker argues that popular comic culture plays a crucial role in the formation and transformation of official culture, emphasizing the importance of laughter and the democratic coexistence of different voices in popular comic culture. Carnivalization is, therefore, closely linked to popular culture and laughter, since, during carnival, social norms are suspended, allowing marginalized and subaltern voices to express themselves. Carnival is, therefore, a moment of inversion, when social roles are subverted, hierarchies are challenged and excluded voices find space to be heard.¹¹

¹⁰ See footnote 2. On the historical conditions of the production of this work, see Grillo (2022).

¹¹ It is important to emphasize, however, that, for Bakhtin, carnival is not a spectacle, or a performance limited to a stage, artificial and staged. Bakhtin understands carnival as a *worldview*, which is, therefore, a flexible world, "inside out," free from moral modesty or hierarchical social restrictions. It manifests itself, in turn, through contexts and in specific spaces, where the boundaries between the official and the comic dissolve, namely: popular rites and spectacles, comic works (both oral and written), and in the various forms and genres of familiar and coarse popular vocabulary.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*,¹² Bakhtin (1984b)¹³ also explores carnivalized literature. Here, the author presents us with categories that constitute the carnival vision of the world, which, although they can be perceived at different levels, are intrinsically interconnected. They are: *family contact* (when social inequalities and hierarchical limits are demolished), *eccentricity* (when the scandalous and obscene are in evidence), *mésalliances* (when, through the approximation of opposites, there is contact between elements that, in other circumstances, would be separated, such as the sacred versus the profane) and, finally, *profanation* (when, through sacrileges, free movement between heaven and hell or parodies of sacred texts, for example, carnival actions are constructed).

According to Bakhtin (1984b),¹⁴ in the category of *family contact*, carnival participants have distances and hierarchical boundaries temporarily demolished between them. Although in the context of carnival certain titles and functions are occasionally highlighted, this is done on purpose, in a way that provokes laughter and mockery of the hierarchies represented. In this way, a “familiarity” develops, a sense of closeness and equality between the individuals who participate in this festive moment. In this way, during Carnival, daily concerns regarding class and social function are diluted, as well as limitations regarding age, wealth and other social demarcations. In the medieval context, this carnival characteristic has a marked subversive potential, as this is a society with few possibilities for social mobility, structured so strongly in a strictly hierarchical community division.

Bakhtin also explains that eccentricity assumes a “solemn and pompous tone,” manifested by exaggeration, for example (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 178).¹⁵ During Carnival, festive banquets, overeating, rude words, insults, and physical abuse are common; the alliance of death and life blooming abundantly, all rocked by the rhythm of laughter. It is no surprise that Bakhtin describes the ambivalence in this carnival eccentricity as “kill and regenerate” way of celebration where the old and the new clash and coexist in ambivalently (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 205).¹⁶

¹² See footnote 3. For an overview of the various editions and retranslations of this work made directly from the Russian language by Paulo Bezerra into Brazilian Portuguese, see Brait (2021).

¹³ See footnote 3.

¹⁴ See footnote 3.

¹⁵ See footnote 3.

¹⁶ See footnote 3.

In this environment, consequently, one also frequently finds what Bakhtin characterizes as *mésalliances*. The theorist highlights, with the *mésalliances*, that carnival not only removes the boundaries between different social *statuses*, but creates, paradoxically, a free and familiar point of view in relation to everything. This means that, within the territory of carnival, any aspect of real life that was distant from another is brought closer in the act of carnival contact, even if it is considered opposite in extra-carnival life.

Finally, in the carnival worldview category of *profanity*, we find the parodies, satires, and other movements to desacralize official texts, especially religious and biblical ones. During Carnival, humorous forms of expression such as parody and satire are widely used as people are encouraged to ridicule authority figures, social institutions and established norms through jokes, satirical songs, and comedic performances.

In this respect, it is noteworthy that, when analyzing the work of Rabelais, for example, Bakhtin (1984a)¹⁷ points out that carnivalization occurs “not a nihilistic act; it is a gay, carnivalesque gesture that regenerates the numbers and renews them” (Bakhtin 1984a, p. 463).¹⁸ This occurs, for example, using symbols, images, clothing, texts, and prayers considered sacred, but attributed, in the context of carnival, to non-sacred, commonplace, grotesque or even transgressive activities. Especially linguistic elements from a sacred and official language mix with common speech, generating different and completely new meanings in relation to its official use.¹⁹

Among such categories, profanity significantly permeates the Wife of Bath’s speech. From the beginning of her narrative, the character demonstrates her link with pagan festivities, for example, nostalgically recalling the times when people feared beings such as fairies and elves instead of Christian authorities. Furthermore, the pilgrimage, in which the Wife of Bath participates, is the stage for the prologues, and the narratives of *The Canterbury Tales* take place in April, during spring, when the Christian Easter celebration coincides, as well as the pagan festival of the Spring equinox). Chaucer’s work also exhibits a transitional character, symbolized by the road, the pilgrimage journey

¹⁷ See footnote 2.

¹⁸ See footnote 2.

¹⁹ When studying the historical and social context in the medieval period in which Rabelais’ work was written, Bakhtin (1984a [footnote 2]) shows, for example, written texts coming from an oral tradition of popular comic culture that profaned the Bible, as is the case of *Coena Cypriani*, who, in a parody, stages a banquet to which biblical characters are invited.

that departs from a “mundane” place (the Inn tavern in Southwark) to a sacred place (the temple of St. Thomas Becket in Canterbury).

Therefore, in this article we will explore the Wife of Bath’s profane interaction with sacred texts when she quotes the Bible or retells biblical narratives, seeking to re-signify, often in a subversive way, the meanings standardized according to current Christian epistemology.

However, to understand the subversion performed by the Wife of Bath, it is essential to pay attention to issues of gender subversion, which we will do through the perspective of performance studies, by John L. Austin (1975) and the theory of performativity, by Judith Butler (1988). In this way, we will see, below, how the concepts of performance and performativity intertwine and contribute to understanding the profanation of Christian discourse within the carnival worldview in which the Wife of Bath emerges in Chaucerian literature.

3 The Performative View of Language and Gender Performativity

Bakhtin (1984a)²⁰ recognizes the real use of language within the context of popular comic culture genres, enabling him to envision possibilities for social change beyond those uttered through textual strategies. For example, for him, discursive genres are born from the reiteration of *performances* in the use of language, which are, in turn, influenced by different contexts, including social gender, social class, ethnicity, time, space, among others. variables (Bauman; Briggs, 2006).²¹ Therefore, language is not an object that can be isolated and empirically studied as structuralists had proposed (Ottoni, 1998). More than that, in a *performative view of language*, there is no split between the subject and (an) other (which Ottoni refers to as “non-self”).²²

²⁰ See footnote 2.

²¹ It is worth distinguishing between the two distinctive meanings of genre: social genre in the Butlerian perspective and discursive/discourse/speech/discourse genres in the Bakhtinian perspective.

²² Ottoni (2002) translates the Austinian approach to language as a “performative vision.” Although Austin (1990) initially proposed a differentiation of language as constative (i.e., which finds, describes and names reality) and/or performative (which executes actions, acts, or *performs*), he soon understands that all language it is performative, and it is then that Austin determines the end of the separation between subject and speech. It is at this moment in Austin’s philosophy of language that we base ourselves to understand the performative character of language, through which we actually act as opposed to understanding it as a mere representation of reality.

It is through this perception that Arbo (2021) elaborates a parallel and a dialogue between the Austinian theory of speech acts and the theory of gender performativity. In the same way that Austin's doctrine of "non-felicity" exposes the standards and expectations of speech acts, the gender intelligibility matrix proposed by Butler seeks to reveal gender norms when such norms are broken, which she calls "gender performativity." In 1988, Butler published an article considered the genesis of her theory: *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* (1988). In this work, she examines how performative acts of language contribute to the constitution of gender and questions the notions of essence and stability in gender identity – a fundamental notion for this work, as we will see later.

Butler (1999)²³ later introduces and extensively develops the *theory of gender performativity*.²⁴ It examines how gender is constructed and maintained through repeated performances and questions the notion of an essential or stable gender identity (Salih, 2012). In this way, Butler understands gender not as something innate or fixed; instead, she argues that gender is a social and performative construction, that is, it is created and maintained through repeated practices and social norms. To this end, the philosopher highlights the importance of the body and language in the construction of gender, claiming that our gender identities are shaped through repeated performances of femininity or masculinity. She challenges the idea of a stable gender identity and argues that gender is an ongoing performance, subject to multiple interpretations and possibilities, as we will discuss below. In this way, *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1999)²⁵ has a political and subversive character, as it challenges gender norms imposed by society.

For Butler, gender is an *effect*, or an illusion of stability sustained by a set of acts in the context of the social and discursive fabric. For her, there is no difference between biological sex and social gender, as there is no "essence" or a "true" or "original" gender, only the appearance of stability through the repetition of gender norms. For Butler, therefore, the repeated and reinforced acts are what she understands as *performance* (Arbo

²³ BUTLER, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York and London: Routledge, 1999.

²⁴ Here it is worth highlighting that, when referring to gender performance, Butler is not suggesting that gender identity is a *performance*, of a theatrical and artificial nature that would come from the subject. On the contrary, the author maintains that performance pre-exists the performer, so that such performance refers to specific philosophical concepts, such as Austinian theory which, as we discussed, defends a performative view of language (Salih, 2012).

²⁵ See footnote 22.

2021; Salih, 2012), while “performativity” alludes to the power that discourse has to produce what it names, so that, as proposed by Austin, there is no language that represents or mediates reality, but rather acts on it.

In this way, Silva, Ferreira and Gonçalves (2021) support a dialogue between the theory of Butlerian performativity and the Bakhtinian perspective of the parodic repetition of gender acts through an analysis of language as a place for the materialization of gender effects. For Bakhtin (1984a),²⁶ as we commented above, there is no distinction between the self and the other as the subject’s speech always, dialogically, takes up the speech of others. We argue here, therefore, that the dialogue already proposed by Butler between his gender performance and Austin’s performance benefits from and remains under construction along with Bakhtin’s perspective of a dialogical and parodic language, which reconstructs and reiterates itself from a repetitive series of acts.

However, in our object of study, yet another aspect significantly guides our analysis: the context of production of the Wife of Bath’s text and its prologue. They are not only part of its discursive construction but echo one important aspect of medieval women’s gender performance: negative stereotypes of femininity, particularly that of which of the literary representation of subversive women, such as the Wife of Bath.

4 Analysis of the Representation of the Wife of Bath as a Profane Woman toward Biblical-Christian Discourse from the Perspective of Carnival and the Butlerian Theory of Gender Performativity

We will begin the analysis by highlighting the profane aspect of the Wife of Bath that is already announced to us by her vocative.²⁷ There is constant reference to her being “the Wife of Bath” throughout the tales instead of her first name (Alison), and such a choice is not generic. Bath is the city where she comes from, thus detaching her from the figure of a husband whose surname she could carry.

Additionally, Alison emphasizes, from the first verses, she understands her position as privileged due to her experience over five marriages, her first being at twelve

²⁶ See footnote 2.

²⁷ It is important to highlight that the name of the woman of Bath has several possible spellings, even within the same book. Although she does not present herself directly throughout her narrative, when describing dialogues with her husbands, she reveals that she was called “Alis” and “Alisoun.” The main narrator, during the general prologue, does not give the character any proper name, referring to her only as “wife of Bath.”

years of age. She stresses having had “valuable” men as husbands, from different social classes, to which she was not only able access, but also build her own wealth by being widowed several times. Marriage is also the main theme to frame Alison’s subversion of gender norms through the desacralization of the biblical text and the enunciation of her genitalia.

Evidently, this behavior was not viewed favorably by the society of her time, and we argue that the carnival atmosphere is decisive for the subversive behavior to be manifested. In an attempt to justify her condition before the moral standards of her time, she appropriates the biblical text, arguing that it is the basis for concluding that her journey through several marriages does not constitute a sin.

For example, the choice of the biblical passage²⁸ to support the ideal of marriage comes from what she says she heard - only recently - about Jesus having attended only one wedding according to the Gospels, creating a “precedent” so that marriage could only go through once in a lifetime. It is unusual that she points to this account as evidence, given that, in the original account (John 2), Jesus was a guest, and not the groom himself. Therefore, it would hardly be seen as a parameter of conduct for married people in the context of this particular narrative. On the other hand, the woman of Bath uses another excerpt from the Gospels to display a “Christian” view in which multiple marriages are not sins.

According to the narrator, the conversation that Jesus had with a Samaritan woman (John 4), where Jesus spoke, naturally, about the husbands that the Samaritan woman had had, reveals that there is no certain number of times that someone must get married. Furthermore, the fifth man with whom the Samaritan woman lived was not, in fact, her husband, which neither Jesus nor his interlocutor reveal why. Hence the Wife of Bath concluded that such ellipses in the biblical text leave room for different interpretations and men made use of that openness for their own benefit. She then excuses herself from obeying a supposed order of getting married only once on those biblical bases, and expresses she recognizes only the divine order to grow and multiply, which she claims to “know well,” emphasizing her sexual experience. In this way, the biblical

²⁸ For this research we used the Portuguese translation of *Versão Católica* [Catholic Version] (available at <https://bibliaestudos.com/vc/>), to go with the probable version of the Bible used by Chaucer that based himself in the *Vulgata* in Latin, according to Besserman (1998), as England in Chaucer times was Catholic. uma nação católica.

narrative of monogamous marriage is diluted - subverted - through an argument based on the biblical text itself and the main character's gender performativity.

Even though she, later in her speech, refers to the passage from Genesis commonly taken as the first biblical reference to monogamous marriage - namely, the creation of Eve - she does so only as the basis of her counter-argument, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

[...] he seyde myn housbonde
Sholde lete fader and mooder and take it to me.
But of no name mention made he,
Of bigamy, or of octogamy (Chaucer, 2008, p. 105).²⁹

Outside the context of carnival, such speech could easily be classified as heretical. Let us take as evidence the thought of Thomas Aquinas (2018),³⁰ one of the most influential Christian theologians of the end of the Middle Ages. For him, stable and monogamous marital relationships constituted the only “natural” way for humanity to generate and raise children, and, by extension, a society (Witte, 2019). Thus, the Wife of Bath treats the prospect of someone, whether man or woman, marrying multiple times with “naturalness.” Thus, while Thomas Aquinas defends that monogamous heterosexual marriage is a natural predisposition of humanity, the Wife of Bath, contrary to biblical teaching, assumes that people can enjoy marriage beyond the limitations established by the Church. In fact, for her, when the Bible says that “a man will leave his father and his mother and stick to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen. 2: 24), the text does not establish any limit to how many times this could occur.

The strategy of using the biblical text and the traditional interpretation of the Church only as content on which to disagree and counter-argue is constantly present in the woman from Bath's speech. While the main narrator's presentation of the character (in the General Prologue) focuses on Alison's clothing, body, stereotypes and financial condition, she, as narrator, begins her text by presenting her thoughts on marriage. Given that the Wife of Bath claims to have heard the biblical text and classical (Greco-Roman) works as the basis for the violence her husbands inflicted upon her, she uses her voice to invert, or subvert, the canon to suit the biblical text in her favor. It is clear, therefore, that

²⁹ CHAUCER, Geoffrey. *The Riverside Chaucer*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

³⁰ AQUINAS, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Claremont: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018.

speech the Wife of Bath articulates enacts a “parody of the local legends” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 192),³¹ in which she uses the official biblical text to desacralize it so that it can adapt to her intentions. In this way, the language of the sacred mixes with the defense of polygamy and heightened sexuality.

We can turn to yet another example of her interpretation of Christian precepts for marriage, when Alison cites, in an animated way, the pleasures of Solomon with his countless concubines, and the bigamy of Lamech, Abraham and Jacob, which did not prevent them from being considered “Men of God.” In addition to the references to characters from the Old Testament, she also brings to attention the apostle Paul’s thoughts on remaining a virgin until marriage. For her, getting married or not getting married is a matter of choice, endowed with intentionality and agency on the part of the subject, even if it is the female subject, as seen in the following excerpt.

I graunte it wel; I have noon envie,
Thogh maydenhede preferre bigamye.
It liketh hem to be clene, body and goost;
Of myn estaat I nyl nat make no boost (Chaucer, 2008, p. 106).³²

The quote reveals Alison’s views on celibacy and virginity (*maydenhede*, or, in modern English, “maidenhood”), as well as her attitude towards marriage and her own position in society: although the Wife of Bath previously claims that recognizes that celibacy is considered superior to marriage, she does not consider it desirable for herself. Alison knows that celibacy was considered a more sacred and virtuous choice, while marriage was seen as a concession for those who could not or would not adopt the religious life. However, she declares that she does not envy virginity, indicating that she does not wish to be pure in body and soul, positioning herself as a woman who values her own sexual experience and the pleasure she finds in marriage. This statement shows that the character does not consider virginity as a superior or desirable ideal, even if this position opposes the normative discourse of the Church. With this attitude, she therefore recognizes that she disagrees with this rule, although she softens her speech by saying that she is not proud of it. In fact, the term *boost* (in modern English, “boast”) in use here does not necessarily mean that she was ashamed of her condition, but only describes a

³¹ See footnote 2.

³² See footnote 29.

supposed “humble” attitude towards it, that is, she does not boast of their position – which can also be interpreted as a criticism of those who boast of their virtue or moral superiority due to their choice of celibacy or chastity. The Wife of Bath thus rejects the idea that social or moral *status* is linked to sexuality or the lack thereof.

This extract allows us to see yet another striking feature of the woman of Bath’s speech: the constant contradiction. Although she states she “does not boast” about her status as a woman married multiple times, she had previously stated, when expressing admiration for Solomon’s polygamy, that she herself had already been married five times and was widely willing to marry a sixth time (boasting, therefore). This constant contradiction is repeated even when the character refers to marriage: sometimes she exclaims in favor of the sexual or financial pleasures acquired through marriage; while in other moments she points to marriage as the greatest of martyrdoms.

Among the references to the biblical text that deal with marriage as an “authorized” source of pleasure, we find the mention of Jesus’ presence at a wedding in Cana (John 2:1), where he performs his first miracle; when Alison claims to know well the divine command to “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28); and even mentions of prophets and bigamous and polygamous “men of God” present in the Old Testament, ranging from King Solomon, to Abraham, Jacob and Lamech – all fundamental characters in the Jewish tradition.

Later, Alison uses Paulo’s words to defend her position. For example, she explains that each servant of God has been given a different gift (virginity is therefore not possible for all Christians), so she does not commit a sin by choosing marriage and experiencing her sexuality, although is not, in your view, the “perfect” or morally superior course, as expressed in the following excerpt.

And everich hath of God a propre yifte --
Som this, som that, as hym liketh shifte.
 Virginitee is greet perfeccion,
And continence eek with devocion,...
And lordynges, by youre leve, that am nat I.
I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age
In the acts and in fruition of mariage (Chaucer, 2008, p. 106).³³

³³ See footnote 29.

However, Alison uses Paulo's words to expose marriage as something negative. This is because, as she herself mentions, although for the apostle it is "better to marry than to burn out" (I Cor.7:9), virginity remains a "superior" form of Christian conduct. Furthermore, the Wife of Bath references the apostle's view that marriage is a scourge, or a martyrdom. Furthermore, it desacralizes the biblical text when it contrasts Christ versus Paul, suggesting that, although the Messiah accepted celibacy, he did not determine that this would be a model for everyone. The strength of this argument lies in the discursive construction that places Christ above Paul in terms of authority. In effect, for Alison, if not even the son of God determined rules on celibacy for *all* Christians, there was little Paul could do.

Furthermore, Alison reports that one of her husbands used to read aloud biblical texts and Greco-Roman philosophical treatises, with the aim of curbing her behavior, suggesting a threat that she should fit into such transgressive profiles denounced by authors such as Paulo. On one of these occasions of reading aloud, she reports having responded with her opinion regarding Paulo's view on the behavior and place of women, by responding to her husband in the following terms:

Thou seyst also, that if we make us gay
With clothyng, and with precious array,
That it is peril of oure chastitee;
And yet -- with sorwe! -- thou most enforce thee,
And seye thise wordes in the Apostles name:
"In habit maad with chastitee and shame
Ye wommen shul apparaille yow," quod he,
"And noght in tressed heer and gay perree,
As pearls, ne with gold, ne clothes riche."
After thy text, nor after thy rubric,
I wol nat wirche as muchel as a gnat (Chaucer, 2008, p. 109).³⁴

The passage mentioned by the character of the Wife of Bath in "The Canterbury Tales" is a reference to an excerpt from the Bible, taken from a Pauline epistle: I Timothy 2:9.³⁵ She is responding to someone who believes that when women dress in valuable clothing and jewelry, they are putting their chastity in danger. Her opinion is clearly expressed when she says that she cares about this statement as much as she cares about a

³⁴ See footnote 29.

³⁵ The text referred to says: "In the same way, let women dress themselves in honest clothing, with modesty and modesty, not with braids, or with gold, or pearls, or precious dresses" (I Tim.2:9).

“gnat,” or a mosquito. With this statement, she is rejecting the idea that wearing valuable clothing and jewelry can lead to loss of chastity – thus rejecting both the sexist speech of her controlling husband and the biblical text itself. The character of the Wife of Bath is known for her extravagant lifestyle and her willingness to challenge the social norms of the time. She is a confident and self-affirmed woman who believes in enjoying the good things in life. For the character, wealth and appearance are important aspects of her identity and she sees no contradiction between dressing well and maintaining chastity.

However, it is important to highlight that, despite the inherent ambivalence in Alison’s attitude towards marriage, both perspectives align with the experiences she reports having lived as a wife. Although she managed to obtain sexual pleasure and financial benefits through widowhood, even managing to navigate the difficult social climb, it was within these relationships that she also experienced violence from her husbands, both verbally and physically. In fact, she narrates how violence, sex and money were intertwined. One of her husbands, one who was young and literate, frequently verbally abused her, often reading aloud texts from the Bible and Greco-Roman philosophy to defend a misogynistic point of view on how to treat wives and deal with women in general, using her reading as a threat to Alison. As a result, Alison decides to take revenge.

And whan I saugh he wolde nevere fyne
To reden on this cursed book al nyght,
Al sodeynly thre leves have I plyght
Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke
I with my fest so took hymn on the check...
He yaf me al the bridel in my hond,
To han the governance of hous and lond,
And of his tonge, and of his honor also (Chaucer, 2008, p. 117).³⁶

As we saw in the excerpt above, Alison suffers domestic violence; even so, she claims to have control over her husband and his possessions. Alison here tells her fellow pilgrims a version of the story when she was shrewd, vengeful, in order to perform the genre in a subversive way, which only seems to be possible within the limits of carnival through humor. She, in effect, is the butt of the joke when she puts herself in a position of dominance even though she lives under the constant threat of being killed by domestic

³⁶ See footnote 29.

violence. It is in this context that gender is performative, as here Alison remakes the discourse on the role of women and the possibilities of power in the domestic environment through her self-narrative. In fact, Alison's own behavior, in desacralizing the sacred text, appears to be a reversal of what her husbands did. After all, if they were able to use the authority of the written word to support their abuses, it takes on the role of using the same, or other texts, with similar authority, to defend their point of view.

The fact that Alison makes the road to Canterbury a public square to, out loud, reflect and share her experiences and controversial opinions constructs her as a subversive character, performing gender contrary to the norms of the time for women - especially if we consider that most of the other characters in *The Canterbury Tales* were men.

On the other hand, the effect of the constant contradiction in the woman of Bath's speech in weakening her reliability is undeniable. By presenting divergent attitudes toward the violence (which she causes and suffers), sexuality, marriage, among other themes central to the character, the reader is led to believe that she is not a reliable narrator. To intensify this effect, in the following excerpt, for example, Alison directly and intentionally reveals how she manipulated her husbands, by using negative stereotypes of female sexuality, as in the following example, where she accuses her husband of infidelity while at the same time suggesting that she lacks expensive clothes and adornments.

But herkneth how I sayde:
Sire olde kaynard, is this thyn array?
Why is my neighebores wyf so gay?
She is honoured overall ther she gooth;
I sitte at hoom; I have no thrifty clooth.
What dostow at my neighebores hous?
Is she so fair? Artow so amorous?
What rowne ye with our mayde? Benedicite!
Sire olde lecchour, lat thy japes be!
And if I have a gossib or a freend,
Withouten gilt, thou chidest as a feend,
If that I walke or pleye unto his hous!
Thou comest hoom as dronken as a mous,
And prechest on thy bench, with yvel preef!
Thou seist to me it is a greet meschief
To wedde a povre womman, for costage;
And if that she be riche, of heigh parage,
Thanne seistow that it is a tormentrie
To soffre hire pride and hire malencolie.
And if that she be fair, thou verray knave,

Thou seyst that every holour wol hire have;
She may no while in chastitee abyde,
That is assailed upon ech a syde (Chaucer, 2008, p. 108).³⁷

In fact, Alison reverses the normative dynamics of social gender again. One of the characteristics that make up the stereotype of the “shrew,” in addition to being chatty and embarrassing her husband, is committing adultery. It was believed that an irreverent and fearless woman would not hold back from exercising her so-called heightened sexuality, even outside of marriage (Brown, 2003). Here the Wife of Bath employs the same coercive strategy that her husband would use to restrain her behavior: suggesting, or threatening her, to face the consequences of possible marital infidelity. Although the strategy of coercion here is an example of gender performativity, a comic vein crosses it, enabling both her subversive performance and her position as the target of the joke, transforming her into a less reliable narrator. Thus, even if Alison criticizes the misogynistic society in which she lived, these criticisms have their potential to convince the reader severely diminished, because the character often appears to be contradictory and unreliable. Contradictorily, therefore, the same environment comedy that allows Alison’s performativity to fall apart when she is the target of laughter.

Another aspect that deserves to be highlighted in the prologue for the construction of the wife of Bath’s desecrating acts is the character’s use of low body language in reference to female genitalia. In the original English, the vagina is referred to, for example, at different levels of specificity and in different nuances of meaning, namely, “reproductive organs,” “cunt” and “belle chose.” As we will see, the choice in the use of each term is linked to specific contexts and purposes, where there is no shame on the narrator’s part in referring to this vocabulary from the public square.

For example, when claiming that God created the “organs of reproduction,” or “members of generacioun” (in medieval English), Alison asks:

Telle me also, to what conclusion
Were members maad of generacioun,
And of so parfit wys a [wright] ywrought?
Trusteth right wel, they were nat maad for noght. [...]
So that the clerkes be nat with me wrothe,
I sey this: that they maked ben for bothe;

³⁷ See footnote 29.

That is to seye, for office and for ese
Of engendrure, ther we nat God displese (Chaucer, 2008, 106).³⁸

It is interesting to note that “generation” (an equivalent term in the current language) appears in English, especially in translations of the Bible from Latin to English, which incorporated the different meanings attributed to “generātiō” (a word in classical Latin used to translate from Aramaic and Greek). Among these, the sense of “reproducing similar beings or things” predominates, emphasizing the *product* of the sexual act as a means through which God not only allows humans to produce new “exemplars of themselves,” while also highlighting the primacy of genealogy, that is, of a production of new beings within the same family and, consequently, the same social stratum. She then expresses a bold and frank opinion about the purpose of reproductive organs, questioning the conventional view that these organs serve only to excrete urine or to differentiate females from males. Instead, she argues that they were ingeniously created to perform two important functions: sexual “service” and the “pleasure” of procreation. Sex for her, according to the interpretation of the Bible that she proposes, has two fundamental purposes: to serve as currency and to populate the earth.

Later, Alison states (and defends) that such members were also made with the aim of conferring *pleasure*, and the character then starts to refer to the female genitalia as “queynte” and “quoniam.” In addition to this being a specific word for the *female genitalia*, it is also a vulgar way of referring to the vagina, even sometimes used as a euphemism for “cunt” (a vulgar word used to this day to refer in a vulgar way to the genitalia). feminine or a woman seen as hypersexualized). Hence, in the Portuguese translation, Vizioli’s choice to render both “queynte” and “quoniam” as “cunt.” Unlike the first mention of genitalia (“membres of generacioun”), “queynte” and “quoniam” demonstrate a focus on another sense: that of the *sexual act itself*, rather than the *product* of it.³⁹ Furthermore, curiously, both occurrences occur in a context in which it is suggested that the woman provides a service or fulfills a duty to her husband through the vagina, which should confer some advantage on her in exchange for the use of her genitals. Therefore, she says, for example:

³⁸ See footnote 29.

³⁹ “Hypersexualization” here refers to the phenomenon of attributing power conflicts to the body, opening, in the case of the female body, space for transgression.

Of alle men yblessed moot he be,
The wise astrologist, Daun Ptholome,
That seith this proverb in his Almageste:
“Of alle men his wysdom is the hyste
That rekketh nevere who hath the world in honde.”
By this proverbe thou shalt understonde,
Have thou ynogh, what thar thee recche or care
How myrily that othere folkes fare?
For, certeyn, olde dotard, by youre leve,
Ye shul have queynte right ynogh at eve.
He is to greet a nygard that wolde werne
A man to lighte a candle to his lanterne;
He shal have never the lasse light, pardee.
Have thou ynogh, thee thar nat pleyne thee (Chaucer, 2008, p. 109).⁴⁰

In the above excerpt, the Wife of Bath expresses a bold and challenging opinion regarding the use of her genitalia and marital infidelity. She confronts the idea of male control over women, questioning why men feel the need to surveil and investigate their wives. The character believes that women should have the freedom to go wherever they want and enjoy their lives without facing constant distrust from their partners. She mentions that she wishes her husband would tell her: “Woman, you can go wherever you want, be distracted, I don’t believe in rumors. I know you are faithful, Miss Alice.” This statement reflects your willingness to be trusted and not restricted, and it shows your belief that mutual trust is fundamental in a relationship.

These statements demonstrate the Wife of Bath’s provocative views on sexuality and the role of women in marriage. She challenges the traditional norms of medieval society, claiming her independence, freedom and right to sexual satisfaction. Her discursive positioning challenges conventional notions of fidelity and monogamy, suggesting that men who have enough should not worry about their wives’ supposed infidelity. Indeed, in the context of the time in which the story was written, the opinions expressed by the Wife of Bath were highly controversial and subversive, possible only within the profane context of the carnivalized worldview (Bakhtin, 1984a).⁴¹

Furthermore, later, in turn, when pointing out their genitalia as a means of manipulating their husbands’ behavior, the vagina is called “belle chose” (a term that Vizioli decided to keep in accordance with the French original in its translation into

⁴⁰ See footnote 29.

⁴¹ See footnote 2.

Portuguese). This nomenclature highlights the representation of female genitalia as an intentional instrument of seduction and manipulation in the face of a confrontation with her husband. In this way, the discursive foreshadowing of the sexual act is what exerts power over the spouse's emotions as a sexual partner. After all, Alison claims that the offer of sex – rather than the actual vagina – is the “secret weapon” she reserves for conflict situations.

In this way, intentionally articulating this speech, not only to her husbands, but to an audience, is an example of how this character can exercise *performativity* as medieval a woman who escapes the current stereotypes of the female figure. Even amidst the chaos of contradictions, the Wife of Bath is still able to articulate a self-representation that aligns with her objectives, discursively using her own body as a currency of exchange, equivalent to material goods, as we can see in the following excerpt:

But tel me this: why hydestow, with sorwe,
The keys of your chest are away from me?
It is my good as wel as thyn, pardee!...
Thou shalt nat bothe, thogh that thou were wood,
Be master of my body and of my good;
That oon thou shalt forgo, maugree thyne yen (Chaucer, 2008, p. 110).⁴²

In the quoted excerpt, Alison proposes that her husband choose to have access to her body or her money, placing the two elements on an equal footing. Yet another similarity between the body and wealth is the fact that both, in theory, already belong to the husband: the first, because she is his wife, and his possession; the second, because the chest belongs to her husband, however she presents the treasure as belonging to both of them, in fact, as, mostly, hers, otherwise he would lose access to his wife's body. Here we see how body language plays an essential role in the performativity exercised by the woman of Bath to desecrate the religious figure of the medieval feminine.

The universe carnivalized by profanity, therefore, allows the Wife of Bath to become comical while encompassing aspects that, outside of carnival, would be seen as evidence to accuse her of being a witch, or a shrew. In fact, she assumes these roles, but, once she finds herself in the middle of the carnival, opposing, contradictory and profane elements mix into a great party. Thus, at the same time that carnival rises and opens space

⁴² See footnote 29.

for gender performativity and the subversion of the official Christian text, this context is marked by laughter and humor. In this sense, if the Woman of Bath is a target of laughter (whether from readers or other pilgrims), its subversive character is also mitigated, as everyone understands that their performance constitutes a joke.⁴³

Despite this, in the prologue of the story that follows the story of the woman of Bath, *The Friar's Tale*, the cleric himself classifies the story of the woman of Bath as serious, and suggests that the story he will tell – in contrast to Alison's speech – will serve as pure entertainment and humor. Bakhtin (1984a)⁴⁴ also predicts this ambivalent character in the world of carnival. The Wife of Bath, therefore, does not constitute a kind of proto-feminist character, but is capable of generating empathy despite her contradictions and her positioning of the self as the butt of the joke.

Conclusion

Throughout these pages our purpose was to analyze the character Alison, the wife of Bath, supported by Bakhtin's theory of carnivalization and Butler's theory of gender performativity, in order to understand how the subversion of the female gender is produced by the profanation of biblical discourse.

When examining the prologue of *The Canterbury Tales* from the theory of carnivalization, we saw, throughout this article, how Chaucer constructs, in a carnivalized way, the character of the wife who performs the feminine gender in a subversive way by desecrating the normative biblical discourse as to the role of women as wives. Her ambivalent attitude towards the biblical text is reflected in the fact that she does not

⁴³ A question we could raise here is: why did Chaucer write the Wife of Bath's Tale and dedicate the longest prologue to her among the other characters? Although there are no records that the English writer commented on the relevance of the character for his work and for his audience, the analysis we have focused on allows us to conclude that, although patriarchal authority may have been the norm for medieval women, this was not the case. the only possible scenario. Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* in a period of transition, when villages slowly grew into cities, and where trade, not just land grants, opened up economic possibilities for artisans like Alison. Chaucer's wife, as well as his daughter, had their own income through services provided to the English aristocratic elite, and he himself benefited from work in the manufacture and sale of fabrics (Turner, 2023). Even if we don't know whether Chaucer originally intended to build a character to envision a future in which women could be free from patriarchal moral norms - or to ridicule those who performed gender that way - it is certain that the symptomatic change, irreverence and freedom that Alison embodies remain echoing in popular culture and literature and, at the same time, maintains an indelible mark on the female trajectory beyond Chaucer himself and the Middle Ages.

⁴⁴ See footnote 2.

rewrite it but offers alternative interpretations to the ecclesiastical orthodoxy of her time. In this profaning gesture, she reinterprets, questions, and manipulates biblical quotations, thus allowing the authority of the Bible to justify and legitimize her *behavior*, especially regarding her experiences in different marriages and her understanding of her sexuality and her role as a wife.

Thus, she becomes free to exercise a comical character in her presentation of herself, whether through the vulgar language of the public square, or through actions permeated with eccentricity, debauchery, irreverence, and stubbornness when occupying her position in marriage, by profaning the biblical commandments for women's role. With this, she can then access the focus on the body and its materiality, the grotesque, the images of "fertility, growth and superabundance," the demotion (from the spiritual to the carnal), the degradation, the ambivalence (like the representations simultaneous death and rebirth), a regenerative character, all interconnected with popular laughter.

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Statement of Author's Contribution

The article “The Canterbury Tales, by Geoffrey Chaucer, from the perspective of Bakhtinian carnival: the wife of Bath and the subversion of female gender through the profanation of biblical discourse” was originated from Vanessa Rodrigues Barcelos’ research for dissertation, supervised by Professor João Batista Costa Gonçalves. It was presented and approved on June 29, 2023, at the Applied Linguistics Graduate Program (PosLA) at the State University of Ceará. For the present article, built in coauthorship between the student and her supervisor, each author contributed to the conception of the article during all stages of writing. Individually, each author contributed specifically in the following ways: the conception of the idea to publish the article was planned by João Batista Costa Gonçalves, who also addressed the theoretical discussion in the paper and worked on revising and formatting the text; Vanessa Rodrigues Barcelos further developed the theoretical discussion that grounds the research, wrote the analysis proposed in the article, and translated the text in Portuguese to English. We, the authors, therefore, are deemed responsible for all the aspects of the article production and guarantee the accuracy and integrity of any part of this written work.

Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana. Revista de Estudos do Discurso* [*Bakhtiniana. Journal of Discourse Studies*] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review I

The article provides a very pertinent and relevant analysis of a classic text of English literature. It uses the carnival worldview and gender performativity to analyze the speech of the “wife of Bath.” Despite being a well- articulated text, in my opinion, it needs some adjustments, which I mention below:

1. The Introduction does not make the objective of the text clear.
2. Some biblical passages are only pointed out (such as, for example, I Timothy 2:9), but are not inserted into the body of the text. It is necessary to remember that dialogism has discourse as a theoretical-analytical basis, hence the need to establish dialogue between discourses (see the observation I make in the case of marriage and the Samaritan woman).

3. When bringing biblical excerpts, due to their multiple versions/translations (some even questionable), it is important to explain which version of the Bible you are using. I suggest the TEB (Ecumenical Translation of the Bible).
4. When bringing passages from the story for analysis, the writer exhibits the translation and not the original text. In the analysis of some citations, it highlights words in Portuguese and not in English. Even if you don't want to bring Medieval English into the body of the work, you can bring a Modern English version to make it easier to read. The Portuguese translation may appear in the footer. Without this, the reader is left with the impression that the entire analysis was carried out based on a translation into Portuguese, making the reader limited to that translation.
5. There are some quotes from the story in the body of the article that are very long. This makes it difficult to read a short text, such as the article. I suggest paraphrasing part of the quotations and leaving as direct quotations only the excerpts that, in fact, will be analyzed in their architecture (content, material and form).
6. Along these lines, there are several quotations that are more illustrative of the argued content than the object of analysis. The quote becomes an object when, in fact, it is analyzed in its content-form relationship, pointing to the material chosen by the author. Therefore, the words that stand out in the analysis must be in English and the translation in parentheses.
7. The final considerations do not return to the objective of the article (which was not presented in the Introduction). There is, therefore, a conclusion on the subject, but not in the article genre.
8. Finally, I missed a distance, showing the author's aesthetic project with the choices he made when creating this character and his ideologemes. MANDATORY CORRECTIONS [Revised]

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Reviewed on September 20, 2023.

Review II

The title of the article, namely, *The Canterbury Tales*, by Geoffrey Chaucer, from the Bakhtinian carnival: the wife of Bath and the subversion of the female gender through the profanation of biblical discourse,” perfectly matches the content presented throughout the text. The objective of the work, that is, “to carry out an analysis of the character Alison,” in the light of the Bakhtinian concept of carnivalization and Butler’s theory of gender performativity, according to the “subversion of the female gender through the profanation of biblical discourse,” is clearly and precisely highlighted in the Summary and Abstract and repeated repeatedly in the body of the text, in order to guide the reading. It is worth noting that the text is well structured, with well-articulated subdivisions that, in sequence, appear to be relevant, logical and coherent, contributing to achieving the desired objective. Regarding the theoretical foundations, anchored in canonical and updated bibliography pertinent to the proposed goal, the references and comments that permeate and support the argument reveal knowledge of the cause, with relevant contributions for a fruitful analysis of the selected excerpts vis-a-vis the objective of the article. Originality of reflection and contribution to the field of knowledge by applying the concepts of

Bakhtin and Butler to the analysis of the Chaucerian character Alison, a central figure in the short story *The Wife of Bath*, the article has undeniable originality and makes an important contribution to both the field of Discourse Studies and Studies Literary, particularly those focused on *The Canterbury Tales*, a canonical work of English literature. The text is clear and well written, in line with academic writing standards, thus providing a fluid and pleasant read. The Introduction is well done, providing the reader with a succinct yet sufficiently enlightening view of the author and work *The Canterbury Tales*, as well as an indication of the structural parts of the article.

Item 1, which deals with the Bible and religious discourse in the English Middle Ages, is anchored in contributions to authors relevant to the purpose in question (Besserman, 1998; Garret, 2013; Minois, 2003), bringing the necessary contextualization for conducting the argument in the following parts.

Items 2 and 3, focused on the theme of the *Wife of Bath*, from the perspective of the Bakhtinian concept of carnivalization and the performative vision of language and gender performativity, based on Butlerian theory and complementary contributions from prominent scholars (Bauman & Briggs, 2006; Ottoni, 1998; Arbo, 2021; Salih, 2012; Silva, Ferreira and Gonçalves, 2021, among others), are also succinct in nature, but coated with density and argumentative richness, leading to the following item.

Item 4, dedicated to the analysis of the representation of the character Alison, as a woman who desecrates the biblical-Christian discourse, is of greater dimension and content, with the application of the contributions previously announced, complemented by citations from other authors relevant to the continuity of the analytical line- argumentative. This is a well-conducted, thought-provoking and fruitful analysis exercise, which gives the article a mark of quality and originality.

An aspect worth noting throughout the article are the footnotes that greatly enrich the work, providing greater conceptual density for exposition and analysis.

The conclusion is brief and objective, finishing off the article satisfactorily. We congratulate the author of the article for the relevant contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the scope of Discourse Studies and Literary Studies, particularly those focused on Chaucer's work.

We suggest that small errors arising from typing, spacing, formatting and grammatical issues (agreement, use of backticks, syntax, punctuation) be corrected.

A file with yellow highlights will be sent separately to the Editor, indicating the points we suggest should be adjusted. APPROVED

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Reviewed on January 24, 2024.

Editorial Review

Considering the opinions above, we ask the authors to review the article, paying special attention to the comments of the first reviewer, and send it again to email bakhtinianarevista@gmail.com by 01/31/2024, for new evaluation (by the first reviewer).

We also inform that Orison Marden Bandeira de Melo is willing to interact with authors.

Review III

The new version of the article seeks to fill the gaps that were previously highlighted, such as the need for the research corpus to be presented in its original English, the analysis of the materiality of all excerpts from the story brought to the article, the insertion of biblical texts and not just the reference, among others. I would like to point out some things that need final adjustments:

1. The final version must be presented without revision marks. This makes reading difficult.
2. It is necessary to adjust the citation format for the revised edition of ABNT NBR 10520 of 2023.
3. It is necessary to bring the translation of the title into English in the Portuguese version of the article.
4. The article presents the biblical texts from a Protestant version, attested by the Brazilian Bible Society (SBS). It states that SBS is guided “by the principle of formal equivalence translation in which it seeks to translate, in a more reliable way, the original text respecting its words and structure.” They need to think about four things:
 - a. Any study of manuscriptology disputes this issue of the original, since it practically does not exist; what exist are copies of copies of copies. If you want to read about the subject, I recommend Bart Ehrman’s work “What did Jesus say? What didn’t Jesus say?”
 - b. Although SBS says that it respects the words and structures of the “original” text, it is very unlikely that this will happen, as the structure of Koiné Greek, in which the new testament was written, for example, does not have a structure similar to that of Portuguese.
 - c. When they say, in the footer, that SBS seeks a reliable translation of the “original” text, this compromises the understanding of what, in fact, a translation is, that is, a refraction by the translator, because, to translate, it is necessary to interpret the text - and this is subjective and refractory. It is no surprise that, in the English language alone, the website biblegateway.com has more than 60 different versions of the Bible.
 - d. If The Canterbury Tales refers to the world of Catholicism, why not bring a Catholic version of the Bible? It is more consistent with the proposal.
5. When reducing the size of analysis excerpts, they need to check whether the footnote (in which they provide the translation) corresponds to the excerpt in the body of the text. See the example in footnote 26, where the translation is longer than the excerpt. Even in the paragraph after the quote, they contain a sentence in quotation marks that is in the translation but is not in the excerpt in the body of the text. APPROVED

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Reviewed on February 05, 2024.