**Chaucer Prologue Breakdown:**

**Lines 🡪 1-50**

**Outline:**

* Introduction to the Wife of Bath
* Focus on ‘auctoritee’
* Uses auctoritee of King Solomon who had more than 1 wife
* Says she’s “wedded five”
* Says as soon as her husband dies she’ll marry again, almost immediately

**Key Quotes:**

1. “Experience, though noon auctoritee […] is right ynogh for me to speke of wo that is in marriage”

🡪 Allusion that she relies on her experience no authority because authority was male dominated regarding access to it etc

1. “God bade us wexe and multiplie”

🡪 Religious authority, this is her “glosen” of the Bible

1. “no mencion made he, Of bigamie or of octogamie; Why sholde men thane speke of it vileynie?”

🡪 Uses religious authority to justify her behaviour

1. “the wise king, daun Solomon; I trowe he hadde wives mo than oon”

🡪 Uses religious authority to justify her behaviour

**Relevant Context:**

* Role of the Church + importance of religious authority on society
* Only men had access to education etc.

**Lines 🡪 50-100**

**Outline:**

* Further evidence of having more than one partner
* Says that the Apostle didn’t say you had to be a Virgin – just that it might be a good thing
* Apostle was a “maide” and so wanted others to be as well
* Alison admits she wouldn’t want to be virginal

**Key Quotes:**

1. “And ech of them hadde wives mo than two”

🡪 Further evidence of polygamy

1. “Men may conseille a woman to be oon, But conseilling is no commandment”

🡪 Arguing that virginity is not necessary nor is it a universal law so we shouldn’t condemn it

1. “Al were it good no womman for to touche […] For peril is both fyr and tow t’assemble”

🡪 The Apostle says its bad for men and women to sexually interact and uses the metaphor of fire and “tow” i.e. flax – a flammable plant = would be bad for them to interact because it would be wildfire

1. “Freletee clepe I, but if that he and she wolde leden al hir lyf in chastitee. I graunte it well, I have noon envie”

🡪 “Freletee” means weakness, so Alison is shocked and believes that sex is not

weakness. Modern POV. Alison admits she wouldn’t envy being virginal

**Relevant Context:**

* Church dominates life – quite risky to say all this because it goes against the standard belief of the period which was that virginity was the ultimate purity so staying pure until marriage was important

**Lines 🡪 100 – 150**

**Outline:**

* Whilst the Bible does say virginity is perfection, God didn’t say all had to be perfect
* Alison uses euphemisms and metaphors to illustrate her enjoyment of sexuality
* Alison describes the function of a penis is not just for functional uses like waste but for reproduction too
* Uses more euphemisms for sexual organs
* Transactional approach to relationship – “dette”
* Alison says she doesn’t fancy virginity
* Bread analogy
* She says in wifehood she will use her sexuality

**Key Quotes:**

1. “But Christ, that of perfeccion is welle, bad nat every with he sholde go selle”

🡪 God says that “Virginitee is greet perfeccion” but he didn’t say that all had to be perfect so people don’t have to be virgins to be good Christians

1. “I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age In the actes and in fruit of mariage”

🡪 Expressing her enjoyment of sex. Use of the word “fruit” correlates to Adam and Eve story whereby the apple was the object of temptation

1. “That man shal yelde to his wyf hire dette? Now wherewith sholde he make his paiement, if he ne used his sely instrument?”

🡪 Stating that men need to use their “instrument” a euphemism for the male sexual organ to pay their “dette” to her

1. “That hath swich harneys as I to yow tolde”

🡪 symbolic a “harneys” controls something, symbolic of power

1. “Crist was a maide, and shapen as a man”

🡪 It is possible for people to be virginal

1. “I nil envye nil virginitee”

🡪 Alison is more pragmatic about life, she enjoys sex

1. “In wyfhod I wol use myn instrument”

🡪 “instrument” as a euphemism for sex, as if it is her talent (her seduction), she’ll embrace her sexuality in marriage

**Relevant Context:**

* Religious connotations regarding virginity
* Religion regarding Adam and Eve story and Alison’s apparent fall to the sin, yet she still attempts to justify her actions
* Contradicts female stereotype of women tending to their husbands needs and she is making him pay his “dette” – female control

**Lines 🡪 150 – 200**

**Outline:**

* Says her husband will have to be having sex both morning + evening so that he pays his “dette”
* Says she has power over his body
* Pardoner interrupts
* She tells him to shut up
* She claims to have the power in the relationship
* Says she’ll begin her tale but she still talks about herself for another 600 lines
* Says which of her husbands were good and which were bad

**Key Quotes:**

1. “and have this tribulacion withal upon his flessh”

🡪 “tribulacion” connotations of suffering, used in biblical language a lot, she is exerting her power

1. “I have the power duringe al my lyf upon his proper body”

🡪 Illustrating her power over his body – almost like the knight who has the power over the maid or the old hag who has power over the knights body bc he owes her since she saved his life

1. “Up stirte the Pardoner”

🡪 Pardoner interrupts, he is demonstrating his power by interjecting

1. “‘Abide!’ quod she”

🡪 Contradicts social stereotype of women remaining submissive and quiet, she is reasserting her power by telling him to be quiet

1. “This is to seyn, myself have been the whippe”

🡪 Connotations of dominance, control and power with the word “whippe”

1. “Now, sire, now wol I telle forth my tale”

🡪 ironic because she doesn’t actually start her tale for another 600 lines

**Relevant Context:**

* Female power contradicts the period in which only men could hold any power

**Lines 🡪 200 – 250**

**Outline:**

* Quite mean, she relishes in the fact that she makes her husbands work
* More connotations of domination and control
* She was so mean to her husbands that they were really grateful when she was nice
* Gives women bad qualities
* Re-enaction of a drama of domesticity
* Comparing to the neighbour

**Key Quotes:**

1. “How piteously a night I had made him swinke!”

🡪 She finds pleasure in his labour, he has to work really hard (sexually) she relishes in this

1. “I had hem hoolly in myn hond”

🡪 she has the power, colloquial phrase

1. “They were ful glad wen I spake to them faire”

🡪 she treats them so badly that they’re greatful when she’s nice to them

1. “For half so boldely kan no man swere and lyen as a womman kan”

🡪 She condemns women as liars and people who swear giving them a bad rep

1. “Sire old kaynard” “Sire olde lecchour”

🡪 Extremely insulting to her husbands, derogatory, she combines all her husbands together – she doesn’t differentiate between them reinforcing the fact that she is exploiting them. Start of the drama of domesticity

1. “What rowne ye with oure maide? *Benedicte!*”

🡪 She accuses her husband of cheating, this story is a projection of her own behaviour because this is what she does. The use of questions is to create a platform for her to continue speaking and holding the power – doesn’t let husband speak

1. “Thou kommest hoom as dronken as a mous”

🡪 proverbial saying

1. “To wedde a povre womman, for costage; And that if she be riche, of high parage, Thanne seistow that it is a tormentrie

🡪 Accuses her husband of finding excuses as to why women should be kept in the house

**Relevant Context:**

* Power is in the wrong hands – should be in a mans (stereotypically)

**Lines 🡪 250 – 300**

**Outline:**

* Lists the reasons men desire women
* Men try to keep women hidden/ inside
* Listing all the negative things about women, which the Wife is retaliating against by insulting her husband but it’s ironic because she exemplifies all these qualities

**Key Quotes:**

1. “Thou sayest som folk desire us for richeese”

🡪 some men desire women for wealth. Continual use of the word “Thou” when talking to her husband is symbolic because its used when talking down to someone, a way to linguistically assert her power/ dominance

1. “Thou seist some men may nat kepe a castel wal”

🡪 imagery of being trapped, contained

1. “if that she be foul, thous seist that she Coveiteth every man that she may se, For as a spaynel she wol on him lepe”

🡪 If a woman is ugly she’s more likely to be promiscuous. Animal imagery is symbolic because “spanyels” are energetic and demand attention like Alison does

1. “Ne noon so grey goos goth ther in the lake”

🡪 proverbial saying meaning that there is somebody out there for everyone

1. “Thow saist that dropping houses, and eek smoke, And chiding wives maken men to flee”

🡪 Alison is depicting herself as the worst stereotype of women – witch a stereotype women suffer. A nagging wife is like smoke – it drives people (men) out of the house

1. “old dotard shrewe!”

🡪 insulting and derogatory

**Relevant Context:**

* Again, about power roles in society which seems to be juxtaposed here
* Significance of the reference to witchcraft

**Lines 🡪 300 – 350**

**Outline:**

* Mentions Jankin and talks about him a bit
* Talks about property
* Explains what all her husbands should do/ allow etc
* She explains the bad qualities of her husband/s
* Men use biblical authority against women to suppress them

**Key Quotes:**

1. “For his crispe heer, shininge as gold so fyn”

🡪 Focuses on Jankin’s physical appearance

1. “I wol him noght”

🡪 She denies that she wants him, this is a lie

1. “wenestow make an idiot of oure dame?”

🡪 ‘do you think to have me treated as insane with no rights to my property’. ‘oure dame’ is using the possessive adjective so she owns the property (allowed to do so bc she’s a widower)

1. “Be maister of my body and of my good”

🡪 contradictory, she’s insulted at the proposition of a man having the control of the property but she then gives it up to Jankin

1. “I trowe thou woldest loke me in thy chiste!”

🡪 connotations of Alison as the property, metaphor

1. “We love no man that taketh kep or charge”

🡪 Women don’t want men that take power (because they want the power)

1. “Ye shul have queynte right ynogh at eve”

🡪 ‘queynte’ is an analogy for sex, quite a blunt word with direct connotations to sex

1. “Thou seist also, that if we make us gay with clothing and with precius array that it is peril of oure chastitee […] And seye thise words in the Apostles name”

🡪 men use religious authority against women because they are the ones who gain an education etc. Bible is being used as an instrument to control women

1. “Thou sedest this, that I was like a cat”

🡪 animal imagery is symbolic because cats are independent creatures like Alison is

**Relevant Context:**

* Only widows could own property in the 14th Century
* Women as property of men

**Lines 🡪 350 – 400**

**Outline:**

* Expresses anger at husbands
* Women as a source of pain – they have the power
* Women manipulate men to a point where they admit this they didn’t even do

**Key Quotes:**

1. “O leeve sire shrewe, Jhesu shorte thy lyf!”

🡪 Extremely insulting and shocking, it is the most extreme statement to wish death by Jesus

1. “Thou liknest also to wilde fyr”

🡪 Liken women to “wlide fyr” because they are dangerous and reckless

1. “right as wormes shende a tree, Right so a wyf destroyeth hire housbonde”

🡪 Women will gradually destroy a husband like a worm does to a tree

1. “Whoso that first to mille comth, firth grint”

🡪 Imagery of grinding down, continuing the imagery of women slowly destroying their husbands or grinding them down

1. “They were ful glade to excuse hem blive of thing of which they nevere agilte hir live”

🡪 Women can manipulate men to a point where they admit things they have never done

1. “I swoor that al my walking out by nighte was t’espir wenches that he dighte”

🡪 Alison is able to leave the house at night because of he manipulation she claims she is merely going to spy on the women that her husband is cheating on her with, but it is more likely an excuse for her to do the same (she accuses her husband of the actions she commits)

**Relevant Context:**

* Lying/ manipulation in this sense goes against one the 10 commandments

**Lines 🡪 400 – 450**

**Outline:**

* Alison says she’ll give her husbands no sexual pleasure
* She’ll make them continue having sex until they’re good
* Insulting to her husbands by saying they have no sexual prowess
* Sexual euphemism

**Key Quotes:**

1. “Thanne wolde I suffer him do his nicetee”

🡪 The wife is mocking her husbands attempts to make love

1. “al is for to selle; with empty hand men may none hauke lure”

🡪 Only people with money have hawks, so you can only lure a woman if you are wealthy according to Alison

1. “For winning wolde I al his list endure”

🡪 For profit she would continually have sex

1. “for the best, or ells hadde we nevere been in reste for thogh he looked as a wood leon”

🡪 she is demanding, she will make him work and work until he is like a mad lion

1. “How merely looketh Wilkin, oure sheep!”

🡪 Degrading her husbands by referring to them as their sheep. Significant that she gives the sheep a name but not her husband.

1. “Is it for ye wolde have my queynte allone?”

🡪 blunt, harsh, plosiveness of “queynte”

1. “if I wolde selle my *bele chose*, I koulde walke as fressh as is a rose”

🡪 courtly euphemism for a woman’s sexual organ contrasted with the bluntness of ‘queynte’

**Relevant Context:**

* Woman as the power holder

**Lines 🡪 450 – 500**

**Outline:**

* Talking about her 4th husband throughout essentially

**Key Quotes:**

1. “in erthe I was his purgatorie for which I hope his soule be in glorie”

🡪 She gave him hell on Earth, so he paid his debts on earth and so his sould was cleansed before he got to heaven. She is deluded she thinks she has done him a favour because now he won’t have to go through purgatory after death

**Relevant Context:**

* Religion

**Lines 🡪 500 – 550**

**Outline:**

* Introduction to Jankin
* He is abusive

**Key Quotes:**

1. “was he to me the mooste shrewe; That feele I on my rives al by rewe”

🡪 He is physically abusive, bruises on ribs are the most painful

1. “But in oure bed he was so fressh and gay and therwithal so wel koude he me glose”

🡪 Alison is able to justify his behaviour or overlook it because of their sexual relationship which it appear Jankin uses to manipulate Alison “glose” – real sense that with Jankin the tables have turned and he retains power

1. “he hadde bete on every bon, He koude winne again my love anon”

🡪 She is abused but still loves him, domestic violence, unhealthy co-dependence – Stockholm syndrome?

1. “Was of his love daungerous to me”

🡪 sado-masochistic, finds pleasure from inflicting pain on others

**Relevant Context:**

* Jankin is a “clerk” we learn and only the elite social classes were literate in the 14th Century giving an insight into his background

**Lines 🡪 550 – 600**

**Outline:**

* Imagery of sexuality – clothing
* Mouse metaphor for adultery
* She has a dream that Jankin kills her
* Alison interprets the dream in a positive way
* Recalls her 4th husbands funeral which is where she met Jankin

**Key Quotes:**

1. “my gaye scarlet gites”

🡪Sexually provocative, the fact that she wears them reflects a lot on her behaviour, and she’s worn them so often that moths haven’t had the chance to eat them

1. “I holde a mouses herte nat worth a leek that hath but oon hold for to sterte to”

🡪 Metaphor for adultery, means she finds it ok to move from 1 person to the nect

1. “He wolde han slain me as I lay upright, and al my bed was ful of verray blood”

🡪 Violent dream about Jankin killing her

1. “I weep algate, and made sory cheere, As wives mooten”

🡪 At her 4th husbands funeral, she is putting on a front of sorrowful behaviour because “wives mooten” it’s a duty

1. “Of legges and of feet so clene and faire that al myn herte I yaf unto his hoold”

🡪 Cynical and grotesque to look at another man in a sexual way at your husbands funeral. Reinforces her focus on the physical aspect of their relationship

**Relevant Context:**

* 14th Century women often wore bland, baggy, mundane clothing – contradicts Alison

**Lines 🡪 600 – 650**

**Outline:**

* Admits she is a lusty woman even at 40
* References to Roman mythology
* Her hunger for sexual activity
* Jankin denies Alison what she wants
* She rips out a page of his book

**Key Quotes:**

1. “Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse, and Mars yaf me my sturdy hardinesse”

🡪 Venus is the God of love and sexuality, and Mars is the God of war, she is a combo of male and female qualities

1. “My chamber of Venus”

🡪 euphemism for female sexual organ

1. “He nolde suffre nothing of my list”

🡪 Jankin isn’t giving Alison anything that she wants, which is significant because he is doing to her exactly what she did to her previous husbands

1. “For that I rente out his book a leef, that of the strook myn ere wax al deef”

🡪 Her revenge is to break authority which is symbolic is symbolic of men bc men were the authors and creators of authority

1. “he often times wolde preche”

🡪 Connotations of a sermon, religious, delivering a moral sermon

**Relevant Context:**

* Men wrote and conducted laws etc

**Lines 🡪 650 – 700**

**Outline:**

* Begins talking about the Book of Wikked Wives by quoting from it
* Ref. to Saint Jerome – misogynist
* Alison responds to the notion of a book of wikked wives

**Key Quotes:**

1. “Of his proverbs n’of his olde sawe”

🡪 Wife completely disregards his proverbs, arguably a sign of disrespect. From a 21st Century perspective this is really admirable she isn’t succumbing to his manipulation and nonsense

1. “that highte Seint Jerome”

🡪 seen as the most misogynist of Christian thinkers

1. “To reden on this book of wikked wives”

🡪 this is not the actual name of the book this is her inference. The book is more about the theme of moral weakness and the dangers of attractive women which make a snare for men

1. “Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?”

🡪 allusion to Aesop’s fables where the lion is presented the way the painter wants not how the lion would be presented

1. “They wolde han witen of men moore wikkednesse”

🡪 if women wrote stories about men it would include more wickeness because men are more horrid according to Alison

**Relevant Context:**

* Defiant woman
* Use of authority to suppress women – used in the 14th C most notable the Bible 🡪 Adam and Eve

**Lines 🡪 700 – 750**

**Outline:**

* Begins to tell stories of wikked wives
* Eve
* Sampson’s wife Delilah

**Key Quotes:**

1. “On Eva first, that for hire wikkednesse was al mankind broght to wrecchednesse”

🡪 Eve, she ate the apple from the tree of knowledge and condemned all of mankind to wrtechedness

1. “For which that Jhesu Crist himself was slain that boght us with his herte blood again”

🡪 A man had to redeem the world that was made bad by women

1. “Sampson lost his heres, slepinge, his lemman kitte it with hire sheres”

🡪 Sampson lost his hair due to it being cut by a woman, having his cut weakened him in the mythological story = an example of how women try to weaken and destroy men

**Relevant Context:**

* Biblical references that all of society would be aware of

**Lines 🡪 750 – 800**

**Outline:**

* Continues with stories about the wikked wives which get continually worse
* Comparison of women to dragons
* Wife retaliates and hits him, he falls into the fire
* Sense of justice

**Key Quotes:**

1. “That somme han slain hir housbondes in hir bed”

🡪 the crimes gradually get worse

1. “And somme han drive nailes in hir brain”

🡪 more examples of wikked wives

1. “Bet is’ quode he, ‘thyn habitacioun be with a leon of a foul dragoun”

🡪 Better to live with a lion or a dragon than with a woman, he is further insulting to women

1. “a womman cast hir shame away whan she cast of hir smok”

🡪 Illustrates the deep misogynistic thinking

1. “Al sodeynly thre leves have I plight out of his book”

🡪 She is so angry that instead of only ripping out 1 page she rips out 3, an outburst against men, against authority (created by men) which oppresses women

1. “I with my fest so took him on the cheke that in oure fyr he fil backward adoun”

🡪 She has physically assaulted him, she is taking back power and control, she will not be mentally bullied into submission

**Relevant Context:**

* Stigma about women – misogynistic views existed within society
* Men made the laws etc so act against authority was an act against men essentially
* Female power is contradictory

**Lines 🡪 800 – 855**

**Outline:**

* Alison has the power
* Jankin essentially submits to her
* Once he gave up his power they never fought again
* Information about the Friar
* Alison says she will begin her tale

**Key Quotes:**

1. “And neer he cam, and kneled faire adoun”

🡪 Positioning is symbolic of male submission which is Alison’s fantasy

1. “He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond”

🡪 “bridel” is a ref to reigns like of a horse, so she has been handed full control and power, what she wants

1. “To han the governance of hous and lond”

🡪continuation of the power she now has, she has control of property (but not a widow which is significant)

1. “made him brenne his book anon right tho”

🡪 Quite powerful to have a man burnt ‘auctoritee’ because they create it, men burning the lies about women which they use to oppress them

1. “Myn owene trewe wyf do as thee lust the terme of al thy lyf”

🡪 He gives his life to her essentially

1. “a flie and eek a frere wold falle in every dissh and eke mateere”

🡪 ‘frere’ means friar, a religious man, analogy the friar is compared to a fly who gets into everything unwantedly

1. “Do, dame, telle forth youre tale, and that is best”

🡪 Tell the tale

**Relevant Context:**

* She is completely contradicting the 14th C stereotype bc she now controls land and a man