

T.C
BEYKENT ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
İNGİLİZ DİLİ ve EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI
İNGİLİZ DİLİ ve EDEBİYATI BİLİM DALI

**DECAMERON VE CANTERBURY HİKAYELERİNDEKİ
KADIN İMGELERİ**

(Yüksek Lisans Tezi)

Tezi Hazırlayan:
Aylin ÜNLÜ TALU

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ÖZ

DECAMERON VE CANTERBURY HİKAYELERİNDEKİ KADIN İMGELERİ

Bu tezde Giovanni Boccacciove Geoffrey Chaucer'in ortaçağ kadınlarını, sorunlarıyla birlikte içinde buldukları koşulları nasıl olduğu gibi ele aldıkları ve her ikisinin kadınlara karşı tutumları işlenmektedir. Bu tezin birinci bölümünde Boccaccio'nun Decameron'da yarattığı kadın imgeleri ve temelde kadın karakterleri tarafından, özellikle de Fiammetta karakteri baz alınarak anlattıkları hikayeler sunulacaktır. İkinci bölümde kadın, Chaucer'in Canterbury Hikayeleri'nde, Bath'lı Kadın ve rahibeler aracılığıyla ele alınacaktır. Bu karşılaştırmalı çalışmada, kadın algısı ve farklı toplumsal sınıflardan gelen kadınlara yüklenen rollerde bu iki sanat eserinin ışığında sunulacaktır. Üçüncü bölümde kadın imgeleri bazı çarpıcı benzerlik ve farklılıklar taşıdıkları için karşılaştırma yapılacaktır. Son olarak, Avrupa'nın iki farklı ülkesi, 14.yy İtalya ve İngiltere'sinden kadın manzaralarını sunan bir model olarak yukarıda bahsedilen her bir eseri öne çıkartarak ele alınacaktır.

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ABSTRACT

WOMEN IMAGES IN BOCCACCIO'S *THE DECAMERON* and CHAUCER'S *THE CANTERBURY TALES*

This thesis shows how Giovanni Boccaccio and Geoffrey Chaucer present the conditions and problems of medieval women in their respective narratives as they are and how the women characters are sympathetically treated by the above mentioned authors of the Middle Ages. To serve this purpose, this study analyzes the aspects of life in the medieval era in terms of women images. Therefore, in the first chapter of this thesis, the women images created by Boccaccio in the *Decameron* and the tales and the novellas are told by basically the women characters with specific reference to *Fiammetta* will be presented. In the second chapter, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* will be dealt with through the characters, *The Wife of Bath* and the nuns. In this comparative analysis, the perception of womanhood as well as the role imposed on women from different social classes will also be presented in the light of the two works of art. In the third chapter, the women images will be compared and contrasted as these two works bear some striking similarities and differences. Finally, the thesis concludes by foregrounding each of the above mentioned works as a model which presents the women landscapes from the two different countries, Italy and England, of the 14th century.

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Table of Contents

Page

ÖZ

ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

INTRODUCTION1

CHAPTER I

1. WOMEN IN BOCCACCIO'S <i>THE DECAMERON</i>	7
1.1. Fiammetta in the <i>Decameron</i>	11
1.1.1.Fiammetta's Novellas	11
1.2. Women Images in Novellas not told by Fiammetta	24
1.3. Nuns in the <i>Decameron</i>	26

CHAPTER II

2. WOMEN IN CHAUCER'S <i>THE CANTERBURY TALES</i>	29
2.1. Wife of Bath	30
2.2. Nuns in <i>The Canterbury Tales</i>	38

CHAPTER III

3. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN <i>THE DECAMERON</i> AND IN <i>THE CANTERBURY TALES</i>	43
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CONCLUSION47

WORKS CITED50

Introduction

Giovanni Boccaccio and Geoffrey Chaucer are not only two of the most prominent writers of medieval Europe but also the works which they produced can be read as literary documentations of medieval life, values, philosophy, religion and institutions. The *Decameron* by Boccaccio and *The Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer in particular are regarded as the highest literary achievements of the era. These two influential figures unfolding the complex web of their societies portray vivid pictures of the major male and female types of their age in looks, types of behaviour and attitude towards specific moral and societal issues concerning various facets of human nature.

This thesis aims to make a comparative analysis of how medieval women are depicted in their two prominent works of art; the *Decameron*, by Boccaccio, and *The Canterbury Tales*, by Chaucer through the frame tales and stories narrated by the female protagonists with specific reference to Fiammetta and the Wife of Bath.

By portraying women with their aspirations, hopes, sorrows and hardships encountered in the background of the Middle Ages, these two masterpieces provide the perfect foundation to delve into the complexities of women's inner selves of the time.

As far as the themes and narrative structures are concerned, there are apparent structural and thematic similarities between these works as Chaucer is said to have been greatly influenced by Boccaccio. However, both of them have their own unique ways of treating and handling characters and events in various aspects of life. The *Decameron* is structured in a frame narrative. It opens with seven young and beautiful women and three young men of similar age belonging to the same social group, that is, Florentine nobility coming together at Santa Maria Novella Church in Florence to find a way of escaping from the destruction of Black Death, the plague while, at the same time, mourning for the people who were the victims of this disease. The young men whom the women met at the church have names carrying symbolic meanings: Panfilo (completely in love), Filostrato (frustrated) and Dioneo

(lustful). Their decision is to leave the city to protect themselves from the epidemic and its devastating effects and enjoy life in one of the villas in the countryside instead of living in fear and grief. In addition, they all agree to follow the guidance of a man to make the right decision, as women naturally do not know how to make reasonable and right decisions in a group. In fact, all they want is basically to forget the plague which was a catastrophic event of the time. Within this frame tale, each traveller is expected to narrate a tale in each of the ten days they are to spend away from their hometown.

In *The Canterbury Tales*, on the other hand, thirty pilgrims, one being the narrator, are described in a tavern, Tabolt Inn, right outside London to set out on a pilgrimage to Canterbury in order to offer their devotions at the shrine of Saint Thomas a' Becket. Before they start the journey, they decide that each pilgrim will narrate one tale on the way to Canterbury and another on the way back. Chaucer, as himself a pilgrim tells the frame tale in which all the characters are introduced, and presents their interaction with one another dramatically. The pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales*, unlike the travellers of the *Decameron* are representative of the society of the time and belong to different age groups and thus pursue a variety of occupations and interests.

When the treatment of the female characters in these works is considered, Boccaccio and Chaucer are both seen to have displayed the conditions, feelings, expectations and problems of women with a great deal of sympathy, which may rank them among those who are ahead of their times. In fact, although feminism is a modern phenomenon, these two works of medieval literature can be read and interpreted from a feminist point of view within the boundaries of the respective period. There is no doubt that both poets have an enlightened view of the women of their times. To exemplify, Alison, the narrator in *The Wife of Bath*, in *The Canterbury Tales* shows some elements of early feminist thought (Vaneckova, 2007) and as S.H. Rigby has asserted, Alison can even be conceived as a feminist prototype (2000). Furthermore, Chaucer's attention to *The Wife* being highly sympathetic is also noteworthy in revealing his ideal conceptions and views of women. In the Middle Ages feminism, both as a word and an ideology had obviously not been

experienced but it is also true that *The Wife of Bath* as depicted in the “Prologue” to her tale is a figure that represents the feminist slant according to various critics. She speaks up for the equality of men and women and underlines the significance of life experience claiming that “experience” is on a par with “ecclesiastical of learning” (Wife of Bath’s Prologue, III, 1-5). *The Wife of Bath* even talks about the supremacy of female wisdom and fair authority and as a working woman and business owner through inheritance, she challenges the patriarchal system of the Middle Ages. Similarly, as it is stated in the context of Michael Calabrese, *Feminism and Packaging of Boccaccio’s Fiammetta*, in the *Decameron*, Fiammetta presents feminist elements as an outspoken and arrogant lady among other female characters (1997). In the *Decameron*, there are also some other characters which exhibit proto-feminist views, like Madonna Filippa whose story is narrated by Filostrato in the seventh story of the sixth day. Filippa, who is almost proud of herself by deceiving her husband, changes the law system defending herself in front of the judge. This can be seen as a great victory for a medieval woman while it is a big defeat for the husband. In the tale of Fiammetta (first day, fifth story-from now on in numerical form, 1.5), Marchioness is an example of a medieval noble woman. She displays her wit and intelligence by putting a distance between her and the King of France who tries to flirt with her and she defends herself to preserve her virtue. Lady Isabella, the character in the tale of Pampinea (7.6) is a very clever woman who enjoys her life and succeeds to manage the relation between the husband, the lover and the knight who loves and desires her. Thus, in many of the stories in the *Decameron* both autonomy and capability are given to women that are able to profit from their wit and intelligence (Schaus, 2006).

Without referring to the socio-economic, religious and political characteristics of the Medieval Period, it is almost impossible to deeply conceive the underlying causes of behaviors of the characters in general and women in particular in the Tales. Generally "Middle Ages" is considered to be “The Dark Ages” not just because life was dark and very tiring for the common people but also because the strict religious and political hierarchies of the period allowed for no economic, social or individual liberties to any persons or groups. It is an obvious fact that the most important institution that dominated the social and the spiritual life of all classes at that time

was the Church. It had its own strict rules and it was very influential in everyday life. Even learning and science were under the control of the Church and no questioning or progress in these areas were allowed without the permission of the Church (Kidd-Richards, 2002). It was believed that God was all-powerful. He was the only one who could explain all the workings of the world, and consequently scientific observations and investigations were considered to be heretic. Every aspect of life was controlled and dominated by feudal and religious norms. The feudal system of hierarchy was based on loyalties, obligations and land ownership. The King and the Pope were at the top and serfs and peasants were at the bottom of the hierarchy. In other words, the inequality in feudal society did not leave any space for change of any sort. In this sense, both poets ironically and sometimes implicitly criticized the prevalent system through the characters' perspectives. When the ascribed roles of women in Medieval Europe led by the feudal rules and harsh religious norms of the Church are considered, it is quite obvious that they experienced challenging lives on which they had almost no control. That is why, some of the women in the tales are revolutionary and rebellious at times to express themselves overtly in the society.

With regards to women's value and role in the medieval society, their image was ambiguous, gloomy and blackened with the restrictions that were practised over them and the tales display the women longing for their own wishes and dreams which cannot be actualized and satisfied within the restrictions of the traditions which determine their roles in such a society where, whether aristocratic or middle class, there is a hierarchy based on gender. In the families the father and the male children were always at the top of the hierarchical order and the mother and the daughters at the bottom (Marcotte, 2007). As such, their importance was underestimated and undervalued both economically and socially creating more obstacles for women in every aspect of life. This patriarchal system was in need of women but yet, they had to be always under control of the patriarchal order which reveals a big conflict in the society as they were often constrained in terms of education, business and living conditions. According to Albrecht Classen, women had to choose between becoming nuns or wives (2007), because they had to live or be trained at home by their fathers or husbands or even by a brother, who were considered their superiors. Their opinions and wishes remained a matter of

speculation, hidden behind the male authority representing the existing hierarchy. In other words, lacking freedom of choice, they were subjected to male authority figures (Opitz, 1994) of whom they were merely the objects. In a sense, this ongoing silence caused a loss of their identities in the feudal structure and removed them from a secure place in the community.

Despite the aforementioned difficulties, aristocratic women, to a larger extent were often both politically and economically more powerful than their counterparts in the lower strata representing peasants and townswomen and they had a significant role, particularly in the locality through their landholding and patronage (Ward, 2006). In other words, the higher in rank or nobility women were, the more power they had. In the meantime, the cities created new corporate bodies such as the guilds having patriarchal vision of the social order which was contemptuous of women's work and the communes which hindered women's active participation in business. Thus, women were always dominated by men in all aspects of trade (Bitel, 2002). Although men and women worked almost in the same categories, their work identities were very different. While male work identity was shaped by age, class and training, female work identity was shaped within the social events such as marriage, motherhood or widowhood. So their occupations were often changeable and for this reason, their security in working area was not so sufficient. Therefore, Weisner identified the guilds as key players in women's exclusion (2000). In fact, no matter what her class was, the woman was effectively the husband's property.

In spite of the majority of wives and mothers, with all homely responsibilities, there were also nuns and anchoresses who had significant roles in the Medieval Era. Especially monasteries for women were very popular as they opened a life outside the marriage, holding positions of authority (Burton- Stöber, 2008). This life style gave women an opportunity to enjoy the privilege of having a status in a secure place and get new responsibilities which they, out of the nunneries or convents, could never get and practice power in social life. Therefore, the nunneries could be seen as refuges for women in this era. However, while the Church was depicted as a holy place where there were strict rules for the medieval people, Boccaccio and Chaucer never hesitated to criticize the clergy that always impacted

the life, especially the nuns in their works. A woman's role in *The Canterbury Tales* and in the *Decameron* is firmly set as either that of a nun, or that of a wife reflecting the realities as Christianity in Chaucer's England and Boccaccio's Italy was not only a system of belief, but a way of life. Therefore, Chaucer's and Boccaccio's women should be dealt with within the framework underlying their social status as being married or belonging to a religious order.

CHAPTER I

1. WOMEN IN BOCCACCIO'S THE *DECAMERON*

Boccaccio's ideology can be assumed to be a "proto-feminist" view, but this has always been a matter of debate. Michael Calabrese explains Boccaccio's approach to women in his *Feminism and the Packaging of Boccaccio's Fiammetta* as follows:

If the modern humanist term "feminist" can at all apply to pre-modern texts, it very well might apply here, for in his work Boccaccio does not neglect the agency of women in history and does not ignore the effects of religious, institutional and cultural power on women. (1997: 20).

However he denies the definition of Fiammetta as "an ardent and outspoken feminist" as stated by Mariangela Causa – Steindler (1990: 180). What is certain is that in the *Decameron*, the reader is introduced to the stories of intelligent, lusty, witty and humorous women who are always praised by Boccaccio.

The *Decameron* is the first example written in prose form using a large number of female characters to show different perspectives about a subject. Fiammetta, Elissa, Filomena, Neifile, Emilia, Pampinea and Lauretta were Boccaccio's fictitious characters who present his own views with a great deal of sympathy. Furthermore, these female characters exhibited courage, wit, naiveness, humor and intellectual capacity (Allen, 2002).

Women play many roles in the *Decameron* and Boccaccio puts them in charge of almost all aspects of their lives for their independence, courage and intelligence. They are Boccaccio's both inspiration and intended audience. Especially Fiammetta is a woman who inspired Boccaccio to a great extent. She acts like the head of the *brigata*, meaning a group of people in English, can be considered as the unique voice who shows resistance to a discourse dominated by male narrators. As

Margaret Schaus states in her book *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* (2006) Fiammetta takes an important role similar to Dante's Beatrice or Petrarch's Laura. Unlike Dante and Petrarch, Boccaccio's Fiammetta is more sensual. Therefore, it would be necessary to observe Fiammetta in Boccaccio's life as she is unreachable and special. The most crucial thing is the fact that Lady Fiammetta appeared in Boccaccio's writings when he was in Naples. Fiammetta could be entirely a product of his imagination or a character whom Boccaccio really knew. In any case, Fiammetta became the woman whose effect on him can be felt deeply such as in his *The Elegy of Lady Fiammetta*, narrated in the first person, and announced herself from the very outset as an outspoken feminist (Steindler- Mauch, 5). At the same time, she acts as one of the noble storytellers in the *Decameron*.

Generally in the *Decameron* women storytellers center more upon women's desire to protect themselves from arrogant or jealous husbands than on women's desire to have sexual satisfaction with their lovers (Migiel, 2003) or sometimes just to have fun or alteration in their monotonous lives. For instance, in the fifth novel of the seventh day, told by Fiammetta, the intelligent wife gives a lesson to the jealous husband by taking the lover in the house while the husband is guarding in front of the house door. And in the tale of Madonna Isabella, told by Pampinea, the wife with two lovers of a knight eludes from the dangerous event with her tricky lies (7.6). She is in charge of the situation and she is capable enough to convince her husband although her lover and the knight by whom she is loved come together at the same time and at the same place. She introduces her lover to her husband as a man who escapes from the knight's rage and the kindhearted husband prevents the knight not to do anything harmful to the young man. Thus, the husband unknowingly preserves him. Here, the skilful speech of Madonna Isabella plays a significant role in the love triangle. Neifile, in the first tale of the eighth day, tells about a character called Gulfardo who borrows money from Guasparuolo. In this tale love is something which is sold. Gulfardo falls in love with Madonna Abruogio, Guasparuolo's wife. He confesses his love to the lady, but in return for it the lady asks hundred florins. Thus, it is a tale of a loving man who gets disappointed in return of his great love. Although many stories deal with tricks that women play on men, Neifile's story is just the opposite, as it is a story in which a man plays a trick on a woman

(Thompson, 1996). She calls the heroine of the story as an “evil woman”. According to Neifile and other female members of the *brigata*, honesty and virtue are two extremely important features that a woman must possess.

Boccaccio’s women are not only the narrators but they have significant roles in the tales of the two male narrators, too. One of Boccaccio’s male narrators, Dioneo gives the example of a married woman whose sexual desire exhibits superiority over the male characters in the tale of Paganino da Monaco (2.10). A notorious pirate kidnaps the beautiful and young wife of Riccardo di Chinzica, the judge. The young wife feels sorrow at first, however, after some time, when she finds the comfort and the sexual satisfaction that she can not get from her old husband, she forgets him and enjoys the pleasures of life. Although the husband finds them at the end, the satisfied wife refuses to go back with him and chooses to stay with the pirate. Therefore; it can be said that lust, sexual desire, comfort and most of the time entertainment are notable elements in the lives of medieval women. Here, it would be right to refer to Aldo Scaglione who suggests Boccaccio’s approach is very straight. Thus, it is natural for the young priest to satisfy a young and vigorous woman and it is equally natural for a young woman to accept the pleasures offered by the priest (1963). Moreover, the old husband realizes that it is his own fault to marry a beautiful and attractive woman whose expectations may differ throughout the life span.

In the tale of Madonna Filippa told by Filostrato, the second male narrator, (6.7) the reader is introduced to the significant wit and courage of a medieval woman who deceives her husband. By defending her adultery successfully, she gains a victory in front of the court. When she explains her dissatisfaction with her husband in a very clever and reasonable way, the court is convinced and her wily behaviour is justified in the society. Another striking point in this tale is that the lover is never mentioned. She expresses her case logically in front of the judges by herself. The question she addresses is: “She has given everything that husband wanted and needed. But what about her needs and desires?” (Furst, 1997: 74). By doing so, she even changes the law system.

Although many of Boccaccio’s tales exhibit the male as the stronger sexual being, the wit of women was often presented to the reader both by the male and

female story tellers. Another example, is the tale of Filomena who tells the story of a noblewoman, Madonna Oretta (6.1), presents the wit of a woman. It is one of the briefest stories, however it reflects both the condition and the image of a woman who is frustrated by the incompetent storyteller, the knight. On the way from one place to another she accepts the company of a knight who travels by horse. However, his repetitive silly and redundant stories disturb her and instead of keeping silent in front of the knight, she tries to move away from him with a quick response.

Lisa Perfetti states in her book *Women and Laughter in Medieval Comic Literature* (2003) that Madonna Oretta is an intelligent woman who emphasizes that storytelling needs art and skill. Filomena, the narrator, shows that a woman can successfully find out a solution with her witty remarks. Thus, Madonna Oretta does not express her discontent directly, but she explains that her reason for feeling dizzy is due to the horseriding in order not to offend the knight. Therefore, instead of remaining voiceless, she responds, just like the Marchioness does to the King of France in Fiammetta's novella. Her clever replies stop the king's desires just like in the story of Madonna Oretta whose responses stop the knight to tell nonsense stories. In both stories Boccaccio exhibits the wit of women who are in nobility and they are given the ability to use the language in a very prudent way.

Boccaccio often emphasizes the needs and desires of women and he reinforces his approach with the characters in the tales. The tale of Rinaldo d'Asti, again narrated by Filostrato highlights this situation (2.2). The tale is about a widow who spends a few hours with a man. One evening outside her house she notices a wounded man and with her servant she takes him in. She prepares a warm bath and meal for the man. Finally she offers to spend the night together which will be a therapy for her soul and loneliness while it will be a pleasure for the man. Lillian Furst mentions that woman's sexuality is revealed once more by Boccaccio in the *Decameron*. Even for her desire and need, the woman trusts the man whom she meets by chance and without hesitation she lives what she eagerly desires and she never questions the rest (1997).

1.1 Fiammetta in the *Decameron*

In the group, Fiammetta is a kind of leader among her companions and her tales reflect her character in the *brigata*. Her resistance, struggle and ability to control bring about a strong and a decisive woman image in the harsh realities of the Middle Ages. Fiammetta takes the pivotal part in Boccaccio's works, as she is considered his great love in Naples. Perhaps that is why most of her tales take part in the South part of Italy. In the *Decameron* at the end of the fourth day she is described in a very enchanting and detailed way as in the extract from the English version below:

Fiammetta, whose locks were curled and long golden and fell over her white and delicate shoulders and whose soft rounded face was all resplendent with white lilies and vermeil roses commingled, with two eyes in her head as they were those of a peregrine falcon and a dainty little mouth, the lips where of seemed twin rubies" answered. I take it willingly (1995: 359).

Fiammetta in her ten novellas describes women from different social status, portraying female desire for lust. The women images are more apparent in eight novellas, which are The Marchioness of Monferrato, Andreuccio da Perugia, The Tale of Ricciardo Minutolo, Prince Tancredi of Salerno, Federigo delgi Alberighi, The Jealous Merchant, The Tale of Spinelloccio and Zeppa and The Tale of Calandrino. In the *Decameron*, Fiammetta is an outspoken lady just like The Wife of Bath in *The Canterbury Tales* which will be analyzed in the next chapter. In fact, they are both proud of themselves as they have the ability to draw others' attention. Fiammetta's manners and quick responses towards Dioneo prove this.

1.1.1 Fiammetta's Novellas

During the escape from the plague, each member of the *brigata* is expected to tell one tale. Most of the tales told until the fourth day, are about adultery, sexual and other illicit relationships. However, on the fourth day the male narrator, Dioneo taking the lead of the group, tells a story which turns the atmosphere into a gloomy one. As the *brigata* gets so frustrated by the unhappy themes and endings of the tales,

when Fiammetta takes over the responsibility of the fifth day, she decides to tell stories of bright finales. Therefore, as a spokesperson she tries to save the day with her way of telling stories and tries to find remedies to relieve both her comrades and the gloomy atmosphere in which they live. It can be concluded that in the *Decameron*, Fiammetta is a constructive character which is a proof of her steadiness. Generally her tales are based on superior ladies who are not typical medieval characters, such as the Marchioness in the fifth novel of the first day or Madonna Giovanna who has a hopeless lover in the ninth tale of the fifth day. Mostly, Fiammetta's tales are the response to Dioneo's tales since he represents a dominant male figure in the *Decameron*. So, she reorganizes the ambiance again with a happy ending, excluding the view of Dioneo in the *brigata*, although Boccaccio always sets the events with her counterpart, Dioneo. She always wants to create a more positive light telling happy ending stories with a particular emphasis on women's negotiations for power. Fiammetta narrates ten stories whose titles are as follows:

1. Marchioness of Monferrato
2. Andreuccio da Perugia
3. Ricciardo Minutolo
4. Prince Tancredi e his daughter Ghismonda
5. Federigo degli Alberighi
6. Michele Scalza
7. The Jealous Merchant
8. Spinelloccio e Zeppa
9. Calandrino, the Lover
10. Carlo, the King

(Day 1, Tale 5) Marchioness: her wit and intelligence:

In this novella Fiametta presents a noble woman Marchioness of Monferrato whose intelligence comes to the forefront. Marchioness reverses the advances of the King of France, who visits her while her husband is away. He hopes that since her husband is away, he will be able to seduce her. The lady invites him for dinner and she serves different types of chickens. The king intends to bring the subject to sexuality and reproduction using hens and chickens as examples and tries to flirt with her, however, her clever reply makes him stop his attempts at jesting with her. When the King turns to her and says: "Madam, are there only hens and no cocks born in this part of the country" The Marchioness answers without any hesitation: "No, my lord, but though they may differ in dress and rank, the women here are the same as they are elsewhere" (1995: 73). She uses the chicken feast as a framing event and she puts him to shame as he compares women to hens. So the king leaves without revealing his real intentions. The Marchioness ironically shows that in order to defend her virtue, she understates her beauty hiding it successfully, and depicts a world where there are many differences and where, everyone looks like everyone else. Thus, the king understands that he has to get through his passion and desire for the woman whom he meets for the first time.

Boccaccio in this story presents a powerful woman character who trusts herself and puts a distance between the man and herself. At this point, Marchioness is in charge of the situation. She is the one who speaks more than the man. Actually, Fiammetta's aim is to show how women could be witty even if they are seen as sexual objects and with the skillful speech of Marchioness, Migiel asserts that Fiammetta's support for women is obvious. Boccaccio indicates the wit of the woman directly and he most probably does this on purpose (Migiel, 2003).

Marchioness plays her role at the right time. Within this manner, the king finds himself locked, although he imagines he could take advantage of that lady whose husband had gone away. In this tale, woman is shown to be able to use her wit, in the way in which she manipulates the language in order to respond to a situation that is unpleasant to her. Rather than being silent voices, women respond. Moreover, the Marchioness is admired by the seven women of the *brigata* as her

answer is in a very clever discourse and like a lesson to the inappropriate behaviour of the king not to be repeated again. Fiammetta is a crucial character for the development of arguments about gender difference and she believes that women know how to protect themselves from the attention of noble men who try to make use of them as it is seen in the story of the Marchioness. She often indicates the virtue and the intellectuality of the Marchioness. And according to her it is a sign of great perception. With her skillful replies and witty remarks she manages to keep distance and she reminds the king he should distinguish every human being from one another who relies on his rank. Therefore, the Marchioness is an example of a noble and an educated lady who knows how to behave politically in a sudden and an unexpected circumstance. She is not naive, in the sense that she is conscious in case of misfit.

(Day 2, Tale 5) Andreuccio da Perugia: a woman who plays upon a man

This story is told by Fiammetta in the fifth novella of the second day and the setting of action is Naples. As Boccaccio spent his most fruitful years in Naples, in most of his works it is the crucial location where his literary life was shaped with his source of inspiration, Fiammetta (Gittes, 2008). However, in this tale Naples is presented mostly in a symbolical way where people attempt to rob or steal easily. The virtuous people are less than dishonest people and they act as if there is no law system.

The theme of the day is power of luck. In this tale, the image of the woman is much more different than the Marchioness or other female characters in the tales. While Andreuccio represents “naive” the woman, Fiordaliso, a Sicilian prostitute, is the evil one. She hides her own real identity and he never suspects her. Moreover, he is affected by her beauty. First of all, she gets all the information from an old woman who knows Andreuccio’s family very well and then she starts to play. She tells him that he is the brother who she has been looking for years. She makes up such a story that the poor guy believes. At last he finds himself in a trap. Everything is organized so well by Fiordaliso that, although he is robbed, he is the one who goes away. This is his first misfortune through which he loses everything. On the way he meets two men who convince him to make money in the same night. The priest of Naples would be buried that day and these two men want Andreuccio to help them to rob his

grave. When he starts to do so, hearing noises, those two grave robbers run away leaving Andreuccio in the grave which is the second misfortune. In the meantime, he manages to take the ruby ring of the priest, when other grave robbers come to do the same thing. They see him in the grave and they are scared as they think that there is someone alive there so they run away without looking behind. Finally, the big horsedealer comes safe out of these serious adventures that take place in one night. In Yashinsky's book *Tales For An Unknown City*, Mariella Bertelli states that "typical folk hero, Andreuccio, finds himself in adventure without noticing and somehow he successfully gets rid of these evil events at least with a ruby ring and a bit of satisfaction" (1990: 22). He is easily tricked because of his credulity. He got out from his town for the first time and departed to Naples without any hesitation, hearing only that it was a good market place for a good trade and good money. However as soon as he arrives, he encounters three unexpected strange events in one night, from all which he manages to escape by chance.

Andreuccio is such an unsuspecting man that he is convinced to go to an unknown person's house in a city about which he does not know anything. On the other hand, although the young woman is a prostitute she never comes on stage using her sexual availability to Andreuccio, on the contrary, she directly puts the distance saying that she is his sister. According to Marilyn Migiel, Fiammetta shows the reader how well a woman narrates a story and convinces Andreuccio that everything told is true (2003). In this way, the wit of the woman is associated with her wily behaviour. Unfortunately, he pays the consequences of his gullibility while she displays her intelligence. At the end, Andreuccio compensates his loss haphazardly. In fact, it can be said that he learns how to be shrewd as he hides the ring from the other grave robbers and he finds the way to get out of the well by frightening them when he is left alone before. Consequently, Andreuccio regains his loss after two inauspicious events and in the third one his misfortune turns to fortune as he acts more prudently when he meets the other robbers. And he reaches a happy ending.

(Day 3, Tale 6) Story of Ricciardo Minutolo: (adultery) a man who plays upon a woman

This novella is told by Fiammetta on the third day and the theme of the day is individual agency, industriousness, sexual liberty and jealousy from the point of women images as portrayed in the text.

In the *Decameron*, especially in Fiammetta's tales wives seem to be loyal to their husbands, however sometimes they cannot prevent themselves from falling in lusty love affairs. The action tends to focus on the lover, not on the husband. The most striking event happens between Ricciardo and Filippello's wife. In the story Ricciardo deludingly prevails an intrigue to get himself in bed with Catella. Although he is married, he eagerly wants to find remedies to be alone with her. He arranges ceremonies in order to attract her attention. First, the lady gets angry, tries to resist, however, she finds herself in a tricky game, organized by Ricciardo. Once she has that sexual encounter with him, they continue to live this lusty love affair. Although at the beginning Catella is introduced as a wife who has a deep love for her husband and has no interest in Ricciardo, at the end of the story, she completely changes and she becomes the lover of Ricciardo. For Myriam Swennen Ruthenberg, the inevitable deception is shaped with Ricciardo's sexual desire and Catella's lack of reason. She is convinced by the skillful speech of Ricciardo about her husband's infidelity. Accordingly, the jealousy that controls Catella deeply arouses the reason for deception (2014). Thus, Catella believes what she hears and she never questions what is told. In other words, she is completely ruled by jealousy and her behaviour is conditioned by a gossip which is put in her mind by Ricciardo. In addition, in this tale silence and darkness are the prominent elements of this secret affair. Catella is trapped in silence and darkness when she wants to set a trap for her husband. Not to be recognized, she keeps silent in the dark and she makes love with Ricciardo unknowingly. When the situation reveals, her scream is silenced by him. In a sense extreme jealousy can be a weakness for person. As a result, this situation turns to an advantage for Ricciardo while it is a shame in the beginning for Catella, however, in time she reacts as Ricciardo wishes and they both enjoy their togetherness. In a way Ricciardo discovers the hidden emotions of Catella.

Migiel affirms that according to Fiammetta men are "the privileged" of the time, and they have the advantages of social and political power to intrigue (2003). So, in this story despite Catella's great love for her husband, she finds herself directly in an inevitable love affair. As she does not refuse Ricciardo, she continues to keep her relationship with him readily. In this story, the roles are exchanged. The reader meets a woman who is not noble and naive, but is willing to live her own life. At the end of the story although she notices the reality, she leaves her control directly to Ricciardo and instead of giving up the situation, she remains voiceless and prefers to live the sexual liberty with him.

(Day 4, Tale 1) Prince Tancredi of Salerno: unhappy ending story

The fourth day of the *Decameron* is crucial as the theme of the stories have tragic endings. The theme of the first tale of this day is unhappy love. It is set at Salerno, an ancient city in the South of Naples.

The two main characters of this story are a father and his daughter and the minor character is Giuscardo as the unfortunate lover of the daughter. The beautiful daughter of Prince Tancredi of Salerno has a kind of life which is shaped by her father and his extreme addiction to his daughter ends in a very tragic way.

Ghismonda's first marriage does not last long and she comes back to live with her father again. After a short time Ghismonda falls in love with Giuscardo, a young man in her father's service. Giuscardo loves her as well, and they meet in secret for a certain period. One day Tancredi comes to Ghismonda's room to see her when she is out and he sits to wait for her and hides himself behind the curtain. Then he falls asleep. Unfortunately, Ghismonda and Giuscardo enter the bedroom when he is there. When Tancredi witnesses accidentally their lovemaking, he is deeply shocked. He had created a world only for himself and the daughter and in this world no one can take place as a third person. Thinking all these details, at night Giuscardo is caught by the guards and kept in prison. Giuscardo who is determined for his love says: "Love is far more powerful than either you or I" (Boccaccio, 1995: 296). However, Giuscardo is killed by the father and his heart is put in a cup to be sent to the daughter. Thus, he proves his great love by losing his life. In spite of the

disapproval of the father, Ghismonda never hesitates to give up her enormous love. She hopelessly drinks a poison. Tancredi finds her just before death and he promises to bury her and Giuscardo together and he will be the one who suffers the most in the end. Ghismonda uses the removed heart of Giuscardo to allow their love to triumph over the jealousy of Tancredi.

In his book, *Philosophy and Humanism* Edward P. Mahoney states that the love and commitment of the father change places with his jealousy and vindictiveness. In the stories of the *Decameron* the role of the jealous husband is given to the father in this tale. According to Mahoney, with this story Boccaccio can seem contemporary and through Ghismonda he appears as a public speaker for sexual freedom and blazing youth. For love and youth he rebels against the parental authority which demolishes the dreams and the happiness of Ghismonda (1976).

The remarkable point about the character of Ghismonda is that she is a strong woman, determined to keep her love for the beloved and she does not care about her life at all costs. However, this story is a big example of a hopeless and irredeemable medieval woman as her life style is shaped by her father. For the father Ghismonda's feelings had no sense at all. Although she is a stubborn character she pays this with her life and the real winner is again the male character, the father. She tries to proclaim her voice, but again it is witnessed that woman is speechless at all. It is true that the situation of Ghismonda reflects the social conditions of medieval women who are dominated by fathers, husbands or other male relatives. This novella is a kind of tragedy and Fiammetta tells this story on purpose because she wants to emphasize the gloomy days that they are living in with this tale, especially under the pessimistic theme of the fourth day. On the other hand, she wants her comrades to tell only happy ending stories for a while and insists others to do so. She believes that it is the only way to get rid of the harsh realities of the period for a little time.

(Day 5, Tale 9) Federigo degli Alberighi: Social connectedness and inheritance in feudal order

The ninth story of the fifth day is important, not only because of the content of the story, but because Fiammetta, the Queen of the day, is the one who tells the

story. This story is perhaps the most well-known of all the tales in the *Decameron*. In the society of the fourteenth century wealth and affluence were not among the facts of an average person's life. Chance was a more important factor especially for the merchant class. If someone was rich one day, the following day he could lose all his wealth. The tale of *Federigo degli Alberighi* takes place in the real world where there are social and economic limitations. Federigo is a noble by birth, falls in love with a noble, married woman at the beginning, but later a widow, Madonna Giovanna.

“He loves her according to the codes of chivalry, and continues to admire her from a distance, until he eventually spends all of his wealth trying to impress his lady” (Masterson, 2008: 35). As a result, Federigo loses everything except a little farm and a falcon which is a very special kind in the world. Giovanna is a widow who dedicates her life in the countryside to her young son whose health problems get worse and worse everyday, which makes Giovanna very concerned. And she claims that he cannot get well unless he takes Federigo's finest falcon. Thus, she is determined to save her son, and as a result, Giovanna goes to Federigo who is very surprised to see her and offers to have dinner. He realizes that he does not have any food to serve for a noble lady like Giovanna, and without hesitation his falcon is prepared for the meal. After the meal, Giovanna feels courageous enough to express her request and wants him to do a great favor for the sick son. Federigo, inevitably confesses what he has done. Giovanna realizes that his love for her is deep and pure. Finally he admits that he loves her so much that he would spend everything just as he did in the past if he could. Unfortunately, her son dies and she remains without a heir to the lands she owns. Her brothers push her to marry and she insists that she will marry Federigo, otherwise she won't marry anyone else. First, this is not approved by the brothers as he is very poor, but later having learned the story, they consent to the wedding and they live happily for the rest of their lives.

In his analysis, *Happy Endings? Resting Women and the Economy of Love in Day Five of Boccaccio's Decameron* Ray Fleming proclaims that “Federigo's passion for Giovanna is a noble passion” as he is very emotional and knows how to keep his feelings, never insists on obtaining Giovanna, the desired woman. From a feminist point of view, the proof of his nobility and generosity by sacrificing his

prize falcon for Giovanna, is the choice of Federigo to respect and accept her indifferent attitude (1993: 31). In a way, he bows to the inevitable. In fact, the priority for Giovanna is to rescue her diseased son but nothing else at the beginning of the story but she inevitably endures the pain of his death at the end. The image of the falcon is extremely deep since it can be seen as a kind of symbol for a passionate “love”; it is love, hope and wish for the diseased son for Giovanna and unrequited love, hope and sacrifice for Federigo. The victimized falcon will lead Federigo to the happy marriage. Also his noble status is displayed symbolically by the falcon. In the Middle Ages hunting was a major economic and leisure activity for the aristocracy, especially it was a criterion for the nobility and a kind of entertainment for these people (Schaus, 2006). Thus, Federigo coming from a noble family, had the same privileges before he lost all his wealth, except his falcon which was his unique possession.

The tale of Federigo is very positive although both Federigo and Giovanna lose their beloved ones. There is a great sacrifice for a deep love and sacrifice is an important fact in the chivalric code, just as it is stated in the great love of Federigo for Giovanna. Money, land, even his valuable falcon are not as important as his lady and he quickly gives them all up for her. The medieval idea of Fortune’s Wheel is clearly seen in this tale. Federigo’s life takes him where he was in the beginning. So, in this story, the death of the ill son was indispensable. It points out the turning of the Wheel of Fortune for both Giovanna and Federigo, thus the son has to die for the union of Federigo and Giovanna. Consequently wealth turns back to Federigo again (Masterson, 2008). So, this tale can be considered a cheerless tale, however with the happy ending, there comes out a modification. The story of Federigo and Giovanna demonstrates that life must continue, and the theme of Wheel of Fortune is clearly seen again. Sometimes circumstances may be awful, but fortunes turn back to find you and happiness shows itself as the Wheel keeps turning. On the other hand, in this tale the image of woman is much more different than the medieval type of woman. She is extremely conscious of what she wants, aware of her desires and is sure about her feelings, so she never listens to her brothers and keeps struggling and she never chooses to be independent as a widow who possesses lands. When love is great and deep, she gets loud and lives her life according to her choices.

**(Day 7, Tale 5) The Jealous Merchant: Jealous husband and a betrayal
of his wife**

The theme of the fifth story of the seventh day is a jealous husband who presents himself to his wife as a priest to hear her confession in the church. When the witty wife is aware of the situation that she is in, she tells him that she loves a priest who comes every night for her. The bewildered and angry husband starts to wait in front of the door and warns her to lock everywhere. In the meantime, the lady takes her lover in from the hidden hole and passes the night with him and from that day on, she often comes together with her lover without being noticed. Thus, the wife proves herself and her husband that if a person wants to cheat, she or he can do it anytime and everywhere. In fact, both the wife and the husband deceive each other. The wife with the young guy and the husband by telling lies to keep her under control. This shows that there is a lack of confidence between the couple. Despite the precautions, the fearless and decisive wife lives her own life when she wants. Therefore, the wife is portrayed as someone who is more intelligent and courageous than the husband. Even if the theme of adultery is very obvious in this story, it never comes up to the surface, whereas the wit of the wife is emphasized or pronounced.

In her book, *Wandering Women and Holy Matrons* Leigh Ann Craig states that Boccaccio emphasizes adulterous topics on purpose to display the truth of masculine jealousy of women's behaviour, however he still presents an unusual reason for the infidelity and adultery of women. Because of the unsupportable, jealous acts of the husbands, women get mad, thus they find themselves in illicit relationships (2009). In addition, according to Wayne Booth, the husband deserves this comic punishment, because the wife's imprisonment in the house prompts her to behave shrewdly (1983). Finally, she manages to make her own life enjoyable. Therefore, the message of this novella is very strong. Noone has to make a fool of someone else, otherwise he is more likely to be a loser.

(Day 8, Tale) Story of Spinelloccio and Zeppa: Adultery and revenge

The theme of the eighth story of the eighth day is a mutual adultery. One of the two best friends, Spinelloccio has a sexual relationship with another friend's, Zeppa's wife. When the betrayed husband is aware of the situation he locks Spinelloccio in a chest with the help of the friend's wife and then he has a sexual relationship with her on the chest. Thus, the deceiving husband becomes the witness to his own deception unwillingly.

Here, adultery brings revenge, as well. Despite this, the story ends in a very peaceful way. Generally, the tales of Fiammetta are full of tricks and happy endings, but they may not seem reasonable. The reader is introduced to two lusty couples who have secret love affairs. What is more, the theme is related to two men who willingly share their wives. These agreements usually take place after each man has had sexual relations with the woman, and these relationships are notable because no rivalry develops between the two men when they discover each other's secret. What is striking is that, the wives perform readily what the husbands wish without any hesitation. So, they are ready to take revenge by deceiving each other. In fact, at this point, one of the most important social wounds of the medieval era is emphasized. Marriages used to be arranged ones, and therefore, if they are arranged for economic and heretic ends, then adultery is inevitable because the union between husband and wife lacks mutual love, and compassion. In addition, adultery is the common theme to some extent in most of the tales and these indiscreet affairs can be considered natural and even sometimes an enjoyable part of life. Therefore, the characters of Boccaccio are allowed to live their lives in a free way even if they are married. Furthermore, prudence and tolerance of the husbands are the important factors in the stories based on adultery. The betrayed husbands can believe in their wives easily or they can be reasonable towards wily behaviour of the wives (Bartley-Hastings, 1975).

According to Thomas Greene, the novella of Zeppa and Spinelloccio draws a very strong image of double adultery, thus reveals an immoral sexual intercourse between the couples (1968). The feeling of revenge reflects a realization that the

deception is a reciprocal instrument, which is sometimes an enjoyable part of life, but sometimes gets dangerous if misused.

(Day 9, Tale 5) Story of Calandrino: (adultery) two friends who play upon their friend

In her book *The Concept of Women* Prudence Allen states: “There is a balance among the male and female characters that moves towards a kind of complementarity: both are equally capable of vice and virtue and both are responsible for the consequences of their actions” (2002:301).

The theme of the fifth story of the ninth day is a trick upon a man whose love becomes the target of his friends’ fun. The consequence is shaped by the action and the gullibility of the hero. In the *Decameron*, Calandrino is a naive character in which he appears in different novellas, too. In this novella, he reveals as a hopeless lover who expects to be loved by Niccolosa, the desired, young woman. Calandrino’s friends who conduct him all the time, prepare an amulet, magic paper which is thought to bring him good luck in love. Once she is touched with it, she can not resist the power of its magic, so they will enjoy their reciprocal sexual desire. However, the power of magic blows out when Tessa, the wife of Calandrino, comes like a storm. While Calandrino, is in shame, Tessa is in rage and Boccaccio makes him the object of derision. According to Don Skemer Boccaccio portrays Calandrino as an amorous but foolish (2006) one. He believes what his friends say without any doubt and at the end this lustful desire turns to a seamy image. In this story, the reader is introduced to two different kinds of woman: Niccolosa as a lusty, passionate person who wants to enjoy the day and Tessa as a vindicator, insubmissive one who does not bury her head in the sand. In this way, the medieval wife draws a strong, voiced woman image.

(Day 10, Tale 6) The Story of King Carlo: The example of magnificence

The theme of the sixth tale of the tenth day is the magnanimity of the King Carlo. It is a story about a king who falls in love with the very young daughters of his friend. After noticing his foolish emotion, he avoids taking advantage of the girl and

he organizes marriages for both the girl and her sister. In general, this tale is not one of those which give priority to woman images, therefore, it has little relevance with regards to the subject matter of the thesis.

1.2. Women Images in Novellas not told by Fiammetta

Generally the tales of Fiammetta focus on wit and intelligence of women and are comprised of stories with happy endings. One of the other conspicuous ladies is Pampinea who develops the intelligence and will in a woman and tells stories that prove the intelligence and stupidity in men, as well (Allen, 2002). For instance, in the second tale of the third day narrated by Pampinea, the theme of both adultery and wit of a man reveals, however, this time adultery is stated in a different way. Here, the topic deals with the hostler who loves and has a sexual relationship with the queen without being noticed and the king who notices the situation. As the king does not want to be disgraced, he prefers to be silent but he promises himself to find the man who spends the night with his wife. He identifies the man and cuts his hair as a sign to recognize him the next day. However, the hostler who is more clever than the king cuts each servant's hair so that the king cannot find him. Next day when the king sees all the servants with a haircut, he understands that he is outwitted and decides not to talk but to say only one thing: "Let whoever did it never do it again, and now, with God's blessing, be off with you" (1996: 204). However, nobody realizes including the queen what he wants to mention except the cunning hostler, so both of them choose to be silent after one night love affair. In this tale, the reader encounters two clever men and a woman who is unaware of the situation. Everything is organized by these two male characters secretly not to reveal the reality for self-interest. Actually, there is a little detail about the role of a woman but all events take place around the female theme. In a way, the tale reflects the character of Pampinea, as well. She is a character who accepts the dominance of men in the group and women for her are to accept this male authority on the way to escape from the plague (Allen, 2002). She always tries to display the reality of the miserable world and reminds the reason for escaping with the guidance of the male companions. Therefore, in this male dominated tale she states the concurrence of two intelligent men who try to hide their secret not to be put in a shameful situation among people.

Another tale that displays woman's wit and intelligence is told again by Pampinea in the tale of Madonna Isabella. Isabella is a beautiful lady who enjoys life both with her husband and the lover at the same time. She is such an attractive woman that she is loved by Lambertuccio, another man who eagerly desires her. When the husband goes away, she immediately takes her lover in. One day when Isabella and her desired lover enjoy themselves, Lambertuccio comes to visit her to spend a beautiful day with her. All of a sudden, with the unexpected return of the husband, the two lovers and Lady Isabella are about to be caught. However, with her quick and witty reply she conceals what is going on and saves the lives of three men, saying that Sir Lambertuccio was chasing the young man with his sword who ran directly into the house just to hide and save his own life. So nobody was hurt. Moreover, the young lover and the husband become friends as he is shown the wretched one. Here, Craig mentions that the theme of the seventh day stories are the wives who deceive their husbands. The lovers can be easily infiltrated in the house by these women in front of their unaware husbands (2009). Even if the theme of adultery is very clear in this story, it is never the leading one as a moral weakness in the personality of the lady, but it is treated as a literary tool in the hands of the writer to emphasize her wit.

In the *Decameron* the intelligence of women is not only displayed by the female story tellers, but it is also stated in the tales of the male story tellers, such as Filostrato. One of the most striking tales is narrated by him in the seventh story of the sixth day. The heroine, Madonna Filippa is a crucial example of wit and courage of a medieval woman who deceives her husband. Although she is caught with her lover by the husband, her adulterous behavior is justified in the society and gains a victory in the court with her remarkable defence. Thus her sexual desire displays superiority and she uses it as a weapon to acquit and prove her rights as a social being. In her book, *The Feminist Encyclopedia of Italian Literature*, Rinaldina Russell states that in the *Decameron* the source of inspiration is the women and it appears protofeminist because women are permitted to speak and it approves sexual desire of women (1997). Therefore, Madonna Filippa reveals herself as an outspoken female character who challenges the patriarchal order in the harsh realities of the medieval world. As Marilyn Migiel states, Filippa is a woman who actively seeks sexual satisfaction.

And she also seeks to justify her choice (2003). Her clever response about her “surplus” does not only justify her in the court but also her victory is approved in the public life.

According to Lisa Perfetti, in the *Decameron* Boccaccio emphasizes the justification of women’s deception as an essential strategy to make equal unjust social norms through his novellas. Thus, the notion of wit is a necessary feature for women to use it under these harsh conditions of medieval life. So, Madonna Filippa exhibits a witty and insubmissive heroine who serves as a model of this situation.

1.3. Nuns in the *Decameron*

As mentioned previously, women always experienced difficulties in the Middle Ages. However, in Boccaccio’s *Decameron* we meet women who had significant roles in the society. They are always more lustful, more cunning or stronger than men. Boccaccio emphasizes this and gives a lot of examples in his novella including the story of Andreuola which is told by Panfilo in the sixth novel of the fourth day. It is a tale about two lovers who married secretly. The striking part of the tale is that the nightmares of the lovers during a sleep come true. And as soon as they tell these dreams of disaster to each other, Andreuola loses her lover, Gabriotto, all of a sudden. The girl does not want to marry anyone else and she prefers to have a life in the monastery in which she believes that she will find honesty and she lives as a nun for the rest of her life. In his book *Love and Marriage In The Age of Chaucer*, Henry A. Kelly mentions that, the reason of their secret marriage can be a proof of their great love that will continue till death (1975).

Panfilo this time in the fourth tale of the third day, tells a story about Priest Pucci, his wife and Don Felice, the monk. Priest Pucci is the man who is deceived by his wife and the monk. While the priest prays all the time with the belief of going to Heaven, the monk and the wife have a passionate and a lustful relationship making fun of him. In all these stories Boccaccio compares or demonstrates the relationship between men and women. Moreover, women who are in clergy are mocked by Boccaccio and they are shown not like nuns, but women who desire sex. In fact, sexual relationship is emphasized remarkably and both men and women are

introduced as lustful creatures. Women also have the ability to be very cunning. They always tend to make plans, such as Isabella, young nun or the abbess who makes love with the priest.

In terms of relationships in the church, there are several examples in the *Decameron*. For instance, in the first tale of the third day, narrated by Filostrato, the theme centers in the convent around a gardener and nine lusty nuns. Masetto who works as a gardener chooses to pretend to be a deaf mute as he does not know how to act among the nuns. After a short time the nuns plan to use this “innocent” guy sexually and begin to make love with him one by one. Thinking that being with a man is the greatest pleasure of the world, they continue to amuse themselves. However, making love with nine nuns almost everyday exhausts him and one day he decides to not go on telling a lie and talks. When the Abbess hears his voice, she thinks that he is bestowed by God with a miracle in return as they, being the holy people, have made love with him. Thus, the male voice speaks and he is paid well by the nuns provided that to keep silent about their sexual relationships and he takes the advantage of the situation. This time a male character becomes the sexual object of the nuns who satisfies their natural desires. The carnal activity of the nuns is so willing and constant that, Masetto is forced to find alternate solution to escape from the aroused feelings (Migiel, 2003).

In the third tale of the seventh day, Brother Rinaldo is narrated in an ironical way. He wants to be considered like other men, but not as a member of the church. Madonna who believes in Rinaldo is convinced by him to make love. Even the narrator, Elissa, is not sure why Brother Rinaldo is acting the way he does. Although both of them know that it is a sin, they make believe themselves that God will forgive them and finally when they are caught by the husband they have their answer. In this story, the Brother, the member of the clergy, has the control and the voice, when Madonna enjoys only the moment that she lives. There is another story about a nun who makes love with a priest in the second tale of the ninth day with Elissa’s story which deals with the uncongenial behaviour of an Abbess. In this tale, a beautiful young nun, Isabetta, is caught with her lover. The Abbess gets up from the bed to reprimand her. In a hurry, she puts the pants of the priest she is sleeping with

on her head instead of her veil. At first she begins to reprimand the beautiful nun, but having been warned by the latter about what she is wearing on her head, she prefers to be silent as she does the same thing (Bosch, 1994).

Almost, in all the tales about the clergy in the *Decameron* sin and insincerity take place. Boccaccio, here, emphasizes that the affair between the beautiful nun and her lover is excusable because it is inevitable. It is the natural event when man and woman meet. It does not matter if they are from clergy or not, because first of all they are human beings. However, the narrator, Elissa, does not sympathize with the other jealous nuns, who accuse Isabetta, or the unlikable Abbes and she claims that with the help of chance the others take lesson from the event. Thus the Abbes is described in the following terms: “a good and holy woman in the opinion of her nuns and all those who knew her” (1995:655), and her behaviour towards Sister Isabetta: “The Abbes began to vilify the young nun in terms never before used to a woman”. About the other nuns we read: “so anxious and eager to catch Isabetta in the act” (656). The tale ends with Isabetta and the Abbes going back to their lovers while the envious nuns “without lovers, sought their solace secretly in the best way they knew how...”(657). And they try their best to find lovers.

Therefore, the deception or infidelity of women draws attention no matter what their status is. In the *Decameron* life is shown more unconventional and people behave as they feel or wish. To be a nun does not change or suppress the emotions or desires of a woman.

CHAPTER II

2. WOMEN IN CHAUCER'S *THE CANTERBURY TALES*

In Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* three women are introduced to the reader, namely, the Wife of Bath, the Prioress and the Second Nun who exhibit specific features of the medieval society. They are classified according to their social status and in a sense, they are highlighted with their skillful speeches. Especially the Wife of Bath challenges the traditional norms or order of the feudal society by participating in the husband's business life and earning her own bread, gaining her economic independence (Patterson, 1991). In fact, as a significant character, she has also the privileges of widowhood. She could be considered a hardworking, independent woman of her time. Both as a widow and a tradeswoman she has a more comfortable life than that of other medieval women who want to earn their lives.

Anne Laskaya, in her book, *Chaucer's Approach to Gender in the Canterbury Tales* (1995) mentions that Chaucer makes his female characters free to speak and to express themselves unlike the medieval women. As he gives remarkable personalities to his three female pilgrims, their voices have considerable effects in front of numerous male pilgrims. When a closer look is taken, it can be seen that Chaucer's three women differ from each other considerably. The Wife of Bath is the one who refuses to be silent while the Second Nun does not tell anything about herself and she prefers to be an obedient medieval nun who lives according to the prescriptions of the Church. On the other hand, the Prioress likes to talk about herself but she knows her limits and behaves gently. However, the Wife of Bath tries to reveal herself much more both in her prologue and in her tale to emphasize the significance of women in society. Substantially, as the women are aware of the boundaries of the patriarchal society for themselves, generally they are obedient and humble. At the same time they can display the rebellious part of their characters, which is depicted by Chaucer manifesting his mastery. For this reason they are given the chance to function and express their main thoughts and opinions. That is to say, Chaucer's female characters are allowed to speak in order to be the voice of women who are oppressed in medieval society. Thus, he tries to show that even in the male dominated society women are indispensable, as his female characters take their

places in the pilgrimage and they fit with their status being nuns or a tradeswoman or a widow sharing a common life with the other gender.

2.1. The Wife of Bath

In Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the Wife of Bath is depicted as a very interesting medieval woman. With her exaggerated language she shows her experience in marriage which is her main topic of conversation. She presents herself with her long prologue rather than her tale. Alison, the Wife of Bath, is not a model of motherhood as she has no children from the marriages that she had, but is definitely considered a model of wife (Vaneckova, 2007) because she is always happy to be married and she sees these marriages as a virtue no matter how she rejects the commonly accepted power relationship between husband and wife (Marcotte, 2007). This behaviour is expressed in the prologue as follows: " I would no longer in the bed abide, / If that I felt his arm over my side, / Till he had made his ransom unto me, / Then would I suffer him do his nicety" (The Wife of Bath's Prologue, III, 409-413

Compared to the other female characters, the Wife of Bath seems extremely independent: she is not a typical conventional mother and a wife, but an outspoken woman who is proud of being married five times. And she is still hopeful to meet the sixth one. Her main topic of conversation always centers around marriage: " Blessed be God that I have wedded five! / Welcome the sixth whenever that he shall" (The Wife of Bath's Prologue, III, 43-44)

The Wife of Bath is the kind of woman who always intends to create a connection between sex and money. Generally, The Wife's prologue reflects the idea that sex is a form of payment within marriage (Marcotte, 2007). The Wife is clever enough to obtain something from these rich husbands and her strong weapon is her sexuality. She only describes them as rich and old without giving their names, as their status is the only factor that she is interested in. Doubtlessly, she gains land and money from them: "They had me giv'n their land and treason" (The Wife of Bath's Prologue, III, 204)

Because of the challenges of being a woman in the feudal system, it seems extremely tough for a woman like the Wife to be accepted by the male authority. Therefore, most of the women of the era were speechless. The Wife of Bath, in her statements, which can also be considered as her confessions, introduces herself as a lusty, brave and an active woman of the period. Alison is one of the only characters who actually reveals herself openly, through her prologue. However, she is tolerant towards her last husband despite his bad treatments. In a way she wants to prove that she has the control and supremacy over her five husbands with her strong personality. Her prologue and her tale are relatively correspondent as she always talks about her life and wants to remain as an attractive woman, and in the tale she emphasizes the beauty and the youth. Unlike the women of the era, she is ambitious and she is full of life as she expresses her feelings about another possible marriage in the future. As the Wife of Bath has no children, so she cannot be an epitome of motherhood, but she can be a role model for all wives. She is aware of her responsibilities and duties for her husband, thus she feels more of a wife than other medieval women. She represents five wives in one person and she is neither virtuous nor humble, but always proud of herself. In her prologue she states: "I'll tell the truth. Those husbands that I had, / Three of them were good and two were bad. / The three that I call 'good' were rich and old." (Wife of Bath's Prologue, III, 195-197)

Moreover, as an experienced woman she also shows way to other women to act carefully to their husbands. She advises them how to behave well or how to be cruel and cunning when necessary. "Ye wise wives, that can understand, / Thus should ye speak, and bear them wrong on hand, / make them believe falsely". (Wife of Bath's Prologue, III, 225-227)

What is striking in her dealings with the first three husbands is that she develops herself which in a way, can be interpreted as a sort of self-actualization. Yet she never loses hope: In her prologue she states that: "Experience, though no authority, / Were in this world, were good enough for me, / To speak of woe that is in all marriage." (Wife of Bath's Prologue, III, 1-5)

As it is seen in the above quotation, she always questions the male authority and religious norms through marriage and virginity and bravely criticises the women of the system. In fact, among three women, the Wife of Bath is the central pilgrim who is energetic and frank. She attacks the church's view on virginity without hesitation. She directly expresses her opinion about the church as virginity is not her ideal, but the ideal of the church. She believes that her body is given to her to be used. Therefore, today some feminist critics see her as a proto-feminist character purposely depicted in that way by Chaucer just to challenge the patriarchal order (Silber- Fisher, 2003).

The social and marital roles have been reversed according to the desires of the Wife of Bath, who very much likes to have control (Brock, 2007). Although she has problems in her five marriages, she still has hope for the sixth marriage, and perhaps for other further relationships, thus she leads a different completely perspective of a medieval women. In fact, she could be very happy as a widow, since she already has enough money and a good social position. She is a strong woman who does not need to be under the control of any man, but she hopes to marry again (Vaneckova, 2007). Alison is a tradeswoman and she earns money and because of being a widow, she enjoys the independence that it provides. A closer look at her marriages shows that she is satisfied with her first three husbands although they are older than her and as she is a passionate woman, she keeps these men always under her control. In general, it seems that for the Wife where there is money, there is a happy marriage as she wants power. This can be deduced from her statements, although they do not always represent the truth since from time to time she expresses her feelings about love and happiness. Another important point is that Alison does not give the names of the four husbands. They are all described with such adjectives as old, rich and, good. However, she gives the fifth husband's name without any hesitation. This can be a proof that she has really loved him: "And yet also of our prentice Jenkin,/ For his crisp hair, shining as gold so fine," (Wife of Bath's Prologue, III, 303-304).

As the Wife celebrates female freedom and sovereignty in marriage, what makes her really unhappy in her own marriages is the moments when her power is threatened (Tucker, 2008). For instance, in fact as she says in her prologue, although

she has lots of problems especially in her last marriage she tries hard to become a perfect wife. Her openness proves that she has nothing to hide because, even the struggle she has lived with her husband is told directly by her without any hesitation. It is obvious that there is not a power struggle in her relationship, but she becomes a good wife only because of her love. Her prologue and tale are the examples of this fact. Her voice is so distinctive that she comes out as the representative voice of women. On the other hand, the Wife of Bath is sure enough of herself to admit that she is not perfect. She knows what she wants from life. In both *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *Tale*, the Wife of Bath draws attention to marriage, virginity, and most significantly the question of dominance: "Virginity is great perfection" (Wife of Bath's Prologue, III, 105). However, temperance or virginity are not the right issues for her personality, as she simply wants to devote her life to marriage (Minnis, 2007).

When the Wife of Bath's prologue and her tale are compared, it can be inferred that her prologue gives much more details about herself and the medieval society. On the other hand, the tale is only another way of presentation for Alison to emphasize again that if women get sovereignty, everything could be easier and different. In the *Wife of Bath's Tale* Alison suggests that power should change hands. According to her, women should have rights to keep control in society, as well. As she is a determined and stubborn woman, when she really desires something, she definitely gets it. "Stubborn I was, as is a lioness, / And of my tongue a very jangleress..." (Wife of Bath's Prologue, III, 637-638)

She cannot be a submissive woman and she can not admit defeat no matter what the cost is. She feels that this is the way things should be and men should obey her.

The Wife of Bath is lucky that she has the advantages of widowhood. Mary Carruthers explains that the Wife's widow status gives her full ownership of the property and money she inherited from each husband (1979). So she feels extremely free to make her own decisions. Also her economic independence plays an important role in her attitudes. She takes her power from the fact that she is a very successful clothmaker. The point of view and foreseeing ideas on Chaucer's mind, and his desire to represent them in a character can be accepted as a proof that Chaucer was

ahead of his time. Another aspect that Chaucer contributed to develop the anti-traditional qualities in his character is the speech of the Wife where she displays self-confidence and victory. "A wise woman will busy her ever-in-one constantly / A wise wife, if that she can her good, knows" (Wife of Bath's Prologue, III, 208-210).

Even in her tale the winner is again the female part that convinces the man to be obedient, although in her own life she was disappointed by her fifth husband. In the tale, the old woman is another example of the true personality of the Wife of Bath because of her outspokenness. The protagonist of the tale is a Knight who has raped an innocent country girl. Here, the Knight is described as a man who misuses his masculine power upon women, but nothing is known about the girl except the fact that she is raped. And as a punishment the Knight has to find out the answer to the question what do women desire the most (Wife of Bath's Tale, III, 905) Unexpectedly, he meets an old woman who gives him the answer: women most enjoy dominating their husbands. The Knight gains his life by giving the right answer in the court. Otherwise, he would have been killed. The old woman wants something in return, since she has told the Knight the correct answer and has saved his life. So she forces him to marry her and the old woman comes with two choices: having her as an old, ugly but faithful wife or a beautiful but unfaithful wife. The Knight wants her to choose. She is very happy to be the winner, rewards the Knight by being both beautiful and faithful all the time. The *Wife of Bath's Tale* is thus a victory for the freedom of women as well as demonstration of their power. In the medieval age women were supposed to be subservient and expected to love and obey their husbands. In fact, this shows that women desire sovereignty most in marriage. In fact, what is common in both tales is the handling of dominance. The Wife wants to demonstrate her desire through the tale. Although she is voiceless in her last marriage, in the tale, she makes her voice heard. While Chaucer pictures his characters in a world of fantasies or ideals contrary to the prevalent values and norms of the age, this character is particularly a good example of a woman possessing power over men representing the protests of women. In the male-dominant society the Wife's Tale sets a model where the women of the era exert power over men in their attempts to claim their rights although these are still not ripe enough. This can

be interpreted as Chaucer's depiction of a world where the real and the ideal are blended. So both prologue and the tale could be seen as a victory of women (Cornelius, 2003). However, "what Chaucer's Wife wants is not political or social change, on the contrary, the traditional order which is quite capable of providing the marital happiness she desires" (Patterson, 1991: 282). It can be stated that Chaucer created Alison to portray a new and enthusiastic kind of woman who was gradually becoming popular in his time. This new woman anachronistically represents today's feminist views as she assertively demands her rights in a completely male-centered medieval world.

As Cornelius Dueck puts forward, the language in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* illuminates her message about love and marriage by shaping her character and situation. However, *The Wife of Bath's Tale* reveals the old woman's desire for sovereignty and her sexual gratification which is restrained until the sovereignty is acquired (2003). Although she is not clearly portrayed as a fairy, there are some clues in the story that show so (Vaneckova, 2007). All of a sudden she appears in the forest and she asks what he is looking for, as if she knows everything about him. "No creature saw he that bare life, / Save on the green he sitting saw a wife./ Sir Knight, hereforth lieth no way. From here / Tell me what ye are seeking, by your fay."(Wife of Bath's Tale, III, 996-1001)

And at the end she changes with a kiss. "Kiss me" quoth she,"we are no longer wroth. / For by my troth I will be to you both "(Wife of Bath's Tale, III, 1238-1240).

As a matter of fact, the main purpose of the *Tale* is to give a valuable lesson to the rapist. As mentioned above, in the tale, the Wife of Bath shows her own point of view by giving the example of the old woman and the Knight who is tested by her. Her name Alison, is the same as the old woman is in the Tale. Thus, there are common features between *The Prologue* and *The Tale* as both deal with the matter of marriage.

The Wife tells such a story that it reflects the battle between the sexes and tries to display through her tale what women want most in life. “What thing is it that women most desire?” (Wife of Bath’s Tale, III, 905).

The Knight’s survival is dependent on the answer to this question. From this moment on, feminine power comes out onto the stage because the Knight should find the answer without fighting, which is something more difficult for him. The purpose of the discourse within the tale is to convince the knight to accept the hag in marriage by reason.

The Wife of Bath’s tale also presents a strategy to seduce men, because a woman who has a magical power appears to save the Knight’s life all of a sudden. So the initiator here is the woman as the first step starts again with a woman. Actually, in *The Tale* this old and ugly woman helps him to find out the very answer, but she demands something in return, that is, getting married with him; and this is the last and the most difficult remedy for him. In a way, the old wife continues to manipulate the Knight. In fact, the old hag is not the only one who manipulates him, but all the women in the tale do the same, too. First, the queen starts and forces the Knight to discover what women desire most in life and she waits for the right time to overpower a man. And then the old woman comes out and uses manipulative tactics to gain a husband. Therefore, if she wants to marry, she must wait for the right opportunity in spite of her age and unattractiveness. Thus, here, the queen asks the Knight, not because she wants to save his life, but because she wants him to give voice to the feminine desire (Moore, 2007).

In the tale there are three steps from rape to marriage and then to love. At the beginning of the story the knight's crime of rape is to be punished by death until the queen and ladies send him to find the answer about women. The second answer of the question “what women most desire”, is solved by the knight’s answer in the court. But it is clear from the old woman’s request that in reality a woman wants not sovereignty over husband and lover, but only a husband and his love (Hupp, 1964). Finally, the third step when the Knight accepts marriage unwillingly without any other choice for the sake of his life, he is asked to be kissed by the old hag. Thus, the magical power of the old wife shows itself. “And when the knight saw verily all this /

That she so fair was, and so young there to,” (Wife of Bath’s Prologue, III, 1250-1252)

In fact, both the wife Alison of the *Prologue* and the Alison of the *Tale*, the old hag wants to demonstrate or prove their power over men. However, the point that they arrive again becomes the same as the tale ends in a wedding. “And she obeyed him every thing / That mighte do him pleasance or liking.” (Wife of Bath’s Tale, III, 1254-1255).

Therefore, the knight has to look from the perspective of the women in order to understand what women really want or why they want it. And the Knight understands this through the experience that he has lived because in the Medieval era the most important thing was the authority of men and women had to obey their rules. This was the system and for this reason this has a specific significance. It was the time when men were always right and women had no voice. Here, the Wife, Alison keeps struggling with this medieval social convention by telling such a tale in which women are right and men are under their control. In fact, according to Charles Owen the husband's dilemma and the Wife of Bath's thesis create the surface of the story (1953). The old woman has already demanded that the knight should marry her. Insisting on this, she reveals her real desire. She wants not just a husband but a husband's love and at the end of the tale the knight is awarded with a magic that touches the old wife, turning her into a beautiful, young wife.

What is more, the emphasis here is not on the man getting what he wants, as it is in a traditional romance, but on the change in his ideas about women. The best result in the end is the knight’s better understanding of women’s experience. The knight can understand women only through becoming a part of their world (Vaneckova, 2007).

The *Wife of Bath’s Prologue* and *Tale* basically deal with marriage. Although in the *Prologue* Alison’s husbands do not or cannot understand her and hence she still tries to find the way of searching for a husband and a lover at the same time, in the *Tale* the man, the knight understands the world of women and their desire, and this time the rules are shaped by women. However, in the medieval social

norms, this regulation is unacceptable and therefore the solution is formulated by the magic, something unreal, or ideal and which cannot be adapted to a real life.

2.2. Nuns in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*

Throughout the Middle Ages, in the early medieval convents, nuns used to receive the same education as their male counterparts, the monks. Nunneries and monasteries thus provided women with the conditions through which they had a significant place in the society as learned people. These places were in a way the "refuge" for the women's existence. The only alternative for women for their presence and development in their society would depend on their social rank, their husbands or their parents whose dowries would be granted (Bardsley, 2007). Therefore, convents had always become outlets for the women who wanted to remain far away from the harsh life conditions of the Middle Ages in which they could not find the right places to live.

In *The Canterbury Tales*, when the Prioress is portrayed, the reader is introduced to a very naive character that is described in the General Prologue as follows (CT, 2011). The first line of her description starts with, "There was also a Nun, a Prioress / That of her smiling was full simple and coy " (The General Prologue / I / 118-120).

In a way, with the word "also" both of them are described as if they should stay in their convent instead of going on a pilgrimage. And the other important point that, the Prioress, Madame Eglentine is described only in terms of her appearance and courtly behaviour (Vaneckova, 2007). The fact that she speaks French properly and that she has had a good education by referring to the names of the schools is also shown directly to the reader: "And French she spake full fair and fetisly properly / After the school of Stratford atte Bow (General Prologue / I / 124-125)

To understand Madame Eglentyne, it is necessary to take a short look into the topic of convent life in the Middle Ages. "Medieval women were perceived as having two basic life choices: religious life or secular life as married women" (Hallissy, 1995: 26). In medieval society it was almost impossible for an unmarried

woman to find a real place, that is, a woman who could not marry, or who did not choose to marry, was associated with a religious order. A woman might become a nun for several reasons. She might be close to God and pray in her convent peacefully or convent life could be a choice for the families who could not afford a dowry for their daughters, thus Chaucer's Prioress comes to the stage as a kind and an attractive woman, so for her, the choice of monastery could have been the reason for the bad straits of her family (Vaneckova, 2007)

Moreover, the Prioress is extremely well-mannered. She knows how to behave and how to talk to or address people. On the way she avoids eating and when they find a place to eat, she is always very careful not to drop a piece of food. Also she is admired by the pilgrims for her gentle manners. All of these details show that she was "well-taught" on how to behave in a society (Hallissy, 1995: 27).

Another important fact about the Prioress is her love for animals. In the medieval convent pets were either strongly discouraged or forbidden. Hence her love for pets is more a secular value than a religious one because to love of animals directly suits with Chaucer's modern audience whereas Prioress should have orientated her love towards God (1995). Despite this prohibition, she has a small pet. "She had small hounds that she fed / With roasted flesh, or milk and white bread, / And she wept bitterly if one of them were dead" (General Prologue, I, 147-149).

At the same time, in the below-mentioned lines, Chaucer presents the Prioress as a delicate, emotional and merciful character, thus he praises her. She is displayed as a more developed persona. "She was so charitable and so full of pity, / That she would weep, if she saw a mouse / Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bled" (General Prologue, I, 143-145).

In the Medieval Era, nuns are imagined or known, as women dressed in a poor way, and praying. However, Chaucer takes our attention to the beauty of the Prioress' cloak which is very fashionable. According to Michael Cornelius, Prioress's gaudy clothes take the attention of the readers on her materialism and indulgence, an important reason for not becoming a medieval nun (2003). Therefore,

she does not have the typical portrait of a nun of the era. “ Full fetis was her cloak, as I was ware” (General Prologue, I, 157).

Her motherly feelings are also expressed in her prayer before she starts telling her tale. “But by the mouth of children thy bounte’ goodness / Performed is, for on the breast sucking” (The Prioress’s Prologue, VII, 457-458).

As far as the tale of the Prioress is concerned, it is appropriately a sad story, convenient to both her profession and to the aspects of her personality that can be seen in the General Prologue. In her story, the main character is a child. In general, it is a tale which appeals more to the feelings than to the mind.

The story takes place in Asia and a little school boy, the son of a widow is the hero of the story. In the first stanza, the Jews living in Asia are set apart as “hateful to Christ and all his company” (The Prioress’s Tale, VII, 492). The school is near to the Jewish ghetto. And the villains seize the poor boy when he goes to school every morning. He is a devout Christian, and loves to sing a holy song, *Alma Redemptor*. The prioress calls on the Virgin Mary to guide her tale. “Our blissful Lady, Christ’s mother dear”. (The Prioress’s Tale, VII, 532).

The Prioress is introduced as a tolerant and sensitive woman who is a proper representative of her order as well as of the clergy itself and as a pure follower of the qualities of the Virgin Mary. However through her tale she depicts a completely different scene as her story is much more violent and bloody (Kudrnova, 2010). The innocence of the child is repeated for several times in the tale and he obeys the rules as he is taught by the authority. “As him was taught, to kneel adown, and say / Ave Maria as he went by the way” (The Prioress’s Tale, VII, 529-530).

This is the difference between the Prioress and the child. She follows the rules, possibly without proper understanding, but when she can, she changes them a little to suit her better. On the other hand, the widow mother is depicted as a woman referring to the Virgin Mary (Vaneckova, 2007). The Prioress’ story focuses on love of an innocent child for his mother. This love is so strong that after he is killed by the Jews with a cut throat, he is again able to sing this *Alma* song for his mother. “ My

throat is cut unto my necke-bone / Saide this child, / And, for the worship of his mother dear, glory / Yet may I sing O Alma loud and clear” (The Prioress’s Tale, VII, 649-651-655)

In a way, in this story we can feel the affection of a child for his mother. Thus the Prioress feels the same thing having a strong emotion of being a mother and having a child. However, she never mentions the fact of marriage as she is a nun. So she often stays between the real and the imagined life but she never reveals this, and remains voiceless as she accepts the strict rules of the era.

The other religious character is the Second Nun who is passive and does not talk much. She keeps silent and she answers only when she is asked. In fact, her character is revealed before her tale as she does not have a personal prologue. Chaucer makes this on purpose to show the reader a real religious character. She is in the pilgrimage and she always prefers listening to talking. There is a great difference between the Prioress and the Second Nun. The Prioress enjoys her life while the Second Nun enjoys only her profession. Due to her steady prays, she is called with her profession, and is not given a name. She is not even described in detailed with respect to her outer appearance. Unlike the Prioress, she does not have an attractive personality. She is not involved in an interaction with the pilgrims, she often prays. She never seems unhappy because she accepts the fact that hiding her emotions is a part of her profession. Furthermore, she seems more intelligent than the Prioress. Intelligence can be assumed for the nun, while emotion comes first for the Prioress (Vaneckova, 2007).

Naturally, her tale is about a saint whose name is Cecilia who was also the patron saint of music, and she is described as a delicate character. “First will I you the name of Saint Cecilie / Expound, as men may in her story see. / It is to say in English, Heaven’s lily, / For pure chasteness of virginity” (The Second Nun’s Tale, VIII, 85-88).

Her narrative begins with a preach against frustration which is very appropriate for both the character of a nun, and the story she tells, as Cecilia is the very opposite of the image of idleness shown in the Nun’s prologue: “We see that

sloth can leash us in a sleep, / To pass the time in sleeping, eating, drinking, / Devouring other people's work, unthinking" (The Second Nun's Prologue, VIII, 19-21). Thus, for both the Second Nun and the heroine in the tale praying is the purpose of life (Vaneckova, 2007).

The Second Nun is an ideal medieval woman and she clearly prefers chastity as the ideal of her age. So the Nun chooses to tell such a tale about a woman saint who preached Christianity and converted many to her religion. "She married a young man named Valerian and even though she was married she maintained her virginity because of her religion". St. Cecile whose name means the way for the blind was a woman not afraid to defend her belief in God. "With courage she used her faith and religious beliefs to defy the standards in marriage" (Gestsdottir, 2010: 19). For example, on their wedding night, she told Valeriana a secret: she had an angel lover who, if he believed that Valerian touched her vulgarly, would slay him. Therefore, virginity is depicted as the most important feature: "I Have an angel which that loveth me, / That for no case nor thing that mighte be, / Is ready aye my body for to keep;" (The Second Nun's Tale, VIII, 152-154).

Even in the tale of the Second Nun the main character is directly related to chastity. She focuses on St. Cecilia's words rather than her action. Through her words, St. Cecilia guides many men to Christianity, which is the ultimate aim. In a way the Second Nun expresses her feelings through St. Cecilia. Margaret Hallissy points out that in the tale, virginity is so supreme that women have to defend it in any case (1995). Cecilia could be the voice of a group of the mediaval traditions, but on the other hand, could be a spiritual character that the Second Nun portrays.

CHAPTER III

3. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE *DECAMERON* AND IN *THE CANTERBURY TALES*

This study, by means of a comparative analysis, focuses on intelligence, virtue, wit and silent screams of women wanting to be heard and idealized by the two authors, Boccaccio and Chaucer respectively in a patriarchal world exhibited in the *Decameron* and *The Canterbury Tales*. The aim of both works is to present human landscapes, uncovering male and female figures from the Middle Ages. Both authors reflect their criticism and natural versus idealistic perspectives of the era symbolized through the characters that they created. This is the most remarkable and major similarity between the *Decameron* and *The Canterbury Tales* from a general perspective. Moreover, the use of the frame narrative technique in both tales is worth mentioning as one of the major similarities. This technique offers many possibilities to exhibit different characters and themes in a multitude of stories.

With regards to the point of departure, these two works involve the theme of the journey. In the *Decameron* the reason for it, is the threat of death, plague, which seems to be related more to an earthly human struggle whereas in *The Canterbury Tales* the reason for the journey is religious, the pilgrimage, that of a heavenly pursuit. These two issues bring together various characters from different age groups and different classes of society. Despite the differences, in each group of characters, in both works there is a character which represents “authority”. Namely, in Boccaccio there is a daily leader, king or queen who decides on who will narrate a tale that day whereas in Chaucer it is the Host who decides on the narrator of the day (Eckhardt, 1990). At this point both works coincide.

When a specifically contrastive and in-depth analysis of the two works of art is conducted, it is apparent that there are striking similarities and differences between the characters drawn by the authors.

The two striking female characters of both of the works, Fiammetta and the Wife of Bath have some apparently common features. In the *brigata*, Fiammetta

has much more control over other characters than the remaining six ladies of the *Decameron*. Similarly, in *The Canterbury Tales*, the Wife of Bath is presented as a more powerful woman because as a woman, she expresses herself more openly than the other two female characters. However, unlike Fiammetta, the Wife of Bath rebels against the patriarchal system more ardently instead of keeping silent as a point of diversion with reference to the attitude towards the existing system. Both women, in their stories, try to emphasize women's struggle for power in their patriarchal societies. For instance, in the tale of *The Wife* the winner is Alison, her namesake. In the story of Fiammetta, as already discussed within the study, the Marchioness uses her wit, and proves her virtue in front of the king. So even in the tales of *The Wife* and Fiammetta, the personality traits of their characters intersect.

In the *Decameron* adultery, as well as virtue, are emphasized by the female characters. Boccaccio's women are strictly against adultery as they defend the moral codes of the society. This is what makes the *Decameron* different from *The Canterbury Tales* because in *The Canterbury Tales* adultery is not dealt with by the women. Both Fiammetta and Neifile (8.1) choose stories of the same topic, adultery. In the first story of the eighth day, Neifile tells a story about a woman who betrays her husband. At the end, she pays the price of her adulterous behaviour in a very shameful way. Fiammetta in the eighth story of the same day narrates a story of two friends. One of them has a love affair with the other's wife and when the betrayed husband understands the situation, in return, he makes love with the other friend's wife. In a sense, he takes revenge. Both of the stories present adultery as an immoral behaviour emphasizing the woman's loyalty and virtue as socially and morally acceptable codes. However, this is most probably a representation of the codes and conduct of medieval society, not Boccaccio's own value judgements. Similarly, these moral values portrayed in the *Decameron* are respected in the tales of the women characters in *The Canterbury Tales*, as well. To put in a nutshell, in neither of the tales the authors are judgemental in presenting moral issues although they seem to provoke the thoughts related to marriage, love, lust or sex in general. This demonstrates that the authors praise women as they are and even equal to men in their desires, expectations, wishes and sexual relationships that is, in all walks of life.

In fact, in the *Decameron* deception or infidelity of women draws more attention, while in *The Canterbury Tales* both nuns, even the Wife of Bath are shown to be more faithful to their life styles, because they accept the rules and traditions of the era. In the tales of the *Decameron* life is shown as more easygoing and people behave as they feel or desire going after their passions. However, it seems that Chaucer is aware of the immorality as a natural part of human existence.

As clergy and Christianity have a distinct role in shaping the societal roles, the nuns, particularly, are expected to live more decent lives. However, in the *Decameron*, nuns enjoy their lives, as well. They do not have such a conservative life as could be expected while in Chaucer, the nuns keep silent as they are more fragile. In general, in the stories of *The Canterbury Tales*, there are no men or women who have lustful relationships and the influence of the Church is often emphasized and felt within the characters. In contrast, nuns or monks in the *Decameron* try to live everything in secret, however, insincerity is emphasized directly in both of the works.

In *The Canterbury Tales* nuns are criticized in a different way. The portrait of the Prioress fits more the description of a vain woman than a great lover. Besides intoning through her nose, "Entuned in her nose full seemly" (General Prologue, I, 123) to show she knows French, she says: And sickerly she was of greet disport, / And full plesaunt, and amiable of port; / And paind hir to countrefete cheere / Of court, and to been estatlich of mannere, / And to been holden digne of reverence (General Prologue, I, 137-141).

In spite of the above mentioned similarities and differences, both Boccaccio's and Chaucer's works intersect on the presentation of women fundamentally as rebellious characters who are ready to fight against the patriarchal world of the Middle Ages.

The moral issues presented through the women characters in both works of art are there to be reflected upon by the readers despite the fact that Boccaccio is more open in expressing them while Chaucer poses the questions to be answered by the readers. As far as the universality of the human relations is considered, what is

common to both works is that the authors successfully picture the human nature and struggles for power between sexes which are accountable at all times.

All in all, the women in both works are similar in the sense that they are cunning, tricky, more lustful and superior to men in terms of intelligence or wit in dealing with the gender relationships and hardships of their societies. Both real life and fictitious life as it is wished not as it is are contrasted and explored through the tales from the women's voices by these two influential writers of the 14th century.

CONCLUSION

Boccaccio's the *Decameron* and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* are the prominent masterpieces presenting the medieval life and culture focusing on the individual lives of male and female characters and presenting human landscapes from English and Italian medieval societies. Although there are some striking similarities in both of the works, there are also many remarkable differences in terms of plot, setting, and characterization. For instance, in terms of the setting, the harsh realities of the medieval life are expressed on the way to pilgrimage by Chaucer, which was an important and enjoyable part of human life in the Middle Ages because it is a sacred journey intended both to purify and hence heal the human soul. Similar situation is given by Boccaccio not on the way to a pilgrimage, but in a secluded place on the way to escape from the plague which was a catastrophic event of the time. And he especially emphasizes the struggle of characters between life and death.

This thesis focused on the social, political and religious norms of medieval life in terms of women images, and presented how realistically Chaucer and Boccaccio dealt with women characters of different age groups and social classes. The period which this study covers is the early middle ages where women are not given a social and political place in the society. Both authors took their women characters and the subject matter of the stories that these women narrated from real life as they were treated as inferior individuals in this medieval world, and both authors intended to make the voice of women characters heard in the medieval society. So, both in *The Canterbury Tales* and the *Decameron* women are presented as intelligent, outspoken, and tactful individuals who are also aware of their feminine sexuality and passion for love as an end in itself.

This study deals with the women characters of the above mentioned works with respect to some social institutions that pressure medieval women. Some of these institutions are religion, marriage, family, and established conventions of a strict society.

Although religion is fundamental in daily life in both of the work, Chaucer gives concrete examples with two nuns who obey the rules of the era and thus their

roles are shaped according to the religious norms of the period. Prioress, in *The Canterbury Tales*, is often mentioned as a character who has a great desire for love and her religious role is shaped, accordingly. Her tale does not fit to the description in the prologue. In her tale, a poor, little boy who loves his mother very much and the mother who refers to Virgin Mary is expressed. Thus, Prioress portrays completely a different style which is misfit. And she prefers to remain speechless under the strict rules of the period and accepts her real life, not the imaginary world. On the other hand, Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath*, is a very independent figure, a tradeswoman and the one who is aware of both her strength and limits. It is noticed that *Wife of Bath* has the role of a wife, but is not identified in terms of her business. She is described as a tradeswoman just to draw an independent female figure, but her marriages form her social position. Although she is aware of the religious norms which put people under pressure, she still has hopes and expectations. In this sense, her tale is a proof of her dreams as she wishes to reform men so that they can understand the feeling of the women who are influenced by the strict medieval circumstances. She acts often as if she can do everything she wants although everyone in the pilgrimage knows that the reality is completely the opposite. However, in Boccaccio's women, we encounter noble ladies who tell us stories about intimate relationships between men and women. For instance, on the first day in the fifth novel, Marchioness is a noble lady who play her role at the right time with her witty style. Also, Madonna Filippa with her independent and courageous action stands against the judgement and she succeeds in her society (6.7). She uses her voice skillfully and creates a strong woman image. Although, the life of men and women are shaped according to medieval norms in the *Decameron*, the speech and the enforcement of women are more powerful than the women in *The Canterbury Tales*. Boccaccio also presents stories about nuns who are completely different from the nuns of *The Canterbury Tales*. Their names are not important. In fact, his nuns are often introduced as lusty creatures because Boccaccio mocks the clergy and first of all they are considered human beings and women, so their sexual need is approved most of the time. As it is told in Elissa's story on the ninth day, the abbess defends herself as if she is right and she reminds people of being a woman first, and then the nun, which is a direct and a cunning answer, indeed. Women in the *Decameron* are presented as speakers,

listeners or readers by Boccaccio both in the *brigata* and in the tales, and generally they act as they wish. The women characters in Boccaccio's work are often praised for their wit. Moreover, the male and female sexual desire is emphasized even more strongly in Boccaccio's stories whereas the women of *The Canterbury Tales* are much more conservative and they are emphasized according to their social position in the system. Chaucer presents his women as individuals who are in need of a place in the society and their voice cannot be heard every time. Although they can easily express their feelings about gender issues, they are not as free as the women characters in the *Decameron* who challenge the social and religious norms without any hesitation. However, in both works, all women characters want to be visible. They do not want to become like the Second Nun, an ideal woman, in *The Canterbury Tales*, who is invisible or nameless.

Another significant factor that is worth mentioning is that geography plays an important role on personality formation, because women in the *Decameron* are Mediterranean characters and they are more hot-tempered, outspoken and excited, whereas the English women in *The Canterbury Tales* are calmer, more self-controlled and silent, which in a way, pictures the Island's more sterile and distant world. So climatic factors effect people's characters, habits, and behaviours. Anyhow, the heroines point out their attitude via their stories against the substantial authority of the era.

Therefore, we can conclude that human nature is shaped by neither gender nor religion only. Individuals are determined in biological, psychological and geographical rules. Even religious order and social norms depending on religion cannot change the human nature. As far as the women characters are concerned, we draw the same conclusion in both works. In other words, human nature is universal. That's why, to reveal the universality of the human nature, in their works both Chaucer and Boccaccio present fictitious settings to the readers where there are fewer social and religious rules. They choose isolated and secluded settings in the medieval era. Boccaccio chose a setting where there was almost no civilization or social rules but only a fear of death during the plague, and Chaucer chooses to present a pilgrimage where there is supposed to be "faith" only to make it more

satirical and ironic. However, ironically enough, even on the way to pilgrimage, characters cannot be free from worldly pleasures despite the heavenly love in the background.

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ÖZGEÇMİŞ

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