

The Wife of Bath's Tale Themes

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Power and Sovereignty in Relationships

A central theme of the tale is the struggle for power within relationships. The Wife of Bath, in both her prologue and tale, argues that women desire sovereignty over their husbands and lovers. This idea is embodied in the tale's resolution, where the knight learns that true harmony in a relationship comes from granting his wife autonomy. The old crone transforms into a beautiful and loyal wife only after the knight gives her control. It suggests that mutual respect and shared power lead to a successful partnership. The theme reflects the Wife of Bath's own belief in using her "gifts" to maintain power over her husbands.