

3. Discuss the analysis category of content, including topic and theme. (Student Question #4)
- This week you read about the analysis category of content for stories, plays, and narrative poems. What kinds of things do we look for in this category?
We look for topics and themes, as well as the author's worldview and the story's presentation of reality, morality, and values.
 - How do we define the term "topic"?
The topic is what the story is about—the general category of reality addressed by a literary work, about which the author will comment through themes. It can be as broad as "love and marriage" or "homecoming."
 - How do we define "theme"?
A theme is the author's message or meaning,¹ which reveals what the author believes to be right or wrong, valuable or worthless, real or not real. So, if the topic is homecoming, then the theme might be, "Home is the most valuable place in the world, and you should do whatever you have to do in order to get home."
 - When studying imaginative literature, we must be careful not to confuse topic with theme. What is the difference between the two?
 - Topic tells us what a work of imaginative literature is about, whereas theme tells us what the author thinks about the topic.*
 - For example, the topic of Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is just that: a story about a Pharisee and a tax collector, or, more broadly, a story about justification before God.*
 - The themes (Jesus' message about justification before God) are that all humans need justification from God, and that there is a right way and a wrong way to go about seeking it.*
 - When studying the content of a story, why do we seek to connect its theme(s) to the author's values and views of reality and morality? Can we also connect the theme(s) to the main characters' experiments in living?
 - Authors' themes flow from their worldviews.*
 - By tracing a theme back to the author's worldview, and then considering that worldview from a biblical perspective, we can better understand how to evaluate the author's theme(s).*
 - Experiments in living most often demonstrate themes, either by negative or positive example.*
 - What do you think the topic and primary theme of the "Wife of Bath's Tale" are? Are these tied to the knight's experiment in living? If so, how so?
 - Topics: Marriage and the roles of husbands and wives*
 - Theme: The Wife's theme is that husbands should be governed by their wives' wishes.*
 - Knight's Experiment in Living:*
 - The knight experiments in allowing his wife to choose whether she will be beautiful or good and faithful. Pleased by this, the wife becomes both beautiful and good, so the experiment turns out well for him.*
 - Thus, the knight's experiment in living makes the Wife of Bath's point: that husbands should (at least sometimes) allow themselves to be governed by their wives' wishes.*
 - Note, however, that the knight's willingness to bow to his wife's wishes does not mean that she assumes leadership of their marriage. When her husband allows her to make the choice for him, she immediately pledges him obedience and faithfulness, and vows to be a true, humble wife to him (line 1227).*
4. How would you evaluate the primary theme in the "Wife of Bath's Tale"? Should men ever bow to their wives' wishes? (Student Question #4)
- Answers will vary. After hearing your student's thoughts, you may wish to make the following points:*
- The Wife of Bath's most pointed theme—that men should bow to their wives' wishes and be "governed" by them—is clearly contrary to Scripture (see Genesis 3:16, Ephesians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:5).*
 - However, at the same time, the Bible does command husbands to love their wives, which means that husbands should be willing and eager to bless their wives in whatever ways they can, as long as those are consistent with their role as biblical servant-leaders (see 1 Corinthians 7:3, Ephesians 5:25 and 5:28, Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7). Thus, to give way to one's wife's wishes in order to please and bless her is not necessarily wrong or an abdication of a husband's biblical authority.*

¹ Some approaches to literary study use the term "theme" as a term that means something like "central focus," (i.e. "justice" would be a theme). We, on the other hand, describe such a central focus as a "topic," and reserve the term "theme" to indicate a particular meaning or message about that area of central focus (such as "justice is right"). We do this because we want students to have a term that allows them to articulate more specifically what the author is saying *about* a central focus.



- It is worth noting that the Wife of Bath's five husbands have not all been biblically loving or even kind in their attitudes toward her.
 - So, although the Wife of Bath is not justified in overturning Scripture and making the husband subservient to the wife's wishes, it is easy to see how her experience of unloving and un-Christlike husbands might lead her to the conclusion that a wife's "governance" would be better.
 - What arguments does the wife in the story use to convince her husband that he should love her truly?
 - The knight in the story objects to his wife's ugliness, her age, her poverty, and her lack of noble birth (1754, lines 214-219).*
 - She responds to the complaint of her low birth by pointing out that people should claim nobility (that is, their grace-filled, virtuous, and generous living) as gifts from Christ, not from old wealth or old family names (1754, lines 223-260).*
 - She replies to the objection of poverty with the answer that poverty was good enough for Jesus, and was praised by Seneca and Juvenal. She argues that poverty relieves a person of worldly cares and is actually a good. She concludes that "Poverty, too, by bringing a man low, / Helps him the better God and self to know" and that "Poverty is a glass where we can see / Which are our true friends," (1755, lines 261-288).*
 - As you read in Frameworks this week, a man is shamed or "cuckolded" when his wife commits adultery with another man (1755, lines 293-296). The wife reminds her husband that her age and ugliness will make it far less likely that she will be an unfaithful wife (1755, lines 293-296).*
 - What would you have answered, if given a choice between a vain but beautiful wife and one who is ugly but also humble and virtuous? Would you *really* choose humble virtue above vain beauty?
Answers will vary, but please encourage your student to give an honest answer, not just the answer that he knows is right.
 - What does your choice say about what you value?
Answers will vary.
 - Finally, think back to Lewis's three kinds of fairies (Week 3). Is the wife in the story a fairy, and if so, what kind? (Student Question #5)
After hearing your student's thoughts, you may wish to make the following points:
 - As we learn from the first few lines of the Tale, this story is set in a time when "This realm we live in was a fairy land" and "The fairy queen danced with her jolly band / On the green meadows" (1749, lines 3-4).
 - Having this in the back of our minds from the beginning, we should not be surprised that the knight comes upon "some four and twenty ladies... / all circling in a woodland dance," and that when they all vanish, the "old woman" left behind "sitting on the green" is capable of changing into the young and fair lady whom we find at the end of the story (1752, lines 111-112; 118; 329).
 - It is possible that the knight's wife is the fairy queen herself, dancing with a band of twenty-four of her followers in a green meadow. Even if she is not the queen, she is almost certainly a fairy, and probably a "high fairy" (Lewis's third type), because she is of human size and does not hide from the knight, but rather helps him and becomes his lady-love (*The Discarded Image* 130-132).
5. Discuss elements of artistry, meaning through form, and enjoyment in the literary analysis category of artistry.
- From your reading in *Poetics* this week, what do we look at in the literary analysis category of artistry?
We look elements of artistry, examples of meaning through form, and examples of personal enjoyment.
 - What are the elements of artistry? What do we include in this sub-category of our literary studies?
 - The elements of artistry are ten elements which can be found in all the arts, including music, painting, dance, etc. They are: Pattern, Central Focus, Unity, Unity in Variety, Balance, Contrast, Symmetry, Repetition, Rhythm, Unified Progression.¹*
 - In the artistic elements section of our study, we also include particular devices and techniques that are associated, in literature, with various of the artistic elements. These include poetic justice and irony.
 - What is the principle of Meaning through Form? What do we look at within this sub-category?
 - "Meaning through form" is a phrase used by Leland Ryken to describe the relationship between content and form (Words of Delight 20). The principle is that, in imaginative literature, we receive the meaning and message (content) through description, techniques, patterns, characters, plots, images, and other elements of artistic form.*

¹ This list of ten elements is based on a similar list provided by Leland Ryken in *Words of Delight*, p. 16.