

The Shipman

The Portrait of the Shipman,
his Prologue
and
his Tale

Here is the description of the Shipman from the General Prologue

The Shipman is a ship's captain, the most skilled from here to Spain, more at home on the deck of a ship than on the back of a horse. He is not above a little larceny or piracy, and in a sea fight he does not take prisoners.

	A SHIPMAN was there, woning far by west;	<i>living</i>
	For aught I wot, he was of Dartemouthe.	<i>I know</i>
390	He rode upon a rouncy as he couth, ¹	<i>nag</i>
	In a gown of falding to the knee.	<i>wool cloth</i>
	A dagger hanging on a lace had he	
	About his neck under his arm adown.	
	The hot summer had made his hue all brown.	<i>color</i>
395	And certainly he was a good fellow.	
	Full many a draught of wine had he y-draw	<i>drawn</i>
	From Bordeaux-ward while that the chapmen sleep.	<i>merchants slept</i>
	Of nice conscience took he no keep:	<i>sensitive c. / care</i>
	If that he fought and had the higher hand	<i>upper hand</i>
400	By water he sent them home to every land. ²	
	But of his craft to reckon well his tides,	<i>But at his trade</i>
	His streames and his dangers him besides,	<i>currents</i>
	His harborow, his moon, his lodemenage	<i>sun's position / navigation</i>
	There was none such from Hull unto Carthage. ³	
405	Hardy he was and wise to undertake.	<i>tough but shrewd</i>
	With many a tempest had his beard been shake.	
	He knewe all the havens as they were	<i>harbors</i>
	From Gothland to the Cape of Finisterre	
	And every creek in Brittany and Spain.	
410	His barge y-clepèd was the Maudelain.	<i>ship was called</i>

¹ "He rode upon a nag as best he knew how." The Shipman is a ship's captain, perhaps from Dartmouth, a port in the west of England well known as a haven for pirates.

² *If that ...*: If he were in a battle and got the upper hand, he made them (the losers) walk the plank.

³ *But of his craft ...*: These lines deal with the mariner's skill as a navigator. *lodemenage* = navigation, cf. lodestone, lodestar. *harborow* = position of the sun in the zodiac, or simply *harbors*. Hull is in England, Cartagena in Spain.

THE SHIPMAN'S TALE

Introduction

The Shipman's Tale is a fabliau, that is, a ribald tale generally involving a "triangle" of two men and a woman, one of the men generally the husband of a dissatisfied woman, the other her lover who is often a "clerk" or cleric of some kind. And in Chaucer's fabliaux there is the added irony that the lover has been introduced to the house and thus to the wife by the husband himself.

This tale is in some other ways quite similar to that other more famous fabliau, *The Miller's Tale*, but it deals with more mature people. *The Miller's Tale* is a randy romp where two young fellows go after a readily persuaded young wench who is married to an old man. They make a thorough fool of him, which is half of the point, and the whole plot is an elaborate farce.

The Shipman's Tale is not at all farcical. Tricks, devices and approaches are very smooth and sophisticated. The clerk is a man of thirty, mature enough to be a companion for his abbot, and trusted enough to have limitless permissions to go visiting wealthy friends outside of the monastery, and the wherewithal to distribute largess to the household. The wife of the merchant involved is presumably much of an age with her husband, an age also at which they are both young enough still to enjoy a bout together in bed. Unlike John the carpenter of *The Miller's Tale*, the merchant is not a "senex amans," the kind of foolish old man, seen closer up in *The Merchant's Tale*, who marries a wife many years younger than himself, and pays the price of his vanity and foolishness. The duped husband of *The Shipman's Tale* is a successful merchant, handling the difficult business of loans, foreign exchange, buying and selling at the best moment, and so forth. He is open-handedly generous but also shrewd; he is competent in business and in bed. And yet he is, indeed, made a fool of, but oh, so skilfully that he is not a public joke. Indeed nobody knows of the infidelity but the two people involved. Adultery Inc. almost, with the necessary bit of doublecross.

There is something much cooler about this story than the farcical doings of the young folk of Oxford in the *Miller's Tale*. The sexual transaction is as well prepared as the money transactions of the merchant himself. In fact, it *is* a money transaction: the wife sells a night of sex for the hundred franks she needs, and the monk pays, but with the money which he in turn has borrowed from the husband. No one loses financially, and no one is really hurt. The ring of money in the selling of sex is very loud in this story, and the language of the tale is ordered so that the reader notices this, especially at the end where "pay," "debt," "debtor," "tallying" / "tailing" are played upon in their marital as well as their commercial senses. And in the central scene where the bargain is struck, there occurs a ringing couplet where one can truly say that the rime clinches the coupling:

"For I will bringè you a hundred franks,"
 And with that word he caught her by the flanks

What Gold hath joined together . . .

Again notice the similarities to and differences from *The Millers Tale*. This embrace occurs at the end of a longish passage in which the wife approaches the monk, the monk tests the situation out, the wife responds, the monk co-responds and so on until they are sure they are talking the same language, and the bargain is struck in the couplet. By contrast, there is no diplomacy in Nicholas's approach to Alison in *The Miller's Tale*. He seizes her by the "quaint" as a preliminary approach, which is at least half right with Alison. *The Shipman's Tale* version is nothing if not smooth and tactful before it becomes tactile, as becomes older people with a good deal to lose.

Besides the cash-and-flesh nexus, there are a number of other observable themes or topics running through the tale: "cousinage," for one. The words "cousin" or "cousinage" are used many times in this tale, in such a fashion as to thrust themselves at the reader. Now, although the *Oxford English Dictionary* does not give any certain use of the word "cousin" or "cozzen," meaning to fool or deceive before 1561, it is widely so used in Shakespeare, and one has to believe that Chaucer is using it in this way. In any case the loyalty of cousins is unreliable when lust appears, as *The Knight's Tale* shows. Cousin or not, the monk owes the merchant some loyalty, but blandly betrays him. His promises are worthless to God or man or woman.

Indeed promises, vows, and oaths are other objects of Chaucer's satire here as elsewhere. In the very process of breaking their marital and monastic vows the wife and monk swear on the prayer book that they will not betray each other. The same people have sworn on the same kind of book to be loyal to God and husband. The blasphemy involved is not heavily leaned on by Chaucer; in fact the scene is soavely comic. The only people in this milieu who keep their bonds are the "worldly" merchants, a fact that has escaped the notice of the comfortable middle class scholars who attack with inexplicable venom the merchant's "bourgeois" values and lack of "spiritual wealth."

The essential plot of this story was old when Chaucer used it. The folklorists even have a category for tales of this type: The Lover's Gift Returned. And it never seems to go away, as its twentieth-century appearance in the hills of North Carolina proves, with the details changed to reflect a twentieth-century milieu. (See *Chaucer Review*, III, 245 ff).

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Some scholars believe that this tale was intended for the Wife of Bath, and that when Chaucer changed his mind and gave her another tale, he forgot to re-do some lines in this prologue and tale. This speculation is

encouraged by the absence of a definitely assigned teller in the MSS, by the narrator's use of the phrase "my jolly body," a phrase used by the wife of the tale (1613), and especially by one passage (1200-1209) with a use of pronouns odd for a piratical ship's captain.

Clearly this is not one of those tales that is perfectly tailored for the teller. Even in the MSS it is assigned variously (and not especially appropriately) to the Squire, the Summoner, and the Shipman. But at the end of the tale in the Hengwrt manuscript at least, the host says "thou gentle master, gentle mariner / God give the monk a thousand last quod year," and then goes on to comment on the story clearly told by the Shipman, for whom the term "gentle" in either its chief modern or medieval senses is *wildly* inappropriate.

Linguistic points for this tale:

Stress:

husband seems to have the stress on the second syllable in l. 1357 where it rhymes with *understand*, and in l. 1337 where the rhyme word *cousin* also has French stress on the second syllable (as in 1554).

*With my husbánd al be he your couśín
Nay, quod this monk, by God and Saint Martín (1337-8)*

Farewell, couśín, God shieldè you from care,

but elsewhere the stress is the modern way:

I pray you cousin wisely that you ride." 1450,

chaffare in 1518 stresses 1st syllable:

And telleth her that cháffare is so dear

but

*And not only my gold but my chaffáre (1475)
Take what you list, God shieldè that you spare.*

(God forbid)

hónour(1598); but *honoúr* (1358)

Other points of pronunciation:

Denis is consistently pronounced with stress on the 2nd syllable, I think, and to judge by its first occurrence where it rhymes with *wise*, the *-s* was pronounced in medieval English, probably as in the modern female name Denise since the ME pronunciation of *wise* was something like "weez".

mischief rhymes with *grief*.

portehors has 3 syllables at 1321 and then 2 at 1325

PROLOGUE to the SHIPMAN'S TALE

When the Host invites the Parson to tell a tale after the Man of Law, the Parson rebukes him for his casual swearing. A vigorous sarcastic reply from the Host is supported by the Shipman, who offers to tell a tale himself.

	Our Host upon his stirrups stood anon	
	And said: "Good men, hearken everyone.	
1165	This was a thrifty tale for the nones. ¹	
	Sir parish priest," quod he, "for Godé's bones,	said he
	Tell us a tale as was thy forward yore.	agreement earlier
	I see well that you learned men in lore	
	Can muchel good, by Godé's dignity!"	Know much
1170	The Parson answered him: "Bendicitee!	Bless us!
	What ails the man so sinfully to swear?"	
	Our Host answered : "O Jankin, be you there?"	

¹ "This was a good story, indeed." The Man of Law has just finished his tale. This Prologue is placed as the Epilogue to the Man of Law's Tale in the Riverside edition. [Our line numbering is the same as the asterisked numbering in that edition.]

- I smell a Lollard in the wind," quod he.¹
 "How! Goodmen," quod our Hostè, "hearken me.
 1175 Abideth, for God's dignè passïon *Wait*
 For we shall have a predication. *sermon*
 This Lollard here will preachen us somewhat."
 "Nay, by my father's soul, that shall he not,"
 Said the Shipman. "Here shall he not preach.
 1180 He shall no gospel glossen here nor teach *comment on*
 We believe all in the great God," quod he
 "He would sow some difficulty
 Or springen cockle in our clean corn. *grow weeds*
 And therefore, Host, I warnè thee befor,
 1185 My jolly body shall a talè tell ²
 And I shall clinken you so merry a bell *ring*
 That I shall waken all this company, *keep awake*
 But it shall not be of philosophy,
 Nor physlias, nor terms quaint of law *medicine(?) / hard*
 1190 There is but little Latin in my maw." *my gut*

THE SHIPMAN'S TALE

- A merchant whilom dwelled at Saint Denis *once lived*
 That richè was, for which men held him wise.
 A wife he had of excellent beauty,
 And companionable and revelous was she, *fond of parties*
- A slight digression from the narrative*
- 1195 Which is a thing that causes more dispense *expense*
 Than worth is all the cheer and reverence
 That men them do at feastès and at dances;

¹ Jankin seems to be a rather contemptuous term for a priest. This priest's objection to the Host's swearing makes him suspect of being a Lollard, a sort of Puritan, a follower of John Wycliffe, and quite possibly a heretic.

² "Jolly body": See end of Introduction to this tale.

- Such salutations and countenances
 Passen as doth a shadow upon the wall.¹
- 1200 But woe is him that payen must for all:
 The silly husband algate he must pay! *poor husband, always*
 He must us clothe and he must us array *deck out*
 (All for his ownè worship!) — richèly;
 In which array we dancen jollily!
- 1205 And if that he not may, peraventure, *perhaps*
 Or elsè list no such dispence endure, *Or wishes / expense*
 But thinketh it is wasted and y-lost,
 Then must another payen for our cost
 Or lend us gold—and that is perilous!²
- A monk, one of the hospitable merchant's many guests, is treated as a relative*
- 1210 This noble merchant held a worthy house, *kept a splendid*
 For which he had alday so great repair³ *constant visiting*
 For his largess, and for his wife was fair, *hospitality and because*
 That wonder is. But hearken to my tale: *But listen*
 Amongest all his guestès great and small
- 1215 There was a monk, a fair man and a bold —
 I trow a thirty winter he was old — *I guess / 30 yrs*
 That ever in one was drawing to that place. *was always visiting*
 This youngè monk, that was so fair of face,
 Acquainted was so with the goodè man
- 1220 Since that their firstè knowledgè began *acquaintance*
 That in his house as fámiliar was he
 As it is possible any friend to be.

¹ *Which is ... wall:* "This causes more expense than it is worth: for the respect, the greetings, the obsequiousness that people show you at the feasts you give and the dances that you put on, are all transient--like shadows on a wall."

² *But woe ... perilous:* The use of *we* and *us* in this passage raises problems. They are not the kind of "domestic" pronouns noted later. Who is speaking? Hardly the Shipman. It seems to be a woman, but it can hardly be the merchant's wife in the Tale. See end of Introduction.

³ *This noble ... wonder is:* "This noble merchant kept such a hospitable house, and there was such constant visiting there because of his largess and his wife's beauty, that it was amazing to see." *repair* means "visiting"; it does not here have its most common modern connotation.

And for as muchel as this goodè man,
 And eke this monk of which that I began, also
 1225 Were bothè two y-born in one villáge,
 The monk him claimeth as for cousináge, as cousin
 And he again, he saith not oncè nay, never denied it
 But was as glad thereof as fowl of day, birds
 For to his heart it was a great pleasáncé.
 1230 Thus be they knit with éterne álliáncé, lasting friendship
 And each of them 'gan other for t'assure
 Of brotherhood while that their life may dure. may last

The monk is also generous

Free was Daun John, and namely of dispense Generous / gifts
 As in that house,¹ and full of diligence
 1235 To do pleasáncé, and also great costáge; at great expense?
 He not forgot to give the leastè page give (a gift) to
 In all that house. But after their degree by rank
 He gave the lord, and sith all his meinee, & then / servants
 When that he came, some manner honest thing. something good
 1240 For which they were as glad of his coming
 As fowl is fain when that the sun up riseth. is glad
 No more of this as now, for it sufficeth.

Before a business trip the merchant invites the monk to visit

But so befell this merchant on a day
 Shope him to makè ready his array Prepared
 1245 Toward the town of Brugès for to fare (a Belgian city) / to go
 To buyen there a portion of ware; some goods
 For which he has to Paris sent anon
 A messenger, and prayèd has Daun John has invited
 That he should come to Saint Denís and play & enjoy himself
 1250 With him and with his wife a day or tway two

¹ *Free was Don John ... costage:* "Daun John was a generous dispenser of gifts in that household, and eager to please." He had gifts for everyone from the master to the youngest servant. "Daun, Dom, Don" was a title of respect used sometimes, but not exclusively, of Monks.

	Ere he to Brugès went, in allè wise.	Before / <i>in any case</i>
	This noble monk of which I you devise	<i>of whom I tell</i>
	Has of his abbot as him list licence,	<i>when he pleases, leave</i>
	(Because he was a man of high prudence	
1255	And eke an officer) out for to ride	<i>abbey official</i>
	To see their granges and their barns wide.	<i>outlying farms</i>
	And unto Saint Denís he comes anon.	
	Who was so welcome as my lord Daun John,	
	Our dearè cousin, full of courtesy? ¹	<i>graciousness</i>
1260	With him brought he a jubb of Malvesy	<i>jug of Malmsey (wine)</i>
	And eke another full of fine vernáge;	<i>Italian wine</i>
	And volatil, as aye was his uságe.	<i>fowl / always his custom</i>
	And thus I let them eat and drink and play,	
	This merchant and this monk, a day or tway.	<i>two</i>

A break while the merchant attends to business

1265	The thirdè day this merchant up ariseth,	
	And on his needès sadly him aviseth,	<i>seriously / attends</i>
	And up into his counting-house goes he	
	To reckon with himself, as well may be,	
	Of thilkè year how that it with him stood,	<i>Of that</i>
1270	And how that he dispended had his good,	<i>had spent</i>
	And if that he increased were or none.	<i>or not</i>
	His bookès and his baggès many a one	
	He lays before him on his counting-board;	
	Full richè was his treasure and his hoard,	
1275	For which full fast his counting-door he shut,	
	And eke he would that no man should him let	<i>also / interrupt</i>
	Of his accountès for the meanè time.	
	And thus he sits till it is passèd prime.	<i>9 a.m.</i>

*A suggestive dialogue between the monk and the merchant's wife
who implies that her problems are desperate.*

Daun John was risen in the morrow also	<i>morning</i>
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¹ 1258-59: *Who was ... courtesy*: Notice the use of the "domestic" pronouns: *my* and *our*. No particular speaker is indicated by this usage.

1280	And in the garden walketh to and fro, And has his thingès said full courteously.	<i>read his breviary</i>
	This goodè wife came walking privily Into the garden there he walketh soft And him saluteth, as she has done oft.	<i>greet</i>
1285	A maidè child came in her company, Which as her listè she may govern and gie, For yet under the yardè was the maid. ¹	<i>chooses / guide in training</i>
	"O dearè cousin mine, Daun John," she said, "What aileth you so rathe for to rise?"	<i>so early</i>
1290	"Niecè," quod he, "it ought enough suffice. Five hours for to sleep upon a night, But it were for an old appallèd wight,	<i>Except / weak old man crouch burrow</i>
	As been these wedded men that lie and dare As in a formè sits a weary hare	
1295	Were all forstraught with houndès great and small. But dearè niecè, why be you so pale? I trowè certès that our goodè man	<i>who was harrassed I guess</i>
	Has you labouèred since the night began, That you were need to resten hastily."	<i>have need</i>
1300	And with that word he laughed full merrily, And of his ownè thought he waxed all red. This fairè wife 'gan for to shake her head And saidè thus: "Yea, God wot all," quod she.	<i>he blushed God knows all</i>
	"Nay, cousin mine it stands not so with me.	
1305	For by that God that gave me soul and life, In all the realm of France there is no wife That lessè lust has to that sorry play.	<i>desire / wretched (cries of dismay)</i>
	For I may sing `Alas!' and `Welaway! That I was born; but to no wight," quod she,	<i>no person</i>
1310	"Dare I not tell how that it stands with me; Wherefore I think out of this land to wend, Or elsè of myself to make an end, So full am I of dread and eke of care."	<i>to go and also</i>

The monk invites her to confide in him and promises confidentiality

¹ This child plays no part whatever in the story.

- This monk began upon this wife to stare
 1315 And said: "Alas, my niecè, God forbid
 That you for any sorrow or any dread
 Fordo yourself! But telleth me your grief. *Do away with*
 Péraventure I may in your mischief *Perhaps / trouble*
 Counsel or help. And therefore telleth me
 1320 All your annoy, for it shall be secree. *problem / secret*
 For on my portéhors I make an oath *prayer book*
 That never in my life, for lief nor loath *love or hate*
 Ne shall I of no counsel you biwray." *betray*
 "The same again to you," quod she, "I say.
 1325 By God and by this portehors I you swear,
 Though men me would all into pieces tear,
 Ne shall I never, for to go to hell, *even if I go*
 Bewray a word of thing that you me tell, *Divulge*
 Not for no cousinage nor álliance,
 1330 But verily for love and áffiance." *confidence*
 Thus be they sworn, and hereupon they kissed.
 And each of them told other what them list: *they pleased*
 "Cousin," quod she, "if that I had a space,
 As I have none, and namely in this place, *especially*
 1335 Then would I tell a legend of my life, *a story*
 What I have suffered since I was a wife
 With mine husband, all be he your cousin." *even if he is*

They exchange confidences

- "Nay," quod this monk, "by God and Saint Martin,
 He is no morè cousin unto me
 1340 Than is the leaf that hangeth on the tree!
 I clepe him so, by Saint Denís of France, *I call*
 To have the morè cause of ácquaintánce
 Of you, which I have lovèd specially *whom*
 Above all other women, sikerly. *certainly*
 1345 This swear I you on my professiön.
 Telleth your grief, lest that he come adown;
 And hasteth you, and go away anon."
 "My dearè love," quod she, "O my Daun John,
 Full lief were me this counsel for to hide! *I would prefer*

- 1350 But out it must; I may no more abide: *I can't hold it in*
 Mine husband is to me the worstè man
 That ever was since that the world began!
 But since I am a wife, it sits not me *is not fitting*
 To tellen no wight of our privity, *no person / intimacies*
- 1355 Neither a-bed nor in no other place.
 God shield I should it tellen, for His grace! *God forbid*
 A wife ne shall not say of her husband
 But all honoúr, as I can understand.
 Save unto you this much I tellen shall:
- 1360 As help me God, he is not worth at all
 In no degree the value of a fly!
 But yet me grieveth most his niggardy. *cheapness*
 And well you wot that women naturally *you know*
 Desiren thingès six—as well as I.
- 1365 They wouldè that their husbands shouldè be *They wish*
 Hardy and wise and rich, and thereto free, *also generous*
 And buxom unto his wife, and fresh a-bed. *yielding to*
- Unknown to her husband the wife is in debt*
- But by that ilkè Lord that for us bled! *that same*
 For his honoúr myself for to array *to dress*
- 1370 A Sunday next I mustè needès pay *on Sunday*
 A hundred franks, or elsè I am lorn. *lost*
 Yet were me lever that I were unborn ¹ *I had rather*
 Than me were done a slander or villainy. *done to me / shame*
 And if mine husband eke might it espy, *find out*
- 1375 I n'ere but lost. And therefore I you pray *I'd be ruined*
 Lend me this sum, or elsè must I die!
 Daun John, I say, lend me these hundred franks!
 Pardee, I will not failè you my thanks *By God*
 If that you list to do what I you pray; *agree to*
- 1380 For at a certain day I will you pay.
 And do to you what pleasancè and servíce
 That I may do, right as you list devise; *as you say*
 And but I do, God take on me vengeance *And unless I do*

¹ *Yetvillainy:* "But I would rather die than suffer indignity or shame."

As foul as ever had Ganelon of France."¹

The monk offers to help. They seal their agreement

- 1385 This gentle monk answered in this mannér:
 "Now truly, mine ownè lady dear,
 I have," quod he, "on you so great a ruth *pity*
 That I you swear and plightè you my truth *pledge my word*
 That when your husband is to Flanders fare *gone*
- 1390 I will deliver you out of this care,
 For I will bringè you a hundred franks."
 And with that word he caught her by the flanks,
 And her embraceth hard, and kissed her oft.
 "Go now your way," quod he, "all still and soft,
- 1395 And let us dine as soon as that you may,
 For by my chilinder t'is prime of day. *sundial it's 9 am*
 Go now, and be as true as I shall be."
 "Now elsè God forbiddè, sir," quod she,

She calls her husband to leave his business and join them for dinner

- And forth she goes as jolly as a pie, *magpie*
 1400 And bade the cookès that they should them hie *hurry*
 So that men mightè dine, and that anon. *eat / at once*
 Up to her husband is this wife y-gone
 And knocketh at his counter boldèly. *counting house*
 "Qui la?" quod he. "Peter! it am I," *Who is it? / By St Peter*
- 1405 Quod she. "What, sir! How longè will you fast?
 How longè timè will you reckon and cast *count*
 Your summès and your bookès and your things?
 The devil have part on all such reckonings!
 You have enough, pardee, of Godè's send! *God's gifts*
- 1410 Come down today, and let your baggès stand.

¹ *Ganelon* was the traitor in the great French epic *The Song of Roland*. His betrayal resulted in the defeat and death of Roland and Oliver. He was executed by being torn limb from limb. One irony of the comparison is that the wife is in the process of betraying her husband.

	Ne be you not ashamed that Daun John	
	Shall fasting all this day alengè gon?	<i>go miserable?</i>
	What! Let us hear a mass and go we dine."	<i>go eat</i>
	"Wife," quod this man, "littre canst thou divine	<i>understand</i>
1415	The curiousè business that we have.	<i>difficult</i>
	For of us chapmen, also God me save,	<i>merchants / I swear</i>
	And by that lord that clepèd is Saint Ive,	<i>is called</i>
	Scarcely, amongest twelvè, twain shall thrive ¹	<i>two</i>
	Continually, lasting unto our age.	
1420	We may well maken cheer and good viságe	<i>put on a good face</i>
	And driven forth the world as it may be	<i>deal with the world</i>
	And keepen our estate in privity	<i>business secrets</i>
	Till we be dead, or elsè that we play	<i>or take it easy</i>
	A pilgrimage, or go out of the way. ²	<i>out of business</i>
1425	And therefore have I great necessity	
	Upon this quaintè world t'avisè me,	<i>tough / watch out</i>
	For evermore we mustè stand in dread	
	Of hap and Fortune in our chapmanhead.	<i>of chance / business</i>

The merchant announces a coming business trip

	To Flanders will I go tomorrow at day	<i>F = modern Belgium</i>
1430	And come again as soon as ever I may.	
	For which, my dearè wife, I thee beseech	
	As be to every wight buxom and meek.	<i>polite & obliging</i>
	And for to keep our goods be curious,	<i>be careful</i>
	And honestly govern well our house.	
1435	Thou hast enough in every manner wise	<i>in every way</i>
	That to a thrifty household may suffice.	
	Thee lacketh no array nor no vitaille;	<i>clothes or food</i>
	Of silver in thy purse shalt thou not fail."	

¹ *Scarcely ... age*: "Out of twelve, barely two will succeed continuously to old age" (?) or "until they are our age." In either case the meaning is much the same: few business succeed for any length of time.

² *or else ... way*: "To play a pilgrimage" appears to mean something like go off and take a vacation from serious business, like most of the people on the Canterbury pilgrimage. If you do that kind of thing often instead of attending to business, the merchant seems to say, you won't be in business for long.

- And with that word his counter-door he shut,
 1440 And down he goes, no longer would he let;
 But hastily a mass was therè said,
 And speedily the tables were y-laid
 And to the dinner fastè they them sped
 And richèly this monk the chapman fed. *"monk" is object*
 1445 At after-dinner Daun John soberly
 This chapman took apart, and privily *t. aside, & quietly*
 He said him thus: "Cousin, it standeth so
 That well I see to Brugès will you go.
 God and Saint Austin speedè you and guide.
 1450 I pray you, cousin, wisely that you ride.
 Governeth you also of your diet *Control*
 Temperately and namely in this heat. *Moderately & especially*
 Betwixt us two needeth no strangè fare. *formality*
 Farewell, cousin, God shieldè you from care.
 1455 And if that any thing by day or night,
 If it lie in my power and my might,
 That you me will command in any wise,
 It shall be done, right as you will devise. *say*

The monk asks the merchant for a favor which is promptly granted

- One thing ere that you go, if it may be:
 1460 I would pray you for to lendè me
 A hundred frankès for a week or two,
 For certain beastès that I mustè buy
 To storè with a placè that is ours. *to stock*
 God help me so, I would that it were yours!
 1465 I shall not failè surely of my day,
 Not for a thousand franks, a milè way. *not by a mile*
 But let this thing be secret, I you pray:
 For yet tonight these beastès must I buy.
 And fare now well, mine ownè cousin dear;
 1470 Grammèrcy of your cost and of your cheer." *Thanks / hospitality*
 This noble merchant gentilly anon *courteously*
 Answered and said: "O cousin mine, Daun John,
 Now sikerly this is a small request. *certainly*
 My gold is yourès when that it you lest; *when you please*

- 1475 And not only my gold, but my chaffáre. *merchandise*
 Take what you list, God shieldè that you spare. *God forbid*
 But one thing is, you know it well enow *enough*
 Of chapmen, that their money is their plow. *merchants*
 We may creancè while we have a name; *get credit*
- 1480 But goldless for to be, it is no game.
 Pay it again when it lies in your ease; *your power*
 After my might full fain would I you please."¹
 These hundred franks he fetchèd forth anon,
 And privily he took them to Daun John.
- 1485 No wight in all this world wist of this loan, *No one knew*
 Saving this merchant and Daun John alone.
 They drink, and speak, and roam a while and play,
 Till that Daun John rideth to his abbey.

The merchant goes to Bruges and conducts his business

- The morrow came, and forth this merchant rides
 1490 To Flanders-ward; his prentice well him guides *apprentice*
 Till he came into Brugès merrily.
 Now goes this merchant fast and busily
 About his need, and buyeth and creanceth. *borrow*
 He neither playeth at the dice, nor danceth,
- 1495 But as a merchant, shortly for to tell,
 He led his life. And there I let him dwell.

At the same time the monk re-visits the merchant's wife

- The Sunday next the merchant was agone, *next after*
 To Saint Denís y-comen is Daun John *has come*
 With crown and beard all fresh and new y-shave.
- 1500 In all the house there n'as so little a knave, *wasn't a servant boy*
 Nor no wight elsè that he n'as full fain *person / very glad*
 That my lord Daun John was come again.²

¹ "I am glad (*fain*) to help you as far as I can (*after my might*)."

² *In all ... again* : "In all the house there was no boy so little, nor anybody else who was not glad of Don John's arrival." All the negatives add up to the meaning that everybody was

And shortly to the point right for to gon, *to go*
 This fairè wife accorded with Daun John *agreed*
 1505 That for these hundred franks he should all night
 Have her in his armès bolt upright.
 And this accord performèd was in deed:
 In mirth all night a busy life they lead
 Till it was day, that Daun John went his way,
 1510 And bade the meinee: "Farewell, have good day," *household*
 For none of them, nor no wight in the town, *no person*
 Has of Daun John right no suspiciõn. *not a trace*
 And forth he rideth home to his abbey,
 Or where him list. No more of him I say. *where he wishes*

The merchants returns home briefly, then goes to Paris to finish his business

1515 This merchant when that ended was the fair *business*
 To Saint Denis he gan for to repair, *he returned*
 And with his wife he maketh feast and cheer
 And telleth her that chaffare is so dear *merchandise*
 That needès must he make a chevissance, *raise money*
 1520 For he was bound in a recognisance *by a contract*
 To payen twenty thousand shields anon. *s = units of money*
 For which this merchant is to Paris gone
 To borrow of certain friendès that he had
 A certain franks, and some with him he led.¹ *he took*

He calls in to see the monk who tells him something unexpected

1525 And when that he was come into the town,
 For great charity and great affection *great love*
 Unto Daun John he first goes, him to play, *to relax*
 Not for to ask or borrow of him money,
 But for to wit and see of his welfare, *know*

positively glad to see him.

¹ *And telleth her ... led:* The merchant is involved in some fairly complicated matters of monetary exchange. He borrows franks in one city (Paris) to repay a debt in shields in another (Bruges). For the full details see K. Cahn's now classic article: "Chaucer's Merchants and the Foreign Exchange: An Introduction to Medieval Finance." *SAC* 2 (1980), 81-119.

1530	And for to tellen him of his chaffare, As friendès do when they be met y-fere. Daun John him maketh feast and merry cheer, ¹ And he him told again full specially How he had well y-bought and graciously,	<i>business dealings</i> <i>together</i> <i>him = merchant</i> <i>him = monk / in turn</i> <i>luckily</i>
1535	(Thankèd be God), all whole his merchandise, Save that he must, in allè manner wise, Maken a chevissance as for the best, And then should he in joy be and in rest. Daun John answéred: "Certès, I am fain	<i>completely</i> <i>in any case</i> <i>raise money</i> <i>I am glad</i>
1540	That you in health are comen home again! And if that I were rich, as have I bliss, Of twenty thousand shields should you not miss, For you so kindèly this other day Lent me gold. And as I can and may	 <i>I assure you</i>
1545	I thankè you, by God and by Saint Jame! But natheless, I took unto our dame, Your wife, at home the samè gold again Upon your bench. She wot it well, certain, By certain tokens that I can you tell. ²	 <i>she knows</i> <i>receipts / show</i>
1550	Now, by your leave, I may no longer dwell. Our abbot will out of this town anon, And in his companiè must I gon. Greet well our dame, mine ownè niecè sweet. ³ And farewell, dearè cousin, till we meet."	<i>stay (to talk)</i> <i>will (go)</i> <i>go</i>

Completing his business successfully, the merchant returns home and celebrates with his wife

1555	This merchant which that was full 'ware and wise	<i>wary</i>
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¹ "Don John greets him cheerfully and makes him welcome."

² The monk says, correctly, that he has returned the money to the merchant's wife, and left it right on the merchant's desk. He claims that she has given him "tokens" for it, i.e. some kind of receipt, though at that point he gets up to leave and does not produce the tokens. Of course, he cannot show the real token he got for the hundred franks.

³ Notice the "domestic" or familiar *our* in *our dame*, rather like the earlier use *my lord Daun John*, / *Our dear cousin* (above). *Our dame* means the lady we both know, or the lady of the house. But here it inevitably has a double meaning for the reader.

- Creancéd has and paid eke in Paris *has borrowed & repaid*
 To certain Lombards, ready in their hand, *bankers*
 The sum of gold, and got of them his bond;
 And home he goes, merry as a popinjay. *bird*
 1560 For well he knew he stood in such array *situation*
 That needès must he win in that viáge *trip*
 A thousand franks above all his costáge. *outlay*
 His wife full ready met him at the gate,
 As she was wont of old uságe algate. *always*
 1565 And all that night in mirthè they biset *spent*
 For he was rich and clearly out of debt.
 When it was day this merchant gan embrace
 His wife all new, and kissed her on her face;
 And up he goes and maketh it full tough.
 1570 "No more," quod she, "by God, you have enough!"
 And wantonly again with him she played
 Till at the lastè thus this merchant said:

He chides her gently

- "By God," quod he, "I am a little wroth *angry*
 With you, my wife, although it be me loth. *I'm reluctant*
 1575 And wot you why? By God, as that I guess *know you?*
 That you have made a manner strangèness *some coolness*
 Betwixen me and my cousin Daun John.
 You should have warnèd me ere I had gone
 That he to you a hundred franks had paid
 1580 By ready token. He held him evil apaid *He took offence*
 For that I to him spoke of chevissance — *raising money*
 Me seemèd so as by his countenance.
 But natheless, by God our heaven king,
 I thoughtè not to ask of him no thing. *I never intended*
 1585 I pray thee, wife, ne do thou no more so!
 Tell me always, ere that I from thee go,
 If any debtor has in mine absénce
 Y-payèd thee, lest through thy negligence
 I might him ask a thing that he has paid."
 1590 This wife was not afearèd nor afraid,
 But boldèly she said, and that anon: *boldly / & promptly*

She is surprised, but has a ready answer

	"Marry! I defy the falsé monk Daun John. I keep not of his token never a deal! He took me certain gold, this wot I well!	<i>By Mary care not a whit this know I</i>
1595	What! Evil theedom on his monké's snout! For God it wot, I wend withouten doubt That he had given it me because of you To do therewith my honour and my prow, For cousinage and eke for bellé cheer	<i>Bad luck to his God knows, I thought & my benefit</i>
1600	That he has had full often timés here. ¹ But since I see I stand in this disjoint I will you answer shortly to the point: You have more slacker debtors than am I! For I will pay you well and readily	<i>difficulty</i>
1605	From day to day, and if so be I fail, I am your wife; score it upon my tail! ² And I shall pay as soon as ever I may; For, by my truth, I have on my array, And not in waste, bestowed every deal.	<i>my tally stick on clothes spent every bit</i>
1610	And for I have bestowed it so well For your honouúr, for Godé's sake, I say As be not wroth, but let us laugh and play. You shall my jolly body have to wed; By God, I will not pay you but a-bed!	<i>because / spent angry as pledge in bed</i>
1615	Forgive it me, mine ownè spouse so dear. Turn hitherward and maketh better cheer." This merchant saw there was no remedy, And for to chide it n'ere but great folly, ³	<i>be happier</i>

¹ *I wend ... here*: The sense is: I thought he had given it to me to use in any way I saw fit, because you are cousins and he has been entertained here often.

² ME *Taile* means both "tally stick" and "tail." The double meaning is obvious. The tally stick was an actual piece of wood on which the creditor "scored" or cut marks indicating how much the debtor owed. The modern equivalent of the whole phrase (without double entendre) would be "Put it on my bill."

³ "To complain would only be pointless."

- Since that the thing may not amended be. *can't be changed*
 1620 "Now wife," he said, "and I forgive it thee.
 But by thy life, ne be no more so large. *so lavish*
 Keep bet my goods, this give I thee in charge." *Keep better*
- Thus endeth now my tale; and God us send
 1624 Tailing enough unto our livès end!

The Words of the Host to the Shipman

- 1625 "Well said, by corpus dominus," quod our Host.¹ *by God*
 "Now longè may thou sailè by the coast,
 Sir gentle master, gentle mariner. *ship's captain*
 God give the monk a thousand last quad year. *loads of bad years*
 Aha, fellows! beware of such a jape! *joke, trick*
 1630 The monk put in the man's hood an ape, *i.e. tricked the man*
 And in his wife's eke, by Saint Austin!
 Draw no monkès more into your inn! *Invite / house*
 But now pass over, and let us seek about.
 Who shall now tellè first of all this rout *group*
 1635 Another tale?" And with that word he said,
 As courteously as it had been a maid: *as if*

The words of the Host to the Prioress

- "My Lady Prioressè, by your leave,
 So that I wist I shouldè you not grieve, *Provided I knew*
 I wouldè deemè that you tellen should *I'd like you to tell*
 1640 A talè next, if so were that you would.
 Now will you vouchèsauf, my lady dear?"² *condescend*
 "Gladly," quod she, and said as you shall hear.

¹ The host's oath, in bad Latin, means "by God's body."

² *My lady Prioress ... dear*: The Host is being extraordinarily polite to the Prioress by contrast with his treatment of some other pilgrims. His speech means something like this: "If you please, my lady Prioress, if I could be sure that you would not be displeased, I would like to ask you to tell the next story, if you would be so kind. Now, would you grant that, my dear lady?" Perhaps he is deliberately overdoing it.

(The Prioress's Tale is on a separate file)