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; living
For aught I wot, he was of Dartemouth. I know
390 He rode upon a rouncy as he couth, nag
In a gown of falding to the knee. wool cloth
A dagger hanging on a lace had he
About his neck under his arm adown.
The hot summer had made his hue all brown. color
395 And certainly he was a good fellow.
Full many a draught of wine had he y-draw
drawn
From Bordeaux-ward while that the chapmen sleep. merchants slept
Of nice conscience took he no keep: sensitive c. / care
If that he fought and had the higher hand
400 By water he sent them home to every land. upper hand
But of his craft to reckon well his tides,
His stream and his dangers him besides, currents
His harborow, his moon, his lodemenage
There was none such from Hull unto Carthage. sun's position / navigation
405 Hardy he was and wise to undertake. tough but shrewd
With many a tempest had his beard been shake.
He knew as all the havens as they were harbors
From Gothland to the Cape of Finisterre
And every creek in Brittany and Spain.
410 His barge y-clep was the Maudlain. ship was called
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 bringé 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 Miller's 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 "cozen," 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 so avely 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 husbând al be he your cousîn
> Nay, quod this monk, by God and Saint Martín (1337-8)

*Farewell, cousîn, 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)
hôñour (1598); but honoûr (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 saidé: "Good men, hearken everyone.
1165 This was a thrifty talé for the nones.1
Sir parish priest," quod he, "for Godé's bones,
Tell us a tale as was thy forward yore.
I see well that you learned men in lore
Can muchel good, by Godé's dignity!"
1170 The Parson answered him: "Bendicitee!
What ails the man so sinfully to swear?"
Our Host answéred :"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 passion
   For we shall have a predication.
   This Lollard here will preach 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
   We believe all in the great God," quod he
   "He would sow some difficulty
   Or springen cockle in our clean corn.
   And therefore, Host, I warnè thee beforn,

1185 My jolly body shall a talè tell ²
   And I shall clinken you so merry a bell
   That I shall waken all this company,
   But it shall not be of philosophy,
   Nor physlias, nor terms quaint of law
   There is but little Latin in my maw."

THE SHIPMAN'S TALE

A merchant whilom dwelled at Saint Denis
That richè was, for which men held him wise.
A wife he had of excellent beauty,
And companionable and revelous was she,

A slight digression from the narrative

1195 Which is a thing that causes more dispense
   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 salutatïons 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!
He must us clothe and he must us array
(All for his ownë worship!) — richely;
In which array we dancen jollily!

1205 And if that he not may, peráventure,
Or else list no such dispence endure,
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,
For which he had alday so great repair³
For his largess, and for his wife was fair,
That wonder is. But hearken to my tale:
Amongst all his guestês great and small

1215 There was a monk, a fair man and a bold —
I trow a thirty winter he was old —
That ever in one was drawing to that place.
This youngë monk, that was so fair of face,
Acquainted was so with the goodë man

1220 Since that their firstë knowledge began
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 goodé man,
And eke this monk of which that I began,
W
1225 Were bothe two y-born in one villáge,
The monk him claimeth as for cousináge,
A
1230 Thus be they knit with éterne álliánce,
And each of them 'gan other for t'assure
Of brotherhood while that their life may dure.

The monk is also generous

Free was Daun John, and namely of dispense
As in that house,¹ and full of diligence
1235 To do pleasánce, and also great costáge;
He not forgot to give the leasté page
In all that house. But after their degree
He gave the lord, and sith all his meinee,
When that he came, some manner honest thing.
1240 For which they were as glad of his coming
As fowl is fain when that the sun up riseth.
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 maké ready his array
1245 Toward the town of Brugès for to fare
To buyen there a portion of ware;
For which he has to Paris sent anon
A messenger, and prayéd has Daun John
That he should come to Saint Denís and play
1250 With him and with his wife a day or tway

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.
Before / in any case
of whom I tell
when he pleases, leave

abbey official
outlying farms
graciousness
jug of Malmsey (wine)
Italian wine
fowl / always his custom
two

A break while the merchant attends to business

The thirdé day this merchant up ariseth,
And on his needes sadly him aviseth,
And up into his counting-house goes he
To reckon with himself, as well may be,
Of thilké year how that it with him stood,
Of that

And how that he dispended had his good,
And if that he increasèd were or none.
His bookês and his bagges many a one
He lays before him on his counting-board;
Full riche was his treasure and his hoard,

For which full fast his counting-door he shut,
And eke he would that no man should him let
Of his accountês for the meané time.
And thus he sits till it is passèd prime.
9 a.m.

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
morning

1 1258-59: Who was ... courtesy: Notice the use of the "domestic" pronouns: my and our. No particular speaker is indicated by this usage.
And in the garden walketh to and fro,
And has his thinges said full courteously.
This goode wife came walking privily
Into the garden there he walketh soft
And him saluteth, as she has done oft.

A maide child came in her company,
Which as her liste she may govern and gie,
For yet under the yardë was the maid.¹
  "O dearë cousin mine, Daun John," she said,
  "What aileth you so rathe for to rise?"

"Niecë," quod he, "it ought enough suffice.
Five hours for to sleep upon a night,
But it were for an old appalled wight,
As been these wedded men that lie and dare
As in a formë sits a weary hare

Were all forstraught with houndës great and small.
But dearë niecë, why be you so pale?
I trowë certës that our goodë man
Has you labouëred since the night began,
That you were need to resten hastily."

And with that word he laughed full merrily,
And of his ownë thought he waxed all red.
This faire wife 'gan for to shake her head
And saidë thus: "Yea, God wot all," quod she.
"Nay, cousin mine it stands not so with me;
For by that God that gave me soul and life,
In all the realm of France there is no wife
That lessë lust has to that sorry play.
For I may sing 'Alas!' and 'Welaway!'
That I was born; but to no wight," quod she,
"Dare I not tell how that it stands with me;
Wherefore I think out of this land to wend,
Or else of myself to make an end,
So full am I of dread and eke of care."

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
And said: "Alas, my niecè, God forbid
That you for any sorrow or any dread
Fordo yourself! But telleth me your grief.
Peráventure I may in your mischief
Counsel or help. And therefore telleth me
All your annoy, for it shall be secrèe.
For on my portehors I make an oath
That never in my life, for lief nor loath
Ne shall I of no counsel you biwray."
"The same again to you," quod she, "I say.
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,
Bewray a word of thing that you me tell,
Not for no cousinage nor álliance,
But verily for love and áffiance."
Thus be they sworn, and hereupon they kissed.
And each of them told other what them list:
"Cousin," quod she, "if that I had a space,
As I have none, and namely in this place,
Then would I tell a legend of my life,
What I have suffered since I was a wife
With mine husband, all be he your cousin."

They exchange confidences

"Nay," quod this monk, "by God and Saint Martin,
He is no moré cousin unto me
Than is the leaf that hangeth on the tree!
I clepe him so, by Saint Denís of France,
To have the moré cause of ácquaintánce
Of you, which I have lovèd specially
Above all other women, sikerly.
This swear I you on my profession.
Telleth your grief, lest that he come adown;
And hasteth you, and go away anon."
"My dearé love," quod she, "O my Daun John,
Full lief were me this counsel for to hide!"
1350 But out it must; I may no more abide:
Mine husband is to me the worst man
That ever was since that the world began!
But since I am a wife, it sits not me
To tellen no wight of our privity,

1355 Neither a-bed nor in no other place.
God shield I should it tellen, for His grace!
A wife ne shall not say of her husband
But all honoûr, 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.
And well you wot that women naturally
Desiren thingès six—as well as I.

1365 They wouldè that their husbands shouldè be
Hardy and wise and rich, and thereto free,
And buxom unto his wife, and fresh a-bed.

Unknown to her husband the wife is in debt

But by that ilkè Lord that for us bled!
For his honoûr myself for to array
A Sunday next I mustè needès pay
A hundred franks, or else I am lorn.
Yet were me lever that I were unborn
Than me were done a slander or villainy.
And if mine husband eke might it espy,

1370 I n'ere but lost. And therefore I you pray
Lend me this sum, or else must I die!
Daun John, I say, lend me these hundred franks!
Pardee, I will not failè you my thanks
If that you list to do what I you pray;

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;
And but I do, God take on me vengeance

1 Yet ....villainy: "But I would rather die than suffer indignity or shame."
The monk offers to help. They seal their agreement

1385  This gentle monk answered in this manner:
    "Now truly, mine owè lady dear,
    I have," quod he, "on you so great a ruth
    That I you swear and plightè you my truth
    That when your husband is to Flanders fare
    I will deliver you out of this care,
    For I will bringè you a hundred franks."
1390  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,
    And let us dine as soon as that you may,
    For by my chilender t'is prime of day.
    Go now, and be as true as I shall be."
1395  And forth she goes as jolly as a pie,
    She calls her husband to leave his business and join them for dinner
    And bade the cookès that they should them hie
    So that men mightè dine, and that anon.
1400  And bade the cookès that they should them hie
    Up to her husband is this wife y-gone
    And knocketh at his counter boldly.
    "Qui la?" quod he. "Peter! it am I."
1405  Quod she. "What, sir! How longè will you fast?
    How longè timè will you reckon and cast
    Your summès and your bookès and your things?
    The devil have part on all such reckonings!
    You have enough, pardee, of Godè's send!
1410  Come down today, and let your bagges stand.

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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.
Scarcely among twelve, twain shall thrive. Continually, lasting unto our age.

The merchant announces a coming business trip

To Flanders will I go tomorrow at day F = modern Belgium

And come again as soon as ever I may. For which, my dear wife, I thee beseech polite & obliging
As be to every wight buxom and meek. And for to keep our goods be curious, be careful
And honestly govern well our house.

Thou hast enough in every manner wise in every way
That to a thrifty household may suffice. clothes or food
Thee lacketh no array nor no vitaille;
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,
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.

At after-dinner Daun John soberly
This chapman took apart, and privily
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.

I pray you, cousin, wisely that you ride.
Governeth you also of your diet
Temperately and namely in this heat.
Betwixt us two needeth no strangè fare.
Farewell, cousin, God shieldè you from care.

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.

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

One thing ere that you go, if it may be:
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.
God help me so, I would that it were yours!

I shall not failè surely of my day,
Not for a thousand franks, a milè way.
But let this thing be secret, I you pray:
For yet tonight these beastès must I buy.
And fare now well, mine owndè cousin dear;

Grammèrcy of your cost and of your cheer."
This noble merchant gentilly anon
Answered and said: "O cousin mine, Daun John,
Now sikerly this is a small request.
My gold is yourès when that it you lest;
And not only my gold, but my chaffāre. Merchandise
Take what you list, God shieldē 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 creancē while we have a name; Get credit
But goldless for to be, it is no game. Your power
Pay it again when it lies in your ease; After my might full fain would I you please."
These hundred franks he fetched forth anon, No one knew
And privily he took them to Daun John.
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 Apprentice
To Flanders-ward; his prentice well him guides Apprentice
Till he came into Brugēs merrily. 
Now goes this merchant fast and busily
About his need, and buyeth and creanceth. Borrows
He neither playeth at the dice, nor danceth, 
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 Denīs y-comen is Daun John Has come
With crown and beard all fresh and new y-shave. 
In all the house there n'as so little a knave, Wasn't a servant boy
Nor no wight elsē 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, 
This faire wife accorded with Daun John 
That for these hundred franks he should all night 
Have her in his armes 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, 
And bade the meinee: "Farewell, have good day," 
For none of them, nor no wight in the town, 
Has of Daun John right no suspicïon. 
And forth he rideth home to his abbey, 
Or where him list. No more of him I say. 

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

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

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

1530 And for to tellen him of his chaffare, business dealings
As friendès do when they be met y-fere. together
Daun John him maketh feast and merry cheer,¹ him = merchant
And he him told again full specially him = monk / in turn
How he had well y-bought and graciously, luckily

(Thankèd be God), all whole his merchandise, completely
Save that he must, in allè manner wise, in any case
Maken a chevissance as for the best, raise money
And then should he in joy be and in rest.

Daun John answéred: "Certès, I am fain I am glad
That you in health are comen home again!
And if that I were rich, as have I bliss, I assure you
Of twenty thousand shields should you not miss,
For you so kindely this other day
Lent me gold. And as I can and may

1540 I thankè you, by God and by Saint Jame! she knows
But natheless, I took unto our dame, receipts / show
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 stay (to talk)

1545 Now, by your leave, I may no longer dwell. will (go)
Our abbot will out of this town anon, go
And in his companiè must I gon.
Greet well our dame, mine ownè niecè sweet.³
And farewell, dearè cousin, till we meet."

1550 Completing his business successfully, the merchant returns home and celebrates with his wife

1555 This merchant which that was full 'ware and wise wary

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.
Creancé has and paid eke in Paris
To certain Lombards, ready in their hand,
The sum of gold, and got of them his bond;
And home he goes, merry as a popinjay.

1560 For well he knew he stood in such array
That needés must he win in that viáge
A thousand franks above all his costáge.
His wife full ready met him at the gate,
As she was wont of old uságe algate.
And all that night in mirthè they biset
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
With you, my wife, although it be me loth.

1575 And wot you why? By God, as that I guess
That you have made a manner strangèness
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
For that I to him spoke of chevissance —
Me seemèd so as by his countenance.
But natheless, by God our heaven king,
I thoughtè not to ask of him no thing.

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 afeared nor afraid,
But boldèly she said, and that anon:
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!

1595 What! Evil theedom on his monkè'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 bellè cheer

1600 That he has had full often timès 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

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.

1610 And for I have bestowed it so well For your honoúr, for Godè'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!

1615 Forgive it me, mine owné 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

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 M E 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.

1620 "Now wife," he said, "and I forgive it thee.
But by thy life, ne be no more so large.
Keep bet my goods, this give I thee in charge."

Thus endeth now my tale; and God us send
1624 Tailing enough unto our livés end!

**The Words of the Host to the Shipman**

1625 "Well said, by corpus dominus," quod our Host.¹
"Now longé may thou sailé by the coast,
Sir gentle master, gentle mariner.
God give the monk a thousand last quad year.
Aha, fellows! beware of such a jape!
1630 The monk put in the man's hood an ape,
And in his wife's eke, by Saint Austin!
Draw no monkës more into your inn!
But now pass over, and let us seek about.
Who shall now tellé first of all this rout
1635 Another tale?" And with that word he said,
As courteously as it had been a maid:

**The words of the Host to the Prioress**

"My Lady Prioressë, by your leave,
So that I wist I shouldé you not grieve,
I woulde deemé that you tellen should
1640 A talë next, if so were that you would.
Now will you vouchësauf, my lady dear?" ²
"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)