

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-316-61564-5 — The Merchant's Prologue and Tale
 Geoffrey Chaucer, Edited by Maurice Hussey
 Excerpt
[More Information](#)

The Merchant's Prologue and Tale

\bar{o} (open – i.e. where the equivalent modern vowel is pronounced as in ‘brother’, ‘mood’ or ‘good’) represents the sound now written *aw* as in ‘fawn’

\bar{o} (close – i.e. where the equivalent modern vowel is pronounced as in ‘road’) as in modern ‘note’

\bar{u} as in French *tu* or German *Tür*

Diphthongs

ai and *ei* both roughly represent the sound now written *i* or *y* as in ‘die’ or ‘dye’

au and *aw* both represent the sound now written *ow* or *ou* as in ‘now’ or ‘pounce’

ou and *ow* have two pronunciations: as in *through* where the equivalent modern vowel is pronounced as in ‘through’ or ‘mouse’; and as in *pounce* where the equivalent modern vowel is pronounced as in ‘know’ or ‘thought’

Writing of vowels and diphthongs

A long vowel is often indicated by doubling, as in *roote* or *eek*. The \bar{u} sound is sometimes represented by an *o* as in *yong*. The *au* sound is sometimes represented by an *a*, especially before *m* or *n*, as in *cha(u)mbre* or *cha(u)nce*.

Consonants

Largely as in modern English, except that many consonants now silent were still pronounced. *Gh* was pronounced as in Scottish ‘loch’, and both consonants should be pronounced in such groups as the following: ‘gnacchen’, ‘knave’, ‘word’, ‘folk’, ‘wrong’.

The Merchant's Prologue

'Weping and wailing, care and oother sorwe
 I knowe ynogh, on even and a-morwe,
 Quod the Marchant, 'and so doon other mo
 That wedded been. I trowe that it be so,
 For wel I woot it fareth so with me.
 I have a wyf, the worste that may be;
 For thogh the feend to hire ycoupled were,
 She wolde him overmacche, I dar wel swere.
 What sholde I yow reherce in special
 Hir hye malice? She is a shrewe at al. 10
 Ther is a long and large difference
 Bitwix Grisildis grete pacience
 And of my wyf the passing crueltee.
 Were I unbounden, also moot I thee,
 I wolde nevere eft comen in the snare.
 We wedded men liven in sorwe and care.
 Assaye whoso wole, and he shal finde
 That I seye sooth, by Seint Thomas of Inde,
 As for the moore part, I sey nat alle.
 God shilde that it sholde so bifalle! 20

A, goode sire Hoost, I have ywedded bee
 Thise monthes two, and moore nat, pardee;
 And yet, I trowe, he that al his live
 Wyflee hath been, thogh that men wolde him rive
 Unto the herte, ne koude in no manere
 Tellen so muchel sorwe as I now heere
 Koude tellen of my wyves cursednesse!

'Now,' quod oure Hoost, 'Marchaunt, so God yow blesse,
 Sin ye so muchel knowen of that art
 Ful hertely I pray yow telle us part. 30

'Gladly,' quod he, 'but of myn owene soore,
 For soory herte, I telle may namoore.'

The Merchant's Tale

Whilom ther was dwellinge in Lumbardye
 A worthy knight, that born was of Pavie,
 In which he lived in greet prosperitee;
 And sixty yeer a wyflee man was hee,
 And folwed ay his bodily delit
 On wommen, ther as was his appetit,
 As doon thise fooles that been seculer.
 And whan that he was passed sixty yeer, 40
 Were it for hoolinesse or for dotage,
 I kan nat seye, but swich a greet corage
 Hadde this knight to been a wedded man
 That day and night he dooth al that he kan
 T'espien where he mighte wedded be,
 Preyinge oure Lord to graunten him that he
 Mighte ones knowe of thilke blissful lyf
 That is bitwixe an housbonde and his wyf,
 And for to live under that hooly boond
 With which that first God man and womman bond. 50
 'Noon oother lyf,' seyde he, 'is worth a bene;
 For wedlok is so esy and so clene,
 That in this world it is a paradis.'
 Thus seyde this olde knight, that was so wis.

And certainly, as sooth as God is king,
 To take a wif it is a glorious thing,
 And namely whan a man is oold and hoor;
 Thanne is a wyf the fruit of his tresor.
 Thanne sholde he take a yong wif and a feir,
 On which he mighte engendren him an heir, 60
 And lede his lyf in joye and in solas,
 Where as thise bachelers singe 'allas,'
 Whan that they finden any adversitee
 In love, which nis but childissh vanitee.

And trewely it sit wel to be so,
 That bachelers have often peyne and wo;
 On brotel ground they builde, and brotelnesse
 They finde, whan they wene sikernesse.
 They live but as a brid or as a beest,
 In libertee, and under noon arreest; 70
 Ther as a wedded man in his estaat
 Liveth a lyf blisful and ordinaat,
 Under this yok of mariage ybounde.
 Wel may his herte in joy and blisse habounde,
 For who kan be so buxom as a wyf?
 Who is so trewe, and eek so ententif
 To kepe him, sik and hool, as is his make?
 For wele or wo she wole him nat forsake;
 She nis nat wery him to love and serve,
 Thogh that he lye bedrede, til he sterve. 80
 And yet somme clerkes seyn it nis nat so,
 Of whiche he Theofraste is oon of tho.
 What force thogh Theofraste liste lye?
 ‘Ne take no wyf,’ quod he, ‘for housbondrye,
 As for to spare in houshold thy dispence.
 A trewe servant dooth moore diligence
 Thy good to kepe, than thyn owene wyf,
 For she wol claime half part al hir lyf.
 And if that thou be sik, so God me save,
 Thy verray freendes, or a trewe knave, 90
 Wol kepe thee bet than she that waiteth ay
 After thy good and hath doon many a day.
 And if thou take a wyf unto thyn hoold,
 Ful lightly maystow been a cokewold.’
 This sentence, and an hundred thinges worse,
 Writeth this man, ther God his bones corse!
 But take no kep of al swich vanitee;
 Deffie Theofraste, and herke me.

The Merchant's Prologue and Tale

A wyf is Goddes yifte verraily;
 Alle othere manere yiftes hardily, 100
 As londes, rentes, pasture, or commune,
 Or moebles, alle been yiftes of Fortune,
 That passen as a shadwe upon a wal,
 But drede nat, if pleynly speke I shal,
 A wif wol laste, and in thyn hous endure,
 Wel lenger than thee list, paraventure.

Mariage is a ful greet sacrament.
 He which that hath no wyf, I holde him shent;
 He liveth helples and al desolat, —
 I speke of folk in seculer estaat. 110
 And herke why, I sey nat this for noght,
 That womman is for mannes helpe ywroght.
 The hie God, whan he hadde Adam maked,
 And saugh him al allone, bely-naked;
 God of his grete goodnesse seyde than,
 'Lat us now make an helpe unto this man
 Lyk to himself'; and thanne He made him Eve.
 Heere may ye se, and heerby may ye preve,
 That wyf is mannes helpe and his confort;
 His paradys terrestre, and his disport. 120
 So buxom and so vertuou is she,
 They moste nedes live in unitee.
 O flesh they been, and o fleesh, as I gesse,
 Hath but oon herte, in wele and in distresse.

A wyf, a, Seinte Marie, *benedicite*,
 How mighte a man han any adversitee
 That hath a wyf? Certes, I kan nat seye.
 The blisse which that is bitwixe hem tweye
 Ther may no tonge telle, or herte thinke.
 If he be povre, she helpeth him to swinke; 130
 She kepeth his good, and wasteth never a deel;
 Al that hire housbonde lust, hire liketh weel;

She seith nat ones 'nay', whan he seith 'ye.'
 'Do this,' seith he; 'Al redy, sire,' seith she.
 O blisful ordre of wedlok precious,
 Thou art so murye, and eek so vertuous,
 And so commended and apprevd eek
 That every man that halt him worth a leek,
 Upon his bare knees oughte al his lyf
 Thanken his God that him hath sent a wyf, 140
 Or elles preye to God him for to sende
 A wyf, to laste unto his lives ende.
 For thanne his lyf is set in sikernesse;
 He may nat be deceyved, as I gesse,
 So that he werke after his wyves reed.
 Thanne may he boldely beren up his heed,
 They been so trewe, and therwithal so wise;
 For which, if thou wolt werken as the wise,
 Do alwey so as wommen wol thee rede.
 Lo, how that Jacob, as thise clerkes rede, 150
 By good conseil of his mooder Rebekke,
 Boond the kides skin aboute his nekke,
 For which his fadres benison he wan.
 Lo Judith, as the storie eek telle kan,
 By wis conseil she Goddes peple kepte,
 And slow him Olofernus, whil he slepte.
 Lo Abigail, by good conseil, how she
 Saved hir housbonde Nabal, whan that he
 Sholde han be slain; and looke, Ester also
 By good conseil delivered out of wo 160
 The peple of God, and made him Mardochee
 Of Assuere enhaunced for to be.
 Ther nis no thing in gree superlatif,
 As seith Senek, above an humble wyf.
 Suffre thy wives tonge, as Catoun bit;
 She shal comande, and thou shalt suffren it,

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-316-61564-5 — The Merchant's Prologue and Tale
 Geoffrey Chaucer, Edited by Maurice Hussey
 Excerpt
[More Information](#)

The Merchant's Prologue and Tale

And yet she wole obeye of curteisye.
 A wif is kepere of thyn housbondrye;
 Wel may the sike man biwaille and wepe,
 Ther as ther nis no wyf the hous to kepe. 170
 I warne thee, if wisely thou wolt wirche,
 Love wel thy wyf, as Crist loved his chirche.
 If thou lovest thyself, thou lovest thy wyf;
 No man hateth his flesh, but in his lyf
 He fostreth it, and therefore bidde I thee,
 Cherisse thy wyf, or thou shalt nevere thee.
 Housbonde and wyf, what so men jape or pleye,
 Of worldly folk holden the siker weye;
 They been so knit ther may noon harm bitide,
 And namely upon the wyves side. 180
 For which this Januarie, of whom I tolde,
 Considered hath, inwith his dayes olde,
 The lusty lyf, the vertuous quiete,
 That is in mariage hony-sweete;
 And for his freendes on a day he sente,
 To tellen hem th'effect of his entente.
 With face sad his tale he hath hem toold.
 He seyde, 'Freendes, I am hoor and oold,
 And almoost, God woot, on my pittes brinke;
 Upon my soule somewhat moste I thinke. 190
 I have my body folily despended;
 Blessed be God that it shal been amended.
 For I wol be, certeyn, a wedded man,
 And that anoon in al the haste I kan.
 Unto som mayde fair and tendre of age,
 I prey yow, shapeth for my mariage
 Al sodeynly, for I wol nat abide;
 And I wol fonde t'espian, on my side,
 To whom I may be wedded hastily.
 But forasmuche as ye been mo than I, 200

Ye shullen rather swich a thing espyen
 Than I, and where me best were to allyen.
 But o thing warne I yow, my freendes deere,
 I wol noon oold wyf han in no manere.
 She shal nat passe twenty yeer, certain;
 Oold fissh and yong flessch wolde I have ful fain.
 Bet is,' quod he, 'a pyk than a pikerel,
 And bet than old boef is the tendre veel.
 I wol no womman thritty yeer of age;
 It is but bene-straw and greet forage. 210
 And eek thise olde widwes, God it woot,
 They konne so muchel craft on Wades boot,
 So muchel broken harm, whan that hem leste,
 That with hem sholde I nevere live in reste.
 For sondry scoles maken sotile clerkis;
 Womman of manye scoles half a clerk is.
 But certeynly, a yong thing may men gye,
 Right as men may warm wex with handes plye.
 Wherefore I sey yow pleynty, in a clause,
 I wol noon oold wyf han right for this cause. 220
 For if so were I hadde swich mischaunce,
 That I in hire ne koude han no plesaunce,
 Thanne sholde I lede my lyf in avoutrye,
 And go streight to the devel, whan I die.
 Ne children sholde I none upon hire geten;
 Yet were me levere houndes had me eten,
 Than that myn heritage sholde falle
 In straunge hand, and this I telle yow alle.
 I dote nat, I woot the cause why
 Men sholde wedde, and forthermoore woot I, 230
 Ther speketh many a man of mariage
 That woot namoore of it than woot my page,
 For whiche causes man sholde take a wyf.
 If he ne may nat liven chaast his lyf,

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-316-61564-5 — The Merchant's Prologue and Tale
 Geoffrey Chaucer, Edited by Maurice Hussey
 Excerpt
[More Information](#)

The Merchant's Prologue and Tale

Take him a wyf with greet devocioun,
 By cause of leveful procreacioun
 Of children, to th'onour of God above,
 And nat oonly for paramour or love;
 And for they sholde leccherye eschue,
 And yelde hir dette whan that it is due; 240
 Or for that ech of hem sholde helpen oother
 In meschief, as a suster shal the brother;
 And live in chastitee ful holily.
 But sires, by youre leve, that am nat I.
 For, God be thanked, I dar make avaunt,
 I feele my lymes stark and suffisaunt
 To do al that a man bilongeth to;
 I woot myselfen best what I may do.
 Though I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree
 That blosmeth er that fruit ywoxen bee; 250
 And blosmy tree nis neither drye ne deed.
 I feele me nowhere hoor but on myn heed;
 Myn herte and alle my lymes been as grene
 As laurer thurgh the yeer is for to sene.
 And sin that ye han herd al myn entente,
 I prey yow to my wil ye wole assente.'

Diverse men diversely him tolde
 Of mariage manye ensamples olde.
 Somme blamed it, somme preysed it, certeyn;
 But atte laste, shortly for to seyn, 260
 As al day falleth altercacioun
 Bitwixen freendes in disputisoun,
 Ther fil a strif bitwixe his bretheren two,
 Of whiche that oon was cleped Placebo,
 Justinus soothly called was that oother.

Placebo seyde, 'O Januarie, brother,
 Ful litel nede hadde ye, my lord so deere,
 Conseil to axe of any that is heere,

But that ye been so ful of sapience
 That yow ne liketh, for youre heighe prudence, 270
 To weyven fro the word of Salomon.
 This word seyde he unto us everychon:
 “Wirk alle thing by conseil,” thus seyde he,
 “And thanne shaltow nat repente thee.”
 But though that Salomon spak swich a word,
 Myn owene deere brother and my lord,
 So wisly God my soule bringe at reste,
 I holde youre owene conseil is the beste.
 For, brother myn, of me taak this motif,
 I have now been a court-man al my lyf, 280
 And God it woot, though I unworthy be,
 I have stonden in ful greet degree
 Abouten lordes of ful heigh estaat;
 Yet hadde I nevere with noon of hem debaat.
 I nevere hem contraried, trewely;
 I woot wel that my lord kan moore than I.
 With that he seith, I holde it ferme and stable;
 I seye the same, or elles thing semblable.
 A ful greet fool is any conseillour
 That serveth any lord of heigh honour, 290
 That dar presume, or elles thenken it,
 That his conseil sholde passe his lordes wit.
 Nay, lordes been no fooles, by my fay.
 Ye han youreselfen shewed heer to-day
 So heigh sentence, so holily and weel,
 That I consente and conferme everydeel
 Your words alle and youre opinioun.
 By God, ther nis no man in al this toun,
 Ne in Itaille, that koude bet han said!
 Crist halt him of this conseil ful wel apaid. 300
 And trewely, it is an heigh corage
 Of any man that stapen is in age