

EXTIMACY IN THE *MILLER'S TALE*

by Gila Aloni

In the *Miller's Tale*, a story of a man whose cuckolding by his tenant is exposed to his community, the category of privacy appears frequently: the words *pryvetee*, *privy*, and *prively* appear thirteen times in the course of the tale. But the way in which privacy is fictionalized in the tale requires that it be discussed not as a separate category connected with the concept of intimacy and opposed to the category of the public, but rather as part of a structure in which inside and outside always turn into one another. What I am referring to here is the structure of *extimacy* or *extimité*, that is, the presence of what is Other at the place thought to be most intimate.¹ The expression *extimité*, coined by Jacques Lacan, “is necessary in order to escape the common ravings about a psychism supposedly located in a biopartition between interior and exterior.”² As Jacques-Alain Miller explains, “it is not enough to say that this biopartition is unsatisfactory. We must also elaborate a relation instead.” This relation is coined in the term *extimacy*: “Extimacy is not the contrary of intimacy. Extimacy says that the intimate is Other—like a foreign body, a parasite.”³ Dylan Evans defines *extimacy* as the problematization of the opposition between inside and outside, between container and contained.⁴ Such problematization of oppositions entails a desire for and deferral of the limit between inside and outside, between private and public. In other words, the polarity between what is socially accessible and what is intimate, between public and private worlds, is in fact not a polarity at all, but a distinction that collapses before it is even formulated.

The *Miller's Tale* questions and repositions the notion of privacy not as opposed to what is public, but in terms of extimacy. Privacy, as Chaucer fictionalizes it in the *Miller's Tale*, is not the *privatus* related to a master's control of his property.⁵ It is privacy with extimacy built in.⁶ It is both proximity to and distance from an object. Understanding Chaucer's deconstruction of the intimate and the exogamous is key to understanding the apparent contradictions in the *Miller's Tale*. Space in this tale forms the arena in which various relationships—male/female, husband/wife, landlord/tenant—are negotiated. This essay examines physical, architectonic

spaces, such as a house that is supposed to keep the Other outside yet actually contains that Other. I also will be also looking at relationships within the private space of the house: that between tenant and landlord, and especially that between husband and wife. Lodging, or *herbergage*, demonstrates the presence of the foreign within architectonic spaces considered private, but which do not safeguard their inhabitants or offer them privacy. Moreover, while the discussion of extimacy in the *Miller's Tale* is the focus of this article, I will also devote some attention to extimacy in the other tales of Fragment I, especially as it illuminates marital relationships. A study of extimacy in this sequence of tales (Knight-Miller-Reeve-Cook) reveals that what most critics have identified as a degenerative mode—a progressive transition from order in the first tale to chaos in the last tale—is not sufficient to describe what happens in the fragment. Central to Fragment I is an increasing exposure of the structure of extimacy and man's inability to control woman.

The connection between space, gender, and power relies on the basic understanding that, to use Michel Foucault's terms, the physical space provides a male/female "space of emplacement."⁷ Scholarly research on the conjunction of space and gender in relation to the control of women in the Middle Ages is vast. There are two major trends. Earlier research can be identified with Georges Duby's model of the separate spheres: male/public, female/private.⁸ Traditionally, power has been equated with public authority. "In this model," as Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski explain, "the public sphere, the domain of men, encompasses the worlds of politics, legal rights and obligations, and the market[;] . . . the private or domestic sphere, to which women are confined by virtue of their role as wives and mothers, encompasses the family and the immediate household."⁹ In the Middle Ages women in both secular and religious contexts were presented as segregated, that is, confined within the domestic sphere of the house or sealed away from the world in convents, chambers, cells, and anchorholds.¹⁰ The division of human activity into private (domestic) and public spheres, with a concomitant segregation of women, was used to explain women's subordination to men and to control women's identity. As Doreen Massey suggests, "one of the most evident aspects of this joint control of spatiality and identity has been in the West related to the culturally specific distinction between public and private. The attempts to confine women to the domestic sphere was both a specifically spatial control and through that, a social control on identity."¹¹

Recent scholarship, more relevant to my study,¹² has revisited the relationship between space and gender in relation to power, attempting to deconstruct the binary classification of private/public and offer new attitudes toward the female body.¹³ Erler and Kowaleski's *Gendering the*

Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages offers an overview of research that attempts to complicate the use of the public/private dichotomy “and to suggest some fresh forms in which female influence can be seen.”¹⁴ Felicity Riddy, for example, suggests that “the circumstances of everyday domestic living [a group of people living in close proximity with one another]—especially urban living—mitigated any simple model of male power and female subordination.”¹⁵ In her examination of home and intimacy, Riddy affirms that “home was both private and public,” so that “only fresh structures of analysis will allow us to describe women’s place in the world.”¹⁶ However, although recent research has been aware of the limitations of the traditional binary classification, it has not conceptualized the structure of the relationship between private and public. The concept of extimacy helps to clarify the relation between private and public, inside and outside.

To the extent to which categories of inside and outside have been examined in the *Miller’s Tale*, they have been considered in relation to the private as opposed to the public. Numerous critics have commented on the reference to privacy in the allusion to “Goddess pryvete” (I 3164) in the *Miller’s Prologue*. Scholars have suggested that the privacy here has to do not with God’s but with Christ’s genitals, in a fabliau version of the artistic tradition of *ostentatio genitalium*.¹⁷ Moreover, feminist critics have looked upon the tale’s anxieties about gender definition. E. Jane Burns, for example, locates male authors’ references to female genitalia within a frame of ignorance about female sexuality.¹⁸ Elaine Tuttle Hansen sees the tale as misrepresenting female sexuality and as fearing the feminine, resulting in a replacement of the female with the male, as Nicholas replaces Alisoun in the finale scene.¹⁹ Louise M. Bishop suggests that the tale equates the mystery of God’s privates with those of a *wyf*, that is, Alisoun, the one character in the tale who receives no punishment.²⁰

Critics also have discussed the notion of privacy in the *Miller’s Tale* within the fabliau genre.²¹ Privacy in general, Thomas J. Farrell has suggested, is a predominant concern of the fabliau genre, which is characterized by an “insistence on the private—the personal, the selfish, the secret, the hidden.”²² He adds that in the *Miller’s Tale* the generic insistence on privacy takes the form of the male characters’ efforts “to privatize the action,” bespeaking an “obsession with secrecy and privateness.”²³ In contrast to Farrell’s view of privacy as associated with the male characters, William Woods sees it as embodied in Alisoun: “the most private space in the tale and the richest metaphor for its world is what Alysoun herself embodies: the promise behind those black eyes. . . . In the course of the tale, Alysoun and her house are established as analogous . . . for the forbidden paradise that constitutes private life in a small town like Oxford.”²⁴ In metaphor, Woods claims, “Alysoun and

the house are co-extensive: each has three 'levels' and each man seeks his private space at a different level, attempting to find with her, and in her, a private world that is peculiarly his own."²⁵ Linda Tarte Holley, too, connects privacy and the household, seeing privacy as a function of the carpenter's house: "once we get past the portraits of the principals, the Miller's narrative moves inward to the carpenter's richly and profoundly limited dwelling. Even Absalon's and John's 'business' trips are understood specifically in terms of their return to the activity in John's house, where Alysoun is held 'narwe in cage.'"²⁶

To be sure, privacy is a category that had specific resonances in medieval culture, which are not without relevance to the tale. Farrell has pointed out that in Chaucer's England, "the nouns 'pryveté' (1g) or 'privates' ('private' n., sense f.) could be used in reference to the anus, the vagina, the uterus, and the penis (in either its sexual or its excretory function), either singly or in various combinations."²⁷ Secrecy, privacy, personal desires, and the hidden are all major concerns of the fabliau.²⁸ Karma Lochrie explains that "mystery, secret, a secret sin or desire, and sex organs are all meanings attached to the word 'pryvetee,'" and the word serves "as a generic marker of the fabliau, setting up an interesting and telling conjunction of genre and gender in the tale."²⁹ That privacy as a concept in medieval culture relates so directly to sexual organs reflects a bodily structure that mirrors extimacy. What characterizes the structure of sexual organs and other orifices of the body is that, in them, inside turns into outside and vice versa. In the orifices of the body, what is outside is a continuum of an inside surface. This phenomenon means that the medieval notion of privacy most relevant to the fabliau—that related to sexual organs—is not one in which inside opposes outside (what most critics have been concerned with), but one in which inside and outside are continuous. It is a structure that involves internal exclusion. To invoke a different image, one may think of a wall not as a barrier that divides spaces, but as something that simultaneously separates and unites spaces.

Extimacy is structurally predominant in the tale on many levels, as relations between characters in the tale—Alisoun/John, John/Nicholas, Alisoun/Nicholas/Absolon, and Absolon/Nicholas—highlight various dimensions of internal exclusion. Such internal exclusion appears both in relationships between characters and in constructions of space. The tale's action centers upon the house, within which "were kept all the *res privatae* or *res familiares*: private, movable property."³⁰ Plot events situated in the house revolve around the most significant object kept in it, the bed. "Of all the objects mentioned" in medieval furnishing, Dominique Barthelemy states, "the bed occurs most often and most prominently."³¹ The conjugal bed is where the most private moments of Alisoun and

John take place, and this bed becomes the site where the privacy of marriage is transgressed in Alisoun's relations with Nicholas.

The first version of extimacy unfolded in the tale involves Alisoun and John. By tradition and medieval norms of marriage, Alisoun is known to be John's private property, *res privata*. In classical Latin, Georges Duby explains,

the noun *privatum* refers to a person's own resources, property for his own use. . . . To act *privatim* (the verb whose opposite is *publice*) is to act not as a *magistratus* invested with a power emanating from the people but as a simple private individual, in a different juridical realm: the private act was one committed not in the open, in the forum, before the eyes of all, but inside one's own house.³²

To ensure his private possession, John holds Alisoun "narwe in a cage" (I 3224).³³ John's mistake lies in thinking that his keeping Alisoun close and enclosed insures intimacy. Mark Miller argues that "The problem posed by the figure of John . . . is that of the lover, the one who desires intimacy. This problem is so deep because the Miller knows that intimacy cannot be what his picture says it must be, simply a matter of coming close to some desired object by possessing it."³⁴ The "cage" in which John holds Alisoun is a metaphoric enclosure in the image of the "jealous" (I 3224) husband: the physical image of the narrow cage expresses John's desire to have full control of what he keeps within it. As Gerhard Joseph notes of fabliaux, "enclosures, far from being the prisons that keep lovers from their ladies, actually become the essential arena for the joyous union of man and wench."³⁵ The structure aimed at isolating Alisoun from other men—that is, the carpenter and his house—contains the elements that allow interaction with them.

In the course of the tale Alisoun's status as John's private possession declines as her suitors' physical interactions with her take place around and inside her husband's home. As husband and wife lie in the bed, John hears Absolon's song directed at the "shot-wyndowe / That was upon the carpenteris wal" (I 3358–59). John cries to his wife:

"What! Alison! Herestow nat Absolon,
That chaunteth thus under oure boures wal?"

(I 3366–67)

Absolon's presence from the outside disturbs John's possession of Alisoun as his private object. At the one and only moment in the tale in which we see John and Alisoun contained in the private space of their bed, their intimacy is intruded upon. This effect illustrates extimacy:

something from outside invades what should be private, that is, a man with his wife.

Later, when Absolon learns that John is supposed to be out of town, he situates himself under the "shot-wyndowe" (I 3695) of the carpenter's bedroom, not knowing that Alisoun is in bed with Nicholas. The term *shot-wyndowe* by which Chaucer chooses to designate the bedroom window, explains Peter Brown, "is a rare and striking term and may designate not [the] conventional arrangement for a domestic window, but a special characteristic, namely that it was a privy window associated with shot in the sense of discharge, shit, or chute."³⁶ Chaucer's choice to call the bedroom window a "shot-wyndowe" indicates its metaphorical status as a threshold between the most private, the interior substance of the body, and the outside.

For Absolon, the closed window is the conventional barrier found in the courtly love tradition, behind which the object of his love is located. Elsewhere in Fragment I, in the *Knight's Tale*, which follows these conventions, the architectonics of courtly love are manifest.³⁷ A basic condition for courtly love is the inaccessibility of the love object: the woman is by definition an unattainable partner with whom no relation other than her impossibility is possible, and this situation does not allow for internal inclusion.³⁸ The description of Emelye, the object of Palamon and Arcite's love, is almost exclusively visual. Emelye's beauty is beyond the senses; she "fairer was to sene" (I 1035) than a lily. Emelye is, as Miller suggests, available "to the pleasures of looking."³⁹

Emelye is presented in the private sphere, in the traditional romance sense of the word *private*: her freedom of mobility is limited to Theseus's castle and to the structure of the exchange of women. Her portrait, unlike Alisoun's, emphasizes "her distance from her male desirers, her unavailability, and her unconsumability; there is no question here of anyone's touching or tasting her."⁴⁰ Palamon and Arcite are jailed in a prison that borders the wall of Emelye's room:

The grete tour, that was so thikke and stroong,
Which of the castel was the chief dongeoun
(Ther as the knyghtes weren in prisoun
.....)
Was evene joynant to the gardyn wal
Ther as this Emelye hadde hir pleyngye.

(I 1056–58, 1060–61)

The wall that separates the lovers from Emelye functions as a condition that enables her to be the unattainable object of their courtly love. The window through which Palamon "cast his eye upon Emelya" (I 1077) is

another spatial manifestation of a barrier that creates the conditions for courtly love. Indeed, as Palamon sees Emelye through the window, he feels the pangs of love: "And therwithal he bleynte and cride, 'A!'" (I 1078). And Arcite soon follows suit (I 1112–16).⁴¹

The *Miller's Tale* with its "erotic triangle" of Alisoun and her two lovers has often been seen as a parody of the *Knight's Tale's* courtly rivalry in love.⁴² One sees the same manifestations of courtly love, but now "in game not in earnest," as Absolon speaks and acts according to its conventions.⁴³ In the courtly love tradition the woman is characterized by her position as a valued—and forbidden—secret her lover insists on revealing. In the psychology of the courtly lover, there are physical barriers—castles, walls, doors, window shutters—that isolate the lady, while her sexual orifices function as imaginary thresholds beyond which the precious secret of her sexuality is supposed to lie. Indeed, references in the *Miller's Tale* to architectonic and bodily thresholds proliferate. As Bishop points out,

Holes show up everywhere in the *Tale's* details, from architectural holes—windows (l.3694, l.3708) and doors (l.3432)—to the cat hole John's servant uses to spy on Nicholas (l.3440–41). Clothes have holes: the windows on Absolon's shoes (l.3318), the gores in Alisoun's apron (l.3237). And bodies have holes: the lover's kissing mouths (l.3305); Alison's singing mouth, sweetened with cardamom and licorice (l.3690); Alison's kissed anus (l.3734) and Nicholas's burned one (l.3812). These orifices are confused: cat holes become peep holes, windows become doors, mouths become anuses and anuses become wounds.⁴⁴

Absolon's insistence on singing at Alisoun's bedroom window and receiving a kiss through it can be seen as an externalization of his desire to gain access to the secret of her femininity through the sexual orifices of her mouth and genitals. Yet, as Bishop has pointed out, orifices in this tale are confused and confusing: "the greatest confusion in the *Miller's Tale* comes from holes."⁴⁵ The hole that Absolon encounters at Alisoun's window is neither the lady's mouth nor the female genitals that the mouth displaces, but the orifice associated with the function of the not-so-courtly barrier of the shot window, that of her anus. And instead of gaining access to the innermost secret of her sexuality and/or femininity, what Absolon encounters is the bodily aperture, which is the point where a substance that had been inner to the body is ejected.

This putative encounter with the sexual aspects of the body is enabled by the very genre of the fabliau and is by definition impossible in the courtly love romance in which the condition for love is the beloved's

inaccessibility. Once the beloved becomes accessible, it is the end of the courtly romance. The *Knight's Tale* reaches its end exactly at this point where Palamon wins the monopoly of access over Emelye through marriage. Marriage moves Emelye out of the market. Emelye becomes a commodity by the end of the *Knight's Tale*, a precious item removed from circulation.

Absolute ownership is, however, only an abstract ideal. The idea that a woman can be kept as a commodity fully integrated into a man's space may exist only in the world of romance. The *Knight's Tale* concludes with this ideal. The remaining three tales in Fragment I all begin after marriage.⁴⁶ They are also part of the same generic group, the fabliau, in which the woman is not ethereal. Instead, she is physically attainable, the carnal aspect of her sexuality is present, and the barrier (of the house, for example) can be shattered in order to gain access to her. The structure of internal exclusion is thus possible within the conventions of fabliau.

Absolon exemplifies the structure of internal exclusion when he is situated outside the house. But the structure of extimacy is best exemplified in the house by Nicholas, the tenant who dwells in John's house.⁴⁷ The very concept of a tenant is a category that disturbs the distinction between inside and outside, and the existence of a tenant enables Chaucer to question the notion of a stranger within. Nicholas, the outsider, has a place inside the carpenter's house and thus access to Alisoun. Nicholas wins Alisoun not necessarily because he merits her, but, as Joseph notes, because spatial arrangements in the tale all but triumph over character: "The proximity of one player and the distance of the other from Alisoun are almost more important than characterization as an index of who 'deserves' her."⁴⁸

Nicholas is a student who could have lived in university rooms where he would have had little privacy but chooses to rent a room in the carpenter's house, a room with more privacy. The narrator stresses that Nicholas's situation is isolated, "Allone, withouten any compaignye" (I 3204). Yet the attraction of isolation and privacy is destabilized by another attraction. Nicholas wishes to get as close as possible to his landlord's most private possession, his wife, so that "She sholde slepen in his arm al nyght, / For this was his desir and hire also" (I 3406–7). The tension between desire for Alisoun and need for privacy is exemplified in the ways Nicholas chooses to try to obtain Alisoun.

To fulfill his lust, Nicholas does not go out of his room, but instead actually encloses himself within it, physically and psychologically. He stocks the room with food and water and cuts out any attempt from the outside to reach him. He thus uses his room as a "retreat" in the sense of "a place of solitude." However, whereas the medieval retreat also

functioned as an indication of a “desire to renounce the world,”⁴⁹ as portrayed, for instance, in relation to recluses like Saint Jerome, Nicholas uses his act of retreating to lure others. At the tale’s beginning it seems that Nicholas rents a room in John’s house so that the room may serve him as a scholar’s study. As the tale unfolds, however, the room becomes a cover for a plan of sexual liaison with Alisoun. The use of a retreat not as the enclosure of a celibate scholar, who insists on clear boundaries between his “inside” world and the outside one, but as the ploy of a lover whose aim is a liaison with a member of that “outside” world, underscores the interpermeability of inside and outside. If Nicholas is able to use the isolated room for the purposes of sexual intrigue, it is because the outside is always already implicated in the logical structure of what is supposed to be the most insulated inside. Such use of architectonic space illustrates extimacy: when Nicholas is physically alone in the room, Alisoun is already there as a dominant presence in his mind even before the actual sexual act takes place between them.

The relations between Nicholas and John underscore, too, the tale’s concern with privacy and its complexities. Nicholas’s enclosure in the room arouses John’s desire to enter it. From the moment that Nicholas encloses himself with nutritious supply and without a need to pass the threshold, his landlord uses every possible means to invade his tenant’s space. The carpenter begins by sending an intermediary—that is, a servant—to check on his tenant and report back to him:

“Go up,” quod he unto his knave anoon,
 “Clepe at his dore, or knokke with a stoon.
 Looke how it is, and tel me boldely.”

(I 3431–33)

The door clearly marks the division between inside and outside. In medieval culture, as Duby points out, “The most important sign of appropriation and privacy was not the banner, but the barrier, the enclosure, the hedge.”⁵⁰ In the *Miller’s Tale* this barrier—which is such an important indication of privacy—is traversed in several manners and by different people. The sound of the outside penetrates the inside when the servant goes beyond the carpenter’s instructions and makes noise:

And at the chambre dore whil that he stood,
 He cride and knocked as that he were wood.

(I 3435–36)

None of these noises, beginning from the less disruptive—a knock—to the most intrusive—throwing a stone and screaming—moves Nicholas the tenant. Yet the barrier between the inside and outside of the scholar's room is not hermetic: there is a hole in the wall, the narrator tells us, that is bigger than a mouse, indeed, big enough for a cat who “was wont in for to crepe” (I 3441).⁵¹ Thus, at the moment Nicholas is contained in his room we learn that there is a possibility for constant movement from outside to inside and vice versa. A further invasion into Nicholas's private space occurs when the servant uses the hole to look “in ful depe, / And at the laste he hadde of hym a sight” (I 3442–43). John, however, is determined to have full access to his tenant's room.

A further breakdown between the room's inside and outside occurs when John, together with his servant, knocks the door down:

And by the haspe he haaf it of atones;
Into the floor the dore fil anon.

(I 3470–71)

The breaking down of the door shows how an insistence on privacy may actually lead to the presence of the Other within, or, in other words, to extimacy. Yet the intrusion into the space of another does not give one access to the other's innermost space: something always remains Other. Intrusion into another's space does not mean a complete breakdown of that other's boundaries. Something within always remains inaccessible. John may believe that at this instance of breaking down the door he achieves close proximity to his tenant. But privacy-seeking Nicholas uses his own body as his house. He shuts himself within, seemingly disconnected from reality, lying “as stille as stoon” (I 3472). The stone image denotes Nicholas's body as a tightly bound space. In addition, Nicholas denies access to his inside through the holes of his eyes. He avoids eye contact by keeping them “evere caped upward into the eir” (I 3473). Unlike his landlord, Nicholas is not a carpenter; he does not know how to seal holes in the wall. As a student, however, whose training is to acquire knowledge stored in the rooms of his brain, he is a master in managing his most private space, his mind.

Yet John is determined to get inside Nicholas's mind, to take him “out of his studyng” (I 3467), to know his secrets. For this purpose John shakes his tenant's body “myghtily” (I 3475), and tries to get to him through another hole in his body—that of his ear—by shouting vigorously (I 3476). John attempts to enter the clerk's psychological space through the holes of the eyes initially inaccessible to him, by screaming to Nicholas to “looke adoun!” (I 3477). Nonetheless, all

efforts expressed directly towards Nicholas are futile: throughout the process of getting closer to Nicholas, John actually gets further away. Only when the carpenter secures the boundaries of the house does Nicholas respond (I 3481–82). The carpenter distances himself from Nicholas by addressing charms against the demons of the night, directed toward the four walls of the house and, significantly, toward the threshold of the door that he had just trespassed.

In other words, it is the affirmation, not the annihilation, of distance, that enables John to attain even an illusion of proximity to his tenant. The illusory nature of the access John acquires to Nicholas's secret is underscored by Nicholas's ploy. Nicholas makes John's access to the secret of the flood conditional upon reversing the entire process John has just gone through to get in the room. On Nicholas's command, John "goth down" and "cometh ageyn" (I 3496) with drinks. Only then does "Nicholas his dore faste shette" (I 3499). The room's wall and door, which had earlier served as barrier between landlord and tenant, now contain both parties. At this moment John is entered with his tenant into the same space and believes he finally has private or secret information about the supposed flood. Yet what he has is mere illusion. John's inclusion in Nicholas's private space is actually part of Nicholas and Alisoun's plan to bring *them* close to one another. In addition, what is supposedly revealed in this moment when John gains access to Nicholas's private space serves as the basis for John's ejection not only out of the room, but also out of the house and into the street. The structure of extimacy recurs as the supposedly private information (the secret of the flood) causes the carpenter's public exposure.

The fact that access to what is innermost and most private leads to a moment of public exposure does not mean that privacy in this tale is an illusion; nevertheless, E. D. Blodgett has read John's ejection out of the house as such: "The illusion of pryvetee is the illusion of the Flood: it only seemed to occur."⁵² Privacy in the tale is only partially an illusion. The spatial configuration subsequent to John's ejection indicates that privacy, as the boundary between one individual and others, cannot break down completely. In that telling moment, John's surrounding neighbors substitute for the walls of the house that have ceased to contain him.

Thus is privacy in this tale always part of an outside that forms it, and thus does its representation always entail the structure of extimacy. Farrell has pointed out that "at the end of the *Miller's Tale*, Absolon, Nicholas, and John have become unable to direct their actions towards meaningful private ends." Each of the male characters, he explains,

fails to keep his relationship with Alison as private as he wishes; John's rest with Alison is disturbed by Absolon's singing; Nicholas's play with her is similarly disrupted by his rival's wooing; Absolon, planning "Ful pryvely [to] knocken at [Alisoun's] wyndowe" (I 3676), finds a larger audience than he expected. Nicholas engages John's interest in the flood partly by promising that "thanne shul we be lordes al oure lyf / Of al the world" (I 3581-82), but no one ever attains such solitary blessedness.⁵³

This lack of what Farrell calls "solitary blessedness" is not the result of any illusory nature attributed to privacy in the tale. Nor is it an implication that privacy is such a desirable state that it might be obtained under circumstances other than those fictionalized in the tale. Instead, what Chaucer shows in the fictionalization of privacy is that it is structurally and constitutively always already bound up with its outside. In his essay "'Telling the Private Parts: 'Pryvetee' and Poetry in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*," Robert Hanning explains how Chaucer's "fiction-making to hide truth and story-telling to reveal it are locked in a perpetual, symbiotic embrace within the human condition. Each impulse, by its very existence and strength, calls forth the other; each is deeply ingrained and gives great pleasure, but that pleasure is somehow increased by the coexistence, and hence the challenge, of its opposite."⁵⁴ In the *Miller's Tale* the relation between the need to conceal what is private and the need to make what is private public is not one of a tension between contraries that call one another forth. Instead these seeming contraries are co-implicated. Each always includes the other in its very substance. The more one progresses towards the inside, that is, towards what is private, the more one finds oneself confronted, in the *Miller's Tale*, with what is alien and outside. For instance, as Woods has noted, "Each of the men tries to create for himself a private world with Alysoun at his center, and each time 'nature will out': the sheltering individual world is transformed into the focus of a communal entertainment."⁵⁵ Conversely, when one believes one confronts an exposure, an ejection of what had been private to the outside, as in the image of John's tub ejected into the street at the tale's conclusion, one is made to realize that what one is witnessing is a containment of John by his neighbors. The very distinction between what is private and what is public, what underpins the impulse to conceal and what calls forth the impulse to reveal, is undone in such a way that one becomes part of the other.

The relations between characters, and between characters and space, highlight two dimensions of extimacy. One dimension is that, as one advances toward the inside and toward what one believes is the

innermost secret, one actually progresses toward an encounter with what is foreign. This feature is seen in the interactions between John and his tenant Nicholas, and between Absolon and Alisoun. The second dimension is that when one believes one is outside, one then encounters what is the most private. This feature occurs when the reader is presented with the two images of buttocks (Alisoun's and Nicholas's) sticking out of the window, and when the reader (and the Oxford community) is presented with the spectacle of John in the tub ejected onto the street.

Chaucer continues the structural dynamic of extimacy in the *Reeve's Tale*. Indeed, the two tales are bound to each other, as J. A. W. Bennett suggests, "in tight warp and woof of parallels and contrasts, verbal echoes and reflections." These echoes include "antagonism in the characters and calling of the two narrators[,] . . . the shared motifs of the cuckolding clerk and snoring husband, [and] things mis-seen in the dark." Even the furnishings are similar: "beds and beards and headdress and the lubricant of ale in both stories."⁵⁶ This bonding between the tales is not simply architectural—the managing of a house's space once the tenants accept lodgers. Nor is it the result merely of similarity in plot structure. The likeness between the tales—that is, what allows one to see, in "‘distorted-mirror effect’ evidence that the two tales were meant to be read as one"⁵⁷—is above all derived from their structures of extimacy.

Everything in the *Reeve's Tale* is multiplied: two tenant students John and Aleyn instead of one, and not only a wife but two women—a wife and a virgin daughter—who have sexual liaisons outside the normative structure of the exchange of women. As Jerome Mandel sums it up, "if the numeral progression means anything, Fragment I deteriorates from love between two (Palamon and Emelye) to sexual involvement among three (John, Alisoun, and Nicholas), four (Aleyn and Malyne, John and Symkyn's wife) or five (if one adds Symkyn), and finally to what masquerades as love between a married prostitute and her numberless clients."⁵⁸ The significant increase in the *Reeve's Tale* is not, however, in the numbers of participants in what is supposed to be an intimate relationship. Nor is the significant decline marked by a fall from platonic, ideal love to sexual involvement with multiple lovers,⁵⁹ or by a degradation in what V. A. Kolve coins as images that address "hierarchical truth."⁶⁰ It is, instead, an increase in the degree of exposure of the structure of extimacy throughout the tales that compose Fragment I, and a decrease in men's control over what in medieval patriarchal society was considered to be their private property—women. Thus comes, concomitantly, a decrease in man's delimitation of woman's freedom. A series of optical errors⁶¹ and confusions that occur throughout the *Reeve's Tale* (including the location of beds and cradle and the identification of who wakes up Symkyn's wife) reveal that those

whom Symkyn believes to be the most intimate to him—his private property, his wife and daughter—are the most foreign to him. Symkyn's wife and daughter act as foreign elements when, consciously or supposedly by mistake, they betray him: Symkyn's wife hits him,⁶² and Malyne reveals the location of the stolen grain.⁶³

The structure of extimacy in the *Reeve's Tale* also manifests itself through the act of stealing—in itself a misperception of one's private property and possessions. Stealing in this tale is committed by both the miller and the students. A theft is an economic action in which property changes hands, albeit unwillingly on one side.⁶⁴ The property that is stolen in the course of this tale includes grain and ground meal. In the very act of stealing his townspeople's grain and ground meal, Symkyn considers what belongs to his neighbors as his own property. Within Symkyn's mill and among his grain and ground meal is other people's grain, visually forming one texture in which the foreign element is undistinguished from what is the miller's own yet never a legitimate part of it. Chaucer uses the structure of extimacy to explicate the popular wisdom that it is legitimate to steal back from a thief. The grain that had been taken away from John and Aleyn, although physically located within the realm of Symkyn's property, is considered "by law" their own and thus they can take it back:

"For, John, ther is a lawe that says thus:
That gif a man in a point to agreved,
That in another he sal be releved."

(I 4180–82)

Another form of theft in the tale involves John and Aleyn's rape of Symkyn's wife and daughter, which constitute a theft of Symkyn's property.⁶⁵ Both the act of rape and the stealing of grain illustrate extimacy. The walls of Symkyn's house that are supposed to keep the external element, the rapist, on the outside come to contain him. The same with a slight variation can be said about the stolen grain, which is supposed to be outside Symkyn's property, yet is part of it.

The Cook as one of the Reeve's immediate audience comments on the Reeve's supposedly conceptual problem of defining privacy in his home:

"Wel oghte a man avysed for to be
Whom that he broghte into his pryvetee."

(I 4333–34)

But the problem of perception is not Symkyn's but rather the Cook's. He fails to understand that the *Reeve's Tale* is not about taking people in, but

about how those who are inside, not solely but especially women, are revealed to be the most foreign. This truth is exposed throughout Fragment I.

The first tale in the fragment ends with woman as a luxury. As the *Knight's Tale* concludes, Emelye's sole identity is as Palamon's property. In the world of chivalry, as Donald Howard puts it, "a lady's favor was a man's reward, something he won and possessed—she was, we learn, his delight in his heart."⁶⁶ In the *Knight's Tale* woman [Emelye] is the luxury kept under lock and key, in the private space of the castle and without freedom. In the three fabliaux that follow, women increasingly gain freedom from men's control. The progressive decline in men's domination over women allows Chaucer to present a non-misogynist view of woman without openly rebelling against the hierarchies of his society.⁶⁷ In the *Miller's Tale* a married woman, Alisoun, who by definition should be out of circulation, brings herself back to the market through an extramarital liaison. Alisoun appropriates freedom within the very context of home and marriage, which is supposed to constrain her. This decreased control over woman continues in the *Reeve's Tale*, where both a wife and a virgin daughter never yet in the market are brought into circulation. The rape indicates the lack of a husband/father's control over his private property. In the *Reeve's Tale* such loss of control entails rape, but, logically, it might allow a woman's freedom, as in the *Miller's Tale*. By the end of Fragment I, in the *Cook's Tale*, a married woman, a private property, exercises freedom. As a prostitute (I 4421–22), she is not controlled sexually by her husband, and she herself acquires private property (money) or at least the possibility to procure it. In other words, her status as a wife implies that she is her master's private property, but her occupation suggests a commodity in constant circulation and never owned by men. The *Cook's Tale* with the prostitute/wife fully exemplifies the structure of extimacy that is exposed in the previous tales in Fragment I.⁶⁸

Significantly, and indicative of this principle of the foreign within, the wife in the *Cook's Tale* is nameless. The woman's lack of specific identity suggests that this principle can apply to any relationship: she could be anyone's wife, and extimacy is intrinsic to the medieval concept of marriage. This lack of identity has been preceded by progressively nameless women in Fragment I: Emelye is named immediately; Alisoun is named about halfway through the *Miller's Tale*; the wife in the *Reeve's Tale* never acquires a name, and her daughter Malyne is named only once. The prostitute-wife in the *Cook's Tale* is not named.

The dynamic element in Fragment I rests in its progressive movement from the concept of a woman as property owned privately by her master and lacking freedom, to woman viewed as nameless, uncontrollable, and

free from ownership. In the *Cook's Tale* woman is constantly offered for sale to numerous clients, even while married and legally her husband's property. She is no longer a commodity of exchange, but, as Woods says, she is (ex)change or, currency itself: "In the *Cook's Tale* sex becomes the exact equivalent of money or money making."⁶⁹ Indeed, in the *Cook's Tale* there is actually a shop and a cash box. Emblematic of the lack of control, continuous circulation is expressed in many ways in the tale: it is an apple that contaminates a barrel, compulsive uncontrollable laughter or gambling, and, most significantly, woman.⁷⁰

Whereas the impossibility of controlling woman is increasingly exposed throughout Fragment I, what stays fixed is the structure of extimacy. Woman is always foreign to the (patriarchal) system that destines her, and considers her, to be its own. The repeated failures of attempts to institute privacy, failures that are inherent in the structure of extimacy, are balanced by the affirmation of the constitutive freedom of women that is accentuated in the progression of Fragment I.

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1. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York, 1992), 3. I am not interested in a detailed analysis of Lacan's work but rather in using a Lacanian concept for enhancing our understanding of Chaucer's text. In listing medievalists who have done important work with psychoanalytic concepts, L. O. Aranye Fradenburg includes David Aers, Sarah Beckwith, A. C. Spearing, Sarah Kay, Simon Gaunt, Sarah Stanbury, Larry Scanlon, Sheila Delany, Elizabeth Scala, Patricia Ingham, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, and Michael Uebel (*Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* [Minneapolis, 2002], 11).

2. This explanation is part of the course on "Extimacy" that Jacques-Alain Miller gave during the 1985–86 academic year at the University of Paris VIII. See his "Extimité," in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*, ed. Mark Bracher, Marshall W. Alcorn, Jr., Ronald J. Corthell, and Françoise Massadier-Kenney (New York, 1994), 74–87, at 75.

3. Miller, "Extimité," 75.

4. Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London, 1996), 58–59.

5. Georges Duby, "Introduction: Private Power, Public Power," in *Revelations of the Medieval World*, vol. 2 of *A History of Private Life*, ed. Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 3–31, at 4. Originally published as *Histoire de la vie privée*, vol. 2. *De l'Europe féodale à la Renaissance* (Paris, 1985).

6. Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love*, explains: "Lacan's coinage *extimité* refers to the dichotomy inside-outsideness of the signifiers (codes, markers, mnemonics, 'emes') whose movements structure, but are absent from, consciousness" (20).

7. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 22–27. My thinking on women and power has been much affected by Foucault's writing on power. His writing and interviews on this topic have been collected in *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al., vol. 3 of *Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984* (New York, 2000); see also Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York, 1980).

8. Georges Duby, "Preface," in *Revelations of the Medieval World*, vol. 2 of *A History of Private Life*, ed. Philippe Ariés and Georges Duby, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), ix–xiii, at x.

9. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, eds., *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens, Ga., 1988), 3.

10. Such a view of the segregation of women relies on studies of the medieval household and the domestic nature of life in castles. See especially M. W. Thompson, *The Rise of the Castle* (Cambridge, U.K., 1991), and *The Decline of the Castle* (Cambridge, U.K., 1987).

11. Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis, 1994), 179. For a general discussion of the cultural and legal limitations of women in the Middle Ages, see Eileen Power, "The Position of Women," in *The Legacy of the Middle Ages*, ed. C. G. Crump and E. F. Jacob (Oxford, 1926), 401–34, repr. in Eileen Power, *Medieval Women*, ed. M. M. Postan (Cambridge, U.K., 1975).

12. For a further examination of the issues of space and gender in relation to power within the context of another Chaucerian poem, see my *Pouvoir et Autorité dans "The Legend of Good Women"* (Paris, 2000).

13. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, eds., *Framing Medieval Bodies* (Manchester, 1994). See esp. Sarah Kay, "Women's Body of Knowledge: Epistemology and Misogyny in the *Romance of the Rose*," 211–35. Kay argues that "changing attitudes towards the problem of knowledge between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries trouble the equations between femininity and carnality, and between masculinity and the mind or spirit, which are extensively invoked in classical and patristic writing to justify the subordination of women to men" (211). According to Kay, the increasingly growing emphasis on the senses as a source of knowledge implies the possibility that women enjoy "more immediate access to knowledge than men" (211).

14. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, "Introduction: A New Economy of Power Relations: Female Agency in the Middle Ages," in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca, N.Y., 2003), 1–16, at 2. This book revisits the issue of medieval women and power presented in Erler and Kowaleski's *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*.

15. Felicity Riddy, "Looking Closely: Authority and Intimacy in the Late Medieval Urban Home," in *Gendering the Master Narrative*, ed. Erler and Kowaleski, 212–28, at 215.

16. Riddy, "Looking Closely," 219, 217.

17. Laura Kendrick, *Chaucerian Play: Comedy and Control in the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley, 1988), 12. On the *ostentatio genitalium*, see Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (New York, 1983). Before Kendrick's observation, the possible allusion to the private parts of God was noticed by, for instance, Joseph Baird, Roy Peter Clark, and Paula Neuss; see Joseph Baird, "The Devil's Privetee," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 70 (1969): 104–6, at 104; Roy Peter Clark, "Christmas Games in Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale*," *Studies in Short Fiction* 13 (1976): 277–87, at 285; and Paula Neuss, "Double-Entendre in the *Miller's Tale*," *Essays in Criticism* 24 (1974): 325–40, at 331. See also Thomas J. Farrell, "Privacy and the Boundaries of Fabliau in the *Miller's Tale*," *English Language History* 56 (1989): 773–95, at 784. Critics have also connected the word *privetee* to the

Biblical story of Moses seeing God's "back parts"; see Frederick M. Biggs and Laura L. Howes, "Theophany in the *Miller's Tale*," *Medium Ævum* 65 (1996): 269–79. R. Howard Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fabliaux* (Chicago, 1986), takes the investigation of the representation of body parts in the fabliaux to the extreme of dismemberment. Bloch explains: "within the fabliaux detached sexual organs circulate freely. . . . Detached sexual organs [mutilated, dismembered and castrated] are an integral part of the representation of the body in the fabliaux and are more the rule than the exception" (61).

18. E. Jane Burns, "A Close Look at Female Orifices in Farce and Fabliau," in *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia, 1993), 31–70.

19. Elaine Tuttle Hansen, "Women-as-the-Same in the A-Fragment," in *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (Berkeley, 1992), 208–44.

20. Louise M. Bishop, "'Of Goddes Pryvete nor of His Wyf': Confusion of Orifices in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 44 (2002): 231–46.

21. Karma Lochrie, "Women's 'Pryvetees' and Fabliau Politics in the *Miller's Tale*," *Exemplaria* 6 (1994): 287–304, at 287.

22. Farrell, "Privacy and the Boundaries of Fabliau," 773.

23. Farrell, "Privacy and the Boundaries of Fabliau," 781, 787.

24. William F. Woods, "Private and Public Space in the *Miller's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 29 (1994): 166–78, at 166.

25. Woods, "Private and Public Space," 175.

26. Linda Tarte Holley, *Chaucer's Measuring Eye* (Houston, 1990), 98. E. D. Blodgett, "Chaucerian *Pryvete* and the Opposition to Time," *Speculum* 51 (1976): 477–93, at 481, argues that the psychological "pryvete" in Fragment I stands for a kind of refuge from time and change.

27. Farrell, "Privacy and the Boundaries of Fabliau," 738.

28. Farrell, "Privacy and the Boundaries of Fabliau," 773–75.

29. Lochrie, "Women's 'Pryvetees,'" 293.

30. Duby, "Introduction: Private Power," 13.

31. Dominique Barthélemy and Philippe Contamine, "The Use of Private Space," in *Revelations of the Medieval World*, vol. 2 of *A History of Private Life*, ed. Philippe Ariés and Georges Duby, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 395–505, at 489.

32. Duby, "Introduction: Private Power," 4.

33. All quotations of Chaucer's work are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Boston, 1987).

34. Mark Miller, *Philosophical Chaucer: Love, Sex, and Agency in the Canterbury Tales* (Cambridge, U.K., 2005), 67.

35. Gerhard Joseph, "'Game-Earnest' and the 'Argument of Herbergage' in the *Canterbury Tales*," *Chaucer Review* 5 (1970): 83–96, at 89.

36. Peter Brown, "'Shot Wyndowe' (*Miller's Tale*, I.3358 and 3695): An Open and Shut Case?," *Medium Ævum* 69 (2000): 96–103, at 100.

37. These courtly conventions are parodied in the two fabliaux that follow. *MilT* is a mockery of courtly manners; *RvT*, with Symkyn's interest in worthy lineage, is a mockery of social aspirations. For discussion of the critical tradition on *KnT*, see Anne Laskaya, *Chaucer's Approach to Gender in the "Canterbury Tales"* (Cambridge, U.K., 1995), 55–77; for an analysis of the tradition of courtly love in the context of history writing on chivalry, see Lee W. Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison, Wisc., 1991), 165–230.

38. Fradenburg argues that this desire for the lady combined with her inaccessibility is the source of *jouissance*, "the pleasure so intense and overwhelming that it verges on, or becomes, unpleasurable" (*Sacrifice Your Love*, 254n11). For a study of the concept of *jouissance* within the context of two medieval texts, see my "Judaism and *Jouissance* in Two Medieval Texts," *The Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* (2001): 159–92.

39. Miller, *Philosophical Chaucer*, 85.

40. Miller, *Philosophical Chaucer*, 85.

41. Another characteristic of courtly love literature is the conventional physical manifestation of the effects of love described as a malady: for example, pallor, sleeplessness, and an inability to think of anything else but the object of love. See Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Parry (New York, 1969), 185. Right after Palamon sees Emelye for the first time, Arcite, who notices the physical changes, asks Palamon: "what eyeth thee, / That art so pale and deedly on to see?" (I 1081–82).

42. For a discussion of erotic triangles see Martin Blum, "Negotiating Masculinity: Erotic Triangles in the *Miller's Tale*," in *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Peter G. Beidler (Cambridge, U.K., 1998), 37–52. According to Blum, "the pattern that forms the structural underpinnings of poems and narratives dealing with one man's challenging of another man's claim to a woman is the erotic triangle" (39). The discussion of the challenge of one man against another over a woman would not be complete without reference to the considerable literature on relationships between men and homosociality. A significant contribution to literature on male homosocial desire within the context of triangular relationships is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, 1985). See especially Sedgwick's first chapter, "Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles," 21–27. The chapter is based on René Girard's argument that "the choice of the beloved one is determined in the first place, not by the qualities of the beloved, but by the beloved's already being the choice of the person who has been chosen as a rival" (21).

43. Joseph, "Game–Earnest," 83. More recently, Lee Patterson has described *MilT* as a mockery and subversion of the Knight's chivalric culture "in terms that are implicitly but thoroughly political"; see "'No Man His Reson Herde': Peasant Consciousness, Chaucer's Miller and the Structure of the *Canterbury Tales*," in Valerie Allen and Ares Axiotis, *Chaucer* (New York, 1996), 169–92, at 174. On the occasion Absolon expresses his "love-longynge" (I 3705), he characterizes himself as unable to eat for his love-sickness. Rule XXIII in Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, states, "He whom the thought of love vexes eats and sleeps very little" (trans. Parry, 185).

44. Bishop, "'Of Goddes Pryvete,' " 238–39.

45. Bishop, "'Of Goddes Pryvete,' " 238.

46. On the specific placement of *KnT* in Fragment I of *CT*, see Helen Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales* (Oxford, 1996), 61–91.

47. The verb *dwellen*, as Fradenburg explains, can mean "'to remain,' 'live, dwell,' but also 'to procrastinate, delay, linger.' It can mean to take time to tell something . . . but also 'to hold back or restrain (lust),' to postpone, to desist, refrain or stay away from, to stop speaking of something—in short, 'al at-ones,' to linger *and* to leave, to dilate *and* to abbreviate. When one dwells, one is either at home or away, or a bit of both: neighborly" (*Sacrifice Your Love*, 190–91, *MED*, s.v. *dwellen*, emphasis in the original). Such a combination of meanings may well exemplify the term *extimacy*.

48. Joseph, "Game–Earnest," 89.

49. Philippe Braunstein, "The Emergence of the Individual. Toward Intimacy: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *Revelations of the Medieval World*, vol. 2 of *A History of Private Life*, ed. Philippe Ariés and Georges Duby, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 535–630, at 617.

50. Duby, "Introduction: Private Power," 11.

51. Another Chaucerian barrier that never fully functions as an impediment is the wall in the *Legend of Thisbe*. The wall separates the two lovers, Piramus and Thisbe, and at the same time unites them by means of a hole through which the lovers can communicate. This hole emphasizes the wall's double function as both separator and connector.

52. Blodgett, "Chaucerian *Pryvetee*," 484.

53. Farrell, "Privacy and the Boundaries of Fabliau," 785.

54. Robert W. Hanning, "Telling the Private Parts: 'Pryvetee' and Poetry in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*," in *The Idea of Medieval Literature: New Essays on Chaucer and Medieval Culture in Honor of Donald R. Howard*, ed. James M. Dean and Christian K. Zacher (Newark, Del., 1992), 108–25, at 112.

55. Woods, "Private and Public Space," 168.

56. J. A. W. Bennett, *Chaucer at Oxford and at Cambridge* (Oxford, 1974), 19–20.

57. Bennett, *Chaucer at Oxford*, 20.

58. Jerome Mandel, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Building the Fragments of the Canterbury Tales* (London, 1992), 133.

59. Chaucerians have pointed to the "degenerative movement" in Fragment I. See Donald Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley, 1976), 275. The degeneration is seen in the sequence of genres, from courtly romance to fabliau and from order to increasing disorder. The weakness of these arguments for degeneration is that they point to a pattern of collapse but do not explain why the fragment proceeds in this way.

60. V. A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford, 1984), 4. By "hierarchical truth," Kolve means "those truths that bore the greatest sort of authority in medieval culture: truths most often theological, moral, philosophical, or astrological, which were perceived as making claims higher and more dignified than . . . the truths of everyday experience as formulated in proverbs of popular speech, or of experience not brought into contact with generalization of any sort at all" (4). For more on the sequence of the tales, see Larry D. Benson, "The Order of the *Canterbury Tales*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 3 (1981): 77–120; Edward S. Cohen, "The Sequence of the *Canterbury Tales*," *Chaucer Review* 9 (1974): 190–95; and Lee Sheridan Cox, "A Question of Order in the *Canterbury Tales*," *Chaucer Review* 1 (1967): 228–52.

61. Critics have been studying the problem of perception and optics in Chaucer's other tales. See, for example, Peter Brown, "An Optical Theme in the Merchant's Tale," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer, Proceedings* 1 (1984): 231–43; Holley, *Chaucer's Measuring Eye*; and Carolyn Collette, "Seeing and Believing in the *Franklin's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 27 (1992): 395–410. For a study of this theme in *RvT*, see Susan Yager, "'A Whit Thyng in Hir Ye': Perception and Error in the *Reeve's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 4 (1994): 393–404. I believe that the conceptual (mis)perception of the idea of privacy, rather than the visual confusion, is the underlying "error" in *RvT*.

62. In this scene, Symkyn is believed to be the intruder, the Other, the foreign, while and the student is mistaken for the most intimate male in the house, her husband. Earlier, when during the fight her husband falls on her, the wife imagines him to be the embodiment of what is Other, a devil, a "feende" (I 4288). By hitting Symkyn, the wife acts as a foreign element rather than as his ally. She is an extension of the student's hand instead of being her husband's "right hand," and her misdirected blow is a betrayal of Symkyn, parallel to her daughter's betrayal. Mother and daughter are thus revealed to be the foreign element in what is considered the intimacy of a family. At the same time, Aleyn mistakenly sees Symkyn, who is a stranger to him, as someone who fulfills a function of intimacy: a friend, a keeper of secrets, of what is private. Thinking that he is lying in bed "by his felawe John," Aleyn "by the millere in creep anon" (I 4259–60), telling him what he had done to the Miller's daughter. The fact that the entire scene takes place in the space of a bed—the place that is supposed to contain privacy—illustrates the idea of a stranger within. Yet Aleyn's bed is never absolutely private since it is initially destined to be shared with another, John. A stranger is always within one's private space in this tale. This confusion is part of the error of perception that dominates the tale and manifests itself in various ways. For a study of the "psychology of perception," see Peter Brown, "The

Containment of Symkyn: The Function of Space in the *Reeve's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 14 (1980): 225–36, at 230.

63. Malyne's betrayal of her father shows her to be the foreign element not only in her relationship with her father, but also in the archetectonic space of his house.

64. On Chaucer as a participant, on a metanarrative level, in transferring capital from one man to another, see my discussion of his variations upon his sources for the *Legend of Hypermnestra*, "A Curious Error? Chaucer's *Legend of Hypermnestra*," *Chaucer Review* 36 (2001): 73–86, esp. 74.

65. The *MED* explains rape as an act done in 'haste, hurry; quickly, hurriedly' and as 'forceful seizure of somebody or something, plundering, robbery, extortion in addition to the act of abducting a woman or sexually assaulting her, or both' (s.v. *rape*). As in the Middle Ages women were considered men's property, a sexual assault against a woman was perceived primarily not as an offense against the woman as an individual, but as against her father or husband. See Frederic Pollock and William Frederic Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I*, 2nd edn., 2 vols. (Cambridge, U.K., 1898; repr. 1952), 2.490.

66. Howard, *Idea of the Canterbury Tales*, 235. Ravishment, as defined, for instance, in one of the important medieval English codes on this issue, chapter 13 of Westminster I (1275), was considered "committed not against the person ravished (the woman) but against those, either husband or guardian, who have an [economic] interest" in her. Similarly, in treating adultery, *ParsT* describes this as including sin against property rights: "This synne is eek a thefte; for thefte generally is for to reve a wight his thyng" (X 876). The woman is presented as an object, a piece of property owned by man. The rape of Symkyn's wife and daughter is then an offense against Symkyn and thus part of the relationship between men in this tale.

67. For an extensive examination of medieval misogyny, see R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago, 1991). Bloch explores early Christian discourses of gender and, more particularly, explicates Christianity's double attitude toward women: the negative portrait of women and of femininity juxtaposed with an equal and opposite discourse which maintains the equality of the sexes.

68. Whereas my examination argues against the inferior position attributed to the tale in the past through an analysis of the structure of extimacy, a recent note on *CkT* by Olga Burakov transcends this position by examining the tale through the lens of the book of Genesis; see "Chaucer's *The Cook's Tale*," *Explicator* 61 (2002): 2–5, at 2.

69. William F. Woods, "Society and Nature in the *Cook's Tale*," *Papers on Language and Literature* 32 (1996): 189–205, at 192. Woods connects the theme of corruption in *CkT* to the increasing rottenness of late fourteenth-century English urban culture.

70. Such a view of woman in *CkT*, seen within the frame of Fragment I, explains the tale's open end as an end. For an overview of critics' opinions on whether *CkT* is finished or unfinished, see Daniel J. Pinti's introductory paragraph in "Governing the *Cook's Tale* in Bodley 686," *Chaucer Review* 30 (1996): 379–88, at 379. Although I disagree with Pinti's argument that the tale is unfinished, the originality of his reasoning is its basis on a fifteenth-century revision of the tale rather than on the text itself or on its sources. E. G. Stanley, one among the few scholars who view the tale as completed, suggests that the tale forms a conclusion to the "argument of herbergage." According to Stanley, this theme, running through the three earlier tales of the fragment, shows how a host cannot lose honor that he does not have ("Of This Cokes Tale Maked Chaucer Na Moore," *Poetica* 5 [1976]: 36–59). Basing his argument on the portrait of Perkyn Revelour, V. J. Scattergood notes that it is not "very plausible that any of the story has been lost: what remains looks completed as far as it goes" ("Perkyn Revelour and the *Cook's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 19

[1984]: 14–23, at 15). But the tale is actually completed as it stands because woman reaches utmost freedom from man's ownership and from the structure of exchange of women. Inevitably, as Emily Jensen contends, we are left with a dilemma: "either we praise her [the prostitute-wife] for finally coming to grips with the world she lives in and turning it to her own advantage, or we condemn her for precisely the same reason" ("Male Competition as a Unifying Motif in Fragment A of the *Canterbury Tales*," *Chaucer Review* 24 ([1990]): 320–28, at 327). Jensen argues for women's increasingly active involvement in the central action of Fragment I: Emelye "is distinctly out of the action. . . . With the three fabliaux, not only are initial portraits more extensive . . . but also the women participate more actively in the main events: Alisoun engages in both male plots . . . the miller's daughter tells Aleyn where the cake is hidden, and his wife accidentally hits her husband in the fracas in the *Reeve's Tale*; and finally, the wife in the *Cook's Tale* runs her own brothel" (324). I do not here examine degrees of woman's activity in man's world, but rather identify a basic infrastructure in which woman's increasing activity is an expression of her constitutive freedom.

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