

**“I Shall Thee Quayte”:
Fabliau Women’s Spatial Resistance in the *Miller’s Tale* and the *Reeve’s Tale***

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Abstract: This essay analyses Chaucer’s fabliau women in the *Miller’s Tale* and the *Reeve’s Tale* through John Fiske’s popular culture theory as figures of resistance who evade their inferiority and accordingly subvert their subordination to their empowerment through using “the tactics, guileful ruses and artful stratagems of the weak”. The adulterous, scheming and promiscuous women actually occupy a secondary position in the power struggle in terms of space and spatial relations. Thus, they are victims rather than victimizers and they contest their subjugation through subversive use of private spaces. Alisoun, miller’s wife and daughter perform spatial resistance to their oppressors through the control and manipulation of spaces allocated to them. Alisoun takes control of John’s spaces which are the house and specifically the bedroom and fashions these spaces as subversive agents for her own pleasures. The wife and Malyne in the *Reeve’s Tale* dwell in Symkyn’s mill where he oppresses them. Hence, these fabliau women transgress the roles of medieval wives (and daughter in the case of Malyne) and turn their subordinate position to an opportunity to achieve popular pleasure.

Keywords: Chaucer, fabliau, the *Miller’s Tale*, the *Reeve’s Tale*, popular resistance, popular pleasure

Women in Chaucer’s *Miller’s Tale* and *Reeve’s Tale* are limited in terms of space and/or they are assimilated into the spaces of which the husbands have the ultimate control and use these spaces and women in these spaces, for their own use. However, these women gradually have the control of the fabliau places/spaces and manipulate them to their own advantage through adopting the tricks and strategies of the weak. In fact, Chaucer’s women’s spatial practices and resistance can be explained through many space theories. However, since women’s position within and against the power implicates space as a territory in which there is power struggle between the weak and the powerful, the notion of space is mostly used in the context of John Fiske’s popular culture theory.

As Fiske and de Certeau suggest, there is not a distinctive definition for both “place” and “space” and they are mostly used as synonyms although they differ from each other in terms of meaning. Place, for example, is an “instantaneous configuration of positions [and] [i]t implies an indication of stability” (de Certeau 117). However, space only “exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables” (de Certeau 117). As de Certeau suggests, space implies mobility not stability (117). It can be stated that space loses its strict geometrical definition and acquires a new use and attributes (Bachelard 1).

In both notions of space, de Certeau and Lefebvre put emphasis on “embodied experience as well as on the material and discursive production of space” (Ganser 59). Hence, space can be considered as “a site and a means of cultural power, informed by a set of historically and culturally specific notions that are loaded in terms of gender, ethnicity, and class” (Ganser 61). In this respect, space becomes a discursive construction, which carries and circulates meanings. Thus, everyday spaces and places such as the home, the

city and the country mirror social relations and produce them. Lefebvre contends that, space is an effective agency for hegemonic powers (1-2).

Since spaces are imbued with meanings and discourses, meanings of gender in this case, such division between public and private are positioned to men and women respectively. Therefore, it would not be wrong to state, “space [in the Middle Ages] carried meanings” (Hanawalt and Kobiak x). In other words, space and spatial practices in the Middle Ages and their representations in Chaucer’s fabliaux can be regarded as discursive constructions which are built by the power. Therefore, the meanings, which are encoded into the medieval spaces, which emplace people and is emplaced by people, can be considered in terms of power relations between the subordinate and the dominant.

John Fiske’s definition of popular culture as “a site of struggle” (20) emphasises specifically the struggle between the powerful and the weak. This struggle can be observed in spatial practices, too. For Fiske, “the powerful construct “places” where they can exercise their power—cities, shopping malls, schools, workplaces and houses” (32). The weak, however, create their own “spaces” within the powerful’s places; and “they make the places temporarily theirs as they move through them, occupying them for as long as they need or have to” (32).

For Fiske, “place is where strategy operates” and “space is practiced place” (32-3). Accordingly, the powerful have the strategy to control and dominate the places through controlling the spatial activities. The powerful construct places, however, the weak dwell within them and consume them for their wishes—not for the power’s intentions. They make their own spaces within these places and they turn the space into their own because the practices of dwelling or consuming the place are theirs, not the powerful’s.

The houses and gardens in the fabliaux are designed for husbands’ intentions; however, women in fabliaux dwell within these places and turn them into their own spaces. Since husbands cannot totally control the spatial activities in the places they build, women evade the male intentions encoded in the places and invest their own meanings into these places where they can enjoy their oppositional meanings. Therefore, the strategy of the power (the husbands in the fabliaux) is both avoided and subverted. However, as Fiske states, “there is a huge paradox here” (41) because “power can achieve its ends only by offering up its underbelly to the attacker; only by displaying its vulnerabilities to the guerrillas can the occupying army hold its terrain, however tenuously” (41). Thus, however the husbands try to oppress their wives through different methods, the popular tactics and tricks provide women with a strategic plan—a way of liberation. Chaucer’s women in his fabliaux, then, as the women of resistance form their own culture in which they are not

helpless subjects of an irresistible ideological system, but neither are they free-willed, biologically determined individuals; they are a shifting set of social allegiances formed by social agents within a social terrain that is theirs only by virtue or their constant refusal to cede it to the imperialism of the powerful. Any space won by the weak is hard won and hard kept, but it *is* won and it *is* kept. (Fiske 45)

Although the spaces which are won and kept by women are temporary, these spaces still assume a liberating role for them because they conform to the power structures which subjugate them through their control over the power’s places within which they position themselves as “tricksters and guerrillas”. These women as the tricksters make use of the tricks of everyday life which “is constituted by the practices of popular culture, and is characterized by the creativity of the weak in using the resources provided by a disempowering system while refusing finally to submit that power” (Fiske 47). Everyday

life can also be described through the metaphors of antagonism, “strategies opposed by tactics, [...], hegemony met by resistance, ideology countered or evaded; top-down power opposed by bottom-up power, social discipline faded with disorder” (Fiske 47). The focal point of all these antagonisms is pleasure; “the pleasure of producing one’s own meanings of social experience and the pleasure of avoiding the social discipline of the power-bloc” (Fiske 47). Therefore, women in Chaucer’s fabliaux adopt the practicality of everyday life, and accordingly get pleasure which arise from such antagonisms. Hence, these women evade and subvert oppressive meanings and generate their own meanings and pleasure from the antagonisms of everyday life and of popular culture.

In Chaucer’s fabliaux, women are especially identified with the home; and confined to it, which limits their mobility. It seems, as Domosh and Saeger state, “[i]t is hard to maintain patriarchal control over women if they have unfettered freedom of movement through space” (115-6). Then, women’s enclosure through the “social forces that keep women in their place” (Ganser 69) signals their subordination because “spaces they inhabit are seen as a part of patriarchal power” (Rose 146). However, clearly in Chaucer’s fabliaux, the power of patriarchy also offers ways of resistance to the “poachers” (women in this case). In this aspect, a way of resistance to power structures for women is to break their coerced immobility and to use spaces effectively and (also to their own interest). Hence, clear-cut definitions of private/public and male/female spaces can be disturbed and subverted through using the spaces for their own advantage.

In the struggle for power in the fabliaux, women are the subordinate ones in spatial terms. One of the reasons for women’s subordination is their limited mobility. As suggested above, space and ideology are interrelated; and space carries meanings. Clearly, women’s confinement to domestic spaces in the fabliaux is a part of domination through space. Institution of marriage as a medium of controlling and shaping women’s activities in accordance with discourse of the patriarchy advises women to be at their proper place (home) and warn/threaten them about the risks if they exceed the borders of their acceptable space (Hanawalt 1).

Fabliau women are all married except Symkyn’s daughter Malyne in the *Reeve’s Tale* and they are subject to such rules of marriage and medieval societal codes. Alisoun in the *Miller’s Tale*, for example, as the young wife of John inhabits the same house with their lodger Nicholas. She is presented as the woman of the house and the medieval wife’s proper place is considered the house. Her situation as a married young woman, hence, restricts her space and spatial activities. For her husband, Alisoun’s proper place is the house since he can control her and prevent her from betraying him: “Jalous he was, and heeld hire narwe in cage/ For she was wylde and yong, and he was old/And demed himself been lik a cokewold” (I 3224-6). She is enclosed in the house and the only place she can go to is the church: “Thanne fil it thus, that to paryssh chirche,/ Cristes owene werkes for to wirche,/ This goode wyf went on an haliday” (I 3307-9). Appropriate places for her are only the house and the church.

Symkyn’s wife and his daughter Malyne in the *Reeve’s Tale* are not different from Alisoun in terms of their legitimate space. They live in Symkyn’s mill in which there is only one room. Any privacy is denied to the wife and Malyne; and their spatial actions are tightly controlled by Symkyn. So these women are emplaced into private spaces. Indeed, fabliau settings are almost always private. As Woods states,

fabliaux belong in or among the buildings of a town. Their significant space is inside or outside the walls of a house, a shop, a garden. It is a world of interiors, where entrances and exits, and ownership, are centrally important, a world, where material

things are prominent, people's bodies count, small-town savvy can dominate space. (134)

Hence, fabliau as a genre presents "a private universe" and so the characteristic setting is private which is constituted of "tubs, closets, rafters, chests, cupboards, nooks [...] and of course beds" (Farrell 773). Thomas J. Farrell, further, suggests that

[t]he typical setting is [...] private, since fabliau plots repeatedly demand small hiding places [...]. These loci circumscribe or limit the action, and also dictate that the typical larger settings be relatively crowded middle-class houses rather than the spacious halls and wide forests of romance. (773)

Etymologically, the word privacy is identified with household as a private space (Farrell 773). Fabliau with its "private universe" (Farrell 773) makes its characters (especially women) very capable to manoeuvre the private spaces to their own advantage (Farrell 773). Thus, the private setting the fabliaux present restricts the action, but it should be stated that the private setting is specially meant to limit women's actions and is designed to have ultimate control over women's activities. However, these women "are fully empowered to manipulate [this] private space to their own advantage" (Farrell 773). As subordinate ones, fabliau women, Joan Ferrante states in a different context, "[w]ith limited opportunities, [...] find subtle or hidden ways to exercise such power, to manipulate people and situations, and to spin out fictions which suit them better than reality, fictions by which they can, or hope to, control reality" (213). Thus, women are coerced to find creative ways to evade the husbands' control and oppression.

John in the *Miller's Tale* tries to frame Alisoun's space where she cannot act without the consent of her husband. Therefore, John as both the husband and the householder has the control of the house. John is the one—the powerful who determines the space of the inhabitants, Nicholas and Alisoun. Moreover, it is important to note that John's house and the spatial setting of the *Miller's Tale* are concentric (Woods 37). John's house is in Oxford, surrounded by the countryside and within which there is Alisoun and their lodger Nicholas. Their emplacement is significant to the dynamics of fabliau, as each character is the key figure in the action of the tale.

John's house has three main spaces where the action happens: Nicholas's room where he predicts the so-called flood, the middle floor within which is the room where Alisoun is sexually active with Nicholas and John; and the outside or street scene before Alisoun's window where Absolon kisses Alisoun's bottom. John's house with three levels contains the actions and also mirrors the relationship between the powerful and the weak. Each man tries to create themselves a private space to emplace Alisoun. John's house is already his house where he keeps Alisoun. Each man practices a kind of privacy to reach her. Alisoun, spatially restricted, pursues a different and more multi-layered plan. She both tries to evade her spatially constricted position and also attempts to subvert the spaces designed to subordinate her. That is, she assumes the role of a trickster as well as a poacher and employs "artful ruses" to be able to react against the dominant's spatial activities disempowering her.

In the *Miller's Tale*, the key figure of the action taking place inside and outside John's house is definitely Alisoun because all the men in the tale—John, Nicholas and Absolon, presume to achieve a private universe with Alisoun in itself. However, her placement into the centre of the tale does not amplify her spaces; on the contrary, it makes her more oppressed. Alisoun is depicted as an object which originally belongs to the bedroom. In her bedroom, both Nicholas and John sleep with her and "they are safe from

harm, more accurately, from harming themselves” (Woods 46) while Absolon remains outside the house. However, all these men are somehow related to the house and/or Alisoun. As Woods rightly asserts, “John by the authority of his marriage and money, Nicholas by his fitness for “derne love”, and Abs[o]lo[n] by way of his fantastical imagination” (46) are related to her and her private space. Thus, for all men, the house is identified with Alisoun and is regarded as a space to belong to and to be entered. The entrance to Alisoun’s private space, however, is only possible with her will; and her will is only activated in “privee”. When Nicholas propositions Aliso[u]n, she responds to his advances, though not immediately;

“I wol nat kisse thee, by my fey!
 Why, lat be!” quod she. “Lat be, Nicholas,
 Or I wol crie ‘out, harrow’ and ‘allas’!
 Do wey youre hands, for youre curteisye. (I 3284-7)

Alisoun’s awareness of her situation explicitly lays bare her restricted space as well as limitation in her mobility. Nevertheless, her spatial boundaries trigger her to “enjoy her narrow confinement with enthusiastic aid of the young scholar” (Woods 39). Hence, she uses the place where she is guarded. In other words, she exploits the private space of her husband John for her own purposes. She sleeps in John’s bedroom with Nicholas; and it is the private space where she is supposed to be safe and secure from other males, yet it is also the space where she betrays her husband. Her manipulation of private space empowers her and provides her with temporary relief from the dominant’s oppressive use of space.

Therefore, Alisoun’s sexuality and her spatial identity are interrelated. When Alisoun has the control over the private spaces, she finds the chance to practice sexuality. Similarly, her control of her own body through sexuality provides her with the manipulation of the spaces to her own interest. Therefore, in *The Miller’s Tale*, Alisoun defies the dominant through spatial and sexual practices together.

The *Miller’s Tale*’s interest in space and characters’ spatialities reveal itself in the frequent repetition of the word “pryvetee” (I 3164) and its derivatives such as “privee”(I 3295) and “pryvely” (I 3802) (Bullon-Fernandez 141-2). Almost all characters keep secrets and create action in private spaces. John’s attempt to keep Alisoun in cage, Nicholas’s yearning for reaching Alisoun in private, Alison’s scheming plan with Nicholas, Absolon’s secretive plan of revenging “the misdirected kiss” all constitute the private actions in private spaces in the tale. Also, it can be inferred that these privacies and the private spaces in the *Miller’s Tale* are unstable. So, the tale supports the idea of the private spaces and practicing privacy as fragile and vulnerable to violation. That is, “as soon as something is defined as “privee”, that very definition opens up the possibility of its violation: if the space were not “privee”, it would not be susceptible (Bullon-Fernandez 146, Lochrie 164). However, Alisoun uses her “privetees” differently and her private spaces serve Alisoun’s own benefits although they are interrupted. When her privacy is interrupted in her private space, the interrupter is punished. Miller’s prologue foreshadows Alisoun’s subversive use of the domestic space and the miller warns the audience about the outcomes of intervening her space, “An housbonde shal nat been inquisitive/Of Goddes pryvetee, nor of his wyf” (I 3163-3164). Along with knowing God’s secrets, knowing a wife’s secrets is described as destructive. The word “pryvetee” in this context has double meanings. One of the meanings of the word “privetee” may be the wife herself if “privetee” is used in bodily sense. Hence, a wife’s “pryvetees” may refer to her desires and secretive plans as well as her body. Alisoun’s body is an important agent in terms of her subversive private spatial practices.

Since body and space are also interconnected, Alisoun's body provides Alisoun with a powerful agent, her sexuality, to gain authority in domestic spaces she inhabits.

Alisoun knows how to have the control of the private space and organizes the action in this space according to her desires. In this case, her gender matters. As already mentioned above, the power structures create spaces and want to control these spaces where they can exercise their power while the weak try to gain a territory both within and against the power's space. Medieval discourse of gender, which marginalizes and weakens women, hence, constructs its own spaces which disempower women. Accordingly, Alisoun is enclosed in a male space—John's house and is expected to serve his desires and to act out the role of a wife. Since women are traditionally associated with privacy and private space (Helly and Reverby x-xi), Alisoun is also identified with the house (Lochrie 164, Bullon-Fernandez 164). The house is John's private space and he wants to have supreme control of the house to be able to use it to control Alisoun. He keeps her in cage since he is jealous and old while Alisoun is young (I 3122). Therefore, John's concern about Alisoun's "privetee" intersects with all private practices in the house since both Nicholas and Absolon are interested in being in privacy with Alisoun in her space.

All male characters in the tale are obsessed with reaching Alisoun's private space, which causes a debate among critics about Alisoun's situation in the tale. Some critics regard Alisoun "as an independent agent with her own desires", while others consider her as an object for male desire (Bullon-Fernandez 164). Indeed, she is both an agent with her own desires due to her subversive use of the spaces and an object for male use (Bullon-Fernandez 165). As Maria Bullon-Fernandez further mentions,

Aliso[u]n is at the same time an agent to the extent that [...] one can adopt practices strategically, which she does, but she is an object to the extent that she is conditioned by existing practices that try to do away with woman's agency and treat her as the "privee" space, indeed the very material "privee" body, to be invaded. (165)

In this point, Alisoun appears as a poacher. She is subordinate to and an object of male desire. She is described as a caged bird, whose proper space is defined by her husband. Her space is limited to be able to manage her actions by her husband John. However, she does not yield to such subordination. Instead, Alisoun as a "guerrilla fighter" adopts "artful stratagems" to elude her spatial restriction. So, she both becomes a part of John's house where he can enter whenever he wishes, and also she gradually evades her subjection and even subverts it through getting the control of John's space or uses the house to her own advantage. She has a sexual affair with Nicholas in John's bedroom. Although John designs his bedroom for consummation of his marriage, Alisoun uses it subversively for her own ends.

Alisoun's control over her private space positions herself as "a guerrilla attacker" and accordingly provides her with the control of her body and her "pryvetees". For example, when John leaves the house, she creates a sense of authority over the space and her initial rejection of Nicholas's advances turn out to be a lustful collaboration with him,

And hende Nicholas and Alisoun
Acorded been to this conclusioun,
That Nicholas shal shapen hym a wyle
And this sely jalous housbounde to bigyle. (I 3401-4)

As a poacher, Alisoun "shal shapen [...] a wyle" (I 3403). She is the active agent and triggerer of the action in this part of the tale. She constructs John's private space into her

own space through tricks. By her alliance with Nicholas, Alisoun usurps John's bedroom though it is temporary. Moreover, through her use of private space in a subversive manner, she creates herself the right to choose between lovers –Absolon and Nicholas: “And if so be the game wente aright,/She sholde slepen in his arm al nyght,/For this was his desire, hire also” (I 3405-7).

Her choice also reveals her sense of control of the private space. She chooses Nicholas rather than Absolon because he is the one who has privacy in a private space in John's house although he loses it in the denouement of the tale. Her awareness of the spatiality also helps her to control the actions in the spaces for all men lose control of their private spaces or they are enclosed in them. However, nothing happens to Alisoun's space; and she can use the bedroom and the house for her needs and desires. The reason for her authority on her private spaces (bedroom and the house) also suggests that she is aware of the limitations imposed on her in terms of space because she cannot go out of these spaces without the knowledge of her husband. Moreover, she also knows that private spaces are inclined to be violated (Bullon-Fernandez 166). Men's lack of awareness lead them to failure while Alisoun, the only woman in the tale, does not fail and achieves victory. Therefore, the biter is bit. John's, Nicholas's and Absolon's spaces end up being conquered and violated. For instance, John loses the control of his own space and Alisoun uses his bedroom with Nicholas. Although John aims to regulate the spatial activities of Alisoun in his division of his house through enclosing her in the private spaces, particularly the bedroom, he does not consider Nicholas as a possible threat. In a way, John as the power both takes measures to confine Alisoun to his spaces, but cannot totally manage his wife's spatial activities because of her practical tactics. Therefore, in the denouement of the tale, he is the one who is enclosed in the tub waiting for the so-called flood while Alisoun and Nicholas are making love in his own bedroom;

Doun of the ladder stalketh Nicholay,
And Alisoun ful softe adoun she spedde;
Withouten words mo they goon to bedde,
Ther as the carperter is wont lye. (I 3648-51)

Alisoun and Nicholas's “bisynesse of myrthe and of solas” takes place in John's bed which is actually designed by John for his own sexual life. Hence, Alisoun's control on spatiality both encloses John to a private space and also results in Alisoun's spatial triumph. Through restricting John's space and mobility, Alisoun amplifies her space through stealing John's available space. After all, John who is the powerful figure in the beginning of the tale becomes “a public joke” (Bullon-Fernandez 166) in the end and he is labelled mad:

The folk gan laughen at his fantasye;
Into the roof they kiken and they cape,
And turned al his harm unto a jape.
[...]
With othes grete he was so sworn adoun
That he was holde wood in al the toun;
For every clerk anonright heeld with oother. (I 3840-7)

Therefore, Alisoun's “poaching attacks” on John through employing tricks and ruses provide her with partial liberation in terms of private spaces.

Women in the *Reeve's Tale* resist their spatial subordination and limitation in their mobility though they are subjugated by their oppressor Symkyn and confined to the house

which is their traditionally defined space. They contest their confinement to the domestic and private space through managing and controlling the spaces which are designated to oppress them. Like Alisoun in the *Miller's Tale*, they construct tricks and gain the control of the spaces and subvert the power's intentions on these spaces through their mobility in their restricted space.

Privacy and private spaces are functionally important agents for women in the *Reeve's Tale* because women utilize them for their own benefit. Their restraint in private spaces helps and triggers them to form a spatial awareness as well as a confrontation to their keeper, Symkyn. Symkyn tries to have the ultimate authority in the private and public spaces in the tale and he has a careful watch over his wife and Malyne's spatial activities in his mill. To be able to be the authority in the spaces, he thoroughly rules the activities in his house/mill. His attentive spatial activities can be categorized in two groups, one of which is fraud (Bullon-Fernandez 169): "A thief he was for soothe of corn and mele,/And that a sly, and usaunt for to stele./His name was hote deynous Symkyn". (I 3939-40). The other private activity of Symkyn is absolutely oppressive protectiveness of his wife and Malyne.

Symkyn's meticulous protectiveness of his wife and daughter Malyne makes these women in the tale oppressed in terms of space. Symkyn as the ultimate authority controls every action in his mill and house, and tries to manipulate all other actions to serve for his two main private activities: – fraud and protectiveness of his wife and daughter. The mill is the central locus where Symkyn deceives and steals from the clerks. Thus, the mill is Symkyn's main medium of fraud. In other words, the mill "is the overt means of his [Symkyn's] predation" (Woods 51); however, the mill/house is also the main setting where women challenge Symkyn's authority through their subversive usage of spaces. The power struggle between women and Symkyn is also evident in Symkyn's wearing swords:

But if he wolde be slayn of Symkyn
With panade, or with knyf, or boidekyn.
For jalous folk ben perilous everemo –
Algate they wolde hire wyves wenden so. (I 3959-62)

The mill as an important space in the tale is itself a weapon for Symkyn and his aims (Woods 51) while it is the place where women are initially enclosed though later they subvert the mill/house to their own weapon to be used against Symkyn. Moreover, the mill is "Symkyn's means of putting a bite on his neigbo[u]rs" (Woods 51) and it provides Symkyn with the power since milling is an economical act. The mill, however, may also be regarded as a spatial instrument for Symkyn to oppress his wife and Malyne. Along with its sexual connotations, the mill is also spatially important in the way it keeps women out of the action. They are enclosed in the house. The house is even more important as a space in the context of women's resistance because women in fabliaux are seen in action in the house.

Symkyn's effort to control women's space activities in his places requires his supreme authority of spatial activities. So, he also tries to limit the clerks' activities who already pose as challenge and violators for Symkyn with their swords: "Forth goth Aleyn the clerk, and also John,/With good swerd and with bokeler by hir side". (I4018-9). However, Symkyn manages to cheat them. After Symkyn achieves to cheat the clerks, they have nothing to do but find a place to stay. They propose to stay at Symkyn's house, of course, in return for money: "But for the love of God they hym bisoght/Of herberwe and of ese, as for hir peny" (I 4118-9). Symkyn's lack of practicality in practicing privacy shows itself again in his greedy invitation. His awkwardness in spatial awareness will lead him to

his own reduction because, as Symkyn mentions, his house is very small and he is not aware that he should define clear boundaries in the interior of the house,

Myn hous is streit, ye han lerned art;
 Ye konne by arguments make a place
 A myle brood of twenty foot of space.
 Lat se now if this place may suffise,
 Or make it rown with speche, as it is youre gise. (I 4122-6)

In this aspect, his offer of “herberwe” (I 4118) creates a practical space for the clerks to avenge themselves. Miller’s wife and Malyne avail themselves of the clerks’ revenge of Symkyn. Although the clerks do not “make it rown with speche” (I 4122), they devise another trick for Symkyn, which also provides women with a chance to evade the oppressive control on themselves and even create their own meanings and pleasures through manipulating the spatial limitations to their mobility and liberation. In other words, the wife and the daughter Malyne form a social alliance with the clerks to react against Symkyn for their pleasures. So, the clerks’ entrance into Symkyn’s private house presents women a chance to perform their desires through using Symkyn’s space in accordance with their own wishes rather than Symkyn’s. In this case, too, privacy calls in its violation (Bullon-Fernandez 146); and the clerks do violate this privacy. Symkyn’s important privacies, his wife and daughter are both violated since Symkyn cannot totally control the spatial activities in his privacy. Aleyn is first to use the advantage of sleeping in the same room with Symkyn’s daughter Malyne: “He [Aleyn] has the milleris doghter in his arm,/He [Aleyn] auntred hym, and has his nedes sped” (I 4204-5); and Malyne enjoys sex: “And shortly for to seyn, they were aton” (I 4194).

Aleyn’s “wikked jape” (I 4201) both threatens and encourages John not to be “a draf-sak in [his] bed” (I 4202) because

[...] when this jape is tald another day,
 I sal been halde a daf, a cokenay!
 I will arise and auntre it, by my faith!
 ‘Unhardy is unseemly,’ thus men sayth”. (I 4201-8)

Therefore, John also uses the limited space to his own advantage and changes the cradle’s place to mislead the wife to his bed: “And up he roos, and softely he wente/Unto the cradle, and in his hand it hente,/And baar it softe unto his beddes feet” (I 4211-3).

On the other hand, Symkyn’s wife and Malyne benefit from the clerks’ spatial activities because they both get pleasure and take their revenge from Symkyn. Though they are confined to the private spaces, they avail of this limitation in space and manipulate it to their own advantage through their ruses. For example, Symkyn’s wife seems to be beguiled by the clerk who changes the place of the cradle, but she does not withstand his advances and enjoys sexual intercourse with John in her husband Symkyn’s house.

The cradle is also significant because it is the symbol of “Symkyn’s domestic kingdom” (Woods 54). The baby is supposed to continue his lineage, however, the baby is treated as an instrument of ridicule of Symkyn and his wife’s confusing the bed because of the cradle’s place (Woods 54). After all, both John and Aleyn violate Symkyn’s daughter Malyne’s and the wife’s bodies in Symkyn’s private space. However, this violation is manipulated by women as a chance to evade the subjection imposed on them. They also take their revenge from Symkyn, who restricts his wife and daughter in his spaces, by making alliances with the clerks. Malyne even sees off Aleyn who is now regarded as

“deere lemman” (I 4235) and tells him the place of the cake which is made with the flour that Symkyn steals:

But er thou go, o thing I wol thee telle:
 Whan that thou wendest homeward by the melle,
 Right at the entree of the dore bihynde
 Thou shalt a cake of half a bushel fynde
 That was ymaked of thyn owene mele,
 Which that I help my sire for to stele. (I 4235-43)

Women in the *Reeve's Tale* are active participants in the action and they use spaces they inhabit as well as the spatial activities. Thereby, they assume the role of the poacher as Alisoun in the *Miller's Tale* does despite subtle differences. They cooperate with the clerks to use the private space for forbidden activities. Hence, their spatial activities in Symkyn's space bring Symkyn's own end. Malyne and the wife are merely treated as means of social climbing by Symkyn. Furthermore, Symkyn as the landlord and the authority in the tale can only achieve his aims through offering gaps and/or opportunities to the attackers who are the clerks and the women. He attempts to control the meanings and spatial activities in his mill/house; however, he also has spatial vulnerabilities the clerks and women use and violate. Hence, firstly, the clerks, then, the wife and Malyne, make use of the opportunities which Symkyn cannot manage and has to offer. Therefore, although Symkyn as the landlord seems to be the only authority in relation to spatial activities in the tale, he cannot totally regulate the meanings which are generated by the lodgers John and Aleyn and later his women.

The house and the mill may be the property of Symkyn, however, his women with the help of the clerks, fashion Symkyn's spaces as they wish. Symkyn cannot interfere in the social allegiances of the women and the clerks; and he cannot control the spatial activities in his own space. Thereby, his women assimilate Symkyn's oppressive spaces into their own space where they can generate their own meanings and pleasures. Through their use of spatial opportunities, they steal from Symkyn's spaces for their own pleasure. Thus, they achieve transitory relief from subjection.

In conclusion, Alisoun in the *Miller's Tale* takes control of John's spaces that are the house and specifically the bedroom; and utilizes these spaces as subversive agents for her own pleasures. Therefore, she uses the resources provided by the dominant to meet her own needs.

Similarly, the wife and the daughter Malyne in the *Reeve's Tale* evade Symkyn's watchful protectiveness on their already limited space, and even organize his space as their own space. Accordingly, both Malyne and his wife violate Symkyn's space and insert their own meanings and pleasures into it. Hence, their use of space and their spatial activities empower them against the dominant Symkyn since they construct dissident meanings out of manipulative use of the private spaces, provided by Symkyn. As Anne Ladd states, the deceitful wives in these fabliaux become the “winning women” (100) because they turn a threatening situation to their own interest. Thus, these women “come out on top” (Johnson 299) creating their own oppositional meanings and popular pleasure.

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