The Portrait, Prologue and Tale of the Reeve
THE REEVE'S TALE

Introduction

The Reeve's story is, as he himself says, a retaliatory response to the tale of the Miller. Suspicious mind that he is, he always brings up the rear of the procession of pilgrims so that he can see all the others. Not surprisingly, he suspects that the Miller's tale, in which an old carpenter has been made to look foolish, is directed against himself. He is probably right; for although he is not an old carpenter, he is old and has been a carpenter in his earlier years.

The Reeve's bawdy tale follows his sermonizing response to The Miller's Tale. The substance of that sermon is in part that old men who are past doing naughty deeds have an ineradicable urge to tell naughty tales. And they have other vices: boastfulness, lying, anger, greed. These are also the vices of the miller and his wife in the tale he is about to tell, a naughty fabliau like the pilgrim Miller's, and told with some of the same "churl's terms," that is, coarse words. The Reeve's tale tells of two young Cambridge students with marked provincial accents who set out to see that the arrogant and dishonest miller who grinds the college wheat does not cheat them. They plan to watch everything he does, but he quietly lets their horse loose, and while they chase it, he and his wife steal part of their flour. Because the students do not catch the horse until near dark, they have to ask the miller for lodging for the night. He agrees (for a fee), and celebrates his victory by getting tipsy. In the course of the night the sleepless students get their revenge on the miller by entertaining his wife and daughter in bed.

Critics have busied themselves in finding differences between these first two tales, mostly to the greater or lesser derogation of the Reeve's. Some even profess to find the Reeve's yarn "darker," "more corrosive," "destructive," making too much earnest of game again, as is the wont of scholars who fail to notice that in the sexual couplings or "swivings" of the tale a good time seems to be had by all. Charges of rape move the story out of the region of bedroom farce where it belongs and into that of realistic crime where it does not. The main victim is the burly miller, whose only physical "punishment" is to miss the fun, and get a bloody nose and a lump on his thick head. The carpenter in The Miller's Tale falls two floors and breaks his arm. If one wants to be "realistic" about which tale is "darker" or "more destructive," one might ask a carpenter how he would ply his trade with a broken arm.

But one should not get too realistic. "How many children had Malin McMiller?" is not an appropriate question to ask of a fabliau. All the pilgrims, Chaucer tells us, laughed at the pilgrim Miller's yarn. At the end of the Reeve's tale, we are told, the Cook cannot contain his
glee, and we assume that the Cook's hearer-response represents that of most of the pilgrims as it does ours, except the most delicately sensitive.

I have said that the Miller's story seems to be a parody of the tale of the Knight which precedes it. There is no question that in its turn, it provokes the response of the Reeve, which in turn induces the unfinished tale of the Cook. In this, the first four-tale Fragment of the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer makes a very successful effort to relate each tale after the first to what has gone before it, something he does again more than once in the later tales. And very satisfying this narrative architecture can be.

The tales of the Miller and the Reeve illustrate what wonderful variations can be wrought on essentially the same material by a crafty artist. In each case a jealous husband is cuckolded by students ("clerks") whom he has let into his house, and he gets physically hurt as well. Both husbands are jealous, but John the carpenter's jealousy is simply stated as the inevitable feeling of a "senex amans," a silly old man who has married a much younger woman. By contrast, the possessiveness of Simon the Miller, which is dwelt on at humorous length, threatens not the happiness of his wife, but the life and limb of would-be flirters, as he struts before his "lady" on Sundays with an armory of swords and knives to protect her "honor" and his. She is proudly the possession of the proud miller, unlike Alison, the unwilling captive of an old carpenter.

The miller's pride is comic, of course, especially for what it consists in — the wife's "noble" lineage: she is the bastard daughter of the local priest! And parents and grandparent have no end of ambition for their (grand)daughter whose agricultural charms are painted in a few swift strokes; she is "beef to the heels," as James Joyce would put it, but she has nice hair! There is small-time, small-town snobbery in 14th-centuryTrumpington as later in turn-of-the-century Dublin: always tuppence-halfpenny looking down on tuppence. But Chaucer makes it a source of outright humor rather than pity, pathos or scalding satire. The miller and his clerk-begotten wife think themselves and their child so much superior to their neighbors that they have plans to marry the girl into the aristocracy, as is appropriate for a daughter of Holy Church and the exalted House of Simkin!

In some ways the student-clerks would be considered their social superiors (the priest who fathered the miller's wife is superior because he *is* a clerk), but the miller and his wife think themselves superior in some ways to *these* clerks who are from an obscure town in the north of England and who betray their origins in a provincial rustic accent and usage—features of speech which Chaucer takes pains to depict as he does nowhere else in the Tales. (The details of the students' dialect speech will be pointed out in the glosses to the text).
These unsophisticated clerks may have heard lectures on philosophy or law, but Simon and his wife have studied Applied Economics: How to Take Friends and Fleece the People; How to Divert the Attention of the Client; How to Conceal the Skim off the Top; How to make the Client pay for his Fleecing, etc. But they were absent for the lecture on Keeping Sober until the Deal is Complete. Hence the failure to realize that if you get drunk on a combination of ale and victory over the book-learned, you will have no control of the two-legged stallions who will behave like the four-legged stallion which you released earlier to run after the mares in the fen. (It is not accidental that the stallion is an old symbol of unbridled lust). How ironically true the wife's words to the students at that point will prove to be later:

She said "Alas! Your horse goes to the fen
With wild mares as fast as he may go.
Unthank [bad luck] come on his hand that bound him so
And he that better should have knit the rein.

Indeed.

And if either of these lusty young males knows how to compose a rustic aubade (a poem of farewell after a night of love) it will not matter that it is spoken in the accents of Northumbria not of Provence. The grateful female will respond by helping to recoup material losses. One of the clerks does know how, and so they both return to Cambridge qualified to give lectures on "Using your knowledge of literary conventions to best the rustic aristocracy for fun and profit."

Their knowledge of natural philosophy does not allow them to take up the Miller's taunting challenge to expand the size of the bedroom in order to avoid proximity with the Miller's more private and prized possessions, his wife and daughter; but when that very proximity expands their erotic imaginings, the knowledge of the philosophy of law comes in useful; it provides for Alan a legal theory to justify his urge for sexual relief. No matter if it is a real legal maxim or just a maxim for the moment; it is convincing, if you want to be convinced:

For, John, there is a law that says thus:
That if a man in one point be aggrieved,
That in another he shall be relieve

And since I shall have no amendement
Against my loss, I will have easement.
The delicious melding of the legal and sexual meanings of "relieved" and "easement" is like the coupling of Alan and Malin, and shows the value of a university education when one needs a law to justify one's lust. A nice goliardic joke.

The Miller's humiliation at the end is directly related to his absurd pride set out at such length at the beginning, and his reaction is correspondingly grotesque when he finds out what Alan and his daughter have been doing all night: he lets out a howl of rage that his daughter, this highly-descended girl, has been swived by an uplandish clerk with an uncouth accent and no brains; now she is spoiled goods. His delusion of marrying her into "blood of ancestry" is shattered. Her ancestral blood is that of her grandmother who has bequeathed to her only a weakness for sweet-talking clerks with a lot of brass.

Here is the portrait of the Reeve from the General Prologue

The REEVë was a slender, choleric man.¹
His beard was shaved as nigh as ever he can.
His hair was by his ears full round y-shorn,
590 His top was dockèd like a priest beforne.
Full longè were his leggès and full lean
Y-like a staff; there was no calf y-seen.
Well could he keep a garner and a bin;
There was no auditor could on him win.
595 Well wist he by the drought and by the rain
The yielding of his seed and of his grain.
His lorde's sheep, his neat, his dairy,
His swine, his horse, his store and his poultry
Was wholly in this Reeve's governing,
600 And by his covenant gave the reckoning
Since that his lord was twenty years of age.
There could no man bring him in árrearage.
There was no bailiff, herd nor other hine
That he ne knew his sleight and his covine.
605 They were adread of him as of the death.

¹ A reeve was a manager of a country estate.
The Reeve is the only one with a grumpy response to the Miller's Tale

3855 When folk had laughèd at this nicè case
Of Absalom and handy Nicholas,
Diversè folk diversèly they said,
But for the mostè part they laughed and played,
Nor at this tale I saw no man him grieve

3860 But it were only Osèwald the Reeve;
Because he was of carpenterè's craft,
A little ire is in his heart y-left.
He gan to grouch, and blamed it a lite.
"So theek," quod he, "full well could I thee quite³

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1 "He had hoarded a lot secretly."

2 It is not clear whether the Reeve sometimes lends money to his master from his (i.e. the Reeve's) resources or from his lord's own resources but giving the impression that the Reeve is the lender.

3
So theek ... forage: "I declare that I could easily get even with you, and wipe a miller's eye if I chose to tell a coarse tale (ribaldry), but I am old, and because of my age I don't care to (me list not) jest; green-grass time is over, and all that is left is dying hay (forage)."
The Host’s annoyed response to the Reeve’s moralizing

When that our Host had heard this sermoning,

He gan to speak as lordly as a king.

He said: "What amounteth all this wit?"  Scripture
What! Shall we speak all day of Holy Writ!
Or of a souter, a shipman or a leech!

Say forth thy tale, and tarry not the time.
Lo Deptford, and it is halfway prime.
Lo Greenewich, where many a shrew is in.

It were all time thy tale to begin."

In response to the Miller’s tale the Reeve will tell a tale about a miller

"Now sires," quod this Osèwald the Reeve,

"I pray you allè that you not you grieve
Though I answér and somedeal set his hove,
For lawful is with forcè force off-shove.
This drunken Miller hath y-told us here
How that beguilèd was a carpenter,

Peráventure in scorn for I am one.
But by your leave, I shall him quit anon.
Right in his churlès termès will I speak.
I pray to God his neckè may to-break.
He can well in my eyè see a stalk,

But in his own he cannot see a balk."

THE REEVE’S TALE

Portrait of a miller: a proud, well-armed thief

At Trumpington, not far from Cantèbridge,

There goes a brook, and over that a bridge,
Upon the whichè brook there stands a mill
And this is very sooth that I you tell.

A miller was there dwelling many a day.
As any peacock he was proud and gay;
Pipen he could, and fish, and nettès beat,
And turnè cups and well wrestle and shoot.
REEVE'S TALE

And by his belt he bore a long panade,  
3930  And of a sword full trenchant was the blade;  
A jolly popper bore he in his pouch;  
There was no man for peril durst him touch.  
A Sheffield thwitel bore he in his hose.  
Round was his face, and camus was his nose;  
3935  As piled as an apè was his skull.  
He was a market-beater at the full.  
There durst no wighte hand upon him lay  
That he ne swore he should anon abey.  
A thief he was forsooth of corn and meal,  
3940  And that a sly, and usant for to steal.  
His name was hoten Deinous Simkin.  

His wife, equally proud

A wife he had, y-comen of noble kin:  
The parson of the town her father was!  
With her he gave full many a pan of brass,  
3945  For that Simkin should in his blood ally;  
She was y-fostered in a nunnery,  
For Simkin woulde no wife, as he said,  
But she were well y-nourished and a maid,  
To saven his estate of yeomanry.  
3950  And she was proud and pert as is a pie.  
A full fair sight was it upon them two:  
On holy days before her would he go  
With his tippet wound about his head,  
And she came after in a gite of red,  
3955  And Simkin hadde hosen of the same.  

| 1 | "He swore that nobody would lay a hand on him without paying for it promptly." |
| 2 | "His name ...: "He was called Proud Simkin" (a form of Simon). Both forms of the name are used the tale. |
| 3 | "With her ...: He gave as her dowry a lot of money so that Simkin would marry her (an illegitimate). |
| 4 | "For Simkin ...: "He wanted no woman as a wife who was not well brought up (y-nourished) and virgin (a maid)--to accord with his social standing as a freeman." |
There durst no wight clepen her but "dame."  
Was none so hardy that wente by the way
That with her durst rage or oncę play
But if he would be slain of Simkin,  
With panade, or with knife, or bodékin;
For jealous folk been perilous evermo'
(Algate they would their wivés wenden so).
And eke, for she was some deal smoterlich,
She was as digne as water in a ditch,
And full of hoker and of bisémare.
Her thoughte that "a lady" should her spare,
What for her kindred, and her nortelry
That she had learned in the nunnery.

Their daughter

A daughter haddë they bitwixt them two
Of twenty years, withouten any more,
Saving a child that was of half year age:
In cradle it lay and was a proper page.
This wench thicken and well y-grownen was,
With camus nose, and eyen grey as glass,
With buttocks broad, and breastés round and high,
But right fair was her hair, I will not lie.
The parson of the town, for she was fair,
In purpose was to maken her his heir
Both of his chattel and his messuage,
And strange he made it of her marriage.
His purpose was for to bestow her high

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1 *There durst...* "Nobody dared call her anything but `My lady,'" a designation generally reserved for women well above her social rank.

2 *Algate:* "At least they would like their wives to think so."

3 *for she was... bisémare:* These lines seem to mean: "For one who was somewhat soiled (she was a bastard) she was inordinately proud and full of scorn and haughtiness. She thought that a lady should hold herself exclusive."

4 *And strange...*: "He made the conditions for marrying her very demanding." In the following lines the sarcasm of the author is evident at the absurd ambitions of the priest for the granddaughter that he should not have had, and his willingness to misappropriate church funds for her.
Into some worthy blood of ancestry,
For Holy Church’s goods must be despended On Holy Church’s blood that is descended;
Therefore he would his holy blood honoúr,
Though that he Holy Churché should devour.

The miller grinds corn for a Cambridge college

Great soken has this miller out of doubt
With wheat and malt of all the land about;
And namely there was a great college,
Men clepe the Soler Hall of Cantebridge.
There was their wheat and eke their malt y-ground.
And on a day it happened in a stound,
Sick lay the manciple in a malady;
Men wenden wisly that he shouldé die,
For which this miller stole both meal and corn
A hundred times more than beforn,
For therebefore he stole but courteously,
But now he was a thief outrageously.
For which the warden chid and madé fare,
But thereof set the miller not a tare;
He crackd boast, and swore it was not so.

Two students think they are a match for the cheating miller

Then were there youngé pooré scholars two
That dwelten in the hall of which I say.
Testive they were and lusty for to play,
And only for their mirth and revelry
Upon the warden busily they cry
To give them leavé but a little stound
To go to mill and see their corn y-ground,
And hardly they durste lay their neck
The miller should not steal them half a peck
Of corn by sleighté, nor by force them rieve;
And at the last the warden gave them leave.

John hight that one, and Alan hight that other;

1 "For which reason the head of the college complained and made a fuss."
Of one town were they born that hight Strother,

4015 Far in the north I can not tell where.
This Alan maketh ready all his gear,
And on a horse the sack he casts anon;
Forth goes Alan the clerk and also John,
With good sword and with buckler by his side.

4020 John knew the way; he needed no guide;
And at the mill the sack adown he layeth.

Their Northern accents and their naïve plan

Alan spoke first: "All hail, Simon, in faith.
How fares thy faire daughter and thy wife?"¹
"Alan, welcome!" quod Simkin, "by my life!

4025 And John also! How now, what do you here?"
"By God," quod John, "Simon, need has na peer:
Him boes serve himself that has na swain,
Or else he is a fool, as clerkês sayn.
Our manciple, I hope he will be dead,

4030 Swa workês aye the wanges in his head.²
And therefore is I come, and eke Alain,
To grind our corn and carry it hame again.
I pray you, speed us hethen that you may."

4035 What will you do while that it is in hand?"
"By God, right by the hopper will I stand,"
Quod John, "and see how the corn gaas in.
Yet saw I never, by my father kin,
How that the hopper waggês til and fra."

4040 Alan answered, "John, and wilt thou swa?
Then will I be Beneath, by my crown,
And see how that the meal fallês down
Into the trough; that sall be my desport.
For John, in faith, I may be of your sort:

4045 I is as ill a miller as are ye."
The miller outwits the students with a trick

This miller smilèd of their nicety, simplicity
And thought, "All this is done but for a wile. ruse
They weenè that no man may them beguile they think / fool
But by my thrift, yet shall I blear their eye, skill / blind

For all the sleight in their philosophy. cleverness
The morè quaintè crekès that they make, clever ruses
The morè will I steale when I take.
Instead of flour yet will I give them bran.

The greatest clerks been not the wisest men,

As whilom to the wolf thus spoke the mare. As once
Of all their arte count I not a tare." their cleverness
Out at the door he goes full privily, secretly
When that he saw his timè softly, quietly
He looketh up and down till he hath found

The clerkès' horse there as it stood y-bound tied
Behind the mill, under a leafèsel, leafy shade
And to the horse he goes him fair and well.
He strippeth off the bridle right anon,
And when the horse was loose, he 'ginneth gone started to go

Toward the fen where wildè marès run, marsh
And forth with "Weehee," through thick and thin.
   The miller goes again; no word he said, goes (back)
But does his note and with the clerks he played, job / joked
Till that their corn was fair and well y-ground. well & truly

The students spend hours trying to catch their horse

And when the meal is sackèd and y-bound, (cries of dismay)
This John goes out and finds his horse away, = bones
And gan to cry "Harrow!" and "Welaway! = at once
Our horse is lost! Alan, for Godè's banes,
Step on thy feet! Come off, man, all atanes!

Alas, our warden has his palfrey lorn!"
This Alan all forgot both meal and corn;

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1 As whilom ...: "As the mare said to the wolf once (whilom)." The hungry wolf, saying he wanted to buy the mare's foal, was told that the price was written on its back leg. Trying to read it he was kicked hard, and the mare made the remark cited.
All was out of his mind his husbandry.
"What, whilk way is he gaan?" he gan to cry.
The wife came leaping inward with a run;

4080 She said, "Alas, your horse goes to the fen
With wilde mares, as fast as he may go.
Unthank come on his hand that bound him so,
And he that better should have knit the rein!"
"Alas," quod John, "Alan, for Christe's pain,

4085 Lay down thy sword, and I will mine alswa.
I is full wight, God wat, as is a raa.¹
By Gode's heart, he sal not scape us bathe.
Why n'ad thou put the capil in the lathe?
Ill hail, by God, Alan, thou is a fonn."

4090 These silly clerkês have full fast y-run
Toward the fen, both Alan and eke John;

The miller uses their absence fruitfully

And when the miller saw that they were gone,
He half a bushel of their flour hath take
And bade his wife go knead it in a cake.

4095 He said: "I trow the clerkês were afeard.
Yet can a miller make a clerkês beard
For all his art. Yea, let them go their way.
Lo, where he goes! Yea, let the children play.
They get him not so lightly, by my crown."

4100 These silly clerkês runnen up and down
With "Keep! Keep! Stand! Stand! Jossa! Warderer!
Ga whistle thou, and I sall keep him here."
But shortly, till that it was very night,
They could not, though they did all their might,

4105 Their capil catch, he ran always so fast,
Till in a ditch they caught him at the last.

The outwitted students have to stay the night

Weary and wet as beast is in the rain,

¹ "I am as fast, God knows (wat) as a roe [deer]."
Comes silly John, and with him comes Alain. "Alas," quod John, "the day that I was born! Now are we driven til hething and til scorn Our corn is stolen; men will us foolis call, Both the warden and our fellows all, And namely the miller. Welaway!"

Thus 'plaineth John as he goes by the way Toward the mill, and Bayard in his hand. The miller sitting by the fire he found, For it was night, and further might they not; But for the love of God they him besought Of harbour and of ease, as for their penny. Thus the miller said again: "If there be any, Such as it is, yet shall you have your part. My house is strait, but you have learnid art, You can by argumentis make a place A mile broad of twenty feet of space! Let's see now if this plac may suffice, Or make it room with speech, as is your guise." "Now Simon," said this John, "by Saint Cuthbert, Ay is thou merry, and that is fair answéred. I have heard say men sal taa of twa things, But specially I pray thee, hoste dear, Get us some meat and drink and make us cheer, And we will payen truly at the full. With empty hand men may na hawkés tulle. Lo, here our silver, ready for to spend."

**Supper and bed**

This miller into town his daughter sends For ale and bread, and roasted them a goose, And bound their horse; it should no more go loose. And in his owne chamber them made a bed With sheetës and with chalons fair y-spread Not from his owne bed ten foot or twelve. His daughter had a bed all by herself Right in the samë chamber by and by. It mightë be no bet, and cause why? There was no roomier harbour in the place.
Heardest: "Did you ever before hear such a song? Listen, what a compline (they are singing) among them all." Compline is the last part of the Divine Office for the day, sung in monastic houses just before retiring to bed. The general tenor of the readings is to urge Christians to be sober and vigilant, "to have compunction in your beds" (Ps. 4); and the prayers are for chaste thoughts!

Alan plans to get some satisfaction

Alan, the clerk, that heard this melody,
He pokèd John and saidè: "Sleepest thou?"

Wha hearkened ever swilk a ferly thing? 2
Yea, they sal have the flower of ill ending!
This langé night there tides me na rest.
But yet, na force, all sal be for the best;

1 Heardest ...: "Did you ever before hear such a song? Listen, what a compline (they are singing) among them all." Compline is the last part of the Divine Office for the day, sung in monastic houses just before retiring to bed. The general tenor of the readings is to urge Christians to be sober and vigilant, "to have compunction in your beds" (Ps. 4); and the prayers are for chaste thoughts!

2 Wha hearkened ...: "Who ever heard such an amazing thing"?
For John," said he, "as ever mote I thrive, 
If that I may, yon wenchè will I swive. 
Some easement has law y-shapen us;

For John, there is a lawè that says thus:
That if a man in one point be aggrieved, 
That in another he sal be relieved. 
Our corn is stolen soothly, 'tis na nay, 
And we have had an ill fitt today, 
And since I sal have naan amendèment 
Against my loss, I will have easement. 
By Godè's soul, it sal naan other be." 
This John answéred, "Alan, avisè thee! 
The miller is a perilous man," he said, 
"And if that he out of his sleep abraid, 
He mighté do us both a villainy." 
Alan answéred, "I count him not a fly," 
And up he rist, and by the wench he crept. 
This wench lay upright and fastè slept, 
Till he so nigh was ere she might espy 
That it had been too latè for to cry; 
And shortly for to say, they were at one. 
Now play, Alain, for I will speak of John.

John decides to follow Alan's example.

This John lies still a furlong way or two, 
And to himself he maketh ruth and woe. 
"Alas," quod he, "this is a wicked jape. 
Now may I say that I is but an ape. 
Yet has my fellow somewhat for his harm: 
He has the miller's daughter in his arm. 
He auntered him, and has his needes sped, 
And I lie as a draf-sack in my bed. 
And when this jape is told another day, 
I sal be held a daff, a cokenay. 
I will arise and aunter it, by my faith! 
Unhardy is unsely, thus men saith." ¹ 
And up he rose, and softly he went

¹ Unhardy ...: "Gutless is luckless ..." i.e. fortune favors the brave.
Unto the cradle, and in his hand it hent,
And bore it soft unto his bedde’s feet.
   Soon after this the wife her routing leet,
   And came again, and gan her cradle miss,1
And groped here and there, but she found none.
   "Alas," quod she, "I had almost misgone;
I had almost gone to the clerké’s bed.
   Eh! bencitee, then had I foul y-sped!" 2
And forth she goes till she the cradle found.
She gropeth always further with her hand,
And found the bed, and thoughte nought but good,
Because that the cradle by it stood;
   And n’istè where she was, for it was dark,
But fair and well she crept into the clerk,
And lies full still, and would have caught asleep.
Within a while this John the clerk up leaps
   And on this goodé wife he lays on sore.
So merry a fitt ne had she not full yore:3
He pricketh hard and deep as he were mad.
This jolly life have these two clerkés led
Till that the thirde cock began to sing. 3

A dawn parting duet by Alan and Malyn

Alan waxed weary in the dawning,
   For he had swonken all the longé night,
   And saide: "Farewell, Malin, sweeté wight.
The day is come, I may no longer bide.
But evermore, whereso I go or ride,
I is thyn owné clerk, swa have I seel." 4

   1 and gan: gan here is probably just a past tense marker like "did", rather than a short form of "began."

   2 Eh, ...: "Bless me! Then I would have made a mistake!"

   3 The "third cock" probably refers to the third crowing of the rooster around daybreak.

   4 whereso ...: "Wherever I walk or ride (i.e. wherever I go) I am forever your devoted clerk, as sure as I hope for heaven." Alan's farewell (in dialect) and Malin's response are parodies of the aube, aubade, or tagelied, the genre poem of the dawn parting of aristocratic lovers. But the aristocrat would not refer to his lady as wight, and neither one would ever use lemman, a very plebeian word for "lover." Also the aube rarely dealt with the details of
"Now, dear lemmam," quod she, "go, farewell. But ere thou go, one thing I will thee tell: When that thou wendest homeward by the mill, Right at the entry of the door behind Thou shalt a cake of half a bushel find, That was y-made of thine own meal, Which that I helped my sire for to steal. And with that word almost she 'gan to weep.

*Alan returns to his own bed -- he thinks*

Alan up rist and thought, "Ere that it daw[n], I will go creep in by my fellow." And found the cradle with his hand anon. "By God," thought he, "all wrong I have misgone. Mine head is toty of my swink tonight, That maketh me that I go not aright.

I wot well by the cradle I have misgo; Here lies the miller and his wife also." And forth he goes (a twenty devil way!) Unto the bed there as the miller lay. He weened have creepen by his fellow John, And by the miller in he crept anon, And caught him by the neck and soft he spake. He said: "Thou John, thou swinê's-head, awake, For Christ's soul, and hear a noble game: For by that lord that call'd is Saint Jame, As I have thricê in this shortê night Swivêd the miller's daughter bolt upright, While thou hast as a coward been aghast." "Yea, falsê harlot," quod the miller, "hast? Ah, falsê traitor, falsê clerk," quod he, "Thou shalt be dead, by Godê's dignity. Who durstê be so bold to disparáge My daughter, that is come of such lineáge?"

*A melee follows his mistake*
And by the throaté-bowl [?] he caught Alain,  
And he hent him despitously again,⁰  

⁰he = Alan

4275 And on the nose he smote him with his fist.  
Down ran the bloody stream upon his breast.  
And on the floor, with nose and mouth to-broke,  
They wallow as do two piggès in a poke,  
And up they go and down again anon,  

4280 Till that the miller spurnèd at a stone,  
And down he fell backward upon his wife  
That wisté nothing of this nicê strife,  
For she was fall asleep a little wight  
With John the clerk that wakèd had all night.  

4285 And with the fall out of her sleep she braid.  
"Help, holy cross of Broméholm!" she said.  
"In manus tuas, Lord, to thee I call!  
Awake, Simon, the fiend is on me fall!  
My heart is broken. Help! I n'am but dead!  

4290 There lies one on my womb and on my head! ²  
Help, Simkin, for the falsè clerkès fight!"  
This John starts up as fast as ever he might,  
And grasphet by the walles to and fro  
To find a staff; and she starts up also,  

4295 And knew the estres bet than did this John,  

"The wife joins the fight with unfortunate results"

And by the wall a staff she found anon,  
And saw a little shimmering of a light,  
For at a hole in shone the moonè bright  
And by that light she saw them bothè two,  

4300 But sikerly she n'istè who was who,  
But as she saw a white thing in her eye,  
And when she gan this whitè thing espy,  
She weened the clerk had weared a voluper,  
And with the staff she drew ay near and near,  

---

¹ "And he (Alan) in turn seized (hent) Simkin fiercely."

² The wife thinks she is being assailed by at least one incubus, a wicked spirit (fiend) that supposedly came upon women at night and impregnated them. Hence her prayer to the cross to repel this devil. Her use of the compline prayer: *In manus tuas: Into thy hands, O Lord *..., is definitely too late.
And weened have hit this Alan at the full
But smote the miller on the pilèd skull
That down he goes and cried: "Harrow! I die!"
These clerkês beat him well and let him lie,
And greythen them, and took their horse anon,

And eke their meal, and on their way they go[n],
And at the mille yet they took their cake,
Of half a bushel flour full well y-bake.

Summary and "moral"

Thus is this proude miller well y-beat,
And has y-lost the grinding of the wheat,
And paid for the supper everydeal
Of Alan and of John that beat him well;
His wife is swivèd and his daughter als.
Lo, such it is a miller to be false!
And therefore this provérb is said full sooth:

Him thar not weenè well that evil doth;
A guiler shall himself beguilèd be.
And God, that sitteth high in majesty,
Save all this companié, great and small.
Thus have I quit the Miller in my tale.

The Cook's Response

The Cook of London, while the Reeve spake
For joy he thought he clawed him on the back.
"Ha! Ha!" quod he, "for Christé's passion,
This miller had a sharp conclusion
Upon his argument of herbergage."

Well said Solomon in his language:
Ne bring not every man into thy house,
For harbouring by night is perilous.

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1 *Him that ...*: "He who does evil should not expect good; a deceiver shall be deceived himself."

2 *This miller ...*: This miller got the worst of his own "argument" about lodging. This is probably a reference back to the miller's would-be clever response to the clerks' request for lodging: My house is small, but you are book-learned, and so you can turn a small space into a large one by philosophical reasoning.
Well ought a man avisèd for to be careful
Whom that he brought into his privy.

4335 I pray to God, so give me sorrow and care, was named
If ever since I hight Hodge of Ware,
Heard I a miller better set a-work.
He had a jape of malice in the dark.
But God forbiddè that we stintè here jest

4340 And therefore if you vouchèsafe to hear stop
A tale of me that am a poorè man,
I will you tell, as well as ever I can if you care to
A little jape that 'fell in our city."
joke / befell

*The Host cheerfully insults the Cook*

Our Host answered and said "I grant it thee.

4345 Now tell on, Roger. Look that it be good, drained?
For many a pasty hast thou letten blood
And many a Jack of Dover hast thou sold pie (Dover = do over)
That has been twicè hot and twicè cold, reheated
Of many a pilgrim hast thou Christè's curse,

4350 For of thy parsley fare they yet the worse
That they have eaten with thy stubble goose,
For in thy shop is many a flyè loose.
Now tell on gentle Roger, by thy name, angry at a joke
But yet I pray thee be not wrath for game.

4355 A man may say full sooth in game and play."
truth

*The Cook responds with the promise of a tale about an innkeeper*

"Thou sayst full sooth," quod Roger, "by my fay.
But 'Sooth play, quad play,' as the Fleming sayth. 2 faith
And therefore, Harry Bailly, by thy faith,
Be thou not wroth ere we departen here Don't be angry

4360 Though that my tale be of a hosteler.
innkeeper
But natheless I will not tell it yet,
But ere we part, y-wis, thou shalt be quit."
And therewithal he laughed and made cheer
And said his tale as you shall after hear.

*The Cook starts his tale of Perkin Reveller, an apprentice more fond of dancing, dicing and general revelry than of trade. The tale has all the appearance of yet another fabliau, but it stops after about sixty lines and Chaucer apparently never finished it. As the marginal note in the Hengwrt MS put it: "Of this Cook's tale maked Chaucer no more."*