Activity 10.4 - Northern dialect in Chaucer’s *Reeve’s Tale*

**Verbs**

- How *faires* thy faire doghter and thy wyf?
  
  Hym *bibones* serue hymself
  
  Swa *werkes* ay the wanges
  
  How that the hoper *wagges*
  
  And se how that the mele *falles* down

The Northern present tense <-es> inflection contrasted with Chaucer’s London dialect - *fareh, biboveh, werkeh, waggeh* and *falleh*.

- And therfore *is* I come / *ar* ye.

As Chaucer doesn’t write *I is* elsewhere, we can infer that this is a dialectal form. *Ar* was a Northern form, but has survived as standard in MnE.

- It *sal* be doon / That *sal* be my desport

Northern [sæl] for [ʃæl]

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**Vowel realisations**

- has *na* peere / *na* swayn
  
  *Swa* werkes / wiltow *swa?*
  
  se how the corn *gas* in
  
  *til* and *fra* ...

OE long [ɑː] has not rounded and shifted to [ɔː]:

Other examples in the *Reeve’s Tale*: *alswa* (also), *banes* (bones), *ra* (roe), *wba* (who), *bathe* (both).

- carie it *beem* agayn

OE *bam* rounded to *home* in dialects of ME south of the Humber, and later, in Northern dialects fronted from [hʌːm] to [hæːm] to [heːm]. Compare modern scots *bame* [heːm].

**Meaning**

- Oure maunciple, *I hope* he wol be deed

The verb meaning *expect, believe*, with no implication of wishing or desiring.

- *I is* as *ille* a millere as *ar* ye.

*ille* from ON illr meaning *bad*, a meaning which survives in MnE in phrases like *ill health, ill humour, ill temper, ill success, ill-advised, ill-bred* etc. *Ill* meaning *sick, indisposed* is not normally used as a noun modifier, but predicatively - *I am ill.*

The compound word *il-bail* meaning *bad luck* occurs later in the *Tale.*