

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

Verbs

- How *fares* thy faire doghter and thy wyf?
Hym *biboues* 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 - *fareþ*, *biboveþ*, *werkeþ*, *waggeþ* and *falleþ*.

- And therefore *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]

Vowel realisations

- | | |
|---|--|
| • has <i>na</i> peere / <i>na</i> swayn | OE <i>nan</i> |
| • <i>Swa</i> werkes / wiltow <i>swa</i> ? | OE <i>swa</i> |
| • se how the corn <i>gas</i> in | OE <i>gaf</i> with Northern inflection |
| • <i>til</i> and <i>fra</i> ... | ON <i>fra</i> (cp <i>to</i> and <i>fro</i>) and ON <i>til</i> for <i>to</i> |

OE long [ɑ:] has not rounded and shifted to [ɔ:]:

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

- carie it *beem* agayn

OE *ham* rounded to *home* in dialects of ME south of the Humber, and later, in Northern dialects fronted from [hɑ:m] to [hæ:m] to [he:m]. Compare modern scots *hame* [he:m].

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*.