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The individual voice: The expression of authority through dialects, idiolects, and borrowed terminology in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

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Abstract

Using Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, this paper seeks to demonstrate how language affects the social construction of identity in literature within the late Middle Ages. To accomplish this it looks at how characters (particularly those in the Reeve's and Miller's Tales) attempt to give themselves greater authority over their peers in instances of social conflict by either changing their dialect or, by using terminology borrowed from power-imbued languages like French and Latin. The paper also discusses changes in authority outside the literature by examining the impact of scribal idiolect on the presentation and perception of Chaucer's individual characters.

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Senior thesis

The Individual Voice:
The Expression of Authority through Dialects, Idiolects, and Borrowed Terminology in
Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

For centuries literary analysis has revolved around the study of words and language, the building blocks of all literature. The emergence of linguistics, a discipline commonly treated as a subfield of English by modern universities, provides literary critics the terminology and analysis methods that have allowed them to venture deeper into the literature through the language. Using linguistics, literary scholars can look at individual words – and the sounds within these words – to determine regional origins, trace dialectal histories, postulate formal or casual use, identify language(s) of origin (if not based in English), and illustrate semantic meaning. These features allow us to fully explore character-driven motivations, intentions, emotions, and perceptions. These, in turn, are provided additional meaning through literary tools such as imagery, characterization, metaphor, and narrative description. The combination of literary and linguistic tools results in a more comprehensive understanding of a given story; the two fields harmoniously support one another, supplying new data to fill the informational voids left by the other. Used in conjunction, these analytical methods produce a literary interpretation that is highly focused and detail-oriented, yet at the same time does not lose sight of the story and its narrative framework by making the interpretation's conclusions ultimately address the larger story itself.

The purpose of this research lies solidly in the conviction that linguistic and literary analyses are not mutually exclusive. Failure to intentionally mix the two in logical and

progressive intellectual study would appear to be more a result of human reluctance than an insurmountable barrier between the two fields. In addition to this purpose, a secondary object of no less importance manifests itself in the product of this research. By performing research from a multi-disciplinary approach, facets of culture that would otherwise remain overlooked get brought to the forefront, particularly the fluctuating relationship between society and language. Language, like all other tools both tangible and abstract in nature, can be used as a balm or a weapon depending on the circumstances surrounding the event and the motives of the involved persons. Linguistic study enables us to compare the actual language to its social context in order to understand the underlying motivations behind why people (or groups of people) utilize language in various ways, which tells us much in determining how and why a society functions. Linguistic analysis in literature makes us aware of the intricate divisions between social and individual relations, presentation versus perception of the individual, and the semantic difference between individuality and identity.

This research ties all three of these underlying social divisions together by addressing the collective issue of authority. In my study of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, I look for instances of language-based authority through analysis of portrayed character dialects, the idiolects of Chaucer's individual scribes, and an extensive study of borrowed terminology from two fourteenth century power languages, French and Latin. The focus of this research has been limited to *The Reeve's Tale* and *The Miller's Tale* for several reasons. The vast amount of research potential for these tales, as evidenced by the extensive linguistic and literary scholarship already present within the realm of Chaucerian studies, would provide too broad a scope for a project with such a short working time frame. Additionally, the best situations in which authority can be viewed are generally found between characters at conflict with one another;

from amongst Chaucer's pilgrims, no pair appears more clearly at odds with one another than the

Miller and the Reeve. Paying particular attention to the ways in which both characters employ

language to establish themselves in positions of higher authority allows for a detailed study of

linguistic practices in social situations, and also a glimpse into the politics surrounding the social

life of the individual in fourteenth-century England.

Within his *Reeve's Tale*, Chaucer's utilization of the northern dialect demonstrates

linguistic (and because of this, social) significance in its presence as well as in its absence. He

merges several dialectal features together to form one uniform, easily identifiable northern

dialect, markers that modern linguists (and presumably native speakers during this time would)

readily identify as characteristic of northern speech. The first indicator includes the "broad", or

northern [a]; a phonological sound commonly attributed to northern dialects, this unrounded

back sound was replaced by an [o] sound frequently spelt 'o(o)' in the more southern dialects.

The distinctiveness of the spelling between the vowels makes the difference clear, but the

problem lies with distinguishing the broad [a] from the normal [a] that was also present in

northern English, and likewise determining the difference between the southern [o] and any other

[o] sound within that particular dialect. Only direct comparison of the same words written in

northern and southern dialects offers proof on the nature of each vowel sound based on spelling

alone. Examples of each (particularly the northern vowels) find refuge in the safety of being one

of the rhyming words at the end of each line; the necessity of maintaining the same sound so that

the rhyme remains intact preserves many original dialectal characteristics that could have easily

been lost in later copies of the text (Horobin *Reeve,* 609).

The difficulty in identifying this northern feature outside the rhyme scheme makes the second major dialectal feature so promising by comparison, this one more morphological than phonological. Chaucer uses the difference between third person singular verbal endings to distinguish one from the other, the northern [-s] being notably different than the southern [-th]. This marked contrast allows for easier discernment between the dialects, both in seeing such dissimilar spellings when reading and in hearing such contrasting sounds when read aloud. In addition, Horobin references a third dialectal feature characterizing first person singular pronouns. He observes that the more northern form 'Ik' remains a much harsher sound than the southern alternatives 'I' and 'Ich', and remain separate between the two dialects with little overlap (*Reeve* 610).

Once applied to the character dialogue found within *The Reeve's Tale*, these three linguistic features combined indicate to which characters Chaucer gives a northern accent. Out of all his characters in the Reeve's and Miller's tales, only three consistently use recognizable northern features in their conversations with other characters – the pilgrim Reeve and the two fictional clerks, John and Alan, within the Reeve's own tale. Right from the beginning, the conversations of the two clerks are filled with the features of the northern dialect. All of their third person verbal endings end with [-s], amounting to seven counted instances by the end of their first conversation with the fictional miller Simkin (4023-4042)[1]. In addition, John's speech also contains two instances of the northern [a], first in 'ham' instead of the southern pronunciation and spelling 'home', and then again in 'gas' (as in the verb *goes*), a word that possesses both the broad [a] and the northern verbal ending. The Reeve also contributes to the pervasive northern dialect present in this tale by using the northern form 'Ik' with just about the

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[1] Unless otherwise stated, the lines cited within this study come from Larry Benson's *Riverside Chaucer.*

same degree of frequency as its southern counterpart 'I' in his first speech of his tale's prologue (3867; 3888).

The presence of a northern dialect in more than one of Chaucer's characters, however, does not necessarily imply that all the characters speak in the exact same manner. A chart of the northern features has been compiled and reproduced below to demonstrate the differences in dialectal usage between the three "northern" characters of this story. The data for the Reeve was gathered from both his speeches during the prologue of the tale, while the examples from John and Alan are taken from their initial conversation with Simkin in the first thousand lines. Each space between the lists of examples indicates the end of a character's speech act, and the beginning of another, a speech act being defined as a period of uninterrupted speech attributed to a single person. It should be noted that for this study, the third person singular forms of "to be" (is/was) will not be considered features of Chaucer's northern dialect; the verb is too common and its usage too widespread across the speech acts of all the characters to serve any analytical purpose in this investigation.

	Reeve		John and Alan	
	North	South	North	South
[a] vs. [o(o)]			4032 4037 4039	
[-s] vs. [-th]		3869 3877 3893 3895	4023 4026 4027 4030 4037 4039 4042	

[Ik] vs.	3867	3864		
[I(ch)]	3888	3871		
		3873		
		3910		
		3911		
		3915		
		3916		
		3917		
		3918		

As can be seen, Chaucer confers "northernness" to the clerks by universally making all their present third person singular markers [-s] without exception, and emphasizes this northern coloring by inserting three instances of the broad [a] in John's speech. By comparison, Chaucer lends the character of the Reeve fewer examples of a northern dialect. In fact, the one feature indicating a possible northern dialect in the Reeve manifests itself in two instances of the first person singular pronoun 'Ik'.

Conversely, the Reeve exhibits a large cache of southern dialectal features, particularly in his consistent use of the present tense verbal marker [-th]. He also demonstrates a certain southern proclivity in his fluctuation between the northern and southern first person pronoun in his first speech, particularly when compared to his uniform adherence to the southern form 'I' in his second speech. The Reeve uses six southern pronouns in nine lines of speech, a dialectal repetition that would demand attention from anyone listening to him talk. Based on this first impression the audience receives regarding all three characters, the two clerks appear to be truly "northern" individuals, while the Reeve demonstrates northern tendencies, but ultimately remains more of a southern character. Analysis of each one of the three character's speech patterns concludes that John and Alan possess the clearest, strongest and most consistent northern dialects. The Reeve, while clearly comfortable enough with the northern dialect to

comfortably use it in his daily speech, does not appear to use it nearly to the same degree as the clerks within his story. Thus, while the strength of the clerks' northern speech indicates that the Reeve intended for them to have a northern dialect, the distinguishable but not very thorough northern features within the Reeve's speech demonstrate that this southern character knows enough about the northern speech patterns to convey a recognizable imitation of one on command.

The striking contrast in the degrees of northern dialect raises the issue of linguistic presentation versus reality. Both the Reeve and the two clerks are said to originate from the Northeast region of the country; while the characters could have come from more remote locations like York where the northern dialect would be much more pronounced, they are stated as coming from Norfolk and Cambridge, respectively (General Prologue 617; RvT 3990). Located just north of London, these two places would produce dialects that were perceived by their southern neighbors as being northern, but would in all reality contain many southern features as well. This gradient approach to dialect separates from the dichotomous view of language being spoken in either a "northern" or "southern" way. Perception of geographically-based dialects ultimately depends on the location of speakers and listeners in relation to one another – had a resident of Northumberland heard either the Reeve or the two clerks speak, their speech patterns may very well have appeared overwhelmingly southern in comparison to his own northern dialect. Chaucer may have been linguistically presenting his three characters as "northern", but the geographic reality of their origins makes them, from a certain perspective, merely "less southern" than the rest of the characters.

In addition to geographic location, the types of dialect spoken from each location add to the separation between linguistic perception and reality. As adjacent counties, Norfolk and

Cambridge would be expected to possess speakers with equally strong northern dialects when heard by a southern listener. In reality these dialects, upon exposure and more careful observation, separate into individual features that would alter slightly according to the originating region's particular dialect. However, contrary to expectation, this type of separation and distinction between the speech patterns of the Reeve and the two fictitious clerks does not occur. They do demonstrate a separation in which northern-tagged features are used with what degree of frequency for each individual, but there is no affiliation between the manners in which the chosen features are used and corresponding dialectal characteristics of either Norfolk or Cambridge speakers. The specific features associated with the individual northern dialects heard in fourteenth-century Cambridge and Norfolk cannot be placed in neat columns as seen above; the varied spelling practices of the time, and the issue of having the same spellings for different sounds spoken in the two places, makes it unclear how to associate each dialect with a specific place. (*LALME*, volume 4). Such an enterprise would take years of study to unravel, and lies beyond the scope of this study.

What becomes evident after a little searching is the fictitious nature of Chaucer's northern dialects. Large amounts of time and effort spent with the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* has resulted in the disappointing conclusion that neither the dialect used by the Reeve nor the clerks can be matched up with a real-world northern dialect (or two separate dialects) in late medieval England. No documented real-world dialect demonstrates the extreme use of one repetitive northern feature at the expense of all others, one of the primary aspects that characterize the clerks' speech – they uniformly use the third person verbal ending with no other clear and equally compelling northern features to support it. The three instances of the broad [a] are not enough to become a second consistent northern feature, which would have made

Chaucer's dialect more realistic, particularly when compared to the number of times the verbal

ending is used. This reliance on a single feature to demonstrate northernism is more indicative of

authorial hypercorrection than an earnest attempt to properly depict the Norfolk and Cambridge

northern dialects through the limited conversations of Chaucer's characters. Through Chaucer's

hypercorrection it becomes apparent that each character is not given the same dialect, but rather

issued the same three features to varying degrees in order to convey the overarching presence of

a northern dialect. By creating a fictional northern dialect, Chaucer relies on his southern

audience's ability to recognize a handful of randomly chosen northern features as one

"stereotypical" northern dialect, rather than their ability to be able to properly identify sub-

dialects within the general penumbra of northern speech.

Universally regarded as the only tale possessing a recognizable regional accent, *The*

Reeve's Tale has attracted no small amount of interest from the academic community. In the

1930s JRR Tolkien initially viewed Chaucer's northern dialect as a "linguistic joke", a genuine

attempt on Chaucer's part to accurately reflect the phonological nuances (expressed through

modified spelling) of a particular dialect around Norfolk (Horobin *Tolkien,* 97). From Tolkien's

perspective, Chaucer was sharing a secret joke with other philology-attentive readers that would

simply go over the heads of more unobservant individuals. However, the work of recent linguists

has discredited this idea due to the inconsistent application of dialectal features, and the presence

of Northern features not seen in the Norfolk dialect during that time (Dor 61-2). The present

prevailing opinion instead claims that the assignation of various dialects to different characters is

indicative of "educational attainment" and a mark of class by "using a language different from

the norm" (Blake *Historical*, 14). Thus, the purpose of having dialectal variation stemmed not

from Chaucer's desire to share his linguistic brilliance with his audience, but rather to highlight the interactions between characters of distinctly separate social classes.

By giving his characters a stereotypical northern dialect, Chaucer conforms to the perceptions and ideas of the north held by his predominantly southern audience. While the linguistic generalizations that Chaucer uses in the clerks' and Reeve's speech cannot be said to stem from only one region in particular, they are different enough to allow Chaucer's audience to immediately discern that these three characters come from "the north." This association between language and geographic location taps into the already existing image of the rough, uncivilized, lower-class rural farmer living beyond the influence of society. Additionally, the very harshness of the northern forms' sounds – 'Ik' versus the softer 'I', and the fricative [-s] compared to the interdental [-th] – reflects the "barbaric", uncouth, and uneducated qualities of individuals who did not speak the southern dialect, a sociolinguistic opinion held by Chaucer's predominantly southern audience at that time.[2] In fact, this perception of northern dialect speakers was so pervasive in British culture that this image of the uncivilized northerner remains a stereotype still maintained by individuals living in the southern half of England today.

Chaucer makes efforts to play up this stereotypical image – one as fictionalized as his northern dialect – through the many details and actions he bestows on his characters in *The Reeve's Tale*. The Reeve is denoted as a lower-class citizen by the undisguised allusions to his past profession as a carpenter, and also by his placement in the "hydreste" of the company (General Prologue 622). During the prologue to his tale, the Reeve furthermore boasts of possessing the "qualities" of cunning, lying, anger, and greed, a list of unsavory qualities and behaviors that align his character with the Southern perception of an uncivilized northerner. The

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[2] The northern stereotype is pervasive in British literature. A dramatized example of the northern "uncivilized" man and his more genteel counterpart can be seen in *Wuthering Heights* with Catherine's two love interests, the surly gypsy fosterling Heathcliff and their well-bred neighbor Edgar Linton.

clerks similarly find themselves cast in this lowly social position, both men acknowledged to be

poor students without money, a distinctive profession, or a family title. Additionally, they

participate in a range of actions of questionable morality, including a sexual encounter with the

Miller's daughter, another sexual liaison with the wife, physical assault of the Miller himself, and

finally an escape highlighted with the theft of a large loaf of bread, flour, and the costs of their

overnight accommodation in the Miller's home. Thus, the class and social stations of these

characters are closely correlated to their poor morals and conduct, a link forged by the

stereotypical images associated with speakers of different English dialects.

This correlation between language-based stereotypes and the actions of the speakers

feeds into the presentation of the *Miller's Tale* and *Reeve's Tale* as competing fabliaux. Both

tales fall well within the definition of fabliaux as brief narrative stories containing complicated

plots focusing around character interaction; Nick's complicated flood predictions and

preparations to sleep with Allison humorously parallel Absalom's plans to woo the same girl,

and the clerks' devious plan to catch Simkin stealing coincides with Simkin's own plans to teach

the clerks a lesson. The feature most indicative of a fabliau, particularly in the *Reeve's Tale*,

manifests itself in the irony usually brought about by "a deception played by one or more

characters on one or more other characters followed by a misdeed committed by the deceiver(s)"

(Hines 3-4). John and Alan try to deceive the miller into exposing himself as a thief, and when

this fails they commit the misdeed evidenced in the sexual transgressions against Simkin's wife

and daughter. This fabliau framework also extends outside the two respective stories to the

Miller and the Reeve themselves as characters within Chaucer's larger story. The interaction of

the two characters is based on misconception and the inevitable complications that ensue,

making "fabliaux…thoroughly suitable textual weapons for the two [pilgrims] to beat each other over the head with" (108).

The additional element of dialectal separation between characters in opposition to one another within the fabliau's framework enhances the conflict within *The Reeve's Tale*. As both the 'deceivers' and the people who 'commit misdeeds', the northern clerks are cast in the light of the fabliau's villains. This position within the fabliau parallels the stereotype of the uncouth northerner, driving the connection home to a degree difficult for readers – both then and now – to ignore. The fact that Simkin also plots against the clerks, yet does not achieve the same degree of association with uncivilized behavior and appearance, remains a fact demonstrated beyond the confines of the tale's literary genre.

The perception and portrayal of these three northern characters stands out in stark contrast to Chaucer's general portrayal of their southern counterpart, Simkin. He is not depicted as an entirely flawless character, as evidenced by his habitual theft of his customers' flour and mean disposition. However, he manages to avoid the moral condemnation his actions might have evoked from his southern audience through the lesser evils of his actions when compared to the clerks – mere theft versus rape, physical abuse, and even more theft. Simkin's actions are also inspired by a degree of forethought; while John and Alan steal the bread for revenge and rape the women of the family because they can, Simkin lets the clerks' horse escape instead of stealing the horse himself. This creates a situation where the clerks must spend the whole afternoon chasing it down, giving him the opportunity to swindle the clerks in comparative privacy.

This subtlety and creative ingenuity in his actions, along with Simkin's southern dialect, gives him the status of an intelligent thief in the eyes of society, as opposed to the uncivilized criminals represented by the northern clerks. The presence of Simkin's southern dialect enables

him to pass himself off as a socially respectable human being, regardless of its veracity. This dialectal-driven, stereotype-based separation between the three "northern" characters and Simkin establishes distinct social classes, and with it a distinct difference in treatment by other members of society.

Despite this sociolinguistic separation, however, Chaucer gives his northern characters qualities that prevent his audiences from completely writing them off as barbaric social outcasts. He describes John and Alan as being students at Cambridge University, one of the oldest and most distinguished universities in the country. The reputation of the school as being a center of intellectual and cultural stimulation clothes the clerks with a veneer of respectability. Chaucer does the same thing to the Reeve by making him a resident of Norfolk; a well to-do agricultural society, Norfolk enjoyed its reputation as a cultural center and a technologically advanced region. By making his pilgrim from Norfolk a reeve (a minor official in charge of overseeing the lands and estate of his lord) in an agriculturally wealthy area, Chaucer places the Reeve in a solid position of respectability, wealth, and power. Described as being wealthier than his own lord through his careful – and as stated in the *General Prologue*, explicitly illegal – financial practices, the Reeve holds an uncontested place of authority in the company of the other pilgrims. This straddling position makes him a "'myddel' man," one who is accepted by both northerners and southerners through his station in life and his ability to adopt both dialects as humorously required (Taylor 473). His position of power and influence despite his linguistic profile is also demonstrated in the way Chaucer exchanges the Reeve's residual northern accent displayed in his tale's prologue for the completely southern dialect within the *Reeve's Tale* itself, where the Reeve is presumed to be narrating his story to the other pilgrims on the journey.

This seeming dialectal paradox serves a very functional purpose within the tale. The Reeve uses the southern dialect to present a uniform linguistic base for the story, much like how a painter paints his backgrounds in neutral colors to draw attention to the more brightly-colored objects in the foreground. To Chaucer's audience, the Reeve's narration of his story in a southern dialect does not stand out because all of Chaucer's other tales are also narrated in the same dialect. However, the instances where the dialect changes from southern to northern (the dialogue of the clerks) noticeably stand apart from the rest of the story, both in appearance on the page and its sound when spoken aloud. The spelling changes in the suffixes and verb endings, in addition to the broadened vowel sounds and harsher pronouns, make the two dialects difficult to mix up, especially to a native resident of England during the time.

Once Chaucer sets the stage with the Reeve's southern narrative voice, the foreground of the tale's story comes to life with the addition of the northern dialect depicted in both John and Alan's speech. These northern passages stand out in sharp contrast to the southern text whenever one of the clerks opens his mouth; the Reeve's southern voice tells the audience how Simkin "goth" to the clerks' horses to let them escape, placed only twenty-six lines away from John's use of its northern form "gas" (208; 182). The clerks' northern dialects would not be clearly distinguishable from the rest of the story had the Reeve chosen not to present his story to the other pilgrims in a southern dialect. The choice to give the Reeve's narrative voice a northern dialect would have effectively subdued, or even eliminated, the northernisms of the two clerks to the degree that they would not be identified as northern characters in the first place. Norman Blake acknowledges this through his study of the perceptive conditions of variety: "[Features] are most apparent when they are significantly different from the language of the rest of the text and occur in sufficient numbers...this difference can then be registered through changes in

spelling" (*Historical*, 13). Having different dialects and registers of speech enables linguistic variety to be seen by the audience, an understanding that does not occur in instances of linguistic uniformity.

To illustrate his point, Blake cites materials that do possess this type of linguistic uniformity. He describes "one or two [manuscripts], in which the whole manuscript is written by a northern scribe, end up with the northernisms of 'The Reeve's Tale' submerged under the overall northern colouring of the manuscript" (13). However, Blake does not cite specifically which manuscripts he is referring to either in a footnote or in the rest of his fairly comprehensive article. In the extensive corpora of dialectal study in Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale*, one other article makes a similar claim to the existence of a completely northern manuscript – as it turns out, one also written by Blake. The issue then becomes, does such a manuscript exist? And if so, where is it and why has it received so little attention from other Chaucerian scholars?

In searching for this elusive, universally northern manuscript, several interesting linguistic qualities found in other manuscripts brought the importance of dialectal maintenance to the forefront. Horobin describes how different manuscripts retain northern features by separating them into linguistic categories, claiming that the Dd and El manuscripts make efforts to retain northern orthography while the Ha and Dd manuscripts even attempt to increase certain morphologically-based northern markers (*Tolkien*, 100.) However, the crown jewel of his study is the discovery of Gg, a *Canterbury Tales* manuscript made prominent by its almost exclusive southern dialectal uniformity in *The Reeve's Tale*. He describes it as "particularly intolerant of northern forms", set apart from all other manuscripts by being the only one that does not preserve the northern features located in rhyming words (99). Located at the end of each line, the rhyming words (as mentioned previously) possessing northern markers were generally safe from

southern dialectal changes because of a desire to maintain the rhyming sound and meter within the northern dialogue. Horobin points out two examples where the rhyme no longer works based on hypercorrection of the northern [a] into the southern [o] in the pairings "bonys/atonys" and "bothe/lathe" (*Tolkien* 100). The unusual decision to change these words indicates a strong desire to dialectally universalize the manuscript, an act that destroys the presence of the characters' northern dialects just as thoroughly as if it had been a completely northern text.

The eventual discovery of a more or less completely northern manuscript demonstrates the same eventual outcome of variation-based extermination of the separate dialects. In a linguistic comparison of different manuscript's treatment of the two dialects, Tolkien contemporary Martin Michael Crow identifies the Paris (Ps) manuscript as showing "northern influence throughout", and includes sections of the manuscript as evidence for his claim (15). Not having the sufficient time to obtain a copy of the manuscript before the end of the semester, the fact that the manuscript contains northern dialectal markers in both the clerk's speech and elsewhere in *The Reeve's Tale* must be assumed based on Crow's assertions. His article does not contain any passages that are *not* instances of John and Alan's dialogue, which raises potential questions regarding the accuracy of his claims. However, Crow ends his analysis with an unambiguous concluding statement that, unlike Blake's comments, leave little room for confusion; "Such dialectal coloring as the Ps scribe adds to the speech of the students is, in general, the same as found throughout the manuscript" (23).

Crow's conclusion draws attention to the inherent connection between the scribe, and the manuscript he produced. In the case of the Paris manuscript, the presence of his signature identifies the scribe as a Johannes Duxworth. This scribe is thought to be from the Northeast Midlands due to the prevalence of Duxworth as a major family name in Lincolnshire during the

fifteenth century, the time period during which this particular manuscript is postulated to have been written (Crow 19). Placing Duxworth geographically in a northeastern English county effectively makes the scribe himself northern. His northern origins indicate that the scribe himself possessed a working knowledge and familiarity with northern dialects, even if he personally chose not to converse with one on a daily basis. Written by an identifiably northern scribe, the Paris manuscript thus became imbued with additional northernisms in places where Chaucer had not originally intended them to occur.

This topic merits a discussion of the difference between dialect and idiolect. Defined linguistically, a dialect is "a variety of language, spoken in one part of a country, which is different in some words or grammar from other forms of the same language" (Summers 349-50). Chaucer gives the Reeve and the two clerks a distinctly northern dialect; they are separated from the rest of his characters because of their northern roots, the social division caused by the projection of the northern "uncivilized" stereotype, and the notable differences in language usage. An idiolect, on the other hand, refers to "a particular person's use of language" (Summers 655). Even though three separate individuals appear to use language in different ways to express their northernness, Chaucer's Reeve and the Reeve's John and Alan cannot be said to possess idiolects. The basis for this determination lies in the fictional quality of Chaucer's northern dialect. Chaucer did not intend to convey a realistic dialect, merely the semblance of one; thus, based on this lack of linguistic specificity, Chaucer cannot be credited with creating separate idiolects for each individual northern character.

Unlike his characters, Chaucer's real-world scribes possess both individual dialects and idiolects. Scribes have dialect because they belong to general linguistic groups based on their mostly southern geographic locations, and also their class statuses in society as educated and

literate professionals. Within these dialects – all southern with a few exceptions, exemplified by

the Ps scribe – each man possesses a unique idiolect that manifests itself in the way each

character linguistically alters his written version of the *Tales*. In late medieval England, scribes

created manuscripts by either copying an already existing version word-for-word, or translating

the text as best as they could using their own language (Smith 461). When copying verbatim

from another source the scribe's dialect gets subtly integrated into the text; it could occur as

unintentionally as failing to recognize a spelling indicative of one dialect and mistakenly

changing the form to the scribe's native dialect, or by more intentionally changing certain

features of the original language in order to produce a significantly linguistically-altered text.

When translating a text, however, the scribe has to rely on his own idiolect to find the words and

spellings he must put into his own manuscript. Traces of the scribe's larger dialect do appear as

well, because both combine to form an individual's unique speech patterns, but the idiolectal

influences are present in the way in which the dialect is used, and how it gets conveyed to others.

This dialectal and idiolectal influence adds the additional layer of scribal intervention to

an already complicated linguistic situation. It prompts readers to consider not only Chaucer's

dialectal intentions in creating these differences, but also to examine the underlying idiolectal

motivations of the scribes themselves. With Lincolnshire located directly to the north of Norfolk,

it could be easily postulated that the Paris scribe himself possessed a much more pronounced

"northern" dialect than the one Chaucer gives to the two scribes. Seeing the inconsistency (or

perhaps inadequacy) in the way which Chaucer wished to portray the northern dialects, the scribe

took it upon himself to rectify the perceived "mistakes" by adding a greater number of features to

the clerk's speeches. In doing this Duxworth misconstrues Chaucer's original intentions to create

the appearance of a northern dialect by throwing in a handful of distinguishable northern markers

into the clerks' dialogue. Instead, he views Chaucer's characterization to be an earnest yet qualitatively lackluster attempt to capture the philological elements of a real-world English northern accent. Alternatively, it is no great stretch of the imagination to assume that the man simply wrote in his own idiolect (presupposing that Duxworth spoke with a northern dialect), a fact that would account for the manuscript-wide presence of a northern dialect. With that said, the reason remains less significant than the result: scribes directly contributed to the existence of heterogeneity within versions of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, changes that in the cases of the Gg and Ps manuscripts render the uniqueness of the clerks' speech – as well as the meaning behind this dialectal difference – virtually obsolete.

Determining the presence and impact of a scribe's idiolect is difficult to achieve without having more than one example of his work to use on a comparative basis; as far as Chaucer studies are concerned, Adam Pinkhurst is the man to study. The scribe most closely associated with Chaucer, Pinkhurst is known to be the scribe for the Hengwrt (Hg) and Ellesmere (El) texts, the two most important Chaucerian manuscripts based on the believed closeness of their content to Chaucer's own drafts. In theory, the idiolect of a single scribe would not change but remain relatively constant throughout his written works. Isolation of Pinkhurst's idiolect through direct comparison of both the Hg and El manuscripts highlights the reasons between manuscript differences, and also explains the scribe's narrative authority and power over the manuscript.[3]

The presence of a scribal idiolect emerges from the observed consistency of non-archetypal spellings of certain words within both the Hg and El manuscripts. Middle English scholars such as Michael Samuels and Jeremy Smith – and more recently Simon Horobin – have spent extensive amounts of time trying to identify the manuscript's underlying voice. Using Hg

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[3] Composed of borrowings from both the Hg and El manuscripts, Benson's *Riverside Chaucer* will be replaced as the primary textual source for the remainder of the idiolect section; the lines cited until the end of the idiolect section will be from the two individual manuscripts as noted.

and El, Samuels and Horobin have compiled data distinguishing between the archetypal spelling of the word 'against' as starting with (ay-), and the deviating version of it as (ag-). The information in the chart below comes from Horobin's study of the word in his article 'The Language of the Hengwrt Chaucer". Recognizing the (ag-) form of the word to be more prevalent in both Hg and El, Horobin lists the uses of its more standardized (ay-) spelling in all of Chaucer's *Tales*; there are not enough occurrences to support an investigation of the word exclusively within the Miller's and Reeve's *Tales* (4):

		Hengwrt	Ellesmere
Fragment I			
	Knight	34	34
		651	651
			929
	Miller	[Hg out]	46/1
	Reeve	146	
	Cook	16	
Fragment IV			
	Clerk	320	320
	Merchant	1016	1016
		1069	
Fragment V			
			88
			119

	662	662

Fragment VII

     Monk   664

     Nun's Priest   590

Fragment X

     Parson   375

The word 'against', in either of its orthographical forms, does not contain any of the linguistic features denoting a northern or southern dialect. The absence of dialectal reasoning behind this difference makes the topic inherently idiolectal. The presence of Pinkhurst's idiolectal (ag-) spelling must be assumed to occur in the empty slots in Horobin's chart where there is an example of a (ay-) spelling in the Hengwrt but not the Ellesmere. Subsequently, the larger number of examples with the word's archetypal spelling within the Hg manuscript implies that the scribe's idiolectal spelling of the word occurs more frequently in El. This coincides with recent scholarship on the subject, with the El perceived as a manuscript which "must be treated with a degree of caution" when looking for textual accuracy (*Spelling* 17-8).

Despite Hg and El being transcribed by the same man, the varying degrees of textual change between the two manuscripts occur through a divergence in motivation. When in the situation of "mixed translation and transcription" where the scribe's idiolect manifests itself on the page, they have the choice of either passively following the text, or intentionally altering it (*Hengwrt* 5). The El manuscript demonstrates Pinkhurst's underlying motivation to make the text conform more to his own conceived version of the tales both through his idiolect and dialect. As

seen already, the greater number of (ag-) spellings of 'against' within the entire manuscript is a direct result of his idiolect.

Evidence has also emerged demonstrating that Pinkhurst additionally altered the El manuscript to conform with his preconceived notions of suitability regarding the clerks' northern dialects in *The Reeve's Tale*. This dialectal tampering, meant to "regularize the inconsistencies" of the original representation of their northern dialect in Hg, results in a notable increase in the number of "northernisms" within that section (*Spelling* 17). Whether Pinkhurst meant to make it more evident that the clerks were northern characters or whether he believed that some of the southern features in the original were mistakes that Chaucer intended to be in the northern dialect is largely irrelevant. The fact that Pinkhurst intentionally changed El in a way not seen in Hg results in a reality where the El manuscript is ultimately viewed as a hypercorrected text (17). Thus, both a scribe's dialect and idiolect are equally capable of altering a text; even by the man considered to be closest to Chaucer, the underlying motivations behind his orthographical changes result in the same deviation from Chaucer's original text exhibited by all the other Chaucer manuscripts.

The importance and obvious influence of the scribe in medieval English literature have major implications in the way texts are read. Whether resulting from willful misinterpretation of Chaucer's original ideas or inadvertent inclusion of the scribe's own idiolect, the changes affect the way the reader perceives the text and ultimately how its characters are viewed. When a scribe makes textual alterations (like increasing northernisms) he wrests for himself the authority over the story that is usually reserved for the author. Combined, scribal dialect and idiolect create the analytic basis for reading the relationships between characters – in the presence of significant scribal change, analyzing these relationships cannot be conducted in the same way with each

manuscript, nor will investigations yield the same results. If every character in every tale were given a northern dialect by the scribe, then the Reeve and the two clerks would cease to become topics of linguistic deviation, and this research would no longer have a purpose. This realization alone demonstrates the importance of dialect and idiolect not only in the relationships between characters, but also the implications of presentation and perception of these texts by real-life readers and redactors.

In addition to the narrative scribal authority, the authority conveyed through purposeful language variation and lexical selection within these languages affects the relationships between characters using different dialects. Moving away from English, this concept addresses the role of prestige languages, a sociolinguistic occurrence that imbues their speakers with more elite, cultured social positions in a manner similar to the way in which southern English dialectal speakers perceive themselves to be more refined than northerners. The Norman conquest of England in 1066 brought about the creation of foreign prestige languages when French replaced English as the language of business, government, and the upper classes, a change that did not reverse itself until the early fourteenth century.

Alongside the English of late medieval England, French joined Latin as a foreign prestige language; the authoritative languages existed in complementary distribution with one another, each one used for specific but generally non-overlapping circumstances. As the language of the courts and the church, Latin was mostly taught to young men of the aristocracy who intended to enter professions in these fields. In addition to more official purposes French became the language of romance and literary authority, carrying a significant amount of importance for women who sought to learn how to speak it in order to affect "gentilesse"; they were not unlike Chaucer's Prioress. In this way, each language provided speakers not only with a sense of social

elevation but also with a degree of intellectual authority and power within these specific fields. English filled the gaps remaining after French and Latin carved out their domains, serving as the day-to-day vernacular language spoken by the masses, particularly those who were not so well educated. Thus, based on the individuals using them, each language was implicitly associated with a specific social class or group; the act of mixing different languages both created an identity for the individual, and also helped negotiate social positions through strategic language choice (Davidson 474).

Language thus became a tool for both the presentation of identity, and also the easiest route to social advancement. Not only was it socially imperative for individuals to speak their primary language (English) with a certain dialect to project a specific public identity for themselves, it was also just as crucial to intersperse their vocabulary with pertinent words and phrases from other socially elevated languages to demonstrate – or perhaps gain access to – advanced positions in society. This potent combination of dialect and selective language usage demonstrates the importance of speech, its power in fourteenth century society, and subsequently its potential as a manipulation device by enterprising individuals looking to get ahead. Linguist Mary Davidson acknowledges the possibility of using language for social advancement in her definition of this "intentional mixing of languages" (also known in the linguistic world as code-switching) as a "strategy of selecting languages to express... the relative social position between interlocutors" (474). She identifies several Chaucerian characters that employ such tactics, noting the Wife of Bath's use of French and the Pardoner's interspersed Latin phrases.

While agreeing with Davidson's argument that language is used intentionally as a tool for social advancement, I would take it a step further and extend her original claim to also include words that are now part of the English language that were originally borrowed from Latin and

French. I am particularly interested in words that had been transferred into English by the beginning of the fifteenth century, when the general population – educated or not – would have continued to have a fairly good idea from which language these words originally came. I argue that these non-native words, having come directly from these two languages of authority, retain the same authority and social prestige they embodied while still used with their native language. When I speak of borrowed terms, I do not refer to occasions when characters use words or phrases directly drawn from the foreign language and thrown into English; this is still an example of language mixing. Rather, by borrowed terms I mean originally foreign words that were becoming Anglicized during the late Middle Ages but have a separate native English synonym, like the French word *sovereign* when compared to the English word *king*. *Sovereign*, drawn from Anglo-French and first found in the *South English Legendary's St. Michael the Archangel* in 1300, stands in linguistic opposition to the word *king*, which is drawn directly from its Old English form *cyning* (MED). While meaning the same thing, the former term possesses a more formal register than the latter, a formality often indicative of the educated and more elite social circles.

Having the option of choosing which English term to use provides the speaker with the possibility of drawing on language's manipulative power without having to change between languages. In effect, using words only within the English language provides speakers a degree of manipulative subtlety that had formerly not been available. Borrowed terminology allowed those wishing to utilize language for their own means to do so without making obvious their intentions. Choosing to use words with distinct linguistic origins in either French or Latin enabled speakers to transfer the social, political, and religious importance stemming from these two authority

languages to themselves and their own lives in order to garner individual advancement in society – and with that, authoritative power over others.

The animosity between the Miller and the Reeve remains a classic Chaucerian example of authoritative power struggles between two individuals. Both pilgrims on their way to religious absolution in Canterbury, these two characters fight subtle battles of authority through language choice in the prologues of their respective tales. Their descriptions in the *General Prologue* set the stage for understanding the social conflict between the two pilgrims – they are opposed to one another both by trade and general temperament – but do not include any examples of speech from either character. Chaucer's unnamed narrator dominates the entire *General Prologue*, which prevents the Reeve and Miller from linguistically sparring with one other until immediately before the telling of their respective stories.

The Miller's prologue contains no instances of borrowed terminology; however, the passage contains examples of purposeful word selection that hint at the Miller's intentions towards heightened social standing. The Miller speaks three times during his tale's prologue – once to volunteer his tale, once to make known his inebriated condition and give a preview of the tale's content, and a final rejoinder countering the Reeve's objections. In his thirty lines of speech, the Miller uses only three words with Latinate origins. His manipulation of language revolves around his use of the French word "legende", documented in twelfth-century French before making its way into English (OED). Instead of using its English synonym *tale*, the Miller purposely chooses the French term in an effort to portray himself in a socially elevated position above his peers, the other pilgrims (3141). The Miller takes advantage of French's position as an authority language in the literary world to enhance his overall position as a storyteller of knowledge, importance, and worldliness.

The other two occasions in which he demonstrates intentional word choice, "protestacioun" in line 3137 and "inquisityf" later in line 3163, directly relate back to the story he plans to tell. Both words possess Anglo-French origins, and they make their debut in the English language in the late fourteenth century, right around the time Chaucer wrote his *Canterbury Tales* (OED; MED). These words would have spanned the intermediary stage between being borrowed French words and integrated English words at the time of Chaucer's writing. The heavy French presence conveyed by these terms perpetuates the Miller's status as the next storyteller of the group, the person to whom the others must pay attention and give deference to for the duration of his story. With the first word the Miller relies on the higher register of the fancy terminology to convey his ability to be a satisfactory orator despite his internal alcoholic content. The latter term occurs in the middle of a moral aside expressing a husband's constant trust in a good wife when the Miller defends himself against the Reeve's angry protest: "An housbonde shal nat been inquisityf/ Of Goddes pryvetee, nor of his wyf" (3163-4). The Miller parcels words of wisdom that gives the Miller's speech a subtle didactic edge that automatically places the Miller in a position of superiority (and thus, authority) over the other pilgrims.

Based on the relative lack of borrowed terminology in the Miller's speech, the Miller appears to harbor little in the way of malicious intention toward the Reeve in particular. A number of scholars have claimed that the Miller chose to tell a story of a cuckolded carpenter in order to make insinuations about the marital life of the Reeve, a man who used to be a carpenter before coming into his minor office. The foundation for this argument appears to stand on the combined effect of their contrastive occupations, and the possibility "that they may have met before…the Miller's Tale is not so much an attack upon carpenters as a class as it is a direct

thrust at this particular Reeve" (Curry 194). While a logical approach, the claim remains largely based on supposition and conjecture regarding the possibility of a personal history between these two men. If taking the linguistic information gathered at face value, it appears that the Miller is largely self-motivated in wanting to tell his tale; his speech remains simple and unembellished by other examples of literary or clerical vocabulary, and it directly states his intentions to tell a crudely humorous story. If his objective was not a drunken bid to teach his listeners but rather an opportunity to intentionally slander the Reeve, the Miller would likely have utilized a more extensive linguistic repertoire of authority-imbued words in his speech.

In fact, this authoritative linguistic repertoire does manifest itself in the word choice of not the Miller, but rather in that of his fictional counterpart, the Reeve. His vehemence starts in the Miller's own prologue when he makes a short protest against the Miller's intended story. Like the Miller, the Reeve uses three obvious authority words – two from French, and one directly from Latin. Having just discovered that the carpenter of the tale gets cuckolded by a poor scholar beneath him both in wealth and station, the irate Reeve protests against this "harlotrye" and "folye", perceiving it to be a slight on his own life (3145-6). Both words of French origin, they are attested as first appearing in their English forms in 1387 and 1230, respectively (MED). The Reeve immediately follows with the Latin word "asperse" in the next line, making a word with vestigial traces of linguistic authority appear in three consecutive lines of a five-line speech. Thus, while the number of words present in each man's speech remains equal, the length of each man's dialogue is not; the Reeve delivers a highly concentrated and powerful message to the Miller, his words seeking to strip away the pretenses of oratory authority with which the Miller seeks to adorn himself.

The Reeve continues his attempts to lower the status of the Miller in his own story's prologue. At the very beginning he uses the two French words "ribaudye" and "folie", nearly an exact repetition in meaning of the two French words formerly spoken by the Reeve in the Miller's prologue (3866, 3880). This repetition indicates the repetition of his intention to linguistically return the Miller to his rightful station – below the Reeve himself. Choosing these words over the native English terms *bawdry* and *silly* bestows importance on the words and makes them points of interest to the casual listener; like speed bumps on a smoothly paved street, the Latinate words would presumably stand out beside their Germanic companions. By giving these specific words emphasis when discussing the Miller's tale, the Reeve effectively seeks to reduce the story to a cesspool of moral outrage with no higher content, thus demonstrating malice that the Miller's speech did not reflect.

The Reeve employs new borrowed terminology to continue his attack upon the Miller. His use of the French word "coveitise" in his list of the four sins draws attention to the lack of morals in the Miller's story, and thus reflects back on the character of the Miller himself (3884). The fact that covetousness was the primary sin of the Miller's tale, along with the fact that it was the only sin not named by native English terminology like the others, is no coincidence. The Reeve takes the pervading theme of the story and, using language meant to attract notice, places the stigma of shame and religious misconduct back upon his fellow pilgrim. The malice behind these borrowed terms remains subtle up until the very end of his prologue, where a sharp rebuke from the company host prompts him to voice his vindictiveness in plain words: "I shal hym quite anoon/Right in his cherles termes wol I speke/ I pray to God his nekke mote to-breke" (3916-8). By utilizing these more sophisticated terms until this outburst, the Reeve creates a distancing effect by placing himself above the common words of the Miller; the lofty, but stinging

definitions of these chosen words give insight into the type of attack the Reeve uses against the Miller within his own tale.

The Reeve highlights the importance of authoritative terminology by creating instances of stark linguistic contrast in the speech acts between characters throughout his *Tale*. The initial conversation between Simkin and the two clerks – twenty three lines long, with each character speaking at least once – remains clear of any borrowed terminology. A situation of potential conflict, the students having visited the miller with the intention of exposing him as a thief, it is surprising that none of the characters utilize any authority words for their own benefit. The casual comment "this millere smyled of hir nycetee" made immediately following this conversation draws attention to the fact that Simkin was aware of the possibility of linguistic interplay, even if it did not manifest itself in that particular interaction (4046). As Cambridge students the two clerks would not be simpletons – nor wish to portray themselves as such – yet they greet and talk with the miller without using any elevated language at all. Simkin picks up on this linguistic behavior right away, obviously expecting to receive some degree of elevated language from the clerks, and he is nonplussed when he does not. This type of encounter goes against expectation in a time where linguistic presentation impacted the social perception of acquaintances, leaving Simkin to account for the motives behind such unexpected behavior. One possible conclusion the miller could have reached would involve condescension; the clerks, puffed up on the self-importance of their mission, talked down to the miller in an acknowledgement of their elevated position over him. The opposite method to using authoritative words, condescension provides John and Alan with a method of elevation through the implied stupidity of the miller, rather than based on the credentials of their university educations.

This distinct lack of Latinate terminology contrasts with the barrage of borrowed words utilized in Simkin's following speech. Promptly following the introductory conversation, Simkin uses three formerly French terms to refer to the clerks' attempts at trickery and deceit: "wyle", "begyle", and "crekes" (4047,-48,-51). The term *beguile* comes from the Old French word *guile* that is attested to have first appeared in English in 1230 in the *Bestiary*, while *trick* and *wile* came into the language straight from their Anglo-Norman forms in the late thirteenth century (MED; OED). This amounts to a peculiar situation which begs the question: why does the Reeve give his miller character an authoritative edge over the clerks when the alleged purpose of his story is to take revenge on the Miller?

The answer lies in the Reeve's exact intentions in telling his story. The words are attributed to Simkin, yet he never speaks them aloud to anyone. Rather, the Reeve informs the reader that the miller is thinking aloud to himself. If these authority words were not spoken out loud in front of John and Alan, then Simkin could not be using them to gain superiority over the two students. Instead, the Reeve intentionally copies the Miller's formerly seen tendency to wax eloquent with his frequent use of borrowed terminology. Thus, the Reeve is concerned less with the actual confrontation between characters, restricting his interest to the way in which he might be able to associate the real-world Miller with his fictional miller. Firmly establishing such a connection through a characteristic as easily identifiable as linguistic tendencies enables the Reeve to directly relate his fellow pilgrim to the man that gets exposed, defrauded, and cuckolded all in the course of a single evening, a purposefully malicious move if there ever was one.

It is interesting to note the disparate levels of malice and harbored ill-will held respectively by the Miller and the Reeve. One possible answer to this inequality lies in the order

of the tales. Another answer lies in the Reeve's previously mentioned origins as a mere carpenter. The Reeve attempts to juggle his profession as a minor official and its associated social status against the downward pull of his former life, the slanderous remarks of a fellow traveler, and the preconceived class notions of the other pilgrims. He experiences no small difficulty trying to defend himself diplomatically against what he perceives to be attacks upon his character in front of an audience of peers who appreciate the subtle nuances of daily conversation. Given the scope of the situation, it is no wonder that the Reeve does everything in his power to elevate his status, even at the expense of the Miller.

The multi-layered intentions behind the Miller and Reeve's use of authority-imbued language, and the different methods by which such language is demonstrated, indicates the levels of complexity associated with the concept of identity. Kwame Anthony Appiah addresses this complexity in his monograph *The Ethics of Identity*, using a formulaic solution to establish patterns of social individuality. Appiah claims that a "paradigm of social identity" exists for all individuals attempting to create an identity for themselves; it manifests itself though recognition, identification, and treatment (67-9). First there must be recognition of the existence of a group (or stereotype), an acknowledgement made by both the individual and those surrounding him. Following this mutual acknowledgement are purposeful and active individual efforts to become a member of this group, a step culminating in the third aspect of identity, the treatment of the individual based on social perception of him as a member of this group or stereotype.

The underlying patterns Appiah identifies provide a framework with which to better explain and understand the actions of Chaucer's characters. The Miller, seeing his chance to raise his position in the company of pilgrims, recognizes the elite nature of individuals who use conversational French, particularly in literary circles. He then tries to become associated with

this group of "elite scholars" by using Anglicized French terms in his story, and he is rewarded by the acknowledgement of his efforts by the Reeve recognizing the Miller's ploy. To requite the Miller, the Reeve essentially does the same thing – only this time, he uses it to undermine the Miller as opposed to elevating his own image. This ultimately accounts for the pervading malice present in the Reeve's speech that fails to appear within any of the Miller's speech acts.

The way in which the Reeve uses language furthermore opens the door to consideration of overarching social and political factors involved in group identification by society. By using authoritative words in the thoughts of characters – where no other character could hear and use them to consequentially alter his treatment of that character – the Reeve indicates the presence of two purposes behind seeking identity: for the self, and also for society. Appiah characterizes these separate paths towards identity through the terms "ethical" and "political." These terms are ambiguous in meaning until more fully explained: "[ethical life] figures in identification, in people's shaping and evaluating their own lives…[political life] figures in treatment by others, and how others treat one another will help determine one's success and failure" (69). Thus, Simkin is shown to be a character that chooses to alter his identity for both ethical (personal) and political (social) reasons, resulting in a character of complexity belied by his unassuming appearance as a simple miller with a predilection for theft.

In essence, authoritative language demonstrates the multifaceted purposes behind the intentional presentation and perception of individuals during conflicts where significant social power is at stake. The Miller's didactic presentation of himself as a storyteller gives him a subtle social edge over his peers that accomplishes status establishment. The Reeve's similar interest in wordplay inherently implies a recognition and understanding of the Miller's actions. Copying the Miller's use of authoritative language ensures that the importance of authority-imbued words is

also recognized by the rest of the pilgrims, individuals coming from all social positions and backgrounds. Thus, authoritative terminology derived from languages associated with power and influence is shown to be the lynchpin of social relations between these people – and within fourteenth-century society in general.

      The linguistic component of literary study places Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* within the role of conveying the interrelated nature of personal and social identity construction in the late Middle Ages. Submitting texts to literary linguistic analysis, while also using linguistic analysis to compare and analyze dialect and idiolect in different manuscripts, opens texts to interpretations that reveal this very important role and make sense of it. This realization operates under the fundamental understanding that the studied language features are inherently intertwined; without the knowledge of dialects and the stereotypes they produce, the underlying motivations of the characters' lexical variety in their authoritative terminology could not be fully explained or understood. Likewise, the presence of the borrowed terminology makes clear the patterns of social construction taking place, patterns unable to be discerned by dialectal and idiolectal study alone. Beyond the scope of Middle English literature, literary interpretation through linguistic observation holds the promise of definite potential for other areas of literature, within different time frames as well as in languages other than English. Its universal acceptance within the folds of literary theory remains to be seen, but the levels of insight and understanding garnered through this method of analysis is unquestionably beyond compare.

Appendix

Cited manuscript abbreviations and origins

Dd – Cambridge University Library (4.24)

El – [Ellesmere] Henry E. Huntington Library

Gg – Cambridge University Library (4.27)

Ha – [Harley] British library (1239)

Hg – [Hengwrt] Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales (392D)

Ps – [Paris] Bibliothèque Nationale (39)

Linguistic symbols

[   ] – referencing its phonology (sound)

(   ) – referencing its orthography (spelling)

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