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Chaucer, the Puppet Master: Role and Significance of Depiction in Festive Function

In *Rabelais* Mikhail refers to "the influence of the folk theatre, especially the puppet show and the performances given at fairs" (37). The idea of the puppet shows where there is one puppet-master telling tales from behind the puppets he is manipulating on strings reflects Chaucer and *The Canterbury Tales* on so many levels. In this article I re-examine the role of the puppet master and his puppets in *The Canterbury Tales* not as a form of mere entertainment but from a socio-historical point of view. As I look at the influences that shaped Chaucer as he constructed his puppets, the pilgrims, I also look at the various functions these constructs fulfilled. All literature, one might argue, fulfils various functions that reflect the socio-political forces of its time, but as the following section will elaborate, the *Tales* has certain unique features that sets it apart from other conventional literature making it more amphibious as it exists between the contrasting yet connected worlds of literature and folklore. It is important to establish at the onset that the focus is not so much on the actual characters per se as it is of puppets who become the voice of a time and place in the history of the Middle Ages as experienced and recorded by Chaucer.

I begin my analysis by positioning *The Canterbury Tales* not just as a work of literature, but as an important piece of folklore from the standpoint that its functional value matches, if not exceeds, its literary value. From there I address the two main potential obstacles in this analysis, which are that of reliability of this piece of literature as a mirror of socio-political events of the times and the fact that *The Canterbury Tales* is incomplete. An important part of addressing these hurdles without adversely affecting the analysis depended upon establishing a link between the worlds of fact and fiction, which in turn compelled me to briefly recount relevant aspects from Chaucer's own personal history that support the functional point of view of this work. From here on I begin my examination of the miller, the main character for this socio-historical analysis through literature/folklore. I conclude my observations by pointing out actual events from history that seem directly reflected in the *Tales*, with supporting literature that further cements these connections as I see them.

Literature as Folklore

The Canterbury Tales is an iconic work of English literature, yet *Earnest Games* looks at it as folklore.¹ *Earnest Games* systematically demonstrates how the *Canterbury Tales* is folklore on two counts, "first as a realistic depiction of storytelling in the Middle Ages, [and] second, as a poem ... strongly influenced by certain rules of folk oral delivery" (3). Since function is central to folklore, the focus of *The Canterbury Tales* is the festive-ritualistic game played by the pilgrims and the function(s) of their tales. Davenport comments on how each tale has function that is in most cases presented in the prologues that precede the tale. He writes, "We do not read merely a sequence of short stories, but are invited to consider what each story is trying to be ... The prologues ... vary a great deal in length, content, function and complexity..." (35). *Earnest Games* enumerates several main functions, two of which seemed rather significant to me. The first was the social function of providing *solace*, and the second was the more academic function of recording a critical moment in Chaucer's fourteenth century England in oral poetry. While one

¹ One of the three basic approaches as outlined in Mary Ellen B. Lewis's paper *The Study of Folklore in Literature: An Expanded View*. The other two are the study of folklore *in* literature, and the study of folklore *as* literature.

is a purely ritualistic function, the other has an entirely scholastic function; while one is communal, emotional, and psychological, the other is a purely cerebral and academic. Yet Chaucer has managed to combine both seamlessly in *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer's character development is as seamless as the functions he derives from the game, as Peter Ackroyd writes, "Characters ... have such naturalistic immediacy that it is hard to know where life ends and art begins" and that is further emphasized when "Chaucer also introduces 'real' people into the proceeding" further distorting the mask of these puppets so that the puppet master "Chaucer deals with the world around him in a different way... through these pages [we get] to glimpse a great deal of medieval life as it was actually experienced. [It is seen in this context] that the pilgrims become caricatures, [that] convey a great sense of the underlying reality of the time" (xvi). I chose Robyn the Miller from the *Millers Tale* to explore the connection between the depiction of the pilgrims, the influences that define the forms they assume, and the functions that these constructs fulfill. Of all the characters in *The Canterbury Tales*, I chose the miller because in my opinion the miller and his tale are perfect examples of what Peter Ackroyd terms as "the authorial strategies of Chaucer [which] was the use of wit and humor to convey a vision of a world that is neither stable nor ideal" (xi).

The Process

As I proceeded to examine this depiction-influence-function relationship I found that I was faced with certain obstacles. I cannot honestly claim to have overcome them in any measure, but I acknowledge them nonetheless. An initial potential obstacle was my questioning Chaucer's reliability as a folklorist, observer and interpreter of the miller folk. I overcame that because if historical records are to be believed, "the life of Chaucer reflects the variously moving forces of the age" (Ackroyd vii). It seems to me that given his personal history he would have had enough first-hand experience to be able to adequately represent these folk on their own terms. Born in London sometime in 1343 to John Chaucer and Agnes Copton, Geoffrey Chaucer, though never a member of the elite class, grew up to live almost all of his adult years in close proximity with courtly life, making him a nobleman by proxy. In a brief biography, Joseph Glaser writes about Chaucer's humble beginnings as a commoner that morphed into a life in the highest circles. Chaucer's public career resulted in a very well documented official life that included over five hundred documents that testify to his career. Some of the main offices that he occupied were as the Page to Elizabeth de Burgh, the Countess of Ulster, at court, where he served successfully under Duchess of Ulster, Edward III, John of Gaunt and of Richard II, as the Comptroller of the customs for the port of London. He ascended this post on June 8, 1374, and records indicate that he stayed on for twelve years, which is when he did most of his writing. Scholars like Lindahl, David, and Donaldson all hold the view that contemporary emotions and motivations are not as far removed from Chaucer's times that they prevent us from understanding Chaucer's times through our own experiences. With nothing to disprove this observation, I make peace with the idea that Chaucer's depiction was "accurate." Yet the question that I explore is not so much the fact of the accuracy of his depiction, but the function of this depiction in the context of the game because it is an indisputable fact that "no attempt to distill the meaning of the *Canterbury Tales* can ... exclude the behavior of the individual pilgrims or their interactions as a group" (Lindahl 3).

The next obstacle is the fact that *The Canterbury Tales* is incomplete. Donald Howard reminds us, "because *The Canterbury Tales* was not finished, we can never know the idea in its final embodiment" (27). This does affect the outcome of my scholarship because the conclusions will be at best an educated guess based on the facts that I can put together.

The final and greatest obstacle was getting information on the miller folk from historical sources of fourteenth century England. Finding sources was incredibly difficult due to the scarcity of records. This was however to be expected since this is an inherent challenge of dealing with folkloric study by virtue of its informal, oral style. Folklore is unofficial, traditional, community culture that is created when different social classes interact. In the case of *The Canterbury Tales*, this expression is in the form of a collection of stories (the item) told to a socially diverse audience that gives it social context. Conventional definitions, such as the one given by Francis Lee Utley, "literature orally transmitted," Carl Lindahl feels, fail to deliver. It is

an “oxymoron” that is of little or no use to the medievalist. Instead Lindahl creates a working definition of “folklore” not by looking for it specifically, but by examining the negative space that surrounds the conventional forms of “cultural expression.” He illustrates, “Throughout the Middle Ages, there were two basic means of communication: the elite and the folk. Elite culture was formal and institutionalized ... and based on a method of rigorous schooling ... therefore, nearly all surviving information on medieval culture reflects the elite view to a greater or lesser extent” (7). Lindahl also goes on to point out that elite culture was “impersonal”, “rigid, impervious to change,” and did not “adapt to the community.” Folk culture on the other hand was everything that elite culture was not. It was “nonstandardized, ... centered outside the boundaries of institutionalized learning ... was passed on through face-to-face communication ... less rigid and more often determined by popular census” (8). (Table.1)

Table 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TWO CULTURES

Elite Culture	Folk Culture
Formal and Institutionalized	Informal
Based on a method of rigorous schooling	Non standardized
Has more available information	Oral, therefore not original many surviving records/versions
Impersonal	Depended on face-to-face communication. More personal
Rigid	Very fluid
Impervious to change	Constantly changing

The informal, non-standardized, intensely personal, and face-to-face nature of the folkloric tradition means a scarcity of sources of information of any surviving, original work that might connect to the millers in fourteenth century England. Other pilgrims like the knight, for example, belong to the elite culture and therefore have relatively more formal, institutionalized information available. Relatively this information will be more reliable. Rigidity and imperviousness to change ensure that these sources of information remain original, or far closer to the original, than information and sources to and on common folk in general.

The Many Masks of Chaucer

In *The Canterbury Tales* Chaucer plays all the parts – he is the narrator, the pilgrim, Robyn the Miller, Robyn the Knave, and every other character we encounter. In the context of oral tradition of literature, Donaldson says, “several Chaucers must have inhabited one body ... in that sense the fictional first person is no fiction at all. In the oral tradition of literature the first person always shared the personality of his creator” (74). The whole idea of these “masks” is “characteristic of the most ancient rituals”; Bakhtin elaborates, “the theme of the mask (is) the most complex theme of folk culture. The mask is connected with the joy of change ... with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity... the mask is related to transition, metamorphosis, the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames. It contains the playful element of life; it is based on ... interrelation of reality and image ... such manifestations as ... caricatures ... are ... derived from the mask” (39-40).

Some scholars suggest that by becoming Robyn the Miller, Chaucer is trying to impart authenticity to the tale, and to that end, the authenticity of the portrayal becomes important. This device on part of story tells, scholars say is nothing unusual, but is noteworthy nonetheless. If one considers the facts that *The Canterbury Tales* is modeled largely after “nine festivals well-known to Chaucer and his contemporaries,” that he might have “witnessed or participated in specific enactments of most of them,” and that he went on to “incorporate each in his poem” (Lindahl 46), it seems very possible that his depiction of Robyn the Miller is more of a

traditional construct conducive to the rules and functions of the game rather than a desire at realistic portrayal. As Donald Howard observes, the “idea of the pilgrimage is part of the idea of *The Canterbury Tales*” (30). However, Chaucer *does* reinforce stereotypes, and this is best seen in the example of Robyn the Knave, the character that Robyn the Miller inserts in his tale. This is repetition of the folkloric devise that Chaucer uses throughout when he inserts *himself* into the *Tales* as the pilgrim narrator. The function is also the same, that of giving a “semblance of truth.” Robyn the Knave is that alter ego. Lindahl cites Robert Pratt who notes the commonalities between both these Robyns, including that they not only share the same name, but they also share the same physical attributes. They are both very strong and break doors down, and they are both referred to as “stout carl” and “strong carl” at different points in the tale. This picture of strength ties in with the image of the miller being a man of a violent nature that has further historical implication in the part the millers played in the Rising of 1382 that I shall discuss further on. Both the Robyns are intimidating in the aggression they wittingly or unwittingly demonstrate, which is a reason why no one argues when Robyn the Miller barges his way into the “social sequence” of the tales.

The Miller and the Knight as the Tragic and Comic Masks of Theatre

It seems to me that when viewed in this light the image of the miller is convenient to the rules of the game because it forms a very neat contrast to everything the knight is and symbolizes. Just like the two masks of theatre, the miller is everything the knight is not; from characterization, plot, genre, imagery, every aspect of the tale of one is the antithesis of the other (Table 2). This inversion is “One of the indispensable elements of the folk festival ... the jester was proclaimed the king” (Bakhtin 81). Our first introduction to the miller’s voice is when it is raised immediately after the knight has concluded his “epic” creation. As Peggy Knapp points out about the Miller’s Tale, it is “a reactive, rather than a founding gesture. Its structure, characterization, and language have their fullest force in point by point contrast to the knight’s” (32). Their introductions begin to create the contrasts. The knight is a picture of decorum and is painted in glowing terms by the Host, while the miller is initially ignored and is acknowledged only when he intimidates the company with his drunken, churlish and potentially aggressive demeanor. The miller’s buffoonery fulfills the very function it was supposed to, which is “the transfer of every high ceremonial gesture or ritual to the material sphere; such was the clown’s role during tournaments, the knight’s initiation and so on” (20). The knight’s characters are in keeping with aristocratic styles, while the miller employs the genre of fabliau to create his characters. Within this characterization the manner of portrayal is also a direct contrast. For example, the heroines are treated in a similar manner: a one-on-one comparison where they are similar in their differences. While the knight’s Emily is painted in asexual, divine imagery, the miller’s Alison is attractive in a very physical, sexual common way that he likens to all the good things of everyday life. While the knight is epic, the miller is *schwank*. The plots are also opposed: while the knight has a thin plot that stretches over huge epic periods of time and in keeping with his elitist genre, the miller’s tale on the other hand has a dense plot that spans a few hours. The climax to the two has the same effect: where the Knight’s Tale resolves slowly and melodramatically, the Miller’s tale’s climax is in a matter of seconds, where a single word “water” brings it to its hilarious climax.

Table 2: The Knight and the Miller

The Knight	The Miller
Invited to begin the festivities	Has to aggressively assert his presence
Noble demeanor	Drunken, churlish manner
The characters in the Tale are in keeping with aristocratic styles	The Miller’s Tale employs the genre of fabliau to create his characters
Emily: asexual, divine imagery	Alison: very physical, sexual and compared to all the good things of everyday life
Thin plot that stretches over huge epic periods of time	Dense and intricate plot that covers time very quickly, matter of hours/minutes

While all of this suggests and supports the idea that the miller was “created” by Chaucer in the interests of the game, there is historic evidence that suggests his portrayal was based in reality. The aggressive and rough portrayal for example is factually supported by the fact that the millers as a class were active participants in the Rising of 1381, which is further seen in the “revolt” the miller stages disguised in jest during the course of the game. For the sake of thematic organization, I will come back to this after looking at the historically accurate hostile relationship between the miller and the reeve.

The Miller and the Reeve

In my opinion it would be impossible to tell whom Chaucer “designed” first, the miller or the reeve. That is how intertwined these two personas were socially, professionally and functionally. Ironically it was this proximity that was the root cause of their animosity, as Lindahl points out in *Earnest Games*,

the most abusive and dangerous quarrels occurred between trades that were in direct competition. The quarrel between the Reeve and the Miller is based on just such overlapping interests ... Reeves and Millers both plied rural trades and were also, perhaps, the two outstanding misfits of the agrarian social order. Both held luminal positions, between the peasantry and the ruling classes, and conducted their business primarily with the lord of the manor, but also had a certain unpopular control over the lowest classes. It was a major function of the reeve or bailiff ... to ensure that the peasants were productive ... the miller, who on most manors contracted directly with the peasants to grind their grain and was granted by contract a share of it, also held power over the villains, a power which, according to almost every folk story and stereotype about millers from the Middle Ages [was] abused ... both these men were scorned by their superiors, and feared by their inferiors, they were a class by themselves, thrown into direct competition for dominance in the midst of a generally unsympathetic society. (III)

Even though they hated each other, ironically, it was the social role and identity of one that largely defined the social role and identity of the other.

Influences of Social, Political, and Economic History on the Development of the Character of the Miller: The Rising of 1381, The Plagues of 1348, 1361, 1369, and the New Cash Economy

Bakhtin writes, “The images of games were seen as a condensed formula of life and the historic process: fortune, misfortune, gain and loss, crowning and uncrowning. Life was presented as a miniature play (translated into the language of traditional symbols) ... At the same time games drew the players out of the bounds of everyday life, liberated from usual laws and regulations, and replaced established conventions by other lighter conventionalities” (235). The miller and everything about the Miller’s Tale responds in the affirmative to this idea of “play.” The date of authorship of the *Tales* also points to the influences real-life events might have had on Chaucer when he was creating the socially disruptive miller. According to Thomas Ross “*The Canterbury Tales* ... may be assigned with fair confidence to 1387-88” (6), which was a time of great social, economic, and political upheaval. Prior to this the feudal order was well established, but the sudden change in the existing world order is reflected in *The Canterbury Tales* when the miller makes a serious social statement in jest by speaking out of turn, inflicting his social superiors (which was almost everyone present) with his churlish vulgar humor. Peggy Knapp supports the idea that what the miller did was in absolute violation of the given norms of societal organization. Thomas Wimbledon’s sermon at St. Paul’s Cross in London in 1388, addresses this very aspect as he talks about the importance of the role of the three estates: “And if there were but one horse, other one shepe in the world ... yet if he had grasse and corne as kind hath ordained for such beasts, he should live well enow. But if there ne were but o man in the world, though he had all that good that is therein, yet for default he shud deie, or his life shuld be worse than if he were naught.” Peggy Knapp argues that “Men are perfect social beings ... Natural necessities dictate both familiar division of labor and the rule that ‘every state should love the other’. The states, estates, or offices of the commonwealth are three: ‘priesthood,

knighthode, and laborers" (11). Yet the social realities were contrary to what was desired by the normative structures of authority. There were several critical events that were definitively reshaping the social and economic landscape of fourteenth century England. Knapp cites John Gower's *Vox Clamatis*, written in 1378 and revised in 1393, in the context of what the prevalent ideas of the normative structure should be. He "insists that it is unthinkable that "anyone from the class of serfs should try and set things right." *Vox Clamatis* today is popular for its "apocalyptic description of the Peasant's Revolt [and] its animal imagery for insurrectionists" (11). Lee Patterson says, "One thing we do know for certain ... is that millers were participants in the Rising of 1381. One John Fillol, for instance, a miller from Hanningfield, Essex was hanged for his part in the revolt, and records indicate that the millers played a predominant role" (256). Patterson goes on to give another real life example of two John Milleres, one of London, who was charged with theft, and the other of Ulford, who was hanged and whose goods were confiscated, along with William Grindecobbe, the eloquent leader of the rebels at St. Albans.

Another critical source of information about the millers is the letters of the John Ball that allegorized the miller. The words are threatening and as Patterson points out: "they are more immediately witness to the long history of peasant anger toward the seigniorial monopoly of the power of the mill – a power that the rebels of 1381 here seek to appropriate and turn to their own, retributive uses. Chaucer's Robyn the Miller would have called such retribution *quiting*, and lest we think the analogy with John Ball's Jack the Miller is arbitrary, let us remember that." Both John Ball and Robyn the Miller have the same message; he "knows both when he has (and when he has had) enough" (258). Added to this were the dissolution of the old world feudal order and the emergence of the capitalist society in the rural economies of fourteenth century England. As Patterson points out, "we must realize that the most important powerful forces for economic and social change were generated in the country and the agents of this social change were agrarian workers like [the miller] and rural small-commodity producers" (247).

All of this paints a very realistic picture, but the context is festive, -- it is the game that is being played. Was the "game" an allusion to the social forces at the time? Could the ritualistic aspect of the pilgrimage and the game played within its context be Chaucer alluding to the idea that as socio-cultural and economic dynamics change and evolve, various levels of society that were otherwise isolated will be forced to face each other as new orders are established? The Rising of 1381 and the development of the cash economy would have been a suitable combination to initiate a metamorphosis of the social and hierarchical structure, with the miller at the lead. If one was to look at the position the Miller occupied in the socio-economic structure, his role in this social restructuring will not come as a complete surprise. The miller's position was, as Lee Patterson puts it, important, yet not really defined. The toll the peasants had to pay to get their corn ground was a huge source of revenue for the landlord and at the same time hated by the peasants, but the miller did his duty with a contracted cut from the proceeds as wages for his work. So in essence the miller found himself in a position where he was not liked, wanted, or trusted² but was needed by his social superiors, and at the same time, he was hated and excluded yet forced upon his social inferiors. Knapp says, "in the late fourteenth century ... the social world ... was less and less accounted for by the ideology invoked to explain it. ... It ... blurred the traditional distinctions between [the three estates]" (12). In *The Canterbury Tales*, had the miller waited for this turn, he would have come in much later. By interrupting the normal sequence of the tales, Robyn momentarily overturns the social hierarchy. Just as Chaucer "reshapes" literature into a "folk form," the miller "reshapes" the vulgar humor of a churl into a strategic attack on the establishment. The Plagues of 1348, 1361, and 1369 were a series cataclysmic events that I group together. As a result of these epidemics, a sizeable chunk of the working class population from the third estate was wiped out. The resultant skewed demographic put the "third estate" in a position of bargaining advantage. This sudden establishment a new order that is reflected in *The Canterbury Tales* is very carnival-like in the way Bakhtin defines it, and this is what the miller symbolizes when he overturns the neat order of the gathered pilgrims. Bakhtin writes, "The carnival-grotesque form exercises the ...

² Lee Patterson mentions in *The Miller's Tale and the Politics of Laughter* that documentation shows the millers stole from their overlords. It is part of the "construct" that has been created.

function... to consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and ... to liberate from the prevailing truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things” (34).

Literary Influences that are Evident in the Miller and its Functions

Besides the historical influences, Chaucer was probably also greatly influenced by the literature around him. As Joseph Glaser writes, Chaucer “was educated in London, possibly at Saint Paul’s Cathedral, and later in the great aristocratic courts, where he played a variety of roles” (1). Being so well read *combined* with his personal history of having experienced many “roles” in life, it is very possible that when designing the game in *The Canterbury Tales* and the players, Chaucer simply “designed” ideal players to illustrate prime functions of the poem- the game “blew off steam,” while the tales became historic narratives in folkloric oral poetry. The literary comparison between Boccaccio’s *Decameron* has been frequently forwarded. While some deny this, Thomas Ross cites the example of Donald McGrady who supports this view. In private correspondence, which was published in part in 1977, Ross says, “the tale derives from *Decameron* 8.7. According to McGrady the focus of the tales of Chaucer and Boccaccio is the ‘inside-outside lovers’ motif” (5). Other famous potential literary influences that seems to have shaped the image of Robyn the Miller in the *Tales* are Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Robert Grosseteste’s *Ludus*, and Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theological*. This is important because the miller fits the image of Aristotle’s idea of the buffoon perfectly, and Chaucer seems to have a definite purpose in fashioning the miller in this way.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle deals with the idea of game and play in terms of virtues and their corresponding vices- *eutrapelia*, *bomolochia*, and *agroica*. Glending Olson explains it, *Eutrapelia* is the mean and is therefore the virtue, while *bomolochia* and *agroica* are the two ends and are therefore undesirable, and unwanted. Now each of these were a “type” with defining characteristics which we see reflected in the knight, the miller and the reeve who are the opening “acts” of *The Canterbury Tales*. The Knight is *eutrapelia*, the “good man” who stays “loyal in the company’s play as in his lord’s wars” (148). The reeve is the symbol of the vice of defect, the *agroica*. He is a “sermonizer, deadly serious about everything: amusement has not mellowed him” (149). And finally, the miller is the image of the buffoon, the *bomolochia*, and symbolizes the vice of excess. The buffoon is another form of the carnival grotesque and the grotesque, Bakhtin says, is everywhere. Citing Victor Hugo, Bakhtin writes, “on the one hand, it creates the formless and the terrifying, on the other hand, it creates the comic, the buffoon-like” (43). The first time we are introduced to Robyn the Miller, we see him forcing his way into the “proper” and “accepted” conventional hierarchical structure. His manners and the contents of his tale seem to be an obvious retaliation to the knight and everything he stands for. This violation of the hierarchy and this disguised social “attack” on the knight seems to be one of the main functions of the character of the miller. On its face, the miller’s buffoonery is to illicit laughter, but in making his fellow pilgrims laugh, is the miller fulfilling the function of the game? Laura Kendrick asks this question: “why does Chaucer’s writing move in the direction it does, toward the ‘comedy’ of the *Canterbury Tales*, towards laughter? Is he just being [playful]... or is it more complicated than that? What are the mechanisms and meanings of medieval mirth, and, more especially, of Chaucer’s literary play?” (2). Bakhtin writes, “Laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning the history of man” (66). He sums up by saying that the universal thoughts that serious thoughts convey in literature are equally well conveyed via laughter.

The game of storytelling serves to create “oppositions unresolved by action,” and through these, “Chaucer creates *narrators*, not combatants, for his poem, people who express their differences in words – who tell about crimes, but do not commit them” (Lindahl 36). The characters like the miller “engage in oral rather than in physical battle [the *fabliaux* of the churls.] The characters extend themselves into their stories, their words take on the strength of actions, and their various styles become increasingly varied and important” (37). While it is impossibly difficult to tell if the construct of the miller is entirely historical or fictional, what is

evident is the influence of the ideal constructs *and* realistic depictions. As Lindahl observes, “In a manner unknown in previous literature, the diction, subject matter, and the theme of each pilgrim’s tale comes to represent that pilgrim’s individual positioning the festival at hand and the society at large. The poetic strategies of *The Canterbury Tales* ... have their ... roots, in the folk esthetic of English medieval pilgrimage” (37). The nature of the game played, that of telling stories, becomes significant when the collection of stories is looked at as a whole. There is an assortment of comedies and tragedies and, as Donald Howard points out, “in tragedy the type of life to be avoided is represented, in comedy the type of life to be espoused. Finally, every comedy is about subjects which are invented, whereas tragedy is often taken from actual history” (32). This again points to the idea that the construct is a combination of realistic depiction and imaginative invention that has exaggerations based on literary constructs so as to achieve a desired function. Chaucer creates characters that are perfect example of these “types” so they fulfill the function of the game. For example, by making the miller the quintessential *bomolochia*, Chaucer creates the desired effect of combining festive celebration (and all its functions) with socio-political representation of the times. The game of storytelling is to provide “a necessary diversion from the hardships of the road ... [for] *solace* for the trials encountered by the penitent” and the stories told are historical snapshots” (Lindahl 37). The character of the miller displays a duality in its conception, and in the process, Chaucer achieves two purposes: that of entertaining *and* that of recording a critical moment in his own personal history and the socio-political history of his times. On the face of it, the *Tales* may look like a game, but to me it looks like something far more serious, just the way the miller who is made to be a *bomolochia* on the surface is actually socially and politically aware and active member of fourteenth century England who uses his stereotypical characteristics to his distinct advantage.

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