APPENDIX A
Specimens of the Middle English Dialects

The discussion of the Middle English dialects in the text (§ 147) is necessarily general. The subject may be further illustrated by the following specimens. It is not to be expected that students without philological training will be able to follow all the details in the accompanying observations, but these observations may serve to acquaint the reader with the nature of the differences that distinguish one dialect from another. Some of them, such as the endings of the verb or the voicing of initial $f$ in Southern and Kentish, are easily enough recognized.

Northern

*The Cursor Mundi*, c. 1300.

\[
\text{\textit{P}} \text{is are þe maters redde on raw} \\
\text{\textit{P}} \text{at i thynk in þis bok to draw,} \\
\text{Schortly rimand on þe dede,} \\
\text{For mani er þai her-of to spede.} \\
\text{Notful me thinc it ware to man 5} \\
\text{To knaw him self how he began,—} \\
\text{How [he] began in werld to brede,} \\
\text{How his oxspring began to sprede,} \\
\text{Bath o þe first and o þe last,} \\
\text{In quatking curs þis world es past. 10} \\
\text{Efter haly kyr[es] state} \\
\text{\textit{P}} \text{isilk bok ít es translate} \\
\text{In to Inglis tong to rede} \\
\text{For þe love of Inglis lede,} \\
\text{Inglis lede of Ingland, 15} \\
\text{For þe commun at understand.} \\
\text{Frankis rimes here I redd,} \\
\text{Comunlik in ilk[a] sted:} \\
\text{Mast es it wroght for frankis man.} \\
\text{Ouat is for him na frankis can? 20}
\]
Of Ingland þe nacion—
Es Inglis man þar in commun—
Pe speche þat man wit mast may spede,
Mast þar-wit to speke war nede.
Selden was for ani chance 25
Praised Inglis tong in france.
Give we ilkan þare langage,
Me think we do þam non outrage.
To laud and Inglis man i spell
Pat understandes þat i tell…. 30

TRANSLATION: These are the matters explained in a row that I think in this book to
draw, shortly riming in the doing, for many are they who can profit thereby. Methinks it
were useful to man to know himself, how he began,—how he began to breed in the
world, how his offspring began to spread, both first and last, through what kind of course
this world has passed. After Holy Church’s state this same book is translated into the
English tongue to read, for the love of English people, English people of England, for the
commons to understand. French rimes I commonly hear read in every place: most is it
wrought for Frenchmen. What is there for him who knows no French? Concerning
England the nation—the Englishman is common therein—the speech that man may speed
most with, it were most need to speak therewith. Seldom was by any chance English
tongue praised in France. Let us give each  their language: methinks we do them no
outrage. To layman and Englishman I speak, that understand what I tell.

OBSERVATIONS: The most distinctive feature of  the Northern dialect is the retention of
OE ā as an a, whereas it became an o in all the other dialects: raw (1), knaw (6), bath (9),
haly (11), mast (19, etc.: Northumbrian māst), na (20). Northern shares with all non-W.S.
dialects ē for W.S. æ (= Gmc. ā): dede (3) rhyming with spede (OE spēdan), rede
(13) rhyming with lede (OE lēod), etc. Characteristic of the Northern is the spelling qu—
for hw-: quaking (10), quat (20); the retention of a hard consonant in kyrces (11), ilk
(12), ilka(n) (18, 27); s for sh in Inglis (13, 14), Frankis (17). The pres. participle ends in
-and: rimand (3), the 3rd pers. sing. pres. indic. in -es: understandes (30). The verb to be
shows typical Northern forms in es (10, 12, etc.) for is, er (4) and are (1), and the pret.
plur. ware (5), with a from Scandinavian influence, corresponding to Midland wēren,
Southern wēren. With this may be compared þar (22: ON þar)=Southern þer. The
infinitive at understand (16) likewise points to Scandinavian influence and the north. The
3rd pers. plur. pronoun in th– is a Northern characteristic at this date, especially in the
oblique cases: þai (4) þare (27), þam (28).
Cethegrande is a fis
ðe moste ðat in water is;
ðat tu wuldes seien get,
gef ðu it soge wan it flet,
ðat it were an eilond 5
ðat sete one ðe se sond.
ðis fis ðat is unride,
ðanne him hungreð he gapeð wide;
ut of his ðrote smit an onde,
ðe swetteste ðing ðat is on londe; 10
ðer-fore oðre fisses to him dragen;
wan he it felen he aren fagen;
he cumen and hoven in his muð;
of his swike he arn uncuð
ðis cete ðenne hise chavelæs lukeð, 15
ðise fisses alle in sukeð;
ðe smale he wile ðus biswiken,
ðe grete maig he nogt bigripæn.
ðis fis wuneð wið ðe se grund,
and liveð ðer evre heil and sund, 20
til it cumeð ðe time
ðe storm stireð al ðe se,
ðanne sumer and winter winnen;
ne mai it wunen ðer Ser-inne,
So drovi is te sees grund, 25
ne mai he wunen ðer ðat stund,
oc stireð up and hoveð stille;
wiles [ðat] weder is so ille,
ðe sipes ðat arn on se fordriven,—
loð hem is ded, and lef to liven,—30
biloken hem and sen ðis fis;
an eilond he wenen it is,
ðer-of he arn swiðe fagen,
and mid here migt ðat-to he dragen.
sipes on festen, 35
and alle up gangen;
Of ston mid stel in ðe tunder
wel[m] to brennen one ðis wunder,
warmen hem wel and heten and drinken;
ðe fir he and doð hem sinken, 40
for sone he diveð dun to grunde,
he drepeð hem alle wið-uten wunde.

Significacio

Þis devel is mikel wið and magt,
So wicches haven in here craft;
he doð men hungren and haven ðrist, 45
and mani oðer sinful list,
tolleð men to him wið his onde:
wo so him he folgeð he findeð sonde;
ðo arn ðe little in leve lage;
ðe mikle ne maig he to him dragen,—50
ðe mikle, i mene ðe stedefast
in rigte leve mid fles and gast.
wo so listneð develes lore,
on lengðe it sal him rewen sore;
wo so festcð hope on him, 55
he sal him folgen to helle dim.

TRANSLATION: The cetegrande (whale) is a fish, the greatest that is in water; so that thou wouldst say, if thou saw it when it floats, that it was an island that set on the sea-sand. This fish, that is enormous, when hungry gapes wide; out of its throat it casts a breath, the sweetest thing that is on land; therefore other fishes draw to it. When they perceive it they are glad; they come and linger in its mouth—of its deceit they are ignorant. This whale then shuts its jaws, sucks all these fishes in; the small he will thus deceive, the great can he not catch. This fish dwells on the sea-bottom and lives there ever hale and sound till it comes the time that a storm stirs up all the sea, when summer and winter contend. Nor may it dwell therein; so troubled is the bottom of the sea, he can not abide there that hour, but comes to the surface and remains still. Whilst the weather is so ill, the ships (seamen) that are tossed about on the sea—loath to them is death, and to live dear—look about them and see this fish. They think it is an island; thereof they are very glad and draw thereto with all their might, moor fast the ships and all go up (on land) to light a fire on this wonder, from stone with steel in the tinder, to warm themselves well and eat and drink. He feels the fire and doth sink them, for soon he dives
down to the ground and kills them all without wound. Significatio. This Devil is so great with will and might, as witches have in their craft, that he makes men to hunger and have thirst and many other sinful desires. He draws men to him with his breath. Whoso follows him finds shame: those are the little (who are) low (weak) in faith; the great he can not draw to him,—the great, I mean the steadfast in right belief with flesh and ghost (body and soul). Whoso listeneth to the Devil’s lore, at length shall rue it sorely. Whoso finds hope in him shall follow him to Hell dim.

OBSERVATIONS: The East Midland character of this text is not so much indicated by distinctive features as by a combination of phonological characteristics that can be found individually in other dialects. Thus OE ð appears as a, as it does also at this date generally: ðat (2) water (2), fagen (12), craft (44), etc. As in the north OE ð appears generally as i: unride (7), stired (22), fir (40), diveð (41), ðrist (45), sinfull (46), list (46), and ðo becomes e: lef (30), sen (31), devel (43, 53). But the development of OE ð in ðoð (30), wo (48), lore (53), sore (54) indicates a district south of the Humber. Northern influence is possible in gast (52) although the a may be due to shortening. The morphology is typically East Midland. The 3rd pers. sing. pres. indic. always ends in -eð (except in contractions); hungreð (8), gapeð (8), lukeð (15), etc.; the pres. plur. always ends in -en: dragen (11), felen (12), aren (12), cumen (13), etc.; the strong past participle ends in -en: fordriven (29), as do all infinitives: seien (3), biswiken (17), bigripen (18), etc.; the 3rd pers. plur. of the pronoun is he (12, etc.), here (34, 44), hem (30, etc.). That the text belongs toward the northern part of the region is indicated by the frequent occurrence of s for OE sc:fis, fisses (1, etc.), sipes (29), sonde (4), fles (52), sal (54, 56); by the -es of the 2nd pers. sing.: wuldes (3); and by the more Northern aren, arn (12, 14, etc.) in place of the typical East Midland form ben (which occurs in other parts of the poem).

West Midland

St. Katherine, c. 1230.

In þis ilke burh wes wuniende a meiden swiðe wone of twenti, feier & freolich o wlite & o westum, ah is mare wurð, steðelfest wiðinnen, of treowe bileave, anes kinges Cost hehte anlepi dohter icuret clergesse Katerine inempnet. meiden wes baðe federles & moderles of hi re childhade. Ah þah ha were, ha heold 5 hire aldrene hird wisliche & warliche i þe heritage & i þe herd com of hire burde: nawt for þi þe hirate god in hire heorte to habben monie under hire & beon icleopet lefdi, feole telleð wel to, ah ba ha wes offearet of scheome & of sunne, þeo weren todreauet oðer misferden, hire forðfederes, hefden ifostr et. For hire seolf ne kepte ha
10 nawt of þe worlde. ðe, for hare sake ane dale ha etheold of hire ealdrene god & spende al oðer in neodfule & in nakede. Peos milde, meoke meiden þeos lufsume lefdi mid lastelese lates ne luvede heo nane lihte plohen ne nane sotte songes. Nalde ha nane ronnes ne nane luve runes leornin ne lustnen, ah eaver ha hefde on hali writ ehnen oðer 15 heorte, oftest ba togederes.

TRANSLATION: In this same town was dwelling a maiden very young in years—two lacking of twenty—fair and noble in appearance and form, but yet, which is more worth, steadfast within, of true belief, only daughter of a king named Cost, a distinguished scholar named Katherine. This maiden was both fatherless and motherless from her childhood. But, though she was young, she kept her parents’ servants wisely and discreetly in the heritage and in the household that came to her by birth: not because it seemed to her good in her heart to have many under her and be called lady, that many count important, but she was afraid both of shame and of sin if they were dispersed or went astray whom her forefathers had brought up. For herself, she cared naught of the world. Thus, lo, for their sake she retained one part of her parents’ goods and spent all the rest on the needy and on the naked. This mild, meek maiden, this lovesome lady with faultless looks, loved no light playings or foolish songs. She would neither learn nor listen to any songs or love poems, but ever she had her eyes or heart on Holy Writ, oftest both together.

OBSERVATIONS: The more significant West Midland characteristics of the above passage are: the preservation of OE ŭ as a rounded vowel, spelled u: icuret<cyre (4), burde (7), sunne (9), lustnen (15); the development of OE eo as a rounded vowel, spelled eo, u: zung (1), freolich (2), wurð (2), etc.; the appearance of OE ā+nasal as on, om: wone (1), monie (8); the i-umlaut of OE al+cons. as al: aldrene (6); the feminine pronoun ha (5, etc.), heo (13) for she; the gen. plur. of the 3rd pers. pronoun hare (11); the form nalde (14) for nolde; the unvoicing of final d to t in the ending -et: icuret (4), inempnet (4), ifostret (10), etc. The ending -ende of the pres. participle (wuniende, 1) is common to East and West Midland, but the ending -eð of the plur, pres. indic.(telleð, 8), characteristic of the south, is found in West Midland where the East would commonly have -en.

Southern

The Owl and the Nightingale, c. 1195 (MS. after 1216).

Al so þu dost on þire side:
vor wanne snou liþ þicke & wide,
an alle wi3tes ŵ habbep sor3e, bu singest from eve fort amor3e.
Ac ich alle blisse mid me bringe: 5

ech is glad for mine þinge,
& blisseþ hit wanne ich cume,
& mine kume.

blostme ginneþ springe & sprede,
boþe inettro & ek on mede. 10

lilie mid hire faire white
wolcumeþ me, þat þu hit w[i]te,
bite me mid hire faire blo
þat ich shulle to hire flo.

rose also mid hire rude, 15
þat cumeþ ut of þe þorne wode,
bite me þat ich shulle singe
vor hire luve one skentinge:

& ich so do & dai,
þe more ich singe þe more I mai, 20
an skente hi mid mine songe,
ac noþeles over-longe;
wane ich iso þat men boþ glade,
ich nelle þat hi bon to sade;
þan is ido vor wan ich com, 25
ich fare & do wisdom.

Wane mon of his sheve,
an falewi cumeþ on grene leve,
ich fare hom & nime leve:
ne recche ich of winteres reve.30
wan ich iso þat cumeþ þat harde,
ich fare hom to min erde
an habbe boþe luve & þonc
þat ich her com & hider swonk.

***

“Abid! abid!” þe ule seide,… 35
“bu seist þat bu singist mankunne.
& techest hom þat hi fundieþ honne
up to þe songe þat evre ilest:
ac hit is alre w[u]nder mest,
þat þu darst li3e so opeliche. 40
Wennest þu hi bringe so
to Godes riche al singin[d]e?
Nai! nai! hi shulle wel avinde
þat hi mid longe wope mote
of hore sunnen bidde bote, 45
ar hi mote ever kume þare.”

TRANSLATION: All so thou dost [behave] on thy side: for when snow lies thick and wide, and all wights have sorrow, thou singest from evening until morning. But I bring all happiness with me: each wight is glad for my quality and rejoices when I come and hopes for my coming. The blossoms begin to burst forth and spread, both in tree and eke on meadow. The lily with her fair form welcom es me, as thou dost know, bids me with her fair countenance that I should fly to her. The rose also with her ruddy color, that comes out of the thorn-wood, bids me that I should sing something merry for her love. And I do so through night and day—the more I sing, the more I can—and delight her with my song, but none the less not over long; when I see that men are pleased I would not that they be surfeited. When that for which I came is done I go away and do wisely. When man is intent on his sheaves and russet comes on green leaf, I take leave and go home; I do not care for winter’s garb. When I see that the hard (weather) comes I go home to my native country and have both love and thanks that I came here and hither toiled…

“Abide! abide!” the owl said,…“Thou sayst that thou singest mankind and teachest them that they strive hence up to the song that is everlasting. But it is the greatest of all wonders that thou darest to lie so openly. Weenest thou to bring them so lightly to God’s kingdom all singing? Nay, Nay! They shall well find that they must ask forgiveness of their sins with long weeping ere they may ever come there.”

OBSERVATIONS: The Southern character of this text is evident from a number of distinctive developments. Noteworthy is the retention of OE ŷ as a rounded vowel, characteristic of the west and southwest: cume (7), cumeþ (16), mankunne (36), sunnen (45). Likewise characteristic of west and southwest is the development of OE ēo as a rounded vowel (u, ue, o), here spelled o: tro (10), blo (13), flo (14), iso (23), boþ (23: OE beop), bon (24: OE beon), honne (37). In the southwest OE īe developed into either ĩ or i, as contrasted with the e of all other dialects: hi (24, 41, etc.), hire (11, etc.). The 3rd pers. sing. pres. indic. of verbs has the characteristic Southern (and East Midland) ending -eð (sometimes contracted); lip (2), blisseþ (7), hizteþ (8), wolcumeþ (12), bit (13, 17), cumeþ (16, 28), (27). The plural always has the Southern ending -eð, except bon (24), which shows Midland influence: habbeþ (3), ginneþ (9), boþ (23), fundieþ (37).
Characteristic of the south are the pres. participle in -inde: singinde (42); the forms of the plur. personal pronoun: hi (24, 37), hore (45), hom (37); the past participle with the prefix i– and loss of final -n: ido (25); and the infinitive with the usual Southern absence of final -n: springe (9), sprede (9), flo (14), etc. It is hardly necessary to point out that OE ā appears as o: so (1), snou (2), boþe (10), more (20), etc. The distinctive Southern voicing of f at the beginning of syllables is evident in vor (18, etc.), avinde (43).

Kentish

Dan Michel, *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, 1340.

This book is Dan Michel’s of Northgate, written in English with his own hand. It is called *Ayenbite of Inwit* (Remorse of Conscience) and belongs to the library of St. Augustine’s at Canterbury...Now I wish that ye know how it has come about that this book is written with English of Kent. This book is made for ignorant men,—for father and for mother and for other kin,—to protect them from all manner of sin, that in their conscience there may remain no foul blemish. “Who as God” is his name said [Michael in Hebrew means “Who is like God”], that made this book: God give him the bread of angels of heaven and thereto his counsel, and receive his soul when that he is
dead. Amen. Mind (note) that this book is fulfilled on the eve of the holy apostles Simon and Judas, by a brother of the cloister of Saint Augustine of Canterbury, in the year of our Lord’s bearing, 1340. Our Father that art in heaven, etc.

OBSERVATIONS: Many of the characteristics of Southern English noted in the preceding specimen are likewise found in Kentish. Thus the Southern development of OE \( \text{æ} \) to \( e \) is better preserved in Kentish than in the southwest: \( \text{þet} \) (2, 5, 9, etc.). \( \text{Vader} \) (7) is commonly an exception in Kentish texts. The Southern voicing of \( f \) and \( s \) at the beginning of syllables is very pronounced in Kentish: \( \text{vor} \) (6, 7, 8), \( \text{vader} \) (7, 17), \( \text{vram} \) (8, 21), \( \text{voul} \) (9), \( \text{ondervonge} \) (13), \( \text{volveld} \) (14), \( \text{vorlet(eþ)} \) (19, 20), \( \text{vondinge} \) (20), \( \text{vri} \) (20), \( \text{zen} \) (8), \( \text{yzed} \) (10), \( \text{zaule} \) (13), \( \text{zuo} \) (21). Kentish shares in the Southern -\( \text{eð} \) of the plur. pres. indic.: \( \text{vorleteþ} \) (20); the pres. participle in -\( \text{inde} \): \( \text{cominde} \) (17); the past par-ticiple with the \( y– \) or \( i– \) prefix and loss of final -\( n \): \( \text{y-write} \) (1, 5), \( \text{y-worþe} \) (18), etc.; and the loss of -\( n \) in the infinitive: to \( \text{berþe} \) (8). Like the rest of the south, Kentish is marked by the absence of \( th– \) forms in the 3rd pers. plur. of the personal pronoun: \( \text{ham} \) (8), \( \text{hare} \) (9). The \( a \) in these forms is a Kentish characteristic. The most characteristic feature of Kentish is the appearance of \( e \) for W.S. \( \text{ken} \) (7), \( \text{zen} \) (8), \( \text{ymende} \) (14), \( \text{volveld} \) (14), with the complete absence of the Southwestern rounding (cf. preceding selection). Similar absence of rounding marks the development of OE \( \text{ē} \): \( \text{berþe} \) (8), \( \text{hevene} \) (s) (12, 17, 18), \( \text{erþe} \) (18). The typical Kentish spelling for OE \( ēa \) appears in \( \text{dyad} \) (13). Here also it is hardly necessary to note the development of OE \( ā>\text{ō} \): \( \text{ōjene} \) (1), \( \text{huo} \) (10), \( \text{holy} \) (14), etc.

London

Geoffrey Chaucer, Canterbury Tales, c. 1387.

Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth 5
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That slepen al the night with open yë, 10
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages):
Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages
(And palmers for to seken straunge strondes)
To ferne halwes, couthe in sondry londes;
And specially, from every shires ende 15
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,
The holy blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen, whan that they were seke….

Ther was also a Nonne, a Prioresse,
That of hir smyling was full simple and coy; 20
Hir gretteste ooth was but by sëynt Loy;
And she was cleped madame Eglentyne.
Ful wel she song the service divyne,
Entuned in hir nose ful semely;
And Frensh she spak ful faire and fetisly, 25
After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,
For Frensh of Paris was to hir unknowe.
At mete wel y-taught was she with-alle;
She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle,
Ne wette hir fingres in hir sauce depe. 30
Wel coude she carie a morsel, and wel kepe,
That no drope ne fille up-on hir brest.
In curteisye was set ful muche hir lest.
Hir over lippe wyped she so clene,
That in hir coppe was no ferthing sene 35
Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte.
Ful semely after hir mete she raughte,
And sikerly she was of greet disport,
And ful plesaunt, and amiable of port,
And peyned hir to countrefete chere 40
Of court, and been estatlich of manere,
And to ben holden digne of reverence.
But, for to spoken of hir conscience,
She was so charitable and so pitous,
She wolde wepe, if that she sawe a mous 45
Caught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde.
Of smale houndes had she, that she fedde
With rosted flesh, or milk and wastel-breed.
But sore weep she if oon of hem were deed,
Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte: 50
And al was conscience and tendre herte.
Ful semely hir wimple pinched was:
Hir nose tretys; hir eyen greye as glas;
Hir mouth ful smal, and ther-to softe and reed;
But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed; 55
It was almost a spanne brood, I trowe;
For, hardily, she was nat undergrowe.
Ful fetis was hir cloke, as I was war.
Of smal coral aboute hir arm she bar
A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene; 60
And ther-on heng a broche of gold ful shene,
On which ther was first write a crowned A,
And after, Amor vincit omnia.

OBSERVATIONS: The language of Chaucer ma y be taken as representing with enough
accuracy the dialect of London at the end of the fourteenth century. It is prevailingly East
Midland with some Southern and Kentish features. The latter are a little more prominent
in Chaucer than in the nonliterary London documents of the same date. Among the usual
East Midland developments may be noted OE ā as ō: so (11), goon (12), holy (17), etc.;
OE ā as a: that (1), spak (25), smal (54), war (58), bar (59); the unrounding of OE ā to
i: swich (3), which (4) first (62), but Kentish e is to be noted in lest (33: OE lyst) and
possible evidence of the Western and Southwestern rounding in the u of Canterbury (16)
and much (33) although the u in these words can be otherwise accounted for; OE Æ as e:
seke (18), cleped (22), depe (30), brest (32), ferthing (35), weep (49), herte (51). Since
the W.S.diphthong ÆE is replaced in all other districts by e, Chaucer has yerde (50). His
inflectional forms are mostly East Midland. Thus he has the usual East Midland in -ē the
3rd pers. sing. pres. indic.: hath (2, 6, 8), priketh (11), and the plural in -en or -e: maken
(9), slepen (10), longen (12), wende (16), were (18). The feminine pronoun in the
nominative is she; the plural forms are they (16, 18), hir (11), hem (11). In his past
participles he shows a mixture of Midland and Southern tendencies. Characteristic of
East Midland is the loss of the prefix y– and the retention of the final -n: holpen (18),
dronken (36), holden (42), but he has the Southern y– in y-ronne (8), y-taught (28), and
the loss of -n in unknowne (27), write (62), etc. The infinitive has the usual Midland -n in
goon (12), seken (13), been (41), ben (42), spoken (43), but the Southern absence of -n in
falle (29), carie (31), kepe (31), countrefete (40), wepe (45).