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An Analysis of Personal Pronouns in Middle English Literary Texts

Melissa Jill Bennett

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An Analysis of Personal Pronouns in Middle
English Literary Texts
(TITLE)

BY

Melissa Jill Bennett

THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis examines the evolution of personal pronouns from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries, with a particular focus upon the southern literary dialects of that era. The baseline text for this analysis is the Anglo-Saxon poem The Dream of the Rood, although Bright's paradigm of Anglo-Saxon pronouns is also employed. The Owl and the Nightingale (circa 1200), The Fox and the Wolf (circa 1275), Piers Plowman (circa 1375), and Parliament of Fowls (circa 1375) are used to illustrate the changes in the forms of the pronouns over four centuries, Chaucer's Parliament serving to represent the emerging London standard. The results of this line-by-line analysis are presented in paradigms supported by narrative commentary which notes significant changes in pronoun forms from text to text.

Texts from the southwestern dialect from 1200 to 1375 were chosen because of the geographic and linguistic correspondence between them and the standard literary dialect of the Anglo-Saxon period, West Saxon. What we see in the analysis of the pronouns from these texts is a continuum of some aspects of the West Saxon dialect: the continual use of the dual case through 1200 (The Owl and the Nightingale), the use of the h- form third person pronouns through 1375 (Parliament of Fowls), and the use of the yogh and the thorn consistently into 1200 (The Owl and the Nightingale), the yogh even being seen in some words as

late as Piers Plowman, though intrestingly not in the personal pronouns.

At the same time we are beginning to see variations in the pronoun forms anticipating the London standard. The changes in pronouns serve as a microcosm of the larger changes in the language which eventually result in the formulation of the London standard. While a number of the forms remain fairly constant, changing primarily in terms of simplification of spelling and reductions in the number of forms for a given pronoun, these changes illustrate the evolution of the language toward the London standard.

The changes in pronouns demonstrate the tendency of the language toward simplification. For example, the number of pronoun forms have decreased from fifty-three in Bright's paradigm to some thirty-four used in Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls. Moreover, the dual case still in evidence in The Owl and the Nightingale (circa 1200) has disappeared by Chaucer's time. By the late fourteenth century, the years of Langland and Chaucer, the secon person plural pronouns forms have been reduced to the y- forms (yow). In the same era, the first person nominative pronoun has largely been simplified to I, although Chaucer occasionally uses the southern ich for emphasis or, as in the Reeve's Tale, ik for characterization (Fisher 964), both exceptions, however, noteworthy in that they represent conscious variations from the standard. This movement

toward simplification and reduction of forms indicates the movement toward a standard dialect.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Tim Shonk. Tim, I owe you much. By teaching me Old and Middle English, you made this project possible. Thank you for all of your help, support, and patience. Most of all, thank you for inspiring my love of this language with all of its beauty and complexity.

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Introduction

During the Anglo-Saxon period, England was divided into seven kingdoms. While each kingdom had its own distinct dialect, West Saxon eventually became the standard literary dialect in part because Wessex became the center of power in England. While Northumbria and Mercia both had been centers of power at one time, they did not exert their influence over the whole Anglo-Saxon nation. However, beginning with Egbert in the early ninth century, the West Saxon kings began extending their influence throughout all of England. By 830, all of the English kings and the chieftains of Wales recognized Egbert's rule (Baugh and Cable 48).

West Saxon also became recognized as the standard dialect during the Anglo-Saxon period because of the large amount of literature that came out of this region. When Alfred the Great ascended to the throne in the late ninth century, he realized that the state of the nation's learning had decayed (Baugh and Cable 69). Alfred then decided to try to restore learning in England to the level it was before in the days of Bede and Alcuin. To achieve this goal, Alfred translated or had others translate for him many Latin texts into the vernacular. Alfred also founded public schools, "creating a literate audience for the literature as well as an educated class able to

administer the growing bureaucracy of a growing state" (Williams 59). In addition, Alfred decided to compile a historical document, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Baugh and Cable 70).

If West Saxon was the standard literary dialect during the Old English period, why then did the London dialect become the standard during the Middle English period? While no one reason accounts for the change, several factors contribute to the rise of London English. One reason is geographic location. The London dialect, a variety of the East Midlands dialect in the Middle Ages, provides a middle ground between the conservative Southern dialect and the radical Northern dialects (Baugh and Cable 187). It tends to blend characteristics of both extremes. For example, the London dialect incorporates northern th forms of pronouns as well as the southern third person singular verb forms (Francis 85). It also uses the southern ch forms of words like cherch as opposed to the northern form, kirk (Jones Map I). In addition, the London dialect incorporates the southern form of the present participle (Pyles and Algeo 163) as well as the northern tendency to leave initial f's unvoiced, a feature expressed in the orthography of words like fader and fox instead of the southern forms, vader and vox (Jordan xv).

In addition to being centrally located, London also became a melting pot for English dialects for economic

reasons. Because land surrounding London was more valuable agriculturally than land in the north and west, population in London increased, making it the largest city in England (Baugh and Cable 188). In addition, London became the most important commercial city in the nation by the end of the 11th century (Williams 63). Because of its prosperity, people from all over England came to London, bringing their regional dialects with them (Williams 86). This migration to London by people from different regions probably accounts for the way London English incorporated features of other Middle English dialects (Baugh and Cable 189).

Another factor that helps explain the rise of the London standard is the presence of the court. As we saw in the Old English period, the West Saxon dialect became the dialect of prestige when the court was located at Winchester. But when William the Conqueror became king of England in 1066, he built his residence at Westminster, two miles away from London, transforming the city into the political, as well as the commercial center of England (Williams 63). Because the court was located there, the London dialect became the prestige dialect, even though the language spoken by the nobility at the time was French. Since the court was located in London, the laws of the land and official documents were issued from there as well. According to Baugh and Cable, after the use of French gave way to English, the language found in these documents

became the basis for Standard English (189). In addition, because the court was in London, the court poets, such as Chaucer, also wrote in London English. While Standard English is not based upon Chaucer's works, his texts were read throughout England and may be responsible for spreading the influence of the London dialect (Baugh and Cable 189).

Although it was not introduced to England until 1476, the printing press plays perhaps the most influential role in making the London dialect the national standard. When Caxton brought the printing press to England, he set up the press in London and translated texts into the current speech of London (Baugh and Cable 190). According to Myers and Hoffman, printing helped eliminate the dialectical diversity that existed between copies of texts (166). Because London became the center of the printing industry, it "reinforced the prestige of London English throughout the country" (166).

In order to study how English changed during the Middle English period, I analyze the use of personal pronouns in the Middle English works The Owl and the Nightingale, The Fox and the Wolf, and Piers Plowman. These three texts come from the Southwestern part of England. I specifically pick texts from this area because it corresponds to the area in which the West Saxon dialect was used, the standard literary dialect during the Anglo-

Saxon period. (See Appendix) In addition, examining Southwestern texts from different centuries throughout the Middle English period allows me to trace the shift in the "standard" English dialect from the West Saxon dialect in the Anglo-Saxon period to the London dialect, the dialect of prestige during the Middle Ages. I also examine Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls, which was written between 1373 and 1378, to see how close the London and Southwestern dialects are at this time. My baseline text is the Anglo-Saxon poem The Dream of the Rood. I also use Bright's paradigm of Old English pronouns as an additional baseline text to cover pronoun cases not present in The Dream of the Rood.

Methodology

The following paradigm for Anglo-Saxon pronouns is set forth in Bright's Old English Grammar and Reader (23).

First Person Pronouns

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Nominative	ic, I	wit	wē
Genitive	mīn	uncer	ūser, ūre
Dative	mē	unc	ūs
Accusative	mec, mē	uncit, unc	ūsic, ūs

Second Person Pronouns

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Nominative	ðū	git	gē
Genitive	ðīn	incer	ēower
Dative	ðē	inc	ēow
Accusative	ðēc, ðē	incit, inc	ēowic, ēow

Third Person Pronouns

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Nominative	hē	hit	hēo, hīe	hēo, hīe
Genitive	his	his	hire	hira
Dative	him	him	hire	him, heom
Accusative	hine	hit	hēo, hīe	hēo, hīe

The Dream of the Rood, taken from the Vercelli Book written in the second half of the tenth century, serves as the baseline text for this linguistic analysis. The first person pronouns in The Dream of the Rood closely follow the paradigm set forth in Bright's Old English Grammar and Reader.

The word ic is used exclusively for the nominative pronoun. The first occurrence of this pronoun is in line 1 of the poem: "Hwæt, ic swefna cyst secgan wylle."

Although The Dream of the Rood does not contain any occurrences of the dual first person nominative pronoun, it does contain one instance of the first person plural nominative wē: "Hwætð ere wē ðær grēotende gōde hwīle/ stōdon on stað ole syðð an stefn ūp gewāt/ hilderinca'" (ll. 70-72).

For the first person genitive case, The Dream of the Rood contains only the singular pronoun, min. It appears,

for example, in lines 130-31: "mīn mundbyrd is/ geriht tō
ƿǣre rōde."

For the both dative and accusative cases, mē is used throughout the poem, as in lines 83-84: "'On mē Bearn Godes
ƿrōwode hwile.'"

In The Dream of the Rood, us is used for both the first person plural accusative and dative, as the following line illustrates: "hē ūs onlȳsde ond ūs līf forgeaf" (l. 147).

This poem also displays one of the dual case forms, the accusative unc. This pronoun refers to just the dreamer and the rood: "'Bysmeredon hie unc bütū
ætgædere'" (l. 48).

The Dream of the Rood contains few second person pronouns. It does contain some second person singular pronouns, but no dual or plural second person pronouns. For the singular pronouns, the scribe uses ƿē for the accusative and ðū for the nominative. Examples of these pronouns can be found in lines 95-96: "'Nū ic ƿē hāte,
hæ leð mīn se lēofa, ƿæt ðū ƿās gesyhð e secge
mannum.'"

The poem displays several third person pronouns, but none of them are feminine. For the masculine nominative, the scribe uses he throughout the poem. Likewise, his is used for the genitive case, as in the following lines:

"'Dēað hē ƿær byrigde; hwæð ere eft Dryhten ārās/ mid

his miclan mihte mannum to helpe'" (ll. 101-02). Him is used for the dative case: "'Ongunnon him ꝥ ā moldern wyrcan/ beornas on banan gesyhð e'" (65-66). In lines 60-61 there is an example of hine used as the masculine accusative: "'Genamon hīe ꝥ ær ælmihtigne God,/ āhōfon hine of ðam hefian wīte.'" "

For the third person neuter nominative, the scribe uses the pronoun hit. It is found, for instance, in the following passage:

Hwæðre ic ꝥurh ꝥæt gold ongytan meahte
 earmra ærgewin, ꝥæt hit ærest ongan
 swætan on ꝥā swīðran healfe. (18-20)

For the plural nominative, the scribe usually uses the pronoun hie, as in line 63: "'Ālēdon hīe ꝥær limwērigne, gestōdon him æt his līce hēafðum.'" However, in one line he uses hi for the same purpose: "'ꝥurhdrifan hī mē mid deorcan næglum"' (46).

In The Dream of the Rood there are two pronouns used for the third person plural genitive case: heora and hira. In lines 30-31 the scribe writes, "'strange fēondas,/ . . . hēton mē heora wergas habban.'" The other form, hira, appears in line 47: "'Ne dorste ic hira ænigum sceðð an.'" "

Although Old English did not have any reflexive pronouns such as myself or herself, writers did convey reflexive meanings by using other pronouns. For example,

in lines 44-45 we find "Rod wæs ic aræred; ahof ic rīcne Cyning, / heofona Hlāford; hyldan mē ne dorste.'" In this sentence, the scribe has used the first person accusative pronoun mē as a reflexive. In line 39 an accusative pronoun, this time the third person masculine hine, is used in the reflexive function: "Ongyrede hine þā geong Hæleð -- þæt wæs God ælmihtig.'" In one line, the scribe also uses the third person dative plural pronoun him as a reflexive: "Genāman me þær strange fēondas, / geworhton him þær tō wæfersýne'" (30-31). On one occasion, the scribe of The Dream of the Rood comes close to using what looks like a modern reflexive pronoun:

Hwæt, mē þā geweorðode wuldres Ealdor
ofer holtwudu, heofonrīces Weard,
swylce swā hē his mōdor ēac, Mārian sylfe,
ælmihtig God for ealle menn
geweorðode ofer eall wifa cynn. (90-94)

The pronoun paradigm for The Dream of the Rood is illustrated by the following charts.

First Person Pronouns

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Nominative	ic		wē
Genitive	mīn		
Dative	mē		ūs
Accusative	mē	unc	ūs
Reflexive	mē		

Second Person Pronouns

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Nominative	ǰū		
Genitive			
Dative	pē		
Accusative			

Third Person Pronouns

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Nominative	hē	hit		hīe, hī
Genitive	his			heora, hira
Dative	him			him
Accusative	hine			
Reflexive	hine		sylfe	him

Analysis of Pronouns in Middle English Literature

The Southwestern Dialect

The Owl and the Nightingale

In order to analyze pronoun changes during the Middle English period, I examine four Middle English texts and compare the pronouns to the baseline text. The first Middle English piece, The Owl and the Nightingale, is one of the first vernacular poems to appear after the Norman conquest (Atkins xii) and consequently shows a remarkable blend of the Old and Middle English features. It survives in two manuscripts, the MS Cotton Caligula A ix, written in the early thirteenth century, and the MS Jesus College, Oxford, 29, written in the fourteenth century. The exemplar, however, dates back to the period 1190-1210 (Atkins xxxv). Scholars consider the Cotton MS more reliable than the Jesus text because the Cotton MS has fewer scribal errors, though both are copied from the same intermediate text. I base my analysis on the Cotton MS although I include significant variants from the Jesus MS.

Although this work is considered to be a Middle English poem, the scribe of The Owl and the Nightingale still uses many Anglo-Saxon pronouns, or slight modifications of them, especially for the nominative

pronouns. In the first line of the poem, "Ich was in one sumere dale," we see that the scribe is using an Anglo-Saxon first person nominative pronoun, Ich. Although the pronoun is spelled ic in Anglo-Saxon, the word is pronounced the same in Middle English, [I^ˈC]. The scribe of The Owl continues to use this pronoun throughout almost all of the poem for the first person nominative. There is, however, one occurrence of the Anglo-Saxon pronoun ic in the Cotton MS: Enes þ u sunge, ic wo[t] wel ware" (l. 1049). The scribe of the Jesus MS uses ic much more frequently than the Cotton scribe. Although the Jesus scribe uses ich almost exclusively through the first part of the poem, after line 750 ic appears with increasing frequency. Atkins suggests that this phenomenon is due to the intermediate text's being copied by two different scribes (xxvi).

For the first person plural nominative case, the scribe uses we, an Anglo-Saxon pronoun that the language has retained up through Modern English.

When using the first person singular genitive case, the scribe of the Cotton MS uses two other pronouns in addition to min, the form found in The Dream of the Rood: mine and mi. In fact, he uses all three of these pronouns within one sentence:

Iwis for þine [vu]le lete,
wel [oft ich] mine song forlete;

min horte atfliƿ ƿ falt mi tonge,
 wonne ƿu art [to me] iƿrunge. (35-38)

In the same sentence, however, the scribe of the Jesus MS chooses to use a different pronoun:

Iwis for ƿine [vu]le lete
 Wel ofte ich my songe furlete;
 Min heorte atflyhƿ ƿ falt my tunge
 Hwenne ƿu art to me iƿrunge. (35-38)

Here it appears that the Jesus scribe uses the pronoun min in front of words that begin with a vowel sound, but uses the pronoun my in front of words beginning with a consonant sound.

For the first person plural genitive case, the scribe of the Cotton MS again uses different pronouns for the same case: the Anglo-Saxon form ure and a variant of it, hure. In line 118 we read of the birds replying to the falcon, "Iwis it was ure o ƿer bro ƿer." However, in lines 185-86 the nightingale says to the owl, "ƿ mai hure ei ƿer wat h[e] wile/ mid ri ƿ te segge mid skile."

One quite interesting genitive pronoun in The Owl is found in lines 991-4:

We ƿer is betere of twe[n]e twom:
 ƿ at mon bo bliƿe, o ƿer grom?
 So bo hit euer in unker siƿe
 ƿ at ƿu bo sori ƿ ich bliƿe.

In this passage we see that the writer of The Owl and the

Nightingale uses a form of the Anglo-Saxon first person dual case possessive, uncer, even though the dual case had almost disappeared from the language by this time. The writer of The Owl consistently uses the dual case genitive in the poem when referring to just two people.

In The Owl we see me used as both the first person singular dative and accusative pronouns, as is done in The Dream of the Rood. At times the scribe also uses the pronoun me in impersonal constructions. For example, in line 39 the nightingale says, "Me luste bet speten þan singe/ Of þine fule 303 elinge." In addition, me is also used in reflexive constructions, as in the following lines:

7 if ich me loki wit þe bare,
 7 me schilde wit þe blete,
 ne reche ich no 3t of þine þrete. (56-58)

Similarly, as in The Dream of the Rood, us is used for both the plural dative and the plural accusative cases. An unusual dative case appears, though, in line 1733 in both the Cotton and Jesus manuscripts: "Hunke schal itide harm schonde." Here again the text has retained an Anglo-Saxon dual case. Atkins argues that hunke derived from the Anglo-Saxon first person dual dative unc (147).

When the Cotton scribe writes the second person singular nominative pronoun, he always uses the Anglo-Saxon pronoun þu. Occasionally this pronoun is contracted with

other words, as in line 95: "Vel wostu *p*at hi do *p*
*p*arinne."

Just as with the first person genitive pronouns, the scribe uses three different forms for the second person singular genitive case. Line 58 reads, "ne reche ich no 3 t of *p*ine *p*rete." In lines 73-74, though, two other forms of the pronoun appear: "*P*i bodi is short, *p*i swore is smal, / grettere is *p*in heued *p*an *p*u al."

The scribe uses the Anglo-Saxon form *p*e for both the second person singular dative and accusative case, as the Anglo-Saxon writers do.

For the second person plural nominative pronoun, both scribes use a modification of the Anglo-Saxon pronoun *gē*. Line 116 of the Cotton MS reads, "Segge [*P*] me 3if *3*e hit wiste," while the Jesus MS reads, "Segge *P* me if *ye* hit wiste" for the same line.

The Owl and the Nightingale also contains an example of the second person plural genitive pronoun:

Schille ich an utest uppen ow grede,
ich shl swo stronge ferde lede,

*P*at ower pr[u]de schal aualle. (1683-85)

Although the scribe has dropped the initial *e*, this pronoun is still quite similar to the Anglo-Saxon form *ēower*.

In the dative case of the second person plural pronouns, the scribe uses three different forms: ow, eu, or ov. For instance, lines 114-115 in the Cotton MS reads,

"`Ov nas neuer icunde ƿarto:/ hit was idon ov a loƿ[e]
[cu]ste.'" However, the same lines in the Jesus MS read,
"Eu nas neuer icunde ƿerto:/ Hit wes idon eu a loƿe
custe.'" In line 1683 of the Cotton MS, however, the
scribe writes, "`Schille ich an utest uppen ow grede.'" The Jesus MS again has the form eu in this line. These pronouns appear to be forms of the Anglo-Saxon dative case ēow, exhibiting a weakening of the eo diphthong.

The third person nominative pronouns in The Owl also show similarities to Anglo-Saxon pronouns. For example, the masculine nominative pronoun is the Anglo-Saxon hē, the same pronoun we use in Modern English. The pronoun appears, for example, in lines 191-92: "`Maister Nichole of Guldeforde,/ he is wis an war of worde.'"

The The Owl and the Nightingale also retains the Anglo-Saxon third person neuter nominative pronoun, hit. The pronoun hit first appears in line 28: "hit was ƿare hule earding-stowe." The pronoun here appears exactly as it does in Anglo-Saxon texts. However, there is one instance in which the Cotton scribe uses the modern form of the pronoun. In line 118 he writes, "`Iwis it was ure o ƿer bro ƿer.'" The scribe of the Jesus manuscript uses hit in this line, though.

One interesting feature found in The Owl is the use of the third person masculine nominative he in place of the neuter hit. The first instance of this feature appears in

lines 21-24:

[B]et þu ʒ ht the dreim þat he were
 Of harpe ʒ pipe, þan he nere;
 Bet þu ʒ t þat he were i-shote
 Of harpe ʒ pipe þan of Prote.

While the antecedent to the pronoun he, dreim, is a word that derives from an Anglo-Saxon masculine noun, drēam (Kurath 1297), the scribe does not retain the Anglo-Saxon grammatical gender of nouns because, in line 136, he also uses the pronoun he to refer to trowe, a word that derives from an Anglo-Saxon neuter noun, trēow (Cassidy and Ringler 475). An analysis of other lines containing the pronoun he for the neuter nominative reveals its use is not limited to subordinate clauses as it is in the above lines either. However, although not always the case, he is most often used with action verbs, while hit is used mostly with be verbs.

For the third person feminine nominative pronoun, the scribe uses three different forms: heo, he, and ho. The heo form is the same as the Anglo-Saxon pronoun. Although he is rarely used for the feminine pronoun, it does appear at least once in the Cotton MS:

þos word a ʒ af þe ni ʒ tingale,
 ʒ after þare longe tale
he song so lude ʒ so scharpe,

riʒ t so me grulde schille harpe. (139-42).

The use of he as a feminine pronoun appears to be a scribal error, though, because in the Jesus MS the scribe supplies the correct form heo in line 141. The last feminine pronoun appears in line 19 which reads, "Ho was *Pe* gladur uor *Pe* rise." According to Mossé, the use of ho for the third person feminine nominative pronoun is taken from the Anglo-Saxon hēo (56). He argues that hēo started being pronounced as [h^o] even though writers were still spelling it heo. He suggests that the pronoun eventually became written as ho because people were writing the word as they pronounced it (56).

Other nominative pronouns we find in The Owl that retain some of their Anglo-Saxon characteristics are the third person plural pronouns. The Owl and the Nightingale contains two different nominative plural pronouns: ho and hi. In lines 75-76 we see the first form of the pronoun:

"*Ʒ* in eʒ ene boʒ col-blake ʒ brode, / riʒ t swo ho weren ipeint mid wode.'" Occasionally, though, the scribe uses heo, which is used for the plural nominative as well as the feminine nominative pronoun in Anglo-Saxon literature. An example of this pronoun appears in the following passage:

Ʒ u seist *Ʒ* at ich am manne [loð],
 an euereuch man is wið me wroð,
 an me mid stone ʒ lugge *Ʒ*reteƷ,
 an me tobu[r]ste ʒ tobeteteƷ,

an hwanne he hab[b]eƿ me ofslahe,
heo hongef me on heore hahe,
 ƿar ich ascheweƿe pie an crowe
 fro[m] ƿan ƿe ƿar is isowe. (1607-14)

Line 12, however, gives us an example of another nominative plural pronoun: "hi holde plaiding su ƿ e stronge." It appears that the plural pronoun used here is closer to the Anglo-Saxon pronoun hīe than it is to the northern form of the pronoun used in London. According to Mossé, the spelling of this pronoun changed from hīe to hi in much the same way that hēo changed to ho. Since the final vowel in hīe became weakened, people started pronouncing it [hī] and as a result, began to spell it that way as well (58).

In The Owl and the Nightingale, the pronoun his is used for both the masculine and the neuter genitive cases. For example, in line 111 we see the masculine case: "ƿe faucun was wroƿ wit his bridde." However, in lines 231-32 we see the same pronoun used for the neuter case: "ƿ eurich ƿing ƿat is lof misdede, / hit lueƿ ƿuster to his dede."

For the feminine genitive case, the scribe uses hire. This pronoun appears, for example, in the following passage:

ƿos hule abod fort hit was eve,
 ho ne miƷte no leng bileue,
 vor hire horte was so gret

Ʒat wel nez hire fnast atschet,
 Ʒwarp a word Ʒar-after longe. (41-45)

The Owl and the Nightingale contains several forms of the third person plural genitive pronoun. The form that seems the closest to the Anglo-Saxon pronoun is hoere, as in line 1612: "heo hongeƷ me on heore hahe." Another plural genitive form of the pronoun appears in the following passage:

Herof Ʒe lauedies to me meneƷ,
 an wel sore me ahweneƷ:
 wel neh min heorte wule tochine,
 hwon ich biholde hire pine. (1563-66)

The form of the plural pronoun that occurs most often is hore. One example of this form occurs in line 588: "Ʒar men goƷ oft to hore node." Mossé notes that this last form of the pronoun is found only in the Southern and Kentish dialects (59).

For the third person masculine dative case, the scribe uses the pronoun him. One example occurs in the following passage:

Maister Nichole of Guldeforde,
 he is wis an war of worde:
 he is of dome suƷe gleu,
 Ʒ him is loƷ eurich unƷeu. (191-94)

Him is also used for the masculine accusative case. One example appears in lines 121-22: "Worp hit ut mid Ʒe

alre-[vu]rste/ ꝥat his necke him to-berste!" The scribe of The Owl and the Nightingale, however, also uses hine for the masculine accusative case, just as the scribe of The Dream of the Rood does. For example, in line 873 we read, "Mid mine songe Ich hine pulte."

For the third person neuter accusative case, the scribe of The Owl and the Nightingale uses the same pronoun as is used in The Dream of the Rood: hit. For example, lines 95-96 read, "Vel wostu ꝥat hi doꝥ ꝥarinne,/ hi fuleꝥ hit up to ꝥe chinne."

The accusative case of the third person feminine pronoun used in The Owl is quite similar to the Anglo-Saxon pronoun hīe. It displays, though, the weakening of the final vowel as many other pronouns do. Examples of this pronoun appear in lines 29-31:

[ꝥ]e niȝtingale hi iseȝ,
 ꝥ hi bihod ꝥ ouerseȝ,
 ꝥ ꝥuȝte wel [vu]l of ꝥare hule.

This same pronoun is also used in reflexive constructions, as in lines 199-200: "ꝥo hule one wile hi biꝥoȝte,/ ꝥ after ꝥan ꝥis word upbroȝte."

Both the dative and the accusative third person plural pronouns show similarities to Anglo-Saxon pronouns, too. While Anglo-Saxon writers use heom for the dative case, the scribe of The Owl uses hom:

Ich wisse men mid min[e] songe,

Ʒat hi ne sunegi nowiht longe:

I bidde hom Ʒat heo iswike,

Ʒat [heo] heom seolue ne biswike. (927-30)

In this passage the Anglo-Saxon dative also appears as part of a reflexive construction, heom seolue. In addition, the accusative plural pronoun used in The Owl, hi, is also much like its Anglo-Saxon predecessor, hīe. One example of this form appears in lines 107-08: "'ho bro ʒ te his briddes mete, / bihold his neste, ise ʒ hi ete.'" "

The pronoun paradigm for The Owl and the Nightingale is summed up by the following charts.

First Person Pronouns

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Nominative	ich, ic		we
Genitive	mine, min, mi	unker	hure, ure
Dative	me	hunke	us
Accusative	me		us
Reflexive	me		

Second Person Pronouns

	Singular	Plural
Nominative	ƿu	3e, ye
Genitive	ƿine, ƿin, ƿi	ower
Dative	ƿe	ow, eu, ov
Accusative		

Third Person Pronouns

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Nominative	he	he, hit, it	ho, he, heo	hi, ho
Genitive	his	his	hire	hore, heore, hire
Dative	him			hom
Accusative	him, hine	hit, hine	hi	hi
Reflexive			hi	heom seolve

The Fox and the Wolf

Written between 1275 and 1300 (Dunn and Byrnes 166), in The Fox and the Wolf two different pronouns are used for the first person singular nominative. Line 36 reads, "Be stille, Ich hote, a Godes nome!" Here the scribe has retained the Anglo-Saxon pronoun, but the c no longer represents the sound [č̥] by itself. Instead, the language now requires a ch to produce the same sound. Yet in line 40 we see that the [č̥] sound is disappearing from the first person nominative by this time, for here the scribe writes, "I have leten *ƿ*ine hennen blod." Both forms of the pronoun appear throughout the poem, with the Ich form appearing slightly more frequently. In addition, though it is an orthographical rather than linguistic development, in this poem the first person singular nominative pronouns are always capitalized.

Used only once in the poem, we is the first person plural nominative pronoun. The only occurrence appears in line 64: "*ƿ*ene we weren wel awareke!"

As in The Owl and the Nightingale, there are three different pronouns for the first person singular genitive case in The Fox and the Wolf: mine, min, and mi. The form of the pronoun used most often is mine, as in line 100: "Nedde lust iben of mine mou*ƿ*e." The pronoun mi is used occasionally, as in line 193: "For Cristes loue, be mi

prest!'" Min, the form used in The Dream of the Rood, occurs in only one line: "' P ou hauest ben ofte min ifere" (185).

In The Fox and the Wolf, there are just two occurrences of the first person plural genitive pronoun, houre. One occurrence is in line 35: "'Houre hennen P ou dest ofte shome.'" It appears again in line 59: "'Ac weste hit houre cellerer.'"

Although there are no occurrences of the first person plural dative pronoun in this poem, the first person singular dative pronoun does appear. For this case, the scribe always uses me, as in line 219: "'And P erfore P ou were me loP.'"

Me is also used for the first person singular accusative case. For example, line 174 reads, "'Let me adoun to P e kome.'" However, no first person plural accusative pronouns appear in this poem.

In The Fox and the Wolf, the scribe uses you for the second person singular nominative pronoun. For example, line 139 reads, "Quod P e vox: `P ou art ounwiis!'" In addition, the scribe occasionally contracts this pronoun with other words when forming questions, as in line 196: "'Woltou, ' quod the vox, `srift ounderfonge?'"

Once more, as in The Owl and the Nightingale, the scribe uses three different second person singular genitive pronouns. Pine is the form used most often. For example,

it appears in line 63: "All pine bones he wold tobreke.'" The pronoun pi also appears frequently, as in line 133: "Ich am Reneuard, pi frend.'" The form pin, though, appears only in line 189: "Neltou?' quod the wolf, 'pin ore!'"

In The Fox and the Wolf, the scribe uses the same pronoun, pe, for both the second person singular dative and accusative cases. One occurrence of the dative case appears in line 34: "Crist pe zeue kare.'" An example of the accusative case, on the other hand, appears in line 225: "Ich pe for zeue at pisse nede.'"

Similarly, the scribe uses the pronoun ou for both the second person plural dative and accusative cases. One passage we contains examples of both of these cases:

Men seide pat pou on pine liue
Misferdest mid mine wiue.

Ich pe aperseiude one stounde,
And in bedde togedere ou founde:

Ich was ofte ou ful ney

And in bedde togedere ou sey. (211-16)

For the third person masculine pronouns, the scribe of The Fox and the Wolf uses the same forms as are used in The Dream of the Rood, with the exception of the accusative case. For the accusative case, the scribe most often uses him instead of hine, as in lines 70-71: "On auenture, his wiit him brohute/ To one putte wes water inne." This

pronoun is also used in reflexive constructions, as in line 83: "Inou he gon him bi *penche*." However, in one line the scribe uses the same form found in The Dream of the Rood:

"*Ʒe* vox hine ikneu wel for his kun" (123).

The scribe of The Fox and the Wolf also uses Anglo-Saxon pronouns for both the nominative and the accusative third person neuter cases. An example of the nominative case appears in line 128: "'Ich wene hit is Sigrim *Ʒat* Ich here.'" The accusative case occurs in the following lines:

Ac weste hit houre cellerer

Ʒat *Ʒou* were icomen her,

He wolde sone after *Ʒe* *Ʒonge*

Mid pikes and stoues and stoues stronge. (59-62)

All of the third person plural pronouns used in The Fox and the Wolf also show similarities to Anglo-Saxon pronouns. For instance, one of the nominative pronouns used in The Fox is hy, which appears to be an alternate spelling for the pronoun used in The Dream of the Rood, hi. One example of this pronoun occurs in lines 283-84: "To *Ʒe* putte hy gonnen gon,/ All mid pikes and stoues and ston--." The other nominative plural form that appears in The Fox is hoe, which appears in the following lines:

Ʒer freren woneden, swi *Ʒe* stey,

Ʒo *Ʒat* hit com to *Ʒe* time

Ʒat hoe shulden arisen ine,

Forto suggesten here houssong. (262-65)

The previous passage also contains an example of the third person genitive plural pronoun, here. The scribe of The Fox and the Wolf also uses the pronoun hoere for the genitive case, as in the following lines: "Þis ilke frere heyte Ailmer--/ He wes hoere maister curtiler" (271-72). This pronoun exhibits a change in the diphthong of the pronoun used in The Dream of the Rood, heora.

For the third person dative and accusative plural pronouns, the scribe of The Fox and the Wolf uses the same form, which indicates a leveling of inflections. An example of the dative case appears in line 45: "'Ich haue hem [hennen] leten eddre-blod.'" An occurrence of the accusative case is found in lines 266-67: "O frere Þer wes among/ Of here [freren] slep hem shulde awecche." This pronoun appears to come from the Anglo-Saxon pronoun heom, displaying a simplification of the diphthong.

In addition, this text has one occurrence of a modern reflexive pronoun:

Þe vox hine ikneu wel for his kun,
 And Þo eroust knom wiit to him;
 For he Þoute, mid sommne ginne,
Himself houpbringe, Þene wolf Þerinne.

(123-26)

The following charts illustrate the pronoun paradigm for The Fox and the Wolf.

First Person Pronouns

	Singular	Plural
Nominative	Ich, I	we
Genitive	mine, min, mi	houre
Dative	me	
Accusative	me	

Second Person Pronouns

	Singular	Plural
Nominative	<i>pou</i>	
Genitive	<i>pine, pin, pi</i>	
Dative	<i>pe</i>	ou
Accusative	<i>pe</i>	ou

Third Person Pronouns

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Nominative	he	hit		hy, hoe
Genitive	his			here, hoere
Dative	him			hem
Accusative	him, hine	hit		hem
Reflexive	him, himself			

Piers Plowman

Although Langland is officially considered a speaker of the West Midlands dialect, his home was not far north of the boundary modern linguists distinguish as the limits of the Southwestern dialect, and so his language exhibits many characteristics of southern speech. However, even the pronouns in the Southwestern dialect were, by this time, beginning to look more like Modern English than Anglo-Saxon. In addition, since Langland spent part of his life in London, an examination of Piers Plowman, which was written between 1377 and 1379, provides the opportunity to examine how the London dialect was exerting its influence upon writers with other native dialects at this time.

Langland uses I exclusively as the first person nominative pronoun throughout Piers Plowman. In line 2 of the prologue Langland writes, "I shoop me into [a] shrou[d] as I a sheep weere." According to Mosse, the use of I instead of ich or ik became common during the 14th century, although ich was still used south of the Thames (55). Since Southwestern writers still commonly used ich during the 14th century, the use of I in Piers Plowman could be a conscious effort on Langland's part to imitate the London dialect.

For the first person singular genitive case, Langland uses just one form: my. One occurrence of this pronoun can

be found in line 193 of the prologue: "For I herde my sire seyn, seuen yeer ypassed."

As the scribe of The Dream of the Rood does, Langland uses the pronoun me for the first person singular accusative and dative cases. In addition, he also uses it in reflexive constructions, as in line 7 of the prologue: "I was wery forwared and wente me to reste."

While Langland uses the same pronoun as earlier writers did for the first person plural nominative case, we, the forms he uses for the plural genitive, dative, and accusative are slightly different. For the genitive case he uses oure, as in line 32 of the prologue: "it semeþ to oure si 3 t þat swiche men þryueþ." This pronoun is quite similar to the one used in The Fox and the Wolf, but Langland has dropped the initial h. For the accusative and dative plural cases, Langland uses vs. Both cases are present in the following lines from the prologue:

if we grucche of his gamen he wol greuen vs alle,
Cracchen vs or clawen vs, and in hise clouches
holde

That vs loþeþ þe lif er he late vs passe."

(154-55).

As Bolton explains, the letter y is often used as a positional variant of u, especially in the initial position (144).

For the second person singular pronouns, Langland uses what are essentially the same pronouns as found in The Dream of the Rood, although they do exhibit some change. For example, Langland uses ƿow for the nominative case, as in line 26 of Passus I: "ƿow worƿe ƿe wers whan ƿow werche sholdest.'" Even though the word does not look the same as the Anglo-Saxon pronoun ƿu, the words are still pronounced the same. Occasionally, though, Langland replaces the thorn in the pronoun with a th. An example of this form appears in line 215 of the prologue: "Thow my test bettre meete myst on Maluerne hilles."

Langland does use the Anglo-Saxon pronoun ƿin for the second person singular genitive case. However, sometimes he drops the final n from the pronoun. Examples of both of these forms appear in lines 40-41 of Passus I: "For ƿe fend and ƿi flessh folwen togidere,/ And that [shende ƿ] ƿi soule; [set] it in ƿin herte.'"

For the accusative case, Langland uses a form quite similar to the one found in The Dream of the Rood. One occurrence of this pronoun is found in line 125 of the prologue: "Crist kepe ƿee sire kyng."

Although it is spelled differently, the pronoun Langland uses for the second person plural nominative case, ye, is pronounced the same as the Anglo-Saxon pronoun ge. One occurrence of this pronoun is found in line 13 of Passus I: "wolde ƿat ye wrouz te as his word teche .'"

For the second person plural genitive, dative, and accusative cases, Langland uses what are essentially modern pronouns. Youre, the genitive pronoun, appears in line 43 of Passus I: "[A] madame, mercy', quod I, 'me likeþ wel youre wordes.'" Langland uses the pronoun yow for both the accusative and dative cases. Both of these cases are found in the following lines from Passus I:

For he is fader of feiþ, and formed yow alle
Boþe with fel and with face, and yaf yow fyue
wittes

For to worshipe hym þerwiþ while ye ben here.
(14-16)

In addition, Langland uses yow as part of a reflexive construction, which appears in line 201 of the prologue: "For hadde ye rattes youre [raik] ye kouþ e no 3 t rule yowselue.'"

Instead of using an Anglo-Saxon form for the third person feminine nominative pronoun in Piers Plowman, Langland uses she. In line 75 of Passus I he writes, "Holi chirche I am, quod she; þow ou 3 test me to knowe.'" Mossé remarks that the form she was used almost exclusively in the East Midlands dialect (56). Therefore, Langland's use of this pronoun may indicate an imitation of the London dialect. However, M. L. Samuels argues that both heo and she existed in Langland's own dialect (243).

For the third person feminine genitive case, though, Langland uses the same pronoun as is used by Anglo-Saxon writers, hire. It appears, for example, in line 10 of Passus I: "I was afered of hire face þeiʒ she fair weere."

By the time Langland wrote Piers Plowman, the h had been dropped from the third person neuter nominative case, resulting in our modern pronoun, it. Langland writes, "I slombered in a slepyng, it sweyed so murye" (Prologue, l. 10). Langland also uses this form for the neuter accusative case, as in lines 167-69 of the prologue: "Reson me sheweþ / To bugge a belle of bras or of briʒ t siluer / And knyttten it on a coler for oure commune profit." Mosse says the dropping of the h occurred because it was weakened in its unstressed position (56). After the 14th century, it permanently replaced hit as the neuter nominative pronoun in literature (Mossé 56).

In Piers Plowman the pronoun used for the third person plural nominative is þei. Line 31 of the prologue reads, "And somme chosen [hem] chaffare; þei cheueden þe bettre." The use of the th form of the pronoun reveals the Scandinavian influence on the language. According to Baugh and Cable, hi would have been the normal development of the Anglo-Saxon pronoun, but the influence of the Scandinavians caused hie to be replaced with þei, which comes from the Old Norse þeir (158).

For the third person plural genitive, Langland uses hire. For example, lines 28-30 of the prologue read, "As Ancres and heremites þat holden hem in hire selles,/ Coueiten noȝt in contree to [cairen] aboute/ For no likerous liflode hire likame to plese."

Langland uses hem for both the third person plural dative and accusative cases, as does the scribe of The Fox and the Wolf. In addition, this pronoun is also used reflexively, as in line 20 of the prologue: "Some putten hem to plouȝ, pleiden ful selde."

In Piers Plowman Langland uses hym for the masculine accusative and dative cases. This pronoun appears, for example, in lines 172-3 of the prologue: "'And if hym list for to laike þenne loke we mowen,/ And peeren in his presence þe while hym pleye like.'"

Langland use the Anglo-Saxon pronouns he and his for the third person masculine nominative and genitive cases. However, sometimes he uses another form for the genitive case. One occurrence of this pronoun is in lines 78-79 of the prologue: "Were þe Bisshop yblessed and worȝ boþe hise eris/ His seel sholde noȝt be sent to decyue þe peple."

The following charts illustrate the pronoun paradigm for Piers Plowman.

First Person Pronouns

	Singular	Plural
Nominative	I	we
Genitive	my	oure
Dative	me	vs
Accusative	me	vs
Reflexive	me	

Second Person Pronouns

	Singular	Plural
Nominative	<i>pow, thow</i>	ye
Genitive	<i>pi, pin</i>	youre
Dative		yow
Accusative	<i>pee</i>	yow
Reflexive		yowselue

Third Person Pronouns

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Nominative	he	it	she	Ʒei
Genitive	his, hise	his	hire	hire, hir
Dative	hym			hem
Accusative	hym	it		hem
Reflexive	hymself			hem

The London Dialect

Parliament of Fowls

Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls serves as an example of the London dialect at roughly the same time that Langland wrote Piers Plowman. Analyzing a text representative of the London dialect allows me to compare the London dialect to the Southwestern dialect to determine how similar the two dialects are at this point. By the time Chaucer wrote Parliament of Fowls (1373-1378), the pronouns used in the London dialect had changed considerably from the pronouns used in The Dream of the Rood. However, Chaucer still retains some Anglo-Saxon pronouns in addition to the ones that still survive in the language today.

Chaucer's third person pronouns show the most similarities to the pronouns used in The Dream of the Rood. For example, Chaucer uses the Anglo-Saxon third person neuter nominative pronoun in addition to the modern form. In lines 27-8 he writes, "To rede forth hit gan me so delite/ That al that day me thoughte but a lyte." Chaucer usually uses it, though, as in lines 18-19: "Agon it happede me for to behold/ Upon a bok, was write with letteres olde." Although he sometimes uses hit for the nominative pronoun, Chaucer uses the modern form it in the accusative case.

Like the Anglo-Saxon writers, Chaucer uses his for the third person neuter genitive pronoun. One occurrence of this form appears in the following lines:

For overal where that I myn eyen caste
 Were trees clad with leves that ay shal laste,
 Eche in his kynde, of colour fresh and greene
 As emeroude, that joye was to seene. (172-74)

Chaucer also uses some Anglo-Saxon forms for the third person feminine pronouns. For example, he uses hire for the genitive pronoun: "And in a prive corner in desport/
 Fond I Venus and hire proter Richesse" (ll. 260-61). He also uses an alternate spelling of this pronoun, hyre: "Hyre gilte heres with a goldene thred/
 Ibounden were, untressed as she lay" (ll. 267-68).

In addition, Chaucer uses the Anglo-Saxon pronoun hire for the feminine dative case. For example, in line 275 he writes, "And Bachus, god of wyn, sat hire besyde."

Chaucer uses slightly different forms of the Anglo-Saxon feminine accusative pronoun too. In line 270, for example, he uses hir, "But thus I let hir [Venus] lie." This pronoun is just slightly different from the Anglo-Saxon pronoun hire, showing a reduction of the final e. Chaucer uses another form in which he substitutes a y for the i used in the Anglo-Saxon pronoun: "Men myght hyre [Venus] sen--and sothly for to say" (l. 270).

However, for the third person feminine nominative pronoun, Chaucer uses she as Langland does. One example of this pronoun appears in line 216: "She couchede hem after as they shulde serve."

Chaucer does not use an Anglo-Saxon pronoun for the third person nominative plural case. Instead, he always uses the Scandinavian pronoun they. This pronoun appears, for example, in lines 55-56: "And rightful folk shul gon after they deye/ To hevене."

In Parliament of Fowls, Chaucer uses two different forms for the third person genitive plural case. One form, here, appears in lines 39-40: "Thanne telleth it here speche and al the blysse/ That was betwix hem til the day gan mysse." An occurrence of the other form, her, can be found in lines 8-9: "For al be that I knowe nat Love in dede,/ Ne wot how that he quiteth Folk her hyre."

For both the third person dative and accusative plural cases, Chaucer uses the pronoun hem, which demonstrates the leveling of inflections that occurred during the Middle English period. This form of the pronoun appears to derive from the Anglo-Saxon dative pronoun, heom. Chaucer uses this pronoun as part of a reflexive construction, too. The reflexive appears, for example, in lines 233-34: "Wemen inowe, of whiche some ther weere/ Fayre of hemself, and some of hem were gay."

Chaucer uses the pronouns found in The Dream of the Rood, the same ones used today, for the third person masculine nominative and genitive cases: he and his. However, Chaucer uses hym for both the dative and accusative cases, once again indicating the leveling of inflections that occurred during the Middle English period. This pronoun is an orthographical variant of the pronoun used in The Dream of the Rood, him.

For the first person singular nominative case in Parliament of Fowls, Chaucer always uses I. For example, in lines 6-7 Chaucer wrote, "So sore, iwis, that whan I on hym thynke,/ Nat wot I wel wher that I flete or synke." Similarly, for the first person plural nominative case, Chaucer uses only we.

Like the previous authors, Chaucer uses more than one form for the first person singular genitive case. One form that he uses is myn, a variant of the pronoun used in The Dream of the Rood, min. It appears, for example, in line 169: "With that myn hand he tok in his anon." However, Chaucer also uses the modern form of the pronoun, as in the following lines: "All this mene I be Love that my felynge/ Astonyeth with his wondyrful werkyng" (4-5).

For the first person plural genitive case, Chaucer uses a form that exhibits a transition between the Anglo-Saxon pronoun ure and the Modern English form our. It appears in line 53-54: "And that oure present worldes

lyves space/ Nys but a maner deth, what wey we trace.'" "

Like Langland, Chaucer uses thow for the second person singular nominative case. This pronoun is found in line 116 which reads, "Be thow myn helpe in this, for thow mayst best!"

As with the first person singular genitive pronouns, Chaucer uses two different forms for the second person genitive singular case. One of those forms is much like the Anglo-Saxon pronoun, þ̄in. The other form is also similar to the Anglo-Saxon form, but without the final n. Both forms appear in the following lines: "It stondesth writen in thy face,/ Thyn errour, though thow telle it not to me" (155-56). Chaucer also uses the pronoun thy as part of a reflexive construction, which occurs in line 73: "And he seyde, `Know thyself first inmortal.'" "

For the second person dative cases, Chaucer uses the for the singular pronoun and yow for the plural. The dative singular case appears in lines 157-58: "But dred the not to come into this place,/ For this writyng nys nothyng ment bi the.'" One example of the plural pronoun is found in line 16: "On bokes rede I ofte, as I yow tolde." Chaucer also uses yow for the accusative plural pronoun, as in line 138: "This strem yow ledeth to the sorweful were.'" "

The pronoun paradigm for Parliament of Fowls can be summed up by the following charts.

First Person Pronouns

	Singular	Plural
Nominative	I	we
Genitive	my, myn	oure
Dative	me	
Accusative	me	

Second Person Pronouns

	Singular	Plural
Nominative	thow	
Genitive	thy, thyn	
Dative	the	yow
Accusative		yow
Reflexive	thysel	

Third Person Pronouns

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Nominative	he	it, hit	she	they
Genitive	his	his	hire, hyre	her, here
Dative	hym		hire	hem
Accusative	hym	it	hyre, hir	hem
Reflexive				hemself

Conclusion

Though all four of the texts I analyze are written in Middle English, we can see that Middle English was really a language in transition. Indeed, as Chaucer himself notes in the prohemium of Book II of Troilus and Criseyde, "Ye knowe ek that in forme of speche is change" (22). Although I found many other differences between the texts in terms of syntax, verb conjugations, and vocabulary, to name a few, the differences in the pronouns alone demonstrate that the language is not static at this time -- nor at any other time for that matter.

The changes in pronouns serve as a microcosm of the larger changes in the language which eventually result in the formulation of the London standard. Because they are so frequently used, it would seem that pronouns would be the least likely to change. One might think that the constant use of such a limited set of words as pronouns in daily discourse and continual copying of texts would tend to preserve their forms. And yet, as this study demonstrates, the pronouns illustrate the evolution of the language toward the London standard.

The changes in pronouns demonstrate the tendency of the language toward simplification. For example, the number of pronoun forms have decreased from fifty-three in Bright's paradigm to some thirty-four used in Chaucer's

Parliament of Fowls. Moreover, the dual case still in evidence in The Owl and the Nightingale (circa 1200) has disappeared by Chaucer's time. By the late fourteenth century, the years of Langland and Chaucer, the second person plural pronouns forms have been reduced to the y- forms (yow). In the same era, the first person nominative pronoun has largely been simplified to I, although Chaucer occasionally uses the southern ich for emphasis or, as in the Reeve's Tale, ik for characterization (Fisher 964), both exceptions, however, noteworthy in that they represent conscious variations from the standard. This movement toward simplification and reduction of forms indicates the movement toward a standard dialect.

The London standard becomes the dominant dialect, certainly by the late fourteenth century, a dominance evidenced by the evolution of the pronouns. The language of Piers Plowman, for example, shows that the London dialect has had an impact upon the writers in the southwest by 1375. While the London dialect may not have become the standard dialect by this time, the language was certainly moving in that direction. Norman Blake sums up the situation well when he writes,

"In the medieval period change in language is a constant theme, particularly towards the end of the period when men were beginning to understand what advantages might accrue from having a

standard language, for a standard was then beginning to emerge" (41).

For writers such as Langland, these advantages would be the cachet of acceptance by the larger urban audience, the imprimatur of the more elite literate classes.

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Appendix

Map of Old English Dialect

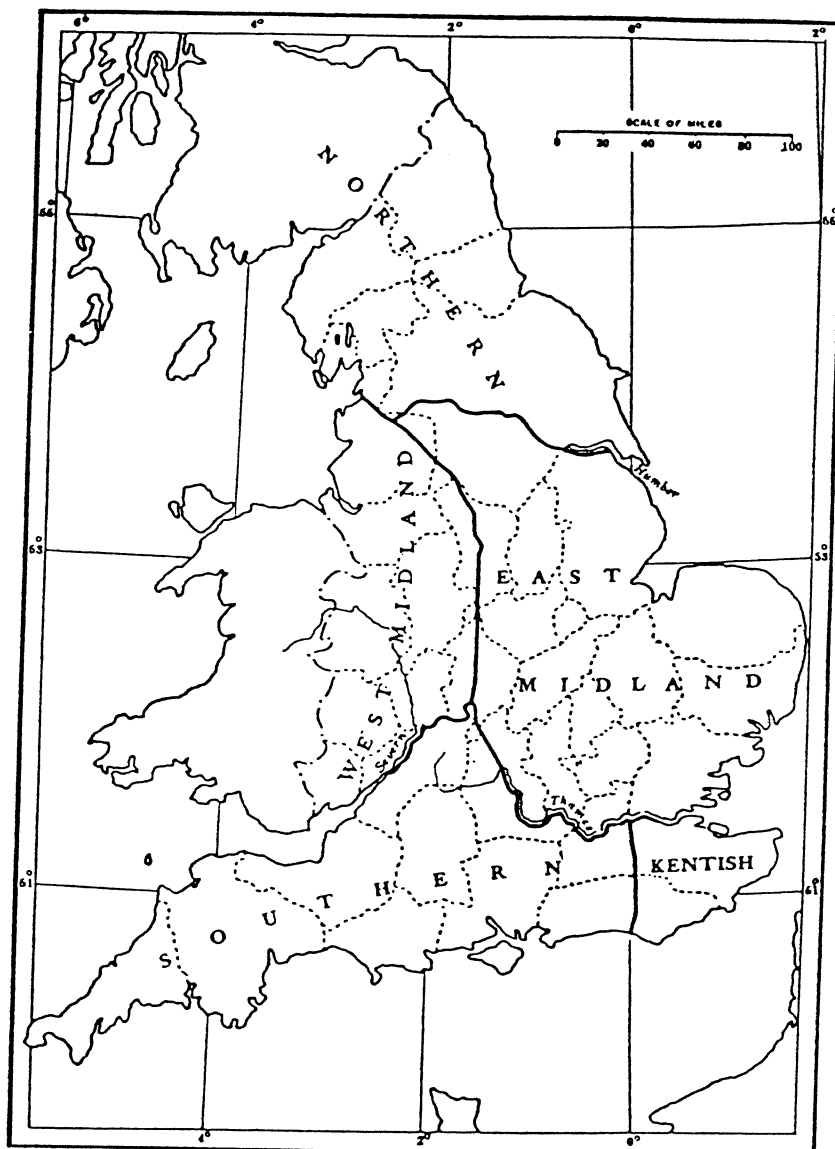


THE DIALECTS OF OLD ENGLISH

Note. Only the major dialect areas are indicated. That the Saxon settlements north of the Thames (see § 34) had their own dialect features is apparent in Middle English.

(Baugh and Cable 52)

Map of Middle English Dialects



THE DIALECTS OF MIDDLE ENGLISH

(Baugh and Cable 186)