Middle English Word List: West Midlands Dialect

The following handout is a supplement to the Middle English Word List for the London Dialect. This list contains some of the more unusual vocabulary and dialect traits for the West Midlands, that area to the northwestern side of England where the author of *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* wrote. Since there is no standardized spelling in the fourteenth century, be alert for words that look like one thing but mean another. Note that voiced consonants (particularly *b*, *d*, and *g*) tend to become unvoiced at the ends of words in the West Midlands Dialect, and thus transform into *p*, *t*, and *k* respectively. Thus, *<lomp>* for "lamb," and *<justyfyet>* for "justified" and *<nothynk>* for "nothing."

Also beware of the Pearl Poet's tendency to switch *qu* with *wh* at the beginning of words, and vice-versa. So the word *<quen>* is actually the modern word "when," and so on.

Also watch for *metathesis* (inverted letters) such as spelling the word "Bird" as "Brid" or "whale" as "hwale." A final warning: quoting sources written in Middle English will annoy your computer's spell-check. Allow extra time for proofreading.

-<ande>: as a suffix, this indicates the present participle when attached to the end of a verb. Thus, "walkande" is equivalent to Mn. English "walking."

anon: at once, immediately

aventure: chance

burg; berg: city; town; cf. modern "Pittsburg" in America and "Hamburg" in Germany.

burn: man; warrior

but, but if: unless

can, kan, conne, konne: to be able, to know, to know how; to learn, to understand.

con: did
certe, certes, certes: certainly

chorl, churle: a low-born or uncouth fellow; a man (cf. modern "churlish")
clepe(n): call, name, mention
clerk, clerke: a cleric; a priest; a scholar; a literate man
comlok, comlych, comelok: comely; attractive;
daunger: lordship, power, control; ungraciousness, disdain
degree: rank, status, social condition
del, deel: bit, part
deme, deeme: judge, decide; suppose (Mn. E. "deem")
dint, dynt: an injury, a crushing blow, a strike in combat (cf. modern "dent")
dom: judgment; decision. cf. Mn. English "doom."
drede: doubt "it is no drede" (there is no doubt).
eek, eke: also
er, ere: before
erd, card, erde: earth, ground, dirt (distantly related to both Mn. English "earth" and "yard")
eyen, eien, yen: eyes (see also "ye" for the singular)
falle: fall; befall, happen
fare: fare, go; act, behave
fayne: glad; as an adverb, gladly, willingly, eagerly
freke: a man; a warrior
folde: earth, hill (especially in sense of a green or fertile area)
for: because (of); for; in order that
fre, free: noble, gracious, generous; free
fro: from (as in "to and fro")
gentlesse: refined character, high breeding, nobility, courtesy
giserne: a battle-ax
go, goon: to walk, to go
gome(n): a game (not to be confused with gome/guma, below)
gome/guma: a man; a warrior (cf. Old English "guma")

gyse: guise; manner, way, fashion, custom

han: have (contracted form of Old and Middle English "haven")
hap: chance, luck; good fortune; occurrence (as in Mn. English "happenstance")
hatan: called, named; ordered
hathel: man; warrior
hende: clever, noble, courteous (Mn. English "handy")
hente(n): to seize, grasp
highte: is called, is named; was called, was named

boh: third person singular feminine pronoun, Mn. English "she"
i-, y-: as prefix indicates the past participle
ic, iche, i: first person pronoun "I"
ilke: same; the same type
intil: unto; as far as
kinde: nature, race, stock, species, sort; natural disposition
koude: knew; knew how to; could
lat: let
lede, lude: man; warrior
leef, lief, leve: dear, beloved; pleasant, agreeable
lewed: ignorant, unlearned; coarse, rude; wicked
like(n), lyke(n): to like, enjoy (often in impers. constructions; e.g., *me liketh*: it pleases me).
list, lest: to please (often occurs in impers. constructions; e.g., *"me list,*" it pleases me)
lite, lyte: little
lust: pleasure; desire
lusty: energetic, happy
maistry: domination, mastery
micel, michel, mickel: much, many
mo: more
moot, moote: may; must; ought to
[idiomatic phrases] *so moot I, also moot I, ever moot I*: as I hope
also *so moote I thee*: as I hope to prosper
most, moste: must; most
mowe: may (pres. plural of *mowen*)
namely: especially
nas: was not (contraction of *ne was*.)
nato: not
ne: not, nor
neret: were not (contraction of *ne were*)
nimian: to take, past tense third person is *"he nam."*; past participle is *nomen*.
niste: knew not (contraction of *ne wiste*)
nolde: would not (contraction of *ne wolde*)
not, noot: knows not (contraction of *ne woot*)
nis, nys, nis, nice, nyce: ignorant, foolish, weak; wanton; precise, scrupulous
nis, nis: is not (contraction of *ne is*)
nyste: knew not, did not know (contraction of *ne wiste*)
paraventure: perhaps
povre: poor (like French *pauvre*)
quit, quite: (infinitive) to reciprocate, repay;
(past part.)* repaid
quod: said
rede, reede: advice, counsel; to advise, to counsel. (Cf. Old English *raed*)
renk: man; warrior
sale: hall; feasting place
segg, segge: man; warrior
sen, syn: since
seker / siker: true, certain, noble (distantly related to Mn. English "secure" and "sacred.")

sentence: opinion, sentiments; moral meaning, significance
siker: certain, sure, true
sikerly: certainly, surely, truly
sit: sits (contraction of *sitteth*)
sith, sithen: since (not to be confused with Darth Vader's domain)
solas: comfort, solace; amusement, entertainment; pleasure
solempne: formal; solemn, serious; ceremonious; festive; merry
sore, soore: bitterly, sorely
sooth, sothe: truth (Mn. English "Soothsayer")
soothfastnesse: truth; truthfulness
stint, stente, stynthe: cease, stop; restrain
sterete: jump, leap, spring, move suddenly (like Mn. English "start," and "startle.")
swir, swire, swyr, swyre: neck
swythe: very, so, suddenly (intensifying adverb)
sythes: since, after
thee, theen: to prosper (infinitive)
ther, there: there; where
thilke: the same (contraction of "the ilke")
tho: then
trowe(n): to believe
tulk: a man, a warrior
umbe, umbre: a prefix meaning "around." cf. Old English *ymbesittendra* in *Beowulf*.
unnethe: scarcely, hardly; with difficulty
wedes: clothes, garments, apparel, (cf. modern "weeds" as slang term for fine clothes in the 1930s).
wende(n): to go, pass, walk (infinitive).
wende: thought, supposed (past tense Old English *wenan*, cf. Mn. English "ween")
whilom: once, once upon a time; formerly
wight wyghe: a man; a creature
wiste: knew
wyse: wise; way, manner
y- / i-: as a verb prefix, it indicates the past participle.
yaf: gave
ye, ey, yghe: eye
yep: new; keen; fresh; brave, ready (primarily Northumbrian)
yif: if; give
ywis: certainly, surely