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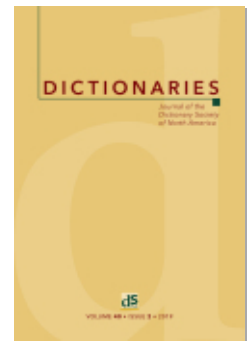
The *Middle English Dictionary* Revenant

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Reference Works in Progress

The Middle English Dictionary Revenant

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ABSTRACT

The online *Middle English Dictionary*, after lying dormant for twenty years, during 2016–2019 staged a revival, receiving both new technical underpinnings (a new platform and interface) and considerable editorial revision, the latter drawing on decades of collected corrections as well as a fresh review of recent scholarship. The *MED*'s unique organizational placement within the University of Michigan Library helped secure it the NEH funding necessary for the success of the immediate project, and it offers some hope for a future of ongoing revision and maintenance.

Keywords: *Middle English Dictionary*, University of Michigan, revision, supplement, maintenance, historical lexicography

“[Thei] lay longe in sowowne that thei semed deed.”
(a1500(?c1450) *Merlin* (Cmb Ff.3.11) 134)

The *Middle English Dictionary* persevered in various states of vigor for the pre-ordained three score and ten (1930–2001), publishing its first print fascicle in 1955 and its final “XYZ-” fascicle in 2001. DSNA

acknowledged this lifetime of accomplishment by holding a wake in Ann Arbor in 2001, celebrating both the completion of the print dictionary and the commencement of its afterlife—the birth of a new and improved online version which the *MED* staff, the University Library, the University of Michigan Press, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and Prof. Frances McSparran had joined forces to produce. But even as the celebrants went home to close up the office and pronounce “well done” on the effort and “RIP” on the Dictionary, they knew that a dictionary’s work is never truly done. Most obviously, the *MED* itself had long promised, and pointed its readers to, putative entries eschatologically destined for inclusion in a future supplement, and the *MED*’s editors had long been accumulating paper “Supplement slips” as work on later fascicles revealed deficiencies in earlier ones. When the *MED* offices shut down, more than 10,000 such slips were boxed up and sent despondently to the university archives; the promised supplement entries never appeared; and the staff, the library, and the records of the *MED* were scattered.

Two decades later, very little had changed. The largely inaccessible Supplement slips (languishing in archival limbo) had been joined by additional reasons for concern. Gaps in the original reading program had been exposed by time. Flaws in the digital model and markup of the online Dictionary, which retained all too many artifacts of its print origin, had been exposed by attempts to repurpose the data. Middle English scholarship, hardly idle, had produced many, many new editions and studies. New sibling and specialist dictionaries had appeared, and old ones had appeared in revised form, along with other relevant online resources. On the technical side, the platform on which the online *MED* rested, a tangle of homemade scripts built around orphaned and obsolete software, made updating the data itself virtually impossible, and threatened to give up the ghost at any minute. Every system upgrade raised the possibility that the online *MED* would simply stop working. The interface remained as inconsistent in its affordances as when it began, and embodied an aesthetic that, if functional, was best described as “late 90s minimalist.” This last was perhaps not critical, but it offended some and certainly contributed to the impression that *MED*, if not “all dead,” was “mostly dead”—moribund and, worse, increasingly irrelevant. It had ceased to participate in the conversation, which therefore increasingly passed it by.

THE SOUND OF TRUMPETS?

“Hoornes tokeneþ..tidinges of newe lif þat cometh here aftir.”

((a1398) *Trev.Barth. (Add 27944) 67a/a)

In a word, back in 2001 we knew we weren't done. Unlike many similar projects that have been written off as “done,” however much they beg for ongoing life of some kind, *MED* has shown signs of coming back to life. It has taken an act of faith on the part of many, continued commitment by a few, and considerable luck to turn that knowledge of incompleteness into an act of renovation and revivification.

MED had several things in its favor, all arising from the fact, perhaps unusual among lexicographic projects, that interest in its success persisted in the relatively stable environment of the University Library. The Library, thanks to its enthusiastic and pioneering embrace of digital texts for the humanities, had housed and organized the original digital conversion of the *MED* (1997–2000), and thereby effectively owned it, having acquired a real if undefined commitment to its long-term maintenance. The Dictionary's publisher of record, the University of Michigan Press, had in the meantime actually merged with the University Library, even while retaining its vested interest in the value of one of its signature publications. The Supplement slips themselves were housed in *a* (not *the*) university library (the Bentley Historical Library) and were therefore accessible to a library-based project. The Library had the organizational wherewithal to support grant administration, the infrastructure to accommodate student workers, and the software-development expertise to work the necessary technical magic. The Library also had at its disposal a small “MED gift fund” which could be used as matching funds in pursuit of a grant from the NEH. And finally, the Library retained several staff members from the original *MED* and e-*MED* projects, who had spent the intervening decades honing their linguistic, editing, text-processing, and production skills on an enormous transcription project known as the Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership—as well as (not incidentally) amassing a large personal library of Middle English primary texts sufficient to form the core working collection of a revived *MED*. The result of this confluence of good fortune was a 2016 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, combined with a very substantial investment

by the University Library over the course of three years, not least in the form of salary support and valuable time commitments on the part of a number of database and web programmers and interface specialists.

SUCSESSES: "IT'S ALIVE"

"Who woll pryue, labour must endure."
(c1500(a1449) Lydg. *Aesop* (Trin-C R.3.19) 117)

What have we accomplished in those three years? At a minimum, we have awakened *MED* and set it moving, or at least shuffling along. The revived *MED* (created by three lexicographers working for three years) cannot hope to enjoy quite the same sort of life as the old *MED* (created by a large team over decades), but we believe the net result of our work has been either to resolve or to alleviate all of our initial concerns. We are now confident there is a way forward, and that the Dictionary (and its nominal Compendium home) may indeed have a future, and that the compromises we have needed to make have been justified by our results.

Problem 1. The *MED* had never been finished as its editors imagined it, since it had accumulated material toward its eventual revision that had never seen the light of day. Most of this was in the form of Supplement slips of the familiar and traditional kind, as exemplified in Figure 1.

As is the way of such random corrections, many were clear and straightforward; some harder to implement or even to decipher; and some mere quagmires of confusion. At their worst, these slips posed intractable textual cruces or were vague: "this definition isn't quite right. Fix it." The worst of the Supplement slips we have left alone, flagged for future consideration; the bulk of them we have responded to in some more useful fashion.

There were also rumors of a print copy of the *MED*, belonging to the former head of production, with hundreds of penciled corrections.

I think we have at least broken the spirit of this problem. Most of the slips whose presence in the university archives has been a constant reproach are now available for consultation exactly where they belong, attached to the *MED* entries, something we have only dreamed about for

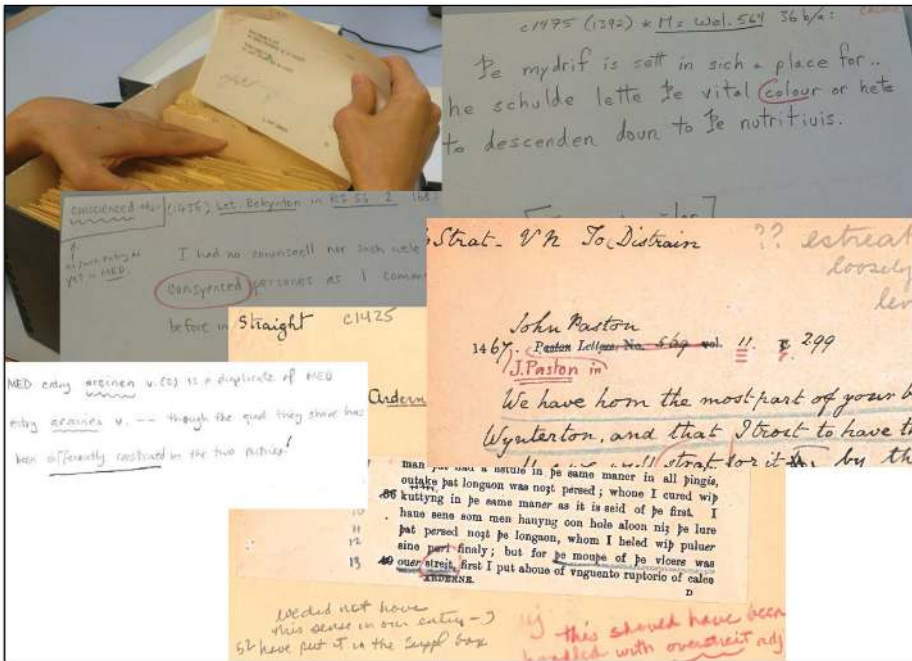


FIGURE 1 The 'Supplement Slips' as Accumulated 1955–2000

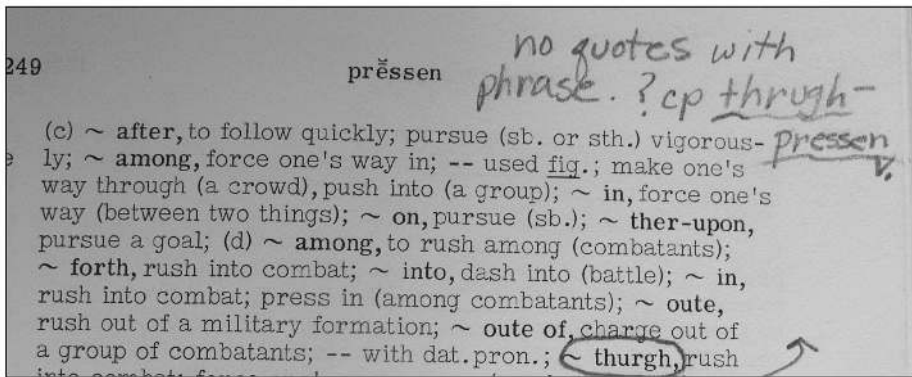


FIGURE 2 An In-House Copy of the Print MED with Corrections

decades, and something which has been hoped for, for over half a century. Hopefully all but the most vague or intractable will eventually follow. Supplement slips have generated changes in something like 15,000 entries, and about 10,000 new quotations have been added as a result. Oh, and that annotated print copy? We found it, photographed it, and made the 200 corrections found there as well. Furthermore, one effect of recent scholarship has been to move a number of "old" (published,

known) works into the *MED*'s orbit that had previously sat outside it. Based on recent work suggesting that the *Revelations of the Monk of Eynsham* preserved in large measure the readings of its source manuscript, we allowed it to be quoted as Middle English; similarly, because recent work has suggested that the Old Testament lives included by Caxton in his *Golden Legend* represented an existing work (albeit somewhat modernized by Caxton) from the middle of the century if not earlier, we have begun quoting that as well. Those two works are now responsible for nearly three hundred new quotations in *MED*. Even housekeeping tasks can lead to new information: cleaning up a few blind references in existing citations revealed works that we had quoted very slightly but which deserved closer reading. Among this "old" material, just a single example: a re-reading of a few previously neglected church-wardens' accounts has yielded about 500 usable, and in some cases quite significant, quotes.

Problem 2. The *MED* had not kept up with scholarship. By the time of our grant proposal, more than twenty years' worth of new editions and studies had been published, without being reflected in either the Dictionary or its Bibliography. Major bibliographies, corpora, handbooks, lexica, editions, and indexes had appeared, year after year, without being acknowledged in the *MED*. The dictionary remained effectively frozen in the late '90s. A second goal of this project was not only to allow some of this newer work to speak through the Dictionary, and to be documented in the Bibliography, but to set in motion a process whereby new work could continue to appear in the Dictionary and Bibliography expeditiously and regularly. If we were to avoid relapsing into slumber, we needed to change *MED* from an essentially static, and therefore always obsolescent, resource to an essentially dynamic one able to accept, store, and publish additions and corrections on an ongoing basis.

Have we done so? To a large degree, yes. Adding 500 works and 1500 bibliographic stencils, mostly from new editions, to the Bibliography has brought it abruptly into the present era; actually reading and consulting these editions and as a result adding thousands of quotations from their texts so far (and more every day) promises to catch *MED* up to something resembling the state of the art. The new interface (see Figure 5), with its facility for rapid reindexing, promises to keep it there. "Personal communications" play a role as well: readers are encouraged

to send in additions and corrections. Even Facebook postings! One such random posting allowed us to tidy up some mistranscriptions dating back to 1885.

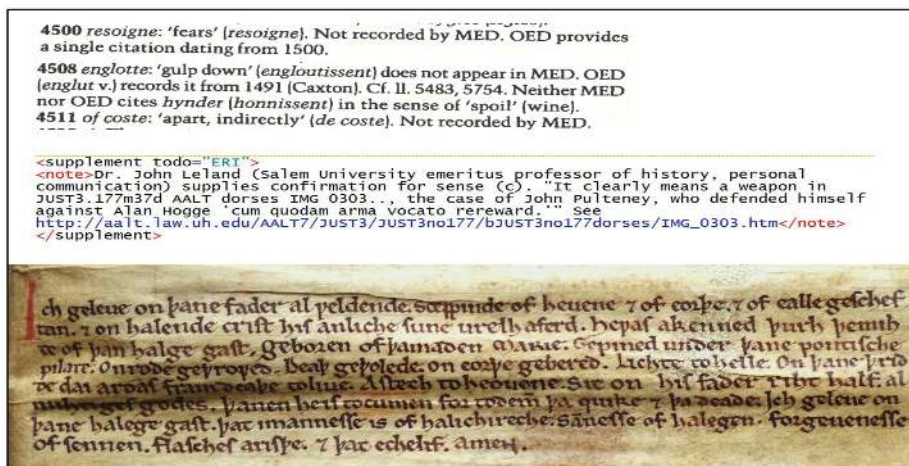


FIGURE 3 Drawing on Editors' Notes, Emails, and Even a MS Image Posted to Facebook¹

Just for a few examples, among new works, consider that Mark Clarke's EETS edition of painters' recipes alone has generated more than a thousand new quotations; William Marx's edition of a prose Lucidarius, seventy; the paraphrase of Chaucer's Boethius called *The Boke of Comfort*, about forty; Richard Hamer's EETS edition of the Gilte Legend, 330; Robert Raymo's edition of the *Mirrore of the World*, 160; and Claire Fennell's edition of the English statutes in Rawlinson B.520, fifty so far and potentially another 300. I've just begun to explore the lexical raw material offered by the Middle English Local Documents database, and Juhani Norri's wonderful *Dictionary of Medical Vocabulary* alone has added more than 450 new *MED* entries (more on that later).

Some of these editions had editors who scrupulously noted passages in their texts that represented necessary corrections to *MED*, for which we are very grateful.² Others did not, which probably means they are still underrepresented and ought to be read again.

¹Respectively: helpful notes from Robert Raymo and Elaine Whitaker, eds., *The Mirrore of the Worlde* (Toronto, 2003); the gist of an email as represented in *MED*'s entry *rere-ward* n.; and a photograph of Blickling MS 6864 posted by Mr. John Gandy to the "National Trust Libraries" group on Facebook (12 May 2019).

²Thank you, Juhani Norri, Robert Raymo, Meg Laing, and Claire Fennell (among others)!

Problem 3. The online *MED* and Bibliography were originally conceived in part not as a wholly independent entity but as a node in a developing network of online resources—but its links had grown stale and failed to take account of the new shape of the network. On the one hand, we needed to prune some parts of the old online Compendium—links, for example, to online facsimiles of manuscripts—since such links could not reasonably or feasibly be maintained as the number of relevant sites burgeoned. And on the other, we needed to add references or links to vital new sites.

The screenshot shows a web interface for the Middle English Dictionary. On the left, under 'Related Dictionary Entries', there is a link to the Oxford English Dictionary for 'dia-, prefix2'. The main entry is for 'diagalange n.' with sections for 'Entry Info', 'Forms', 'Etymology', 'Definitions (Senses and Subsenses)', and 'Supplemental Materials (draft)'. The definition is: '1. A medicinal concoction of which the chief ingredient is galingale; *fig.* a superfluous aggregate of terms or details.' Below this is a note: 'Note: *Med.*, etc., see further J.Norri, *Dictionary of Medical Vocabulary*, s.v. **diagalange**.' At the bottom, under 'Cursor Mundi', there is an 'Entry Info' section with 'External References' and 'Manuscript, print, and LALME references'.

Related Dictionary Entries

Oxford English Dictionary
(Please note that the OED is a subscription resource)

dia-, prefix2

Middle English Dictionary Entry

diagalange n. Quotations: Show all Hide all

Entry Info

Forms **diagalange n.**

Etymology **From *dia-* & *galanga*.**

Definitions (Senses and Subsenses)

1. A medicinal concoction of which the chief ingredient is galingale; *fig.* a superfluous aggregate of terms or details. Show 1 Quotation

Supplemental Materials (draft)

Note: *Med.*, etc., see further J.Norri, *Dictionary of Medical Vocabulary*, s.v. **diagalange**.

Cursor Mundi

Entry Info

External References: *IMEV* 694, 780, 788, 959, 1775, 1786, 1885, 2153, 2685, 3208, 3976
NIMEV 694, 780, 788, 959, 1775, 1786, 1885, 2153, 2685, 3208, 3976
DIMEV 1155, 1285, 1296, 1574, 2931, 2945, 3092, 3474, 4265, 5020, 6363
Manual 7.XX.31

Manuscript, print, and LALME references: London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian A.3. (**Pref. MS**)
LALME: vol. 1. 108 (two entries, q.v.). Hand A. LP 18. WRY. Hand B. LP 100. WRY.
LAEME: Item 295. Hand A. Fols. 2r-91v; 93va line 9-95vb line 19; 99ra-112vb; 119rb-139va line 36; 139va line 37-163ra. Very hard to date. Yorkshire, West Riding.

FIGURE 4 Links from *MED* (*diagalange*) to *OED* and Norri; and from Bibliography (*Cursor Mundi*) to *IMEV*, *NIMEV*, *DIMEV*, *Severs Manual*, *LALME*, *LAEME*

This aspect of the *MED*'s online presence will always be a work in progress, but we have at least brought it some measure of respectability. From the Bibliography we used to refer to *LALME*, to the original *Index of Middle English Verse*, and to the *Manual of Writings in Middle English*. We have retained those, brought the *Manual* references up to date, added references to the *New Index of Middle English Verse*, and also added 300 links to the online *Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English* (*LAEME*) and 2500 to the *Digital Index of Middle English Verse* (*DIMEV*).

From the Dictionary, we had made some efforts to link entries to corresponding entries in the *Dictionary of Old English* and the *OED*, based largely on an auto-generated entry map created by James McCracken at *OED*. For the renovated *MED*, we have put many hours into significant revision and expansion of the *MED-OED* map, with the result that most *MED* entries now link to the corresponding *OED* entry. The same map will be shared with *OED* so they can return the favor. Other sets of links are under consideration, but one resource we could not neglect was Juhani Norri's *Dictionary of Medical Vocabulary* (2016), which we needed to reference and make use of, without simply ransacking it. The result is the addition of 3,056 notes, under 2,685 entries, directing our readers to consult particular entries in Norri's work for specifically medical usage. Additional links are under consideration.

Problem 4. The online platform. The platform on which the online *MED* sat was inadequate in two respects: it was difficult, verging on impossible, to update with new data; and it was technically obsolescent, employing orphan software no longer supported, always at risk of failing completely at every routine system upgrade. We needed to stabilize the underlying technology, allowing for regular updates of the data, and working with widely supported, regularly updated, off-the-shelf software that should ensure the technical viability of the site for the foreseeable future. Without achieving this goal, the other problems could not be solved: there was no point to correcting the *MED* if we had no ready way to publish the updates, and little incentive to update the data without the confidence that the system would survive from one month to the next.

Back in S.E. Michigan, at least one automotive metaphor is required. In terms of our technical underpinnings, we transitioned from driving a 1940s Chevy truck—beautiful in its way, and certainly functional and versatile, but liable to break down at any minute, and just try finding parts!—to a 2019 F-150: not suited for every purpose but decidedly capable, popular for good reason, easily repaired, and still under warranty. We moved from a jury-rigged tangle of PAT, CGI, and Perl to a more straightforward implementation of Solr combined with Blacklight, and we reused components that had already been developed for other library projects including the main library catalogue. We should be able to reload the data regularly, and it should be immune from most technical shocks.

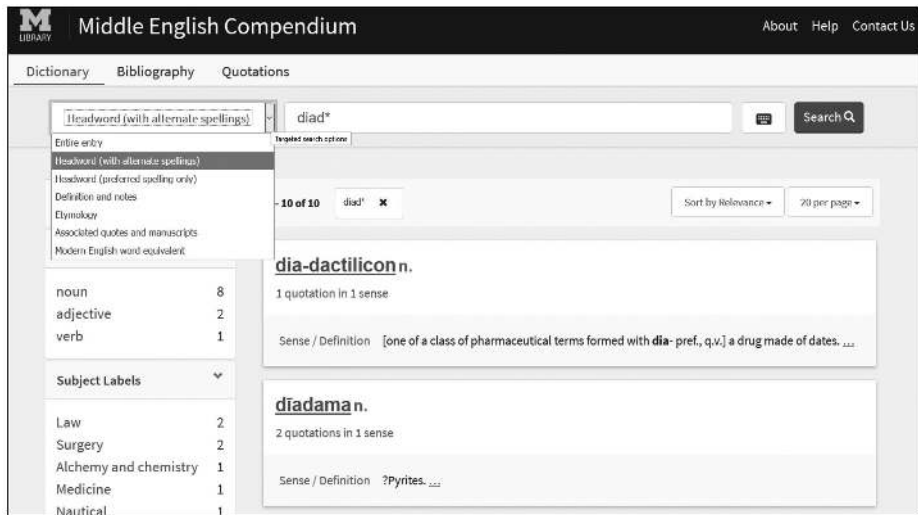


FIGURE 5 New Platform (Solr, Blacklight) Allows Faceting, Relevance Sorting, Wildcards

Problem 5. The online interface to the Dictionary and Compendium, though it had some quite powerful search features, was as obsolete as its technical underpinnings. Aesthetically, it belonged to the web of 1996, not an entirely negligible concern, since younger users found it baffling, especially when coupled with marked inconsistency in the input of searches (some were case sensitive, some not; some assigned special functions to certain letters, others did not; some used wildcards, others modified regular expressions, and so forth), and an output that many found challenging. We needed to create a search and display interface that reflected intervening advances in interface design; was careful to follow accessibility guidelines; was consistent in the way it treated data at both the input and the display stage; tested itself against actual users; avoided idiosyncratic kludges of all kinds; and was, if possible, mobile-friendly.

We are actively collecting suggestions for improvements, but even as it stands the new *MED* interface seems to strike the right balance between utility to scholars and comprehensibility to novices, though it has clearly moved toward the novice end of the range. It is standards-based and accessible and mobile-friendly. Its clean and informative look has an immediate appeal. Probably no one is more accustomed to the old interface than I am myself, since I have used it regularly since I

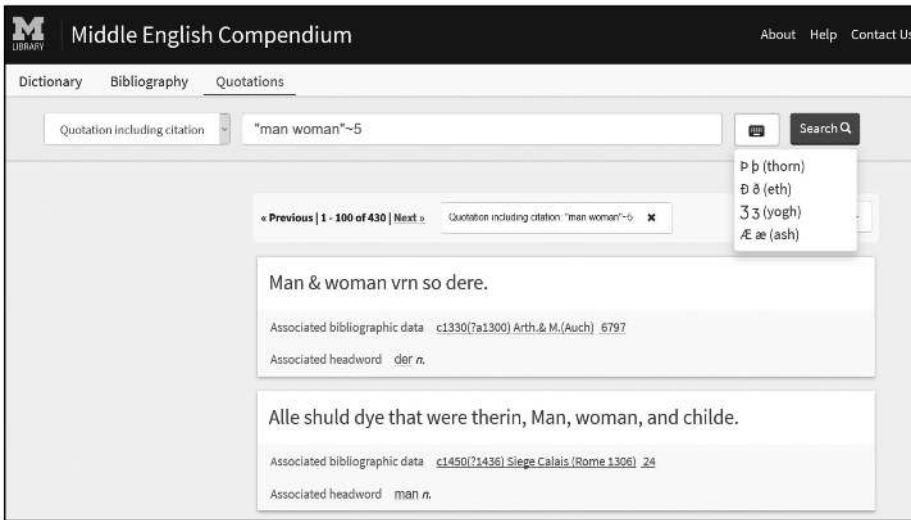


FIGURE 6 Modern Look with Standardized Input and Display, Retaining Quotation Search and Proximity Operators

helped create it in 1998. But even I have taken to the new system immediately, and reports from our first users are mostly positive.

Problem 6. Print artifacts. In correspondence from Juhani Norri early in 2019, he asked about “the structure of MED as a database.” I found it hard to answer that because *MED* is still basically *not* a database. It is primarily a transcription of a printed book with some data fields overlaid upon it, and some significant pieces of information left with merely transcriptional markup. For example, phrases and compounds are not marked as such but simply as bold text; etyma are not marked as such but, again, simply as bold text. Cross references within *MED* are merely implicit and (though we’ve eliminated most of these) may well consist of statements like “from the noun” (what noun?!)

We have been slowly and laboriously trying to move *MED* away from its print origins, but at present there are still points of firm attachment. This is particularly troubling when it comes to information that is only implicit in the silences of the print, since it is difficult to force a computer to search for information that is present in the text only by subtle implication from its absence! We have moved forward in this area especially when improvements to the interface required corresponding improvements in the data: for example, the expansion of abbreviations

The image shows a screenshot of an XML document with several annotations pointing to specific elements:

- New entries have decimal IDs, to slot them in with existing entries in sequence**: Points to the ID attribute in line 1.
- Searchable expanded spelling**: Points to the `<REG>pilot</REG>` in line 5.
- Displayable compact spelling (in this case, the same)**: Points to the `<ORIG>pilot</ORIG>` in line 5.
- Expansion of part-of-speech abbreviations**: Points to the `<POS><PS EXPAN="noun">n</PS></POS>` in line 5.
- Expansion of language abbreviations**: Points to the `<LANG><LG EXPAN="Middle French">MF</LG></LANG>` in line 8.
- Coded summary of entry status**: Points to the `<EG>` tag in line 11.
- Newly added stencil (marked by XXX in the ID)**: Points to the `<STNCL RID="HYP.XXX558.20180724T095900">` in line 15.
- Addition of 'supplement' block (draft additions)**: Points to the `<supplement todo="E">` tag in line 20.
- Expansion of subject labels into search facets**: Points to the `<REG>pilot</REG>` in line 5.

The XML code shown in the screenshot is as follows:

```

1 <?xml version="1.0" encoding="US-ASCII" ?>
2 <?xml-stylesheet type="text/css" href="http://www-personal.umich.edu/~pfs/mec/code/med.css"?>
3 <IDOCTYPE MED SYSTEM "http://www-personal.umich.edu/~pfs/mec/code/med.xml.dtd">
4 <MED>
5 <ENTRYFREE ID="MED33376.5" SEQ="33376.5" RESP="pfs">
6 <FORM><HDORTH><REG>pilot</REG><ORIG>pilot</ORIG></HDORTH> <POS><PS EXPAN="noun">
7 n</PS></POS> Also <ORTH><REG>peilotte</REG><ORIG>peilotte</ORIG></ORTH>.</FORM>
8 <NOTE>Stub entry.</NOTE>
9 <ETYM>From <LANG><LG EXPAN="Middle French">MF</LG></LANG> <HI REND="B">pilot(e</HI>.</ETYM>
10 <SENSE>
11 <DEF><USG TYPE="FIELD" EXPAN="Nautical">Naut.</USG> A person familiar with shoals, channels, etc.
12 and charged with guiding a boat or ship, navigator, pilot.</DEF>
13 <EG>
14 <CIT CD="1458"><BIBL><STNCL RID="HYP.197.19981211T105002"><DATE>(1458-9)</DATE> <TITLE
15 >Let.Sou.</TITLE>in <TITLE>Sou.RS 22</TITLE> <MS>Sou SC.2/9/2</MS></STNCL><SCOPE>16
16 </SCOPE></BIBL>
17 <Q>I.wolde haue taken the pylot.</Q>
18 </CIT>
19 <CIT CD="1480"><BIBL><STNCL RID="HYP.XXX558.20180724T095900"><DATE>(1480)</DATE>
20 <TITLE>Acc.Purser</TITLE> in <TITLE>BMS ser.4.7</TITLE> <MS></MS></STNCL><SCOPE>27
21 </SCOPE></BIBL>
22 <supplement todo="E"><note>New entry. Second quot. taken from OED.</note></supplement>
23 </ENTRYFREE>
24 </MED>

```

FIGURE 7 Refinements to Data and Markup Mark Departures from Print Original

into search facets could best be accomplished by expanding the abbreviations in the data itself; searching for variant spellings could best be improved by “unpacking” the compactly expressed listings of spellings in the data itself; and introducing a search by modern English reflex—one of the most frequently requested improvements—required that we (manually and laboriously) assign a modern English equivalent to most of the Middle English headwords. There are still some abbreviations in need of expansion, but those are in progress; we have at least begun to identify cross-references and will eventually turn those into links; we have also begun to identify Linnaean binomials and will eventually use that to update them. At some point we may be in a position to begin isolating and tagging etyma, source words, compounds, and phrases, among other things, but we are not there yet.

I’ll leave the seventh problem till the end.

ROUGH EDGES

“Be neuer vnpacient of .. imperfeccioun.”
(c1460 *Tree & Fruits* HG (McC 132)122/14)

Three people and a few student hours were not going to accomplish all this if we adhered strictly to the mode and manner of the original dictionary. The sheer scale of the needed data improvements, combined with the labor-intensive character of historical lexicography, made a full-scale revision, essentially a rewrite, of the *MED* an unrealistic proposition at best. The original *MED* took seventy years to write: no one was going to fund a team to spend the next seventy rewriting it. Our goal was to discriminate between essential revisions and inessential, find a way to undertake the former while deferring (without foreclosing) the latter, and adopt basically a cost/benefit approach to lexicography. In fact and in effect working in the basement, without the institutional controls that governed the original *MED*, we found ourselves making a number of choices that our predecessors might have shuddered at. Notably, (1) we've tolerated provisional information, and allowed provisional information, notes, caveats, questions, and even questionable data, to be published in the online Dictionary. And (2) rather than take on every ME lexicographic task, we've begun linking to more specialist resources, acting in some cases as a portal rather than as a compendium.

Both of these tactics have in effect cracked the Dictionary's veneer of authority and omniscience. In the interests of “getting the information out there,” and “getting readers to the information,” the new *MED* exposes what was in any case always true, that it is a work in progress, that it comprises surmises built upon ignorance, and that, far from being an authority for the ages, *MED* is always in need of revision, *semper reformanda*.

The platform. From the Library's point of view, *MED* is a small niche dataset, one among many, with a limited if intense user base, an idiosyncratic format, and an uncomfortably demanding set of search and display requirements. That said, the Library devoted an inordinate amount of expensive and highly sought-after programming and design time to giving us an attractive and usable site. But there were inevitably losses

too. Since Solr does not support regex (i.e., regular expression) searching natively, we had to jettison the limited regex support available in the old *MED*. Because adding a true Boolean multi-field interface would cost more weeks or months of effort from several departments, that was left to a future programming cycle, where it will have to compete with other programming demands. And because we're a library and not an academic center, we necessarily stress ease of use (even by novice users), sustainability, and perhaps reusability over the needs of advanced users. To my mind, this is an acceptable, even admirable, bargain. For one thing, by building the new *MED* out of standard parts, it allows us at least to consider reusing the platform to host similar XML-encoded dictionaries (or "entry-oriented datasets," as they would say).

The Dictionary itself. Our biggest innovation lay in adding a <supplement> element similar in concept to the *OED*'s "draft additions" block, in which we can dump almost anything we like without touching the existing dictionary, equipping it with an attribute by which we can code how much more review the entry and its additions require. Though we *have* made many corrections directly to the *MED*'s text, most additions and some corrections appear only, quarantined as it were, in the supplement block, where editors are free to insert citations and append notes. Having an unconstrained <note> element in the <supplement> block is of course dangerous. Most often we use it simply to indicate why a quote has been added ("antedates sense 2.;" "new phrase"; "requires tweak of the gloss"). But a free-field note allows us also to attribute opinions explicitly to editors and scholars without putting the *MED*'s authority behind them. The same <note> element allows us to entertain guesses of all sorts and float alternative theories discursively, and to add more explanations and more crossreferences between similar or easily confused entries, or to add inconclusive or reflective comments. This can occasionally get out of hand.

The supplement block overlaps with a new "stub entry" class (based on the Wikipedia model), which often lacks even a definition. Many of these consist of nothing but a supplement block; they say in effect, "there is a word here of this shape, as evidenced by these examples: details to follow." We've globally added 455 such stub entries from Norri's dictionary but also created nearly 2000 individual entries, many of the same stubby variety, manually.

Findings and theories attributed

<supplement todo="I">
 <NOTE>The example from a1475 <HI REND="I">Gilb.Angl.</HI> has been corrected and removed to this entry from the ghost entry <HI REND="B">volating</HI> ger., the latter arising from the editor's misreading of MS 'w-' for 'vo-'. See J. Norri, "'Volaten' and 'volating': Two Ghost Words in the <HI REND="I">Middle English Dictionary</HI>," <HI REND="I">Notes and Queries</HI> 262:3 (September 2017), 385-386.</NOTE>
 </supplement>

Ghosts deprecated (not removed)

<NOTE>This entry has been deprecated, and its single example moved to <HI REND="B">wlatinge</HI> ger.</NOTE>

Notes exposed

<q>Y the same John Osbarn' in the age of Syxtene wynter beyng wt my fader John Osbarne..and beyng a chyld att scole.</q></cit>
 <note>Additional quot., sense <hi rend="b">3b.</hi> usefully specifies an exact age (16) at which one could still be considered a 'child.'

Doubts expressed and guesses floated

<Q>I bequeathe my crimson fawne gowne to the Parish Church of Tychesey in..Surrey..to make thereof a cope or a chesible.</Q></CIT>
 </EG>
 </SENSE>
 <supplement todo="R">
 <NOTE>It is difficult to credit that the single quot. under sense (d) really belongs there, since the color sense is not attested in OED till the 19th century, but neither is there any obvious alternative explanation.</NOTE>
 </supplement>

FIGURE 8 Rough Edges Now More Visible

OLD INCONSISTENCIES REMAIN

The more we worked with *MED*, the more acutely we realized how inconsistent it could be, between its earliest volumes (E- and following) and its latest. Spellings were represented differently, senses arranged differently, phrases formatted differently, compounds placed differently. With few and modest exceptions—mostly adding attested spellings—even when driven to say, “we would never do it that way nowadays,” we left the earlier practice in place and worked around and through it.

My guiding principle, grandiosely stated, was to make no change—especially no time-consuming change—that did not represent a net addition to human knowledge. Improving the consistency of the *MED* was not in itself sufficient cause to intervene. We do occasionally add notes pointing to the need to do some re-editing for consistency’s sake but go no further.

NEW INCONSISTENCIES ADDED?

Indeed, working twenty years after the fact, not even veterans of the original *MED* project can be confident in their memories of what some of its editorial policies were during its final stages. Likely there has been some “policy creep”: the introduction of new inconsistencies or the reintroduction of old ones in (for example) the selection of a preferred form for new headwords. I tend to prefer a form that matches existing entries, so that like falls together with like, even if that form is not attested, so that is what we have mostly done. In some cases, I am sure, we have introduced new inconsistencies without being aware of it. We have also, aware of our insufficiency, allowed ourselves to say only what we know instead of pretending to knowledge we lack. Most of our new entries, for example, if not derived from an existing entry or supplied with clear rhyme evidence, are allowed online without *MED*’s famous, or notorious, “phonemic layer”—a set of diacritics imposed chiefly upon vowels to indicate their quality and quantity. None of us is a phonologist, certainly not one of the caliber of Sherman Kuhn or Hans Kurath, and so we prudently refrain from asserting facts we are not prepared to defend.

PORTAL, NOT COMPENDIOUS LEXICON

We accommodate our insufficiencies in other respects as well, looking when possible to reference and link to specialist sites rather than trying to duplicate or (worse) appropriate their work. Our sustained effort to link more reliably to *OED* (as well as our other new links) probably falls into this category, but the most obvious example concerns Juhani Norri’s *Dictionary of Medical Vocabulary*. With Prof. Norri’s cooperation, we identified several hundred words that had Middle English examples and therefore belonged in *MED*; for those words, we created “stub” entries using Norri’s evidence and definition, citing his work explicitly. For all other words in his dictionary that overlapped with *MED* entries, we were content to point users to the more substantial and expert treatment there. We propose to extend this model, born of necessity, to other specialist fields such as place-name elements and surnames, both of which are better treated by name specialists, even while deserving at least bare mention in a general-purpose lexicon: a bare-bones entry

in *MED*, supplemented by a reference to exhaustive treatment by those better placed to provide it, seems a reasonable solution.

THE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Dates. People tend to rely inordinately on the dates in dictionaries—a particularly dangerous practice when it comes to Middle English—and one sometimes envies the freedom of dictionaries that dispense with dates altogether. In adding new works to the bibliography, new editors inevitably disagree with dates previously accorded works and MSS in the *MED*. Sometimes I have been able to resolve these; more often, through want of knowledge or time, I have allowed the discrepancies to remain, and acknowledged the discrepancy and the provisional character of the dating. As a special case, we are attempting to coordinate the re-dating of some important MSS with *OED*. With those, I have made the change in the bibliography, added a note, and changed all examples in the dictionary retroactively.

Works and authors. The original *MED* bibliography was built on the knowledge of the time. More recent work has reanalyzed many works, lumping disparate parts into wholes, separating apparent wholes into individual parts with separate transmission, assigning or reassigning authorship. Where feasible or where the new information is certain, I have followed it and, if necessary, retroactively converted titles in the *MED* to suit; where less feasible and less certain, I have retained the *MED*'s old arrangement, titling, attributions, etc., and merely left a note in the Bibliography.

CONTINUED LIFE AND RELEVANCE

“There ys a newe contryved processe.”
((1467) *Paston* 2.562)

Our seventh problem, as we saw it three years ago, was the large one of relevance and continued relevance. Our impression was that the Dictionary was faltering as a vital node in the network of resources that together serve to document the history of English and its kindred and neighbor languages. Even from its beginnings in Craigie's dream of an

interlocking set of period dictionaries, *MED* has always seen itself as contributing to a team effort. In the digital era, this vision has become both more pressing and more able to be realized. Our goal, laid out in conference papers as early as the early '90s, has always been to do everything we could to remove artificial barriers between *MED* and other historical dictionaries (especially *OED*) and between *MED* and smaller projects. The language itself knows no such siloes. To do that meant making *MED* both current and open. Our modest goal for the past three years was to advance both of these aims; in pursuit of currency, to "hold up our end" as regards the state of our scholarship; in pursuit of openness, to link as granularly as feasible to other resources, provide the means whereby others could link to us; exchange data if possible; and cooperate whenever and however we could with our fellow lexicographers and fellow scholars.

I believe the *MED* has put itself back into the conversation, where those who study and document the language work with and talk with each other. As regards features, our new links to LAEME (http://www.amc.lel.ed.ac.uk/?page_id=492) and DIMEV (<https://www.dimev.net/>) especially may help; more importantly, we have begun collaborating much more directly, lexicographer-to-lexicographer, with other projects. *MED* and *OED* now enjoy a data exchange, swapping the entire raw text of their respective dictionaries every year. *MED* and *OED* have likewise begun to collaborate on matters of attribution and dating. We are in contact with our fellows at other sibling dictionaries. And beyond the world of dictionaries, individual scholars of Middle English have graciously contributed texts.³

It is of course one thing to bring *MED* alive, another to keep it that way. We will doubtless have to depend increasingly on others to do so, and in order to turn the *MED* into something other than a moribund reference work, will need to treat it as something a little closer to a constantly renewed and shared repository to which all may contribute. In order to ensure ongoing life for *MED* beyond these few years, I am looking to new models: I seek to sponsor internships, allow signed entries,

³Thanks in particular go to Tess Tavormina, who supplied pre-publication copies of her uroscopy texts, including the "big one"—Henry Daniel. Also to Paul Remley, who unearthed an old unpublished glossary—concordance, really—to his edition of the Trevisa translation of Aegidius Romanus, and put the whole thing through the copy machine.

and solicit external editors to take on individual entries or groups of entries. In our favor, again, may be our organizational location. We are probably unique among dictionaries in being located organizationally as well as physically within a university library—the IT division of a library, no less. Such a position obviously offers us access to books and e-resources, as well as access to programming talent and a robust server architecture, but it also steeps us in a tradition of unostentatious service and a philosophy of broad usefulness and access without intrusive interpretation or agenda, none of which is contrary to the inclinations of dictionary makers. My particular unit in the library is devoted to sorting the chaos of natural language into usable text—I call its charge “structured reading”—whether through lexicography or markup. It is I think a natural home for *MED*, if not one that springs first to mind, and I hope one that can keep the Dictionary shuffling along for the foreseeable future.

REFERENCES

- Juhani, Norri. 2016. *Dictionary of Medical Vocabulary in English, 1375–1550: Body Parts, Sicknesses, Instruments, and Medicinal Preparations*. London and New York: Routledge.