"May the Text Rise up to Meet You": New Ways of Reading Old Manuscripts

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Abstract

This poster demonstrates the suite of programs I created for the Society of Early English and Norse Electronic Texts (SEENET) to facilitate the display of its TEI-compliant documentary and critical editions of medieval texts.
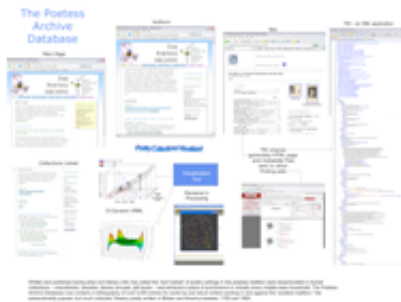
Poster Abstract

Interface design was the uppermost concern when I set out to create a suite of programs for the Society of Early English and Norse Electronic Texts (SEENET) to facilitate the display of its TEI-compliant documentary and critical editions of medieval texts. From its inception, my project has been shaped by the tremendous potential of electronic textuality to redefine our experience of what it means to possess and read a text. This poster demonstrates these programs and surveys the principles that have given rise to their creation.

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The SEENET interface project has been carried out as an iterative process moving between (1) identifying the broad parameters of questions that readers might be tempted to ask of a text and (2) shaping an electronic *mise en page* that will engage a reader's inquisitive eye, promoting curiosity and thus the development of new insight and knowledge. The process of developing such an interface has led to the articulation of a set of axioms that have guided my work:

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- Seek tight coordination in the display of text and facsimile image
- Incorporate visual cueing to guide/reinforce reader attention
- Provide unobtrusive, but handy, analytical tools
- Promote ease of navigation – build in linkages that are likely to answer and/or provoke a reader's curiosity
- Work in one visual space for text and images – no windows or frames, no scrolling when possible
- Supply information at likely points of need – avoid overload, expose what the text "knows" selectively
- Keep decoration to a minimum: no chrome, don't frame the view, don't let the tools distract or overwhelm.

In addition to demonstrating programs designed to display documentary and critical editions of Piers Plowman (which serves as the locus for all examples shown), the poster describes programs written to permit electronic markup of facsimile images of the medieval manuscripts as well as programs that assist editors in the TEI-compliant markup of documentary and critical texts.

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Poster

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