

MIDDLE ENGLISH PREPOSITION *TWĒN(E)*

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ABSTRACT

The present paper focuses on the Middle English preposition *twēn(e)* ‘between, among, in between’. The aim of the study is to review the acknowledged etymology of *twēn(e)* as well as to provide its semantics, dialect distribution, complete textual distribution (record of texts employing *twēn(e)*), and absolute token frequency. Moreover, all texts including the preposition *twēn(e)* are subject to an analysis of the whole variety of prepositions meaning ‘between’ and their token frequency in order to establish the proportions of the use of *twēn(e)* and other discussed prepositions, especially the better established preposition *betwēn(e)* in texts employing *twēn(e)*.

The study is based on such extensive electronic databases as the *Middle English Dictionary online*, the *Oxford English Dictionary online* and the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* as well as on a number of complete Middle English texts. The study of the corpus demonstrates the presence of *twēn(e)* and other prepositions meaning ‘between’ also in texts not listed by the *Middle English Dictionary online* or the *Oxford English Dictionary online* under appropriate entries, and thus helps to provide a more complete record of texts and authors utilizing *twēn(e)* and the extent of use of *twēn(e)* as compared to other prepositions meaning ‘between’. Moreover, the study demonstrates that also the other discussed prepositions are often not recorded in particular texts by the *MED online* or the *OED online*. In more general terms, the paper points out the need for the use of complete texts for the study of historical prepositions.

Keywords: *twēn(e)*, Middle English prepositions, MED online, Oxford English Dictionary online, Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse

1. Introduction

The present paper focuses on the Middle English preposition *twēn(e)* ‘between, among, in between’. The aim of the study is to provide a plausible etymology of *twēn(e)* as well as its semantics, dialect distribution, textual distribution (a full record of texts employing *twēn(e)*), and absolute token frequency. Moreover, all

texts found to contain the preposition *twēn(e)* are examined in order to establish the whole repertoire of prepositions meaning ‘between’ in them and to evaluate their token frequency and the proportion of the application of *twēn(e)* as against all other examined prepositions, especially the better established preposition *betwēn(e)* in these texts. Finally, apart from contributing to a better knowledge of the Middle English preposition *twēn(e)*, a more general aim of the present study is to point out the need to employ complete historical English texts for the study of prepositions.

As regards the applied method, acknowledged historical English dictionaries such as the *Middle English Dictionary online* (henceforth the *MED online*) and the *Oxford English Dictionary online* (henceforth the *OED online*) are employed for the analysis. The linguistic information provided in these is used to critically evaluate the origin of the preposition *twēn(e)* and to establish a more plausible etymology of the preposition as well as to construct a semantic profile and preliminary dialect and textual distribution profiles of *twēn(e)*. Then, the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* is employed in order to corroborate the dialect and textual distribution patterns of *twēn(e)*. Finally, the corpus and a few complete Middle English texts listed by the *MED online* as containing *twēn(e)* but not included in the corpus are exposed to the investigation of all the types of prepositions meaning ‘between’ and of their token frequency and proportions of use.

The present study is of both a qualitative and quantitative nature. The etymology and the semantics of *twēn(e)* will be considered in the context of subjectification (Traugott 1989, 1995), whereas the analysis of the dialect distribution, textual distribution and token frequency constitutes the statistical part of the paper.

## 2. Studies in Medieval English prepositions

Some Medieval English prepositions have been recently of interest to a few scholars. Lundskaer-Nielsen (1993) focuses on the semantics and syntax of the prepositions *in*, *on*, and *at* in selected Medieval English texts. Molencki (2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2011a, 2011b) devotes his papers to the study of prepositions such as *after*, *before*, *because*, *forward* in the framework of Hopper & Traugott’s (2003) grammaticalization and Traugott’s (1989, 1995) subjectification as well as to the analysis of a group of prepositions/conjunctions borrowed from French. Krygier (2011) discusses the preposition *till* in Old English and concentrates on a thorough investigation of its actual etymology in the context of structural borrowing. Iglesias-Rábade (2011) selects for his study a group of twelve Middle English prepositions including *aboue*, *after*, *at*, *bi*, *bifore*, *bihinde*, *biside*, *in*, *on*, *ouer*, *purgh* and *under* and studies their attestations in the *Helsinki Corpus*. Ciszek-Kiliszevska (2014) investigates the loss of the preposition *yēond* in

Middle English on the basis of *Layamon's Brut*. The Middle English preposition *twēn(e)* lacks proper treatment or even a remark in Middle English grammars or handbooks. As regards detailed studies of other prepositions meaning 'between', Kitson (1993, 1996), who establishes the provenance of selected Old English texts on the basis of spelling and phonetic variants of selected lexemes, thoroughly discusses also the dialect distribution, frequencies and syntax of the forms of the OE preposition *between*. Moreover, Alcorn (2013) concentrates on the placement of nominal and pronominal objects in phrases including variants of the prepositions *by*, *for* and *between* in Old English. Ciszek-Kiliszevska (2013, in press) provides a detailed account of the Middle English prepositions *emell(e)* and *twix* respectively.

### 3. Corpus descriptions

The *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* is a part of the *Middle English Compendium online* supported by the University of Michigan. The corpus description found on the official site contains information about the corpus so far including 54 Middle English texts and the statement that the corpus will be successively extended. However, the bibliography of the *Middle English Compendium online* comprises as many as 146 texts and text collections, some of them preserved in two or more manuscripts each (<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/browse.html>; 18 April 2013). These are texts of all the attested Middle English genres and text types such as, e.g., religious texts, chronicles, documents and plays. Both poetry and prose texts are collected. These features of the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* illustrate the extensiveness and representativeness of the corpus.

### 4. Etymology of *twēn(e)*

The *Middle English Dictionary* online labels the preposition *twēn(e)* as a “[s]hortened form of **bitwēne** prep. or **atwēn** prep.” It also refers the reader back to “OE **twēonum** in phrase **be him (sām, ūs) twēonum**”. The earliest occurrence of *twēn(e)* recorded by the *MED* comes from c. 1175 and can be found in *Holy Rood* (MS Bodl. 343).

The *Oxford English Dictionary online* describes *tween* as an “[a]phetic form of ATWEEN *prep.* and *adv.*, BETWEEN *prep.*, *adv.*, and *n.*” The earliest citation is dated to 1330 and comes from *Guy of Warwick* (MS Auchinleck).

However, it has to be noticed that while the ME *bitwēne* goes back to the OE *betwēonum*, the first attestation of *atwēn* is recorded only in 1425 in John Lydgate's *Troy Book* (MS Cotton Augustus A.4; the *MED*). Hence, the etymology of the preposition *twēn(e)* needs to be revised and the ME *twēn(e)* should rather be defined as “an aphetic form of *betwēn(e)* < OE *betwēonum*”.

5. Semantics of *twēn(e)*

The *MED online* describes *twēn(e)* as having meanings such as ‘between, among, in between’. The most frequent is the meaning ‘between’, which seems to be the prototypical meaning of the investigated preposition. It can also be concluded from the definition that the ME *twēn(e)*, like the ME *betwēn(e)* from which *twēn(e)* was derived, can assume locative (1.), temporal (2.) and abstract (3., 4. and 5.) senses. The prototypical sense of *betwēn(e)*, and hence of *twēn(e)*, was locative, thus literal, which then gave rise to some metaphoric, more abstract semantic extensions (cf. Traugott 1989, 1995). The comparison of the *MED online* definition of *twēn(e)* with a slightly more detailed definition of the preposition *bitwēn(e)* demonstrates that it is not only the senses, but also the references of the two prepositions which overlap<sup>1</sup> (see Table 1 and definitions below). This means that the same semantic context is available for the Middle English preposition *twēn(e)* as for the better established preposition *betwēn(e)*, which apart from going back to Old English was used in a much wider range of texts. The proportion of the application of *twēn(e)* and *betwēn(e)*, and other prepositions meaning ‘between’, will be then tested in all texts which employ *twēn(e)*.

Table 1. Correspondence of references of *twēn(e)* and *bitwēn(e)*

<i>twēn(e)</i>	<i>bitwēn(e)</i>
(1.)	(1a., 1b.)
(2.)	(2.)
(3. (a), (b))	(3a., 3b.)
(4.)	(4., 5., 6.)
(5.)	(7.)

**twēn(e)** (prep.) Also **twīn**, **tuene**, (early) **tweonan** & (error) **tiren**.

1. With ref. to location or position in space: between (two objects, localities, groups of people).
2. With ref. to position or duration in time: between (two events).
3. (a) With ref. to association or relationship: between (two persons or parties); (b) with ref. to communication, discussion, negotiation, or reconciliation: between (two parties or countries).
4. With ref. to something that separates or obstructs: between (two people), among (a number of persons).

<sup>1</sup> There is an additional meaning, i.e., 8., of *bitwēn(e)*, which includes a couple of specific collocations, i.e., **bidden** ~ **the teth**, to pray silently; **passen** ~ **the teth**, utter or say (sth.).

5. (a) With ref. to opposition, vacillation, uncertainty, etc.: intermediate or wavering between (two states, qualities, etc.), in between; **atwen..~**; (b) with ref. to difference: between (two qualities, things, or groups of people); **~..atwen (in)**; (c) with ref. to equity: between (right and wrong).

**bitwēne** (prep.) Also (early) **bitwenen**, **-twienen**, **-tweonen**, **-twune**; **bitwin(e)**.

**1a.** Of location or position in space: (a) between (two objects, localities, points); in among (several things); (b) in between (two surrounding objects); **~ armes, hondes**, in (one's) arms, hands.

**1b.** Of extent or distance: between (two places).

**2.** Of position or duration in time: between (two events or periods of time).

**3a.** Of association or relationship between two persons or parties: between; – (a) of joint effort or enterprise; **us ~**, together; (b) of procreation; (c) of affection, trust, etc.; (d) of strife, discord, hatred, etc.

**3b.** Of communication, consultation, etc., between two persons or parties: between; – (a) of negotiation, discussion, correspondence, dialogue; (b) of conferring or acting confidentially or secretly; **~ us (tweie)**, between (the two of) us; etc.; (c) of making an agreement or decision; (d) of mediation, reconciliation, etc.

**4.** Of dividing something: between (parties).

**5.** Of something that separates or obstructs: between (two parties or acts).

**6.** Of a group: among.

**7.** (a) Of states, qualities, etc.: intermediate or wavering between, in between; (b) of weight: between (two extremes); (c) of similarity or difference: between (two things, etc.); (d) of discrimination: between (two things).

The *Oxford English Dictionary online* does not provide the meaning of the Middle English preposition *twēn(e)*.

#### 6. Dialect distribution and textual distribution of *twēn(e)*

The *Middle English Dictionary online* makes no clear statement concerning the dialect distribution of the preposition *twēn(e)* in Middle English. The dictionary records the use of *twēn(e)* in 14 texts preserved in 15 manuscripts which could be localized in the South-West, in the North and in the East-Midlands. The manuscripts, however, are not equally distributed. Only one manuscript comes from the South-West and only two manuscripts (one text) from the North. The remaining 12 manuscripts can be localized in the East-Midlands. Moreover, it is noteworthy

that of the latter, the majority of the texts, i.e., eight, constitute those by John Lydgate. Table 2 below classifies dialectally the texts containing *twēn(e)*. These particular texts will be subject to quantitative analysis in section 7 below.

Table 2. Dialect distribution of the *MED online* texts containing *twēn(e)*

South-West	North	East Midlands
<i>Holy rood</i> (1175) (MS Bodl. 343)	<i>Cursor mundi</i> (1400) (MS Fairfax 14) (MS Göt. Theol. 107)	<i>Genesis and exodus</i> (1325) (MS Corpus Christi College 444)
		<i>Guy of Warwick</i> (1) (1330) (MS Auchinleck)
		Osbern Bokenham, <i>Lives of the saints</i> (1447) (MS Arundel 327)
		Charles of Orleans, <i>Poems</i> (1450) (MS Harley 682)
		J. Lydgate: <i>Fall of princes</i> (1439) (MS Bodl. 263)
		<i>Secreta secretorum</i> (1450) (MS Sloane 2464)
		<i>Praise of peace</i> (1460) (MS Harley 2255)
		<i>Horns away</i> (1475) (MS Laud Misc. 683)
		<i>Assembly of Gods</i> (1500) (MS Trin. Coll. R. 3.19 (599))
		<i>Aesop's fables</i> (1500) (MS Trin. Coll. R. 3.19 (599))
	(1500) <sup>2</sup>	<i>Saints Alban and Amphibal</i> (MS Lansdowne 699)
		<i>Debate of the horse, goose and sheep</i> (1500) (MS Lansdowne 699)

The *Oxford English Dictionary online*, similarly to the *Middle English Dictionary online*, only lists texts in which it attests the preposition *twēn(e)*. Among these, there are only six Middle English texts. Table 3 below organises them according to the dialects of the manuscripts. All these texts have been included in the *MED online* entry for *twēn(e)*.

<sup>2</sup> The text will not be analysed in terms of token frequency since the author of the paper had no access to the complete text.

Table 3. Dialect distribution of the *OED online* texts containing *twēn(e)*

North	East Midlands
<i>Cursor mundi</i> (1400) (MS Göt. Theol. 107)	<i>Guy of Warwick</i> (1) (1330) (MS Auchinleck)
	Osbern Bokenham, <i>Lyvys of seyntys</i> (1447) <sup>3</sup>
	J. Lydgate: <i>Assembly of Gods</i> (1420) <sup>4</sup>
	<i>Fall of princes</i> (1430-40) (MS Bodl. 263)
	<i>Political poems and songs relating to English history</i> (1443) <sup>5</sup>

The analysis of the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*<sup>6</sup> reveals the use of the preposition *twēn(e)* in four additional texts (five manuscripts) not listed by the *Middle English Dictionary online*. All the texts belong to the East-Midlands and are written by John Lydgate (see Table 4 below).

Table 4. *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* extra texts containing *twēn(e)*

John Lydgate – East Midlands
<i>The pilgrimage of the life of man</i> (1426) (MS Cotton Vitel)
<i>S. Giles</i> (1460) (MS Harley 2255)
Lyke the Audience, so uttir thy language (MS Harley 2255) (1460) (MS Univ. Lib. Camb. Hh. 4. 12) (c.1475)
<i>S. Edmund und Fremund</i> (1500) (MS Ashmole 46)

Altogether, there are 18 Middle English texts preserved in 20 manuscripts which contain the preposition *twēn(e)*. All of them are poetical texts covering both religious and secular (also political) topics. The majority of these texts, i.e., 12, including one preserved in two manuscripts, are authored by John Lydgate and localised in the East-Midlands. Four further texts, including those by Osbern Bokenham and Charles of Orleans, also belong to the East-Midlands.

<sup>3</sup> Labelled as *Lives of the saints (Legends of holy women)* in the *MED online*.

<sup>4</sup> Should be 1500 (cf. *MED online*).

<sup>5</sup> The *MED online* labels this passage of text as *Praise of peace* from 1460.

<sup>6</sup> The corpus had been searched for all possible spellings such as *twen\**, *tween\**, *tuen\**, *tven\**, *twyn\**, *twin\**, *tuy\**, *tvin\**, *tvyn\**.

Moreover, *twēn(e)* can be found in one South-Western text, i.e., *Holy rood* (1175) and in two Northern manuscripts of one text, i.e., *Cursor mundi* (1400).

#### 7. Token frequency and the proportion of *twēn(e)* and other prepositions meaning ‘between’

The detailed analysis of the entire preserved Middle English texts in which the *MED online* attests the presence of *twēn(e)* (see Table 2 above) provides insight into the token frequency of the investigated preposition and other prepositions meaning ‘between’. In the present section the examined texts will be first grouped according to the dialectal provenance of the manuscript in which they are preserved. Next, the author will provide the repertoire (type frequency) of prepositions meaning ‘between’ as registered in particular texts by the *Middle English Dictionary online*. These types will be subsequently validated against respective whole texts. Finally, the token frequency of *twēn(e)* and other attested prepositions meaning ‘between’ will be calculated. Moreover, the results of the *Corpus of Middle English prose and verse* search will be presented in this section. The type and token frequency of *twēn(e)* and other prepositions meaning ‘between’ will be likewise provided for these. The discussion is supplemented with some examples illustrating the usage. All the findings are summarised in Table 5 in section 7.4. below.

##### 7.1. South-Western texts

As regards the only South-Western text employing the preposition *twēn(e)*, i.e., *Holy Rood* (MS Bodl. 343; 1175), the *Middle English Dictionary online* does not record the use of any other prepositions meaning ‘between’ there. The present text analysis reveals the application of one more such preposition, i.e., *bitwēn(e)*, not registered in *Holy Rood* by the *MED online*. What is more, *bitwēn(e)* is attested three times, whereas *twēn(e)* only once. Thus, the preposition *twēn(e)* actually produces more instances. The examples (1) – (3) below illustrate the use of both *bitwēn(e)* and *twēn(e)* in context.

- (1) Ic wat, leof, ðet ȝit mycele godes lufe  
& mycele freondrædenne habbæð inc **tweonan**.  
(*Holy Rood*: 8/16)
- (2) ȝif hit godes wille beo..þur þa freondrædene þe unc **betweonan** is  
ic wolde wilniæn æt þe ane bene. (*Holy Rood*: 6/15)

- (3) Heo wundriende wæron heom **betweonon** þæt heom swa ilumpen wæs ðæt heoræ nan oðer icnawæn ne cuðe. (*Holy Rood*: 16/30)

## 7.2. Northern texts

The only Northern manuscripts listed by the *MED online* as featuring *twēn(e)* are two manuscripts, i.e., MS Fairfax 14 and MS Göttingen Theol 107 of *Cursor mundi*. In the case of MS Fairfax 14, the other ‘between’ preposition ascribed to the manuscript by the *MED online* is *bitwix(e)*. MS Göt Theol 107 is listed as including *twēn(e)* and *twix(e)*. The scrutiny of both manuscripts demonstrates that they both actually employ the same set of four prepositions meaning ‘between’, i.e., *bitwix(e)*<sup>7</sup>, *twix(e)*, *bitwēn(e)* and *twēn(e)*. Surprisingly, *twēn(e)*, which is the least frequent of all these prepositions with only one occurrence in each manuscript, is recorded by the *MED online*. At the same time, for example, the use of *bitwix(e)*, which is the most frequent preposition from the analysed group appearing as many as 96 times in MS Göt Theol 107, is omitted from the *Middle English Dictionary online*. Table 5 below shows the token frequency of ‘between’ prepositions in the two manuscripts. Types neglected by the *MED online* are put in bold type.

Table 5. Token frequency of ‘between’ prepositions in *Cursor mundi*

MS Fairfax 14		MS Göt Theol 107	
<i>bitwix(e)</i>	46	<b><i>bitwix(e)</i></b>	96
<b><i>twix(e)</i></b>	3	<i>twix(e)</i>	19
<b><i>bitwēn(e)</i></b>	31	<b><i>bitwēn(e)</i></b>	10
<i>twēn(e)</i>	1	<i>twēn(e)</i>	1

Examples (4) and (5) below illustrate the use of the only instances of *twēn(e)* in each manuscript. A parallel passage from the other manuscript is added to each example. When we consider the replacement of *twēn(e)* with *tuix* and *by-twene* as well as *by-twene* with *tuix*, we can assume that the prepositions meaning ‘between’ could be rather freely selected from the available repertoire according to the preferences of the scribes. The choice might have been dictated by the requirements of meter since the text was written in eight-syllable couplets.

<sup>7</sup> Kitson (1993, 1996) and Alcorn (2013), following Kitson, treat *bitwix(e)* (OE *betwēox*) as a spelling/ phonological variant of *bitwēn(e)* (OE *betwēonum*). I treat these, following the *MED online*, as two separate prepositions.

(4)

I ne ro3 quat dede hit ware  
 þat blessed bodi to winde þai walde  
 & I. be-gan againe to halde  
 suche strife **twene** vs was þare.  
 (MS Fairfax 14)

I ne roght quat dede it ware.  
 þat blisced bodi to wind þai wald,  
 And i bigan it to wid-hald,  
 Sli strijf **tuix** vs was þare.  
 (MS Göt Theol 107)

(5)

As dovis eie hir loke is swete  
 Rose on thorne to hir vn-mete  
**By-twene** hem feire accord is non  
 Then **by-twene** her kynne & my lemman  
 (MS Fairfax 14)

As douues eye hir loke es suete,  
 As rose on thorn er to vnmete;  
 And **tuene** þaim fayre acord es nane,  
 Sua es **tuix** hir kin and my lenman.  
 (MS Göt Theol 107)

Yet another interesting observation is that the West-Midland manuscript of the same text, i.e., MS Trin. Coll. R.3.8 (383) uses exclusively *bitwēn(e)*. Hence, one can assume that *bitwix(e)*, *twix(e)* and *twēn(e)* did not belong to the unmarked pool of the ‘between’ prepositions of the West-Midland scribe.

### 7.3. East Midland texts

#### 7.3.1. East Midland texts by John Lydgate

John Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes* (MS Bodl. 263; 1439) is the text which includes the highest number of occurrences of the preposition *twēn(e)* and also of *atwēn*. The *Middle English Dictionary online* does not record the use of any other preposition meaning ‘between’ in the text. The analysed *Fall of Princes* features, however, also *atwix* and *bitwix*, with eight instances each. The former two top frequency prepositions produce as many as 65 and 93 occurrences respectively. It appears that the text exhibits a tendency for the use of *twēn(e)* with nouns (see examples (6) – (8)), whereas *atwēn* rather attaches to the numeral *tweyne* ‘two’ and personal pronouns (see (9) – (11)):

(6) I meene, in sooth, **twen** Ing[e]land & Fraunce,  
 His purpos was taue had a pes fynall,  
 (p. 168)

(7) In this mater mak a comparisoun  
**Twen** Alisaundre and Diogenes:  
 (p. 177)

- (8) **Twen** the residue off this gret iourne  
And litil part theroff that was begunne,  
(p. 330)
- (9) To declare, the story list nat feyne,  
The grete hatrede that was **atwen** hem tweyne.  
(p. 103)
- (10) **Atwen** hemsilff[e] be a feyned striff,  
To fynde a weie to reue hym off his liff.  
(p. 365)
- (11) Ther may **atwen** vs be no menyng double,  
But oon herte, o will and o corage.  
(p. 357)

John Lydgate's *Secreta Secretorum* (MS Sloane 2464; 1450) is yet another work of Lydgate which includes numerous instances of the preposition *twēn(e)*. In terms of types, the *Middle English Dictionary online* lists *Secreta Secretorum* in the entries for *twēn(e)* and *atwēn*. In the text, however, one can also find *atwix*. As regards tokens, there are 15 occurrences of *twēn(e)*, eight of *atwēn* and three of *atwix*. As the examples (12) – (14) illustrate, *twēn(e)* and *atwēn* can be used exchangeably:

- (12) Set a good mene / **twen** yong and Old of age.  
Excellent prynce / this processe to Compyle  
Takith at gre / the Rudnesse of my style.  
(ll. 19-21)
- (13) That the streemys / of liberallite  
Set in good mesour / Reffreytes of prudence,  
Peysed in ballaunce / So that Sapience,  
Queen of vertues / as lady souereyne,  
That such a meene / be set **atwen** hem tweyne.  
(ll. 815-819)
- (14) Or kepe a meene / *twen* vertuous plente,  
**Atwen** largesse / and prodigalyte.  
(ll. 598-599)

In his *Praise of Peace* (MS Harley 2255; 1460), John Lydgate involves the prepositions *twēn(e)* and *atwēn*. This *MED online* information is confirmed by the whole text analysis. Actually, one can find two instances of *twēn(e)* and six of *atwēn*. There seems to be no semantic difference between the two prepositions and their use might have been required to balance the meter, see the illustrative examples below:

- (15) God sende vs pees **twen** Ynglond and Fraunce;  
 Werre causith povert, pees causith habundaunce,  
 And **attween** bothen for ther moor encrees,  
 Withoute feynyng, fraude, or varyaunce,  
**Twen** al Cristene Crist Ihesus send vs pees.  
 (stanza 22)
- (16) God graunt vs alle, now aftir his discees,  
 To sende vs grace **attween** ech partye,  
 By loue and charyte, to live in parfihht pees:  
 (stanza 23)

*Horns away* (MS Laud Misc. 683) from 1475, which is a poem consisting of nine eight-lined stanzas, contains only one instance of the preposition *twēn(e)*:

- (17) **Tween** gold and gossomer is greet dyfference;  
 Trewe metall requeryth noon allay;  
 Vnto purpos by cleer experyence,  
 Beute wol shewe, thogh hornys wer away.  
 (stanza 1)

In the 1500 manuscript (MS Trin. Coll. R. 3.19 (599)) of *Assembly of Gods* by John Lydgate the *Middle English Dictionary* records the use of *twēn(e)* and *atwēn*. However, my analysis of the whole text clearly demonstrates the presence of two more prepositions from the investigated group, i.e., *bitwēn(e)* and *atwix*. In terms of token frequency, I have obtained the following results: *twēn(e)* – 4 occurrences, *atwēn* – 1, *bitwēn(e)* – 2 and *atwix* – 1, which shows that the use of the four prepositions was rather balanced, with a slight tendency to employ *twēn(e)* more frequently. The prepositions seem to be used exchangeably in similar contexts and with the same senses (see examples (18) and (19) below). Their application might be dictated by the requirement of meter, though.

- (18) The batayll holde **twene** Vyce & Vertew.  
 But when I sy hit, hit was but a whew,  
 A dreme, a fantasy, & a thyng of nought.  
 To study theron I had nomore thought.  
 (stanza 293)
- (19) And as for the batayll **betwene** Vyce & Vertew holde,  
 So pleylny appereth to the inwardly,  
 To make exposicion therof, new or olde,  
 Were but superfluyte–therfore refuse hit I.  
 (stanza 261)

John Lydgate's *Aesop's fables* preserved in MS Trin. Coll. R. 3.19 (599) from 1500 employs *twēn(e)* and *atwēn*, which has been mentioned by the *MED online*. *Twēn(e)* appears three times in the text and *atwēn* six times. Here are two examples illustrating the use of *twēn(e)*

- (20) And phylosophers by wrytyng bere recorde,  
**Twene** trowþe & fraude may be non acorde.  
 (stanza 33)
- With cancryd lypes & with tung[e] double  
**Twene** ryght & wrong forþe þey woll procede,  
 (stanza 77)

Lydgate's *Debate of the horse, goose and sheep* (MS Lansdowne 699; 1500) is labelled by the *Middle English Dictionary* as including occurrences of *twēn(e)* and *atwēn*. The entire text analysis reveals that the use of the preposition *bitwēn(e)* has been omitted. Moreover, the token count analysis demonstrates that *bitwēn(e)* is actually the most frequent with four instances, whereas *twēn(e)* and *atwēn* produce two examples each. The example below illustrates the use of *twēn(e)*. It is interesting that MS Harley 2251 (c. 1475) incorporates *atwēn* in the same position.

- (22) **Tweene** riche & poore what is the difference,  
 Whan deth approachith in any creature,  
 (MS Lansdowne 699; 1500; stanza 87)

What is more, my analysis of the texts comprised in the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* demonstrates the presence of several more tokens of *twēn(e)* in four more texts by John Lydgate (see 7.2. above). These instances

have not been recorded by the *Middle English Dictionary online*, even though both the dictionary and the corpus belong to the *Middle English Compendium*.

In *The pilgrimage of the life of man* (MS Cotton Vitel) from 1426 there is a wide range of types of the prepositions meaning ‘between’. Round the beginning of the text one can find the only instance of *twēn(e)* (see example (23) below). Further in the manuscript, there appear *atwēn* (16 occurrences), *atwix* (11 occurrences), *betwixt* (5 occurrences) and *bitwēn(e)* (2 occurrences). The prepositions seem to be used interchangeably with parallel senses (see examples (24) and (25) below). *Atwēn* and *atwix* tend to be used with the numeral ‘two’ and with ‘both’ (see example (26)).

- (23) **Twēn** hevene & Erthe stood the place,  
As yt hadde (only by grace)  
(ll. 865-866)
- (24) And declare to yow I shal,  
Now that ye & I be met,  
The trewē boundys that be set.  
**Atwyxe** vs tweyne, syth go ful long,  
That noon to other do no wrong;  
(ll. 3404-3408)
- (25) And therefore, yiff ye wer wys,  
Ye sholdē nat in your avys.  
Speke of boundys in no degre.  
Set **be-twyxē** yow & me.  
(ll. 3767-3770)
- (26) Concludē nat / In oo Sentence;  
For, as grete ys / the dyfference  
**Atwene** hem tweynē / by Obstācle,  
As **bytwene** venym / and Tryacle.  
(ll. 16165-16168)

In S. Giles (MS Harl. 2255; 1460) one can find three instances of *twēn(e)* and three of *atwēn*. Similarly, the two versions of *Lyke the audience, so uttir thy language* contain three occurrences of *twēn(e)* in each manuscript, i.e., MS Harl. 2255 from 1460 and MS Univ. Lib. Camb. Hh. 4. 12 from c.1475, see example (27) below. Additionally, there is one instance of *atwēn* in each manuscript.

- (27) **Twene** germany and affrik was gret enmyte;  
 Noo comperison **twene** good grayne and forage;  
 Prayse euery thyng like to hys degre,  
 And like þ<sup>e</sup> audience, so vttyr þ<sup>i</sup> langage.  
 (MS Univ. Lib. Camb. Hh. 4. 12, ll. 93-96)

Finally, the text of *S. Edmund und Fremund* preserved in MS Ashmole 46 from 1500 contains seven occurrences of *twēn(e)*. The use of the preposition is accompanied by five occurrences of *atwēn* and three of *atwix*. *Twēn(e)* rather appears with nouns without numerals, whereas *atwēn* tends to be followed by a numeral 'two', e.g.,

- (28) **Tween** wynd and wawe his barge almost brast  
 (l. 250)
- (29) Thus **atween** tweyne hangyng in ballance,  
 (l. 477)

### 7.3.2. Other East Midland texts

There are some dozen instances of the preposition *twēn(e)* in four East Midland texts not attributed to John Lydgate. Interestingly, the *MED* records their presence in these texts but the dictionary omits some other preposition(s) meaning 'between'.

*Genesis and exodus* (MS Corpus Christi College 444) from 1325 employs *twēn(e)* and *bitwēn(e)*. Here, exceptionally, all the types are mentioned by the *MED online*. However, the number of instances the dictionary provides can be misleading. The five examples of *twēn(e)* are actually all the five occurrences in the whole text, while the four *MED* examples of *bitwēn(e)* correspond to 18 instances in the text.

A slightly later text of *Guy of Warwick* (1330) preserved in MS Auchinleck is listed by the *MED online* as including *twēn(e)* and *atwix*. These types occur only once in the whole text each. Interestingly, the later 1475 manuscript of the text paraphrases the passage including *twēn(e)* in the way that the preposition is completely omitted (see example (30) below). Two other investigated prepositions not recorded by the *MED online* are *bitwēn(e)* and *bitwix*. It is worth mentioning that *bitwēn(e)* produces as many as 22 tokens in *Guy of Warwick*. *Bitwix* appears twice.

(30)

Pemperour cleped Herhaud him to,	The emperowre syr Harrowde calde
& aresound him <b>twene</b> hem tvo:	And askyd hym, yf he dwelle wolde
Sir Herhaud, þou schalt bileue wiþ me.	Wyth hym in that cyte,
Wele ich þe sigge, & siker þou be,	And a ryche man schulde he bee:
(MS Auchinleck; 1330)	(MS Cambridge Cai 107/176; 1475)

Osbern Bokenham's *Lives of the saints (Legends of holy women)* (MS Arundel 327) from 1447 contain *twēn(e)*, *bitwēn(e)* and *bitwix*. The first two prepositions appear in the text three times each, and *bitwix*, not recorded by the *MED*, five times.

Finally, *Poems* by Charles of Orleans (MS Harley 682) from 1450 include five instances of *twēn(e)*, seven of *bitwēn(e)* and one of *twix* (see examples (31) and (32) employing personal pronouns, which was rather unusual in the works of Lydgate). The latter type is not attested by the *MED online*.

(31) For as for thyn y take it hir bewte  
 And yit she lete it ly **twene** hir and me  
 As thou mayst se as yit she doth it wayfe  
 As she were loth more then hir owen ressayue.

(32) Allas alone am y without compane  
 Fare welle my lady fare welle my gladnes  
 Now is the loue partid **twix** yow and me  
 yet what for then y make yow here promes

#### 7.4. Summary of the findings

Table 6 below includes the token frequency of the prepositions meaning 'between' in the investigated texts. Tokens in bold print refer to the types which have not been recorded by the *Middle English Dictionary online* in particular texts. The scale of negligence of the *MED online* is spectacular. Four texts (in five manuscripts) included in the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*, which like the *Middle English Dictionary online* belongs to the *Middle English Compendium*, are completely omitted in the *MED online* entries for prepositions meaning 'between'. In the remaining 13 texts<sup>8</sup>, preserved in 14 manuscripts, *bitwēn(e)* is not recorded in six manuscripts, *atwix* in three, *bitwix* in four and *twix* in two.

<sup>8</sup> One text, *Saints Alban and Amphibal* (1500), is not analysed in terms of token frequency since the author had no access to a complete text.

Table 6. Token frequency of the prepositions meaning ‘between’

East Midlands – John Lydgate	<i>twēn(e)</i>	<i>bitwēn(e)</i>	<i>atwēn</i>	<i>atwix</i>	<i>bitwix</i>	<i>twix</i>
<i>Fall of princes</i> (1439) (MS Bodl. 263)	65		93	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	
<i>Secreta secretorum</i> (1450) (MS Sloane 2464)	15		8	<b>3</b>		
<i>Praise of peace</i> (1460) (MS Harley 2255)	2		6			
<i>Horns away</i> (1475) (MS Laud Misc. 683)	1					
<i>Assembly of Gods</i> (1500) (MS Trin. Coll. R. 3.19 (599))	4	<b>2</b>	1	<b>1</b>		
<i>Aesop’s fables</i> (1500) (MS Trin. Coll. R. 3.19 (599))	3		6			
<i>Debate of the horse, goose and sheep</i> (1500) (MS Lansdowne 699)	2	<b>4</b>	2			
<i>The pilgrimage of the life of man</i> (1426) (MS Cotton Vitel)	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>	
<i>S. Giles</i> (1460) (MS Harley 2255)	<b>3</b>		<b>3</b>			
Lyke the Audience, so uttir thy language (MS Harley 2255) (1460)	<b>3</b>		<b>1</b>			
(MS Univ. Lib. Camb. Hh. 4. 12) (c.1475)	<b>3</b>		<b>1</b>			
<i>S. Edmund und Fremund</i> (1500) (MS Ashmole 46)	<b>7</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>		
<b>East Midlands – other texts</b>						
<i>Genesis and exodus</i> (1325) (MS Corpus Christi College 444)	5	18				
<i>Guy of Warwick</i> (1) (1330) (MS Auchinleck)	1	<b>22</b>		1	<b>2</b>	
Osbern Bokenham, <i>Lives of the saints</i> (1447) (MS Arundel 327)	3	3			<b>5</b>	
Charles of Orleans, <i>Poems</i> (1450) (MS Harley 682)	5	7				<b>1</b>

North				
<i>Cursor mundi</i> (1400)				
(MS Fairfax 14)	1	<b>31</b>	46	<b>3</b>
(MS Göt. Theol. 107)	1	<b>10</b>	<b>96</b>	19
South-West				
<i>Holy rood</i> (1175)				
(MS Bodl. 343)	1	<b>3</b>		

Regarding tokens, of the 126 attested tokens of the Middle English preposition *twēn(e)* 109 are recorded in the works of John Lydgate in the East-Midland dialect. Fourteen are found in other East-Midland texts, two in two Northern manuscripts of *Cursor mundi* (1400), and one in *Holy rood* (1175) composed in the South-Western dialect. In the texts by John Lydgate *twēn(e)* is either the dominating preposition meaning ‘between’ or the second one in terms of frequency. The other leading preposition is *atwēn*. The only exception is *The pilgrimage of the life of man* (1426) in which *atwēn* produces the highest number of tokens and *twēn(e)* is the least frequent of the five prepositions meaning ‘between’ in the text. In other East-Midland texts, not authored by John Lydgate, *twēn(e)* is the second or even third most frequent preposition meaning ‘between’, after *bitwēn(e)* and/or *bitwix*. As regards the proportions in the two Northern *Cursor mundi* (1400) manuscripts, *twēn(e)* constitutes about one per cent of the analysed prepositions, being strongly outnumbered by *bitwix*, *bitwēn(e)* and *twix*. In the South-Western *Holy rood* (1175) the total number of tokens of all discussed prepositions is low, i.e., four, including one *twēn(e)* and three instances of *bitwēn(e)*.

## 8. Conclusions

The aim of the present paper was to focus on the Middle English preposition *twēn(e)* and to provide its origin, semantics, dialect distribution, complete textual distribution (record of texts employing *twēn(e)*) and token frequency. Moreover, all the texts containing the preposition *twēn(e)* were examined in order to establish the whole range of the prepositions meaning ‘between’ in them, and to evaluate their token frequency and the proportion of the application of *twēn(e)* as against all other examined prepositions in these texts. The analysis was carried out on the basis of such extensive electronic databases as the *Middle English Dictionary online*, the *Oxford English Dictionary online* and the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* as well as on the basis of a number of complete preserved Middle English texts.

The etymology of *twēn(e)*, as the investigation has shown, is different from that presented by the *MED online* and *OED online*, which suggest the shorten-

ing/aphesis of both *bitwēn(e)* and *atwēn*. The analysis of the dates of the first attestations of these three prepositions clearly implies that the etymology of ME *twēn(e)* needs to be revised as “an aphetic form of *betwēn(e)* < OE *betwēonum*”.

As regards the semantics, *twēn(e)* had the prototype meaning ‘between’. It could also sporadically mean ‘in between, among’. The analysis demonstrates that the preposition *twēn(e)*, similarly to *betwēn(e)*, could assume locative, temporal and abstract senses. Some syntactic observations include the fact that *twēn(e)* was most frequently used with nouns and only sporadically with personal pronouns, without any numerals.

The dialect distribution of the preposition *twēn(e)*, as deduced from the localisation of the manuscripts of the texts listed by the *Middle English dictionary*, is confirmed by the analysis of the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* texts. Hence, *twēn(e)* was attested most frequently in the East-Midland texts, mostly in the writings of John Lydgate. In the North and in the South-West, the preposition was almost unattested but still available, as demonstrated by the presence of three occurrences of *twēn(e)* in two texts (three manuscripts). *Twēn(e)* has not been used in any preserved Kentish or West-Midland texts. The analysis brings to light the recorded use of the preposition *twēn(e)* in 18 Middle English texts preserved in 20 manuscripts. The majority, i.e., 12 texts (13 manuscripts) are authored by John Lydgate and localised in the East-Midlands. Four further texts also belong to the East-Midlands. Moreover, *twēn(e)* can be found once in one South-Western manuscript and once in each of two Northern manuscripts of one text. All texts including *twēn(e)* are metrical texts covering both religious and secular topics.

The investigation of the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* and of a few other complete Middle English texts has granted us access to the actual token frequency of *twēn(e)* and other prepositions meaning ‘between’. Moreover, the study shows some instances of the use of *twēn(e)* in texts which for unexplained reasons have not been recorded in the *Middle English Dictionary online*. Here belong four works of John Lydgate. In general, the investigation has revealed that the highest number of instances (absolute token frequency) of *twēn(e)* can be found in the texts by John Lydgate (see Table 5 in section 7.4.), in which *twēn(e)* is the top frequency or the second frequent preposition meaning ‘between’.

Finally, a more general conclusion of the present study is that the *Middle English Dictionary online* needs to be treated more cautiously in terms of the text and thus dialect distribution of particular prepositions. Thus a study of complete Middle English texts is advisable not only for a token but also for a type frequency analysis.

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