



# The William Blake Archive

Stephen Miller

AAC / ÖAW

*Texts & Files* SS 2007

Universität Wien

# William Blake & The Illuminated Book





# William Blake (1757–1827)

- Printmaker and painter by training, who later added poetry to his accomplishments
- Produced “illuminated books”
- Critical stature has grown considerably over the years



# Blake Scholarship

- Dispersed and various audience of readers and viewers
- Impact on the collections where his original works are to be found



# “Hard Necessity”

- Term of an early critic, refers to the restrictions placed upon the reproduction of Blake’s work
  - Technological issues of reproduction
  - Costs associated with the above
- The visible Blake is invisible



# The Blake Archive

- Founded in 1996, WWW-based from the start
  - <http://www.blakearchive.org>



# Fundamental Aim

- To construct a unified international resource out of highly disparate and dispersed original materials to which access is ordinarily limited by institutional and other restrictions and by the sheer cost and difficulty of travel
- As a public resource, the Blake Archive would be maintained free and open to all through the WWW



# Broad Aim

- Unified access to major works of visual and literary art that are
  - highly disparate
  - widely dispersed
- Access severely restricted as a result of
  - value
  - rarity
  - extreme fragility



# Blake as Poet

- Dominant tradition of Blake editing has been overwhelmingly literary
  - Converted, editorially, into a poet
  - Visual work acknowledged but sidelined



# Blake as Artist

- Art-historical world
  - Scholarly tradition of cataloguing work



# Where does Blake begin & end?

- In Blake's illuminated prints, difficult to say where the poet leaves off and the visual artist begins
- But 19th print limitations made it difficult to reproduce the artwork well, and soon Blake's artistic work became overlooked and his poetry "translated" into type.



# Blake & Multimedia

- Blake is a mixed-media artist
- Work was designed to be read visually and to be visually read
- Graphical & Textual elements work together



# Blake & Hypermedia

- So what better way then than to use (digital) multimedia to create a hypermedia presentation of the works of William Blake
- In order to better understand the analogue productions of Blake we need the Blake in digital format



# Historical Balance

- Methodologically, the William Blake Archive is an attempt to restore historical balance through the syntheses made possible by the electronic medium



# Images

- Reproductions that are more accurate than ones in the best commercially published photomechanical reproductions
  - Colour
  - Detail
  - Scale



# Texts

- Texts that are more faithful to Blake's own than any other collected edition so far to date
- Powerful text-searching and image-searching tools
  - Controlled vocabulary
  - Detailed image descriptions



# What is the concept of the Blake Archive?

- 3 previous models for scholarly work
  1. Archive
  2. Catalogue
  3. Edition



# What is the Blake Archive?

- “Hybrid all-in-one edition”
- An **integration** into one electronic archival resource
  - Editions
  - Catalogues
  - Databases
  - Scholarly tools



# Prototype

- Not designed to be an isolated resource
- Blake Archive has a vision of a multiplicity of cooperating electronic resources for scholarly research
- Demand for collaborative procedures
  - Prototype for “distance editing”
  - Integrate the textual, art-historical, critical, and technical expertise necessary for the construction of a scholarly resource as complex as the Blake Archive



# Blake Archive DTD

- Essentially, “an art historian's DTD”
- Software tools
  - Inote
  - ImageSizer
- Placed in the public domain



# “Open-endedness”

- With electronic editing and access it is possible to add material, correct errors, incorporate new discoveries
- What is needed is a “sound and durable foundation for decades of future scholarship”



# “Multiplication of Copies”

- “[...] let us save what remains: not by vaults and locks which fence them from the public eye and use in consigning them to the waste of time, but by such a multiplication of copies, as shall place them beyond the reach of accident.”

Thomas Jefferson, 1791



# LOCKSS

- LOCKSS

- “Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe”
- <http://lockss.stanford.edu/index.html>