

The William Blake Archive

Stephen Miller
AAC / ÖAW
Texts & Files WS 2006/07
Universität Wien

William Blake & The Illuminated Book



2

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / ÖAW 2006

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

3

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / ÖAW 2006

Blake Scholarship

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

4

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / ÖAW 2006

“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

5

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / ÖAW 2006

The Blake Archive

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

6

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / ÖAW 2006

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

7

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / OAW 2006

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

8

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / OAW 2006

Blake as Poet

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

9

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / OAW 2006

Blake as Artist

- Art-historical world
 - Scholarly tradition of cataloguing work

10

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / OAW 2006

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.

11

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / OAW 2006

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

12

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / OAW 2006

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

13

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / ÖAW 2006

Historical Balance

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

14

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / ÖAW 2006

Images

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

15

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / ÖAW 2006

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

16

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / ÖAW 2006

What is the concept of the Blake Archive?

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

17

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / ÖAW 2006

What is the Blake Archive?

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

18

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / ÖAW 2006

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

19

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / ÖAW 2006

Blake Archive DTD

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

20

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / ÖAW 2006

“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”

21

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / ÖAW 2006

“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

22

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / ÖAW 2006

LOCKSS

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

23

Texts & Files WS 2006/07

© AAC / ÖAW 2006