

The William Blake Archive

The William Blake Archive. <http://www.blakearchive.org> (Last Accessed: 2016-11-06). Reviewed by Kendal Crawford (Simon Fraser University), [kendal_crawford \[at\] sfu \[dot\] ca](mailto:kendal_crawford@sfu.ca);  Michelle Levy (Simon Fraser University), [mnl \[at\] sfu \[dot\] ca](mailto:mnl@sfu.ca).

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Abstract

The William Blake Archive (WBA) attempts to remediate digitally William Blake's entire corpus of poetic and artistic artifacts. The resulting website exhibits high-fidelity images of his surviving prints, plates, drawings, and canvases that would otherwise remain isolated in difficult-to-access collections around the world. Using an editorial strategy that focuses on the physical object, the WBA successfully individuates physical copies of Blake's work by supplementing each digital facsimile with unique bibliographic information, editorial commentary, and viewing tools that help users investigate the object's unique material nature. Functionally, the site would greatly benefit from updates to its user interface and key applet (the Virtual Light Box). The project succeeds as a scholarly digital edition by providing curated and contextualized access to Blake's literary and artistic output, implementing its core editorial strategy since the archive was launched twenty years ago, in 1996. This review examines the WBA as it existed until 12 December 2016, when the site underwent a major overhaul.

Note. The content of this review is based on our examination of and interactions with the WBA, as conducted between May and December, 2016. This review was in press when a new version of the WBA was released on 12 December 2016; prior to this release, the website provided no indication that a website redesign was imminent. As our review pertains to a legacy Digital Humanities project that had been in use for twenty years at the time of our review, the authors of this review and the editors of this journal believe it is useful to publish this review in its current form, even though many of the site's features and functions discussed below have been altered by the new release. The authors followed RIDE's guidelines and archived several pages of the site, and also took screen shots (displayed throughout the review), so that the reader of this review can view various pages of the WBA in its former incarnation.

The editors of the new WBA have described the update as 'a complete and transformative redesign of its website.' Given that not only the look and feel of the digital archive has changed, but also its functionality, a thorough reinvestigation of the site is required. It is anticipated that many of the issues of functionality we raise in this review will have been addressed by this redesign. The authors of the current review look forward to undertaking a full examination of the new WBA in the coming months and publishing a supplementary review in the next issue. We also plan to address the more conceptual issues that this series of events raises — the shifting and impermanent nature of a digital edition's web interface over time.

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