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The John Milton Digital Library

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Abstract: The John Milton Digital Library (JMDL) is an online platform for scholars, researchers, students, professors, and information seekers interested in learning more about John Milton and his works. The JMDL aims to serve as an information and community resource for those wishing to study Milton's works alongside critical reviews, biographical information, and upcoming and existing exhibitions that may be of interest to those in the field. It is the only digital library of its kind and offers a host of useful and intellectually stimulating content, while giving its users access to the complete works of John Milton, courtesy of the public domain. The JMDL will offer full text PDF downloads of all of Milton's works, provide biographical information, collaborative online discussion spaces for intelligent conversation, and highlight critical reviews and exhibitions of Milton's works. A mock digital library has been created and readers are invited to peruse for a better visual representation.

Mission Statement

The John Milton Digital Library (JMDL) is an online platform for scholars, researchers, students, professors, and information seekers interested in learning more about John Milton and his works. The John Milton Digital Library aims to serve as an information and community resource for those wishing to study Milton's works alongside critical reviews, biographical information, and upcoming and existing exhibitions that may be of interest to those in the field. The John Milton Digital Library is an open source platform offering its users free, downloadable access to all of John Milton's works. The mission of JMDL is to provide information seekers with a reliable, free resource that encourages the continued study of this influential writer. Users are encouraged to explore JMDL's intellectual landscape, participate in open discussions on Milton's writings, and share their knowledge with others.

Nature of Collection

The JMDL will provide access to all of Milton's published writings. This consists of over 35 works, categorized as epic poetry, dramas, political writings, and prose. The JMDL will also provide access to some of John Milton's original manuscripts, when obtainable. All writings will be available as PDF documents, text files, and in HTML format. Also, where applicable, the JMDL will provide high-resolution JPEG images (formatted from TIFF) of Milton's original writings (handwritten or, when he became blind, transcribed). High-resolution images from First Edition manuscripts will also be listed as an option for download, alongside PDF and text files. All original text and image files will be stored on a remote, physical hard drive for posterity. Downloadable files offered to users will be retrieved from a cloud server for instant access and quick download speeds.

The JMDL acts primarily as a stand-alone library, with some portal and collaborative features. Biographical content and non-copyright texts are accessed through JMDL, while information on exhibitions and critical reviews act as a portal. In addition, the discussion board serves as a collaborative feature aimed to enhance the user-experience through participation and real-time discussion. The site is designed with the user in mind, incorporating consistent design, intuitive navigation buttons, advanced search features, and user-friendly modules to ensure a uniform and superior experience. Users will find the ability to search with natural language descriptors instinctive and helpful. Researchers and scholars who are familiar with controlled vocabulary will also benefit from JMDL's search lexicon, which combines controlled vocabulary and natural language to ensure relevant results, no matter what search terms are used. Additionally, a context-sensitive help agent will accompany misspelled or nonexistent search queries in order to assist users with locating their desired information.

The JMDL is completely supported on all mobile devices, including all Apple, Android, and e-readers, so there is no lapse in website browsing capabilities. The JMDL also features an active social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Google+, and Tumblr. Users are able to stay up-to-date, pose questions, learn interesting tidbits, and more by following the JMDL's presence on these popular social media sites. Links to the JMDL social media sites are located on every page of the website in the upper right hand corner, below the search box. Social

tagging is available on discussion board conversations and blog posts and can be searched for in the main simple search box. In addition, users can "share" blog posts and forum talks instantly with their social media following with integrated social media buttons located on each post.

On the "Exhibitions" page, the JMDL features information on current and upcoming Milton exhibits. The category is broken down into two subsets, digital and physical, and users can choose their desired exhibit type and find relevant information regarding the featured collection. All digital exhibitions listed are linked to their online counterparts and physical exhibitions are linked to information pages about the scheduled exhibit at its physical location.

Website Platform

The JMDL is currently hosted on the open-source platform Weebly. The Weebly interface makes it extremely easy to design and publish a website with little to no coding experience. At the moment, this platform is ideal for the JMDL because it gives the creator free license to create as many pages, subpages, links, blogs, and headers without labor-intensive coding and design work. Weebly also offers integrated search functions (at an added price), social media modules, a melded blog platform, and converts the entire website to a mobile-friendly layout (a staple for today's information seeking behaviors). The Weebly interface has a slight learning curve concerning design and elemental functions, however these concerns are quickly alleviated as the creator becomes more familiar with the platform. Weebly offers many free website templates which are minimally customizable as well as a number of different options for building interior elements (columns, text, images, etc). Each free template comes with a basic, unalterable navigation and main header design and then gives the creator license to design interior pages as they choose. The Weebly platform offers its users very little code manipulation on the free package, only giving the creator access to the CSS backend. This can be rather frustrating for someone who would like to manipulate the code to accommodate certain design features, however it is not detrimental to the design process. Paid Weebly subscriptions allow creators much more control over their site, including access to HTML, add-ons like integrated search, slide-show options, and even selling capabilities. Eventually, the creator plans to move away from this prefabricated layout to a much more customizable site that offers similar functionality but complete back-end control.

There are a few copyright/intellectual property concerns that need to be addressed within the JMDL. All works of John Milton are out of copyright and so they are freely offered to users. Biographical content, exhibition information, and blog posts are offered with in-text citations to indicate the source of the information and give proper credit the respective authors and organizations. Access to critical reviews and the discussion board require login information and are not open to nonsubscribers. Content featured on the "Critical Reviews" page will only appear after express consent/permissions have been granted from the author(s) for their publication on JMDL. These authors can choose to publish their full-text article on JMDL or provide an abstract with a link to an outside journal.

All intellectual conversations on the JMDL discussion board require a login to view and participate in the topics being discussed. Users will agree to a number of Discussion Board rules, such as posting relevant content, respecting fellow contributors, and giving proper citations/credit when necessary, in order to participate in these online discussions.

Discussion

The John Milton Digital Library addresses many of the deficiencies currently existing in comparable digital collections for those in the Humanities fields. Firstly, this is the only digital library of its kind, strictly devoted to John Milton and his complete texts. The JMDL is, at its core, a comprehensive Milton resource, not merely a reservoir for holding his texts. Not only does the JMDL give its users access to the complete works of John Milton (in various formats), it provides users with a comprehensive understanding of this celebrated, though controversial, author, writer, and political figure. The JMDL gives its users access to only the highest standard of information and resources regarding John Milton on an easy to use, coherent interface. Unlike Project Gutenberg, the JMDL includes visual cues like images, buttons, and social media links to enhance the overall experience. The design of the site is pleasing to look at, incorporates a simple color scheme, and is organized in a fashion that is familiar to most users, subtly important features not present on Project Gutenberg. The search interface offers various ways of locating information and the browse function supports learners who are interested in discovering new topics. The website functions as one, regardless of what page or interior page a user is on, reinforcing its credibility as a veritable resource as well as its continued use. The JMDL, unlike Project Gutenberg, offers a variety of resources for continued learning and education on Milton. Researchers and students alike can access highly regarded reviews of Milton's texts, learn from and participate in Q&A sessions with Milton experts, and pose discussion questions to those in the Humanities community who are interested in exploring Milton further.

In order to alleviate some important issues regarding the search behavior preferences of humanists, the JMDL endeavored to provide an overall learning experience for its users. Simple additions such as coherent, advanced search options and the ability to "browse" a topic were included to ensure humanists experienced a digital search comparable to "browsing the stacks" (Kachaluba, 2014). Kachaluba et al. (2014) also stated that most humanists were intrigued by the digital formats and saw remote accessibility and search functionality as tremendous advantages over print materials. In order to reinforce this notion, the JMDL incorporated a variety of search features, like searching by natural language descriptions and controlled vocabulary, as well as access to different critical reviews on Milton to highlight a sense of "one stop shop for Milton" that the JMDL provides. Additionally, the content offered on the JMDL is of the highest resolution available. Original texts that have been scanned and uploaded are offered as high resolution JPEG files, giving users the ability to zoom deep into the text to analyze every mark and mistake. This is extremely important asset for humanists as many of Milton's original texts are not available for in person display. In order to gain an accurate analysis of these texts, it is important that the highest quality image be provided. The value added with the incorporation of these images is vital to the JMDL's success as a digital library and also serves as another encouraging reason for humanists to venture into the digital landscape.

The JMDL is constantly working toward bettering our resources. As mentioned above, I will eventually transfer the site to a more malleable platform that will give me complete control over the back-end. The current search and advanced search features are still in beta mode and cannot be moved live until funding is attained, which is a drawback. The same is true for login access to critical reviews and discussion board conversations, as this function requires additional funding. As always, the main challenge for the JMDL is staying relevant in the academic and research world. Social media presences and actively blogging, as well as SEO tactics and superb metadata, will help keep the JMDL at the forefront of Milton research results and scholarly pursuits. Continued funding will also affect the lifespan of the JMDL but as it becomes known as an authoritative and well-liked resource, this issue should dissipate.

Conclusion

The JMDL attempts to change a traditionally print research community into a digital, collaborative learning space. Through careful analysis of targeted user behavior and research patterns, the JMDL gathered the best resources in the field and presented them on an interactive and comprehensive literary platform. The JMDL plays host to all of Milton's works and provides access to the best critical and collaborative materials on the famous author. In this way, the JMDL aims to enhance, and maybe start a change, in the way humanists and literary scholars view print resources.

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