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Images of the English Landscape Garden

Proposal for the Technology Fellows Program Summer 2005

Abstract

A proposal to digitalize 300-500 slides of English landscape gardens and to store them in a searchable, annotated, web-based database for use in 18th-century English literature courses and art history courses.

Background

This project builds on three ongoing projects. First, it will serve to complement my Web site on Stowe Landscape Gardens (<http://panther.bsc.edu/~jtatter/stowe.html>), which I have continued to develop since I went on line with it in 1996. The virtual reality panoramas on that site were developed in the summer of 2000 partially funded by a Technology Fellowship. On the Stowe site, the digital images supplement the text that describes the garden features and outlines their history. Accordingly, the images are small and, consequently, not always useable as components of classroom presentations or as visual records to be examined in detail. My proposed database, which will include images from Stowe and a dozen additional gardens, will serve students and faculty whose research and teaching needs center on images rather than text. In this way it will join two other growing databases housed at Birmingham-Southern with the same function but different subjects: "The Classics Images Collection" (<http://csunx2.bsc.edu/CIC>) created by Samuel J. Pezzillo and partially funded by a Technology Fellowship in spring 2001, and "Images of the English Medieval Cathedral and City" (<http://csunx2.bsc.edu:8080/IEMCC>) created by Susan K. Hagen and partially funded by a Technology Fellowship in summer 2003. Like these two collections, mine will be hosted by the computer science discipline at the College in a database that allows queries, textual descriptions, and thumbnail examples.

Description and Timeline

Using the hosting option just described, I will use the summer of 2005 to do the following:

- choose the best images from among approximately 1100 slides and re-scan 300-500 of them at a higher resolution (500x800 pixels as compared 250x400 pixels)
- enter these images in the database with appropriate identifying text and query tags
- make the collection available online for research and instructional use

Technology and Other Support

The hardware and software I need are readily available on my campus. For these scans, I plan to use a slide scanner as opposed to the flatbed scanner with slide attachment that I used previously. To “clean” and manipulate the images, I will use Adobe Photoshop.

Learning Outcomes and Curriculum

The database will be most useful for teachers, researchers, and advanced students of 18th-century studies. In particular, it will allow one to compare the varied uses of Greek, Roman, and Gothic architecture as appropriated by landscape designers. Because the database contains identifying text and query tags, faculty can create assignments directly from the database (to research a particular landscape architect, or the ways in which one Roman temple was used as a model for structures in several gardens, for example). Students and faculty alike will use individual images to enrich classroom presentations, lectures, and papers. Specifically, students in my own EH 349 Literature and the Arts, and students in Professor Michael Leslie’s course English 336 Literature and Landscape 1500-1800 (Rhodes College) will use this resource.

Assessment

The project can be assessed by the frequency of its use (like Hagen’s and Pezzillo’s collections, mine will include a counter) and the depth and breadth of its coverage. I will continue to solicit feedback from ACS colleagues about this collection as I have about the Stowe site. (Faculty and students in the British Studies at Oxford Program this past summer made extensive use of the Stowe site, and will undoubtedly make use of the proposed image database.) The National Trust is also very interested in this project, and as I plan to spend two months at Stowe during the fall of 2005 as part of my sabbatical leave, I expect to get specific and helpful responses from the Trust staff there.

Collaboration and Dissemination

Along with the image databases compiled by Professors Hagen and Pezzillo mentioned above, the landscape garden database will appear as a link off of the Birmingham-Southern College library webpage. The collection will also be linked to my Stowe Landscape Garden Web site, which is referenced both by the official National Trust Stowe Web site and the Stowe School Web site as well as Professor Jack Lynch’s Eighteenth-century Research Archive (Rutgers University) (<http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/18th>), the most extensive collection of 18th-century resources on the internet. The collection will thus be readily available to ACS students and faculty as well as to the wider population of scholars of the literature and art of the Eighteenth Century.