MINUTE PARTICULAR

New Night Thoughts Sightings

BY WAYNE C. RIPLEY

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1 The second new listing occurs in A Catalogue of Books, for the Year 1807, … by Cuthell & Martin, Middle Row, Holborn (London: n.d.). It is lot 960: “Young’s Night Thoughts, beautifully printed, with engravings round the letter press, part I, all that was ever published, 15s — 1797” (39). What is painfully significant here is that Blake’s name is not mentioned as either the designer or engraver, even as Robert Cromek was publicly trying to puff up Blake’s status as a designer while privately denigrating his engraving skills. The catalogue offers many other editions of Night Thoughts, and the listing for an 1802 reprint of Thomas Stothard’s illustrations does mention his name. Like the Mills listing, Cuthell and Martin’s listing emphasizes the beauty of the printing. It also confirms that there were no more volumes.

2 What is noteworthy in the description of the book is the fact that Blake’s illustrations are not mentioned. Blake’s edition was the only folio of Night Thoughts published (and certainly the only one in 1797). In addition, the book is classified under the category “Miscellaneous, Including the English Classics” and not under “Natural History, and Books of Prints,” which includes other well-illustrated books, most of which are folios. Moreover, because Mills was desperate for cash, the presence of any plates and other potentially lucrative bibliographic details are carefully noted in both categories. It is possible, therefore, that the catalogue describes the unillustrated state of Night Thoughts, first noticed by Bentley in 1980. Whether or not this is the case, Mills did know at least one of the Edwardses, and his bookplate is found in a copy of Junius’s Stat nominis umbra, 2 vols. (London: T. Bensley, 1796-97), with the inscription “1796 B[ough]t. of Edwards.” As Bentley notes, the initials “J / E,” James Edwards, appear on the inner front cover of the unillustrated Night Thoughts. As my discovery of the advertisements for volume 2 suggests, James may have been more involved in the production and distribution of the book than has been recognized. Unfortunately, if Mills did, in fact, own the unillustrated copy, the sales catalogue explains neither why he did so nor why the copy was created in the first place.

The third listing appears in A Catalogue of the Library of the Late Sir H[enry]. C[harles]. Englefield, Bart. … Which Will Be Sold by Auction, by Mr. Stanley ([London], 1833). The copy is lot 1135, and it has a minimal description: “Young’s Night Thoughts, illustrated by Blake” (52). The Catholic Englefield (1752–1822) belonged to many scientific and artistic societies, including the Society of Antiquaries, the Geological Society, and the Society of Dilettanti. He also served as the antiquary for the Royal Academy, and his works were on display there between 1787 and 1789 (ODNB).

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The fourth and fifth references are in the collection catalogues of Richard Heber and Edward Littledale. Heber's vast collection was sold at several auctions, spread over more than a year, and the Night Thoughts listing is found in Bibliotheca Heberiana. Catalogue of the Library of the Late Richard Heber, Esq. Part the Seventh, Removed from His House at Pimlico. Which Will Be Sold by Auction, by Mr. Evans ([London], 1835). It is lot 6789: “Young’s (E.) Night Thoughts, with Blake's Designs, 1797” (305). Littledale's copy is in the Catalogue of the Library of the Late Edward Littledale, Esq. ... Sold by Auction by Mr. Evans ([London], 1837), lot 2890: “Young’s Night Thoughts, plates by Blake, 1797” (124).

Heber's and Littledale's copies are significant because both collectors were members of the Roxburgh Club, as were fellow Night Thoughts owners T. F. Dibdin and Francis Wrangham. Dibdin belonged to the Roxburgh Club from its founding in 1812 until 1843, and served as the club's secretary. He met Blake in 1816 and owned several copies of the illuminated books, but it is not known which copy of Night Thoughts he owned. Heber was also an original member of the Roxburgh Club, while Littledale joined in 1813. Dibdin had a great interest in Heber's collection, and after Heber's death he played a major role in organizing and cataloguing the collection until the latter's sister dismissed him for unknown reasons.¹

Wrangham was a relative latecomer to the club, joining in 1822, but like Dibdin, he would have brought a great deal of information about Blake. In addition to his copy of Night Thoughts, Wrangham also owned the Descriptive Catalogue, the illustrations to Hayley's Designs to a Series of Ballads, Blair's The Grave, and the engravings of Job.² His own copy of Night Thoughts may have been obtained quite early, since he knew Richard Edwards, who published his Reform: A Farce (London, 1792) and sold copies of his Restoration of the Jews (Cambridge, 1795). Reform was a satire of Thomas Paine written under the pseudonym “[Samuel]. Foote, J.”, which shows that Wrangham placed himself in the tradition of the comic playwright Samuel Foote (bap. 1721–1777), whom Blake would attack in Jerusalem for his parodies of Methodism. In light of Blake's later enmity to Foote, it may be significant that Reform makes a hostile reference to his and Fuseli’s “Fertilization of Egypt,” which had been published in Erasmus Darwin's Botanic Garden. Attributing the design to Fuseli alone, Wrangham claims that what he calls “the Fertilization of Nile” was “borrowed from the Jupiter Pluvius of the Columna Antoniniana,” an engraving of which, in Pieter Burman’s Petronii Arbitri Satyricôn (1709), Wrangham reproduces to indicate the obvious borrowings.³ Since he makes no reference to Blake in the passage, however, how much knowledge he possessed of Blake at this date is unclear. In addition to his early connections to Edwards, Wrangham was a promoter of Leigh Hunt, providing moral support at the time of his government prosecution⁴ and making solicitations on behalf of the Examiner (ODNB). Given his interest in the Examiner, it is likely that he read Robert Hunt's reviews of The Grave and the 1809 exhibition, which he may have attended, and his Job impressions suggest that he maintained an interest in collecting Blake's commercially available works.

Since neither Heber nor Littledale owned other works by Blake, it is probable that their connection to Dibdin or Wrangham accounts for their possession of Night Thoughts. Moreover, the ownership of Night Thoughts by four members of the Roxburgh Club provides a new context for Dibdin's widely reprinted remarks on the illustrations. These were first printed in The Library Companion, published two years after Wrangham had joined the club:

Wherefore is it, that I love to read that portion of the poem, published in a folio form, with bizarre but original and impressive ornaments by Blake? At times, the pencil of the artist attains the sublimity of the poet: and it is amidst the wild uproar of the wintry elements—when piping winds are howling for entrance round every corner of the turreted chamber, and the drifted snow works its way into the window casement, however closely fastened—it is in moments like these that I love to open that portion of the text of Young which has been embellished by the pencil of Blake. My friends will laugh .. peradventure deride .. but let us all be endured in these venial moments of hallucination. The soul of poetry itself (we are told) is fiction: and I would feign happiness at such moments.⁵

Dibdin's note refers to Isaac D'Israeli's Blake collection:

My friend Mr. D'Israeli possesses the largest collection of any individual of the very extraordinary drawings of Mr. Blake; and he loves his classical friends to disport with them, beneath the lighted Argand lamp of his drawing room, while soft music is heard, upon the several corri-

dores [sic] and recesses of his enchanted staircase. Meanwhile the visitor turns over the contents of the Blakean portefeuille.

Heber, Littledale, Wrangham, and other club members may have been among the “friends” who derided Dibdin’s dreamy admiration of Blake or among the visitors who floated about D’Israeli’s private exhibitions of Blake’s works. Where Heber and Littledale obtained their copies is unclear, but it may suggest that Alexander Akehurst’s 1824 claim that copies were “now reposing in the warehouses of some of the London Booksellers” has some validity.¹⁴

The sixth new listing is in an advertisement for the Saturday, 10 November 1838 issue of the Athenaeum, no. 576. The copy was offered by John Bryant at the Camden’s Head, 9 King William Street, and the advertisement reads: “YOUNG’S NIGHT THOUGHTS, with Blake’s curious Designs, imp. 4to. large paper, half blue mor. 1l. 16s. 1797.” Four previous listings had also described the illustrations as “curious.”

The seventh listing is in a Sotheby auction catalogue dated 20 November 1839. Three collections were offered: one of a deceased clergyman, one of a deceased gentleman, and a third whose owner is not described. This last was the prize collection, with its key items, like Audubon’s prints, highlighted on the title page. Blake’s Night Thoughts was in this collection, listed as lot 417: “Young’s Night Thoughts, with engravings after Blake 1797” (15). The error in not attributing the engravings to Blake may suggest that the compiler was familiar with The Grave, since Blake did not engrave his designs in that work. Coincidentally, in the copy of the catalogue held by the Bodleian and available through Google Books, the title page contains the signature of “Rev D’ Bandinel,” the longtime Bodleian librarian, who was also a member of the Roxburghe Club (1839–58). Bandinel’s membership commenced the year of the catalogue, and he was also an acquaintance of Isaac D’Israeli.¹⁵

The final new listing can be found in the literary advertisements to the Gentleman’s Magazine for December 1839. The copy was offered by J. F. Setchel, No. 23 King Street, Covent Garden. It was listed as lot 747: “YOUNG’S Night Thoughts, with Blake’s Designs, fol. 35s. hf.-bd. 1797” (13). This listing also emphasizes Blake’s designs over the engravings.

¹⁵. Marc Vaulbert de Chantilly, “Property of a Distinguished Poisoner: Thomas Griffiths Wainewright and the Griffiths Family Library,” Under the Hammer 130. I have not been able to access the catalogue of Bandinel’s own extensive collection to see if he owned any Blake items.