

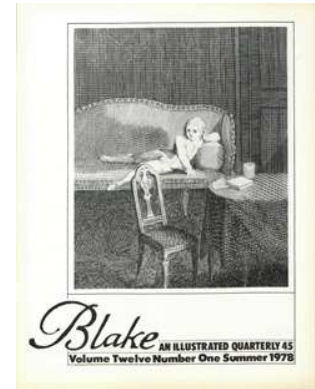
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M I N U T E
P A R T I C U L A R

The First Printed Reference to the Publication of
Job: Disraeli(?) in The Star Chamber (1826)

G. E. Bentley, Jr.

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⁵ Ibid., p. v.

⁶ Noted by Suzanne R. Hoover in "William Blake in the Wilderness: A Closer Look at his Reputation 1827-63," *William Blake: Essays in Honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes*, ed. Morton D. Paley and Michael Phillips (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 322.

⁷ James H. Wilson, *Life of Charles A. Dana* (New York: Harper, 1908), p. 159.

ANOTHER EARLY PRINTING OF BLAKE'S "NIGHT"

Raymond H. Deck, Jr.

Blake's "Night" from *Innocence* appeared in the *New Church Advocate* for 16 May 1843 (1, no. 26, 208). I should have noticed this printing in preparing my article, "New Light on C. A. Tulk, Blake's Nineteenth-Century Patron" (*Studies in Romanticism*, 16 [1977], 217-36), which included discussion of Tulk's responsibility for the insertion of Blake's "The Divine Image" in the *New Church Advocate* for 1 December 1844. My arguments about Tulk's role in the publication of "The Divine Image" apply equally about the probability that he was responsible for the insertion of Blake's "Night" more than a year earlier. The text of Blake's "Night" in the *New Church Advocate* is followed by the citation, "Blake's *Songs of Innocence*" and, most notably, differs in more than a half dozen particulars of punctuation and spelling from that given by J. J. Garth Wilkinson in his 1839 edition of the *Songs*, thus suggesting that the text of Blake's "Night" was provided by someone who, like Tulk, had access to one of Blake's original copies.

THE FIRST PRINTED REFERENCE TO THE PUBLICATION OF JOB: DISRAELI (?) IN THE STAR CHAMBER (1826)

G. E. Bentley, Jr.

Professor William S. Ward has generously drawn my attention to a previously unrecorded reference to Blake's *Job* in the obscure and short-lived satirical political weekly *The Star Chamber* for Wednesday 3 May 1826:

Mr. William Blake, whose illustrations in outline of Young, Gray, and other poets have long been before the public, has completed his designs for the Book of Job. Some of the etchings are full of that remarkable wildness and singularity of conception, for which Blake is so well known. The embodying of the plagues inflicted on Job by the Almighty; the personification of a Night-mare, and the figures of the creation,¹ are wonderful, although we do not think them equal either in point of originality or skilful execution to some of the earlier productions of this extraordinary artist.²

The account is interesting for a number of reasons. For one thing, it displays a surprising knowledge of Blake's works. The "illustrations in outline of Young" refer of course to Young's *Night Thoughts* (1797) with forty-three plates designed and engraved by Blake. The "Gray" outlines can scarcely refer to the series of watercolors Blake made in 1797-98 for Flaxman in illustration of Gray's poems, for these were not "before the public" in 1826 (they were first published in 1922); "Gray" is probably a mistake for *The Grave* by Robert Blair with twelve designs by Blake etched by Schiavonetti published in 1808 and 1813, for this was Blake's best-known work. The "earlier productions of this extraordinary artist" seems to refer to Blake's works in Illuminated Printing, and since very few copies were printed they were known only to few. The *Star Chamber* author seems to have been surprisingly well informed about Blake's works.

He is also strikingly up-to-date in his information about the publication of *Job*. Subscriptions for it had been taken since 1823 (*Blake Records* [1969], 598), but the label is dated "March 1826," and the first completed copies were distributed at the end of that month (*ibid.*, p. 327). It was not, however, published in the ordinary way, apparently no review-copies were sent to journals, and no review of it is known. Indeed, not only is the *Star Chamber* paragraph the first known published reference to the publication of *Job*, but it seems to be the only such reference during Blake's lifetime. Even the obituaries of Blake failed to mention *Job* except for that in *The Literary Gazette* (1 November 1827), and the only other account before 1830 was in J. T. Smith's life of Blake (1828). The *Star Chamber* account is important, therefore, as the only printed reference during Blake's lifetime to the publication of his greatest finished series of line-engravings.

The Star Chamber is a jocular sixteen-page weekly published by W. Marsh which began on 19 April 1826 and ended with No. 9 on Wednesday 7 June 1826. It includes reviews, attacks on politicians, "The Dunciad of To-day," and news of the arts, particularly exhibitions; it is in the untitled art section that the Blake reference comes. The periodical seems to have been founded by Peter Hall (who gave a copy to Bodley) with various assistants. Benjamin Disraeli was accused of having been the first editor, but he expressly denied this in *The Times* for 3 November 1871 and *Leisure Hours* for 4 November 1871.³ However, his authorized biographer concedes that Disraeli did contribute some fables called "The Modern AEsop," a review, "and perhaps other matter,"³ and it is not unlikely that he was responsible directly or indirectly for the notice of Blake's *Job*. At any rate, he was peculiarly well situated to know of Blake's more "original" and "skilful" "earlier productions," for his father Isaac (d. 1848) owned *The Iliad* (F), *Visions* (F), *Marriage* (D), *Urizen* (B), *Songs* (A), *Europe* (A), and *Song of Los*, and these works of course later came into Benjamin Disraeli's hands. And we know that Benjamin himself was interested in Blake, for he tried to get The British Museum to buy Blake's 537 watercolor designs to Young's *Night Thoughts* in 1875,⁴ over fifty years before they eventually reached the Museum. It is at least a plausible guess that Benjamin Disraeli is the

author of the only contemporary printed reference to the publication of Blake's *Job*.

¹ The three *Job* plates referred to are presumably pl. 6, "And smote Job with sore boils"; pl. 11, "With Dreams upon my bed thou scarest me"; and pl. 15, "Behold now Behemoth which I made with thee."

² *The Star Chamber*, No. 4 (3 May 1826), 73.

³ William Flavelle Monypenny, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli Earl of Beaconsfield*, I (1910), 84n. Robert Blake, *Disraeli* (1966), p. 44, finds it "difficult to avoid the conclusion that Disraeli was the moving spirit."

⁴ James S. Bain, *A Bookseller Looks Back* (1940), p. 75.

THE SELLING OF BLAKE'S NIGHT THOUGHTS DESIGNS IN THE 1870s

G. E. Bentley, Jr.

The most extensive series of illustrations Blake is known to have made was for Young's *Night Thoughts*--537 large water colors preparatory for the Richard Edwards edition of 1797. When that publication proved to be an incubator baby, requiring peace and seclusion from the world for over a century before reaching full growth in public esteem and commercial price, the drawings too were largely forgotten. They passed from Richard Edwards to his brother Thomas, who offered them at £52.10.0 in 1826 and 1828,¹ but even praise comparing them favorably with the work of Michael Angelo could not lure a collector to venture so large a sum.¹ They therefore retreated into the bosom of the Edwards family, and their whereabouts was almost completely unknown for some fifty years. In his *Life of William Blake, "Pictor Ignotus"* (1863) which revived Blake's flickering fame, Alexander Gilchrist supposed erroneously that the *Night Thoughts* drawings had gone to "one of the royal collections" (Vol. I, p. 140). A few new facts have recently turned up which throw light on the history of the drawings in the 1870s.

About a decade later, the interest in Blake which Gilchrist's book had aroused fostered the emergence of the *Night Thoughts* drawings again, and by the above passage in Gilchrist one reader wrote:

No, I saw these drawings, over 500 in number, at [*the bookdealer*] Rimell's in Oxford Street, in May 1874. They were then the property of the Edwards family, and for sale.²

Something of the background of the re-emergence of the *Night Thoughts* drawings is given in the diary of Louisa Bain, whose uncle James was one of the chief antiquarian booksellers of the time. On 18 June 1874 she wrote that she went

To the Haymarket [*where the Bain shop was located*] and looked at the two volumes of Young's *Night Thoughts* with original illustrations by William Blake, which James has lately met with [*at Rimell's*], and thinks himself extremely fortunate to have secured at the price of £425. He considers it a perfect treasure, and people who are considered judges flock to

see it, and speak highly of it. I do not like it, but then I am no judge of its merits.³

A year later, on 13 June 1875, she wrote again:

James has spoke of his *Blake* to Mr. Disraeli who advises his writing to the British Museum authorities, and allows him to use his name, which we hope will have great weight, both as Prime Minister and also as a member of the British Museum Committee. James has written accordingly and they have sent for the book, which is there now to be inspected. [P. 75]

They had another reason to think that Disraeli's opinion might bear some weight, for he had inherited from his father one of the most notable early collections of Blake's books and therefore was in a good position to judge Blake's merits. However, what Disraeli did was fairly minimal. The bookseller wrote to the British Museum:

James Bain
1 Haymarket
London (SW)

7th June 1875

Sir

I am desired by Mr. Disraeli to bring under your notice some original drawings by William Blake now in my possession.

The designs illustrate Young's *Night Thoughts* and are drawn upon the enlarged margins of the original quarto text.

They form the most extensive series of designs done by this Artist and tho' unknown to his later biographers may be regarded as the 'great work' of his life. As such it seems desirable that they should find an appropriate place in the National Collections. My price is £2,000. (Two Thousand Pounds).

Your obedient servant
(signed) James Bain.⁴

The sponsorship of Disraeli was given through his Parliamentary Secretary as follows:

10 Downing Street
Whitehall

June 9 1875

Dear Sir,

Mr. Disraeli desires me to send you the enclosed letter left here today by Mr. Reid [*Keeper of the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*], and to tell you that on being asked by Mr. Bain in what way he could bring the drawings referred to to the notice of the authorities of the British Museum Mr. Disraeli advised him that the best course would be to write to you on the subject and gave him authority to make use of his name in the matter.

Yours faithfully,
(signed) James F. Daly.

J. Winter Jones Esq.⁵