

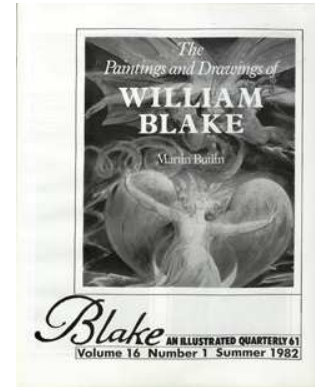
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

A R T I C L E

Some Drawings Related to Blake's Night Thoughts Designs: The Coda Sketch and Two Pictures not Previously Connected with the Series

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SOME DRAWINGS RELATED TO BLAKE'S NIGHT THOUGHTS DESIGNS: THE CODA SKETCH AND TWO PICTURES NOT PREVIOUSLY CONNECTED WITH THE SERIES

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The welcome appearance of Martin Butlin's great catalogue, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (1981), enables us to make many new correlations among Blake's pictorial works. Using Butlin's catalogue and plate numbers, I wish to call attention to connections between several pictures and some of the designs for Young's *Night Thoughts* (c. 1795-97), which I shall identify according to the numbering system in *William Blake's Designs for Edward Young's Night Thoughts: A Complete Edition*, ed. John E. Grant, Edward J. Rose, Michael J. Tolley, co-ordinating ed. David V. Erdman (1980).

Butlin's catalogue helps us to appreciate how frequently Blake repeated the same motifs. Normally each variation marks a further development or clarification of vision, though there are occasional exceptions suggesting that Blake misplaced some of his sketches and thus repeated himself without making significant progress, or that some subjects may have been peculiarly recalcitrant. But with *Night Thoughts*, repetitions of previous designs are rare. In preparing our edition, Rose, Tolley, Erdman, and I saw that the number of surviving sketches that could strictly be called preliminary drawings--that is, closely related to a *Night Thoughts* design and to no other known work--is so small a proportion of the 537 subjects that Blake must have done most of his preliminary sketching right on the drawing paper for the finished water color, as Butlin agrees in a letter of 8 July 1981.

The drawings included as Figures 1-12 of the Clarendon edition stand in a variety of relations to the *Night Thoughts* water colors; correlation of our accounts of them with those given by Butlin will further clarify the range of Blake's employment of the same or closely related compositions in a variety of contexts. One noteworthy relationship overlooked in both the Clarendon edition and the Butlin catalogue--but recorded in *The Notebook of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman with Donald K. Moore (1974, rev. 1977), p. 51--is the connection between the drawing in Blake's Notebook, p. 17, emblem 2 (made for but unused in *The Gates of Paradise*) and *Night Thoughts* 61 (II, 28). A youthful traveler with round hat and stick is alarmingly confronted at a door by a robed figure of Death the porter, who appears in the emblem as a grinning skeleton and in *Night Thoughts* as a bewhiskered old man. A number of connections between other drawings in the Notebook and the *Night Thoughts* designs are also listed in Erdman and Moore, pp. 51-52, but most of these are motival rather than compositional relationships (except for that between emblem 22, N 42, and NT 26, which is discussed as figure 2 in the Clarendon edition, p. 41).

There is a sketch on the verso of the final watercolor for the *Night Thoughts* series which, because of its faintness, was not reproduced in either the Clarendon edition or in Butlin's catalogue, though it was known to the editors of both. Thanks to the perseverance of the British



Museum Department of Photography, a suitable infrared has at last been produced (illus. 1). Butlin, p. 252, cat. 330, describes NT 537 verso as follows: "Cartoon Sketch of Britannia, [in] Pencil. The drawing on the verso accompanies the first page (page 120) of a poetical address to 'Holles! immortal in far more than fame!', a sycophantic attempt by Young to curry favour with the powerful Thomas Pelham-Holles, Duke of Newcastle." The only notice of this drawing in the Clarendon edition is in fn. 33, p. 88: "JEG reports that there is . . . a faint untinted pencil sketch located to the left of lines 11-19 of the poem to 'Holles' that begins on the verso of NT 537. It appears to depict a seated fat woman who holds a child in her arms. This is the only suggestion of a drawing on the additional mounted sheets for the coda to *Night Thoughts*." I first observed this faint sketch in May 1969 when the sheet, the verso of which had previously been glued to another, was lifted by Eric Harding, the conservationist; its existence was again confirmed on several unusually sunny days in 1977, in consultation with Mary Lynn Johnson and Peter Moore of the Department of Prints and Drawings. Since, however, David V. Erdman could not discern the drawing and neither of our other colleagues was in a position to recheck it, and, moreover, since we could not get a satisfactory photograph, it seemed best for me to take entire responsibility for reporting the existence of this sketch. The accompanying reproduction makes about as clear an impression as the sketch itself under average lighting conditions; if the sheet is held up at an angle in strong light so that light from above rakes the slightly incised sketched lines, a figure something like a snowman is quite clear. The top-knot indicates that the figure is female, and the circular lines in the vicinity of the figure's left shoulder seem to represent the head of a child. Fainter pentimenti, more angular in character, are also visible in the photograph, but they are unrelated to the picture of the fat woman. Similarities to the brooding figure of the heroine in *Thel* 5, both in the variously altered engraved versions and in the preliminary drawing (Butlin cat. 218, pl. 249), and to the figure of the mother at the right of the fire in the bottom scene of *Songs* 45, "The Little Vagabond," further suggest that the sketched figure is female. In any case, the figure is seated on a cloud; the placement of a fat person in an ethereal situation has unmistakably satirical potentialities, as Byron was to show later with the corpulent Southey in *A Vision of Judgment*. The spirit of caricature to which Butlin alludes in identifying the sketched figure as Britannia, in pictorial response to the sycophantic patriotism of Young's lines, has also been evident in Blake's major pictures for the *Night Thoughts* series.

Butlin's catalogue presents at least two other subjects related to *Night Thoughts* watercolors; in the first there is a painting similar in theme to the main figures in NT 379 (VIII, 33); in the second there is a pencil drawing so closely related to NT 469 (ix, 51) that it deserves consideration as a preliminary drawing, as Butlin has now agreed in correspondence. The first subject, *An Old Man and a Woman in Contemplative Adoration Amid Trees* (illus. 2), now in a private collection in the West

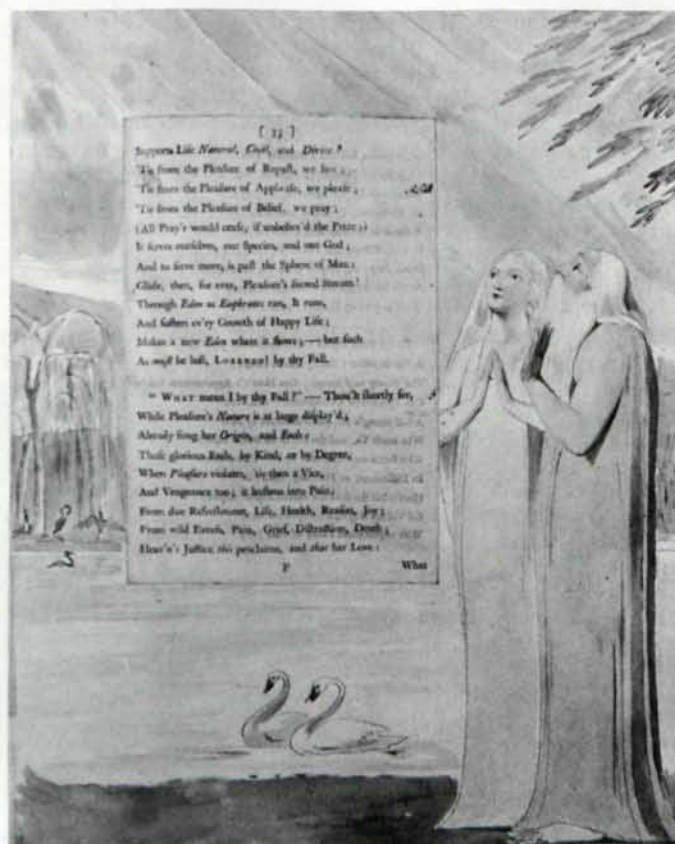
Indies, is dated by Butlin c. 1785, since the male figure bears a close resemblance to the old men in cat. 88r, pl. 97, *An Enthroned Old Man Offering Two Children to Heaven* (Fogg) and in cat. 91, pl. 179, *Age Teaching Youth* (Tate Gallery). Butlin notes that the male figure is sketched in panel 8 of cat. 85-86v, pl. 94. In *An Old Man and a Woman in Contemplative Adoration Amid Trees*, the figures are flooded by diagonal beams of light. When Blake adapted the picture in NT 379 (illus. 3), he reversed the figures to fit the space on the right side of the text panel: the white-bearded man with his left hand raised in wonder and the white-haired woman with both hands raised in prayer look up to the left at the yellow diagonal beams coming down from the top. In the *Night Thoughts* version the trees are reduced to some foliage above the heads of the figures, who now stand beside a river in which two swans swim near them (the swan motif occurred earlier in NT 159). On the other side of the river a large red bird swims while on the farther shore two red herons preen or display themselves beneath willow trees. The first two of the following lines are marked with a penciled cross:

Glide, then, for ever, Pleasure's sacred Stream!
Through *Eden* as *Euphrates* ran, It runs,
And fosters ev'ry Growth of Happy Life;
Makes a new *Eden* when it flows; . . .

Earlier (l. 551) Young had declared that "'Tis from the Pleasure of Belief, we pray." There seems to be no reason to suspect ironic reservation on Blake's part to this scene of idyllic piety any more than in the preceding design, NT 378, showing little children coming to Christ, the Good Shepherd—a variant of the second design for "The Little Black Boy" of *Songs of Innocence*. To be sure, the following sequence, NT 380 and NT 381, respectively show a dissolute man and Satan sowing tares, but these marks of Experience are themselves put in their places in the redemptive sequence NT 382 and 383.

Butlin cat. 235 R (Pl. 270), *An Old Man Seated Leaning on a Pile of Books: A Young Man Approaches* (Rosenbach Foundation) (illus. 4), is dated c. 1789. Butlin calls it "A fairly early drawing, somewhat akin to the *Tiriel* illustrations of 1789." In fact, the style is quite compatible with a date in the mid-nineties, as Butlin has agreed in correspondence. This drawing was only slightly altered for the water color NT 469 (IX, 51), which—as I noted in *Blake Newsletter*, 5 (1971-72), 202—depicts Alexander the Great before Diogenes (see Butlin cat. 330:469, p. 243). In pictures based on this traditional subject, Diogenes the Cynic is often shown with books despite the austerity of his home: in the version by Ferdinand Bols (Princeton University Art Museum), for example, Diogenes has open a huge folio, which he was evidently reading when interrupted by Alexander's offer. Bols, incidentally, also features the lamp of Diogenes, but Blake does not include it in either the sketch or the *Night Thoughts* design.

In Blake's pencil drawing Diogenes has a curly beard (but is not necessarily "old"); he looks in



1 Infrared photograph of *Night Thoughts* 537v. British Museum.

2 *An Old Man and a Woman in Contemplative Adoration Amid Trees*. Private Collection.

3 *Night Thoughts* 379 "Glide, then, for ever, Pleasure's sacred Stream!/Through *Eden*." British Museum.

4 *An Old Man Seated Leaning on a Pile of Books: A Young Man Approaches*. Rosenbach Foundation.

the direction of Alexander and props his chin as he leans with his left elbow on a pile of at least three books. A group of six or more vertical lines that go over his left forearm may suggest other books or an inkwell and quill pens. Behind Diogenes there are faint outlines of a large barrel and even some of the staves. The figure of Alexander is cut off above the mouth. He appears to be nude except for a cloak on his right shoulder. He gestures with his left hand, and his left leg seems at some point to have been drawn frontally, though the rest of the figure is consistently shown in left profile.

The fact that the top of Alexander's head is missing is probably due to Blake's having run the sketch off the top of the sheet or, perhaps, to subsequent trimming. The possibility remains, however, that this was an intentional symbol; in an interlinear design in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, pl. 11, a headless warrior with a sword is worshipped by a group of figures (see Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake*, p. 108). When Blake adopted this interlinear design for NT 507 (IX, 89), however, the warrior becomes a bronze statue, with a flesh-colored head, who is trampling on a brown man. This motif was in turn the basis for the anti-militarist symbolism in *The Spiritual Portrait of Nelson* (Butlin cat. 649, pl. 876). In adopting the Rosenbach pencil drawing of Diogenes and Alexander for NT 469 (illus. 5), Blake gave young Alexander a laurel in his black hair and a light blue tight body-leotard with open toes, as well as a larger red cloak. Now Alexander gestures with his open right hand while his sinister left hand is hidden behind his back, under his cloak. Alexander is accompanied by two bearded elders: I imagine that Blake would have thought of his right-hand man, in a light blue robe with folded arms and severe look, as Aristotle, though there is little to support this inference except that the author of the *Analytics*, satirized in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, pl. 20, is the natural antitype of "our friend Diogenes the Grecian," as he is referred to by Ezekiel in the *Marriage*, pl. 13.

The figure of Diogenes in NT 469 has been reversed so that he now leans on his right elbow, which rests on two books only (a third was considered and then washed over). This Diogenes is a vigorous, almost nude old man with a white, straight, pointed beard who looks intently almost straight ahead (but not at the viewer), rather than at Alexander. Even the fact that he does not really support his head with his (right) hand, but merely bends his fingers at his neck, contributes to his appearance of alertness. And the fact that Diogenes' bent-back left leg is now closer to Alexander, rather than being remote from him as in the drawing, is also expressive of his indifference to Alexander's notorious offer. Perhaps his parted lips signify that Diogenes has just made his famous rejection--in no jocular fashion, we are shown. In part, it is the responses of Alexander's party that indicate the timing: Alexander is wide-eyed and stern; Aristotle, with twisted brow over his left eye, looks on disapprovingly and crosses his arms; the other follower (clad in a pink robe), who has a short beard, shows his consternation with both wide eye and drooping mouth. The other object in the picture, Diogenes' huge barrel, with six hoops

at top and five at bottom, is not expressive as are the human figures, but the way the grey barrel both incorporates most of the text panel and also serves to balance the entourage of Alexander makes it an admirable pictorial element. Visually, the uniformly yellow sky serves to set off the barrel and Alexander's party; in the story it represents the sunshine which Diogenes the seer demands to have restored.

The marked lines in the poem give little enough cue for the development of a picture of the encounter between Diogenes and Alexander, but Blake did pick up some imagery elsewhere on this page and also from the previous and succeeding pages.

"The *Stagyrte*" and "*Pagan Zeal*" are spoken of in Young's lines 1004 and 1020 on page 50, and diffused among the following lines on pages 51 and 52 are sentiments with Blakean resonances:

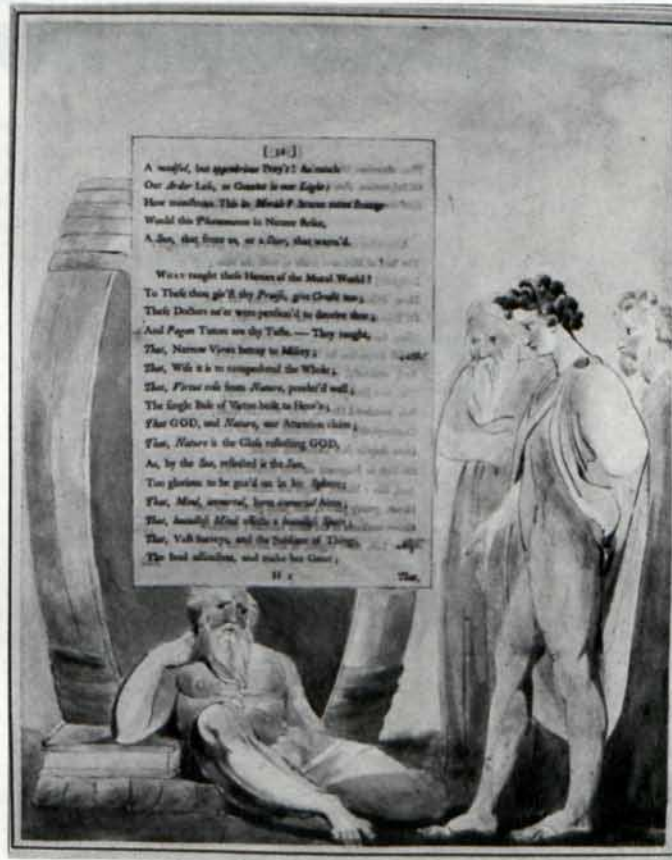
As much

Our *Ardor* Less, as Greater is our *Light*:
How monstrous This in *Morals*? . . .
What taught these Heroes of the Moral World?
To These thou giv'st thy *Praise*, give *Credit*
too;
These Doctors ne'er were pensioned to deceive
thee;
And *Pagan* Tutors are thy Taste.--They taught,
That, Narrow Views betray to Misery; . . .
That, *Mind, immortal*, loves *immortal* Aims;
That, *boundless Mind* affects a *boundless Space*;
That, Vast Surveys, and the Sublime of Things,
The Soul assimilate, and make her Great;
That, therefore, Heav'n her Glories, as a Fund
Of Inspiration, thus spreads out to Man.

(IX, 1021-23; 1026-30; 1038-43)

Certainly line 1029, marked with both a penciled asterisk and an ink line, never implied to Young, or any other reader but Blake, an allusion to the meeting of Alexander and Diogenes, but it is part of the genius of Blake's accomplishment that this episode can appear to be compatible with the drift of Young's lines.

There is no indication that Blake ever attempted, after NT 469, a further reinterpretation of Diogenes and Alexander, though in depicting the exemplary defiance of classical militarism, he chose in 1812 much the same composition (in horizontal rather than upright format) for *Philoctetes and Neoptolemus at Lemnos* (cat. 676, pl. 965). Here another outcast, Philoctetes, seated before his humble home, defies a standing figure, the scaly son of Achilles, who offers him practically anything for his services; this encounter is witnessed by three followers, led by Ulysses, who is the real power behind the conspiracy. The odds against the Just Upright Man, as shown in the case of Socrates (NT 270, 271; VII, preface vi and vii) are finally revealed in *Jerusalem* 93 to be the Triple Hand. The work of imagining the three sage Accusers had continued from NT 340 (VII, 68) to the False Friends of Job (nos. 7-11; cat. 551:7-11, pls. 739-743).



5 Night Thoughts 469 "Pagan Tutors are thy Taste."