

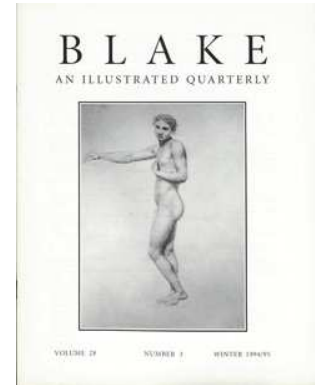
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P A R T I C U L A R

A New Colored Copy of Night Thoughts at Smith  
College

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## A New Colored Copy of *Night Thoughts* at Smith College

BY ALEXANDER S. GOURLAY

In late 1992, G. E. Bentley learned that the Neilson Library at Smith College, Northampton, MA, contains a hand-colored copy of the 1797 edition of Young's *Night Thoughts* with engravings by Blake. This copy is not listed in Bentley's 1977 *Blake Books* (642-46, 956-57), nor in the census of colored copies in the 1980 Clarendon edition of Blake's illustrations to Young (Grant et al. 1: 62-72). Bentley, who was in England at the time, asked me to take a look at the book so that it could be included in his forthcoming supplement to *Blake Books*, where it will be designated Copy Z, the twenty-sixth colored copy known. I am grateful to G. E. Bentley for the tip, to John E. Grant for loaning me slides of other colored copies, and to Sarah Black and other members of the staff of the Neilson Library for their assistance.

The volume at Smith College is a fine example of a "Type I" or "White Death" copy, that is, one of a group of similar copies, most of which are thought to have been colored by someone other than Blake under commercial auspices shortly after the publication of the book. (Perhaps the colorist was John Harris, Sr., a London artist specializing in book-coloring who was long affiliated with the family of the publisher of the 1797 *Night Thoughts*; see Weimerskirch 251n15.) Although there is considerable variation within the group, and some problems have arisen with the classification system devised by the editors of the Clarendon edition, one can still say that the White Death copies are as a class most similar in coloring to Blake's watercolor drawings on which the engravings were based.

The title page of the Smith College copy is colored according to the pattern found in other White Death copies; furthermore, the robe of Disease on illustration 6E (page 10) and the faces of the old man and woman on 20E (page 35) contain the darkened, mottled colors that were referred to as "grotesque coloring" in the Clarendon edition (1: 57-59). The presence of these colors, which probably resulted from long-term chemical decomposition of pigments that were intended to produce a much less extreme effect, indicates that the colorist used the same unusual palette as well as the same coloring pattern found in several other White Death copies. The most interesting feature of the Smith College copy is the title page to "Night the Second" (11E, page 17), where the giant figure of Death has

been given a black gown and shroud that cover his head and even his left hand. Grant reports in correspondence that this color detail also appears in other White Death copies, including those at Washington University (Copy W) and the University of Texas (Copy C). The pigments throughout the Smith College copy are bright and fresh, some remarkably so, and the coloring scheme is often complex, but no more so than in many other White Death copies; in general the work is very competent and careful but evinces no inspired attention. I couldn't discern any pencil annotations or variant states of plates in the book.

According to a tiny stamp inside the front cover, the volume was "Bound by Riviere and Son" in the present full dark blue leather with elaborate gilt tooling on the back and sides; this binding appears to have been part of a general restoration in which all the leaves were cut out of an earlier binding and "guarded," that is, glued (precariously) in pairs to narrow strips of paper and sewn together in a new binding. This unusual guarding may have been intended to correct the inadequate inner margins usually found throughout these books; several designs disappear into the gutter in most copies. The last leaf of the poem (43E, pages 95-96) has been trimmed by an extra inch at the bottom, probably to even up a ragged edge. The single-sheet "Explanation of the Engravings," which is here smaller than any other leaf, has been inlaid in a larger sheet of paper and bound last (as in Copy E).

The book came to Smith College from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Louis W. Dommerich, accessioned 13 April 1967, and bears the Smith College bookplate. It is undoubtedly the copy listed as item number 25 in a 1935 sales catalogue of *The Library of the Late Ogden Goelet* (American Art Association), where it is described exactly as it appears today.

### WORKS CITED

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