

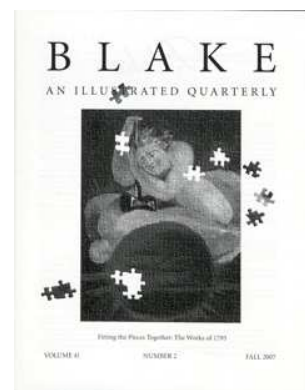
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

R E V I E W

Folio Society, *Night Thoughts*: The Poem by Edward Young Illustrated with Watercolours by William Blake

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Edward Young. *Night Thoughts: The Poem by Edward Young Illustrated with Watercolours by William Blake*. Commentary by Robin Hamlyn. London: Folio Society, 2005. 3 vols., boxed: 268, 272, xx + 362 pp. US \$1700.

Reviewed by Karen Mulhallen

THIS set of reproductions by the Folio Society is the third publication in book form of William Blake's watercolor drawings in illustration of Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* and the first to present all the drawings in full color and at approximately original size. A comparison with the earlier attempts at reproduction highlights the Folio Society's accomplishment. The first set was published for the Fogg Museum (Harvard UP, 1927) in an edition of 500 copies, but it contains only 30 images, of which five are in color. Like this new edition, however, the Fogg edition was made from the original drawings, which were then owned by William Augustus White, who personally approved the final versions of the reproductions as "finishes" and declared them the "most

Work on this review was facilitated by the staff of the British Museum Department of Prints and Drawings and in particular by curator Angela Roche.

successful attempt he had seen to bring out the full quality of the original designs" (Fogg, "Prefatory Note"). Unfortunately, there is no information as to what "finishes" means, although one might suppose the term refers to accuracy of texture and color. The Fogg reproductions (13 1/8 inches high by 10 3/8 inches wide) are smaller than the Blake originals by approximately three inches in height and two in width.

A microfilm of the watercolors was published in the early 1970s by Micro Methods (now Microform Imaging Limited), but the second attempt at a paper edition of the drawings was not until 1980: *William Blake's Designs for Edward Young's Night Thoughts: A Complete Edition* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1980), ed. John E. Grant, Edward J. Rose and Michael J. Tolley, with David V. Erdman as the coordinating editor. Like the Folio Society edition, the Clarendon publication presents the designs in two volumes, but the complete set of plates is in black and white, with the addition of 78 in color. The images, at 11 1/4 by 8 1/2 inches, with some slight variations, are not the full size of the originals.

The 1927 Fogg edition is a luxury limited edition—my own copy is number 55 of 500—and it is presented as loose sheets, in the French manner of many artists' books, in a light blue buckram portfolio, tied with a grosgrain ribbon. Its images are printed on deckle-edged paper, textured for color images, and smooth for black and white images. It includes a separately printed commentary by Geoffrey Keynes in a sewn pamphlet. The Clarendon edition is a scholarly publication with a sewn binding but with none of the extra details one gets in luxury limited editions. In format, this new edition by the Folio Society returns the work to the luxury trade with its small print run—my copy is number 187 of 1000—its large scale, and its sumptuous bindings in buckram and leather, with a specially designed cover ornament reflective of Blake's work, and an ample hinged box, crafted to hold all three volumes: the reproductions in two large tomes and the plate-by-plate critical commentary in a large octavo by Robin Hamlyn, keeper of drawings at the Tate. Weighing in at approximately 27 pounds, the Folio Society publication gives its buyer a hefty package for the money.

An announcement of the Folio Society edition appeared in *Blake* 40.1 (summer 2006): 4-5, 13, and I must concur with G. E. Bentley, Jr.'s, statement there that "one can appreciate as never before" the way in which Blake created connections between the designs, not only diptychs, as Bentley argues, but whole runs of images and coloristic connections creating a narrative line. Bentley hails the publication as a major event, and it is. We have never had the whole series in paper in color before. Until now anyone wishing to place these designs next to each other has had to travel to the study room of the British Museum Department of Prints and Drawings in London, and wait while the 43 heavy boxes of drawings, each drawing individually encased in acetate or Plexiglas (called Perspex in the UK), are lugged, box by box, by the stewards to the table. Even in the museum, it has been difficult to flip back and forth, to compare one design to the next, all of which book publication

facilitates. We can actually climb into these drawings for the first time, and it is a profound experience. Hence the Folio Society publication is, again in Bentley's words, "a gorgeous book, a joy for both scholars and aesthetes." But is it a "true facsimile," as Hamlyn claims in the commentary volume (vii), as the colophons at the end of the folio volumes state, and as Bentley also asserts (5)?

In its conception for the luxury market, the Folio Society edition resembles one of the two interrelated projects proposed to Blake around 1795 by the publisher Richard Edwards: the commissioning of Blake's original watercolor designs and the proposal to use them as the basis of a luxurious engraved edition of Young's *Night Thoughts*. Both the Folio Society edition and the Edwards engraved edition, in conception and marketing, are publications for the wealthy, so the Folio Society edition completes in some sense the initiative begun more than 200 years ago, which is to say that Blake's designs at last find their luxury audience. The asking price of the 1797 edition, for all four parts of the Edwards *Night Thoughts*, was five guineas, a considerable sum, representing approximately three weeks of a manual worker's income. Given the cost of hiring a plumber today, we can see that the Folio Society actually represents a considerable bargain in comparison to the 1797 edition, but both are unquestionably publications conceived for the luxury commodity marketplace. Although the Folio Society edition was only listed for publication in 2005, and is shipped only as orders are received for its 1000 copies available to the public (there are 20 more *hors de commerce*), in checking the listings for the book on www.abebooks.com, I note that number 425 is already listed for resale by MisterE Books and Records for \$2500 (US). This is the nature of luxury limited editions: their price increases and their potential audience decreases. Speaking of scarcity, a curiosity of this particular publication relates to its method of production, since by binding only as orders are received, with the exception of a copy or two as stock, the Folio Society in effect creates a book which is always almost out of print. Blake was paid only a pittance for all his *Night Thoughts* work, but a similar phenomenon of scarcity and increasing prices has developed with the original 1797 engraved edition of *Night Thoughts*, which is now listed for sale by one US dealer, Phillip J. Pirages (McMinnville, OR), at \$19,500 (US).

It is of interest, I think, to consider how the current Folio Society edition is akin to Blake's original project. This question is complex, because Blake's drawings were themselves never intended to be published. They were unique and also preliminary to a projected four-volume set of engravings. The book of watercolor drawings has its own logic and can be considered as an artist's book, running parallel to, but different from, the engraved edition. In the engraved edition, for example, there is a mixture of illustrated and unillustrated pages. The watercolors appear on every page, including the preliminaries. Although discussion of the engravings needs to be left aside from this review of the Folio Society reproductions, it is an issue to keep in mind in any critical work on Blake's *Night*

Thoughts project, since the two sets of designs, watercolors and engravings, constitute quite different works.

The question of how the current edition matches the original drawings also asks us to consider what constitutes a facsimile. A facsimile is a copy, and in a secondary sense it is understood as an exact copy or likeness, attempting, as Bentley argues, "very close reproduction of an original named copy including size of image, color of printing (and of tinting if relevant), and size, color, and quality of paper, with no deliberate alteration as in page order or numbering or obscuring of paper defects, or centering the image on the page" (*Blake* 40.1 [summer 2006]: 9n17).

Is an exact copy ever a possibility? Every reproductive process carries its own identifying features and differences from the original. Perhaps a good way of beginning to talk about these distinctions in regard to Blake's *Night Thoughts* is to think of the watercolor drawings as what Fredson Bowers has called the "ideal" copy. Bowers is of course talking about facsimile as it relates to several versions of a printed text from which one model should be constructed. Since there is only one copy of these watercolors, they form in fact that "ideal" model. Any attempt to reproduce them must deal with this "ideal" copy. In *The Republic* Book VII, Plato describes the world of mortals as a world of shadows being played out on the wall of a cave, a descent from the world of ideal forms. So the original is unique, and thereafter reproductions are a falling away from originality.

This distance from the original to the copy will have a great deal to do with the material from which the original was made. Engravings, for example, printed books, even money, are easier to facsimilize than paintings, especially watercolor drawings, which depend on so many ephemera, such as water and light, speed of execution, pigment, dampness of paper, paper density, and texture, and present rather formidable obstacles for reproduction.

The story of William Blake's commission to illustrate Edward Young's international bestselling poem for an audience in the 1790s, 50 years after the original poem had been published, has often been rehearsed, and only a brief summary is needed here to place in context some of the remarks which follow. When Richard Edwards, the publisher, commissioned the series of watercolors from Blake as preliminary to a four-volume set of *Night Thoughts*, to be accompanied by some engravings (reported by Joseph Farington as 200) based on Blake's preliminary designs, several luxury book projects were already underway in London, illustrating major authors such as John Milton and William Shakespeare. John Boydell's edition of Shakespeare was in fact a multifaceted business venture that included gallery displays of the commissioned oil paintings by some of the best artists of the day. Blake was not invited to participate in any of these large scale ventures—although he did engrave for Boydell's Shakespeare—so we can imagine what it might have meant to him to have been invited to have his own large artistic project. The promise of a solo showing of his work, in whatever format, clearly gave Blake

the energy to complete more than 500 drawings in what appears to be about two years. That's a massive amount of work, and the drawings show various stages of completion, some complex and highly finished, others lightly drawn, almost sketches.

Richard Edwards's project was never completed; only 43 of the drawings were developed as engraved images, and only one volume was published by Edwards (1797) before he retired from the trade and went to Minorca in 1799. Edwards had each of Blake's original drawings mounted on a leaf with a complementary tinted border, and the whole collection was divided into two volumes, bound in red morocco. Edwards's signature and the words "High Elms," Edwards's residence in Hertfordshire to which he retired in 1803, appear in each volume on the back of the frontispiece in the upper right hand corner, above the pencil sketch (and onto the tinted mount) which Blake made for the actual watercolor drawing on the other side. (This inscription is still visible today on the originals, but it does not appear on either of these pages in the Folio Society reproduction, because the mounts for the drawings have been cropped out.) The original drawings seem to have become the property of Richard's brother Thomas, who had them offered for sale three times in auction catalogues, in 1821, 1826, and 1828. The drawings in effect disappeared from public view for many decades, while the engraved book continued to appear for sale on the book market. It is scarce, but not rare. The drawings were offered for sale again in the later nineteenth century; they were displayed in London in a hotel, purchased by the bookseller James Bain, who displayed them in his shop for 30 years, then sold to Marsden J. Perry and finally William Augustus White. In 1928 White's daughter gave them to the British Museum, where they were accessioned in 1929. The British Museum accession stamp—"1929-7-13-[sheet number]"—appears in the lower left-hand corner of the verso of each of the drawings. I mention these facts because they are relevant to my consideration of what constitutes a facsimile.

What Are We Looking at in This Folio Society Edition?

I. The Binding and Numbering of the Pages

The two frontispieces have been treated as separate drawings, and the British Museum accession numbering designates them as rectos, in effect denying their status as frontispieces and making them into something like fly-titles or even end-papers. The Folio Society edition, like the earlier Micro Methods microfilm and Clarendon edition, adheres to the museum's rearrangement. The inscription "Richard Edwards / High Elms / WA White / 20 March [illegible date (?), covered with tape in the British Museum] / of M.J. Perry" is cropped out in the Folio Society and Micro Methods versions. (It is visible, however, in the Clarendon edition of the first volume.) In other words, the details of page one are silently altered. Blake's original pencil sketch, a standing figure, presumably

Christ, with arms raised pushing aside clouds, remains in the Folio Society edition on the back of the watercolor drawing of Christ resurrected, but it is now page two, as it is in the Clarendon edition. Like the inscription, the pencil sketch is not reproduced in the microfilm. In the Folio Society edition, the back of the second frontispiece, which opens the second volume of drawings, has no pencil sketch on it (although there is one in the second frontispiece original: a faint design, perhaps a show-through of the underlying pencil sketch for the front image), but it does show the British Museum accession number. The back of the Clarendon edition second-volume frontispiece is a blank page.

Do these changes matter? Perhaps they are of interest only to scholars concerned with interventions reflective of the relationship between possessors and artifact. But the purpose of a frontispiece is to set up a reaction to, or even present an epitome of, the whole, and these frontispieces were designed and made by Blake; they presumably represent his sense of the two gatherings of the drawings. To place them in effect as dust jackets or front covers for the drawings does change their integral relation to the sequence. In the case of the second frontispiece, the preliminary sketch is actually important in helping to ascertain just what it is that the watercolor depicts. In considering the semantic trajectory of the drawings, I will return to these frontispieces in my remarks on Hamlyn's commentary.

II. The Size and the Mountings

As I pointed out in my opening paragraphs, there is some deviation in the different reproductions from the size of the original watercolor drawings. The original drawings also vary. I have measured several of the original pages. Night I, page 15 (1929-7-13-11), for example, is 16 7/16 inches high by 12 3/4 inches wide. Including the tinted mounting border, the overall size grows to 20 9/16 inches by 15 7/16 inches. The text window, which contains Young's poem, is 8 5/16 inches high by 6 3/16 inches wide. All the original cutting and mounting was done by hand, and there are differences of as much as a half inch between drawings. Although the Folio Society pages are uniform at 16 1/2 by 13 (slightly larger than the originals), their text windows vary to reflect the originals. The original text box containing Young's poem was mounted off-center toward the upper left in the recto, thereby creating irregular margins in which Blake drew his designs, and a pairing of pages, verso-recto, creates a balanced asymmetry.

Once Blake completed his drawings, Edwards had them placed in individually tinted cardboard mounts. These framing and strengthening devices add another dimension to the designs within them, and, of course, both highlight each individual design and increase the overall page size. They are still extant on the originals in the British Museum, but are not reproduced in the Folio Society edition. They appear in irregular, almost shadowy fragments, with no apparent pattern, sometimes a bit of the bottom edge, sometimes of the

side edges, and so on, in the Clarendon edition, but they are reproduced in the Fogg *Night Thoughts*. In removing the evidence of these mounts, the Folio Society might be considered to be altering Blake's final intentions. Although there are no mounts for Blake's Gray designs, which he executed for the Flaxmans, the mounts in the *Night Thoughts* watercolors do appear to be integral to the completed volumes. Because the mounts are individually and distinctly tinted to reflect the coloring of the drawing for each page, I would argue that the tinting was completed either by Blake or under his supervision. The text box in Blake's *Night Thoughts* has a line around it, and the internal title-page text boxes carry a number of lines, some in brilliant red. These lines appear in the Fogg, Clarendon, and Folio editions.

III. The Quality of the Reproductions

Young's printed text is clearly reproduced in the Folio Society edition, even to the point of the show-through of text from the verso. Show-through is also evident in the Fogg edition, in the microfilm, and in the Clarendon edition. The incidental pencil and pen additions, some by Young, some by Blake, and perhaps even some by Richard Edwards, show corrections to the text, underlining, marginal markings of potential lines and groups of lines for illustration, manuscript additions such as quotations from Joseph Addison's *Cato*, and a few pages which have the pencil notation "Engraved" or even "Engraved reversed." All of these incidental marks, except the ownership inscriptions, accurately match the originals. There is, however, an omission with the final Folio Society design, which shows the biblical figure of Samson pulling down the pillars of the temple of Dagon. The back of this design in the original, and also visible as show-through in the Micro Methods microfilm, the Clarendon edition, and the Folio Society edition, is the printed opening of a few stanzas by Young of another poem altogether. This verso page, including the British Museum accession number in the lower left-hand corner, has been omitted from the Folio Society version.

Accurate color reproduction is extremely difficult, and using modern photographic methods not only requires precise scans from the originals, but also demands a technician who has the skill to match the computer scans again to the originals. A feedback loop is created between the technician at the computer and the person operating the press. Each of the *Night Thoughts* editions has used a different printing technique, but every method is capable of superb results. In each case, photography has yielded a pattern of dots per square inch which is only one of the determining factors in the fineness of the translation. Although some might argue that a regular dot pattern cannot do justice to the actual irregularities in most works of art, there are many examples which belie such an assertion. However, anyone who has ever stood before a painting in a gallery with the catalogue in hand knows just how elusive reproduction in color is. In May 2006 I stood in a small side gallery in Sotheby's New York with their

catalogue for the sale of the watercolors of Blake's designs for Blair's *Grave* and the actual drawings on the walls before me. In some cases, the catalogue reproductions seemed not even to be of the same works of art. I did inquire of Sotheby's about these radical variations, since they had done the photography themselves, working, they told me, from Blake's originals, but the staff were unable to proffer any explanation for the astonishing differences in coloration which we agreed were visible before us.

Before making a journey to the British Museum, I began by comparing my different reproductions of *Night Thoughts*. I examined the Folio Society edition next to the Fogg Museum edition, commissioned by White and made from the originals, next to the Micro Methods microfilm, also made from the originals, which were by then in the British Museum, and next to the Clarendon Press edition, which I understand was made not directly from the originals but from glossy photographs that were considerably smaller than the original pages and the published reproductions. I also compared two copies of the Folio Society edition. My own copy, number 187, and that of G. E. Bentley, Jr., number 214, were placed side by side. He and I found the color, page for page, to be consistent in our different copies. We also placed our copies next to the Fogg edition pages which are in color. Here the differences of coloration were radical. Next we placed side by side the colored Fogg pages, the relevant Folio Society pages and the Clarendon colored pages. Again, we both observed widely variant colorings and widely variant details. The Fogg edition coloring is denser and richer, while its details are in every case sharper.

To try to find out why, I consulted three experts in the printing industry in Toronto. First, I spoke to Marcus Schubert of Toronto Image Works, a renowned high-quality digital imaging house, and then, at Schubert's suggestion, I talked to Jay Mandarin, president of C. J. Graphics Inc., Printers and Lithographers. Finally, I spoke to Michael Torosian, proprietor of Lumiere Press, which specializes in photographic, limited edition, handbound books. Torosian, who works as both administrator and technician, was able to explain to me as a layperson what is entailed in various processes—photogravure, collotype, photographic offset, halftone screens, and stochastic offset lithography. What follows by way of explanation of the different methods of reproduction is always informed by the clarity of Torosian's explanations and my own attempts to grasp these highly technical processes.

After examining the Fogg, Clarendon, and Folio Society versions, Schubert compared the density and richness of the coloring of the Fogg edition, the quality of its tonal range, to examples he had seen of gravure reproductions and wondered whether this was the actual process used. Photogravure is a printmaking process developed in the 1830s with an ability to register extraordinary tonal variation. This process was more prevalent in the first half of the twentieth century than today. Torosian pointed out to me that photogravure is an intaglio process where the etching plate is inked, wiped, and heated. The paper must always be dampened before being pressed

into the plate. The results can be very subtle. In some cases a reticulated pattern is placed over the entire plate before it is exposed to the negative. This is the equivalent of the halftone screen, except more random. Torosian felt that the overall effect of the Fogg edition was subtle and very like an original watercolor on densely textured handmade paper.

Jay Mandarino of C. J. Graphics is an internationally recognized, award-winning fine art printer, specializing in limited edition fine art books. I took my three *Night Thoughts* paper editions out to his plant where paper samples and pigments and a production crew were on site. Together we compared the reproductions.

Mandarino agreed with the judgment of the richness, that is, the vibrant color and the sharp details, of the Fogg edition. The Fogg edition, however, lacks a colophon, and it presents conflicting printing information. On the title page, the reader is told the book is an American printing, and yet each individual reproduction of illustrations from *Night Thoughts* is marked "Printed in Austria." (This variation may be a simple matter of site of production versus place of publication, or of a division of letterpress for the introductory pamphlet and another method for the printing of the illustrations.) There is no information in this book about actual printing processes, but an unusual and complex dot pattern is visible on its pages. Again, Mandarino's conclusion was that the printing method was photogravure, with each sheet hand fed, which produced very sharp detail and very high quality.

Although each of the three experts whom I consulted speculated that the printing process for the Fogg reproductions was probably photogravure, the other process which was widely used for fine art printing in the early twentieth century was collotype. Collotype was developed in the 1860s and has the advantage, like hand photogravure, of rendering continuous gradations of tone. The printing surface is a film of gelatin which is subjected to different degrees of drying and hardening. In collotype, a base color creates a framework for the image. Subsequent colors may be laid on through a hand-stenciling process known as *pochoir*, or through a series of separate collotype plates. The irregular dot pattern discernible in the Fogg reproductions indicates that the plates used were not *pochoir*, but were rather collotype, photographic plates. The process is labor intensive in either case, taking months and months to complete, because of all the handwork involved. Because of the subtle layering, the end result can have great depth of color, as in the Fogg reproductions. A side effect of the collotype process is the reticulation, or the breaking up into a fine-grained pattern, of the gelatin coating on the plate as it is dried. Finally, although the consensus among the printing experts I had consulted was that photogravure was highly likely for the printing of the Fogg reproductions, in fact under 100 times magnification there are discernible separate collotype layers and a telltale ragged craquelure pattern in both the monochrome and color sheets. Collotype is the only process which would produce at this time the unusual dot pattern found in the Fogg reproductions.

Mandarino and his production head reported that the photographic dot patterns in the Clarendon and Folio Society editions are pretty much the same. They felt the color quality is not significantly different between the two, although the use of textured paper gives the Folio edition a much more luxurious feel. For the Clarendon edition they estimated 150 dots per square inch and for the Folio Society 175 dots. They found a kind of uniformity in each page of reproductions, and a lack of distinction in details and variations found in the originals. Mandarino argued that in order to produce a set of reproductions closest to the originals, offset lithography using a stochastic screening process, where a laser etches the dots onto the plates, would have allowed a variable dot pattern for each page and given more vibrant color on the paper. The Clarendon edition was made using photographic offset, a halftone screen with film. The Folio edition uses a digital photographic process, eliminating the film stage, in which an image is sent from the computer to the press.

The consensus is that accurate color reproductions are very difficult to achieve; what we hope for is a continuous tone translation which recalls the original. As viewers, rather than as printers, we must ask ourselves how important it is that the reproductions of the *Night Thoughts* drawings be precise as to color. The Folio Society volumes bring us close to the originals, but how close is close enough? In some of Blake's drawings for *Night Thoughts*, color is a critical component of meaning. I will return to color in my remarks on Hamlyn's commentary, but let me take just one example from the originals to illustrate how important color can be to our understanding. On page 32 of *Night III* (NT 107) are two figures, Age and Disease, emerging from under the text box against a background of red, which is decorated with branching lines. The Clarendon background reproduction is yellowish-red in hue. The Folio is a brighter red, not as red as the original, but red. What the two figures are cruising in is the human bloodstream, complete with branching veins. Accurate color cues the viewer to the content of the design. Blake knew very well the scientific and medical treatises of his own time, and William Harvey's theory of blood circulation was more than a century old. The notion that disease is carried by infections in the bloodstream was commonplace, and is mentioned by Young as well. Color, then, can be crucial as an identifying sign.

IV. The Original Drawings and the Folio Society Reproductions

The ultimate question for scholars is accuracy: how close are the Folio Society reproductions to the originals? Although I have extensive notes on all of the original drawings, and measurements of many of them, accuracy can finally be determined only by placing the reproduction next to the original. In September 2006, in the British Museum Department of Prints and Drawings, I examined each page of the Folio Society edition, copy H (one of the lettered *hors de commerce* copies), next to Blake's originals.

I found remarkable variations as to accuracy of color in the Folio edition throughout the series. Some designs seem precise, others in coloring almost unrecognizable. Problems of coloring arise most particularly in designs where there is great tonal variation, such as the title page to Night III (NT 78), and there is a general washing out of color and a turn to a greenish hue in the grays. Night V, page 29 (NT 184), is an example of this change in coloring, in its turning of gray to green. Night VI, page 3 (NT 224), is pure gray in Blake's design, with apricot flames, and an apricot-tinted border. In the Folio edition, the colors are blue, gray, and red. In fact, greenishness seems to be the major problem in the edition's coloring. Blake's gray tree trunk for Night VI, page 13 (NT 234), is now green. In the same Night, page 36 (NT 257), Blake's partial blue ground has become an all-over blue. The title page before Night VII in Blake's originals (NT 265) is gold, gray, and white; in the Folio edition it is green and gray. Blake's color might be a lemon yellow; the edition will change it to gold (Night VIII, page 2 [NT 348]), or Blake's gold in Night IX, page 62 (NT 480), is changed to brown. There are many examples of such shifts. While they may seem minor, they are surprising in an edition on which such care has been lavished. The Department of Prints and Drawings reported to me that the British Museum itself had done the photography, but the Folio Society came in and checked proofs against the originals. Perhaps it is impossible to expect a check of every single page—certainly that was not done. Because the Folio sheet size is taller and wider than Blake's, there is some figural distortion. There are also consequent distortions in the text box and the relationship between elements in some of the designs.

Another remarkable feature which deserves study is the numerous pentimenti on the Blake drawings. There is a world of marginal activity here. Scene after scene, page after page, has erased pencil marks, figures, scenes, and postures. These are clear in the originals, but not always in the Folio edition, nor are they remarked upon in Hamlyn's commentary. Indeed, the complexity of the pentimenti in Blake's *Night Thoughts* rivals that of the *Vala* manuscript, and will richly reward study, which none of the currently available reproductions will allow. Page 28 of Night I (NT 33), for example, has several pencil sketches illustrating the three ages of man. They are readily visible in the originals, and dimly in the Folio edition, but they are not commented on by Hamlyn. Anyone interested in this parallel universe will have to visit the originals.

There are also annotations both in the text-box area and below in the tinted border. Some of these inscriptions refer to the many numbering systems found in pencil on various areas of the mountings, some in the lower section, others toward the upper margins. Page 25 of Night I (NT 30), for example, has a note: "wrong plac'd, as are also several others [P Lane?] number'd the corners of / The pages as they ought to follow to the end of Night the Fourth." Because of cropping, all annotations beyond the text box and drawing area are not visible in the Folio edition.

When Blake's original drawings were bound by the firm of Benedict, No. 4 Mays Building, Saint Martin's Lane, they were bound out of sequence. In the marginal notations are several attempts, in several hands, to sort out the correct order of the designs. In fact, when Frederic James Shields did his description of the *Night Thoughts* designs for William Michael Rossetti's "Descriptive Catalogue" in the second edition of Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* (1880), he also made a number of errors regarding the order of the drawings, so they must have remained out of order until they were disbound for exhibition at the Fogg Museum and in Birmingham in 1928–29, before they went to the British Museum. Hence one of the hands in the various pencil numberings on the originals might be that of Frederic Shields. These incomplete numberings on the designs are now part of the history of the drawings themselves.

V. The Commentary

There is no question that Blake shared the public reverence for Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* which was apparent throughout the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth century. Young was spoken of along with John Milton, and *Night Thoughts* was several times published in editions with *Paradise Lost*. In his own work, Blake began to quote Young in the 1780s. Young was a major influence on the age, and Blake's remarkable output in the *Night Thoughts* project was no doubt fueled by both Young's reputation and Blake's own admiration for him.

There has been little study of the Blake-Young relationship, and Robin Hamlyn's commentary makes very plain the intimacy between Blake's drawings and Young's poem, the visual artist and the poet. Both Blake and Young were learned, deeply schooled in the Bible and the classics. Young's politics, and his courting of promotion, might have offended Blake, but there is much which Blake would have admired. And Young's Newtonian inebriation—Newton *does* demand the muse—which seems to have made Young soar into the heavens, as often carries Blake up with him as it becomes an occasion for Blake to demur. Both men are visionaries, and their considerable common ground in "European literature and religious and classical iconography" (Hamlyn xx) is everywhere evident in Young's allusions and Blake's responses.

Although Martin Butlin in his two-volume *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (1981) does deal briefly with each *Night Thoughts* drawing, Hamlyn's is the first monograph discussion of every single *Night Thoughts* design. Bentley calls Hamlyn's commentary "workmanlike" (Blake 40.1 [summer 2006]: 13) and in its page-by-page format the commentary is indeed "workmanlike," which is no small achievement, but it is much more, for it takes us back to huge reservoirs of images and references, historical, art historical, political, biblical, biographical and classical, and also points to autobiographical moments for Young in the poem, as well as important political references for Young's time. Paradoxically, Young's life

in the poem has been overtaken by Blake's reputation in our time, and the text has been treated as a Blake text rather than a Young text. Hamlyn certainly redresses this imbalance. The virtues of the commentary are the density of its identification of classical references in both Young's text and Blake's pictures, the use of Young's biography to explicate moments of the poem, the creation of a political context for Young's writing of the poem, and the cross-referencing of Blake's imagery to other works by Blake, both verbal and visual.

The page-by-page format of the commentary is designed to explain the pictures to the general reader who might be presumed to be just leafing through them, perhaps even dipping into the volumes at random. A page-by-page commentary is not ideal for a coherent reading, because the format necessarily involves a lot of repetition, and some of the arguments, assuming a general reader, might seem perhaps self-evident, even too literal, to a scholar. This is the difficult task—to create a commentary which satisfies two radically different audiences.

Hamlyn discusses Blake's working methods in these drawings with admirable clarity and concision, showing how each illustration was drawn in graphite, worked over with watercolor and then often "strengthened with firmer dark lines" (xviii). He even points out marks left by two edges of a sheet of paper which were placed on a design where the watercolor was still wet. Such lines are clearly visible on the left and upper left around the text box on page 55 of Night VII (NT 327). He also argues that Blake's use of color is conventional—green for earth, gold for the sun, black for death, and the like, since there are so many different scenes in the series, some set in the world of the grotesque, some classically iconographic, others Christian, and some even historical. Hamlyn presents the costuming of Blake's figures as timeless rather than contemporaneous, just as we find in Blake's own *Songs of Innocence*. While this argument holds generally, Hamlyn does not examine the possibility of actual historical representations. In fact, the series, just like Blake's design of the pilgrims from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, contains a real portrait gallery of Blake's time, including Pitt and Fox, the king and the prince regent, and even Napoleon. The possibility of actual representation is cued quite early in the series in a realistic portrait of the poet Edward Young. Later there are two portraits of Blake himself. None of these realistic portraits is mentioned by Hamlyn.

Edward Young was notably shy of having his portrait drawn and several biographies recount how he finally capitulated and "s[a]t to the pencil." The only authenticated portrait of Young is an oil painting, now in All Souls College, Oxford, by the eminent painter Joseph Highmore. The image has been reproduced in several editions of Young's works, and Blake must have known it, for he includes a portrait of Young on the verso of the first preface page (NT 5), pen in hand, light from above beaming down on him as he looks up to that light. This is a realistic portrait of Young, and there is another in Night VIII, page 67 (NT 413), where he is reunited with his dead wife. Throughout the series, there are two pilgrims whom

Blake uses to make the journey through the landscapes of the poem. One has golden curly hair, the other has straight hair. The curly-haired figure is also depicted in a design which is cognate to the earlier portrait of Young. In Night VII, page 51 (NT 323), the figure is described as a prophet from Sion, and he reappears a few pages later, inspired by an angel, on page 72 (NT 344). These two portraits are of Blake himself, and resemble strikingly a later visionary portrait of Blake drawn by his wife Catherine.

One of the problems with the commentary stems in fact from its strength, the richness of its referencing, for Hamlyn has a tendency to read Young as if Young were John Milton, and to comment on Blake and Young as if we were reading Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in particular, and not Young and Blake's *Night Thoughts*. For instance, in discussing Night IX, page 39 (NT 457), a spectacular design, and a stunning passage of poetry, where the urns of heaven pour down inspiration, Hamlyn reads back into the composite work classical, biblical, scientific, Shakespearean and Miltonic sources to the point where Young and Blake are buried altogether (291-93).

In conclusion, I'd like to return to the two frontispieces which open the bound drawings. The first frontispiece (NT 1 [1929-7-13-1]) shows Christ emerging from the tomb, throwing aside his grave clothes as two figures kneel before his radiance. Hamlyn correctly identifies the scene as the resurrection, but sees Christ as rising toward heaven (3). That is certainly an error of emphasis, for Christ does not rise to heaven until his ascension, which is 40 days later than the resurrection. Blake's design shows an energetic figure leaping up and pushing away clouds, but not an ascension. (There is an ascension scene later in the series of *Night Thoughts* drawings.) Hamlyn compares this first frontispiece to the second frontispiece, NT 264 (1929-7-13-133): "A different treatment of the subject is seen in the frontispiece to volume II" (3; see also 165). He quotes various biblical passages to bolster this identification, but the passages quoted do not explain the actual design by Blake, which shows Christ as a beaming light centered in a world of darkness where two figures are wrapped, even cocooned, in imprisoning carapaces or clothes, as they agonizingly twist and look toward his radiance. The scene, which is also apparent in the preliminary sketch on the back of the watercolor (not reproduced in the Folio Society edition), may indeed be read as an early stage of the resurrection—chronologically earlier than the scene depicted in the first frontispiece with Christ just beginning to emerge from the tomb—but it also refers to the harrowing of hell, the scene based on the New Testament passage that tells how, before Christ ascended, he descended "into the lower parts of the earth" (Ephesians 4:9-10).

While one might disagree with analyses such as these of individual pages of the composite work, Hamlyn's commentary is a major contribution to Blake scholarship. It is rich in its knowledge of art, art history, Edward Young, William Blake, western iconography, the Bible, and the classics, and it will provide a foundation for all future work on Blake's *Night Thoughts*.

The Folio Society edition does not constitute a facsimile in the truest sense of the word. Any scholar wishing to complete work on the drawings will still have to consult the originals in the British Museum. Nonetheless, the Folio Society has given us a beautiful edition of Young's poem with reproductions of pictures by Blake and an important commentary. Together, the three volumes do constitute a major publishing event.

Editors' note: The Folio Society edition may be purchased by calling the society; the telephone number depends on your location, but is listed at <<http://www.foliosoc.co.uk>>.

Michael Bedard. *William Blake: The Gates of Paradise*. Toronto: Tundra Books, 2006.
vi + 192 pp.; 89 reproductions. Can. \$28.99,
US \$19.95, hardcover.

Reviewed by Elizabeth B. Bentley

FORTY years ago Michael Bedard was introduced to the work of William Blake by his high school English teacher, and he has continued to live with Blake ever since. He knew he had to write a biography which would assist adolescent readers, and nine years ago he started writing it. During these years he established himself as a poet and as an author of books for children.

My first experience of this book was hearing it read. My reader and I agreed that it is eminently suitable to be read both aloud and silently. It is also a book that is accessible for browsing. Furthermore, it is visually pleasing, with 89 well-chosen reproductions, including a plate from *For Children: The Gates of Paradise* as a heading for the prologue and each of the 16 chapters.

In the first two chapters, Bedard points out the effect on the small William Blake of his long solitary walks in the country where he could create his own songs about "Englands green & pleasant Land." Here he experienced some of his first visions. In the city he observed the poverty and suffering brought about by the "dark Satanic Mills" of the Industrial Revolution. Bedard skillfully tells us what fine parents William Blake had. They provided enough security and recognition of his gifts to support him in becoming a richly developed human being who

was not simply an engraver; he was a poet and a painter. He dreamt of uniting the arts of writing and painting, as the artists of the Middle Ages had in their illuminated manuscripts. He discovered a way to write and draw on the copper plates he used for engraving, and create a raised image he could print from on his wooden press and then color by hand.

He called his discovery Illuminated Printing, and in the books he created with it, he confronted all systems of power that confined the human spirit. He announced a gospel of

freedom and fellowship founded on the exercise of the creative imagination. In a world impressed with the great and powerful, he celebrated the small. He delighted in the innocence of the child. He showed us "a world in a grain of sand, and a heaven in a wild flower." (2)

Bedard presents Catherine as the wife William needed. She worked by his side and did not complain when project after project did not bring the income they had expected. One despair over the years when William was forgotten. We can be grateful that Thomas Butts remained a faithful commissioner of paintings by Blake, especially the Bible illustrations. The formation of a group of young admirers, who called themselves the "Ancients" and ranged in age from 15 to 25, was a godsend to the childless Blakes in their old age. The Ancients came for advice, they came to admire, they went off for excursions into the country to paint and draw, taking William with them.

William Blake had said on more than one occasion that death was not something to fear. It was like passing from one room to another. Bedard describes Blake's passage with a sure pen which leads us to admire his biography of Blake.

I recommend this book to adolescents and to anyone teaching them, first and foremost for its compelling portrait of Blake and his time. In an age like ours that is experienced as apocalyptic, it is well for youth to be introduced to a human being who does not turn his back on that condition but can become an inner counselor and guide.

I look forward to giving this book to my 12-year-old grandson and hope to be able to read it with my granddaughter when she turns 10. I hope that they will find both Michael Bedard's and William Blake's *Gates of Paradise* as rewarding as I do.

