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Printed References to and Known Prices of Blake's Night Thoughts, 1796-1826

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MINUTE PARTICULARS

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BY WAYNE C. RIPLEY

THERE are precious few contemporary printed references to Blake's illustrations and engravings of Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*. In November 1796 the *Monthly Magazine* was the first to anticipate the publication of the volume; it listed the price of the entire nine-night work at five guineas for subscribers and six for non-subscribers.¹ That December Blake's publisher, Richard Edwards, released an advertisement without prices, and in January 1797 the *Monthly Epitome and Catalogue of New Publications* announced that the first part would be published "in a few days" and repeated the price mentioned by the *Monthly Magazine* (BR(2) 77). These "few days," however, turned into months, and in the spring Edwards issued a prospectus, which promised publication in June and claimed that the first volume would have forty "very spirited engravings." It repeated the price of five guineas to subscribers, but emphasized that "the price will be considerably advanced to non-subscribers," without giving a specific figure (BR(2) 78-79). In November 1797 the first and only volume was finally published, and that month William Roscoe paid £1.1 for the first number and £1.1 as a down payment for the subscription (BR(2) 79).² Despite Edwards's threat to raise the price for non-subscribers, when the *Monthly Magazine* announced the published volume in June 1798, the price for the general public was the same as Roscoe had paid: "Young's *Night Thoughts*, decorated with appropriate Designs, by Mr. Blake, Part I. 11.1s." (BR(2) 82).

While Bentley notes that after the book was published "it was scarcely noticed" (BR(2) 76), I want to examine the known references in light of eleven recently discovered notices, which are not recorded in *Blake Records* and which were found using Google Books. I have coordinated these discoveries with the known references in table 1; the first four, from 1798 to 1801, are given below:

1. White, John. *A Catalogue of Rare, Splendid, and Valuable Books, in Every Branch of Polite Literature; Including the Entire*

1. G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) [hereafter cited as BR(2)] 74. The *Monthly Magazine* announcement was reprinted in the *Edinburgh Magazine* (December 1796): 450.

2. Whether this money was ever returned to him or any of the other subscribers when the project failed is unknown.

Libraries of the Rev. Harvey Spragg ... also of the Rev. Henry Putman ...: Comprehending a Large Assortment of Learned Theological Books. ... The Sale Will Begin on February 19, 1798 London, 1798.

Young's *Night Thoughts*, a magnificent edition, with Engravings from Drawings by Blake, 5l 5s to subscribers, when completed, boards — — — 1797

2. Schubart, Ludwig. *Englische Blätter*. Erlangen, 1798.

Young's *Night Thoughts*, decorated with appropriate Designs, by Mr. Blake, Part. I.

3. Payne, Thomas. *Catalogue of Valuable Books, in Various Languages, and in Every Class of Literature: Which Are to Be Sold, at the Prices Affixed to Each Article* London, 1799.

Young's *Night Thoughts*, with engravings round each page from the designs of Blake, 2 numbers, boards, — 1797 & 98

4. White, John. *A Catalogue of Books, in Every Department of Literature, Now on Sale* London, March 1801.

Young's *Night Thoughts*, a magnificent edition, with Engravings from Drawings by Blake, boards, 5l 5s — 1797

As brief as these descriptions are, they do raise some interesting points. White's catalogue entries borrow their description of the volume as a "magnificent edition" from the spring 1797 prospectus. This echo makes the second mention of Blake's edition by the *Monthly Magazine* more notable, since the latter steps away from the laudatory language of the prospectus for the more tempered "appropriate." While Jon Mee has argued that Blake's designs employed many images current in the radical millenarian culture of the 1790s,³ the description of the designs as "appropriate" suggests that at least one early reader saw them as entirely suitable to Young's poem, a viewpoint that anticipated the opinion of readers in the 1820s.⁴ The reprinting of the *Monthly Magazine* entry in Schubart signals, to my knowledge, the first international reference to Blake's *Night Thoughts*, and in Germany the description of the designs as "appropriate" to Young would have had special resonance, given the popularity of Young and his impact on German romanticism.

Both White and Payne were involved in other projects that Blake worked on. Blake either knew the men or was familiar with them through his immediate circle. Both took subscriptions for *The Grave*, and late in Blake's life John Linnell bought

3. "As portentous as the written wall": Blake's Illustrations to *Night Thoughts*, *Prophetic Character: Essays on William Blake in Honor of John E. Grant*, ed. Alexander S. Goulay (West Cornwall: Locust Hill Press, 2002) 171-203.

4. In 1824 Thomas Frognall Dibdin, who obviously admired the sublimity of Young over that of Blake, conceded, "At times, the pencil of the artist attains the sublimity of the poet ..." (BR(2) 398-99).

paper from White and used him to bind illustrations of the Book of Job (BR(2) 785).⁵ There is no doubt that Blake knew Payne by 1804; on 23 October, Blake wrote to William Hayley that he had given Payne the note Hayley had sent and had received cash from Payne.⁶ Through James Basire or John Flaxman, Blake's acquaintance with Payne may have come much earlier. Payne was one of the four publishers of Jacob Bryant's *Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (1774-76), for which Blake likely provided an engraving. In 1799 Blake engraved Flaxman's designs for the *Letter to the Committee for Raising the Naval Pillar*, which was printed for T. Cadell, W. Davies, R. H. Evans, and Payne. In 1804, after Blake returned to London from Felpham, he engraved Flaxman's frontispiece for Hoare's *Academic Correspondence*, for which Payne was also a publisher. If Blake was not acquainted directly with Payne in the late 1790s, the latter did collaborate on several projects with James Edwards, brother of Richard Edwards, and Payne, C. Dilly, and Richard Edwards were listed as the only London sellers of Francis Wrangham's *The Restoration of the Jews* (1795).

Given Blake's possible connections to White and Payne, the descriptions in their catalogues of the book and its publication details are significant for what they say about the expected production schedule. Even though the first and only *Night Thoughts* number was published in November 1797, White's 1798 catalogue, which was likely printed in January or February, still references subscribers and uses the phrase "when completed." This phrase originates in neither the advertisement nor the prospectus, and White's description and price refer to the full four-volume set, which suggests that in early 1798 further volumes were expected. Payne's 1799 catalogue raises even larger issues, since it lists "2 numbers" with the dates of "1797 & 98." We know that Blake began to work on an engraving for *Night the Fifth*, which would have been included in a second volume.⁷ Was Payne, and perhaps Blake himself, still expecting a second volume as late as 1799? Or were both catalogues committing errors that resulted from the slow and uncertain production of the first volume and its aborted sequels? Unfortunately, Payne's catalogue makes no mention of a price for these two supposed volumes, even though most of the other books in the catalogue are priced. At what point Edwards and Blake finally abandoned the project is unclear, but because Payne's only reference to it comes more than a year after the publication of the volume, it is highly likely that the work may have been given up much later than we have recognized. For his part, White must have been attuned to the production of the book, since he omits the phrase "when completed" in his 1801 description.

5. Linnell's accounts refer only to "White," but Bentley includes this man under John White in his index.

6. David V. Erdman, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, newly rev. ed. (New York: Anchor-Random House, 1988) [hereafter cited as E] 756.

7. John Grant et al., eds., *William Blake's Designs for Edward Young's Night Thoughts: A Complete Edition*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) 7.

White's 1801 price was either an oversight or an overestimation of the solitary volume's value, since in the English marketplace at least the book appears to have done little to help the fortunes of any booksellers lucky or unlucky enough to have a copy. The next mention of the book occurred in Germany, when Jean Paul Richter received a copy from Erbprinz Emil August von Gotha in November 1801 (BR(2) 113). Schubart's 1798 reference may explain how von Gotha came to know of the book's existence. Before giving it to Richter, he had it richly bound and included "a real gold [*chain*] ending with a huge pearl," which Richter was inclined to give to his wife as a necklace. Richter valued the book at fifteen guineas, declaring "Perhaps there is not a second [*copy of the book*] in Germany, [*a fact*] which may help me a good deal in selling it" (BR(2) 115, Bentley's emendations). We do not know if Richter did sell the volume, and if he did, whether he was able to obtain his price. He also recognized the beauty of Blake's designs, and in a book he published in 1804 described the figure peering over a bush in *Night the First*, p. 4, in terms Blake would have appreciated: "its seeing becomes vision for me" (BR(2) 186-87). In any case, Richter's estimation of both its visionary and market value far exceeded what anyone in England was willing to concede for years to come.

The next printed references to the book are found in three catalogues by William Gardiner; I have included the catalogue number before each entry:

5. *A List of Books, for Sale at W. Gardiner's, 48, Pall-Mall, at the Ready Money Prices Affixed*. London: J. Barker, 1808.

860 Young's Night Thoughts, *curious cuts*, by Blake, boards, 11 5s 1797

6. *A Catalogue of Books ... for Sale at W. Gardiner's, 48, Pall-Mall, at the Ready Money Prices Affixed*. London: J. Barker, 1809.

860 Young's Night Thoughts, *curious cuts*, by Blake, boards, 11 5s 1797

7. *A Catalogue of a Small Collection of Ancient and Modern Books ... for Sale at W. Gardiner's, 48, Pall-Mall, at the Ready Money Prices Affixed*. London: J. Barker, 1810.

691 Young's Night Thoughts, *curious cuts*, by Blake, boards, £1 5s — 1796

1213 Young's Night Thoughts, with Engravings by Mr. Blake, fol. boards, £1 5s — 1797

This is one of the most singular and eccentric works that ever appeared.

Presumably, the 1796 date for item 691 in the 1810 catalogue is an error. If so, it may be safe to assume that the four listings all refer to the same volume, which Gardiner classified in different ways. The 1808 and 1809 catalogues listed the book in the

category "Poetry, Plays, &c." By doing so, Gardiner chose not to list it with the other "Books of Prints" he offered, a decision that privileged Young's poetry over Blake's designs. Failing to attract a buyer that way, however, Gardiner may have been motivated to cross-list the book in 1810 in the new category of "English Poetry and Miscellanies" and in "Books of Prints."

After Gardiner, James Lackington listed it in his *General Catalogue* (1811) for £2.10 and *Catalogue of Books* (1815) for £2.2 (BR(2) 600fn).⁸ The 1811 catalogue gives two separate copies of the book, which are prefaced here with their lot number:

264 Young's Night Thoughts, *finely printed, with curious plates, designed and etched by Blake*, first 4 Books, bds. 21. 10s. 1797

6569 Young's Night Thoughts, (first four nights of) *finely printed, with marginal plates, from designs by Blake*, bds. 21. 10s.

Both repeat Gardiner's description of the engraved plates as "curious," and it is interesting that Lackington describes the volume as "finely printed," when, in fact, it was very sloppily done. Perhaps this idea of the fine printing helped him raise the price more than a pound over Gardiner's copy, which itself was only four shillings more than the *Monthly Magazine* had announced for the book on the open market in 1798. Strikingly, Gardiner's catalogues appeared when Blake's edition of *The Grave* was being published and when Blake was receiving the most positive attention he would ever receive; this increased attention may have motivated Lackington to push up his prices in 1811. Given that he again offered two copies of the work in 1815, it is highly probable that he failed to sell his copies in 1811 and tried again at slightly lower prices. We do not know if they sold. In 1810, Henry Crabb Robinson bought his copy for £1.11.6, which was between the prices offered by Gardiner and Lackington. Despite the likelihood that Lackington failed to sell two copies in 1811, Robinson claimed in his German article on Blake that the *Night Thoughts* volume "is no longer to be bought, so excessively rare has it become." Either Robinson believed the book was rare, or he wanted, perhaps, like Richter, to push up the value of his copy (BR(2) 771, 600).

A bookseller with more direct connections to *The Grave* was William Ford of Manchester, who, as announced in the 7 November 1807 advertisement in the *Manchester Gazette*, had displayed Blake's original drawings for the project and taken subscriptions (BR(2) 248). Like Lackington, Ford had two copies of *Night Thoughts* for sale in 1811, which are found in both parts of a two-part catalogue:

8. Ford, W[illiam]. *A Catalogue of a Curious and Valuable Collection of Books, in Various Languages and Classes of Literature. ... Part the First for 1810*. Manchester, 1811.

8. Note that the price Bentley lists for the 1811 catalogue, £2.12, is an error. I have not been able to check the 1815 catalogue.

Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality, with the singular designs round the margins by BLAKE, calf cleg. ib.⁹

9. Ford, W[illiam]. *A Catalogue (Part the Second for 1810-11) of a Curious and Valuable Collection of Books, in Various Languages and Classes of Literature*. Manchester, 1811.

Young's Complaint, and the Consolation; or Night thoughts with Blake's singular designs round the text. ib. 1797.—*Blair's Grave*, with engravings from the designs of Blake. LARGE PAPER. eleg. bd. in blue mor. &c. 818s. ib. 1808

It was perhaps sometime during the interest in Blake following *The Grave* that the British Museum obtained its copy (now in the British Library), which is listed in an 1819 catalogue:

10. *Librorum Impressorum, Qui in Museo Britannico Adservantur, Catalogus*. Vol. 7. London, 1819.

The Complaint and the Consolation or Night Thoughts, with marginal Designs by Mr. Blake. fol. Lond. 1797.

The following year, another catalogue listed two copies at prices in the same range as Gardiner's. They are given below, prefaced by their catalogue number:

11. Evans, E. and A. *Bookseller's and Printseller's Catalogue*. London, 1820.

421 Blake (Wm.) Illustrations of Young's Night Thoughts, 4to. bds. 30s. — 1797

566 Young's Night Thoughts, with numerous fine plates by William Blake, fol. Bds. 11. 1s. — — 1797

This Evans is likely Edward Evans (1789-1835), who on 19 April 1830 wrote to Linnell about selling copies of *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (BR(2) 528). Their association dates from at least 23 November 1826, when Linnell listed Evans in his account book (BR(2) 789). The relationship may have begun earlier, since in the catalogue entry for another item by Blake, he is described as an "eminent genius."¹⁰

After the Evans' catalogue, Thomas Edwards, the brother of the original *Night Thoughts* publisher Richard, attempted to sell the original watercolor designs in 1821. He also offered an uncolored copy of the engraved edition, listed at £2.12.6.¹¹ Ed-

9. The first part of Ford's catalogue is not available for full viewing on Google Books. Both parts are held by Oxford, shelfmark 2593 e.51.

10. "422 — an additional plate to Young by this eminent genius, hitherto unpublished, engraved by Perry, 4to. 1s". Unfortunately, this is not the lost engraving for Night the Fifth first described in the 1927 catalogue of Francis Edwards (Grant et al. 1: 87n18), but Blake's wild, full-page engraving for Bürger's *Leonora*, which had an excerpt from Young beneath it. It was published in 1796, along with two other designs by Blake, all engraved by Perry. Item 423 is a copy of Blake's designs for *The Grave*.

11. G. E. Bentley, Jr., "The 1821 Edwards Catalogue," *Blake* 17.4 (spring 1984): 154-56.

wards was unsuccessful in selling the designs, and there is no indication if he disposed of the uncolored copy. The price of the book is not recorded again until the collection of Rebekah Bliss was sold in April 1826. She had both a colored and an uncolored copy, with the former selling for four guineas and the later for £1.19 (BR(2) 444). The price of this uncolored copy was only slightly higher than Gardiner's 1808-10 asking price of £1.5 and the Evans' £1.10 in 1820, which suggests that there still remained very little demand. Unless Lackington and Edwards successfully sold their copies, the obtainable market price for an uncolored copy had not risen more than eighteen shillings between 1798 and 1826. In 1824, Alexander

Akehurst found it very easy to find a copy after reading a biography of Hayley that mentioned Blake. He wrote to Philip Bliss, "I lately picked up a Copy of this Work, which is [*word del*] [thought] to be now reposing in the warehouses of some of the London Booksellers, as it is believed to have met with little encouragement" (BR(2) 388, Bentley's emendations). Akehurst's opinion, rather than Robinson's, must remain the consensus on how readily available Blake's *Night Thoughts* was to the reading public. But we at least know now that a few more people noted its publication and sale, even though these notices did nothing for Blake's (or anyone else's) fortune.

Table 1: Printed References to and Known Prices of Blake's *Night Thoughts* (1797), 1796-1826
(newly discovered references are shaded)

Date	Source	Price
November 1796	<i>Monthly Magazine</i>	£5.5 for subscribers/£6.6 for non-subscribers*
December 1796	<i>Edinburgh Magazine</i>	£5.5 for subscribers/£6.6 for non-subscribers* (reprint of <i>Monthly Magazine</i> announcement)
22 December 1796	Richard Edwards's advertisement	No price given
January 1797	<i>Monthly Epitome</i>	£5.5 for subscribers/£6.6 for non-subscribers*
Spring 1797	Richard Edwards's prospectus	£5.5 for subscribers/"considerably advanced" for non-subscribers*
November 1797	Likely publication	William Roscoe billed £1.1 for first number and £1.1 as down payment for subscription
January or February? 1798	White's catalogue	£5.5 for subscribers/no mention of non-subscriber price*
June 1798	<i>Monthly Magazine</i>	£1.1
1798, after June	<i>Englische Blätter</i>	No price given
1799	Payne's catalogue	Two numbers mentioned; no prices given
March 1801	White's catalogue	£5.5
November 1801	Richter's correspondence	£15.15 (his estimate of value)
1808	Gardiner's catalogue	£1.5
1809	Gardiner's catalogue	£1.5
1810	Gardiner's catalogue	£1.5
1810	Henry Crabb Robinson	Paid £1.11.6
1811	Ford's catalogue (part 1)	Not available
1811	Ford's catalogue (part 2)	£8.8 (with Blake's edition of <i>The Grave</i>)
1811	Lackington's catalogue	Two volumes: £2.10 each
1815	Lackington's catalogue	£2.2 each (perhaps same two volumes from 1811)
1819	Catalogue of books in the British Museum	Price paid not given
1820	E. and A. Evans' catalogue	Two volumes: 30s (£1.10) and £1.1
1821	Thomas Edwards's catalogue	£2.12.6
1824	Akehurst's correspondence	Price paid not given
1826	Collection of Rebekah Bliss	£4.4 paid for a colored copy; £1.19 paid for an uncolored copy

* These prices refer to the never completed four-volume set.