



Young's Night Thoughts

Edward Young

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Young is said to have been a brilliant talker. Although Night Thoughts is long and disconnected, it abounds in brilliant isolated passages. Its success was enormous. It was translated into French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, Welsh and Magyar. In France it became a classic of the romantic school. Questions as to the "sincerity" of the poet did arise in the 100 years after his death. The publication of fawning letters from Young seeking preferment led many readers to question the poet's sincerity. In a famous essay, *Worldliness and Other-Worldliness*, George Eliot discussed his "radical insincerity as a poetic artist." If Young did not invent "melancholy and moonlight" in literature, he did much to spread the fashionable taste for them. Madame Klopstock thought the king ought to make him Archbishop of Canterbury, and some German critics preferred him to John Milton. Young's essay, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, was popular and influential on the continent, especially among Germans, as a testament advocating originality over neoclassical imitation. Young wrote good blank verse, and Samuel Johnson pronounced Night Thoughts to be one of "the few poems" in which blank verse could not be changed for rhyme but with disadvantage. The poem was a poetic treatment of sublimity and had a profound influence on the young Edmund Burke, whose philosophic investigations and writings on the Sublime and the Beautiful were a pivotal turn in 18th-century aesthetic theory.

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