

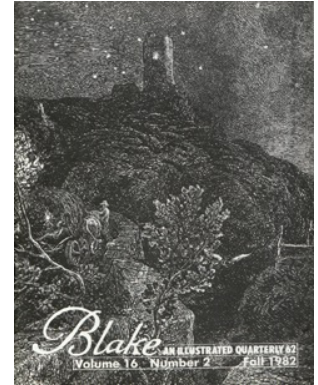
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R E V I E W

T. V. F. Brogan, *English Versification, 1570-1980:
A Reference Guide with a Global Appendix*

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T. V. F. Brogan. **English Versification, 1570-1980: A Reference Guide with a Global Appendix.** Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981. 794 pp. \$47.50.

Reviewed by Judith W. Page

T V. F. Brogan's *English Versification, 1570-1980* is a welcome reference guide that will help students and researchers plow through the overgrown field of versification, defined here as the study of the rhythmical elements and structures of poetry. In this thick volume, Brogan organizes works on English versification according to theoretical subjects such as sound, syntax, and meter. In addition to the clearly outlined table of contents, a global appendix, indexes arranged by poet and author, and generous cross-references make the guide readily accessible for research into any component of verse theory, from particular studies of Blake to general studies of the role of syntax in versification.

The book is valuable not only because of the author's painstaking efforts of organization and consolidation, but also because of his firm grasp of the history of versification and of the theoretical importance of linguistics in the field. In his general introduction, in the introductions to various subjects, and in the evaluative descriptions of many of the works cited, Brogan recognizes and confronts the historical problems of versification: imprecise thinking and confused terminology. According to Brogan, this theoretical confusion developed because theorists before the twentieth century did not understand the place of language in versification. But this understanding is essential, since the increased patterning of verse organizes language on a higher level: "Verse-patterning is contrived out of--superimposed upon yet also generated inductively from--the only available elements, the natural phonological features of each particular language" (xix). Brogan's emphasis on a sound linguistic basis for verse theory informs his judgments of particular entries and, in my opinion, gives credence to his evaluations.

As far as I can tell, too, Brogan includes and fairly evaluates all of the major works in versification, from the earliest theorists through the

generative metrists of the 1970s. In his evaluation of T. S. Omond's *English Metrists* (Oxford, 1921), Brogan restates the need for a modern evaluative bibliography for versification. Brogan also rightly identifies the weakness of George Saintsbury's influential *History of English Prosody* (3 vols., London, 1906-10) as a complete lack of a consistent theory, which makes the book "one of the most extravagant irrelevancies in criticism" even though it is "a great monolith of wide and informed reading" (p. 10). Brogan outlines major works and schools in modern English verse theory, including those of the structural linguists Seymour Chatman and Roger Fowler and the generative metrists Morris Halle, S. Jay Keyser, and Paul Kiparsky. He sees Marina Tarlinskaja's *English Verse: Theory and History* (The Hague, 1976) as "the most extensive and the most important study of English verse-structure produced in this century" (p. 282), because Tarlinskaja is comprehensive (dealing with verse from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries) and thorough (with the aid of a computer inventory of 100,000 lines).

The major Romantic poets and their interpreters are well represented in *English Versification*. For instance, Brogan summarizes Wordsworth's comments on meter in the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and Coleridge's "answer" to them in Chapter 18 of the *Biographia*. In his comments on Wordsworth, Brogan could have been more thorough, though. Wordsworth deserves more credit as a forward-looking theorist, aware of the psychological effects of meter, not just meter as a "mild narcotic" (p. 163) but also meter as a means by which the poet can heighten and intensify emotion. In his entry under W. J. B. Owen's "The Theory of Meter" from *Wordsworth as Critic* (Toronto, 1969), Brogan quotes and seems to accept at face value Owen's comments that "'the prose parts of Wordsworth's blank verse, especially, appear to gain no advantage from being in meter'" (p. 157). Such a questionable statement at least needs to be read alongside Wordsworth's own assertion

in the Preface "that of two descriptions either of passions, manners, or characters, each of them equally well executed, the one in prose and the other in verse, the verse will be read a hundred times where the prose is read once."¹ The pleasure provided by the meter (in blank verse, the rhythmical repetition of the iambic pattern) may thus interact with and intensify the poetry.

Blake presents us with more questions than does Wordsworth. His comments on versification consist of a few aphorisms, with nothing as systematic even as the paragraphs from the Preface. And whereas Wordsworth works within the tradition of accentual-syllabic verse, Blake's poetry does not flow easily into this mainstream. *English Versification* will be useful to the student who wants to investigate the principles behind or follow through on hunches about Blake's versification. Suppose that someone has been working on the idea that the rhythmical principle of Blake's prophecies is based on syntactical patterns. Brogan's descriptions and evaluations of studies written on the role of syntax in versification under the category "Syntax and Grammar" should direct that person to relevant readings. Another useful category for the Blake researcher would be "Visual (Typographic) Structures." Although many of the entries deal with modern "concrete poetry" and Renaissance "pattern poetry," insights into both of these could enhance the study of Blake's composite art.

Furthermore, a researcher can turn to the index and immediately find a listing of works specifically on Blake's versification or works in which Blake

may be mentioned. From these entries, the researcher can piece together a historical survey of the writings and determine what kinds of things have been written. Brogan summarizes and evaluates some of the works, including Alicia Ostriker's *Vision and Verse in William Blake* (Madison, 1965), the only book-length study of Blake's versification. Brogan sees Ostriker's book as a "groundbreaking survey" (p. 349) but claims that it is methodologically faulty; he rightly implies that the "concrete foundation" (p. 349) will have to include a more precise theoretical structure. Other Blake entries include studies that mention or begin to investigate the influence of music and the visual arts on Blake's metrical styles. But the big question remains: what principle is behind the rhythmical structures of Blake's poetry? Quantities, syntax, stress, all of the above, none of the above? This question and its answers will have to be based on an understanding of the history and theory of English versification.

Brogan's *English Versification* can help to strengthen this basis. Brogan succeeds in his intentions of offering a single view of the field, of sketching its historical contour, and, potentially, of generating new ideas and works about versification in the future. Anyone interested in the verse structures of Blake's--or any poet's--"sweet forms" should hurry to this worthy guide.

¹ *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), I, 150.

Johann Caspar Lavater. **Aphorisms on Man (1788)**. A Facsimile Reproduction of William Blake's Copy of the First English Edition with an Introduction by R. J. Shroyer. Delmar, New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1980. xxxiii + 227 pp. (With one illus.). \$22.00.

Reviewed by Jenijoy La Belle

APHORISMS ON MAN
(1788)

By Johann Caspar Lavater

A FACSIMILE REPRODUCTION
OF WILLIAM BLAKE'S COPY OF THE FIRST ENGLISH EDITION
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
R. J. SHROYER

The business of making facsimiles of Blake's illuminated books has a long and fascinating history, beginning with John Camden Hotten's edition of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in 1868 and culminating in recent years with the splendid work of the William Blake Trust. There are of course many beautiful copies of the illuminated books still awaiting appropriate replication, but we seem

to have reached a point in Blake studies where the reproduction of Blake's pictorially less impressive works can also find an audience. Thanks to R. J. Shroyer and Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, a reproduction of the copy of Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man* annotated by Blake is now available. Since there are at least three typographic editions of the annotations,¹ the audience for such a work must