

# AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

N O T E

## The 1788 Publication of Lavater's Aphorisms on Man

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But I have no ingenious speculations ready, nor has John Grant, who led me to these surprises.

Thanks, then, to Professors Essick, Grant, and Hagstrum, this new edition contains significant improvements that have involved minor revisions throughout, even in the index. And although I have found no way to make direct use of "'Blake's Gothicised Imagination and the History of England,' David Bindman's essay in *William Blake*, 1973 (the *Keynes Festschrift* edited by Morton Paley and Michael Phillips), my brief discussion of the historical sketches and of the list of topics from English history on page 116 would benefit from the wider context supplied by Bindman's survey "of Blake's interpretation of the whole panorama of English history from its mythological origins to the apocalyptic future."

Jean H. Hagstrum is to be thanked for a most interesting textual correction of "Public Address" sections 63 and 29 (N 20 and N 62). What has always been read as "Poco Pen" and "Poco Pend," but never made sense of, can now be confidently given as "Poco Piu" and "Poco Piud." Hagstrum observed that *n* was a misreading of *u*, and Geoffrey Keynes noted that what looks like *e* (though loopless) is indistinguishable from an undotted *i* (of which the text affords frequent examples) and that Blake is attacking the slang of the "Cunning Sures" (N 40); compare his scorn of their "je ne sais quoi" in Poem 124 (N 41). The only other error of transcription noted, and corrected, is "Accusation" corrected to "Accusations" in Appendix page 95.

## The 1788 Publication Date of Lavater's Aphorisms on Man

by Richard J. Schroyer

William Blake's annotated copy of the first English edition of J. C. Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man* (tr. H. Fuseli, pub. J. Johnson)<sup>1</sup> is usually dated 1788 on the apparently firm evidence of the title page dated 1788 and the unsigned "Advertisement" (pp. v-vi) dated "May, 1788."<sup>2</sup> This date may be especially important for the chronology of Blake's earliest illuminated books, if, as S. Foster Damon first observed, *All Religions are One* and the two series of *There is No Natural Religion* are formally and materially indebted to Lavater's *Aphorisms*.<sup>3</sup> In light of this, it is unsettling to find that David Erdman, in two very influential studies of Blake,<sup>4</sup> re-dates *Aphorisms* 1789--and thereby pushes the *terminus a quo* of Blake's annotations forward by at least six months --on the authority of the following statement in John Knowles' *Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli* (1831):

In the beginning of the year (1789), Fuseli published, in a small duodecimo [*sic*, for octavo] volume, a translation of Lavater's "Aphorisms on Man;" which work, written in German, was dedicated to him by this early and esteemed friend. The dedication is dated October, 1787.<sup>5</sup>

Knowles' generally valuable biography is, I would suggest, almost certainly wrong on this particular point, the victim perhaps of a printer's slip.<sup>6</sup>

Although there is some reason to believe that the first edition of *Aphorisms* was not widely circulated until the spring of 1789, when Christopher Moody wrote that the volume was "now before us,"<sup>7</sup> other evidence indicates that the book was in print, and therefore available to Blake, as early as perhaps May (the date of the "Advertisement"), and very probably by June or July 1788. The July 1788 issue of Joseph Johnson's recently founded *Analytical Review* carried two notices of the book. *Aphorisms* is listed as one of the "Books and Pamphlets Published during the first six months [i.e., by June] of 1788,"<sup>8</sup> and a critic identified as "N" gives a fairly extensive account of the book, with a generous selection of aphorisms:

ART. III. APHORISMS ON MAN: *Translated from the original German MS. of John Caspar Lavater, Citizen of Zurich. With a frontispiece. Pot. 8vo. P. 232. Price 3s. sewed. Johnson.*

The author of these Aphorisms seems to have proceeded from the head to the heart, or rather the study of one enabled him to trace the different forms the passions wear, and to discriminate many of their almost endless combinations. We with pleasure read the only maxims extant written by a benevolent man; and perhaps it is necessary





*John Caspar Lavater*  
APHORISMS ON MAN.

BY  
JOHN CASPAR LAVATER,  
CITIZEN OF ZURICH.

— English Edition by John Caspar Lavater —  
— Second Edition —

SECOND EDITION.

London,

PRINTED BY T. PAULSON,

AT THE PAULSON PRESS, IN ST. MARTIN'S LANE.

MDCCLXXXVIII.

to love the human race, and to be one of its ornaments, before the virtues and vices which adorn and debase it can be discerned and unfolded. He must have genius who can point out its characteristics, and display the sublime he describes. [Following an accurate transcript of the "Dedication" and "Advertisement," the reviewer continues.]

Many of the aphorisms are so well expressed in the translation, that they have all the merit of an original thought almost intuitively struck off. . . . The blemishes . . . are trifling; and the work, taken collectively, we think the most interesting and original production we have for a long time perused, and that it does equal honour to the goodness, discernment, and sensibility of the author.

The number of the aphorisms is 643.<sup>9</sup>

The existence of this dated review, together with the facts and inferences already available, permit us to construct a fairly detailed outline of the history of *Aphorisms*. During the autumn of 1787, when, as Blake later recalled, "Flaxman was taken to Italy"

and "Fuseli was given to me for a season,"<sup>10</sup> Fuseli's friend Lavater was rapidly composing his "verdicts of wisdom on the reports of experience,"<sup>11</sup> a task he evidently completed by 13 October, when the dedication to Fuseli was written. By the end of the year, part of the collection was published in German as *Ver-mischte unphysiognomische Regeln zur Selbst- und Menschenkenntniss*, but without the dedication. The part of the collection not published in 1787 was apparently reserved for a second volume of 1788.<sup>12</sup> Between October 1787 and May 1788, Fuseli translated Lavater's *Regeln* into English aphorisms which, as far as I can determine, fairly reflect the spirit of the originals. And it was probably during the same period that either Fuseli or Johnson employed Blake --who may have begun to experiment with illuminated printing--to engrave the frontispiece after Fuseli.<sup>13</sup> By May 1788, when Blake's first plate for Lavater's major work, *Essays on Physiognomy*, was issued,<sup>14</sup> *Aphorisms* was very probably ready for the press. By July 1788, as we have seen, the first edition was in print and was being discussed openly, at least in Johnson's house journal.

That Blake did in fact obtain his copy of the book in May-July 1788 is probable but not certain.





*John Houghton*

APHORISMS ON MAN.

TRANSLATED

FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

OF

THE REV. JOHN CASPAR LAVATER,  
CITIZEN OF ZURICH.

— ē cœlo descendit ꝑꝑꝑꝑ creator.

Jav. Sat. IX.

THIRD EDITION.

Dublin,

PRINTED BY W. SLEATER, DAME-STREET,  
AND P. EVENE, CRAFTON-STREET.  
M,DCC,XC.

As the engraver of the frontispiece and as a friend of the translator, Blake seems to have had both opportunity and motive to acquire and begin to annotate his copy of *Aphorisms* as soon as it became available. Further, nothing in Blake's annotations would contradict a date of composition as early as spring or summer 1788, and the evidence of offsets gathered by G. E. Bentley, Jr. may indicate that Blake received an unbound--and therefore possibly a pre-publication--copy of the book, perhaps in partial payment for engraving the frontispiece.<sup>15</sup> In sum, although several problems in Blake's chronology await better solutions (or at least more precise definitions) than are now available, the 1788 publication date of Lavater's *Aphorisms* would seem to be fairly secure, and the traditional chronology of Blake's annotations and Natural Religion tractates, as a consequence, intact.

Postscript

In his *Life of William Blake*, Alexander Gilchrist tells a story about Blake, Fuseli, and Blake's copy of Lavater's *Aphorisms* which has always seemed to me to have the ring of truth. "Blake," Gilchrist reports, "showed his notes to Fuseli; who said one could

assuredly read their writer's character in *them*."<sup>16</sup> I had hoped to find that Fuseli's revisions for the second edition of *Aphorisms* (1789) would show that he read and incorporated into his revised text some of the suggestions found in Blake's annotations. Alas, a careful comparison of the two editions against Blake's comments does not confirm or deny Gilchrist's story, and it must therefore remain in the limbo of unsubstantiated anecdote.

<sup>1</sup> I wish to express my thanks to the authorities of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, for supplying me with a microfilm of Blake's copy of Lavater's *Aphorisms* (shelf-mark RB 57431).

<sup>2</sup> On the conventional date of the Lavater marginalia, see G. E. Bentley, Jr. and Martin K. Nurmi, *A Blake Bibliography* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1964), pp. 36, 37, 137, 207-08. Hereafter cited as Bentley & Nurmi.

<sup>3</sup> S. Foster Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), p. 37n. Admitting the real differences between Lavater's *Aphorisms* and Blake's principles in the Natural Religion tractates, one may nevertheless agree



with Damon that Lavater's first two aphorisms (which Blake in his note called "true Christian philosophy far above all abstraction") bear a striking resemblance to *All Religions are One*, principles 1, 2, and 7. Although none of the extant copies of the Natural Religion tractates can be shown to have been printed as early as 1788, the scholarly consensus is that the plates were probably etched at about that time. Briefly, the evidence for this conjecture is that the size and technical imperfections in the lettering and designs suggest that Blake was experimenting with a new medium, and that the colophon to the *Ghost of Abel* ("1822: W Blake's Original Sterotype was 1788"), a work addressed to "Lord Byron in the wilderness" probably refers to *All Religions are One*, the frontispiece of which is inscribed "The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness." If Lavater's *Aphorisms* is considered to be a positive influence upon the Natural Religion tractates, then, as Martin K. Nurmí plausibly argues in *William Blake* (London: Hutchinson Univ. Library, 1975), pp. 52-54, Bacon's maxims may be considered a negative influence.

<sup>4</sup> *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, 2nd ed., rev. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), p. 139n, and *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, with a commentary by Harold Bloom, 4th printing, rev. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 572, 799.

<sup>5</sup> I, 159. Those who date *Aphorisms* 1789 include: E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Innocence and Experience: An Introduction to Blake* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1964), p. 326; Marcia Allentuck, "Fuseli and Lavater: Physiognomical Theory and the Enlightenment," in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Theodore Besterman, 55 (Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1967), 97; Anne Kostelanetz Mellor, *Blake's Human Form Divine* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1974), p. 4n; Morton D. Paley, *Energy and the Imagination: A Study of the Development of Blake's Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 10n. Paley is alone in identifying and trying to resolve the discrepancy between the 1789 date of *Aphorisms* and the traditional chronology of Blake's other works: "As Blake, having engraved the frontispiece for Johnson, obtained an unbound copy, he probably read the book before its publication in 1789."

<sup>6</sup> As occurs elsewhere in the *Life*, e.g., I, 287-88, where Knowles' first meeting with Fuseli in 1805 is dated 1825, the year of Fuseli's death.

<sup>7</sup> [Christopher] Moody, review of Lavater's *Aphorisms*, in *The Monthly Review*, 80 (June 1789), 526-28. When Moody writes that the "little book of aphorisms" is "now before us" (p. 526), he may simply mean that the work is now under review. Moody's review first noted by Allentuck, p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> *Analytical Review*, 1 (July 1788), 377. *Aphorisms* is described here, as in Knowles above, as a duodecimo rather than an octavo volume, though I suspect that these terms were used rather loosely to indicate relative size rather than exact format.

<sup>9</sup> *Analytical Review*, 1 (July 1788), 286-89. In fact, the volume contains only 633 aphorisms, numbered 1-189, 200-643; this mis-

numbering was corrected in the second edition of 1789. It is of course possible that the July number of *Analytical Review* came out after July (the combined title page for volume 1 reads "From May to August, Inclusive, 1788."), though I have no solid evidence that this in fact happened.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Blake to Flaxman of 12 September 1800; E 680. The Flaxmans evidently left England in August 1787 and made their way slowly to Rome by way of France. See Eliza Meteyard, *The Life of Josiah Wedgwood* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1865), II, 503-06.

<sup>11</sup> J. C. Lavater, *Aphorisms on Man* (1788), "Advertisement," p. v (perhaps by Fuseli).

<sup>12</sup> The colophon of the first volume in German reads: "Zurich Freytags den 30. Nov. 1787." I have not seen the second volume of 1788, though Miss Hilde Siegl of the Deutsche Bibliothek, Frankfurt, reports that the title page reads: *Vermischte unphysiognomische Regeln zur Menschen- und Selbsterkenntnis Von Johann Kaspar Lavater. Zum Besten der Armen* [the last seven words handwritten, perhaps by the author]. 1788. Presumably, the aphorisms found in Fuseli's translation, but not in the *Regeln* of 1787, were included in the *Regeln* of 1788. For Lavater's habit of dedicating his works to friends, see Franz Muncker, "Lavater," in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, 18 (1883; rpt. Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 1969), 783-94.

<sup>13</sup> On the frontispiece, see Ruthven Todd, "Two Blake Prints and Two Fuseli Drawings with some possibly pertinent speculations," *Blake Newsletter*, 5 (Winter, 1971-72), 173-81. According to Bentley & Nurmí, p. 137, "There were no plates in the 'Third Edition' of Dublin, 1790, or the 'Fifth Edition' of Newburyport, 1793." The copy of the Dublin edition of *Aphorisms* in the University of Western Ontario Library, however, contains a frontispiece copied from Blake's and is inscribed "P. Maguire Sculpt." (illus. 2.)

"P. Maguire" is very probably Patrick Maguire, an Irish engraver about whom I know very little except that he was "admitted as a student in the Dublin Society's School in 1783, and afterwards worked in Dublin for many years [c. 1790-1820], as an engraver in Trinity Place and Anglesea Street" according to Walter G. Strickland, *A Dictionary of Irish Artists* (Dublin: Maunsell, 1913; reprint ed., Shannon: Irish Univ. Press, 1969), II, 86-87.

<sup>14</sup> Bentley & Nurmí, pp. 137-38.

<sup>15</sup> Bentley & Nurmí, pp. 207-08. Since Blake apparently kept his copy of *Aphorisms* by him until his death in 1827, it is not impossible that some of his annotations were made long after 1788. See G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 288-89, 355-56.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake*, ed. Ruthven Todd, rev. ed. (London: Dent, and New York: Dutton, 1945), p. 54.

