

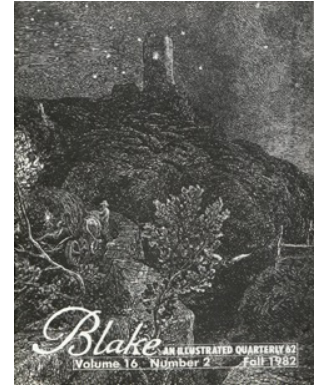
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

R E V I E W

R. J. Shroyer, ed., Johann Caspar Lavater,
Aphorisms on Man (1788)

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Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 16, Issue 2, Fall 1982, pp. 126-128



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

be fairly limited. Yet, in the pages of this journal, it is difficult to decry such a publication. A facsimile edition certainly recommends itself to dedicated Blake scholars.

Blake apparently annotated his copy of the *Aphorisms* shortly after its publication in 1788. Although the typographic editions of these annotations all reprint the parts of Lavater's text most essential for understanding Blake's commentary, the entire 643 aphorisms have not been reprinted for over a hundred years, and they have never before been printed in full in conjunction with Blake's marginalia. Scholars have long recognized the significance of Blake's responses to Lavater at a crucial early point in the development of Blake's ideas on man, society, and God. The directness and brevity of the annotations help to make them capsule distillations of concepts we find more expansively and complexly woven through the fabric of Blake's poetry. For anyone eager to produce a facsimile edition of one of Blake's annotated books, surely Lavater's *Aphorisms* is a good first choice.

Shroyer's twenty-eight page introduction is the best part of this book. He does a good job of presenting, in a surprisingly lively manner, essential information about Lavater, Henry Fuseli (the translator of the aphorisms and a close friend of their author), and bibliographical details concerning the editions of the book and Blake's annotations. These materials are just what is wanted in an introduction to a facsimile edition. Although Shroyer's discussion of Lavater's work on physiognomy is a bit tangential to this edition, it contributes to the historical context in which Shroyer sets the aphorisms. The introduction remains strong when it moves into such detailed matters as the question of Fuseli's possible rewritings of Lavater's work. Fuseli made his translation from a now lost manuscript and included some sixty-five aphorisms, by Shroyer's count, that have no "close matches" with the German editions of the *RegeIn* of 1787 and 1788. Shroyer offers a convincing explanation of how this came about, based on the fair assumption that Lavater himself (having caught what Shroyer calls "gnomic fever") revised his maxims between the writing of the manuscript he sent to England and the publication of the German editions. One of the strengths of the introduction is that Shroyer is concerned with Lavater's works in their own right before he plunges into Blake's annotations.

In the last few pages of his introduction, Shroyer surveys some of Blake's more significant annotations to Lavater and points out the basic concepts they embody. Blake's long concluding comment is quoted, including seven or eight words thoroughly deleted with circular pen strokes in the original. Shroyer's transcription of this deleted passage is identical to Erdman's text: "& they converse with the spirit of God." Bentley's reconstruction, "& thus are either good or Evil,"² makes a completely different conclusion to the passage. The only evidence I can see in the original at the Huntington Library for either reading is the pattern of ascenders and descenders not obscured by Blake's deletion lines. These fragmentary pieces of evidence tend to give more support to Bentley's

reading than to Erdman's. I suspect, however, that we will never be sure of any reading, unless computer-enhanced photography can give us a definitive answer.

Shroyer comments sensibly on the structural and thematic relationships between the Lavater annotations and Blake's other writings of the late 1780s and early 1790s. He also makes an interesting suggestion (p. xxiii) that there is a more than accidental similarity between the frontispiece that Blake engraved after Fuseli's design for the English edition of the *Aphorisms* and the frontispiece to *Songs of Innocence*. The remarks on Lavater's presence in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and Blake's later poems are less compelling and too brief to be convincing. Shroyer emphasizes Lavater's membership with Swedenborg in the party of repressive moralizers scorned by Blake; but we need more evidence for this than Shroyer has room to provide, and surely Blake's possible criticisms of Lavater must be balanced by the numerous indications, provided throughout the annotations, of Blake's sympathies with Lavater's energetic humanism.

After such a promising introduction, the facsimile itself is a distinct disappointment--or, rather, an indistinct disappointment because of the soft-focus fuzziness it gives to Blake's fine and clear penmanship.³ Blake's copy of the aphorisms is reproduced slightly larger than the original. The photographic process used was apparently one of those that register only black or white, converting any middle tones in one direction or the other. As a result, a disturbing number of Blake's pen strokes are lost or fragmented into vague rows of dots and dashes. The problem here is not merely aesthetic, but textual.

In his introduction Shroyer notes that neither the Keynes nor the Erdman edition is "wholly satisfactory" in its rendering of Blake's underlinings of Lavater's text. He then claims that "this facsimile . . . should go a long way toward alerting the student to such problems and suggesting some answers" (p. xvii). Unfortunately, this facsimile creates a good many problems and solves few. Indeed, one must use the Keynes, Erdman, or Bentley text as a constant guide while attempting to read Shroyer's reproductions. For example, in aphorism no. 3 Blake's underlining of the penultimate line is signalled only by a few easily overlooked dots; the underlining of the last line here (and in no. 424) is not indicated at all. In the original, the pen strokes are fine but unmistakably clear. Blake's X next to aphorism no. 21 is reduced to a large T and makes it seem as though it were the first letter of the non word, "Tuneasy." The X next to the end of no. 619 disappears altogether. Blake wrote two large exclamation points following aphorism no. 157. In the facsimile, these become four widely spaced dots that look like nothing more than accidental flyspecks. And at the end of no. 309, Blake's question mark becomes a colon. The vertical line in pencil next to no. 285 does not appear at all in the facsimile, and the long pencil note on no. 532 is illegible. The word "Admirable!" written vertically next to aphorism no. 20 reproduces fairly well, but nowhere does Shroyer point out that it is

written in pencil. Nor does he identify other annotations in pencil or in a light brown ink quite distinct from the black ink of the majority of the annotations. Blake's editors have attributed some of these annotations to a hand other than Blake's, and surely this is a matter Shroyer should have taken up in his introduction. He cannot be held responsible for his publisher's failures in reproducing the original, but even if he had expected high quality photographic work he should have realized the necessity for identifying different inks and different hands.

Another difficulty not overcome by the publisher is the presence of annotations very close to the spine of the book. Apparently the volume could not be opened wide enough to expose such annotations completely to the camera. As a result, it seems as though Blake wrote "ellent" next to aphorism no. 40; in the original, "Excellent" is clear and fully present. The lengthy annotations in the inner margins of aphorisms nos. 248, 342, 532, 533, and 605 are converted to odd bits and pieces. Once again, the reader must return to typographic texts in order to make sense of the facsimile.

Professor Shroyer has indicated in correspondence⁴ that the *Aphorisms on Man* is the first volume

in a proposed series of facsimiles of Blake's annotated books. Future volumes will have full transcriptions of the annotations. These transcriptions, if accompanied by appropriate notes on such matters as differences in ink, should go a long way toward solving some of the problems burdening the *Aphorisms* facsimile. One can only hope that a solid scholar like Shroyer will be better served by his publisher in prospective volumes, and that we can use them with full confidence in their accuracy and completeness. As Blake wrote, "He who would do good to another, must do it in Minute Particulars."

¹ *Blake Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 65-88; *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965), pp. 572-90; *William Blake's Writings*, ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), II, 1350-87. A new edition of Erdman's text is forthcoming, one which has been carefully collated in galley proof against the original volume in the Huntington Library.

² *Poetry and Prose of Blake*, ed. Erdman, p. 590; *Blake's Writings*, ed. Bentley, II, 1386.

³ All comments on the accuracy of the facsimile are based on a comparison between it and the original volume in the Huntington Library.

⁴ Letter from R. J. Shroyer to Nelson Hilton, 6 May 1981.

William Blake. **The Everlasting Gospel/**
L'évangile éternel, trans. by Joëlle
Abitbol [text and French translation].
Paris: Editions Vrac, 1981. 45 pp., illus.
Reviewed by Krzysztof Z. Cieszkowski

Blake's *The Everlasting Gospel* exists in manuscript form scattered through the pages of the *Notebook* in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum, and in part in the Rosenbach MS; it is usually dated c. 1818. A full treatment of the work and the bibliographical and interpretational problems it raises can be found in Randel Helms's essay *The Genesis of "The Everlasting Gospel"* in *Blake Studies*, 9 (1980), 122-60.

Joëlle Abitbol and Samuel Tastet's edition prints the text and Mme. Abitbol's French translation in parallel; it constitutes "Volume I" of a series entitled *Double Same/Double Même*. Despite the inscription of the verso of the title-page, "c Editions G. Keynes--1957," the text used adheres to the conjecturally chronological arrangement printed by Bentley; but its adherence is limited: Abitbol and Tastet eschew Blake's capitalization and a fair