

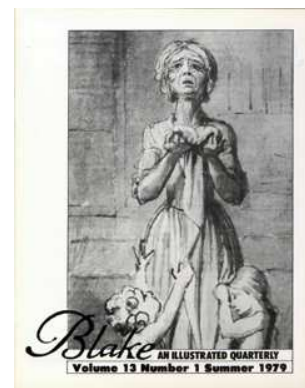
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**BLAKE**

P O E M

Bifocal

Warren Stevenson

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iron age "alchemized into the new golden age" in Blake's imaginative version of the industrial blast furnace.<sup>9</sup> The last Memorable Fancy of *The Marriage*, then, may be seen profitably as one of Blake's earliest efforts (if not the earliest) to incorporate "the symbolism of the new iron age," of which Priestley had to be considered one of the high priests, into his art.

<sup>1</sup> Frye calls the episode "orthodox theology" (*Fearful Symmetry* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1947], p. 196), and Bloom extrapolates on this: "The Angel teaches light without heat [i.e. without energy]; the vitalist--or Devil--heat without light; Blake wants both, hence the marriage of contraries" ("Dialectic in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*," in *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. M. H. Abrams [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960], p. 80). Erdman, however, cautions against too readily identifying the embracing figures on the title page of *The Marriage* as male or female, heaven or hell, angel or devil (*The Illustrated Blake* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1974], p. 98).

<sup>2</sup> *Blake's "Marriage of Heaven and Hell"* (Kent: Kent State Univ. Press, 1957), p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, rev. ed. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969), p. 177.

<sup>4</sup> *William Blake: A Reading of the Shorter Poems* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1963), p. 293.

<sup>5</sup> The evidence that Blake had actually met Priestley is shaky. We know from letters and diaries that "more or less frequent guests" of Joseph Johnson included Priestley (from the 1770's to 1793), and we can "assume that Blake sometimes attended Johnson's conversational Tuesday dinners in the early '90s" (Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire*, p. 156). The two may have met there. If only because of Priestley's connection with Johnson--and given Blake's intense interest, even early, in matters of vision--Priestley's book almost surely would have attracted the poet's especial attention. Erdman also notes that the will-o'-the-wisp-like light in "The Little Boy Lost" and "The Little Boy Found" was a "phenomenon in which Priestley was greatly interested" (*Prophet*, p. 126n). As a matter of fact there is a long section on the ignis fatuus (which, Priestley notes, Newton in his *Opticks* called "a vapour shining without heat") in *The History and Present State of Discoveries Relative to Vision, Light, and Colours* (1, 579-84). Donald D. Ault, in his *Visionary Physics* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974), cites Priestley's two-volume work several times, though without indicating whether he believes that Blake had seen it. Morton D. Paley has argued that Blake knew Priestley's *Matter and Spirit* (*Energy and the Imagination* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970], pp. 8-10, 66-67). And, finally, it is still possible, though less acceptable these days, to see Priestley behind the character of Inflammable Gass in *An Island in the Moon*.

<sup>6</sup> *Blake's "Marriage of Heaven and Hell"*, p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> D. V. Erdman, *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), p. 551.

<sup>8</sup> *Poetry and Prose*, p. 550.

<sup>9</sup> *The Evidence of the Imagination*, ed. D. H. Reiman, M. C. Jaye, B. T. Bennett (New York Univ. Press, 1978), pp. 1-11. The quotations are from pp. 8-9.

## BIFOCAL

Cruciform poles recede into the distance  
 excoriating the sky with tuneless wires  
 whose parallels intersect at Golgotha  
 or Golgonooza, infinite or inane;  
 someone reins in her white geese from my gander  
 and green shoots brave the alley of gabled brick  
 where night has slain the chameleon-tinctured sun  
 who daily grows like what he feeds upon.

Time was once that chameleon  
 and we were slain in the valley of Megiddo  
 then swiftly rose like love on a green meadow  
 where small birds hovered on impromptu wings  
 or else resumed their pleasant parleyings  
 while every stone shone like a thousand suns.

Warren Stevenson