Bifocal

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iron age "alchemized into the new golden age" in Blake's imaginative version of the industrial blast furnace. 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.

1 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).


5 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 '90's" (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" (Prophecy, 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 Colour (I, 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 Gas in An Island in the Moon.


8 Poetry and Prose, p. 550.


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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.

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