

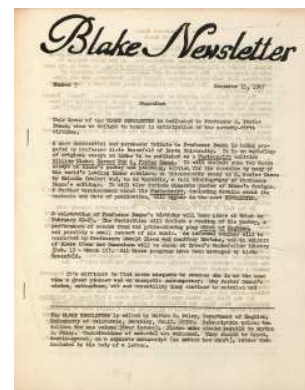
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

P O E M

Sermon by Mr. Blake

Laurence Goldstein

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 1, Issue 3, December 15, 1967, p. 5



The man I am trying to describe here is, to borrow a term from Coleridge, myriad-minded, and as such certainly one of America's most remarkable men of letters. A few of us know him this way; most know him essentially and only as the prominent Blake scholar that he is; and many who should know him do not know him at all.

Malcolm Cowley, a long-time friend of S. Foster Damon, perfectly described this situation when, in a recent letter to me, he referred to what he called Damon's "genius for concealing his genius from the public." That seems to get at both some of the most endearing features of Damon's charm and also the vexing situation of his relative obscurity. It is gratifying, therefore, that the present number of the Blake Newsletter, dedicated to S. Foster Damon, at last allows some of us who have known him well to celebrate this very admirable and distinguished man and perhaps win for him something of the larger audience that he deserves and should have had all along.

SERMON BY MR. BLAKE

for S. Foster Damon

No man can keep the rose from death;
by breathing back the borrowed sun
it makes infirmity of god-
head rooted in the hoary earth;
the power lies in what consumes,
not what is eaten up. Who lives
in fire praises energy;
he feels no spider crawl beneath
the fallen leaf, his eyes intense
with coming next refuse the sun-
light as a yellow unguent
effacing flame. He dwells inside
a city out of space, a source
immune from ever stepping back
(the burning bush before the gate
returns the timid to a life-
time of tormenting flies); beside
the fiery fountains what is wrought
can never die; enslavement to
the cycles of the sun becomes
a dream upon awakening.
We give its colors to the rose;
all beauty we adore is what
we conjure up and sprinkle
on the grasping soil. Who would lose
by lack of crossing over all
creation at its origin?
The fire, gentlemen, the fire!
There is nothing in the world
but what is hammered out of flame.

Laurence Goldstein