

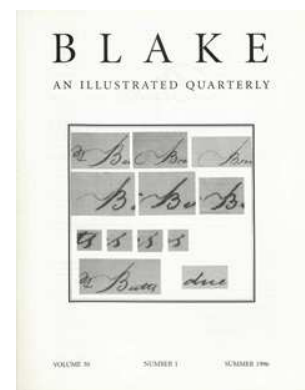
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P O E M

Blake in Boca Raton

David Caplan

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MINUTE PARTICULAR

Apollonian Elephant?

BY DENISE VULTEE

In *Blake Records Supplement*, G. E. Bentley, Jr. includes part of a 20 June 1802 letter to William Hayley from his friend Edward Garrard Marsh, an Oxford student who had met Blake at Felpham (21). In the letter, Marsh offers Hayley and Blake his translation from the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes, wishes Blake success "on his elephant" (i.e., his engravings for Hayley's Elephant ballad), and suggests that the elephant "from its rider might (I think) be called the Apollonian elephant." As Bentley points out in a footnote, however, "There is no reference to elephants in Apollonius of Rhodes" (21). Nor does Robert N. Essick, in his article on Marsh's letters, see anything "particularly 'Apollonian' about Blake's design" (69).

The confusion here results from Marsh's mental leap from one Apollonius to another. The "Apollonian elephant" refers to Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, a highly embroidered tale of the travels and purported miracles of a Neopythagorean philosopher who lived during the first century A.D. In the second book of that work, Apollonius and his sidekick Damis travel to India, where they encounter a number of elephants. (This, by the way, is the same Apollonius who spoils Lamia's fun in Keats's poem.)

If Bentley is right (and I think he is) in suggesting that the "rider" is Blake, Marsh appears to be comparing Blake, however facetiously, to Apollonius of Tyana. What's more, he clearly expects Hayley to see the resemblance without further explanation and to enjoy his little joke. Why Marsh thought the comparison apt is a tantalizing—and probably unanswerable—question. Perhaps Marsh was simply alluding to Blake's lack of worldliness rather than to any specifically Pythagorean tendencies in his thought or work.

Works Cited

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- Essick, Robert N. "Blake, Hayley, and Edward Garrard Marsh: 'An Insect of Parnassus.'" *Explorations* 1 (1987): 58-84.
- Philostratus. *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. Trans. F. C. Conybeare. 2 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1960.

Blake in Boca Raton

BY DAVID CAPLAN

He cannot help but see conspiracies
everywhere—in a flashing traffic light
that orders a Chevy to a sudden halt,
in cameras perched atop electric fences.

Here, nothing is unthinkable, with streets
all rightly angled to the avenues
and swept so clean by gasping, humpbacked trucks,
he leaves no footprints where he wanders barefoot.

But the colors, a chaos of inflorescence,
of ginkgo leaves, of cruciform shoots entangled
with ovate blossoms, weeping lantana, and leaves
pink-tipped and purple-ringed that smell like opium.

Not knowing their names, he makes his own: *The Parnel's**
Mad Song, Thro' Fires Unconsumed, Orange Unfettered.

*The OED defines "parnel" as "A priest's concubine or mistress; a harlot; a wanton young woman."