Blake's Names—Prolegomena

Ronald Clayton Taylor

The aim here is to determine the function of proper names within the Blakean poetic. The method will be semantic rather than etymological, and will involve, among other things, probing the minds of Blake's readers to discover what happens when they encounter his various names. It is hoped that this probe will enable us to ascertain the poetic motivation behind the form and the fact of Blake's names.

A mere pass over the pages of Blake's writings reveals that names and naming are of central importance in his poetry, both as a stylistic tool and as a meaning-bearing theme. Blake is probably richer than any other poet in the plenitude and the frequency of his names, and perhaps in their variety as well. There are long genealogies and long lists of place names. There are frequent vocatives. And the forms of Blake's names range from common personal names like "old John" to historical names like "Locke," and further, to bizarre creations like "Manathu Vorcyon." Moreover, the type and frequency of names varies with the type of poem: there are, for example, only three "created" names in the Songs of Innocence and of Experience ("Lyca," "Tirzah," and "Ona"), amid many vocatives appropriated from the class of common nouns ("Piper sit
Blake's Names — Prolegomena

thee down,” e.g.). There are several common personal names in the *Songs* ("old John," "Tom Dacre," "dame Lurch," "Dick, Joe, Ned & Jack," etc.), but there are no historical names. The contrast with the prophecies, where there are so many more names and especially so many more created names and historical names, seems to be as much a function of difference in poetic purpose as is the contrast in line length or type of plot. One might guess that the *Songs* abound in vocatives, in common names and in pronouns because they are “lyric” — intended as universal moments of expression, applicable subjectively to anyone's point of view; while the prophecies are “didactic” — are supposed to have objective content, the names being part of the message:

... the Emanations of Albions Sons! the Daughters of Albion
Names anciently remembered, but now contemn'd as fictions!

..............................................................

While in Selfhood Hand & Hyle & Bowen & Skofield appropriate
The Divine Names: seeking to vegetate the Divine Vision
(Jerusalem 5:37–38, 90:40–41)

It is worth asking, then, how this plethora of names affects the reader, and how the several types of names differ in their effects.

I

The first question that arises in a truly objective account of this subject is, how does Blake's reader recognize a name? Most of us have a sense that we know what a name is and if pressed could give a rough definition. Careful reading of Blake, however, is enough pressure to prove us wrong.

Recognition of names does not pose a problem in ordinary written English, because names are distinguished by capitalization. A capital
letter cannot be depended on as conclusive evidence in Blake, however, for Blake also capitalizes common nouns, and even verbs and other grammatical classes. Moreover, he did so intentionally: there are numerous cases where, in emending a plate, Blake capitalized a non-name.\(^2\) Moreover, occasionally Blake left a name uncapitalized: “Joy is my name, ... Pretty joy!”\(^3\) Blake’s conventions for capitalization, like his punctuation conventions, remain a mystery.

Therefore, in order to identify a Blakean name conclusively, we must resort to the grammatical criteria given us by English. These are summed up in various published grammars:

I *Names (proper nouns)* occur only in the singular number, take no determiner, and are always definite: *John, Chicago.*\(^4\)

These criteria require a little revision. Strictly speaking, common nouns also occur without determiners, as is exemplified in Blake: “Joys upon our branches sit” (a plural count noun without determiner — p. 405, 1. 5). If one adds singular number to lack of determiner, then the field is narrowed to common mass nouns (“Little boy / Full of joy” — p. 15, 11. 10-11) and names (“Joy is my name”). As for definiteness, this is not a formal criterion at all, but a semantic inference.\(^5\)

How then does the reader distinguish names from other types of words? The answer is complex indeed. Once he has determined, from grammatical context, that a given sequence is a noun, and furthermore ascertained that it has no determiner and is singular in number, the sequence is often immediately identified as a familiar name (e.g. “Bill”).\(^6\) If it cannot be identified, the reader must resort to the semantic context. The given noun may, for example, be the subject of a verb which presupposes agency of its subject (e.g. *order*), or the object of a verb which
presupposes sentiency of its object (e.g. discourage), or it may be the most likely antecedent to a pronoun such as she or he. Similarly, the semantic context may label an eligible noun as a common noun. It is clear that such contexts are numberless and that there is no easy way to classify them. A separate judgment must be made in each instance.

It may be wondered why all of this is necessary. Don't we know which words are names, and which are not? In most cases we do. However there are some cases which help to make Blake the mystery that he is. He frequently uses what we would consider mass nouns as if they were indeed proper names; and occasionally he uses what we take to be the names of beings in contexts which we would apply only to inanimate objects or masses. And some of his names are so strange that it is difficult to know for certain whether they are intended as names, or rather as hitherto unheard-of substances (mass nouns). Furthermore, a thoroughly objective approach to Blake's names tends to cast doubts on some prevalent ways of talking about them and about the things they are supposed to represent.

Let us first consider those cases where Blake uses what is normally a mass noun as if it were a name:

He cried: Why trembles honesty and like a murderer,
Why seeks he refuge from the frowns of his immortal station!
(America 11:4-5)

“Honesty” occurs here without a determiner, in the singular, and is construed as representing an animate being by "seeks," "he," and "his" (less cogently by "trembles," "like a murderer," and "station"). Except for the lack of a capital letter, "honesty" plays the role of a name. And yet, quite obviously, honesty is lexically classed as a mass noun
representing an abstract quality. What is the reader to do? The interpretation process is blocked.

It will be answered that “honesty” is standing in for “people who are honest” or something of the sort. Perhaps it is, but this interpretation is a secondary step, in effect an easy solution to a problem we are meant to struggle with. The question is more than stylistic: why did Blake, who elsewhere attacks general knowledge and abstraction in the strongest language, choose to represent a specific entity (the referent of “he”) by an abstract, general name? Or was he rather treating as a specific being something which most of us consider an abstraction?

This kind of semantic anomaly is by no means an isolated phenomenon. Another passage may make the nature of the device a little clearer:

Now thou maist marry Bromions harlot, and protect the child
Of Bromions rage, that Oothoon shall put forth in nine moons time

Then storms rent Theotormons limbs; he rold his waves around.
And folded his black jealous waters round the adulterate pair
Bound back to back in Bromions caves terror & meekness dwell

(Visions of the Daughters of Albion 2: 1–5)

As was the case with “honesty,” everything in the context indicates that “terror” and “meekness” are meant to refer to animate, bodily beings. Here also one might claim that there is no anomaly, that “terror” indirectly refers to Bromion by overtly referring to his emotional state, and that “meekness” indirectly refers to Oothoon in the same way. One of the pictures in the text seems to confirm this interpretation by showing a terrified man and a dejected (meek?) woman bound back to back at the opening of a cave.

This latter interpretation, however, could very well be putting the
cart before the horse. There is, first of all, nothing in the text which
conclusively identifies "terror" with Bromion and "meekness" with Oothoon:
successive definite references identify "the adulterate pair" of line 4
with Oothoon and Bromion, but the use of new names ("terror & meek-
ness") in line 5 would normally dissociate the entities referred to from
previous definite references within the same discourse. Secondly, the
picture, which seems to clinch the identification for many readers, could
easily represent "terror & meekness." Blake often chose to represent what
we would consider an abstraction by means of a bodily human form.¹¹

The "terror"-is-Bromion reading is not wrong. If one is looking for
a "right" reading, it is certainly the right one.¹² Yet it is important
to point out that Blake's text does not warrant a simplistic X-is-Y
interpretation.¹³ Such an interpretation robs the verse of much of its
beauty and of all of its power as an intellectual stimulant. As written,
the passage forces us to consider what it means for two emotions to be
bound together, back to back. Furthermore, treating an emotion as a
specific, bodily, human form forces us to reconsider from a more Blakean
point of view what kind of reality emotions have.

Pursuing our question (How does Blake's reader recognize a name?)
a bit further, we may ask why, if Blake could capitalize verbs, adjectives
and common nouns, is a sequence like "Oothoon" considered a name:

For the soft soul of America, Oothoon wandered in woe,
Along the vales of Leutha seeking flowers to comfort her;

(Visions 1: 3-4)

Unless the reader has previously read one of Blake's later illuminated
books, he has never encountered "Oothoon" before.¹⁴ Therefore, from
its form alone, he cannot know what it represents. According to the
criteria outlined above, "America," "Oothoon," and "Leutha" are all to be identified either as mass nouns or as names. Since Blake's reader presumably knows about the continent lying west of Europe, he would naturally conclude that "America" is here a name referring to that continent. But what does he do with "Oothoon" and "Leutha"? If "honesty" can "seek refuge," and "terror & meekness" can be "bound back to back," cannot "Oothoon" be an abstract mass which "wanders in woe" and "seeks flowers"?

Fortunately there is a clear answer to this question. First, there is a universal tendency to identify a new sequence as a name if it satisfies the contextual criteria. While common mass nouns have a "sense" conferred by the language (Blake's referential uses being oddities), new formal sequences cannot have any,\(^{15}\) and so are assumed to have reference. They must have some kind of significance, after all, for the first principle of communication is the assumption that the speaker intends a meaning by what he says.\(^ {16}\)

Moreover, in reading Blake these strange sequences tend to reappear and gradually, from their various contexts, to acquire associations which support their interpretation as names. As is customary with names, these sequences serve as indices or formal loci for the gathering of associations ("pegs on which to hang descriptions," as Searle calls them).\(^ {17}\) This can be tested by altering the form of a name, letter by letter. As Plato's Socrates noted, "the greater part may be supposed to be made up of proper and similar letters, or there would be no likeness."\(^ {18}\) That is, if the altered form is not close enough to its original, any associations pertaining to it in a context go automatically to a new referent—a new "reference account" is opened.
In the preceding paragraphs, we have looked at cases where the context treats the given sequence as a name. But there are cases where the referent of what appears to be the name of an animate being is subjected to strange processes, processes which would normally be predicated only of inanimate nouns. Consider the following instance:

Jerusalem his Emanation is become a ruin
Her little ones are slain on the top of every street
And she herself led captive & scattered into the indefinite

(The Four Zoas 19: 1–3 — p. 308)

"Jerusalem" is again and again, in The Four Zoas and elsewhere, contextualized as a woman. Here also, "Her," "she herself," "little ones," and "led captive" contribute to this impression. Hence one wonders what it means for a woman to be "scattered" and to "become a ruin." Of course we do occasionally speak of humans as "ruins," metaphorically; but in this case the conventional sense of "Jerusalem" as a city reinforces the most common literal reading of "a ruin." In fact, the city sense of "Jerusalem" can also give a clear interpretation to "every street" and to "scattered" — the latter implying that the city is composed of its inhabitants. The passage is, then, a mixing of metaphors, which by either interpretation leaves some part in semantic anomaly. Similar oddities abound in Blake, making it difficult (by semantic context) to confirm many nominal sequences as the names of beings. Usually the sequence occurs in many different contexts, in which more than one sexed pronoun refers to it, so that the reader has no choice but to imagine human bodies participating in strange physical processes.

Similar to these and to the earlier cases is the case where a single noun form is contextualized so as to belong to several different semantic
categories within the same plot sequence. The word "eternity," for example, occurs repeatedly in *The Book of Urizen*, capitalized and uncapitalized, and hops nimbly from one semantic category to another throughout. Indeed, for a few instances it is quite difficult to determine the intended category, if the word was in fact meant to belong to a single category:

Lo, a shadow of horror is risen
In Eternity! Unknown, unprolific! (3: 1–2) (name: a place)

Shrill the trumpet: & myriads of Eternity
Muster around ... (3: 44–4:1) (name/mass: a place? a being? a genus?)

On the rock of eternity unclasping (4: 43) (name/mass: a place? a being? a substance?)

Eternity roll'd wide apart (5: 5) (name: a concrete object)

View'd by sons of Eternity, standing (5: 34) (name/mass: a being? a place?)

For Eternity stood wide apart, (5: 41) (name: a being? an object?)

In pangs eternity on eternity (13: 54) (count noun: time unit)

All Eternity shudderd at sight
Of the first female ... (18: 9) (name/mass: a being? a group of beings?)

A shriek ran thro' Eternity:
And a paralytic stroke: (19: 41) (name: a being? a group of beings? a place?)

Stretch'd for a work of eternity;
No more Los beheld Eternity. (20: 1–2) (name/mass: a being? a place? a substance?)
(name/mass: a being? an object? a place? a substance?)¹⁹

The phrase "a work of eternity" can be understood as a work *for* eternity (where "eternity" names the goal or purpose of the work) or as a work...
from eternity (where "eternity" names the source of the work). By thus conflating and confusing the end with the beginning, and by using the very same word to measure out the middle, in the phrase "eternity on eternity," Blake no doubt meant to bring the timelessness of the concept into the form of his poem. By leaving the distinction between being, substance and object ambiguous, he must have meant to represent indirectly the humanness of all reality. And by using an undepicted noun in plural contexts ("All Eternity shudderd," cf. also "Eternity shudder'd when they saw"—19:14), he must have meant to embody his notion that the eternal divine humanity appears as one from a distance, as multitudes close up. There is, no doubt, much more to be said about the use of this word. Let it stand as evidence that Blake made ample use of the syntacto-semantic ambiguities offered by English.

II

The second question which must arise in any thorough account of these matters is, what happens once a name has been identified as such? Whatever happens in a reader in response to any symbolic form must necessarily be a function of its "meaning," in the widest possible sense of "mean." We are, then, in a rough way of speaking, asking what Blake's names mean. Setting aside momentarily the distinction between sense and reference and considering the "meaning" of names as undifferentiated significance, Blake's names readily fall into two groups: those we have heard of and those we haven't. If we take for example the name "Beelzeboul" (The Four Zoas 113:2, 26—p. 362), most of us believe that we know something about the referent of the name, even if all we know is that the name comes from the Bible. Yet even this small amount
of knowledge provides definite associations which are consistent from one reader to the next and which can therefore form a basis for interpretation. Whereas a name like "Eleth" (The Four Zoas 79:25, 32 — p.348) is new to us and therefore can have no conventional associations. This distinction seems to be fundamental, and rather important for Blake's works, which contain so many of both types of names.  

Concerning the "knowns," it seems clear that their "definitions" would normally include associations derived from the original source of the name. That is, the reader assumes that the "Beelzeboul" he reads of in Blake is the same entity as the "Beelzebub" he has read of in the Bible. Consequently he brings associations pertaining to the Biblical character to bear in his interpretation of the Blakean character and the contexts in which it appears. It is in this sense that the original source of a name may be considered valid evidence for critical conclusions.

Yet we must ask how far knowledge of the source of a name permits one to go in assertions concerning its "meaning." Consider, for example, the name "Naamah," which occurs in The Four Zoas (115:9 — p. 365) and in Jerusalem (62:9). Damon (s.v.) tells us that this name is to be found "in the Midrash Rabba, Genesis xxiii:3, or in the Book of Jasher v:16," although not in the Bible. How many of us have read either the Midrash Rabba or the Book of Jasher? Was Blake seriously expecting us to know that Naamah was the wife of Noah? Perhaps not, for he identifies her in one of the contexts:

I see the Maternal Line, I behold the Seed of the Woman!
Cainah, & Ada & Zillah & Naamah Wife of Noah.  

Whatever associations we apply in identifying Blake's "Naamah" must in fact be stimulated by "Noah." Knowing Blake's source for the name
does not necessarily tell us anything about the meaning he intended by it.

Damon goes on to say that "according to rabbinical tradition, Naamah the Cainite was utterly evil. . . . The reputation of this second mother of mankind would doubtless have appealed to Blake . . . but it is only fair to add that the evil Naamah is never mentioned in connection with Noah, whose wife, according to the Midrash Rabba, was very pious." This is a curious turnabout. Neither the positive nor the negative association can be supposed to apply to Blake's Naamah (except in so far as they may be stimulated by the mention of Noah). Apparently Damon does not see that it is not enough for the name and its associations to have appealed to Blake. If Blake took the name from rabbinical tradition, he took it with the intention of using it to communicate to his readers. Yet it is doubtful he would have expected them to be acquainted with rabbinical tradition, even if he was. Appealing to an outside source for an interpretation, when it bypasses the reader, goes against the essential principles of communication.

In spoken language, one of the first and most general principles is that the speaker takes account of the hearer's point of view and amount of knowledge, as far as is possible and practical. The hearer, in his interpretation of what the speaker says, does the same kind of thing, holding in mind what he considers to be the speaker's intention and amount of knowledge. The normal usage of names is constrained by this principle, with the result that the speaker does not use a proper name which he does not expect his hearer to be able to refer to the correct entity. If he does, it is because that is the only practical way to accomplish his communication, and he identifies the referent as soon as possible. If he knowingly fails to identify the referent, he is abusing
his hearer's faith, speaking as an insider to an outsider, and runs the risk of sounding snobbish. 23

This principle is even more important in writing than in speaking, for the writer cannot be present to correct any misapprehensions on the part of the reader. Thus we must assume that if Blake intended to be understood at all, he, like other writers, used names which he expected his audience to recognize, and in other cases (i.e., fictional ones) took upon himself the responsibility to identify the referents (in pure fiction, of course, "identification" is complete, amounting to a creation of all associations pertaining to the name). Thus Blake's intended meaning must involve those associations which spontaneously occur in the minds of his intended audience, in so far as he could have predicted them. Bypassing the reader's associative process means importing to the interpretation of his writings associations which may or may not have been part of his intended meaning. Working through the reader's associative process, to the degree to which that process is a generalizable one which Blake could have foreseen, is bringing to bear associations which he must have intended.

Another case of misinterpretation may help to clarify the matter. Damon bases his description of the character Theotormon on Blake's uses of the name, but as for the meaning of the name itself he states, "His name might be a combination of theo (god) and torah (law), signifying the divine man under the law" (s.v.). This explication fits nicely with the general symbolic definition of Theotormon as "Desire," which "when repressed ... becomes Jealousy" (Damon, s.v.). Nevertheless it is a mistake to base an interpretation on a handicapped association to a foreign term when a more direct association to a word in the native
language is available. That is, Damon chooses the association from -tormon to Hebrew torah over the association to English torm- \(^{24}\), which is represented most directly in torment, but also in a number of words for turning, twisting and straining (turn, contort, trauma; cf. also torn). \(^{25}\)

The idea of the law appears nowhere in direct collocation with "Theo-tormon;" \(^{26}\) whereas the meaning 'tormented by god' (or perhaps 'tormented god') is everywhere appropriate. \(^{27}\)

Damon's preference of torah over torment is characteristic of his drive to find external, esoteric keys to unlock Blake. I have found only a handful of cases in which Damon's explication seems actually to go wrong; by and large his interpretations are bolstered by Blake's usage. Yet these few cases are typical of a tendency in Blake studies generally. One might compare Kathleen Raine's need to define "Beulah" for the beginner: "(Beulah, in Blake's symbolic language, represents the married state.)" \(^{28}\)

"Definitions" of this kind can be discouraging to the newcomer, causing him to think that he has not seen the "answer" himself. Or worse, some go ahead in symbol-loving delight, thinking that they know what "Beulah" is, without having read the relevant passages or thought deeply about them.

The reader's associative propensities must take first place in interpretation, since it is these that Blake himself had to depend on in formulating the whole of his writings. Without the reader's recognition of "Beelzeboul," the purpose for using this particular form is defeated. Similarly, if the reader associates to torment rather than to torah — as a native speaker would — torment is the more reasonable basis for interpretation. The appeal to sources and other outside information, when it is not part of the expected heritage of Blake's intended audience,
is unnatural, and tends to hinder free experiencing of the poetry.

Of course the question of just who Blake's intended audience is or was is an old and prickly one. But if rephrased as "What level and kind of knowledge did he expect of his reader?", then it is at least roughly answerable. One might hazard the following answer: Blake could reasonably have expected an audience fairly well read in the classics of Western literature and fairly well acquainted with the main currents of Western culture. The exact borders of this domain can be infinitely debated, of course. Blake might have expected us to know the Apocrypha as well as the Bible, or all of Ossian as well as all of Chapman's Homer. Nevertheless we have at least a general idea of what is meant by "Western tradition," 'sufficient for us to be able to spot sources which lie far afield of it.

There is, however, one area of knowledge which certainly lies outside this large domain and yet seems to have been expected of us by Blake. Such are the names "Lambeth," "Tyburn," "Willan's Farm," and "Peachey"—that is, names belonging specifically to Blake's time and place. Many of the place names present no difficulty for English readers, especially for residents of London; and foreigners are assisted by Damon. Nor can we blame Blake for not knowing that Tyburn and Willan's Farm would disappear from the map and from common knowledge. Yet a few of his place names must have been relatively obscure even in his own day: it is to be wondered how he could have expected minute knowledge of the London streets of readers living in other districts of England, such as one of his most faithful customers, George Cumberland. Moreover, at least a couple of his place names were even then not on the maps: "Verulam," according to Damon, was a heap of Roman
ruins, the name surviving only in Lord Bacon's official title and in archeological treatises (s.v.); "Mona" is Blake's name for the Isle of Anglesea, though it had not gone by that name since Roman times (Damon, s.v.). Concerning the persons of his time, Blake had every reason to expect that the name of Whitefield would be remembered, or the name of Paine, or of Warren. But could he have expected even his next-door neighbor to recognize "Peachey" or "Bowen?" Even now the latter name eludes identification (Damon, s.v.).

The problem results from the fact that Blake uses these names without identifying them—in effect violating the principle outlined above. It seems there are two ways to look at this phenomenon. One is simply to make allowances for Blake, admitting that he was being a bit extreme in his expectations, and proceed in faith. The other, and wiser, method is to consider how these names strike us in our reading experience and to assume that since Blake must have known they would so affect us, he must have intended to affect us in that way. In all but a couple of cases, it gradually becomes very clear to the reader, without any assistance from notes or commentary, that these names are taken from the author's personal life. He treats them as representing real entities, and they seem to be highly specific. The reader quickly realizes that he cannot hope to know who "Peachey" and "Kox" are, just as he cannot hope to see the "Gate of Precious stones and gold ... bending across the road of Oxford Street" (Jerusalem 34:55–57). He decides that he will have to learn about them solely from Blake, and be happy with a partial picture.

The reader's strategy is more fruitful than it might at first seem. The main effect, and no doubt the intended one, is a merging of intensely
personal, circumstance-bound experience with values existing on a transcendent level. It is as if the paperboy who delivers the reader's morning paper were to become a figure of mythic proportions. The phenomenon has been called the creation of a "private mythology," but in Blake's case it is one in which the private and the mythic aspects both retain their original scope of reference. It is thus another example of Blake's uneasy partnership of universality and specificity.

III

Concerning that group of names called the "unknowns," it is in order now to ask if they in themselves can convey meaning, in addition to fulfilling their role as loci for the gathering of associations. The form of the name must itself embody a "sense," if these names are to signify anything independently of the associations they acquire in context. There seem to be essentially two ways for names to have "sense:" by stimulating associations to meaning-bearing words or morphemes, and by "sound symbolism."

The explication of "Theotormon" in the preceding section exemplifies the former type of signifying, for the meaning of "Theotormon" is shown to depend on direct associations to other words. Other examples are "Bowlahoola" and "Cathedron." The suggestiveness of such names lies on the surface and is relatively easy to retrieve: "Bowlahoola" associates to howl and to bowels, and "Cathedron" to cathedral. It is to be noted that the Blakean context in which the name appears either supports or precludes a particular association. "Bowlahoola" associates to howl (the h of -hoola substituting for the b of Bowl-) rather than to bowl because the idea of anguished activity and the noise associated with it (i.e.,
howling) fit very well into the introductory contexts:

In Bowlahoola Los's Anvils stand & his Furnaces rage;
Thundering the Hammers beat & the Bellows blow loud
Living self moving mourning lamenting & howling incessantly
Bowlahoola thro all its porches feels tho' too fast founded
Its pillars & porticoes to tremble at the force

(Milton 24:51–55)²⁹

Other contexts support the association to bowels: “Bowlahoola is the Stomach in every individual man” (Milton 24:67).

Of course the second means of signifying, sound symbolism, can also apply to these names. According to Hans Marchand, the ow and oo of “Bowlahoola” symbolize low pitch (being or incorporating back vowels) and relatively loud, long sound—or slow, long movement (being long vowels or diphthongs); while “/l/ at the end of a word [or a syllable, presumably] symbolizes prolongation, continuation.” By these generalizations, then, “Bowlahoola” would suggest some thing or place which makes long, low, continuous sounds by virtue of heavy, large-scale, continuous movement—a concept and an image quite consonant with the contexts of its occurrence.

Sound symbolism is the sole key to many names which do not readily stimulate appropriate associations to other words. The term “sound symbolism” is here used to refer broadly to the expressiveness of sounds, whether language-dependent or universal, and is not meant to be limited to the realm of onomatopoeia. It is necessary to bear in mind, also, that similar effects can be achieved by spelling alone. The eccentric English spelling system has acquired a degree of expressiveness of its own, even tending in some cases toward the ideographic. “Cathedron,” for example, would not associate so easily to cathedral if a k
were substituted for the c. "Golgonooza" could have been spelled "Golgenuza" or "Golganuza" if the sound were the only object; apparently the symmetry of multiple o’s has a suggestive function. Approaching the ideographic end of the spectrum is the name "Catherloh," which could have been "Catherlo," "Catherlow," or "Catherloe," but has an h appended to signal Celticness.

In the study of purely phonetic symbolism, we are not much further along than Plato was when he wrote the Cratylus, with its attribution (426c) of "motion" to ὁ, and so on. Yet the unraveling of a few names can be attempted, with the help of Marchand’s English Word Formation.

Take first of all "Bromion," which has no obvious associations, other than the chemical one (which dates from 1827).31 According to Marchand, initial "/br/ is found with a few words expressive of unpleasant noise: ... brag, ... brawl, ... brash" (p. 407). The following /ə/ tends to indicate lowness of pitch, which would be attributed to the noise signified by /br/ (p. 400), and the medial /m/ signifies continuation of the sound (compare hum, rumble, drum — p. 399). All of this is quite consonant with the contextual associations, which portray Bromion as a thunderous braggart:

Bromion spoke. behold this harlot here on Bromions bed,

.........................

Then Bromion ... shook the cavern with his lamentation

(Visions of the Daughters of Albion 1:18, 4:12)

These lines exemplify the unpleasantness of Bromion's noise, and show that he was given to making noise about his power. This characterization of Bromion is, moreover, evidenced in the critical descriptions. Both Frye and Erdman associate "Bromion" with the Greek for 'roaring'
Blake’s Names — Prolegomena

(βρόμιος), and Erdman calls Bromion a “blusterer” whose “name-calling” has the power to “intimidate” Theotormon.\(^{32}\)

The final -ion is a rhythmical variant of the Greek nominal ending -on, so frequent as an ending for names in Blake. Although for the reader this ending hearkens to Greek antiquity, Blake uses it in the names of figures who, in his mythology, “pre-date,” or transcend, Greek antiquity — as in “Albion,” who “was the Parent of the Druids” (Jerusalem 27 — p. 170) and therefore pre-Hebrew and pre-Greek. Thus the ending is, as it were, gradually “revalued” in Blake.

“Rintrah” is another name which seems to have no clear associations and yet is rather expressive. Initial /r/, according to Marchand, “introduces a number of words expressive of loud, noisy or noisily vibrating sounds” (e.g., rattle, rout, roar, all of which remain from Old English — p. 416). In “Rintrah,” the /r/ is followed by a high-pitched front vowel, a combination also found in ring, of which Marchand says, “the idea of ‘clear sound of hard metal’ is the earliest recorded.” There are thus two nuances symbolized by initial /r/: loud, noisy sound and clear, hard sound. The “high (or thin) tone” associated with /i/ (p. 400) would seem to favor the latter nuance, and the following /n/ supports it, as it adds the effect of continuity to the suggested sound. The /tr/ must be considered as a unit, since the sound normally represented by these two letters in a syllable-initial combination is quite different phonetically from the two taken separately (specifically, the /r/ is in this position a voiceless allophone of normally voiced initial /r/). As a unit, then, “/tr/ introduces a number of words with the basic idea ‘tread.’” Marchand cites tread, trod (sb.), trap, tramp, trample, trip, troll, trudge, and trot (p. 408). The final -ah surely indicates a full, open /a/ rather than an
/ʌ/, /æ/, or /eɪ/. (The spelling with ħ, in addition to disambiguating the vowel sound, could—and does, to some extent—stimulate the associations appropriate to phonetic /h/—namely, Celticism, Hebraism, Gothicism.) The vowel /a/ is generally expressive of relatively low pitch, which would be attributed to the "tread" symbolized by /tr/ and thus imply a heavy step.

All of these suggestions are supported by the contexts, where "Rintrah" is given the associations appropriate to a lion:

Rintrah roars & shakes his fires in the burdened air;
Hungry clouds swag on the deep

(Marriage of Heaven & Hell 2:1–2)

The atmosphere is heavy, Rintrah is noisy, and the movement attributed to him is characteristic of a lion, as is a heavy tread.

"Ulro" has definite suggestiveness, and Marchand's generalizations seem to articulate it. "Indistinct low pitch is expressed by /ʌ/, as in hum," for example (p. 400). The long, back vowel /ɒ/ at the end affirms the suggestion of low pitch and tends to indicate a large, long sound. Low-pitched, loud, long sound is characteristic of the sea, and although "Ulro" is not overtly contextualized as a sea, it is everywhere a "deep" "dark"-ness, a "night" and something to go "down" "into." Moreover, its first occurrence is as a "space" (The Four Zoas 5:36–37 —p. 299), and space comes under the umbrella of "the Sea of Time & Space" (Milton 15:39 et passim). It is also worth noting that the darkness association, found in most of the contexts, is a universal property of back vowels (the /ɒ/ of "Ulro"), according to Jespersen.

Taken separately, the syllable-final /l/ suggests continuity of the sound symbolized by the preceding vowel, while the syllable-initial /r/
would seem to suggest the noise mentioned in connection with "Rintrah" (compare roar with the -ro of "Ulro"). However these two sounds are rather similar, and are often transposed in historical changes, as well as in tongue-twisters. If they had been transposed, they would be considered as a unit, /-url/, which Marchand says "is symbolic of prolonged vibrating, dull sounds" — e.g., purl (p. 425). This combination has obvious associative propensities to roll, curl, and other similar words which are appropriate to the "dark ocean" image of Ulro.

One would like to be able to say something about a few other names — "Fuzon," "Los," "Luvah," "Olonol," "Orc," "Udan-Adan," "Urizen," "Urthona" — but gross ignorance stands in our way. There is the sketchiness of Marchand's material, which does not stray far from word families and etymologies, although it goes far beyond any other treatment of phonetic symbolism. And to add to this, there is our uncertainty about how some of Blake's names are to be pronounced.

IV

Among the general effects which may be attributed to the multitude of "known" and "unknown" names in Blake's poetry, is one which relates to the status of the characters. Blake's characters seem to stand outside their respective poems, as if they had a separate existence in a larger fictional universe than that created by a single poem. They belong as it were to a pantheon rather than to a plot — the phenomenon is comparable to the plot-independence of, say, Charlie Brown, as opposed to the plot-dependence of Tom Jones.

One obvious source of this effect is the fact that Blake's characters tend to enter and re-enter his poems, many of which are themselves
bizarre orderings of episodes and fragments of episodes. In this situation, the name's usual function of providing a "peg" onto which to hang associations is accentuated, being a mnemonic necessity for the reader, and one of his primary means of stitching the plot together.

Yet I wish to suggest another, less obvious source for this pantheonic effect. It is in the collocation and co-contextualization of different types of names. Blake's poems involve the names of real, historical persons and places, alongside his own fictional creations. Consider the following passage:

Between the clouds of Urizen the flames of Orc roll heavy
Around the limbs of Albions Guardian, his flesh consuming.
Howlings & hisings, shrieks & groans, & voices of despair
Arise around him in the cloudy
Heavens of Albion, Furious
The red limb'd Angel siez'd, in horror and torment;
The Trump of the last doom; but he could not blow the iron tube!
Thrice he assay'd presumptuous to awake the dead to Judgment.

A mighty Spirit leap'd from the land of Albion,
Nam'd Newton; he siez'd the Trump, & blow'd the enormous blast!

(Europe 12:32–13:5)

*Europe* is one of the most neatly framed of Blake's works, complete with Preludium and dream-frame introduction. Largely because of this framing, the whole can be looked on comfortably as fictional myth, until Newton "leaps" onto the page. Blake's created names, "Urizen," "Urthona," "Orc," and "Enitharmon," figure prominently in the preceding part of the poem, rather than the historical names the title might lead one to expect. The only name familiar to the reader is "Albion," but this is known to him as a "mythical" name. Blake seems to have been aware of the incongruity of "Newton" in this context, for he took the
trouble to introduce him formally—with an indefinite common noun ("A mighty Spirit") and a naming phrase ("Nam'd Newton"). The sudden appearance of a name associated with the newest in scientific achievement effectively contemporizes the entire myth, retroactively—forces into the reader's mind, willy-nilly, a re-evaluation of the time frame into which he has put the story. And the particular mythical occasion is a striking one: that which is always indefinitely far-off, the last judgment, is suddenly already under way, even overdue.

It may be argued that my terms are too strong, that the reader has a choice about how to take Newton's presence, or that different readers will take it differently. I must insist, however, that if the reader is following the literal sense of the passage and identifies the "Newton" therein with the "Newton" file in his memory, he has no choice but to attempt, if only for a fleeting instant, to reconcile the two frames of reference. It is this kind of co-contextualization of the historical and the fictional that, along with the entry and re-entry mentioned above, gives us the sense that Blake's characters exist apart from their specific fictional appearances.

Consider another passage, this time involving place names:

Then Albion rose up in the Night of Beulah on his Couch
Of dread repose seen by the visionary eye; his face is toward
The east, toward Jerusalems Gates: groaning he sat above
His rocks. London & Bath & Legions & Edinburgh
Are the four pillars of his Throne; his left foot near London
Covers the Shades of Tyburn: his instep from Windsor
To Primrose Hill stretching to Highgate & Holloway
London is between his knees: ... (Milton 39:32–39)

In such passages as this one, Blake is in effect spiritualizing the English
Blake’s Names — Prolegomena 

Note how the transformation is accomplished: “knowns” are suddenly introduced into a landscape altogether composed of “unknowns.” Whatever the reader is able to imagine of Beulah and Albion’s Couch (perhaps even of Jerusalem’s Gates) he has gleaned from the contexts in which Blake uses the names. If he is a normal reader, he does not associate these fictional places with the English landmarks he considers real. Yet in this passage Blake defines them by reference to these familiar English places.³⁷

Bloom tells us that this passage “may be based on Milton’s vision of an awakening Albion in Areopagitica.”³⁸ It is instructive to compare that vision to the above lines:

Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks: methinks I see her as an eagle . . . ³⁹

The most striking difference is the absence of names in the Milton version — though not of detailed description. Note, however, the difference in the frame of reference. The Milton version is presented as a vision, as a formal simile — a fiction within a “factual” piece of prose. The Blake version of Albion’s rising is in truth equally a fiction, but there are references to the real world introduced into it, and the whole scene has no formal framing as does the Milton scene. If it be objected that Blake’s piece is part of a larger fiction, a prophecy, a “vision,” and that consequently even the “factual” references within it are looked upon as unreal, I must present another passage as supporting evidence. It is just not true that Blake’s prophecy is received as a homogeneous fiction:

But Milton entering my Foot; I saw in the nether
Regions of the Imagination; also all men on Earth,
And all in Heaven, saw in the nether regions of the Imagination
In Uro beneath Beulah, the vast breach of Miltons descent.
But I knew not that it was Milton, for man cannot know
What passes in his members till periods of Space & Time
Reveal the secrets of Eternity . . .

There are Two Gates thro which all Souls descend. One Southward
From Dover Cliff to Lizard Point. the other toward the North
Caithness, & rocky Durness, Pentland & John Groat's House

(Milton 21:4–10; 26:13–15)

Blake’s own voice enters this poem at numerous points. With the “my
Foot” and the “I” used here, it is unmistakable. There is no one else
to whom these pronouns could refer. Within the same stretch of dis-
course, Blake speaks of “all men on Earth” and of “man” in general
(“man cannot know”). We must assume that this is a real voice talking
about real things: note that we do not fictionalize the “Earth” mentioned.
The passage is just as much an instance of expository prose as Milton’s
Areopagitica. When the same voice later refers to “Dover Cliff” and
“Lizard Point,” we naturally assume that he refers to the real places.
The difficulty is that he mentions “souls” in connection with them, and
we do not generally consider souls to be material (and therefore not
capable of motion within a spatial matrix with “real” reference points).

When Blake’s voice thus uses the names “Albion,” “Beulah,” etc.,
within the same plot sequence as names like “London,” “Primrose Hill,”
etc., we as readers are, by the principles of ordinary communication,
supposed to be able to refer them all to their respective referents—all
equally well. But of course we cannot. We simply do not have any file
for “Beulah,” other than what we have gathered from Blake. Yet we are
expected to put “Beulah” and “Lizard’s Point” on an equal footing
with respect to reality. In order to continue reading in any seriousness, we must attempt to stretch our frame of reference to encompass both the real and the unreal. Of course a complete reconciliation of the two in a clear mental image turns out to be impossible: the reader simply does not know the appearance of “Beulah” with his vegetative eye. The result is that he is forced to attend to Blake’s descriptions even more closely, trying to piece together a coherent picture and a coherent plot. One aspect of “attending” in this sense is the formation of mental dossiers for each of Blake’s created names, to be shelved alongside the familiar names, “Newton,” “Caitness,” “Bath,” “Edinburgh.” Thus the pseudo-reality of Blake’s characters and visionary places.

The co-contextualization of familiar names with unfamiliar also seems to be the source of the curious tendency in Blake studies, mentioned above, to search for the meaning of “Urizen,” “Orc,” etc., in outside, and, occasionally, esoteric places. The logic goes, Blake used the name “Newton” as a way of making us think of what we know about Newton, and since we refer to history books and encyclopedias to refresh our memories of such referents, perhaps we can find out what we don’t know about “Orc” by looking there too. This approach neglects the basic fact that in all probability Blake used “Orc” precisely so that we would not automatically identify it with any known being. This is the usual purpose of fictional names, and Blake was acting no differently from other authors in this regard. The difference was that he chose to give them all, fictional and non-fictional, the same value. He himself assumed his characters to be real, and so in the process of writing, placed them in the same frame of reference as real beings.

Supposing Blake, then, to have used new names so that we would
not refer them to known entities, what did he gain by this? He con-
textualized these names as if he believed they in fact represented real
entities. If he did believe this, and had something to say to a real reader,
then he must have needed new names because he thought he was referring
to things which his reader had not seen. Take for example Raine's
hypothesis that "Oothoon" represents "the soul" in *Visions of the
Daughters of Albion*. If Blake wished to describe something akin
to what most of us call "the soul," but did not wish also to invoke some
of our conventional associations with the word *soul*, or felt that this
word in its usual sense is too vague, or worn out, then "Oothoon"
was the perfect vehicle for his notion. It is new (except perhaps for
the association to "Oithona"), and has a good, harmonious sound and
appearance. If this was Blake's reason for using it, however, Raine's
verbal equation of "Oothoon" with "soul" is inappropriate, for Blake's
idea is, "by definition" as it were, at least slightly different from Raine's
idea of "soul"—but for the chance that Raine knows exactly what
Blake was thinking, in which case she needs to redefine "soul" for the
rest of us.

This new-name-for-new-idea motivation could very well be the *raison
d'être* for any one of Blake's created names. It is certainly the purpose
behind a few of them, judging by what Blake says about them. "Bowlah-
oola," he says, "is the Stomach in every individual man" (*Milton* 24:67),
and is also "nemd Law by mortals" (*Milton* 24:48), and is furthermore
involved in the creation of "Human Forms" (*Milton* 24:36ff). Obviously
no ordinary word could do the work done by "Bowlahoola." The several
functions by which it is "defined" and with which it is associated are
in ordinary thought consigned to completely separate spheres. The notion
itself is new.

The same is true of “Los,” who is within a single verse paragraph held to be “by mortals nam’d Time,” to be “the Spirit of Prophecy, the ever apparent Elias,” and “the Fourth Zoa;” and “Time” is in turn defined as “the mercy of Eternity” (*Milton* 24:68–76). These various predications are clearly not “definitions” in the sense that any one of them can be substituted for “Los” in any one of its occurrences: each new occurrence may have its own facet to add to the meaning of “Los.” In fact, the adequacy of any simple verbal equivalence is to be doubted. If Blake could use common nouns as “names” for universals (as shown in section I), why then did he use “Rintrah” instead of “wrath,” which the critical tradition holds to be the meaning of “Rintrah” (see, e.g., Damon s.v.)? For Blake, “Rintrah,” like “Los,” “Bowlahoola,” and many others, represents a reality which a verbal abstraction cannot touch.

The existence of any particular created name, then, might be accounted for by its respective meaning. Do Blake’s created names have a *raison d’être* in common? Do they serve as a group to affect the reader in a certain way? Surely they do, and the effect involves a violation spoken of earlier. That is, Blake uses a great many new names, in the midst of old names, without identifying them. In normal, Dickens-type fiction, this is all right, for we expect the whole frame of reference to be fictive. But Blake’s frame of reference for these created names is not distinguished from his frequent references to the real world. Hence his unidentified names are violations of the principle which requires him to take account of his reader’s point of view—in effect an instance of snobbery. It is true that he gives “definitions,” like those cited above, but he does
not do so for the majority of his created names, and they generally come far after the first occurrence of the given name. The reader has had to struggle in ignorance and faith all that while.

Yet would we call Blake a snob? No; a prophet, a mystic, a poet, but not really a snob. It is typical of religious language, of language which is supposed to come out of another reality, that it leaves some things in mystery. In particular, inspired writings abound in unidentified names and in the use of names to label what is for the devotee still a blank. Some would call it the mystique of names and naming, for it seems to glorify the word over and above the thing. Blake's created names and his references to such obscure realities as "Verulam" and "Mona" and "Peachey" and "Kox" fall within this realm for the reader. He is supposed to proceed in devoted concentration, painstakingly seeking to piece together Blake's mysteries. It is not necessary to label Blake a "mystic" in order to admit that much of his language is mystical. Nor is it necessary to call it "mystical" and at the same time believe that it is devoid of real content. Anyone who reads Blake reads him because he is seeking what he supposes lies behind the names.

Notes

1 The prominence of names and naming as a theme is not the proper subject of this paper, but it is certainly true that naming is one of the most important themes in Blake. Variants of the root word "name" rise well above the rank and file of index words in Appendix A of the *Concordance to the Writings of William Blake* (comp. David Erdman et al, Cornell Univ. Press, 1967), demonstrating by their great frequency the centrality and the endurance of the idea in the Blakean corpus.
All citations of Blake will be from *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman (Doubleday & Co., 1970), by title of poem with plate number and line number; and page number in the Erdman edition will be added if helpful.

2 See Erdman's textual notes, ibid. p. 731, for an example.

3 Ibid. p. 16. Compare also p. 31, l. 21; and *Jerusalem* 6:10, 6:31, where the first word of "old Bow" is left uncapsitalized, though the entire phrase is contextualized as a name.


5 Moreover, as a criterion for names, it is in effect circular, since the definiteness of a name is determined simultaneously with the determination of namehood, or is even dependent on it. If a listener/reader decides that a certain noun is a common noun rather than a name, it automatically loses its definiteness.

6 Grammatical context is primary, as may be seen by comparing the sentence *Bill me when ready* with the sentence *Bill is ready*. The first contextualizes a familiar name as a verb; the second contextualizes a verb as a name. Note that the second *Bill* is not mistaken for a debit slip, and that this depends on the absence of a determiner.

7 An opposition of "human" versus "common" nouns is not intended here. Of course an inanimate object may be referred to by a name. Contexts which label a noun as "human" are simply one type of name-identifying context. In regard to the primacy of verbs, such that they can determine the nature of their subjects and objects, see Wallace Chafe, *Meaning and the Structure of Language* (Chicago Univ. Press, 1970),
8 I have left the question of uniqueness of form, and the classification of certain forms as familiar names, to be dealt with below, pp. 6–8.

9 Some may wish to classify *honesty* as a "universal abstract" or something of the sort, rather than as a "mass" noun. A semantic distinction between masses and universals may or may not be appropriate in general, but it does not affect the point under discussion here. All of the "mass nouns" discussed in this paper could equally well be called "noncount nouns."

10 The reading which has "Bound back to back in Bromions caves" modify "the adulterate pair," as a continuation of the syntax of line 4, is not tenable after reaching "dwell," though tempting at first. For "dwell" requires a complement; to leave "dwell" without a complement is a greater violation of syntax than it is a violation of semantics to assume that "terror & meekness" have backs.

11 See, for just one example, his *Malevolence*, 1800, reproduced in David Bindman’s *Blake as an Artist* (Phaidon Press, 1977), pl. 96.


13 In other places Blake seems to support this kind of interpretation, by doing the same thing himself: "Then Los & Enitharmon knew that Satan is Urizen" (*Milton* 10:1). However it is a dubious procedure to assume that such a line exists on the same level of literary facthood as a reading of another kind of line: it is to be remembered that the form in which an idea is put forth is as much the poem as is the idea that is put forth. It is also worth noting that *Milton* 10:1 is odd. Aside from the simple deceptiveness of having two different names for
a (presumably) unique being, it has long been known that there is an intimate connection between predication and indefiniteness. One can appreciate this by considering a line like "The Mundane Shell, is a vast Concave Earth." (Milton 17:21), which is not semantically odd at all. But when a definite noun enters into predicate position after a copula, something special is going on ("analytic" propositions are not part of natural language — see John Searle, "Proper Names," in Philosophical Logic, ed. P. F. Strawson, Oxford Univ. Press, 1967. p. 90).

14 There is the possibility that Blake appropriated "Oothoon" from Ossian's Oithona, as noted by Damon and others — S. Foster Damon, A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake (Brown Univ. Press, 1965), s.v. Nevertheless, the form of "Oothoon" is different from "Oithona."

15 Objections to this assertion may be put to rest by referring below, to section III, where I take up the possibility that sounds have meanings of their own.


19 The other instances of "eternity" in The Book of Urizen (10:27, 13:28, 13:54, 18:5, 19:14) repeat one or another of the categories represented here, a few being simple repetitions.

20 Counting those entries which are given no source in Damon's Dictionary,
I estimate that about a hundred of Blake’s names are pure creations. One might compare the works of Henry James or of Charles Dickens, in which nearly all names of persons seem to be either created names or fictional appropriations of common names.

21 I suppose Damon refers to the version published in England in 1751 and again in 1827. There is more than one Book of Jashar [sic]. J. Hastings, A Dictionary of the Bible (T. & T. Clark/Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1899), s.v.

22 The fact that Blake may have used the identifying phrase to distinguish this Naamah from “Naamah the Ammonite,” who is mentioned a few lines later (Jerusalem 62:12), does not interfere with the point here: the effect on the reader is the same in either case, for “Naamah” is nevertheless identified.

23 This “snobbery” is involved in one of the general effects of Blake’s names, discussed in section IV. I should also note here that it is of course possible that Blake was the kind of writer who left clues to hidden meanings and expected serious readers to trace them down. In the case of many a name, however, it is difficult to see what would be gained by this, since Blake purported to give a new revelation of the ancient truths.

24 If it be objected that Damon syllabified the name as -tor-mon, so that a combination of torah and man seems not so unnatural, I must respond that the educated reader would normally take the -on as a Greek-like ending, on the analogy of words like phenomenon. Moreover, we have Blake’s indirect testimony that the ending is -on rather than -mon, for at line 12 of plate 6 in Milton, Blake wrote “Theotorm,” which Erdman takes to be an error for “Theotormon” (p. 729).
25 *Torn* does not descend from the same IE root as *torment* (see the appendix of *The American Heritage Dictionary* [New York, 1969], s.v.), but is a clear association nonetheless, with a meaning which is similar to those of the etymologically related words.

26 The idea of religion and the idea of jealousy appear in context with the name in many places; although one might think the idea of religion to associate to *torah*, this is hardly necessary or natural, as this idea is already covered by *Theo*, *Concordance to the Writings of William Blake*, s.v.

27 This is essentially the meaning understood by Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire*, p. 233: “theology-tormented man.”


29 There are a few earlier occurrences of the name, all of them consonant with the associations of this context, though the associations supporting the “howl” reading are more obvious here. Immediately preceding these lines is what may appear to be a definition: “Bowlahoola is namd Law. by mortals” (24:48) — the associations of which conflict with those cited. Note, however, that the conflict was intended and that the “definition” is overtly undercut.


33. In the event that the reader pronounces this name with an initial /u/, Marchand’s attribution of low pitch to back vowels applies, as in the case of the final /ð/.

34 See the *Concordance*, s.v.


36 Strictly speaking, this remark applies only to names of characters, as there are a few rather specific names of real places preceding the lines cited, such as “Westminster” (12:14) and “Great George Street” (12:19).

37 “Legions” may not be familiar, and is certainly not contemporary. It is an ancient place name, taken from Geoffrey of Monmouth apparently. Damon, s.v. Note that this effectively collapses three different time frames: the contemporary, the fictional-mythical, and the ancient.

