

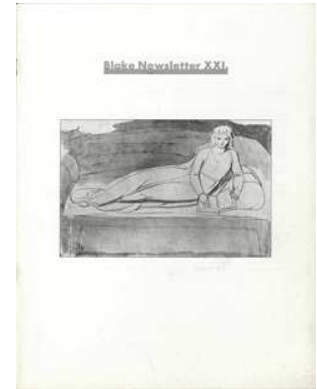
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N O T E

Reason and Urizen: The Pronunciation of Blakean
Names

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3. The Heavens melted from north to south; and
 / . / . / . . / . / .
 Urizen who sat (A 16:2)
4. In that dread night when Urizen call'd the
 / / / . / . / / / .
 stars round his feet (A canc. b:5)
5. And Urizen unloos'd from chains (E 3:11)
6. Till all the sons of Urizen look out and envy
 / / . / . / . / . / . / . / .
 Los (E 4:2)
7. He saw Urizen on the Atlantic (E 11:2)
8. For Urizen unclaspd his Book; feeding his soul
 / / . / . / / . / . / / . / . / .
 with pity (E 12:4)
9. Between the clouds of Urizen the flames of Orc
 / / . / . / . / . / . / . / . / .
 roll heavy (E 12:32)
10. Waking the stars of Urizen with their immortal
 / / . . / . / . / . / . / . / .
 songs (E 14:33)

Notice that in every context except the seventh, "Urizen" begins on an even-numbered, stressed syllable unless preceded by an anapest (as in two and three), in which case the syllable is stressed and odd-numbered. The apparent exception of context seven is equivocal since it occurs in a group of short and metrically irregular lines. Context five is also short, but sturdily iambic. To remove the primary stress from the first syllable of "Urizen" and the secondary stress from the last, and to accent arbitrarily the name's middle syllable, would be to commit unjustifiable violence on each line. We then would have an unbroken series of pyrrhic feet followed by medial inversions, or else no heptameters at all. Later on in Blake's poetry, when the metrical scheme is less clearly defined, the mid-stress could in isolated cases perhaps be reasonably suggested; but these very rhythmic lines allow no alternative to a front-stressed "Urizen."

A contrast with "Urthona" is instructive. In each of its first ten occurrences, "Urthona"--to the contrary of "Urizen"--begins on an *odd*-numbered, *unstressed* syllable unless preceded by an anapest.

This positioning would prevail in the case of "Urizen" were it mid-stressed like "Urthona," but since it is not, it begins on the contrary syllable.

Further evidence for a front-stressed "Urizen" may also be seen in contrast to an "Urthona" paradigm. In its ninety-four occurrences in Blake's poetry (counting possessives), "Urthona" begins nine times in a line's first syllable but only once in its second: "Of Urthona. Los embrac'd" (FZ VII: 85:29). Blake deliberately avoided the latter placement because it gives the effect of anacrusis--an extra unstressed syllable before the proper beginning of an iambic line. But "Urizen" begins in a line's second syllable about sixty times--almost characteristically. The initial syllable is usually a conjunction--cf. "And . . ." and "For Urizen," above--which forms, with front-stressed "Urizen," a normal iambic opening. That "Urizen" should also by itself begin many lines is not surprising in view of the Miltonic and even Augustan precedents for initial inversion. In such cases, the name's third syllable becomes the unstressed first half of the succeeding iamb: "Urizen knew them not" (FZ VI:67:7).

Whether Blake usually spoke "Urizen" as a pure dactyl or with a secondary final stress--as "Benjamin" or as "Benjamite"--is not finally deducible from the metrics, and raises the forbidding problem of vowel-quality. On this subject our only assurance is that the middle vowel is neither EE or AYE, but a swallowed short "i" or a schwa.¹ One is tempted to speculate that the doubly-emphasized "-zen!"-"men!" pairing of the first appearance of "Urizen," quoted above, is an internal rhyme designed to aid pronunciation, and that the attachment of an off-glided "y" to the first vowel is probable since it eliminates hiatus, but Blake's practice remains obscure--excepting, of course, the initial stress. In this connection, it would seem that despite Mr. Preston's suggestion that "Oloolon" be accented on the second syllable, Blake stressed it on the first. It begins in a line's second syllable proportionately even more often than "Urizen" does. All students of Blake will be pleased to know, however, that on the basis of the method outlined above, "Bromion" and "Enion" have been pronounced by them correctly all along.

¹Mona Wilson, in Keynes's new edition of *The Life of William Blake* (Oxford, 1971), p. 106, states in a footnote about "Urizen" that ". . . the i scans short." Her judgment agrees with mine, but its bearing upon the stressing of the whole name is not entirely clear. Does she advocate YUR / I / ZEN or YU / RIZZ / EN?