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Nelson Hilton and Thomas A. Vogler, eds.,
Unnam'd Forms: Blake and Textuality

Dan Miller

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¹The most important works in illuminating printing not to be found there are the *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *Jerusalem*.

²No attempt is made to detail the Huntington's extensive holdings of reprints, criticism, and scholarship concerning Blake nor to describe the related materials such as the bill for Blake's funeral or drawings and manuscripts of contemporaries like Flaxman, Fuseli, Stothard, and Palmer.

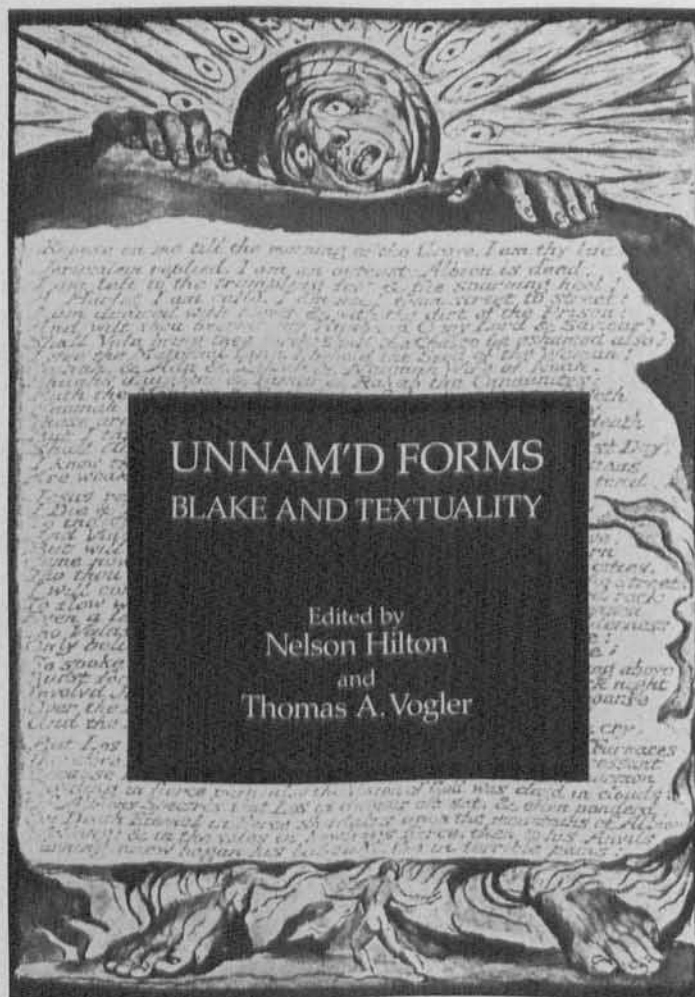
³These reproductions are serviceable, but they are only in black-and-white, and they are not so good as those in previous Huntington catalogues. A major catalogue deserves better plates than these. Doubtless the motive was to keep the price to the remarkably low level of \$20.

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Unnam'd Forms: Blake and Textuality.
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Reviewed by Dan Miller

That Blake criticism has entered a transitional phase is now beyond doubt. We are witnessing far-reaching, possibly radical changes in the methods, concerns and purposes of Blake study. The motives for change stem, in part, from a realization that the previous critical project, shaped largely by Northrop Frye, has attained its exegetical goals and thereby reached its limits. But even more powerfully, it is the body of linguistic and critical speculation which has come to be known as "literary theory" that has forced a revaluation and a redefinition of Blake criticism. Auguries of innovation abound, and the rhetoric of passage—"major shift," "paradigm change," "new dispensation"—grows somewhat too familiar, even to the advocates of change. But neither hyperbolic diction nor the false starts and premature attempts that unavoidably plague any new critical enterprise should obscure the possibilities for substantial change. The transition is only barely underway, and since all transitions are periods of risk and uncertainty, the future of Blake studies is still very much up in the air. But we are clearly in transit, and the essays collected by Nelson Hilton and Thomas A. Vogler in *Unnam'd Forms* serve admirably to register the new movement and explore some of the terrain it opens.

According to its dust jacket, the book "initiates the encounter of Blake studies and contemporary literary-critical concepts of 'textuality,'" and a blurb from W. J. T. Mitchell asserts, "It will serve as the basic introduction to the application of advanced theory to Blake." These claims are accurate enough and well warranted by the essays within, but the undertaking of *Unnam'd Forms* is actually much more specific and consequential.



The subtitle "Blake and Textuality" might be translated "Blake and Derrida," for while Derrida is not the only contemporary theorist of language used to illuminate Blake (Lacan, Kristeva and Foucault also figure prominently), his is the name most insistently and forcefully invoked. Most of the essays work to bring Blake and Derrida into some sort of alignment, to discover some mode of rapprochement. Putting it perhaps too bluntly, we see here Blake, still the presiding prophet of Romanticism, and Derrida, now the tutelary genius of modern theory, put on the same stage and asked to define their common ground. Such a meeting was inevitable, however much it becomes here often a strange and, at times, strained encounter. But the venture itself is important. A coming-to-terms between Derrida and Blake seems natural—and urgent—in a way that a similar confrontation of Blake and, say, Heidegger or Nietzsche does not. If earlier critics felt compelled to connect Blake and Hegel or, more recently, Blake and Freud, the current agenda demands an encounter with Derrida. It would be easy to dismiss these arranged meetings as critical fad and fashion, and such dismissals are all too certain and predictable. But as the literary and philosophic landscape

undergoes the constant re-mapping that is one of the central functions of criticism, each site upon it must be located anew. Much is at stake in the encounter between Blake and Derrida, nothing less than the significance—the meaning that asserts import and consequence—of each figure.

Given these stakes and the difficulty of linking discourses as complex and finely articulated as Blake's and Derrida's, it should not be surprising that the meeting is not altogether happy. In some cases, Blake and Derrida do not meet at all, despite some repeated assertions that they do. Blake frequently encounters a theorist who is called Derrida but who bears only slight similarity to Derrida. This pseudo-Derrida, not an altogether naive thinker about language, will merit some attention. In other cases, Derrida and Blake do approach one another, but then some unease emerges in the critic who hosts the discussion, and that anxiety will also require some investigation. Finally, in some instances, a confrontation does take place, and when it does, sparks fly that light up the path ahead.

The collection had its origins in the 1982 "Blake and Criticism" conference at the University of California, Santa Cruz, but much separates that beginning from the end product. Of the nine essays contained here, three were written after the event, while many participants in the conference have not been included. David Simpson's opening piece and Geoffrey Hartman's concluding "Envoi" are expansions of verbal remarks made at the time, and all writers appear to have revised in light of responses made by others. As a result, some pointed debate takes place among the essays, though often the issues under debate become clear only on a second reading. Simpson responds to arguments made by Paul Mann and V. A. De Luca in the third and ninth essays, so that the cautionary tone of his essay makes sense only after the reader is well past it. Similarly, a long footnote in Stephen Leo Carr's essay engages Robert N. Essick in detailed argument concerning Blake's printmaking, but the target of that note, Essick's response to Carr, comes after Carr. Almost every essay refers, directly or indirectly, to its companion pieces, and the intramural discussion often becomes quite detailed. This debate makes the book much more than a collection of discrete pieces, but the effect is often that of a conversation struggling through time lags and confusing echoes.

For all the discord, however, the essays do make a collective statement. Hilton and Vogler's introduction isolates three unifying themes. First, the critics represented here tend to agree upon the displacement of the author and of authorial intention by "the power of social structures like language" (p. 5). Second, they focus on the special character of Blake's art that highlights the "inevitable materiality of all language-as-writing" (p. 6). And, finally, they insist upon the "plurality of meanings" and the dependence on meaning upon interpre-

tive technique (p. 6). But there are also several other motifs sounded repeatedly: the problem of history, particularly in relation to the supposedly dehistoricizing force of deconstruction; the destruction of "identity" by "difference," as exemplified by the variations in each copy of Blake's hand-produced books; the rousing of the reader's faculties in the face of interpretive cruxes; the relation of critical language to the language of the text; and, most importantly, the special status of Blake. In the introduction, Hilton and Vogler go so far as "to displace Jacques Derrida's description of Hegel onto Blake, seeing in him the last poet of the Book and the first poet of writing" (p. 4). As a whole, the volume tends to make Blake's text into a privileged anticipation of contemporary textuality.

Before looking more closely at specific issues, we need a quick overview of the whole. David Simpson opens the volume with "Reading Blake and Derrida—Our Caesars Neither Praised nor Buried," an essay that sketches several parallels between Derrida's analysis of writing in Rousseau and Blake's own treatment of writing in order to define a "common history" (p. 13) that can ground their encounter. Simpson argues that a firm fixing of historical coordinates is necessary to prevent Blake's absorption into a Derridean self-reflexive verbal play, an empty linguistic sublime that denies history. Gavin Edwards follows with "Repeating the Same Dull Round," a close examination of the performative language in "London" and the paradoxical character of Blake's aphorisms. Edwards attends, in the first case, to the embedding of human subjects (including the subjectivity of the poetic "I") in language and, in the second, to the complication of meaning in proverbs that undercut the universality of proverbial wisdom. Language working against language reappears in the third essay, Paul Mann's "*The Book of Urizen* and the Horizon of the Book." After showing that, in Blake, the Fall and the institution of the Book are the same event—the displacement of an eternal *logos* by representation, supplementation, boundaries and divisions—Mann asserts that Blake allows little possibility of exit or exodus from writing. A redemptive reading may be generated by "textuality at the level of language, an automatic disruption of ideology," but Mann also recognizes that "textuality has by now long since been installed in the Urizenic pantheon" (pp. 66-67).

The three essays at the center of the volume meditate on the peculiar force and fluidity of Blakean language. Nelson Hilton's "An Original Story" opens, as if it were a work of classical scholarship, by describing the historical context of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, particularly Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* and the unhappy affair between Wollstonecraft and Henry Fuseli. But through a patient unfolding of "intertexts" for the poem and the application of his method of "literal imagination," Hilton under-

mines the accepted reading of *Visions* to show that Oothoon, far from the wise heroine of the story, actually serves as the limited projection of a desiring eye—the narcissistic “I” of Theotormon—yet also, by figuring the text itself, as a potentially stronger force impinging on the reader’s vision. The act of reading woven into the text itself also plays a role in Donald Ault’s “Re-Visioning *The Four Zoas*,” an account of Blake’s “radical poetic ontology that fundamentally revises the meaning of ‘narrative,’ of ‘text,’ and of ‘reader’” (p. 105). Ault analyzes the small- and large-scale features of Blake’s text that subvert the mimetic assumptions and unifying tendencies of classical or, as he calls it, “Newtonian” narrative. Causal paradoxes within the narrative, the migration of details from character speeches to the action proper, manifest discrepancies within the order of events, plots embedded within plots embedded within plots—all these aspects of *The Four Zoas* create a narrative in which event, character, and setting have no identity except as continual transformations of one another and in which the real narrative is the succession of altered perceptions within the reader. With Vogler’s “Re: Naming MIL/TON” we arrive at the limits of language. Drawing on Jacques Lacan’s analysis of the Symbolic Order and Julia Kristeva’s account of the pre-symbolic, rhythmic and acoustic domain she calls “the semiotic,” Vogler reads *Milton* as Blake’s attempt to breach the Oedipal-Urienian wall of words and enter “a place marked by the absence of figuration or representation, a physical and linguistic Beulah” (p. 156) where experience replaces interpretation and where desire exceeds all possible objects. Milton’s search for his emanation Ololon becomes, in Vogler’s hands, a quest for speech free of the tyranny of nomination, law, prohibition, and closure. Vogler argues, as others in the collection do, that Blake’s narrative attains resolution only in the act of reading, here a “participatory or writerly reading” that discovers “a textural as well as a textual Beulah” (p. 174).

The final three essays take us from the word to the letter, from language to inscription and icon. In “Illuminated Printing: Toward a Logic of Difference,” Stephen Leo Carr shows how the “radical variability” resulting from Blake’s unique method of producing books, in which no one “copy” is ever absolutely identical with any other, “reveals the ultimate impossibility of determining some underlying authoritative structure” (p. 186), whether that structure is some hypothetical original state of the etched plate, a hypothetical composite of several copies, a controlling authorial intention, a “vision” or “myth” informing all Blake’s works, or any other articulation of what Carr calls the logic of identity. Carr explicitly links the material, variable character of Blake’s art and Derridean *différance*; he holds that Blake’s art reveals and enacts the movement of *différance*, thereby generating “an ongoing, open-ended production of meanings” (p. 190). In direct answer to Carr, Robert N.

Essick’s “How Blake’s Body Means” points out that the value of difference is not unique to Blake’s art but, for the collector, inheres in the entire history of engraving and book production. Essick also argues that copy differences exist only in relation to some mode of identity, in this case the relatively stable etched copperplate. But Essick wants really to extend Carr’s logic of difference to include such variants as accidental spots, degrees of inking, and brush strokes that have little or no signifying value. Essick calls for a “media-oriented hermeneutics” (p. 216) that respects the pre-symbolic experience of the work (Kristeva again) and the extent to which all artistic intentions and signs are shaped by the medium. The final essay “A Wall of Words: The Sublime as Text,” focuses once more on the visual impact of Blake’s language, but V. A. De Luca turns our attention *away* from the unmediated materiality that Essick celebrates. Rather than the sheer matter of printing, De Luca argues, Blake asserts the iconicity of language by creating verbal “walls” that, in the manner of the Romantic sublime, first baffle, then block, and finally release the reader’s understanding into higher modes. While Blake’s sublime differs from other versions in its total rejection of nature and materiality, it still does not, according to De Luca, take us to some transcendent state or vision beyond words. Instead it gives us fully humanized, transparent forms that remain written language: “heaven is a form of text” (p. 238).

Geoffrey Hartman brings the book to a close in characteristically understated, richly suggestive Hartmanian style. “Envoi: ‘So Many Things’” raises questions, many of which had been elided in the previous essays: with what authority does Blake utter his prophecies? how are we to judge his claims on us? does the Blakean mythic system retain any place or value? how do we account for or describe “the voice of Blake” and the peculiar “music” of his poetry (pp. 246–47)? In effect, Hartman suggests that if we are to heed the experience, rather than the meaning, of Blake’s works, we may need to return to very traditional critical concerns—to poetic diction and sound, to the matter of artistic value, even to the personal experience of reading.

Such is the trajectory of *Unnam’d Forms* (though paraphrase and summary can only do injustice to nuanced arguments), and its virtues are many. Phases in Blake criticism have tended to announce and define themselves by anthologies, and this collection will also mark a turning point. It successfully articulates a novel set of critical concerns and puts into practice a number of interpretive techniques relatively new to the field. As a group, these essays also make overwhelmingly clear the degree to which Blake’s poetry is shaped by its medium and plays off of its own typographical existence. Whether or not Blake does here become “the first poet of writing,” he certainly emerges as “the first epic poet of ‘print consciousness’” (p. 4). By focusing attention on previ-

ously overlooked aspects of Blake's work, in particular those aspects that proved intractable for previous critical approaches, the book performs some much-needed clearing of space for other new studies of Blake. *Unnam'd Forms* also asserts the value of Blake for contemporary literary theory, and while it is far too early to expect that this field will again, as it did with Frye, serve as a source of new theoretical insight, at least the possibility is here established. The book as a whole makes a convincing case that Blake's art, with its combination of the verbal and the visual, as well as its foregrounding of the material signifier, offers critical theory a particularly fertile area for investigation. Above all, this collection reasserts the power of Blake's art; it demonstrates that Blake is as crucial a figure in Romanticism (and cultural history generally) for the present intellectual climate as he was in the rather different worlds of previous decades.

Save for Hilton's commentary on *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, there is little here that could count as close reading. Mann examines *The Book of Urizen*, and Vogler takes up *Milton* in some detail, but both of them actually read *from* the text to certain principles and possibilities of language instead of undertaking detailed commentary. Donald Ault does elaborately chart Nights 1, 7 (a and b), and 9 of *The Four Zoas*, but he is primarily interested in the ways that the text structures reading, and the essay seems a prelude to his forthcoming book on that poem. Most all the contributors concern themselves less with particular texts than with general characteristics of Blake's discourse and the modes of reading mandated by it. This is appropriate for an anthology that sets out to explore new territory, but it also distinguishes *Unnam'd Forms* from the several collections of essays that preceded it. The moments when critics succeed in illuminating a text are rather few: Edwards' comments on Blake's aphorisms, Hilton's contextualization of *Visions*, and Ault's account of the Circle of Destiny in Night 1 of *The Four Zoas* are some of the notable instances.

Perhaps the most constant refrain in these essays is, put bluntly, the rejection of meaning—or, at least, of anything like a univocal, determinate meaning. Vogler begins his reading of *Milton* by denouncing "our interpretive urge for closure and univocal meaning" as an "inevitable Urizenic impulse" that the poem itself diagnoses and seeks to destroy (p. 141). Mann also sees archetypal, systematizing criticism as Urizenic (pp. 63–64). "Methods for containing variation within a hierarchy of meaning or value" are, for Carr, critical expressions of the logic of identity, and he claims less interest "in advancing a particular new interpretation" than "in exploring the general conditions of encountering works of illuminated printing" (pp. 182, 196). And De Luca asserts directly, "The Intellectual Powers do not address themselves to meaning as such" (p. 240). Here we encounter a difficulty in *Unnam'd Forms*. Meaning is ex-

tremely hard to elude; it inevitably reconstitutes itself in discourse, even in a critical discourse that seeks to talk about something prior to or beyond meaning. These essays tend to deny meaning but then assert something beyond meaning that, it turns out, is quite meaningful.

Essick offers one example of the return of meaning as he argues against the hegemony of verbal signification:

If such things as ink drops and brush strokes are signs, they signify only their material selves and their coming into being. This hypothetical sign offers some intriguing characteristics. It constitutes a semiotic phenomenon, but not a symbolic system. It resists translation from one medium to another—or, to put it another way, it is the nontranslatable part of any sign. It refuses identical iteration, for it exists only as a spatial/temporal performance. (p. 211)

It would not be difficult to show that, in many classical theories of meaning, the unique and untranslatable sign represents the apex of significance. For the connoisseur who values accidental variation of plate or page, the small mark that distinguishes this from all other copies has exactly that meaning: it is valued not as an accidental mark but as the pure sign of uniqueness. The ink drop does not signify itself or its own materiality; it signifies its own production and, beyond that, its producer. The ink that Blake dropped means Blake and so is valued as such; the ink I drop has no such significance or value. Singularity is the utopia of meaning, and it is exactly the iterability of the sign that complicates meaning.

In fact the unique graphic sign permits a return of meaning on the grandest scale. Essick wants to insist on the non-significative aspects of the sign, yet the graphic mark, filled with the presence of its own artistic coming-to-be, becomes an "incarnational" sign: "Like Blake's sense of the immanence of the spirit within the body, for which Christ is the paradigmatic type, such a sign contains the signified within the material presence and history of the signifier" (p. 212). In the name of asymbolic marks, Essick actually returns to one of the most traditional notions of absolute signification, an indwelling of meaning that is essentially symbolic. Of course, Essick's intent is to widen the domain of "meaning" to include all those "accidents" that, like the particularities of any musical performance, contribute to effect and impact, but his distinction between symbolic and semiotic phenomena keeps breaking down. In Essick's own discussion, the graphic mark always becomes sign and then symbol.

Similar unacknowledged recuperations of meaning pervade other essays. Gavin Edwards is perhaps least guilty of this, but even his claim that "ineradicably unstable and multiple significance" (p. 34) fills Blake's art eventually gives way to assertions of the value—and meaningfulness—of instability itself. In his proverbs, Blake "is questioning the finality of proverbs as such," and he thereby "rouse[s] the faculties to act" (p. 47). The action of roused faculties becomes itself a final end,

though the question of exactly what action those faculties take is elided. "Consider *The Book of Urizen*," Mann writes, "as the sort of text Barthes calls *scriptible*" (p. 65). And De Luca describes Blake's sublime as "an affair of the text and the text alone" as it "presents a refractory iconicity, a wall or steep, that halts or dizzies the Corporeal Understanding. At the same time it displays an exuberance in its own self-referential play that provides the leap of *jouissance*, as Barthes would say, for the Intellectual Powers" (p. 231). What the text means is textuality; what reading reads is the liberating play of textual pleasure. The text does not *mean* so much as *act*, and reading plays with it. But, once again, as Barthesian *jouissance* gets written into these essays, it serves as significance. And the fact that play consistently comes to play the role of meaning may not be accidental.

The significance of the indeterminate comes again into play as Vogler sketches the possibility, within *Milton*, of a Kristevan Beulah characterized by pure vocalization and object-less (hence in-significant) desire:

The realm of the absence of the signified, as the realm of *play*, is the realm both of labor and of rest, the contraries that need each other for the full engagement in Mental Fight. As such the realm is a mediating space, like that of Barthes' pleasure of the text. If it is to be found and entered, . . . it must be on the level of experience rather than of abstract thought, a textural as well as textual Beulah. What this means is that if Blake "found" it, it would be in the *writing* of his text. . . . The reader cannot "know" this unless s/he too can *experience* Beulah in a participatory or writerly reading. . . . I am convinced that the main tendencies brought to the reading of Blake are among those tendencies in literature — and in his own artistic efforts — that he was struggling to overcome in the only way he could imagine overcoming them; not through a writing as allegoresis, . . . but a writing as mode of praxis, the writing of a full word rather than a univocal word. (pp. 174-75)

A critical reading again concludes with Barthesian text and reading. The fundamental openness of the text, the openness and freedom of reading that text, the pure experience of textuality, the purely "textual" character of that experience — these themes strain to move beyond the confines of poetry bounded by stable meaning, but they also risk resolving both text and reading into one significance, that of abstract indeterminacy, which may well be even more fixed, more stable than that which it ostensibly replaces. As Derrida has pointed out in his several debates with Lacan, the "full word" may function in no significantly different way than the "univocal word." When the reader refuses to endure the delays and deferrals of allegorical meaning, s/he courts the illusion of unmediated knowledge.

In may be safer, in the long run, to acknowledge the inevitability of closure than to pretend it can be denied, for whenever one of the essays gestures toward a realm beyond fixed meaning, the gesture itself serves to fix a meaning. Carr speaks of "an ongoing, open-ended production of meanings rather than a re-presentation of an original meaning" (p. 190) and of "an interpretive will-

ingness to enter into the play of differences, to see the double inscription of illuminated printing as generating an open-ended proliferation of verbal-visual exchanges, and to join in the strenuous imaginative activity of producing and reproducing each page" (p. 196). Not only does the critic once again approach thematizing the non-thematic and fetishizing openness, but he blinds himself to his own assertions of identity and theme. In his fine discussion of variants in "Little Boy found," Carr establishes that copy P shows a Christ leading the child, while copy F presents what must be a female, probably the boy's mother. Carr is correct to conclude, "Variation thus invites alternative and even antithetical readings" (p. 195), but his reading of each individual copy is fully univocal and non-antithetical. To establish variation of meaning between copies, he has had to assert a self-identical meaning *for* each one. Further, there would be no interpretive problem in the fact of variation *unless* there were also some connection, some identity, *between* the copies. If P and F are absolutely different, if they are two different poems unrelated even by the identity of Blake as their author, there would be no variation and hence no "play of differences." Not only does something-beyond-meaning almost inevitably become a meaning, but here the "beyond-meaning" seems to depend absolutely on meaning. To attempt to speak past meaningfulness is both to create a meaning and to obscure the meanings that make such speech possible — a double bind.

Many of the critics sense some version of that double bind, and none are quite as unaware of their own discourses as might be implied by the preceding discussion. Paul Mann knows that "the most deconstructive reading imaginable would still be merely obligatory" and that it becomes, as all other readings do, simply another interpretation, another Urizenic boundary from whose "perspective Vision must be equated absolutely with that which remains invisible" (p. 67). And Nelson Hilton knows that reading never actually contains multiplicity, for when we register contradictory possibilities, "The issue is not 'ambiguity' or logical contradiction but the experience of various levels, or 'folds,' of perception: contradictions in the logic of identity" (p. 101). We may read a meaning, and we may read its contrary, and we may read the *fact* that contrary meanings are implicated, but we cannot read both meanings at once except by conflating them. And Thomas Vogler knows that the attempt to name that which is nameless and which resists all naming is a very tricky maneuver, and even more so any venture at articulating the nameless in a language of names: "If we succumb to the temptation to name [Olo-lon] as the Feminine, the Spontaneous, the Body, the Mother, the Natural, and so on, we should do so only in the most self-conscious and evasive manner possible, recognizing the power of the Symbolic Order as it is manifested in its onomastic power" (p. 161). Vogler

knows the twin temptations of his interpretive double bind: "on the other hand, a nostalgic and simplistic *Lacanisme* that would appropriate and valorize a reductive notion of the Imaginary as the completely adequate answer to the ills of the Symbolic and, on the other, its counterpart in producing yet another disguised manifestation of the signifying chain of the Symbolic Order in which the woman . . . is always already *represented*" (p. 162). Invocations of the unnameable verge on nostalgia, for the ambition of naming is always unmediated representation, and at the same time they risk reasserting nomination, abstraction, and meaning. And, finally, V. A. De Luca knows, as David Simpson has already suggested, that while Blakean textuality obtrudes upon us, at the same time, for Blake, "Presence is available, and the transcendental subject exists" (pp. 240-41). The critic who maintains historical bearings is caught between the textual sublime and very specific Blakean beliefs (see also Mann's closing acceptance of Blake's "messages," pp. 67-68). But these acknowledgements that criticism finds itself in a double bind, unable to perform what it asserts but compelled to assert what lies beyond its performance, usually come at the ends of essays, after the critic, with varying degrees of confidence, has named the nameless and has identified difference. One wonders what might have happened had reading begun, rather than ended, with such realizations. In what ways would these analyses be different had they started with the knowledge that all reading creates meaning, even when it works to escape signification?

For all the insistence on the multiplicity of meaning, there remains a curious unwillingness to allow contradictions *within* the text. A certain model of poetic text and critical interpretation maintains a strong hold on most of the essays, and that model assumes *the* classical norm of homogeneity. If, in these essays, Blake's text asserts textuality, it does so consistently and coherently; it "knows" textuality and, in that sense, masters it. Only rarely do the readings here approximate a textuality that would be out of the control of either the text or its reading, a textuality that would be literally unreadable. Such illegibility would arise not from a domain of namelessness or the purity of experience, but from the fact that textuality forms the necessary precondition for all naming and experience. It would involve a "difference" that, in making any identity or meaning possible, is itself invisible and unavailable to experience.

The editors drew their title from plate 15 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake's description of "a Printing house in Hell" in one chamber of which "Unnam'd forms" take molten metals and "cast [them] into the expanse" to become books. The introduction calls these forms "unnamed signifiers" and asks us to see in them the yet unnamed forms that actually shape our reading of Blake (p. 5). The motif of the unnamed appears also in one of the two epigraphs, a quotation, in

French, from Derrida's essay "Différance" that reads, in Alan Bass's translation:

This unnameable is the play which makes possible nominal effects, the relatively unitary and atomic structures that are called names, the chains of substitutions of names in which, for example, the nominal effect *différance* is itself *enmeshed*, carried off, reinscribed, just as a false entry or a false exit is still part of the game, a function of the system.¹

Much in *Unnam'd Forms*, in fact, *is* named, particularly "difference" and "writing," so that it may be useful to back up a bit and read the sentences just before the epigraph. "'There is no name for it': a proposition to be read in its *platitude*. This unnameable is not an ineffable Being which no name could approach: God, for example" (p. 26). Derrida knows he skirts an old cliché; he knows that namelessness is part of a very old system of names and, in truth, one of the most prominent names in a well-known family. He also asks us to attend to the fact that it is difficult and, in some senses, impossible to unname. The name "*différance*" itself "remains a metaphysical name, and all the names that it receives in our language are still, as names, metaphysical" (p. 26). Namelessness takes its place in the system of names; it serves as "a false exit" that only appears to leave the orbit of nomination but in fact has been preinscribed in the circle and only brings us back to the circuit. How then to name that which makes naming possible? How does the critic describe that which governs all the naming and all the thematic assertions that take place in the text? Obviously, the only words available are those which language offers, and the Derridean gambit involves strategically playing language against itself in order to speak about that which regulates, and thereby eludes, all speaking. Hence the neologism "*différance*" and all of Derrida's other false nominatives. That tactic of using the conventional name of namelessness to designate the inevitability of names is what is most often missed in *Unnam'd Forms*.

Given all the naming in *Unnam'd Forms*, it may be useful to back up from the epigraph passage, which comes at the end of "Différance," to see what the non-name "*différance*" actually does designate. Derrida states explicitly that *différance* pertains neither to sensibility nor to intelligibility—neither to the domain of the material and the experiential nor to the domain of ideality and meaning—for the sensible/intelligible distinction is itself "one of the founding oppositions of philosophy," while *différance* will "refer to an order that resists the opposition" (*Margins*, p. 5). As the differentiation that governs the formation of all signifieds as well as all signifiers, *différance* can never be reduced to either a concept or any particular set of graphemes. The manifest differences that pertain either to experience or to abstractions from experience ("meaning" as it is usually defined in *Unnam'd Forms*) are themselves *effects* of *dif-*

férence. (It could easily be shown that *différance* structures both the Lacanian symbolic and the Kristevan semiotic, and the distinction between the two would lose its absoluteness.) The crucial point is that *différance* at once produces and transgresses all possible forms of experience and meaning: "*Différance* is not only irreducible to any ontological or theological — ontotheological — reappropriation, but as the very opening of the space in which ontotheology — philosophy — produces its system and its history, it includes ontotheology, inscribing it and exceeding it without return" (p. 6). *Différance* can never be placed in simple opposition to meaning, for meaning itself is an articulation of *différance*. And neither can any visible or experiential mode of textuality be directly identified with *différance*. Differential textuality, or *écriture* in the Derridean sense of the word, governs and overruns any bounded text available to experience. Derrida opens the possibility that all texts are internally conflictual, governed simultaneously by an economy of meaning (whether experiential or symbolic) and by an economy of loss of meaning, and that these two economies are mutually necessary.²

We have returned to the question of Blake and Derrida, their encounter or missed assignation. And we have arrived at the issue of the use and appropriation of Derrida. Simpson: "Of all the major writers I know Blake is, along with Smart . . . and Joyce . . . , the most open to analysis in terms set forth by Derrida" (p. 13). Mann: "Perhaps we encounter here something like what Derrida encounters in Rousseau's *Confessions*" (p. 53). Es-sick: "deconstruction and *histoire du livre*, Derrida and the collector, share a small patch of common ground even if they rarely speak each other's language" (p. 203). De Luca: "The terminology of our present-day discourse on textuality easily lends itself to the discussion of Blake" (p. 240). Blake and Derrida converge, find connection, make common cause. Derrida tends to supply terms and themes that can be applied to and discovered within Blake. But, paradoxically, what such use of Derrida prohibits is deconstructive reading itself.

The swerve away from deconstruction is marked most clearly in Carr's essay. After noting that his "formulation of this 'logic of difference' and its implications bears certain obvious resemblances to the idioms and insights associated with deconstruction, most especially to what Derrida labels *différance*," Carr quotes Derrida:

the movement of play that "produces" (and not by something that is simply an activity) these differences, these effects of difference. . . . *Différance* is the nonfull, nonsimple "origin"; it is the structured and differing origin of differences.

Carr's comments after the quotation are significant:

The virtual or imaginary origin of meaning constituted by the double inscription of an illuminated page exemplifies the "nonfull, nonsimple 'origin'" of *différance*. Of course, Derrida's formulation leads us to explore the ways each of these double inscriptions also

differs inevitably from itself, from what we may imagine to be Blake's intention at each stage in his printmaking process. But, rather than directly following this line of thought, I prefer to focus on the way *différance* is related to the contradictory impulses of reproduction, to the repetition necessary for representation, in ways that further clarify the import of the logic of difference embedded in Blake's process of reproduction. (p. 187)

The path that Carr chooses not to take — the examination of *différance* within text and design separately — could have made considerable difference. The mere fact that a plate is divided between word and image does not, in itself, manifest either difference or *différance*. Neither an emblem with its subscription nor an illuminated manuscript necessarily abrogates the logic of identity. And the same holds true for variations across handprinted copies: the tree that appears in the margin of *Jerusalem*, plate 36, in copy F but not in copy A (Carr's example) may well be only a further elaboration of verbal and visual themes already present on the plate. Of course, such differentiation *may* be symptomatic of the operation of *différance*, but to establish that it would be necessary to enter the area that Carr turns away from — the invisible and inaudible differentiation at work within each design, each theme, each word.

The issue is really not whether the Derridean argument has been understood or misunderstood. If the encounter between Blake and Derrida were simply a juxtaposing of cultural icons, the use of Derrida by Blake's critics would be a matter of great indifference. The important issue, though, has to do with how Blake is read and with changes in our readings, and bringing Blake and Derrida together (or, in the case of this review, bringing Derrida to bear on Blake's Derridean critics) is one way of articulating and gauging that change. The editors are well aware that clean breaks with the past are impossible: "While this volume presumes to represent the 'new,' it cannot pretend to have escaped social and material constraints any more than the generation [of earlier critics] we have been relativizing" (p. 4). Ideological constraints are equally intransigent. Several contributors make a point of denying absolute innovativeness, both to Blake's poetics and to their own analyses. But when Derrida is as consistently misread as he is here, it betokens the persistence of very traditional critical assumptions. Critics here confidently overturn classical norms of authorial intention and univocal meaning, but they also leave untouched and unexamined classical oppositions within Blake's text: the superiority of "Intellectual powers" to "Corporeal Understanding," the difference between "vision" and "allegory," the distinction between the eternal and the fallen, and even the simple contrasts between experience and signification, materiality and ideality, signifier and signified. When critics merely invert the order of value and priority within the material signifier/ideal signified hierarchy, the structure of hierarchy is preserved, as is the act of giving value and

priority. Derrida repeatedly warns that simple inversions represent no change at all. David Simpson implies that a "radical Blake" who is made roughly synonymous with self-referential linguistic play is finally as unitary and reductive a figure as the previous visionary Blake (p. 23). By the same token, when plurivocity simply replaces univocity, it becomes univocal itself.

What possibility, then, is there for effectively different readings of Blake? What could Derrida in fact offer to Blake critics? If we accept that Blake's texts need not be univocal, even in their plurivocity, and that certain strictly defined contradictions govern those texts, then we may be able to proceed on newer critical paths. For example, one of the most striking debates in *Unnam'd Forms* concerns Blake's eternity: for Paul Mann, the fall is a fall into bounded, representational books, while eternity is atextually "seamless and present" (p. 52), but De Luca finds that Blake equates "divinity and textuality" (p. 238). In a footnote, De Luca quotes Mann, "Eternity is bookless, a perspective from which the book is seen as a hole torn in the seamless fabric of Eternity," and then responds that "it is not so much a case of language doing violence to Eternity as of Urizen doing violence to language, by limiting its endless potentialities to reductive descriptiveness and prescriptive fiat. But the living Words of Eternity still form collectively Eternity's ideal, unfallen book" (p. 238, no. 7).³ Mann replies that "to indicate the ideality of some counter-Urizenic disruption is already to target it for destruction, . . . just as De Luca's representation of Edenic textuality, elsewhere in this volume, itself exiles Blake's text from the Eden it describes" (p. 67). There is clearly disagreement here, but it is altogether unnecessary disagreement. Only if Blake's text says or performs *one* theme or action, only if the text says exactly what it performs, only if, in short, the text is again univocal is there any contradiction.

But if we give up the assumption of textual coherence, the blunt contradiction disappears and is replaced by something much more interesting and powerful. Blake's eternity aspires to a condition of absolute ideality, self-presence, and unity, but, as in the great vision of apocalypse that concludes *Jerusalem*, language persists *in spite of* that aspiration. Blake's eternity is riven by the tension between the transcendence of language and linguistic forms that will not finally disappear. Blake's vision of language at the close of *Jerusalem* attempts, but fails, to deprive words of all those features that make them linguistic. And here is the crux: the drive to transcend language and everything in language that mandates the fall (absence, representation, abstract meaning, boundaries) comes from nowhere else but the domain of language. Blake's eternity is neither textual nor atextual; Blake's eternity is, as it must be within an idealist vision, a transcendence of textuality that, as it must within a poetic text, shows the marks of textuality. Blake's poetry may speak of textuality *and* the end of

textuality, *but* it does not speak of those two things at the same time or in the same way. This is not to suggest that somehow Blake could or should have known the truth of textuality, for textuality as *différance* contains no truth that could be known. The conflicts that structure Blake's poetic discourse are not between two orders of truth, but between an order of truth (or meaning, whether experiential or symbolic) and an order of *écriture* that both motivates and eludes truth. And if we allow the text to become truly non-univocal, we may also begin to recover literary history, a problem raised by De Luca, Simpson, Edwards, and others. In the kind of Derridean reading I have been trying to suggest, Blake's poetry remains what it obviously is: an important episode in the late-eighteenth, early-nineteenth century project of idealist poetics that we know as Romanticism. That Blake's poetry also manifests other, non- or anti-idealist tendencies in no way denies that historical placement. Of course, history itself offers yet another opportunity to make the text univocal, so that against Simpson's charge that "Derrida and many of his disciples seem to offer precious little in the way of incentives to move the analysis beyond the surface of the text, back into the historical powers that constitute its play" (pp. 23-24), we can offer as Derrida's reply, "If the word 'history' did not in and of itself convey the motif of a final repression of difference, one could say that only differences can be 'historical' from the outset and in each of their aspects" (*Margins*, p. 11). *Différance* historicizes.

I suggested at the outset that Blake and Derrida do meet at certain points in *Unnam'd Forms*, and in most of the cases when they do, Derrida is *not* named. Three brief examples will have to suffice. When Hilton demonstrates that, in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Oothoon functions as both the projected object of Theotormon's narcissistic desire and a covert representation of the poetic text, "the other that lives in a desire not to master but to know" (p. 104), he suggests that all reading would be the imposition of our desires were it not for the fact that text, in its otherness, anticipates and reads our projections. The model of interpretation Hilton offers is one in which "We see, and we see our not seeing; we know and know that we know only in part" (p. 101), and here both text and reading truly escape univocity. Similarly, Ault envisions *The Four Zoas* as a text woven by the interplay of structured patterns and the working of "discrepancies, inconsistencies, gaps, and discontinuities" (p. 112), and this critic is canny enough to refuse to valorize either aspect. By paying heed to both economies at once, Ault can show, for example, that the "Fall" is less an actual event to which the narrative refers than an event *within* the reader's construction—or misconstruction—of the narrative. The most powerful moment in Ault's essay comes when he notes, "There is, however, strong evidence that the precipitating event (the 'Fall') finally materializes in the text itself

at the moment the apocalyptic reunion of Tharmas and Enion takes place" (p. 118). Ault thus opens the possibility that, even as the fall is a function of the reader's understanding, the difference between fall and apocalypse may be extremely uncertain. Like Hilton, Ault refuses to reduce the text to any idealized readerly experience and shows how the text anticipates and shapes its own reading. Ault may seem at times to celebrate instability for its own sake, but his reading finally takes its place in the area between stable form and destabilizing breaks, the discursive space that Blake criticism needs to explore. Finally, while Vogler often succumbs to nostalgia for unmediated, pre-symbolic linguistic experience, he also names that temptation and recognizes the possibility that pure semiosis may be yet another theological illusion. After quoting Peirce on the infinite regress of signification, Vogler asks whether Milton's attempt to take off all false garments and put on the clothing of "Imagination" means returning to a condition of nakedness or whether it means exchanging one symbolic covering for another (pp. 169-70). Does Milton, Vogler asks, recover a body free of allegorical clothing or does he just put on another mythic garment? Vogler is very hesitant to provide a simple answer, and rightly so, for no simple answer is possible. Vogler multiplies questions:

At issue here is the question of whether language is an autonomous master structure, a psychological and cultural anticathexis [defense against instinct in the Freudian sense], that always precedes the human subject and preinscribes its *parole*, or whether there "really" is a void or gap in language that makes possible a "Divine Revelation in the Litteral Expression." And if so, can it be "represented" in a literary text that does not in the very process of literary mediation reveal its absence? Can we name an unnamed subjective state without engaging in that process whereby the state in receiving a name is transformed into nothing more than a representation of itself? (p. 169)

Vogler replies to these questions with tentative affirmations, but they are so tentative, and the questions often so outweigh the responses, that it begins to seem that the correct answer must be, somehow, yes and no. For the last time, we meet the problem of naming names. But now it begins to be clear that all names misrepresent and thereby violate the realities they designate even as they also bring those realities into existence. The meaning of the symbolic word and the force of asymbolic language may be ultimately not that different. Names create the desire that transgresses them. And immediacy is an effect of linguistic mediations, though no less a compelling force for that fact. And, finally, the "Litteral Expression" of "Divine Revelation" can exist nowhere else but in an allegorical language that also misrepresents it. Naming and namelessness exist only in relation to each

other, and the word that names also creates unnamed forms.

While Derrida's name appears repeatedly in *Unnam'd Forms*, the name most reckoned with is, of course, Blake's. At the end, Hartman asks, "Where does Blake get his authority from?" (p. 244). While the essays often deny the authority of authorial intention, they tend to maintain the authority of the text. Some of the problems encountered here stem from the attempt to make the text master of its own textuality and, thus, the authority for its own interpretation. But, as David Simpson observes, "in our myth of Blake's aesthetic wholeness there may be something we should suspect" (p. 23). It takes fine critical tact to strike the right balance between giving the text its due authority and maintaining the power of analysis. To give the text more than its due authority is to reduce reading to commentary, which will usually be reductive itself, while overpowering the text by analysis ends in an equal oversimplification as the text simply mirrors analytic categories. *Unnam'd Forms* represents an advance in the demythologizing of Blake that will have to take place before Blake can actually be read, but vestiges of the myth endure in the phantasy of a fully textual text. Rather than making Blake into Derrida's precursor, we need to allow their differences and let Derrida guide a reading of Blake that, since Derrida offers few themes or meanings, would not finally be "Derridean." When and if that happens—when and if both Blake and Derrida cease being masters of significance—then perhaps the "Unnam'd forms" will be heard to speak their names in the silences and cacophonies of Blake's language.

¹Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 26-27. All subsequent citations will be incorporated in the text.

²When Mann links Urizen's attempt to confine existence within the book and the Derridean "*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*," he misses the force of the maxim (p. 54). *Écriture* will always overrun the boundaries of any given text. Carr rightly associates *différance* with the iterability of the sign (p. 187), though he then reduces *différance* to differences between signs and between appearances of one sign, a reduction Essick justly criticizes (p. 202, n. 9). But when Essick discusses the non-iterable graphic mark, he speaks of "a *différance* constituted only by the difference between the sign's being in space and its becoming in time" (p. 212), and this difference is really no *différance* at all, despite Essick's assertion, in a footnote on the same page, that it is.

³In Mann's essay, the sentence actually reads, "Eternity is a perspective from which the book is seen as a hole torn in the seamless fabric of Eternity . . ." (p. 51). Perhaps the circulation of essays among contributors prior to publication led to some revision.