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AN INQUIRY INTO THE METRIC OF NAMES: SOUND AND RHYTHM OF NAMES IN HART CRANE’S WHITE BUILDINGS

John T. Shawcross

City University of New York

The use of names in literature generally seems to fall into four categories: those which denote a specific person or place, those which are allusive, calling up associations of the past or symbolic relationships as well as literary, political, ideational contexts, and those whose etymologies suggest further meaning for a work, often through word-play. Further, names are significant in literature as historical coordinates, often unknown to the author himself, or as psychological predicators, frequently unintentioned by the author. An author has control over including or not including a denotative name, is almost always purposive in using allusive and symbolic names, and may at times be aware of the etymologies he is raising. What I should like to examine here is the effect of names in poetry through their contextual sounds and rhythms, overlooking for the most part, these important onomastic hinges of meaning. The competent author is, I am sure, aware of the effects of names
and employs specific names to achieve desirable effects. Basically I ask these questions: what effect does this particular name have on the line of poetry and the poem? what would be the effect if a different name were used? what would be the effect if a word that is not a name were used?

I choose a poet whose use of names is often denotative, though frequently allusive—one who is not particularly noted for using names symbolically, though he does—and a collection of poems with not a great many names in it so that we can deal with many of them. By "symbolic" use of names I mean the way in which, say, T.S. Eliot in "Gerontion!" talks of "Mr. Silvero / With caressing hands, at Limoges," with its ethnic slur intended against allegedly greasy, libidinous Italians, whose supposed vulgarity and physicality contrasts sharply with the refinements of France. These names serve a number of purposes in the lines, of course, but at least one use is as symbols. Further, I wanted a poet whose poetic unit was often the line, since considerations of syllables and accent would then not be dictated by a preconceived metric scheme. For contrast, however, there should be metered and patterned lines and stanzas. And so I choose White Buildings, the first published volume by Hart Crane, which came out in 1926 and which includes twenty-three poems, one of which is a sequence of six poems. There are thirty-six occurrences of thirty-one names in these poems.
First, we should note that six of these names appear only in titles and thus offer no evidence for the metric of names under investigation here. But they are more than denotative, being symbolic, ironic, or allusive. "North Labrador" adds some symbolic quality, which could have been evoked by another geographic name suggesting cold and ice, land and ocean. It is the poem that develops the paradox of the frigidity of the mother sea. "Lachrymae Christi"—the tears of Christ—prepares the reader for the symbolic nature of the poem and for certain references. The allusion to Christ gives meaning to the "Immaculate venom," for instance, and his tears ironically comment on the "eyes galvanized by perjuries." "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" alludes to the ephemeral goal for which a soul was sold to the devil. But the story is symbolic, Crane reminds us, and is played over and over in time. Like a Faustus Crane admonishes:

Laugh out the meager penance of their days
Who dare not share with us the breath released,
The substance drilled and spent beyond repair
For golden, or the shadow of gold hair.

Some other seafarer would not have done for "At Melville's Tomb," even though the denotation of the name seems uppermost. Most of us, directed to think of Moby-Dick or White Jacket or some other work pitting man against the supposed evil in nature and particularly against his own nature, read the lines with added meaning:
Their numbers [the dice of drowned men's bones] as he watched,
'Beat on the dusty shore and were obscured.

Or,

'Compass, quadrant and sextant contrive
No farther tides'...

Or,

'This fabulous shadow only the sea keeps.

We suspect that Crane recognized Melville's latent homosexualism, particularly when we remember Melville's words on Hawthorne, and that the poem 'could not have referred to someone else--a Richard Dana, a C.S. Forrester. The poem is immediately followed in White Buildings by "Voyages," Crane's poetic sequence to homosexual love.

One other name appears as a title, but in an adjectival form, "Chaplinesque." "My poem is a sympathetic attempt to put in words," Crane wrote to Gorham Munson on October 1, 1921, "some of the Chaplin pantomime, so beautiful, and so full of eloquence, and so modern."

The person was the inspiration, and the poem is controlled by Crane's view of the person: sentimental, tragic, eccentric, homely, brilliant. Without the title clue we might not know what the poem is all about (really, of course, it is Crane himself); it received vilification from some critics of its separate printing apparently because they didn't recognize the purpose of the sentimentality and the eccentricities.
This little survey of title names in Crane indicates their literary significance as allusions, contexts, and symbols. Names have the immediate effect of directing the reader to his associations with or knowledge of the person or place or a person of that name. Such significance would be further evidenced in the use of other names within the poetry, but let me turn to the question of the metric of names.

In "My Grandmother's Love Letters" Crane calls her by her given name, "Elizabeth," which constitutes a single line. It is denotative, and whatever etymology (it is Hebrew, meaning "God has sworn") or allusion (such as to the mother of John the Baptist) it might yield is beside the point. The passage reads:

There is even room enough
For the letters of my mother's mother,
Elizabeth,
That have been pressed so long
Into a corner of the roof
That they are brown and soft,
And liable to melt as snow.

To delete the name does nothing to the sense of the passage; it is not necessary, and it is the only name in the poem. There is no stanzaic patterning that requires the line. Did Crane include it just to be specific? Would he have included it if the name were
"Gladys"? or "Veronica"? Well, of course, I do not know, but "Gladys" with its two syllables, a trochee, and final chopped sound jars my ear in this line. The only echoing sound is the "s," for the "l" is lost in combination with the "g." "Veronica" has the same number of syllables in a double iamb, but the "v" and "c" and the open vowel ending causing a kind of hiatus also jar my ear. The actual name picks up the liquid "l," echoes the "z" sound of "is," and plays against the "s!" sounds, softens the "b," and allows the final sound to trail off while at the same time it merges with the ensuing sound in "That." The name permits a dwelling on the specific word, creating an atmosphere reminiscent of memory by not being abrupt, by trailing off, and by softness of tone. The two iambics "Elizabeth," with a slight pause after "liz," contrasts with the immediately preceding two trochees. "mother's mother," with its slight pause after "ther's." As a single line the name acquires importance and focus. Crane did not have to include the name, but he did so because he was able to employ it in such a way that it enhanced his poem in rhythm, sound, and tone.

Similar is "Bill" in "Sunday Morning Apples." This is William Sommer, the artist. The name appears in the last line of the poem to separate "the apples" repeated:

I have seen the apples there that toss you secrets,—

Beloved apples of seasonable madness.
That feed your inquiries with aerial wine.

Put them again beside a pitcher with a knife,

And poise them full and ready for explosion—

The apples, Bill; the apples!

The single syllable divides the two phrases, breaks the line into two and creates a tone of anticipated discovery, and plays with the plosives "p"/"b" and echoes the "1's." No name in the line creates a longer pause and removes a sense of immediacy and actuality which the names produces. A different name—say, Jack—does not allow for the sound duplication or the same tone. Whatever Crane might have done if this had been addressed instead to Max Ernst or someone names Jack, we can not guess. But the name "Bill" in the line creates a sound and rhythm that no other name or lack of name would have; they would have created a different sound and rhythm, which too might have been effective—but different.

My point, of course, is that names do have metric effects in a poem. There is rhythm, sound, tone, even a sense of meaning arising from that rhythm, sound, and tone. An author may be limited by the denotative name, but he is not limited in the way in which he employs it, and indeed the way in which he employs it may offer a key to technique and to reasons for success or failure of the poem.

"Possession" refers to Bleecker Street in Greenwich Village in New York City; the main reason for its appearance in the poem is
undoubtedly allusive, calling to mind a street of mixed, though
then primarily Italian, cultures, of artists and eccentric types,
and primarily for the poem of its demi-monde male inhabitants. It
is still, Crane says, "trenchant in a void"; but Carmine Street
(same number of syllables and same stress) or Thompson Street or
some other might possibly have served as well, though they do not
carry the pun on "bleak." For the sexual world depicted is bleak
except the bright stone become "the pure possession" or "the inclu-
sive cloud / Whose heart is fire." (Note the allusion to the pres-
ence of the godhead: in "cloud" and "fire." ) Here the specific name
"Bleecker Street" achieves a double phonically high and sustained
"ee," and the harsh sounds of "Bl" and "ck" and "St" and "t"
compare with the "st" and "I" and "tr" and "ch" and "nt" immediately
following in the line: "In Bleecker Street, still trenchant in a
void." The rhythm is almost duplicaté in the two halves of the
line: short; long, short, long; and short; long, short, two fast
shorts, long. The pauses after "street" and "void" create voids;
the harsh and sibilant sounds are themselves trenchant. "Carmine
Street" or "Thompson Street" simply does not achieve all the "Bleecker
Street" does.

"Hades" occurs in "Repose of Rivers" with a small letter:

Flags, weeds. And remembrance of steep alcoves

Where cypresses shared the noon's
Tyranny; they drew me into hades almost.

And mammoth turtles climbing sulphur dreams

Yielded, while sun-silt rippled them

Asunder...

Should we call "hades" a name or not? It is here more a common noun for hellish surroundings or mental condition. But therefore Crane might more logically have written "hell" or "torment" or "holocaust," because "hades" does set up specific reference for us. Yet "hades" says all these things and emphasizes as even "hell" does not that it is a world populated by the dead in body and spirit, a world that "cypresses" metaphorically connoted just before. It has its semiotic reasons for being in the line. The number of syllables—one, two, or three—in the word used does not matter, for there is no metrical pattern. "Hades" is two syllables, like "torment," and both are trochaic; but metrically what the word used does is, first, maintain the "s" and "d" sounds of the poem. There are 53 "s" sounds in it and 44 "d" sounds, and the last two words of the 23-line poem are significantly "steady sound." Second, the vowels of the word, a and e, enhance the play of vowels in the line: i, ө, e, a, өө, e, i, өө, a, e, aw, o. The sounds are almost chiasmatic. "Hades" much better than "hell," or "torment," but not "holocaust," contributes to the open feeling of the vowel sounds. In fact, it seems that "almost" is placed last in the line to emphasize the word very much more than in normal posi-
tion, but also to close the open feeling of the rest of the line:
"Tyranny; they drew me into hades almost."

Crane also wrote metered verse, most often the four-line stanza
in a not-relentlessly iambic pentameter. Three names appear in
is here only a common noun with a small letter. While the choice of
the first two names was limited by the geographic area of the
"Voyages," we might wonder why the first rather than some other is-
land and why the particular form of the second. To take the lines
in which the first appears:

And onward, as bells off San Salvador
Salute the crocus lustres of the stars,
In these poinsettia meadows of her tides,—
Adagios of islands, O my Prodigal,
Complete the dark confessions her veins spell.

One reason why San Salvador is used here is its meaning, for Crane
is talking of salvation out of "this great wink of eternity" into
the "spindrift gaze toward paradise." (There is also an identifica-
tion of San Salvador with a lost world beneath the sea.) The bells
suggest the tolling bells of death. But further the lines are deca-
syllabic and the name constitutes the last two iambic of its line.
The word "San" is metrically unstressed, but it has some stress in
the line, for we do not want to stress "off" after "bells" has received
a strong accent: "And onward, as bells off San Salvador." With "Sal-" following "San" there is a progression of similar sounds and an increased stressing. "Salvador" is then followed by "Salute" with some on the first syllable, although it is metrically un-stressed.

The reechoing sounds of "s," "l," and "d" occur frequently in the poem; but interesting is the sounding of "v": "vast," "veins," "wave," "vortex," "grave," plus nine instances of "of." While "s," "l," "d" and such sounds develop a mood consonant with the subject and treatment (that is, a soft, slowish, languid mood), "v," its voiceless form "f," which occurs eleven times, and "w," which occurs thirteen times in the poem, create a physical effect as one reads aloud, the lips pushed forward, the breath expelled through a thin opening—all sexually suggestive. The three sounds occur in this line: "And onward, as bells off San Salvador." "San Salvador," therefore, contributes to a physical metaphor created within the act of reading the poem aloud. It is a metaphor of sensuality; for example, notice the effect of "laughing the wrapt inflections of our love." Crane's attention to sound, I would argue, here and elsewhere, is one of the masterstrokes of his poetry.

The substantive form "Carib" used as an adjective allows two immediate feelings to emerge: a heightened tone continuing the epic evocation of "O minstrel galleons" and an emphasis by pausation, for
we must shift our vocal reproduction to move from "b" to "f" ("Carib\, fire"), and thus we stress all three syllables although the first and third only are metrically stressed. The ordinariness of "Caribbean"—it would fit into the line with elision and by eliding "galleons"—would run counter to the epic intention of the poem and sequence. The epic of man's struggles against the sea, as symbol and source of life and death, of his brief moment in the eternal sea of life, of the psychomachia played out in human relationships—this is the subject and genre of the poem and sequence. These two names—San Salvador and Carib, which means "cannibal" and has Freudian overtones in this homosexual poem—sit as opposites of epic significance, for the body consumed by fire frees the spirit to move toward salvation and paradise, the third name in the poem. The words "minstrel" and "galleons" indicate the commonalty of the heroes of the poem (the author and his lover, a different kind of Adam and Eve), and the lower-case paradise stands for the common man's hope for paradise on Earth. This is a green world of crocuses, poinsettia meadows, a floating flower. The sounds of the word "paradise"—"p," "r," "d," "s"—are all elsewhere in the line: "The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise." The line is slowed by the monosyllabic importance of the words preceding "toward paradise": "seal's," "wide," "spindrift" (which comes across as if it were two separate words), "gaze"—and then the rush to the last syllable
"-dise." The final sound goes on, does not stop the reading abruptly. The rhythm of the word, produced by two short vowels and a long diphthong, contrasts with the deliberateness of the heavy accents of "O minstrel galleons of Carib fire." "Belle Isle," employed twice in "Voyages," VI, and symbolizing "paradise," contrasts in the same way by its two accented, deliberate syllables, once ending a line, once beginning a line:

Still fervid convenant, Belle Isle,

—Unfolded floating dais before

Which rainbows twine continual hair—

Belle Isle, white echo of the oar!

The "s," "l," and "d" sounds are here again, and the "v's," "f's," and "w's." But now the name acts as accomplished fact (the achieved paradise) by its strong, definite two single syllables, for as "The imaged Word" (with its Christological reference) it "is the unbetrayable reply / Whose accent no farewell can know." The capital letters of this paradise indicate the difference from the more common and more tentative paradise of "Voyages," II. (And we should note too a paradoxic pun in "Belle Isle" on the tolling bell of death.)

The three names in "The Wine Menagerie," which is the roster of animal visions induced by inebriation, are conjured by the anguished wit of the author as it speaks forth to itself:
"Rise from the dates and crumbs. And walk away,
Stepping over Holofernes' shins—
Beyond the wall, whose severed head floats by
With Baptist John's. Their whispering begins.

"And fold your exile on your back again;
Petrushka's valentine pivots on its pin."

The names range through chronological times and spheres of action and through types of man destroyed by woman, one a general to Nebuchadnezzar and slain by the Jewish heroine Judith, one a holy man who resists the advances of Salome only to be beheaded, and one a rag doll clown, with cloth heart, brought to life and human loving only to be torn to bits and pieces, his sawdust strewn, after romantic rejection. (There is also an allusion to the symbolic poet Orpheus whose severed head floated down to the isle of Lesbos after he was attacked by frenzied women-followers of Dionysius. All of Crane's references have been destroyed by woman.)

But more than these allusively profitable avenues for meaning, the names subtend metric effects. The line which the first dominates is defective; in which the second appears, is an exact iambic pentameter; in which the third resounds, is hypermetric. The four-syllable name in the first line perhaps makes us unaware that the line is defective; its position stretches over the third, fourth,
and fifth feet. The three-syllable name of the second line, not in initial position, is used in the first two feet, as is the three-syllable name of the third line, in initial position. Each name appears in alternate lines of the last six lines of the poem, broken into two stanzas, though really constituting one. Crane has contrasted the metrical use of the three names given in close proximity, and he has also thus contrasted their sounds: "Holofernes", "Baptist John's", "Petrushka's." Only the final possessives echo as we move from legs to head to heart. The sounds are not particularly pleasant, nor should they be in this menagerie of bellies, manure, sweat, black tusks, talons, bile.

The author, of course, will not "Rise from the dates and crumbs. And walk away." He will revel again tomorrow (and the next day and the next) in the martyrdom that the allusive names connote, and in the masochistic harshness that the sounds of these names announce, for the snow will have wrought its treason in a little while. The choice of names was conditioned by many aims, one of which was sound, and the effects they create were conditioned by the rhythms of their lines.

Finally, let me note two names in the deservedly celebrated "Black Tambourine," of which Crane wrote to Gorham Munson in 1921, it is a "description and bundle of insinuations, suggestions bearing on the Negro's place somewhere between man and beast, That is why
Aesop is brought in, etc.,—"The two names are Aesop and Africa. "Aesop," beginning with a strong stress and ending with a closed sound, sets up a rhythm accenting the stressed syllables. The line hits our ear as a trochee; two dactyls, and a catalectic foot: "Aesop, driven to pondering, found." The final line, in which "Africa" appears, seems to have a separated initial word followed by five iambics: "And, in Africa, a carcass quick with flies." The entire poem is one in which strong stresses beat like percussion, setting up structures which seem not to be metrically patterned and, in which final stanzaic lines contrast with a more ordinary iambic meter. It suggests that Crane is equating the music of the Black by "native" rhythms and syncopations intermixed with "civilized" rhythms. The two names contribute to these basic rhythms.

From Crane's comment to Minson, Aesop was integral to the development of the poem and certainly Africa is an obvious name for use in the poem. Thus it is probable that the lines in which those names occur were worked out to fit the names. The first is dominated by "s" and "p"; echoes are "pondering" in the same line and "top," and "tortoise" and "sow." The second is dominated by "f," "r," and "c," with echoes of "flies" in the same line and "foiled," and "carcass quick." in the same line and "stuck." The last line—"Africa, a carcass quick"—approaches the clicking
sound of some African tongues; I do not suggest that this was in Crane's mind, although he had struck up friendships with numerous sailors from Africa. It can be explained rather by its percussive tambourine-like sound. In "Black Tambourine" we seem to have two names which help lead to the metric on which the poem is built.

The point of this paper I hope is clear: names act not only denotatively and connotatively, but, like well chosen poetic words of any nature, they enhance the sound and the rhythm of a poem, being employed both for the ways in which they will fit into the forms of sound and rhythm. Names should not simply be identified in footnotes—such as reminding the reader that Absalom, found in "Recitative," was the son of David and that he built himself a pillar to keep his name in remembrance since he had no son. Here the name is integrated to the sound and rhythm of the poem, significant though it is as allusion, particularly in the "m," "s," and "l" sounds.

The title of the collection we have been discussing, White Buildings, comes from this same poem, "Recitative": "Then watch / While darkness, like an ape's face, falls away, / And gradually white buildings answer day." The white buildings, which are each of the poems of this collection, are Crane's Absalom pillars; they are the revelations of the self once the darkness of deception and secrecy have fallen away. The theme—despite Allen Tate's obtuse
belief and Waldo Frank's approval that a suitable theme is lacking—is the ostracized self, seen largely through Crane's self, in all its manifestations as it tries to achieve the goals desired by the publically accepted and conventional self. The collection reveals Crane as one of "those who step / The legend of their youth into the noon." Each poem is a well-placed step, achieving a structure seen in the whiteness of noon; each poem is an element in building the whole self, not just a facade. An examination of names introduces us to interpretations of the poems in which they occur and, as here, of the collection in which those poems appear, when that collection is so carefully put together and organized as Hart Crane's *White Buildings* is. And further the metric which names sustain leads us to an understanding of the poet's techniques and craft, perhaps the most important concern of the literary critic.

John T. Shawcross

City University of New York
Names in Hart Crane's White Buildings

Absalom, 20 "Recitative"
Aesop, 5, "Black Tambourine"
Africa, 12, "Black Tambourine"
Anchises'. 35, "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," III
Baptist John's, 47, "The Wine Menagerie"
Belle Isle, 25, 28, "Voyages," VI
Bill, 18, "Sunday Morning Apples"
Bleecker Street, 18, "Possessions"
Brandywine, 12, "Sunday Morning Apples"
Carib, 22, "Voyages," II
Chaplinesque, title, "Chaplinesque"
Christi, title, "Lachrymae Christi"
Dionysus, 42, "Lachrymae Christi"
Elizabeth, 7, "My Grandmother's Love Letters"
Eramus, 36, "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," III
Faustus, title, "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen"
Gargantua, 4, "Praise for an Urn"
hades, 8, "Repose of Rivers"
Helen, title, "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen"
Helen's, 28, "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen"
Holofernes', 45, "The Wine Menagerie"
Janus-faced, 1, "Recitative"
Melville's, title, "At Melville's Tomb"
Nazarene, 25, 35, "Lachrymae Christi"
Nineveh, 22, "Recitative"
North Labrador, title, "North Labrador"
Olympians, 7, 43, "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," II
paradise, 25, "Voyages," II
paradises, 24, "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," II
Petruska's, 49, "The Wine Menagerie"
Pierrot, 3, "Praise for an Urn"
Ptolemies, 32, "Passage"
San Salvador, 11, "Voyages," II