

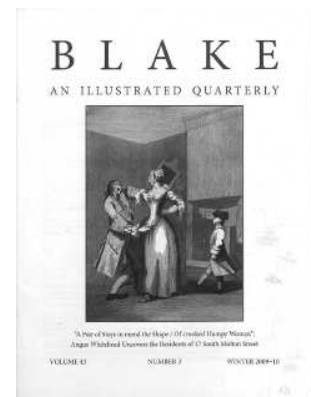
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

M I N U T E
P A R T I C U L A R

Waxed in Blake

Nelson Hilton

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 43, Issue 3, Winter 2009-10, pp. 110-111



"The Cunning sures & the Aim at yours" may have been spurred by its association with Cromek's fashionable marketing language.⁶

6. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, newly rev. ed. (New York: Anchor-Random House, 1988) 510. As Paley observes, the first recorded use of "amateur" was in 1784, and it was still new enough in 1803 that Rees's *Cyclopædia* had to gloss it ("Blake's Poems on Art and Artists," *Blake and Conflict*, ed. Sarah Haggarty and Jon Mee [Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009] 214).

Waxed in Blake

BY NELSON HILTON

THOSE who write on Bob Dylan appear to take for granted the influence of Blake on his "Gates of Eden" (in performance by 31 October 1964, then issued on *Bringing It All Back Home*, March 1965, and as the flip side to the single version of "Like a Rolling Stone," July 1965). Michael Gray speaks for many, if at greater length, in stating that "the purposive force of what is palpably Blakeian impinges in every verse. It is the major Dylan song prior to 'Every Grain Of Sand' that is most like Blake, and like the most characteristic Blake at that." Without giving specifics, Gray argues that "the general themes of 'Gates of Eden' could not be more Blakeian and nor could their treatment. Dylan is treating of balances of opposites—of material wealth and spiritual; of earthly reality and the imaginatively real; of the body and soul; of false gods and true vision; of self-gratification and salvation; of mortal ambitions and the celestial city; of sins and forgiveness; of evil and good."¹ Lawrence Wilde suggests, more concretely but equally without evidence, that "William Blake's poem 'Gates of Paradise' may well have inspired Dylan's composition," and Mike Marqusee finds "an apt reference to Blake" in the song's seventh-stanza reference to "kingdoms of Experience."²

The recent publication in facsimile of a manuscript version of "Gates of Eden" enables further speculation about Blake's presence in the song's first stanza, at least, and how it came to pass.³ As published and recorded, the first stanza reads:

1. *Song and Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan* (London: Continuum, 2000) 61, 62. See also John Hinchey, *Like a Complete Unknown: The Poetry of Bob Dylan's Songs, 1961-1969* (Ann Arbor: Stealing Home Press, 2002) 88.

2. Lawrence Wilde, "The Cry of Humanity: Dylan's Expressionist Period," *The Political Art of Bob Dylan*, ed. David Boucher and Gary Browning (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 92; Mike Marqusee, *Chimes of Freedom: The Politics of Bob Dylan's Art* (New York: New Press, 2003) 166.

3. Robert Santelli, *The Bob Dylan Scrapbook, 1956-1966* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005) 41 (insert).

Of war and peace the truth just twists
Its curfew gull just glides
Upon four-legged forest clouds
The cowboy angel rides
With his candle lit into the sun
Though its glow is waxed in black
All except when 'neath the trees of Eden.

The facsimile has in the third line not "four-legged" but "fungus forest cloud." This, together with the twisting of the truth, the black glow, and the setting "'neath the trees," seems strongly to recall "A Memorable Fancy" in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plates 17-18. There the speaker, in the company of "An Angel," finds himself "sitting in the twisted root of an oak. he was suspended in a fungus" and beholding "the sun, black but shining" (E 41).⁴ In the facsimile the cowboy angel "lights his candle in the sun" (itself replacing the original "his candle burns the day"), which flips us a few plates forward in *Marriage* to the argument that a "man of mechanical talents" producing volumes—or vinyl recordings "waxed in black"—from the writings of inspired authors should "not say that he knows better than his master, for he only holds a candle in sunshine" (pl. 22, E 43).

It seems likely that Dylan may have come upon or have been reminded of Blake's work through a rapidly developing friendship with Allen Ginsberg that began in early 1964.⁵ Ginsberg's long-standing and idiosyncratic, deep involvement with Blake is well known, and he "had studied, in particular, the visionary masterpiece, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*."⁶ Dylan may have come to his title image not only through Blake's *Gates of Paradise*, but also through Ginsberg's very early collection *The Gates of Wrath*. Though not published until 1972, the unique manuscript of these "rhymed poems, 1948-1952," was, surprisingly, in Dylan's possession.⁷ There, beginning his twenty-fourth year in May 1964, Dylan could have read "Ode: My 24th Year" and its concluding line, "Here is no Eden: this

4. The power of this image is evident again several years later in John Gardner's *Grendel* (New York: Knopf, 1971), where the protagonist "recall[s] something. A void boundless as a nether sky. I hang by the twisted roots of an oak, looking down into immensity. Vastly far away I see the sun, black but shining ..." (137).

5. Michael Schumacher, *Dharma Lion: A Critical Biography of Allen Ginsberg* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992) 405; Bill Morgan, *I Celebrate Myself: The Somewhat Private Life of Allen Ginsberg* (New York: Viking, 2006) 383; Richard E. Hishmeh, "Marketing Genius: The Friendship of Allen Ginsberg and Bob Dylan," *Journal of American Culture* 29.4 (2006): 395-405.

6. Paul Portugés, *The Visionary Poetics of Allen Ginsberg* (Santa Barbara: Ross-Erikson, 1978) 101.

7. Ginsberg relates in a "Hindsight" to the 1972 edition published by Grey Fox Press (Bolinas) that "*Gates of Wrath* ms. was carried to London by lady friend early fifties, it disappeared, and I had no complete copy till 1968 when old typescript was returned thru poet Bob Dylan—it passed into his hands years earlier." The volume has Blake's "Right thro' the Gates of Wrath" as one of its epigraphs and two directly Blake-inspired poems, "On Reading William Blake's 'The Sick Rose'" and "The Eye Altering Alters All."

is my store." By the release of "Gates of Eden," Dylan was close enough to Ginsberg that they are depicted each wearing the same top hat in photographs on the back cover of *Bringing It All Back Home* (pictures evidently taken early in 1964).⁸ For his part, Ginsberg felt strongly enough about the song that in "Who Be Kind To," first read at the International Poetry Incarnation, 11 June 1965, Royal Albert Hall (shortly after he

accompanied Dylan's UK concert tour recorded in *Don't Look Back*), he celebrates the raising up of "joyful voices and guitars / in electric Afric hurrah / for Jerusalem— / The saints come marching in, Twist & / Shout, and Gates of Eden are named / in Albion again."⁹

8. Barry Miles, *Ginsberg: A Biography*, rev. ed. (London: Virgin Publishing, 2000) 330.

9. Allen Ginsberg, *Collected Poems: 1947-1997* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2006) 368 (text is dated 8 June 1965); see also Schumacher 447.

WILLIAM BLAKE

Songs of Innocence and of Experience



Meticulously researched by Blake scholar Michael Phillips, this facsimile edition includes 18 monochrome impressions from plates that have been relief etched following Blake's method, inked using a leather dauber, and wiped and printed exactly as he printed the first combined issue of the *Songs* in 1794.

The edition is limited to 33 copies including those now in the collections of:

The Morgan Library and Museum, Reference Collection
Berg Collection at New York Public Library
Victoria University Library (Toronto)
Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress
Glasgow University Library
and other institutional and private collections

Orders and information:

FLYING HORSE EDITIONS

University of Central Florida • www.flyinghorse.cah.ucf.edu/blake • 407-823-4995