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The Influence of William Blake's Work on Popular Music in the Second  
Half of the Twentieth Century

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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci na téma vypracoval samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedl jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne.....

Podpis.....

Děkuji Mgr. Davidu Livingstoneovi Ph.D, za odborné vedení práce, poskytování rad a materiálových podkladů k práci.

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# 1 Introduction

William Blake was as a poet, painter and a very controversial figure for his era. He was not accepted by the majority of the society and lived in poverty his whole life because his contemporaries did not understand him. His attitudes and the concepts expressed in his work were so visionary and futuristic for the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that it had to wait more than one hundred years to be fully appreciated by the beat poets and other counter-cultural artists, who identified themselves not only with his poetry but also with his views on sexuality, his visionary abilities, or with his fight against the established system.

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the influence of William Blake's on popular music of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, how the artists perceived him, how they understood his poetry or what concepts influenced them. In the first chapter I will attempt to describe the aspects of William Blake's life which were crucial for the musicians and which inspired them the most. In this chapter I would like to also present two works of Blake which are mentioned by the artists as the greatest sources of inspiration.

The major part of the thesis will be focused on two artists, Bob Dylan and Jim Morrison, who started their careers in the 1960s and helped spread the knowledge of William Blake. Because those two musicians were not only influenced the most by Blake but also experimented with his concepts and ideas, I have decided to put them into separate chapters which allows me to describe their relationship with the poet in great detail.

In the last part of the thesis I will briefly mention not all but the most important musicians throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who approached Blake in a certain way.

## **2 Blake's notion of the world as a source of inspiration**

In the first half of my thesis I would like to present some elements of Blake's life which were crucial for musicians in the second half of the twentieth century. My main concern here is to describe Blake's attitudes towards religion, clarify his concept of free love and how he perceived sexuality, explain the phenomenon of his visions and in the end there can be found a section which is dedicated to some of his most influential works. It is apparent that all the subchapters are dealing with the elements of Blake's life, which made people think that he went completely insane. However, those ideas were revolutionary for his era and that is one of the reasons why he is not forgotten but still recalled even at present by musicians such as Jim Morrison, Bob Dylan or Patti Smith.

### **1.1 Blake and Religion**

“We know that Blake's friends were Deists and Swedenborgians, Unitarians and Anglicans – but Blake himself can be found to be critical of aspects of each of these positions, at least from time to time<sup>1</sup>,” wrote Victor N. Paananen in *William Blake and* in fact it perfectly demonstrates Blake's way of seeing God, religion beliefs or religion in general. It can be seen in his later or earlier thoughts and work that each of these groups had a certain impact on Blake. Despite his thinking and how he understood the concept of the church and the God, he was baptized into the Church of England and was married and buried following the Anglican traditions as well.

In any case, one thing is certain – he refused to conform to the ceremonies of the established church, which was at that time the Church of England, so he was trying to find other churches, religious groups, or congregations which would have offered him beliefs and thoughts he would agree with. He was actually in contact with some of these but in the end he was forced, because of his attitude, to rely on himself. According to Jesse, Blake's religious ideas were interpreted very diversely by scholars. Their views

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<sup>1</sup> Paananen, *William Blake*,

differ mainly in what traditions Blake promoted and what traditions he followed himself. Thomas Altizer suggests that Blake is the first Christian atheist and promoter of the tradition which he later described as the death of God. Kathleen Raine or George Mills Harper on the other hand presume that Blake was attracted by the ancient-Greek philosophy such as Neo-Platonism or theosophy. Additional critics like A. L. Morton and M. H. Abrams treat him as an antinomian, radical Gnostic and others like S. Foster Damon think of him as of a mystic. Anyway, one man is mentioned more than the others – Emanuel Swedenborg.<sup>2</sup>

Swedenborg was a theologian who believed that after death, the spirit leaves the dead body and reincarnates in a different world. One of the reasons why Blake was so captivated by him was the fact that Swedenborg had the same experiences with visions as he had. Swedenborg claimed to see Jesus, to speak with ghosts or to live in the company of angels and Blake is known for having those visions as well. He attracted Blake's attention after the death of his younger brother Robert in 1787 – Blake had read some of Swedenborg's papers even before but when Robert died, he supposedly saw Robert's spirit leaving the body and clapping (which corresponds with the Swedenborg's teachings). Blake and his wife even attended a Swedenborgian meeting in London where they both participated in the founding of a brand new church – New Jerusalem Church. His interest in this sort of event is very important because it is the first time (and also the last time) he joined some kind of religious group or congregation.<sup>3</sup> A few years later, in 1790, he started to understand, that this church only preaches in different words all that he hated in the previous churches so he left it. This experience moved him so much, he decided to “never again become associated with organized religion”.<sup>4</sup>

William Blake released two writings in 1788 where he summarizes and describes his own theological and philosophical ideas which are quite nonconformist and unusual for the era he was living in – *All Religion Are One* and *There Is No Natural Religion*. They partly provide insight into his thinking and convictions. In *There Is No Natural*

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<sup>2</sup> Jesse, *William Blake's religious Vision*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ackroyd, *Blake*, 95.

<sup>4</sup> Philips, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 9.

*Religion* he stands in opposition to eighteenth century philosophy, which is based on the empirical way of seeing God using man's senses and logic. According to him, a man is not capable of perceiving naturally, so he must use his natural or bodily organs. Also no one can yearn for something what he did not perceive before because it requires special abilities far beyond the senses to do so. Thus, using the senses to perceive God limits man only to the object of sense.<sup>5</sup> In *All Religions Are One* he expands his thoughts and says that the source of all the religious knowledge is the capability of imagination, which can free man from the bounds of senses – it allows him to see the imaginative prophecy. “Our perception of our own bodies, like our perception of the universe, is the acceptance of a frozen imaginative act. Similarly, every religion is an authentic imaginative creation distorted only by whatever each prophet has permitted to limit his vision – such as the character of the physical world that he thinks he inhabits or the nature of his civilization,”<sup>6</sup> wrote Paananen about *All Religions Are One* and argues that all religions are one because they have one source – Divine Imagination.

People argue about what tradition Blake actually followed himself but this is not what was so inspiring about Blake. Artists around the world admired primarily his great effort to break the bounds of rules held for years and rebel against the system by rejecting the established religious values.

## **1.2 Blake and the Concept of Free Love**

Blake's attitudes were extraordinary, or unacceptable for the majority of the society, not only towards the religion but even in such matters as sexuality or eroticism. According to him one can break the boundaries of reason and free the imagination during the sexual act, when there are all the five senses involved and fully open. No kind of oppression should be allowed. This approach impressed the generation of counter-culture the most in the 1960s and musicians such as, to mention one for all, Jim Morrison. In this chapter I would like to explain these concepts and show how

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<sup>5</sup> Paananen, *William Blake*, 31.

<sup>6</sup> Paananen, *William Blake*, 31.



revolutionary they were in contrast with the 18<sup>th</sup> century standards for society. For this part I drew a great deal of inspiration from the thesis *Let the Devil Speak: Free Love and Sexuality in William Blake's Poetry* written by the Palacky University student Adam Petrasek.

Before I begin to describe Blake's views on sexuality, to understand Blake's unusual attitude towards sex and sexuality in general, it is necessary to present the way how the English society in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century perceived the human body, its notion of marriage and the influence of a church or religion in such matters. One of the basic kinds of sexual repression was a ban on exploring man's body – masturbation. According to Jan Marsh in the article *Sex and Sexuality in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* the society of Victorian Era always emphasized the “[...] baleful effects of masturbation, which was alleged to cause a wide range of physical and mental disorders, and venereal diseases, especially syphilis”.<sup>7</sup> People were taught to think about a self-exploring as about a sin which you will be punished for, if you commit it. In fact, everyone except for the married couples (marriage was the only way how to express sexuality) were impelled to resist the physical need of sexuality. However, even within the marriage there were boundaries which should not be crossed.<sup>8</sup>

Blake's rebellious opinions and attitudes were idiosyncratic throughout the whole range of his interests and so were his views on sexuality, which were considered very controversial for the era. It is possible to see from his drawings and lyrics that he followed with his wife, who obviously had to collaborate on this, some radical and unusual sexual theories. Blake understood sex as an act of liberty and holiness and he saw the linkage between sexuality and politics, because the egoistic repression of sexuality leads to military suppression of liberty. These ideas are evident in his works, which are “preaching the right of a free love”.<sup>9</sup> The most noticeable this fact is in his *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, where he is comparing marriage to the slavery. One

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<sup>7</sup> Marsh, Jan. “Sex & Sexuality in the 19th Century.” V&A, January 23, 2013. Accessed March 5, 2016. <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/s/sex-and-sexuality-19th-century/>

<sup>8</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, 37.

<sup>9</sup> Damon, *A Blake Dictionary*, 638.

can sense here an influence of the ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft and John Gabriel Stedman, which are focused on the freedom in expressing of the energy and sexuality.<sup>10</sup> In *Visions* Bromion labels Oothoon, after the act of rape and of losing her virginity, as a “harlot”, which gives him a control over her the same way a husband wants to control his wife.<sup>11</sup> The poem can be understood as an attack on the sexual oppression, which is a part of the oppression of the human consciousness.

Blake’s work did not meet with much popularity or understanding from his peers during his lifetime because his revolutionary thoughts and radical thinking were really difficult to accept for his era. The unconventional ideas and attitudes hidden in the poems of his had to wait to be rediscovered by the generation which identified itself with “his remarkable modernity and his imaginative force, both as a poet and artist”<sup>12</sup>, the generation of counter-culture, the generation which openly explored the body, homosexuality and free love, the generation which wanted to dispose of the old orders, the generation of 1960s. For the young people who protested against the materialism and establishment, whose values were opposed to those accepted by most of the society, were Blake’s lyrics something like mantra. Among those were a lot of artists and musicians who were directly influenced by Blake’s concepts like Jim Morrison or Bob Dylan.

### **1.3 Blake’s Visions**

Blake claimed to have visions since his early childhood and never tried to hide it. This was probably one of the main reasons why he was always considered, by the majority of his contemporaries, to be, at best, an outlandish and controversial figure or a madman at worst. Even though there were suggestions that he was a drug addict, there are no direct proves to be found which would indicate that such possibility could be valid. His visionary experiences can be seen in many of his poems and in this section I

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<sup>10</sup> Ackroyd, *Blake*, 163.

<sup>11</sup> Paananen, *William Blake*, 71.

<sup>12</sup> Keynes, *Songs of Innocence and Experience by William Blake*, 8.

will show some of the specific examples of the visions, the principles how it worked and in which aspect it affected Blake's works and followers.

It is known that Blake as a child "have had an even more insistent and compelling visual capacity than most children"<sup>13</sup>. But in contrast to the other people, this imaginative and visual capacity did not fade out or disappeared completely as he had been growing up. This ability was supposedly one of the causes, thanks to which he was able to perceive the outer world along with objects and people which were not physically there.<sup>14</sup> He had been having visions since a very young age. Ackyord in Blake mentions several occasions when he, as a child, saw a tree filled with angels where every branch was decorated by the angelic wings shining as bright as stars, when he saw a face of God at the window as a four-year-old, or when he saw Biblical prophet Ezekiel sitting calmly under the tree. All those visions were considered by his parents as figments of Blake's childish imagination or even worse as lies they had been punishing him for. He partly managed to maintain this capacity throughout his entire life and this childhood experience had such a great impact on him that he always felt like a child whose inspiration is questioned by its father<sup>15</sup>. Nevertheless, when he "began to regard himself as an artist and a poet [...], he came to regard his visions as divine favor."<sup>16</sup> This realization let him feel like he was predestined to be special and gave him a certain identity, especially in the times of despair.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Blake was sure that such gift of visions is available for everyone. The only thing one should do is to "trust and cultivate their imaginations".<sup>18</sup> Blake, however, understood the concept of imagination differently than others. For him it was the elementary "creative power of the human psyche"<sup>19</sup> which he also called, if it is used with its full power, 'the Divine Vision'.

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<sup>13</sup> Schorer, *William Blake: The Politics of Vision*, 10.

<sup>14</sup> Schorer, *William Blake: The Politics of Vision*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Ackyord, *Blake*, 28-29.

<sup>16</sup> Schorer, *William Blake: The Politics of Vision*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Ackyord, *Blake*, 29.

<sup>18</sup> De Sola Pinto, *William Blake*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> De Sola Pinto, *William Blake*, 5.

Such strong Vision enables man to see the infinity and eternity hidden beyond the material world.<sup>20</sup>

There is an innumerable amount of notes from his biographers, that he, even in his advanced age as a grown-up, suffered (he actually thought of it as of a blessing) from envisioning the angels, ghosts or dead people. All those experiences can be traced in his art both in his drawings and poems. Although his contemporaries thought of him as of a madman and of those visions as of hallucinations, Blake has never mistaken his visions with objects he perceived with senses and was aware of the fact that the visions are just the products of his imagination.<sup>21</sup> The most notable is however the moment, when the ghost of his dead brother Robert appeared to him.<sup>22</sup> Robert was Blake's "favorite brother, a boy in his teens but already capable of sketches".<sup>23</sup> They both were so close to each other that Blake claimed to "never lose touch with Robert's genius".<sup>24</sup> In one of those visions or prophetic dreams the ghost of Robert revealed to his brother a specific mechanism of illuminated printing – "the method to be used to publish his poetry and its complementary illustrations".<sup>25</sup> First writings that Blake produced this way were his tracts *There Is No Natural Religion* and *All Religions Are One*. All of this happened during 1787 and 1788 which led Blake to follow the Swedenborgian's teachings.

In spite of the fact that he is often labeled by scholars as a mystic, the usage of this term is absolutely off the mark when we speak about Blake. De Sola Pinto argues, that "the true mark of the mystic [...] is the unintelligible character of the Divine coupled with the claim to the ineffable experience of being united to this unintelligible

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<sup>20</sup> De Sola Pinto, *William Blake*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> De Sola Pinto, *William Blake*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Ackroyd, *Blake*, 104.

<sup>23</sup> Paananen, *William Blake*, 22.

<sup>24</sup> Paananen, *William Blake*, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Paananen, *William Blake*, 22.

power”.<sup>26</sup> This definition says the complete opposite of Blake’s view on the Divine. In contrary, he wanted to make it understandable “by the imaginative methods of poetry”.<sup>27</sup>

By the Blake’s concept of vision and “the doors of perception” were fascinated musicians especially in 1960s. They tried to induce this state of trance by using various drugs like LSD, hallucinogens and other psychedelic drugs. The only one who claimed to experience something what he later referred to as his Blake vision with no use of drugs was the beat poet Allen Ginsberg. He allegedly heard the voice of Blake himself, reading his poems *Ah! Sunflower*, *The Sick Rose* and *Little Girl Lost*. This was a crucial moment for Ginsberg, which affected his beliefs about his life and work. Although, there were no drugs in his body during this vision, he later tried to induce this state again to experience the feelings using some.

## **1.4 The Most Influential Works of William Blake**

In this section I would like to present some of the works written by Blake, which influenced the musicians throughout the whole second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I will not provide here the whole list of his writings but only the ones which contain his essential revolutionary ideas. I will be talking about *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. It would be also possible to talk about *The Visions of Daughters of Albion* but this piece of work is already mentioned in the previous section.

### **2.1.1 The Songs of Innocence and of Experience**

Blake published those two works separately at first. In 1789 he released *The Songs of Innocence* and *The Songs of Experience* were released four years later. They appeared together for a first time as one publication in 1794. When Blake started to work on *The Songs of Experience* he intended right from the beginning that the poems

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<sup>26</sup> De Sola Pinto, *William Blake*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> De Sola Pinto, *William Blake*, 3.

should be linked to the ones in *Innocence*. In both of these works can be found the pairs of the poems referring to each other, dealing with the same themes but from different perspectives, and sometimes even having the identical titles (*The Chimney Sweeper*, *Holy Thursday* or *Nurse's Song*).

During the work on *Innocence* Blake drew inspiration from nursery rhymes published in the eighteenth century and the books of poetry for children which he read during his own childhood. This allowed him to adopt the form of poems which can be found in such collections and use the conventional images like animals, birds, child, or lullaby not as emblems with a meaning clear right from the text, but as symbols “standing for something of which the general nature is evident but the precise range and boundaries of meaning are not readily specified”.<sup>28</sup> Nursery rhymes are usually written very simple, using regular rhythm and sound patterns and so are the poems in the collection. Blake uses it probably to emphasize the ingenuous mood of the collection which has here, in fact, the function of a disguise for the real meaning of this piece of poetry. In *Innocence* he presents the ideas from “the state of purity and childlike perspectives, which establish Blake’s ideal condition for humanity” states Timothy Vines.<sup>29</sup> He pictures the world in these poems from the point of view of the “innocent” child. It means that he refers quite often to their ability to cross the boundaries and perceive the world with their imagination, avoiding the perception with the common sense or with the ratio like the adults do. If a man is capable of such thinking, he is than able to create a non-existent but an ideal world.<sup>30</sup> Even though the world is described very idyllically in the poems, it is still the world of eighteenth-century London with all of its sorrows. Probably the greatest example is the poem *The Chimney Sweeper* where Blake shows us the problem of child labor, the inhuman conditions under what the children had to work, or their dying of cancer and of suffocation, along with the vision of the ideal life where “they run and wash in the river, and shine in the Sun”.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> De Sola Pinto, *William Blake*, 16

<sup>29</sup> Vines, *An Analysis of William Blake's Songs of Innocence and of Experience as a Response to the Collapse of Values*, 116.

<sup>30</sup> Paananen, *William Blake*, 75.

<sup>31</sup> Blake, *Songs of Innocence*, 12.

On the other hand, the poems in *Songs of Experience* are satirizing the ones they are linked to, imitating their style but bitterly comment the moral values raised by the political and social system or the institutional religion. The “Experience” represents here the child entering the world of morality and oppression, abandoning its fantasies and letting the system to build the boundaries around it. De Sola Pinto suggests that Blake must have undergone some kind of crisis in the gap between the publications. It could have been caused by the jealousy of his wife Catherine, when she found out he feels some affection for another woman or by the social and political situation in England including the mental and physical abuse of the young people.<sup>32</sup>

One of the main reasons why this collection is so popular among the musicians and the verses used to be used as the lyrics in their songs is the fact that even Blake himself intended those poems (or “Songs” as it is stated in the title) to be sung. Although Smith argues, that Blake “according to his confession, he was entirely unacquainted with the science of music”,<sup>33</sup> there are several occasions mentioned in Ackyord when Blake sang those verses in public in the company of Mathews’ family. He had reportedly a great ear for music and “his tunes were sometimes most singularly beautiful” that they “were noted down by musical professors”.<sup>34</sup>

### **2.1.2 The Marriage of Heaven and Hell**

Blake published *The Marriage* in 1793 but he started to working on it already in 1790, after he left the New Jerusalem Church and stopped to believe the Swedenborgian teachings, as a parody of Swedenborg’s visions and an attack against Swedenborg himself. A lot of scholars understand it also as a “satire on an institutional Christianity and the contemporary version of Christian morality”.<sup>35</sup> Even though Blake’s opinions

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<sup>32</sup> De Sola Pinto, *William Blake*, 18.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, *Noelkens and his Times*, 465

<sup>34</sup> Smith, *Noelkens and his times*, 465

<sup>35</sup> De Sola Pinto, *William Blake*, 24

diverged from the Swedenborg's belief in predestination and moral law, he still respected his work and according to Emery he drew inspiration from him when he was creating a universe of *The Marriage*.<sup>36</sup> Both Blake and Swedenborg agree that the point of man's living is not perceiving the world only by senses but while Swedenborg emphasizes Reason, Blake prefers Imagination.<sup>37</sup>

In *The Marriage* Blake operates with the term "Contraries". It is a concept borrowed from Jacob Boehme but it is used by Blake in his own way and a bit differently. According to him, "Without Contraries is no progression" and here are those two major contraries Reason (which he recognizes as the "'Good" of conventional religious teachings"<sup>38</sup>) and Energy (which he recognizes as the "Evil") presented as opposites, but both good for life. He argues that none of them should be dominating - it is necessary for the life of human to keep them well balanced.<sup>39</sup> He thought of "evil" as of an energy coming from the original thought, which the institutional religion cannot stand, and of "good" as of the obedience to the moral law. Blake also disagrees with a dogma of the eighteenth century that "God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies". Thus, Blake's purpose in *The Marriage* is to restore the Energy in the world, where most of the Christians chose to follow the Reason and its "fixed world of fallen perception and of rigid moral categories".<sup>40</sup>

### **3 Bob Dylan and Blake**

Bob Dylan is the first 1960's musician, whose poetry I will be analyzing and in which I will be looking for the indications that there really was some influence of Blake's works and ideas. Dylan never really liked to be labeled. Whether people talked about him as of a poet or of a singer, he did not care. He just wanted to play his music

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<sup>36</sup> Emery, introduction, 8

<sup>37</sup> Ficová, afterword, 70

<sup>38</sup> De Sola Pinto, *William Blake*, 24

<sup>39</sup> De Sola Pinto, *William Blake*, 24

<sup>40</sup> Paananen, *William Blake*, 55.



and compose new songs. All the other things were irrelevant for him. When he was asked this question whether he feels more like a singer or like a poet during the press conference in San Francisco in 1965, he simply responded: “I think of myself more as a song and dance man, y'know” (transcription of the conference in Rolling Stone magazine’s website). In spite of all the things he said or thought of himself, he was in 1997 nominated for the Nobel Prize for literature, which makes him in a certain way a poet but he would probably never admit it. In this chapter I would like to describe the journey which led Dylan to Blake, to his works and ideas, in which aspects it affected him and finally prove the claims with some specific examples of lyrics written by both of these poets.

Dylan admired the Beats and their poetry since his high school years. Robert Shelton states that “the beat poets were working alongside the folk-guitar pickers. Where the romanticism [of the beats] left off, the new romanticism of the city folk singer took over”.<sup>41</sup> For Dylan the most important and the most influential of these poets was Allen Ginsberg. Dylan discovered his works, and the most notably his collection *Howl*, when he was eighteen. Ginsberg, on the other hand, listened to Dylan’s early recordings and the same way Dylan praised him as a poet, Ginsberg admired him as a musician and later as a poet as well. They both met in New York in 1963 and became friends for a lifetime. Ginsberg is known for its obsession with Blake and Blake’s vision, which he supposedly experienced once. He was also the first, who introduced Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and other writings to Dylan.<sup>42</sup> Their paths have crossed during their careers for many times. Ginsberg for example followed Dylan on his tours around the world every time there was such an opportunity or made an appearance in Dylan’s music video for *Subterranean Homesick Blues*. Among the others, the most relevant to mention in this paper is probably the studio recording session in 1971 which both of these artists participated in with Ginsberg on harmonium and vocals and Dylan on guitar. Apart from some of Ginsberg’s original songs, which were partly co-written by Dylan, this “band” also performed some of Blake’s poetry set to music – *Nurse’s Song*, *A Dream* and *The Tyger*.

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<sup>41</sup> Shelton, *No Direction Home*, 91

<sup>42</sup> Whittaker and Connolly and Clark, 210

As I stated above, Dylan learnt about Blake from Ginsberg after they met around 1964. Following this crucial encounter he released an album called *Bringing It All Back Home* which corresponded a lot with Blake's verses, thoughts or themes. The purpose of this part is to demonstrate the connection, whether it was made consciously or unconsciously, between the works of Dylan and Blake. Stelzig claims that the major themes of poetry, which are shared by both of them, concern mostly the moral and religious matters which are not approached in the traditional manner. They made a great effort to avoid the dogmatic point of view of their times and offered some other, unusual perspectives<sup>43</sup>. The ideas of their poetry might be summarized in specific terms of "human freedom, dignity, and integrity of experience, love and compassion as opposed to injustice, evil, inhumanity, hypocrisy, and indifference"<sup>44</sup>. Dylan's way of thinking about the music and about writing the lyrics could also lead us back to the period of the Romantic authors. Dylan stated in *Eleven Outlined Epitaphs* that his songs are "unfolding his innermost self"<sup>45</sup> and this idea is actually not that far from the thinking of Romantics, who considered art as one way how to reveal the true self. Dylan similarly to Blake considered life a mysterious gift which should be celebrated because one may "attain salvation through achieving the fullness of life" but "we are damned if our vitality is seriously impaired or denied"<sup>46</sup>. This "lifelessness" may be caused, according to Blake, by the oppression of human freedom by church or any other institution. As Stelzig further suggests, Dylan would agree with Blake that God, in the general sense, "is only a cosmic, mythic projection of our profoundest self"<sup>47</sup> and, in the Romantic sense, that God can never be more than a Man and the other way round, Man can never be more than God because God is only "the fulfillment of human potentialities through the exercise of imagination"<sup>48</sup>. It is necessary to mention that both authors had one

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<sup>43</sup> Stelzig, *Bob Dylan's Career as a Visionary and Romantic*, 6

<sup>44</sup> Stelzig, *Bob Dylan's Career as a Visionary and Romantic*, 7

<sup>45</sup> Stelzig, *Bob Dylan's Career as a Visionary and Romantic*, 7

<sup>46</sup> Stelzig, *Bob Dylan's Career as a Visionary and Romantic*, 8

<sup>47</sup> Stelzig, *Bob Dylan's Career as a Visionary and Romantic*, 8

<sup>48</sup> Stelzig, *Bob Dylan's Career as a Visionary and Romantic*, 8

common source of the inspiration – The Bible and despite the fact that they interpreted it in their own way, the spirit of it was always present in their work.<sup>49</sup>

I have chosen for the particular demonstration of the resemblances three Dylan's songs which might exhibit the impact of Blake the most. The songs are *Mr. Tambourine Man*, *Gates of Eden* and *Every Grain of Sand* and I will not be examining the themes and ideas of the songs which might be common for both poets but also the words which are used to deliver the message, their structure and arrangement.

## 1.5 Mr. Tambourine Man

Before the comparison it is necessary to mention that there are also some elements shared by the poets, which do not concern only the poems themselves. Dylan was writing his lyrics during the political revolution in the USA in the 1960s when the society dealt with such things like the woman's movement, civil rights movement or a movement focused on the rights of homosexuals. Blake on the other hand worked on his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* when the political upheaval in France later known as the French Revolution was about to happen. *Mr. Tambourine Man* is Dylan's song released in 1965 on the album *Bring It All Back Home*. The surreal mood of the song might be an evidence which proves that Dylan already in that time read Blake and was influenced by his concepts of visions and imagination. In the song Dylan deals with "a progressional journey from the public world to an understanding of his own individual consciousness"<sup>50</sup>, which reflects the development in the thinking of young people in the society. Most of them wanted to express their "wild and unexplained emotions"<sup>51</sup>, turned away from the group and started to focus on the individual, exploring their own consciousness. The message of *Mr. Tambourine Man* is, thus, closely related to Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.

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<sup>49</sup> Stelzig, *Bob Dylan's Career as a Visionary and Romantic*, 11

<sup>50</sup> Nielsen, Mary. "Hey! Mr. William Blake!" Duke University, October 26, 2011. Accessed March 22, 2016. <https://sites.duke.edu/jdharris2/2011/10/26/hey-mr-william-blake/>

<sup>51</sup> Nielsen, Mary. "Hey! Mr. William Blake!" Duke University, October 26, 2011. Accessed March 22, 2016. <https://sites.duke.edu/jdharris2/2011/10/26/hey-mr-william-blake/>

There are several facts which prove that Dylan really drew some inspiration from this two-piece collection during the writing of *Mr. Tambourine Man*. The song manifests a great resemblance with the *Introduction* of *Songs of Innocence*. For example, Dylan starts the song with the line “Hey ! Mr. Tambourine man, play a song for me”<sup>52</sup>, which corresponds with Blake’s narrator in *Introduction* who is confronted by the child sitting on the cloud saying “Pipe a song about a Lamb [...] Piper pipe that song again”<sup>53</sup>. From such perspective it seems that Dylan as a speaker declares himself to be the child asking for some tune from the Piper/Mr. Tambourine man. The speaker of *Mr. Tambourine Man* is trying to find his true self with some help from that Tambourine man who can be thought of as Blake himself. According to Nielsen, Dylan here similarly to Blake “explores the very truth of mystery and touches on the transcendence of art and music”<sup>54</sup>. Another thing which may lead one think that Dylan was inspired by the verses of *Introduction* is the fact that the song is in the track list placed as a first, intended to open the B-side of the album the same way *Introduction* opens the *Songs of Innocence*.

As Stelzig argues, this *Mr. Tambourine Man* only “reveals Dylan becoming more conscious of his gifts as a visionary, for it is an ode to his imagination”<sup>55</sup>. From this point of view the song could be viewed as a celebration of drugs referring to the 1960s hippie and LSD culture (even though Dylan’s first experience with LSD dates few months later after the release). However such approach might be misleading and inadequate when one wants to understand the full meaning of the lyrics<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> Dylan, *Lyrics: 1962-2001*, 184

<sup>53</sup> Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, 4

<sup>54</sup> Nielsen, Mary. “Hey! Mr. William Blake!” Duke University, October 26, 2011. Accessed March 22, 2016. <https://sites.duke.edu/jdharris2/2011/10/26/hey-mr-william-blake/>

<sup>55</sup> Stelzig, *Bob Dylan’s Career as a Visionary and Romantic*, 19

<sup>56</sup> Dalton, *Kdo je ten chlap? Hledáni Boba Dylana*, 108

## 1.6 The Gates of Eden

Another Dylan song whose lyrics are evidently and demonstrably influenced by Blake is a song *Gates of Eden* released in 1965 on the album *Bringing It All Back Home*. It can be seen, that this is already a second song from that album which was somehow inspired by Blake's verses. Hilton argues, that this sudden interest in Blake's work was caused by "a rapidly developing friendship with Allen Ginsberg that began in early 1964"<sup>57</sup>. Especially the collection *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* had a great impact on him and on the main ideas of his lyrics in that time. In the song he refers to the major concept of this collection, the oppositeness of two different worlds - of Innocence (the Eden) and Experience (the real outside world). Whereas the real world is full of misery, despair and lifelessness, the Eden is displayed here as "what the condition of an unfallen humanity might be: everything there is simply the opposite of what prevails in the kingdoms of Experience"<sup>58</sup>. Gray further adds that Dylan is only trying to balance the 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"<sup>59</sup>. I will demonstrate the connection between Dylan's song and Blake's writings on the first stanza of *Gates of Eden*.

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.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Hilton, *Waxed in Blake*, 110

<sup>58</sup> Stelzig, *Bob Dylan's Career as a Visionary and Romantic*, 20

<sup>59</sup> Gray, *Song and Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan*, 61

<sup>60</sup> Dylan, *Lyrics: 1962-2001*, 186

It is important to mention that *The Bob Dylan Scrapbook*, which was written by Robert Santelli and released in 2005, includes the manuscript of *Gates of Eden* with some changes in lyrics. This earlier version of *Gates* proves the linkage between the poets even more. The third line which made it to the album “Upon four-legged forest clouds”<sup>61</sup> slightly differs from the one in the manuscript where is the word “four-legged” replaced by “fungus”<sup>62</sup> and when it is read together as a whole with “the truth just twists”, “glow waxed in black”, “cowboy angel” and the setting somewhere “neath the trees”<sup>63</sup> it might evoke Blake’s *A Memorable Fancy*, a part of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. The speaker there finds himself accompanied by “An Angel” with whom he sits “in the twisted root of an oak” and who is “suspended in a fungus”, the speaker then spots “the sun, black but shining”<sup>64</sup> - each of these lines clearly shows some connection between the emphasized excerpts of Dylan’s lyrics.<sup>65</sup>

Shelton also believes that Dylan drew some inspiration for the song from the series of emblems called *The Gates of Paradise*, which present the journey man experience from the cradle to the grave. Even though the title of Dylan’s song seems obviously derived from Blake’s series, Shelton does not state any specific reasons to support the claim why she thinks of it this way.

## 1.7 Every Grain of Sand

The last Dylan song which evinces the marks of the direct influence of the poetry of William Blake the most during its writing is *Every Grain of Sand* released in 1981 on the album *Shot of Love*. This era of Dylan’s life is mostly known as his Christian period. It is evident right from the title that he refers to the Blake’s poem *Auguries of Innocence*. Dylan borrowed from him a concept which was in *Auguries*

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<sup>61</sup> Dylan, *Lyrics: 1962-2001*, 186

<sup>62</sup> Santelli, *The Bob Dylan’s Scrapbook, 1956-1966*, 41

<sup>63</sup> Dylan, *Lyrics: 1962-2001*, 186

<sup>64</sup> Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 17-18

<sup>65</sup> Hilton, *Waxed in Blake*, 110

presented by “a pair of images intended to contain the universal within the particular”<sup>66</sup>. The opening lines are the most significant:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour.<sup>67</sup>

Dylan took this idea but re-arranged it other way round. Unlike Blake, he sings about how he feels the presence of “The Master”, which is probably Jesus, “in every leaf that trembles, in every grain of sand”<sup>68</sup>. The crucial thing here is Dylan’s notion of himself within the world. He is “placing his afflicted, penitent self amid the minutiae of existence on every level”<sup>69</sup> so he considers himself on the equally important level with every leaf, every hair or every grain of sand.<sup>70</sup>

As it can be seen, the influence of Blake’s works on Dylan’s thinking, on the way how he wrote his lyrics, or on his religious beliefs is not that negligible. Despite the fact that I did not find, during my research, any Dylan statement referring explicitly and directly to Blake, it is possible to presume that he actually read some of his works. There are, as I stated before, several facts which prove this claim and I tried to do my best to demonstrate the connection between poets.

#### **4 Jim Morrison and The Doors**

In this chapter I would like to describe Morrison’s poetry in comparison with Blake’s works. This task will not be as complicated as in the case of Dylan because,

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<sup>66</sup> Bell, *Time Out of Mind*, 241

<sup>67</sup> Dylan, *Lyrics: 1962-2001*, 635

<sup>68</sup> Dylan, *Lyrics: 1962-2001*, 635

<sup>69</sup> Bell, *Time Out of Mind*, 241

<sup>70</sup> Bell, *Time Out of Mind*, 241

unlike him, Morrison confessed publicly many times in interviews to his affection for Blake talking about him, quoting his works or Blake himself with ease. Even though Morrison regarded himself a poet, the overwhelming majority of experts and critics has never thought of him this way. Morrison and Blake were both counter-culturalists in a certain way and shared a lot of elements which determined the way of their thinking and the way they were writing their poetry. Morrison drew some inspiration mainly from Blake's ideas of visions, breaking the boundaries to release the full power of the imagination and by his concept of erotic mysticism. All the resemblances of, more or less direct, influences between the works of both poets will be demonstrated not only on the examples of Morrison's lyrics for The Doors but also on the poems from the collections which Morrison released with no intention of using them as lyrics for The Doors' songs.

Morrison heard about Blake for the first time during his university studies at UCLA. "The young student who is already well-read in Nietzsche and Freud becomes so enthusiastic about the Romantic visionary poet"<sup>71</sup>. Tristanne Conolly argues that Morrison was during his university years interested especially in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake's visions and intoxication and as an evidence he puts forward a statement by Fredrick Burwick, an instructor who taught Morrison: "He showed me a paper on Hieronymus Bosch that he had written for a community college in Florida and wanted to know whether he might submit a similar paper on Blake. His Bosch paper focused on the visionary/hallucinatory experience of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. I agreed that a similar approach to Blake's illuminated works was possible. [...] Jim asked me if Blake did drugs. I told him that I didn't think so"<sup>72</sup>. The ideas presented by Blake in this writing had such a great impact on him that when he was founding, together with the other musicians, his band The Doors, he chose the name of the band referring to the quote from Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "If the doors of perception cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite"<sup>73</sup>. Most people

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<sup>71</sup> Firchow and Real, *The Perennial Satirist*, 123

<sup>72</sup> Conolly, Tristanne. "How Much Did Jim Morrison Know about William Blake?" Zoamorphosis, March 20, 2011. Accessed April 4, 2016. <http://zoamorphosis.com/2011/03/how-much-did-jim-morrison-know-about-william-blake/>

<sup>73</sup> Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 14



however suggested that the name of the band is derived from the phrase “the doors of perception” which was in 1960s popular not because of Blake but because of Aldous Huxley. He is known for reading Blake, adopting his concepts of visionary experiences and popularizing them among the rebellious youth which agreed and celebrated the fact which Huxley emphasize – one may experience such visionary states using drugs like mescaline or LSD. That is also one of the reasons why many Morrison’s biographies (for example Sugerma’s *No One Here Gets out Alive*) speak about Morrison’s poetry and lyrics only as about figments of the imagination of a drug addict and LSD user. There is no doubt that drugs affected, to some degree, Morrison’s visionary poetry, more important is however the poetic tradition from which he drew inspiration throughout the lifetime including Rimbaud, Wordsworth, Coleridge and most importantly Blake. Such approach, similar to Sugerma, to his poetry might disparage “its artistic integrity”<sup>74</sup> and even Morrison himself.

Erkel argues that Blake was for Morrison the “greatest poetical influence”<sup>75</sup>. Blake’s works helped him understand the human form, the potential it possesses and inspired him “to categorize humanity into two parts: a state where people live within a system of order that produces how they perceive their identities and reality” and in an opposition to this he puts a state in which “people can live free from the confines of a fixed existence and begin to see the infinite in all things”<sup>76</sup>. Morrison’s quote, when he was asked to explain his band’s name in an interview, confirms this conjecture: “there are things that are known and things that are unknown and in between are The Doors”<sup>77</sup>. It is apparent that the statement is almost identical with Blake’s quote from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. The first state which I mentioned Morrison describes, similarly to Blake, in the terms of perceiving the world using our five senses. These senses usually create boundaries or frameworks that might limit us.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand,

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<sup>74</sup> Erkel, *The Poet behind the Doors: Jim Morrison’s Poetry and the 1960’s Countercultural Movement*, 10

<sup>75</sup> Erkel, *The Poet behind the Doors: Jim Morrison’s Poetry and the 1960’s Countercultural Movement*, 10

<sup>76</sup> Erkel, *The Poet behind the Doors: Jim Morrison’s Poetry and the 1960’s Countercultural Movement*, 11

<sup>77</sup> Prochnicky and Riordian, *Break on Through: The Life and Death of Jim Morrison*, 68

<sup>78</sup> Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of 1790’s*, 183

the world “behind the doors” allows “us to experience unrealized opportunities through our imagination”<sup>79</sup>. Morrison celebrates in his poetry the greatness of imagination the same way Blake did in his own writings. Both poets describe with a great precision what can be and what cannot be approached through the imagination. Basically, they argue that when man separates himself from the elements which might somehow limit the perception of the everyday reality, he frees his imagination and will be able to attain anything because “nothing stops our imagination from accomplishing what it can accomplish”<sup>80</sup>. This Blake-like way of understanding the outer world is demonstrated by Morrison in the poem *Power* from the collection *Wilderness: The Lost Writings of Jim Morrison*. He describes here the possible potential of his human form and the “relationship to the exterior world”<sup>81</sup>. I have chosen for the demonstration the middle part of the poem.

I can make myself invisible or small.

I can become gigantic & reach the  
farthest things. I can change  
the course of nature.

I can place myself anywhere in  
space or time.

I can summon the dead.

I can perceive events on other worlds,  
in my deepest inner mind,  
& in the minds of others.<sup>82</sup>

Morrison in the poem states that he can be anything. Whether “small” or “gigantic” it does not matter because it is still him - what he can become or what he is able to

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<sup>79</sup> Erkel, *The Poet behind the Doors: Jim Morrison's Poetry and the 1960's Countercultural Movement*, 13

<sup>80</sup> Erkel, *The Poet behind the Doors: Jim Morrison's Poetry and the 1960's Countercultural Movement*, 14

<sup>81</sup> Erkel, *The Poet behind the Doors: Jim Morrison's Poetry and the 1960's Countercultural Movement*, 17

<sup>82</sup> Morrison, *Wilderness: The Lost Writings of Jim Morrison*, 13

achieve, when he shatter the limitations of reason and walk through “the door”. Morrison also used these Blakean images of breaking the boundaries of imagination or infinitely perceiving the reality beyond the five senses in the opening lines of The Doors’ song *Moonlight Drive* released in 1967 on the album *Strange Days*:

Let's swim to the moon, uh huh  
Let's climb through the tide  
Penetrate the evenin' that the  
City sleeps to hide<sup>83</sup>

It would be appropriate to mention that Morrison here expresses his attitude not only with the meaning of the words but also with their form and arrangement. He intentionally switched the verbs in the first two lines (it is more likely that you will swim “through the tide” and climb “to the moon” than the other way round) to manifest the rejection of the fixed rules which might limit him in some way.

The more Morrison’s visionary poetry one reads the more obvious it appeared to ask one question: Did Morrison acquire such visionary capabilities because of his huge drug addiction? There is no evidence or indication in any book I examined that Blake ever took drugs. He was according to Grinspoon capable of entering such states of deep consciousness only by using the power of his strong will and imagination. On the other hand, his followers like Huxley or the beat poets who admired him, among which we might find even Morrison himself, tried to induce such state using psychedelic or hallucinogenic drugs like LSD or mescaline. However the only one who succeeded to experience the vision in a Blakean sense with no use of such drugs, which in some way support imagination, was Allen Ginsberg (see Chapter 2). Even though the Morrison’s biographers or critics like Sugerma and Fowlie suggest that the visions were caused predominantly by the substances, Erkel believes that the drug addiction took only a minor part in his visions in comparison with his imagination – he argues that Morrison identified “his reality and his identity as infinite”<sup>84</sup> by nature. This is certainly an

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<sup>83</sup> Sugerma, *The Doors: Complete Lyrics*, 76.

<sup>84</sup> Erkel, *The Poet behind the Doors: Jim Morrison’s Poetry and the 1960’s Countercultural Movement*, 19

interesting point of view but he does not explain anywhere, why does he hold such opinion. The facts that Morrison was a drug user for a relatively long time and that I did not find during the research any evidence which would support Erkel's claim make me think that this assumption is not really valid. Nonetheless, one thing is for sure – one of the major goals of Morrison's poetry is to "move readers beyond "The Doors," allowing their identities and realities to be free from any restrictions or boundaries"<sup>85</sup> which is in a certain point in accordance with Blake's idea that the gift of visions is available for everybody if the imagination is practiced regularly.

It is possible that Morrison found himself in Blake and in his criticism of the institutionalized notion of the world. According to Blake, the institutions only creates the rules and the rest of the society is expected to follow them. Similarly to him, Morrison expressed his attitudes towards freedom and the boundaries created by institutions in the interview with Lizzie James which was released in Creem magazine in 1981: "[...] teachers, religious leaders-even friends, or so-called friends – take over where the parents leave off. They demand that we feel only the feelings they want and expect from us. They demand all the time that we perform feelings for them. We're like actors-turned loose in this world to wander in search of a phantom ... endlessly searching for a half-forgotten shadow of our lost reality [...] When others demand that we become the people they want us to be, they force us to destroy the person we really are [...] Society, parents; they refuse to allow you to keep the freedom you are born with"<sup>86</sup>.

In contrast with Dylan Morrison spoke of Blake on public quite often. He was quoting him, mentioning him explicitly and usually exhibited at least an elementary knowledge of the ideas of Blake's two works – *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. For example in the interview with John Carpenter for the Los Angeles Free Press he simply utters for no specific reason or

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<sup>85</sup> Erkel, *The Poet behind the Doors: Jim Morrison's Poetry and the 1960's Countercultural Movement*, 23

<sup>86</sup> Morrison, Jim. "Ten Years Gone." Interviewed by Lizzie James. *Creem Magazine*, July 1, 1981, <http://archives.waiting-forthe-sun.net/Pages/Interviews/JimInterviews/TenYearsGone.html>

wider context “Opposition is true friendship, ha!”<sup>87</sup> which would perfectly describe the major idea of *The Songs of Innocence and Experience*. However, Morrison was willing to speak about his relationship with Blake and his influence the most in the interview with Lizzie James. When Morrison is asked about the apocalyptic mood of their debut album *The Doors* released in 1967, it is possible to sense the presence of Blake in his response (he even mentioned him): “It used to seem possible to generate a movement – people rising up and joining together in mass protest – refusing to be repressed any longer – like, they'd all put their strength together to break what Blake calls "the mind-forged manacles"<sup>88</sup>. In the next part of the same interview, when James wonders how one can break the boundaries, he starts to explain it through the Blake’s ideas of the sexual mysticism: “By listening to your body – opening up your senses. Blake said that the body as the soul's prison unless the five senses are fully developed and open. He considered the senses the "windows of the soul." When sex involves all the senses intensely, it can be like a mystical experience...”<sup>89</sup> This proves that Morrison not only read Blake but also adopted some of his fundamental ideas which are then later reflected in his lyrics.

It can be seen that Morrison shared with Blake, apart from his ideas, also his vocabulary and concepts. This fact is clearly manifested in Morrison’s collection of poems published during his lifetime which is called *The Lords and the New Creatures*. For example the lines from the page 36:

When men conceived buildings,  
and closed themselves in chambers,  
first trees and caves<sup>90</sup>

They show great resemblance with Blake’s lines from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* following the famous quote about “the doors of perception”: “For man has closed

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<sup>87</sup> Hopkins, *The Lizard King: The Essential Jim Morrison*, 205

<sup>88</sup> Hopkins, *The Lizard King: The Essential Jim Morrison*, 279

<sup>89</sup> Hopkins, *The Lizard King: The Essential Jim Morrison*, 281

<sup>90</sup> Morrison, *The Lords and the New Creatures*, 36

himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern"<sup>91</sup> However, there is only one noted occasion when the influence of Blake on The Doors' music and primarily the lyrics is direct. In the song *End of the Night*, released on The Doors' debut album, Morrison explicitly quotes the final lines from Blake's *Auguries of Innocence*:

Some are born to sweet delight  
Some are born to sweet delight  
Some are born to endless night<sup>92</sup>

Morrison has never stated any specific reasons why he has put those lines in the song. It is possible to think of them as of a homage paid to his visionary idol, however, there is definitely some more meaning behind those borrowed lyrics. One may argue that Morrison wanted to emphasize the contrast between the "sweet delight" and the "endless night" similarly like Blake shows the differences between the innocence and experience, putting a stress on the duality.

Morrison admired Blake and his work influenced Morrison's entire life and the notion of the world. As I demonstrated above, a lot of Blake's concepts penetrated Morrison's thinking and it is possible to find references in the lyrics written for his band The Doors or for his collections of poems. Although Morrison's poetry can be interpreted in various ways, it is still possible to sense the spirit of Blake.

## **5 Blake in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

Whereas in the previous chapters I specifically described the relationship towards Blake held by Dylan and Morrison, who were probably, among the other musicians in the second half of the twentieth century, influenced the most by his works, in this part I would like to present the most relevant songwriters or bands on whom the impact of Blake's poetry was not as significant as in the case of Dylan and Morrison but they used Blake's verses as lyrics, his paintings as album covers or demonstrated the

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<sup>91</sup> Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 14

<sup>92</sup> Sugeran, *The Doors: Complete Lyrics*, 32

connection between them and Blake in some other way. However I will not be taking such a deep insight into the poetry and lyrics of those artists. I will try to demonstrate in the next paragraphs the realization of Blake's poetry in their music and then I will use the quotations from the interviews those musicians gave, if there are some, to explain the connection. The goal of this chapter is to sum up the occurrence of Blake in the popular music in the next three decades of 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

## **1.8 The Fugs**

This psychedelic folk band formed in 1960s set into music, among the other poems like *Dover Beach* by Matthew Arnold, also some of Blake's famous poems. It is possible to find a song on their debut album *First Album* released in 1965 which is called *Ah, Sunflower!*. As the title might indicate, the band borrowed Blake's poem from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and used it as lyrics for the song. Later The Fugs did the same thing on the album *Golden Filth* from 1969. Here they set to music poem *How Sweet I Roam'd from Field to Field* published by Blake in the collection *Poetical Sketches*. The Fugs are often considered to be a part of the countercultural movement which was to some degree influenced by Blake, and they certainly were. However, their fight for liberty and equality was different. More than the others, they adopted Blake's sense of irony and humor which they applied frequently in their own lyrics.

## **1.9 Van Morrison**

Van Morrison has never been hiding his passion for Romantic poetry and the authors like Wordsworth, Coleridge or Blake. Once he even compared himself to Blake claiming that the same connection Blake felt between himself and London, he experiences in a relation with East Belfast. Morrison was amazed by Blake's idea of transcendence which affected the most his album *Veedon Fleece*. He spoke of his relationship with Blake in an interview with Sean O'Hagan for *New Musical Express* magazine in 1989: "Blake I've read since school. He was a big influence. He seemed to

perceive, in a direct way, some form of reality beyond, outside the ordinary one. I used to sing *Jerusalem* at Sunday school not knowing it was his song. He could put the indescribable into words”<sup>93</sup>.

As it can be seen, Morrison thinks of Blake not as of a poet or a lyricist, but as of a songwriter which makes Morrison quite unusual for his era. When most of the pop musicians admire artists like Elvis Presley or The Beatles and, thus, the influence of those interprets is highly significant in their music, Morrison on the other hand “identifies more with Blake than Elvis Presley or The Beatles”<sup>94</sup>. It is apparent that Morrison liked to point out or emphasize his literary heroes, Blake above all, in his songs. For example in the song *Let the Slave* from the album *A Sense of Wonder* released in 1984 he quotes a long passage from Blake’s poem *The Price of Experience* which was originally published as a part of *The Four Zoas*. Morrison also explicitly mentions Blake in several of his songs throughout of his whole career. Blake is mentioned along with other authors who had some impact on Morrison in *Summertime in England*, *Golden Autumn Day*, *When Will I Ever Learn to Live in God* or *You Don’t Pull No Punches, But You Don’t Push the River*. As it can be seen, Morrison approach Blake in a different way in contrast how Dylan or The Doors did. Even though there is an innumerable amount of direct references to Blake in his music, he, as Hunter suggests, works in Morrison’s songs only “as inspirational example rather than as fully absorbed influences”<sup>95</sup>.

## 1.10 Patti Smith

Smith often describes Blake as somebody who had the biggest influence on her ever during her lifetime. As she stated in an interview with David Fricke for Rolling Stone magazine, she has been reading Blake’s collection *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* since she was around 8 years old. She later describes her beginnings with

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<sup>93</sup> Hage, *The Words and Music of Van Morrison*, 74

<sup>94</sup> Hage, *The Words and Music of Van Morrison*, 75

<sup>95</sup> Hunter, *The Poet in Van Morrison*, 172



Blake for The Guardian: “I thought he was a children's writer, and in a way he was making me aware of the life of a chimney sweep. But then I grew with Blake, with his sense of spirituality, of social activism, his visionary experience, his compassion for the flaws in human nature and his own nature”<sup>96</sup>. Smith references to Blake throughout her whole career but according to what she said in interviews, she seems more influenced by him in terms of the way how he lived his life than in terms of the verses he wrote or the ideas presented in his poems.

The most direct connection can be seen in her song called *My Blakean Year* in which she describes her life and “the pursuit of faith, spiritual confidence, and garnering acceptance”<sup>97</sup>. Smith stated that she wrote the song when she was feeling low and unappreciated by the outer world. In this difficult time she remembered Blake and how he was accepted by his contemporaries. According to her, he was a man “who had visions as a child, who was ridiculed and even beaten for having these visions. But he maintained those visions his whole life. Wherever they came from, whether he animated them from within or they were from God, William Blake held on to his vision. He never got a break in his life. His work never sold. He lived in poverty. When he spoke out, he nearly lost his life. [...]What I learned from William Blake is, don't give up. And don't expect anything”<sup>98</sup>. Smith also often mentions Blake’s poem *The Tyger* as the best description of her life full of “fearful symmetry” and sings it at most of her shows. Smith’s passion for Blake is so deep that she decided to write a preface and rearrange one issue of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.

## 1.11 U2

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<sup>96</sup> Vulliamy, Ed. “Some Give a Song. Some Give a Life...” The Guardian. June 3, 2005. Accessed April 16, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2005/jun/03/meltdownfestival2005.meltdownfestival>

<sup>97</sup> Wendell, *Patti Smith: America's Punk Rock Rhapsodist*, 126

<sup>98</sup> Fricke, David. “Patti Smith on Blake and Bush.” Rolling Stone. May 5, 2004. Accessed April 16, 2016. <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/patti-smith-on-blake-and-bush-20040505>

It might seem improbable that Bono, as a main lyricist of the band, has ever had Blake on his mind during the process of writing. However it proved to be true when the band released in 2004 a digital box set which contained the complete discography with some bonus tracks. The version of their groundbreaking album *The Joshua Tree* includes previously unreleased track called *Beautiful Ghosts* which was intended to open the whole album but it was cut before the release. While the rest of the band plays some melancholic instrumental jam, Bono here recites *Introduction* from Blake's *Songs of Experience*. When I realized that there really might be some connection between U2 and Blake, I started to examine their discography and found some interesting facts worth mentioning which might prove it.

Even though they never really spoke of Blake in public, Bono's obsession with *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* is more and more apparent. There are some themes which are shared by both U2 and Blake. In this collection Blake discovers and deals with the themes of childhood innocence, social injustice, poverty or conflicting aspects of religion are in a broad sense identical to those Bono, who often calls in his songs for political and social change, sings about. Those suggestions whether Blake somehow influenced the band and Bono himself or not were confirmed in 2014 when they released an album borrowing a title from the first part of Blake's two-piece collection – *Songs of Innocence*. Though Bono said in the conversation with Dave Fanning that the recording is “all about first journeys”<sup>99</sup>, which might evoke Blake's ideas from his collection of the same title, the content of the album is not much deeply inspired by Blake. In fact, the influence can be recognized only in the evident similarity of general concepts of Blake's poems and the themes Bono sings about. The band announced early this year that they will be releasing new album called *Songs of Experience*, title is obviously referring to Blake, which should follow its predecessor. Whether the songs on the album will be somehow connected or in contrary with the *Songs of Innocence* is unknown.

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<sup>99</sup> Vox, Bono. “This Is About the Songs.” Interviewed by Dave Fanning. RTE, September 21, 2014, <https://soundcloud.com/u2community/bono-with-dave-fanning-sunday-21st-sept-2014>

U2 already put two albums in a contrary in 1980's, when the influence of Blake on their lyrics was the strongest. On the cover of their debut album *Boy* was a black-and-white photo of a young boy standing in front of white background which completes the idea of purity. Even the songs deal with themes like adolescence or childlike notion of the world. In contrary they released an album *War* which features on the cover a photo of the same young boy with soiled skin and hands thrown up who looks tired, desperate and probably confronted by experience in Blakean sense. The themes of the songs from the album like social criticism, realization that the world is a cruel place full of injustice or calling for political change are more mature but also darker in the same time, which might be caused by the experience which interrupted and terminated the joyful state of childhood. Even though this suggestion has never been confirmed, it seems to me like the one of the most possible explanations.

## 1.12 Blake and Metal

As I show further, Blake's impact on the musical scene was so intense that not only pop/rock artists read him and let themselves inspire in his verses but the metal, experimental or progressive groups approached him in a certain way as well.

Some memorable mentions are for example a progressive rock band Mastermind which released song called *Tiger! Tiger!* which used Blake's poem *The Tyger* as lyrics, an electronic black metal band from Norway Ulver released in 1997 album called *Themes from William Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* where can be found the musical background, composed by them, for Blake's lyrics, or Bruce Dickinson. A singer from the heavy metal band Iron Maiden exhibits great passion for poetry. For one of his solo album *The Chemical Wedding*, released in 1998, he drew some inspiration from Blake. From the cover which features Blake's painting *The Ghost of a Flea* to his own version of Jerusalem, the album is full of references to Blake. Roberts argues that the album "contains a mixture of Blakean themes, and songs about Urizen and Jerusalem"<sup>100</sup>. It can be seen that Blake was popular not only among the countercultural

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<sup>100</sup> Roberts, *William Blake's Poetry*, 100

musicians of 1960s but also the bands of 1970's playing progressive kinds of rock and metal grew some fond of him. One of them was London-based band Emerson, Lake and Palmer. They included on their fourth studio album a song called *Jerusalem* which is in fact a cover of Charles H.H. Parry's hymn. The lyrics which Parry used for the hymn are from a poem written by Blake *And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time*. Parry composed the song in 1917 and through the time it became almost equivalent to the national anthem. It is played on the sport events or during the royal weddings. *Jerusalem* was covered several times in the past and even though the words stays the same, the meaning differs as the context changes. For example when the English band Test Dept released their version on the album *Pax Britannica* in 1990, the song was understood as a political protest. The facts that the hymn is broken into two parts interrupted by the voice of Margaret Thatcher and that the song was released a month before the Poll Tax riots only confirm this claim.

The last mention will be the progressive rock band Atomic Rooster. In fact, there is no clear evidence that they were somehow acquainted with Blake's literary work. Although their second album *Death Walks behind You* features a painting of *Nebuchadnezzar* created by Blake himself, it seems improbable that it has some deeper meaning in this context. As most of the reviewers, such as Raffaella Berry from Prog Sphere, suggest, the band used Blake's painting only for its obscurity and the petrifying impression it gives for the first time.

As I presented above, since Blake's revival in 1960s by the Beats and the counter-cultural artists like Ginsberg, Morrison or Dylan, he is cited quite often as a source of inspiration for musician through the whole spectrum of genres in any decade. This confirms how great and timeless his poetry is. People only discovered it almost one hundred years after his death. There are much more musicians claiming to be influenced by Blake which I did not list such as Led Zeppelin, John Lennon, Radiohead, The Verve or The Libertines.

## 6 Conclusion

There is no doubt that William Blake was since his revival in 1960s considered to be the one of the biggest literary influences on the popular music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It seems logical that it was the beat poets, and subsequently the musicians influenced by the Beats like Morrison or Dylan, who rediscovered his works and immediately identified with his rebellious attitudes expressed in the texts and poems. As a generation of counter-culture who protested against the establishment, materialism, who used drugs and openly explored sexuality, they considered Blake to be more like the speaker voicing their inner feelings with his revolting lyrics of freedom.

The musicians who drew inspirations from his work admired the most his notion of religion. Blake did not agree with the fact, that man must be a member of some religious congregation or a church to perceive God. Even though he was for some time engaged in the newly found church based on Swedenborg's teachings, he left it after two years. Since then he started to protest against the institutionalized perception of God and claimed that God is no more than a man. The artists shared with him this disapproval of institutions and the emphasis of a free will and freedom in general. The notion of sexuality and free love was important for both because the oppression of sexuality was seen as the oppression of one's freedom. The musicians in the 1960s also admired Blake's ability of visions. They were trying to induce such state of visions by using various hallucinogenic drugs like LSD because they wanted to reach the infinity Blake was talking about in his *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

The most distinctive musicians influenced by Blake in the 1960s were Bob Dylan and Jim Morrison. While Bob Dylan was interested more in Blake's attitudes towards religion and how to perceive God using one's imagination, Morrison was amazed by his visionary abilities, by the conceptions of breaking the boundaries and engaging all of his senses to reach the state of infinity. Since this decade, it is possible to find references to Blake in a popular music in any genre and any decade. Artists like Patti Smith, who admired his endurance to hold on to his attitudes even though he lived in poverty and people ridiculed him, U2, influenced mostly by the concept of contrary

in the collection *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, Van Morrison or the vast amount of the bands playing progressive rock and metal confess in their songs for the passion for Blake and most of those artists even identifies themselves with Blake in interviews. Blake can be found even nowadays in the songs of modern bands like Radiohead, The Verve or The Libertines which only proves the timelessness of his poetry.

## 7 Resume

Není pochyb, že William Blake byl od svého obrození v šedesátých letech považován za jednoho z největších literárních vlivů populární hudby dvacátého století. Zdá se logické, že to byli zrovna beatníci, a následně muzikanti ovlivněni tvorbou beatníků jako Bob Dylan, nebo Jim Morrison, kteří znovuobjevili a ihned se ztotožnili s rebelujícími názory vyjádřenými v textech a básních. Jako generace undergroundu, která protestovala proti vládnoucí třídě a materialismu, která užívala drogy a otevřeně objevovala svou sexualitu, považovali Blaka za mluvčího, který svými rebelujícími verši svobody vyjadřoval jejich niterné pocity.

Umělci, kteří se inspirovali v jeho díle, nejvíce obdivovali jeho způsob nazírání na náboženství. Blake nesouhlasil s tím, že člověk musí být členem nějaké náboženské organizace, aby mohl vnímat boha. I když byl jednu dobu zapojen do nově vznikající církve založené na učení Swedenborga, po dvou letech ji opustil. Od té doby protestoval proti institucionalizovanému vnímání boha a tvrdil, že bůh není nic víc, než obyčejný člověk. Umělci s ním sdíleli tuto nechuť k institucím a zdůrazňovali obecně svobodu. Vnímání sexuality bylo důležité jak pro Blaka, tak i pro umělce, protože potlačování lidské sexuality jimi bylo nahlíženo, jako potlačování lidské svobody. Muzikanti šedesátých let také obdivovali Blakovu schopnost mít vize. Snažili se navodit takový stav a zažít vizi pomocí různých halucinogenních drog jako LSD, jelikož chtěli dosáhnout nekonečna, o kterém Blake psal.

Nejvýraznější muzikanti ovlivněni Blakem byli v šedesátých letech Bob Dylan a Jim Morrison. Zatímco Dylan se zajímal spíše o Blakovy názory na náboženství a jak vnímat boha skrze lidskou představitost, Morrison byl ohromen jeho vizionářskými schopnostmi, tím, jak překonat hranice zapojením všech pěti smyslů a dosáhnout tak nekonečna. Od této doby je možné najít v populární hudbě odkazy na Blaka v jakoukoli dekádu a v jakémkoli žánru. Umělci jako Patti Smith, která zbožňovala jeho schopnost vytrvat ve svých názorech i za cenu života v chudobě i zesměšňování, U2, kteří jsou nejvíce ovlivněni konceptem rozdílů sbírky *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, a další široké množství muzikantů hrajících progresivní rock a metal, kteří veřejně

přiznávají svou zálibu v Blakovi a mnoho těchto umělců se dokonce Blakem během interview ztotožňuje. Odkazy na Blaka můžeme najít i dnes v textech moderních kapel jako Radiohead, The Verve, nebo The Libertines, což jen dokazuje nadčasovost Blakovy poezie.



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## 9 Anotace

V práci se budu zaměřovat na dílo Williama Blaka a jeho vliv na populární hudbu dvacátého století od šedesátých let až po konec. V první části představím Blakův život a dílo, což zahrnuje nejen básně, ale také obrazy. V druhé části budu dokazovat přítomnost jeho vlivu v různých žánrech populární hudby od popu, přes klasický rock až po metal, nebo underground.

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## **10 Annotation**

In my thesis I will be focusing on the work of William Blake and how it influenced popular music of the 20th century from the 1960s up until the end of the century. In the first part of my thesis I am going to introduce Blake's life and his work which includes not only his poems and poetry but also his artwork. In the second part I will be demonstrating the occurrence of his work in various genres of popular music from pop, classic rock to progressive metal or underground.

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