

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: FATHERS AND SONS: AMERICAN BLUES AND
BRITISH ROCK MUSIC, 1960-1970

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This dissertation examines the unique cultural phenomenon of British blues-based rock music in the 1960s. It provides answers to two important questions of trans-Atlantic intellectual and cultural history. First, this dissertation will provide answers to two questions. First, it interrogates how and why African-American blues music became so popular amongst a segment of young, primarily middle-class men in Great Britain. It maps out “blues trade routes”—that is, the methods by which the music was transmitted to Britain. It explains the enthusiasm shown by young male Britishers largely in terms of their alienation from, and dissatisfaction with, mainstream British masculinity. Seen in this light, the “adoption” of African-American bluesmen as replacement “fathers” can be seen as an attempt to fill a perceived cultural need.

This dissertation will also examine how these young British men, having formed bands to perform their own music, began in the mid-1960s to branch out from the blues. In a developing dialogue with like-minded bands from the United States, bands such as the Rolling Stones and Yardbirds started combining the lessons of the blues with other cultural influences such as jazz, classical music and English folk. The resulting cultural bricolage innovated popular music on both sides of the Atlantic from the 1970s onward. The dissertation draws on a variety of primary sources, including the popular music press, published interviews with key musicians, and, of course, the recorded music itself.

Fathers and Sons uses the development of popular music to address issues that have traditionally been central to the study of ideas and cultures. These include: the role of interpersonal relationships in disseminating ideas and culture; the impact of distance and proximity in impelling cultural innovation; the occurrences of bursts of creativity in distinct places at distinct times; and the ways in which gender and sexual identity are performed and negotiated through mass consumer culture. These are salient issues with which intellectual and cultural historians have dealt for decades. Thus, *Fathers and Sons* seeks a broader audience than merely that which would be interested in American blues, British rock music, or both.

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BRITISH ROCK MUSIC, 1960-1970

by

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DEDICATION

For my mother, from whom I learnt about the likes of John Lennon, Paul McCartney, Steve Winwood, Pete Townshend, Eric Clapton and Elton John in the first place, and to whom they mean something more than just the topic of a doctoral dissertation in history.

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This work rests on the shoulders of three giants in the world of cultural history—Greil Marcus, Charles Shaar Murray and Peter Guralnick. I have not personally interacted with these scholars, but their work has provided an invaluable model for my own, and so to them I am also grateful.

Finally, I must thank my partner, Julie Mancine, for her support, her encouragement, her expertise in American cultural history, and her enthusiastic and thorough critical feedback.

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INTRODUCTION

“Well I hope we’re not too messianic/
Or a trifle too satanic/
We love to play the blues!”
—The Rolling Stones, “Monkey Man” (1968)¹

This dissertation will attempt to explain two distinct yet related statements about the blues-based rock music of the post-Second World War period. The first is cultural historian David Christopher’s assertion that “by the mid-1970s all the major [rock] bands in the world were British.”² This statement is misleading—of course there were popular and important American bands during this period, and there had been for a decade or more. But one can make the slightly less strident, but more accurate, argument that by the mid-1970s, popular music expression was dominated by British groups and the examples they set in the mid-to-late 1960s. The second is music critic and historian Robert Shelton’s argument that “musical developments” made by British musicians such as Eric Clapton, the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin were “more imaginative” than those made by American musicians. Both Christopher and Shelton’s claims are all the more striking when one considers that the United States was the nation where rock ‘n’ roll was invented—and yet by the 1970s, British bands were dominating popular music expression with imaginative and innovative fare.³ One of the tasks of *Fathers and Sons* will be explain how and why this happened.

¹ Epigram: The Rolling Stones, “Monkey Man,” *Let It Bleed* (Abkco, 1968).

² David Christopher, *British Culture: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 272.

³ Robert Shelton, *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), p. 314.

In order to do so, I argue that it is necessary first to explain the unique methods by which young, white, mostly middle-class British men consumed and appropriated African-American blues music. *Fathers and Sons* relates how and why, beginning in the early 1960s, a more or less cohesive social network of such consumers received and adopted the blues, to the point of attempting to emulate it by forming their own blues bands. However, groups such as the Rolling Stones, the Yardbirds and Cream were not content merely to churn out covers, however earnestly respectful, of Muddy Waters and Robert Johnson. If they had, it is likely that the world at-large would no longer find the music they made worthwhile. So the second story is one of synthesis, recombination and innovation. *Fathers and Sons* examines how the members of this network used the tropes, vocabulary and mythology of the blues to create a new, innovative form of popular music that was clearly influenced by the blues, without being completely derivative of it. The rock music produced by British rock musicians would dominate listeners and audiences on both sides of the Atlantic into the twenty-first century.

Fathers and Sons is a work of trans-Atlantic intellectual and cultural history. It will use the development of popular music and youth culture to address issues that have traditionally been central to the study of ideas and cultures. The subject of the cultural exchange between African-American blues and British rock music is bound up with issues like the role of interpersonal relationships in disseminating ideas and culture; the ways in which multiple cultural traditions (often from multiple national contexts) can be integrated into a new cultural form which is derivative of both but unique and innovative; the impact of distance and proximity in impelling cultural innovation; the question of why bursts of creativity happen in distinct places at distinct times; and the ways in which

gender and sexual identity are performed and negotiated via the forms and rituals of mass consumer culture. These are salient and classic issues with which intellectual and cultural historians have dealt for decades, whether it be at the level of Freudian psychoanalysis, French Impressionist painting or modernist literature. Thus, *Fathers and Sons* seeks a far broader audience than merely that which would be interested in American blues, British rock music, or both.

As Britishers, the enthusiasts-turned-performers who comprised the British blues network found themselves as the intersection of proximity to, and distance from, American culture. This combination of commonality and difference enabled British performers to relate to that culture in interesting and innovative ways. Chief among the commonalities is that they spoke English, and quite simply, the common language was crucial to explaining British cultural dominance. It helps to explain why similar emulation and innovation never emerged amongst young people in France or West Germany. If one of the most powerful elements of blues music, at least in the opinion of British enthusiasts, was its rich and evocative lyrics, then it makes sense that French or German listeners would have had a harder time becoming fluent in the blues and using the idiom as a basis for creative expression. (It may also help explain why, during this period, French directors such as François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard made their contribution in the much more visual medium of film.) In addition to a shared language, Britain and the United States share some of the same “folkways”—in fact, the blues itself has its roots not only in West African *griot* music, but the folk musical traditions of England, Scotland and Ireland.

However, Britain was also distant enough from America for young Britishers to be able to develop the fresh perspective on American culture that only an outsider can bring. The blues, as a cultural form and a social text, “meant” something to both black and white audiences in America during the 1940s and 1950s. This “meaning,” derived from the immediate social contexts in which blacks and whites interacted, culturally, socially and economically, shaped audience responses to the music. But British audiences were separated from these contexts; they had not grown up with much institutionalized racism, and they had little factual knowledge, besides what they could glean from books, about what it would have actually “meant” to be a black or white Southerner.

This method of learning the blues via records, radio broadcasts and books, as opposed to actual experience of African-American life, was taken by some critics at the time—and by several today—as a weakness in the British blues project. But I will argue that, in terms of creativity and innovation, it was actually one of their chief strengths. Young Britishers were able to stand apart (at least in their own minds) from the ideological quicksand of racism and “white guilt” that often impeded their American counterparts’ attempts to appropriate the blues and to play it with sincerity. As such, the British proceeded to borrow freely, absorbing styles and genres at will, piecing together repertoires based on whatever they liked (or thought audiences might like).

The trend toward borrowing and amalgamation has been a defining characteristic of British culture for centuries. Politically, Great Britain itself is an amalgam of English, Scottish, Irish, Welsh polities, and what can be called “British” culture has been forged over the centuries out of an admixture of English, Celtic, German and French elements. This tendency can be traced at least as far back as the works of Chaucer and Shakespeare,

who routinely borrowed characters and plot devices from ancient Greek drama, Celtic legend, French and Italian melodrama and religious passion plays, with little regard for what could or should be mixed together. Two hundred years after Shakespeare, Charles Dickens proved that this tradition of often contrary mixing was still alive when he referred to the practice of alternating dramatic and comedic elements in English fiction as “streaky well-cured bacon.”⁴ We can also see the tendency toward borrowing in English classical music where, before 20th century composers like Edward Elgar and Ralph Vaughan Williams started overtly to emphasize English folk themes, England gained a reputation for borrowing forms and styles from the Continent and adapting them in interesting ways. Finally, in the 1960s, British blues enthusiasts drew on this long-standing tradition by attempting to produce a musical *mélange* first of American styles such as blues, soul, jazz and country, and subsequently, of European and non-Western styles such as English folk, Indian raga and European classical. The British borrowing tradition was not necessarily a conscious influence, but I argue that it did help to prepare the ground.

Finally, British dominance in popular music can be explained by the ability of a dense network of urban centers to foster a dialogue between young people who were first consumers, and then producers, of mass popular culture. London was, far and away, the intellectual and cultural hub of Great Britain, but other important urban centers such as Liverpool and Birmingham were within a train ride of under four hours. This meant that it was easier for ideas and cultural products to be disseminated throughout Britain. It also

⁴ Charles Dickens, quoted in Nicola Bradbury, “Dickens and the form of the novel,” in John O. Jordan, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 155.

meant that once blues enthusiasts became active performers, it was relatively easy for them to travel to perform in urban centers with similarly developing blues-driven “scenes.” Although their home base was the constellation of blues clubs in and around London, in 1965, John Mayall’s Bluesbreakers would often perform gigs as distant as Birmingham and Manchester in the span of a single night. Such treks were certainly grueling, but the point was that they were possible. The British situation may be favorably compared to that in France, where most cultural and intellectual ferment is concentrated in Paris, but where few, if any, other major urban cultural centers are nearby, or in the United States, where traveling even between Chicago and New York requires the better part of a day’s journey by car or train.

Aided by geography and better linkages in travel and communication, the “British blues boom” was driven along by the interconnectivity of what I shall call an “interpersonal cultural network.” The members of the interpersonal cultural network were often of a broadly defined generation. They all knew each other socially (or at least knew each other’s acquaintances socially). They appraised each other’s work and relied on each other for inspiration and more-or-less friendly discussion and criticism. They were certainly not all friends, and more often than not they were fierce rivals. But they regarded themselves as peers—steeped in the same idioms, and often devoted to similar aesthetic and moral ideals. The network’s admixture of camaraderie, friendly and not-so-friendly rivalry and petty jealousies undoubtedly spurred its members on to greater cultural achievements that might have been possible had they all been the best of friends.

In analyzing the interpersonal nature of the British “blues boom,” *Fathers and Sons* will join an ever-growing body of scholarship whose purpose has been to explain

why large-scale bursts of creativity happen in certain definable places and times by focusing on similar interpersonal networks. Intellectual and cultural historians have done interesting and significant work by identifying these networks, reconstructing the circumstances under which their members got together and collaborated with one another, and assessing the importance of such collaborations to the cultural and intellectual history of the last four centuries. This historiography is certainly not limited to popular music. For example, Ross King has addressed these issues with regard to the French Impressionists who redefined 19th century painting in his *Judgment of Paris*.⁵ Dan Franck and Peter Gay have made similar, though separate, contributions on the nature of the social “scene” and network-formation of European Modernists in the early 20th century.⁶

Gay, actually, has already had enormous success using such a conceptual framework to describe the interconnectivity of Enlightenment *philosophes* in his two-volume history, *The Enlightenment* (1969); his work has proved highly valuable to my own in that he paid attention to how such networks functioned to facilitate dialogue across national boundaries.⁷ Intellectual networks, especially those made up of politically-minded thinkers, from the Enlightenment forward have continued to provide subject matter for historians interested in these questions, from the American “Founding Fathers” (or, as historian Joseph Ellis has labelled them, “Founding Brothers”), to Italian

⁵ Ross King, *The Judgment of Paris: The Revolutionary Decade that Gave the World Impressionism* (New York: Walker & Co., 2006).

⁶ Dan Franck, *Bohemian Paris: Picasso, Matisse and the Rise of Modern Art*, trans. Cynthia Liebow (New York: Grove Press, 2001); Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007).

⁷ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 2 vol. (New York: Knopf, 1969).

Futurists (Walter Adamson, *Avant-Garde Florence*), to the Weimar German technocrats who helped launch that country's "conservative revolution" (Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*).⁸ In works such as these, historians have enriched our understanding of intellectual thought and cultural production by recognizing that it mattered that thinkers knew, ate, drank, and cohabitated with each other, and that their work would have been noticeably different without the necessary influences provided by their peers. *Fathers and Sons* will do likewise.

At its greatest extent, the British blues network probably numbered between seventy and one hundred twenty young men (see Appendix 1). This group was not a monolith, and each individual participating in it had slightly different opinions and leanings as far as musical direction and influences went. Thus, whenever I use the term "blues network" (or, later, "blues-rock network") I am making a necessary generalization, confident that the assertion being made applies to a great enough number of these men to be analytically significant. I will draw statements and examples from as wide a range of participants and ranges of opinion as possible, but I cannot speak for everyone, and there are doubtless important figures who will receive barely a mention in this study. For manageability's sake, I have chosen to focus on eleven main interlocutors, whose stories I will return to often in the course of the narrative: Jeff Beck; Eric Burdon; Eric Clapton; Mick Jagger; Van Morrison; Jimmy Page; Robert Plant; Keith Richards; Rod Stewart; Pete Townshend; and Steve Winwood. This grouping—which, for better or worse,

⁸ Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Knopf, 2001); Walter Adamson, *Avant-Garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

privileges guitarists and vocalists as a band's major creative forces—benefits from being representative, yet diverse.⁹ There is ethnic diversity (*e.g.*, Stewart is Scottish; Morrison is Irish); geographic diversity (seven are from London and the Home Counties; four are from the Midlands or points further north); and musical diversity (some were more influenced by English folk, or jazz, or country-and-western music than others).

The interpersonal network comprised of young British blues enthusiasts was vital to the diffusion of musical and artistic ideas throughout Britain, as well as to the development, on both sides of the Atlantic, of rock music. How the blues spread throughout Britain, what impact it had, what meanings it came to be laden with, and everything that emerged, musically, as a result, cannot be understood without recourse to the interpersonal aspect. Most obviously, a more-or-less like-minded group of one's peers provided the opportunity to form a band and play in public. Beyond that, however, the intellectual network provided much-needed discussion, inspiration, support and bases for comparison. In many ways, the British blues network was rather like an arms race—that is, its members drove themselves to succeed and innovate in an atmosphere of almost constant one-upmanship.

It is unlikely that the most important British bands would have been driven to experiment and become more musically sophisticated if there was no one to impress (or at least to outsell). Would Bob Dylan have been moved to “go electric” without first hearing the Animals' “The House of the Rising Sun”? Would Steve Winwood have found the right blend of jazz, blues and English folk without his co-collaborators in Traffic?

⁹ Alternately, it may just be that these two types of musicians are the ones to whom the media gravitate for quotes and interviews, and thus, simply, there are more primary sources for them than for drummers and bass guitarists.

Would George Harrison have done as much to popularize the sitar if his compatriots in the Yardbirds and the Kinks were not already experimenting with Indian music? And finally, would albums like *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, *Their Satanic Majesties Request*, *The White Album* and *Beggars' Banquet* have ever entered the world without the late 1960s musical duel between the Beatles and the Rolling Stones? John Lennon may have said that the Rolling Stones merely did what the Beatles did, six months later, but this call-and-response fueled both bands' musical creativity. In business, this is called market competition, and it usually results in greater innovation and better product. The necessary linkage between competition and innovation is also a key component of popular music, which is, after all, a multi-millionaire-dollar business selling a product, and not just a forum for cultural expression.

Such "what-ifs" (of which many more could be listed) can obviously never be answered, but they are instructive to understanding the rich social and intellectual ferment in which trans-Atlantic popular music was being produced at this time. It could be argued, of course, that all of these individuals were supremely talented, and might have indeed scaled such creative heights even without the "invidious comparison" (to borrow the phrase from Thorstein Veblen) provided by their comrades.¹⁰ But that is equally unanswerable, and the point remains that the cultural network *did* exist, that it *did* provide a laboratory and a sounding board for its members, that it *did* spur them on creatively, and that the results *did* innovate popular musical expression from the 1960s onward.

¹⁰ Thorstein Veblen, "The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions" (New York: Viking Press, 1912), p. 16.

Fathers and Sons is also a history of how people in Britain received and perceived American culture. The often tortured cultural and social relationship between the United States and Western Europe after the Second World War has been the subject of a diverse historiography already. As historian Richard Pells has (perhaps glibly) put it, Europeans have “loved, hated and transformed American culture,” with their divergent reactions depending on their age, economic class, political leanings, and understanding of their own supposed “national culture”—a culture that “America” was gradually yet inexorably destroying.¹¹ As Rob Rydell and Rob Kroes’ recent study of the fortunes of the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show in Europe in the 1890s points out, the career of American mass culture in Europe predates the 20th century entirely. Kroes has written about this topic more generally; his important work, *If You’ve Seen One, You’ve Seen the Mall* deals with an eclectic grab-bag of Euro-American cultural topics, from the shopping mall, to films about the Viet Nam War, to rap music.¹² Two edited collections by historians—one by Heide Fehrenbach and Uta Poiger, and the other by Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May—have likewise adopted as eclectic an approach as Kroes, in attempting to explain the “transactions, transgressions and transformations” of American popular culture as it has traveled to and been received by Europe.¹³ Again, films, popular music,

¹¹ Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated and Transformed American Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

¹² Rob Kroes, *If You’ve Seen One, You’ve Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

¹³ Heide Fehrenbach and Uta Poiger, eds., *Transactions, Transgressions and Transformations: American Culture in Western Europe and Japan* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000); Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May, eds., *Here, There and Everywhere: The Foreign Policy of American Popular Culture* (Hanover, NH: The University Press of New England, 2000).

urban design and business methods all come under scholarly scrutiny as products and forms in the vanguard of what Wagnleitner called the “Coca-Colonization” of Europe in the postwar period.¹⁴

What the term “Coca-Colonization” implies, if not flat-out asserts, is that the traffic in cultural products and consumer durables across the Atlantic was a deliberately planned and executed operation—a strategy by the American “empire” to conquer European markets and households. As mentioned above, there was a purposeful deployment of American mass culture by American political and business interests in the Cold War battle for the hearts and minds of Western Europeans. To this end, the American State Department launched a veritable “culture war” in Europe. As discussed by Penny von Eschen, they sponsored world tours of jazz ensembles, in order to convince European listeners that the free improvisation of artists like Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie was only possible in the liberal-capitalist United States.¹⁵ Richard Pells has noted how the United States Information Agency established “America Houses” in European cities, stocked with books, newspapers and other media disseminating suitably American ideas and values. And Frances Stonor Saunders has written about how the Central Intelligence Agency even set up a clandestine organization called the Congress for Cultural Freedom, a consortium of trans-Atlantic academics and writers whose

¹⁴ Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria After the Second World War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

¹⁵ Penny von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

purpose was to provide intellectual cover for the aims and activities of American liberalism.¹⁶

Nor was the American government the only “cultural cold warrior” during this period. Soft drink bottling giant Coca-Cola waged a vicious (if, in the end, victorious) campaign against what might be called the “beverage interest” in France over the issue of establishing a bottling plant in that nation. This fracas, which is the subject of Richard Kuisel’s important work, *Seducing the French*, was in the end, obviously, about more than just the deleterious effects of soda pop on French consumers. It was about the incursion of America onto French territory, both cultural and economic.¹⁷ Again, this was a defining feature of the American “cultural cold war” in Europe, and as such, is among the dominant themes in the historiography. Serge Guilbaut’s *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, for example, is not just about how the abstract expressionism of artists like Jackson Pollock superseded traditionally European-dominated artistic modes; it is also about how the *idea* of abstract expressionism, of an artistic freedom that was only possible in a liberal-capitalist West, was deployed by a matrix of artists, investors and United States congressmen as a weapon on the ideological battlefields of Europe.¹⁸

Fathers and Sons will complement this varied historiography by offering a contrasting narrative. African-American blues, as received and consumed by young

¹⁶ Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 2000).

¹⁷ Richard F. Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

¹⁸ Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

enthusiasts like Eric Clapton, was *not* deliberately deployed in Western Europe by American political or business interests as part of the Cold War “cultural offensive.” The transmission of the blues to Great Britain in the post-Second World War period was a haphazard, almost accidental process. The blues came into the country through numerous unofficial, under-the-radar channels. Records were available in Britain because individuals (usually jazz musicians or other aficionados) had taken the initiative to order them direct from the States, or buy them from an African-American GI stationed in or around London or Liverpool. Britain’s Pye Records label did have a trans-Atlantic distribution agreement, from 1960 onward, with Chicago blues giant Chess Records that ensured the presence of the latter’s product in London record stores. But the agreement, as far as can be deduced, was not reached so that Chess could fight a Cold War battle, but for the good old-fashioned reason: profit margin. Chess executives might not understand why white British audiences were buying up Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf albums, but they knew a reliable market when they saw one.

The presence of the American GIs also was one of the reasons why one could hear the blues on the radio. The US Armed Forces Network, broadcasting jazz, blues and rock ‘n’ roll music for the troops’ benefit, could also be picked up by civilian transistor radios. And unlike American jazz musicians, who traveled the world on State Department “freedom tours,” American blues musicians who came to Britain to perform did so strictly on the invitation and initiative of European aficionados. The State Department had nothing whatsoever to do with Muddy Waters’ first tour of Britain in 1958, nor with the American Folk Blues Festivals held throughout Europe from 1963-1968. The former was organized by “trad” jazz bandleader Chris Barber, and its purposes were selfish—

Barber wanted to play with his hero, and thought there might be a profit in bringing the Chicago bluesman over for a short tour. The latter was the brainchild of two *German* jazz enthusiasts, Fritz Rau and Horst Lippmann, and was arranged directly between them and concert promoters in Britain, France, Holland and West Germany. Publicity was done at the grassroots level, or what singer Paul Jones called “the bush telegraph.” Both in-person performances were to prove vital to the development of the British blues “scene,” and involved no greater involvement from the US government than making sure bluesmen like Waters and Willie Dixon could clear customs. Thus, in an era where so much popular culture made it overseas in service of the American struggle for the hearts and minds of Europeans, the blues—which, at least in Britain, had an enormous impact on young men’s opinions of America—came in through the backdoor.

And yet, as my subsequent analysis will prove, the blues often managed to do the same ideological work in the minds of British enthusiasts as American “Cold Warriors” intended that American cultural products do—that is, transmit generally favorable impressions of American life, culture and society, with an emphasis on the freedom that was America’s supposed watchword, and the superiority of the American way of life. A whole host of cultural assumptions and values about American and African-American culture and life came across as well. Reading testimony from British blues enthusiasts, it is obvious that these young men used the blues either to form such ideas about America and its culture, or to add texture to ideas they had already formed from the mainstream culture as a whole. The blues in Britain stands out as an example of an American cultural product that helped to create favorable impressions—however distorted—of the society that had created it, without deliberately being *sent* to do so. It is quite possible that the

lack of overt state or business backing helped, in this case, to make American culture more acceptable; in consuming the blues, British enthusiasts could congratulate themselves on having found it on their own, without worrying whether or not they were being “Coca-Colonized.”

“Coca-Colonization” also implies that the traffic from the United States to Western Europe was almost entirely one-way in nature—with the United States sending, and Europeans passively receiving and consuming, American popular culture.¹⁹ This, to varying degrees, is a principle that governs most of the aforementioned literature on Euro-American cultural relations. If Western Europeans actively responded to “Americanization” in ways other than buying, listening to, drinking, and watching it, it seems to have been almost entirely negative. During the period under examination here, there seem to have been plenty of instances where European intellectual and cultural elites reacted to the encroachment of American culture with anxiety, or loathing, or both. Examples of such critiques include Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber’s *Le Défi Américaine* (*The American Challenge*) and Jean Baudrillard’s *Amérique* (*America*).²⁰ I am mindful, of course, of the fact that both of these works were produced by Frenchmen, and the situation in France is certainly not to be conflated with that in Britain. But generally speaking, these reactions are only the most extreme version of what is always taken to be the more generalized reaction of Western Europe to American culture. This has been the

¹⁹ From Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration and the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

²⁰ Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, *Le Défi Américaine* (*The American Challenge*) (Paris: Denöel, 1967); Jean Baudrillard, *Amérique* (*America*), trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1988).

subject of Andrew and Kristin Ross' recent edited collection, *Anti-Americanism*, as well as works by Philippe Roger and by Andrei Markovits.²¹

What has been less often studied are the ways in which European consumers have responded to American culture in ways that were more sophisticated than passive consumption or blind outrage—ways that entailed the creative recombination, reinterpretation and retransmission of that culture in innovative ways. On one level, perhaps, this is because the case of British rock music is the most visible case of Europeans repackaging and retransmitting an American culture form with such popular and innovative results back in America itself. The comparison with the example of Truffaut, Godard and other French *nouvelle vague* filmmakers only works to a certain extent; although their films were incredibly innovative and had a serious impact on subsequent filmmakers (for example, David Lynch and Quentin Tarantino), their films did not dominate the American box office, but were instead limited mostly to “art-house” consumption. British rock musicians, I argue, were both more innovative *and* more popular than their American counterparts. And if contemporary artists like Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix scored successes in terms of innovation or popularity, it was, as I will show, largely the result of their having been influenced by the British example. The positive, creative response of European consumers to American culture—represented here by the achievement of the British blues-rock network—has not often been looked at

²¹ Andrew Ross and Kristin Ross., eds., *Anti-Americanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Philippe Roger, *L'Ennemi Américaine (The American Enemy)*, trans. Sharon Bowman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Andrei Markovits, *Uncouth Nation: Why Europe Dislikes America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

in a serious fashion, and *Fathers and Sons* hopes to add to the historiography of Euro-American cultural relations in this way as well.

At the center of this dissertation will be the ways in which British consumers interpreted the supposed “meaning” of African-American blues, and used that “meaning” to fill a perceived need in their own cultural situation. One of the main attractions of the blues for young men like Jagger, Clapton and Burdon was the way in which it seemed to portray an “imagined” America full of the promise of wide-open spaces, and populated with dynamic, larger-than-life heroic characters. At the time, Britain, although it had defeated the Nazis and defended democracy, seemed to be a grey, small, second-rate power, financially strapped and culturally exhausted. It was everywhere in retreat from its formerly vast Empire (no matter with how much good grace Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was organizing the withdrawal), and uncertain about its place in the world. It is doubtful whether young men like Mick Jagger and Eric Clapton ever gave much thought to the loss, say, of India or Kenya—they certainly never went on record with any such thoughts—but they cannot have failed to have been affected by the prevailing national mood of uncertainty and ossification.

The decline of British power and influence has for the previous five decades been the subject of an extensive historiography of its own. The withdrawal of Great Britain from its empire, beginning with India in the 1940s, has been the subject of works by numerous scholars, including D. George Boyce, Roy Douglas and Piers Brendon.²² Meanwhile, Corelli Barnett and David Reynolds have analyzed the concomitant decline

²² D. George Boyce, *Decolonization and the British Empire, 1775-1997* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Roy Douglas, *Liquidation of Empire: The Decline of the British Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007).

of British military power and policy-making in the postwar world.²³ Historians have also given a great deal of attention to the perceived effects of this international decline on British identity and culture. Robert Hewison's *In Anger* has forcefully argued the case that international decline was mirrored by cultural infirmity, especially in the visual arts, literature and theatre.²⁴ Stuart Ward, David Cannadine, and Stephen Caunce have all discussed different facets of the ways in which British (in addition to English and Celtic) identity has needed to be "relocated" (as per the title of Caunce's 2004 edited collection) in such diverse arenas as spy novels, football matches and seaside resort vacations in the aftermath of decolonization and decline.²⁵

The historiography on British decline in the 1950s and 1960s has often been bound up with a related historiography: that of the so-called "special relationship" between Britain and the United States since 1945. This relationship has had a great deal of historiographical attention paid to it, of course, dating back at least as far as the late 1950s, when Winston Churchill published his famous five-volume history, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*.²⁶ However, the vast majority of this attention, for most of

²³ Corelli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (New York: W.W. Morrow, 1972) and *The Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (New York: Macmillan, 1986); David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the 20th Century* (London: Longman, 1991).

²⁴ Robert Hewison, *In Anger: British Culture in the Cold War, 1945-60* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

²⁵ Stuart Ward, ed., *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2001); David Cannadine, *In Churchill's Shadow: Confronting the Past in Modern Britain* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Stephen Caunce, ed., *Relocating Britishness* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004).

²⁶ Winston S. Churchill, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, 4 vols. (London: Cassell, 1956-58). See especially, *Volume 4: The Great Democracies*, for a fuller

the previous five decades, has focused on those “mainstream” aspects of the relationship that contributed to the defeat of the Nazis in the Second World War or to the frustration of Soviet designs in the Cold War—that is, Anglo-American financial, military, diplomatic and political interactions. For example, Peter Hennessey and Caroline Anstey have analyzed these facets in their useful *Moneybags and Brains*.²⁷ Also, there have recently been studies made of the personal-political relationships between British and American leaders like Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt (by Jon Meacham), and Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan (by Nicholas Wapshott), which are necessary contributions in that they at least focus on the ways in which interpersonal considerations influenced the formation of policy.²⁸

Recently, however, scholars have begun to focus on the intellectual and cultural levels at which Americans and Britishers have understood (or misunderstood) and interacted with one another. In fact, a few very recent works—notably Andrew Roberts’ self-styled “sequel” to Churchill’s work, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples Since 1900* and Kathleen Burk’s *Old World, New World*—have tried admirably to blend the older, military-diplomatic-economic approach with the intellectual-cultural approach.²⁹

expansion of Churchill’s views on the necessary partnership between the two “Anglo-Saxon” powers.

²⁷ Peter Hennessey and Caroline Anstey, *Moneybags and Brains: The Anglo-American Special Relationship* (Glasgow, UK: Strathclyde University Press, 1990).

²⁸ Jon Meacham, *Franklin and Winston: An Intimate Portrait of an Epic Friendship* (New York: Random House, 2003); Nicholas Wapshott, *Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher: A Political Marriage* (London: Sentinel HC, 2007).

²⁹ Andrew Roberts, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples Since 1945* (London: Phoenix Press, 2007); Kathleen Burk, *Old World, New World: The Story of Britain and America* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 2007).

There have been numerous studies of British travelers (usually drawn from among the *literati*) who traveled to America beginning in the Victorian period, recording their observations about life, culture and politics whilst on the ground, and then publishing them to a wider readership upon returning home.³⁰ These “intellectual tourists,” among them Charles Dickens, Frances Trollope and Oscar Wilde, helped to inaugurate a discourse in which Britishers formed ideas of what America and its culture and people were supposedly “like,” often without ever having set foot on American soil. This discourse was still operating—though it had had many other contributors to it by the 1960s—and so it is a pre-history, and a rich historiography, that I recognize as part of the backdrop to my own narrative.

In attempting to discuss the related issues of American dominance and British decline, *Fathers and Sons* responds, in a small way, to a famous remark made during the Second World War by future Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. Speaking to an associate, Macmillan drew on the British aristocracy’s inexhaustible storehouse of classical allusions to lay out his ideal for the “special relationship”:

We... are the Greeks in this American empire. You will find the Americans much as the Greeks found the Romans—great big, vulgar people, more vigorous than we are and also more idle, with more unspoiled virtues but also more corrupt. We must run [Allied Forces Headquarters] as the Greek slaves ran the operations of the Emperor Claudius.³¹

³⁰ See, for instance, Richard Rapson’s *Britons View America: Travel Commentary, 1860-1935* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1971); Barbara Bennett Peterson’s *John Bull’s Eye on America* (Honolulu, HI: Hawaii Chapter of the Fulbright Alumni Association, 1993); and James Simmons’ *Star-Spangled Eden: 19th Century America Through the Eyes of Dickens, Wilde, Frances Trollope, Frank Harris and Other British Travelers* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2000).

³¹ Harold Macmillan to Richard Crossman, quoted in Alistair Horne, *Harold Macmillan* (New York: Viking Press, 1989), p. 160.

Leaving aside for a moment the fact that this would cast Britishers in the role of “slaves,” and not of advisors, it is clear that Macmillan envisioned a post-1945 world where, simply put, Americans provided the muscle and the money, while the British supplied the know-how and the sophistication necessary to run a world empire. Or, as an old rhyme put it,

In Washington Lord Halifax /
Once whispered to Lord Keynes /
“It’s true they’ve all the moneybags /
But we have all the brains.”³²

The “special relationship” was meant to be a symbiotic conversation, to some extent, in which each would benefit from the other’s contributions. Looking at the subsequent history, in military, political and economic terms, of the “special relationship,” it is obvious that that symbiosis never really occurred. The British expedition to Suez in 1956 was stranded by the withdrawal of American support (and capital), and since then, Macmillan and many of his successors at 10 Downing Street have tended to play an unequal role in their public political relationship with American presidents from Dwight Eisenhower to George W. Bush.

Fathers and Sons advances the argument that, although the equal conversation may never have occurred in the world of diplomacy or international finance, the cultural relationship between American and British musicians is an example of a significant instance where it did. The development of blues-based popular music, as chronicled in this study, was not merely another area where America exported popular culture, and where Britain passively received it. Through the efforts of British blues bands, the

³² Quoted in Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: The History of Britain From Suez to the Beatles* (London: Abacus, 2006), p. 212.

direction of trans-Atlantic cultural production shifted, so that by 1965, Britain was exporting popular culture to America, and American musicians were being influenced and inspired by them. Through American musicians' responses to the British Invasion, an actual trans-Atlantic dialogue began, in which neither nation's musicians simply dictated the terms of cultural expression to those of the other. Here, at the level of popular music and youth culture, we can see the "special relationship" operating as British politicians like Macmillan had wished it to operate. Here, perhaps, we may see another way in which the British attempted to "relocate" their dominance.

By listening to and then performing the blues, young middle-class British enthusiasts undertook a "relocation" of their own—to Chicago, Memphis or Mississippi. The blues offered an alternative masculine ideal to which they could aspire, and a different set of "fathers" to which they could adhere in preference to what they perceived as an unsatisfactory cultural inheritance at home. Blues performers constructed a persona, the "bluesman," and when they sang, it was from this archetype's perspective. The "bluesman" had gained a measure of power and freedom in a world that often denied black men the most basic of civil rights. He had achieved these things through his skill and knowledge (some of which, he implied, was supernaturally gained), through his sexual dynamism and through his use of violence. Furthermore, the "bluesman" portrayed himself as a thoroughly modern man, at home in the sprawling urban cityscape and proficient in what might be called "modern masterable machines"—the automobile, the railroad and the electric guitar. The "bluesman" was just a persona, a way for the blues performer to negotiate an identity through his music. However, many of the "bluesman's" British acolytes took him at his word. To them, the "bluesman" actually

lived the things he sang about, and the key to appropriating even a portion of his power and knowledge was to do likewise. Thus the “bluesman” provided these young Britishers with a blueprint for how to “be a man.”

Besides their more or less simultaneous development, the common thread that links together narratives of the relationship between a rising America and a declining Britain, and of the British blues network’s project of “filiation” is their reliance on articulations and understandings of masculinity. Notions of masculine vigor have not been unimportant to the constructed relationships between American presidents and British prime ministers—they were especially near to the surface during the almost three years in which John F. Kennedy and Macmillan were their nation’s respective leaders, not to mention during the 1980s, with Reagan and Thatcher.³³ And, as Juliet Gardiner and David Reynolds have ably demonstrated, masculine power and sexuality were a key aspect of how the media portrayed—and, to some extent, the public perceived—American (especially black) GIs in Britain during the Second World War.³⁴

As the following chapters will demonstrate, understandings of masculine sexuality and power are central to the reception, appropriation and emulation of the blues by British enthusiasts as well. The blues was a cultural form that, as mentioned, communicated to its listeners the freedom of the open road, and the allure of the American way of life, but it was—or at least it was perceived to be—even more about masculine sexuality. In fact, in the blues, freedom and masculine sexuality were often

³³ Nigel John Ashton, *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War: The Irony of Interdependence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

³⁴ Juliet Gardiner, *Over Here: The GIs in Wartime Britain* (London: Collins and Brown, 1992); David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945* (New York: Random House, 1995).

inextricably linked. Freedom for the bluesman was often freedom to seduce as many women as possible. Mobility was the ability not to be “tied down” by any one woman, and to escape women entirely whenever necessary. Literary scholar Leslie Fiedler identified this equation of masculine freedom with escape from women as one of the central features of classic American literature, from Huckleberry Finn onward, in his groundbreaking 1966 study, *Love and Death in the American Novel*.³⁵ Subsequently, sociologist Michael Kimmel and cultural scholar David Leverenz have expanded upon Fiedler’s analysis, finding this theme in works as diverse of James Fenimore Cooper’s *Last of the Mohicans* and Batman comic books.³⁶ As I argue in this dissertation, the analysis should be pushed even further, to include blues music as well.

Discourses on masculinity as requiring the absence of women were also a part of British culture—especially imperial culture. As Peter M. Lewis has noted in his essay, “Mummy, matron and the maids,” its importance as a defining characteristic of boys’ education can be seen in the British public school structure, whose purpose was to create an entirely male social world, where heterosocial interaction was to be eschewed at the moment when the schoolboy left his mother to enter the school, and replaced with homosocial bonding and an educational regime designed to rid the schoolboy of any

³⁵ Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Stein and Day, 1966).

³⁶ Michael S. Kimmel, “Born to Run: Fantasies of Male Escape From Rip Van Winkle to Robert Bly,” in Kimmel, *The History of Men: Essays on the History of American and British Masculinities* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp. 19-37; David Leverenz, “The Last Real Man in America: From Natty Bumppo to Batman,” *American Literary History*, v. 3, no. 4 (Winter 1991), pp. 753-781.

lingering “effeminacies.”³⁷ The overriding purpose of the British public school was to breed generations of empire-builders and administrators, and so, presumably, the British Empire was meant to be a homosocial preserve, free of women, as well.

The Empire was constructed, by such media as the “boys’ paper” and the adventure novel, as a place where young men could go to escape tedium and anomie and instead find adventure, homosocial bonding and the chance to “make one’s name.”³⁸ Historian Graham Dawson has written about the construction of an archetypal figure, the “soldier hero,” who communicated such ideas to a metropolitan male readership.³⁹ For example, Dawson posits that T.E. Lawrence (“of Arabia”) was so captivating to British audiences, circa 1917, because he had proved, that there were still chances for young men to find adventure in wide-open, exotic locales, even as the machine guns of the Western Front had seemed to foreclose on that possibility.⁴⁰ Thus, masculine power and the imperial project were two sides of a mutually constitutive relationship, and so, too, on some level, were masculine impotence and imperial decline. *Fathers and Sons* picks up these historiographic threads and applies them to British blues culture in the 1960s. In a culture of perceived national decline, British blues enthusiasts constructed “America” as

³⁷ Peter M. Lewis, “Mummy, matron and the maids: Feminine presence and absence in male institutions, 1934-63,” in Michael Roper and John Tosh, eds., *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1991).

³⁸ Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys’ Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855-1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Martin Green, *The Adventurous Male: Chapters in the History of the White Male Mind* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

³⁹ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 167. See also Michael Roper, *Masculinity and the British Organization Man Since 1945* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1994).

a place where there was still adventure and homosocial bonding to be had, where a young man could go to be free from women except for sexual encounters—and then only on terms where he was the dominant partner. This was how British “sons” perceived the lives of their African-American blues “fathers,” and they constructed an entire alternative masculine persona accordingly.

The prevailing ethos of the British blues boom that resulted was inquisitive and active. Rather than passively taking in the strange yet enthralling music that they heard coming out of their transistor radios or friends’ turntables, young blues enthusiasts actively went in search of more: more music like it, and more information about both the music and the performers behind it. With a starting-point of Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley and Little Richard, British blues “scholars” dug deeper and further back. Such a task would not be very taxing to the modern young listener; a trip to one’s local library or to the Internet, would obtain for him or her detailed biographies of blues performers; their entire recorded catalogues; lists of performers who had influenced or been influenced by them, and so on.⁴¹

But in the early 1960s, there was comparatively little information about the blues in circulation. The recording project undertaken by folklorists John and Alan Lomax and John Work on behalf of the United States Library of Congress was only twenty years old at this point, and Robert Johnson, the Delta bluesman who would prove so influential to rock music on both sides of the Atlantic, had only just been “re-discovered.” And there was even less information in Great Britain. Undaunted, young enthusiasts seized upon

⁴¹ For example, these were the tools available to me when, as an undergraduate, I set out to learn all that I could about bands like Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones—although, admittedly, the process has continued through to the end of this dissertation and will likely continue beyond even that.

every scrap of information they could get their hands on, scouring secondhand shops for obscure record albums, taping songs and concerts off of the radio using reel-to-reel tape recorders, and even—in the case of some enterprising individuals like Mick Jagger and John Mayall—ordering record albums, books and magazines directly from the United States. The scholarly approach stood the British blues enthusiasts in good stead, as they were able to cobble together an impressive collection of blues records, taped radio broadcasts and what little published material existed at the time. It bears repeating: The blues took hold in Britain not as the result of some organized sales strategy, nor as the spearhead of the American cultural mission in Europe, but through the interest and initiative of enthusiasts on the ground.

Pieced together in this manner, British enthusiasts' understanding and knowledge of the blues was very eclectic and did not always recognize the stylistic boundaries between sub-genres that were in force in America. So, strictly speaking, this is a story not only about the blues, but also about two related musical forms, rhythm-and-blues (or R&B) and soul. The classification of "R&B" refers to a musical offshoot of "country" or "city" blues that emerged in the 1950s, and was generally recognized by many in the American music industry as a slicker, more urbane, and more danceable style than its predecessor. Soul, on the other hand, emerged in the early 1960s as a fusion of R&B and the Southern gospel tradition. It was more concerned with the uplift in the here-and-now of a new generation of young African-American listeners, and often replaced gospel's focus on the spiritual with a focus on the worldly, and replaced devotion to God with devotion to a woman or a man. Both because of the generational gap and because of its secularization of gospel themes, soul was viewed by many in the African-American

community as inherently sinful, just as blues had been before it. In America, then, white and black, these sub-genres were regarded as separate and rarely mixed. But in Britain, as mentioned, no such formal distinctions existed, due to the haphazard collection of sources. Enthusiasts of one sub-genre most likely also listened to, and collected, the other as well. Thus, although at times I will specify when I mean *blues* or *R&B* or *soul*, usually I will operate as though there was very little in the way of formal distinctions—because that is how my subjects often operated.

While reception and enjoyment of the forms of American mass culture by Europeans is certainly interesting in and of itself, it is the point at which former European consumers become first emulators, and then producers in their own right that is much more significant to this story. To take a cultural example from the world of cinema, Frenchmen like Truffaut and Godard did not merely watch American *films noir* and then express enthusiasm about their merits. They took the initiative and shot their own films, creating a dialogue that was trans-Atlantic, and a body of cultural product that betrays both American and European influences. This same step was taken by British blues enthusiasts, and the same sort of dialogue was entered into. The dialogue began in certain urban centers around Great Britain—London, Birmingham, Newcastle, Liverpool, Manchester, and even Belfast—where like-minded young men became acquainted with each other in secondhand record shops and the coffee bars where live music was played. In time, following a path that had been used by ambitious young men for centuries, they migrated to London, which, by virtue of its being Britain's largest city as well as its capital, offered a larger "scene"—more like-minded compatriots, more secondhand record shops, more coffee bars and pubs in which to perform. Provincial young men were

thrown together with young men from London—or, more likely, from the suburban Home Counties, as hardly any of the British blues enthusiasts, it seems, were actually *from* London. The dialogue gained even more layers.

Finally, as “Beatlemania” enlisted many British R&B groups in the “British Invasion” of America, quite a few of these British enthusiasts-cum-performers actually got a chance to travel across the Atlantic to see the land that had heretofore been the subject of fantasies. In doing so, they also entered into dialogue with American musicians, who were simultaneously challenged and inspired by the “British Invasion’s” repackaging and re-transmission of part of Americans’ own cultural heritage. The resulting musical and personal responses of American musicians like Bob Dylan or Jimi Hendrix, as I will demonstrate, represented a second influence on British musicians. On several notable occasions, the Americans challenged the Britishers’ musical authenticity or blues orthodoxy and helped to spur the latter on to even greater cultural creativity and eclecticism.

Viewed as the product of a fruitful trans-Atlantic dialogue that began with and remained conversant with the blues, Anglo-American rock texts as diverse and divergent as Bob Dylan’s Dada-esque poem “Subterranean Homesick Blues,” the Who’s rock opera “Tommy,” and Led Zeppelin’s quasi-mystical epic “Stairway to Heaven” can be seen as different variations on the same source material. All of this, it must be stressed, began with the reception and appropriation of the blues by seventy to one hundred twenty young British men in the early 1960s. The blues’ tropic vocabulary, its fund of characters, expressions and ideas, became the bedrock upon which so much British and American rock music of the 1960s was built. The Beatles relied less overtly on the blues and R&B

than almost all of their counterparts on the mid-1960s British scene, and yet John Lennon would still declare that “[t]he blues is a chair, not a design for a chair, or a better chair... it is the first chair. It is a chair for sitting on, not chairs for looking at or being appreciated. You sit on that music.”⁴² Because of the “British blues network,” rock musicians have been sitting—and continue to sit—on that chair for almost fifty years.

The subject matter of *Fathers and Sons* will doubtless be familiar to many readers. Many of its central characters have achieved international superstardom over the last five decades, and even those who have not, have spent at least some time in the public eye for either their achievements or their exploits. These achievements and exploits, in turn, have been available for public consumption in a substantial number of popular biographies and documentaries.⁴³ Thus, I do not purport to make any claims that have not already been made, nor any genre-shattering revelations that have hitherto lain buried under piles of trade publications and liner notes. Where *Fathers and Sons* will make substantial contributions is in the area of historical analysis and embedding of the well-worn narrative in the ebbs and flows of British and trans-Atlantic cultural history over the past seven decades. This is an area where not only popular, but also scholarly attention is demonstrably thinner—which is not to say that it does not exist.

⁴² John Lennon, interview with Jann Wenner, in Wenner, ed., *Lennon Remembers: The Rolling Stone Interview* (New York: Straight Arrow, 1971), p. 66.

⁴³ For popular biographies, please see the numerous books written by former rock critics Ray Coleman and Alan Clayson. Stephen Davis is noteworthy for two lively, often scurrilous exposés of Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones—*Hammer of the Gods: The Led Zeppelin Saga* (New York: W. Morrow, 2008 [3rd ed.]) and *Old Gods Almost Dead: The 40-Year Odyssey of the Rolling Stones* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001), respectively.

Although recognition has been slower in coming than it has to classical music, popular music has been the subject of an ever-growing serious historiography for the past three or four decades. There are quite a few notable examples where academic historians have attempted to show that popular music expression has not operated in a vacuum—that it is informed by, and in turn informs, the larger sociocultural context in which it is performed and consumed. Many of these works have taken the Beatles—the environment (Liverpool specifically; Great Britain more generally) in which the individual Beatles grew up; the trans-Atlantic phenomenon of “Beatlemania;” and the impact of post-1967 “serious” Beatles’ music on the youth counterculture—as their subject.⁴⁴ In fact, it is for this reason, among others, that I have chosen to focus in many cases on bands *besides* the Beatles. This is not to say the Beatles were not important—they were, of course. However, the story of directly blues-influenced bands in Great Britain is much more than “just” the story of the Beatles—especially when serious academic attention has tended to concentrate on that band, often to the exclusion of the numerous other important figures in this study.

An approach that treats popular music and the culture out of which it emerged as a serious topic for academic discussion also defines works in other musical sub-genres. For example, historian Brian Ward has examined the intricate relationship between soul

⁴⁴ On the Beatles and their environment: Sara Cohen, “Liverpool and the Beatles: Exploring the relationship between music and place, text and context,” in David Schwarz, Anahid Kassabian and Lawrence Siegel, eds., *Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinary, Culture* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1997), and Jonathan Gould, *Can’t Buy Me Love: The Beatles, Britain and America* (New York: Harmony Books, 2007). On “Beatlemania”: numerous works, but most notably, Stephen Stark’s *Meet the Beatles: A Cultural History of the Band That Shook Youth, Gender and the World* (New York: Harper Entertainment, 2005). On “serious” post-1967 Beatles: Devin McKinney, *Magic Circles: The Beatles in Dream and History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

and rhythm-and-blues music on one hand, and the burgeoning civil rights movement in the United States on the other, in his *Just My Soul Responding*.⁴⁵ Musicologist Edward Macan has made connections between the “progressive” and psychedelic rock music of the 1970s and ideas about religion, community, masculine virtuosity and the European classical tradition in *Rocking the Classics*—a work whose subject matter immediately follows my own, but whose approach I share.⁴⁶ Even heavy metal—the *bête noire* of music criticism and a sub-genre that journalist Charles Shaar Murray has labeled the blues’ “malformed idiot grandson”—has received its due with regard to serious academic work.⁴⁷ Deena Weinstein, a sociologist, and Robert Walser, a musicologist, have in their separate contributions to the field grounded heavy metal music and culture in discourses about gender, sexuality, socioeconomic class relations, juvenile delinquency and mental health.⁴⁸ What Ward has done for soul; what Macan has done for “progressive;” and what Weinstein and Walser have done for heavy metal—all, incidentally, musical forms that either influenced or were influenced by the musicians in this study—I intend to do for British blues-based rock music.

⁴⁵ Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm-and-Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

⁴⁶ Edward Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁴⁷ Charles Shaar Murray, “What Have They Done to My Blues, Ma?,” reprinted in Clinton Heylin, ed., *The Da Capo Book of Rock and Roll Writing* (Chicago: Da Capo Press, 2000), p. 604.

⁴⁸ Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology* (New York: Lexington Books, 1991); Robert Walser, *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1993). Walser has also written extensively about jazz and the classical canon, proving, perhaps, that scholarship in musicology has always been defined by a wide eclecticism that other disciplines tend to lack.

This project is quite necessary because, on the more precise topic of this dissertation—the relationship between African-American blues and British rock ‘n’ roll—there has not been much work done. The best work on the topic has been done by music journalists. Charles Shaar Murray has grappled with the relationship between blues and white rock in terms of sexuality, power and skill (and, specifically, through the person of Jimi Hendrix) in his book, *Crosstown Traffic*.⁴⁹ Esteemed rock critic Greil Marcus has thought and written much about the cultural iconography of rock music, especially its communication of “American” ideals and mythologies, in over thirty years of writing about Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan, Robert Johnson and the Band—to name just four examples that have proved especially relevant and engaging to my own understanding of British blues-based rock music.⁵⁰ But thus far, the fields of cultural and intellectual history have been reluctant to categorize rock musicians as worthy commentators on serious issues. This neglect ignores a vitally important category of cultural producers who wrestled with the issues of American cultural influence, social inclusion and marginalization, race and gender relations, and the relationship between sexuality and power.

In terms of academic work, the most important contributions in these areas have come from musicologists and ethnomusicologists. Susan Fast, for example, has written an insightful book, *In the Houses of the Holy*, on the meanings of Led Zeppelin’s recordings

⁴⁹ Charles Shaar Murray, *Crosstown Traffic: Jimi Hendrix and the Post-War Rock ‘n’ Roll Revolution* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989).

⁵⁰ E.g., see Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock ‘n’ Roll Music* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975) and *Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan’s Basement Tapes* (London: Picador, 1997).

and performances.⁵¹ Susan McClary has devoted a short portion of her book, *Conventional Wisdom*, to the adoption and appropriation of Robert Johnson's music by the British rock group Cream, even laying out some arguments as to why Eric Clapton and those like him would have found Johnson's example appealing.⁵² Roberta Freund Schwartz is responsible for what is to my knowledge the only academic book-length study of the British R&B scene of the early-to-mid-1960s—aptly titled, *How Britain Got the Blues*.⁵³ Simon Frith, Angela McRobbie and Sheila Whiteley have all dealt with the performative gender aspects of British “cock rockers” such as Mick Jagger, Robert Plant and Rod Stewart.⁵⁴

But though there is wide scope for fruitful interdisciplinary discussion between ethnomusicology and history, they are at heart distinct disciplines, with distinct purposes. Thus, as they ought to, ethnomusicologists focus mostly on the music, whereas in this study, I will attempt more solidly to embed the music in the context of the individuals who produced it, and to make connections with the wider culture whenever applicable. One of my tasks, then, in this dissertation, is to make the case that the rock music of the

⁵¹ Susan Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy: Led Zeppelin and the Power of Rock Music* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵² Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 49-62.

⁵³ Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of Blues Style in the United Kingdom* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007).

⁵⁴ Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, “Rock and Sexuality,” in Frith and Andrew Goodwin, eds., *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word* (New York: Pantheon, 1990), pp. 317-332; Sheila Whiteley, “Little Red Rooster vs. The Honky Tonk Woman: Mick Jagger, sexuality, style and image,” in Whiteley, ed., *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 67-99. I will deal more directly with the phenomenon called “cock rock” in Chapter 3.

late 1960s can, in fact, be the province of the serious academic historian, just as it is that of the ethnomusicologist or the sociologist. However, I also want to use the examples of that music, and the young men who produced it, to say something deeper and more significant about British and trans-Atlantic intellectual, cultural and social history at-large.

In *Crosstown Traffic*, Murray contends that if a young hippie from 1970 were somehow transported to the America of 1985, he would find an oasis of familiarity in the issue of rock music magazine *Rolling Stone* that commemorated 1985's "Live Aid" charity concert. In this issue, the time-travelling hippie would learn that most of the bands he liked or at least knew of in 1969—*e.g.*, the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, the Who, Eric Clapton, Bob Dylan—were still important (at least, important enough to be invited to play "Live Aid") in 1985.⁵⁵ In researching and writing this dissertation, I have found that the reverse of Murray's formulation applies to my personal situation. I grew up in the 1980s, familiar with the names, faces and sounds of many, if not all, of the artists within these pages, as cultural fixtures in my middle-class, middle-brow, Midwestern home—albeit usually in their latter-day incarnations as peddlers of "adult contemporary" rock or pop music.⁵⁶ That these men had begun their careers twenty to thirty years earlier, often producing vastly different kinds of music than what I was hearing as an elementary

⁵⁵ Murray, *Crosstown Traffic*, pp. 26-27.

⁵⁶ "Adult contemporary" refers merely to a radio programming format, and not a musical sub-genre, *per se*. As a format, "adult contemporary" refers to broadly mainstream rock and pop music, designed to appeal to as wide a demographic as possible (ages 16-54 of both sexes is the definition often given) without being deemed "inappropriate." There is no denotative value judgment inherent in such an appellation, but from the 1970s onward, "adult contemporary" has been *connoted* as "safe" music that one's parents would allow one to listen to.

school student in 1988, I had had little idea until I reached university. Then, researching backward, I encountered many of them in their initial career-making days as blues-rock musicians in the 1960s—which is, of course, when my “baby boom”-era parents had first encountered them. And so, in response to John Lee Hooker, the circle is, in fact, unbroken.⁵⁷

Also, like many of the young men who made up the British blues boom, I am an educated middle-class white male who worked my way back to the blues through the works of the idiom’s (mostly) white popularizers. Eric Clapton, Keith Richards, *et. al.*, began as enthusiasts of first-wave rock ‘n’ roll stars like Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry and Buddy Holly, but, as Clapton famously said, “It was... like a religious experience that started out by hearing Chuck Berry, and then at each stage I was going further and further back, and deeper and deeper into the source of the music.”⁵⁸ In my case, the starting-point was the likes of Clapton, the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin, but the backward process of research and discovery, and the ultimate sources to be found at the end, were the same. So in a very real sense, in *Fathers and Sons* I am telling the story of young men whose experience, at least in this respect, was rather similar to my own, and whose creativity provided the bridge that has enabled me to connect the music of my own youth and adolescence to its ultimate sources.

Fathers and Sons will proceed chronologically and thematically, examining the development of British blues-based popular music from the beginnings of the so-called “blues boom” through its period of greatest creativity in the late 1960s. It takes in the

⁵⁷ John Lee Hooker, “Will the Circle Be Unbroken,” *In Person* (Vee-Jay, 1974).

⁵⁸ Eric Clapton, interview with Peter Guralnick, in “Eric Clapton at the Passion Threshold,” *Musician*, no. 136 (February 1990), p. 46.

British blues network's transition from blues emulators to blues-rock innovators, through to the formalization and fragmentation of blues-rock into sub-genres by the beginning of the 1970s. But I also take the long view of the British blues network as men who were shaped by their historical circumstances—especially the circumstances of their crucial formative period as young adolescents. Thus, **Chapter 1: Talkin' Bout My Generation**, will situate the British blues network in its proper historical context. It will sketch out the political, social and cultural *milieu* of post-Second World War, post-imperial Great Britain, in which these young, mostly middle-class white men were born, grew up and became teenagers. The chapter will also trace the development of a distinctively British youth culture in the emergence of the Teddy Boys, Mods and Rockers in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and analyzes the impact of these subcultural moments on the subsequent blues boom.

Against this milieu, American blues and R&B music was transmitted to, and received by, British audiences. **Chapter 2: Tryin' to Make London My Home** examines the multifarious ways by which these related processes of transmission and reception actually occurred. Through the American military, but in other unique ways as well, blues and R&B music made its way to Britain via such diverse media as record albums, radio broadcasts, and infrequent barnstorming tours featuring African-American blues musicians. The chapter also relates the humble origins of some important early British blues bands—most notably the Rolling Stones, the Yardbirds and the Animals—and makes some general statements about the impact of “Beatlemania” on those bands’ career trajectories. However, transmission and reception do not necessarily entail acceptance, much less popularity. **Chapter 3: But My Dad Was Black** pauses to

consider at length some of the reasons *why* the blues—its imagery, emotions and legends in addition to the music itself—struck such a profound chord in its young male British enthusiasts. It is, of course, not completely implausible that young Britishers should have been attracted to the blues, but throughout this chapter I will analyze the reasons for the attraction, reinscribing familiar blues tropes such as violence and sexuality in the process. I provide a case study for looking at how these issues played out in **Chapter 4: The Cult of the Delta Blues Singer**. Here, I will build on earlier themes and then demonstrate how they worked, specifically in the case of Delta bluesman Robert Johnson, whom British fans raised to the top of their personal pantheon.

However much enthusiasts wanted to spread the gospel of the blues, the British “blues boom” was at first a minority endeavor. That changed in the wake of “Beatlemania” and the “British Invasion,” when British R&B groups were sent across the Atlantic to feed the demand for British pop music. British R&B, plainly put, came to America and resold Americans a bit of their own cultural heritage. **Chapter 5: Call and Response** examines how American rock groups responded by throwing down a series of “gauntlets” of their own. Each challenge—posed by Bob Dylan, Paul Butterfield, Jimi Hendrix and the Band—struck at some aspect of the British groups’ sophistication, “authenticity,” or masculine power. The result of these challenges, and the British responses, was a greater creativity in British blues-rock music, and the beginnings of a truly trans-Atlantic cultural dialogue by the late 1960s.

One of the most important features of the British response to the American “challenges” as described in the previous chapter, was the way in which British groups began to express themselves as British men against a British cultural landscape. **Chapter**

6: Bringing It All Back Home will look at both urban and rural manifestations of “Britishness” and “Englishness” in the music of the British blues-rock network. By the late 1960s Britain’s rock groups were building on the lessons of blues, along with a myriad of other musical and cultural influences, to create a kind of rock music that was truly innovative instead of being merely derivative. **Chapter 7: Just Can’t Be Satisfied** takes note of the most important musical developments that came out of this period. During this time, the rock groups in question borrowed liberally from various musical traditions, including Eastern, jazz and classical forms, and grafted them onto their foundation in the blues. They also “supercharged” the blues itself, by amplifying its treasure-trove of tropic resources, and revitalized their work by returning to the primal sources of rockabilly and country-and-western.

I have chosen to end my study in 1970. First, simply, this was the year in which the 1960s ended, both chronologically and, to many observers, emotionally. It was a year of events that were taken as marking the end of one cultural “era” and the beginning of another—for example, the deaths of Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin; the campus shootings at Kent State University and Jackson State University in the United States; and the acrimonious breakup of the Beatles. But 1970 also represents a watershed in terms of the creative output of the British rock network. In this year, as I later argue, British blues-based rock bands produced a number of “classic” recordings—among them, *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs*, by Derek and the Dominoes and *Led Zeppelin III*, by Led Zeppelin—that can be taken to represent the coming to fruition of all of the cultural and musical lessons in which the British blues network had been immersing themselves for a

decade.⁵⁹ On these recordings, one can discern the influences at work, but the bands have made musical statements that are, for the most part, unique and not derivative. The prodigious creativity of the previous five years may have arrived at a low ebb, but a set of rules and conventions had been established that would govern musical expression in rock for the remainder of the 1970s and beyond.

This interconnected network of young British, and to a lesser extent, American men dominated popular music and youth culture, inspired numerous others to imitate their example by forming bands of their own, and inspired countless others besides to adopt them as their heroes, just as they had once adopted African-American bluesmen as their replacement “fathers.” Our understanding of popular culture in general, and the youth culture of the 1960s and 1970s in particular, cannot be complete without first understanding the products and processes that inspired the British rock musicians who were at the forefront of musical innovation. A tangled recitation of recording sessions, sales figures, and interactions with fans and media the world over, would be needed to explain how and why Mick Jagger, Eric Clapton, and many others like them, achieved international rock stardom. *Fathers and Sons* will explain how and why these men were motivated to emulate the blues, and start down the path to that stardom, in the first place.

⁵⁹ Derek and the Dominoes, *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs* (Polydor, 1970); Led Zeppelin, *Led Zeppelin III* (Atlantic, 1970).

CHAPTER ONE
Talkin' 'Bout My Generation:
The British Blues Network and Its Environs⁶⁰

As large as the “British blues boom” came to loom in both popular music and mass culture, and as much as it helped to shape both, it began as the province of a distinct minority of British society. As Keith Richards puts it, “every town” in Britain had its own passionate blues enthusiasts, “sometimes just four or five guys—the blues freaks!”⁶¹ Scouring their hometown’s record shops for the latest prized releases from America, packing into downtown jazz clubs to hear their favorite groups (whether local or, as a rare treat, from the States), or strumming along to beat-up radios in art college common rooms, it was perhaps only a matter of time before each town’s quota of “four or five guys” would find each other and eventually form groups to imitate their heroes.

London, by virtue of being Britain’s largest city as well as its capital, not only boasted the biggest population of native “blues freaks;” it also served as a lodestone for provincial devotees. The attraction of London for a blues enthusiast—especially one in a group—was legion. The capital was (and remains) the cultural and economic nerve center of Britain. It was home to the most recording companies, the most publishing houses, the most jazz clubs and—perhaps most importantly for the young blues fan—the most record stores. For centuries, London, like Paris, was the place where writers, artists and performers, no matter how successful they were in the provinces, needed to go in order to

⁶⁰ Chapter title: The Who, “My Generation,” *The Who Sings My Generation* (Decca, 1966).

⁶¹ Keith Richards, interview with Andrew Franklin, in Tony Scherman, “The Hellhound’s Trail: Following Robert Johnson,” *Musician*, no. 147 (January 1991), p. 37.

prove themselves—to *really matter*.⁶² And so, in the 1960s, in the wake of “Beatlemania,” young blues enthusiasts did go to London, to prove themselves not only to ardent record company executives, but also to each other.

The young men who populated the British blues and rock ‘n’ roll scene in the 1960s comprised an interpersonal cultural network. That is, they were a more or less definable grouping of, at my estimate, roughly seventy to one-hundred-twenty young British men whose social interconnectivity collaborated on the project of British blues emulation and, later, innovation. With the exception of bass guitarists Bill Wyman and Bryan “Chas” Chandler, pianist Ian Stewart, drummer Peter “Ginger” Baker and guitarist Spencer Davis, all of its major figures were born either during the Second World War, or during the tenure of the first Labour government (1945-1951).⁶³ Their lives growing up were impacted by the succession of first rationing and then affluence, as well as by the retreat from Empire. They were members of the “baby boom,” and as such were either observers or actors in the growing debates in Britain about the relationship between youth culture, affluence and delinquency. Many of them logged at least some time either in university, art school or technical college—a key factor not only in their acculturation, but also, perhaps more mundanely, in how they got to know one another.⁶⁴

Like most Western European young people during this time, they were massively impacted by America—borrowing American styles and speech patterns, to be sure, but

⁶² Shawn Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!: The Smashing Rise and Giddy Fall of Swinging London* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), p. 124.

⁶³ Paul Addison, *Now the War Is Over: A Social History of Britain, 1945-51* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1985).

⁶⁴ Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art Into Pop* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 6.

also adopting Americans, often black men, as their heroes. Finally, almost without exception, they hailed from six major urban areas—London/ Home Counties; Liverpool; Birmingham/Midlands; Newcastle-upon-Tyne/Northumberland, Greater Manchester and Belfast. In other words, although there was some slight class disparity between its members, the “British blues network” was all shaped in and by roughly the same social and cultural *milieu*. Thus, in order to better understand how these young men shaped popular music and culture, we must first understand how that *milieu* shaped them.

That the Second World War was a major formative influence on Great Britain well into the 1950s and even the 1960s has been remarked upon so often as to be regarded as something of a commonplace.⁶⁵ Physically, Britain’s cities bore the scars of Nazi Germany’s aerial assaults in the form of destroyed buildings (and sometimes whole neighborhoods) and the numerous craters left by Hitler’s V-1 and V-2 weapons.⁶⁶ In Dartford, the house of Bert and Doris Richards and their infant son, Keith, was demolished by an air strike in 1944; that the young family was out for the day would have crucial repercussions for the future of popular music. Reflecting on the episode years later, Keith Richards would remark, with perverse glee, that “Hitler was after my

⁶⁵ See Robert Hewison, *In Anger: British Culture in the Cold War* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1981); Corelli Barnett, *The Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (New York: Macmillan, 1986); Peter Hennessy, *Never Again: Britain, 1945-1951* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993); David Cannadine, *In Churchill’s Shadow: Confronting the Past in Modern Britain* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁶⁶ Francis Sheppard, *London: A History* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 337-38.

ass.”⁶⁷ In 1963 his Rolling Stones would pose for one of their very first album cover photographs on one of London’s still-visible bomb craters—at once, signifying their own gritty menace as well as reminding the world that, at least in an architectural sense, Britain had still not completely recovered.⁶⁸ Further to the west, in Chiswick, the destructive sounds of the Blitz left a lasting impression on Peter Townshend, who, as the leader of the Who two decades later, “tuned up [his] guitar to emulate the sound of bombers” he had heard in his street, two blocks from some Luftwaffe-targeted railway yards.⁶⁹

Richards was unique in that his family was the only one of the British blues network to actually have their house destroyed. In terms of the socioeconomic and cultural impact of the war, however, he certainly was not. This larger and less direct impact took three distinct yet interrelated forms. The first was economic. Rationing of food and consumer durables, introduced in 1940, was not lifted on V-E Day, but, owing to the precarious economic position in which Britain found herself, lasted until 1954.⁷⁰ Many British children—our protagonists included—grew up knowing meat, sugar, candy, gasoline, tea and even bread only as infrequent treats. Bill Wyman remembers his parents

⁶⁷ Christopher Sandford, *Keith Richards: Satisfaction* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2004), p. 9.

⁶⁸ Stephen Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead: The 40-Year Odyssey of the Rolling Stones* (Broadway Books, 2001), p. xxvi. The album in question was *The Rolling Stones: England’s Newest Hitmakers* (Abkco, 1964).

⁶⁹ Pete Townshend, open letter to David Lister, *The Independent* (January 6, 2007), p. 11.

⁷⁰ Ina Zweininger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls and Consumption, 1939-1955* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 124. Meat was the last item to have controls lifted.

stretching the family diet with horsemeat and whale.⁷¹ In this most basic of ways, the economic realities of postwar Britain were brought home to British youth in this most basic of ways. Whether or not one believes biographer Stephen Davis' assertion that "the Stones and their generation were short of stature, thanks to Hitler and his armies," the gastronomic scarcity imposed by rationing was perhaps the only economically sound analogy that could be drawn between the black sharecroppers of the Mississippi Delta and their largely-middle-class disciples.⁷²

The second effect of the war was geopolitical. Owing to a variety of factors, which have been dealt with admirably by a number of scholars, Britain suffered a drastic downturn in its geopolitical standing.⁷³ Britain's reward for standing alone against, and helping to defeat, the Nazis was vastly straitened economic circumstances, a secondary status to and reliance on the new American superpower and the beginnings of a decolonization process that would see the Union Jack lowered all over the world. Solid causal connections between Britain's geopolitical weakness and the loss of Empire, and the favorable reception of the blues by a visible section of young British manhood, are obviously very difficult to prove, and must remain conjectural. It can be argued, however,

⁷¹ Bill Wyman, with Ray Coleman, *Stone Alone: The Story of a Rock 'n' Roll Band* (New York: Viking, 1990), p. 14.

⁷² Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. xxv.

⁷³ See Corelli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (New York: W.W. Morrow, 1972); David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the 20th Century* (London: Longman, 1991); John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire: The Historical Debate* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991); D. George Boyce, *Decolonization and the British Empire, 1775-1997* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Roy Douglas, *Liquidation of Empire: The Decline of the British Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); and Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

that there was in British culture a palpable if abstract feeling of national exhaustion and even of sclerosis, and an unease over a perceived lack of virility.⁷⁴

Additionally, the windup of empire deprived the sons of Britain's aristocrats and bourgeoisie of a traditional opportunity for employment and adventure. Since the 17th century, these young men might have opted for a post in the military-cum-administrative apparatus that governed the empire, in preference to the dreary clerical or mercantile career that might have been theirs if they stayed in grey, rainy Britain.⁷⁵ Such a post offered adventure and a chance to "see the world"—a chance that, to the ever outward-looking British, held a considerable attraction. With decolonization, obviously, all of these opportunities ended. A young man like Mick Jagger could in previous times have parlayed his anticipated degree in political science at the London School of Economics into a high post in the Colonial Office or the colonial administration. Likewise, someone like Robert Plant might have found his apprenticeship in accounting a bit more palatable if he could look forward to managing the imperial accounts in Nairobi or Cairo.⁷⁶

If young British men found it infinitely more difficult to migrate to work in the former empire, by the late 1950s, the sons of the former empire were having no such difficulties. In the face of an acute labor shortage, the Labour government began to heavily recruit from the West Indies and South Asia. In 1948 Parliament passed the British Nationality Act, which extended full citizenship to all residents of the Empire

⁷⁴ Hewison, *In Anger*, p. 13; Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 3.

⁷⁵ John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester, UK, 1984), pp. 206-7.

⁷⁶ John M. Hellmann, Jr., "I'm A Monkey: The Influence of the Black American Blues Argot on the Rolling Stones," in *The Journal of American Folklore*, v. 86, no. 342 (Oct.-Dec. 1973), p. 368-373.

(later Commonwealth), with corresponding rights to enter and settle in the country.⁷⁷ In addition, the government advertised in the local press, offering inexpensive transportation costs and affordable housing to any Commonwealth resident willing to live and work in Britain. No sooner had the ink dried on these advertisements than the first transport ship, the HMS *Empire Windrush*, carrying 492 Jamaicans, docked at Tilbury, near London, on 22 June 1948.⁷⁸ Immigration from the Commonwealth continued unabated until 1962, when legislation was passed to limit the influx. But by that time, over 200,000 West Indians, Indians, Pakistanis, and Africans living and working—primarily in the transportation, food service and janitorial sectors—in Britain’s cities.⁷⁹

The photographs of Jamaicans disembarking from the *Empire Windrush* in 1948 have come to symbolize for many the beginning of modern British multicultural society.⁸⁰ The truth is that, in some sense, Britain has always been a multicultural society—the presence and influence of the Scots, Welsh and Irish, in addition to émigrés from the Continent, would attest to that. But the “Windrush generation” (as the first emigrants were called) provided Britain with her first large-scale taste of a *multiracial* society.⁸¹ That “generation’s” sociocultural impact on, and uneasy relations with, “white”

⁷⁷ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain From Suez to the Beatles* (London: Little, Brown & Co., 2005), p. 295.

⁷⁸ Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), p. 51.

⁷⁹ Dilwyn Porter, “‘Never-Never Land’: Britain Under the Conservatives,” in Nick Tiratsoo, ed., *From Blitz to Blair: A New History of Britain Since 1945* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997), p. 112.

⁸⁰ Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 313.

⁸¹ Phillips and Phillips, *Windrush*, p. 71.

Britain have been detailed admirably by historians Mike and Trevor Phillips.⁸² In addition, the immigrant community would leave its musical mark on the British blues network. Thanks to them, West Indian ska, “bluebeat” and reggae, African polyrhythmic drumming, Indian sitar and tabla music, and an overall partiality for the musically exotic (what Jimmy Page has referred to as the “CIA – Celtic/Indian/Arabic – Influence”) were added to the British musical palette.⁸³

As important and enriching as these multicultural stimuli were, however, they must pale in comparison to the colossal impact of America and American culture. This was the third important effect of the Second World War. To be sure, America, as a cultural construct as much as an actual political entity, has been a fixture in Europe’s collective imagination, so to speak, ever since de Tocqueville published his impressions of political life in the new republic in 1835.⁸⁴ Throughout the Victorian era, the imagery of what America—its lifestyle, culture and people—was supposedly like was cultivated and maintained by a series of first-hand encounters between European (especially British) and American travelers.⁸⁵ Beginning in the last quarter of the 19th century, and continuing on into the 20th century, these encounters began to be supplemented by the commodities

⁸² Ibid, p. 11.

⁸³ Jimmy Page, interview with Cameron Crowe, in *Rolling Stone* (January 1975), reprinted in Peter Herbst, ed., *The Rolling Stone Interviews: Talking With the Legends of Rock, 1967-1980* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), p. 316.

⁸⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2004). A second volume of same was published in 1840.

⁸⁵ See Richard Rapson, *Britons View America: Travel Commentary, 1860-1935* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1971); and James Simmons, *Star-Spangled Eden: 19th Century America Through the Eyes of Dickens, Wilde, Frances Trollope, Frank Harris and Other British Travelers* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2000).

of a fast-growing mass culture—films, phonograph records, fashion, automobiles and traveling entertainment, the most famous of which was Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, which captivated not only the British, but also the French, Germans and Italians in its circuit of the Continent during the late 1880s.⁸⁶

Depending on one’s age, class and political persuasion, America and all it was taken to stand for—technological efficiency, mass-produced banality, lowbrow tastelessness, social egalitarianism, autonomy from history and tradition—was either sought-after or abhorrent to Europe. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, however, it was safely “offshore.”⁸⁷ For Britain as well as for much of Western Europe, the war brought America firmly and irrevocably “onshore”—both literally and figuratively. American military forces were deployed in the hundreds of thousands to posts throughout Britain and Northern Ireland, in anticipation of the invasion of the Continent. They brought with them American food and drink (especially Coca-Cola, that bane of the 1950s European protectionists), American accents (particularly Southern and Midwestern), American slang and, perhaps most pertinently for this study, American music.⁸⁸ The transmission of American jazz, blues and country-and-western music to Britain via American personnel will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter.

⁸⁶ Robert Rydell and Rob Kroes. *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁸⁷ Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), p. 3.

⁸⁸ David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), pp. 280-81; David Crystal, “American English in Europe,” in C.W.E. Bigsby, *Superculture: American Popular Culture and Europe* (Bowling Green, OH: The Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1976), pp. 57-68.

With the end of the war and the gradual onset of the Cold War, America's presence in Britain was felt figuratively as well. The decline of Britain's international role and prestige coincided with the rise of America's. The financial center of the world was now New York, not London; Whitehall had ceded its geopolitical decision-making power to Washington. And as much as politicians in both countries touted the Anglo-American "special relationship," it was clear who was the weaker sister. Britain found herself economically dependent on, and unable to act militarily without the support of the Americans—two related shortcomings that were ruthlessly exposed in the Suez debacle of 1956.⁸⁹ Even when the British economy rebounded in the late 1950s, providing the general prosperity that led Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to remark that, "Most of our people have never had it so good," this did not translate to a reinvigoration of British muscle on the geopolitical stage.⁹⁰

What it did lead to was American cultural dominance. From the 1940s onward, American popular culture saturated Western European markets, including those of Britain. Historians have identified a variety of factors that caused this saturation. Favorable trade agreements between the United States and Europe's governments stipulated that a majority of the films shown would be American-made.⁹¹ The devastation of domestic cultural industries by the war meant that they were no match to out-produce

⁸⁹ Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, pp. 24-26.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 75.

⁹¹ *E.g.*, the Blum-Byrnes Treaty of 1946, which stipulated that, in exchange for American financial aid, a quota was established whereby, of the films to be shown to domestic audiences in France, 65% would be American-made. For the contentious debate over this agreement, as well as the battle to ban Coca-Cola from France, see Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, pp. 18-19 and 52-69.

the Americans anyway. Additionally, the war had put an end to European importation of American products (especially films); with the ban lifted, a six-year backlog now flooded Europe.⁹²

Finally, and quite simply, although it was a difficult pill for Europe's politicians to swallow, domestic audiences preferred American cultural products.⁹³ In Britain, Coca-Cola began to challenge ale, beer and the ever-popular gin-and-tonic for supremacy. "Hamburger joints" sprang up in London's cities, although, it being Britain, they were outdone by two other "foreign invaders," the Indian tandoori and the Chinese restaurant.⁹⁴ And American films—action-packed, violent and melodramatic—carried the day almost effortlessly. For all the critical adulation and retrospective cultural weight heaped on the grittily realistic "Kitchen Sink" films, to the average British moviegoer, they were rarely preferable to Westerns or *films noir*.⁹⁵

Of course, the most popular American cultural export, not only to Britain but the rest of the world as well, was rock 'n' roll music, whose emergence in the 1950s from a mélange of white country and black rhythm-and-blues music has been documented far

⁹² Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated and Transformed American Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), pp. 216-217.

⁹³ Rob Kroes, *If You've Seen One, You've Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p. 72.

⁹⁴ Colin Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 218.

⁹⁵ Peter Hutchings, "Beyond the New Wave: Realism in British Cinema, 1959-63," in Robert Murphy, ed., *The British Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), p. 148.

too many times to require repetition here.⁹⁶ A few words must be said, however, about rock ‘n’ roll’s introduction in Britain, both because of its importance as a way of communicating America to Britain, and because of the numerous parallel developments that speak to a growing Anglo-American perspective on popular culture. Rock ‘n’ roll first came to Britain, as it came to much of Western Europe, in the form of that utterly-un-rock-‘n’-roll figure, Bill Haley, whose hit singles, “Shake, Rattle ‘n’ Roll” and “Rock Around the Clock” were the first rock ‘n’ roll songs to enter the British charts (in December 1954 and November 1955, respectively).⁹⁷ Also influential was the film *Blackboard Jungle*, which featured “Rock Around the Clock” as part of its soundtrack. American and British teenagers alike greeted the film by dancing in the aisles and, when ordered to desist, by destroying the seating.⁹⁸ Such incidents alerted the adult Establishment in both countries to the violence and hedonism supposedly encouraged by the “jungle music.”

All this seemed as nothing, however, compared to the advent of Elvis Presley in 1956. As in America, Elvis earned at once the shock and disgust of Britain’s adults and the undying devotion of many of Britain’s teenagers. The reasons for adult repulsion were the same on both sides of the Atlantic. Elvis’ lyrics were perceived as imbecilic and

⁹⁶ See, for example, Charlie Gillett, *The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock ‘n’ Roll* (New York: Da Capo, 1996); Iain Chambers, *Urban Rhythms: Pop Music and Popular Culture* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1985); James Miller, *Flowers in the Dustbin: The Rise of Rock and Roll, 1947-1977* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999); and Nick Tosches, *Unsung Heroes of Rock ‘n’ Roll: The Birth of Rock in the Wild Years Before Elvis* (New York: Da Capo, 1999).

⁹⁷ Dick Bradley, *Understanding Rock ‘n’ Roll: Popular Music in Britain, 1955-1962* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1992), p. 17.

⁹⁸ Miller, *Flowers in the Dustbin*, p. 94.

his music was sexually suggestive (as was the man himself, all curled lip and swiveling hips).⁹⁹ The “blackness” of Elvis’ music and singing style attracted comment in Britain just as it did in America, although the apocalyptic fears of racial miscegenation that marked the American reaction to Presley were largely absent from British discourse.¹⁰⁰

None of this, of course, mattered to British youth. Keith Richards declared (with the benefit, no doubt, of thirty years of hindsight) that, “We were very conscious that we were in a totally new era.... It was like A.D. and B.C., and 1956 was Year One.”¹⁰¹ John Lennon noted that “[n]othing really affected me until Elvis.... It was the spark, and then everything opened up for us.”¹⁰² Paul McCartney concurs: “That was him, that was the guru we had been waiting for. The Messiah had arrived.”¹⁰³ The British teenager’s love of American rock ‘n’ roll did not limit itself to Presley, of course, even if he remained their favorite. “Rockabilly” stars such as Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Eddie Cochran and Gene Vincent were all massively popular amongst young British audiences (who were relieved, after having seen the supposedly “dumpy, middle-aged Haley,” to learn

⁹⁹ Brian Ward, “‘By Elvis and All the Saints’: Images of the American South in the World of 1950s British Popular Music,” in Franklin T. Lambert and Joseph P. Ward, eds., *Britain and the American South: From Colonialism to Rock ‘n’ Roll* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2003), pp. 205-06.

¹⁰⁰ Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), p. 96.

¹⁰¹ Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. xxvii.

¹⁰² John Lennon, interview with Hunter Davies, 1968, reprinted in Hunter Davies, *The Beatles*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), p. 19.

¹⁰³ Paul McCartney, quoted in The Beatles, *The Beatles Anthology* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 2000), p. 22.

that some rock ‘n’ roll heroes were nearer to their own age).¹⁰⁴ So, too, was Texas-born guitarist Buddy Holly; Lennon and McCartney, for example, renamed their skiffle band “the Beatles” in a “punning homage” to Holly’s band, the Crickets.¹⁰⁵ On the rhythm-and-blues side of rock ‘n’ roll’s biracial amalgam, Little Richard, Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley achieved legendary status in Britain—this, even moreso once the “blues boom” got underway, and their hits became *de rigueur* cover material for any aspiring British blues band.¹⁰⁶

Britain played an important role in the admittedly-brief first flowering of rock ‘n’ roll in the late 1950s—if not, as yet, as a place where hit records and trans-Atlantic taste were made, then at least as the scene of some of early rock ‘n’ roll’s most infamous moments. Indeed, it was at the outset of Jerry Lee Lewis’ wildly-anticipated British tour in May 1958 that the controversy surrounding Lewis’ bigamous marriage to his thirteen-year-old cousin, Myra Brown, first became public knowledge.¹⁰⁷ And it was an automobile accident in London in 1960s that claimed Eddie Cochran’s life and severely crippled Gene Vincent.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 465; Andrew Loog Oldham, *Stoned: A Memoir of London in the 1960s* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), p. 28. This, even though Haley was barely thirty when his records started becoming hits in Britain.

¹⁰⁵ Miller, *Flowers in the Dustbin*, p. 182.

¹⁰⁶ Sean Egan, *Animal Tracks: The Story of the Animals, Newcastle’s Rising Sons* (London: Helter Skelter, 2001), p. 7.

¹⁰⁷ Brian Ward, “‘By Elvis and All the Saints’,” in Lambert and Joseph P. Ward, eds., *Britain and the American South*, p. 206.

¹⁰⁸ Peter Guralnick, “Rockabilly,” in Anthony DeCurtis, James Henke and Holly George-Warren, eds., *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* (New York: Straight Arrow, 1992), p. 67.

Rock ‘n’ roll’s development in Great Britain was uniquely shaped by its interaction with a musical phenomenon that was simultaneously derivative of African-American style, and yet distinctly British. Skiffle was equal parts jazz, folk (both American and British) and country blues, played out of reverence for what were supposedly the simple charms of an imagined early 20th-century rural South, in which the music supposedly had its roots.¹⁰⁹ What distinguished skiffle from the music out of which it was cobbled together, was its emphasis on rustic simplicity, a sort of “do-it-yourself” mentality that fit in very well in a Britain with fresh memories of rationing and a command economy.¹¹⁰ The fact that, in the absence of an expensive stand-up model, a bass guitar had to be improvised out of a tea-chest, a broomstick and a length of string was seen not as a drawback, but as a badge of noncommercial authenticity.¹¹¹ The underlying mentality of skiffle, which shares some basic similarities with that which prompted the emergence of punk music in the mid-1970s, was to democratize music, to make it possible for anyone to play it.¹¹²

For eighteen months beginning in early 1955, this mentality began to catch on, and not just in “trad” jazz or folk circles. The godfather and, in time, the virtual

¹⁰⁹ In this way, as would often be the case in British popular music during the 1960s and 1970s, the imagined America often bore very little resemblance to the America on the ground, the America of, at least at that moment, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. Brian Ward, “By Elvis and All the Saints,” in Lambert and Joseph P. Ward, eds., *Britain and the American South*, p. 193.

¹¹⁰ Ian Macdonald, *The People’s Music* (London: 2003), p. 192.

¹¹¹ Ewan MacColl, *Journeyman: An Autobiography* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1990), p. 273.

¹¹² Patrick Humphries, *The Lonnie Donegan Story, 1931-2002: Puttin’ On the Style* (London: Virgin, 2003), p. 78.

embodiment of what has come to be called “the skiffle boom” was Lonnie Donegan, a banjo player for Chris Barber’s influential Dixieland jazz band. Donegan scored a huge, if inadvertent, hit in early 1955 with “Rock Island Line,” an old Lead Belly song recorded almost as an afterthought on Barber’s album, *New Orleans Joys*.¹¹³ The song made it onto not only the British but also, miraculously, the American charts. On the strength of this and subsequent hits, such as “Midnight Special” and “Wabash Cannonball,” Donegan became something of an overnight sensation. In his wake, for eighteen months at least, skiffle became a *bona fide* craze.¹¹⁴

When rock ‘n’ roll invaded Britain over the winter of 1955 and spring of 1956, skiffle initially proved resistant. Donegan, although he has in recent years come to be seen by the historiography as a proto-rock ‘n’ roller, was extremely contemptuous of the new American craze, saying, “Like all gimmicks, [rock ‘n’ roll] is sure to die the death. Nothing makes me madder than to be bracketed with those rock ‘n’ roll boys.”¹¹⁵ However, legions of teenaged boys, concerned less with reverence for the old-time South and more with earning the affections of the girls at their school by “playing like Elvis,” seized upon skiffle’s do-it-yourself ethos for their own purposes.¹¹⁶ After all, skiffle and rock ‘n’ roll both came out of the same place and the same admixture of American folk

¹¹³ George Melly, *Revolt Into Style: The Pop Arts* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1971), p. 26.

¹¹⁴ Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 467.

¹¹⁵ Lonnie Donegan, interview in *Picturegoer*, September 1, 1956, quoted in Alan Clayson, *Beat Merchants: The Origins, History, Impact and Rock Legacy of the 1960s British Beat Groups* (New York: Blandford Press, 1995), p. 36.

¹¹⁶ Brian Ward, “By Elvis and All the Saints,” in Lambert and Joseph P. Ward, *Britain and the American South*, p. 196.

styles. What could be called “purist” skiffle, performed by the likes of Donegan and Barber, gave way to a sort of skiffle-inflected rock ‘n’ roll, performed by literally thousands of earnest young men, giving it their all on tea-chest bass, washboard-and-thimble and acoustic guitar.¹¹⁷ Such groups provided a start not only to Lennon and McCartney, but also to Ray Davies of the Kinks, Jimmy Page of the Yardbirds and Led Zeppelin, and numerous other key figures of the British “blues boom.”¹¹⁸

Many skiffle groups never advanced past some enjoyable after-school entertainment (nor, to be fair, did their members probably have much ambition beyond that). However, there was a rising and affluent teenage market for record albums, fan magazines and concert tickets, much of whose purchasing power was presently flowing in the wrong direction—away from Britain, and across the Atlantic.¹¹⁹ Just as their counterparts were doing in Western Europe, British record companies and impresarios, although suspicious that rock ‘n’ roll was a passing fad (in fact, sometimes *because* of these suspicions), got to work finding homegrown talent to harness that purchasing power.¹²⁰ Skiffle groups and singers, on display nightly at one of Britain’s many coffee

¹¹⁷ Clayson, *Beat Merchants*, p. 42.

¹¹⁸ Mo Foster, *17 Watts?: The Birth of British Rock Guitar* (London: Sanctuary, 2000), pp. 34-36.

¹¹⁹ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 79.

¹²⁰ Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 472.

bars (frequented by the teenage hipster too young to purchase alcohol), were an ideal talent mine.¹²¹

The first such find was Tommy Hicks, who was talent-spotted by the British pop impresario Larry Parnes playing at the 2 I's Coffee Bar in Soho. Renamed "Tommy Steele," and given a leather jacket, Hicks was unleashed upon a breathless public as "the British Elvis."¹²² In this way, Parnes began to stockpile a stable of young (mostly working-class) singers who comprised the "first wave" of British rock 'n' roll. He renamed them, too, as he had Steele, using a simple formula that leaves the contemporary observer wondering if, in Levy's words, "they might've been porn stars"—Dickie Pride, Marty Eager, Johnny Gentle, Billy Fury and Georgie Fame being the most remarkable.¹²³ The British situation was comparable to that on the Continent, where France's Johnny Hallyday and Italy's Adriano Celentano also drove adolescent girls in their respective countries wild with their best Elvis impersonations—the difference being that Steele, Fury, *et. al.*, were able to use "the King's English," so to speak.¹²⁴

Tommy Steele was undoubtedly popular, but by 1958 he had begun starring in West End musicals and, accordingly, his rock 'n' roll value waned. Billy Fury and Adam Faith also enjoyed brief popularity, but it was Cliff Richard who, with his group the

¹²¹ Juliet Gardiner, *From the Bomb to the Beatles: The Changing Face of Post-War Britain* (London: Collins and Brown, 1999), p. 11.

¹²² Miller, *Flowers in the Dustbin*, p. 179.

¹²³ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 87.

¹²⁴ Christian Victor and Julian Regoli, *Vingt Ans de Rock Français* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1978), p. 18; Franco Minganti, "Jukebox Boys: Postwar Italian Music and the Culture of Covering," in Heide Fehrenbach and Uta Poiger, eds., *Transactions, Transgressions and Transformations: American Culture in Western Europe and Japan* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), p. 156.

Shadows, left the most lasting imprint on British popular music, pre-1963.¹²⁵ Between 1960 and 1969, his records spent more time on the British charts than any other, and he outsold, among others, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.¹²⁶ Partly this must be attributed to the almost three years' head-start he had on both groups, but unlike some of his pop-singer contemporaries, Richard and the Shadows had genuine talent and earned their accolades largely on their own merit. According to Dominic Sandbrook, the secret of Richard's success lay in his ability to infuse American "rockabilly" with the conventions and polish of the English music-hall.¹²⁷ To countless British rock singers and bands of the 1960s and 1970s who sought to blend elements of American and English styles in their music, Cliff Richard was an early (if probably unrecognized) intellectual predecessor.

Certainly, the cultural progression from Cliff Richard and his ilk to the Beatles and Rolling Stones on the other is not a straight and unbroken line. Nor will it do to downplay the distinctiveness of the groups that comprised the "beat boom" and the "blues boom." Certainly one of the factors that drove the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Yardbirds, *et. al.* to immerse themselves in the sounds of African-American R&B was their perception that "white American" rock 'n' roll had become tamed—in Brian Jones' estimation, "watered down"—and in forming this opinion, the records of Steele, Fury and Richard were as much a body of evidence as those of Americans Paul Anka or Frankie

¹²⁵ Sandbrook, *You've Never Had It So Good*, p. 474.

¹²⁶ Steve Turner, *Cliff: For the Record* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 79.

¹²⁷ Sandbrook, *You've Never Had It So Good*, p. 476.

Avalon.¹²⁸ On the other hand, it is important to note that, as laughable as it might seem at first, there are salient musical, stylistic and socioeconomic connections linking the Beatles with their predecessors. In other words, 1963, the year that has been (rather clumsily) labelled the *Annus Beatleus*, was not a Year Zero.¹²⁹

A major effect of the entrenchment of rock ‘n’ roll in Great Britain between 1955 and 1963 was to intensify the image of America that had been conveyed to Europe for the past seven decades (if not longer). The prevailing image of America was of a wide-open fantasy land, populated with cowboys, Indians, gangsters, cops, hard-boiled detectives, *femmes fatales*, riverboat captains, tycoons and sports heroes.¹³⁰ Once jazz and the blues came to Britain, this cast of mythic characters was augmented by a black face—the itinerant musician, cast aside by both white and black America, financially and politically powerless but sexually dynamic.¹³¹ In America, women, whether good or evil, were invariably glamorous and alluring—indeed, the ambivalent image of the American woman is one of the enduring elements to make the transition from American to British popular culture.¹³²

American culture echoed America’s ethos, where anything was possible, where man was master of his own destiny, and where good more often than not defeated evil

¹²⁸ Brian Jones, quoted in Nicholas Schaffner, *The British Invasion: From the First Wave to the New Wave* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1983), p. 56.

¹²⁹ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 166.

¹³⁰ Doris and Edward Bernays, *What the British Think of Us* (New York: n.p., 1957), p. 18.

¹³¹ Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock ‘n’ Roll Music* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), pp. 22-23.

¹³² Rapson, *Britons View America*, pp. 106-25.

(even if evil was attractive or likeable). Blues music, ironically enough, joined this chorus from the underground, extolling an America in which there was freedom in solitude and power in sexuality.¹³³ Above all, from American popular culture, one got the impression that there were seemingly no “ordinary” people in America. Britain, however, aside from the aristocrats and the royal family, seemed to be *full* of them—and many of those under the age of eighteen dreamed of America and of being extraordinary.¹³⁴

The British youngsters who were held in thrall by American popular culture in the 1950s and early 1960s were, like their American, French, German and Italian counterparts, unique in several important ways. For starters, they were members of the “baby boom”—the largest cohort of young people in Western history. Secondly, having been born during the war or in the five years that followed, they were uniquely placed to take advantage of both the British economic boom that began in the 1950s, and the rapidly expanding consumer culture that followed in its wake.¹³⁵ Thirdly, they were the first grouping of young people to foster a more or less national “youth culture,” the first to be identified and targeted by advertisers and retailers with regard to their own wants and needs. They were even the first to be categorized by the burgeoning disciplines of sociology and child psychology as “teenagers”—that is, as being a class of people neither child nor adult.¹³⁶ With their numerical size, their unprecedented buying power, their

¹³³ Marcus, *Mystery Train*, p. 25.

¹³⁴ William Chew, ed., *Images of America: Through the European Looking Glass* (Brussels, VUB Press, 1997), p. 43.

¹³⁵ Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and the Rockers* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980), p. 178.

¹³⁶ Marwick, *The Sixties*, p. 57.

self-identification and their self-promotion, they were the driving force behind much of the cultural and social development that we have come to associate with “the Sixties” in the West.¹³⁷

To be certain, the concept of “youth culture” in Britain was not a new one. As Bill Osgerby has pointed out, a British adolescent culture, recognized as distinct from adult culture, did not just “suddenly and spontaneously materialize in the 1950s amid a wave of rock ‘n’ roll records, coffee bars and brothel-creeper shoes.”¹³⁸ Rather, it had existed on the margins of the mainstream, attracting the attention and anxiety of adult commentators, ever since the turn of the century. Beginning in the 1880s, social reformers, noticing a general trend toward increased wages and leisure time among the working classes, as well as the growth of a commercial entertainment market to take advantage of that trend, began to fret publicly for the moral character of working-class youth.

Their worries were seemingly focused as much on the often outlandish attire of working-class youth, as on their purported criminality. The most visible targets of official opprobrium were the “scuttlers” of Manchester, or the “peaky blinders” of Birmingham, whose wardrobe consisted of “the union shirt, bell-bottomed trousers, the heavy leather belt, picked out in fancy designs with the large steel buckle and the thick, iron-shod clogs,” topped off with a “donkey-fringe” haircut. The girlfriends of these unfortunates shared their taste in shoes, although they traded in the trousers for “skirt[s] with vertical

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 3.

¹³⁸ Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1998), p. 5. For the alternative argument, that British youth “were not different but simply younger versions of their parents,” see Peter Lewis, *The Fifties* (London: Heinemann, 1978) and Ernest Cashmore, *No Future* (London: Heinemann, 1984).

stripes.”¹³⁹ The danger posed to the ordinary law-abiding citizen by these youth groups was certainly criminal—the “scuttler” was seen as likely to “pick your pocket, rifle your house, and even bash your head in a dark corner if it is made worth his while.”¹⁴⁰ However, it is easy to detect a solid streak of outrage directed at what might be called the “hooligan at rest;” simply put, at his or her impudence to loiter about on city street corners, wearing such garish clothing, wasting his or her time and money on trifles, while the average Englishman and -woman had to go to work!¹⁴¹

The visibility of working-class youth “spectacular” subcultures, and the official concern they elicited, continued almost unabated through the Second World War. The terms of the debate were modified slightly by the circumstances of the times—*e.g.*, the social and economic fallout from the First World War, the unemployment brought on by the Great Depression, the concurrent expansion of mass culture and the leisure industry—but the basic elements present in portrayals of the late Victorian “hooligan” remained.¹⁴² The “hooligan” had too much time and disposable income on his hands, enjoyed too

¹³⁹ Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum* (Harmondsworth, UK: Pelican, 1973), p. 155.

¹⁴⁰ Geoffrey Pearson, *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears* (London: Macmillan, 1983), quoted in Bill Schwarz, “Night Battles: Hooligan and Citizen,” in Mica Nava and Alan O’Shea, *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 103.

¹⁴¹ Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945*, p. 7.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10. For a more detailed discussion of the debate over youth culture prior to 1945, both in and out of Parliament, see Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979); Pearson, *Hooligan*; John Springhall, *Coming of Age: Adolescence in Britain, 1860-1960* (Dublin, IRL: Gill and Macmillan, 1986); and David Fowler, *The First Teenagers: The Lifestyle of Young Wage-Earners in Interwar Britain* (London: Woburn, 1995).

much license, made too much of a spectacle of himself, and posed an ever-present (if not overtly violent) menace to respectable society.

During the Second World War, public anxieties over working-class youth came to rest in the figure of the “spiv,” or shady dealer in black-market goods. “Spivs,” of course, were men of all ages. However, their “flashy” petty villainy “bore specifically youthful connotations.”¹⁴³ The “spiv’s” wardrobe was closely modeled on that of the West Indian pimp and the black GI on weekend leave—flamboyant suits in loud colors of the sort in which the average grey-worsted-and-wool Englishman would never think to be seen.¹⁴⁴ Official adult irritation deepened, not just because the suits were so garish, but also perhaps because there was a war on, supposedly a “people’s war” in which all pulled their weight. The “spiv,” who contravened the wartime economy and, worse, flaunted his contravention, was seen to be actively hurting the British war effort. That the public at large harbored a certain fondness toward, and fascination with the “spiv” only made him that much more reprehensible.¹⁴⁵

The sartorial preferences of the “spiv” point up another important facet in the perception of British youth culture—its use of America and “American” styles as reference-points. As noted above, America had become synonymous with mass culture; it also came increasingly to stand for youth culture. This conflation was due not only to the perceived origins of most types of youth culture (*e.g.*, movies, “pulp” literature, and jazz music) in the United States, but also to the cultural perception that America was itself a

¹⁴³ Because, presumably, only a young man would want to dress like a “spiv.” Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9; Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 104.

¹⁴⁵ Addison, *Now the War Is Over*, p. 47, quoting interview with John Basnett.

youthful society, both in terms of its comparatively recent existence as a nation, and of the supposedly youthful values of its people—shallowness, optimism, innocence and immaturity among them.¹⁴⁶ Once safely “off-shore,” America had now (in the 1940s) landed. Its GIs (both black and white) seemed to inspire the outlandish wardrobe of the “spiv.” Furthermore, their seemingly-inexhaustible supply of cigarettes, food, alcohol and fuel represented, like the illegal economy of the “spiv,” a contravention of wartime rationing and the “people’s myth.”¹⁴⁷ Thus, official indignation toward the “spiv” and other species of working-class “hooligans” was a way of articulating not only concern over the lawlessness or immorality of the youths themselves, but also uneasiness over the onrush of America and “Americanization”—this at a time of unprecedented solidarity between Britain and the United States.¹⁴⁸

Thus, as rationing gradually gave way to affluence, the rise of the concept of the “teenager,” with his or her own disposable income, fashion sense, cultural tastes and group dynamics, should be seen as a development of continuity within British society. Obviously, there were differences that made British teenage culture in the 1950s and 1960s *seem* like a new phenomenon. Firstly, as mentioned, the cohort of young men and women under the age of twenty was larger than it ever had been—8% of the British

¹⁴⁶ Kroes, *If You’ve Seen One, You’ve Seen the Mall*, p. 54.

¹⁴⁷ Juliet Gardiner, “Overpaid, Oversexed and Over Here”: *The American GI in World War II Britain* (New York: Canopy Books, 1992), p. 23.

¹⁴⁸ Dick Hebdige, “Towards a Cartography of Taste, 1935-1962,” in Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 52-3.

population in 1951, and 10% in 1966.¹⁴⁹ Secondly, the anxiety over “Americanization,” and its conflation with youth culture, continued and deepened as the world hardened along Cold War lines, drawing Britain ever closer into the embrace of the new American superpower. Thus, young people, perceived as the first and easiest targets for American mass culture, attracted an increased amount of attention from cultural commentators.¹⁵⁰

Finally, just as mass media and improved transportation had begun to knit various regions and ethnicities into a developing “national culture,” so too did the prevalence of affluence and the accessibility of consumer goods and entertainment begin to herald a more or less “national” youth culture that came to transcend socioeconomic class.¹⁵¹ No longer was the “subcultural spectacle” practiced by the “scuttlers” and the “spivs” limited to working-class youths on street corners. Most of the youth stylistic archetypes made famous in the 1950s and 1960s—the Teddy Boy, the Mod, the Rocker, the Skinhead—began in working-class areas of London, but soon climbed the class ladder to embrace middle-class youths.¹⁵² The youngster in the loud clothing with too much money for alcohol (and, later, drugs) and a penchant for petty crime could now almost as easily be from the middle classes.¹⁵³ Thus, not only were there more young people in Britain in the

¹⁴⁹ Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945*, p. 18 (Table 3:1). Source: Department of Employment, *British Labour Statistics Historical Abstract, 1886-1968* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1971), pp. 206-7.

¹⁵⁰ Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried, *Between Marx and Coca-Cola: Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), p. 131.

¹⁵¹ Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain, 1900-2000* (London: Allen Lane, 1996), p. 254.

¹⁵² Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 455.

¹⁵³ Most accounts of postwar British youth culture almost completely discount middle-class youth from having participated in these decades at all, claiming that he had less disposable income and more responsibilities than his working-class brethren. See, for example, Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945*, pp. 26-27. This is a curious assertion,

1950s and 1960s, there were also more young people whose conspicuous consumption and seeming moral corruption came to the attention of the adult “Establishment.”¹⁵⁴ The increased attention paid to the “Youth Problem” gave rise to archetypal characters on which the media could focus their anxieties—what Stanley Cohen termed “folk devils.”¹⁵⁵

The first such “folk devil” was the Teddy Boy, so named for the way in which his outlandish costume supposedly recalled the look of upper-class London dandies during the early twentieth century “Edwardian” period.¹⁵⁶ At his finest, he wore a drape coat with a velveteen collar, a brightly-colored shirt, “drainpipe” (that is, narrow-legged) trousers and thick crêpe-soled shoes (called “brothel creepers”). His hair was swept forward into a pompadour, crudely termed a “duck’s ass;” it required large quantities of grease to keep in order.¹⁵⁷ Like the “scuttlers” of old, the “Teds” incurred adult ire merely for standing around, making spectacles of themselves, but they also had a penchant for violence. Even more so than the “brothel creepers” or the “duck’s ass,” the accepted symbol of the Teddy Boy was the flick-knife that they all supposedly carried (and used).¹⁵⁸

The Teddy Boy phenomenon attained mass visibility due to a pair of high-profile murder trials. In 1952, nineteen-year-old Derek Bentley was convicted of shooting a

however, in view of the fact that many of the most notable cultural producers of the 1960s were middle-class.

¹⁵⁴ Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁶ “Ted” was an English nickname for King Edward VII (r. 1901-1910). Peter Vansittart, *In the Fifties* (London: J. Murray, 1995), p. 56.

¹⁵⁷ Tony Jefferson, “Cultural Responses of the Teds,” in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance To Rituals: Youth Subculture in Post-War Britain* (Birmingham, UK: The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1975), p. 83.

¹⁵⁸ Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 446.

policeman and hanged; one year later, twenty-year-old Michael Davies was convicted of stabbing a rival and sentenced to death (although this sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment).¹⁵⁹ These cases attracted the sort of salacious press attention that normally builds up around murder trials; however, as Osgerby attests, “their dress became symbolically significant” as well.¹⁶⁰ The press focused on both young men’s “flashy” dress, noting that they “took great pains to look like a dandy,” and tut-tutting with disapproval over the revelations of how much each of them spent on his wardrobe every week.¹⁶¹ The Teddy Boy became an object of intense sociological speculation—perhaps, said the pioneering market researcher Mark Abrams, he was plagued by a social disease caused by the dislocations of the Second World War.¹⁶² Worried commentators also noted the emergence of the Teddy Boys’ opposite numbers across Europe—the *Blousons Noirs* in France, the *Halbstarcken* in West Germany, the *Stilyagi* in the Soviet Union—and fretted about a “Teddy-boy International.”¹⁶³

Proclamations of a world Teddy Boy revolution were premature, obviously. However, British adult society’s fascination with, and angst over, the Teddy Boy was such that it was made the subject of several popular (if cinematically formulaic) movies by the end of the decade.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, it even outlasted the Teddy Boys themselves. As

¹⁵⁹ Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945*, p. 12.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁶¹ Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 443.

¹⁶² Mark Abrams, *The Teenage Consumer* (London: Press Exchange, 1959), p. 13.

¹⁶³ Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 444. The labels translate as “Black Shirts,” “Half-Strong” and “Style Boys.” For the “Teddy-Boy International,” see T.R. Fyvel, *The Insecure Offenders: Rebellious Youth in the Welfare State* (Harmondsworth, UK: Pelican, 1963), p. 51.

¹⁶⁴ E.g., *No Trees in the Street*, dir. J. Lee Thompson (1958), *Violent Playground*, dir. Basil Dearden (1958), *And Women Shall Weep*, dir. John Lemont (1960) and *Some People*, dir. Clive Donner (1962).

Dominic Sandbrook notes, “When Elvis Presley’s first number one, ‘All Shook Up,’ reached the top of the British charts in July 1957, the ‘Teddy Boys’ moment had already passed.”¹⁶⁵ However, the Teddy Boy could be seen (through the eyes of the over-eager press, that is) to have reared his ugly head during the Notting Hill race riots of 1958.¹⁶⁶ Teddy Boys still existed on the fringes of youth culture, although he was increasingly viewed as an eccentricity and a minority taste. In his brief hour on the public stage, however, the Teddy Boy phenomenon served to solidify what had previously been a vague concern over youth delinquency, crystallizing it as a full-blown “moral panic.”

By 1963, the mantle of “folk devil” had passed from the Teddy Boy and was being sought after by two challengers, the Mod and the Rocker.¹⁶⁷ Both of these groups were, in their own way, the legitimate successors to the Teddy Boys. Both defined themselves through cultural and sartorial style.¹⁶⁸ Both were seen as having too much disposable income and a readiness to engage in violence. The Mods appropriated the Teddy Boy’s weakness for men’s fashion—indeed, with the Mods this became an obsession—while the Rockers borrowed his pompadour and flick-knife.¹⁶⁹ Combined, they inherited the moral outrage and sociological curiosity that had been directed at the Teddy Boy. Their much-publicized clashes in the mid-1960s were arguably the culmination of the “moral panic” referred to by Cohen, and, although the Skinhead would

¹⁶⁵ Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 445.

¹⁶⁶ John Davis, *Youth and the Condition of Britain: Images of Adolescent Conflict* (London: Athlone Press, 1990), p. 147.

¹⁶⁷ “Mods” were so named because in their earliest and most cliquish incarnation, they were partial to “modern” jazz of the type made by Charlie Mingus and Miles Davis.

¹⁶⁸ Dick Hebdige, “The Meaning of Mod,” in Hall and Jefferson, *Resistance Through Rituals*, p. 90.

¹⁶⁹ Richard Barnes, *Mods!* (London: Eel Pie Publishing, 1979), p. 125; Osgerby, *Youth In Britain Since 1945*, p. 42.

also receive his share of press in the late 1960s, the Mods and the Rockers were the decade's quintessential British teenagers.¹⁷⁰

Generally speaking, Mods belonged either to London's middle classes or upwardly mobile working classes; they worked white-collar entry-level jobs (in such public-sector fields as banking, advertising or sales), from which vanilla employment they earned the wages to support their various addictions—namely the “holy Trinity” of fashionable clothing, record albums and amphetamines.¹⁷¹ Musically, the Mods' preferences ran overwhelmingly to the R&B and soul music being produced in Detroit and Memphis.¹⁷² Gradually, their dogmatic attachments to these black styles would relax to allow allegiance to a small but noteworthy knot of “official ‘Mod’” bands like the Who, the Small Faces, the Animals and the Kinks—bands who, not coincidentally, started by hammering out their earnest imitations of R&B and soul.¹⁷³ This was one of the most evident points of interface between the “blues freaks” and the larger youth culture—quite simply, although among the “blues freaks,” only Steve Marriott actually *was* a Mod, many of them (most notably Pete Townshend, Ray Davies, Georgie Fame and Rod Stewart) came to be adopted *by* the Mods.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ John Barron Mays, *The Young Pretenders*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 34.

¹⁷¹ Hewitt, *The Soul Stylists*, p. 16.

¹⁷² Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 109.

¹⁷³ Kevin Davey, *English Imaginaries: Six Studies in Anglo-British Modernity* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999), p. 122.

¹⁷⁴ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 101. However, perhaps understandably, the Mods generally regarded the Rolling Stones, arguably the biggest of the “blues freaks,” with

The sartorial style of the Mods was a volatile marriage of the “Americanized” Teddy Boy style, and the *haute couture* fashions emerging from France and Italy. As Shawn Levy has pointed out, Continental culture had a remarkable impact on British youth culture in the 1960s. Teenagers (especially the Mods) consumed Italian cuisine and coffee, watched French and Italian movies, read works of French existentialism and toiled around town on Italian motor scooters.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, the experience of the Mods in Britain was but one page in a general history of conspicuous youth consumption across the entirety of Western Europe; thus, it should not be surprising that the trappings of consumer culture crossed the boundaries of the nascent European Community as much as they crossed the Atlantic.¹⁷⁶

Besides their love of Continental fashion, American R&B music, and amphetamines, many Mods had something else interesting in common: their background in British art schools, which had themselves undergone something of a postwar transformation. Before the Second World War, art schools certainly existed, but, in the words of historian Shawn Levy, they were “the province of the wealthy... a thoroughly toffee-nosed pursuit.”¹⁷⁷ However, the 1944 Butler Education Act, which established a tripartite system of secondary schools and made secondary education free of charge, had expanded to include art schools as an option alongside grammar schools, secondary

vague distaste because they were seen as not sufficiently concerned with their own hygiene and wardrobe!

¹⁷⁵ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 106.

¹⁷⁶ Schildt and Siegfried, eds., *Between Marx and Coca-Cola*, p. 38.

¹⁷⁷ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 95.

modern schools, and technical colleges.¹⁷⁸ This meant that working-class and middle-class boys who had not scored well enough on the “Eleven-Plus” (the examination designed to assess where students belonged, academically) could at once avoid the socially humiliating secondary moderns and technical colleges and enjoy “some simulacrum of the privileges previously enjoyed by boys from old families.”¹⁷⁹ The main privilege was freedom—a relatively unfettered social life, the ability to express oneself creatively, and the chance to delay entrance into the workaday world for a few years.

The avowed intent of the art school was to teach both technique and aesthetic sensibility to Britain’s future painters, sculptors and printmakers, and indeed, many of the leading lights of the Pop Art and Kitchen-Sink movements of the 1950s and 1960s did earn their stripes in this way. However, the main contribution of the British art schools to Western popular culture lay in what many of their students learned outside the classroom—blues and rock ‘n’ roll. David Jones, who started out as an aspiring blues musician before achieving “glam rock” superstardom as David Bowie in the 1970s, remarked that, “In Britain, there was always this joke that you went to art school to learn to play blues guitar.”¹⁸⁰ Art dealer Barry Miles concurred, saying, “You came out of [art school] knowing a lot more about rock ‘n’ roll than you did about art.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Kenneth O. Morgan, *The People’s Peace, British History 1945-1989* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 19. The three tiers were: grammar schools for the elite boys (those scoring in the top 25% on the Eleven Plus examination); technical colleges for the bottom 10%; and secondary modern schools for everybody in between.

¹⁷⁹ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 101.

¹⁸⁰ Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. 37.

¹⁸¹ Barry Miles, quoted in Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 101.

The list of young men who met in art schools, who listened to blues records in art school common rooms and who played gigs in art school pubs, is impressive indeed. Kingston Art College alone was home to, at one time or another, Eric Clapton; Paul Jones and Tom McGuinness of Manfred Mann; and four of the original five Yardbirds. Pete Townshend and Ron Wood both attended, however indifferently, the Ealing College of Art. Keith Richards, after having been kicked out of technical college, found himself, fortuitously, at Sidcup Art College with future Pretty Things Phil May and Dick Taylor. The Quarry Men (soon to rename themselves the Beatles) and three of the Animals got their starts at art schools in Liverpool and Newcastle, respectively. Additionally, Jeff Beck, Ray Davies, Jimmy Page and Charlie Watts were also veterans (if not graduates) of other assorted Greater London art schools.¹⁸²

Why was the art school scene in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s so fertile? The aforementioned freedom (or, one might say, tolerance) must be given due credit. In stark contrast to the more structured, goal-oriented teaching style favored by the rest of the British education system, the British art school championed a much more indulgent approach.¹⁸³ Steeped in the Romantic-bohemian tradition that “genius” (or at least, creativity) could not be shackled to the time-clock or forced to produce on command, the faculty of the British art school often refrained from imposing any sort of work ethic or

¹⁸² Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 101. British art schools were also responsible for producing numerous rock ‘n’ roll stars of the 1970s—*e.g.* Marc Bolan of T. Rex, David Bowie, Brian Eno and Bryan Ferry of Roxy Music, Jeff Lynne of the Electric Light Orchestra and Freddie Mercury of Queen.

¹⁸³ Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art Into Pop* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 24. Frith and Horne insinuate that this difference might help explain why there is not a corresponding tradition of American art colleges begetting rock ‘n’ roll bands.

deadlines on their students.¹⁸⁴ With this in mind, the fact that Eric Clapton was eventually asked to leave Kingston Art College in 1963 because his portfolio was unsatisfactory must be regarded with some amazement.¹⁸⁵

What this meant in theory was that the unfettered young artist would feel him- or herself completely at liberty to better exercise his or her artistic genius, and the result would be better (or at least “truer”) art. What it meant in practice, however, was that a Jimmy Page or a Jeff Beck could while away days at a time, listening to Muddy Waters or Robert Johnson records, perfecting their guitar technique and talking music with comrades, without once picking up a pencil or a paintbrush, and without much faculty reprimand. The British art and design world’s loss was undoubtedly Western popular music’s gain. However, the freedom found in British art schools is only a part of the answer. The British art student could have done many different things with the leisure time and lack of conformist pressures. As it was, more often than not, he opted for a deeper education in the blues.

Another piece of the puzzle lies in understanding the relationship between art school culture and traditional (“trad”) jazz in the 1940s and 1950s. Jazz has long been acclaimed by European intellectuals as the only American cultural import with any cultural significance or value whatsoever.¹⁸⁶ Although it was described by some as

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 28.

¹⁸⁵ Eric Clapton, *Clapton: The Autobiography* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), p. 36.

¹⁸⁶ See, for instance, Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); George McKay, *Circular Breathing: The Cultural Politics of Jazz in Britain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 36.

exotic, savage and subversive (these were usually applied as positive epithets), it also found a place in Europe's critical discourses as serious, complex and intellectual.¹⁸⁷ It was this often muddled but no less sincere intellectual *milieu* in which the British art school approach to jazz was situated. Jazz was taken, variously, as a badge of authenticity, anti-commercialism, intellectual and emotional sensitivity, and (because it came to be seen as the cultural face of the United States) either pro- or anti-Americanism. In short, as Frith attests, "jazz was art school music."¹⁸⁸

Many of the salient features of the art school blues cliques of later years—the congregations in common rooms and flats to listen to old records (the more obscure, the better); the obsessive reliquarianism; the glorification of the amateur and dismissal of the professional; the insistence on the music's superiority to everything the BBC and the Hit Parade had to offer—were initially characteristics of art school jazz cliques.¹⁸⁹ In subtle yet noticeable ways, the art school jazz cliques differed from the larger "trad" jazz revival that seized Britain during these years—most notably in the division of musical labor whereby art schools mainly produced the fans, and London's factories, offices and dockyards provided the performers.¹⁹⁰ I will deal in greater detail with the larger "trad" revival in the next chapter. For the moment, suffice it to say that there existed, by the time the Keith Richardses and Eric Burdons of the world matriculated to art school, a

¹⁸⁷ Frith and Horne, *Art Into Pop*, p. 77.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 77; Penny von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 27.

¹⁸⁹ McKay, *Circular Breathing*, p. 52.

¹⁹⁰ Frith and Horne, *Art Into Pop*, p. 78.

tradition of student bohemianism and jazz appreciation that lent itself quite nicely to a similar regard for blues and rock 'n' roll.

Finally, from the uneven imaginative biographies of African-American bluesmen that they were cobbling together from the scant source base, art students also began to see parallels between themselves and their newfound heroes. The bluesman was creative, ingenious, and told the honest truth, but he was an outcast twice over. He was an oppressed minority in white American society and, as a sinful practitioner of “Devil’s music,” a pariah in his own community.¹⁹¹ Meanwhile—and, again, it would be ludicrous to equate this with institutionalized racism—the young men who made up the bulk of art school populations felt like pariahs in their own small way. They were creative and talented but often awkward in, and misunderstood by, mainstream society, which had branded them social failures for not having passed the Eleven-Plus examination. The art school track was publicly for the creative and talented but, as Richards has suggested, it was not-so-secretly a place where the educational system could put those misfits that “they didn’t know what to do with.”¹⁹² Clapton refers to himself as a “seven-stone weakling,” one of “the outcasts” at his secondary modern school, and says that he developed a sizable chip on his shoulder as a defense mechanism against what he interpreted as society’s failure to understand him.¹⁹³ Art school enabled those like

¹⁹¹ Peter Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Dream of Southern Freedom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), p. 28.

¹⁹² Keith Richards, quoted in Sandford, *Satisfaction*, p. 14.

¹⁹³ Clapton, quoted in Steve Turner, *Conversations With Eric Clapton* (London: Abacus, 1976), p. 32; Clapton, *Clapton*, p. 19.

Clapton to fit into a network of other young men who felt likewise, and the blues provided them, collectively, with yet another defense mechanism.

Of course, “Blues 101” was not the only thing British art school students learned, however much it seemed like it. As might be expected, whether they were taking “fine arts” or “graphic arts” courses, they also developed some very definite ideas about fashion and mass culture. This they shared with the Mods, who were obsessed with the finest details of consumer culture. Debates were actually held amongst Mods as to whether a suit ought to have six- or eight-inch lapels, whether a record album had better sound quality on the original pressing, or on a re-release, or whether a shirt ought to be made in America, or in Britain but cut to *look like* it was American-made.¹⁹⁴ Mod was, as its original adherents proudly attest even now, forty years later, “incredibly snobbish,” even bigoted.¹⁹⁵ Both in their insatiable lust for the genuine and unique article, and in their amazing particularity, they informed the cadre of amateur blues zealots, who might, as Manfred Mann guitarist Tom McGuinness once did, “walk three miles to catch a glimpse of a John Lee Hooker album cover”—not to listen to it, just to look at it.¹⁹⁶

Mod began as an extremely exclusive, narcissistic cult whose members aspired to impress and one-up their comrades, to buy the most obscure soul records, to sport the “sharpest look” in the nightclubs, and, above all, to become a “Face”—the *crème de la*

¹⁹⁴ Hewitt, *The Soul Stylists*, p. 54. To wit, in the words of Patrick Uden, an original Mod, “[a]n English shirt that was made to look like an American shirt, notably a Ben Sherman shirt, is not on. Okay?”

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 60-63.

¹⁹⁶ Dave Thompson, *Cream: The World’s First Supergroup* (London: Virgin, 2005), p. 11.

crème of Mod society.¹⁹⁷ As Pete Townshend would attest, “[I]n the real mod scene [late 1962 to mid-1963] no one would tell you... It was incestuous, secretive. Difficult to be a real up-to-the-minute Mod ‘cause no cunt would tell you where to get the clothes.”¹⁹⁸ It was a punishing lifestyle, hard on the pocketbook as well as on the constitution—thus, one relied on amphetamines to keep up.¹⁹⁹ It is important to emphasize that all of this effort was designed not to impress girls—although most Mods were aggressively heterosexual—but each other. One girl memorably recalled, “It got to be a big deal to have a conversation with a guy.... We thought we were very lucky if one of these gorgeous creatures actually *danced* with us.”²⁰⁰ This “boys-club” sensibility would have echoes for British popular music, which, generally speaking, has always been portrayed (and attempted to portray itself) as an almost entirely male world.²⁰¹

This ultra-exclusive narcissism was really only a feature of the “first wave” of Mod. From August 1963, with the launch of a television program (*Ready, Steady, Go!*) aimed at Mods, and a massive expansion of boutiques selling affordable, lesser-quality “Mod fashions” to teenagers throughout the country, Mod went public.²⁰² Or, perhaps more accurately, Mod entered a “second wave,” as the original Mods, scandalized by the

¹⁹⁷ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 107.

¹⁹⁸ Pete Townshend, quoted in Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 114.

¹⁹⁹ Hebdige, “The Meaning of Mod,” in Hall and Jefferson, *Resistance Through Rituals*, p. 91.

²⁰⁰ Anonymous British woman, quoted in Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 109.

²⁰¹ Sheila Whiteley, *Too Much Too Young: Popular Music, Age and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 141.

²⁰² Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 111-13.

democratization of their style and by the “new Mods”’ lack of stylistic integrity and standards of quality, beat a hasty retreat.²⁰³ What the “second wave” Mods retained from their predecessors was the pill-popping, the posing, the love of American soul and British R&B, and the professed love of stylish clothing—even if their suits were now neither unique nor particularly well-made, and even if their wearers cared not a whit for the length of their lapels. What they added to the mix was a penchant for violence. This was an element that was simply not a part of “first wave” Mod; “true Mods,” in the words of Richard Barnes, “were really too concerned with their clothes to want to ruin them by fighting.”²⁰⁴ Unencumbered by such concerns, the new Mods liked to fight, and most often these violent impulses were directed at their professed arch-nemeses, the Rockers.²⁰⁵

The Rockers, or “Ton-Up Boys,” as they were sometimes called, were a far less numerous and far less cohesive subcultural grouping. They were squarely working-class, and not usually upwardly mobile—in fact, the Roker *zeitgeist* seemed to be rebellion against society, not advancement within it.²⁰⁶ Like the American “greasers” who were their closest analogue, they took as their role model the motorcycle-driving outlaws

²⁰³ According to Paolo Hewitt, they would resurface as either the “Northern Soul Boys” or the “Skinheads,” still vaguely recognizable by their smart clothing and their love of soul music and, subsequently, West Indian “ska” and reggae music. Hewitt, *The Soul Stylists*, p. 17-18.

²⁰⁴ Barnes, *Mods!*, p. 128.

²⁰⁵ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 114.

²⁰⁶ The Rockers have, interestingly enough, been given but a fraction of the scholarly ink devoted to their nemeses, the Mods; indeed, the only book devoted to them specifically is Johnny Stuart, *Rockers!* (London: Plexus, 1987).

played on-screen by Marlon Brando and James Dean.²⁰⁷ In emulation of these cinematic icons, they wore black leather jackets and army boots, Brylcreemed their hair into the customary “duck’s ass,” and rode large, powerful motorcycles.²⁰⁸ Perhaps to help signify their status as society’s rebels and outsiders, they remained enamored of the rockabilly music that had been the standard-bearer of teenage rebellion in the mid-1950s, but which had become passé by the beginning of the 1960s. Overall they attempted to portray an image of tough, working-class masculinity.²⁰⁹

By the time they appeared on the national media’s radar in the wake of the Bank Holiday “riots,” they seemed to pride themselves on being the utter antithesis of the Mods. To the Rockers, Mods were effeminate, snobbish and finicky, too obsessed with their image and with the trappings of consumer culture. “Let them wear a skirt,” one Rocker magnanimously announced to an interviewer in the mid-1960s, “just so long as I don’t [accidentally] pick one up as a girl.”²¹⁰ By contrast, the Rockers considered themselves manly, faithful to their working-class roots and free of consumer society’s mundane, narcissistic concerns. The loathing was mutual; Mods regarded Rockers as uncouth, slovenly and out-of-touch, the “ton-up boys whose Brylcreem seems to have

²⁰⁷ Mike Brake, *Comparative Youth Culture: The Sociology of Youth Cultures and Youth Subcultures in America, Britain and Canada* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1985), p. 112. The films in question are *The Wild One*, dir. László Benedek (1953) (Brando), and *Rebel Without a Cause*, dir. Nicholas Ray (1955) (Dean).

²⁰⁸ Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945*, p. 42.

²⁰⁹ Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, p. 185.

²¹⁰ John Clarke, “Style,” in Hall and Jefferson, *Resistance Through Rituals*, p. 181, quoting Barker-Little survey of Margate offenders, July 30, 1964.

seeped into their brains.”²¹¹ Scholarly commentators have questioned the solidity of the dichotomy between the two groups, but as many Mods attested, “You were either a Mod or a Rocker—there was no in-between.”²¹²

For all that, however, the arch-nemeses seemed to co-exist more or less peacefully until Easter weekend (March 26-28) 1964. Large numbers of Mods who had decamped to the Essex resort town of Clacton-on-Sea came to blows with the local Rockers in what Levy calls “an honest-to-goodness teenage riot.”²¹³ Throughout the spring and early summer—and then again the following year—Mod-versus-Rocker violence spread to other resorts along the southern coast, Margate, Brighton, Weston-super-Mare among them. The media, confident that they were witnessing the culmination of the “moral panic” threatened by the Teddy Boys, went into a sensationalist uproar.²¹⁴ To some extent, the responsibility for the spread of violence must be laid at the door of the national media. The initial unrest at Clacton was more or less an isolated incident, the result more of bored teenagers looking for something to do in a cold and unexciting Cockney resort town than of any ideological hatred.²¹⁵ However, the ranks of those participating in the subsequent “riots” were undoubtedly swelled by curious teenagers who read the panicked headlines and went down to the coast at the next Bank Holiday to

²¹¹ Hewitt, *The Soul Stylists*, p. 44.

²¹² *Ibid*, p. 50, quoting Phil Smee, a clothing designer.

²¹³ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 113.

²¹⁴ Jonathon Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counter-Culture* (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 48.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 46.

see what was happening. Far from merely reporting the activities of the “folk devil,” the media had a hand in creating him.²¹⁶

Calmer assessments noted that most of the youths present at the “riots” were merely spectators; that when all was said and done, the amount of vandalism and violence was quite small; that the Mods and Rockers, as sartorially visible as they were, were not full-scale armies bent on destroying England between them.²¹⁷ Clear-headed observers of the 1965 “riots” even noted how the whole thing had become rather ritualized and half-hearted.²¹⁸ However, in the debate that had begun, not only in the national newspapers but also in the House of Commons, none of this mattered much. The Mod-versus-Rocker violence seemed to bring into focus everything that was wrong with British youth—and, by extension, with the affluent society that had nourished it and provided it with pocket money.²¹⁹ In a larger sense this concern over youth delinquency formed the backdrop against which producers of youth culture—especially of rock ‘n’ roll—were forced to operate. With this in mind, the timing of the Beatles’ investiture as Members of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II on June 11, 1965—barely a month after the 1965 Bank Holiday “riots” had subsided—hardly seems coincidental.²²⁰ It was as though, in addition to the Fab Four’s impact on the trans-Atlantic balance of trade (the

²¹⁶ I am grateful to one of my students, Tommy Ashton, for providing me with this insight.

²¹⁷ Osgerby, *Youth In Britain Since 1945*, p. 44.

²¹⁸ Green, *All Dressed Up*, p. 47.

²¹⁹ Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, pp. 178-79.

²²⁰ Bob Spitz, *The Beatles: The Biography* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2005), p. 556.

stated reason for the honours), they were being thanked by the Labour government for giving British youth a more acceptable face.

However, concerns over youth delinquency were only part of that backdrop. By 1965, the year of the Beatles' honours, important cultural developments in many fields (of which "Beatlemania" and the "British Invasion" were but two examples) were coalescing to make Britain, and especially London, the epicenter of international "cool." Whereas in the 1940s and 1950s, America seemed to have the monopoly on that intangible and elusive commodity, a cadre of young, creative men and women in photography, fashion design, film, painting, literature and popular music strove to reverse—if only temporarily—the direction in which trans-Atlantic cultural creativity flowed. Actor Terence Stamp, himself one of that cadre, recalls how, in 1963, he heard the Beatles' "Love Me Do" for the first time:

Because we were so subjected to anything good being American,...I just assumed that [the song] was American.... And I went into a record shop and said, "Do you have this American record 'Love Me Do'?" And [the clerk] said, "That's an English record." And I was floored.²²¹

The onset of such cultural dynamism was already being talked about in the late 1950s—for example, in Colin MacInnes' provocative 1959 novel about bohemian London, *Absolute Beginners*.²²² However, it can be truly said to have reached its apex in 1966. In that year, taking belated public notice of what many in the capital already knew, *Time* magazine devoted a cover story to the vibrant British cultural scene and, to name it,

²²¹ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, pp. 133-34.

²²² Colin MacInnes, *Absolute Beginners* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1959).

coined the phrase “Swinging London.”²²³ Michelangelo Antonioni’s iconic film, *Blow-Up*, which depicted a cultural landscape of photographers, mini-skirted aspiring fashion models, pop music groups, recreational drug use and casual sex, was also released that year.²²⁴ And on the very same evening in July 1966, England’s football team won the World Cup (over the hated West Germans, no less) and the supergroup Cream, representing what was supposedly the best of British rock music, took the stage for the very first time, at the National Jazz and Blues Festival in Windsor.²²⁵

Of course, this remarkable *mélange* of cultural creativity, hedonism and optimism certainly could not last, and by early 1968, most commentators agree that “Swinging London” was, if not over, at least on the wane.²²⁶ San Francisco and Paris were waiting to usurp London’s title as “the most swinging city in the world.”²²⁷ But, in full force, it was responsible for a great deal of remarkable cultural productivity, and it gave necessary intellectual and cultural cover to the British blues network, which were a subset of it. The “blues freaks” were purists, to be certain, and, at least in the beginning, fiercely defensive of their chosen art form, but they did not exist separately from the rest of the seemingly pop-obsessed London scene. For example, in 1967, Mick Jagger could count among his social acquaintances fashion photographer David Bailey, Guinness brewing heir Tara

²²³ Piri Halasz, “You Can Walk Across It On the Grass,” *Time* (April 15, 1966).

²²⁴ *Blow-Up*, dir. Michelangelo Antonioni (1966).

²²⁵ Thompson, *Cream: The World’s First Supergroup*, p. 1.

²²⁶ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 319.

²²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 319; the quote is from Diana Vreeland, editor-in-chief of British *Vogue* magazine, quoted by John Crosby, *Weekend Telegraph*, April 16, 1965.

Browne, and avant-garde art dealer Robert Fraser.²²⁸ The Yardbirds provided the soundtrack for Antonioni's *Blow-Up*; the Who arguably did the same for "Swinging London's" archetypal teenager, the Mod, with such songs as "I Can't Explain" and "My Generation."²²⁹ As mentioned above, some of the "blues freaks" were also (however tangentially) members of the Mod network. Indeed, if Howlin' Wolf and Robert Johnson inspired what the young British performer played and sang, "Mod" or "Pop" artists and designers influenced, among other things, how he looked.²³⁰

The kinds of inspirational cultural encounters that occurred within the British blues network also occurred between that network and the larger British youth culture. Whether at the Scotch of St. James, or backstage at Eel Pie Island, ideas were traded not only about music, but also about art, film, design, even literature.²³¹ In fact, it might be tempting to think of "Swinging London" itself as an interpersonal cultural network, or at least an umbrella for the many smaller and perhaps more cohesive networks that functioned in the city. I make mention of the extraordinary interconnectedness between the "blues freaks" and "Swinging London" at-large because, in a study that endeavors to explain the social and cultural factors that shaped the British blues network, the contemporary youth culture in which the network was subsumed must be accorded as much attention as the impact of black American music and culture. Eric Clapton may

²²⁸ Ibid, p. 159, p. 235. Jagger was Bailey's best man when the photographer married actress Catherine Deneuve in 1965.

²²⁹ Alan Clayson, *The Yardbirds: The Band That Launched Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002), p. 41; Barnes, *Maximum R&B*, p. 37.

²³⁰ Hewitt, *The Soul Stylists*, p. 13.

²³¹ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, pp. 96-97.

have tried to immunize himself against the pop influences to which he felt his ex-bandmates in the Yardbirds had succumbed, but he could not exist apart from the London *zeitgeist*.

The resulting increase in London's gravitational pull as a popular music hub drew in many provincial youths who would play important roles in the British blues boom.²³² From Manchester came John Mayall, a singer/keyboardist who first emerged onto the scene with Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated before forming his own band, the Bluesbreakers, with a similarly open-door membership policy.²³³ Newcastle-upon-Tyne sent its Animals, led by lead singer Eric Burdon. The Geordie singer was perhaps the most fanatical of them all, having scrawled the word "BLUES" on the front cover of a school copybook in his own blood to prove his allegiance.²³⁴ Birmingham's Spencer Davis Group featured the teenage prodigy Steve Winwood, whose soul-drenched vocals belied both his race and his tender age (he was barely sixteen) when the group first recorded in 1964).²³⁵ In fact, the West Midlands, or "Black Country," adjacent to Birmingham, proved to be an enormously rich vein for young blues musicians, later producing the other three members of Winwood's subsequent group, Traffic, and one-

²³² Clayson, *Beat Merchants*, p. 76.

²³³ Bob Brunning, *Blues: The British Connection* (New York: Blandford Press, 1986), p. 46.

²³⁴ Egan, *Animal Tracks*, p. 13.

²³⁵ Alan Clayson, *Call Up the Groups!: The Golden Age of British Beat* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1985), p. 89.

half of Led Zeppelin—lead singer Robert Plant and drummer John Bonham.²³⁶ Finally, even Belfast, Northern Ireland, never to be mistaken for an internationally-renowned cradle of musical talent, was the birthplace of lead singer George “Van” Morrison, first a member of the blues-soul band Them, and then a successful solo artist in his own right, steeped as much in Leadbelly as in Celtic folksongs.²³⁷

Once installed in London, the provincial boys found an already burgeoning native blues and rock scene, which will be discussed much more fully in the following chapter. From 1962, the London blues scene had revolved around Alexis Korner and Cyril Davies’ seminal band, Blues Incorporated, which began playing at the Ealing Blues Club in Ealing Broadway, in that year.²³⁸ Most of the London- and Home Counties-based talent who formed the British blues network cut their teeth in public with Blues Incorporated. Michael “Mick” Jagger, on semi-frequent larks from the political science course he was taking at the London School of Economics, sat in on vocals; his childhood friend Keith Richards came along to play guitar. Through Blues Incorporated, the two formed the Rolling Stones, the first permanent “spin-off” band to emerge from Korner’s “stable.”²³⁹

In 1964, when the Rolling Stones had outgrown their residency at London’s vibrant yet undersized Crawdaddy club, their resident spot was taken up by the

²³⁶ Pete Frame, ed., *Pete Frame’s Rock Family Trees* (London: Omnibus, 1983), maps 17 and 22; *Red, White and Blues*, dir. Mike Figgis (2003).

²³⁷ John Collis, *Van Morrison: Inarticulate Speech of the Heart* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), p. 31; Colin Harper and Trevor Hodgett, *Irish Folk, Trad and Blues: A Secret History* (Cork, IRL: The Collins Press, 2004), p. 233.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²³⁹ Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. 28.

Yardbirds, a London blues band best known to posterity (perhaps unfairly) for its succession of popular lead guitarists—Londoners Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page.²⁴⁰ In their turn, the Yardbirds left the Crawdaddy for bigger and better things, and were replaced by the Who, another London band who were the favorites of the Mod crowd. Fusing what band publicists called “Maximum R&B” with the “Pop Art” sensibilities of its leader, guitarist Pete Townshend, the Who would rival the Beatles and the Rolling Stones as the most popular British band by the beginning of the 1970s.²⁴¹

The London scene threw up countless other challengers to this “Big Three” of British pop before the end of the decade. Jack Bruce, a young Scotsman who gave up classical cello to pursue his calling as a jazz and blues musician, joined with Anglo-Irish drummer “Ginger” Baker to form a number of important 1960s jazz and blues bands, perhaps none more important than Cream.²⁴² The lead guitar spot in that earliest of “supergroups” was filled by Eric Clapton, already a fervent disciple of Delta bluesman Robert Johnson. Clapton earned his credentials not only with his virtuosity, but also by his departure from the Yardbirds, in 1965, because he disapproved of the band’s drift away from orthodox blues toward pop.²⁴³ Clapton’s principles immediately found him a

²⁴⁰ Clayson, *The Yardbirds*, p. 8.

²⁴¹ Barnes, *Maximum R&B*, p. 46.

²⁴² Thompson, *Cream: The World’s First Supergroup*, p. 83.

²⁴³ Michael Schumacher, *Crossroads: The Life and Music of Eric Clapton* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), p. 46.

home with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, whereupon he began to earn the reputation that would result in the well-known London Underground graffito, "Clapton is God."²⁴⁴

Often, on free weekends, this developing crowd of young "blues freaks" would decamp to the Surrey home of Jimmy Page, a young art student and guitarist. Page, whose obsession with the technical and aesthetic side of music would manifest itself in his work with Led Zeppelin, had converted his parents' front room into a sort of studio where his compatriots could "jam" and record demonstration tapes for the record companies.²⁴⁵ Page's best friend at this early stage was another west London guitarist, Geoffrey "Jeff" Beck, who was soon to replace Eric Clapton in the Yardbirds.²⁴⁶ In 1966, Page himself joined the Yardbirds, before recruiting Plant and Bonham, along with bass guitarist John Paul Jones, to form the immensely popular Led Zeppelin out of the Yardbirds' ashes.²⁴⁷ Beck, meanwhile, teamed up with Rod Stewart, a raspy-voiced young London singer of Scots extraction, to form his first version of the eponymous Jeff Beck Group.²⁴⁸ Between them, Cream, the Jeff Beck Group, and Led Zeppelin came to dominate the blues-based "hard rock" of the late 1960s.

This, then, was the hard core of the British blues network. By 1965, a social geography began to emerge, comprised of the places where these men might be found,

²⁴⁴ Brunning, *The British Connection*, p. 44.

²⁴⁵ Davis, *Hammer of the Gods*, p. 17.

²⁴⁶ Annette Carson, *Jeff Beck: Crazy Fingers* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2001), p. 35.

²⁴⁷ Davis, *Hammer of the Gods*, p. 30.

²⁴⁸ Uli Twelker, *The Small Faces, the Faces, Peter Frampton, Rod Stewart, Ronnie Lane, Steve Marriott, Humble Pie, and Other Stories* (London: Sanctuary, 2002), p. 117.

nearly every night of the week. It began locally, often in the suburbs, in art college common rooms and pubs, coffee bars, and parents' front rooms. In the reverse of the way popular culture is usually supposed to spread, it turned inward to points within metropolitan London. These were mostly to be found within the one-mile square of Soho, the old West End bohemian stronghold. Especially vibrant were the blues clubs, at which the British blues network played, drank and socialized. Some of these started life as jazz clubs but gradually switched over to blues when the latter eclipsed "trad" jazz in popularity. Studio 51, in Great Newport Street, had previously hosted bandleader Ken Colyer's groundbreaking "trad" jazz band. The Marquee Jazz Club in Oxford Street was where Korner and Davies got their start with Chris Barber's "trad" band in 1951. It was also the site, in November 1958, of Muddy Waters' controversial first appearance in Britain (on which more later).²⁴⁹

The Flamingo in Wardour Street was famous (or notorious) for being a colorful, no-holds-barred nightspot for black US servicemen, West Indians and assorted "weirdos." One of these latter, R&B wild man Jalacy "Screamin' Jay" Hawkins, routinely performed there when in London.²⁵⁰ The Ealing Blues Club, as noted, was home to Korner and Davies' Blues Incorporated (and, indeed, had been started by the two bluesmen in 1962).²⁵¹ Eel Pie Island, perhaps the most peculiar (and most pungently named) British venue, was located on a small island in the Thames River. Customers had to cross a toll bridge to get there from London proper, but once there, they were

²⁴⁹ Brunning, *The British Connection*, p. 11.

²⁵⁰ Green, *All Dressed Up*, p. 42.

²⁵¹ Brunning, *The British Connection*, p. 13.

invariably treated to a powerful show: the Rolling Stones, the Who, Cream, and Led Zeppelin all performed at Eel Pie.²⁵² Vying for second, perhaps, in the “weirdly named” derby was Kloooks Kleek in the Hampstead Railway Hotel, and the Ricky Tick in Windsor, both of which played host to visiting American jazz and soul luminaries in addition to their normal blues offerings.²⁵³

Finally, there was the Crawdaddy, run by impresario Giorgio Gomelsky. The club was named in honor of the Rolling Stones’ song “Crawdaddy,” as this was the number that provoked the greatest hysteria amongst the club’s patrons. It operated first out of the Station Hotel, Richmond, before being evicted due to excess volume—both in decibels and in size of audience. Gomelsky then moved the club to the Richmond Athletic Association clubhouse off the Kew Road in Surrey. As mentioned, during its memorable existence, the Crawdaddy enjoyed the services of, in succession, the Rolling Stones, the Yardbirds and the Who.²⁵⁴

In addition to these venues, there were also numerous nightclubs and fashionable restaurants that were frequented by not only the “blues freaks,” but all the young and talented (or at least well-publicized) men and women who comprised the “Swinging London” scene. The Scotch of St. James, located in Mason’s Yard, was where Jimi Hendrix first performed in London, to wide acclaim, in 1966.²⁵⁵ In addition, there was

²⁵² Tony Bacon, *London Live: From the Yardbirds to Pink Floyd to the Sex Pistols* (San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 1999), p. 69.

²⁵³ Graeme Patingale, “Renovating the Blues: The Early Bootlegs” (<http://twtd.bluemountains.net.au/cream/renovating.htm>) (accessed 18 December 2006).

²⁵⁴ Bacon, *London Live*, pp. 52-54.

²⁵⁵ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 209.

Leicester Square's Ad Lib ("the initial nucleus of 'Swinging London'," according to Shawn Levy); Piccadilly Circus' Sibylla's; the Speakeasy in Oxford Street (above the Marquee, making it doubly attractive to young "blues freaks"); the Trattoria Terrazza, the first successful Italian restaurant in London; and, finally, the London Playboy Club, in Montpelier Square.²⁵⁶

Most importantly than socializing with each other, however, the network *worked* (that is, performed) with each other as well. All of them seemingly were in a band or a side project with each other at some point during their careers. Amongst the members of the network there existed a kind of nepotism. Whenever a new band was being formed, or a slot opened up in an existing one, with few exceptions it was from within the network that shortlists were drawn up—almost as though it were a labor union. To wit, when Clapton left the Yardbirds in 1965, the remaining band members asked Jimmy Page to replace him on guitar; Page demurred but recommended Jeff Beck. Later, Beck repaid the favor by inviting his old friend to join the band on bass guitar in 1966.²⁵⁷ The most famous example, however, might be the "derby" held by the Rolling Stones to find a new guitarist after Mick Taylor quit in 1974. As Stephen Davis puts it, "a parade of famous ax heroes" in Britain was auditioned or at least considered for the gig—Beck, Marriott, Townshend, Rory Gallagher, and even Clapton—before Ron Wood was given the job.²⁵⁸

Alongside the actual bands that were formed from the network—and infinitely more tantalizing from the point of view of the music aficionado—were the impromptu

²⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 125-26.

²⁵⁷ Carson, *Crazy Fingers*, p. 52.

²⁵⁸ Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. 392.

recording sessions on which these young men collaborated. Two examples of many shall suffice. The first took place in 1966, when Elektra Records put together an all-star studio band, consisting of Bruce, Clapton, Winwood, session pianist Ben Palmer, Manfred Mann singer Paul Jones and Spencer Davis Group drummer Pete York.²⁵⁹ The band, hastily named “the Powerhouse,” recorded three tracks for Elektra’s blues sampler album, *What’s Shakin’*.²⁶⁰ The second landmark session was in 1967, on behalf of Beck, who was between bands and record contracts and looking to record a “demo” to drum up interest. The resulting single, a proto-heavy metal version of Maurice Ravel’s “Bolero,” featured Beck, Page, John Paul Jones, perennial guest pianist Nicky Hopkins, and Keith Moon, who claimed to be fed up with Daltrey and Townshend. This lineup talked about forming officially as “Led Zeppelin.” This did not come off, obviously, as Page subsequently put together the version of Led Zeppelin that would attain global prominence the next year.²⁶¹

Again, it is important to stress that by no means was this network driven solely by friendship. Some, quite frankly, hated each other (though, as in the case of “Ginger” Baker and Jack Bruce, this did not stop them forming bands and side projects

²⁵⁹ Brunning, *The British Connection*, p. 46. Winwood sang lead vocals and Jones played harmonica.

²⁶⁰ Various Artists, *What’s Shakin’* (Elektra, 1966). For contractual reasons, Winwood, York and Jones were listed under the pseudonyms “Steve Anglo,” “Peter Howard,” and “Jacob Matthews,” respectively.

²⁶¹ The Jeff Beck Group, “Beck’s Bolero,” *Truth* (Epic, 1968); a narrative of this truly momentous recording session may be found in Carson, *Crazy Fingers*, p. 66.

together).²⁶² Most of the members of the network, however, managed to feel at least a kinship with the others that arose from being enthusiasts of the same underappreciated art forms, and most harbored a certain respect for what his fellows were doing musically.²⁶³ This mixture of friendship, petty jealousy and rancor, professional respect and creative kinship also marked other such interpersonal networks throughout history—whether it was the Enlightenment *philosophes*, the American Founding Fathers, the French Impressionist painters, or the conservative technocrats of Weimar Germany.

What is more, this interpersonal cultural network consciously thought of itself as such. John Lennon, after the dissolution of the Beatles, waxed lyrical to *Rolling Stone* about the “best period” of his life:

We created something... We didn't know what we were doing, but we were all talking, blabbing over coffee, like they must have done in Paris, talking about paintings. Me, [Eric] Burdon, Brian Jones would be up night and day, talking about music, playing records, and blabbing and arguing, and getting drunk.²⁶⁴

(Burdon, it should be noted by way of cementing his friendship with Lennon, was immortalized in the Beatles' “I Am the Walrus” as the “Egg Man,” so named for his bizarre proclivity for breaking eggs over his sexual partners.)²⁶⁵

²⁶² The pair's mutual loathing had its roots in their tenure with the jazz-blues group the Graham Bond Organization. In spite of this, they got together with Clapton to form Cream, which split up in part due to their constant feuding. In spite of *that*, however, Baker and Bruce were soon at it again, joining forces in the hard-rock group Air Force in 1970!

²⁶³ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 83.

²⁶⁴ John Lennon, quoted in Eric Burdon, with J. Marshall Craig, *Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2001), p. 48.

²⁶⁵ The Beatles, “I Am The Walrus,” *Magical Mystery Tour* (Capitol, 1967); Burdon, *Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood*, p. 48.

The interpersonal network comprised of young British blues enthusiasts was vital to the diffusion of musical and artistic ideas throughout urban/suburban Britain, as well as to the development, on both sides of the Atlantic, of rock music. The network was forged in a very specific social, economic and cultural *milieu*—urban/suburban Great Britain in the 1950s and early 1960s. As the young men who would eventually form the network grew up, Britain was gradually recovering from the Second World War. Having endured wartime rationing for several years into peacetime, British society turned the corner into an era of unprecedented affluence and consumer purchasing power in the late 1950s. However, widespread affluence could not reverse the seemingly-inexorable decline of Britain from the ranks of the world’s great powers, a slide symbolized by Britain’s withdrawal from her Empire during this era—no matter with how much good grace Harold Macmillan was organizing the retreat—as well as by the proportionate accession of the United States to the position of world superpower.

The young Britishers of this generation grew up in the shadow of what historian Melvyn Leffler called America’s “preponderance of power” in military and economic, as well as cultural terms.²⁶⁶ The transmission of popular culture to Britain from across the Atlantic—especially, beginning in 1956, of rock ‘n’ roll—had its equal throughout Western Europe, but, as I argued and will continue to argue throughout the subsequent chapters, the British case was quite different. Rather than passively receive and consume the forms of American popular culture, young British men aspired to emulate it, and in the end, to innovate it. The way that this happened over the next decade was influenced (though not pre-determined) by the distinct social, economic and cultural backdrop

²⁶⁶ Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: the Truman Administration and the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

against which British young men's consumption and production of American popular culture was registered. The combination of sociocultural circumstance, and the specific methods of reception started a cultural chain reaction that led, by 1962, to the beginning of the British "blues boom" and the formation of the interpersonal network that would come to innovate popular music and youth culture not only in Britain, but in the United States as well. What has yet to be addressed, of course, is how the "blues freaks" that Keith Richards claims were in "every town" received creative inspiration before finding each other—that is, how the blues came to Britain in the first place. It is to this reception that we now turn.

CHAPTER TWO
Tryin' to Make London My Home:
Transmissions and Introductory Encounters With the Blues²⁶⁷

As roommate Jimmy Phelge tells the story, it was a freezing Saturday morning in 1963 when a young Keith Richards burst into the Chelsea flat he shared with Phelge and fellow Rolling Stones Mick Jagger and Brian Jones, flushed with pleasure in spite of the temperature, and cradling a large parcel under his arm. He was joined in his excitement by Jones and, within minutes, Jagger, who broke off from warming themselves by the flat's "pathetic-looking fire" and crowded around Richards to see what he had brought home: It was a record album. "It was the latest Bo Diddley, ordered from the States... Each arrival generated the same routine with the ritual studying of the cover. Everyone seemed to be trying to savor the precious moments of anticipation before playing the first track, when all would finally be revealed. To be loved or rejected."²⁶⁸

It seems safe to surmise that what emanated from the flat's beat-up record player that morning was more likely to be loved than rejected. After all, in the early days before Jagger and Richards became a top-selling songwriting team, the *oeuvre* of Bo Diddley, alongside that of Chuck Berry and Muddy Waters, provided the fledgling Rolling Stones with most of their performed material.²⁶⁹ Young British men of the post-Second World War generation like the Rolling Stones carried on a love affair with the blues and R&B, and like all love affairs, it was built on encounters, rendezvous and precious tokens.

²⁶⁷ Chapter title: Sonny Boy Williamson II (Rice Miller), "I'm Tryin' to Make London My Home," *American Folk Blues Festival, 'Sixty-Two to 'Sixty-Five* (Evidence, 1995).

²⁶⁸ James Phelge, *Nankering with the Rolling Stones: The Untold Story of the Early Days* (Chicago: A Cappella Books, 1998), p. 25.

²⁶⁹ Alan Clayson, *Mick Jagger: The Unauthorized Biography* (London: Sanctuary, 2005), p. 32.

The preceding story relates one such encounter between the Rolling Stones and the R&B that they so loved. At one level, of course, it answers the basic question of how the Rolling Stones came in contact with a particular Bo Diddley offering on a particular winter day. However, in its basic contours it can be made to stand in for numerous encounters occurring in various forms all over Great Britain in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Change the locale from Chelsea to Newcastle, for instance; change the artist from Bo Diddley to John Lee Hooker; and change the method of acquisition from catalog mail-order to a donation from a merchant seaman living downstairs, and now it is the story of an early encounter for Animal-in-waiting Eric Burdon.²⁷⁰ Alternatively, imagine that it is not a record album at all, but the scratchy signal of the American Forces Network on a transistor radio that is the site of the encounter, and it becomes the experience of, among others, future guitar hero Jeff Beck.²⁷¹ Among the British blues network, the medium and the circumstances of the blues encounters were quite different from person to person. However, the excitement and awe that resulted from the first encounter with the blues, and the anticipation that met subsequent encounters, were universal.

One of the underlying premises of this dissertation is that this process of transmissions, encounters, and receptions should not be taken for granted, as though it were a completely natural thing for young British men to even come into contact with, let alone enjoy and emulate, musical forms which were not even perceived as mainstream in the country that had produced them. In some ways, the British blues boom must be seen as the result of a series of momentous historical accidents, as it was certainly not a

²⁷⁰ Eric Burdon, interview in *Red, White and Blues*, dir. Mike Figgis (2003).

²⁷¹ Annette Carson, *Jeff Beck: Crazy Fingers* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2001), p. 17.

concerted effort on the part of American record companies or the American government that placed all those Muddy Waters and Jimmy Reed albums into the hands of Britain's young people.

Besides attesting to the inherently accidental and often variable nature of these cultural transmissions, a close examination of these processes will be of significant importance for two reasons. On a specific level, it is my belief that the often vastly different ways in which British and American musicians dealt with and used the blues *vis-à-vis* popular music has much, if not everything, to do with the distinctive means and methods by which the British and American fans (as all musicians once were) received and responded to the blues initially—not to mention the different cultural *milieux* in which these receptions occurred.²⁷² Thus, it will be necessary to chart the differences in the beginning to help more fully explain the divergences further down the line.

Secondly, and on a much more general level, the unique and often fascinating methods by which the blues was transmitted to Britain will help to shine some light on the ways in which popular culture and images of America crossed the Atlantic to Western Europe—especially the unofficial ways. Much scholarly attention has been paid to the massive effort undertaken by the United States to promote and advertise its culture, society and ideology to Europe, through both “high” and “low” culture, during the Cold War.²⁷³ The achievements of this “culture war” are at best uneven, and their success in

²⁷² A supposition made, but not fully explored, by Charles Shaar Murray in *Boogie Man: The Adventures of John Lee Hooker in the American Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 264-65.

²⁷³ Especially relevant to the current discussion is Penny von Eschen's *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

inculcating Europeans with a positive attitude toward American society and culture is certainly open to debate. Meanwhile, it could be argued that the transmission of American blues and R&B music to Britain, accomplished piecemeal and unintentionally, fostered a much deeper and longer-lasting love of (or at least fascination with) America on the part of its recipients than anything pushed by American politicians and subsidized by American corporations.

There are important problematizing aspects of this relationship to consider, of course. For one, as has been pointed out many times, love of American culture does not necessarily imply support for American policies. To Keith Richards, America was a “fairyland,” or even “heaven,” where everything was better and more plentiful, but that did not stop him from voicing his disapproval of the Vietnam War in 1968.²⁷⁴ For another, a nation cannot and should not be viewed as a monolith, especially not with regard to its reception of American culture. As Richard Kuisel and Uta Poiger have separately pointed out, European politicians and teenagers often had diametrically opposed views on, for instance, Coca-Cola and Elvis Presley.²⁷⁵ Finally, it is perhaps unwise or unfair to compare too closely the reception of American culture in Great Britain (which, generally speaking, has always recognized a cultural and certainly a linguistic kinship with the United States) and France or Germany (which, generally

²⁷⁴ Keith Richards, interview in *My Generation*, dir. Obie Benz, in *The History of Rock 'n' Roll*, prod. Quincy Jones, Bob Meyrowitz and David Salzman (1995).

²⁷⁵ See Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

speaking, have not).²⁷⁶ However, the supposition that “soft power” might be more effective than “hard power,” at least in the realm of cultural transference, will remain in the background throughout my discussion of the “blues trade routes.”

This chapter will examine the transmission of American blues and R&B music to Great Britain, beginning in the 1940s. By and large, this transmission was accomplished via three key media: record albums, radio broadcasts, and the infrequent live performances given by eminent African-American bluesmen in Britain. This initial period of prodigious exchange between African-American music and British musicians lasted, in my opinion, until the mid-1960s. At this point, the blues had had enough of an impact to established a kind of critical mass of young blues enthusiasts who had formed bands and become more or less well-known, in Britain if not yet in America. From this point forward, although African-American bluesmen were obviously still influential and widely revered, it was the young British musicians that would serve to inspire subsequent generations of their countrymen to make music. But this critical mass never would have been reached without the multifarious and often unwitting trans-Atlantic musical exchange that preceded it.

Prior to embarking on a discussion of that exchange, however, it will be helpful to say a few words about the reception of American jazz in Britain as well as in the rest of Europe beginning with the First World War. This is a subject that has received a great deal of scholarly attention already, and it is not my intention needlessly to belabor any of

²⁷⁶ Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated and Transformed American Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), p. 67.

the points that this literature has so skillfully made.²⁷⁷ However, I should like to touch on it briefly, because it is the necessary pre-history of the British blues movement. Generally speaking, it is an early signpost in Europe's relationship with African-Americans and their culture. Specifically, jazz is crucial to Britain's later reception of the blues, because of the ways in which many British listeners and performers conflated the two. It hardly seems an overstatement to say that if there had been no jazz, the British would have understood the blues very differently.

Jazz, emerging from the African-American communities in cities like New Orleans, Chicago and New York in the first two decades of the twentieth century, made its way to Europe during and immediately following the First World War. Although a few jazz bands had been to Britain and France in 1914 and 1915, it was the Harlem Hellfighters, the regimental band of the 15th Infantry Regiment, led by James Reese Europe, who truly kindled France's (and, by extension, the Continent's) love affair with jazz in earnest.²⁷⁸ Their reception was rapturous; many of the Hellfighters, taking note both of the applause and of the relative lack of racial discrimination, decided to stay on in France (or elsewhere in Europe) after they were demobilized from the US army.²⁷⁹ In this way, they foreshadowed a generation of bluesmen who toured Europe in the 1960s and

²⁷⁷ See, for instance, William Wiser, *The Crazy Years: Paris in the 1920s* (New York: Athenaeum, 1983); Olivier Barrot and Pascal Ory, eds., *Entre deux guerres: la création française entre 1919 et 1939* (Paris: Éditions François Bourin, 1990); William A. Shack, *Harlem in Montmartre: A Paris Jazz Story Between the Great Wars* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001); and Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

²⁷⁸ Shack, *Harlem in Montmartre*, pp. 18-20. The nickname "Harlem Hellfighters" was also applied to the 15th Infantry Regiment itself, who earned battlefield glory by being the first Allied unit to reach the Rhine River (in December 1918).

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

came to similar conclusions (see below). Joined by an expatriate community of African-American intellectuals who had come to the same conclusions about France, plus a small but committed coterie of jazz-mad white Frenchmen, the post-First World War musicians formed the basis of a vibrant jazz culture in the Parisian *arrondissement* of Montmartre.²⁸⁰

This vibrant jazz culture was reproduced throughout Western Europe—though nowhere as visibly or as famously as in France. Throughout the interwar period, European jazz scenes were augmented not only by expatriate intellectuals and musicians, but also by barnstorming tours of American musicians, lured by the prospect of good pay, convivial company and a supposedly more enlightened racial atmosphere.²⁸¹ Throughout the decade, American jazz luminaries such as Memphis Slim, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Billie Holliday, Lonnie Johnson and Sidney Bechet all made their way to Europe, where they were quite successful in entrenching jazz's popularity.²⁸²

None of these American jazz missionaries was as momentous (or as notorious) as Josephine Baker, the jazz singer and dancer who absolutely scandalized British, French and German audiences in the interwar period with her scant outfits (sometimes consisting of no more than a skirt of bananas) and downright erotic stage performances. To many white people involved in or aware of the jazz scene, Baker was the epitome of the black

²⁸⁰ David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 3.

²⁸¹ Shack, *Harlem in Montmartre*, p. 34.

²⁸² *Ibid*, p. 38.

sexual fetish object.²⁸³ This was actually one of the few legacies of interwar Europe's relationship with jazz that did *not* translate into the postwar British jazz and blues experience. With the notable exception of Memphis Minnie, there were no blues heroines in the British pantheon, only heroes—although, obviously, the eroticisation of the blues singer remained a given.²⁸⁴

As discussed briefly in Chapter 1, jazz was only the most recent of the American cultural exports that had made their way to Europe. However, it was unique for a number of reasons. First of all, jazz was seen as an intrinsically modern cultural product. Emerging from the (supposedly) ultra-modern American cityscape, arriving in Europe via modern media such as the phonograph album and the radio, and appearing to usher in a new age of youth, movement and sexual permissiveness, jazz music seemed nothing less than the syncopated emblem of onrushing modernity.²⁸⁵ For this reason, as well as the obvious racial provenance of the music, jazz was seen as inherently and inescapably American. Perhaps due to the ways in which jazz was bound up with issues of modernity, it was held up by a growing number of European commentators as the first intellectually worthwhile cultural form produced by the Americans (prior to this, America and its

²⁸³ Samir Dayal, "Blackness as Symptom: Josephine Baker and European Identity," in Heike Raphael-Hernandez, ed., *Blackening Europe: The African-American Presence* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 38.

²⁸⁴ Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holliday* (New York: Pantheon, 1998), p. 78.

²⁸⁵ Joel Dinerstein, *Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology and African-American Culture Between the World Wars* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), pp. 4-28.

culture tended to be viewed by Europe as puerile, “common,” and not to be taken seriously).²⁸⁶

Just because it was taken seriously by intellectuals as a viable cultural form, does not mean those intellectuals always viewed it in a positive light. Modernity and a sinister, creeping “Americanization” were not necessarily conditions to be wished for, after all. Because it was modern, because its spread was sustained by the burgeoning machinery of American mass-production, and, quite simply, because it was so popular among the young (and those, like the Prince of Wales, who wished to *appear* young), its diffusion throughout Europe was viewed with some anxiety by those who saw it as the spearhead of American corruption and decadence.²⁸⁷ However, this viewpoint was deeply complicated by the fact that the Nazis (and, to a lesser extent, the Italian Fascists) seemed to be providing the most hostile opinions of the racial impurity and moral degradation implicit in jazz; thus to the anti-Fascist intellectual community, one could begin to see some merit to the idea that perhaps jazz could be held up as a coded form of resistance to Fascism.²⁸⁸

This debate was still not resolved satisfactorily by the time the Nazi invasion of France in 1940 effectively shut down the Montmartre jazz scene, and it would spill over

²⁸⁶ This intellectual view of jazz would persist for some into the post-1945 period, although the French *cinéphiles* of the 1950s made the case that certain kinds of American films could stand alongside jazz. Rob Kroes, *If You've Seen One, You've Seen the Mall* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p. 36.; James Campbell, *Paris Interzone: Richard Wright, Lolita, Boris Vian and Others on the Left Bank, 1946-60* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1994), p. 71.

²⁸⁷ Pells, *Not Like Us*, p. 14; Brian Inglis, *Abdication* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 27-29.

²⁸⁸ Michael Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 57.

(indeed, it would intensify) in the postwar period.²⁸⁹ The European discourse over the ideological work done by jazz music on behalf of a sinister and creeping “Americanization” was to some extent muted during the interwar period. For the moment, America was safely “offshore,” its influence to be wondered about, but not necessarily worried about in the here and now.²⁹⁰ In any case, Britain and the rest of Europe had more pressing concerns on their collective minds. The Second World War, the moment when America finally “came ashore,” transformed the relationship between the United States and its culture on the one hand, and Europe and its culture on the other, irrevocably.

In Britain, this “coming ashore” took corporeal as well as cultural form beginning in 1942, when the United States military began to be deployed throughout Britain and Northern Ireland in anticipation of a massive invasion of Europe. Nearly 3 million troops, support staff and diplomatic personnel were stationed in Britain at the height of what David Reynolds has called an “American occupation.”²⁹¹ Even after V-E Day, the Americans maintained enough of a military presence in Britain throughout the 1950s for many of the teenagers of the 1960s to have had some awareness of the “Yanks” in uniform.²⁹² They were the first and sometimes only physical manifestation of the trans-Atlantic ally that many Britons had ever seen.

²⁸⁹ Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New York: Norton, 1996), p. 237.

²⁹⁰ Pells, *Not Like Us*, p. 9.

²⁹¹ David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), p. xxvi.

²⁹² *Ibid*, p. 456.

As historians such as Reynolds and Juliet Gardiner have shown, the encounter between the American GIs and the British people on the ground was uneven, “special relationship” or no.²⁹³ On a personal level, many Britons found the GI very easy to get along with—friendly and polite if not always well-spoken, generous, often homesick more than anything else. Reynolds has related how to many middle-aged British women with sons away in the Forces, the GIs often came to be regarded as surrogate sons. However, in the abstract, “the Yanks” became a screen onto which numerous collective anxieties and discourses could be projected.

For example, in the oft-repeated British jibe that the Americans were “oversexed, overpaid and over here,” one can see concentrated numerous unarticulated resentments about American spending power and moral laxity, as well as the nameless worry that once the Americans (and their culture) were “here,” it would be the absolute devil to return to any kind of status quo.²⁹⁴ One can also see insecurities at play that were much more a commentary about Britain itself than about America. For instance, the much-voiced concern over sexual liaisons between the GIs (and, to be fair, other foreign servicemen as well) and British girls can be seen more as a reflection on the place of the British woman in the carefully-constructed “myth of the Blitz,” and the threat that sexual indelicacy posed to the maintenance of that myth.²⁹⁵

²⁹³ See Juliet Gardiner, “*Overpaid, Oversexed and Over Here*”: *The American GI in World War II Britain* (New York: Canopy Books, 1992); Reynolds, *Rich Relations*.

²⁹⁴ Not to be outdone, the Americans countered that their British opposite numbers were “underpaid, undersexed, underfed and under Eisenhower.” Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. xxii.

²⁹⁵ Sonya O. Rose, *Which People’s War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 74-76. For a comparative

Complicating the picture slightly was the African-American GI. Like his white comrades, the African-American GI too was constructed and used for ideological work, though in different ways. Drawing (if unwittingly) on a century's worth of racial mythologizing on both sides of the Atlantic that constructed the black male as hypersexual and exotic, British popular discourse pointed to the African-American GI as, if anything, even more of a sexual threat than his white compatriots.²⁹⁶ My understanding of this discourse, however, is that it was merely a matter of degree that set the African-American GI apart in terms of sexual danger. Paradoxically, it is arguable that in this regard, the African-American man was a threat because he was an *American* and not so much because he was black.²⁹⁷

The other ideological function performed by the presence of the African-American GI was to allow the British people to develop a sense that they were a less overtly racist people than the Americans. On the level of policy, the British government and military command were strongly resistant to the Americans' insistence that the color bar, which so defined not only social but military relations in the United States, be transposed to Britain, where, it was proudly pointed out, no such segregation existed.²⁹⁸ On the ground, local publicans and dance-hall proprietors were often ostentatious in

look at similar discourses featuring the African-American GI in West Germany, see Maria Hoehn, *GIs and Frauleins: The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

²⁹⁶ Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow Met John Bull: Black American Soldiers in World War Two* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p. 199.

²⁹⁷ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 302-307.

²⁹⁸ How West Indians or South Asians living in Britain might have responded to that claim has not been recorded, but could be guessed at. See Colin Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 283.

accepting the African-American GIs' custom, even (and especially) over the loud protests of white American GIs (mostly, as might be expected, hailing from the American South).²⁹⁹

Of course, as is always the case with race relations, attributing motivation and analyzing deeper emotion is always tricky. Were the British people who acted in breach of the American military's attempts to reproduce the color bar in their country, genuinely tolerant individuals who saw African-American GIs as humans with equal rights as whites? Or did they view the issue in terms of national sovereignty, with serving a drink to an African-American GI a subtle way to resist an American attempt to re-order British society? It could be speculated that a bit of both motivated the British to act, or at least think of themselves as acting, in a more racially tolerant manner than their white American "guests."

With regard to the Britons' general attitude toward the American GI, white or black, the "overpaid..." truism had some basis in factual evidence. Simply put, the American GI *was* often better paid than his British counterpart.³⁰⁰ For the "oversexed" part of the triad, the roughly 40,000 British girls who became American "war brides," and the larger unverifiable numbers who became pregnant by an American GI without marrying, were proof enough.³⁰¹ Looking at things through the wider lens of "Allied servicemen," for the purposes of this study, it might also be useful to note that Eric Clapton was the illegitimate son of a Canadian airman stationed in Surrey during the

²⁹⁹ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 313.

³⁰⁰ For a rigorous breakdown of the comparative pay grades for American and British servicemen, see Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 152.

³⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 422.

war.³⁰² However, aside from any factual discussion of pay grades and pregnancies, the tension that existed between wartime British society and the American GIs is more significant—and, in my opinion, much more interesting—when read as a construction of the United States, its culture and its people, and as a discourse over how Britain should best comport herself with regard to all three. As such, it is important to an understanding of how young British musicians in the 1960s consumed and interpreted American (and especially African-American) culture.

Lest we get lost in ideologies and cultural imaginings, the presence of the American GI during and after the Second World War was significant to a future British blues culture in purely pragmatic ways as well. For many British children, their relationship with the American GI was perhaps not so fraught with so much ideological baggage. The iconic American GI, strapping and handsome, extroverted, well-heeled and—most importantly—generous, was quite popular amongst the young. The GI's seemingly endless supply of Coca-Cola, chocolate and chewing gum, provided those children an occasional respite from the strictures of rationing.³⁰³

The American GI's record albums were a welcome treat, as well. They provided many British children with their first exposure to the sounds of blues, R&B and country-and-western, “sounds the English began to love.”³⁰⁴ These records trickled through to the locals by barter or out-and-out donation—there exist stories of GIs simply giving away

³⁰² Michael Schumacher, *Crossroads: The Life and Music of Eric Clapton* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), p. 9.

³⁰³ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, pp. 280-81.

³⁰⁴ Stephen Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001), p. xxvi.

their records to pint-sized supplicants.³⁰⁵ Even just hearing the records, and not owning them, was sometimes enough. Mick Jagger, for instance, recalls first hearing Muddy Waters whilst spending a summer teaching physical education at an American airbase; there, he was befriended by an African-American army cook who played blues records almost constantly.³⁰⁶ Van Morrison's father, who worked as a shipyard electrician, supplemented his enormous collection of American jazz, blues and country-and-western records by buying from and bartering with the American GIs and merchant marines stationed in and around his native Belfast. In the years to come, this mother lode would help to fire his only son's interest in Lead Belly, Josh White and Mose Allison.³⁰⁷

The importance of the African-American GI to the development of an indigenous British blues scene continued after V-E Day. As did the West Indians who had been emigrating to Britain's urban areas in large numbers ever since the late 1940s, the African-American GIs on weekend furlough made up roughly half of the nightly clientele at the British blues network's most vital proving-grounds, the London nightclubs.³⁰⁸ (This was also the case in Hamburg, where the African-American GIs helping to occupy

³⁰⁵ Gardiner, "*Overpaid, Oversexed and Over Here*," p. 112.

³⁰⁶ Christopher Sandford, *Mick Jagger: Primitive Cool* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p. 30. Sandford intimates that, from hanging around with this GI, young Michael (as he was still known) even started picking up a trace of an American accent, which would become useful later on.

³⁰⁷ Van Morrison, interview with Bill Flanagan, in "Van Morrison Emerges From the Shadows," *Musician*, no. 75 (Jan. 1985), p. 32.

³⁰⁸ Shawn Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!: The Smashing Rise and Giddy Fall of Swinging London* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), p. 100.

West Germany found their demand for blues and R&B met by a succession of fledgling British bands, most notably the Beatles and Them.)³⁰⁹

Onstage at London's famous (or infamous) Flamingo Club, it was not unusual to look out into the audience, as British blues shouter Chris Farlowe did one evening in 1965, only to be confronted by a sea of black faces, with the occasional clusters of fearless white Mods sprinkled throughout.³¹⁰ Eric Clapton attests that it was "a place that I was scared to go, until I was actually in bands," and even for those in bands, intimidating it must surely have been.³¹¹ The African-American GI was often, as I have said, the first and most immediate living representative that the British had ever seen of the culture that they had come to so admire. Thus, the stakes for onstage failure, so to speak, were enormously high. However, as would happen numerous times (however unexpectedly) throughout the British blues movement, often in these early days, the young white musicians would earn the enthusiastic respect of that audience. Georgie Fame relates an unexpected benefit of becoming a crowd-pleaser amongst the African-American GIs:

I hated the name Georgie Fame, because I'd been...saddled with this name by [pop impresario] Larry Parnes as one of his exotic, sort of, rock 'n' roll stable of singers. But when we went down the Flamingo, and the GIs would yell out, "Hey, *Fame*, mutha!," it sounded OK. It sounded hip.³¹²

³⁰⁹ Alan Clayson, *Beat Merchants: The Origins, History, Impact and Rock Legacy of the 1960s British Pop Groups* (New York: Blandford Press, 1995), p. 74.

³¹⁰ Chris Farlowe (John Deighton), interview with Mike Figgis, in *Red, White and Blues*.

³¹¹ Eric Clapton, interview with Mike Figgis, in *Red, White and Blues*.

³¹² Georgie Fame (Clive Powell), interview with Mike Figgis, in *Red, White and Blues*.

Besides the proliferation of their record albums, and their patronage of the nightclubs where many British R&B bands learnt their trade, the other major way in which the American GIs were instrumental in helping to bring blues to Britain was through the radio broadcasts provided on their behalf by the American Forces Network (AFN). Like the GI presence in Britain itself, the AFN was a phenomenon that began during the Second World War and continued well into the Cold War. Almost immediately upon his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the European Theater of Operations (ETOUSA) in June 1942, General Dwight D. Eisenhower made it one of his top priorities to gauge the morale of US troops in Britain. One of the main gripes that came to light as a result was the GIs' general dissatisfaction with the quality of radio broadcasting in Britain.³¹³

Initially, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) attempted to help accommodate this grievance by including more American programs in the Home Service. When that proved unsatisfactory, the US military command pressed for the establishment of a separate broadcasting service.³¹⁴ Over the strenuous (though ineffectual) objections of the BBC, who worried that a separate service would be a breach of their royally-mandated monopoly over British broadcasting, the AFN began broadcasting on July 4, 1943, from eight locations throughout England and Wales.³¹⁵ After D-Day, as the Allied

³¹³ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, pp. 168-69.

³¹⁴ Patrick Morley, *"This is the American Forces Network": The Anglo-American Battle of the Airwaves in World War II* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), p. 3.

³¹⁵ In time, this number would grow to sixty-six (out of a proposed seventy-five) in operation throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland—the last of which were built and opened in April 1945. Morley, *"This is the American Forces Network,"* Appendix 1, pp. 151-55.

armies pushed eastward through France, the Low Countries and Germany itself, the AFN dispatched mobile broadcast units to serve the advancing armies. Within months of V-E Day, the AFN shut down its transmitters in Britain and re-established its headquarters and main broadcast center in Frankfurt. Powerful 100,000-watt transmitters based in Frankfurt, Munich, Stuttgart and Bremen enabled the AFN to continue to reach Great Britain.³¹⁶

The ability of the AFN to continue to reach Britain was important because the network had become quite popular amongst British audiences as well as the American troops. This development occurred against the intentions of the AFN programmers (and to the extreme concern of the BBC, who had been reassured that this would not be an issue)³¹⁷. The AFN was meant solely for the consumption of the American troops in Britain, but British audiences had begun to find the AFN's wavelength and to tune in regularly. In a radio-mad culture such as Great Britain (nearly every household had a radio set), and with little else to do under wartime blackouts and rationing, it is unclear why anybody ever thought that resourceful local audiences would be unable to find AFN on their dials.³¹⁸ But find it they did; this is yet another example of the ways in which transmissions and receptions of popular culture are often achieved by accident or against the intentions of those producing and disseminating it.

The AFN provided, at least until the mid-1960s, the only outlet for British audiences to hear American popular music over the radio. The BBC, with its monopoly

³¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 127-29.

³¹⁷ Ibid, p. 15.

³¹⁸ Robert Giddings, "Radio in Peace and War," in Clive Bloom and Gary Day, eds., *Literature and Culture in Modern Britain* (London: Longman, 2000), p. 133.

over the airwaves, employed a broadcasting philosophy, first developed by its founding director-general, Sir John Reith, which held that radio should be mobilized solely for the public good.³¹⁹ (For this reason, the BBC took on the popular nickname, “Auntie.”) This did not mean that the BBC was to broadcast no entertainment whatsoever, but that “entertainment” was defined much more solidly in terms of informing and educating the listener via “high” culture—serious drama, classical music, and under very rare circumstances, the odd bit of jazz.³²⁰ Even jazz was restricted on the BBC, though, because of a 1930 “needletime” agreement reached with the fiercely protectionist British Musicians’ Union (MU) that severely limited the amount of American music that could be broadcast on the BBC.³²¹

This ban was lifted in 1959, but even while it was in effect, it was only partially successful at silencing American music, which managed to get through sometimes in the oddest of ways. Eric Clapton, for instance, remembers a weekly show, *Children’s Hour*, that aired “when [he] was ten or eleven,” on the BBC’s Light Programme every Saturday morning.³²² The show was hosted by

³¹⁹ Reith encapsulated his philosophy thusly: “Give the public slightly better than it thinks it likes.” Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 459-60.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14. Observe again how jazz was regarded as a serious intellectual form of entertainment in certain circles.

³²¹ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London: Little, Brown & Co., 2005), p. 379. The ban also applied to live performances by American musicians; however, it is unclear why this did not deter Chris Barber from bringing in American bluesmen such as “Big Bill” Broonzy (1951) and Muddy Waters (1958) for gigs throughout Britain (see below).

³²² After 1945, the decision was made to split the BBC into three stations, programmed along cultural lines and broadcasting simultaneously. The Light Programme was the most

this strange person, Uncle Mac, a very old man with one leg. He'd play things like [Frankie Laine's] "Mule Train," and then every week he'd slip in something like a Buddy Holly record or a Chuck Berry record. And the first blues I ever heard was on that programme; it was a song by Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, with Sonny Terry howling and playing the harmonica. It blew me away.³²³

That *Children's Hour* has been called "one of BBC Radio's most fondly remembered children's programmes" suggests that there were probably numerous unnamed others who also got their first taste of the blues in this manner.³²⁴

"Uncle Mac" (whose given name was Derek McCulloch) was presumably tolerated because he was old (57 when he began hosting the show) and eccentric.³²⁵ Other justifications can help to explain other notable instances whereby the blues slipped past the BBC's vetting process. Alan Lomax, the esteemed American folklorist whose recording trips into the Deep South in the 1940s on behalf of the Library of Congress were responsible for the discovery (or re-discovery) of many important blues artists, hosted two popular shows on the Light Programme. Entitled "Adventures in Folksong" and "Patterns in American Song," these half-hour-long broadcasts were devoted to the history and anthropology of jazz and the blues—with a healthy slice of airtime for

"lowbrow," offering popular music, comedy and soap operas. The Home Service was the "middlebrow" station, airing news, popular plays and academic lectures. Finally, at the intended pinnacle, was the Third Programme. The most self-consciously "highbrow" of the three, this station played classical music, Shakespeare and poetry readings. Not surprisingly, amongst most Britons of the postwar period, the Light Programme proved the most popular by far. See Asa Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1985).

³²³ Eric Clapton, interview with Robert Palmer, in *Rolling Stone* (June 20, 1985), p. 53.

³²⁴ Dave Thompson, *Cream: The World's First Supergroup* (London: Virgin, 2005), p. 28.

³²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 29.

Lomax's field recordings as "evidence."³²⁶ These shows were allowed to air because, passing as they did for erudite lessons on the nature of African-American culture, they fit the Reithian dictum that radio programs inform and educate.

Nuggets such as these, however, were still few and rather far between. Thus, those who wanted to hear American popular music had to go elsewhere. Their main avenue was the American Forces Network, whose popularity, always strong, was amplified with the advent of rock 'n' roll in the mid-1950s. Now, jazz and blues fans looking for their fix were joined by teenagers who had heard (or at least heard *of*) the exciting new American music from the media, and from movies like *Blackboard Jungle* (1956), which featured Bill Haley's song "Rock Around the Clock." They tuned into the AFN, often surreptitiously—going by the testimonies of the British blues network, one would think that every boy in Britain spent his nights thrilling to the sounds of Elvis Presley and Chuck Berry by the glow of the small transistor radios he kept hidden under his bedsheets.³²⁷

AFN's late night broadcasts were hosted by the deep-voiced Willis Conover, "from Washington, D.C.," which might as well have been "another planet" to his young British audience.³²⁸ Bound only by the wide-ranging listening tastes of his primary audience, the American GIs, Conover played a diverse variety of popular music—rock

³²⁶ Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1993), quoted in Robert Santelli, "A Century of the Blues," in Peter Guralnick, et. al., eds., *Martin Scorsese Presents the Blues: A Musical Journey* (New York: Amistad Books, 2003), p. 43.

³²⁷ E.g., see Bob Spitz, *The Beatles: The Biography* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2005), p. 34; Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. 14; Geoffrey Giuliano, *Behind Blue Eyes: A Life of Pete Townshend* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2002), p. 13.

³²⁸ Georgie Fame, interview with Mike Figgis, in *Red, White and Blues*.

‘n’ roll, country-and-western, jazz, R&B and blues. Most of the British blues network actually came to the blues in this way, as something they were drawn into by being interested in rock ‘n’ roll. Both Keith Richards and John Lennon, for example, were initially rockabilly-loving Teddy Boys who latched onto Muddy Waters and Jimmy Reed because their songs were often played in the same block of airtime as those of Chuck Berry.³²⁹

Doubtless many British youngsters just listened to the blues, R&B and rock ‘n’ roll that were broadcast over the AFN and the pirate stations. However, in Manchester, John Mayall took his love of the American music put forth by the AFN one step further—he taped it. Mayall, who was in his mid-twenties in the late 1950s, benefited from the fact that he, unlike most of the younger cohort, held down a steady job (he was the art director of a Manchester graphic design studio).³³⁰ This was significant not only because it meant that he began his record-buying habit much earlier than his fellows, but also because it allowed him to purchase a reel-to-reel tape player, which he used to record much of what came through on the AFN.³³¹ By 1963, when he moved from Manchester to London to join Blues Incorporated, he had amassed what has been described by Clapton, Fame,

³²⁹ Sandford, *Primitive Cool*, p. 31; Spitz, *The Beatles*, p. 41.

³³⁰ Richard Newman, *John Mayall: Bluesbreaker* (Chessington, Surrey, UK: Castle Communications, 1995), p. 56.

³³¹ Thompson, *The World’s First Supergroup*, p. 24. Interestingly enough, Thompson (whose book, maddeningly, does not cite any sources whatsoever) states that Willis Conover’s radio show came across on the Voice of America (VOA) radio network.

Steve Winwood and many others as simply the *largest* collection of records and reel-to-reel tapes they had ever encountered.³³²

This collection became an invaluable asset to the younger members of the British blues network, who, although they had jobs and the pocket money to buy their own albums, could never have matched Mayall's horde—frankly, he had had almost a decade's head-start on them. By Mayall's own admission, his home in Blackheath became a central gathering place for British blues enthusiasts, who used to “have record-listening parties...on Saturday nights, and go all the way through the night, listening to ‘em all.”³³³ Clapton, in particular, benefited immensely from Mayall's collection. After Clapton quit the Yardbirds in 1965, Mayall promptly invited the young “pseudo-intellectual of the blues” to join his outfit, the Bluesbreakers. Before Clapton joined, however, he installed himself in a spare bedroom in Mayall's home, determined to listen to, and learn how to play along with, as many of Mayall's records as he could.³³⁴ This vital period of “woodshedding” no doubt paid off, as within a very short time of joining the Bluesbreakers, admirers had begun to proclaim his divinity in graffiti on walls throughout Greater London.³³⁵

³³² Clapton, Fame and Steve Winwood, interviews with Mike Figgis, in *Red, White and Blues*.

³³³ John Mayall, interview with Mike Figgis, in *Red, White and Blues*.

³³⁴ Eric Clapton, interview in *Sessions for Robert J*, prod. Eric Clapton and Doyle Bramhall II (2004).

³³⁵ *Ibid*; George Melly, interview with Mike Figgis, in *Red, White and Blues*. “Woodshedding,” a term lifted from jazz circles, means “sequestering oneself away for the purpose of mastering a musical instrument.”

The importance of record albums to the British blues network is not to be underestimated. However, record albums were often not the initial point-of-entry to the blues for young Britons. Of course, there are important exceptions to this generalization. As mentioned, Van Morrison first heard the blues through his father's record collection, and Eric Burdon got his first fix from the records given to him as a Christmas present by a friend of the Burdon family, a merchant seaman who lived downstairs.³³⁶ Jeff Beck was introduced to the blues by his older sister, who bought jazz and blues records and (since their parents disapproved of the music) listened to them with her little brother on the sly.³³⁷ Encounters like Beck's, as well as the late-night under-the-bedsheets listening sessions discussed above, doubtless solidified the aura of the blues as a secret code, a culture that was their own and not their parents'.

However, since most record albums had to be actively sought after and purchased, using a variety of methods, it stands to reason that they were often not something to be encountered by the uninitiated. Generally speaking, record albums were media by which British blues enthusiasts were able to confirm or deepen their love of the blues, *after* they had already been exposed to it in other ways (namely radio). They were also ways to forge the acquaintances that would later coalesce into the British blues network. The story of how, in 1962, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards renewed their childhood friendship on a commuter train on the basis of Jagger's carrying a handful of Chuck

³³⁶ John Collis, *Van Morrison: Inarticulate Speech of the Heart* (New York: Da Capo, 1997), p. 22.

³³⁷ Carson, *Crazy Fingers*, p. 8.

Berry and Muddy Waters albums, has by now passed into rock legend.³³⁸ Similar processes were repeated over and over again in art college common rooms (all of which featured a record player and a hefty pile of jazz and R&B albums) and parents' living rooms across Britain. Hanging around both of these places, Clapton, a self-professed grammar school outcast, "met a certain crowd of people, some of whom played guitar."³³⁹ This, in embryo, was much of the British blues network, concerned far more at that point with who had the latest Howlin' Wolf album and not so much with forming bands or booking recording studios.

In addition to solidifying a love of the blues, and initiating social contacts between enthusiasts, record albums also became the centerpiece of what became, amongst those enthusiasts, a *bona fide* cult—the holy relics that, once found, justified the expenditure of an entire day's worth of hunting through dark, secluded secondhand shops and record outlets (as well as perhaps an entire fortnight's pay packet).³⁴⁰ The cult of record acquisition became the most visible evidence of the necessary linkage between the R&B movement and the wider consumer culture of which it was a part.³⁴¹ Without the boom in consumer durables and the increase in standard-of-living with which it went hand in hand, this cult would never have been possible. The cult is also the most obvious

³³⁸ The Rolling Stones, with Dora Loewenstein and Philip Dodd, eds., *According to the Rolling Stones* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2003), p. 28.

³³⁹ Eric Clapton, interview with Steve Turner, in *Rolling Stone* (July 18, 1974), p. 56; Clapton, interview with J.D. Considine, in "Eric Clapton Is Not God. And He Knows It," *Musician*, no. 97 (November 1986), p. 88.

³⁴⁰ Paolo Hewitt, *The Soul Stylists: Forty Years of Modernism* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2000), p. 23.

³⁴¹ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958-1974* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 67-72.

way by which the R&B and Mod movements overlapped. The Mods were obsessed with both acquiring and then categorizing the stuff of modern consumer culture; foremost among their pursuits was record albums.³⁴² Only the most obscure would do; a guaranteed way for either a Mod or an R&B enthusiast to earn the (temporary) respect of his compatriots was to bring an album to art school that had either not been known to exist, or had not yet been found.³⁴³

When it came to searching for these treasures, the ever-resourceful *cognoscento* had to come up with a variety of methods. One was to trawl the multitude of secondhand shops in Soho, London's bohemian enclave. Jazz historian Jim Godbolt claims that "before the war shops specializing in jazz [and, by extension, the blues] were virtually unknown."³⁴⁴ However, with the consumer culture boom and the coincident "traditional" ("trad") jazz revival (see below), shops catering to this sort of clientele sprang up within striking distance of the Soho jazz clubs.³⁴⁵ In particular, Dobell's in Charing Cross Road was a popular destination. The shop had begun life before the war as an antiquarian bookshop run by Doug Dobell's father; after his demobilization from the army, Doug Dobell converted it entirely into a record shop. From the 1950s, it became a "collector's

³⁴² Richard Barnes, *Mods!* (London: Eel Pie Publishing, 1979), p. 34.

³⁴³ Dave Marsh, *Before I Get Old: The Story of the Who* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), p. 22.

³⁴⁴ Jim Godbolt, *A History of Jazz in Britain, 1950-70* (London: Quartet Books, 1989), p. 262.

³⁴⁵ Daniel Farson, *Soho in the Fifties* (London: Michael Joseph, Ltd., 1987), p. 72.

Mecca and a dropping-in point for visiting musicians,” able to boast by the early 1960s that “every true jazz fan is born within the sound of Dobell’s.”³⁴⁶

Another way to at least hear the latest R&B record albums, if not acquire them, was to spend an evening in a London nightclub. The Roaring Twenties nightclub was one such place, owing to the presence of its Jamaican disc jockey, “Count” Suckle. Suckle, whose Christian name has apparently been lost to history, had connections with the music scene in Memphis, Tennessee, which kept him supplied with the latest releases by the Sun, Chess and Modern/RPM labels. Suckle would then play these records during the intermissions between the club’s live acts. In this way, Georgie Fame heard James Brown’s *Night Train*, Sam Cooke’s *Night Beat*, and numerous other African-American imports—in addition to the West Indian ska and calypso records that Suckle acquired from within the London’s West Indian community.³⁴⁷ Likewise, Guy Stevens, the disc jockey at London’s Scene club, also had an American source, whose records ensured that the Scene was the favorite hangout of Keith Richards and Mick Jagger throughout the summer and autumn of 1963.³⁴⁸

Sometimes the young British blues enthusiast could have a record collection fall into his lap. This was the happy circumstance that befell Pete Townshend when his American flatmate was deported in 1962 on a charge of marijuana possession. The young American’s vast record collection became Townshend’s by default. According to fellow flatmate Richard Barnes, this mother lode consisted of, among many hundreds of albums,

³⁴⁶ Godbolt, *The History of Jazz in Britain, 1950-70*, p. 263.

³⁴⁷ Fame, interview with Mike Figgis, *Red, White and Blues*; James Brown, *Night Train* (King Records, 1963); Sam Cooke, *Night Beat* (Abkco, 1963).

³⁴⁸ Phelge, *Nankering*, p. 103.

Jimmy Reed, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Mose Allison, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Ray Charles, the Coasters and Ray Charles.³⁴⁹ The eclecticism of this unfortunate young American's collection directly influenced the selection of material covered by Townshend's band, the Detours (who later became the Who).

After 1959, the quest for American blues albums got a little easier, due to a limited production and distribution agreement struck between Chicago's Chess label and Britain's Pye label in that year.³⁵⁰ This deal enabled many of the early 1960s hits of Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and Willie Dixon to reach a British audience, and can help to explain why songs written by three artists, in particular, were so well represented in the cover versions performed by the British blues network. It is unclear, however, to what extent the Chess-Pye agreement affected the release of items from the Chicago label's back catalogue. The extreme measures taken by Mick Jagger would certainly seem to suggest that the agreement held only for new releases. Saving up the government stipend that was supposed to be seeing him through a degree program at the London School of Economics, Jagger wrote away to Chess for a direct-mail catalog, from which he regularly ordered obscure vinyl treasures.³⁵¹ This was not an entirely ideal method of acquisition, what with the exorbitant shipping-and-handling, as well as the obligatory

³⁴⁹ Barnes, *Mods!*, p. 131.

³⁵⁰ Robert Gordon, *Can't Be Satisfied: The Life and Times of Muddy Waters* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 2002), p. 185.

³⁵¹ The Rolling Stones, with Loewenstein and Dodd, *According to the Rolling Stones*, p. 14.

two-month turnaround time for international mailings.³⁵² But, under the circumstances, it was what Jagger and *cognoscenti* like him felt compelled to do.

The cult of record acquisition still had its echoes in the later careers of the British blues network, often after they had been superstars for many years. Pete Townshend recalls a 1981 party thrown by Mick Jagger for his second wife, Jerry Hall, at which Jagger played a host of “old, great blues records” that he kept in an enormous travel trunk in his hotel room. Many of them, he claimed, he had owned since before he was a Rolling Stone. In response to Townshend’s query about how he had chosen which ones to bring with him, Jagger replied earnestly, “I take all my records. All of them. Everywhere.”³⁵³ And although none may match Jagger in this respect, it is beyond question that many of the British blues network still feel much the same adolescent enthusiasm for the records that first inspired them.³⁵⁴

A self-contained British R&B scene, made up of committed enthusiasts who had fallen in love with the music through radio broadcasts and record albums, did not just materialize out of thin air, however. In a direct sense, British R&B descended, or perhaps more accurately, seceded from a curious and entirely British phenomenon known as “traditional” (or “trad”) jazz.³⁵⁵ “Trad” had its roots in the 1920s and 1930s, in the

³⁵² Phelge, *Nankering*, p. 27.

³⁵³ Pete Townshend, weblog for October 3, 2006 (http://petetownshendwhohe.blogspot.com/2006_10_03_archive.html) (accessed May 9, 2007). I am grateful to my colleague Chas Reed for bringing this website to my attention.

³⁵⁴ Jagger’s zeal has no doubt been greatly facilitated by the fact that he has not had actually to carry his own luggage for decades!

³⁵⁵ George Melly, *Revolt Into Style: The Pop Arts in Britain* (London: Penguin, 1970), p. 82.

aftermath of jazz's arrival in Europe. In the face of those cultural and intellectual commentators who were prepared to embrace the modernity of jazz, the British revivalists instead took a seemingly anti-modern path by trying to recreate the "Dixieland" style that had supposedly been performed in New Orleans' famous Storyville red-light district, thirty years beforehand.³⁵⁶

In the post-Second World War period, the revivalist ethos was resurrected by a cohort of musicians who found themselves confronted with a new form of "modernist" American jazz—"bebop," the self-consciously sophisticated and often anti-melodic style promulgated by African-American jazzmen such as Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie.³⁵⁷ The "trad" crowd, in opposition to what they perceived as the overweening intellectualism, technical fussiness and blatant commercialism of "bebop," clung to the earnest, simple, and deliberately uncommercial sounds of "Dixieland" jazz. It must be pointed out, however, that was some measure of intellectualism involved in "trad" jazz. Aficionados were not above an earnest discussion of the relative merits of their preferred bands or performers. Indeed, the noted British academic historian Eric Hobsbawm regularly contributed—under his *nom de plume*, Francis Newton—articles and opinion pieces on jazz to various music periodicals throughout the country.³⁵⁸ And when rock 'n' roll came along, the most frequent protest made by the "trad" crowd was

³⁵⁶ Brian Ward, "By Elvis and All the Saints: Images of the American South in the World of 1950s British Popular Music," in Franklin T. Lambert and Joseph P. Ward, eds., *Britain and the American South: From Colonialism to Rock 'n' Roll* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2003), p. 192.

³⁵⁷ Pells, *Not Like Us*, p. 146.

³⁵⁸ Many of his writings on the subject were collected as Francis Newton, *The Jazz Scene* (New York: Pantheon, 1993).

that the new “craze” was completely devoid of any intellectual foundations. A defining feature of “trad,” then, was that it was intellectual *up to a point*, which, it is fair to say, has been a self-identification of British intellectuals for many years.³⁵⁹

Spearheaded by such luminaries as Chris Barber, Kenny Ball, Ken Colyer and Humphrey Lyttleton,³⁶⁰ the “trad” crowd tried very hard to present itself as a mixture of vague leftist political leanings and reassuring Edwardian cultural nostalgia. As Dominic Sandbrook points out, “the period of trad jazz’s greatest commercial success was also the period when the CND [Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament] was at its height.”³⁶¹ Many, indeed, began to talk of “trad” as the soundtrack of not only the disarmament campaign, but also of a growing variety of leftist political movements, participated in mainly by university students, whose traditional uniform of oversized sweater, sandals and a goatee was now supplemented by a CND badge and a trumpet case.³⁶²

The “trad” movement was also, at heart, one of nostalgia. In part, this stemmed from the very music being played and listened to. “Dixieland” jazz hearkened back to the Edwardian era, a time when the Empire was still a going concern, London did not have to kow-tow to Washington, and humanity had not yet had to learn to live in fear of

³⁵⁹ See, e.g., Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³⁶⁰ Godbolt, *The History of Jazz in Britain, 1950-70*, pp. 136-38.

³⁶¹ Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 482.

³⁶² Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, The Bomb and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest, 1945-1980* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 180-86.

imminent nuclear annihilation.³⁶³ This, like most nostalgia, was based only tangentially in reality. For starters, during those Edwardian halcyon days, the British public did not even know what “Dixieland” jazz was. Also, the actual social and cultural circumstances of African-Americans in Storyville in the first decade of the twentieth century were either glossed over as equally nostalgic or not even countenanced.³⁶⁴

The nostalgic nature of “Dixieland” jazz as a music was coupled with the public personae of the men performing it. A case in point was Acker Bilk, the flamboyant (and, for a time, immensely popular) clarinetist. In his mid-forties, balding, and a bit overweight, from a rural background (in Somerset), Bilk seemed an unlikely candidate for national stardom. His success lay primarily in his ability to cut what was perceived to be a quintessentially Edwardian figure, complete with rainbow-striped waistcoat and bowler hat.³⁶⁵ His publicity seemed to have been copied verbatim from some of the more rococo examples of Victorian music-hall advertisements. To wit, one poster read

NEW ORLEANS JOYS... with Mr. Acker Bilk, Esq. ... More than a Furlong to the West, my Ear was beguiled in so Tempting a Fashion by the Mellifluous Sounds proceeding from a Basement Saloon situate at No. 100 that I could not forbear to allow my Feet to carry me Thither. O Happy Pedal Error! What Transports of Delight derived from so Seemingly Trivial an Incident! For, securely Ensconced on a Dais among the Denizens of this Subterranean Hall, there I descried the Noble Countenance and Dignified Mien of that Pillar of Metropolitan Diurnal Entertainment, Mr. Acker Bilk.³⁶⁶

The poster continues on in this vein for another four paragraphs.

³⁶³ Jonathon Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counterculture* (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 37.

³⁶⁴ Ward, “By Elvis and All the Saints,” p. 193.

³⁶⁵ Godbolt, *The History of Jazz in Britain, 1950-70*, p. 135.

³⁶⁶ “New Orleans Joys with Mr. Acker Bilk,” publicity poster for Mr. Acker Bilk and his Paramount Jazz Band, reproduced in full in Godbolt, *The History of Jazz in Britain, 1950-70*, p. 134. All of Bilk’s publicity was careful always to refer to their man as “Mr.”

Furthermore, Bilk's rural background, far from being an impediment in cosmopolitan London, was actually hyped beyond all belief.³⁶⁷ Much was made, for example, of the fact that the only vice in which he indulged was a pint or two of West Country cider (in unspoken contrast, perhaps, to the African-American "bebop" jazzmen, who were generally thought to be heroin addicts).³⁶⁸ The merits of "trad's" fusion of leftist political sympathies and Edwardian cultural nostalgia (at least as personified by Mr. Acker Bilk) were not immediately apparent to some cultural observers on the scene. George Melly's commentary on the public reception of Bilk, for instance, is simply too good not to quote in its entirety:

In effect then the public was asked to accept a cider-drinking, belching, West Country contemporary dressed as an Edwardian music-hall "Lion Comique," and playing the music of an oppressed racial minority as it had evolved in an American city some fifty years before. More surprisingly they did accept it. Acker was soon a national idol.³⁶⁹

Not even the most callous critic could deny "trad's" popularity, however. The successes of Bilk, Barber, Colyer, *et. al.*, led some lighter-headed observers to bluster that "trad" jazz would be the next big worldwide fad, filling the vacuum left behind by the seeming implosion of rock 'n' roll.³⁷⁰ The sudden emergence of "Beatlemania," followed by the "blues boom," proved these predictions painfully wrong, of course. But there is no denying that, among a much wider swath of the British listening public than

³⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 133.

³⁶⁸ Iain Chambers, *Urban Cultures: Pop Music and Popular Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), p. 48.

³⁶⁹ Melly, *Revolt Into Style*, p. 60.

³⁷⁰ Brian Matthew, *Trad Mad!* (London, 1962), quoted in Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 479. Of course, some of these observers also predicted that calypso and the cha-cha would succeed rock 'n' roll.

might have been expected, “trad” jazz initially did seem a worthy contender for mainstream musical hegemony.³⁷¹

The legacies of the “trad” jazz movement to British R&B are several. There was the obsessive antiquarianism that led members of both sects to spend their leisure time hunting for the most obscure jazz and blues records available. There was the idealization of the African-American culture of decades past, and the urge to exalt that culture, through emulation, over and above the unsatisfactory culture of the present. There was also, in jazz clubs, the forging of a listening audience from university students, lower-middle-class white-collar employees and upwardly mobile working-class types—which was basically the same audience catered to by British R&B.³⁷² Finally, there was the co-optation of Victorian and Edwardian imagery, themes, vocabulary and modes of dress in order to fuse British sensibilities to American culture.

Chroniclers of the early British beat groups have often tended to portray the “trad” jazz scene as bigoted, obsessed with the “authenticity” and “purity” of their music, and unwilling to make time even for the blues, especially the younger blues enthusiasts coming of age in their midst.³⁷³ The evidence simply does not bear out this characterization. What has sometimes been overlooked in recounting the interactions between the “trad” jazz and blues cliques was the fact that the latter also embraced rock

³⁷¹ Godbolt, *The History of Jazz in Britain, 1950-70*, p. 258.

³⁷² Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art Into Pop* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 72.

³⁷³ Alan Clayson, *Call Up the Groups!: The Golden Age of British Beat, 1962-67* (New York: Blandford Press, 1985), p. 33; Thompson, *The World's First Supergroup* (New York: Virgin, 2005), p. 21.

'n' rollers like Elvis Presley and Chuck Berry, and it was for *this* reason, above all, that the "trad" clique professed such extreme distaste for, among others, the Rolling Stones.³⁷⁴

If anything, the "trad" jazz revival must be credited with providing a much-needed helping hand to the spread of the blues in Great Britain. After all, it was Chris Barber whose organization, the National Jazz League, was the driving force behind the first tours of Britain by American bluesmen in the 1950s.³⁷⁵ These in-the-flesh appearances, though rare, were no less meaningful in confirming a generation of young Britons in their love affair with the blues. The first bluesman to travel to Britain was "Big Bill" Broonzy, who came to prominence in America due to his spirited performance at John Hammond's "From Spirituals to Swing" concert of African-American music at Carnegie Hall, New York, in December 1938.³⁷⁶ By 1951, however, Broonzy's star was on the wane amongst African-American audiences, and so he shrewdly made the jump to white coffeehouse audiences in New York and, then, Great Britain and France.³⁷⁷ He was rapturously received in Britain—although, as might be obvious, by a slightly older crowd than the yet-to-emerge "blues network."³⁷⁸ Mick Jagger, for instance, was just eight years old when Broonzy first came over, and was most assuredly *not* at the concert.

As the first blues tour of Britain, Broonzy's gigs were important for the emergence down the line of the British blues network, even if none of them actually

³⁷⁴ Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. 23.

³⁷⁵ Bob Brunning, *Blues: The British Connection* (New York: Blandford Press, 1986), p. 12; Melly, *Revolt Into Style*, p. 35.

³⁷⁶ Robert Palmer, *Deep Blues* (New York: Viking Press, 1981), p. 130.

³⁷⁷ Santelli, "A Century of the Blues," p. 43.

³⁷⁸ Godbolt, *The History of Jazz in Britain, 1950-70*, p. 91.

attended them. For one, it convinced Barber and some of his like-minded colleagues in the “trad” scene that there did indeed exist a viable audience for folk blues (which was still thought of as primitive jazz); this realization prompted Barber to devote a portion of his band’s gigs to some folk blues numbers.³⁷⁹ This in turn led to Lonnie Donegan’s performing “Rock Island Line,” which in turn led to the skiffle boom, at which point our (very young) protagonists entered the picture. The other way in which Broonzy’s first tour in 1951 was significant was because it convinced Barber that bringing over American bluesmen was worthwhile, both culturally and financially, and should be continued in future.

To this end, Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry visited Britain in 1954, followed by Champion Jack Dupree in 1956, by Broonzy again in 1957, and finally by Muddy Waters in 1958.³⁸⁰ Waters’ performances created what Bob Brunning calls “a now scarcely creditable storm” of controversy.³⁸¹ Fans of “trad” jazz and folk blues, accustomed over the better part of the decade to elderly African-Americans, dressed either in overalls or threadbare suits, accompanying themselves with acoustic guitars and sometimes un-amplified harmonicas, were completely unprepared for Waters and his backing band. They did not look the part, dressed impeccably in silk suits and patent leather shoes, with Waters’ hair done up in the elaborate “conk” style that was very

³⁷⁹ Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 468.

³⁸⁰ Brunning, *The British Connection*, p. 12.

³⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 12.

popular amongst African-Americans of the 1940s and 1950s.³⁸² And they certainly did not sound the part, plugged into an admittedly small amplifier that made the scandalized audience wonder if either they or the walls would survive the band's aural onslaught.³⁸³ To the "trad" crowd, the "screaming guitar and howling piano" were absolute heresy. Chastened, Waters told the English music paper *Melody Maker*, "now I know that the people in England like soft guitar and the old blues. Next time I come I'll learn some old songs first."³⁸⁴

However, Waters' electrified Chicago blues deeply impressed some within the audience. In London, Alexis Korner and Cyril Davies, a guitar and harmonica player, respectively, in Chris Barber's "trad" band, liked what they heard, comparing it favorably with the tedium of what Korner called "this skiffle shit."³⁸⁵ They felt sufficiently emboldened to form a modestly amplified blues unit within Barber's band, and then, in 1962, to part ways with Barber entirely and form a band of their own (on which more later). Further north, Eric Burdon, then an indifferent seventeen-year-old graphics student at the Newcastle College of Art and Design, had somehow acquired two tickets to Waters' show. In the school cafeteria on the afternoon of the show, he announced that he had an extra ticket and asked if anyone wanted to accompany him. John Steel, also

³⁸² Gordon, *Can't Be Satisfied*, p. 159. The liner notes accompanying Waters' "psychedelic blues" album, *Electric Mud* (MCA/Chess, 1968) feature a photographic step-by-step of how that trademark "conk" was painstakingly shellacked into place.

³⁸³ Les Fancourt, liner notes accompanying *The Complete Muddy Waters, 1947-67* (Charley, 1992).

³⁸⁴ Palmer, *Deep Blues*, p. 258, quoting Muddy Waters, interview with Max Jones, in *Melody Maker*, November 3, 1958.

³⁸⁵ Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. xxix.

seventeen, said he would. On the way home after the show, all the two young Geordies could talk about was Waters' sound. The genesis of their R&B band, the Animals, can be traced to that night in 1958.³⁸⁶

Other bluesmen, namely the Reverend Gary Davis, Roosevelt Sykes and Jesse “Lone Cat” Fuller, continued to cross the Atlantic to play in Britain over the next five years—presumably only after assuring their hosts that they would stick either to acoustic folk blues or jazzier offerings.³⁸⁷ The first large-scale appearance of American bluesmen in Great Britain, however, was in 1962 as part of the first American Folk Blues Festival (AFBF), a package tour of Europe organized by two German enthusiasts, Fritz Rau and Horst Lippmann. Well aware of the grassroots interest in the blues amongst (mostly teenaged) European audiences, and eager to get some footage of the genuine article for their German television show, *Jazz Gehört and Gesehen* (“Jazz Seen and Heard”), Rau and Lippmann contacted Chess Studios producer/bass guitarist/lyricist Willie Dixon to help them round up the best American blues talent and book dates all over the Continent.³⁸⁸ The original bill was breathtaking: it included Dixon, John Lee Hooker, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Memphis Slim and T-Bone Walker.³⁸⁹ Inconceivably, in light of the strength of the scene in Britain, Rau and Lippmann got only

³⁸⁶ Gordon, *Can't Be Satisfied*, p. 163.

³⁸⁷ Val Wilmer, “The First Time I Met the Blues,” in *Mojo* (1995), p. 84.

³⁸⁸ Willie Dixon with Don Snowden, *I Am the Blues* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989), p. 198.

³⁸⁹ Ulrich Adelt, “Germany Gets the Blues: Negotiations of ‘Race’ and Nation at the American Folk Blues Festival,” unpublished dissertation chapter, p. 10. It is quite rare to see Terry and McGhee performing without one another during the period of their “re-discovery” by European audiences.

a lukewarm reception from British promoters, so that only one British date could be booked, in Manchester on October 18, 1962.³⁹⁰

Proving those promoters tremendously wrong, budding blues fans from all over the country, having caught wind of the concert via what vocalist-in-training Paul Jones called “the bush telegraph,” piled into vans or caught commuter trains to Manchester to see the show. One such truck conveyed Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton, Brian Jones, Keith Richards and Mick Jagger to Manchester’s Free Trade Hall, which was packed to capacity by such as these.³⁹¹ When Rau and Lippmann, buoyed by the Continent-wide success of the inaugural AFBF, began sending out feelers for a return engagement in October 1963, they had no trouble whatsoever booking dates in Britain.³⁹²

The 1963 AFBF featured the return of Muddy Waters to the nation that had met his previous trip there with such hostility and incredulity. This time round, he was true to the promise he had given to *Melody Maker*, sticking to “soft guitar and old blues.” What he had not reckoned with—indeed, could not have reckoned with—was the sea-change that had occurred in the British scene over the preceding five years.³⁹³ The “trad” jazz scene was on the wane, retreating before the electrified R&B produced by Korner and Davies, and their spin-off, the Rolling Stones.³⁹⁴ “Screaming guitar and howling piano”

³⁹⁰ Thompson, *The World’s First Supergroup*, p. 33. One has to wonder how much the Manchester booking had to do with personal pressure brought to bear on the luckless promoter by John Mayall, a native Mancunian.

³⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 33.

³⁹² Thompson, *The First Supergroup*, p. 33.

³⁹³ Gordon, *Can’t Be Satisfied*, p. 184.

³⁹⁴ Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. 31.

were now all the rage, so to speak. Thus, Waters' acoustic "Big Bill" act was now just as out of place as his amplified Chicago-style act had been five years ago. A bewildered Waters wondered, "'Just what did they want, these white folks?' He'd given them the old down-home country blues this time—and now all they could ask him was, 'Why'd you leave the Telecaster behind?'"³⁹⁵

On subsequent trips to Britain, Waters did not leave the Telecaster behind, and reassumed his rightful role as a *paterfamilias* to the British blues network. So, too, as a direct or indirect result of their exposure via the AFBF, did John Lee Hooker, Howlin' Wolf and Sonny Boy Williamson II.³⁹⁶ These last three gained added stature in the eyes of the movement because, appreciative of the warm reception they were accorded in Britain, they decided to stay on once the AFBF had concluded.³⁹⁷ Since this added touring was organized off-the-cuff (that is to say, had not been booked in advance), it was also done on a shoestring budget, meaning that Chess Records, for instance, could not afford to retain their studio band in Britain to back Howlin' Wolf.³⁹⁸ However, booking agents found an inexpensive local talent source, practically begging to be tapped—the

³⁹⁵ Wilmer, "First Time," p. 87.

³⁹⁶ Adelt, "Germany Gets the Blues," p. 12.

³⁹⁷ Murray, *Boogie Man*, p. 269.

³⁹⁸ In Howlin' Wolf's case, the budget stretched enough to let Wolf's guitarist and boy-Friday, Hubert Sumlin also stay on in Europe after the AFBF had ended. James Segrest and Mark Hoffmann, *Moanin' at Midnight: The Life and Times of Howlin' Wolf* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), p. 209.

young British blues enthusiasts, who craved the kind of training that only backing up the masters could provide.³⁹⁹

While in England, John Lee Hooker was backed first by John Mayall's Bluesbreakers (to less than stellar reviews, it must be said) and then by a South London R&B outfit called the Groundhogs (who, as luck would have it, had actually started life as "John Lee's Groundhogs," in homage to the Detroit-based bluesman).⁴⁰⁰ Howlin' Wolf was backed by Long John Baldry's Hoochie-Coochie Men, as well as a group called the Muleskinners (whose keyboardist, Ian McLagan, later went on to greater notoriety with the Small Faces, the Faces and the Rolling Stones), and one called the T-Bones.⁴⁰¹ Sonny Boy Williamson II seems to have been backed by most of the bands on the scene—the Yardbirds, the Animals, Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames, the Spencer Davis Group and the Hoochie-Coochie Men—everybody except the Rolling Stones, who were by then "too big in their own right to serve as anybody's backing band."⁴⁰² Of all these pairings, however, the most noteworthy, the most contentious, and arguably the most telling in the early days of this trans-Atlantic relationship, was the shotgun marriage between Sonny Boy Williamson II and first, the Yardbirds and later, the Animals.

Sonny Boy Williamson II was one of the great characters of postwar blues. He first attained prominence in the South as the voice of "King Biscuit Flour" and the

³⁹⁹ Brunning, *The British Connection*, p. 166.

⁴⁰⁰ Murray, *Boogie Man*, pp. 273-275. The Bluesbreakers' stint backing Hooker was quite a while before they enjoyed the services of Eric Clapton.

⁴⁰¹ Segrest and Hoffmann, *Moanin' at Midnight*, p. 219.

⁴⁰² Murray, *Boogie Man*, p. 269.

Helena, Arkansas radio station KFFA.⁴⁰³ He had stolen his sobriquet (thus the designation “II” after his name) from Chicago bluesman John Lee “Sonny Boy” Williamson, who, having been murdered in 1948, was in no position to challenge the usurpation. Blues historians Barry Lee Pearson and Bill McCulloch have called him a “con man,” and indeed no one has ever been able to actually confirm his real name, since at various times he said his name was Rice Miller, Aleck Miller, Aleck Ford, Willie Williamson, “Little Boy Blue” and, quite unhelpfully, “the original Sonny Boy Williamson.”⁴⁰⁴ By 1964, he was somewhere between fifty-six and sixty-seven years old, had lost most of his teeth, and was drinking several bottles of whiskey a day.⁴⁰⁵ Based on these facts alone, one might guess that his relationship with his young white acolytes would be uneven at best.

Williamson II did seem to harbor a genuine respect and affection for Great Britain. He was touched by the fervent applause he received all over Britain, as well as by the relative lack of racism he encountered. He certainly enjoyed the paycheck; according to Horst Lippmann, he wept with joy when he received his cut at the end of the first AFBF.⁴⁰⁶ A noticeable slice of that cut went to pay for a blue-and-grey alternating

⁴⁰³ Santelli, “A Century of the Blues,” p. 35.

⁴⁰⁴ Barry Lee Pearson and Bill McCulloch, *Robert Johnson: Lost and Found* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 16; William E. Donoghue, *Fessor Mojo’s “Don’t Start Me To Talkin’”* (Seattle: Mojo Visions Productions, 1997), p. 8. The confusion about “Sonny Boy II’s” real name is just one of the factors that can help explain why there have been no biographies of the man, even though there have been at least five biographies of Robert Johnson.

⁴⁰⁵ Brunning, *The British Connection*, p. 175.

⁴⁰⁶ Horst Lippmann, quoted in liner notes accompanying CD box set, *American Folk Blues Festival ‘Sixty Two to ‘Sixty Five* (Evidence, 1995).

pinstripe suit and bowler hat, which Williamson II ordered custom-made because that was what he imagined a proper British “gent” would wear.⁴⁰⁷ The aging bluesman also expressed his fondness for Britain and the British people in the song, “I’m Trying to Make London My Home,” which stated that “the people back in the United States/I declare they just don’t know what in the world is goin’ on.”⁴⁰⁸ For a few months from the end of 1964 to the beginning of 1965, it was believed (or at least hoped) that Williamson II was speaking literally, that he would actually resettle in England permanently, as Memphis Slim had done in Paris, and Eddie Boyd in, of all places, Helsinki. However, in April 1965, four months after his last tour of Britain, the “grand vizier of the blues” was dead, of cancer.⁴⁰⁹

Sonny Boy Williamson II began his stormy relationship with first the Animals and then the Yardbirds in 1964. Fond of Britain though he was, Williamson II was far less positive about his backing bands. Offstage, he spent a great deal of his time telling his wide-eyed young charges tall tales about the American South and the blues circles in which he moved. For his party piece, he related the story of how Robert Johnson had sold his soul to the Devil in exchange for his limitless talent, and how he had later died, “on all fours, barking like a dog.”⁴¹⁰ He came off to the Animals and Yardbirds as a condescending, mean-spirited drunk who berated them for their onstage failings (which,

⁴⁰⁷ Brunning, *The British Connection*, p. 35. Perhaps he had seen Mr. Acker Bilk onstage.

⁴⁰⁸ Sonny Boy Williamson II, “I’m Trying to Make London My Home,” *American Folk Blues Festival 1964* (Fontana, 1964).

⁴⁰⁹ Donoghue, ‘Fessor Mojo’s “Don’t Start Me To Talkin’,” p. 103.

⁴¹⁰ Simon Napier and Sonny Boy Williamson II (Aleck or Rice Miller), “I Knew Robert Johnson,” in Mike Leadbitter, ed., *Nothing But the Blues* (London: Hanover Books, 1971), p. 96.

it should be noted, were as often his fault as they were theirs) and pulled a knife on them in the dressing room.⁴¹¹ The final indignity came after Williamson II got back to Arkansas, when he confided in another band of young white admirers, the Hawks (later to become the Band), that “these British kids, they want to play the blues so bad... and they play the blues *so bad!*”⁴¹²

Still, despite the “staggering levels of mutual incomprehension” that often defined relations between the British blues network and Sonny Boy Williamson II, it was by and large quite a fruitful partnership, at least for the British. In a general cultural sense, interaction with Williamson II was a discursive site at which ideas about America, American culture and African-American life were transmitted to Britain. That many of Williamson II’s stories were either embellished or patently false is rather beside the point. No scholarly corrective existed; they were the only source the British enthusiasts had.⁴¹³ After all, it certainly would not be the first time that understandings of a culture by another culture would have rested on utter fabrications!

From a strictly musical standpoint, too, the partnership with Williamson II was beneficial to the British. Even as they shudder, decades later, at their memories of dealing with the difficult bluesman, the likes of John Mayall, Eric Burdon and Eric Clapton do

⁴¹¹ Sean Egan, *Animal Tracks: The Story of the Animals, Newcastle’s Rising Sons* (London: Helter Skelter, 2001), p. 37; Eric Clapton, *Clapton: The Autobiography* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), p. 48.

⁴¹² Robbie Robertson, quoted in Robert Palmer, *Deep Blues* (New York: Penguin, 1981), p. 263. Fellow Hawk Levon Helm remembers things a little differently, saying that Sonny Boy harbored a guarded respect for the British bands. Helm, with Davis, *This Wheel’s On Fire*, p. 63.

⁴¹³ I shall make this point in greater detail in Chapter 4, with regard to the many legends surrounding Robert Johnson.

pay tribute to the invaluable tutelage they received from him. Charles Shaar Murray has referred to the support given to visiting bluesmen by British R&B bands as “Blues University”—even if the professor was cruel, the lessons were necessary.⁴¹⁴ Clapton even allows himself the comforting thought that, by doing their best, picking up as much as they could, and letting their very heartfelt sincerity show through, the Yardbirds and the Animals did in the end manage to earn Williamson II’s grudging approval.⁴¹⁵

The relationship between the British bands and the other American bluesmen, if certainly not as volatile as the one with Williamson II, also yielded much in the way of positive results. With Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker and Howlin’ Wolf, the British enthusiasts managed to forge a much more intimate personal rapport that crossed on several occasions into the realm of the filial. On the most basic level, this came down simply to age. All the American bluesmen were in their fifties or sixties, whereas John Mayall was certainly the oldest of the Britons that played with them, and he was thirty-one in 1964. On another level, of course, it was musical, with the “fathers” teaching their “sons” the trade, to carry on in their footsteps.

But on a deeper level that is perhaps harder to explain, it also was quite personal, with the British (even the most arrogant among them) adopting an attitude of reverence and humility towards the bluesmen. Giorgio Gomelsky, onetime manager of both the Rolling Stones and the Yardbirds, related a scene that occurred in his living room in 1964, which had Howlin’ Wolf, Willie Dixon and Sonny Boy Williamson II sitting on his sofa, imparting wisdom to a small knot of young British acolytes including Jimmy Page

⁴¹⁴ Murray, *Boogie Man*, p. 269.

⁴¹⁵ Eric Clapton, interview with Peter Guralnick, in “Eric Clapton at the Passion Threshold,” *Musician*, no. 136 (February 1990), p. 48.

and Eric Clapton, seated reverently at their feet.⁴¹⁶ This tableau also played out in 1965 on the American television program *Shindig!*, in which the Rolling Stones refused to perform unless Wolf could also perform, and then sat at the gigantic bluesman's feet as he sang "How Many More Years."⁴¹⁷ Andy McKechnie, guitarist of the T-Bones, who backed Wolf, attests that "what he had to offer to a very young bunch of boys was so very touching—not just in the music field, but [also] heart-to-heart father-like instructions for a good life."⁴¹⁸

Thus, it is clear, that in terms of completing (or at least considerably improving) the blues education that the British network had started via record albums and radio broadcasts, these live concerts, and the opportunities they afforded for young British enthusiasts to meet and play with their heroes—their *father figures*—were of considerable consequence. One of the ways of looking at what I have called the "first period" of the British blues movement is as an apprenticeship, in which passionate fans were converted into eager, though inexperienced musicians, and from there into learned pseudo-scholars and seasoned musicians with what they would have considered a much deeper understanding of the music. Thus, one of the reasons I choose to date the "first period" as ending in 1965 is because I argue that, for the most part, the apprenticeship had been served. The first of the "British Invasion" bands had broken through to massive and hysterical acclaim in the United States, and the newly-seasoned British R&B bands,

⁴¹⁶ Giorgio Gomelsky, quoted in Dixon and Snowden, *I Am the Blues*, p. 135.

⁴¹⁷ The Rolling Stones with Loewenstein and Dodd, eds., *According to the Rolling Stones*, p. 16.

⁴¹⁸ Segrest and Hoffmann, *Moanin' at Midnight*, p. 218.

swept up along in the “Invasion’s” wake, were ready to make their mark in a trans-Atlantic setting as well.

It must be pointed out that, in attempting to make this mark, the British R&B bands who were forged in the “first period” were defined by their very eclectic understanding of “the blues” or “R&B.” When discussing the African-American music that they so admired, the British blues enthusiasts usually used either “the blues,” “rhythm-and-blues” or “R&B” more or less interchangeably.⁴¹⁹ This parallels the categorization used by the music industry, who, until the Second World War, lumped together all forms of recorded African-American music under the rubric of “race” or “sepia” records. In 1949, this rather indecorous designation was replaced by the less racially-charged “R&B.”⁴²⁰

By the time of the British blues boom, the American music industry had diversified, and could recognize more specialized categories for African-American music. “R&B,” which featured electrified instrumentation and (usually) a brass section, was now recognized by many in the industry as a slicker, more urbane, and more danceable style than “country (or Delta) blues,” “city blues,” “gospel,” or “soul” music.⁴²¹ Amongst the buying public, there were further delineations, based on regional, age and class differences. “Blues” and “R&B” were seen by many older African-

⁴¹⁹ And thus, so will I.

⁴²⁰ Jim Miller, *Flowers in the Dustbin: The Rise of Rock and Roll, 1947-1977* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), p. 8.

⁴²¹ This is not to suggest that these differences were not previously present; simply that the music industry was far less aware of them. See Martha Bayles, *Hole In Our Soul: The Loss of Beauty and Meaning in Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 37.

Americans, usually residents of the rural Deep South, as inherently sinful, and thus separate from the purer strains of “gospel” music; to them, “soul” music was often seen as a betrayal, since it attempted to fuse “blues” and “gospel,” and since it enabled many popular gospel artists to crossover to the pop domain.⁴²² Finally, in the 1960s, as the civil rights movement began to gain ground in the American South, “soul” music became very popular in the African-American youth community, to the detriment of “city” and especially “country” blues, which, depending on the opinion given, either held too many associations with their parents’ or grandparents’ generations, or was too popular with white people.⁴²³

By and large, however, the British audience for these types of music did not make such tidy distinctions. The tendency to conflate all or most African-American musical genres under a vastly simplified rubric began, as we have seen, with the “trad” jazz revival. These conflationary tendencies continued throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, not only through the influence of the “trad” jazz clique, but also through the methods by which African-American music continued to be transmitted to Britain. Disc jockeys on the American Forces Network rarely differentiated between musical sub-genres; they just played what was popular on the *Billboard* or *Cash Box* charts. Nor did differentiation matter much to retailers; the American mail-order catalog from which John Mayall ordered his favorites was entitled *Vintage Jazz Mart*, but sold blues, spirituals, early Motown and Atlantic soul, even children’s novelty records, in addition to

⁴²² Peter Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Dream of Southern Freedom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), p. 28. The most famous of these “crossover” artists was Sam Cooke.

⁴²³ Francis Davis, *The History of the Blues: The Roots, the Music, the People: From Charley Patton to Robert Cray* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), p. 226.

the expected jazz titles.⁴²⁴ The record collection owned by Van Morrison's father was defined mainly by its eclecticism, as was the massive library inherited by Pete Townshend.

What all of this eclecticism did was produce a generation of young British men who were allowed to become just as fanatical about not just the blues, but all kinds of African-American music. This broad inclusiveness explains how, for instance, Georgie Fame could cite Ray Charles, Fats Domino, blues pianist "Big Maceo" Merriweather and jazzman Mose Allison as formative influences.⁴²⁵ It explains how Rod Stewart could actively aspire to being the vocal heir to soul crooner Sam Cooke but tell an interviewer with a straight face, as he did in 1970, that his only career ambition was to sing "*dee blooze* (the blues)."⁴²⁶ It explains how the Rolling Stones were seemingly so quick to abandon Chicago-style blues after performing on the same bill as soul heroes James Brown and Ike Turner in 1965; it even partly explains their very poorly-understood embrace of funk and disco music in the late 1970s.⁴²⁷

Finally, the British audience's sense of catholicity can help to explain a seeming paradox at work in the young Eric Clapton. If any participant in the British blues scene

⁴²⁴ Mayall, interview with Mike Figgis, in *Red, White and Blues*.

⁴²⁵ Fame, interview with Mike Figgis, in *Red, White and Blues*.

⁴²⁶ Rod Stewart, interview with John Morthland, in *Rolling Stone* (April 1970), reprinted in Peter Herbst, ed., *The Rolling Stone Interviews: Talking With the Legends of Rock, 1967-1980* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), p. 125.

⁴²⁷ Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. 104. As Davis puts it, after the 1965 Teenage Music International (T.A.M.I.) show in Los Angeles, Mick Jagger "decided to *become* James Brown."

could be said to be a strict purist, eschewing all else for the pursuit of the Delta ideal, it would be Clapton. And yet, he himself said of his early tastes:

I got caught up with [Thelonious] Monk, and [Charlie] Mingus, and all those guys in the same period, and was listening to it all at the same time, and I would buy a John Lee Hooker album on [record label] Riverside, and someone, a [jazzman] Lee Morgan album on Riverside, and to me, it was all... the same thing.⁴²⁸

In the same interview, Clapton admitted to being, in those days, a “self-appointed ambassador of the blues” to Britain, a young man who was “very judgmental about anybody that wasn’t doing it the way I thought it should be done.”⁴²⁹ To Clapton, and many others like him on the scene at that time, this was in no way a contradiction, but a very real part of their musical expression. None of these men was lying or insincere; none of them “sold out on” their roots. It is true that young men like Clapton *were* judgmental and protective of their precious African-American R&B music, but what they included within the category of R&B was a great deal broader than most people might realize.

The British scene’s inclusiveness was to have important and lasting repercussions on the musical direction taken by its members in later years. Separated from the immediate social contexts that, in America, had shaped audience response to different African-American musical styles, the British proceeded to absorb these styles at will, piecing together repertoires based on whatever they liked (or thought audiences might like), instead of remaining within the strict constructs of genres.⁴³⁰ For example, a performance by the Spencer Davis Group at the Flamingo Club in London might include

⁴²⁸ Clapton, interview with Mike Figgis, in *Red. White and Blues*.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁰ Charles Shaar Murray, *Boogie Man: The Adventures of John Lee Hooker in the American Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), p. 271.

some Ray Charles, some jazz, some 1940s-era big band music, even some Fats Domino, a mélange designed to appeal equally to the teenage Mods, West Indians and African-American GIs in the audience.⁴³¹ This juxtaposition even occurred *within songs*, as the Who's lead singer, Roger Daltrey, attests:

Because so many of the songs sounded exactly the same, we had to use our imagination to build them up. Blues taught us to use musical freedom. Playing pop before, you just copied a record and that was it. If we got near to the record, we were happy. But blues was a completely different thing altogether. We'd play one verse for twenty minutes and make up half the lyrics.⁴³²

That freedom, the perceived ability to mix anything into a song, as long as it sounded good and conveyed the requisite feeling, became, in Charles Shaar Murray's words, a "springboard," off of which the groundbreaking British bands of the 1960s and 1970s "innovated rather than imitated" the music that had come before them.⁴³³ In time, reggae, British music-hall standards, Indian ragas, Anglican hymns, Gregorian chants, classical concertos, country-and-western, funk and—yes—even disco music all became grist to the mill for such artists as the Rolling Stones, Cream, Led Zeppelin, the Jeff Beck Group and Traffic, as well as numerous "glam," progressive and art-rock bands who followed them in the 1970s.⁴³⁴ To return to the example of the Spencer Davis Group for a moment, it was that group's teenaged lead singer/keyboardist, Steve Winwood, who later

⁴³¹ Clayson, *Beat Merchants*, p. 159.

⁴³² Roger Daltrey, interview with Dave Marsh, in Marsh, *Before I Get Old*, pp. 28.

⁴³³ Murray, *Boogie Man*, p. 271.

⁴³⁴ Thompson, *The World's First Supergroup*, pp. 2-3; Ken Emerson, "Britain: The Second Wave," in Anthony DeCurtis, James Henke and Holly George-Warren, eds., *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* (New York: Straight Arrow, 1992), pp. 419-27; Chris Welch, *Led Zeppelin: Dazed and Confused: The Stories Behind Every Song* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1998), p. 8.

starred in Traffic, and whose forays into jazz, folk and music-hall territory in the 1970s can be seen to have brought the eclecticism of those early R&B days full circle.⁴³⁵

All of this was yet to come when guitarist Alexis Korner and harmonica player Cyril Davies, as mentioned, decided to strike out on their own from within Chris Barber's renowned "trad" jazz band in 1959. They were a decidedly odd pairing—Korner (1928-1984), a dignified Austro-Greek transplant from Paris, and Davies (1932-1964), a nonsense Welsh panel-beater—but they shared an intense love of the blues.⁴³⁶ More importantly, they shared a deep conviction that the blues was a vibrant and vital musical form in and of itself, and not just the primitive forebear of jazz (which seemed to be the prevailing opinion within the "trad" camp). On the basis of this conviction, they formed the band Blues Incorporated, which is quite simply the root from which the entire British blues scene and even much of the later British rock scene stems.⁴³⁷ Blues Incorporated brought together on the one hand, older and more established "trad" types who, like Korner and Davies, wanted to stretch out from "trad" into a more exciting, amplified blues sound, and on the other hand, young untried talent looking for a place to cut their teeth in public.⁴³⁸

The band operated on the basis of an revolving-and-open-door policy. The "revolving" part of this policy meant that band members could stay as long as they liked, mastering technique or performance style, getting a feel for the nuances of the idiom, and

⁴³⁵ Emerson, "Britain: The Second Wave," pp. 424-25.

⁴³⁶ Harry Shapiro and Marc Troster, *Alexis Korner: The Biography* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p. 20; Brunning, *The British Connection*, p. 13.

⁴³⁷ Brunning, *The British Connection*, p. 13.

⁴³⁸ Godbolt, *A History of Jazz in Britain, 1950-70*, p. 261.

then go on to form their own bands, usually with Korner and Davies' blessing. Once they left, they would then be more or less easily replaced, usually from within the burgeoning and incestuous London blues scene. The "open" part meant that the time-servers would be augmented, from gig to gig, by anybody who had the courage (or had had enough to drink, in the case of Mick Jagger) to get up and sing or play with the band for a few numbers.⁴³⁹ What this meant was that there was never an actual formalized "band lineup" to which the historian of this scene can point—just Korner and Davies and a constantly changing cast of anywhere from four to seven other blues musicians.⁴⁴⁰

The first two semi-stable bands to emerge from this primordial ooze were the Rolling Stones and John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, both formed in 1962. Later that year, Blues Incorporated split down the middle. Korner and Davies parted company over a fundamental difference in musical approach—the former wanted to inject more elements of jazz into the band's repertoire (and, to this end, hired a full-fledged horn section), and the latter wanted to stick to an earthier, less compromising style that was closer to the Chicago-style blues played by Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf.⁴⁴¹ Korner kept the Blues Incorporated name, and Davies formed an outfit called the R&B All-Stars, which he led until his untimely death from leukemia in 1964. To Bob Brunning, a participant in

⁴³⁹ Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. 23-24.

⁴⁴⁰ Brunning, *The British Connection*, p. 17. Brunning asserts that these amorphous lineups were of the sort that "makes one long for the availability of a time machine," as they included so many rock stars-in-waiting.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 17.

the London scene, this was actually a positive development: “it certainly led to the existence of two fine blues bands rather than just one!”⁴⁴²

In due time, the binary of Blues Incorporated and the R&B All-Stars led to the existence of more than just two fine blues bands. It led, indirectly and over a period of roughly eight years, to virtually all of the bands and performers whom this study takes as its subjects—young men who, with a stint in Blues Incorporated or the R&B All-Stars, got to know one another and began to form their own bands. In these early days, it is important to note that the blues scene that coalesced around these bands was more a blues appreciation society than anything else. True, the underlying goal was, as Steve Winwood has said, “to bring this music to people’s attention [and] show them what an interesting, wonderful form it was,”⁴⁴³ but, beyond the confines of Britain’s nightclubs and art college common rooms, the scope for evangelism was rather limited. By 1963, “British pop” had been a going concern for more than seven years, and with the exception of a brief dalliance with the American Top 100 by Cliff Richard, there seemed to be little chance of selling one’s earnest approximations of Muddy Waters and Robert Johnson on the other side of the Atlantic.⁴⁴⁴

That was all changed, of course, by the arrival of Liverpool’s Beatles and the launching of the “British Invasion,” with which I shall deal in much greater detail in a subsequent chapter. The trans-Atlantic phenomenon called “Beatlemania,” on both sides of the Atlantic, caused an immediate and seemingly insatiable demand for more just like

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Winwood, interview with Mike Figgis, *Red, White and Blues*.

⁴⁴⁴ Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 294.

them. A cadre of A&R (artist-and-repertory) executives, representing virtually all the major British and American recording companies (especially Decca, who had famously declined to sign the Beatles in 1963), combed Great Britain for more purveyors of tuneful, well-scrubbed pop music.⁴⁴⁵ It seemed that as long as a group was young, British and capable of attracting teenage girls, they were to be signed up immediately—they could be cleaned up later.⁴⁴⁶ In this way, bands such as Freddie and the Dreamers, Gerry and the Pacemakers, the Hollies, Billy J. Kramer and the Dakotas, and Herman’s Hermits were hastily recorded and rushed into an “invasion” of America.⁴⁴⁷

In their zeal to capitalize on the successes of the Beatles (and, at least initially, of the aforementioned “beat” bands), non-discriminating record companies also began to tap the British R&B scene. By 1965, the Rolling Stones, the Animals, the Yardbirds, the Kinks, the Who, the Spencer Davis Group and Manfred Mann had all joined the ranks of the “British Invasion.”⁴⁴⁸ In many cases, the strictures of the pop process were as ill-fitting as the matching suits in which the bands were outfitted. Eric Burdon and Jeff Beck still wax bitterly about pop producer Mickie Most, whom they blame for ruining their raw R&B sound; as Ian McLagan of the Small Faces famously remarked, “[Most]

⁴⁴⁵ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 95; Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. 46. Artist-and-repertory executives were the ones responsible for finding and signing up new musical talent.

⁴⁴⁶ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 88.

⁴⁴⁷ Lester Bangs, “The British Invasion,” in Anthony DeCurtis, James Henke and Holly George-Warren, eds., *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* (New York: Straight Arrow, 1992), pp. 199-208.

⁴⁴⁸ Clayson, *Beat Merchants*, pp. 113-15.

couldn't produce a burp after a glass of beer."⁴⁴⁹ As it often does in the pop world, "invading" America often meant a compromising of one's musical philosophy—often to whispers of "selling out." Many of the more overtly R&B-influenced bands of the "British Invasion" period reckoned that this was a necessary compromise, a way to get a foot in the door in order to spread the "gospel" of the blues in America.⁴⁵⁰

Once this door was open, bands were usually able, to a limited extent, to sneak R&B material into their routines and recording sessions. Usually this was accomplished either by watering down R&B numbers and passing them off as pop or by putting R&B numbers on the B-sides of their singles. A good example of the first tactic is the Rolling Stones' maiden single, "Come On" (originally a Chuck Berry hit but sapped of all Berry's raucous energy in their version). As for the second tactic, the Yardbirds paired their pop hit "For Your Love" (which was the occasion for Eric Clapton's secession from the band) with the much bluesier "Got to Hurry."⁴⁵¹ And of course, the record companies generally did not much mind bands playing as much R&B as they liked in their live performances—in the case of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, at least, it was next to impossible to hear what they played anyway.⁴⁵² However, it must be noted that for these musicians, including the Beatles, much of their creative energy during the period from

⁴⁴⁹ Harold Bronson, "Among other things: Call Mickie Most 'the Hitmaker,'" in *Rolling Stone* (December 21, 1972), p. 12; Ian McLagan, quoted in Egan, *Animal Tracks*, p. 56.

⁴⁵⁰ Clayson, *Beat Merchants*, p. 162.

⁴⁵¹ Alan Clayson, *The Yardbirds: The Band That Launched Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002), p. 76; Phelge, *Nankering*, p. 87.

⁴⁵² Melly, *Revolt Into Style*, p. 80.

1964-1966 was spent struggling to break free of the pop straitjacket into which they had been put at the outset of their careers.

The transmission of the blues and R&B to Great Britain in the postwar period was not planned, and in many ways it happened completely against the intentions of the people responsible for its diffusion. In this way, it is highly illustrative of the haphazard and variable nature of cultural transmission—a fact that is sometimes obscured by the perhaps more visible attempts by the United States and the Soviet Union to plan the purposeful spread of both “high” and popular cultures to achieve a greater political end.⁴⁵³ But certainly no one in Washington (or in London) thought of African-American blues as a Cold War weapon, and yet it found its way to the turntables and transistor radios of a large proportion of young male Britons. However, transmission is certainly not the same as reception or consumption. Explaining how the blues made it to Britain is only the first step in the story. Why a cohort of young, mostly middle-class British men chose to consume the blues, and in vast preference to the other forms of popular music that were *also* transmitted to Britain at the same time, is the next step. The next chapter will examine the attractions offered by the blues, as a musical and literary form, to its young British listeners, and attempt an explanation of why those listeners found it so seductive, so magnetic that they anointed themselves its prophets.

⁴⁵³ See David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy in the Cold War* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003).

CHAPTER THREE
But My Dad Was Black:
Masculinity, Modernity and Blues Culture in Britain

In the days of my youth, I was told what it means to be a man/
Now I've reached that age, I've tried to do all those things the best I can
—Led Zeppelin, “Good Times, Bad Times” (1969)⁴⁵⁴

In his 1983 work, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, theorist Edward Said drew a distinction between “filiation” and “affiliation” as sociocultural influences on the thought and work of intellectuals and cultural commentators.⁴⁵⁵ “Filiations” are circumstances, loyalties and identifications that we inherit from our parents’ generation, whereas “affiliations” are those which we actively choose for ourselves as maturing individuals forming our own identities—usually in contradiction to our “filiations.”⁴⁵⁶ In the opening chapter’s discussion of the socio-cultural context of post-Second World War Britain, I have already devoted some critical attention to the “filiations” of the British blues network. However, beginning in the early 1960s, these young men, dissatisfied with their cultural inheritance, chose to embrace, and appropriate for themselves, aspects of a culture than—on the surface, at least—seemed diametrically opposed to their own. Their self-selected “affiliation” was with African-American male blues culture.⁴⁵⁷ In enjoying

⁴⁵⁴ Chapter title: The Who, “Substitute” (single – Reaction Records, 1966); epigram: *Led Zeppelin I* (Atlantic, 1969).

⁴⁵⁵ Edward Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983). I am grateful to Professor Adam Gussow of the University of Mississippi at Oxford for pointing out this theory to me.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴⁵⁷ My naming of this culture as “male” is not intended to obscure or deny the vital role played in it by women, whether as blues singers, “jook joint” patrons, or bluesmen’s paramours. However, this “female blues culture” was not widely partaken of by white British men in this period, and thus is outside the scope of this particular study. For two

blues music, seeking to learn all they could about the music and the culture that produced it, and then taking the step of forming bands to emulate it, the members of the British blues network were self-identifying as the white “sons” of faraway, often middle-aged (or older) African-American “fathers.” Moreover, on those occasions when the two sides met in the early-to-mid 1960s, the “fathers” often looked indulgently on the prospect of being “adopted” by their “sons,” sometimes even actively encouraging it. In this context, Said’s distinction is only too appropriate, seeing as how the root word of both “filiation” and “affiliation,” *filius*, means “son” in Latin.

Taking this “affiliation” as a given, this chapter will analyze the blues, both as a text and as a cultural practice, in order to offer some explanations as to why it proved so popular and attractive to the British blues network that they would choose to “affiliate” themselves with that culture, in the process adding important layers to their existing identity as young white Britishers in the 1960s. As consumed and interpreted by British enthusiasts, the blues seemed to provide an “authentic” alternative to the banal sentiments that were currently being offered up by the pop music establishment in the late 1950s and early 1960s.⁴⁵⁸ The blues seemed to speak directly and honestly, and with a *soupeçon* of menace and danger, about classic tropes like sexuality, freedom, violence and power. Finally, since the blues was a part of the larger American culture (however oppressed and

examples of the fine scholarship on the subject of “female blues culture,” see Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holliday* (New York: Pantheon, 1998); and Adam Gussow, *Seems Like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), ch. 4-5.

⁴⁵⁸ John W. Hellmann, Jr., “‘I’m a Monkey’: The Influence of the Black American Blues Argot on the Rolling Stones,” in *The Journal of American Folklore*, v. 86, no. 342 (Oct.-Dec. 1973), p. 370.

marginalized the form and its practitioners may have been), it provided a sort of “back way in” to America and its culture, vividly depicting American landscapes, structures, ways of life, and consumer goods. In this way, like *films noir* and Western movies before it, the blues was seen as yet another point of entry for young Europeans yearning for some kind of interaction with the trans-Atlantic superpower.

African-American blues musicians accomplished all of these things through the use of a constructed persona, the “bluesman.” It is crucial to remember—as many of the British blues enthusiasts did not—that through his music, the African-American blues musician was not necessarily relating his autobiography. Rather, he was negotiating an identity, and a relationship to and understanding of the world, just as those who later heard and appropriated that music would also do.⁴⁵⁹ As the agent through which these negotiations occurred, the “bluesman” was a powerful, skilled and sexually dynamic man who, though he was politically and economically oppressed and often frustrated by the woman (or women) in his life, enjoyed a spiritual and creative freedom that young British listeners felt had been denied them. Furthermore, the bluesman articulated himself through an inherently modern musical form, forged out of the experiences of African-Americans in the industrial urban landscape and expressing itself through the idioms of the factory, the electrified city, the railway station and the open road. Thus, the blues used the forms of modernity to present a contemporary masculine ideal to a group of young white men who felt that either their masculinity, or their ability to express that masculinity, was in crisis.

⁴⁵⁹ Dennis Jarrett, “The Singer and the Bluesman: Formulations of Personality in the Lyrics of the Blues,” *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, v. 42, no. 1 (1978), p. 31.

It must be noted, of course, that much of this was and remains open to interpretation. For the past four decades, a lively debate has raged, both in and out of academe, regarding the “true meaning” of the blues—that is, whether or not blues lyrics should be understood literally and, if so, what they mean. Some commentators have claimed that the blues is a literature of encoded resistance to white racism; others, that the blues is actually a cultural mythology, designed to help pass on values and explain the nature of society.⁴⁶⁰ As a result, the adherents of both these approaches savage the simple-minded British musicians who perverted the blues and made them sound like a bunch of songs that glorify sex, violence and devil-worship.⁴⁶¹ I recognize the attempt to derive solid, definitive meaning from cultural forms for the intellectual minefield that it is. It is not my purpose or my place to say what the blues are or are not “about.” In fact, for the immediate purposes of this study, this would be somewhat beside the point. Whether or not the blues are actually full of promiscuous sex, wanton violence and diabolical transactions, the British blues enthusiasts *perceived* that they were—owing to an accumulation of cultural beliefs and prejudices that they brought to the music as Britons, as Europeans, as white men, as members of the middle-class, and so on.

⁴⁶⁰ For “encoded resistance,” see Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), *Blues People: The Negro Experience in America and the Music That Developed From It* (New York: W.W. Morrow, 1963); Julio Finn, *The Bluesman* (London: Quartet Books, 1986); and Charles Keil, *Urban Blues*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). For “cultural mythology,” see Rod Gruver’s four-part series on “The Blues as Religion” in *Blues World* from April-July 1970 (no. 29-32); James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972); and Jon Michael Spencer, *Blues and Evil* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993).

⁴⁶¹ Spencer, *Blues and Evil*; Charles Shaar Murray, *Crosstown Traffic: Jimi Hendrix and the Post-War Rock ‘n’ Roll Revolution* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989).

Everything that they did musically after engaging with the blues was done with these perceptions fully (if subconsciously) in mind.

I'm a Man: Masculinity and Male Selfhood in the Blues

Before discussing how the masculine ideal that was supposedly articulated in the blues was used to fill a cultural need, we must first examine that need in some detail. Numerous socio-cultural factors—the windup of the Empire, moral and physical exhaustion as the result of the war, economic weakness and resultant cultural malaise, especially *vis-à-vis* the Americans—can be said to have contributed to a general feeling of emasculation among young middle-class British men, or at least of such powerful alienation as to render them unable to properly articulate their own masculine identities.⁴⁶² Furthermore, the bourgeois culture with which they were “filiated” seemed to be incapable of providing satisfactory male role models, to the point where young men felt compelled to look outside it, to another race in another country, for alternatives.

And yet it is probably too simplistic to say merely that British masculinity was in crisis. As George Mosse has pointed out, there have been several occasions since the dawn of the “modern” age (which Mosse dates to the Enlightenment) during which British (and European) middle-class masculinity has supposedly been “in crisis.”⁴⁶³ During these troubling times, the normative standards of masculinity have been perceived as being under attack by various sociocultural factors resulting from the onrush of

⁴⁶² Robert Hewison, *In Anger: British Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 7; Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 58-62; Michael Roper, *Masculinity and the British Organization Man Since 1945* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁴⁶³ George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 77-81.

modernity. As a result, so, too, is the stability of the society of which normative masculinity is a barometer.⁴⁶⁴ Two examples of this phenomenon are the weakness felt by British masculinity in the wake of the Boer War at the turn of the twentieth century, and the anxieties occasioned by the emergence the so-called “new Woman” in the German Weimar Republic immediately following the First World War.⁴⁶⁵

After the Second World War ended, there was an understandable desire to return society to some sort of normality as soon as was feasible. This desire took different forms throughout Europe. Generally speaking, in West Germany, France and Great Britain, it resulted in an uncomfortable silence on the part both of politicians and populace—a refusal to critically engage with the events of the past six years, choosing instead to just move forward.⁴⁶⁶ This “unique post-war mood of denial” (as Pete Townshend describes it) was one of the defining aspects of the wartime generation, and it would become a key causal factor behind the student unrest in the late 1960s.⁴⁶⁷ Along with this denial came, according to Mosse, a swift re-inscription of the normative masculine ideal. The virtues which went to make up this ideal—most notably sobriety, self-restraint, decency and

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 6.

⁴⁶⁵ Mosse, *The Image of Man*, p. 10.

⁴⁶⁶ The literature on this subject is especially rich (perhaps understandably) for West Germany. See, e.g., Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (2002); and Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (2004). For France, which had defeat, collaboration and complicity in the Holocaust to “remember,” see Henri Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France Since 1944* (1991).

⁴⁶⁷ Pete Townshend, open letter to David Lister, *The Independent* (January 6, 2007), p. 11; Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year That Rocked the World* (New York: Ballantine, 2004), p. 100.

courage—were seen as being more necessary at this time than ever before.⁴⁶⁸ Proof of this reinstatement, after years of Nietzschean supermen rampaging throughout Europe, can be seen in both the politics of the age—where morally upright grandfather figures (Adenauer, de Gaulle, Churchill, Macmillan, Truman and Eisenhower) were elected to power in West Germany, France, Britain and the United States—and the mainstream culture.⁴⁶⁹

Thus, it stands to reason that, for young British middle-class men, concern over the unstable nature of normative masculinity was not the problem. The concern that normative masculinity was *boring*, however, was. For more than three centuries, alongside the stereotype of the masculine ideal, there had grown up a “countertype,” which for the sake of convenience I shall call the “man of adventure.” Strictly speaking, the “man of adventure” was not the antithesis of the middle-class “ideal man;” in fact, the two shared many of the same aspirational characteristics—with courage and restraint being foremost among them—and many “men of adventure” were of middle-class origins.⁴⁷⁰ However, there were important differences—whereas the middle-class “ideal man” drew strength from his settled lifestyle, the “man of adventure” relished his freedom to wander as he chose. On the fringes of middle-class modernity, he escaped the

⁴⁶⁸ Mosse, *The Image of Man*, p. 181.

⁴⁶⁹ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), pp. 253-268. Judt calls this “the politics of stability.”

⁴⁷⁰ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 32; Mosse, *The Image of Man*, p. 15.

unrest and anomie that beset those at the center of that modernity.⁴⁷¹ Of necessity, the “man of adventure” was principally an imperial archetype, as only the safety valve of the empire could afford that kind of escape.⁴⁷² In his way, the imperial “man of adventure” shared much with his closest American counterpart, the Wild West “cowboy” archetype; the similarities go a long way toward explaining Britons’ fascination with the Western movie.⁴⁷³

With the windup of the Empire, the sudden relegation of Britain to a second-rate power, and the settling-down of the world to a long and drawn-out Cold War, the opportunities for a “man of adventure” seemed to be closing down. In their place beckoned the lifestyle “organization man,” one of grey flannel suits and an unending nine-to-five workweek in middle management somewhere.⁴⁷⁴ Rage at this imposed combination of impotence and futility fueled the work of the “Angry Young Men,” the misleadingly labelled assemblage of young male writers who emerged (largely as a creation of the media) in the 1950s.⁴⁷⁵ In what is perhaps its most exemplary work, John Osborne’s play, *Look Back In Anger* (1957), the main character, Jimmy Porter, rails against the *ennui* that he feels is the hallmark of postwar Britain:

⁴⁷¹ Martin Green, *The Adventurous Male: Chapters in the History of the White Male Mind* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), p. 181.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁴⁷³ Daniel Snowman, *Britain and America: An Interpretation of Their Culture, 1945-1975* (New York: New York University Press, 1977), pp. 56-57.

⁴⁷⁴ Roper, *Masculinity and the British Organization Man*, p. 51.

⁴⁷⁵ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain From Suez to the Beatles* (London: Abacus, 2006), p. 177.

I suppose people of our generation aren't able to die for good causes any longer. We've had all that done for us, in the Thirties and the Forties, when we were still kids. There aren't any good, brave causes left. If the big bang does come, and we all get killed off, it won't be in aid of the old-fashioned grand design. It'll just be for the Brave New-nothing-very-much-thank-you. About as pointless and meaningless as stepping in front of a bus. No, there's nothing for it, me boy, but to let yourself be butchered by the women.⁴⁷⁶

In their impatience with the meaninglessness of postwar middle-class culture, as well as in their fear of the allegedly baleful influence of "the women," there are striking parallels to be drawn between the articulations of the "Angry Young Men" and those of African-American blues culture as expressed and interpreted by the British blues musicians (on which more later). The two "movements" (and I use this term very lightly) diverged, however, in their attitude toward America and American culture. The "Angries" were heavily suspicious of both, and also of those of their countrymen who went along with what was perceived as a "creeping Americanisation."⁴⁷⁷ The cantankerous Porter muses that "it's pretty dreary living in the American Age—unless you're an American, of course. Perhaps all our children will be Americans."⁴⁷⁸

On the other hand, the young men who made up the British blues boom, however, were unqualified devotees of anything American. Eric Clapton recalls that, growing up, "America was the land of promise:"

When I was eight or nine years old, I had been given a prize at school for neatness and tidiness. It was a book on America, filled with pictures of skyscrapers, cowboys and Indians, cars, and all sorts of other stuff, and what I did first when I knew we [Cream] were going [to America in 1966] was to make a short list of all the things I had fantasized about doing if I ever went there. I was going to buy a fringed cowboy

⁴⁷⁶ John Osborne, *Look Back In Anger* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 89.

⁴⁷⁷ Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 212.

⁴⁷⁸ Osborne, *Look Back In Anger*, p. 11.

jacket, for example, and some cowboy boots. I was going to have a milk shake and a hamburger.⁴⁷⁹

As discussed in a previous chapter, America seemed like it was still full of wide-open spaces and larger-than-life characters. Clapton's anecdote is telling because, in addition to indulging in quintessentially American sensory experiences like eating American "diner food," he fervently wanted to assume the wardrobe, and with it (he hoped) the identity, of the American "man of adventure," the cowboy. Through their growing acquaintance with African-American music, young British men soon discovered another "man of adventure" that they could also emulate: the African-American bluesman.

As an articulated persona pressed onto vinyl, the bluesman was knowledgeable, accomplished, virile and seemingly unfettered by the demands of society. In the words of author William Barlow, "[b]lues personas... constitut[ed] a black pantheon separate from—and in many ways antithetical to—the white heroes and heroines of middle-class America"—and, one might add, middle-class Britain.⁴⁸⁰ He had had little if any formal education; this fact was communicated to the British via the blues histories they had read, all of whom spent a good deal of time elaborating on the social conditions that spawned the music.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁹ Eric Clapton, *Clapton: The Autobiography* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), p. 81.

⁴⁸⁰ William Barlow, *"Looking Up at Down": The Emergence of Blues Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), p. 327.

⁴⁸¹ The two main sources available to British readers at the time were Samuel Charters' *The Country Blues* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1960), and Paul Oliver's *Blues Fell This Morning: Meaning in the Blues* (New York: Collier Books, 1963). Roberta Freund Schwarz, "Preaching the Gospel of the Blues: Blues Evangelists in Britain," in Neil A.

In spite of this lack, the bluesman boasted of having earned a great deal of knowledge from experience. These boasts were supported by the fact that many of them were middle-aged or older—a function of the “blues revival’s” having rediscovered them after decades out of the limelight.⁴⁸² Thus, at the time of the initial encounter, most of the re-discovered bluesmen were old enough to be their British acolytes’ fathers—or even, as in the case of Sonny Boy Williamson II or “Son” House, their grandfathers.⁴⁸³ Andy McKechnie of the London blues group, the T-Bones, even reminisced about how Howlin’ Wolf offered him and his bandmates “heart-to-heart father-like instructions for a good life.”⁴⁸⁴ The bluesman’s relatively advanced age spoke for his greater experience; if his career traveling and performing in the Deep South or Chicago had begun before the average British blues enthusiast was even born, surely he had learned a few valuable lessons about life and love along the way. This knowledge, in a Foucauldian sense, gave him power; in fact it was the main circumstance that served to mitigate his old age in a developing popular culture that would come to fetishize young manhood.

Wynn, ed., *Cross the Water Blues: African-American Music in Europe* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2007), p. 159.

⁴⁸² Bob Groom, *The Blues Revival* (London: Studio Vista, 1972), pp. 29-30.

⁴⁸³ Keil, *Urban Blues*, pp. 34-35. That these grandfatherly men were still called “Sonny Boy” and “Son,” respectively, was due to the fact that in the Jim Crow South, black men, no matter their age, were invariably called “boy” or “son” by whites to emphasize their social inferiority.

⁴⁸⁴ James Segrest and Mark Hoffmann, *Moanin’ at Midnight: The Life of Howlin’ Wolf* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), p. 218.

Blues culture actively celebrated the bluesman's attainment of knowledge—and thus skill—through experience. In “Young-Fashioned Ways,” Muddy Waters boasts that

I may be gettin' old, but I got young-fashioned ways (twice) /
I'm gonna love a good woman for the rest of my nat'ral days...

A young hawk is fast, but a old hawk know what's goin' on (twice) /
You know, young hawks wanna race, but an old hawk stay up so long.⁴⁸⁵

Perhaps appropriately, the fifty-six-year-old Waters included this song on his 1971 *London Sessions*, on which his record company, Chess, backed him with an all-star band of those “young hawks,” including Georgie Fame, Rory Gallagher and Mitch Mitchell.⁴⁸⁶ Actually, as will be discussed in the following chapter, one reason why bluesman Robert Johnson's legend might have been so attractive to British enthusiasts was because he had not *needed to* grow old; he had attained his astonishing level of mastery—musical as well as sexual—by the age of twenty-five. As a result of the dual influences of Waters and Johnson, the goal for British blues and rock musicians was to do as much living, and thus gain as much knowledge and experience, as possible while they were still young.

However, the knowledge the bluesman gained from his ordinary, everyday life experiences was augmented by a more supernatural brand of knowledge. In the blues idiom, the bluesman has recourse to all manner of magical and voodoo talismans, the mere names of which—black cat bones, mojo hands and teeth, the “High John the Conqueror” root—must have sounded like holy writ from some alien cult to young,

⁴⁸⁵ Muddy Waters, “Young-Fashioned Ways,” *London Sessions* (MCA/Chess, 1972).

⁴⁸⁶ Robert Gordon, *Can't Be Satisfied: The Life and Times of Muddy Waters* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2002), p. 230.

Anglican or Nonconformist British youth seated around their turntables.⁴⁸⁷ These fetishes were meant to supposedly give the bluesman control over the weather and the ability to read minds, to discern if people are lying or telling the truth, and to predict the future. They could also—and here, one imagines, was the real attraction for those teenaged boys—make him irresistible to women.⁴⁸⁸ These powers were also bestowed, according to blues legend, on the incredibly fortunate individual known as the Seventh Son—quite literally, the seventh of his mother’s sons—who, as a result of these faculties, was a man to be respected and feared in the African-American community.⁴⁸⁹

Another option to obtain supernatural knowledge and skill was to sell one’s soul to the Devil in exchange for it. Whereas the voodoo route was material—the acquisition of certain items through certain means, and then the maintenance of these items on your person—the diabolical transaction was practical. According to bluesman Tommy (no relation to Robert) Johnson, an interested party could call forth the Devil—who was actually more of an analogue to the African trickster god Legba than the Christian adversary Satan—simply by going to an abandoned rural crossroads at midnight.⁴⁹⁰ The Devil, described as a “big black man,” would then come and tune his guitar, and when the bluesman retook possession of the instrument, the deal was sealed and he could play

⁴⁸⁷ Harry’s Blues Lyrics Online, “Blues Language” (<http://blueslyrics.tripod.com/blueslanguage.htm#top>) (accessed November 13, 2007).

⁴⁸⁸ Debra DeSalvo, *The Language of the Blues: From Alcorub to Zuzu* (New York: Billboard Books, 2006), p. 13.

⁴⁸⁹ Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning*, p. 36.

⁴⁹⁰ Tommy Johnson, quoted in Robert Palmer, *Deep Blues* (New York: Viking Press, 1981), pp. 59-60.

anything he liked.⁴⁹¹ This “devil’s bargain” trope is vastly more famous than the bluesman’s use of voodoo charms to enhance his knowledge. This is partly because of the increased visibility brought to the supposed practice by British rock and heavy metal musicians, and partly because it was infinitely more fascinating to a culture that had brought forth numerous variations on the Faust myth, as well as, in Britain, the works of Christopher Marlowe, John Milton, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and C.S. Lewis, all of which deal with the interactions between man and Satan or his minions.⁴⁹²

Being a bluesman also seemed to confer extra-sensory cognition as well as supernaturally-obtained knowledge. This can be demonstrated by pointing out the prevalence of blindness as a trope in the blues idiom. As blues historian Christopher John Farley has pointed out, many of the most influential early bluesmen were blind (or at least claimed to be in their stage names): Blind Boy Fuller, Blind Willie McTell, Blind Joe Reynolds, Blind Blake, Sonny Terry and Blind Lemon Jefferson; Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder provide examples of a more recent vintage.⁴⁹³ The appeal of these bluesmen to young British audiences (as well, most likely, as the domestic black audiences amongst whom they got their start) was grounded in the deep-seated notion in

⁴⁹¹ Of course, this deal would not directly give a man power over the opposite sex, as a mojo hand would, but as subsequent generations of “guitar gods” (and groupies, for that matter) would attest, musical skill was certainly a step in the right direction.

⁴⁹² Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 100.

⁴⁹³ Christopher John Farley, “Visionary Blindness: Blind Lemon Jefferson and Other Vision-Impaired Bluesmen,” in Peter Guralnick, et. al., eds., *Martin Scorsese Presents the Blues: A Musical Journey* (hereafter referred to as *The Blues*) (New York: Amistad Books, 2003), p. 165.

Western culture that blindness, in addition to representing “chaos and impotence,” also symbolizes greater and more profound insight than ordinary visual perception.⁴⁹⁴

This idea has a scientific as well as a cultural basis. Science has long believed that deprivation of one sense often leads to compensatory heightening of the others. Farley suggests that blindness might make the bluesman better-suited to the essentially oral and aural realm of music-making.⁴⁹⁵ Meanwhile, this belief has enjoyed an even longer life in Western culture, dating back to antiquity. In Greek mythology, the poet Tiresias had his eyesight taken away from him by the goddess Hera for taking her husband Zeus’ side in an argument; Zeus in turn gave him an “inner eye” that allowed him to express great truths through his poetry.⁴⁹⁶ Likewise, the Norse god Odin sacrificed one of his eyes in return for a drink from the Well of Wisdom. The poet Homer was alleged to have been blind, and although John Milton was born able to see, the entirety of his two most-acclaimed works, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, was written after he had become totally blind from glaucoma.⁴⁹⁷

With all the weight of this centuries-long cultural heritage behind it, the idea that the bluesman was the beneficiary of a kind of “second sight” that transcended and, in many cases, compensated for the lack of eyesight, was a powerful inspiration to a youth

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 166.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid. In the last twenty years, this tradition has been carried on by white Canadian guitarist/vocalist Jeff Healey, as well as by the black group The Blind Boys of Alabama.

⁴⁹⁶ In another story, Tiresias was blinded by the goddess Athena, after he accidentally came upon her bathing in the nude. Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (London: Penguin, 1955), p. 71.

⁴⁹⁷ John Leonard, “Language and Knowledge in *Paradise Lost*,” in Dennis Danielson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Milton* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 118.

culture that was becoming more and more interested in alternate means of perception. For example, in 1954, Aldous Huxley (who was himself nearly blind) published a treatise, *The Doors of Perception*, on the extra-sensory benefits of the drug LSD; it was adopted as one of the key texts of the hippie drug culture and inspired the name of the psychedelic rock band, the Doors.⁴⁹⁸ The psychedelic rock music that grew out of the blues tradition is full of references to searching for ways to better see, hear and sense the world. The protagonist in the Who's "I Can See For Miles," for instance, boasts that the "magic in my eyes" allows him to see as far away as "the Eiffel Tower and the Taj Mahal;" he uses this newfound talent to catch his woman in the act of cheating on him.⁴⁹⁹ Listeners understood this to be a reference to the enhanced perception bestowed by psychotropic drugs, but "See's" protagonist is nothing so much as an updated, white version of the Seventh Son.⁵⁰⁰ Bluesmen had been dealing in such braggadocio for decades, and without having to resort to laboratory-invented chemicals.

The knowledge that is boasted of in the blues idiom is, not surprisingly, sexual knowledge. Sex is the most pervasive trope at play in the blues lyrical idiom. Every bluesman worthy of the name sang at one time or another about it. Even "tortured soul Robert Johnson took time out from playing hide-and-seek with Satan" to make bawdy overtures to his "sweet rider" in such songs as "Traveling Riverside Blues" and "Come

⁴⁹⁸ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1954); James Miller, *Flowers in the Dustbin: The Rise of Rock and Roll, 1947-1977* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), p. 287.

⁴⁹⁹ The Who, "I Can See For Miles," *The Who Sell Out* (Track Records, 1968).

⁵⁰⁰ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 481.

on in My Kitchen.”⁵⁰¹ As presented in his songs, the bluesman is a seducer *par excellence*. For every song whose protagonist rhapsodizes about true love (or bemoans the lack thereof), there are undoubtedly five or six wherein he brags about his previous sexual exploits, or attempts to seduce a new woman with promises of more to come. The most obvious example of the bluesman-as-sexual paragon is the eponymous hero of Waters’ “Hoochie-Coochie Man” (1954) and its sequel, “Mannish Boy” (1955). Waters claims that his sexual prowess began even “before [he] was born,” when a “gypsy woman told [his] mother” that he was “gonna make pretty womens jump and shout.”⁵⁰² On one night in particular, the Hoochie-Coochie Man and his woman went at it so hot and heavy that they “made the moon...come up two hours late.”⁵⁰³ The bluesman’s capacities as a lover are so prodigious that, to hear him tell it, they alter the very motion of the cosmos.

In order to pull off these spectacular amorous feats, the Hoochie-Coochie Man is armed with the voodoo charms mentioned above (all of which can be viewed as phallic symbols) as well as his own “line,” which “will never miss.”⁵⁰⁴ In the blues idiom, it is difficult to tell where the voodoo ends and the actual seductive technique (the “line”) begins. Bo Diddley’s “I’m a Man,” a slight retooling of “Mannish Boy,” the protagonist

⁵⁰¹ James Marshall, “Let’s Get Drunk and Truck: A Guide to the Party Blues,” in Guralnick, et. al., eds., *The Blues*, p. 119; Robert Johnson, “Traveling Riverside Blues” and “Come On In My Kitchen,” *The King of the Delta Blues Singers, Vol. 1* (Columbia, 1961).

⁵⁰² Muddy Waters, “Hoochie-Coochie Man,” *Muddy Waters Live at Newport* (MCA/Chess, 1960).

⁵⁰³ Waters, “Mannish Boy,” *The Real Folk Blues* (MCA/Chess, 1965).

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

declares that he “got somethin’ in my pocket/keep a lotta folks alive.”⁵⁰⁵ Is this Diddley’s mojo hand, his penis or his gun (which, as I will discuss below, was also used, if obliquely, to coerce women into sex)? This reduction also occurs in one of Waters’ best-known songs, “Got My Mojo Working,” in which the word “mojo” is expanded from its literal meaning as a voodoo fetish to serve as shorthand for the entirety of the protagonist’s sexual animus—which, it is interesting to note, is for once being frustrated (“it just don’t work on you”).⁵⁰⁶ The British zeroed in on the loaded image of the “mojo,” a fixation that is reflected by the fact that “Mojo” was without a doubt *the* most-covered song of the British blues boom, and that “mojo” with a small *m* became an important part of the vocabulary of 1960s youth culture.⁵⁰⁷

Being in possession of so much knowledge and skill with regard to lovemaking often lent the bluesman a paternal or professorial air, which added to the overall impression of the bluesman being older and wiser than most men. A good example is the narrator of Waters’ 1962 hit “You Need Love.” Waters cuts right to the chase, flatly informing his quarry, “You got yearnin’, and I got burnin’...Baby way down inside, woman you need love.” No one else has been able to give her what she yearns for, the “good things you ain’t gettin’.” But here, finally, is a man who can give her the proper

⁵⁰⁵ Bo Diddley, “I’m a Man,” *Bo Diddley* (Chess, 1957).

⁵⁰⁶ Waters, “Got My Mojo Working” (single – Chess, 1957).

⁵⁰⁷ Versions of “Got My Mojo Working” were recorded or performed by, among many others, the Rolling Stones, Manfred Mann, the Yardbirds, the Kinks, Them and the Zombies. Alan Clayson, *Beat Merchants: The Origins, History, Impact and Rock Legacy of the 1960s British Pop Groups*, p. 78. The centrality of “mojo” to 1960s youth culture can perhaps be gauged by its importance in the second installment of the Austin Powers “Swinging London” spoof film series (*Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me*, dir. Jay Roach [1999]).

“schoolin’” in the ways of lovemaking.⁵⁰⁸ This is arguably Waters’ most explicit expression of the bluesman as “sexual educator” and of his woman as “jailbait,” but its essence pervades many other of his blues as well, including “Good Morning Little Schoolgirl,” and “She’s Nineteen Years Old.”⁵⁰⁹ There is admittedly a vague touch of the sinister to these kinds of blues. After all, Waters is informing the woman of what she *needs*, not what she wants, and of what he *will do*, not what he would like to do if given permission. For the most part, however, this father figure had much in common with Waters’ real-life persona—that of “a benign patriarch, an easily graceful monarch.”⁵¹⁰ This understated grace would come to have little in common with the rough machismo articulated in a great deal of British blues-rock, and certainly not with the “thermonuclear gang rape” conveyed by Led Zeppelin in “Whole Lotta Love,” their cover version of “You Need Love.”⁵¹¹

For a company of men who presented themselves as experienced and knowledgeable adults when it came to sex, the language they used to talk about it—all adolescent euphemism and double entendre—certainly was less than wholly adult. The most obvious reference to the sexual act was “rock and roll,” proving that rock music owes a debt to the blues even for its name, and securing the centrality of sex as a motif in

⁵⁰⁸ Waters, “You Need Love” (single – Chess, 1963).

⁵⁰⁹ Waters, “Good Morning Little Schoolgirl” and “She’s Nineteen Years Old,” *Muddy “Mississippi” Waters Live* (Sony, 1979).

⁵¹⁰ Peter Wolf, “Muddy, Wolf and Me: Adventures in the Blues Trade,” in Guralnick, et. al., eds., *The Blues*, p. 190.

⁵¹¹ Murray, *Crosstown Traffic*, p. 61.

both musical genres.⁵¹² Other euphemisms for intercourse included “trucking,” “riding,” “coffee-grinding,” “sporting,” and “balling the jack.”⁵¹³ A bluesman’s penis was variously his “black snake,” his “lemon,” his “ramrod,” his “pencil,” or his “little red rooster”—in addition to various types of firearms, which will be discussed at greater length below.⁵¹⁴

However, bluesmen were generally at their most creative and imaginative when waxing lyrical about their womenfolk. Blind Boy Fuller declared that his woman’s “custard pie [was] sweet and nice,” and implored her to “save [him] a slice...before [she] gave it all away.”⁵¹⁵ Fuller also sang the praises of his woman’s “jelly roll,” as did Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee.⁵¹⁶ Waters’ “King Bee” buzzed around in search of his woman’s “pot of honey,” and Jelly Roll Morton spoke of his woman putting her

⁵¹² Miller, *Flowers in the Dustbin*, p. 84.

⁵¹³ Marshall, “Let’s Get Drunk and Truck,” in Guralnick, et. al., eds., *The Blues*, p. 121; Waters, “I Feel So Good,” *Muddy Waters Sings Big Bill Broonzy* (Chess, 1960).

⁵¹⁴ Blind Lemon Jefferson, “That Black Snake Moan” (single – Okeh, 1927; re-released on *Blind Lemon Jefferson* [Riverside, 1961]); The Mississippi Sheiks, “Ramrod Blues” (1930) and “My Pencil Won’t Write No More” (1935), quoted in Marshall, “Let’s Get Drunk and Truck,” p. 119; Howlin’ Wolf, “Little Red Rooster,” *Howlin’ Wolf (The Rocking Chair Album)* (Chess, 1962).

⁵¹⁵ Blind Boy Fuller, “I Want Some Of Your Pie,” *The Early Blues Roots of Led Zeppelin* (Catfish Records, 2000).

⁵¹⁶ It should be noted that blueswomen were not to be outdone by their male counterparts in rhapsodizing about their own “jelly rolls.” Perhaps the most prominent was Bessie Smith, “the Queen of the Blues,” who bragged, “Nobody in town can bake a sweet jelly roll like mine.” Smith, “Nobody in Town Can Bake a Sweet Jelly Roll Like Mine” (single – Columbia, 1923).

“cabbage” up for sale.⁵¹⁷ The sheer number of food metaphors used as vaginal euphemisms served to underscore the exoticism of sexual practice in blues culture, as the dominant culture still held cunnilingus to be a debauched sideshow to proper vaginal intercourse. In the words of music author Charles Shaar Murray, it was an activity “that only wicked, depraved men would perform and even wickeder and more depraved women would want.”⁵¹⁸ To young Britons eager to set themselves apart from the dominant culture (and who were horny adolescent men into the bargain) this sort of vocabulary sounded perfect.

Such was the somewhat contradictory image of the bluesman as paramour—horny yet fond, cocksure yet gentlemanly, vulgar yet good-natured, highly knowledgeable yet not above crude euphemism. Momentary lapses like the failed seduction in “Got My Mojo Working” aside, he was self-assured to the point of swaggering. He often suggested—and sometimes baldly stated—that he could have any woman he wanted, whether or not she was already spoken for. In fact, the bluesman often seemed to pursue adulterous conquests with even greater relish. In “I’m a King Bee,” Waters claimed that “stinging” and “honeymaking” were best when “your man is not at home.”⁵¹⁹ “Mississippi Fred” McDowell commanded his woman to send her man packing when she

⁵¹⁷ Muddy Waters, “I’m a King Bee,” *King Bee* (Blue Sky, 1981); Jelly Roll Morton (Ferdinand Lamothe), “New Orleans Blues,” *Library of Congress Recordings* (recorded 1923; re-released on *Jelly Roll Morton, Vol. 1* [Smithsonian, 1991]).

⁵¹⁸ Murray, *Crosstown Traffic*, p. 69.

⁵¹⁹ Waters, “I’m a King Bee,” *King Bee*.

saw him coming toward her house.⁵²⁰ John Lee Hooker’s “Crawlin’ King Snake” imagined the protagonist as a serpent who, ignoring such trivialities as lock and key, would “crawl in through your window...[and] across your floor” to get to his prospective lover’s bedside.⁵²¹ But if there was no open window, the bluesman might just break in. An especially vivid metaphor for adultery in the blues—“another mule kicking in your stall”—attests to this sort of violent entrance.⁵²²

The bluesman, perhaps naturally enough, knew how to get out of the room as well as into it. Willie Dixon boasted that he knew “29 ways” to enter and escape from his lover’s bedroom unseen, and while Sonny Boy Williamson II might not have had nearly as many options as Dixon (in “One Way Out”), he used it—the window—quickly enough to get out before the “man downstairs” caught him.⁵²³ From the example of adventurous lyrical escapes such as these, the exploits of Mick Jagger’s “Midnight Rambler”—though partly based on Albert de Salvo, the so-called “Boston Strangler”—began to take shape a generation later.⁵²⁴

⁵²⁰ “Mississippi Fred” McDowell, “Shake ‘Em on Down,” *Mississippi Delta Blues* (Arhoolie, 1965).

⁵²¹ John Lee Hooker, “Crawling King Snake,” *I’m John Lee Hooker* (Vee Jay, 1960).

⁵²² E.g., Muddy Waters, “Long Distance Call” (single – Chess, 1951).

⁵²³ Willie Dixon, “29 Ways,” *I Am the Blues* (Columbia, 1993); Sonny Boy Williamson II, “One Way Out,” *One Way Out* (MCA/Chess, 1968). Willie Dixon was Chess Records’ house songwriter, meaning he wrote many of Waters’ and Howlin’ Wolf’s hits, but he was also a bass guitarist and singer, and released quite a few of these songs in his own right.

⁵²⁴ The Rolling Stones, “Midnight Rambler,” *Let It Bleed* (Decca, 1969); Steve Appleford, *The Rolling Stones: It’s Only Rock ‘n’ Roll: Song-By-Song* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), p. 93.

Escape—and not just from a lover’s bedroom—and exile were important tropes in the blues idiom. The bluesman was perceived to be the quintessential outsider—an oppressed minority in white American society and, as a sinful practitioner of “Devil’s music,” a pariah in his own community. However, in the blues idiom, this sense of alienation is often “spun” as a positive, as freedom and self-sufficiency, instead of rejection and loneliness. There were benefits after all, to not being seen as a full-fledged member of the community—its morals and codes supposedly no longer applied to the bluesman, who was then free to wander to his heart’s content, taking on the identity that he chose instead of that which society had forced onto him. In this respect, blues culture echoes that quintessentially American cultural medium, the Hollywood Western, in which leaving “town” (a stand-in for East Coast society) for the “frontier” throws identities into flux and, more often than not, identifies the so-called “outsiders” as the only characters with true merit.⁵²⁵

As a result, “the road” is, with the exception of male sexuality, the most potent—and most frequently borrowed—metaphor in the blues idiom. The bluesman was never able to stay in one place for very long, before the urge to strike out again for points unknown seized him. Often, as in Elmore James’ “Dust My Broom” and “Big Bill” Broonzy’s “Key to the Highway,” this *wanderlust* is so strong that it shakes the bluesman awake in the middle of the night, or early in the morning, and compels him to leave immediately.⁵²⁶ Once on the road, the bluesman could be very specific about where he

⁵²⁵ E.g. *Stagecoach*, dir. John Ford (1939). Michael Coyne, *Crowded Prairie: American National Identity in the Hollywood Western* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), p. 19.

⁵²⁶ Elmore James, “Dust My Broom” (single – Trumpet, 1951); “Big Bill” Broonzy, “Key to the Highway” (single – Columbia, 1941).

was going—to Memphis, Vicksburg, Clarksdale, Chicago, or even to such exotic locales as China, the Philippines or Ethiopia—or he could have just started walking down the first road, or jumped onto the first freight train, which he saw.⁵²⁷ Robert Johnson imagined that he was being pursued by “hellhounds on his trail,” or accompanied by Satan himself, on his wanderings, but in this, as in many ways, Johnson’s lyrics are a unique case.⁵²⁸ Most bluesmen did not need anything nearly so diabolical to drive them from town to town; the lure of “the open road” was enough.

The young British blues enthusiasts adopted this particular blues metaphor enthusiastically. They felt alienated from the conformism of middle-class British society, and what they considered the useless banalities of popular culture.⁵²⁹ They sought freedom, the relaxation of oppressive social norms and the wealth of sensory experience that could only be attained by traveling through open spaces. Great Britain in the early 1960s seemed woefully short of all three, but America—so the blues (and other forms of American popular culture) seemed to announce—had plenty. Even the African-American bluesman seemed, in some ways, more the master of his own destiny than a young British man, and he was a poverty-stricken member of America’s underclass.

The blues’ celebration of the “open road” also resonated with the British because of their cultural heritage. The British have always seen themselves as an outward-looking people, animated by a *wanderlust* that led them to earn and then jealously guard the

⁵²⁷ Robert Johnson, “Travelling Riverside Blues” and “Ramblin’ On My Mind,” *King of the Delta Blues Singers, Vol. 1*.

⁵²⁸ Johnson, “Hellhound on My Trail” and “Me and the Devil Blues,” *King of the Delta Blues Singers, Vol. 1*.

⁵²⁹ McClary, *Conventional Wisdom*, p. 60.

mastery of the seas that allowed them to roam the world as they pleased.⁵³⁰ Appropriating the “rambling” of the African-American bluesman just meant trading the high seas for the pavement. Eric Clapton spoke of his inner “gypsy,” saying “I had a restlessness in me, which I still have, and however much I loved my roots of Ripley and Hurtwood, the road always beckoned.”⁵³¹ In Clapton’s case, the urge to “ramble” translated not only in the desire to travel the world, playing the blues, but also in his seeming inability in the 1960s and 1970s to remain with any one band or project for more than a few years at a time before picking up and moving on.⁵³²

The parallels between Clapton’s personal and professional life, on the one hand, and what he understood to be the lifestyle of his idols on the other, point up an interesting aspect of the British blues enthusiasts’ affiliation with those idols: They felt that they had to combine their lives with their art. Both the British musicians-in-training and the ethnomusicologists of the day held the often-erroneous notion that blues lyrics were actually blues *autobiography*—that what bluesmen were singing about, had actually happened to them. I shall deal with this tendency more fully in the following chapter, as it was especially a problem for those attempting to understand the life and lyrics of Robert Johnson. This interpretive fallacy translated into practice for the British. They bought into the idea that they had to *live* the lifestyle of a bluesman—however impressionistic and

⁵³⁰ Bernhard Klein, “Introduction: Britain and the Sea,” in Klein, ed., *Fictions of the Sea: Critical Perspective on the Ocean in British Literature and Culture* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 1-12.

⁵³¹ Clapton, *Clapton*, p. 121. Ripley, in Surrey, was Clapton’s birthplace; Hurtwood Edge was the country manor in Surrey that he bought and moved into in 1968.

⁵³² Michael Schumacher, *Crossroads: The Life and Music of Eric Clapton* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), p. 92.

romanticized that might have been—if they wanted to realize the music that these men had made. Clapton more or less confirmed this when he remarked, thinking back on his early 1970s heroin addiction,

In spite of Ahmet's [Ertegun's] warnings, I enjoyed the mythology surrounding the lives of the great jazz musicians, like Charlie Parker and Ray Charles, and bluesmen like Robert Johnson, and I had a romantic notion of living *the kind of life that had led them to create their music*. [my emphasis]⁵³³

Likewise, Keith Richards implicitly bore witness to this perceived connection between the imagined lifestyle of the African-American musician (especially as it pertained to drug use) and cultural creativity in 1972, as he and the Rolling Stones struggled to record the double album, *Exile on Main St.*, at Richards' estate in the south of France.⁵³⁴ Richards had overcome his addiction to heroin earlier in the year, but nothing of value was written or recorded until he went back on the drug. It was, as the guitarist told an associate, a matter of "[k]nowing that the work was there and the work required that level of decadence.... that fantastic self-confidence to create that incredible work."⁵³⁵

The scores of rock stars who, like Clapton and Richards, became addicted to drugs and alcohol or, like Levon Helm and Richard Manuel of the Band, drove their sports cars as fast as they could to see if they could walk away from the ensuing wreckage—not to mention those who, like Jim Morrison and Jimi Hendrix, died of drug

⁵³³ Clapton, *Clapton*, p. 134.

⁵³⁴ The Rolling Stones, *Exile on Main St.* (Rolling Stones Records, 1972).

⁵³⁵ Robert Greenfield, *Exile on Main St.: A Season in Hell With the Rolling Stones* (New York: Da Capo, 2006), p. 99.

overdoses—would doubtless have agreed with Clapton’s romanticized statement.⁵³⁶ It is no exaggeration to state that the received image of the “rock star lifestyle” which has been an established part of the modern cultural landscape for the past five decades, actually had its roots in the assumption made by a few dozen young men in Britain in the early 1960s: that their newfound idols actually lived the way the songs said they did.

Devil Got My Woman: The Female “Other” in the Blues

Having concocted the persona of the powerful, sexually dynamic bluesman, the blues idiom then turned to his necessary foil and nemesis: the bluesman’s woman (or prospective woman). It should be noted that the “bluesman’s woman” and the “blueswoman” are vastly different constructions. The “blueswoman” is the lyrical persona created by the female blues singer, and—quite naturally—is usually portrayed with a great deal more empathy than is the “bluesman’s woman.”⁵³⁷ The latter, who appears in the vast majority of blues in various forms, is the central adversary or “Other” in African-American male blues culture. Even the numerous appearances of or allusions to the Devil in the blues are not comparable. After all, the African trickster god Legba, who is widely accepted as the basis for the Devil in the blues, was a trickster, not necessarily an enemy.⁵³⁸ He was one with whom a man could negotiate a better deal for himself in the world, with varying good and bad consequences. Not so, the vast majority

⁵³⁶ Harry Shapiro, *Waiting for the Man: The Story of Drugs and Popular Music* (New York: W.W. Morrow, 1988), p. 43; Levon Helm, with Stephen Davis, *This Wheel’s On Fire: The Story of Levon Helm and the Band* (New York: W.W. Morrow, 1993), pp. 170-72.

⁵³⁷ See Harrison, *Black Pearls*, p. 103.

⁵³⁸ Gerhard Kubik, *Africa and the Blues* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1999), p. 73.

of the women with whom the bluesman found himself interacting. Indeed, sometimes, as in Robert Johnson's "Me and the Devil Blues," the bluesman felt compelled to *call on* the Devil to help him sort out his woman.⁵³⁹

By "adversary," I do not mean to suggest that the bluesman's woman is an entirely malevolent figure. There is a very pronounced element of goodness (whether in the form of love, kindness, or at the very least physical attractiveness) in most of the women in the blues, which, in all fairness, the bluesman does celebrate a great deal in his songs. In a way, this goodness is at the heart of the bluesman's trouble. If a particular woman had no redeeming qualities whatsoever, one gets the feeling that the bluesman would not be having so many problems with her. When in "Killing Floor," Howlin' Wolf complains that he should have "quit" his woman "a long time ago," her residual goodness, and the powerful hold it continues to exercise on him, are the reasons why he will not or cannot do so.⁵⁴⁰ Thus, the bluesman's woman is often portrayed with at least some degree of internal complexity. Johnson's "kind-hearted woman" will "do anything in this world for [him]," but also "studies evil all the time," and cheats on him with "Mister So-and-So."⁵⁴¹ Complexity or no, however, the bluesman's woman *is* his chief adversary—the primary "Other" against whom he must struggle to define his identity and derive his power. Blues chronicler Rod Gruver may have been right to characterize the

⁵³⁹ Johnson, "Me and the Devil Blues," *King of the Delta Blues Singers, Vol. 1*.

⁵⁴⁰ Howlin' Wolf, "Killing Floor," *The Real Folk Blues* (Chess, 1966).

⁵⁴¹ Johnson, "Kind-Hearted Woman," *King of the Delta Blues Singers, Vol. 1*.

bluesman's woman as a "goddess," but she did not, as he claimed, earn that title for her unalloyed goodness.⁵⁴²

Stormy relationships with women, and the negotiation and formation of male identity that resulted, provided a solid common ground between black and white male experience. The would-be British blues disciples had no personal experience of enslavement or racism, and neither had any of their immediate relatives or acquaintances (leaving aside any subtle prejudice that those of Irish descent might have experienced living in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century).⁵⁴³ Although almost all of them could remember rationing, it would be ludicrous to claim that any of the British blues network had actually known the sort of grinding economic poverty that marked the lives of sharecropping African-Americans in the Deep South. They might not have even felt Eric Clapton's alleged "emotional poverty."⁵⁴⁴ However, as young heterosexual males, all could relate to the trials and tribulations of dealing with the opposite sex. "Son" House had famously said that "Ain't but one kind of blues, and that consists of a male and female that's in love," and the British took this statement of lowest-common-denominator to heart.⁵⁴⁵ As a result, the British interpretation of the blues zeroed in on the woman-as-"Other" trope, often to the exclusion of other forms of expression.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴² Gruver, "The Blues as Religion, Part Four," in *Blues World*, no. 32 (July 1970), p. 7.

⁵⁴³ Donald MacRaild, ed., *The Great Migration and Beyond: Irish Migrants in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Dublin, IRE: Irish Academic Press, 2000), p. 89.

⁵⁴⁴ Clapton, quoted in Ray Coleman, *Clapton! The Authorized Biography* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1994), p. 28.

⁵⁴⁵ Eddie "Son" House, quoted in Guralnick, et. al., eds., *The Blues*, p. 8.

⁵⁴⁶ Murray, *Crosstown Traffic*, p. 63.

The bluesman's woman was portrayed as, by turns, demanding, unfaithful, petulant and manipulative, and in general "just doggone crooked." In terms of sheer volume of lyrical references, being cuckolded, even more than being evicted, shot at, arrested or forced to give up drinking, was the bluesman's primary worry in life. Partly, this was just the other side of the coin with respect to the bluesman's own persona as a man on the make. He had been in plenty of other men's bedrooms; there could just as easily be another man in his. But the fear of being cuckolded had its basis in the woman's supposed untrustworthiness, as well. In a remarkable example of transference on the part of the rambling, womanizing bluesman, his woman simply could not be trusted to remain faithful to him; he had to be keep an eye on her at all times, lest she give in to her baser passions. "Outside Woman Blues" by Blind Joe Reynolds finds the protagonist planning in one verse to "buy me a bulldog [to] watch my old lady whilst I sleep," whilst in the next complaining that "you can't watch your wife and your outside women too;" the bluesman's lot was certainly a difficult one.⁵⁴⁷

Keeping an eye on his woman was at times rather difficult for the bluesman, who had to work during the day. In this respect the woman was the personification of the bluesman's social and economic responsibilities, though in true blues-boasting fashion, he exaggerated: according to him, she demanded that he make enough money not only to support them, but also for her to buy luxury items for herself, like jewelry or a new car. To satisfy her unreasonable demands for the trappings of urban consumer culture, he had to work "all summer and all the fall," even making him "spend Christmas in [his]

⁵⁴⁷ Blind Joe Reynolds, "Outside Woman Blues" (single – Paramount, 1929).

overalls.” Even after all of that, she still left him for another man.⁵⁴⁸ In many blues, economic and sexual anxieties were interwoven. Bluesmen attempted to exchange luxury items for sexual favors; in “Long Distance Call,” Waters offers to buy a woman “a brand-new Cadillac/if you’ll just speak some good words about me.”⁵⁴⁹ In a kind of reversal of this sexual calculus, women threatened to leave if the man refused to get a job and buy them these things, as in “Little Johnny” Jones’ “Big Town Playboy.”⁵⁵⁰ Finally, the bluesman often articulated the anxiety that his woman was taking his hard-earned money and using it to exchange for the sexual favors of another man.⁵⁵¹

Blues anxieties over the relationship between femininity, masculinity and consumer culture in a capitalist society found a responsive audience in British youth. There is a noticeable streak of ambivalence that colors perceptions of consumer culture on both sides of the Atlantic in the twentieth century. On the one hand, a full-fledged consumer culture, following in lockstep with the return of economic prosperity in Britain in the late 1950s, led in turn to the existence of youth culture in the first place. Thus, the blues boom, which was a subset of that larger culture, would not have occurred without the mass availability to British youth of record albums, phonographs and transistor radios. The British Mods viewed consumer culture as not only indispensable but downright alluring. They embraced its trappings and its finer details with enthusiasm, without—in their opinion—sacrificing any of their masculinity or heterosexuality.

⁵⁴⁸ Howlin’ Wolf, “Sitting on Top of the World,” *The Real Folk Blues* (Chess, 1966).

⁵⁴⁹ Waters, “Long Distance Call.”

⁵⁵⁰ “Little Johnny” Jones, “Big Town Playboy” (single – Aristocrat, 1949).

⁵⁵¹ E.g., Howlin’ Wolf, “Killing Floor;” Sonny Boy Williamson II, “Fattenin’ Frogs for Snakes,” *The Real Folk Blues* (Chess, 1965).

On the other hand, there was an extent to which consumer culture has always been viewed as inherently feminine (and feminizing). In the first half of the twentieth century, as historians have amply demonstrated, most advertising was aimed at women, who were responsible for most of the shopping, and many of the commodities being advertised were appliances for so-called “women’s work.”⁵⁵² The dichotomy that arose seemed simple enough: men earned the money, which they then gave to their wives, who used it to buy consumer commodities. Some of this began to change with the rise of a specifically *youth*-targeted consumer culture, which attempted to sell products to both young men and young women with discretionary income.⁵⁵³ This raised the issue of whether participation in mass consumer culture could be reconciled with traditional masculinity, or would result in emasculation and feminization.

The latter was the stance (however ineloquently articulated) of the Mods’ nemeses, the Rockers, who sneered that their counterparts spent an unseemly amount of time and effort on their hair and clothing, and were too finicky about their shirts being pressed just so, or their lapels measuring a certain length—qualities that were deemed “feminine.”⁵⁵⁴ Admittedly, the Rockers, as consumers of commodities such as hair-styling products, leather jackets and motorcycles, were no innocents to consumer culture themselves. However, it was not necessarily the buying of consumer commodities, but the unwonted obsession with them, which threatened to emasculate the Mods, and British

⁵⁵² See, for example, Pamela Walker Laird’s *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

⁵⁵³ Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 444.

⁵⁵⁴ Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p. 56.

young men as a whole. The blues was an artifact of consumer culture that voiced these very anxieties—the danger of emasculation by participating in the inherently feminine pursuit of the things that male-earned money could buy—while reinforcing the traditional gender roles (man works and earns, woman buys and spends). Consumption of the blues, then, was a way to participate in mass consumer culture while remaining securely within the boundaries of traditional masculinity.

The emergence in Europe and America of the teenage girl as a major player in mass consumer culture had an interesting cultural antecedent in the blues idiom's tendency to depict the bluesman's relationship with women that might, for lack of a more scholarly term, be labelled "nymphets." This term was brought to cultural prominence by Russian expatriate novelist Vladimir Nabokov to describe the *femme fatale* in his 1958 novel, *Lolita*, a sexually precocious fourteen-year-old girl who bewitches the middle-aged narrator, Humbert Humbert, and leads him to commit kidnapping, statutory rape and murder.⁵⁵⁵ It is an apt comparison to make with the numerous very young women of whom the normally mild-mannered Waters once boasted, "I'm so carried away [with them] that I'll kill anybody 'bout one of 'em."⁵⁵⁶

The "blues nymphet" is in many ways an accentuation of tropes we have already seen in action in the blues idiom's portrayal of the woman-as-Other. I have discussed how the bluesman, by virtue of his age and accumulated wisdom, took on a paternal or professorial persona; by contrast, the object of his desire would be younger and less experienced. Thus constituted as the sexual opposite of the older bluesman, the "blues

⁵⁵⁵ Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1958).

⁵⁵⁶ Waters, "She's Nineteen Years Old."

nymphet” had all the attributes one might associate with a teenage girl—exuberance, attractiveness, innocence, but also petulance, self-centeredness, talkativeness and immaturity. She was unnecessarily cruel in Sonny Boy Williamson I’s “Good Morning Little Schoolgirl;” at first dismissive, then difficult-to-please in Waters’ “She’s Nineteen Years Old;” and spoiled by both parents and would-be suitors in Chuck Berry’s “Sweet Little Sixteen.”⁵⁵⁷ Thus, the “blues nymphet” also manifested the complexity and contradictions of her older sister, all the while placing the bluesman in uncomfortable proximity to the legal system (who did not hesitate to put Berry in prison in real life for allegedly “transporting a minor across state lines for immoral purposes” in 1958).⁵⁵⁸

To explain why exceedingly young women seemed to enjoy such a prominent place in the blues lyrical idiom would require a deep sociological analysis of pre-1950 African-American society that I am not qualified to undertake. Whatever the reasons for her prevalence, though, the greater point is that the British enthusiasts took to her with disturbing alacrity. Part of the basis for this lay in the literal fact that, as much as they might have wanted to play at being older, wiser black men, they were still adult white men in their late teens and early twenties. So, too, were the male fans—first in Britain and then in America—that have historically constituted the greater part of rock audiences

⁵⁵⁷ Sonny Boy Williamson I (John Lee Williamson), “Good Morning Little Schoolgirl,” 1937-39, *Volume 1* (Blues Collection, 2004); Waters, “She’s Nineteen Years Old;” Chuck Berry, “Sweet Little Sixteen,” *One Dozen Berries* (Chess, 1958).

⁵⁵⁸ Greg Shaw, “The Teen Idols,” in Anthony DeCurtis, James Henke and Holly George-Warren, eds., *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* (New York: Straight Arrow, 1992), p. 107.

and the imperfectly-defined “rock fan culture.”⁵⁵⁹ Thus, during the moment of their initial encounters with the blues, they found themselves in pursuit of adolescent girls—who, in the context of the larger consumer culture, had a much greater capacity for being materially spoiled (and for spoiling themselves) than their mothers and older sisters had been. Whenever a bluesman sang about having problems with their demanding, self-centered young women, young British men felt that they could sympathize with him.

This fascination deepened with the British enthusiasts’ burgeoning popularity. Their music began to become popular to first a British and then a trans-Atlantic audience—many of whom were adolescent men like them, and whose life experiences of women were similar. The British began to surpass their audiences in terms of these experiences, however, as they gained sexual access to three distinct groups of young, previously unavailable trans-Atlantic women—aristocrats’ daughters, fashion models and, later, groupies—to all of whom the persona of the “blues nymphet” could be applied at some level. Both aristocrats’ daughters and fashion models were conspicuous participants in consumer culture, without having to work very hard (or at all) to pay for it; both (especially the former group) were used to having their every demand gratified. All three groups of women were invariably young—American groupies, especially, were very young, somehow managing to sneak out regularly enough to fulfill all of their parents’ worst fears ever since 1965, when the Rolling Stones’ manager, Andrew

⁵⁵⁹ Sheila Whiteley, *Too Much, Too Young: Popular Music, Age and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 12.

Oldham, had planted the headline in *Melody Maker*, “Would you let your daughter go with a Rolling Stone?”⁵⁶⁰

Art and life began to imitate one another, *ad infinitum*. Mick Jagger and fashion model Chrissie Shrimpton (then eighteen) formed the British music scene’s first “power couple;” their relationship was a stormy one, as she constantly quarreled with the singer, sometimes even hitting him (not that Jagger was an aggrieved innocent; he often hit her back).⁵⁶¹ Shrimpton was purportedly the inspiration for the Rolling Stones’ mid-1960s sequence of misogynistic put-downs of shallow, immature girls, most notably “Under My Thumb” and, straightforwardly enough, “Stupid Girl.”⁵⁶² During and after his days with Cream, Eric Clapton took up first with French fashion model Charlotte Martin (then twenty years old), then Alice Ormsby-Gore (sixteen), whose father was Lord Harlech, the former British ambassador to the United States.⁵⁶³ This was a long way indeed from merely playing “Good Morning Little Schoolgirl” as a Yardbird.

It was Robert Plant and Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin, however, who took both real-life and artistic relationships with “blues nymphets” to the furthest extreme. On Led Zeppelin’s first album, Plant sang of an unfaithful schoolgirl who “was rid of him” after “a couple of days” and of another (faithful, for the moment) to whom he just “can’t get

⁵⁶⁰ Quoted in Shawn Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!: The Smashing Rise and Giddy Fall of Swinging London* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), p. 167.

⁵⁶¹ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 171.

⁵⁶² Appleford, *It’s Only Rock ‘n’ Roll*, pp. 37-39; The Rolling Stones, “Under My Thumb” and “Stupid Girl,” *Aftermath* (Decca, 1966).

⁵⁶³ Clapton, *Clapton*, p. 85.

through,” try as he might.⁵⁶⁴ These paeans to jailbait were followed by Plant’s assumption, on the group’s second album, of the professorial role in “Whole Lotta Love” (their cover of Waters’ “You Need Love”), and the paternal role in their cover of Williamson II’s “Bring It On Home,” in which the young girl calls Plant “Daddy” before leaving home to get her loving elsewhere.⁵⁶⁵ After dallying with young girls on vinyl, the group then went on tour and surrounded themselves with groupies, many of whom were teenagers. This was especially true of Jimmy Page, who seemed especially to revel in the company of teenage girls, two of whom—Pamela des Barres (eighteen at the time) and Lori Maddox (fourteen)—served on separate occasions as his unofficial “road wives,” traveling and staying with the guitarist whenever he was in America.⁵⁶⁶ These sorts of experiences in turn led to more songs about teenage groupies, most notably “Sick Again,” in which Plant crows that his favorite Los Angeles conquest would “someday...reach sixteen”—a celebration of statutory rape that he would repeat elsewhere.⁵⁶⁷

Life experience aside, the “blues nymphet” trope can be seen to resonate with the British blues network on an intellectual level. She serves as the mirror image of the powerful and dynamic bluesman, serving to define and empower him by everything she

⁵⁶⁴ Led Zeppelin, “Good Times, Bad Times” and “How Many More Years,” *Led Zeppelin I*.

⁵⁶⁵ Led Zeppelin, “Whole Lotta Love” and “Bring It On Home,” *Led Zeppelin II* (Atlantic, 1969). Interestingly enough, though, this album also includes, in “Living Loving Maid (She’s Just a Woman),” a rare feminine subject that was *older* than Plant’s swaggering protagonist.

⁵⁶⁶ Stephen Davis, *Hammer of the Gods: The Led Zeppelin Saga* (New York: W. Morrow, 1995), p. 92, 169; Pamela des Barres, “Every Inch of My Love,” in William McKeen, ed., *Rock and Roll is Here to Stay: An Anthology* (New York: W.W. Morrow, 2000), pp. 299-305.

⁵⁶⁷ Led Zeppelin, “Sick Again,” *Physical Graffiti* (Swan Song, 1975).

is not. She is immature and inexperienced where he has the benefit of years of accumulated sexual knowledge; she is capricious and petulant where he is the epitome of what Robert Johnson called “a steady rolling man.”⁵⁶⁸ However, at the end of the day, it is she who maintains a noticeable degree of control over the bluesman, no matter what his skills or powers: he will not or cannot leave her, and, although he complains in song that she makes him miserable, he does what she asks.

Finally, on top of all the other tribulations the bluesman’s woman put him through, there was all the possibility of the coup de grâce: she might try to murder him. Such a grim threat was at the center of quite a few blues, including Sonny Boy Williamson II’s “I’m Too Young to Die,” which confesses to being “scared of that child.” Note again his infantilization of his woman, even as he concedes that she has the “unwomanly” ability and motivation to kill him.⁵⁶⁹ Even in blues where the bluesman is able to countenance his own death at his woman’s hands, he is still able to inscribe both of them in their proper gender roles: while a man would have used a gun or a knife, the woman, aside from a few notable exceptions, must resort to poison. This is the *modus operandi* at work in Howlin’ Wolf’s “I Asked for Water (And She Gave Me Gasoline)” and Muddy Waters’ “Iodine in My Coffee.”⁵⁷⁰ Poisoning her man is of a piece with the rest of the behavior he has imputed to her; just as she has snuck around behind his back to cheat on him, now she will try to kill him in much the same indirect manner.

⁵⁶⁸ Johnson, “Steady Rollin’ Man,” *King of the Delta Blues Singers, Vol. 2* (Columbia, 1970).

⁵⁶⁹ Williamson II, “I’m Too Young to Die,” *The Real Folk Blues*.

⁵⁷⁰ Howlin’ Wolf, “I Asked for Water (And She Gave Me Gasoline),” *Moanin’ in the Moonlight* (Chess, 1962); Muddy Waters, “Iodine in My Coffee” (single – Chess, 1952).

This is one of the rare occasions where British blues enthusiasts did not apply the blues idiom literally to their own lives. So far as is known, none of the British blues network were done in by their women. This did not stop the protagonist in the Who's "My Wife" from singing about how his wife was coming after him to murder him after he had failed to return home after a night of drinking and carousing.⁵⁷¹ It is more likely that British enthusiasts affiliated themselves to this particular lyrical trope in a metaphorical way—that is, a woman trying to murder her man was merely the logical extreme to which their adversarial relationship could be taken. Being murdered would be the ultimate defeat of the male self, and even if it never came to that in real life, the prospect of that metaphoric defeat seemed real enough to those who felt that their masculinity was being challenged. Osborne's Jimmy Porter forecast the day when he and his ilk would be "butchered by the women." Within two years of his having uttered these words, other young British men were figuring out that the blues seemed to proffer a way to respond.

Your Funeral and My Trial: Violence and Power in the Blues

A central aspect of the adversarial relationship between the bluesman and his woman, one at which I have thus far only hinted, is physical violence. This is also a key element in African-American blues culture in general, which "is, or was until recently, a culture permeated by intimate violence, both figurative and real, threatened (or promised) and inflicted."⁵⁷² Decades before rap music provoked a public hue and cry against its seeming glorification of violence—especially against women—many of the same tropes

⁵⁷¹ The Who, "My Wife," *Who's Next* (Polydor, 1971).

⁵⁷² Gussow, *Seems Like Murder Here*, p. 195.

were being expressed in the blues.⁵⁷³ The expression of blues violence had its roots in the day-to-day experiences of the men (and women) who performed the blues. Whether or not the individual blues musician was actually singing about violent acts that he had seen or had happened to him, in point of fact the “jook joint” was just a violent place. Huddie “Lead Belly” Ledbetter and Charley Patton both had their throats cut (though not fatally) in the course of “jook joint” altercations.⁵⁷⁴ “Lead Belly,” along with Edward “Son” House, were themselves convicted murderers.⁵⁷⁵ Robert Johnson died of poisoning, but for years, inaccurate versions of the stories (believed and passed on as gospel truth by white chroniclers) claimed that he had been shot or stabbed to death.⁵⁷⁶

As a culture permeated by intimate violence, African-American blues culture is a subset of rural Southern culture, which along with the “Wild West” has been culturally “signified” as being more violent than the rest of American culture.⁵⁷⁷ In turn, American society has long been understood by Europeans as being more violent than most other Western societies—this has been a central concern ever since colonial times.⁵⁷⁸ Whatever serious flaws it may have suffered from in terms of archival research, historian Michael Bellesiles’ controversial *Arming America* was fundamentally correct in identifying a

⁵⁷³ Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 197.

⁵⁷⁴ Gussow, *Seems Like Murder Here*, p. 217.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 196.

⁵⁷⁶ Patricia Schroeder, *Robert Johnson, Mythmaking and Contemporary American Culture* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 46.

⁵⁷⁷ David Courtwright, *Violent Land: Single Men and Social Disorder From the Frontier to the Inner City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 3-4.

⁵⁷⁸ Michael Bellesiles, *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* (New York: Knopf, 2000), p. 308.

powerful “gun culture” at the center of American life, and in dating its large-scale emergence to the post-Civil War period, when the United States was in the throes of the large-scale modernization that would make it a world power by the outbreak of the First World War.⁵⁷⁹ The glorification of violence in American culture (or at least its centrality as a method of solving conflict and negotiating male identity) is articulated in precisely those forms of American mass consumer culture that young British men latched onto in the post-war period—Western films, “hard-boiled” *films noir* and comic books.⁵⁸⁰

These issues were also articulated in the blues, which is as much a matter of boasting about violence as it is about sexual encounters. By and large, it was violence against women that seems to predominate in the blues lyrical idiom. The bluesman promised violence for a whole catalog of sins—cheating on him, staying out too late, spending all of his money, or mouthing off. In “.32-20 Blues,” Robert Johnson lumped all of these crimes under the umbrella of “get[ting] unruly;” all were shooting offenses in Johnson’s book.⁵⁸¹ Such were the perceived tribulations by which he was beset by his troublesome woman, that even Muddy Waters got into the act, fantasizing about “snapping a pistol in your face” and “let[ting] some graveyard be your resting place” in the hit single that established him on the Chicago blues scene, “I Can’t Be Satisfied”

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 9.

⁵⁸⁰ Roger Lewis, “Captain America Meets the Bash Street Kids: The Comic Form in Britain and the United States,” in C.W.E. Bigsby, ed., *Superculture: American Popular Culture and Europe* (Bowling Green, OH: The Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1975), p. 179.

⁵⁸¹ Johnson, “.32-20 Blues,” *King of the Delta Blues Singers, Vol. 1*. A .32-20 is a caliber of handgun. See Harry’s Blues Lyrics, “Robert Johnson – .32-20 Blues” (http://blues.lyrics.tripod.com/lyrics/robert_johnson/32-20_blues.htm#top) (accessed 9 December 2007).

(1948).⁵⁸² Waters even seemed to revel in the violence to which his woman had driven him—in “Oh Yeah!,” he gloats that he will “whup my baby in the mornin’ and beat my little girl in the afternoon.”⁵⁸³

In this culture of intimate blues violence, however, the women often gave as good as they got. In a few notable cases, these women even managed to evade the “proper” gender roles into which they were often inscribed. We have seen how Waters and Wolf indicted their women for attempting to murder them with poison, a properly “womanly” way to commit murder. However, in “Walking Through the Park,” Waters allows his woman to handle the more “masculine” guns and knives, warning his listeners, “dont’cha bother my baby, no tellin’ what she’ll do/That girl she may cut you/She may shoot you too.”⁵⁸⁴ This is couched as advice to other men, and as such Waters might be using his woman as his proxy—if they “bother” her, *he* might “cut” or “shoot” them. Implicit in this advice, however, is the possibility that she could turn on him if he bothers her as well. After listing all the things that his woman did that made him reach for his “.32-20,” and vowing that if she continued, “all the doctors in Hot Springs sho’ can’t help her none,” Johnson admitted that she had a gun of her own, a “.38 Special.” Johnson’s magnanimity is short-lived, however: her gun is “much too light,” certainly no match for Johnson’s own “.32-20.” Besides, Johnson has also somehow acquired a Gatling gun—making the point that, when it comes to blues armaments at least, size does matter.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸² Waters, “I Can’t Be Satisfied” (single – Chess, 1948).

⁵⁸³ Waters, “Oh Yeah” (single – Chess, 1954).

⁵⁸⁴ Waters, “Walking Through The Park,” *Fathers and Sons* (Chess, 1969).

⁵⁸⁵ Johnson, “.32-20 Blues.”

These were sentiments of which Jimmy Porter, concerned with being “butchered by the women,” might well have approved.

Compared to the many references in the blues idiom to bluesmen either committing or threatening to commit acts of violence against their women, references to the bluesmen coming after the men who have cuckolded them are thin on the ground. In John Lee Hooker’s “I’m Mad Again” we find the protagonist trying to decide on the appropriate vengeance for the man he has caught with his wife—drowning him and shooting him (“like Al Capone”) are his options.⁵⁸⁶ Blues like this are quite rare, however. There are a few more—Williamson II’s “One Way Out” and Dixon’s “Back Door Man” immediately come to mind—that are sung from the point of view of the “outside man,” as he hastens to leave the woman’s bedroom before her husband or boyfriend returns. Dixon’s protagonist even admits to failure, and has to be “taken to the doctor, shot full of holes.”⁵⁸⁷ The reasons for this seeming double standard are unclear. Perhaps bluesmen maintained with each other a kind of “gentleman’s code” that caused them to be lenient with each other in their lyrics, knowing that it could just as easily be them looking down the barrel of a jealous lover’s gun.

It is curious that most of the references to intimate violence in the blues seem to be about men against women, or vice versa, since it is man-on-man violence that drives one of the blues’ (and, by extension, African-American culture’s) greatest heroic myths,

⁵⁸⁶ John Lee Hooker, “I’m Mad Again,” *The Folklore of John Lee Hooker* (Vee Jay, 1961).

⁵⁸⁷ Dixon, “Back Door Man.”

that of the “bad nigger” Staggerlee.⁵⁸⁸ Besides “Railroad Bill”—the black outlaw whose exploits robbing trains and killing sheriffs made him a folk hero in the 1890s—Staggerlee is the epitome of what historian John Roberts calls the “badman” or “bad nigger” tradition.⁵⁸⁹ Like most good myths, that of Staggerlee is unfixed chronologically as well as spatially—Greil Marcus, who devoted some attention to the myth in his *Mystery Train*, says that it could have happened “in Memphis around the turn of the century, in New Orleans in the twenties, in St. Louis in the 1880s.”⁵⁹⁰ What all versions of the story agree on is that Staggerlee walked into a barroom on Christmas night and shot a man named Billy Lyons four times in the head. Of course, after that the story clouds over again; Staggerlee either killed Lyons for the Stetson hat Lyons was wearing, or because Lyons beat him in a card game, or just for the sheer thrill of doing it. In most versions of the story, Staggerlee leaves the bar unmolested, and avoids capture for his crime (in the most extreme version, he is so fearsome that no sheriff even attempts to capture him).⁵⁹¹ This is essentially an African-American Western, with essential touches like the Stetson hat, a

⁵⁸⁸ There seem to be as many variants of the name—Staggerlee, Stack’o’lee, Stacker Lee, Stagolee, etc.—as there are versions of his story.

⁵⁸⁹ John W. Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), pp. 171-73.

⁵⁹⁰ Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of American in Rock ‘n’ Roll Music* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), p. 66. Cecil Brown, in his *Stagolee Shot Billy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), claims to have unearthed the actual historical Staggerlee: one Lee Shelton (aka Stack Lee), who shot William Lyons in St. Louis on December 25, 1895.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

barroom as the venue, and the sheriff as the agent of law and order with whom Staggerlee must contend as a result of Lyons' murder.⁵⁹²

The myth of Staggerlee became so popular that it was made into a song as well as a tall tale. There are three noteworthy versions of it in the blues canon, the first by Delta blues guitarist "Mississippi John" Hurt (1929), the second by an ensemble of Memphis Slim, Big Bill Broonzy and Sonny Boy Williamson II (1948), and the third by Lloyd Price (1958).⁵⁹³ It is probable that the avid record collectors in the British blues network knew of all three versions, but even if this were not true, the fantasies and values bound up in the myth have transcended the boundaries of the song and wormed their way deep into blues (and African-American) culture. Marcus sees the echoes of Staggerlee in black male heroes as varied as Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters, boxers Muhammad Ali and Jack Johnson, and Black Panthers Bobby Seale and H. Rap Brown.⁵⁹⁴

What all of these men share in common is their status as free agents in a society where black men are rarely permitted such unqualified autonomy, the threat of violence they seemed to personify to white America, and the resulting high esteem in which they were held by many in their own community.⁵⁹⁵ The "badman" was an attractive figure to emulate because, like his white "man-of-adventure" counterpart, he carved out his own

⁵⁹² Ibid, p. 66.

⁵⁹³ "Mississippi John" Hurt, "Stack O'Lee Blues" (single – Okeh, 1929); Memphis Slim (Peter Chatman), "Big Bill" Broonzy and Sonny Boy Williamson II, "Bama's Stackerlee," *Blues in the Mississippi Night* (United Artists, 1959); Lloyd Price, "Stackalee" (single – ABC-Paramount, 1958).

⁵⁹⁴ Marcus, *Mystery Train*, p. 67.

⁵⁹⁵ It should be recalled that amongst rural blacks in the Deep South, the bluesman was still considered something of an outcast for playing "the devil's music."

destiny and achieved a hard-won mastery, both with violence. Gussow claims, invoking Elaine Scarry and Robin D.G. Kelley, that intimate violence was a way of “taking back the black body,” of affirming the “somebodiness” of the violent man by his demonstration that, far from being a passive victim in racist society, he could alter his world in the most fundamental way possible—by removing a life from it.⁵⁹⁶ Not only that, but at least in the case of Staggerlee, he got away with it, as the white authority figures had no power to stop him. The “badman” had achieved freedom, and it was this “[c]omplete indifference to the consequences of liquor, reefers [sic], drugs, gambling, women and assorted crimes [that lent] the badman boaster a kind of wildman glamour as well as a high position in his competitive society.”⁵⁹⁷

The possibility did exist (in different versions of the song) for Staggerlee to be arrested, convicted and executed, and this points up another quarter from which the bluesman could potentially encounter violence: the legal system. For while certain members of the black community may have approved of Staggerlee’s murderous swagger—women reputedly wore red to his funeral, for example—the sheriff and the courts certainly did not.⁵⁹⁸ Living in a racist society meant that prison and capital punishment (to say nothing of lynching) were realities of life for many African-American men. As mentioned, Lead Belly and House were imprisoned for murder. Sonny Boy

⁵⁹⁶ Gussow, *Seems Like Murder Here*, pp. 203-209, citing Kelley, *Race Rebels*, p. 44, and Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: Making and Unmaking the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 174-75.

⁵⁹⁷ Mimi Clar Melnick, “‘I Can Peep Through Muddy Water and Spy Dry Land’: Boasts in the Blues,” in Alan Dundes, ed., *Mother Wit From the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 276.

⁵⁹⁸ Marcus, *Mystery Train*, p. 67.

Williamson II was imprisoned on two separate occasions (though, true to form, he was never entirely clear as to what his crime had been).⁵⁹⁹ And although no notable bluesman was ever the victim of a lynch mob, “Southern justice” touched the lives of several (including Willie Dixon and Josh White) indirectly, and its specter, as blues scholar Adam Gussow argues, haunts the culture and the idiom.⁶⁰⁰ Death at the orders (or at least connivance) of the state, then, was the other side of the coin—the “non-intimate” violence of African-American blues culture. Being faced with a death sentence was a power struggle just like anything else in the bluesman’s universe. The forces of law and order—the policeman, the judge, the executioner and the lynch mob—had the power to take away the bluesman’s freedom and end his life, but the bluesman had the power to resist.

Flight was the option taken by the protagonist in the Leaves’ “Hey Joe” (which Jimi Hendrix covered in 1967). Having caught his woman in bed with another man, he gets his gun and murders her. In the final verse, the protagonist makes plans to flee “way down south” to Mexico, beyond the clutches of the hangman. The protagonist of Lead Belly’s “Gallis Pole,” however, was not so lucky, and thus tried another option: bribery. Standing at the gallows, he offers the hangman gold, silver and his sister’s company if only he will untie his ropes. However, unlike Led Zeppelin’s 1970 cover (where the hangman takes the bribe *and* still hangs the protagonist anyway), Lead Belly does not

⁵⁹⁹ William E. Donoghue, *Fessor Mojo’s “Don’t Start Me to Talkin’”* (Seattle: Mojo Visions Productions, 1997), pp. 28-29.

⁶⁰⁰ Willie Dixon, with Don Snowden, *I Am the Blues: The Willie Dixon Story* (New York: Da Capo, 1989), p. 20; Gussow, *Seems Like Murder Here*, p. 3.

resolve the protagonist's dilemma.⁶⁰¹ Perhaps the most outlandish method for resisting capital punishment occurs in Peetie Wheatstraw's "Drinking Man Blues." Wheatstraw, who had already arrogated some of the signifying power of the police by referring to himself as the "High Sheriff of Hell," tells of how, after a night of drinking, his protagonist shot a policeman, claimed his pistol and badge and then walked the dead man's beat! Fortunately for the protagonist, the judge lets him off relatively easily, with only a six-month sentence to "change my drinking ways."⁶⁰²

For sheer audacity, however, it would be difficult to top the feat described in Dixon's "Back Door Man." In fact, it is perhaps the most flamboyantly subversive commentary on the matrix of sex, power, race and justice in the entire blues canon. On trial for his life, Dixon's protagonist finds himself sponsored by two powerful white women, who plead with their husbands for his release:

I was accused of murder in the first degree/
The judge's wife cried, "Let the man go free!"/
...
The cop's wife cried, "Don't take him down/
I would rather be in six feet of ground!"/
I am the Back Door Man.⁶⁰³

In a way, Dixon's salvation is totally in keeping with the cultural convention—a holdover from the days of slavery—that denied the African-American man a voice in legal proceedings unless he could muster a white man, whose word could be trusted, to

⁶⁰¹ Lead Belly, "Gallis Pole," *The Early Blues Roots of Led Zeppelin*.

⁶⁰² Peetie Wheatstraw, "Drinking Man Blues" (single – Bluebird, 1940), cited in Gussow, *Seems Like Murder Here*, pp. 191-92.

⁶⁰³ Dixon, "Back Door Man."

corroborate his testimony.⁶⁰⁴ The way in which this occurs in Dixon's case is infinitely more provocative. Once again, the bluesman's power and autonomy are again expressed in sexual terms—and in public, no less. Here, it is the bluesman's ability to sexually satisfy the wives of his town's authority figures that saves him from his fate, allowing him to remain (for the moment) a free man. The outlandishness of this claim—black men were not permitted even to wolf-whistle at white women, much less have sex with them, *much less* have it announced at a public hearing—only adds to its mythic resonance.⁶⁰⁵

The near-simultaneity with which Dixon's protagonist is first charged with murder, and then saved from his charge by his sexual prowess puts an exclamation point on the linkages in blues culture between violence and sexuality. It should be noted that numerous blues go even further, positing the gun as a powerful phallic symbol. Upon hearing the title and the first two lines of John Lee Hooker's "Boom Boom" (which are, "Boom boom boom boom, gonna shoot you right down") one might think that this is merely another blues glorifying gunplay. In reality, it is a seductive boast; noting the alluring way in which his woman walks and talks, Hooker promises to "take [her] home with me."⁶⁰⁶ This ambiguity is also present in "Little Walter" Jacobs' "Boom Boom, Out Go the Lights!" in which it is unclear whether or not Jacobs plans to shoot at, beat, or have forceful sex with his wayward woman (all are insinuated by the phrase, "out go the

⁶⁰⁴ Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 44-46.

⁶⁰⁵ The lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till, who had supposedly wolf-whistled at a white woman in Mississippi in 1955, serves to underscore this point. Touré, "And It's Deep, Too," in Guralnick, et. al., eds., *The Blues*, p. 211.

⁶⁰⁶ John Lee Hooker, "Boom Boom," *Burnin'* (Vee Jay, 1962).

lights!”).⁶⁰⁷ The last word, as usual, belongs to Robert Johnson. When, in “Stop Breakin’ Down Blues,” Johnson boasts that, “The stuff I got’ll bust your brains out/It’ll make you lose your mind,” he could just as easily mean his gun or his penis.⁶⁰⁸ Certainly, Mick Jagger was untroubled by the ambiguity; his Rolling Stones covered the song on their double-album monument to Deep South sexuality and violence, *Exile on Main St.*⁶⁰⁹

Bright Lights, Big City: Modernity and the Blues

The perceived modernity of the blues was also of great appeal to the British blues enthusiasts. Contrary to popular belief—and that of numerous commentators—which holds that the blues was (and remains) primitive and backward-looking (to the Deep South, to Africa, or to both), blissfully free of the decadence of the modern urban landscape and, indeed, safeguarding various pre-modern values that have sadly been lost to modern (white) society, the blues is very much a modern (even a *modernist*) musical form.⁶¹⁰ Along with its close musical relative, jazz, the blues is inextricably a part of American modernity. In terms of their being recognized as a distinct musical form from slave spirituals or “work hollers,” the blues and jazz both date back to the last two decades of the nineteenth century, when, with the Civil War and Reconstruction over, the

⁶⁰⁷ “Little Walter” Jacobs, “Boom Boom, Out Go the Lights!” (single – Chess, 1955).

⁶⁰⁸ Johnson, “Stop Breakin’ Down Blues,” *King of the Delta Blues Singers, Vol. 2*.

⁶⁰⁹ The Rolling Stones, “Stop Breaking Down,” *Exile on Main St.*

⁶¹⁰ E.g., Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1993).

United States began finally to assert itself as a modernizing industrial power and to make its presence felt on the international stage.⁶¹¹

The blues and jazz were propelled forward commercially by two modern innovations in communication—the radio and the phonograph. Historian Joel Dinerstein has argued that these two inventions were integral in helping to create a more-or-less unified national culture.⁶¹² This is no less true of blues culture. Thanks to radio broadcasts and phonograph records, a practitioner of the blues idiom in Mississippi or Virginia, whose previous relative isolation had led to the formation of two discernibly different blues “sounds,” could now listen to and learn how to play in the style of his fellows.⁶¹³ As discussed in the previous chapter, this was a similar development to what happened in Great Britain, twenty or thirty years later. It is no coincidence that it was these modern innovations that, when they arrived in full force in Britain in the 1950s, brought the blues to those who would become its most passionate advocates. To young British teenagers, belatedly enjoying the fruits of modern technology as brought to them through mass consumer culture, African-American music stood for American modernity.

Of course, both radios and phonographs require electricity to function; thus the blues was also deeply shaped by this technology. In the South, widespread rural electrification was only achieved after the Second World War, although it started as a

⁶¹¹ Robert Santelli, “A Century of the Blues,” in Guralnick, et. al., eds., *The Blues*, p. 14.

⁶¹² Joel Dinerstein, *Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology and African-American Culture Between the World Wars* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), p. 23.

⁶¹³ Palmer, *Deep Blues*, p. 43.

New Deal program in the 1930s.⁶¹⁴ Electricity's major effect on blues culture in the South was in the installation of brightly-colored multi-record players (nicknamed "jukeboxes" since they soon became standard features in Southern "jook joints"), which, according to Robert Palmer, "supplemented live music rather than supplanting it."⁶¹⁵ In the urban North, where African-Americans migrated in large numbers during and after both world wars, electricity shaped the blues in a different way. The nightclubs of Chicago, Detroit and St. Louis were usually larger than the Southern "jooks" had been; acoustic instruments simply could not be heard over the din of a large audience.⁶¹⁶ Plus, as Charlie Gillett argued in his influential *The Sounds of the City*, the urban landscape itself was louder, full of the sounds of industry, traffic noise and crowded streets. Blues musicians, exposed to this cacophony from the minute they alighted from the trains carrying them from Mississippi, needed to amplify their blues to keep up.⁶¹⁷ Thus, the Chicago blues (and, later, rock 'n' roll) are muscular, noisy musical forms because of the muscular, noisy *milieux* in which they developed.

However, the amplification of blues music in Chicago was not merely a necessity; there is ample evidence that the supposedly "anti-modern" musicians who developed Chicago-style blues during the 1940s and 1950s recognized the innovative sonic potential presented by electrified instruments. Muddy Waters realized shortly after deciding to

⁶¹⁴ David Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880-1940* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), p. 334.

⁶¹⁵ Palmer, *Deep Blues*, p. 118.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 120.

⁶¹⁷ Charlie Gillett, *The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock 'n' Roll* (New York: Dell, 1970), p. 1.

“plug in” that his electric guitar did not merely make the notes he played sound louder than on his acoustic; “it also made [them] sound *different*.”⁶¹⁸ For example, when bending a string to achieve the “blues notes” that gave the music its distinctive sound, guitarists were able to make the note sound even more warped than on an acoustic.⁶¹⁹ Even the archetypical Delta bluesman, Robert Johnson, who made his unforgettably evocative music with simply his acoustic guitar and his own voice, was rumored to have been exploring the possibility of putting together an electrified blues band before his untimely death in 1938.⁶²⁰

The issue of modernity as personified by electricity in the blues also occasioned a quarrel between Howlin’ Wolf and his record company, Chess. To capitalize on the blues’ popularity amongst the white “hippie” audience, Chess attempted to repackage Wolf and Waters as psychedelic “acid” bluesmen.⁶²¹ Wolf’s forced contribution to this credibility-damaging campaign was the cumbersomely-titled *This Is Howlin’ Wolf’s New Album. He Doesn’t Like It. He Didn’t Like His Electric Guitar At First Either*—the implication being, if the skeptical record-buyer would only keep an open mind, he would be rewarded.⁶²² When the record was released, Wolf was furious—and not just because

⁶¹⁸ Murray, *Crosstown Traffic*, p. 118.

⁶¹⁹ Robert Santelli, “A Century of the Blues,” in Guralnick, et. al., eds., *The Blues*, p. 34.

⁶²⁰ Palmer, *Deep Blues*, p. 131.

⁶²¹ Nadine Cohodas, *Spinning Blues Into Gold: The Chess Brothers and the Legendary Chess Records* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2000), p. 210.

⁶²² Another implication being, “Who cares if the artist doesn’t like it? You will...” Howlin’ Wolf, *This is Howlin’ Wolf’s New Album, etc....* (Chess, 1969). For a discussion of Muddy Waters’ “psychedelic albums,” *Electric Mud* (1968) and *After the Rain* (1969), see Chapter 5.

the record itself was critically panned. He had, he claimed, picked up the electric guitar with enthusiasm, and much earlier than many of his contemporaries had—he had led an electrified band even before he moved up north from Memphis in 1952.⁶²³ That the Chess-propagated myth was in any way believable was the result of the company’s attempts earlier in the decade to package Wolf and Waters as *acoustic folk* bluesmen, to cash in on the popularity of the American folk revival. Only as the result of *this* marketing ploy could the Chess brothers then turn around and sell the idea that Howlin’ Wolf was some kind of Luddite, who did not like to play electric blues.⁶²⁴

Industrial modernity was not just a function of the electrification of the instruments used to play the blues; it was also arguably woven into the very musical and lyrical structure of the blues. Cultural scholar Carlo Rotella writes that urban blues expressed a “mechanized, routinized, mass-produced—that is, industrialized—sound and experience.”⁶²⁵ This is especially true of the “riff”—the pattern of notes, played by the rhythm guitarist, whose continuous repetition forms, along with the beat of the drums, the rhythmic motor of most blues songs—which is at one level a musical mimicry of mechanized mass production.⁶²⁶ The driving pace of jazz and blues seemed to echo the frenetic pace of modern, urban life—and was seen as doing so by numerous

⁶²³ Murray, *Crosstown Traffic*, p. 134.

⁶²⁴ For a detailed study of the Chess brothers’ various attempts to “repackage” their artists to capitalize on this or that trend, and the misunderstandings that inevitably followed, see Cohodas, *Spinning Blues Into Gold*.

⁶²⁵ Carlo Rotella, *Good With Their Hands: Boxers, Bluesmen and Other Characters From the Rust Belt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), p. 64.

⁶²⁶ The guitarist’s riff is usually doubled, and thus augmented, by the band’s piano player and/or harmonica player. Dinerstein, *Swinging the Machine*, pp. 72-73.

commentators on both sides of the Atlantic.⁶²⁷ In juxtaposing this crunching, repetitious mass-produced pace with the ostensibly more “authentic” and emotionally expressive improvisations of lead guitar and voice, the blues musical structure posits a metaphor for the individual man, coping with the alienations of modernity: even with the din of industrial noise going on in the background, the solo artist can still make a statement of individuality.⁶²⁸ As young men yearning to make their own mark as individuals, young British men took this metaphor to heart, elevating the “solo” to a position of primacy in their music. By the time psychedelic and “progressive” rock emerged, sometimes the “solos,” plural, were the whole point of the song.⁶²⁹

The blues confronts industrial urban modernity in its lyrics as well as in its musical structure. To be sure, rural images, locations and even barnyard animals abound in the blues, as do instances where bluesmen refer to themselves as “country boys.” The most evocative such image was the “crossroads,” where the bluesman met the Devil to barter his soul away. This was obviously a desolate country crossroads; such a diabolical deal could never have occurred at a busy city intersection! Since at heart, Chicago blues was an updating of the older Delta styles that rural Southern blacks had brought with them, such tropes would always have a central place in the idiom. However, one of the

⁶²⁷ See, for example, French modernist architect Le Corbusier’s musings on the subject of jazz and industrial modernity in his memoir, *When the Cathedrals Were White* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1947), pp. 159-69.

⁶²⁸ Ben Goertzel, “The Rock Guitar Solo: From Expression to Simulation,” in *Popular Music and Society* (Spring 1991), reprinted in Chris Potash, ed., *The Jimi Hendrix Companion: Three Decades of Commentary* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996), pp. 108-09.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 112.

updates given to the Delta blues by its urban practitioners was to augment its lyrical storehouse by drawing on the contours of the modern urban landscape.⁶³⁰

Two of the most heavily-used manifestations of urban industrial modernity are the train and the automobile. Both vehicles serve as testaments to speed, power and modern technology and design. They also serve as means of attaining the freedom of the “open road” that Americans in general (and bluesmen specifically) held so dear. The pursuit of freedom was often portrayed in African-American culture using train metaphors. The arrangement of farmhouses, cellars and tunnels that conveyed runaway slaves to freedom in the North (or, after 1850, to Canada) was dubbed the “Underground Railroad;” such is the power of this metaphor that the incorrect notion that it was actually a clandestine railway line has proven difficult to completely eradicate from American popular understanding.⁶³¹ Likewise, the African-American gospel music tradition is rife with references to the “train carrying people to deliverance,” most notably in the “This Train (Is Bound for Glory),” which was recorded by numerous black singers and gospel groups—and, decades later, by Bob Dylan.⁶³²

In the twentieth century, the image of the train as the chugging embodiment of freedom was entrenched by itinerant bluesmen who “hoboed” and “rode the blinds” throughout the South, and sometimes to points north. Johnny Shines, a bluesman who is

⁶³⁰ Rotella, *Good With Their Hands*, p. 67.

⁶³¹ Fergus Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the Battle for the Soul of America* (New York: Amistad Books, 2005), p. 121.

⁶³² Mike Marqusee, *Wicked Messenger: Bob Dylan and the 1960s* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), p. 123.

(perhaps unfairly) best remembered as the friend and traveling companion of Robert Johnson, characterized Johnson as

[the kind of] guy, you could wake him up any time and he was ready to *go*. Say, for instance, you had come from Memphis to Helena, and we'd play there all night probably and lay down to sleep the next morning and hear a train. You say, "Robert, I hear a train. Let's catch it." He wouldn't exchange no words with you. He's just ready to go. We'd go right back to Memphis if that's where the train was going. It didn't make him no difference. Just so he was going.⁶³³

The train offered the freedom of motion for motion's sake, and the African-American bluesman took full advantage of it. Johnson, although portrayed at the time of his posthumous encounter with the British blues enthusiasts as an untraveled country rube, "rode the blinds" as far away as Kansas City, Chicago, New York City and even Canada.⁶³⁴

The notion that the train offered mobility and, thus, freedom, came to its culmination with the Great Migration, when the railroad conveyed African-Americans searching for better economic and social opportunities to northern industrial centers like Chicago, Detroit and Gary, Indiana, by the thousands.⁶³⁵ The Chicago bluesmen-to-be were sprinkled in among these train-borne throngs, migrating north in the 1940s and 1950s with the promise of better money (whether in the factories, the nightclubs or both) luring them to the big city. Howlin' Wolf was a notable exception—he drove to Chicago

⁶³³ Johnny Shines, quoted in Palmer, *Deep Blues*, p. 118.

⁶³⁴ Barry Lee Pearson and Bill McCulloch, *Robert Johnson: Lost and Found* (hereafter referred to as *Lost and Found*) (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 7.

⁶³⁵ Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's new Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 32.

in his station wagon—but almost every other important Chicago bluesman shared this formative railroad experience.⁶³⁶

Thus, it should not be surprising that the train—both as a literal, sensory experience, and as a metaphor—should find a place of prominence in the bluesman’s lyrics. In his masterful work on the importance of the railroad to American culture, James McPherson writes that

[To] the people who comprised the vernacular level of American society... the machine might have been loud and frightening, but its whistle and its wheels promised movement. And since a commitment to both freedom and movement was the basic promise of democracy, it was probable that such people would view the locomotive as a challenge to the integrative powers of their imaginations.⁶³⁷

Literary scholar Houston A. Baker attests to their powerful responses to that challenge, claiming that “the signal expressive achievement of blues, then, lay in their translation of technological innovativeness, unsettling demographic fluidity and boundless frontier energy into expression which attracted avid interest from the American masses.”⁶³⁸

This translation can be heard in a multitude of train blues, most of which celebrate the railroad’s speed, power and freedom of motion. Hopping on a railroad car seemed to assure the bluesman of unlimited choice. In Lead Belly’s “Leavin’ Blues,” the protagonist sets off for the station (in the early morning, of course), determined to catch a

⁶³⁶ Mike Rowe, *Chicago Blues: The City and the Music* (New York: Da Capo, 1975), p. 34.

⁶³⁷ James A. McPherson, *Railroad: Trains and Train People in American Culture* (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 6.

⁶³⁸ Houston A. Baker, “Introduction to *Blues, Ideology and African-American Literature*,” reprinted in Steven C. Tracy, ed., *Write Me a Few of Your Lines: A Blues Reader* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), p. 465.

train out of town, armed only with the knowledge that the train is on the “C&O” (Chesapeake & Ohio) line, but not where it is headed or how long it will take to get there.⁶³⁹ Moreover, the protagonist does not seem to care that he does not know this information. Like Robert Johnson, the bluesman traveled light and cared only that the train was taking him somewhere else.

Of course, mobility was a double-edged sword, with the train granting the bluesman his freedom in one instant, and spirited away his woman in the next. In “Mystery Train,” Junior Parker bemoans the “long black train” that “took my baby and gone;” when covered by Elvis Presley, this commentary on the negative aspects of train-borne motion would become one of American, and thus British, rock ‘n’ roll’s founding texts.⁶⁴⁰ In “Love In Vain,” Robert Johnson sees his own heartbreak (“my blues”) in the receding red and blue lights of the train that carried his woman out of town and away from him (after he had carried her suitcases, no less). In both of these blues—and in others besides—it is worth noting that the train is responsible for the woman’s departure. It is not a conscious decision on the woman’s part, or some wrongdoing on his, that has driven her from him. It was in moments such as these, when the train represented a negative occurrence, that the bluesman realized (however briefly) that he could not actually control the train (or, by extension, technological modernity itself). The only men in the blues idiom that are capable of doing so are the conductor, the engineer and the fireman, and, understandably, these three men are held culpable for the “theft” of the

⁶³⁹ Huddie “Lead Belly” Ledbetter, “Leavin’ Blues,” *The Library of Congress Recordings* (Rounder, 1995).

⁶⁴⁰ Commentators have not overlooked the fact that the “long black train” is also a thinly-veiled phallic reference. Nick Tosches, *Unsung Heroes of Rock ‘n’ Roll: The Birth of Rock in the Wild Years Before Elvis* (New York: Da Capo, 1999), p. 67.

woman in equal measure with their machine (e.g., in Otis Rush's "So Many Roads, So Many Trains").⁶⁴¹

The train could also be conjured up musically as well as lyrically—what musicologist Albert Murray calls "locomotive onomatopoeia."⁶⁴² The blues harmonica, especially once electrified, was the perfect musical instrument to evoke the haunting sound of the train whistle. Sonny Boy Williamson II and "Little Walter" Jacobs were especially well-known for their ability to make their harmonicas sound like a train. Paul Butterfield opened the train blues, "All Aboard"—the opening track of *Fathers and Sons*, his 1969 collaboration with Muddy Waters—with two harmonica blasts that admirably recreate the whistle made by the train as it prepares to pull out of the station; to cap this mimesis, Waters follows Butterfield by calling out, "All aboard!"⁶⁴³ Blues guitarists could also suggest the chugging-along of the train on its tracks with rhythmic strumming. Perhaps the finest example of this can be found in Robert Johnson's "Rambling On My Mind," in which Johnson interrupts himself in the middle of a verse about catching "the first mail train I see" to say, "Think I hear one comin' now," and then speeds up his loping guitar fill to a vigorous strum that replicates the onrushing train.⁶⁴⁴

Historians have rightly accorded the train a prominent place in the development of the always-elusive American "character" or "psyche." James A. Ward neatly labels the Americans as a "railroad people," and George Douglas argues that trains "determined the

⁶⁴¹ Otis Rush, "So Many Roads, So Many Trains," *Chess Blues Classics, vol. 1: 1957-1967* (MCA/Chess, 1997).

⁶⁴² Albert Murray, *Stomping the Blues* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), pp. 161-62.

⁶⁴³ Waters, "All Aboard," *Fathers and Sons*.

⁶⁴⁴ Johnson, "Rambling On My Mind," *King of the Delta Blues Singers, Vol. 1*.

essence of life” in urban, industrial America.⁶⁴⁵ These statements are also applicable to the British, who were themselves very much a “railroad people” (even if in Britain there was far less capacity for travel across such enormous distances as there was in the United States).⁶⁴⁶ In this respect, railroad culture provides yet another cultural common ground between the American and British popular experience, and thus, another point of entry for the British into African-American blues culture. A blues like Howlin’ Wolf’s “Smokestack Lightning,” with its equation of the power of the urban factory and that of the locomotive, could resonate just as much with denizens of Birmingham or Manchester as it would with those of Chicago or Detroit. The proof lay in the literally dozens of versions of “Smokestack Lightning” hammered out by fledgling British blues bands (rivaling “Got My Mojo Working” and “I’m a Man” in terms of the frequency with which it was covered).⁶⁴⁷ In fact, early publicity for the Who attempted to distinguish them from the rest of the “blues boom” by announcing that the band *did not* cover the Howlin’ Wolf chestnut.⁶⁴⁸

As the twentieth century progressed, both American culture in general, and blues culture specifically, made room in their collective imagination for another modern

⁶⁴⁵ James A. Ward, *Railroads and the Character of America* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), p. 30; George Douglas, *All Aboard!: The Railroad in American Life* (New York: Paragon House, 1992), pp. 235-36.

⁶⁴⁶ See, for instance, two recent works that deal with the impact of the railroad on British society and culture: Ian Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain: The Epitome of Modernity* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); and A.K.B. Evans and J.V. Gough, eds., *The Impact of the Railway on Society in Britain: Essays in honour of Jack Simmons* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003).

⁶⁴⁷ Howlin’ Wolf, “Smokestack Lightning,” *Moanin’ in the Moonlight* (Chess, 1962).

⁶⁴⁸ John Atkins, *The Who on Record: A Critical History, 1963-1998* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press, 2000), p. 47.

machine: the automobile. At the risk of mouthing platitudes, the automobile has held a prominent place in American culture ever since its invention in the late nineteenth century. Like the train, it exemplified (and continues to exemplify) speed, power and mobility. Unlike the train, however, the automobile is a great deal more personal. It allows the motorist the opportunity to experience the freedom of the open road by him or herself, without having to adhere to a railway timetable, as long as he or she had the money for a tank of gasoline.⁶⁴⁹

To Europeans, the automobile also exemplified America itself, taking its place in a representative bricolage that also featured jazz music, skyscrapers and gangster movies.⁶⁵⁰ As the result of the innovations brought about in mass production technique by automobile manufacturer Henry Ford in the 1910s and 1920s, the automobile was also heavily bound up, on both sides of the Atlantic, in intellectual discourses regarding the potential risks and benefits to modern industrial society of mechanization, mass culture and scientific progress.⁶⁵¹ These issues, bracketed together under the shorthand term “Fordism,” came to stand for the ambivalent nature of American society and culture; thus, so did the automobile, as the product whose manufacture had given rise to “Fordism” in the first place.⁶⁵²

⁶⁴⁹ Wolfgang Sachs, *For Love of the Automobile*, trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), p. 13.

⁶⁵⁰ Rob Kroes, *If You've Seen One, You've Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p. 78.

⁶⁵¹ Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 42.

⁶⁵² The most notable contribution to this discourse was Antonio Gramsci's “Americanism and Fordism,” in Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio

America's "car culture" only intensified and entrenched itself after the Second World War, and the African-American bluesman was as active a participant in it as any other man with power and sex on his mind.⁶⁵³ Interestingly, blues culture's most readily apparent tropic accomplishment in this regard was the conflation of automobile and woman. Cars, of course, have been feminized ever since they were invented—Henry Ford's first "Model T" was nicknamed "Tin Lizzie," for example. However, in blues culture, it is often the other way around: the bluesman refers to his woman in terms that he might use to refer to a car.⁶⁵⁴ Waters, for example, deployed an *au courant* advertising technique when he urged his woman, as oil company Exxon likewise urged its customers, to "put a tiger in your tank" in the blues of the same name. Here, not only was Waters co-opting the perceived speed and power of the tiger (as was Exxon), but he was also equating his "loving" with the "fuel" that the woman-as-automobile needed to keep going.⁶⁵⁵

Robert Johnson's "Terraplane Blues," which suggests automotive maintenance as a stand-in for sex, goes a step further, and establishes the protagonist's expertise on two

Callari (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). Also, see Nolan, *Visions of Modernity*, pp. 54-57.

⁶⁵³ Christopher Finch, *Highways to Heaven: The Auto Biography of America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 174-76

⁶⁵⁴ There is an interesting parallel between blues culture and mainstream poetry in this regard. See e.e. cummings, "She being Brand" (1926), which conflates taking a girl's virginity with taking a new car out on its first drive. cummings, *Collected Poems* (New York: Liveright, 1994).

⁶⁵⁵ Waters, "I'll Put a Tiger in Your Tank," *Muddy Waters Live at Newport*.

levels: that of the driver, and that of the auto mechanic.⁶⁵⁶ Suspicious that his woman has been cheating on him (“Somebody’s been runnin’ my batteries down on this machine”), the protagonist plaintively asks, “Who been driving my Terraplane for you since I been gone?”⁶⁵⁷ Moving right along, the protagonist suggests a few “tune-ups” that he can perform for her now that he has her alone:

I’m gonna heist [sic] your hood, mama, I’m bound to check your oil (repeat)

...

Now you know the coils ain’t even buzzin’,

The generator won’t get the spark,

Motor’s in a bad condition,

You gotta have these batteries charged.

Apparently satisfied that his woman is “road ready,” Johnson settles in for a test-drive—“when I mash down on your starter, then your little spark plug will give me fire.”⁶⁵⁸ Thirty-seven years later, Robert Plant and Jimmy Page were so taken with Johnson’s double entendres that they composed “Trampled Underfoot,” which is inspired by “Terraplane” without being a cover version—or, as was so often the case in Led Zeppelin’s work, a blatant lyrical larceny.⁶⁵⁹

British youth became as enamored of the American car as their American counterparts, an affection that is somewhat bizarre, given that the British and European auto industries were just as capable of producing powerful, flashy sports cars during this

⁶⁵⁶ Lest the reader be confused into thinking of a pontoon boat, the “Terraplane” in the song’s title refers to the Hudson Motor Company’s Terraplane, a large, powerful car that was popular in the late 1930s. See Harry’s Blues Lyrics, “Robert Johnson – Terraplane Blues” (http://blueslyrics.tripod.com/lyrics/robert_johnson/terraplane_blues.htm#top) (accessed December 8, 2007).

⁶⁵⁷ Johnson, “Terraplane Blues,” *King of the Delta Blues Singers, Vol. 1*.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁹ Led Zeppelin, “Trampled Underfoot,” *Physical Graffiti* (Swan Song, 1974).

period (James Bond's emblematic Aston Martin DB5 springs immediately to mind).⁶⁶⁰ The Cadillac, for instance, was another thing that every American just had as a master of course. The supposed ubiquity of the sports car, and the speed and power it conferred on its owner, was even extended to African-Americans. Listening to his beloved blues records, Clapton added another item to the "to-do-whilest-in-America" list he had been mentally writing since grammar school:

I would picture what kind of car [the bluesman] drove, what it would smell like inside. Me and Jeff [Beck] had this idea of one day owning a black Cadillac or a black Stingray that smelled of sex inside and had tinted windows and a great sound system. That's how I visualized these guys living.⁶⁶¹

Here is another disconnect between the often-mythic world of male blues culture, and the ways in which "these guys" actually lived. Although they were popular Chess recording artists, Waters and Wolf had to content themselves with station wagons, not sports cars. Even then, these cars were used primarily to transport their entire bands and all their equipment to gigs, not to cruise around town impressing women.⁶⁶² And in the Deep South, it was quite a status symbol for a black man even to have a station wagon.⁶⁶³ Having purchased one to drive himself and his band up to Chicago from Memphis in 1952, Wolf bragged, "I'm the onliest one [who] drove out of the South like a

⁶⁶⁰ James Chapman, *Licence to Thrill: A Cultural History of the James Bond Films* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 87. In fact, as Christopher Finch points out, there was even a craze for British sports cars in *America* in the 1950s. Finch, *Highways to Heaven*, p. 178.

⁶⁶¹ Eric Clapton, quoted in Dan Forte, "The Eric Clapton Story," *Guitar Player*, v. 19, no. 7 (July 1985), p. 57.

⁶⁶² Segrest and Hoffmann, *Moanin' at Midnight*, p. 96.

⁶⁶³ One can only imagine how the Ku Klux Klan, for example, might have viewed the spectacle of a black man driving a flashy sports car.

gentleman.”⁶⁶⁴ This was still an era where most bluesmen (and, in a wider historical sense, most of the African-Americans who came north as part of the Great Migration) simply took the train.⁶⁶⁵ And yet the idea of Muddy Waters’ non-existent Cadillac fired the British male imagination nonetheless.

The big, flashy American car came to symbolize “America” itself—a land of youth, freedom, wealth and masculine power—and could be used to point up the contrast with enfeebled, sclerotic, effeminate Britain. A revealing incident from early in the Who’s career brings together all of these symbolic elements. Pete Townshend had purchased a “large and conspicuous American car” (a 1958 Cadillac) from his cut of the Who’s early royalties.⁶⁶⁶ The Who’s guitarist parked his pride and joy in London’s fashionable Belgravia neighborhood, in a street through which Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, happened to be chauffeured regularly.⁶⁶⁷ After a few passes through the neighborhood, the Queen Mother requested that the police have the car removed, as it “offended the royal eye.”⁶⁶⁸ The car was duly removed, and one imagines that Townshend had to pay a stiff fine to recover it. Townshend recalled to his biographer that

⁶⁶⁴ Wolf, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 98.

⁶⁶⁵ Baldwin, *Chicago’s new Negroes*, p. 21.

⁶⁶⁶ Townshend’s car marked him off from the Mods, who preferred European-made scooters and would have decried the 1958 Cadillac as too much of an outmoded “Rocker” mode of transport. Townshend admitted to interviewer Pete Frame that he had to keep it a secret from “the little mod chicks” so they would go out with him. Townshend, interview with Frame, in “Chatting With Pete Townshend,” reprinted in Frame, ed., *The Road to Rock: A Zigzag Book of Interviews* (New York: Charisma Books, 1974), p. 25.

⁶⁶⁷ Geoffrey Giuliano, with Pete Townshend, *Behind Blue Eyes: A Life of Pete Townshend* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996), p. 63.

⁶⁶⁸ Davey, *English Imaginaries*, p. 85.

it was this incident that inspired him to write the Who's first breakthrough hit, 1965's "My Generation," a blistering attack on what cultural critic Kevin Davey calls "the unresponsive fusion of age and power, the 'old' which [Townshend] would rather die than become."⁶⁶⁹

The final modern masterable machine in the blues tradition is, of course, the guitar. It is arguable that in the blues, the electric guitar was not the musical centerpiece and cult symbol that it would become in Anglo-American blues-rock. Rather it was one crucial instrument amongst many—drums, bass guitar, harmonica, piano, vocals, sometimes even horns—in Chicago blues' driving ensemble sound.⁶⁷⁰ The balance was tilted even more heavily against the guitar in urban soul music, where "nothing could compete for primacy with the human voice."⁶⁷¹ However, that the electric guitar did not dominate blues music did not mean that it was without at least the germ of the potent technological and sexual symbolism with which it would come to be invested.

Like the train and the automobile, the electric guitar seemed to represent the triumph of modern technological innovation. By 1958, American guitar manufacturers had introduced the five guitar models that would come to define trans-Atlantic rock 'n' roll—Fender's Telecaster (1948) and Stratocaster (1954), Gibson's Les Paul (1952),

⁶⁶⁹ Giuliano, *Behind Blue Eyes*, p. 64, quoted in Davey, *English Imaginaries*, p. 85.

⁶⁷⁰ Francis Davis, *The History of the Blues: The Roots, the Music, the People: From Charley Patton to Robert Cray* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), p. 226.

⁶⁷¹ Peter Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Dream of Southern Freedom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), p. 54.

Gretsch's Country Gentleman and Rickenbacker's Capri (both 1958).⁶⁷² At first, however, such high-quality musical instruments were not widely available in Britain.⁶⁷³ Numerous British rock musicians reminisce about their first guitars as being highly-touted knock-offs of popular American models that were so shoddily made that they broke after a few months, or were too heavy to hold properly, or had strings that were too thick and heavy to depress onto the fretboard properly.⁶⁷⁴ Even at that, these guitars were so expensive that parents or older siblings had to be persuaded to provide a down payment and co-sign a "hire-purchase" agreement (basically, a monthly payment plan) in order to acquire them.⁶⁷⁵ Little wonder, then, that Brian May (later of Queen), Roger Daltrey and Jeff Beck decided simply to build their own guitars out of discarded wood (an old fireplace in May's case), metal and wire, buying the electrical parts at hobbyist shops around London.⁶⁷⁶

Whether they were homemade, or inadequate knock-offs of the prized American models, or—and this was extremely rare—the genuine articles, received as presents from relatives or friends who brought them in from America, the budding British musicians

⁶⁷² André Millard, "Solidbody Electric Guitars," in Millard, ed., *The Electric Guitar*, pp. 89-104.

⁶⁷³ André Millard and Rebecca McSwain, "The Guitar Hero," in Millard, ed., *The Electric Guitar*, p. 142.

⁶⁷⁴ Mo Foster, *17 Watts?: The Birth of British Rock Guitar* (London: Sanctuary, 2000), p. 32; Clapton, *Clapton*, p. 23.

⁶⁷⁵ Annette Carson, *Jeff Beck: Crazy Fingers* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2001); Foster, *17 Watts?*, p. 34.

⁶⁷⁶ Jacky Gunn and Jim Jenkins, *Queen: As It Began* (New York: Hyperion, 1992), pp. 3-4; Roger Daltrey, interview in *Amazing Journey: The Story of the Who*, dir. Murray Lerner (2007); Carson, *Jeff Beck: Crazy Fingers*, p. 21. Amazingly, Brian May still uses his homemade guitar, which he named the "Red Special," to this day.

treated the guitar in much the same way as they treated any of the coveted forms of American mass consumer culture. Proving that the Mod sensibility was still very much alive, they obsessed over the guitar's every detail—the width of the neck, the dimensions and shape of the guitar's body, the distance between the strings and the fretboard, even the manufacturers' serial number.⁶⁷⁷ They committed themselves to learning the guitar's secrets (recall that most British blues musicians did not actually know how to play their instruments at first, and most were self-taught). For most guitar gods-in-training, the most sought-after trick was the ability to “bend” notes.⁶⁷⁸ However, once they learned these secrets, they did not usually guard them as jealously as the Mods would have if it were a Motown record or a double-breasted suit jacket.

The cult of the electric guitar intensified during the British Invasion, as guitarists' augmented incomes and newly-acquired access to retailers in the United States gave them the opportunity finally to acquire the instruments that they had only been able to lust after in manufacturers' catalogues. Guitar-acquisition became an obsession and a pastime, as guitarists began to buy up many more of them than they could ever use on-stage. Indeed, *owning* a guitar (or a dozen) began to rival *playing* a guitar as a badge of masculine pride.⁶⁷⁹ A symbolic economy also emerged, whereby male friendship bonds were forged or solidified by the emotionally-freighted practice of giving one another guitars. This practice had its roots in the early days of the blues boom, with father figure Cyril Davies,

⁶⁷⁷ Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*, p. 324.

⁶⁷⁸ *E.g.*, Jeff Beck, interview with Mike Figgis, in *Red, White and Blues*, dir. Mike Figgis (2003).

⁶⁷⁹ This obsession was lampooned in the heavy metal spoof film, *This is Spinal Tap*, dir. Rob Reiner (1984).

who was known on occasion to take fledgling guitarists who were unhappy with their own instruments to music shops in London and buy them a suitable replacement.⁶⁸⁰ The practice continued, helped along (and invested with more symbolic meaning) by the aforementioned socioeconomic developments. On the eve of his first trip to America with the Yardbirds in June 1965, Jeff Beck presented Jimmy Page with a rare 1958 Fender Telecaster, both as a token of his friendship, and presumably as a thank-you gift for Page's recommending Beck to the Yardbirds when they were looking for a replacement for Eric Clapton the month previously.⁶⁸¹

Throughout all of this, the British tendency toward bricolage and tinkering continued unabated. One notable example of this tendency was the development of the "fuzz box," a device that distorted the guitar sound so that it mimicked a buzzing motor; this effect, of which the British became particularly fond, can be heard perhaps most famously on the Rolling Stones' "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction."⁶⁸² The device was not a British invention; Jimmy Page remembered hearing one (which he somehow learned was produced by the Gibson guitar manufacturer) on a rockabilly song from the 1950s. As with the electric guitar itself, there were British-made versions of the device available, but they were, in Page's opinion at least, "a disaster."⁶⁸³ So Page enlisted the help of Roger Mayer, a friend who worked for the British Admiralty. In a striking example of the military-industrial complex being subverted in the name of counter-cultural innovation,

⁶⁸⁰ Geoff Bradford, quoted in Richard Newman, *John Mayall: Bluesbreaker* (Chessington, UK: Castle Communications, 1995), p. 81.

⁶⁸¹ Davis, *Hammer of the Gods*, p. 21.

⁶⁸² The Rolling Stones, "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" (single – Decca, 1965).

⁶⁸³ Davis, *Hammer of the Gods*, p. 17.

Mayer used the facilities of the Crown to build an improved “fuzz box,” which Page, Townshend, Beck and Jimi Hendrix all used to great effect in creating the psychedelic rock music of the late 1960s.⁶⁸⁴

The burgeoning relationship between British musicians and the electric guitar is a useful point of entry for our understanding of the situation of the British blues network at the confluence of two successive economic-cultural drifts in British society. First, the British blues network inherited a residual mentality of “making do” that was left over from the days of wartime and postwar rationing.⁶⁸⁵ This mentality also could be seen at the heart of the British skiffle craze. If the proper instruments were unavailable or too expensive, the would-be guitarist resorted to a bricolage of whatever was handy—as the examples of May and Beck illustrate.⁶⁸⁶ On the other hand, the British blues network was very much a product of the mass consumer cultural age, and so too was their love of the electric guitar. Mass consumer culture played a formative role at nearly every step of the process by which the British absorbed and re-transmitted the blues during this period. Without the stuff of consumer culture, the British would probably never have heard African-American popular music; and they certainly would never have thought to make records. Without consumer culture’s sheer variety and quantities, the cult of the electric guitar would have been less likely. What would be the point of collecting literally hundreds of guitars, if there were not so many different models in different colors and with different technical features? It would have made guitar-worship unlikely at best.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 17.

⁶⁸⁵ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls and Consumption, 1939-1955* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 56.

⁶⁸⁶ Foster, *17 Watts*, p. 41.

As a masterable machine, the electric guitar was also seen as a symbol of, or a substitute for, a woman. Several commentators have pointed out the similarities between the curvaceous shape of the guitar and that of the female body; both “bodies” are perceived as potential sites of male mastery—that is, as sites where a man can demonstrate his proficiency and dexterity with his hands.⁶⁸⁷ The guitar was the blues guitarist’s constant companion and on one level, his eternal “Other,” a visible means by which to express his masculinity. Many blues musicians referred to their guitars as “she,” although few have gone as far as B.B. King, who named his guitar “Lucille.”⁶⁸⁸ Jimi Hendrix and Keith Richards were known to sleep with their guitars, thus seemingly bestowing upon their instruments a level of respect and intimacy that was not usually extended to groupies, who were not often allowed to spend the night.⁶⁸⁹ In fact, such was the intimacy between the blues guitarist and his guitar that, until quite recently, blues scholarship had misread the “easy rider” that appears in so many blues (Lead Belly’s “C.C. Rider,” for instance) as the bluesman’s guitar, when in fact it is more likely that this term refers to a sexual partner.⁶⁹⁰

Conversely, the electric guitar has also been pressed into service as a symbolic phallus. Musicologist Steve Waksman has written an entire book, *Instruments of Desire:*

⁶⁸⁷ Millard and McSwain, “The Guitar Hero,” in Millard, ed., *The Electric Guitar*, p. 145. More disturbingly, Charley Patton equated manual mastery of a woman with that of a guitar when, slapping his guitar to keep the beat, he would announce to his audience, “This is how I beat my woman!” Gussow, *Seems Like Murder Here*, p. 216.

⁶⁸⁸ B.B. King, with David Ritz, *Blues All Around Me: The Autobiography of B.B. King* (New York: Avon Books, 1997), pp. 43-44.

⁶⁸⁹ Millard and McSwain, “The Guitar Hero,” in Millard, ed., *The Electric Guitar*, p. 145.

⁶⁹⁰ Pearson and McCulloch, *Lost and Found*, p. 71; Lead Belly, “C.C. Rider,” *The Library of Congress Recordings*.

The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience, which deals with various cultural and musical aspects of the guitar-as-phallus trope.⁶⁹¹ The electric guitar is peculiarly well-placed to double as a phallus, usually hanging from the guitarist at groin level and manipulated in a masturbatory fashion. Many blues-rock and heavy metal guitarists adopted an even more explicit posture, holding the instrument so that it jutted out from their bodies like an erect penis (as opposed to the more traditional stance of holding it flat against the body with the guitar's neck off to one side). This explicit connection between guitar and phallus is one of several reasons for which the hard blues-based music pioneered by the British blues network has come to be called "cock rock."

In one of his more bizarre public pronouncements, Robert Plant unconsciously confirmed this connection—as well as his status as one of the most visible purveyors of "cock rock"—by suggesting the possibility that his status as a sexual icon was due to female fans having an unobstructed view of the bulge in his jeans, unlike guitarist Jimmy Page, whose guitar was blocking that particular area of his anatomy.⁶⁹² Likewise, Paul Stanley of American heavy-metal band KISS put it bluntly when he told an interviewer for a PBS documentary on the history of the guitar, "it's an extension of what you've got between your legs."⁶⁹³ Even Peter Noone, of the decidedly *un*-cock-rock British Invasion band, Herman's Hermits, declared that he and his fellow countrymen were "English

⁶⁹¹ Steve Waksman, *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁶⁹² Robert Plant, interview in Paul Kendall and Dave Lewis, eds., *Led Zeppelin: In Their Own Words* (London: Omnibus, 1995), p. 105. One can only speculate as to what it might have meant (symbolically, not musically) for Page to employ a guitar with two necks during performances.

⁶⁹³ Paul Stanley, interview in *Guitar Heroes*, dir. Marc J. Sachnoff, in *The History of Rock 'n' Roll*, prod. Quincy Jones, Bob Meyrowitz and David Salzman, 10 vols. (1995).

guitar freaks!... they [guitars] are sort of like another organ on your body.”⁶⁹⁴ It takes very little imagination to guess which organ he meant.

It is important to note that the emphasis on the phallic nature of the electric guitar was not an overt component of the African-American blues tradition. The bluesman might refer to his penis using any number of colorful metaphors, but from a performative standpoint, the African-American blues guitarist did not generally make such a show of his guitar being a duplicate penis.⁶⁹⁵ It was his British disciples who began the fetishization of the guitar-as-phallus in earnest, just as it was the practitioners of heavy metal who pushed it to the often-ridiculous status that it enjoyed into the late 1980s.⁶⁹⁶

Thus, the blues idiom, far from being anti-modern or backward-looking, seemed not only to capture perfectly the essence of urban industrial and technological modernity, but also to provide its male protagonists with the opportunity to achieve mastery over that modernity, and, in so doing, to assert his masculinity. The automobile and the electric guitar were potential sites of male mastery, and the men who participated in both car culture and the burgeoning cult of the electric guitar were proud of their hard-won status as *cognoscenti*. The train was not a masterable machine—as blues that feature the train “taking” a woman away make evident—but it did bestow seemingly limitless spatial independence, and thus served as the means by which the bluesman could achieve mastery over the American landscape itself. Perhaps not surprisingly in light of my earlier assertions about the female-as-Other, all three blues tropes were heavily bound up

⁶⁹⁴ Peter Noone, interview in *Guitar Heroes*, dir. Marc J. Sachnoff.

⁶⁹⁵ Murray, *Crosstown Traffic*, p. 134.

⁶⁹⁶ Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*, p. 318.

with issues of female sexuality as well. The automobile and the guitar were objects of modern consumer culture that could be used to seduce a woman, but they were also often used as symbolic stand-ins for women themselves.

Conclusions

Whatever intellectual work the blues were meant to accomplish in the community that originally produced it, it is clear that, amongst young British males in the 1960s, the idiom and its cultural trappings provided a blueprint (no pun intended) for an alternative masculine ideal to the normative bourgeois masculinity that the post-war period had reinscribed. In the “bluesman,” who was himself a constructed artistic persona, the young Britisher found a “man-of-adventure” whom they perceived as skilled, self-assured, and sexually dynamic. He had attained power through accumulated knowledge (part of which was supernaturally-gained) as well as through violence. Furthermore, the bluesman seemed to have achieved mastery over the avatars of modernity—the industrial cityscape, the train, the automobile and the electric guitar—and was using them to assert his own masculine independence. Here was an archetype whom the young Britisher in search of his own masculine independence could contrast favorably with the “organization man” of 1950s Britain, and thus a role model to emulate. And so it was that a cadre of white middle-class European men, living in a former global power, began to “affiliate” themselves with a cadre of black, working-class American men, living in the new global superpower.

Most of the members of this latter cadre, as I discussed in the previous chapter, were still alive at the time of their “adoption” by young British blues enthusiasts. Thus, they could capitalize on their trans-Atlantic fame by participating in the blues package

tours of the 1960s. The British blues pantheon did, however, make room for one ghost—Robert Johnson. The man who came to be revered as the British R&B movement’s greatest hero and mentor had been dead for twenty-three years by the time he appeared on the British cultural radar. For this reason, and because of the almost-mystical devotion he inspired, he was different from the rest of the blues pantheon. In many other ways, however, his reception provides us with a fascinating case study, an encapsulation of many of the themes and issues that were in play amongst the British blues network. Thus, some attention must be paid to Robert Johnson, “the King of the Delta Blues Singers.”

CHAPTER FOUR
The Cult of the Delta Blues Singer:
Robert Johnson and British Cultural Mythmaking

At the age of sixteen—long before he was selling out football stadia, before his reputed divinity was inscribed on the walls of London subway terminals, even before he had played his first gig—Eric Clapton had an epiphany. A friend of his—like young Eric, a blues fanatic—had obtained a copy of Robert Johnson’s *King of the Delta Blues Singers*,⁶⁹⁷ and the two sat down in Eric’s flat to listen to it. The result was an almost visceral shock. “I actually couldn’t take it,” Clapton said, thirty years later. “[I]t was too much to cope with... It came as something of a shock to me that there could be anything so powerful.... It was almost like Robert Johnson was too strong to mix with other people.”⁶⁹⁸ Such was the intensity of Johnson’s music that Clapton could not bring himself to even listen to the record again for another six months. The second time, “[h]e got me like a bug. I got really bigoted and fanatical about it.”⁶⁹⁹

To be sure, Clapton has been fanatical about the entire genre of the blues. But he has always reserved his most sincere reverence for Johnson. Talking with blues chronicler Peter Guralnick, Clapton effused about Johnson, and the Delta tradition he represented, in almost apostolic terms. “It was almost like I’d been prepared each step of the way to receive him... like a religious experience that started out by hearing Chuck Berry, and then at each stage I was going further and further back, and deeper and deeper

⁶⁹⁷ Robert Johnson, *King of the Delta Blues Singers* (Columbia, 1961).

⁶⁹⁸ Eric Clapton, interview with Andrew Franklin, in Tony Scherman, “The Hellhound’s Trail: Following Robert Johnson,” *Musician*, no. 147 (January 1991), p. 33.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

into the source of the music, until I was ready for Robert Johnson.”⁷⁰⁰ Once ready, Clapton then set about evangelizing. He has paid homage to his hero almost every chance he has gotten, most notably by telling anyone who will listen about Johnson’s importance to the entire history of rock ‘n’ roll music. An early desire to include a Johnson cover version on each of his albums was not realized, but Clapton in some sense made up for his sins of omission with 2004’s *Me and Mr. Johnson*, an entire album of Johnson covers.⁷⁰¹

Clapton is certainly not unique in his obsession. Johnson has exerted a powerful hold on many of the most prominent British blues and rock ‘n’ roll musicians ever since the 1960s and, if the flurry of testimonials to Johnson that appeared in music magazines in the wake of the release of his *Complete Recordings* in 1990 are any indication, this hold is unlikely to be relaxed any time soon. Of course, as with Clapton, British blues and rock ‘n’ roll musicians were and still remain passionate about the blues itself, and about the many other original blues artists who served to inspire them. They might even claim other artists as their favorites—Eric Burdon of the Animals is partial to John Lee Hooker, while Van Morrison leans toward Huddie “Lead Belly” Ledbetter.⁷⁰² However, above all others (if not to the exclusion of those others), it is Johnson who provokes universal awe

⁷⁰⁰ Eric Clapton, interview with Peter Guralnick, in “Eric Clapton at the Passion Threshold,” *Musician*, no. 136 (February 1990), p. 46.

⁷⁰¹ Eric Clapton, *Me and Mr. Johnson* (Reprise, 2004).

⁷⁰² Eric Burdon with J. Marshall Craig, *Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood* (New York, Thunder Mouth Press, 2001), p. 52; John Collis, *Van Morrison: Inarticulate Speech of the Heart* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), p. 25.

and admiration. Thus it was with only slight hyperbole that *Musician* magazine bestowed on Johnson in 1990 the title “The Father of Rock ‘n’ Roll.”⁷⁰³

At first blush, Johnson’s preeminence seems a bit curious. After all, he recorded only twenty-nine songs in his short lifetime (plus another thirteen out-takes that never saw the light of day until 1990’s *Complete Recordings*), and none of them were what could be called “hot” sellers. By the time of the 1961 release of *King of the Delta Blues Singers*, Johnson had been dead for more than twenty years, “survived only by a few sketchy documents, [and] the fading memories of aging people who knew him or claimed to have known him decades ago.”⁷⁰⁴ In fact, it must be classified as a minor miracle that he was not lost to history entirely, as some pre-Second World War bluesmen must certainly have been.

If he had been, the British blues revival would probably have happened anyway; author Bruce Cook echoed Voltaire when he said, “If Robert Johnson had not existed, they would have had to invent him.”⁷⁰⁵ But Johnson *did* exist, and, as blues scholars Barry Lee Pearson and Bill McCulloch are quick to point out, *they* invented him anyway—or re-invented him.⁷⁰⁶ From the time of Johnson’s recording sessions in 1936 and 1937, until the moment that *King of the Delta Blues Singers* arrived in British and American record shops, a legend had been gathering around Johnson. Music critics and

⁷⁰³ Cover page, *Musician*, no. 147 (January 1991).

⁷⁰⁴ Patricia Schroeder, *Robert Johnson, Mythmaking and Contemporary American Culture* (hereafter referred to as *Robert Johnson*) (Urbana-Champaign, IL, 2004), p. 1.

⁷⁰⁵ Bruce Cook, *Listen to the Blues* (New York: Scribner’s, 1973), p. 74.

⁷⁰⁶ Barry Lee Pearson and Bill McCulloch, *Robert Johnson: Lost and Found* (hereafter referred to as *Lost and Found*) (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 36.

researchers spent the three decades in between filling in the many large gaps in Johnson's biography, adding color and mystery to what actually *was* known, and molding it all into a romantic image of a tormented, doomed loner whose days were marked by women, whiskey and *wanderlust* and whose nights were disturbed by visions of "playing hide-and-seek with Satan."⁷⁰⁷

This accretion of myths and flights-of-fancy about Robert Johnson took a single, definitive form when it was condensed into the text of the liner notes, written by Frank Driggs, that accompanied *King of the Delta Blues Singers*.⁷⁰⁸ As this album was, with a few exceptions, young British blues enthusiasts' only *entrée* to Johnson and his music, the legend thus became irrevocably bound up with both; after all, it was all right there in black-and-white as a sort of field guide to the raw, eerie music on the vinyl. In this way, as happened countless times over the course of the trans-Atlantic cultural relationship, America's ideas and cultural values rode piggy-back across the Atlantic with America's consumer goods.

Of course, as was also often the case, European consumers were not passive dupes; they did not unquestioningly accept the ideas and values they received. In this case, British blues enthusiasts were given to doubt many aspects of the Johnson legend—Eric Clapton, for instance, has consistently poured scorn on the myth whereby Johnson sold his soul to the Devil (on which more later) ever since the late 1960s.⁷⁰⁹ Even if they

⁷⁰⁷ James Marshall, "Let's Get Drunk and Truck: A Guide to the Party Blues," in Peter Guralnick, et. al., eds., *Martin Scorsese Presents The Blues: A Musical Journey* (hereafter referred to as *The Blues*) (New York: Amistad Books, 2003), p. 119.

⁷⁰⁸ Frank Driggs, liner notes accompanying Johnson, *King of the Delta Blues Singers*.

⁷⁰⁹ *E.g.*, Eric Clapton, interview with Andrew Franklin, p. 50.

did not swallow all the more lurid and fanciful stories, however, the general contours of Johnson's legend—the emotional torment, the uniqueness, the loneliness, the restlessness, the fascination with the mystical, and the carnality—did stick with the major figures of British blues and blues-based rock 'n' roll. It formed the underlying basis for much of the best rock music to emerge from the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, the story of how an Eric Clapton or a Keith Richards used the legend, how they came to simultaneously idolize and identify with Robert Johnson, must be examined.

The Life and Passion of Robert Johnson

What follows is a brief biography of Robert Johnson—as close to the verifiable truth, and as untangled from mythmaking and embellishment, as historians and researchers have been able to come over the sixty years. Robert Leroy Johnson was born on May 8, 1911, in Hazlehurst, Mississippi, the illegitimate son of Julia Dodds and Noah Johnson. The young Robert spent his childhood shuffling between Memphis, where Charles Dodds (Julia's ex-husband) lived, and Robinsonville, Mississippi, where Julia and her second husband had moved in 1918. While living in Memphis, Johnson developed a love of the blues, picking up a few rudimentary guitar pointers from his half-brothers on Charles Dodds' farm. Not much else is known about Robert's childhood; indeed, the next indisputable fact we know is that he was married in 1929, at the age of eighteen, to his first wife, Virginia Travis, who was fifteen.⁷¹⁰

It was around the time of his courtship of Virginia that Robert crossed paths with Edward "Son" House, a powerful and accomplished acoustic guitar player who would, decades later, find himself the darling of the American and British coffeehouse crowds

⁷¹⁰ Pearson and McCulloch, *Lost and Found*, p. 6.

during the 1950s blues revival. House had come to Robinsonville with his playing partner Willie Brown in search of gigs. It was at one such gig—likely a “jook joint”—that he made Robert’s acquaintance.⁷¹¹ Later, in the midst of House’s re-discovery, he remembered Robert as something of an irritant, an enthusiastic but unskilled guitar player who often tried to play during breaks in House and Brown’s set, and who just as often had to be chased away by House and Brown because his bad playing chased away their customers.⁷¹²

In 1930, Robert’s beloved wife, Virginia, died in childbirth, as did the baby. Robert’s grief, compounded by a visceral distaste of the sharecropping life that he had developed while living with Charles Dodds, and the otherwise gloomy prospects for a young unskilled laborer in Depression-era Mississippi, drove him onto the open road. Some accounts claim that Robert went off looking for Noah Johnson, his biological father.⁷¹³ On his travels, Robert supported himself by playing the harmonica at jook joints, house parties and church dances, and began to acquire an increasing proficiency on the guitar. In this, he was aided by a teacher, Ike Zinneman, as well as by long hours

⁷¹¹ “Jook” or “Juke joints” (from the Wolof, *dzug*, “disorderly or wicked”) were small shacks on the outskirts of Southern plantations, where the plantation workers would meet after the workday to eat, drink and dance to live music. Often these establishments doubled as brothels. In time, the definition of a jook joint expanded to include small-time blues clubs on the outskirts of Southern towns. From Clarence Major, *Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African-American Slang* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994).

⁷¹² Schroeder, *Robert Johnson*, p. 27.

⁷¹³ *Ibid*, p. 25.

listening to, and then attempting to imitate, various jazz and blues records and the radio—a practice known in jazz and blues circles as “woodshedding.”⁷¹⁴

Whatever else he may have done, and whether or not he was successful in tracking down his father, sources agree that Robert returned to Robinsonville (though they disagree on the length of his sojourn—anywhere from seven months to a year-and-a-half), where he proceeded to astound “Son” House and Willie Brown with his newfound skill.⁷¹⁵ The relative brevity of Robert’s absence, plus his supposed evasiveness about what he had spent those months doing, were probably the key factors in the rise of a rumor that, at a crossroads one particular midnight, he had sold his soul to the Devil in exchange for his matchless talents.⁷¹⁶ The effects of this rumor on the British blues scene will be discussed at some length below.

What followed Johnson’s attention-grabbing return to Robinsonville was another six years spent almost entirely on the road. Some of this time was spent with his off-and-on travelling companion and fellow bluesman, Johnny Shines (who, besides “Son” House and a few other contemporaries, is the main source of whatever information we know—or think we know—about Johnson in the first place). According to Shines, the duo “rambled” all over the Deep South, up into the Midwest, and even as far north as New

⁷¹⁴ Ibid, p. 26. Clapton discussed the practice, in a latter-day interview regarding Johnson’s prowess, on his behind-the-scenes DVD, *Sessions for Robert J* (prod. Eric Clapton and Doyle Bramhall II, 2004).

⁷¹⁵ Peter Guralnick, *Searching for Robert Johnson* (New York: Dutton, 1989), p. 17.

⁷¹⁶ Robert Palmer, *Deep Blues* (New York: Viking Press, 1981), p. 113.

York City and Canada.⁷¹⁷ These reminiscences—unconfirmed, of course—put paid to the notion that appears in the liner notes to *King of the Delta Blues Singers*, that Johnson was a naïve and untraveled rube who had never ventured off of the plantation until the day he showed up in the recording studio in Dallas.⁷¹⁸

Throughout his travels, Johnson, with or without Shines, exhibited all of the tendencies that later became the most alluring components of his legend. He was known for his prodigious consumption of alcohol, and he enjoyed a reputation of an irresistible ladies' man. During his mysterious 1931 sojourn he was reputed to have fathered illegitimate children by two different women, and over the next seven years, he cut a sexual swath through the Deep South.⁷¹⁹ Shines claimed that “[w]omen, to Robert, were like motel or hotel rooms; even if he used them repeatedly, he left them where he found them...Heaven help him, he was not discriminating.”⁷²⁰ As told by Shines and by other corroborative contemporaries, Johnson's career, and thus his subsequent reputation, is built as much on stories of sexual exploits, narrow bedroom escapes and ugly catfights as it is on actual musical performances.

For Johnson to be known at all to British blues enthusiasts of the 1960s, though, some performance and recording had to intrude on these long stints of drinking and womanizing. The entirety of Johnson's recorded *œuvre* (twenty-nine sides and thirteen out-takes) was committed to acetate in five recording sessions for the American Record

⁷¹⁷ Johnny Shines, “Remembering Robert Johnson,” in Guralnick, et. al., eds., *The Blues*, p. 124.

⁷¹⁸ Driggs, liner notes, *King of the Delta Blues Singers*.

⁷¹⁹ Pearson and McCulloch, *Lost and Found*, p. 7.

⁷²⁰ Shines, “Remembering Robert Johnson,” p. 125.

Corporation's Vocalion label—three in a San Antonio hotel in November 1936, and two in a Dallas warehouse in June 1937.⁷²¹ The record engineer for these sessions was, perhaps appropriately, a native Briton named Don Law. It is from Law's testimony that the Johnson legend acquires a few more rich layers.

For one, Law claimed that Johnson was painfully shy, a characteristic supposedly illustrated by Johnson's playing the session facing the wall, with his back to the ARC/Vocalion staff and a group of Mexican musicians who were slated to record after him.⁷²² Law also supplied what was taken as strong evidence confirming Johnson's love of "wine and women as well as song." Within hours of Johnson's arrival in San Antonio, Law was called away from dinner with his wife to bail Johnson out of the county jail, where he had been booked on a vagrancy charge. Then, later that same night, Law was again called to the phone. This time it was Johnson himself, who found himself in a bit of a bind—claiming loneliness, he had hired a prostitute but "she wants fifty cents and I lacks a nickel."⁷²³ All of this found its way into Frank Driggs' infamous liner notes, and contributed to the paradoxical image of Johnson as a shy, lonely wanderer, yet at the same time, a rogue who was never without the company of a woman (no matter how unsavory).

⁷²¹ Palmer, *Deep Blues*, p. 124. Palmer is the first to make the excellent point that these sessions were initiated *by Johnson*, who went to see a friend who knew Ernie Oertle, ARC's field representative—another dent in the myth of Johnson as thoroughly unambitious and unprofessional.

⁷²² Don Law, quoted in Jas Obrecht, "Robert Johnson," in Jas Obrecht, ed., *Blues Guitar: The Men Who Made the Music* (San Francisco: Miller Freeman, 1993), p. 12.

⁷²³ Steve James, "Robert Johnson: The San Antonio Legacy," in *Juke Blues*, no. 12 (Spring 1988), p. 26.

Driggs' liner notes are more accurate when they claim that of the twenty-nine sides Johnson recorded in San Antonio and Dallas in November 1936 and June 1937, "their distribution was limited, and only one, 'Terraplane Blues,' sold really well, almost exclusively in the Deep South."⁷²⁴ Johnson does not seem to have been concerned by the initial tepidity with which his records were met (partially, this was because Law and his staff at ARC/Vocalion promised to record more in the next year). Over the next year, Johnson was back to his old habits, touring his familiar route, which, although it varied, consisted primarily of Memphis—the Mississippi Delta—Helena, Arkansas—St. Louis, Missouri—and east Texas.⁷²⁵

In August 1938, Robert was back on his old stomping grounds in western Mississippi, and had taken up a sort of semi-residency at a jook joint in Greenwood. It is said that he also, in a typically brazen move, began an affair with the wife of the jook joint's owner. On the night of August 13, someone served Johnson a poisoned whiskey.⁷²⁶ The cuckolded owner of the jook joint has been placed under the most serious suspicion by researchers and other amateur "blues detectives," but so too have a few of Johnson's ex-girlfriends and at least one fellow bluesman to whom Johnson owed money.⁷²⁷ After four days of agonizing pain, Johnson died of internal bleeding—although

⁷²⁴ Driggs, liner notes, *King of the Delta Blues Singers*.

⁷²⁵ Shines, "Remembering Robert Johnson," p. 124.

⁷²⁶ Elijah Wald, *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues* (New York: Amistad Books, 2004), p. 124.

⁷²⁷ Schroeder, *Robert Johnson*, pp. 46-48.

the death certificate listed syphilis as the cause of death—on August 16, 1938.⁷²⁸ He was twenty-seven years old.

Neither Johnson nor his burgeoning legend could be laid to rest without a fittingly outlandish conclusion, however. Veteran bluesman Sonny Boy Williamson II (born Aleck Miller) finishes the tale with an appropriate flourish. According to Williamson, he warned Johnson, “don’t never take no drink from no open bottle,” but Johnson cavalierly ignored him. Also present for Johnson’s death throes, Williamson then claimed that the pain drove Johnson mad, and that he spent his last hours “crawling around on the floor, barking like a dog,” before finally expiring peacefully, cradled in Sonny Boy’s arms.⁷²⁹ For a bluesman who had supposedly lived his life in fear of the “hellhounds” on his trail, it seemed an all-too-appropriate finish, and Sonny Boy got a lot of mileage out of the story over the next three decades—particularly by telling it to wide-eyed and admiring young British blues musicians whom he met and played with in the 1960s.

Barry Lee Pearson flatly labels Williamson a “con man,”⁷³⁰ but if the bluesman was telling tall tales, he certainly was not the only one guilty of this sin. “Son” House

⁷²⁸ The death certificate was found by blues historian Gayle Dean Wardlow, after an exhaustive search through the archives of the Mississippi state registrar of vital statistics. (Wardlow, *Chasin’ That Devil’s Music* [San Francisco: Miller Freeman, 1998], pp. 87-92.) Incidentally, “syphilis” was a commonly-listed cause of death amongst black sharecroppers; the columnist for *Blues Access* magazine wondered “how many blacks in 1930s Mississippi were pronounced dead of syphilis...with bullet holes in the backs of their heads?” (“New Information Found on the Death of Robert Johnson,” in *Blues Access*, no. 28 (Winter 1997), p. 108.

⁷²⁹ Simon Napier and Sonny Boy Williamson II (Aleck Miller), “I Knew Robert Johnson,” in Mike Leadbitter, ed., *Nothing But the Blues* (London: Hanover Books, 1971), p. 96.

⁷³⁰ Pearson and McCulloch, *Lost and Found*, p. 16. Pearson is not being uncharitable; after all, Aleck Miller stole the name “Sonny Boy Williamson” from another, earlier

heard from somewhere that Johnson had been shot or stabbed. “Big Bill” Broonzy swore that the murder had been perpetrated by an ex-girlfriend, “a dark girl from Bogalusa, Louisiana.” Another “personal friend” of Johnson, James Banister, fingered a “woman from Detroit” who gave Johnson a bottle of beer with a “douche tablet” in it—the effect of this was apparently to “[dry] up all his blood.” John Hammond put it about that Johnson was “murdered in a Mississippi barroom brawl.” David “Honeyboy” Edwards claims to have been there at the jook joint, and to have seen Johnson die within two hours of drinking the poison, although he is plainly outnumbered by witnesses who corroborate the length of time as four days. Other reports somehow had the death scene transposed to Texas!⁷³¹

At the remove of seventy years, when nearly all of the key players have passed on, and with no new records likely to come miraculously to light, it seems unlikely that we will ever know what exactly happened to Johnson, and who the perpetrator was.⁷³² The significant point for the current study is that Johnson’s early death, in shadowy circumstances, and with supposed sinister echoes, was the appropriate climax to a legend

bluesman who had died in 1946, and then went around masquerading as the earlier one for years thereafter.

⁷³¹ For House, Broonzy and Banister’s testimony, see Schroeder, *Robert Johnson*, pp. 46-48. For Hammond and Edwards, see Pearson and McCulloch, *Lost and Found*, p. 15. The claim that Johnson’s murder took place in Texas is uncredited, but appeared first in Samuel Charters, *The Country Blues* (New York: Da Capo, 1959), p. 208. It should be noted that Charters also got the date wrong—1937 instead of 1938.

⁷³² In 1998, Wardlow conferred with a Dr. Walter Holladay about the cause of Johnson’s death; he thought it likely that, had Johnson *actually* had syphilis, the disease, if combined with “poison, moonshine and liver damage, could have caused pneumonia,” which was incurable in 1938.” This may be the closest we ever come to a definitive medical opinion on the death of Robert Johnson. (Wardlow, *Chasin’ That Devil Music*, p. 92).

that was already larger-than-life. For a generation of young British musicians who would soon take as their rallying cry, “Hope I die before I get old,” it was almost too good to be true.⁷³³

The legend of Robert Johnson is all the more compelling for its intimations of what might have been. Two months after Johnson’s death, the record impresario John Hammond was trying to put together a massive concert, *From Spirituals to Swing*, intended to be the first presentation of black music at New York’s prestigious Carnegie Hall. He had obtained a copy of “Terraplane Blues,” and wanted Johnson to appear on the show as its representative blues musician.⁷³⁴ Hammond embarked on a long and unsuccessful search, which led in the end to Don Law. A phone call to Law at the ARC/Vocalion offices in Dallas confirmed that Johnson had died only three months previously. Hammond, in his elegy to Johnson delivered on the night of the concert, maintained later that this invitation had actually reached Johnson, and that he “died [presumably of fright]...at the precise moment when Vocalion scouts finally reached him and told him he was booked to appear at Carnegie Hall on December 23.”⁷³⁵ It is likely that Law fed Hammond the line about Johnson never having been off the plantation before his recording session, and that Hammond ran with it for the sake of melodrama.

⁷³³ The Who, “My Generation,” *The Who Sing My Generation* (Brunswick Records, 1965).

⁷³⁴ Palmer, *Deep Blues*, p. 130.

⁷³⁵ John Hammond, “Jim Crow Blues” (A reprint of the program notes to *From Spirituals to Swing* concert at Carnegie Hall, December 23, 1938), in *New Masses* (December 13, 1938), pp. 27-28; quoted in Pearson and McCulloch, *Lost and Found*, p. 14.

In the event, Hammond chose to replace Johnson with “Big Bill” Broonzy, who had been recording in Chicago.⁷³⁶ Broonzy’s well-received performance at Carnegie Hall undoubtedly played an important role in securing his reputation, on the basis of which he became one of the favorite artists of the 1950s blues revival, and one of the first bluesmen to visit Great Britain (in 1951).⁷³⁷ Rumors abound that in the months before his death, Robert Johnson had begun playing an electric guitar and was in the process of putting together a five-piece band to back him.⁷³⁸ Breathlessly, Robert Palmer asserts that if this band, with Robert’s electrified guitar leading the way, had performed at Carnegie Hall, he would have invented Chicago blues, ten to fifteen years before its time.⁷³⁹ Palmer has not been the only one to daydream about what might have happened. Others have hint that this would have been the birth of rock ‘n’ roll.⁷⁴⁰ It is more realistic to think that, at the very least, Johnson would have attracted the international audience that became Broonzy’s.

As it was, however, Johnson did not perform, and the American folk-and-blues revival happened largely without him. Frank Driggs was, at least for the moment, accurate (though his prose was a bit purple) when he averred that “[Today] Robert Johnson is little, very little more than a name on aging index cards and a few dusty

⁷³⁶ Palmer, *Deep Blues*, p. 130.

⁷³⁷ Christopher John Farley, “Big Bill Broonzy: Key to the Highway,” in Guralnick, et. al., eds., *The Blues*, p. 241.

⁷³⁸ Palmer, *Deep Blues*, p. 131.

⁷³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 131.

⁷⁴⁰ Hints of this are to be found in Samuel Charters, *Robert Johnson* (New York: Oak Publications, 1972), and Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock ‘n’ Roll Music* (New York: Dutton, 1975).

master records in the files of a phonograph company that no longer exists.”⁷⁴¹ Johnson did not actually disappear, as Driggs claimed, like a “sheet of newspaper, twisting and twirling,” but rather faded into a sort of semi-obscure.⁷⁴² Alan Lomax found that, when canvassing the Deep South making recordings of blues and spirituals for the Library of Congress in the early 1940s, most inquiries about Johnson would be met with a “Robert who?”—this not even five years after Johnson’s death.

Of course, Muddy Waters would later cite him as an influence, and, as noted above, “Son” House could remember him quite well.⁷⁴³ Robert “Junior” Lockwood was the only bluesman to have actually been tutored by Johnson, as Johnson had lived with Lockwood’s mother for a time, and taught the boy to play the guitar.⁷⁴⁴ And Johnny Shines knew him best of all, and would later tell what he knew. But all of these statements and reminiscences would come out *after* Johnson had already been crowned “King of the Delta Blues Singers” by the British blues aficionados. After all, someone would have had to *ask* Waters, House and Lockwood about Johnson for them to hold forth as they did, and such questions were not forthcoming in the 1940s and 1950s. Thus, for twenty years, the legend of Robert Johnson lay dormant.

Even the British blues revival began without knowledge of the man it would later acknowledge as its master. Those who inspired the initial burst of enthusiasm were bluesmen like Brownie McGhee, Broonzy and Waters, who crossed the Atlantic and gave

⁷⁴¹ Driggs, liner notes, *King of the Delta Blues Singers*.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*

⁷⁴³ Palmer, *Deep Blues*, p. 111.

⁷⁴⁴ Wald, *Escaping the Delta*, p. 112.

influential early barnstorming tours.⁷⁴⁵ Even Lead Belly, who never made it to Britain, was initially a more-recognized father figure to the British scene—owing mainly to the version of his “Rock Island Line” that was cut by Britain’s Lonnie Donegan in 1957.⁷⁴⁶ With very little recorded product to be sent overseas, and with obviously no chance of a tour, Robert Johnson initially had no chance to crack the British market.

This changed in 1961 with the release of *King of the Delta Blues Singers* by Columbia Records, which, unlike ARC/Vocalion, had an international distribution presence. The record was the beneficiary of some rather fortuitous timing. For one, by 1960, the various “special interest” groups of British music enthusiasts—the “trad jazz” crowd, the skiffle crowd, and the rockabilly crowd—had begun to realize that the music of Waters, Broonzy, *et. al.*, was not just “trad jazz,” skiffle or rockabilly, and to classify it as something separate and special in its own right—as *blues*. At precisely this moment, Alexis Korner and Cyril Davies, tired of “trad jazz” and skiffle, decided to form a band that played blues, and to open a pub where they could rehearse and play. Only after these almost-simultaneous developments could a “British blues scene” even be said truly to exist.⁷⁴⁷

Furthermore, the period from 1959-61 was a very pregnant one, in which rock ‘n’ roll seemed to have completely fizzled out (owing to Bill Haley’s retirement, Elvis Presley’s conscription, Buddy Holly’s death, Little Richard’s taking of holy orders and Jerry Lee Lewis’ legal troubles) but in which nothing nearly so edgy or raucous had

⁷⁴⁵ Farley, “Big Bill Broonzy: Key to the Highway,” p. 241.

⁷⁴⁶ Bob Brunning, *The Blues Connection* (New York: Blandford Press, 1986), p. 11.

⁷⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 13.

entered the mainstream to replace it. Into this vacuum rushed a number of important blues records—*e.g.* Sonny Boy Williamson II’s *Down and Out Blues* (1959), Muddy Waters’ *Muddy Waters Sings Bill Broonzy* (1959) and *Live at Newport* (1960), Bo Diddley’s *Have Guitar, Will Travel* (1960) and John Lee Hooker’s *I’m John Lee Hooker* (1960) and *John Lee Sings the Blues* (1961).⁷⁴⁸ However, none was as important, as profoundly life-changing, for British blues enthusiasts as *King of the Delta Blues Singers*.

The “Sacred Text”: *The King of the Delta Blues Singers*

With a clarity that is remarkably similar to that with which Americans of the same generation can remember where they were when John Kennedy was assassinated, many British musicians can remember the exact circumstances in which they first heard Johnson’s album.⁷⁴⁹ Eric Clapton’s formative moment has been detailed above, but in its intensity and detail it is matched by that of Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards and Led Zeppelin vocalist Robert Plant, both of whom held forth for *Musician* magazine on the occasion of the release of *The Complete Recordings* (1990):

Richards: I guess [prior to *King*] *The Best of Muddy Waters* was the criteria album at the time for us. And then we found out about Jimmy Reed. And then you realize there’s a whole load of them! When I was 18, it was Brian Jones who first played me the record [*King*], and I said, “Who the hell—where’d you get this?? This is *superior!*” Because that must have been the peak, at least of ‘30s blues, just a blues singer with a guitar...[i]f you listen to a lot of Robert Johnson, well, in one form or another he’s in

⁷⁴⁸ Sonny Boy Williamson II (Aleck Miller), *Down and Out Blues* (Chess, 1959); Muddy Waters (McKinley Morganfield), *Muddy Waters Sings Bill Broonzy* (Chess, 1959) and *Live at Newport* (Chess, 1960); Bo Diddley (Ellis McDaniel), *Have Guitar, Will Travel* (Chess, 1960); John Lee Hooker, *I’m John Lee Hooker* (Collectables, 1960) and *John Lee Sings the Blues* (King, 1961).

⁷⁴⁹ I have borrowed this comparison from writer Russell Banks, who used it in his article, “The Devil and Robert Johnson: The Blues and the 1990s,” in *The New Republic*, vol. 204, no. 17 (1991), pp. 26-28.

you...I wonder sometimes if he was anything like that persona that comes across on that record.⁷⁵⁰

Plant: When I was 15, in Worcestershire, I went into a record store and there was an old CBS gatefold album which was part of a series that included Blind Boy Fuller, Bessie Smith, Leroy Carr. What this album was, was a repackaging of Robert Johnson's *King of the Delta Blues Singers*. It had scant detail. No photo, of course. There was a sharecropper's shack on the front and then it went into some eloquent, glib overview of the blues. And I was absolutely astounded...Through the folk clubs and the whole beatnik movement I'd been exposed to Big Joe Williams and the, let's call it, the general slide style. But I'd never heard anything as seductive.⁷⁵¹

All three of these testimonies are shot through with three common themes that are important to constructing the reception of Robert Johnson by British listeners, and the importance with which he came to be invested. First, *King of the Delta Blues Singers* was hardly ever the first blues record that listeners purchased or listened to. There was usually a working standard of what blues music sounded like, against which the "epiphany" of listening to Johnson would be compared. Second is the depth of the emotional impact of the music itself on the listener. The third and final common theme is the mystery that seemed to swirl around Johnson, a mystery that was certainly encouraged by the spare packaging accompanying the record.

Upon purchase of *King of the Delta Blues Singers*, the buyer found it to contain three major elements out of which some idea of the identity of "Robert Johnson" might be fashioned. The first was the art that appeared on the record sleeve. On the album purchased by Plant, this was a picture of a forlorn sharecropper's shack, but on the original pressing, the sleeve featured a stylized painting by artist Burt Goldblatt, of a

⁷⁵⁰ Keith Richards, interview with Andrew Franklin, in Tony Scherman, "The Hellhound's Trail: Following Robert Johnson," p. 37-38.

⁷⁵¹ Robert Plant, interview with Tony Scherman, in Scherman, "The Hellhound's Trail: Following Robert Johnson," p. 41.

solitary guitarist, viewed from above, head down and intent on the guitar across his lap, seated on a chair and casting a long shadow across an empty, earth-colored field.⁷⁵² In some sense, the choice of artwork was one of necessity—no photographs of Johnson were known to exist until the late 1980s—but the composition of Goldblatt’s painting certainly conjures up an image of a mysterious stranger, unrecognizable and inscrutable, concentrating intently on his music, a lonely man torn between “physical and shadowy reality.”⁷⁵³ All this, before the young Eric Clapton even put the record on his turntable.

Turning the sleeve over, the buyer encountered Frank Driggs’ aforementioned evocative liner notes. Starting from the premise that “Robert Johnson is little, very little more than a name on aging index cards and a few dusty master records in the files of a phonograph company that no longer exists,” the putative aim of the précis that followed was to rectify the situation—to inform the record buyer of the artist whose record they now owned (or were thinking of owning). As Pearson is quick to point out, however, Driggs was perhaps better suited to the role of propagandist than that of biographer, and his liner notes represented a setback to the serious research of Johnson’s life and career that, at some subconscious level, has yet to be completely overcome.

The problems that beset Driggs’ story are several. First of all, there is an uncritical reliance on the romanticized and somewhat paternalistic stories told by Don Law about Johnson’s behavior before and during his recording sessions. Included is Law’s insistence that Johnson had never been off the farm, to the pitiable yarn about Johnson’s playing the

⁷⁵² Cover art, *King of the Delta Blues Singers*.

⁷⁵³ *Ibid.*

session facing the wall out of shyness, right down to his phone call asking Law for the nickel that he lacked to pay the prostitute—from Law’s mouth to Driggs’ typewriter.

Law, and thus Driggs, also got Johnson’s age wrong—eighteen at the time of recording, twenty or twenty-one at his death, as opposed to twenty-five and twenty-seven, respectively.⁷⁵⁴ On the face of it, this is a minor mistake over which to grouse, even an understandable one, as records of vital statistics for African-Americans in the early twentieth century are scant to non-existent. What the subtraction of seven years does for the Johnson legend, though, is stress his youth. His musical skills now seem amazing; his acquisition of those skills through normal means (*i.e.*, lengthy practice) seems less likely; and his death, now occurring even earlier in his life, seems more tragic.

Another tendency that damages the credibility in Driggs’ liner notes is toward what Pearson has termed “constructing biography from repertoire”—that is, reading far too much into the sentiments and exploits expressed in Johnson’s lyrics, and to assume that they were autobiographical (and to be taken literally).⁷⁵⁵ Every betrayal by an errant woman, every tryst with a “sweet rider,” every bout of loneliness, was interpreted as having happened to Johnson personally. For example, cultural critics and would-be musical sleuths who wished to make the case that Johnson was a violent and abusive man, could (and did) cite songs like “32-20 Blues” (“And if she gets unruly, thinks she don’t wanna do/Take my 32-20 [a type of pistol], now, and cut her half in two”) or “Me and the Devil Blues” (“I’m gonna beat my woman/Until I get satisfied”) as their

⁷⁵⁴ Driggs, liner notes, *King of the Delta Blues Singers*.

⁷⁵⁵ Barry Lee Pearson, “Standing at the Crossroads Between Vinyl and Compact Discs: Reissue Blues Recordings in the 1990s,” in *The Journal of American Folklore*, no. 105 (Spring 1992), p. 222.

evidence.⁷⁵⁶ And every time Johnson sang that he “don’t mind dyin’,” this is supposed to prove that he was psychologically tormented, even suicidal.⁷⁵⁷

Such an approach to understanding Johnson’s life misunderstands the blues tradition in which Johnson was steeped, in two crucial ways. The first is a matter of authorship. All twenty-nine songs in Johnson’s *œuvre* are credited to him; however, it is unlikely that any of them were his unique lyrical creations.⁷⁵⁸ The blues tradition is in many ways a fund of ideas, metaphors and ways of expressing emotion that musicians have been drawing from ever since before the Civil War. It has been even been opined that there are actually “only...thirty or forty lines of lyrics that show up in half the songs that count as blues”—with innumerable variations and re-orderings to provide the blues with its characteristic richness.⁷⁵⁹ So perhaps it may be said that *somebody, somewhere* in the Deep South once actually had some of these experiences and wrote a song about them, but to speculate that Johnson did, and then to pass that speculation off as biographical fact, does not stand up to serious argument.

The second misunderstanding of the blues tradition comes with regard to the audience. A seasoned performer who understood the finer points of entertaining (even if his biographers failed to realize it), Johnson would certainly have known that the surest way to connect with an audience would be to sing about themes with which all, or at least

⁷⁵⁶ Robert Johnson, “32-20 Blues” and “Me and the Devil Blues,” *King of the Delta Blues Singers*.

⁷⁵⁷ *E.g.*, in “Walking Blues.”

⁷⁵⁸ Wald, *Escaping the Delta*, p. 144.

⁷⁵⁹ Richard Hell, “My Blues Band: The Rolling Stones,” in Guralnick, et. al., eds., *The Blues*, p. 240.

most, of the audience could relate—“changing towns, changing partners, seduction, betrayal and sexual boasting.”⁷⁶⁰ To this could certainly be added loneliness and poverty. By this token, all a researcher could really prove from mining Johnson’s lyrics for meaning was that *someone* in Johnson’s jook joint audience had at one time had sexual intercourse, left town on a freight train, been cheated on by their spouse, or been down to their last nickel. Again, certainly not the stuff from which proper biographies are constructed.

And yet this approach persisted (and, as mentioned, one still finds traces of it in printed matter about Johnson as late as 1990). Driggs certainly declares his intentions from the start: “He [Johnson] lived the life he sang about and which ultimately killed him.”⁷⁶¹ Having exhausted the scant and inaccurate extant facts about halfway through the liner notes, Driggs spends the rest of his time stringing together Johnson’s lyrics with single lines of speculation. To wit, the statement “he seemed constantly trapped” is followed by four lines from “Cross Road Blues.”⁷⁶² Driggs supports the speculative, “Symbolic beasts seemed to give him a great deal of trouble” by quoting Johnson thusly: “I got to keep moving, I got to keep moving/Blues falling down like hail/I can’t keep no money/There’s a hellhound on my trail, hellhound on my trail.”⁷⁶³

⁷⁶⁰ Pearson and McCulloch, *Lost and Found*, p. 44.

⁷⁶¹ Driggs, liner notes, *King of the Delta Blues Singers*.

⁷⁶² Lyrics, incidentally, which do not seem to have anything to do with being trapped: “I went down to the crossroads, fell down on my knees (x2)/Ask the Lord above for mercy, say boy, if you please/Mmm- standing at the crossroads, I tried to flag a ride (x2)/Ain’t nobody seem to know me, everybody pass me by.” Ibid, quoting Robert Johnson, “Cross Roads Blues.”

⁷⁶³ Ibid, quoting Robert Johnson, “Hellhound on My Trail.”

In appraising *King of the Delta Blues Singers* next to what is now known about Johnson's life from over sixty years of earnest (if not always successful) detective work, there is the temptation to savage Frank Driggs for what seems like shoddy research and almost willful over-dramatization with a view to selling records. To some extent, doing this would be unfair. For one, he admittedly did not have a lot of solid facts with which to work. For another, the assumption that African-American artists actually experienced that about which they sang was prevalent amongst outsiders at the time of the record's release.⁷⁶⁴ And finally, Driggs was certainly not the only one guilty of romanticizing Johnson, substituting speculation for fact, or attempting to fashion a biography from his lyrics. In fact, Pearson and McCulloch enumerate a whole host of journalists, researchers and cultural critics who do likewise, as does Elijah Wald.⁷⁶⁵ Driggs himself admits his reliance on one of them, Samuel Charters, the dean of blues historians, whose 1959 work *The Country Blues* was nevertheless riddled with the kinds of weaknesses that plague Driggs.⁷⁶⁶

However, although Driggs is only one of many to add to or entrench the Robert Johnson legend, he merits special attention in this study because his liner notes were really the only material on Johnson to which British blues enthusiasts would have access in this formative period. Mick Jagger could write to Chess Records in Chicago for his favorite record albums, but no such service existed for blues books and magazines published in America. The proof of the liner notes' impact can be gauged from British

⁷⁶⁴ Pearson and McCulloch, *Lost and Found*, p. 29.

⁷⁶⁵ See chapters 3-6 in Pearson and McCulloch, *Lost and Found*, as well as chapters 6, 11 and 13 in Wald, *Escaping the Delta*.

⁷⁶⁶ Samuel Charters, *The Country Blues* (New York: Da Capo, 1959).

musicians' lasting impressions of their hero. According to Driggs, Johnson was hounded by "symbolic beasts" as well as by women—"in his case [they] only meant trouble." Thirty years later, Keith Richards would declare that the reason Johnson had died so young was because he was "asking for trouble all the way down the line. *All his deals with the hellhounds and the bitches*—one of them will get you [my emphasis]."⁷⁶⁷

Finally, after the cover art had been admired—after all, many British blues enthusiasts were art students—and the liner notes pondered over, there was the music itself. This was obviously the crucial ingredient in Johnson's appeal to young British musicians. Many of Johnson's blues are constructed using the traditional twelve-bar format as a model, and instrumentally, like most Delta blues, they are rather minimalist. There were no horn pyrotechnics of the kind found in Memphis Stax-Volt recordings, nor was there the tight synthesis of many different instruments that distinguished Chess blues records. Johnson's guitar was not even electrified, as was nearly everybody's by the 1960s. And yet, as Robert Plant said, "I'd never heard anything so seductive." Just what was it that accounted for this seduction, the raw intensity that so impressed and haunted British musicians (and, to be fair, their American cousins)?

The first remarkable quality of Johnson's recorded music was its instrumental virtuosity. This is certainly not to argue that, say, Muddy Waters was a ham-handed bungler when it came to playing the guitar—far from it. However, Johnson's playing belies a certain dexterity and grace that seemed somehow different from most practitioners of the Delta blues. "Son" House was among the first to acknowledge this; when Johnson returned from his twelve-to-eighteen-month hiatus, House readily admits

⁷⁶⁷ Keith Richards, interview with Jas Obrecht, in Obrecht, *Blues Guitar*, p. 8.

that Johnson's skill was so great (and so suddenly acquired) that "all our mouths were standing open."⁷⁶⁸ In fact, it is this uncanny virtuosity that was the animus behind the rumor that Johnson had sold his soul to the Devil in exchange for it. Resorting to such tales of legerdemain is a tacit admission that Johnson was better than most, if not all, of his contemporaries.

British blues enthusiasts picked up on this virtuosity immediately. On his very first hearing of *King of the Delta Blues Singers*, Keith Richards asked Brian Jones, "Who's that playing with him?," assuming that Johnson's guitar fills were so complex that he had to have split the workload with at least one other guitarist.⁷⁶⁹ Johnson's ability to play bass lines simultaneously with the guitar melody also led people to assume that there was a bass guitarist in the studio with him as well. In fact, as well as can be established, there is no one else present on Johnson's recordings.⁷⁷⁰ The mystery of how Johnson was able to accomplish this was to some extent solved with the emergence of the first two confirmed photographs of the bluesman in the late 1980s. Quite simply, his fingers were so long and, according to guitarist Ry Cooder, so "strangely...jointed" that they allowed him to move all around the guitar's fretboard and reach more notes than the average guitarist.⁷⁷¹

⁷⁶⁸ Edward "Son" House, interview with Pete Welding, in Welding, "Hell Hound On His Trail: Robert Johnson," in *Down Beat's Music '66* (Chicago: Maher, 1966), p. 76.

⁷⁶⁹ Keith Richards, interview with Stephen LaVere, quoted in Pearson and McCulloch, *Lost and Found*, p. 119n15.

⁷⁷⁰ Pearson and McCulloch, *Lost and Found*, p. 26.

⁷⁷¹ Ry Cooder, interview with Franklin, in Scherman, "The Hellhound's Trail," p. 41.

But this piece of physiognomic evidence was almost thirty years in the making. In the early 1960s, all British blues enthusiasts knew was that somehow Johnson was playing two guitar parts, as well as occasionally a bass line, all by himself. And those guitar parts were things of beauty—Johnson could make his guitar “sing,” “cry” and “talk,” and mimic a winter wind or a chugging locomotive.⁷⁷² So completely overawed were they by Johnson’s mastery of his instrument, that they could really only describe it in terms of past masters of the European classical tradition, such as Mozart, Bach or Ravel—none of whom, admittedly, played the guitar, but whose polish and consummate musical genius were the only true standard that seemed fitting to young educated Europeans.⁷⁷³

One of the lasting legacies of the British blues and rock ‘n’ roll scene of the 1960s and 1970s is an obsession with guitar virtuosity—in other words, the “cult of the guitar god.”⁷⁷⁴ It is safe to say that this obsession began with Robert Johnson. It is surely no coincidence that three of the biggest Johnson disciples of the early 1960s—Clapton, Richards and Jimmy Page—became three of the earliest and most influential bearers of the title “guitar god.” Richards makes this connection explicit when he says,

In a way, Eric Clapton was very much like that [referring to the stories about Johnson’s diabolical bargain]. When we [the Rolling Stones] first started playing, Eric would be at the front watching us play. He couldn’t play at the time. Six months later he came back and he blew everybody out.⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷² As can be heard on “Come On In My Kitchen,” “Hellhound On My Trail” or “Love In Vain.”

⁷⁷³ Richards, interview with Franklin, in Scherman, “The Hellhound’s Trail,” p. 37.

⁷⁷⁴ Steve Waksman, *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 181.

⁷⁷⁵ Richards, interview with Franklin, in Scherman, “The Hellhound’s Trail,” p. 37.

Clapton actually has the dubious distinction of seeming to have replicated Johnson's story *twice* in the 1960s—supposedly in between leaving John Mayall's Bluesbreakers and forming the supergroup Cream, Clapton “did what every legend must do: he locked himself in a room for a year with only his guitar and hammered out his own style.”⁷⁷⁶

British musicians' appreciation of Johnson's virtuosity proves that the attraction of the blues was not primarily, as has been often argued, its status as a “primitive” music, reminding disaffected young men in a modern industrial society that there had once been, and perhaps still was, a “more authentic” society and mode of cultural expression that were untouched by modern decadence.⁷⁷⁷ In arguing this, I would like to make the distinction between two kinds of “rawness,” that of feeling and that of technique. Often the two are conflated; however, it is clear from the testimonies of Johnson's British devotees that they made a distinction. This is a point that has often been misunderstood, and used to paint British blues musicians with the same essentialist brush as have white American intellectuals who patronized the Harlem Renaissance or the 1950s folk revival,

⁷⁷⁶ John Hutchinson, “Eric Clapton: Farther Up The Road,” in *Musician*, no. 43 (May 1982), p. 41. This has always been a curious story—Hutchinson, as quoted, places this hiatus between Clapton's leaving Mayall and his forming Cream. On the other hand, J.D. Considine places it earlier, claiming it occurred after leaving the Yardbirds, but before joining up with Mayall. (Considine, “Eric Clapton Is Not God. And He Knows It,” in *Musician*, no. 97 [Nov. 1986], p. 84. Meanwhile, Clapton biographer Michael Schumacher notes that Clapton's time between the Yardbirds and Mayall was only two months, and the time between Mayall and Cream was almost instantaneous—indeed, Clapton had yet to leave Mayall when he accepted Ginger Baker's offer to form Cream. (Schumacher, *Crossroads: The Life and Music of Eric Clapton* [New York: Hyperion, 1995], p. 48, 68.)

⁷⁷⁷ *E.g.*, Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), *Blues People* (New York: W.W. Morrow and Co., 1963).

or French jazz fans in the same decade.⁷⁷⁸ British musicians appreciated both Johnson's technical virtuosity and the unrestrained emotion in his music, and when they said "raw," they meant the latter.

They could hear this unrestrained emotion in the various uses to which Johnson put his guitar strings, but it was most obvious in his singing. Johnson had a forceful, plangent singing voice, which invested all of his lyrics with a scary intensity that was rarely matched. Historian Giles Oakley noted how it seemed "on the edge of an abyss of complete psychic disintegration [and] changes from high frenzy to little boy vulnerability."⁷⁷⁹ Clapton said that the voice was that of a man whose "thing was so unbearable for him to have to live with that he was almost ashamed of it."⁷⁸⁰ British musicians also noted Johnson's skill in using his voice almost as another instrument—this is especially noticeable in the wordless vocalizing that makes up most of the last verse of "Love in Vain," as well as the empathy he was able to achieve between his voice and his guitar.⁷⁸¹ Plant applauded "the way the voice and the steel intertwine...[and] weave through so much pain and so much anticipated pleasure."⁷⁸²

⁷⁷⁸ Mark Helbling, *The Harlem Renaissance: The One and the Many* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999); Elizabeth Vihlen, "Sounding French: Jazz in Postwar France," Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 2000.

⁷⁷⁹ Giles Oakley, *The Devil's Music: A History of the Blues* (London: BBC, 1976), p. 199.

⁷⁸⁰ Clapton, interview with Guralnick, in "Eric Clapton at the Passion Threshold," p. 46. Presumably, Clapton refers either to Johnson's talents, or to his psychological distress, or both.

⁷⁸¹ Johnson, "Love in Vain," *King of the Delta Blues Singers, Volume 2* (Columbia, 1970).

⁷⁸² Plant, interview with Scherman, in "The Hellhound's Trail," p. 41.

Just how influential was Johnson's music, specifically, on British blues and rock 'n' roll musicians? Consider the following: in subsequent decades, many lead singers would claim (or have it claimed on their behalf) that their most powerful vocal performances were the ones that came the closest to doing what Johnson did. In terms of approaching that "abyss of psychic disintegration," we may look to Eric Burdon's performance in "The House of the Rising Sun," Plant's in "Whole Lotta Love," Roger Daltrey's in "Won't Get Fooled Again," and Clapton's in "Layla."⁷⁸³ The interplay, if not always the empathy, between lead vocals and lead guitar was a hallmark of the music of Led Zeppelin, the Rolling Stones, the Who and the Jeff Beck Group. Properly reverent, however, none of Johnson's latter-day British acolytes would ever claim to have matched their hero's achievements. Plant, for one, when asked about "the anguish, the desolation" in Johnson's voice, demurred, "*Sometimes* I get within 10 miles of it."⁷⁸⁴ Likewise, Richards, in a rare self-effacing moment, admitted, "I can figure out everybody else's licks, just about. But not his."⁷⁸⁵

Finally, British blues enthusiasts were powerfully influenced by not just how, but also *what* Johnson sang. They had been given a taste of the "earthy and only thinly-disguised" references in Johnson's lyrics from quotations in the liner notes, but found

⁷⁸³ Susan Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy: Led Zeppelin and the Power of Rock Music* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 192. See the Animals, "The House of the Rising Sun," *The Complete Animals* (EMI, 1990); Led Zeppelin, "Whole Lotta Love," *Led Zeppelin II* (Atlantic, 1969); The Who, "Won't Get Fooled Again," *Who's Next* (Polydor, 1971); and Derek and the Dominoes, "Layla," *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs* (Polydor, 1970).

⁷⁸⁴ Plant, interview with Scherman, in "The Hellhound's Trail," p. 42.

⁷⁸⁵ Richards, interview with Andrew Franklin, in Scherman, "The Hellhound's Trail," p. 38.

upon listening to the record that the music was full of them. Many of Johnson's songs were about amorous relationships—not courtly love, not chaste, saccharine sentimentality, but unabashedly sexual and unapologetically masculine. As we have seen, one of the reasons the British blues enthusiasts connected so viscerally with blues music was the direct and often muscular ways in which it dealt with masculine sexuality. Thus, the music of Robert Johnson was not unique, although his most outrageous euphemistic come-on, “squeeze my lemon ‘till the juice runs down my leg,” was remarkable enough for Led Zeppelin not only to cover the song in which it appeared (“Travelling Riverside Blues”), but also to name their 1969 mishmash of blues metaphors “The Lemon Song.”⁷⁸⁶ What did distinguish Johnson's music was how that unabashed male sexuality was fused with all the other diverse and seemingly paradoxical aspects of his “character”—that is, the character that listeners supposed him to have, based on the lyrics of his songs.

We have already noted how Johnson's voice seemed to combine elements of fierce mania and delicate vulnerability. This amalgamation of seemingly disparate sentiments occurs in Johnson's *œuvre* from song to song, and even, within a song, from line to line. The cold-blooded Johnson who threatens his woman with violence in “32-20 Blues” gives way to the tender Johnson whose woman drives him to drink and to tears in “Kind-Hearted Woman Blues”:

Ain't but the one thing, makes Mister Johnson drink
I's worried about how you treat me, baby, I begin to think
Oh babe, my life don't feel the same
You breaks my heart, when you call Mister So-and-So's name⁷⁸⁷

⁷⁸⁶ Johnson, “Travelling Riverside Blues,” *King of the Delta Blues Singers*; Led Zeppelin, “The Lemon Song,” *Led Zeppelin II* (Atlantic, 1969).

⁷⁸⁷ Johnson, “32-20 Blues;” “Kind-Hearted Woman Blues,” *King of the Delta Blues Singers*.

By the next track, “If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day,” the grim, menacing Johnson has returned (“If I had possession over judgment day/Lord the little woman I’m lovin’ wouldn’t have no right to pray”). In one moment, he sidles up to a pretty girl in a “barrelhouse” (a jook joint) with a bawdy proposition; in the next, he is gone, one step ahead of the phantasms chasing him.⁷⁸⁸

Much of the blues is characterized by this amalgamative spirit, situated at the interstices of urban *and* rural, sadness *and* happiness, darkness *and* light, vulgarity *and* purity, the spiritual *and* the secular. Johnson’s trick was to seem to embody these dualities not only in his lyrics but also in his voice and in his personality (if one constructed his personality from his lyrics, that is). It has been argued that the English (and to some extent, the British) literary tradition is one of borrowing, amalgamation and adaptation—what Charles Dickens called the manufacture of “streaky, well-cured bacon.”⁷⁸⁹ Seen within the contours of this venerable tradition, the appeal of the blues to young British musicians, and their adoption of Robert Johnson as a cultural and literary hero, gain a new and more powerful traction.

So, too, does the intriguing tendency to recognize a certain essential “Englishness” to Johnson’s lyricism. Clapton mused,

[I]t seemed like he had a collection of English poetry at home or something. Like, ‘She’s got an Elgin movement from her head down to her toes.’ Unbelievable! Almost Byronesque, in a way. Just his turn of phrase was so classical.⁷⁹⁰

⁷⁸⁸ Johnson, “If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day;” “Travelling Riverside Blues;” “Hellhound On My Trail,” *King of the Delta Blues Singers*.

⁷⁸⁹ Peter Ackroyd, *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), p. 247.

⁷⁹⁰ Clapton, interview with Guralnick, in “Eric Clapton at the Passion Threshold,” p. 46.

It is unclear how the “turn of phrase” in this lyric (from “Walking Blues”) is “Byronesque” or even in any way English. It has been posited that “Elgin” is a reference to the noted American watchmaker; thus, an “Elgin movement” would have been smooth, fluid, like the motion of a watch-hand.⁷⁹¹ Lord Byron may have compared his lady to a summer’s day, but never to a watch-hand. Clapton more likely refers to Johnson’s fluidity with the language, his creative mixing of sentiments and his sprinkling-in of unexpected words and phrases with which to enrich his lyrics. Richards seems to corroborate this reading of Johnson:

“He’s *English!*... He had quite a vocabulary... There is some extra intelligence or work in the lyrics and the subject matter; I mean, “Come On In My Kitchen,” or “32-20”—“all the doctors in Hot Springs sure can’t help you now.” There’s a master of English right there.⁷⁹²

Another parallel between Robert Johnson and at least a branch of the English literary tradition is the prevalence of phantasmagoric or diabolical themes. Indeed, the writers with whom Johnson has been most often associated (by both British and American commentators) are those—Lord Byron, Robert Blake, Percy Shelley and John Keats—who dealt with the fantastical in their prose and poetry.⁷⁹³ The English tradition of fascination with ghosts and demons can be seen to have filtered down through the Romantic poets to, among others, Aleister Crowley, the late 20th century mystic and author who claimed to have trafficked in the satanic arts, and who was posthumously a

⁷⁹¹ Harry’s Blues Lyrics Online, “Robert Johnson – Walkin’ Blues” (http://www.members.tripod.com/blueslyrics/lyrics/robert_johnson/walkin_blues.htm#top) (accessed October 16, 2006).

⁷⁹² Richards, interview with Franklin, in “The Hellhound’s Trail,” p. 37.

⁷⁹³ See Peter A. Schock, *Romantic Satanism: Myth and the Historical Moment in Blake, Shelley and Byron* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

spiritual mentor of sorts to Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page.⁷⁹⁴ It should also be noted that, along with Plant and drummer John Bonham, Page was rumored to have sold his soul to Satan—just like Johnson.⁷⁹⁵ It is no exaggeration to say that, in some sense, Johnson served as a rather perfect stepping-stone from Byron and Crowley to the Age of Aquarius.

This begs the question of just how the myth of the “Devil’s bargain” even came to Britain in the first place. The liner notes to *King of the Delta Blues Singers* neither mention nor allude to it. Indeed, amidst all the other myths and conjectures that were made to stand in for Johnson’s biography, the story of the bargain is of relatively late vintage—it first appeared in print in 1966, when “Son” House told interviewer Pete Welding that Johnson must have “sold his soul in order to play like that.”⁷⁹⁶ This interview appeared a full five years after *King of the Delta Blues Singers* was released, and the Johnson legend took the nascent British blues scene by storm.

It is entirely possible that this particular myth was transmitted to Britain via that old “con man,” the voluble Sonny Boy Williamson II—we have already seen his

⁷⁹⁴ Charles M. Young, “Jimmy Page’s True Will,” *Musician*, no. 117 (July 1988), p. 76.

⁷⁹⁵ Stephen Davis, *Hammer of the Gods: The Led Zeppelin Saga* (New York: W. Morrow and Co., 1995), p. 15. Davis extends the tradition to the Continent, comparing Page to nineteenth-century Italian violinist Nicolò Paganini, who was also reputed to have bartered his soul for musical talent and fame. (Davis, *Hammer of the Gods*, p. 18.)

⁷⁹⁶ Pete Welding, “Hellhound on His Trail: Robert Johnson,” in *Down Beat’s Music ’66* (Chicago: Maher, 1966), p. 76. It is not entirely clear to this day what House meant by this. Was he telling the truth? Was he being ironic? Bitter? Was he having fun with an earnest young interviewer? Welding pressed him to elaborate, but got nowhere. House never repeated the charge in any subsequent interview. In 1991, Robert “Junior” Lockwood, tired of enduring countless interviews whose sole purpose seemed to be to get him on record as believing or disbelieving the legend, shot back, “I wanna know how you do that”—that is, sell your soul.

influence in spreading a version of Johnson's last hours. The specific method of transmission may never be solidly verified. What can be said for certain is that there was, in 1960s Britain, a general cultural trend of literary fascination with the diabolical and a much more specific cultural trend of conflating lyrical expression and biographical fact, and that these two trends can be seen to have prepared the ground for such a myth to take hold.

This is not to say the myth was always understood literally. Clapton, who believes that such beautiful music "couldn't have come from an evil alliance," understands the story more as a metaphor for the misfortunes that had befallen Johnson as a youth, and the fear he felt when he thought of the consequences.⁷⁹⁷ Richards thinks the "deal with the Devil" might be shorthand for the choices that a man such as Johnson—and by inference, himself, his bandmates and errant rock musicians in general—made in rejecting society's conventions in favor of the life of a travelling musician. After that bit of insight, however, the ever-mischievous Richards intimates, "Maybe he actually met the cat!"⁷⁹⁸ Eric Burdon, governed by his strong if not always perfectly-informed opinions on American race relations, implies that the "deal with the Devil" is the black man's rejection of white social oppression (whether it was via the actual commission of violence or, in Johnson's case, playing the blues).⁷⁹⁹

⁷⁹⁷ Clapton, interview with Franklin, in "Hellhound on My Trail," p. 50-51.

⁷⁹⁸ Richards, interview with Franklin, in "Hellhound on My Trail," p. 37.

⁷⁹⁹ Burdon, with Craig, *Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood*, p. 80.

The Cult of the Delta Blues Singer

Understanding this aspect of Johnson's legend as a metaphorical statement (as opposed to merely a ghost story) did not diminish, but rather deepened, its spiritual significance for British blues enthusiasts. The rest of Johnson's life and *œuvre* were sufficient to elevate him to the status of a legend, but the "Devil's deal" made him a mythic, even a cultic figure. Like any cult, the British cult to Johnson had its holy places and its relics, as well as a cadre of resourceful amateur historians and collectors who set themselves the task of unearthing them. For one thing, as important as *King of the Delta Blues Singers* was for that generation of British blues enthusiasts, it was not comprehensive. It included only sixteen of Johnson's twenty-nine recorded sides. This gave rise to the notion of a fabled "Lost 13," rumors of which quickly spread throughout the London and Birmingham blues scenes.⁸⁰⁰ Using the variety of methods that they had devised for finding and acquiring blues records (described in Chapter 2), British collectors were able to get their hands on most, if not all, of Johnson's "Lost 13" years before they officially appeared on vinyl (as Columbia's *King of the Delta Blues Singers, Volume Two*, released in 1970).⁸⁰¹

A reliquary pursuit that proved far less successful was that devoted to finding a photograph of Johnson himself. Many of the most influential American bluesmen (*e.g.* Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson II, Howlin' Wolf and John Lee Hooker) were known quantities to British blues fans, by virtue of their having performed in the country

⁸⁰⁰ Plant, interview with Scherman, in "Hellhound on My Trail," p. 41.

⁸⁰¹ This explains, for instance, how the Rolling Stones had heard, and thus were able to cover, one of the "Lost 13": Johnson's "Love in Vain." The Rolling Stones, "Love in Vain," *Let It Bleed* (Abkco, 1969).

on barnstorming tours. Johnson, on the other hand, was almost unique in that no one knew what he looked like. The navel-gazing guitarist on the cover of *King of the Delta Blues Singers* could have been almost anyone. This lack of a photograph, admittedly, deepened the air of mystery around Johnson, leaving his devoted acolytes free to imagine him however they wished.

In any event, no matter how resourceful British blues enthusiasts were, their search proved fruitless. The first photographs of the bluesman—the only two, in fact, which are known to exist to this day—were unearthed by American researcher Steven LaVere in 1986 and 1990.⁸⁰² The first was apparently taken in a photo booth; it shows Johnson from the chest up, dressed in a plain white shirt with overalls. His guitar is cradled close, with his outrageously long, thin fingers gripping the upper fretboards. His facial expression is one of relaxed somnolence—the result, it has been suggested, of the picture having been taken the morning after a late night at the jook joint. A cigarette dangles rakishly from the left side of his mouth.⁸⁰³ The second of the two shows Johnson seated, cross-legged in a chair. He is dressed nattily, in a dark pinstriped suit, a striped tie, and a fedora—again, tipped at a jaunty angle atop his head. His face is fixed in a pleasant, if slightly forced, grin. In neither of these photos does Johnson seem to

⁸⁰² LaVere promptly copyrighted both pictures, in addition to registering himself as the executor of Johnson's estate.

⁸⁰³ This innocent-looking cigarette was at the center of an enormous controversy. When, in 1994, the United States Postal Service wanted to honor Johnson by putting him on a stamp, they chose the first photograph for the stamp's image. However, the Post Office ordered that the cigarette be deleted from Johnson's mouth, leading to a pitched battle between pro- and anti-smoking camps. In the end, the stamp was released, *sans* cigarette. For more details on this issue, see Schroeder, *Robert Johnson*, pp. 4-10.

resemble an anti-social and unsophisticated country bumpkin, driven to distraction by his demons.⁸⁰⁴

In Britain, amongst Johnson's original, now-middle-aged disciples, the reception of the photographs was quite instructive. Shown the second photograph in 1990, Clapton mused, "Wow. He's a pretty fancy dude, isn't he? Look at the suit and the hat and everything!" Proving that the imagery contained in the original album's liner notes still resonated, he continued,

He looks more worldly than I thought he would be, you know. In this picture, he looks far more sophisticated than—you kind of got the impression that he never ever would have worn a suit somehow, or a hat like that. It's great."⁸⁰⁵

Richards was quick to agree:

Great suit!...This cat is a really sharp motherfucker!...Charlie Watts [the Rolling Stones' drummer] is going to go *berserk* when he sees this suit and these shoes!...This cat was obviously no country bum anymore, by the time he got to this!...Wait until I show the guys!⁸⁰⁶

These responses are illustrative of the somewhat ambivalent mental image that these men had formed in the absence of any actual image. It was surprising to learn that Johnson could "clean up," as it were, but once the initial surprise wore off, it was replaced by an inevitable admiration for his elegance. It also showed that that adolescent eagerness to learn new things about Johnson—especially things that their comrades had

⁸⁰⁴ These photographs have since been reproduced in a vast number of sources, but as I have already borrowed much in the way of conceptual analysis from Patricia Schroeder, it seems only right to cite her reproductions as a guide to the curious. For the photo-booth shot (with cigarette), see Schroeder, *Robert Johnson*, p. 6; for the full-length studio shot (with suit and hat), see *ibid.*, frontispiece.

⁸⁰⁵ Clapton, interview with Franklin, in Scherman, "The Hellhound's Trail," p. 50.

⁸⁰⁶ Richards, interview with Franklin, in Scherman, "The Hellhound's Trail," p. 38.

not yet seen or heard—died hard. Richards was at once a nineteen-year-old kid again, itching to run off and impress the other Rolling Stones with a new angle on his hero.

Robert Johnson, the heroic, mystical figure at the center of this *bona fide* blues cult, has had that effect on British rock musicians in general, for the last forty years. As journalist Tony Scherman points out, “Ask them about themselves and they’re testy, glib or unreachable; ask them about Robert Johnson and you’ve got an interview.”⁸⁰⁷ Johnson was rarely British musicians’ first experience with the blues, and he was certainly not their last. The British blues cult had room for other sainted figures—even Clapton would come to develop a close rapport, musical and personal, with such blues grandees as Waters, Wolf, Buddy Guy, Otis Rush and B.B. King. Furthermore, as the 1960s progressed, Britain’s blues-rock scene was defined ever more strongly by a spirit of eclecticism and experimentation that drew many of the most prominent performers away from strictly-defined twelve-bar blues and into other musical styles that helped to innovate rock ‘n’ roll music.

However, through their various musical journeys, which have lasted in many cases up to the present day, the poetry, the paradoxes and the persona of Robert Johnson have remained constant influences. More than any other important blues artist, he and his music came, in the minds of the British men who took up the blues’ cause in the 1960s, to stand for the blues, to personify its stark masculine sexuality, its eerie intensity, and its essentially interstitial existence. The crossroads, at which Johnson purportedly sold his soul, and which formed the setting for his “Cross Road Blues,” is a perfect symbol of the blues’ situation at the intersection of so many seemingly paradoxical styles and

⁸⁰⁷ Scherman, “The Hellhound’s Trail,” p. 32.

sentiments—and it is fitting that Clapton’s cover version became known as “his theme song.”⁸⁰⁸

From the moment the young Clapton picked up *King of the Delta Blues Singers*, read the back of the sleeve, and actually played the record, a legend began to form in his head about Robert Johnson—a legend that in several places bore almost no resemblance to the actual flesh-and-blood Johnson but which, for lack of any corrective, far surpassed him. The cover art, the liner notes and the music itself worked as a tandem to first introduce, and then entrench, this legend. It asserted that Robert Johnson was a man shrouded in mystery, burdened by demons both internal and infernal. A shy, nervous man, he sought neither fame nor adulation; Clapton wondered if he even *wanted* to play for people. Don Law’s yarn about Johnson playing facing the wall would bear this out. Johnson was not a professional; he was merely an “incandescent” genius who lived just long enough, thankfully, to commit some of that genius to vinyl for posterity’s sake, and then was gone again, a victim of predatory women, perhaps, but more generally of the life he led.⁸⁰⁹ Or, then again, his time was merely up and the Devil came to collect what was owed; Johnson’s genius was snuffed out in a whiff of fire and brimstone.

Four subsequent decades of detective work (conducted in varying degrees of academic sobriety) has taught us that much of this is romantic waffle. He was unknown because his records never sold particularly well, and because he was long dead by the

⁸⁰⁸ Johnson, “Cross Road Blues,” *King of the Delta Blues Singers*; Clapton first recorded his version of the song with Cream (“Crossroads,” *Wheels of Fire* [Polydor, 1968]), and has been playing it live as a solo artist ever since.

⁸⁰⁹ “Incandescent”: see Richards, interview with Franklin, in Scherman, “The Hellhound’s Trail,” p. 38. This adjective, interestingly enough, is also used by Peter Guralnick to describe Johnson’s appeal to the 1960s generation in *Searching for Robert Johnson*, p. 2.

time the American folk revival hit. Far from being a naïve rube with neither ambition nor desire, as we have seen, he was a consummate professional, traveling far and wide, even actively seeking out a recording contract. Even the touching tale of Johnson playing with his back to the wall can be explained pragmatically. From Johnny Shines we hear that Johnson was a tremendously secretive musician, and that he most likely turned his back so the Mexican musicians could not see, and then steal, his tunings or technique.⁸¹⁰ Richards wonders if Johnson was simply after a better sound, and playing toward the wall meant better acoustics.⁸¹¹ Finally, Barry Lee Pearson punctures Sonny Boy Williamson II's tall tale regarding Johnson's last hours, conjecturing that perhaps the pain made Johnson double over onto the ground (the "crawling"), and that the poison made him dry heave (the "barking").⁸¹²

To understand the appeal of the blues to young British men, and the lead role played by Robert Johnson in forging that appeal, however, these debunkings are rather beside the point. Firstly, they were quite simply not available to British blues enthusiasts in the early 1960s. Any other printed material that these young men would have been able to get their hands on at this early juncture would have echoed, if not intensified, the rhapsodizing found in the liner notes.⁸¹³ Secondly, even if such a rhetorical dose of cold

⁸¹⁰ Johnny Shines, interview with Gayle Dean Wardlow, in Stephen Calt and Gayle Dean Wardlow, "Robert Johnson," in *78 Quarterly*, no. 4 (1989), p. 46.

⁸¹¹ Richards, interview with Obrecht, in Obrecht, *Blues Guitar*, p. 12.

⁸¹² Pearson and McCulloch, *Lost and Found*, p. 35.

⁸¹³ *E.g.* Charters' *The Country Blues*. Pete Welding's 1966 article in *Down Beat*—the one that publicized "Son" House's claim about the "Devil's deal"—was, if anything, even more overblown than anything that had come before it—so much so that, twenty years later, Welding called it "vintage rococo Welding" (Pearson, *Lost and Found*, p. 30).

water would have been available, it is doubtful that it would have had any impact. For a generation of young men feeling—in the words of Susan McClary—“emotionally dispossessed,” alienated from an uncertain postwar inheritance and an affluent yet colorless society, Johnson represented the tragic hero who shook loose from the oppression of traditional society, if only for a moment, before dying young and mysteriously.⁸¹⁴ The potency of this myth was such that all the factual refutations in the world might not have prevailed against it.

Disproving the facts of the Johnson legend would have only thrown his British disciples back on its abstract or metaphorical aspects, which was how, as we have seen, many of them were prepared to understand it anyway. Understanding the legend this way certainly made Johnson more accessible. Literally speaking, Johnson’s is the tale of a young, black itinerant womanizer and musician in the Depression-era American South, and only truly makes sense when considered against the backdrop of racism, poverty, African-American religious culture and local prejudices against the blues and its practitioners that existed at that specific time and place.⁸¹⁵ Hoping to emulate his experience in early 1960s Britain would have been laughable and, indeed, impossible. When viewed as a metaphor, as a myth, Johnson was freed from these specific historical constraints and could be made to stand for the struggle between young masculinity and a

⁸¹⁴ Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 55.

⁸¹⁵ Schroeder, *Robert Johnson*, p. 39-40.

whole host of social anxieties, pressures and prejudices.⁸¹⁶ Itinerant womanizing was nothing to be sneezed at, either.

In this regard, Johnson's death was of supreme importance—and not just because of the added pathos of “the genius who died before his time” that it lent to the story. Being dead for twenty years meant that Johnson was in some sense an empty screen, onto which all of the aforementioned hopes and desires could be projected. There was no chance of ever meeting him or even seeing his face—hence, why it was such an important point that no photographs of him seemed to exist. To actually meet one's idol in the flesh always carries with it the potential for disappointment, and to the British blues scene, this potential was no less real.

The relationship between the Animals and Yardbirds and Sonny Boy Williamson II is a case in point. As much of an honor as it was to meet him, and serve as his backing band, and however many good stories he told about his fellow bluesmen or America in general, Sonny Boy came off to his young acolytes as a condescending, mean-spirited drunk who threatened them with a loaded gun and openly disparaged their musical ability.⁸¹⁷ Johnson, by all accounts, was nowhere near as unpredictable or irritable as that. But even just proving to be an ordinary flesh-and-blood man would very easily have provided a jarring contrast with the legend that had been created about him. As things

⁸¹⁶ Or, in Roland Barthes' words, “the history evaporates.” Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 117.

⁸¹⁷ Sean Egan, *Animal Tracks: The Story of the Animals, Newcastle's Rising Sons* (London: Helter Skelter, 2001), p. 37; Clapton, interview with Guralnick, in “Eric Clapton at the Passion Threshold,” p. 48; Alan Clayson, *The Yardbirds: The Band That Launched Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002), p. 28.

stood, though, British blues enthusiasts' favorable opinions of Johnson would never be challenged; he would remain what they made of him.

In many ways, what they made of Robert Johnson was a star. He was rescued from his semi-obscurity and elevated to the pantheon of blues heroes, at a moment when his previous influence upon the genre was rather negligible. In countless interviews, British musicians (especially Clapton) extolled his greatness, insisting that if fans had any interest at all in where their music came from, they needed to go back to Johnson, just as they had done.⁸¹⁸ His songs were covered, not only by Cream, Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones, but by fellow British acts such as Fleetwood Mac and Steve Winwood, as well as much more recent artists such as Robert Palmer, Keb' Mo', Tracy Chapman and the White Stripes. As mentioned, Johnson was a member of the inaugural class of inductees in the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame. In 1990, *The Complete Recordings* was awarded a Grammy for best historical album; for a brief period of time in early 1991, it ranked as Sony Records' third-best-selling album. Robert Johnson had become something of a rock star.⁸¹⁹

Arguably none of this would have been possible if the British blues enthusiasts had not hit upon his record in the spring of 1961 and built a cult around the tortured genius they perceived to be responsible for it. The blues boom of the 1960s would have happened without Robert Johnson; in many ways, it already had. But the blues boom

⁸¹⁸ Eric Clapton, interview with J.D. Considine, "Eric Clapton Is Not God. And He Knows It," in *Musician*, no. 97 (Nov. 1986), p. 89.

⁸¹⁹ Scherman, "The Hellhound's Trail," p. 32-34. Johnson's renewed popularity led to a bizarre incident wherein a CBS record executive got an entirely serious phone call from a Midwestern staffer, asking if the Grammy-winning bluesman would be available to do some interviews for local call-in radio shows!

mutated into blues-rock, which then, along with other influences, helped to influence and innovate rock 'n' roll proper in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It seems no stretch to say that *that* would not have been possible without Robert Johnson. Robert Plant, who was partly responsible (for good or ill) for what rock 'n' roll became in the 1970s, put it succinctly when he said, "Somebody, someday is going to get my record collection, whether it's my daughter or my son or both—and they better know what they got. 'Cause Johnson is part of why their dad is what he is."⁸²⁰

⁸²⁰ Plant, interview with Scherman, in Scherman, "The Hellhound's Trail," p. 42.

CHAPTER FIVE
Call and Response:
American Challenges to the British Blues Network, 1965-1969

From the moment the airplane carrying the Beatles to New York City touched down on the tarmac at John F. Kennedy International Airport in February 1964, a process of cultural integration began that would see the merger of British and American rock ‘n’ roll music into a truly trans-Atlantic phenomenon by the early 1970s. It has been suggested that the “British Invasion” shook the American music scene out of the stupor in which it had languished ever since the “death” of rock ‘n’ roll in the late 1950s, and inspired it to the great creative heights it enjoyed throughout the 1960s.⁸²¹ Although this is obviously a misleading and over-simplified view—one has only to look at the American folk movement and attendant blues revival, or Atlantic and Motown soul, all of which were already in play during the early years of the decade—it is not without some basic truth. Simultaneously inspired by the infectious energy (and hefty sales figures) of the British groups, and embarrassed that the British were having such success using a discarded piece of *America’s* own cultural heritage, many American musicians did view the “British Invasion” as both a turning-point and a creative gauntlet that required a response in kind. The trans-Atlantic dialogue that resulted, and its impact on rock music, will be the focus of this chapter.

The American music scene that emerged in large part in response to the “British Invasion” was incredibly diverse and heterogeneous. Its most famous bands—the Mamas and the Papas, the Byrds, the Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, *et. al.*—are familiar

⁸²¹ *E.g., The History of Rock ‘n’ Roll*, the popular 1995 PBS/BBC documentary produced by Quincy Jones, Bob Meyrowitz and David Salzman, the third episode of which is entitled *Britain Invades, America Fights Back* (dir. Andrew Solt).

to even the most casual of music fans. Instead of attempting a comprehensive discussion of this scene, however, this chapter, in assessing the full impact of the American riposte, will limit itself to a discussion of the musical challenges posed to the British blues network by four American musical acts: Bob Dylan, Paul Butterfield, Jimi Hendrix, and the Band. In their own way, each of these acts could make a claim for greater musical authenticity or sophistication—claims that needed to be taken seriously, and addressed if the British bands hoped to remain relevant—let alone dominant—in a rapidly developing music industry. Two of the acts (Dylan and Butterfield) helped to bring about the end of British blues’ “first wave;” the other two (Hendrix and the Band) helped the British blues network to transition from “second” to “third wave.”

My choice of these four acts has been governed by three interrelated considerations. The first is the seriousness of the challenge to what could be called, for lack of a better term, the British sense of musical integrity. If, for example, the British blues network lacked the authenticity of a direct personal connection with American bluesmen and their surroundings, then an American band whose members had grown up in Chicago and learned their craft from Muddy Waters—like Paul Butterfield’s band—would pose a serious challenge indeed. Secondly, in keeping with my emphasis on the interpersonal nature of trans-Atlantic musical development, all four of these acts were personally acquainted with the British blues network. They socialized, jammed and sometimes recorded with them—and were thus better placed to have a direct influence on them. Finally, and simply enough, these were the musicians that the British *themselves* felt challenged or threatened by. Here, as in so many places in this study, I rely on the responses of the British network, as articulated both at the time and in later years.

Bob Dylan's challenge was based initially both on his direct connection with, and descent from, the American folk-protest movement that had been so instrumental in rediscovering the work of old bluesmen and reintroducing it to trans-Atlantic audiences. However, beginning in 1965, with his trifecta of "electric mod" albums, Dylan's challenge was also based in his work in expanding blues-based rock music's capacity for sophistication and artistry. His lyrical approach, which employed what came to be called "flashing-chain imagery," had an immediate effect on the songwriting teams of Lennon/McCartney and Jagger/Richards, among others. Simultaneously, Dylan's music was firmly rooted in blues and country-and-western traditions; thus it achieved both an authentic richness and a greater poetic sophistication. Dylan, who consorted enough with the British blues network that he was almost an auxiliary member, was throughout this period a friend, a rival, a co-conspirator and a critic. Alongside that of Jimi Hendrix, it was Dylan's challenge that was the most immediate, because it was the most personal.

For the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, the challenge was based in what might be called a sort of "sibling rivalry." As mentioned, harmonica player/singer Butterfield and guitarists Michael Bloomfield and Elvin Bishop, all aspiring white bluesmen, received their musical education direct from the source: the South Side of Chicago, where they sat in and socialized with the likes of Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. Thus they enjoyed a personal rapport with the black Chicago blues luminaries whom the British bluesmen mainly worshipped from afar. This lent Butterfield's outfit an authenticity that the British, who had learnt their craft from record albums, the radio and fleeting encounters with their heroes, could not initially hope to match. In effect, it established Butterfield, *et. al.*, as the Chicago bluesmen's other "sons." It also resulted in a greater orthodoxy with

regard to the structure of blues music, and thus provides an interesting counterpoint to the British scene's already-growing tendency toward experimentation.

The challenge of Jimi Hendrix was musical as well as strongly personal. For one, as a young black bluesman, he was personally authentic in a way that the British, who could only at best *sound* like young black bluesmen, could not. For another, his technical virtuosity on the guitar threatened to show up the entire phalanx of budding British guitar heroes, who had made a fetish out of mastering the instrument. If he played fast, loudly and spectacularly, it raised the bar for the British to play even faster, even louder and with even more flamboyance. Hendrix also posed a sexual threat, in which was bound up ideas of race, masculinity, "Americanness" and the sexual nature of blues culture itself. For a population of young men who were, on at least a subconscious level, negotiating and acting out their own masculinities by playing the blues, then the arrival of Hendrix, the so-called "king stud" of the psychedelic scene, would have been disconcerting indeed.

The Band's challenge was initially a bit more ambivalent. Four of its five members were Canadian, and thus came from a similar position of proximity to and distance from American culture—particularly that of the Deep South—to the British network. However, by touring for years behind rockabilly singer Ronnie Hawkins and then the "electrified" Bob Dylan, they earned an authenticity and a fluency in that culture that gave them a slight advantage over their British counterparts, who had not yet seen much of America. Once the Band struck out on their own, they used this advantage—and their continuing closeness with Dylan—to create two monumental albums that were vivid explorations of some of the themes of Americana that the British bands were themselves attempting to explore. As a result, the Band's music had deep repercussions for the

British blues network—not the least of which was the hastening of Cream’s dissolution in 1968.

This is not to say, of course, that only these four acts had any musical or personal influence on the British blues network from 1965 onward. An obvious example outside this quartet would be the Beach Boys, whose 1966 album *Pet Sounds* has been cited as a significant influence by British rock musicians from Paul McCartney and Mick Jagger, to Jimmy Page and Brian May.⁸²² The American music scene of the late 1960s was not only diverse and heterogeneous; it was also incredibly well populated. Of the literally hundreds of bands making records and giving live performances at this time, the British blues network probably heard (or heard about) a great deal of it, especially after they began traveling to the United States in large numbers themselves. It would be impossible to quantify or even to name all the subtle ways in which these American acts influenced some aspect of the British groups’ technique, songwriting or visual presentation. However, there were influences, and then there were out-and-out challenges to authenticity, and it was *these* four acts who posed the most important challenges—and who, in turn, stimulated the British blues network to the creative heights they would scale as the 1960s came to a close.

Like a Rolling Stone: Bob Dylan and the Poetics of Rock ‘n’ Roll

Bob Dylan’s challenge to the British was initially based in his connection with, and lineage from, the American folk movement, whose members had been among the first white Americans to discover and publicize Delta blues. It was largely through the efforts of the chroniclers and performers of folk music that influential bluesmen like Lead

⁸²² The Beach Boys, *Pet Sounds* (Capitol, 1965). See also, Peter Arnes Carlin, *Catch a Wave: The Rise, Fall and Redemption of Brian Wilson* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale, 2006);

Belly and “Son” House were re-discovered in the 1940s and 1950s.⁸²³ Chief chronicler Alan Lomax hosted a weekly blues show on the BBC’s Light Programme, which was instrumental, along with similar shows hosted by Alexis Korner, in disseminating the Delta blues to Britain as a subject for quasi-scholarly study. In order to cater to the growing “folk” market, the “major” record companies—Capitol, Columbia, MGM, *et. al.*—started repackaging and re-issuing old blues records beginning in the late 1950s.⁸²⁴ One of these re-issues, Robert Johnson’s *King of the Delta Blues Singers*—released by Columbia Records in 1961—had an enormous impact, as I have demonstrated, on the development of the British blues scene. Thus, the people and tradition that Dylan represented were not only more knowledgeable about the blues, and had been earlier, than their counterparts in Britain—they were also partially responsible for that knowledge having made its way to Britain in the first place.⁸²⁵

Dylan’s challenge to the British, however, consisted of more than just being able to serve as a personal reminder to them of the music’s sources in the American folk movement. Increasingly, his challenge was based in his ability, beginning in 1965, to make music that explored rock ‘n’ roll’s capacity for lyrical sophistication and meaning, and to advance the claim that rock ‘n’ roll was a valid form of modern poetry. In other words, as his manager, Albert Grossman, put it, whereas “[p]op music [had] aimed below

⁸²³ Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and Roots Music* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 49.

⁸²⁴ Barry Lee Pearson and Bill McCulloch, *Robert Johnson: Lost and Found* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 43.

⁸²⁵ Robert Santelli, “A Century of the Blues,” in Peter Guralnick, et. al., eds., *Martin Scorsese Presents The Blues: A Musical Journey* (New York: Amistad Books, 2003), pp. 45-46.

the waist for so long,” Dylan’s music “did something to the mind.”⁸²⁶ Dylan’s first four albums had boasted impeccable folk credentials, with the so-called “folk bard” singing protest songs from a solidly Leftist perspective, decrying political and social injustice, and accompanying himself with only an acoustic guitar and a harmonica. Subsequently, however, with a trilogy of “electric mod” albums that encompassed March 1965’s *Bringing It All Back Home*, August 1965’s *Highway 61 Revisited* and May 1966’s *Blonde on Blonde*, Dylan took three bold steps forward.⁸²⁷ To American folk purists, each of these steps was a betrayal, but to Britain’s nascent blues enthusiasts, they amounted to an inspiration and a challenge.

The first step was a striking change in lyrical focus. As Dylan’s writing skills sharpened and his interest in Beat poetry and British rock music deepened, his songs became less concerned with the old forms of socio-political protest. In September 1965, Dylan told one interviewer, “I’d rather listen to Jimmy Reed or Howlin’ Wolf, man, or the Beatles or [French pop singer] Françoise Hardy, than I would listen to any protest singers... Just because someone mentions the word ‘bomb,’ I’m not going to go ‘Aalee!’ and start clapping!”⁸²⁸ To another, he professed to be “bored with the atom bomb... bored with our Government”—the two chief topical concerns of the American and British

⁸²⁶ Grossman said these words to a reporter from the *Daily Mail* as he threw him out of Dylan’s hotel room! Quoted in Robert Shelton, *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), p. 290.

⁸²⁷ Alan Light, “Bob Dylan,” in Anthony DeCurtis, James Henke and Holly George-Warren, eds., *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* (New York: Straight Arrow, 1992), p. 301; Bob Dylan, *Bringing It All Back Home* (Columbia, 1965), *Highway 61 Revisited* (Columbia, 1965), and *Blonde on Blonde* (Columbia, 1966).

⁸²⁸ Bob Dylan, interview with Paul J. Robbins, *Los Angeles Free Press* (March 1965).

folk movements at the time.⁸²⁹ Instead, Dylan began to be increasingly apolitical, interested more in personal matters, like the development of the self and its relationship to the larger society.⁸³⁰ These were issues he would explore in his music for at least the next fifteen years.

In exploring these issues Bob Dylan was fully in step with his peers in Britain, for whom socio-political activism was always a lukewarm lyrical inspiration, at best. Even after 1965, as the Beatles' lyrics began to become more sophisticated, Paul McCartney would still claim, "[t]he [protest] songs are getting a bit silly, aren't they?"⁸³¹ It is important to note that to the British rock musicians, "freedom" (as in the Rolling Stones' "I'm Free" or Cream's "I Feel Free") was always strictly a personal matter, never a class, racial or national concern.⁸³² Furthermore, in what are perhaps the best-known examples of political activism in British rock music (the Beatles' "Revolution" and the Rolling Stones' "Street Fighting Man"), "revolution" is viewed with a great deal more ambivalence than it was by, say, the New Left in the United States or the student revolutionaries in France.⁸³³ For the mutually influencing trans-Atlantic rock community, the discovery of the self was usually a much more rewarding (and thus, much more common) lyrical pursuit.

⁸²⁹ Bob Dylan, interview with Maureen Cleave, *The Evening Standard* (n.d., 1965).

⁸³⁰ Mike Marqusee, *Wicked Messenger: Bob Dylan and the 1960s* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), p. 187.

⁸³¹ Paul McCartney, quoted in Shelton, *No Direction Home*, p. 287.

⁸³² The Rolling Stones, "I'm Free," *December's Children (And Everybody's)* (Abkco, 1965); Cream, "I Feel Free," *Fresh Cream* (Polydor, 1966).

⁸³³ The Beatles, "Revolution," *The Beatles (commonly titled "The White Album")* (EMI, 1968); The Rolling Stones, "Street Fighting Man," *Beggars Banquet* (Abkco, 1968).

More important than Dylan's new topical approach was the lyrical idiom he was developing to address those topics. Rejecting the "archaism and stilted poetic diction of the folk tradition" (not to mention its earnest straightforwardness) Dylan opted instead for what became known as "flashing-chain imagery," a free-associative blend of oddly-juxtaposed proper nouns, vivid yet often bizarre descriptors, and absurdist wit that drew equally from the blues, Dadaist and Surrealist art, and nineteenth-century Romantic poetry.⁸³⁴ This approach often combined seemingly incompatible ideas and images and crammed as many of them as possible into lines and verses, which Dylan almost spat out in a rapid-fire, rhyming delivery. The juxtaposition of interesting, yet seemingly contradictory images can be seen in "Just Like A Woman," which speaks of the titular woman's "fog, her amphetamines and her pearls."⁸³⁵ Likewise, "Like a Rolling Stone" introduces the following characters: a "diplomat who carried on his shoulder a Siamese cat," "Napoleon in rags," and a "mystery tramp... [who is] not selling any alibis."⁸³⁶ Even Dylan's song titles reflect his newfound interest in "flashing-chain imagery"—"folk Dylan" titles like "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" and "The Times They Are A-Changin'" gave way to "electric Dylan" titles like "Motorpsycho Nitemare" and "Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat."

Dylan extended this lyrical approach to his public persona, infusing even his interpersonal conversations with elaborate verbal put-ons that make his interviews from

⁸³⁴ Marqusee, *Wicked Messenger*, p. 140.

⁸³⁵ Bob Dylan, "Just Like A Woman," *Blonde on Blonde* (Columbia, 1966).

⁸³⁶ Bob Dylan, "Like A Rolling Stone," *Highway 61 Revisited* (Columbia, 1965).

this period more like performances in themselves. A “Life Lines” questionnaire sent to Dylan by the British music magazine *New Musical Express* yielded the following gems:

Miscellaneous likes: Trucks with no wheels. French telephones, anything with a stewed prune in the middle.

Miscellaneous dislikes: Hairy firemen, toe-nails, glass Mober forks, birds with ears.

...
Taste in music: Sort of peanut butter.⁸³⁷

Playboy’s Nat Hentoff, who in March 1966 asked Dylan why he had gone “the rock-and-roll route” (perhaps the fiftieth time by then that a reporter had asked him that question), got this monument to absurdity in response:

Carelessness. I lost my true love. I started drinking. I wind up in Phoenix. I get a job as a Chinaman. I start working in a dime store and move in with a 13-year-old girl. Then this big Mexican lady from Philadelphia comes in and burns the house down. I go down to Dallas. I get a job as a “before” in a Charles Atlas “before and after” ad. I move in with a delivery boy who can cook fantastic chili and hot dogs. Then this 13-year-old girl from Phoenix comes and burns the house down. The next thing I know I’m in Omaha.

This continued for some time, and when Dylan was finished, Hentoff ventured, “And that’s how you became a rock-and-roll singer?” Dylan: “No, that’s how I got tuberculosis.”⁸³⁸

I have quoted these excerpts to underscore two fundamental points about Bob Dylan’s development in this period—points that were not lost on his admirers on the British blues scene. The first is that, in extending his “flashing-chain imagery” to his public pronouncements, Dylan seemed to be sublimating himself in his art, making himself as much a part of his performance as the words he sang, or the music with which

⁸³⁷ “Life Lines: Bob Dylan,” in *New Musical Express*, March 1965, quoted in Shelton, *No Direction Home*, p. 291.

⁸³⁸ Bob Dylan, interview with Nat Hentoff, *Playboy* (March 1966).

he accompanied them. This, ironically, was a point of continuity with the folk revival, since it was a cherished folk tenet that the artist was as much a cultural artifact as the songs he or she sang.⁸³⁹ Even as Bob Dylan's sense of himself as a "pop" artist in the modern marketplace grew, this notion that both singer and song occupied a more or less equal artistic importance remained constant. The difference lay in the type of art. With the "folkies," both singer- and song-as-art were simple, unadorned and earnest; for "electric mod" Dylan, they were flashy, complex and surrealistic. Contrast the proletarian image of folk balladeer Pete Seeger, content to perform in simple denim or flannel, with that of Bob Dylan onstage at the Royal Albert Hall in London in May 1966 wearing an ostentatious hound's-tooth jacket, stylish sunglasses and Cuban-heeled boots.⁸⁴⁰ This synthesis of artist and art was perceived by the British to be a crucial element of the blues tradition (this helps to explain their belief that blues lyrics were autobiographical); it was also a part of their own country's Pop Art movement.⁸⁴¹ Now, it was a part of Dylan's repertoire as well.

Simultaneously, Dylan also seemed to be cloaking himself, as artist, in a layer of inscrutability, declaring that any serious personal understanding of the artist was impossible. The artist's identity was mutable, able to be put on and cast off as often as the artist liked. Robert Zimmerman (Dylan's birth name) was born in Hibbing, Minnesota in 1942, and had left home for New York City immediately after high school. Bob Dylan,

⁸³⁹ Georgina Boyes, *An Imagined Village: An Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 43.

⁸⁴⁰ Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, p. 56; Shelton, *No Direction Home*, p. 366.

⁸⁴¹ Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art Into Pop* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 51.

on the other hand, was a reinvention, a man who could change his back-story and his image as often as he changed clothes. Dylan asked Laurie Henshaw of *Disc Weekly*,

Why don't you just say my name is Kessenovitch... and I... come from Acapulco, Mexico... [and] that my father was an escaped thief from South Africa? I started making records in 1947 [keep in mind that Dylan was born in 1942]... A race record. I made it down South. Actually, the first record I made was in 1935. John Hammond came and recorded me. Discovered me in 1935, sitting on a farm.⁸⁴²

Giving such exasperating responses to interviewers was most likely the result of Dylan's mounting road-weariness, as well as his frustration with being asked what he considered to be invasive or idiotic questions. However, there was also a level at which Dylan's ongoing campaign to obscure his identity and background can be taken as echoing a larger blues tradition—that of a change of identity as one way to escape the circumstances of one's life. The modern blues pantheon is full of pseudonyms—Sonny Boy Williamson II, Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf immediately jump to mind—and invented or embellished back-stories. Both Lead Belly and Son House were supposed to have committed murder; Robert Johnson supposedly sold his soul to the devil. Williamson II appropriated the first “Sonny Boy's” life story in its entirety, and told many other tall tales besides. This blues tradition also helps to explain Dylan's tendency, especially in the early 1970s, to appear unbilled at the concerts and recording sessions of friends and contemporaries, usually under such “bluesy” pseudonyms as “Big Joe's Buddy,” “Elmer Johnson,” “Tedham Porterhouse,” or “Blind Boy Grunt.”⁸⁴³

⁸⁴² Bob Dylan, interview with Laurie Henshaw, in Henshaw, “Mr. Send Up,” *Disc Weekly* (May 12, 1965), pp. 55-56.

⁸⁴³ Shelton, *No Direction Home*, p. 423; Barney Hoskyns, *Across the Great Divide: The Band and America* (New York: Hyperion, 1993), p. 216.

The mutability of the bluesman's identity, and the role that reinvention played in helping a man achieve his freedom, fit quite nicely with the idea, promulgated in such diverse media as Western films and comic books, that America is a site for remaking oneself and starting over again. The British musicians had received this idea via their consumption of American culture; indeed, it was the better part of their fascination with that culture. At some level, then, Bob Dylan was partaking—and was being seen by his British counterparts as partaking—in a cultural mythology that had a larger scope than simply the absurd put-ons given by a testy singer trying to dodge the inquiries of a bemused reporter.

Thus, although Bob Dylan's music and public persona were so distinctive and creative as to defy any strict categorization besides simply "pop" (in that it was played by mainstream radio and sold well enough to appear on the *Billboard* charts), they still were rooted heavily in blues traditions. Even as Dylan's lyrics became increasingly sophisticated and influenced by Beat poetry and Dada, they still retained a hardcore of blues themes and imagery. Dylan's continued recourse to this idiom is reflected at the superficial level in the many song titles containing the word "blues"—"Subterranean Homesick Blues," "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues," "Tombstone Blues," to name a few—and in name-checks of blues personages such as Ma Rainey, Bo Diddley and the Seventh Son.⁸⁴⁴ But it is also reflected at the deeper level of lyrical meaning. The songs in Dylan's "electric mod" *oeuvre* address such quintessential blues themes as

⁸⁴⁴ Ma Rainey: "Tombstone Blues;" Bo Diddley: "From a Buick 6;" the Seventh Son: "Highway 61 Revisited." All three songs feature on Bob Dylan, *Highway 61 Revisited* (Columbia, 1965).

rootlessness, freedom from social conventions, and the personal, almost spiritual quest undertaken by every man to either arrive at or escape from his own destiny.

Like the old blues canon, Dylan's songs also seemed to draw, with admittedly broad brushstrokes, a map of America, and to populate that map with American myths and icons. Even before he had abandoned the folk-protest movement, Dylan described folk music (or what he called "historical-traditional music") as contrasting favorably with "this wasted world and totally mechanized" existence. It was "a parallel universe... with more archaic principles and values."⁸⁴⁵ This universe, this alternate, imagined America, was "a culture of outlaw women, super thugs, demon lovers and gospel truths... [of] landlords and oilmen, Stagger Lees, Pretty Pollys and John Henrys."⁸⁴⁶ In short, it was a land of the myths that helped forge the idea of America, and by which Americans measured and defined themselves. It also just happened to be the very land with which young British men had fallen in love; thus, any music that came from within that invisible republic (to borrow Greil Marcus' phrase) was bound to resonate in Britain.⁸⁴⁷ Whether this land had ever existed, or how many years had passed since it had, was almost beside the point. It was the promise it represented that mattered, and Bob Dylan's music seemed to reinscribe that promise.

Bob Dylan's radical reinvention from 1965 onward also included a crucial musical element: the use of electrified instruments. Of the several changes adopted by Dylan, this was the one that caused the most controversy. To the folk revival elites in

⁸⁴⁵ Bob Dylan, *Chronicles, Volume 1* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), p. 235.

⁸⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 236.

⁸⁴⁷ Marcus, *Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes* (London: Picador, 1997).

both America and Britain, the choice of instrumentation followed a simple enough dichotomy. White folk musicians played acoustic guitar and harmonica, usually alone onstage, to emphasize the simplicity and purity of the music they championed. White rock ‘n’ roll musicians, on the other hand, played electric instruments that demonstrated their own and their music’s vulgarity and complicity with modern mass culture.⁸⁴⁸ Thus, when Bob Dylan took the stage at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival with an electric guitar, supported by members of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, he was flouting that careful dichotomy, and if the unanimity of the booing that resulted has been exaggerated, the anger felt by those who did boo was most likely quite real.⁸⁴⁹

Like most creation myths, the story of how Bob Dylan was motivated to “go electric” has several forms. In one version, Bob Dylan was driving down a deserted highway somewhere in Kansas, with fellow folk singer Joan Baez by his side, in the summer of 1964. The Animals’ version of “The House of the Rising Sun” (an old blues that Dylan had recorded for his debut album in 1962) began playing on the car radio. Riveted, Dylan pulled the car off to the shoulder of the highway. He listened intently for a few moments before he jumped out of the car, banging on the hood and shouting,

⁸⁴⁸ In an interesting show of the “white inferiority complex” that could often be found in abundance amongst the “folkies,” African-American blues musicians were able to continue playing the Newport Folk Festivals with full amplified bands behind them; their authenticity was seemingly accorded by race, and not by technique. Michael Bloomfield, quoted in Jan Michael Wolkin and Bill Keenom, *Michael Bloomfield: If You Love These Blues* (San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 2001), p. 103.

⁸⁴⁹ Marcus, *Invisible Republic*, p. 32.

“Electric! Electric!”⁸⁵⁰ In another, more subdued, version, music journalist Al Aronowitz took Dylan to the Paramount Theatre in New York City to see the Beatles perform because he “thought that Lennon and Dylan oughta meet.” Watching the Beatles’ concert from the wings, standing on a chair, Dylan was mesmerized by the Beatles’ energetic, electric rock music, as well as the rapturous response from the audience. The next day, Dylan asked Aronowitz’s wife to drive him to a music store, where he bought an electric guitar, never to look back.⁸⁵¹

Whatever the truth of the matter (and Dylan, for his part, claimed at the time that “no one told [him] to go electric”) it is certain that his decision was at the very least hastened by the impact of the “British Invasion.”⁸⁵² Dylan, who had started off (as a high-schooler) wanting to be a rock ‘n’ roll singer, was outspoken in his admiration for the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Animals and Manfred Mann, whose music he saw as resurrecting the sheer energy of early rock ‘n’ roll and R&B and injecting it back into pop music, where its absence had caused Dylan to turn instead to folk music.⁸⁵³ Dylan also appreciated the Britishers’ role as advocates for the blues and R&B, telling interviewers Nora Ephron and Susan Edmiston, “The English did that. They brought it out. They hipped everybody. You read an interview asking who the Beatles’ favorite singer was, and they say Chuck Berry. You never used to hear Chuck Berry on the radio, [or] hard

⁸⁵⁰ Dylan told the Animals’ drummer, John Steel, this story during the Animals’ US tour in early 1965. Quoted in Sean Egan, *Animal Tracks: The Story of the Animals, Newcastle’s Rising Sons* (London: Helter Skelter, 2001), p. 51.

⁸⁵¹ Al Aronowitz, interview in *Plugging In*, dir. Susan Steinberg, in *The History of Rock ‘n’ Roll*, prod. Quincy Jones, Bob Meyrowitz and David Salzman (1995).

⁸⁵² Dylan, quoted in Shelton, *No Direction Home*, p. 266.

⁸⁵³ Dylan, *Chronicles, Volume 1*, pp. 5-6.

blues.⁸⁵⁴ Furthermore, Dylan harbored a genuine respect for the British songwriters. Though not as fully developed as it would become on later albums, the writing of Lennon and McCartney, Jagger and Richards, Pete Townshend and even Alan Price and Eric Burdon, even then showed a literacy that was often absent (and assumed to be impossible) from pop music.⁸⁵⁵

Even before his first tour of Great Britain in the spring of 1965, Dylan sought out his peers on the British music scene, eager to learn from them, as well as to try out new ideas on them. Meeting the Beatles for the first time in August 1964, Dylan was shocked to learn that their early smash hit, “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” did not include a drug reference, as he thought it did (he heard “I get high, I get high” for “I can’t hide, I can’t hide”), and that, in fact, the Beatles had never smoked marijuana at all, although they had taken amphetamines by the bottleful during their early days in Hamburg.⁸⁵⁶ He proceeded, as a thoughtful ambassador of American popular culture, to remedy this situation, initiating the Beatles into that particular drug. Its mind-altering effects were demonstrated on the “Fab Four’s” next two albums, *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver*.⁸⁵⁷ John Lennon invited Dylan to dinner at his house in Surrey; the two talked music, played each

⁸⁵⁴ Dylan, interview with Nora Ephron and Susan Edmiston, *Positively Tie Dream* (August 1965).

⁸⁵⁵ Greil Marcus, “The Beatles,” in DeCurtis, Henke and George-Warren, *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History*, p. 212

⁸⁵⁶ Bob Spitz, *The Beatles: The Biography* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2005), p. 535; The Beatles, “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” *The Beatles: 1962-1966* (EMI, 1973).

⁸⁵⁷ Spitz, *The Beatles*, pp. 535-36; The Beatles, *Rubber Soul* (EMI, 1965), and *Revolver* (EMI, 1966).

other a few records, and even—according to Dylan—tried recording some hastily written songs on a tape recorder, although if this is true, they have never surfaced.⁸⁵⁸

Dylan was also anxious to meet the Rolling Stones, in particular Brian Jones, who was still perceived—mistakenly, as it turned out—to be a creative force in the band he had helped found. In April 1965, Dylan called Jones and asked to meet him during Dylan’s British tour the following month. The anticipated meeting did happen in May, but in New York, during the Rolling Stones’ American tour. Over the next few months, Jones called Dylan so regularly that the band’s London office eventually had to put a cap on Jones’ use of their telephone.⁸⁵⁹ Of the five Stones, it was Jones with whom Dylan spent the most time whenever he was in Britain or the Rolling Stones were in America. For example, on November 6, 1965, the night of the famous “blackout of ‘65” that threw the entire Northeast into darkness, Dylan, Robbie Robertson (the guitarist in his backing band, the Hawks) and a sizable entourage showed up at Jones’ motel room with acoustic guitars, candles and marijuana, and jammed through the night.⁸⁶⁰

It is unclear why Jones so intrigued Dylan. On a superficial level, it can likely be explained by Dylan’s being intrigued by the Rolling Stones in general, and by his perception that Jones was the band’s leader and creative force. Whatever the reason, however, it is clear that Jones’ creative influence on Dylan was considerable (though,

⁸⁵⁸ Shelton, *No Direction Home*, p. 294; Dylan, liner notes to *Biograph* (Columbia, 1985).

⁸⁵⁹ Stephen Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead: The 40-Year Odyssey of the Rolling Stones* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001), p. 120.

⁸⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 146.

sadly for Jones, the reverse was decidedly not true).⁸⁶¹ According to biographer Robert Shelton, Dylan told his audience at Carnegie Hall that the “Mr. Jones” referenced in his song, “Ballad of a Thin Man” was in fact the Rolling Stones’ lead guitarist (although, when feeling uncooperative with reporters, he also said that “Mr. Jones” was a woman, a composite character, and a fictitious character altogether. On top of these, it was also speculated that “he” could have been Pete Seeger or Joan Baez).⁸⁶² Those close to Dylan thought that “Like A Rolling Stone,” the seven-minute-long epic rant from August 1965’s *Highway 61 Revisited*, was about Jones, and that the title of his March 1966 magnum opus, *Blonde on Blonde*, was inspired by watching Jones and his equally blonde girlfriend, German fashion model Anita Pallenberg, quarreling at a London nightclub.⁸⁶³

Although Jones himself did not profit musically from his association with Dylan, the Rolling Stones in general (and the songwriting team of Jagger and Richards specifically) benefited immensely. Jagger, who has proven incredibly good at adapting himself and his lyrical approach to outside influences, quickly absorbed Dylan’s flashing-chain imagery and capacity for biting (yet apolitical) social satire. The finest examples of this absorption are to be found on what critic Jonathan Cott termed the band’s “pop art masterpieces... [which] attempted to exorcise the demonic ghosts of the Oedipal family

⁸⁶¹ Although Jones was a gifted instrumentalist, seemingly able to pick up and play any instrument that happened to be lying around, he was fundamentally incapable of songwriting, a handicap that sealed his creative obsolescence in the Rolling Stones. Alan Clayson, *Brian Jones* (London: Sanctuary, 2003), pp. 106-07.

⁸⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 130; Dylan, interview with Robert Shelton, in Shelton, *No Direction Home*, pp. 280-81.

⁸⁶³ Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. 151.

romance and all forms of social hypocrisy”—songs like “Get Off My Cloud,” “Mother’s Little Helper” and “Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby, Standing in the Shadow?”⁸⁶⁴

It is necessary to stress the interpersonal aspect of Dylan’s relationship with the members of the British blues network in order to fully explain his ability to influence them. It was not simply Dylan’s musical example that was brought to bear on the British; Dylan also provoked their creativity by taunting them. For example, in May 1966, Dylan ran into Keith Richards at Dolly’s, a nightclub in London’s Mayfair neighborhood. Fueled by drink and amphetamines, Dylan began to bait Richards, telling the guitarist that the Hawks were the best band in the world at the time. Richards replied, “What about us?” ““You guys may be the best *philosophers*, man,’ Dylan slurred,

but the Hawks—they’re the best *band*. . . . I coulda written “Satisfaction”—easy. . . but there’s no fucking way you guys coulda written “Mr. Tambourine Man.” You know that? *Think about it.*’ [emphasis in original]”⁸⁶⁵

It was a game that Dylan liked to play with people—he had taunted John Lennon and Brian Jones along similar lines on previous occasions. Miffed, Richards’ immediate response was to aim a punch at Dylan’s head; in the long-term, this put-down rankled, and drove Jagger and Richards to try and prove Dylan wrong.⁸⁶⁶

⁸⁶⁴ Jonathan Cott, review of the Rolling Stones’ *Aftermath*, *Rolling Stone* (Month, 1966); The Rolling Stones, “Get Off My Cloud,” *December’s Children (And Everybody’s)* (Abkco, 1965); “Mother’s Little Helper,” *Aftermath* (Abkco, 1965); “Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby, Standing in the Shadow?,” *Big Hits (High Tides and Green Grass)* (Abkco, 1966).

⁸⁶⁵ Later, Jagger sneered, “Yeah, but I’d like to hear Dylan *sing* ‘Satisfaction.’” Quoted in Steve Appleford, *It’s Only Rock ‘n’ Roll: The Rolling Stones: Song by Song* (New York: Schirmer Press, 1997), p. 52.

⁸⁶⁶ Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. 166.

From exchanges such as these evolved the rock music of the late 1960s. The dialogue was trans-Atlantic and the influence was mutual. As biographer Stephen Davis puts it succinctly, “Mick [Jagger] appropriated the flashing imagery of Dylan’s lyric style, while Dylan adapted the Stones’ electric clamor and immediacy, plus their sharp London look. The result for both Dylan and the Stones was some of the best work of their careers.”⁸⁶⁷ Davis’ summation may be expanded to include several of the Rolling Stones’ comrades on the British scene. In addition to the above-mentioned albums and singles by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, the lyrical sophistication and artistry that resulted from interaction with Bob Dylan also infused the work of the Who (*A Quick One While He’s Away* and *The Who Sell Out*) and the Kinks (*Face to Face* and *Something Else*).⁸⁶⁸ In the long-term, the enhanced attention to lyrical sophistication mutated into the often-purposeful obtuseness of psychedelic rock, which in turn fed into “progressive” and glam rock; those wondering to this day what British bands such as Pink Floyd, Procol Harum and T. Rex are singing about have, on some level, Bob Dylan to thank.

Born In Chicago: The Paul Butterfield Blues Band and “Sibling Rivalry”

More than forty years after the fact, the 1965 Newport Folk Festival is largely remembered solely for the moment when Bob Dylan “plugged in” with members of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band behind him. What is far less well remembered is the fact that earlier that day, Butterfield’s band had performed in their own right, during the “blues workshop” portion of the festival. The Chicago-based blues band’s set was not without its

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 130.

⁸⁶⁸ The Who, *A Quick One While He’s Away* (Reaction Records, 1966), and *The Who Sell Out* (Track Records, 1967); The Kinks, *Face to Face* (Reprise, 1966), and *Something Else* (Reprise, 1967).

share of controversy, either; viewed with suspicion by the purist organizers for playing electrified blues, their condescending introduction by Alan Lomax led to a violent altercation between the veteran folklorist and Butterfield's manager, the redoubtable Albert Grossman.⁸⁶⁹ After their performance at Newport (which, incidentally, was rapturously received by most of the audience if not by the organizers), the Paul Butterfield Blues Band's groundbreaking self-titled debut album was released to much acclaim.⁸⁷⁰ The combination of Butterfield's fluid harmonica fills, and Michael Bloomfield's blistering guitar "licks," as heard on such monumental tracks as "Born In Chicago" and "Shake Your Moneymaker," took the American and British music scenes by storm.⁸⁷¹ Alongside the R&B-influenced rock music filtering in from Britain, Butterfield helped usher in a somewhat belated blues revival in the land of the music's origins. Amongst the British blues network, the arrival of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band presented a unique challenge: the authenticity of *white American* blues enthusiasts with a closer and more personal relationship to the blues.

Paul Butterfield, an Irish-American, and Michael Bloomfield, a Jewish-American, both grew up in well-to-do families (Butterfield's father was a lawyer, Bloomfield's a manufacturer-wholesaler of restaurant supplies) in predominantly white neighborhoods in

⁸⁶⁹ Grossman actually managed three of the four acts discussed in this chapter—Butterfield, Dylan and the Band. Joe Boyd, *White Bicycles: Making Music in the 1960s* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2006), p. 99.

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.101.

⁸⁷¹ The Paul Butterfield Blues Band, "Born in Chicago" and "Shake Your Moneymaker," *The Paul Butterfield Blues Band* (Elektra, 1965).

Chicago.⁸⁷² They were introduced to the blues as adolescents and began teaching themselves to play. In the late 1950s, the two young blues fans (who were not as yet aware of each other's existence) began frequenting the nightclubs and bars of Chicago's South Side, where many of the biggest names in the electric urban blues plied their trade every night.⁸⁷³ Two middle-class white faces in an otherwise all-black club would have been peculiar enough, but Butterfield and Bloomfield eventually summoned the nerve to actually approach Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, et. al., and ask to sit in with their bands.⁸⁷⁴

Over time, they began to learn they were not the only whites "slumming it" on the South Side. Guitarist Elvin Bishop, a native Oklahoman who was studying at physics at the University of Chicago, would come by to sit in, as would harmonica player Charlie Musselwhite, a transplant from Memphis.⁸⁷⁵ Gradually, the newcomers earned the respect of the older musicians with their confidence and proficiency, and became more or less accepted by the overwhelmingly black bands and the audiences on the scene. Waters, Wolf and "Sunnyland" Slim would smile at them when they came through the doors—the precise moment where the displeasure of the bandleaders would have gotten the

⁸⁷² The bulk of the Bloomfield family fortune was actually acquired thanks to Bloomfield, Sr.'s invention of the flap-lidded sugar dispenser that are found in diners and restaurants to this day. Wolkin and Keenom, eds., *If You Love These Blues*, p. 12.

⁸⁷³ Mike Rowe, *Chicago Blues: The City and the Music* (New York: Da Capo, 1975), p. 212.

⁸⁷⁴ Ed Ward, *Michael Bloomfield: The Rise and Fall of an American Guitar Hero* (New York: Cherry Lane Books, 1983), p. 23.

⁸⁷⁵ Robert Santelli, "A Century of the Blues," in Peter Guralnick, et. al., eds., *Martin Scorsese Presents the Blues: A Musical Journey* (hereafter referred to as *The Blues*) (New York: Amistad Books, 2003), p. 45.

interlopers ejected or worse—and announce their presence to the audiences.⁸⁷⁶ In time, Waters would invite Butterfield, Bloomfield, Bishop and Musselwhite to his home—where, incidentally, about half his band also lived—for some of his wife Geneva’s “down-home” cooking.⁸⁷⁷

Bloomfield, especially, viewed the older black bluesmen as father figures:

A lot of these cats were old enough to be my father. And I had that sort of feeling—they were like dads, y’know. Like a father relationship. And I had to be polite.... [And] [s]everal guys took to me almost like I was their son—Big Joe Williams, Sunnyland Slim and Otis Spann. They took me to be like their kid, man; they just showed me from the heart. They took me aside and said, “You can play, man. Don’t be shy. Get up there and play.” What I learned from them was invaluable. A way of life, a way of thinking...⁸⁷⁸

It is hard to miss the similarities between Bloomfield’s testimony in this regard, and those of the young British enthusiasts who got to know Waters and Wolf when they passed through as part of the American Folk Blues Festivals. The difference—and part of the nature of Butterfield’s challenge to the British—was that the white Chicagoans’ rapport with their heroes was built on more frequent and more intimate contact. None of the British blues enthusiasts had (yet) had dinner at one of their idols’ houses; nor had any of them been stabbed with a penknife as the result of an argument by one of them, as Bloomfield was (by “Big Joe” Williams in 1964).⁸⁷⁹

⁸⁷⁶ Wolkin and Keenom, *If You Love These Blues*, p. 49.

⁸⁷⁷ Robert Gordon, *Can’t Be Satisfied: The Life and Times of Muddy Waters* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 2002), p. 187.

⁸⁷⁸ Michael Bloomfield, quoted in Wolkin and Keenom, *If You Love These Blues*, p. 27-28.

⁸⁷⁹ Michael Bloomfield, *Me and Big Joe* (San Francisco: RE/SEARCH Publications, 1980), p. 132.

Part of the reason for Waters' support and eventual affection for the boys he eventually came to call his "white sons" was his overall gracious nature.⁸⁸⁰ However, Bloomfield, Butterfield, et. al., also earned the respect of Howlin' Wolf, Big Joe Williams and Sonny Boy Williamson II, who were much harder to please.⁸⁸¹ At the heart of the matter was that the older black bluesmen genuinely respected the musical abilities of the younger white players in their midst. Of Butterfield, Bloomfield said, "If you wanted to play with some authority, you had to go down and prove yourself. You had to burn. [And Paul] wouldn't take no jive from nobody. And he held his own. God, did he hold his own."⁸⁸² In turn, Al Kooper said of Bloomfield, "He had a certain innate talent for playing the guitar that was instantly obvious to his mentors. They knew this was not just another white boy; this was someone who truly understood what the blues were all about."⁸⁸³

Eventually, in 1963, on the basis of this proficiency in the blues, and the respect it earned them from the established figures on the scene, Bloomfield and Butterfield formed their own bands, playing residencies at South Side clubs with names like the Fickle Pickle, Big John's and Magoo's. Butterfield scored an initial coup when he poached Howlin' Wolf's rhythm section—bassist Jerome Arnold and drummer Sam Lay—for his

⁸⁸⁰ Peter Wolf, "Muddy, Wolf and Me: Adventures in the Blues Trade," in Guralnick, et. al., eds., *The Blues*, pp. 190-93; Paul Oscher, "The Gift," in Guralnick, et. al., eds., *The Blues*, p. 224.

⁸⁸¹ Howlin' Wolf (Chester Burnett), interview with Paul Williams, in "Blues '66, Part One," *Crawdaddy* (November 1966), pp. 12-13.

⁸⁸² Bloomfield, quoted in Wolkin and Keenom, *If You Love These Blues*, p. 36.

⁸⁸³ Al Kooper, quoted in Wikipedia.com, "Mike Bloomfield" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike_Bloomfield) (accessed October 29, 2007).

own outfit.⁸⁸⁴ This lent Butterfield yet another layer of credibility, as it made him the first racially-integrated blues band outside of Memphis (where Booker T. and the MGs served as Stax Records' house band before scoring a nationwide hit with the instrumental "Green Onions" in 1963).⁸⁸⁵ In Bloomfield's memorable phrase, Butterfield's band came to be known as a "freak act: see the white kid play blues harmonica" (and, he might have added, blues guitar).⁸⁸⁶ The band came to the attention of folk music insiders such as singer/guitarist John Hammond, Jr. (whose father had hosted the "Swing to Spirituals" concert in 1938 that was supposed to feature Robert Johnson, and had signed Bob Dylan in 1960), talent scout Joe Boyd, folk singer Peter Yarrow (one-third of Peter, Paul and Mary), Yarrow's manager, Albert Grossman, and record producer Paul Rothchild. Yarrow and Grossman used their influence to get Butterfield's band a spot at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, and Rothchild offered them a recording contract with Elektra Records—provided they added Bloomfield to the group to enhance the guitar sound.⁸⁸⁷

While the solidified six-piece band—Butterfield, Bishop, Bloomfield, Lay, Arnold and pianist Mark Naftalin—recorded their first album (which took eight months to record, and was released in September 1965), Bloomfield was asked by Bob Dylan to

⁸⁸⁴ Not surprisingly, he was able to do this because he was offering substantially more money. Sam Lay, quoted in Wolkin and Keenom, *If You Love These Blues*, p. 86.

⁸⁸⁵ Robert M.J. Bowman, *Soulsville, U.S.A.: The Story of Stax Records* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), p. 67.

⁸⁸⁶ Ed Ward, "The Blues Revival," in DeCurtis, Henke and George-Warren, eds., *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History*, p. 344.

⁸⁸⁷ Paul Rothchild, quoted in Wolkin and Keenom, *If You Love These Blues*, p. 94.

play on the recording sessions for what became *Highway 61 Revisited*.⁸⁸⁸ Dylan recalls how the first time they met, a few months before these sessions, Bloomfield told him “he had heard my first record, and said he wanted to show me how the blues were played.... I didn’t feel much competitive with him, he could outplay anybody.”⁸⁸⁹ This astounding confidence caused Bloomfield to be the first in Dylan’s mind when he started assembling a studio band. After the *Highway 61* sessions, Dylan, favorably impressed and looking for an electric blues band to help him make the shift he was about to make, invited the Butterfield Band to back him up at Newport.⁸⁹⁰ As it would later in the case of the Band, association with Dylan (and, thus, being thought good enough to play alongside him) added a sort of authenticity-by-proxy that reached Britain even before the release of the record.

In 1964, Waters had told Bloomfield, who was interviewing him for *Downbeat* magazine, “I have a feeling a white is gonna get it and really put over the blues.... I know they can feel it, but I don’t know if they can deliver the message.”⁸⁹¹ Over in Britain, where the likes of the Rolling Stones and the Yardbirds had been trying to “really put over the blues” for three years, the worry was that Butterfield and his outfit had stolen a march on them. The music on the album is powerful, capturing the energy and exuberance of the classic Chess sides that both American and British enthusiasts had

⁸⁸⁸ Boyd, *White Bicycles*, p. 98.

⁸⁸⁹ Bob Dylan, interview with Martin Scorsese, in *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan*, dir. Martin Scorsese (2005).

⁸⁹⁰ Shelton, *No Direction Home*, p. 302.

⁸⁹¹ Muddy Waters (McKinley Morganfield), interview with Michael Bloomfield, *Downbeat* (February 1964), quoted in Gordon, *Can’t Be Satisfied*, p. 187.

listened to, spellbound, as adolescents. Part of the revelatory nature of Butterfield's music was simply that it was electric; before this, white musicians had rarely attempted to play the urban electric style of blues, "afraid of sounding inauthentic."⁸⁹² Generally speaking, when blues was played by white Americans in the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was of the Delta variety, with a lone singer accompanying himself on an acoustic guitar: shades of the folk revival movement, quiet and properly reverential. It is important to stress that the British contingent was only just starting to emerge from its "first wave," where groups paid eternal lip service to their blues and R&B influences, but where the actual "bluesiness" was barely noticeable beneath the smiling pop veneer. So, in 1965, a band featuring young white men (even if it was racially-mixed) plugging in and playing forceful, up-tempo straight blues was a revelation indeed.

However, *The Paul Butterfield Blues Band* was a challenge to the British not simply because it was electric, but also because, to be perfectly frank, it was so staggeringly well-done. Critics were nearly unanimous in praising Butterfield and company for their instrumental skill and their proficiency in preserving and duplicating the classic Chicago blues sound. Perhaps this was to be expected; after all, two of their members had been part of Howlin' Wolf's band only a year ago, and the rest had sat in with Wolf and Waters frequently enough to perhaps merit a cut of the band's money. Butterfield's British counterparts were quick to contribute their favorable, if awestruck, assessments—sometimes at their own expense. Years after the fact, Eric Clapton told Peter Guralnick, "I had the first Butterfield album right after it came out.... I thought it

⁸⁹² Steve Huey, "Paul Butterfield," Allmusic.com (www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll) (accessed October 30, 2007).

was great.... I thought Butterfield was the first one that I heard who could come anywhere near it. My singing doesn't stand up to the test, 'cause I don't consider myself a singer. I still consider myself a guitar player, and I always did."⁸⁹³

Clapton's statement is interesting because it points back to the distinction between white guitar virtuosity and black vocal authenticity that was discussed in an earlier chapter. Clapton was not intimidated by Bloomfield's guitar playing, as he would later be by Jimi Hendrix's, but by Bloomfield's "authentic" singing. Although he was in the process of developing a unique personal guitar style, no one would claim that Clapton could not play the blues as well as his idols. Where numerous observers—from music journalists to black bluesmen to the British themselves—perceived a letdown was in the realm of singing the blues in an authentic or convincing fashion.⁸⁹⁴ Although it varies according to who is asked, there have only been a select few white men (British or American) who have been considered properly "authentic" blues singers.⁸⁹⁵ On the British side, the roster includes (though is not limited to) Steve Winwood, Van Morrison, Joe Cocker and Eric Burdon, but by late 1965, only Burdon had yet attained any sort of

⁸⁹³ Eric Clapton, interview with Peter Guralnick, in Guralnick, "Eric Clapton at the Passion Threshold," *Musician* (February 1990), p. 48.

⁸⁹⁴ *E.g.*, Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), *Blues People* (New York: W.W. Morrow & Co., 1968), p. 112.

⁸⁹⁵ It is important that I stress the difference between "authentic" and "good" or "skilled." Whether a singer is "good" or "skilled" has largely to do with personal taste. I personally think Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin is a great singer, but many others disagree. "Authenticity"—which in this case (perhaps unfortunately) means, "sounding like a black man"—is imprecise as well, and yet more able to provoke a rough consensus of opinion as to who is and who is not.

visibility.⁸⁹⁶ Bloomfield subconsciously confirmed this dichotomy; when asked which blues guitarists he liked, he named Clapton, Beck and Alexis Korner along with a few Americans. However, when asked about singers, he did not mention a single Britisher.⁸⁹⁷ Thus, although both Butterfield's band and some of the British bands had virtuoso guitarists, only Butterfield's (at least in Clapton's opinion) also boasted a white singer who could "come anywhere near" an authentic sound.

Bloomfield's thoughts on the relationship between race and "blues authenticity" were murky. On some occasions Bloomfield made statements to the effect that a shared racially-inflected suffering was necessary to be able to play the blues. He once told an interviewer, "It's a natural. Black people suffer externally in this country. Jewish people suffer internally. The suffering's the mutual fulcrum for the blues."⁸⁹⁸ He would also imply that Butterfield's Irish-American heritage gave him a similar "fulcrum." But then on other occasions, he seemed to refute all of these ideas as unenlightened. "Man, I'm Jewish... Hell, man, I'm no Son House. I have not been pissed on, stepped on, shit on. But Butterfield's something else. There's no white bullshit with him. It wouldn't matter if he was green. If he was a planaria [sic], a tuna fish sandwich, Butterfield would still be into the blues."⁸⁹⁹ For his part, Butterfield, as the bandleader, usually maintained a

⁸⁹⁶ Alan Clayson, *The Yardbirds: The Band That Launched Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002), p. 44. For the record, Clayson does not include the Yardbirds' Keith Relf in this number.

⁸⁹⁷ Michael Bloomfield, interview with Paul Williams, in "Blues '66, Part Two," *Crawdaddy* (November 1966), p. 10.

⁸⁹⁸ Bloomfield, quoted in Wolkin and Keenom, eds., *If You Love These Blues*, p. 52.

⁸⁹⁹ Michael Bloomfield, quoted in Guralnick, et. al., eds., *The Blues*, p. 197.

studied silence, not only on matters such as these, but seemingly in interviews in general. “You guys take care of it,” he once said during an interview, “I just sign my name.”⁹⁰⁰

Oddly enough, in this growing trans-Atlantic world, where British and American musicians were able to travel from continent to continent to an unprecedented degree, the music of these American and British blues rivals met before the musicians themselves did. In March 1966, producer Joe Boyd had the idea of compiling a blues anthology featuring both British and American groups.⁹⁰¹ The featured Americans were the Butterfield Band, the Lovin’ Spoonful and the Blues Project; Boyd was supposed to fill the British spot with an unknown band that he would “discover,” sign, and then record for the anthology. Unfortunately, he was unable to find such a band—the strength of the blues boom in Britain meant that most of the good (or even mediocre) bands had already been signed.⁹⁰² Paul Jones, lead singer of Manfred Mann, suggested instead that Boyd assemble an all-star band, made up of himself, Clapton, Steve Winwood, Ginger Baker, Jack Bruce, and Ben Palmer. Clapton saw the project as a sterling opportunity to match his talents, and those of his countrymen (whom he named “The Powerhouse”), up against those of the Butterfield Band. Probably unwittingly, Butterfield had thrown down a

⁹⁰⁰ The Paul Butterfield Blues Band, interview with Paul Williams, in “Blues ’66, Part Two,” *Crawdaddy* (November 1966), p. 7.

⁹⁰¹ Boyd, *White Bicycles*, p. 112.

⁹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 112.

gauntlet by contributing to the anthology a version of “Good Morning Little Schoolgirl,” which the Yardbirds had released as a single in 1964, during Clapton’s tenure.⁹⁰³

In many ways, the Powerhouse’s three contributions to the Elektra anthology (released in July 1966 as *What’s Shakin’!*) are indicative both of the ways in which British blues had already developed, and of the ways in which it would continue to develop in response to the “orthodox” white Chicago blues bands. “I Want to Know” was an original composition (by Paul Jones’ wife, Sheila MacLeod) that bore enough similarities to the Chicago style that Boyd mistakenly thought it was by bluesman Otis Rush.⁹⁰⁴ “Stepping Out” was an instrumental piece, originally by Memphis Slim, but is reworked by the Powerhouse into an extended jam that fused elements of jazz to the original blues format.⁹⁰⁵ For the third and final track, Boyd and Clapton wanted something that would showcase Clapton’s guitar proficiency. Boyd suggested Robert Johnson’s “Cross Road Blues;” Clapton countered with Johnson’s “Travelling Riverside Blues.” Rather than choose, they simply fused deconstructed portions of both songs, calling the resulting *mélange* “Crossroads.”⁹⁰⁶ None of these is a faithful recreation of the originals, but retains enough of them to serve as a basis for the British penchant for

⁹⁰³ Dave Thompson, *Cream: The World’s First Supergroup* (London: Virgin, 2005), p. 81. Baker bowed out at the last minute, and was replaced by Spencer Davis Group drummer Pete York.

⁹⁰⁴ The Powerhouse, “I Want to Know,” *What’s Shakin’!* (Elektra, 1966); Christopher Hjort, *Strange Brew: Eric Clapton and the British Blues Boom, 1965-1970* (London: Jawbone, 2007), p. 41; Boyd, *White Bicycles*, p. 112.

⁹⁰⁵ The Powerhouse, “Steppin’ Out,” *What’s Shakin’!* (Elektra, 1966).

⁹⁰⁶ The Powerhouse, “Crossroads,” *What’s Shakin’!* (Elektra, 1966); Boyd, *White Bicycles*, p. 112. Note that Clapton played yet a third version of this song during his tenure with Cream.

reconstruction and experimentation. The anthology was unevenly reviewed (although the Powerhouse portion fared marginally better than the Americans'), but remains important from a music history perspective, as it identifies trends that would only intensify as the decade wore on.⁹⁰⁷

In November 1966, the Paul Butterfield Blues Band traveled to Britain for a package tour that also included British R&B stalwarts Georgie Fame and Chris Farlowe. After the tour ended, they stayed on, like Sonny Boy Williamson II before them, to play two more weeks of club dates.⁹⁰⁸ Butterfield's band and the British blues network finally got to meet, and continued a social trend that started with Dylan's first meetings with the Beatles and the Rolling Stones: when American and British blues musicians met, no matter how much they felt intimidated or threatened by each other musically, they invariably came to like—or at least respect—each other, and were excited to get the chance to socialize, trade ideas and jam together. Bloomfield, Beck and Clapton had nothing but praise for each other's guitar work, and both sides enjoyed swapping stories about their experiences with their mutual idols.⁹⁰⁹ The only exception to this “mutual appreciation society” was John Mayall. Fresh off his groundbreaking album with Eric Clapton (although Clapton had already left to form Cream by the time of its release), Mayall invited Butterfield into the studio to record an extended-play (EP) record with

⁹⁰⁷ Thompson, *Cream*, p. 82.

⁹⁰⁸ Hjort, *Strange Brew*, p. 63.

⁹⁰⁹ Michael Bloomfield, interview with *Melody Maker* (October 17, 1966), p. 17; Clapton, quoted in “Blind Date,” *Melody Maker* (December 24, 1966), p. 8.

him.⁹¹⁰ No sooner had Butterfield and his band departed England, however, than Mayall, exhibiting some rather poor form, scoffed to *Melody Maker*, “I heard Paul Butterfield live recently, and I agree with [Mayall guitarist] Peter Green: it was a pathetic hotch-potch [sic].”⁹¹¹ But Mayall’s was by far a minority opinion.

The example of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band “sow[ed] the seeds,” in the words of one reviewer, “of a thousand bar bands” and, alongside their counterparts from Britain, helped launched a long-overdue blues renaissance in the United States.⁹¹² Just as they had done (and to some extent still were doing) in Britain, suddenly American blues groups sprang up by the dozens; and just as had been the case in Britain, many of them passed without much comment. Of the few that approached the Butterfield Band in terms of skill and authenticity were New York’s Blues Project (led by the seemingly-omnipresent Al Kooper), Boston’s J. Geils Band, Los Angeles’ Canned Heat, and San Francisco’s Steve Miller Band (featuring a young Boz Scaggs).⁹¹³ All of these bands were made up of committed young white men who had the same “hands-on preservationist” approach of

⁹¹⁰ John Mayall, *Bluesbreakers With Eric Clapton* (Deram, 1966); Hjort, *Strange Brew*, p. 78. During this period, there were three classifications of records. The single disc included two tracks (one per side). The extended-play (EP) disc included four to six tracks (two to three per side). Finally, the long-playing (LP) album included anywhere from eight to twelve tracks (four to six per side). As the 1960s wore on, the LP overtook the single as the primary focus for recording artists, and remains so to this day.

⁹¹¹ John Mayall, quoted in Bob Brunning, *Blues: The British Connection* (New York: Blandford Press, 1986), p. 51.

⁹¹² Steve Huey, “Paul Butterfield,” Allmusic.com (www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll) (accessed October 30, 2007).

⁹¹³ Ward, “The Blues Revival,” in DeCurtis, Henke and George-Warren, eds., *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History*, p. 343.

Butterfield's band.⁹¹⁴ They actively sought out and became acquainted with blues legends (in Miller's case, hitchhiking all the way from California to Chicago), and devoted themselves to helping to rescue the art form they loved from oblivion.⁹¹⁵ All four of these bands became popular in the mid-to-late 1960s, and through their advocacy, introduced white audiences to their heroes, and were instrumental in assuring that the careers of, for instance, Buddy Guy and B.B. King remained going concerns (however painful it may have been for these distinguished gentlemen to see their names listed under their white protégés on the marquees of America's concert halls).⁹¹⁶

All of which begs the question of how the British blues enthusiasts were to stay relevant. The British blues scene had emerged to fill a perceived gap in the musical landscape. As Steve Winwood attested, "There was a feeling in the early days of... English blues, of wanting to bring this music to people's attention, to show them what an interesting, wonderful form it was."⁹¹⁷ The British R&B bands that had been sent off to America in the wake of "Beatlemania" saw their purpose as to do just that. At their first press conference in February 1964, the Beatles were asked what they wanted to see and do in America. When Paul McCartney said he wanted to see Muddy Waters, a befuddled

⁹¹⁴ I have borrowed this phrase from Francis Davis' *The History of the Blues: The Roots, the Music, the People: From Robert Johnson to Robert Cray* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), p. 221.

⁹¹⁵ Jas Obrecht, *Rollin' and Tumblin': The Postwar Blues Guitarists* (San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 2000), p. 64.

⁹¹⁶ Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 282.

⁹¹⁷ Steve Winwood, interview in *Red, White and Blues*, dir. Mike Figgis (2003).

reporter asked, “Where’s that?”⁹¹⁸ Early exchanges like these served only to steel the resolve of the young British blues evangelists.

Such a mission was only possible so long as there existed an “authenticity gap” in the dominant (read: white middle-class) culture. When the mainstream popular music of the day was perceived as banal, saccharine and without much in the way of deep lyrical meaning, then the novelty of young, more-or-less educated Englishmen belting out impassioned note-for-note *homages* to the Chess and Atlantic catalogues had a certain resonance that was unavailable anywhere else. R&B producer and entrepreneur Quincy Jones, of all people, says that the British were so immediately successful because “they were students of American music, much more so than any American musicians were. And they gave everybody a run for their money.”⁹¹⁹

At first, that is. After 1965, young white men who had, in Howlin’ Wolf’s phrase, “grown up in it” (*it* being the blues tradition) were now putting out records that were technically proficient and, what was more, were perceived as “sounding black.”⁹²⁰ Aside from their role as *bona fide* blues musicians, these young Americans also began to perform the role that the British had arrogated unto themselves—that of the evangelist, the advocate for neglected music and obscure musicians. There seemed to be very little chance of the British being able to produce blues music that was *more* authentic than that of their American counterparts. Instead, the British took the bold step of abandoning their

⁹¹⁸ Exchange quoted in Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, p. 123.

⁹¹⁹ Quincy Jones, interview in *Britain Invades, America Fights Back*, dir. Andrew Solt, in *The History of Rock ‘n’ Roll*, prod. Quincy Jones, Bob Meyrowitz and David Salzman (1995).

⁹²⁰ Howlin’ Wolf (Chester Burnett), interview with Paul Williams, in “Blues ’66, Part One,” *Crawdaddy* (November 1966), p. 7.

purism, and aiming instead to reconstruct and innovate the blues. Thus they turned what might have been perceived as an inadequacy into a virtue.

As discussed in the second chapter, the seeds for an anti-purist strain of British blues were sown with the very methods by which the blues and other forms of American music were transmitted to Britain. The British were separated from the social circumstances that had produced varying types of American music, and absorbed it at will, without worrying whether it was defined as “jazz,” “blues,” “R&B,” or “soul” music. Conversely, growing up in Chicago and receiving one’s musical apprenticeship directly from the acknowledged masters, as Butterfield, Bloomfield and the other white “hands-on preservationists” did, meant a much more structured approach to learning and playing the music. Admittedly, in the beginning, authenticity and orthodoxy were qualities for which both sides strived for; the fledgling Rolling Stones and Yardbirds would probably have gladly played the blues, note for note, and intonation for intonation, if only they *could* have. Butterfield and Bloomfield *could* do this, because they had been taught by the masters—and, it must be stated, because in the South Side clubs’ black audiences they had quite literally a tougher crowd to please.⁹²¹

British bands recorded literally dozens of versions of blues classics like “Smokestack Lightning” (so much so that a 1965 press release for the Who tried to emphasize their originality by saying that they did *not* perform it), and many of them were noticeably different from the original Howlin’ Wolf version.⁹²² This often happened because British bands could not always remember the words, or how the tune went, or

⁹²¹ Bloomfield, quoted in Wolkin and Keenom, *If You Love These Blues*, p. 34.

⁹²² John Atkins, *The Who On Record: A Critical History, 1963-1998* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press, 1998), p. 47.

simply could not make their guitars do what Hubert Sumlin's did. However, by the time Cream was performing four vastly different versions of "Spoonful" on four consecutive nights, ineptitude was no longer the culprit.⁹²³ Simply speaking, the combination of just enough proximity to and distance from the blues began to feel quite liberating. In biographer Stephen Davis' words, "The Stones had the advantage over the local white musicians: they had... a sexy, hip-swiveling lead singer who had never been advised by Muddy—as had Mike Bloomfield—that he wasn't [yet] man enough to sing the blues yet."⁹²⁴

The differences between the more orthodox approach of the Butterfield Band, and the looser, more experimental approach of the British blues bands can be gauged by comparing recordings where both sides backed up their idols on retreads of their old hits—*Fathers and Sons*, featuring Muddy Waters and some of his band, plus most of Butterfield's; and the *London Sessions*, which combined Waters and Wolf with a constellation of British rock stars that included Clapton, Rory Gallagher, Mitch Mitchell, Ringo Starr, Charlie Watts, Winwood and Bill Wyman.⁹²⁵ All three albums, along with the enormously controversial psychedelic offering, *Electric Mud*, were attempts by Chess Records to sell Waters and Wolf to a white, predominantly hippie audience.⁹²⁶ Of the

⁹²³ Thompson, *Cream*, p. 83.

⁹²⁴ Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. 91.

⁹²⁵ Muddy Waters, featuring Michael Bloomfield and Paul Butterfield, *Fathers and Sons* (Chess, 1969); Howlin' Wolf, *London Sessions* (Chess, 1971); and Muddy Waters, *London Sessions* (Chess, 1972).

⁹²⁶ Muddy Waters, *Electric Mud* (Chess, 1968). Although rock stars like Jimi Hendrix and the Rolling Stones loved the album, Waters himself dismissed it, calling it "dogshit." Douglas Robillard, "Electric Mud: Muddy Waters and Psychedelic Blues," unpublished

three, however, *Fathers and Sons* is the most straightforward; although Butterfield and Bloomfield had by then begun to branch out from their former orthodoxy, there is still a great deal of faithfulness to the old Chicago style that readily suits Waters, who had seemed lost at times when attempting to front what amounted to an “acid” jazz band the year before.⁹²⁷ The *London Sessions*, on the other hand, “brings a modern sensibility to Muddy’s blues, updating his updated blues.”⁹²⁸ Listeners familiar with the classic Chess sides are more likely to immediately recognize the workouts given to them by Waters and Butterfield on *Fathers and Sons*.

The differences were apparent not just to the listeners, but also to those recording the albums. By all accounts, the first day of *London Sessions* was disastrous, as the cantankerous Wolf was frequently annoyed by his young acolytes’ propensity to take liberties with songs he had been playing the “right” way for upwards of thirty years. Said Eric Clapton, “His attitude was the same as Sonny Boy’s. You know, like, ‘We’re going to do “Little Red Rooster” and it goes like *this*. And it doesn’t go like anything *you* think it goes like.’... You see, I was already going along a different path. I was a rock musician. *And it’s not that I’d left my blues roots behind*; it’s just that I’d forgotten a lot of the ways things [actually] went. (my emphasis on this sentence)”⁹²⁹ Ringo Starr, who had been a member of arguably the most innovative and progressive band of the 1960s, the Beatles, took Wolf’s tongue-lashing especially hard, so much so that he did not return

conference paper given at the 13th Annual Delta Blues Symposium, Arkansas State University, March 30, 2007, p. 5.

⁹²⁷ Gordon, *Can’t Be Satisfied*, p. 206.

⁹²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 294.

⁹²⁹ Clapton, interview with Guralnick, in “Eric Clapton at the Passion Threshold,” p. 36.

for subsequent days of recording.⁹³⁰ In the end, according to Clapton, Wolf relented, and although he did take the time to walk the band through “Little Red Rooster,” how it *actually* went, the resulting album is still far more given to reconstructed and impressionistic takes on Wolf’s hits than *Fathers and Sons* is with Waters’ hits.⁹³¹

It can be argued that the British approach to, and treatment of, the blues is the one that ultimately won out in the end. Blues inflections and improvisations form the backbone not only of much of the rock music of the late 1960s and early 1970s, but also of such seemingly-unconnected popular sub-genres as heavy metal and glam rock. Meanwhile, straightforward blues became the province of a minority (if a very visible minority) of collectors, hobbyists and *cognoscenti*, content to remain in reserve as an alternative “whenever mainstream pop music finds itself weighed down by gimmicks.”⁹³²

Even Butterfield and Bloomfield, as mentioned, began to stray from strict twelve-bar orthodoxy. In 1966’s *East-West*, the follow-up to their self-titled debut, the Butterfield Band began blending their Chicago blues with Indian instrumentation (mainly the use of the sitar) and “raga” rhythms. It is not unreasonable to posit that they were helped along in this direction by the British musicians, several of whom—Ray Davies, Jeff Beck, Brian Jones, Jimmy Page and George Harrison being chief among them—had

⁹³⁰ James Segrest and Mark Hoffmann, *Moanin’ at Midnight: The Life of Howlin’ Wolf* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), p. 301. Starr’s place was taken by Charlie Watts of the Rolling Stones.

⁹³¹ Studio patter between Howlin’ Wolf and session band [Clapton audible], “Little Red Rooster, Take 2,” *The London Howlin’ Wolf Sessions* (Chess, 1971).

⁹³² Ward, “The Blues Revival,” in DeCurtis, Henke and George-Warren, eds., *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History*, p. 347.

already started to incorporate these non-European influences in their work.⁹³³ Almost immediately after *East-West* was released, Bloomfield left the Butterfield Band to set up his own outfit, the Electric Flag. This band was an attempt by Bloomfield to realize “the music he heard in his head”—which encompassed the entire vast spectrum of American music “from Stax to Phil Spector to Motown.”⁹³⁴ Although short-lived (Bloomfield quit his own band after only a few months), the Electric Flag was a strong statement of where blues-rock was going—away from twelve-bar purism, and towards a vast array of other influences.

I’m a Voodoo Child: Jimi Hendrix and Black Blues Masculinity

According to Eric Burdon, Pete Townshend telephoned Eric Clapton one autumn Saturday in 1966, even though the two had “never spoken to each other before,” and asked his fellow guitar hero out to the cinema. As they sat in the theater, Townshend turned to Clapton and said, “I’ve just seen this guy that’s gonna put us all out of work.”⁹³⁵ That “guy” was, of course, African-American guitarist Jimi Hendrix, and he did indeed take Great Britain by storm in the autumn of 1966. Though Burdon’s story is not without a certain charm, it seems likely that Burdon was taking some liberties with the facts. Hendrix had been in the country since September 22, and had already earned a considerable notoriety as of October 1, when he sat in with Cream and, quite simply,

⁹³³ The Paul Butterfield Band, *East-West* (Elektra, 1967); Sandy Pearlman, “Patterns and Sounds: The Uses of Raga in Rock,” in *Crawdaddy* (January 1967), p. 5.

⁹³⁴ Bloomfield, quoted in Wolkin and Keenom, *If You Love These Blues*, p. 139.

⁹³⁵ Eric Burdon, interview in *Guitar Heroes*, dir. Marc Sachnoff, in *The History of Rock ‘n’ Roll*, prod. Quincy Jones, Bob Meyrowitz and David Salzman (1995).

outplayed Clapton.⁹³⁶ Prior to that, in America, Hendrix had been acquainted with guitarists Michael Bloomfield and Keith Richards; indeed, it was Richards' American girlfriend, Linda Keith, who had introduced Hendrix to his future manager, former Animals bass guitarist Chas Chandler.⁹³⁷ Thus, it seems unlikely that Hendrix's arrival on the British scene was so sudden and so undetected that it required Townshend to tell Clapton about him in a darkened cinema.⁹³⁸

If the details of the story are suspect, however, the fear and anxiety supposedly voiced by Townshend seem to have been quite real, and would shortly be echoed by Clapton, Jeff Beck and Peter Frampton, among others. For a cohort of young white men who had made emulation of the blues their personal preserve, Hendrix represented in many ways "the real thing." His virtuosity, his "authenticity" and his perceived hyper-masculinity threatened to show up each and every one of them. Implicit in this expressed anxiety was an admission that there was something abnormal about young white men playing and singing the blues, and that audiences and the record-buying public would inevitably prefer the real thing, if ever it should arrive, over the abnormality they were peddling. Thus, the emergence of Hendrix in Britain, and the various reactions he provoked amongst the blues-rock aristocracy there, are important to understand, since they cut straight to the heart of the contemporary discourse over what it meant to be white (and British) or black when it came to playing and *living* the blues.

⁹³⁶ Thompson, *Cream*, pp. 108-9.

⁹³⁷ Charles Shaar Murray, *Crosstown Traffic: Jimi Hendrix and the Post-War Rock 'n' Roll Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 42.

⁹³⁸ It also seems highly unlikely that Townshend and Clapton had never met personally before the evening in question.

Hendrix's authenticity was first and foremost as an American bluesman, with all of the skills and characteristics that that entailed. Like Paul Butterfield, Michael Bloomfield and Steve Miller, Hendrix had left an un-bluesy *milieu* behind in order to learn to play the blues properly, from established masters in a more appropriate locale. In Hendrix's case, the place he left was Seattle, Washington—which was home (according to the 1950 census) to roughly 15,000 African-Americans out of a total population of 375,000.⁹³⁹ After a stint as a paratrooper in the US Army, Hendrix found his way to the so-called “chitlin’ circuit” of the Deep South.⁹⁴⁰ Hendrix earned his chops over the course of four years as an itinerant sideman in a number of R&B backing bands, supporting the likes of Little Richard, Curtis Knight, “Little” Johnny Jones, and the Isley Brothers.⁹⁴¹

Invaluable though this education must have been, it paled in comparison to the list of R&B luminaries that Hendrix *told* people in London that he had worked with and learned from: Wilson Pickett, Ike and Tina Turner, Sam Cooke and Jackie Wilson, in addition to those names already listed.⁹⁴² Even given the transitory nature of backing bands and barnstorming tours, such impressive claims should probably have sounded a bit far-fetched, but keep in mind that credulous British enthusiasts believed Sonny Boy Williamson II's claims that he had cradled the dying Robert Johnson—so there was a

⁹³⁹ Charles Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors: A Biography of Jimi Hendrix* (New York: Hyperion, 2005), p. 9.

⁹⁴⁰ The “chitlin’ circuit” was a loose network of bars, nightclubs and jook joints in the Deep South, which featured black performers for the entertainment of black audiences in the 1950s and 1960s.

⁹⁴¹ Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors*, p. 47.

⁹⁴² In his defense, Hendrix had, with his various bands, served as the opening act for all of these more established artists, but this is obviously not the same as having actually been in their bands, which is what Hendrix claimed. Murray, *Crosstown Traffic*, p. 38.

very high limit to what they might believe.⁹⁴³ In the best blues tradition, then, at least part of Jimi Hendrix's authenticity—and thus, his identity—was as put-on as a pair of velvet trousers.

Though only a few of Hendrix's songs are what could be called straightforward blues covers, many of them feature strong elements of the "bluesman" persona that helped to confer a virile, dynamic masculinity on Hendrix, just as they did on male blues singers from Charley Patton to Howlin' Wolf.⁹⁴⁴ For example, the monumental "Voodoo Chile" and its follow-up, "Voodoo Chile (Slight Return)" (1967) are essentially Hendrix's re-readings of the Hoochie-Coochie Man saga.⁹⁴⁵ In it, he boasts of having turned the moon "a fire red" at his birth, of being able to make love to his woman from "a million miles away," and of forming a chain of islands by chopping down a mountain "with the edge of my hand."⁹⁴⁶ In "Hey Joe"—the Experience's first single, and thus many fans' first exposure to Hendrix—the bluesman's exploits are far less otherworldly,

⁹⁴³ Simon Napier and Sonny Boy Williamson II (Aleck Miller), "I Knew Robert Johnson," in Mike Leadbitter, ed., *Nothing But the Blues* (London: Hanover Books, 1971), p. 96.

⁹⁴⁴ Dennis Jarrett, "The Singer and the Bluesman: Formulations of Personality in the Lyrics of the Blues," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, v. 42, no. 1 (1978), p. 31.

⁹⁴⁵ The Jimi Hendrix Experience, "Voodoo Chile," and "Voodoo Chile (Slight Return)," *Electric Ladyland* (MCA, 1968). "Voodoo Chile" is a fifteen-minutes-long extended jam featuring Steve Winwood of Traffic and Jack Casady of the Jefferson Airplane; "(Slight Return)" is just over five minutes long and was released as a single in 1968. "Chile" is a corruption of "child."

⁹⁴⁶ "A fire red," and "a million miles away": "Voodoo Chile;" "with the edge of my hand": "Voodoo Chile (Slight Return)."

but if anything, even more heavily grounded in blues tradition.⁹⁴⁷ Having caught his woman “messing around with another man,” Joe shoots her dead.⁹⁴⁸ The song ends with Joe defiantly vowing to flee “way down south” to Mexico to escape the reach of the hangman.⁹⁴⁹

However, it was Hendrix’s virtuosity with the electric guitar that made up the lion’s share of his authenticity, and thus of the challenge that he posed. Indeed, it was this stunning virtuosity that was what got him noticed in the first place, and it was this—along with enduring rumors that Hendrix had bedded Keith Richards’ girlfriend, Linda Keith—that earned him the first of many uncomfortable receptions amongst Britain’s guitar heroes. In the summer of 1966, Michael Bloomfield, who had only recently sent Britain’s guitarists into a mild panic himself, bore witness to more to come: “Hendrix knew who I was and that day, in front of my eyes, he burned me to death. H-bombs were going off, guided missiles were flying—I can’t tell you the sounds he was getting out of his instrument.... How he did this, I wish I understood.”⁹⁵⁰ By equating Hendrix’s virtuosity with deployed weaponry, Bloomfield was making an implicit (and probably subconscious) connection with the blues’ traditional conflation of the bluesman’s guitar with a gun (and, often, with his penis).⁹⁵¹ But he was also making the case for Hendrix’s

⁹⁴⁷ The Jimi Hendrix Experience, “Hey Joe,” *Are You Experienced* (US version) (released in UK as a single – MCA, 1967).

⁹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵⁰ Michael Bloomfield, interview with Ed Ward, quoted in Murray, *Crosstown Traffic*, p. 42.

⁹⁵¹ See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of this blues tradition.

unique superiority. Whereas the most Robert Johnson had ever packed was a Gatling gun, Hendrix was symbolically deploying the most modern and destructive arsenal anyone had ever seen. This testimony, if nothing else, should have put the British guitarists on notice.

Besides coaxing such strange sounds from his guitar as noted by Bloomfield, Hendrix also employed an array of “flashy” visual tricks that, although not necessarily representative of his actual musical talent, put additional pressure on his British colleagues because they made him popular with audiences. These included playing the instrument behind his back or his head, or with his teeth, grinding the instrument against his pelvis in an act of mock-intercourse, and, à la Pete Townshend, smashing it against the stage or his amplifiers.⁹⁵² However, Hendrix’s guitar virtuosity was built on more than just spectacular guitar tricks—although that was a significant part of his showmanship. As Eric Clapton condescendingly noted in 1968, “[i]f you scrape away the bullshit he carries around you’ll find a fantastically talented guy and a beautiful guitar player.”⁹⁵³ Hendrix’s virtuosity was premised on an impressive and genuine talent—even if it took a *cognoscento* like Clapton truly to recognize it.

Hendrix also had the extraordinary gift of being able to hear a piece of music only a few times before he could reproduce it or, more importantly, improvise off of it. This talent enabled him on June 4, 1967, to pull off what biographer Charles Cross calls “one of the gutsiest moves Jimi ever made in his life”—covering the title track from the

⁹⁵² Don Menn, “Jimi’s Favorite Guitar Techniques,” *Guitar Player* (September 1975), reprinted in Chris Potash, ed., *The Jimi Hendrix Companion: Three Decades of Commentary* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996), p. 84.

⁹⁵³ Eric Clapton, interview with Jann Wenner, in “The Eric Clapton Interview,” *Rolling Stone* (May 11, 1968), reprinted in Peter Herbst, ed., *The Rolling Stone Interviews: Talking With the Legends of Rock, 1967-1980* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), p. 28.

Beatles' epochal *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, a mere three days after the album's release, and at a concert at a theater owned by Beatles manager Brian Epstein, and with the Beatles in the audience.⁹⁵⁴ Even though Hendrix had just heard the album for the first time earlier in the day, and even though he had just taught the song to bass guitarist Noel Redding and drummer Mitch Mitchell a few minutes before they went onstage, the Experience's version was universally regarded as brilliant—faithful to the original, but with a somewhat more complex arrangement and capped off by one of Hendrix's trademark feedback-laden guitar solos. Sound engineer Eddie Kramer said, "The Beatles [who were in the audience] couldn't believe it.... It took *balls*, and straight-ahead testosterone [emphasis in original]."⁹⁵⁵ Here was Hendrix threatening the British blues-rock aristocracy on a completely different level. This was more than simply the authenticity of the blues; Hendrix had proven that he could explore the same psychedelic terrain as the undisputed kings of the trans-Atlantic music scene, and do something that was widely regarded as slightly more interesting, musically speaking. Paul McCartney, the song's co-composer, could only clap Hendrix on the back, offer him a joint and say, "That was fucking great, man."⁹⁵⁶

To make matters worse, Hendrix was still a very young man. Born in 1942, he was the same age as many in the British blues cohort. This played havoc with the British network's established wisdom regarding the relationship between age, experience and virtuosity. As discussed earlier, the prodigious knowledge and instrumental virtuosity that

⁹⁵⁴ Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors*, p. 188.

⁹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

defined the bluesman was supposedly the result of years of hard-earned experience—thus the predominance of fatherly and grandfatherly types like Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf and Sonny Boy Williamson II.⁹⁵⁷ Robert Johnson, with whom Hendrix was often compared, was the exception that proved the rule—and the British blues network had it on what they thought was good authority that Johnson’s talents were diabolically granted, anyway.⁹⁵⁸ In the British network’s carefully-constructed “affiliation” with blues culture, the “fathers” were old, black, and eager to give of their knowledge; the “sons” were young, white and eager to receive and build on it. As a black “son” who had already learned all he needed to know about the blues, Hendrix threatened to upset that careful construction.

Finally, Hendrix posed a sexual threat. According to jazz chronicler George Melly, Hendrix made Mick Jagger “look like Shirley Temple,” and indeed, the Rolling Stones’ frontman was publicly humiliated in 1967 when the guitarist almost succeeded in persuading Jagger’s girlfriend, Marianne Faithfull, to go home with him for the night.⁹⁵⁹ Pete Townshend had the uncomfortable experience of taking his girlfriend (and later, wife) Karen Astley to one of the Experience’s gigs. “If I’d known then what I know now about how aroused my wife had been,” the Who’s leader reported later, “I wouldn’t have so willingly dragged her from club to club.” Underscoring his (and, by extension, his fellows’) implicit view that Hendrix’s black sexuality was something from which he

⁹⁵⁷ Keil, *Urban Blues*, pp. 34-35.

⁹⁵⁸ Napier and Williamson II, “I Knew Robert Johnson,” p. 96.

⁹⁵⁹ George Melly, quoted in Murray, *Crosstown Traffic*, p. 70. Vengeance was Jagger’s in 1969, however, when he left Hendrix’s twenty-seventh birthday party with “supergroupie” Devon Wilson, Hendrix’s on-and-off girlfriend.

needed to shield his woman, lest she be enticed away from him, he continued, “I would have gone, but made sure that she went off to watch something more antiseptic.... I talked to Karen about that, you know: ‘What was it like? Was it sexual?’ She said, ‘What a stupid fucking question.’”⁹⁶⁰ As Howlin’ Wolf used to say, “the men don’t know but the little girls all understand.”⁹⁶¹

To the extent that they knew about it, Britain’s rock aristocracy would have only been made more anxious by Hendrix’s encounter with the so-called “Plaster Casters of Chicago.” This was a clique of American groupies whose self-avowed mission was to immortalize, using dental plaster casts, the erect penises of the rock musicians with whom they had had sex.⁹⁶² Hendrix and Noel Redding made the acquaintance of the Casters in February 1968, and would be the first rock stars to participate in their “art.” And, at least according to the clique’s leader, Cynthia Albritton, he was the most well-endowed.⁹⁶³ With this contribution to the plastic arts, Hendrix unwittingly confirmed what audiences on both sides of the Atlantic thought they already knew from almost four centuries of received wisdom about African-American male sexuality—namely, that black men have bigger penises than white men.⁹⁶⁴ It was this trans-Atlantic cultural baggage that, at some level, informed the British reception of Hendrix from the moment

⁹⁶⁰ Pete Townshend, quoted in Murray, *Crosstown Traffic*, p. 69.

⁹⁶¹ Howlin’ Wolf, “Back Door Man” (B-side – Chess Records, 1961).

⁹⁶² John Burks, et. al., eds., *Groupies and Other Girls: A Rolling Stone Special Report* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), p. 61.

⁹⁶³ Cynthia Albritton, interview with Charles Cross, in Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors: A Biography of Jimi Hendrix*, p. 220. When Albritton later exhibited her “collection” at a Chicago art gallery, one newspaper dubbed Hendrix’s cast “the Penis de Milo.”

⁹⁶⁴ Touré, “And It’s Deep, Too,” in Guralnick, et. al., eds., *The Blues*, p. 210.

he stepped onto the scene, just as it had probably informed their fathers' and mothers' reception of the African-American GIs stationed in the Home Counties during the war.⁹⁶⁵ And it was this trans-Atlantic cultural baggage that would provoke Eric Clapton into making some quite unfortunate remarks to *Rolling Stone* about the man who was equal parts friend and nemesis.

The threats posed by Hendrix—whether real or imagined—moved Britain's blues-rock aristocracy to some rather bizarre behavior. Clapton, who considered Hendrix a good friend, nevertheless spouted off with crude public observations on race and sexuality. "You know English people have a very big thing towards a spade," he told *Rolling Stone's* Jann Wenner in March 1968. "Everybody and his brother in England still sort of think that spades have big dicks. And Jimi came over and exploited that to the limit, the fucking tee. Everybody fell for it. I fell for it."⁹⁶⁶ (Recall that Hendrix's encounter with the Plaster Casters had occurred only the month before.) Clapton then went on to say that he felt Hendrix only used guitar trickery to fulfill a stereotype demanded by British audiences.⁹⁶⁷ These stated opinions seem to demonstrate Clapton's desire to be recognized as a *cognoscento* (he realized what Hendrix was up to, and what his actual talents were, even if no one else seemed to), as well as to explain away Hendrix's burgeoning popularity (if people were not so obsessed with the African-American penis, Hendrix would be seen as just another good guitarist, like Clapton). In

⁹⁶⁵ David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), p. 311.

⁹⁶⁶ Clapton, interview with Wenner, in "The Eric Clapton Interview," *Rolling Stone* (May 11, 1968), p. 28.

⁹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

the end, what all of this actually does is underscore the strong, if subtle, anxiety that Hendrix continued to stir in his fellow guitarist.

Jeff Beck also took issue with Hendrix's crowd-pleasing tricks, but unlike Clapton, he did not see them as playing to the audience's racial stereotypes, or as unnecessary gimmicks that obscured a genuine talent. Rather, Beck complained petulantly that he could not use any of *his* trademark tricks anymore because audiences would claim he had stolen them from Hendrix!⁹⁶⁸ Hendrix's arrival on the scene occurred mere weeks before Beck left the Yardbirds (in October 1966), and although the former probably had nothing to do with the latter, it did affect Beck's subsequent career direction. Said Beck, "I thought, rather than be a follower, I'd rather not play for awhile."⁹⁶⁹ Thus, with the exception of two disastrous pop-oriented singles released in 1967, Beck went to ground, watching the scene develop and plotting out a way to combine the musical influences he had already absorbed with the louder, "heavier" music that Hendrix and others were beginning to create.⁹⁷⁰

Pete Townshend might have had the most peculiar relationship with Hendrix of anyone in the British blues network, besides Clapton. First, there was the initial experience of bringing his girlfriend to one of Hendrix's gigs. Initially, Townshend seems to have overcome this awkward moment, and relations between the two guitarists during

⁹⁶⁸ Interestingly, this complaint was also voiced by black Chicago blues guitarist George "Buddy" Guy, whose audiences began to respond to his pyrotechnics with catcalls like, "You been watching Hendrix!" George "Buddy" Guy, quoted in Robert Neff and Anthony Conner, *Blues* (Boston: D.R. Godine, 1975), p. 131.

⁹⁶⁹ Annette Carson, *Jeff Beck: Crazy Fingers* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2001), p. 65.

⁹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 201.

Hendrix's first few months in Britain were cordial, if not as overtly friendly as they were between Hendrix and, say, Clapton or Eric Burdon. According to Townshend, the two often discussed (amicably enough) the role of race in the development of popular music in both Britain and the United States, and the irony of blues being sold back to the United States by white Britishers.⁹⁷¹

Their relationship took a downward turn when both the Who and the Jimi Hendrix Experience traveled to California to play at the Monterey International Pop Festival in July 1967—interestingly enough, as two of the Festival's three representative "British" acts.⁹⁷² The two bands were scheduled to go on last—first the Experience, then the Who—but Townshend balked at having to follow Hendrix's theatrics. Hendrix sneered, "You just want to be up there first with the guitar smashing." A coin flip by John Phillips of folk group, the Mamas and the Papas, decided the matter in Townshend's favor. The Who proceeded to unleash their customary on-stage destruction, with Townshend smashing his guitar and amplifiers, Keith Moon overturning his drum kit, and Roger Daltrey swinging his microphone in dangerous arcs.⁹⁷³ However, this was immediately eclipsed by Hendrix's set, in which, after being introduced by Brian Jones, he pulled out "every show-stopping trick he could think of," all of which culminated in the *coup de grâce*: Hendrix doused his guitar in lighter fluid, set it ablaze, and *then* smashed it.⁹⁷⁴

⁹⁷¹ Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors*, p. 195.

⁹⁷² The third was Eric Burdon & the New Animals.

⁹⁷³ Richard Barnes, *The Who: Maximum R&B* (London: Plexus, 1982), p. 46. As the *New Musical Express* reported, "Even John [Entwistle] knocked a mike or two over as a concession."

⁹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 194; *Monterey Pop*, dir. D.A. Pennebaker (1967).

Down in the front rows of the audience, Mama Cass (also of the Mamas and the Papas), told Townshend, “He’s stealing your act.” Ruefully aware that he had lost that particular battle for authenticity, Townshend smiled, “No, he’s *doing* my act.”⁹⁷⁵ Eric Burdon concurred: “One [Townshend’s] was like a violent rape, and the other [Hendrix’s] [was] like an erotic sacrifice.”⁹⁷⁶

The following day, Townshend ran into Hendrix at the Monterey airport. Attempting to mend fences, Townshend became the picture of the shy, stammering fan: “Listen, no hard feelings, and I’d love to get a bit of that guitar you smashed.” Hendrix, for whom racist outbursts against white people were admittedly quite rare, shot back, “Oh yeah? I’ll autograph it for you, *honkie*.”⁹⁷⁷ Townshend was deeply hurt, and, like Clapton, resorted to his own odd reflections on the relationship between race and authenticity. As he later told Murray,

I thought, Eric’s [Clapton] getting the big hugs, why aren’t I? And I think the difference is that Eric feels perfectly natural with his adoption of blues music. He feels it inside; I don’t. I don’t even really feel comfortable with black musicians. It’s always been a problem with me, and I think Jimi was so acutely sensitive in his blackness that he picked that up. I felt a lot of hate, vengeance and frustration [from Hendrix]... I felt I deserved it somehow.⁹⁷⁸

It seems rather typical, in retrospect, that the former art student and amateur Pop Art theorist should give a deep sociological reading to an exchange that more likely had as its cause the aftermath of a long and tiring thirty-six hours of performing and partying, compounded by genuine pique that Townshend had tried to upstage him.

⁹⁷⁵ Pete Townshend, interview in *Plugging In*, dir. Susan Steinberg.

⁹⁷⁶ Eric Burdon, interview in *Plugging In*.

⁹⁷⁷ Murray, *Crosstown Traffic*, p. 91.

⁹⁷⁸ Townshend, interview with Charles Shaar Murray, in *ibid*, p. 91.

Envy, alarm, condescension, petulance, subterfuge and unrequited friendship—these were the avatars of the tortuous relationship between Britain’s blues-rock aristocracy and Jimi Hendrix (or, rather, the challenge to their authenticity and commercial standing that he personified). In the end, though, whatever personal foibles he may have provoked among Britain’s white bluesmen, Jimi Hendrix did not send them to the unemployment queue. Partly this was due to his early, tragic death in September 1970, a mere four years after his meteoric rise on the trans-Atlantic music scene.⁹⁷⁹ As with Robert Johnson, there has been no end of commentators speculating on what Hendrix might have done musically had he lived past his twenty-seventh birthday, but—also as with Johnson—his ability to directly influence the shape of popular music died with him.⁹⁸⁰

Another reason why Hendrix did not render the likes of Townshend, Clapton and Beck irrelevant by retrieving from them his rightful mantle of authentic alpha-male and blues virtuoso was because, quite simply, *he did not want to*. By 1968, it was becoming clear to those around Hendrix that the guitarist was growing weary of the psychedelic blues “straitjacket” into which both his record company and his audience’s expectations had forced him, and was trying to escape it.⁹⁸¹ In this regard, it would seem that Clapton’s assessment of Hendrix had been at least partly correct: the flashy repertoire

⁹⁷⁹ Michael Lydon, “Jimi Hendrix: 1942-1970,” in *The New York Times* (September 27, 1970), p. 12.

⁹⁸⁰ *E.g.*, Tom Gogola of the *New York Press* speculated, in a fake obituary, that had Hendrix survived into the 1990s, he would have served as a musical godfather to another group from Seattle—Nirvana! Gogola, “Jimi Hendrix, 1942-1995,” *New York Press*, September 27-October 3, 1995, reprinted in Potash, ed., *The Jimi Hendrix Companion*, pp. 187-200.

⁹⁸¹ Murray, *Crosstown Traffic*, p. 55.

was not what Hendrix wanted, but it was what the audience demanded. All Hendrix wanted was to play a kind of music that would have much more in common with the soul-derived “funk” music played by James Brown and the “acid” jazz played by Miles Davis, than it would with the heavy blues played by Clapton—a music he called “Electric Church Music.”⁹⁸² To this end, Hendrix parted company with Redding and Mitchell and formed a new outfit, the Band of Gypsys, with bass guitarist Billy Cox and drummer Buddy Miles—both African-American musicians.⁹⁸³ As pressure to continue on in the same old heavy blues vein mounted, however, Hendrix became dispirited and public performances became few in number and rather uninspired in nature.⁹⁸⁴ Thus, even before his death, Hendrix had largely absented himself from the ongoing deification of heavy blues-rock masters.

When all was said and done, however, Jimi Hendrix did not make his British comrades obsolete because, by and large, they responded to the gauntlet he had thrown down. Of the four acts discussed in this chapter, Jimi Hendrix was the only one to whom the British blues network responded on his own terms—that is, by trying to outdo him, as opposed to outflanking him with a combination of borrowing, synthesis and subtle innovation. In response to Hendrix’s guitar pyrotechnics, Britain’s phalanx of guitar heroes tried their best to burn even hotter.⁹⁸⁵ The guitar solos got even louder (and

⁹⁸² Or, alternately, “Sky Church Music.” Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors*, p. 241.

⁹⁸³ John Burke, “The End of a Beginning Maybe,” in *Rolling Stone* (March 19, 1970), p. 28.

⁹⁸⁴ Murray, *Crosstown Traffic*, p. 56.

⁹⁸⁵ The exceptions were Clapton, whose divergent career development as the result of his encounter with the Band is detailed below; and Keith Richards, who, as the scene’s

longer); the drive to push the boundaries of what technology and experimentation could do for the guitar's sound intensified. When Jeff Beck emerged from his self-imposed exile in early 1968, it was as the leader of an eponymous new band, with a powerful mixture of psychedelic sounds and heavy blues. Later that same year, Jimmy Page, absorbing the lessons he had absorbed not only from Hendrix but also from his days in the fading Yardbirds, formed a band, Led Zeppelin, which used a very similar blueprint to that of Beck. Both groups founded their sound and their image on Hendrix's guitar virtuosity and his masculine sex object persona, although they divided them amongst the lead guitarist and the lead singer, respectively, whereas Hendrix had combined them both in himself. As a result, both groups pointed the way toward a British "hard rock" style that many credit with helping to spawn the sub-genre of heavy metal.⁹⁸⁶

Jimi Hendrix's influence on British blues-based rock music was even more pronounced on a slightly younger generation of fledgling "guitar gods"—men like Deep Purple's Ritchie Blackmore, Queen's Brian May, and Black Sabbath's Tony Iommi. All three guitarists were inspired, at least in part, to pick up the guitar in the first place, by Hendrix's example.⁹⁸⁷ This slightly younger generation would sustain and deepen the cult

eminence grise, felt that he and his band were above having to prove themselves to anyone.

⁹⁸⁶ That is, along with Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath and other British bands. See Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology* (New York: Lexington Books, 1991), and David Konow, *Bang Your Head: The Rise and Fall of Heavy Metal* (New York: Three Rivers Books, 2002).

⁹⁸⁷ Laura Jackson, *Queen and I: The Brian May Story* (London: Smith Gryphon, 1994), p. 17; Konow, *Bang Your Head*, p. 8.

of the Romantic, powerful “guitar god” as hard rock developed in the 1970s.⁹⁸⁸ Reflecting on the matter three decades later, Pete Townshend said that watching Hendrix for the first time was a “hell of a lot of pain... because in his presence, and the presence of that music, you felt small, and you realized how far you had to go.”⁹⁸⁹ Considering what “guitar gods” like Beck, Page and May were able to come up with by following Hendrix’s example, it is clear that the British rock network made up the difference and then some.

Maple Leaf Rag: The Band and the “Open Spaces” of Folk Americana

Over the past four decades, the summer of 1968 has become almost synonymous with discord and upheaval. In America, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy, and rioting at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago seemed to signal a nation in the midst of tearing itself apart.⁹⁹⁰ In France, a shotgun marriage between students and organized labor brought the country to a standstill for four weeks and nearly succeeded in bringing down the government of Charles de Gaulle.⁹⁹¹ In Prague, students and intellectuals enjoyed a brief thawing of the local Communist régime, but this was swiftly crushed by Soviet tanks. Demonstrations and street fighting erupted in Italy, West Germany, Spain,

⁹⁸⁸ André Millard, “Heavy Metal: From Guitar Heroes to Guitar Gods,” in Millard, ed., *The Electric Guitar: A History of an American Icon* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 167.

⁹⁸⁹ Townshend, interview in *Plugging In*, dir. Susan Steinberg.

⁹⁹⁰ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958-1974* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 667.

⁹⁹¹ Kristen Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 12.

Mexico and Japan. Even in Britain, which had a much calmer 1968 than its Continental neighbors, tranquility was marred by anti-war demonstrations in Trafalgar Square and racist hatemongering by Conservative MP Enoch Powell. Taken together, the euphemistically labelled “events” of 1968 were arguably the closest the world has come to global revolution since 1919.⁹⁹²

On the trans-Atlantic rock music scene, 1968 was no less eventful. Creativity, innovation and reinvention were now the name of the game, and nearly all of the key players contributed to the discussion. The year began with Bob Dylan emerging tentatively from his seclusion with the release of *John Wesley Harding*, a quiet, country-inflected ballad album that was seemingly as far removed from his “electric mod” trifecta as those albums had been from his “folk-protest troubadour” phase.⁹⁹³ The Beatles and the Rolling Stones continued their duel at rock music’s summit with gritty, powerful post-psychedelic albums such as the Beatles’ *White Album* and the Stones’ *Beggars Banquet*.⁹⁹⁴ Van Morrison earned plaudits for his *Astral Weeks*, an album that made connections between R&B, jazz, classical and Celtic sounds.⁹⁹⁵ Hard blues-based British rock was continuing to develop thanks to the Jeff Beck Group, who released their first album, *Truth*, in August, and Cream, who continued their dominance with *Wheels of*

⁹⁹² Marwick, *The Sixties*, p. 584.

⁹⁹³ Shelton, *No Direction Home*, p. 391; Bob Dylan, *John Wesley Harding* (Columbia, 1967).

⁹⁹⁴ Ellen Willis, “Records: Rock, Etc.—the Big Ones,” in *The New Yorker* (February 1, 1969), pp. 55-63.

⁹⁹⁵ Van Morrison, *Astral Weeks* (Warner Brothers, 1968).

Fire.⁹⁹⁶ In July, Cream shocked the music community by announcing their dissolution; six months later, Steve Winwood's "supergroup" Traffic would do likewise.⁹⁹⁷ Before the year was out, Jimmy Page would form Led Zeppelin from the wreckage of the Yardbirds; *Led Zeppelin*, the first of their decade-long run of monumental records, was released in January 1969.⁹⁹⁸ Amidst all of these remarkable offerings from rock's biggest names, however, the mantle of "most important album of 1968" arguably belongs to an unexpected offering from a group of unheralded musicians: *Music from Big Pink*, by the Band.⁹⁹⁹

They had not actually come out of nowhere; it just seemed that way at first. The Band—Rick Danko, Levon Helm, Garth Hudson, Richard Manuel and Robbie Robertson—had started life as the Hawks. They had been last seen (sans Helm) backing up Bob Dylan on his controversial American and European tours in 1965 and 1966, sharing in the nightly spectacle of booing and catcalls.¹⁰⁰⁰ After Dylan was injured in a motorcycle accident in July 1966, he retreated to his home in Woodstock, New York, and the Hawks followed him there. In Woodstock, Dylan and the Hawks were more or less

⁹⁹⁶ The Jeff Beck Group, *Truth* (Epic, 1968); Cream, *Wheels of Fire* (Polydor, 1968).

⁹⁹⁷ Chris Welch, "Cream Split Up," *Melody Maker* (July 13, 1968), p. 1; Chris Welch with Steve Winwood, *Winwood: Roll With It* (New York: Perigee, 1990), p. 124.

⁹⁹⁸ Led Zeppelin, *Led Zeppelin I* (Atlantic, 1969).

⁹⁹⁹ Al Kooper, "Review of *Music From Big Pink*," *Rolling Stone* (August 10, 1968), pp. 26; The Band, *Music From Big Pink* (Capitol, 1968).

¹⁰⁰⁰ Drummer Helm was with the Hawks for their initial concerts behind Dylan, but quit the tour in November 1965, unable (or unwilling) to handle the booing. He returned to the band at Woodstock in late 1967, as they were recording *Music From Big Pink*. Levon Helm with Stephen Davis, *This Wheel's On Fire: The Story of Levon Helm and the Band* (New York: W.W. Morrow, 1993), p. 140.

free from the pressures of the road and the scrutiny of the media; indeed, many commentators have debated whether or not the severity of Dylan's injuries was exaggerated to allow him a much-needed extended break from the spotlight.¹⁰⁰¹ As a result, for the next year and a half, the six musicians holed up in a large pink house in the woods (the inspiration for the album's title) and simply jammed, recording much of it in the studio that had been installed in the basement.¹⁰⁰²

No longer worried about pleasing anybody but themselves, they recorded a massively eclectic mix of songs, comprising blues, country, pop, rockabilly, and church hymns—even Rimsky-Korsakov's "The Flight of the Bumblebee."¹⁰⁰³ Many of these songs were covers—for example, "Big Bill" Broonzy's "Key to the Highway," or the traditional "Ain't No More Cane"—but almost as many were original compositions, penned by Dylan, Manuel, Robertson, or all three.¹⁰⁰⁴ Likewise, although many of them were performed by Dylan and the Hawks together, quite a few featured the Hawks by themselves. The Hawks-only "basement" songs boast an impressively rich ensemble sound that would become the Band's trademark. For one, the group had no frontman; depending on the song, lead vocals were sung by either Manuel, Danko, Robertson or—after he arrived in Woodstock—Helm, and everyone except Hudson contributed backing

¹⁰⁰¹ Among biographers and latter-day critics, see Shelton, *No Direction Home*, and Marcus, *Invisible Republic*. The debate also raged among journalists; see Ellen Willis in *Cheetah* (August 1966); filmmaker D.A. Pennebaker's interview in *Melody Maker* (January 1967); and Hubert Saal in *Newsweek* (January 1968).

¹⁰⁰² Marcus, *Invisible Republic*, pp. 42-44.

¹⁰⁰³ Marqusee, *Wicked Messenger*, p. 225.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Neil Minturn, *The Last Waltz of the Band* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2005), p. 27.

vocals.¹⁰⁰⁵ Furthermore, the “basement” sessions demonstrate a solid grounding in Americana, or what Greil Marcus calls the folk culture of the “old weird America.”¹⁰⁰⁶

What made that grounding so surprising, and so daunting to their British counterparts, was the fact that four-fifths of the Hawks were Canadian, and as such were in a similar position to the British with respect to proximity to and distance from, American culture. The spread of R&B and rockabilly to Canada occurred by means that were roughly similar to the British experience. American record albums were traded and sold in Canada—if anything, this particular transnational economy was more easily established, since Canada is closer to the United States and the two nations share a long and permeable land border. Where records were not available in Canadian retail outlets, resourceful enthusiasts, like Richard Manuel, mail-ordered them from Memphis and Chicago, just like their British counterparts.¹⁰⁰⁷ Canadian teenagers also listened to the strange sounds of American popular music over the radio. All four Canadian members of the Band recall being able to pull in broadcasts from powerful (up to 50,000 watt) clear-channel radio stations such as WLAC and WSM (Nashville), WWVA (Wheeling, West Virginia) and WINS (New York City)—the latter the home of pioneering disc-jockey Alan “Moondog” Freed.¹⁰⁰⁸ Once again, intention was overtaken by reality; the reason the clear-channel stations were so powerful was because they needed to reach throughout

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ed Ward, “The Band,” in DeCurtis, Henke and George-Warren, eds., *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History*, p. 431.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Marcus, *Invisible Republic*, p. 89.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Helm, with Davis, *This Wheel’s On Fire*, p. 61.

¹⁰⁰⁸ This incredibly powerful wattage allowed WLAC to broadcast over a thousand-mile radius. Minturn, *The Last Waltz*, p. 10; Helm, with Davis, *This Wheel’s On Fire*, p. 67.

the American South, as well as to the African-American migrant communities in the industrial North. Ontario was not a target market by any means, and yet the 50,000-watt broadcasts introduced the young Robertson and Manuel to Elvis Presley and Ray Charles nonetheless.

The successful transmission of R&B and rockabilly to Canada resulted, much as it did in Britain, France and West Germany, in the establishment of vibrant, if small-scale local scenes that incubated these musical styles, and ensured their continued survival for years after they had “died” in their homeland.¹⁰⁰⁹ Thus, in the case of the Hawks, there was a dynamic rock ‘n’ roll scene centered around Toronto’s Yonge Street that was heavily populated with youngsters itching to jump on a musical bandwagon that was still *au courant* in Canada, though outdated in America.¹⁰¹⁰ According to Greil Marcus, these bands were “walking jukebox[es] that played only other people’s hits, and the jukebox was a few years out of date to boot.”¹⁰¹¹ It was in rough-and-ready bands such as these, with names like the Capers, the Rockin’ Revols and the Jungle Bush Beaters that the future Hawks all got their start.¹⁰¹² The Canadian rock ‘n’ roll *milieu* also attracted American cut-rate rockabilly singers who had never quite made it to the “big time” along with Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins, and who now sensed a prime opportunity

¹⁰⁰⁹ Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock ‘n’ Roll* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), p. 42; Christian Victor and Julien Regoli, *Vingt Ans de Rock Français* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1978), p. 23.

¹⁰¹⁰ The only book-length treatment of this fascinating yet under-researched “scene” is Peter Goddard and Philip Kamin, eds., *Shakin’ All Over: The Rock ‘n’ Roll Years in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw Hill Ryerson, 1989).

¹⁰¹¹ Marcus, *Mystery Train*, p. 43.

¹⁰¹² *Ibid*, p. 43.

to be “big fishes in the littler pond.”¹⁰¹³ It was one such “big fish,” Ronnie Hawkins, who gave the fledgling Hawks their first sustained shot at success (as measured by regular gigs and the chance to make record albums).

Behind this self-styled “Mr. Dynamo,” the Hawks moved beyond radio broadcasts and record albums, and earned their authenticity the same way as their idols had, by performing almost without end for the better part of nine years. In addition to gigs up and down Ontario, they also rode a continuous circuit of the bars, ballrooms, “juke joints,” and nightclubs of the Deep South for six-and-a-half years. In June 1964, they split with Hawkins (with Helm taking over the band) and rode the same circuit on their own, as Levon and the Hawks, for a little over a year.¹⁰¹⁴ For the Canadian Hawks, these eight years allowed them to steep themselves in the culture that they had grown up worshipping from afar. Their musical education intensified, as they found themselves with even greater access to radio stations and record albums. Robertson remembers how, in January 1960, he was taken on by Hawkins on a trial basis, with instructions to stay in Arkansas and practice while the band went on yet another whirlwind tour. Instead, one of the Hawks’ former guitarists took Robertson (who was only fifteen) to Beale Street in Memphis, where he spent his entire allowance on blues and R&B records—an opportunity that Mick Jagger or Eric Clapton might very well have killed for.¹⁰¹⁵

After leaving Hawkins in the spring of 1965, the Hawks strengthened their claim to authenticity, as had Butterfield and Bloomfield, by building a personal rapport with a

¹⁰¹³ Helm, with Davis, *This Wheel’s On Fire*, p. 71.

¹⁰¹⁴ Hoskyns, *Across the Great Divide*, pp. 77-78.

¹⁰¹⁵ Robertson, interview with Andrew Franklin, in Tony Scherman, “The Hellhound’s Trail: Following Robert Johnson,” in *Musician*, no. 147 (January 1991), p. 35.

blues legend. In the Hawks' case, it was Sonny Boy Williamson II, whom they had venerated since hearing his radio broadcasts for KFFA in the 1950s.¹⁰¹⁶ Williamson II and the Hawks made each other's acquaintance in April 1965, mere days after the bluesman's return from Britain. They jammed together and got on famously. Word of this camaraderie must have been rather surprising to the British, who had certainly not gotten along as well with him. More disturbing to British sensibilities, at the end of their jam session, Williamson II pronounced the Hawks "naturals," praising their technique and their "feel."¹⁰¹⁷ From the cantankerous "grand vizier of the blues," this was high praise indeed; his opinion of the young Britishers from whose company he had recently returned was not nearly so complimentary. In fact, it was to the Hawks that Williamson II divulged his negative verdict of those British bands: "They want to play the blues so bad... and they play the blues *so bad!*"¹⁰¹⁸ He was suitably impressed with the Hawks, however, and seriously discussed with them the possibility of taking them on as his permanent backing band, but he died before it could come to pass.¹⁰¹⁹ It is interesting to note how Williamson II served as a sort of trans-Atlantic talisman, who left both British and American blues enthusiasts waiting for some sort of legitimation from him (recall that the British hoped he would resettle there)—legitimation that was denied them by the bluesman's death.

¹⁰¹⁶ Hoskyns, *Across the Great Divide*, p. 83.

¹⁰¹⁷ Helm, with Davis, *This Wheel's On Fire*, p. 64; Michael Schumacher, *Crossroads: The Life and Music of Eric Clapton* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), p. 106.

¹⁰¹⁸ Robbie Robertson, quoted in Robert Palmer, *Deep Blues* (New York: Penguin, 1981), p. 263.

¹⁰¹⁹ Hoskyns, *Across the Great Divide*, p. 84.

The end result of all that education accumulated on the road was a band that was as well-versed in American roots music as any native-born outfit, and, in Robertson, a songwriter who was arguably as fluent in the language and lore of the American South as John Steinbeck or Tennessee Williams, the two American writers to whom he has been compared.¹⁰²⁰ In the spring of 1968, production staff at New York’s Carnegie Hall asked Helm (who was still nominally the band’s leader) what the band was to be called. He replied, without any hint of irony, “The Crackers” (a colloquial term for poor white Southerners).¹⁰²¹ By dint of application, the four Canadians in the Band had become Southern enough as to make no real difference in the eyes of the Band’s only Southerner-by-birth.

In this regard, the Hawks’ career trajectory was the reverse of most of the British blues bands, who were still developing as bands—even still learning to play their instruments, in some cases—in the full glare of the public eye. The Band was not a fresh new pop group full of what Robertson contemptuously referred to as teenaged “cutie pies,” but a highly-seasoned unit made up of five committed musicians in their late twenties (which was, by the standards of the day, downright ancient for a group releasing their first album).¹⁰²² Thus, *Music from Big Pink* and its equally successful follow-up, *The Band*, were not the Band’s tentative first steps into the musical community, but rather the coming to fruition of all the cultural lessons they had absorbed over a decade-long

¹⁰²⁰ Marcus, *Mystery Train*, p. 51.

¹⁰²¹ Helm, with Davis, *This Wheel’s On Fire*, p. 77.

¹⁰²² Robbie Robertson, interview with John Rockwell, in Rockwell, “Tour’s Roaring Ovations Leave Dylan Quietly Pleased,” *The New York Times*, January 8, 1974.

apprenticeship, a fact reflected by the Band's initial desire to title their second album *Harvest*.¹⁰²³

The Band's distinctiveness lies in the ways in which they used those cultural lessons, just as Bob Dylan had before them, to conjure up and populate an imagined America. Where they differed, if only ever so slightly, was that whereas Dylan's Americans were myths and abstracts—John Wesley Harding, Christopher Columbus, Captain Ahab—those called forth by the Band seemed to be living, breathing, *real* Americans, with their own real struggles and relationships. The old sailor in “Rocking Chair,” whose world revolves around the prospect of finishing that one last voyage so he can return to the comfort of friends and family before he dies, was no abstraction; nor was the sugar-cane rancher in “Ain't No More Cane.”¹⁰²⁴ Rather, in the America expressed by the Band's music, it was the choices these characters faced, and the forces against which they struggled, that were larger-than-life. For the farmer-cum-union man of “King Harvest (Has Surely Come), it was drought, fire and poverty.¹⁰²⁵ For the convict of “I Shall Be Released,” it was an unfeeling legal system and the “crowd” who “put [him] here.”¹⁰²⁶ In “The Weight,” even the Devil himself makes an appearance, walking “side

¹⁰²³ Helm, with Davis, *This Wheel's on Fire*, p. 178.

¹⁰²⁴ The Band, “Rocking Chair,” *The Band* (Capitol, 1969); Bob Dylan and the Band, “Ain't No More Cane,” *The Basement Tapes* (Capitol, 1975).

¹⁰²⁵ The Band, “King Harvest (Has Surely Come),” *The Band* (Capitol, 1969); Hoskyns, *Across the Great Divide*, p. 106.

¹⁰²⁶ The Band, “I Shall Be Released,” *Music From Big Pink* (Capitol, 1968).

by side” with “Carmen,” in a vivid allusion to Robert Johnson’s “Me and the Devil Blues.”¹⁰²⁷

Although their characters hail from every corner of America, it is clear that the Band felt a special reverence for the South. Even before he first saw the South, Robertson recalled, “I was born to do it, man... I wanted to see all those places with those fantastic names. Chattanooga, Tennessee—wow! Shreveport, Lu-zee-ana—wow! I just couldn’t wait to drive down that road, you know.”¹⁰²⁸ Eight years later, it was this reverent attention to the South—its landscape, its people and its rhythm—that came through in the Band’s music and impressed itself upon the awestruck listener. It is especially clear in Robertson’s most arguably powerful song, “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down.” Written for Levon Helm (both in the sense that he sings it, and that Robertson wrote it with him in mind), “Dixie” introduces us to one Virgil Kane, a Confederate Civil War veteran.¹⁰²⁹ Kane has lost his brother as well as a substantial portion of himself in the war; not even a brief glimpse of his hero, Robert E. Lee, is good for anything more than a brief swell of pride.¹⁰³⁰ Strictly speaking, the song is about the South, but it is also, in

¹⁰²⁷ The Band, “The Weight,” *Music From Big Pink* (Capitol, 1968); Marcus, *Mystery Train*, pp. 49-50.

¹⁰²⁸ Robertson, interview in William Bender, “Down to Old Dixie and Back,” *Time* (January 12, 1970), p. 42.

¹⁰²⁹ Robertson, interview with John Poppy, in Poppy, “The Band: Music From Home,” *Look* (August 25, 1970), p. 25. Interestingly, in his 1982 interview with Joshua Baer, Robertson denies ever writing any song “for [Levon] or ‘at’ him or ‘because of’ him.” Baer, “The Robbie Robertson Interview,” *Musician* (May 1982), p. 67. Of course, in 1970, Robertson and Helm were still friends, and in 1982 they had not spoken for several years.

¹⁰³⁰ The Band, “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down,” *The Band* (Capitol, 1969).

Marcus' analysis, about the way in which "every American still shares this old event... what we share is an ability to respond to a story like this one."¹⁰³¹

Furthermore, the Band also dealt in many of the same blues themes as their British counterparts. Chief among these were the fascination with "the road" and "the open space" as a signifier of freedom and a shaper of identity—subjects in which the Band had a vast accumulated expertise, having been forged on the "endless highways" of Canada and the South for so long. When the individual Band members began their journey, they were callow adolescents; ten years on the road had made mature adults of them. The way they in turn used their maturity to make music that sounded every bit as mature was one of the hallmarks of that music. There have been dozens of covers by white bands of Big Bill Broonzy's classic celebration of the rambling lifestyle, "Key to the Highway," but arguably none of them sound as real as the Band's version, as sung by Helm.¹⁰³²

The Band also used their experience to put specific twists on the blues that put them in contrast with their British counterparts. At the moment that *Music From Big Pink* entered the public consciousness, the British blues-based rock bands—and, by extension, the "progressive" rock music scene that they dominated—read American culture with an emphasis on the ego, the individual and the abstract.¹⁰³³ The Band, on the other hand,

¹⁰³¹ Marcus, *Mystery Train*, pp. 55-56.

¹⁰³² "Big Bill" Broonzy, "Key to the Highway," *A Tribute to Big Bill* (Pye, 1955); The Band, "Key to the Highway," *Music From Big Pink* (Capitol, 2000) (re-release, re-mastered and with bonus tracks).

¹⁰³³ "Progressive" rock carries two distinct yet related meanings, depending on chronology. Between roughly 1965 and 1969, "progressive" rock meant popular music that was inspired by folk and blues, and that self-consciously aspired to be more serious

celebrated the community, simplicity and conservatism (in the non-political sense) that they found when *they* looked at America's (as well as their own) culture.¹⁰³⁴ Said Robertson, "we get sick and tired of all these whiny rock groups who are always bitching about their parents."¹⁰³⁵ "Out of all the idle scheming," sang Richard Manuel in *Big Pink's* "In a Station," "can't we have something to feel?"¹⁰³⁶ Record producer Joe Boyd saw in the Band's first two albums a "rebuke" to the British and their attempts to articulate Americana: "You want to play American music? Well, try playing something as American as *this!*"¹⁰³⁷ It was a challenge that the British would spend the next few years trying to adequately answer.

Word of this great "new" band and what they were doing holed up in Woodstock with the reclusive Dylan actually began to seep out to the musical community, if not quite the general public, months before *Music From Big Pink* was released. Although the "basement" songs were not recorded with any commercial agenda in mind—they were just the "messing-around," as Robertson put it, of six vacationing musicians—they began to circulate in the form of numerous illegal "bootleg" recordings, many of which went by

and sophisticated than either the rockabilly of the 1950s, or the "bubblegum pop" of the early 1960s. After roughly 1969, the definition of "progressive" rock narrows to refer to a sub-genre of rock music, produced mainly by college-educated young British men, who attempted to infuse jazz and classical music and high-literary allusions into the music. See Kevin Holm-Hudson, ed., *Progressive Rock Re-considered* (London: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁰³⁴ Helm, with Davis, *This Wheel's On Fire*, p. 173.

¹⁰³⁵ Robertson, interview in Bender, "Down to Old Dixie and Back," *Time* (January 12, 1970), p. 45.

¹⁰³⁶ The Band, "In a Station," *Music From Big Pink* (Capitol, 1968).

¹⁰³⁷ Joe Boyd, *White Bicycles: Making Music in the 1960s* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2006), p. 226.

the title *The Great White Wonder*.¹⁰³⁸ Copies of these “bootlegs” found their way into the hands of George Harrison, who proclaimed that the Band were the “next big thing” to come out of America, as well as Eric Clapton, who listened obsessively both to *The Great White Wonder* and to an advance copy of *Music From Big Pink* whilst on tour with Cream in the spring of 1968.¹⁰³⁹

Listening to *Music From Big Pink*, Clapton had an epiphany that rivaled the moment he discovered Robert Johnson, only in this case, he did not need to wait six months before listening to it a second time.

I used to put it on as soon as I checked into my hotel room, and listen to it, and then go and do the gig and be utterly miserable. Then [I’d] rush back and put the tape on and go to sleep fairly contented, until I woke up the next morning and remembered who I was and what I was doing. It was that potent. And I thought, ‘Well, this is what *I* want to play – not extended solos and maestro bullshit, but just good funky songs.’...

When I heard [*Music From Big Pink*], I felt we were dinosaurs and what we were doing was rapidly becoming outdated and boring. *Music From Big Pink* bowled me over ‘cause I thought that’s where everything should be going and we were nowhere near it.¹⁰⁴⁰

The Band’s music, in Clapton’s opinion, served as a stern reminder that he had strayed very far indeed from the path on which he had started out. In Clapton’s eyes, the Band’s approach offered a warning and a potential corrective, and it was this influence,

¹⁰³⁸ Marqusee, *Wicked Messenger*, p. 226. Belatedly, in 1975, Columbia Records responded to the proliferation of these “bootlegs” by releasing twenty-five of the tracks as a legitimate double album, *The Basement Tapes* (credited to Bob Dylan and the Band, Columbia, 1975).

¹⁰³⁹ Schumacher, *Crossroads*, p. 105.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Eric Clapton, interview with Barbara Charone, in Charone, “Please Take This Badge off of Me,” *Crawdaddy* (November 1985), pp. 23-24; Clapton, interview in Dan Neer, “Eric Clapton Testifies,” *Guitar* (June 1986).

along with other, more personal factors, that motivated Clapton to fold Cream in July 1968.¹⁰⁴¹

What Clapton did not yet know, but would learn soon enough, was that between the Band and himself (and, by proxy, the entire British blues network), there existed strong parallels, which were detectable in the music and which deepened once the two sides actually got to know each other personally. Both had started off as young, star-struck fans of the blues, and had formed their first bands as committed emulators of, and advocates for, that music.¹⁰⁴² The mid-1960s “mod” period had seen both sides take the first steps toward electric experimentation (the Band with Dylan, and Clapton with Cream), which, although healthy in terms of musical growth and expansion, arguably served to dilute the purism of that initial blues crusade. At that point, however, the parallel diverged—in Woodstock, the Band seemed to have taken a necessary step back, refreshing their commitment to the roots of the music, and reaffirming what that music was supposed to be “about.” What was more, they seemed to have convinced Bob Dylan to do likewise. Cream, on the other hand, had gotten progressively “out there,” setting too much stock by showy virtuosity and experimentation.

The divergence was apparent even at the level of nomenclature. Cream (or *the* Cream, as it was initially known) was so named because it comprised three celebrities, three acknowledged masters of instrumental prowess—“the cream of the crop.”¹⁰⁴³ Media

¹⁰⁴¹ Although the group’s dissolution was officially announced in July, Cream did not actually disband until November, after a much-ballyhooed farewell tour. Hjort, *Strange Brew*, p. 206.

¹⁰⁴² Marcus, *Mystery Train*, p. 43.

¹⁰⁴³ Thompson, *Cream*, p. 1.

attention was as often focused on what Clapton was wearing, say, or how Baker and Bruce were (not) getting along on the road, as it was on what they were playing. But the Band consciously downplayed its own star quality. *Music From Big Pink* was technically an anonymous album (though in official Capitol Records documents, they are referred to as “the Crackers”).¹⁰⁴⁴ At the group’s insistence, the album’s gatefold sleeve was printed without any identifying text whatsoever, just an odd painting by Bob Dylan on the front, and a caption-less photograph of the Band and thirty-five of their family members on the back.¹⁰⁴⁵ Ideally, the music was supposed to speak for itself. In fact, according to Robertson, “The Band” was nothing more than a placeholder, “so they can file it in the record stores. And also, that’s the way we’re known to our friends and neighbors.”¹⁰⁴⁶ However, “The Band” had a resonance above and beyond mere pragmatism. On the one hand, the five men were simply “the Band,” an ensemble of equals who saw no need to call attention to themselves with a “groovy” band name. On the other hand, they were “*the* Band,” which bestowed on them a sort of dignity and mastery.¹⁰⁴⁷

In between the break-up of Cream and the formation of Clapton’s next project, the ill-fated “supergroup” Blind Faith, Clapton traveled up to Woodstock to meet the musicians whose work had so affected him: “I had to go and see what they looked

¹⁰⁴⁴ Minturn, *The Last Waltz*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Helm, with Davis, *This Wheel’s on Fire*, p. 175. This lesson was not lost on Jimmy Page, who used the same tactic on Led Zeppelin’s fourth album in 1971, although he went one further—the album does not even have a title. Led Zeppelin, *Untitled* (commonly titled “IV” or “ZOSO”) (Atlantic, 1971).

¹⁰⁴⁶ Robertson, quoted in Helm, with Davis, *This Wheel’s on Fire*, p. 177.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Helm, seemingly never satisfied, was uncomfortable with “the Band” because he felt it was “pretentious, even blowhard... burdened by greatness;” he still preferred “The Crackers” or “The Honkies.” Helm, with Davis, *This Wheel’s on Fire*, p. 174.

like.”¹⁰⁴⁸ What he saw there confirmed the wisdom of his decision to leave Cream. “They looked like characters from the Hole in the Wall Gang... Like Jesse James or something.”¹⁰⁴⁹ The visual contrast, which underscored the discrepancy in musical direction, must have been almost laughable—the five members of the Band, dressed as they often were in simple, rustic vests, trousers and homburg hats, opening the door to find Clapton, the self-described “psychedelic loonie,” no doubt resplendent in a velvet military tunic and brightly-colored trousers, topped off by the “white man’s Afro” that he had adopted in emulation either of Bob Dylan, or of Jimi Hendrix.¹⁰⁵⁰

The six musicians chatted amicably if somewhat stiffly, and played a few records. Clapton was impressed not only by their simple unpretentiousness, but also by the fact that—unlike Cream—the five members of the Band actually got along with one another. Said Rick Danko, “I think he just wanted to soak up whatever atmosphere he thought he would find there, and then he left.”¹⁰⁵¹ If that was the case, then it can only be said that he was successful, as something of the Band’s approach and style rubbed off on Clapton’s subsequent work. Gone were the long, free-form soloing for soloing’s sake, the psychedelic finery, even the Afro. In their place was a more subdued musician, content

¹⁰⁴⁸ Clapton, quoted in Schumacher, *Crossroads*, p. 112.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Clapton, interview with John Pidgeon, in Pidgeon, “Eric Clapton: Return of the Reluctant Hero,” *Creem* (April 1978), p. 13. The Hole in the Wall Gang was Butch Cassidy’s gang of Wild West-era bank robbers.

¹⁰⁵⁰ I am basing my visualization of this scene on the way the Band and Eric Clapton look in numerous photos taken in late 1968—in Clapton’s case, the photos accompanying the album *Disraeli Gears*, as well as the *Rolling Stone* cover story (May 11, 1968); in the Band’s case, those accompanying *Music From Big Pink*, as well as the *Time* cover story (January 12, 1970) referenced above.

¹⁰⁵¹ Rick Danko, quoted in Thompson, *Cream*, p. 213.

merely to serve as a sideman in other people's bands (even trying, with his band Derek and the Dominoes, to hide his involvement completely), playing a quieter, looser kind of music that was neither country nor blues, but which was clearly indebted to both.¹⁰⁵² For his 1976 album, *No Reason to Cry*, he went even further, co-writing two songs with Manuel and Danko, and enlisting all five members of the Band (along with Dylan, Georgie Fame and the Rolling Stones' Ron Wood) to back him in the studio.¹⁰⁵³

The emergence of the Band, coming as it did on the heels of "countrified" albums by Bob Dylan, the Byrds and Crosby, Stills & Nash (*John Wesley Harding*, *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*, and *Crosby, Stills & Nash*, respectively), seemed to betoken the rise of an important new sub-genre of rock 'n' roll.¹⁰⁵⁴ *Time* magazine, who devoted their January 12, 1970, cover story to the Band, coined the term "country rock" to describe it, and proclaimed it as a balm and a corrective to the noise and self-indulgence of contemporary rock music.¹⁰⁵⁵ Psychedelic rock was starting to be seen as tired, overblown and too concerned with technical virtuosity; also, it was just too loud.¹⁰⁵⁶ According to its champions in the media, "country rock" would infuse rock with all of the perceived

¹⁰⁵² Dave Marsh, "Eric Clapton," in DeCurtis, Henke and George-Warren, eds., *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History*, p. 408.

¹⁰⁵³ Eric Clapton, *No Reason to Cry* (Polydor, 1976). One of these songs, the Clapton-Danko-penned "All Our Past Times," was specifically about Clapton's friendship with the Band, particularly Manuel.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Dylan, *John Wesley Harding* (Columbia, 1968); The Byrds, *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* (Columbia, 1968); and Crosby, Stills & Nash, *Crosby, Stills & Nash* (Atlantic, 1969).

¹⁰⁵⁵ Bender, "Down to Old Dixie and Back," *Time* (January 12, 1970), pp. 42-46.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Commentators may have had a point here; Pete Townshend of the Who has suffered major hearing loss as the result of all those "power chords" over the years. Dave Marsh, "The Who," in DeCurtis, Henke and George-Warren, eds., *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History*, p. 408.

virtues of country music: honesty, community, a commitment to traditions, what reviewer William Bender called “straight lines and pure sentiments.”¹⁰⁵⁷ Given the derision with which the majority of Americans outside the South or West had heretofore viewed country-and-western music, its presumptive appeal as an alternative is mildly surprising.¹⁰⁵⁸

In the end, “country rock” was largely an artificial category, dreamt up by breathless rock journalists who lacked the means to adequately articulate what was being produced, or how it related to the rest of the musical landscape, and who had a wider social agenda to pursue.¹⁰⁵⁹ To be fair, however, “country rock’s” most visible supposed practitioners were either unable or unwilling to come up with a better definition. Dylan dismissed the attention to “country rock” as more hype, fitting right in with what he called “the season of hype.”¹⁰⁶⁰ Helm flatly refused to comment, other than to declare that he “hated” the label.¹⁰⁶¹ Even Robertson, who was quickly becoming known as an aspiring rock intellectual (or at least a reliable font of eloquent-sounding quotes on

¹⁰⁵⁷ Bender, “Down to Old Dixie and Back,” *Time* (January 12, 1970), p. 43.

¹⁰⁵⁸ David Sanjek, “Blue Moon of Kentucky Rising Over the Mystery Train: The Complex Construction of Country Music,” in Cecelia Tichi, ed., *Reading Country Music: Steel Guitars, Opry Stars and Honky-Tonk Bars* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 33.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Paul Nelson, “The New Country Rock?,” *Hullabaloo* (November 1968), p. 17.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Dylan, in conversation with Albert Grossman, quoted in Hoskyns, *Across the Great Divide*, p. 170.

¹⁰⁶¹ Helm, with Davis, *This Wheel’s On Fire*, p. 175.

musical matters), could only say that it was “mountain music, because this place where we are—Woodstock—is in the mountains.”¹⁰⁶²

Perhaps vindicating the likes of Levon Helm, “country rock” faltered as a sub-genre with any sort of staying power. The Band itself would not long survive the sub-genre it had supposedly helped to spawn, either, only producing two albums of original material after 1973, before disbanding in 1976.¹⁰⁶³ Both Band and genre did, however, leave a lasting imprint on rock music—by stressing a return to the sources (whether that meant 1950s rockabilly, country music or the blues), and lighter and more understated arrangements. In their way, such seemingly disparate developments as glam rock’s renewed interest in rockabilly styles and heavy-metal bands’ inclusion of acoustic sides on their albums and acoustic mini-“sets” in their concert performances have their roots in the music of the Band and the musical conservatism they represented.¹⁰⁶⁴

Conclusions

From 1965 onwards, in the face of America’s musical ripostes—as exemplified by Bob Dylan, Paul Butterfield, Jimi Hendrix, and the Band—the British blues network took some interesting and innovative steps. One was to conceive of blues-based rock music as a vehicle for expressing more sophisticated sentiments than the typical “boy-meets-girl” clichés of standard pop music, or the evocative yet self-limiting conventions of the blues and R&B. Another was to begin to deviate from the purism and orthodoxy to

¹⁰⁶² Robertson, quoted in Helm, with Davis, *This Wheel’s On Fire*, p. 177.

¹⁰⁶³ Minturn, *The Last Waltz*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), p. 56; Susan Fast, *Houses of the Holy: Led Zeppelin and the Power of Rock Music* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 79-81.

which they had self-consciously during the first years of the British blues boom—although, as the case of certain British bands following in Hendrix’s wake proves, they did not abandon, but intensified, the growing cult of electric guitar virtuosity. The third and final step was to reconceptualize their musical direction—partially by returning to the sources of their music and partially by adopting a more musically conservative approach that they hoped would correct some of the excesses of “progressive” rock. In undertaking all of these steps, the British blues network showed itself to be adaptable enough to be able to meet a set of musical challenges that might very well have discouraged them from continuing to make the kind of music they wanted to make.

In truth, this adaptability had been with the British blues network from the beginning. Not even the most self-assured young British bluesman would have the audacity to think he or his mates could best their masters. We have seen in a previous chapter how Robert Plant became the picture of modesty when asked if he thought his vocal style was as good as that of Robert Johnson. Likewise, Eric Burdon observed that he realized, on the eve of the Animals’ 1964 American tour backing Chuck Berry, that “if you tried to out-rock Chuck Berry, you’re wasting your time. So I was looking for a song that was... very erotic, very atmospheric [instead].”¹⁰⁶⁵ The result was the Animals’ first major hit, their reworking of the American folk chestnut “The House of the Rising Sun,” which was just what Burdon was looking for—instead of trying to compete with Berry’s

¹⁰⁶⁵ Eric Burdon, interview in *Britain Invades, America Fights Back*, dir. Andrew Solt, in *The History of Rock ‘n’ Roll*, prod. Quincy Jones, Bob Meyrowitz and David Salzman (1995).

forceful guitar playing, the Animals opted for understated arpeggios from Hilton Valentine's guitar, and mesmeric solos from Alan Price's organ.¹⁰⁶⁶

In many ways, this set a precedent for the British blues network. When challenged by seemingly more authentic and aggressive American acts, the British would respond on their own terms—by borrowing, synthesis and subtle innovation—and not by direct confrontation, which would have been those of the Americans. And only infrequently would they flat-out copy their mentors or their peers. This has been a central feature of British musical culture dating back to the 18th century with European classical music—British composers may not have come up with a strikingly distinct national style until Edward Elgar, but what music they did compose was very rarely simple mimicry.¹⁰⁶⁷ Almost two centuries later, it is perhaps telling that although the music industry has thrown up a veritable army of singer-songwriters supposedly contending for the mantle of “the next Dylan”—with Phil Ochs, James Taylor, Carly Simon, Loudon Wainwright III, Tom Petty and Bruce Springsteen being the most notable—the only Britisher in the whole bunch was Donovan Leitch.¹⁰⁶⁸

It was not so much that the British would stop experimenting, on the one hand, nor that they would stop borrowing, on the other. If anything, the music produced by British bands in the 1970s are marked by an even greater blend of progressivism and bricolage than that of the earlier decade. What the call-and-response of a growing trans-Atlantic musical dialogue really did for British rock music was to help set the parameters for its

¹⁰⁶⁶ The Animals, “The House of the Rising Sun,” *The Animals* (MGM, 1964).

¹⁰⁶⁷ Peter Ackroyd, *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), pp. 455-56.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Shelton, *No Direction Home*, p. 438.

continued evolution. Inspired by Bob Dylan's lyrical sophistication, British rock musicians began to reconceptualize what they could say, using both the language and the themes of the music they loved. Outflanked by Paul Butterfield with regard to strict blues orthodoxy, they opted instead to search for common ground between the blues and broader-based popular and folk idioms, and then to integrate the blues therein. Intimidated by Jimi Hendrix's black blues virtuosity, they renewed their commitment to instrumental mastery and sonic pyrotechnics. Admonished by the Band's simple musical conservatism and reverence for earlier styles, the British used them to refresh their conception of what they were experimenting *with*, and to ground any further flights of fancy. As the 1960s wore on, all of these steps enabled the British blues network to articulate more fluently their explorations of Americana, and even moved them to begin to conceptualize what might be called a sense of "Britannica"—that is, a vocabulary of British cultural tropes—to both respond to and enrich those explorations. It was at that point, when British musicians stopped trying so hard to sound "American" (to say nothing of sounding "black") that popular music became a truly trans-Atlantic dialogue.

CHAPTER SIX
Bringing It All Back Home:
Rock Music and English-British Identities, 1965-1975¹⁰⁶⁹

Onstage in 1966, Pete Townshend of the Who wore a blazer tailored to look like the Union Jack and draped the flag itself over the growing arsenal of amplifiers behind him. The following year, the Beatles wore outlandishly-dyed British Guards uniforms on the cover of their epoch-making album, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. In 1969, Ray Davies of the Kinks—whom Townshend feels should be “poet laureate” for his lyrical depictions of modern-day Britain—composed an entire concept album entitled, *Arthur (Or, the Decline and Fall of the British Empire)*. Two years after that, on an album whose songs had been written in a cottage in rural Wales, Led Zeppelin offered “Immigrant Song,” a tale of medieval Britons struggling against Norse invaders. And in 1975, with punk rock looming on the horizon, *The Times* made sure to point out that Led Zeppelin’s Robert Plant “drank tea on the stage” during a concert at London’s Earls Court.¹⁰⁷⁰

All of the foregoing cultural fragments, though seemingly unrelated, are linked as examples of one of the most remarkable aspects of the development of blues-based rock music in the late 1960s: the seemingly concerted project by which British rock bands began to express themselves as British men, operating against a British cultural and

¹⁰⁶⁹ Chapter title: Bob Dylan, *Bringing It All Back Home* (Columbia, 1965).

¹⁰⁷⁰ Kevin Davey, *English Imaginaries: Six Studies in Anglo-British Modernity* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999), p. 85; The Beatles, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (EMI, 1967); Pete Townshend, interview in *Britain Invades, America Fights Back*, dir. Andrew Solt, in *The History of Rock 'n' Roll*, 10 vols., prod. Quincy Jones, Bob Meyrowitz and David Salzman (1995); The Kinks, *Arthur (Or, the Decline and Fall of the British Empire)* (Reprise, 1969); and Led Zeppelin, “Immigrant Song,” *Led Zeppelin III* (Atlantic, 1970); Philip Norman, “Led Zeppelin: Earls Court,” *The Times*, May 26, 1975, p. 5.

historical backdrop. This deployment of “British” culture, constructed mainly out of “English” cultural tropes, with some elements of “Celticness” mixed in, was an important, if never quite dominant, component of British rock music until the late 1970s. The irony, of course, was that the members of the British rock network had started off trying to emulate African-American music so that they could better interact and spiritually identify with America and American culture. They had affiliated themselves with African-American male blues culture because their “filiated” British cultural inheritance had seemed unsatisfying. But now, as these young men matured in terms of both age and creativity, they found aspects of that inheritance that were worthy of their attention after all.

This chapter will define and describe the ways in which English and/or British cultural identities manifested themselves in British rock music, beginning with the psychedelic era, and continuing through to the mid-1970s. The primary means by which the British blues-rock network expressed “Britishness” and “Englishness” through their music was through the construction of an imagined Britain. In doing so, they essentially reversed the practice, cribbed from African-American bluesmen (as well as white musicians like Bob Dylan and the Band), of constructing an imagined “America.”¹⁰⁷¹ This deployment of “Americana”—that is, America’s archetypes, its myths and its landscapes—was now applied to the other side of the Atlantic, to construct something that could easily be called “Britannica.” Britain’s urban and rural landscapes, populated by archetypal characters congregating in certain community-forming and identity-

¹⁰⁷¹ See, e.g., Greil Marcus’ essential works, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock ‘n’ Roll Music* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975) and *Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan’s Basement Tapes* (London: Picador, 1997).

affirming spaces such as the local pub, the nightclub, the city street, the music-hall, the country house, and the rural countryside, came through in blues-rock, psychedelic, “progressive” and even heavy metal music with the same vividness as had previously been the hallmark of American blues, folk and country-and-western music.

Chronologically and stylistically, some general trends can be detected. Spatially speaking, British rock groups moved from urban to rural tropes over time, although disgust with and satire of suburban culture remained a constant. Within these spatial boundaries, the British groups moved from American-based to British-based expression. That is, while initially the British celebrated the urban or the rural experience in American terms, they gradually moved into more distinctively British territory. However, it must be stressed that attention to fresh tropes did not supplant established ones, but were overlaid onto them in a characteristic bricolage that resulted in a much thicker cultural discourse. For example, just because the British began to explore their own cultural heritage in music, did not mean that they abandoned the fascination with America (especially black America) that had motivated them to musical expression in the first place. For example, Led Zeppelin’s untitled fourth album includes songs devoted to California, the Mississippi Delta and Chicago, alongside other songs full of reference to Arthurian legend, Tolkien-esque fantasy and Celtic myth.¹⁰⁷² Likewise, the use of rural or pastoral tropes is to be found right alongside continuing evocations of the urban landscape of both Britain and the United States.

It is important to recognize the continuing importance of urban and suburban tropes to British rock music, even as it began to include more and more references to a

¹⁰⁷² Led Zeppelin, *Untitled (commonly called “IV” or “ZOSO”)* (Atlantic, 1971); Erik Davis, *Led Zeppelin IV (ZOSO)* (New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 13.

pastoral, mystical England of centuries before. This has not been done to a great enough degree by much of the existing literature—particularly on the subject of British “progressive rock”—which has, as cultural critic Kevin Davey rightly notes, often conflated “Englishness” with Anglican choral music, medievalism and pastoralism, while leaving little room for the possibility that the city-and-town-based expressions of groups like the Who, the Kinks, and the Rolling Stones could also be part of an “English” or even “British” cultural story.¹⁰⁷³ Even if, as ethnomusicologist Edward Macan has argued, the rural-pastoral was the “dominant... mode” in British rock music both of this period and of the subsequent, “progressive rock”-dominated years, it is still necessary to keep the scope wide enough to take in the urban- and suburban-modern forms of British musical expression as well.¹⁰⁷⁴ Otherwise, our analysis of what might be intrinsically “British” or “English” about rock music will be severely limited.

There were several reasons for this newfound introspection. For one, Britain’s aspiring rock stars had been profoundly affected by their initial experiences in the United States as the advance guard of the “British Invasion.” The massive trans-Atlantic publicity machine that basically invented and then launched the Invasion, played up the uniqueness of its product by defining and selling the groups as either British or English—the distinction being thought too fine for American audiences to bother making. The Rolling Stones were touted in early 1965 as “England’s Newest Hitmakers!” and photographed for their first album cover standing in front of some of the still-visible

¹⁰⁷³ Davey, *English Imaginaries*, pp. 96-97.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Edward Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counter-Culture* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 154.

bomb damage left over from the Blitz.¹⁰⁷⁵ Months later, for the cover of their single, “My Generation,” the Who were photographed in front of Big Ben, wearing surly expressions and, in Townshend’s case, the aforementioned Union Jack blazer.¹⁰⁷⁶ And a 1966 poster advertising the Beatles’ final American tour featured a yin-yang floating above the Fab Four’s heads in which half the design was the Union Jack, and the other, the Stars and Stripes.¹⁰⁷⁷

This process of selling the British Invasion in national cultural terms, coupled with the inevitable realization of difference that occurred upon actually experiencing America and meeting American people, had the effect of driving home to Britain’s aspiring rock stars that they were, in fact, *British*, as opposed to “White Negroes” in training. As Townshend told an interviewer almost fifteen years later, “we went there [America] to be English.”¹⁰⁷⁸ Townshend’s experience, and by extension, that of many of his “Invasion” mates, was rather like that of African-American author James Baldwin, who spent most of the 1950s as an expatriate in Paris. As a black man, Baldwin perhaps had good reason to disavow his American identity. Yet, he noticed how, no matter how much he consciously tried to forge a European identity, he was still as “inescapably American as a Texas G.I.” Said Baldwin, “It was the American in myself I stumbled

¹⁰⁷⁵ The Rolling Stones, *The Rolling Stones: England’s Newest Hitmakers* (Decca, 1965); Stephen Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead: The 40-Year Saga of the Rolling Stones* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), p. xxvi.

¹⁰⁷⁶ The Who, *The Who Sing My Generation* (Brunswick, 1965).

¹⁰⁷⁷ “Here Come the Beatles!,” advertising poster for the Beatles’ “Final Concert Appearance,” Candlestick Park, San Francisco, CA, August 29, 1966, reproduced in Paul D. Grushkin, *The Art of Rock: Posters From Presley to Punk* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1987), p. 52.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Pete Townshend, interview in *The Kids Are All Right*, dir. Jeff Stein (1979).

upon while trying to discover Europe.”¹⁰⁷⁹ This process was true, albeit in reverse, of the British blues-rock network as well: by starting out trying to understand and articulate America and American culture, they ended up learning how to better express themselves as Britishers.

Another related factor that spurred the British bands to begin looking inward to their own cultural heritage was the challenges posed by the North American bands discussed in the last chapter. Bands like the Rolling Stones, who had made their names singing about Chicago, found themselves bested by bands made up of young men who were actually *from* Chicago. As I have said previously, strictly orthodox British R&B (which, by necessity, meant being skilled interpreters of American cultural sources) was only viable as long as there existed a perceived “authenticity gap” in American popular music. As of 1966, this gap was steadily closing, and by and large, the British response was to open up the discourse to include idioms in which they *could* speak with the kind of authenticity or fluency they heard in the music of Dylan or the Band. Britain’s urban, suburban and rural landscapes, and a well-stocked fund of cultural tropes, were readily seized upon as answers. After all, could the Band’s Robbie Robertson claim to know the suburban/rural Home Counties better than Jimmy Page? The emerging British folk-rock movement, and the established rock groups that it influenced, spent considerable effort trying to do for Britain what *Music From Big Pink* had done for America, and numerous

¹⁰⁷⁹ James Baldwin, “The Discovery of What it Means to Be an American,” in Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York: Dell, 1963), pp. 18-21.

British records have been trumpeted as “the British answer” to that monumental album.¹⁰⁸⁰

There was a racial element to the British bands’ cession of the authenticity stakes to the Americans, as well. British blues-based rock music was marked by a gradual diminution of self-consciousness about being white men playing in a black musical form, and a provisional reconsideration of Norman Mailer’s cult of the “white Negro,” in which young white men “wished” that they were, as Jack Kerouac so memorably put it, “a Negro... anything but what I was so drearily, a ‘white man’ disillusioned.”¹⁰⁸¹ To this end, Clapton proclaimed confidently upon the formation of Cream, “I’m no longer trying to play anything but like a white man. The time is overdue when people should play like they are and what colour they are.”¹⁰⁸² A dramatic turnaround, this, from the young man who just fifteen months earlier had quit the Yardbirds in disgust because they wanted to release a pop single on which was used that mainstay of the European Baroque canon, the harpsichord.

But it was not merely a shift toward playing “like... what colour they are” that Clapton and his fellows were undertaking by the mid-1960s. After all, they could still have tried for authenticity as white *Americans*. However, British rock musicians went all

¹⁰⁸⁰ E.g., Fairport Convention’s *Liege and Lief* (Island, 1968); the Kinks’ *The Village Green Preservation Society* (Reprise, 1968); Humble Pie’s *Town and Country* (Immediate, 1969); and the Faces’ *Long Player* (Warner Bros., 1972). See Joe Boyd, *White Bicycles: Making Music in the 1960s* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2006), p. 227; and Uli Twelker, *The Small Faces, the Faces, Peter Frampton, Rod Stewart, Ronnie Lane, Steve Marriott, Humble Pie and Other Stories* (London: Sanctuary, 2002), p. 67.

¹⁰⁸¹ Norman Mailer, *The White Negro* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1957); Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin, 1999), pp. 169-70.

¹⁰⁸² Eric Clapton, quoted in John Pidgeon, *Eric Clapton: A Biography* (London: Vermilion, 1985), p. 43.

the way back and started trying to play like what *nation* they were from, too. Actually, in the lead vocals of the *haute-bourgeois* Mick Jagger, the Rolling Stones had already been occupying this racial and national territory for quite some time. To record producer Joe Boyd, this was one of the band's real sources of strength. Americans, he said, "were obsessed with sounding like black men, whereas Mick showed them how to sing blues and be unashamed of being white *and being a kind of tarty little English schoolboy*. There wasn't the same awkwardness [my emphasis]."¹⁰⁸³ Henceforth, British musicians, following Jagger's example, would undertake their blues excursions, secure in their white British masculinity (however much makeup and drag they might choose to wear in years to come) and open to the numerous cultural and sonic possibilities that their racial and national identities afforded them.

Got No Time For Muswell Town: Suburban Culture and Its Discontents¹⁰⁸⁴

The imagined "Britain" that was conjured up by British rock bands was tripartite, consisting of urban, suburban and rural worlds. This was a slight, though important, departure from the imagined "America" of the blues and country-and-western, in which, by and large, the suburb is non-existent as either background or trope. The relationship between these three worlds in British rock music was simple. The suburban world was the adversary, a stultifying world of social conformism and proper moral values. It was also, more or less, the very real lot of the many young blues enthusiasts who grew up in it. But even if one grew up outside of this *milieu*, the values it seemed to represent were what young men of the working-class and petty bourgeoisie felt they had to look forward

¹⁰⁸³ Joe Boyd, quoted in Jonathan Green, *Days in the Life: Voices From the English Underground, 1961-71* (London: Pimlico, 1998), p. 234.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Section title: The Kinks, "So Long," *Kinda Kinks* (Reprise, 1965).

to. Thus, a boy from London's working-class Shepherd's Bush area, like Pete Townshend, could articulate the same fear and loathing of suburban Britain and all that for which in their minds it stood, as one from the petit-bourgeois London suburb of Muswell Hill, like Ray Davies. Counterpoised to this objectionable status quo were the urban and, after roughly 1968, rural British "escape worlds." Disaffected young Britons looked to these worlds to provide them with an alternative in terms of experience and identity, just as they had looked (and continued to look) to the "imagined" American urban landscape. The suitability of Chicago or the Mississippi Delta as a backdrop for the African-American "bluesman" was transposed onto London and rural Berkshire for his British counterpart.

Britain's suburban sphere, though described with as much vivid detail as the urban and rural spheres, served mainly as fodder for often-satirical condemnations of the "normal" or "straight" world and value system that the British bohemian element wholeheartedly rejected.¹⁰⁸⁵ Here was the domain of parental authority, both literally and, in the form of "Auntie" BBC, figuratively; of the dreaded "organization man" and his grey flannel suits and 40-hour-work-week somnolence; and of domestic responsibility and "feminized" mass consumer culture.¹⁰⁸⁶ The lack of enthusiasm that the typical British blues enthusiast held for the suburban experience had been amplified by comparison with the urban- and rural-based dynamism of the African-American bluesman's world. When this came into contact with the self-consciously sophisticated

¹⁰⁸⁵ Jonathon Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counter-Culture* (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 56.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Michael Roper, *Masculinity and the British Organization Man Since 1945* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 12.

satire of Bob Dylan's "flashing chain imagery," the result was a body of attacks on suburban culture that is both incredibly strident and extremely conspicuous. It is no exaggeration to say that, if cheerful, cheeky endorsements of romantic love launched the "British Invasion," then surly, bohemian disgust with suburban conformism kept it alive. Perhaps this was because it was so near to them, and their position apart from it so precarious, but whatever the reason, Britain's budding rock musicians seemed at constant pains to remind not only themselves, but also their audiences, of precisely what they were rebelling against by adhering to African-American blues and R&B culture.

What, specifically, were British rock bands like the Kinks and the Rolling Stones attacking when they turned their metaphoric guns on suburban culture? First there were satires of suburban culture's stifling conformism (and simultaneously, its hypocrisy in celebrating that conformism), especially as embodied by the archetype of the "organization man."¹⁰⁸⁷ The Kinks' "Well-Respected Man" was a litany of all the sins for which this wretched creature deserved the scorn of the Mods and blues enthusiasts. He was punctual, conservative, obsessed with keeping up appearances, and followed conscientiously in the footsteps of his equally conformist parents.¹⁰⁸⁸ All of this earned him the unquestioning esteem of his social peers (the "respect" of the title). This would have been bad enough on its own, but it was made worse by its being just a façade, concealing the fact that he was actually greedy, arrogant and clutching, and that his

¹⁰⁸⁷ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain From Suez to the Beatles* (London: Abacus, 2006), p. 125.

¹⁰⁸⁸ The Kinks, "Well-Respected Man," *Kinkdom* (Rhino, 1965).

parents were immoral and sexually debauched.¹⁰⁸⁹ This sort of sordidness clad in grey flannel was also disparaged by Mick Jagger in “Memo From Turner,” the theme song from the film *Performance*: “You’re the misbred grey executive I’ve seen heavily advertised... You’re the great grey man whose daughter licks the policeman’s buttons clean/You’re the man who squats behind the man who works the soft machine.”¹⁰⁹⁰

Jagger’s “Turner” had first met this example of the “organization man” at “the Coke convention in 1965,” and the latter’s occupation points up another oft-satirized element of suburban culture: its obsession with, and promotion of, a soulless and feminized consumer culture. Although the (usually feminine) victims of this culture make their appearances in British rock music—for instance, the suburban housewife in the Rolling Stones’ “Mother’s Little Helper” who swallows amphetamines by the handful to combat a typically suburban anomie—advertisers and advertising itself are more often the satirists’ target. This is perhaps fitting, since in the postwar affluent society, advertising was increasingly omnipresent and, as a result, more and more of a menace.

Laundry detergent—a consumer good that had been solidly branded as feminine—seemed in particular to attract the disdain of the Rolling Stones. “Get Off My Cloud” finds the protagonist minding his own business, “when in flies a man who’s all dressed up like a Union Jack,” intent on selling him detergent.¹⁰⁹¹ This had followed the group’s first breakthrough single, the anthemic “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction,” in which Jagger similarly has his protagonist sneer at a man who “comes on [television] and tells

¹⁰⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁰ The Rolling Stones, “Memo From Turner,” *Metamorphosis* (Decca, 1970).

¹⁰⁹¹ The Rolling Stones, “Get Off My Cloud,” *December’s Children (And Everybody’s)* (Decca, 1965).

me/How white my shirts can be/But he can't be a man 'cause he doesn't smoke/The same cigarettes as me." Underneath the derision is an implicit confirmation of advertising's baleful universality: while the protagonist may have successfully fended off one advertising ploy (for detergent), he has fallen for the second (for cigarettes) wholeheartedly.¹⁰⁹² One could take solace, perhaps, in the fact that at least cigarettes are branded as masculine.

This brings up again a central conundrum to which I referred in a previous chapter—namely, how to reconcile simultaneous loathing and lust after aspects of suburban culture. I alluded to this conundrum in a previous chapter: mass consumer culture is supposed to be feminine—and feminizing—and yet both Mods and blues enthusiasts zealously acquired, catalogued and obsessed over consumer goods such as clothing, motor scooters, record albums and guitars, without much damage to their credibility as paragons of aggressive heterosexuality.¹⁰⁹³ This conundrum applied to songwriting as well. On the one hand, Townshend could craft an entire “concept album” that satirized mass advertising and corporate culture, but on the other, he almost immediately saw the profit in licensing the Who's songs to companies for use in their advertisements, a decision he defends contemptuously against fans' outraged claims of inauthenticity.¹⁰⁹⁴ Likewise, on the level of social class and consumer culture, Davies could viciously lampoon the “unpleasant and unkind” man with “a house in the country

¹⁰⁹² The Rolling Stones, “(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction,” *Out of Our Heads* (Decca, 1965).

¹⁰⁹³ See Andreas Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other,” in Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Post-Modernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 45.

¹⁰⁹⁴ The Who, *The Who Sell Out* (Track Records, 1967).

and a big sports car.”¹⁰⁹⁵ But none of Britain’s newly-minted rock stars hesitated to buy themselves both country houses and sports cars—the better to fulfill their odd composite dream of being an English aristocrat-cum-American bluesman (on which more later).¹⁰⁹⁶

This conundrum lies in the project, discussed in an earlier chapter, of branding certain aspects of consumer culture as “masculine”—and, thus, safe and appropriate for young male consumers—and of others as “feminine.”¹⁰⁹⁷ Automobiles, as modern, masterable machines, were branded as “masculine” (even if American car companies paid increasing attention to the opinions of a man’s wife in such areas as interior trim and reliability). And if the interior of the home was seen as entirely the woman’s province, home ownership (especially aristocratic homes with extensive grounds and large domestic staffs) was “a man’s job.” So was do-it-yourself work, which, as commentators have noted, approached the level of a national cult hobby in Britain.¹⁰⁹⁸ Thus, the young male consumers who had once spent their entire white-collar pay packet on clothing, blues records and guitars could now, having grown older, could pay obsessive attention

¹⁰⁹⁵ The Kinks, “A House in the Country,” *Face to Face* (Reprise, 1966).

¹⁰⁹⁶ Nor, for that matter, have various members of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Who or Led Zeppelin refused the knighthoods that have been offered them (although John Lennon returned his Most Excellent Order of the British Empire award in 1969 in protest over Britain’s stance on the Vietnam War and its involvement in the Nigerian Civil War). See Shawn Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!: The Smashing Rise and Giddy Fall of Swinging London* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), p. 131.

¹⁰⁹⁷ For an interesting discussion of these issues as they applied to the world of marketing to American boys of a slightly earlier period, see Lisa Jacobson, “Manly boys and enterprising dreamers: Business ideology and the construction of the boy consumer, 1910-1930,” in *Enterprise and Society*, vol. 2, no. 2 (June 2001), p. 228.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Jeremy Paxman, *The English: A Portrait of a People* (London: Michael Joseph, Ltd., 1998), p. 123.

to the details of the cars and stately homes on which they now spent their recording royalties, without falling victim to the “feminizing” effects of consumer culture.

Although consumer culture and masculinity could in this way be properly reconciled, the point remains that, to the British blues network, suburban conformist culture was always the adversary, to be avoided and escaped by the dynamic male protagonist looking for a more authentic experience. This led to a gendered bifurcation of the world: the suburban neighborhood belonged to women and femininity; the urban cityscape (and later the rural countryside), to men and masculinity. Each was a stranger in the other’s world, and transgressing the carefully-constructed barriers would only lead to problems. Thus, while the female antagonist of the Who’s “A Legal Matter” is portrayed as perfectly content to wallow in the trappings of the suburban bride and *hausfrau* (“Wedding gowns and catalogs/Kitchen furnishings and houses/Maternity clothes and baby’s trousers”), the male protagonist can only regard it as “a household fog.”¹⁰⁹⁹

Conversely, the woman who tried to enter the urban cityscape would be just as lost. Consider the pitiable young woman in the Animals’ “Gonna Send You Back to Walker,” who prevails upon her boyfriend to bring her to the “big city,” even though her parents warned him not to. Once there, she is “knocked out” by the “bright lights” and starts mistreating her boyfriend, whose only recourse is to “send [her] back to Walker” (a suburb of the Animals’ home city of Newcastle), since “that’s where [she] belong[s].”¹¹⁰⁰ Drawing on the blues tradition, the “mistreatment” referred to in the song is sexual; thus, it seems that what British songwriters were *really* afraid of was that the urban landscape

¹⁰⁹⁹ The Who, “A Legal Matter,” *The Who Sing My Generation*.

¹¹⁰⁰ The Animals, “Gonna Send You Back to Walker,” *The Animals* (Columbia, 1964).

would heighten women's sexual awareness—and, worse, that they would focus it on other men. The aspiring British bluesman could be magnanimous about the matter—“I don't mind other guys dancin' with my girl,” the protagonist claims in “The Kids Are Alright.” However, given his way, he would much rather “leave her behind” (that is, at home), while he stepped “out in the light”—that is, the world of urban freedom that was his rightful domain.¹¹⁰¹ Here, life came to imitate art in an interesting way—after having exposed his girlfriend to the erotic dynamo that was Jimi Hendrix in 1967, Townshend privately vowed that, on future occasions, *he* would go to the urban nightclubs to witness such scenes, and make sure that *she* stayed home to watch something “more antiseptic.”¹¹⁰² Clearly, the city streets were no place for a respectable young British woman, whether the threat was as spectacular as Jimi Hendrix, or something a bit more prosaic.

Out in the Street: Masculine Spectacle and Adventure in the Urban Cityscape

British blues enthusiasts seized upon African-American urban blues for numerous reasons, but chief among them was the ways in which the blues idiom articulated and valorized an urban modernity in the foreground of which the bluesman carved out a niche of power for himself. As discussed previously, this modernity most often took the form of the masterable machine—the car, the train and the electric guitar. But the urban cityscape itself also proved quite attractive to young British men, and in the process of transmuting American blues into British blues-rock, they privileged the urban *milieu* as the first alternative space to which disaffected suburbanites could flee for more authentic

¹¹⁰¹ The Who, “The Kids Are Alright,” *The Who Sing My Generation*.

¹¹⁰² Pete Townshend, quoted in Charles Shaar Murray, *Crosstown Traffic: Jimi Hendrix and the Post-War Rock 'n' Roll Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 69.

experience. The British musical cityscape comprised two sub-spaces: the pub or nightclub, and the street itself. Each of these sub-spaces enabled suburban escapees the chance to find adventure, self-actualization and homosocial bonding with like-minded young men. Both sub-spaces were supposed to be solely masculine preserves, but as we shall see, this sense of social exclusion led to an impossible double standard, and was in any case extremely difficult to enforce.

The traditional English pub, and the social discourses that it was supposed to have reproduced, have occupied a growing place in the literature of cultural studies and history over the last ten years or so, thanks to scholars like Steven Earnshaw and Paul Jennings.¹¹⁰³ They have located the pub, and the drinking culture that been perpetuated within its boundaries, at the very heart of discourses about what constitutes “Englishness” and “Britishness.”¹¹⁰⁴ They have also mapped out the ways in which the social space of the pub operated. The pub is an urban or rural enclosed space, permeable from the street by some but not necessarily by all (*i.e.*, the restricted circumstances in which women are tolerated inside the pub). It has served as a gathering-place, a temporary leveler of social distinctions, and has come to be intrinsically linked with what it might mean to be a British man since the 1500s.¹¹⁰⁵

The pub (as well as its 1960s variants, the nightclub and the discothèque) also occupied a central place in the emerging social geography of the British blues network

¹¹⁰³ Steven Earnshaw, *The Pub in Literature: England's Altered State* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000); Paul Jennings, *The Local: A History of the English Pub* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007).

¹¹⁰⁴ Earnshaw, *The Pub in Literature*, p. 2.

¹¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 12.

and its secondary cadre of visiting American musicians. They were a drinking culture, congregating around English drinking establishments and claiming to draw both sociability and inspiration from innumerable bottles of brandy, English bitter, and brown ale.¹¹⁰⁶ This claimed connection is, of course, nothing new to students of intellectual and cultural history, who have seen it at work in creative interpersonal networks dating back to the days of the ancient Greek *symposia*, the male wine-drinking and philosophical societies.¹¹⁰⁷ Intellectual networks that were also drinking networks have existed throughout modern history, with the tavern-haunting American Founding Fathers or the café-frequentering French Impressionists or Modernists springing immediately to mind as examples.¹¹⁰⁸ What is more, the British blues network self-consciously placed themselves in this cultural lineage. John Lennon told *Rolling Stone* interviewer Jann Wenner in 1971 about how he, Eric Burdon and Brian Jones “would be up night and day, talking about music, playing records, and getting drunk.... like they must have done in Paris, talking about paintings.”¹¹⁰⁹

This culture began in the art school common rooms, where empty bottles were as much a part of the spartan furniture as acoustic guitars and stacks of record albums, and moved into the student union pubs, where fledgling British blues bands had their first

¹¹⁰⁶ George Pearson, *Sex, Brown Ale and Rhythm-and-Blues: The Life That Gave Birth to the Animals* ([Great Britain]: SnagaP Publishers, 1998), p. 18.

¹¹⁰⁷ Tom Standage, *A History of the World in 6 Glasses* (New York: Walker and Company, 2005), pp. 56-59.

¹¹⁰⁸ Of course, dependence on alcohol-plying establishments was not always necessary for cultural creativity, as the example of the Scottish and French *philosophes*, who congregated in London and Paris’ coffee-houses (respectively), proves. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹¹⁰⁹ Eric Burdon, with J. Marshall Craig, *Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2001), p. 48.

gigs. Indeed, it was for spending far more time in the latter establishment than in the art studio that led to Eric Clapton's dismissal from Kingston Art College in 1963.¹¹¹⁰ In time, Britain's blues enthusiasts graduated to the pubs and nightclubs of the cities—Liverpool, Belfast, Newcastle, Birmingham, Manchester and London. The necessary connection between drinking culture and blues enthusiasm was recognized by founding fathers Alexis Korner and Cyril Davies. Upon deciding to abandon what Korner called “this skiffle shit” in favor of Chicago-style blues, the pair simultaneously started a new band and opened a pub, the London Barrelhouse Blues Club.¹¹¹¹

British blues network immortalized their early reliance on this constellation of drinking establishments in their music. Their idol, John Lee Hooker, had celebrated “Henry's Swing Club,” a favorite stomping ground on Detroit's Hastings Street in his song, “Boogie Chillun,” and his British acolytes did much the same.¹¹¹² Them, led by Van Morrison, immortalized the seediness and drink-fuelled rowdiness of Belfast's Maritime Hotel, where they had gotten their early start, in “The Story of Them”:

Too much it was
Yeah, good times
Wild, sweaty, crude, ugly
And mad...
And the misty, misty atmosphere
Gimme another drink of beer, baby
Gotta get goin' here...¹¹¹³

¹¹¹⁰ Eric Clapton, *Clapton: The Autobiography* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), p. 36.

¹¹¹¹ Bob Brunning, *Blues: The British Connection* (New York: Blandford Press, 1986), p. 13.

¹¹¹² John Lee Hooker, “Boogie Chillen,” *Burning Hell* (Riverside, 1964).

¹¹¹³ Them, “The Story of Them,” *Them Featuring Van Morrison* (Decca, 1982).

Likewise, the Animals paid tribute to Newcastle's Club A Go-Go—a seedy nightclub owned by their manager, Mike Jeffrey—in a song of the same name, saying “the place is full of soul,” before name-checking the various visiting blues legends who had stopped by the club, everyone from Bo Diddley and Hooker to the Rolling Stones.¹¹¹⁴

Obviously, London had the most drinking establishments, and it was in these pubs, clubs and discothèques that most of the provincial blues enthusiasts, and even a sizable number of those from the environs of the capital, first met, socialized, jammed and made plans to form bands with one another. Jimi Hendrix's invitation to bass guitarist Noel Redding to join his new band, the Experience, was made in a quiet pub across the street from the recording studio where Redding had just finished auditioning; the deal was sealed with Redding buying the African-American guitarist his first half-pint of English bitter.¹¹¹⁵ The SLAGs (or, Society of Looning Alcoholic Guitarists), the joke fraternity discussed in a previous chapter, were formed and had their first “meetings” in the Cromwellian pub in London's South Kensington neighborhood, inaugurating themselves with a bottle of Mateus Rosé wine.¹¹¹⁶ Clapton, the SLAGs' first president, later told Steve Turner that the mid-1960s “were wino days. Everyone was drinking wine

¹¹¹⁴ The Animals, “Club A Go-Go,” *Animal Tracks* (US) (MGM, 1965).

¹¹¹⁵ Noel Redding, *Are You Experienced?: The Inside Story of the Jimi Hendrix Experience* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), p. 32.

¹¹¹⁶ Christopher Hjort, *Strange Brew: Eric Clapton and the British Blues Boom, 1965-70* (London: Jawbone Press, 2007), p. 42.

by the gallon and getting wiped out at three o'clock in the afternoon"—before presumably waking up in the evening, ready to play a gig or record a few tracks.¹¹¹⁷

Aside from European cultural traditions, blues enthusiasts also looked to their usual source of inspiration, African-American bluesmen, in constructing a culture where drinking and creativity supposedly went hand in hand. African-American blues culture also centers around drinking establishments that are also performative and social spaces—either the Southern “jook joints” or the Northern city clubs in which solo musicians and bands alike plied their trade to a mostly African-American clientele.¹¹¹⁸ Here again, it seems that British enthusiasts’ knowledge of these establishments came more from what they were able to read about blues culture, than from getting it from the recorded music, since the blues musicians to whom they listened did not often make the performative aspect of being a bluesman a central part of their lyrics.

Jook joints and bars do appear in the blues, but usually as places where the protagonist goes as a spectator, not as a performer. For instance, Robert Johnson invites his “sweet rider” to come and “barrelhouse” (that is, drink and carouse) with him at jook joints “by the river side” in Friars Point and Rosedale, Mississippi.¹¹¹⁹ Likewise, Hooker’s sole occupation at the bar in his popular and often-covered “One Bourbon, One

¹¹¹⁷ Eric Clapton, interview with Steve Turner, in Turner, “Conversations With Eric Clapton” (London: Abacus, 1976), p. 53.

¹¹¹⁸ David Grazian, *Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 21.

¹¹¹⁹ Robert Johnson, “Travelling Riverside Blues,” *King of the Delta Blues Singers, Vol. 1* (Columbia, 1961).

Scotch and One Beer” is simply to drink until last call, not to perform.¹¹²⁰ Hooker’s inebriation—the title is a request made of the bartender, and is repeated four times throughout the song—has its equals elsewhere in blues culture. For instance, B.B. King’s popular blues “Sloppy Drunk” also concerns the attempts by the protagonist to bend the ear of the bartender, for “another half a pint,” which he claims he needs to cope with his woman.¹¹²¹ Tommy Johnson (no relation to Robert) sang a song called “Canned Heat Blues,” in which the protagonist was reduced by his poverty to drinking Sterno brand lighter fluid.¹¹²²

The purpose of drinking (especially to excess) presents another, perhaps willful, distortion of African-American blues culture in the hands of its British acolytes. Generally speaking, African-American bluesmen drank as a coping mechanism, a way to deal with personal suffering or pain. This pain can be romantic, or it can be socioeconomic. Hooker’s outsized consumption in “One Bourbon...” is meant to dull the pain of being abandoned by his woman (“Well I ain’t seen my baby since I don’t when/[so] I been drinkin’ bourbon, whiskey, scotch and gin”).¹¹²³ And Tommy Johnson’s resort to lighter fluid is both a function of his poverty (he cannot afford anything better) and a response to that poverty (since drinking the Sterno will no doubt render him unconscious).

¹¹²⁰ John Lee Hooker, “One Bourbon, One Scotch and One Beer,” *The Real Folk Blues* (Chess, 1966).

¹¹²¹ B.B. King, “Sloppy Drunk,” *King of the Blues* (MCA, 1992).

¹¹²² Tommy Johnson, “Canned Heat Blues” (single – Document, 1929); Debra DeSalvo, *The Language of the Blues: From Alcorub to Zuzu* (New York: Billboard Books, 2006), p. 25.

¹¹²³ Hooker, “One Bourbon, One Scotch and One Beer.”

But the drinking culture in which British blues enthusiasts engaged was premised on a different idea: that drinking until inebriation produced greater cultural creativity. At its core, this idea, though drawing also on the earlier European traditions I have mentioned, was inspired by the supposedly autobiographical example of the African-American bluesman. The bluesman's lifestyle (that is, what he sang about as his lifestyle) and the creativity and power of the music he made were taken to be irretrievably linked. Indeed, the former was taken to be the source of the latter. And since "getting high... getting mellow" (in Hooker's words) was a conspicuous subject of blues lyrics, it must be a contributing factor to the richness of the music.¹¹²⁴ And so British blues enthusiasts like Eric Clapton and Rod Stewart made inebriation a conspicuous aspect of their project of blues emulation. It was a subtle, yet important logical leap to make.

Of course, the question of whether drink actually fuels cultural creativity is elusive, and probably unanswerable. Many authors, playwrights and musicians have certainly perceived this connection with regard to their own lives and work, and as we have seen, artists like Eric Clapton, Keith Richards and Levon Helm actively indulged in drink and drugs as a way of "living the bluesman's lifestyle."¹¹²⁵ So perhaps there was a kind of placebo effect at work here—that they *thought* drugs and alcohol would bestow the bluesman's genius on them, may have inspired their work. In more prosaic terms, the members of the British blues network used inebriation simply to embolden themselves to perform. For example, Mick Jagger's first efforts onstage with Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated only came, according to Jimmy Phelge, after he had built up enough "Dutch

¹¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹¹²⁵ See Chapter 3 for a somewhat more involved discussion of this kind of emulation.

courage” to ask Korner for the chance to sit in.¹¹²⁶ The same was true of the Faces, whose members had all performed in public before, even touring America, but who still had to get alarmingly drunk in their dressing rooms before their first concert, in order to overcome their massive stage fright.¹¹²⁷ Finally, drinking did encourage sociability and male bonding, and the assertion that rich cultural creativity arose from close homosocial interaction is one of the central premises of this study.

For all of their professed reliance on alcoholic beverages as a spur to their cultural creativity, however, the British blues-rock groups did not refer much to drinking or drunkenness in their actual music. Bands of the 1960s actually made far more lyrical references to smoking marijuana or “dropping” LSD than they did to imbibing alcohol, even if they consumed all three drugs more or less equally.¹¹²⁸ The Faces, in keeping with their public persona as a bunch of hard-drinking lads concerned only with good times, are just about the only exceptions to the rule. In “Had Me a Real Good Time,” they painted a picture of a proper upper-class soirée that degenerates into a drunken romp, complete with a drunken vicar (the epitome of respectability gone awry) and a collective sing-along of the popular Scottish song, “Auld Lang Syne.”¹¹²⁹ At another such party, related in “Too Bad,” Rod Stewart and his mates are expelled from the premises by the snobby

¹¹²⁶ James Phelge, *Nankering With the Rolling Stones: The Untold Story of the Early Days* (Chicago: A Cappella, 2000), p. 23.

¹¹²⁷ Rod Stewart, interview with Pete Frame, in “Face to Face With a Face,” *Zigzag*, no. 19 (May 1971), reprinted in Frame, ed., *The Road to Rock: A Zigzag Book of Interviews* (New York: Charisma Books, 1974), p. 134.

¹¹²⁸ Harry Shapiro, *Waiting For the Man: The Story of Drugs and Popular Music* (New York: W.W. Morrow, 1988), p. 65.

¹¹²⁹ The Faces, “Had Me a Real Good Time,” *Long Player* (Warner Bros., 1972).

hosts before they can recreate their earlier experience.¹¹³⁰ The Who, meanwhile, recorded two songs about drinking—specifically, about being drunk on and around the London Underground—but aside from these offerings, however memorable they might be, British blues-rock generally did not sing very often about drinking—preferring, it would seem, simply to *do* it.¹¹³¹

*The Pavement Is One Huge Crowd: The City Street and the Urban Flâneur*¹¹³²

The Faces and the Who are linked by more than just being responsible for two of the very few references to drunkenness in British blues-rock. They are also linked by having been connected (however tenuously) with the Mod youth subculture of the early-to-mid 1960s. The Mods were, as discussed earlier, distinct from the British blues boom, and yet overlapped a great deal with it in terms of musical interest, opinions on “Americanized” consumer culture, and even, to a certain extent, membership. The Mods and the blues enthusiasts also shared a glorification of chemically-enhanced male homosocial bonding in an urban *milieu*. And although the Mods preferred amphetamines to the blues enthusiasts’ brandy and brown ale, nightclubs and other drinking establishments were a major component of the social geography for both groups.

Another important component was, quite simply, “the street” itself. The streets and alleys of London and other British cities were conduits that connected automobiles, scooters and foot traffic and their eventual destinations, but often, they were destinations

¹¹³⁰ The Faces, “Too Bad,” *A Nod Is As Good As a Wink... To a Blind Horse* (Warner Bros., 1971).

¹¹³¹ The Who, “5.15,” *Quadrophenia* (Polydor/MCA, 1973); “Who Are You,” *Who Are You* (MCA, 1978).

¹¹³² Section heading: Cream, “I Feel Free,” *Fresh Cream* (Polydor, 1966).

in and of themselves. This colonization of the urban street dates back to the Teddy Boys—indeed, it was this youth subculture’s penchant for standing around and making a spectacle of themselves that incurred the wrath of the adult mainstream, long before they started pulling knives on each other. The urban street maintained its status as a primary element of youth culture’s social geography with the Mods and blues enthusiasts. In fact, it is not inappropriate to state that British youth culture’s social geography consisted basically of streets, with important interior sites dotting them. If superimposed on a map of, say, London, it would resemble a constellation of straight lines, connected to one another, more than it would square-shaped or circular “zones.”

The importance of “the street,” along with “the pub,” to British youth culture—especially that of the Mods—cannot be emphasized enough. The establishments that dotted the streets were where one shopped, ate, drank, danced and (in the case of the blues enthusiasts) performed. But the street itself was where one displayed oneself, and watched others displaying themselves. For the Mod was nothing if not a *flâneur*—the man of leisure who, as Charles Baudelaire memorably described him, walked through the urban cityscape and experienced the full panorama of the city by watching it.¹¹³³ The ability to transgress any and all social boundaries, to be “in” the crowd but not “of” it, and to watch and know without having to get involved, was emblematic of the *flâneur*’s

¹¹³³ Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” in Vincent B. Lietch, ed., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), pp. 795-800. For a classic intellectual take on Baudelaire’s notion of the *flâneur*, see Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in Neil Leach, ed., *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 33.

power as a white man of means.¹¹³⁴ The *flâneur* operated both day and night, but as the “labyrinthine city” was more dangerous in the dark, his symbolic power was enhanced when he strolled the streets at night.¹¹³⁵

The urban *flâneur* was a creature of enormous late Victorian metropolises like London and Paris, and fruitful research has been done in analyzing the phenomenon at that time and in those cities.¹¹³⁶ But the concept can also be applied usefully, to the young men who walked the lamplit streets of 1960s Soho and Chelsea, looking and presenting themselves to be looked at in turn. In fact, even before they began haunting London’s streets, the blues education earned by the Mods and blues enthusiasts had made them vicarious or disembodied *flâneurs*, in a way. When they listened to the music of bluesmen and like Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker—a great deal of which expressed and articulated the African-American urban experience in Chicago or Detroit—young British men experienced American city streets through other men’s eyes, transgressing racial and social boundaries and overcoming the fact that they were thousands of miles away from those streets. Of course, this kind of experience substituted someone else’s looking and experiencing for one’s own, and it made the would-be British *flâneur* a listener and not a viewer. But on one level it is rather fitting, since listening to records in an art school common room removed entirely the chance that the young *flâneur* would be

¹¹³⁴ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in Amelia Jones, *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 45.

¹¹³⁵ Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delights: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 5.

¹¹³⁶ In addition to Walkowitz, see also T.J. Clark’s *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (New York: Knopf, 1985), and Vanessa Schwartz’s *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

made to interact with the city scenes in question. The experience of being disembodied *flâneurs* through the medium of recorded sound carried over to and shaped the real-life experiences they began to have: they self-consciously drew upon the supposed experiences of their African-American heroes, fusing this cultural tradition with the native concept of European urban *flânerie*.

Van Morrison walked listeners through the paces of the young Mod's promenade through the nocturnal cityscape in 1971's "Wild Night." After engaging in the obligatory obsessive-compulsive rituals of "brush[ing] your shoes," "comb[ing] your hair" and "stand[ing] before the mirror," the young urban *flâneur* descended to the pavement, turned towards the welcoming city, in search of the night's spectacles:

And the boys do the boogie-woogie
On the corner of the street
And the people passin' by just stare in wild wonder
And inside the jukebox roars out just like thunder

And everything looks so complete
When you're walkin' out on the street...

The wild night is callin'.¹¹³⁷

Although Morrison tacitly admits that there are some women populating this *tableau*, his "wild night" is mostly male-populated, and this is an important distinction. For the ideal of "the street" as conjured up by young British *flâneurs* belonged exclusively to young men. It was a place where they could find masculine adventure and homosocial bonding, and engage in conspicuous self-display. Women supposedly ruined this homosocial dynamic, by demanding men's attention and making them think, speak and act differently than they would in all-male company. Thus, being properly masculine

¹¹³⁷ Van Morrison, "Wild Night," *Tupelo Honey* (Warner Bros., 1971).

first entailed freedom from women, and so the urban “street” was a place from which women should be excluded or marginalized, if possible. This is the crux of the Spencer Davis Group’s “I’m a Man.” In it, Steve Winwood’s protagonist declares, “If I had my choice of [the] matter, I would rather be with cats [*i.e.*, young men]/ All engrossed in mental chatter, moving where our minds are at / And relating to each other, just how strong our wills can be / And resisting all involvement with each groovy chick we see.”¹¹³⁸

Mick Jagger put the matter far more bluntly, with the Rolling Stones’ “I’d Much Rather Be With the Boys.”¹¹³⁹ Jagger’s protagonist finds himself at loose ends for the evening, but unlike similar offerings in popular music from the 1950s and 1960s, this state of affairs is celebrated, not lamented. The protagonist is “all alone and dressed to kill,” although not for long, because soon he has found his mates in the city:

Here I am, with the gang/
I don’t care where you are/
I hold my head up high when I walk down the street/
Now I’m a man, standing on my own two feet/
‘Cause I’d much rather be with the boys/
Than be with girls like you.¹¹⁴⁰

The Rolling Stones were not a “Mod band”—that is, one of the white British bands that Mods began to identify with and to claim as their own—and none of the individual band members were Mods themselves. But this song (recorded in 1965 but not released until 1970) is an almost perfect distillation of the Mods’ ethos regarding men,

¹¹³⁸ The Spencer Davis Group, “I’m a Man” (single – Fontana, 1966).

¹¹³⁹ The Rolling Stones, “I’d Much Rather Be With the Boys,” *Metamorphosis* (Decca, 1970).

¹¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

women and the cityscape: Men went to the city to act like men; women distracted them and diminished their independence, and thus should be kept out of the all-male preserve.

Non-lyrical proof of Mod's overarching wish to create a British urban "boys-only club" can be had in testimonies from young women on the "Swinging London" scene at the time. As one young woman memorably recalled, "It got to be a big deal to have a conversation with a guy.... We thought we were very lucky if one of these gorgeous creatures actually *danced* with us."¹¹⁴¹ That young women were in close enough proximity to the Mods and blues enthusiasts to even attempt to strike up a conversation with them, or to ask them to dance points up the central conundrum of the Mods' boys-in-the-city ethos: an all-male preserve was simply impossible. The boundaries defining the streetscapes of Soho and Chelsea were solely imaginative. As is illustrated by the example of Pete Townshend's girlfriend attending Jimi Hendrix's London performance, young women could, and regularly did, transgress those boundaries.

Furthermore, even if young women could somehow have been kept out of the urban cityscape, there begs the question of how these young bluesmen-in-training would have been able to prove their sexual power. Part of the masculine adventure was to seduce and make love to women—the more, the better. How would these young men have found suitable targets, having somehow banished them from their nocturnal haunts? Unable to prevent women from entering their "territory," and needing them there in any case as potential conquests, the young male Mods and blues enthusiasts drew further imaginative boundaries. Men were there for camaraderie and "serious" discussion; women were there to be looked at and to be "pulled"—that is, to be seduced and taken

¹¹⁴¹ Anonymous British woman, quoted in Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 109.

home. It was a divide that was then transferred to the music business itself—men occupied roles where strength, skill and intellect were deemed necessary (lead guitarist; manager; studio producer; drummer; roadie), whilst women were marginalized into roles that called for emotion and sex appeal (lead singer; rhythm guitarist; groupie).¹¹⁴²

Such a Lovely Audience: The Influence of the Music-Hall Tradition on British Rock

British blues enthusiasts' inheritance of the 19th century's urban *flâneur* tradition, and the "male gaze" by which they converted strolling and seeing into mastery and dominance, was part of a more general trend that can be seen at work in British rock music: a nostalgia for the Victorian past. As British rock groups began to express themselves more and more as Britishers, it was in many conspicuous ways a Victorian-era Britain that they evoked. Resurrecting the iconic urban *flâneur* was just one of these ways. Besides this, perhaps the most visible incarnation of such nostalgia was the brief but enthusiastic vogue amongst young British men for Victorian-era military uniforms, which were plentiful in the secondhand shops of Soho and Chelsea.¹¹⁴³ (The linkage between Victorian nostalgia and "Swinging Sixties" fashion and culture can be seen in the name of one of the more popular secondhand shops, "I Was Lord Kitchener's Valet.")¹¹⁴⁴ Of particular interest were the distinctive red tunics with gold braid worn by Guards officers during the Victorian era. Eric Clapton proudly sported one, and his example inspired Jimi Hendrix to purchase one within two weeks of his arrival in London

¹¹⁴² Marion Meade, "Does Rock Degrade Women?," *The New York Times* (March 14, 1971), pp. D13, D22.

¹¹⁴³ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 191.

¹¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

in September 1966.¹¹⁴⁵ In fact, the guitarist was accosted one night by two drunken ex-servicemen who, certain that he was deliberately demeaning the memory of Britain's fallen fighting men, loudly demanded that he remove the tunic.¹¹⁴⁶

The Beatles were immortalized wearing similar garments in the famous ensemble portrait that graced the cover of their psychedelic masterpiece, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (although it must be said that no self-respecting officer of the Crown would have ever been caught dead in uniforms dyed in the Beatles' Day-Glo colors).¹¹⁴⁷ The governing premise behind that album, in fact—that the four Beatles were veteran music-hall performers, reunited in the psychedelic era to play their old-time favorites for their loyal fans—speaks to a general fascination in this period for the trappings of the past.¹¹⁴⁸ We have seen how the British music-hall tradition, with its emphasis on all-around entertainment and audience sing-alongs, helped to determine the career path of early British rock 'n' rollers. But, even if subsequent British rock stars did not follow the likes of Adam Faith and Cliff Richard into the world of "all-around" entertainment, they still incorporated great swathes of music-hall's structures and vocabulary into their own music.

Such incorporations began, predictably, with the earliest days of the "British Invasion"—although not, as one might guess, with the Beatles. In fact, it was squeaky-

¹¹⁴⁵ Charles Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors: A Biography of Jimi Hendrix* (New York: Hyperion, 2005), p. 11.

¹¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴⁷ The Beatles, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (EMI, 1967).

¹¹⁴⁸ Paul McCartney, quoted in *The Beatles Anthology* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000), p. 241.

clean British pop group Herman's Hermits who inaugurated the latter-day tradition of British rock groups' fascination with music-hall. In 1965, they covered the music-hall chestnut "I'm Henry the VIII, I Am," which had been written in 1910 by music-hall stalwarts Fred Murray and R.P. Weston, and sung (in a broad Cockney accent) by acclaimed singer Harry Champion.¹¹⁴⁹ As the Beatles began to break new artistic ground beginning in late 1965 and early 1966, they, too, hearkened back to this deep-seated British cultural institution. In the Beatles' case, the incorporation of music-hall tropes was even less surprising, since Paul McCartney's father had been a pianist in local jazz and vaudeville bands around Liverpool in the 1930s and 1940s.¹¹⁵⁰

Other bands followed the Beatles' example (much as they would have responded with consternation to the charge that they were operating in a creative vein that had first been opened by Herman's Hermits).¹¹⁵¹ Music-hall's populist reliance on audience participation and community-building comes through on the Rolling Stones' "Sing This All Together," Traffic's "You Can All Join In," and the Who's "Join Together."¹¹⁵² Indeed, in this respect, the music-hall can be seen to have to some extent pre-conditioned British audiences to the blues—which often relies on the same call-and-response

¹¹⁴⁹ Herman's Hermits, "I'm Henry the VIII, I Am," *Herman's Hermits* (Columbia, 1965).

¹¹⁵⁰ Philip Norman, *Shout!: The True Story of the Beatles* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), p. 14.

¹¹⁵¹ Mick Jagger, for example, was driven to distraction whenever female fans assumed, upon seeing him in the street, that he was Hermits' lead singer Peter Noone. See Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. 122.

¹¹⁵² The Rolling Stones, "Sing This All Together," *Their Satanic Majesties Request* (Decca, 1967); Traffic, "You Can All Join In," *Traffic* (Island, 1968); The Who, "Join Together," *My Generation: The Very Best of the Who* (MCA, 1996).

formula—and when including this in their repertoires, British bands were channeling both influences simultaneously. The instrumentation—jaunty brass, thumping drums, vaudeville piano, and jangling acoustic guitars—can be heard on Traffic’s “Berkshire Poppies,” and the Faces’ “Ooh La La.”¹¹⁵³ In format as well as in instrumentation, both the Beatles’ “Sgt. Pepper” and the Rolling Stones’ “Their Satanic Majesties Request” (an attempt to jump on “Sgt. Pepper’s” bandwagon) reflect those two bands’ appropriation of music-hall and an attempt to meld it with the psychedelia of the “Age of Aquarius.”¹¹⁵⁴

The format of a music-hall performance was defined by its eclecticism. A succession of acts—singers, bands, novelty acts, comedians—followed one another on-stage before all the performers joined up at the end for a rousing sing-along finale.¹¹⁵⁵ The format had lingered on in the “variety hour” television programs in Britain in the late 1950s and early 1960s, which were some of the first venues where the Beatles and Rolling Stones were invited to perform during their early days of nationwide fame.¹¹⁵⁶ Although first the Beatles and the Rolling Stones resented being made to participate in such programs (in the Beatles’ case, earning showbiz ire for flatly refusing to do so in 1964), the music-hall format did influence their later work.¹¹⁵⁷ A classic example would be the Rolling Stones’ 1968 made-for-television extravaganza, “Rock ‘n’ Roll Circus.”

¹¹⁵³ Traffic, “Berkshire Poppies,” *Mr. Fantasy* (Island, 1968); The Faces, “Ooh La La,” *Ooh La La* (Warner Bros., 1973).

¹¹⁵⁴ Barry Miles, *Hippie* (New York: Sterling, 2004), pp. 84-87.

¹¹⁵⁵ Peter Bailey, *Music-Hall: The Business of Pleasure* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1984).

¹¹⁵⁶ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 131.

¹¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Self-proclaimed “ringmaster” Mick Jagger compèred a bill including—in addition to the Rolling Stones—the Who, Jethro Tull, Marianne Faithfull, the Dirty Mac, and bluesman Taj Mahal.¹¹⁵⁸ In more elemental terms, the residual influence of music-hall’s emphasis on melody and harmony was partially responsible for the maintenance of pop sensibilities in psychedelia’s ever more experimental musical palette.

Victorian-era music-hall was an intrinsically urban phenomenon. Most, if not all, of the actual venues were located in cities—especially in London—and its audiences were made up almost entirely of the urban working-classes. As a result, much of the subject matter of urban music-hall dealt with themes and matters that the urban working-classes would understand from their daily experiences.¹¹⁵⁹ Thus, it might be expected that British rock groups in the 1960s, when appropriating music-hall’s format, instrumentation or “feel,” would also deal almost exclusively in urban subject matter—all the more, as the vast majority of Britain’s blues-rock network hailed from the cities or the suburbs. However, this was not always the case. Urban-based expression made room over the course of the 1960s for music that increasingly dealt with rural, pastoral expression. Here, as with urban-based rock music, there was a heavy dose of nostalgia involved, but it often went back much further than the Victorian era, to rural Britain’s medieval “golden age.”

Country Comfort: Pastoralism in British Rock Music

To properly situate the rural or pastoral expressions of British blues-rock groups beginning in the late 1960s, it is necessary to define them as the inheritors of a long and

¹¹⁵⁸ The Dirty Mac was a one-night-only “supergroup” that comprised John Lennon, Eric Clapton, Yoko Ono, Keith Richards and Mitch Mitchell.

¹¹⁵⁹ Bailey, *Music-Hall: The Business of Pleasure*, p. xv.

venerable British pastoral tradition. Also known as “rural romanticism” (as cultural theorist Raymond Williams termed it in 1973), pastoralism has played a central role in British political as well as social and intellectual life since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.¹¹⁶⁰ Put simply, it is the fervently held belief that the soul or essence of England (or Britain) is in the countryside, and that the increasingly industrial and urban society in which the majority of Britons find themselves, is an aberration. In the twentieth century a large chorus of politicians, poets, novelists and cultural critics gave it voice. In 1926, Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin valorized “the sounds of England, the tinkle of the hammer on the anvil in the country smithy, the sound of the scythe against the whetstone, and the sight of a plough-team coming over the brow of a hill.”¹¹⁶¹ In 1935, author Philip Gibbs declared that “England is still beautiful where one slips away from the roar of traffic and the blight of industrialism,” which in his opinion had almost (but not quite) “bitten into the soul of England or poisoned its brain.”¹¹⁶² And in the middle of the Second World War, George Orwell conjured up a portrait of England that, although it made room for “smoky towns [and] red pillar [mail] boxes,” seemed mainly to consist of “winding roads, green fields [and] old maids biking to Holy Communion through the mists of the autumn morning.”¹¹⁶³

¹¹⁶⁰ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), pp. 281-82; Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 213.

¹¹⁶¹ Stanley Baldwin, *On England, and Other Addresses* (London: Philip Allan, 1926), pp. 6-7.

¹¹⁶² Philip Gibbs, *England Speaks* (London: Heinemann, 1935), pp. 3-4.

¹¹⁶³ George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn* (London: Penguin, 1941), pp. 74-75, quoted in Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, p. 228. Proving that this idea

Beginning in the late 1960s, Britain's rock and folk-rock songwriters picked up the thread. Although even more British people lived in the cities (and now the suburbs) than ever before, Britain was still, to hear the likes of Traffic or Led Zeppelin tell it, essentially a nation of proud country squires, yeomen and peasants, drawing strength from the mystical powers of the ancient countryside. Again, America provided the initial inspiration, with the much-vaunted fusion of country-and-western, folk and rock music that I have dealt with in the previous chapter. However, there was also a specifically British impetus to the renewed musical celebration of the rural folk traditions. There was a folk revival in Britain after the Second World War, just as there was in the United States. In fact, the leading advocates of the two revivals, trading on the common cultural origins of American and English folk music in the 17th and 18th centuries, corresponded with one another regularly, shared the same far-Left political sympathies, and often thought and acted in concord with each other on musicological matters.¹¹⁶⁴

Whereas the American arm of the trans-Atlantic folk revival was centered around Appalachian jug band music, Delta blues and slave work songs (while explicitly recognizing the debt that such forms owed to British folkways), its British counterpart specialized in the old folk traditions of England and the so-called "Celtic fringe."¹¹⁶⁵ This meant attention to English madrigals, Old English church hymns, sea chanteys, and Irish

could and did survive the onset of post-industrial Britain, John Major drew upon its imagery in a Conservative Party convention speech in 1993.

¹¹⁶⁴ Michael Brocken, *The British Folk Revival, 1944-2002* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003), p. 44. An example of such a collaboration is the partnership between Scotsman Ewan MacColl and American Peggy Seeger, who together wrote the influential book, *The Singing Island* (London: Mills Music, 1960).

¹¹⁶⁵ Brocken, *The British Folk Revival*, p. 23.

and Scottish jigs and reels. For example, the 16th century English standard, “Greensleeves,” which was later converted into a popular Christmas carol (and, even later, covered by the Jeff Beck Group) is a noteworthy example of an British folk revival favorite.¹¹⁶⁶ Through the efforts of British folklorists like Ewan MacColl and Bert Lloyd, the British folk revival succeeded in resuscitating and preserving what they thought of as an “authentic” cultural tradition. Tangible evidence of the fruits of their labors came in 1961, with the publication of *The Penguin Book of English Folksongs*. The hefty volume, edited by Lloyd and noted English classical composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, served for the “folk revival” crowd the same purpose as the release in the very same year of Robert Johnson’s *King of the Delta Blues Singers* for young blues aficionados—as a talismanic text around which a movement could coalesce, and as an invaluable source for composers and musicians alike.¹¹⁶⁷

Like the American folk revivalists, these early British “folklorists” were openly contemptuous of any attempts to modernize or even to adapt the supposedly timeless traditions of which they were the self-appointed guardians.¹¹⁶⁸ They also attempted to institute a sort of racial essentializing whereby African-American songs could only be sung by African-Americans, Scottish songs by Scotsmen, and so on. (This was especially true of MacColl.) Thus, the spectacle of a Mick Jagger from Dartford or an Eric Clapton

¹¹⁶⁶ The Jeff Beck Group, “Greensleeves,” *Truth* (Epic, 1968).

¹¹⁶⁷ Bert Lloyd and Ralph Vaughan Williams, eds., *The Penguin Book of English Folksongs* (London: Penguin, 1961); Brocken, *The British Folk Revival*, p. 82.

¹¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 83.

from Surrey trying to play the Delta blues of Robert Johnson was the purest heresy.¹¹⁶⁹ But, as with the folk purists who had led the assault against “electric” Bob Dylan in America—as well as the so-called “moldy figs” of the concurrent English “trad” jazz revival—traditionalists like MacColl were swept aside by the trend toward electrification, modernization and musical cross-pollination of the mid-to-late 1960s. As music historian Robert Shelton has argued, “musical developments” in Britain after the fusion of electric rock, blues and folk “were even more imaginative” than in the United States.¹¹⁷⁰ Perhaps this was because British musicians could draw upon a millennium-long folk music heritage, comprising four distinct yet historically related musical traditions—English, Scottish, Irish and Welsh—and enjoying recourse to five hundred years of classical music of the Continent on top of those.¹¹⁷¹ Although these traditions had also influenced American music, the influence was arguably more direct in Britain due to a deeper grounding in, and a greater proximity to them.

The common ground between American and British folk music had been explored since the days of the “skiffle boom” of the mid-to-late 1950s. Steve Winwood, who has said that the goal of his band, Traffic, was “to make a uniquely British form of rock ‘n’ roll that incorporated or evoked traditional music,” has elsewhere implicitly grounded

¹¹⁶⁹ Martin Carthy, interview with Colin Harper, in Harper, *Dazzling Stranger: Bert Jansch and the British Folk and Blues Revival* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), p. 31.

¹¹⁷⁰ Robert Shelton, *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), p. 314.

¹¹⁷¹ James Day, *Englishness in Music: From Elizabethan Times to Elgar* (London: Thames, 1999), p. 7.

that project in the skiffle era, calling that form of music “purely British.”¹¹⁷² American blues and country-and-western (e.g., “Rock Island Line;” “Midnight Special”) had mingled freely with English traditional ballads (e.g., “My Old Man’s a Dustman”) in the *oeuvre* of skiffle’s “founding father,” Lonnie Donegan.¹¹⁷³

This cultural openness also defined the approach taken by the path-breaking trio of British folk guitarists collectively known in the mid-1960s as the “three kings”: Davy Graham, Bert Jansch and John Renbourn.¹¹⁷⁴ All three saw such seemingly disparate forms as Balkan folk dances, Indian ragas, English madrigals, modern jazz and Delta blues as grist for the mill, taking as their maxim the oft-quoted view of African-American bluesman and father figure “Big Bill” Broonzy: “All these things are folksongs. I never heard a horse sing one yet.”¹¹⁷⁵ Moreover, Graham pioneered a form of guitar tuning (called DADGAD for the succession of key changes that it followed) that proved adaptable to most, if not all, of these folk forms and made it possible for guitarists to move between them, from song to song, and even from verse to verse.¹¹⁷⁶ The influence of this musical eclecticism on the rock stars of the late 1960s and early 1970s will be the subject of the following chapter.

¹¹⁷² Steve Winwood, interview with Timothy White, in White, “Steve Winwood: Rock’s Gentle Aristocrat,” *Musician*, no. 48 (October 1982), p. 62; Winwood, interview in *Red, White and Blues*, dir. Mike Figgis (2003) .

¹¹⁷³ Chas McDevitt, *Skiffle: The Definitive Inside Story* (London: Robson Books, 1997), p. 74.

¹¹⁷⁴ Harper, *Dazzling Stranger*, p. 194.

¹¹⁷⁵ William “Big Bill” Broonzy, with Yannick Bruynoghe, *Big Bill Blues: Big Bill Broonzy’s Story, as Told to Yannick Bruynoghe*, rev. ed. (New York: Oak Publications, 1974), p. 54.

¹¹⁷⁶ Harper, *Dazzling Stranger*, p. 88.

Although Graham, Jansch and Renbourn got their start in the trans-Atlantic “purist” folk revival, they were younger men, closer in age to the British blues network than to purists like MacColl or Lloyd. Their age and their ideas about musical exclusivity and modernization, which were almost diametrically opposed to those of the “purists,” marked them off as a group apart. Indeed, these folk-rock pioneers were in many ways an interpersonal network of their own—a network where social interconnectivity spurred cultural creativity. Like that of the Mods, the “electric folkies” (for want of a better term) network co-existed alongside the British blues-network in the bohemian enclave of Soho, where, of a Saturday evening, one might just as easily find Jimmy Page in the audience at the folk club Les Cousins, as at the R&B stronghold The Flamingo.¹¹⁷⁷ I have earlier pointed out how, with the possible exception of the Small Faces’ Steve Marriott, blues enthusiasts were rarely, if ever, actual members of the Mod clique. But there were notable examples of young musicians with one foot in each camp—most notably Rod Stewart, who spent a summer wandering on the Continent with noted folk guitarist “Wizz” Jones, and Page, whose initial goal in dreaming up Led Zeppelin was to marry “heavy” blues to the lighter folk offerings he heard at Les Cousins.¹¹⁷⁸

The relationship between the blues-rock enthusiasts and the “electric folkies” was reciprocal, so that by 1966, as Britain’s rock stars began to dip down into the vast well of the British folk tradition, the folkies began to take some of rock’s power and immediacy

¹¹⁷⁷ John Platt, *London’s Rock Routes* (London: Fourth Estate, 1985), p. 44; Jimmy Page, interview with Pete Frame, in Frame, “Talking With Jimmy Page,” *Zigzag*, no. 28 (December 1972), reprinted in Frame, ed., *The Road to Rock: A Zigzag Book of Interviews* (New York: Charisma Books, 1974), p. 103.

¹¹⁷⁸ Rod Stewart, interview with Pete Frame, in “Face to Face With a Face,” *Zigzag*, no. 19 (May 1971), reprinted in Frame, ed., *The Road to Rock*, p. 132; Harper, *Dazzling Stranger*, p. 4.

(if not necessarily its decibels) for their own as well. Bert Jansch and John Renbourn assembled Britain's first electrified "folk-rock" band, the Pentangle, in March 1967.¹¹⁷⁹ The Pentangle were soon followed by two other important "folk-rock" groups, Fairport Convention and the Incredible String Band. Similarly to the process that had already happened in mainstream British rock, when these initial bands dissolved, their members formed new bands—Steeleye Span, Fotheringay, and the Albion Country Band—out of the ashes.¹¹⁸⁰

Though guided in overall terms by musical eclecticism, it was their repackaging and re-articulation of English, Scottish and Irish traditional modes of expression for which they are best known, and which comprised their substantive influence on modern popular music. The solid grounding of British "folk-rock" in British cultural and musical traditions is evident at face value in the groups' names. The pentangle, for example, was a powerful Celtic pagan emblem, and, according to the Arthurian tale *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, was etched onto the back of King Arthur's shield, to bring the Celtic warlord strength and protection on the battlefield. Jansch and Renbourn chose this name for their group specifically for its central place in Arthurian legend—although the fact that there were five group members also played a role in the decision.¹¹⁸¹ The Albion Country Band was another group who owed its name to ancient British culture—Albion being an archaic label for England—as was Lindisfarne, whose members named

¹¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 207.

¹¹⁸⁰ R.J. Bater, "Folk Guitar in Britain: An Individual Assessment," in *Guitar Player* (March 1973), p. 26.

¹¹⁸¹ John Renbourn, interview with Eleanor Houldson, "Bert Jansch/John Renbourn," in *Guitar Player* (March 1971), p. 37.

themselves after a famous medieval monastery in Northumbria (in the northeast of England).¹¹⁸²

However, the debt to British tradition went much deeper, obviously, than mere group nomenclature. The “folk-rock” groups capitalized in many ways on the musicological work undertaken by the folk revivalists of the 1950s, raiding what had by the late 1960s become quite a formidable fund of songs to cover, sounds to imitate and ideas to incorporate. This fund, it must be noted, included mostly rural, pastoral ideas. Although there was room for songs like the MacColl-penned “Dirty Old Town”—which simultaneously expresses disgust with, and affection for, the urban landscape—the majority of British folk (and folk-rock) songs take as their subject a rural Britain that is often dated as pre-industrial and even pre-modern.¹¹⁸³ For example, prior to their involvement in Pentangle, Jansch and Renbourn collaborated to evoke rural Elizabethan England in the peculiarly-titled “Ladye Nothing’s Toye Puff.”¹¹⁸⁴ With Pentangle, the pair continued to work the same ground, in the emblematic “Let No Man Steal Your Thyme” and “Light Flight.”¹¹⁸⁵ Numerous groups even drew upon a long-standing tradition of British children’s fiction-writing set in the countryside and dealing with rural themes. In an interview with biographer Colin Harper, Jansch named J.R.R. Tolkien,

¹¹⁸² Britta Sweers, *Electric Folk: The Changing Face of English Traditional Music* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 21.

¹¹⁸³ “Dirty Old Town,” though written by Ewan MacColl, gained renown by being recorded by other artists, most notably the Spinners (1964) and Rod Stewart (1969).

¹¹⁸⁴ Bert Jansch and John Renbourn, “Ladye Nothing’s Toye Puff,” *Bert and John* (Transatlantic, 1967).

¹¹⁸⁵ The Pentangle, “Let No Man Steal Your Thyme,” *The Pentangle* (Transatlantic, 1968); “Light Flight,” *Basket of Light* (Transatlantic, 1969).

Mervyn Peake and Kenneth Grahame—all three of whom conjured up rural British scenes for consumption by a mostly-young reading public—as among the major influences on his songwriting during this period.¹¹⁸⁶

Today, although individual musicians like Richard Thompson and Sandy Denny have managed to achieve some modicum of mainstream fame as solo artists, the “first wave” of English folk-rock bands are known mainly to *cognoscenti*, and even then, moreso in Great Britain than in the United States.¹¹⁸⁷ Their primary cultural significance lies in the strong influence they exerted on the British blues-rock network, who benefited from their example (and became a great deal more famous in so doing). Foremost among these British rock bands was Led Zeppelin, which should not be that surprising, considering that, as mentioned, Jimmy Page had been an eager student of the “three kings,” dating back to his days as a sessions guitarist. It has been widely noted that Davy Graham’s guitar instrumental “Angi,” in addition to inspiring young guitarists to cover it, lent the descending chord progression on Led Zeppelin’s anthemic “Stairway to Heaven.”¹¹⁸⁸ More direct appropriation can be seen in Led Zeppelin’s instrumental “Black Mountain Side,” which flat-out lifts entire passages from Jansch’s “Blackwater Side” and Graham’s “She Moves Thru the Bizarre.”¹¹⁸⁹ To cement this formative connection, it should be noted that, on their mostly-acoustic third album (of which a great deal more will be said shortly), Led Zeppelin invited Fairport Convention’s vocalist,

¹¹⁸⁶ Jansch, interview with Harper, in *Dazzling Stranger*, p. 340n21.

¹¹⁸⁷ Patrick Humphries, *Meet on the Ledge: A History of Fairport Convention* (London: Virgin, 1997), p. 100.

¹¹⁸⁸ Harper, *Dazzling Stranger*, p. 4.

¹¹⁸⁹ Welch, *Dazed and Confused*, p. 24.

Sandy Denny, to sing a duet with Robert Plant on the epic “The Battle of Evermore,” which combined medieval subject matter with twelve-string guitars and mandolins tuned in folk’s characteristic DADGAD tuning.¹¹⁹⁰

There were non-musical lessons to learn from the “electric folkies,” as well. For one, the entire project of re-discovering and reviving British folk music had necessarily educated both listeners and performers in the common origins of British and African-American folksong and lore. This was overall a positive development, as it helped promote the idea of a trans-Atlantic musical community—first in folk music and then in rock music. But it had its sinister undertones, as well. It provided bands like Led Zeppelin with ethnographic cover when they “borrowed” (often without citing) African-American blues and folk songs for their own repertoires. Robert Plant, who has elsewhere defended his band by claiming that borrowing and adaptation is all part of the oral blues tradition,¹¹⁹¹ seized upon the theory of Anglo-American musical commonality in a 2008 interview. Seconds after paying homage to Leadbelly, who was “intrinsic to the development of Led Zeppelin,” Plant argued that “Gallows Pole,” a Leadbelly song that Led Zeppelin “borrowed” in 1970, was originally a folksong “from Cornwall or Scotland”—implying that Leadbelly had stolen it first, and from Plant’s homeland on top

¹¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 38.

¹¹⁹¹ Susan Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy: Led Zeppelin and the Power of Rock Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 25. Plant’s side, interestingly, has also been taken up by blues chronicler Robert Palmer in his piece, “Led Zeppelin: The Music,” in *Led Zeppelin, Volume 2* (Warner Chappell Music, 1991), n.p.

of it.¹¹⁹² Given the eternally politically-charged nature of black-white cultural transmission (especially considering the issue of unpaid financial remuneration), such a statement is troubling, to say the least.

Finally, Britain's "electric folkies" provided inspiration to British rock musicians through their example of conjuring up and peopling an imaginary rural Britain, images of which had been culled from both folk songs and literature dating back to Elizabethan times, if not earlier. Although the "folk-rock" movement, like its "country rock" analogue in the United States, was not destined to achieve widespread mainstream success, its example did ensure that, by 1970, Anglo-American rock music had acquired a decidedly pastoral flavor.

*A Bustle In Your Hedgerow: Escape and Regeneration in the British Rural Countryside*¹¹⁹³

British rock pastoralism often registered frustration with urban life, or at the very least, the desire to escape it for a short time to recharge one's batteries. This was the central theme of quite a few rock songs of the period. The Kinks eulogized the peaceful, bucolic "Village Green," "far from all the soot and noise of the city."¹¹⁹⁴ Ray Davies' protagonist had spent time there as a youth, and fallen in love with a country girl named Daisy. He expresses his wish to go back there and drink tea with his lost love, but voices his concern that it will not be the same as it was before—not because of creeping urban

¹¹⁹² Robert Plant, interview with Philip Schofield, "This Morning," pt. 1 of 2, January 11, 2008, on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfdbUoSJ9tY) (accessed August 2, 2008 and August 6, 2008).

¹¹⁹³ Section title: Led Zeppelin, "Stairway to Heaven," *Untitled* ("IV" or "ZOSO").

¹¹⁹⁴ The Kinks, "Village Green," *The Village Green Preservation Society*.

or suburban sprawl, but because dim-witted American tourists “snap[ping] their photographs” will have ruined it.¹¹⁹⁵ This is a characteristic European chord of anxiety over the supposedly ruinous effect of American culture on local traditions, but it is almost unique in the body of British rock music, most of whose creators admired Americana almost without reservation. In “Drivin’,” the Kinks returned to the theme of the British countryside as a necessary tonic, though leaving out the baleful influence of America this time. Faced with the stress of the workaday world and the anxieties of Cold War politics (“It seems like all the world is fighting”), the protagonist sets off with his family to the countryside to enjoy a picnic lunch—including such quintessentially British staples such as tea, warm beer and “gooseberry tarts”—and relax amongst the grass and livestock.¹¹⁹⁶ Interestingly, this song is in its own way a celebration of the urban blues trope of automotive mobility, but here it is used to escape the city.

Traffic worked a similar vein with “Berkshire Poppies” (which, incidentally, uses the music-hall structure discussed above to evoke old-timey nostalgia). Tired of the crowding and noise of the big city (not to mention the “hundreds of buildings” that block his view of the sky, the protagonist longs to be in rural Berkshire County, “where the poppies grow so pretty.”¹¹⁹⁷ A trip to this nearby idyll (which doubles as a drug reference) would relieve him of all his cares. In the end, however, the protagonist cannot get away, and has to content himself with an afternoon in a city park—tiny, enclosed, and full of less-than-savory company, but the closest the urban wage-slave can seemingly get

¹¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁹⁶ The Kinks, “Drivin’,” *Arthur (Or, the Rise and Fall of the British Empire)*.

¹¹⁹⁷ Traffic, “Berkshire Poppies,” *Mr. Fantasy*.

to the great outdoors.¹¹⁹⁸ Later on the same album, on the mostly-instrumental jazz workout, “Giving to You (Part 2),” Traffic’s protagonist had better luck. Much like the picnicker in “Drivin’,” he was able to escape to the country by car:

Movin’ and groovin’ through country so soothin’
My mind catching fire now and then
Relaxed at the wheel, I’m beginnin’ to feel
That life is worth livin’¹¹⁹⁹

Subtly, Winwood implies that, were it not for the chance to exchange the urban/suburban miasma for invigorating countryside, life would most assuredly *not* be worth living. It is a “Swinging Sixties”-era elaboration on a deeply-held British idea.

The Birmingham natives who comprised Traffic had had the kind of formative experience about which they now wrote songs. Traffic formed in late 1966, when its four members retired to a cottage in Berkshire County to plot out the new musical direction they wanted to take.¹²⁰⁰ The influence of the cottage, and the Berkshire farmland in which it was situated, on this new direction cannot be overlooked. Winwood has said that “John Barleycorn Must Die,” the band’s cover of an English folksong and one of their most characteristic evocations of rural Britain, was the product of months living amidst “acres of wheat and barley.”¹²⁰¹ Other musicians adopted Traffic’s approach, and by early 1967, the Berkshire cottage was somewhat of a British rock “scene” in miniature, as luminaries

¹¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹⁹ Traffic, “Giving to You (Part 2),” *Mr. Fantasy*.

¹²⁰⁰ Chris Welch, with Steve Winwood, *Winwood: Roll With It* (New York: Perigee Books, 1990), p. 105.

¹²⁰¹ Ibid, p. 62.

such as Ginger Baker, Eric Clapton, Joe Cocker, and Pete Townshend either stopped by for jam sessions, or rented cottages nearby.¹²⁰²

Likewise, Led Zeppelin used the British rural countryside as a retreat to plot a new musical course, and to refresh themselves after the chaos of constant touring. In May 1970, after fifteen months of highly lucrative (yet massively draining) touring across America, Jimmy Page and Robert Plant repaired to Bron-Yr-Aur, a small cottage in South Snowdonia, Wales.¹²⁰³ Plant had been to the cottage on family holidays as a child, and the idea was to go there and rest, “soak[ing] up the country vibes of peace and quiet.”¹²⁰⁴ But, as Page and Plant also had an album of songs to write, it was something of a working holiday as well. After days spent on invigorating walks through the Welsh hills, the evenings were spent, according to Page, “sitting around log fires, with hot poker being plunged into cider. As the nights wore on the guitars came out and numbers were written.”¹²⁰⁵ Out of this Welsh idyll came the mostly-acoustic blend of blues, country-and-western and Celtic music on *Led Zeppelin III*. That album registered a dramatic departure from the electrified blues bombast that had been the defining characteristic of the band’s sound for the previous two years. Plant later told an interviewer that the retreat to Bron-Yr-Aur had enabled him and Page to “get that real Californian, Marin County blues, which we managed to do in Wales as opposed to San

¹²⁰² Welch, with Winwood, *Roll With It*, p. 106.

¹²⁰³ Stephen Davis, *Hammer of the Gods: The Led Zeppelin Saga* (New York: W. Morrow, 1995), p. 119. The name “Bron-Yr-Aur” is Welsh for “Golden Breast,” and would appear in the titles of two separate Led Zeppelin songs.

¹²⁰⁴ Chris Welch, *Led Zeppelin: Dazed and Confused: The Stories Behind Every Song* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2001), p. 43.

¹²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 43.

Francisco” on songs like “Bron-Yr-Aur,” “Tangerine” and “Immigrant Song”—as clear a statement of this English band’s project of mingling American blues with British cultural tropes as one might hope for.¹²⁰⁶

Even the Who, a band that traded primarily in images of suburban and urban Britain, participated in this trend toward rock pastoralism, with 1971’s “Love Ain’t For Keeping.”¹²⁰⁷ The song’s action, such as it is, involves the protagonist attempting to entice his lover to have sex with him in a field. In and of itself, it is unremarkable, aside from its fitting into a grand tradition of English pastoral/poetic come-ons, such as Robert Herrick’s “To the Virgins, To Make Much of Time,” and Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress.”¹²⁰⁸ What makes “Love Ain’t For Keeping” more than this is the vividness of the landscape in which this romp is to take place. Having finished her womanly tasks of making him tea and putting their child to bed, the woman is asked to “lay down beside” the protagonist, who paints a picture of “newly-mown grass,” upon which a light rain falls:

And the air is perfumed by the burning firewood
The seeds are bursting
The spring’s a-seeping
Lay down beside me
Love ain’t for keeping¹²⁰⁹

¹²⁰⁶ Davis, *Hammer of the Gods*, p. 119.

¹²⁰⁷ The Who, “Love Ain’t For Keeping,” *Who’s Next* (Polydor, 1971).

¹²⁰⁸ Robert Herrick, “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time;” and Andrew Marvell, “To His Coy Mistress,” both appearing in Arthur Quiller-Couch, ed., *The Oxford Book of English Verse* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1939).

¹²⁰⁹ The Who, “Love Ain’t For Keeping.”

“Love Ain’t For Keeping” and the rest of the songs on the 1971 album *Who’s Next* were originally meant to have appeared in Pete Townshend’s abortive “science-fiction rock opera,” *Lifthouse*.¹²¹⁰ It is rather fitting that in Townshend’s plan for the project, “Love Ain’t For Keeping” was to be sung by a Scottish farmer named “Ray,” so solidly does it ground itself in an imagined rural British landscape.¹²¹¹

According to Townshend’s vision for *Lifthouse*, “Ray” and his family were supposed to live in a futuristic Britain in which urban pollution has made it necessary for the populace to live in protective suits.¹²¹² This plot device is an example of a strain in British rock music of anxiety that the true soul of Britain, the rural countryside, is in danger of being destroyed by the encroachments of urban and suburban sprawl. Ray Davies had sounded this note in “Drivin’,” and it can be heard at different times throughout the rock music of the period. In “Love Ain’t For Keeping,” Townshend bemoans the “black ash from the foundry” that “hangs like a hood” over the landscape.¹²¹³ The village locals in “Country Comfort”—written and recorded by Elton John and subsequently covered by Rod Stewart—can tolerate the imposition into their rural community of the railroad that “roar[s] past the creek.”¹²¹⁴ However, they attempt to draw the line at invasion by the urban factory system, embodied by a “new machine” that

¹²¹⁰ Pete Townshend, interview with John Swenson, in Swenson, “The Who Put the Bomp,” *Crawdaddy* (December 5, 1971), p. 21.

¹²¹¹ Geoffrey Giuliano, with Pete Townshend, *Behind Blue Eyes: A Life of Pete Townshend* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1996), p. 298.

¹²¹² Townshend, interview with Swenson, in “The Who Put the Bomp,” p. 22.

¹²¹³ The Who, “Love Ain’t For Keeping.”

¹²¹⁴ Rod Stewart, “Country Comfort,” *Gasoline Alley* (Mercury, 1970).

“cuts manpower by fifteen.”¹²¹⁵ (Never mind that that system had already won, as far back as 1830, and that by the late 1960s, Britain was already beginning a painful process of *de-industrialization*.)¹²¹⁶ That system is also the problem in Traffic’s “Hope I Never Find Me There,” where the protagonist returns to his boyhood home, only to find that everything he once knew has been replaced by “synthetic grass,” “plastic flowers” and “atomic factories.”¹²¹⁷

Lyrics such as these sound a great deal like they belong with the fledgling environmental movement that began to emerge around this time in Britain and the United States.¹²¹⁸ Indeed, British rock pastoralism and environmentalism did dovetail in a number of interesting ways throughout the 1970s.¹²¹⁹ However, it must be noted that neither British rock music, nor its musicians, were environmentalists, *per se*. Their expressions on behalf of the dwindling countryside were inspired by the deeply-held belief that Britain is, at heart, is a rural country, whose soul and animating essence reside in the fields and forests, not in the great cities where Britons had been living in ever greater numbers since the Victorian period. Such an idea, as Jeremy Paxman and Krishan

¹²¹⁵ Ibid.

¹²¹⁶ Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 9.

¹²¹⁷ Traffic, “Hope I Never Find Me There,” *Mr. Fantasy*.

¹²¹⁸ Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest, 1945-1980* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 221.

¹²¹⁹ Green, *Days in the Life*, p. 179.

Kumar have noted, has been held fast to, even in the face of mounting evidence to the contrary.¹²²⁰

British rock pastoralism deploys rural tropes in a markedly different way than in African-American blues. This is especially the case with regard to the conditions and effects of rural labor. For African-Americans in the American South, rural labor was obviously quite different than it was for white men in Britain. Prior to the American Civil War, obviously, African-Americans had been enslaved, and after emancipation, were still basically forced to work the former plantations as sharecroppers. The decades of sharecropping, spanning the turn of the twentieth century, were the immediate socioeconomic context out of which the blues as an idiom and a culture grew. To the extent that the blues is a musical expression of despair and complaint, the source of both (that is, if not an unfaithful woman) is usually the backbreaking labor, harsh conditions, unfair treatment by supervisors, or unsatisfactory wages of the rural sharecropping system.¹²²¹

British blues enthusiasts knew this, as the details, however vague, of the African-American socioeconomic context were transmitted on album liner notes and blues histories of the period. When covering or interpreting the Delta blues, they even expressed these tropes themselves. For example, on their first album, 1967's *Truth*, the Jeff Beck Group covered the African-American spiritual, "Ol' Man River," which relates the dreariness of plantation labor in no uncertain terms:

¹²²⁰ Paxman, *The English*, pp. 74-75; Kumar, *The Making of English Identity*, p. 230.

¹²²¹ Robert Palmer, *Deep Blues: A Musical and Cultural History, from the Mississippi Delta to Chicago's South Side to the World* (New York: Penguin, 1981), pp. 9-11.

You and me, we sweat and toil
Our bodies all achin' and wracked with pain
Lift that bar, you better tote that bail
And if you get a little drunk, you land in jail

I'm so weary and sick of tryin'
Tired of livin' but afraid of dyin' ...¹²²²

Although it alluded to the reality of imprisonment for many black sharecroppers, what "River" left unsaid was the ever-present threat of racial violence.¹²²³ This was made more apparent (and in keeping with the theme of imprisonment) by the Delta blues standard "Parchman Farm," a cover of which appeared on John Mayall's epochal *Bluesbreakers with Eric Clapton* (1966). The protagonist, an inmate of the titular prison plantation in Mississippi, spends his days "putting that cotton in an eleven-foot sack/With a twelve-gauge shotgun at [his] back."¹²²⁴ Thus, the Delta blues certainly did not romanticize rural labor, but instead portrayed it as it doubtless was for the many sharecropping blacks in the American South.

However, when British rock musicians began to paint their native landscape, rural labor was portrayed in quite a different way. Often it was not portrayed at all, and the rural countryside was constructed as merely a place of enjoyment that the male protagonist visited, recharging his batteries amidst the pristine wilderness and the unspoiled air on a brief respite from the demands of modern urban/suburban life. But even when rural labor was portrayed in British rock music, it was seen as ennobling and

¹²²² The Jeff Beck Group, "Ol' Man River," *Truth*.

¹²²³ Adam Gussow, *Seems Like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), p. 18.

¹²²⁴ John Mayall, "Parchman Farm," *Bluesbreakers With Eric Clapton* (Deram, 1966).

invigorating, the sort of necessary exercise that made “real” Englishmen out of enervated suburban “organization men.”

*Mad Dogs and Englishmen: British Characters and British Identities*¹²²⁵

It was not enough for the British rock network to conjure up an imagined “Britain,” whether urban or rural. The achievement of American challengers like Bob Dylan and the Band had been to populate their “imaginative map” with distinctly American characters, and to sing of them in distinctly American voices. England and Britain had their own characters, both mythical or workaday, and those had their own voices. As they moved away from simple mimicry of America and Americans, and began to try and express themselves as Britishers, British rock musicians needed to sketch out those characters and to speak in those voices.

The task of expressing oneself in a distinctly British voice was undertaken first by the Beatles. As cultural scholar Pete Atkinson has pointed out, part of the novelty and freshness that played such an important role in carving out the “Fab Four’s” initial popularity was the fact that they spoke in “Scouse”—the Liverpudlian dialect and linguistic structure that, to most Britishers and Americans, has become irrevocably linked with the Beatles.¹²²⁶ “Scouse” was radically different than the “voice” of the upper-class, London-based Establishment that so dominated British culture before and after the Second World War. Since most Britishers’ primary experience of this Establishment was via the radio—courtesy of “Auntie BBC’s” monopoly over the airwaves—the Beatles’ first performances and interviews on the BBC provided a jarring contrast (especially for

¹²²⁵ Section title: Joe Cocker, *Mad Dogs and Englishmen* (A&M Records, 1970).

¹²²⁶ Pete Atkinson, “Scouse Voiced: Broadcasting the Modern Myth of Liverpool, 1955-1964,” unpublished PhD thesis, Lancaster University, 2006, pp. 291-300.

young people), and seemed to announce the advent of a new British “voice” and sociocultural identity.¹²²⁷

In the aftermath of “Beatlemania” and the “British Invasion,” London-based bands largely did not attempt to emulate the Beatles and sing in Cockney or the more refined “Estuary English” of the upper-crust. Instead, in keeping with their project of preaching the gospel of American blues orthodoxy, they usually sang in either a straightforward mid-Atlantic accent, or attempted to thicken that accent with a Southern American drawl.¹²²⁸ Mick Jagger’s vocalizations on early Rolling Stones hits such as “I’m a King Bee” and “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction” are good examples of this trend.¹²²⁹ With the explicit move toward exploring British cultural tropes in their music, British musicians also began to consider singing in ways that more closely resembled their actual speaking voices (which, by and large, they did *not* alter to sound “black” or even “American”). Cream drummer “Ginger” Baker, for example, sang lead on “Blue Condition” in his ordinary, Cockney voice.¹²³⁰ The supergroup also closed their 1967 album, *Disraeli Gears*, with an old music-hall-style sing-along, entitled “Mother’s Lament.” Recorded for fun after a long night of drinking in a London pub, “Mother’s Lament” features Baker and Eric Clapton using broadly exaggerated Cockney accents to

¹²²⁷ Ibid, p. 7.

¹²²⁸ Michael Watts, “The Call and Response of Popular Music,” in C.W.E. Bigsby, ed., *Superculture: American Popular Culture and Europe* (Bowling Green, OH: The Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1975), p. 128.

¹²²⁹ The Rolling Stones, “I’m a King Bee,” *The Rolling Stones: England’s Newest Hitmakers* (Abkco, 1964) and “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction” (single – Abkco, 1964); Paul du Noyer, *Liverpool, Wondrous Place: Music From Cavern to Cream* (London: Virgin, 2002), p. 92.

¹²³⁰ Cream, “Blue Condition,” *Disraeli Gears* (Polydor, 1967).

sing the darkly comic song about an underfed baby who is accidentally washed down the sink while his working-class mother is attempting to give him a bath.¹²³¹ Perhaps no band went as far in putting across a Cockney accent as the Herman's Hermits did in "I'm Henry the VIII, I Am," but for the British rock network, being able to sing in demonstrably British voices was an important step toward being able to create demonstrably British characters.

The characters who populate British rock music are, like their American counterparts, both abstract and concrete, mythical and anonymous, ancient and modern. Ancient Celts, Norse invaders, and fairies and elves from the pages of Oxford medievalist J.R.R. Tolkien share the imagined "Britain" with yeomen farmers, county politicians, train conductors and parish priests.¹²³² Although many of these characters could be from the present day, just as many are clearly historic or mythic figures. Whereas Dylan and the Band filled their "invisible republic" with cowboys, Civil War generals and steel-driving men, the British reached back into their stockpile of imperial heroes to populate their "invisible monarchy." Admirals and sailors, generals, colonels, and enlisted men, all make prominent appearances in British rock music—a lasting legacy of a culture that glorified Britain's empire and attempted to instill the values that its builders supposedly embodied, in decades of boys and young men.¹²³³ On the loose concept album, *Arthur (Or, the Decline and Fall of the British Empire)*, the Kinks even call forth Winston

¹²³¹ John A. Platt, *Disraeli Gears: Cream* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998), p. 151; Cream, "Mother's Lament," *Disraeli Gears*.

¹²³² Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, p. 80.

¹²³³ J.S. Bratton, "Of England, Home and duty: the image of England in Victorian and Edwardian juvenile fiction," in John M. Mackenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 73-93.

Churchill and Queen Victoria.¹²³⁴ An English queen also appears in the Rolling Stones' "Jigsaw Puzzle," although she could be either Victoria or one of the two Elizabeths—Mick Jagger never mentions her by name.¹²³⁵

The Spencer Davis Group gave a notably British twist to their cover version of the 1959 rhythm-and-blues record, "Searchin'," by inserting a reference to "Bulldog Drummond," the popular hero of a series of 1930s-era British detective stories created by "Sapper" (Cyril MacNeile).¹²³⁶ The effect of such a lyrical device is to emphasize the centrality of British masculinity in the song's titular "search" (for a wayward woman whom the protagonist wants to return to him). Generally speaking, the construction of distinctly British characters, and their deployment into British-made rock music does the same intellectual work. It asserts a fact that had become more and more commonplace by the late 1960s: that British men, values and outlooks had achieved a central presence in an American cultural idiom. Rock 'n' roll had emerged to express American masculine identity against an American backdrop; even when it was transplanted across the Atlantic, it continued to do so via British interlocutors. Now, however, rock 'n' roll music expressed Anglo-American identity against an increasingly trans-Atlantic backdrop.

¹²³⁴ The Kinks, "Mr. Churchill" and "Victoria," *Arthur (Or, the Decline and Fall of the British Empire)*.

¹²³⁵ The Rolling Stones, "Jigsaw Puzzle," *Beggars Banquet* (Abkco, 1968).

¹²³⁶ The Spencer Davis Group, "Searchin'," *Their First LP* (Fontana, 1965); James Chapman and Matthew Hilton, "From Sherlock Holmes to James Bond: masculinity and national identity in British popular fiction," in Stephen Caunce, et. al., eds., *Relocating Britishness* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 131.

Down the Manor: The Archetype of the Country House and the Country Gentleman

It can be argued that the most distinctive British characters created by the British rock network were themselves. As we can see from the examples of Traffic and Led Zeppelin, who plotted out new musical directions from rural cottages in Berkshire and Wales, the gradual construction of a distinctly British musical identity was often assisted by similar developments in the musicians' actual lives. We can see, to some extent, what these young men aspired to become, on the basis of how they spent their money. Since the emergence of the "star" phenomenon (dated roughly to the appearance of the first nationwide sports and film celebrities in the 1920s), culture heroes on both sides of the Atlantic have generally splurged on similar things: clothing, automobiles, drugs and alcohol, technological gadgetry, and expensive houses. Almost as soon as they began to make enough money, British rock stars purchased all of these things, to be sure, but it was their investment in real estate that illustrates a specifically English mindset. The likes of Mick Jagger and Eric Clapton did not only purchase town houses and apartments in fashionable neighborhoods of London.¹²³⁷ Britain's *nouveau riche* rock musicians also set their sights on owning country houses in the Home Counties with distinguished-sounding names and impressive, often centuries-long pedigrees.¹²³⁸ Not content to dominate the growing trans-Atlantic aristocracy of music, film, sports and fashion, British rock musicians actively aspired to present themselves as *actual* English aristocrats.

¹²³⁷ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 83.

¹²³⁸ An important exception was Elvis Presley, who purchased a massive estate on the outskirts of Memphis and gave it the grandiose name of "Graceland."

To this end, in 1968, Eric Clapton bought the immense Hurtfield Manor in his home county of Surrey, while his Blind Faith bandmate Steve Winwood found a similar (though unnamed) estate in rural Gloucestershire in the early 1970s. The urge was especially acute amongst the Rolling Stones, all five of whose original members had bought himself a country manor somewhere in the southeast of England by the end of 1969. Bill Wyman bought a thirteenth-century “cottage” named Gedding in Suffolk, which, according to historian Shawn Levy, “entitled him to call himself Lord of the Manor of Gedding and Thornwoods.”¹²³⁹ Keith Richards’ twelfth-century Sussex estate, Redlands, even came with a medieval moat, in which Brian Jones once pretended to drown. (When he actually *did* drown, it was at Cotchford Farm in Hartfield, the former home of author [and Winnie the Pooh creator] A.A. Milne that Jones purchased in 1968.)¹²⁴⁰ Not to be outdone, Mick Jagger bought an immense fifteenth-century house “with Cromwellian associations” called Stargroves, not to live in, but to convert into a recording studio.¹²⁴¹ This was arguably the pinnacle of the British blues network’s project of personal reinvention. Having first transformed themselves from disaffected lower-middle-class suburban white boys into dynamic, powerful bluesmen on the make, young British rock stars now used the money and the cultural visibility that doing this had brought them to remake themselves again: as young lords to the manor bought, if not born.

¹²³⁹ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 228.

¹²⁴⁰ Alan Clayson, *Brian Jones* (London: Sanctuary, 2002), pp. 159-160.

¹²⁴¹ Stephen Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. 223.

Rather surprisingly, the national and trans-Atlantic popular media often acquiesced in this reconstruction, by helping to present British rock stars publicly as quintessential English country gentlemen. In 1970, *Rolling Stone's* Jonathan Cott, who traveled to Pete Townshend's "quiet and unassuming 18th Century house" for an interview, found that the Who's guitarist was not at home. In the resulting article, Cott rhapsodized, in almost Austenian terms, "It was one of those lazy afternoons when spring promises and river scents set you in the mood for an 18th Century English gardener to say something like 'Sir, I for my part shall almost answer your hopes, but for this gentleman that you desire to see has stretched his legs up to town.'"¹²⁴² And just over a decade later, *Musician* magazine's Timothy White painted this bucolic Gloucestershire scene:

[U]nder a shifting midsummer sky, the grey and yellow quilts of clouds that hover above the English countryside showing neither approval nor disapproval; properly they evince a benign, atmospheric British frown... Many miles deeper into the countryside, outside a lovely manor house, "dating back to the *Doomsday Book*" according to its rock star owner, and nestled in the vicinity of Highgrove, official residence of the Prince and Princess of Wales, Steve Winwood sips a cup of tea in a typically English garden...

A country gentleman residing in his dream house...¹²⁴³

White thus neatly combined five core elements of the image that had crystallized of the English rock star-turned-country gentleman: an impeccable pedigree; a bit of ancient history; gentility by association with the royal residence nearby; the ubiquitous cup of tea, taken in an English garden; and the "benign frown" of English weather. Winwood himself embroidered on White's theme further in the interview, when he claimed to have "an absorbing interest in field sports: game birds, hunting, falconing and

¹²⁴² Jonathan Cott, "A Talk With Pete Townshend," in *Rolling Stone* (May 14, 1970), p. 32.

¹²⁴³ White, "Winwood: Rock's Gentle Aristocrat," p. 56.

coursing”—rural aristocratic pursuits, all of them.¹²⁴⁴ Here in the strangest of places, we find an unconscious echoing of author and social critic J.B. Priestley’s claim that “nearly all Englishmen are, at heart, country gentlemen.”¹²⁴⁵

But why should this have been the common aspiration of so many of Britain’s rock musicians, who were supposedly the incarnations of Prime Minister Harold Wilson’s new, young, classless, meritocratic Britain in the immediate post-imperial period? For one, the readiness to absorb and enfold upwardly-mobile bourgeois elements into itself has been a defining feature of the British aristocracy—and, as a result, of the bourgeoisie—since the 18th century, if not before.¹²⁴⁶ This readiness was how the aristocracy was able at once to replenish both its stock and its coffers, and to defuse any bourgeois notions of social uprising. Indeed—according to Cannadine, at least—it allowed the aristocracy to survive into the post-Second World War world in altered form.¹²⁴⁷ And it became built into the mindset of the British bourgeoisie—enriching oneself financially led to social advancement and potential ascent into the upper classes. In this way, while the spectacle of longhaired bohemian musicians receiving MBEs and buying country manors might have caused members of the Establishment a bit of

¹²⁴⁴ Winwood, interview with White, in *ibid*, p. 62.

¹²⁴⁵ J.B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London: Mandarin, 1994), quoted in Paxman, *The English*, p. 148.

¹²⁴⁶ For more on this accepted British tradition of socioeconomic advancement, see David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). For a comparison with how different the situation was in, say, Germany or the Habsburg Empire, see Arno Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

¹²⁴⁷ Cannadine, *Decline and Fall*, p. 149.

apoplexy, it was really not too different than that of self-made brewers or captains of industry, seventy or eighty years earlier.

Secondly, the British aristocracy was the nearest model to hand of how *nouveau riche* rock stars should comport themselves once they began to make a great deal of money. Here was an area in which the example of their blues mentors could not offer any guidance; the likes of Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf had certainly never made the type of money that the Rolling Stones and Beatles were now making. White American film and music stars could provide something of an analogue, but the power of the British aristocracy as a cultural model lie in its very proximity. This was especially true with the emergence of a subset of mostly young aristocrats who began "slumming" in the British popular culture *demimonde*. Thus, John Lennon and Paul McCartney careened around town in a sports car driven by Guinness brewery heir Tara Browne.¹²⁴⁸ Various members of the Yardbirds and Beatles could be seen in chic London nightclubs dancing with Jane and Victoria Ormsby-Gore, the daughters of a former British ambassador to the United States; Eric Clapton dated and was briefly engaged to their younger sister, Alice.¹²⁴⁹ Contact with these young aristocrats was on one level an education in how aristocrats spent their money, and British rock stars were quick learners. Thus, the young British rock musician's pursuit of a countryside abode and social gentility can be seen, on one level, as being very much in sync with a long, venerable British tradition. But an irony inherent in this situation must not be overlooked: cultural tradition or not, British

¹²⁴⁸ Browne features in the Beatles' "A Day in the Life," as the young man who "blew his mind out in a car," a reference to the young heir's death in an automobile accident in 1966. The Beatles, "A Day in the Life," *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

¹²⁴⁹ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. Michael Schumacher, *Crossroads: The Life and Music of Eric Clapton* (New York: Hyperion, 1994), p. 288.

bluesmen had started off wanting to renounce the idea of “home” and “settling down” entirely, and now were paying high prices to become established homeowners.

*Can't Find My Way Home: Re-Conceptualizing “Home” vis-à-vis “the Open Road”*¹²⁵⁰

In the blues, generally speaking, “home” was anathema to the errant bluesman-as-adventurer. “Home” was where one started out, but left as soon as possible, to “ride the blinds” in search of freedom, adventure and a more fully-realized masculinity. Since traditionally, man’s place was the “public sphere,” and woman’s was the “private sphere,” going back home and settling down was read as defeat. It entailed a tacit surrender of the freedom of the open road, and an acceptance of the trap of domesticity—for young British men, most likely in the suburbs. In blues such as “Jesus Gonna Make Up My Dying Bed,” and latter-day interpretations like the Band’s “Rocking Chair,” home was simply where the “man of adventure” went to die.¹²⁵¹ However, with the development and deployment of “British” or “English” cultural imagery, along with the incorporation of country-and-western influences, came a reconceptualization of “home” in a British context. This began to take some of the edge off of the blues’ purely negative representations of “home,” and helped to create a discursive space in music where both “home” and “the open road” could co-exist as potentially positive concepts.

The Rolling Stones demonstrate the possibilities for this kind of co-existence on their two “country” albums, *Beggars Banquet* (1968) and *Let It Bleed* (1969). On the one hand, Jagger uses the country-and-western formula to launch a typical young male

¹²⁵⁰ Section title: Blind Faith, “Can’t Find My Way Home,” *Blind Faith* (Polydor, 1969).

¹²⁵¹ “Blind Willie” Johnson, “Jesus Gonna Make Up My Dying Bed,” *The Early Blues Roots of Led Zeppelin* (Catfish Records, 2000); The Band, “Rocking Chair,” *The Band* (Capitol, 1969).

complaint against a “shotgun” marriage in 1968’s “Dear Doctor.”¹²⁵² On the other, he used the same formula to craft paeans to settled domestic arrangement and emotional dependency, even if, in typical Rolling Stones fashion, both are made sordid in the process. “Live With Me” finds Jagger doing his best to persuade his woman to settle down with him. “Don’tcha think there’s a place for us?,” he asks, “right across the street?”¹²⁵³ The catch is that the prospective *hausfrau* will have to share the house not only with Jagger, but also with Richards, “a score of harebrained children,” and a full staff of sexually debauched servants.¹²⁵⁴ Likewise, “Let It Bleed” opens with what seem like perfectly charming statements on friendship—“Well we all need someone we can lean on [dream on]/And if you want to, well you can lean on [dream on] me.”¹²⁵⁵ However, the sentimentality is purposefully ruined by the squalor of the next two verses, which change “lean/dream” to “cream/bleed.” Jagger finishes up this cozy depiction by casually mentioning how his lover “knifed [him] in that dirty, filthy basement.”¹²⁵⁶ The sordidness of these domestic arrangements should not detract from the fact that Jagger, if not the woman in question, looks forward to realizing them, as opposed to wanting to put as much distance as possible between them and himself, as the blues formula might have dictated.

¹²⁵² The Rolling Stones, “Dear Doctor,” *Beggars Banquet*.

¹²⁵³ The Rolling Stones, “Live With Me,” *Let It Bleed* (Decca, 1969).

¹²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵⁵ The Rolling Stones, “Let It Bleed,” *Let It Bleed*.

¹²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*; John W. Hellmann, “‘I’m a Monkey’: The Influence of the Black American Blues Argot on the Rolling Stones,” in *The Journal of American Folklore*, v. 86, no. 342 (Oct.-Dec. 1973), p. 372.

Other members of the British blues-rock network also managed to balance the blues' *wanderlust* with a more positive British view of "settling down." Much of Van Morrison's solo work, for example, is infused with a marked sense of place (in his case, either the Belfast of his adolescence or the upstate New York and northern California of his adulthood), as well as an often-idealized notion of home and hearth.¹²⁵⁷ His 1971 album, *Tupelo Honey*, is especially rich with regard to both, as both American and British pastoralism work together to convey a domestic scene where the male protagonist, far from wanting to flee, is content finally to put down roots.¹²⁵⁸ "Old Woodstock" expresses the protagonist's desire to return home to his cabin in the woods after a long sojourn, while "I Wanna Roo You (Scottish Derivative)" manages to fuse an American country-and-western sensibility with its English pastoral counterpart in describing a winter scene where two lovers are happily "stranded" in a snowbound country cottage, with only a fire, a pot of tea, the protagonist's acoustic guitar, and each other for company.¹²⁵⁹ The interplay between American and British pastoralism was a key factor in the development of a sense of "Britishness," to stand alongside the strong sense of "Americanness" in rock music.

Occupying a prominent place along this reconceptualization of "settling down" at "home" was the claim that the reconceptualization had come about because of the British

¹²⁵⁷ Lauren Onkey, "Ray Charles on Hyndford Street: Van Morrison's Caledonian Soul," in Diane Negra, ed., *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity and Popular Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 242.

¹²⁵⁸ Johnny Rogan, *Van Morrison: No Surrender* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2005), p. 247.

¹²⁵⁹ Van Morrison, "Old Woodstock," and "I Wanna Roo You (Scottish Derivative)," *Tupelo Honey* (Mercury, 1971).

blues-rock star had grown tired of his wandering. He could now appreciate “home” in a more positive way because he had tried the alternative. In Rod Stewart’s “Gasoline Alley,” the protagonist reflects, “I think I know what’s making me sad”:

It’s a yearning for my own backyard
I realize maybe I was wrong to leave
Better swallow up my silly country pride
...
Going home, running home
Down to gasoline alley where I started from¹²⁶⁰

With the Faces, Stewart further embroidered on this theme in “Bad ‘n’ Ruin.” The protagonist’s desire to escape his hometown for a romanticized bohemian lifestyle in an urban slum has come up against the unpleasant reality of actually living that way (“The rent up here is much too high for a room without a tap”).¹²⁶¹ Now, very much the prodigal son, the protagonist wants nothing more than to return home, “tail between my legs”—that is, if his mother will have him back.¹²⁶² Traffic went a step further and overtly linked this world-weariness and longing for home to the rock musician’s constant touring. In “Rock ‘n’ Roll Stew,” Steve Winwood laments “Sitting in a transit all night long / Playing clubs and rocking right on,” and observes that

The road’s much too long since I’ve been wasting my time
Wish I was home again, sipping my wine
LA to London is a mighty long time
Eight hours flying can bring you down¹²⁶³

¹²⁶⁰ Rod Stewart, “Gasoline Alley,” *Gasoline Alley* (Mercury, 1970).

¹²⁶¹ The Faces, “Bad ‘n’ Ruin,” *Long Player* (Warner Bros., 1972).

¹²⁶² Ibid. The Rolling Stones put the “prodigal son” theme even more bluntly, covering the Reverend Robert Wilkins’ blues version of the Biblical parable, entitled simply, “Prodigal Son,” on 1968’s *Beggars Banquet*.

¹²⁶³ Traffic, “Rock ‘n’ Roll Stew,” *The Low Spark of High-Heeled Boys* (Island, 1971).

Returning “home”—and to Britain, specifically—was the much-yearned-after cure to the malaise wrought by constant touring around the world.

A compelling depiction of how many British rock stars had come to imagine themselves, their lives as touring performers, and the land in which they were born, comes at the outset of Led Zeppelin’s legendary 1976 concert film, “The Song Remains the Same.” The film opens with an extended dream sequence, one of five interspersed with live concert footage throughout the movie.¹²⁶⁴ After imagining manager Peter Grant and various road crew as 1930s-era American gangsters in pinstripe suits and fedoras, clutching Tommy guns, it introduces the viewers to the members of the band. Lead singer Robert Plant is seen happily prowling the acres of his Welsh farm with a walking stick, his wife by his side and his young children splashing away in a small pond. Bass guitarist John Paul Jones initially appears as a backwoods highwayman, before returning to his country manor to play his 17th-century pipe organ. Guitarist Jimmy Page reclines on a blanket in some out-of-the-way field, reading books of occult spells and warning away intruders with glowing red eyes.¹²⁶⁵

With the exception of drummer John Bonham, who is portrayed riding his motorcycle and frequenting his favorite local pub, the band are essentially portrayed as rural squires, content with home, family and countryside. However, the idyll is broken by the constant demands of touring, and the urban noise, chaos and commodified mass consumer culture that accompany it. (It is telling that the concert that drags the band away from their country homes in this particular instance takes place in New York City,

¹²⁶⁴ Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy*, p. 17.

¹²⁶⁵ *The Song Remains the Same*, dir. Peter Clifton and Joe Massot (1976).

the epitome of urban America.)¹²⁶⁶ The message of this introductory dream sequence—that England represents a pastoral respite from the ravages of “the open road”—is clear, and it portrays in gigantic celluloid what the music had been saying for years.

Conclusions

Ironically, the re-conceptualization that made “home,” in both literal and national terms, begin to seem like a positive instead of a negative concept, and something to be striven for, as opposed to escaped from, reached its highest point at the very moment when, in the early to mid-1970s, many of Great Britain’s rock musicians no longer called their own homeland “home.” British Inland Revenue’s taxation statutes required high-income earners—a status that many of Britain’s rock stars now enjoyed—to pay an amazingly steep percentage of their earnings in income tax. To avoid having to do so, many bands arranged to spend the majority of any given year either touring or outright living abroad.¹²⁶⁷ For example, the Rolling Stones spent 1972 in the south of France, where they recorded their double album, *Exile on Main St.*, and much of the remainder of the 1970s in New York City.¹²⁶⁸ Rod Stewart, Van Morrison and the members of Led Zeppelin chose California as their adopted home and tax haven.¹²⁶⁹ The escape from “the police and the taxman” that Pete Townshend had sung about in the Who’s “Going

¹²⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁶⁷ Davis, *Hammer of the Gods*, p. 226.

¹²⁶⁸ Robert Greenfield, *Exile on Main St.: A Season in Hell With the Rolling Stones* (New York: Da Capo, 2006), p. 13.

¹²⁶⁹ Davis, *Hammer of the Gods*, p. 296.

Mobile” (1971) had now become the literal truth, and the result was what the Tory MP Sir Geoffrey Howe called “the fame drain.”¹²⁷⁰

One might surmise that of course British rock musicians began to look at “home” more fondly, now they had been exiled from their homeland. However, as I have demonstrated, the re-conceptualization actually began in the late 1960s. It could perhaps be argued that the so-called “fame drain” intensified positive articulations of “home” in general, and England or Britain specifically; we have already seen how nostalgia played a powerful role in British musical articulations. But the phenomenon of Britons expressing themselves as Britons against a British backdrop preceded exile; it was not by and large caused by it.

Such a phenomenon had been present, on a small-scale from almost the beginning of the British blues boom—or at least from the emergence of Mod culture—but it increased as the years wore on, as the result of important sociocultural considerations. The first was the need for British bands to search out modes of expression in which they could speak fluently and authentically, having given up on trying to sound authentically “American,” after being confronted by a wave of young American men who, they reasoned, ought to do it much better. Another was a re-identification by British musicians of themselves as English or British, due to the inevitable comparison provided by having been packaged, sold and consumed as “British” by audiences in the United States. There was also the salutary guidance provided by innovative English electric-folk groups such

¹²⁷⁰ The Who, “Going Mobile,” *Who’s Next*; Sir Geoffrey Howe, MP, quoted in George Clark, “Howe appeals to Labour Party moderates to part company with Mr. ‘Robespierre’ Benn,” in *The Times*, Sept. 15, 1975, p. 2.

as Fairport Convention and the Pentangle, who mapped out useful common ground between the old African-American blues and the older English folk traditions.

The British blues network then began to occupy this common ground. Much of their expressions of English or British identity and culture were actually attempts to see to what extent they could apply the tropic vocabulary of African-American blues to their own experiences. And with the exception of their reconsideration of “home” in a British upper-class rural setting—which was a significant departure from what they perceived as blues tradition—they found that there was much that carried over. The threat of capture and an enforced domesticity embodied by women applied, in the mind of Ray Davies or Mick Jagger, in the suburbs of the Home Counties just as it did in the Mississippi Delta or Chicago’s South Side. So, too, did the alternative of escape from that domesticity, the better to enjoy a sense of masculine freedom and adventure. And although there were certainly less wide open spaces to be experienced in Britain than in the United States, the impulse and the opportunity to ramble was no less developed in music set in Wales or Hertfordshire.

Expressing themselves as young middle-class Britons, as opposed to as poor African-Americans (or as white Americans, for that matter), represented an important step further in the creative maturation of the British blues-rock network. By 1966 and 1967, many of these young former blues disciples felt they had finished their apprenticeships with the old African-American sources. They now considered themselves ready to try and branch out into more self-consciously sophisticated territory. Access to the European social and cultural traditions of their own homeland was one of many new paths upon which blues-rock “journeymen” had embarked by the late 1960s. Finding the

common ground between American and British forms of cultural expression was a necessary step on this path.

The approach taken by British rock musicians had always been a very scholarly approach. Initial interest in African-American blues music that was not easily accessible in their own communities had sent legions of earnest young blues enthusiasts digging back as far as they could, using the sources and methods available to them, to try and piece together an understanding, however distorted or romanticized, of that music. Blues enthusiasts used this scholarly approach to great success (for example, to assemble all of Robert Johnson's so-called "Lost 13" tracks, years before they were released commercially). Along the way, they discovered the linkages between American and British culture, and thus began to "re-filiate" themselves with, some of their own culture. Desirous of learning and absorbing as much as they could, Britain's blues enthusiasts, now world-famous "rock stars," would find themselves moving further away from the blues traditions with which they had begun (although they never abandoned them entirely). The creativity and innovation that resulted would dominate popular musical expression, and will be the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN
I Just Can't Be Satisfied:
Between Authenticity and Creativity, 1966-1975

Between 1966 and 1970, with the firm foundation of the blues underneath their feet, British and American rock musicians—now in proper cultural dialogue with each other—used African-American blues to create a body of rock music that was both creative and innovative, and which came to dominate popular musical expression during this period. This chapter will examine four related processes that were at work during this period—processes of recombination, experimentation, augmentation and revitalization. British musicians absorbed lessons and influences from other musical traditions, especially the folk music of the peoples of their former empire. They combined these influences with not only the blues, but also with other musical forms such as classical, country-and-western and rock ‘n’ roll.¹²⁷¹ In the end, they drew up a blueprint for a form of Anglo-American rock music that was much greater than the sum of its constituent parts.

Intimations that British rock musicians were about to embark upon such a seismic cultural shift can be traced as far back as August 1966, when Animals lead singer Eric Burdon told Paul Williams of American rock and folk music magazine *Crawdaddy!* that, in essence, strict adherence to the blues format was no longer satisfying to him as a developing artist:

¹²⁷¹ In this chapter, I will be relying upon a distinction in terminology that will require some explanation. In this study, “rock ‘n’ roll” will be used, as it was nearly always used during the period in question, to mean the kind of music—also termed “rockabilly”—produced by Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly and Chuck Berry in the mid-to-late 1950s. Meanwhile, “rock” or “rock music” will be used to refer to the blues-based popular music made during and after the British Invasion. As this music is the main focus of this study, the term “rock” will appear far more often than “rock ‘n’ roll.”

[T]his is why I'm branching out by myself, because I realize now that I've gone through the schooling period of learning from the American Negroes but now I want to try and advance and use whatever English influences there are inside me and develop the two. Which means almost trying to develop the pretty side of myself, as well as the dumb-gut side, if there is one. I want to combine the two and use them and develop them because I think it'd be a goof to try and keep on singing blues the rest of my life.¹²⁷²

Burdon's declaration was an amazing expression of creative self-confidence on the part of a young and presumably still-maturing performer.¹²⁷³ In late 1963, his Rolling Stones having only just burst onto the music scene with their Chuck Berry and Jimmy Reed covers, Mick Jagger had scoffed to an interviewer, "Can you imagine a British-composed R&B song? It just wouldn't make it."¹²⁷⁴ And, to be sure, what Burdon was now proposing to do was not to start composing straight rhythm-and-blues. But neither was he advocating the route traveled by British proto-rockers like Cliff Richard and Billy Fury, for whom R&B had been just a formative phase before "maturing" into the world of banal pop compositions and "family entertainment."¹²⁷⁵ Rather, Burdon's avowed mission, upon having achieved a measure of commercial stability, was to develop the lessons he had learned from the blues and to integrate them with as wide an array of other musical influences as possible.

¹²⁷² Eric Burdon, interview with Paul Williams, in "Blues '66, Part One," *Crawdaddy!*, no. 5 (September 1966), p. 8.

¹²⁷³ Burdon was twenty-five at the time of this interview.

¹²⁷⁴ Mick Jagger, quoted in Charles Shaar Murray, *Crosstown Traffic: Jimi Hendrix and the Post-War Rock 'n' Roll Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 137.

¹²⁷⁵ The same could be said, in all honesty, for Elvis Presley—who redefined himself after his discharge from the Army as a ballad singer and actor in a series of lightweight, if popular, films—as well as his British counterparts. Alan Clayson, *Mick Jagger: The Unauthorized Biography* (London: Sanctuary, 2005), p. 18.

Truly, if the cultural commentator were looking for a manifesto for the “art” and “psychedelic” blues-rock movements to come, this statement might be as good as it gets. Beginning roughly in 1965, due to a variety of developments that I have described previously, the bands that made up the British blues network began to feel, like Burdon, that their apprenticeship at the feet of the blues masters was nearing its end, and that if they did not want to become the proverbial “one-trick ponies,” they would do well to think about expanding the creative boundaries of their music. To John Mayall, this was all to the good:

I found it logical.... Everybody was very young and drawn to the electrification of the guitars and the music... [but] they had to find their own way of expression. That kind of led them into the areas that just happened to make them very popular on the rock and roll pop scene. In all cases, everyone ended up finding their own identity. The blues was their starting point.¹²⁷⁶

However, it would be quite wrong to characterize this attempt at development as a betrayal of the blues or of the formative influence of the idiom on the likes of Burdon. The blues tropes that had so fired the young British enthusiast’s imagination would still play a prominent role in his expression after 1966, and indeed, it was the eclecticism that the British had imbibed along with the blues that enabled them to experiment so wildly—and often so successfully—in the years to come.

Recombination: Structural Changes and Directional Shifts

To understand the extraordinary creativity that burst forth from the Anglo-American blues-rock network during these years, one must first understand some developments in the structural makeup of the music industry, and of the interpersonal network itself, that allowed this creativity to flourish. This is not to argue for structural or

¹²⁷⁶ John Mayall, quoted in Steve Appleford, *The Rolling Stones: It’s Only Rock ‘n’ Roll: Song-by-Song* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), p. 35.

economic determinism, of course; even with these structural changes and financial and distributive matrices in place, the agency of the British and American rock musicians as creative producers was still of paramount importance in determining the direction that popular musical expression would take. For one example, the technology that surrounded the performance and recording of popular music underwent substantive advances, which resulted in ever-greater creativity, experimentation and sophistication onstage and in the recording studio. However, the technology did not make the music by itself; it fell to the musicians themselves to put technology to specific uses.

A good example of the necessary interaction between technology and its users is the use of multi-track recording. This was not a new advance; guitar pioneer Les Paul had been experimenting with simple stereo (or dual-track) recording as early as 1950, and had purchased an Ampex eight-track tape recorder for use in his home studio by 1956.¹²⁷⁷ The first eight-track recording equipment was not installed and made available for use in British studios until 1967, but once it was, imaginative musicians and sound engineers more than made up for the delay. Multi-track recording was generally used to strengthen the sound of certain instruments. For instance, a sound engineer wanting to “fatten” the guitar sound might have the guitarist record the same guitar line using several different tracks and then record all of the tracks together (a process called “overdubbing”).¹²⁷⁸ Alternately, if the engineer wanted two guitar parts in harmony, but the band in question

¹²⁷⁷ Susan Schmidt-Horning, “Recording: The Search for the Sound,” in André Millard, ed., *The Electric Guitar: A History of an American Icon* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 110.

¹²⁷⁸ John Lennon, interview with Jann Wenner, reprinted in Wenner, ed., *Lennon Remembers*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 2000), p. 4.

only had one guitarist, he could tape the guitarist playing each part, and overdub them together to make it sound as if there were multiple players.

These novel recording techniques were featured prominently on the Beatles' landmark psychedelic album, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967), which used multi-tracking to create echo, reverberation and other unworldly sounds alongside the band's palette of interesting and unorthodox instruments and tones.¹²⁷⁹ However, it was Jimmy Page who exploited the technique to the fullest, sometimes recording himself playing the same or different guitar lines on dozens of tracks.¹²⁸⁰ The resulting dense guitar sound, which Page dubbed the "guitar army," was a defining characteristic of Led Zeppelin's relentless sonic assault.¹²⁸¹ Likewise, Freddie Mercury of Queen would do the same with regard to vocals, sometimes recording literally hundreds of tracks of himself, guitarist Brian May and drummer Roger Taylor singing Mercury's quasi-baroque vocal pieces.¹²⁸² This created the lush, operatic quality of many of Queen's most famous

¹²⁷⁹ Bob Spitz, *The Beatles: The Biography* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2005), pp. 654-663; The Beatles, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (EMI, 1967).

¹²⁸⁰ Chris Welch, *Led Zeppelin: Dazed and Confused: The Stories Behind Every Song* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1998), p. 59.

¹²⁸¹ Of course, this made some of Led Zeppelin's songs incredibly difficult to perform onstage, as Page was the band's only guitarist, and he refused to engage guest guitarists for the band's tours. David Fricke, "Q&A: John Paul Jones of Led Zeppelin," *Rolling Stone* (January 24, 2008), p. 22.

¹²⁸² Jacky Gunn and Jim Jenkins, *Queen: As It Began* (New York: Hyperion, 1992), p. 94; Brian May, interview in *The '70s: Have a Nice Decade*, dir. Bill Richmond, in *The History of Rock 'n' Roll*.

works—for example, the extensive middle section of “Bohemian Rhapsody”—without the hassle of having actually to import a full choir.¹²⁸³

As demonstrated, one of the main ways in which studio technology aided creativity was by removing or lessening logistical constraints to building a signature sound. Also instrumental in this regard were two instruments, the modular synthesizer and the Mellotron. The former emulated the sounds of different instruments by manipulating sound waves, while the latter actually contained pre-recorded tracks of said instruments, which could be accessed at the press of a button.¹²⁸⁴ Just as with the “overdubbing” process, both machines allowed musicians and producers to incorporate a wide variety of sounds and instruments into their music without requiring the presence of other musicians. The opportunities presented by these two instruments to play around with sounds and effects fit hand-in-glove with the already-broached tendency of the British toward technological tinkering. It was all of a piece with the British network’s experimentation with distortion and backward echo, and the task of building a better “fuzz box.” As psychedelic blues-rock metamorphosed into other musical sub-genres in the 1970s, it was this love of tinkering that may help explain why “progressive” rock, which valued technological proficiency so highly, was almost entirely the province of young, middle-class British musicians.¹²⁸⁵

An early indication of the potential that these advances in studio technology could unlock for the progressive-minded rock musician also came in 1967, courtesy of the

¹²⁸³ Queen, “Bohemian Rhapsody,” *A Night at the Opera* (EMI, 1975).

¹²⁸⁴ Edward Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 34-35.

¹²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 152.

Moody Blues. Once one of the many R&B-steeped outfits who made up the British Invasion, the Birmingham quintet had foundered on the rocks. The band had replaced its guitarist/vocalist, Denny Laine, and its bass guitarist, Clint Warwick, with Justin Hayward and John Lodge, and were in need of a fresh start, musically.¹²⁸⁶ Deram Records (a subsidiary of Decca Records, home of the Moody Blues as well as the Rolling Stones) approached the group with a proposition. It wanted them to record a rock ‘n’ roll version of Czech composer Antonín Dvořák’s “New World Symphony,” using Deram’s newly-installed advanced studio technology. Deram would then use the recording as essentially an advertisement for their technology, in order to attract studio users; in exchange, the label would forgive the debt (several thousands of pounds in advance salary) that the group owed them.¹²⁸⁷

After a few weeks in the studios, the group secretly scrapped the Dvořák symphony in favor of a rock “suite” they had been writing themselves, an “everyman’s journey from dawn to night” called *Days of Future Passed*.¹²⁸⁸ The album is justly famous for its use of the London Festival Orchestra, but it is also significant because it showcased the use of the Mellotron. Keyboardist Mike Pinder used the instrument in the studio to create rich tone color that would embellish the sound of the symphony orchestra, but it was even more prominent during live performances, when continuing to

¹²⁸⁶ Alan Clayson, *Call Up the Groups!: The Golden Age of British Beat, 1962-1967* (New York: Blandford Press, 1985), p. 32. Denny Laine resurfaced in the early 1970s, as lead guitarist and backup vocalist in Paul and Linda McCartney’s group Wings.

¹²⁸⁷ Edward Wincentzen, *The Moody Blues Companion* (Pickens, SC: Wynn, 2001), p. 95.

¹²⁸⁸ The Moody Blues, “Days of Future Passed” (Deram, 1967).

use the orchestra would have been logistically difficult.¹²⁸⁹ The lush, symphonic yet guitar-heavy sound that resulted was an innovative marriage between the European classical tradition and the American blues-based pop sound. *Days of Future Passed*, which brought the Moody Blues back to national (and trans-Atlantic) prominence, stands, along with the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper*, among the first examples of the psychedelic "concept album."¹²⁹⁰

The mid-1960s also saw changes in how the finished studio product could be disseminated to the listening public. As discussed earlier, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) enjoyed a royally-sanctioned monopoly over the British airwaves, and, generally speaking, used it to carry out a rather paternalistic mission to provide the British public with socially and intellectually uplifting programming. As a result, popular forms of music such as jazz and the blues, though they did manage to sneak onto the BBC's playlists, received short shrift, and straightforward "pop" music was limited to the "lowbrow" Light Programme.¹²⁹¹ Rock 'n' roll did manage to make it over the airwaves via a few independent stations such as the US Armed Forces Network and Radio Luxembourg, even though, as Robert Chapman has pointed out, the five "major" record

¹²⁸⁹ Mike Pinder, "History of the Mellotron," *Mike Pinder's Official Website* (<http://www.mikepinder.com/mellotron.shtml>) (accessed January 22, 2008). The Mellotron would figure even more prominently in the Moody Blues' subsequent records, replacing the symphony orchestra entirely.

¹²⁹⁰ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, p. 42.

¹²⁹¹ See Chapter 2 for a more detailed breakdown of the BBC's various programming formats in the 1950s.

companies had bought up enough airtime on Luxembourg to render it little more than a “shop window” for the industry.¹²⁹²

The lessons of the AFN and Radio Luxembourg, broadcasting from Europe and thus outside of British sovereignty, were not lost on a few intrepid entrepreneurs hoping to capitalize on the burgeoning youth listener market. Beginning in the mid-1960s, Britain saw the emergence of the “pirate” radio stations, broadcasting off-shore from aboard ships in international waters, thus circumventing both the BBC monopoly and British law.¹²⁹³ Though attempts had been made in the late 1950s in Scandinavia to establish such offshore broadcasting entities, the first such station broadcasting to Britain was Radio Caroline, which began operations in March 1964 off the coast of Suffolk.¹²⁹⁴ Partly because its major *raison d’être* was to thumb their collective nose at the “proper” authorities by playing the kinds of music the BBC vowed never to play, and partly because it was a shoestring financial operation kept alive by “payola” from all sources, Radio Caroline played all manner of eclectic and bizarre pop, rhythm-and-blues, jazz, even Hawaiian guitar instrumentals, if they thought that was what their listeners might respond to.¹²⁹⁵ With its libertarian approach to programming, Radio Caroline was a success and was soon joined by two other similar ship-based stations, Radio Atlanta

¹²⁹² Robert Chapman, *Selling the Sixties: The Pirates and Pop Music Radio* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 2.

¹²⁹³ Michael Keith, *Voices in the Purple Haze: Underground Radio and the Sixties* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), p. 12.

¹²⁹⁴ Chapman, *Selling the Sixties*, p. 13.

¹²⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 34.

(which would merge with Caroline in July 1964) and Radio London.¹²⁹⁶ Between them, they exposed the first cracks in the BBC's armor.

The pressure from the “pirates” format of offering pop music all day long eventually forced the British government, at the BBC's behest, to intervene. The Marine Broadcasting Offences Act, enacted on August 15, 1967, made it illegal for British subjects to advertise or supply an offshore broadcasting ship.¹²⁹⁷ The legislation did not technically make it illegal for “pirates” like Caroline to broadcast, *per se*, but without advertising revenue or the ability to refuel and restock supplies easily, the “pirates” were gradually forced to cease operations. The BBC's victory did not come without a compromise, however. To capitalize on the enormous popularity of the “pirates,” and to fill the gap left by their cessation, the BBC launched Radio 1 on September 30, 1967.¹²⁹⁸ This station was mostly pop-oriented, borrowing the formatting and American-style on-air jingles and “disc jockey” presentation of the “pirates.” It being the BBC, of course, there were limitations—Radio 1 had to share airtime with Radio 2 (formerly the Light Programme), and some “needle time” agreements still prevented the network from playing as much pop as had the “pirates.”¹²⁹⁹ But Radio 1 represented at least a partial victory for rock music (and a more youth-oriented culture in general), and over the subsequent few years, the station would develop into a *bona fide* outlet for the members

¹²⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 32.

¹²⁹⁷ Gillian Reynolds, “The day we woke up to pop music on Radio 1,” *The Telegraph* (September 30, 2007), p. 1

¹²⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 2.

¹²⁹⁹ Briggs, *The BBC*, p. 311.

of the British rock network, with Cream, Jimi Hendrix, the Who and Led Zeppelin all performing memorable segments on the airwaves.¹³⁰⁰

As rock music began to prove that it was not necessarily just a three-year fad (as “first wave” rock ‘n’ roll had been before it), the idea of cultivating a longer-term relationship with a successful and creatively expanding rock group began to take hold amongst some industry personnel. Since the beginning of the “British Invasion,” the pop manager was generally perceived as being an obstacle not only to the rock musician’s ability to develop creatively and play the sort of music he wanted, but also to his general personal well-being. Managers were always after one more interview, one more tour, one more appearance on this or that television program. And in the understandable pursuit of a profit, they sometimes signed their charges up for some truly ridiculous and humiliating commitments. Brian Epstein of the Beatles is surely an exception, but even he dictated a radical change in the band’s wardrobe, for the sake of commercial success.

As an exception, Epstein threw into sharp relief the realities faced by much of the British network in its early days. For instance, in 1964, the Animals found themselves cast as R&B-singing wolves in a film version of the Little Red Riding Hood fairy tale.¹³⁰¹ Mick Jagger still cringes at the thought of the Rice Krispies breakfast cereal advertisement that he and his fledgling Rolling Stones were made to do, at manager

¹³⁰⁰ Ken Garner, *In Session Tonight: The Complete Radio One Recordings* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1993), p. 87.

¹³⁰¹ Eric Burdon with J. Marshall Craig, *Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2001), p. 23. *The Dangerous Christmas of Little Red Riding Hood*, dir. Sid Smith (1964), also starred Liza Minnelli as Little Red Riding Hood and Cyril Ritchard as the Big Bad Wolf.

Andrew Oldham's behest, in 1964.¹³⁰² Perhaps Jagger could take solace knowing that, under Giorgio Gomelsky, the Yardbirds were entered in the 1965 San Remo Song Festival (the precursor to the Eurovision song competitions of the 1970s and 1980s) in Italy, singing saccharine pop standards—in Italian, no less—to festival-goers more accustomed to hearing crooners like local favorite Adriano Celentano.¹³⁰³ Gomelsky had been the Rolling Stones' first manager, prior to Oldham, and had they stayed with him, the Rolling Stones' fate might have indeed been that of the Yardbirds.

The way the music industry was (and still is) structured, it was imperative to have a manager, to help secure gigs, to provide a liaison between the band and public media outlets and to handle all the financial arrangements. Thus, the pop manager was tolerated as a necessary evil. Still, such was the typical uneasy relationship between the creatively-developing rock 'n' roll band and the pop manager that, by 1966, as they were forming Cream, Ginger Baker, Jack Bruce and Eric Clapton raised the possibility of managing themselves.¹³⁰⁴ In the end, they did opt for a manager, Robert Stigwood (who would play a role in Clapton's career until the late 1970s), but in this decision they were doubtless helped along by the fact that the music business was loosening up—if ever so slightly—and that there now existed a small but growing breed of management types who were

¹³⁰² Of exceptional cringe-worthiness is the jingle, entitled "Wake Up In the Morning," that has Jagger calling out, "Rice Krispies for you!—and you!—and you!" Clayson, *Mick Jagger*, p. 51.

¹³⁰³ Alan Clayson, *The Yardbirds: The Band That Launched Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002), p. 63. On the Eurovision phenomenon, please see Ivan Raykoff and Robert Deam Tobin, *A Song for Europe: Popular Music and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007).

¹³⁰⁴ Dave Thompson, *Cream: The World's First Supergroup* (London: Virgin, 2005), p. 83.

either genuinely more progressive-minded and sympathetic, or at least realized the financial benefits of allowing their artists more creative license.

Interestingly, many of these men were crucially situated as both “outsiders” and “insiders” *vis-à-vis* the larger, London-based pop management and recording world (I hesitate to say Establishment). They were all “insiders” in that they were all white British men. However, they were most often “outsiders” because of their geographic provenance. For example, Epstein was an “outsider” because he was a Liverpudlian; perhaps ironically, his Jewishness and homosexuality made him an “insider” to the British music business, many of whose members shared one or both of these identity traits.¹³⁰⁵ Likewise, “Chas” Chandler, the former bass guitarist of the Animals who later served as Jimi Hendrix’s manager, was an outsider in that he was from Newcastle (as well as because he was a former musician and brought that perspective to the management end of things).¹³⁰⁶ “Outsiders” to the business came not only from the North of England, but from the former Empire as well—Robert Stigwood grew up in Australia (and is also a homosexual), while Island Records founder Chris Blackwell came from Jamaica.¹³⁰⁷ The emergence of this caste of young male “insider-outsiders” gives solid credence to theorist Thorstein Veblen’s argument that cultural and intellectual creativity has often been

¹³⁰⁵ David Sapsford and Sarah Louisa Phythian-Adams, “Tidal Waves of Culture: Information From the Atlantic,” unpublished conference paper given at “Liverpool 800: A Sense of Time and Place,” the University of Liverpool, September 15, 2007, p. 8.

¹³⁰⁶ Charles Cross, *Room Full of Mirrors: A Biography of Jimi Hendrix* (New York: Hyperion, 2005), p. 143.

¹³⁰⁷ Thompson, *Cream*, p. 52; Jon Bradshaw, “Blackwell’s Island,” *Rolling Stone* (May 27, 1982), p. 24.

advanced by individuals situated at the intersection of “outsider” and “insider” in the socio-cultural *milieu*.¹³⁰⁸

In terms of achieving the greatest possible creative freedom for his artists, the most successful of the “new breed” of managers was Led Zeppelin’s Peter Grant. A Londoner of working-class origins, Grant was only an “outsider” to the pop music world in terms of the professions he pursued before entering it—professional wrestler, security guard and bit-part film actor.¹³⁰⁹ He assumed management of the Yardbirds during that band’s death throes in 1968, and with Jimmy Page, built Led Zeppelin out of the ashes.¹³¹⁰ A firm believer in the notion that musical creativity was only possible if the musicians in question were financially stable, he worked hard to ensure that the band always got paid, sometimes resorting to physical violence to achieve this end. The result was that the band, aside from their handsome contract with Atlantic Records and vast returns from album sales, also received the then-unheard-of 90% stake in the receipts from their performances.¹³¹¹ Furthermore, Grant was firmly against the hype and exploitation that traditionally forced musicians to do whatever the music industry wanted; the band hardly ever released singles, rarely if ever appeared on television, and toured

¹³⁰⁸ Thorstein Veblen, “The Intellectual Pre-Eminence of the Jews in Europe,” in Veblen, *The Portable Veblen*, ed. Max Lerner (New York: Viking, 1950), p. 32.

¹³⁰⁹ Chris Welch, *Grant: The Man Who Led Zeppelin* (London: Omnibus, 2002), p. 45. Among his film credits was a bit part in *The Guns of Navarone*, dir. J. Lee Thompson (1961).

¹³¹⁰ Davis, *Hammer of the Gods*, p. 40.

¹³¹¹ Dave Lewis and Simon Pallett, *Led Zeppelin: The Concert File* (London: Omnibus, 1997), pp. 76-77.

when and where they pleased.¹³¹² Such unprecedented control over their creative and financial destinies led to greater ability to experiment in the studio and to do and say only and exactly what the band wanted.

Led Zeppelin's incredibly wide creative latitude owed a great deal to the imagination of Jimmy Page, and the often physically violent business acumen of Grant, but it also was the result of the indulgence of their record company, Atlantic Records. Beginning in the 1950s, the New York-based company founded by Turkish immigrant brothers Ahmet and Nesuhi Ertegun was, along with Berry Gordy's Motown label, one of the two undisputed giants of R&B and soul music.¹³¹³ By the late 1960s, however, Ahmet Ertegun began to expand Atlantic's remit to embrace white blues-based rock music as well. Apocryphally, Ertegun's decision sprang from an epiphany he had at the London nightclub The Scotch of St. James in March 1966. After a performance by soul singer Wilson Pickett, an impromptu jam session began involving members of Pickett's band and various rock bystanders, including Eric Clapton. Ertegun, with his back to the stage, remarked to Pickett that his guitarist "sure [could] play the blues."¹³¹⁴ In fact, the guitarist in question was having a drink at the bar, and the music Ertegun heard was being played

¹³¹² Welch, *The Man Who Led Zeppelin*, p. 8.

¹³¹³ Peter Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Dream of Southern Freedom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), p. 247.

¹³¹⁴ Ahmet Ertegun, quoted in Thompson, *Cream*, p. 84.

by Clapton. The Atlantic chief always said that he knew at that moment, that he wanted Clapton (and, later, by extension, Cream) on his label.¹³¹⁵

While there is no reason to suspect that this anecdote did not happen as Ertegin has told it, it might be a little inaccurate to attribute such a substantive shift in corporate policy to a five-minute blues jam session in a nightclub. But Ertegin did feel that what the likes of Clapton and Page were doing was the natural progression of the R&B and soul music that was Atlantic's bread-and-butter. Besides, white blues-based rock was far more lucrative. Thus, whatever Ertegin's personal tastes, expanding into that market made solid financial sense.¹³¹⁶ Whatever the motivation, by early 1969, the label once known for Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles and Otis Redding also boasted the services of Cream, the Buffalo Springfield, Led Zeppelin, the Allman Brothers Band and the Rolling Stones.¹³¹⁷ The role that Ertegin—and thus his company—served for these white bands was simultaneously to reinforce their blues training, and to encourage their more experimental impulses, in the studio.

Cream's early experiences serve as a case in point. The band's first album, *Fresh Cream* (1966), was recorded in London, under the supervision of manager Stigwood; it

¹³¹⁵ Ertegin, quoted in Dorothy Wade and Justine Picardie, *Music Man: Ahmet Ertegin, Atlantic Records and the Triumph of Rock 'n' Roll* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), p. 137.

¹³¹⁶ Francis Davis, *The History of the Blues: The Roots, the Music, the People: From Robert Johnson to Robert Cray* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), p. 226.

¹³¹⁷ Charlie Gillett, *Making Tracks: Atlantic Records and the Growth of a Multi-Billion Dollar Industry* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1974), p. 242. By the mid-1970s, white British "progressive" rock bands such as Genesis and Yes also called the label home.

had sold well, but Ertegün felt it was far too “poppy.”¹³¹⁸ For the sessions, beginning in April 1967, that would result in *Disraeli Gears*, Ertegün invited the band to Atlantic’s New York studios, where the label’s biggest hits had been recorded.¹³¹⁹ The first session was supervised by Ertegün himself, but for subsequent sessions, the Atlantic chief brought in two younger (and, in his opinion, “more progressive”) men: engineer Tom Dowd and producer Felix Pappalardi.¹³²⁰ As a result of the combination of the three Atlantic men and the three members of Cream, *Disraeli Gears* was a much better synthesis of the band’s blues, jazz, Dada and pop sensibilities.¹³²¹

In the case of the Rolling Stones, Atlantic Records even established a “vanity” subsidiary label (Rolling Stones Records) on the band’s behalf in 1970.¹³²² In addition to the band being given creative license for any material that was released on this subsidiary label, the Rolling Stones were also given limited responsibilities as A&R (artist-and-repertory) personnel: they could produce and supervise the release of other bands’ material as well as their own.¹³²³ (Later, with Swan Song Records, Atlantic gave similar privileges to Led Zeppelin.)¹³²⁴ To top it all off, the founding president of Rolling Stones

¹³¹⁸ Cream, *Fresh Cream* (Polydor, 1966); Ertegün, quoted in Wade and Picardie, *Music Man*, p. 137.

¹³¹⁹ Cream, *Disraeli Gears* (Polydor, 1967); Thompson, *Cream*, p. 146.

¹³²⁰ Tom Dowd, quoted in *ibid*, p. 151.

¹³²¹ “Review: *Disraeli Gears*,” *Beat Instrumental* (December 1967), p. 21.

¹³²² Gillett, *Making Tracks*, p. 271.

¹³²³ *Ibid*, p. 272.

¹³²⁴ Loraine Alterman, “Led Zeppelin: Swan Song Is a Beginning,” *Rolling Stone* (June 20, 1974), p. 20.

Records was Marshall Chess, the twenty-eight-year-old son of Chess Records founder Leonard Chess. The younger Chess, who masterminded the controversial *Electric Mud* project involving Muddy Waters, had left the company after the death of his father the previous year.¹³²⁵ With the Rolling Stones, Chess became heavily involved with the new label's business practices (including helping to design the band's distinctive tongue-and-lips logo) as well as overseeing recording sessions.¹³²⁶ If visible proof were needed that Atlantic was basically giving its white rock bands almost complete *carte blanche* to produce innovative music within the blues tradition, the hiring of Chess to manage much of the Rolling Stones' financial and musical affairs would seem to be that proof.

The final structural change to play a role in the British network's musical transformation was change amongst the bands and artists themselves. One of the salient features of the "second wave" of British R&B was an often rapid turnover in band membership. The personnel of the "Big Three"—the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and the Who—remained unchanged, and would do so until Brian Jones' firing from the Stones in 1969.¹³²⁷ However, by and large, they were the exceptions to the rule, as all around them bands split up or lost members, with new groups being formed out of the wreckage. Clapton began this mid-decade game of "musical chairs" in March 1965 by leaving the Yardbirds and subsequently joining forces with John Mayall. By the beginning of 1967, nearly all of the prominent British R&B outfits that had launched the movement had

¹³²⁵ Marshall Chess, quoted in The Rolling Stones, with Dora Loewenstein and Philip Dodd, eds., *According to the Rolling Stones* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2003), p. 170.

¹³²⁶ Gillett, *Making Tracks*, p. 273.

¹³²⁷ Pete Frame, *Rock Family Trees* (London: Omnibus, 1983), p. 6.

either dissolved (the Animals, the Spencer Davis Group, “Long John” Baldry’s Hoochie-Coochie Men, and Them) or undergone significant personnel change (the Yardbirds, the Kinks, the Graham Bond Organization, the Moody Blues, and Manfred Mann).¹³²⁸

The bands that dissolved, and the performers who quit, did so for very typical reasons—differences in musical policy, growing family commitments, personal feuds, disenchantment with touring and recording. Most of the members of these defunct British R&B bands retired from the limelight altogether, either segueing into production or management, or returning home, perhaps to play on the club circuits from which they had emerged. But some—most notably Eric Burdon, Steve Winwood, Van Morrison and Rod Stewart—continued on, joining or forming new groups or establishing themselves as solo artists. The groups that dissolved were replaced on the scene by new outfits—often, though not always, made up of some of the former members of defunct groups. There were some genuine newcomers to the field, groups like the Small Faces, the Soft Machine, and Pink Floyd, who were inspired to play music as much by the Rolling Stones and Eric Clapton as by the old blues masters.¹³²⁹ The combinations that had been established by 1967 and thereafter might not have been any more enduring—witness Cream, or any other band featuring Clapton, for that matter—but they were certainly influential. By and large, it was these bands whose recordings defined this period of remarkable trans-Atlantic creativity.

¹³²⁸ Strictly speaking, the Spencer Davis Group and Them did not *dissolve* with the departures of Steve Winwood and Van Morrison, respectively, but they ceased to be major players on the British music scene. And of course, I have left out John Mayall’s Bluesbreakers—the band with the greatest turnover in membership during this time—because the “revolving door” was more or less Mayall’s stated policy (see Chapter 2).

¹³²⁹ Jim DeRogatis, *Kaleidoscope Eyes: Psychedelic Rock From the ‘60s to the ‘90s* (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishers, 1996), p. 171.

Again, the interpersonal aspect of this creativity must be underscored. Changes in personnel meant a great deal more than just changing the names on publicity materials and recording contracts. After all, these were creative individuals, not just machine parts to be substituted at will without effect. As the result of personnel turnover, musical policy and direction often changed as well. For example, Clapton's defection from the Yardbirds led to the hiring of Jeff Beck, who was much more given to experimentation with the sonic possibilities of his guitar than his blues-purist predecessor; the musical innovativeness that followed has earned the Yardbirds at least one commentator's vote for the title of "the first psychedelic band."¹³³⁰ Likewise, when the Moody Blues replaced Laine and Warwick with Hayward and Lodge, respectively, in 1966, the result was a shift away from an R&B-inflected sound toward the symphonic bombast for which the band achieved international renown.¹³³¹ And of course, the formation of new bands was often the result of the new members' expressed desire to try out new ideas or pursue different creative paths. Traffic and Cream, the vehicles for Winwood and Clapton, respectively, were prime examples of this tendency toward innovation through recombination. In both cases, blues and R&B orthodoxy (especially, with John Mayall, in Clapton's case) were abandoned in favor of a more eclectic approach.¹³³²

¹³³⁰ Manager and record producer Simon Napier-Bell, quoted in Clayson, *The Yardbirds*, p. 11.

¹³³¹ Clayson, *Call Up the Groups*, p. 65.

¹³³² Michael Hicks, *Sixties Rock: Garage, Psychedelic and Other Satisfactions* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), p. 140.

Experimentation: Psychedelia Looks to Outside Sources and Influences

One outward indicator of British rock musicians' increased eclecticism was their facility for borrowing elements from other musical and cultural traditions, and then combining them together in a bricolage that bore traces of the traditions from which they had been culled, without descending into out-and-out pastiche. Boyd described the developing sound of the Rolling Stones as "shopping" in other cultures, and the metaphor is an apt one, especially for a group of young men who were so heavily involved in mass consumer culture.¹³³³ Just as a young *flâneur* might construct a wardrobe out of bits and pieces unearthed at half a dozen or more small boutiques up and down the King's Road, the psychedelic songwriter might write lyrics that were inspired by J.R.R. Tolkien, Robert Johnson, William Blake or his most recent drug "trip," and set them to music that melded together a blues chord progression, an Indian sitar riff, and possibly a harpsichord solo.¹³³⁴ This penchant for musical borrowing and bricolage dates back to the European classical tradition, but for our immediate purposes, in the case of the British blues network, it began with their absorption of the blues; we have seen how young blues enthusiasts felt at liberty to lift verses or even single lines of lyric from any number of separate blues songs, and combine them into one song. Having achieved some measure of creative stability, British musicians felt comfortable extending this approach outward.

Perhaps not surprisingly, young British musicians turned to the former Empire as a major source of musical borrowing. Historian Deborah Cohen has demonstrated how

¹³³³ Ibid.

¹³³⁴ DeRogatis, *Kaleidoscope Eyes*, p. 37. It should be noted that, to my knowledge, no single song produced by the British bands during the psychedelic era contained *all* of the aforementioned elements. But they were all possibilities, and multiple combinations of at least two of them appear in numerous songs.

many middle-class British consumers of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries purchased and decorated liberally with furniture and bric-a-brac from throughout the Empire.¹³³⁵ By and large, this approach continued in the musical “shopping” of the 1960s. Beginning in 1965, British bands began to inject Indian influences into their music through the use of the sitar—a hollow-necked string instrument that produces a harmonic, droning sound—and the tabla—a pair of hand drums lined with goatskin.¹³³⁶ Contrary to popular belief, the sitar was not introduced to popular music by Beatles guitarist George Harrison, although his use of the stringed instrument was the most famous, and although it was “the quiet Beatle” who did the most to bring the sitar virtuoso Ravi Shankar to the attention of music fans around the world.¹³³⁷ Page claims that folk legend Davy Graham was the first to try to make his acoustic guitar sound like a sitar, and to introduce what he called “raga tunings” into English folk music.¹³³⁸ Page also claims that he himself was the first among his peers to own a sitar, “certainly before George Harrison, for instance.”¹³³⁹ The general consensus, however, is that the sitar’s first appearance on a

¹³³⁵ Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 127-28.

¹³³⁶ Sandy Pearlman, “Patterns and Sounds: The Uses of ‘Raga’ in Rock,” *Crawdaddy*, no. 7 (January 1967), p. 5.

¹³³⁷ Jonathan Bellman, “Indian Resonances in the British Invasion, 1965-68,” *The Journal of Musicology*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Winter 1997), p. 121.

¹³³⁸ Jimmy Page, interview with Pete Frame, quoted in Frame, ed., *The Road to Rock: A Zigzag Book of Interviews* (New York: Charisma Books, 1974), p. 103. “Raga” is a term used to describe melodic practices in Indian (or Carnatic) classical music.

¹³³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 103.

rock record came courtesy of Ray Davies, who played it on the Kinks' "See My Friends."¹³⁴⁰

From early 1965 until roughly 1969, Indian influences were plentiful in British rock music. For example, Harrison played a sitar on the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)" and "Love You To," as did Brian Jones on the Rolling Stones' "Paint It, Black" and "Mother's Little Helper."¹³⁴¹ However, the instrument's real impact on popular music was actually the result of guitarists, inspired by Graham's example, tuning their guitars to mimic the sitar's distinctive sound. Jeff Beck used the technique on the Yardbirds' "Heart Full of Soul," as did Jimmy Page on the instrumental "White Summer," which was a part of his repertoire both in the Yardbirds and in Led Zeppelin.¹³⁴² Proving, perhaps, that Page was an equal-opportunity plagiarist, "White Summer/Black Mountain Side" was an uncredited copy of Davy Graham's 1963 "She Moves Through the Bizarre," which (appropriately enough for the purposes of this discussion) was a fusion of an old Irish folksong and Indian melodic influences.¹³⁴³ By the time of Shankar's much-acclaimed appearance playing the sitar at the Woodstock Arts and Music festival in August 1969, the instrument (or an approximation of it on

¹³⁴⁰ The Kinks, "See My Friends," *Kinkdom* (RPT, 1965); Bellman, "Indian Resonances," p. 122.

¹³⁴¹ The Beatles, "Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)," *Rubber Soul* (EMI, 1965); The Beatles, "Love You To," *Revolver* (EMI, 1966); The Rolling Stones, "Paint It, Black" and "Mother's Little Helper," *Aftermath* (Decca, 1966).

¹³⁴² Clayson, *The Yardbirds*, p. 97; The Yardbirds, "Heart Full of Soul," *Having a Rave-Up!* (Epic, 1965); The Yardbirds, "White Summer," *Little Games* (Epic, 1967). Page combined "White Summer" with another instrumental, "Black Mountain Side," which featured the tabla, for inclusion on *Led Zeppelin I* (Atlantic, 1969).

¹³⁴³ Welch, *Dazed and Confused*, p. 24.

guitar) could be found in the work of Traffic (throughout much of their début album, *Mr. Fantasy*), the Hollies (on the single “Stop Stop Stop”) and the Paul Butterfield Blues Band (on their monumental, thirteen-minute-long raga jam, “East-West”), among others.¹³⁴⁴

This post-colonial “shopping trip” also visited the musical cultures of North Africa and the Middle East. Partaking of a cultural tradition of “desert-loving Englishmen” (and a few Americans) that dates back to the beginning of a British presence in Egypt (if not further), and included the likes of Lord Kitchener, T.E. Lawrence, Gertrude Bell and, latterly, Beat poet role models like William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, British rock musicians felt a strange attraction to these desert lands, appropriating their supposed exoticism and sensuality for their music.¹³⁴⁵ Again, the Yardbirds seem to be in the vanguard of this practice; their “Over Under Sideways Down” (1966) features Beck once again using his guitar to emulate an Eastern sound—this time, a distorted riff that evokes what Beck biographer Annette Carson calls a “manic, skirling Moroccan dance.”¹³⁴⁶ Brian Jones, who showed an enthusiasm (and a remarkable facility) for learning to play any outré musical instrument he could get his

¹³⁴⁴ Traffic, *Mr. Fantasy* (Island, 1967); The Hollies, “Stop! Stop! Stop!,” *Stop! Stop! Stop!* (Imperial, 1966); The Paul Butterfield Blues Band, “East-West,” *East-West* (Elektra, 1966); Frederick W. Harrison, “West Meets East,” *Soundscapes.info* (http://www.icce.rug.nl/~soundscapes/VOLUME04/West_meets_east.shtml) (accessed December 23, 2007).

¹³⁴⁵ Derek Hopwood, *Tales of Empire: The British in the Middle East, 1880-1952* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1989), p. 36; Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, p. 170. The phrase in quotation marks is taken from *Lawrence of Arabia*, dir. David Lean (1962).

¹³⁴⁶ The Yardbirds, “Over Under Sideways Down,” *The Yardbirds (commonly called “Roger the Engineer”)* (Edsel, 1966); Annette Carson, *Jeff Beck: Crazy Fingers* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2001), p. 50.

hands on, became enamored of the pipe- and drum-driven folk music of Morocco. The doomed Rolling Stones guitarist's last pet project before his death in 1969 was to record the so-called Master Musicians of Jajouka, whose existence up in the mountains outside Tangier was related to him by Gysin.¹³⁴⁷ And finally (and perhaps most famously) the allure of the desert manifests itself in Led Zeppelin's monumental "Kashmir," which lionizes the "sun," "stars," "sand" and "four winds" of the endless desert, through which Robert Plant fantasized about driving in an open-topped sports car.¹³⁴⁸

In appropriating the music and culture of former imperial outposts, British rock musicians were guided by several considerations. Firstly, and most basically, this music was foreign to them. As they grew in aptitude and confidence, it made sense for these musicians to want to develop and expand their sound as far as possible, as well as to prove that they could master these sounds that were so different to the ones with which they had grown up. However, due to over three centuries of cultural appropriation during the days of the empire, as well as the post-1945 influx of Indian, Caribbean and Asian immigrants to Britain, this music was, on some level, familiar to Britishers as well.¹³⁴⁹ To take just one example, Robert Plant married an Anglo-Indian girl, and reminisces fondly of his time spent in her family home, "a soulful scene full of hot curries and great

¹³⁴⁷ Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead*, pp. 248-53. *Brian Jones Presents the Pipes of Pan at Joujouka* (Rolling Stones Records, 1971) was released after the guitarist's death; almost thirty years later, Mick Jagger returned to Jajouka and played with the Master Musicians as well.

¹³⁴⁸ Led Zeppelin, "Kashmir," *Physical Graffiti* (Swan Song, 1974); Robert Plant, quoted in Welch, *Dazed and Confused*, p. 90.

¹³⁴⁹ Paul Oliver, *Black Music in Britain: Essays on the Afro-Asian Contribution to Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990), p. 78.

people.”¹³⁵⁰ Finally, the British interaction with, and appropriation of, these foreign sounds was part of Western youth culture’s larger embrace of non-Western cultures, which they saw as morally and spiritually superior to the corrupt, capitalist, middle-class Puritanical culture in which they had been raised.¹³⁵¹

Psychedelia is often assumed to be merely an expression of the late 1960s’ burgeoning “hippie” drug culture, which arose *sui generis* as an attempt by disaffected Western youth to secede from a mainstream “straight” world that denied civil rights to African-Americans in the American South, oppressed colonial peoples around the world (especially in Viet Nam), seemed to value greed and materialism above community and morality, and whose nuclear armaments were in danger of obliterating humanity at a moment’s notice. The ways to achieve this secession were to reject conventional standards of fashion, morality and sexuality, and, above all, to engage in the recreational use of psychotropic drugs.¹³⁵² Over time, the sexual and hallucinogenic aspects of late 1960s youth culture have come, for better or worse, to loom largest in the public imagination.¹³⁵³ While I would certainly not attempt to deny those aspects, or to diminish their importance for participants and observers of the scene, it should be stated that, at least in terms of the music and the musicians themselves, these were not the only aspects.

¹³⁵⁰ Davis, *Hammer of the Gods*, p. 49.

¹³⁵¹ Jonathon Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counter-Culture* (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 211.

¹³⁵² Hicks, *Sixties Rock*, pp. 54-55.

¹³⁵³ Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of “Cool”: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 3.

Psychedelic music was about more than simply recreating or enhancing the experience of “getting high,” and had very real cultural remit and antecedents.

In its desire to discover and make use of non-mainstream, extra-sensory ways of seeing and knowing, psychedelia clearly reflects blues culture, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, had placed a premium on such epistemological methods as magic, voodoo and the so-called “deal with the Devil” ever since the days of Reconstruction. This affinity, rather than the happy accident of their all being the proper age during psychedelia’s first flowerings, goes a long way toward explaining why British blues-rock bands (with a few exceptions) “went psychedelic” with such enthusiasm. In terms of deriving power from seeing and knowing, psychedelia was just the blues with a more colorful wardrobe and better drugs.

In presenting first the bluesman and then the (overwhelmingly white) rock musician as a virtuoso, psychedelia was taking its place in a cultural lineage that, again, dates back to the nineteenth century and the Romantic tradition. In the nineteenth century, Italian violinist Nicolò Paganini and Hungarian pianist Franz Liszt were both accorded heroic status on the strength of their personal charisma and their instrumental virtuosity and flamboyance.¹³⁵⁴ Of Paganini, it was heavily rumored that he had acquired his genius by selling his soul to the Devil. The provenance of Paganini’s musical gifts notwithstanding, audiences saw him (as well as Liszt) as an individual whose skill and mastery over his instrument had allowed him to transcend the social constraints against

¹³⁵⁴ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, p. 46; William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1975), p. 74.

which the Romantics struggled.¹³⁵⁵ As ethnomusicologist Edward Macan has argued, this Romantic tradition was passed down to the Age of Aquarius via jazz and then blues; for example, it was the primary intellectual framework for understanding the life and legend of Robert Johnson.¹³⁵⁶ Blues-rock and then psychedelic rock added the names of Clapton, Hendrix, Page, Green, Richards and Townshend to the pantheon, but expanded the scope for virtuosity. Now drummers, bass guitarists and keyboardists could come to be seen as virtuosos. In fact, the entire concept of the “supergroup” is premised on this possibility.¹³⁵⁷

The archetype of the virtuoso instrumentalist was not the only point of interaction between psychedelic music and the European classical tradition, however. Rock musicians, seeking simultaneously to clothe themselves in musical sophistication and respectability, and to provide a necessary structure to their growing creative experimentation, borrowed liberally from the classical canon.¹³⁵⁸ With the exception of polymaths such as Steve Winwood and Garth Hudson, however, few amongst the British rock network had any classical training. Rather, their knowledge of classical forms was largely self-taught. At the most basic level, the inclusion of classical influences can be seen in the usage of instrumentation that is more typically associated with the concert hall—harpsichords, pipe organs, violins and sometimes entire woodwind sections. Jimmy

¹³⁵⁵ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, p. 46.

¹³⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 46; see Chapter 4.

¹³⁵⁷ For example, if Ginger Baker and Jack Bruce were not recognized as being just as accomplished on their respective instruments as Eric Clapton was on his, it would have made no sense for them to band together to form Cream.

¹³⁵⁸ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, p. 53.

Page, who interacted a great deal with orchestral musicians, particularly violinists, during his days on the London session circuit, achieved perhaps the most bizarre instrumental marriage of all. Acting on the suggestion of a violinist acquaintance, Page played his Gibson electric guitar with a violin bow, by either striking it against the guitar strings or bowing it across them.¹³⁵⁹ Both approaches created a distinctive dissonant sound that left its mark on such Led Zeppelin hits as “Dazed and Confused” and “In the Evening.”¹³⁶⁰

British psychedelic rock musicians also appropriated the style and form of classical music as well. In much the same way as the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British composers and conductors who came before them, however, they did not merely copy the symphonic form, but welded to it the musical lessons they had already learned. One example of this musical welding was the powerful “Beck’s Bolero,” recorded, as mentioned earlier, by Jeff Beck and a one-off “supergroup” featuring Page, John Paul Jones and Keith Moon.¹³⁶¹ The song, which was heavily influenced by French composer Maurice Ravel’s renowned orchestral piece “Boléro,” makes use of the same cut-and-paste structural technique as many of the blues “covers” produced by British musicians. “Beck’s Bolero” is divided into three sections (I shall refrain from calling them “movements”), the first and third of which feature an electric guitar and a steel acoustic guitar playing differing melody lines over a “bolero” dance rhythm. The second section dispenses with the bolero rhythm and instead features distorted guitar riffs and powerful

¹³⁵⁹ Welch, *Dazed and Confused*, p. 23.

¹³⁶⁰ Led Zeppelin, “Dazed and Confused,” *Led Zeppelin I*; “In the Evening,” *In Through the Out Door* (Swan Song, 1979).

¹³⁶¹ Jeff Beck, “Beck’s Bolero” (B-side to single, “Hi Ho Silver Lining” – Epic, 1967; also released on The Jeff Beck Group, *Truth* [Epic, 1968]).

drumming, of the kind for which Moon became famous with the Who.¹³⁶² The shotgun marriage of orchestral music played with blues guitar, and riff-driven hard rock, was to provide a blueprint for numerous emerging progressive and heavy metal bands, not to mention Beck and Page's subsequent groups.

Usages of the classical tradition's forms and structures appear elsewhere in psychedelic and progressive rock. Garth Hudson, putting the classical piano training he received at the University of Western Ontario to profitable use, used the theme from J.S. Bach's "Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor" as the template for the sprawling organ solo that introduces the Band's "Chest Fever." The German musical patriarch was also "raided" by Procol Harum ("A Whiter Shade of Pale") and Pink Floyd (the mock-oratorio *A Saucerful of Secrets*).¹³⁶³ Possibly the most famous (or infamous, depending on one's tastes) example of the use of classical themes in rock music is the development of the "rock opera," which attempts to tell a unified, if loose, narrative using the language and musical accompaniment of rock and the structure (scenes, movements, acts) of the opera.

In 1969, Pete Townshend composed, and the Who recorded, the first "rock opera," *Tommy*, which attempted to tell the story of a "deaf, dumb and blind" "Pinball Wizard" who leads an unsuccessful religious sect after being miraculously healed.¹³⁶⁴

This ambitious yet ill-starred work was followed by the Kinks' *Preservation*, which was

¹³⁶² Beck, interview in *Guitar Magazine*, vol. 3, no. 4 (June 1993), p. 41.

¹³⁶³ Barney Hosykn, *Across the Great Divide: The Band and America* (Hyperion, 1993), p. 155; The Band, "Chest Fever," *Music From Big Pink* (Capitol, 1968); Procol Harum, "A Whiter Shade of Pale," *Procol Harum* (Deram, 1967). The song's distinctive *obbligato* was inspired by, but not a copy of, Bach's "Air on a G String." See also Pink Floyd, *A Saucerful of Secrets* (Capitol, 1968).

¹³⁶⁴ Pete Townshend, interview with Jann Wenner, *Rolling Stone* (September 28, 1968), p. 27.

even less well received.¹³⁶⁵ In fact, the concept of the “rock opera” was (and, to some extent, remains) one of the most controversial developments in popular music history, and came under intense abuse by those critics and commentators (and, it should be noted, fans) who believed that the self-conscious sophistication and overblown artistry of the form was a betrayal of rock ‘n’ roll’s essential nature, which was supposedly youthful rebellion and populist “authenticity.”¹³⁶⁶ This criticism only intensified as “prog” rock employed and even furthered many of “rock opera’s” more outlandish devices. When naysayers began casting about for the sources of rock’s so-called decline into overblown pomposity in the mid-1970s, it was the “rock opera,” and the discourses that had nourished it, that bore much of the blame.¹³⁶⁷

It is important to note that, whatever these tendencies might have led to, the employment of classical music influences began, as mentioned, as an attempt to add legitimacy and weight to the enterprise of psychedelic blues music. The hippies, in their attempt to “drop out” of mainstream straight society, sought also to legitimate their project by invoking the example of societies that they imagined to have been non-mainstream, pre-modern and uncorrupted by capitalist greed and oppressive bourgeois

¹³⁶⁵ Neville Marten and Jeffrey Hudson, *The Kinks* (London: Sanctuary, 2002), p. 147; The Kinks, *Preservation, Acts 1 and 2* (Velvet, 1975).

¹³⁶⁶ Steve Knopper, “The Who: *Tommy*,” in Jim DeRogatis and Carmél Carrillo, eds., *Kill Your Idols: A New Generation of Rock Writers Reconsiders the Classics* (Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books, 2004), pp. 36-37.

¹³⁶⁷ See, for example, Lester Bangs’ work for *Creem* magazine, collected in two volumes, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, ed. Greil Marcus (New York: Anchor Books, 2003) and *Mainlines, Blood Feasts and Bad Taste: A Lester Bangs Reader*, ed. John Morthland (New York: Anchor Books, 2003).

morality.¹³⁶⁸ In America, the only such forms that seemed applicable were those of the American Indians and the Transcendental poets, both of whom had supposedly eschewed individual property and sexual propriety in favor of a more communal lifestyle, and used hallucinogenic drugs in religious rituals to achieve heightened consciousness.¹³⁶⁹ These romanticized ideas of bygone societies were put into practice in the spread of communal living arrangements, “free love” and recreational drug use for which the hippies became notorious.

On the other side of the Atlantic, psychedelia, though driven by the same basic desires, took slightly different forms. For in Britain, hippies could make use of over two millennia of English mysticism and pastoralism, from the rich treasure-trove of Arthurian legend, to the medievalism popularized by J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* saga, all the way down to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*.¹³⁷⁰ The different intellectual inheritance of American and British psychedelic culture is literally reflected in full color, at the level of the posters that advertised psychedelic bands’ gigs and assorted hippie “happenings”: American posters, where they depict people, often depict American Indians, whereas British posters are full of wizards, fairies and Knights of the Round Table.¹³⁷¹

¹³⁶⁸ Green, *All Dressed Up*, p. 291.

¹³⁶⁹ Christoph Grunenberg and Jonathan Harris, eds., *The Summer of Love: Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis and the Counter-Culture in the 1960s* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), p. 71; John Leland, *Hip: The History* (New York: Ecco, 2004), pp. 42-51.

¹³⁷⁰ Michael Alexander, *Medievalism: The Middle Ages in Modern England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 271.

¹³⁷¹ Grunenberg and Harris, eds., *The Summer of Love*, p. 52.

Psychedelia also owed an intellectual debt to the European traditions of Dada and Surrealism, which the British musicians undoubtedly learned in equal measure as students at art school, and as admirers of Bob Dylan's "flashing-chain imagery." The connections between these two artistic "movements" (if Dada can indeed merit such a restrictive label) and Anglo-American psychedelic rock music are legion. The Beatles' "Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds," for instance, is rife with imagery ("looking-glass ties," "the girl with kaleidoscope eyes," "newspaper taxis") that one could expect to find in the work of Salvador Dali.¹³⁷² Cream's bizarrely-titled "She Walks Like a Bearded Rainbow (SWLABR)" references a picture with a mustache, which is redolent of, if not explicitly emulative of, Marcel Duchamp's scandalous "L.H.O.O.Q." (1919), which portrays a mustachioed and goateed Mona Lisa.¹³⁷³ Going further, Clapton recalls that "the initial agenda was that Cream was going to be a dada group," with "all these weird things" and "mad props" onstage, not the least of which was a giant stuffed bear, which the group purchased at a London junkshop.¹³⁷⁴ Finally, for the cover of *Beck-Ola*, his eponymous group's second album, Jeff Beck selected a reproduction of the enormous green apple from René Magritte's "The Listening Room" (1952). This painting was also a favorite of Paul McCartney, who claims that seeing the painting gave him the idea to

¹³⁷² The Beatles, "Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds," *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*; Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), p. 150.

¹³⁷³ Cream, "She Walks Like a Bearded Rainbow (SWLABR)," *Disraeli Gears*; Gay, *Modernism*, p. 164.

¹³⁷⁴ Eric Clapton, quoted in Thompson, *Cream*, p. 80.

name the Beatles' business empire "Apple."¹³⁷⁵ It bears repeating that Lennon, Clapton, Beck and McCartney were all art students at one time or another, and used their exposure to modernist art to shape their own aesthetic statements.

In keeping with Dada's de-emphasis of binding names and strict categories, the innovators of psychedelic rock music refused to provide rock journalists and critics with any assistance in labeling the music they were making. Ginger Baker said that Cream was in the business of making "sweet and sour rock 'n' roll," and warned, "I've never put a name to [our] music. You play *yourself*."¹³⁷⁶ Traffic drummer Jim Capaldi called what he and his mates produced "Headless Horseman music"—meaning, presumably, that it did not have a face and was thus not readily identifiable.¹³⁷⁷ However, against Capaldi's label, Steve Winwood echoed Baker, saying, "You won't be able to put a name to what we'll be playing."¹³⁷⁸ Although the amount of hype attracted by psychedelic rock musicians varied widely during this era, the intent—at least initially—was that labels and categories were useless; how the musical bricolage sounded, and what it meant to those playing and listening to it, were the only considerations that mattered.¹³⁷⁹

¹³⁷⁵ The Jeff Beck Group, *Beck-Ola (Cosa Nostra)* (Epic, 1969).

¹³⁷⁶ Peter "Ginger" Baker, interview with Chris Welch, quoted in Thompson, *Cream*, p. 92.

¹³⁷⁷ Jim Capaldi, interview with Welch, in Steve Winwood with Chris Welch, *Steve Winwood: Roll With It* (New York: Perigee, 1990), p. 129.

¹³⁷⁸ Winwood, interview with Welch, in *ibid*, p. 95.

¹³⁷⁹ DeRogatis, *Kaleidoscope Eyes*, p. 131.

Augmentation: “Hard” Rock and Putting the Blues “on Steroids”

Amidst all of the jazz, folk, raga and music-hall influences at work in psychedelic rock music—not to mention all of the cribbed literary and artistic references—the casual observer might have been tempted to wonder what role, if any, was to be played by the blues that had set these bands on their path. The scrupulous orthodoxy with which the early British blues bands had approached the object of their reverence had largely fallen away, due largely to the superior efforts of white American bands like Paul Butterfield’s outfit. And as we have seen, the British were often quite adept at breaking down the blues into its component musical elements and tropes and integrating them with other musical styles. However, these developments did not mean an end to “covering” and appropriation—far from it. British bands like the Rolling Stones, Cream and Led Zeppelin, in addition to building on the blues to create rock, also “supercharged” the blues itself, making it sound louder, more raw and more violent than ever, and enhancing its tropic vocabulary in ways that would have been unimaginable even five years earlier.

Crucial to this “supercharging” of the blues was a second, smaller-scale blues renaissance that occurred in Britain beginning in mid-to-late 1967. Energized by the possibilities that the burgeoning musical dialogue between Britain’s “heavy” bands and American challengers such as Jimi Hendrix seemed to open up for psychedelic blues, a passel of bands—among them Led Zeppelin, the Jeff Beck Group, the Savoy Brown Blues Band, Ten Years After, Taste and Chicken Shack—emerged to seize those possibilities.¹³⁸⁰ Again John Mayall’s influence proved instrumental. Just as his outfit, the Bluesbreakers, had helped to launch the career of Eric Clapton in 1965, a year and a half

¹³⁸⁰ Bob Brunning, *Blues: The British Connection* (New York: Blandford Press, 1986), p. 116.

later it would provide a springboard for Clapton's replacement, Peter Green, and Mayall's rhythm section, drummer Mick Fleetwood and bass guitarist John McVie.¹³⁸¹ The trio formed Fleetwood Mac with slide guitarist and rock 'n' roll enthusiast Jeremy Spencer, and on the strength of its first two albums, the band immediately established a reputation as skillful interpreters of the tough Chicago-style blues sound.¹³⁸² This reputation was cemented in 1969, when, just as the Rolling Stones and the Yardbirds had done before them, Fleetwood Mac traveled to Chicago to record at Chess Studios with their heroes.¹³⁸³ The two compilations that resulted, *Blues Jam in Chicago, Volumes 1 and 2*, showcased the delicate balance that Fleetwood Mac (and, by extension, the British blues-rock tradition they represented) had struck between authenticity and creativity, an achievement noted with guarded respect by the Chess players who collaborated with them.¹³⁸⁴

The bands who came to prominence in the "second blues boom" confirmed for their predecessors—if such confirmation was required—that there was still musical hay to be made in exploring and experimenting with the "fire and dread" of Chicago blues.¹³⁸⁵ Furthermore, the dark malevolence that British enthusiasts thought they could

¹³⁸¹ "More Cream?," *Melody Maker* (July 15, 1967), p. 21.

¹³⁸² "Review: *Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac*," *Beat Instrumental* (March 1968), p. 18.

¹³⁸³ Mick Fleetwood, with Stephen Davis, *Fleetwood: My Adventures in Fleetwood Mac* (New York: W.W. Morrow, 1990), p. 102.

¹³⁸⁴ Fleetwood Mac, *Blues Jam in Chicago, Volume 1* (Blue Horizon, 1969), and *Blues Jam in Chicago, Volume 2* (Blue Horizon, 1970); Willie Dixon, with Don Snowden, *I Am the Blues: The Willie Dixon Story* (New York: Da Capo, 1989), p. 260; Mick Fleetwood, interview with Mike Figgis, in *Red, White and Blues*, dir. Figgis (2003).

¹³⁸⁵ Appleford, *It's Only Rock 'n' Roll*, p. 18.

hear in the blues from the outset now seemed strangely apropos in the atmosphere of tension and barely-contained rage that seemed to grow as the 1960s drew to a close.¹³⁸⁶ Much as the likes of Jagger, Clapton and Beck might have wished to remain apolitical, it was clear that, in light of what was happening in the streets and college campuses of the United States and Europe (if not exactly in Great Britain), the emotion conveyed by “heavier” psychedelic blues struck a responsive chord amongst audiences.¹³⁸⁷ “Fire and dread” might not have erupted amongst Britain’s young people in the same ways as they did in Paris, Prague, or Chicago, but they were there in London if one knew where to look—and listen.

This growing sense of violence and dread in society was paralleled by a seemingly precipitous relaxation in sexual mores, emblemized by the hippies’ celebration of “free love” and the ever-increasing availability of birth control.¹³⁸⁸ Taken together, these developments made for a much widened scope for young white male rock musicians to express themselves using two of the blues’ predominant tropes—violence and sex. This affected Anglo-American rock music on two formal levels—on the one hand, in cover versions of a band’s favorite blues and R&B numbers, and on the other, in original compositions that drew heavily on the blues lyrical idiom. Blues covers became louder, faster and longer, and in many cases, songs that started life as rather easy-going three-minute-long workouts on acoustic guitar and harmonica were transfigured into ten-minute-long epics, full of crunching guitar riffs and bombastic drumming.

¹³⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 19.

¹³⁸⁷ Appleford, *It’s Only Rock ‘n’ Roll*, p. 72.

¹³⁸⁸ Cate Haste, *Rules of Desire: Sex in Britain, World War I to the Present* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992), p. 201.

Eric Clapton's version of Robert Johnson's "Cross Road Blues" (renamed simply "Crossroads"), for instance, replaces Johnson's acoustic strumming with a guitar riff that more resembles a cross-cut saw, and adds one of Clapton's trademark blistering solos into the song's "middle eight" (the section, usually lasting eight bars, in which the verse-chorus-verse structure pauses to feature instrumental solos).¹³⁸⁹ Where Johnson's version was marked by a sort of other-worldly eeriness, Clapton's is muscular, urgent and earthbound.¹³⁹⁰ Consider, as well, two of Led Zeppelin's better-known blues homages, "When the Levee Breaks" and "In My Time of Dying."¹³⁹¹ Both of the originals (the former by Memphis Minnie, the latter by "Blind Willie" Johnson) were relatively short in length, and featured pleasant, almost jaunty vocals over an acoustic guitar and little, if any, additional accompaniment.¹³⁹² Led Zeppelin's versions, on the other hand, take this comparatively light fare and turn it into monolithic slices of blues-rock bombast—"In My

¹³⁸⁹ Cream, "Crossroads," *Wheels of Fire* (Polydor, 1968); Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), p. 57.

¹³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹³⁹¹ Led Zeppelin, "When the Levee Breaks," *Untitled (commonly titled "ZOSO" or "IV")* (hereafter referred to as *ZOSO*) (Atlantic, 1971); "In My Time of Dying," *Physical Graffiti*.

¹³⁹² Johnson's version is actually entitled "Jesus Make Up My Dying Bed." His version, along with Memphis Minnie's (Lizzie Douglas), "When the Levee Breaks," can be found on the recent compilation disc, *The Early Blues Roots of Led Zeppelin* (Catfish, 2000). Memphis Minnie is unique in that she is the only blueswoman to have a song covered by a British blues-rock band during this period.

Time of Dying,” for one, clocks in at an astounding eleven-plus minutes!—that call into question the validity of the term “cover version.”¹³⁹³

As the members of the Anglo-American rock network gained in confidence and aptitude, they began to compose their own blues, as well as rock songs that owed a great deal to the blues idiom. These songs often pushed the envelope with respect to the usage of blues idioms, or ran with an image or a progression of images much further than the original blues had. Nowhere is this more evident than in blues-rock’s expressions regarding sex and sexuality. The major difference to be found in this realm is one of explicitness. British blues musicians strutted, bragged, and seduced with an alacrity that would probably have amazed their creative forebears, and the claims that they made regarding their prowess in the bedroom were often light-years removed from those of a Waters or a Wolf. On one level, this was a function of the license afforded to the British musician by his social situation. As a middle-class young white male, in a liberal society, operating in a chronological window between, on the one hand, the legalization of birth control and loosening of sexual mores, and, on the other, the ascendancy of feminism and the emergence of AIDS, he enjoyed an astonishingly wide capacity for sexual profligacy.¹³⁹⁴ Not most, but *any* woman, any time, was considered fair game. Thus, when singing about their past and future sexual conquests, the British rock musician had tremendous leeway, *vis-à-vis* his African-American mentors. Robert Johnson would have had to worry about censorship and the lynch mob; what was to stop Robert Plant or Mick Jagger from waxing lyrical about lemons and roosters and groupies?

¹³⁹³ Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of Blues Style to the United Kingdom* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), p. 242.

¹³⁹⁴ Haste, *Rules of Desire*, p. 171.

The hard rock musicians who accomplished these feats of increased lyrical vulgarity did so, generally speaking, from within the blues idiom, not by inventing new metaphors to augment or supplant it. The penis was still a “crawling king snake,” a wasp’s “stinger,” and a “little red rooster;” the vagina was still a “pot of honey” or a slice of “custard pie.” Rather than coming up with new nicknames for genitalia, British musicians just made alterations to the existing ones. Thus, in “Black Dog,” Led Zeppelin takes up Waters’ “honey bee” metaphor and embellishes it. Plant entreats his quarry, “when you walk that way/watch your honey drip, can’t keep away” and “when you shake that thing/gonna make you burn, gonna make you sting”—essentially taking Waters’ metaphors and constructing longer lines of dialogue around them.¹³⁹⁵ In fact, Plant was apparently so enamored of this metaphor that he borrowed it when naming his first post-Led Zeppelin band, The Honeydrippers.¹³⁹⁶

Vying with Led Zeppelin for the dubious honor of the most outlandish sexual boasting ever committed to vinyl were—perhaps not surprisingly in light of their salacious off-stage exploits—the Rolling Stones. In “Let’s Spend the Night Together,” Mick Jagger, momentarily borrowing the persona of the Hoochie-Coochie Man, declares that his lust is so strong that “he can’t disguise it”—a poorly-veiled reference to a sizable erection inside his trousers—and asserts that “he will satisfy [his lover’s] every need.”¹³⁹⁷ Elsewhere, Jagger improves upon Willie Dixon’s phallic bravado—instead of saying that he *has* a “little red rooster,” prowling around the barnyard, Jagger claims to *be* that “little

¹³⁹⁵ Led Zeppelin, “Black Dog,” *ZOSO*.

¹³⁹⁶ Davis, *Hammer of the Gods*, p. 307.

¹³⁹⁷ The Rolling Stones, “Let’s Spend the Night Together,” *Between the Buttons* (Decca, 1967).

red rooster.”¹³⁹⁸ There is perhaps no greater way to emphasize the size of one’s endowment, and the totality of one’s lust, than to express oneself *as* one’s penis. Finally, in an astoundingly vulgar piece of braggadocio, “Parachute Woman” finds Jagger proclaiming that if his lover “land[s] on me tonight...I’ll break big in New Orleans, and I’ll overspill in Caroline...make my blow in Dallas and get hot again in half the time.”¹³⁹⁹ With “Caroline” being a reference to the American states of North or South Carolina (precisely which is unclear), and not to a woman, it would seem that here Jagger actually has outdone the Hoochie-Coochie Man, who, after all, never claimed to be able to ejaculate across the entire Deep South.

The British practitioners of what was increasingly becoming known as “hard” or “heavy” rock not only embellished the Herculean sexual exploits of the bluesmen, they also widened the scope for potential sexual partners considerably. For one, it was a widening with respect to age. As discussed earlier, the British took up the blues’ interest in young women and teenage girls and ran with it, in song—for example, the Rolling Stones’ “Stray Cat Blues” and Led Zeppelin’s “Sick Again”—and, often enough, in real life.¹⁴⁰⁰ However, even older women were also portrayed as falling under the spell of the virile young rock god. Rod Stewart is visibly repulsed by the heavily-made-up, visibly-past-her-prime “old Jezebel” who comes onto him in the Faces’ joyously misogynistic “Stay With Me,” as is Jagger by the middle-aged New York divorcée he meets in “Honky

¹³⁹⁸ The Rolling Stones, “Little Red Rooster,” *The Rolling Stones: England’s Newest Hitmakers* (Decca, 1964).

¹³⁹⁹ The Rolling Stones, “Parachute Woman,” *Beggars Banquet* (Decca, 1968).

¹⁴⁰⁰ The Rolling Stones, “Stray Cat Blues,” *Beggars Banquet*; Led Zeppelin, “Sick Again,” *Physical Graffiti*.

Tonk Women” (though both take their respective admirers home at the end of the night anyway).¹⁴⁰¹

The British rock musicians’ achievement was also to widen the scope with respect to race, as they frequently flaunted their ability to seduce women of all races and then boast about it afterwards. These sexual encounters were sites for the demonstration of masculine knowledge and, thus, power, and for the negotiation of masculine identity. Thus, the ability to have intimate sexual knowledge of many different kinds of women was, for the British rock musician, reassurance of his continued white male dominance and status as a connoisseur. Again, the cultural position of the Britisher as “shopper” comes to the fore. Through their music (and increasingly through their real-life encounters with groupies and other women) British musicians sampled the sexual charms of the women in the places to which they traveled, with the same facility as they sampled the musical styles of foreign cultures. This led to a kind of sexual “cataloguing” in which the British rock connoisseur listed, labelled and typified his conquests on the basis of race and nationality.

For instance, in “Three-Button Hand-Me-Down” (a song which is actually about a secondhand dress suit), Stewart ticks his American “specimens” off his fingers—“there was a filly from Boston, a barmaid from Houston, not forgettin’ the one in Detroit.”¹⁴⁰² Then there was the Rolling Stones’ infamous “Some Girls,” where Jagger, sounding for all the world like a museum curator, details the sexual and personal proclivities of, among

¹⁴⁰¹ The Faces, “Stay With Me,” *A Nod is as Good as a Wink... To a Blind Horse* (Warner Bros., 1971); The Rolling Stones, “Honky Tonk Women” (single – Decca, 1968).

¹⁴⁰² The Faces, “Three-Button Hand-Me-Down,” *First Step* (Warner Bros., 1970).

others, American, Italian, French, English, Chinese and black girls.¹⁴⁰³ Simultaneously imbibing and helping to reify racial and national stereotypes, Jagger announces that “American girls want everything in the world” and that “black girls just want to get fucked all night.”¹⁴⁰⁴ The latter, which drew the ire of African-American political leader Jesse Jackson, is interesting if only because it is one of the rare times in which Jagger (or any of the British blues network, for that matter) admits that he might not be able to satisfy a woman.¹⁴⁰⁵

The tendency to categorize exotic sexual exploits is present elsewhere in British rock as well. With a kind of racial insensitivity that is embarrassing to read nowadays, Stewart sang (in “Every Picture Tells a Story”) the praises of “Shanghai Lil,” “the slit-eyed lady” who ministered to his needs on a ferry boat sailing out of Peking harbor.¹⁴⁰⁶ Plant at once celebrated and lamented his “brown-skinned woman” (who, by the way, was only sixteen) in “Travelling Riverside Blues” and “Hats Off to (Roy) Harper.”¹⁴⁰⁷ Even the Band, though stylistically opposed to much of the excess of psychedelic music, were not above contributing to this discourse with “Jemima Surrender,” a piece of barroom raunchiness that utilizes the familiar image of Aunt Jemima to make a case for

¹⁴⁰³ The Rolling Stones, “Some Girls,” *Some Girls* (Rolling Stones Records, 1978).

¹⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰⁵ James Maycock, “White Men Sing the Blues,” *The Independent* (London), June 4, 1999, p. 2. The lyric in question is “I just don’t have that much jam.”

¹⁴⁰⁶ Rod Stewart, “Every Picture Tells a Story,” *Every Picture Tells a Story* (Mercury, 1971).

¹⁴⁰⁷ Led Zeppelin, “Travelling Riverside Blues,” *BBC Sessions* (Atlantic, 1997); “Hats Off to (Roy) Harper,” *Led Zeppelin III* (Atlantic, 1970).

the pleasures of interracial sex by equating it with sticky-sweet maple syrup.¹⁴⁰⁸ Finally, in a similar vein, there is the Rolling Stones' "Brown Sugar," which could as easily be about heroin as about New Orleans prostitutes, were it not for the mention of "scarred old slavers" who "whip the women just around midnight," which Jagger notes with barely-concealed glee.¹⁴⁰⁹

The Rolling Stones' use of the phrase "brown sugar" points up an important aspect of the ways in which British rock musicians were furthering the lyrical idioms they had appropriated from their mentors. Prior to the Stones' ode to sex and slavery (which appeared on the aptly-titled album *Sticky Fingers*), "sugar" had been a common blues metaphor referring to women, the vagina and the sexual act itself, for decades. Perhaps the most notable instance of this metaphor in the blues canon is "Sugar Mama" (recorded by, among others, John Lee Hooker and Sonny Boy Williamson II), in which the protagonist demands his lover's "sugar" "three times a day."¹⁴¹⁰ In these blues, it is implicit that the "sugar" is "brown" (indicating an African-American woman), since "white" sugar was off-limits to the African-American man.¹⁴¹¹ By differentiating between "brown" and "white" sugar (perhaps for the first time), the Rolling Stones put their distinctive exclamation mark on the increased sexual power and knowledge they enjoyed as white bluesmen with socially-sanctioned access to both varieties of "sugar."

¹⁴⁰⁸ The Band, "Jemima Surrender," *The Band* (Capitol, 1969).

¹⁴⁰⁹ The Rolling Stones, "Brown Sugar," *Sticky Fingers* (Rolling Stones Records, 1971).

¹⁴¹⁰ John Lee Hooker, "Sugar Mama," *Chess Blues Classics, Volume 1: 1947-1965* (MCA/Chess, 1997).

¹⁴¹¹ Serving to confirm this analysis is the fact that the protagonist also euphemizes his woman's sex as his "coffee" and his "tea;" both beverages that, like the African-American woman, exist in varying shades of brown.

The resulting expansion and extension of the blues' tropic vocabulary inspired the (initially) derogatory label "cock rock," so named because of its celebration of male sexual prowess and capacity, and its chauvinistic commodification of women.¹⁴¹² Not a little paradoxically, in so doing, "cock rock" also objectified the male body. As "cock rock's" male sex object was generally the lead singer—*e.g.*, Jagger, Plant, Roger Daltrey, Rod Stewart—it helped to spawn a cult to place alongside—and in tension with—that of the "guitar god."¹⁴¹³ Both masculine archetypes were portrayed as powerful, dynamic and knowledgeable characters, who had achieved mastery over their respective instruments as well as the female body. And yet the masculine lead singer-as-sex-object often bore strikingly feminine (or at least effeminate) characteristics that helped to place him in productive tension with the lead guitarist-as-virtuoso.¹⁴¹⁴

Lead singer and lead guitarist often occupied differing sides of the stereotypical divide between traditionally "masculine" and "feminine" characteristics. Befitting his image as the calm, rational male, the lead guitarist was often undemonstrative and immobile, exuding a quiet confidence as he clearly established his instrumental mastery. Eric Clapton, for one, often played with his back to the audience, emphasizing his studied

¹⁴¹² Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, "Rock and Sexuality," in Frith and Andrew Goodwin, eds., *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 272-292.

¹⁴¹³ Cintra Wilson, "Of Cock Rock Kings and Other Dinosaurs," in William McKeen, ed., *Rock and Roll Is Here to Stay: An Anthology* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), p. 577.

¹⁴¹⁴ Steve Waksman, *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 245.

lack of theatricality.¹⁴¹⁵ The lead singer, on the other hand, often exhibited emotional, dramatic tendencies more closely associated with the female stereotype. He strutted, pranced and leaped about the stage, calling attention to himself and his physicality. Jagger emphasized the feminine showmanship inherent in being a lead singer-as-sex-object by saying, “I’m just the same as a stripper. I go out there and do the same thing: bumps and grinds to music, and take off lots of my clothes. I mean, there’s not really a lot of difference between stripping and being a rock singer.”¹⁴¹⁶

The emotive “hard” rock vocal style, which often exaggerated the bluesman’s rough shout into a high-pitched countertenor scream, also bore traces of the feminine. Moreover, as Susan Fast and Robert Walser have pointed out, the “feminine” lead singer and the “masculine” lead guitarist often engaged in an implicitly sexual bonding on-stage.¹⁴¹⁷ The most famous such duo was, of course, Page and Plant. Plant would often sing “at” Page, even leaning in towards the guitarist as he did so. In songs like “Dazed and Confused,” Page would “lead” Plant in a musical call-and-response, that “would begin with Page would playing a pitch, which Plant would imitate, this being repeated at increasingly higher intervals, forcing Plant to the uppermost reaches of his range.”¹⁴¹⁸

¹⁴¹⁵ There were exceptions, of course: Pete Townshend, for one, was an incredibly athletic guitarist who flailed his right hand in giant windmills as he hammered out his trademark “power chords,” and frequently matched Daltrey leap for on-stage leap.

¹⁴¹⁶ Mick Jagger, interview in *My Generation*, dir. Obie Benz, in *The History of Rock ‘n’ Roll*.

¹⁴¹⁷ Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy*, pp. 41-47; Robert Walser, *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), p. 108.

¹⁴¹⁸ Led Zeppelin, “Dazed and Confused,” *Led Zeppelin I*; Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy*, p. 45.

This sort of exchange, which Fast has likened to the sex act in its buildup and eventual climax, inscribed Page as the dominant, masculine provider and Plant as the submissive, feminine receiver.¹⁴¹⁹ Thus conceived, the productive tension between masculine and feminine was the motor that propelled rock music's fruitful navigation of both sexual extremes. As a blueprint for an interpersonal musical dynamic, it informed such diverse musical duos as Freddie Mercury and Brian May of Queen, David Bowie and Mick Ronson, and Bono and the Edge of U2, among others.¹⁴²⁰

Interestingly, though, “cock rock’s” lead singers and lead guitarists performed this *pas de deux* without ceding their essential aggressive heterosexuality. Amongst fans, no one ever questioned their manhood, no matter how long their hair or how much they “camped it up” on-stage—although amongst fellow musicians, this was less guaranteed. Pete Townshend, for instance, memorably told an *Zigzag* magazine’s Pete Frame in 1972 that he felt Rod Stewart was a “poove” (a homosexual) because of his outrageous spiked-up hairdo and costume.¹⁴²¹ Though it is difficult to gauge the sort of impact that a Robert Plant or a Mick Jagger had on a homosexual male audience and record-buying demographic, it is clear that “cock rock” artists were delineated and marketed as heterosexual. Judging both by the number of groupies that found their way to lead singers’ hotel suites, and by the responses given by women who were decidedly *not* groupies to opinion polls conducted in recent years by scholars like Fast, it is equally

¹⁴¹⁹ Ibid, p. 45.

¹⁴²⁰ Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), p. 141; Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy*, p. 45.

¹⁴²¹ Pete Townshend, interview with Pete Frame, in Frame, “Chatting with Pete Townshend,” *Zigzag* (March 1972), p. 24.

clear that these men were also received that way, at least by the demographic that mattered most to rock musicians—young heterosexual women.¹⁴²²

The success of these increasingly “heavy” rock bands led to a spate of followers on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition to the “second wave” British blues boom acts already mentioned, bands eager to exploit the widening possibilities of the “supercharged” psychedelic blues in the land of the idiom’s birth included the Doors, the Vanilla Fudge, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Aerosmith and Foghat. Of course, it would be simplistic and misleading just to lump all of these bands together into a grouping called “psychedelic blues inheritors,” and in terms of deep musical analysis, the Chicago-transplanted swamp blues of Creedence Clearwater Revival bears very little resemblance to the psychedelic pseudo-poetics of the Doors. For the purposes of this study, however, all of the aforementioned bands share the crucial fact that all of them followed the formula laid down by the members of the trans-Atlantic blues-rock network, thus furthering the creative objectives the latter had set for themselves and planting the seeds for the growth of heavy metal. In the words of guitarist/vocalist Paul Stanley, whose group KISS did much in the 1970s to build on the example set by these “heavy” bands, the likes of Led Zeppelin “[took] the blues and [pumped] it up on steroids.”¹⁴²³ This is a marvelously apt statement, capturing perfectly the sense of sonic enhancement that was at the heart of the British blues network’s achievement. Perhaps, however, it is just as fitting to say that these bands took the blues and *used it as* a steroid, injecting themselves with its energy to give substance to their own collective masculinity.

¹⁴²² Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy*, pp. 177-182.

¹⁴²³ Paul Stanley, interview in *The ‘70s: Have a Nice Decade*, dir. Bill Richmond.

Revitalization: Going Back to Rock's "Other" Sources

The blues, of course, was not the only primal source of rock music. In addition to country-and-western, "first wave" rock 'n' roll—of the sort produced by Elvis Presley and Chuck Berry—also enjoyed renewed importance in British rock music during this period. At first blush, it might seem, since early rock 'n' roll and British rock were both equally the product of the mid-1950s fusion of country-and-western and the blues, that any distinction between the two (save to say that they were earlier and later articulations of the same broader style) would be artificial. However, it becomes readily apparent, from examining the culture of the late 1950s and early 1960s, that rock 'n' roll as a prominent form of popular music did largely "die," just as singer Don McLean famously sang, in the 1950s.¹⁴²⁴ It also is apparent that, as far as the birth and youthful beginnings of British blues and rock bands is concerned, rock 'n' roll was a distinct, somewhat passé style that served as just as powerful (yet just as outmoded) an influence as blues or country-and-western.

However, unlike the blues, rock 'n' roll's continued importance to the British bands as a fund of musical and tropic ideas waned as time went on. The Beatles might have started off wanting to play like Buddy Holly (even naming their band in what Jim Miller calls "a punning homage" to Holly's band, the Crickets), and Keith Richards might have felt a similar emulative urge regarding Berry, but by 1966 it seemed that the British bands had outgrown their youthful love of early rock 'n' roll.¹⁴²⁵ Whether or not

¹⁴²⁴ Don McLean, "American Pie," *American Pie* (BGO, 1971).

¹⁴²⁵ Jim Miller, *Flowers in the Dustbin: The Rise of Rock and Roll, 1947-1977* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), p. 182. A notable exception was the original Fleetwood Mac, in which slide guitarist Jeremy Spencer gave spot-on impersonations of

that was true, in point of fact, it changed as the 1960s wore on. Anglo-American bands began to re-discover the simple raucous energy of rock ‘n’ roll and began actively to re-infuse their music with it. As is becoming rather typical, much of the credit must be accorded to the influence of the Band, who, as the Hawks, had started off playing straightforward rock ‘n’ roll and, even when they were playing in support of Bob Dylan’s surrealist imagery, had never really stopped.¹⁴²⁶ In the Band, we can see the dual influence of proximity and distance in the sustenance and restoration of a musical style that was thought passé. In a manner quite similar to the way in which rock ‘n’ roll and the blues found their way to Britain and were incubated there during a time when they were underappreciated in America, now rock ‘n’ roll was resurrected again, this time by a mostly-Canadian band in whose Toronto stomping grounds the music was still considered fresh and dangerous.

In its tropic vocabulary, rock ‘n’ roll, too, was quite similar to the blues. All the major themes were present in both—the youthful hedonism, cut with frustration; the young love (or at least lust); the urge to attain some sort of dominance, if only in the bedroom; and the almost otherworldly concern with heaven and hell.¹⁴²⁷ And since, as demonstrated above, Anglo-American rock bands were having no trouble expressing

Elvis Presley and Carl Perkins during the band’s sets. In time, Spencer would be given his own “set-within-a-set” to perform these homages, going so far as to dress up in gold lamé suits, *à la* Presley, circa 1960.

¹⁴²⁶ Levon Helm, with Stephen Davis, *This Wheel’s On Fire: The Story of Levon Helm and the Band* (New York: W.W. Morrow, 1993), p. 129.

¹⁴²⁷ For the concern with heaven and hell, see, for example, an exchange between Jerry Lee Lewis and Sun Records founder Sam Phillips, quoted in Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock ‘n’ Roll Music* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), pp. 290-93.

themselves using those tropes, rock 'n' roll's restored influence on late 1960s rock would be both musical and attitudinal. Musically, it was an attempt to "get back to basics," to try and strip away the overblown complexities of psychedelic blues-rock and return to making music with the original three chords and thumping backbeat that had been the extent of their skills when they first started out. Thus, rock 'n' roll's imperative was closely related to, and worked towards the same purposes as, rock music's attempt to appropriate the acoustic subtlety of country. Paradoxically, a similar crusade was being launched at roughly the same time, in the bars and clubs of New York, Detroit, Los Angeles and London, by the younger men (and sometimes women) who would eventually make up the vanguard of punk rock. They, too, felt disdain toward what they felt rock music had become, and they, too, sought the simplicity and grit of rock 'n' roll as a necessary corrective.¹⁴²⁸

Rock 'n' roll served an emotional purpose for those revisiting it as well. To fully understand this purpose, one must look at the simple facts of being a member of the Anglo-American rock network in or around 1970. The average rock star might have been playing in public for upwards of ten years by then, in a variety of different bands; if he were a member of the Beatles or the Rolling Stones, he might have been a member of the same band, gigging and touring endlessly with the same three or four other people, the entire time. Many of the bands who made up the British Invasion had attempted one or two tours of Britain, the United States and possibly Europe; meanwhile, by 1972, the Rolling Stones had toured America five times, and Led Zeppelin had done so six times in

¹⁴²⁸ David Johansen, quoted in "Legs" McNeil and Gillian McCain, eds., *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. 116.

eighteen months!¹⁴²⁹ Journalist Ellen Sander chronicled the mind-numbing effects of such a schedule on the members of that band, and if Led Zeppelin's experience was unusual, it was not *that* unusual compared to those of other bands.¹⁴³⁰ In addition, many rock stars, whether seeking to emulate what they thought was the lifestyle of their blues idols, or simply to get through the demands of touring, drank heavily and took massive amounts of hard drugs. Add these experiences to a more general social malaise that hit the hippies (and the young musicians who made music to entertain them) as a result of the dense constellation of events that seemed to have brought about "the end of the '60s," and the fact of the matter is: the members of the Anglo-American rock network were *tired*.¹⁴³¹ At the very least, they were jaded.

Thus, rock 'n' roll was eagerly seized upon as a source of renewal by artists who felt like they had reached a creative dead-end, and a refreshing break from the complexities of psychedelia and the pressures of the spotlight. This, among other considerations, was what drew Clapton to Delaney and Bonnie Bramlett; their simple, sober approach to the blues, country-and-western and rock 'n' roll reminded Clapton of what he had wanted to accomplish in the aftermath of Cream—"just good funky

¹⁴²⁹ Keith Shadwick, *Led Zeppelin: The Story of a Band and Their Music, 1968-1980* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2005), p. 126.

¹⁴³⁰ Ellen Sander, "Inside the Cages of the Zoo," reprinted in William McKeen, ed., *Rock and Roll is Here to Stay* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), pp. 575-83.

¹⁴³¹ A.E. Hotchner, *Blown Away: The Rolling Stones and the Death of the Sixties* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 87.

songs”—but had failed to, given the massive hype of the “supergroup” Blind Faith.¹⁴³² It was also what led him to accept the invitation of his close acquaintance, John Lennon, to perform at the Toronto Rock ‘n’ Roll Revival Festival on September 13, 1969, with Lennon’s own “supergroup,” the Plastic Ono Band.¹⁴³³ The group, featuring former Manfred Mann bass guitarist (and graphic designer) Klaus Voormann and future Yes drummer Alan White, along, of course, with Lennon and Yoko Ono, performed three old rock ‘n’ roll chestnuts, including the hardy perennial “Blue Suede Shoes.”¹⁴³⁴

Lennon’s resort to his old rock ‘n’ roll favorites continued past the acrimonious dissolution of the Beatles in 1970. Actually, it had filtered into some of his last work with his old bandmates; the Beatles’ song “Come Together” borrowed the rhythm and portions of the guitar line from Chuck Berry’s 1956 hit “You Can’t Catch Me,” and lifted an entire lyrical phrase (“Here come old flat-top”), to boot.¹⁴³⁵ When Lennon admitted these debts in a 1972 interview, he was promptly sued for copyright infringement by Morris Levy, the chief executive of Roulette Records, who owned the rights to the Berry song. In an out-of-court settlement, Levy agreed to drop the charges and not to seek compensatory damages, *per se*, provided that Lennon recorded at least three songs from Levy’s publishing catalog for release on his (Lennon’s) next solo album. Lennon realized that

¹⁴³² Delaney Bramlett also encouraged Clapton to trust in his own singing abilities, and thereafter, with a few exceptions, Clapton has always sang lead vocals on his albums. Clapton, *Clapton*, p. 117.

¹⁴³³ Christopher Hjort, *Strange Brew: Eric Clapton and the British Blues Boom, 1965-1970* (London: Jawbone, 2007), p. 259.

¹⁴³⁴ The Plastic Ono Band, *Live Peace in Toronto* (Apple/EMI, 1969).

¹⁴³⁵ The Beatles, “Come Together,” *Abbey Road* (EMI, 1969); Chuck Berry, “You Can’t Catch Me” (single – Chess, 1956).

there were a lot of his favorite songs in that catalog, and decided that to recharge his creative batteries, so to speak, he would devote an entire album to paying homage to the likes of Berry, Gene Vincent and Little Richard. This effort, though delayed by two years, eventually was released as *John Lennon: Rock 'n' Roll*, in 1975.¹⁴³⁶

For Lennon, this musical reorientation was accompanied by a sartorial makeover as well. At the 1969 Toronto Rock 'n' Roll Revival Festival, Lennon and Ono were still wearing the psychedelic finery that he referred to in song as “look[ing] like two gurus in drag.”¹⁴³⁷ But for the *Rock 'n' Roll* album, Lennon revisited not only his old songbook, but his old wardrobe as well. The album's cover photo shows him wearing a leather jacket and “drainpipe” trousers, his hair slicked back with Brylcreem, leaning indolently against a brick wall.¹⁴³⁸ In so doing, the erstwhile Beatle reclaimed the “rocker” image that he had sported during the Beatles' days in Hamburg, and which he and the other Beatles had had to give up in 1963 at the behest of manager Brian Epstein in favor of respectable dress suits and “mop top” haircuts.¹⁴³⁹ Though thirty-four years old at the time of the album's release, Lennon, musically as well as visually, was making the case that he had re-discovered the energy and bravado of his twenty-one-year-old self.

Rock 'n' roll also was used as a bonding element, as what had once been a loose yet cohesive interpersonal network started (perhaps inevitably) to fray. Bands split up, as they had done since the beginning of the British Invasion—though in the latter stages

¹⁴³⁶ John Lennon, *John Lennon: Rock 'n' Roll* (Apple/EMI, 1975).

¹⁴³⁷ The Beatles, “The Ballad of John and Yoko” (single – EMI, 1969).

¹⁴³⁸ Cover photo, Lennon, *Rock 'n' Roll*.

¹⁴³⁹ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, p. 56.

with increasing amounts of acrimony amongst the members—and friendships and working relationships began to be put asunder. For the members of these bands, rock ‘n’ roll became one of the last areas of common ground. All had grown up with this music, and been moved by it at a formative stage. Thus, as jaded rock stars, it was something they could still relate to; in some cases, it was about all they could agree on playing. This was the case with the Jeff Beck Group. Having been formed in late 1967 and performed only fitfully since then, the group could not justly claim to be overworked and fatigued, as could Clapton or Lennon. However, the group was constantly bickering, in public and in private.¹⁴⁴⁰ The presence of two Elvis Presley “covers” (“All Shook Up” and “Jailhouse Rock”) on the group’s second album, *Beck-Ola*, can be understood as exercises in providing some musical stability to a band roiled by internal chaos.¹⁴⁴¹

A similar impulse can be seen on the Band’s 1973 album, *Moondog Matinee*.¹⁴⁴² By 1972 the Band’s dynamic was similar to that of many of their fellows on the Anglo-American rock scene. Whereas previously, all five members had been extremely close, and this intimacy had informed their music (especially at the level of the collaborative songwriting), now they had grown apart, with Robbie Robertson doing much of the writing and the others merely playing along.¹⁴⁴³ Under pressure to fulfill the terms of their recording contract with Capitol, the Band essentially went into a holding pattern,

¹⁴⁴⁰ Dave Thompson, *Truth!: Rod Stewart, Ron Wood and the Jeff Beck Group* (London: Cherry Red, 2006), p. 233.

¹⁴⁴¹ The Jeff Beck Group, “All Shook Up” and “Jailhouse Rock,” *Beck-Ola (Cosa Nostra)* (Epic, 1969).

¹⁴⁴² The Band, *Moondog Matinee* (Capitol, 1973).

¹⁴⁴³ Helm, with Davis, *This Wheel’s On Fire*, pp. 210-11.

recycling old favorites in an attempt to reconnect to each other and to regain the sense of excitement with which they had started their careers.¹⁴⁴⁴ The result was an album entirely of covers, mostly of 1950s rock ‘n’ roll, with some soul thrown in for good measure.¹⁴⁴⁵ Since they were among those who repopularized rock ‘n’ roll with their first two albums, and *Moondog* was only their fifth album, recorded three years later, it is not quite accurate to say the Band “returned” to rock ‘n’ roll after wanderings further afield. However, the Band’s best music had been original compositions that blended and re-interpreted rock ‘n’ roll, country-and-western and the blues.¹⁴⁴⁶ An album of covers was on one level a contradiction of what the Anglo-American rock network had been attempting to do for the previous seven years, but as was the case with Eric Clapton and John Lennon, this is where many of these artists found themselves in the middle of the 1970s.

The availability of rock ‘n’ roll as a musical “safe haven” and a way to “get back to basics” would persist throughout the decade. By 1976, after seven years of dominating the music scene with their “supercharged” blues and admixture of Celtic, Indian, country-and-western and Middle Eastern music, Led Zeppelin was mentally and physically exhausted, in large part due to the injuries sustained by Plant in a 1975 automobile accident, the death of his five-year-old son from a viral infection in 1977, and Page’s

¹⁴⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 235.

¹⁴⁴⁵ E.g., Elvis Presley’s “Mystery Train,” Chuck Berry’s “The Promised Land” and Sam Cooke’s “A Change is Gonna Come.” *Moondog Matinee* even featured a version of Anton Karas’ instrumental “The *Third Man* Theme”—which is decidedly *not* rock ‘n’ roll—by Garth Hudson.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 238.

worsening addiction to heroin and alcohol.¹⁴⁴⁷ Perhaps inevitably, a retreat to rock ‘n’ roll’s simplicity and energy suffused the band’s final two studio albums. *Presence* (1977) featured the Elvis Presley send-up “Candy Store Rock,” as well as “Royal Orleans,” which combined a wryly humorous tale of a man who unknowingly takes home a New Orleans “drag queen,” with a distorted rock ‘n’ roll riff and drum beat.¹⁴⁴⁸

In Through the Out Door (1979), the group’s widely-touted “comeback” album, was if anything even more given to rock ‘n’ roll nostalgia, using it to prop themselves up on such cuts as “South Bound Saurez” and “Hot Dog,” the latter of which tells of an unfaithful teenage girl who leaves the protagonist via the Greyhound bus from some depot in the heart of Texas.¹⁴⁴⁹ For Led Zeppelin, which would dissolve a year after the album’s release due to drummer John Bonham’s alcohol-related death, things really had come full circle. Jimmy Page had first been inspired to play the guitar after hearing the “raw energy” of musicians like Scotty Moore and James Burton—Elvis Presley and Ricky Nelson’s guitarists, respectively—and now his band was trying to feed off that energy again just to survive.¹⁴⁵⁰

¹⁴⁴⁷ “The Song Remains the Same – But Does It?,” *New Musical Express* (September 24, 1977), reprinted in Robert Godwin, ed., *Led Zeppelin: The Press Reports* (London: CG Publishing, 1997), p. 407.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Led Zeppelin, “Candy Store Rock” and “Royal Orleans,” *Presence* (Swan Song, 1977).

¹⁴⁴⁹ Led Zeppelin, “South Bound Saurez” and “Hot Dog,” *In Through the Out Door* (Swan Song, 1979).

¹⁴⁵⁰ Jimmy Page, interview in *Guitar Heroes*, dir. Marc J. Sachnoff, in *The History of Rock ‘n’ Roll*.

Conclusions

As many of the biggest names in rock music began to base their musical direction on sounds and influences that had been popular fifteen to twenty years prior, one might very well have been forgiven for wondering if their heroes had quite simply run out of ideas. By 1973, for some artists more than others, a sense of malaise and creative calcification had begun to set in. The resort to the “first wave” rock ‘n’ roll that had inspired them in the first place was an attempt to reverse both, and in the process to reinvigorate their music. However, although it undoubtedly resulted in some noticeably good (and demonstrably popular) recordings, it could not stop the Anglo-American rock network from calcifying—which does not mean that they faded from the headlines or the Billboard charts. After 1973, however, the bands who impelled popular music’s development belonged, by and large, to a younger generation. However, they did so owing a massive discursive debt (unacknowledged though it may have been) to those who had come before.

By about 1970, the Anglo-American rock network had laid the groundwork for much of what, in musical terms, would follow. The formula they created—of eclectic borrowing and bricolage, of augmentation and expansion of the blues’ tropic vocabulary, and of revisiting the primal sources of rock ‘n’ roll for fresh inspiration—would not only define the rest of those bands’ careers, but would serve as the framework in which future bands would operate. This was true not just of the ever-fragmenting music of the 1970s, but over the next three decades as well. Successful acts, whether defined and marketed as “glam” rock, “progressive” rock, heavy metal, and even punk rock, would work according to the terms set down by the British (and, later, Anglo-American) rock

network, whether emulating them, tinkering with them, or downright subverting them. However, even with subversion, the Anglo-American rock network's example still informed the discourse. This is a phenomenon that has been understood and articulated in useful ways by film scholars for decades. After the solidification of a genre—the western film, to take one example of many—latter-day filmmakers might attempt either to “spoof” (that is, to poke fun at) or to reconceptualize the genre (think of Mel Brooks' various films for the former, and Sergio Leone's “spaghetti westerns” for the latter).¹⁴⁵¹ However, even the most radical “spoofs” are still beholden to the genre's formulae, tropes and rules, if only to understand what is being spoofed. The same concept is applicable in understanding the musical groundwork laid down by the blues-based bands of the late 1960s.

The example that they set was a powerful one indeed. During this extraordinary period of creativity and innovation, dated roughly between 1966 and 1970, the Anglo-American rock network, having internalized the lessons, themes and sounds of their beloved blues, became creatively strong enough to make their own lasting statements. It was as a result of this combination of close study and creative confidence that these bands made their most powerful contributions to popular music in songs that were certainly not blues in the traditional twelve-bar sense, but were fueled by the blues' despair, pain and carnality. A case in point—and, admittedly, I am not the first to make it—is Eric Clapton's masterpiece, “Layla,” which he recorded in 1970 with Derek and

¹⁴⁵¹ Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking and the Studio System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), p. 4. See, for example, *Blazing Saddles*, dir. Mel Brooks (1974); *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, dir. Sergio Leone (1966).

the Dominoes.¹⁴⁵² The seven-minute slice of despair was inspired by the guitarist's unrequited love for Pattie Boyd, the wife of his best friend, Beatles guitarist George Harrison.¹⁴⁵³ It features a typical grinding electric blues riff from Clapton and a haunting contribution on slide guitar from Duane Allman (of the Allman Brothers Band, and Clapton's guest in the studio).

However, it is Clapton's voice, which—as noted previously—he felt was inadequate to the task of conveying blues emotion, which defines the song. After seven years of hearing, playing, preaching, arguing for, and even sometimes singing the blues, finally Clapton had, in “Layla,” caught up to his mentor, Robert Johnson, on (as historian Giles Oakley so memorably put it) “the abyss of complete psychic disintegration.”¹⁴⁵⁴ Critic Dave Marsh perhaps put it best when he wrote: “He had finally felt the music as deeply as anyone, matched Robert Johnson blow for blow, sorrow for sorrow, stride for stride. Having done so, he dropped from sight for three years.”¹⁴⁵⁵

Within a few years after “Layla,” numerous of Clapton's compatriots would “drop from sight” as well, their bands dissolved, their creative voices in abeyance, their personal lives blighted by fatigue, substance abuse and other personal tragedies. Some of

¹⁴⁵² Derek and the Dominoes, “Layla,” *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs* (Polydor, 1970). I am indebted to Dave Marsh's insightful analysis of “Layla” and its place in Clapton's *oeuvre*. Marsh, “Eric Clapton,” in Anthony DeCurtis, James Henke and Holly George-Warren, *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* (New York: Straight Arrow, 1992), p. 409.

¹⁴⁵³ Michael Schumacher, *Crossroads: The Life and Music of Eric Clapton* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), pp. 146-47.

¹⁴⁵⁴ Giles Oakley, *The Devil's Music: A History of the Blues* (London: BBC, 1976), p. 199.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Marsh, “Clapton,” in DeCurtis, Henke and George-Warren, eds., *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History*, p. 410.

them—most notably Brian Jones, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison—passed not just from the scene, but also from the mortal coil itself. Before they did so, however, their creative restlessness, their refusal to be satisfied, led them to dizzying creative heights. Clapton's masterpiece—and there are others dotting the *oeuvre* of his compatriots from this period—proves that Anglo-American rock musicians certainly did not abandon the blues as they developed creatively, as is often claimed, but used its themes, tropes and musical elements to redefine popular music, and used its eclecticism to bring together all manner of diverse musical and lyrical elements to make a series of cultural statements that are still being emulated and responded to, almost forty years later.

CONCLUSIONS

This is an old blues number right here, we used to do it at Richmond, and all that sort of thing. We used to do it very fast... Now we do it slow.

—Mick Jagger, introducing live version of “I Just Want to Make Love to You” (1997)¹⁴⁵⁶

In the 1960s, a definable group of young, white, mainly middle-class British men decided to “filiate” themselves with African-American blues culture, first emulating and then innovating that culture. The result was a period of intense trans-Atlantic cultural creativity whose significance to the study of intellectual and cultural history is not to be underestimated. The collective career of the British “blues network” is essential to our deeper understanding of salient cultural issues such as the reason why bursts of creative output occur in distinct places at distinct times; the ways in which American culture influenced Western Europeans (and, in this case, how some Western Europeans were able to respond with cultural innovation of their own); the impact of the interpersonal relationship and network on cultural production; and the negotiation of masculine, generally heterosexual identities through the forms of mass popular culture. By dealing with all of these issues, this dissertation has modified and enriched the existing historiography, and represents a substantive contribution to the intellectual and cultural history of Britain and Europe, and of their relationship with the United States.

Fathers and Sons makes a contribution to the historiographical dialogue that has sought to explain why bursts of creativity occur at distinct times and places—especially in instances where their occurrence seems superficially incongruous. Just as David Landes has sought to explain why Britain was able to industrialize first in the early 19th

¹⁴⁵⁶ The Rolling Stones, “I Just Want to Make Love to You,” *Rarities, 1971-2003* (Virgin, 2004).

century, and Carl Schorske has looked for the causes of Freudian psychoanalysis in early 20th century Vienna, *Fathers and Sons* has taken up the challenge of attempting to explain how and why it was in Great Britain, a small country in the process of giving up its former imperial power, that young men created a musical form that dominated not only Britain, but, when sent back across the Atlantic, the nation that had invented rock ‘n’ roll in the first place. It was, I have argued, Britain’s unique position of proximity to, and distance from, the United States and its culture that proved of fundamental importance in explaining how Britishers were able to create such an innovative, dominant cultural form.

Britishers shared a number of important commonalities with Americans—not least of which were a common language, and common folkways dating back to the era of British colonization. But America was also “distant enough” for Britishers to bring to bear the fresh perspective that, as Thorstein Veblen and Peter Gay have separately argued with respect to the Jews, only a cultural outsider can bring. Britishers were free, if only in their own minds, of the ideological quicksand of “white guilt” and racism with which white Americans’ understanding of the blues was often encrusted. Britishers also enjoyed a long tradition, dating back to their initial colonial adventures, of cultural openness, and the confidence to borrow from other cultures. As the latter-day beneficiaries of these interrelated traditions, Britishers could attach different cultural “meanings” to the blues, and combine with it other musical and cultural forms, seemingly at will. The result was a style of music so eclectic and dynamic that several commentators have doubted whether the blues was still a salient influence in it at all.

The burst of musical creativity that occurred in London and other British urban centers in the 1960s can also be explained by Britain’s situation as a relatively small and

compact island archipelago, in which urban cultural centers were densely located. The relative ease of travel and communication between London, the intellectual and cultural hub of Britain and, for instance, Birmingham, meant that ideas and cultural forms could be disseminated more readily in Britain than in France, West Germany or the United States. It also meant that blues enthusiasts-cum-performers had an easier time of meeting and interacting with one another. *Fathers and Sons* has argued that it was the interpersonal cultural network of British blues enthusiasts and performers that was among of the most important driving factors in explaining the extraordinary creativity of British blues-based rock music. Cultural creativity is enhanced when cultural producers live and work in close social proximity to one another. Through frequent social interaction, ideas are both hatched and honed. One's social peers can provide friendly or not-so-friendly criticism and feedback, and the up-close example of what one's peers are doing can drive cultural producers to much greater achievements than had they been working alone. Such interpersonal networks have been the subject of much important work in European as well as American intellectual and cultural history—from Joseph Ellis on the American Founding Fathers; to Ross King on the French Impressionists; to Peter Gay on both the Enlightenment *philosophes* and Europe's Modernist artists and authors. *Fathers and Sons* provides an analogue to how the issues discussed in these key historical works apply to the realm of popular music in Britain in the “Age of Aquarius.”

Fathers and Sons, finally, is a contribution to the vast historiography that has dealt with the ways in which Americans and Europeans have interacted with each other in the twentieth century. The historiography is especially rich at the level of cultural exchanges and transmissions. Scholars such as Victoria de Grazia, Rob Kroes and

Richard Kuisel have done an admirable job of portraying how this often tortured relationship was built and sustained by consumer durables, television, popular films and even Coca-Cola. They have influenced my work in their attention to how cultural forms were transmitted, received and consumed by European audiences, and how these forms carried with them constructed meanings of “America” and “American” values (such as freedom, choice, prosperity and sexuality) like an army of mass-produced Trojan Horses. While acknowledging my conceptual debt to these giants, I also attempt to fill some notable lacunae in the historiography of Euro-American cultural relations. One such lacuna is, quite simply, the fact that the transmission and reception of blues to Great Britain has not been the subject of much scholarly literature. But the greater conceptual lacuna, in my opinion, is the lack of attention paid to the ways in which Europeans (in this case, Britishers) did not just passively consume American culture, or reject it with knee-jerk anti-Americanism, but also responded to it in creative ways. *Fathers and Sons* has attempted to redress this imbalance by arguing on behalf of British rock musicians who, enamored of the promise of American (and African-American) culture, recombined and repackaged that culture, in the process reversing (however temporarily) the flow of trans-Atlantic cultural creativity.

The achievements of the British “blues network” still comprise a central part of our cultural heritage today. The British, and later the Anglo-American, blues-rock network may not have survived the 1960s entirely intact. But while it was a going concern, its members quite simply created many of the conventions and ground rules that blues-based popular music would follow for the subsequent thirty-five years and beyond. The Anglo-American blues-rock network helped to spawn—for better or for worse—such

seemingly disparate sub-genres as “glam” rock, “progressive” rock, heavy metal, “Southern” rock and garage rock. Even punk rock, which self-consciously rode to prominence in the mid-1970s on a wave of iconoclasm and an avowed goal of figuratively spitting in blues-rock’s face, cannot escape its debt to the examples set down by Jagger, Clapton, Stewart, Morrison, Beck and Plant. Detroit punk rocker Iggy Pop has admitted the influence of the early British blues bands on his songwriting, and has even said that his 1969 hit “I Wanna Be Your Dog” is his creative “mishearing” of Muddy Waters’ “Baby Please Don’t Go.”¹⁴⁵⁷ The Clash may have sneered that they wanted “no Beatles, no Rolling Stones” in 1977, but both they and the Sex Pistols grew up wanting to be like those bands, as well as the Small Faces and the Yardbirds.¹⁴⁵⁸

The greater significance of the British blues-rock network lies not only in the massive formative influence they have exerted on forty years of popular music, but also in their role in helping to effect a major transition in Britain’s social and cultural place in the world. In 1962, speaking to an audience at the US Military Academy in West Point, New York, American Secretary of State Dean Acheson remarked, “Great Britain has lost an Empire, but not yet found a role.”¹⁴⁵⁹ Within three years of this cutting yet admittedly apt remark, Britain had found a role: as the seedbed of influential blues-based rock music; as the epicenter of a veritable revolution in first musical and then cultural taste;

¹⁴⁵⁷ Iggy Pop, quoted in “Legs” McNeil and Gillian McCain, eds., *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. 38.

¹⁴⁵⁸ Jon Savage, *England’s Dreaming: Punk Rock, Anarchy, Sex Pistols and Beyond* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), p. 232.

¹⁴⁵⁹ Dean Acheson, speech at the United States Military Academy, December 5, 1962, quoted in Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain From Suez to the Beatles* (London: Abacus, 2006), p. 218.

and as the arbiter of international (or at least trans-Atlantic) cultural “cool,” the place where a gifted young African-American guitarist like Jimi Hendrix would seemingly have to go to prove himself *before* being able to earn a similar reputation in his own homeland. In the arena of youth culture and popular musical expression, at least, Great Britain truly was “great” again. Of course, Acheson had been speaking in terms of a global, geopolitical role, *vis-à-vis* the United States and the Soviet Union. Cream’s ability to reach gold or platinum status for album sales, or to sell out the Royal Albert Hall was not going to restore Britain’s colonies to her, of course, and it would be ludicrous for me to suggest that the success of Led Zeppelin caused any reconsideration of the balance of trans-Atlantic political power.

But cultural supremacy is at once more ethereal and, in some ways, more significant to the development of the world than a traditionally-defined economic or geopolitical *imperium*. By 1975, the Union Jack may not have flown over so many far-flung bits of the world anymore, but, emblazoned on T-shirts, umbrellas and motor scooters along with the bulls-eye symbol of the Royal Air Force, it represented British cultural dominance far more visibly, if far more subtly. It might not be entirely accurate to state, as David Christopher has been quoted as saying at the outset, that “all the biggest bands in the world were British.” But it is for certain that whoever the biggest bands in the world were, whether in 1975 or 2005, whether they were British, American, Canadian or otherwise, they were powerfully influenced by the example of the 1960s-era British blues network. This network innovated the blues and rock ‘n’ roll, and then sent them back across the Atlantic, conquering America in their turn. The musical and cultural “special relationship” between Britain and the United States helped to define discourses

on race, sexuality, masculinity, youth and power for the next thirty years. Generations of young men engaged with these discourses by listening to Anglo-American blues-based rock music and by taking its producers as their heroes; that, too, is the legacy of the British blues network.

The members of the British blues-rock network have repeatedly returned to the blues over the last two decades or so, as middle-aged men continuing to ply their trade (with varying degrees of success) in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In the liner notes to his 2004 *homage* to Delta bluesman Robert Johnson, *Me and Mr. Johnson*, Eric Clapton asserted that Johnson served as “the keystone of my musical foundation...a landmark that I navigate by, whenever I feel myself going adrift.”¹⁴⁶⁰ Less charitable opinions might have suggested that Clapton has certainly gone adrift a great deal in the quarter-century between 1970 and 1994, when he returned to recording straight-ahead blues with the cover-laden album *From the Cradle*.¹⁴⁶¹ Aesthetic judgments aside, however, what is important about Clapton’s statement is that it illustrates how formative an influence the blues remains after all these years, not only on Clapton, but on many of his blues network compatriots as well.

Conventional wisdom holds that British rock musicians abandoned the blues almost as soon as they became financially viable, turning instead to rock poetry, and adapting any other musical influences on offer—everything *but* the evocative, yet musically unsophisticated fare that had been their meat and drink in the days before they learned how to play their instruments properly. I have demonstrated, throughout the

¹⁴⁶⁰ Eric Clapton, liner notes to *Me and Mr. Johnson* (Reprise, 2004).

¹⁴⁶¹ Clapton, *From the Cradle* (Reprise, 1994).

preceding chapters, that this is quite simply not the case. British rock musicians, and the American musicians with whom they were in increasing dialogue in the 1960s and 1970s, *did* broaden their horizons as they matured in both age and proficiency, liberally raiding any and all cultural storehouses with which they came into contact. However, they did not abandon the blues; indeed, it was their unique reception of, and education in, African-American blues that, as I have argued, made them even more predisposed toward eclectic musical bricolage. The blues was still at the core of the music played by the trans-Atlantic blues network, no matter what other musical styles were also blended therein, and no matter how un-bluesy the resulting rock music may have sounded. Clapton explained how he kept the blues in his music thusly: “I used to think I could make any music, but the guitar playing would always be blues.... [I]f I took a solo, I would always make sure that I could find some place to put the blues in, so that *I* knew, even if nobody else did, that I always still had one foot on the path.”¹⁴⁶²

Men like Clapton, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, and Jimmy Page and Robert Plant, are still on the path, forty-odd years on. A crucial difference is that Britain’s blues-rock pioneers, far from being the young enthusiasts who, uncertain of their identities as British middle-class men, first starting listening to blues and marveling at the immediacy and carnality in the grooves, are now, in many cases, over sixty years old, secure in their reputations (and, in many cases, their fortunes), and facing a situation in which they are now at the same age and level of musical experience as the men who once inspired them. The “sons” have become the “fathers.” What is more, they are keenly aware of it, of their status as godfathers, of their carefully-guarded place in the long legacy of blues and rock

¹⁴⁶² Eric Clapton, interview in *Guitar Heroes*, dir. Marc J. Sachnoff, in *The History of Rock ‘n’ Roll* (1995).

music. When CBS' John Blackstone referred, in a 2006 interview with Clapton, to the "great appeals" of the blues' "long history," Clapton implicitly acknowledged his place in that history, at the age of sixty-one: "When I was listening to music, even as a kid, all my heroes were always old guys. So, y'know, I'm safe in that respect."¹⁴⁶³

And so, in a way, is the blues itself. One of the British blues revivalists' initial goals, starting off in the early 1960s was to spread the Word about the blues, both in Britain and America, and to re-assert its primacy in popular music. By taking the blues, first emulating and then innovating it, and then using the resulting musical forms to vault to international prominence, the British blues network has fulfilled this goal. After all, as Muddy Waters himself said, "It took the people from England to hip my people—my *white* people—to what they had in their own backyard."¹⁴⁶⁴ Even Amiri Baraka, the black nationalist poet who famously declared that any white attempt to perform black blues was a heinous form of cultural larceny, seemed to give the efforts of the British blues network his qualified approval.¹⁴⁶⁵ At least, Baraka said, "they have actually made a contemporary form" of the blues (unlike their American contemporaries). That bands like the Rolling Stones had made far more money doing this than the idiom's originators was certainly

¹⁴⁶³ Eric Clapton, interview with John Blackstone, on CBS' "Eye to Eye" (2006), on Youtube.com (www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EN2RycWeYY) (accessed August 2, 2008).

¹⁴⁶⁴ Muddy Waters, quoted in Stephen Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead: The 40-Year Odyssey of the Rolling Stones* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001), p. 570.

¹⁴⁶⁵ For the idea of cultural larceny, see Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), *Blues People: The Negro Experience in America and the Music That Developed From It* (New York: W.W. Morrow, 1963), p. 27.

problematic, but at least the British attempted to make “reference to a deeper emotional experience” before cashing their checks.¹⁴⁶⁶

And as British blues-rock godfathers stay in more or less the mainstream of 21st-century popular music, it seems certain that the blues will too. However, while the likes of Clapton will remain popular, he and his compatriots have ceded their place at the forefront of the music “scene,” in terms of widespread popularity, creativity and the elusive quality of “star power.” This is no condemnation of their abilities; the music business is necessarily cyclical, constantly pushing the youngest, newest and “hottest” acts forward, whilst established acts step backward from the limelight. The British blues-rock godfathers’ continuing relevance to popular music in the 21st century will be in the guise of *eminences grises*. They have come to play three primary roles in the music business: as mentors; as educators; and as tributaries. All three of these roles demonstrate their abiding passion for and love of the blues, and their desire to continue, in whatever ways possible, the mission they set for themselves forty years ago.

The last decade or so has seen Britain’s blues-rock godfathers becoming mentors, after a fashion, to a younger generation of blues-influenced performers. Just as they had once felt themselves the beneficiaries of the advice and support (or, in the case of Sonny Boy Williamson II, the “trial by ordeal”) of their African-American blues “fathers,” now they, in turn, have sought publicly to fill that same role. So, for example, Jimmy Page joined up with Southern blues-rock group, the Black Crowes for a much-discussed

¹⁴⁶⁶ Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), *Black Music* (New York: W.W. Morrow, 1968), p. 124.

American tour in 1999 and 2000.¹⁴⁶⁷ The band's repertoire with Page combined both Led Zeppelin and Black Crowes material, as well as a few blues chestnuts thrown in for good measure. Brothers Chris and Rich Robinson, the Black Crowes' lead singer and lead guitarist, respectively, told interviewers that they had been great admirers of Led Zeppelin ever since their childhood in Atlanta, and the 1999 arrangement effectively allowed Chris to play the part of Robert Plant for a few months.¹⁴⁶⁸

Just as Page "adopted" the Robinson brothers, Eric Clapton has "adopted" alternative guitarist/singer John Mayer. For both of his Crossroads Guitar Festivals (held in 2004 and in 2007), Clapton invited Mayer to participate. The primary purpose of the outdoor music festivals has been to benefit Clapton's charity foundation for drug rehabilitation, but secondarily it has been a chance for Clapton to get together with friends (Steve Winwood, Jeff Beck, Robbie Robertson) and heroes (Buddy Guy and B.B. King) for jam sessions.¹⁴⁶⁹ Thus, by including Mayer, Clapton was subtly conferring his imprimatur on the young guitarist. Their partnership deepened in 2006, when Clapton and Mayer collaborated on the latter's album, *Continuum*. In that album's liner notes, Mayer wrote, "Eric Clapton knows I steal from him and is still cool with it."¹⁴⁷⁰

¹⁴⁶⁷ The double live album that resulted from the two performances at Los Angeles' Greek Theatre was released as Jimmy Page and the Black Crowes, *Live at the Greek* (TVT Records, 2000).

¹⁴⁶⁸ Chris Robinson, interview with Bill Crandall, in Crandall, "Chris Robinson Has a Whole Lotta Love For Zeppelin," *Rolling Stone* (October 8, 1999), archived on RollingStone.com (http://www.rollingstone.com/artists/jimmypage/articles/story/5925254/chris_robinson_has_a_whole_lotta_love_for_zeppelin) (accessed September 24, 2008).

¹⁴⁶⁹ *Eric Clapton: Crossroads Guitar Festival*, dir. Martyn Atkins (2007).

¹⁴⁷⁰ John Mayer, liner notes to *Continuum* (Columbia, 2006).

Finally, for their 2008 tour, which was documented for posterity's sake by acclaimed filmmaker Martin Scorsese, the Rolling Stones invited Jack White, the guitarist/singer of Detroit "garage rock" band the White Stripes, along for the ride. White, who at the time of writing is arguably the most overtly blues-influenced performer in the modern mainstream, joined Jagger and Richards for a live version of the band's "Loving Cup."¹⁴⁷¹ Prior to the film's release, Richards and White spoke with *Rolling Stone's* David Fricke. The resulting article was called "Blues Brothers," but throughout the interview, both musicians (one sixty-four years old, the other thirty-two) made it clear that theirs was more of a father-son relationship than anything else:

White: When you see someone play, you know immediately if you can connect with them or not. You know you're in the same family. And I think we are. You ask me... [w]as I born in the wrong generation because I didn't get to play with Muddy? I play with the sons of those guys. And there will be more grandkids after that.

Richards: [to White] [B]rother, you've made your deal now. The only thing you can do is pass it on.... That's for the tombstone, baby. "He passed it on."¹⁴⁷²

In these responses lies the essence of the relationship that is at the heart of this dissertation: first, that between African-American bluesmen and young British devotees, and now, that between the elderly men those young devotees have become, and the next generation to whom they have passed the legacy of the music that inspired them and so many others.

In 2003, Martin Scorsese—who is himself devoted both to the blues and to British blues-rock—provided the British blues network with a public opportunity to serve as

¹⁴⁷¹ *The Rolling Stones: Shine a Light*, dir. Martin Scorsese (2008).

¹⁴⁷² Keith Richards and Jack White, interview with David Fricke, in Fricke, "Blues Brothers: The Rolling Stones and Jack White shine a light on the roots of their music," *Rolling Stone* (April 17, 2008), archived on RollingStone.com (http://www.rollingstone.com/news/story/19969845/blues_brothers) (accessed September 24, 2008).

public educators by producing a six-part documentary series for the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), entitled *The Blues: A Musical Journey*.¹⁴⁷³ One of the six parts, directed by British filmmaker Michael Figgis, was *Red, White and Blues*, and focused on the blues experience in Britain.¹⁴⁷⁴ An impressive roster of British blues-rock's godfathers participated in the film. Clapton, Winwood, John Mayall, Georgie Fame, Mick Fleetwood and Van Morrison, among others, served as interviewed "talking heads," reminiscing about their experiences and paying tribute to the music that inspired them. Beck, Morrison and pop crooner Tom Jones (who had started out as a blues singer, although his subsequent career took a different direction entirely) also took part as members of an impromptu jam band, assembled by Figgis with the intention of recording some songs for the film. The purpose of the documentary series as a whole was to celebrate the blues (in a year that the United States Congress had respectfully, if belatedly, named "The Year of the Blues") by educating television audiences about it, and by re-asserting its validity to modern music.¹⁴⁷⁵

Britain's blues-rock godfathers likely needed little prodding from Figgis to embrace the documentarian's mission; indeed, it is a topic that they have returned to again and again for decades. Never shy about proselytizing on the blues' behalf in printed interviews during their heydays in the 1960s and 1970s, the likes of Clapton and Jagger have simply expanded into film and television. Examples, of which there are several, include another PBS documentary (*The History of Rock 'n' Roll*), one for the BBC (*The*

¹⁴⁷³ *The Blues: A Musical Journey*, exec. prod. Martin Scorsese (2003).

¹⁴⁷⁴ *Red, White and Blues*, dir. Mike Figgis (2003).

¹⁴⁷⁵ Peter Guralnick, et. al., eds., *Martin Scorsese Presents the Blues: A Musical Journey* (New York: Amistad Books, 2003), p. 3.

Seven Ages of Rock), and more specific projects about individual bands (Led Zeppelin and the Who have been recent subjects).¹⁴⁷⁶ Not that they have abandoned print testimonials, however. Over the past few years, as they have advanced inexorably toward old age, many British rock stars have begun engaging ghostwriters for the purposes of crafting memoirs and autobiographies; Eric Clapton's and Ron Wood's are two noteworthy examples just from 2007.¹⁴⁷⁷ In these memoirs, they have told, in no uncertain terms, of the life-changing impact of the blues and R&B on their formative development. Many of these public utterances have helped to form the primary source base for this study, which, after all, hopes to contribute to the project of increasing the public's knowledge of the legacies of blues and rock music in its own small way.

Finally, Britain's blues-rock godfathers continue to advance the cause of the blues in much the same way as they always have: through their music. If they had retired from performing, but still served as reliable sources for quotes and testimony, that would be one thing. But most of them are still active musicians, and, to whatever extent they may have "drifted" (to again use Clapton's phrase), they have reserved an increasingly prominent place in their recording and performing for the blues and R&B. They have done this in two main ways: through including cover versions of blues and R&B songs on their albums, or by participating in compilations or "tribute albums" for other artists.

¹⁴⁷⁶ *The History of Rock 'n' Roll*, 10 vols., prod. Quincy Jones, David Salzman and Bob Meyrowitz (1995); *The Seven Ages of Rock*, 7 vols., prod. The British Broadcasting Corporation (2007); *Led Zeppelin: The Origin of the Species*, prod. Sexy Intellectual Productions (2005); *Amazing Journey: The Story of the Who*, dir. Murray Lerner (2007).

¹⁴⁷⁷ Eric Clapton, *Clapton: The Autobiography* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007); Ron Wood, *Ronnie: The Autobiography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007).

Clapton is the main practitioner of the first method. After 1970's *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs*—his one and only album with Derek and the Dominoes—Clapton's resume had tended to look uneven. Many critics (especially in the era of punk rock) sneered that the guitarist had gone “soft,” preferring slick, radio-friendly pop music and tailor-made Armani suits to the hard-edged blues that had made him famous.¹⁴⁷⁸ This trend began to reversed with the aforementioned *From the Cradle* (1994), which was made up entirely of blues covers, and demonstrated to reviewers and fans alike that Clapton was still capable of playing the blues.¹⁴⁷⁹ Since then, with a few exceptions, Clapton seems to have given up entirely on cracking the Top 40 lists, and has re-invented himself (again) as a self-appointed guardian and interpreter of the blues, a re-invention that culminated in 2004 with *Me and Mr. Johnson*, his *homage* to his ultimate hero. In this way, he is keeping not only the blues, but also his own career, a going concern.

Clapton has also been active in supporting his mentors—with many of whom he has become personal friends—by appearing in guest or collaborative spots on their own recordings, and in this he is certainly not alone. This is a tradition that dates back at least as far as 1969, when Paul Butterfield and his band assisted Muddy Waters on *Fathers and Sons*, and when a veritable constellation of British musicians did likewise for Waters and Howlin' Wolf on the *London Sessions*. In the last twelve years, this sort of thing has

¹⁴⁷⁸ Dave Marsh, “Eric Clapton,” in Anthony DeCurtis, James Henke and Holly George-Warren, eds., *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* (New York: Straight Arrow, 1992), p. 409.

¹⁴⁷⁹ Tom Sinclair, “Blues Traveler: review of Eric Clapton's *From the Cradle*,” *Entertainment Weekly* (September 16, 1994), archived on TopTenReviews.com (<http://www.toptenreviews.com/scripts/eframe/url.htm?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ew.com%2Ffew%2Farticle%2F0%2C%2C303663%2C00.html>) (accessed September 24, 2008).

become a cottage industry of sorts. Clapton teamed up with B.B. King for the collaborative album, *Riding With the King*, and again (along with Roger Daltrey, Van Morrison and Elton John) on King's 80 album, which commemorated the veteran bluesman's eightieth birthday.¹⁴⁸⁰ Jimmy Rogers enjoyed the support of Clapton, Jimmy Page, Robert Plant, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards on *Blues Blues Blues*, his last album before his death in 1997.¹⁴⁸¹ Finally, John Lee Hooker recorded several albums in the decade-and-a-half before his death in 2001, with a large supporting cast of "disciples" from both sides of the Atlantic, including Clapton, Richards, Morrison, Bonnie Raitt, John Hammond, Jr., Carlos Santana and Robert Cray.¹⁴⁸² Projects such as these might, at first glance, tend to encourage the view that the blues are merely a museum piece, not a dynamic, living musical form. However, most of the music offered on these albums is marked by the distinctive British tendency, discussed in a previous chapter, to tinker with the structure and feel of the originals. Instead of just playing note-for-note retreads, the support bands give the material a much more impressionistic take. *Plus çe change...*

Britain's blues-rock godfathers would not, one suspects, be nearly so active in playing the role of *eminences grises* if the influences, ideas and metaphors of the blues were not still so personally meaningful to them as well as to the legions of fans who regard them as heroes. African-American blues music made its way across the Atlantic to Great Britain after the Second World War in an extremely haphazard and almost

¹⁴⁸⁰ Riley "B.B." King and Eric Clapton, *Riding With the King* (Polydor, 2000); Riley "B.B." King and Friends, *80* (Geffen Records, 2005).

¹⁴⁸¹ The Jimmy Rogers All-Stars, *Blues Blues Blues* (Atlantic, 1997).

¹⁴⁸² *E.g.*, *The Healer* (Chameleon, 1989); *Mr. Lucky* (Pointblank, 1991); *Don't Look Back* (Pointblank/Virgin, 1997); and *The Best of Friends* (Pointblank, 1998). All four collaborative efforts earned Grammy Awards for Hooker and various co-stars.

accidental manner. In an era in which American political and business interests were deliberately sending American culture over to Western Europe literally by the boatload to fight on one front of the Cold War with Soviet Communism, the blues came to port cities like London and Liverpool through the back door.

The two main vehicles by which the blues “invaded” Britain were record albums and radio broadcasts, and by looking at these media one can see the haphazardness of the affair. Record albums had to be bartered, bought or received as gifts—from American GIs stationed in Britain, or from friends and relations who had actually been to the States. Some, like Mick Jagger, went to the extreme length of writing directly to American companies like Chess and Vee-Jay and ordering records that way. Radio broadcasts, too, point up the accidental nature of blues transmissions. Young enthusiasts tuned in to the American Forces Network or other networks meant for American servicemen, in order to circumvent the British Broadcasting Corporation’s monopoly over the airwaves.

In addition to records and radio, there were rare public performers by African-American bluesmen in Britain. These, too, were reliant on the initiative of interested individuals—in this case, “trad” jazz revivalists who thought they heard in the blues the ancestor of the “Dixieland” jazz styles with which they had become enamored. Through the efforts of revivalists like Chris Barber, African-American bluesmen like “Big Bill” Broonzy, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, some of whom were not even well-known in their own country, found themselves fêted by white audiences in Britain. Fifty years ago (at the time of writing), Muddy Waters played his first controversial club dates in Great Britain, sending “trad” jazz and folk fans running for the exits with his amplified Chicago-style sound, but electrifying a younger generation and setting the stage for two

related movements. The first was an attempt to recreate the raw power and dynamism that enthusiasts such as Mick Jagger, Jimmy Page and Eric Burdon heard that night in November 1958. It began with the defection from “trad” jazz of two godfather figures, Alexis Korner and Cyril Davies, their formation of a Chicago-style blues band and, subsequently, the coalescence around this band of a fledgling interpersonal network out of which would emerge the first British R&B bands to achieve international acclaim.

Meeting first in art school common rooms, pubs and secondhand record shops throughout Britain, young white British blues enthusiasts gradually began to congregate in local *ad hoc* “blues appreciation societies,” trading record albums and scraps of information about the music itself, discussing the merits of this or that artist or song, and, in time, banging out their own earnest, if not technically proficient versions of the music they had come to love. The biggest such “blues appreciation society” was, obviously, in London, the social, economic and cultural hub of the country. By 1965, London was exerting a kind of gravitational pull on urban centers in the rest of Britain, so that the members of “blues appreciation societies” in Liverpool, Newcastle, Birmingham, Manchester and Belfast began making their way south to join the fast-growing British “blues boom.” Once installed (however semi-permanently) in the capital or the Home Counties, British blues enthusiasts lived, ate, drank, talked and performed with each other, and the result was a much greater creativity than would have resulted had they been socially separate, making their music without recourse to the inspiration and the invidious comparison that came with being part of a social network.

The fact that African-American blues should have become so very popular with this interpersonal network of young, white, mostly middle-class male listeners *seems* like

it should be read as a colossal cultural anomaly—after all, what common ground would an art student from the suburban Home Counties have with a poor, black Mississippi sharecropper? However, as I have demonstrated, it truly was not. The blues, as interpreted by British enthusiasts, presented young white suburbanites with an alternative masculine ideal at a time when white, middle-class British masculinity was perceived not so much as being in jeopardy as being unsatisfactory and boring. Great Britain had won the Second World War but appeared to be losing the peace. The loss of the Empire, economic and physical exhaustion, diminution on the international stage, and cultural sclerosis were Britain's postwar inheritance. By contrast, the constructed persona of the “bluesman” was a sexually dynamic, knowledgeable and virile figure, who relished his freedom to wander the wide open spaces of America, carving out an existence and an identity that was wholly separate from the anomie of middle-class modernity. That the “bluesman's” persona was, again, a cultural construction, and not to be construed as in any way accurately reflecting the life of itinerant African-American musicians in the Deep South, either did not occur or did not matter to aspiring British blues enthusiasts. Pre-conceived notions of American culture and American race relations, plus a long cultural heritage of “soldier-heroes” that had attained this sort of masculine freedom and power, in a British imperial context, made this group of young white men especially receptive to the blues.

The earliest British blues enthusiasts, starting with Korner and Davies, listened to the blues because it spoke directly to them in ways that nothing else in the mainstream of popular culture could. They began to play the blues in public to appropriate some of its directness and masculine swagger for themselves. Thanks to their efforts, there was by

1962 a full-fledged blues and R&B-driven “scene” in London, as well as similar “scenes” in Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle, Belfast and Liverpool. Out of the Liverpool “scene” (which was markedly different than the others, in that it was more influenced by country-and-western, Irish ballads and sea chanteys) came the Beatles, the first British rock band to make an impact in the United States. The phenomenal success of the Beatles, dubbed “Beatlemania,” caused record executives in both countries to search frantically for more tuneful, radio-friendly pop to throw into a “British Invasion” of America. In their decidedly broad talent search—being young, male and British were the basic criteria—these record executives enlisted many of British R&B’s most prominent bands. In this way, the Rolling Stones, the Animals, and the Yardbirds, among many others, achieved international prominence and began to have an impact on American popular music. Beginning in roughly 1965, having achieved some measure of stability in the marketplace, these British blues disciples began to feel that they had served their apprenticeships at the feet of their African-American blues “fathers,” and inaugurated a second cultural movement.

The second movement was an attempt to use the blues to create something truly innovative in popular music expression. British rock musicians never abandoned the blues, but began drawing from other musical and cultural influences with which they came into contact to *build* on them. Their newfound creativity was further fueled by a burgeoning dialogue with like-minded performers in America. Simultaneously stung and inspired by the “British Invasion”—which, if looked at properly, was basically selling young Americans back a piece of their own discarded cultural heritage—American musicians such as Bob Dylan, Paul Butterfield, Jimi Hendrix and the Band offered

several challenges of their own. Each new American challenge struck at some cherished aspect of the British blues movement, whether it be lyrical sophistication, blues orthodoxy, masculine virtuosity or the ability to creatively conjure up a sense of “Americana.” These were serious challenges to British authenticity, and they in turn stimulated the British blues network to scale even greater creative heights in the late 1960s.

One significant result of the opening-up of a trans-Atlantic dialogue between British and American blues-rock musicians was a growing manifestation of “British” or “English” cultural tropes in popular music. The British blues network had started off attempting to emulate (African-)American culture, but now, increasingly, they began to look for inspiration among their own cultural traditions as Britishers—traditions that often hearkened back to the Victorian era, if not earlier. Just as American blues (and country-and-western) had conjured up for British listeners an imagined “America” of wide-open spaces, peopled with larger-than-life, often mythic characters, now British musicians set out to construct their own imagined “Britain,” which was related to, and yet distinct from, the imagined “America.” Both imagined nations valorized the urban cityscape as places where men could demonstrate their mastery over the forms of modernity. In the British case, the celebration of urban culture also connected back to the Victorian-era tradition of the *flâneur*, the male observer who gained mastery and power from his ability to walk through London’s streets and watch the panorama that unfolded before him. And both imagined nations maintained a healthy respect, if not romance, for wide-open spaces and “the land.” For America, this was the frontier; for Britain, in these immediate post-imperial days, it was the rural countryside. British musicians thus drew

heavily on a long tradition of intellectual and cultural pastoralism that has remained strong even though Britain has been an industrial (and now post-industrial nation) for more than two hundred years.

Expressing themselves as middle-class white Britishers, instead of overtly trying to pass themselves off as African-Americans-in-training, was a crucial step in the creative maturation of the British blues network. Having established the common ground between American and British cultural modes, the next step for many British rock musicians was to branch out into any number of other outside cultural influences. In the late 1960s, almost every form of Western, and some forms of non-Western, music—jazz, English folk, Indian raga, European classical—became grist for the mill as British rock performers sought to forge an eclectic and increasingly self-consciously sophisticated form of music. One might have been forgiven for wondering where, in this “art” or “psychedelic” music, a continued relationship with the gritty, down-to-earth blues tradition would fit. But British rock musicians maintained their love of the blues, and in the late 1960s, they “supercharged” it, making it sound louder and more raw, and expressing themselves using an even more muscular and often more violent blues vocabulary. Finally, in constructing their eclectic bricolage, British musicians even found room to reinvigorate 1950s-era rock ‘n’ roll themes, as a way of recharging their creative batteries by returning to rock ‘n’ roll’s energy and dynamism.

The all-encompassing musical creativity of the Anglo-American rock network can be seen largely to have fizzled out by the beginning of the 1970s. By that time, the world-conquering optimism that had defined the wider youth culture of the 1960s had been succeeded by a prevailing mood of social and cultural fatigue. Various events,

sociopolitical as well as cultural, contributed to what has been referred to as the “Death of the Sixties”—among them, the deaths of rock stars Brian Jones, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison; the violence at the Rolling Stones’ free concert at Altamont, California in 1969; the campus shootings at Kent State and Jackson State in 1970; and the bitter, seemingly earth-shattering dissolution of the Beatles at the end of the same year. Besides the Anglo-American rock stars who passed from the mortal coil, there were countless others who passed less dramatically, if just as completely, from the mainstream music scene, the victims of personal tragedy and creative stagnation.

During its heyday in the 1960s, however, the raw, unabashed power and dynamism of British blues-rock bands did an admirable job of restoring something of British masculinity’s faded sheen. In an era where British men were seeking a role, a purpose, an affirmation of their virility and their vitality, assistance came from a rather unlikely quarter. Drawing on, appropriating and, in many cases, amplifying the blues’ vast reservoirs of sexual prowess, self-confidence, violence, power and virtuosity, British bluesmen were able to reassert some sort of dominance over the world around them. The world depicted by the blues was exotic, intriguing, adventuresome—a world where the rules applied somewhat less rigidly, and where honest, direct reality held sway over meaningless banality. The blues enabled a generation of young, white, middle-class Britishers, anxious about their post-war sociocultural inheritance and enamored of what they perceived as the promise of the new American superpower, to stand up and declare, just as Muddy Waters had done a decade earlier, “I’m a man.” The sun may have set on

the British Empire, but African-American blues music proved to British enthusiasts that, far from being the end of the world, “the nighttime was the right time.”¹⁴⁸³

¹⁴⁸³ Ray Charles, “The Nighttime Is The Right Time,” *The Very Best of Ray Charles* (Rhino Records, 2000).

APPENDIX:
A Representative Roster of the Anglo-American Blues Network

London/Home Counties

Mick Jagger
Keith Richards
Brian Jones
Bill Wyman
Charlie Watts
“Long John” Baldry
Eric Clapton
Keith Relf
Paul Samwell-Smith
Chris Dreja
Jim McCarty
Jeff Beck
Ron Wood
Rod Stewart
Brian Auger
Spencer Davis
Peter “Ginger” Baker
Pete Townshend
Roger Daltrey
Keith Moon
John Entwistle
Peter Green
Mick Fleetwood
John McVie
Jimmy Page
John Paul Jones
Mitch Mitchell

Liverpool

Paul McCartney
John Lennon
George Harrison
Ringo Starr
Noel Redding

Birmingham/Midlands

Steve Winwood
Mervyn “Muff” Winwood
Dave Mason
Jim Capaldi
Chris Wood
Robert Plant

John Bonham
Denny Laine
Graeme Edge
Mike Pinder
John Lodge
Justin Hayward

Newcastle/Northumberland

Eric Burdon
Bryan “Chas” Chandler
Alan Price
John Steel
Hilton Valentine
Dave Rowberry
Barry Jenkins

Manchester/Lancashire

John Mayall
Georgie Fame
Graham Nash

Northern Ireland

Van Morrison
Billy Harrison
Alan Henderson
Eric Wrixon
Rory Gallagher

Scotland

Jack Bruce

United States/Canada

Bob Dylan
Jimi Hendrix
Paul Butterfield
Michael Bloomfield
Elvin Bishop
Al Kooper
Levon Helm
Robbie Robertson
Richard Manuel
Rick Danko
Garth Hudson

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Cash Box

Cheetah

Circus

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Crawdaddy

Creem

Disc

Disc and Music Echo

Downbeat

Fusion

GQ

Go

Guitar Player
Guitar World
Hit Parader
Home of the Blues
Hot Buttered Soul
Jazz and Blues
Juke Blues
Ker-rang!
Living Blues
Melody Maker
Music Maker
Musician
New Musical Express (NME)
The New Yorker
Newsweek
Now Dig This
Oz
Q
R&B Monthly
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Rock
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