Part 1 Theory

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Chapter 1

Theory

Death, drugs, and rock & roll

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Whether we like it or not, death is *the* universal concern.

The most cogent writing on the subject, aside from theological and spiritual tracts, is found in Ernst Becker's (1972) *The Denial of Death.* Becker, a philosopher gifted with a brilliant writing style, devotes each chapter in his book to a different human remedy for "the sickness unto death" (Kierkegaard, 2009) – mortality. Becker's conclusion, echoing that of his luetic predecessor, Friedrich Nietzsche, is quite simply, "Human, all too human." Devotion to work, family, love, sex, addiction…in the final analysis, each falls short of allaying the pandemic fear. The final chapter of the Becker book takes a surprising leap straight toward heaven: the only way out of this literal "suffering unto death" is to embrace a spiritual belief.

Becker's perspective is of course based on fear. His perspective is dualistic, since he subscribes to the universal belief that death is the opposite number of life – that death is something bad, something we constantly strive to contain, minimize, or deny.

The terror, the abject fascination inspired by death, finds expression in countless works of art, music, and science. From epoch to epoch, from one civilization to the next, death is the chief catalyst of some of mankind's greatest cultural achievements. Consider, for example, the Faust motif, which sprouts like poison mushrooms after rain, taking innumerable forms in art, music, and in literature. The idea of trading one's immortal soul for infinite wisdom and riches and power, right here and now, is inextricably bound with the fear of death.

Of course, if one actually *has* an immortal soul, then there is little to fear. Such a belief was no consolation to Mann's (1948) *Doktor Faustus.*

Becker's ominous maunderings aside, most of us somehow manage to sidestep the issue – by means of work, relationships, and creativity—until it is staring us straight in the face. The performance and appreciation of great music is for many the apex of their spiritual pyramid. The creative apogee, whether realized in music, writing, or any other form of artistic expression, is a secular variant of spiritual arrival.

How many have devoted – *sacrificed* – their lives in the pursuit of art? The lives of the composers, the painters, the actors and actresses, often read like Grand Guignol, like a soap opera dripping with blood, sweat, and tears. Alternately, their biographies read very much like *The Lives of the Saints* (Butler, 1788). The artist is a shaman, a kind of freak who suffers for the rest of us to keep our connection with "eternity" alive. The artist, struggling with his craft, shut away in his garret to wrestle with demons, is "Byronic." "You can't fool with Mother Nature." And, "You've got to suffer to play the blues." Anyone daring to loiter in Parnassus always pays, pays in unimaginable ways.

Beethoven's life – his interior life, in particular – is often considered a prime example of bartering "agony for art." Thomas Mann's novel, *Doktor Faustus*, depicts in shattering detail the legendary barter that this fictive Beethoven could have made. Mann's protagonist, Adrien Leverkuhn, is a nineteenth-century version of Ludwig B., in Mann's *roman à clef.* Leverkuhn, already an enormously accomplished pianist and composer, strives to reach his "personal best." His striving is so powerful – so persistent, so cosmically *loud* – that it is heard on the other (darker) side. A minion of Lucifer arranges the swap, and Leverkuhn gets his wish: he becomes the greatest composer in the world. The price? The composer must suffer the death by childbed fever of the only person he has ever loved, his adored and beautiful grandson. Would Leverkuhn have signed on had he known the real terms of the pact?

Would you?

No doubt there are many who would grab the opportunity. The "peak" experience, the incomparable sensation of being "in the pocket" (described as "oceanic bliss" or as "flow"), is without question supremely appealing and supremely addicting. Some clinicians

actually advise their patients to accept life on a more even keel – to avoid moments of ecstasy or intense wellbeing intentionally, since the down side potential (craving for more!) is quite significant. This advice may sound puritanical, or repressive; on the other hand, the proffered wisdom is similar to some of the basic tenets of Buddhism, and, for that matter, of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Most of the suffering in life, it is held, is due to *attachment* and *desire*. "Desire" contains the potential (or promise!) for both fulfillment and often for devastating disappointment. If you can't take the heat – namely, the troughs that invariably follow peaks – well, then, stay out of the sun.

The dividing line between clinical issues and spiritual ones is ambiguous here. Bipolar disorder is more common among creative artists (Redfield Jamison, 1993), but the temptation to ascribe all artistic, mystical, and other intense states of mind to manic-depressive illness is a vast oversimplification that should be avoided. Oceanic bliss, whether experienced by musician, yoga master, or lover, should not be confused with psychiatric illness. William James' masterwork *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (originally 1902; then Dover Publications, 2002), is basically a 400-page travel guide to these perilous regions of oceanic bliss.

With all due respect (to Ernst Becker), who is to say which devotions are spiritual in nature, and which are "merely" secular? To confound the issue even further, death itself often takes on the allurement of erotic love.

The depiction of death – as final surrender to the vastness of the cosmos – is often highly erotic. The period of romanticism, especially in the culture of pre-Victorian Europe, is supercharged with depictions in art and literature of the allure of death. The works of Aubrey Beardsley, Charles Baudelaire, Lord Byron, Algernon Swinburne, Edgar Allan Poe, Joris-Karl Huysmans, to list but a few, are synonymous with the fetish of, and fascination with, death.

The artist's spiritual twin is the vampire. Once you have "touched the flame," there really is no turning back. The appetite for oceanic bliss only grows with time. Like Faust, like the vampire, the artist has sold his soul for an eternal life that seems abhorrent, inhuman, and freezing cold to the touch. Perhaps art conquers death by living on in the minds and hearts of those who follow.

Why has orgasm been described as "la petite morte" ("the little death")? The surrender of the forebrain (=ego), the letting go of the survival/vigilance/hunting and gathering functions, is common to artistic achievement – and is also a necessary ingredient of great sex, intense physical activity, and deep meditation.

Unlike our puritan clinician promoting bland living, good morals, right living, and squeaky clean fingernails, some consider the pursuit of oceanic bliss a core human drive. The fusion of protons releases thermonuclear energy. The single-minded pursuit of oceanic bliss, to the exclusion of all else, can also be monstrously destructive (when it takes, for example, the form of addiction, incessant exercise, or incessant *anything*).

Fusion? Hydrogen bombs? What do they have to do with rock music and catastrophe and death?

Rock & Roll

Rolling Stone magazine, reporting on the contemporary musical scene for more than four decades, has from time to time published roll calls of the "greatest" guitar players, blues players, and rock musicians of the century. A moment's glance at any of these makes it plain that this craft is, to put it mildly, *dangerous.* The life trajectories of the greats (such as Jimi Hendrix, Brian Jones, Duane Allman, Jim Morrison, Lowell George, and others) are absolutely rife with disaster. Most of the top blues players of the twentieth century (60% or more) died young and died tragically, victims of violence, fatal accidents, and of alcohol/drug overdose.

The conditions of death, dismemberment, disaster, and all out alcohol and drug dependence are present among these players more often than not. Many of the players' biographies read like eulogies, like body counts in an invisible and endless war.

For the sake of brevity – but also for shock value – I will describe the amazing parallels of mischance in the lives of four widely known musicians (three of whom are very much alive!). Each spent his formative years, creatively speaking, in electric blues bands. Each has been considered "the greatest" blues guitar player of his time. One – Eric Clapton (vide infra) – provoked hysterical fans to spray paint walls with the pronouncement, "Clapton is God." Each is British, each began their meteoric careers in John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, and to a man each went on to even greater celebrity with groups like Fleetwood Mac and the Rolling Stones.

Two of the three became (for a time) drug devotees; the other fell prey to psychosis. Even more

extraordinary, each had the staying power and resilience of spirit to overcome his demons and to return to the world stage, where each always belonged.

Robert Johnson

No discussion of deals with the devil would be complete without mention of the original blues genius, Robert Johnson.

Johnson was a laborer in the cotton fields of the Mississippi delta during the second and third decades of the twentieth century. He was also (and certainly not by choice) a myth-maker. The tradition of "you've got to pay your dues to play the blues" began with Johnson.

Do you have to suffer to play the blues? What's up with that, anyway? It's a tragic tradition that goes way back. Johnson's lyrics are comic, tragic, and utterly transparent. Johnson was a womanizer, too.

Many people really believe that to make it big, you must sell your soul to the devil. The legend goes like this: Johnson met up with Satan at a country crossroads at midnight and made a deal. In exchange for his immortal soul, Johnson would (for a very short time, as it turned out) be the greatest blues player in the world. Listening to the scratchy primitive recordings that survived, the legend seems less far-fetched. Johnson worked the guitar strings like three virtuosi playing at once. Many Johnson tunes became hits (and then standards) for world famous rock bands like Cream and the Rolling Stones.

The man had hell to pay. When he wasn't working, he was playing, and much of the time he was living hard and fast and dangerous. Johnson was a handsome man, a drinking man, and his appetite for women didn't discriminate between those already spoken for and those who were not. Within 2 years of achieving local fame, Johnson was fatally poisoned by a very angry, very jealous husband.

The idea that extraordinary artistic talent and success come at a high price is not new. The medieval playwright Christopher Marlowe's character *Dr. Faustus* was the prototype of the artist in search of perfection – no matter the price. In more recent times, music (especially blues music) lovers still lower their voices whenever the name Robert Johnson comes up.

The songs were deadly serious – these are songs about love, loneliness, sadness, and pain – but that didn't stop Johnson from poking fun at himself and this doom-ridden world. Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Mann, Robert Johnson: three men who at least on paper were galaxies apart.

Still, it is easy to imagine the three nefariously communing around song.

The curse didn't stop there. Art and doom have remained coevals right up to this day. The death or dissipation of *many* (former) key associates of the Stones is not the stuff of legend – it is a fact. Brian Jones (the first of several guitar players to "pass through" the band) died violently, mysteriously. Thirteen years ago, Eric Clapton's toddler tumbled out of an open window of a Manhattan high rise to his death. And the list goes on: Janis Joplin, Mike Bloomfield, Gram Parsons, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Kurt Cobain, Lowell George…

Eric Clapton

Most people old enough to remember have their own stories of joy, nostalgia, horror, and extremity about the late, great "sixties." The end of the seventh decade of the twentieth century was a kind of Rabelaisian tempest, or perhaps feast, an international transcultural carnival where everything exploded at once. Although no single event or personality was to blame, the rock and roll heroes of that time certainly took center stage. (Which was more compelling: the Stones' epochal album *Let It Bleed* [Rolling Stones, Decca Records, 1969] or the astronauts on the moon?)

EC was right up there. After deciding that his mentor – John Mayall – and Mayall's tyrannical adherence to the three-chord melodic structure of blues was too limiting (for him, that is), Clapton moved on. His next venue, a three-man band called The Cream, created an international stir and a taste for a very new kind of music. The tunes were recognizable, very basic: Cream's melodic structures were often even simpler than the blues. At the heart of these performances were the virtuoso's (very) extended solos. On stage, Clapton and cadre used the recorded material as launch pads for other-worldly, often brilliant, improvizations that dipped up, over, sideways, and down. At the heart of these performances were the extended solos, sometimes lasting an hour or more, that each player took. During these, the band – their hearts and spirits "in the pocket," their souls at peak flow – weaved complex tapestries of super-amplified freefall through fantasy realms of minor and major and most everything else in between scales. (During one interview, Clapton described these forays as musical highwire

acts often fueled by LSD. Specifically, he noted that he felt "evil" when lapsing into a minor chord pattern or scale; he felt at peace when returning to the land of the major scale.) This kind of experience, for him and other musical champions of the era, was nothing out of the ordinary.

Spiritually, Clapton's experience in Cream was compelling. How does a human brain create cogent and complex and brilliant art, while traversing a landscape of melting forms and unbidden synaesthesiae? The explanation is not readily forthcoming. Historical parallels certainly exist: da Vinci noted in his journals that he often hallucinated complex figures and beings by continuous staring at highly grained pieces of wood. Perhaps unhinging the doors of perception is the preamble to a dance with "Mr. D.," Old Nick himself.

This is where the mysteries, allusions and scandal come full circle. Recall the terrain of the still unexplained miracle of Robert Johnson's delta blues: a dark and desolate crossroads, always at spiritual nadir in the middle of the night. This is where the deal-making, the signing of blood pacts, takes place. Johnson's tunes all gave witness to dark, grave proceedings.

Throughout his musical career, playing in different bands at different points in time, EC paid homage to these tunes. Many fans consider Clapton's rendition (on Cream, *Wheels of Fire,* Polydor Records, 1968) of Johnson's *Cross Road Blues* (Robert Johnson, Vocalion Records, 1937) to be one of the supreme examples of guitar virtuosity.

How long can a brilliant flame burn? During Clapton's decades'-long reign (an arbitrary designation, since he continues to play to adoring audiences around the globe), parties and drugs and many thousands of altered "states" danced in tandem with EC's guitar. He took most every drug around yet had a very long and productive run. Eventually, however, he seemed to tire of occupying that center panel of the Brueghel triptych and he literally slowed down. Musically, after 4 or 5 years with Cream, his taste and artistic requirements changed again. Cream disbanded, but Clapton played on, his records still selling by the millions. His work took on a distinctly more traditional sound. He was tired of the pandemonium and he wanted to play songs, wanted to play ballads, wanted to turn down the heat.

Rather than disinter and rehash biographical information that has been covered in great detail elsewhere, this monograph will explore and emphasize the musicological ("pyrotechnical") and consequent artistic and spiritual dimensions of this "holy trinity" (Eric Clapton, Peter Green, and Mick Taylor).

Eric Clapton was born and educated in England. Clapton did not meet his biological father until he was 30 years old. Like the other British musicians discussed here, EC was socioculturally poised for the life of a skilled laborer, or, failing that, for a working class life. Instead, in the years that followed, Clapton became one of the greatest if not *the* greatest electric blues player of all time.

It is tempting but perhaps specious to speculate how Clapton's life turned out the way it did. No doubt part of the explanation was Clapton's seething ambition to succeed at his art.

Clapton's earliest visible years, as he moved from one band to the next – usually as the showcased player – were already rife with hints of the success and virtuosity that lay ahead. The mysterious quantum leap from the Ripley teenager who went on to achieve world musical fame remains a puzzle. What is perfectly clear, however, is that this young man practised his music steadily, doggedly, honing his musical ear and tormenting his bleeding fingers mercilessly during many thousands of intensely driven hours of practice. While most of us recall our youth as a time of exploration, a phase of quick nervous forays from one new thing to the next, it seems that Clapton single-mindedly devoted his formative years to learning the blues. His study of music was extensive; he describes listening to endless collections of discs, recordings of Mississippi delta players, Chicago blues masters, folk guitarists, jazz players – absorbing the spirit and technique of any genre or player who touched his creative core.

The early 1960s, particularly in England , were an exciting time for emerging young musicians. First, the sentimental and often spiritually banal artists and songs of the previous decade were on their way out, replaced by a new generation of players and bands who believed in their hearts that their mission – to capture and convey the essence of a largely overlooked musical tradition (American blues) – was for all intents and purposes a *holy* one. Mayall, for example, titled the second Bluesbreakers album "Crusade" (John Mayall & the Bluesbreakers, *Crusade,* London Records, 1967).

Further, the instruments themselves had greatly changed. While acoustic guitar remained prominent in pop music, the newfangled thing – a guitar of solid

wood, equipped with two or more microphones ("pickups") that amplified the strings – opened up new worlds of sound for players. These were sounds that had never been heard before. Thanks to the efforts of guitar makers like Leo Fender and Stanky Gibson, players like Clapton could turn a gently weeping note into a wall-shaking thunderclap at the turn of a dial or the slash of a guitar pick.

Early on, EC played "riffs" that were recognizably *his.* His playing, while touted for its seemingly inhuman speed and accuracy, was most notable for its gorgeous and passionate "feel." EC, as the saying goes, "had the touch." He often put his personal stamp on a solo by somehow intuiting the exact moment in a passage when extra volume or muting or a moment of electronic feedback would be absolutely "right."

Clapton chronologies are widely available. His first internationally known band was the YardByrds, a five-man "combo" that interpreted and put rocket fuel into the music of their heroes – Muddy Waters, B. B. King, Elmore James, among others. The YardByrds, like the Mayall outfit, also became a graduate school of sorts for artisan-grade guitar players. Clapton was ultimately replaced by other brilliant players, guitar gods like Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck (each of whom went on to world-rocking careers; their recordings and concerts still ignite the hearts and gonads (!) of fans the world over).

Another intense personality of the time – John Mayall – made musical history by recruiting EC into his squad of dedicated British bluesmen, John Mayall & The Bluesbreakers. Mayall, like Clapton and the other artists under review, was a devoted if not fanatical student of American-based blues. Mayall's record collection was a bluesman's Library of Congress; to his further credit, Mayall loaned discs from his priceless collection to players he considered dedicated, like himself, to the artistic and spiritual challenge of the blues. If you worked for Mayall, you didn't do much else. Mayall was obsessed with his work, and he insisted that his players work and always do better according to his empyrean standards. The Bluesbreakers, featuring Clapton, flourished between 1965 and 1966. The band toured widely, and sleeplessly, to the growing acclaim of hundreds of thousands of fans – fans who had never heard this kind of music before. The best known recording, *The Bluesbreakers with Eric Clapton* (Decca, 1966) is a sacred relic among fans. Collectors and Clapton cultists have been able to salvage a number of archival tracks, including out-takes, rare sessions with other players, and the like. But the total collaborative musical output was, many feel, never enough.

What was so special about EC and his playing? His intensity, in both appearance and musical sensibility, and in the way he handled the guitar – all these were very special. Much of the rock music of the time was easy to listen to – and just as easy to forget. But very few players crafted a twelve-bar blues solo in the same life or death manner that Clapton did. Armed with his Gibson Les Paul (a guitar that soon became the "hammer of the gods" among players and enthusiasts), Clapton attacked his solos with a vengeance, with a heartfelt ferocity that was at once primal *and* technically flawless. For EC, bending a note was never a casual thing; every note, every bend, every inflection, had its deadly serious purpose. A personal favorite is the soul-piercing solo EC takes on Mayall's version of "Have You Heard" – a slow and majestic slow blues that unflinchingly builds from the first opening note to the orgasmic burst of notes at the very height of the solo.

Afficionados of other musical genres (such as opera or jazz) can relate to the superlatives and apostrophes that are enlisted in any serious attempt to describe this music in words. Lovers of opera, of symphonic orchestra, use similar language when attempting to describe peak moments of their treasured music. Although electric blues seems at quite an aesthetic distance from the work of Verdi, Mozart, and Puccini, both forms capture the spirit and express the passions of the human heart with equal intensity, fervor, and majesty.

Clapton's time with Mayall was a tiny blip – a flea on an elephant – compared with what was to come. Clapton told reporters that he felt hemmed in, limited, by Mayall's tyrannical devotion to the blues – blues, more blues, and nothing but the blues! Deviations from the genre? In Mayall's band, there was no such thing. Either you loved the blues or you left.

Clapton chose to leave.

EC rising

Signing a pact with the devil is not light opera. Even the saddest and sorriest "bottoms" that seasoned clinicians encounter over the course of a busy career pale in comparison to the life-changing horror that could have swept Clapton completely away. Recent biographies, including those of Clapton (2007), Marianne

Faithfull (2000), and Patti Boyd (2007) document the gory detail of EC's drug abuse years.

The absolute nadir, however, must have been his 4-year-old son Conor's fatal fall from the 53rd floor of a midtown Manhattan high rise in 1991. The closest we can get to that experience is the horrifying narrative of Adrien Leverkuhn, the fictive Beethoven in Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus.*

That's when EC turned his life around. His soul and his music softened, became humble, and many of the songs from this period are filled with an almost intolerable freight of sorrow.

Clapton's story, a model of human endurance and courage, continues to this day. Perhaps the absence of a father steeled him for what was to come.

EC began to prefer playing unamplified ("unplugged") guitar. He also founded a toney rehab program in the Caribbean. Clapton's most recent work – his acoustic interpretations of Robert Johnson – will easily rise to the top of the canon and resist erosion by the mournful friction of time.

As Clapton sweetened his music – and frustrated countless fans by holding back the banshee attacks and fighter jet solos – he became more thoughtful, more open, and generally more remorseful about his drinking, drugging, and womanizing ways. His recent autobiography (Clapton, 2007) reads like a puritan's travel guide to the bars, clubs, and concert halls of his past: there is minimal mention of the chemical extremes, of the drug-primed bacchanals of his earlier days. Clapton went in and out of collaborations with various musicians whose sensibilities – and talent – diverged, sometimes greatly from his.

Then everything came to a halt. "Mr. D." came to collect his due. Clapton's 4-year-old son fell to his death from a Manhattan high rise.

EC had already embraced sobriety. Now he was really done. Too many things had gone out of control. Clapton toned down his look and he toned down the music. He began recording ballads – many from the Robert Johnson songbook – on an acoustic guitar, sans band. Now he produced very mournful, very elegant lieder, songs about his absent father and his lost son. These songs are painful: they are sweet, lugubrious, and overwhelmingly sad.

Those with grit and intestinal fortitude can handle the jeroboams of sorrow packed into these songs. In one song, Clapton mourns the father that, as a child, he never knew.

In real life, EC didn't get to look into his father's eyes until he was 30 years old. Yet the song succeeds brilliantly at evoking both the joy and the sorrow of having no one to show you the way. The death of Clapton's 4-year-old son Conor may have been EC's final payment to the Great Deceiver. Perhaps Satan and his minions have stopped knocking on Clapton's door, evermore.

The supernatural

Similarities, strange coincidences, parallel universes, doppelgangers, synchronicity…Peter Green, another young working class Englishman, signed on with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers the moment Clapton left.

Born Peter Greenbaum, son of an English butcherman, PG – like his predecessor in Mayall's "college of electric blues" – was an autodidact who devoted his adolescence and young adulthood to a steady diet of study, practice, and playing the blues. Rarely was he seen without guitar in hand.

His ascension to the very "top of the pops" ran the usual (usual for emerging superstars, that is) obstacle course of short-lived engagements and gigs in the highly incestuous world of English blues players, pubs, and clubs.

During his pre-Bluesbreakers period, Green (with great trepidation) watched Clapton perform; not only was the Les Paul guitar on fire – but Clapton's singing was awesome, too!

Undaunted, Green played on – and his success took him down a hard and rocky road.

A Hard Road (John Mayall & the Bluesbreakers, Decca, 1967) was the second Bluesbreakers album, Peter Green at the helm. The recording features the identical twelve-bar blues structure, scales and fingerings that Clapton used. None the less, Green's sound was totally unique.

Green and Clapton even used the same equipment, early model Gibson Les Pauls. But the sounds each achieved were worlds apart. On guitar, Green could twist a note, bend it and turn it, and then sustain it for what sounded like forever.

Green's sound: that of a high voltage shaman, an oracle, launching fire and brimstone portents from the Dark Side. Green's preference for minor seventh chords explains some of the uncanny sounds he achieved. The technical aspects of his playing, such as his use of reverb and extreme sustain effects, do not fully account for the music's power. Green's instrumental and vocal

magic bore witness to his personal crucifixion in strange and unearthly realms.

All told, Green did one album with the Bluesbreakers; this album, *A Hard Road,* is a masterwork of the genre. The guitar sound is unmistakable. Each passage – the solos in particular – rises and then falls from astonishing heights of passion and brio. Further, Green's signature "attack" sounds faster and more technically perfect each time you hear it.

One of the best examples of Green's guitar is his instrumental, *The Supernatural* (on *A Hard Road,* op cit.). Even those sworn to scientism – card-carrying atheists, too – will hear shadow and séance and tenebrous possibility in the unforgettable two and a half minutes of this very strange song.

Mayall's Schoolmen each went on to international recognition and fame. After Mayall, PG founded what was arguably *the* band of the era, Fleetwood Mac. Many "Mac" devotees are unaware of the band's solid foundation (thanks to Green) in the blues. Again, the Peter Green tunes are crepuscular, other-worldy, and they begin to point toward his imminent collapse into apocalyptic and gnostic-type beliefs.

Green quit Mac at the height of its success. Pumping out one chartbuster after another, the young men of Mac were practically millionaires.

Green, already a mendicant in his mind (he wore long flowing garments, a long beard and a halo of unshorn locks, very much the latter-day Christ), then gave all his money away. Green the anchorite disavowed all commercial attachments and inducements and ignored the desperate pleas that he remain with Mac. He continued to write and play, recording a number of songs that became increasingly eccentric, almost messianic in tone.

Green had found God.

Then he disappeared. According to rumor, PG had joined a cult called The Children of God and had moved to Israel. The last album-length recording was a record aptly entitled *The End of the Game* (Peter A. Green, *The End of the Game,* Reprise Records, 1970). The album art (featuring a tight head shot of a ferocious tiger) very much matched the music within. The album tracks – instrumental forays into odd sound effects and melodic blind alleys – were disturbing and very different from anything PG had ever done before.

Decades later PG re-emerged, this time with a bona fide band (The Splinter Group), international concert dates, and a more recognizable and more traditional sound. Green had wandered into stygian precincts, with LSD as his guide. Psychosis soon followed. His second coming, likely facilitated by psychiatric treatment, was a triumph and an inspiration.

Before his extended sojourn into mysticism and madness, he (yes, he too!) recorded an archival Robert Johnson tune (Robert Johnson, *Hellhound On My Trail,* Vocalion Records, 1937).

Michael Taylor

Michael ("Mick") Taylor, the third panel of the metaphorical triptych, was the last superstar graduate of the Mayall/Bluesbreakers school.

Taylor's profile will sound familiar: English, working class, intensely dedicated, afficionado of blues. In many photos Taylor is seen wielding a Les Paul. Unlike Clapton and Green, he stayed with the Bluesbreakers long enough to record at least three world-class LPs.

Taylor was 16 years old when he was recruited by Mayall. His sound – again, within the same melodic and rhythmic structure, the twelve-bar blues – was totally unique. Descriptions of his work capture elements but never the entirety of the sound. He perfected a finger vibrato style that took the instrument and its electronics to the peak of their potential. Further, he has been an acknowledged master of electric slide guitar. His sense of timing is simultaneously brilliant, surprising, and filled with passion. Taylor's listeners continually react to his solos, almost by reflex: "*Of course, how could it be any other note but that*?"

It is unclear exactly how or why Taylor left the blues band.

We do know that he was drafted by The Rolling Stones following the drug death of their guitar player, Brian Jones. Taylor was with the Stones from 1969 until the mid-1970s. During this period the band astounded the world with one creative triumph after another. The recorded material was brilliant; the concerts are still talked about in hushed, devotional tones. On stage, Taylor took the Stones' overplayed trademark tunes to new and exotic places. Taylor's extended solos on stage were comparable in both majesty and invention to the sumptuous musical excursions of Ravi Shankar. In fact, Taylor often surprised and amazed listeners with forays into exotic "Far Eastern"-sounding intervals and scales. These extended passages were usually improvised; their spontaneity added to the musical power. Taylor's guitar solo on *Sway* (Jagger/Richards and Mick

Taylor, from the album *Sticky Fingers* (Rolling Stones/Atlantic Records, 1971) – 16 bars from start to finish – is one of the supreme guitar passages in rock and roll.

Are drugs bad? The challenge here is to consider the question from a non-dualistic point of view. The Stones' best album, *Exile on Main Street* (a double album, containing 18 original songs; Rolling Stones/Atlantic Records) was recorded in 1972 at a rented chateau in the south of France. During their months'-long stay, the band's unabashed drug consumption took on almost heroic proportions. None the less the Stones and their precocious virtuoso managed to craft music that was rapidly (and appropriately!) canonized. Some argue that creative triumphs sometimes occur *despite* the drugs.

Taylor did pay the devil his due.

His life and career took an extended nose dive, no doubt related to some of the appetites he had cultivated as a Stone. Taylor spoke of his drug use publicly and actually continued to perform and record during those difficult times. Taylor, like Clapton and Green, overcame his demons. The best part of the happy ending is that he is still out there, at the top of his spiritual form, playing out music miracles just like before.

CODA: how to treat VIPs

Everyone is a VIP, especially when they come to you for help. Individuals with damaged self-esteem (along with everyone else) should always be treated as VIPs.

Life and doctors and treatment programs, however, often fail to rise to this level of compassion.

VIP patients (celebrities, artists, musicians, actors, politicians, plutocrats) often have the following in common:

1. They expect (boundless) individual attention, unconditional love, and immediate gratification of expressed (or even covert) needs.
2. Substance use history is often marked by intake of massive and costly amounts of drugs and/or alcohol.
3. Substance use is not only condoned but actually encouraged by fans and those trying to gain entry to the Olympian social circle.
4. They are often irritable, and have intense feelings of both entitlement and self-loathing.
5. Self-regard roller coasters between heavenly aeries and self-created dungeons of despair.
6. They have been courted many times by healers and would-be miracle workers, so they are suspicious of any new Buddhas on the block.
7. They expect shallow superficial relationships; they often expect very little of others – "*everyone wants something from me*."
8. Attempts at honest, direct communication may be perceived as more efforts to manipulate and to connive.
9. "The show must go on:" they *must* have their drugs because of a critically important rehearsal, performance, recording session, etc.
10. Often dismissive or suspicious of attempts to gather background information on family of origin, childhood, personal issues: "*Hey Doc, been there, done that…how many milligrams can you write me*?"
11. Beneath the bravado and the tough as nails exterior there is often an extremely fragile and sensitive soul, who over-personalizes events and behaviors, and reacts to even neutral content conversations as though being criticized or rejected.

On the other side of the smoking gun sits the therapist, who needs to monitor both the client–therapist interaction and his/her own feelings, which are also to some extent predictable:

- Why me? What makes him think I can possibly help him?
- He's got serious money, inconceivably more than I do. Which of us really needs help?
- With all that money, all that power at his beck and call, how can he possibly be so depressed/messed up/self-destructive?
- He has no idea what real pain is about.
- How come he can get away with all this? Anyone else would be in prison by now!
- This person loves drugs. There's no way he's going to be interested in any meaningful change.
- I must have listened to his second album 400 times. Here he sits, in my office, asking for help. I used to worship this person!

And so it goes. Usually the second meeting is far more comfortable and informal than the first. It's probably helpful to back off on systematic information gathering during the first meeting, unless issues related to acute withdrawal or other potential medical crises are imminent. It's best when VIP and doctor can establish a relationship where each recognizes the humanity and (to some extent) the limitations of the other. More often than not the VIP is from New Jersey or Brooklyn, not Mount Olympus; although the clinician is rife with

diplomas, certifications, and academic honors, he too is a human being, a human being who will try to do his best by his patient but who is certainly not infallible, certainly not equipped with all the answers and quick fixes that his high roller patient wants. It's also helpful to spend some time trading life stories, so each gets to see the other as real, as capable – yet fallible, too.

So if and when the shade of Robert Johnson comes knocking on your office door, parchment and blood ink and wax seal in hand, find the nearest exit and head for the hills!

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