

# AFTERMATH OF A BREAKDOWN

By Ian Brown

*Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep  
And doesn't know where to find them,  
Leave them alone, and they'll come home  
Bringing their tails behind them.*

Flying through a nightmare to Switzerland. A blur of events, a time warp. Spiralling through a black hole, unseen, unreal in all aspects but the inner horror. Screaming across a bridge of despair, like in Münch's painting.

What is 'a breakdown'? Is it panic? Hysteria? Withdrawal? Tears? Screams? Is it exploding anger? Depression? Collapsing identity? Annihilation of the ego? Raw vulnerability? Or is it, a disintegration of the thinking process? A breaking loose of the feeling process? An emergency of the spiritual process, rich with potential? Are delusions, voices in the head, a deep sense of unreality necessary conditions? Is 'a breakdown' breakthrough? Breakthrough to the light? Breaking through encrusted patterns and petrified routines? Breaking through layers of maya?

Standing paralyzed in the middle of Victoria station, like a motionless bird poised for a long flight through the dark night. The real flight was not to Switzerland and Morocco, but through a nightmare of uncharted states of consciousness. It was a flight that continued long after I got back from Morocco.

One of these states involves becoming a passive receptor, as opposed to an actor. The barriers and defenses, both emotional and cognitive, that normally filter out unwanted stimuli, collapse. What then takes place is the phenomenon of 'flooding', a heightened awareness of sound and light and feeling due to extreme sensitization of the nerves. The flooding by intense sensory input and an unrestrained flow of ideas becomes too much, and there is a need to escape, insulate, withdraw.

Like a white star collapsing into a black hole, my sense of who I was, my underlying matrix of identity, went through a process of splintering, fracturing, disintegrating. I was left aware of many 'I's', and no 'I's', a quivering jellyfish of vulnerability, unable to move myself back to the safety of the all embracing, amniotic universe. Whatever identity I was aware of, seemed to be a negative mass of ingested shame and feelings of utter failure.

Little Bo Peep. Lost her sheep. Lost her way. Lost her marbles. Lost her wits. But like the sheep, not really lost - just overwhelmed, exhausted, disorientated.

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Outer events reflect the inner state. In my disorientation, I take the wrong train at Calais and go to Lausanne instead of Zurich. Trying to make the best of the situation, I hitch-hike through the southern part of Switzerland, through Montreux and Martigny. When I am let off in Brig, high up in the Alps, close to the Jungfrau, I am told that the pass ahead is blocked with snow. The only way to Zurich, and from there to Davos, is to retrace my steps to Lausanne and take the northern route. Trying to create some certainty in the chaos of my mind, I decide not to hitch-hike any more, but instead to buy a train ticket all the way to Davos, via Lausanne and Zurich.

Spend the night in Zurich railway station. The city is rich and antiseptic, a sugary coating to the bitter pill of capitalism all around. My interpretation of what I see alternates between Marxist and Freudian concepts. The station at night seems like the anus of an anal-retentive society. The excrement hole, the vomit hole. It is a scene from Bosch or Breugle. The misfits and rejects gather here - drunks, homosexuals, prostitutes, all clinging to the slippery orifices of this great putrid organism. I try to figure out whether I am one of them. I feel like shit but am not yet shit. But as I tune into my surroundings, I realize that they are not shit either. They are people, trying to survive despite the shit. I am approached by a nice-looking blond haired guy. "Would you like to go for a coffee?" he says. "No, thank-you," I reply, feeling shocked. He smiles pleasantly, says "O.K.", and moves off. For some reason, I feel a bit ashamed.

Over at the news-stand, I pick up a Sunday Times. In the sports section, I see the headline 'Scotland's great 14-5 win over England at Murrayfield'. I take a quick look and see that two of my old Sedbergh team-mates, Alistair Biggar and John Spencer, have each scored a try. Boy, if they could see me now!! Shrivelled further by shame.

Time to write my diary. It is becoming a necessary daily exorcism. I go into the cafeteria and order a tea. The waitress is pretty. I make a feeble attempt to flirt with her. Forget it, she's not interested. But then she disappears and returns a few minutes later looking like she's put on some make-up. For an instant my spirits rise, then I am flooded with feelings of anger and humiliation evoked by memories of all the talk about 'love' and 'cooperation' between the three of us. Why didn't I fight for Ellie, for us, for myself? Was she not worth it? Were we not worth it? Was I not worth it? There had been conflict - yes, but not cooperation. There had been hypocrisy rather than truth and honesty. And there had been scheming and betrayal rather than love and support. Give me a break!

In my diary, I write: 'I must read Hemmingway and Nietzsche - especially the former for his recognition of the razor-edge aspect of life, and the resulting necessity to experience those things which will continually assert the quintessence of life.'

I have only one book with me. It was lent to me by Brenda before I left. It is called The Big Sur and The Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch by Henry Miller. Brenda was sure that I would like it. I take it out of my rucksack and start reading. Strangely, I feel much better after thirty or forty minutes reading. I even get a little sleep before the morning comes.

The next day, in Davos, I touch base again with the outer reality. Popping out of my black hole, I meet up with Mark and Ruth. They are staying at a hotel and seem to have lots of money. They tell me that they have been going skiing every day. They say they plan to stay another four or five days in Davos before setting off through France and Spain to Morocco. They ask me where I am going to sleep. I reply that I have no idea. They tell me that I can spend one night in their hotel room as long as I find a place for myself the next day. I say, wearily, that I will look for a part-time job and a place to stay first thing in the morning.

Diary entry: 26-3-70:

*This morning I was recommended to visit a house called Pravignan to see a Herr Sciarmella about a place to stay. I was told that this gentleman had a Laager where the impoverished ski-bums could stay for a fraction of what they would have to pay at a hotel. Herr Sciarmella turned out to be a corpulent Italian with a strong face softened by gentle eyes and a warm smile. He was wearing a house painter's white trousers with sufficient paint smudges and frayed patches to give him a professional look.*

*Herr Sciarmella can't help me as regards the Laager .... "rempli"... but "un moment s'il vous plaît" ... phone call ... "venez avec moi." We drive down the hill across the main street, across the railway track and turn up a slushy lane. At the end is a dilapidated wooden chalet. A man appear, embraces Herr Sciarmella, and I am introduced to Signor Serèno Secchi. He is lean, tanned, deeply lined ... hawkish, but then the eyes ..., kind, compassionate, generous. We enter into his house, 'Waldhaus'.*

*So far, it has been established that Signor Secchi is an architect/builder/painter/artist/artist/writer and musician. I believe it. I am offered a drink ... "whisky?" ... "cognac?" ... "campari?" ... "thank-you, campari" ... "mit wasser?" ... "non, merci, je vais l'essayer sans l'eau" ... "ça va?" ... "oui, ça va" ...*

*The two ex-patriot Italians are very close. In the car, Herr Sciarmella said, "Signor Secchi is a very good man ... we are very good friends" (and as he says this, he touches his heart)... "he makes some money and then spends it on food and drink. He likes to live well. Son and daughter both married. Wife is in Davos with other man. Herr Secchi alone."*

*On the door into the living room is a large photo. In it are Signors Secchi and Sciarmella, both looking younger. The latter is resplendant in a dinner jacket and white bow tie as he stands beside an elderly lady. He is singing (possibly opera, with his magnificent chest and posture), and behind him, looking handsome and very Latin, is Signor Secchi with accordion box outstretched.*

*So we have a few drinks and Signor Secchi says he would be very happy if I stayed at his house for as short or as long time as I want. We agree on a minimal 'rent' and he shows me where I'll be sleeping.*

*If this is not enough, he tells me that he knows a hotel where I may be able to get work as a dishwasher. He takes me there. Within half an hour I have a job, as a potato peeler as it turns out, effective immediately. Signor Secchi takes his leave and I start peeling potatoes.*

*And now, looking back on this amazing day, my heart is full of joy and gratitude. I am living again. I dance. I kiss the grass, the sky, the mountains. The lines of pain and deadness around my eyes have vanished. My mouth moves more naturally into a smile. The laugh is there to be provoked or evoked. The fragments have reintegrated. I am whole again. People can be beautiful. God bless Signor Sciarmella, and Signor Secchi with his unquestioning openness and trust, his generosity and friendship. God bless Dragon, the Yugoslavian dishwasher (who said that "all the people in the world are good"), and Tomas, the Spanish floor-cleaner, and the girl in the restaurant who gave me a glass of milk for free. And God bless those poor bastards (of which I have been one for far too long) who shut the doors to Life with their ideas and fancy theories. Tomorrow, I ski in the morning, I peel potatoes in the evening, and I sleep in a house full of good vibrations at night. I am content.'*

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I was a potato peeler in Davos for three days. It wasn't long before I was seeing things through the eyes of a sociologist again. The pecking order in the hotel was clear for all to see. At the top was the 'gros bonnet', who was either German or German-Swiss. At his side were his deputies, the French or

Italian-Swiss sauce chefs. Under their command were the 'entremetteurs' (in charge of soups, vegetables, and sweets), the rôisseurs (roast, fried and grilled meats). Then came the waiters - mostly Italian-Swiss. At the bottom of the pyramid were the 'lumpen-proletariat' - the floor-cleaners, dishwashers, delivery people and kitchen helps (including potato peelers), who were usually from the 'lesser' countries such as Yugoslavia, Spain, Greece and Turkey. To have a kitchen help from Britain was unheard of, which was fine by me.

So much for 'generalists'! In the 'brigade de cuisine' as developed by Georges Auguste Escoffier, there was only place for specialists. Ah ... disciplinary boundaries - Dr. Clifford-Vaughn would have felt right at home. The whole experience put me in mind of George Orwell's descriptions of hotels and restaurants in Down and Out in London and Paris.

And then it was time to leave. Mark and Ruth put away their natty ski-suits, got on their hip suede pants and fringed jackets, and we were ready to roll. I said a heartfelt goodbye to my friend Signor Secchi (who felt like a friend even though I'd only known him such a short time), and off we went.

On the way to Lausanne, we passed a home called 'Mimosa'. The pain came flooding back. I sat in the back of the car fighting back tears. Maybe I hadn't given enough. Maybe I hadn't been patient enough. Maybe Roy was right about "fear being realized." Maybe if I'd had more faith, shown more love and less fear and pain, maybe I would still be Ellie's 'man'. But is that what I wanted? I needed love, yes, but did I want her love? Did I want her to be my 'woman'? And what the hell did that mean anyway? But I missed her. I wished she was with me.

I could feel the pit of despair opening wide. We stopped in Lausanne for lunch. After we'd eaten, I offered to pay and Mark and Ruth accepted - 18 francs that I can ill-afford. If it leaves me resentful, why did I offer, I wonder.

I am beginning to feel more and more disconnected. Why am I going to Morocco? It doesn't make any sense. You should be getting back to London. Retrieve the situation before it's too late. Get back there. Get Ellie back. Get back into L.S.E. You're going in the wrong direction. But am I? I'd just be going back to the source of all the pain. The wounds are too fresh. I need time.

In an attempt to shift my thoughts to something else, I bought two books - A Moveable Feast by Hemmingway, and The Poorhouse Fair by John Updike (one of Ellie's favorite authors). A cursory glance at their writing styles plunges me further into feelings of despair. I have decided that I want to be a writer, either doing what Steuer suggested, or else fiction writing. But I can't write like these two guys, as different as they are from each other. It's like when I listen to Oscar Peterson or Jacques Loussier, it quickly squashes any delusion I might have that I am a 'good' pianist.

I feel the familiar feelings of inner shrinking. I am tiny and fragile. I am a jelly-fish. One better, perhaps, than a vegetable.

"I'm going back to London," I announce to Mark.

"Oh, wow ... it's really bad, is it?" says Mark.

And the tears start up - tears that just bring further feelings of humiliation. Ruth becomes flustered and sympathetic. Mark become fatherly.

"Let's drive to Geneva before making any decision," he says with some authority.

I take my rucksack out of the car and walk off, still crying. I feel somehow irretrievably committed to a self-destructive course of action, like Gerald as he starts trekking off through the snow. Mark catches up with me, takes my arm and gently leads me back. And that is what I need, to be led back, or led forward, or led anywhere, just so long as someone is leading me. What was that hymn, 'through the encircling gloom, lead thou me on'? Is God dead, as the existentialists said? God knows. I sit in the car sobbing while Mark starts the car. This is too humiliating. I don't want to be led. I'm not a child. "Just a minute," I say, gaining a strand of sanity from the assertion. "I need to be on my own for

a moment." I get out of the car again, and go to the restaurant washroom. Thank God for washrooms. Now there's a thesis topic: 'The washroom as Asylum - a practical (and cost effective) application of R.D. Laing's ideas.' Relief of aloneness. I feel a fearful rent in my soul. I allowed myself to be psychically transported back to London, the source of the pain. Not a good idea. Time to seal over the wound again. Time to cautiously extend a foot forward again. Time to compose myself.

I go to sleep in the car and wake up in a new world. No longer the concrete and steel and urban cleanliness of Zurich and Lausanne, but a new enchanted realm; mountains, fields, tractors ... a small town of wood châteaux ... an outdoor fête drawing life from these dour Swiss people ... young people sprout from the ground ... three children in a field form a triangle ... they appear to be playing something ... magic ... the light is soft and diffuse ... the sounds are sweet ... mother earth yielding, accepting, supporting; and I am Roy ... the little kid sitting in the back seat as Daddy drives, a look of concentration on his face, and Mummy makes occasional remarks about the scenery; and now I am the court eunuch ... the Eunuch of Istanbul ... humiliation becoming abdication becoming emasculation. Sitting, crouched in the back seat, neither heard nor seen - except for the occasional quick glance through the rearview mirror. I have abdicated my responsibilities for my past, or present, or even future actions. Why should I take any blame? 'Mum, Dad, I didn't know any better ... honest.'

Ruth hands me a chocolate bunny. Of course, it is Easter ... and I guess, this being Switzerland and all. Now I am the bunny ... the Easter bunny, being prepared for sacrifice ... some huge hand is removing the beautiful red ribbon from around my neck ... they are not rough ... they are doing it delicately, gently, almost ceremoniously ... and then, mesmerized, I see huge, open jaws appearing, saliva dripping, drooling, tongue lolling expectantly ... oh no, you couldn't! you wouldn't! aaaahhhhhh ... and I bite off the head of my rabbit self, now getting a perverse pleasure as I see myself as one of those power-crazed ogres in Grimm's Fairy Tales, or Saturn in Goya's painting, savaging naked bodies, dismembering helpless limbs, huge teeth ripping into, insatiably feasting on human flesh.

Softness of landscape. No more snow and harsh dark blue sky. I am the reincarnation of Gerald, born into a gentler, more androgynous world - no, not Gerald, but Gerald and Birkin combined, an interanimation of their two souls, as John Donne would say. Warm golden sun dissolves the horror, chases away the ogres of the night.

Mark makes a comment about the film 'Joanna'... the need they all had to go to Morocco ... and the images return ... the amiable, aristocratic Englishman, the child-woman Joanna, the white cotton dresses, the flaming sun going down over the ancient deserts. The sun, the sun, we're following the sun. We're going to Morocco.

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Following the sun, through Avignon, Provence, and into Spain. And then, in the unpredictable interplay between inner and outer, suddenly, unexpectedly, and brilliantly, the sun floods into my inner darkness. The event took place in the Youth Hostel of Lérida, in northern Spain. It was evening and I was on my own. According to our established pattern, Mark and Ruth found themselves a hotel and I located the youth hostel. I sat in the courtyard of the hostel, smoking and reading randomly from Miller's book The Big Sur And The Oranges Of Hieronymous Bosch. Suddenly, I hit a section that drew me in with an almost magnetic pull. What I read was so important to me at the time, that I would like to include lengthy excerpts.

In the pages that I read, Miller is having a passionate discussion about 'choice' and 'fate' with an astrologer friend named Moricand.

Miller starts things off:

*"What is the most important - peace and joy, or wisdom? If to know would make you a happier man, which would you choose?"*

*I might have known his answer. It was that we have no choice in such matters.*

*I violently disagreed. "Perhaps," said I, "I am still very much of an American. That is to say, naive, optimistic, gullible ... I am a product of the land of plenty, a believer in superabundance, a believer in miracles. Any deprivation I suffered was my own doing. I blame nobody but myself for my woes and afflictions, for my shortcomings, for my transgressions. What you believe I might have learned through a deeper knowledge of astrology, I learned through experience of life. I made all the mistakes that it is possible for a man to make - and paid the penalty. I am that much richer, that much wiser, that much happier, if I may say so, than if I had found through study or through discipline how to avoid the snares and pitfalls in my path ...*

*... Every so often I revolt, even against what I believe in with all my heart. I have to attack everything, myself included. Why? To simplify things. We know too much - and too little. It's the intellect which gets us into trouble, not our intelligence. That we can never have enough of. But I get weary of listening to specialists, weary of listening to the man with one string to his fiddle. I don't deny the validity of astrology. What I object to is becoming enslaved to any one point of view ... I abhor people who have to filter everything through the one language they know, whether it be astrology, religion, yoga, politics, economics, or what ...*

*... We all want to extract the full measure of life. Must we go to books and teachers, to science, religion, philosophy ... to take the path? Can we not become fully awake and aware without the torture we put ourselves through!?"*

*"Life is nothing but a Calvary," he said. "Not even knowledge of astrology can alter that stern fact ... life is perpetual struggle, and struggle entails sorrow and suffering. And suffering gives us strength and character."*

*"For what? To what end?"*

*"The better to endure life's burdens."*

*"What a woeful picture! It's like training for a contest in which one knows in advance he will be defeated ... life as a burden, life as a battleground, life as a problem, these are all partial ways of looking at life. Two lines of poetry often tell us more than the weightiest tome by an erudite. Knowledge weighs us down; wisdom saddens one. The love of truth has nothing to do with knowledge or wisdom ... the sum of all knowledge is greater confusion. The intellect runs away with itself. Mind is not intellect. The intellect is a product of the ego, and the ego can never be stilled, never be satisfied. When do we begin to know what we know? When we have ceased to believe that we can ever know. Truth comes with surrender. And it's wordless ...*

*... [There was] a moment in man's evolution when he lost faith in himself. Or, to put it another way, when he lost his wholeness. When he wanted to know instead of be. Schizophrenia began far back, not yesterday or the day before. And when man split, he split into myriad fragments. But even today, as fragmented as he is, he can be made whole again. The only difference between the Adamic man and the man of today is that the one was born to Paradise and the other has to create it. And that brings me back to the question of choice. A man can only prove that he is free by electing to*

*be so. And he can only do it when he realizes that he himself made himself unfree. And that to me means that he must unvest from God the powers he has given God. The more of God he recognizes in himself, the freer he becomes. And the freer he becomes, the fewer decisions he has to make, the less choice is presented to him. Freedom is a misnomer. Certitude is more like it. Unerringness. Because truthfully there is always only one way to act in any situation, not two, not three. Freedom implies choice, and choice exists only to the extent that we are aware of our ineptitude. The adept takes no thought, one might say. He is one with thought, one with the path ...*

*... We talk about fate as if it were something visited upon us; we forget that we create our fate every day we live. And by fate, I mean woes that beset us, which are merely the effects of causes which are not nearly as mysterious as we pretend. Most of the ills we suffer from are directly traceable to our own behaviour ... there is no mystery about disease, nor crime, nor the thousand and one things that plague us. Live simply and wisely. Forget, forgive, renounce, abdicate ... peace and joy ... I say it's ours for the asking ... le bel aujourd'hui."*

Miller's writing - both the ideas and the style - was intoxicating to me. It was like the music I loved the most. Variations on a Theme. Beethoven 'cello variations on a theme by Haydn. Dixieland jazz improvisations. Extemporizing Bach as in Loussier a combination of the two as in Jacques Loussier. Variations on a theme - an upward spiral of repetition and change, returning to the source while developing the message. Like Indian ragas, with the energy of life, the kundalini, the chi, deeply grounded, emanating from the roots, and then slowly spreading upward through the trunk, while at the same time pulsing outward through the branches and leaves, lifting upwards, but always connected to the trunk ... and then after the expansion and the climax, the journey inward and homeward back to the roots.

This writing was pure and true and bursting with the rhythmic energy of life, with both its dazzling symmetries and puzzling contradictions. It was uplifting because, like melody and rhythm and harmony, it connected and blended the myriad fragments into a flowing, joyous whole. It was the language of the soul, reassuring, validating, reconnecting one to the godhead - an intertwining of the word and the spirit.

*Diary Entry: 2-4-70*

*My immediate response to reading this passage by Miller was illumination, inspiration, joy, and a desire to reach out to others. The joy that I used to have, the joy which has gradually become emmeshed by more and more strands of doubt and confusion, that joy just burst through its bonds. I have been defeating myself for too long, causing my own despair, projecting it onto others, pursuing goals which are not inwardly mine. To hell with what others want or believe!! Or what they have or don't have. I can't write like Updike, or Miller for that matter, but why should I want to?! Why don't I remember what I have, listen to my inner voice and follow its calling, do what is right for me. If only one could keep this light clear and bright all the time.*

*My immediate impulse is to write to Bob Davies of Everdale Place (the Ontario school based on A.S. Neill's 'Summerhill' model). Now it all makes sense - why it turns out to be Erich Fromm and Henry Miller who are the ones that endorse A.S. Neill's book. My favorite sociologist and my favorite writer supporting my favorite educator - there really is such a thing as 'kindred spirits'.*

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The next day we reached Madrid, where we spent two days. The effects of Miller's writing stayed with me and I had a good conversation at breakfast with Mark about intellect versus emotions (Koestler) as compared to spirit (Watts and Wilson).

Madrid. Another big city with big city rhythm. Does nothing for me. I visit The Prado - a vast mausoleum of paintings. I don't like places where vital energy and spirit is captured and contained inside cases and cages and frames. Places like museums, galleries, concert-halls, galleries, zoos, classrooms. I wander around by myself. Renaissance paintings in dark earth tones surround me: Anonimo Español (1450) - saints with millstones around their necks being drowned or decapitated, burned or beaten ... expressionless faces, an abundance of incubi and succubi floating around; El Maestro de Arguis - devil and angel weighing human souls on balance scales; Escuela de Van Eyck - 'La Fuente de la Gracia' - the fount of all wisdom, emanating as a waterfall from God.

We leave Madrid. I am happy to go. We climb over the mountains which helps put things in perspective - at least for a while. Then descending, we finally reach Granada. This is truly a new world. My previous homes have all been in grey towns: Edinburgh ('Auld Reekie'); Sedbergh (grey walls, grey skies and grey slate); Kingston, Ontario ('The limestone city'); and London (admittedly more colour than the others). Here, amidst a barren yet magnificent landscape, the only grey to be encountered is in the mountainous cliffs surrounding the city. The earth is a rich red and the town is full of beige coloured turrets and towers, and white-washed walls and red-tiled rooves. Granada, the great Moorish fortress town, whose population in the 12th. Century was twice its current level. A magnificent and dramatic place, as proud and beautiful as an El Greco painting or a flamenco dance.

And we follow the sun southwards and eventually reach Algeciras, the gateway to Morocco. No turning back now. I buy a Spanish guitar (my only real purchase except for food and a couple of books). However, I soon find that unlike my last trip around Europe, when I was 19, I do not have the confidence to play it. It is a vivid reminder of how much I have changed in four years.

I am feeling tension with Mark. I resent his control, his money. Every night he and Ruth stay at a hotel, and I go off in search of a youth hostel. We are a little microcosm of the class system, transporting it with us wherever we go. Ruth is completely bland. She is careful not to challenge Mark. However, neither do I, a fact which is producing growing disgust with myself.

We give a ride to two San Francisco freaks. Despite my scepticism about hippies in general, I have yet to meet a Californian that I didn't like. They really do seem to be 'beautiful' people with their immediate and unquestioning acceptance of who you are.

Everyone seems excited about making the ferry crossing to Morocco.

"That's where it's at, man," says one of the freaks. "That's where everyone's going. There's a place on the coast, man, called Essauara. You can live their for next to nothing. Beautiful beaches, friendly natives, no dope hassles ... communes man, lots of communes, free love, sharing, people with heightened consciousnesses ... real good vibrations ... Paradise from what I hear."

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For me anyway, Morocco was like a trip into hell. Morocco was where the inner and outer nightmare became one.



At first, it wasn't so bad. There was the usual excitement of travel through unexplored regions, the sensory enrichment that came from passing through northern Morocco, through Rabat and Fez, on our way to Marrakesh. A fragmented dream, yes, but not yet a full-fledged nightmare.

Fragments, fragments ...

... Kind-eyed Moroccan in Marrakesh wearing Canadian plaid jacket, offers his services to make coos-coos for some Americans, if one of them opens a restaurant for him in the States ...

... Californian freaks, European hippies, Canadian drop-outs, all espousing the philosophy of 'peace 'n love man', 'be groovy not greedy', 'money's not where it's at, man'. And the stark contradictions ... the line-ups at the American Express office, calling to Dad back in the States to send some cash. We'll send you the good vibes, Dad - you send us the cash. And I cling to the stoic philosophy of 'self-reliance' that I was brought up with, by my parents, by my school - values that were then reinforced by reading people like Emerson and Thoreau. And I recoil from the indulgence, the escapism, and the hypocrisy ...

... There is a very sensual atmosphere, completely unlike European or North American culture. The freaks are attracted by the exotic, and erotic 'feel' of the place, as were gay writers like Orton and William Burroughs before them. Because everything is so cheap, freedom to 'be' (i.e. not work) can be bought. The freaks 'choose' not to see the underlying rigid social order, and work-to-survive daily life of the average Moroccan ...

... Smell of hot coffee and deep-fried doughnuts, freshly baked bread, cinnamon and thyme, and of course the omni-present 'kif'.

Fragments, some good, some not so good, but more and more I am popping in and out of my black hole of identity, disappearing into the crisis of who or what I am, what I have become, what I am meant to be doing, where in hell I am supposed to be going.

And then we get to Essauara. Our destination, the end of the trip, the promised land. And what I find is a cul-de-sac, a fetid backwater of beached dreams. The clock stands still and entropy proceeds almost visibly.

Mark and Ruth find a hotel. Even at Moroccan rates, I cannot afford a hotel room. But through the grapevine I am introduced to a crazy Scottish guy with short hair (!) who thinks that he is the Devil. He lets me stay in his small flat. At night he disappears wearing a black cloak. Perfect. I have entered the gates of hell itself, and someone from my homeland is the gatekeeper.

Trying to be 'the writer'. But nothing comes. Blocked, barren as the Saharan sands to the south.

Walks to Diabet (where all the communes are meant to be) ... see wild hippies living in the woods ... the commune people seem suspicious, inbred. There is an air of heavy inertia everywhere. The freedom of non-work becomes the bondage of how to get through the day. There may be 'free love' - I don't know, I'm certainly not a part of it. In Diabet, there is also, apparently, rampant venereal disease.

Time stands still, like one of Dali's bent clocks, lying stripped of its purpose on the desert sands.

Days pass. Doing nothing, being nothing, becoming nothing. I go on a four day fast. Why not? It costs nothing. I eat nothing. And I gain a sense of purpose by submitting myself to a test of self-restraint amidst all the self-indulgence.

Apart from 'doing drugs', reading is the other popular pastime. The supply of books within the community is constantly in circulation. At least this works well. I read Tom Wolfe's The Pump House Gang (with its chapter on McLuhan), Zorba The Greek, and Soul On Ice.

Weeks pass. And then one day, I know that I've had enough. If this is the great amoral, anarchistic hippy ideal, get me out of it! There is no code, no norms, no structure.

Anything goes. Everything is acceptable. There is no discrimination, in the best and worst sense of the word. White magic is groovy, but then so is black magic.

I am a lost soul and this is a lost community. Maybe, just maybe, I perceive it as a lost community because I am lost myself. Maybe the subjective reality determines all. Maybe it's all a projection - hell is in the eye of the beholder. Maybe, in reality, everyone is having a wonderful time. But I don't think so.

All the time, I am haunted by a quote from Rimbaud written on the dingy wall of a Marrakesh hotel. It went something like: 'the prerequisite for artistic perception and creation is a complete dissociation of the senses.' Well, if that's true, I figure that despite not being able to write anything, I must, by definition, be on my way to becoming a great artist.

So, sometime at the end of April, somehow I manage to get out, to extricate myself from the hell of the here and now, like a fly from a lump of molasses. I have no idea what Mark and Ruth have been doing, or when they plan to return. It doesn't matter. I don't really care. I take a bus to Casablanca. There, I am told that the S/S Leopard is leaving that very day, and that it won't sail for England for another two weeks. It turns out that I don't have enough money for a ticket. The clerk makes a deal with me. Seeing my guitar, he asks to look at it. Then he tells me that if I leave it with him as collateral, he will give me a ticket, and two weeks later I will be able to pay the balance and redeem my guitar at Southampton. I agree.

As I stand on the boat, feeling like I've just been in a B movie remake of Bogart's movie 'Casablanca', I take out the letter I received from Ellie a week earlier. It consists of a watercolour painting entitled, 'wet sad tulip for Ian - where are you?', and an anonymous quotation:

*"Love is a profound urge to preserve and extend life in all its manifestations - a reaching out for union with all living forces that protect, comfort and sustain. It includes love of mate, family, friends, work, humanity, God - all the wonders of the mind and spirit. It is acceptance and affirmation of life in its totality.*

*Love is all of one piece, growing out of a healthy self-regard. What man does to others, he does to himself. This spirit of mutuality, this capacity to give and receive is love's keynote. Impossessive, those who truly love go about this business of living, knowing that everyone has a right to his own integrity; they know that life is so infinitely varied that dependance for personal fulfillment upon any single individual, or upon any one thing is a delusion. Hence rejections, real or fancied, can be borne more philosophically."*

Once again, a feeling of utter disgust filled me. I pulled out my diary and wrote:

*"Don't throw this shit at me! Everyone knows what should be. Everyone wants to be able to love, to give it and receive it. Thank-you for pointing out that I am possessive, dependant, deluded and unable to love. Thank-you for at least admitting you rejected me, and no, sorry, I haven't yet learned how to bear it ('it' being denial, deceit and betrayal, as well as rejection) philosophically. Maybe reading Wittgenstein would help!"*