

"WHEN the going gets weird, the weird turn pro." Raoul Duke, sports writer.

SMITH

DREAMS

Where am I?

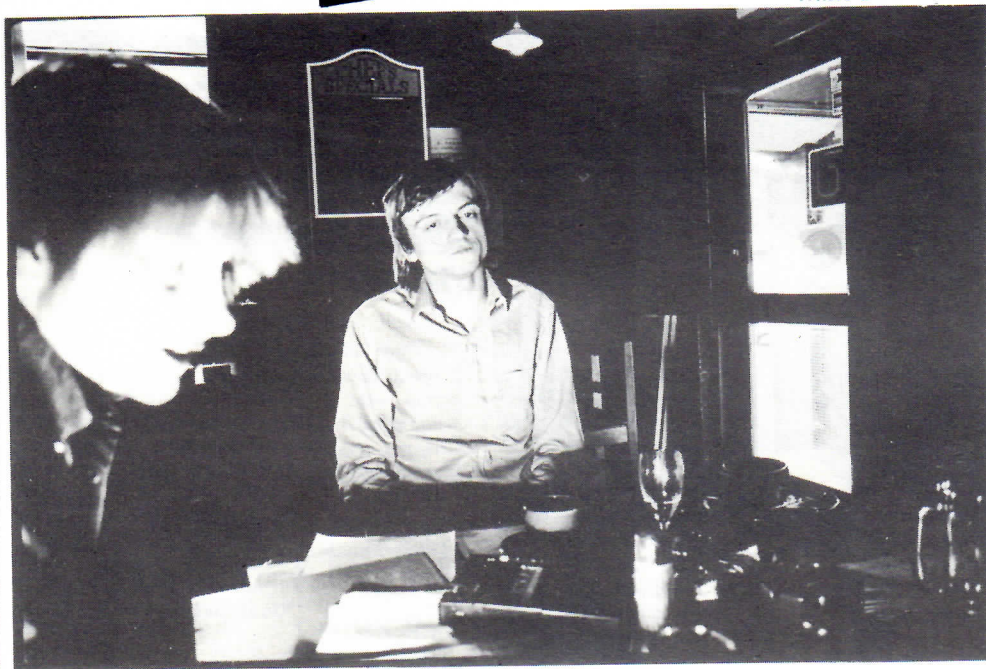


Foto: Charles Jameson

I LOVE The Fall because they are such arrogant bastards. GREAT! It's a necessary survival tactic. If you aren't reasonably fast, tough and dogmatic, the dumb jerks behind you will readily take what they think is your place. That's obvious.

NOT everyone wants to be a cute Whore-ho! diplomat on a chrome horse. People love their own reflections, no matter how hideous. Nothing changes, and an artist turns to dead glass to be preened in.

SO smashing fucking Mark has written his piece on Fantastic Life and now he'll move on to something else, thank god. Nice to know that not everybody digs repetition.

Mark Smith was late for the interview, which didn't help my nerves. Getting a friend to check out various bars. Ringing Sandy from EMI — "GOD, THEY AREN'T HERE!" Someone shouts: "It's them!" I turn, peer myopically at a group of people coming towards me, and sigh with relief and terror. As we proceed downstairs, I see a woman. This must be — Kay Carroll, Fall manager and Ardwick terrorist. "Kay!" I yell, throwing my arms around her. "Kay! I recognised you immediately from the *Hex* cover."

The lady disengages herself and explains that she is Helene, one of the tour promoters. C'est la vie. At the bottom of the stairs, I spy another female face. "Kay!" I yell. "I recognised you immediately . . ." Second time lucky. We proceed into the restaurant, I concealing my manic excitement under a layer of cool

supreme. Seating myself next to Mark E Smith, I shake his hand and pray the valium doesn't let me down.

I asked about an article Mark wrote for *Vox*, an Irish fanzine, following the suicide of Joy Division's Ian Curtis in 1980.

Most of the information regarding Curtis' death has filtered down to the Antipodes by way of the conventional music papers. *Sounds'* David McCullough and the *NME's* Paul Morley wrote particularly emotive obituaries, which firmly established the "Curtis died for our sins" deification myth.

Mark says that when *Vox* asked him to write a page, he tried to be objective about the whole affair, but ultimately found he couldn't be. "I wasn't a mate of Ian's or anything, but the Fall used to play with Warsaw [first incarnation of Joy Division] in the early days, so we used to see him about. Ian used to come up to me, and all this. I was regarded as the little boy."

You're 25 now, aren't you?

"Yeah. He was older than me, yeah."

"Ian was always very nice", says Mark. "But the rest of the Joy Division were always very competitive."

"But it was Christmas of 1980. We'd just got off the plane from America for the first time, and we went to this fancy Factory party. I was disorientated, you know, and it was a nightmare. Ian came over, and he was in a worse state than I was. And he said, 'How are you, why don't you come and play with us, and jam with us.' I said 'sorry, but I don't work on holidays!' Mark laughs.

"And he was trying to talk to me, right, and these six-foot fuck-

Morefalllover



ing chicks, you know, the *hairdresser* types, came over. And it was like they virtually surrounded him and took him away. It was like 'don't talk to Smith, he's not fucking hip. He's got long hair. It was really bad. And the next thing you hear, he's dead.

"I don't think the Factory scene helped, and I don't think the press helped at all", says Mark. "That's why I wrote that article for *Vox*."

Anyway, where did The Fall's name come from; the Camus book or the Fall of the North bit?

Mark: "The name was Tony Friel's idea; he played bass on the very first record ["Bingo Master's Breakout"]. Me and him started the group, and he was into all this existential stuff."

"We were originally called The Outsiders, you see, which I thought was better."

I thought you might.

"I liked that book, it was the only French thing I ever really liked. I thought it was a great name. But we got this old sixties record by a group called the Outsiders. I can't remember what it was called, but it was like The Seeds' stuff, fucking great. So we thought we'd call ourselves The New Outsiders!"

"Then all these punk groups started coming up called The Outsiders so we dropped it, we weren't called that more than a week or so. No, it was quite an alright name really, The Fall. Camus . . ."

I ask Mark whether he feels *Hex Enduction Hour* [the newest album] has accomplished its purpose, ie demolished the Hip Priest Mythical Thingy structure.

Mark: "It's worked out well. Abolished all the bullshit, trendy part! The *Hex* became sort of a mind thing. Like, *Slates* was in-



Dave: Ooh, Eee, Ooh-Aah-Aah, Ting, Tang.
Wallawalla Bing Bang!

Kay: Coma againa?

tended to get rid of the underground, Rough Trade type of following. Subconsciously. And *Hex* is a furtherance of that. Well, "Lie Dream" was too. The rap on the back of "Lie Dream" is a very bitter, horrible laugh. A return to the roots and all that shit, see."

Silence. For some reason I ask which are the worst countries The Fall's ever performed in.

Kay: "Belgium. We did two gigs, and about 50 people turned up. Belgium is the heaviest administration-wise, too."

I heard someone got up on stage with a gun, and you thought it was a joke.

Kay: "Mark, yeah, he thought it was a guy in fancy dress. But it was a pig with a gun telling us to shut up."

Mark: "But then the fucking kids were great, they've got a great sense of humour."

"I always think LA is like that. They've got groups there that haven't been signed up and spoiled. In a lot of ways, they've got genuine integrity. To be a drop-out in that society is really something, you know. You don't get it in England."

Kay started doing mixing work for The Fall because they never had enough money to run a PA around the country. "So in whatever city or town we were in, we'd rig up a PA, and I'd stand in front of it saying 'don't do this, don't do that'. But I technically didn't know what to do, right? So I always knew what the Fall sound was, but never how to get it. I'm just starting to learn that now."

"But I still think the technicians are the biggest lot of liggers, and they want shooting, I really do!"

"The only thing that I produced record-wise was "Totally Wired", says Kay. "We played it in the studio, and I went: 'That's really wrong!' I felt so strongly about it that me and Mark took it back in, and did it again."

"To me, "Totally Wired" was an attempt at a "Walk On The Wild Side". You know, just suddenly get really big and then go back underground again. That's really what I felt, because I think "Totally Wired" is a classic. It's really weird that it never took off. I think it'll stand up forever."

"I don't ever want to get into being a producer, though. Mark has still basically got to be there. It's still got to be his work."

After the departure of Tony Friel, who apparently disliked her intensely, Kay became The Fall's manager, cold.

"I was a psychiatric nurse, right? I'd just sat my final exams, so there was my career planned out. But I just got into the music."

"I used to get gigs from phoneboxes, and I'd get laughed at down the phone. But I've got the last laugh on most of those people. You've just got to believe in it, that's all."

"LA...they've got genuine integrity. To be a drop-out in that society is really something."

I tip over a chair, get embarrassed, and to create a diversion credit The Fall with the inception of the English rockabilly scene — "Fiery Jack" being the prime mover.

Mark: "Fiery Jack" was the stage, if you like, after all the arty shit we'd done, like *Witchtrials*. At the time, music in general was really crappy, sort of Johnny-Rotten stuff. I always feel the need to change, to go in the opposite way to what's going on. So I felt a need to get back, and I've always been into Elvis and Johnny Cash. And I could do that kind of stuff with Mike Lee, who was the drummer I got in after Karl Burns left at the end of '78.

"Nobody in the group wanted Mike. When we were playing gigs at the time, Mike always played perfect sort of cabaret rock and roll. I remember we used to get booed off stage. People would go: 'We want the fucking new wave drumming!'"

Kay: "Mike had been in all these rock and roll bands; used to do all this really good fifties stuff. He used to wear a sequinned vest and a cap. It's true! He was a really great guy."

Mark: "But that's sort of as far as that bit went. But it was really quite a kick, getting the idea through to people."

A short didactic note: as Mark says, the Scots and those people who got kicked out of Northern England settled in the American Mid-West to do their rockabilly-folk thing. Suddenly The Fall, out of all the Mancunian bands, began reviving old traditions.

Mark: "It's true white music, you know? I'm surprised nobody else did it before, really. It wasn't that conceived on my part, just the only stuff that was appealing to me at the time."

So why didn't The Fall's music make it big at the proper time; because it didn't wear the regulation Stray Cats hair style?

Kay: "It was the cancelling of clothes. It's true, you've got to have the whole lot."

"I've always been into Elvis and Johnny Cash."

Mark, to me (I am visibly upset): "I know you're right and it's very annoying, and bad when you look at your bank balance. But to carry that sort of thing off, you'd have to be like the Stray Cats. And we'd have to do "Fiery Jack" forever. Like for the first year or so, people go "Fiery Jack"! as you're going on stage. Now I say; 'Look, forget it, it's fucking bad for you. Do you get the drift? Because after "Fiery Jack", we did "Elastic Man", and we did "Container Drivers" shortly after that. I mean, that's enough. To be big like the Stray Cats, you'd have to do albums and albums of that stuff. People are thick like that, it takes them *years* to see that. Know what I mean? I'm glad really, although at the time I was pissed off. But about a year later, you hear all these others, like — even The Cramps. They got really lauded for doing that sort of stuff."

"The Cramps are tied to that. But they're a great group. I'm not a great group. Do you understand me? I wouldn't like to go around doing "Fiery Jack" and rockabilly stuff all the time, it would wear me down. It would turn into a parody, wouldn't it?"

"I think The Cramps would find it hard to do a third album. Oh, they'll probably do one, and it'll be good. But it won't be anything fucking exciting."

"I don't have those limitations, so it doesn't worry me."

OK. I know you don't like explaining things, but what's the story behind Roman Totale and his vicious son Joe?

Mark: "What's-it-all-about, then? It's a bit tedious. I can't remember, it's not good for me to remember all this. I'm still working, you know?" A pause. I method-act person desolated by loss of mother.

Mark: "What do you want to know about him, just don't ask me to explain it from the start, because I don't know the facts! Because after I've done something like that, I wipe it out of my head. Like we can't do "Fiery Jack" on stage anymore, I can't remember how it goes. I can remember the words, the band can remember the music. But when we played it last, we did the most horrible thing, a massacre, you'd ever heard. Because I'd wiped it out of my head. God, you can't keep everything in your fucking head. Can you?"

"Roman Totale was like this big philosopher. And his son Joe sort of betrayed him. It's dreams I had, mythology sort of thing. Joe Totale was like a joke, almost. You could use it as a comparison for these fucking skinheads."

LEAVE THE CAPITAL - EXIT THIS ROMAN SHELL. I always loved that bubbling corruption thing. Sorry.

Mark: "S'alright. That's all, really. And *Slates* is like a combination of all that. Did it quite well."

Slates is probably my favourite Fall record. What's yours?

Kay: "I like *Grotesque*, that's my favourite album."

Mark: "I liked the second half of the second side of *Grotesque*, which everybody really hated. I like that middle one, where Kay's singing." [WMC/Blob 59] Sort of just a load of noise, and then it goes into "Gramme Friday". It's like the introduction to "Gramme Friday"; it's really good."

Why do you think people hated it?

"Well, it was very unprepared", says Mark. "The band didn't really know the songs!"

It made perfect sense to me - but then I'm crazy.

Mark: "Yeah, and to me, of course. But I didn't write the reviews at the time, which was a pity!"

Adlai Stevenson: "In a democracy, people usually get the kind of government they deserve."

Why do you usually do interviews by yourself, Mark?

Do you think the presence of the rest of the band would dilute the essence of what you've got to say, or is it just that the rest of the band can't be bothered turning up?

Mark: "No, but people ask the band things that they don't know about. You asked me about the Totale thing, they don't know about that. They've got things to say, it's just that people don't ask them the right questions. People ask the band things like: "Who is The Hip Priest", and all that sort of thing."

Kay: "But they see it differently to Mark. They take it seriously. People are trying to use the rest of the band as surrogate Mark Smith's, instead of Marc Riley, or Craig Scanlon. Loads of people ask me things about Mark, and I tell them to ask *him*, because I still don't know. The band's the same. They're great if you want some funnies, or how did you get from A to B to C. But they're musicians, they aren't into words, prose. And we're not into democracy, it doesn't work."

Mark tells a little story centering around the poetic genius of John Fogarty and the decline of Creedence Clearwater Revival. "Fogarty had all these hit singles, like "Bad Moon Rising", and three or four million selling albums", he says. "And the rest of the band were just fucking rednecks. It's like they said to him, 'Well, it's not fair'. So they made an album where four members of Creedence had two songs on it each."

"It was the worst album they'd ever made, and it bombed and destroyed Creedence Clearwater. It destroyed the whole group."

On that note, I'll finish.

Mark: "Thank you. I was wondering when you were going to."

Charming. What does the "E" in Mark E Smith stand for?

Mark: "Edward. Kind Edward."

Kay: "King of the Potatoes."

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