

Review

Goddard, M., and Benjamin Halligan, eds. 2010. *Mark E. Smith and The Fall: Art, Music, and Politics*. Aldershot: Ashgate. ISBN 9-780-754-66867-1 (pbk). 209 pp.

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In May 2008, thirty academics gathered at the old fire station in Salford for the 'Messing Up The Paintwork' symposium which examined the rich and varied cultural milieu of Mark E. Smith and his band, The Fall. A cross section of these papers have been gathered for the book *Mark E. Smith and The Fall: Art, Music, and Politics*: a suitably eclectic collection in keeping with the idiosyncratic subject matter. The collection is divided into four themed sections: 'Part 1: The Fall and "The North"', 'Part 2: The Techniques and Tactics of The Fall', 'Part 3: The Aesthetics of The Fall', and 'Part 4: The Fall, the Media and Cultural Politics'.

At the symposium, Richard Witts' keynote address titled 'Building Up a Band: Music for a Second City' set the tone perfectly, and it also makes an excellent opening chapter for the book. He offers a necessary corrective to the distinctly un-Mancunian wave of heritage industry nostalgia which seems to have afflicted the city in recent years. Attacking what he calls 'the coarse and quixotic determinism that conjures up the grids and correspondences needed to bond building sites and bands' (25), Witts offers an alternative history of Mancunian civic development and uncivic music.

Mark Goodall's chapter, 'Salford Drift: A Psychogeography of The Fall' liberates UK psycho-geography from London-centricity and makes a plausible case for the urban ghost grids of the post-industrial North. Goodall's close reading of literary influences provides explicit links between Smith's lyrical concerns and the writing of Arthur Machin, Malcolm Lowry, and H. P. Lovecraft. Equally compelling is Robert Walker's chapter 'Dictaphonics: Acoustic and Primitive Recording in the Music of The Fall', which offers a meticulous examination of Smith's approach to audio aesthetics. Both of these excellent chapters point to areas for future fieldwork. Goodall ends his account with a plea for 'further experiments with writing about music using the methods of the derive' (53), while Walker's contribution points to a wider consideration of the prevailing norms of studio technique.

Paul Wilson's chapter 'Language Scraps': Mark E. Smith's Handwriting and the Typography of The Fall', steps away from a musical analysis to examine typographic signifiers in Smith's distinctive scrawl. Wilson asserts that the band's construction of a 'notional primitive'(120) is drawn as much from its visual lexicon as its auditory one. In contrast, Robin Purves uses a single song, 'Iceland', as a platform for some wider reflections on the nature of improvisation. His vitriolic and, at times, hilarious comments on the paradox of 'avant-garde tradition' and 'free-form idiom' should provoke empathy and derision in equal measure. Mark Fisher's chapter 'Memorex for the Krakens: The Fall's Pulp Modernism' takes a different view, and distinguishes 'the gothic' from 'the weird', and indeed 'the gothic' from 'goth', and precisely locates the inter-textual methodology that is necessary in order to fully understand the work of The Fall.

If the collection has a fault, it is its undue concentration on the early years (approximately 1978–83) of The Fall; very few of the essays step outside of this period. The writing style is also problematic, and a few contributors barely rise above fan writing. Several authors effectively canonize The Fall's music—despite editorial claims to the contrary in the book's Introduction—and a couple state quite explicitly that The Fall's early years were the band's best. Like all golden ages, of course, this period just happens to coincide with these writers' own youth.

Owen Hatherley's contribution, 'Let Me Tell You about Scientific Management: The Fall, the Factory and the Disciplined Worker', offers a brief examination of the connection between the principles of Taylorism (cf. Taylor 1911) and Smith's draconian discipline. Hatherley's central thesis reads too much like a first draft and might have benefited both from expansion and a relative account of other perceived taskmasters, particularly another of John Peel's favourite, Captain Beefheart.

Talking of Peel, Paul Long's chapter examines the relationship between the late DJ and his relationship with The Fall, a band he championed for more than 25 years. Long critiques the shortcomings of previous radio research and is justifiably scathing about accounts which relegate Peel's role as a broadcaster to that of indie-gatekeeper. Smith always railed against the orthodoxies of a career trajectory, which saw The Fall simply perceived as a 'Peel band'. I would suggest that this subtle demarcation also marks the differences between the chapters in this collection—the best do justice to the complexity of Mark E. Smith's creative vision, while the weakest simply document a 'Peel band'.

References

Taylor, Frederick Winslow. 1911. *The Principles of Scientific Management*. New York and London: Harper and Brothers.