

griminess with a clean and shiny production job, resulting in a kind of grey, industrial psychedelia. *Witch Trials* suggests magic mushroom tea drunk from a dirty pub ashtray, an Ambrosian dishwater. It doesn't taste very nice, but it's probably good for you.

Although guitarist Martin Bramah and drummer Karl Burns were to be on-off members of The Fall for the next two decades, neither was present on the October 1979 album *Dragnet*, which saw the arrival of three new members: future Radio 1 DJ Marc 'Lard' Riley and Craig Scanlon on guitars, and bassist Steve Hanley. Scanlon, a gifted interpreter of Smith's often incomprehensible instructions, spent the next 15 years reining in his improvisatory tendencies to define The Fall's majestically monolithic sound, alongside the similarly long serving Hanley's overhead power cable bass boom. Both *Witch Trials* and *Dragnet* contain the kind of paper-cut, spiky post-punk currently plagiarised by contemporary pop groups, but The Fall's vision remains too individual to assimilate easily.

Seven live albums of extremely variable quality document the group's 1977-80 incarnations. The best is Rough Trade's *Totale's Turns*, capturing The Fall infuriating various Northern working men's club crowds as Smith audibly baits his colleagues into ever more intense performances. "Hey," he asks a heckler, "are you doing what you did two years ago? Yeah? Well, don't make a career out of it." This acidic put-down could be used to sum up The Fall's own ethos. The Castle reissue (CMRCD882 CD) includes a Peel Session.

GROTESQUE (AFTER THE GRAMME)

ROUGH TRADE 1980

SLATES

ROUGH TRADE 1981

LIVE IN LONDON 1980

CHAOS TAPES 1980

A PART OF AMERICA THEREIN, 1981

COTTAGE

"C&N music is born," declared Smith's Northern playboy alter ego R Totale on the sleeve of November 1980's *Grotesque (After The Gramme)*. The cover, a Friday night out Giotto fresco in lurid felt tip by Smith's younger sister Suzanne, sums up *Grotesque's* tone perfectly. This record, and its attendant singles "Totally Wired" and "How I Wrote Elastic Man" – both collected on the Castle reissue (CMRCD883 CD) – moved The Fall yet further from the prevailing punk template. As Echo And The Bunnymen and their indie rock contemporaries posited a vaguely mystical post-punk psychedelia, Smith turned The Fall into kitchen sink realists who found Lovecraftian horrors lurking down the U-bend. Collapsed Country & Western clichés and rickety rockabilly rhythms pinned and mounted various contemporary social archetypes – CB radio enthusiasts, long distance lorry drivers and ambitious emigres – with an accuracy that escaped other lyricists of the era. While Paul Weller stuck 'Kick Me' signs on the back of be-suited businessmen and ran away, "English Scheme" explained the English disease in a hilarious stream of consciousness

splurge of social theory, with exquisitely detailed supporting evidence: "Your psychotic big brother who left home for jobs in Holland, Munich, Rome – he's thick, but he's struck it rich." "Impression Of J Temperance", "New Face In Hell" and "The NWRA" moved towards the expansive, narrative driven epics that would characterise The Fall's best work in the near future.

The 10" mini album *Slates*, issued the following year (and augmented with a Peel Session and a single on Castle CMRCD1006 CD), pursued the same themes in less forgiving terms, with song structures sacrificed to relentless repetition, as if Smith and his cohorts were furiously scratching the tracks into the vinyl themselves. *Slates* includes the incendiary "Leave The Capitol", a fevered vision of London at its most irritating, with buried lyrical nods to the forgotten mystic Arthur Machen, rendered over a pulverising descending guitar riff that never fails to excite. "I laughed at the great God Pan!"

Live In London 1980 is a sardine-tin recording of the group reaching towards ideas beyond their ability at the time, reissued by Castle with extra tracks (CMRCD 1005 CD). But *A Part Of America Therein 1981*, though taped only a year later, reveals the group achieving its aims, with endless riffs approaching trancelike qualities. It includes a definitive, hallucinatory live reading of "An Older Lover", against which the *Slates* version sounds stunted. As usual, there are extra tracks on the Castle edition (CMRCD1006 CD).



The Fall 1978 (left to right): Martin Bramah, Karl Burns, Yvonne Pawlett and Mark E Smith



Brix and Mark E Smith at home in Prestwich

PHOTOS: KEVIN CUMMINS (1978); BLEDDYN BUTCHER (PRESTWICH)



The Fall 1983 (left to right): Paul Hanley, Karl Burns, Craig Scanlon, Steve Hanley, Mark E Smith and Brix

HEX ENDUCTION HOUR

KAMERA 1982

ROOM TO LIVE (UNDILUTABLE SLANG TRUTH)

KAMERA 1982

FALL IN A HOLE

FLYING NUN 1982

PERVERTED BY LANGUAGE

ROUGH TRADE 1983

The Fall's recorded output from 1982 and 1983 is incomparable and indispensable. *Hex Enduction Hour* remains their greatest album, and the Peel Session that preceded *Perverved By Language* documented the group on the cusp of discovering a new and unique mode of expression that mixed rock's primitive structures with a transcendental, avant garde aesthetic. The *Hex* era is great art, made by people who did everything they could to avoid looking or sounding like great artists.

Hex Enduction Hour, issued in March 1982, is a masterpiece contained in a studiously non-designed sleeve, on which Smith has been let loose with green Letraset and a black marker pen. Like the music within, it is ugly, intriguing, confusing, profound and beautiful. Smith's lyrics balance recognisable fragments of narrative, and well chosen pop-cultural references with cryptically alluring phrases. "You won't find anything more ridiculous than this new profile razor unit/Made with the highest British attention to the wrong detail/Become obsolete units surrounded by hail," he deadpans during "The Classical". The music suckers you in with overdriven steamroller riffs, but kicks you sideways with the percussive clatter of the double drum kit line-up, the stop-start rhythms and the uncharacteristic use of improvisation. The psychogeographical incantation of "Iceland" was made up on the spot; "And This Day" was edited from a 25 minute jam, and the aforementioned "The Classical" includes a bass solo. The single "Look Now", sung

by Marc Riley, is omitted from the otherwise exemplary expanded Castle reissue (CMQDD1059 CD), for indecipherable reasons.

Six months later, *Room To Live* – reissued by Castle (CMRCD1135 CD) with the rare live track "Words Of Expectation" – was considered a failure at the time, because of its refusal to follow the acclaimed *Hex* template. But its retreat into a loose-limbed, more fluid, fragmentary mode is typical of Smith's characteristic refusal to satisfy expectations.

By the release of 1983's *Perverved By Language*, Riley had been replaced by Smith's future wife Brix, whom he had met after a gig in Chicago, but the young American guitarist's eventually civilising influence was yet to be felt. Instead, the album finds The Fall at a peak of non-rock. The extended workouts of "Smile" and "Garden" achieve an impossible super-density. Smith, who'd been digesting Wyndham Lewis, is at his most elliptically intriguing. The "Jew on a motorbike!" refrain of "Garden" and his declaration in "Tempo House" that "The Dutch are weeping in four languages at least" are just two of many Fall lyrics that still seize fans at inopportune moments. On *Perverved* the group channelled the twang of Link Wray into a vortex of vast, surreal mantras and dadaist call and response chants. The Castle reissue (CMQDD1134 CD) includes essential singles from the period, such as "The Man Whose Head Expanded" and the Bury 1982 set spread over the bonus discs issued with the inferior 1998 Cog Sinister reissues of *Room To Live* and the compilation *Palace Of Swords Reversed*. However, the superb New Zealand set, *Fall*

Any live recording of this period is worth owning, including *Live To Air In Melbourne* (Cog Sinister COGVP108 CD), *Austurbæjarbio* (Cog Sinister COGVP125 CD) and the Bury 1982 set spread over the bonus discs issued with the inferior 1998 Cog Sinister reissues of *Room To Live* and the compilation *Palace Of Swords Reversed*. However, the superb New Zealand set, *Fall*

In A Hole, finally reissued in a serviceable form by Castle (CMQDD1225 CD), captures versions of the period's best material performed with an improvisatory fluidity Smith usually discouraged and disparaged.

THE WONDERFUL AND FRIGHTENING WORLD OF THE FALL

BEGGARS BANQUET 1984

THIS NATION'S SAVING GRACE

BEGGARS BANQUET 1985

BEND SINISTER

BEGGARS BANQUET 1986

458489 A SIDES

BEGGARS BANQUET 1990

458489 B SIDES

BEGGARS BANQUET 1990

After *Perverved By Language*, Smith seemed to have had enough of leading Britain's biggest unknown group and, emboldened by Brix's way with a winning hook and a clothes iron, The Fall entered a new phase by signing to Beggars Banquet, the batcave-like home of Gary Numan, Gene Loves Jezebel and The Cult. For the remainder of the 1980s, The Fall became a commercially successful alternative rock act, despite making no obvious concessions to public taste. They appeared on TV shows such as *The Tube* and *The Old Grey Whistle Test*. They did not look appalling. Smith wore long leather coats and eyeliner, as if attempting to beat the black-clad hordes at their own game. On *Top Of The Pops*, BBC cameramen tried to film up the skirts of Brix Smith and keyboard player Marcia Schofield. There were videos, 12" remixes, interviews in *Smash Hits*, collaborations with ballet dancers and middle billing at summer rock festivals. Indie guru producer John Leckie built an ongoing relationship with the group. Everything had changed.

Their Beggars debut, 1984's *The Wonderful And Frightening World Of The Fall*, marked a seismic shift of

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