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## THE FALL

*Ersatz G. B.* (Cherry Red)

The dominant voice by Mark E. Smith on the Fall's 29th album, "Ersatz G. B.," or at least the funniest, and the one that creates the moments you will remember, is a hard, monstrous, guttural yell, like something coming from a very angry baby lodged inside an old man. He uses it best on "Greenway," a song named after a current guitarist in the band, Pete Greenway, whose aggressive sound unspools, supercharged, all over the record, and who for some reason is not credited on the CD insert as a member of the band. The name, grotesquely shouted, becomes the refrain: "*Green-waaay!*"

"Greenway" uses a riff that sounds like 1990s metal, with a little funk in the drums. The credits indicate that it is based closely on a song called "[Gameboy](#)" by the Greek rock band Anorimoi from its album "Kings of Feta," released in 2005. (This must be what Mr. Smith was thinking about last year when he told an interviewer that the record, then under way, sounded like "[Greek heavy metal.](#)") In "Greenway," which does not seem to be about Mr. Greenway at all, he tells a story about "channel-hopping through Danish rock TV" and finding a video that looks like one he was in. While performing this song at gigs last year, Mr. Smith made negative references to the band These New Puritans. He might be talking about their video for "[Attack Music.](#)" which has a similarity to the Fall's video for "[Bury Pts. 2+4](#)"; both use dark lighting and slow motion.

I'll stop now. Trying to make wholeness of purpose out of Fall records is a waste of time. As usual, most songs are built on one or two hard vamps with a passionately abstract intuitive mess on top, wrought by Mr. Smith's irritable and inventive words, making familiar jargon seem like foreign language, and his sonic interruptions as a producer. (In "Age of Chang" he uses what sounds like a cassette recorder to present a tinny version of the band playing the song, before the band itself, in better fidelity, comes in on top of it.) The mess can be tense and charmed, or just dull. "Ersatz G. B." is too often dull.

The band and Mr. Smith are doing much the same as ever. (Mr. Greenway and the whomping, just-the-basics drummer Keiron Melling, are the M.V.P.'s.) But if you compare this record to the Fall's last two, "Imperial Wax Solvent" (2008) was more mysterious, better articulated and funnier; "Your Future Our Clutter" (2010) was harder rocking and thematically more coherent.

Mr. Smith's attention seems to wander, unless he has a narrative, as he does on "Nate Will Not Return," which has something to do with the character played by Chace Crawford on "Gossip Girl." (Television is one of the only solid landmarks or referents in the words; another is Captain Beefheart, whose lyrics from "Trout Mask Replica" seem to have influenced a few phrases.) This is a recondite, quickly palling record. I find myself able to recommend no song in full. Only a few gnomic interjections, which include: "Do not underrate what I say!" And "How can we recover?" And "*Green-waaay!*" **BEN RATLIFF**