BODIES OF WRITING, BODIES IN PERFORMANCE

Edited by Thomas Foster, Carol Siegel, and Ellen E. Berry
Music of the “Fourth Gender”:
Morrissey and the Sexual Politics
of Melodic Contour

Nadine Hubbs

Morrissey is an artist who believes in the precious, life-sustaining, re-
demptive power of pop music. And he scorns those who fail in their
responsibility to that power: “Michael Jackson has outlived his usefulness.
... Prince and Madonna are of no earthly value whatsoever. ... Most
records portray life as it isn’t lived by people.”1 Or at least that’s how he
felt in 1985, and according to one interview.2 Of course, one probably
ought to exercise sufficient skepticism—toward the press, and particu-
larly the pop star-making machinery—to question statements like these,
with such obvious myth- and money-making potential.

But Morrissey has proclaimed the same sentiments in his music. “Rub-
ber Ring,”3 for example (excerpted below), is a homage to songs that have
been cherished and faithful companions:

But don’t forget the songs
That made you cry
And the songs that saved your life
Yes you’re older now
And you’re a clever swine
But they were the only ones who ever stood by you

And in “Panic” Morrissey is joined by a children’s chorus for the final
statement of the refrain, a tunefully cheery declaration of war on the
purveyors of pop irrelevance:

Burn down the Disco
Hang the blessed D.J.
Because the music that they constantly play
IT SAYS NOTHING TO ME ABOUT MY LIFE

Whether through his verbal or musical utterances, however, Morrissey
may not be easily readable at face value. For he has shown himself to be
an artist of rather complex and elusive subjectivity, whose regard for
conventional categories of fixed, literal meaning often seems to resemble
that of Oscar Wilde,4 whom he cites as one of the heroes of his tortured
adolescence. Tortured, reclusive, celibate, narcissistic, dour, droll, liter-
ate—these are some of the key words in the Morrissey mythology. The
persona we’re encouraged to construct is clear enough: a sort of rock
Emily Dickinson, trapped in a James Dean-like body.

This is not to say that Morrissey’s personal “authenticity” is somehow
undermined by his Wildean sensibility. Morrissey is a star, and every
star (Wildean or otherwise) is subject to interpretation—whether through
song lyrics, performances, video images, or personal interviews—only in
terms of his or her constructed image. As a star Morrissey is, in Julian
Stringer’s words, a “media sign.”5 It is difficult, if not impossible, to
know the extent to which his constructed public image genuinely re-
resents the private person. The question, in any case, is irrelevant for
present purposes: my focus in this essay is on Morrissey’s work and on
his public persona (which may also be viewed as one component of his
work—a crucial one), both of which I assume to be deliberately and
carefully constructed. These, after all, are the signifying elements that
audiences respond to and interact with, and thus that contribute to the
discourses of culture.

Having said all this, nevertheless I cannot resist briefly remarking on
what may be irrefutable evidence of Morrissey’s genuine messianic devo-
tion to pop music. At age thirteen, a decade before the birth of his star
persona, Steven Patrick Morrissey was so enamored of his favorite band
that he began to collect their every press clipping; by nineteen he had
even written a book about them, which was published in Britain.6 “They”
were none other than the seventies’ trash-transvestite, glam-rock, hitless
cult-band the New York Dolls. For some of us who likewise grew up
with the Dolls, Morrissey’s labors may give documentary proof of his
love and devotion to pop—indeed, this might seem the only possible ex-
planation.
Whether or not one shares such passion toward popular music, its considerable cultural power and influence, by now multigenerational, can scarcely be denied. Of course since the earliest days of rock 'n' roll certain observers have been eager to credit this music with tremendous social power, of a destructive sort; this is still the case with heavy metal and rap, especially. Such concerns are in a sense opposite to my concerns in these pages, however—which lie with a constructive function of pop music. Specifically, I shall examine some ways in which powerful regulatory practices of gender, sexuality, and desire are constructed by popular music, Morrissey's songs in particular, and music in general.

Some groundwork for such consideration has already been laid: Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie provided the first word with their 1978 article "Rock and Sexuality." Frith and McRobbie's central thesis still holds: in contrast with the common view of rock as a sexually liberating force, they argued that rock reinscribes conventions of masculinity and femininity—all lines of active participants and passive observers, respectively. Subsequent examinations—scholarly sociological studies as well as journalistic criticism—have dissected sex and identity in rock's visual images, bodily displays, and song lyrics. But, as I'm not the first to note, considerations of the music itself are conspicuously absent from most of these analyses; I'll return to this point.

For the moment, however, I return to Morrissey. He arrived on the scene in 1983, as lead singer and co-songwriter (with guitarist Johnny Marr) for the English postpunk band The Smiths. The band broke up in 1987, and since that time Morrissey has seen continued popularity as a solo artist, writing and performing music that is often much in keeping with the Smiths' work, but in both style and content. I should note, however, that the songs analyzed in this paper come exclusively from Morrissey's recordings with The Smiths, and thus from a five-year period, 1983-87.

Considerable popular and critical attention has been focused on Morrissey since his debut with The Smiths. In particular there has been a great deal of fascination and speculation concerning his gender identity and sexual orientation. Press sources have reported variously that Morrissey is admittedly gay, that he denies rumors that he's gay, and simply that he evinces an "ambiguous sexual point of view." The cherished artistic idols and role models he has cited as his sole companions in a distraught and isolated adolescence—Oscar Wilde, James Dean, and the New York Dolls—constitute a veritable who's who of gay-camp sensibility. Yet he also has appeared to collaborate with journalists who seek to explain his avowed isolation and celibacy in heterosexual terms of rejection and impuissance, supplying references to "dreadful, incredibly uninteresting [adolescent] episodes with girls." Morrissey's song lyrics are characterized by his singular first-person perspective: it is that of a self-loathing narcissist, according to some critics, or of "the greatest autobiographical songwriter of his age," according to others. His narratives suggest a gay viewpoint in some instances, and a straight viewpoint in others, but every instance is fraught with ambiguity. This ambiguity, as I shall illustrate, manifests an intriguing and rather specific schema in the Smiths' songs: that is, most often the identity of the male as object of desire is shrouded in mystery; the female object appears more clearly identified, but more ambiguously desired.

Perhaps Morrissey's most candid confession concerning sexual orientation is his admission to cultivating a sort of obscurity, or indeterminacy, in this regard. A 1986 Rolling Stone article observed that Morrissey claims the lack of specific boy-girl (or even boy-boy, girl-girl) references in his lyrics is quite deliberate. "It was important for me to try and write for everybody. Yet there is an implicit erotic quality to Smiths records . . . that is quite different from the explicit sexuality of most top pop platters. "I find when people and things are entirely revealed in an obvious way," Morrissey says, "it freezes the imagination of the observer. There is nothing to probe for, nothing to dwell on or try and unravel. With the Smiths, nothing is ever open and shut."

Elsewhere, Morrissey has proclaimed himself "a prophet for the fourth gender." Thus he evidently passes on not only the first and second, but skirts the "third gender" as well, that nineteenth-century sexologists' category of the gender invert—a female soul in a male body, or vice versa. From such elliptical statements one point emerges clearly: that sex and gender ambiguity, a resistance to finite fixing of sexual or gender viewpoint, is not merely an aspect of style with Morrissey. It is, in fact, a primary substantive element of his stated artistic project.

And it is more substantive, I would argue, than the "gender bender" poses struck (especially in the early and mid-eighties) by such artists as Boy George, Michael Jackson, Annie Lennox, David Bowie, and Prince. The former two in particular make clear, with their shrill claims of heterosexuality and "real" manhood, a willingness to cash in on the style
of gender transgression while disclaiming associations with any deeper substance, as it were. For all these stars, the potentially ruinous image-effects of transgendering are counterbalanced by public displays of “normal,” heterosexual credentials—which may involve spouses and children, womanizing, or even wedding Elvis’s daughter.

The “gender play” itself, among pop artists of this ilk, is signified primarily and sometimes solely by a “look”—which, essentially, occupies some point along a cross-dressing continuum. Morrissey’s appearance, on the other hand, has always been rather conventionally masculine, and is quite possibly the least subversive aspect of his work and persona. This difference was characterized by one journalistic critic, writing in 1985: “Like their name, The Smiths don’t exactly look outrageous, but listen to them for a bit: Frankie Goes to Hollywood begins to sound like a retreat party and Boy George is revealed as a pleasant but altogether conventional crooner. However outlandish their get-up, none of these guys seem actively intent on rearranging our taboos. The Smiths on the other hand, [are].”²² Of course sex and gender taboos are chief among those being rearranged here, primarily by means of Morrissey’s renowned “ambiguous sexual point of view.” And his construction of this viewpoint is distinguished by a reliance on textual, musical, and visual significations that exceed and exclude drag accoutrements and gestures.

Also notable, and somewhat paradoxical, is the fact that Morrissey advocates, simultaneously and with equal vigor, relevance and accessibility, indeterminacy and ambiguity. In the early days of the Smiths especially, he had much to say about the irrelevance of most pop music and his passionate belief in the power of that music—when it is attuned to people’s real lives.²¹ Significantly, Morrissey’s lyrics, however sexually open-ended, are sung with perfect English diction and printed as liner notes in most of his recordings.

Hence Morrissey’s position, as it emerges from the intersection of these elements, must be distinguished from one of merely noncommittal or undirected obfuscation (as I shall further explicate below). His “fourth gender” standpoint rests on a refusal of both heterosexual and homosexual classifications, and dissonance from the binary genders that make these possible. The only banner that he willingly bears in this realm is one of personal celibacy, which he has claimed from the time of his earliest interviews up to his most recent ones. This celibacy manifesto, whether or not it is truthful (predictably, there are those who seek to disprove it),

certainly constitutes a unique stance among pop-rock stars and, whether or not calculated, a stratagem seemingly ideal to purposes of Morrissey’s sex-gender resistance: for thwarting the reigning binarisms, it’s hard to imagine a better position than celibacy.

NOWHERE FAST: MORRISSEY’S MELODIC CONTOURS

Having addressed several of the more usual themes of Morrissey criticism, I’d like now to turn to a consideration of his music. It is ironic that the music receives less critical attention than any other aspect of Morrissey’s work, for it is indeed the music that fosters audiences’ most powerful connections.²⁴ But such silence remains the norm for popular music criticism in general. As Simon Frith observed in 1987, “We still do not know nearly enough about the musical language of pop and rock: rock critics still avoid technical analysis, while sympathetic musicologists... use tools that can only cope with pop’s... least significant... qualities.”²⁵

What strikes me as one of the most significant qualities of Morrissey’s musical language, particularly in the Smiths songs, is conspicuous in such passages as this one from “Still Ill,”²⁶
and this one from “There Is a Light That Never Goes Out.”

The quality I find salient in examples like these (it may come as no surprise) has to do with melody: melodic contour in these excerpts (and their continuations, not shown here) is extraordinarily flat. And this is especially evident at the earlier foreground, a step removed from the surface ornaments—the trills, mordants, and grace notes—that characterize Morrissey’s “idiosyncratic crooning.” Some melodic passages in Morrissey’s oeuvre are more active than these examples, but overall it is very typical for his vocal melodies to present extended stretches of repeated pitch. When pitches do change they do so within restricted pitch space, and stick mainly to chord tones. Notably, what melodic motion is present at the foreground is not goal-directed: repetition of figures is common, and within such figures starting and ending points are often identical. Hence the flatness of melodic contour observed at the foreground is echoed at, continues through, the middleground.

One important effect of such melodic inactivity is the declamatory emphasis it lends to Morrissey’s distinctive lyrics. An absence of motion represents an absence of new melodic information, as it were, and thus listeners’ attention is “preserved” for the remaining components—lyrics and accompaniment. But the static melodic quality also garners attention in its own right: it functions, in relation to relevant melodic norms, as a mark of difference—specifically a difference of inactivity. Such difference arises, of course, by contrast with other singers’ levels of rhythmic activity and melodic contours.

But it is also created by contrast with the level of activity of the other members—the instrumentalists—of Morrissey’s own (all-male) bands. This is true with the Smiths, and equally so with the bands that Morrissey has worked with in his solo career. A vivid sense of such contrast is evoked by one Rolling Stone concert reviewer, who remarks that “[the band] rocked tough, their precise swagger and matching ducktails setting off the singer’s idiosyncratic crooning and silver-lamé theatricality.” In this excerpt, as in the performances themselves, contrast and hence difference arises out of visual, bodily, dramatic, and musical signs and gestures, which simultaneously coexist, intermingle, reinforce, inflect, and oppose one another.

Of course, journalists write regularly and adeptly about the visual signs of style, drama, and embodiment that can construct difference. Even in the brief passage just quoted, the reviewer manages to provide powerful images in all these realms. There is also some suggestion (albeit vague) of aural, musical difference in the references to “rock[ing] tough” and “idiosyncratic crooning.” I believe that a crucial component of the “idiosyncrasy,” or difference, that audiences perceive in Morrissey’s singing is the static quality of his melodies. And this quality constitutes an intersubjective mark of difference so potent, I shall argue, that it has even received comment in the pop press—one of those rare instances of musical structure attracting the notice of rock critics. To notice their notice, however, requires some translation and interpretation of the discourse of rock criticism—a discourse that supports a rich and constantly evolving vocabulary of musical, visual, and expressive style, and a virtually nonexistent vocabulary of musical structure.

In Rolling Stone’s first article on the Smiths, in 1984, the critic James Henke comments that Morrissey “doesn’t really sing so much as he speaks the lyrics in an often droning monotone that can be irritating.” But in fact, Morrissey does really sing—every syllable; never in his career has he approached anything like a rock Sprechstimme (which exists, of course—quintessentially with Bob Dylan). Though Henke purports to describe Morrissey’s vocal technique in the early Smiths songs, I believe that his remarks are best understood as linguistically rough attempts to characterize their melodic structure. For this is indeed “droning,” and literally monotonous—that is, static and non-theological—whereas the singing is not at all speechlike.

Thus in the annals of Morrissey press, alongside the ever-present ruminations over the singer’s personal and lyrical peculiarities, some peculiarities of his musical structures are also perceived and noted—if inarticulately. But these discourses typically link Morrissey’s celebrated sex and gender complexities exclusively with his words and his persona, leaving untouched the structural qualities of his music, and the signifying
potential therein. Meanwhile in academic music circles, “perhaps the most burning question regarding gender,” as Marcia Citron has recently remarked, “is whether it is present in a piece of music.” To prepare the ground for this “burning question” as it relates to Morrissey, I shall outline a few of my assumptions and premises about gendered meaning in music.

First, I do not assume that any musical gestures are intrinsically gendered. But throughout history many aspects of music have been invested with particular meanings, including representations of sexuality and gender. These, in turn, are not intrinsic phenomena, nor eternal or universal: though gender and sexuality are naturalized in culture and thus made to seem inevitable, they have been variously constructed in particular cultures and historical eras. Of musical conventions for their representation, some endure, while others do not; some cross boundaries of genre, style, and so forth, while others apply only within one school, a single composer’s oeuvre, or even an individual work. Any analysis invoking such conventions therefore must be grounded in a discriminating awareness of musical and sociohistorical particularities.

A good deal of theory and criticism has already deconstructed the myriad ways our cultural discourses are rooted in notions of dialectical gender. If I rehearse some of the well-worn facts of these genders—that the masculine is constructed in terms of primacy, strength, action, and independence, and the feminine as its opposite and Other, secondary and different, weak, inactive, and dependent—my litany is intended as descriptive (of long-standing, powerful, and constructed cultural products), and surely not prescriptive (according to essentialist or any other assumptions). Like gender, the very notion of sexuality, and its associated categories as well, are cultural constructions. These are of more recent vintage, however, according to Foucauldians.

BOYS’ SONGS, GIRLS’ SONGS, AND MUSIC’S PRODUCTION OF GENDER

Deconstruction of gender and sexuality in musical texts has been contested, problematized, and generally slow in coming to music theory and musicology. It is indeed problematic to theorize musical signification in the concert hall canon, where instrumental music is the prime repertory.

Here, of course, there are no words—or pictures—to help us along. And, in contrast with some past eras (such as the Baroque), compositional and critical practices over the past century haven’t provided much framework for understanding meanings in music; until very recently such a perspective has been overwhelmingly ignored by performers, critics, composers, and listeners of serious music.

For present purposes, however, there’s no need to take on music, and melody, in its most abstract, inscrutable incarnations. After all, my subject isn’t just any melody; it’s melody in the service of song. And in art and pop song alike, one usual function of melody, text, and other available means is to represent and characterize a narrating subject, embodied by the singer. The most emphatic proof of this function is perhaps found in the silent, empty spaces of performance practice. That is, Joan Baez proclaims, “Virgil Cain is my name.” Ella Fitzgerald covers “Caravan” and “Witchcraft.” Bette Midler snarls her own version of Mick Jagger’s “Beast of Burden.” But has anyone heard Elvis doing “My Boyfriend’s Back,” Joe Williams singing “Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man,” or Sinatra performing “Someday My Prince Will Come?”

These examples may push it a bit, but the point remains: there are boys’ songs and girls’ songs, and specific (though tacit) laws governing each. A female vocalist may, occasionally, cover a boy’s song; she is understood to take on the purportedly neutral and universal masculine perspective of the song’s first-person subject, and thus, as a stand-in of sorts, she may sing love songs to another “she.” This is “allowable” partly because the singer’s subjective identity, being feminine (and hence passive, nonpenetrating), is not so overpowering as to pose a threat to the understood, heterosexual arrangement. But clearly, a male singer is less free to sing girls’ songs; pronouns are assiduously altered, or more often, this threatening situation is avoided altogether. For it places a man in position to assume the gender-marked, nonuniversal identity of the feminine Other—or even to sing love songs to another “he.” The taboo-energy accrued at such boundaries is evident in those instances when they are transgressed, as when artists tap this power for parody or other humorous purposes, or expressly to shock, provoke, or titillate.

But it’s not only gendered verbiage that plays into the codes of subject performativity in song. Can we imagine a demure soprano performing Vaughan Williams’s “Vagabond,” or a brawny baritone singing Poulenc’s
“Hôtel”? Of these two well-known twentieth-century art songs, neither is a love song; their texts both contain first-person references to a narrating subject, but no gendered references at all.

The Vaughan Williams is a rousing, cocksure, devil-may-care song of wayfaring. Of course, this is gendered subject matter, but surely the fact that this song is performed exclusively by male singers also has much to do with musical rhetoric: from its first notes the vocal melody cuts quite a swathe through pitch space, scaling rugged triadic ascents within the phrases—each of which is pitched progressively higher—in pursuit of the climactic goal. The piano accompaniment also participates in subject construction, notably through the steady tramp-tramp-tramping of the left-hand part. Issues of embodiment loom huge here: women don’t walk this way!—nor move through (pitch- or other) space with such rambling, boisterous freedom. To invoke the 1950s medicoscientific voice of authority: songs like this could harm a female singer’s reproductive system!

Musical rhetoric is implicated more pointedly in the Poulenc, for the text’s topic—idle smoking in one’s hotel room—is not clearly gendered. But by the time Apollinaire’s surrealism text is layered with Poulenc’s musical setting we have indeed, in Glenn Watkins’s words, “the perfect transformation of an art song into a torch song.”46 The mere presence of this last phrase, torch song, is worth several paragraphs’ analysis and explication. The term is freighted with gender- and sex-coded meanings, as Harvey Fierstein illustrates via his deft co-optation in his play title Torch Song Trilogy. In relation to the musical rhetoric of Poulenc’s song, “torchiness” inheres in harmonic inflections from jazz and the cabaret, as well as tropes of erotic seduction invoked by the voice and piano parts alike. Rhythm and melody throughout the song create a static wash, a languid inactivity, constructing a subjectivity that male singers have tended infrequently to take on.

We might further note a parallelism between the musical rhetoric of gender in these two songs and the gendered conception of sonata themes documented by A. B. Marx in 1845, and echoed by subsequent writers. The resonance of “The Vagabond” and “Hôtel” with Marx’s contrasting (primary) masculine—energetic and (secondary) feminine—supple themes, respectively, suggests the presence of shared conventions across certain boundaries of genre and history within serious music practice.47 More relevant to my immediate concerns is the possibility of shared conventions among songs by Vaughan Williams, Poulenc, and the Smiths—hence, within a genre of song conceived across boundaries of popular and serious musical practice, and twentieth-century history. Whether or not such a conception is orthodox, its potential validity is implied by a remark from Poulenc himself: “From childhood onward I’ve associated café tunes with the Couperin Suites in a common love without distinguishing between them.”48

THE MUSICAL RHETORIC OF THE “FOURTH GENDER”

Morrissey’s songs, as the preceding examples may suggest, transgress masculine convention through identifications with feminine subjectivity, and with other distinctly unmasterful ways of being. Of course, popular music offers an established practice of gender transgression: as flagrant spectacle—sparing no eyeliner—that ultimately enhances a rock’s daring, bad-ass image. Morrissey’s transgender identifications—frequently abstruse and spectacularly unprowductive—are thus doubly transgressive; they are cast, among other unglamorous subject identifications, in the construction of a bona fide misfit. The song “Bigmouth Strikes Again” (excerpted below) presents an intriguing instance:

and now I know how Joan of Arc felt
now I know how Joan of Arc felt
as the flames rose
to her roman nose
and her hearing aid started to melt

The hearing aid image here lends a note of delicious absurdity, via obvious anachronism. But less obviously, it deepens and complicates Morrissey’s identification with Saint Joan: she never wore a hearing aid, but as fans know, in public appearances since the early Smiths years Morrissey has often affected (a nonoperative) one.49 Thus the boundaries between the singer and the (feminine) object of his vicarious focus are blurred. The hearing aid, one might observe, is not standard issue in studly rock-star accessorizing; still, Morrissey’s wearing it was an exercise in semiotic power. “In the midst of all the glamour, light, and shallow veneer of pop,” he has said, it was “a symbol that spoke for downtrodden and lonely people.”50

Another Smiths song, “Sheila Take a Bow,” seems at first glance a fairly conventional affirmation of boy-girl love. In its twice-occurring refrain, Morrissey sings:
Sheila take a, Sheila take a bow
Boot the grime of the world in the crotch, dear
And don’t go home tonight
Come out and find the one that you love and who loves you

The impression of heterosexual normality endures undisturbed through the final refrain, and then receives amplification in its extension:

Take my hand and off we stride [la la la la la la la]
You’re a girl and I’m a boy [la la la la la la, la la la la la la]

Line 18, “You’re a girl and I’m a boy,” is delivered and left at that, as a statement gloriously and patently replete in its ramifications. It suggests the reassuring familiarity of every boy-meets-girl script: “You’re a girl and I’m a boy”—there it is; enough said. The bawdy dance hall stride gives way to smiling, carefree skipping music, for which “la, la, la” now suffices as a lyric—after all, from this point presumably everyone can supply the rest for themselves. With the myth well in motion, there’s no stopping the inevitable love and happy-ever-after; all we need now is to repeat and fade.

And Morrissey obliges, beginning a repeat with line 19. But at line 20, something goes awry:

Take my hand and off we stride [la la la la la la la]
I’m a girl and you’re a boy [la la la la la la, la la la la la la]

One hears the sound of a wrench being thrown—or perhaps it’s the drop of a large hairpin. In any case, its reverberations are enough to call into question all that had seemed manifest in the preceding scenario: we might note now, in retrospect, the presence from the start of a certain tone in the narrator’s orientation to the girl. Beneath the very overt positioning of the girl as object of desire is a subtler note of something like avuncularity—located in the repeated, somewhat stymied references to her youth; the indication that she is a schoolgirl (l. 22; “Throw your homework into the fire”), and that he is older; and in the chaste epithet dear. On closer examination even the name, Sheila, is subsersive: in vernacular usage it refers generically to a woman or girlfriend, like “chick” or “broad.”

Clearly line 20 presents a small but resounding bump in the dramatic narrative, for which, it seems, the text is to blame. But the text doesn’t act alone: the wry piquancy of this moment owes much to its setup in strophic musical patterning. Lines 5–8 and 13–16 present a parallelism both musical and textural—the song’s refrain; then lines 17–18 extend the preceding refrain (ll. 13–16), with new text on the same musical framework (and “la la la ...” filling in for the second and fourth lines of text). By the time line 19 begins just as line 17, we are thoroughly lulled into our expectations—for continued musical and textual parallelism in line 20. The music plays to these expectations; it extends the parallelism—and thereby redoubles our surprise at the text’s detour (“I’m a girl and you’re a boy”).

A similar textual picture receives a different sort of musical frame in “Half a Person.” From line 10 until the end of line 12, predictable patterning is created by rhyme scheme, melody, and harmonic progression:

Sixteen, clumsy and shy
I went to London and I
I booked myself in at the Y. . . . W.C.A.
I said, “I like it here—can I stay?”
I like it here—can I stay?
And, do you have a vacancy
For a Back-scrubber?”

The material of lines 10–11 presents as an antecedent unit: textually and harmonically open-ended, it awaits completion by a causual consequent. And we get just that—or its beginnings, at least—in the music that follows: “I booked myself in at the Y” (l. 12) sets the stage for such completion, through its textual rhyme and musical parallelism with line 10. But then comes Morrissey’s ellipsis . . . which leads into a gender-reversing twist of text (“. . . W.C.A.”), wedged to a reopening of the musical argument. That is, rather than the expected consequent unit and cadential closure, we get a deceptive cadence of sorts (at “W.C.A.”); and this gives rise to an extensional offshoot (ll. 13–16) in which the nascent narrative queerness is embroidered unmistakably queerer (“I said: ‘I like it here can I stay? I like it here can I stay? And, do you have a vacancy for a Back-scrubber?’”). Thus, in this case, an unexpected addition to the text and dramatic narrative is mirrored by its musical setting—painted, and hence amplified, by a melodic extension.

I have already discussed the presence and significance of Morrissey’s melodic inactivity, in his work in general and three examples in particular, including “Half a Person.” But melodic structure carries further,
powerful connotations in the latter instance. For within "Half a Person," melody is not only static and nonteologically, but repetitive, and narrowly focused in both range and idea. Such melody is exquisitely commensurate with Morrissey's textual themes in this song and elsewhere: it is the melody of obsession. It sets its own narrow confines and paces back and forth within them, frequently retracing its own path—and thus acts as ideal musical counterpart to Morrissey's narratives of compulsion, with their *idée fixe*, and their voyeuristic and sometimes agoraphobic preoccupations. And Morrissey provides still a further level of reinforcement of his themes of obsession—in his obsession with (particular) themes. One needn't possess an exhaustive knowledge of the oeuvre to observe that Morrissey perpetually "is still singing the same old songs." Throughout his work Morrissey's concerns, fascinations, and fixations run less broad than deep, and he continually revisits his lodes—at times with delectation, at times with loathing, but always, time and again, returning for more.

The song "Sheila Take a Bow" was found above to present a clear feminine object, of subtly equivocated desire; in this respect it groups with a number of other Morrissey songs. "Girlfriend in a Coma" does the same thing, but with a greater reliance on the manipulation of musical rhetoric. The song's textual scenario is grave from the outset:

- **Girlfriend in a coma, I know**
- I know—it's serious
- ..............................................................
- there were times when I could
- have "murdered" her
- (but, you know, I would hate
- anything to happen to her)
- NO, I DON'T WANT TO SEE HER
- Do you really think
- she'll pull through?

By the closing lines, things have progressed from bad to worse:

- Let me whisper my last good-byes
- I know—IT'S SERIOUS

This text alone introduces apparent conflicts of feeling in the narrator, in his odd responses to the grim circumstances: he "know[s]—IT'S SERIOUS," but he does not "WANT TO SEE HER"; he expresses concern for her life, but the occasion of her mortality finds him musing over the times when he "could have 'murdered' her." This marriage of tragic seriousness with transparent artifice is characteristically Wildean and quintessentially camp, as is the peculiar usage of capitalization and quotation marks—just what does it mean to "murder" or "strangle" in quotes? Meaning is precisely indeterminate: Morrissey's caps and quotes cultivate enigma, like the italics used similarly by generations of campy writers.

But the ironic clincher in this song is provided by the music, which from its opening notes is a banal cliché. It is the fifties rock 'n' roll of willful naïveté, and of bland sentimentality. This insipid music and Morrissey's vacant, pretty crooning in it are as remote as they could be from any authentic sympathetic response to the sorrowful goings-on in the text.

In a number of his songs Morrissey presents the reverse dynamic of that seen here: thus, a highly charged situation of desire, and a masculine object of ambiguous identity and role. "This Charming Man" (excerpted below) provides the prototypical example:

**Punctured bicycle**

on a hillside desolate

will Nature make a man of me yet?

then in this charming car

this charming man

why pamper life's complexities

when the leather runs smooth

on the passenger seat?

Questions around gender are introduced immediately in the first stanza of this song, when the narrator mocks his own masculinity ("will Nature make a man of me yet?"). In stanza 3, a second question is posed rhetorically ("why pamper life's complexities when the leather runs smooth on the passenger seat?"). Here Morrissey's last syllable, "seat," is melismatic. He had sung melisma in one previous place: that is, where the words "charming man" lightly trail off in mid-sentence. There follows a momentary descent into interiority (during one bar's vocal rest); the narrator seems to weigh his options; and he reemerges with a decision: "why pamper life's complexities when the leather runs smooth on the passenger seat?" The mind/body problem implicit here is something of a recurrent theme in Morrissey's lyrics; in this instance the narrator
decides it in favor of the body—his rhetorical question (st. 3) tells us that much. But Morrissey’s prolongation and inflection of the melisma on “seat” tells us more: it seems a marked indulgence, and tantalizingly
connotes (while the text denotes) a surrender to sensual pleasure.

Fans of The Rocky Horror Picture Show might compare this moment with one in Frank N. Furter’s song and dance number, “I Can Make You a Man.” Frankie (a transvestite alien scientist) sings the song to his newly unveiled human creation, Rocky (a tan, blond, muscular hunk). He breathlessly details what he has planned for Rocky’s workout regimen, but barely loses his bearings at the line, “With some massage, and just a little bit of steam....” Tracing his gloved finger down the creature’s magnificent, oiled pecs, and then abs, Frank’s voice reaches the word “steam” just as his finger reaches Rocky’s skimpy gold lamé trunks. He fingers there (faintly tremulous), melismatically drawing out the word before finally regaining self-control, and resuming progress toward the cadence. The double entendre potential of “steam” is close to the surface in this steamy moment; it is more buried, but equally present, in Morrissey’s “seat.”

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

As I stated near the outset of this essay, one of my primary aims is to illuminate some ways in which Morrissey’s music, and music in general, can participate in the cultural production of sex, gender, and desire. Such interrogation might help us interpret, among other things, one rock critic’s reference to the Smiths’ music as “distinctly nonphallic rock & roll.” The location may represent mere rock catch-phrasology, a coinage too hip to pass up; but it seems worth noting that its assessment is stated in terms of difference: “distinctly non-”anything invokes comparison with a prior, somehow normative standard—here, “phallic rock & roll,” which echoes Frith and McRobbie’s “cool rock” (and is to that extent transparent).

Morrissey’s work resists, subverts, and transvalues cultural terms of sexuality and gender on verbal, visual, and musical levels. I have argued that Morrissey’s melodies signify difference, specifically a difference of inactivity. And if Morrissey’s different, inactive melodies—doubly gendered feminine—attract the notice of pop critic Henke, they also, significantly, incur his disapproval: his reference was to a “droning mono-
tone that can be irritating” (emphasis added). Such irritation may bespeak a cultural expectation articulated, in conspicuously gendered terms, by Charles Ives, that music must go “onwards and always upwards.” What, then, of music that doesn’t? Well, perhaps this is how music comes to seem “distinctly nonphallic.”

Recognizing and unpacking the musical component in Morrissey’s rock discourses affords illumination on multiple fronts: it redresses the neglect of this component in existing criticism; and it distinguishes Morrissey’s constructions from more conventional rock examples of sex and gender transgression, in which musical semiotics is often less a factor. Further, analysis of this sort recovers for conscious reckoning a dimension of Morrissey’s songs that is powerfully, viscerally meaningful: the music. Here as elsewhere, music possesses exceptional qualities as a signifier—being perceived as nonverbal and embodied, seemingly “natural” and unmediated by social structures. Such an experience is evoked poetically by T. S. Eliot:

Music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts.

Morrissey’s songs afford insights into the ways in which music, through forces as mysterious to most listeners as they are irresistible, presents constructions of sex, gender, and desire. Such constructions cannot be understood apart from any verbal and visual dimensions attending a musical activity, or from the larger cultural ecology that sustains them. Thus any assessment of Morrissey’s artistic difference must be drawn in relation to its particular cultural and historical contexts.

Most specifically, Morrissey may be considered in relation to a recognized postmodern practice invoking “flexible” subjectivities, including sexual and gender identities, and its enactment in the realm of pop music. In recent popular-culture criticism such practice has elicited a good deal of comment, both admiring and detracting, of which Susan Bordo’s astute feminist critique is especially relevant to my concerns. Bordo contrasts resistance that is “directed against particular historical forms of power and subjectivity” with resistance “imagined [by some postmodern theorists] as the refusal to embody any positioned subjectivity at all; what is celebrated is continual creative escape from location, containment, and definition.” And she identifies examples of the latter in the “plasticity
of Madonna's subjectivity,” as embodied in her chameleon-like image transformations, and in certain of her music videos.59

Unlike some other critics, Bordo finds little liberation in such "jouissance." Rather she perceives in the purportedly playful, tongue-in-cheek expressions of Madonna and some other artists (an example from Ice-T is also cited) an irresponsible disregard toward the oppressive and coercive powers of the images in which they commute. Bordo summarizes:

Turning to Madonna and the liberating postmodern subjectivity that [certain academic and popular-critics] claim she is offering: the notion that one can play a porno house by night and regain one's androgynous innocence by day [as Madonna portrays in her video, “Open Your Heart to Me”] does not seem to me to be a refusal of essentialist categories about gender, but rather a new inscription of mind/body dualism. What the body does is immaterial, so long as the imagination is free. This abstract, unsituated, disembodied freedom . . . celebrates itself only through the effacement of the material praxis of people’s lives, the normalizing power of cultural images, and the sadly continuing social realities of dominance and subordination.60

Perhaps Morrissey should be counted among such pop artists whose claims as “daring and resistant transgressors of cultural structures that contain and define” Bordo exposes as facile and false.61 He alleges, after all, to have “no sexual standpoint whatsoever.” Undoubtedly he constructs a rather agile subjectivity in his work: it is readable sometimes in gay terms, sometimes in straight terms, and it involves feminine, cross-gender identification in multiple realms. He has also consistently evaded self-declaration along hetero- and homosexual lines. Morrissey’s refusal to assert publicly any gay identification has drawn criticism from various sources—including some fans and press accounts, and at least one pop colleague (Jimmy Somerville, fellow falsettoist of Bronski Beat and Communards fame). But neither has he sought to establish a straight identity. Indeed, unlike so many other stars of speculative sexuality, Morrissey has never presented the kinds of public spectacle by which one presumably qualifies for membership in the Conspicuous Heterosexuality Club.

For purposes of historical contextualization, another factor demands notice. That is, more or less simultaneous with the appearance of the Smiths, and of public ponderings over Morrissey’s sexuality, was that of the outing phenomenon. With its advent in the eighties, queer subjects could fear imposition of unwelcome containment and definition not only from outside, homophobic forces, but from their own avowedly queer-

identified and -affirmative peers. The impetus came from a new political faction within the queer community, professing belief in the transformative potential and efficacy of coming out. This position, of course, was and remains anything but unanimous in a community that is far from monolithic. In fact, if there is any point of uniformity in queer lives, it lies in the continuing certainty of reduction (to the perceived terms of one’s difference), marginalization, and oppression in a queer-phobic, queer-hating culture. Whatever the future prospects for social transformation via coming out, it is this present reality that greets those who do.

Against such cultural and historical backdrops, and from an artistic position of which arcanness is a refined and defining feature, Morrissey has steadfastly refused to declare (or confirm) a gay subject position. But still he chooses to explore queer themes, in the most knowledgably “inside” of queer-insider language. This sign is abundantly meaningful to other insiders: for queer listeners, Morrissey’s work is about queer erotics and experience. I know of no queer fan who perceives Morrissey’s work or persona in terms at all straight. Ambiguous, yes—infinately, ingeniously so; but ambiguity is not particularly confusing to queer subjects, to whom its utility and indeed necessity are intimately known. Even cultivated sexual ambiguity is not something that tends to jam or erase well-formed “gaydar” readings—to the contrary, it tends to reinforce positive readings.

I also know of straight fans who harbor no notion that Morrissey or his work has anything to do with queerness. This perspective (not so rare as it may seem improbable) is readily afforded by mainstream ignorance of queer codes, and supported by the economy of compulsory heterosexuality. Morrissey’s international following is considerable, and includes an oft-remarked male majority, particularly in Britain, where the Smiths “became a fundamental part of male adolescence, alongside acne and soccer.”62 This following includes numerous straight-identified members (even, undoubtedly, homophobic elements). And these fans too feel that their idol is singing directly to them and their experiences. Thus the question may arise: is one or another constituency being deceived or manipulated? Is Morrissey therefore an artistic fraud?

My answer is that if Morrissey is a fraud, it’s not on this account. Perhaps the real question here is whether one can effectively resist and destabilize the hegemonic forms of subjectivity, while refusing containment in any of them. In his acknowledged attempts to decentralize the
control of gender and sexuality, Morrissey has indeed evaded subjective containment—but not through indiscriminate refusal of any subject position whatever. Other pop artists, displaying what Bordo has called “true postmodern fashion,” may deny any serious artistic intent for their ironic and ambiguous gestures. But Morrissey’s renowned irony and ambiguity contravene contemporary fashion, situated as they are by his effusions on the importance of pop music and its message. Surely there is a difference between the postmodern resistance that primarily expresses “rebelliousness and a desire to fuck with people” and Morrissey’s project of resistance directed consistently, for over a decade, toward particular historical forms of subjectivity.

One of these forms is conventional masculinity. Morrissey’s cross-gender identifications depart, however, from the usual pop-rock strategies, pioneered by his beloved New York Dolls. His approach involves not visual signs of cross-dressing and -compartment, but the more subliminal means of musical rhetoric, and allusively sophisticated textual identifications with feminine subjects—heroized, feminist (or protofeminist) figures like Joan of Arc, Virginia Woolf, Molly Haskell, and Susan Brownmiller.

Morrissey’s resistance is also directed toward sexuality. Presented with the standard sexuality ballet, he selects “none of the above,” and specifies a write-in choice: celibacy. It's an odd choice, and a unique self-designation among pop-rock stars; it places him in a category reserved for nuns, monks, and scattered, scarcely noticed pre-, post-, or asexual others, whose full subject status is rendered problematical by their membership here. Of course this conventional form of celibacy is weakened by Morrissey’s presence, and the distinct erotics of his work and persona.

From both artistic and commercial perspectives, it’s not difficult to imagine why Morrissey might wish to resist containment in the binary categories of contemporary sexual subjectivity—particularly when the one most eagerly offered (by the media) is that of homosexuality. Not all forms of subjectivity are equally containing, of course; such is the essence of difference, of Otherness. The neutrality that is ascribed to a normalized subject position (whiteness, maleness, straightness) carries with it the broadest range of possibilities for both empathic appeal and individual particularities. The Other’s position is more circumscribed, and, significantly, less valent; such is the essence of marginalization and ghettoization. Straight experiences, concerns, loves are everyone’s concerns, whereas gay concerns are presumed to be relevant only to gay subjects.

Some would argue for direct and explicit insurgency as the only appropriate response to such constrictive, coercive social structures. But the more circuitous route by which Morrissey’s work is received offers some undeniable advantages, to his accessibility agenda and, hence, to subversion. He claims that he wants to “write for everybody,” and in this he seems at least partly successful. His celibacy platform is strange, but not alienating; to an extent unavailable via homosexual or bisexual (even heterosexual) identification, it eludes foreclosure on the full range of themes and qualities in his work—including not only sex and gender issues, but loneliness, literariness, wit, dourness, irony, and so on. In this way his work and persona remain “relevant” and susceptible to the identification needs and desires of even widely divergent audiences. Ultimately, however, Morrissey’s work does not speak to “everybody.” His most ardent devotees have been described as “[high-IQ misfits and fervent introverts]”—surely there are limits on such a fan base. But if Morrissey’s greatest appeal is to misfits and introverts, it appears, at least, to embrace misfits and introverts of all sexual and gender outlooks.

Thus in addressing signification in Morrissey’s songs, I don’t intend or hope to fix them with determinate meaning; neither to contribute to the already bloated discourses of sanitizing normalization, nor to “our” his work and thus reduce it from the opposite direction. Either choice represents a surrender to the tyranny of literalism, and a failure of imagination. Moreover, neither choice represents the work’s actual reception. Even Keith H MSOWE’s recent book, an encyclopedia of homosexuality in the British media, defines the Smiths as a “pop band of the early 1980s, whose moody lyrics . . . could be interpreted in a number of ways.” And these measured (if suggestive) tones emanate from a volume entitled Broadcasting It, whose neon-pink cover features three men in high retro-drag—all bold eyeliner, blond beehives, and polka-dot minidresses.

Morrissey’s music is rife with sex and gender anomalies, and traffics heavily in gay-insider-coded meanings—to an extent perhaps only hinted at by the limited examples given here. And these preoccupations surface even more strikingly in Morrissey’s post-1987, solo work: viewed with any awareness of the insider codes, releases like Viva Hate (1988) and Bona Drag (1990), especially, seem positively like gay theme-albums. Both the
title of Bona Drag and its first track, "Piccadilly Palare," use palari, an underground language of gay Londoners and lingua franca of "gypsies, tramps, thieves and chorus boys." And song titles on the solo albums include "Hairdresser on Fire," "Billy Budd," "Lucky Lisp," and "I Am Hated for Loving"—significantly, and in classic Morrissey fashion, these flaming, flaunting titles are less amplified and clarified than coyly equivocated by the songs that follow.

Clearly, any listening or criticism of Morrissey's oeuvre that ignores the relevant codes and secret languages Neglects a crucial part of the picture. But to ghettoize this music under some reductive rubric of "gay rock," as certain observers would have it, is also to miss the point rather completely—as I hope my readings have suggested. Far more rewarding than either of these extremes is to claim all the potential resonances of the work, in its rich multiplicity and adroit resistance to univocal interpretation.

NOTES

Earlier versions of this paper were presented to audiences at the Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the Society for Music Theory in Tallahassee (1994), Feminist Theory and Music 3 in Riverside (1995), the University of Michigan School of Music, and Wayne State University; I am grateful for their input, some of which has been incorporated into the present version. Acknowledgment is due to two anonymous respondents and the editors of Gender for their astute readings and suggestions, by which the essay has benefited considerably. I'd like also to express sincere thanks to all my friends and colleagues who have lent their insights, support, and encouragement to this project, including particularly Lisa Bowersox, Robert Hatten, Kevin Kopelson, Angela Le Compte, Fred Maus, and Andrew Mead.

2. The same viewpoint is expressed in numerous interviews and articles, however.
3. I read the title as a reference (characteristically oblique) to the vinyl disc—equally, compact disc or record.
4. Line division, punctuation, and capitalization in all Morrissey's song texts cited here follow that given in the booklets accompanying The Smiths Best . . . 1, and The Smiths . . . Best ii (see discography).
5. A relevant observation is registered in Mark Peel, "Viva Morrissey," review of Viva Hate, Stereo Review 53 (July 1988): 85: "Morrissey is so accustomed to writing in the first person that he ends up being a spokesman for views you can't quite believe he'd admit to."
8. This is pointed out and variously illustrated in Robert Walser, Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1993), 147.
12. The resemblance between Marr's name and the popular French idiom j'en ai marre (essentially, "I've had it up to here") seems uncanny, especially given the prevalence of the punk "no future/ton-the-dole outlook in early-eighties Britain. Apparently it's mere happenstance; according to biographer Johnny Rogan, the guitarist made only one change to his given name, in 1983 adopting the present spelling so as to distinguish himself from Buzzcocks drummer John Maher. See Rogan, Morrissey and Marr: The Severed Alliance (London: Omnibus Press, 1992), 163.
13. Morrissey's recurrent themes and charged images include dreams; despair, betrayal, beleaguered, and demoralization at the hands of one's intimates; bicycle mishaps; alienation; fat women; self-mockery and -deprecation; criminals; and dogged pursuit of a disinterested love object. This list is partial and selective, and undeniably reflects my own fascinations with Morrissey's creative fetishes.
14. All these songs can be found on two disc volumes, The Smiths Best . . . 1, and The Smiths . . . Best ii, in addition to their respective original releases (see discography). It seems both desirable and essential to define clearly one's historical frame of reference in this realm: things have changed pretty rapidly over the last decade vis-à-vis society's general awareness of issues of gender and sexuality,
and hence, meanings have shifted. Too, gender and sexuality have a very different presence in pop music today than in the mid-eighties. Queer presence in particular is radically redefined by k.d. lang. Indigo Girls, Melissa Etheridge, Erasure, and others who have appeared on the scene since that time. Surely it would be premature to proclaim any “death of the closet” in pop music; however, as the work of some of these very artists attests, coded meaning, and reliance on the mechanisms of insider/outsider perceptions, are alive and well.


16. Hauptfuhrer, “Roll Over, Bob Dylan,” 106. A similarly ineffectual boy-girl scenario is depicted in the Smiths’ song “Half a Person.” This quotation is, of course, one of those references that can be interpreted as proof of either heterosexuality or homosexuality. In the context of the mainstream media (and indeed, the article just cited pushes hard on the heterosexual interpretation) and compulsory heterosexuality, the reference is conventionally read as a statement of (distressed) heterosexuality. As always, however, particular subjects’ situations will lead them to read against conventional norms, and Morrissey’s words may also satisfy those seeking statements of homosexuality, or asexuality.

17. See Paul Evans, “Morrissey,” Rolling Stone (21 Jan. 1993): 24; and Shaw, “Homme Alone 2,” 102, respectively. Critics elsewhere have expressed views reinforcing each of these.

18. Among the Smiths songs, examples of the former type include “This Charming Man,” “William, It Was Really Nothing,” “Hand in Glove,” and, arguably, “There Is a Light That Never Goes Out”; examples of the latter type include “Girlfriend in a Coma,” “Half a Person,” and “Sheila Take a Bow.” Interestingly, the female object of desire seems to disappear from Morrissey’s more recent solo work.


24. An exception to this critical norm is provided by Stringer, “The Smiths,” 15–26. The author examines several elements of the Smiths’ image—English identity, white ethnicity, emotion, and sexuality—in connection with qualities of their music. I find his insights peripetial, even if I am not always satisfied by his musical analyses, which indulge at times (like much journalistic rock criticism) in a pastiche-like rhetoric of unexplained catch-phrases and unsubstantiated semiotic characterizations.


26. The song transcriptions are my own.

27. The latter phrase appears in Evans, “Morrissey,” 24.

28. The terms foreground and middleground originate in the work of the Austrian music theorist Heinrich Schenker (1868–1935). Schenker and his followers analyze tonal music in terms of hierarchic levels, namely, foreground, or actual musical surface; middleground, in which embellishing details are partially stripped away; and background, representing an ideal structural “skeleton” of the music.

29. Another structural and semiotic factor in these melodies, on which I’ll comment only briefly here, is their rhythmic quality. In this realm, too, inactivity constitutes a salient feature and a mark of difference. But rhythmic activity in Morrissey’s songs tends to work in its own rather specific way; that is, longer passages of rhythmic stagnation are followed by (indeed answered by) short bursts of rhythmic activity. An instance is found in “Half a Person” (see example): rhythm is sustained, widely spaced, and deferred by syncopation on “Call me morbid, call me pale / I’ve spent six years on your trail”; then, in a relative flurry of vocal and accompanimental rhythm, come the (musically and textually) amplifying lines, “Six full years of my life / On your trail.” The opening stanza of “This Charming Man” is in some ways comparable, though here the answering rhythmic burst delivers a suggestive stroke that meaningfully inflects and augments (again, musically and textually)—rather than repeating or amplifying—that which precedes it. This little burst soon turns out to have been a mere foreshadowing, however, of the more climactic one comprising the whole of the third stanza.

30. The “silver-lamé” metaphor recalls an earlier reference to the shirt Morrissey wore on stage that night. See Evans, “Morrissey,” 24.

31. Henke, “Oscar! Oscar!” 45. An apparently echoing reference, “his voice has been described as dronish,” appears the following year in Hauptfuhrer, “Roll Over, Bob Dylan,” 105.

32. Sprachstimme is a technique of half-speaking and half-singing introduced by Arnold Schoenberg in his Pierrot lunaire, op. 21 (1912). One could cite in comparison a number of pop vocalists, including not only Dylan but Leonard Cohen, Rickie Lee Jones, Tom Petty, Robbie Robertson, and Neil Young.

33. Every other popular-press characterization of Morrissey’s singing known to me confirms my assessment here, and favors a “crooning” trope over anything involving speech. A sampling taken only from Rolling Stone yields references to “a choirboy’s tremulous cry” (Fricke, “Keep Up,” 33); “Edith Piaf-on-the-dole vocals” and “croons and hoots” (Mark Coleman, review of The Queen Is Dead, Rolling Stone [11 Sept. 1986]: 94); and idem, review of Year, Rolling Stone [29 Oct. 1992]: 69); and “idiomsyncratic crooning” (Evans, “Morrissey,” 24).


35. These run roughly parallel with those detailed more fully by Citron (ibid.); that she breaks such issues down to simplest, clearest terms is quite useful, given music scholars’ widely varying levels of openness and sophistication toward
humanities critical and theoretical discourses (not to mention past polemics and misapprehensions arising therefrom).


38. As the first line in her definitive rendition of the Robbie Robertson song, "The Night They Drove O' Dixie Down."

39. I find Prince's song "I Wanna Be Your Girlfriend" an excellent example in this regard; of course, many artists could be cited, including the New York Dolls, Madonna, David Bowie, and Mick Jagger.


41. It was Peter Bloom who identified the passage from Marx, *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition* (1845) as possibly the first statement of thematic contrast in terms of a "masculine-feminine analogy." See Bloom's communication to *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 27 (1974): 161–62. I translate Marx's *schmiegung* as "supple," whereas Bloom uses "flexibly" (and restructures the grammar a bit at this point).


43. At the same time, incidentally, his eyeglasses, functional and corrective of nearsightedness, have tended to be worn only offstage and in private.


45. The name is Irish, but this vernacular usage is now chiefly Australian and New Zealander; antipodal usages are widely familiar among Britons, however.

46. See also Morrisey's latest U.S. single (as of the time of this writing), "The More You Ignore Me, the Closer I Get," in which the narrator clearly is stalking the object of his second-person address. The narrating subject appears desperately consumed by obsession, *Fatal Attraction*-style, in songs like the Smiths' "What Difference Does It Make?" ("The devil will find work for idle hands to do / I stole and I lied, and why? because you asked me to / but now you make me feel so ashamed / because I've only got two hands / well, I'm still fond of you") and Morrisey's "Last of the Famous International Playboys" ("Reggie Kray—do you know my name? / don't say you don't / please say you do . . . but

I never wanted to kill / I AM NOT NATURALLY EVIL / such things I do / just to make myself / more attractive to you / HAVE I FAILED?


49. If there are hints of intextual paths leading into the song, there is also some path leading away from it: for reasons not entirely clear to me (except insofar as Araki has publicly professed admiration for the Smiths), Daryl Chin uses the title "Girlfriend in a Coma: Notes on the Films of Gregg Araki" for his contribution to *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, ed. Martha Gever, Pratibha Parmar, and John Greyson (New York: Routledge, 1993).

50. The song was the Smiths' second single, and first chart hit, in 1983.

51. *Melisma* refers to a more or less extended melodic passage set to a single syllable of text, usually to expressive effect.

52. It is likewise, of course, in Wilde's writing. Another, quite explicit, occurrence in Morrissey's lyrics is the refrain of "Still Ill": "Does the body rule the mind / or does the mind rule the body? / I donno . . . ."

53. Such double entendre may be more likely for listeners familiar with some of Morrissey's other references. In "Hand in Glove," for instance (a Smiths song explicitly about a socially taboo love; its specific makeup as male-to-male is not explicit but clear enough, the assiduous avoidance of pronouns notwithstanding—even a fortiori), posterior imagery is planted from the very first words: "Hand in glove / the sun shines out of our behinds."


55. Frith and McRobbie define "cock rock," in contrast with "teenybop," as "music making in which performance is an explicit, crude and often aggressive expression of male sexuality" ("Rock and Sexuality," 5–8).


57. It is worth noting that rock performances in which “gender bending” is primarily a visual (or even verbal) affair often involve musical gestures, including virtuosic ones, undifferentiated from those of “gender-normative” performances. But virtuosity, which is conventionally gendered masculine, is not a feature of the inanimate melodies cited above. See Walser, Running with the Devil, 126, for further discussion of the gendering of virtuosity in rock.


60. Ibid., 676.

61. Ibid.


63. Ibid.

64. As does Madonna, according to Bordo, “‘Material Girl,’” 673.

65. This unfashionableness has been noted in the popular press. William Shaw, for example, in recalling his first meeting with Morrissey in 1983, remarks on his outpouring of “a giant love of pop music that none of his would-be cool contemporaries seemed able to match.” See Shaw, “Homme Alone?,” 104.


67. The reference to Joan occurs in “Big Mouth Strikes Again,” and the Wolf reference (invoking A Room of One’s Own) in the title of the Smiths’ “Shakespeare’s Sister”; Morrissey claims important sympathies with feminist authors, including Haskell and Brownmiller, in a 1985 interview (Hauptfuhrer, “Roll Over, Bob Dylan,” 105).

68. This phenomenon has been exposed and explored in relation to Elvis Presley and his differing audiences: see Sue Wise, Sexing Elvis, in On Record, ed. Frith and Goodwin, 390–98.

69. The description is from Evans, “Morrissey,” 24.


71. Ibid., s.v. “polari.” Variants of polari include polari, parlari, palare, and parlaree.

72. For example, Henke (“Oscar! Oscar!” 45) claims at the outset of his 1984 article that Morrissey “admits that he’s gay.” He later writes, in discussing the songs, “it would appear that his is largely a homosexual viewpoint,” and—coincidentally—delivers a higher density of gay cliché-loaded references than any other Morrissey commentator I’ve encountered (ascribing, within short space, an “upper-crust” English accent, tendency to extravagance, disinterest in teenage dating and sports, and great importance to Oscar Wilde and James Dean). One can only speculate as to the possible relevance of Morrissey’s contemptuously titled song “Journalists Who Lie” (on the 1991 CD maxi-single Our Frank, Sire/Reprise 9362–40043–2).

DISCOGRAPHY

Chronologically ordered, of Morrissey’s albums (U.S., on CD) with the Smiths and as solo artist

Smiths. 1984a. The Smiths. Sire/Rough Trade 7599–25065–2. Reel around the Fountain; You’ve Got Everything Now; Miserable Lie; Pretty Girls Make Graves; The Hand That Rocks the Cradle; This Charming Man; Still Ill; Hand in Glove; What Difference Does It Make?; I Don’t Owe You Anything; Suffer Little Children.

———. 1984b. Hatful of Hollow. Sire/Reprise 9362–45205–2. William, It Was Really Nothing; What Difference Does It Make?; These Things Take Time; This Charming Man; How Soon Is Now?; Handsome Devil; Hand in Glove; Still Ill; Heaven Knows I’m Miserable Now; This Night Has Opened My Eyes; You’ve Got Everything Now; Accept Yourself; Girl Afraid; Back to the Old House; Reel around the Fountain; Please, Please, Please, Let Me Get What I Want.


———. 1986. The Queen Is Dead. Sire/Rough Trade 7599–25426–2. The Queen Is Dead; Frankly, Mr. Shankly; I Know It’s Over; Never Had No One Ever; Cemetry Siege Gates; Bigmouth Strikes Again; The Boy with the Thorn In His Side; Vicar in a Tutu; There Is A Light That Never Goes Out; Some Girls Are Bigger Than Others.

———. 1987a. Louder Than Bombs. Sire/Rough Trade 7599–25569–2. Is It Really So Strange?; Sheila Take a Bow; Shoplifters of the World Unite; Sweet and Tender Hooligan; Half a Person; London; Panic; Girl Afraid; Shakespeare’s Sister; William, It Was Really Nothing; You Just Haven’t Earned It Yet; Baby; Heaven Knows I’m Miserable Now; Ask; Golden Lights; Oscillate Wildly; These Things Take Time; Rubber Ring; Back to the Old House; Hand in Glove; Stretch Out and Wait; Please Please Please Let Me Get What I Want; This Night Has Opened My Eyes; Unloveable; Asleep.

———. 1987b. Strangeways, Here We Come. Sire/Rough Trade 7599–25649–2. A Rush and a Push and the Land is Ours; I Started Something I Couldn’t Finish; Death of a Disco Dancer; Girlfriend in a Coma; Stop Me If You Think You’ve Heard This One Before; Last Night I Dreamed That Somebody Loved Me; Unhappy Birthday; Paint a Vulgar Picture; Death at One’s Elbow; I Won’t Share You.

Angel, Down We Go Together; Late Night, Maudlin Street; Suedehead; Break Up the Family; Hairdresser on Fire; The Ordinary Boys; I Don't Mind if You Forget Me, Dial-a-Cliché; Margaret on the Guillotine.

Smiths, 1988. *Rank* (live album). Sire/Rough Trade 7599–25786–2. The Queen Is Dead; Panic; Vicar in a Tutu; Ask; Rusholme Ruffians; The Boy with the Thorn in His Side; What She Said; Is It Really So Strange?; Cemetery Gates; London; I Know It's Over; The Draize Train; Still Ill; Bigmouth Strikes Again.

Morrisey, 1990. *Bona Drag*. Sire/Reprise 9362–26221–2. Piccadilly Palare; Interesting Drug; November Spawned a Monster; Will Never Marry; Such a Little Thing Makes Such a Big Difference; The Last of the Famous International Playboys; Ouija Board, Ouija Board; Hairdresser on Fire; Everyday Is Like Sunday; He Knows I'd Love to See Him; Yes, I Am Blind; Lucky Lisp; Suedehead; Disappointed.

Morrisey, 1991. *Kill Uncle*. Sire/Reprise 9362–26514–2. Our Frank; Asian Rut; Sing Your Life; Mute Witness; King Leer; Found Found Found; Driving Your Girlfriend Home; (I'm) The End of the Family Line; There's a Place in Hell for Me and My Friends.

Morrisey, 1992. *Your Arsenal*. Sire/Reprise 9362–26994–2. You're Gonna Need Someone on Your Side; Glamorous Glue; We'll Let You Know; The National Front Disco; Certain People I Know; We Hate It When Our Friends Become Successful; You're the One for Me, Fatty; Seaside, Yet Still Docked; I Know It's Gonna Happen Someday; Tomorrow.

Smiths, 1992a. *The Smiths Best... 1*. Sire/Reprise 9362–45042–2. This Charming Man; William, It Was Really Nothing; What Difference Does It Make?; Stop Me if You Think You've Heard This One Before; Girlfriend in a Coma; Half a Person; Rubber Ring; How Soon Is Now?; Hand in Glove; Shoplifters of the World Unite; Sheila Take a Bow; Some Girls Are Bigger Than Others; Panic; Please; Please; Please; Let Me Get What I Want.

Smiths, 1992b. *The Smiths... Best II*. Sire/Reprise 9362–45097–2. The Boy with the Thorn in His Side; The Headmaster Ritual; Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now; Ask; Oscillate Wildly; Nowhere Fast; Still Ill; Bigmouth Strikes Again; That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore; Shakespeare's Sister; Girl Afraid; Reel around the Fountain; Last Night I Dreamt That Somebody Loved Me; There Is A Light That Never Goes Out.

Morrisey, 1994. *Vauxhall and I*. Sire/Reprise 9362–45451–2. Now My Heart Is Full; Spring-Heeled Jim; Billy Budd; Hold On to Your Friends; The More You Ignore Me, the Closer I Get; Why Don't You Find Out for Yourself; I Am Hated for Loving; Lifeguard Sleeping, Girl Drowning; Used to Be a Sweet Boy; The Lazy Sunbathers; Speedway.

Morrisey, 1995. *World of Morrisey*. Sire/Reprise 9362–45879–2. Whatever Happens, I Love You; Billy Budd; Jack the Ripper; Have-a-Go Merchant; The Loop; Sister I'm a Poet; You're the One for Me, Fatty; Boxers; Moon River; My Love Life; Certain People I Know; The Last of the Famous International Playboys; We'll Let You Know; Spring-Heeled Jim.

**ELEVEN**

Lost Boys and Angry Ghouls: Vietnam's Undead

Amanda Howell

[W]ar... requires both the reciprocal infliction of massive injury and the eventual disowning of the injury so that its attributes can be transferred elsewhere, as they cannot if they are permitted to cling to the original site of the wound, the human body.

—Flaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* 1

Myth deprives the object of which it speaks of all History.

—Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* 2

After her husband, an Air Force colonel, was declared missing in action in 1967, Emma Hagerman became one of the first members of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia. In 1976, she testified before the House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia as to the effect of the POW/MIA issue on American families who wait and watch for the return of lost husbands and sons. She commented bitterly on both the power and strange logic of images that deny the effects of war and time on the body: "we families have become emotional cripples... some families... no longer look for an accounting, but are waiting for a resurrection." 3

In the horror films *Deathdream* (1972), 4 *House* (1986), *Jacob's Ladder* (1990), and *Universal Soldier* (1992), dead, missing, and imprisoned American soldiers are resurrected, and they return to the United States as...