

# MEAT BLEAT MANIFESTO

● Those were the days, eh readers? When **MORRISSEY** made great records and was prepared to lower himself and do interviews. By the late summer of 1985 The Smiths had firmly established themselves as the most important British band of the second half of the '80s. As they progressed from critical cult to mass popularity so the sniping (at the band's stances and Morrissey's outpourings) began in the music press.

● Not in these pages, though, as a dewy-eyed **DANNY KELLY** threw himself at the feet of Chairman Mo and begged him to defend himself.

● Pictures: **LAWRENCE WATSON**

● On my way to gather the latest thoughts of Chairman Mo, it was clear that the honeymoon between the press and The Smiths had ended.

● After a period when a thousand hip typewriters clattered in united praise of the Whalley Rangers – the blue-eyed boys, the real thing, the new dawn, the only ones – a calm descended.

● And, as the band became public property and public faves, new lines were drawn in the ink, new stances struck.

● Some were reasoned. These took a step back, listened to the music for signs of stagnation (or greatness) and examined the words of Morrissey and Marr for pointers, clues and insights. This was the attitude of the questioning raised eyebrow, a necessary and healthy balancing of the earlier euphoria.

● For others it was not enough. A stream of hacks with suspicious minds and third class degrees in homebrew psychology beat a cynical, salivating trail to master Morrissey's door. Their mission was to prove The Smiths over-rated and samey, just another rock band, and Morrissey a fake, a charlatan and an exploitative merchant of misery.

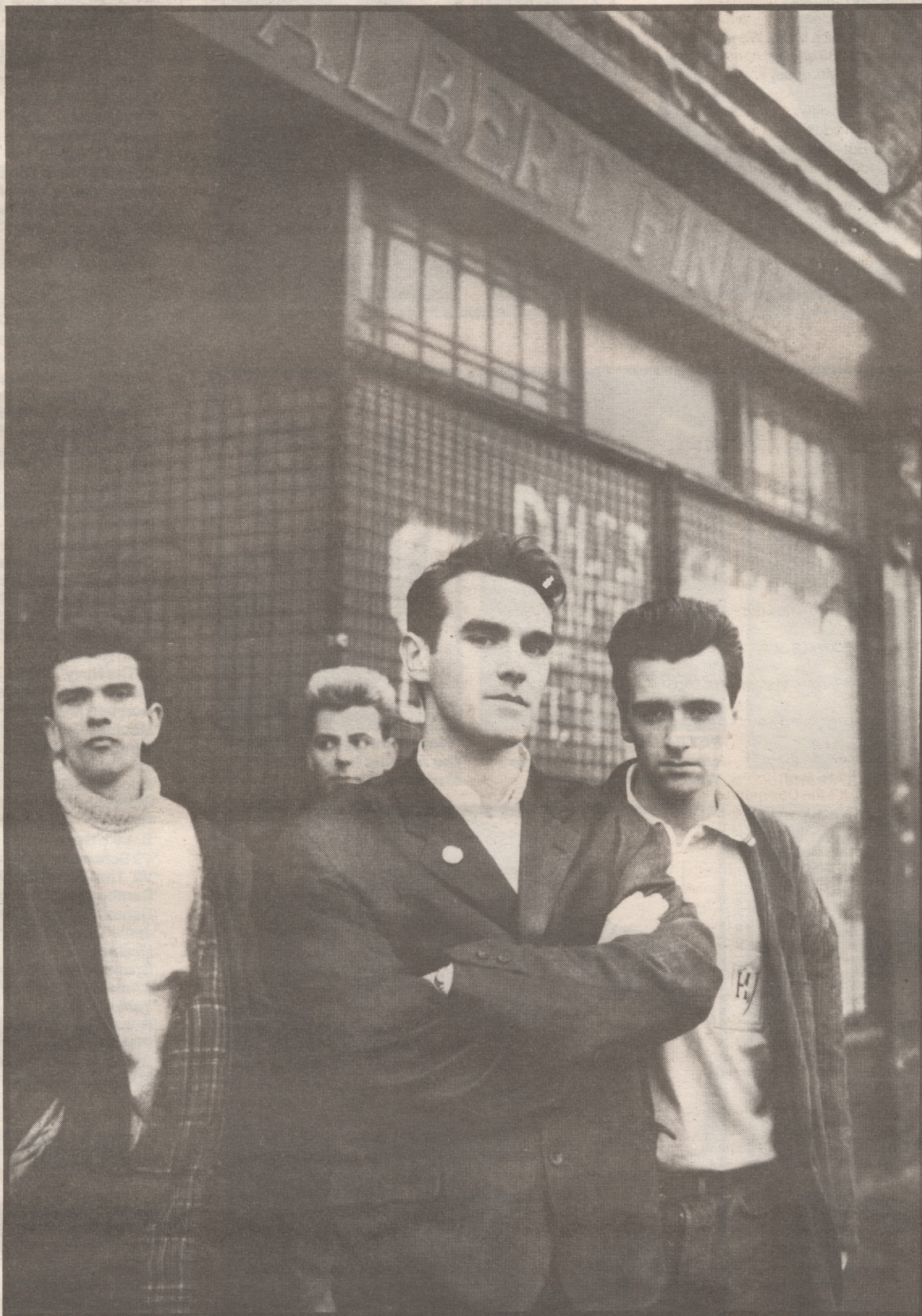
● For them it wasn't a case of terminating the honeymoon. They wanted *decrea nisi*.

● Yet 'Meat Is Murder' is a brilliant record – a catherine wheel of inspired language nailed to a shifting, sometimes unnervingly evocative and beautiful guitar music – and The Smiths' first major tour, culminating in a fraught, celebratory night at the Royal Albert Hall, was sold out, thronged with an unusually healthy mix of age and sex.

● So while the affair between the band and the press has cooled – as *passion* inevitably must – the pop public got on with the business of voting The Smiths the best group on the whole bloody planet!

● The vehemence of some of the realignment (call it a backlash if you will), the need to tarnish and sully, baffles me. I'll be straight: I love the music of these Smiths.

● They've had me vice-gripped since the very first time I heard 'This Charming Man' in a shabby shop



Joyce, Rourke, Morrissey and Marr: Britain's favourite Whalleys, 1985

doorway. It was an experience – we've all had them – like my first encounter with Marvin's 'What's Going On', or 'White Riot' or 'Shipbuilding', one of those moments when a vivid, electric awareness of the power of music is born or renewed.

● The Smiths continue to billow into the senses, reminding that hardened heart of the desires and fears that the passing of time – school, dole, work, home, shattered dreams and bitter romances – drive deep within us, to be outwardly replaced by a defensive shell of knowingness, of would-be fireproof worldliness.

● The spell cast in that dusty doorway remains intact.

● But loving The Smiths is not the same thing as loving Morrissey. In the past six months the son and heir of that famous shyness has maintained a profile marginally lower than the Telecom tower. He's spewed forth his none-too-humble opinion on every subject he's been asked about, and many he's not, taking the butcher's knife to such sacred cows as the Royal Family and the Band Aid project. Thus he's kept the chinny visage and that gleaming torso glaring

from a myriad news stands.

● The irony is that the same seemingly endless fountain of pronouncements that makes him fave interview have also started to grate, to get under people's skin, and we render him (and the band) less well regarded. The manic motion of Morrissey's motor mouth is simultaneously The Smiths' best friend and their worst enemy.

● We meet in Manchester's hilarious Britannia Hotel – the Palace Of Versailles furnished from Woolworth's home 'n' wear. He is somewhat shorter than the six feet claimed in the tour programme, and sports those national health specs and an old-fashioned leather briefcase.

● Settling into a room booked for the day – he now lives with his mother in a newly acquired house in the Cheshire stockbroker belt – he's in obvious high spirits. He's having one of his good days – "It's a constant source of amazement to me" – and every word from his mouth is wickedly sarcastic or self-deprecatingly humorous.

● So much for him being a perpetual miserygob.

● He takes a tape recorder from the valise and sets it going next to mine – a little monument to misrepresentation – and drinks arrive. Mine is a large glass of orange juice, his is an ornate silver samovar filled with hot chocolate!

● So much for him *not* being a practising eccentric.

● Close up, he speaks with the throwaway theatricality of some actors: the small, soft hands in constant motion, the brain always searching for a more risqué or witty or cutting word. He probably thinks it's all very Oscar Wilde, but Frankie Howerd, Dame Edna Everage and Russell Harty are in there too.

● Invariably the opening topic of conversation is interviews themselves. I tell the wordSmith that if the law of the land wasn't so specific about premeditated murder, I'd like to stealthily lace his hot chocolate with strychnine and then, the fatal brew drunk, tell him that he had two hours to live, two hours to cut the crap, to articulate whatever the hell he's trying to tell us in his stream of broadcasts.

● He seems unperturbed by the prospect and even giggles a little. He's

heard all the threats before.

● "I realise that interviews are fraught with difficult contradictions but it's better than being a pot-holer."

● Fair enough, but why do you do so many of them?

● "Because there's a lot of things that we *don't* do. We're never on television, or the radio, so without interviews we'd have no sort of presence at all."

● But don't you ever get sick to death of the sight of your face, your skinny body, your words everywhere?

● "Oh, don't be silly, don't be silly, of course not. I'm dramatically under-exposed. I demand more attention! I'd like to do a bitter commercial or something."

● Yeah, or a chat show, no doubt. Morrissey's saturation of the media – revenge for his rejection as a journalist? – reminds in some way of the fate of Ian McCulloch, Boy George, Kevin Rowland and Joe Strummer, pop stars who could be relied upon to shoot their mouths off; Pavlov's dog before tape recorders, autoquotes.

● "Oh, that's both nice and nauseating at the same time. People love to have their little scapegoats, people willing to walk the plank for them."

● In a wider context, the Bishop Of Durham is performing much the same function.

● The Morrissey brow knits at this. "People *always* ask me if I'm religious, I don't know why."

● Well, you were born into a Catholic household weren't you?

● "Quite vividly Catholic. Then it became vaguely Catholic."

● Kids like Steven Patrick Morrissey see to that.

● Recently the majority of interviews have been terribly confrontational. When people come to attack you, to pick your locks, to examine your undies, how do you feel?

● "I understand it really. If you've got a grain of intellect you run the risk of making your critics seem *dull*. So people feel the need to adopt the most violent attitude, even when they like you. So I don't mind too much, I know what's happening."

● Maybe people are antagonistic because it's hard to believe that you're as snowdrivenly faultless as you make out.

● "Perhaps. Because I say that I'm a stainless individual, and because I say it so often, so frequently and so loudly, I suppose people really don't have much choice. They have to consume those words somehow."

● It's human nature. Everyone believes that everybody else harbours a cupboardful of skeletons.

● "Oh, I *know*, one just throws up one's hands in wide-eyed innocence. All these interviews are a constant battle of wits. People think that in some former life I was a debauched rugby player, or that I've got a stream of illegitimate children cluttering up some home on a hillside."

● Is there *anything* you've regretted saying?

● "I can't think of one sentence!" he exclaims, his body racked with laughter.

● The hair trigger tongue apart, the reason for Morrissey's position as Britain's most interviewed face is the sheer popularity of The Smiths; a popularity bolstered this year by their major, often tense, but ultimately successful tour. What had been his feeling about the jaunt?

● "It was long, very, very long and very exhausting. Some of the dates were quite religious and some were quite difficult. It's just fascinating to see those people, and of course it was an endless triumph."

● To many the most amazing (some would say amusing) incident occurred when Morrissey was hit full in the face by a half pound of sausages, each one with the legend 'Meat Is Murder' etched on it. The recollection of this close encounter of the skinless kind screws the bony mug into contortions of Munch-

# THIS WEEK: MORRISSEY, 1985

like horror. Eventually he gathers himself.

"I think it was done out of affection, misguided affection. They hurled it so accurately that I actually bit it in the action of singing the word 'murder'. I thought at first that it was something else, something *extreme*. . . I fled the stage, a grand exit."

You looked pretty unhappy at the tour's culmination in the great high culture temple of the Royal Albert Hall.

"If the truth be known it had been an awful day. Audiences never want to know about that, about the PA giving trouble or someone shouting things and making life quite unbearable. They just want you to get out there and be Bugs Bunny."

"The venue was quite inappropriate but I must say that it did make perfect sense that The Smiths at the Albert Hall was not a perfect communion, that there was a tragic element."

**"Nothing is important so people, realising that, should get on with their lives, go mad, take their clothes off, jump in the canal, jump into one of those supermarket trolleys, race 'round the supermarket and steal Mars Bars and, y'know, kiss kittens and sit on the back of bread vans."**

Unlike Johnny Marr, you don't give the impression that you like playing live very much.

"Oh I do, we all really enjoy it. Johnny and I just chuckle away to each other during the set. It's immensely pleasurable but the technical difficulties do distract, because we care."

"It's like a play, you can't just skip the words missing from the script and carry on at the bottom of the page. Everything has to blend. . . it's like *King Lear* to me, it's just. . ."

What, if anything, separates them from the herd, makes them unique?

"It's hard to articulate. Language here is utterly useless, the situation is beyond language. You have to see one of our appearances to understand. . . people, at the front at least, are so frantic. It's like, if I die tonight. If I'm eaten outside by a brontosaurus, what does it matter? I like that. They run towards the stage, throw their bodies *against* the stage, jump on the stage. To me this is priceless, and that's ultimately why The Specials are Smith. . . why *The Smiths* are special live."

Then, as if shocked or frightened by this sudden show of exuberance, another deep sigh, the face disappears momentarily into the white, labour-free, hands.

"But after all's said and done. I'm still here, the press are still not convinced. We're still at the stage where if I rescued a kitten from drowning they'd say, 'Morrissey Mauls Kitten's Body'. So what can you do?"

A silence ensues as the question



Flower potty man

PICTURE: STEPHEN WRIGHT

remains unanswered. Then he lifts one caterpillar eyebrow—the left—and fixes me with a pantomime wicked grin.

"Maybe we should make a record for Ethiopia. . ."

**A**nd so, Britain is theirs. Next stop America, where their first two LPs have sold healthily on import and, in Morrissey's words, "polluted the air a bit. . . We signed America in 1983 but that doesn't count."

What's the Morrissey line on the Big Country?

"Erm. . . it's difficult. . . it's quite a good place if you belong and if you're not poor. But if you *don't* belong and if you *are* poor, I think it's the worst place in the universe. Obviously it's very materialist and all of that. And it's a cultural wilderness, we all know that."

Johnny Marr wouldn't agree.

"Oh well, he might in his sleep. . ."

In its favour, America doesn't have a Royal Family. . .

"Oh, but it does. It *does*. What about the Reagans?"

At least they were elected. We can't change ours.

"Oh, we *can*. There's such a thing as cyanide."

"Why is Reagan there? I'm sure this is a question that's even foxing Americans. It's the Daz mentality! I'm sure they'd elect Joan Collins if she were available."

It's perhaps a puzzle that as English a noise as 'The Smiths' or 'Hatful Of Hollow' should sell in, or rather infiltrate, America. Why people in America?

"'People in America'? We talk about them as though they were diseased orang-utans."

You're being terribly coy.

"I'm not saying they're models of perfection, but diseased orang-utans is a little extreme. I'm sure they're a couple of steps up from that! No, I mustn't say that. I'm about to be confronted by them."

That'll be no problem surely, given your powers.

"Oh I know." There's a devilish grin now. "But taking on the whole of America singlehanded. . . I'd need a lot of cornflakes to do that."

**H**it LPs, sell-out tours, adoring masses, America. All is rosy in The Smiths' garden. . . except their singles don't sell like hot cakes. 'Shakespeare's Sister'—the band on autopilot—was a fine, not *great* record, but it didn't even dent the Top 20. Morrissey was mightily put out, and the unending music biz speculation about The Smiths' relationship with their record company Rough Trade grew.

The next single will be 'That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore' which, though not the best song on 'Meat', is the most likely to be played on daytime Radio 1.

"Look, if I was trying to steal a sweet from a child, I'd be honest, I'd let the child know. Radio 1 has to be taken into consideration." There's a hint of anger now glowing through today's good-tempered shell.

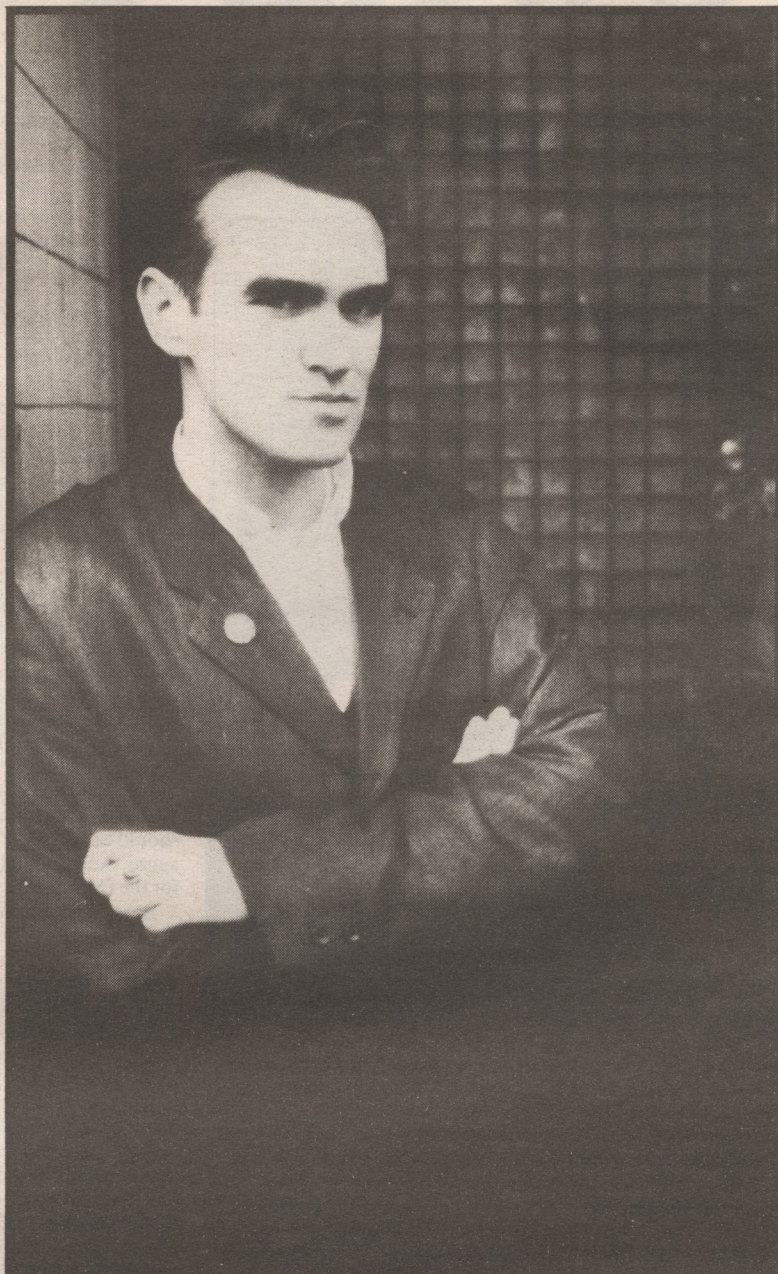
Why did the last single fail, commercially?

"There's no earthly reason why it should have. The height of suspicion surrounds the fate of that record."

What do you suspect?

"Many things. I know for a fact it wasn't played on the radio. The record's merits are irrelevant here. With our status it should have automatically had a high profile, but it was blacklisted by the BBC because I denounced the BPI awards. The sinner must be punished. . . I'm slowly edging away from certain issues."

Not likely. Tell me about 'certain



"Time is a mere scratch and life is nothing. . ."

issues'.

A deep breath, a quick fidget, and away: "I think Rough Trade released the record with a monstrous amount of defeatism. They had no faith in it whatsoever. They *liked* it but they allowed it to dribble, to stall. They didn't service it or market it in any way."

How has your relationship with the company changed since you signed?

"When you become successful, people—if they've had even the vaguest connection with you—claim absolute responsibility for your success. But I can safely and honestly and loudly say that The Smiths have been successful without any help from a living soul anywhere on this planet."

You can safely say it, but I don't believe you. . .

"Please believe me. It's an absolute fact. For a manager-less group like us to survive is miraculous. The evil forces within this industry are quite monstrously absurd. The Smiths have done it all on their own and that makes everything a triple triumph."

"Rough Trade have done their job and no more. They're bored with The Smiths now. I've seen maximum evidence of this."

So what have you been offered in the line of cars, sex, drugs and undreamt of wealth to sign for Megabucks International Records?

"We've always been offered moderate amounts, healthy sums, but we've always said no. But never anything extravagantly uncountable."

There's little hint of displeasure—or of poverty, for that matter—in his voice.

**M**orrissey, Morrissey, Morrissey, Johnny Marr, Morrissey, Morrissey, Morrissey. The Smiths sometimes don't give the impression of being a band at all, just a vehicle for a dozen Morrisseys soundtracked by someone called, erm, Johnny Marr. The dense webbing of their music denies it, but the image is hard to shake.

How do you personally relate to the other Smiths?

"Very, very strongly. Let it be said here and now that I'm massively

dedicated to them as individuals, to the point of love.

"Obviously with Johnny, I feel very defensive about our relationship. Some things have to be shielded, but the dedication I feel to him is quite solid and impregnable."

But you must be aware that the drone Smiths, the worker Smiths, seem like, well, session men.

"Yes, but I positively know that they're not as upset about it as people think they should be."

A moment of concentration. The voice loses a little of its confident stridency.

"This is tricky. . . they have their position and they know what it is. We all have our roles, our functions and we know how to fulfil them. We all know our limitations."

So what if Andy or Mike turned up tomorrow morning saying that they'd written a great lyric for the next Smiths LP. Would that cause a problem?

Another pause. "Yes it would. But then if, say, let me see, P G Wodehouse came with a lyric, that would be a problem too."

P G Wodehouse isn't in the Smiths!

"He could've been. . ."

As I've said, The Smiths are by no means universally valued. There are those souls who detest the band, think them boring, repetitive, unimaginative, iniquitous. They see The Smiths as whining soundtracks for bedroom-bound 17-year-old males sulking over a lack of sex.

"Yes, but these people are important. Their desires matter, all of our desires matter. I mean, who *do* we sing for, Denis Thatcher?"

"In Manchester, particularly, there's a body of people who are very negative about us but they're the very ones who, if we disappeared in a blizzard tomorrow, would say 'ooh what a shame'."

There's a massive ego at work here. According to this Morrissey dictum, even those who profess a hatred for his precious band are actually admirers *deep down*.

So what are the real haters (they *do* exist). . . truly estranged, missing?

"They've got used to dance music, to music without the human element and this strong reality. They've lost faith, they don't believe that anything can happen anymore."

"There are pop historians who have closed the book. 'Let's remember Elvis and Jagger and The Beatles. Let's remember The Sex Pistols and let's close the book'."

"They've got hang-ups, but then I'm bound to say that, aren't I? I'm not likely to say that people who dislike The Smiths are rational, intelligent human beings, am I?"

Let's talk about your much-publicised heroes.

"I'm bored stiff with them."

Tough. James Dean, Oscar Wilde, the fresh-faced working class boys from late '50s films, all those people are in one way or another alone, persecuted, crucified.

"I'm very interested in what emerges from the ashes of poverty and the bruises of torture, to see what people are capable of in extremes."

"People who achieve things artistically after persistent public floggings, after being roasted alive by the critics and after having doors slammed in their faces, interest me when they come out on top, smiling, in control, impregnable. That to me is treasurable."

So they're role models, this ragged-arse cast of heroes, and you're The Great Rejected One come to seek this vengeance?

"Yes, that's undoubtedly true!"

Maybe you're actually more comfortable being persecuted than praised. Maybe, despite all the whining, you attract the attacks on the band because you *need* them, you *like* them.

"I'd like to risk going through a period *without* criticism. I'd like to see what it was like."

When you're in the States will you be visiting any James Dean or New York Doll shrines?

"I would like to go to Indiana and mess with James Dean's soil, but so many others have done it. They've taken away the monument, they've taken away the stone and they've taken away the grass."

"People have been so *greedy*. What's left for me?"

CONTINUED PAGE 52



So lads, about that bitter commercial

# MORRISSEY

FROM PAGE 27

Why do you buy so many photographs of yourself?

"Another cruel question . . . I like them . . . I like to have a lot of photographs on the wall. I want to chronicle everything."

Would you agree that you're terribly vain?

"Oh yes, I *am* vain. If someone punches me in the face and I lose five teeth then I'm going to be upset, make no mistake about that. Yes, it's vanity – I care about the way I look, the way I feel and the way I am – and I don't want to apologise about it."

"People can picture me laying naked in my house, covered in feathers, rubbing these pictures on myself."

"But that isn't the case . . ."

**T**here is a topic from which Morrissey does shy, recoil almost, and that's his past, the subject matter of so many of those aching songs. Efforts to prise open the doors of that hidden world have been thwarted. The beans remain unspilled. Maybe, but no one believes this, there's just nothing to tell.

So why *is* the past, spotlighted and loudly trumpeted in the songs, so vigorously veiled elsewhere? Silence. It's all very well autoranting about James Dean, Rough Trade or vanity, but this is Thin Ice. Answers here have to be waited for, teased out by expectant pauses.

" . . . It's just that the past is so very important. I don't like it when people say let's leave the past and go ahead, because a lot of the future isn't that attractive."

Are you afraid that by sharing your past, you'll somehow lose it?

"No, it's nothing mystical like that, my writing is to a large extent journalistic observation."

OK. So let's observe. What did you actually learn at school?

"I learned that if I ever wanted to be educated I'd have to leave school. So anything I learned was from outside of the education system."

"I came from a working class background and very brutal schooling, which is of no use to anyone who wants to learn. So education, quite naturally, had no effect on me whatsoever."

And to what extent was the childbashing opus 'Barbarism' written from personal experience?

"Not to a dramatic extent, not from my experience really. It was simply another recognition that the only channel of communication open to a lot of parents is violence."

In all this childhood misery, who did you blame for your predicament?

"I think I always blamed myself. I always felt 'these things are happening because I'm an awkward, ugly, gawky, individual' and that stayed with me for years and years. I used to believe that if I wasn't successful in any way it was because I was a totally worthless, shallow slob."

Who do you blame now, looking back?

"The same person. In some totally inexplicable way, I still accept a lot of the blame. Perhaps it isn't right but I do. Guilt and regret are the most futile emotions in the universe."

Yeah, but guilt is the central motif of Roman Catholicism, so you're bound to have armfuls.

"Yes, isn't it awful? The Catholic church has nothing in common with Christianity. I can remember being at school on Mondays and being asked 'did you go to church yesterday?' And if you hadn't been you literally had the arms twisted off you. It's 'we'll sever your head for your own good, you'll learn my son'."

But of course he hasn't.

In all Morrissey's bleak urban mindscapes of isolation, disappointment, iron bridges, razor boys, illness and mistrust, the only word that keeps blinking out, is 'love'. Love as an adjective, a noun, a verb; love with a sigh, a



The mid-'80s Smiths: quiffing yarns . . .

groan, a sneer; love as sustenance, as torturer, as celebration and desecration.

And yet there's this creature who claims – yawn – to sleep with no one (thus eschewing the notion that love equals the achievement of orgasm, rock's commonest definition), so what the hell is he on about? Has he ever *been* in love?

"Do you mean actually experiencing relationships?"

No, not really, I mean the spiritual, mental delirium of being in love.

"Not the physical thing?"

Paranoia is not a pretty sight. No.

"Oh well, in that case I can easily answer. I am constantly in that state of desire and admiration for things, words . . ."

What's your conception of this thing called love?

"It's very difficult to put into words because for each individual it's something quite different. Being in love is something I would never claim to fully understand."

Now the Morrissey voice is low; these are *answers* rather than public notices, words from somewhere other than the tip of his tongue.

You seem to be talking about loving things rather than people.

"Weil it's largely things other than people that I do become in love with. I must say that I'm even more bored than you, bored to nausea, with the word 'celibacy'."

"But I do think it's actually possible to go through life and never fall in love, or find someone who loves you."

You look and sound unbearably sad when you say that. Do you find a lack of human love a

problem?

"I do, but this word 'love' – the head shakes slowly from side to side – "people can quite easily say that they love marmalade or they love mushrooms, or they 'love' people."

Oh come on, that's clutching at evasive straws. Don't you wish you loved people, and that people loved you?

The famous bogbrush haircut tilts back, his eyes fix a spot on the ceiling. "Yes, yes I do."

Do you think you'd be happier, more content, then?

"Well yes. I'm convinced that once it happens, if indeed it ever does, there will be a tremendous turnabout in my life and that's captivating and riveting to me. I'm waiting for it to happen . . ."

Let's return to the strychnine, to your imminent death. You've got three minutes to live. Tell us what it is that you're actually and endlessly trying to convey to us.

"If I've got just three minutes . . . I'll say something that you won't accept . . . but which I want people to believe . . . oh stop being so boring Morrissey . . . I want people to know that almost everything that concerns them in their daily lives is of no consequence whatsoever. Nothing and nobody is really important."

"Oh, this is so negative . . ."

You've been quite positive so far, this will just reassure people.

" . . . Nothing is important so people, realising that, should get on with their lives, go mad, take their clothes off, jump in the canal, jump into one of those supermarket trolleys, race 'round the supermarket and steal Mars Bars and, y'know, kiss kittens and

sit on the back of bread vans.

"Whatever makes people happy they should just do it, 'cos time is a mere scratch and life is nothing . . ."

**W**ould you find it difficult to shut up now?

"Yes I would. I've still a few things to say, a few comments to be aired. My notebooks are still quite bulging and like it or not they're going to be foisted on the British public."

Whether they're ready for them or not?

"Well, obviously they're *not* ready."

And then, this charming man (this outrageous, self-centred, witty, sad, wicked, paranoid, sly, funny, warm, frightened, silly, galvanising or boring, love-him-or-loathe-him man) is gone.

As I watch him disappear in a flounce of hair, briefcase, specs and baggy jeans through the huge revolving doors of The Britannia, my mind wanders to all the doubters, to the Smith-haters.

I understand that they've got some fair points – it is sometimes hard to fathom just *why* this band should command such devotion, and sure, Morrissey says some of the daftest things imaginable – and, well I wonder, just what – if Messrs Marr, Joyce, Rourke and Morrissey were suddenly lost in one of the latter's imaginary blizzards – we'd put in the place of The Smiths.

And at that precise moment my eyeliner was filled with two members of The Alarm – it could have been any of a thousand bands – crossing The Britannia's foyer, and a strange chill gripped my body.