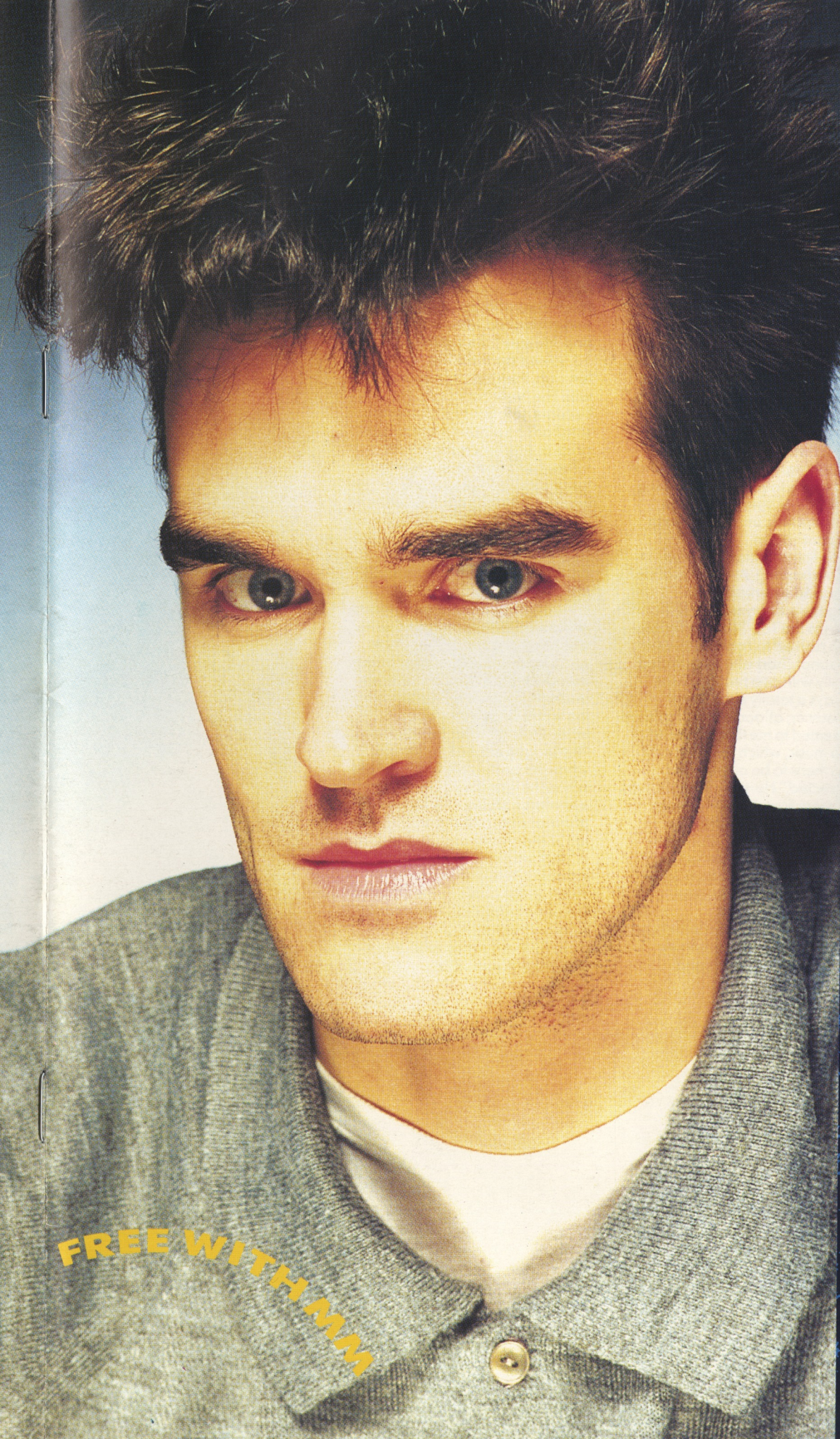




"The Smiths provoke absolute adoration or absolute murderous hate. There are people out there, I know, who would like to disembowel me, just as there are people who would race towards me and smother me with kisses."

MORRISSEY



MELODY-MAKER  
BANDS OF THE  
EIGHTIES

# THE SMITHS

FREE WITH *Rolling Stone*

MELODY-MAKER





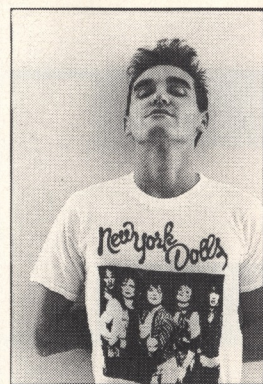
STEPHEN PATRICK MORRISSEY was born on May 22, 1959. From the earliest age, he was obsessed with two things: fame and pop music. "I always thought being famous was the only thing worth doing in human life, and anything else was just perfunctory. I wasn't terribly *impressed* with obscurity." The infant Morrissey quickly acquired a rich sense of destiny and difference. "I always knew something, shall we say, peculiar was going to happen . . . I saw a multitude of options, and the dilemma was just which one to concentrate on."

His first ambitions centred around writing. At the age of six he compiled a personal pop magazine every week. He would listen to the Top 30 each Tuesday, then rush off to compile his own personal chart which conflicted totally with pop reality. "I was always a totally dissatisfied consumer, aflood with complaints. It seemed to me that the world of pop music, which I worshipped, was there to be *altered* and *corrected*." Here, in chrysalis, was the resentment that Morrissey would eventually turn into a crusade: the desire to unleash upon the world a "perfect pop" woven from strands from all of Morrissey's favourite pop moments.

These favourites included early Sixties teen idols like Johnny Leyton and Billy Fury, and

chanteuses like Timi Yuro and Sandie Shaw. Later, the teenage Morrissey would become fascinated with androgynous and sexually indeterminate figures in pop. He saw T. Rex at the age of 13, joined the Mott The Hoople fan club, then became obsessed with The New York Dolls. He became notorious locally for the small ads he placed in the music press asking for contacts with fellow Dolls devotees. This vague fascination was elucidated intellectually for him by reading, at the age of 14, a book entitled "Men's Liberation", which argued for the dissolving of gender barriers and the feminisation of men.

As a teenager, Morrissey was a recluse, an avid reader and writer, and obsessed with James Dean and Oscar Wilde (the latter being introduced to him by his librarian mother). He communicated with the world largely through letter-writing. (Later he would say, "the biggest crisis of my life was when the postal rate went up.") At school he was saved from merciless bullying only by his prowess as an athlete. In 1975, he left St Mary's Secondary Modern in Streford ("a very deprived school . . . total disinterest was thrust on the pupils, in the absolute belief that when you left you would just go down and down and down") and, sure enough, went straight onto the dole.



SORROW'S NATIVE SON

## OH MANCHESTER, SO MUCH TO ANSWER FOR

IN July 1976, Morrissey was one of those present at The Sex Pistols' legendary Manchester gig at the Lesser Free Trade Hall. he was sufficiently impressed to write into the New Musical Express: "The Sex Pistols are very New York and it's nice to see that the British have produced a band capable of producing the atmosphere created by The New York Dolls and their many imitators, even though it might be too late . . ."

Morrissey was already hanging around the fringes of the Mancunian bohemian milieu, a scene that found refuge from local thugs (the "Perry boys" and "beer monsters") in gay pubs and clubs. Patti Smith's "Horses" had already turned many heads, Morrissey's included, and things were ripe for the violently catalysing impact of the Pistols.

Of the immediate fall-out, the most significant sharpnel was The Buzzcocks. For Morrissey they "were *the* group. I liked their intellectual edge." Pete Shelley's eternally unrequited, sexually ambiguous songs, addressed to deliberately non-gender specific lovers, were a major influence on Morrissey's aesthetic.

The turmoil of punk notwithstanding, 1977-82 (his late teens and early twenties) were wilderness years for Morrissey. He hung around ex-Doll Johnny Thunders and The Heartbreakers when they toured the UK. He sent scripts into "Coronation Street". He tried to write for the music press (he was rejected by the NME five times, but got a few reviews printed in Record Mirror, under the nom de plume Sheridan Whitehead). He wrote and even had published flowery fan biographies of James Dean and The New York Dolls. He befriended Linder from the art-punk band Ludus, and eventually moved into the flat she shared with Ian Devine from the band. "Wonderful Woman", one of *the* sublime Smithsongs (tucked away on the 12-inch B-side of "This Charming Man") is said to be about his strange relationship with Linder: it's a portrait of a charismatic, capricious woman whose remedy for *ennui* is "let's go and trip a dwarf". Other early Smiths songs like "Jeanne" and "Miserable Lie" also drew on the years of bedsit Bohemia amidst the squalor of Whalley Range. Morrissey was waiting for something to happen, something to snatch him out of the "sleepwalk" of his life.



# FAME, FAME, FATAL FAME

IN 1982, an 18-year-old guitarist called Johnny Marr with a huge quiff "the size of a French stick" and a Roger McGuinn fixation, was desperate — after years of messing around with drum machines and Portastudios — to start a band. He heard about this weird, hermit-like fellow who'd written a book about The New York Dolls and was rumoured to be a lyricist, and went to meet him.

Marr: "I remember when he answered the door, I just laid this heavy jive on him, like 300 words a second. I just said: 'This is how Leiber and Stoller got together'... When I walked into his room, he asked 'What music do you like?' And after every single group I mentioned he just went 'Yeah, yeah'... Since that day my life has totally changed, and I know Morrissey's has too. Right from the beginning, we knew it was going to be brilliant."

Immediately the pair began work on songs like "Suffer Little Children" and "The Hand That Rocks The Cradle". Marr brought in an old schoolfriend called Andy Rourke as bassist, and Mike Joyce (ex-Victim, a minor legend of Belfast punk) as drummer. And The Smiths were born.

Their first gig was at the Manchester Ritz supporting Blue Rondo A la Turk, on October 4, 1982. It was a suitably symbolic mismatch: Blue Rondo were the embodiment of everything The Smiths were against, the whole metropolitan "style culture" scene then at its zenith. The name "The Smiths" — drab, un-exotic, the epitome of provincial normality — was deliberately chosen as an emblem of the dispossessed and downtrodden no longer represented by the pop that ruled.

Throughout 1983, The Smiths' notoriety/celebrity escalated, with live dates around the country and a series of Peel sessions that provoked a tremendous response from listeners. In the music press, the rave reviews and interviews focussed on the floral extravaganzas of their live performances and Morrissey's much-trumpeted monastic lifestyle. The A&R men duly started to sniff around Morrissey's chrysanthemum-festooned



hindquarters in their droves. But in the end The Smiths elected to sign a singles deal with Rough Trade.

After some deliberation, "Hand In Glove" was selected as their debut. It's difficult now to re-evolve how *fresh* that song felt in the context of the summer of '83. New Pop was in the ascendant, its opulence no longer a welcome reprieve from the dour parsimony of post-punk angst rock, more like a new orthodoxy. 1983 was the year of the obligatory black backing singers and the tacked-on string section. Against the forced optimism of chartpop, "Hand In Glove" was a revelation in its purity, the rapturous folk-punk tumult of Marr's guitar cascading around Morrissey's stark declamation of doomed, undying devotion. This was the return of white rock with a *vengeance*, as radical a blow against the blue-eyed soul/neo-"Young Americans" consensus of the period as R.E.M.'s "Murmur".

Of "Hand In Glove", Morrissey has said that his whole life was nothing but a preparation for this song. And that's what it *sounds* like: two decades of repression finally gushing free in a torrid declaration of defiant narcissism — "the sun shines out of our behinds". "Hand In Glove" is a vision of redemptive love, of two exiles on Main Street finding solace in shared martyrdom. But its joyousness is undercut by the sobering knowledge that possession is a fiction, and "I'll probably never see you again".

"Hand In Glove" didn't hit, but was hailed all over, and it announced Morrissey as both an unprecedented voice of rock romanticism and as the harbinger of a new literacy in pop. The second single, "This Charming Man", was another elegant and effervescent vision of enchantment, and when it got The Smiths onto "Top Of The Pops" in November '83, it announced Morrissey as a new physical presence, too. Morrissey's fey flamboyance and eloquently incoherent gestures, his alchemy of awkwardness into grace, was supremely embarrassing and utterly riveting all at once. The glacial cool and scripted showbiz

moves that were the "TOTP" norm were disrupted as Morrissey played the holy fool. The next week, "This Charming Man" plummeted several places down the chart. (Precisely the same thing had happened when Bowie's "Boy's Keep Swingin'" had intruded a similar farrago of gender confusion into the staid environs of pop TV).

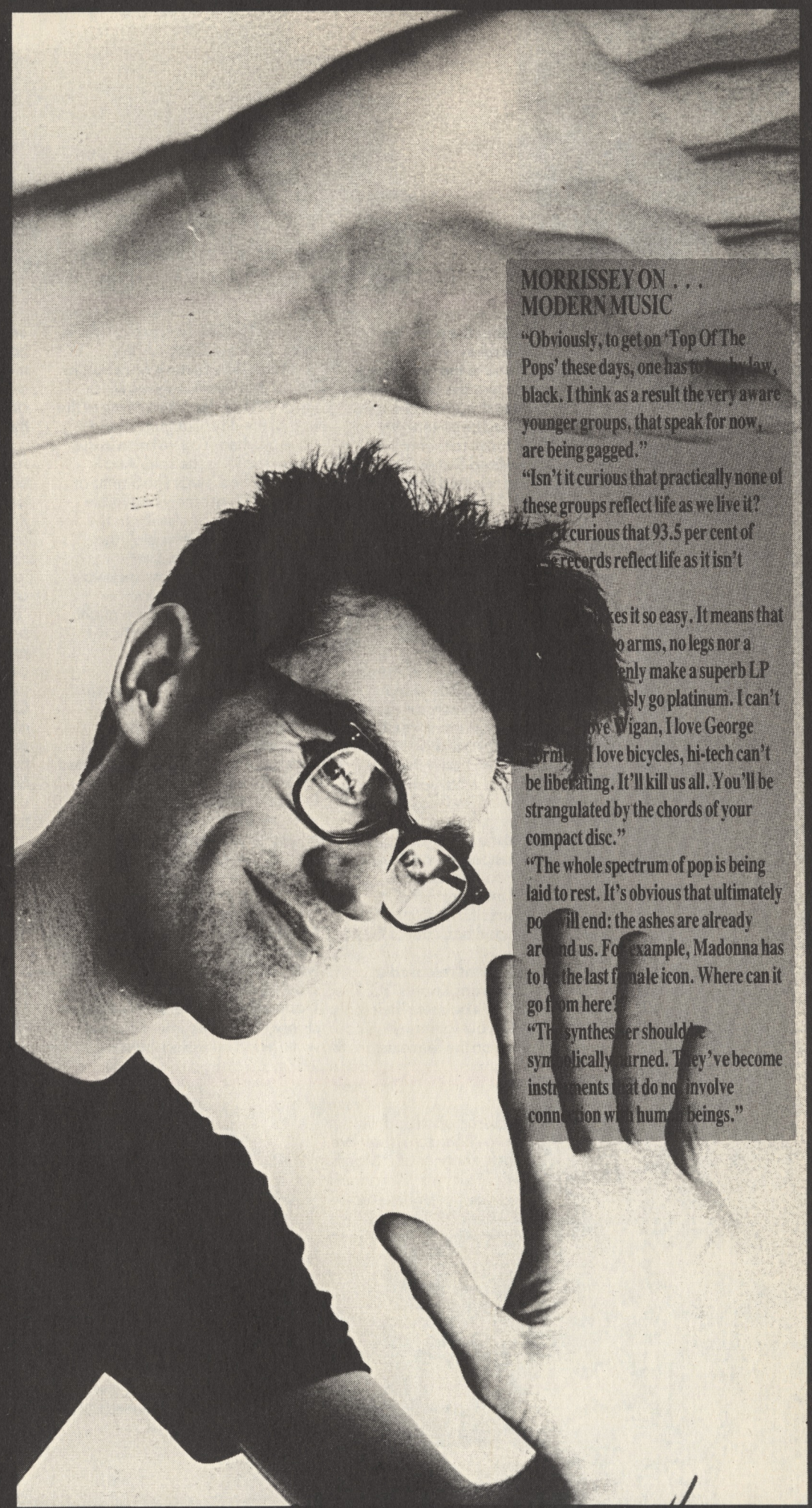
Around Christmas '83, The Smiths made their US debut at the Danceteria in New York, and got signed to Sire while they were out there. Rough Trade made their first blunder when they released a special dancemix of the second single, "This Charming Man New York". The whole idea of the "remix" (which was a tediously endemic New Pop manoeuvre in '83) was anathema to The Smiths vision of pop, and there were immediate cries of "sell-out" from the fans. The version was quickly withdrawn.

In January '84, The Smiths released their third single, "What Difference Does It Make". In itself a rather pedestrian outing, with Morrissey's wan ennui cutting across a robustly stomping rhythm, "What Difference" probably did more to establish them as populist rockers than any other record. It became a hardy perennial at student and "alternative" discos, and earned the band their first substantial hit. (The cover of "What Difference" continued the tradition, initiated on "This Charming Man", of featuring one of Morrissey's idols, but the hero in question, Terence Stamp, objected and the sleeve was replaced by a mock-up of the original photo with Mozzer adopting Stamp's pose.) The Smiths embarked upon their first major tour, but the Scottish and Irish dates had to be cancelled when Morrissey's voice succumbed to mounting pressures.

You could have been forgiven for attributing another factor behind the sudden exhaustion of Morrissey's vocal cords: he was establishing himself as the music press' most in-demand quote-machine, with his trenchant opinions on celibacy, his pop contemporaries, and, not least, The Smiths' earth-shattering importance in the scheme of things.

The Smiths were in many ways his *revenge* on the world, and after two decades of being silenced he was going to have his say, and *then* some... He embarked upon a year-long manic round of interviews that even his devoted fans found a little oppressively ubiquitous.

February '84 saw the release of the long-anticipated debut album, simply titled "The Smiths". Many decreed it to be a substantial disappointment, finding it muddy and morose next to the sparkle and shimmer of the live performances and the Radio One Sessions. Reservations aside (it was a bit uniformly sombre), "The Smiths" was the definitive unveiling of an awesomely original vision. "Reel Around The Fountain" and "I Don't Owe You Anything" showed that Morrissey was writing a new kind of "love song", one where possession was replaced by devotion, the urgent thrust toward consummation replaced by the eternally unrequited gaze. "The Hand That Rocks The Cradle" seemed to be about a love whose perversity resided in the fact that wasn't *sexual* at all. On songs like "Miserable Lie", Morrissey's writing was full of tart reversals ("I know that wind-swept mystical air/it means I'd like to see your underwear") and abrupt shifts between solemnity and flippancy ("You have corrupt my innocent mind/Not once — but twice"). "You've Got Everything Now" and "Still Ill" were strident affirmations of Morrissey's anti-work ethic, a refusal of the brutalisation and disenchantment involved in adjusting to the real world. "I decree today that life is simply taking and not giving/England is mine and it owes me a living". Morrissey's peculiar version of rock rebellion, it was becoming clear, took the form of neurasthenia and absenteeism, an ostentatious withdrawal from the sexual and material rat race. "Suffer Little Children" consisted of perhaps *the* most laceratingly poignant chords Johnny Marr ever wrote, through which drifted Morrissey's chilling reveries on the fate of the Moors Murders children. "The Smiths" was a flawed masterpiece.



## MORRISSEY ON . . . MODERN MUSIC

"Obviously, to get on 'Top Of The Pops' these days, one has to be low, black. I think as a result the very aware younger groups, that speak for now, are being gagged."

"Isn't it curious that practically none of these groups reflect life as we live it? It's curious that 93.5 per cent of the records reflect life as it isn't."

"It makes it so easy. It means that you can have no arms, no legs nor a face, and you can still make a superb LP. It's so easy to go platinum. I can't believe it. I love Wigan, I love George Formby, I love bicycles, hi-tech can't be liberating. It'll kill us all. You'll be strangled by the chords of your compact disc."

"The whole spectrum of pop is being laid to rest. It's obvious that ultimately pop will end: the ashes are already around us. For example, Madonna has to be the last female icon. Where can it go from here?"

"The synthesiser should be symbolically burned. They've become instruments that do not involve connection with human beings."

SANDIE SHAW: "Working with her has been an endless thrill, it's almost like meeting oneself in a former life."



# HATFUL OF HOLLOW



TWO months after the release of the album, Morrissey was to discover that one of the rewards of his new power was the opportunity to make ancient dreams come true. He and Marr had been sending Sandie Shaw tapes for some time now, but the retired Sixties chanteuse had rejected them as "noisy rubbish." But when Marr and Morrissey went to visit her in person, they were able to persuade her out of retirement and into the studio to record a version of "Hand In Glove", with The Smiths as her backing band. "Hand In Glove" (b/w "Jeanne" and "I Don't Owe You Anything") was released on Rough Trade in April '84, and — despite Shaw singing flat throughout — became a minor hit. For Morrissey, it was a triumph on two counts: not only had he realised a private fantasy, he had also seen to it that what he had originally dubbed "the most important song in the world" finally had its crack at the hit parade. Sandie Shaw appeared on "Top Of The Pops", leatherclad and shoe-less, and made *rather* a spectacle of herself. The single promptly dropped back out of the charts.

In May, The Smiths released a new single, "Heavens Knows I'm Miserable Now". It became their biggest hit so far, but for many people still stuck on the fence as

regards The Smiths, it proved to be the final straw. Certainly the combination of sunny, nonchalant sound and facetiously mawkish lyrics ("What she asked of me at the end of the day/Caligula would have blushed/You've been in the house too long she said/And I naturally fled") was The Smiths at their most winsomely negligible yet. But above all else it was the title, the word "miserable", that invited the backlash. The over-interviewed Morrissey was beginning to seem far too enamoured of his lovelorn plight, far too *comfy* in his self-pity, to convince.

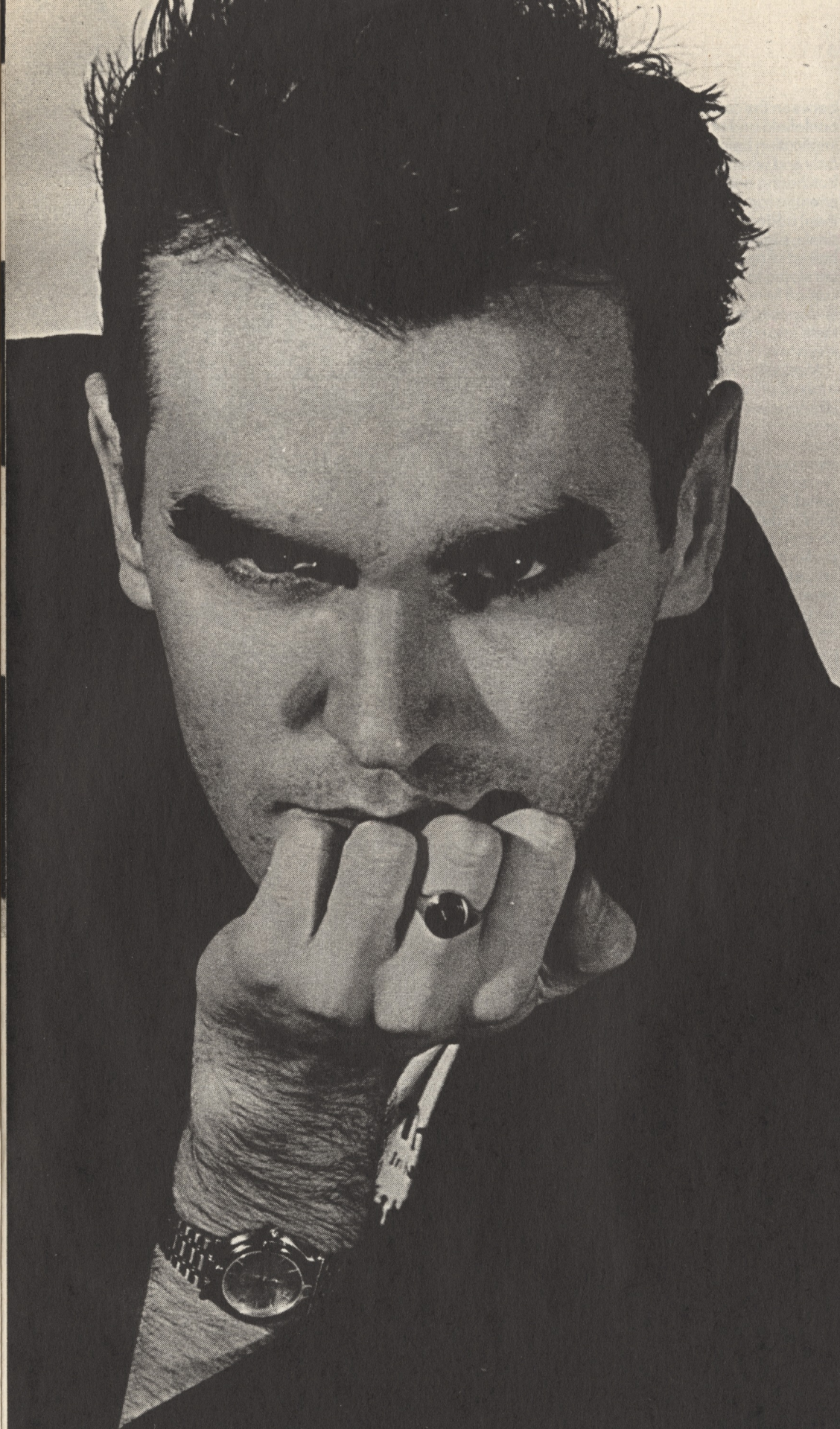
"William, It Was Really Nothing", the next single, was just as slight as its predecessor, a glossy, rather cursory song (it clocked in at under two minutes) with lyrics that obliquely lambasted the institution of matrimony. The B-Side, "Suffer Little Children" instigated some rather belated controversy, with the tabloids — who, by now, had the "fruitcake" Morrissey well in their sights — insinuating that it was offensive to the bereaved relatives of the Moors Murders children. As a result, Woolworths and Boots withdrew both the single and the album from their shelves. Rough Trade issued a statement hoping to clarify The Smiths' intentions in writing and releasing the song,

and reported that Morrissey had had a conversation with the mother of Leslie Anne Downey and had been able to reassure her of the nobility of his motives. But the damage had been done.

In November '84, Rough Trade released "Hatful Of Hollow", a compilation of the non-album singles, B-sides and the celebrated Radio One sessions. "Hatful" appears genuinely to have been a simple response to demands from fans, and an attempt to compensate for the "disappointing" first album, by presenting a more dynamic and panoramic selection of The Smiths oeuvre. But it was widely regarded as an attempt to cash in on the Christmas market, and for those already sated with The Smiths, the prospect of the release of much of the same material again in a different format seemed dangerously close to saturation point. The Smiths ended the year on a funny note. Artistically, they seemed in a rut, and Morrissey had become a rather predictable media presence. At the same time, The Smiths had attained an invincible ascendancy in the world of "alternative" music, dominating both the music papers readers polls and John Peel's Festive 50. They were definitely the new Great White Hope.



MARR ON MORRISSEY: "Sometimes, I think all he needs is a good humping."



WHAT kind of a phenomenon were The Smiths? What was the nature of the community they had convened? The Smiths were at once orthodox (a four square, guitar rock combo) and supremely radical. They staged a final renovation of rock rebellion, preserving the form but turning the "content" inside out: replacing lust with purity, aggression with fragility, and — most crucially — anticipation with wistfulness. Marr's rockist muscularity substantiated (and for some people, excused) Morrissey's frail fancies. The Smiths were thus able to win over an increasingly large number of laddish types who would otherwise have been alienated by Morrissey's effeminate ways.

But for a crucial core of diehard devotees, it was precisely Morrissey's sexual confusion and hyper-sensitivity that they had identified with. Morrissey is the paradigm of a certain kind of ethereal, inhibited masculinity that would rather live in dreams than risk being disappointed by reality. (Morrissey seemed to prefer to fall in love with the pristine images of his icons than risk the messy awkwardness of any real close encounters.) And here lay the crucial difference between The Smiths and poll-winning predecessors like The Who, The Clash and The Jam. Like The Smiths, these bands became spokesmen for a unity of alienation and aspiration, articulated a sense of "us" against "them". But where these bands' music embodied a sense of action and expectation, The Smiths expressed only vacillation and impotence. "How Soon Is Now" — in many ways, *the* Smiths song, in its fusion of rockist magnificence and fey self-pity — expressed this perfectly: it was a song about waiting, waiting in vain. The Smiths constituency was the eternal "grass-roots" audience for "alternative" a.k.a. "progressive" rock: which is to say, *rootless*, suburban/provincial, predominantly sixth-form or student. Morrissey's vision appealed and appeals to those who dream for a while of a vague "something more" from life, but who secretly know they'll never get it. People who only really know what they *don't* want: the compromises they'll eventually have to accede to, the dreamlessness that comes with adjustment to the "real world", the tarnishing of innocence.



I'D LIKE TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT...

"HOW Soon Is Now" was a crucial record for The Smiths, the solidity of both the sound and the chart position it reached, reaffirmed The Smiths ascendancy just as they seemed to be faltering. In America, Sire trailed it as "a 'Stairway To Heaven' for the Eighties", and though "the 'Satisfaction' of the Eighties" would have been nearer the truth it more or less broke them over there. And now The Smiths began to comport themselves in line with their new sense of themselves as a Rock Institution. They extended patronage to a number of protege bands: James, Easterhouse, The Woodentops. And with their second album, "Meat Is Murder", Morrissey's lyrical emphasis shifted from the furtive private discourse of the unrequited lover, to the denunciatory public tenor of the Rock Statesman, taking issue and issuing statements. "Meat Is Murder" was almost an attempt at a unified critique of society. "Headmaster Ritual" was a "Kes"-style portrait of the brutal and brutalising reality of working class education. "Rusholme Ruffian" was a vision of the fairground as the acme of degraded proletarian leisure ("the senses being dulled are mine"). "I Want The One I Can't Have" was Sixties social realism on the lines of "A Kind Of Loving". "Nowhere Fast" abused the Royal Family, "Barbarism Begins At Home" flinched at the horrors of childhood, and "Meat Is Murder" was a self-explanatory vegan tirade. The cover picture of a soldier with the legend "meat is murder" scribbled on his helmet (Emile de Antonios from "The Year Of The Pig") drew the dots

between the carnography of the battlefield and of the abattoir: the implication being that wars would only end when man stopped butchering animals. Morrissey's enemies (and he had a few, by then) added a further twist to the simile, suggesting that the singer's hatred of carnage might not be unrelated to his antipathy to the carnal: here was a man as ill-disposed towards sinking his teeth into a chicken leg as he was into a lover's thigh. Musically, "Meat Is Murder" was a mixed affair, much of the natural effervescence addled away by misguided attempts at "expansion" (false endings, sound effects and other studio wizardry) and "versatility" ("Barbarism" was failed, flailed funk, "What She Said" a daft essay at heavy metal). Overall, there was an airless, studio-bound feeling to the proceedings. But there were some gems here: "Headmaster Ritual" was utterly harrowing, "That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore" had a certain gilded grandeur, and "Well I Wonder" was one of Morrissey's most delicately devastating lovelorn laments. Anyway, "Meat Is Murder" was critically well-received and garnered Rough Trade their first Number One album. It also engendered its fair ration of controversy. "Headmaster Ritual" caused a minor storm in Manchester and provoked Morrissey's former headmaster to appear on local radio in defence of the city's education system. And some fans did not respond well to Morrissey's new didacticism: one gig on their national tour saw Morrissey being pelted with a pound of sausages.

"I don't want anything to interfere with this state of dissatisfaction."



INFATUATION: "It was always these very dark desires, I had. Mostly with people on the television, which is utterly pointless anyway. But in the real world, well I just wasn't really there. I never snogged in the corner."

"It's difficult to describe how really insular I was, especially when I was 21, 22, 23 . . . The very idea of me becoming what I have become was unthinkable. I found life unbearable at times. It's very hard when you don't really like people. There should be a union formed to protect us . . ."



**MORRISSEY ON . . .**

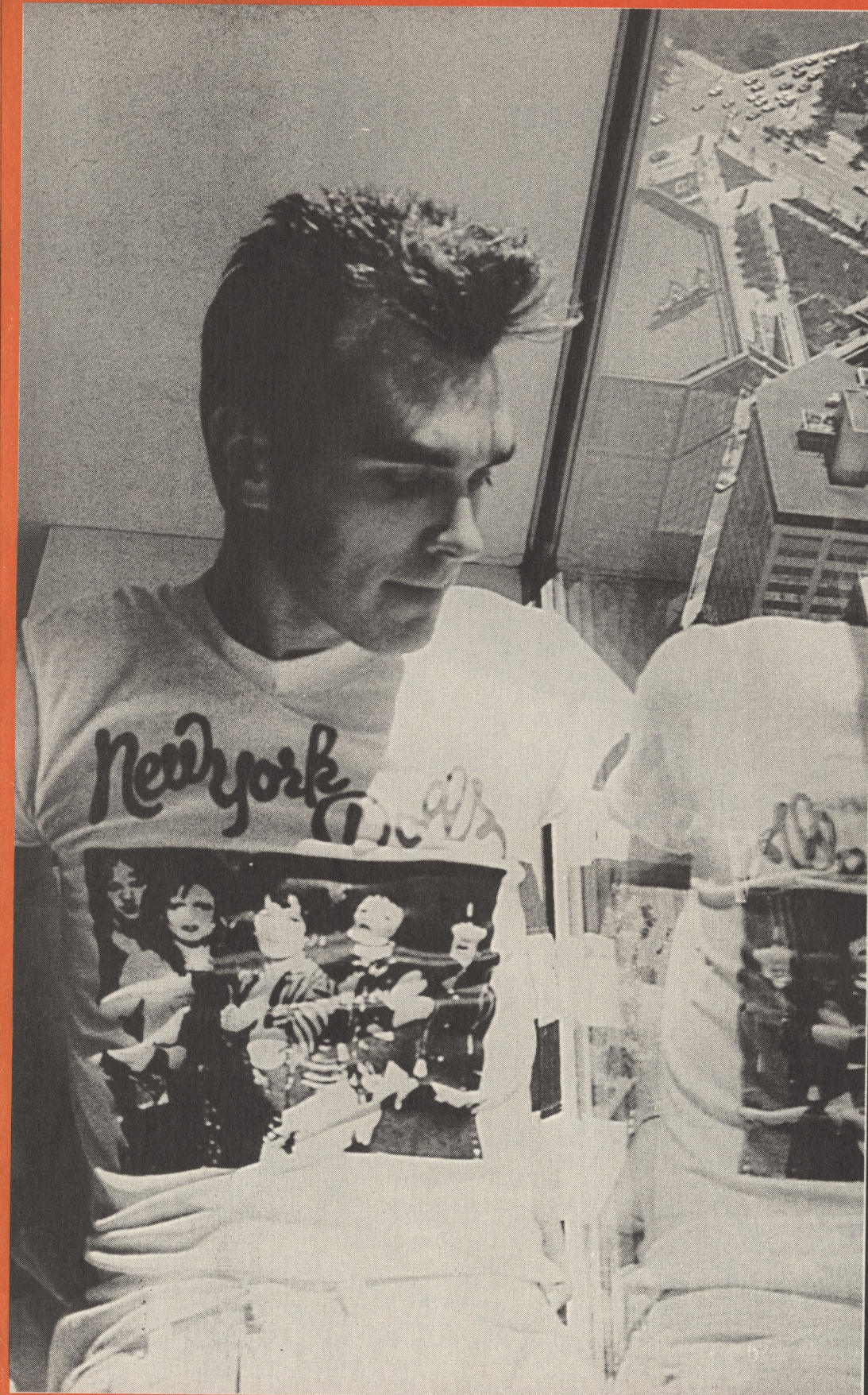
**CELIBACY:** "It's not really fear: I just don't really have a tremendously strong belief that relationships can work. And if they do, it's really quite terribly brief and sporadic . . . It was simply provoked by a series of very blunt and thankfully brief and horrendous experiences that me made decide upon abstaining."

**RELATIONSHIPS:** "In a way, I believe that all those things like love, sex, sharing a life with somebody, are actually quite vague. Being only with yourself can be much more intense."

**PERSONAL ASSETS:** "I always thought my genitals were the result of some crude practical joke."







## THE WORLD WON'T LISTEN!

AS 1985 proceeded, The Smiths fell into a predictable routine. They played bigger and bigger shows, gradually losing contact with their audience; they kept releasing unsuccessful singles ("Shakespeare's Sister" and "That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore"), which further confirmed their new status as a rock band (worse, an *album* band) rather than a scandalous pop presence; Morrissey was avidly pursued by magazines as a lone source of good copy and soon reached the brink of complete interview burn-out. As the band got sucked further and further into the rock syndrome, two processes began to set in. One was paranoia: a new wariness as regards who got to interview Morrissey, who was allowed access to the band; a growing suspicion that there was some kind of radio conspiracy to deny The Smiths the amount of airplay proportionate to their stature. The other was frustration — with Rough Trade, for their "failure" to furnish The Smiths with chart hits. Both were really facets of the same process: for Morrissey, The Smiths had become a crusade *in itself*, and anything that impeded its ascent was "the enemy".

After a month-long and extremely successful tour of the USA in August, Morrissey and Marr were even more taken with the idea of megadom. The Smiths' relations with Rough Trade worsened to the point where, for a few months, band and label were incommunicado. The cute but slight "Boy With The Thorn In His Side" was consciously radio-friendly in design (I heard it on Radio 2) but still only a minor hit. The Smiths were all set to appear on "Wogan", but Morrissey backed out at the last minute without telling the others and the appearance was cancelled.

In October, The Smiths finished recording "The Queen Is Dead" but problems between the band and Rough Trade (ultimately solved with the renegotiation of their contract) meant that it had to be delayed for six months. The Smiths trod water. In early '86, there was a desultory involvement in the Red Wedge Tour. A brief tour of Ireland was followed by Andy Rourke's dismissal from the band: no reason was given, but rumours of a heroin problem began to circulate. He was replaced by Craig Gannon (ex-Aztec Camera). Shortly afterwards, Rourke rejoined the band, with Gannon staying on as part of a new, heftier line-up. But things clearly didn't seem to be all they should have been in The Smiths camp.

## WE CANNOT CLING TO THE OLD DREAMS

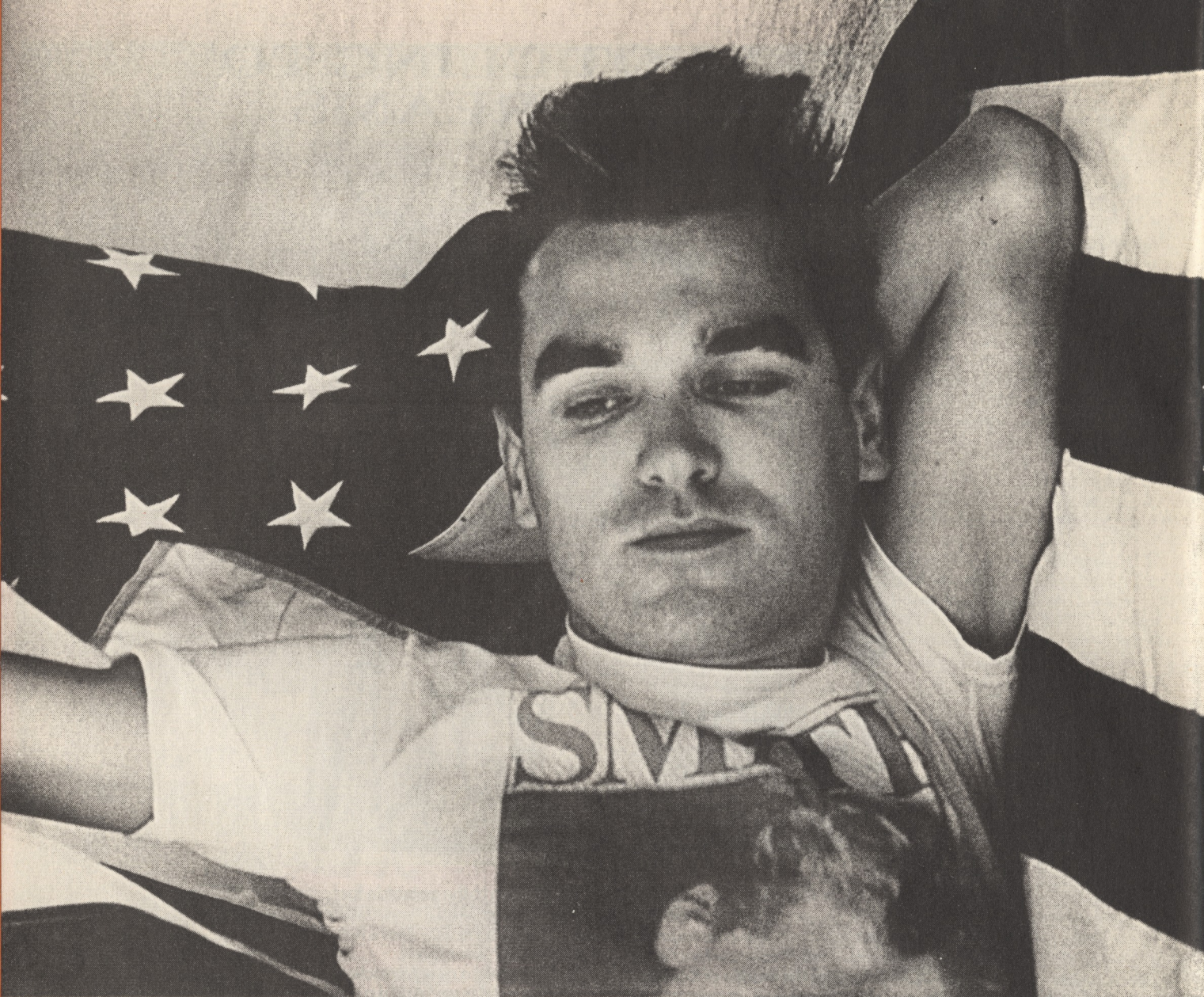


WHICH made the sheer majesty of "The Queen Is Dead" all the more of a bolt-from-the-blue triumph. Their third album saw Morrissey taking on the mantle of Rock Icon, with its concomitant responsibility to issue serious statements but avoiding the sanctimonious tone that had marred "Meat Is Murder". The title track was an awesome, almost Stoogesy wah-wah blitz, a black-humorous whirlwind of surreal images of a nation's decline and fall: like the Pistols' "God Save The Queen", it served notice on "England's dreaming", the "mad parade" of our mausoleum culture. "When you're tied to your mother's apron/No one talks about castration". "I Know It's Over" was a swan-song for the dreams of youth, an elegy for the defeated spirit of rock romanticism. The line "Mother, I can feel the soil falling over my head" seemed to echo unconsciously Hendrix's lament in "I Don't Live Today" ("Feel like I'm living in the bottom of a grave"). But whereas in the Sixties, there was still the hope of a bright new tomorrow, now there was only

resignation to the palpable fact that "It's over/And it never really began". On the flip, "There Is A Light That Never Goes Out" reached a new pinnacle of amorous delirium: "And if a double decker bus/Crashes into us/To die by your side/Such a heavenly way to die". Elsewhere on the album, the tone was altogether lighter: the lover's tiff of "Bigmouth Strikes Again", the music hall jig of "Frankly Mr Shankley", the halcyon reminiscence of "Cemetery Gates", the saucy reverie of "Some Girls Are Bigger Than Others". For the first time, the full span of The Smiths' emotional repertoire was covered, and with such panache.

The title of the album was inevitably picked up on by the tabloids and marked the debut of one Geoffrey Dickens MP, as self-appointed scourge of the upstart Morrissey. He had already established himself with the gutter press as a reliable source of reactionary quotes, and now determined to see this "public enemy" brought to heel.





## NOW I KNOW HOW JOAN OF ARC FELT

"I sometimes wonder if we're the last dying breath of that Sixties grim working class thing. I often feel like we're that one solitary clog left in the middle of the Arndale Centre."

HAVING re-established themselves as rock saviours with their best album yet, it now fell to The Smiths to become the mischievous pop presence they always should have been. This they began to do with "Panic" in July 86. "Panic" was a shameless rewrite of "Metal Guru" married to an hysterical fantasy of revenge on the part of the dispossessed pop majority The Smiths claimed to represent. The chorus "Burn down the disco... Hang the blessed deejay" won them no new friends at Radio One, but earned them their first Top Ten hit in two years.

"Panic" also stirred up a hornet's nest of controversy, being widely misconstrued as an anti-black music anthem (the new 12-inch culture of house and hip hop based around the DJ as opposed to pop group). It was an interview with Morrissey in *Melody Maker*, conducted by Frank Owen, that

caused the biggest furore. While nothing the singer said was actually racist, his unprompted suggestion that there was a "Top Of The Pops" conspiracy to keep white rock bands off the show was inflammatory, and his comments about contemporary black music (like his earlier, infamous remark "all reggae is vile") were crass and ignorant, and couldn't help but reinforce the implicit, if subconscious racism in the indie scene. (The kind of double standard that allows New Order to be feted for making disco records which no indie fan would buy if produced by a black artist. It is a thoroughly researched fact that music press readers do not buy music papers if they have black faces on the cover). The Smiths response was to claim they had been "stitched up" and to threaten *Melody Maker* with litigation and Owen with physical violence.

## MONEY CHANGES EVERYTHING

AS the latter half of '86 proceeded, The Smiths' new-found momentum gathered pace. They played a 25-date tour of the USA, a whirlwind of fan-demonium and rock 'n' roll madness that saw Johnny Marr sliding dangerously close to alcoholism, putting back a bottle of Remy Martin a night. On their return they signed to EMI for a rumoured £1 million. But they were still bound to Rough Trade for another year's full recording schedule. On their British tour, there were scenes of fan hysteria similar to their US experience, and a gig in Newport saw Morrissey suffering concussion when over-ardent fans dragged him into the audience. In November, The Smiths were all set to play a mammoth anti-apartheid benefit at the Royal Albert Hall when Marr was involved in a car crash and the show had to be cancelled. Meanwhile Rourke, despite being (according to Marr) both clean and cured, was awaiting trial for a "possession" bust dating back to that four-week period when he "left" The Smiths.

The Smiths started the New Year with "Shoplifters Of The World Unite", a groiny, grungey glam-stomp with Marr coming over strangely like Brian May in the middle. It was fun, but Morrissey's *ennui* — "Tried living in the real world/Instead of a shell/But I was bored before I even began" — was oddly infectious. It was a hit, and the title incited more predictable controversy in the tabloids. Shortly after came a new compilation of hits and B-Sides with the distinctly paranoid/messianic title "The World Won't Listen", whose contents compared unfavourably next to "Hatful Of Hollow". The Smiths continued their dogged, doomed quest for that elusive Number One single, with "Sheila Take A Bow" (charming but inconsequential) and "Girlfriend In A Coma" (ghastly, glossy). For a while, though, The Smiths made the upper reaches of the charts their natural habitat, thanks in large part to their producer Stephen Street.

All the while the rumours of major dissension in The Smiths ranks kept percolating through the music scene. They were denied, repeatedly, right up to the very last days before the split was officially announced. In late July it was admitted that Johnny Marr had left the group, but it was insisted that other guitarists were being considered as replacements and that The Smiths were eager to

promote the new album with live dates once a new guitarist had been announced. And apparently Morrissey's old friend Ivor Perry from Easterhouse was approached, as was Roddy Frame. Both declined.

On August 8, Marr released his own statement about the split: he denied the existence of any acrimony, and attributed his departure to the lack of scope for his musical ambitions within The Smiths. This seemed unconvincing, especially as it appeared that Marr and Morrissey had in fact been incommunicado for several months. In the absence of any satisfactory explanation from either side, speculation was rife. The theory that gained the greatest credence was that the Marr and Morrissey partnership had broken apart over the question of conquering America, with Marr keen to push for U2-scale success, Morrissey reluctant to take on the gruelling touring involved. A further layer of rancour stemmed from Morrissey's resentment of Marr's hackwork for superstars like Bryan Ferry and Talking Heads. An even more elaborate theory pointed to The Smiths' new manager Ken Friedman as the evil genius behind the whole debacle, deliberately driving a wedge between the more ambitious Marr and the reluctant and retiring Morrissey.

Later, Morrissey was to make a couple of guarded comments that nonetheless gave some credence to this theory. On the subject of conquering the USA, he admitted to a lack of enthusiasm compared with the other members of the band. "It's true, if I'd nodded, a world tour would have happened. But I wasn't prepared to become that stale pop baggage, simply checking in and checking out, not knowing where I was or what clothes I was wearing, and quite ritually standing onstage singing." And while he declined to make any comment about Ken Friedman, he attributed large blame for the downfall of The Smiths to the financial chaos engendered by The Smiths' Stateside success, with Marr and he watching huge amounts of money passing through their hands like quicksilver. "Finally," Morrissey reflected, "I think, Johnny had to back off from that, and put his entire *life* into the hands of his manager, because there was too much pressure."

On September 2, 1987, the final Smiths album, "Strangeways Here We Come" was released. Even



taking into account the shadow cast by the posthumous nature of its release, it was an unusually dismal record. It *sounded* like a band falling apart. Marr, all frilly guitar conceits and unwanted versatility, seemed to be preparing a CV for a life of session-hacking for big names. Morrissey was a poor caricature of himself, reiterating well-worn themes and archly acknowledging the onset of self-parody with "Stop Me If You've Heard This One Before". Two more singles limped from the wreckage: "I Started Something I Couldn't Finish", a middling hit, came complete with a video whose conceit was to be full of Morrissey clones and "Last Night I Dreamed Somebody Love Me", which died a quick death.

The much-heralded South Bank Show profile of The Smiths finally appeared (hastily adapted into a retrospective) and made its own considerable contribution to the drab state of affairs. It was a remarkably dull, dessicated appraisal which stolidly pursued The Smiths' "importance" without conveying one iota of their magic. Morrissey appeared pompous and self-regarding, Marr came over all smugly thuggish. 1987 ended with Morrissey announcing his new songwriting partner as longstanding Smiths producer Stephen Street, and Marr a member of The Pretenders (manag. K. Friedman). Rourke and Joyce did the odd bit of work for Brix Smith and Sinéad O'Connor.

"I get terribly embarrassed when I meet Smiths apostles. They seem to expect so much of me. Many of them see me as some sort of religious character who can solve all their problems with a wave of a syllable. When I meet people like this I start to stumble with words and it almost impossible to say the most basic things clearly. Lots of people march away thinking I'm a totally empty-headed sieve because I haven't said 'Go forth and multiply' or something."





# WHEN WILL YOU DIE?

AFTER the ignominious disarray of The Smiths' (timely) demise, Morrissey returned with unusual promptness. "Suedehead", the first example of his work with Stephen Street and guitarist Vini Reilly from Durutti Column, was an iridescent warp and waft of sound, and lyrically uncannily attuned to a sudden outbreak of early Seventies nostalgia. With the corporate muscle of EMI behind it, "Suedehead" reached Number Four in the charts. The album "Viva Hate", released on the His Master's Voice label (reactivated at Morrissey's request, making him the first artist on it since Joyce Grenfell) was an unexpected triumph. Songs like "Late Night Maudlin Street" and "Little Man What Now" were Morrissey's most lucid and luminous work since "The Queen Is Dead". The rather silly final track, "Margaret On The Guillotine", and accompanying

interview comments about how he'd gladly carry out the execution himself, saw Morrissey once again, stirring up controversy in the tabloids. The indefatigable Geoffrey Dickens even persuaded the Manchester Police that it was their duty to investigate Morrissey to see if there was a possible case of incitement to violence. I myself ended up being questioned by a detective inspector as to the *tone* of voice in which Morrissey made his remarks.

Since then the future of the Street/Morrissey partnership has been thrown into question, what with Street having filed a suit against Morrissey for unpaid monies. Morrissey has been working with Rourke and Joyce again (producing perhaps the

most insipid work of his career in the "Last Of The International Playboys" and "Interesting Drug" singles) and is perhaps trying to open the way for a Smiths reformation. Just before Christmas, Morrissey played a show in Wolverhampton, with Rourke, Joyce and Gannon. His first gig for nearly two years, and free to the first 1700 to show up wearing a Smiths tee-shirt, it inevitably brought chaos to the streets of Wolverhampton and induced hysteria (part relief at having got in, part anticipation) inside the Civic Hall. As it was, it was *calculated* too, for the whole event was being filmed for a video. Morrissey struggled to perform from under a hail of adoring bodies piling onto him singly or six at a time. The event was a striking demonstration of the depth of ardour Morrissey still incites.

"It seems that in the very serious and critical things in life, one is absolutely alone. People kind of trundle through life with this very merry idea that they are not alone."

## THERE IS A LIGHT THAT NEVER GOES OUT

"If we look back on the history of literature, it's always these really creased, repressed hysterics, who are enchained in these squalor-ridden rooms, who say the most poetic things about the human race."

SO where can Morrissey go from here? Where can he lead that still massive reservoir of fanatical devotion he commands? Morrissey can't grow, as an artist or a person, because he's addicted to his own neurosis, addicted to poignancy — which is, after all, the sublime taste of your own defeat, your own incompleteness. This is why he jealously keeps the wounds of the past open, why he zealously keeps satisfaction at arm's length.

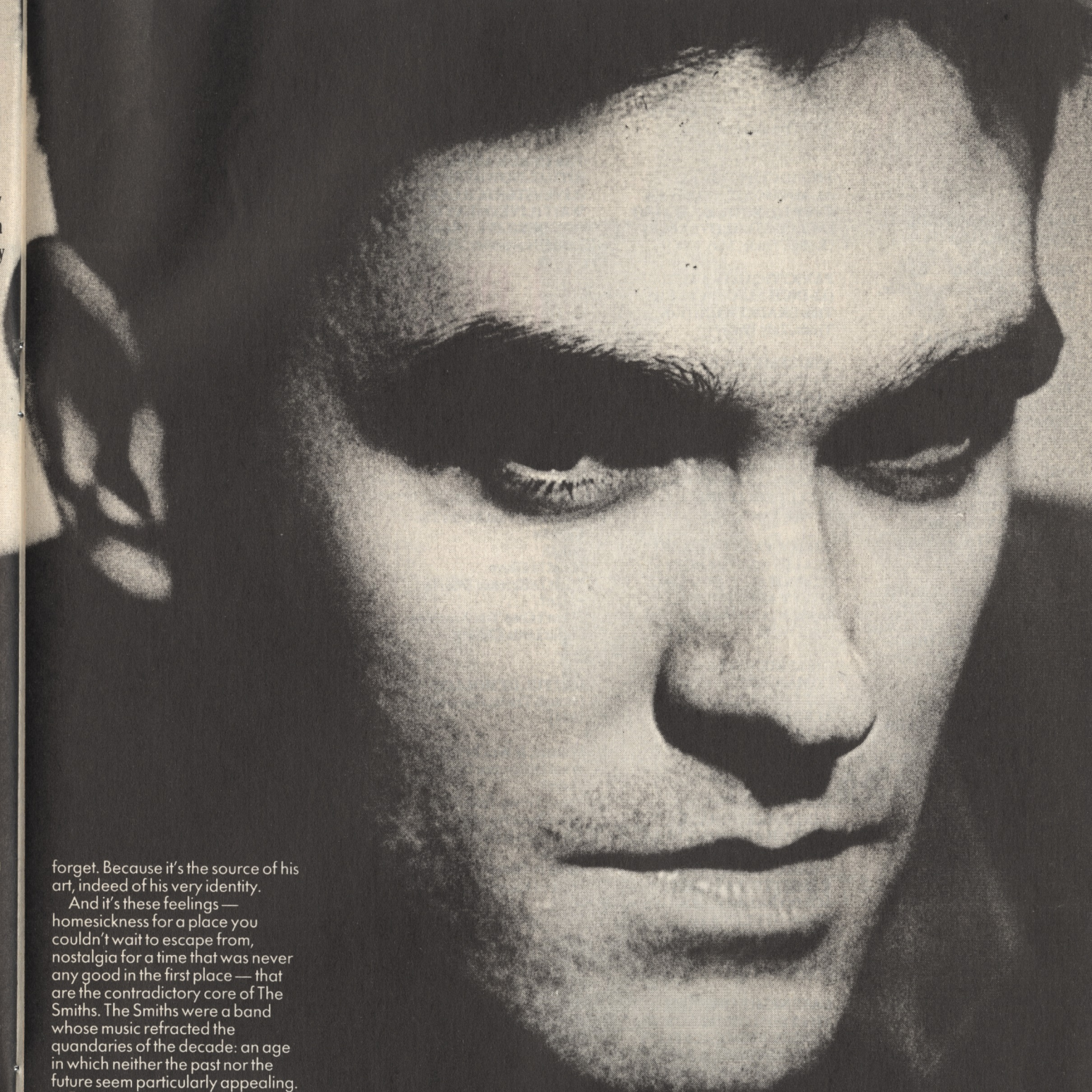
If, as Jon Savage argues, Morrissey is the Billy Liar who got on the train and left his hometown behind, then like the Sixties social realist writers he is doomed to remain chained to his memories, to a past he can neither return to nor

forget. Because it's the source of his art, indeed of his very identity.

And it's these feelings — homesickness for a place you couldn't wait to escape from, nostalgia for a time that was never any good in the first place — that are the contradictory core of The Smiths. The Smiths were a band whose music refracted the quandaries of the decade: an age in which neither the past nor the future seem particularly appealing.

For Morrissey, it's a question of whether he can continue to find new twists to his eternal posture of unrequited exile. Of how long he can fend off the obituary he unwittingly composed for himself some years ago: "There's nothing worse, really, than the writer, the singer, who's outlived their usefulness and who's really *drained* their diaries, as it were."

But he's come back from beyond the grave to surprise us before, and there's no reason to believe he can't do it again.





# DISCOGRAPHY

## SINGLES

**HAND IN GLOVE/HANDSOME DEVIL** (Rough Trade, May 1983)

**THIS CHARMING MAN/JEANNE** (Rough Trade, September 1983)

**THIS CHARMING MAN (MANCHESTER)/THIS CHARMING MAN (LONDON)/ACCEPT YOURSELF/WONDERFUL WOMAN** (Rough Trade, September 1983)

**THIS CHARMING MAN (NEW YORK MIX — VOCAL)/THIS CHARMING MAN (NEW YORK MIX — INSTRUMENTAL)** (Rough Trade, November 1983)

**WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?/BACK TO THE OLD HOUSE** (12-INCH ALSO INCLUDES THESE THINGS TAKE TIME) (Rough Trade, January 1984)

**HEAVEN KNOWS I'M MISERABLE NOW/SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN** (12-INCH ALSO INCLUDES GIRL AFRAID) (Rough Trade, May 1984)

**WILLIAM, IT WAS REALLY NOTHING/PLEASE PLEASE LET ME GET WHAT I WANT/HOW SOON IS NOW** (Rough Trade, August 1984)

**HOW SOON IS NOW/WELL I WONDER** (12-INCH ALSO INCLUDES OSCILLATE WILDLY) (Rough Trade, January 1985)

**SHAKESPEAR'S SISTER/WHAT SHE SAID** (12-INCH INCLUDES STRETCH OUT AND WAIT) (Rough Trade, March 1985)

**THAT JOKE ISN'T FUNNY ANYMORE/MEAT IS MURDER** (LIVE) (12-INCH ALSO INCLUDES NOWHERE FAST (LIVE), SHAKESPEAR'S SISTER (LIVE), STRETCH OUT AND WAIT (LIVE)) (Rough Trade, July 1985)

**THE BOY WITH THE THORN IN HIS SIDE/ASLEEP** (12-INCH ALSO INCLUDES RUBBER RING) (Rough Trade, September 1985)

**BIGMOUTH STRIKES AGAIN/MONEY CHANGES EVERYTHING** (12-INCH ALSO INCLUDES UNLOVEABLE) (Rough Trade, May 1986)

**PANIC/VICAR IN A TUTU** (12-INCH ALSO INCLUDES THE DRAIN TRAIN) (Rough Trade, July 1986)

**ASK/CEMETRY GATES** (12-INCH ALSO INCLUDES GOLDEN LIGHTS) (Rough Trade, October 1986)

**SHOPLIFTERS OF THE WORLD UNITE/HALF A PERSON** (12-INCH ALSO INCLUDES LONDON) (Rough Trade, January 1987)

**SHEILA TAKE A BOW/IS IT REALLY SO STRANGE?** (12-INCH ALSO INCLUDES SWEET AND TENDER HOOLIGAN) (Rough Trade, April 1987)

**GIRLFRIEND IN A COMA/WORK IS A FOUR LETTER WORD** (12-INCH ALSO INCLUDES I KEEP MINE HIDDEN) (Rough Trade, August 1987)

**I STARTED SOMETHING/PRETTY GIRLS MAKE GRAVES** (12-INCH ALSO INCLUDES SOME GIRLS ARE BIGGER THAN OTHERS (LIVE); CASSETTE INCLUDES SOME GIRLS ARE BIGGER THAN OTHERS AND WHAT'S THE WORLD (LIVE)) (Rough Trade, November 1987)

**LAST NIGHT I DREAMT THAT SOMEBODY LOVED ME/RUSHOLME RUFFIANS** (PEEL SESSION); (12-INCH INCLUDES NOWHERE FAST (PEEL SESSION); CD INCLUDES NOWHERE FAST (PEEL SESSION) AND WILLIAM, IT WAS REALLY NOTHING (PEEL SESSION)) (Rough Trade, December 1987)

**BARBARISM BEGINS AT HOME/SHAKESPEAR'S SISTER/STRETCH OUT AND WAIT** (November 1988)

**THE HEADMASTER RITUAL/NOWHERE FAST** (LIVE)/STRETCH OUT AND WAIT (LIVE)/MEAT IS MURDER (LIVE) (Rough Trade, November 1988)

## ALBUMS

**THE SMITHS** (Rough Trade, February 1984)

Reel Around The Fountain  
You've Got Everything Now  
Miserable Lie  
Pretty Girls Make Graves  
The Hand That Rocks The Cradle  
Still Ill  
Hand In Glove  
What Difference Does It Make?  
I Don't Owe You Anything  
Suffer Little Children

**HATFUL OF HOLLOW** (Rough Trade, November 1984)

William, It Was Really Nothing  
What Difference Does It Make?  
These Things Take Time  
This Charming Man  
How Soon Is Now?  
Still Ill  
Hand In Glove  
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

**MEAT IS MURDER** (Rough Trade, February 1985)

The Headmaster Ritual  
Rusholme Ruffians  
I Want The One I Can't Have  
What She Said  
That Joke Isn't Funny  
Anymore  
Nowhere Fast  
Well I Wonder  
Barbarism Begins At Home  
Meat Is Murder

**THE QUEEN IS DEAD** (Rough Trade, June 1986)

The Queen Is Dead  
Frankly Mr Shankly  
I Know It's Over  
Never Had No One Ever  
Cemetery 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

**THE WORLD WON'T LISTEN** (Rough Trade, February 1987)

Panic  
Ask  
London  
Bigmouth Strikes Again  
Shakespeare's Sister  
There Is A Light That Never Goes Out  
Shopluckers Of The World Unite  
The Boy With The Thorn In His Side  
His Side  
Asleep  
Unloveable  
Half A Person  
Stretch Out And Wait  
That Joke Isn't Funny  
Anymore  
Oscillate Wildly  
You Just Haven't Earned It  
Yet, Baby  
Rubber Ring  
Money Changes Everything (cassette only)

**STRANGWAYS, HERE WE COME** (Rough Trade, September 1987)

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've Heard This One Before  
Last Night I Dreamt That Somebody Loved Me  
Unhappy Birthday  
Pain In A Vulgar Picture  
Death At One's Elbow  
I Won't Share You

**THE QUEEN IS DEAD** (Rough Trade, September 1988)

The Queen Is Dead  
Panic  
Vicar In A Tutu  
Ask  
Rusholme Ruffians/Marie's  
The Name, His Latest Flame  
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

**RANK** (Rough Trade, September 1988)

The Queen Is Dead  
Panic  
Vicar In A Tutu  
Ask  
Rusholme Ruffians/Marie's  
The Name, His Latest Flame  
The Boy With The Thorn In His Side  
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

**LOUDER THAN BOMBS** (Rough Trade, November 1988)

Is It Really So Strange?  
Sheila Take A Bow  
Shopluckers 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  
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

**MORRISSEY SOLO SINGLES**  
**SUEDEHEAD/I KNOW VERY WELL HOW I GOT MY NAME** (HMV, February 1988)

**EVERYDAY IS LIKE SUNDAY/DISAPPOINTED** (HMV, May 1988)

**THE LAST OF THE INTERNATIONAL PLAYBOYS/LUCKY LISP** (HMV, January 1989)

**INTERESTING DRUG/SUCH A LITTLE THING MAKES SUCH A BIG DIFFERENCE** (HMV, April 1989)  
**ALBUMS**  
**VIVA HATE** (HMV, March 1988)

Alsation Cousin  
Little Man, What Now?  
Everyday Is Like Sunday  
Bengali In Platforms  
Angel, Angel, Down We Go Together  
Late Night, Maudlin Street  
Suedehead  
Break Up The Family  
The Ordinary Boys  
I Don't Mind If You Forget Me  
Dial-A-Cliche  
Margaret On The Guillotine

