

Peculiarly Mancunian?

Visions of a Past Manchester through Three Post-Punk Literary Frontmen

Richard John Walker

Abstract

This paper is a psychogeographic study on the influence of home location on the work of three literarily fuelled working-class icons of the post-punk music scene in Manchester, England. Following an exploration on the ever-evolving meaning of psychogeography, I investigate how a past Manchester is revealed within the early works of Ian Curtis, Mark E. Smith and Morrissey, both through insights attained from contemporary writings and also by necessarily short analyses of output from the artists themselves. All three possess peculiarly Mancunian artistic and behavioural traits that emerged from a literate working-class artistic sensibility, one that has faded and arguably disappeared from the British working classes today but which possessed clearly defined links to established artistic traditions. This weakening of working-class based output in ‘rock and pop’ is perhaps a late-capitalist Internet-fuelled symptom of Guy Debord’s spectacle deepening its impact on local art scenes and might help us understand why the financially privileged appear to dominate pop culture in the UK today.

Psychogeography Pop culture. Society of the Spectacle

A psychogeographical introduction

Coloured through its unique history, the distinctiveness of a city bears a direct imprint upon the character and identity of its citizens. The reasons why the Osakan is perceived as laid-back and humorous compared with the colder Tokyoite, for instance, are not necessarily found within the theoretical pontificating of the professional academic but can be *felt* while walking within city borders where the time-bound colourations of economic, geographic and immigration flow combine to effect a palette of moods within. To feel a city, guided tours won't usually suffice: you've automatically handed over your agency to a professional 'other' to see a history already-authenticated within myriad texts. In order to discover a city truly one might, in the words of John Lydon, seek out the 'sides [of London] that the tourists never see' (1979). Even better perhaps would be to purify the process and take money out of the equation; commit to a now revolutionary act of 'walking', which, as Iain Sinclair noted, is the last urban act incapable of being exploited: 'You can't get money out of pedestrians' (Kobek, 2014: 35). The artist-as-child unconsciously imbibes the essence of a hometown, allowing for a conditioning of the psyche well before teenage troubles set in. Such was the case with Ian Curtis, Mark E. Smith and Morrissey, their psyches imprinted by the urban environments of Greater Manchester.

Finding the genius loci

Psychogeography is a subject umbilically linked to writers who focus on the effect of urban environments upon the psyche, and indelibly linked to the French Lettrists of the 1940s and Guy Debord's Marxist-inspired Situationist International group. Debord's (1955) original definition, 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals', has retained its relevancy but almost sixty years later

Coverley's overview of a considerably broadened theme offers: 'a bewildering array of ideas from ley lines to the occult, to urban walking and political realisation' (2012: 2).

As Goodall (2010) has shown there is no reason why the output of musicians may not join the psychogeographic party, music, as it were, often reflecting the pervading spirit of an area. Coverley's extensive study uncovered rich links between psychogeography and literary writings centred on both London and Paris to highlight writers such as Defoe, de Quincy, Stevenson, and Machen. Writers who sought to uncover a *genius loci*, an eternal spirit of a place, within stories set in a specific locale. While London was often used as a site of forebode and terror, Parisian based writers focused on the role of the *flâneur* exploring fashionable arcades of nineteenth century Paris: presenting themselves as writers immersed within city life but remaining aloof from it. Ironically though, it was American Edgar Allen Poe's *The Man of the Crowd* that Baudelaire claimed expertly painted the 'turmoil of thought' that the *flâneur* sought to detect (1964: 7).

The *flâneur* emerged from the French literary tradition, and two French terms promoted by Guy Debord and the Situationists soon emerged from politicised literature: *détournement* and *dérive*. *Détournement* involves the act of turning expressions of the capitalist system and media against themselves, while *dérive* refers to unplanned journeys through landscapes to discover subtle aesthetic contours: the ultimate goal being to encounter a new and authentic experience. Collectively these French terms suggest a philosophic mindset seeking ways outwards from the quotidian patterns and concerns of our urbanised, electronically-organised, lifestyles.

Liquid modernity and modern technologies

Urban lifestyles and community cohesion in the West have drastically

changed during our ‘liquid times’ (Bauman, 2007). There has been a widespread weakening of social forms and state backed financial help at a time when globalisation has overseen a rise in individual responsibility and a divorce between power and politics. The move from a solid to a liquid modernity has led to lives of uncertainty while an enslavement to technology has intensified. Although mechanised transportation takes us to places faster and more smoothly than ever, recent technologies – the Internet, the iPhone and SatNav tools – have reconfigured the way we move, how we are surveilled and even the way we think. We live in a screened *Country on the Click* (an LP title from Mark E. Smith, one of the three frontmen under scrutiny): the embedding of sensors inside everyday objects, such as recent Samsung televisions that have microphones inside them, have strengthened the “Internet of Things” and spread web connectivity to within everyday objects (Steadman, 2015).

With such environments emerging worldwide, we might even ask: Will there ever be something ‘new’ again outside of the Net? In his last significant piece of writing, Guy Debord didn’t think so, noting that the ‘crushing presence of media discourse’ has destroyed – or fatally damaged – the *agora*, the general community, and that ‘fashion itself, from clothes to music, has come to a halt’ due to an ‘endless circulation of the media’ (1991: 13-20). The Internet and websites such as YouTube have certainly hastened this trend and as Maconie (2015) noted, mainstream rock and pop in the UK has become gentrified. The ending of benefits systems that helped working-class musicians sustain themselves while cooking-up new trends has now gone. ‘Smart, impassioned outsiders’ such as Morrissey, Lennon or McCartney are now blocked from entering the house.

Urban lifestyles now shepherd new generations inward towards a universe of screen stars, selfies and recycled past images where the past can be instantly accessed and circulated online. Offline there is a whole world to explore through direct contact with the vast natural universe, replete with stars, trees and natural cycles – *and* the city, yet city dwellers act like the myopic monkeys many have become. Parallels with decadent

protagonist Des Essientes in Huysmen's urban novel *Against Nature* (*À rebours*) spring to mind: Essientes, unhappy with urban redevelopment, retreats to his own room and chooses to travel mentally within his four walls rather than get dirty and feel the discomfort of physical exertion (Coverley, 2012: 184).

Walking: a recovery kit that's always free

The act of walking is an always-free, always-available, recovery kit that takes us away from the ubiquitous lens, screen and web, and allows room for adventure to discover the new-unseen often undocumented within our cities. Inevitably the artistically-minded will be the prime beneficiaries of an act that can result in reportage that best captures the relationship between the urban event and human behaviour. Like Des Essientes they often question the merits of urban development; unlike him they do not retreat from the streets. However, some might say that modern psychogeographers such as Peter Ackroyd have retreated from the safe streets of sanity. Serious or not, his more occult-driven pronouncements about cities possessing sentient and, importantly for literary tradition, unseen forces have raised many eyebrows. Huggill quoted him in 1994, as saying:

I truly believe that there are certain people to whom or through whom the territory, the place, the past speaks . . . Just as it seems possible to me that a street or dwelling can materially affect the character and behaviour of the people who dwell in them, is it not also possible that within this city [London] and within its culture are patterns of sensibility or patterns of response which have persisted from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and perhaps even beyond?

Ackroyd was roundly lampooned for positing that unseen

echoic effects may influence the present in a city into the future; yet read in a literary way, this pseudoscientific vision is a compelling one which connects to Rupert Sheldrake's hypothesis of a morphic resonance process working across space and time from a collective memory bank. It also makes one recall themes in H. P. Lovecraft's, M. R. James's or Edgar Allan Poe's work. While writing this piece, I read an article on the sacking of Uruguayan soccer manager Gustavo Poyet at Sunderland A.F. C. Despite loyal support and solid financial backing, past managers noted that there were 'gremlins' at the club, holding it back, Poyet saying '(t)here's something wrong here and I need to find it before I go ...' (Taylor, 2015). He couldn't. His quote wouldn't be out of place in a mystery by the above authors and although a solution *probably* could be resolved by an in-depth investigation of club personnel – the picture of unseen forces overseeing events at a managerial poisoned chalice is welcome to those of a certain bent.

Manchester and Liverpool: only 32 miles between them, but...

In Britain you can walk 5 miles and be in a completely different world (Mark E. Smith, 2003).

The reference to a north-eastern football team allows us to step westwards towards the location of our study: Manchester. As Tara Brabazon noted, 'Music is a way to mark a city as distinct' and Manchester's musical history has been distinctive – and regionally competitive (2012: 53). Despite only 32 miles (52 kilometres) separating Manchester from Liverpool, the cultural differences are stark. Close ties were forged when the 1830 Liverpool and Manchester railway was built, but the opening of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894 sparked a rivalry which grew and manifested through industry, sport and music. In his nineteenth century writings on English cities, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote of a 'black smoke' in Manchester that made the sun 'a disc without rays' and through which

unusual noises emerged. Taking the short move west, he described Liverpool as containing the same amount of poverty as Manchester, but was a ‘beautiful city’ in which squalor was ‘hidden’ (1958: 110). Liverpool’s port city status afforded the Liverpoolian room to breathe, unlike their Mancunian brethren who were confined by stifling smoke from the cotton manufacturing industry. Mancunians endured their clouds of black, cabbing it up and down their smoky metropolis, while Liverpoolians had the option of taking a ferry across the Mersey – out and away from smog- filled environs.

It was no mistake then that the Beatles – the cheery pop band that inspired a Merseybeat scene – were from Liverpool, nor that the poppier, more accessible side of 1970s post-punk emerged there through Echo and the Bunnymen, Teardrop Explodes, and Pete Burns; it neither is coincidental that Manchester housed a darker, more abrasive and literary-minded music scene. Du Noyer noted in *Liverpool: Wondrous Place – from the Cavern to Cream*, that Liverpool had always been an ‘entertainment’ city (2002: 2-5); Manchester, however, appeared to contain something more worrying.

Cross-pollination

Cities cannot be hermetically sealed and between Liverpool and Manchester there were always cross-pollinators: people whose effects brought a feeling of friendship and unity between music scenes. ‘Music maven’ Roger Eagle had a core influence on 1970s Liverpool and Manchester in the 1980s and ‘was ... right in the midst of things, at a series of crucial moments’ (Wilson: 2014). Julian Cope, ex frontman of Liverpool’s Teardrop Explodes, noted that Mark E. Smith had a crucial effect on the post-punk Liverpool scene: ‘I’ll say the main reason anything started to happen was because of Mark. He had very shamanistic qualities, a particular ability to draw the best from people’ (Cope, 1999: 59). Yet Mark E. Smith himself had been galvanised into action by a London band,



Figure 1: 'This Store Welcomes Shoplifters'
(Reid, 1987)



Figure 2: 'Save Petrol Burn Cars'
(Reid, 1987)

one whose image was filled with the Situationist International influenced works of Jamie Reid, The Sex Pistols. Two of Reid's works associated with the band can be seen in figures 1 and 2.

Singer John Lydon may well support the established order today (Toynbee, 2014), but he fronted an act filled with a melange of confrontational artwork in the Debordian tradition of *détournement* and whose birth emerged at a time of social disquiet and widespread strikes that culminated in the 1979 Winter of Discontent. The explosive effect of a band unafraid to air confrontational views had a definite effect on Manchester and stimulated three disaffected, artistically inclined, working class youths to take their art out of the bedroom and onto a public stage.

Here are the young men

The Sex Pistols' concert at Lesser Free Trade Hall, Manchester on 4 June 1976 had an audience of fewer than 35 to 40 attendees but included two of three charismatic frontmen whose work displays the influence of Manchester on their psyche: Stephen Patrick Morrissey, future vocalist of The Smiths, and the aforementioned Mark E. Smith of The Fall. Guitarists Bernard Sumner and Peter Hook, whose band would soon become Joy Division, attended both this and the Pistols' second Manchester concert

that year where they met future lead man and the third front man in question, Ian Curtis. The concerts acted as ‘year zero’ to the youthful attendees – none of whom were university educated though two had been to grammar school. Almost four decades on, all have etched their mark on UK pop culture to reach a broad range of society. An excerpt from Morrissey’s recent autobiography, for example, was used in a question in the final year English literature exam at Cambridge University (Corcoron, 2014); Mark E. Smith’s art and management of The Fall has led to a university conference on his work and a cottage-industry of memoirs, whilst the deceased Ian Curtis was the centre of a movie, *Control*, by Anton Corbijn. Savage might well have been writing about all three when he noted that Curtis was:

a product ... of a particular time in working class cultural history, when there was an urge to read a certain sort of highbrow literature, and when intelligence was not a dirty word (2008).

Method? Who needs it?

These three artists possessed an outsider outlook incubated by the streets they slipped down as northern youths. Using the plethora of literature recently published on each frontman, selected analysis of their physical ‘product’ and localised themes found within their works, I shall present a preliminary assessment of a past Manchester seen through the prism of their works. While Ian Curtis’s work painted an atmosphere of oppression by forces and works outside of his control, both Mark E. Smith and (at least, initially) Morrissey supplied more overtly Mancunian fragments of their experience: the former through seemingly impenetrable and fantastical voice and prose, the latter through a desire to celebrate and occasionally denigrate the ordinary.

Their three bands were suffused with references to literature in their lyrics that, while not always traditionally poetic, can be read in

literary ways. Smith's *The Fall* were named after Albert Camus's philosophical novel, *Le Timbre*, while Joy Division were named after a concentration camp brothel in Yehiel De-Nur's novel *House of Dolls*. Morrissey famously noted that Oscar Wilde was a continuous companion as a distraught teenager, and that '(e)very line that Wilde wrote affected me so enormously' (Henke, 1984). Didactic by nature, he left the Sex Pistols concert impressed by the 'striking Dickensian original' of John Lydon, soon-after communicating with Curtis through telephone calls to discuss and support artistic plans (2013: 115-116). The ability of all three to transmit their artistic message was rendered more powerful through the effects of the predominant medium of the times, vinyl. The record helped to create a semiotic mutability: an ability to materialize a flexible range of meanings, and all three artists used this medium well. Through hypergraphical methods, an artist's intended meaning can be synthesized from a record cover into the record and songs themselves (Goodall, 2010: 41). It adds an additional dimension to the communicative intent of an artist, especially in the case of Mark E. Smith of The Fall.

Of hypergraphy and the record sleeve

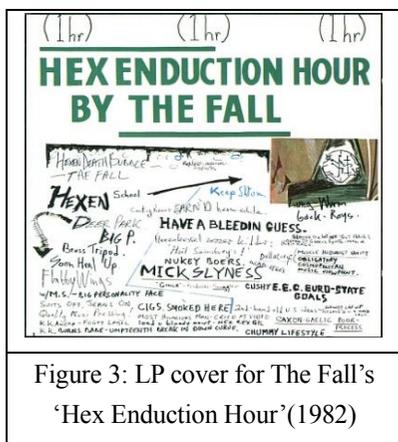


Figure 3: LP cover for The Fall's 'Hex Enduction Hour' (1982)

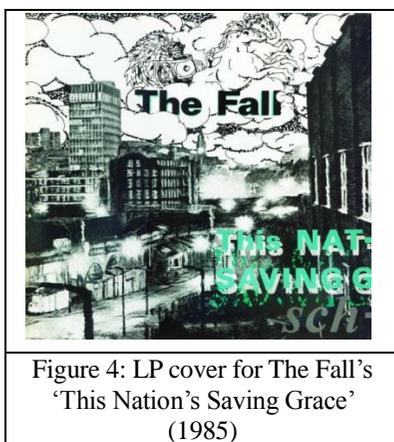


Figure 4: LP cover for The Fall's 'This Nation's Saving Grace' (1985)

Mark E. Smith had direct input on The Fall's LP sleeves and was clearly indebted to Wyndham Lewis's use of language in pre-war twentieth century modernist magazine *BLAST* on 1982's *Hex Enduction Hour*, shown in Figure 3, the cover filled with graffiti not unlike that found on Manchester city walls. Fisher (2010: 107-108) wrote of Smith's use of 'paratexts' to mediate a main text and the sleeve for *Hex* called for engagement prior to taking the record from the sleeve. It erects a 'writerly' (Barthes) barrier around the work, crucial to an artist who was intent on preventing the construction of definitive meanings around his songs. The message is not gently presented; the audience must grapple with the work to reap any benefits. Too dense for some, it fully complements his anti-music persona; an amorphous text filled with stimulating prose and open to endless interpretation.

The album cover for *This Nation's Saving Grace* (1985), shown in figure 4, was the product of a collaboration by two artists commissioned by Smith to create a Mancunian night skyline as viewed from the backstreets, with a Blakean touch hovering within the clouds (Pollard & Castenenskiold: 2011, 16-18). Unlike with Smith, for Joy Division's LP covers (see figure 5 and 6), frontman Ian Curtis had minimal input over artwork which lacks overt reference to Manchester. For example, the LP cover for *Unknown Pleasures*, shown in figure 5, contained a depiction of a pulsar, the idea of guitarist Bernard Sumner (2014: 114), and *Closer*, shown in figure 6, shows Peter Saville's design of a classical scene that contained the presence of a tomb—eerily chosen in view of the record's release just weeks after Curtis's suicide (Saville, 2011). Morrissey had complete directorial control over all Smiths covers designs (see figures 7 and 8) and sentimentalized a past Manchester through images of an idealised past, such as the band posing in front of Salford Lads Club in *The Queen Is Dead* and the photo of pools winning spender Viv Nicholson standing in front of terraced housing on the cover for *Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now*.

Discussion - Ian Curtis

Back in the seventies, Manchester was not the place it is now ... I much prefer Manchester the way it is now ... You could get stabbed quite easily, and I certainly don't miss that. (Sumner, 2014: 94-95)

Prior to joining the band that would become Joy Division, guitarist Bernard Sumner knew Ian Curtis as a punk fan who walked around Manchester with 'Hate' daubed on the back of his coat. In the decades that followed his suicide, when we considered Joy Division's music and live performance, it became acknowledged that his was a voice possessed by a distinct, almost gothic sensibility: a doomed romantic-cum-modernist within the medium of post-punk who fictionalised his literary heroes to paint dystopian pictures before he came upon a truly new voice through 1980s *Love Will Tear Us Apart*. If not already apparent the recent publication of his lyrics and notebooks, *So This Is Permanence* (2014), bear this process out. The book contains an appendix of full colour photographs of Curtis's own copies of works by Burgess, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Wilde, some of whose work were appropriated for his own songs and vision.

Whatever Curtis thought of Manchester, he used the city as a template to explore themes, such as fate, that predominate within his lyrics. In *Interzone*, a phrase used to describe a imaginary dreamlike state in Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, he writes of walking through city limits attracted by an unknown force inside; *From Safety to Where?* sees him moving, transport ticket in hand, to a stage that 'has all been arranged', and a doomed fate deepens in *Dead Souls* where he sings about something that keeps 'calling me'. The obvious reading is that this controlling muse was a depression which pre-empted the epilepsy that compromised his final year.

Sumner stated that Curtis claimed his lyrics were appearing ‘fully-formed’ to give him the feeling that he was being ‘pulled inexorably into a great big whirlpool’ (2014: 105). It pushed him towards the darker lyrics of his final LP, *Closer* (1980), which in retrospect is the suicide note many believed it was.



Figure 5: LP cover for Joy Division's 'Unknown Pleasures' (1979).

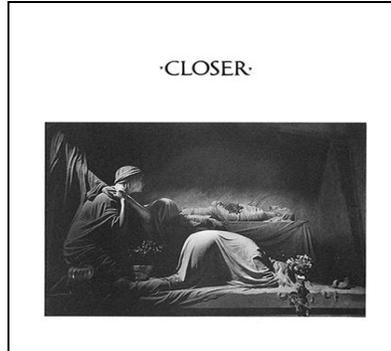


Figure 6: LP cover for Joy Division's 'Closer' (1980).

His non-musical life involved work with the handicapped in Greater Manchester from which his observations influenced two notable songs: *She's Lost Control*, about a mentally challenged girl he assisted in finding employment; and *The Eternal*, inspired by the unchanging face of a child with Down's syndrome. Unwilling and unable to ignore these realities, his songs contained doom-laden but intelligent comments on our broad society: not just Manchester. The J. G. Ballard influenced *Atrocity Exhibition* may have contemporary relevance to today's global celebrity culture: 'Asylums with doors open wide / Where people had paid to see inside / For entertainment they watch his body twist / Behind his eyes he says I still exist', but we can never know for certain. An atrocity exhibition formulated in a mind shaped by the urban north with lyrics that could refer to anywhere – not just Manchester. Yet more than anything, the

music of Joy Division sounded like Manchester: cold, sparse and, at times, bleak' (Sumner, 2014: 7).

For all their beauty, in both words and music, Joy Division symbolised a then industrially depressed city of Manchester (Savage, 2014). It is just a tragedy that Curtis's calls for a way out, 'Gotta find my destiny before it gets too late' (*24 Hours*), weren't heeded; his death no one individual's fault, it leads back to the aforementioned Ackroyd quote to make one consider: Could the individuals involved in Joy Division's work have tapped into patterns of sensibility that materially affected character and behaviour? Too illogical or plain mad to accept, it is better to conclude that Curtis's work emerged from a Manchester that stimulated lyrics of alienation, desolation and isolation. The mid 70s Mancunian environment that city impresario Tony Wilson later desired to regenerate, and which he described as a 'piece of history that [looked as if it] had been spat out', was one key stimulant for the darkened emotions that filled their works (Gee, 2007).

Discussion - Mark E. Smith

Before the bomb in '96 Manchester city centre was populated by some of the best Victorian architecture in the world. You could read history off some of those buildings. They were masterpieces – beautiful combinations of science and art. It's not like that now... (Mark E. Smith, 2010: 96-97).

Mark E. Smith started off as a contemporary of Curtis but has continued to record as The Fall to the present day. As McDonald (2010: 154) noted, his was a Manchester that did not need the regeneration desired by Tony Wilson because 'to Smith, there was nothing wrong with the Old North'. Because of their longevity, there have been many 'Falls' and Hannon offers that The Fall are the best group to represent Manchester because of their

‘inscrutable, tense and ever changing’ nature (2010: 33). Smith once claimed that one reason The Fall were formed was that bands are not ‘true to their roots’; so perhaps he saw his role to remedy that and deal with the unique localised matter that fascinated him. But if he had a *raison d’être* it was to personify opposition, to be sceptical of everything and everyone – especially academics. The legend ‘Notebooks out plagiarists ... And Academics’ adorn the liner notes of *Shiftwork* (1991) and his lyric book, *vII* (2008).

Mark Fisher saw both Curtis and Smith as ‘forbiddingly intense vocalist-visionaries’ with Curtis the depressive-neurotic who ended the European Romantic line and Smith the ‘psychotic, self-styled destroyer of Romanticism’ (2010: 97). Unlike Curtis, Smith’s work doesn’t surrender easily to textual analysis, and why should it? The medium is a rock n’ roll which he has repeatedly said should be a mistreatment of instruments to get feelings across. His lyrics, rich with meaning and possibilities, are definitely not formal poetry but he uses them – and his paratexts – as literature, to critical effect. This rock n’ roll art form allows his uneducated (yet not jargonised) art to thrive and is a suitable medium for him. Better than the book world which in 1983 he described as ‘an evil world’, in that ‘it asks a lot more of you and gives you back even less’.

The Fall might have emerged as a musical collective but it soon turned into what Witts (2010: 28) termed a ‘business entity under his [Smith’s] leadership’ in which his wives and girlfriends soon become subsumed into the narrative of the group. Interestingly, Goodall (2010: 24) noted that Smith shares personality traits with Guy Debord: megalomania, desire to control collaborators, fondness for the amateur, the use of war tropes, abuse of alcohol and a delight in violent expulsion – with a critical assessment of this seen in recent memoirs of former bassist Steven Hanley (2014) and drummer Simon Wolstoncroft (2014). His unorthodox recording practices and seeming lack of desire for commercial success seem to confirm Kearns and Lockwoods (2010) perception of Smith’s status as a Deleuzo-Guattarian positioned ‘minatorian’ within a

majoritarian system. He may provide resistance for the minority, but stories of sacking a band member on the eve of his wedding and multiple in-band fist fights make the situation tricky to assess. His maverick tendencies may well be related to a cynicism that has its roots in an Old Manchester where his grandfather would stand outside Strangeways and give just-released prisoners the option of working at his plumbers shop - rather than join the army (Smith, 2010: 22). Early songs such as *Industrial Estate* reflected his awareness of the grim late 70s Manchester working environment, with *Two Steps Back* vilifying available choices and the workers reliant upon local government re-training schemes: ‘The cracker factory! A place where you get into the working routine again. Rehabs for no hopes! Prefab for jobless dopes!’

But by *Dragnet* (1979), the second LP, his reverence for the works of H. P. Lovecraft and M. R. James fused with his penchant for narrating local strife. In the genuinely scary *Spectre vs Rector*, that was specially recorded in a damp local warehouse, his interest in unutterable forces, psychic powers and other worlds emerge – and are manifested within Manchester. This interest in the uncanny has continued into the present and led to a genuinely disconcerting episode when *Powder Keg* (in which Smith refers to the IRA bombing of Enniskillen while warning his sister not to enter the powder keg of Manchester city centre) was released on an LP five days before the IRA bombing of ... Manchester city centre in June 1996 (Herrington, 2006). Of course it was merely coincidental, but makes one visit that ‘cranky’ quote of Ackroyd – again.

Smith certainly knows the streets of Manchester and imbibes all that enters his zone which led to his habit of grounding songs with a reference to ‘walking down a street’. Some examples follow: in *Blindness*, a one legged narrator hobbles down a street only to find a poster of blind then Cabinet member David Blunkett; in *Jerusalem*, the narrator walks down a street and trips up on a discarded banana skin, bangs his head and declares that ‘it was the government’s fault’; in ‘*Ol’ Gang*, a walk leads him to a ‘fist fight’. Hills are also conspicuous: in *Hard Life in Country* a

league of nymphette New Romantics come ‘over the hill’ to a land where David Bowie lookalikes permeate car parks; *Bad News Girl* sees him tell an ex-wife he’ll see her over the hill, while *Clear Off* sees a killer civil servant go off and away over the hill. The meaning of the walk and the hill remain ever-open to interpretation.

The streets of Manchester have long had a reputation for an underground drug culture and Fall songs frequently reference it. Like De Quincy’s accounts of his laudanum days, Smith didn’t shy from investigating such Mancunian ‘madness’: from the human ‘dwarf’ who played pool to prove his height (*In My Area*) to innumerable tales of pharmaceutical use (e.g., *Underground Medecin*, *Pat-Trip Dispenser*, and *Rowche Rumble*) which added to an overall embrace (but not promotion) of a surreal Manchester filled with fantastical imaginings. Tales such as speed-fuelled all night dancing in Northern Soul clubs as referenced in *Lie Dream of a Casino Soul* ensured his surrealism had one foot in a Mancunian reality where *Container Drivers* receive speed as their wages and tourists visit Manchester to get ‘out of their head on a quid of blow’ (*Idiot Joy Showland*). (In *Idiot Joy Showland* he sang that California has Disneyland, Blackpool has Funland, Flanders has no man’s land, but Manchester has Idiot Show Bands!)

Discussion – Morrissey

Although Hanley (2014: 171) infers Mark E. Smith may have had a point when claiming that Morrissey’s group, The Smiths, had ‘nicked’ his name, Morrissey claims he chose ‘The Smiths’ because of its timeless connotations: it could evoke a Hancock Park of 1947 or a Hulme of 1967 (2013: 147). In style and approach, Morrissey was probably the most self-consciously literary of the three frontmen from the beginning of his career, but focused upon the canon and avoided the obscurer areas that Curtis and Smith dwelt in. Through his autobiography and Hopps’s (2009) academic study it is clear that his was a bookish youth, in which he also

accrued an encyclopaedic knowledge of pop culture, and he filled his time by reading the influences that fuelled much of his early works (Shelagh Delaney, Keats, Yeats, and Wilde): influences that propelled him towards becoming the witty lyricist he is acknowledged to be today. While happily showing off influences, he also celebrated the ordinary individual; subversively promoted vegetarianism (*Meat Is Murder*), opposed the Royal Family (*The Queen Is Dead*), and spoke of his hatred for Margaret Thatcher (*Margaret on the Guillotine*). Such was the effect of his lyrics within the rock medium that Hopps called for Morrissey to be spoken of in the same breath as John Betjeman and Phillip Larkin. Like Smith, his record covers acted as paratexts, but his contained more sentimental images of his Mancunian childhood (see figures 7 and 8).

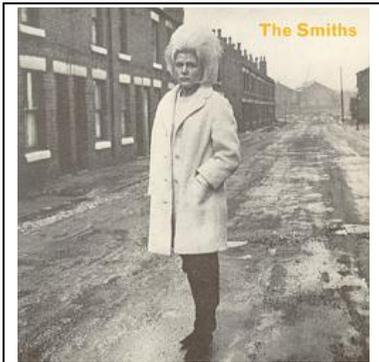


Figure 7: Cover for The Smiths's 'Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now' (1984)

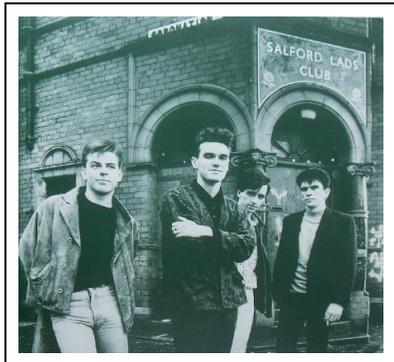


Figure 8: Photo for LP inlay in The Smiths's 'The Queen Is Dead' (1986)

He has referred to his early life as a place where 'birds abstain from song' and the 'dark stone of the terraced houses is black with soot' (2013: 4), an unpleasant environment he would reference in songs. Local crimes fascinated him: *Suffer Little Children* chronicled the appalling Moors Murders that occurred nearby when he was a child, while *The Headmaster's Ritual* told of 'belligerent ghouls [who] run Manchester

schools' - their crimes further outlined in his autobiography. But mainly he focused on writing lyrics on the art of desire, or unfulfilled desire, with songs such as *Accept Yourself, Please, Please, Please Let Me Get What I Want*, and the far brighter *There Is a Light That Never Goes Out*. Later obsessions with crime saw him refer to inner-city tribulations in *Rusholme Ruffians* which revealed a carnivalesque scenario within inner-city Manchester that deteriorated into the stabbing and robbing of a boy, and left the air to 'hang heavy like a dulling wine'. The final Smiths LP was even named after the old name of HM Manchester Prison, 'Strangeways', in *Strangeways Here We Come* (1987).

The most iconic and successful of The Smiths' LPs is an album British Prime Minister David Cameron announced to the press that he enjoyed, *The Queen Is Dead*. After he visited Salford Lads Club, a club immortalised in artwork for that album, Smiths songwriters Morrissey and Johnny Marr took the trouble to disassociate themselves from Cameron. Morrissey (2010) took offense to the Prime Minister's support of foxhunting, writing: 'David Cameron hunts and shoots and kills stags – apparently for pleasure. It was not for such people that either *Meat is Murder* or *The Queen is Dead* were recorded; in fact, they were made as a reaction against such violence'. One also wonders whether a politician in Cameron's position should align himself with an LP with a title track bearing lyrics that gleefully brush with lèse-majesté, Morrissey addressing Prince Charles in the title song with 'Don't you ever crave to appear on the front of The Daily Mail, dressed in your Mother's bridal veil?'

Conclusion

All three frontmen provide insights into the psyche of artists who grew up in the working class streets of a post-war Greater Manchester. Their importance will continue to be probed while regional based and working-class based scenes appear to disappear from the musical radar. Their

oppositional spirit was displayed at a time when ‘capitalist realism’ (Fisher, 2009) destroyed perceived notions of alternative economies. Mark E. Smith may have written *Leave the Capital* (1980) with a desire to ‘exit this Roman shell’ (London) where ‘hotel maids smile in unison’, but he and the other two frontmen could not escape the all-encompassing control of *capital*: of the neo-liberal takeover of economic possibilities that drastically changed Mancunian environments. All three artists displayed an impulse to create without due regard of ‘the market’ but all fell to its pernicious effect: Curtis through a vocation-induced worsening illness, Smith with initial ideologies tempered by an unpredictability unsuited for ‘the business’, and Morrissey with a High Court trial that led to him being dubbed ‘truculent’. All are ill-suited within the dominant neo-liberal cultural narrative, and the ramifications of financial issues compromised the vision of all three, but their outlook remained defiantly yet peculiarly Mancunian – of a certain time. Time has seen only Mark E. Smith stay in the Manchester area; Morrissey re-located to the USA, while Curtis died in Macclesfield. Their voices were unmistakably carved from a memorable time in working class musical history. Increasing interest in the importance of regional identity and music scenes will ensure such topics be discussed well into the future.

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