

Abstract zur Masterarbeit

*“Strangeways, Here We Come”:
Queer Discourse and the Disruption of Normativity
in Morrissey and The Smiths*

One of the definitions of the term *queer* is its opposition to the idea of the concept of the normal rather than a distinction from heterosexuality. In queer theory, this concept of the normal – with the expectations, regulations, and norms that it poses, and therefore the pressure it exerts on individuals unable to meet such norms – is constantly questioned and deconstructed in order to expose its constructedness and draw attention to the basis it provides for discrimination and prejudice. In line with this queer cause, the oeuvre of the British musician Morrissey and his former band The Smiths offers a wide variety of song lyrics that challenge and disrupt normative ideas of the dominant order, especially with regard to sexuality and gender. Instead of feeding into mainstream discourses of romance and sex as solely heterosexual endeavours, Morrissey’s writing maintains a tension of ambiguity, contradiction, and undecidedness concerning the gender and sexuality of his characters that leaves room for a multitude of interpretations and therefore opens the readings of his texts to a queer audience. By allowing both straight and homosexual viewpoints, Morrissey’s lyrics oppose normative assumptions of a compulsory heterosexuality and thereby translate into discourses of a specific queer art form that denaturalises the very idea of the concepts of gender and sexuality.

In order to establish and defend such a view of songs by Morrissey and The Smiths as queer texts, in my analysis of the lyrics I examine their queer potential in terms of the three thematic domains of queer desire, queer discourse, and camp aesthetics. Hereby, I draw on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s approach of a queer reading and her work on homosocial desire in literature, Harold Beaver’s examination of homosexual signs, and Teresa de Lauretis’ definition of queer texts. One of the pillars of de Lauretis’s classification is that of non-closure of a narrative and is thus closely linked to queer negativity and non-futurity. Morrissey and The Smiths’ oeuvre offers a significant set of songs that embrace these ideas. Deriving from Jack Halberstam’s concept of the queer art of failure, Lee Edelman’s critique

of reproductive futurism, Judith Butler's reflections on the term *queer*, José Esteban Muñoz's conceptualisation of a queer utopia, and disability scholars Rosemarie Garland-Thomson and Lennard J. Davis's normativity critiques, I show how Morrissey uses different formulas of negativity and longing to generate power from, thus transforming them into his very own attacks on regimes of the normal. Conclusively, with the help of Susan Sontag's register of camp style, I trace fundamental aspects of camp in Morrissey's usage of pathos, irony, and frivolity as playful engagements with the serious, thus redeeming the serious of its naturalising implications by questioning its essential truth value. It is in this diverse and subversive expression of queer negativity, desire, and camp aesthetic that Morrissey disrupts normativity and its underlying stigmatising and discriminating potential, and thereby contributes to the multitude of ways in which art can shape discourses of sexuality, gender, and normativity.