Brontë Schiltz, independent researcher, UK

"But What about Me, and What I Felt?": Morrissey's List of the Lost as Queer Gothic

Abstract

In one of the numerous negative reviews, Michael Hann described singer-songwriter Morrissey's debut novella, List of the Lost (2015), as "an unpolished turd of a book, the stale excrement of Morrissey's imagination," yet from a queer perspective, it is pioneering. This article explores Morrissey's innovative engagement with Gothic horror, building on his explorations of the mode during his musical career. Throughout the novella, Morrissey subverts numerous Gothic staples, from curative maternity and reproductive futurity to monstrously fragmented subjectivity to condemnations of Catholicism – the latter of which he retains, though to entirely different ends to his Protestant literary ancestors. Through such devices, Morrissey participates in Teresa Goddu's concept of 'haunting back,' turning hostile Gothic tropes on their head to carve out a new space for queer experience within the mode – historically conservative as often as it is transgressive – and reveals the true specter of society to be not difference, but its suppression.

Keywords: Gothic, queer Gothic, monstrosity, spectrality, reproductive futurity, ghost stories, horror, queer horror, indie music, indie rock

In one of the numerous negative reviews, Michael Hann described singer-songwriter Morrissey's debut novella, List of the Lost (2015), as "an unpolished turd of a book, the stale excrement of Morrissey's imagination." From a queer perspective, however, it is pioneering. As an exploration of the deep-rooted adolescent anxieties attached to burgeoning queer desire, the novella offers answers to questions many young people struggle to articulate. Through an innovative engagement with the Gothic, it embraces queerness in the truest sense, not merely centering on

gay characters and their experiences but suggesting strategies of thoroughly rejecting heteronormative expectations. Read through this lens, the novella is worthy of far greater critical attention than it was granted on its release.

William Hughes and Andrew Smith argue that "Gothic has, in a sense, always been 'queer'" (1). Delving deeper into this assertion, George Haggerty posits that

> *[i]t is no mere coincidence that the cult of gothic fiction reached its apex at the very moment when gender and sexuality were beginning to be codified for modern culture… Gothic fiction offered the one semirespectable area of literary endeavor in which modes of sexual and social transgression were discursively addressed on a regular basis [and therefore] itself helped shape thinking about sexual matters – theories of sexuality, as it were. (2-3)*

Dale Townshend adds that "[i]f contemporary popular culture is anything to go by, the Gothic is more in need of a straightening out than a queering up" – but proceeds to note "queer monstrosities," "cinema's long-term exploitation of the monstrous queer," "queer terrors," and "spine-chilling queerness" (11-12). As such terms imply, Townshend acknowledges that "queerness in early Gothic is consistently bound up in the problems of negative representation" (27). Similarly, Ellis Hanson argues that "the Gothic often reproduces the conventional paranoid structure of homophobia and other moral panics over sex, and yet it can also be a raucous site of sexual transgression and excess that undermines its own narrative efforts at erotic containment," though adds that "queer reading rescues us from homophobic paranoia by reading Gothic narratives against the grain" (176). This still implies, though, that the Gothic tradition is inherently homophobic, requiring deliberate reading strategies to escape censure. In List of the Lost, however, queerness is central to the narrative, which explores the formation of selfhood in four teenage relay racers at an American high school – Ezra, Nails, Harri, and Justy – after they accidentally kill a mysterious stranger, whom Morrissey had described before the novella's publication as "a discarnate entity in physical form" ("Morrissey's Novel List of the Lost").

This entity is one of Townshend's spine-chilling queers – a "wretch" who survives for only six pages before he administers "a lightning-fast pinch between Ezra's legs" (Morrissey, List of the Lost 28) and Ezra fatally hits him. This unleashes a curse on the protagonists – all of them die before the

end of the book, except for Ezra, who suffers a worse fate, "condemned to life" completely alone (113). The wretch's sexuality is explicitly established by this point – immediately after meeting the team, he recalls: "I'd known a boy from over the back, and I'd stand on tip-toe to watch him every day at four o'clock ... not knowing why at first. I'd wait to the point of excited tears" (25). He then reveals the hardship that led to his current circumstances to be "the demands of other people, other people, other people, other people, other people," and asks, "but what about me, and what I felt? … They said my emotions were unusual, but they weren't unusual enough for there not to be laws against them, so they must have been quite common, in fact, and not unusual at all" (25). The narrator describes him as "[a] pitiful vision of life's loneliness ... trapped in his history – the history that created him" (22-23), neatly mirroring Butler's concept of 'heterosexual melancholy' (95), in which the social prohibition of queer desire from childhood produces a damaging – even monstrous – effect on the human psyche. The wretch is not monstrous because he is queer but has become so because he has not been permitted to express his desires. Ezra's panicked response therefore suggests, as well as repulsion from an unwanted sexual overture, an inability to reconcile the repression of his own queerness, soon to be explored, with this forthright rebellion against the societal constraints that necessitate self-subdual.

The novella also grapples with associations of queerness with pedophilic monstrosity. Hann remarks that Morrissey's "attitude towards sex ... seems to be predatory: older men feed upon the young." This fails to account, however, for Morrissey's handling of this theme. Child abuse is far from anomalous in Gothic fiction – "[v]ictimization of the young is… a Gothic staple, and concern for the safety of children has been there from the first" (Haggerty 131). In List of the Lost, the most obviously evil character is Dean Isaac, who "molested and butchered" a young boy, Noah (Morrissey 64). Isaac is also gay, telling the team: "I look at young men such as yourselves, and that really is enough for me" (103). However, this is not established until page 103 of 118 and, as Police & Crime Commissioner-backed organization Victims First's website notes, "[m]en who rape other men do so as an expression of power or control. They might be heterosexual ... A man's sexuality does not cause him to rape." Meanwhile, the relationship between the team is charged with eroticism from the very beginning, when we are informed that they "performed marital duties as joined by strengths, but not weaknesses, and this crowned their lives. They each saw the

desirable object within each other, and combined, they had no cause to justify one second of their contract" (Morrissey, List of the Lost 2). Morrissey encourages the reader to regard them approvingly, describing them as "[o]ur four boys" and "our heroes" (1, 54). Elsewhere, predatory desire is also explored in a heterosexual context through the team's coach, Rims, who "sees teenage girls as he saw them when he too were a teenager, and he cannot bear that they no longer see him – as they once had" (41). Queerness and sexual violence are never conflated – as in reality, the capacity for love and for abuse has no correlation with sexuality.

Morrissey also questions public interest in sexual abuse. The narrator notes that

> *Noah Barbelo's name had slipped from print as an embarrassingly timed discovery that had been inefficiently investigated and then flicked away with easy conscience. Had Noah been Naomi, perhaps the hot-pants turn-on might have sweet-toothed the press into a more aroused cruise mode, but it was rarely admitted that such off-base sex attacks could possibly befall boys such as Noah, and thus the media struggled with the language required to describe what they could have outlined with such impressive oomph and glitz had Noah been a fluffy girl. (88)*

Jennifer Patterson laments the "mainstream understanding of [sexual] violence in which the 'victim' is (assumed) to be a white, cisgender, heterosexual, virginal woman – the perfect survivor" (3). Such a conceptualization of victimhood is a double-edged sword, injuring victims who fall outside of these demographics with invisibility (and, sometimes, exclusion from supportive organizations) and those who match it with cultural fetishization. One need only think of the posters advertising Gothic offerings from Hollywood's Golden Age, such as 1931's Dracula or 1933's King Kong, in which young, pale women lie prostrate and scantily clad in the (male) monster's arms in a disturbingly erotic suggestion of impending violation. Mair Rigby argues that early Gothic fiction put "into play signs and codes," including "the unspeakable," that came "to double as ... tropes ... of sexual 'deviance'" (38), but in List of the Lost, Morrissey turns this monstrous unspeakableness back onto heterosexual deviance. Isaac's rape and murder of Noah is underplayed by the media, he suggests, because it does not appeal to the public's predatory voyeuristic interest in female victims of sexual crimes – including children. Morrissey was also himself a victim of sexual abuse at school, recounting in his Autobiography how

[o]ne day during five-a-side, I flip forwards and crash down on my right hand. This stirs a blip of compassion from Mr Sweeney, who then takes me into his private office, whereupon he proceeds to massage my wrist with anti-inflammatory cream. At 14, I understand the meaning of the unnecessarily slow and sensual strokes, with eyes fixed to mine, and I look away, and the moment passes. Shortly thereafter, drying myself off after a shower, Mr Sweeney leans into my mid-region to ask, 'What's that scar down your stomach, Steven?' – but his eyes are lower, and these are the moments that cause you to check certain words in dictionaries, and for the first time you are forced to consider yourself to be the prize, or the quarry. (52)

Morrissey is assertive in distinguishing this from his own queer desire, which developed concurrently but separately from his victimization. In List of the Lost, he continues to raise the oft-erased voice of male victims of sexual assault while explicitly disaffiliating predation from respectful desire and consensual bonds.

List of the Lost also challenges heteronormative constructs of monstrosity by positioning motherhood as one of its most tragic and disruptive forces. In a ground-breaking piece of horror criticism, Barbara Creed coined the term 'monstrous-feminine' to explore "what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject" (1), arguing that "when woman is represented as monstrous [in horror cinema] it is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions" (7). Yet within the Gothic literary tradition, motherhood often functions as a restorative force – the works of Ann Radcliffe, for instance, "all begin by sketching the pastoral Eden of safe family life ... and end back in the haven of a new family which duplicates the virtues of the initial one" (Durant 520). In some cases, order is restored through the rediscovery of the original – "[i]n The Italian and A Sicilian Romance, the supposedly dead mother comes back to life" (Durant 526). In List of the Lost, however, motherhood is stripped of such curative properties and instead becomes monstrous, yet unlike the sources of Creed's censure, this monstrosity derives from a demonization not of female sexuality, but of heteronormative expectations. Lee Edelman argues that, particularly in America, politicians "recurrently frame their political struggle ... as a 'fight for our children – for our daughters and our sons,' and thus as a fight for the future," an ideology he terms "reproductive futurism" (2). Within such a system, "queerness names the side of those not 'fighting for the children,' the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of

reproductive futurism" (Edelman 3). Carla Freccero aligns this structure with the Gothic imagination, arguing that 'heteroreproductive futurity' produces "the illusion of a choice between 'life' and 'death'" and proposes "haunting – a mode of 'precarious life' – as an alternative model for how queer history might proceed" (337). That is, queer subjectivity is inherently spectral, uncomfortably placed in the social binary of 'life' (heterosexual reproduction) and 'death' (childlessness). Haggerty likewise argues that "apocalyptic thinking places male-male desire at the fulcrum of cultural collapse," potentially because of "the desire for the escape from heteronormativity that male love offers," and that "[m]ale love, properly articulated and fully identified, can only mean the end of history" (128). Yet Morrissey celebrates this liminality – in an unreleased track recorded in 1992, he remarks: "I am born to hang / Well, it's all healthy news / In a nutshell, this means / That I never have to live like you" – that is, to "wed ... someone who I don't even love" and "have kids" ("Born to Hang"). Premature death, he suggests, would be preferable to a life spent conforming to heteronormative expectations at the cost of affection and freedom. In List of the Lost, moreover, he takes this even further: queerness offers salvation, while heteronormativity spells catastrophe.

The most explicitly supernatural figure of the novella is Elizabeth Barbelo, "a shrunken and concave visualization that looked as if released from her own grave" (Morrissey, List of the Lost 63), who is characterized almost entirely through her role as Noah's mother. She tells Ezra that Noah is "the one and only thing I have ever loved" and even that "he is me" (66). The only other mother in the text is Harri's, and she is mentioned only upon his realization that his "[i]mmortal, indestructible mother is dead" (48), and then ends his own life. Parenthood, then, is associated both with the destruction of individual subjectivity and literal death. Queerness, meanwhile, is portrayed as a socially prohibited opportunity to fully realize the self:

Heatedly the four gather daily, minus boos and taboos, free of the prohibitions that dishonour us all should we dare remark upon each other's physical good fortune … Did you ever compliment a friend, a mere friend, on the directed desire of their eyes? Of course you didn't. Or on their sexually agreeable smile? Of course you wouldn't. Or on their hands – whose touch certainly does something as the waft of their passing being triggers unsuspecting impulses within unsuspecting you? The will to find all of these motions in others runs strong in our being, yet we must only ever

observe without acting, and even the very words that are in themselves a form of action … must never be said. (3-4)

Morrissey thus presents queer desire as an opportunity for authentic expression and therefore a site of self-actualization, if only it could be indulged. In The Smiths' "Back to the Old House" (1984), he melancholically laments that his addressee "never knew how much I really liked you / Because I never even told you / Oh, and I meant to." The line is tragic, but as a novelist, Morrissey suggests one way of avoiding such suffering: forsaking the heteronormative prerogative that prohibits the expression of queer desire. Meanwhile, adherence to heteronormative expectations, textually contained in the symbol of heterosexual reproduction, invariably results in devastation, inverting traditional portrayals of queer monstrosity.

Maternity also assumes a spectral narrative role. Early in the novella, Ezra's girlfriend, Eliza, tells him that she is "definitely having a baby," then clarifies that "the baby was not currently within, but that the wish would one day certainly be fulfilled" (15-16). This desire for a union sealed by reproduction haunts the narrative – although "[b]eyond each other and their will to run, [the team] seek no other distraction" (2), Ezra remains with Eliza until her death five pages before the end of the text. By this point, Ezra's teammates are already dead, and it is too late to seek the sexual or emotional fulfilment with them that he obviously desired. After Eliza's death, semiconscious in hospital, Ezra imagines a visitation from a spectral Harri. In this fantasy space, he "lean[s] into a rolling and groaning Harri" and

kisse[s] him softly on the head and Harri look[s] up with eyes that shed a gentle melancholy at an affection so unexpected and one that moves different people in different ways. … 'May we never be apart,' Ezra sensitively murmur[s] to Harri, knowing that love could never be experienced without risk, or without a voice with a certain sound. (115)

During this exchange, Eliza is "chewing on a pencil in Ezra's memory" (116), no longer the primary recipient of his affection. Townshend posits that "in by far the majority of cases, heterosexual marriage … appears to be the teleological goal to which most Gothic fictions aspired" (13). In Wilkie Collins's Gothic works, Ardel Haefele-Thomas adds, the solution to a preceding "crisis in the heterosexual marriage plot … [rests] with the ingenuity of a queer character" (5). Here, however,

rather than queer characters aiding a heteronormative romantic denouement, queer unions are possible only in dreams due to the looming specter of heterosexuality. Morrissey thereby opposes the Gothic's conservative strain and reclaims the mode on his own terms, exploring the horrors visited on queer subjects within a heteronormative social framework.

It is little surprise, given Morrissey's obvious investment in the novella's central thematic concerns, that List of the Lost has been widely read as partially autobiographical; Hann, for instance, titled his article "Morrissey: what we learned about him from List of the Lost." Brian Loftus argues that "'queer autobiography' … expresses both the problem of the homosexual's entry into representation and the (im)possibilities of the claim to an 'I' that autobiography demands" (28). That is, the narrativization of the self is complicated for the queer subject due to a shortage of predecessors on whose experiences to draw and the complexity of condensing an experience that defies the normative markers of the life story into a straightforward narrative. William C. Spengemann discusses similar pitfalls more broadly in The Forms of Autobiography – one of which, he argues, is "poetic autobiography" (110), an early theorization of autofiction. Taking David Copperfield as an example, he argues that "Dickens saw in his past experiences not the tangled root-system of a single self but the seeds of many separate selves, all of whom had some ineffable kinship with each other but could be brought together only upon a fictive stage" (130). This persistent difficulty in condensing experience into the narrative of a singular, continuous, and linear subjectivity is integral to the Gothic, which typically "fragments stable identity and social order" (Hendershot 1). As Haefele-Thomas argues, "many … Gothic monsters cause fear and panic because of their uncanny ability to simultaneously embody multiple subject positions" (4). This uncanny fragmentation of identity abounds in List of the Lost. Notably, however, its characters primarily provoke anxiety not in others, but in themselves, tormented by their inability to embody a stable subjectivity due to societal prohibitions.

Adam Sherwin suggests that "[l]iterary critics may have missed an elaborate metaphor at the heart of the book. For its four young heroes … read Morrissey, Johnny Marr, Andy Rourke and Mike Joyce of The Smiths." What he misses, however, is that Morrissey weaves his own experience into every corner of the text, sometimes deliberately drawing attention to this scattering of subjectivity. Following Harri's death, one of his teammates complains to another that "[y]our leg is touching my

leg, which is all very nice, but I think of you more as a friend," and the addressee replies, "Ah yes! Sorry! God forbid a leg touch another leg and the entire foundation of rigid sexual mores crash to shuddering, shamed failure!" (Morrissey, List of the Lost 58). The third surviving runner then recalls how Harri would

> *walk across the field ... towards me … with that strong stride and stupid with smiles, and I'd be happy just to hear whatever the hell would stream out of him on that day, on any day ... that open face, that knowing grin ... that grin I'd known all of my life ... before we'd even met. I grew up on tales of his exploits, I knew his body like I knew my own. (58)*

This dialogue is untagged, and the narrator remarks that "[a]t this stage it hardly mattered who was saying what" (58). The Gothic, a form intimately concerned with both transgression and fragmentation, provides the ideal mode for Morrissey's exploration of the struggle of containing internalized homophobia ("Your leg is touching my leg…"), heteronormative expectations ("God forbid a leg touch another leg…") and queer desire ("I knew his body like I knew my own…") within a single coherent identity. Queer existence within a homophobic culture fragments subjectivity – many people experience shame or at least trepidation concerning how others will treat them alongside the desire such anxieties spring from. Like many Gothic figures, Morrissey's characters function not so much as representations of real people but as ciphers for particular aspects of human experience. Jack Halberstam[1] argues that "[t]he monster always represents the disruption of categories, the destruction of boundaries, and the presence of impurities and so we need monsters and we need to recognize and celebrate our own monstrosities" (27). In List of the Lost, this destruction also includes the boundary between human and monster: the novella's heroes, much like the traditional Gothic villain, signify those who dominant culture holds "must be removed from the community at large" (Halberstam 3) for it to maintain the stories it tells itself about itself. As such, Morrissey directly counteracts the fact that "most Gothic novels lack the point of view of the monster" (Halberstam 21) – marginalized perspectives fill its pages, constantly refracting to explore the nuanced complexities of subjugated human identities.

If List of the Lost tells the story of an aspect of Morrissey's life, then, it is the misery produced by heteronormative culture. Expanding his reading of David Copperfield, Spengemann argues that

"[t]he concern with self that permeates autobiography is evident ... in Dickens's apparent need to write about a period of his life that was so distasteful, even shameful; to confess himself publicly, as it were, and to redeem his past" (123). This compulsion towards purification also emerges in List of the Lost, though here it is society, not the self, of which Morrissey seems to be ashamed. The narrative is set in "1975, so lavish with promise, so sadistic in demand" (Morrissey, List of the Lost 7). Born in 1959, this was the year that Morrissey, who describes himself as "humasexual" ("Statement"), turned sixteen, and thus his sexual desire for women became legally permissible while enactment of his desire for men was to remain illegal for another five years. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 lowered the age of consent for sex between men from 21 to 18, then the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000 lowered it again to 16, finally offering queer Britons the same sexual rights as their heterosexual compatriots, but these changes arrived decades after Morrissey's adolescence. The novella's temporal setting, when considered alongside its central themes, thereby suggests a preoccupation with the homophobic constraints of its author's own past. This is addressed explicitly when the narrator remarks that "the grand assumption that all children are extensively heterosexually resolved at birth whipped a demented torment across the many who were not" (Morrissey, List of the Lost 11). Morrissey thus draws on the Gothic's "emphasis on the returning past" (Spooner and McEvoy 1) to explore the haunting influence of his personal history on his own identity.

List of the Lost also offers a radical reworking of the Gothic mode's historical use of Catholicism as a signifier of queer desire. Haggerty notes that "Catholicism emerges from the historical setting to play an active role in most gothic novels" (63) to such an extent that the denomination and sexual transgression become interchangeable:

> *When, in The Monk (1796) Matthew G. Lewis uses the details of conventual life to suggest lurid forms of sexual excess ... he does not need to explain his choice of a Catholic setting ... Although reviewers criticized Lewis's excess, they never suggested that his portrayal of Catholic monastic life was inappropriate. (63-64)*

Townshend likewise notes that "queer desire in The Monk and Melmoth the Wanderer figures as an exclusively Catholic phenomenon, a form of perversion that, for all its unproductivity, breeds

wildly and profusely within the confines of the all-male Abbey or monastery" (24). Morrissey also draws on this collapse of signification, though to entirely different ends. Christian condemnations of homosexuality are a recurrent theme – the "wretch" asks why, since his feelings are apparently "impossible to satisfy ... are they there ... in God's image!" (Morrissey, List of the Lost 25). The narrator also remarks that "there would certainly be no question of allowing the child time to choose its preferred religion" while contemplating "sexual cremation for the young child" (11). Although Catholicism is not specified in these passages, it is implied in the observation that "[t]he Church is obsessed with everlasting punishment, or forgiveness ... It's not enough to commit yourself to God – but you are quite unfairly obliged to commit yourself every single day, hour after hour" (104). Catholicism, then, is monstrous not for facilitating sexual transgression, but for constructing a world in which "[t]he natural order is the one that essentially suits [those in power], and they consider execution far too comfortable an end for people who don't share their very private lusts" (104) – by which, presumably, Morrissey means heterosexuality. This reflects Morrissey's own experience of becoming "a seriously lapsed Catholic ... after being forced to go to church and never understanding why and never enjoying it, seeing so many negative things, and realising it somehow wasn't for me" ("The Soft Touch"). This quandary appears to be inseparable from his sexual identity. In the 2004 single "I Have Forgiven Jesus," an exploration of Catholic guilt, Morrissey asks the Messiah: "Why did you give me so much desire / When there is nowhere I can go to offload this desire? / And why did you give me so much love in a loveless world / When there is no one I can turn to / To unlock all this love?" In the music video, he appears in a priest's cassock while his band wear t-shirts emblazoned with "Jobriath" – the name of "the first gay pop star" (Almond). Even decades after Morrissey's abandonment of Catholicism, then, its early influence clearly retained a substantial and detrimental impact on his sense of self, particularly regarding queer desire. In appropriating the Gothic preoccupation with the denomination to signify homophobic rather than queer monstrosity, he thereby creates a subversive space in which to safely explore his injurious early experiences.

Moreover, when Morrissey's autobiography was first published in America, where he has lived since the turn of the twenty-first century, "three sentences detailing his relationship with [former partner] Jake Walters ... were removed from the book. Two other sentences were tweaked, and a

picture of Walters was excised, too" (Lynch). In US-set List of the Lost, Morrissey uses the Gothic mode to explicitly reclaim his formerly suppressed identity – to excise mentions of queer sexuality from the novella would reduce it to a mere pamphlet, hardly likely to generate substantial economic returns for a conservative publisher. He thus also again diverges from the Gothic's historical condemnation of Catholicism based on Protestant sexual morals. A 2022 report found that in America, 70% of Catholics believed that homosexuality should be accepted. This falls to 66% among mainline Protestants and 36% among evangelical Protestants. With Protestantism being the largest faith group in, and a major cultural influence on, America, Morrissey's pushback against the censorship of his autobiography in his adopted country also signifies a rejection of all Christian homophobia.

The novella is not the only time Morrissey has dabbled in the queer Gothic – the mode recurs throughout his oeuvre. In The Smiths' 1986 song "Cemetry Gates," [sic] he aligns himself with Oscar Wilde; in 1994's "I Am Hated For Loving," he declares himself "haunted for wanting"; and on the same album, Vauxhall and I, "Spring-Heeled Jim," named after mythological Spring-Heeled Jack, features the lyrics "So many women / His head should be spinning / Ah, but no!" 2006's "You Have Killed Me" even situates lines from Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights alongside homoerotic innuendos – "I entered nothing and nothing entered me / 'Til you came with the key" – and mentions queer filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini. Morrissey engages more directly with Gothic literature in "Billy Budd," also from Vauxhall and I, evoking Herman Melville's novella of the same name, posthumously published in 1924, about the downfall of a handsome young sailor. The antagonist, Claggart, is explicitly queer – "sometimes [his] melancholy expression would have in it a touch of soft yearning," Melville writes, "as if [he] could even have loved Billy but for fate and ban" (265). Instead, Claggart accuses Billy of conspiracy to mutiny, Billy kills him in his panic, and the rest of the crew are forced to sentence Billy to death in accordance with maritime law. As in The Monk, "because same-sex love is impossible, everyone becomes a victim" (Haggerty 26), and Robert Martin hypothesizes that "Melville was not able to imagine what it might have been like for two men to love each other and survive" (7). Despite the tragedy of the tale, which knowingly evokes "Radcliffian romance" (Melville 253), James Creech claims it as an "important piece of homosexual meaning in American literature" (10). Morrissey preserves this meaning, though the

song's narrative is entirely different, concerning prejudice and discrimination, and despite the heavy subject matter, it ends with a declaration of love: "I would happily lose both of my legs ... If it meant you could be free" ("Billy Budd"). Notably, though, he divests the song's source material of its Gothic trappings. In 1994, he perhaps found the mode too hostile to evoke in an exploration of loving queer self-sacrifice. Two decades later, however, he takes a more emboldened approach. List of the Lost represents an act of 'haunting back,' in which subordinated subjects rework "the gothic's conventions to intervene in discourse that would demonize them" (Goddu 138) and participates in a recent renaissance of queer Gothic texts offering "a much needed positive antidote to a hostile backlash against homosexuality" (Armitt 119).

List of the Lost is not without its weaknesses – it won 2015's Bad Sex Award, though reading the portrayal of sexual intercourse between Eliza and Ezra (who the narrator repeatedly suggests is probably gay) as deliberately grotesque is not beyond the realm of plausibility. Regardless of the validity of Hann's assertions that "Morrissey can't write dialogue" or that his apparent lack of research into relay racing is "the least of List of the Lost's problems," however, the claim that the novella suffers from an "inability to come to any sort of a point" feels misguided given the persistent engagement with queer subjectivity through Gothic tropes. Responding to the novella's overwhelmingly negative reviews, Morrissey suggested that critics should not take "the moral high ground against a book just because you don't like it. It wasn't written for you" ("Morrissey Bites Back"). While he does not specify who the intended audience is, the text's central concerns suggest an imagined queer readership. After all, as Nadine Hubbs has noted, Morrissey has long "explore[d] queer themes, in the most knowledgably 'inside' of queer-insider language. This sign is abundantly meaningful to other insiders: for queer listeners, Morrissey's work is about queer erotics and experience" (285). She means this quite literally – 1990 single "Piccadilly Palare" features Polari, "a secret gay language" (Baker, Polari 1). Paul Baker, in his recent history of Polari, remarks that the stories of its users "were not told. If they were ever represented in books, films, plays or songs, they were usually given tiny supporting roles, and the audience was not supposed to identify with or root for them" (Fantabulosa! 11). Yet here was Morrissey three decades prior, crooning that "the Piccadilly palare was just silly slang / Between me and the boys in my gang," providing no translations of lyrics like "So bona to vada, oh you / Your lovely eek and

your lovely riah" for non-members – "You wouldn't understand / Good sons like you never do" ("Piccadilly Palare"). The stated aim of Polari – that people turned into criminals for their harmless desires "could not be understood by others" (Baker, Fantabulosa! 11) – is by no means overturned here. Morrissey conveys no desire for mainstream approval.

This refusal to translate an often silenced minoritized experience for a majority audience likewise constitutes the heart of List of the Lost's charm. In The Celluloid Closet, the 1996 documentary film based on Vito Russo's book of the same name, gay actor and screenwriter Harvey Fierstein remarks that

> *the reading I was given to do in school was always heterosexual, every movie I saw was heterosexual, and I had to do this translation. I had to translate it to my life rather than seeing my life, which is why when people say to me, 'your work is not really gay work, it's universal' ... I say, 'up yours! ... It's gay, and that you can take it and translate it for your own life is very nice, but at last, I don't have to do the translating; you do.*

With List of the Lost, Morrissey pushes this sentiment to its extreme – the language with which he crafts it is so obscure that translation was ostensibly impossible for much of its mainstream readership. Monique Wittig argues that "[a] text by a minority writer is effective only if it succeeds in making the minority point of view universal, only if it is an important literary text" (62). Alan Sinfield, however, contests this view, arguing that

> *Wittig is right: if you take 'literature' as your reference point, it will draw you towards a 'universal', i.e. straightgeist (straight-mind), way of thinking. But why should the lesbian or gay man be wanting 'above all to create a literary work'? 'Art' and 'literature' are defined by the established gatekeepers as meaningful to heterosexuals. (157)*

Nabeel Zuberi concurs: "the idea of coherence always comes down to one basic question: Whose coherence is it anyway? Coherence is mapped out by particular groups with the most power. If their coherence breaks down, then that allows other more marginalized voices to be heard" (189). This postmodern philosophy echoes Gothic preoccupations. As David Punter argues, the Gothic increasingly "speaks ... with the voice of the repressed; it is relentlessly dissatisfied with the official account of things" (10). Moreover, Horace Walpole, author of The Castle of Otranto (1764), widely

considered the first Gothic novel, distinguished the mode from Classicism precisely by arguing that "[o]ne must have taste to be sensible of the beauties of Grecian architecture; one only wants passions to feel Gothic" (94).

List of the Lost is perhaps most effective when reading focuses not on typical assessments of form but on its fantastical articulation of queer subjectivity, so hard to express in traditional realist terms. Steven Bruhm argues that "[t]he Gothic's basic investment in ravaging history and fragmenting the past meshes with our own investments now as we attempt to reinvent history as a way of healing the perpetual loss in modern existence" (274). That, surely, is the point of List of the Lost: to take a mode in which queerness has, for centuries, been both visible and monstrous, and to turn that visibility and monstrosity back onto the forces that suppress it. Homophobia is, after all, the cause of many of "the complicated pangs of the empty experiences of flesh-and-blood human figures" and fraught friction of "the reality of what is true against what is permitted to be true" (Morrissey, List of the Lost blurb). It is the reason why, for some – and certainly, it would seem, for Morrissey – "nothing can ever be enough" (List of the Lost blurb).

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[1] Since the publication of Skin Shows under the name Judith, Halberstam came out as transgender and changed his name to Jack.



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