

## Chapter 11

‘[S]he Loved Him Madly’: Music, Mixtapes and Gendered Authorship in Alan

Warner’s *Morvern Callar*

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Popular music is an integral feature of Alan Warner’s *Morvern Callar* (1995), a novel which is often categorised – alongside Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* (1993) – as a fiction of the ‘repetitive beat generation’.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, dance music cultures play an important role in the narrative of *Morvern Callar* in which the eponymous protagonist is depicted as escaping the post-industrial Scottish port of her childhood for the ecstatic pleasures of the rave clubs of the Spanish Mediterranean. However, the club sound system is not the only, or even primary, source of music in Warner’s novel. Car stereos, domestic record players and pub jukeboxes all play their part but the most frequently occurring mode of listening in *Morvern Callar* is privatised; it takes place through what Iain Chambers has called the ‘equipment of modern

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Repetitive beat generation’ is a term coined by Steve Redhead in a collection of the same title; its name is taken from the prohibitive legislation which politicised the dance subculture which it sought to control. For Redhead the fiction of the ‘repetitive beat generation’ is not merely a narrative counterpart to the rave music phenomenon but also expressive of ‘the new counter cultures which have grown up in the wake of yuppiedom, and so-called Thatcher-ism, the free market, economic globalisation and the New Right’. Steve Redhead, ‘Introduction: The Repetitive Beat Generation – Live’, *Repetitive Beat Generation* (Edinburgh, 2000), p. xxvii.

nomadism:<sup>2</sup> the personal stereo. Moreover, the music which is ‘in the ears’<sup>3</sup> (as Morvern puts it) is much more eclectic than the ‘repetitive beat’ denomination might suggest; it ranges from jazz (mostly free, electric and funk) to Krautrock, post-punk and Afropop. Of the many track citations which occur in the novel, the two groupings which receive by far the most references (whether as a collective or in solo projects) are a German experimental rock band formed in the late 1960s and a late 1980s free jazz supergroup: Can and Last Exit respectively. This emphasis on avant-garde music characterised by experiment, innovation and improvisation is far removed from the lyrical, narrative and performer-based pop song which can be so readily enlisted to signify affect, action and character. The majority of the music is not contemporaneous to the narrative or its young protagonist and – in an era before the advent of internet file sharing – its collation implies a degree of knowledge, systematic acquisition and selective consumption. These qualities, combined with the careful and curatorial compilation cassette track listings which are orthographically reproduced in the text of the novel, conspire to suggest a musical sensibility which has more in common with the thirty-something record store owner protagonist of Nick Hornby’s novel of male middle-class fandom, *High Fidelity* (1995), than with the Iggy Pop fan and heroin addict protagonist of Irvine Welsh’s ‘repetitive beat generation’ classic, *Trainspotting* (1993). Such an analogy is all the more striking given the conventional gendering of pop and rock connoisseurship as a male-dominated activity. To date little critical attention has been paid to the diverse nature of popular music citations in Alan Warner’s novel; this chapter aims to redress this, through a focus on the content and significance of Morvern’s compilation cassette tapes. Moreover, it will examine the gendered politics of music consumption as they pertain to Warner’s depiction of his young female protagonist. Authorship

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<sup>2</sup> Iain Chambers, ‘A miniature history of the Walkman’, in Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda James, Hugh Mackay and Keith Negus (eds), *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*, (London, 1997), p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Warner, *Morvern Callar* (London, 1995), p. 12 and p. 13.

as a gendered category is cast into crisis from the outset of this novel when Morvern appropriates the unpublished manuscript of her older, and now deceased, boyfriend; this chapter will examine the ways in which this tension may be said extend to the ‘authorship’ of Morvern’s musical tastes.

### **‘The Noise of Trouble’: Soundtracks and Subjectivity**

Alan Warner’s novel begins with Morvern’s discovery of the dead body of her older boyfriend, known only as ‘Him’, who has committed suicide in the home that they share; he leaves behind an unpublished manuscript and a request that he not be ‘LOST IN SILENCE’.<sup>4</sup> Morvern later overwrites his name on the computer disk containing his life’s work, submits it to a London-based publisher under her own name, and uses the advance to fund a youth-oriented package holiday for herself and her best friend Lanna. Morvern does not notify anyone of her boyfriend’s death, only later concealing his corpse for fear of discovery. Using skills acquired while working ‘in the meat’<sup>5</sup> at the butcher’s counter of a local supermarket, she dismembers his body and buries it in parcels in the Scottish Highlands during a summer camping trip. Morvern’s failure to notify the authorities of her boyfriend’s death by suicide could be attributed to the traumatic after-effects of the discovery of his self-mutilated corpse; however, her clinically executed disposal of his remains might test the reader’s sympathies. Indeed, an apparent absence of affect is a distinctive feature of Morvern’s enigmatic first person narrative; in this context, music might seem to offer indirect access to the motivations and emotions which Morvern does not otherwise disclose. Carole Jones expresses this hope when she describes music in *Morvern Callar* as ‘a source of feeling, a substitute for [Morvern’s] inaccessible emotions’.<sup>6</sup> Morvern is depicted as compiling cassette tapes to accompany key activities; the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Carole Jones, *Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979–1999* (Amsterdam and New York, 2009), p. 175.

close identification between these mixtapes and Morvern's narrative point of view – she selects the music and comprises its sole audience – implies that they may exercise a privileged role in disclosing her narrative perspective.

In his study of the uses of music in film, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, Michel Chion constructs categories to describe the different affective functions that music may serve within a film narrative; he describes 'empathetic' music as 'directly express[ing] its participation in the feeling of the scene, by taking on the scene's rhythm, tone, and phrasing' and observes that 'such music participates in cultural codes for things like sadness, happiness, and movement'.<sup>7</sup> This framework of analysis might also be extended to the uses of music in literary narrative. Sunbathing in a Mediterranean holiday resort forms the focus of one of Morvern's three mixtapes; it is an activity which most readers will be able to recognise and with which many will identify. But what recognisable 'cultural codes' exist for the dismemberment of a man's body in a domestic bathroom or the burial of his remains in the Scottish Highlands (the activities which two of Morvern's 'suitable compilation[s]'<sup>8</sup> accompany)? Moreover, the diverse, eclectic and even obscure musical content of these compilations do not readily mobilise popular cultural codes; in the close analysis which follows I will suggest that these citations perhaps serve to compound, rather than dispel, the impression of an inaccessible interiority.

The three minute pop song is nowhere in evidence in the mixtape which Morvern compiles for the dismemberment of her boyfriend's corpse; it consists almost exclusively of avant-garde improvisational compositions, mostly in the free and electric jazz genres. The compilation opens with two tracks from *The Noise of Trouble*, a 1987 live album recorded in Tokyo by the free jazz supergroup *Last Exit*. Solo recordings by the band's members make up a further five tracks in this ten track tape, including electric guitarist Sonny Sharrock's 'Dick

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<sup>7</sup> Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. and ed. Claudia Gorbman (New York, 1990), p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Warner, p. 80.

Dogs' (from the 1996 album *Into Another Light*), drummer Ronald Shannon Jackson's 'Undressing' (from the 1985 album *Decode Yourself*) and bass guitarist Bill Laswell's 'Assassin' (from the 1988 album *Hear No Evil*). Renowned for the volume and aggression of their live performances, *Last Exit* provide a driving, fast-paced and agitated soundscape for Morvern's actions. 'Straw Dogs' is a medley in which fragments of blues vocals and bass rhythms alternate with hectic high register saxophone and percussion. 'Panzer Be-Bop' revisits in electrifying fashion a genre often seen as a revolt against the commercialisation and sanitisation of swing era jazz; uncompromising and confrontational in the rapidity of its delivery, it also conveys a sensation of inexorable momentum. If a linear trajectory forcefully propels the two opening tracks (which together account for almost fifteen minutes of the compilation) a raga-like structure informs the gathering swells of Miles Davis's 'Great Expectations', recorded in 1969 and released on the 1974 *Big Fun* album. Incorporating Indian classical instruments such as the sitar, tamboura and tabla, the loping rhythm and expansive texture of this track sustains a mood of gathering and dispersing anticipation for over thirteen minutes. Luciano Berio's 'Visage' is a departure from the electric jazz of *Last Exit* and Miles Davis but an intensification of the experimental sensibility. In this 1969 recording the Italian composer and pioneer of electronic music radically cuts and rearranges the classically trained voice of Cathy Berberian to produce a babel of language. The use of editing as a compositional device, and of the recording studio as an instrument, also informs the second Miles Davis track, 'Pharoah's Dance', from the 1970 album *Bitches Brew*, a recording widely credited with pioneering the jazz-rock fusion genre.

While Morvern's account of what must surely be an arduous and protracted task occupies little more than two pages of the narrative, the extended, improvisational compositions which make up the mixtape give some indication of the duration of the labour and hint at the endurance and persistence required to complete it. Motifs of violent fragmentation perhaps allude to the nature of the work in which Morvern is engaged, but it is striking that it is the female voice in this otherwise male company which is the object of disarticulation, a gendered

assault which is reversed in the novel. This compilation seems designed to enlist the iconoclastic energy of avant-garde sonic experiment in support of socially transgressive action. The non-lyrical – and even anti-lyrical – nature of the musical content does not readily offer insight into articulable feeling but rather serves to confound conventional codes of emotion. In place of sentiment, expressed by voice or solo instrument, the mixtape gives musical expression to sheer force of will. To return to Chion's terms, this music could be described as 'empathetic' to the degree that it reflects Morvern's subjective state. However, the identification which it might invite is also likely to provoke resistance in the reader by placing insight into Morvern's subjective state in tension with ethical discomfort with her actions.

In contrast to empathetic music, Chion suggests that 'anempathetic' music 'exhibit[s] conspicuous indifference to the situation, by progressing in a steady, undaunted, and ineluctable manner: the scene takes place against this very backdrop of 'indifference'".<sup>9</sup> The compilation tape which Morvern prepares to 'suit the camping weekend in such heatwave'<sup>10</sup> might be placed in this category. During this trip Morvern experiences a liberation from the regimes of paid shift work and an affinity with the natural world – 'all this loveliness'<sup>11</sup> – which anticipates her Mediterranean sojourns. The prosaic rituals of swimming, sunbathing and eating are recounted with a relish suggestive of a heightened appreciation of the pleasures of everyday experience; in time-honoured Romantic tradition Morvern's relish for being 'in Nature'<sup>12</sup> infers an elevated sensibility and perhaps serves to redeem what might, in other scenes, seem an unthinking materialism (typified by her habitual consumption of cigarettes). However, the camping trip also serves another purpose: the disposal of her boyfriend's dismembered body parts – reduced

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<sup>9</sup> Chion, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.104.

to ‘easy-to-handle packages’<sup>13</sup> with the aid of bin liners, hessian sacking and parcel tape – by burial in the mountainside.

The legacy of the pop and rock explosion of the 1960s, exemplified by the careers of The Beatles, the Rolling Stones and Bob Dylan, is one which the musical score of Warner’s novel tends to defiantly ignore. This trend is typified by the prominence of Can, an experimental rock band formed in Cologne, West Germany in 1968, whose reliance on improvisation has parallels with the jazz genres which prevail in the novel. While the more visually iconic Kraftwerk have assumed greater visibility in the pop landscape, Can – alongside Tangerine Dream and Neu! – are recognised as leading figures in the genre popularly known as Krautrock, which John T. Littlejohn describes as ‘arguably the single most important strand of modern popular music to originate outside the United States’.<sup>14</sup> Bassist Holger Czukay (one of the novel’s dedicatees) was also a pioneer of sampling, a technique which is utilised on a solo track included in the compilation, alongside almost the entire contents of the 1972 album *Ege Bamyasi*. Czukay’s ‘Persian Love’ features sampled voices reputedly recorded from Iranian radio; this track from his 1980 album *Movies* anticipates later interest in ‘world’ music – a genre which is prominent in the camping compilation. The opening track, ‘Nyanafin’, is by legendary Malian singer-songwriter Salif Keita, whose fusion of traditional West African musical traditions with Western pop has played a key role in establishing the global popularity of Afro-pop. This motif is continued in the second track ‘Essingan’ by La Têtes Brulées, a Cameroonian group credited with bringing the Bikutsi music of the Beti people to Western audiences through their own pop fusions. The prominence of strings, lyrical vocals and highly textured orchestration are qualities also found in the ‘dream pop’ of celebrated independent recording label 4AD. ‘Another Day’, recorded by This Mortal Coil, a 4AD supergroup led by label founder Ivo Watts-Russell, is a cover of a song by British folk singer Roy Harper, with vocals

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>14</sup> John T. Littlejohn, ‘Introduction’, *Popular Music and Society*, 32:5 (2009), p. 577.

provided by Elizabeth Fraser of The Cocteau Twins, the quintessential 4AD band. ‘Blue Bell Knoll’, from their 1988 album of the same name, exemplifies the band’s uniquely distinctive sound, with a piano loop, layered guitars and drums and ethereal vocals combining to construct a richly textured and enveloping sound; a British folk vernacular is also at work in the song title and lyric which allude to the legend that the sound of a blue bell’s knoll is an omen of death. The jazz standard ‘Up A Lazy River’, written by Hoagy Carmichael and Sidney Arodin and recorded by the popular doo-wop group *The Ink Spots*, is a striking departure from the free and electric jazz which characterises the first compilation; its title self-referentially alludes to Morvern’s Highland camping location by a stream in which she washes and swims. In a more conventional setting this song might evoke nostalgia for uncomplicated sentiment and melodic listening; however, in this context its inclusion perhaps amplifies a sense of dissonance between musical register and narrative event.

The keynote of this compilation is one of euphoric transportation: ‘Salif Keita sounded so good in the sunshine I stuck out my arms and started spinning round slowly, squinting up at the sun as it looked to be darting and was warm in the face. I was dizzy when I stopped’.<sup>15</sup> While electric instruments are used to sometimes abrasive effect in the first compilation, here strings and vocals are integrated in multi-layered soundscapes. Other worlds are conjured by the music in this mix – whether the world of the past in surviving folk traditions, of other cultures mediated by ‘world’ music or of fantasy and imagination as summoned by non-representational lyrics. This music is empathetic to the extent that it sympathetically renders feelings of ease and elation as Morvern escapes the confines of the Port, but it is also anempathetic in the sense of indifference it exhibits to the purpose of the trip. As Morvern listens to the ‘happy sound’<sup>16</sup> of ‘Nyanafin’, the ‘chopped-off head’ of her boyfriend ‘bump[s] away against [her] back’<sup>17</sup> in her

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<sup>15</sup> Warner, p. 89.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 88.



backpack. Scottish indie dream pop – ‘Blue Bell Knoll was going in my ears’<sup>18</sup> – evokes expressions of carefree joy but in contexts where such an emotion seems strikingly inappropriate: ‘I took out the head and put it down a good bit away. I made special sure it was secure then laughed out loud in case it went rolling and bouncing all the way down with me chasing’.<sup>19</sup>

A close analysis of the musical content of Morvern’s compilations only compounds the impression of emotional dissociation as a defining characteristic of her inner life; sentiments not presented in this music include grief, remorse and guilt. This absence of affect has prompted some critics to draw parallels between *Morvern Callar* and Albert Camus’s 1942 novel *The Outsider*,<sup>20</sup> but Morvern’s failure to exhibit conventional emotion is transgressive in specifically gendered ways. The signifying power of the boyfriend’s suicide – an act of implicitly existential masculine agency – is subverted by Morvern’s indifference to its authority; her casual appropriation of his manuscript and illicit disposal of his corpse suggest a radical disregard for the patriarchal protocols of property. His record collection is the one aspect of his legacy to be accorded any reverence: ‘His records and CDs are the only thing I wont be sending off to the auction rooms one Saturday’.<sup>21</sup> The possibility that Morvern’s choice of music might constitute a form of homage to the boyfriend’s memory is one raised by the author in an interview with Steve Redhead published in *Repetitive Beat Generation*: ‘Morvern is listening, not to *her* music but to the favourite music of her dead boyfriend, therefore that prescriptive, rather hysterical

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>20</sup> See Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland: The 20th Century* (London, 2007) and Duncan Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish Fictions: Film, Television and the Novel* (Edinburgh, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Warner, p. 70.

listing had an emotional point [emphasis in original].<sup>22</sup> The tensions between authorship and appropriation at work within Warner's novel are perhaps typified in the author's own interpretative intervention; I wish now to consider the narrative within the context of the gendered politics of musical taste.

**'It was the music that made me': gender, authorship and musical taste**

Morvern's musical choices are suggestively considered and indeed the meticulous reproduction of the track listings for the compilations which she prepares for her personal stereo seem to offer a readymade 'soundtrack' for the narrative. The analogy with film which this term invites – and which I have exploited in the above analysis – is appealing when attempting to theorise the significance of pop song references within literary narrative, but its limitations are also important to consider. A film music soundtrack can direct, manipulate or confound an audience's affective and cognitive engagement with a dramatic narrative; it can serve to disclose meanings and emotions which may not otherwise be apparent in the plot, dialogue or *mise en scène*. By contrast a literary soundtrack can arguably only function on an intertextual level whereby the citation serves to activate meanings signified by the music. Moreover, the function of the citation is dependent not only on the reader's capacity to identify the music in question but also to decipher the complex signifying codes to do with performance, genre, period, lyrical and musical content by which a pop song generates meaning in a non-aural context. The tracks cited in Morvern's mixtapes are not popular generational standards; their very obscurity – for an uninitiated readership – confounds easy intertextual deductions. If they do suggest a community it is the select or exclusive kind of the connoisseur or collector.

In his discussion of Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*, Barry Faulk observes that 'lists orient fan subjectivity in the process of articulating it'.<sup>23</sup> What is significant here is that the fan

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<sup>22</sup> Alan Warner, 'Celtic Trails', in Steve Redhead (ed.), *Repetitive Beat Generation*, p.132.

<sup>23</sup> Barry Faulk, 'Love, Lists and Class in Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*', *Cultural Critique* 66 (Spring 2007), p. 153.

subjectivity associated with the authoring of lists is most commonly identified as male. In his classic article, 'Sizing up record collections: gender and connoisseurship in rock music culture', Will Straw writes of the 'intuitive acceptance of the idea that record collecting, within Anglo-American cultures at least, is among the more predictably male-dominated of music-related practices'.<sup>24</sup> At first sight, the eclectic content of Morvern's mixtapes might seem to challenge this dominant gender construction and to offer a refreshing model of female connoisseurship. However, the disparity between Morvern's apparently expert and elite musical choices and the lack of cultural capital which she demonstrates elsewhere in the novel (mistaking the Spanish Alhambra for a nightclub for example) serves to reinforce a suspicion that her tastes may not be her own. Indeed, the narrative insinuates that the boyfriend, in some ways, 'authors' Morvern – who is placed in a position of structural inferiority in terms of age, education, class and gender – and continues to do so after his death, principally through the medium of music.

The personal stereo on which Morvern listens to her compilation cassettes is a Christmas gift from the boyfriend, which she opens as his corpse lies on the scullery floor; identified as a record collector in the narrative, 'his' music is distinguished from hers by both Morvern and her close friend Lanna, who pronounces his records 'queer'.<sup>25</sup> Roy Shuker has written that record collectors are often represented, in fiction and film, as 'obsessive males, whose passion for collecting is often a substitute for 'real' social relationships, and who exhibit a 'train spotting' mentality towards music'.<sup>26</sup> Indeed the gendering of record collecting is by no

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<sup>24</sup> Will Straw, 'Sizing up Record Collections: Gender and Connoisseurship in Rock Music Culture', in Sheila Whiteley (ed.), *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (London and New York, 1997), p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Warner, p. 70.

<sup>26</sup> Roy Shuker, 'Beyond the "high fidelity" Stereotype: Defining the (Contemporary) Record Collector', *Popular Music*, 23:3 (2004), p. 311.

means unproblematic where normative male identity is concerned; as Straw notes, ‘we may say of record collecting, as of most practices of connoisseurship and systematic consumption, that it stands in an uncertain relationship to masculinity’.<sup>27</sup> Estranged from his family and his class and seemingly unengaged in waged work, Morvern’s boyfriend lives a life dominated by solitary occupations; the port in which he lives is mapped in miniature form on the model railway which occupies the loft of their shared flat. He is implicitly depicted as in an ‘uncertain relationship’ to the modes of working-class masculinity which prevail in the port and through which the ‘insecurity, self-loathing, abuse and exploitation defining the psyche of the Scottish “hard man”’,<sup>28</sup> to use Duncan Petrie’s words, is given often outlandish expression. In a novel in which mythic meanings often underline otherwise social realist settings, Morvern’s ecstatic scattering of her boyfriend’s body parts evokes the myth of Orpheus. In this context, the Walkman could be seen as a ‘singing head’ and its presence throughout the narrative signifying the persistence of the boyfriend’s musical voice.

The possibility that Morvern is no more the author of her musical tastes than she is the author of the novel published under her name is implicit throughout Warner’s novel; this suspicion arguably activates gendered stereotypes of music appreciation, whereby female expertise is only thinkable in the context of tutelage to a male genius. As Christopher Whyte argues, in relation to the boyfriend’s novel, ‘the implication is that all an aspirant narrator from outside the compound of straight masculinity can do is to overwrite a text originating within it’.<sup>29</sup> However, in appropriating her boyfriend’s manuscript Morvern is also defying masculine authority; her blithe disregard for his property – whether that be his book or his body – is

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<sup>27</sup> Straw, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Petrie, p. 92.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher Whyte, ‘Masculinities in Scottish Fiction’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 34:3 (1998), p. 283.

arguably subversive of patriarchal prerogatives. Morvern listens to ‘one of his records’<sup>30</sup> – ‘Stravinsky’s Ballets (Orpheus side)’<sup>31</sup> – as she winches his corpse, laid out on the baseboard of his own model railway, to the ceiling of the attic; this act of homage evidently has ambivalent undercurrents. Indeed, she later fulfils the role of the furies – enraged, not charmed, by Orpheus – when she dismembers her boyfriend’s body. I want to conclude by reflecting on the subversive potential of Morvern’s appropriation of her boyfriend’s music, with a focus on the significance of Miles Davis in Warner’s novel.

The recording and performing artists most frequently cited in *Morvern Callar* do not, for the most part, represent an individual or group-based brand sufficient to reach beyond their own audience: in other words, they are not celebrity or star personas. By contrast, Miles Davis is arguably the artist with the strongest performance persona cited in the novel, one which commands recognition beyond the jazz world, and arguably beyond the music world, having entered a lexicon of masculine style which has currency in the fields of fashion and design. Unlike many of the other artists cited in the novel, Davis has an extra-textual iconic status as a performer whose meaning exceeds the select membership of jazz fandom; his sound and image can be mobilised to signify ‘cool’, modernity and avant garde edge and does so within an intellectual and masculine idiom. Christopher Smith describes Davis as ‘one of the most influential figures in black American music’ whose ‘musical innovations, performance conduct, and public persona excited extensive comment, imitation and castigation’.<sup>32</sup> Davis’s relentless innovation and versatility have meant that his career can be read as a kind of microcosmic history of post-war jazz: as Jeffrey Magee has written, ‘his musical path illuminates almost every major movement in modern jazz: from bebop, to cool jazz, to hard bop, to modal jazz, to a

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<sup>30</sup> Warner, p. 53.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Smith, ‘A Sense of the Possible: Miles Davis and the Semiotics of Improvised Performance’, *TDR*, 39:3 (1995), p. 41.

controlled version of free jazz, to jazz-rock fusion, and, finally, to hip-hop hybrids at the end of his life'.<sup>33</sup> This path is not without controversy, with his electric turn, his pioneering of jazz fusion hybrids and his status as a crossover artist attracting rock audiences challenging conventional thinking about jazz markets, audiences and 'authenticity'. Davis's performance persona has contributed to his reputation as an uncompromising artist motivated by creative integrity rather than commercial success; as Krin Gabbard has written, Davis was known for 'refusing to develop an ingratiating performance persona, often turning his back on audiences, ignoring their applause, and leaving the stage when other musicians were soloing'.<sup>34</sup> While this seemingly aloof conduct attracted criticism from some, others recognised it as expressive of a politics informed by black cultural nationalism.<sup>35</sup> Davis's status, alongside Malcolm X, as an 'iconic incarnation of African-American masculinity'<sup>36</sup> is widely recognised; the specific form of black masculinity which he is seen to personify is one which, in George Elliott Clarke's words, 'the masterful and triumphant exude confidence, poise, purpose, style – in short, "cool"'.<sup>37</sup>

Miles Davis's 'He Loved Him Madly', taken from his 1974 collection of recordings, *Get Up With It*, is the only track to which Morvern listens more than once; it is the first and last

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<sup>33</sup> Jeffrey Magee, 'Kinds of Blue: Miles Davis, Afro-Modernism, and the Blues', *Jazz Perspectives*, 1:1 (2007), p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Krin Gabbard quoted in George Elliott Clarke, 'Cool Politics: Styles of Honour in Malcolm X and Miles Davis', *Jouvert: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 2:1 (1998), para 15.

<sup>35</sup> As Ingrid Manson writes: 'those who admired Davis's attitude found it political in nature, the ultimate refusal of the Jim Crow expectation that African Americans smile, grin, and entertain for the pleasure of white folks'. 'Miles, Politics and Image', in Gerard Early (ed.), *Miles Davis and American Culture* (St. Louis, 2001), p. 87.

<sup>36</sup> Clarke, 'Cool Politics: Styles of Honour in Malcolm X and Miles Davis', para 8.

<sup>37</sup> Clarke, para 8.

track to which she listens on her personal stereo in the novel and thus if any track were to attain the status of a 'signature tune', this might be it. 'He Loved Him Madly' is widely understood as a tribute to Duke Ellington; the sentiment expressed in the title seemingly at odds with the affectless condition of 'cool' but confirming membership of an elite homosocial brotherhood. When Morvern listens to this track on the Walkman given to her by her boyfriend it might seem that her 'soundtrack' is posthumously authored by male expertise and that her musical appreciation is reduced to the imitative homage of one who 'loved Him madly'. However, Morvern performs a rather subversive 'auto reverse' on this dynamic when she attributes responsibility for her actions to the music. When she leaves her flat for the first time after the discovery of her boyfriend's body she approaches but then passes a public telephone box; in declining to report his death it is his agency, expressed through a violent act of suicide, which is erased:

Out there were no people. Puddles were frozen and wee-ones off from school had burst all ice. A car passed and you saw smoke clinging to the exhaust. Miles Davis doing He Loved Him Madly off of Get Up With It was going in the ears. My hands were in jacket pockets, the nose was cold like it was pinched between finger and thumb; I touched the computer disc in the other pocket, as I walked up to the phonebox I felt the cassette moving next to one pinkie, and it was that bit where the trumpet comes in for the second time: I walked right past the phonebox. It was the feeling the music gave me that made me.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Warner 5. 'He Loved Him Madly' later provides the soundtrack to Morvern's return to the Port pregnant with the 'child of the raves' (229). Her pregnancy is figured not only as a kind of infidelity to the boyfriend's memory but also a violation of the patriarchal laws of property and inheritance which govern authorship and paternity alike. For a discussion of the representation of Morvern's pregnancy see Rachel Carroll, 'Unauthorised Reproduction: Class, Pregnancy and Transgressive Female Heterosexuality in Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar*', *Rereading Heterosexuality: Feminism, Queer Theory and Contemporary Fiction* (Edinburgh, 2012).

The title of Davis's track might seem to lend itself to acts of posthumous devotion but it is here employed to rationalise an act which ensures that the boyfriend will not be commemorated through the conventional rites of burial. Morvern's failure to report the boyfriend's death is a pivotal event in the development of the narrative; an omission suggestive of passivity, it nevertheless becomes characteristic of the peculiar and powerful agency which she exercises throughout the novel, an agency which is both wilful and seemingly unmotivated. Even if Morvern's musical tastes are the legacy of her dead boyfriend, the uses to which she puts them are arguably subversive of the authority he seeks to exert from beyond the grave. If Miles Davis represents a model of masculinity in which the boyfriend can only vicariously participate, Morvern effectively ensures her own entry into the fictional lexicon of 'cool' in Warner's cult novel by appropriating the poise of 'the masterful and triumphant'<sup>39</sup> at his expense.

In an article published in *The Guardian* newspaper in 2006, Alan Warner testified to the importance of music in the shaping of his identity as a writer living in Oban, the Scottish port on which Morvern's home town is modelled:

I will never forget listening to that album [Can, 1979] for the first time back in the old village: an airy, clean, modernist sheen to its sound. . . It is no exaggeration to state that my first novel, *Morvern Callar*, would never have been conceived if it was not for Holger Czukay's solo album *Movies*, Can's *Saw Delight* and *Ege Bamyasi* and my Sony Walkman. . . With the Walkman, suddenly I was wired directly into Can, timing physical reactions to tracks. Jumping a mountain stream along with a drum break. Music that had been communal was suddenly solitary, secret and subjective – which suited me fine.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Clarke, para 8.

<sup>40</sup> Alan Warner, "'This is the music of the whole earth singing",' *The Guardian* 8 June 2006.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2006/jun/09/popandrock1>. Accessed 22 April 2013.



The resemblance between Warner's listening choices and practices and those exhibited by his female narrator in *Morvern Callar* is striking. Literary critics have explored the paradoxes entailed in Warner's adoption of a female narrative voice in relation to questions of literary authorship, with Sophy Daly observing that the author is 'impersonating a woman's voice, while within this text [Morvern] is appropriating a male-authored novel'.<sup>41</sup> This chapter has suggested that Warner's decision to transfer his musical tastes to a young working class female protagonist is one which has complex implications where gendered constructions of popular music consumption are concerned. It could be argued that in one sense *Morvern* serves as little more than a cipher for the author's musical manifesto, the perhaps improbable track listings for her compilation cassettes pasted into the narrative like didactic authorial footnotes. In another sense, however, the implied disparity between *Morvern*'s limited cultural capital and eclectic musical knowledge serves to expose, and perhaps subvert, class and gender-based hierarchies of cultural taste. This tension is not resolved in Warner's novel but its persistence can be considered productive; it usefully dramatises the gendered politics of a genre of fiction which all too often serves to reinforce the perception that popular music expertise is an exclusively male prerogative.

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<sup>41</sup> Sophy Daly, *Alan Warner's Morvern Callar: A Reader's Guide* (London and New York, 2002), p. 55.

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