

'We're All Mad Here': Alienation, Madness, and Crafting Tom Waits

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Abstract. Tom Waits, through his poetry, his poetic and public personae, has become the father of the desperate failures of society, those who lay down and fill the background with disillusionment. No-direction-homers flock together and become the majority of Waits' main characters. As an artist, he gives a voice and a name to those who, otherwise, would remain invisible, endowing them with corporeality. Waits, through the projection of his public persona, illumines the lives of the weak, who strive to survive in a world that has always fed upon those below. There is something honourable about the people who struggle the most, trying to find their path in the darkest of places, and Waits, through his career as an entertainer, has always prioritised his respect for these people, praising their many faults and poor decisions, merging them with the tormented collective and thus becoming one with their sadness and horror.

This paper will focus on how Tom Waits constructs his personae through an identification with the disappointments of society: the underdog, and, more particularly, the alcoholic underdog. I intend to focus mainly on the lyrical content of his albums *Rain Dogs* and *Small Change*, together with their respective representations in other art forms, specifically interviews, lives, artistry, etc. This section will also include Tom Waits' depiction of some characters as grotesques, as they form the limits of societal acceptance. In the last section, I will examine the presence and construction of these grotesques in his album *Alice* (2002), while comparing the lyrical content to its other cultural manifestations.

Keywords: Tom Waits, artistic personae, lyrics, artistic discourses

Singer-songwriter and actor Tom Waits (Pomona, CA, 1949) has been identified as the father of the desperate failures of society (Jacobs 2006: 11), those who lay down in shame and drown in disillusionment and neglect. No-direction-homers (the Waitsian 'nighthawks') flock together in Waits' music, as they provide comfort to those who come home to nothing. As an artist, he gives a voice, a name, and he endows with corporeality those who would otherwise remain invisible. Waits, through the projection of his public persona, brings light to the lives of the weakest, who strive to survive in a world

that feeds upon the unfortunate. Waits, however, sees something honourable in those who find themselves struggling, trying to find their way in the darkest of places. As an entertainer, he utilises his career to, precisely, showcase this respect towards these people – his characters, prioritising their hurdles and strongly empathising with their faulty nature (Kessel 2009: xiv). As an artist, he eventually merges with the tormented collective, and becomes one with their sadness and horror. I intend to examine the way in which Tom Waits artistically meets the world through his poetic persona and his very explicit processes of identification with his fictional creations. I will look at his lyrics not only as mere forms of literary manifestation, but in relation to the many discourses of art that his lyrical speech interacts with. Stemming from this, I will also consider the ways through which his public persona is revealed in interviews, showing that he is a lot more performative than traditionally expected. These interviews will be compared to the live concerts¹ and the artwork in his albums, which I found to be suggestive of the content and meaning behind his songs.

To this end, I will employ a combined methodology. First, there will be a multimodal examination of Tom Waits' artistic discourses following the definition and procedures to multimodality explained by Bateman et al. (2017: 112–130). In their research, the material constraints inherent to multimodality are addressed as the main issue, as much as how human perception of the physical (material) world (112–120) plays a fundamental role in the analysis. There is, too, a natural tendency to classify objects, for example the traditional *signifiers* and *signifieds*, into sets of opposites, which is explored as the basic premise of multimodal analysis. This categorisation of objects into opposites is what links this methodology to my own approach to Jungian archetypal criticism, which will be discussed shortly. In this line, I will also illustrate how a “scriptable” Tom Waits brings the Barthesian myths into consciousness (for example the bottle of the alcoholic, the tone of his voice singing, his facial expressions, his characterisation at live performances, etc.), and uses them to convey his own socio-political criticism and the ideology of American civilisation simultaneously. All of these denotations have proved how Waits portrays himself to his audience as instigative, the audience in turn respond by laughing, applauding, talking back, etc. In order to carry out this multimodal analysis, I will follow the procedures illustrated by musicologists Allan Moore, Walter Everett and Lori Burns (in their approach to live performance, instrumental narrative, vocals, and lyrics).

¹ In these, he becomes quite the story-teller entrapping the audience with monologues that at times eclipse the purpose of the concert as a musical event.

As for the second section of this study, there will be an analysis of Waits' public persona, which has been shown to eventually embody the notions of alienation and madness. There will be a semiotic reading of this, specifically through Gérard Genette's notion of transtextuality² as applied to the original lyrics, the live performances, as well as the album art. Tajfel and Turner's *Social Identity Theory* is essential in this – multimodal – analysis of Waits, as it supports the belief that identity can only be developed, and will be forever subject to the sense of belonging within a collective (Turner 1982: 17–18). From a Jungian perspective, and elaborating on his *Collective Unconscious* (1968: 87), I will study his alienated characters (underdogs, alcoholics, and mad people) as archetypes belonging to a greater collective. This will follow Jung's understanding of the *Collective Unconscious* as the place where one can find liberation of the soul and connect to God, but lose one's attachment to the world (ibid.: 95–97). This symbolic place is what the Greek philosophers associated with compulsive behaviour and addiction³, noticing how it had the potential of endowing one with religious ecstasy as much as leading them down the pathway of insanity.⁴ When prey to alcoholism in an attempt to find true meaning in one's world (religion), the soul is not liberated, but rather, lost (Plato: *Laws*, Book X).

In order to clarify what Tom Waits understands as isolation and madness, I will draw special attention to the experimental and transgressive use of musical instruments; the distortion of his voice; the public displays of eccentricity verging on feigned madness; the radically urban, low-side-of-the-road personalities that he takes on; and the odd artistry he purposefully surrounds the lyrics with. His persona as a performer becomes overemphasised, as he, probably in an attempt to protect his private self (Jacobs 2006: 11), embodies the collective for those who are perceived as hopeless.⁵ The greatest transition here is the one that he makes as an entertainer, where he metaphorically *becomes* this collective and portrays himself as the representative of extreme isolation and

² “All that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts” (Genette 1997: 1)

³ The many depictions of alcoholism and alcoholics in Waits that will be studied here.

⁴ Both Pythagoras (*Golden Verses* 33) and Plato (*Republic*, Books IV and VII through the cave allegory, as well as *Laws*, Book X) discussed the dangers of drunkenness for inducing madness and uncontrolled thoughts. These substances can be very helpful when used for divine reflection and to achieve catharsis, but when abused they oppose reason and can lead one to metaphorically exit the body. It would be worth noting how in Greek myth, Dionysus the God merges both insanity and extreme religious devotion through the consumption of wine (or mead, as the human alternative to divine nectar).

⁵ Turner's idea that identity cannot be developed unless one is conscious of the collective that one represents should be considered here (1982: 15–20).

social rejection. This is achieved through acts of socially constructed madness. It is by means of ultimately personifying what he writes about that he expresses – becoming a Barthesian myth himself – strong social criticism towards the continuous attempts at censoring unconventionality.

My Jungian approach to literary and archetypal criticism involves how Tom Waits tacitly divides the metaphorical mind-state of the collective unconscious into types: the underdogs, the alcoholics, and the madmen, which can be analysed separately but also as causal archetypes, where the expression of one of them leads to the birth of others. It is also interesting how Waits uses irony to build their personalities and contexts; some instances of this will be studied in relation with Billy Clark's (2013: 281) (Neo-Gricean) approach. The corpus for this paper will be made up of the lyrics from the albums *Small Change* (1976), *Rain Dogs* (1985) and *Alice* (2002), together with their respective representations in other art form, specifically: interviews, lives, artistry, etc., which is what Genette originally referred to as transtextuality (1997: 381–393).

I. The Rain Dog

The lines drawn between conventional and unconventional meet in Waits' "New-York-Influenced" (Jacobs 2006: 127) *Rain Dogs*. The title hints at the disorientation and lack of direction induced by homelessness. When hit by rain, dogs are unable to find their way, and then they get lost and are found quailing in alleys or drifting aimlessly (Kessel 2009: 22). Waits wanted to make this new album even odder, more offbeat sounding than *Swordfishtrombones* (1982) (Kessel 2009: 22–23), which had already been a very sui generis production. According to musicologist Robert Walser (1993: 26–30), this divergence of sound adds to the literary meaning that can be extracted from the text.

The artwork in *Rain Dogs*, a paratext (Genette 1987: 1–5) to the lyrics, depicts a man and a woman fictionally named Rose and Lily, respectively, who were photographed by Anders Petersen at Café Lehmitz in New York (Petersen 1997)⁶. The black and white edition of the picture gives it a touch of melancholia, and the two characters portrayed express conflictingly opposing emotions. The woman is either laughing hysterically or screaming in pain; the man is sad or asleep, searching for comfort in the woman. He looks naked, smaller and seems accepting of a role as 'lesser than' that of the woman. She, on the other hand is conventionally dressed, and her face is looking upwards. The female names chosen for these first two protagonists, Rose and Lily, are also revealing of the kind of relationships that will be featured in the lyrics (Maalej et al. 2016:

⁶ Picture available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rain_Dogs.

212–225), and that are implied within the artistic conception of the album as a cultural body. Rose is diminished in importance, looking down, unsure, almost piteous; the flower – to which her name alludes, solely relies on the protection of its thorns for its survival – is craved by many who neglect it as soon as it starts to wither, and it consequently goes to waste. The lily is associated with purity, given the preference for it at weddings and funerals (which already symbolises an extreme emotional contraposition) and hence the choice for a prudish apparel in the woman. The horizontal stolon of the lily endows it with masculine, phallic symbolism, which, seen as the name of a woman, picture her as aspiring of the male qualities she lacks (which is reminiscent of Sigmund Freud's theory of penis envy), as wanting to compete against men in the world and as disregarding of her femininity. These are some the characters that Tom Waits embraces as manifestations in his artistic persona.

The lead-off of the album, *Singapore*, depicts an outlandish place for the lost and isolated, in a modern-world collective unconscious manner; the narrator takes little people (to whom the narrator refers, in a politically incorrect manner, as dwarfs and midgets) as characters, and fills the plot with a ruling class of cyclops. At a 2008 live concert in Edinburgh, Waits sang the lyrics changing the tune of his voice, enhancing the rhythm, and emphasising the word “home”, repeating the phrase “heave away” multiple times. The ending is completely experimental, with the instrumental fading but reappearing in the end, with the repeated lyrics “heav[ing] away” and with fireworks. Waits, in this performance, not only created a new land for lost souls, but also gives them hope with a much more uplifting melody, as opposed to what is found in the hypotext (the ‘original version’) which veers more pessimistically towards the macabre. In this particular live show, Waits seemed sympathetic to the people embarking on the journey towards this new land as he attempts to join them emotionally. The fireworks at the end function as a symbol of the promise that this new land could potentially represent.

As Waits himself states, the lyrics of *Cemetery Polka*, the third song on the album bearing a musically remarkable resemblance to the previous one, seem to attempt a reproduction of the way people talk behind each other's backs (Jacobs 2006: 128). The characters in the lyrics are closer to grotesques in their physical appearance, and become embodiments of the inner workings of the troubled family that is the world as a whole (Maher 2011: 186). At a live performance in the same year, in Atlanta, Waits introduced this number with a little chat in which he warns the audience he is going insane, and yells at them not to look, then proceeds to scream the lyrics in a rumbling and distorted voice:

Uncle Bill will never leave a will
 And the tumor is as big as an egg
 He has a mistress, she's Puerto Rican
 And I heard she has a wooden leg

He makes a contrast between his scary voice when speaking about some characters, and the soft, waltz-like instrumental melody, as if he wanted to hide all of the things he just said underneath a nice, functional-looking surface. Then, he screams once more and instantly apologises: “too much sugar in my coffee”. What this whole performance seems to hint at is an almost embarrassing need for society to keep a mask over the lewd (which can be deduced from his previous words of caution, urging the audience to keep their eyes shut), the vulgar and the vile. During this number Waits does not seem to care about being a “rain dog, too” (*Rain Dogs*, *Rain Dogs*, 1985), but about ironically exposing through the Barthesian myths that constitute his voice, gestures, and forewords, human ways as a great sham.

Waits becomes a somewhat raging alcoholic in other songs on this album, too. In a live show from 2000 (in Warsaw), in *Jockey Full of Bourbon* (from *Rain Dogs*), he personifies a drunkard too intoxicated to stand still, and too angry to perform amicably. This becomes another instance of Tom Waits' tendency to yell the lyrics that deal with themes such as isolation, insanity, addiction, and the bizarre, which scholar Walter Everett (2000: 269–285) would characterise as an open display of what a particular⁷ context does to certain individuals. During the show, the lights are low and Waits stands crouching, a slim figure with eerily slender fingers gripping the mic, all in black. The only thing that is left glowing in the dark is his scary face grinning; this can be interpreted as supportive of the hypothesis which holds him as a judge of social neglect and as the neglected, simultaneously.

The first song on side two of the album is the eponymous and celebrated *Rain Dogs*. At the beginning of his performance of the song for the *Big Time Documentary*, directed by Chris Blum in 1988, Waits begins to howl as an early warning that he will be personifying the dogs in the song, “for [he is] a rain dog too”. Once more, the lighting darkens the scenario, where Waits mimes every word of this piece, “splashing the wine” with his fellow rain dogs, signalling a taxi only to tell them they would “rather walk”, and yelling in frustration what a gothic female character, the romanticised Rose of Tralee, whispered in his ear, that they would “never be going back home”. Then he sits on the floor and starts weightlifting the microphone, and, back up again, he stands energetically,

⁷ Which, in this case, is toxic and harassing.

showing off animalistic moves, seemingly attempting to enter the grotesque, so as to join his characters. The whole concert turns into a freak show, as Waits personifies an alienated rain dog who barks deafeningly every time he reveals to the audience that he can never go home. The performance ends when the music turns into a circus march, where Waits dances imitating the moves of a joker as the audience claps in delight; these objects bear a scriptability pertaining to the hostile look that society gives the homelessness.

The album *Rain Dogs*, as explained, deals mainly with the underdog: the striving, crippled human on the outskirts of town who is neglected and subject to abuse, usually because of their anomalous appearance and vagrant nature. However, what stands out the most, from a melodic perspective, in the album, is the striking contrast between the corpus examined (and additional songs) and downright love ballads such as *Time*, *Blind Love*, and *Hang Down Your Head*, where the underdog turns into the traditionally medieval lover who is a servant to the lady and is devoured by the might of his emotions. This from a literary standpoint obviously endows characters with emotional depth, but, according to the multimodal approach of Bateman et al. (2017: 112–138) it serves as the premise that multimodality is built on, which stems from archetypal contraries. What is meant by this is that the album gives more proof of its potential for a multimodal analysis. The lady of this medievalising narrative is, similarly to the literary tradition (Van-Remoortel 2006: 247–250), compared to flowers, to precious gems; she is unreal or only real in tales and she is harmful to her lover, who falls at her every whim, like a martyr or a victim:

Hush, a wild violet, hush, a band of gold
 Hush, you're in a story I heard somebody told
 Tear the promise from my heart, tear my heart today
 You have found another, oh baby, I must go away

Even in his ballads, Waits plays the part of society's scapegoat. In the live performance of this song, selected from the *Big Time Documentary*, Waits performs this number almost in tears, laying on the floor, pretending to be sleeping in the corner of a street as a result of having lost his mind over a woman. In the same way he is a rain dog (an isolated 'alien') to society, in this album, and from what can be deduced from these performances, he is a rain dog to his romantic interest, too.

II. The Alcoholic

Small Change (1976) stands as one of Tom Waits' personal favourites (Jacobs 2006: 66) for the inevitable transformation of the previous, archetypal rain-dog into the archetypal alcoholic. Still bearing the ironic undertones common to almost every Waits' song, the 1976 album shows the distress and pain of the alcoholic or addict, whose co-dependency on a woman or a substance will eventually drive them to insanity. The cover picture⁸ features Tom Waits sitting in the extremely untidy dressing room of a nightclub dancer, and a topless nightclub dancer standing right behind him. Neither of them engages with the camera, opting to look down, which is symbolic of submission, fear, and inferiority. Their body language hints at a possible feeling of embarrassment which the potential narrator of the image succeeds in portraying. Waits is looking at some cigar boxes that are spread along the counter, while the topless dancer is lost in the void. A Jungian interpretation of this could be that the woman symbolises the truth (nakedness) of the character's addiction, looking away in a subconscious, metaphorical wish to escape⁹.

The lead-off song of the album, Tom Traubert's Blues (Four Sheets to the Wind in Copenhagen), introduces a new miserable character, lost in a foreign city, poverty-stricken, and stranded between high walls made of Bourbon bottles. The character wants to go "Waltzing Matilda", an evident intertextual reference (also in terms of the melody) to the Australian traditional folk song. The terms used are slang for aimless hitchhikers (Jacobs 2006: 66). The name Matilda in the song is allusive to solitude itself. To anyone unaware of the cultural tradition, a ballad about waltzing and (with) someone called Matilda would appear sentimental. This is Waits' way of romanticising the idea of solitude that becomes intoxicating in the end. In the live performance at Rockpalast from 1977 (WDR Studios in Köln, Germany), Waits sits normally at the piano and announces that this will be the last number of the show. He sounds intoxicated, playing the melody in a significantly more nostalgic fashion than the original. Waits' facial expressions match the lyrics, showcasing the deep commitment to his tale, as if he were experiencing the events again. The rhythm is slower, too, making it easier for the narrator to revel in every word, which, pragmatically (Burns 2002: 187–200), serves to intensify the meaning.

⁸ This artwork can be found at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Small_Change_\(Tom_Waits_album\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Small_Change_(Tom_Waits_album)).

⁹ From a Jungian perspective, this could explain why she sits at the background, while the conscious mind (at the front) cannot see further than their substance co-dependency.

When it comes to the lyrics, there are some recognisable transtextual¹⁰ instances (Genette 1987: xvii–xviii). The following extract (1) brings other lyrics to mind (2):

1
 No, I don't want your sympathy, the fugitives say
 That the streets aren't for dreaming now
 Manslaughter dragnets and the ghosts that sell memories
 They want a piece of the action anyhow go

2
 Though I know that evening's empire has returned into sand
 Vanished from my hand
 Left me blindly here to stand, but still not sleeping
 My weariness amazes me, I'm branded on my feet
 I have no one to meet
 And the ancient empty street's too dead for dreaming

(2) belongs to the song 'Mr. Tambourine Man', by his deeply admired (Maher 2011: 436) contemporary singer-songwriter Bob Dylan, and released more than a decade earlier. Dylan's lyrics transport the theme of isolation and solitude to streets that are no longer recognisable by the narrator. These themes are present in Waits' song, too, as the traveller, although not alone, feels solitude in a foreign place he will never be able to call home. The "ghosts that sell memories" from 'Waltzing Matilda' are in fact ghosts of the past, and in Dylan's song, the past is no longer reminisced (as seen in "ancient", "empty", "returned into sand" and "blindly"). The main character in Waits seems to have landed in a far-off place (which can be seen in hints at Australian culture) to start anew, so he does not wish to remember the past, although he seems aware that it is still there. This hidden past is eventually revealed towards the end, where there is another intertextual reference:

And it's a battered old suitcase to a hotel someplace
 And a wound that will never heal
 [...]
 An old shirt that is stained with blood and whiskey
 And goodnight to the street sweepers
 The night watchman flame keepers and goodnight to Matilda too

¹⁰ Or intertextual, if they are considered as direct allusions (xviii).

The emotional baggage Waits' character carries can find elucidation in "blood and whiskey", their eternal wound. The goodnights at the end are Shakespearean allusions to two plays, *Romeo and Juliet* (2.2), and *Hamlet* (5.2). Waits makes it look as though the ostracism his characters face at every twist and turn in the world is eventually what leads them down a hole of despair and inescapable madness. Waits' ballad hints at a tragic ending for the main character, whose addiction to alcohol might be too much to bear and who will never make the world his place. In 1977's live performance (Rockpalast, Köln), Waits, insinuating that he is the protagonist, musically fades the song away, slowing the tempo and smoking out his last words, and partially falling off of the duet bench, hinting at the implied death of the character. Through this diversity of allusions and transtextual references to Australian folklore, Dylan and Shakespeare, Waits' Tom Traubert's Blues becomes, in the clearest sense, a Genettian palimpsest (1997: 1–9), a mosaic of texts in which the hypertexts become merged in a way that makes the hypotext a completely new cultural artefact.

Tom Waits impersonates the archetype of the alcoholic very overtly in other pieces from the same album: *The Piano Has Been Drinking* (Not Me) (An Evening with Pete King) and *Bad Liver and A Broken Heart*, both involve an interesting use of linguistic (neo-Gricean) irony (Garmendia 2015: 40–45). In the first, Waits says the opposite of his intended reaction: his character in the song has clearly been drinking a lot, but attributes it to the musical instrument he plays through personification. It becomes more evident as the song plays out:

And the combo went back to New York, the jukebox has to take a leak
 And the carpet needs a haircut, and the spotlight looks like a prison break
 And the telephone's out of cigarettes, and the balcony is on the make
 And the piano has been drinking, the piano has been drinking

Waits' character accuses the piano of its own dissociations ("the carpet needs a haircut", "the telephone's out of cigarettes", etc.). In *Live at Fernwood Tonight* (1977), Waits resorts to attending the interview drunk. He emphasises the drinking part by slightly switching the lyrics to give them more realism, and by giving himself the appearance of forgetfulness; this results in the audience bursting out laughing when it becomes obvious he is feigning intoxication. Along these lines, his poor performance on the piano adds to the effect, and he continues the performance well after the song is finished through the rest of the interview, seen drinking directly from a bottle of wine before answering questions in his, by now signature, low and raspy voice. An important on-going

theme in his lyrics and, most particularly, his performances, is how it seems that he uses the archetypal alcoholic as the natural mediator between loneliness and madness; however, he never really makes it a point to differentiate the three archetypes of underdog, alcoholic and madman, and instead lets them roam freely in the audience's texts (in the Barthesian sense) to ultimately converge as one and the same.

According to Sperber and Wilson, an ironic utterance can also be achieved by overemphasising the truth (2012: 130–150), exactly opposing the ironic statement analysis in the previous example. *Bad Liver* and *A Broken Heart* begins:

Well I got a bad liver and broken heart yeah
I drunk me a river since you tore me apart
And I don't have a drinking problem, 'cept when I can't get a drink

Following the hyperbole, where instead of “cried”¹¹ Waits opts for “drunk”, in comes the ironic statement, that there is no issue, except for the issue itself. When it comes to the instrumental part of the song, the melody is that of a ballad and incorporates, at the beginning and at the end, the introductory melody of 1946 film *Casablanca* (dir. Michael Curtiz) leitmotif song of Herman Hupfeld's *As Time Goes by*, where the protagonist is seen to drink himself out of heartbreak. Here, as Waits himself writes, the character in his song is devised from overheard rumours that he was an alcoholic: “It don't do nothing but rest us assured / And substantiate the rumors that you've heard”. Tom Waits embraces the ill-willed opinions of others to *substantiate* his character. In the already mentioned 1977 live at Rockpalast, Waits makes no great changes to the original version; he only adds facial expressions that suggest emotional distress to conform to the lyrics, and adjusts his voice to a more guttural tone, building on the mad-and-drunk piano player that had been introduced in the prior ‘*The Piano Has Been Drinking*'.

III. The Madman

The archetypal underdog as the madman and alcoholic now meets its extreme expression in the form of grotesques, in Waits' album *Alice* (2002). Although it has been described as a more accessible album from the lyrical-melodic perspective (Jacobs 2006: 173–175), Tom Waits, perhaps subtly, turns it into a

¹¹ There is an instance of transtextuality with the song ‘*Cry Me a River*’ by Arthur Hamilton, 1955.

carnavalesque freak show, which does not fall short of terrifying at points. Some tracks can be seen as moving, even grieving, ballads, from the eponymous Alice to Poor Edward. The artistry on the cover is simple:¹² Waits sitting on a tire with colours around him, blue and watered-down yellow that can function as active reminders of Disney's Technicolor version of Carroll's novel; in the artwork, the yellow delineates the shape of a tunnel, the blue marks its boundaries. Although the album is not solely based on Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), the abstract colouring of the cover already anticipates the tracks as dreamy and whimsical; in actuality, even Waits referred to it as "taking a pill" and "druggy" (Maher 2011: 344). Like Carroll's protagonist, a fictional main character goes down the rabbit hole and through a journey of woe, ceaselessly searching for beauty amongst the grotesque and the surreal.

In his concert in Amsterdam from 2004, Waits sets the mood for Alice by discussing spiders and spider webs. He makes the number less jazzy and more of a chamber song. He sings to the audience in a whisper, with both hands curving on the sides of his mouth, as if the lyrics were a secret, giving the impression that he is telling a tale that belongs to someone else, or even to himself. This ballad clashes with other tracks on the album, such as *Kommienezuspadt*, a completely experimental number featuring made-up German words sung in a rumbling distortion. Although Waits' narrator does not create a character using standard procedures here, he (through his narrator) does create a grotesque. This grotesque could be seen to materialise the song into a fantastic yet deformed creature that emerges from the melody and lyrics, and haunts an implied Alice character or voyager whose state may bring relatability to the listener. Once again, the striking conflict between styles and harmonies is made explicit. Waits performed a song very similar to the previous one in 2008 (Berlin), *Table Top Joe*. In this one he begins whispering a couple of ominous "Oh Mys" to the audience, implying that he has experienced something shocking, which, given the freaky, over-accentuated tone of voice quickly makes the character sound insane. Then, he claims the lyrics are biographical; he talks about Joe being a little person (a "dwarf"), and twin to a giant whom they had to cut in half (a story that bears resemblance to Carroll's mushroom, which makes Alice grow bigger or smaller depending on the side she eats from, and, again, another hint at madness). Waits uses the introduction to the song as a metatext (Genette 1987: 172–173) to effectively set the mood to grotesque, since Joe, the character he takes on, is one:

¹² Artwork: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_\(Tom_Waits_album\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_(Tom_Waits_album)).

Well my mama didn't want me
 On the day I was born
 I was born without a body
 I got nothing but scorn

Waits makes sure to praise this character's morality and somewhat instinctive self-respect, as he eventually finds his home in a circus and becomes rich and famous. The sympathy shown for this grotesque is somewhat similar to the ways in which Lewis Carroll's characters are described; however, Waits' song is more explicitly socially invested, as he drops the circus reference hinting that there is only one place these outcasts can ever call home. In the end, what Waits seems to want to get from the audience, based on his many performances of the songs in this album, is to build a realm of make believe where – much like in his ominous and yet hopeful piece, which also includes representations of grotesques – “everything [he] can think of is true” (*Everything You Can Think of is True, Alice*). This could perhaps serve as Waits' motto for freedom, where a world that is already insane is allowed to at least seek refuge in imagination and constant daydreaming. The social sphere he creates for these alienated individuals, and which he personifies in himself, is, very cleverly, more similar to a mental state than a physical place, where one can freely enter and leave at will.

The song *We're All Mad Here*, from *Alice*, gives a very evident account of what really contributes to madness in the crafting of his characters as well as that of his own public persona: it is a somewhat incomprehensible blend of heartbreak that follows societal rejection and neglect, together with the hopelessness that drives those who have nothing to lose, and are, therefore, no longer bothered by social codes:

You can hang me in a bottle like a cat
 Let the crows pick me clean but for my hat
 Where the wailing of a baby
 Meets the footsteps of the dead
 We're all mad here

As the devil sticks his flag into the mud
 Mrs Carol has run off with Reverend Judd
 Hell is such a lonely place
 And your big expensive face will never last

And you'll die with the rose still on your lips
 And in time the heart-shaped bone that was your hips
 And the worms, they will climb the rugged ladder of your spine
 We're all mad here

There is a daunting sense of freedom and peace to this, which becomes clearer in the live performances of the song. It implies that scrutiny can only travel so far, and that those who are othered can always choose to be the ones to separate themselves from society. The archetype of the liberated lunatic in Waits' songs will be seen to inevitably come to embody an archetypal Satan figure. This is the eternal adversary to rationality and society, something which, as stated earlier, was what Greek philosophers feared most. Preyed on by civilisation for long, it is now these 'others' who seek refuge, occasionally through avant-garde forms of self-expression. They run on an incessant heartbeat for the metaphorical release of their true selves, which have been unfairly and harshly rejected. In later albums Waits, as an artist, will follow this path towards crafting and personifying a subversive Miltonian type of Satan.¹³ This will come as the only remedy for the isolated underdogs, alcoholics, and mad people and the only way to prosper in a world that is essentially pernicious and menacing; and the only way to find hearth and home as universal orphans.

The world is not my home
 I'm just a-passing through
 You got to come on up to the house

Come on Up to the House, *Mule Variations* 1999.

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¹³ This follows a pattern similar to Genette's architext (1987: xix), in which the songs are organised into categories depending on the music, themes, and lyrics (these are, in essence, the archetypes of the underdog, the alcoholic, and eventually Satan, etc.).

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