

Jim Morrison Interview With Lizzie James

Lizzie: I think fans of The Doors see you as a savior, the leader who'll set them all free. How do you feel about that?

Jim: It's absurd. How can I set free anyone who doesn't have the guts to stand up alone and declare his own freedom? I think it's a lie – people claim they want to be free – everybody insists that freedom is what they want the most, the most sacred and precious thing a man can possess. But that's bullshit! People are terrified to be set free – they hold on to their chains. They fight anyone who tries to break those chains. It's their security... How can they expect me or anyone else to set them free if they don't really want to be free?

Lizzie: Why do you think people fear freedom?

Jim: I think people resist freedom because they're afraid of the unknown. But it's ironic... That unknown was once very well known. It's where our souls belong... The only solution is to confront them – confront yourself – with the greatest fear imaginable. Expose yourself to your deepest fear. After that, fear has no power, and fear of freedom shrinks and vanishes. You are free.

Lizzie: What do you mean when you say "freedom"?

Jim: There are different kinds of freedom – there's a lot of misunderstanding... The most important kind of freedom is to be what you really are. You trade in your reality for a role. You trade in your senses for an act. You give up your ability to feel, and in exchange, put on a mask. There can't be any large scale revolution until there's a personal revolution, on an individual level. It's got to happen inside first. ... You can take away a man's political freedom and you won't hurt him – unless you take away his freedom to feel. That can destroy him.

Lizzie: But how can anyone else have the power to take away from your freedom to feel?

Jim: Some people surrender their freedom willingly – but others are forced to surrender it. Imprisonment begins with birth. Society, parents – they refuse to allow you to keep the freedom you are born with. There are subtle ways to punish a person for daring to feel. You see that everyone around you has destroyed his true feeling nature. You imitate what you see.

Lizzie: Are you saying that we are, in effect, brought up to defend and perpetuate a society that deprives people of the freedom to feel?

Jim: Sure... teachers, religious leaders – even friends, or so called friends – take over where parents leave off. They demand that we feel only the feelings they want and expect from us. They demand all the time that we perform feelings for them. We're like actors – turned loose in this world to wander in search of a phantom... endlessly

searching for a half-forgotten shadow of our lost reality. When others demand that we become the people they want us to be, they force us to destroy the person we really are. It's a subtle kind of murder...the most loving parents and relatives commit this murder with smiles on their faces.

Lizzie: Do you think it's possible for an individual to free himself from these repressive forces on his own – all alone?

Jim: That kind of freedom can't be granted. Nobody can win it for you. You have to do it on your own. If you look to somebody else to do it for you – somebody outside yourself – you're still depending on others. You're still vulnerable to those repressive, evil outside forces, too.

Lizzie: But isn't it possible for people who want that freedom to unite – to combine their strength, maybe just to strengthen each other? It must be possible.

Jim: Friends can help each other. A true friend is someone who lets you have total freedom to be yourself – and especially to feel. Or not feel. Whatever you happen to be feeling at the moment is fine with them. That's what real love amounts to – letting a person be what he really is...Most people love you for who you pretend to be...To keep their love, you keep pretending – performing. You get to love your pretense... It's true, we're locked in an image, an act – and the sad thing is, people get so used to their image – they grow attached to their masks. They love their chains. They forget all about who they really are. And if you try to remind them, they hate you for it – they feel like you're trying to steal their most precious possession.

Lizzie: It's ironic – it's sad. Can't they see that what you're trying to show them is the way to freedom?

Jim: Most people have no idea what they're missing. Our society places a supreme value on control – hiding what you feel. Our culture mocks "primitive cultures" and prides itself on suppression of natural instincts and impulses.

Lizzie: In some of your poetry, you openly admire and praise primitive people – Indians, for instance. Do you mean that it's not human beings in general but our particular society that's flawed and destructive?

Jim: Look at how other cultures live – peacefully, in harmony with the earth, the forest – animals. They don't build war machines and invest millions of dollars in attacking other countries whose political ideals don't happen to agree with their own.

Lizzie: We live in a sick society.

Jim: It's true...and part of the disease is not being aware that we're diseased...Our society has too much – too much to hold on to, and value – freedom ends up at the bottom of the list.

Lizzie: But isn't there something an artist can do? If you didn't feel you, as an artist, could accomplish something, how could you go on?

Jim: I offer images – I conjure memories of freedom that can still be reached – like the Doors, right? But we can only open the doors – we can't drag people through. I can't free them unless they want to be free – more than anything else... Maybe primitive people have less bullshit to let go of, to give up. A person has to be willing to give up everything – not just wealth. All the bullshit he's been taught – all society's brainwashing. You have to let go of all that to get to the other side. Most people aren't willing to do that.

Lizzie: In your early, first album, stuff, there's a definite feeling of an apocalyptic vision – "break on through"- a transcendence. Do you see this as a still existing possibility?

Jim: It's different now. (Pause) It used to seem possible to generate a movement – people rising up and joining together in mass protest – refusing to be repressed any longer – like, they'd all put their strength together to break what Blake calls "the mind-forged manacles."... The love-street times are dead. Sure, it's possible for there to be a transcendence – but not on a mass level, not a universal rebellion. Now it has to take place on an individual level – every man for himself, as they say. Save yourself. Violence isn't always evil. What's evil is the infatuation with violence.

Lizzie: What causes that?

Jim: If natural energy and impulses are too severely suppressed for too long, they become violent. It's natural for something that's been held under pressure to become violent in it's release... a person who is too severely suppressed experiences so much pleasure in those violent releases... they're probably rare and brief. So he becomes infatuated with violence.

Lizzie: But then – the real source of evil isn't the violence – or the infatuation with it – but the repressive forces.

Jim: That's true – but in some cases, a person's infatuation with violence involves a secret complicity with his oppressors. People seek tyrants. They worship and support them. They co-operate with restrictions and rules, and they become enchanted with the violence involved in their brief, token rebellions.

Lizzie: But why is that?

Jim: Tradition, maybe – the sins of the fathers. America was conceived in violence. Americans are attracted to violence. They attach themselves to processed violence, out of cans. They're TV – hypnotized. TV is the invisible protective shield against bare reality. Twentieth-century culture's disease is the inability to feel their reality. People cluster to TV, soap operas, movie, theatre, pop idols, and they have wild emotion over symbols. But in reality of their own lives, they're emotionally dead.

Lizzie: But why? What makes us run away from our own feeling?

Jim: We fear violence less than our own feelings. Personal, private, solitary pain is more terrifying than what anyone else can inflict.

Lizzie: I don't really understand.

Jim: Pain is meant to wake us up. People try and hide their pain. But they're wrong. Pain is something to carry, like a radio. You feel your strength in the experience of pain. It's all in how you carry it. That's what matters. (Pause) Pain is a feeling – your feelings are a part of you. Your own reality. If you feel ashamed of them, and hide them, you're letting society destroy your reality. You should stand up for your right to feel your pain.

Lizzie: Do you still see yourself as the shaman? I mean, lots of Doors fanatics look to you to lead them to salvation. Do you accept that role?

Jim: I'm not sure it's salvation that people are after, or want me to lead them to. The shaman is a healer – like a witch-doctor. I don't see people turning to me for that. I don't see myself as a savior.

Lizzie: What do you see them turning to you for, then?

Jim: The shaman is similar to the scapegoat. I see the role of the artist as shaman and scapegoat. People project their fantasies onto him and their fantasies by destroying him. I obey the impulses everyone has, but won't admit to. By attacking me, punishing me, they can feel relieved of those impulses.

Lizzie: Is that what you meant before, about people having a lot of wild emotions over symbols – pop idols for instance?

Jim: That's right. People are afraid of themselves – or their own reality – their feelings most of all. People talk about how great love is, but that's bullshit. Love hurts. Feelings are disturbing. People are taught that pain is evil and dangerous. How can they deal with love if they're afraid to feel?

Lizzie: Is that why you said, "My only friend, the End"…..?

Jim: Sometimes the pain is too much to examine, or even tolerate…..That doesn't make it evil, though – or necessarily dangerous. But people fear death even more than pain. It's strange that they fear death. Life hurts a lot more than death. At the point of death, the pain is over. Yeah – I guess it is a friend…..

Lizzie: People see sex as the great liberator – the ultimate freedom. Aren't a lot of your songs pointing the way to freedom through sex?

Jim: Sex can be a liberation. But it can also be an entrapment.

Lizzie: What makes the difference?

Jim: It's all a question of how much a person listens to his body – his feelings. Most people are too battered with rules to be heard, and bound with pretenses so it can hardly move. We cripple ourselves with lies.

Lizzie: How can we break through the rules and lies?

Jim: By listening to your body – opening up your senses. Blake said that the body is the soul's prison unless the five senses are fully developed and open. He considered the senses the "windows of the soul." When sex involves all the senses intensely, it can be like a mystical experience...

Lizzie: In some of your songs, you present sex as an escape – a refuge of sanctuary – like "Crystal Ship" or "Soft Parade" or "Soul Kitchen." I've always been fascinated by the way your lyrics suggest parallels between sex and death – "Moonlight Drive" is a beautiful example. But isn't this an ultimate rejection of the body?

Jim: Not at all – it's the opposite. If you reject your body, it becomes your prison cell. It's a paradox – to transcend the limitations of the body, you have to immerse yourself in it – you have to be totally open to your senses...It isn't so easy to accept your body totally – we're taught that the body is something to control, dominate – natural processes like pissing and shitting are considered dirty...Puritanical attitudes die slowly. How can sex be a liberation if you don't really want to touch your body – if you're trying to escape from it?

The article "Jim Morrison: Ten Years Gone" was originally published in article form with commentary by Ms. James in the 1981 Creem Magazine Special Edition devoted to the Doors on the tenth anniversary of Jim Morrison's passing. This is an unedited portion of the interview, this section of the piece is uncorrected, the original being unavailable. Parts of this interview were also published in The Doors Illustrated History.

From: [Jim Morrison: Ten Years Gone by Lizze James - Creem Magazine, 1981](#)

Also can be found at [Roger Brown's Quasar website](#).