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Recurrent topics in Nick Cave's lyrics and prose

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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci na téma Recurrent topics in Nick Cave´s lyrics and prose vypracovala pod vedením vedoucího práce samostatně za použití v práci uvedených pramenů a literatury. Dále prohlašuji, že tato práce nebyla využita k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

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podpis

Chtěl bych poděkovat svému vedoucímu bakalářské práce Mgr. Jakubu Ženíškovi za odborné vedení, za pomoc a rady při zpracování této práce.

## **ANOTACE**

Cílem této práce je srovnání písňové tvorby australského hudebníka Nicka Cavea s jeho prózou, zejména s románem *A uzřela oslice anděla*. Práce se zaměřuje na témata opakující se v jeho díle, například téma lásky, smutku, utrpení, smrti, vraždy, hudby, násilí, sexu a náboženství. Předmětem zkoumání je také vliv témat na lyricitu nebo epičnost textu.

V jeho románové tvorbě můžeme vysledovat paralely k jeho životnímu stylu hudebníka a zpěváka.

## **ANNOTATION**

The aim of this thesis is to compare Nick Cave's lyrics with his prosaic work, especially the novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. It focuses on the main topics covered in his work, such as love, sadness, suffering, death, murder, violence, music, drugs, sex and religion. The topics are observed in relation to the lyrical or epic elements of the text. There are many parallels in his novels that relate to his lifestyle as a musician and a performer.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Nick Cave, *A uzřela oslice anděla*, písňové texty, poezie, láska, smutek, utrpení, násilí, smrt, vražda, hudba, sex, drogy, víra, šílenství

## **KEYWORDS**

Nick Cave, *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, lyrics, songwriting, poetry, love, sadness, suffering, death, murder, music, sex, drugs, faith, madness

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## Introduction

Nick Cave is best known as a singer of his band The Bad Seeds. During the last thirty years, he has been a frontman of several rock groups, namely The Boys Next Door, The Birthday Party, The Bad Seeds and Grinderman.

However, music is not his only sphere of interest. When he was young, he attended an art school in order to become a painter and later he took up writing as his most recent creative endeavor. He began his writing career by composing lyrics for his band and later he progressed and wrote a novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, which is considered as his masterpiece. Over past couple of years, he has also been active in the movie industry as a screenwriter, he appeared in couple of films as an actor and also composed several film soundtracks.

From this point of view, he can be seen as a true Renaissance man, who in his creative work employs different art forms. Such a wide scope of art work is not unusual for musicians and we can find some other artists who started with songwriting and turned out to be successful poets or novelists.

One example of this case is Patti Smith, American singer who won a National Book Award with her novel *Just Kids*. We can also mention Leonard Cohen, Canadian folk singer with Jewish roots, who wrote two critically acclaimed novels, *The Favorite Game* and *Beautiful Losers*.

This thesis seeks to compare the lyrics that Nick Cave wrote for his band with his prose, especially with the novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. This thesis will review the main topics that plausibly connect his writings with his personal experience. His life as an artist and a rock star is reflected in his work, as well as his various adventures involving drugs.

The practical part of the thesis will more closely scrutinize some crucial topics, namely the topics of love, murder, music, drugs and religion.

For the purpose of basic taxonomy, Cave's writings will be divided according to whether they are mainly lyrical or epic. It can be assumed that the novels will be more epic, because there is more space to tell the story, but that does not automatically mean that the shorter song lyrics will be lyrical only. The respective part of the thesis try to compare how



in each genre the epic story is delivered to the reader differently and, alternatively, how the epic content in the song lyrics can be synthesised with some degree of syllogic clarity, despite the fact that rock'n'roll lyrics tend to use free association as the default.

Nick Cave's work spans four decades and the number of his writings (especially songs' lyrics) leaves no other choice but to select only those whose texture allows for a more complex interpretation. Some obviously syllogic pieces of his writing had to be omitted for the purpose of this work.

# **1 Nick Cave - life and work**

## **1.1 Nick Cave as a musician**

### **1.1.1 Early years**

Nicholas Edward Cave was born in Warracknabeal, Australia on the 22nd of September 1957. His mother was a librarian and his father a secondary school teacher of English and math. His parents encouraged his passion for the books, in the movie *20,000 Days on Earth* he remembers how his father used to read Nabokov's *Lolita* and what a crucial experience this has been to him. (Forsyth, Pollard)

Cave was raised as an Anglican and later became fascinated by The Bible, especially The Old Testament, and biblical allusions can be found interweaving his work. (Alderton)

When he was thirteen, Cave was expelled from high school and he continued to be a problematic teenager known for his eccentricity and troubles with law. When he was nineteen, his father died in a car accident, which had a great impact on the young artist.

He attended an art school for two years; his original plan was to become a painter. Therefore it can be said that he has touched almost all forms of art during his life. However, Nick soon quit the academic ground and concentrated mainly on music.

### **1.1.2 The Boys Next Door and The Birthday Party**

In 1978, while staying in Melbourne, Nick founded a high-school band The Boys Next Door with Mick Harvey, who stayed with Cave in The Bad Seeds for another 25 years. Other members of the band were Tracy Pew, Phillip Calvert and Rowland S. Howard. (Johnston 13)

In 1980, the album *The Birthday Party* come out and the band slowly adopted the same name. The band moved to London and later to West-Berlin. In both places they quickly established themselves as an important part of alternative scene. (Johnston 111)

The band did not have a great commercial success, the live performances often resulting in chaos. They performed mostly in small obscure clubs; their wild attitude was even heightened by the use of alcohol and various drugs. Cave began to use heroin when he was attending art school and this habit lasted with him for years. In London he lived with Anita Lane, who appeared on some of the early Bad Seeds' songs and who repeatedly worked with the band for the next couple of years. The band broke up in 1983, some of the members aiming for their own careers, some continuing to form The Bad Seeds. (Johnston 125)

### **1.1.3 Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds**

The Bad Seeds were first established in 1983, with Mick Harvey from The Birthday Party and Blixa Bargeld, guitarist and leader of the industrial band Einstürzende Neubauten, who had met Cave while they were both living in Berlin. Other members through the years included Barry Adamson, Thomas Wydler, Jim Sclavunos and Warren Ellis. (Johnston 140)

The band was influenced by various genres, eclectically mixing Elvis Presley's songs with punk and new wave and creating his own original sound. Their first album was *From Her to Eternity*, and then they relocated to Berlin. This was another period of on-the-edge lifestyle, because as critical acclaim and commercial success graduated, there were also parties and drugs. The band appeared in the Wim Wenders' film *Wings of Desire*. (Johnston 192)

In 1989 Cave broke finished his first novel, *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. Soon after that, he attended a drug rehabilitation program. He moved to Brazil and married Viviane Carneiro and together they had a son.

At that time, Cave's music became more calm. He often used the form of a ballad, accompanying himself with a piano. Album *The Good Son* was released in 1990, followed by *Henry's Dream*.

The next album, *Murder Ballads*, was a big commercial success. Violent lyrics about killers and their victims were always Cave's specialty. He recorded two duets for this album, *Henry Lee* with P.J. Harvey, whom he used to date at the time, and *Where the Wild Roses Grow* with Kylie Minogue, which became a mainstream hit.

In 1999, Nick Cave married a British model Susie Bick and a year after they had twins named Arthur and Earl. Unfortunately, his son Arthur died in 2015 after he fell off a cliff after taking some LSD. (Smith)

Following album *The Boatman's Call* focused mainly on the topic of love. After *Nocturama*, released in 2003, Blixa Bargeld left the band wishing to spend more time with his family and his original band *Einstürzende Neubauten*.

#### **1.1.4 Grinderman**

In 2006, Nick Cave, along with with Jim Sclavunos, Martyn P. Casey and Warren Ellis, formed a side project called *Grinderman* and next year they released an album of the same name. Its raw, garage-like sound reminded the public and reviewers of *The Birthday party*.

Second and last album, *Grinderman 2*, was also experimental and sort of psychedelic. The project ended in 2011, with a one-time reunion two years later at *Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival*.

### 1.1.5 The Bad Seeds nowadays

Album *Dig, Lazarus, Dig!!!* was released in 2008 and it was influenced by Grinderman. Lyrics based on biblical motives as well as aggressive music did not resemble The Bad Seeds from previous years. Shortly after, Mick Harvey announced his decision to leave the band after 25 years for personal and professional reasons.

After this, The Bad Seeds were not active for a few years, with Nick Cave concentrating on his side project Grinderman.

After few years of silence, The Bad Seeds released their so far last album, *Push the Sky Away*. The album resembles some of their older music, especially *The Boatman's Call*, it is a return towards minimalistic melodies with emphasis on the lyrics.

The band now seems to be as active as twenty years ago, going on tours all around the world, playing their old hits as well as the new ones.

In 2014, documentary movie about Nick, called *20,000 Days on Earth*, was directed by Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard. In this movie, we can see stylized (not as much by the directors as by himself) twenty-four hours in the life of an artist.

## 1.2 Novels

### 1.2.1 **And the Ass Saw the Angel**

Nick Cave's first novel was first published in 1989, but he had been working on it for a few years, during which he lived in a West-Berlin. Berlin at the time was allegedly a very bohemian city which attracted alternative artists from all around the world.

The end of the eighties was a time when Nick experimented with many drugs; especially his heroin addiction was at that time very strong. All his inner demons are manifested in a book. About the process of writing Cave himself says: "In the actual realization of the story, in terms of the character, I found myself becoming more and more obsessed with Euchrid. More and more becoming his character. There was a definite change in the way I related to other people. The more I concerned myself with writing the book, which I had to do in four-month chunks, and then go off with the band, the more I became involved and obsessed and like him in my habits: more and more reclusive. It became like method writing." (Smith)

The main protagonist of the novel is Euchrid Eucrow, a mute boy from the family of alcoholics. His brother twin dies during the childbirth and Euchrid grows up outside the local religious community of Ukulites. His father Ezra makes traps and collect trapped animals to torture them and and he kills his wife in a rage. Ezra is later killed in what seems to be an accident.

The novel's settings are inhabited by strange creatures. The mad preacher Abie Poe falls into the company of hobos and those are later killed by themselves and by Euchrid. Cosey Mo, a local prostitute addicted to heroin, is Euchrid's object of desire and admiration. She is lynched by the enraged crowd and later dies but before she gives birth to a girl.

Beth resembles her mother and for Euchrid it is impossible to stay away from her. Beth thinks Euchid is Jesus and prays to him. He finally tries to kill her but is chased into the swamp where he dies. The Beth dies but the child is saved and Euchrid's son becomes the new town's saint.

This novel is often labeled as southern gothic. The religious sect of Ukulites is very similar to the Mormons in their seclusion. (Wilson) The language of the book is very complex, onomatopoeic and visual, mixing dialect with very formal English. Biblical language is used in quotations; there are documents and maps depicting the scenery, even the flyer at the beginning of a second chapter. We can also find lamentations and monologues that may have been loosely based on Christian Jeremiads rooted in the Old Testament.

There are multiple narrators in the book. There is an omniscient narrator who gives us an objective picture of the situation and there is a first-person narration from Euchrid himself, which is a highly subjective point of view. There are also instances of camera-eye technique, for example in this passage which transpires shortly after Euchrid kills the hobo:

“Euchrid lay sprawled across a heap of strangled bedding. Unmoving in the moon-glow, he wore a singlet stained with rings of dark, leaked sweat and patches of gravy-coloured blood. His denims were stiff with grime and gore. His bed, a heap of sacks thrown in a pile on the floor, could barely be distinguished from the garbage and rubble and animal filth that surrounded it. Lit by both moon and lamp, the squalor seemed alive under the pale but stuttering light. The recumbent Euchrid appeared bereft of life.” (Cave 145)

As for the time setting of the story, according to the fifth chapter of the first book: “Well, ah was in mah seventh year and ah remember sitting on the steps of the porch (...) That’s approximately what ah was thinking there on the steps in the summer of ‘40.” (Cave 18)

We can therefore assume that Euchrid Eucrow was born somewhere around 1933 and he dies twenty-eight years old in 1961.

The Bible, especially The Old Testament, clearly provided Cave with a strong source of inspiration. Although Euchrid is mute, he can talk with God and in his head also God talks to him and reveals him something what Euchrid calls “Big plan”. This schizophrenic nature of Euchrid also manifests itself in seeing angels. Also Beth is here seen as some kind of saint. This seems to be alluding to the topic of prophetic exclusivity ubiquitous in Christianity and other major monotheistic religions.

The novel also features a self-referential book in the book device. There is a passage when Euchrid finds the book: “Ah was reminded of an illustration ah had torn from a book ah had found buried unner some mutilated girlie magazines on the junkpile out back of the shack. It was called Go Ask The Angel or O The Ass On That Angel or some such smut.” (Cave 75)

Cave deftly deploys the literary devices of foreshadowing and flash-ahead in this novel. For example, when the cursed horse, named Sorrow, spooks and drowns in the mud, we already know by that time that the same destiny is awaiting Euchrid.

### **1.2.2 The Death of Bunny Munro**

Nick Cave’s second novel was released in 2009, twenty years after *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. In a striking contrast to the Southern Gothic label of Cave’s literary debut, Independent’s reviewer Matt Thorne calls this book “a work of contemporary kitchen-sink realism.” (Thorne)

Bunny Munro is a repulsive character. The middle-aged womanizer and door to door salesman does not care about anything except sex, drugs and booze. The book starts with the suicide of his wife who cannot stand his attitude anymore. Bunny then takes his nine-year-old son Bunny Junior for a road trip, trying to teach him the business.

This novel is nothing like the first one. While *And the Ass Saw the Angel* had taken Cave several years to finish, he claims he wrote *The Death of Bunny Munro* in only a few weeks’ time. (Thorne) The setting of the novel is the current city of Brighton in South East England, which also happens to be the current residence of Nick Cave lives and his family. The novel is permeated with references to the modern culture. Most notably there is the presence of pop singers Avril Lavigne and Kylie Minogue in Bunny’s erotic fantasies.

Cave uses an omniscient narrator; therefore we have a fairly good insight into the mind of a man who seems completely possessed by all the world’s vices. His stream of thought is like a continuing flow of dirty talk and images of sex. He is practically a caricature, prototype of a chauvinistic macho.



It is known from the first page and from the title itself that the main character is doomed to die. From the point when his wife dies, the readers can watch the downward self-destructive spiral of actions, driven by purely animal needs. There is no place for spirituality in the life of Bunny Munro.

The atmosphere of the book is grotesque and unreal, yet absurd situations are described very naturally, as for example when Bunny rapes an overdosed junkie who is dying. Bunny's sense of humor is very low and very vulgar, typical example being jokes about genitals and sex.

Cave in this book again proves that he is the master of the English language. His very sophisticated style is here intently contaminated with pornographic expressions and vulgarisms, quite in line with the postmodern artistic maxim of mixing the high and the low.

There is an interesting character of a serial killer dressed up as a devil who is going slowly towards Brighton and Bunny and his wife are obsessed with him. He creates the atmosphere of fear and foreboding.

The little Bunny Junior mirrors the actions of his father. He loves both of his parents and after the death of his mother he is taken out of the school and travels with his father to "learn the craft". Bunny is everything but the caring father. He fails to provide his son with basic necessities, for example the solution for his contact lenses. Besides that they are eating only unhealthy food and Bunny Junior has to witness his father's obscenities.

Bunny's wife, Libby, commits suicide at the beginning of the book, but both the father and son feel her presence through the rest of the book. This ghost of a dead mother and wife creates a supernatural element in otherwise purely materialistic world. Bunny sees her for the first time when he is having sex with another woman. This only strengthens his paranoia.

Bunny Junior sees the ghost of his mother when he is left on his own in the car, abandoned by his father who goes to his customers. He has the feeling of safety as she is always wearing the orange dress, the ones she had on when she killed herself. Near the end of the

book they have a conversation in which she encourages him to stay strong and warns him that something bad is about to happen.

If in Cave's previous book *And the Ass Saw the Angel* there were multiple allusions to the Old Testament, here we can find the allusions to the New Testament. Especially, The Revelation to John is mentioned. (Cave 176) The apocalyptic prophecy of the end of the world is mirrored in the end of *The Death of Bunny Munro*. Cave uses the similar vivid imagery and the atmosphere of the book foreshadows some tragic end, which is the final obscure death of the main character.

In the chapter when Bunny and Bunny Junior are visiting Bunny's father, we can see that they are quite alike. Bunny Munro senior is a scary caricature of a man. He is even more vulgar than his son. They obviously share some negative characteristics and the reader is inevitably left to wonder whether even the young boy will be affected.

When Bunny gets into car accident, he is dying and he has a hallucination about all the people he has wronged during his live. He says his apologies and asks for forgiveness. He dies in his son's arms in the air of consolation.

## 2 Methodology - lyrical and epic writing

As has been mentioned at the outset, the taxonomy of the theoretical part will partly rely on the conventional division into lyric and epic can be used as a methodological ground. A large contingent of the work under examination will consist of song lyrics, i.e. a genre which may loosely qualify as poetry. Considering this, and also the fact that the thesis is primarily content oriented, and therefore does not discuss formal issues such as Cave's poetics and prosody, we may safely abide by this basic general taxonomy examining some finer nuances.

According to Holman's *Handbook to Literature*: "It is [...] still common today to classify poetry into three great type-divisions: the epic, the dramatic and the lyric. These three types are, in turn, broken into further classifications." (353)

There are no dramatic works by Nick Cave except his movie screenplays, which are outside the scope of this thesis, so the focus will be put on the lyrical and epic types of writing.

The main characteristic of the epic genre is the story that is narrated. Story is "in its broadest sense any account, written, oral or in the mind, true or imaginary, of actions in a time sequence." (Holman 438) Story differs from plot, which "takes a story, selects its materials in terms not of time but of causality, gives it a beginning, a middle, and an end, makes it serve to elucidate or develop character, embody a theme, express an idea, incite to an action, or express an abstract concept." (Holman 439)

As an antipode, lyric is "characterized by a minuteness of subject, great delicacy of touch, much care in phrasing, artificiality of sentiment, and formality" (Holman 47) and "marked by imagination, melody, and emotion, and creating for a reader a single, unified impression." (Holman 262)

For the purpose of this thesis it would be useful to divide Nick Cave's lyrics into three basic groups and create taxonomy according to the lyrical/epic scale.

## 2.1 Lyrical writing

In lyrical songs, there is usually no clear story present in the text. Instead there is an expression of a feeling or an emotion. It often induces a certain atmosphere or expresses the quality of an item or a particular observation. It can be presumed that it will be concerned with more abstract topics such as for example the topics of love or religion.

There is a whole album that can be described as mostly lyrical. *The Boatman's Call* was released in 1997 and it consists of twelve songs. The main topics that repeatedly appear in the songs are love, faith, mourning, saying goodbye and death, which are mostly abstract. There are no complete narrations in the lyrics.

A fairly representative example of this type of lyrics can be “Into My Arms”, first song from *The Boatman's Call*.

“I don't believe in an interventionist God  
But I know, darling, that you do  
But if I did I would kneel down and ask Him  
Not to intervene when it came to you  
Not to touch a hair on your head  
To leave you as you are  
And if He felt He had to direct you  
Then direct you into my arms” (Cave 504)

As can be seen from this first stanza, in this song there is no story. The text compares the love of God to the human love and therefore deals with the topics of love and faith. The author addresses a girl who is dear to him and he seems to be assessing the value her love flatteringly when compared to (her own) doctrinal devotion and, perhaps more importantly, he chooses to condone the existence of divine providence as long as it leaves her natural beauty untampered and sanctions her choice of the author as her love interest. The juxtaposition of romantic love and doctrinal devotion may be understood as an echo of 17<sup>th</sup>

century British metaphysical poets or the more mild-mannered devotional poetry by authors such as Anne Bradstreet, to stay within the same century. The author's request for untampered natural beauty, on the other hand, is an obvious variation on the time tested Renaissance/Romanticist theme.

## 2.2 Epic writing

As an opposition to the lyrical texts, there is a group of epic writings, containing both lyrics and novels. The genre of novel is predisposed to be epic, because of its greater extent that creates more space for narrating the story. Nick Cave's novels are not an exception, although in both of the books there can be found lyrical and descriptive passages.

Holman defines song as "a lyric poem adapted to musical expression" and he adds that "Songs lyrics are usually short, simple, sensuous, emotional - perhaps the most spontaneous lyric form." (Holman 432) In the process of creating a song, there is no space for long detailed stories, so most of the songs employ association and ellipsis.

However, among Nick Cave's songs, many of them do tell a story which can be easily synopsisized. There are usually folk-like, simple narrations, often told from the first person point of view. Topics are not abstract; sometimes they can be inspired by events that happened in a real life or by some old traditional song. Presumed topics are murder, madness, drugs and sex.

There is one album that is composed solely of epic songs, namely the monothematic *Murder ballads* released in 1997. Ten songs are united by the topics of murder and death and they are both original and covers of traditional songs.

One example of this type of epic lyrics can be "O'Malley's Bar", a song that is more than fourteen minutes long. It is basically a lengthy and detailed description of a mass murder in a local bar, told from the point of view of the killer. The narration is very naturalistic and does not avoid any part of the plot, no matter how gory it may be.

“Well, you know those fish with the swollen lips  
That clean the ocean floor  
When I looked at poor O’Malley’s wife  
That’s exactly what I saw  
I jammed the barrel under her chin  
And her face looked raw and vicious  
Her head it landed in the sink  
With all the dirty dishes.” (Cave 482)

Narrator here addresses the audience, as to regain their sympathy. Later when the police arrive he contemplates suicide, but is too cowardly to kill himself and eventually gives up to the police.

### **2.3 Lyrics employing free association**

There are some lyrics that do not belong to neither one of the preceding categories, but have certain parameters of both lyrical and epic. These are the lyrics that employ free association, but they are generally not lucid enough to lend themselves to a clear-headed synopsis, so this is a very fringe and liminal category within the scope of this thesis.

Example of this category can be the song “That’s what jazz is to me“ from the album *Tender Prey* released in 1988. The main topic of the song is music and the associations it induces.

“Fire eating drag queens dressed as society whores  
Crazy two timing bitches running round  
Ghetto blasting blasters, blasting magnificently  
Blossoms falling from the cherry trees

That's what jazz is to me

High buildings with crippled backs

Circle around my dreams

I clutch at the greasy tails of my dreams" (Cave 296)

It is necessary to mention that there are also songs which fall outside of the scope of this thesis, as my expertise and interpretive abilities do not enable me to crystallize them enough for the purpose of this project.

### 3 Murder as a form of art

Nick Cave's work was never considered particularly joyful, so it is not surprising that when you ask people what topics come to their mind (an anecdotal reference to a little experiment I conducted with some of my friends), murder is definitely somewhere at the top of the list. Maybe it has something to do with the enormous success of *The Murder Ballads* (I remember that while I was at high school, there was an entire wall with the painting of Nick and Kylie Minogue from the clip "Where the Wild Roses Grow", created during the art class).

Indeed, in the world of Nick Cave the readers can trace very few (if any) instances of a natural death. People do not die quietly in their bed, weary with old age and diseases. Instead we can trace all kinds of violent ends. Cave seems to really enjoy killing his characters in the most brutal ways. Let us look closer at the murders in his work.

It has become rather inappropriate to use writers' biography as an interpretive prism for their work, yet it is tempting to guess where Cave's fascination with death might have come from, maybe it was because of the death of his father, which affected young Nick. Death was always an inherent part of Cave's work.

The first song about murder that can be found is "6" Gold Blade" from Birthday party's album *Junkyard* released in 1982. Cave here stylizes himself into the role of the murderer and narrates the story from the first-person perspective. This viewpoint will be repeated in many of his later songs, resulting in Cave's image of a villain.

Another song dealing with the topic of murder is "Knockin' on Joe" from the album *Firstborn Is Dead*. In this story, the main protagonist is a man who is convicted to death. Cave will later revive this topic in his famous song "The Mercy Seat" which was later covered by Johnny Cash. There is music a video for this song where Cave can be seen in the cell, acting the role of the criminal.



Among the lyrics employing free association there is “Scum”, where audience can get only pieces from murderer’s monologue. At the end of the song there is a passage describing the murder:

“That’s right, it’s a gun  
Face bubbles blood in Grub street  
Snowman with six holes clean into his fat fuckin’ guts  
Psychotic drama mounts  
Guts well deep then spring abounds  
I unload into his eyes  
Blood springs  
Dead snow  
Blue skies” (Cave 212)

Another later case of free association can be “We Came Along This Road” from *No More Shall We Part*, where only two initial lines tell us that:

“I left by the back door  
With my wife’s lover’s smoking gun.” (Cave 616)

“John Finn’s Wife” from *Henry’s Dream* contains another epic narration. Both here and in “Stagger Lee” from *Murder Ballads* there are women who serve as a reason for the murder and in both cases their husbands are eventually killed.

### **3.1 *The Murder Ballads***

In 1996, ninth studio album by Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds was released. It consists of ten songs, most of them in the genre of murder ballad, which is either traditional or newly composed song narrating the story of a murder, chain of events that leads to the murder and often the story of both the victim or victims and the murderer. Holman describes the

ballad as “a form of verse to be sung or recited and characterized by its presentation of a dramatic or exciting episode in simple narrative form.” (Holman 53)

On this album, Cave collaborated with Kylie Minogue, P. J. Harvey and Shane MacGowan, who all appeared on the last track “Death Is Not the End” originally written by Bob Dylan. This is the only unquestionably lyrical song on the record; as it creates a final consolation and a sense of balance:

“When you’re sad and when you’re lonely  
And you haven’t got a friend  
Just remember that death is not the end” (Cave 446)

There are some songs that can be described as lyrics employing free association, for example “Lovely Creature” and “Crow Jane” In the later, the passage of her preparation for the killing is a part of a dialogue:

“O Mr. Smith and Mr. Wesson  
Why you close up shop so late?  
Just fitted out a girl who looked like a bird  
Measured .32, .44, .38  
I asked that girl which road she was taking  
Said she was walking the road of hate.” (Cave 476)

There is no clear story that can be synopsisized, associations suggest that the girl was looking for weaponry. There is the transition between last two lines where instead of giving her directions she says she is walking the road of hate.

However, the majority of the songs is epic. Here are two duets: “Henry Lee”, traditional song recorded with P. J. Harvey, and “Where the Wild Roses Grow” written by Cave and recorded with Kylie Minogue (her part was often sung by Blixa Bargeld during the live shows).

What is interesting is the presence of women murderers on this album. So far the majority of Cave's killers were men strikingly similar to Cave himself. Here he breaks this pattern and in "Henry Lee" (this particular song was however not written by Cave) and "Crow Jane" are the main protagonists women and moreover, in "The Curse Of Millhaven" are all the horrible crimes committed by a little girl.

There is also an aspect of name dropping, when in Song of Joy the murderer:

"Quotes John Milton on the walls in the victim's blood  
The police are investigating at tremendous cost  
In my house he wrote Red right hand  
That, I'm told is from Paradise Lost" (Cave 450)

Cave also has a song titled Red Right Hand on his album Let Love in. The quote from Book Two from Milton's *Paradise Lost* is thus:

"What if the breath that kindl'd those grim fires  
Awak'd should blow them into sevenfold rage  
And plunge us in the flames? or from above  
Should intermitted vengeance arm again  
His red right hand to plague us?" (Milton)

### **3.2 Murder in *And the Ass Saw the Angel***

In this book, the presence of death in the story starts with the prologue. Readers know from the start that the main character is doomed to die. But it all started generations ago, Euchrid's father Ezra came from a family that was known for incest behaviour, which caused mental instability and acts of cruelty, murders among them. Also Jane Crowley, Euchrid's mother, has her parallel in Crow Jane from *Murder Ballads*.

When Euchrid Eucrow is born, first thing he sees is the death of his brother twin. There is an interesting connection with the album *Firstborn is dead*. There is a parallel with the life of Elvis Presley, Cave's idol. Elvis Presley was born in Tupelo, Mississippi and had a few minutes older twin brother, who was delivered stillborn. Cave later covered his song *In the Ghetto*.

The lynch of Cosey Mo, a local whore and heroin addict is seen more like an act of justice and morality. Only Euchrid shows compassion for the poor woman and Cosey is finally buried by his father Ezra. Before that she makes one last appearance, leaving behind newborn who was about to become town's new Messiah.

In the book, the death of an animal repeatedly foreshadows the death of a person. The horse named Sorrow anticipates Euchrid's destiny, they both drown in a swamp. Pa beats Mule to death and it foreshadows the murder of Ma, which is painted very naturalistically:

“He slammed his body into hers, hammering her head face first against the wall. Glass splintered as the bottom of the stone bottle, still in her mouth, smashed the glass in the wedding picture, and a strange sick gurgle accompanied it. With a fistful of hair Pa wrenched back her head and pounded her face into the wall again. The bottle sank deeper and even from where ah was ah could hear her jaws cleave apart with a clear "cra-a-ack," so that the third time the bottle slipped into her throat, it split her grin's skin from ear to ear.“ (Cave 121)

In general, there are some differences between the depiction of the murders in the novel and in the songs. In the song the author is bound by the formal shape of the song and by its rhythm. On the other hand in the novel there is more space for a lengthy description of the act. The story compressed into song is not able to cover all the details, mental processes of the killer and his inner monologues.

When Euchrid's Pa dies, at first it seems like an accident. Crushed by his own watertank, in which he used to store dead and tortured animals, he could have been the victim of his own cruel behaviour.

Sometime after Euchrid moves to Doghead, he addresses his audience once again:

“Do you think that ah don’t know what’s running through your minds? Well let’s straighten some simple truths that seem to be getting mighty twisted. Ah did not sabotage the water tower. Ah mean, for Christ’s sake, the goddamn stilts were riddled with woodrot. In any case, me and Pa were close. God rest his soul. Perhaps they crept up from town and did it? Ah can’t, in fairness, directly blame them but ah wouldn’t put it past them. Would you?

Ah’m no killer, no. Well, yes ah am. OK—so ah killed a few hobos last year. But one thing at a time and each thing in its place. Do you know that you will be a party to mah inevitable and irreversible demise? No? Well, oil your shotguns and grease your machetes and noose up a nice fat rope, for, know it or not, you are the ones that will hunt me down—yes! Hunt me down and kill me. Hunt me down and kill me. You hate me and you don’t know why. But one thing at a time and each thing in its place. Now to return, to the grave where mah daddy lay for the rest of his days. For the rest of his days.” (Cave 198)

Perhaps more interesting that Euchrid’s confession that he may have been involved in the death of his father is the fact that Cave here drags the reader into the center of the action. Euchrid’s accusations that the reader will be involved in his persecution and death are a part of strategy how Cave wants to find a possible murderer in every reader.

Shortly afterwards Euchrid murders another hobo. He poisons some liquor and lets the hobo steal it. This time he is just getting rid of someone who has violated his newly gained territory. There are also the murders of other hobos, Queenie, Kike and Albie Poe, who are in the book reduced almost to animals.

And finally there is the murder of Beth. Euchrid believes that he can talk with God and that he is predestined to kill Beth. She does not attempt to resist him, strongly convinced that Euchrid is Jesus, she is awaiting her destiny. He uses the sickle as a murder weapon and gets sick right after. This murder is different for him; suddenly he feels remorse and even breaks into tears after. Beth dies but her newborn baby is rescued, Euchrid’s offspring is ready to be the next Messiah of the town.

The one remaining death is Euchrid drowning in a swamp. Through the book there can be seen his prolonged dying as he is slowly sinking deeper into mud. In the end the swamp is set to fire by a raging crowd.

### **3.3 The unnatural *Death of Bunny Munro***

Bunny Munro, however repulsive a character he may be, is not a killer like Euchrid Eucrow from *And The Ass Saw the Angel*. His actions are more subtle, for example when his wife hanged herself, nobody doubts that it was Bunny's notorious unfaithfulness that contributed to Libby's suicide. He later becomes paranoid and haunted and sees her everywhere, which is a sign of remorse.

Another incident occurs when Bunny finds an overdosed junkie that looks like Avril Lavigne and instead of helping her he takes advantage of her. There is a very descriptive, pornographic passage that describes her death which was nominated for a Bad Sex in Fiction Award in 2009.

In *Death of Bunny Munro* there is only one true murderer, serial killer in a devil's costume who is slowly approaching Brighton. Libby is nervous and paranoid about him and later Bunny fears him as well.

In both Cave's novels, the main characters die at the end. The inevitable death of Bunny is also foreshadowed throughout the book and in the title itself. However, Bunny is not murdered, his death during the car accident seems almost banal.

## 4 Love in a dark world

It may seem strange that in a cruel and decadent world of Nick Cave, the topic of love is very often present in his work, arguably as a singular way of transcending a very bleak and dark world. In the previous chapter, murder was picked as an example of topic connected with the epic aspect of Cave's work. In this chapter there will be discussed the topic of love and his influence on the lyrical aspect of the text.

As mentioned above, the songs in which the topic of love is present are usually lyrical. First songs employing the topic of love are those written for Anita Lane (an artist and a former Cave's girlfriend, with whom he lived in Berlin), namely "From Her to Eternity" and "Cabin Fever" from the album *From Her to Eternity* released in 1984.

In some songs, the topic of love is closely connected with the topic of sexuality, for example in "Hard on for Love" from the album *Your Funeral, My Trial*. There are images of physical love:

"It is for she that the cherry bleeds  
That the moon is steeped in milk and blood  
That I steal like a robber  
From her altar of love" (Cave 232)

When it comes to love songs, crucial was the album *The Good Son* released in 1990. "Foi na Cruz" integrates the topic of love with traditional Brazilian Protestant church song.

One of the most known Cave's songs about love is "Ship Song", slow and soft ballad where Nick is accompanied by piano and in his white suit and in the company of children he looks like the opposite of his dark self. This album also contains couple of songs that deal with unhappy love. "Lament" contains a description of a beloved girl who is gone away and also "Lucy" and "The Train Song" are songs written from the point of view of an abandoned lover.

Album *Let Love In* has the word love in its title and the first song “Do you love me?” is a description of love through which can the main protagonist, an outlaw and generally dark character, be saved.

The next song “Loverman” is about love that is more physical, the actual lover is more readily understood as the Mephistophelian tempting presence of the devil. Here the love is not something innocent, but destructive, almost animalistic power. Also “I Let Love In” is not a song that would be suitable to be played on a romantic date, the very first line saying: “Despair and Deception, Love's ugly little twins.” (Cave 414)

On the album *Nocturama*, there is a remarkable song called “Babe, I'm on Fire”. It is over fourteen minutes long song, most of time Cave names the people who are saying the refrain:

“The drug-addled wreck  
With a needle in his neck says it  
The drunk says it, punk says it  
The brave Buddhist monk says  
Babe, I'm on fire  
Babe, I'm on fire

Hit me up, baby, and knock me down  
Drop what you're doing and come around  
We can hold hands till the sun goes down  
Cause I know  
That you  
And I  
Can be  
Together  
Cause I love you” (Cave 682)

There is also an exceptionally funny video clip with the band members dressed in various costumes.



## 4.1 *The Boatman's Call*

The album *Murder Ballads* was used to demonstrate the topic of murder and its epic potential. To follow this pattern, we can use album *The Boatman's Call* (which was released only a year later, so they both come from the same creative period of his life) to show the various forms in which the topic of love can be found and its tendency to make song lyrical.

The first song "Into My Arms" does not employ only the topic of love between partners, but touches also the topic of spiritual love. On this album there is a noticeable inclination towards spiritual and religious. This can be seen for example in the song "Lime-tree Arbour" in the refrain:

"Through every word that I speak  
And every thing I know  
There is hand that protects me  
And I do love her so" (Cave 508)

Songs "People Ain't No Good" and "Where Do We Go Now But Nowhere?" deal with the topic of unhappy love. In the second one there is a trace of a story, when author wants to explain why the relationship is irreparably broken:

"Across clinical benches with nothing to talk  
Breathing tea and biscuits and the Serenity Prayer  
While the bones of our child crumble like chalk  
O where do we go now but nowhere" (Cave 520)

This is one of the rare epic fragments in this category. However, the reader does not get more hints of the actual story.

"Idiot Prayer" combines two above mentioned topics of love and murder. Cave pictures his favourite portrait of a murderer. The killer addresses his victim, his fatal love, but this time we do not get the murder ballad with a story, just the lyrical confession.

Songs “Black Hair” and “Far from Me” refer to Cave’s relationship with British musician P.J. Harvey and their break-up.

## **4.2 Love in the Ukulore valley**

Euchrid Eucrow, the main protagonist of the novel “And the Ass Saw the Angel”, had experienced in his life a lot of violence and fear, but very little of love. Therefore searching for the topic of love in the book appears to be a difficult task.

There was certainly no love in the relationship of his parents and Euchrid himself was certainly not a beloved child. Only thing resembling love is Euchrid’s silent adoration of Cosey Mo, local fallen woman. After her death he keeps her perfumes and personal things together with a lock of hair and hides them in the box as a remembrance.

Euchrid’s relationship with Beth is similarly unbalanced. He is spying on her, because she reminds him of her mother. Beth on the other hand thinks that Euchrid is Jesus and worships him and prays to him. This connection between love and religion, when the God is loved almost in the profane meaning of the word, appears in Nick Cave’s world quite often.

## **4.3 Is Bunny Munro capable of love?**

Bunny Munro is a selfish person who appears to love only himself. His word is ruled by sex, but what about love? To trace this feeling in a world so sarcastic and decadent is not an easy task.

At the beginning of chapter three, there is repeatedly said that: “the weather is fine and Bunny loves his wife.” (Cave 24) In the same chapter his wife Libby commits the suicide, unable to cope with his affairs and his constant drinking.

## 5 The question of faith: Is there a God?

Nick Cave's attitude toward religion changed couple of times during his lifetime. He was raised in an Anglican family and attended services regularly when he was a boy. However his attitude toward Church was at the time very distant. It was only a few years later that he approached The Bible as a literary text and at first he become fascinated with the Old Testament.

The Biblical language as well as the idea of cruel and merciless God from the Old Testament had a profound influence on Cave's writing, especially on the novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. Later he was studying the New Testament as well and become interested in the life and acts of Jesus Christ. In this stage, he perceived the religion through the literary qualities of the Bible.

When the album *The Boatman's Call* was released, Cave was interviewed by Belgian Magazine "Telemoustique" and he was given the question whether he really believes in God:

"I'm a believer. I don't go to church. I don't belong to any particular religion, but I do believe in God. I couldn't write what I write about and be creative without a certain form of belief. Most of my lyrics have a spiritual character and deal with this search for God. I've always had this faith, even if, at a certain time, I could not say it with the same conviction. Nothing happened in my life. I had no revelation. For me, believing in God doesn't change life. It is neither an obstacle nor a relief. It has no influence on my behaviour. Believing has nothing to do with morality, but with freedom and inspiration. For many people, faith should automatically dictate a behaviour, show the way to saintliness. Far from these certainties, my faith is made of doubts." (Alderton 179)

In the movie *20,000 Days on Earth* Cave says that his religious period was just a phase that was connected with the stage of his life when he was using heroin regularly. However in this document it is very hard to distinguish what is truth and what is mystification.

First song in which the topic of faith can be found is “Big-Jesus-Trash-Can” from the Birthday Party’s album *Junkyard* released in 1982. Here Jesus is a nickname of a figure that is described in the song:

“Big-Jesus soul-mates Trash-Can  
pumped me fulla Trash at least it smelt like Trash  
wears a suit of Gold (got greasy hair)  
but God gave me sex appeal” (Cave 64)

“Christina the Astonishing” from the album *Henry’s Dream* is a song based on the form of the legend. Legends are generally described as narratives of the lives and deeds of the saints.

The topic of faith appears in both lyrical and epic songs, it depends on its combination with other topics. As it was shown in the chapters above, in combination with the topic of murder (*Murder Ballads*) the songs are usually more epic and in combination with the topic of love (*Boatman’s Call*) the songs are mainly lyrical. Generally the topic of faith does not determine whether the song is more epic or more lyrical.

On the album *No more shall we part* there is a song “Hallelujah”, the word itself being the refrain and also the only visible religious element in the song. The reason for this can be the inspiration by traditional gospel that is visible mainly at the end of the song.

Another song from this album, “Fifteen Feet of Pure White Snow”, contains at its end a prayer:

“Raise your hands up to the sky  
Is it any wonder?  
Oh my Lord Oh my Lord  
Oh my Lord Oh my Lord  
Save Yourself! Help Yourself!” (Cave 600)

In the last line it is obvious that Cave is sceptical about the idea of God who intervenes in the affairs of the world.

In the song “God is in the House” Cave paints the picture of an ideal utopic society, in which there is no crime, but looking at the wider picture, the whole song is just a caricature of the religious society ignoring the real problems of the world.

Not all the songs are so sceptical, for example “Bless His Ever-loving Heart” is based on the feeling of God’s love and unquestioning faith. The same thing can be said about “Let the Bells Ring” from the album *Abbatoir Blues / The Lyre of Orpheus* with the refrain:

“Let the bells ring  
He is the real thing  
Let the bells ring  
He is the real, real thing.” (Cave 746)

## 5.1 The God of Ukulites

It was already mentioned that the novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel* was very much influenced by the Old Testament, even the title comes from the Book of Numbers.

The second chapter begins with the poster inviting the inhabitants for a religious celebration. Jonas Ukulore, town’s prophet and Messiah, is the central character of the Ukulite’s faith. They even built him the monument on the square in the centre of the town.

Sardus Swift, Ukulore’s religious leader is later replaced by Abie Poe, fanatic preacher with rather theatrical and very exalted behaviour. Here is the extract from his first sermon:

““And ye,” said Poe, finger pointing at one and all, after the chair had at last stopped its terrible puling and the attention of the congregation was his again, "ye cocks of the dunghill, ye strutters on the muckheap of the world, ye who have kissed the devil beneath the tail, pray to the Lord God Almighty that He have mercy upon you! For His hunter has his arrows drawn, and, like the way to the kingdom, his aim is straight and clean. Pray, wallowers, for His hunter's heels are raised! Wicked hearts shall be lanced, and their carcasses swallowed into the earth!”” (Cave 56)

The Ukulites remind us of Southern religious communities that were based on evangelical Protestantism and isolated from an outer world. Undoubtedly the religious Ukulites meet all the characteristic of the sect. As Charles Reagan Wilson describes it: “Sectarians relied often on charismatic leadership, doctrinaire beliefs, and rigid morality to create separate religious space and to compete effectively for members.” (Wilson)

Euchrid firmly believes that he can talk with the God. The voice in his head telling Euchrid about “His Big Plan” would nowadays be considered as a sign of schizophrenia. In the similar way Beth believes that she can talk to Jesus. In both these cases the faith is purely personal, they believe they can communicate with the God directly; therefore they do not need the institution of the Church.

Cosey Mo, local prostitute and a heroin addict is in this novel pictured as a saint. When Euchrid narrates her story, he describes her as beautiful and pure. Later he compares her to an angel. After her death, he collects her personal things and keeps them as a remembrance. He is later drawn to Beth, her daughter, who is considered to be the redemption child for the town.

## **5.2 Secular world of Bunny Munro**

Bunny Munro does not believe in God, Bunny Munro is an ultimate sinner and a heretic. In his world the miracles do not happen and there is no afterlife. Can the topic or faith be traced in the novel?

The absence of any religion and focus on the profane are the constituting elements of the novel. Even the funeral of Libby, Munro’s wife, is not a quiet piety, but is ruined by the arguments and Bunny’s inappropriate behavior.

The only supernatural elements in the story can be explained psychologically. Bunny sees the ghost of his dead wife because he feels guilty and his son sees his dead mother because he feels alone and abandoned.

## 6 Drugs and inspiration

Nick Cave used to be known not only for his work, but also for his exuberant lifestyle. He experimented a lot with various substances and the whole band used to throw parties in the typical rock 'n' roll style.

Cave himself started using heroin when he attended the art school and this addiction lasted for the next twenty years. He also experimented with other drugs and significant part of his work was created in a state of intoxication.

The drug addiction manifested itself in his first novel, *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. Cave himself described the process of writing:

“I was always taking heroin. But that Berlin amphetamine is the most extraordinary stuff – if you kept taking more, you never slept. So that created some extraordinarily lengthy days and nights, days and nights, at the typewriter. The [original] book was 500 pages long, twice as long as the published version. The speed probably had something to do with that.”  
(McLean)

The topic of drug abuse can be found rather often in Cave's work, but the topic itself does not have a direct influence on the lyric or epic text. Drugs are used by his characters but in most cases this does not create the epic narration.

However, a significant part of the references to drugs can be labeled as free associations. In the community of the drug users it is common to use a substitution word for the drug, for example “snow” for cocaine and similar stimulants. The addicts usually speak in this code to avoid disclosure.

The song “Sometimes Pleasure Heads Must Burn” from the album *Junkyard* is a typical example. The lyrics are very unclear, describing probably the state induced by the use of cocaine:

“bu-u-u-u-u-rn! pop! pop!  
bu-u-u-u-u-rn! pop! pop!  
I feel a little low, you know what I mean?  
buried neck-high in British snow  
I reckon I'm a bit too close to this one  
shoot me darling, shoot me in the head and go” (Cave 86)

In the song “Babe, I got you Bad,” there is the picture of “a bed of snow“, in which the unfortunate lover lies.

Perhaps the most known Cave’s song about drugs is “Fifteen Feet of Pure White Snow” from the album *No More Shall We Part*. The reference to cocaine is in the title itself and the whole song deals with the matter of the drug addiction:

“Where's my nurse  
I need some healing  
I've been paralysed  
By a lack of feeling  
I can't even find  
Anything worth stealing  
Under fifteen feet of pure white snow” (Cave 598)

It is also important to mention the alcohol in this chapter, among the experts there is a tendency to label alcohol as a hard drug. Cave has a couple of drinking songs. “Brother, My Cup Is Empty” from *Henry’s dream* is a lament of a lonely drinker at a bar who is out of money.

Loretta, the little murderess from “The Curse of Millhaven” is given the legal drugs as a treatment: “So it's Rorschach and Prozac and everything is groovy” (Cave 470) In “Opium Tea” from *Boatman’s Call* Cave uses the substance as a song’s title.



## **6.1 Drugs and alcohol in And the Ass Saw the Angel**

In the dark and gloomy world created by Cave, the unhappy characters try to find the meaning of life in the various substances. Both Euchrid's parents are alcoholics, his mother is drunk even during the childbirth. She also distills her own brews called White Jesus, Apple Jack and Stew.

The hobos are also heavy drinkers and preacher Abie Poe joins their company. Euchrid uses their addiction to alcohol and poisons the bottle he gives them.

Only one person in the book uses hard drugs. Cosey Mo is a heroin addict, despite this Euchrid sees her as a saint. She is the sinner among the puritan inhabitants of the town, but from Euchrid's point of view there is certain purity in her because she does not engage with the townsfolk and therefore is an outlaw, just like Euchrid himself.

## **6.2 Bunny Munro and his favourite drugs**

Bunny Munro is among Cave's heroes the most repulsive one. Reader can easily feel pity for Euchrid Eucrow and his unhappy fate, but Bunny intentionally chooses his life path. His hedonic lifestyle includes as much sex, booze and drugs as he can get.

It starts with the first chapter when reader learns that Bunny is drinking all day and his wife Libby is taking antidepressants. However the pills will not save her from committing suicide. After the death of his wife Bunny has no reason to stay sober so he drinks almost constantly through the novel.

There is also a young junkie who reminds Bunny of Avril Lavigne and who dies from overdose while having sex with Bunny.

## 7 Music as a purpose of life

Although the two novels established Cave as a successful writer, he is still seen mainly as a musician and rockstar. Writing songs and touring with his band takes up most of his time so it is natural to ask what kind of impact his musical career may have on his writing.

In his work the topic of music is not as common as one would think. This topic is also only minor and appears mostly in combination with other topics, so it does not have a profound effect on the lyric or epic in the text.

The first song where this topic can be found is “Zoo-music Girl” from the album Prayers on Fire released in 1981. The meaning of the song is rather opaque, Cave employs free association:

“you know exactly what I'm talking about  
don't drag the orchestra into this thing  
rattle those sticks, rattle those sticks  
the sound is beautiful, it's perfect!” (Cave 30)

“The Six Strings That Drew Blood” from the album From Her to Eternity is about the killer who is at the same time a guitar player, so Cave here combines the topics of music and murder.

The song “Tupelo” and the title of the album Firstborn is dead are both inspired by the life of Elvis Presley. There are allusions to the birth of the “King” as well as to the death of the firstborn brother. Cave deeply admired Presley, he even covered his song “In the Ghetto.”

In “That's What Jazz Is to Me” from the album Tender Prey Cave cumulates the free associations and metaphors to describe jazz music and its influence on him:

“History repeating itself like a vindaloo  
All the great cars of the world in one massive collision  
All the doctors swallowed up by one incompetence  
All the great theorists and teachers eaten alive  
Religious ecstasy and a blossom falling from a cherry tree  
That's what jazz is to me ” (Cave 296)

## **7.1 Music in novels *And the Ass Saw the Angel* and *The Death of Bunny Munro***

In Euchrid Eucrow's world the absence of music is striking. Euchrid being mute, he has no chance to speak or sing and the moral puritanism of the citizens allows them only religious songs, all entertainment is dubious.

Euchrid's family is too unsophisticated to read the book or to listen to the music. This lack of culture of any kind (with the exception of religious texts about Jonas Ukulore) contributes to the seclusion of the valley.

Bunny Munro is not very sophisticated either. He has all the possibilities but his only cultural activity is watching TV (preferably with porn). He measures the quality of pop music through the attractiveness of the singers. He seeks only the sexual icons Kylie Minogue and Avril Lavigne.

It seems that Cave does not employ the topic of music in his novels for a reason. Both of the novels are centered on the characters whose lives are so deranged that they are not capable to understand and to enjoy the music.

## Conclusion

Nick Cave is an artist who concentrates mainly on his band as a singer and a songwriter. Besides that he wrote two novels, *And the Ass Saw the Angel* and *The Death of Bunny Munro*. Both the novels are considered to be important additions to the current Anglo-American literary lore and thanks to those books Cave established himself as a writer.

The purpose of this work has been to compare Cave's songs with the two novels and to focus on some recurring topics in his work. The methodological approach consisted of the observation of the effect that those topics have on the text in terms of its lyric or epic components or, more importantly, whether there is some degree of consistency in the way Cave approaches identical or similar subjects. This consistency stands out in the case of lyrics with the topic of murder. In these songs author narrates the story, often using the point of view of the killer and naturalistic details.

The lyrics were divided into several groups. Topics which tend to emphasize the epic aspect of the text and create a narration were represented by the topic of murder and as the model album were chosen *The Murder Ballads*.

In the next chapter, the topic of love was chosen to contrast with the topic of murder. The topic of love has a tendency to strengthen the lyrical element in the text. The album on which this tendency was explained was *The Boatman's Call*. Both the albums were released in two following years, therefore it can be said that those tendencies existed concurrently.

The topics of murder and love were chosen as the two main examples to demonstrate the lyric and epic potential and were elaborated on in detail. The thesis continues with the topics of faith, drugs and music which are usually not crucial enough to determine the lyric or epic aspect of the text which depends on their combination with other topics. Therefore they could not be put into the abovementioned categories.

There is also another marginal category of the lyrics employing free association that are on the borderline between lyric and epic. The attention was drawn to the individual examples of this category.

Another presupposition was that there would be the difference between the individual genres of Cave's work. The song lyrics were supposed to have a tendency to be more lyrical, because of their formal attributes and the novels on the other hand contain enough space for the lengthy narration.

This presupposition was not fully confirmed because Cave mastered the ability to deliver the complete detailed narration in the song which can be seen mainly in his album *The Murder Ballads*.

It was not possible to include the full quantity of Cave's work into this thesis, especially in the amount of songs he has produced over the years it was necessary to omit some of his less known and in the overall context less important pieces. Some lyrics were not lucid enough to generate a clear interpretation.

The particular topics described in this thesis were chosen to demonstrate the methodological framework and according to their relevance in Nick Cave's work.

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**Prohlášení žadatele o nahlédnutí do listinné podoby práce před její obhajobou**

Závěrečná práce:

Druh závěrečné práce:           Bakalářská práce

Název závěrečné práce:        Recurrent topics in Nick Cave's lyrics and prose

Autor práce:                    Eva Wicheová

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