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Catherine Girodet

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**Monstrosity in the Music
of PJ Harvey and Nick Cave:
the Poetics of the Grotesque in Rock**

Présentée par Catherine GIRODET

Sous la direction de
Monsieur le Professeur Claude CHASTAGNER

Soutenue le 6 décembre 2019 devant le jury composé de :

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Résumé

LA MONSTRUOSITE DANS LA MUSIQUE DE PJ HARVEY ET NICK CAVE : UNE DYNAMIQUE GROTESQUE DANS LE ROCK.

Les univers sonores des auteurs-compositeurs de rock indépendant PJ Harvey et Nick Cave sont souvent présentés comme une même réalité musicale de sensibilité « gothique », hantée par la violence, la folie et la peur. Par ailleurs, les deux parcours partagent une esthétique de l'extrême où se mêlent grotesquerie psychique, corporalité abjecte et transgression au gré d'un mode hyperbolique oscillant entre horreur et parodie.

En s'appuyant sur les modalités du monstrueux dans les œuvres des deux artistes, il s'agit de mettre au jour la stratégie de rupture et de contradiction déployée, ainsi que les mécanismes grotesques qui la sous-tendent.

En s'appuyant sur les études gothiques anglo-américaines, la critique du grotesque et la récente recherche anglophone sur la monstruosité (« *Monster Theory* »), ce travail met en lumière une écriture transgressive de l'humain qui passe du mode carnavalesque au mode introspectif, entremêlant les plaisirs troubles du jeu monstrueux et le récit de vie, par le biais d'une spectralité musicale, intertextuelle et inter-artistique.

MOTS-CLEFS :

Ambivalence – Gothique – Grotesque – Hybridation - Horreur – Humour noir - Monstruosité – Théorie de la monstruosité - Récit de vie - Transgression - Rock indépendant – Traumatisme - Violence

Abstract

MONSTROSITY IN THE MUSIC OF PJ HARVEY AND NICK CAVE: THE POETICS OF THE GROTESQUE IN ROCK.

The independent rock singers-songwriters PJ Harvey and Nick Cave have often been critically compared on account of their Gothic sensitivities and fascination with violence, insanity, and fear. Moreover, the two musicians share an aesthetics of the extreme intermingling psychic grotesquerie, gross corporality, and transgression by means of a hyperbolic mode oscillating between horror and parody.

Focusing on the monstrous modalities at work in both bodies of work, this dissertation investigates Harvey's and Cave's strategy of contradiction and disruption and its grotesque mechanisms. Drawing upon Anglo-American Gothic studies, grotesque criticism, and recent Monster Theory, this research brings to light a transgressive rendering of human identity ranging from the carnivalesque to introspective modes, in a songworld alternating the lure of barbaric drama and life writing, and with an aesthetic of intermusical, intertextual, and inter-artistic spectrality.

KEY WORDS:

Ambivalence – Black humour - Gothic – Grotesque – Hybridisation - Horror – Independent Rock - Lifewriting - Monstruosity – Monster Theory - Transgression - Trauma - Violence

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STYLING

Gender-neutral language

Whenever the gender of a singular subject is unknown (e.g., performer, singer, writer...), I use gender neutral pronouns “they/their/them” in reference to them.

Gothic / gothic

“Gothic” is capitalised as noun and in lower case as adjective.
The noun “Gothic” is generally used without a definite article.

Grotesque / grotesque

“Grotesque” is capitalised as noun and in lower case as adjective.

References to *Gothic* by Fred Botting

By default, I use the 2014 edition, hence the *Op.Cit.*:

BOTTING. *Gothic*. *Op.Cit.*

When referring to the 1996 edition I signal it as follows:

BOTTING. *Gothic*. 1996. *Op.Cit.*

Photographs and visual documents

All artwork used for close analysis is included directly in the text.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. Presentation of the Two Artists' Songworlds

The singer-songwriters PJ Harvey and Nick Cave have often been critically compared to each other on the 1990s independent rock music scene, on account of their gothic-romantic themes and self-representations and of their aesthetics of the extremes. Beyond their temporal and geographical concurrence on the London scene from the early nineties onward, the two musicians share a number of key hallmarks in terms of themes, aesthetics, and musical texture.

Theirs is a polymorphous style prone to experimentation and abrupt stylistic shifts: from dissonant post-punk cacophony, through jaunty rock soundscapes, and to more expansive sobering pieces. This idiosyncratic musical style is deployed against a similarly mutable cultural and generic backdrop, whereby Harvey and Cave draw upon various cultural spaces and traditions to explore the darker side of reality. Most of their early 1990s music is infused with the barbaric and the monstrous, and features a wealth of unpalatable tales such as the ravings of barbaric murderers and paranoid misfits, and the violent fantasies of sex-obsessed minds. Both musicians thus conjure up a world awash with violence and alienation where human beings forever dwell on the psychic edge.

In dramatising the vicissitudes of subjective formation, the works of Harvey and Cave foreground a postmodern awareness that the self is not whole and set, but rather is fragmented, in flux and under constant threat of dissolution both from without, and most terrifyingly, from within. In their song-worlds, the monstrous threat thus lurks not only in the hostile external environment, but indeed at the very heart of the human psyche, assaulting the protagonists' senses and sanity and leaving them torn between their civilised selves and their barbaric impulses. This inner monster, the underside of consciousness, is evoked in terms of gross corporeality (extreme physical violence and abject representations), and psychic grotesquerie (terror, loathing, barbaric impulses, distortion...).

Whilst their songs of monstrosity may be considered aesthetically gothic in their focus on the barbaric, paranoia and the taboo¹, they also exhibit grotesque sensitivities in their propensity for disharmony, exaggeration, and extreme ambivalence². In particular, they

¹ PUNTER, David. *The Literature of Terror, a History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*. London and New York: Longman, 1980.

² THOMSON, Philip. *The Grotesque*. London: Methuen and co Ltd, 1972.

incorporate extreme forms of incongruity in the treatment of horror (e.g., the co-presence of the comic and the terrifying) and the conflation of perceived incompatibles (e.g., human/animal, male/female). Overall, their monstrous songs make for an unpredictable listen, alternately soliciting the audience with their escapist drama and playfulness and rebuffing them through violence and disgust.

We are going to probe the grounds for a joint study on Harvey and Cave, and survey their marginality on the rock scene and their artistic interactions.

1.1. Two Mavericks on the UK Independent Rock Scene

Firstly, in order to locate Harvey and Cave on the British spectrum, we are going to take a cursory glance at the musical landscape of the 1990s independent rock scene. Secondly, we will stake out their interplay with the independent rock scene in general.

Harvey and Cave are widely perceived as unclassifiable mavericks on the UK independent rock scene. Although both musicians are sonically grounded in rock music in terms of instrumentation (guitar, bass, drums) and sonic structure (chorus and verse), their shared tendency to experiment across genres and cultures sets them apart from the collective semantics of Independent British Rock. When their career paths crossed in London in the early nineties, the UK indie rock scene was heavily influenced by *Cool Britannia*, a 1990s cultural movement in pop rock and contemporary art that celebrated British popular culture heritage, and influenced fashion and cinema. *Cool Britannia* found its conduit in Britpop, a British pop and rock movement that exalted Britishness through regional topics, sensitivities, and musical lineage. Such Britpop figureheads as Suede, Blur, Oasis, and Pulp put British 1960s and 1970s pop and rock aesthetic back in the frame. Britpop's emphasis on British musical heritage and identity made it a mono-cultural phenomenon with little or no space for such stylistic and cultural hybrids as Cave and Harvey. The only feature that Harvey and Cave shared with British rock was not so much a sonic style as a propensity for literate music (especially Cave), stylisation, and irony, which may relate their music to the British art-rock of the seventies.

However, in terms of sonic and lyrical texture, Harvey's and Cave's early nineties productions had nothing in common with whatever else was happening in British Indie rock at the time: Harvey's debut albums *Dry* (1992) and *Rid of Me* (1993) had more to do with

American grunge's lo-fi and "ugly" aesthetic of distortion, while Cave's *Good Son* (1990) and *Henry's Dream* (1992) were dark rock ballad albums with explicitly North American narratives and blues-rock inflections. Their resort to American hybridisation sets their aesthetics apart from early nineties' British Independent rock (i.e., the prominent Britpop trend), with its focus on defiant and undiluted Englishness. In running against the grain of the early nineties *Zeitgeist*, they thus stood out as maverick musicians at the periphery of British indie rock.

At the other end of the UK rock spectrum were the direct offshoots of the nineties' rave culture: Trip-Hop (e.g., Portishead, Massive Attack, Tricky), and electronic dance music or EDM (e.g., The Chemical Brothers, FatBoy Slim, Prodigy, Drum'n'Bass...). The rest of the indie set of hip-hop, electronic music, and dance music was closely related to the drug-fuelled club-scene of the time, and encompassed "trippy" soundscapes with loops of either deep slow beats (e.g., Trip-Hop) or fast techno beats (e.g., Drum'n'Bass, Big Beat). This rave-inspired music was part of a youth subculture that originated mainly from London, Bristol and Manchester, which made it a parochial British phenomenon.

Cave's and Harvey's reliance on cultural and musical hybridisation positions them closer to the UK Dance music scene of the time, which exhibited "a pro-hybridity rhetoric".³ By purposely melding together Indian, Western, and African tunes, such ethnic electronica groups as Asian Dub Foundation, Transglobal Underground, and Indie Rock band Cornershop set a potent World Fusion musical counter-current to the parochial Brit-rock mainstream. However, it is noteworthy that Harvey's and Cave's hybridisation is not so much politically as aesthetically motivated; rather, its idiosyncratic use may be ascribed to artistic license rather than identity politics.

1.2. Polymorphism and Ruptural Style

Moreover, Harvey and Cave are not only marginally positioned on the British nineties independent scene, but also on the independent rock scene in general: due to their essential polymorphism, the two productions elude musical categorisation. The broad-ranging label "independent rock" fails to capture the stark variations at work in the two bodies of work: the extreme stylistic mutability and the all-abiding cultural and generic cross-fertility underlying

³ REYNOLDS, Simon. *Bring the Noise: 20 Years of Writing About Hip Rock and Hip-Hop*. London: Faber and Faber, 2007. 275.

them. A cursory glance at both productions testifies to the sheer breadth of their stylistic spectrum.

Over the course of her twenty-six-year career, Harvey has made a habit of baffling both rock conventions and her public's expectations by constantly reshuffling her musical texture. Her music jump-cuts from the shrill strings and grunge-inflected sonic of her 1992-1993 debut albums to an expansive blues pastoral with *To Bring You My Love* (1995), slick FM Rock in 2000, and onward to a distinctive blend of rock, pop and folk music (*Let England Shake* [2011] and *Hope Six Demolition Project* [2016]). Her instrumentation itself is prone to abrupt changes, as over time she has replaced or counterpointed her emblematic guitar with a piano (*White Chalk*, 2007), an autoharp (*Let England Shake*, 2011), and a saxophone (*Hope Six Demolition Project*, 2016).

Cave exhibits a similar experimental disposition, his career spanning raucous post-punk cacophony (the early 1980s Birthday Party), a more cohesive blues-rock balladic style (1984-1996), a foray into hymnal style from 1997 to 2001, and free-style ambient ruminations from 2013 onward (*Push the Sky Away* [2013] and *Skeleton Tree* [2016]). Like Harvey, he has also challenged the rock canon by producing a piano-led "hymnal" diptych (*The Boatman's Call*, 1997, and *No More Shall We Part*, 2001) in the middle of an otherwise blues-rock songbook. Cave not only resorts to musical hybridisation, but also generic hybridisation, as he overtly experimented with Southern Gothic literature by writing a novel (*And the Ass Saw the Angel*, 1989) much in the same vein and aesthetic as his musical production of the time. Cave also writes poetry, and has consistently affirmed his main focus on the lyrical craft, which foregrounds an intersection between his music and literature, and by extension, interrogates the interplay between Independent Rock and literature.

Through their forays into intermusicality and intertextuality, Harvey and Cave challenge the boundaries of the rock canon, and stretch the semantics of the term "Independent Rock". Their fluid creativity beckons beyond the confines of rock, and weaves outwardly disparate (or even incompatible) borrowings from other genres into the fabric of their repertoire.

Moreover, they are essentially not in line with other existing aesthetic clusters within rock repertoire (e.g., Industrial Gothic, Brit-rock...) with their set collective semantics and practices. Indeed, whereas independent rock is based on the notion of difference⁴ that delineates

⁴ GROSSBERG Lawrence, "Is there rock after punk?" *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*. Ed. Simon FRITH, and Andrew GOODWIN. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. 111-124.

a collective identity against other existing trends, Harvey and Cave operate apart from other existing indie rock hubs, and within a fluid aesthetic framework. The two productions thus fall out at the seams of independent rock, being altogether too polymorphous to be contained within its boundaries.

1.3. Professional and Personal Crossroads

Unsurprisingly, the two *gothic-ish* mavericks' musical and personal paths have crossed over the years. In 1995, Harvey and Cave collaborated in a duet for Cave's album *Murder Ballads*: "Henry Lee". The song is a Romantic murder ballad, casting them as two lovers caught in murderous embrace, at the end of which Harvey kills Cave for spurning her for another girl. Real life met fiction, as the two singers fell in love during the shoot and went on to have a much-publicised affair. Their whirlwind relationship fuelled extensive coverage in the music press, and contributed to further bind the two songworlds and musicians together, thereby creating a sort of mythology around the pair of dark lovers. Their relationship crashed after a year, and inspired Cave to write an album about his heartbreak, *The Boatman's Call* (1997), that included several songs about Harvey. As a barely concealed fictionalisation of their relationship, the album has mythologised the couple, and incidentally fused them in rock's public consciousness. Since then, they have not performed together, except for a one-off impromptu duet during one of Cave's book-reading event in 2009.⁵

However, they have continued to intersect indirectly, through key collaborators: Mick Harvey and Flood. Mick Harvey, a founding member of Cave's Bad Seeds, played with them for twenty-five years and he has also played and produced for Harvey since 1995. Similarly, Flood mixed and produced six Cave and the Bad Seeds albums from 1984 until 1996 and has been regularly producing and co-producing for Harvey since 1995. These significant musical overlaps reflect deep-seated musical affinities between the two musicians, whilst establishing an overt musical thread between their respective bodies of work.

More recently, songs of theirs were used for the soundtrack of the BBC TV hit series *Peaky Blinders* (2013-present). Cave's blues noir track "Red Right Hand" is the series theme

⁵ On 11th October 2009, at the Palace Theatre (London), Cave launched his black comedy novel *The Death of Bunny Munro*, with a show entitled "An Evening with Nick Cave" which contained book-readings and musical pieces. Harvey was spotted in the theatre and persuaded by the crowd to join Cave onstage and sing "Henry Lee" with him.

tune, and other tracks are used as soundtrack, whilst Harvey's music constitutes the main bulk of season 2's soundtrack. In 2014, Harvey sang a cover version of "Red Right Hand" for the series. The co-presence of Harvey and Cave on the series' soundtrack takes their musical kinship away from the confidentiality of rock and into the wider arena of popular culture, thereby consecrating their artistic affinities.

2. Individual Hallmarks

2.1. Nick Cave

Australian singer-songwriter Cave began his musical career on Melbourne's postpunk rock scene in the late seventies, more than fifteen years before Harvey's ground-breaking debut on the British independent rock scene in 1992. Cave's forty-year artistic career has been remarkably prolific and broad-ranging, encompassing twenty-two studio albums, four live albums, two novels, three poetry books, and a wealth of side-projects including writing film scores, screenplays and co-directing films, as well as the occasional acting part.

Cave's music is underpinned by an abiding fascination with the darker end of the lyrical spectrum, which has earned him the trite nickname of "the Prince of Darkness" in the popular music press. The Cavian songworld is indeed a dark underworld haunted by the motifs of violence, the barbaric and the taboo, and peopled by a gallery of deranged denizens. Whether evoked in songs, films, poetry or music soundtracks, the Cavian world lies on the outer reaches of normality, where rationality collapses before corporeal violence and psychic grotesquerie.

The Band behind the Man: Cave the Frontman and Conductor

While Cave has gone through a number of solo and duo side-projects over the years, his main creative trajectory is overwhelmingly intertwined with his bands: from his early post-punk bands The Boys Next Door and The Birthday Party (from the mid-seventies to 1983), to his band of thirty-three years: The Bad Seeds (from 1984 until the present day). Cave's songwriting and musical artistry have thus come to fruition in symbiotic interaction with his bands, and through a succession of potent creative synergies with key band-mates. More recently, for the 2017 release of a twenty-year compilation of the Bad Seeds work, Cave has repeatedly stated that his creative collaborations have been critical to his success and ability to progress

musically. These creative collaborations have included Australian guitarist Mick Harvey (1973-2009), avant-garde Berlin guitarist and vocalist Blixa Bargeld (1983-2003), and lately Australian multi-instrumentalist Warren Ellis (from 1995 to the present day).

The Bad Seeds have consistently relied upon a dynamic of novelty and change both in terms of style and band-mates, and Cave himself has relied on this band's dynamic for creative impetus and stylistic renewal. Therefore, Cave's craft should be construed in relation to his band, and perhaps, the very name "Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds" may be misleading in that it signals two separate entities: the lead singer as the mover and shaker and his support band. And yet, they may be more intermingled than their name suggests, since Cave's success and longevity probably owe as much to his artistic vision and charisma as to the band's ability to bring him fresh musical impetus.

Although Cave feeds off The Bad Seeds creatively, Cavian band politics have consistently remained his own prerogative: having formed the band, he retains creative authority over them. He very much steers his band's musical trajectories, reviewing their creative moves and bringing specific band members to the creative helm, as has lately been the case with genius experimentalist Warren Ellis, who has become the creative driving-force behind The Bad Seeds since Mick Harvey's departure in 2009. As well as a lyricist and leader of his band, Cave is also their face and the embodiment of their music: he is the front-man whose performances exude the raw life force and the dark radiance of transgression, violence, and black humour present in their music.

Although The Bad Seeds have been mutable in style and have undergone some turnover over the years, they nonetheless present some fixed hallmarks: Cave's volcanic stage presence and frontmanship, and a lyrical focus on transgression, violence and the Anglo-American cultural space.

The Art of Songwriting: Cave the Literary Musician

Within the economy of the Bad Seeds, lyric-writing has been Cave's sole prerogative, and he has thus shaped the lyrical scopes of the songs, leaving his band-mates in charge of setting the lyrics to music. In this respect, the Bad Seeds can indeed be considered as "the vehicle for Nick to hang his words on".⁶ This particular *modus operandi* implies that the Cavian

⁶ ELLIS, WARREN. "Lovely Creatures Grow from Seeds". Rae, Harvey. *The West Australian*, 5 May 2017. <<https://thewest.com.au/entertainment/music/lovely-creatures-grow-from-seeds-ng-b88461437z>>

song primarily hinges on a narrative songtext, which gets subsequently fleshed out into a song through musical composition. This process is revealing of Cave's core artistry: his is first and foremost the lyrical craft, above and before music. That is how the band operates, and also how Cave constructs himself narratively, as he has consistently claimed his hybridity as a literary musician, repeatedly affirming in interviews his interest in the literary craft, and reiterating his literary filiations (with Southern Gothic authors, English Romantic poets, and Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca).

Moreover, Cave's ambitions as a literary musician and his interactions with existing literary genres are not confined to songwriting but also surface in his various literary endeavours: his poetry collections *King Ink*, *King Ink II* and *The Sick Bag*, and his novels *And the Ass saw the Angel* (1989) and *The Death of Bunny Munro* (2009).

Cave's versatile songwriting has resulted in a rich lyrical tapestry that owes as much to his experimenting not only with existing musical traditions (the American Murder Ballads, the blues, laments and Anglican hymns), but also with the literary reservoir (the American Southern Gothic, tall tale frontier storytelling, English Romanticism, poetry, and the Spanish *duende*). The breadth of his lyrical repertoire extends far beyond the generic boundaries of independent rock, pointing to a liminal space where not only do various geographies and cultural spaces conflate, but popular music gets hybridised with literature.

In drawing upon the Anglo-American cultural and literary pools, Cave creates an idiosyncratic and polymorphous musical space haunted by the ghosts of other texts and times. Encapsulating this intrinsic "spectrality" of his music,⁷ his seminal album *Murder Ballads* (1996) contains twelve murder narratives in the style of the traditional American murder ballad. A number of songs were explicitly borrowed from the American folklore, but most of them were composed by Cave. The album conjures up a cohesive songscape imbued with American culture and history, and conveyed not only through explicit American anchoring (American names, places, and objects), but also through literary borrowings and experimentation.

⁷ "Spectrality": term used by UK academic Isabella Van Elferen in reference to Cave's music. Van Elferen posits that like Gothic music in general, Cave's music is haunted by the ghosts of other texts, cultural spaces, and times. VAN ELFEREN, Isabella. "Nick Cave and Gothic: Ghost Stories, Fucked Organs, Spectral Liturgy." *The Art of Nick Cave*. Ed. John BAKER. Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2013. 175-188.

His novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel* (1989) is replete with Southern Gothic literary overtones: set in a Deep South backwood community with its gallery of borderline lunatics and barbaric freaks, the novel acts as a literary extension to Cave's songworld of the time. Just like his novel, Cave's 1984-1996 albums feature an array of Deep South denizens. In their focus on psychic grotesquerie and gross corporeality, the novel and its contemporaneous songworld could seamlessly stream into the lineage of William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers or Erskine Caldwell.

Therefore, literary filiation is not only part of Cave's self-narrative, but it also filters into the fabric of his songs through literary experimentation. This peculiar blurring of generic boundaries testifies to the profound hybridity of Cave's music, hence the Cavian song should be not approached as a mere musical object, but rather as a trans-generic object, a hybrid melding together of literature and popular music.

Cave the Trans-generic Hybrid

Finally, novel-writing is not the only source of hybridisation in Cave's songwriting, poetry is also a potent source of literary inspiration. The album *Boatman's Call* (1997) breaks away from the previous American Appalachia and Deep South repertoire to leap into an intimate love song mode with a stripped piano aesthetic tinged with Anglican hymns and English Romanticism. Cave effects overt generic transfers, as strands of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* morph into an iconic Cave song ("Red Right Hand", 1994), the image of Millais's tragic Ophelia haunts the lascivious murder love-ballad "The Wild Rose" in 1996, and Coleridge's poetic intensity becomes a Cavian song of longing with the "Lime Tree Arbour" in 1997. Speaking to the breadth of Cave's songwriting craft and musical spectrum, these stark stylistic shifts and bold reinventions also bear testament to the uncompromisingly jump-cut nature of his aesthetic moves and literary experimentations.

Cave also drew explicit attention to his poetic skills in two BBC lectures about his love songs and their literary filiations ("The Flesh Made Word" [1996] and "The Secret Life of the Love Song" [1998]). Whilst providing a valuable insight into the inner workings of the Cavian love song, the lectures also signify Cave's willingness to establish an overt literary filiation for his songwriting, whilst affirming his own status as a literary musician. Moreover, the fact that his lyrics are published alongside his own poetry in *King Ink* (1988) and *King Ink II* (1997) further blurs the boundaries between songwriting and literature, and clearly sets his music

beyond the confines of independent rock, in a hybrid space where popular music and literature merge. Cave's keen awareness and constant honing of his lyrical craft point to his kinship with the musical poets Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, who similarly use the songtext as a field for literary experimentation. Cave thus presents himself not only a trans-cultural hybrid, but also as a trans-generic hybrid, a literary creature operating through the medium of independent rock.

2.2. PJ Harvey's Extreme Mutability

Born in rural Dorset (UK) in 1969, Polly Jean Harvey's music career started out in her late teens as part of the Bristol band Automatic Dlamini (from 1988 to 1991), before she went on to form the PJ Harvey band with two former band-mates in 1991. Over the twenty-six years of her career, she has been a maverick on the British independent rock scene. In 1991, the singer-songwriter and guitarist burst onto the British independent rock scene in a whirl of hacking guitar riffs, shrill vocals and strings. Twenty-one-year-old Harvey compelled the attention of musical talent-spotter and trend-setter John Peel⁸. Her live performance on Peel's BBC radio 1 programme, the Peel Session, in 1991, consecrated her as a new indie voice to be reckoned with, and propelled her into public consciousness ahead of her first album release. She went on to gatecrash the independent scene with a raw diptych about romantic fairy-tales gone sour: *Dry* (1992), and *Rid of Me* (1993). Since then, she has released a further ten albums, and received a host of industry accolades: eight Brit Awards nominations, seven Grammy Award nominations and two Mercury Prize nominations (in 2001 and 2011). Notably, Harvey is the only artist ever to have received two Mercury Prizes, which is testament to the extent of her critical acclaim. She also received prizes from the music press: the *Rolling Stone* magazine awarded her 1992's "Best New Artist and Best Singer Songwriter" and 1995's "Artist of the Year"; three of her albums made it onto the *Rolling Stone*'s "500 Greatest Albums of All Time" list. In 2011, she was awarded for "Outstanding Contribution To Music" at the NME

⁸ John Peel was an English disc jockey, radio-presenter, record-producer and journalist, who was widely regarded as an authority in independent rock music. From 1967 to 2004, he curated The Peel Session on BBC Radio1, where a band or artist would play four songs live in the BBC studio. The Peel sessions provided a platform for previously unsigned bands to gain national exposure and break record-deals. Peel championed such prominent bands as the Undertones, Pink Floyd, David Bowie, Led Zeppelin, the Cure, the White Stripes, and many others. Harvey first performed on The Peel Session in October 1991, prior to her first album release. In 2006, Harvey released a tribute album, *The Peel Sessions 1991–2004*, compiling her various performances on the show (in 1991, 1993, 2000, and 2004).

Awards. Finally, by an odd twist of fate for an artist exhibiting countercultural sensitivities, in June 2013, she was awarded the highest official title, an MBE (Member Of The Most Excellent Order Of The British Empire) for services to music.

Harvey's repertoire ranges from her grunge-inflected *début* (*Dry*, 1992, and *Rid of Me*, 1993), through a "gothic blues" epic (*To Bring You my Love*, 1995), an electronic-inspired endeavour (*Is this Desire?* 1998), a foray into mainstream slick FM rock (*Stories from the City, Stories from the Sea*, 2000), a stripped piano-led piece of English Victoriana (*White Chalk*, 2007), and a dark English-folk infused war album (*Let England Shake*, 2011). She thus operates through abrupt stylistic shifts, heralding a distinctive soundscape and persona with each new album.

Career Collaborations

In terms of career collaborations, Harvey is more of a lone wolf than Cave. She started out as a band for the first two albums, and then went on to become a solo act, even though like Cave, she has surrounded herself with long-term musical collaborators. John Parish has regularly produced and played guitar with her since the late eighties, Flood has produced and co-produced Harvey's albums since 1995, and Mick Harvey has played with and produced Harvey since 1995. The reasons behind her shift from a band to a solo formation are not immediately clear, but it effectively freed her from collaborative constraints and enabled her to retain complete creative control over her music. Moreover, the solo configuration creates an optimal bond between her persona and her music, since the work is explicitly framed as hers alone rather than the fruit of creative collaboration. And indeed, her extreme personal makeovers from one album to the next invite an identification of her music with her self-representations. It is noteworthy that Harvey's mutability not only affects the musical texture of her songscape, but also her self-representations, as she does not present a set persona to her audience, but myriad personae to match the texture of each album.

The Elusive Persona

Contrary to Cave's stable signature persona (dressed in a tight-fitted three-piece suit and with his jet-black hair in a bob), Harvey drastically changes corporeal style with each album: from the stick-thin desexualised persona of *Dry* (1992) and *Rid of Me* (1993), through the outrageous diva in drag of *To Bring You my Love* (1995), the urban chick of *Stories from the*

City, Stories from the Sea (2000), to the straitlaced Victoriana of *White Chalk* (2007), and the feather headpiece-clad eccentric of *Let England Shake* (2011).

In using her body as a blank canvas, she turns it into both a visual signifier for the album, and a prop that weaves her persona into the aesthetic of the album. Whereas Cave's signature persona positions him as a conventional narrator occasionally impersonating his characters, Harvey's shifting personae position her as a carnal *tabula rasa* that moulds itself around each album. Her status is thus double: as a singer, she is the narrator of her songs, but as a corporeal impersonator of her albums she dissolves into the album's character gallery. Therefore, contrary to Cave's, her persona does not provide a stable thread through a shifting aesthetic, but rather it mirrors the core plasticity and transience of her work, it is ruptural style, and destabilises because it deprives the listener-spectator of a steady persona to rely on.

Further contributing to the overall elusiveness of her persona is Harvey's reluctance to disclose anything about her personal life. In interviews, she consistently declines to discuss her personal life, and sticks to her artistic intents and work process. Whereas Cave constructs his persona narratively, Harvey establishes no connection between her personal life and her work, hence her minimal self-mythology: she does not frame herself, rather she blurs her outlines, and projects her albums into her personae.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Rock and Popular Criticism

Firstly, a few preliminary remarks regarding the critical literature on rock musicians in general, and of Harvey and Cave in particular. Because rock music belongs to popular culture, its historiography and criticism mostly originate from non-academic writers, such as rock journalists and fans. Other than album and concert reviews, this non-academic repertory tends to focus on the personal lives of popular musicians, witness the wealth of biographical histories purporting to shed new light on rock musicians' subjectivity. Whilst non-academic writings are valuable tools to appraise a rock artist's reception within the rock apparatus, it is very informed by the collective rock rhetoric with its focus on rebellion, authenticity, freedom, and hedonism. Therefore, such writings tend to over-dramatise and mythologise rock artists in order to suit the requirements of the rock canon, and present a marketable picture of the artist. Because this rock-oriented interpretation of the artists' works and lives favours insider's decoding and encoding

over the intellectual distance of scientific enquiry, it is to be taken with caution when used as part of an academic argument.

In this respect, it is noteworthy that the non-academic representations of Harvey and Cave appear to be accordingly slanted by the rock rhetoric. Whilst the two musicians dwell in a similar aesthetic end of the rock spectrum, their darkly countercultural sensitivities and torments are subjected to very different interpretations. Early nineties' press coverage thus pathologised Harvey, alleging she suffered a string of mental health issues (i.e. eating disorders and nervous breakdowns), as evidenced in the many qualifiers stressing her supposed fragility and vulnerability: "Little Polly was in a bad way",⁹ "the virgin from the sticks...with a boyfriend problem".¹⁰ By framing Harvey as a helpless girl overcome by her emotional turmoil, the popular rock press defused her subversive potential as a female rock performer daring to defy the conventions of female musicianship. Harvey's violent depiction of feminine sexuality and identity formation confronted the prevalent rock rhetoric that presented (heterosexual) sexuality as a hedonistic pursuit, and female sexuality as conveniently compliant. Her counter-narratives on the angst and pitfalls of female desire - and lack thereof - subverted not only societal norms (which is in line with rock's rebellion and transgression), but also rock's discourse itself. And that was hitting perhaps too close to home, hence the "defusing" response of part of the press.

Meanwhile Cave was advantageously cast as a raging tormented Romantic (hence his nickname "the Prince of Darkness"); by contrast to Harvey's supposed ill-health, Cave's well-documented heroin-addiction is depicted as a heroic part of his dark Romantic persona rather than an affliction bearing down on him.

This obvious discrepancy in media coverage should interrogate the academic reader, as it points to a gender-biased interpretation of dark musicality. This is where academic criticism should probe the rock discourse for a potential gender-bias, and examine how that prevalent discourse may compel different personal strategies for Cave and Harvey.

⁹ KESSLER, Ted. "Thin White Kook." *NME*, 28 Jan. 1995: 33. Qtd. in LEONARD, Marion. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse, and Girl Power*. Aldershot, UK and Burlington, US: Ashgate, 2007. 74.

¹⁰ BILLEN, Andrew. "The Billen Interview." *The Observer*, 8 Oct. 1995. 8. Qtd. in LEONARD. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse, and Girl Power. Op. Cit.*, 74.

3.2. Existing Academic Criticism on Harvey and Cave

Taking a cursory glance at the existing academic criticism on Harvey and Cave, it is worth examining the peculiarities and discrepancies in coverage. Firstly, although Harvey and Cave dwell in the same gothic-ish end of the independent rock music spectrum, and in spite of their overt musical and aesthetic similarities, the two musicians have hardly come under combined academic scrutiny. And yet, since they share an aesthetic and a following, a comparative approach seems particularly appropriate in order to interrogate their underlying mechanisms, performance strategies, and marginality. In particular, focusing on the interplay between both bodies of work enables a double gaze whereby they shed light on each other structurally and aesthetically. The conjoined study also enables a probe into the peculiar musical space they delineate, and its place on the independent rock spectrum.

The one and only comparative study of Harvey's and Cave's works, J.R.C. Cousland's "God, the Bad, the Ugly: the *Vita Negativa* of Nick Cave and P.J. Harvey" (2005) stems from a religious studies perspective, and provides an insight into the emergence of spiritual transcendence by means of grotesque operations in their works.¹¹

Elsewhere on the critical field, there is a blatant discrepancy in the breadth of academic criticism Cave and Harvey have attracted individually, despite their similar level of popular acclaim. Whereas over the past ten years, there has been extensive academic criticism on Cave's works, originating from various research fields (cultural studies, Gothic studies, literary studies, religious studies, and film studies); Harvey's work has attracted very limited academic interest, and mostly from feminist theorists.

Academic criticism has widely focused on Harvey's early works (Judith Peraino,¹² Lori Burns and Mélisse Lafrance,¹³ Mark Mazullo,¹⁴ Simon Reynolds & Joy Press,¹⁵ Sheila

¹¹ COUSLAND, J.R.C. "God, the Bad, the Ugly: The *Vita Negativa* of Nick Cave and P.J. Harvey." *Call me the Seeker: Listening to Religion in Popular Music*. Ed. GILMOUR, Mickael. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2005. 129-157.

¹² PERAINO, Judith. "Harvey's "Man-Size Sextet" and the Inaccessible, Inescapable Gender", *Women & Music 2* (1998): 47-63.

¹³ BURNS, Lori, and LAFRANCE, Mélisse. *Disruptive Divas: Feminism, Identity and Popular Music*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

¹⁴ MAZULLO, Mark, "Revisiting PJ Harvey's 'Dry' and the drowned Virgin-Whore", *Popular Music* 20.3 (2001): 431-447.

¹⁵ REYNOLDS, Simon, and Joy PRESS. *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock'n'Roll*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Whiteley¹⁶), with a marked gender studies and feminist approach to both her music and her persona. Most critics tend to contextualise her work strictly within the spectrum of female rock (female contemporaries and rock lineage), with a focus on female representations. This marked feminist interest reflects a key preoccupation of Harvey's early works (from 1992 to 1998): the quest for self-affirmation and her difficulty in coming into her own subjective and corporeal identity within a predominantly masculinist rock tradition. Whilst a valuable tool to appraise Harvey's early female characterisation and performance of gender, this prevalent feminist reading seems to unduly bind Harvey's works to a restricted feminist meaning, thereby typecasting her in a "women in rock" minority niche.

So far, Abigail Gardner (2015) is the only academic to have pointed out the inconsistencies of the existing popular music feminist criticism of Harvey.¹⁷ Gardner argues that popular music feminist theorists have failed to embrace the originality of Harvey's work as an "eccentric intellectual", as they entrap their interpretation of her work in a "theoretical feedback loop".¹⁸ Gardner's approach to Harvey as an archivist of the self and nation is particularly illuminating in that it takes into account Harvey's peculiar interplay with both the British and North American musical, visual, and lyrical heritages. Gardner shifts the critical goalposts away from the binary prism of the disruptive feminine, and onto a broader interdisciplinary line of interpretation.

It is noteworthy that Reynolds and Press's as well as Peraino's criticisms open onto wider interpretive fields too, as they suggest disruptive strategies at work in Harvey's songs, as well as a playful and performative approach to identity as a provisional guise.¹⁹ Peraino's argument that Harvey wages a "civil war" in every song, where sonic dynamics are built upon a pattern of attraction and repulsion, and upon a tension between order and chaos,²⁰ echoes the notion of "carnal insurrection" identified by Reynolds and Press, and points to the disruptive grotesque mechanisms which, I will argue, she shares with Cave.

By contrast, Cave's work has attracted extensive trans-disciplinary criticism, spirituality and literature being major focal points in recent criticism, much in keeping with their prevalence

¹⁶ WHITELEY, Sheila, "Authenticity, Truthfulness, and Community: Tori Amos, Courtney Love, PJ Harvey, and Bjork." *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 196-213.

¹⁷ GARDNER, Abigail. *PJ Harvey and Music Video Performance*. Farnham (UK) and Burlington (US): Ashgate, 2015.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁹ REYNOLDS and PRESS. *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock'n'Roll*. *Op. Cit.*

²⁰ PERAINO. "Harvey's "Man-Size Sextet" and the Inaccessible, Inescapable Gender". *Op. Cit.*, 2.

in his post-1996 work. His relations to Christian spirituality and literature have come under close academic scrutiny, notably his fusion of the profane and the sacred, and the transgressive streak of his spirituality (J.R.C. Cousland,²¹ Roland Boer,²² Fred Botting²³). But it is perhaps the more recent criticism of the Cavian foray into the Romantic tradition and the sublime that affords new critical potentialities. As demonstrated by Fred Botting and Steven Barfield,²⁴ the Cavian music presents overt Romantic sensibilities in its embrace of sadness as a conduit to wonder, and darkness as a conduit to light. Namely, access to transcendence is granted through a play of oppositions: the moment of grace occurs within the cracks of apocalyptic mayhem.²⁵

This paradoxical dynamic brings to mind Cousland's *Via Negativa*, a concept that he applies to both Cave's and Harvey's works and which designates a core grotesque anti-aesthetics whereby black humour, ugliness and violence paradoxically lead to transcendence and beauty. This definition of Cavian poetics resonates with Emma Mc Evoy's contention that Cave has brought a new aesthetics to the Gothic, "re-hashed Romanticism", with at its core a "post-modern sublime reaching for passion" which is paradoxically achieved through "irony, posturing and pastiche".²⁶

Building upon Cousland's argument, it can be inferred that Harvey and Cave share a grotesque anti-aesthetic which enables radical stylistic of rupture and renewal, and sustains the progression of both songworlds from one aesthetic to another.

Branching out from existing criticism on the two artists, this research will draw upon a combination of four theoretical frameworks: Popular Music, Gothic, Grotesque, and Monster Theory.

²¹ COUSLAND, J.R.C. "God, the Bad, the Ugly: the Vita Negativa of Nick Cave and P.J. Harvey." *Op. Cit.*, 129-157.

²² BOER, Roland. *Nick Cave: A Study of Love, Death and Apocalypse*. Sheffield (UK) and Bristol (CT): Equinox Publishing, 2013.

²³ BOTTING, Fred. "From "Cute Cunts" to "No Pussy": Sexuality, Sovereignty, and the Sacred." *The Art of Nick Cave*. Ed. John H. Baker. Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2013. 263-276.

²⁴ BARFIELD, Steven. "'The time of our Great Undoing': Love, Madness, Catastrophe and the Secret Afterlife of the Love Songs", *The Art of Nick Cave*. Ed. John BAKER. Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2013. 241-259.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Mc EVOY, Emma. "'Now who will be witness When you're all too healed to see?': The Sad Demise of Nick Cave" *Gothic Studies* 9:1 (2007): 79-88.

4. Theoretical Framework and Research Premises

4.1. Popular Music

Popular music theory is essential to understanding the apparatus informing rock songs. As objects melding together music and lyrics in performance, their interpretation is subject to multiple strands of decoding, not only of the lyrical and musical content, but also of their communication context.

Originating from Great Britain, the academic field of *Cultural Studies* has sought to theorise culture in relation to social groups and sub-cultures in particular (e.g., Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, and Edward Thompson). They purported to analyse popular culture as resistance to societal hegemony, and inspired the Birmingham School (1964-1980) and the creation of the CCCS (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) in 1964.

The field ramified into popular music theory, heralding a radically new approach to rock music as a sociological object from the 1970's onward. Rock music thus goes from being considered as a leisure pursuit, to being studied as a subcultural musical object, with such theorists as Dick Hebdige, Paul Willis, and Phil Cohen. The latter three move on from Marxist reading of popular music in relation to social determinism. Hebdige thus conceptualises popular music as signifying practices to decipher. Building his argument on the notions of *bricolage* (of signifiers) and homology, he argues that subcultures are only outwardly contradictory whilst actually sharing an inner coherence.²⁷ However, the downside of these theories is that they tend to focus on spectacularly deviant subcultures, at the expense of more ordinary musical strands. In particular, they use an undifferentiated approach to music, fashion, styles, and collective behaviours.

British socio-musicologist Simon Frith articulates the meaning of rock not as a symbol but as an activity, not as a leisure pursuit but as an integral part of daily life.²⁸ In the process, he bypasses the hitherto the restrictive interpretation of rock as a teenage practice, and the subcultural reading of rock as symbolic of a style.

²⁷ HEBDIGE, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge, 1979.

²⁸ FRITH, Simon. *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, And the Politics of Rock'n'roll*. New York: Pantheon books, 1981.

For the purpose of this thesis, it is Frith's seminal work *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*²⁹ that will provide a yardstick to appraise Harvey's and Cave's songs by. In his study of the inner mechanisms of rock music, Frith posits that as an embodied medium, rock music is intrinsically reliant upon inter-subjectivity and inter-corporeality. His contention that the meaning of popular songs lies not in their lyrical or musical content but in their performance foregrounds the threefold structure of a song's dynamic. His conception of listening as an act of communication and performance thus emphasises the context of the song, and the co-implication of the audience and the performer. In his view, the songs are primarily expressive of the interaction between the performer and their listeners; therefore, the event of the song is a confluence of production and reception, a constant flow between the performers and their audiences.

Drawing upon Frith's theory, I contend that listening to Harvey's and Cave's monstrous songs is a co-enactment of monstrosity, and therefore, the performers and their audiences engage in role-playing. Listening to monstrous songs thus entails experimenting with scripts, therefore it is not only about visualising monstrosity, but primarily about experiencing it either as a victim or a co-perpetrator.

French post-structuralist Roland Barthes's notion of the "Grain of the Voice"³⁰ is also particularly illuminating in that it posits an unmediated corporeal bond between the singer and their audience, and conceives of music as an aesthetic of pleasure. This view concurs with the general theoretical consensus that rock music is based on the pleasure principle (e.g., Lawrence Grossberg³¹ and Simon Frith), and also reflects a very perceptible pleasure game at work in Harvey's and Cave's songs of monstrosity. Hence, Barthesian theory will be used as a conceptual tool, notably the pleasure of text.³²

As part of this research, the translation of monstrosity into music is essential and requires close analysis. Indeed, both corpuses contain numerous instances of sonic aggression, and therefore compel a theoretical framework on the issue.

²⁹ FRITH, Simon. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

³⁰ BARTHES, Roland. "The Grain of the Voice." *Image, Music, Text*. Trans. & ed. Stephen Heath. London: Fontana Press, 1997. 179-189.

³¹ GROSSBERG, Lawrence. "Is There a Fan in the House: the Affective Sensibility of Fandom." *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. Ed. Lisa LEWIS. London: Routledge, 1992.

³² BARTHES, Roland. *The Pleasure of Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. London: Cape, 1976.

Sacrificial theories of music shed light on the mechanisms of sonic monstrosity, based on the notion of noise as transgression and violence. In particular, Jacques Attali's sacrificial reading of music³³ as ritual sacrifice thus draws a parallel between ritual sacrifice and music. Contending that noise is violence in that it disturbs, disconnects, and kills, Attali posits that music is a simulacrum of murder. Building upon this statement, he goes on to argue that, as a channelisation of noise, music itself is a simulacrum of sacrifice, and therefore a sublimation of violence. This intrinsic sacrificial dimension of music resonates with Harvey's and Cave's sonic, especially as it combines with murderous songtexts.

Paul Hegarty³⁴ provides further valuable conceptual tools to analyse Harvey's and Cave's sonic assaults. In his study of noise music, he theorises that noise should be construed as transgression, insofar as noise is negativity and only exists in relation to non-noise. This transgression extends to the interplay between the performer and the audience, which is made essentially sado-masochistic by a consensual experience of violence. He posits that sonic violence paradoxically binds the performer and their audience in subjective dissolution and ecstasy. Hegarty's conception of a sado-masochistic bond born out of sensory aggression is applicable to Cave and Harvey, as their songs of monstrosity rely on similar patterns of sensory overload.

The academic field of popular music studies has been mostly probed from a cultural studies perspective, and therefore in sociological terms. Because this thesis primarily aims to analyse a musical corpus in aesthetic terms, there are limits to the theoretical benefits that a cultural studies approach may bring. Whilst providing a valuable theoretical framework to decode the semantics of rock music as a medium and a cultural practice, it does not enable a comprehensive probe into the complex dynamic at play in Harvey's and Cave's works. Moreover, because both bodies of work rely on hybridisation and multiple aesthetics, they compel similarly multifocal criticism.

This thesis thus brings together a range of methodological approaches that highlight the relevance of inter-disciplinary filters when analysing a rock music corpus, especially one of such stylistic breadth as Harvey's and Cave's. We shall now examine the three other theoretical frameworks in use in thesis: Monster Theory, Grotesque, and Gothic.

³³ ATTALI, Jacques. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis and London: The University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

³⁴ HEGARTY, Paul. "Brace and Embrace: Masochism in Noise Performance." *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience*. Ed. Ian Biddle and Marie Thompson. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

4.2. Theory on Monstrosity

In order to stake out the conceptual scope of monstrosity, we shall survey the recent criticism on monstrosity starting from French theorists and moving on to Anglo-American criticism, in order to delineate the theoretical framework of this research.

In his seminal work on monstrosity and the monstrous, Georges Canguilhem³⁵ differentiates between monstrosity as morphological abnormality, and monstrousness as transgression of the law. In his view, monstrousness is not a natural anomaly, but an act that breaches a taboo.

Michel Foucault³⁶ analyses the monster category within social theory, and conceives of monstrosity as a double-transgression of the law of nature and of the civil, canon or religious law. Foucault contends that the issue with monsters lies in their effect: they elude conceptual categorisation. Foucault also notes that there is a contemporary shift in the conception of monstrosity, in that it is no longer construed in physical but psychic terms, as a deviance from a socially acceptable pattern of behaviour. Contrary to Canguilhem, Foucault does not consider monstrosity in terms of visibility and externality, but in terms of interiority. Building upon this notion of monstrosity as a psychological phenomenon, much of the subsequent monster criticism has focused on a psycho-analytical interpretation of monstrosity, as the repressed innate within the human psyche.³⁷

The recent rise of monster fiction in visual popular culture, in the shape of thrillers, vampire, and zombie films has prompted a cultural reading of monstrosity. Jerome Cohen thus inaugurated the new academic field of “Monster Theory” with a collection of essays: *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*.³⁸ Cohen postulates that a monster is culturally specific in that it is a mixture of cultural constructions and projections. He also conceives of monsters as “harbingers of category crisis”³⁹ in that their ontological liminality challenges the adequacy of our established conceptual categorisation, thereby introducing an epistemological crisis. In inciting

³⁵ CANGUILHEM, Georges. “Monstrosity and the Monstrous.” *Diogenes* 10.40 (1962): 27-42. Trans. Therese Jaeger.

³⁶ FOUCAULT, Michel. *Abnormal, lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*. London : Verso, 2003.

³⁷ KRISTEVA, Julia. *Les Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'Abjection*. Paris: Edition du Seuil. 1980.

³⁸ COHEN, Jeffrey Jerome, ed. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Minneapolis, Minnesota and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

a radical rethinking of boundary and normality, monstrosity demands “a third system allowing polyphony, mixed response (difference in sameness, repulsion in attraction) and resistance to integration”.⁴⁰ He also argues that due to their kinship with the forbidden, monsters elicit “escapist delight”,⁴¹ awakening the transgressive pleasure of being in turn terrified and terrifying.

For the purpose of this thesis, Cave’s and Harvey’s monstrosity will be analysed through the prism of Cohen’s theory for two reasons. Firstly, because Cohen incorporates and elaborates upon non-binary polymorphism, which is an essential part of Harvey’s and Cave’s grotesque aesthetics. Secondly, his contention that the pleasure principle is at the core of monstrous experience intersects with rock music’s hedonistic discourse.⁴² I postulate that, in so far as Cohen’s premise echoes observable features of the two musicians’ music, his theory can shed light on the inner mechanisms of their monstrous songworlds. Building upon Cohen, this research posits that Cave’s and Harvey’s monstrous songs should be construed as “wishfulfilment drama”,⁴³ namely emancipatory fantasies enabling the receiver to escape reality whilst vicariously experiencing gross corporeality and the psychic edge. When applied to the performance of monstrous rock songs, this wishfulfilling component is particularly promising in that it raises the possibility of a liberating co-experience between the performers and their audiences. Moreover, it concurs with the ideology of rock music, with its emphasis on freedom.⁴⁴

Because Harvey and Cave treat the transgressive component of monstrosity as both terrifying and extravagant, the concept lies at the intersection of Gothic and Grotesque as aesthetics of transgression and excess and therefore compels the two theoretical frameworks.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴² GROSSBERG, Lawrence. “Another Boring Day in Paradise and the Empowerment of Every Day Life” *Popular Music* 4 (1984): 225–58. Grossberg argues that the rock apparatus hinges upon the pleasure of the body and celebrates physical pleasure and sexuality. Elsewhere in rock criticism, there is a consensus that the pleasure of rock music is related to sexuality and corporeality, as demonstrated by Simon Frith in *Performing Rites: On the Value Of Popular Music*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

⁴³ COHEN. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. *Op. Cit.*, 18.

⁴⁴ FRITH, Simon. *Performing Rites: On the Value Of Popular Music*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996. 269-278.

4.3. Anglo-American Gothic and Grotesque Theory

Expanding upon post-1980's Anglo-American gothic criticism, I argue that Harvey's and Cave's focus on psychical and corporeal monstrosity partakes of a commitment to exploring aesthetics of fear⁴⁵ consistent with Gothic. Moreover, my contention is that they share what Fred Botting identifies as gothic negativity, "a pattern of transgression, excess and monstrosity"⁴⁶ that underpins both artists' music, lyrics, and performances. In this respect, Harvey's and Cave's music can be read as gothic songtext, and their songwriting as a transgressive "songwriting of excess" analogous to Botting's gothic writing of excess,⁴⁷ namely informed by gothic negativity.

Moreover, I hold that Harvey's and Cave's songwriting of excess not only incorporates formal gothic signifiers (i.e., motifs and narratives) but also operates within a distinctively grotesque framework. Mikhail Bakhtin's interpretation of the grotesque as a celebratory process of laughter and degradation is a relevant filter for Harvey's and Cave's comic grotesque songs.⁴⁸ However, their grotesque devices include a broader tonal and structural palette than Bakhtin's carnivalesque grotesque. Therefore, in order to probe the full breadth of Harvey's and Cave's grotesque spectrum, this research will also draw upon post-Bakhtinian grotesque criticism, with its emphasis on liminality and its unresolved tension.

Both bodies of work exhibit staple grotesque stylistic features and structural devices as defined by Anglo-American post-1970's criticism: a hyperbolic style, disharmony, the conflation of opposites, the juxtaposition of incompatibles, a focus on the abnormal and the abject, and a marked propensity for the satiric and the playful (i.e., the grotesque criteria identified by Philip Thomson⁴⁹).

Extrapolating from Anglo-American grotesque criticism, I postulate that both songworlds are underpinned by one and the same grotesque "strategy of disruption and contradiction"⁵⁰ that foregrounds "the ambivalently abnormal",⁵¹ and relies on the explosive

⁴⁵ PUNTER, David. *The Literature of Terror, a History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*. London and New York: Longman, 1980.

⁴⁶ BOTTING, Fred. *Gothic*. London and New York: Routledge, 2014. 8.

⁴⁷ BOTTING, Fred. *Gothic*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996. 1.

⁴⁸ BAKHTIN, Mikhail. *Rabelais and his World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. 1964.

⁴⁹ THOMSON. *The Grotesque. Op. Cit.*

⁵⁰ HARPAM, Geoffrey. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

⁵¹ THOMSON. *The Grotesque. Op. Cit.*

force of clashing opposites.⁵² This grotesque pattern is deployed at various levels: within the musical and lyrical scopes of the songs, in the two artists' self-representations and performances, and in their interactions with their audiences.

In facilitating extreme stylistic shifts and experimentations, this disruptive grotesque dynamic inscribes unpredictability and mutability at the core of their music, and enables them to conflate various cultural spaces and genres. Hence a polymorphous cultural texture encompassing dark folk tales, love songs, and Murder ballads from the Anglo-American traditions, frontier tall tales, comic grotesque thrills and spills, as well as overt musical borrowings from different traditions such as blues-rock, folk ballads, electronic music, post-punk, garage-rock, grunge, and church hymns abound in both bodies of work.

This artistic versatility sets Harvey's and Cave's muscscapes not only outside the confines of the official gothic music subgenre, but also on the periphery of independent rock. Harvey and Cave have thus created an idiosyncratic gothic aesthetic drawing upon a wealth of generic influences, be they literary and aesthetic (e.g., the Southern Gothic, the Grotesque, English Romanticism, Post-modernism), cultural (i.e., North American and English), or musical (e.g., folk, blues...).

In so hybridising their music with inter-generic and intercultural undertones, they have widened their instrumental and lyrical ranges, as well as their thematic palettes and narrative tones (from dark Gothic to comic grotesque), whilst weaving stylistic renewal into the fabric of their works. Through the embodied medium of popular music, the two musicians have thus translated Gothic into musical text, incarnating it into a voice, a body, and a sound, thereby delineating a fresh "gothic-ish" subgenre.

5. Research Purpose

Monster:

1. **a** : an animal or plant of abnormal form or structure
b : one who deviates from normal or acceptable behavior or character
2. : an animal of strange or terrifying shape

⁵² HARPHAM. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*. *Op.Cit.*, 9. This conception of Grotesque as a strategy of contradiction and disruption is based on Geoffrey Harpham's theory that grotesque is a "civil war of attraction and repulsion". As figures of physical and psychological deformity and transgression, monsters elicit this same conflictual response in the receiver. Monstrosity is thus intrinsically grotesque not only in its manifestation, but also in its reception.

3.: something monstrous; *especially:* a person of unnatural or extreme ugliness, deformity, wickedness, or cruelty

<<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/monster>>

Looking at the above definition of monster, what stands out is the notion of deviance from acceptable physical, psychological, and social norms, and of deformity. The latin root of the word, *monstrum* is both related to the verbs *monstrare* (to show or reveal) and *monere* (to warn or portend). Therefore, the monster is both a revealer and an omen: it foregrounds the *unnatural* side, the *unacceptable* side of humanity in its ontological aberrations, and as such it causes repulsion.

In Harvey's and Cave's bodies of work, a gallery of monsters incarnates the unpalatable and the taboo through violent storylines and discordant soundscapes. This monstrous component is especially prevalent in their 1990s works, and takes on various forms in their subsequent works. The salience of monstrosity denotes Harvey's and Cave's propensity to breach proportionality, rationality, and normality, and to engage with psychic and corporeal taboos. Monstrosity thus acts as a site for experimentation with fragmented and disparate identities, hence an array of monstrous hybrids and song characters prone to dark irrationality and violent outbursts. Musically, monstrosity sustains a similarly unpredictable and violent soundscape. Being embodied and narrated by the performers, monstrosity also conditions the intersubjective exchanges between the performers and their audiences. Consequently, monstrosity should be construed as a comprehensive principle underpinning all dimensions of the songs: their dramatic texture (i.e., monster drama and the song characters), sonic texture, and performance, and thereby affords a fully immersive experience to the listeners.

This research aims to analyse the peculiar experience(s) of monstrosity elicited by Harvey's and Cave's monstrous repertoires. I contend that, in both musical works, monstrosity not only acts as an aesthetic prop conveying a fascination with transgression and the barbaric, but it also fulfils a structural function. As a centrepiece to a broader negative aesthetics, the trope provides a lead into an aesthetic of disharmony, discordance, and contradiction. As a manifestation of the abnormal, monstrosity enables the two musicians to usher in grotesque devices, such as the meltdown of proportion and rationality and conflicting opposites.⁵³ Indeed,

⁵³ This conception of Grotesque as a strategy of contradiction and disruption is based on Geoffrey Harpham's theory that grotesque is a "civil war of attraction and repulsion", as formulated in HARPHAM. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature. Op. Cit.*, 9. Harpham postulates that, as figures of physical and psychological deformity and transgression, monsters elicit a conflictual response in the receiver. Monstrosity is thus intrinsically grotesque not only in its manifestation, but also in its reception.

Harvey's and Cave's treatment of the monstrous highlights its essentially grotesque ambivalence: in turn depicted as comic and terrifying, attractive and repulsive, the monstrous facilitates abrupt tonal shifts from dark to comic grotesque horror. In this respect, the monstrous motif is an active agent of disruption inscribing mutability and hybridity at the core of the two musical productions.

This research starts from the premise that in both bodies of work, monstrosity partakes of a gothic-grotesque dynamic of transgression and horror whereby the monstrous song is the site of a polymorphous experience of violence and escapist delight. Moreover, it purports to probe the inner mechanisms of the jubilant transgression of horror drama and its trajectory over the course of their careers.

To what extent does monstrosity, with its Gothic and Grotesque attire, enduringly shape Harvey's and Cave's aesthetics? In particular, how does their nineties monster drama interact with their more recent albums?

Cave's latest album *Skeleton Tree* (2016) deals with the personal trauma of losing a loved one, whereas Harvey's 2011 *Let England Shake* explores the collective experience of war atrocities by revisiting British History and documenting war trauma. Does the language of monstrosity disappear from their new tonal palettes, or is there an identifiable lineage from their songs of monstrosity to their trauma songwriting?

6. Corpus

The primary corpus for this thesis is staked out according to a chronological and thematic axis. The temporal scope focuses on the 1992 to the present period and the monstrous theme acts as a thread in delineating the primary corpus selection:

1992: *Dry*

1993: *Rid of Me*

1993: *4-Track Demo*

1995: *To Bring You My Love*

1998: *Is this Desire?*

2007: *White Chalk*

2011: *Let England Shake*

This primary selection encompasses all of Harvey's musical works from 1992 to 2011, except two albums in which the horror content is subdued: *Stories from the City, Stories from the Sea* (2000) and *Huh Huh Her* (2004). The former is an FM rock album mostly concerned with slick urban tales, and the later is an album about heartbreak, slow and contemplative, and has no correlation with monster drama. Her latest album, *Hope 6 Demolition Project* (2016) does not feature on the corpus either, because it veers toward social activism or at least social commentary, and thus moves on to another chapter.

In view of Cave's prolific and wide-ranging production, strategic cuts had to be made in corpus delineation. Because the purpose of this thesis is to probe the melding together of text and music in performance, its primary corpus excludes Cave's literary and script-writing works. Chronologically, it starts with 1992's *Henry's Dream*, and includes his subsequent Bad Seeds albums except the three love song / hymnal albums from the 1997 - 2003 period: *The Boatman's Call* (1997), *No More Shall We Part* (2001), and *Nocturama* (2003). These albums function as a creative cluster where the monstrous motif is subdued, and a new hymnal song-scape brings the pangs of love and longing to the fore.

Moreover, the albums *Abattoir Blues / the Lyre of Orpheus* (2004) and *Dig Lazarus, Dig!!!* (2008) are excluded from the primary corpus. The former because it contains a selection of naturalistic songs, love songs and only a few monstrous songs, but it is not an album of monstrosity. The latter because it is a slick album that contains a few experimental post-modern narratives, but does not deal directly with monstrosity or shed light on it.

The primary corpus for this research includes five Bad Seeds albums and two *Grinderman*⁵⁴ albums:

1992: *Henry's Dream*

1994: *Let Love In*

1996: *Murder Ballads*

2007: *Grinderman*

2009: *Grinderman 2*

2016: *Skeleton Tree*

⁵⁴ *Grinderman* is a side-project diptych including Cave and four of his Bad Seeds bandmates: Warren Ellis, Jim Sclavunos, and Martyn Casey.

Besides the six albums by The Bad Seeds, this primary corpus incorporates two seminal side-projects: *Grinderman* (2007) and *Grinderman 2* (2010). An offshoot of the Bad Seeds, the Grinderman band included Cave and three of his Bad Seeds band-mates, and it was originally intended as a garage-rock escapist enterprise. However, the adventure took on a life of its own, and in breaking away from the Bad Seeds' rock ballad formula, the *Grinderman* project afforded Cave and his musicians a new lease of creative life, and ignited a fresh type of monstrosity. Indeed, the *Grinderman* diptych exhibits a feral creative urge that opens up a hitherto unexplored animalistic dimension in Cave's work. Its unabashedly abrasive, wild and crude aesthetic is conveyed through a potent fantastical imagery of half-human half-animal hybrids. The musical, lyrical and visual textures are infused with monstrosity, and therefore, the two albums and their artwork undoubtedly contribute to the Cavian monstrous scope.

It is noteworthy that the corpus includes two albums that are not immediately related to monstrosity: Harvey's *Let England Shake* (2011) and Cave's *Skeleton Tree* (2016). The two albums are not scripts of monstrosity, however they shed light on the evolution of the horror theme over the course of the period. Although these albums are outwardly distinct from the rest, they will be brought into interaction with the monstrous songs so as to probe their interplay with the songs of monstrosity and determine the new function of horror.

7. Method and Outline

Harvey's and Cave's songs of monstrosity will thus be approached from several theoretical angles: as rock objects informed by specific semantics and practices, as Gothic songwriting of excess fascinated with transgression, and as grotesque objects underpinned by a grotesque pattern of disruption and contradiction.⁵⁵ Moreover, the songs are read as experiential scripts of monstrosity, where through lyrical role-playing, co-enactment and co-performance, audience and performer weave a monstrous bond.

On a wider perspective, their music is conceived as a site of hybridity and cross-fertility. Therefore, the two repertoires act as a contact zone between different genres (literature, music, visual culture), styles (blues, country-folk, rock, ambient), aesthetics (Gothic, Grotesque, dark

⁵⁵ HARPHAM. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*. *Op. Cit.*

Romanticism), and cultural spaces (North American, British, Australian). Their music thus bends and blurs the boundaries of rock music by mixing in other art forms and aesthetics.

In Part I, we will demonstrate that Harvey and Cave use monstrosity to problematise human identity, and deploy a two-fold strategy of radical uncertainty. Firstly, they debunk essentialist views on humanity by representing monstrosity as intrinsic to human nature. “*In-humanity*” is thus conveyed in hyperbolic mode, by turning stereotypes on their heads (e.g., the monstrous feminine, the hapless male predator), and by overdoing human stereotypes to ludicrous effect (e.g., hypermasculinity, hyperfemininity). Human beings are portrayed as tiptoeing on the psychic edge, and prone to barbaric impulses and sadism, and therefore they elicit repulsion. Secondly, we will argue that by a strategy of extreme hybridising (human/animal, male/female), Cave and Harvey wreak havoc with scientific enquiry and further pulverise conceptual categorisation. This double strategy opens an epistemological abyss at the heart of the listening experience, thereby destabilising the listeners through brutal defamiliarisation.

This deconstruction of humanity is used both to sinister and hedonistic ends, to establish a transgressive playground for the listener and performer to co-perform the song drama and play out monstrous identities. We will argue that Cave’s and Harvey’s persona-mingling also partakes of a broader dynamic whereby the performers’ identities not only assume monstrous guises, but they too are so polymorphic that they dissolve into hybridity and radical uncertainty. We will demonstrate that the bond between the performers and their audience is itself informed by a monstrous dynamic, as through the monstrous scripts they engage in polymorphous games of sacrificial kinship. On the one hand, the performers assault the listeners by using shock tactics and sonic assault, and on the other hand, they are conjoined in transgression and violence as the listener vicariously enjoys the performer’s murderous feats. This monstrous kinship relies on escapist and barbaric delight, whilst partaking of a sadomasochistic pattern of pleasure in displeasure.

Part II will focus on how Harvey and Cave use cultural and aesthetic hybridisation as a field of exploration of monstrous identities and monstrous experience. Through a comparative study of Harvey’s *To Bring You My Love* (1995) and *Is this Desire?* (1998), with Cave’s 1992-1997 works, we will examine how they bring the American folk-blues tradition into fruitful interaction with English Romantic themes in order to create a fresh aesthetic. In particular, we will argue that by a grotesque operation of fusion of disparates, both artists slide down the North

American poetry of disorder into Romantic agony to produce a multifarious form of monstrosity encompassing comic grotesque, dark Gothicism, and a form of Romantic sado-masochism.

Part III will probe a parallel trajectory in the two artists' recent works, notably a shift in the treatment of horror, as the two musicians shift from fictional monstrous stories to life writing. This part includes two case studies: Harvey's *Let England Shake* (2010) and Cave's *Skeleton Tree* (2016), as heralds of a new song-writing focusing on the world instead of fictional worlds. Both albums shift from fiction to reality, Harvey focusing on the effect of war carnage on the human psyche, whilst Cave depicts his personal trauma after the death of his son. We will probe the two albums' interactions with each other, and with Harvey's and Cave's songs of monstrosity. In particular, we will examine to what extent the two albums break away from the monstrous songs and their grotesque framework, and probe for intersections between the two clusters of work.

**PART I. PROBLEMATISING HUMAN
IDENTITY: A STRATEGY OF MONSTROUS
DISRUPTION**

INTRODUCTION TO PART I

In Harvey's and Cave's musical works, the monstrous trope emerges through barbaric drama, whether as gruesome murders, manic killing sprees, or sadistic impulses. Their song-texts teem with full-blown horror, and with more incipient strands of monstrosity such as black humour. Monstrosity thus filters into the song narratives, soundscapes, and performance strategies, and the sonic texture actualises monstrosity through an aesthetic of discordance foregrounding musical assaults and vocal distortions. This ubiquity makes for essentially unpredictable works, and for an aesthetic of radical instability.

As figures of physical and moral transgression, monsters challenge established biological categories and social conventions. Their ontological liminality threatens conceptual categories and smashes the perceived boundaries of human identity. Indeed, Cave's and Harvey's barbaric protagonists, whether fully human (e.g., Cave's serial killers and Harvey's lover-torturers) or semi-animalistic, pulverise essentialist assumptions about innate human behaviour, and thus interrogate established distinctions between humanity and animality. Positing a structural overlap between humanity and monstrosity, Jerome Cohen contends that "the categories of human and monsters are co-incipient, mutually constitutive, monstrously hybrid".⁵⁶ Thus, conceptualising monstrosity is conceptualising humanity, notably because as a transgressive principle, monstrosity only exists in transgression of a perceived human normality. Namely, Harvey's and Cave's monstrous character galleries and sonic texture speak to a definition of humanity as we-don't-know-it (or as we don't want to know it), and as such they provide a counternarrative to established conceptions of humanity.

Positing that monstrosity not only problematises what constitutes acceptable humanity (i.e., its innate qualities), but also questions the adequacy of its biological definition, I contend that Harvey and Cave use monstrosity to usher in grotesque disruption and contradiction, and to open an epistemological abyss at the heart of the listening experience. In other words, the listener is jolted into epistemological uncertainty by means of a series of monstrous scripts and characters breaking both the laws of culture (social conventions and "normal" human behaviour), and the laws of nature (through inmixing).

The purpose of Part I is to probe the production and reception of monstrous songs, and examine Cave's and Harvey's use of the monstrous motif as a means to debase humanity and

⁵⁶ COHEN. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture. Op. Cit.*, XI.

disturb their listeners' epistemological certainties. Positing the monstrous song as a storytelling script reliant on dramatisation and co-performance, I will demonstrate that the two musicians deploy a grotesque strategy of disruption and contradiction. Through their monstrous songscapes, they tear an epistemological hole through rationality by representing human beings as either "in-human"⁵⁷ (i.e., intrinsically monstrous) or hybrid, whilst luring the listener into a monstrous role-play and a radically unstable listener-performer bond.

Firstly, I will argue that Harvey and Cave throw essentialist views of humanity into disarray by representing humanity as "*in-human*",⁵⁸ namely by depicting the barbaric impulse as inherent in human beings, rather than external to them. This portrayal is conveyed by a gallery of in-human monsters prone to violent outbursts and psychic disturbances. "In-humanity" underpins a representation of general human interactions as essentially violent, and of sexuality as friction and the site of the barbaric. Harvey and Cave notably debunk human stereotypes both by turning essentialist assumptions on their heads and by overdoing them to ludicrous effect. The listener is thus plunged into horror stories, and left reeling from confronting the unthinkable qualities that lurk at on the borderlands of humanity.

Harvey and Cave further destabilise epistemological certainties by wreaking havoc with binary conceptual categories such as human/animal, male/female, and natural/supernatural. For the purpose, they resort to a strategy of extreme hybridising, whereby the protagonists go semi-feral in characterisation and behaviour (e.g., Cave's *Grinderman* diptych), ambisexual (e.g., Harvey's hermaphrodites), or supernatural.

Secondly, by positing the songs as mini-drama, I will focus on the various listener-positions put forward in the monstrous scripts. In particular, I will argue that both musicians solicit the listener into co-enacting the song-script, alternately casting them as implicit monster or victim of the monstrous protagonists. This instability of the listener-position contributes to their general disorientation by making the listening experience radically unpredictable.

⁵⁷ EDWARDS, Justin, and Rune GRAULAND. *Grotesque*. London and New York: Routledge, 2013. 87.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER I: Staking out Monster-Mongering Cave and Harvey Style

Before examining the production of monstrosity in Harvey's and Cave's songworlds, we are going to clarify our use of the terms "Gothic" and "Grotesque" in this thesis, since as a figure of transgression and excess, monstrosity is a natural offshoot of both Gothic and Grotesque. Starting from the premise that Harvey's and Cave's monstrous songs are grotesque objects conveyed by a gothic song-writing of excess, this research brings together three key concepts: monstrosity, Grotesque, and Gothic, hence the necessity of fathoming the interactions between the three notions, and their critical resonance. In order to further define our operative conceptual framework and outline Harvey's and Cave's monstrous scope, we will probe for structural overlaps between the three concepts and examine their aesthetic implications.

1. Gothic, Grotesque, and Monstrosity: Theoretical Disambiguation

1.1. Gothic

Cave's and Harvey's styles have been critically described as "Gothic", especially in the music press, in reference to their dark Romantic inclinations. Since this research also posits their songworlds as "Gothic", how should the term "Gothic" be construed as part of our academic argument?

A cursory glance at the semantic evolution of the term "Gothic" indicates how slippery it is. Firstly, is Gothic a genre? In early 20th literary criticism, Gothic was conceptualised as an artistic genre pertaining to a particular historical period: the term was understood as specifically referring to early 18th and 19th century English fiction. It is noteworthy that French academic criticism prevalingly adheres to this definition of Gothic as a historic genre. This initial definition was subsequently challenged with the emergence of American Southern Gothic and its authors William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, or Carson McCullers from the 1920s onward. Over time, "Gothic" has also extended to films and a musical subculture (i.e., industrial Gothic), thus testifying to a formal malleability that exceeds the confines of its former definition as a genre, with its static conventions and signifiers.

Taking into account the polymorphous component of Gothic, from the 1980s onward Anglo-American criticism has radically redefined the term as an aesthetic instead of a formulaic

genre. David Punter thus defined it as an aesthetic of fear relying on the three potentially disruptive themes of the taboo, paranoia, and the barbaric.⁵⁹

Building upon Punter's contention, Anglo-American literary criticism has continued to theorise Gothic as a fluid principle that moves across media and forms: from narrative into dramatic and poetic modes, and from literary into visual and musical media. The general critical consensus that emerged in the early 1990s is that Gothic varies across history and cultures, and should be construed as "a series of contemporaneously understood forms, devices, codes, figurations for the expression of the fragmented self".⁶⁰ Literary theorist's Robert Miles's definition reflects this critical shift:

What is "Gothic"? My short answer is that Gothic is a discursive site, a "carnavalesque" mode for representation of the fragmented subject. Both the generic multiplicity of the Gothic, and what one might call its discursive primacy, effectively detach the Gothic from the tidy simplicity of thinking of it as so many predictable, fictional conventions. This may end up making "Gothic" a more ambiguous, shifting term, but then the textual phenomena to which it points are shifting and ambiguous.⁶¹

Miles's definition of Gothic highlights three main features: formal and generic plasticity, a play of masks and identities ("the carnivalesque"), and ambiguity. His contention that Gothic is a "carnavalesque" mode points to a structural overlap between Gothic and Grotesque, as aesthetics concerned with multiple identities. The diversity of Gothic also compels multiple analytical tools: the grotesque for extravagant Gothic, the uncanny⁶² for dark Gothic, and the abject⁶³ for its more repulsive manifestations.

In the wake of Miles's definition, Gothic has been widely theorised as a discursive site for excess and transgression, which is also the starting point of this research on Harvey and Cave. Fred Botting thus conceives of Gothic as a "writing of excess"⁶⁴ that reflects Gothic's fascination with the irrational, the fantastical, and the taboo. Therefore, Gothic excess is

⁵⁹ PUNTER, David. *The Literature of Terror, a History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*. London and New York: Longman, 1980.

⁶⁰ MILES, Robert. *Gothic Writing 1750-1820: A Genealogy*. London: Routledge, 1992. 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶² FREUD, Sigmund. The "Uncanny." Ed. Sigmund Freud. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works. 217-256. London: Vintage. [1919]

⁶³ KRISTEVA, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

⁶⁴ BOTTING. *Gothic*. 1996. *Op.Cit.*,1.

concerned with transgression at large: of rules, conventions, normality, spatio-temporality, and proportion. He formulates Gothic negativity as “an overflow of words, feelings, ideas, imaginings”⁶⁵ that relies upon “patterns of transgression, excess and monstrosity”.⁶⁶ According to this definition, monstrosity is inherent in Gothic, and the two notions are therefore intertwined. My contention is that both Harvey’s and Cave’s monstrous songwritings are informed by Botting’s “Gothic negativity”. Moreover, in foregrounding excess and transgression as the key driving forces of Gothic, Botting’s “gothic negativity” also points to a structural intersection between Gothic and the Grotesque as aesthetics of disharmony and transgression. This junction provides an apt critical angle to examine Harvey’s and Cave’s songs from, in that it encompasses the stark complexity of their musical texture: its extreme variations from noise to orderly structure and the meltdown of proportion affecting sonic, lyrics and performance alike.

Moreover, Cavian and Harveyan monster-mongering not only shares Gothic’s fascination with the barbaric, the taboo and fear, but also hinges on excess and extravagance,⁶⁷ which can tip the works over into grotesque chaos and the ludicrous. This tonal slip from dark Gothic to comic Gothic is facilitated by Gothic overstylised theatricality which is susceptible to parody, and thus points to second junction between Gothic and Grotesque.⁶⁸ In its embrace of the dark macabre and the comic grotesque, Harvey’s and Cave’s Gothic can therefore be read as contemporary Gothic. Indeed, 1990s Anglo-American Gothic criticism integrates this satirical potential of Gothic and shifts the definition of Gothic closer to the Grotesque spectrum, thereby reflecting contemporary Gothic’s propensity to push the boundaries of excess into comic grotesque. Whereas Victorian Gothic was a dark dramatisation of binary oppositions such as good and evil, the normal and the abnormal, 20th century Gothic veered towards ambivalence and ironic distance, which is especially evident in American Gothic literature. In blurring the boundaries between perceived binary opposites rather than pitching them against each other, Southern Gothic authors such as William Faulkner, Flannery O’Connor or Carson

⁶⁵ BOTTING. *Gothic. Op.Cit.*, 6-7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁷ THOMSON. *The Grotesque. Op. Cit.* 20-28.

⁶⁸ HORNER, Avril, and Sue ZLOSNIK, eds. *Gothic and the Comic Turn*. New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 17. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik posit that the “comic turn” is a key component of Gothic hybridity, and therefore there is not binary opposition between comic and serious Gothic: “it is precisely because the Gothic is always liminal and poised on boundaries – and already half-way to sending itself up - that its characteristic features can be turned to comic effect. Thus, its sinister grotesque is easily converted to the gothic flamboyance of the grotesque as excess.”

Botting also points out that contemporary popular culture features many instances of monster satires turning Gothic tropes and narratives on their heads for societal subversion (e.g., “The Adams Family”, 1964-66) and camp effect (e.g., “The Horror Picture Show”, 1975). BOTTING. *Gothic. Op.Cit.*, 174.

McCullers have added a distinct grotesque hue to the Gothic. Because they represent binary oppositions such as good and evil, the normal and the abnormal as intermingled, a paradoxical scope arises, foregrounding the co-presence of incompatibles such as horror and laughter, and a general pattern of attraction and repulsion. Witness to Southern Gothic's structural affinities with the grotesque, the genre has alternatively been referred to as "Southern Grotesque". As a result of the integration of grotesque components in recent Gothic criticism, the term "Gothic" is now widely used in reference to a broad variety of media (film, music, literature) and to aesthetics ranging from one-dimensional horror to black comedy.

Building upon post-1980s Anglo-American criticism on Gothic, this research works from the premise that Harvey's and Cave's monstrous musical corpus not only matches Punter's key gothic criteria (the taboo, paranoia and the barbaric)⁶⁹ but it also unfolds according to a gothic *songwriting* of excess analogous to Botting's definition of "Gothic writing of excess"⁷⁰, and as such it includes a potent parodic slant. I posit that gothic negativity is a comprehensive structuring principle to Harvey's and Cave's songwriting of excess: it infuses their lyrics, music (through sonic assaults and discordance), and performance styles (through theatricality and a play of affinity and antagonism). As a contemporary gothic object with a propensity for overexaggeration, Harvey's and Cave's music thus operates on a gothic-grotesque spectrum, and compels grotesque interpretative tools. Therefore, we are going to present an overview of the grotesque criticism used as part of this research.

1.2. Grotesque Conceptual Frameworks

20th century grotesque criticism broadly falls into two theoretical discourses: on the one hand, grotesque is theorised as a horrific response to the modern world (e.g., Sigmund Freud, Wolfgang Kayser), and on the other hand, it is theorised as a celebratory subversion of societal norms (e.g., Mikhail Bakhtin, Mary Russo, Geoffrey Geoffrey Harpham). In both instances, it is construed as disruptive of established boundaries and hierarchies.

The former conception is propounded by Wolfgang Kayser and based upon Sigmund Freud's theorising of the uncanny⁷¹ as the strangeness in the familiar. Kayser thus interprets grotesque as the expression of the estranged or alienated world, when the familiar world is seen

⁶⁹ PUNTER. *The Literature of Terror, a History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*. *Op.Cit.*

⁷⁰ BOTTING. *Gothic*. 1996. *Op. Cit.* 1.

⁷¹ FREUD, Sigmund. The "Uncanny." Ed. Sigmund Freud. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works. London: Vintage. [1919]. 217-256.

from a perspective which suddenly renders it strange. Kayser's conception highlights grotesque's horrific side (and its dark Gothic sensitivities), when the receiver falls into utter disorientation and terror in the face of an estranged world where "the categories which usually apply to our world view become inapplicable"⁷². Kayser posits grotesque laughter as essentially bitter and subduing the demonic. Whilst this definition of grotesque acknowledges darkness and alienation, it does not encompass the full breadth of Cave's and Harvey's tonal mutability and satirical eruptions, which is where the Bakhtinian notion of carnivalesque grotesque can be illuminating.

Contrary to Kayser, Bakhtin's theory focuses on the positive side of grotesque, positing that laughter and degradation serve as rejuvenating forces, and emancipate human consciousness, thought and imagination for new potentialities.⁷³ Bakhtin's grotesque carnival pertains to folk culture and relies on the communal flouting of cultural and societal norms. Bakhtin's comic grotesque interpretation has sustained Mary Russo's construction of the female body as a "female grotesque",⁷⁴ and Geoffrey Harpham's notion that the grotesque falls into four subdivisions: caricature, comic grotesque (ludicrous or satiric), fantastic grotesque (terrible), and Gothic-macabre.⁷⁵ In emphasising the broad aesthetic spectrum of the grotesque, Harpham's definition foregrounds a structural overlap between the Gothic and grotesque aesthetics, thus echoing Botting's grotesque-inflected definition of Gothic. Harpham's theory not only embraces the overlap between the dark grotesque and Gothic *spectra*, but also affirms the centrality of laughter in grotesque, albeit an ambiguous and complex laughter. Since grotesque laughter erupts in response to "the familiar world ... being mocked and subverted by the abysmal, the nocturnal, the irrational, the satanic",⁷⁶ it is expressive of barbaric delight. Moreover, on a more comprehensive artistic level, Harpham conceives of grotesque as an aesthetic that "opens into a realm of contradiction and ambiguity, frequently through the fusion of forms or realms that we know to be separate",⁷⁷ thereby suggesting the core hybridity of grotesque. He extends this particular understanding of grotesque as a boundary phenomenon to all artistic forms, and postulates that all grotesque art is informed by "a strategy of contradiction

⁷² KAYSER, Wolfgang. *The Grottesque*. Trans. Ulrich Weisstein. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963. 185.

⁷³ BAKHTIN. *Rabelais and his World*. *Op. Cit.*

⁷⁴ RUSSO, Mary. *The Female Grottesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity*. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.

⁷⁵ HARPAM, Geoffrey. "The Grottesque: First Principles." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34. 4 (1976) : 461-468.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 462.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 464.

and disruption”.⁷⁸ In his view, grotesque’s relentless onslaught on categorical distinctions is ultimately conducive to an epistemological abyss, as the receiver’s ways of conceptualising the world are radically called into question.

Harpham’s definition of grotesque is a particularly illuminating theoretical tool to examine Harvey’s and Cave’s music by, in that it encompasses the full tonal spectrum of their song-writing of monstrosity, ranging from the macabre to the comic. My contention is that their works are underpinned by a core grotesque principle, and wage a “civil war of attraction and repulsion”⁷⁹ in terms of music, lyrics, and performance tactics. Therefore, Harpham’s theory of grotesque will be checked against the patterns at play in Harvey’s and Cave’s individual songs as well as on the scale of their entire productions.

In so far as this research focuses on the experience of monstrosity, we are going to take a cursory glance at the theoretical approaches to the reception of grotesque, with a view to stake out the operative space for Harvey’s and Cave’s music in terms of listening experience.

1.3. The Grotesque and Its Reception: the Interplay between Cave’s and Harvey’s Monstrosity and the Grotesque

Since the 18th century, Harpham and a lineage of grotesque theorists have held that the grotesque is defined by its effect. Accordingly, an object qualifies as grotesque when it arouses four responses: “laughter, astonishment, disgust and horror”.⁸⁰ I contend that Cave’s and Harvey’s *horribilia* elicit such an ambivalent response: they terrify as much as they thrill, and their hyperbolic and extravagant style brings the listener to the boundary of laughter and terror. For instance, Harvey’s phallic female protagonist in “50 ft Queenie”(1993), for all her violent swagger, is primarily a figure of camp: the brush-stroke is so bold that it turns satirical, so the listener is torn between horror and laughter at a graphic description of rape. Likewise, because

⁷⁸ HARPHAM. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature. Op. Cit.*, 9.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸⁰ HARPHAM, Geoffrey. “The Grotesque: First Principles.” *Op. Cit.*, 463. Harpham extrapolates from Wolfgang Kayser’s conception of Grotesque as “a comprehensive structural principle of works of art” (KAYSER, Wolfgang. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*. Trans. Ulrich Weisstein. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963. 184), an aesthetic category that applies to three realms: the creative process, the work of art itself, and its reception. Kayser subscribes to 18th century scholar Christoph Martin Wieland’s seminal theory about the reception of grotesque. Wieland identifies the core component of European grotesque art as provoking “laughter, disgust, and astonishment” (qtd. in KAYSER. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature. Op. Cit.*, 30.)

the horror tale of Cave's two semi-animalistic killer brothers in "Mickey Mouse and the Good Bye Man"(2009) tips into howling and sonic overload, by the end of the cacophonous piece, the listener feels disoriented, but also astonished and amused by the hyperbolic and animalistic vocal range. In both instances, the horror content is so overblown that it flirts with the ludicrous, thereby eliciting a combination of laughter and terror. The Cavian and Harveyan monster-range also includes darker pieces, however the bold characterisation always leaves space for carnivalesque intrusion.

Drawing upon this notion that grotesque triggers contradictory responses in the receiver, I would argue that Harvey's and Cave's monstrous repertoires should be approached as the locus of radical unpredictability of content and effect, and as such they are conducive to an essentially polymorphous listening experience where laughter and terror never sit too far apart. Because theirs is a medium that melds together music, lyrics and performance, monstrosity is to be found on all three levels: in the song protagonists' melodrama, in the music, and in Harvey's and Cave's vocal performance and impersonations. The next paragraph will focus on home in on Harvey's and Cave's monster-mongering, with a view to delineate its aesthetic.

2. Overview of Monstrosity in Harvey's and Cave's Works

2.1. Representation of Monstrosity: Social Monsters all around

The theme of monstrosity, although prevalent through most of Harvey's and Cave's works, takes on different shades over time, and broadly falls into two main clusters: 1992-2010, and post-2010. For the purpose of this research, we shall differentiate between the 1992-2010 and the post-2010 albums because the latter period marks an aesthetic shift in both bodies of work. As an experiment in war song-writing, *Let England Shake* (2011) heralds Harvey's new engagement with the real world rather than inner worlds, whilst Cave's *Push the Sky Away* (2013) leaps from the savage cacophony of *Grinderman 2* (2010) to existential ruminations instead of narrative-based songs. 2010 thus marks their passage from fictional to existential palettes, which affects both the occurrence of horror, and its treatment. We are going to survey the monstrous scope in Harvey's and Cave's 1992-2010 albums, which we approach as works of monstrous drama

In most of their 1992-2010 music, the monstrous trope surfaces as a disruptive component conducive to grotesque mayhem, which is deployed through a focus on psychic disturbances and gross corporeality. Until 2010, Cave's monstrosity partakes of fiction in general, and melodrama in particular. Indeed, in his 1992-1996 Southern Gothic inspired albums (*Henry's Dream* [1992], *Let Love In* [1994], and *Murder Ballads* [1996]), Cave consistently develops the monstrous motif against the background of a mythologised songworld. Much in the fashion of his novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel* (1989), he conjures up a vivid songworld through a wealth of epic stories drawn upon the North American folklore (the blues ballad traditions). His songworld is replete with the thrills and spills of serial murders (e.g., "The Curse of Millhaven"), the nightmarish descriptions of gruesome murders and other graphic nightmare visions, and with larger-than-life barroom action that goes wrong (e.g., "Stagger Lee", "O'Malley's Bar"). Will Self's portrayal of Cave's 1990s lyrical scope highlights this mythological dimension:

Cave's mythopoeic terrain: a landscape, present in his songs and prose alike, wherein sex kicks up the dust, murders take place in the heat (of the moment) and the sins of the fathers are visited on everyone.⁸¹

The term "mythopoeic" aptly encapsulates the essence of Cave's lyricism of the time: it produces myth by mingling biblical imagery with hostile dreamworlds, and brings to musical life monstrous characters and freaks, thus creating an idiosyncratic folklore. For the purpose, Cave appropriates existing folklore monsters (e.g., "Jack the Ripper" from British culture, "Stagger Lee" from American blues) and also invents his own folklore characters (e.g., "Red Right Hand" "Loverman", "Jangling Jack", "Crow Jane"). Cave's bold portrayals emphasise the protagonists' extraordinariness, hence they could seamlessly blend into the existing gallery of Anglo-American folklore characters. Whether it partakes of downright terrifying or comic grotesque horror, the monstrosity of Cave's characters and storylines makes for vivid fictional narratives. Post-1996, Cave steers away from monstrosity to focus on matters of the heart in *Boatman's Call* (1997), *No More Shall We Part* (2001), and subsequently broader existential matters (*Nocturama*, 2003). Cave's next monstrous endeavour, the *Grinderman* diptych (2007 and 2010), ties in with his earlier phantasmagorical tales through a fictional character gallery of sexual freaks and semi-animalistic hybrids. *Grinderman* travels the road of hybridity with more

⁸¹ CAVE, Nick. *The Complete Lyrics 1978-2013, Nick Cave*. London: Penguin Books, 2013. Foreword by Will Self. XI.

fragmented narrative structures and supernatural characters fit for myth: the songs are haunted by the Grinderman animal hybrid gallery (e.g., the monkey-man of *Grinderman* and the wolfman of *Grinderman 2*), hypermasculine male predators, and supernatural creatures (e.g., “Heathen Child” and the “Worm Tamer”). Moreover, the protagonists’ monstrosity is matched (or fostered?) by ominous landscapes and hostile social environments. Mostly, Cave’s social monsters are enmeshed in horrific ecosystems, be they nightmare landscapes springing to life or violent local communities. To a lesser extent, monstrosity also surfaces within an idyllic environment that it throws upside down (e.g., murder ballads).

Harvey’s 1992-2010 songbook is similarly broad-ranging: from raw tales of torture and violence (e.g., *Rid of Me*, 1993), through infanticide and doomed love pursuits (e.g., *To Bring You My Love* [1995] *Is this Desire?* [1998], *White Chalk* [2007]), and supernatural monster narratives (e.g., “Meet the Monsta”, “50ft Queenie”, “The Devil”), her songs feature a wealth of unpalatable tales: sadism, obsessive compulsion, sexual perversity and freakery. Her debut albums *Dry* (1992) and *Rid of Me* (1993) feature borderline insanity and sexual anxiety conveyed by tormented female psyches, such as sadistic lovers prone to revenge torture fantasies, and a promiscuous hermaphrodite. Harvey’s early albums thus depict sexuality as friction and the site of barbarity and anxiety. *To Bring You My Love* (1995) stands out as an album of sophisticated monstrosity, with expansive lyrical narratives, ample orchestration, and vivid allegorical imagery, it deploys the monstrous theme to convey a portrayal of desire as pleasurable suffering. It is noteworthy that even in the middle of her most romantically inflected album, monstrosity is cloaked in grotesque attire and flirts with parody, be it as a supernatural demon-lover materialising to take the narrator down to hell (e.g., “Meet Ze Monsta”), or as a semi-feral lover threatening to playfully kill her lover (e.g., “Long Snake Moan”). Monstrosity also features as warped maternal instinct that turns murderous (e.g., “Down by the Water”) or falls into biological self-doubt (e.g., “I Think I’m a Mother”).

Elsewhere on *Is this desire?* (1998), monstrosity features as passion-murder, cruel lovers, or good-bad lovers drawn to dark love. At the more sombre end of the spectrum, *White Chalk* (2007) features cloistered Victoriana, a spectral piano-led album resonant with chamber music intimacy, where monstrosity surfaces in the midst of loss and grieving as graphic post-abortion guilt and the grotesque literalisation of abstract notions⁸² (e.g., darkness and the devil). Regardless of its tonal oscillations between the gloomy and comical poles, and between

⁸²BAKHTIN. *Rabelais and his World. Op.Cit.*, 19-20. Bakhtin establishes that “the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level”.

dejection and defiance, throughout Harvey's works monstrosity primarily occurs as psychodrama,⁸³ a form of fiction foregrounding the protagonists' feelings over dramatic events. The prevalence of first-person narratives with limited interpersonal exchanges is evidence of this psychic filter, which in turn paves the way to grotesque distortion and insanity.

2.2. Psychic Grotesquerie

Although the two artists' depiction of monstrosity varies in dramatic texture, they converge in their focus on what Gothicist David Punter names "psychic grotesquerie", a process whereby the world is distorted under the pressure of the characters' irrationality and obsessions.⁸⁴ Positing it as central to American Gothic literature, Punter also argues that psychic grotesquerie affords the reader no access to an "objective" world, but instead immerses them "in the psyche of a protagonist, often through a sophisticated use of first person narrative".⁸⁵ Many of Cave's and Harvey's horror songs are analogous to Punter's definition insofar as they contain many first person narratives and they too deal in the "landscapes of the mind".⁸⁶ Their listeners experience those psychic landscapes not only through lyrical means, but also through performance and music, hence the listener is immersed both imaginatively and corporeally. In this respect, Harvey's and Cave's songs of monstrosity should be construed as a multifarious experience that engages the imagination, the senses and the body of both the performers and their listeners.

The songs thus usher in a character-gallery of human monsters that exemplify different shades of monstrosity. Whilst Harvey's focus is chiefly on the psychic landscapes of her protagonists, Cave's repertoire brims with a constellation of denizens intermingled with ominous settings and communities. In both instances, monstrosity partakes of a broader grotesque treatment of horror in a hyperbolic style that thrives on contradiction and disruption, and repudiates rationality and linearity. In blurring the categorical delineations between monstrosity and humanity, monsters challenge our perception of what constitutes acceptable human identity and make us rethink the concept of humanity. As discussed above, the two

⁸³ "Psychodrama.": a play, film, or novel in which psychological elements are the main interest. Oxford Dictionaries, 2017. <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/psychodrama>>

⁸⁴ PUNTER. *The Literature of Terror, a History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*. Op. Cit.,3.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

categories are mutually constitutive,⁸⁷ and evoking monstrosity thus means evoking humanity. The next chapter will examine what structural devices underlie Harveyan and Cavian monstrous galleries, and what sort human identity is conjured up by their monster-mongering.

⁸⁷ “The categories of human and monsters are co-incipient, mutually constitutive, monstrously hybrid.” COHEN. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture. Op. Cit.*, XI.

CHAPTER 2: Monstrosity as The *In*-Human: into the Epistemological Abyss

*My songs may be using characters and the narratives may appear fictitious
but they are all very much reflections of myself,
I recognize them, with a shudder,
in the same way one sees their reflection in the mirror.*⁸⁸

Nick Cave

Introduction

The prevalence of tormented protagonists prone to violent impulses and sexual freakery partakes of Harvey's and Cave's shared aesthetics of disproportion, disharmony, and transgression. In representing humanity as barbaric, they reverse the established conception of humanity as innately rational, benevolent, and reflective, and instead depict it as prone to irrational outbursts. In dramatising the characters' inhumane behaviour (i.e., sadism and violence) towards their peers, the two songworlds foreground social monstrosity, thereby severing the semantic ties between the words "human" and "humane". In conjoining human nature and benevolence, the etymology of the term "humane" signifies an ontological belief that human beings are inherently compassionate and able to empathise with other sentient beings. The term "humane" thus implicitly equates humanity with benevolence, whilst cruelty and lack of compassion are perceived as *inhuman* occurrences negating the core of human nature. However, in Harvey's and Cave's terms, humankind is not so kind. In a reversal of ontological assumptions, their social monsters stand out as a barbaric antithesis to compassionate humanity.

Applying Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory*⁸⁹ to the two musicians' monstrous repertoire is promising insofar as it affords a theoretical insight into the interplay between the monstrous and the grotesque, the two salient threads in Harvey's and Cave's musical works. Focusing on the monstrous grotesque, Cohen pinpoints the intrinsic paradox of monstrosity: in defining itself through transgression of normality, it conjures up the very category it breaches: humanity. This

⁸⁸ CAVE, Nick. "Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds: Lovely Creatures, 1984-2014." *Uncut*. Sodomsy, Sam. 22 May 2017.

<https://www.uncut.co.uk/reviews/album/nick-cave-bad-seeds-lovely-creatures-best-nick-cave-bad-seeds-1984-2014?utm_content=manual&utm_campaign=socialflow&utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_term=uncut>

⁸⁹ COHEN. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture. Op. Cit.*

observation leads Cohen to postulate that monstrosity and humanity are inherently intertwined and therefore “co-incipient and mutually constitutive”.⁹⁰

Extrapolating from Cohen’s argument, Harvey’s and Cave’s monster-mongering can thus be construed as expressive of humanity. In focusing on the outlands of humanity, their songwriting problematises the antinomic correlative of monstrosity: human identity. From this perspective, their songs of monstrosity not only engage in transgressive carnival mayhem, but also reconfigure human identity according to a process of antinomic correlation. Harvey’s infanticidal mothers⁹¹ thus bring to mind the notion of maternal instinct, whilst the spectacle of murdering psychopaths calls into question the innate compassion of human nature. This process of limning out a component by means of its antithetic foil is paradoxical, and as such structurally akin to grotesque as an aesthetic of disruption and contradiction.⁹²

Therefore, Harvey’s and Cave’s songs of monstrosity intersect with Grotesque on two counts: because their monstrous characters are essential figures of contradiction and disproportion, and because they operate within a grotesque framework of juxtaposition and conflation of disparates, whereby (perceived) polar opposites (i.e., monstrosity and humanity) erupt out of one another. Therefore, we can argue that with Harvey’s and Cave’s monstrous songwriting speaks about humanity in grotesque tongues, in an idiom of transgression and distortion.

Beyond the transgressive delight inherent in carnivalesque degradation, what purpose does this radical counter-representation of humanity serve? What strategies do Harvey and Cave deploy in their characterisation and how do they affect the listener? In an attempt to shed light on the inner mechanisms and ramifications of Harvey’s and Cave’s monster-mongering, this chapter will stake out the operative framework for Harvey’s and Cave’s monster drama by probing it for structural overlaps with the Grotesque.

We will argue that Harvey’s and Cave’s monstrous songwriting wreaks havoc with established conceptions of humanity in two ways: by depicting humanity as intrinsically sadistic, and by using extreme hybridising. In both instances, the focus is on the porousness of human boundaries, and human identity is accordingly presented as a boundary phenomenon in constant transaction with its outside. Firstly, we are going to probe their representation of monstrosity as inherent in human nature.

⁹⁰ COHEN. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture. Op. Cit.*, XI.

⁹¹ “Down by the Water”, “I Think I am a Mother” (1995); “White Chalk” (2007).

⁹² HARPAM. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature. Op.Cit.*

1. *In-humanity* as Monstrosity Within

The terror of the Gothic often inherent in its monsters and othered bodies, functions as a deconstructive counter-narrative, which presents the darker side of subjectivity, the ghosts of otherness that haunt our fragile selves.

Maria Beville⁹³

Sadistic humanity is particularly prominent in Harvey's and Cave's early to mid-nineties music, however it is also consistently present throughout the rest of their works, whether satirical or sinister in tone. Harvey and Cave convey their depiction of sadistic humanity through a gallery of abhorrent human specimens whose behaviour flouts the conventional scripts of humanity: psychopaths compulsively inflicting pain on other people (e.g., Harvey's "Down by the Water"[1995], Cave's "The Curse of Millhaven" [1996]), narcissists enjoying the spectacle of their own violence onto others (e.g., Cave's "O'Malley's Bar" [1996], Harvey's "Rid of Me" [1993]), and twisted lovers equating desire with death and pain (e.g., Harvey's "Catherine" [1998], Cave's "The Wild Rose" [1996]). Being deprived of empathy, these characters are morbidly self-absorbed and fail to act humanely.

Justin Edwards and Rune Grauland contend that "The grotesque represents the inhuman as simultaneously inside and outside for the inhuman is always "in humanity": it is in-human or "in the human". Inhuman is, then, the otherness that always inhabits the human from the inside".⁹⁴ Extrapolating from this argument, I postulate that Harvey's and Cave's depiction of human monsters matches Edwards and Grauland's formulation of the *in-human* insofar as their human monsters are not presented as radical others, but indeed as *human beings* harbouring a barbaric streak. This intermingling of humanity and barbarity implies that humanity and its perceived incompatibles (i.e., cruelty and irrationality) are not antithetical but commingled. Therefore, inhumanity is presented as embedded in human identity: "the inhuman is the other side of the human or cohabitant with humanity".⁹⁵ This understanding of inhumanity as the psyche's twin inmate is an illuminating filter to examine Harvey's and Cave's monsters by: as aberrant composites, they disrupt established conceptions of normality, and as grotesque subjects, they are also essentially ambivalent. They can therefore be construed as objects of

⁹³ BEVILLE, Maria. *Gothic Post-Modernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009. 41.

⁹⁴ EDWARDS, Justin, and Rune GRAULAND. *Grotesque*. London and New York: Routledge, 2013. 87.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

either horror or comedy, therefore their treatment ranges from gothic-macabre to comic grotesque. Harvey's and Cave's grotesque registers travel the full span of the tonal spectrum: in some songs it unfolds according to a Bakhtinian pattern (i.e., as a momentary intrusion of grotesque reversal and misrule), and in others it veers towards the macabre. This continuum of the comic and the terrifying underpins their monstrous songwriting and acts as a comprehensive disruptive principle.

In the following paragraph, we will demonstrate that Harvey and Cave convey their portrayal of inhumanity according to grotesque pattern of contradiction, by turning essentialist stereotypes on their heads. The two musicians not only challenge essentialist assumptions, but they debase them in a manner akin to what Bakhtin identifies as a key mechanism of carnivalesque grotesque: the desecration of the ideal, and its repudiation into the lower bodily stratum.⁹⁶ Bakhtin's formulation of grotesque realism as a drive towards the concrete applies to Cave's and Harvey's portrayal of sadistic humanity: they bring down the concept of enlightened humanity and drown it out in gross corporeality. Indeed, along with the psychic edge, abhorrent physicality features high in their repertoire, through the motifs of murder, torture, and rape. In downgrading humanity to the barbaric and ludicrous levels, Harvey's and Cave's grotesque portrayal negates humanity's claims to any intellectual or moral high ground, and relegates it to its basest level.

2. Turning Essentialist Stereotypes on their Heads

2.1. (in-) Human Behaviours: Human Interactions, Friction, and Sexual Violence

The inhuman theme is especially prevalent in Cave's and Harvey's early nineties works, surfacing as a gallery of social, psychic, and biological monsters. A cursory look at their albums testifies to the extent of their monster-mongering. Cave's albums *Henry's Dreams* (1992) and *Let Love In* (1994) feature bar-room murder drama (e.g., "John Finn's Wife"), full-blown nightmare visions with barbaric creatures (e.g., "Papa Won't Leave You Henry", "Jack the Ripper", "Loverman"), stories of bitter self-damnation (e.g., "Brother my Cup is Empty"), impending doom (e.g., "Red Right Hand"), and cautionary tales (e.g., "Let Love In"). Harvey's

⁹⁶ BAKHTIN. *Rabelais and his World. Op. Cit.*, 19-20. "The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity."

debut diptych *Dry* (1992) and *Rid of Me* (1993) exhibits a focus on inner rather than social monsters, articulating femininity and female sexuality in terms of psycho-sexual disturbances. Representing sexuality as friction, the two albums feature an array of female protagonists experiencing social and sexual inadequacy (e.g., “Dress”), toxic desire (e.g., “Happy and Bleeding”, “Hair”, “Plants and Rags”, “Hook”), lack of desire (e.g., “Dry”), and exemplifying sexual freakery (e.g., the hermaphrodite in “Sheela-na-gig”, the phallic woman in “50ft Queenie”). Pushing the boundaries of warped sexuality to sado-masochism, *Rid of Me* locates the barbaric at the core of romantic relationships, hence the prevalence of the torture fantasy motif (e.g., “Rid of Me”, “Legs”, “Rub till it Bleeds”, “Snake”).

In both repertoires, human interactions are represented as essentially violent, witness the proliferation of murders, torture fantasies, infanticides etc. The operative framework of Cave’s and Harvey’s songworlds is *in-human* in that not only do human beings act on impulse, but they also harbour a sadistic streak that drives them to derive pleasure from inflicting violence onto others. This is particularly visible in Cave’s murder ballads where murderer-narrators relish their murderous feats, and in Harvey’s revenge torture fantasies (e.g., “Rid of Me”, “Rub till it Bleeds”, 1993). Reflecting the general violence of human interactions, sexuality is represented as a psychic and corporeal battlefield, and the site of friction and the barbaric.

Whereas Harvey tends to present violent social interactions within the confines of one-to-one relationships, Cave contextualises the barbaric in a fully-fledged social environment. Although human communities could potentially alleviate the protagonist’s plight and counterbalance the alienated environment, they fail to afford the protagonists any solace, but rather they partake of the violent underworld and add to the protagonist’s fears. The relationship of Cave’s protagonist to the wider human community is indeed one of deep distrust and anticipated violence, as signified in the recurrent motif of the lynch-mob. In “Papa Won’t Leave You Henry” (1992), the community is referred to as a non-descript “they” and there is little doubt about its intrinsic barbarity as the song opens with the evocation of a lynching (“they rolled him in linoleum/shot him in the neck”), and as the barbaric becomes tinged with monstrosity through the image of “lynch mobs, death squads, babies born without brains”. The latter element points to a correlation between psychological and physical monstrosity, whilst establishing the pervasiveness of human violence. Many a Cavian character is plagued by the fear of the lynch-mob: some seek safe havens where their necks are “free from the lynching

rope”⁹⁷ and others run for their life and away from a killing mob.⁹⁸ Best typifying the Cavian community is the town of Millhaven which the narrator Lollie describes as “small, ... mean, and cold”.⁹⁹ The term “mean” strikes an enduring chord as it encapsulates the essence of the Cavian world: it is tormented, swarming with dark forces, and barbaric humans that coalesce to antagonise the protagonist from all angles. Being deprived of social sympathy, the Cavian protagonist finds himself caught in the middle of a gigantic web of threats emanating from humans, objects and the natural world alike. The sense of enclosure and persecution translates into a terror of human interactions: “I fear the noose; I fear the stake for there is no bone they did not break”.¹⁰⁰ The crowd appears purposeful in its bleak design, which imparts a sense of ruthless persecution.

Cave’s female figures provide little solace either. Many of them are portrayed as dangerous and potentially violent, and there is a gallery of monstrous women to further arouse the protagonist’s paranoia: whether it’s a woman “with legs like scissors”,¹⁰¹ a woman who rules “with an iron fist”,¹⁰² or the one with “her bleached and hungry eyes, her hair was like a curtain falling open with the laughter and closing with the lies”,¹⁰³ they all share an overt connection to death, cruelty and deception. The alliteration of “laughter” and “lie” clearly points to their intrinsic duplicity and places them in the scope of the nightmare. There is no rest for the hell-bound Cavian protagonist: his is a disjointed world which offers no human respite, a social environment which relentlessly assaults his nerves and indeed his sanity.

In order to probe Harvey’s and Cave’s treatment of barbaric human interactions, we are going to examine the rape motif, which acts both as a signifier of innate aggressiveness and a trigger of grotesque mayhem. Partaking of a general meltdown of normality and proportion, the rape motif occurs as the ultimate embodiment of gross corporeality and produces optimal repulsive charge. Although it is not the most recurrent motif in their works, it stands out as a most spectacular deployment of grotesque violence. In order to probe this rendition of inhumanity across time, we are going to analyse its use in Cave’s “Stagger Lee” (1996) and

⁹⁷ “Up Jumped the Devil”, *Tender Prey*, 1988.

⁹⁸ “The Hammer Song”, *The Good Son*, 1990.

⁹⁹ “The Curse of Millhaven”, *The Murder Ballads*, 1996.

¹⁰⁰ “When I first Came to Town”, *Henry’s dream*, 1992.

¹⁰¹ “John Finn’s Wife”, *Ibid.*

¹⁰² “Jack the Ripper”, *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ “Papa won’t Leave You Henry”, *Ibid.*

“When My Baby Comes” (2010), and in Harvey’s “50ft Queenie” (1993) and “A Woman A Man Walked Past” (2009).

2.2. A Comparative Study of the Rape Motif

From Downright Comic Horror to Ambivalence: Cave’s “Stagger Lee” and “When My Baby Comes” (2010)

Cave’s treatment of the rape motif encapsulates the breadth of his aesthetic spectrum, ranging from theatrical comic grotesque to sinister Gothic, as reflected in “Stagger Lee” (1996) and “When My Baby Comes” (2010). As vivid instances of gross sexuality, the two songs exemplify Cave’s *in-human* scope, although they are afforded distinct stylistic treatments.

“Stagger Lee” (1996) epitomises the heyday of Cave’s comic grotesque phase in the early to mid-nineties, with its propensity for murderous mayhem set against a North American backdrop. In it, the eponymous protagonist Stagger Lee goes on a killing spree in a bar, and promises to rape the barroom owner Billy Dilly upon his return. The horrific threat of homosexual rape is couched crude language: “I’ll fuck Billy Dilly in his motherfucking arse”, and “I’d step over 50 good pussies to get to one’s boy’s fat arse”. In a manner evocative of tall tale bragging, the hyperbolic abuse and macho bravado tip the song into carnivalesque grotesque, thereby diverting the horrific content towards comedy. The graphic extravagance of the depiction thus counteracts the horror content and introduces a sense of the ludicrous. As Cave’s foulest treatment of the rape motif, “Stagger Lee” conveys a portrayal of humanity in ludicrous overtones, whereby the rape narrative acts as an unlikely trigger of comic extravagance.

Whereas in “Stagger Lee” the rape motif is used to comic horror effect, in “When My Baby Comes”, it is conveyed ambivalently, thus leading to a more complex listening experience in which the horror of the rape narrative is counteracted by comic intrusions on a second narrative line. A delicate piece of fluttering anxiety on the otherwise rough’n’rugged *Grinderman 2* (2009), the song is dual in terms of both music and narrative. Musically, it hinges on two concurrent musical lines: the first line a pleasing lullaby sonic conveyed by violin loops, whilst the second loops on coarser guitar riffs. The song is imbued with an apocalyptic mood and produces an antithetical listening experience: its circular structure and saturated strings effect (violin and guitar) unnerve the listener, whilst its rippling reverberations entice them. The dual texture of the sonic has its narrative counterpart, as the song floats two concurrent

narratives: the present narrative frame includes a narrator (possibly in a hospital) anxiously waiting for his loved one to come and visit him, and it is interspersed with the fragmented memories of a horrific rape in the past.

In depriving the listener of a linear narrative and objective anchoring, the elliptic narration and internal focus create confusion about the protagonists (Who is the narrator? What is the referent of the much-awaited “baby”?), and the plotlines (How is their current hospital stay connected with the rape?). The rape narrative stumbles and erupts in the cracks of the present hospital narrative, between trivial observations (“Best thing about this place are the showers/Worst thing is the visiting hours”) and inane fixations (“Hey, careful of the carpet! /Hey, don't do that on the carpet!”), as if traumatised memory, forever tripping on itself, chitchatted itself back to a comfort zone of normality.

The account of the rape itself is conveyed elliptically and unfolds over two separate stanzas:

They had pistols and they had guns
They threw me on the ground as they entered into me
(I was only fifteen!)
When my baby comes

[...] They had pistols and they had guns
My skirt above my head I was so much older
When I crawled out from their mushroom cloud
When my baby comes

Being both framed with “They had pistols and they had guns” and “When my baby comes”, the two stanzas are structurally akin and echo each other. In imparting a binary rhythm to the stanzas, these two repeated lines produce a steadying chorus-effect that counteracts the horrific description of the rape: “They threw me on the ground as they entered into me / (I was only fifteen!)” and “My skirt above my head I was so much older/When I crawled out from their mushroom cloud”. Moreover, the embedded pattern cushions the graphic scene by containing it within a set frame, thereby preventing the traumatic memories from leaking into the present temporality. The formal structure partakes of a containment strategy whereby the traumatic event is compartmentalised and kept at bay from the present temporality.

In contrast to the horrific rape account, the chorus line “when my baby comes” sounds like a wishful mantra for solace, as if to ward off the memory of horror by fast-forwarding to a restorative future. And yet, even such a gruesome song contains tonal ambivalence, which

surfaces in the black humour of the opening lines: “Thank God we don’t get all our hurts at once/that would be a really really bad thing”. The lines introduce an incongruous chitchat dimension that jars with the horror content of the song, and their full humorous charge only comes to fruition retrospectively, in light of the ensuing song narrative. Whilst the ingenuousness of the utterance “all our hurts once” and the childish colloquialism of “*really really* bad thing” (italics mine) and “hurts” initially conjure up innocuous chatter, their meaning changes once the full story has unfolded, and they retrospectively achieve dark humorous effect. In trivialising unspeakable violence with this incongruous naivety, the lines subdue and subvert the horror narrative. This intrusion of black humour in an otherwise gruesome tale of violence and mental dislocation is testament to the abiding presence of grotesque ambivalence in Cave’s songworld.

Therefore, the treatment of the rape motif in “When my Baby Comes” and “Stagger Lee” reflects Cave’s reliance on gross corporeality as a source of horror and comedy, whether as part of macabre grotesque (“When My Baby Comes”) or carnivalesque grotesque (“Stagger Lee”). In this respect, Cavian in-humanity fully partakes of the grotesque dimension of the work.

Harvey’s “50ft Queenie” (1993) And “A Woman A Man Walked By” (2009)

Although, like Cave, Harvey makes economical use of the rape motif, it nonetheless achieves optimal subversive charge in terms of physical defilement and reversal of expectations. The rape motif features most shockingly in two of Harvey’s songs which we are going to analyse: “50ft Queenie” (1993), and “A Woman A Man Walk By” (2009). Like Cave’s two songs, Harvey’s are nearly fifteen years apart, and display very different sonic textures. “50ft Queenie” is bold as brass rock, a raucous stampede with pounding percussion and raw guitar work, a raging piece of self-affirmation. A more complex sonic tapestry, “A Woman A Man Walked By” reflects the more sophisticated experimentations Harvey undertakes in her collaborative albums with composer John Parish. The album is an experimental cacophony of folk, rock, jazz, and classical music. Its loose structure disconcerts the listener, as it includes a combination of percussive lines, jazz riffs, and swathes of melodic piano brushing past.

Harvey’s third single, “50ft Queenie” is a song of reverse machismo where the female protagonist boasts her phallic size and compares herself successively to a queen, a king, and a force 10 hurricane. The song’s tempo is fast and furious, its soundscape bursting with the raw

energy of abrasive guitar-work and sung-screamed vocals. The percussive sound matches the aggressive self-affirmation of the protagonist who claims to be “number one, second to no-one”, and keeps taunting the listener to “come on and measure” her, repeatedly bragging about her measurements (rising from 20 to 30, 40, and finally 50 inches long). The song is in full hyperbolic mode: its larger-than-life protagonist flirts with supernatural omnipotence (“Biggest woman /I could have ten sons /Ten gods /Ten queens”), and her self-aggrandising reaches ludicrous proportion (starting at 10 foot in height and finishing at 50) against a backdrop of brazen antagonism (“I’ll tell you my name: F-U-C-K”).

Being ripe with excess, the satirical and the playful, the song is a quintessential grotesque number. The phallic female of “50ft Queenie” marked the early nineties independent rock scene with her parodic take on macho bravado. In the context of the male-dominated rock scene, the song makes a gibe at male rock-stars and their performance of macho heterosexuality (so-called “cock-rock”). The macho parody culminates with gross sexual aggression when the protagonist threatens to commit rape on Casanova (“you bend over, Casanova”). In reversing the conventional scripts of sexuality and gender, the notion of female phallic rape causes optimal repulsion and transgressive delight.

Moreover, as a female performer, Harvey thus appropriates phallic omnipotence and re-assigns it to a female protagonist, thereby affirming a third sexual act that wreaks havoc with the hetero-normative matrix. Indeed, 50ft Queenie’s boastful threat to rape Casanova is a most grotesque deployment of the rape trope: it is extravagant and ludicrous, at once comic and terrifying, and in its extreme reversal of heterosexual roles, it ushers in carnivalesque grotesque. 50ft Queenie stands out as one of Harvey’s most transgressive monsters: she transgresses the boundaries of gender, proportion, and nature, whilst gleefully toying with sexual taboos. The Casanova rape acts as a centrepiece of defiant sexual freakery and encapsulates the protagonist’s relish in phallic self-affirmation, flouting of normality and propriety, and flaunting of sexual otherness in the face of dominant masculinity and heteronormativity.

The song stands out as an inverted mirror image to such typical rock songs as Led Zeppelin’s rock classic “Whole Lotta Love”,¹⁰⁴ and their scripts of heteronormative sexuality. In this masculinist tradition, the male performer achieves sexual stardom status thanks to a male-

¹⁰⁴ The track “Whole Lotta Love” by British hard rock band Led Zeppelin was released in 1969. It achieved global commercial success and is known for the explicit sexual content of both its lyrics (recounting the performer’s sexual encounter with a girl) and sonic (singer Robert Plant’s extended orgasmic moans). The song exemplifies a dominant masculinist trend in rock music lyrics and performance.

centred scenario, whereby an objectified female lover acts as a foil for the male performer's sexual prowess. In challenging the sexual omnipotence of the male rockstar (Casanova), Harvey subverts the rock discourse by reshuffling conventional sexual roles and breaking heteronormative symbolism (i.e., the passive female/active male dichotomy of the heteronormative rhetoric). She also blurs gender boundaries, since her protagonist is an omnipotent female who mixes and matches biological attributes: she can mother ("biggest woman/I could have ten sons"), whilst boasting a phallus and exhibiting a taste for sexual aggression and bravado commonly associated with males. Whilst her unruliness and extravagance partake of carnivalesque mayhem, the genderfuck¹⁰⁵ rape threat she issues goes further and tips the song into gross inhumanity. Harvey said in an interview that Queenie "stomps around a lot" and "she's big cos she feasts on men and that's a good form of protein",¹⁰⁶ Harvey too "feasts on men" with this song, rockstars and Casanovas beware. The fact that Harvey impersonates and embodies Queenie (through a first-person narrative and her vocal performance) is disruptive because it posits her as ambisexual and playfully violent, which transgresses the rock canon whereby sexuality is represented as a hedonistic pursuit, and women as compliant sexual objects.

It is noteworthy that in the early nineties female rock artists were a minority on a predominantly male-driven scene, therefore the implied rock star and song persona was male. Harvey's female peers broadly fell into two categories: they were either blazing a peculiar female trail with its own imagery and iconography (e.g., Kate Bush, Tori Amos, Sinead O'Connor), or emulating male rock-stars (e.g., tomboys Patti Smith and Joan Jett).¹⁰⁷ However, there was also a third female rocker position, albeit essentially post-punk and mostly North-American: the feminist (punk) indie-rock of the Riot Grrls movement with its defiant confrontation of dominant sexual ideologies. Such bands as Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear

¹⁰⁵ "Genderfuck" (more commonly known as gender-bending) originates from 1970s gay vernacular, and was theorised by American sociologist Laud Humphreys' 1972 work *Out of the Closets: Sociology of Homosexual Liberation*, and subsequently popularised in the August 1972 issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine, in reference to the glam rock style and a new "macho" transvestism mixing signifiers of femininity (i.e., make up, dresses, pumps, full make-up) and macho virility (beards, bodily hair). The term "gender-fuck" has been widely used to describe the act of consciously and conspicuously challenging established gender binary conventions through androgyny, hyperbole, and cross-dressing. In LGBT studies, the term can also refer to a deliberate strategy of sending mixed messages about one's gender as part of a strategy of social activism.

¹⁰⁶ REYNOLDS, Simon. *Bring the Noise: 20 Years of Writing About Hip Rock and Hip-Hop*. London: Faber and Faber, 2007. 163.

¹⁰⁷ REYNOLDS, Simon, and PRESS, Joy. *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock'n'Roll*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. 230-235. Reynolds and Press distinguish four categories of female rock rebellion in the early eighties: the "can do" approach (i.e., emulating men), and three subcategories of female rock (infusing rock with femininity, celebrating femaleness, and focusing on the pangs of identity formation).

unleashed an unprecedented backlash against patriarchy by producing counter-narratives on sexuality, with a focus on domestic abuse, rape, and the pitfalls of heteronormative sexuality. Grunge singer Courtney Love expressed similar feminist sensitivities and frustrations and debunked the myth of compliant femininity with confrontational lyrics and kinderwhore attire.¹⁰⁸ The Riot Grrls reflected the early 1990s *Zeitgeist* and expressed the frustration of gender politics.

At first glance, Harvey's two debut albums *Dry* and *Rid of Me* seem to reflect the gender preoccupations of their age, as they both deal with the pitfalls of femininity and female sexuality within the constraints of patriarchy. However, Harvey has consistently steered clear of collective female identity politics, and her songscape is too idiosyncratic to be typecast as feminist. Whilst Harvey's "50ft Queenie" shares the thematic focus on rape with early nineties female rock musicians, the trope is used to different ends: whereas such female musicians as Tori Amos, Hole, or Liz Phair used the rape motif as a signifier of female oppression by patriarchy, Harvey decentred it to the carnivalesque fringe. The treatment of rape in "50ft Queenie" epitomises Harvey's off-centre stance: as the focal point of a bragging extravaganza, it partakes of grotesque disruption, and as such precludes political interpretation. Indeed, the protagonist of "50ft Queenie" is so outlandish and outrageously camp that she does not typify any collective gender identity, but its unbridled freakery and free play of gender roles point to parodic misrule rather than political statement.

"A Woman a Man Walked by"¹⁰⁹

Similarly, in "A Woman A Man Walked By", the rape motif is evoked as part of a narcissistic spectacle and is deployed in such grotesque overtones that it cannot be read as a straightforward political statement. The song is testament to Harvey's expanding experimental artistry: compared to the unstoppable energy of "50ft Queenie", "A Woman A Man Walked By" presents a more complex tapestry interweaving several musical and vocal lines, relying on tension and release rather than sustained sonic assault. Indeed, it exhibits a similar artistic curve to Cave's "When My Baby Comes" in its sophisticated mastery of multi-layered and liminal

¹⁰⁸ The Kinderwhore look was created and popularised by Courtney Love and a few other early nineties female punk / indie rock artists. It combined torn babydoll dresses or nighties, school-girls' favourites Mary-Jane shoes. An image of sexualised childhood, it combined elements of childhood innocence (the school-girl look, the nightie) with sexualised elements (cleavage, heavy make-up, babydoll dresses).

¹⁰⁹ In this paragraph, I am using the gender-neutral pronouns "they/theirs/them" in reference to both the rapist character and the woman-man because their respective biological sexes are unclear in the song.

musical structure. “When My Baby Comes” may sound less percussive than Harvey’s “A Woman A Man Walked By”, however it shares its polymorphic quality.

The eponymous song “A Woman A Man Walked By” features on Harvey’s second collaborative album with her song-writing accomplice John Parish, released in 2009. Parish and Harvey had written another album together in 1996, *Dance Hall at Louse Point*, a darkly experimental piece of work, on which Harvey conveyed fresh character explorations. Parish also produced the ground-breaking *To Bring You My Love* (1995) which propelled Harvey to commercial success, and *White Chalk* (2007), which shifted to a piano-led style with high pitch vocals, in a bold departure from her customary blues-rock shore. At the time of its release, *A Woman A Man Walked By* was aptly described it as “wonky, folk blues pop, filled with rusty tin can moments and poetry”¹¹⁰; indeed the album brims with restless creativity and stretches musical and vocal experimentation into a fresh territory.

“A Woman A Man Walked By” is structurally akin to “50ft Queenie” in that it features a first-person narrative of anal rape, with Harvey impersonating a raving rapist that narrates their revenge rape fantasies on a woman-man friend of theirs. The latter, who is initially presented as “a courageous friend”, unleashes the narrator’s rage by their cruelty and scorn. The narrator’s mindset goes from relatively composed to frantic, morphing into retaliatory rage after the woman-man spurns the protagonist (“all the times I tried to help he just spat in my face and laughed”). The protagonist then spits out a mocking portrayal of the woman-man’s “chicken liver” parts, snarling explicit rape threats that become the backbone of the lyrics.

A marking feature of the song is that, sonically and lyrically alike, it is something of a schizophrenic experience. Structurally, it is split in the middle: the lyrical content is delivered in the first part and ends with manic percussions, subsequently yielding to an instrumental second part which is more ethereal. Moreover, Harvey’s multiple vocal styles evoke aural schizophrenia; as she skips from one vocal distortion to another, her subjectivity seems to dislocate and ramify into two characters, one female and one male. Harvey delivers her “woman-man friend” description with girly vocals that subsequently erupt into a raspy male rant when depicting the rape fantasy itself, and punctuates the song with various screams and moans. The progression of the song is thus erratic and ruptural, breaking into conflicting

¹¹⁰ JONES, Chris. *BBC Review*. “PJ Harvey & John Parish. A Woman A Man Walked By.” 2009. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/reviews/pwgb/>>

musical riffs, personae and vocals. In the midst of this aesthetic maelstrom, the one semblance of structure hinges upon the conventional storytelling of the opening lines (i.e., “I once knew a woman-man...”), and in the two “rape choruses”. The choruses are built upon a four-fold repetition of respectively “I want his fucking ass” and “you stick it up your fucking ass”. Whilst the chorus-based structure foregrounds the centrality of the rape motif, the foul language and crude description produce optimal narrative assault, which is underscored by a cacophony of thunderous drums simultaneously running counter to and complementing the screaming vocals.

From the first chorus onward, Harvey’s oscillations from hysterical female to raspy male ensnare the listeners in an aural schizophrenia of overlapping voices, whereby they are caught up between the girly/hysterical female narrator that playfully explores “the damp alleyways” of the woman-man’s soul and her barbaric (male-ish) counterpart belching out their urge to rape. The girly narrator provides the main subjective anchoring, as she gleefully enumerates the woman-man’s shortcomings (i.e., their premature balding, their miniature genitals that she calls “little toy”). The girly vocals escalate from this playfully cruel register to sung-screamed hysterics, until they finally break out into extended groans of frenzy and bring the focus to the “mummy’s boy’s” genitalia:

Where's your liver?
Where's your heart?
What's with all your woman parts?

The gradation of the bodily parts from liver and heart to “woman parts” homes in on the taboo of sexual indeterminacy, thereby highlighting the sexual freakery of the woman-man. These lines bear the stamp of grotesque extravagance in their playful treatment of the taboo, and in the ludicrous vocal modulations. Harvey turns the song into a torture stomp in which corporeal violence is conveyed on multiple levels through lyrical, sonic, and vocal assault. Her visceral interpretation of body horror is reminiscent of American performance artist Diamanda Galas who uses a similar mixture of vocal terror and unconcern when relating sexual revenge on “The Sporting Life” (1994) as she chitchats, screams and cackles her way through the rape and lynching of a trickster by prostitutes.

In its entanglement of vocals and personae, the song generates not only aural and narrative confusion, but also gender uncertainty. Indeed, the interspersed croaky and girly vocals seem to originate from either side of the gender divide: the former sounding high-pitch female, and the latter feral macho-male. Conflating these two clashing gender identities into one narrator defies accepted gender norms and conjures up ambisexuality. Therefore, like in

“50ft Queenie”, gender-bending looms large in that not only is the object of the rape an ambiguous “woman-man” “made of chicken liver parts”, but the narrator’s biological sex is just as indeterminate. In conveying the subjective dislocation of a psychotic individual in gender-bending overtones, Harvey weaves in a liminal dimension that wreaks havoc with sexual boundaries and norms, thereby deploying a multi-layered strategy of disruption. The ambisexuality of the singer-narrator resonates with the graphic description of penetrative rape, which suggests a phallus-endowed rapist, and therefore a man-woman narrator. The genderfuck rape acts as the transgressive centrepiece of a song saturated with gender-bending to ludicrous excess. In this respect, the song shares the grotesque overdrive of “50ft Queenie” and Cave’s “Stagger Lee”. In fact, it also shares “Stagger Lee”’s spectacularly foul language, and its comic grotesque component. However, it is noteworthy that with “50ft Queenie” and “A Woman A Man Walked By”, Harvey pushes transgression further than Cave. Indeed, Cave’s “Stagger Lee” rape does not question the gender identity of its perpetrator: Stagger Lee is explicitly depicted as male and also exhibits macho swagger, which reinforces the societal stereotypes of masculinity. Conversely, Harvey’s rapists are all the more disturbing as their gender identity is rendered uncertain by a gender-confusing characterisation. At a time when gender was conceived of as strictly binary, and the recent concepts of “gender spectrum” and “gender-fluidity” were unheard of, this gender confusion transgressed the boundaries of propriety and acceptability. The phallic woman of “50 ft Queenie” behaves out of gender when in a show of macho swagger, she manically brandishes her phallic size as proof of her omnipotence, whilst the multi-layered ambisexuality “A Woman A Man Walked By” features a man-woman narrator as well as a man-woman object. In both of Harvey’s songs, the motif of genderfuck rape encapsulates a pervasive ambisexual theme, and also intensifies the repulsive charge of the song.

Finally, “A Woman A Man Walked By” mirrors Cave’s “When my Baby Comes” in that it seems to replicate psychic dissolution. In dramatising the narrator’s inner struggle between their civilised self (the female voice), and their barbaric self (i.e., the rape impulse), the song mimics a psychotic episode, with a fragmented narrator speaking in voices and yielding to their basest urges. Moreover, this impression of psychotic meltdown is reinforced by the fragmented soundscape: the song opens with manic guitar loops counterpointing the girly narrator’s conventional storytelling, only to shift to pounding and screeching distortion during the rape chorus, until the song becomes completely instrumental. The instrumental half is articulated around a piano line that arises sporadically at first and gradually supersedes the

percussive soundscape as a structuring theme. As the two antithetical lines coalesce into a cacophonous jazz riffing off the piano loop, the discordant piece is mellowed down with the melodious streak of the piano line. Stylistically, the sonic texture of the song is just as baffling and composite as its protagonist, and its rambling/drifting flow makes it aesthetically liminal, as if forever poised on the edge of antithetical aesthetic movements. This meandering flow resembles Cave's "When my Baby Comes", even though the latter does not feature such abrupt leaps.

Conclusion

In Harvey's two songs, the disproportion of language, drama, and performance echoes the comic grotesque of Cave's "Stagger Lee" where the rape motif is deployed as the cornerstone of a satirical horror show. "A Woman A Man Walked By" is infused with crude corporeality and borderline insanity, and although essentially liminal in tone, it tips into comic horror through the swing-door of incongruity.

For all their outwardly antithetical aesthetic twists and bends, the four songs exemplify Harvey's and Cave's consistent reliance on grotesque devices in their characterisation and musical aesthetics. From the outrageous comic grotesque of Cave's "Stagger Lee" and Harvey's "50ft Queenie" to the complex ambivalence of "When my Baby Comes" and "A Woman A Man Walked By", their representation of in-humanity oscillates between the terrifying and the ludicrous, a tonal shift that is facilitated by the element of excess, which lies at the intersection of the gothic and grotesque aesthetics.

Their treatment of the rape motif epitomises a general pattern at work in their portrayal of human beings: the emphasis is on the taboo and the "base" of humanity, the unavowed barbaric mire that lurks at the core of human nature. In exposing the B-side of our civilised selves, Harvey and Cave bring to light the abhorrent components that were cast out in order to create an acceptable narrative of human identity: the barbaric and the non-descript.

Over the fifteen year span that separate the songs, Harvey's and Cave's musical aesthetics may have undergone stylistic shifts, nevertheless the songs retain the core plasticity of grotesque, which enables the two artists to experiment with more subtle blends of comic extravagance and horror, gravity and laughter, the horrifying and the ludicrous. In fact, both "When My Baby Comes" and "A Woman A Man Walked By" exemplify a honed artistry in

their portrayal of inhumanity, hence a subtler balance of grotesque ambivalence than in their earlier works.

Therefore, in representing humanity as inherently barbaric and on the psychic edge, Harvey and Cave pulverise essentialist assumptions about humanity's innate benevolence and rationality and throws human identity into disarray. In the face of such a disjointed perspective, previous certainties about human identity collapse, thereby jolting the listeners into an epistemological abyss where their assumptions about the world are invalidated, and their self-identity is shattered. The listening experience thus relocates the audience to an alienating place where their prior certainties no longer stand.

The next chapter will investigate how, as well as turning essentialist views about humanity on their heads, Harvey and Cave toy with gender myths and deploy a strategy of gender freakery in order to further disrupt established conceptions of humanity.

CHAPTER 3: An Epistemic Crisis in Gender Identity: Debunking the Myths of Femininity and Masculinity

Whilst generally presenting human interactions as marked by the barbaric, Harvey and Cave also take the portrayal of the in-human further by turning essentialist gender assumptions on their heads. Indeed, as part of a strategy foregrounding the underside of humanity, they meddle with gender stereotypes in two ways: by drafting in a gallery of characters either blatantly flouting gender stereotypes or overdoing them to ludicrous effect. In the process, they throw the cultural scripts of femininity and masculinity into disarray, thereby challenging epistemological certainties about innate gendered behaviour. As feminist film theorist Barbara Creed notes: “there is always something attractive in looking at the frightening or the forbidden, such as the human male (or female) in one of its monstrous disguises”,¹¹¹ Harvey and Cave make the most of this attraction-repulsion of gender games, and use them as a source of carnivalesque misrule and transgression.

It is noteworthy that the two musicians convey gender mayhem not only through their characterisation, but also by using their own embodied individuality to flesh out their portrayal of inhumanity. Insofar as Harvey and Cave impersonate and embody their protagonists, their bodies are expressive of their protagonists’ gender as well as their own, and the performers’ gender identity is therefore enmeshed with that of their protagonists’. There ensues that, by default, Harvey and Cave incarnate their own gender, and their actual gender implicitly coincides with their characters’. This structural overlap implies that as well as acting in character, the performer acts “in gender”, namely Harvey performs scripts of femininity, Cave scripts of masculinity, and in this respect, their personae and self-representations are gender signifiers. In the process, the performers’ physicality is bound up with two entities: the imaginary characters they impersonate, and the wider cultural assumptions attached to their gender identity. Harvey and Cave toy with gender norms, and use reversals of expectations and gender parody as a source of disruption. Whilst consistent with their transgressive thread, this non-alignment raises questions: what effect do Harvey’s counternarratives of femininity achieve? What is the purpose of Harvey’s and Cave’s performance of hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity?

¹¹¹ CREED, Barbara. *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psycho-Analysis*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993. 33.

I contend that Harvey and Cave subvert cultural notions of masculinity and femininity as part of a monstrous satire, relying on the grotesque devices of degradation and exaggeration. In compelling a grotesque co-presence of the gender norm and its degenerate counterpart,¹¹² this monster-mongering operation elicits an ambivalent response in the listener who is torn between attraction and repulsion, and laughter and disgust. In the forthcoming analysis, I will argue that by means of the deformation and conflation of gendered dichotomies, the monstrous gender song dramatises an epistemic crisis in human identity, and by extension, in the performer's identity.

1. Harvey, Cave, and the Gender Divide

Before probing Harvey's and Cave's monstrous gender identities, we are going to stake out the structural implications of Harvey's and Cave's respective gender identities in terms of position and reception on the independent rock scene.

Since the early nineties, rock music has been widely theorised as a "masculine" idiom, exemplifying "masculine" performance conventions such as a sonic of loudness, relentless rhythms, arousal and climax, and an arrogant vocal style involving screaming and shouting,¹¹³ as evident in "cock rock" and early rock. Feminist music critics subsequently shifted the gender focus away from the perceived masculinity of the rock medium to the masculinist discourse sustained and promoted within the rock culture, and the resulting alienation of female performers.¹¹⁴ Whereas early rock is construed as the site for rock machismo (e.g., cock rock), 1980s independent rock perceived itself as more enlightened intellectually, artistically, and sexually. In particular, it was considered that independent rock exemplified a more enlightened form of masculinity devoid of aggressive macho swagger and upfront sexuality. This self-perception of the independent *milieu* is in keeping with its self-styled marginality on the rock scene, as a movement repudiating mainstream codes and advocating artistic autonomy.¹¹⁵

¹¹² HARPAM. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*. *Op. Cit.*, 9.

¹¹³ FRITH, Simon, and Angela McROBBIE. "Rock and Sexuality." [1978]. *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*. Ed. Simon FRITH and Andrew GOODWIN. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. 371-389. 374.

¹¹⁴ LEONARD. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse, and Girl Power*. *Op.Cit.*; WHITELEY, Sheila, ed. *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005. BURNS and LAFRANCE. *Disruptive Divas: Feminism, Identity and Popular Music*. *Op.Cit.*; DAVIES, Helen. "All Rock and Roll is Homosocial: The Representation of Women in the British Rock Press." *Popular Music*, 20.3 (2001): 301-319.

¹¹⁵ LEONARD. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse, and Girl Power*. *Op. Cit.*, 4.

However, in his study on masculinity and rock, music studies scholar Matthew Bannister deconstructs this assumed polarity between indie¹¹⁶ rock's enlightened masculinity and mainstream rock's machismo, and demonstrates that indie rock is not quite so at odds with its forebears in terms of gender division, representation, and power balance.¹¹⁷ Bannister argues that, although UK indie rock is imbued with high art ideology and its libertarian discourse, the indie genre is not immune from gender power relations. He concludes that cock rock and indie rock are indeed both underpinned by "hegemonic masculinity",¹¹⁸ a form of dominant masculinity theorised by Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell as oppressing both women and subordinate masculinities.

Therefore, it is noteworthy that Cave and Harvey dwell on a musical scene which, in spite of its outward progressive claims, is nonetheless infused with mainstream gender bias. Therefore, as male and female performers, the two musicians sit on either side of the hegemonic divide: Cave belongs to the dominant group, and Harvey to the subordinate group. Whilst not all-encompassing, this power imbalance is worth bearing in mind as it has repercussions on how they negotiate their self-representations and interactions with their gender identity within the rock apparatus.

As will be argued in the following analysis, although both artists distort and debunk femininity and masculinity, Harvey resorts to gender disruption more extensively than Cave, hence this chapter will primarily focus on Harvey's gender disruption. Harvey's strategies of contradiction are multiple: not only does she resort to repulsive femininity (failure to comply with gender expectations), but also gender parody, and gender-bending. Adding to the confusion, she also casts herself as a protagonist of her albums, and in espousing each album's aesthetic, her self-representations undergo the same abrupt stylistic breaks and distortions as her music. As a result, Harvey's persona is elusive, ruptural, and seems to have no set characteristics. Indeed, her strategy of fluidity and contradiction delineates elusive gender boundaries, whereby the scripts of femininity proliferate and clash with one another. These scripts are conveyed by an array of desexualised and oversexualised self-representations toying

¹¹⁶ "Indie" is short for "independent" and mostly applies to British independent music. Since Matthew Bannister uses the word "indie" in his argument, I adopt the term as part of this demonstration.

¹¹⁷ BANNISTER, Matthew. *White Men, White Noise: Masculinities And 1980s Indie Guitar Rock*. Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, US: Ashgate, 2006.

¹¹⁸ The concept of "hegemonic masculinity" was put forward by Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell in her books *Masculinities* (1995) and *Male Roles, Masculinities and Violence: A Culture of Peace Perspective* (2000). The term "hegemonic masculinity" signifies the power relations at work both between and within genders. Positing gender as plural and hierarchised, Connell identifies one dominant male group exercising social ascendancy not only externally (over women), but also internally, over other men (i.e., "subordinate masculinities").

with a monstrous rewriting of femininity as eroticised disgust, titillation, frustration, sexual defiance or duplicity.

British music studies academic Abigail Gardner points to the archival nature of Harvey's self-representations, and formulates Harvey's performances as "memorades", namely events intermingling masquerade and cultural memory.¹¹⁹ Gardner thus construes Harvey's performances as an ironic interplay with eternal archetypes of femininity, notably the lover and the mother figures. Whilst drawing upon "communal cultural reservoirs",¹²⁰ Harvey engages in a self-conscious play of masks whereby in performing archetypes of femininity, she wilfully interweaves personal and collective identities together.

Cave's interplay with his own gender is more limited: although he indulges in gender parody, and brings down man's supposed omnipotence, he does not, however, venture into gender-bending territory, but consistently behaves as a *male* impersonator by exhibiting conventional masculine tendencies such as violent social behaviour, sexual predation, aggressive self-affirmation. These same traits, when taken on by Harvey's female impersonations, convey a different meaning, since they are, in essentialist terms at least, in breach of the operative norms of womanliness in Western culture in general, and in indie music in particular.

2. Harvey's Counter-representations of Femininity

2.1. Harvey as a Female Rock Artist: the Pitfalls of "Women in Rock"

As a female rock performer, Harvey belongs to the "women in rock" category, which has been widely theorised as a minority group in a predominantly male-run industry. In their 1978 seminal study "Rock and Sexuality", Simon Frith and McRobbie formulate rock as an artistic ideology, that is a mode of sexual expression and control that constructs sexuality, and ultimately reinforces conventional scripts of femininity and masculinity.¹²¹ Frith and McRobbie lay the foundation for subsequent critical works on the masculinist discourse of rock, whether focusing on rebellion strategies and gender identity (e.g., Simon Reynolds and Joy Press¹²²;

¹¹⁹ GARDNER. PJ *Harvey and Music Video Performance*. *Op.Cit.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹²¹ FRITH, Simon, and Angela McROBBIE. "Rock and Sexuality." *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*. 373.

¹²² REYNOLDS and PRESS. *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock'n'Roll*. *Op. Cit.*

Lori Burns and Melissa Lafrance¹²³), female subjective formation and gender construction (e.g., Sheila Whiteley¹²⁴), or creative production and control (e.g., Marion Leonard¹²⁵).

As a result of the sexual politics underpinning the rock apparatus, the position of female performers is problematic in that they are alienated by a genre coded as expressive and affirmative of masculine values. Norma Coates¹²⁶ points out the exclusionary mechanisms at work in the construction of the archetypal rock performer as inherently male, whilst Leonard¹²⁷ exposes the gender bias that pervades rock-writing and canonising, whereby women are significantly under-represented. These observations imply that the rock discourse normalises male performers, whilst excluding women performers, or at any rate, casting them as cultural *others*. Leonard also notes that the very phrase “women *in* rock”, which is widely used in rock journalism and criticism, epitomises the problematic status of women in rock, in that it peculiarises their presence in the industry and posits male performers as the implicit norm.

Moreover, another pitfall of female performance lies in the rock idiom itself. When female rock performers engage with the hallmarks of the rock canon (i.e., passion, excess, rebellion, and confrontation), and when they use rock’s vocal style, they are misconstrued by critics as driven by “*female anger*” (i.e., borderline hysteria).¹²⁸ Because it is interpreted differently for male and female performers, the very act of using the rock idiom is fraught for female rock singers who risk being reduced to mere conduits of “female anger”.

Being both othered and constricted by dominant gender representations of femininity, female rock artists such as Harvey need to deploy effective disruptive strategies in order to construct themselves discursively and escape the limitations of the “women in rock” interpretative framework. Leonard demonstrates that in the early nineties, the performance of anger and excess leads to diametrically opposed critical reception, depending on which side of the gender divide it originates from: whereas in such male artists as Kurt Cobain, the self-destructive streak is glorified and mythologised as the epitome of an iconic artistic persona, in women such as Harvey, it is pathologised and dismissed as personal ill-health, thereby

¹²³ BURNS and LAFRANCE. *Disruptive Divas: Feminism, Identity and Popular Music*. *Op.Cit.*

¹²⁴ WHITELEY, Sheila, ed. *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

- - -. *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

¹²⁵ LEONARD. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse, and Girl Power*. *Op.Cit.*

¹²⁶ COATES, Norma. “Can’t We Just Talk About Music? Rock and Gender on the Internet.” Ed. Thomas Swiss, John Sloop, and Andrew Herman. *Mapping the Beat: Pop Music and Contemporary Theory*. Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1998. 77-79.

¹²⁷ LEONARD. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse, and Girl Power*. *Op.Cit.*, 31-32.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

questioning her agency and infantilising her.¹²⁹ Because rebellion, the core component of rock music, is construed as masculine, female rock performers have difficulty coming into their own voice through the rock medium.

This gender status imbalance has a direct impact on the transgressive strategies Harvey and Cave are able to deploy: whereas in the early nineties, Cave could perform excess and defiance as part of an archetypal *male* artistic persona, as a woman, Harvey ran the risk of being personally pathologised, and simply dismissed as a mentally unstable figure. And indeed, in the early 1990s, Harvey's supposed mental health issues were critically presented as the source material of her music, witness the press depiction of Harvey as "a screeching visceral harpy" who "makes records that wring every last drop of mental anguish from her tortured life".¹³⁰ Meanwhile, Cave's heroin addiction was documented as a mark of dark Romantic genius (hence his nickname "the prince of darkness"), or of rock's rebellious spirit and "live fast die young" lifestyle. This discrepancy in media coverage speaks to a pervasive gender bias on the indie scene of the time.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that as an embodied medium, popular music foregrounds corporeality, in that the musician lends their voice, body language, and public persona to their music. The performer impersonates their songworlds, whilst their body encapsulates their music. Through this incarnation process, the musician's body becomes a signifying practice which entails a choice of signifiers, performance strategies, and semantics of self-representations to be decoded by the listeners /viewers.¹³¹ The centrality of corporeality in the rock medium compels a *corporeal* subjectivity, that is a corporeal persona that conveys meaning to the listeners, and acts as an aesthetic foil for their music.

Insofar as popular music is informed by the dominant cultural discourse on gender, men are perceived as normal and therefore gender-neutral, whereas women are conversely seen as gender-fraught because they signify gender difference.¹³² Then, by virtue of their marginality and deviance from the "masculine norm" of rock, female performers are left to carry the burden of defining gender, in other words, female performers act as gender signifiers, and do not enjoy the same neutrality as men. Consequently, as an artist belonging to a genre (rock music) and a gender (female) which foreground corporeality, Harvey is doubly bound up with the semantics

¹²⁹ LEONARD. *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse, and Girl Power. Op. Cit.*, 73-77.

¹³⁰ FOWLER, Simon. "Tea and Sympathy with the Devil." *Select* 58 (1995): 80.

¹³¹ HEBDIGE, Dick. "Style as Homology and Signifying Practice." (1979) *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*. Ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. 57-65.

¹³² BURNS and LAFRANCE. *Disruptive Divas: Feminism, Identity and Popular Music. Op. Cit.*

of corporeality, and her body acts as a signifying practice. How does Harvey use her conspicuous corporeality? What monstrous use does she make of her body?

2.2. Harvey's Monstrous Incarnations

Firstly, through an analysis of Harvey's extreme self-representations, we are going to analyse her strategy of corporeal performance as monstrous self-styling. In particular, we will study how she subverts the high art tradition of the female nude to expose the female body as a crude fact of biology. For the purpose, we are going to use four official photographs of Harvey from her early nineties albums, *Dry* (1992), *Rid of Me* (1993), and *Four Track Demo* (1994).

Picture 1
"Man-Size" single cover, 1992.



Picture 2
Dry Album back-cover, 1992



Picture 3

Rid of Me album cover, 1993.



Picture 4

Four Track Demo, album back-cover, 1994.



The Female Nude Tradition and Fantasies of Femininity in High Art

As a preamble, a few words about the core aesthetic values of the nude tradition. Since the Renaissance, the female nude has been a prevalent representation of the female body that transforms crude facts of biology into aesthetic sophistication. For instance, Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1478) typifies the idealised female body as healthily plump, hairless, clean, and compliantly a-sexual (exit unruly female desire). Whilst perpetuating the classical canons of beauty, harmony and regularity in its depiction of women, this sanitised depiction of the female body exemplifies the classical pictorial traditions until the 20th century. The female nude tradition thus frames woman by precluding any intrusion from biological reality: genitals are hidden or barely noticeable, and nipples are blurred. This idealisation of womanhood unfolds according to such cultural archetypes as the "Eternal Feminine", a conceptual ideal enunciated by Goethe in *Faust Part II* (1832) that pervades 19th century's cultural and pictorial representation of women. The "Eternal Feminine" essentialises women as conduits to morality, domesticity, and spiritual elevation. In particular, the concept of the "Eternal Feminine" ascribes women such set virtues as "modesty, gracefulness, purity, delicacy, civility, compliancy, reticence, chastity, affability and politeness".¹³³

It is noteworthy that since the 1970s, art criticism has widely acknowledged that the representation of female corporeality in high art is problematic in that the female body has been

¹³³ GILBERT, Sandra, and Susan GUBAR. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 2000. 23.

mostly contained and defined by the traditional scripts of heterosexuality. In his seminal essay *Ways Of Seeing* (1972), British art critic John Berger points to an artistic bias in dealing with female nudity, and distinguishes between female nakedness and nudity: “to be naked is to be oneself”¹³⁴ whereas the nude is subjected to pictorial conventions. Positing nudity as an objectification and disguise of the female body, Berger exposes the European nude as a voyeuristic spectacle gratifying an implied male viewer. As a patriarchal construction, the female nude appropriates the female body and conceals its biological crudity, which leads Berger to conclude that “nudity is a form of dress”.¹³⁵

Berger’s observations on gendered power relations in art inspired a lineage of feminist art criticism in their wake, such as art critic Laura Nead who, positing the female nude as “both a cultural and a sexual category”,¹³⁶ probes the boundaries separating high art eroticism from obscenity.¹³⁷ Nead approaches the female nude as an epitome of the process by which high art transmutes nature’s base matter and raises it into the “elevated form of culture and spirit”.¹³⁸ She goes on to postulate that this very process of transforming “pure nature [...], through the forms of art, into pure culture”¹³⁹ is in fact a containment strategy aiming to subdue female corporeality (and sexuality). Nead’s contention that “the act of representation [of the female body] is itself an act of regulation”¹⁴⁰ suggests that the female performer’s self-representations are subjected to an inescapable normative process. Extrapolating from the latter argument, and positing all representation of the female body as a form of disciplining, in the upcoming picture-analysis, we are going to probe how Harvey negotiates the pitfalls of corporeal representation of woman in visual arts, whilst resorting to the regulatory tradition of the nude. In particular, we will investigate what self-representational strategies she deploys through this medium, and to what end.

A cursory look at the four photographs points to a shared aesthetic of low-fi monochrome with a minimalist backdrop, whereby the character’s nude flesh echoes the barrenness of the setting: a white wall in pictures 1-3-4, and a non-descript water background in picture 2. By providing no distraction to the viewer’s gaze, the stripped composition affords undivided visual primacy to the female figures. Strikingly, the drab black and white contrasts

¹³⁴ BERGER John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: BBC & Penguin, 1972. 54.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ NEAD, Lynda. “*The Female Nude: Pornography, Art, and Sexuality.*” *Signs* 15.2 (1990): 334.

¹³⁷ NEAD, Lynda. *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

do no favour to the subjects, in that they highlight the crude biology of Harvey's body: her bushy eyebrows (pictures 2-3-4), her gaunt shoulder blades, her unruly hair (pictures 1 and 3). The photographic style conveys an unforgiving portrayal that draws attention to bodily imperfections and in this respect, runs counter to the embellishing conventions of the nude tradition. In fact, the lo-fi monochrome acts as a "de-aesthetising" filter through which the female body is rendered as base flesh and therefore stripped of its erotic charge. It is noteworthy that although all four pictures expose established sexual signifiers such as breasts (cf. pictures 2-3-4) and genitalia (cf. picture 1), they do not treat them as erotic props, but as a source of discomfort or downright repulsion (e.g., picture 1). Therefore, Harvey's self-representations should be read as subversive visual texts: whilst they are structurally compliant with high art's representation of women (i.e., semi-naked female bodies), their aesthetic stance breaches the classical canon: it degrades the subject instead of idealising it. Indeed, the radical anti-aesthetic of the pictures replaces the classical values of beauty and harmony with ugliness and discomfort, thereby pulverising conventional scripts of femininity.

Harvey and The Repulsive Nude (Picture 1)

Picture 1 is undoubtedly the most repulsive of the four and relies on a visual and cultural pun. Providing full body exposure, the picture composition revisits more recent offshoots of the nude tradition in popular culture, notably the myth of alluring and sexually compliant nudity. A glance at the composition conjures up Lewis Morley's iconic portrait of model, topless showgirl and socialite Christine Keeler. Keeler was at the centre of the "Profumo Affair", a much publicised political scandal which combined Cold War politics, sexual promiscuity and illicitness, and suspected spying. Keeler had an affair with a married British government minister, John Profumo, as well a Soviet diplomat; she was subsequently vilified in the press, tried and sent to prison for perjury. Since then, she has been widely remembered both as the archetypal fallen woman with loose morals, and as an alluring *femme fatale*. Although Keeler went on to live away from the limelight, her story lives on in popular culture, hence it was adapted into a film, (*Scandal*, 1989, directed by Michael Caton-Jones) and a stage musical (*Stephen Ward*, by Andrew Lloyd-Weber, 2013)



Photograph: Lewis Morley/Sloane, 1963.¹⁴¹

The composition of Harvey's picture 1 is strikingly similar to the Keeler photo: both feature a semi-naked female subject in the centre, and both women sit with their legs apart and stare at the camera. The first difference is the colour reversal: whereas the black background of the Keeler portrait sets off the outlines of her body and creates a pleasing visual curve with the back of the chair, the background of picture 1 is off-white and thus blends in with Harvey's flesh. Keeler's pose exudes sensuality, the contours of the chair concealing her genitals are smooth, curved and voluptuous, which makes her flesh more appealing, as if put on display for the viewer. Her folded arms conceal her breasts in an ambivalent manner: whilst semi-forbidding the breast area, they also point to Keeler's sexual availability, as they lead the viewer's gaze to her cryptic facial expression. The posture of her head on her hands suggests hesitancy rather than sexual rebuke, and combined with her slanted gaze at the camera, it seems to suggest her potential sexual availability. The Keeler photo is a work of titillation, it is visually and formally enticing in that its black and white curves foreground the hidden corporeal parts. In staging a hide-and-seek game with Keeler's body, the picture teases the viewer into visual suspense and erotic experience. Roland Barthes posits the erotic as a moment of uncertainty and suspense, and that is exactly what the Keeler portrait plays into. In relation to eroticism, Barthes'

¹⁴¹ DAVIS, Caroline. "Christine Keeler, former model at heart of Profumo affair, dies at 75". *The Guardian*. 5 December 2017.
<<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/dec/05/christine-keeler-former-model-at-heart-of-profumo-affair-dies>>

asks: “is not the most erotic portion of the body where the garment gapes?”¹⁴²; the aesthetic thrust of the Keeler portrait lies within these enticing visual gaps.

Harvey’s take on the Keeler pose is quite disconcerting: the curved designer chair is replaced with a wooden stool, the floorboards look like odd-fitting unpolished planks, and her posture does not leave much to the imagination. Exeunt the Keeler picture glamour and visual titillation, enter the visual rebuke. Harvey’s genital area is no object of erotic suspense, rather it lies at the visual intersection of the horizontal and vertical lines of the picture, and is made conspicuous by her wide open legs and her clutching hands in front of it. In leading the viewer’s gaze to Harvey’s genital area, the geometrical convergence of Harvey’s arms and legs compels the watcher into a voyeuristic position. The viewer is further destabilised by Harvey’s lacklustre physical appearance (her drab underwear, scruffy tee-shirt, and unkempt hair) which in foregrounding crude corporality, arouses a feeling of repulsion. Moreover, her gaunt body denotes ill physical health, and the fact that she sticks out the tip of her tongue whilst staring straight at the camera conjures up distortion, abnormality, and incipient insanity. The picture is no pleasant tease on the viewer: it is a visual affront that antagonises the viewer with its corporeal bluntness and defiant anti-aesthetic, and by replacing the fantasy-friendly ethereal icon with base flesh. Whereas Keeler’s portrait solicits the viewer with its tentativeness, Harvey’s portrait rebukes them with its brazen and abject reworking of the female nude glamour. Against the general repulsiveness of the photograph, Harvey’s direct stare threatens the viewer, and thus reverses the pleasure principle that underlies conventional art. What does Harvey’s anti-aesthetic achieve?

The pleasure principle of visual arts was classically conceived of as a pleasure issuing from the contemplation of beauty as defined by the classical canon (i.e., orderly lines, harmony, and regularity). In more recent criticism, there has been much attention devoted to the interactions between the viewer and the visual subjects in terms of gendered power relations. The Freudian term *scopophilia* as a one-sided “pleasure in looking” (i.e., prying),¹⁴³ has been redeployed as a means to read the viewing experience. Expanding upon the notion of *scopophilia* as narcissistic pleasure derived from unrequited gazing, film academic Laura Mulvey contends that in films the woman subject is objectified and arrayed as a scopophilic

¹⁴² BARTHES, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. London: Cape, 1976. 9.

¹⁴³ “Scopophilia.” *Oxford Reference*. Oxford Reference, 2019.

<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100448183>>

spectacle in order to gratify the male viewer with a sense of omnipotence.¹⁴⁴ She thus reformulates *scopophilia* as the peculiar pleasure derived by an implied *male* viewer in contemplating *female* bodies as erotic objects, without being engaged in a mutual visual exchange: “Pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly”.¹⁴⁵ In a bid to satisfy the *scopophilic* pleasure of the spectator, the female body is thus reinvented as an erotic object, according to a voyeuristic operation that she names “the male gaze”. Mulvey argues that the representation of woman in films relies on the subjugation of female corporeality in order to turn it into a source of self-gratification for the viewer. Like Nead with the nude tradition, Mulvey thus posits the containment of female sexuality as critical to visual pleasure.

We are now going to probe how Harvey’s picture 1 self-representation operates in relation to the “male gaze” principle. Harvey effects a double reversal of the “male gaze” and the female nude operations: whilst arraying herself with the conventional props of female objectification (i.e., being semi-naked in a pose evoking a popular “male gaze” photo classic), she reconfigures the female body as an object of disgust. Whereas high art and popular aesthetics transmute base flesh into idealised beauty, Harvey takes female corporeality straight back to base flesh: in turning her body into a figure of abjection, she highlights its “male gaze” incompatibles (i.e., her gauntness, exposed genital area, and sartorial unkeptness). Her own gaze challenges the “male gaze” with its unabashed directness, which reverses the viewing process: she is the one gazing at the viewer, and thus forces them into mutual (and uncomfortable) gazing. Harvey’s aesthetics is the antithesis of conventional art and feminine archetypes in that it reaffirms the primacy of the anatomical body over the fantasised and sanitised body of high art. In turning herself into a body grotesque, she challenges the fictions of femininity in visual arts (i.e., sexual compliance, idealised beauty, docility, and seduction), and puts forward radical counternarratives of womanhood. Harvey thus delineates a grotesque antiaesthetics whereby the female body is desacralised, defiled, and therefore rendered improper for conventional idealisation or fetishisation.

¹⁴⁴ MULVEY, Laura. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Ed. Leo Brady and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 833-844.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 837.

Harvey's Self-Representations, Body Art, and Conversations with the Cultural Reservoir

In using her body as a medium, Harvey's self-representations could be read as Body art, a type of contemporary art in which the artist uses their own body as a canvas or artwork.¹⁴⁶ Picture 1 exemplifies Harvey's radical strategy of non-alignment in her early self-representations, which echoes early 1970s feminist Body art in its refusal to abide by existing stereotypes of femininity. In exposing the unofficial part of female sexuality, 1970s body art subverts the representation of womanhood in art and thus reclaims female artistic and corporeal agency. In line with 1970s body artists, Harvey turns her body into an artistic battleground against conventional femininity, and subdues "the male gaze" by casting herself as the gazing subject. Harvey disrupts expectations by behaving off-script and by not presenting herself as an erotic commodity. Incidentally, the commodification and containment of the female body is made explicit in picture 4, where Harvey displays herself as a commodity, with her naked body wrapped in cellophane. Again, she reverses conventions, since cellophane is usually used to make the commodity more attractive, whereas here, Harvey's naked breast, navel and genital area are glimpsed through an unsightly entanglement of plastic, which makes for a desanitised rendition of the female body. Harvey's commodified body rebuffs rather than solicits the viewer.

Much like US photographer Cindy Sherman,¹⁴⁷ Harvey engages in visual conversations with cultural representations of women, by moulding herself according to existing works such as the Keeler portrait in picture 1, or cultural archetypes such as Millais's Ophelia (picture 2), or the Medusa (picture 3). In picture 2, Harvey revisits the floating Ophelia figure with a twist: her naked breasts are visible, and she is alive and gazing at the camera. Her facial expression is cryptic, unyielding, and her incipient smile suggests both confidence and casualness.

Picture 3 engages with Greek mythology, as Harvey's unkempt beehive hairstyle evokes the fabled writhing serpents of Medusa's hair. Medusa was a monster (a Gorgon) with venomous snakes *in lieu* of hair, and her gaze could freeze to stone anyone who looked at her. The Medusa figure has inspired famous paintings such as Italian tenebrist painter Caravaggio's *Medusa* in 1596 and 1597, and English pre-Raphaelite Edward Burnes-Jones's *The Finding of*

¹⁴⁶ "Body Art." Tate. Tate, 2015. <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/b/body-art>>

¹⁴⁷ In her series *Untitled Film Stills* (1977–1980), Cindy Sherman revisits popular representation of femininity by casting herself in different social and cultural archetypes (librarians, hillbillies, and seductresses). She would often pose her heroines as alone, expressionless, and in private. Her protagonists did not comply with conventional scripts of femininity in terms of domesticity and sexuality.

Medusa, and *the Death of Medusa* in 1875-1876. Medusa has also inspired Freudian psychoanalysis, since in his 1940 essay “*Das Medusenhaupt*” (Medusa’s Head), Freud interpreted her as a figure of castration. In engaging with the Medusa myth, Harvey draws upon the cultural reservoir to conjure up an archetype of female monstrosity, castrating womanhood, which she deploys as a figure of disruption. In presenting herself as dangerous and hostile womanhood, Harvey posits her persona as antagonistic, and consequently at odds with the requirements of the “male gaze”, whether in visual arts or rock culture. A cursory glance at Harvey’s unkempt hair and at her bare flesh against dingy bathroom tiles brings to mind the crude materiality of a bathroom (or a psych ward?). Her oblique stare, defiant and unflinching, combined with her snake-like hair, imposes a female gaze which undercuts the male gaze.

In all four pictures, Harvey uses nakedness as a scarecrow: not only does she not let herself be framed and contained by the male gaze, but she effects a revolution by infusing her nakedness with the ugly and the abject, witness the unceremonious exposure of bare breasts through plastic (picture 4), in washed-out black and white contrasts (picture 2), the absence of flattering make-up (all pictures), and the hunched posture and grimace (picture 1). Harvey manipulates her self-representations to conjure up monstrous femininity, thus reframing womanhood through a knowing female gaze that brings to life counter-narratives of femininity. It is a strategy of reversed scopophilia, whereby the female subjects derives pleasure from looking at the viewer and from making them cringe. Her aesthetic of disgust arouses a paradoxical form of eroticism in which the very object of disgust becomes, by a grotesque twist, an object of attraction. Reynolds and Press identify a peculiar eroticisation of disgust in Harvey’s early interplay with her body and the female body at large, arguing that she has “perfected a kind of self-exposure: both in lyrics and self-representation, uniquely combining seduction and threat, intimacy and estrangement”.¹⁴⁸ They also contend that her early nineties style not only eroticises disgusts, but turns “embarrassment and the blush into a kind of rapture”.¹⁴⁹ I would argue that all four photographs of Harvey exude a form of monstrous eroticism that hinges not on making the female subject culturally desirable but, due to its kinship with gross corporeality and the taboo, culturally repulsive. In its reliance on the explosive force of the repulsive and the taboo, this transgressive eroticism brings to mind Georges Bataille’s argument that “the images which quicken desire ... are usually equivocal, *louche*: if it be horror,

¹⁴⁸ REYNOLDS and PRESS. *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock’n’Roll. Op. Cit.*, 337.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*,338.

if it be death these images present, they always present them guilefully”.¹⁵⁰ Harvey’s monstrous self-representations exude Bataille’s *louche* eroticism in that they entice the viewer with horror and repulsion, and with the dark lure of threat and the abject. In this respect, Harvey is knowingly manipulative: she knows full well the fascination monstrosity can exert on its receivers and makes the most of it.

3. Harvey’s Carnal Insurrection

Harvey negotiates female corporeality very radically, by foregrounding it and using her body as a site for identity construction and deconstruction, in conjunction with musical and lyrical tools. In her earlier albums in particular, her focus is on portraying femininity in monstrous guise, which comes with matching self-representations and “corporeal styles”¹⁵¹ to match her albums’ aesthetics: a desexualised Medusa (*Rid of Me*, 1994), a duplicitously seductive diva (*To Bring You My Love*, 1995), a non-descript country chick (*Is this Desire?* 1998), “madwoman in the attic” Victoriana (*White Chalk*, 2007). In this respect, Harvey’s body is not her own but it is cast and recast as an album protagonist. Along with Reynolds and Press, I contend that Harvey rattles the cage of her gendered body, and stages a “carnal insurrection”,¹⁵² thereby turning the female body (and her own) into the epicentre of an epistemic crisis. Through this defiling of femininity, Harvey takes spectacular control of her own public image, whilst experimenting with *female* monster-mongering.

Harvey’s response to the injunction of femininity is two-fold: she puts forward both embodied and lyrical counter-representations, hence her artistic personae and lyrical impersonations partake of one and the same counterpunch. We are now going to parse the counter-narratives of femininity in her songs.

¹⁵⁰ BATAILLE, Georges. *Eroticism. The Bataille Reader*. Ed. Fred BOTTING and Scott WILSON. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1997. 227.

¹⁵¹ BUTLER, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. New York and London: Routledge, 1990. 189-190. Butler formulates gender identity a performative act which she calls “corporeal style”.

¹⁵² REYNOLDS and PRESS. *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock’n’Roll. Op. Cit.*, 337. “If some females dream of escaping the cage of the body, others stage a kind of prison riot, a carnal insurrection. The songs of PJ Harvey dramatise the conflicts of possessing a body, of desiring and being desired, in a way that is charged but not exactly sexy.”

3.1. Harvey's Monstrous-Feminine: the Abject Female Subject in Songs

The “Monstrous Feminine” is a phrase coined by feminist film theorist Barbara Creed in *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993), in which she analyses the interplay between the cultural constructions of the female gender and the monstrous.¹⁵³ Creed’s “Monstrous Feminine” designates a typology of abject female representations in film and popular culture such as the archaic mother, the monstrous womb, the witch, the vampire, the possessed woman. Creed formulates the “Monstrous Feminine” in relation to feminist psycho-analytical theorist Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject and the maternal. Kristeva defines abjection as “that which does not respect borders, positions, rules”, that which “disturbs identity, system, order”.¹⁵⁴ Because the abject threatens life’s integrity, it must be “radically excluded”¹⁵⁵ from the living subject, and cast out on the other side of an imaginary border. Kristeva locates abjection in liminality, the mother-child relationship and the feminine body.

Expanding upon Kristeva’s abjection, Creeds argues that the monstrous representation of womanhood in popular culture primarily relies upon its mothering and reproductive functions, witness the reproductive theme running through such archetypes as the archaic mother, the monstrous womb, or the murderous mother. Moreover, Creeds identifies a transgressive potential in these female monsters in that they challenge the voyeuristic patriarchal apparatus.

The notion of “Monstrous Feminine” seems a fitting lens to examine Harvey’s representations of femininity by, notably because it typifies a specifically female form of monstrosity. Since Harvey’s lyrical impersonations are predominantly female and display abject tendencies (e.g., sexual freakery, gross corporeality, and dysfunctional motherhood), we are going to approach them through the “Monstrous Feminine” filter.

3.2. Harvey's Gendered Monstrosity

Harvey’s early self-representations, her three debut albums (*Dry*, [1992], *Rid of Me* [1993], and *4-Track Demos* [1994]) radically challenge the idealised female body and its sexuality. All three albums feature femininity in disarray, whether through failure to comply

¹⁵³ CREED, Barbara. *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psycho-analysis*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

¹⁵⁴ KRISTEVA, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982. 4

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

with gender expectations (*Dry*), or with hetero-normative relationships (*Rid of Me*), or a mixture of the two (*4-Track Demos*). The angst of dysfunctional femininity looms large in the song “Dress” (1992), where the female protagonist puts on a dress to seduce her suitor, only to end up “falling flat” like “a fallen woman in a dancing costume”. The song is a searing hymn to the pitfalls of the feminine attire. Musically, it makes for a restless listen, opening with a guitar loop and banging drums to a frantic tempo, and escalating to a more and more discordant sonic texture. Harvey’s voice goes to high pitch mode on the repeated chorus line “If you put it [the dress] on”, thereby conveying her panic in the face of oppressive hetero-normativity. The guitar line sounds trapped on a loop, while pounding drums and shrill strings hammer out frenzied rhythms. Overall, the piece is sonically exhausting, as its relentless cacophony jostles the listener from one panic zone to another. The music actualises the protagonist’s angst into the sensory map of the listener, so that just like the protagonist is corseted by her dress, so is the listener corseted by the soundscape.

A harrowing descent into a private hell of humiliation and failure, the song exposes the yoke of feminine seduction in the shape of a dress that “feels damn tight” and hampers the protagonist’s moves until she feels as if she was grotesquely “swinging over like a heavy loaded fruit tree”. The dress epitomises the strictures of dominant femininity, with its requirements of sexiness and regulated self-expression, whilst also symbolising the scripts of hetero-normative seduction and dominant gender expectations. The fact that the dress was offered by her suitor turns it into an instrument of subjugation and an injunction to seduce *appropriately*, whilst suggesting that the female body requires embellishment in order to be deemed attractive. Indeed, the lines “You pretty thing, my man says/But I bought you beautiful dresses” hinges on a contrast between “*pretty thing*” and “*beautiful dress*”, thereby implying that the protagonist *per se* is not attractive enough (she is just “pretty”), and the dress is what will make her beautiful. The fact that he calls her “thing”, even colloquially, reifies the objectification of her body, as if dispossessing her of her agency. The protagonist is thus trapped, self-consciously trying to act the feminine part (“Must be a way that I can dress to please him”), whilst acutely aware of being ensnared in a game of masks, which shows in the fourfold repetition of the chorus: “if you put it on”. The line summarises the constructedness and artificiality of gender games, and suggests gender identity is a mere performance in gendered character.

This song brings to mind 1990s gender theorist Judith Butler’s contention that gender identity is a cultural construct which is performed on the surface of the body, through a series of words, gestures, and acts that fabricate the illusion of a gender core, whereas there is no such

thing as a unified and steady gender core.¹⁵⁶ In other words, in Harvey's song, the dress is a prop enabling and enforcing the performance of femininity. It is also an instrument of grotesque defilement, which instead of turning the protagonist into a feminine icon, turns her into a ludicrous figure, a freak in deformed motion (e.g., "*swinging* over like a heavy loaded fruit tree", italics mine), the unwitting freak-star of the show (e.g., "falling flat and my arms are empty"), until she flees the dance-floor in humiliation ("a fallen woman in dancing costume"). The final analogy with "a dancing costume" confirms the performativity of gender, and the fact that the protagonist was made a freak by her inability to perform the script. This is a peculiar sort of monstrosity in Harvey's female repertoire, one which exposes the cultural construction of monstrosity as failure to comply with societal norms. Harvey uses these same gender-transgressive lines to underpin more offensive (and wilful) characters in her Monstrous Feminine gallery.

3.3. The Abject Reproductive Body

As argued above, Kristeva and Creed have identified female reproductive functions, genitals, and the maternal as the fulcrum of female monstrosity. So has Harvey, hence she taps into the abject grotto of female sexuality in order to challenge essentialist assumptions of femininity by explicitly foregrounding the underside of femaleness such as menstrual bleeding, sexual appetite (or lack thereof), and maternal instinct (or absence thereof).

"Happy and Bleeding" (1992) states its purpose bluntly in the title, in a reference to loss of virginity (or menstruation) that breaks the taboo of the contained body. The song opens with the original sin through the mention of a fruit that brings sexual awareness: "She burst, dropped off / picked the fruit, / and realised /I'm naked, I'm naked too". The fruit motif runs throughout the song, as part of the chorus "fruit flower myself inside-out"), and the final lines: "fig fruit flower myself inside out", like an extended metaphor of sexuality and fertility. The fact that the female protagonist "fruit flowers" herself "*inside out*" (italics mine) is an object of discomfort, in that it foregrounds the in-betweenness of the female body which in oozing out transgresses its own boundaries. Moreover, abject liminality is reinforced in the chorus lines "I'm happy and bleeding for you", and "I am tired and bleeding for you". The same focus on uncontained female corporeality occurs in "Me Jane" (1993), which transposes

¹⁵⁶ BUTLER, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. New York and London: Routledge, 1990.

heteronomativity into the Tarzan and Jane relationship, with Jane reclaiming her territory from Tarzan whilst affirming femaleness (rather than femininity) in graphic terms: “Move it over Tarzan can’t you see I am bleeding”. Both instances testify to Harvey’s use of female abjection as a means to convey a portrait of womanhood that runs against the sanitised sensitivities of society and culture, and highlights the “monstrous” affinities of womanhood.

Sheela-Na-Gig as a Figure of Degraded Femininity and Abjection

“Sheela-Na-Gig” (1992) is a culmination the Monstrous Feminine as crude female biology in grotesque overload. Sheela-Na-Gig¹⁵⁷ is a traditional celtic fertility icon, a figure who squats and pulls open her vagina, and whom Harvey turns into a lusty hermaphrodite. Here the Monstrous Feminine takes on an oversexualised guise: the protagonist tries to seduce her lover with conventional signifiers of femininity (i.e., hips and lips) and her “bottleful of charm” only for him to dismiss her as “Sheela-Na-Gig”, and to point to her oversexuality as a source of outrage (“you exhibitionist!”) and disgust (e.g., “wash your breasts/I don’t want to be unclean”). The song starts with a self-conscious performance of conventional femininity as part of a seduction ritual (i.e., “Look at these my child-bearing hips/Look at these my ruby-red, ruby lips”), and a demonstration of the protagonist’s worthiness as a seductress (“I’ve been trying to show you over and over”). However she repels her lover because she fails to show her sexual attributes modestly enough, instead using overt allusions to reproductive functions (i.e., “child-bearing”) and a bright red hue suggestive of blood (“ruby red”) causes abjection (by mentioning the excluded filth) and thus precludes fetishisation. “Sheela-Na-Gig” thus conjures up a form of female monstrosity issuing from outsize femaleness, whereby woman’s sexuality is no longer discursively contained. The song is a polyphonic agony, with the protagonist’s split consciousness frantically oscillating between compulsive seduction and defiant snarl, and her lover fiercely rejecting her as a whore. Toward the end, obscenity erupts in full swing with the

¹⁵⁷ “Sheela Na Gig, also spelled Sheela-na-gig, short form Sheela, a type of (usually) stone architectural figure of uncertain significance, representing a naked woman gesturing to or otherwise flagrantly displaying exaggerated genitalia. Sheela Na Gigs are usually situated on or in Romanesque churches of western and central Europe (dating roughly from 1000 to 1200 CE), but they can also be found, though less frequently, on secular buildings of the same era.

The greatest concentration of Sheela Na Gig figures occurs in Ireland, but there are also significant numbers in England, France, and Spain, and they also have been found in smaller numbers in Scotland and Wales as well as elsewhere in Europe.”

“Sheela Na Gig.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2016.

<<https://www.britannica.com/art/Sheela-Na-Gig>>

lover's line "put your money in your idle hole", which defiles her vagina into a mere cavernous hole, and a figure of abjection.

Much as she does in her early self-representations, in her songs Harvey abjectifies femininity and makes it unfit for the male gaze, alternately degrading the female body by oversexualising it (e.g., "Sheela-Na-Gig") but also by under-sexualising it. For instance, in the song "Dry" (1993), Harvey rips up the myth of compliant female sexuality by impersonating a character who sings her abiding lack of sexual desire for her lover, repeatedly throwing the accusatory chorus line "you leave me dry" in his face, and flaunting the taboo of frigidity. In her early songs, Harvey thus morphs the female body into the locus of abject corporeality and sexuality through over-sexualisation and under-sexualisation.

3.4. Warped Desire and Infanticidal Instinct

Desire itself is evoked in sadomasochistic overtones, notably in "Hardly Wait" (1994), Harvey's transgressive rewrite of the traditional tale "Sleeping Beauty" in which the female protagonist waits for Prince Charming in her glass coffin. Whereas the repeated line "I Can Hardly Wait" and title express eager anticipation, the song is mostly concerned with lust gone stale, as stated from the outset: "it's been so long/I have lost my taste". The song features a litany of unpalatable corporeal details to signify lack of desire, such as "lips cracked dry" and "tongue blue burst", which subvert the conventional signifiers of desire (i.e., tongue and lips). Here, abjection lies in the combined image of parched lips and blue tongue which are evocative of death and decay instead of sexuality. When the protagonist implores her "Romeo" (mixing up her *beaux* archetypes) to make her waters break, the incongruous allusion to mothering imparts abjection (i.e., Kristeva's maternal) to the hetero-normative ritual, to darkly comic effect. Like in "Dress", the protagonist exposes the performativity of hetero-normative romantic rituals when she says that she'll "play the part" (of Sleeping Beauty), whilst introducing her own sadistic twists. The protagonist's promise to "open this mouth wide/and eat your (his) heart" imparts a disturbing touch of sadism which turns the traditional script of Sleeping Beauty on its head: the protagonist is wide awake and taking over the romantic rituals, incidentally turning them into the site of sadistic impulses. Harvey thus turns Sleeping Beauty into a Monstrous Feminine by stressing her kinship with death and decay, the maternal, and her sadistic tendencies. The barbaric element translates into extended vocal moans and distortions towards the end when she mentions eating her lover's heart, in a swoon of barbaric delight. The

final lines further reverse the tale, as the final repeated lines “In my glass coffin I am waiting” are sung with vocal distortions evoking sinister demise rather than the proverbial happy ending. In articulating sexuality in sadistic terms, Harvey turns sexuality into a site of friction and warped desire, where the Monstrous Feminine arises from the cracks of warped desire and abject filth.

Moreover, Harvey also uses the maternal as a centrepiece of abjection, as allusions to motherhood are invariably conveyed in disquietingly tones, and in stark contrast to the dominant cultural script of blissful motherhood (exit the Madonna and Child icon, enter dysfunctional motherhood). In particular, her repertoire features counter-narratives to maternal instinct, with allusions to infanticide. Her 1995 album *To Bring You My Love* thus features two songs about the maternal: “Down by the Water”, in which the heroine playfully sings about drowning her daughter, and “I Think I Am a Mother”, where pregnancy is presented as an ambivalent ordeal. “I Think I Am a Mother” is a cryptic tale of motherhood sung-spoken in distorted low-key vocals, which makes the narrator sound eerily ambisexual. The muffled sound effect produces an under-water sound which along with the ambisexual vocals causes aural confusion. The lyrics too are very unclear and scattered, containing no narrative thread but random lines rhyming with “mother” (i.e., number, doctor, lover, voter...). In its oscillation between femaleness and maleness, the piece disrupts gender assumptions and the concept of maternal instinct, as the narrator doubts whether to keep her daughter or not. The final lines state the protagonist’s distress and lack of direction:

Alone I implore ya
I think I am a mother
I need you mother
more than ever

This final note casts doubts on the myth of maternal fulfilment, and the notion that motherhood is the ultimate fulfilment of a woman’s life. The same maternal ambivalence is conveyed through allusions to abortion on *White Chalk* (2007). “When under Ether” is a first-hand narrative of clinical abortion, narrated in anaestheticised daze (“When under ether the mind comes alive”) and with clinical accuracy (e.g., “I lay on the bed/waist down undressed”). The harshness of termination evaporates before the kindness of the attending nurse (“the woman beside me is holding my hand”, “she smiles so kind”... “human kindness”), which imparts a floating haze to the song. Against this eerily cosy backdrop, the abrupt final lines come down as a shock:

Something's inside me
unborn and unblessed
disappears in the ether
this world to the next

In the nostalgic hymn to the Dorset Hills “White Chalk”, Harvey sings her love for her homeland in a folk pastoral intermingling childhood memories and a visceral sense of rootedness. The final stanza closes the song with an abrupt allusion to abortion guilt:

Dorset's cliffs meet at the sea
where I walked, our unborn child in me
White chalk, gorse-scattered land
scratch my palms – there's blood on my hands

The final image of blood on her hands, combined with the unborn child she carries, conjures up abortion guilt, whilst suggesting that maternal compulsion, the pillar of essentialist narrative, is an illusion.

Harvey thus uses the female body as the site where essentialist assumptions collapse: in sitting uncomfortably close to the abject, female sexuality is depicted as not contained and domesticated, but rather as unpredictable, violent and wild, witness the sadistic aesthetics underlying her albums *Dry* (1992), *Rid of Me* (1993), and *4-Track Demos* (1994). Harvey thus deconstructs all the myths of femininity: the female body is unruly and abject, and the female psyche is prone to violent and sadistic outbursts. Indeed, Harvey's women are closer to the Monstrous Feminine than to the myths of dominant femininity. This strategy of degradation of the feminine ideal is only one aspect of Harvey's gendered monster-mongering, since we shall see later on that Harvey also resorts to parodic performance in drag.

4. Cave's Debunked Masculinities: from “Loverman” to “No Pussy Blues”

Whereas Harvey primarily portrays in-humanity by turning essentialist assumptions of her own gender on their heads, Cave's relationship with masculinity is less markedly conflictual. Whereas Harvey's in-human monsters are primarily presented as monstrous per se, either through their abject corporeality, or through their deviant psyches, Cavian monsters are mostly *social* monsters whose monstrosity reveals itself in their violent social interactions with

their communities. Hence the broader range of social atrocities committed in Cave's song-world: passion or serial murders, self-affirmative shootings, rape, lynching, highway and opportunistic murders, and sadistic relationships. Whereas most of Harvey's drama is set in the narrator's psyche and includes limited external action, Cave's drama is all thrills and spills, and comes with a full-fledged imaginary world of its own, with its community and settings, thereby occurring within a social ecosystem. Cave's monstrous drama should not be construed so much in terms of individual as social identity, therefore we will examine it at a later stage as a narrative-based form of cultural hybridisation (see Part II).

Cave reverses gender expectations to debunk myths of dominant masculinity, albeit to a much lesser extent than Harvey does with femininity. For instance, he reinvents Jack the Ripper's back-story as a hen-pecked male dominated by a woman who rules his house "with an iron fist" who imposes a reign of domestic terror.¹⁵⁸ Deployed to much gothic effect, with heavy musical artillery and vivid nightmarish images, the song opens a breach in the general assumptions of dominant masculinity, by suggesting it is a mere response to overpowering femininity.

One particular defilement of dominant masculinity is to be found in the portrayal of a Quixotic anti-hero, a figure of self-delusion and ineffectuality, whose sexual inadequacy adds the ludicrous into the mix. Fred Botting¹⁵⁹ identifies degraded manhood as a centrepiece of the Cavian anti-hero, which is embodied by abhorrent and abject creatures, whether cartoon comic book characters, literary grotesques, or fairground freaks. Botting's observations concern Cave's pre-1990 material, but they could equally apply to his post-1990 music, although abject masculinity is no longer his main tool of monster-mongering and grotesque mayhem. Abject masculinity features in such figures as the hapless sexual predator, who, although laying claim to sexual domination, turns out to be ineffectual, rebuked or impotent. There is degraded masculinity in the rueful figure of "Loverman" (1994):

With his straining sex in his jumping paw
There's a devil crawling along your floor
And he's old and he's stupid and
he's hungry and he's sore
And he's blind and he's lame

¹⁵⁸ "Jack the Ripper", *Henry's dream*, 1992.

¹⁵⁹ BOTTING. "From Cute Cunts to no Pussy: Sovereignty and the Sacred." *Op.Cit.*, 261-276.

and he's dirty and he's poor
There's a devil crawling along your floor

There is a reversal of expectations at work in the self-deprecating characterisation. Indeed, the enumeration of derogatory binaries such as “old/stupid”, “hungry/sore”, blind/lame”, “dirty/poor” run counter to the fabled sexual omnipotence of dominant masculinity, suggesting instead a form of defunct masculinity no longer in any fit state to act out their sexual fantasies. Impotent masculinity turns into grotesque self-parody in the song “No Pussy Blues” (*Grinderman*, 2007), a song about ageing rockstars and masculinity in crisis. The song features on Cave’s side-project *Grinderman*, a raucous musical escape from the strictures of The Bad Seeds which Cave described as “a mammoth midlife crisis”¹⁶⁰ on which he embarked with three other Bad Seeds members (i.e., Warren Ellis, Jim Sclavunos, and Martyn Casey). The album artwork states its purpose bluntly, with a monkey holding onto his genitals, apparently masturbating, although Cave ironically clarified: “Just for the record, it's not wanking, it's holding on to its genital area, terrified”.¹⁶¹ Cavian masculinity is not only sex-obsessed and defunct, but also fearful then. There goes the myth of male boldness. “No Pussy Blues” is a grotesque hymn to failed ageing masculinity, where Cave’s sexual advances to a young girl are spurned one by one. The song builds up a staccato of frustration over eight stanzas until it erupts into a final outburst of rage. The song unfolds to a guitar loop punctuated by drum riffs, thereby conveying the protagonist’s frustrated anticipation, whilst Cave unyarns his tale of self-humiliation and spurned advances in sung-spoken mode, like a piece of storytelling rather than a song.

From the outset, Cave’s description establishes the self-referential frame of the song, in a barely veiled evocation of the adulated rock-star standing “in all this applause” and looking at his young public (“the young and the beautiful/with their questioning eyes”). The song starts with a stark contrast between the rockstar-narrator’s corporeal decay (“my face is finished/my body’s gone”) and his “young and beautiful” audience. His failed seduction is narrated as tragicomedy, whereby Cave goes through the repertoire of romantic pick-up acts, such as reading her poetry, writing her a song, taking her on a romantic walk, using terms of endearment (e.g., “Honeybee”, “Love”), and doing her DIY (e.g., “fixing the hinges on her gate”); all to no avail, witness the lines “but she said she didn’t want to”/“she still didn’t want to” that snap all

¹⁶⁰ PETRIDIS, Alexis. “It’s OK to embarrass yourself” - Nick Cave and the return of *Grinderman*.” *The Guardian*, 2 September 2010.

<<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2010/sep/02/grinderman-nick-cave-bad-seeds-interview>>

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

eight stanzas shut. The self-deprecating tone imparts an additional sense of the ludicrous, as the rockstar desperately tries to blot out the physical signs of ageing in a bid to impress her (e.g., sucking in his gut, hiding his receding hairline, “crossing my (his) hair across my (his) head”, and trying his best “to stay up late”). The typology of ingratiating acts is not only romantic and self-embellishing, but also farcically flirts with self-humiliation (e.g., “I did her dishes in rubber-gloves”, and “patted her revolting little chihuahua”), in an exercise of self-parody (“I felt like mime Marceau”). The protagonist’s humiliation culminates in stanza 7, when in desperation and after a bottle of Dutch courage, he tries to force himself on her (“I threw myself upon her back”) only for the girl to laugh in his face, and for the curtain to snap itself shut again (“she just laughed and said that she just didn’t want to”). Cave thus articulates failed masculinity as an inability to ingratiate himself with the coveted girl, and also to act as a sexual predator, as required by the scripts of dominant masculinity.

It is noteworthy that this ineffectuality translates into a circular musical structure, with two distinct sonic releases: the first one (after stanza 4) is an instrumental meltdown of guitar reverberations and saturation, the second one an all “hell-break-loose” finale of saturated instruments and savage screaming. The first outburst is contained as an instrumental interlude between two storytelling stanzas, following the frustrated trigger “Damn!” until Cave resumes his storytelling in the following stanza. Conversely, the final explosion is an unbridled instrumental and vocal release of pent-up rage, and breaks into the song’s finale after Cave’s admission of failure (“I got the no pussy blues”). Cave delivers the line twice to minimal instrumentation, in tentative deliberation, and then the sonic meltdown occurs from the third repetition onward, marking the full realisation of his doomed seduction attempts. Cave’s final howling and screaming suggests a feral human streak, which further debases the image of masculinity by bringing it closer to the animalistic level.

While “No Pussy Blues” reflects Cave’s recent propensity to locate his characters closer to his own locale (e.g., ageing rock-star worrying about their fading looks and sexual decline), its protagonist seems a matured resurrection of an early Cavian anti-hero: Nick the Stripper¹⁶² “hideous to the eye” and “dancing on all fours” and Figure of Fun¹⁶³:

I am a figure of fun
Dead-pan and moribund
... All the things I do are better left undone.

¹⁶² “Nick the Stripper”, The Birthday Party. *Prayers on Fire*. 1981.

¹⁶³ “Figure of fun”. *Ibid*.

... And I'm impressed by everyone
But I impress no one.

Both self-parodic doppelgangers hail from Cave's Birthday Party days in the early eighties, and although evoked with more lapidary lyrics in their original form, the "No Pussy Blues" alter-ego is reminiscent of the freaky masculinity of "Figure of Fun": his "finished" face and "gone" body echo the "moribund body" of "Figure of Fun", as does his lack of sex appeal.

However, it is mostly by overdoing the established attributes of masculinity that Cave achieves his full potential of gendered monstrosity, as a majority of his male characters exemplify dominant masculinity in bold: prone to narcissistic violence, domination, and sexual predation.

CONCLUSION

As argued in this chapter, Harvey and Cave use gender mis-representations as a source of monster-mongering. While Harvey deconstructs femininity by exposing it as a groundless fabrication to be deconstructed and toyed with, Cave highlights the essentially hybrid nature of masculine identity. Both portrayals debunk gender myths, whilst introducing the notion of freakery in relation to both genders. It is noteworthy that Cave's use of such gender debunking is less extensive and incisive as Harvey's, for whom it is a structuring motif. Cave tends to represent ineffectual masculinity in comic grotesque overtones, which moves his portrayal to the ludicrous end of the spectrum and therefore undercuts its subversive charge. Conversely, Harvey's carnal insurrection is all the more scathing as it is conveyed with tonal blankness and it occurs both in and out of character, which leaves its subversive effect intact (namely, not dismissed as mere comic grotesque). Moreover, whereas Harvey stages the drastic defilement of gender assumptions on her own body, Cave carefully locates it in his songworld rather than in his own persona, thereby containing gender subversion in playful fictionality, and leaving his persona intact.

Harvey and Cave not only debunk gender constructs through abjectification, but also with parody and exaggeration, according to a grotesque pattern of extravagance leading to hyper-femininity and hyper-masculinity.

CHAPTER 4. Monster-Mongering: Overdoing Gender and Extreme Hybridising

Cave and Harvey both use gender parody tactics whereby they render both genders grotesque by overdoing established gendered attributes. As part of a carnivalesque strategy of monster-mongering, Harvey and Cave overblow femininity and masculinity both in their self-representations and character impersonations. A cursory look at their self-representations points to their tendency to resort to a hyperbolic rendition of gender, Harvey conjuring up hyper-femininity and Cave hyper-masculinity.

Feminist cultural theorists such as Tori Moi, Mary Ann Doane, Luce Irigaray have elaborated on grotesque gender parody as conscious strategizing through exaggeration. Doane's analysis of gender mimicry is a particularly illuminating tool to examine their work.¹⁶⁴ She argues that when a female spectator witnesses mimicry of a stereotypical image of femininity, she both recognises and misrecognises herself, which leads her to realise that her self does not pre-exist the mimicry, but is already a construction. Doane further elaborates that mimicry can be used as a "political textual strategy" whereby overdoing femininity makes it "strange". Namely, parody exposes gender identity as a cultural construction rather than essential identity.

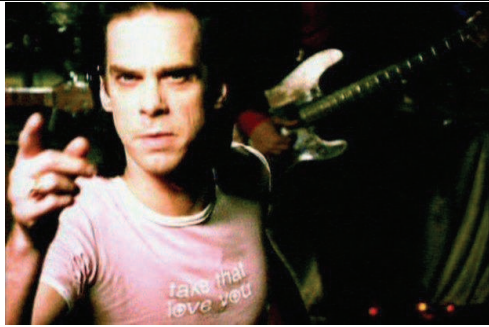
Building upon Doane's notion of "making-strange", I contend that Cave and Harvey develop a peculiar song-textual and performance strategy that is not so much political as grotesque "making-monstrous", a process whereby dominant forms of masculinity and femininity become the fulcrum of ontological confusion and essentialist misrule.

1. Cave's Fuck-Off Masculinities

Table 1: Cave's Masculinities

| | |
|------------------|------------------|
| Picture 1 | Picture 2 |
|------------------|------------------|

¹⁶⁴ DOANE, Mary Ann. *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987. 182. "Mimicry as a political strategy makes it possible for the female spectator to understand that recognition is buttressed by misrecognition"



Screen shot Stagger Lee Official Video, 1996



By Polly Borland (circa1996)

<https://lookthinktalk.wordpress.com/2013/05/08/polly-borland-and-nick-cave/>

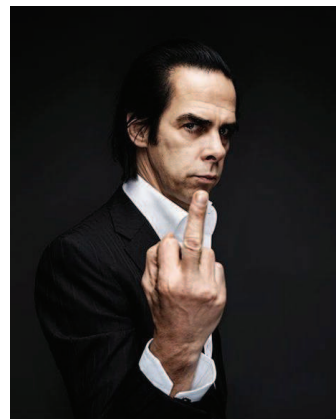
Picture 3



Circa 2007, *Grinderman*

<https://swench.net/2016/09/07/an-audience-with-the-grindermen/>

Picture 4



Circa 2014

<https://a1000mistakes.wordpress.com/2018/01/31/top-tens-nick-cave-songs/>

Cave’s self-representations feature versions of masculinity in bold: picture 1 as defiant macho attitude, picture 2 as sexual predator, picture 3 as feral outlaw, and picture 4 as insolent dandy. Although differing in style, all four pictures overdo established masculine stereotypes, thus camping them out as mere constructions. As an illustration of “Stagger Lee”, a gruesome murder ballad about a narcissistic psychopath out on a mass killing spree, picture 1 operates on visual dissonance: whereas Cave’s pointed finger and fierce-looking facial expression denote masculine aggression gone to the extreme, his pink T-shirt “*Take that I love you*”¹⁶⁵ introduces an incongruous effeminate note that contradicts the macho swagger. The juxtaposition of the

¹⁶⁵ Take That is an English boy-band formed in Manchester in 1989 and rose to stardom in the mid-nineties.

extreme violence of “Stagger Lee” with a camp boy-band produces comic effect, whilst challenging the cultural assumption that virility and aggressive self-affirmation are not only fused, but also necessarily heterosexual.

The now iconic picture 2, where Cave poses in a “Suck my dick” T-shirt (quoted from the song “Stagger Lee”), conjures up the stereotype of libidinous and domineering masculinity, whilst titillating the viewer with transgressive language. It echoes the obscene defiance of picture 4, which functions on the visual dissonance between between Cave’s three-piece suit dandy persona and his raised finger. Picture 3 exemplifies uncivilised masculinity, incarnated in a new moustachioed version of Cave, who ditched his dark dandy persona for its antithetical counterpart: the rough and rugged outlaw, unleashing his inner barbaric self and giving in to his basest urges.

Whilst exposing the constructedness of gendered stereotypes, these gendered parodies should not be read as countercultural but as actually quite at home with the masculine clichés conveyed by the rock apparatus. Therefore, Cave’s overdoing of masculinity does not deconstruct gender stereotypes, but indeed creates a flattering aura of rebellious self-affirmation which plays into the masculinist discourse of rock. In other words, Cave does not invalidate the clichés, rather he uses them to create an arch-masculine stage persona: Cave the transgressive seducer, bad boy Cave meets cruel dandy sophistication, all these components make up an enduring *masculine* Cavian persona.

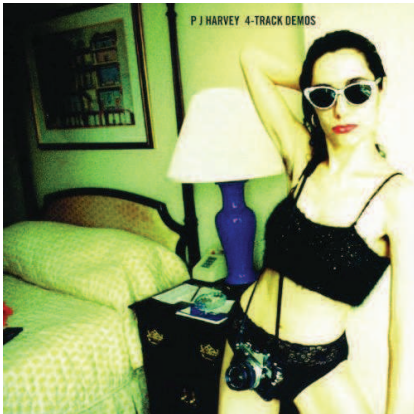
Cave’s songworld also teems with lyrical incarnations of hypermasculinity, narcissistic serial killers (e.g., “O’Malley’s Bar” 1994), barroom brawl murderers (e.g., “John Finn’s Wife” 1992), unearthly evil figures (e.g., “Red Right Hand”, 1994), and sexual killers (e.g., “The Kindness of Strangers”, 1996). Sexual obsession also underpins hypermasculinity, through such characters as predatory males with compulsive sexuality (e.g., “Loverman” [1994] or “Stagger Lee” [1996]), and more recently when Cave ironises that all men “wanted is a little consensual rape in the afternoon/And maybe a little bit more in the evening”.¹⁶⁶

2. Harvey’s Femininity in Drag

Table 2

¹⁶⁶ “Go tell the Women”, *Grinderman*, 2007.

Picture 1



Album cover, *4 Track Demo*, 1994.

Picture 2



I-D Magazine, September 1995. *PJ Wonder Woman*, photo by Craig McDean

Picture 3



Glastonbury festival (UK), 1995. [screen capture]

Picture 4



White Chalk album cover, 2007.

Whereas in her early self-representations Harvey conjured up the monstrous feminine by “abjectifying” femininity, in her subsequent works she conjured up feminine freakery by overdoing existing feminine archetypes: the upfront seductress (picture 1), Wonder-woman (picture 2), the sexy performer (picture 3), and the Victorian “madwoman in the attic” (picture 4). In particular, she plays with archetypal female seduction (pictures 1, 2, and 3), and with the

perceived kinship between femininity and madness (picture 4). In picture 1, Harvey poses as a scantily clad seductress whose provocative posture seems to invite the viewer into a sexual encounter, as is also implied by the bed in the background. Whilst the composition of the picture frames the visual experience as erotic spectacle, there are a few jarring notes: Harvey's quizzical pout, her concealing sunglasses, and the camera dangling from her neck suggest she is no passive object of erotic contemplation, but she is actively gazing and appraising the viewer. Overall, the picture conjures up a sort of promiscuous yet confrontational femininity that beckons as much as it rebuffs.

Picture 3 is a most interesting instance of freak femininity in performance, where Harvey turns conventional feminine seductiveness into a freak show. Donning a bright pink cat-suit and wearing heavy made-up, Harvey performed at Glastonbury Festival (1995) as the anti-thesis of her previous stage persona, an un-stylised indie chick in plain clothes and docs. The new persona flaunts her erotic props (i.e., a bright pink catsuit, a cleavage revealing a sexy black brassiere, high heels, and heavy facial make-up) and waves her sexuality like a flag, as if signposting her suitability as a sexual fantasy. In multiplying and exaggerating the conventional signifiers of femininity, Harvey turns femininity into a pantomime reliant on props and masks, and thus exposes its constructedness and performativity. Harvey's parodic accoutrement is all the more outrageous as she performs a double drag: being a woman, she engages in a grotesque masquerade of femininity, as if being a woman did not predispose her femininity. In highlighting the disconnect between her anatomical sex and gendered identity, Harvey's double drag act exposes the constructedness of gender, and makes its suturing points apparent. The notion of "suture" articulates a form of composite monstrosity that Judith Halberstam identifies as a centrepiece of gothic horror, which consists in amalgamating disparate parts and making them conspicuously dissonant, thereby exposing their heterogeneity and constructedness.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, Harvey introduces a form of composite femininity made monstrous by the suturing points of its clashing components.

In picture 4, Harvey opens a conversation with historical scripts of femininity in the Victorian age, whereby womanhood invoked fears of monstrosity and madness, witness such characters as Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's 1847 novel *Jane Eyre*, who was said to be so insane that she had to be locked away in her husband's attic. Over time, the trope of the madwoman in the attic has been formulated by feminist literary critics as a strategic figure in

¹⁶⁷ HALBERSTAM, Judith. *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.

“feminine fictions”, insofar as she encodes both imprisonment within and transgression of sociocultural strictures.¹⁶⁸ The madwoman in the attic has also become a central feminist archetype to re-interpret 19th century English Literary Imagination by.¹⁶⁹ In reincarnating herself into the Victorian epitome of female insanity, Harvey thus draws attention to the pathologising discourse of female emancipation, and thus brings to light the historic interplay between female agency (or lack thereof) and female monstrosity. The photo relies on stark visual contrasts between light and darkness (i.e., the white dress against the dark brown background evocative of cloistered quarters, Harvey’s dark shadow), which imparts a gothic sense of impending threat. Harvey’s corseted figure in a straight-laced Victorian dress denotes the containment imposed by conventional Victorian femininity, whilst her unkempt hair and expressionless face evoke borderline insanity. The picture illustrates an abiding cultural tendency to frame womanhood in terms of femininity (i.e., the contained and culturally acceptable cloak of femaleness, here the dress) and monstrosity (as untamed womanhood, here the unkempt hair). This articulation of unruly womanhood as monstrous pathology continued into the early 20th when women’s mental health issues were construed as related to reproductive organs; witness the etymology of the term “hysteria” which although designating psychological symptoms, derives from the Greek word for “uterus”.

Harvey’s pictures can be read as a play of feminine signifiers, whereby she uses her own body as a privileged site of monstrous gender performance, which exposes the unreliability of gender identity. As Harvey shifts feminine disguises, in turn camping it out in drag, or soliciting and rebuffing sexual interaction, she produces a proliferation of monstrous avatars that suggest that not only is femininity fabricated through performance, but so is Harvey. She puts on stylistic masks and what feminist theorist Judith Butler names “corporeal styles”, that is “an ‘act’ which is both intentional and performative, where ‘performative’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning”.¹⁷⁰ Butler thus argues that gender has no intrinsic existence, and is only a cultural fantasy projected on the surface of the body. Furthermore, she construes drag as a comic exposure of the vacuity of gender identity: “In imitating gender, drag

¹⁶⁸ BECKER, Suzanne. *Gothic Forms of Feminine Fictions*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999. 10-11.

¹⁶⁹ GILBERT, Sandra, and Susan GUBAR. *The Madwoman in The Attic: The Woman Writer and The Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven (Conn.): Yale university press, 2000. 78. Gilbert and Gubar argue that in 19th century women’s literature the madwoman figure “is usually in some sense the author’s double, an image of her own anxiety and rage. Indeed, much of the poetry and fiction written by women conjures up this mad creature so that female authors can come to terms with their own uniquely female feelings of fragmentation, their own keen sense of the discrepancies between what they are and what they are supposed to be”.

¹⁷⁰ BUTLER, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. New York and London: Routledge, 1990. 190.

implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself - as well as its contingency.”¹⁷¹ Therefore, if Harvey’s drag is a social performance that creates gender reality according to a strictly imitative pattern, so is her stage persona a pure reflection without an original, a projection with no intrinsic substance. In other words, she turns herself into a shape-shifting artistic grotesque that confounds interpretation.

3. Harvey’s and Cave’s Embodied Monstrosities and Artistic Stances

From this analysis of Cave’s and Harvey’s stage personae, we can conclude that both use the constructedness and performativity of gender as a site of embodied monstrosity. Whether emerging as counter-narratives or hyper-narratives, their gendered monster-mongering disrupts ontological certainties about gendered identity, human identity in general, and ultimately about their own artistic personae.

Although both artists rely on a proliferation of monstrous alter egos and self-impersonations, it is noteworthy that their persona-minglings achieve different impacts. Firstly, Harvey’s embodied upheavals are much starker than Cave, in that her monstrous avatars travel the full spectrum of femininity from abject to oversexualised physicality, from prosaic to accessorised femininity. Moreover, when in double-drag, Harvey queers her own gender and therefore highlights the mimetism of performance, thereby suggesting that she is not expressive of any stable identity core, but is purely performative. In saturating her persona with paradoxical corporeal self-representations, she makes her own body and gender unreliable signifiers and turns her persona into a blank canvas on which to project representations and aesthetics. I would argue that her early strategy of adopting corporeal styles and masks enabled Harvey to create a level playing field in which her own persona and gender identity become so blurred that they are unsuitable material for gender-biased interpretation. In fact, Harvey’s blank canvas persona is reminiscent of the manner in which 1970-80s “art rock bands treated the body as purely instrumental to delivering whatever persona the artist adopted”.¹⁷² Bannister argues that such art rock artists as David Bowie or the Velvet Underground deployed a strategy of presentational blankness in their performance personae, and thus disrupted the romantic view that the rock

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁷² BANNISTER. *White Men, White Noise: Masculinities And 1980s Indie Guitar Rock. Op.Cit.*, 45.

artist's work is expressive of their own subjectivity. The malleability of the art rock artist (e.g., Bowie) enables them to take on and off different stylistic cloaks without being specifically identified with any one of them. Harvey's presentational blankness enables her to make her body obsolete as a signifying practice, and therefore it represents nothing more than performance. This strategy doubly emancipates her: from expectations of artistic consistency and continuity, and from her work to be read through rock's masculinist filter. Harvey's semantics of self-representations are thus dismissed as a mere play of masks and signifiers, thus pointing to provisional identities rather than a stable identity.

The scope of Cave's monstrous incarnations is not as wide-ranging as Harvey's: although; he too goes into gender parody, he does not queer his own gender, and thus leaves his stage persona's gendered identity intact. Whereas Harvey takes acidic jibes at femininity through extreme abject counter-representations (e.g., highlighting the monstrous feminine's unsuitability for hedonistic consumption), Cave's jibes may be hyperbolic and repulsive, but they do not debunk the myth of dominant masculinity. For instance, such a figure of hapless masculinity as the protagonist of "No Pussy Blues" appears as a comic freak because he has sexual ambitions above his station, however the said ambitions match the injunction of sexual success that underlies dominant masculinity. Moreover, such hypermasculine archetypes as narcissistic serial killers (e.g., "Stagger Lee") exhibit a macho swagger consistent with the aggressive self-affirmation of hegemonic masculinity. Consequently, Cave's carnivalesque monsters are performed in rock machismo's idiom and as such, can be construed as an insider's game within the rock apparatus.

4. Probing the Boundaries of Humanity: Extreme Hybridising

Cave's and Harvey's portrayal of humanity not only highlights its innate barbaric streak and ontological vacuity, but also its affinities with otherness: the inanimate and the animalistic. Geoffrey Harpham formulates grotesque as a "species of confusion",¹⁷³ and posits the essence

¹⁷³ HARPHAM, Geoffrey. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982. Introduction XXI.

of grotesque as “the sense that things that should be kept apart are fused together”.¹⁷⁴ That is precisely what Cave and Harvey play with in their monster-mongering: they conflate perceived incompatibles and collapse conceptual dichotomies such as animate/inanimate, and human/non-human, to conjure up hybrids, thereby outlining a composite human identity.

4.1. Harvey’s (limited) Human Bestiary

Because Harvey’s prime focus is on intrinsic monstrosity and gender confusion, her human-animal hybrid repertoire is noticeably more limited than Cave’s. Her works contain such supernatural creatures as 50ft Queenie, the phallic woman of gigantic proportion and “force 10 hurricane”¹⁷⁵ potency, but for all her supernatural attributes, she remains essentially human. Elsewhere, there are occurrences of humans described in supernatural terms, such as the lover-monsoon of “Meet ze monsta”¹⁷⁶ who is compared to a “big black monsoon”, or animalistic terms such as the protagonist of “Long Snake Moan”¹⁷⁷ whose animality is expressed in a feral scream range including moaning and growling. Overall however, Harvey suggests animality not so much in her descriptions, but through vocal effects mimicking animal sounds.

The only song that spectacularly smashes the animal-human distinctions occurs on her 2007 album with John Parish, *A Woman A Man Walked By*. A barking-protest by a pig-headed protagonist, “Pig Will Not” stands out as one of Harvey’s most animalistic cacophonies. Featuring little dramatic anchoring and overlapping narrative lines, the piece is saturated with noise and screams, in a manic sonic of pounding drums and looping guitar riffs. The lyrics are elliptic, manically looping on the line “I will not”, in a confusing set-up involving a protagonist barking their refusal to obey, and another protagonist, an angel-preacher whom Harvey impersonates in a raspy voice. The protesting protagonist only screams “I will not” on a loop, while the angel-preacher spits out the other lines, enforcing religious submission through physical and psychological abuse. Physical violence escalates from “the angel shakes the disbeliever’s head” to “even lovelier than I was before/your face all mashed up”, against a backdrop of coercive control (e.g., “All that *rubbish* inside your *rotting* mind”, italics mine) and brainwashing (“I am your guardian, I am your fairy”... “This is true love that we are doing now”).

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁷⁵ “50ft Queenie”, *Rid of Me*, 1993.

¹⁷⁶ “Meet Ze Monsta”, *To Bring You My Love*, 1995.

¹⁷⁷ “Long Snake Moan”, *Ibid.*

Moreover, the abuse is not restricted to the lyrics but also actualises as a frontal sonic assault, thereby spilling into the listening experience and attacking the listener on three concurrent levels: lyrically, vocally, and sonically. Harvey screams-sings her lyrics throughout, over-extending syllables to painful length, and incongruously erupting into barking. Moreover, her two “protesting” vocal lines are superimposed, as if engaged in a screaming contest for sonic supremacy, which produces a battleground effect: the song thus becomes the locus of hyperbolic power struggle and aggression, with the listener caught up in the middle and therefore receiving multiple sensory blows. The first line itself sets the violent overload of the song when Harvey makes the main utterance of the song “I will not” aurally painful, by wrenching “I” into a prolonged grating howl that tortures the listener’s senses with its animalistic overtones.

The song is optimally disturbing due to its combination of extreme hybridising and brutal delivery: not only does Harvey intermingle species with her barking and animalistic screams, but also her consistent sung-screamed vocals impart an emotional directness that forces the listener into sensory intimacy with both animality and human barbarity. In bringing her audience into visceral proximity with that monstrous hybridity, Harvey effectively uses shock tactics.

In her study on monstrous scream and horror films, cultural theorist Deborah Dixon¹⁷⁸ formulates scream as “psychic cum somatic shock-wave”,¹⁷⁹ and argues that a woman’s scream is culturally construed as expressive not of will (as a man’s scream is), but of subjective dissolution.¹⁸⁰ Through her screaming overload, Harvey thus brings the “psychic cum somatic shock-wave” to the entire scope of a song, to optimal impact, since she subjects her listener to a four-minute attack. Although more animalistic than most of Harvey’s songs, “Pig Will Not” exemplifies a general pattern of aggression at work in Harvey’s performance, whereby the listening experience itself is the locus of monstrous interactions between the listener and the performer.

¹⁷⁸ DIXON, Deborah. “Scream: The Sound of the Monstrous.” *Cultural Geographies* 18.4 (2011): 435-455.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 441.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 438.

4.2. Cave's Grotesque Characterisation: Mixing the Human and Non-Human.

Whereas Harvey's mixing of the human and the non-human is limited in scope and its manifestations are few and far between, Cave hybridises humans extensively, whether through characterisation or explicitly hybrid character-galleries. In many of his songs, Cave blurs the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate, and portrays humans in mechanistic or animalistic terms. For instance, in "John Finn's wife"¹⁸¹ (1992), the female protagonist has "legs like scissors and butcher's knife" and is described as "carving her way through the dance floor".¹⁸² In drawing a parallel between a human being and two blunt objects (outright epitomes of impending violence), the simile opens the possibility of a sub-human level of being, one in which humans assume an inordinate amount of inanimate features. This trait challenges the animate/inanimate and human/non-human dichotomies by suggesting human identity is in constant interplay with otherness, and therefore essentially hybrid. Cave thus delineates an alternative space in which human beings and objects intermingle and are driven by the same malevolent life force.

In the same in-mixing vein, the Cavian world also teems with humans exhibiting animalistic characteristics, which Cave encodes in his character descriptions. "Papa won't Leave You Henry"¹⁸³ exemplifies his biological cross-over with the description of "wet-lipped women with greasy fists/ (who) crawled the ceilings and the walls". The combination of "wet" and "crawled" draws a parallel between women and slugs, whilst alluding to a perverted form of cross-breeding. Man's animalistic features take shape both lyrically (e.g., "I *bellowed* at the firmament" has distinct animalistic undertones) but also in the vocals themselves. Indeed the vocals on "Papa Won't Leave You Henry" grow more and more animalistic through the repetition of "woah" which escalates to full-blown barking toward the end of the song. These vocal effects sonically actualise the animalistic whilst affirming the innate bestiality of human beings.

Elsewhere in "John Finn's Wife"¹⁸⁴ the disquieting image of dancers who "writhed and squirmed and then came apart and writhed again like squirming flies on a pin" conjures up animalistic body movements ("writhed and squirmed"). The image of the flies on a pin is

¹⁸¹ *Henry's dream*. 1992.

¹⁸² "John Finn's Wife", *Henry's dream*, 1992.

¹⁸³ *Henry's dream*. 1992.

¹⁸⁴ "John Finn's Wife", *Henry's dream*, 1992.

particularly terrifying in that it morphs humans into helpless flies suffering at the hands of an unidentified torturer. The pin completes the simile by hinting at a cruel game played at man's expense. Elsewhere, the hybrid cast of "The Ballad of Robert Moore and Betty Coltrane"¹⁸⁵ (i.e., "the frog-eyed man", "a little bald man with wing-nut ears", and the barman who had a "face like boiled meat") brings together the animalistic ("frog-eyed"), the mechanistic ("wing-nut ears"), and the inanimate ("boiled meat") in the characterisation of humans. The incongruous images produce comic effect by creating a disjointed perspective on humanity and presenting it as inherently hybrid. This characterisation of the human in animalistic and mechanistic terms is grotesque in form in that it toys with established conceptual categories and consecrates hybridity as its main feature. Later on in Cave's production, the animalistic trope is granted pride of place on two albums: *Grinderman* and *Grinderman 2*.

4.3. Grinderman (2007) and Grinderman 2 (2010)

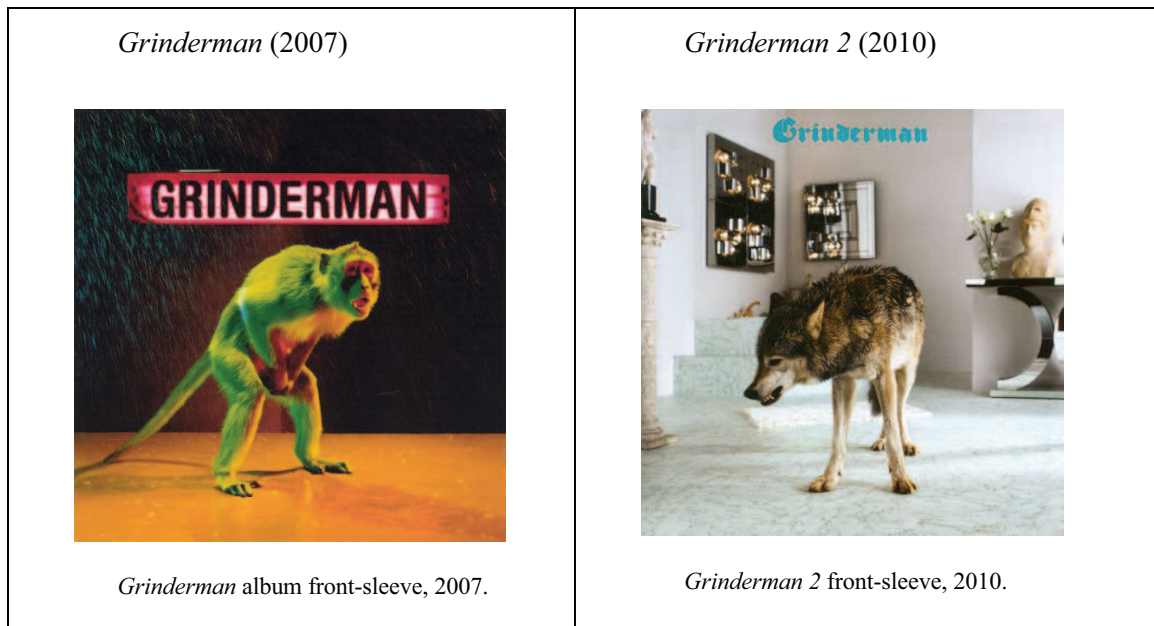
Cave brings the figure of the human-animal hybrid centre-stage in a full-blown animalistic diptych: *Grinderman* (2007) and *Grinderman 2* (2010). Originally intended as a garage-style jamming venture away from the Bad Seeds formula, the *Grinderman* project became a major extra-curricular experiment, with two album releases in 2007 and 2010, and a tour. The *Grinderman* formation is a spin-off of the Bad Seeds, including three Bad Seeds musicians (Warren Ellis on tenor guitar, electric mandolin, violin, viola, guitar, Jim Sclavunos on drums and percussion, and Martyn Casey on bass guitar). *Grinderman* is very much grounded in collective garage-mayhem and in this respect overhauls the usual Bad Seeds' dynamics with frontman Cave as a centrepiece, and the band as his back-up. The very name "Grinderman" points to a communal identity, as it merges the band members into one single iconic figure stating its blues lineage (drawing upon bluesman Memphis Slim's song "Grinder Man Blues"). The *Grinderman* sound is a world away from the staple Bad Seeds rock-ballad and sees Cave pick up the guitar for the first time. Based on improvisation, the band unleashes ferocious urges in the guitar-work and vocals which Cave describes as "monstrous sound".¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ B-side of the single "Where the Wild Roses Grow", October 1995.

¹⁸⁶ "It just had a kind of cataclysmic effect, you know? [...] There's a sound that's really unique to them, this kind of monstrous sound, and there's nothing I like more than going onstage with them and having this monstrous kind of thing about me. There's a kind of open rule within Grinderman that it's OK to embarrass yourself, to go to places that could be potentially disastrous." Nick Cave, 2010.
<<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2010/sep/02/grinderman-nick-cave-bad-seeds-interview>>

Most songs contain a percussive soundscape, launching into abrasive thrashes, while there is also a rising electronica undercurrent which introduces more liminal and sophisticated overtones. The whole experiment went far beyond a wayward jamming adventure, and lastingly redefined The Bad Seeds soundscape.¹⁸⁷

Both albums are marked by animality in their iconography, lyrics, and musical texture (e.g., the prevalence of animalistic screams such as howling, buzzing, etc.) and each album is articulated around its own animalistic totem: the man-monkey on *Grinderman*, and the wolf-man on *Grinderman 2*, as evident on the album sleeves:



Grinderman and the Monkey-Man

Grinderman's monkey makes for a disturbing sight: his hands ostensibly holding his genitalia make him look obscene, and his screaming face makes him appear hostile, as if about to assault the viewer. Moreover, the saturated colour scheme makes it look otherworldly, or like a lab animal. Either way the monkey is represented as unnatural in its apparent sexual obsession.

¹⁸⁷ Martyn Casey sums up the lasting impact the Grinderman project has had on the Bad Seeds sound and self-perception, in line with what other band members and Cave himself have often discussed in interviews. "Grinderman really opened up what the band could be. It loosened us up. We were approaching stuff that we probably couldn't go near before, very rhythmic sort of stuff. We certainly got away from doing the Nick Cave ballad formula". CASEY, Martyn. "An enquiry into the making of Dig Lazarus Dig!" *Lovely Creatures: the Best of Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, 1984-2014* (print). Interview by Larry "Ratso" Slowman. Mute, a BMG Company, 2017. 105-118.

Cave described the album as “a mammoth midlife crisis”,¹⁸⁸ thus positing sexual obsession and insecurity as a centrepiece of the album. The fact that monkeys look like animalised humans facilitates the crossover between the two species, the monkey-man theme underlies the whole album, surfacing either in character grotesques, or in animalistic behaviour such as unbridled sexual urges or primitive violence. Cave resorts to an aesthetic of extreme hybridising that conflates the human and animal species, thereby hinting that human beings sit uncomfortably close to animals.

The superposition of man and monkey is outrageously laid out in the opening song of the album “Get It On”, which jointly proclaims the monkey-man’s lustful intent (through the repetition of “Get it on” throughout) and *Grinderman*’s garage band (“Head down to the basement and shout”). The song oozes with animalistic sex and sleaze and introduces the sonic arsenal of the album: fuzzed out guitar saturation, insistent rhythms, and visceral defiance. As if flaunting its animalistic stance, the song kicks off to an enumeration of animals that had to be aggressively wiped out for the *Grinderman* project to take off:

kick those white mice and black dogs out
kick those baboons out
kick those baboons and other motherfuckers out

The angry kick-off repudiates science (i.e., “white mice”), depression (i.e., “black dogs”), and feral instinct (“baboons”), although the latter point is not all that clear, since the *Grinderman* enterprise is all about claiming man’s animality back.

The monkey protagonist is portrayed as a hybrid grotesque with odd-matching biological attributes such as “monkey fingers” and “green flippers”, and as a comically camp freak with incongruously effeminate attributes (e.g., “pink hair curlers”, “sequined gown”, and “a pornographic crown”). The description reaches comic grotesque heights in its juxtaposition of the monkey’s crude urges (“he drank panther piss/and fucked the girls you’re probably married to”) and his drag queen-esque affectation. Although initially described as an animal, the monkey-man slides down the animal to human chain as the song progresses to become something of a celebrity (“he got in the British weeklies”). Evolution is dramatised in grotesque overdrive, as the monkey is said to have “crawled out of the ooze” and “defied evolution”, and

¹⁸⁸ PETRIDIS, Alexis. “It’s OK to embarrass yourself - Nick Cave and the return of Grinderman.” *Op. Cit.*
< <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2010/sep/02/grinderman-nick-cave-bad-seeds-interview> >

he “sang the blues” and “caused a revolution”. The randomness of the images makes for a disjointed logic that comically brings together disparate elements.

The song narrative does not progress, but rather falls back on itself, starting off as a description of the monkey-man and repeatedly announcing words of wisdom (“he’s got some words of wisdom”), only to lapse into nonsensical babble and end up shouting the same laconic lines as the beginning of the song: “Get it on!” Likewise, the musical line operates on furious loops that never seem to achieve any resolution, it is trapped in a circular structure in which for all the screaming and pounding, nothing comes to fruition. The vocals themselves operate according to a call-and-response pattern, whereby the back-vocals announce words of wisdom, and yet fail to get any more wise words than Cave’s endless repetition of “Get it on” and his nonsensical babble.

The porous boundaries between humans and animals are further highlighted in the eponymous song “Grinderman”, a piece of gothic blues where Cave impersonates the effigy of the band against a slow oscillation of tortured guitar. The Grinderman character is inspired by “The Grinderman Blues”, a song by American bluesman Memphis Slim (1915-1988) about a killer in a shop. The Grinderman song is an animalistic take on a human monster, and the Grinderman figure embodies the collective identity of the band, morphing from realistic human killer into a mysterious creature primitively related to natural elements, as it lurks “in the silver rain/in the pale moonlight”. The slow swinging movement of the music creates a lullaby effect, yet it is counteracted by the achingly shrill stings, hence the music line is grinding rather than comforting, and makes for a harrowing aural experience. Overall, the piece is liminal in sound and lyrics and seems to waver tentatively on the borderlines of humanity and animality. Its minimalism brings out its interstitial quality, as opposed to the sonic and lyrical extravagance of “Get it on”.

The Evolutionary Loop

Further contributing to the species blur, *Grinderman* presents evolution as fluctuating rather than linear, so that human beings can slide up and down the human-animal spectrum, and play along primitive and semi-animalistic lines. This is particularly evident in the song “Go Tell the Women” where evolution is ironically depicted in animalistic terms, with Cave claiming that as human beings “we have done our thing...we’re up on our hind-legs”. The term “hind-legs” invalidates evolution as we (want to) know it (i.e., as a finite process that took humans permanently away from primitivity). In displaying humans revelling in their own primitivity,

the song ridicules human claims to civilisation, and suggests that under their civilised cloak, humans are closer to their primitive core than their civilised selves would allow. In self-parodic mode, Cave thus mocks and enjoys his own human primitivity, by presenting evolution as a full circle.

Moreover, human beings actually yearn to dispense with their civilised selves:

We are artists
We are mathematicians
Some of us hold extremely high positions
But we are tired
We're hardly breathing
[...] we are tired
We got nothing to believe in
We are lost

The lines imply that not only are humans uncomfortably close to animality, but evolution itself is such a failed process that it results in mental exhaustion and existential crisis. “We are free but we are lost”, says the song later on, before announcing their return to primitivity: “come on back now to the fray”. Therefore, having reached completion, evolution leaves humans wanting more, and makes them nostalgic for their lost primitivity. Being thus dismissed as meaningless and vacuous, evolution goes full circle and takes us right back to point zero. Exit intellectual man (i.e., “scientists”, “mathematicians”), enter monkey-man and his feral urges:

We're sick and tired of this self-serving grieving
all we wanted was a little consensual rape in the afternoon
and maybe a bit more in the evening

Cave's strategy of extreme hybridising is structurally grotesque insofar as not only does it juxtapose oppositional binaries such as animal/human, horror/laughter, but indeed it conflates them. With *Grinderman*, Cave opens a liminal breach whereby composite monsters such as the monkey-man are created, and conceptual categories construed as incompatible are no longer distinguishable. Cave also adds a layer of comic extravagance in order to foreground biological hybridity in bold (e.g., by using the notion of “*consensual rape*”, he ushers in barbaric delight and black humour to debunk the scripts of civilised sexuality and behaviour).

***Grinderman 2* and the Wolf-man Figure**

Elsewhere on *Grinderman 2*, it is the wolf-man hybrid that haunts the album, as heralded on the album cover, which features a fierce-looking wolf against a minimalist designer interior.

“Mickey Mouse and the Goodbye man” stands out as the most accomplished piece of hybrid monster-mongering on the album, in that it combines lyrical and musical animality, as well as an animated adaptation which affords it a vivid visual translation. The song is a manic epic that goes from human aimlessness (“I woke up this morning and thought what am I doing”) to full blown animalistic violence. The song is relentlessly pounding and howling, with vicious guitar loops and saturations slashing across the aural scope. The piece’s animalistic sounds and maddened rhythms elicits a restless listening experience with abrupt stops and goes; with its high voltage and nightmarish soundscape, it is a roller-coaster of a song. In order to probe its full hybrid scope, we are going to combine the lyrics, music, and visuals from its animated adaptation.

Lyrically, “Mickey Mouse and the Good Bye Man” is an urban tale about evil twin brothers on a rampage and it features a species meltdown whereby characters seem to travel across species boundaries: the twins vampirise their lupine mother (“and we sucked her and we sucked her dry”) and become “Mickey Mouse” (mouse-wolf?) and the Big Bad Wolf, and then there is a “lupine girl with her hair on fire” becoming a “bat-faced girl with dynamite curls” banging on the narrator’s door. The narrative is lacunary, and the story goes along these lines: the twins suckle their lupine mother in a manner evocative of vampirising (i.e., they “sucked her dry”), and one twin bites at the other and says good-bye. There then ensues a chase with the lupine child (Grindergirl?) all the way up to the 29th floor that ends with an explosion. The animated adaptation fills in the narrative gaps of the lyrics, and brings the extreme biological hybridising to visual life.

The animated adaptation¹⁸⁹ is directed by German animator Ilinca Hopfner, and its old school black and white aesthetic contains roughly drawn characters reminiscent of comic books. The film is in itself a work of cultural hybridisation, as it features a wealth of different cultural traditions: European folklore (folktale tradition), communist propaganda (Soviet Agitpop), Roman mythology (Remus and Romulus), the Hindu tradition (the Grinderman band feature as Hindus and perform an Indian dance routine), early American animation style (Fleischer brothers’ mix of German expressionism and animation whereby moves are synchronised with the musical rhythm), and German Nazism (red-white-black theme). The visual twist of the

¹⁸⁹ *Mickey Mouse and the Good Bye Man*. Dir. HOPFNER, Ilinca. 27 June 2011. <<https://youtu.be/UkZSPdN9aTk>>

animation is that the twin protagonists are cartoonish doppelgangers of Cave, as are all the other reincarnations of the characters, hence a baffling proliferation of Cavian avatars.

The video starts with a jerky shot of tall buildings and a zoom into a flat, where the protagonist is sitting with his back to us. Then there is a subliminal flash of Cave as a Dictator who howls “whaoo”, and a return to the room with a twin preparing a potion, and his evil twin turns up with a machine-gun. Later on, the Cavian twins are seen fiercely suckling their lupine mother’s gigantic udder, like Roman figures Remus and Romulus, and then they “turn” respectively into a moustachioed creature with lupine ears (“the Big Bad Wolf”), and a large-eared reincarnation of Cave (i.e., Mickey Mouse). On the next “whaooo”, a subliminal shot of the lupine girl with vivid orange hair flashes, and then the Grinderman band caricatures perform an eerie hindu dance routine before the evil twins return with machine-guns and spiral into a close-up spinning visual. The lupine girl gingerly climbs up the tall building front, in a manner reminiscent of Spiderman. When the Grinderman band return, they perform their Hindu dance again and howl like wolves. Mickey Mouse Cave is then alone in a folktale-like forest and is chased up a gigantic teat by guns and eyes, until Dictator Cave finally hands him a grenade which he blows up with his teeth, as the song explodes into sonic overload and animalistic screaming. The subliminal flashes of Dictator Cave and the lupine girl burst out in red and black, until Dictator Cave finally fronts the Grinderman band (including his own musician avatar). The final shots feature the lupine girl and Dictator Cave together, with a red and black battleground burning as a closing shot.

The animation is especially interesting in that it fleshes out the album’s aesthetic with visuals, as does the artwork booklet that comes with the CD. The artwork was created in a close collaboration between Cave and Hopfner, which means that all alterations are deliberate on Cave’s part. The monster gallery of the animation is particularly rich, and teems with visual monstrous Cavian avatars. The only female character, the Grindergirl, is herself a treble hybrid: she has a human body, lupine ears, and climbs buildings like Spiderman. Most strikingly, the animation expands upon the song storyline, and introduces an avatar-based visual storyline with a proliferation of Cavian figures. All Cavian avatars are interconnected not only physically but also in characterisation (i.e., they are all evil). As a result of this visual proliferation of Cavian doppelgangers, subjective boundaries are blurred, or at least made porous, and one character seems to segue into another (through the Cavian figure continuity). In total, there are five Cavian avatars:

Figure 1



Hopfner, Illinca. "Evil 2". Artwork from *Grinderman 2* CD.

Figure 2



Hopfner, Illinca. "Evil 2". Artwork from *Grinderman 2* CD.

Figure 3



Hopfner, Illinca. "Dictator Extended 20". Artwork from *Grinderman 2* CD.

Figure 4

Figure 5



Hopfner, Illinca. "Grindergirl 36". Artwork from *Grinderman 2 CD*.



Hopfner, Illinca. "Goodbye". Artwork from *Grinderman 2 CD*.

Caption

- Figure 1: Big Bad Wolf (Cavian Twin 1)
Moustachioed, with pointy ears, lupine fur, he is physically stronger and domineering.
- Figure 2: Mickey Mouse (Cavian Twin 2)
The weaker twin, he is slight of build, has mickey mouse ears, he is submissive, scared, and a bit ridiculous. Reminiscent of E. Munch's "The Scream" painting.
- Figure 3: Dictator Cave: Soviet style, wearing full army uniform, fierce looking, agitprop like, he is the ultimate destroyer along with Grindergirl.
- Figure 4: Wiseman Cave
Hands in prayer pose signifying spirituality, sitting in easy pose, Hindu style, posing with the Grinderman band.
- Figure 5: Grinderman bandmate Cave
Physically looks like the evil twin, but less evil-looking.

The animation of "Mickey Mouse and the Good-Bye Man" creates multiple Cavian avatars, thereby dislocating his persona until Cave the musician retains no intrinsic identity and becomes an infinitely plural being. Whilst a flight of grotesque fancy, this form of extreme hybridising also affords a visual translation of the album's theme of human-animal hybridity, and therefore disrupts not only our ontological certainties, but also our grasp of Cave the musician. The fact that Cave's doppelgangers have animalistic qualities points to their connection with the subconscious, the *id*, as if these supernatural doubles were representations of the second self, the underside of his civilised self, "the physical projection of the second of the mind's twin inmates".¹⁹⁰

The wolf-man motif recurs on the song "Heathen Child" where a hybrid woman-child "raised by beasts" and "photographed by vultures" sits in the bathtub waiting for the wolf-man to come so she can kill him with her pistol. In hybrid proliferation, the Wolf-man is referred to

¹⁹⁰ TYMMS, Ralph. *Doubles in Literary Psychology* Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1949. 27. Literary critic Ralph Tymms applies the term "mind's twin inmate" to Hoffman's supernatural doppelgangers.

as “the abominable Snowman”, as if creatures randomly crossed from one hybrid species into another, and the boundaries between human, animal, and natural categories no longer operated. And indeed, sexual desire is also animalised in “Kitchenette”, a tale of suburban desire for the MILF¹⁹¹ next door, where Cave articulates his desire in terms of sticking his fingers in her biscuit jar, and crushing all her gingerbread men for lust of her. His singing goes into howling mode every time he sings “I waaaaaant you”, thereby aping Howlin’ Wolf, whilst re-affirming the lupine thread of *Grinderman 2*.

Elsewhere, the hybrid bestiary goes supernatural. In the dense guitar-work of “Worm Tamer”, Cave becomes a grotesque Lochness monster whose sexual performance is mocked (“my baby calls me the Lochness monster/two great big humps and then I am gone”), and he subsequently self-identifies as the “Abominable Snowman” in a comic bid to affirm his sexual potency. The “Worm tamer” character is a formidable she-monster comparable to Harvey’s 50ft Queenie,¹⁹² a fierce voodoo priestess (“a Mambo rider”) with supernatural powers: she “cracks lightning with a viper’s tongue”, “eats inchworms down a billabong”.¹⁹³ Like *Grinderman*’s “No Pussy Blues”, “Worm Tamer” deals with ageing men’s flagging sexuality, and takes a jibe at male sexual pretensions and ineffectuality. The Worm tamer is thus said to be nicknamed the “Snake charmer” and “Serpent wrangler”, which comically animalises and ridicules Cave’s phallic size by downgrading it from “snake” to “worm”.

With *Grinderman* and *Grinderman 2*, Cave foregrounds biological and ontological liminality in grotesque attire, and thus causes ontological certainties and rational enquiry to collapse. Whilst partaking of a grotesque phantasmagoria, his extreme in-mixing throws the listeners into an epistemological abyss that engulfs our categorisation system, and indeed our self-identity as human beings. In the face of Cave’s hybrid monsters, we as human beings no longer know who we are, or at the very least, we realise that our civilised self may just be a front concealing our animality.

¹⁹¹ “MILF.” “A sexually attractive older woman, typically one who has children. Origin: 1990s acronym for “mother I’d like to fuck.” Oxford Dictionary Online. Oxford Dictionary, 2017.

<<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/milf>>

¹⁹² “50ft Queenie”, *Rid of Me*, 1993.

¹⁹³ A billabong is an Australian word designating a body of water, like a large pond, that is formed when a river changes its course. *Questacon*. Internet Archive Wayback Machine, 2016.

<<https://web.archive.org/web/20130510032448/http://burarra.questacon.edu.au/pages/billabong.html>>

Conclusion

Cave's and Harvey's monster-mongering debunks not only essentialist assumptions about humanity identities, but also about the very category of humanity, which is depicted as uncomfortably close to the barbaric and the animalistic. Harvey and Cave thus use the grotesque register for its full disruptive potential and turn their monstrous songs into an epistemological warp where perceived oppositions and contradictions dissolve into one another, and rationality collapses. By focusing on non-dualism and hybridity, they deploy a strategy of disruption that robs their listeners of the safety net of dualism, debunks the myth of human normalcy, and opens an epistemological abyss at the heart of the listening experience. Indeed, the listeners are confronted with a space where scientific knowledge collapses and prior certainties are blown to pieces.

As narratives whose dramatic plotlines hinge upon central characters, popular songs are essentially concerned with subjective identity. Within the span of a song, the listener is thus exposed to multiple subjectivities: those of the song characters and of the performer. Therefore, the popular song could be construed as a reflexive project in which imaginary selves are conjured up and their trials and tribulations are dramatised. Each fictional self occurs as a self-contained identity project, complete with its inner coherence (or incoherence), goals, and personal history. The process of subjective formation that underpins songwriting brings to mind British sociologist Anthony Giddens' argument that subjective formation relies on narrative construction, and assembling disparate fragments into a cohesive whole, which forms the foundation of self-identity. Giddens postulates that "the self becomes a reflexive project, for which each individual is responsible", hence "we are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves".¹⁹⁴ Applying Giddens' formulation to monster-mongering, Harvey and Cave assemble disparate parts in order to build cohesive self-narratives and subjective coherence for their characters. However, they engage in a paradoxical operation since they construct fictional selves whilst emphasising their inconsistencies and disparateness. Although such characters as psychopaths and human-animal hybrids are fully-fledged subjects at the centre of coherent self-narratives, as monsters they are quintessential figures of fragmentation and disparateness either

¹⁹⁴ GIDDENS, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity, 1991. 75. Giddens put forward the structuration theory and went on to focus the paradox of modernity: it inhibits the individual, whilst providing them the means for self-actualisation. Faced with the uncertainty of the modern world, the self thus becomes a reflexive (i.e., circular) project where the individual achieves subjective coherence by mastering the self and assembling fragments into a cohesive whole. Individuals then piece all fragments of knowledge and experience together to create a coherent self-narrative about their selves and their lives.

torn between their civilised and barbaric selves, or aberrant composites whose pieces forever clash with one another and whose suturing points show.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, Harvey's and Cave's monster-mongering exercise tantamounts to a self-disruptive identity project of sorts.

Cohen contends that, in breaking the laws of nature and resisting classification, monsters are ontologically liminal, and as such herald an epistemological crisis.¹⁹⁶ In the face of Cave's and Harvey's in-humanity and extreme hybridising, the listener is thrown into an epistemological abyss that engulfs established rules of human behaviour, and the determinacy and stability of human identity. Therefore, because the listening experience operates in a liminal zone where common rationality is suspended, it is marked by radical unpredictability and instability. Cohen contends that monsters compel a "third system" "allowing polyphony, mixed response (difference in sameness, repulsion in attraction) and resistance to integration".¹⁹⁷ Extrapolating from Cohen's argument, I posit that listening to Harvey's and Cave's monstrous songs is entering a "third system" which, due to the prevalence of the monstrous, "allows a deeper play of differences, a non-binary polymorphism at the "base" of human nature".¹⁹⁸ How does that third system function and what sort of performer-listener bond does it forge? What does that "non-binary polymorphism" entail in terms of narrative and performance strategies? To what extent do songs, as monstrous scripts, shape the interaction between performer and listener?

¹⁹⁵ HALBERSTAM, Judith. *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. *Op. Cit.* Halberstam posits suture as a gothic horror device whereby dissonant othered parts are stitched together and their visible suturing points expose their heterogeneity.

¹⁹⁶ COHEN. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* *Op.Cit.*, 6-7

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹⁸ HOGLE, Jerrold. "The Struggle for a Dichotomy: Abjection in Jekyll and his Interpreters", in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde After One Hundred Years*, eds. William Veeder and Gordon Hirsch. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988. 161. Qtd. in COHEN. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. *Op. Cit.* 7.

CHAPTER 5. Monstrous Drama: the Songtext as Monstrous Script

What I suspend is not disbelief, but something more like any propensity I might have to divide the world into the believable and the unbelievable. What I accept, provisionally, is an alternative world... the storyteller, in other words, creates by fiat, or web of fiats, an alternative world that I agree to inhabit for a while ... It's like a social relationship: a story entertains you – you entertain the story. You invite it in, pour it a drink, and let it talk to you without interrupting.

Michael Frayn¹⁹⁹

1. The Song as Monstrous Text and Wishfulfilment Drama

1.1. The Monstrous Song and The Novel as Interactive Spaces

British novelist Michael Frayn's formulation of novel-reading as an alternative reality that we can consensually inhabit and socially interact with posits the reader as a traveller of imaginary worlds. Insofar as the popular song hinges on a narrative that conjures up imaginary landscapes for the listener to roam, Frayn's definition of novel-reading could apply to the popular song. However, insofar as the song narrative only comes to fruition through performance and music, and therefore, its reception relies on multiple semiotic systems. Frayn's argument that the story is co-produced by the writer and their reader is especially illuminating in that it reconfigures the writer-reader interaction as collaborative, instead of polarised between an actively creative writer and a passive reader-receiver. If we posit, along with Simon Frith, that the act of listening is in itself performance²⁰⁰, then the song can be construed as co-performance, and Frayn's notion of co-production can be fruitfully transposed to the popular song. For the purpose of this chapter, we shall posit the song as an interactive space like the novel, and probe the listener-performer interactions it entails.

¹⁹⁹ FRAYN, Michael. *The Human Touch*. London: Faber & Faber, 2006. 245.

²⁰⁰ FRITH, Simon. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996. 203. My premise is also based on the notion of "participatory drama" put forward by French academic John Mullen in his paper "Que font les chansons anti-racistes?" presented before the GRER research group (Groupe de recherche sur l'eugénisme et le racisme) in November 2017, at Université de Paris 7.

Cave's American Southern Gothic (1984-1996 musical works), the dark Romantic world of his love songs (*Boatman's Call* [1997], *No More Shall we Part* [2001]) and his more recent impressionistic worlds (*Dig Lazarus* [2008] and *Push the Sky Away* [2013]) afford his listeners imaginary worlds to dive into. Similarly, with each of Harvey's albums, we can engage in tormented psycho-drama (*Dry* [1992], *Rid of Me* [1993], and *4-Track Demos* [1994]), or roam Gothic Americana (*To Bring You My Love*, 1995) and the bleak Dorset landscape (*White Chalk*, 2007), or revisit British war history (*Let England Shake*, 2011).

French researcher Antoine Hennion²⁰¹ compares the popular song with "a little three minute novel", in that like a novelette it provides a contextualised narrative focusing on a protagonist's interactions with other protagonists or with the world at large. Using this analogy between the popular song and the novel, Cave's and Harvey's songworlds can be construed as clusters of aural vignettes for the listener to immerse themselves into. Like novels, their songworlds convey drama through character-based narratives, thus providing the listener with an array of psyches to gain insight into, and potentially identify with. Insofar as most of Harvey's and Cave's characters dwell on the psychic edge and are prone to barbaric impulses, the fictional identifications afforded to the listener can be formulated as monstrous scripts.

An illuminating theoretical tool to probe the various positions of the listener within these scripts, is the notion of "implicit monster" formulated by literary theorist Andrew Hock-Soon Ng.²⁰² Hock-Soon Ng approaches contemporary monster narratives in literature through the notion of "implicit monster": through imaginary impersonation, the reader gets unwittingly embroiled in the monster's atrocities. The reader thus ends up positioned both within the text (as vicarious participant) and without it (as observer). In other words, they enjoy monstrosity both as spectacle and as vicarious experience. Therefore, the very act of reading turns the reader into an implicit monster, as if the monstrous text cross-contaminated the reader.

Extrapolating from Hock-Soon Ng's argument, I contend that Harvey's and Cave's monstrous songs function as contemporary monster narratives in that they too transform the listener into a potential monster. Like the act of reading, listening to Harvey's and Cave's songs of monstrosity is a monstrous experience, and ambiguously positions the listener as implicit monster:²⁰³ both *without* the song narrative (as a spectator unwittingly witnessing the monster's

²⁰¹ HENNIION, Antoine. "The Production of Success: An Anti-Musicology of the Pop Song." *Popular Music* 3 (1983): 159-193.163.

²⁰² HOCK-SOON NG, Andrew. *Dimensions of Monstrosity in Contemporary Narratives: Theory, Psychoanalysis, Postmodernism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*,13.

atrocities), and *within* (as vicarious participant). For example, when listening to Harvey's first person narrative of revenge torture fantasies in "Rid of Me" (1993), we are simultaneously positioned as unwilling witness (i.e., outsider looking in) and beckoned into empathic torture (i.e., potential insider and perpetrator). In other words, the listener can either stay outside the songtext, as the viewer of a monstrous spectacle, or imaginatively identify with the monster and thus become an active protagonist. In both instances, the act of listening itself is fraught in that it is conducive to an experience of horror that compels positioning.

Therefore, listening to Harvey's and Cave's tales of the monstrous can be conceived of as an invitation to engage in a monstrous role-play with the song characters, whereby the listener can slip into a protagonist's psyche and assume their subjectivity for a while. By identifying with Cave's comic grotesque or dark Romantic murderers or any one of Harvey's unhinged female monsters, the listener thus vicariously becomes a monster. When listening to Cave's "Stagger Lee" (1996), the listener can momentarily become Stagger Lee the narcissistic serial-killer and taste murderous omnipotence, just like when listening to Harvey's "Rid of Me" (1993), the listener can become the lover-torturer protagonist and indulge in sadistic games by proxy.

Although popular songs intersect with novels for narrative-based interactions and imaginary identifications, the song dynamic is more complex since the monsters are both embodied by and/or narrated by the performers. Since the song as text-in-performance is mediated by an embodied persona and their corporeal and sonic idiom, the listener is not alone with the text, but engaged in an intersubjective exchange with the performer. The monstrous song experience is both multi-dimensional and multi-personal, insofar as it involves the performer's, the characters', and the listener's subjectivities. First-person narratives include a personal overlap between the performer and the monster, and the performer is in a position to assign the listener's position in the monstrous script. Namely, the performer calls the role-casting shots: they can cast the audience as their implicit co-monster, or as lambs to their monstrous slaughter, and then victimise them. In tampering with the listener's identification patterns, the performer can interfere between the listener and the monstrous script.

1.2. Monstrosity as Wishfulfilment Drama

As figures of transgression, monsters elicit both repulsion and attraction. In “Thesis VI”, Jerome Cohen argues that what makes the monster appealing is its kinship with the forbidden, and its emancipation from constraints.²⁰⁴ As figures of self-emancipation and insubordination, monsters arouse escapist fantasies that thrive all the more as monstrosity is safely contained by “geographic, generic, or epistemic marginalization”.²⁰⁵ This containment of monstrosity enables the receiver to identify with a monstrous alter-ego, and experience “escapist delight”.²⁰⁶ Expanding upon Cohen’s argument, we can approach Harvey’s and Cave’s narrative vignettes as conduits to escapist delight in that they contain monstrosity in a fictional temporality and songworld. Therefore, their monstrous songs can provide what Cohen calls the “wishfulfilment drama of monstrous stories”.²⁰⁷ Cohen postulates that one major outcome of monstrous tales is to enable us to act our unavowable fantasies with impunity, which makes wishfulfilment the main attraction of monstrous stories.²⁰⁸ My contention is that Harvey’s and Cave’s tales of the monstrous provide the audience with an escape route away from the demands of rationality and social acceptability. As an implicit monster, the listener can indulge in the barbaric delight of abject corporeality and mortality, and revel in the thrill of being in turn terrifying or terrified. Therefore, outwardly antithetical entities (i.e., experiencing and inflicting terror) are only just two manifestations of one and the same wishfulfilment principle.

Hence, when listening to Harvey’s “Long Snake Moan” (1995), the listener who sings along to a raging Harveyan monster gets to terrorise by proxy, whereas conversely as Cave’s protagonist of “Papa Won’t Leave You Henry” (1992), they come under threat of mental dissolution when confronted with the nightmare vision of portentous landscapes and hostile characters. Although these two experiences of monstrosity may seem antithetical, they are nonetheless underpinned by one and the same transgressive delight: in the first instance, the pleasure of inflicting pain on and annihilating another human being, and in the second instance, that of being potentially annihilated by the pervasive violence of the songworld. Both the spectacle and the menace of impending subjective dislocation elicit the dreadful pleasures that lie at the periphery of our civilised behaviour: unholy glee and barbaric delight.

²⁰⁴ COHEN. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Op.Cit.,16-25.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*,17.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*,17.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*,18.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

In his analysis of the Grotesque, Philip Thomson²⁰⁹ defines grotesque laughter as essentially transgressive, and revealing of the receiver's own primitive pleasure. He thus defines "unholy glee" as the pleasure derived from flouting moral and social conventions, and "barbaric delight" as sadistic pleasure derived from horror, the cruel, and the revolting. These two responses are akin to Mikhail Bakhtin's primitive delight, which he locates in the carnivalesque celebration of the barbaric and the obscene.²¹⁰ By enabling the listeners to place themselves within imaginary monstrous narratives and slip into the skin of a fictional alter-ego or even just watch violent narratives, Harvey's and Cave's musical vignettes thus afford the audience an opportunity to liberate, by proxy, "the soul's twin inmate",²¹¹ their inner monster.

Their songtexts can be read as "wishfulfilment drama", in that the listener gets away, quite literally, with (wishful) murder, or at least with indulging their basest instincts. That flight of fancy is all the more enjoyable as it is safely contained in the parallel temporality of the song, a safe space for us to let our inner monster play out our fantasies, and then resume our (supposedly) civilised self at the end of the song. Therefore, Harveyan and Cavian monstrosity provides both Cohen's "escapist delight"²¹² and barbaric delight, the unmitigated pleasure of suspending our rationality and surrendering to a darker variety of self-indulgence. For the span of a song and under cover of role-playing, the listener can thus shed the shackles of their civilised self and roam the fields of unbridled monstrosity with impunity. The pleasure of listening to Cave's and Harvey's monstrous songs is underpinned by imaginative emancipation from moral and rational constraints, compensatory fantasies of insubordination, and the thrill of toying with the forbidden and the destructive. It is about playing with one's fears and repulsions and experimenting with one's inhumanity on the monstrous playground of a song.

The delectable interlude afforded by Harvey's and Cave's songworlds brings to mind Frith's contention that "musical listening means grasping a piece intellectually and then taking sensual pleasure in the "movement of the mind."²¹³ When listening to monstrous songs, we take in their horrifying content and subsequently derive sensuous pleasure from their mental and emotional ripple effects: unholy glee, barbaric and escapist delight.

Qualifying Frith's notion that sensuous gratification occurs as a side-effect of intellectual satisfaction, I would contend that in popular songs, sensuous gratification occurs

²⁰⁹ THOMSON. *The Grotesque. Op. Cit.*, 9; 50-57.

²¹⁰ BAKHTIN. *Rabelais and his World. Op.Cit.*

²¹¹ TYMMS, Ralph. *Doubles in Literary Psychology*. Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1949. 27.

²¹² COHEN. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture. Op.Cit.*, 17.

²¹³ FRITH. *Performing Rites: On the Value Of Popular Music. Op. Cit.*, 261.

not after but concurrently with intellectual satisfaction, due to the optimal corporeal investment mobilised in the act of listening. As such, the listening experience is immersive, and involves intimate interactions between the performer and their audience. How do Harvey and Cave incorporate the immersive component of the listening experience into their monstrous scripts?

2. The song as an Immersive and Interpersonal Experience of Monstrosity

2.1. Listening as a Performance

Frith conceives of the act of listening as a performance,²¹⁴ insofar as each time we listen to a song, we perform the music for ourselves. With known repertoires in particular, the audience performs the musical and dramatic twists and bends of a song not only mentally but also physically, by singing along to it or impersonating the performer. The listener is thus simultaneously engaged on two levels: mentally, they enact the scripts and impersonations of the song's drama, and physically they enact its musical line and respond to its sound (e.g., by recoiling or breaking into dance moves). Building upon Frith's conception of listening as performance, I contend that in a similar fashion, the role-play provided by the popular song foregrounds physicality. Accordingly, Harvey's and Cave's monstrous songs elicit not only mental and emotional response, but also a physical one, and therefore monstrosity is not perceived only with the mind, but first and foremost with the senses. The listener is involved in multi-sensory interactions: not only do they gain an insight into the feelings of the song protagonists, as is the case with literary characters, but they can *sense* them physically through the sonic and vocal texture of the song. In other words, Cave's and Harvey's monstrous tales trigger not only an emotional flight of imagination, but also a corporeal experience of the song, conveyed by the singer-songwriters. Monstrosity is thus encoded in the sonic texture of the song, and actualised in instrumental and vocal performance. Bearing in mind the corporeal modalities of monstrosity, we will analyse the dramatic interpersonal strategies deployed by the two musicians and the scope of narrative monstrosity.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 203. "Listening itself is a performance".

Rock Music as an Inter-Subjective Medium

Firstly, a few words regarding the interpersonal apparatus that underpins the performance of rock music and conditions the listening experience. In popular music, the performer is foregrounded by the fact that they lend their voice and body to their medium, and thus embody their music. As an embodied medium, independent rock encapsulates music in its performer. Namely, the performer conveys the meaning of the song and fleshes it out through their vocals, physical performance and visual self-representations. This intrinsic reliance on physicality leads the listener to engage simultaneously with multiple individuals within the songscape: with the performer who embodies the music and with whom the listener experiences an immediate relationship, and with the lyrical characters conjured up in the song, whether impersonated or narrated by the performer. Being an embodied medium makes rock music an essentially interpersonal medium in that the voice, as an intimate expression of the artist's body, not only affords the listener unmediated access to the artist's corporeality, but also - allegedly - to their interiority. Through the singing performance, not only does the listener interact with the body and assumed subjectivity of the performer enacting the song narratives, but also with the human being behind the singing mask - or so goes the rock myth. The listener-performer bond is all the more potent as the listener's sensory engagement is multifocal (being concurrently psychological, emotional and physical).

The combination of the two core components of rock (i.e., the carnal identification of the performer with their music, and the optimal inter-subjective intimacy between listener and performer) interrogates the existing interplay between Harvey's and Cave's performance of monstrosity, their persona construction, and the ensuing bond they form with their audience. How do the two performers convey the monstrous content of their songworld? How does their performance of monstrosity affect their listeners and to what extent does it shape the performer-listener relationship?

2.2. The Performer as Narrator-Impersonator: the Various Positions of the Performer's Persona in the Song Narrative

As embodied selves, rock performers can present different degrees of identification with their song content and protagonists. Performance studies academic Philip Auslander distinguishes three personae levels for singer-songwriters: the real person, the performance

persona and the character.²¹⁵ The real person is the performer as human being, the performance persona, the performer as social being, and the character is the enactment of the song's narrative and protagonists. Central to Auslander's conception of musical personae is the premise that musical performance is "a person's representation of self within a discursive domain of music".²¹⁶ Therefore, in musical performance, because the singer performs his self/selves through musical personae and through social interaction, the subjective constructions may represent the performer's real personality or the song's narrative (i.e., Simon Frith's "song personality"²¹⁷), and the whole spectrum in-between.

Building upon Auslander's formulation of musical personae, I postulate that Harvey and Cave can adopt three positions in relation to their songtext: they can either impersonate a fictional protagonist, narrate the story as an external narrator, or be a *real* protagonist. When impersonating a fictional protagonist, they sing in character much as an actor does, as part of a first-person narrative, in a manner that is clearly signalled as fictional impersonation. For instance, when Cave sings "O'Malley's Bar" (1996), the marked North American anchoring and epic exaggeration explicitly locate his singing within the American tradition of literary orality and tall tales, which implies storytelling through character-based narratives. There ensues that the "I" used by Cave issues from his fictional character, and presents minimal overlap with Cave's real subjectivity. Likewise, when Harvey sings and impersonates "Angelene" (1999), the storytelling mode clearly positions her first-person narrative as a fictional impersonation, as marked by the opening lines "my first name Angelene" which explicitly signal conventional storytelling. When they sing in fictional character, the two musicians' implicit monstrosity is overtly contained within the enactment of the song's personality, and therefore kept to a minimum. When singing as a narrator, their implicit monstrosity is even more minimal, whether they are positioned as an outside observer or involved in the situation described.

The third position - that of *real* protagonist - is the most ambiguous in that the performer is not overtly depicted as in character, so that their real subjectivity becomes enmeshed with

²¹⁵ AUSLANDER, Philip. "Musical Persona: the Physical Performance of Popular Music." *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Musicology*. Ed. Derek B. Scott. Farnham, UK, and Burlington, US: Ashgate, 2009. 304-315.

²¹⁶ AUSLANDER Philip, "Musical Personae." *The Drama Review* 50.1 (Spring 2006): 100-119.102.

²¹⁷ FRITH. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. *Op. Cit.*, 212. Frith argues that popular singers are engaged in a double enactment: that of the "star personality" (their image), and that of the "song personality", that is "the role that each lyric requires". Rock performance thus oscillates between these two poles, and encompasses the whole spectrum in between them.

that of the song's protagonist. In the process, the performer's fictional and realistic personae²¹⁸ become superimposed, and the audience perceive the enacted monstrosity as the performer's.

In her early albums (*Dry*, 1992 and *Rid of Me*, 1993), Harvey plays on this superimposition between her real and fictional personae, and thus impersonates her female monsters with optimal identification. We are going to see that her persona-mingling induces a peculiar monstrous experience for the audience.

3. Harvey's Antagonistic Role-Play: Claustrophobic Listener Positions

Due to their shared focus on female subjective formation and the pitfalls of femininity, Harvey's first three albums *Dry*, *Rid of Me*, *4-Track Demos* present a potential identity overlap between their female protagonists and Harvey's real person as a female performer. Moreover, the ambiguity shrouding Harvey's real and fictional identities is further reinforced by her physical appearance at the time: stick-thin, unsmiling and unyielding, Harvey looked like the antithesis of the sexy rock chick, and her appearance incidentally matched her tormented song characters. Indeed, there seemed to be no clear delineation between a stage persona and her real persona. The picture used on the front cover of *Rid of Me* exemplifies this personal overlap: an unflattering black and white portrait of naked Harvey with unkempt beehive hair. As argued in chapter 3, the aesthetic of the picture is purposely smudgy and crude, evoking "scarecrow nakedness" rather than eroticised nudity. Indeed, the combination of cryptic facial expression, de-eroticised nudity, and bathroom tiles seem to cast Harvey as the inmate of a psychic ward, which encapsulates the psychic edge of the album (i.e., sadistic over-possessive lovers, overbearing females...). Harvey's self-portrait effectively embodies the album's psychic disorders and womanhood in disarray, therefore Harvey's real persona intersects with her protagonists'. This overlap blurs the boundaries between Harvey's real identity and her fictional impersonations and leads the listener to wonder who the person on the cover is: is it Harvey the

²¹⁸ MOORE, Allan. *Song Means: Analysing and Interpreting Popular Songs*. Farnham, Great Britain; and Burlington, US: Ashgate, 2012. 179-215. Expanding upon Auslander's theory of the singer-songwriter's three personae (the real person, the performance persona and the character) in Auslander 2009: 305, British musicologist Allan Moore theorises that there are three levels of personae: the performer (the human being), the Persona (the performer's social construction) and the protagonist (Frith's "song personality"). Moore further elaborates that the persona can be either realistic (i.e., interpreted as coming directly from the singer) or fictional (when the singer unambiguously takes on a particular character as an actor would).

musician or Harvey as a protagonist of her album? The ambiguity of Harvey's corporeal style is reflected in the popular music press coverage of the time which mostly identified Harvey's real persona with her deranged female characters, and depicted her as prone to mental illness and anorexia. The presumed autobiographical source of her songworld overtly identifies Harvey's real psychic state with that of her protagonists', and interprets the emotional range of her albums as realistic rather than fictional.

Lyrically, all three albums are first-person narratives, thereby signalling a consistent subjective anchoring, and further reinforcing the implicit correlation between Harvey's real and fictional subjectivities. As discussed in the previous section, in first-person popular songs, because the performer's impersonation is both lyrical and physical, there is optimal overlap between the performer's real and performed subjectivities. In Harvey's early works, this overlap is reinforced by minimal dramatic anchoring, so that the song space is not "bracketed"²¹⁹ as separate from the moment of performance, but indeed embedded in the time of performance. My contention is that Harvey purposefully "de-brackets" her performance so as to deprive her audience of psychical distance and intensify the effect of her performance. We will see that her "de-bracketing" is three-fold: she mingles her real persona with her fictional personae, opts for dramatic immersion with minimal scene-setting, and casts the listeners as the victims of her monstrous assaults.

3.1. Signifying Fictional Distance and Lyrical Impersonation

Fictional impersonation is signified through personal characterisation (name, social and cultural background etc.), which explicitly disconnects the singer from the fictional character they are impersonating. The more dramatic markers there are, the more distance there is between the performer's impersonation and their real self. Notably, Harvey's first three albums contain minimal cultural or social anchoring, and limited characterisation, consequently her subjectivity merges with her impersonations, and the listener is immersed in a stream of consciousness that appears to be Harvey's.

Moreover, due to the lack of spatiotemporal bearings, the song's operative framework is not staked out as alternative and fictional, but instead it superimposes with the space and time

²¹⁹ AUSLANDER Philip, "Musical Personae." *The Drama Review* 50.1 (Spring 2006): 105. Auslander posits aesthetic performance as "bracketed", that is "set apart from the flow of ordinary life by means of signs that indicate their special status".

of the song's performance and listening experience. As a result, the fictional dimension of the song dissolves into the here and now of performance and, being thus deprived of fictional distance, the listener's experience of the song is fully immersive. For instance, the boisterous self-affirming epic "50ft Queenie" (1993), in which Harvey impersonates a phallic female sing-screaming her supernatural omnipotence, seems to gatecrash the listener's actual reality. Upon listening to the song, we are not transported to a fictional temporality, but through fictional deprivation, Harvey-the-phallic-female materialises on our doorstep, hence a heightened experiential charge.

Harvey's 1992-94 triptych features first-person narratives with the exception of one third-person narrative, "Highway 61". The prevalence of first-person narratives foregrounds a structural overlap between her real and fictional personae. If some songs clearly signal fictional impersonation through personal characterisation, the majority of them present little or no fictional anchoring, consequently Harvey's persona mingles with her protagonists'. In most instances, the persona-mingling combines with a direct address using the pronoun "you", which can be either explicitly named and/or characterised, or indeed left unnamed and referent-free. For instance, the songs "Me-Jane" and "O Stella" belong to the former category in that their narrators both castigate an explicitly named addressee (respectively Tarzan and Stella), as do the songs "Oh My Lover", "Snake", "Happy and Bleeding", "Joe", and "Hair" (*Dry*, 1992). In these instances, the listener is kept at a dramatic distance, and thus positioned as a spectator. Conversely, in first-person narratives that include an unspecified "you" and little or no dramatic context, the listener is cast as *de facto* victim of the protagonist's violence. This dual identification of the performer with a violent protagonist and of the listener with their victim jolts performer and listener into a violent co-enactment of the song's narrative.

As part of her early narrative shock tactics, Harvey forces the listener into a monstrous role-play with her, notably by combining a referent-free "you" and a vengeful sadistic first-person narrator fantasising about inflicting pain on an implicit lover. The song then becomes a monstrous role-play casting Harvey as torturer and summoning her listener as her implicit lover-victim. This concurrent identification of Harvey's persona with a sadistic narrator-protagonist, and of the listener with the implicit lover culminates in four songs on the album *Rid of Me*: "Legs", "Rid of Me", "Rub 'til It Bleeds", and "Dry". The songs typify an antagonistic role-play between Harvey and an implicit lover, whereby Harvey puts forward a litany of torture fantasies to inflict on her lover/listener (e.g., "Rid of Me", "Rub 'til It Bleeds", "Legs") and castigates them for failing to arouse her (e.g., "Dry"). The spectrum of violent fantasies is broad,

ranging from sexual torture (in “Rub ‘til It Bleeds”) to violent murder (in “Legs” she suggests killing her lover by cutting off his legs, while in “Rid of Me” she muses about twisting her lover’s head off).

The listener is thus narratively enmeshed in a web of disturbing evocations of sexuality as violence and power struggle, and as the site where all barbaric impulses break loose. Simon Reynolds fittingly describes *Rid of Me* as a “monstrous blues-rock stampede”,²²⁰ it is indeed monstrous in its aggressive eroticism, combined with the relentless sonic assaults conducted in the form of percussive guitar work, distorted vocals, and screams.

3. 2. Case Study: “Rid of Me” as Claustrophobic Intimacy

The song “Rid of Me” (1993) epitomises this antagonistic interplay, as a first-person narrative in which a scorned lover fantasises about inflicting revenge-torture on her lover. Interpellating her lover, the protagonist enumerates the many sadistic ways in which she will stalk her lover, through forced physical proximity (“tie yourself to me”, “keep you against my chest”) and relentless blaming and threatening (“don’t you wish you never met her”/“you’re not rid of me”). Throughout the song, it is not clear who the pronoun “I” refers to: is it Harvey’s fictional or realistic persona? There is no contextual indication as to who the speaker may be or where and when the scene takes place, which anchors the narrative in real-time psychodrama rather than in an alternative subjectivity and temporality. This lack of fictional anchoring affords little distance between Harvey and the scene, and indeed seems to imply that Harvey is not speaking in character, but as herself.

Consequently, the listener is forced into first-hand monstrous experience on two counts: by being addressed by the referent-free pronoun “you”, and through injunction. Firstly, the use of the pronoun “you” with no named referent directly summons the listener and places them in the vacant position of referent. Secondly, the listener is denied the comfort and safety of external observer’s distance when Harvey addresses them in the imperative mood (“tie yourself to me”) from the opening lines onward. As a result of the double role-casting of Harvey as tormentor and of the listener as her lover-victim, the listener is thrown into violent interaction with Harvey.

²²⁰ REYNOLDS and PRESS. *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock’n’Roll*. *Op.Cit.*, 164.

Namely, they are sucked into claustrophobic intimacy with the singer's monstrous alter-ego and thus trapped as the target-object ("you") of her sadistic desire.

The song typifies a form of lyrical assault conducted on the audience through subjective re-assignment. This lyrical violence is a hallmark of Harvey's early works and is all the more traumatic for the listener as the violence escalates throughout the song. In "Rid of Me", the initial imperative "tie yourself to me", which still afforded the listener some (relative) agency gradually yields to the crush of an increasingly imperious "I" stating its barbaric intents ("I'll tie your legs/Keep you against my chest"; "I'll make you lick my injuries"). The escalation culminates with the graphic depiction of her lover's murder ("I'm gonna twist your head off"). The lyrical assault alone would suffice to destabilise and disorient the listener, but it is also reinforced by a sonic assault. Indeed, the song creates extreme tension by alternating two antithetical musical lines. The first musical line is all muted: the vocals are low-key, the instrumentation minimalist, with a circular guitar loop. It arouses a sense of constraint, angsty stagnation, and claustrophobic confinement. The second musical line is the polar opposite of the first: it is a sonic outburst of saturated and explosive instrumentation, sing-screaming vocal style, and pounding percussion. The abrupt alternation of the two musical lines makes the listener oscillate between sensory deprivation and sensory overload. Consequently, the audience find themselves under dual attack: on their sanity (through the lyrical assault and the monstrous role-play) and on their senses (through the sonic and vocal assaults). The monstrous role-play thus operates on two levels: the enumerated torture fantasies provide imaginary visions of torture, whilst the sensory assaults physically actualise the torture. The two simultaneous attacks hijack the listener's body and mind.

Moreover, making the experience even more unsettling, there is a marked pattern of attraction/repulsion to her love game, a disquieting correlation between sexual desire and sadistic impulses, which surfaces in the use of a term of endearment "my darling". The phrase occurs twice and is interspersed with injunctions to lick her legs and injuries and vivid descriptions of tying her lover-listener's legs and forcing them against her chest. Harvey thus simultaneously coaxes the listener whilst repulsing them with her barbaric fantasies. This incongruous juxtaposition of affection and violence is customary in Harvey's early works, when she weaves terms of endearment ("baby" "sweet thing", "sweet babe", "my love") into the fabric of her barbaric fantasies (e.g., hitting, "rubbing till it bleeds", cutting off her lover's leg), as is the case in "Legs" and "Rub 'til It Bleeds". The listener is stunned and disoriented by the incongruous marks of affection in the midst of a graphic evocation of sadistic violence, and they

are thus torn between attraction and repulsion. For example, in “Legs”, the protagonist describes cutting off her lover’s legs so he cannot leave her, and yet in the same breath addresses her lover as “my love” and “lover boy”. The horror stems from being simultaneously brought into claustrophobic intimacy with a barbaric protagonist, and targeted by them. And indeed, much like the lover-victim of the song’s narrative, the listener too is trapped in a cruel role-play and unable to escape it. The songs thus operate according to a sadomasochistic pattern, involving a domineering protagonist (i.e., the performer) and their helpless victim (i.e., the listener).

The listener is positioned ambivalently, both as the object of Harvey’s violence, and also as the implicit voyeur of this violence. Namely, the listener’s position toward the narrative is double: they are being assaulted lyrically whilst compelled to watch the spectacle of that violence. In “Rid of Me”, such graphic descriptions as “I’ll tie your legs”, “I’ll make you lick my injuries”, “I am gonna twist your head off”, force the listener to contemplate a spectacle of violence inflicted upon themselves, and thus experience an imaginary assault from the singer. The fact that sexual desire is expressed as an injunction (“Lick my legs, I am on fire”) further heightens the sense of oppression and horror. Harvey’s representation of desire as warped and fraught with violence is all the more unsettling as it subverts the conventional scripts of sexuality as a hedonistic pursuit. In this respect, by being cast as the lover-victim of Harvey’s *salvoes*, the listener is not only destabilised within the songscript, but also within the semantics of rock music.

Indeed, Harvey’s reinvention of sexuality as the site of violence and friction runs counter to the rock apparatus that locates itself as a celebration of physical pleasure.²²¹ Building on Lawrence Grossberg’s contention that the power of rock lies in the optimal affective investment of its fans and on its essential kinship with pleasure, I argue that Harvey deploys a strategy of brutal defamiliarisation. Indeed, in breaking away from the core hedonistic component of rock by replacing pleasure with counterpleasure, Harvey’s monstrous role-play shocks and disorients the listeners by reversing their expectations, and by recasting rock music as the site of counterpleasure and first-hand aggression (as opposed to the staged aggression associated with rock rebellion).

²²¹ GROSSBERG, Lawrence. “Another Boring Day in Paradise and the Empowerment of Every Day Life.” *Popular Music* 4 (1984): 225–258.

In short, Harvey's early albums go off-script to convey a marginal experience of violence: she transposes the monstrous experience of her songs into the live role-play, and reconfigures musical pleasure as a sadomasochistic pursuit.

4. Cave's Monstrous Dramatisation

In his 1992-1996 albums (*Henry's Dream* [1992], *Let Love In* [1994], and *Murder Ballads* [1996]), Cave does not engage in such a brutal narrative role-casting of his listener as his implicit victim. Instead, he mostly sticks to the escapist and barbaric delight of being in turn victim and perpetrator of violence. Whilst most of his staple songs are first-person narratives, the songs that do include a referent-free "you" (thus potentially casting the listener as the implicit addressee) are not as narratively confrontational as Harvey's. Indeed, they consist of cautionary tales (e.g., "I Let Love In", "Red Right Hand"), love songs (e.g., the tentative "Do You Love Me?" and unabashed "Straight to You"), and mock apologetic mayhem ("Thirsty Dog").

The one song that poses a direct narrative threat to the listener, the lustful character of "Loverman" who smells of sulphur and rampant sexuality, is defused by an implicit characterisation of the referent-free "you" and by the inclusion of the final cautionary lines: "there is a devil lying by your side/You might think he's asleep but take a look at his eyes", which delineates the narrative space of the song as fictional. Moreover, throughout the song, the "Loverman" narrator fictionalises the song space by providing dramatic information about his relationship with his addressee. For instance, by addressing her as "baby", "darling" and asking her to "take off that dress", he suggests a romantic relationship, whilst the deictic demonstrative "that" posits the song space as fictional and therefore removed from the listener's immediate temporality and physicality. Accordingly, the indirect characterisation of the addressee as a known lover positions the listener as a witness of the Loverman-narrator's address, and not as a party to the song's drama.

However, although none of Cave's songs operates on the brutal level of subjective reassignment of Harvey's, they still function as monstrous scripts. We are going to determine what the mechanisms of these monstrous scripts are.

4.1. Scene-Setting and the Conventional Storytelling Mode

Contrary to Harvey's barren scene-setting, Cave's narratives are conveyed in conventional storytelling mode, and usher in horror through extensive dramatic anchoring and characterisation. Consequently, the narrative space of Cave's songs is clearly delineated as fictional and its temporality does not intersect with that of the song's performance. Moreover, this fictional scene-setting affords greater psychological distance and agency to the listener as they are not jolted into an alternative reality, but rather, they can choose to fictitiously inhabit it or just enjoy its spectacle.

Another factor contributing to fictional distance lies in Cave's character enactment, which is made explicit in the lyrics, either through self-identification or in the title itself. Indeed, his fictional impersonations are signalled by naming the protagonist either in the title ("Jack the Ripper" [1992] and "Where The Wild Roses Grow" [1996]) or in the corpus of the song (e.g., "The Curse of Millhaven" [1996] where the character introduces herself with "My name is Loretta"). Therefore, only Cave's persona partially overlaps with the impersonated character, whilst his real person remains further removed from his characters. When this distinction between Cave's real person and his impersonations does not feature in the lyrics, it is implicitly signified in the extensive scene-setting.

Cave's 1992-1996 albums belong to his Southern Gothic phase, and their songs are very much akin to mini-novels in that each of them conjures up a very vivid North American songworld, replete with spatiotemporal bearings and an extensive character gallery. Insofar as Cave's albums *Henry's Dream* (1992) *Let Love in* (1994), and *Murder Ballads* (1996) rely on elaborate fictionalisation, they do not only operate as psycho-drama as entire fictional geographies unto themselves, complete with a wealth of spatial and personal signifiers that locate the narratives in an alternative temporality. In this respect, Cave's Southern Gothic contrasts sharply with the extreme dramatic minimalism and claustrophobic psychodramas of Harvey's 1992-1993 albums.

Although all three albums dramatise monstrosity, they fall into two distinct aesthetics: *Let Love In* pertains to the allegorical and the phantasmagorical, whereas *Henry's Dream* and *Murder Ballads* belong to a more realistic balladic tradition. This distinction has a bearing on the portrayal and experience of monstrosity, therefore we are going to analyse first *Let Love In* and subsequently *Henry's Dream* and *Murder Ballads* in order to bring to light their patterns of monstrosity in terms of lyrical representation and listening experience.

4.2. *Let Love In* and the Phantasmagorical Grotesque

Let Love In (1992) comprises ten songs including seven horror narratives and three non-horror laments. The latter three consist of the love songs “Ain’t Gonna Rain Anymore” and “Nobody’s Baby Now”, and the sad ballad “Lay Me Low”, and are not relevant to this analysis since they do not belong to a monstrous repertoire. The seven remaining narratives encompass five dark gothic classics (“Red Right Hand”, “Do You Love Me?”¹ and 2, “Loverman” and “I Let Love In”), and two blues-rock stampedes (“Jangling Jack” and “Thirsty Dog”). The latter two do not unfold against expansive imagery, but rather through manic repetition and a comic grotesque enumeration of trivia. Indeed, the drunken protagonist of “Thirsty Dog” frantically apologises for all sorts of odd-matching shortcomings ranging from the way he looks to “being always pissed”, and the song finally culminates in grotesque self-pity (“sorry that I exist”) and mock wisdom (“Love is always having to say you’re sorry”). “Jangling Jack” is similarly comic grotesque rather than monstrous-gothic, and the jaunty singalong line “do da do do da do” punctuating the song defuses the gory horror of its hapless protagonist’s death by shooting. The lines describing his final moments do not so much highlight the atrocity of his death as its comic theatricality, in that the vision of Jack falling “back down on his arse / In a puddle of blood” elicits laughter rather than horror.

The other five dark gothic narratives are conveyed through vivid imagery and a gallery of phantasmagorical characters such as the devil-loverman (“Loverman”), the Lady of the Various Sorrows (“Do You Love Me”), the evil “Red Right Hand” character (described as “a ghost, a god, a man, and a guru”). The songs’ phantasmagorical dimension is also conjured up through grotesque literalisation, as concepts and feelings personify into characters. For instance, in the cautionary tale “Let Love In”, Despair and Deception are personified as “Love’s ugly little twins”, whilst Love is personified as a shrewd and bold character. In “Loverman”, devils similarly materialise (“there’s a devil outside your door” / “crawling along your floor” / “lying by your side”), and in “Do You Love Me?” when the protagonist finds both devils and God inside his beloved (“I found God and all his Devils inside her”). Even shadows literalise and assume a life of their own: “her shadow fanged and hairy and mad” conjures up a fabulous creature, the materialised doppelganger of the female character of “Do You Love Me?” In a similar drive toward the concrete and the fabulous, the city is personified as “an ogre squatting by the river” in “Do You Love Me” (Part 2), whilst a viaduct is personified as a bird of doom in “Red Right Hand” (“Where the viaduct looms like a bird of doom”). The combination of grotesque personification and figurative imagery delineates an imaginary geography where the

laws of rationality and physics pale into insignificance before the fantastic and the fabulous. The landscape teems with phantasmagorical creatures, dead metaphors seem to come alive, and the song space acts as a fantasy world.

The tonal palette of *Let Love In* exemplifies the three strands of grotesque identified by Geoffrey Harpham: comic grotesque, fantastic grotesque, and Gothic macabre.²²² It is an album that is infused with the fantastic grotesque and its “macabre dream worlds abounding in rattling skeletons, creeping, root-like creatures, frightful monsters or the like”.²²³

4.3. *Henry’s Dream* and *Murder Ballads*: Fictionalising and Dramatising

A mix of Fiction and Realism

Whilst also relying on vivid alternative songworlds, the albums *Henry’s Dream* and *Murder Ballads* break away from the phantasmagorical backdrop of *Let Love In* and conjure up a more realistic songworld. Indeed, both albums’ fictional spaces share a combined realistic and folkloric anchoring. Their monstrous songs are written in the storytelling style of North American murder ballads, with a focus on murderous feats or tragedies, the songs hinge upon fully-fledged narratives complete with dramatic build-ups and character development. The songs may vary in tone and musical texture, however they exhibit a consistent combination of descriptive realism in the depiction of the lyrical geography, and a folklore-inspired character gallery.

When listening to such epic songs as “John Finn’s Wife”, “Papa Won’t Leave you Henry” (*Henry’s Dream*), “Stagger Lee”, “O’Malley’s Bar” or “The Curse of Millhaven” (*Murder Ballads*) the listener is transported to vivid imaginary worlds and invited into horror roller-coasters. The listening experience is very much enhanced by the fact that these songworlds combine the escapist lure of a fictional narrative and realistic (and therefore relatable) bearings. This conflation of realism and fiction surfaces in the use of story-telling markers such as evocative places, times and characters to spur on the listener’s imagination, and more realistic bearings. For instance, the towns of New Haven (in “Crow Jane”) or

²²² HARPAM, Geoffrey. “The Grotesque: First Principles.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34. 4 (1976): 464. Harpham puts forward a four-fold typology of Grotesque as caricature, comic grotesque (with an emphasis on the ludicrous and satiric, fantastic grotesque, and gothic-macabre.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 464.

Millhaven (in “The Curse of Millhaven”) delineate a fictional geographical space for the listener to roam, much as a reader roams the fictional geographies of a novel. Elsewhere, the songworld’s geography is fictionalised and dramatised by such suggestive names as “The Bucket of Blood” (“Stagger Lee”) or “Reprobate Fields” (“The Loom of the Land”) which add to the figurative texture of the song and intensify its dramatic build-up by heralding the upcoming horror content.

The realistic dimension of the songworld is conveyed through ordinary places resonating with the listener’s reality. Such geographical ordinariness as “the mission house” and “the little house on the hill” (“Papa Won’t Leave You Henry”), “the old dance room on the edge of town” (“John Finn’s wife”), the viaduct at the edge of town, the square, the mills (“Red Right Hand”), Millhaven High, the Mayor’s Residence (“The Curse of Millhaven”) contextualises the song in the chartered territory of a generic North-American town known to the listener. Consequently, the songworld is brought to the threshold of the listener’s familiar reality, which facilitates their identification and projection, and accordingly enhances their immersion.

Moreover, contrary to Harvey’s preferred one-to-one mode, Cave’s broad character gallery and detailed characterisation bring the listener into interaction with a fictional community, thereby positioning them as a virtual protagonist of the song. For instance, in the cautionary tale “The Kindness of Strangers” (*Murder Ballads*), Mary Bellows the naïve country-girl and her ruthless murderer Richard Slade are both afforded detailed characterisation so that like novel characters, they come to life narratively, her as a wide-eyed idealist (“in hope and loneliness”), and him as an archetypal murderous seducer from the folklore (he “tipped his hat and winked his eye” at her). In keeping with the folklore tradition, the name “Richard Slade” heralds the upcoming murder, hence the listener is both in a prescient and omniscient position, especially as the outcome of the encounter is stated from the opening lines: “they found Mary Bellows ‘cuffed to the bed/with a rag in her mouth and a bullet in her head.” The graphic horror of the depiction is all the more effective as the listener is given an insight into the character’s inner and outer lives, and therefore empathises with them. The fact that she comes from Arkansas, travelled to the sea in pursuit of her dream, and is lonely, creates empathy with her, and therefore heightens the listener’s mental and emotional engagement with the song. Cave’s extensive characterisation is in stark contrast with Harvey’s minimalistic characterisation in her early albums. As a result, Cave’s persona as external narrator or narrator-protagonist is overtly set within a fictional frame and thus distinct from his real person, whereas Harvey’s persona blends in with her protagonists’.

Consequently, the listening experiences differ: with Harvey the listener is scripted into the song and the song temporality merges with the listening act, whereas with Cave the listener is a spectator of the horror, and is therefore afforded psychic distance, and a choice of listener positions.

Song formats

Looking at Cave’s North American diptych of *Henry’s Dream* and *Murder Ballads* as fictional narratives, it is worth delineating the various storytelling modes and tones of the songs in order to comprehend the various dramatic scripts at hand. Consequently, I have devised a four-fold song typology for *Henry’s Dream* and *Murder Ballads*: the lament, the blues-rock stampede, the Gothic Blues song, and the love song, as featured in the table below:

| Type of song | <i>Henry’s Dream</i> | <i>Murder Ballads</i> |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Lament | Christina the Astonishing When I First Came to Town The Loom of the Land | Song of Joy The Kindness of Strangers |
| Blues-rock Stampede | Papa won’t Leave You Henry I had a Dream Joe Brother My Cup is Empty John Finn’s Wife Jack the Ripper | The Curse of Millhaven Stagger Lee |
| Gothic Blues | | Crow Jane O’Malley’s Bar Lovely Creature |
| Love Song | Straight to You | Henry Lee (L) The Wild Rose (L) |
| Other | | Death is not the End (Bob Dylan cover) |

The lament²²⁴, as a piece of music expressing intense sorrow, is in the dark Romantic vein in its focus on suffering and on the atrocity of the crimes committed. The music is slow and melancholy, the vocal range harmoniously balladic to occasionally sinister to signify the

²²⁴ “Lament.” A song, piece of music, or poem expressing grief or sorrow. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford Reference, 2016.
<<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/lament>>

omnipresence of danger and horror (e.g., “Song of Joy”, “The Loom of the Land”). The tone is sombre and cautionary, and the listener is positioned as external spectator.

What I call the blues-rock Stampede²²⁵ is a boisterous song narrated and performed in hyperbolic style, sharing the melodramatic and epic texture of tall tales from the American Frontier, it is comic grotesque and parodic in both lyrics and delivery (hence a vocal range including shouting and polyvocality). It has high black humour content (e.g., “Stagger Lee”, “John Finn’s Wife”), its sound is relentlessly percussive, and its vocals distorted and mostly in loud range, conveying the violence and borderline insanity of the characters.

Gothic Blues songs share the blues-rock Stampedes’ comic grotesque treatment of the horror content (e.g., the black humour in “Crow Jane” and the narcissistic self-aggrandising in “O’Malley’s Bar”). However, contrary to the relentlessly percussive soundscape of the blues-rock Stampede, the Gothic Blues sonic pattern is hauntingly circular, imparting a sense of doom and impending disaster. The listener is thus held captive to the hovering loops, and forced to watch the horror narrative unfold. For instance, when listening to “Lovely Creature”, we are forced into murderous intimacy with the narrator-protagonist who meticulously describes the build-up to his murder: the encounter with the “lovely creature”, their walk through the mountains, and her subsequent murder. The depiction of the landscape also forebodes the murder: “the mad moaning winds” and “the desert writhing with diabolical things” seem to conspire with the murderer and spur him on. All the while, the listener is made further complicit with the murder by the soundscape itself, in that not only is the listener enmeshed in the obsessive loops, but they are also made keenly aware of the upcoming crime through a suggestive vocal backdrop of howling humans, wolves, and wind. Moreover, the song narrative is eerily punctuated by the “lalalala” singalong of female back-vocals, which provides a balladic counterpoint to the scream soundscape and murder narrative. While the folk-inflected female vocals should offer a comparative respite from the oppressive scream soundscape, instead they actually heighten the sense of sonic confinement, as their repetitiveness segues into the circular sonic pattern of the musical loops.

5. Cave’s Murderous Complicity

The listener to Cave’s Gothic blues song is not only positioned as a helpless spectator of horror, but they are also given narrative clues, in the form of foreboding landscapes, as

²²⁵ REYNOLDS and PRESS. *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock’n’Roll*. *Op.Cit.*, 164.

mentioned above, but also through narratorial hints. Consequently, the listener is not only a passive receiver of the songtext, but they also are prompted into reconstructing the full meaning of the text, and they thus co-produce textual meaning.

Reception theory²²⁶ postulates that textual meaning is not stable or linear, but in its reliance upon the receiver for interpretation, it is bound up with its reception context. According to Stuart Hall's 1973 encoding/decoding model of communication,²²⁷ a text, whether a literary, filmic or creative, is not passively received by the audience, but actively interpreted by them. Therefore, this interpretative work is subject to the audience's personal and cultural perceptions. Transposed to popular music, because the songtext is decoded by the listener, the listening experience is inherently interpretative and co-enunciative: the listener interprets it by bringing in their own subjectivity and imaginative response to the text.

In this respect, the songtext can be approached as what Roland Barthes names a "writerly text", that is a "productive model" that invites the reader into a creative co-writing process ("ourselves writing", or a "work-in-reading" (*lecture-travail*)).²²⁸ Likewise, the songtext should be construed as plural, and approached as a constellation of signifiers opening multiple interpretative lines upon reception.

Based upon Reception Theory and the Barthesian notion of writerly text, we can posit Harvey's and Cave's songs as the site of the listener's creative interaction with a monstrous songtext. It is noteworthy that through the rock music medium, the song also brings the listener into contact with non-verbal elements: music, performance, and the voice. Therefore, even though the textual element of a song can be subject to literary analysis (especially with such carefully crafted lyrics as Cave's), the songtext should not be approached as autonomous, but as performed songtext. Located at the intersection of multiple interactions with the live voice, the music, and the performer, the song partakes of a complex multifocal dynamic. In other words, the lyrical content is *not* the song, but only one of its components, and therefore its interpretation should be holistic and embrace its entire interactive constellation.

²²⁶ Derived from reader response literary theory and the late 1960s/early 1970s works of French Post-structuralist Roland Barthes and German theorist Hans Robert Jauss, Reception Theory postulates that media texts have no meaning in and of themselves. Instead, meaning-making is produced from the creative interaction between receiver and text. Reception Theory as propounded by Stuart Hall posits that the receiver's decoding operations are shaped by contextual factors such as individual and social identity and perceptions.

²²⁷ HALL, Stuart. "Encoding/decoding." *Culture, Media, Language*. Hall Stuart, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis, eds. London: Hutchinson, 1980. 128-138.

²²⁸ BARTHES, Roland. *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002. 4-5.

Extrapolating from Reception Theory and the centrality of the receiver's productive work, song performance can thus be construed as a creative process whereby the song's interpretation depends upon the listener's own experience of performance. Simon Frith's formulation of performance interpretation foregrounds the prevalence of context over text, and thus emphasises the productive role of the listener.²²⁹ Frith builds his argument on the premise that listening is an act of performance in which the audience perform the song for themselves.²³⁰ In this respect, the listener is posited as a co-performer *actively* engaging in performance by drawing upon their own experience.

Moreover, discourse analyst van Dijk's "situational model" provides a valuable tool to consider song reception by, in that it brings to light the importance of personal knowledge in the process of "discourse production and understanding".²³¹ Van Dijk thus argues that "the processes of comprehension have a strategic nature",²³² in that they require drawing information from different discursive levels and from the communication context. Interpretation is therefore strategic because it involves anticipation, retroaction, and perpetual adjustments. Applied to the song, the interpretative process involves multiple productive interactions: with the music, the lyrics, and the stylistic idiom of the performer. The performer can also manipulate interpretation either narratively by withholding or strategically distilling information, or through performance, by introducing dissonance, exaggeration, or parody.

Cave uses such co-productive strategies, notably by introducing dramatic lapses in otherwise linear narratives, thereby inciting the listener to reconstruct the story and become *de-facto* co-narrator. This manipulation heightens the listener's mental engagement whilst making them complicit with the narrative. For instance, in the song about a female serial-killer "Crow Jane" (1996), Cave compels the listener's co-enunciation through ellipsis. He conveys the protagonist's killing spree in New Haven obliquely by stating two headcounts for the town: 48 at the beginning of the song, and subsequently 28. The phrase "population *now* 28" (italics mine) highlights the time gap with the time signifier "now" and draws attention to the discrepancy between the two figures. Because the two figures are interspersed with an overt allusion to Crow Jane's guns (her "guns drunk and smoking"), and occur in a narrative of overt violence ("she was walking the road of hate"), the listener can only infer that she committed

²²⁹ FRITH. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music. Op.Cit.*, 203-205.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 203.

²³¹ VAN DIJK, Teun. "Episodic models in discourse." *Comprehending Oral and Written Language*. Ed. Rosalind Horowitz and S. Jay Samuels. San Diego: Academic Press, 1987. 161-196.

²³² *Ibid.*, 165.

mass murder. In prompting the listener to calculate and deduce what happened to the twenty missing souls, Cave manipulates the listener into becoming not only his co-narrator, but also a complicit monster. Indeed, the playful bravado of the announcement trivialises the killing spree and turns into a game and a source of black humour, and a moment of shared barbaric delight between Cave and the listener. The fact that the listener engages in the transgressive game, even unwittingly, makes them complicit in the horror. Of course, Cave's audience are consciously entering transgressive listening territory, therefore Cave's humorous nudge comes as a welcome mark of sulphuric complicity.

Similarly, the "Lovely Creature" (1992) murder (a man going on a murderous walk with an innocent girl) is suggested elliptically through fragments to be pieced back together for meaning, as evident in the final lines:

When I got home, my lovely creature
She was no longer with me
Somewhere she lies, this lovely creature
Beneath the drifting sands.

The meaning of these lines can only be fully elucidated by cross-checking them with the previous lines. Only then does the inchoate violence of the landscape come to fruition and shed light on the unspoken crime, and on its implicit perpetrator. Retrospectively, the "mad, moaning winds" that "lashed and whipped" the narrator-protagonist and "the deserts (that) writhed with diabolical things" take on fresh significance as harbingers of the final murder, and the interplay between the ominous landscape and the protagonist's actions becomes evident and essential to the interpretation of the final lines. The malevolent life force of the landscape thus seems to contaminate the protagonist's mindset, and the verbs "lashed" and "whipped" suggest that the natural elements urged the protagonist to murder. The listener is thus made to decode the lacunary narrative and recreate its full meaning, in a process of narrative reconstruction. Recreating the fictional narrative implies that the listener adjusts their comprehension retroactively, and therefore their full understanding requires their implicit cooperation with the narrator. This interaction between the murderous narrator and the elucidating listener makes them co-enunciators, hence the listener is not just witnessing monstrosity, but co-producing it. In other words, the boundaries between the monstrous narrator and their listener become porous: the listener briefly becomes a monstrous co-narrator through the act of deciphering.

Cave's elliptic song template thus acts as a lacunary narrative vignette that, in forcing the listener to co-produce a monstrous narrative, reveals the listener's agency, and implicit

monstrosity. Through this co-narration of monstrosity the narrator-performer and their listener become monstrous kin. In this narrative role-play, roles are interchangeable, and the cloak of monstrosity is passed from narrator-performer to listener. Consequently, the boundaries of narration and reception become so blurred that the act of listening itself is monstrous. The songtext thus turns the listener into an “implicit monster”, according to the same contaminating process that Hock Soon Ng’s identifies in contemporary monster narratives.²³³ This pleasure in playing co-monster is also present in some of Harvey’s songs such as “50ft Queenie” (1993), where the listener enjoys a violent ride in grotesque attire, and gets to play with the taboos of transgender freakery and genderfuck rape.

Conclusion

Having probed the representation and performance of monstrosity in Harvey’s and Cave’s works, it is evident that Harvey’s and Cave’s scripts of monstrosity can be either consumed as a spectacle (as vicarious pleasure) or as narrative co-participation. Whereas the listener’s participation in Cave’s violent scripts primarily occurs through co-narration, in Harvey’s it occurs through brutal and antagonistic role-casting. In both instances, the listening experience is the site of a monstrous role-play both with the song’s protagonists, and with the performer.

What those monstrous scripts reveal is the plurality of the listener positions: they can be positioned as co-enunciator enjoying complicit co-enactment of monstrous identities as is the case in Cave’s murder ballads, or as the victim of the monster-performer’s assaults, as is the case in some of Harvey’s early songs. In both instances, the songtext acts as a monstrous contact zone, as a co-productive site of monstrosity. Therefore, monstrosity is not just an aesthetic feature but a structural centrepiece: the monstrous experience not only underpins the two songworlds, but it also conditions the interaction between performer and listener. Indeed, the monstrous experience on offer is not so much a spectacle of violence as a monstrous role-play for the reader to engage in, not only with the song’s protagonists, but with the performer, as the impersonator and/or narrator of monstrosity.

²³³ HOCK-SOON NG. *Dimensions of Monstrosity in Contemporary Narratives: Theory, Psychoanalysis, Postmodernism. Op. Cit.*

CONCLUSION TO PART I

Like being hit over the head with a sledge-hammer for 3 minutes.

PJ Harvey²³⁴

1. The Consequences of Extreme Hybridising on the Listener

In conflating established dichotomies such as human/animal, female/male, benevolent/malevolent, repulsive/attractive, Harvey and Cave imply that binary oppositions are inoperative. Through this prism, monstrous characters are not presented as radically “other” but are exposed as mere composites in constant flux. Harveyan and Cavian monsters are indeed *human* hybrids, either intrinsically (e.g., inhuman characters such as psychopaths and sexual monsters) or biologically so (e.g., hybrids straddling the boundaries of humanity and animality). The constant intermingling blurs the categorical distinctions between monstrosity and humanity, making them so intertwined that they can no longer be told apart, let alone pitched as polar opposites.

This focus on non-dualism and indeterminacy delineates a non-binary vortex at the heart of Harvey’s and Cave’s songworlds, whereby all rational formulations of humanity and the world collapse. Indeed, the two musicians do not let us rest on our ontological certainties: in the face of their lyrical and embodied monstrous identities, we no longer know what marks humanity out, and our self-identity as human beings becomes uncertain. Therefore, the listening experience jostles the listener into an epistemological abyss that engulfs their self-identity as a human being, as well as the performers’. Through their extreme and extravagant impersonations and self-representations, Harvey and Cave present their personae identities as hybrid, liminal, and intrinsically intermingled with otherness. As such, the two performers cast themselves as “grotesque subjects”, namely shape-shifting figures of inner estrangement, contradiction and transgression. Cultural theorist Sara Cohen-Shabot conceives of the “grotesque subject” as shaped by intersubjectivity, and “constantly reemerging from its amalgamation with the outside world and others”.²³⁵ Building upon Cohen-Shabot’s notion of grotesque subjectivity, Harvey’s and Cave’s personae can be construed as expressive of a grotesque ontology that embraces

²³⁴ HARVEY, PJ. *iTunes Originals*, 2004.

²³⁵ COHEN SHABOT, Sara. “Towards a Grotesque Phenomenology of Ethical Eroticism.” *Women: A Cultural Review* 24.1 (2013): 64.

change, fluidity and disorder”²³⁶, and therefore, their performance is radically unpredictable, and accordingly forges an unstable bond with their audience.

2. The Lure of Monstrous Identities and the Third System

Jerome Cohen argues that in inducing “a radical rethinking of boundary and normality”,²³⁷ monsters not only invite but *compel* a “third system allowing polyphony, mixed response [...] and resistance to integration”.²³⁸ Therefore, the receiver’s response to monstrosity is, of necessity, ambivalent. Cohen’s definition of the “third system” points to a structural overlap with the Grotesque as an aesthetic conflating polar opposites and thus exposing the porousness of categorical boundaries. Like the monstrous, the Grotesque repudiates dualism and thrives on paradox and contradiction, and therefore compels a fresh epistemology to comprehend the world by. Cohen’s “third system” draws upon Jerrold Hogle’s notion that monster is nonbinary polymorphism made flesh, and as such opens new potentialities for human ontology: monster “allows a deeper play of differences, a nonbinary polymorphism at the “‘base’ of human nature”.²³⁹

Expanding upon Cohen’s argument, I would argue that Harvey’s and Cave’s monstrous songs are a return to the forbidden, to the primal filth and chaos that our civilised self had to cast out in order to form a unified identity. As hybrids, monsters embody what Julia Kristeva calls the *abject*, that is the “in-between... ambiguous... composite”²⁴⁰ part of our beings that we cast out during subjective formation.²⁴¹ Kristeva construes monsters as our othered selves returning from our original bog and threatening to take us back into it. Monsters simultaneously disgust and thrill us with the promise of the primal mire that lurks beneath our subjective construction. Effectively, monsters embody the lure of self-dissolution: they radiate a primal life force that exposes the constructedness of our subjective identity and challenges its integrity.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

²³⁷ COHEN. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, *Op.Cit.*, 6.

²³⁸ COHEN. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, *Op.Cit.*, 7.

²³⁹ HOGLE, Jerrold. “The Struggle for A Dichotomy: Abjection in Jekyll And His Interpreters.” *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde After One Hundred Years*. Ed. William Veeder and Gordon Hirsch. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988. 161. Qtd. in COHEN *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. *Op. Cit.*, 7.

²⁴⁰ KRISTEVA, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982. 4. According to Kristeva, the abjection process enables the subject to banish fundamental ambiguities that would prevent them from forging and projecting a consistent self.

The monstrous song thus acts as a playground for the audience and performers to shed the shackles of civilised behaviour and reconnect with their “othered selves”. Through the embodied medium of rock music, this fresh epistemology of performance and experience occurs within an inter-subjective frame, in that the performers not only narrate but also impersonate their monstrosity through their body language and self-representations. Therefore, for the span of a song, they *are* monstrous, and as such they elicit an immediate response on the part of their listeners: horror, fear, disorientation, or complicit delight. As an intrinsically intersubjective space, the song thus creates a direct exchange between a monstrous mediator (the performer) and a receiver (the listener). Therefore, the song is a monstrous event, and the site of monstrous experiences and transactions.

3. The Listener-Performer Bond as Transgressive and Sadomasochistic Interaction

As a consensual event, the popular song can be formulated as a participatory game wherein listener and performer engage in both scripted (in the song narrative and music) and unscripted interactions (in the live performance). Harvey and Cave can thus assign the listener’s role in that event, either inviting them to enjoy the jubilation of monstrous co-enactment, or subjecting them to their monstrous salves. Therefore, the monstrous song entails a paradoxical experience of complicity and antagonism. And yet, since music is a hedonistic pursuit, whether the listeners are roped into complicit or antagonistic role-play, they are consensually engaged in a *pleasure* experience. Therefore, the space of the monstrous song opens a radically transgressive listener-performer bond marked by radical unpredictability, and a pleasure issuing from cruelty and monstrosity: barbaric delight. Harvey’s and Cave’s monstrous songs act as “wishfulfilment drama”²⁴² that provide pleasure precisely because they break away from rational and social constraints. As rock objects, they foreground physicality and emotional intensity, and thus actualise monstrosity on the corporeal, mental, and emotional levels. The song lyrics offer a dramatic narrative and interact with the musical lines and performance strategies to create a multifocal experiential field, as the mind, senses and vocal intimacy with the singer come together with explosive force. When they perform such extravagant tales of barbaric self-affirmation such as “50ft Queenie” or “Stagger Lee”, Harvey and Cave invite us

²⁴² COHEN. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture. Op. Cit.*, 18.

into transgressive complicity through a co-performance of violence. The listener thus momentarily share the spoils of the violent song and acts as a co-monster to the performer, in a shared moment of sadistic jubilation and unbridled barbaric delight.

However, the sacrificial kinship between the performers and their audience is no plain sailing either, as the sadistic dynamic also contaminates the music itself, and produces sonic monstrosity, which assaults the listener's senses. The two musicians thus use sound as a weapon to inflict pain and discomfort on the listener, and to destabilise them. Sonic violence surfaces in an aesthetic of discordance and disharmony, through such as sound effects, vocal or instrumental distortion, screaming, pounding percussions, sonic overload. For instance, "Stagger Lee"²⁴³ ends with a high-pitched holler that spans the last forty seconds of the song, which makes the listener physically hurt from the strident scream. Elsewhere in "Mickey Mouse and the Good Bye Man", the listener is subjected to the aural assault of the stop-and-go sonic texture combined with Cave's howling. Harvey too uses pounding percussions (e.g., "50ft Queenie") and shrill strings (e.g., "Plants and Rags") to conduct her sonic attack on the listener. In particular, Harvey causes aural confusion with vocal schizophrenia, by multi-layering her own vocals, or by singing in extreme vocal registers (i.e., raspy male/high pitch) and in a distorted style (e.g., the muffled or ambisexual vocals). As Harvey multiplies vocally, the listener is enmeshed with multiple subjectivities, and deprived of steady interpersonal bearings.

In introducing unexpected noise, these disruptive elements produce sonic monstrosity, which causes the listener's experience to slip. When subjected to Harvey's raspy in-breathing or Cave's howling, the listener is disoriented and thrown into "polymorphous perception",²⁴⁴ that is no longer able to decode the sound. Sonic monstrosity thus places the listener in a double position: they are both the performer's vicarious co-tormentor (or willing spectator), and their sonic victim. The listener-performer bond is a game of affinity and antagonism whereby the listener experiences monstrosity as a spectacle, as wishfulfilling transgression, and as sensory assault. These shock tactics are consistent with the function and purpose of the Grotesque, which Philip Thomson formulates as a disorienting emotional mode: "the impact of the grotesque is one of sudden shock which is likely to stun, bewilder or nonplus – the mind takes a few seconds to function dispassionately again".²⁴⁵ However, insofar as music is a conscious pursuit, Harvey's and Cave's sonic monstrosity is consensual experience.

²⁴³ CAVE, Nick et al. *Murder Ballads*. Mute, 1996. CD

²⁴⁴ IHDE, Don. *Listening and Voice*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2007. 233.

²⁴⁵ THOMSON. *The Grotesque. Op.Cit.*, 47.

Paul Hegarty defines noise performance as sadomasochism, positing that both performer and audience have consented to a shared musical experience.²⁴⁶ Hegarty also posits a connection between noise and eroticism, in that not only does noise act directly upon the senses, but also in establishing relation flows between the audience and the performer, it enables both parties to lose themselves (in uncertainty, loudness, the here and now of the song). Consequently, noise manifests the listener's and performer's readiness for subjective dissolution, and binds them in erotic interaction: "these flows also create an ecstatically shared situation, where we do not all merge as one, but in a process of negativity (i.e., mutual loss of self through proximity to the other)".²⁴⁷

Extrapolating from Hegarty, I would argue that the monstrous song operates as an event that enables "mutual loss of self through proximity to the other" by sadomasochistic means: the listener expects the performer not only to narrate and impersonate monstrosity, but also to actualise it into sensory experience. Therefore, Harvey's and Cave's monstrous songs could be read as a musical translation of French poet and playwright Antonin Artaud's "Theatre of cruelty".²⁴⁸ Artaud deployed a "Theatre of cruelty" aiming to transpose drama to a sensory level, so as to short-circuit the audience's rationality and connect with them viscerally, through their emotions and senses. Artaud's notion that theatre should act as "organised anarchy"²⁴⁹ also ties in with Cave's and Harvey's shock tactics: they disrupt the linear musical experience, jolt the listener into unpredictable grounds and sensory immediacy. Harvey and Cave radically reconfigure the hedonistic component of rock performance as paradoxical experience: pleasure in displeasure, co-transgression, and a sacrificial kinship relying upon violence and extreme unpredictability. This grotesque mutability at the core of their music is what enables them to shift across tones, genres, and cultural spaces. In Part II, we will probe how the core hybridity

²⁴⁶ HEGARTY, Paul, "Brace and embrace: Masochism in noise performance." *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience*. Biddle Ian, and Marie Thompson, eds. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. 133-146.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

²⁴⁸ ARTAUD, Antonin. *The Theatre and Its Double*. Trans. Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Press, 1958. 89-100. "The "Theatre of Cruelty" is both a philosophy and a discipline. Artaud (1896–1948) wanted to disrupt the relationship between audience and performer. The 'cruelty' in Artaud's thesis was sensory, it exists in the work's capacity to shock and confront the audience, to go beyond words and connect with the emotions: to wake up the nerves and the heart. He believed gesture and movement to be more powerful than text. Sound and lighting could also be used as tools of sensory disruption. The audience, he argued, should be placed at the centre of a piece of performance. Theatre should be an act of 'organised anarchy.'" TRIPNEY, Natacha. "Antonin Artaud and the Theatre of Cruelty." *The British Library*. 7 September 2017.

<<https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/antonin-artaud-and-the-theatre-of-cruelty>>

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

of Harvey's and Cave's aesthetic and performance also translates into transcultural and transgeneric experimentations.

PART II. THE WORLD IS A HYBRID STAGE

Deep into that darkness peering.

Edgard Allan Poe ²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ POE, "The Raven", 1845.

INTRODUCTION TO PART II

As argued in Part I, the monstrous song acts as a script to be co-performed by the performer and the listener, and as such, it is the locus of a monstrous interaction between them, as co-monsters, or monster to victim. Having studied the monstrous strategies deployed in these scripts and how they problematise humanity in grotesque terms, we are going to examine the cultural and generic lineage of Harvey's and Cave's songs of monstrosity.

Harvey's and Cave's songworlds may be aesthetically broad-ranging, mutable and prone to stylistic shifts, however they are distinctly shaped by Anglo-American traditions which act as breeding ground for their explorations of monstrous identities. Inherent in the rock medium, the blues influence is evident in their music and lyrics, and established cross-referentially through staple narrative themes and folk-blues borrowings. The American backdrop is especially prominent in Cave's works, as his 1984-1996 foray into Deep South territory spans nine albums and one novel. Harvey's American influences may be more sporadic but they are nonetheless woven into her musical fabric and inform her sonic and thematic palettes.

The folk-blues tradition ushers in a full-fledged folklore and its related cultural space: the American Deep South, along with its wider cultural heritage of storytelling and Southern Gothic literature. Therefore, the Deep South acts as a fulcrum of intermusicality and intertextuality whereby Harvey's and Cave's sonic and lyrics get cross-pollinated. In this respect, their music can be construed as a confluence zone between the rock apparatus, the American folk-blues tradition, and the wider Deep South cultural matrix.

If we understand these cultural topographies as encompassing a wider "cultural constellation such as geographical environments, objects, and social interactions",²⁵¹ the Deep South landscapes shape the social behaviours and emotions not only of their real inhabitants, but also of their imaginary (i.e., literary and musical) denizens too. Focusing on the impact of the geographical environment on the human psyche, the field of psychogeography "describes the point where psychology and geography collide, a means of calibrating the behavioural impact of place".²⁵² Extrapolating from this focus cultural and psychological impact of

²⁵¹ HABERMANN, Ina, and Daniela KELLER, eds. *English Topographies in Literature and Culture: Space, Place, And Identity*. Leiden; Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2016. 2.

²⁵² COVERLEY, Merlin. *Psychogeography*. Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2010. 10. Coverley surveys the ramifications of the term "psychogeography" and its intellectual, political, and literary developments in British

geography on the human psyche, we will examine how Cave's and Harvey's cultural crossovers inflect their representation of humanity and monstrosity.

Media and Cultural Studies academic Isabella Van Elferen argues that as a gothic text, Cave's music is haunted by other texts, musical traditions, and historical periods, and can thus be conceived of as spectral.²⁵³ I contend that the concept of spectrality is also relevant to Harvey's music, which exhibits similar tendencies towards intertextuality and intermusicality. This chapter purports to analyse how Cave's and Harvey's "rock gone spectral"²⁵⁴ incorporates the Anglo-American psychogeographies and cultural imaginaries and brings them into fruitful interaction. In particular, we will examine how in sliding from the American Deep South to English Dark Romanticism, the two musicians instil peculiarly spectral dimensions of monstrosity into their musical texts, and thereby hybridise their aesthetics.

and French cultures. The term "psychogeography" was originally coined in 1955 by French Marxist theorist Guy Debord who defined the concept as "the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals" Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography, 1955: 23. Qtd. in COVERLEY, Merlin. *Psychogeography*. Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2010. *Op. Cit.*, 10.

²⁵³ VAN ELFEREN, Isabella. "Nick Cave and Gothic: Ghost Stories, Fucked Organs, Spectral Liturgy." *The Art of Nick Cave*. Ed. John H. Baker. Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2013. 175-188.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

CHAPTER 6: Aesthetic Mingling: Delving into the American Deep South and the Balladic Style

In order to examine Harvey's and Cave's interactions with the American Deep South traditions and their aesthetic implications, we are going to conduct a comparative study of two contemporaneous albums that are both marked by American hybridisation: Harvey's *To Bring You My Love* (1995) and Cave's *Murder Ballads* (1996). The two albums resonate with each other in their reliance on the North American cultural setting and on the musical traditions of blues and folk music. As contemporaneous works of cultural and generic hybridisation, they stand out as generically akin, therefore it is worth parsing them for intersections and patterns.

It is also noteworthy that *Murder Ballads* provided an opportunity for Harvey's and Cave's first personal and musical encounter. Harvey sang the duet "Henry Lee" with Cave, and the collaboration sparked a one year love affair, which was much publicised in the music press of the time. The concurrence of their singing collaboration, love affair and American folk and blues inflected albums raises questions about the interplay between their personal exchanges and their musical productions: to what extent, if at all, did they influence each other's albums? Is their shared North American aesthetic purely coincidental? The matter of the two albums' potential inceptive ties remains an open question.

1. Aesthetic and Cultural Overview of *To Bring You My Love* (1995) and *Murder Ballads* (1996)

1.1. *To Bring You My Love*: The American Blues Revisited

Harvey's third album *To Bring You My Love* effects a radical stylistic shift away from its grunge-blues predecessors *Dry* (1992) and *Rid of Me* (1993) in terms of cohesion, formal coherence, and imagery. *To Bring You My Love* breaks away from discordance and the pounding guitarwork of *Dry* and *Rid of Me* to a more cohesive musical territory where vocals are no longer drowned out by thrashing instrumentation but function symbiotically with the

music. In foregrounding both vocal and lyrical contents, this new aesthetic enables more expansive lyrical narratives, and facilitates a leap into a narrative-based lyric.

The album consists of ten blues-infused ballads, most of them with expansive experimental soundscapes (six), two “blues stampedes”²⁵⁵/ Gothic blues pieces and two claustrophobic blues pieces. Overall, the album unfolds like an epic of love as agony and obsessive longing, as the protagonists pine for their beloved, however it also features violent outbursts (e.g., “Long Snake Moan”), an infanticidal song (e.g., “Down By the Water”), and dark interstitial pieces (e.g., “Tecló”, “Working for the Man”, “I Think I Am a Mother”).

Simon Reynolds commented that many *Dry* and *Rid of Me* songs were located in “the classic blues combat zone, love’s ‘killing floor’ ”,²⁵⁶ which reflects the intimate connection between “carnal desire and emotional carnage” in Harvey’s songs. I contend that *To Bring You My Love* also dwells in “love’s killing floor” in its focus on the pitfalls of love, and in its wavering between longing and rage. Whilst establishing Harvey’s blues lineage, the analogy with blues singer songwriter Howlin’ Wolf’s 1964 Chicago blues classic “Killing Floor” also aptly encapsulates the sonic and lyrical blues quality of her early music. In particular, *To Bring You My Love* is very much caught up in the same romantic predicament as Howlin’ Wolf’s protagonist when he sings:

I let ya put me on the killin’ floor.
Lord knows, I shoulda been gone.
And I wouldn’t’ve been here, down on the killin’ floor.²⁵⁷

Harvey’s heroines too are “down on the killin’ floor”, both literally and figuratively; they are all in the throes of an intoxicatingly toxic form of love, whether romantic, maternal or religious. Moreover, on *To Bring You My Love*, the narrator-protagonists not only desire love but are also willing to sacrifice everything for it, in a self-destructing manner reminiscent of the Stooges’ song “Dirt” and more generally of Robert Johnson’s blues with its focus on hardship and the Devil.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ REYNOLDS, Simon. *Bring the Noise: 20 Years of Writing About Hip Rock and Hip-Hop. Op. Cit.*, 165. Reynolds talks about “the monstrous, blues-rock stampede” of *Rid of Me*. The phrase aptly captures the songs where Harvey rages and screams in blues-rock codes, with the percussive vocals and music of rock and the more enduring insistence of blues.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

²⁵⁷ Howlin’ Wolf, perf. “Killing Floor”, 1964. <<https://youtu.be/dOEildgmwNQ>>

²⁵⁸ Harvey’s multiple references to the Devil and self-damnation bring to mind American Delta bluesman’s Robert Johnson’s song “Crossroad”. In the wake of his song, Johnson (1911-1938) became the centre of a Faustian blues myth that alleged he had sold his soul to the Devil in exchange for mastery of the guitar. These shady associations of the blues, notably the trope of self-damnation to the Devil, haunt Harvey’s album too.

The album's American lineage is explicitly encoded in scattered cross-references to Harvey's inspirations such as Captain Beefheart: the first song of the album "To Bring You My Love" opens with the line "I was born in the desert", which was also the opening line of Captain Beefheart's debut album *Safe as Milk* (1966), whilst Harvey's "Meet ze Monsta": borrows a line from Beefheart's "Tropical Hot Dog Night": "meet the monster tonight" (the second track of album *Shiny Beast (Bat Chain Puller)*, 1978). "Down by the Water" is loosely based on an early 1900 Southern folk song "Salty Dog" or "Salty Dog Blues", as it hinges on the borrowed line "Lil' fish big fish swimmin' in the water" for its chorus. The song has been covered by bluegrass bands, and also notably by folk and blues musicians Leadbelly (1888-1949) and Mississippi John Hurt (1892-1966). These lyrical quotes and cross-references in Harvey's lyrics not only establish the album's American anchoring, but they also have a bearing on the reception of the songs which, being signalled as blues-inspired, will be interpreted by the listeners within the blues apparatus.

The blues-inflected sonic of the album is melded in with a twist, as Harvey fleshes out the staple blues formula to create a syncretic soundscape of her own, by replacing the blues bassline with deep rumbling organs and adding bells, chimes, vibraphone and keyboard to the two lead guitars. The resulting sonic tapestry is polymorphous, a sort of "Gothic Blues" combining the gritty realism of blues and a poetic darkness evocative of the psychic corridors of Gothic as an aesthetic of fear and extreme emotional states, and as the locus of self-dislocation.

1.2. Cave's *Murder Ballads* (1996)

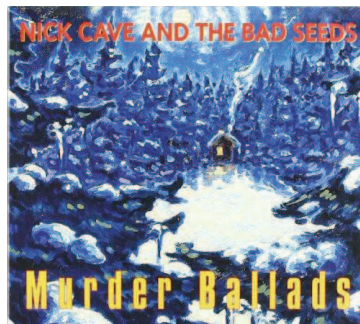
The album closes a twelve-year North American inflected output encompassing eight albums and a novel (*And the Ass Saw the Angel*, 1989), infused with the blues, country-folk, and a Southern Gothic aesthetic of backwoods communities and alienated protagonists on the verge of subjective dislocation.

Murder Ballads is composed of nine Anglo-American style ballads relating horrific crimes such as the killing sprees of narcissistic serial killers, crimes of passion, and the opportunistic murders of roving psychopaths preying on helpless victims. The songs' tonal palette is wide-ranging, and Cave alternately depicts the horrific events as heroic feats, tragedies, or comic-tragedies. As signalled in its title, the album's aesthetic line is broadly Anglo-American folk-blues, and as Cave revisits American folklore and traditions, he crafts his

ballads in two ways: by reinventing existing popular ballads about folk legends (e.g., “Stagger Lee”, “Henry Lee” and “Crow Jane”), and by writing his own songs in the ballad format (seven songs). In its marked concern for musical, cultural and narrative coherence, *Murder Ballads* stands out as one of Cave’s most formally coherent albums in his Southern production.

Cave’s formal adherence to the folk canon means that his songs could seamlessly segue into the folk repertoire. Contrary to Harvey whose instrumentation strays from the strict ballad tradition (notably in her inclusion of organs which are alien to the folk-blues idiom), Cave’s sonic texture is consistent with folk-blues songs. *Murder Ballads* thus includes five laments (i.e., songs focusing on the darkness of the murder and conveying sorrow in dark Romantic undertones and to a slow tempo), two Gothic blues ballads (i.e., a blues ballad conveying a sense of horror with touches of black humour), and two comic grotesque stampedes (i.e., jaunty songs with epic narratives and hyperbolic delivery, and high comic horror content). Additionally, the album closes with a collective cover of Bob Dylan’s “Death is not the End”²⁵⁹, thereby overtly establishing the album’s filiation with the contemporaneous balladic rock tradition, and framing the album as a collective re-creation of popular forms.

Folklore Visuals



Front cover of *Murder Ballads*, painting by Jean-Frédéric Schnyder²⁶⁰, “Landschaft I-XXXV”, courtesy of Kunsthau Aarau, Switzerland.

Cave’s concern with formal coherence not only surfaces in the lyrical and musical textures of his murderous narratives, but also in the album’s art-cover, which affords a visual

²⁵⁹ The album version of “Death Is Not The End” features Anita Lane, PJ Harvey, Shane MacGowan, and Kylie Minogue)

²⁶⁰ Jean-Frédéric Schnyder is a Swiss born painter (born 1945), a “lapsed conceptualist” who tackles the themes of hearth and home, and alternates sincerity and irony. SMITH, Roberta. “Jean-Frédéric Schnyder.” *The New York Times*, 8 December 2011. < <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/09/arts/design/jean-frederic-schnyder.html>>

access point into the album's songworld and distils the all-abiding sense of dread into a visual piece.

The painting features a visual dissonance between the folktale idyll of a house nestled in a snowy forest, and the album's title underneath, which drastically reassigns the meaning of the scene. The focal point of the painting is the house, as foregrounded in the composition and colour scheme. Firstly, the central position of the house in the painting attracts the viewer's gaze. Secondly, the house stands out from the rest of the scenery because it is located in a clearing, and the patch of snow before it contrasts with the surrounding blue forest. Moreover, the house is made all the more central by the fact that its window is the only touch of yellow in an otherwise blue and white colour scheme. The yellow-lit window, as the only warm colour in the painting, entices the viewer-traveller with its promise of cosy domesticity and solace. Therefore, the viewer is visually drawn to the house, and perceives it as a peaceful respite in an otherwise cold hostile environment.

Moreover, there is a poetic visual flow to the painting, as the wreathes of smoke rise from the house to the moonlight halo overhead, thereby establishing a visual connection between the house and the moon. Combined with a log-cabin in the snowy woods, the evocative visual flow conjures up a staple folktale setting. The album title *Murder Ballads* at the bottom compels the viewer to re-interpret the painting as ominous, by imparting fresh meaning to the house: its peaceful domesticity is thus revealed as under threat, and its central position turns it into the prime target of the forthcoming violence. The correlation between the intimation of violence and the house is further signified by the "murder ballads" font colour that matches the window's yellow halo. The cover artwork thus reassigns the meaning of the painting as the site of impending horror, and the viewer's gaze can thus be construed either as that of a spectator, or, more chillingly, that of a lurking murderer. The album cover heralds the musical aesthetic of the album and delineates a peculiar cartography of folktale horror.

Cave's explicit foregrounding of the North American anchoring of *Murder Ballads* through iconography and musical signifiers runs counter to the contemporaneous UK Indie scene, as will be argued the next paragraph.

1.3. Harvey and Cave as Mavericks on the UK Indie Rock Scene

At a time when the British cultural scene was at the peak of *Cool Britannia* with its emphasis on Britishness, the two albums stood out for their cultural non-alignment. In a counter-attack against the American grunge invasion by such bands as Pearl Jam, Soundgarden or Nirvana,²⁶¹ such prominent Britpop bands as Suede, Blur, and Pulp adopted a defiant revivalist style reflecting their transatlantic antagonism.

In such a polarised context, releasing albums celebrating transatlantic traditions clearly positioned Cave and Harvey beyond the pale of the British *Zeitgeist*, and in an indeterminate sub-genre. Since there was virtually no space for intercultural experimentations in the mono-cultural confines of Britpop, cross-cultural endeavours were relegated to the dance-culture margins, where a pro-hybridity rhetoric prevailed and aesthetic mingling was highly valued; hence genre and culture boundaries remained porous and in flux.²⁶² Fusion music mixing in African, Indian, Caribbean styles with dance music flourished in those margins, with the bands Cornershop, Transglobal Underground, and Massive Attack at the helm. However, contrary to their contemporaneous dance-scene, Harvey's and Cave's style did not go for a radical global collage, but indeed quite the opposite: both productions exhibited distinctive *Anglo-American* folk and blues inflections. Insofar as their stance was cultural anchoring rather than transglobal fusion, they drew specifically on the American musical and lyrical reservoir in order to weave its structural conventions and signifiers into the core structure of their works. Therefore, *To Bring You My Love* and *Murder Ballads* were, from the outset, eccentric in the literal sense of the term, unfolding off the cultural centre point of the day, and even off its existing collective margins. The albums were nonetheless "centric" in their abidance by the Anglo-American tradition.

Surprisingly, although *To Bring You My Love* and *Murder Ballads* ran against the UK Indie cultural tide of the day, they both achieved significant public and critical acclaim. *To Bring You My Love* received two Grammy Award nominations as Best Alternative Music Performance and Best Female Rock Vocal for the single "Down By The Water", and was nominated for the Mercury Music Prize. *Murder Ballads* became the band's biggest commercial success to date, notably thanks to the hit single "Where the Wild Roses Grow", a

²⁶¹ HARRIS, John. *The Last Party: Britpop, Blair and the Demise of English Rock*. London: Fourth Estate, 2003, 79-80; Stuart MACONIE, "Who Do You Think You Are Kidding, Mr Cobain?", *Select*, April 1993. 60-71.

²⁶² REYNOLDS. *Bring the Noise: 20 Years of Writing About Hip Rock and Hip-Hop*. *Op. Cit.*, 272-281.

duet between Cave and pop-star Kylie Minogue that won an ARIA Award (Australian Recording Industry Association Music Awards) ²⁶³ in 1996. Cave's other guest performers on the album include PJ Harvey and Shane MacGowan. *Murder Ballads* is the album that propelled Cave and the Bad Seeds from limited cultish status to wider public consciousness, much like *To Bring You My Love*, with its pleasing harmonies and soaring vocals, enticed a broader audience than its discordant predecessors had. Having presented an aesthetic and cultural overview of the albums, we are now going to situate them in relation to the Anglo-American folk tradition.

2. Parsing Anglo-American Folk Balladry

The aim of this paragraph is to identify the peculiar operative framework of Anglo-American folk and blues balladry, with a view to determine what the genre can bring to two rock musicians such as Harvey and Cave in their portrayal of monstrosity. In order to fathom the stylistic and tonal potentialities, we are going to stake out the ballad tradition in terms of genealogy, canonical rules, and themes. Firstly, we are going to probe the Anglo-American ballad tradition in terms of history and characteristics, and secondly we will focus on folksong theory.

2.1. Genealogy

Ballad: Short narrative folk song, whose distinctive style crystallized in Europe in the late Middle Ages and persists to the present day in communities where literacy, urban contacts, and mass media have little affected the habit of folk singing. The term ballad is also applied to any narrative composition suitable for singing. France, Denmark, Germany, Russia, Greece, and Spain, as well as England and Scotland, possess impressive ballad collections. At least one-third of the 300 extant English and Scottish ballads have counterparts in one or several of these continental balladries, particularly those of Scandinavia.²⁶⁴

The above Encyclopaedia Britannica definition of the ballad foregrounds two key components: the ballad tradition has travelled extensively across cultural spaces and through time, and it is essentially popular and collective. The combination of these elements accounts for its essential

²⁶³ The Australian Recording Industry Association Music Awards, known as ARIA Music Awards or ARIA Awards, is an annual awards event celebrating the Australian music industry, and organised by the Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA). The event has been held since 1987.

²⁶⁴ "Ballad." *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2014.
<<https://www.britannica.com/art/ballad#ref50927>>

mutability over time. The ballad tradition encompasses both ends of the social class spectrum and a variety of styles and registers: the entertaining minstrel's songs aimed at the nobility and clerics until the 17th century, while their lower-class counterparts, the 16th to late 19th century broadside ballads provided sensationalist news in rhyme to the English masses. In 18th and 19th century Britain, a new high culture upshoot gained momentum, as writers and poets turned to literary ballad writing (e.g., Jonathan Swift, Lewis Carroll, W.M. Thackeray). Finally, there is the folk ballad, supposedly the songs of the peasantry, recounting romantic tragedies or comedies, crime, occupational stories (e.g., seafaring, mining, lumbering songs), and stories of legendary outlaws and villains.

Because popular ballads are primarily passed down through oral transmission and slide across spatial, temporal and social boundaries, their songtexts are essentially mutable; and there are multiple song variants. The Anglo-American ballad repertoire exemplifies these cross-cultural transactions; as English, Irish and Scottish songs migrated to America, their lyrics and titles evolved gradually under the influence of their new locales. Meanwhile, the imported European songbook was implemented as North American settlers invented their ballads, later labelled by folk academics "native American Ballads".

Therefore, for British Harvey and Australian-born Cave, experimenting with the ballad tradition means delving into their Anglo-American heritage at large, whilst streaming into an essentially transcultural and hybrid genre. As a genre ripe with cultural adaptations and translations, the ballad tradition is an essentially malleable form open to appropriation and re-invention.

2.2. Ballad Theory

Before exploring the hybridisation process at play in the ballad tradition any further, let us stake out operative definition for the ballad genre and rules by taking a cursory look at the existing ballad theory.

Since the late 19th century, Anglo-American folklorists have tried to inventory and delineate the canonical rules of folksongs. In particular, in 1860, American scholar and folklorist Francis James Child (1825-1896) published a canonical collection entitled *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, in which he anthologised the lyrics of 305 English and Scottish traditional ballads along with their American variants. The Child ballads were

organised according to their narrative themes and constituted a canonical reference for subsequent ballad studies. Folk scholars have since continued to use narrative themes to classify ballads as romantic, criminal, occupational, supernatural, heroic, comic etc.

In the UK, British folklorist Cecil Sharp initiated a folksong revival in the early 20th century when he compiled thousands of tunes both from rural England and the US Southern Appalachians into a seminal volume: *English Folk Songs: Some Conclusions* (1907). In the volume, Sharp discusses the origins, characteristics, and the value of the English folk song repertoire.

The issue of composition and transmission of folk ballads has divided theorists into two schools: the “communal school” and the “individualists”. The communalists were led by two American scholars, Francis Gummere (1855–1919) and George Kittredge (1860–1941), and argued that ballads were composed collectively, like a spontaneous form of “communal poetry”²⁶⁵. Opposing this quasi-pastoral ideal of ballad creation, the individualists, fronted by the American linguist Louise Pound (1872–1958) and British literary men William Courthope (1842–1917) and Andrew Lang (1844–1912) held that each ballad was composed by an individual composer, and that only its oral transmission was communal. Over time, the general academic consensus has become that the ballad is originally the creation of a single individual, but is subsequently perpetuated and reshaped by collective transmission and performance. This view originates from American collector Phillips Barry (1880-1937) who put forward the “communal re-creation theory”²⁶⁶ whereby the folksong is posited as “*song alive*, a living organism, subject to all the conditions, and manifesting all the phenomena of growth and change.”²⁶⁷ Moreover, he affirmed the mutual inclusivity of the lyrics and the music of folksongs:

Music and text, moreover, form an organic whole. The tune is “the life of the ballad,”—so much so, that no ballad can survive, if it ceases to be sung. The text of a ballad or folk-song, apart from the music, is a lifeless thing.²⁶⁸

The latter formulation is particularly ground-breaking, in that ballads had hitherto been analysed and classified chiefly in terms of narratives, while their melodies were analysed

²⁶⁵ GUMMERE, Francis. Qtd. in *The Anglo-American Ballad: A Folklore Casebook*. Ed. Dianne DUGAW. London and New York: Routledge, 2016. 84.

²⁶⁶ BARRY, Phillips. “The Music of the Ballads” (1929). Qtd. in *The Anglo-American Ballad: A Folklore Casebook*. Ed. Dianne DUGAW. London and New York: Routledge, 2016. 111-128.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

separately. In fact, Barry's statement has not only laid the foundation to ballad studies, but more widely to contemporary popular music theory, which does not dissociate music from text and performance.

Now that we have staked out the generic boundaries of balladry in terms of composition and transmission, let us focus on the individual characteristics of the Anglo-American ballad.

3. The Ballad as Dramatic Narrative

American folksong scholar D.K. Wilgus (1918-1989) contends that the ballad is identifiable by the peculiar interplay between a narrative and the tune that accompanies it.²⁶⁹ He subscribes to folklorist Malcolm Laws' definition of the folksong that a ballad is "a narrative folksong which dramatizes a memorable event",²⁷⁰ and to philologist and folklorist Gordon Gerould's contention that the traditional ballad hinges on a three-fold technique of a "compressed and centralised episode... dramatic presentation of action... and... impersonality of the approach".²⁷¹

Therefore, the folksong should be construed first and foremost as a narrative, and as such it is essentially akin to storytelling, with its emphasis on dramatic build-up and effect, climax and resolution. Wilgus bases his analysis of the ballad form on thematic comparative table of Native American and British broadside-inherited ballads:

²⁶⁹ WILGUS, D.K. *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship since 1898*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1959. In his seminal work, Wilgus reviews folk academic criticism and further defines the canonical rules of balladry.

²⁷⁰ LAWS, George. "Native American Balladry: A Descriptive Study and a Bibliographical Syllabus." *Philadelphia: The American Folklore Society, Bibliographical Series I* (1950): 2.

²⁷¹ GEROULD, Gordon. *The Ballad Tradition*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1932.10-11. Qtd. in WILGUS, D.K. *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship since 1898*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1959. 260. Gordon Gerould (1877-1953) formulated and clarified the Child canon.

| Native American Balladry | American Ballads from British Broad-sides |
|--|--|
| A. War Ballads | J. War Ballads |
| B. Ballads of Cow-boys and Pioneers | |
| C. Ballads of Lumberjacks | |
| D. Ballads of Sailors | K. Ballads of Sailors and the Sea |
| E. Ballads about Criminals and Outlaws | L. Ballads of Crime and Criminals |
| F. Murder Ballads | |
| | M. Ballads of Family Opposition to Lovers |
| | N. Ballads of Lovers' Disguises and Tricks |
| | O. Ballads of Faithful Lovers |
| | P. Ballads of Unfaithful Lovers |
| G. Ballads of tragedies and Disasters | |
| H. Ballads on Various Topics | Q. Humorous and Miscellaneous Ballads |
| I. Ballads of the Negro | |

George Laws' Ballad Table, 1950. ²⁷²

In his analysis of the differences in popular themes between British and American balladry, Wilgus notes that British murder ballads, when imported to North America, do not translate into straightforward folksongs, but are adapted into other categories, notably into the blues. He also points out that there is a salient sentimental streak at work in Native American and British-American balladry, which is marked by “sincere tenderness” and a high moral tone.²⁷³

Having delineated the operative space of the Anglo-American ballad, one aspect stands out as potentially promising for Harvey and Cave: the dramatic component. As a “folksong

²⁷² LAWS, George. *Native American Balladry: A Descriptive Study and a Bibliographical Syllabus.*, 1950, Qtd. in Wilgus, D.K. *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship since 1898.* New Brunswick and New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1959. 254.

²⁷³ WILGUS, D.K. *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship since 1898.* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1959. 273.

narrative that dramatizes an event”,²⁷⁴ the ballad is akin to the storytelling tradition, and therefore compels narrative-based lyrics. Moreover, the structural centrality of the narrative in the song’s structure provides ample ground for literary and dramatic experimentation. Moreover, some darker ballad themes in Law’s table present some potential for Cave’s and Harvey’s Gothic songwriting of excess: Ballads about criminal and outlaws (E), Murder Ballads (F), Ballads of Crimes and Criminals (L).

However, if the dramatic and thematic content of balladry seems fertile ground for two musicians concerned with the underside of humanity, the tonal palette is more problematic. The prevalent “high moral tone” and sentimentality of American balladry identified by Law are not obvious conduits to transgression and monstrosity. In this respect, native American balladry seems to provide limited scope for Harvey’s and Cave’s songwriting of excess to unfold. However, there is another offshoot of folk balladry that can provide a structural outlet to less palatable subjects: the blues ballad.

3.1. The Dark Lure of the Blues Ballad: Musical Idiom, Folklore, Geography unto Itself

In 1968, Wilgus coined the term “blues ballad”, thereby establishing a subgenre in the ballad tradition.²⁷⁵ He argues that contrary to the bulk of American folk balladry, “negro balladry” concerns itself with more raucous material such as sex and crime. This transgressive counterpart to the sentimental and moral streak of American balladry presents structural affinities with Harvey’s and Cave’s songwriting and therefore seems most suitable for their purpose. Wilgus also comments on the more fluid form of the blues ballad, which he defines as “a highly variable, subjective, lyrical, yet dramatic narrative which celebrates and comments on an event rather than presenting a straightforward, circumstantial account”.²⁷⁶ More recently, Simon Frith has also commented on the highly symbolic and allusive content of the blues idiom that exemplifies a “language organised as sound”,²⁷⁷ which points to more poetic potentialities than the folk ballad.

²⁷⁴ LAWS, George. *Native American Balladry: A Descriptive Study and a Bibliographical Syllabus*. Philadelphia: The American Folklore Society, Bibliographical Series I, 1950. 2.

²⁷⁵ WILGUS, D.K. “Clure and Joe Williams: legend and blues ballad.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 81.322 (1968): 295-315.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 296.

²⁷⁷ FRITH. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Op. Cit., 172.

The blues officially emerged in the American South in 1902-1903, when Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Jelly Roll Morton, and WC Handy claimed to have heard blues songs for the first time.²⁷⁸ It is widely acknowledged that the blues derives from the folk-song, and as such its root cultural folklore of legends and events is continuously adapted and reinvented.²⁷⁹

The genre has been widely mythologised and connoted as both “authentic” (especially in the rock discourse) and strictly African-American. Although most blues musicians are of African-American descent, many of them also identify the blues as related to African-American roots. Memphis Slim contextualised the genre in African-American history and said that “blues started from slavery”,²⁸⁰ while John Lee Hooker concurs that the blues is expressive of one’s ancestries: “it’s not only what happened to you, it’s what happened to your forebears and other people. And that’s what makes the blues.”²⁸¹ Although it may only be partly founded, this general perception that the blues speaks exclusively about the black community and its history (and stories) shows the profound correlation between the genre and its historical context and cultural lineage.

British blues historian Paul Oliver (1927-2017) argues that blues ballads are essentially syncretic in that they originally inherited their narratives from the Anglo-American tradition.²⁸² Therefore, the blues folklore should not be read as strictly Afro-American but as cultural fusion.²⁸³ Building upon Oliver’s argument, I postulate that as a syncretic genre, blues is intrinsically open to hybridisation. Not only is the ballad form in constant flux due to its recreational transmission, but it also partakes of a fluid genre reliant upon generic and cultural cross-pollination. Therefore, the blues balladic mode broadens Harvey’s and Cave’s respective

²⁷⁸ MIDDLETON, Richard. “O brother, let’s go down home: loss, nostalgia, and the blues.” *Popular Music* 26.1 (Jan. 2007): 48-49.

²⁷⁹ OLIVER, P, RUSSELL, Tony, DIXON RMW, Godrich J, and Rye H. *Yonder Comes the Blues: The Evolution Of A Genre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Russell argues that the blues shares a common stock of instruments, tunes, and vocal techniques with 19th century folk Southern traditions, which makes it both a hybrid and inter-racial genres, contrary to popular public assumptions that sees it as a quintessentially black genre. It is, therefore, more racially hybrid than meets the eye.

²⁸⁰ LOMAX 1993, 460. Qtd. in MIDDLETON, Richard. “O brother, let’s go down home: loss, nostalgia, and the blues.” *Popular Music* 26.1 (2007): 51.

²⁸¹ OLIVER et al 2001: 203. Qtd. in MIDDLETON, Richard. “O brother, let’s go down home: loss, nostalgia, and the blues.” *Popular Music* 26.1 (2007): 51.

²⁸² The syncretism of the blues song was further commented upon by many blues specialists such as John White who views blues as “ a conflation of late nineteenth century ballads, work shouts, field hollers, and spirituals.” WHITE, John. “Southern Music.” *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*. Ed. Richard Gray and Owen Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 185-202. 192.

²⁸³ OLIVER, Paul. “Survivors of the Ballad Tradition.” *The Anglo-American Ballad: A Folklore Casebook*. Ed. Dianne DUGAW. London and New York: Routledge, 2016. 289-327.

tonal and thematic palettes on two counts: by providing them with an existing folklore reservoir with its tropes and devices, and by inviting them to add to the existing tradition and hybridise their own music. In other words, in experimenting with a mode that relies on individual creativity for its own evolution and dissemination, Harvey and Cave join a “hybridising matrix”.

I contend that three ballad components may be potentially fruitful for Harvey’s and Cave’s monstrous song-writing: firstly the blues ballad is primarily concerned with transgression and the underside of humanity (i.e., unruly sexuality and crime), secondly the sentimental streak of the native American ballad ushers in a more romantic theme to monstrosity (i.e., the passion murder), thirdly the existing folklore characters are open to stylistic reinvention and reshaping. Therefore, as well as cultural filiation, the blues folklore offers the two musicians ample aesthetic ground to explore monstrous identities. Moreover, the blues ballad is conducive to another reservoir of creative influences: the American South.

3.2. Aesthetic and Generic Potentialities of the Deep South

The American South as a Popular Object

Because the blues is so deeply infused with its Southern cultural roots, it is inseparable from its locale. Consequently, for musicians such as Cave and Harvey, experimenting with the blues not only means espousing its musical idiom and folklore themes, but also the wider cultural topographies of the American South. With its farmlands, plantations, small towns, and racial divide, the Deep South conjures up a potent imaginary space which has been widely represented in popular culture. In films, the depiction of the Deep South is polarised between the romantic agrarian idyll (e.g., *Gone with the Wind*, 1939) and the backwoods nightmare with morally and physically abhorrent characters (e.g., *The Night of the Hunter* [1955], *In the Heat of the Night* [1967], *Deliverance* [1972]). The fact that the Deep South has fired popular imagination signals an existing representational frame that could be summed up as follows:

The American South, it seems, is frozen at its exoticised apex and nadir, relegated by tacit national consensus to a heaven-and-hell diptych of social types: sleepwalking belles and gentlemen of the Old South, and rampaging crackers and hillbillies of the Benighted South.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ GRAHAM, Allison. “The South in Popular Culture.” *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*. Ed. GRAY, Richard, and Owen ROBINSON. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 335.

If the romanticised Old South seems to present little interest for Harvey's and Cave's monstrous songwriting, the "Benighted South", with its promise of transgression, abnormality and violence, offers fertile ground for an exploration of monstrosity.

The cultural imaginary of the Deep South is also marked by Southern Gothic literature and its propensity for grotesquerie: comic grotesque violence and religiosity (e.g., Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* [1932]), interstitial territories and freak characters (e.g., Carson McCullers), dark grotesque (e.g., William Faulkner), and even grotesque spiritual epiphanies (e.g., Flannery O'Connor). The Southern Gothic aesthetic echoes Harvey's and Cave's propensity for the abnormal, and so does the Southern authors' array of motifs and themes. Historian of the South Lewis P. Simpson identifies a literary symbolism of the South, and notes that Southern Gothic authors "tended to render the image of the South as a symbol of the disorder and depravity of the modern age at its worst, filling their stories with a complete catalogue of the bizarre and the horrible: rape and incest, murder and suicide, lynching (by fire or rope), castration, miscegenation, idiocy and insanity".²⁸⁵ Consequently, Harvey and Cave can also use the South as a space for literary experimentation with monstrosity.

By weaving the American South and the folk-blues idiom into the fabric of their songs, Harvey and Cave thus usher in a gallery of themes and representations inherited from the Southern authors. Their exploration of the South is therefore double: it provides a dark and disorderly cultural background for them to roam, and also a literary field to investigate. Borrowing on the literary reservoir is also facilitated by the core storytelling component of balladry, which paves the way for literary experimentation within songwriting.

Therefore, in experimenting with the blues ballad format and the Deep South, Harvey and Cave expose their music to intermusicality, intertextuality and intergenericity. Now we are going to analyse Harvey's *To Bring You My Love* (1995) and Cave's *Murder Ballads* (1996) as two albums resulting from the two musicians' foray into the American South. In particular, we are going to probe the albums for a peculiar form of monstrosity born out the dual encounter with the American ballad tradition, and with the wider cultural pool of the American South.

²⁸⁵ SIMPSON, Lewis. 3 By 3, *Masterworks Of The Southern Gothic*. Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers, 1985. Introduction. VII-XIV. Qtd. in *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, People, Movements and Motifs*. FLORA, Joseph, Lucinda MACKETHAN, and Todd TAYLOR, eds. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2001. 316.

4. *To Bring You My Love* and *Murder Ballads*: a Palette most Foul

| | |
|---|---|
|  <p><i>To Bring You My Love</i> (1995)</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "To Bring You My Love" 2. "Meet Ze Monsta" 3. "Working For The Man" 4. "C'mon Billy" 5. "Tecló" 6. "Long Snake Moan" 7. "Down By The Water" 8. "I Think I Am A Mother" 9. "Send His Love To Me" 10. "The Dancer" |
|  <p><i>Murder Ballads</i> (1996)</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Song of Joy" 2. "Stagger Lee" (Trad.) 3. "Henry Lee" (feat. PJ Harvey) (Trad.) 4. "Lovely Creature" 5. "Where the Wild Roses Grow" (feat. Kylie Minogue) 6. "The Curse of Millhaven" 7. "The Kindness of Strangers" 8. "Crow Jane" 9. "O'Malley's Bar" 10. "Death Is Not The End" (feat. Anita Lane, PJ Harvey, Shane MacGowan, Kylie Minogue) – (Bob Dylan cover) |

4.1. Differing Artistic Stances: Cave's Formal Filiation versus Harvey's Hybrid Rhetoric

Before analysing the monstrous content of the two albums, we are going to survey the two songwriters' artistic stances with regard to the American cultural space, by focusing on the visible signs of their American anchoring, and their hybridising strategies. In particular, I will demonstrate that Cave uses a strategy of continuity and alignment with the American tradition, whereas Harvey consistently uses aesthetic-mingling.

Cave's Formal Folk-Blues Filiation

Cave uses a range of folk signifiers that frame *Murder Ballads* as an Anglo-American folksong album: the album title states both the genre and the narrative theme, whilst the artwork

provides a visual atmosphere for the songs, and the song titles themselves are evocative of folk ballads. The tracks “Stagger Lee”, “Henry Lee”, and “Crow Jane” refer to existing American folklore characters from folk and blues ballads, so their inclusion heralds Cave’s entry into the folksong re-creational process. The other titles are crafted in the style of traditional ballads: “Where The Wild Roses Grow” thus echoes such naturalistic ballad titles as “On The Banks of the Ohio” and “Down in the Willow Garden”; “Lovely Creature” and “Song of Joy” are variations on typical murdered girl ballads such as “Pretty Polly” or “Poor Pearl”; whilst “O’Malley’s Bar” and “The Curse Of Millhaven” contextualise the stories and prefigure their narrative content, and “The Kindness Of Stranger” anchors the ballad in shared popular wisdom. Cave also reinforces the realism of his North American backdrop by using typical names (e.g., “The Bucket of Blood” for a typical blues bar, a home in Arkansas), objects (e.g., a Stetson hat, a deck of cards), North American slang (e.g., “black Mariah” for a police van). By stating his authorial intent to join the Anglo-American folk lineage and experiment with its conventions, Cave invites his listeners to experience the album as a piece of Anglo-American folk-blues music.

Harvey’s Cultural Bricolage

Conversely, Harvey’s album title and track-list do not convey overt cultural signifiers encoding the traditional ballad style, except for “C’mon Billy”, which may be construed as a folk song title, and “Down By The Water”, the only title that sounds like a murder ballad in the naturalistic vein of “Down In the Willow Garden”. And indeed, “Down By The Water” is the only murder ballad on the album, a loose adaptation of Child Ballad 20, “The Cruel Mother”, also known as “The Greenwood Side” or “Greenwood Sidey” recounting a mother’s infanticide. The other titles include a selection of love themes (“To Bring You My Love”, “Send His Love To Me”), fantastical monstrosity (“Meet Ze Monsta”, “Long Snake Moan”), storytelling titles (“Working For The Man”, “I Think I Am A Mother”, “The Dancer”) and an inscrutable name (“Teelo”). Overall, there is a striking contrast between Cave’s cultural signposting and formal coherence, and Harvey’s cryptic cultural cartography. Harvey evokes the American setting more indirectly, by weaving the American Wilderness into the lyrical texture for instance. She uses its vast expanses of mountains and deserts as a naturalistic backdrop to her songs, and as a source of natural symbolism articulating her protagonists’ emotional journeys. *To Bring You My Love* thus breaks away from its predecessors *Dry* and *Rid Of Me* in that it no longer unfolds within the confines of a character’s mind but shifts from claustrophobic interiority to a North American natural geography.

Moreover, the album's artwork cover further contributes to the cultural blur in that it does not provide an American but an English visual anchoring, through a reference to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The romanticised self-representation of Harvey floating in water with her eyes closed brings to mind Ophelia, thereby ushering in the English cultural heritage. The drowned heroine of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is an emblematic proto-figure of the lovelorn heroine losing her mind through heartbreak, and has inspired much artwork, notably by Pre-Raphaelite painters (e.g., John William Waterhouse and Arthur Hughes). The composition of the photo and Harvey's posture are reminiscent of Sir John Everett Millais's 1852 *Ophelia* painting (see chapter 8, p 224), and thus conjure up female insanity and suffering through unrequited love. In foregrounding a romantic theme and English roots, Harvey leads her listener to anticipate a quintessentially English aesthetics. Therefore, the American influence is not the only cultural frame to the listening experience, and is not overtly heralded in the artwork or track titles, but it is woven into the musical fabric of the album through instrumentation (the prevalence of the guitar line modulated in blues style), and a vocal texture resonant with the blues (wailing, roaring, howling in a manner reminiscent of Howlin' Wolf).

Although Harvey sprinkles American cross-references, they do not create a cohesive tapestry like Cave's, but instead function in a confluence of different eras, styles and geographies. "Down by The Water" encapsulates the essence of Harvey's aesthetic mingling: she freely adapts the traditional song narrative of Child 20 ballad "The Cruel Mother", which features a mother killing her illegitimate son(s), into a song about a mother drowning her daughter. She then weaves in a chorus line from early 20th century "Salty Dog Blues" (i.e., "Lil' fish big fish swimming in the water"), thereby conflating the sentimental traditional folk ballad and the grittier blues ballad. The inclusion of cross-references to 1960s-1970s American iconoclast Captain Beefheart²⁸⁶ (in "To Bring You My Love" and "Meet Ze Monsta") instills another layer of aesthetic and temporal mingling. "Meet Ze Monsta" is borrowed from Beefheart's "Tropical Hot Dog Night" on *Shiny Beast* (1978), whilst the opening line of "To Bring You My Love" and of the album, "I was born in the desert", is borrowed from Captain Beefheart's opening line on "Sure 'Nuff'n'Yes I Do", on *Safe As Milk* (1967). "To Bring You

²⁸⁶ Captain Beefheart, Don Van Vliet (1941–2010) was an American singer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist. He recorded thirteen studio albums between 1964 and 1982 with his ensemble, the Magic Band. His musical style was an eclectic blend of blues, free jazz, and rock with avant-garde composition. Beefheart did not achieve great crucial and commercial success, however, he has sustained a cult following among rock, punk, and experimental musicians. "Captain Beefheart." *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2015. <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Captain-Beefheart>>

My Love” is further hybridised with the blues, since the song hinges on the traditional blues theme of self-damnation for love, which is reminiscent of Mississippi bluesman Robert Johnson’s seminal blues songs: “Cross Road Blues”(1936), “Hell-bound on my Trail” (1937), and “Me and the Devil Blues” (1938).

Harvey’s technique is to mix and match cultural and aesthetic signifiers, so that the end product eludes classification and filiation, and produces a fresh aesthetic. In this respect, Harvey’s stance on cultural borrowings is one of *bricolage*²⁸⁷: she draws upon various Anglo-American aesthetics and periods to create an idiosyncratic songspace that eludes stylistic classification. In so doing, she locates her album in a third musical space,²⁸⁸ a liminal zone where cultural and aesthetic boundaries are kept porous, metamorphic and unstable.

For the purpose of the upcoming comparative study of the two albums, it is worth bearing in mind that the listeners enter the albums with different expectations: whereas they expect *Murder Ballads* to be a cohesive collection of Anglo-American folk and blues ballad, the cultural and generic expectations for *To Bring You My Love* are not set.

4.2. Monstrous Drama

Both albums foreground the barbaric and the psychic edge which translate into monstrous drama. The protagonists’ actions and interactions are tinged with monstrosity and the dramatic texture is marked by explicit violence. As announced in its title, *Murder Ballads* contains nine murder narratives that fall into three categories: serial killing sprees (e.g., “Stagger Lee”, “The Curse Of Millhaven”, “O’ Malley’s Bar” and “Crow Jane”), murdered girl ballads (“Song of Joy”, “Lovely Creature”, “Where The Wild Roses Grow”, “The Kindness of

²⁸⁷ The notion of bricolage was put forward by the French structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in relation to the characteristic patterns of mythological thought. In *The Savage Mind* (1962), Lévi-Strauss defines Bricolage as the skill of using existing elements and recombining them to create something new. The bricoleur thus assembles pre-existing things in novel ways and creates originality by diverting the purpose of existing signs and objects. LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude. *The Naked Man: Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, vol. 4. Trans. Doreen and John Weightman. New York: Harper and Row, 1971. Cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall have since applied the concept of bricolage to subcultural styles and identi and extended it to popular music studies. For instance, Dick Hebdige articulates a theory of style as a signifying practice in his analysis of the punk movement. “Style as Homology and Signifying Practice” (1979). *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*. Ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. 57-65.

²⁸⁸ Indian-American post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha contends that culture is essentially hybrid and formulates the “third space” theory, whereby culture is in constant flux and construction, and in a state of in-betweenness. He also puts forward the concept of “cultural translation” as a process whereby all cultural forms are continuously engaged in a process of hybridity. BHABHA, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Strangers”), and “murdered sweetheart” ballad (“Henry Lee”). The album includes two adaptations of traditional North American murder ballads (“Stagger Lee” and “Henry Lee”), and seven Cavian creations.

The monstrous drama of *To Bring You My Love* is less graphic, featuring only one murder song, “Down By the Water”. The rest of the album is imbued with an intimation of violence rather than with graphic scenes of rampage. In fact, *To Bring You My Love* conjures up psychic rather than corporeal monstrosity, with characters torn between a feral urge for narcissistic self-affirmation (“Long Snake Moan”, “Meet Ze Monsta”) and a pining for love and self-redemption. In “Working for the Man” and “I Think I am A Mother”, there are also indeterminate freaks lurking in the shadows: a gloomy preacher and a tormented self-doubting mother whose ambisexual vocals make for a liminal narrative. Firstly, we are going to focus on Cave’s and Harvey’s love murders, and monstrous intrusions.

4.3. Cave’s Lover-Murderer Motif: Monstrous Intrusions

Subverting the Ballad format: Cave’s Inverted diptych of “Henry Lee” and “Where the Wild Roses Grow”

Violent psychopaths abound on *Murder Ballads*, in the shape of spurned lovers turned murderers, a boisterous teenage serial killer, megalomaniac maniacs carrying out spectacular killing sprees, and opportunistic murderers. By contrast, *To Bring You My Love* contains only one murder, perpetrated by a mother on her daughter in “Down By The Water”. We are going to analyse how the female murderer motif is deployed in Harvey’s “Down By The Water” and Cave’s “Henry Lee”. In particular, we are going to probe the two songs for incongruity and comic intrusion as a form of monstrous breach into the song’s surface.

Murder Ballads includes two sweetheart murder ballads, functioning as a reversed gender diptych: “Henry Lee”, a duet with Harvey, features a spurned female lover killing her lover, whereas “Where the Wild Roses Grow”, a duet with pop singer Kylie Minogue, features a demure young girl murdered by her lover. Both are adapted from existing North American ballads, “Henry Lee” (variant “Love Henry”) is based on a traditional Scottish folk song “Young Hunting”, catalogued by Francis James Child as “Child Ballad number 68”. “Where the Wild Roses Grow” is loosely inspired by “Down in the Willow Garden”, also known as

“Rose Connelly”, a traditional Appalachian murder ballad about a man facing the gallows for poisoning and stabbing his lover to death, and finally throwing her in a river. Cave’s version includes a murderous embrace by a river, during which the man kills his beloved with a rock.

Although the two songs differ in female characterisation, one featuring a purposeful murderess and the other a helpless victim, they are aesthetically akin: both unfold to opulent orchestral harmonies that drift away from ballad style and into love song territory: “Henry Lee” is led by a piano line, and “Where the Wild Roses Grow” by the violin. Both pieces are harmonious, slow-paced and voluptuous, gratifying the listener’s senses, and thus turning a murderous narrative into a pleasurable experience. The hypnotic quality of the musical line is reinforced by the poetic quality of the lyrics, which draws the listener into an aestheticised experience of murder. The paradoxical thrust of romanticised violence testifies to Cave’s idiosyncratic appropriation of the ballad genre: he complexifies the murderous experience and turns into a sophisticated and paradoxical listening experience. Effectively, because the audience is deriving sensory pleasure from the listening, they become complicit with the lover-murderers, and vicariously turn into romantic monsters.

However, there is a drastic difference in the treatment of the outwardly parallel murder narratives: one is in keeping with the balladic convention in tone and content (i.e., “Where the Wild Roses Grow”), and the other strays from it (i.e., “Henry Lee”). The lyric of “Where the Wild Roses Grow” is poetic and earnest, and its sentimental overtones are sustained throughout, so that it could seamlessly blend into the “sincere tenderness”²⁸⁹ of the North American ballad repertoire. Conversely, whilst formally conform to the North American ballad template, “Henry Lee” introduces a Cavian twist. Therefore, we are going to analyse the mechanisms of “Henry Lee” as a piece of generic subversion and disruption of listeners’ expectations.

Henry Lee

(Traditional lyrics adapted by Nick Cave)

²⁸⁹ LAWS, Malcolm. *Native American Balladry* (1950): 34. Qtd. in WILGUS, D.K. *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship since 1898*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1959. 273.

Get down, get down, little Henry Lee
 And stay all night with me
 You won't find a girl in this damn world
 That will compare with me
 And the wind did howl and the wind did blow
 La la la la la
 La la la la lee
 A little bird lit down on Henry Lee
 I can't get down and I won't get down
 And stay all night with thee
 For the girl I have in that merry green land
 I love far better than thee
 And the wind did howl and the wind did blow
 La la la la la
 La la la la lee
 A little bird lit down on Henry Lee
 She leaned herself against a fence
 Just for a kiss or two
 And with a little pen-knife held in her hand
 She plugged him through and through

And the wind did roar and the wind did moan
 La la la la la
 La la la la lee
 A little bird lit down on Henry Lee
 Come take him by his lilly-white hands
 Come take him by his feet
 And throw him in this deep deep well
 Which is more than one hundred feet
 And the wind did howl and the wind did blow
 La la la la la
 La la la la lee
 A little bird lit down on Henry Lee
 Lie there, lie there, little Henry Lee
 Till the flesh drops from your bones
 For the girl you have in that merry green land
 Can wait forever for you to come home
 And the wind did howl and the wind did moan
 La la la la la
 La la la la lee
 A little bird lit down on Henry Lee

“Henry Lee” is a rare occurrence of a sweetheart murder committed by a female lover spurned for another. The video²⁹⁰ features Harvey and Cave acting out the duet as a sensual love game, combining loving embraces and more ambiguous entanglements with their hands roving around each other’s throat a bit too insistently for comfort, thereby suggesting a barbaric streak lurking underneath the love-bird routine. The stripped green background sets off Harvey’ and Cave’s matching black suits and white shirts, thereby staging them as visual *doppelgangers*, which imparts of a sense of fusal unity. The formal harmony of the visual composition echoes the voluptuous vocal texture and piano melodies. Overall, the enticing visual and sonic sensuousness of the piece jars with its gruesome dramatic material. The language is in the traditional ballad style (e.g., the use of the archaic pronoun “thee”, the emphatic use of the modal in “the wind *did* howl/the wind *did* blow”, italics mine), with poetic notes such as the metaphor of the “merry green land” in reference to Ireland.

Where Cave deviates from the original ballad is in his Gothicising of the scene: he infuses the natural environment with a sense of impending violence and doom, notably through the repeated evocation of the howling wind in the chorus. Through a pathetic fallacy, the chorus line, which progresses from “and the wind did howl and the wind did blow” to “and the wind

²⁹⁰ Henry Lee. NICK CAVE, perf. (feat. PJ HARVEY). Originally released in February 1996.
<https://youtu.be/QzmMB8dTwGs>

did roar and the wind did moan”, personifies the wind as an ominous and prescient element auguring murder. Moreover, Cave intensifies the drama by including a gory description of the spurned lover who “plugged him through and through” and by evoking the decay of the lover’s body (“till the flesh drops from your bones”). In spite of its conventional Victorian Gothic backdrop, the ballad can not be read as straightforward tragedy, since Cave introduces a dark humorous twist in the female murderer’s final words:

For the girl you have in that merry green land
Can wait forever for you to come home

The lines introduce an incongruous touch of black humour in the middle of a piece of dark sentimental balladry, and thus tip the song into comic horror. This final twist suggests that under the cloak of generic appropriation, Cave deploys a strategy of disruption: by espousing the stylistic rules of the classical ballad genre, he creates a conventional (and familiar) narrative frame for his listeners to settle into, only for them to get jolted by a comic intrusion. The song relies on a double movement: on the one hand, the sentimental lyrics and harmonious music line lure (and lull) the listeners into experiencing the song as a romantic tragedy, and on the other hand, the incongruous intrusion of black humour forces them out of the sentimental mode. In introducing critical distance toward the subject, the comic intrusion prevents both earnest reception and empathy. In dismissing the gravity of the protagonist’s death, black humour introduces a perverse gaze and a brutal anti-climax to the tragic build-up. For all its unsettling potential, this perverse twist partakes of Cave’s transgressive idiom, with its abrupt shifts and reversal of expectations, hence to Cave’s audience it is not unfamiliar disruption. It also resonates with the full-blown comic horror of other songs on the album, such as “Stagger Lee”, “O’Malley’s Bar” and “The Curse of Millhaven”, which exemplifies a prevalent comic grotesque thread.

“Henry Lee” stands out as a crafty piece of Cavian monstrosity in which Cave replicates the innocuous sentimentality of traditional ballads only to subvert it with a single line, and thus infuse murder balladry with a twisted addition: barbaric delight. It is noteworthy that the notion that the murderer may derive barbaric pleasure from their killing is alien to American murder ballads, which deal with crime in a moralistic manner.²⁹¹

²⁹¹ WILGUS. *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship since 1898. Op. Cit.* 273-274.

The Black Humour Thread

This black humour is consistent with a similarly subversive undertow at work in such dissonant titles as “Song of Joy” which misleadingly refers to a song about a girl called Joy who ends up “bound up with electric tape... stabbed repeatedly and stuffed into a sleeping bag”, or “The Kindness of Strangers” that tells the story of a naive girl who ends up “cuffed to a bed/A rag in her mouth and a bullet in her head”, or even “The Lovely Creature” who now lies somewhere “beneath the slow drifting sand”. All three titles function as puns reversing the sentimental expectations raised in the title, whilst contravening the conventional earnestness of murdered girl ballads. Indeed, ballad scholars such as Eleanor Long-Wilgus²⁹² have long posited the murdered girl ballad sub-category as essentially moralistic in treatment and cautionary in purpose. It typically features demure, naive girls and women and lecherous male predators who prey upon them and kill them. The aim of such ballads is to warn girls and women that should they fail to keep their romantic impulses under check, they will die in the hands of male sexual predators. Through these ironic twists on the titles, Cave toys with the paradigmatic “murdered girl” theme, whilst contradicting the prevalently serious tone of his lyrics. In undermining his sentimental verse with dark humour, Cave also takes a jibe at his own poetic ambitions.

5. Harvey’s “Down by The Water”

This strategy of subversion through mock appropriation of canonical rules echoes Harvey’s “Down By The Water”, where Harvey diverts the balladic mode by introducing incongruous elements. The piece is the closest Harvey gets to overtly rewriting a traditional murder ballad, since it borrows the narrative from the Child 20 ballad “The Cruel Mother”. Like Cave’s “Henry Lee”, it features the female murderer motif, although in the form of an infanticidal mother instead of a lover-murderer.

DOWN BY THE WATER.

²⁹² LONG-WILGUS, Eleanor. *Naomi Wise: Creation, Re-creation, and Continuity in an American Ballad Tradition*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

I lost my heart
Under the bridge
To that little girl
So much to me
And now I moan
And now I holler
She'll never know
Just what I found
That blue eyed girl
She said "no more"
That blue eyed girl
Became blue eyed whore
Down by the water
I took her hand
Just like my daughter
I'll see her again

Formally, Harvey does not imitate conventional ballad storytelling, as her internally focused narrative is fragmented rather than expository, and does not contain any staple ballad archaisms or phrases to contextualise the story in a faraway place in a faraway past. Indeed, the stripped syntax partakes of a lacunary storytelling mode whereby the listener is left to piece the story back together and make up for factual inconsistencies. While the opening lines locate the drama under a bridge, there are very few indications who the narrator may be, and it is not clear who she may be referring to when she says “blue-eyed girl” / “blue-eyed whore”: is she the narrator’s daughter or another victim? The lines “Just *like* my daughter / I’ll see her again” (emphasis mine) suggest that the narrator is superimposing a prior infanticide with another murder that she may be contemplating (cf. the use of the future) or has already committed. The timeline and events are thus blurred and distorted by the narrator’s psyche, which hampers the listeners’ rational decoding. The fragmented nature of the story is evocative of a manic inner dialogue, which again differs from the ballad tradition where the singer sings a story to an implied audience. Being deprived of objective bearings, Harvey’s audience is thus left to experience the murder not as a spectator, but from within the narrator’s psyche, by impressionistic means.

Like Cave with “Henry Lee”, Harvey also introduces incongruity at the end of the song, and thus abruptly overhauls its tonality. The oppressive atmosphere is consistently sustained by heavy instrumentation, with a saturated soundscape counterpointing Harvey’s vocal line. The

terrifying soundscape is further enhanced by Harvey's vocal schizophrenia, whereby her vocal lines overlap and thus produce a spectral effect, as if the split subject of the lyrics spoke in different voices.

In breaking into nursery rhyme style, the final lines "Little fish, big fish, swimming in the water/Come back here, man, gimme my daughter" impart a sense of childish playfulness to the song. In a song dealing with infanticide, introducing playfulness and childhood innocence is downright transgressive: not only does murder seem morally incompatible with lightness, but maternal infanticide is the ultimate taboo in that it challenges essentialist assumptions about maternal instinct.

6. Conclusions on Cave's and Harvey's Incongruity and Monstrosity in Balladic Mode

Analysing the songs "Henry Lee" and "Down By The Water" brings to light Cave's and Harvey's shared use of incongruity within the ballad format: in both instances, they breach the inner narrative coherence of their songs by introducing an element that clashes with its prevalent mood. Cave thus introduces black humour within a romantic tragedy, whilst Harvey ends a horror song with lyrical and musical playfulness. These incongruous intrusions testify to a subversive treatment of the ballad format, whereby through the monstrous gaze, Harvey and Cave introduce a Grotesque pattern of disruption that disrupts the moralistic frame of the folksongs.

This reliance on disparity and conflict as a source of disruption is perceptible in Harvey's and Cave's use of incongruity as a means to challenge the coherence of their songs: these incongruities can be read as the intrusion of "the estranged world"²⁹³ of the grotesque. Introducing humour and playfulness in a horror song not only enables Harvey and Cave to breach continuity and coherence, but also ushers in a more extreme form of monstrosity, which exceeds narrative monstrosity. Indeed, the staple narrative of passion murder is not monstrous *per se*, it may be horrific, but can still be romanticised as emotional excess (as does Cave), or staged as darkly Gothic (as does Harvey). What makes it monstrous is when it becomes an opportunity for transgressive laughter, thereby revealing the performer's and listener's barbaric

²⁹³ KAYSER. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature. Op. Cit.*, 184.

delight. Through their incongruous twists, Harvey and Cave shift monstrosity from the dramatic content to the singer-narrators' treatment of it, and the audience's response. Indeed, by a grotesque operation, incongruity reveals an "estranged world",²⁹⁴ a disjointed perspective at odds with received values and perceptions. In the case of "Henry Lee" and "Down By The Water", black humour and playfulness dismiss the atrocity of the crime, and thus momentarily suspend the moralistic frame, hence singer-narrator and listener can share a glimpse of complicity and unbridled barbaric delight. In other words, the incongruous breach actualises the monstrous scope and relocates it to the heart of the listening experience: monstrosity is no longer a spectacle removed from the listener, but an interpersonal experience between the performer and their audience. In casting a transgressive gaze into the "estranged world" of comic horror, listener and performer share a moment of monstrous complicity.

²⁹⁴ KAYSER. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature. Op. Cit.*, 184.

CHAPTER 7: The Comic Grotesque and Monstrous Melodrama

*The American novel tends to rest in contradictions
and among extreme ranges of experience.*²⁹⁵

Richard Chase

Introduction

The setting of the American Deep South not only provides Cave and Harvey with the folk-blues ballad tradition and its folklore, but also with a wealth of oral and literary traditions to draw upon as aesthetic filters. In particular, there is, in American oral culture and literature, a potent propensity for melodrama, myth-making, and the Grotesque.

The general consensus is that “the Grotesque is characterised by the juxtaposition of contradictory elements or genres”, meant to present “a reality characterised by radical discontinuity” and “devoid of significance”, thereby conjuring up “a world which is disjointed and senseless”.²⁹⁶ In this respect, the Grotesque can be seen as an aesthetic of incongruity and senselessness. Philip Thomson²⁹⁷ thus posits disharmony as a structuring principle of the Grotesque: “The most consistently distinguished characteristic of the Grotesque has been the fundamental element of disharmony, whether referred to as conflict, clash, mixture of the heterogeneous or conflation of disparates.”²⁹⁸ My contention is that the North American cultural space provides Harvey and Cave with a grotesque idiom to convey the disjointed world with.

The Tall Tale Tradition

One mythopoeic popular tradition is the Frontier tradition of tall tale, which developed in 18th and 19th century America, was transmitted through bar-room storytelling, and finally morphed into popular written humour. Its narrative formula is a mock anecdotal account of the unbelievable feats of a popular hero (or the narrator himself), wildly exaggerating the hero’s

²⁹⁵ CHASE, Richard. *The American Novel and Its Tradition*. New York: Double Day Anchor Books, 1957.1.

²⁹⁶ CASTILLO, Susan. “Flannery O’Connor.” *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*. Ed. Richard Gray and Owen Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 488.

²⁹⁷ THOMSON. *The Grotesque*. *Op.Cit.*, 20.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

proWess. The tall tale relies on fiction being presented as fact, and on an accumulation of impossible events increasing in absurdity and enormity. The humour erupts from the enormity of the lies and the wild exaggeration of the narrative. The popular heroes of tall tales can be either historically based (e.g., John Henry a strong steel-driver who was also celebrated in folk songs), or fictional legends (e.g., Paul Bunyan, a massive lumberjack who is rumoured to have dug the Grand Canyon). The tall tale tradition was a prevalent humorous type in American folklore²⁹⁹; hence it has sunk into American orality, and survives as comic exaggeration and hyperbolic storytelling.

My contention is that tall tale melodrama and humour have fuelled three songs on *Murder Ballads*: “Stagger Lee”, “The Curse of Millhaven”, and “O’Malley’s Bar”. These display the hallmarks of the genre as defined by Carolyn Brown, that is “outlandishness”, and a drive “from the realm of the realistic and probable to the improbable”.³⁰⁰ In particular, I will demonstrate that Cave uses the tall tale format in order to depict epic social monsters and saturate his songs with monstrosity.

Moreover, I postulate that Harvey and Cave also draw on a broader American “cultural matrix”³⁰¹ that echoes the Gothic “overflow of words, feelings, ideas, and imaginings”³⁰² at work in their song-writing of excess. In drawing upon the literary American imagination as an aesthetic source, they not only flesh out their lyrical experimentations but also turn their musical works into a confluence of genres, aesthetics and media.

²⁹⁹ BROWN, Carolyn. *The Tall Tale in American Folklore and Literature*. Knoxville: the University of Tennessee Press, 1987. According to American folklorist Ernest Baughman’s compilation of 3871 humorous types and motifs, 3710 were tall tales. Ernest Boughman Type and Motif Index of the Folktales of England and North America. Indiana Folklore Series, no 20. Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1966. Cited in Brown 1987: Chapter 1. 1-7. Carolyn Brown comments that the tall tale tradition is an essentially native American tradition, since by comparison folklorist only found 29 tall tales out of 3966 collected in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland combined.

³⁰⁰ BROWN, Carolyn. *The Tall Tale in American Folklore and Literature*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987. 38.

³⁰¹ ABRAHAMS, Roger “Folklore and Literature as Performance.” *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 9. 2/3 (1972): 75-94. American folklorist Abrahams puts forward the notion that literature and folklore are first and foremost performance, which he theorises as “a demonstration of culture” (75) and coordination between a performer and their audience. In particular, Abrahams puts forward the notion of “cultural matrix” as “conventional themes, situations, and patterns” that the artist uses to elicit the audience’s participation” (78). This interactive and cooperative view of performance lay the foundation for current academic views on performance in popular music studies (e.g., Simon Frith)

³⁰² BOTTING. *Gothic. Op.Cit.*, 7.

The American Poetry of Disorder

Literary theorist Richard Chase's American Romance Theory³⁰³ is an illuminating filter by which to probe the wide aesthetic range of *To Bring You My Love* and *Murder Ballads*. Chase posits that the American novelistic tradition has incorporated an element of romance, and he surveys American literature for traces of "American novel-romance"³⁰⁴. He identifies three salient threads in American romance, other than the heroic and the picturesque: "a tendency toward melodrama and idyll", a "formal abstractness and tendency to plunge into the underside of consciousness" and "a willingness to abandon moral questions or to ignore the spectacle of man in society or to consider these things only indirectly or abstractly".³⁰⁵ Chase's formulation contains an overt structural intersection with Harvey's and Cave's Gothic songwriting of excess: the fascination with "the underside of consciousness", which accounts for the prevalence of psychic monstrosity in their works. Moreover, in relating American romance to melodrama and pastoral, Chase's definition also brings to mind a prevalent melodramatic strand on both *To Bring You My Love* and *Murder Ballads*, which translates into a naturalistic odyssey and fantastical melodrama for Harvey, and comic grotesque drama and murder melodrama for Cave.

Expanding on his observation of the novel-romance, Chase conceives of American fiction as reliant upon a "distortion of personality, dislocation of normal life, recklessness of behaviour, malignancy of motive" which he names "poetry of disorder".³⁰⁶ He postulates that this poetry of disorder has consistently stirred the American imagination toward "the aesthetic possibilities of radical forms of alienation, contradiction, and disorder".³⁰⁷

As formulated by Chase, the American imagination is thus essentially melodramatic, renders reality indirectly or poetically, and operates among extreme contradictions. These characteristics structurally concur with the Gothic as an "aesthetic of the extremes"³⁰⁸ and with the Grotesque as a mode concerned with extreme contradiction, extravagance and

³⁰³ CHASE, Richard. *The American Novel and Its Tradition*. New York: Double Day Anchor Books, 1957. Richard Chase postulates that Romance is a core element of American novel, and by extension of American artistic imagination. In order to formulate his paradigm of American literature, he focuses on the relation between romance and novel in an analysis that encompasses literary works ranging from Brockden Brown to William Faulkner. His seminal work identifies a specifically American literary aesthetic that has continued to sustain much literary theory. In the process, the term "romance" has been redefined and rid of its 19th century connotations.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, IX.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁰⁸ As argued in Part I of this thesis, based on BOTTING. *Gothic. Op. Cit.*

exaggeration.³⁰⁹ Insofar as Chase's poetry of disorder is structurally akin to this thesis's conception of Harvey's and Cave's songwriting as Gothic and Grotesque text, it seems a potentially fruitful filter to probe Harvey's and Cave's monstrous Americana through. In particular, we will wonder if their works could be construed as musical off-shoots of the American poetry of disorder.

Cave's and Harvey's Monstrous Americana: Grotesque Melodrama

Melodrama³¹⁰

Derived from the Greek word *Μέλος*, "music", and the Latin word *drama* "play, drama"

A work (such as a movie or play) characterized by extravagant theatricality and by the predominance of plot and physical action over characterization

1784: "a stage-play in which songs were interspersed and music accompanied the action," from French *mélodrame* (18c.)

Considering the dictionary definition for the word "melodrama", two characteristics spring to attention: "extravagance" and "theatricality", which both contain the elements of excess as emotional and corporeal effusion. Melodrama is intrinsically related to the Grotesque as a mode of extravagance and exaggeration,³¹¹ which surfaces in Harvey's and Cave's monstrous melodrama. They alchemise the melodramatic component of American aesthetics into a carnival of outsize distortion and theatricals.

Firstly, we are going to examine the melodramatic element as a channel to grotesque mayhem and comic-horror, and to a form of extravagant monstrosity. For the purpose, we will focus on Harvey's "Meet Ze Monsta" and "Long Snake Moan", and Cave's three comic grotesque stampedes: "Stagger Lee", "The Curse of Millhaven", and "O'Malley's Bar". The aim of this analysis is to demonstrate that Harvey and Cave deploy the American poetry of disorder according to a grotesque pattern of extravagance, playfulness, and disharmony conducive to a meltdown of proportion and rationality.³¹²

³⁰⁹ As argued in Part I of this dissertation, based on HARPAM. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature. Op.Cit.*; EDWARDS and GRAULAND. *Grotesque. Op. Cit.*; and THOMSON. *The Grotesque. Op. Cit.*

³¹⁰ "Melodrama." *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2016.

<https://www.etymonline.com/word/melody?ref=etymonline_crossreference>

"Melodrama." *Merriam-Webster Online*. Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2014.

<<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/melodrama>>

³¹¹ EDWARDS and GRAULAND. *Grotesque. Op.Cit.*, 65-77. THOMSON. *The Grotesque. Op.Cit.*, 20-28.

³¹² *Ibid.*

1. Harvey's Experimental Melodrama

In terms of poetry of disorder, *To Bring You My Love* dwells on the epic and allegorical end of the spectrum, with six of the ten songs unfolding as a quest for love lost.

Firstly, we are going to survey two “nocturnal songs” which stand apart from the rest of the tracks by their ambivalence and indeterminacy: “I Think I Am A Mother” and “Working for The Man”. The songs share an oppressive soundscape of muffled and distorted vocals foregrounding gender-mixing and the psychic edge. “I Think I Am A Mother” unsettles by its lack of musical progression, its circular music line traps the listener in a loop, while its ambisexual vocals and theme of non-committal motherhood contribute to the otherworldly atmosphere. It sounds like an eerie inner monologue mimicking a dialogue, as the lack of personal and contextual bearings (the narrator alternates I/You with no clear narrative thread or communication frame) makes for a fragmented songtext which echoes the in-betweenness of the sonic. The song is too interstitial and elusive to be specifically relatable to the Southern matrix, other than through its focus on the underside of the human psyche.

However, “Working for The Man” presents overt affinities with Southern Gothic. Tiptoeing on the edge of dark Gothic and grotesque, the piece features disturbing characters in an oppressively claustrophobic soundscape, whilst containing hints of parodic excess. The song is a sung-spoken first-person narrative by a shadowy preacher “going around and doing good”, getting his “strength from the man above” and working hard for “the man”. His is a literal faith evoked in mechanistic terms (“God of piston/God of steel”), incongruously merging spiritual elevation with prosaic materiality. Moreover, the interstitial quality of the music is matched by an intimation that the character dwells on the edge of barbarity and lust as he sends “pretty things” flying after they get into his car, and exhibits narcissistic tendencies (“Look good in my steel machine”). Overall, the song conjures up a disturbing combination of Southern style Protestant religiosity and innuendos of sexual deviance. This, I would argue, is an offshoot of the Deep South matrix: the borderline insane preacher is an archetype of Southern Protestantism that features widely in Southern Gothic popular film culture³¹³ and literature.³¹⁴ The stock

³¹³ Richard Laughton's 1955 film *The Night of The Hunter* exemplifies this gothic mix of religiosity and death with the self-anointed Reverend Harry Powell who is also a serial killer.

³¹⁴ The preacher figure encapsulates the Southern authors' focus on psychic vagaries and contradictory inner impulses. William Faulkner, John Hawkes, Erskine Caldwell, Flannery O'Connor, and Carson McCullers notably share this grotesque characterisation.

character of the deranged Southern preacher is afforded either comic grotesque (e.g., Erskine's Caldwell's 1932 novel *Tobacco Road*), or ambivalent grotesque treatment (e.g., Flannery O'Connor's 1952 novel *Wise Blood*).

This dual treatment also surfaces in Harvey's song, in the form of otherworldliness (notably through the ambisexual vocals) and of hints of the ludicrous (i.e., the fusion religious fanaticism with macho swagger). Indeed, the repeated phrase "the man above" in reference to God combines with the deep vocals and the mechanistic description of the "God of steel" to produce a grotesque literalisation of God as a car. Moreover, in articulating religion in literal and materialistic terms, the description evokes Southern protestant religiosity. Although poised in oscillation, the song contains a hint of grotesque incongruity which ties it, albeit subtly, with the extravagance of "Meet Ze Monsta" and "Long Snake Moan", which could be classified as grotesque melodrama.

"Meet Ze Monsta" and "Long Snake Moan" stand out as the most extravagant songs on the album, both sonically and lyrically. They feature a fantastical form of melodrama, and an overblown sonic texture of pounding loops and open-throated vocal projection. The songs share a phantasmagorical character-gallery, with a lover-monster who becomes a monsoon ("Meet Ze Monsta"), and a supernatural female performing "snake moan", "snake growl", and "snake roar" whilst drowning her lover ("Long Snake Moan").

The title "Long Snake Moan" states its American blues lineage as it is a free adaptation of the blues classic composed by American blues singer Victoria Spivey's in 1926, which also inspired Blind Lemon Jefferson to rewrite it as "That Black Snake Moan" in 1927.³¹⁵ Harvey thus anchors the song in the American blues tradition, whilst also reinventing it, as is customary in the blues tradition. She turns it into a self-affirmative piece of supernatural omnipotence (i.e., "her long snake moan") that the female protagonist achieves by overpowering her lover. The song builds up tension with heavy guitar-work pounding out as Harvey sing-screams the lyrics. The chorus provides tension release when Harvey overextends the final "moan" of the chorus line "You oughta hear my long snake moan". The chorus retains musical tension as the guitar

See Erskine Caldwell's 1932 novel *Tobacco Road* for the figure of promiscuous Sister Bessie Rice who preaches her own perverted gospel; Flannery O'Connor's 1952 novel *Wise Blood* which features the preacher Hazel Motes, a Southern preacher plagued by his demons and constantly torn by guilt, temptation and expiation.

³¹⁵ American blues singer Victoria Spivey (1906-1976) had a forty-year career from 1926 to the mid-1960s. She collaborated with Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, Clarence Williams, Luis Russell, Lonnie Johnson, and Bob Dylan. American country blues musician Lemon Blind Jefferson (1893-1929) released "That Black Snake Moan" in 1927. His song contained sexual innuendoes that did not feature in Spivey's original version.

simulates an abrupt car brake, as if attempting to contain its own angry overdrive. This particular effect echoes Harvey's segmented vocal modulations, whereby she belts out a line and in the slight pause before the following line, the energy goes down, only to erupt again on the next line. This template of energy release/abrupt stop frustrates the listener, as the delivery seems to stumble upon itself, and the angry energy of each line gets swallowed back down. The built-up frustration only gets finally released at the very end of the song when Harvey repeatedly roars out the word "Moan" as the guitar continues its jarring brakes pattern.

"Meet Ze Monsta" causes aural disorientation due to multiple pounding lines piling up on top of one another. The percussive saturation is relentless, whilst noise, in the form of fuzzy guitar-work, piston-like noises, and a whistle-blow, further disrupts the sonic surface. Overall, the soundscape conjures up a sort of mechanistic primitivism, whereby the monster-lover is evoked through a combination of sonic machinery and relentless pounding. Harvey's piercing scream at the end of the song echoes the feral energy of the music. The lyric is equally hyperbolic, with the narrator watching the monster-monsoon lover arrive, and taunting him to take her with him. The extravagant story tips into black humour in the final stanza, as the narrator playfully suggests that there is plenty of room for the monster to take her down with him: "Hell ain't half full". The song is grotesque in its sonic and lyrical excess, and in its comic treatment of the love game. Indeed, the narrator overblows the sexual prowess of the monster to ludicrous effect ("What a monster/ What a night/ What a fight") and overplays her admiration ("I am lucky, the lucky girl").

The two songs exemplify the "tendency toward melodrama",³¹⁶ that Chase identifies as one of the core components of the American poetry of disorder. They translate melodrama into a sonic of hyperbolic orchestration, noise saturation with sung-screamed vocal delivery and into a lyric of phantasmagorical creatures and storylines. It is noteworthy that their lyrics do not contain any explicit cultural signifiers in their content and narrative texture. The songs are essentially idiosyncratic, more loosely shaped by blues and rock in their combination of prominent guitar lines and heavy percussions.

Although Harvey signifies the structuring blues influences in her song titles, the songs testify to her idiosyncratic take on blues genre and her marginal stance as an experimentalist.

³¹⁶ CHASE. *The American Novel and Its Tradition*. *Op. Cit.*, IX.

2. Cave and the Grotesque American Collage: “Stagger Lee”, “The Curse of Millhaven”, and “O’Malley’s Bar”

Contrary to Harvey’s, Cave’s melodrama hinges on formal coherence with the American tradition in terms of narrative and cultural anchoring. “Stagger Lee”, “The Curse of Millhaven”, and “O’Malley’s Bar” all feature an overt American backdrop. They unfold according to a conventional storytelling formula structured around an event or a series of events, with a dramatic build-up to a climax. “Stagger Lee” is part of the American folklore, its protagonist was based on a real-life murderer, Lee Shelton (1865 – 1919) from Missouri. He subsequently became a folk figure of the trickster and has been the subject of many legends and blues songs.³¹⁷

They are narrative-based and follow the conventional ballad format of “a narrative folksong which dramatises a memorable event”³¹⁸. And indeed, the events are memorable: “Stagger Lee” features pimp Stagger Lee’s killing spree in the aptly named bar “The Bucket of Blood”; “The Curse of Millhaven” features Lottie the cheerful teenage serial killer in a small town; whilst “O’Malley’s Bar” sees a megalomaniac narcissist narrating his killing spree in a bar. Moreover, Cave dramatises the events: the stories are told and performed in bold, to expansive narratives with unbelievable thrills and spills. The three murder ballads typify a meltdown of proportion that affects all the dimensions of the song: the storyline itself, characterisation and language, and Cave’s performance. Moreover, all three songs include staple comic grotesque components: a saturated horror content that achieves ludicrous effect through extravagance and exaggeration.

We are going to analyse the three songs’ melodramatic content for intersections with the American cultural poetry of disorder. In particular, the purpose of this analysis is to determine how Cave crafts melodrama out of the American reservoir and brings several strands into interaction: the ballad tradition, the Frontier tall tale, and the broader comic grotesque register.

³¹⁷ As part of his academic work on the syncretism and badmen blues ballads, Paul Oliver surveys the early century blues ballad “Stagger Lee” and its variants “Stackerlee”, its origins and dissemination. Stagger Lee was a ruthless killer who committed multiple murders, however Oliver notes that the ballad tradition has focused on the murder of the pimp Billy Lyons, as does Cave. Oliver locates the first instance of Stagger Lee ballad before 1900. OLIVER. “Survivors of the Ballad Tradition”. *The Anglo-American Ballad: A Folklore Casebook*. 289-327.

³¹⁸ LAWS. “*Native American Balladry: A Descriptive Study and a Bibliographical Syllabus.*” *Op. Cit.*, 2.

2.1. Cave's Agglutinative Dramatics: The Ever-Expanding Story

The three songs undergo a visible expansion of their narrative and dramatic texture, and an increase in length and duration: “Stagger Lee” spans 18 stanzas and 5’15, “The Curse of Millhaven” 13 stanzas and 6’56, and “O’Malley’s Bar” culminates with 37 stanzas over 14’28. Combined with the extravagant storylines, this general outsizing evokes the “distortion of ‘natural’ size and shape”³¹⁹ which Kayser identifies as a hallmark of the Grotesque. Through this distorting principle, the notion of “natural size” dissolves, hence storylines become endlessly convoluted and ludicrous. This quality brings to mind “Lying songs” or “songs of marvels” which were inherited from the Anglo-Irish repertoire, and featured “the invention of as many picturesque or preposterous marvels, declared to have been seen by the singer, as can be strung upon successive verses”.³²⁰ We are going to see that all three songs share this element of implausibility, thereby getting into dramatic overload.

There is an agglutinative quality to the songs in that the tale never seems to end where it reasonably should, and the narrator keeps producing new dramatic twists to extend the tale further and further. Through this unbridled ad-libbing, the song is saturated with horrific content, and thus achieves optimal horror drama within its timeframe.

In the case of “Stagger Lee”, the stanzas may be quite short (i.e., two lines each), however they occur in quick succession, which builds up a staccato rhythm suggestive of endless (and restless) accumulation. The song is built upon a series of vignette-like scenes: the conversation with the barkeeper, the banter with Nellie Brown the prostitute and the final exchange with the pimp Billy Dilly.

The ever-expandable quality of the story features blatantly in at least one live performance of the song where Cave adds a whole new stanza after the original end. He recounts the devil arriving to take Stagger Lee down to hell, leading to an extravagant ending where Stagger Lee finally shoots the Devil down.³²¹ The additional stanza exemplifies the ad-lib dramatics and a narrative propensity for exaggeration and outsizing.

³¹⁹ KAYSER, Wolfgang. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*. [1957]. Trans. Ulrich Weisstein. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963. 185.

³²⁰ GILCHRIST, Anne “The Songs of Marvels (or Lies).” *Journal Of The English Folk Song And Dance Society* 4.3 (1942): 113-121.113.

³²¹ CAVE, Nick And The Bad Seeds. *CD1: The Abattoir Blues Tour 2004* “Stagger Lee” (Munich). *The Abattoir Blues Tour 2006*. Mute Films. 29 Jan 2007. DVD and CD.

The same agglutinative process is at work in “The Curse of Millhaven”, where Lottie gleefully keeps admitting to more and more murders. The sentence introducing her additional murders, “I’ll sing to the lot now you got me going” testifies to her compulsive need to spin her yarn. And so she does, by prolonging her tale with the sordid details of her murders: Bill Blake’s little boy had his “head bashed in”, Professor O’Rye’s terrier “was found nailed to his door”, “the head of Handyman Joe was found in the fountain” etc. The tale continues on and on, until it finally escalates from individual to mass murders, as Lottie admits to even more crimes after being arrested: “twenty little children” who drowned in Lake Tahoe and a slum fire. Lottie’s post-arrest addition illustrates the same logorrhoea and manic action-piling as “Stagger Lee”. Like in “Stagger Lee”, there is an obvious delight in overextending the story to ludicrous effect.

“O’Malley’s Bar” outdoes the other two songs in terms of outsizing: with its thirty-seven stanzas, it is a manic mass-shooting epic in a bar. Its narrator-killer wallows in the minutiae of his murders: one head landing in the sink here, bowels blown to the floor there, a throat “crumbling” in his fist elsewhere.

Whilst saturating the song with horror, this narrative agglutination opens a ludicrous dimension and thus tips the song into comic horror. Therefore, the sheer disproportion of the storyline defuses the horror and produces a comical effect, thus enabling further horror. In other words, the distortion of size and proportion sustains the melodramatic overdrive: exaggeration breeds more exaggeration, and horror breeds more horror.

2.2. Tall Tale and South-Western Roots: Bragging, Self-Aggrandising, and Myth-Making

All three songs bring to mind tall tales not only through their melodrama, but also in their bragging and self-aggrandising: Stagger Lee brags about spectacularly killing Billy Dilly the pimp, Lottie in “the Curse of Millhaven” boasts about starting “the biggest shit-fight this country’s ever seen”, while the protagonist of “O’Malley’s Bar” magnifies his own actions, and in the line “with an ashtray as big as a fucking big brick/I split his head in half”, explicitly evokes the tall tale tradition of the American Frontier. The phrase “an ashtray as big as a fucking big brick” indeed echoes “that fish was so big, why I tell ya’, it nearly sank the boat when I pulled it in!” a staple phrase in popular fish stories of the American Frontier.

The songs are in keeping with the tall tale tradition in that they involve larger-than-life folk heroes whose superhuman exploits are recounted in a boastful and exaggerated manner.³²² What marks Cave's stories out as tall tales rather than mere myths is the sheer gigantism of their narrative style, and the sense of the ludicrous that their extreme horror arouses. Where myths are narrated in earnest to convey universal significance, Cavian stories are so convoluted and fanciful that they can only be taken as anecdotal entertainment, much in keeping with the tall tale tradition. On a cultural level, it is noteworthy that the tall tale bridges the gap between Cave's Australian background and American folklore, as the tradition existed on both Frontiers. American heroes such as Paul Bunyan the huge lumberjack and Davy Crockett the pioneer had their Australian counterparts in the characters of Crooked Mick, a champion shearer of colossal strength and quick wit and Big Bill, the dumbest man on the Speewah who made his living cutting up mining shafts and selling them for post holes.

2.3. The Epic Dimension

Moreover, there is an epic³²³ dimension to the songs, in the sense that the heroes and their murderous feats are aggrandised to mythical proportion. Indeed, the hyperbolic characterisation turns the murderer into a hero and his killing spree into a heroic feat of sorts. The manic epic of "O'Malley's Bar" exhibits a blatant epic dimension in the narrator-murderer's self-portrayal in embellishing overtones, describing himself as "of *enviable* height" and "so *handsome*", swooping "*magnificent*" upon his victim and spinning "*heroically* around" (italics mine). This abundant use of meliorative descriptors conveys an outsize perspective (megalomania), whilst simultaneously providing a heroic frame to the story. It is no coincidence that the word "heroic" should occur here, as it explicitly grounds the narrative in the epic mode. The narrator pushes his narcissism as far as providing what could be his own epitaph: "there stands some kind of man", thus consecrating the epic dimension of his story and his status as a

³²² BROWN, Carolyn. *The Tall Tale in American Folklore and Literature*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987. 17-30. Brown identifies descriptive exaggeration as a key component of the tall tale, and "a series of events increasing in absurdity or in their distance from ordinary life" (30) as its dramatic hallmark.

³²³ For the purpose of this research, I base my understanding the word "epic" on the following definition, with its emphasis on myth-making and legendary heroicism: "long narrative poem recounting heroic deeds, although the term has also been loosely used to describe novels. An epic may deal with such various subjects as myths, heroic legends, histories, edifying religious tales, animal stories, or philosophical or moral theories."

"Epic." *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2014.
<<https://www.britannica.com/art/epic>>

hero. Adding to his self-styled grandeur, the line “I raised the gun up to his head/Executioner-style” imparts a cinematic aesthetic to the scene, as if indeed he was stage-directing and starring in his own action movie. In giving in to full-fledged self-delusion, the killer-narrator turns his killing-spree into a heroic tale. Action itself becomes melodramatic, as shown in such overblown images as “blood spilled across the bar like a steaming scarlet brook” and “...the strangest thing I ever saw/The bullet entered through the top of his chest/And blew his bowels to the floor”. Such descriptions embolden the narrative by means of hyperbolic metaphor (e.g., “blood steaming like a scarlet brook”) and superlative (e.g., “strangest”).

Overall, the gigantism affecting action and protagonist alike partakes of a myth-making process, as signified in the following lines:

I am the man for which no God waits
For which the whole world yearns
I am marked by darkness and by blood
And one thousand powder burns.

In their reference to God and darkness, the lines afford a cosmic significance to the protagonist’s actions, whilst turning him into a messianic figure. The image of “one thousand powder burns” conjures up Christ’s stigmata, and thus posits the killer-protagonist as a heroic figure of Christian sacrifice. The ludicrous theatricality of this megalomaniac narcissism and the transgressive religious comparison are true carnivalesque grotesque.

“Stagger Lee” displays the same propensity for myth-making. The melodramatic strain is set in the description of Stagger Lee’s arrival: “he walked through the rain and he walked through the mud/till he came to a place called ‘The Bucket of Blood’ ”. The very name “The Bucket of Blood”, whilst consistent with the North American setting (it was a popular name for blues bars), also provides an ominous backdrop for the melodrama to unfold against. Moreover, Cave depicts Stagger Lee as an archetypal badman through his distinctive attributes (e.g., “a Colt. 45 and a deck of cards”, “rat-drawn shoes and an old Stetson hat”). The protagonist also styles himself as a legendary hero by asserting his identity with mantra-like regularity: “I am that bad motherfucker called Stagger Lee”, “I am a bad motherfucker, don’t you know?”

2.4. Outsize Language, Verbal Abuse, and Black Humour

Foul Language

Language is not only hyperbolic but outrageously sexually explicit. The words “fuck” and “motherfucker” recur with the regularity of a punctuation mark in “Stagger Lee”, where

the two words total nine occurrences, not to mention the flurry of obscenities which accompanies them (e.g., “ass”, “asshole”, “pussies”, “dick”). The song culminates with the highest number of obscenities in any one Cavian song, as Cavian abuse goes into self-parodic overdrive. The obscene language partakes of the extravagance of a song which seems to overflow both dramatically and lyrically. The effect here is clearly comic grotesque, and the song stands out as a most achieved piece of primitive delight in its combination of extreme violence and obscenity.

Elsewhere in “The Curse of Millhaven”, Lottie’s language shifts from barbaric gloating to verbal transgression as she mock-admits her own monstrosity: “Fuck it, I am a monster I admit it!” The exclamation denotes verbal and moral release, whilst the playful rhyme emphasises the barbaric delight she derives from uttering the phrase. The playfulness and swearing thus defuse the impact of the word “monster”, which gets drowned out by the comic element. In both songs, the outrageous abuse partakes of comic horror and of grotesque exuberance, whilst reinforcing the transgressive component of the songs’ monstrous melodrama.

Black humour, the Humour of Conflict

Humour emerges in several guises, affecting both form and content and bringing them up against each other. One of the most obvious manifestations of Cavian humour lies in the juxtaposition of horror and glee. This uneasy alliance mostly relies on a clash between form and content; on an immediate level it occurs between music and lyrics. This is particularly striking in “The Curse of Millhaven” which is built on a dissonance between the playful music and light narrative tone and the horrific song content. The jaunty tune is reminiscent of a singalong, which is reinforced by the “La la la la La la la lie” line that punctuates the song. The repeated rhyme weaves playfulness into the fabric of the song, and because it occurs as a chorus, it acts as a rhythmical backbone to the song. That the horrific murders should be sung to a happy childish tune has two antagonising effects: on the one hand it heightens the horror (as it makes the narrator sound deranged), and on the other hand it defuses the horror by introducing comic distance and playfulness.

Moreover, there are a number of strikingly transgressive language slips resulting in puns and dark humour, as Lottie gleefully slips through semantic loopholes to comic effect. For instance, with her repeated mantra “All God’s children, they all got to die”, Lottie playfully subverts its original fatalistic meaning and turns it into an injunction to kill more people. While

the line initially sounds like innocuous popular wisdom, in light of her growing list of murders, it comes to signify her compulsion to kill, in a piece of barbaric delight. The semantic subversion of the phrase “have to” is playful and witty and brings an enjoyable twist.

The same process is at work when Lottie recounts that “in a *cruel* twist of Fate, old Mrs Colgate/was stabbed but the job was not complete” (italics mine). The “cruel” twist of Fate is not the horrific attack sustained by Lottie’s victim but the fact that she survived it. “Cruel” is thus stripped of its conventional meaning (i.e., “acting with barbarity”) and infused with the notion of “*unfinished* barbarity”, which produces satanic humour.

Finally, she does the same with the connotation of the word “remorse”, when asked if she feels any remorse for her murders, she replies: “why of course: there is so much more I could have done if they had let me! ”. She gleefully disregards the implied notions of guilt and morality contained in the word and reverses its connotation to comic-barbaric effect.

Dissonance and black humour are also present in the childish overtones of the narration. Lottie thus includes inane naïve comments evoking teenage chitchat (e.g., “My name is Loretta but I prefer Lottie”), colloquial emphasis (e.g., “ Just imagine...”, “then the next thing you know...”) and childish boasting (e.g., “if you think you have seen a pair of eyes more green/Then you sure didn’t see them around here”). In trivialising the horror content, these combined elements make for a light-heartedness that jars with and trivialises the horror content, and thus produce comic effect.

Cave’s three songs thus operate within a comic grotesque frame whereby the accumulation of gory details and self-mythologising introduce a ludicrous breach. The mode is essentially parodic, as the narcissistic monsters of the songs become theatrical figures of transgression and parodies of social monstrosity. Whilst borrowing the hyperbolic style and larger-than-life heroes of tall tales, Cave also customises the genre to suit his own ends, by turning his characters into *monstrous* heroes. In hybridising the badman blues ballad genre with tall tale melodramatics, Cave crafts an idiosyncratic subgenre infused with barbaric delight.

3. The Legacy of Southern American Traditions and the Poetry of Disorder

Surveying the comic grotesque from slight intrusion to its outsize melodrama on *To Bring You My Love* and *Murder Ballads* testifies to the American influence in terms of musical lineage, songtext, and performance. The traditional ballad and blues legacy enables Cave and

Harvey to experiment with the darker themes of the genre, whilst broadening their aesthetic palette with a literary tradition that encompasses “polarities and irreconcilables”³²⁴. This paradoxical element is particularly prominent in Southern Gothic literature, which foregrounds grotesque contradiction and characterisation, and ranges from darker Gothic (e.g., Carson McCullers, Flannery O’Connor) to comic grotesque drama (e.g., Erskine Caldwell). This array of aesthetic potentialities accounts for Harvey’s and Cave’s wide monstrous gallery that encompasses passion murderers, serial killers, opportunistic psychopaths, supernatural monsters and more subtle forms of psychic monstrosity such as maternal killer-instinct and sado-masochistic love.

To Bring You My Love includes loosely blues-inspired grotesque melodrama in the form of comic horror (e.g., “Meet Ze Monsta”, “Long Snake Moan”, “Down By The Water”), more expansive romantically inflected epics (e.g., “To Bring You My Love”, “Send His Love To Me”), interstitial unclassifiable pieces (e.g., “Working For The Man”, “I think I Am a Mother”). *Murder Ballads* ranges from conventional balladic monstrosity featuring the ruthless murder of a helpless victim (e.g., “Song of Joy”, “Lovely Creature”), to more Romantic murder ballads (e.g., “Henry Lee”, “Where The Wild Roses Grow”), and boisterous comic grotesque melodrama (e.g., “The Curse Of Millhaven”, “Stagger Lee”, “O’Malley’s Bar”). Although both albums draw on the American space, the extent of their borrowings differs greatly. As demonstrated above, Harvey’s appropriation is looser, more indirect, therefore the American thread does not surface as an identifiable format, but instead it is conveyed obliquely through cross-references (i.e., blues inflections, the backdrop of the American wilderness, and the melodramatic and epic dimensions).

Conversely, Cave explicitly signals his borrowings from American templates of traditional ballads and badmen blues ballads. At the crossroad of the ballad tradition and Frontier orality, Cave creates his own hybridised form of comic grotesque reliant on a mixture of formal coherence and subversion. Whilst applying the conventions of badman blues ballad in terms of narrative themes and folklore gallery, he puts them through the magnifying glass

³²⁴ CHASE. *The American Novel And Its Tradition*. *Op. Cit.*,1. American literary theorist Chase postulates that “American literature takes its form and tone from polarities, opposites, irreconcilables”.

of the grotesque to produce ludicrous melodrama. He thus melds balladic storytelling, tall tale exaggeration, and the confusion principle of grotesque.³²⁵

Integrative Performance and the Rise of Comic Grotesque

Harvey' and Cave's treatment of the established folk and blues genre could qualify them as "integrative" performers, as defined by folklore academic Eleanor Long³²⁶ to describe the folk singer who "makes use of traditional verbal formulae and narrative themes, but is not enslaved by them: his value-system is that of the poet, or "maker," not that of the craftsman, decorator, or free-style artist."³²⁷ This notion of the "integrative" performer who forges something new out of traditional material is particularly relevant to Harvey's and Cave's *modus operandi*: taking different levels of liberties, they establish a generic framework from which they depart, Cave through subversion, Harvey through experimental *bricolage*. In both instances, they establish musical and cultural lineage whilst drafting in disparate elements in order to shape a fresh aesthetic.

The element of comic horror stands out as the most spectacular outcome of the two musicians' Monstrous Americana. Structurally, it dwells on the spectrum of "polarities and incompatibles"³²⁸ that Chase posits as central to American literature, and it is also in keeping with the grotesque dynamic of disruption and contradiction that not only juxtaposes opposites, but indeed conflates them³²⁹. Because comedy and horror are commonly perceived as incompatible, merging them into comic horror is a grotesque operation whereby two "things that should be kept apart are fused together"³³⁰. Indeed, morality dictates that murder, violence and barbaric impulses should not be a source of laughter or pleasure, but of undiluted horror and reprobation. In reversing the moral paradigm, comic horror relies on transgression and a grotesque conflation of two categories that are perceived as incompatible.

³²⁵ Geoffrey Harpham formulates the Grotesque as an "element that inhabits forms", a "species of confusion" that relies on a dynamic of contradiction, "a civil war of attraction and repulsion". HARPHAM. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*. *Op. Cit.*, Introduction XXI; 11.

³²⁶ LONG Eleanor. "Ballad Singers, Ballad Makers, and Ballad Etiology." [1973] *The Anglo-American Ballad: A Folklore Casebook*. Ed. Dianne DUGAW. London and New York: Routledge, 2016. 246-261. As part of her analysis of ballad creation and transmission, Long classifies ballad singers as either "per-serverating", "confabulating", "rationalizing" or "integrative". Her argument is that for the folksong to survive, it requires "piecemeal recreation", that is "the periodic transfusion of radically new periodic materials", which must be performed by an "integrative personality".

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 255.

³²⁸ CHASE. *The American Novel and Its Tradition*. *Op. Cit.* 1.

³²⁹ HARPHAM. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*. *Op. Cit.*

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

The instances of comic grotesque melodrama observable on both albums thus denote Harvey's and Cave's intention not only to draw upon a palette of American motifs, backdrops, and themes, but also to weave monstrous mechanisms into their music. In this respect, they use the American South as the fulcrum of a monstrous interplay between the listener and the performer. When they make horror playful, they elicit a complicit form of pleasure on the part of the listener, a pleasure derived from the spectacle of horror: barbaric delight. Therefore, the pleasure principle of their comic grotesque music is multi-faceted: reversing the moral perspective elevates what is morally abhorrent to pleasurable, hence the monstrous protagonist is simultaneously perceived as repulsive AND attractive. Comic horror binds performer and listener together in the shared delight they derive from horror and violence, and thus exposes their "monstrous gaze".

In this respect, comic horror provides not only a monstrous spectacle, but indeed monstrous experience, since that particular spectacle can only be enjoyed if the listener responds positively to the moral reversal and shares the performer's transgressive take on horror. The monstrosity of comic grotesque is two-fold: narratively, it stages the monstrosity of the song-drama, whilst revealing the performer's and the listener's monstrosity in the barbaric pleasure they derive from their co-enactment.

Literary Orality in the South: the Storytelling Mindset

A cultural legacy of Southern literary orality, the "storytelling mindset"³³¹ that permeates Southern fiction wove itself into the fabric of Cave's and Harvey's songwriting. This potent intersection between textual meaning and sheer sound underpinning North American musical traditions (notably folk blues ballads) provided them with an opportunity to experiment as writer-musicians, witness the expansive narrative scope of their songscapes, and the more cohesive imagery arising in the two albums.

Murder Ballads is the culmination of Cave's twelve-year foray into the Deep South, spanning nine albums and the novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel* (1989) which is a literary extension to Cave's songworld. The novel features a deranged loner, Euchrid Crow, who lives in a backwood community, and exhibits severe psychic disturbances such as hallucinations and barbaric impulses, as well as religiosity in the shape of self-harming, messianism, and relic-making. The novel unfolds against an infernal background of backwood community,

³³¹ William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Erskine Caldwell, Eudora Welty, and Carson McCullers have all extensively written in the short story mode.

lynch mobs, and extreme physical and psychological abuse. The novel reflects the comic grotesque themes running throughout his Deep South albums: such songs as “Papa Won’t Leave You Henry”, “Brother My Cup Is Empty” (1992) or “John Finn’s Wife” (1992) conjure up vivid infernos in such bold grotesque overtones that they are borderline parodic, even though as Gothic nightmares they remain on the darker end of the grotesque spectrum³³². Other pre-*Murder Ballads* songs were overtly comic grotesque, such “Jangling Jack” or “Thirsty Dog”(1994), however, they are more boisterous, pounding out their narratives in repetitive overdrive, and they do not display the same sophisticated narrative consistency and dramatic build-up as the three comic grotesque stampedes on *Murder Ballads*.

With *To Bring You My Love*, Harvey leaps from lyrical fragmentation and cloistered borderline insanity to a more sophisticated narrative scope, with expansive storylines and a greater variety of tones ranging from comic grotesque, to dark liminality and naturalistic epics. Sonically, her encounter with North American traditions translates into a leap from grunge inspired lo-fi into a slick aesthetic of classical harmonies and blues-inflected vocals.

Conclusion

With both albums, Harveyan and Cavian infernos take on a new cohesiveness, sustained by a new richness of imagery and an increasingly expansive grotesque register to convey monstrosity with. This is perhaps what the blues ballad, the American poetry of disorder, and the Southern authors have brought to Cave’s and Harvey’s songworlds: a Southern Gothic B-side to normality and moral conventions, and an enhanced grotesque lens.

Experimenting with the literary orality of the Gothic South enabled Harvey and Cave to engage in stylistic shifts: mixing genres and registers they are able to leap from dark Gothicism to comic grotesque through the conduit of monstrosity. The two musicians’ foray into Southern Gothic has crucially revealed their intrinsic hybridity as “literary musicians” or at least as musicians with a taste for intergeneric experimentation. What they found in the culture of the Gothic South is a crossover space in the form of literary orality. The latter fundamentally altered

³³² KAYSER, Wolfgang. *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*. [1957]. Trans. Ulrich Weisstein. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963. Kayser is a proponent of the “dark grotesque” as a radical tipping point into an alien world which terrifies us because of its incomprehensibility and of its radical breach from our epistemological certainties.

Cave's songwriting as he came to experiment with his lyrics like a wordsmith, so that they have become more and more expansive and central to his songscape (witness his 1989 novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel* and his poetry collections *King Ink I* 1988 and *King Ink II* in 1997, and *The Complete Lyrics* volumes in 2007 and 2013).

Harvey's and Cave's foray into the American space is informed by the American poetry of disorder, and that both musicians make full use of its potential for excess, dark irrationality, and contradiction. They use the American South not only as the site of apocalyptic mayhem and the barbaric, but also as the locale of ambivalence and romance. Consequently, Harvey and Cave expand their monstrous range by using the American poetry of disorder as a conduit to two antithetical registers: the comic grotesque and Romanticism. Having studied their use of the comic grotesque to produce both a monstrous character gallery and a monstrous gaze on horror, we will now turn our attention to another side-effect of their intergeneric and intercultural hybridisation: Romantic Agony, or a form of perversity incorporating Romantic (and romantic) themes.

CHAPTER 8: Crossing over into Romantic Agony: The Drowned Ophelia Theme

Introduction

As demonstrated in chapter 7, comic horror elicits a paradoxical form of pleasure: a delight that originates from the spectacle of violence, and from magnifying it to ludicrous effect. The incongruous comic intrusions thus introduce a disjointed perspective on the monstrous drama, and finally reveal the monstrous gaze of the performer and their audience. This form of monstrous melodrama relies on the grotesque mechanisms of excess, extravagance, and the juxtaposition of incompatibles, which produce knockabout mayhem.

It is noteworthy that Cave and Harvey slide down the aesthetic spectrum to also engage with a more subtle form of monstrous drama, one that draws upon the flipside of the “American poetry of disorder”³³³: its tendency toward “idyll”,³³³ and “extreme ranges of experience”.³³⁴ Likewise, the two performers indulge in extreme ranges of musical experience: on the one hand, the boisterous extravaganza of comic grotesque, and on the other hand, a romantic form of monstrosity, sustained by the theme of dark love.

For Harvey, this romanticised strand emerges on *To Bring You My Love*, alongside her comic grotesque and interstitial songs, and it continues onto the next electronica-inflected album *Is this Desire?* (1998). The thread is to be found sporadically on her subsequent albums, and notably on the piano-led *White Chalk* (2007). *To Bring You My Love* is aesthetically pivotal in that Harvey shifts from representing desire through abjection and disgust (e.g., *Dry*, *Rid Of Me*, and *4-Track Demos*) to a more complex tapestry of love as pain and longing. On *To Bring You My Love*, the love quest unfolds in naturalistic overtones, as Harvey’s protagonists embark on a self-redemptive odyssey against the backdrop of the American wilderness.

Cave developed a multi-faceted aesthetic throughout his Deep South-influenced production, from 1984 to 1996, having shifted from raucous cacophony, to more elaborate gothic nightmare narratives, comic grotesque chaos, and occasional dips into love songs.

³³³ *Ibid.*, IX.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

Although Cave's and Harvey's musical trajectories are distinct, they do converge in the fact that their aesthetic shifts have both occurred as part of an exploration of the North American cultural space.

This chapter works from the premise that, through a process of generic cross-pollination and by an operation related to Chase's "Poetry of Disorder", Harvey and Cave cross over into a romantically inflected English aesthetic. Just as they use the American Poetry of Disorder to experiment with a comic grotesque filter, they also delve into its darker romantic strain and forge a form of romantic monstrosity through the motif of "dark love". This chapter purports to examine how, in representing "dark love" through aestheticised death and suffering, Harvey and Cave delineate a transmedial and transgeneric form of perversity. Crossing over from the American poetry of disorder, they hybridise their songs with English pictorial motifs, thereby weaving in an English thread. I contend that the themes of this hybridisation are consistent with the notion of "Romantic Agony",³³⁵ an aesthetic template foregrounding the mutually constitutive interplay between pleasure and pain.

In his seminal work on Romantic aesthetics *The Romantic Agony* (1933),³³⁶ literary theorist Mario Praz focuses on the erotic sensibility of the European Romantics, and identifies the kinship between pleasure and suffering, "Romantic agony", as their focal point. Praz's study of the "perversities of pleasure and pain"³³⁷ brings to light the paradoxical nature of the Romantic aesthetic and points to its core sadomasochistic streak. In particular, Praz stresses the Romantic propensity for "dark love"³³⁸ and the use of horror as a source of delight and beauty, which he sees as a legacy of the 18th century aesthetic theory of the Horrid and the Terrible, and the discovery of the beauty of the Horrid, notably in William Collins's *Ode to Fear* (1746) and Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764). Praz argues that horror became a core component of beauty, and that the "beautifully horrid" gradually became a cult of the "horribly beautiful"³³⁹:

For Romantics, Beauty was enhanced by exactly those qualities which seem to deny it, by those objects which produce horror; the sadder, the more painful it was, the more they relished it.³⁴⁰

³³⁵ PRAZ, Mario. *The Romantic Agony*, 2nd Edition. Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1970.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ KERMODE, Frank. "Foreword to The 1970 Impression." PRAZ, Mario. *The Romantic Agony*, 2nd Edition. Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1970. Foreword V.

³³⁸ PRAZ. *The Romantic Agony. Op.Cit.*, 27.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Praz's theorising of the Romantic treatment of horror as a source of delight and beauty, and his emphasis on the Romantics' fascination with repulsive objects echo Jerome Cohen's notion that the thrust of the monstrous lies in its contradictory effect of repulsion *cum* attraction.³⁴¹ Moreover, dark love is structurally akin to monstrosity in that it posits two perceived incompatibles, love and pain, as interdependent. The theme also is also a source of monstrosity, as evident in Harvey's and Cave's works: it ushers in the motifs of murder, as well as physical and emotional suffering. But it is also a source of ambivalent pleasure underpinned by sadomasochism. Extrapolating from Praz, Henderson thus formulates Romantic desire as comprehensively informed by the paradox of pleasure in pain, anxiety, and eroticised submission.³⁴² Using Praz's "Romantic Agony" as an aesthetic filter rather than a historically grounded tool, we are going are to probe the scope for these sadomasochistic mechanisms in Harvey's and Cave's formulations of desire, notably in terms of iconographical cross-references.

Based on a comparative study of the figure of Ophelia in the artwork for Harvey's *To Bring You My Love* album (1995) and Cave's *Where the Wild Roses Grow* single (1996), this chapter will interrogate Cave's and Harvey's pictorial treatment of the motif as a conduit to a monstrous erotic spectacle. In particular, we are going to analyse their aestheticisation of passion murder/suicide in relation to 19th century English art, and outline its aesthetic implications in their representation of monstrosity. My contention is that Cave and Harvey use the Ophelia theme as a crossover space into Romantic Agony and the English cultural space, as part of a broader cross-artistic and cross-medial pattern at work in their music. It should be clarified that for the purpose of this research, the terms "Romanticism" and "Romantic" should not be construed as artistic references to a set historical era and works, but rather as an aesthetic prism comprising motifs and devices. Praz's notion of "Romantic Agony" with the aesthetic features and poetics it encompasses, thus constitutes our operative conceptual framework.

³⁴¹ COHEN. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture. Op.Cit.*, 17. In "Thesis VI" Cohen theorises that the monster is always dangerously enticing due to its connection with the forbidden and the taboo, notably corporeality and mortality.

³⁴² HENDERSON, Andrea K. *Romanticism and the Painful Pleasures of Modern Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Building upon Praz's *Romantic Agony*, Henderson contends that Romantic desire has a core sadomasochistic streak which surfaces as a quest for pleasure in pain experience, lover's idealisation, and intense anxiety for deferred love. Introduction, 10-16.

1. Romanticising the Visual: where *Murder Ballads* and Romantic Agony Meet

1.1. The Murdered Girl Theme in the Ballad Tradition

In order to stake out the interplay between Harvey's and Cave's dead girl theme and the ballad tradition, we will examine the conventions of passion murder ballads. Otherwise referred to as songs of "Passion Murder" or "Cruel Lover", the "Murdered Girl" ballads are of British descent and were adapted to suit the American cultural space: the British ballad "The Berkshire Tragedy" thus became "The Waxford Girl", "The Gosport Tragedy" "Pretty Polly", "The Cruel Miller" "On The Banks Of The Ohio", to name but a few. There are also native American ballads such as "The Knoxville Girl", "The Weeping Willow", and the "Jealous Lover". Traditional murder ballads were reworked to echo the details of true crime stories reported in the popular press, and could be told either from the point of view of the killer or the victim.

Arthur Field³⁴³ formulated the Murdered Girl ballad according to the following dramatic criteria:

- a. a man invites his beloved to come with him
- b. they walk or ride until they come to a deserted place, usually a river
- c. the man threatens to murder the girl with a knife or club
- d. the girl pleads for her life
- e. the man kills her regardless
- f. he either throws the body in the well or buries it.
- g. The girl's body is found and the man is convicted of murder.

The murdered girl theme is prevalent on *Murder Ballads*, which includes four such ballads: "The Song of Joy", "Lovely Creature", "Where the Wild Roses Grow", "The Kindness of Strangers", and the gender-reversed passion murder, "Henry Lee", where the female lover kills her male lover. Cave's ballads include narratives of opportunistic murders (e.g., "The Kindness of Strangers", "Lovely Creature"), serial murders (e.g., "Song of Joy"), and passion murder (e.g., "Where the Wild Roses Grow"). By contrast, there is only one murdered girl track on *To Bring You My Love*, "Down by the Water", although the drowned girl theme

³⁴³ FIELD, Arthur. "Why is the "Murdered girl" so popular?" *Midwest Folklore*. 1.2. (Summer 1951): 113-114.

features on the album's front cover. Whereas Cave complies with the ballad genre conventions as defined by Arthur Field (i.e., passion murder, a walk leading to the murder location by a river), Harvey does not, in so far as "Down by the Water" does not feature a romantic relationship gone sour or an opportunistic murder, but a mother drowning her daughter.

In the ballad tradition, Field notes, the murdered girl theme has often been associated with natural settings, notably riverbanks, as featured in the titles (e.g., "On the Banks Of The Ohio", "The Weeping Willow"). Harvey and Cave have both incorporated the water theme not only in their songs' narratives but also in their visual artwork for *To Bring You My Love's* album cover and *Murder Ballads's* single "Where the Wild Roses Grow". Most interestingly, their photos resonate with each other both thematically and cross-referentially, in that they both translate the dead girl in water motif into a visual replica of John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* painting.³⁴⁴ The aesthetic coincidence is noteworthy because it conflates a staple American folk trope with a quintessentially English literary figure, thereby effecting a visual crossover into 19th century English aesthetics, whilst ushering in a stylised and romanticised treatment of death and suffering. In this respect, both album covers provide a visual translation of a dark romantic motif.

Firstly, we are going to compare the two art covers with Millais's original in order to probe the aesthetic implications of their reinvention of the literary figure of Ophelia. In particular, this analysis purports to demonstrate that the covers function as visual introductions of the theme of "Romantic Agony" which will also seep into their musical works. Besides Romanticist Mario Praz's theory of Romantic Agony,³⁴⁵ we are going to use several theoretical frameworks in order to shed light on their artwork: cultural academic Elizabeth Bronfen's analysis of literary and pictorial representations of femininity,³⁴⁶ feminist theorist Griselda Pollock's modes of gendered visuality,³⁴⁷ and Laura Mulvey's "Male Gaze theory",³⁴⁸ will enable us to examine the visual dynamic and pleasure experience at hand.

³⁴⁴ In 1851-52, Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais completed his painting *Ophelia*, which depicts the character Ophelia from Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* (1599-1602). The painting features Ophelia floating in water as she is about to die. Millais's *Ophelia* is one of the most celebrated paintings of the literary figure.

³⁴⁵ PRAZ, Mario. *The Romantic Agony. Op. Cit.*

³⁴⁶ BRONFEN, Elisabeth. *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992.

³⁴⁷ POLLOCK Griselda. *Vision and Difference*. London: Routledge, 1988.

³⁴⁸ MULVEY, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." (1975) *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Ed. Leo BRADY and Marshall COHEN. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 833-844.

1.2. The Literary Figure of Ophelia and its 19th Century Pictorial Translations



John Everett Millais's *Ophelia*, 1851-52. Tate Britain, UK.

Firstly, we are going to survey the representational field of Ophelia in the 19th century pictorial tradition, and its interplay with Shakespeare's original text. Secondly, we will compare Harvey's and Cave's artwork with John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* painting in terms of composition and representation.

*Hamlet*³⁴⁹, Act 1V, Scene VI

Laertes: Drowned! O, where?

Queen Gertrude: There is a willow grows askant the brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead-men's-fingers call them.
There on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up;
Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes,
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

Laertes: Alas, then she is drowned?

³⁴⁹ SHAKESPEARE, William. *Hamlet*. Approx. 1599-1602.

Queen Gertrude: Drowned, drowned.

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the description of Ophelia's tragic demise (having lost her mind with grief, she makes garlands with wildflowers, climbs up a willow tree, falls into a brook and drowns) only occurs as a reported account by Hamlet's mother Queen Gertrude, however this drowning scene has been the subject of extensive pictorial interpretation. Indeed, the literary figure of Ophelia has taken a life of its own, and has become a myth unto itself in visual art and popular culture. It spurred many painters to translate it into paintings, notably 19th century English Pre-Raphaelite painters such as John William Waterhouse (1889, 1894, 1908, and 1910), Arthur Hughes (1851 and 1863), John Everett Millais (1852), but also foreign painters such as French Academic painter Alexandre Cabanel (1883) and French Romantic Eugène Delacroix (1853). Although this wealth of generic cross-pollination owes much to the tragic storyline, it also draws upon the aesthetic quality of Shakespeare's textual description. Gertrude's pictorial account of Ophelia floating "mermaid-like" with "her clothes spread wide", combined with the bucolic elements (the garlands of "crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples", "the weeping brook"), conjures up a vivid visual of the drowning. Shakespeare's aestheticised description solicits the reader's (or spectator's) imagination to expand on the text, thereby inviting pictorial interpretation, hence painters such as Millais have filled the textual gaps of the drowning scene inter-artistically. As a result of the cross-generic recreation of the scene, "the Ophelia scene" has survived into popular culture as a conflation of the original literary storyline, and of the subsequent visual narratives added onto it.

1.3. Ophelia: A Romanticised Literary Figure

In her article “Framing Ophelia: Representation and the Pictorial Tradition.”³⁵⁰ on the pictorial interpretations of Ophelia, Kaara Peterson draws attention to the factual distortion resulting from the extensive pictorial interpretation of the drowning scene, pointing out that over time, the popular imagination tends to forget “how her death is reported in *Hamlet*, or even we tend to augment the text to include a drowning scene, which literalises into a ‘seen, appearing in our mind’s eye’ as we read”.³⁵¹ In highlighting the potent interplay between visual and textual representations, Peterson points to a mutually productive process whereby visual interpretation not only fills in the textual gaps of the original text, but also lastingly alters the reading experience of the original text. This interactive cross-pollination raises questions about Harvey’s and Cave’s hybridisation: how do their transgeneric and transcultural re-interpretations affect the reception of the Ophelia motif? And how does the motif influence the reception of their music?

Peterson notes about Nick Cave’s “Where The Wild Roses Grow” art cover (fig. 3a) that his use of an Ophelia-inspired picture for a murder story that has no connection with Ophelia’s original story exemplifies the divide between “the original Shakespearean character and the established cultural modes for her representation”.³⁵² She argues, dismissively, that this popular use of the Ophelia figure strays from the Shakespearean blueprint and reduces Ophelia to “a drowning woman scenario”.³⁵³

Departing from Peterson’s argument, I would argue that Harvey’s and Cave’s inclusion of the Ophelia visual reference is not reductive but integrative, in that it incorporates the Victorian pictorial romanticising of the literary figure, and draws upon its aesthetic potentialities. In other words, Harvey and Cave do not close in on the Ophelia theme, but they contribute to its organic dissemination across media, genres, and historical periods. As a site of artistic cross-fertility between literature and the pictorial tradition, the Ophelia motif is essentially polymorphous and malleable, and consequently ripe for Cave’s and Harvey’s cross-generic translation into rock music.

³⁵⁰ PETERSON, Kaara. “Framing Ophelia: Representation and the Pictorial Tradition.” *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 31.3 (1998)

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

Building upon Peterson's observation that pictorial reinventions have gradually distorted the popular memory of Shakespeare's original text, I contend that Ophelia's 19th century pictorial reinventions have also left an enduring imprint on it. Indeed, regardless of its Elizabethan roots, over time Ophelia has come to signify a form of 19th century Romantic Agony, itself cross-pollinated with Victorian aesthetics. The reinventions of John Everett Millais, John William Waterhouse or Arthur Hughes have informed the popular perception of Ophelia by emphasising the Romantic themes of inconsolable grief, love, insanity, beauty, and death. Through pictorial translation, the painters unlocked the incipient potential of Shakespeare's drowning scene, and morphed Ophelia into a figure of Romantic Agony. And it is that romanticised pictorial reinvention that Harvey and Cave are extrapolating from.

2. Harvey's and Cave's Reinventions of Ophelia

Both the textual and pictorial representations of Ophelia's drowning incorporate key elements of Praz's "Romantic agony", notably the theme of tainted beauty³⁵⁴ (here beauty is tainted both figuratively and literally by "muddy death"), and enticing mortality. In intermingling horror and beauty, the death of Ophelia becomes "horridly beautiful" and thus evokes the "tempestuous loveliness of terror"³⁵⁵ that arouses what Praz identifies as "a new sense of beauty, a beauty imperilled and contaminated, a new thrill".³⁵⁶ This "new thrill" of aestheticised death is, I would argue, what binds together Harvey's *To Bring You My Love* artwork (figure 2), Cave's "Where the Wild Roses Grow" artwork (figure 3), and John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* (figure 1a).

Moreover, the conjunction of femininity, death, and aesthetics is a popular theme that fired the 19th century imagination, as articulated by Allan Edgar Poe: "the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical in the world".³⁵⁷ In her study on the aesthetic interplay between death and femininity, literary and cultural academic Elisabeth Bronfen³⁵⁸ postulates that Poe's statement epitomises a long-standing tradition in literature and painting to this day. She posits that art's fusion of femininity and death runs counter to the colloquial conception of woman as life-giver and sustainer, and of female death as abhorrent because it

³⁵⁴ PRAZ, Mario. *The Romantic Agony*, *Op. Cit.*

³⁵⁵ SHELLEY, Percy Bysshe. "On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery." *Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Ed. Mary Shelley. London: John and Henry Hunt, 1824. 139-140.

³⁵⁶ PRAZ, Mario. *The Romantic Agony*. *Op. Cit.*, 26.

³⁵⁷ POE, Edgar Allan. "Philosophy of Composition (1846)." *Essays and Reviews*. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984.19.

³⁵⁸ BRONFEN. *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic*. *Op.Cit.*

challenges human survival. Indeed, in making death of a woman productive (i.e., prompting artistic creativity and results in artwork), art reverses this assumption that woman's death is necessarily destructive.³⁵⁹ Perhaps, it is precisely this antithetical interplay between death and beauty that makes the floating Ophelia motif so compelling. Conflating death and life, it radiates nocturnal brilliance.

Having outlined the aesthetic scope of the Ophelia motif, we are now going to analyse the three pictures and probe their interactions in greater detail. In particular, we shall examine how Harvey's and Cave's interpretation of Ophelia affords a peculiar monstrous experience to the viewer.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

Figure 1a

John Everett Millais's *Ophelia*, 1851-52 (oil on canvas, full view)



Figure 1b

John Everett Millais's *Ophelia*, 1851-52 (oil on canvas, partial view)



Figure 2

PJ Harvey, album cover of *To Bring You My Love*, 1995.



Figure 3a

Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, "Where the Wild Roses Grow". Single album cover, October 1995.



Figure 3b

Screen capture from "Where the Wild Roses Grow" video, 1995.



In terms of composition, Harvey's and Cave's photos are strikingly faithful to Millais's *Ophelia*, featuring a central Ophelia-like woman (Harvey herself in figure 2 and Kylie Minogue in figures 3a and 3b) floating in water, in a listless sensual pose. Whereas Harvey's cover does not include any vegetation (see fig. 2), Cave's includes weeping willows in the background and his floating girl's head rests on the long grass (fig. 3a), thereby mirroring Millais's vivid green flora. Cave's composition includes an addition since Cave is cast as the murderer of the "Where the Wild Roses Grow" heroine, crouching by the side of the pond, holding his head in his hands, and looking down at his victim. This self-inclusion alters the visual narrative of the picture by turning it into a murder scene.

Both Harvey's and Cave's pictures retain Millais's green and red colour scheme, Millais's Ophelia holds a poppy, whilst there are blurred red roses on Cave's cover (fig. 3a), and Harvey wears a red satin dress (fig. 2). Overall, Harvey and Cave signal the lineage of the photos through composition, so that the operative framework is clearly established as darkly Romantic, and related to 19th century aesthetics.

How do Harvey's and Cave's compositional variations on Millais's original affect the viewing experience? What other shades of horror do their reinventions of *Ophelia* infuse the scene with?

2.1. Representing the Female Subject: the Male Gaze

Firstly, since the subjects of Millais's, Harvey's and Cave's depictions are all females, let us take a cursory glance at the conventional representation of women in art, notably 19th century art, and its cultural and receptive implications. This will enable us to analyse the pictures in the light of an existing theoretical frame.

In her work on the visual representation and construction of female identity in 19th and 20th century art, feminist visual theorist and cultural analyst Griselda Pollock³⁶⁰ highlights the interactions between gender construction and modes of visibility. Drawing upon feminist visual arts analysis, Pollock provides a feminist re-reading of the work of canonical 19th and 20th century painters (e.g., Edgar Degas and Gabriel Rossetti), and traces the 19th century pictorial origins of an ideal femininity constructed as passive and seductive. She argues that there is an intrinsic patriarchal ideology bound up with the system of representation and comments that

³⁶⁰ POLLOCK Griselda. *Vision and Difference*. London: Routledge, 1988. Pollock is a feminist art theorist who has studied gender construction and representation in art.

the word *representation* (i.e., to *re-represent*: to present again or anew) itself implies that “images and texts are no mirrors of the world, merely reflecting their source. Representation stresses something refashioned, coded in rhetorical, textual, or pictorial terms”.³⁶¹ The latter point is particularly illuminating in that it underscores the discrepancy between the object and its representation in art. Being essentially subjective, representation is informed by the artist’s sensitivities and preconceptions.

As pointed out by feminist cultural theory, when the artist is male (as was prevalent until the 20th century), and the object of his gaze is female, there is plenty of space for the artist to project their gender assumptions onto their subject, and thus reshape it according to their personal (and socially inherited) views of womanhood. Therefore, embedded in the represented female subject is the artist’s own construction of femininity, and that of their contemporaries. In a patriarchal context, it means that the female subject is rendered through a patriarchal filter, with its gender stereotypes and hierarchies. This distortion affecting film and literature has been a focus of feminist theory since the 1970s, notably in the wake of film theorist Laura Mulvey’s seminal “male gaze” theory.³⁶² Mulvey coined the phrase “male gaze” to designate the mechanisms by which in films, women are set in a position of spectacle or image to be gazed at by a male character and an implied male audience. Based upon psycho-analytical theory, she posits that women are displayed and coded as passive objects for the active male gaze, and potent objects for the (male) spectator, thereby eliciting a sense of omnipotence in the viewer. She also articulates the “male gaze” as *scopophilia*,³⁶³ namely deriving sexual pleasure from surreptitiously looking at a passive object of desire, which she posits as an essential component of visual art production and reception. The notion of *scopophilia* is a particularly illuminating concept to use in relation to Millais’s *Ophelia* and its two offshoots, in that all three are visually enticing, whilst featuring death or intimations thereof. Let us attempt to elucidate the source and nature of the three experiences of pleasure at play.

All three pictures gratify the viewer’s sense of sight, not only through their lush colour patterns and pictorial composition, but also due to their erotic charge. All three women are indeed eroticised both in pose and composition, and we are going to examine their individual strands of erotic encoding and effect. The differences in their erotic profiles pertain to the

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁶² MULVEY, Laura. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” (1975) *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Ed. Leo BRADY and Marshall COHEN. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 833-844.

³⁶³ Scopophilia: Etymology: σκοπέω, to look, to watch, and φιλία, to like, to enjoy. To derive pleasure from watching.

intensity of their erotic overtones, to their suggested sexual passivity, and to their availability to the male gaze.

2.2. Three Distinct Erotic Spectacles

Millais's *Ophelia* is arrayed as an archetypal surrendering Christian: her arms are open in the conventional pose of Christian Saints, as if welcoming God (and her death), whilst her upward gaze and semi-open mouth evoke a conventional representation of Christian martyrdom. These elements position her as innocent victim and devout Christian figure, and thus superficially preclude a sexual reading. However, in spite of (or thanks to) its saintly connotations, the painting is imbued with eroticism: Ophelia's yielding pose simultaneously evokes the martyr's sacrifice to God and erotic surrender. The sensuousness of the natural setting and the harmony of the composition suggest that her semi-open arms may invite an amorous embrace, and her parted lips a kiss. Therefore, Millais not only aestheticises death, but he also eroticises it, thereby making mortality doubly enticing. Millais's *Ophelia* is thus "horribly beautiful"³⁶⁴ in the Romantic sense, in its fusion of beauty and death, and she is also an object of *scopophilia*: her beauty and passive pose array her for the male gaze. Her erotic charge is two-fold: it issues from the explosive force of the "horridly beautiful", but also from the implied sexual surrender of her pose. Therefore, the pleasure afforded by Millais's *Ophelia* pertains both to dark Romantic perversity, and to a *scopophilic* spectacle.

Likewise, Cave's floating heroine is eroticised by visual markers of dark Romanticism and sexual compliance (fig. 3a). Striking a similar open arm pose as Millais's *Ophelia*, she seems all the more sexually inviting as she is more scantily clad than her Millais counterpart, and her legs are both naked and slightly apart (fig. 3a). Cave thus sexualises the original *Ophelia*, which is made more blatant in the video, where a snake swims between Minogue's thighs (fig. 3b) in an explicit visual allusion to the original sin. It is also noteworthy that Cave's drowned woman is subjected to two male gazes: her murderer's (i.e., Cave himself) who hovers over her, and the implied viewer's. In Mulvey's terms, Cave's floating woman is doubly objectified, and thus fully subdued into "male gaze" material. Consequently, the representation of Millais's and Cave's heroines are akin in that not only do they entice the viewers with the

³⁶⁴ PRAZ. *The Romantic Agony. Op. Cit.*, 27.

visual perversity of the “horribly beautiful”, but also, through the spectacle of eroticised submission, they provide narcissistic wish-fulfilment drama to the spectator.

That is where Harvey’s *Ophelia*-inspired alter ego differs from the other two works: Harvey toys with the dark Romantic Ophelia theme and its sexual innuendoes, but subverts its erotic mechanisms. In establishing a visual lineage with Millais’s *Ophelia*, Harvey creates representational and thematic expectations in her viewers, notably concerning the subservience of her heroine. In styling herself as an attractive (and romantic) floating figure, Harvey outwardly complies with the visually gratifying element of the Millais template. However, her encoding is drastically different in that she portrays herself as *unyielding*. Firstly, she is not dead or dying: she is lying with her eyes closed, but in rest instead of death. Secondly, her cryptic smile indicates that not only is she alive, but she is also deriving pleasure from floating and being watched, which connotes her as both sentient and active. Therefore, contrary to her two Millais and Cave counterparts, she is not represented as a helpless martyr, but as her own agent. Moreover, combined with her lascivious facial expression, her bright red lipstick and matching satin dress cast her as a *femme fatale*, and as such she is not coded as sexually passive but as a sexual initiator. Her eroticism runs counter to that of Millais’s and Cave’s heroines: it does not lie in her implied sexual passivity and compliance, but in her sexual agency.

Consequently, Harvey’s radical reinvention of *Ophelia* short-circuits “male gaze” mechanisms: in turning her figure into a willing subject, she prevents the viewer from projecting their fantasies onto her and from engaging in *scopophilia*. Because Harvey’s Ophelia cannot be objectified, neither can she be fetishised into an erotic object of contemplation, since according to Mulvey’s definition, fetishising consists in objectifying woman into an innocuous erotic object.³⁶⁵ Therefore, the viewer is no longer positioned as a self-indulging voyeur before a fetishised object, but as subject before another subject making a spectacle of herself. This de-objectified reconfiguration puts forward an *interactive* erotic spectacle, whereby Harvey the willing subject invites the viewer into a playful and potentially transgressive game with her. Conversely, both Millais’s and Cave’s protagonists are fetishised insofar as they are connoted as passive, their physical beauty is staged as iconic, and their death is eroticised. Harvey’s twist on the *Ophelia* scene reflects her tendency to toy with conventions, and with her self-representations and personae in general. As a female artist and an Ophelia impersonator, indulging in fetishised self-representation would have an immediate impact on

³⁶⁵ MULVEY, Laura. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”(1975) *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Ed. Leo Brady and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 840-843.

her persona, and cast Harvey the musician as a passive sexual object submitting to the “male gaze”. This move would be at odds with Harvey’s consistent claim to artistic and representational freedom, and the overlap between the protagonist persona and her musician persona would be potentially disempowering. Moreover, subverting Millais’s original enables her to inscribe a romantic theme in her work, whilst affirming her critical distance towards it, which leaves space for aesthetic experimentation.

Conversely, as a male performer, Cave’s compliance with 19th century treatment of the beauty in death motif does not threaten his own image, but reinforces it. Indeed, in his album cover (fig. 3a), Cave’s visual impersonation of the murderer looking down at his female victim gives him the active and empowered role. In this respect, Cave’s and Harvey’s representations of Ophelia are partly shaped by their respective positions on either side of the gender divide, and the heightened necessity for Harvey to distance herself, through irony, from potential patriarchal appropriations. Effectively, Harvey’s strategy is similar to the one she deploys in her earlier repulsive self-representations (see Part I): she reverses and subverts existing myths of femininity with ironic twists, thereby exposing the performativity of gender.

2.3. The Deliciously Perverse

What sort of monstrous visual experience do their depictions put forward to the viewer? How do they resonate with their musical works?

Although Cave and Harvey aestheticise and eroticise death in a variety of tones and to different ends, nevertheless they share a Romantic interest in the underside of love as the site of horrifying beauty, beauty tinged with horror. In particular, the two Ophelia visuals denote a conception of love akin to Praz’s notion of “Romantic Agony” in its intermingling of pleasure, pain and beauty.³⁶⁶ In both instances, the viewing experience is made pleasurable by the conjunction of an object of desire with mortality, or in Harvey’s self-portrait, an *intimation* of mortality. In evoking a form of beauty marked by the Romantic “tempestuous loveliness of terror”,³⁶⁷ Harvey and Cave arouse paradoxical feelings. Both pictures afford the viewer an experience of *scopophilia* in the etymological sense of the word: *σκοπέω*, to look, to watch, and *φιλία*, to like, to enjoy: the viewer is coaxed into “visual delight” by the aestheticised

³⁶⁶ PRAZ. *The Romantic Agony*. *Op.Cit.*

³⁶⁷ SHELLEY, Percy Bysshe. “On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery.” *Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Mary Shelley. London: John and Henry Hunt, 1824. 139-140. Shelley “Ode to the Medusa...” is a manifesto of the Romantic conception of Beauty.

composition, but the experience also strikes a perverse chord in the viewer. Cave's murder scene presents itself as a piece of voyeurism whereby the viewer's gaze is guided to the murdered girl because she is in the light and stands out against the comparatively dark setting. The contrast between darkness and light makes the experience subterranean, as if the viewer were straining their eyes to look at the scene through branches, as if in a peeping position. Cave said about "Where the Wild Roses Grow" that there was something "deliciously perverse"³⁶⁸ about the song, and the oxymoron may also apply to its artwork and video: it provides a "deliciously perverse" visual experience, from which the viewer derives voyeuristic pleasure and terror. Cave's photo could be read as a piece of visual sublime in the Burkean sense of the term, as an experience that overwhelms the viewer with awe and terror, and generates negative delight.³⁶⁹ The pleasure elicited by Harvey's art cover is more playfully transgressive than voyeuristic, insofar as her closed eyes and cryptic pout seem to beckon the viewer into an erotic dalliance with pseudo-death. The incongruous juxtaposition of death and playful seduction is "deliciously perverse" in that her facial expression and seductress outfit titillate the viewer, whilst the intimation of mortality (i.e., the cross-reference to Ophelia's demise) rebuffs them. This dual movement leaves the viewer torn between two responses, and simultaneously creates pleasure and discomfort.

The analysis of the two art covers brings to light Cave's and Harvey's affinities with Romantic Agony through the motif of dark love, which is to be found in Harvey's and Cave's musical songworlds and treated through an aestheticisation and eroticisation of death and suffering. The theme of dark love and its Romantic aestheticisation also echo in their music, leading to Romantic monstrosity and sublimity, as we are going to demonstrate in the next chapter.

³⁶⁸ <<https://youtu.be/e8Lp5lroVTc>> [ZDF Interview, no source information available]

³⁶⁹ BURKE, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. Ed. Adam Phillips. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990. [1757]
English Philosopher Edmund Burke identifies sublimity as born out of a confrontation with horror and its effect is akin to terror. According to Burke, "whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror", is a source of the sublime."⁽³⁶⁾ Burkean sublime thus intersects with Gothic for the centrality of horror, and is applicable to Cave's "Where the Wild Roses Grow" as a piece of horror artwork.

CHAPTER 9. Dark Love, Romantic Monstrosity, and Transcendence

Introduction

As argued in Chapters 7 and 8, Harvey's and Cave's songwriting is primarily integrative in that it draws upon upon different cultural spaces and traditions, and uses intertextuality and intermusicality as an aesthetic source. Their monstrous palette is accordingly broad, encompassing both popular traditions such as comic grotesque and folk-blues ballads, and high art such as the Ophelia theme.

Although primarily applying to a Romantic aesthetic, Praz's concept of Romantic Agony as a sadomasochistic principle of pleasure in pain matches the ambivalence of Harvey's and Cave's monstrous scripts, and the dynamic of their role-plays that alternate antagonistic and complicit interactions as part of a transgressive hedonistic pursuit. We have demonstrated that Romantic Agony is a worthy filter to apply to Harvey's and Cave's treatment of the dark romantic theme, notably because it renders the more subtle hues of monstrosity, such as the eroticisation of love and death.

The purpose of this chapter is to probe the two musicians' representations of dark love through intertextuality, by weaving in the romantic motif of love and suffering as a centrepiece to a more sophisticated blend of lyrical and musical monstrosity. I postulate that Harvey's and Cave's resort to Romantic Agony to experiment with the junction of the Gothic and Romantic themes, and engage in a paradoxical oscillation toward transcendence.

We will probe the structural intersections between Gothic, Romanticism and Rock, in order to delineate the potential for crossover. After staking out Harvey's and Cave's respective songwritings in terms of intertextuality and inner lyric to music equilibrium, we shall analyse how, through Romantic motifs and the filter of pleasure in pain, their portrayal of love as suffering crosses over into a Romantic aesthetic, thereby leading to a form of Romantic monstrosity.

1. Harvey's And Cave's Gothic Songwriting Of Excess And Romanticism: Convergences and Potentialities

Firstly, a cursory glance at the academic criticism on Cave and Harvey reflects the general academic gap between the two artists. Whereas there has been no academic probe into Harvey's Romantic theme, there is extensive criticism on Cave's love song and its interactions with Romanticism. In her study of love, creativity and melancholy, Tanya Dalziell notes the centrality of melancholy and spirituality in Cave's love songs, and posits that Cave's language of love fills in and performs the silence between the temporal and the divine.³⁷⁰ British literary academic Steven Barfield³⁷¹ probes the Romantic scope in Cave's work, but broadens the definition of the term to encompass the symbolist and surrealist movements, which he sees as modern off-shoots of Romanticism. Whilst analysing the ecstatic dimension of the love song, he draws attention to the intermingling of the sacred and the profane love motifs in Cave's love songs, and also identifies hints of sublimity in the interplay between love, disaster, and madness at work in Cave's songs.

1.1. Gothic, Romanticism, and the Primacy of Feelings

Before exploring Harvey's and Cave's dark love motif any further, we are going to probe their songworlds and the medium of rock music for structural overlaps with Romanticism. Building upon our research premise that Harvey and Cave share a Gothic songwriting of excess that relies on patterns of transgression, excess and monstrosity³⁷² we will search for intersections between the Gothic and Romantic aesthetics.

As part of an aesthetic of the extremes, Harvey's and Cave's songworlds are marked by lyrical and musical excess, which translates into a broad thematic palette featuring not only violence and barbaric impulses, but also suffering and desolation. There is, at the core of their music, an element of excess which, whether channelled or let loose, underpins their work and surfaces in different guises: as lyrical or musical overload, grotesque humour, and extravagant

³⁷⁰ DALZIELL, Tanya. "The Moose and Nick Cave: Melancholy, Creativity, and Love Song." *Cultural Seeds: Essays on the Work of Nick Cave*. Ed. WELBERRY, Karen, and Tanya Dalziell. Farnham (UK) and Burlington (US): Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009. 187-201.

³⁷¹ BARFIELD, Steven. "'The time of our Great Undoing': Love, Madness, Catastrophe and the Secret Afterlife of the Love Songs." *The Art of Nick Cave*. Ed. John H. Baker. Bristol and Chicago: *Intellect*, 2013. 241-259.

³⁷² BOTTING. *Gothic. Op.Cit.*, 8.

storylines, delivery or self-representations. The Cavian and Harveyan songworlds are thus conveyed according to a pattern of “Gothic negativity” that entails an “overflow of words, feelings, ideas, imaginings.”³⁷³ Fred Botting’s formulation of Gothic echoes English Romantic poet William Wordsworth’s definition of Romantic poetry as a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”.³⁷⁴ The mirror phrasing highlights that, as aesthetics of “overflow” and emotional intensity, Romanticism and Gothic are both underpinned by the primacy of feelings. Whereas the Gothic emotional range pertains to fear, revulsion, and barbaric impulses, its Romantic counterpart focuses more on pain and suffering; however, they intersect on excess and emotionality.

Moreover, the intrinsic malleability of Gothic facilitates Harvey’s and Cave’s aesthetic leaps. As argued by Anglo-American post-1980s Gothicists, although Gothic presents some permanent structural features, it is not formulaic, but rather it fluctuates over time and space. Literary theorist Robert Miles’s contention that Gothic is not a genre but a discursive site and an aesthetic points to the core plasticity of Gothic. Miles understands Gothic as a “series of contemporaneously understood forms, devices, codes, figurations for the expression of the fragmented self”³⁷⁵; hence its signifiers vary across times, cultures, and media. Witness the many mutations of Gothic over time, from eighteenth-century to post-modern Gothic, Southern Gothic, and Contemporary Gothic. Therefore, the structural mutability of Gothic paves the way for crossovers into different media and genres, and potentially enables Harvey and Cave to shift from Gothic to Romantic aesthetics or to intermingle the two.

The emotional junction between Gothic and Romanticism is palpable in the two musicians’ tonal trajectories, shifting from angst-ridden Gothic nightmare horror, through comic grotesque mayhem, to love song melancholy and existential atrocity.

Harvey shifts from the prevalently Gothic-grotesque range of feelings expressed in her first three albums to the more Romantic emotional scope of *To Bring You My Love*, which introduces such staple Romantic emotions as longing and dejection. In *To Bring You My Love* and *Is This Desire?* (1998), the primacy of feelings translates into “an array of psychic states”³⁷⁶ such as pain, frustration, envy, jealousy, and anxiety. Likewise, Cave shifts from fast and furious soundscapes (e.g., “Papa Won’t Leave You Henry” [1992], “Jangling Jack” [1994],

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁷⁴ WORDSWORTH, William. “Preface, 1800 Version.” *Lyrical Ballads*. COLERIDGE Samuel Taylor, and William WORDSWORTH. London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2005. 286-314.

³⁷⁵ MILES, Robert. *Gothic Writing 1750-1820: A Genealogy*. London: Routledge, 1992. 3.

³⁷⁶ BURNS and LAFRANCE. *Disruptive Divas: Feminism, Identity and Popular Music*. Op. Cit., 170.

“Get it On”, [2007]) through comic grotesque epics (e.g., “The Curse of Millhaven”, 1996), sobering love songs (e.g., “Ain’t Gonna Rain Anymore”, 1994) and to cosmic love songs (e.g., “Straight To You”, 1992). The emotional charge is thus alchemised into peculiar sonic and lyrical textures.

1.2. Rock as a Romantic Medium

Harvey’s and Cave’s songwriting is not only akin to Romanticism through Gothic’s emotional excess, but also through the medium of rock music itself. Indeed, the rock apparatus has essential affinities with Romanticism in its emphasis on originality, uniqueness, and personal expression. Rock culture openly embraces the myths of Romanticism on various levels: because of its excessive “live fast die young” lifestyle, its overt aesthetic affiliations with the Romantics through personal mythology (e.g., Patti Smith, Jim Morrison), and because it popularises variants of Romantic poetry in the form of love songs (e.g., Leonard Cohen).

Rock: a Social Practice Popularising the Romantic Ethos

Quentin Schultze formulates rock’s Romantic affinities as a popular translation of the Romantic core spirit:

In part because of its contradictions, the best way to understand rock and roll is to see it as a twentieth century popular expression of Western Romanticism. [...] More than any contemporary cultural form, rock captures the central elements of the romantic spirit: its individuality, freedom, and rebellion [...] its exaltation of emotion, physicality, and imagination, and its relish of contradictions, extremes, and paradoxes.³⁷⁷

Schultze’s conception of rock as a “popular expression of Western Romanticism” is particularly noteworthy in that it establishes a correspondence between rock as a popular medium, and Romanticism as high art. Although Schultze’s definition focuses on the Romantic *values* that rock popularises (i.e., individuality, emotionality, physicality, and excess), it also paves the way for an understanding of rock as a Romantic idiom intrinsically prone to

³⁷⁷ SCHULTZE Quentin, et al., eds. *Dancing in the Dark: Youth, Popular Culture, and the Electronic Media*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990. 164.

borrowing Romantic imagery and stylistics. We shall see later on that Cave and Harvey use this underlying Romantic component as a conduit to experimental Romantic songwriting.

The Romantic component of rock music not only surfaces in the emotionally charged song-texts and performances, but Lawrence Grossberg also argues that Romanticism is inscribed in the social and emotional fabric of rock, as an “apparatus” reliant on youth and the body,³⁷⁸ and therefore with a prime interest in pleasure, extremes, and individual experience, much in line with Romanticism. Furthermore, Grossberg conceives of rock as defining a space of difference for its fans, a space operating on “affective alliances” (i.e., collective practices and sensitivities) and emotional investment in the music.³⁷⁹ Moreover, Grossberg’s notion that the power of rock lies in its affective investment inscribes emotional experience at the heart of the rock apparatus.³⁸⁰ Based on Grossberg’s argument, we can posit rock experience as an intrinsically romantic social practice. And this “social” component of rock places interpersonal exchanges at the heart of rock.

1.3. The Embodied Intersubjectivity of Rock

The experience of rock is inherently intersubjective, since the listener simultaneously engages with multiple individuals: with the performer who embodies their music and with whom the listener has an immediate relationship, and with the song protagonists. As noted by music theorist Terry Bloomfield, the performer’s impersonation of the narratives leaves the listener under the impression that the essence of the rock song is “‘artistic’ interiority made exterior”,³⁸¹ and that the song space provides unmediated access to the performer’s subjectivity. This perceived intimacy with the performer’s psyche makes for heightened emotionality. Bloomfield goes on to demonstrate that the listener’s imaginary identification with the singer-songwriter’s persona has contributed to rock’s ideology of authenticity. Postulating that this ideology draws upon a Romantic conception of art as expressive of emotional authenticity, Bloomfield formulates the rock song as a personal musical narrative

³⁷⁸ GROSSBERG, Lawrence. “Is there Rock After Punk?” *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, eds. Simon FRITH and Andrew GOODWIN. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. 111-123.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ GROSSBERG, Lawrence. “Another Boring Day in Paradise and the Empowerment of Every Day Life.” *Popular Music* 4 (1984): 225–258. “Its [rock’s] power lies not in what it means or what it says but in what it does in the textures and contexts of its uses”. 233.

³⁸¹ BLOOMFIELD, Terry. “Resisting Songs: Negative Dialectic in Pop.” *Popular Music* 12.1 (1993): 13-31.13. As part of his deconstruction of rock’s ideology, Bloomfield posits that rock’s cult of authenticity originates from a Romantic conception of art. For the purpose, he draws structural parallels between rock music and the Romantic ethos.

that induces an emotional exchange between the performer and their audience. Insofar as the listeners read emotional meaning by transferring their own personal experience into the song, the listening experience is both receptive and productive. They identify the lyrical protagonist with the singer, whilst personally identifying with them both. Bloomfield's concept of a constellation of imaginary identifications mirrors the experience of Romantic poetry reading, whereby the reader identifies the protagonist with the poet and also empathises with both. The latter criterion features in Abrams and Harpharm's typology of Romanticism, along with emotional intensity.³⁸²

Moreover, the kinship between the audience and the performer is enhanced by the physicality of performance. As an embodied medium, rock music prompts inter-corporeal experience since the voice, as an intimate expression of the artist's body, gives the listener unmediated access to the artist's corporeality. Through performance, the listener encounters the assumed subjectivity of the performer not only with their mind (through the song narratives), but also with their senses (through performance). As a result, the bond between listener and singer is all the more potent as it develops concurrently on the psychological and corporeal levels. Roland Barthes pointed out the quasi-erotic pleasure of vocal intimacy, the "grain of the voice"³⁸³ signifying a most visceral and sensual bond between listener and performer. This rapturous component to singing brings to mind Romantic rapture, especially as it is intensified by rock's reliance upon optimal affective investment.³⁸⁴

Having staked out the structural scope for Romanticism in Harvey's and Cave's music, we will analyse their treatment of the motif of dark love as "Romantic Agony",³⁸⁵ thus delineating a paradoxical aesthetic whereby pleasure issues from pain, and love is the site of a sadomasochistic dynamic. Building upon Henderson's argument that Romantic desire is underpinned by the paradox of pleasure in pain, anxiety, and eroticised submission,³⁸⁶ we will demonstrate that Harvey's and Cave's Romantic sensitivities surface in their portrayal of love as the site of violent impulses and willing suffering. Focusing on Harvey's *To Bring You My Love* (1995) and *Is this Desire?* (1998), and Cave's *Henry's Dream* (1992), *Let Love In* (1994) and *Murder Ballads* (1996) we will stake out their aesthetic of pleasure in pain. Beforehand,

³⁸² ABRAMS M. H. and Geoffrey HARPHARM, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 9th ed. Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009. 213-215. 214.

³⁸³ BARTHES. "The Grain of the Voice." *Image, Music, Text. Op.Cit.* 179-189.

³⁸⁴ GROSSBERG, Lawrence. "Is there Rock After Punk?" *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, eds. Simon FRITH and Andrew GOODWIN. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. 111-123.

³⁸⁵ PRAZ. *The Romantic Agony. Op. Cit.*

³⁸⁶ HENDERSON. *Romanticism and the Painful Pleasures of Modern Life. Op.Cit.*

we are going to examine Harvey's and Cave's differing artistic stances, and their interactions with existing literary traditions, and the Romantic aesthetic.

2. Harvey's and Cave's Artistic Stances and Literary Lineage

2.1. Two Distinct Songwriting Approaches: Impressionistic Harvey versus Literary Cave

A few words about Cave's and Harvey's differing stances towards their work and songwriting in general, and the resulting differences in lyrical texture. Although they both self-identify as songwriters, they have distinct approaches to their craft: whereas Harvey's lyric is more elliptic, fragmented, and conveys meaning symbiotically with the sonic line, Cave's lyric is generally more cohesive and narrative-based (at least until *Push the Sky Away* [2013]), and it is the structuring force of the song. Moreover, in weaving literary experimentation into the fabric of his songwriting, Cave presents his music as literary music.

Harvey's lyric functions impressionistically in that the song meaning lies somewhere between the textual gaps and the musical notes. Although some of her songs present more cohesive narratives (e.g., "The Dancer" [1995], "The River" [1998], "White Chalk" [2007]), overall her lyrical texture remains looser than Cave's, operating through internally-focused snapshots, and relying on a combination of aural and textual prompts. Despite its reliance on a narrative base, her song texture is integrative, in the sense that textual gaps are filled in by the musical line. This intermingling of text and sonic elicits synesthetic meaning-making whereby the listener produces meaning impressionistically, by reconstructing the meaning of the textual ellipses with musical hints. A peculiar chord, distortion or vocal effect thus connects the lyrical dots together. In a 1993 interview, Harvey stated that she disliked excessive attention being paid to lyrics: "lyrics aren't meant to be read. They're meant to be heard with the music. A song is a song, not a poem or a play."³⁸⁷ This early stance testifies to Harvey's awareness of the organic interconnection between lyrics and music, and encapsulates the dynamic at play in her songwriting. She qualified this statement from 2009 onward, stating that she keeps notebooks full of lyrics that she subsequently matches with the music. Nevertheless, Harvey does not isolate lyrics from their musical expression, and indeed her first four album sleeves

³⁸⁷ REYNOLDS, Simon. *Bring the Noise: 20 Years of Writing About Hip Rock and Hip-Hop. Op. Cit.*, 164. Quoted from the transcript of a 1993 interview of Harvey by Simon Reynolds.

contained no lyrics, and contrary to Cave, she never published her lyrics. Insofar as her song-texts were never afforded individual literary existence, Harvey positions her work as music first and foremost, thereby presenting herself as a *bricoleuse* gleaning aesthetic prompts without committing to any formal literary lineage.

Cave has consistently foregrounded his literary credentials over his musicianship by framing himself as a literary musician in interviews, and by drawing attention to his lyrics as self-reliant texts. Testifying to his concern for his lyrics, his early lyrics and poetry were compiled in the books *King Ink* (1989) and *King Ink II* (1997), and his complete lyrics were subsequently published in paperback format in 2001, 2007, and 2013. In 2008, he declared that he approached “music as a writer”, and had “always approached the act of writing a song as a writer rather than a musician”.³⁸⁸ This statement discloses the extent of Cave’s self-perceived hybridity: seeing himself as a wordsmith who mediates his literary texts through music, he positions himself on the fence between the literary and musical crafts. In explicitly anchoring his song-writing in the literary act of lyric-writing, he posits the backbone of his songs as primarily textual, and thus affiliates his work and himself to a literary tradition. Moreover, Cave’s artistic stance as a literary hybrid filters into a song format structured by its lyrical content: the lyrics set the mood, thematic scope and genre, and then music-writing weaves itself around it. Retrospectively, Cave describes his creative collaboration with the Bad Seeds as “a lyrically-driven thing. It needed music that a long narrative could sit on top of”.³⁸⁹

2.2. Cave the Literary Musician: Signalling a Hybrid Lineage

Cave’s focus on lyric-writing shows in his extensive experimentation with existing literary modes: his 1984-1996 albums incorporate Southern and Frontier storytelling and Southern Gothic experimentation. This hybridising trend culminates with *Murder Ballads* (1996), and his novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel* (1989), a subterranean exploration of a backwood freak that resonates with Southern Gothicism. *Dig Lazarus, Dig!* (2008) features a postmodern songwriting style, whereby Cave edits the main event out of the narrative (e.g., “Moonland”), thus disrupting linear understanding and disorienting his listeners. The latter is reminiscent of the deconstructive technique William Faulkner applies in *Sanctuary* (1931) and

³⁸⁸ CAVE, Nick. Interview Berlin 2008. N.p. 14 September 2009. Accessed 15 July 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBqWikfETcM&NR=1>>

³⁸⁹ CAMERON, Keith and Dave TONGE. “The King of Strangers.” *Mojo*, July 2018: 72.

John Hawkes in *Second Skin* (1964), in which the narrative line stumbles upon temporal and dramatic shifts. In their improvisational manner and lyrical ad-libbing, *Grinderman* (2007) and *Grinderman 2* (2009) could be construed as automatic (song) writing.

With *The Boatman's Call* (1997) and *No More Shall We Part* (2001), Cave experiments with a more poetic lyric, influenced by Romanticism and *duende*. His literary self-consciousness even led him to give a lecture in 1999, "The Secret Life of the Love Song",³⁹⁰ which provided a detailed insight into the creative mechanisms underpinning his love songs. In particular, he put forward his definition of the love song as intermingling love and inexplicable longing, *saudade*. Originating from 13th century Galician-Portuguese troubadour love poetry (*Cancioneiro da Vaticana*), the word *saudade* designates an emotional state of wishful longing for something that is missing, a sort of pervasive melancholy. In citing *saudade* as a source of inspiration, Cave further affirms his poetic filiation, since the bittersweet melancholy of *saudade* has informed Portuguese-speaking literary and musical aesthetics to this day (e.g., Portuguese author Fernando Pessoa's posthumous work *The Book of Disquiet* in 1982, Fado music, and Cape Verdean singer Cesaria Evora's "Sodade" in 1992).

He further elaborates on the intrinsic duality of the love song by referring to Spanish writer Gabriel Garcia Lorca's aesthetics of *duende*. In his *Juego y teoria del duende* lecture ("Play and Theory of *Duende*"³⁹¹), Lorca formulates *duende* as a dark emotional force that surges up in artists and springs forth in artistic creativity. In explicitly locating his love songs within an artistic lineage that fuses pain and longing, Cave indicates an aesthetic overlap with the Romantic approach to love as a simultaneous awareness of pleasure and pain. He also posits the artist's capacity to embrace joy and sadness as critical to the love song:

All Love Songs must contain *duende*, because the Love Song is never simply happy. It must first embrace the potential for pain...within the fabric of the Love Song, within its melody, its lyric, one must sense its acknowledgment of its capacity for suffering.³⁹²

³⁹⁰ CAVE, Nick. *The Secret Life of The Love Song/Flesh Made Word: Two Lectures*. Emi Music. 2000. CD. Cave composed the lecture 'The Secret Life of The Love Song' for the Vienna Poetry Festival 1998. He discussed his love songs: their genesis and influences, his artistic intent.

³⁹¹ LORCA, Federico Garcia. "Play and Theory of Duende." Christopher Maurer, ed. *In Search of Duende*. San Francisco: New Directions, 1998. 48-63.

³⁹² CAVE, Nick. "The Secret Life of The Love Song/Flesh Made Word: Two Lectures." *The Complete Lyrics 1978 – 2013*. London: Penguin Books, 2013. 8.

Moreover, Cave articulates his writing as providing access to his imagination, as spiritual healing, and as a means of “writing God into existence”³⁹³. He also defines it as “the actualising of God through the medium of the love song as his “prime motivation as an artist”³⁹⁴. His claims should be contextualised within his preoccupations of the time, since he was in the middle of a spiritual phase on *Boatman’s Call* (1997) and *No More Shall We Part* (2001). Cave’s quasi-mystical vision of the love song as “the light of God, deep down, blasting through our wounds”,³⁹⁵ calls forth the sublime as an overwhelming experience leading to “a mixed feeling ... a composition of melancholy ... and of joyousness”³⁹⁶. German playwright and philosopher Friedrich Schiller’s definition theorises sublimity as a combination of pleasure and pain, which concurs with the Burkean and Kantian sublime, and with the Romantic conception of sublime as a negative pleasure. Cave’s incorporation of this dual component in his songwriting is therefore in line with the Romantic sensitivity.

It is noteworthy that Cave’s experimentation with literary styles and aesthetics is both conscious and narratively constructed. His statement of artistic intent as a literary hybrid positions him in an existing lineage of literary musicians which he explicitly signals: Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan, Van Morrison, Tom Waits, and Neil Young.³⁹⁷ In presenting himself as a literary hybrid, Cave frames both his persona and his work, and to some extent invites literary interpretation and acknowledgment.

Harvey and Cave thus differ starkly in artistic lineage and song composition. Whereas Cave constructs his filiation both self-narratively and through formal coherence, Harvey positions herself in the wings, and has been notoriously reluctant to frame her work narratively in interviews, thereby leaving the listeners to their own responses and thought associations. This difference is particularly evident in the way that they deal with their respective Romantic streaks: Cave elaborates on the interplay of his music with existing canons, whereas Harvey brings the focus to the musical artistry and soundscapes of her albums. In fact, she only started to discuss her artistic stance in greater detail upon the release of *Let England Shake* in 2011.

Harvey’s and Cave’s respective songwriting stances should be born in mind when approaching their songs as Romantic texts: whereas Harvey’s text is in flux and only decipherable as text-in-performance (i.e., lyrics and music are interwoven), Cave posits text as

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁶ SCHILLER, Friedrich. *Essays*. Ed. Walter Hinderer and Daniel Dahlstrom. New York: Continuum, 1988. 42.

³⁹⁷ CAVE, Nick. *The Complete Lyrics 1978 – 2013*. London: Penguin Books, 2013. 8.

the centrepiece of the song dynamic, and as such it can be approached as a self-contained object.

Having staked out Cave's and Harvey's respective artistic positions, we are going to survey Cave's and Harvey's works for the love theme.

2.3. Overview of the Love Motif in Harvey's and Cave's Works

Cave's and Harvey's treatment of the Romantic trope of love is as wide-ranging as their tonal palettes. On her first three albums, *Dry* (1992), *Rid of Me* (1993), and *4-track Demos* (1993), Harvey explores the theme of female desire through a discordant and aggressive soundscape of raw strings and pounding percussions. Lyrically, desire is evoked by means of sadomasochistic tales of love and desire in which sexuality becomes the site of friction and abject corporeality and also the locus of the barbaric. Love features as an intense power struggle whereby protagonists are prone to sadistic impulses (e.g., revenge torture). The potent sadomasochistic component present in the representation of love is matched in the soundscape: its explosive and visceral sound and vocal assault make for a painful listening experience. Conversely, *To Bring You My Love* marks an abrupt stylistic shift from a grunge-inspired sonic to ample harmonies and a blues-inflected style. Whilst continuing her exploration of the vicissitudes of love and desire, Harvey broadens her psychic palette to include pain and longing, with the quest for love spanning six out of the ten tracks. This tonal shift introduces a new Romantic scope to her depiction of love, since pain and suffering are staple Romantic themes and central to Romantic Agony. This more subtle treatment of desire is deployed most fully on *To Bring You My Love*, it still underlies *Is this Desire?*, and resurfaces sporadically on subsequent albums. *To Bring You My Love* and *Is this Desire* are Harvey's most striking instances of romanticised songwriting, hence they will be given closer attention in this study.

Cave's treatment of love is similarly broad-ranging. In his pre-1984 Birthday Party production, it was afforded transgressive treatment as rampant sexuality and lust, and the love song theme gradually surfaced from 1984 onwards, with the creation of his band The Bad Seeds, and the emergence of more a cohesive lyrical and sober sonic texture. The transgressive thread of seedy sexuality and the Romantic love song continue to coexist throughout his career, hence the same transgressive streak that underlies "Hard on for love" (1986) erupts again in "Stagger Lee" (1996) or in "No Pussy Blues" (2007).

Cave's love songs may sound like "crooner songs" in their orchestral harmonies and smooth vocal texture, however their tonal complexity mitigates the crooning element of their musical line, and points to a subtler equilibrium than the term "crooning", with its trite connotations, would allow. The lyrical content of Cave's love songs is bittersweet and tinged with darkness, oscillating between pining for the beloved (e.g., "Ain't Gonna Rain Anymore", 1994), contemplation of aching beauty ("Black Hair", 1997) and explosions of cosmic uplift ("Straight to You", 1992). Scattered though they may be across Cave's repertoire, the love songs constitute a fully-fledged creative cluster that sits alongside his lewder palette. Within the contrasted economy of Cave's songworld, the antithetical threads of outrageous sexuality and Romantic love are not mutually exclusive, but indeed interwoven. They interact as antinomic correlatives, and flow into the multifarious stream of Cave's songworld.

It is noteworthy that Cave has also crafted a love song diptych, *The Boatman's Call* (1997) and *No More Shall We Part* (2001), which stands out as his most sustained exploration of the themes of love and longing. *Boatman's Call* marks an abrupt stylistic shift from its blues-inspired predecessor *Murder Ballads*: the guitar-based blues-rock sound yields to a stripped structure with a main piano line and minimal orchestration. In their hymnal overtones, the sober music and vocals invite the listener into quiet contemplation rather than imaginary thrills and spills: the lyrics no longer recount dramatic events, but share emotional intimacy. As he sings about heartbreak, lost love, and spiritual yearning, Cave exhibits Romantic sensitivities in the way he establishes an emotional flow foregrounding inner life over external reality. The listeners are no longer roaming an existing cultural space with its associated stories and traditions, but Cave's inner world. Whether pondering on the spirituality of love or pining for his beloved, Cave beckons his audience into poetic recollection and emotive life-gazing.

The next paragraph will investigate the scope for Romantic sadomasochism in Cave's and Harvey's representation of dark love, whilst trying to identify the convergences between the two artists' works. We will now revisit Harvey's *To Bring You My Love* (1996) and *Is This Desire?* (1998), and Cave's 1992-1996 albums (*Henry's Dream* (1992), *Let Love In* (1994) and *Murder Ballads* (1996)) for their aesthetic of pleasure in pain.

3. Love as Pain and Longing

Praz posits a deeply-rooted “masochistic streak” and “erotic sensibility”³⁹⁸ at the heart of Romanticism, featuring frustrated desire and pain, a barbarous lover to be dominated by, and a propensity to seek pleasure in pain. Expanding upon Praz’s notion of Romantic agony, Andrea Henderson contends that Romantic-era writers were fascinated by experiences of pain and sought to derive pleasure not only from displeasure and suffering but also from submission and self-abnegation:

Pain becomes meaningful in the context of desire: it is the pain of this unsatisfied desire that brings pleasure. This pain arises not simply from the absence of straightforward satisfaction, but also from the frustration and humiliation attendant upon nongratification.³⁹⁹

In postulating that mastery and subjection underpin the Romantic aesthetic, Henderson places the paradoxical dynamic of sadomasochism at the heart of Romantic poetics. Henderson’s definition of Romantic desire intersects with the grotesque pattern of contradiction and disruption⁴⁰⁰ at work in Harvey’s and Cave’s aesthetics, and therefore seems a worthy filter to examine Harvey’s and Cave’s works by. First, we will examine Harvey’s and Cave’s portrayal of love as anxiety and pain, and secondly we will explore the scope for Romantic sadomasochism in Cave’s and Harvey’s treatment of the love theme.

3.1. Harvey’s *To Bring You My Love* and *Is this Desire*: the Love Junction



³⁹⁸ PRAZ. *The Romantic Agony*. Op. Cit.

³⁹⁹ HENDERSON. *Romanticism and the Painful Pleasure of Modern Life*. Op. Cit. 7.

⁴⁰⁰ HARPAM. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*. Op. Cit.

NB: for the purpose of this analysis, *To Bring You My Love* will be shortened to *To Bring...* and *Is this Desire* as *Desire*.

Both *To Bring You My Love* and *Is this Desire* are explorations of love, the former through expansive American blues-infused narratives and the latter in slick electronica overtones. Whereas *To Bring ...* is sonically and lyrically anchored in the North American cultural space (see chapters 6 and 7), *Desire* moves on to Harvey's English homeland, as signalled by the "Dorset" sticker on the album's back-cover (see above), and it probes the twists and bends of (female) desire through a gallery of female protagonists (Angelene, Catherine, Leah, Elise, Joy). Like *To Bring...* and its focus on love and longing, *Desire* dwells on the darker end of the love spectrum, and focuses on carnal love. Whether desire surfaces as a sexual encounter gone sour (e.g., "A perfect Day Elise"), aching beauty ("Electric Light"), hell-bound journey (e.g., "No Girl So Sweet", "My Beautiful Leah"), or sensuous torture (e.g., "Catherine", "The Wind"), it is presented as a source of angst.

Absence and Longing

Both *To Bring...* and *Desire* articulate the love quest in terms of pain and anxiety, evoking the object of desire either as an elusive form of longing (e.g., in "Angelene"⁴⁰¹, the protagonist yearns for a man "to come and collect her soul/and come to her") or as a known lover whose pervasive absence is evoked through the motif of pining. The object of the protagonist's quest, their lover, is made all the more omnipresent by their absence, which is a cause for acute sorrow, and gives rise to an emotive natural imagery. For instance, in the eponymous song "To Bring You My Love", the love quest unfolds against a hostile natural backdrop of epic proportion as the doomed protagonist "climbed over mountains", "travelled over dry earth and floods" and "at sea". Amid this vivid cartography of desert and flood, such phrases as "hell and high water" become fraught with biblical meaning and ignite visions of Old Testament destruction. The incipient religious element of the landscape is made explicit in an analogy between love and self-damnation: "I have lain with the Devil", "cast down off Heaven", and "cursed God above". The song is imbued with a sense of absence that contaminates the natural world, as if the search for the beloved conveyed cosmic significance. The chorus line "to bring you my love" operates like a mantra and turns the song into a spiritual meditation on the omnipresent absent "you," thereby articulating a vision of love as frustrated desire and obsessive longing.

⁴⁰¹ *Is this Desire?*, 1997.

Love as a figure of absence is also the salient motif of “Send His Love to Me” (*To Bring...*). In an inverted mirror image of “To Bring You My Love”, love is depicted as a pendulum swinging between the two lovers, forever poised in wishful swinging and never reaching its desired destination. The protagonist of “Send His Love to Me” reaches frantic heights as she repeatedly begs Jesus to send her lover home to her and howls extended “please”(s) throughout the song, likening her plight to a calvary (“How long must I suffer?/Dear God I have served my time”). The official video for the track affords a visual translation of the protagonist’s despair through the harsh backdrop of the American desert, with a run-down log-cabin surrounded by dust and gnarly trees. The juxtaposition of the domestic sphere with the barren wilderness imparts a sense of desolation, whilst suggesting a doomed vision of love. The mantra-like plea for the return of her beloved and his love “send me his love”/“send him to me again” also recurs as low-key wailing on “Tecló” (“send me his love/send him to me again”) so that the plea for the beloved resonates over three songs on *To Bring You My Love*, thereby creating a cohesive undercurrent of suffering within the scope of the album. Therefore, Harvey’s depiction of love as doomed is intimately connected with loss and suffering.

3.2. Cave, the Painful Corporeal Memory, and Love Anxiety

Cave’s portrayal of love as longing is a recurring motif in his love songs, however, his tone tends to be more melancholy than melodramatic, and his depiction of the beloved differs from Harvey’s. Indeed, in aesthetising the lover-protagonists’ feeling of longing instead of their beloved, Harvey’s elliptical description turns the beloved into an elusive figure. Although driving the emotional flow of the song, the beloved is thus stripped of individuality, and as such they act as a generic figure of loss.

Conversely, in his love songs, Cave’s focus is on his beloved, and he alchemises his yearning for the absent lover into vivid depictions. Cave’s pining thus dissolves into a gaze that brings the beloved into lyrical existence. Absence is evoked through spectrality, whereby the narrator’s senses are so haunted by the beloved that they conjure up a corporeal geography of painful memories. In “Nobody’s Baby Now” (1994), the narrator’s body aches with his lover’s physical presence (“She lives in my blood and skin/Her wild feral stare, her dark hair”). The carnal description and visual details actualise her pervasive presence-absence, thereby signifying his complete subjugation. The song ends with his inability to shake off the memory

of her, which comes back to haunt him (“And though I’ve tried to lay her ghost down/She is moving through me even now.”). Elsewhere in “Ain’t gonna rain anymore” (1994), a melancholy song about a narrator lamenting the departure of his lover, the haunting presence manifests itself sonically against a backdrop of destruction (“Sometimes I swear I can still hear her howl /Down through the wreckage and the ruins”).

Cave’s love songs thus delineate a corporeal cartography of absence, whereby the narrator’s senses can retrospectively feel the physical imprint of the beloved. In “Brompton Oratory” (1997), a hymn to love lost and aching beauty, the narrator can still smell his beloved in a quasi-religious analogy with the chalice ritual (“The smell of you still on my hands/As I bring the cup up to my lips.”), until he finally admits to his own powerlessness before his longing (“Outside I sit ... forlorn and exhausted by the absence of you”). Cave thus evokes a polymorphous form of pining which infiltrates the sensory, physical, and mental dimensions of the sufferer.

Love is also depicted as anxious questioning in such songs as “Do You Love Me?” (1994), a spectral piece oscillating between the tentative love song idiom with its obsessive chorus question “Do you love me like I love you?” and the gothic nightmare with its pounding soundscape and the discordant “jingle-jangle” of the bells punctuating the question. The setting itself is ominous (“on a night of fire and noise”, “the moon in the sky is battered and mangled”), and the love bond is described as a mixed blessing (“Our love lines grew hopelessly tangled/And the bells went jingle-jangle”), as the pounding and scream-sung “jingle-jangle” suggest a restless toll rather than wedding bells. Overall, the song brims with love anxiety and crippling doubt. This is a Cavian template for the angsty love song, in contrast to his crooner love song template, which is more celebratory and spiritually inclined (e.g., “Brompton Oratory”).

Echoing Cave’s intimation that love is a tether (“hopelessly tangled”), Harvey’s dark love also brings in a layer of claustrophobic discomfort, whereby the protagonists feel trapped under the spell of their desire. In “Long Snake Moan” (*To Bring...*) and “Catherine” (*Desire*), they vow to free themselves of their lovers’ spells, while in “Send His Love to Me”, the protagonist compares her love to torture and begs both her lover (“lover please release me”) and God to free her. Love is portrayed as a prison: “this house becomes a hell/This love becomes a tether/this room becomes a cell.” Through the ternary evocation of house/love/room, the word “love” is trapped between two confined spaces (i.e., “hell” and “cell”), which conjures

up a feeling of spatial and emotional claustrophobia. The binary analogies describing the love-cage (house/hell, love/tether, room/cell) further reinforce the impression of imprisonment.

This form of Harveyan and Cavian desire is thus portrayed as an obsessive path of longing, as a source of overwhelming despair and frustration, much in keeping with the aesthetic of counterpleasure Henderson and Praz associate with the Romantic treatment of love. Although Cave's love songs generally unfold in quiet recollection, they are akin to the pleasure experience in that their core is wishful longing.

Cave and Harvey also share a simultaneous awareness of bliss and the abyss, which in *To Bring...* Harvey expresses through a dramatic journey through the heights of rapture and the depths of darkness, thereby bringing to mind Coleridge's juxtaposition of voluptuous beauty with a "savage place. . . haunted by a woman wailing for her demon-lover" in "Kubla Khan".⁴⁰² And indeed, the figure of the wailing female lover occurs throughout *To Bring...*, which is not only evoked in the lyrics, but also in Harvey's vocals that soar into a wailing gallery of moans, growls or roars.

Moreover, there is another aspect central to Cave's and Harvey's dark love: a core sadomasochistic component that surfaces in a peculiar dynamic whereby the protagonists derive pleasure from inflicting and receiving violence, and from wallowing in their (cruel) lover's shadow.

4. Cultivating Pain: Willing Self-Submission to a Cruel Lover

4.1. Sacralising the Demon Lover and Eroticised Submission

Praz and Henderson contend that "Romantic agony" is not only underpinned by a representation of love as suffering but also by an aesthetic of eroticised submission to a cruel lover. Henderson contends that the Romantic-era lover yearns for a demon-lover to idealise and ultimately be dominated by,⁴⁰³ which translates into an allegorical depiction of the beloved as a divine creature.

⁴⁰² COLERIDGE, Samuel Taylor. "Kubla Khan." *Romantic Poetry*. Ed. Paul Driver. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Popular Poetry, 1996. 43.

⁴⁰³ HENDERSON. *Romanticism and the Painful Pleasure of Modern Life*. Op Cit., 8.

I postulate that in their love songs, Harvey and Cave not only represent dark love as suffering from the absence of the loved one, but indeed, as eroticised submission. Cave's and Harvey's suffering protagonists idolise and sacralise their beloved ones as a means to enhance their pleasure in pain experience.

Harvey's Mythical Lover

In a number of songs on *To Bring...*, there is an ambiguity surrounding the identity of the beloved, and it is not clear whether the Harveyan protagonist is addressing her lover or a divine figure. In "Tecló", a low-key guitar-led song where the narrator pines for her lover's love to be sent back to her, the addressee is elusive. What starts as a plea for her beloved's love slips into a more ambiguous spiritual evocation with the line "let me ride on his grace for a while," which imparts divine attributes to the beloved. Similarly, in "To Bring You My Love," there is a lingering ambiguity as to the referent of the pronoun "you," as at the beginning of the song the lovelorn protagonist says "Jesus come closer" before going on to address her lover as an ambiguous "you" for the rest of the song. The ambivalent signified of "you" merges Jesus and her lover, or at least blurs the boundaries between the two, and thus sacralises the lover.

In "The Dancer," the same ambiguity recurs, as the protagonist evokes a rider "like a Phoenix out of fire flames", "bathed in light and splendour and glory". The vivid evocation in meliorative terms is replete with religious overtones ("bathed in light" evokes sainthood or divinity) and also raises the beloved to mythical status. The comparison with the Phoenix, the Greek mythical bird that is born again cyclically, glorifies the beloved and endows him with supernatural longevity and power. Throughout the song, it is not clear who the rider is: is he her lover or some divine emissary? Or both? Or just the ultimate incarnation of the idealised lover? Another form of idealisation is also conveyed by empowering the lover with phenomenal force, as is the case in "Meet ze Monsta," where the lover is likened to a monsoon and praised for his sexual prowess ("what a monster/what a night"). The latter instance may be conveyed in grotesque overtones but it nonetheless affirms in bold Harvey's tendency to idolise the demon-lover, either ironically or earnestly.

Cave and the Good-Bad Woman: that Dark Object of Desire

Cave's female lovers broadly fall into three categories: the meek lambs ready for the slaughter (e.g., the naive girls of "Where the Wild Roses Grow" or "Lovely Creature", 1996), the ruthless type that delights in inflicting pain (e.g., "Crow Jane", 1996), and the good-bad women, whose cruel actions are a source of pleasure and devotion. In Cave's Gothic inferno

songs, many women are portrayed as violent and potentially dangerous, whether it is a woman “with legs like scissors” (“John Finn’s Wife”, 1992), a woman who rules “with an iron fist and strikes (her husband) down with a fist of lead” (“Jack the Ripper”, 1992), or the one with “her bleached and hungry eyes, her hair ... like a curtain falling open with the laughter and closing with the lies” (“Papa won’t Leave You Henry”, 1992); they share an overt connection to death, cruelty and deception.

In his love song range, most women belong to the good-bad category: whilst their characterisation suggests intrinsic cruelty, they are also idealised and sacralised. For instance, the lover of “Do You Love me” is depicted as a witch-like creature (i.e., “fanged and hairy and mad”), whilst her ambivalent psychological profile emphasises her oscillation between sainthood and aggression: “she had a heartful of love and devotion/She had a mindful of tyranny and terror”. Elsewhere, she is described as a saintly figure of sorrow, evoking a Virgin-like figure: “And I kissed away a thousand tears/My Lady of the various sorrows”. In sacralising her and “kissing away her tears” the narrator posits her as a deity and himself as her worshipper. The metaphor of the devotional bond comes to fruition with a full-blown mystical evocation:

Still I seemed so obsolete and small
I found God and all His Devils inside her
In my bed she cast the blizzard out
A mock sun blazed upon her head
So completely filled with light she was
Her shadow fanged and hairy and mad.

The passage encapsulates the core ambivalence of the good-bad woman: on the one hand she is perceived as saintly and benevolent (“I found God ... inside her”, “she cast the blizzard out”, “completely filled with light she was”), and on the other hand she is portrayed as inherently evil (“I found ... all His Devils inside her”), duplicitous (“ a *mock* sun blazed upon her head”, italics mine), and malevolent (“Her shadow *fanged* and hairy and mad”, italics mine). The fact that the two antithetical descriptions are intermingled signifies the mutual inclusivity of her contradictions as a quintessentially good-bad figure. Moreover, with the sentence “I seemed so obsolete and small”, the narrator self-submits by raising her higher on her pedestal and foregrounding his comparative insignificance, which also intensifies the devotional bond.

The oscillation between the ominous and the holy culminates with a leap into a monstrous love reunion:

So come find me, my darling one,
I'm down to the grounds, the very dregs
Ah here she comes blocking the sun
Blood running down the inside of her legs
The moon in the sky is battered and mangled
And the bells from the chapel go jingle-jangle

The equilibrium of threat and divine grandeur finally tips into nightmare, as the beloved turns from a divine figure of light into an oppressive figure of darkness that “blocks the sun” and evokes death, as intimated by the ominous surroundings (i.e., the battered moon and jangling bells). Moreover, the raw image of “blood running down the inside of her legs” clashes with the previous divine and ethereal characterisation and brings her back down to crude corporeality, whilst instilling a sense of deadly menace. The fact that the narrator should ask her to come and get him when he is at his weakest testifies to a willingness to submission and self-abnegation, as is evident in the line “I’m down to the grounds, the very dregs”, which is suggestive of self-humiliation. “Do You Love Me” thus exemplifies in bold a sadomasochistic love pattern whereby the lovelorn lover heightens his perverse delight through willing submission. In this respect, it combines the three components of Henderson’s understanding of Romantic Agony: eroticised submission to a cruel lover through a paradoxical process of idealisation and self-humiliation.⁴⁰⁴ The template of “Do You Love Me” recurs in various shades in Cave’s crooner love songs (e.g., “Lucy”[1990], “Brompton Oratory” [1997]).

4.2. Aching pleasure and Sensuous Torture

Henderson argues that the Romantic idealisation of the demon lover partakes of a broader Romantic aesthetic of pleasure in pain, whereby the more intense the suffering is, the keener the pleasure.⁴⁰⁵ Prior to Henderson, Praz had also identified dark love, a form of love made all the more enjoyable by the experience of pain, as a core component of Romantic poetry.⁴⁰⁶ Moreover, Henderson contends that by Romantic standards, pleasure is not only

⁴⁰⁴ HENDERSON, Andrea. *Romanticism and the Painful Pleasure of Modern Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 8.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁰⁶ PRAZ, Mario. *The Romantic Agony*. *Op.Cit.*, 26.

derived from unsatisfied desire, but also from submission and humiliation. Keats's "perplexed delight" or Byron's "rack of pleasures" indeed point to a core element of sadomasochism at the heart of Romantic desire, and thus to an implicit compulsion not just to embrace pain, but indeed to cultivate it in order to derive pleasure from it. In this respect, the figure of the demon-lover is essential to the sadomasochistic aesthetic, which brings to mind William Hazlitt's lines in *Liber Amoris* 1823: "how can I escape from you, when every new occasion, even your cruelty and scorn, brings out new charm."⁴⁰⁷ This antithetical pleasure principle is present in Harvey's repertoire as the motif of love torture, and in Cave's as an aestheticisation of aching pleasure.

Harvey's Willing Torture

This sadistic kinship between pleasure and pain is salient in the Harveyan desire repertoire, notably in the shape of torture. It features as vivid torture fantasies on *Rid of Me*, and recurs as love-game and eroticised experience of pain on *To Bring...* and *Desire*. In "Long Snake Moan," the protagonist engages in power games with her lover and playfully suggests that she dreams of drowning him so he can die of pleasure. The song provides a playful fusion of pleasure and pain in its oscillation between the Romantic excess of "die of pleasure" and the grotesque overtones of a boisterous and hyperbolic delivery supported by roaring vocals and loud guitar riffs. Harvey thus conveys the interplay between pleasure and pain not only in her lyrics but also through the musical medium, by means of discordance and sonic overload.

The sensuousness of torture is evoked in vivid detail in "The Wind" (*Desire*), a sung-whispered piece combining a gritty guitar baseline with trip-hop beats, slick electronica, and sonic bricolage. The female protagonist, Catherine, is a brooding figure retired in a chapel on a hill. She is characterised in religious overtones, having built a chapel with her own icon on a wall. The featured chapel is reportedly St Catherine's Chapel in Abbotsbury (Dorset, UK). By focusing on the archetypal martyr Saint Catherine of the Wheel, a legendary Christian Saint martyred in the 14th century on a spiked torture wheel and subsequently beheaded, Harvey explicitly places torture at the centre of the song. In Harvey's terms, Saint Catherine becomes a figure of desolation that just "sits and moans", against a natural backdrop of blowing wind and "noises like the whales". In this sensory tableau, pleasure and pain coalesce in the oxymoronic depiction of the protagonist "dreaming of children's voices and torture on the

⁴⁰⁷ William Hazlitt, *Liber Amoris or the New Pigmalion*. London: Hogarth Press, 1985. 12-13. Qtd. in HENDERSON, Andrea. *Romanticism and the Painful Pleasure of Modern Life*. Op. Cit., 1.

wheel”. The juxtaposition of the two antithetical elements (i.e., children’s voices connoting vitality and innocence and the wheel torture and death) is unsettling in its combination of joyfulness and extreme pain, and it is also confusing: are both elements to be construed as equally enjoyable? Or does the verb “dream” refer to two distinct dreams: one an enjoyable experience (i.e., children’s voices), and the other a nightmare (i.e., torture)?

The ambiguity of the lyrics is partially lifted by the sensuousness of the soundscape: the soundscape renders the listener all the more responsive to the evocation of torture as it solicits the listener’s senses optimally. In particular, Harvey’s wind-murmurings (e.g., “washhhh”), and background noises such as the brush of a guitar string which evokes power lines humming in the wind or electronic modulations of whale noises stimulate the listener’s sensory engagement and receptiveness, which heightens the impact of the lyric “torture on the wheel”. As is often the case with Harvey’s music, lyrics are elliptic and function symbiotically with the sonic: the sensuous soundscape thus fuses with the “torture on the wheel” imagery to conjure up an impressionistic experience of pleasure and pain. Consequently, “The Wind” can be construed as an emotive piece the reception of which is not linear but experiential, hence listeners produce the song’s meaning according to their own sensory journey.

As an embodied natural soundscape, “The Wind” invites a parallel with Coleridge’s description of the ice in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” where the mariner comes across a similarly living soundscape: “It cracked and it growled, and roared and howled/Like noises in a swound.”⁴⁰⁸ Harvey’s lyrics are punctuated with the phrase “noises like the whales,” which combined with Harvey’s wind-whisperings, echoes Coleridge’s personification of ice through sounds (i.e., the verbs “growl”, “roar” and “howl”). The fact that torture on the wheel should be evoked against such a sensuous backdrop only highlights the paradoxical eroticism of torture. The form of desire arising from the song is fluid (as suggested by the prevalence of the wind motif) and ripe with spiritual undertones, as the longing for a lover yields to an inarticulate longing for something beyond immediate reality, a form of spiritual yearning.

Harvey’s “Catherine” and the Sadomasochistic Streak

The sadomasochistic element of Harveyan desire is also exemplified by the protagonists’ willingness to subject themselves to their unfeeling and barbarous lovers, which is reminiscent of Romantic heroes’ use of “self-abasement as a way of articulating the

⁴⁰⁸ COLERIDGE, Samuel Taylor. “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” *Romantic Poetry*. Ed. Paul Driver. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Popular Poetry, 1996. 93.

individuality of desire”⁴⁰⁹. In a manner resonant with Cave’s self-humiliation in “Do You Love Me”, “Catherine” (*Desire*) stands out as a most striking instance of Harvey’s sadomasochistic palette. Whilst the narrator-protagonist laments her unrequited love for cruel Catherine de Barra, she also looks up to her as an object of worship. The name “de Barra” itself is evocative of desolation, loneliness and pain, in that it refers to the remote Scottish island Barra in the Outer Hebrides, and conjures up a hostile climate. The desolateness of the Barra landscape seems to leak into the musical fabric of the song, with its slow tempo and muffled guitar loop, and into Harvey’s ambisexual vocal style. The combined effect of the muffled sonic and the distorted vocals imparts a sense of spectrality to the song, as if it were both haunted (by memories and longing) and haunting the listener (with otherworldly sounds and vocals).

The song narrative features the hallmarks of an archetypal pleasure in pain experience: a cruel lover who scorns and crushes the protagonist’s love (“Catherine de Barra you murdered my thinking/I gave you my heart, you left the thing stinking”), the rejected protagonist’s willing self-damnation (“I damn to hell every second you, breathe”) and her compulsive adoration of and submission to her demon lover (“I envy the road, the ground you tread under”). The song hinges on a tension between the slow-paced sonic surface and the seething anger underlying the lyrics. Harvey’s low-key vocals and the muffled piano create a lullaby effect that clashes with the incipient violence of the lyrics. The protagonist expresses her longing for Catherine de Barra with the anaphora “I envy”, which introduces an enumeration of all the inanimate objects she envies for their physical proximity with her beloved: the wind, her pillow, the road, and her lover. The eight-fold enumeration builds up rhythmically and comprises a repeated four-line stanza:

I envy the road, the ground you tread under,
I envy the wind, your hair riding over,
I envy the pillow your head rests and slumbers
I envy to murderous envy your lover

In these lines, desire arises in the devotional eroticisation of the slightest physical brush with the beloved, and follows a pattern of poetic self-abasement whereby the protagonist fantasises herself *underneath* her beloved by wishfully identifying with the ground and pillow. Eroticism thus stems from the protagonist’s willing submission to her cruel lover, and from a wavering

⁴⁰⁹ HENDERSON, Andrea. *Romanticism and the Painful Pleasure of Modern Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 10.

between devotional lust and a thrilling proximity to pain, whether inflicted upon oneself or upon another. Indeed, in its escalation to “I envy to murderous envy your lover”, the stanza leaps from devotional contemplation to barbaric fantasy, which tears a sadistic breach through the song’s surface. As she courts both the pangs of abject rejection (the revolting image of the heart “left stinking” bears upon the song from the opening lines), and the possibility of unleashing her sexual frustration into a murderous act, the protagonist dwells at the intersection of masochism and sadism. “Catherine” is an exquisite piece of Romantic sadomasochism which, in its wavering between light and shadow, delineates a subtle interstitial space where pain and pleasure coalesce.

Cave’s Aching Pleasure and Eroticisation of Suffering

The same propensity for aching pleasure and cultivating pain is to be found in Cave’s love songs, and falls into two main blueprints: eroticised violence drama (e.g., “Henry Lee” and “Where the Wild Roses Grow” [1996]), and a more introspective contemplation of the ambivalent beloved (e.g., “West Country Girl”, “Black Hair”[1997]). It is noteworthy that the second template sustains Cave’s most homogeneous Romantic album *Boatman’s Call* (1997), although it also occurs sporadically in other albums. In order to fathom these two dimensions of Cave’s “deliciously perverse” songwriting, we are going to compare “Where the Wild Roses Grow” (1996) and “West Country Girl” (1997) as templates of the two trends. This analysis will lead us to reflect upon the monstrous correspondences in Cave’s works: whereas “Where the Wild Roses Grow” features on his last North American album *Murder Ballads*, and “West Country Girl” epitomises his reflective spiritual piece *Boatman’s Call*, they both partake of one and the same dark romantic flow. Many old-time fans cried out for Cave to return to his transgressive vein and dismissed *Boatman’s Call* as a saccharine sell-out, and yet, we will demonstrate that such love songs as “West Country Girl” are more ambivalent than meets the eye, and contain hints of Romantic monstrosity.

Like its single artwork and video, the track “Where the Wild Roses Grow” (1996) exemplifies a voluptuous form of violence conveyed by lush orchestral harmonies and Cave’s and Kylie Minogue’s crooning voices. As heralded by its Ophelia-inspired single cover photo (see Chapter 8), the song eroticises its central love-murder by foregrounding the contrast between the beauty and innocence of its victim Elisa Day, and the darkness of her lover-murderer. The song has a Gothic quality in that the murder is co-narrated by the murderous suitor and his victim who speaks from the grave. This polytemporal element contributes to the spectrality of the narrative, whilst the intermingling vocals denote an eerie sacrificial proximity

between the two lovers. Sonically and lyrically, the murder is thus framed as loving synergy, and therefore consensual violence, which imparts a sadomasochistic dimension to the piece. Moreover, the lyrics have a poetic quality that further aestheticises the scene, hence the language and vivid imagery merge with the lush sonic to convey a sensuous listening experience.

The narrative unfolds methodically, and is structured around the temporal line of the encounter and the lead-up to the murder: “on the first day... on the second day... on the third/last day”. Each episode is recounted successively by the suitor and his victim with a descriptive abundance that immerses the listener. The two vocal lines create a haunting effect as the two voices echo each other and produce two simultaneous accounts of the same events. The meticulousness of the description draws the listener into a piece of storytelling with its dramatic build-up to the final murder. From the first line, it is clear that Elisa Day is speaking posthumously (“They call me The Wild Rose/but my name *was* Elisa Day”, emphasis mine), which creates a sense of anticipation. Since the song includes archaisms such as inversions (“Why they call me it I do not know”) and romantic lyricism (“My trembling subsided in his sure embrace”), it is clearly framed as a poetic ballad. This marked effort to set the piece in the distant past, and within the balladic tradition, is consistent with the Irish-Appalachian origins of the song, which was adapted from “Down in the Willow Garden”, whilst the archaisms reflect Cave’s poetic ambitions as a literary musician and his filiation with the Romantic idiom.

“Where the Wild Roses Grow” relies on a red rose motif binding together the victim’s nickname (“Wild Rose”), her lips, and the murder setting by the river, as if prefiguring her demise. The description slides down organically to the murder scene, starting with a fraught analogy between Elisa’s red lips and the river bank (“For her lips were the colour of the roses/That grew down the river, all bloody and wild.”), and continuing with the murderer’s luring of his beloved to the fateful place by piquing her curiosity (“Do you know where the wild roses grow/So sweet and scarlet and free?”), offering her “a single red rose”, and finally inviting her (“if I show you the roses, will you follow?”). Much like before the Ophelia-inspired single cover, the listener is put in a voyeuristic position, since they witness the murderer’s methodical deception of his naive victim in the lead-up to the murder. Moreover, the listener is beckoned into co-narration since there is a textual gap on the murder itself which the listener is left to reconstruct for themselves. Indeed, the murder is elliptically poised between Elisa’s lines (“And the last thing I heard was a muttered word/As he stood smiling above me with a rock in his fist”), and her murderer’s (“And I kissed her good-bye, I said “All beauty must

die/And lent down and planted a rose between her teeth”). The elliptical co-narrative resonates with the loving synergy of the song, whilst enabling a final aestheticisation of death, when Elisa’s death is turned into an eroticised installation of her lying with a red rose between her teeth. The murderer’s final line “All beauty must die” echoes English Romantic poet John Keats’s final stanza of “Ode on Melancholy” (1819), and thus renders the English Romantic theme explicit:

She dwells with Beauty – Beauty that must die;
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching pleasure nigh,
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips.
John Keats, “Ode to Melancholy”, 1819.⁴¹⁰

Although truncated for the purpose of the story, the allusion to Keats’s poem encapsulates both the aesthetic and the experience of the song, as a piece in which pleasure issues from the spectacle of violence and from an awareness of mortal beauty. Keats’s lines highlight the inextricable link between melancholy and joy, transience and beauty, thus articulating a vision whereby pleasure is all the more intense as it is short-lived, and the experience of beauty and joy is all the more thrilling as it is fated to die. Cave’s murderer takes an ironic short-cut on Keats’s formulation of the interplay between beauty and death, and diverts the meaning of the phrase “all beauty must die”, into an injunction to kill rather than an acknowledgement of mortality. The semantic slip on “must” thus brings down Keats’s statement of art aesthetic into an incitation to commit murder. One may wonder whether the semantic slip is a touch of black humour in an otherwise earnest piece, or Cave’s signposting the literary lineage of the song, or maybe a bit of both. Either way, the song has overt Romantic connotations in its fusing of pleasure and pain, and in its aestheticisation of violence and mortality, and in this respect, it has affinities with Romantic agony. “Where the Wild Roses Grow” provides a vivid example of Cave’s fusion of the American and English cultural themes, and stands out as one of Cave’s most Romantic songs of monstrosity. However, in Cave’s love songs violence is not so graphic but instead is channelled into an ambivalent aesthetic of aching pleasure which is only tinged with a sadomasochistic streak.

⁴¹⁰ KEATS, John, “Ode on Melancholy” (1819). *Selected Poems/Poèmes choisis*. Aubier-Flammarion, 1968. 300.

Cave's "West Country Girl": Subtler Romantic Monstrosity

We will study the scope for this subtler Romantic vein in "West Country Girl" (1997) which typifies a mix of melancholy, bliss, and a sense of love and longing. The song epitomises the sonic and lyric of *Boatman's Call* (1997), which marked an abrupt stylistic shift from its predecessor *Murder Ballads* (1996), and from the bulk of Cave and The Bad Seeds' prior production. The album is stark and dark, stripped of rock and blues-rock thrills and spills, with Cave leading on the piano to minimalist orchestration. Its lyric breaks away from character-based narratives to delve into intimate ruminations about love and longing, as well as spiritual yearning. The reflective and hymnal quality of the songs reflects Cave's personal life of the time, as he contemplated his break-up with long time partner Vivian Riveiro and subsequent whirlwind romance with Harvey. It is noteworthy that the album (reportedly) contains two songs about Harvey: "Black Hair" a transfixed meditation on the mystery of her black hair, and "West Country Girl", a vivid eulogy to his beloved. Anecdotally, "West Country Girl" set tongues wagging at the time of its release, as its title pointed in the direction of Harvey, as their affair had just ended. The term "West Country" refers to the Southwest of England (Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, and Somerset), and since Harvey originates from Dorset and has a broad Dorset accent, it was widely assumed by media and fans and the character was based on Harvey. Cave attempted to dispel public assumptions at the time, but has since acknowledged the correlation in interviews.

"West Country Girl" has a distinctly English folk sonic, sustained by a rumbling drum, string orchestration, and a prominent violin line. The song draws an ambivalent portrayal of his beloved who pours her love on the narrator, yet there are a number of disturbing elements in her characterisation. The piece hinges upon a corporeal cartography of love and adoration, as from the opening lines, Cave intermingles his psychological and physical depictions of her: she has "a heart-shaped face", "a house-big heart where we all live/And plead and counsel and forgive". The narrator thus establishes a constant flow between her physical appearance, her psyche, and his love. The accumulation of minute details makes for an engrossing experience, whereby both listener and narrator are transfixed in intense gazing, and immersed in the narrator's emotional flow. Cave's gaze thus alchemises her physical quirks into objects of adoration and intoxication: "her widow's peak, her lips I've kissed", "her lovely lidded eyes I've sipped", "her accent... has been poured into my human heart/and filled me with love to the brim". In elevating her ordinariness (i.e., "widow's peak") to eroticised extraordinariness (i.e., by equating her widow's peak with her lips), he infuses his description with a sense of

wonder, and thus turns his beloved into an object of worship. And indeed, she is explicitly sacralised in the lines: “her godly body and its fourteen stations that I have embraced”, which sanctifies her corporeality. The allusion to Christ’s Stations of the Cross posits her as a Christian martyr, and himself as her worshipper, which transmutes their relationship into a devotional bond between a self-submissive lover/worshipper and a saintly figure. Set against a background of intoxicating love, willingly submitting to a sacralised and suffering beloved is quintessential Romantic agony, in that it embeds melancholy and pain within the broader frame of delight. In this respect, “West Country Girl” can be construed as an experience of the Keatsian “aching pleasure”.⁴¹¹

However, alongside Cave’s exalted eulogy to his beloved, there is a dark undercurrent running counter to the laudatory tone, suggesting the transience and fragility of joy, as shown in the following lines:

Her accent which I’m told is “broad”
That I have heard and has been poured
Into my human heart and filled me
With love up to the brim and killed me,
And rebuilt me back anew
With something to look forward to

The ambivalent lines acknowledge a form of suffering and destruction that originates from the very core of intoxicating love, and from the very object of the narrator’s adoration. By conjoining the destructive and redemptive potential of love within a sentence (i.e., killing and rebuilding “back anew”) the song points to the stark ambivalence of their relationship. This mutual inclusiveness of creation and destruction, and of pleasure and pain introduces a breach in the joyful surface, which echoes a more explicitly ominous description:

Her unborn baby crying “Mummy”
Amongst the rubble of her body

The lines imbue her persona with a more sinister aura, by abruptly bringing down her body from bountiful sanctity to ruins (“rubble”), and through the disturbing image of her unborn baby calling out to her. The juxtaposition of a symbol of vitality (i.e., the baby) with destruction and ill-health (“the *rubble* of her body”, italics mine) shocks the listener as it implies a cruel or deathly streak in her, and thus defiles her sacralised portrayal. Moreover, the

⁴¹¹ KEATS, John, “Ode on Melancholy (1819).” *Selected Poems/Poèmes choisis*. Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1968. 300.

passage resonates with “a glove of bones at her wrist”, which occurs earlier in the song and points to her kinship with death.

Overall, the song remains primarily eulogistic, however, it is noteworthy that the beloved harbours a potential for destruction and cruelty. Consequently, “West Country Girl” exemplifies Romantic agony in that it conjoins pleasure and pain in the figure of the beloved, and its narrator willingly embraces the potential for suffering as a source of pleasure.

Conclusion

Cave’s and Harvey’s use of the sadomasochistic motif of Romantic Agony testifies to their all-abiding awareness of the *in-human*,⁴¹² the underside of humanity, as a form of monstrosity inherent in human beings, even in the subtlest manner. Romantic Agony relies upon this intrinsic duality of humanity, and upon a simultaneous attraction to pain and pleasure, and beauty and horror. Namely, it builds upon the tension between polar opposites and the nocturnal attraction exerted by the forbidden and the fearsome. As a paradoxical dynamic relying upon one element erupting out of its polar opposite (i.e., pleasure out of pain, beauty out of horror), Romantic Agony posits a “third system” analogous to the grotesque mode. In this respect, although Cave’s and Harvey’s foray into dark Romanticism may seem at odds with their prevalently grotesque style, it is structurally consistent with their abiding taste for the non-dualist polymorphism of Grotesque. Therefore, leaping from comic grotesque to Romantic Agony and a Romantic form of monstrosity is not so much a rupture as a modulation of the same paradoxical vein, a probe into every last recess of the human psyche, and whatever barbaric pleasures it pursues.

5. The Monstrous Sublime: Love as a Conduit to the Spiritual

Whilst introducing a finer blend of monstrosity in sadomasochistic overtones, Cave’s and Harvey’s foray into dark Romanticism is also conducive to the sublime, either as a fleeting moments of grace (Harvey) or as full-fledged cosmic uplift (Cave). We are going to explore this paradoxical emergence of sublimity in the cracks of monstrous experience.

⁴¹² EDWARDS and GRAULAND. *Grotesque. Op. Cit.*, 87. In-humanity is a concept put forward by Grotesque theorists Justin Edwards and Rune Grauland as part of their analysis of the grotesque as a mode of categorical fusion: “the inhuman is always “in humanity”: it is in-human or “in the human.... Inhuman is, then, the otherness that always inhabits the human from the inside.” They thus formulate the inhuman as intrinsically human, as “otherness within”, as opposed to the intrusion of otherness.

The sublime is a difficult notion to conceptualise, precisely because it falls out at the seams of ordinary human experience, and of ordinary language. Its latin etymology itself is confused and confusing: “sublime” is derived from the latin word *sublimis*, itself a translation of the Greek word *hypsos*: “high, up in the air”. And yet, paradoxically, the latin word *sublimis* is made up of *sub*, “under”, and *limine*, “the threshold”, therefore *sublimis* literally translates as: “under the limit, on the threshold of what is attainable”. This etymological confusion makes for an accordingly slippery term to grasp.

Surveying the Romantic and Gothic understanding of the sublime, it is noteworthy that from the late 18th century onward, the sublime has been broadly understood as an encounter with such magnitude that it inspires either transcendence or terror. In particular, Edmund Burke’s⁴¹³ definition of the sublime as a negative pleasure born out of a confrontation with horror has shaped the Gothic conception of the sublime, which has incorporated it in its aesthetic of terror.⁴¹⁴ Conversely, the Romantic sublime, as formulated by Samuel Coleridge⁴¹⁵ and William Wordsworth⁴¹⁶ is a moment of self-transcendence, but it is not so much connected to an emotional response (terror) as to a movement of transcendental imagination. These two definitions of the sublime present a structural overlap with Cave’s and Harvey’s songs, as objects informed by a Gothic aesthetic of fear and transgression, and by the delicious perversities of Romanticism. Although these formal definitions are worth bearing in mind whilst probing Harvey’s and Cave’s songs for traces of sublimity, for the purpose of this research, we shall use the concept of the sublime in its broadest sense, as an experience of transcendence and negative pleasure.

We are now going to investigate the place of transcendence and spirituality in rock music in order to delineate a genealogy of musical sublime.

⁴¹³ BURKE, Edmund. “*A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*.” (1757). <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/15043/15043-h/15043-h.htm#Page_110>

Edmund Burke defines the sublime as “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion, which the mind is capable of feeling.”

⁴¹⁴ See Sue Chaplin’s study of the genealogy of Gothic sublime and its interactions with Romanticism: CHAPLIN, Sue. *Gothic Literature: Texts, Contexts, Connections*. London: York Press, 2011. 55-74. See also BAYER-BERENBAUM, Linda. *The Gothic Imagination: Expansion in Gothic Literature and Art*. London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1982.

⁴¹⁵ COLERIDGE, Samuel. *Biographia Literaria* (1817). <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/6081/6081-h/6081-h.htm>> Coleridge propounded a theory of creativity, and theorised the power of creative imagination.

⁴¹⁶ WORDSWORTH, William. In “*The Prelude*” (1850), Wordsworth theorises Romantic sublime as transcendental imagination connecting human beings to the divine. <<https://www.bartleby.com/145/ww292.html>>

5.1. The Rock Academy and the Spiritual

Spirituality

The quality or state of being spiritual or of being attached to or concerned with religious questions and values broadly conceived. The term is also frequently used in a non- (or even anti-) religious sense to designate a preoccupation with or capacity for understanding fundamental moral, existential, or metaphysical questions, especially regarding the nature of the self (or soul, or person), the meaning of life, the nature of mind or consciousness, and the possibility of immortality.⁴¹⁷

The above definition clarifies the use of the term “spiritual” as opposed to “religious”. Whereas both the spiritual and the religious refer to an individual’s relation to ontological and metaphysical issues, the religious formulates these concerns within a framework including a community, rituals, reverence for a higher authority, scriptures, and common practices. Conversely, the term “spirituality” can be used “un-religiously”, to refer to a profane aspiration to or experience of transcendence. This is the working distinction used in this research.

With its prime interest in affective investment and corporeal pleasure⁴¹⁸, the rock apparatus seems rather removed from transcendental concerns, and therefore ill-suited for spiritual pursuits. Moreover, the rock academy tends to formulate the rock idiom in sociological rather than aesthetic terms, hence a discursive gap on rock and the sublime. There are other musical genres more overtly conversant in spiritual matters, such as gospel, church liturgy, country-gospel, and Christian rock which are designated channels for spiritual endeavours. And yet, within rock music there exists a profane spiritual lineage, as exemplified by Canadian singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen. Admittedly, Cohen’s style is idiosyncratic and mingles folk, rock and pop music, but still, he crafted a form of spiritual popular music, witness his hit track “Hallelujah” (1984), a love song that articulates romantic love as spiritual yearning and has acquired spiritual rock status. In his love songs, Cohen has continuously interwoven carnal and spiritual themes, thereby creating secular hymns. Cohen’s style testifies to the potential for rock to straddle the carnal and spiritual divide.

⁴¹⁷ “Sprituality.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2014.
<<https://www.britannica.com/topic/spirituality>>

⁴¹⁸ GROSSBERG, Lawrence. “Another Boring Day in Paradise and the Empowerment of Every Day Life” *Popular Music 4* (1984): 225–258.

It is noteworthy that the rock academy has steered clear of approaching the sublime in Cave's and Harvey's works. There is no academic criticism on Harvey's spiritual streak, and although Cave's religious stance has come under academic scrutiny, the sublime is not its focal point. J.R.C. Cousland⁴¹⁹ analyses Harvey's and Cave's artistic stance on religion, and binds them up with a grotesque anti-aesthetic. He thus articulates Cave's approach as "the Bad", that is a propensity to dwell on Old Testament violence and the scabrous in his early career, and his post-1995 foray into the New Testament and into redemptive love. Cousland calls Harvey's religious approach "the Ugly", in reference to her early abject self-representations, in particular he reads Harvey's work as focusing on sexuality, beauty and ugliness. Although Cousland's analysis of Cave's fusion of the sacred and the profane provides a valuable insight into Cave's use of religion, he approaches the spiritual scope in Harvey's work strictly in gendered terms, by focusing on her response to Christianity as a patriarchal establishment. In peculiarising Harvey's spirituality as gendered, Cousland solely reads it as expressive of identity politics, thereby failing to explore the core of her spiritual streak further. Therefore, although Cousland's work provides an insight into Cave's and Harvey's interactions with Christianity at large, it does not shed light on the mechanisms by which transcendence occurs.

Australian theologian Roland Boer⁴²⁰ probes Cave's engagement with the Bible, and his theological stance. In his analysis of the Cavian love song, Boer brings to light a type of song exemplifying "Cave's Trinity": "God, Cave, and woman, with the outcome that God and woman merge into one".⁴²¹ Noting that painful secular love songs are the most common in Cave's love song repertoire, Boer also defines them as marked by sadism rather than the divine.⁴²² Boer finally formulates Cave's Trinity of love as "God, pain and woman", a template not only informed by the pain of loss and longing, but also by "the pain inflicted, the angry and sadistic violence of love".⁴²³ Boer concludes that Cave's love songs illustrate the fact that redemption paradoxically occurs within the sadistic side of love too. Boer's conception of Cave's love song as intermingling God, woman and pain not only acknowledges a sadistic component but also insightfully points to the possibility of transcendence arising within the sadistic love song format.

⁴¹⁹ COUSLAND, J.R.C. "God, the Bad, the Ugly: The Vita Negativa of Nick Cave and P.J. Harvey." *Call me the Seeker: Listening to Religion in Popular Music*. Ed. Gilmour, Mickael. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2005.

⁴²⁰ BOER, Roland. *Nick Cave: A Study of Love, Death and Apocalypse*. Sheffield (UK) and Bristol (CT): Equinox Publishing, 2013.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 65-67.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 71.

Cousland and Boer chiefly focus on Cave's and Harvey's incorporation of and stance on religion, and articulate their spiritual scope strictly in Christian terms, which is restrictive. Admittedly, Cave has extensively signalled his borrowings from and questioning of the Old and the New Testaments both in interviews and in his music, which accounts for the academic interest from theologians. Harvey has, to a lesser extent, included side-references to Christianity in her music, but she has not discursively constructed them as a structuring thread either in her works or songwriting inspiration. Consequently, I would argue that their music would benefit from a probe for *secular* transcendence, "secular" in the sense that it is not necessarily bound up with any particular religious idiom, but pertains to a more elusive spiritual experience broadly akin to the sublime, as an encounter with awe-inspiring grandeur that may or may not be God. It is noteworthy that Steven Barfield⁴²⁴ points to this core secular spirituality of the Cavian love song when he locates the sublime at the intersection of the sacred and profane love motifs, notably in "Brompton Oratory" (1997).

There are palpable moments of spiritual uplift in Cave's and Harvey's songs. They are all the more elusive and tentative as they rely on a delicate synergy of music, lyrics, and vocal delivery, and therefore outside an identifiable Christian or poetic frame. Our purpose is not to formulate them, but merely to delineate this sublime space as concurrent to, and sometimes intermingled with the Romantic, the Gothic or the grotesque strands. Most importantly, our comprehension of the sublime in their songs is not strictly song-textual or musical, but it is a melding together of text and music in performance. Harveyan and Cavian sublime should thus be construed as inexpressible inner experience emerging in a congruence zone between the song's and the listener's emotional flows.

5.2. Harvey and the Elusive Uplift

Harvey's spiritual dimension unfolds on a figurative level, as *To Bring You My Love* unfolds like a tale of redemption through suffering, each song contributing to the redemptive journey. The whole album is haunted by an acute sense of loneliness and misery as the self-damned protagonists pine for their redemption through devotion to their beloved. In its metaphorical blurring of internal and external landscapes and its depiction of a soul in isolation

⁴²⁴ BARFIELD, Steven. "'The time of our Great Undoing': Love, Madness, Catastrophe and the Secret Afterlife of the Love Songs." *The Art of Nick Cave*. Ed. John H. Baker. Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2013. 241-259.

and despair, the album is reminiscent of Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1834), where before he can achieve redemption, the mariner faces a hostile nature in utter loneliness:

Alone, alone, all alone,
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.⁴²⁵

In the odyssey of the "soul in agony" of *To Bring You My Love*, the landscape is infused with biblical overtones: water symbolises divine punishment or purification, the desert becomes the metaphorical space for atonement. The protagonists explicitly plead with God for help in their quest for the beloved, especially in "Send his Love to Me" where the entire lyrical scope of the song foregrounds the protagonist's desperate plea to God (through the repetition of and extended vocals on the word "please"). Elsewhere in "Tecló," the protagonist relates her quest for love to a plea ("I have learnt to beg"/"I have learnt to pray"), and in "Long Snake Moan" the protagonist implores God to raise her like Lazarus. On both *To Bring...* and *Desire*, the spiritual is signified by the water and wind elements. The trope of the ambivalent river is recurrent as the site of death by drowning in "Long Snake Moan" and "Down by the Water" and as the site of spiritual catharsis and renewal in "The River" (e.g., "throw your pain in the river").

In addition to these overt religious allusions, both albums also vividly evoke transcendence in varying overtones, some of them dark and violent, others a brighter spiritual uplift. At the darker end of the spiritual spectrum, "The Sky Lit Up" (*Desire*) weaves together nature, love, and the spiritual to conjure up a moment of cosmic transcendence: "I saw the trees crossing the moon/I saw the stars in the Heaven above." Elsewhere in "No Girl So Sweet" (*Desire*) the protagonist experiences an ominous revelation ("deep in the sky, a storm he'd seen"), as if the sky acted as a crossover space between the spiritual and natural worlds. Glimpses of transcendence also occur in "Tecló," when in the middle of her quest for her lover, the protagonist pleads with God to let her "ride on his grace for a while." The sentence occurs as a fleeting moment of grace that is repeated several times and musically underscored by a guitar riff slowly rising over it. The combination of the rising vocals and guitar riff affords a rare moment of spiritual uplift in the middle of an otherwise bleak piece. The sentence and its musical theme stand out as the focal point of the song and a musical and spiritual breakthrough.

⁴²⁵ COLERIDGE, Samuel Taylor. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." *Romantic Poetry*. Ed. Paul Driver. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Popular Poetry, 1996. 93.

“Catherine”: a Piece of Masochistic Sublime

Harvey also introduces a typically Romantic form of sublime resulting from masochistic adoration. “Catherine” resonates with Percy Bysshe Shelley’s “tempestuous loveliness of terror”,⁴²⁶ which epitomises a peculiarly Romantic sense of “beauty arising from objects of fear and repulsion.”⁴²⁷ “Catherine” is in keeping with this Romantic aesthetic in that not only does it juxtapose horror and grace, but it also intermingles them. The fleeting moments of grace of the song are marked by a vocal rise on the line “till the light shines on me”, and on the final “Oh my Catherine”, followed by a musical lull which lets the lines linger on. It is noteworthy that the line “till the light shines on me”, which imparts a sense of spiritual uplift, occurs twice, in-between the “I envy...” stanzas, and is embedded between a sadistic impulse (“I envy to murderous envy your lover”) and a masochistic line (“I damn to hell every second you breathe”). The fact that the spiritual uplift should erupt in the cracks of the two antithetical movements denotes a paradoxical pattern whereby perceived opposites conflate and create a fresh monstrous dynamic. This mechanism is informed by the same principle of non-binary polymorphism that underlies the operations of the grotesque and the monstrous. Indeed, as argued by Grotesque theorist Geoffrey Harpharm⁴²⁸ and Monster theorist Jeremy Cohen⁴²⁹, the grotesque and the monstrous repudiate key dualisms so that the interactions between perceived binary opposites are radically reshuffled into a “third system” whereby attraction issues from repulsion, spirituality from materiality, beauty from horror, and so forth. Accordingly, in “Catherine”, transcendence occurs through a third system: pleasure and spiritual uplift arise from their proximity to pain and gross corporeality. This moment of grace arising from the pleasurable agony of violence is reminiscent of Charlotte Smith, the eighteenth-century English Romantic poet, who displays similar affinities with the darker end of the sublime:

Like the poor maniac I linger here,
Still haunt the scene where all my treasure lies;
Still seek for flowers where only thorns appear,
“And drink delicious poison from her eyes!”
[. . .]

⁴²⁶ SHELLEY, Percy Bysshe, “On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery.” *Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Ed. Mary W. Shelley. London: John and Henry L. Hunt, 1824. 139-140.

⁴²⁷ PRAZ. *The Romantic Agony*. *Op.Cit.*, 27.

⁴²⁸ HARPHAM. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*. *Op.Cit.*

⁴²⁹ COHEN. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. *Op.Cit.*

So round the flame the giddy insect flies,
And courts the fatal fire by which it dies!⁴³⁰

The antithetical metaphor “delicious poison” captures the essence of the Romantic pleasure in pain aesthetic, the eroticisation of suffering and the willingness of the beholder to cultivate that pain. There is a sense of rapturous pain and aching sublime emanating from the piece, which is very akin to Harvey’s oxymoronic depiction of desire.

Harvey’s Sublime Uplift: “The Dancer” (1996)

The evocation of a brighter sublime culminates in “The Dancer,” the last song on *To Bring You My Love*, and one of the most accomplished spiritual songs in Harvey’s repertoire. It is a slow expansive song, with multi-layered instrumentation, with a fuzzy guitar sound running through the piece in tentative oscillation, while the organ conveys the main tune. Harvey’s vocals are open-throated and ample in range, soaring into a wail and then subsiding again, conjuring up the rise and fall of the waves. The piece is oceanic, both musically and lyrically. The portrayal of the lover is infused with religious mysteries, both in characterisation (“he came bathed in light and splendour and glory”) and in the lover’s divine attire itself (“he came dressed in black with a cross bearing my name”). The song bears the hallmarks of Romantic aesthetics in its emotional intensity (love and longing), and because love is depicted in symbolic overtones (“it will stay till the riverbeds run dry”), the protagonist is engrossed in the quest for her lover (pleading with God to bring him back), and the lover is idealised and even sacralised (he can fly with her and show her “the face of the true God”). The piece features polarised feelings: the raptures of love and adoration and an intense longing to find her lover again. It is noteworthy that Harvey’s foray into Romantic aesthetics has coincided with the emergence of a spiritual dimension in her songworld.

Harveyan Sublime

Due to its core ambivalence, Harvey’s sublime is essentially Burkean⁴³¹: it is a sustained “delight” born out of the simultaneous feelings of pleasure, pain, and danger, which points to a structural overlap not only with Gothicism through its kinship with terror⁴³² but also with Romanticism through its kinship with pain. Because Harvey’s aesthetic fluctuates between

⁴³⁰ SMITH, Charlotte. “Supposed to be Written by Werther.” *Elegiac Sonnets, The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, Ed. Stuart Curran. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

⁴³¹ BURKE, Edmund. “*A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*.” (1757) <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/15043/15043-h/15043-h.htm#Page_110>

⁴³² BOTTING. *Gothic. Op. Cit.*, 7-8.

Gothic (with its focus on fear and the taboo) and dark Romanticism (through the centrality of pain and longing), in her music the sublime occurs either out of a confrontation with horror, as Gothic sublime, or as a moment of self-transcendence, out of an experience of pleasure in pain, as Romantic sublime.⁴³³ It alternately takes on Romantic overtones (e.g., “The Dancer”) and further Gothic-Romantic overtones, in its mixture of abject and pleasure-in-pain aesthetics (e.g., “Catherine”). In both instances, the Harveyan sublime surfaces as a redemptive breakthrough amid emotional and spiritual suffering, as a “central peace, subsisting at the heart of endless agitation.”⁴³⁴ In other words, hers is a sublime that is never far from darkness and monstrosity, and sometimes paradoxically issues from the heart of the monstrous (e.g., “Catherine”).

Surfacing as a moment of grace and spiritual uplift, a respite in the heart of pain and chaos, Harvey’s sublime is elusive and has no formal coherence. It is a fleeting synergy between the music and lyrics, an impressionistic and synaesthetic experience that arises in the cracks of the song. For instance, “The Wind” conjures up transcendence in its eerie combination of wind-whisperings, multi-layered vocals, and strange electronic soundscape against the narrative of a spiritual journey up a desolate hill. The combined elements merely point towards a moment of grace in the windswept song, but it is almost imperceptible. Because the sublime is evoked through such impressionistic means, its charge lies in the alchemy of its reception, it becomes sublime experience if its tentative flux coincides with the listener’s emotional flow. Harveyan sublime is therefore an improbable congruence of emotional flows, a slight shimmering to be captured by the receiver – or indeed not.

⁴³³ BAYER-BERENBAUM, Linda. *The Gothic Imagination: Expansion in Gothic Literature and Art*. London: Associated University Press, 1982.

⁴³⁴ WORDSWORTH, William. *The Excursion IV*, 1146-7, 1814 <<http://www.bartleby.com/145/ww398.html>>

5.3. Cave's Cosmic Uplift

Like Harvey's, Cave's sublimity structurally relies on a melding together of music and lyrics in performance, however, his presents more formal coherence than Harvey's, notably because it is more firmly anchored in lyrical expression. In the main, the Cavian sublime occurs either as Romantic engrossment in the beloved, or as cosmic uplift. The former sublime is formally cohesive, and generally expressed in the recognisable idiom of the love song, either as Romantic ballad (e.g., "Where the Wild Roses Grow") or as an ambivalent *duende*-infused recollection (e.g., "West Country Girl"). Whether it emerges as aestheticised Romantic cruelty or bittersweet recollection, inner experience issues from a prolonged and intense gaze at the beloved and from becoming fully alchemised into the moment. The Cavian sublime comes in various spiritual shades, either as hymnal music with overt religious connotations (e.g., "Brompton Oratory" and "Into my Arms" on *Boatman's Call*), or as profane cosmic exaltation and spiritual uplift. The former exemplifies what Boer calls "Cave's trinity", in which God and woman merge into one,⁴³⁵ and the latter introduces a form of profane transcendence which we are going to analyse in the song "Straight to You" (1992).

The Cosmic Love song: "Straight to You"(1992)

"Straight to You" stands out as one of Cave's most cosmic love songs, sitting alongside other such songs as "The Ship Song" (1990). On *Henry's Dream*, it features alongside seven Gothic nightmares (e.g., "Papa won't leave you Henry", "John Finn's Wife" and "Jack the Ripper"), and one religious song, "Christina the Astonishing". "Straight to You" is a love song of exaltation that unfolds to a soaring melody and lush orchestration, and conjures up love as apocalyptic disaster. The lovers' reunion is magnified by a mythopoeic language of destruction whereby the "time of (their) undoing" erupts amid crumbling towers of ivory, "the sea swallowing up the mountains", and the sky "throwing thunderbolts and sparks". The images are reminiscent of the Bible Psalms 46:2: "therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea".⁴³⁶ However, instead of relating it to God's omnipotence, Cave redeploys it profanely into a cosmic ballet that propels him to this beloved: "I'll come running straight to you". In evoking the sublime in terms of overwhelming life force, "Straight to You" is reminiscent of Cave's earlier description of spiritual bliss in his 1989 novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, where spiritual experience

⁴³⁵ BOER, Roland. *Nick Cave: A Study of Love, Death and Apocalypse*. *Op.Cit.*, 63.

⁴³⁶ Psalm 46:2, King James Version

<<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+46%3A2&version=KJV>>

morphs into ecstasy. In both instances, he outlines an elemental geography of spiritual vitality. Euchrid Euchrow's fits of ecstasy are detailed in internal focus, which provides a sensory cartography of spiritual bliss:

All fear did subside

Mah body was seized by a delicious trembling. Sudders of glory. Mah whole being surged with power – with the power. Mah blood smoked in my veins and kept coming – humming. Singing. Mah blood sang. The pump of pleasure beserk and sounding. Mah flesh like warm mud.⁴³⁷

This passage epitomises the embodied dimension of spiritual bliss which manifests itself as an upsurge of physical life force (i.e., “power”), as implied in the accumulation of action verbs in the gerund form (i.e., “trembling”, “humming”, “singing”, “sounding”) applied to parts of the body (i.e., “body”, “blood”, and “flesh”). The “Fear and trembling” (Bible, Phil. 2:12) is thus literally made flesh, the “trembling” an expression of awe and bliss. The proximity to transcendence thus transmutes the body into a seat of pleasure, and the heart into “a pump of pleasure”, which merges the spiritual and the physical into sublime experience.

The final stanza of “Straight to You” ushers in the religious only to subvert it into a scene of apocalyptic intoxication:

Heaven has denied us its kingdom

The saints are drunk and howling at the moon

The chariots of angels are colliding.

The lines imply that the lovers' damnation frees them from moralistic constraints and enables them to blossom in the moment, rather than look forward to a potentially redemptive future. The song exudes profane transcendence, whereby Cave subverts religious props (i.e., Heaven, the saints, “the chariot of angels”) and morphs them into conduits to life affirmation. The return to the beloved - the central motif and the chorus of the song - is formulated as willing submission to the beloved: “I'll come a-running straight to you/because I am captured/One more time”, which makes it akin to an intoxicating form of Romantic agony.

What arises from the song is a vision of love as rapturous catastrophe, as sheer elemental potency pulverising human and religious limitations. It articulates a profane and spiritual vision of love, whereby through mythopoeic exuberance, love is spurred on by cataclysmic destruction. The extravagance and paradox of the imagery testifies to the fact that Cave's quill remains firmly grotesque in its tendency toward excess and disproportion, whether comic grotesque, or indeed cosmic grotesque. The images of the drunken saints howling and

⁴³⁷ CAVE, Nick. *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. London: Penguin Books, 2009. 139.

angels colliding bear the stamp of grotesque desecration and therefore make for a poetry of disaster that remains tinged with transgression, even at its most poetic.

6. The Lasting Imprint of Romanticism

Through their foray into Romanticism, Cave and Harvey experiment with a more intimate form of monstrous drama, located at the intersection of love and pain. In particular, they experiment with the interstitial monstrous: the “horribly beautiful”, the deliciously perverse, and aching pleasure. Romantic agony, in its multifarious manifestations, also provides them with a broad aesthetic spectrum encompassing the most sadomasochistic recesses of the love motif, as well as the sublime.

During Harvey’s Romantic experimentations on *To Bring You My Love* and *Is This Desire*, her songwriting becomes markedly more cohesive than the more lapidary style of her three previous albums, and includes unprecedented lush natural imagery. The emergence of sublimity is perhaps the most enduring legacy of the Romantic aesthetic in her work. It is noteworthy that the Romantic undercurrent underlining *To Bring You..* and *Desire* gets woven into the fabric of Harvey’s music-scape and surfaces sporadically on her subsequent albums as melancholy recollections against a bleak Dorset landscape on *White Chalk* (2007) or as a longing for the English homeland on *Let England Shake* (2010). However, Harvey’s use of Romantic devices and motifs remains fundamentally idiosyncratic in that she uses them as an experimentalist toying with several types of signifiers.

Contrary to Harvey’s bricolage approach, Cave’s Romantic vein betrays a conscious effort to play with existing literary conventions, as testified by his self-narrative as a literary musician and his 1999 lecture on the love song. There is, in Cave, a self-conscious move toward formal coherence and established artistic lineage which surfaces in his appropriation of the blues ballad and in his Romantic stance. His songcraft is more cross-referential than Harvey’s, in that not only does it incorporate imagery and motifs, but also literary motifs and narrative devices. Consequently, whereas Harvey’s songs elude classification, Cave’s love songs speak to his Romantic filiation, and posit him in a musical line of literary musicians such as Leonard Cohen or Bob Dylan. Cave’s Romantic streak continues throughout his production, although it becomes less and less formulaic, and streams into less structured electronic ruminations on *Push the Sky Away* (2013) and *Skeleton Tree* (2016).

CONCLUSION TO PART II

A cursory look at their hybridising patterns testifies to Harvey's and Cave's idiosyncratic use of the Anglo-American space; they slide down its hybrid lineage and turn it into a site of exploration of monstrous identities and stylistic hues (e.g., folk-blues storytelling, comic grotesque freakery, and Romantic monstrosity). Considering their extensive experimentation with the folk and blues traditions, the American Poetry of Disorder, and with English Romantic themes, what do Harvey's and Cave's hybridising strategies reveal about their artistic stances and progression? What does it mean when two rock performers cross over into other genres, arts, and cultural spaces as extensively they do?

Firstly, their music is more fluid and integrative than ruptural. Their respective styles may seem ruptural due to their abrupt stylistic shifts (e.g., Harvey's leap from lo-fi grunge to expansive song-scapes, and Cave's leap from North American folk-blues ballad to piano-led pieces with *Boatman's Call* [1997]), however they retain residual traces of other albums' aesthetics. For instance, we have demonstrated that even Cave's most outwardly "Romantic" album, *Boatman's Call*, with its love song aesthetic, is not immune from monstrosity, whilst love songs are also sprinkled throughout his more Gothic-Grotesque albums (e.g., "Straight to You" on *Henry's Dream*, "Where The Wild Roses Grow" on *Murder Ballads*). Likewise, Harvey's aesthetic clusters are not as hermetic as they seem, her romantic epic *To Bring You My Love* thus contains grotesque extravagance (e.g., "Meet ze Monsta") and playful intrusions in the middle of murder songs (e.g., "Down by the water"), whilst her darker album *Desire* contains such liminal songs as "Catherine" which combine sadomasochistic desire and moments of sublime uplift. Therefore, in the same manner that Harvey and Cave intermingle aesthetics and musical styles, their songscapes cross-pollinate one another, and the monstrous motif gets disseminated across cultural and stylistic boundaries. In blurring the boundaries between musical genres (i.e., rock music, the American traditional and blues ballad traditions) and literature, Harvey and Cave foreground cultural and generic cross-fertilisation and thus delineate a fluctuating musical space, a hybrid creative hub eluding cultural and generic characterisation. Theirs is an aesthetic confluence of music, texts, and cultures, a "third musical space" reliant on aesthetic-mingling.⁴³⁸ Consequently, Harvey and Cave rely on what post-

⁴³⁸ The term "third musical space" is used in reference to post-colonial thinker Homi Bhabha, who posits the third space as a state of cultural in-betweenness where disparate and opposites encounter and transform into something new. Therefore, Bhabha formulates "the third space" as a creative epicentre where a transformation occurs. BHABHA, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

colonial literary critic Elleke Boehmer calls “the powerful mutating energies of mixed genres”⁴³⁹ as a driving-force for stylistic and tonal renewal, and as such their aesthetics are informed by transcultural mechanisms.

Secondly, their aesthetic-mingling is best approached as an ebb and flow whereby stylistic, musical, and cultural signifiers conflate to produce an idiosyncratic sub-genre, itself never set but always “in becoming”. Although they deploy different strategies (Harvey uses *bricolage* whereas Cave tends to play within existing conventions), they both hybridise their tunes inter-generically, interculturally, and inter-artistically.

In the process, they open conversations between rock music and the popular and high arts. Whereas their borrowings from blues and folk are predictable (since the rock apparatus has always laid claim to a blues lineage, with its connotations of rugged authenticity), their foray into English romantic themes (e.g., the Ophelia figure) and literary reservoir (e.g. Cave’s “Red Right Hand” character is loosely based on John Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost*)⁴⁴⁰ is more unexpected. Admittedly, as rock academic Lawrence Grossberg notes, rock has a propensity for hybridisation: “rock constantly steals from other sources, creating its own encapsulation by transgressing any sense of boundary and identity”.⁴⁴¹ But what does it say about Harvey and Cave when, as rock artists prone to transgression and monstrous drama, they experiment with conventional high arts such as Romanticism and 19th century pictorial art? I would argue that they turn their music into *art rock*,⁴⁴² a branch of rock concerned with fluid experimentation, as practised by such artists as David Bowie, Brian Eno, and the Velvet Underground.

⁴³⁹ BOEHMER, Elleke. *Colonial and Post-colonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. 203.

⁴⁴⁰ MILTON, John. *Paradise Lost*. (1674) Book II, 170-174. <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20/20-h/20-h.htm#link2HCH0002>> “What if the breath that kindled those grim fires, / Awaked, 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?”.

⁴⁴¹ GROSSBERG, Lawrence. “Is there rock after punk?” [1986]. FRITH, Simon, and Andrew GOODWIN, eds. *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. 116.

⁴⁴² For the purpose of our analysis, we comprehend the term “art rock” according to the typology put forward in the following encyclopaedia Britannica definition: “an eclectic branch of rock music that emerged in the late 1960s and flourished in the early to mid-1970s. [...] In common, all these bands regularly employ complicated and conceptual approaches to their music. Moreover, there has been a relatively fluid movement of musicians between bands that fall under the most general definition of art rock. [...] Some of the experimental rock by such American and British artists as Laurie Anderson, David Bowie, Brian Eno, the Velvet Underground, and Frank Zappa is also often categorized as art rock.” “Art rock.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2014. <<https://www.britannica.com/art/art-rock>>

Sadistic Intellectuals

Art rock broadly falls into two categories: progressive rock and radical art. Progressive rock was born out of British psychedelia and harmonies inspired by the European classical tradition. Radical art drew upon an edgier approach heralded by the Velvet Underground, glam rock (e.g., David Bowie, Roxy music, Lou Reed), and relied upon an avant-garde modernist approach including collage, irony and parody. I contend that Harvey's and Cave's fluid experimentations and tonal shifts place them in the latter category. Moreover, their conversations with high art also resonate with the roots of art rock. Indeed, art rock was born out of the conflation of art discourse and popular music in the 1960s, whereby art-school terminology and ideology leaked into popular music. As a result, art rock shifted the focus to the artist's intellectual and artistic creativity, therefore art rock artists were construed as "*auteurs*" first and foremost.⁴⁴³

Rock academic Matthew Bannister identifies a strand of radical art rock *auteurs*, the "sadistic rock intellectuals", that deals exclusively in "dark, dystopian, nightmare scenarios characterised by extreme distortion and aggression".⁴⁴⁴ Bannister posits these "sadistic intellectuals" as focusing on pain and suffering, and violence either inflicted upon the self or others. In this category, Bannister places Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Frank Zappa, and Nick Cave. Bannister argues that these so-called *auteurs* "construct themselves as cerebral observers of excess and debauchery, reproducing a traditional division of "high" aesthetic awareness (mind) with a view of the body as object, and violated. They replace sex with violence, or combine the two. Typically, such artists... are also published poets and authors. Others work off high culture associations."⁴⁴⁵

Cave matches Bannister's definition: he produces nightmare songworlds and scenarios where violence takes pride of place, uses ironic distance and parody, whilst exhibiting high culture sensitivities and ambitions (witness his published poetry and novels, and the many literary cross-references in his songs). In short, Cave's music collapses the boundaries between the canonical hierarchy of high culture (e.g., Romantic-era poetry and style) and the popular value of the raucous rebellion of rock. Cave's deliberate inmixing of high and low cultures is acknowledged in the critical terminology used to describe his persona: such terms as "fractured

⁴⁴³ BANNISTER. *White Men, White Noise: Masculinities And 1980s Indie Guitar Rock*. *Op.Cit.*, 139-40.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 140-141.

troubadour”, and “epic poet”⁴⁴⁶ connote high culture. Because Bannister’s research focuses on masculinity, his sadistic intellectual canon does not include any female rock performer, however, there is also a wider critical tendency to associate rock poets or intellectuals with male rather than female performers. With the exception of Patti Smith who is often cited as a rock poetess, the high art road is widely attributed to male rock musicians.

I would argue that, like Cave, Harvey belongs to the sadistic intellectual category. Over the span of her career she too has displayed a propensity to mingle high art aesthetics with abject corporeality, and her music overtly converses with high art, both visual and literary. There is a sadistic quality to her early works in particular, but also throughout her other albums, although it varies greatly in style and shape.

The notion of “sadistic intellectuals” aptly encompasses Harvey’s and Cave’s artistic personae in the bulk of their songs of monstrosity: whether they represent inhuman monsters, hybrids, or engage in more subtle sadomasochistic games, they both exhibit sadistic tendencies, high art ambitions, and a taste for aesthetic experimentation.

However, their songs of monstrosity present only one side of their treatment of horror: their more recent works feature a tonal shift, in that whilst the horror content remains, it is no longer fictional wishfulfilment drama or jubilant transgression, but instead a reflection of raw traumatic experience.

Do these new horror scripts toll the bell of monstrosity, or is there some continuity between the two creative clusters? What does this joint aesthetic shift say about the artistic trajectory of the two artists and the place of monstrosity in their work? Does this shift to real life interests reflect a wider trend in Western popular artists and their audiences?

⁴⁴⁶ HREHA, Scott. <<http://www.popmatters.com/music/reviews/c/cavenick-nocturama.shtml>>. Qtd. in *White Men, White Noise: Masculinities And 1980s Indie Guitar Rock*. *Op.Cit.*, 141.

**PART III. TRANSCENDING MONSTROSITY:
FROM GROTESQUE MAYHEM TO
EXISTENTIAL ATROCITY**

INTRODUCTION TO PART III

Until 2011, Harvey's and Cave's albums consistently conjure up fictional worlds, whether gothic macabre, comic grotesque, or darkly romantic. As demonstrated in part I, these imaginary songworlds put forward fictional scripts for the performers and their audience to co-perform, as part of a participatory game of escapist pursuit. Although, as argued in part II, the monstrous component of the songs takes on various shapes and tonalities, mingling various Anglo-American cultural spaces and traditions, they nonetheless partake of a gothic songwriting of excess and transgression, the purpose of which is both compensatory and transgressive. Indeed, whether relying on outrageous extravagance or subtle perversity, the monstrous songs are conducive to barbaric delight, and therefore shape a polymorphous interplay between the performers and their listeners. Being cast either as the performer's co-monster or their victim, the audience gets to taste the murky pleasure of being in turn terrified and terrifying, and thus form a sadomasochistic bond with Harvey and Cave (see part I). The two "sadistic intellectuals" thus provide dark spectacles and experiences made all the more enjoyable as they are safely contained in a fictional temporality.

Then the two musicians effect a sudden leap from imaginary worlds to *the* world, Harvey with *Let England Shake* in 2011, and Cave with *Skeleton Tree* in 2015. Although the two albums adopt different focuses and aesthetics, they both break away from Harvey's and Cave's prevalent treatment of horror as monster-mongering. Turning their attention to war carnage (Harvey), and personal loss and grieving (Cave), the two artists thus drive out "the wishfulfilment drama of monstrous stories"⁴⁴⁷ and re-locate horror into real life.

Outwardly, the albums' aesthetics are at odds: whereas *Let England Shake* relies on a stylised synergy of musical dynamism and graphic lyrics, *Skeleton Tree* evokes emotional collapse in its laden swathes of ambient music and fragmented lyrics. *Let England Shake* chiefly operates in a dissonant mode: providing an enticing counterpoint to the dark subject matter of the lyrics, the catchy musical lines enable Harvey to saturate the lyrics with graphic evocations of battlefield carnage. It is a paradoxical album: whilst its lyrics are infused with

⁴⁴⁷ COHEN. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture. Op. Cit.*,18.

the horrors of war in their unflinching depiction of corporeal and psychological mutilation, its music is dynamic.

Conversely, *Skeleton Tree* is weighed down by Cave's personal tragedy, since the album's production was completed in the aftermath of the accidental death of Cave's fifteen-year-old son. Because the subject matter is painfully autobiographical, the tone and musical texture of the songs are elegiac and laden with grief, and horror is only suggested elliptically, through fragmented images of an inner world in disarray. Through the prism of real life trauma, horror is no longer a transgressive toy to conjure up human monstrosity with, but it becomes the unspeakable epicentre of disaster.

And yet, in spite of these formal disparities, the two albums are more akin than meets the eye (or ear). Not only do they both take the world as their subject, but they specifically explore human suffering by means of lived experience; *Let England Shake* revisits 20th century wars through soldiers' testimonies, whilst *Skeleton Tree* deals with the aftermath of brutal bereavement through Cave's post-traumatic meanderings.

The two albums testify to a profound change in the two musicians' treatment of horror, and also in their artistic stances. With these two albums, horror no longer provides an escape route into imaginary worlds, but indeed an insight into the real world, though a confrontation with the trials and tribulations of the human condition. This new focus on human suffering as opposed to monstrous idiosyncrasies signifies their unprecedented engagement with the real world, and speaks to a gritty artistic gaze on existence.

The purpose of part III is to examine the implications of the reframing of horror in *Let England Shake* and *Skeleton Tree*, and its effects on aesthetics, listening experience, and performer-listener bond. In particular, I will interrogate the artistic rupture between their older songs of monstrosity and the new songs of trauma: does the abrupt shift to real life atrocity repudiate or merely reframe their former monstrous scripts? How does it alter Harvey's and Cave's transgressive bond with their audience? Has their songwriting of excess, with its emphasis on monstrosity and transgression, completely gone?

I will work from the premise that in their focus on collective and individual trauma, both albums put forward "haunted narratives"⁴⁴⁸ of trauma that open conversations on life and

⁴⁴⁸ RIPPL, Gabriele, Philipp SCHWEIGHAUSER, Tiina KIRSS, Margit SUTROP, and Therese STEFFEN, eds. *Haunted Narratives: Life Writing in An Age Of Trauma*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2003. 3.

the human condition. As such, the songs will be approached as musical translations of “life writing” as a narrative form that “takes life as its subject”.⁴⁴⁹ Bearing in mind the multimediality of rock music, my analysis aims to bring to light the multimedial strategies (i.e., sonic, lyrical, visual and embodied performance) that Harvey and Cave deploy in order to represent trauma.

In particular, extrapolating from trauma theory and trauma literary theory, I will demonstrate that *Let England Shake* and *Skeleton Tree* evoke trauma by mimicking its disorientation and subjective disintegration, thereby putting forward an experiential representation of trauma that immerses the listener in the traumatised psyche.

Finally, I will address the question of the artistic function of the two albums: what is their actual impact? I will demonstrate that their new idiom, although outwardly remote from their previous songwriting of excess may actually issue from one and the same creative flow.

⁴⁴⁹ SMITH, Sidonie, and Julia WATSON. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. 3.

CHAPTER 10. From Monstrous Fiction to Haunted Narratives of Trauma

Introduction

Firstly, we will parse trauma theory for structural tools to read Cave's and Harvey's trauma songtexts by, with a view to stake out the aesthetic challenges of representing individual and collective trauma. Secondly, we will compare the two musicians' positions toward their respective trauma contents in terms of psychical distance and creative agency.

1. Staking out the Trauma Territory: Trauma Theory and the Artistic Representation of Trauma

1.1. Trauma and Haunted Narratives

Trauma theory will enable us to define a working definition of trauma, and provide an insight into the mechanisms of trauma and the challenges of trauma writing. Trauma theory emerged in the U.S. and flourished concurrently to Gothic studies from the 1990s onward, when a group of critics started to probe the cultural implications of trauma. In her seminal collection of essays *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), Cathy Caruth brought to light the trans-disciplinary component of trauma theory, thus exploring its ramifications in psychiatry, sociology, as well as film and literary studies. Caruth theorises trauma as follows:

A pathology that cannot be defined ... by the event itself the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event.⁴⁵⁰

Because the individual is unable to grasp traumatic experience at the time of its occurrence, the individual does not possess their trauma, but rather they are possessed by it, at the mercy of its ceaselessly returns. Caruth posits trauma as a collapse of understanding which triggers a pattern of repetition and unfinishedness: "since the subject experiences trauma one moment too late, they are forced to confront the primary shock over and over again".⁴⁵¹ As an unintegrated experience that keeps gatecrashing the present, trauma causes a temporal disjunction whereby

⁴⁵⁰ CARUTH, Cathy, ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1995. 4-5.

⁴⁵¹ CARUTH, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, And History*. Baltimore and London: the Johns Hopkins university press, 1996. 62.

the full traumatic impact of an event is only ever experienced retrospectively (i.e., “one moment too late”). Insofar as trauma acts as a conduit between the present and the past, the “structure of its experience” is essentially polytemporal, and therefore spectral.

The subject’s oscillation between the present and “a primary experience that can never be captured”⁴⁵² disrupts their perception of time, and thus “induces a ghostly relationship with the past which results in hauntedness”.⁴⁵³ The traumatised subject can thus be approached as haunted by their past, much like the Gothic subject is haunted by their outer or inner demons, which delineates a structural intersection between trauma and Gothic as modes of spectrality.

Such literary theorists as Avril Horner⁴⁵⁴ and Dori Laub⁴⁵⁵ have elaborated upon the spectral affinities of trauma and Gothic. Focusing on the entrapment of the subject in the uncanny irruptions of trauma into their actual life, Laub articulates the spectrality of trauma in terms of timelessness and ubiquity.⁴⁵⁶ Bringing to light the dramatic interplay between trauma and Gothic narratives, Avril Horner postulates that trauma and Gothic feed off each other:

Trauma and Gothic narratives equate to disruption, irruption, and melancholy. It is therefore not surprising to find that they seep into each other: the Gothic mode feeds off the horror of traumatic situations for plot while trauma narratives are often structured through Gothic effects in order to convey a sense of haunting, of matters unresolved, of the past intruding into the present.⁴⁵⁷

Horner not only highlights the shared narrative spectrality of trauma and Gothic, but also the aesthetic reliance of trauma narratives on the Gothic filter in order to convey hauntedness and temporal transgression. The latter interplay suggests that although trauma-writing outwardly seems beyond the scope Harvey’s and Cave’s songwriting of excess, there is a cross-over potential in their shared spectrality.

⁴⁵² LUCKHURST, Roger. *The Trauma Question*. London: Routledge, 2008. 5.

⁴⁵³ NADAL, Marita, and Mónica CALVO, eds. *Trauma in Contemporary Literature: Narrative And Representation*. New York: Routledge, 2014. 4.

⁴⁵⁴ HORNER, Avril. “Apocalypse Now: Collective Trauma, Globalisation, and the New Gothic Sublime.” *Trauma in Contemporary Literature: Narrative And Representation*. Ed. Marita NADAL and Mónica CALVO. New York: Routledge, 2014. 35-50.

⁴⁵⁵ LAUB, Dori. “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening.” *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. Ed. Shoshana FELMAN and Dori LAUB. New York and London: Routledge, 1992. 57-74.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 69. “While the trauma uncannily returns in actual life, its reality continues to elude the subject who lives in its grip and unwittingly undergoes its ceaseless repetitions and reenactments. The traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of “normal” reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after. This absence of categories that define it lends it a quality of “otherness”, a salience, a timelessness, and a ubiquity that puts it outside the range of associatively linked experiences, outside the range of comprehension, of recounting, and of mastery.”

⁴⁵⁷ HORNER, Avril. “Apocalypse Now: Collective Trauma, Globalisation, and the New Gothic Sublime.” *Op. Cit.*, 36.

A concept that seems promising in relation to Harvey's and Cave's songs is that of "haunted narratives" as a type of trauma fiction that evokes "the lingering, haunting presence of the past in the present and the psychological, ethical, and representational difficulties involved in narrative negotiations of traumatic memories"⁴⁵⁸. I contend that the definition of Rippl *et al.* is transferable to Harvey's and Cave's songs in that they too put forward narratives of trauma, albeit not only in writing, but also in music and performance. Therefore, we are going to approach the *Let England Shake* and *Skeleton Tree* songbooks as haunted narratives informed by the peculiar spectrality of traumatic memory.

In order to better understand the kind of subjective experience Harvey and Cave represent in their haunted narratives, I am going to focus on the experience of trauma in terms of narrative and traumatic memory, and its implications in terms of representability.

1.2. Trauma, Unspeakability, and Unrepresentability

Stories are the only enchantment possible,
for when we begin to see our suffering as a story, we are saved.
Anais Nin, *The Diary of Anais Nin*, vol 3.

In bringing together different disciplines (i.e., psychiatry, sociology, as well as literary, film, and cultural studies), trauma theory has spurred fresh trans-disciplinary readings on the impact of trauma on subjective identity and self-narrative, and has raised issues about trauma's defiance of verbalisation and narration.

The Unthinkability and Unspeakability of Trauma

The Greek etymology of the word "trauma" designates a "wound", which invites an analogy between the corporeal and psychic realms: psychological trauma can thus be construed as a tearing in an otherwise wholesome psychic body. The parallel can be insightfully applied to the psychic effects of trauma: resulting from an encounter with the incomprehensible, the traumatic event deals such a violent blow that it tears the individual's psyche. Much like a physical wound, the psychic wound ruptures psychic tissues and compromises the integrity of the psyche, thereby preventing it from functioning as an organic whole.

⁴⁵⁸ RIPPL, Gabriele, Philipp SCHWEIGHAUSER, Tiina KIRSS, Margit SUTROP, and Therese STEFFEN, eds. *Haunted Narratives: Life Writing in An Age of Trauma*. Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2003. 3.

In line with this notion of trauma as a psychic tearing, American psychiatrist Judith Herman⁴⁵⁹ argues that due to its unpredictability, trauma shatters one's sense of identity, and impacts one's life narrative. Because it occurs outside of the linear process of logic and coherence, the traumatic event overrides the subject's ability to process and integrate it into their life narrative, and instead overwhelms the traumatised subject by confronting them with the incomprehensible. The processing of trauma being latent and retrospective,⁴⁶⁰ it unfolds outside the margins of one's consciousness, in a suspended temporal and psychic space. Therefore, the traumatised self does not perceive the traumatic event like any other event in their life, but as an unknowable aberration, a rupture from all their cognitive schemes. As a result, trauma is experienced in a fragmented manner, through disconnected sensations and images that float back to the subject's mind, thereby creating a disjointed perspective.⁴⁶¹ The traumatic event is so unimaginable that it confounds intellectual and emotional formulation, thereby requiring the subject to interpret it retrospectively.

In pulverising and invalidating all prior epistemological certainties and subjective constructions, trauma precludes self-narratives and thus entails an *anti-narrative* dynamic. Because its assumptions about itself and the world are no longer operative, the traumatised self thus turns into a *tabula rasa*, and is unable to use its life knowledge to articulate its experience into meaningful words. And yet, argues French psychologist Pierre Janet,⁴⁶² the only way for the traumatised subject to heal is precisely by turning the traumatic event into a narrative.

Janet distinguishes between narrative and traumatic memory. Narrative memory integrates events into the subject's history and consciousness, thus enabling a linear chronology separating past and present, whereas traumatic memory superimposes the emotional charge of a past event onto the subject's actual reality. By turning traumatic memory into narrative memory, the individual reframes (and contains) the traumatic event in the past, which affords them psychological distance to narrativise the event and assimilate it into their self-narrative.⁴⁶³ Insofar as narration is critical to psychic restoration and survival, the anti-narrative component of trauma is highly problematic, since it traps the individual in a traumatic loop.

⁴⁵⁹ HERMAN, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.

⁴⁶⁰ CARUTH. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. *Op. Cit.*

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.* See also VAN DER KOLK, Bessel, and Onno VAN DER HART, "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma." CARUTH, Cathy, ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1995.

⁴⁶² JANET, Pierre. *Les Médications psychologiques*, 3 vols. Paris : Société Pierre Janet, 1919-1925.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*

The Representational Challenges of Trauma: the “Trauma paradigm”

The unspeakability of trauma accordingly challenges its representation: how can one represent an event that overwhelms the subject and resists language?

British literary academic Roger Luckhurst puts forward the concept of “trauma paradigm”, which insightfully encapsulates the double bind of representing collective trauma.⁴⁶⁴ Luckhurst argues that when cultural work engages with trauma, it is confronted with a double difficulty: whilst traumatic experience is so ungraspable that it is virtually inexpressible, there is also a necessity to transmute trauma into shared experience and knowledge so as to transmit it for collective healing and memory. Whilst formulated for collective trauma such as the Holocaust, the template for Luckhurst’s “trauma paradigm” relies upon the same pattern as Janet’s individual trauma: in both instances, the traumatic events are locked in inexpressibility and yet require narration in order to be assimilated into a wider life narrative, whether individual or collective. In their kinship with the incomprehensible and the unspeakable, both forms of trauma thus pose the same representational challenges.

Literary critic Leigh Gilmore⁴⁶⁵ concurs that “self-representational stories”⁴⁶⁶ (i.e., trauma fiction and life writing) are extremely difficult to produce, because trauma tests the limits of self-representation:

Trauma, from the Greek meaning “wound”, refers to the self-altering, even self-shattering experience of violence, injury, and harm. Crucial to the experience of trauma are the multiple difficulties that arise in trying to articulate it. Indeed, the relation between trauma and representation, and especially language, is at the center of claims about trauma as a category... Trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency. Yet at the same time, language about trauma is theorized as an impossibility, language is pressed forward as that which can heal the survivor of trauma.⁴⁶⁷

Gilmore notes the same double bind as Luckhurst with regards to trauma-writing: narrativising is critical to the survivor’s recovery, and yet hampered by trauma since it shatters not only the self, but the possibility of linguistic expression.

⁴⁶⁴ LUCKHURST, Roger. *The Trauma Question*. London: Routledge, 2008.

⁴⁶⁵ GILMORE, Leigh. *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma And Testimony*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

Artistic Responses to the Unrepresentability of Trauma

Where conventional language fails, Luckhurst argues, artistic expression can provide aesthetic outlets. Luckhurst thus postulates that due to their core plasticity, cultural forms are structurally fit to accommodate “the trauma paradigm” and render trauma disruption creatively: “Given the narrative/anti-narrative tension at the core of trauma, aesthetics might step into this area because its task is (like that of the cultural critic) to ‘play with contradictions’”.⁴⁶⁸ In other words, it is in the non-literality and fluidity of art that trauma could be best captured.

French post-structuralist philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard concurs that art can overcome the narrative impossibility of traumatic experience. Lyotard does not elaborate on art’s ability to solve contradictions, but instead contends that art can conjure up trauma elliptically, by foregrounding its very inexpressibility: “What art can do, is bear witness ... to this aporia of art and to its pain. It does not say the unsayable, but says it cannot say it”.⁴⁶⁹ Lyotard’s notion that art can be most effective by turning inexpressibility into a focal point is particularly interesting in that it posits unrepresentability both as a yardstick of emotional and intellectual overload, and as an aesthetic basis. Lyotard thus lays the foundation for a non-linear representation of trauma, through oblique evocations and scattered fragments, like so many mirror splinters offering glimpses into trauma.

Applied to Harvey and Cave, Lyotard’s speculations point to infinite possibilities to articulate trauma elliptically, within the gaps of music, performance, and lyrics.

1.3. Trauma Fiction and Life (song-)writing

Insofar as Harvey’s and Cave’s aesthetic impact issues from a synergy of lyrics and music in performance, their artistic means to convey trauma are multiple and intermingled. However, the key notions of narrativity/anti-narrativity, which are central to trauma, are worthy filters to apply to their songs: insofar as songs put forward textual, musical, visual, and embodied narratives, they too rely on an idiom to confer meaning and coherence to trauma. In this respect, the literary criticism related to “trauma fiction” is an illuminating tool to stake out the potential artistic responses to the unrepresentability of trauma.

⁴⁶⁸ LUCKHURST. *The Trauma Question. Op. Cit.*, 80.

⁴⁶⁹ LYOTARD, Jean-François. *Heidegger and “the Jews”*. Trans. Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990. 47.

The phrase “trauma fiction” itself testifies to the recent cross-pollination of the concept of trauma from medical discourse to literary studies. Literary criticism has extensively investigated the poetics of the trauma idiom, with a focus on trauma’s resistance to narrative formulation. In keeping with Lyotard’s and Luckhurst’s observation, literary critics widely acknowledge that because trauma baffles conventional language and linear representation, it compels an innovative idiom. Anne Whitehead thus contends that “if trauma is at all susceptible to narrative formulation”, then it can only be conveyed by “a literary form which departs from conventional linear sequence”.⁴⁷⁰

One observable literary response is to not only evoke trauma through themes and characterisation, but to let its symptoms seep into the stylistics of a text, thereby conveying not a portrayal but an *experience* of trauma, by imitating the stupor and disorientation that it plunges the traumatised individual into. Whitehead thus notes that “novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only be adequately represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterized by repetition and indirection”.⁴⁷¹ Trauma is thus rendered obliquely, by translating the effects of psychic dissolution into formal and stylistic mechanisms, thereby applying a traumatic filter to the plot. Laurie Vickroy concurs that trauma narratives “internalize the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of trauma within their underlying sensibilities and structures”,⁴⁷² evoking traumatic memory “through affective and unconscious associations rather than through conscious memories or structured plots. Thus the reader is guided through the narrative via the disorientations and conflicts of traumatic memory”.⁴⁷³ Therefore, trauma fiction has developed specific devices so that the reader is “stylistically traumatised” by being immersed in the disjointed perspective of trauma. By placing the reader in the heart of trauma, this immersive writing leads them to grasp trauma experientially rather than intellectually, from the internal focus of the traumatised subject.

This notion of mimicking trauma symptoms is particularly promising in that it highlights the experiential potentialities of trauma representation, and thus suggests similarly immersive means for the two musicians to explore. How can rock artists such as Harvey and

⁴⁷⁰ WHITEHEAD, Anne. *Trauma Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004. 6.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁷² VICKROY, Laurie. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*. University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville and London, 2002. 3.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*

Cave produce an experiential cartography of trauma? What fresh musical idiom can they deploy for the purpose?

1.4. Harvey and Cave: from Fiction to Life writing

Both *Let England Shake* and *Skeleton Tree* narrativise trauma through testimonial songs related either by soldier-narrators (the former) or by the traumatised performer himself (the latter). Contrary to their former works, the source material of the two albums is not fictional but *actual* horror, and the focus shifts to the lasting imprint of horrific events on individual and collective consciousness. In this regard, the two albums' song-writings are akin to life writing in purpose and intent: forsaking the thrills and spills of wishfulfilment drama, the songs attempt to make sense of past horrors. Both albums dwell in the aftermath of atrocity, in the liminal zone where the psyche (whether individual or collective) is relentlessly plagued by traumatic memories, and unable to move forward. The songs articulate memory in terms of experiential stigmata, and probe the internal imprint left by a traumatic event: Harvey's soldiers are haunted by battlefield atrocities, Cave by brutal loss. Bearing in mind that "memories are records of how we have experienced events, not replicas of the events themselves",⁴⁷⁴ the notion of subjective experience is central to trauma texts: what makes an event traumatic is not its atrocity, but the post-seismic effects of that experience on the subject.

Trauma fiction is intrinsically akin to "life writing" in the sense that it does not only speak to a single individual experience, but also to the world in general, and the human condition in particular. For the purpose of this study, the term "life writing" is construed as a form of writing that "takes life as its subject",⁴⁷⁵ as defined by literary trauma studies academics Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson.⁴⁷⁶ Smith and Watson insightfully distinguish between fiction as representing "a world" and life writing as representing "the world".⁴⁷⁷ This differentiation can be fruitfully applied to Harvey's and Cave's song-writing on *Let England Shake* and *Skeleton Tree*, since it narrativises the lived experience of war and bereavement.

Smith and Watson also contend that although life writing conveys experience through personal storytelling, it goes beyond the personal: "mediated through memory and language,

⁴⁷⁴ SCHACTER, Daniel. *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past*. New York: Basic Books, 1996.6.

⁴⁷⁵ SMITH, Sidonie, and Julia WATSON. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. 3.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 10. "We might helpfully think of what fiction represents as 'a world', and what life writing refers to as 'the world'".

“experience” is already an interpretation of the past and of our place in a culturally and historically specific present”.⁴⁷⁸ Therefore, they argue, “acts of personal remembering are fundamentally social and collective”.⁴⁷⁹

Extrapolating from these observations, it can be inferred that although the nature of Cave’s trauma is intimate, it nonetheless carries social weight; much like Harvey’s war testimonies in their overt engagement with collective memory. Their songs thus become a means of sharing a social past with their listeners, and of processing it collectively. This new purpose of the song testifies to a profound change in their relationship to both their music and their audience: the song is no longer a flight into an imaginary world but instead prompts an existential exchange on humanity and the world.

CONCLUSION

The blurred lines between fiction/nonfiction and the focus on life as a subject thus bring Harvey’s and Cave’s *Let England Shake* and *Skeleton Tree* into the umbrella understanding of life writing as defined by Smith and Watson. Although Harvey’s fictionalised life narratives are more cohesive and stylised, and Cave’s are fragmented and unfiltered, both are expressive of traumatic memory and posttraumatic shock, and should thus be construed as conversations about life.

Having delineated the operative framework for Cave and Harvey’s “haunted narratives” in terms of trauma representation and life writing, it is worth considering how their respective narratorial positions toward their traumatic subject matter affect their artistic agency.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

2. Harvey's and Cave's Interactions with their Trauma Material: Psychological Distance, Narratorial Positions, and Creative Agency

There is a wide gap between Cave's and Harvey's relationship to their latest source material, in that Cave's content is autobiographical whereas Harvey's is historical, which conditions their room for artistic manoeuvre and creative freedom. Moreover, since Cave represents individual trauma, and Harvey collective trauma, they outwardly diverge in social scope, which calls for a probe into the interplay between individual and collective trauma.

2.1. Individual Versus Collective Trauma

Given the mass deadly events afflicting 20th century history, the haunting presence of Western Europe's traumatic past (i.e., two world wars and the Holocaust) has seeped into our collective consciousness and shaped our cultural imaginary, surfacing as an abiding theme in popular culture and high art alike. In this respect, Harvey's *Let England Shake* segues into a wider cultural lineage of artistic responses to collective trauma.

Extensive academic attention has been afforded to the trans-generational and social dimensions of historical trauma, and some academics have drawn an insightful parallel between individual and collective trauma, as evidenced in sociologist Kai Erikson's definition of collective trauma:

Sometimes the tissues of community can be damaged in much the same way as the tissues of mind and body... But even when that does not happen, traumatic wounds inflicted on individuals can combine to create a mood, an ethos – a group culture almost – that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up. Trauma that is, has a social dimension.⁴⁸⁰

Erikson's organic articulation of collective trauma, through an analogy between society and the human body, posits trauma as an inter-subjective phenomenon whereby the wounds experienced by some members of the community coalesce and sink into the cultural fabric of a community, thus haunting the community trans-generationally. This social dimension of trauma through second-hand experience highlights similar mechanisms at work in individual and collective trauma: in both cases, the present is haunted by a past event, and there is a need

⁴⁸⁰ ERIKSON, Kai. "Notes on trauma and community." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy CARUTH, 183-199. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. 185.

for processing in order to move forward. In this regard, Cave's and Harvey's trauma contents are structurally akin.

Extrapolating from Erikson's notion of the social transmission of trauma, Harvey's soldier's songs can be construed as bridges between individual and collective experience: their individual testimonies act as a constellation that sustains a collective atmosphere and ethos. Accordingly, Cave's individual trauma can be construed as indirectly constitutive of a broader social constellation whereby the sum of individual traumas creates a wider social map encompassing all forms of human experiences. This social component is noteworthy in that it may act as an avenue of interpersonal communication.

2.2. Antithetical Authorial Positions: Harvey's External Observation vs Cave's Self-Referential Exploration

Because the war trauma of *Let England Shake* is not only collective, but also historic and therefore only experienced vicariously, it affords Harvey emotional distance and artistic agency. Being emancipated from the emotional weight of lived experience, Harvey can choose her narratorial style and position (either external or first-person narrative), tone, and musical aesthetic. As an external "war songwriter", Harvey documents war carnage through soldiers' psyches, but it is only an assumed internal narratorial role. Although her source material is real life and her inspiration can be drawn from war archives and testimonies, her first-hand war accounts are fictionalised reconstructions. Consequently, Harvey enjoys greater artistic agency than she would if dealing with autobiographical content, since she is not personally confronted with the disorientation and subjective disintegration of traumatic memory. She lends her voice to her characters so they can narrate their tragic stories, but ultimately their tales of battlefield carnage issue from vicarious as opposed to first-hand trauma. Her emotional interaction with her trauma songs thus enables greater artistic distance. Like Cave, she is speaking from the heart of trauma, but unlike him, she is speaking from an *assumed* position of trauma, which affords her greater creative leeway.

Conversely, Cave's autobiographical position in *Skeleton Tree* poses more psychological and artistic challenges, since with "self-representational stories" (i.e., trauma-writing), the narrator-survivor is trapped in unthinkability and unspeakability, as literary critic

Leigh Gilmore points out.⁴⁸¹ Moreover, as a performer conveying his personal trauma, Cave cannot hide behind fictional personae, his real and artistic personae superimpose, which makes for optimal intimate exposure. While Harvey and Cave can both resort to trauma-mimicking in order to convey trauma musically, Cave is not mimicking retrospectively or externally, but he is experiencing traumatic memory in real time, so the disorientation and fragmentation is not stylised representation but actual psychological experience. Therefore, contrary to Harvey's narratorial position that is retrospective and only fictionally immersive, Cave's position is personally and temporally immersive, since at the time of singing, he is trying to make sense of trauma.

Cave himself commented on the crushing emotional charge of grief that robbed him of his physical and creative energy:

I never found [grief] numb. It was too much to feel. A deeply physical situation. I was unable to do anything. I was so full of this thing.⁴⁸²

Skeleton Tree is Cave's attempt to break through paralysing grief and find his self-narrative again. In this respect, the album is first and foremost about processing personal trauma through creative expression. His trauma being both raw and actual, it is not ripe for artistic interpretation and aestheticisation, hence a necessarily stern tonal palette. Cave delivers his pain as is, by capturing his stunned meanderings through fragmented memories. The final rendition of *Skeleton Tree* is accordingly sketchy, in flux, and unfinished, indeed like traumatic memory. This tentative component sets *Skeleton Tree* and *Let England Shake* at either end of the creative spectrum: the former is as stripped and in process as the latter is honed and matured.

2.3. Cave's Stripped Aesthetic versus Harvey's Conversation with War

Cave's and Harvey's respective levels of artistic agency are directly informed by their respective autobiographical and non-autobiographical positions. Whereas Harvey consciously

⁴⁸¹ GILMORE, Leigh. *The Limits Of Autobiography: Trauma And Testimony*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001. 14.

⁴⁸² FREYNE, Patrick. "Nick Cave at the Abbey: A funny, strange and beautiful evening. The audience asks the questions in this raw, intimate and revealing show." *The Irish Times*, 6 Jun.2018. Web. 6 June 2018. <<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/music/nick-cave-at-the-abbey-a-funny-strange-and-beautiful-evening-1.3521061>>

chose her project, Cave did not, life thrust it upon him. Cave's original project was effectively high-jacked by the loss of his son, since the death occurred in mid-production and overhauled the album's tonality, therefore *Skeleton Tree* only became an album of grief by necessity. With *Skeleton Tree*, Cave did not set out to lead his listeners down the road of grief and emotional carnage, but he was compelled to do so by his life events.

Because Harvey's album is a long-gestated and well-researched project, her album's aesthetic is finely chiselled and multi-layered. *Let England Shake* is one of Harvey's most finely textured albums, its melodies and lyrics are symbiotically evocative, and it unfolds like a synesthetic tapestry mingling musical, lyrical and visual sensations. Having the luxury of artistic agency and emotional distance, Harvey was able to stylise her album, retaining some of her key hallmarks such as graphic horror and dissonance, whilst experimenting with folk music and cross-cultural quotations. She thus articulates a sophisticated artistic take on war horrors.

Dorian Lynskey contends that *Let England Shake* should be construed as an exploration of artistic responses to war:

The war lyrics here are more about the history of responding to war in visual art, folksong, etc. than about the event itself.⁴⁸³

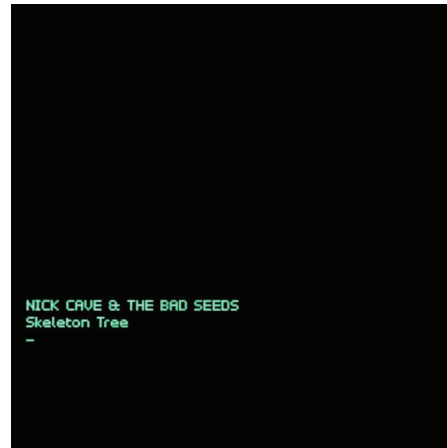
Judging by the breadth of Harvey's artistic borrowings (ranging from Goya's "Disasters of War" to rockabilly, through reggae music, Kurdish and English folk music), Lynskey's statement stands. Harvey fine-tuned both her artistic intent and lineage, which sets her apart from the circumstantial constraints affecting the production of *Skeleton Tree*. With *Skeleton Tree*, Cave does not purport to survey artistic responses to a traumatic event, but articulates his *personal* response to it, hence its unfiltered and minimalist aesthetic.

Indeed, the two album covers aptly encapsulate the aesthetic gulf that separates them:

⁴⁸³ LINSKEY, Dorian. Qtd. in *The Quietus*, 11 February 2011. "Review: PJ Harvey, Let England Shake", by John DORAN <<http://thequietus.com/articles/05683-pj-harvey-let-england-shake-review>>



Let England Shake (2011)



Skeleton Tree (2016)

The artwork of *Let England Shake* guides the viewer's gaze to the black centre circle against the white backdrop, and upon closer scrutiny the dark hole turns out to be made up of black birds. The vision is dark and nightmarish, the black birds act as ominous fragments of a shattered piece, either fleeing from or hovering over the dark hole of history. The fragmented and sketchy outlines of the black hole overlap into the white background, thereby contaminating their surroundings, and threatening to leak into our world too. The drawing makes for uncomfortable viewing, as the dark hole seems to threaten to engulf the viewer into its expanding epicentre. Styling war horrors into a vision of downward spiralling, the piece mimicks the effect of trauma as an event that shatters the traumatised subject's psyche and overshadows their life.

Conversely, Cave's cover is unaestheticised and states its purpose bluntly: it is uniformly black except for the green letters of the album title, and there is no visual movement, it is only black void. This non-representation of trauma brings to mind Lyotard's argument that art "does not say the unsayable, but says it cannot say it".⁴⁸⁴ Likewise, Cave's aesthetic approach in his *Skeleton Tree* songs is to say that he cannot say it, he skirts around trauma and evokes it elliptically, foregrounding its unspeakability and unrepresentability both in his lyrics and in the black uniformity of his artwork. In this respect, the album is aptly named: its aesthetic is indeed "skeletal" in its stark minimalism. Because *Skeleton Tree* is in sharp contrast with Harvey's highly stylised rendition of war trauma, the two songbooks compel different

⁴⁸⁴ LYOTARD, Jean-François. *Heidegger and "the Jews"*. Trans. Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990. 47.

interpretive tools: Harvey's sophisticated stylistics require a detailed content analysis, whereas Cave's lacunary aesthetic offers limited scope for stylistic interpretation. Therefore, Cave's album may be best probed through its ripple effects, by delving into the ecosystem of its live performances and other subsequent interactions between Cave and his audience.

Having probed the two album's operative framework and conception, we are going to analyse their mechanisms into greater detail, notably with a view to understand their treatment of the horror content in relation to trauma.

CHAPTER 11. Staking out *Let England Shake* and *Skeleton Tree*

1. *Let England Shake*: a Mystifying Rock Object

1.1. From Allegorical Geographies to the Terra Firma of *Let England Shake*

In a 2011 interview about the release of *Let England Shake* (2011), Harvey said:

I feel like I have just begun, that's the strongest feeling. I have felt that, with this record in particular, I have covered a new way of writing which is just a beginning. I feel I have so much yet to do, and that's a wonderful feeling.⁴⁸⁵

A first listen to the album confirms Harvey's stated enthusiasm: the fresh musical and lyrical perspectives brim with the energy of new beginnings. Forsaking fictional psycho-drama for the grim reality of Anglo-European war history, Harvey conducts a foray into World Wars I and II, and the Gallipoli campaign⁴⁸⁶ with a combination of unsparing realism and enticing tunes. Although leaping from fictional to realistic narratives, *Let England Shake* retains a high horror content, much in keeping with her prior monster-mongering repertoire. Harvey's treatment of war is not conveyed in muffled undertones: her imagery is bold and graphic, and in this respect resonant with the grotesque excess and transgression of her prior songwriting. The songworld of *Let England Shake* is one of utter desolation and stunned horror, of dismembered bodies and "unburied ghosts", narrated by traumatised soldiers haunted by guilt, alienation or the fear of death. The settings include World War I and the 1915 Gallipoli Campaign's trenches, the treacherous mountain passes to a deadly battle, the apocalyptic sight of a city devastated by war. The fiercely realistic descriptions contaminate the entire songscape

⁴⁸⁵ HARVEY, PJ. Interview by Miranda Sawyer. *The Culture Show*. BBC 2, London. 12 February 2011. Television. <<https://youtu.be/0Lg2j0zU1II>>

⁴⁸⁶ "The Gallipoli campaign, also called Dardanelles Campaign, (February 1915–January 1916), in World War I, an Anglo-French operation against Turkey, intended to force the Dardanelles channel and to occupy Constantinople." It is estimated that over 100 000 people were killed, including 56 000–68 000 Ottoman and around 53 000 British and French soldiers. It is widely remembered as a particularly bloody battle. "Gallipoli Campaign." *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2015. <<https://www.britannica.com/event/Gallipoli-Campaign>>

with battlefield carnage: nature and human life are relentlessly defiled, and the vicious cycle of pain and death is relentless.

And yet, musically, *Let England Shake* sounds surprisingly energising and fresh for an album dealing with such a gruesome subject matter as battlefield carnage. Overall, Harvey crafted a hauntingly melodic album whose catchy tunes combining guitar and English folk instrumentation are particularly engaging. The sound of the album is fresh and expansive in its resort to untypical instruments such as the autoharp, the saxophone, or the bugle as counterpoints to the central guitar line. The effected guitar lines interweave with the autoharp, which imparts a wash of fluidity and folkish simplicity, while the scattered smears of brass, fuzzy electric piano and samples reinvigorate the sonic texture with unpredictable combinations. The songs thus merge the immediacy of singalongs and an energising touch of polyphony.

Another compelling component of the album is Harvey's vocal quality. Just as she shifts her corporeal styles to suit her albums, Harvey alters her vocal range to suit the aesthetics of her albums, effectively using her voice like an instrument. Prior to *Let England Shake*, Harvey had experimented with excruciating vocal distortions (e.g., the muffled, in-breathing and sung-screamed vocals of *Dry* and *Rid of Me*), expansive blues vocals (*To Bring You My Love*), slicker pop vocals (*Stories From the City, Stories From the Sea*), and a borderline hysteric high-pitch register (*White Chalk*). On *Let England Shake*, she remains in the higher register, but her voice has a sort of unflinching candour jarring with the graphic horror of the lyrics. This child-like component provides a counterpoint to the weighty lyrics, and conjoined with the melodic charm, affords the listener a respite from the sustained horror vision of the lyrics. As a result, the album brings a double-edged musical experience: on the one hand, the listener is enticed by the tunes and vocals, and on the other hand they are horrified by the lyrics. This play of light and shadows paradoxically enables Harvey to saturate the lyrics with graphic depictions of horror. Indeed, if the musical and vocal texture matched the lyrical horror, the album would either become virtually unbearable, or downright melodramatic. It is precisely in the subtle *chiaroscuro* balance, the lightness and weight, that Harvey's *tour de force* lies: she sustains an unsparing depiction of carnage throughout the album whilst providing various degrees of immersion and intensity.

Personalising War through Soldiers' Songs

Let England Shake unfolds in testimonial mode, as a collection of soldiers' personal narratives of war, in what popular music academic Abigail Gardner calls "a poetic personalisation of political discourse"⁴⁸⁷ that focuses on ordinary voices and experiences of war. Gardner posits *Let England Shake* as a radical album, in that it repudiates globalistic discourses to focus on the ordinary human perspective.⁴⁸⁸ Indeed *Let England Shake* personalises war by conveying the traumatic stories of the anonymous masses, thereby turning them into relatable vignettes: Bobby jauntily heading off to war, James Walker dying all alone in no-man's-land, Louis the Anzac soldier whose body was never found.

The characters are rendered familiar either through internally focused narratives, which afford an insight into their psyches and unmediated access to their emotions, or through emotive descriptions of their plight. The internally focused narratives allow the listener to know the character empathically, by their feelings: the protagonists of "The Last Living Rose" and "England" yearn for their homeland, the soldier of "The Words that Maketh Murder" is relentlessly haunted by battlefield horrors, the young soldiers of "In the Dark Places" and "All and Everyone" are filled with dread as they journey to a deadly campaign. What is at the core of the album is the vivid experiential charge they bring to life in the span of a song. The intimate insight enables the listener to create an emotional cartography of the characters, and to feel *with* the protagonists as well as *for* them. The album thus operates as a kaleidoscopic piece whereby the soldiers' narratives conjure up an experiential representation of war. In its focus on the lived experience of ordinary soldiers, *Let England Shake* is a life writing album in the sense of Smith's and Watson's definition, namely as a genre that takes the world as its subject.⁴⁸⁹

Moreover, insofar as the testimonial mode involves unmediated intersubjectivity, it generates optimal empathy with the various incarnations of war suffering: the "young men hid with guns" going "hellward" ("In the Dark Places"), Bobby "packing up his troubles" and "heading out to the fountain of death" ("Let England Shake"), James Walker dying in the dehumanised loneliness of No man's land ("Hanging In The Wire"), and the war veteran forever haunted by the brutal loss of his friend Louis in the Anzac Trench ("The Colour of The Earth"). Harvey relentlessly voices their pain and despair with the steadfastness of a newsreader. For

⁴⁸⁷ GARDNER. PJ *Harvey and Music Video Performance*. *Op.Cit.*,147.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁹ SMITH and WATSON. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. *Op.Cit.* 10.

the span of the album, we enter the intimacy of trauma and are granted an insight into the unimaginable through the song protagonists.

Poetic Journalism: Harvey the Self-appointed War-songwriter

With *Let England Shake*, Harvey applies the staple character-based popular song format to real-life material. Harvey's focus on 20th century World wars testifies to a new concern with realism that also underpins her creative process. In interviews, Harvey explained that she had researched her topic much like an investigative journalist, by reading WWI and WWII war histories and first-hand testimonies far and wide, in order to fictionalise battlefield experience into songs. The Gallipoli songs "All and Everyone" and "The Colour of the Earth" were reportedly inspired by Australian journalist Leslie Allen "Les" Carlyon's writings⁴⁹⁰ and by New-Zealand history writer Maurice Shadbolt, who sifted through official documents, memoirs, war histories and soldiers' diaries in order to chart the Gallipoli campaign in his book *Voices of Gallipoli* (1988). Whilst Harvey's research method is consistent with war journalism in its fidelity to authentic lived experience, her treatment of the source material is not, since she transmutes the fragments of war memories into an artwork. In appropriating and reconfiguring the content of soldiers' journals and letters into testimonial fiction, Harvey dwells at the intersection of journalistic investigation and poetic re-interpretation. This new poetic-journalistic stance radically reassigns the purpose of her fictionalisation from conjuring up imaginary worlds to rendering an intimate portrayal of actual reality.

This commitment to factual accuracy surfaces in Harvey's stated authorial intent to merely observe live action from the wings, and report through songwriting like a self-appointed war songwriter:

I could visualise the action taking place on the stage, and the narrator's on the side relaying the information of the action. I had to find the right voice to carry out the action as if I were the voyeur, and had to relay the story. And that actually grew from my research, looking at officially appointed war artists and war poets, and thinking, "where are the officially-appointed war song writers?"⁴⁹¹

This position of external narrator voicing over rather than impersonating shifts Harvey's persona off the song-frame, so that the prime intersubjective exchange does not occur between

⁴⁹⁰ Leslie Allen "Les" Carlyon's book *Gallipoli*, a popular history of the Allied Gallipoli campaign in the Dardanelles during the First World War was published in 2001, and met with critical and commercial success in Australia, New Zealand and England. His book *The Great War* was published in 2006, it is documents Australian forces on the Western Front in France and Belgium also during World War I.

⁴⁹¹ HARVEY, PJ. Interview. "Local rock star PJ Harvey talks to the news." *The Bridport News*. 26 January 2011. <<https://www.bridportnews.co.uk/news/8813041.bridport-local-rock-star-pj-harvey-talks-to-the-news/>>

the audience and the performer, but with the song-protagonists. This subduing of the performer's persona goes against the rock discourse, with its structural emphasis on the centrality of the performer in embodied performance, and it stretches the boundaries of rock, as does the focus on war history, which therefore deserves closer scrutiny.

1.2. This is not a Protest Song (or how to Confound Linear Interpretation)

Defying Rock's Discourse

With its affinities with national identity and patriotic narratives, the topic of war makes *Let England Shake* a mystifying object at odd with the countercultural sensitivities of rock. Insofar as the rock apparatus values rebellion against the Establishment over dedication to King and Country, individual over national narratives, and hedonistic pursuits over dutiful endeavours, the conservative notions of nationhood and history sit uncomfortably in the rock repertoire.⁴⁹² On the rare occasions when they are addressed by rock music, historical concerns are mostly treated through the filter of social activism with its concern for social justice, and its support for the marginalised and the oppressed. For instance, the 1960's Anglo-American protest song can be read as a call for action that compels a political response (e.g., Joan Baez, Bob Dylan). This oppositional stance to authority and the politicised approach to historical events have filtered into the rock tradition, and have continued to surface under various guises on the UK Independent Rock scene, whether as post-colonial pro-hybridity rhetoric (e.g., Asian Dub Foundation in the 1990s, or more recently Damon Albarn against Brexit), pro-world peace commitment (e.g., U2), or individual protest against political figures (e.g., Sinéad O'Connor singing explicitly anti-Thatcher and anti-Vatican songs in the late 1980s and early 1990s). Such anti-system manifestations comply with rock's emphasis on self-affirmation (through the singer's explicit political positioning), and with its countercultural discourse (in their anti-authority and anti-inequality rhetoric).

Before Harvey, rock has mostly dealt with war through protest songs, notably anti-Vietnam war songs in the 1960s. Bob Dylan's 1963 "Masters of War"⁴⁹³ rails against Cold War nuclear arms build-up in the early 1960s. True to protest style, the song is antagonistic and

⁴⁹² FRITH, Simon. *Performing Rites: On the Value Of Popular Music. Op. Cit.*; GROSSBERG, Lawrence. "Another Boring Day in Paradise and the Empowerment of Every Day Life." *Popular Music* 4 (1984): 225–258.

⁴⁹³ BOB DYLAN. *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, 1963.

addresses arms producers with an accusatory “you”. In a similar confrontational vein, Bruce Springsteen’s cover of the counterculture soul classic “War”⁴⁹⁴ made it to the Top 10 in 1986. With its heavy rock artillery and muscular vocal delivery, Springsteen’s rendition hammered out its one-dimensional message loud and clear: “What is it (war) good for? /Absolutely nothing.” On the fringe of protest songs, there are nevertheless more eccentric treatments of war through sarcasm and dissonance, such as the Doors’ “Unknown Soldier”⁴⁹⁵ which operates on a clash between the gruesome subject matter (i.e., a soldier’s death) and an upbeat DIY musical texture that brings it closer to Performance Art. The song is antagonistic yet anything but earnest in tone, and blazes a trail of dark sarcasm through the anti-war theme. Likewise, Pink Floyd’s “Corporal Clegg”,⁴⁹⁶ a song about a shell-shocked soldier who lost his leg in WWI, delivers a scathing blow on the patriotic war discourse by means of psychedelic cacophony and distorted vocals, dark sarcasm and targeted nonsense. Against this broad tonal backdrop, what is Harvey’s artistic treatment of war on *Let England Shake*?

A cursory look at the track list of *Let England Shake* testifies to the prevalence of the potentially patriotic themes of Englishness and the homeland (tracks 1, 2, 3, 7), alongside a more familiar Gothic concern with death and darkness (tracks 4, 8, 9, 10):

Let England Shake track list:

1. "Let England Shake"
2. "The Last Living Rose"
3. "The Glorious Land"
4. "The Words That Maketh Murder"
5. "All and Everyone"
6. "On Battleship Hill"
7. "England"
8. "In the Dark Places"
9. "Bitter Branches"
10. "Hanging in the Wire"
11. "Written on the Forehead"
12. "The Colour of the Earth"

The co-presence of the above threads baffled Harvey’s fans and music critics and raised fresh interpretative questions about *Let England Shake* at the time of its release. Notably, in the

⁴⁹⁴ SPRINGSTEEN, Bruce. *Live 1975-85*.

⁴⁹⁵ THE DOORS. *Waiting for the Sun*, 1968.

⁴⁹⁶ PINK FLOYD. *A Saucerful of Secrets*, 1968.

context of rock music's anti-establishment's attitude, Harvey's abrupt shift from imaginary song-worlds to Britain's war history seemed to signal a protest music album. In order to locate *Let England Shake* on the rock spectrum, the next paragraph will investigate Harvey's self-positioning through her TV performance of the album eponymous track "Let England Shake".

Harvey's Non-alignment with Protest Music

I don't feel that it's my place as a singer-songwriter to bring politics into my songs other than from the way it affects human beings. So I sing as a human being affected by politics. (...) With a lot of protest songs, I feel I am being preached to a lot of the time, and I don't want that.⁴⁹⁷

In response to questions regarding the political message of *Let England Shake*, Harvey repeatedly asserted herself as a non-political artist and denied any lineage with what she dismissed as "chest preaching protest music".⁴⁹⁸ Her position goes against the grain of the rock tradition on two counts: firstly, it challenges the centrality of the rock performer in their work, and secondly, it spurns the self-affirmative dimension of rock by dismissing it as evangelising. Harvey thus frames her album as a non-committal *human* tapestry of war, rather than a piece of political activism. In lending her voice and craft to soldiers' testimonies, Harvey yields the centre-stage to the spectacle and experience of battlefield carnage. The depictions of war are mostly conveyed by a gallery of reminiscing soldiers but also external narrators, notably in the songs "On Battlefield Hill", "Bitter Branches", "Hanging in the Wire", and "Written on the Forehead". The soldiers' songs contain five individual soldiers' narratives, and, significantly, three collective "we" narratives: "The Glorious Land", "All and Everyone", and "In the Dark Places". The latter three songs testify to a rising collective consciousness: in "The Glorious Land", the first-person plural narrative expresses a people's terror at the sight of their land being "ploughed by tanks and feet marching", and their children being orphaned and maimed. Elsewhere in "All and Everyone" and "In the Dark Places", the collective voice of battalions recounts the death-permeated daily life of the battlefield and the hellish journeys of war campaigns. In the manner of a film-director documenting war trauma, Harvey zooms into her protagonists' psyches and directs our gaze onto war horrors through this personal filter, whilst saturating her lyrics with graphic depictions (e.g., the dismembered bodies of "The Words that Maketh Murder") and subtler intimations of death (e.g., in "All and Everyone" the narrator

⁴⁹⁷ HARVEY, PJ. Interview by Andrew Marr. *The Andrew Marr show*. BBC 1, London. 18 April 2010. Television. <<https://youtu.be/w1b2nN6zdB8>> and <<https://youtu.be/vd2VHfpGxuw>>

⁴⁹⁸ HARVEY. "Local rock star PJ Harvey talks to the news." *Op. Cit.*

describes how death contaminates every moment of ordinary battlefield life). Harvey's commitment is thus consistently human: in giving a voice to the voiceless, she conveys historical events in strictly human terms, letting her protagonists' haunted narratives run their course. Harvey's non-interventionist approach surfaces not only lyrically, but also vocally, in a new reverberating vocal style which imparts a sense of emotional blankness to her delivery. Consequently, in its reliance on the non-committal over the political, and on personal over national content, *Let England Shake* operates as an impressionistic rather than a political art-piece, and as such, it cannot be construed as a protest song. In refusing to convey a political message, Harvey radically subdues her individual self-expression and does not position herself as a conventional rock performer but rather as a contemporary artist who self-effaces behind her project, and leaves the listeners to their own emotional responses.

To add to the confusion, Harvey's first TV launch of *Let England Shake* was a particularly astounding move for a self-professed apolitical artist who had hitherto steered clear of worldly considerations: in April 2011, Harvey performed "Let England Shake" on national TV, and in the presence of the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown.⁴⁹⁹

A Cryptic Album Launch: Upstaging the Political

Harvey's performance is all the more spectacular as she sings a soldiers' song, "Let England Shake" on a prominent current affairs BBC programme (i.e., *The Andrew Marr Show*) at a time when the war issue is particularly sensitive. The title track itself is something of a coup: the eponymous track features a young protagonist, Bobby, going to war, against a jaunty loop of The Four Lads' 1953 novelty hit "Istanbul (Not Constantinople)". The event sees Harvey crash-landing into British politics with an eerily provocative song that makes the Prime Minister's attendance incongruously meaningful. The very topic of the song is politically sensitive in 2011 Britain, since the British troops were engaged in two deadly conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The regular TV broadcasts of military tributes to fallen young soldiers brought the death toll of war into Britain's public consciousness. Moreover, both conflicts were particularly controversial domestically, as the Blair government was perceived to have led the country into war on spurious grounds.

Against this fraught background, Harvey's song disturbingly turns going to war into a children's game, as signified by the nursery song-inspired melody and the cheerful lyrics:

⁴⁹⁹ *The Andrew Marr Show. Op. Cit.*

let's head out to the fountain of death
and splash about
swim back and forth
and laugh out loud

Harvey further trifles with the tragic content of the song by restructuring her performance around the 1953 novelty song “Istanbul” by The Four Lads, much to comic grotesque effect. Throughout the song, the “Istanbul” lines “Take me back to Constantinople/No, you can't go back to Constantinople” play on a loop in the background, thereby overlapping the nursery lines. The dual lyrical and musical structure causes aural confusion by evoking a spiralling movement endlessly looping on itself, thereby following a pattern of endless repetition suggestive of borderline insanity or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. This manic component sets off the ambivalent lyrics, whilst its circular stagnation embeds Harvey’s performance of “Let England Shake”. Indeed, the song finally yields to the repetitious stream as Harvey’s vocals finally endlessly repeat the The Four Lads’ two-liner. Circularity thus hijacks the song, as if the vicious circle snapped itself shut on us hapless human cogs in an implacable war machine. Harvey’s performance strategy ushers in a deliberately ambivalent treatment of war horror, whereby Harvey weaves childish playfulness and slapstick comedy humour into the fabric of a graphic horror narrative. What does this outlandish performance say about Harvey’s stance towards war?

It interrogates more than states. In the context of this TV performance, the disruptive nonsense of “Istanbul” loop is precisely what stops the song short of acting as confrontational protest music. Indeed, the loop not only disrupts the sonic surface but also diverts the listener’s attention away from the lyrics, by superimposing a comical two-liner over the main lyrical line. Therefore, the loop subdues the horror of the song, whilst its silliness both echoes and heightens the playful element at work in the lyrics and music. The sophistication of this multi-layered sonic precludes any linear reading of the song, and therefore compromises political interpretation (and misinterpretation).

Harvey’s disruptive performance strategy sets the tone for future critical interpretation of her work: in blurring the boundaries between horror and laughter, Harvey heightens the ambiguity of the song, and prevents the war motif of her album from being misconstrued as protest music. Her performance is grotesque in its conflation of incompatibles and its emphasis on contradiction and disruption, so that the audience experiences and subsequently construes

the song in a multifocal manner. In this respect, Harvey performs a coup: she manages to stage an act of political provocation whilst confounding linear political interpretation. By the end of her performance, it is evident that Harvey redeploys horror as part of a fresh conversation about war, albeit in a cryptic idiom. In so far as Harvey's new endeavour is distinct from conventional protest music, it requires fresh interpretative tools, beyond the confines of oppositional music. In particular, in view of its overt cultural anchoring, the album needs to be probed for interactions with other war artwork from the UK.

2. *Let England Shake* and British War Songwriting and Writing

Insofar as the three core motifs of the songs are death, battlefield life, and England, they contain a potent cultural component and thus invite a comparison with the existing repertoire of British war songs and war writing. Therefore, we are going to probe the interactions between Harvey's songs and British World War songwriting and literary traditions.

The Anglo-American Cultural Space Revisited

It is noteworthy that *Let England Shake* departs from Harvey's previous treatment of the Anglo-American cultural space in the realistic treatment she affords it. As demonstrated in Part II of this dissertation, on *To Bring You My Love* (1995) Harvey approaches the North American space as an allegorical geography, and thus uses it as a fulcrum of musical and poetic creativity (through the folk and blues folklore, and wider Deep South motifs). Likewise, whilst *White Chalk* (2007) shares an explicit English anchoring with *Let England Shake*, in the former Harvey turns Dorset into a metaphorical site of loss and longing, the white chalk cliffs motif lending itself to a cartography of grief. As signalled by the album's visual aesthetics (on the front cover, Harvey's is reincarnated in a corseted Victorian woman with unkempt hair, and a blank facial expression), the focus is on 19th century English literature and art as an aesthetic source, and not on historical actualities. Prior to *Let England Shake*, Harvey does not engage with the actual reality of US and British histories, but instead she mines the Anglo-American cultural reservoir for musical and lyrical tropes, thereby conjuring up imaginary worlds and monster-drama through aesthetic-mingling.

Working from the premise that, contrary to her former cultural forays, *Let England Shake* is primarily an open conversation about both history (as opposed to fictional folklore)

and the artistic responses to it, we are going to probe its interactions with the English WWI song repertoire, as the formal forebear of Harvey's soldiers' songs.

2.1. Harvey's War Songs and the English Cultural Reservoir

***Let England Shake* and the British Popular War Song Tradition**

In his study of British popular songs during the Great War, popular music academic John Mullen observes that the soldiers' song tradition developed exponentially between 1915 and 1918, providing a wealth of testimonies on the "blood and mud" lived experience of life on the battlefield.⁵⁰⁰ Mullen formulates the soldiers' songs as mostly anonymous, short, reliant on a popular tune, and as only one type of war song among others (i.e., music hall, musicals, hymns...).⁵⁰¹ He also contends that the main theme of the songs is best epitomised by the war song "I Want To Go Home",⁵⁰² as it captures the mixture of protest spirit against the Army hierarchy (through anti-patriotic irony and acidic humour) and fatalism that underpins British soldiers' songs.⁵⁰³ Mullen's soldiers' songs typology reveals that 33% of them satirise war and life as a soldier, 20% are anti-military, 17% are comedy nonsensical songs, 13% bawdy songs, and the rest of the songs fall into attack on officers (11%), nostalgia for civilian life (11%), and only a minority of songs are patriotic in content (about 10%).⁵⁰⁴ According to this typology, the staple WWI soldiers' song format is that of protest song where black humour prevails. To what extent are Harvey's songs akin to genuine WWI soldiers' songs?

Harvey's song lyrics broadly fall into three categories: anti-war songs, nostalgic laments, and black humour songs:

| Anti-war songs | Nostalgic patriotic songs | Black Humour / Unhinged Songs |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| "All and Everyone" | "The Last Living Rose" | "Let England Shake" |
| "On Battleship Hill" | "England" | "The Words that Maketh Murder" |
| "In the Dark Places" | | "Glorious Land" |
| "Bitter Branches" | | |

⁵⁰⁰ MULLEN, John. *La Chanson populaire en Grande-Bretagne pendant la Grande guerre, 1914-1918. "The show must go on!"* Paris: l'Harmattan, 2012.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁵⁰² "Trench Songs." The First World War Poetry Digital Archive.

<<http://ww1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/education/tutorials/intro/trench/songs#barbed>>

⁵⁰³ MULLEN. *La Chanson populaire en Grande-Bretagne pendant la Grande guerre, 1914-1918. "The show must go on!" Op. Cit.*, 234-253.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 240-241.

“Hanging in the Wire”

“The Colour of the Earth”

Harvey’s songbook is consistent with original trench songs since the anti-war format prevails, and black humour is present in three songs. The two nostalgic laments slightly deviate from the original dichotomy between “nostalgic” or “patriotic” songs in that they conflate the two elements. Moreover, Harvey’s songs also match the “I Want To Go Home”⁵⁰⁵ theme of the original trench songs, as all her songs echo the trench song’s homesick lines:

I want to go home, I want to go home.
I don't want to go in the trenches no more,
Where whizzbangs and shrapnel they whistle and roar.
Take me over the sea, where the Alleyman can't get at me.
Oh my, I don't want to die, I want to go home.

Harvey’s depiction of the desolation and horror of the battlefield foregrounds senseless death and destruction, and thus implicitly challenges the validity of war. There are also clear anti-military and anti-Establishment overtones in the three black humour songs, as Harvey calls out to the United Nations (“The Words that Macbeth Murder”), and mocks patriotic war songs in “Glorious Land” (an ironic praise of a land ploughed by tanks and breeding deformed children). “Hanging in the Wire” is Harvey’s macabre take on the black humour trench song original “Hanging on the Old Barbed Wire”,⁵⁰⁶ which signifies both an overt cultural lineage and an integrative approach to the genre.

Although there are structural affinities between Harvey’s songs and the original trench songs, the mood of her songs is starker and darker, and the prevalent tone is not satirical but grave, whilst the painstaking accuracy of her descriptions locates her songs halfway between life writing and documentary journalism. This tonal difference may be attributable to several contextual factors: firstly, Harvey’s songs are not actual soldiers’s songs, but retrospective recreations addressing not the soldiers but their descendants; as such, their purpose is different from the originals. On the front, it was critical for soldiers to create some semblance of normality through entertainment (e.g., music, singing, sports, shows...), in order for them to cohere and find communal comfort. The songs thus fulfilled a compensatory communal role,

⁵⁰⁵ “Trench Songs.” *Op. Cit.*

<<http://www1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/www1lit/education/tutorials/intro/trench/songs#barbed>>

⁵⁰⁶ “Hanging on The Old Barbed Wire” is a satirical WW1 trench song critical of social inequalities and of army hierarchy on the battlefield.

“Trench Songs.” *Op. Cit.*

<<http://www1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/www1lit/education/tutorials/intro/trench/songs#barbed>>

and provided them with an imaginary escape from their daily ordeals. The satirical content of the songs enabled them to collectively subdue battlefield trauma and fear through gallows humour. However, when writing testimonial songs ninety years on like Harvey, the prime objective is not to bring distraction from harsh realities but indeed to raise awareness about them, and to bring the individual experiences of war into cultural memory and the collective imaginary.

As reinventions of a tradition, Harvey's songs pertain to the cultural (i.e., focusing on the residual traces of past events on the national psyche), and as such they reflect upon the collective processing of trauma over time. Since the theme of Englishness is prominent not only in the album's title, but also in the folk instrumentation and key motifs of the songs, we are going to probe the interactions between Englishness and War Gothic.

2.2. Englishness as a Theme of War Gothic

Firstly, we are going to investigate the aesthetic implications of Harvey's cultural anchoring in Englishness rather than Britishness, with a particular focus on the cultural resonance of the notion of Englishness.

Other than its geographical meaning, the term "England" has cultural connotations and conveys symbolic meaning. Positing that "Britain is seen as a political invention covering the older national cultures of England, Scotland, and Wales",⁵⁰⁷ literary critic Ina Habermann thus distinguishes between Britain as a "political nation" and England as a "cultural nation". Moreover, she postulates that "Englishness has a mythical dimension which exceeds the scope of 'mere' cultural stereotyping",⁵⁰⁸ hence its reliance on shared myths about collective identity. She also points out that Englishness is mythopoeic in its relation to the past and collective memory, positing that evoking Englishness is engaging in a process of collective myth-making. Extrapolating from Habermann, I would argue that Harvey's foregrounding of England ushers in the cultural symbolism of Englishness, whilst weaving her songs into a collective mythopoeic imaginary. For a British artist dealing in war songs like Harvey, the resort to Englishness also drafts in a cultural idiom to convey her songs by. Based upon Habermann's postulation that Englishness is bound up with cultural memory and has a mythopoeic relation to its past, it can

⁵⁰⁷ HABERMANN, Ina. *Myth, Memory, and the Middlebrow*. Priestley, Du Maurier and the Symbolic of Englishness. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 4-5.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

be inferred that through the inclusion of Englishness, Harvey's war songs feed both off and into the English pool of war writing.

In their interdisciplinary work *War Gothic in Literature and Culture*, Agnieszka Soltysik-Monnet and Steffen Hantke build upon the affinities between Gothic and war, positing that Gothic plays a significant part in representing war.⁵⁰⁹ In particular, they identify a potent gothic component in World War I English war poetry, since the "War Poets" Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke, and Isaac Rosenberg depicted the casualties and eviscerated landscapes of trench war in gothic overtones. Soltysik-Monnet and Hantke thus conceptualise War Gothic as a mode that "names the nameless traumas of war, counting its countless casualties, and giving voice to the unspeakable horrors that have accompanied war since the birth of the Gothic".⁵¹⁰ Harvey's war songbook matches this definition of War Gothic in that it is expressive of war trauma, and gives a voice to the voiceless and the unspeakable, whilst relying on the aesthetic spectrality of Gothic. Therefore, for all its outward aesthetic differences with Harvey's prior songbook, *Let England Shake* presents structural affinities with her songwriting of excess. Indeed, much like the War Gothic genre identified by Hantke and Soltysik-Monnet, the album is spectral both in its temporal transgression (since it actualises voices from the past into the present), and in the fact that horror remains its prime focus. As such, Harvey's songwriting of trauma still operates within a gothic framework.

Insofar as Harvey's songs are informed by Englishness, War Gothic, and World War I trauma, they are structurally akin to WWI war poetry. Consequently, the next paragraph will investigate the aesthetic intersections between the *Let England Shake* songbook and WWI English poetry.

2.3. English War Poetry and Harvey's Songs of Dissent and Nostalgia

Mostly prolific in 1914-1915, the Georgian war writers heralded a form of soldier-writing intent on conveying the experience of war to civilians. Siegfried Sassoon thus stated that "the essence of" his "war poems was fellow-feeling for the troops, whose sufferings were so remote from the comprehension of many civilians".⁵¹¹ The War poets considered writing as their human duty to report their fellow-soldiers' ordeals and thus bring their suffering into the

⁵⁰⁹ HANTKE, Steffen, and Agnieszka SOLTYSIK-MONNET, eds. *War Gothic in Literature and Culture*. New York and London: Routledge, 2015.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Introduction, XX.

⁵¹¹ MOORCROFT WILSON, Jean. *Siegfried Sassoon: The Making of a War Poet*. London: Duckworth, 1998. 402.

collective consciousness. Central to WWI poetry is the notion that experience and its rendition should be truthful, which makes it essentially realistic in intent.⁵¹² Effectively, the poems relocate individual war trauma into collective memory, thereby affording cultural significance to the soldiers' individual suffering. War poetry can thus be construed as an exchange between the poets and their fellow-countrymen, and as a conduit from individual to collective experience. Like war poetry, Harvey's war songbook fulfils the intersubjective purpose of bringing the experience of war home to her contemporaries, using soldiers' testimonies as relatable insights.

Notwithstanding their retrospective component, two out of the three tonal categories of Harvey's songs echo English war poetry: anti-war songs denouncing the useless ravages of war and the nostalgic songs yearning for the homeland. As noted earlier, there is a third category of Harveyan soldier's song (i.e., using black humour to evoke war horror with a twist), however since it is not in keeping with English war poetry, it is not relevant to this argument.

The predominant anti-war song format encompasses the desolation of war, the visceral fear of soldiers heading to war (e.g., "In the Dark Places"), the pervasive presence of death contaminating humans and landscapes alike (e.g., "All and Everyone"), and the haunting memories of witnessing death (e.g., "The Colour of the Earth", "On Battleship Hill"). The most traumatising piece, "Hanging in the Wire" deals with a young soldier dying on No man's land, and conjures up a nightmare vision of death in a wasteland of utter loneliness. The unsparing depictions of war and Harvey's blank vocal style immerse the listeners in war horror, thereby making battlefield carnage so unbearable that it becomes unjustifiable. As vignettes illustrating the extent of the human sacrifice, the songs are therefore expressive of *human* rather than political dissent. In their focus on human carnage, Harvey's anti-war songs achieve a similar effect as Wilfred Owen's 1917 poem "Dulce et Decorum Est"⁵¹³ which denounces "the (patriotic) old lie" that sacrificing one's life for one's country is an honour and joy. The poem builds up on a description of a battalion trudging to war (like Harvey's "In The Dark Places"

⁵¹² For Sassoon, the "essential quality" of his poetry lay in it being "true to what I experienced. All the best ones are truly experienced and therefore authentic in expression." Roberts, David. *Out of the Dark*. Burgess Hill: Saxon Books, 1998. 139.

⁵¹³ Written in 1917, the poem "Dulce et Decorum Est" is a scathing attack on the imposture of war as a useless sacrifice of human life. The latin title originates from Horace's (Odes III.2.13), and the full lines "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" translate as: "it is sweet and proper to die for one's country". Owen's title is darkly ironic, since in the last line of the poem, Owen dismisses the adage as "the old lie" told to "children ardent for some desperate glory".

OWEN, Wilfred. "Dulce et Decorum Est." *BBC website*. BBC.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/poems/dulce_et_decorum_est.shtml> Accessed 10/08/2016.

and “All And Everyone”), and culminates with a minute depiction of a fellow-soldier in his death throes (echoing Harvey’s “Hanging In The Wire” and “The Colour Of The Earth”). Although Owen and Harvey exhibit a similar concern for the human cost of war, they fall on either side of the political divide: whereas Owen’s attacks on war are unabashedly political, Harvey’s coverage of war is consistently non-committal, in line with her anti-protest stance.

The second category of tracks related to WWI poems, the nostalgic songs, surfaces in “England” and “The Last Living Rose”, and includes a glimmer of hope through a recollection of England. Both songs are conveyed through the scopic mode of Englishness,⁵¹⁴ which ties in with WWI poetry’s resort to pastoral England as a means to sustain soldiers through the horrors of war. “The Last Living Rose” offers an imaginary flight to the solace of the pastoral idyll of England, its natural opulence providing a respite from the pervasive battlefield wasteland. The pastoral idyll unfolds like a poetic return to the prelapsarian bliss of “the green and pleasant land”,⁵¹⁵ celebrating “fog rolling down behind the mountains”, and the River Thames “glistening like gold”. The song resonates with English folklore such as fabled “dead sea-captains” and “graveyards”, ending with a sensuous suite of “moon rising to silver”, and shimmering oceans and hedges. The song converges to the central motif of the poem and its closing image, a quivering rose. The inclusion of the Tudor rose (the traditional heraldic emblem of England)⁵¹⁶ as a key motif acts as a potent signifier of Englishness, and thus inscribes the songs in a historical lineage of bloody English wars (i.e., the War of the Roses).⁵¹⁷ The reference imparts a sense of historical perspective whilst conjuring up a form of English patriotism affirming national resilience in the face of war.

⁵¹⁴ In this dissertation, the term “Englishness” is construed as mythopoeic representations of England, based on Hermann’s argument that “Englishness has a mythical dimension that is beyond the scope of ‘mere’ cultural stereotyping.” HABERMANN. *Myth, Memory, and the Middlebrow. Op. Cit., 7.*

⁵¹⁵ The phrase “green and pleasant” originates from British poet William Blake’s poem “Jerusalem” (1804) and has sunk into popular and artistic imagination as the embodiment of the pastoral idyll of England as opposed to the newly industrialised England that spoils natural landscapes. The phrase “Green and pleasant land” thus evokes English landscapes as idealised rural settings. BERBERICH Christine. “This Green and Pleasant Land: Cultural Constructions of Englishness.” BURDEN, Robert, and Stephan KOHL, eds. *Landscape and Englishness*. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2006. 207-224.

⁵¹⁶ The Tudor rose symbolises the union of the feuding royal houses of Lancaster and York into the House of Tudor.

⁵¹⁷ In English history, the War of the Roses refers to a series of bloody dynastic wars (1455-1465) opposing the royal Houses of Lancaster and York for the throne of England.

“War of the Roses.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2017.
<<https://www.britannica.com/event/Wars-of-the-Roses>> Accessed 4/05/2017.

A dying soldier's eulogy to his homeland, "England" brings to mind Rupert Brooke's 1914 poem "The Soldier"⁵¹⁸ in its articulation of love for one's homeland in terms of dying and in ruralistic overtones.⁵¹⁹ Brooke thus romanticises the soldier's death, transforming it into a blissful embrace with his homeland:

A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

The evocation of England as a source of intellectual ("thoughts") and spiritual ("heaven") sustenance combines with the corporeal lexical field (i.e., "pulse" and "hearts") and turns the homeland into a mystical principle of eternal life. This ecstatic fusion of the individual with the land that shaped him morphs the soldier's death into a moment of both profane and religious rapture, since the word "heaven" merges a natural element (the sky) and a religious concept.

By contrast, Harvey's portrayal of the homeland is more ambivalent. For instance, in "England" she reverses Brooke's peaceful and life-giving analogy and instead turns England into a source of love and pining:

I live and die through England
It leaves a sadness
It leaves a taste
A bitter one

Therefore, whilst outwardly espousing Brooke's theme of patriotic love and self-sacrifice for one's country, Harvey conveys her lament in bittersweet overtones, in an oscillation between devotional love ("I live and die through England") and a sense of burdensome presence ("England you leave a taste, a bitter one").

In establishing overt ties with English WWI poetry, Harvey reinforces the English cultural anchoring of her album, whilst affirming its cross-artistic lineage with existing forms

⁵¹⁸ "The Soldier" is a 1914 sonnet about a soldier's ultimate declaration of patriotic love to his homeland at the moment of dying, its blissful tone is typical of pre-war patriotism, and the poem is often contrasted with Owen's "Dulce et Decorum". "The Soldier." The Poetry Society. <<https://poetrysociety.org.uk/poems/the-soldier/>> Accessed 19/07/2015.

⁵¹⁹ English ruralism is a form of earth mysticism prevalent in interwar literature and culture, reflecting a blood-and-soil mentality that binds together one's personal identity with the landscape of one's homeland. HABERMANN, Ina. *Myth, Memory, and the Middlebrow. Priestley, Du Maurier and the Symbolic of Englishness*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 1-42.

of the broader tradition of War Gothic. In consciously moving toward formal coherence, Harvey breaks away from her hitherto extreme *bricolage* approach, whilst maintaining gothic continuity. Therefore, Harvey's war songwriting presents a structural convergence with her prior albums, since *Let England Shake* still issues from a gothic songwriting of transgression and horror, but horror is relocated from the theatricality of monster-drama to the gruesome reality of war.

3. *Skeleton Tree*: Cave and the Unspeakable

*Invisible things, lost things, have so much weight...
they are as big as the universe.*

Nick Cave, 2016.⁵²⁰

*But mostly I curl up inside my typewriter, curl up inside my typewriter and wish that I could die
But mostly I am curled up inside my typewriter and I just want to die
But mostly I am curled up inside my typewriter and I just want to cry.*

Nick Cave, 2016.⁵²¹

With *Push the Sky Away* (2013), Cave shifted away from fictional to existential ruminations, and to a looser musical texture. The album illustrates the rising prominence of a more fluid songwriting style, based on streams of consciousness instead of cohesive narratives. The album sonic is clearly no longer rock-based, but rather ambient, with internally focused lyrics more akin to existential ruminations than stories, approaching such topics as sexual obsession, popular culture, and the ever-expanding inner worlds of rock music. The album also steers away from the boisterous shores of garage-rock inflected *Grinderman* (2007 and 2010), and from the slick grooves of *Dig Lazarus* (2009).

And then with the brutal death of Cave's son, life hijacked Cave's new meditative ruminations and jolted him into traumatic shock. Released in the aftermath of the death of Cave's son, *Skeleton Tree* was ushered in by a documentary film in lieu of promotional interviews, *One more time with feeling*,⁵²² which was broadcast in cinemas worldwide just a few days before the

⁵²⁰ Spoken poetry read out by Nick Cave in *One More Time with Feeling*, 2017.

⁵²¹ "Steve McQueen", spoken poetry read out by Nick Cave in *One More Time with Feeling*, 2017.

⁵²² *One More Time With Feeling*. Dir. Andrew Dominik. Iconocast/JW Films/ Pulse Films, 2017. Film.

album release of *Skeleton Tree* in September 2016. The film documented the production of the album, articulating “the unspeakable” in terms of artistic survival to trauma.

An Autobiographically Fraught Album

Cave’s sixteenth album, *Skeleton Tree* stands out from the rest of his repertoire due to its autobiographical nature and to its unfiltered rawness. It is the album of “the After”, after the brutal loss of a loved one. The album is sombre and ruminative, sustained by ambient waves with occasional swells of piano and violin. It has the loose musical structure of *Push the Sky Away*, however there are no energising musical flights, as if the orchestration was freighted with grief too. In its raw emotional intensity and haunting electronic loops, *Skeleton Tree* is first and foremost an album of grief and devastation, as foreboded in its title. The entire album reels from the shock of personal tragedy and hardly contains any relief from the gloom, other than two comparatively luminous tracks, “Distant Sky” and “Skeleton Tree”, which afford a touch of cosmic serenity to the album.

Cave crafted all eight songs from the heart of emotional carnage, and through them he stares at his traumatic loss and subjective disintegration. The lyrics still contain some of Cave’s hallmark apocalyptic imagery, but overall, they are more impressionistic and noticeably less cohesive and honed than any of his previous albums. The songs unfold through a host of vivid images that do not flow into a unified narrative or an extended metaphorical field, but rather they are thrown in as is, with their loose ends and rough edges, like an instinctive howl. The unfinished nature of the lyrics suggests that emotions are captured unprocessed, rather than chiselled into a homogeneous and presentable whole. Emotional and visual fragments free-float into the lyrics as Cave probes the depths of post-traumatic shock and gropes his way through spiralling self-disintegration. Cave’s songwriting of trauma is imbued with the fragmentary nature of traumatic experience, with its constellation of disconnected sensations and images conjuring up a disjointed perspective.⁵²³ In this respect, Cave’s lyrics are informed by “the anti-narrative component”⁵²⁴ of traumatic memory that prevents the traumatised self from putting events into a linear sequence.

My contention is that in the economy of the Cavian trauma song, the sonic and lyric actualise the experience of trauma in a manner analogous to what Laurie Vickroy observes in

⁵²³ HERMAN. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. *Op.Cit.*; VAN DER KOLK and VAN DER HART. “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma.” *Op.Cit.*

⁵²⁴ JANET. *Les Médications psychologiques*. *Op.Cit.*; HERMAN. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. *Op.Cit.*

trauma-writing, by weaving the symptoms and effects of trauma into the emotive texture of the texts.⁵²⁵ Applying Vickroy's filter to Cave's musical texts, the traumatic content is thus to be found not so much in the lyrics as in their interstices, where the unspeakable dwells; not so much in the musical line as in the blanks of its dotted lines. The songs thus induce a lacunary listening experience, whereby Cave says that he cannot say "it" (i.e., trauma). In foregrounding the unsayable, Cave's trauma songwriting actualises Lyotard's argument that art can express the inexpressible precisely by turning it into a focal point it.⁵²⁶ This lacunary mode hampers and limits the interpretive work of the songs, since meaning is not expressed through signs and signifiers, but through absence and lack (of words, linearity, coherence, or connection). In this respect, *Let England Shake* and *Skeleton Tree* are diametrically opposed: whereas the former teems with cultural cross-references and honed stylistics, the latter, poised in an intimate void, is inchoate and suggestive rather than expressive.

As a result of the trauma-mimicking structure and fragmented rendering, the listener is positioned as a traumatised subject, and co-experiences the disorientation (e.g., the haunting past surfacing in an ebb and flow of scattered images) and repetition (e.g., musical loops evoking a sense of entrapment and stagnation) of trauma. This immersive mode makes the listening strenuous, since like Cave the listener is trapped in the polytemporal warp of traumatic memory and can feel the sting of those memories. Moreover, trauma not only seeps into the lyrical and musical texture, but also into the corporeality of Cave's voice.

3.1. Inter-corporeality and Psychological pain

Vocal Pain

Cave's voice is noticeably frailer than usual, cracking in parts, as if his voice, like his psyche, had collapsed and was in recovery. The alteration in the grain of his voice is all the more conspicuous as the minimalist orchestration brings his vocals to the fore. Along with Cave's altered vocals, the unfiltered grief of the stripped lyrics and orchestration arouse a feeling of defamiliarisation⁵²⁷ on the part of the listener. Cave's frayed voice in particular is the chief signifier of personal trauma, it resonates with pain, dislocation, disbelief, and its timbre is outside

⁵²⁵ VICKROY. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction. Op.Cit.*, 3.

⁵²⁶ LYOTARD. *Heidegger and "the Jews". Op.Cit.*, 47

⁵²⁷ Defamiliarisation: the term coined by Russian Structuralist Victor Shklovsky in his 1917 essay "Art as Device" in reference to literature, can aptly describe the effect Cave's altered vocals. Indeed, whilst Cave and Harvey primarily use "vocal defamiliarisation" as a disruptive device (through screaming, vocal distortion, animalistic sounds, or high and low register variations), *Skeleton Tree* provides a rare instance of unintentional defamiliarisation.

Cave's usual range, which produces a defamiliarising conflation of a known vocal frame and an alien texture. The listeners can hear Cave's familiar voice with an unidentified timbral quality.

Prior to *Skeleton Tree*, Cave deployed a vocal spectrum ranging from manic psychopath, screaming monster, through to love song crooner. However, the timbre of *Skeleton Tree* is unprecedentedly downbeat and irregular. Not only is Cave's voice feebler, but its projection is noticeably more tentative and less controlled than usual, hence the flow of Cave's delivery sounds more strenuous. His voice is painful to listen to, because it *embodies* the corporeal impact of grief: its tight grip on one's throat and entire body, its relentless energy-sapping. Cave's voice is the chief signifier of pain in the songs: before the lyrics or the music, his voice brings the audience into immediate contact with the physicality of grief. Indeed, as demonstrated by Barthes,⁵²⁸ because the voice is expressive of the body, it provides unmediated access to the singer's corporeality. The "grain of the voice" (i.e., "the voice in the body that sings") thus establishes an immediate inter-corporeal connection between the singer and their audience, hence hearing the "grain" of a voice elicits corporeal and emotional responses in the receiver (e.g., pleasure, exhilaration, fear...). As a result, in the altered grain of Cave's voice, the listeners can not only hear grief, but they can feel it too and ache empathically.

"Close your eyes, little world/And brace yourself", warns Cave in "Anthrocene": the line could act as an apt motto for the album, for *Skeleton Tree* brings home the experience of crash-landing into grief. The listener is jolted into the pangs of personal trauma with no buffer: no fictional drama to escape to, no transgressive banter or role-play, no structuring narrative thread to hold on to.

Prior Treatment of Painful Material

The dark material is not new to his repertoire; prior to *Skeleton Tree*, Cave had already explored the feelings of sorrow and longing, notably on *Boatman's Call* (1997) and *No More Shall We Part* (2001). However, the songs chartered the more conventional territory of romantic heartbreak and were stylised in the formal coherence of love songs. They chiefly consisted in the poetic broodings of a dejected lover sung to the strains of a sorrowful tune, with a lyrical and sonic structure hinging upon chorus and verse. Being stylised in the existing tradition of the love song, the emotional flow was contained within set conventions and aesthetics. The source material may have been autobiographical, since *Boatman's Call* dealt with his break-up with Harvey, but Cave fashioned it into lyrical narratives on the pangs of love, thus mingling

⁵²⁸ BARTHES. *The Grain of the Voice. Op. Cit.*, 179-189.

emotional authenticity and aestheticisation. As demonstrated in Part II, the love songs conjured up a fully-fledged aesthetic, complete with an idiosyncratic sonic melding together balladic and hymnal strains, and a new Cavian persona, the brooding lover-poet, which tied in with the dark romantic themes of the album.

Conversely, with *Skeleton Tree*, Cave does not aestheticise his grief, nor does he attempt to create a cohesive narrative out of it: he delivers it raw and scattered. In the process, Cave not only suspends his conventional artistic strategies as a literary musician (i.e., lyrical sophistication, story-telling consistency, character-impersonations...), but also his own artistic persona. Due to its painful autobiographical content, *Skeleton Tree* leaves no space for Cave to develop a fictional persona, or even a realistic persona⁵²⁹ that as a construct would require psychical distance. Instead, the album exposes the real human being behind the personae. The game of masks is suspended for the span of the album, which is further reinforced by the cinema release of the behind-the-scenes documentary *One more Time with Feeling* in September 2016, featuring Cave veering between post-traumatic numbness and raw grief, and trying to come to terms with his loss. Therefore, *Skeleton Tree* adds no new album persona to the existing gallery of Raving Cave, Gothic Cave, Crooner Cave, Grinder-Cave, or Poetic Cave. All there is Cave and his grief. And we, listeners, are not indulging in a flight of escapist fancy with one of Cave's stage personae, but we are travelling the road of grief with Cave the human being.

3.2. Probing the Dimensions of Grief: into the Heart of Traumatic Memory

Skeleton Tree track list:

1. "Jesus Alone"
2. "Rings of Saturn"
3. "Girl in Amber"
4. "Magneto"
5. "Anthrocene"
6. "I Need You"
7. "Distant Sky"
8. "Skeleton Tree"

⁵²⁹ MOORE, Allan. *Song Means: Analysing and Interpreting Popular Songs*. Farnham, Great Britain; and Burlington, US: Ashgate, 2012. I am using Allan Moore's theory of persona that distinguishes between the performers' "realistic" and "fictional" personae. The "realistic persona" is interpreted as directly expressive of the singer's subjectivity, and the "fictional persona" is the performer openly acting in character.

Being located in the emotional pile-up of post-traumatic shock, the album features a full range of post-traumatic mindsets: numbness, personal disintegration, longing for the loved one, and holding on to glimmers of hopefulness. The lyrical texture of the songs is noticeably more fragmented and elliptic than Cave's previous albums, which brings to mind the anti-narrative component observed by trauma theorists such as Herman.⁵³⁰ In these songs, Cave seems to be groping for a coherent narrative, whilst bogged down in the trauma mire. In their book *Beyond the Threshold: Explorations of Liminality in Literature*, Hein Viljoen and Chris van der Merwe postulate that in robbing the individual of their narrative identity, trauma also deprives them of a meaningful social role, and of a life purpose.⁵³¹ Therefore, they argue, "the coherence of the life narrative is shattered - the traumatised person has 'lost the plot' - and a void enters the structure of the narrative".⁵³² This conception of trauma's anti-narrativity as a void is particularly insightful in that it foregrounds disconnectedness and lack, which resonates with Cave's trauma songs. Indeed, his *Skeleton Tree* tracks hinge on free-floating images that hover about like specks of perceptual dust, thereby delineating a lacunary narrative structure. In fact, I would argue that Cave's trauma songwriting not only exemplifies the life shattering effect of trauma, but also turns it into a scopic mode that distorts and fragments all perceptions and memories, and hollows out their narrative potential.

Conceptualising life as a narrative seeking to be told, French philosopher Paul Ricoeur⁵³³ postulates that trauma processing involves rewriting one's life narrative, by transforming the "bits and pieces" of the broken life into "a story that is both intelligible and more bearable".⁵³⁴

Drawing upon Ricoeur's argument, I approach Cave's trauma songs as a form of post-traumatic songwriting through which Cave attempts to restore some thread to his shattered life narrative. His trauma songs should thus be construed as ruptural structures that require Cave (and his listeners) to collect his splinters of memory and arrange them back into some linear structure.

⁵³⁰ HERMAN, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books, 1997. See also VAN DER KOLK, Bessel, and Onno VAN DER HART, "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma." Ed. Cathy CARUTH. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1995.

⁵³¹ VILJOEN, Hein, and Chris VAN DER MERWE, eds. *Beyond the Threshold: Explorations of Liminality in Literature*. New York: P. Lang; Potchefstroom, South Africa, 2007.1.

⁵³² *Ibid.*

⁵³³ RICOEUR, Paul. "Life: a Story in Search of a Narrator." *A Ricoeur Reader*. Valdes, Mario, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991. 425-438. 434.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, 435.

Interestingly, post-*Skeleton Tree*, Cave acknowledges a narrative dissolution affecting both his outlook on life and his songwriting:

I haven't much time for overtly narrative songs these days. It has felt hugely restrictive for some time. The idea that we live life in a straight line, like a story, seems to me to be increasingly absurd and more than anything a kind of intellectual convenience. I feel that the events in our lives are like a series of bells being struck and the vibrations spread outwards, affecting everything, our present, and our futures, of course, but our past as well. Everything is changing and vibrating and in flux.

So, to apply that to songwriting, [in] a song like "I Need You" off the new album [*Skeleton Tree*], time and space all seem to be rushing and colliding into a kind of big bang of despair. There is a pure heart, but all around it is chaos.⁵³⁵

Cave's comment reveals an acute awareness that life is not linear but resonates forward and backward, thereby constantly reshaping our perspective. This core fluidity thus requires accordingly mutable means of representation, which leads him to highlight the unsuitability of narrativity to render reality by: "the Big Bang of despair" cannot be expressed with words, precisely because its chaotic nature precludes sequential representation. Cave thus conveys the "unspeakability" and "unrepresentability" of trauma in songwriting terms, as the end of his staple narrative-based song, and the rise of a looser lyric better suited to more liminal states of being.

In his new "non-narratives", Cave evokes death and his loved one(s) obliquely, distilling the feelings of grief and longing into fragmented vignettes rather than extended scenes, and conflating characters and feelings. This process enables Cave to maintain a safe distance from his subject matter, whilst expressing the core feelings associated with the event. Because of the tense musical delivery and Cave's strained vocals, even the songs that are not directly connected to bereavement are freighted with grief, as if the devastation contaminated every last recess of the album.

The album encompasses various dimensions of individual trauma: the sense of apocalyptic collapse (e.g., "Jesus Alone"), free falling, and disintegration (e.g., "Magneto" and "I Need You"), and the ache of prelapsarian (i.e., before the loss) memories floating back into consciousness (e.g., "Girl in Amber"). But Cave also articulates an urgent spiritual yearning for peacefulness and higher meaning (e.g., "Distant Sky" and "Skeleton Tree"), which affords a metaphysical dimension to the album.

⁵³⁵ MORDUE, Mark. "Nick Cave: Premonitions of Love." *Neighbourhood*, 7 June 2017. Accessed 10 July 2017. <<http://neighbourhoodpaper.com/features/nick-cave-premonitions-of-love/>>

The core cluster of songs of inescapable grief, “Girl in Amber”, “Magneto”, “I Need You”, and “Jesus Alone” inform the listening experience of the album, hence even the less laden songs such as “Distant Sky” and “Skeleton Tree” are experienced through this prism. The album operates as a synergy whereby all songs resonate with one and the same feeling of desolation, and thus segue into one sorrowful flow.

The tipping point into atrocity is vividly evoked in “Jesus Alone”, in apocalyptic scenes reminiscent of Cave’s earlier material, with a vision of Jesus falling from the sky into a surreal scene of “lambs bursting from the wombs of their mothers”. It is a mysterious and portentous song, tense with electronic loops and with rising and falling orchestral movements. The lyrics are superficially universalistic, as Cave reaches out to a variety of human beings: a young man waking up with his hands covered in blood, “a woman in a yellow dress surrounded by a charm of hummingbirds”, and a believer betrayed by God. However, in the context of the album and juxtaposed with the other songs of grief, the chorus “with my voice I am calling you” seems to call out his loss. Furthermore, the heavy sonic and low vocal register counterbalance the ambiguity of the lyrics, and imbue the song with pain and longing, thereby marking it as a song of loss.

We are now going to study in greater detail the different ways in which Cave’s haunted narratives mimick traumatic memory, in a manner analogous to what Vickroy identifies in trauma fiction,⁵³⁶ that is through affective and unconscious associations rather than through conscious memories or structured plots.”⁵³⁷

3.3. Mimicking Traumatic Memory

Cave’s songs imitate traumatic memory in several manners: with prelapsarian memories gatecrashing the present and trapping the individual in a liminal temporality (e.g., “Girl in Amber”), by replicating the distortions of traumatic perception (e.g., “Magneto”), and in a dual vision of being crushed by grief and even more crushed by the helpless spectacle of the grief of a loved one (e.g., “I Need You”). But mostly, the structure of his trauma is spectral because the present is constantly broken into or haunted by an intrusive past that highjacks actual reality.

⁵³⁶ VICKROY. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*. *Op.Cit.*

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

Cave's songwriting of trauma is haunted by traumatic loss, much like the traumatised subject is "possessed by an image or event".⁵³⁸

This liminal wavering between past and present underpins the lyrical structure of "Girl in Amber", as Cave's quivering voice conjures up the ghostly vision of a girl haunted by a blue-eyed boy. It is a slow song, built on musical and lyrical loops, and musically stripped down to the piano, violin and back-vocals. Its slow pace leaves space for grief and memories to arise from the cracks of the song. It is not a linear narrative, so that we are only left with fleeting images: of a girl in amber forever spinning down the hall, of a phone that has stopped ringing, of pain trickling into blood. In the middle of the endless downward spiral, a vision arises of the girl in amber taking her blue-eyed boy down the hall, their figures spinning out of sight. The referential frame of the song is unclear: who is the referent of the "you" Cave addresses? Is it the girl or the blue-eyed boy? Who does Cave address when he says: "the world has stopped spinning since *you've* been gone"? (italics mine) The referential blur conveys a feeling that memories free-float back into consciousness in fragments, with past moments and people coalescing into one shimmery recollection. This fragmented memory is central to the experience of trauma, which in shattering the individual's sense of life narrative, leaves them unable to process their life in a linear manner anymore.⁵³⁹

The enduring impression arising from the song is a one of love and longing for the beloved one(s), as all other personal and spatio-temporal delineations evaporate. The superimposed snapshots actualise thought associations and fluctuating feelings, and thus capture the movements of the subconscious rather than conscious mind, in a manner analogous to Laurie Vickroy's formulation of traumatic memory as surfacing through "affective and unconscious associations".⁵⁴⁰ The vision of the girl in amber also conflates temporalities, since the ghostly figure of the blue-eyed boy belongs to the past but materialises in the present. With this spectral image, Cave reifies the acute longing that leaves the bereaved wandering through life like ghosts, forever wavering between a prelapsarian past and an incomprehensible present. Likewise, insofar as the girl in amber dwells between two worlds (the past and the present, the living and the dead), her presence is ghostly too, like a hazy recollection flooding back into the present and releasing its emotional charge. The song illustrates and immerses the listener in the traumatised subject's psychic collapse, and in the polytemporal warp that Caruth identifies as

⁵³⁸ CARUTH. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. *Op.Cit.*, 4-5.

⁵³⁹ HERMAN. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. *Op.Cit.*

⁵⁴⁰ VICKROY. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*. *Op.Cit.*, 3.

a key component of traumatic shock: the relentless repetition of the primary shock that comes back to haunt the individual, eluding comprehension and assimilation.⁵⁴¹

This immersive experience of trauma also resonates in “Magneto”. An atmospheric piece with a slow, low-key, jagged electronic sonic and occasional swells of piano, “Magneto” conveys the abyssal black hole of traumatic shock. It is fraught and meditative, its lyrics loose and surreal, superimposing surreal ruminations (“I spun on my wheel like a laboratory rat”) onto more graphic images of a domestic life under threat (“and all through the house we hear the hyena’s hymns”). Again, the allusions are not linear, but the vivid images of the lines “I’m sawn in half and all the stars are splashed across the ceiling” are hauntingly evocative of the mental dislocation of trauma, and of its self-alienating impact (“I’m sawn in half”). The lines “one more time with feeling” and the mirror structure “I laugh, you laugh... I move, you move...” reinforce the sense of emotional paralysis, thereby capturing an inner world in disarray, running on empty, when the traumatised subject goes through the motions of communication robotically, absently replicating emotions and social interactions whilst unable to feel or process anything.

“I Need You” articulates the grief and self-disintegration in the aftermath of death, when an ordinary moment (queuing at the supermarket) turns into a double ordeal: that of seeing a loved one so stricken by grief they are unable to engage with the world anymore, and that of being powerless and crushed by the same grief. The piece is freighted with grief and despair, both sonically and lyrically. Like in “Girl in Amber”, Cave uses vivid images, but there is a blur as to what exactly he may be referring to and who he is addressing. The situation is ostensibly a romantic break-up with his lover (the woman in a red dress), but there are narrative inconsistencies, such as the opening lines: “when you feel like a lover/Nothing really matters anymore”. The term “*like a lover*” (italics mine) seems to indicate that there is another storyline at play, which could make the song’s protagonist a “lover” in the literal sense of “someone who loves” and has lost a loved one. The song is ambiguous, as there are elements pointing to death rather than separation: “a long black car is waiting for you”, “I will miss you when you’re gone”, and “Just breathe, just breathe I need you”. The repetition of “I need you” states the centrality of loss and longing, but Cave blurs the lines as he transposes the pining to a romantic break-up. The song’s ambivalence is palpable in that Cave’s urgent plea “I need you” is set against a musical line which suggests depths of gravity and despair that go beyond romantic

⁵⁴¹ CARUTH. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Op. Cit. CARUTH. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, And History*. Op. Cit.

heartache. Moreover, the gradation from “I need you” (which is repeated throughout the song) to the final “I need you/Just breathe”, suggests a more pressing life matter than romantic heartbreak. Indeed, the injunction echoes the earlier description of his beloved’s “red dress falling” and her “eyes to the ground” and captures his beloved’s inner collapse, thus pointing to the same emotional numbness and abyssal despair as “Magneto”.

Overall, the fragmented nature of Cave’s songs reflects the difficulty of self-referential trauma fiction, the quasi impossibility to verbalise one’s harrowing experience, even more so when, like Cave, it has not been assimilated yet. Therefore, his trauma songs are informed by avoidance strategies, which result in an oblique rendition of trauma through fragmentation and an accordingly looser sonic capturing the bewildered blur of trauma, the suspended memory that trips over itself. Cave thus ploughs his way through trauma with a new unfiltered songwriting at odds with the honed lyrics of Cave the literary musician.

In Pursuit of Hopefulness

Finally, the album ends with two more peaceful meditations on grief, “Distant Sky” and “Skeleton Tree”, which bring some solace to the listener. “Distant Sky”, an organ-led duet between Cave and Danish soprano Else Torp, steps out of the immediate pain and sets out for the distant skies. It is hymnal, ethereal and contemplative, and the mingled sounds of the xylophone and the organ afford it a lullaby quality. Else Torp’s soothing voice leads the hypnotic flight and provides a rare moment of cosmic uplift and solace, even though the song is still haunted by pain, as Cave calls out his loss of hope and life:

They told us our gods would outlive us
They told us our dreams would outlive us
But they lied.

The song is bitter-sweet in its double acknowledgement of human impotence in the face of tragedy, and of the need for cosmic transcendence. The song effects a musical and lyrical ascent towards the “distant skies” (“we can set out for the distant skies”/“let us go now my darling companion”), articulated as a lull in the storm, a suspension of ordinary life (“Call the gasman, cut the power out”), as the slow organ-led music line imparts a meditative mood to the song. In its yearning for peaceful transcendence amid senseless atrocity, the song points to an irrepressible hope for redemption and sublimation of earthly suffering. “Distant Skies” is elegiac in tone, unfolding like a meditation on the painful finitude of the human condition, and articulating survivor’s pain as a quest for metaphysical meaning. In Cave’s chorus line “they said our gods would outlive us”, the term “outlive” posits the pain of human existence as having

to survive our loved ones, and being thus left bereft. In comparing the departed with “gods”, Cave signifies that death undercuts all our hopes for and beliefs in transcendence.

The title track “Skeleton Tree” is the only song in which Cave directly confronts his bereavement. Like “Distant Skies”, the piece has a slow hymnal quality, as its music line is conveyed by a slow piano and organ, while its melodious, slightly balladic overtones impart a soothing note. The song is ripe with the realisation of absence, as Cave repeatedly calls out across the sea and “the echo comes back empty”. Cave reaches out to the departed, in the hope that they might respond, “in the window a candle” so that maybe they can see “fallen leaves across the sky”. The song ends with a crushing awareness that in the aftermath of death, nothing will ever come effortlessly anymore (“nothing is for free”). However, for all its melancholy, the song is serene and bears testament to the possibility of redemption from abyssal sadness, be it in the narrative articulation of grief. The two songs thus offer hope of spiritual and emotional healing by assimilating the traumatic experience into a meaningful (albeit painful) life narrative.⁵⁴²

Both pieces bring a glimmer of hope in the middle of an otherwise torn and rugged album. Significantly, by ending the album with these two peaceful songs, Cave signifies his search for a redemptive closure to trauma. By the end of the album, the focus has shifted from trauma to the next stages of grieving: accepting loss and grief (e.g., the final line of “Skeleton Tree” is “it is all right now”) and subsequently placing the departed on the cosmic map (“Distant Sky”). Cave’s final note thus conveys universal and spiritual meaning: as human beings, we are animated by one and the same desire for transcendence, even in the face of the most crushing disasters. The final two songs bear testament to the fact that tragedy does not weaken our life force and spiritual resolve, but indeed spurs them on by making life affirmation more urgent and critical to our survival.

⁵⁴² JANET. *Les Médications psychologiques*. *Op.Cit.*

4. Ushering in a New Listening Experience

Skeleton Tree invites a new form of listening experience that is very much grounded in the nitty-gritty of real-life rather than an escapist pursuit. Cave suspends his former audience-performer interactive strategies, and strips away such performance artifices as character-impersonating, role-playing and co-performance, only leaving the skeletal structure of a core human baseline. The songs no longer act as monstrous scripts for fictional impersonation, but as a contact zone where existential meaning is conveyed and co-experienced. Indeed, as fictional monstrosity gets upstaged by real life atrocity, horror goes from fiction to life writing, and the masks are dropped. Cave sings in his own name and none other, as he acknowledges in a subsequent interview: “The skin has been pulled away and now I, as well as others, can have a look inside.”⁵⁴³ The skin analogy is a particularly apt evocation of the de-cluttering Cave operates on *Skeleton Tree*: in stripping down songwriting (and life) to its bare essentials, he turns his and his listener’s gaze inward. Indeed, *Skeleton Tree* is not about co-performance anymore, but about co-gazing into the heart of existential atrocity. The focus is on the communality of the gaze and experience: the positioning between performer and audience is no longer oppositional but communal.

Co-gazing into Atrocity

Cave thus outlines a geography of personal tragedy and invites the listener into the heart of post-traumatic shock. Because the subject matter is so fraught, in order to be sustainable, it compels toning down and an oblique treatment. Cave thus leaps from a strategy of exaggeration and theatricality to its polar opposite, a stripped rendition whereby horror is never directly stared at but hinted at in light brush-strokes, hence the album is freighted with mere intimations of horror. Whereas on prior albums Cavian horror used to be in bold (i.e., macabre gothic or comic grotesque) or aestheticised (e.g., love songs), and the tone hyperbolic and transgressive, on *Skeleton Tree* the aesthetic and tonal palettes are, of necessity, sober and tentative. Since the exploration of atrocity is conducted from the epicentre of Cave’s personal trauma, the listening experience is both immersive and interpersonal, thus calling forth empathy. With the album, Cave establishes a potent intimacy with his audience, a profoundly human communication line,

⁵⁴³ CAVE, Nick. “The problem most songwriters have in rock music is writing honest songs.” Interview. *Telerama*. Telerama. 26 April 2017. Accessed 30/05/2017.

<<https://www.telerama.fr/musique/nick-cave-the-problem-most-songwriters-have-in-rock-music-is-writing-honest-songs,157179.php>>

whereby his lived experience hints at broader universal patterns. The stark minimalism of *Skeleton Tree* and its autobiographical content clearly make it an album that “takes life as its subject”, much in line with life writing.⁵⁴⁴ Moreover, extrapolating from Smith and Watson’s contention that “all acts of personal remembering are fundamentally social and collective”,⁵⁴⁵ I would argue that Cave’s individual testimony is expressive of universal patterns and *Skeleton Tree* therefore carries potential universal significance.

The title’s image of a skeleton tree is appropriate in more ways than one: not only does it encapsulate the stark desolation of the album, but it also reflects a musical experience stripped down to its existential core. As a result of Cave’s effusive style being temporally put on hold, the listening experience sobers down too, and invites quiet contemplation rather than upfront interaction with Cave. Cave’s emotionally fraught and tentative music draws the listener away from the semantics of rock music, and into the human fold. The proximity to Cave’s lived experience of grief also invites a more contained listener-performer bond.

A Filmic Insight into *Skeleton Tree*: *One More Time With Feeling*.

The dark mindscape of the album is made explicit in *One More Time with Feeling*,⁵⁴⁶ the documentary film by Australian director Andrew Dominik (*Chopper*, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, and *Killing Them Softly*). The documentary was broadcast as a one-off worldwide cinema event on September 8th 2016, the day before the release of *Skeleton Tree*, instead of promotional interviews. Dominik’s initial plan was a performance-based concept, but the project expanded into a mixture of Cave and the Bad Seeds’ final recording sessions at Air Studios (London), backstage footage and interview extracts with Cave, his crew, and his wife Susie. It also included intermittent Cave’s voice-over narration and poetic ruminations. The piece provides a valuable insight into the album’s recording: the artistic collaborations behind the scenes, and Cave’s mindset at the time of recording. A subtle balance of personal and musical insights, the film addresses personal trauma obliquely, by probing the territory of unspeakable grief and psychological survival through a poetic flow of images and spoken word. *One More Time With Feeling* goes far beyond its originally intended documentary format and articulates a profound meditation on the fragility of life and the purpose (and consolation) of art in relation to trauma.

⁵⁴⁴ SMITH, Sidonie, and Julia WATSON. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. 3.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁴⁶ *One More Time with Feeling*. Dir. Andrew Dominik. *Op.Cit.*

The film and album function as a diptych, in that the documentary contextualises the album's production, and provides an insight into Cave's and the Bad Seeds' creative process. It echoes and expands upon the final redemptive notes of the album and Cave's tentative search for sublimation of trauma through art. The film skirts around the edges of Cave's despair and hints at the redemptive nature of communality through glimpses of stolen moments of joy and banter with his Bad Seeds' band-mates and family. Without ever falling into trite sentimentality, Dominik captures glints of joy and comfort in ordinary moments: Ellis winding Cave up about his hair and eliciting a rare laugh, Cave and Ellis symbiotically engrossed in musical improvisation in the studio. All these glimpses of human kinship present friendship and love as critical to psychological survival, and art as a potent conduit to the sublimation of trauma and redemptive communality.

Conclusion

Having staked out the representation of trauma and relocation of the horror content in *Let England Shake* and *Skeleton Tree*, I have demonstrated that whilst both albums put forward immersive and mimetic experiences of trauma, they are aesthetically and stylistically at odds since Harvey relies on stylisation and cross-referentiality, whereas Cave's renders trauma raw and stripped.

The shift in their treatment of horror leads to the central question of the function of their songwriting of trauma. What is the ultimate purpose of their songs and what impact do they achieve? Laurie Vickroy identifies the two main functions of trauma narratives as engaging the readers in a reflection on individual suffering and communal healing, and turning trauma into shared collective knowledge.⁵⁴⁷ Vickroy contends that trauma narratives enable both subjective reconstruction and a collective meditation on and response to trauma, thereby highlighting the interconnectedness of the personal and the collective. In particular, Vickroy argues, human-made trauma narratives have a cautionary purpose: they "reshape cultural memory through personal contexts, adopting testimonial traits to prevent and bear witness against such repetitive horrors."⁵⁴⁸

Based on Vickroy's argument, Harvey's war narratives can be construed as conversations on cultural trauma, and Cave's grief narratives as conversations on the social

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3-5.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

dimension of individual trauma. In both instances, art performs a similar function: it transforms traumatic memories by placing them “in their proper content” and by restructuring them into “a meaningful narrative”.⁵⁴⁹

My contention is that *Let England Shake* and *Skeleton Tree* may both universalise trauma and bring out the interconnectedness of traumatic experience, however they do it through different means: Harvey universalises the experience within her artistic treatment, whereas Cave’s universalising occurs in the wake of the album, in performance, as a ripple effect of the album. Therefore, *Let England Shake* will be analysed through its multimodal encoding of interconnectedness and universality (i.e., as an art project), whereas *Skeleton Tree* will be analysed through its live performances during the 2017-2018 Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds tour.

⁵⁴⁹ MODLINGER Martin, and Philipp SONNTAG, eds. *Other People's Pain: Narratives Of Trauma And The Question Of Ethics*. Oxford and New York: Peter Lang, 2011.9. In their study of the ethical implications of representing trauma, Modlinger and Sonntag argue that art can mirror the nature of traumatic memories and their “need to be modified and transformed by being placed in their proper content and restructured into a meaningful narrative”. VAN DER KOLK, MCFARLANE, and VAN DER HART, “A General Approach to Treatment of PTSD”. Ed. Bessel VAN DER KOLK, Alexander MCFARLANE, and Lars WEISAETH. *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*. New York: Guildford, 1996. 420.

CHAPTER 12. Universalising Trauma: *Let England Shake* and The Interconnectedness of Lived Experience

*To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.*

William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence", 1863.

As argued in Chapter 11, in using an aesthetic of Englishness in her reconfiguration of horror as war trauma, Harvey develops a contextualised life-writing strand within her Gothic songwriting of excess. What does this new language of horror-cum-Englishness achieve? In particular, does *Let England Shake*, as an album of war trauma, strictly deal with the English collective legacy or does it reach beyond its outwardly English frame?

I contend that, contrary to Harvey's former monster-drama, the War Gothic of *Let England Shake* no longer focuses on individual idiosyncrasies but on humanity at large. Harvey thus uses the experience of battlefield horror as a means of interconnecting with others, of initiating what Cathy Caruth describes as "a speaking and a listening from the site of trauma",⁵⁵⁰ thereby establishing a form of transpersonal and transcultural communication.

Therefore, although Harvey uses an identifiably English idiom, the scope of her album is not culturally specific, but universal, and therefore the filter of Englishness should be construed as a mere structural means to a universal end, an emotional template to enter war horror by.

This chapter will investigate the scope for universality and interconnectedness in *Let England Shake*, by focusing on Harvey's idiom of authenticity (folk-rock), cross-culturality, and inter-artisticity (e.g., cross-referencing other art forms and the commissioning of war

⁵⁵⁰ CARUTH. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory. Op.Cit.*, Introduction. 11.

photographer Seamus Murphy to make short film adaptations of the songs). In particular, I will argue that *Let England Shake* is first and foremost an emotive art project conducive to a multimodal and universal experience of battlefield trauma. Consequently, what Harvey outlines is the interconnectedness of human suffering, and the potential for the collective healing of traumatic heritage.

1. Turning to Folk Music and Communalty

1.1. Through the Rock-Folk Junction: a Language of Authenticity

The instrumentation of *Let England Shake* is noticeably influenced by folk music, notably through the autoharp, the zither, and the bass harmonica. The autoharp is a fixture of North American folk and country music (e.g., the Carter Family), as is the harmonica, whilst the zither is used in Eastern European and Austro-German folk music. Although Harvey's prior albums contain North American inflections (e.g., *To Bring You My Love*), they were mostly blues folk, whereas *Let England Shake* is influenced by traditional folk music. In order to appraise the implications of this traditional folk component for Harvey's language, we will survey the rock and folk ideologies for intersections.

Simon Frith identifies a structural interplay between the folk and rock ideologies, notably in their shared emphasis on authenticity. Working from the premise that rock is the "folk music of our time",⁵⁵¹ Frith postulates that rock listeners use rock as a folk music, namely as a genre perceived to express communal values. According to Frith, the core values of folk (i.e., truth and sincerity) seeped into the rock discourse from the late 1960s onward, and the myth of authenticity became central to rock fans and critics alike. Whereas in folk terms, authenticity was construed as reflecting the experience of a social class, in rock terms, the concept was individualised by folk rock performers in the 1960s, by such singers as Bob Dylan, who placed a new emphasis on "truth-to-self"⁵⁵² and "truth-to-experience". Rock authenticity thus conflated "the folk conventions of sincerity with

⁵⁵¹ FRITH, Simon. "'The Magic that Can Set You Free'": The Ideology of Folk and the Myth of the Rock Community." [1981] *Taking Popular Music Seriously, Selected Essays*. Alderscot, UK, and Burlington, US: Ashgate, 2007. 31-40. 31.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.* 35.

literary devices drawn from beat poetry; their ‘authenticity’ was the result of a combination of soul baring and poetic vision”.⁵⁵³

Frith also notes that, although rock focuses on individuality, the myth of community continues to underpin its ideology, however the said community is no longer bound together by politics or class-consciousness, but by taste and sensitivity. Consequently, Frith concludes, “the rock ‘community’ refers not to an institution, to a set of people, but to a sensation”,⁵⁵⁴ to an experience of togetherness conjured up by musical experience, and central to the ideology of rock.⁵⁵⁵ As a result of this combination of individuality and communality, rock music entails heightened emotionality: whilst enhancing one’s sense of self, it elicits collective exaltation through its unmediated emotional directness.⁵⁵⁶

Harvey uses this junction between rock and folk to slide down from one end of the stylistic and semantic spectrum to the other, thereby leaping from stylised theatricality and fictionality to their diametrical opposite: authenticity and truth-to-experience. Namely, with *Let England Shake* she branches out into another strand of rock, folk rock, thereby incorporating its core value of authenticity into her songwriting. Structurally, the truth-to-experience value of the folk rock medium also matches the purpose of her testimonial songwriting, with its emphasis on conveying the lived experience of war.

1.2. The Communality of Folk

Harvey has stated her artistic intent to craft simple catchy tunes in the folk tradition for *Let England Shake*:

I sang them *a capella* for a long time, almost so that my intellect wasn’t particularly engaged, and I ended up with very simple, almost nursery-like quality to the melody. And I wanted the melody to be so simple that it could be sung from one person to another, and be remembered straightaway, it’s that simple. That harks back to how music ever begins, in the tradition of storytelling; folk music is often very simple because it’s just passed on from one generation to another, everybody remembers it was never written down it because the melodies have this simple very strong quality to them.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.* 36.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 39. “Music is a source of both an emotionally intensified sense of self, (as artists are heard to articulate their listeners’ own private fears and feelings) and collective excitement, an illicit, immediate sense of solidarity and danger, an un-bourgeois innocence of caution, an uncalculated directness, and honesty.”

⁵⁵⁷ BBC 2, *The Culture Show*. Interview conducted by Miranda Sawyer, February 2011. <<https://youtu.be/0Lg2j0zU1II>> Accessed 14/03/2011.

Harvey highlights her interest in the interpersonal component of folk music, through its ties with storytelling and orality. In line with the communal interpretation of British folklorist Cecil Sharp,⁵⁵⁸ Harvey articulates folk as a tradition of oral recreation whereby the audience transmits the song through appropriation and performance. In pointing out that folk music not only creates interpersonal interactions at the time of performance (through singing along), but also inter-generationally, Harvey signifies her concern with the inter-temporal chain of collective memory, whilst tapping into the notion of “communality” widely associated with the folksong. Originating from the French revolutionary word “Commune”,⁵⁵⁹ the term “communal” has sunk into folk theory as what folklorist Louise Pound describes as “a doctrine of spontaneous, unconscious growth “from the heart of the people”.⁵⁶⁰ More generally, the term “communality” denotes a belief in a communal soul shared by the individuals of a social group.

By placing folk communality at the centre of her creative process, Harvey signals the centrality of the collective concern on *Let England Shake*. Indeed, the album not only deals with an intrinsically collective subject-matter, but also puts forward a communal musical experience, which surfaces in the multi-layered sonic texture intermingling different voices (polyvocality) and musical traditions (intermusicality). Polyvocality abounds on the album, as Harvey’s vocals are superimposed with her main vocals, or with her band-mates Mick Harvey’s and John Parish’s back-vocals. Moreover, intermusicality reinforces the sense of interconnectedness, whilst pointing to the perpetual repetition of traumatising events and situations across cultures and historical eras. In incorporating intercultural and inter-musical quotes, Harvey inscribes communality in the fabric of her songs, thereby signifying the universality of the painful human experience across ages and cultures.

⁵⁵⁸ SHARP Cecil. *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions*. London: Simpkins; Novello; Taunton: Barnicott & Pierce, 1907. Cecil Sharp theorises the English folk song as reliant on oral transmission and communal recreation, according to a process of continuity and variation. This communal reading of folk music has remained widely paradigmatic, although it has been challenged by recent folklore theorists such as David Atkinson, who have pointed out the prominent textuality of traditional song. ATKINSON, David. “Folk Songs in Print: Text and Tradition.” *Folk Music Journal* 8.4 (2004): 456-483.

⁵⁵⁹ The Paris Commune (La Commune de Paris) was a radical socialist revolutionary government that ruled Paris from 18 March to 28 May 1871.

⁵⁶⁰ POUND, Louise. “The Term ‘communal’.” *PMLA* 39.2 (Jun.1924): 440-454. 440. American folklorist Louise Pound exposes the uses and abuses of the term “communal” in relation to folk poetry and music, dismissing the collectivistic notion that folk ballads issue from “communal inspiration”, namely from the people instead of the individual. Postulating that there is no such thing as spontaneous communal creativity, Pound argues that ballads are crafted by one individual and subsequently modified by the audience and singers.

1.3. Intermusicality and Musical Puns: Connecting across Cultures

The album is thus sprinkled with musical quotations and features musical quotes from different times, cultures and genres: the 1953 novelty hit Istanbul (not Constantinople) by Canadian male singing quartet “The Four Lads” (in “Let England Shake”), 1958 “Summertime Blues” by US rockabilly singer Eddie Cochran (in “The Words that Maketh Murder”), and 1971 “Blood and Fire”, by reggae musician Niney the Observer (in “Written on the Forehead”). In addition, there is also the Kurdish lament in “England”, and also a bugle call by HM Irish Guards in “Glorious Land”, and the lyrics of “Glorious Land” and “In the Dark Places” are inspired by Russian folk lyrics. All these inclusions segue into a trans-cultural and trans-temporal flow of traumatic human experience, whether through war, personal loss, or social strife.

It is noteworthy that except for the Kurdish lament, which is in keeping with the prevalent sad tone of the song “England”, the other musical quotations of the album function more incongruously. As discussed in Chapter 11, in “Let England Shake” the “Istanbul (not Constantinople)” sample introduces a jarringly cheerful element into an otherwise dark song concerned with a young soldier’s departure to war. Elsewhere in “The Words that Maketh Murder”, the perky melodic line is at odds with the graphic depictions of battlefield carnage, and the song incongruously ends with Harvey, Parish and Mick Harvey breaking into a refrain from Eddie Cochran’s “Summertime Blues”: “What if I take my problems to the United Nations?”. Again, the sample introduces incongruity and black humour into the song, as it playfully points to the uselessness of international peacekeeping institutions in the face of the cyclical return of war atrocities. The song’s protagonist’s plea with the United Nations for help seems hilariously futile in response to the unimaginable.

Finally, the reggae sample from Niney the Observer’s “Blood and Fire”, looping in the song “Written on the Forehead”, provides a deceptively jaunty counterpoint to the horrific description of a city under siege, with its inhabitants drowning in a river of sewage. Jamaican singer and producer Niney the Observer was a prominent figure in the creation of many classic reggae recordings in the 1970s and early 1980s. A deceptively cheery paean to imminent apocalypse, his 1970 hit song “Blood and Fire” resonates with the Rastafarian⁵⁶¹ focus on

⁵⁶¹ Rastafari or Rastafarianism is a Pan-African Abrahamic religion that developed in Jamaica during the 1930s. It was both a religious and social movement advocating the emancipation of the African diaspora from the oppression of Western society. Reggae has been widely influenced by Rastafari, and has acted as a means to spread the Rastafarian gospel worldwide.

social and religious justice. In using a reggae quote, Harvey introduces the social criticism and global idealism originating from diasporic African communities and Western societies, thereby establishing a unifying parallel between colonising and colonised nations in terms of destruction and suffering.

What do these musical puns bring to the songs? Other than reinforcing an existing dissonance between the singalong melodic lines and the horrific lyrical content, they introduce humour, incongruity, and in providing a crossover into other cultural and temporal dimensions, they have a totalising effect binding together distinct temporalities and communities by the experience of destruction and suffering. In hybridising and counterbalancing the prevalent Englishness of the album, these diasporic and transatlantic cross-references establish a global human lineage, conjuring up a sense of enlarged communality. This intercultural undercurrent questions the position of Englishness in *Let England Shake*, is it just a device rather than a steady cultural bearing?

2. *Let England Shake*: An Album of Interconnectedness

Let England Shake has been critically acclaimed as one of Harvey's most English albums both in its lyrical and sonic palettes, witness its lyrical themes and album and song titles. As argued in Chapter 11, Harvey weaves in Englishness cross-referentially, through overt aesthetic borrowings from war writing and trench songs, and through symbolic imagery. The English pastoralism⁵⁶² that infuses the depictions of an idyllic English countryside posit the English homeland as an antinomic correlative to the alienating battlefield experience, thereby inscribing her songs in a peculiarly English popular heritage.

And yet, for all its English signifiers, to what extent should *Let England Shake* be construed as an album of Englishness? Firstly, the topic of WWI and WWII itself encompasses Western Europe, North America and Commonwealth countries. Secondly, Harvey includes foreign musical quotes that outline a cross-cultural scope. The song "England", an outward

⁵⁶² I use the term "English pastoralism" according to Christine Berberich's definition, as an artistic theme representing England as an idealised rural setting. BERBERICH Christine. "This Green and Pleasant Land: Cultural Constructions of Englishness." Ed. Robert BURDEN and Stephan KOHL. *Landscape and Englishness*. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2006. 207-224.

English lament, epitomises this core cross-cultural counterpoint to the English thread, hence it calls for closer scrutiny.

2.1. Englishness as an Emotional Template: the “England” lament

The bitter-sweet lament “England”, Harvey’s ode to England, narrates a soldier’s pining for his homeland, with a wistful awareness of a “bitter taste” tingeing his patriotic love. Sung in a child-like vocal style, the song builds up around a guitar-led wailing melody, thus echoing the homesickness of the lyrics. The “bitter taste” of the lyrics is echoed in the slow melody that builds up to the final haunting pain of the lyrics: “Undaunted, never-failing love for you England”. Overall, it is an ambivalent piece, both nostalgic and resentful of the homeland, as evoked in the sour analogy between his patriotic love and “a withered vine...reaching from the nation’s dirt”. The musical texture of “England” disrupts the English surface with an instrumental and vocal sample from a Kurdish folk song. The song opens with Harvey’s “lalala” vocals intermingling with a Kurdish female vocalist’s love song, as if Harvey were merely accompanying the Kurdish singer. Moreover, the song opens and closes with the Kurdish folk instrumental sample, which paradoxically reframes “England” within a broader cultural frame encompassing the Middle East. Harvey stated her intention to intermingle love for one’s country with romantic love:

[...] a woman singing to her beloved, and I wanted to keep that little sample in there because I had been listening to that and there was something about the emotion there that I wanted to bring into my love song to England. So there are these two love songs, hers is Kurdish, and mine is English and they cross in the middle.⁵⁶³

Acting as a contact zone between two cultures and two forms of longing, the song is not only the site of aesthetic and cultural mingling, but also of emotional mingling. Just like the Kurdish song-line segues into the fabric of Harvey’s song-line, so does the love song segue into the homeland lament, thereby merging into a single emotional flow.

The song thus operates in a liminal emotional space beyond cultural and personal boundaries, and as such it subverts its parochial English surface. It is noteworthy that from the first opening notes, the emotional core of the song is ushered in by the Kurdish singer’s wailing vocals, therefore by the time Harvey starts singing, the listener has already tuned in to the

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*

feelings of suffering and yearning. By introducing the song's emotional palette in a language and musical tradition unknown to her average listener, Harvey short-circuits the listener's intellectual and cultural pathways and articulates the song in terms of emotional immediacy. The listener's empathy for the Kurdish singer compels them to grasp the song intuitively. As a result, the impact of the lyrics is reconfigured: Harvey's pining for England does not ring so much as national sentiment as a broader longing for solace. When Harvey sings the lines "I live and die/through *England*", "*England* I have searched for your springs", and "Undaunted, never-failing love for you, *England*, is all to which I cling" (italics mine), the listener instinctively grasps that the word "England" could be replaced by any other object of longing, be they countries or people.

Therefore, although outwardly a hymn to the English homeland, "England" is in fact a universal song of grief, which Harvey explicitly posits as a transposable template:

I think you can't help but respond to the country you are living in. As an English person living in England, I am talking about this country but you could supplant that soul to a lot of different countries. We all feel this terrible disappointment in what happens to our countries, mostly its disappointment and this sense of connection and sense of push and pull with all the things you hate about it and love about it. They're parts of you but then again you want to get it away from you at the same time. I think it's a common human feeling no matter what country you're living in. There are these feelings that you wrestle with and I can't help but be affected by where I have grown up. I was trying to talk about that using very broad brush-strokes to leave it open for other people to enter. I didn't want it to become so specific and so narrowed down and I hope that's what I have done because I would like to leave it open for other people to bring forward their responses.⁵⁶⁴

Harvey's insistence on the coincidental nature of one's homeland signifies an essentially fluid perception of personal and cultural boundaries, and an acute sense of human interconnectedness. The song "England" thus illustrates Harvey's aim to interconnect cultures, histories, and personal trajectories across established boundaries, thereby tapping into the pool of universal human experience. Consequently, she uses battlefield horror not as a means to assert national cohesion and identity, but as the site of human togetherness, which is in line with Caruth's conception of trauma as interconnecting cultures through the experience of self-alienation:

⁵⁶⁴ HARVEY, PJ. Interview. "Local rock star PJ Harvey talks to the news." *Op. Cit.*

In a catastrophic age, that is, trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures: not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves.⁵⁶⁵

The theme of English wars merely provides Harvey with an access route into the experience of war in general. She contextualises her exploration in British history because it happens to be the culture and the cultural imaginary that she has the best insight into. This operative framework may be read as a generic blueprint of cultural cartography: she is writing from a familiar place of collective trauma that is transposable to other cultures. The insider's outlook affords a relatable quality to the album, whilst enabling her to convey an intimate geography of war with existing stylistic tools (i.e., cultural symbolism and traditions).

Moreover, the theme of interconnectedness does not stop at human beings but is also encompasses the interactions between human beings and nature, which Harvey represents as conjoined in suffering.

2.2. Organic Interconnectedness: Humanity and Nature Entwined

The desolation of *Let England Shake* surfaces in vivid depictions of disfigurement and annihilation of both human and natural life, suggesting that nature and human beings are conjoined by destruction. To the hopeless spectacle of shattered human lives, Harvey adds the death-infected landscapes, suggesting that nature itself is sucked out of its life-sustaining core. The entire songscape is permeated with the decaying natural and human worlds, and infused with the dehumanising and alienating geography of war, thereby echoing the physical and psychical mutilation and annihilation of soldiers. In depicting the human and natural worlds as brutally defiled and contaminated by war, Harvey intermingles the two entities.

The natural landscape thus comes to signify the alienation of war in two manners: either by cross-contamination, it becomes hostile to human beings, or just like human beings, it is maimed by war. First, we are going to examine nature made hostile by war, and then nature as man's fellow-victim.

⁵⁶⁵ CARUTH. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. *Op.Cit.*, Introduction. 3-11, 11.

Natural Cross-contamination

Hostile nature features in “Battleship Hill” where natural elements torment the narrator with painful memories of war: “the scent of thyme carried on the wind, stings your face into remembering/that nature has won again”. The opening lines evoke the insidious and relentless assault of nature on the protagonist’s senses with the verb “sting”, and through a cruel sensory reversal, the scent of thyme, a conventionally pleasant and comforting smell, is turned into a trauma-trigger. Throughout the song, the protagonists’ senses and memory are assaulted by personified natural elements: the wind that stings and speaks evil (“I hear the wind say/cruel nature has won again”), the mountains “cracked like teeth in a rotten mouth”. Nature materialises as a malevolent monster actively conspiring against human life, and cynically surviving it regardless of the carnage. Battleship hill (related to the Gallipoli Campaign) is the site where the horrors of war have taken root (“a hateful feeling still lingers”), the solace of time collapses (“even now, 80 years later”), and traumatic memories spring back to life (“caved in trenches”). It is the place where human life was defiled and defeated, and nature is so contaminated by war that it becomes figuratively belligerent, as conveyed in the repetition of the phrase “nature has *won* again” (italics mine). The line signals a monstrous cross-pollination between war and nature, as battlefield violence filters into nature itself and crushes the protagonist (and human life). The song features nature’s survival to horror not as a source of hope and resilience, but as the cynical victory of a ruthless opponent.

Elsewhere in “Bitter Branches”, again nature is evocative of death and mutilation, and Harvey uses natural imagery to convey the deathly contamination of soldiers heading to war. The song is framed by the image of bitter branches spreading out, wood becoming an extended metaphor of death worming its way into the ground and stalking the soldiers from underfoot. It is depicted as evil (“there is none more bitter than wood”) insidious and warped, through the repetition of the word “twisting” (“*twisting* its roots... *twisting* under soldiers’ feet”, italics mine). In its kinship with death and its ramifying into branches, wood turns into a figure of deathly contamination. Indeed the bitter branches finally take over the landscape as the song closes with the image of “bitter branches spreading into the white world”. The juxtaposition of “the soldiers standing in line” and “the damp earth underneath” suggests an ominous closeness between the soldiers and death. The trope of earth is thus stripped of its conventional connotation of life and growth to become crudely evocative of death and human burial. The music seems to pound out the lyrical content of the song, thereby sonically entrapping the listener in the metaphorical contamination of the landscape.

Symbiotic Mutilation: Nature and Human Beings as Fellow-victims

Harvey not only represents nature as a hostile reflection of war, but also (and chiefly) as human beings' fellow-sufferer. Therefore, the theme of natural defilement is often deployed jointly with that of human defilement. Nature as an "unearthly place" ("The Words that Maketh Murder"), surfaces in the ironically entitled song "Glorious Land", a "glorious country ploughed by tanks and feet marching" where the "glorious fruit of the land" is "deformed" and "orphaned children". Whilst the title announces a patriotic war song, Harvey turns it into an anti-war song ripe with horrific descriptions of war-torn land delivered with acidic humour. Harvey's tour de force lies in the reversal of expectations in the evocation of the "glorious" homeland, which turns the song into a piece of reverse ruralism.

English ruralism relies on an idealistic vision of Englishness through myth and soil, and informed much of interwar artistic representations of the English landscape. This scopic mode was infused with earth mythicism and *volkishness*, a blood and soil mentality that considers human identity as directly fashioned by the landscape.⁵⁶⁶ In his analysis of ruralism in the interwar period, Alex Potts says that "the true England" of Christopher Hussey's *The Fairy Land of England* (1924) was this beautiful "legendary country", the "dust we are made of, and to which we will return".⁵⁶⁷ With "Glorious Land" Harvey turns "the legendary country" on its head and transforms it into a monstrous matrix. The defilement is conveyed through a dual image of nature being debased and destroyed by human armies, whilst human life is mutilated and defiled ("deformed") and also bereft of love ("orphaned"). The horror vision unfolds to a military-inspired soundscape including a bugle call, a fast drumbeat, and a reverberating guitar line. The vocals are mostly collective, with Parish and Mick Harvey joining Harvey, which imparts a sense of communality to the song, whilst enabling a camp duet between Harvey and Parish (or Mick Harvey?). The high-pitched duet briefly steers the song away from the horrific lyrics and into borderline nonsense, as they sing "Engeland" (*italics mine*) and "America" in what sounds like a rapturous and comical song contest. Yet, the camp interludes are kept short enough so they do not tip the song over into comic grotesque, and the tension of the song is sustained throughout. The piece is energetic, enticing the listener with its fast pace and reverberating guitar work, and it is built on a call and response singalong pattern whereby

⁵⁶⁶ HABERMANN, Ina. *Myth, Memory, and the Middlebrow. Op.Cit.*, 1- 42.

⁵⁶⁷ POTTS, Alex. "'Constable Country' between the wars." Ed. Raphael SAMUEL. *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989. Vol. III: 160-186; 173. Potts quotes Hussey, Christopher. *The Fairy Land of England*. London: Country Life, 1924. 80.

Harvey asks questions and the collective vocals answer back. The combination of the jaunty tune and question and answer pattern solicits the listener's physical and mental engagement. Horror culminates in the final verse, with Harvey's repeated question "And what is the glorious fruit of our land?" The disquieting answers "deformed children" and "orphaned children" are repeated like a final refrain, closing the song on an a darkly sarcastic note. The simile "fruit of our land" binds together human and natural mutilation figuratively as part of a shock tactic: its implicit reliance on the ruralistic blood-and-soil trope creates expectations of an idealised organic bond between humans and their homeland, which come crashing down with the unexpected monstrous imagery of "*deformed* children". The shock stems from the antithetical interplay between "fruit" as evocative of fertility and growth and "deformed" with its monstrous and grotesque connotations. "Glorious Land" is one the most spectacular pieces of black humour on the album, it delivers its blow unsparingly, in a manner analogous to the gallows humour of some WWI trench songs.

Elsewhere in "Hanging in the Wire", the mutilated natural environment of No man's land ("a smashed up wasteground" with no vegetation or wildlife left) resonates with the horror of James Walker's mutilated body with its "limbs pointing upward". Likewise, "Colour of the Earth" contains a metaphor of the symbiotic interaction between nature and humans, as twenty years after his friend Louis died in the Anzac trench, the protagonist remembers the earth that day as "brown-red/the colour of blood"), a visual image merging human and natural corporealities of war.

As well as conveying the all-encompassing horror of war by highlighting the organic bond between human beings and nature, Harvey also uses shock tactics in order to produce an immersive experience of horror, by applying staple devices of her songwriting of excess: convergence and dissonance.

3. Shock Tactics and the Immersive Path to Horror

In Part I, we have demonstrated that one of Harvey's monstrous games consists in bringing her listener into claustrophobic intimacy with her embodied monstrosity (e.g., "Rid of Me"), through an antagonistic performance and role-play. We are going to see that her war Gothic songwriting has structural similarities with her prior monstrous scripts.

Anne Whitehead's argument that trauma can only be conveyed by means of "a literary form which departs from conventional linear sequence"⁵⁶⁸ can be transposed to Harvey's songwriting. In response to the unrepresentability of trauma, Harvey deploys an innovative, oblique, and non-linear strategy that is in line with the mechanisms of trauma fiction. Notably, Harvey's songwriting "departs from conventional linear sequence" in that it alternates two antithetical interplays between musical and lyrical contents: convergence and dissonance.

In the convergent songs, the horror and suffering of the lyrics resonate in the musical texture, which is either elegiac (i.e., laments) or restless (i.e., mimicking chaos). Conversely, the dissonant songs are characterised by a clash between graphic lyrical depictions of death and mutilation and upbeat musical lines. It is noteworthy that the dissonant format prevails on the album since four out of the twelve songs have concurrently dark musical and lyrical lines, whereas eight of them have cheerful tunes. Setting songs about war carnage to singalong tunes suggests a conscious move to make dissonance a core structural device to the album.

In order to probe Harvey's strategy, we are going to analyse these two access routes into atrocity according to the convergence/dissonance paradigm, and determine the type of listening experience at hand.

The Immersive Path into Horror: when Lyrics and Music Converge

The four convergent songs are made up of three laments ("All and Everyone", "England", "Hanging in the Wire") and one maverick, "Bitter Branches", which will be the first focus of this study. The convergent format relies on a symbiotic dynamic between the music and the lines, which produces an immediate and sustained exposure to war horrors.

"Bitter Branches" stands out from the rest of the convergent repertoire in that its music and lyrics are consistently dark but do not belong to the lament tonality. Its guitar line is relentless, and combined with Harvey's hammering vocals, it provides a percussive background to the depiction of soldiers leaving their wives to go to war. The piece acts as a gateway into darkness: it is uniformly dark and does not provide any relief from the oppressive vision of soldiers fading into a deathly haze. The song is jagged and haunted by a sense of impending death, as the "bitter branches" metaphorically spread into the white world, and finally absorb the waving white hands of the soldiers' wives ("their arms as bitter branches spreading into the white world"). Along with the jagged musical texture, the sung-screamed quality of Harvey's

⁵⁶⁸ WHITEHEAD. *Trauma Fiction. Op.Cit.*, 6.

vocals turns the song into a warning call to soldiers. The sense of impending danger is further enhanced by the manic repetition of “wave good-bye” at the end of the song, which suggests that the good-byes may be more final than it seems. In superimposing the upbeat patriotic *cliché* of battalions being waved off to war with a vivid evocation of their proximity to death, the song is a harsh deconstruction of grand national narratives. The external focus has a totalising effect since it broadens the scale of death to the entire battalion: it is not the intimacy of an individual soldier’s fate which is contemplated here, but that of an entire army contingent, which points to the sheer scale of the carnage. Harvey thus debunks heroic war narratives by interweaving a stock valedictory scene with a depiction of insidious death.

The other three convergent songs (i.e., “All and Everyone”, “England”, and “Hanging in the Wire”) are straightforward laments in which the slow mournful musical texture matches the grief and desolation of the lyrics. All three are internally focused individual and collective narratives.

Foregrounding the pervasiveness of death, “All and Everyone” starts off to a slow tempo and to the melancholy sound of organ, as a battalion advances to its death. The song alternates an elegiac slow pace of an anticipation of death, and occasional accelerations reflecting the battalion’s fear. The slow tempo underscores the opening lyrics and their enumeration of every last recess of daily life being hijacked by death: rolling a cigarette, telling a joke, having a banter, drinking water. The gradation from an ordinary action (rolling a cigarette) to life-sustaining action (drinking water) is highlighted by the slow pace and clear vocal delivery, which leaves ample opportunity for the listener to take in the lyrics. The song then accelerates to evoke the full horror and inescapability of battlefield death, and of a natural environment conspiring against life: “the bank of red earth dripping down death”, the air and sun contaminated by death. The acceleration culminates with a graphic vision of carnage, with death “rattling the bones” of unburied soldiers (“it rattled the bones of the Light Horsemen/still lying out there in the open”), before abruptly dying back down to the elegiac pace again. As the soldiers chant “Death to all and everyone” at the end of the song, the deathly contamination of the song culminates with the human spirit finally giving in to a death impulse, and perpetuating the deadly cycle.

The most harrowing song, “Hanging in The Wire”, bears witness to the horror of a soldier facing a lonely death in No man’s land. The low-key piano-led lament rises and falls to a sorrowful reverberating chord and to the sung-whispered vocals of Harvey and John Parish/Mick Harvey, which creates a mournful soundscape. The song feels muffled under a

dull layer of pain, as if the battlefield mist of the lyrics somehow contaminated and weighed down on the musical texture, as the two vocalists describe James Walker dying on “a smashed up waste-ground”. The mournful pace of the song foregrounds the horror and desolation of ending one’s days mutilated (“in the wire/limps point upwards”), surrounded by “unburied ghosts”, and denied the peaceful consolation of nature since all wildlife has been annihilated by war (“no birds singing/the “White Cliffs of Dover”/there are no trees to sing from”). Whilst historically confusing in the context of a WWI song, the allusion to the popular WW II song “White Cliffs of Dover”⁵⁶⁹ at the time of dying encapsulates the profound hopelessness of Walkner’s demise in an eviscerated environment where all hope is relentlessly crushed.

The songs convey the horror scene through musical reverberation and an unflinching depiction of the lifeless wasteland with razor-sharp precision. No man’s land is portrayed as negating life in all its forms: both wildlife (through a series of negations: “it has “*no* fields or trees/*no* blades of grass”, “*no* birds singing”, “*no* trees to sing from”, italics mine) and human life. As Walker heaves his last breath (“he cannot hear the wind”), humanity fades into disembodied figures (“unburied ghosts hanging in the wire”). The camera-like progression of the depiction imparts a sense of unstoppable horror, so that the listener feels just as trapped in the dehumanised songscape as Walker in No man’s land. Like Walker, the listener ends up drowned out in the ominous symphony of gun firing, the only hint of life left in the death-infected scene. The song traumatises the listener by turning them into the helpless witness of a harrowing death for the span of the song.

With the convergent songs, Harvey jolts the listener into the heart of battlefield carnage, indeed into breathing distance of those soldiers’ ordeals, without providing any temporary respite from the horror. The songs are indeed *structurally* brutalising in that their slow musical tempo compels a prolonged gaze on battlefield horrors, thereby bringing the listener into claustrophobic intimacy with the traumatic dimensions of war (i.e., the anticipation, experience and aftermath of mass carnage), and with the acute feelings of alienation and homesickness aroused by the battlefield.

⁵⁶⁹ "(There'll Be Bluebirds Over) The White Cliffs of Dover" is a popular World War II song composed in 1941 by Walter Kentto, with lyrics by Nat Burton. The song was made famous in Vera Lynn's 1942 version, and it was among the most popular World War II tunes.

However, it is noteworthy that this optimal horror format is a minor trend on the album, all other eight tracks testify that with her War Gothic songwriting, Harvey does not forsake her old transgressive ways, and still makes full use of playful dissonance.

Playfulness and Structural Dissonance

Although *Let England Shake* is aesthetically realistic in its subject matter, Harvey still engages in a playful game of disruption and contradiction with her listeners, notably by introducing dissonance between her lyrics and music. Admittedly, there are instances of dissonance and black humour in the treatment of war in rock music, notably, in 1968 The Doors' "The Unknown Soldier" and Pink Floyd's "Corporal Clegg". An anti-Vietnam song, "The Unknown Soldier" relies on a disjunction between the gravity of the topic (the death of a soldier) and the cheerful tune and tone ("it's all over/for the unknown soldier"). Likewise, although dealing with a maimed soldier, "Corporal Clegg" is a psychedelic extravaganza of distorted vocals and circus-like music. The sarcastic tone and cacophony make the song a particularly unhinged alternative to the protest-song. In using dissonance, Harvey is potentially following this unhinged anti-war song tradition.

Dissonance has been a staple disruptive device in Harvey's songwriting. Harvey's old monster-drama such as "Down by the Water" (1995), operates on a pattern of dissonance whereby the listener is enticed into her first-person infanticidal tale by means of a catchy musical line, however the effect is very different. Impersonating the mother, Harvey recounts how she drowned her daughter, with an incongruously cheerful singalong chorus line, thereby making for an ambivalent listening experience. The playful musical line beckons the listener to sing along, which tips the listening into monstrous experience. The listener is tricked into an enjoyable moment of violence, and they are torn between the immediate pleasure of the tune, and the horror of the lyrics. In the context of wishful monster-drama, the listener can give in to a moment of barbaric delight and sacrificial kinship with Harvey. In conjuring up a disposable stage for monstrous role-plays, dissonance fulfils an escapist and wishfulfilling purpose, and acts as the structural centrepiece to a flight of monstrous fancy.

Outwardly, the dissonant songs of *Let England Shake* hinge on the same structural disjunction as Harvey's former comic grotesque repertoire: an enticing musical line clashing with gruesome lyrics, thereby inscribing ambivalence in the texture of the song. However, dissonance is no longer conducive to the transgressive co-enactment of a monstrous songtext, nor is it a source of unholy glee. The effect of the dissonant device is the polar opposite of

escapism: it crash-lands into atrocity and compels a painful confrontation with a traumatic reality. Contrary to Harvey's previous albums, *Let England Shake* contains no fictional softeners: its terse verse and gritty realism do not cushion the blow.

The Dissonant Anthem: "In the Dark Places"

The dissonant song format prevails in eight out of the twelve album tracks. It is noteworthy that there are musical contrasts between the songs, in that seven are unabashedly upbeat whereas one is more tonally ambivalent: "In the Dark Places". Yet the track stands out as a most effective popular anthem and thus deserves closer scrutiny.

A collective narrative of a battalion going to war, "In the Dark Places" interweaves two musical strands: a catchy balladic line, and an emotional gravity imparted by a regular percussion line. The song combines an energising melodic quality and a freighted subject, young men going to war ("hellwards") and digging makeshift graves for those who will not return. The song is divided into two movements: the first half is composed of two stern verses describing the battalion setting out to war, whereas the second half of the song erupts into a balladic tribute to young fallen soldiers.

In the first half, Harvey's vocals deliver a tense narrative of the battalion walking to battle, and then mid-song, there is a sonic shift, and Harvey is finally joined by John Parish and Mick Harvey to sing the last three lines of the verse:

and not one man has
and not one woman has
revealed the secrets of this world.

The lines are hummed low-key to a tentative musical line, until the vocals yield to a fluid guitar bridge that unfolds, ample and melodious, over a few chords. The bridge provides a balladic respite and builds up to the chorus lines: "So our young men/hid with guns, in the dirt/and in the dark places". The chorus somehow becomes an entire song within the song, as it takes up half the song's time-span, and is sung three times by Harvey and her back-vocalists.

In the heart of a song of desolation, the shimmering bridge and chorus tip the song over into musical and spiritual uplift, as they unfold to an expansive guitar chord and fluid washes of saxophone. It is a catchy popular tune and a stern military tribute rolled into one: a popular anthem that resonates with an awareness of death and suffering, and a human tribute to the fallen. The polyvocals of Harvey, Parish and Harvey impart a sense of communality to the

song, as if the collective vocals reaffirmed the resilience of humanity in the face of the hell-bound journey depicted in the lyrics. This collective presence is also palpable in the use of the possessive pronoun in the chorus: “*our* young men hid/with guns” (italics mine). Through the use of “our”, the trauma of war is reclaimed and relocated at the heart of collective human experience. The bridge and chorus unlock an unexpected potential for solace and healing, and thus enable the song to blossom forth from the desolate suffering of the first two verses to the redemptive re-appropriation of historical suffering.

The track encapsulates Harvey’s *tour de force* on *Let England Shake*: she manages to deliver a very stark lyrical content to enticing musical lines, and in the process, she avoids hackneyed national sentimentality, which is the potential pitfall of a war songbook. The song “In the Dark Places” illustrates the sophistication of Harvey’s artistry: even when dealing with such fraught issues as war carnage, Harvey remains consistently subtle in her portrayal, painting in suggestive brushstrokes rather than bold overtones, so that the outlines are vivid yet never simplistic or melodramatic. Harvey crafts a popular anthem to the fallen soldiers that neither sounds pompous nor pontificating, it is both intensely aware of the trauma of war, yet life-affirming in its collective anchoring. Furthermore, in focusing on the human experience of war, she transcends national boundaries, so that a single historical event such as the Gallipoli campaign is sublimated and conveys universal meaning. A tribute to gritty humanity, the track encapsulates Harvey’s new use of dissonance as a conduit to life writing, whilst testifying to its abiding structural prevalence in her songwriting idiom.

The same core dynamic is at work in Harvey’s dissonant songs old and new: the lyrics lead the listener beyond the pale of human experience, into the zone of horror and the taboo to ear-pleasing melodies. Within the economy of these songs, the dissonance between lyrical and musical texture is instrumental in foregrounding horror: it is precisely because the listening experience is rendered enjoyable by the music that the listener can sustain the full charge of the lyrical horror.

On *Let England Shake* Harvey’s strategy of dissonance remains playfully transgressive in that it makes horror musically attractive, and thus lures the listener into the graphic atrocity of the lyrics, however she reshuffles the semantics of her “civil war of attraction and repulsion”.⁵⁷⁰ Notably, the interplay between pleasure and horror is altered: whereas in monstrous scripts, the mixture of horror and pleasure is conducive to barbaric delight, on *Let*

⁵⁷⁰ HARPHAM. *On The Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art. Op. Cit.*, 9.

England Shake, it brings about a shocking realisation of the brutality of war. Harvey still uses shock tactics; however, it is no longer part of a sacrificial kinship but of a new language of empathy for fellow-human beings.

Harvey's listeners are "stylistically traumatised" by being immersed in the disjointed perspective of trauma, which leads them to grasp trauma experientially rather than intellectually, in a manner analogous to trauma fiction, whereby the listener experiences war trauma "through affective and unconscious associations rather than through conscious memories or structured plots."⁵⁷¹ Thus the listener "is guided through the narrative via the disorientations and conflicts of traumatic memory".⁵⁷²

Moreover, Harvey conveys the "affective and unconscious associations"⁵⁷³ of trauma not only through musical means, but also through the visual mode, with Seamus Murphy's short film adaptations of the songs. I would argue that this multimodal synergy exceeds rock's combination of musical and lyrical textures, and turns *Let England Shake* into an emotive art project soliciting the audience synaesthetically.

4. Seamus Murphy's *Let England Shake* Short Films as Visual Music

When she commissioned Irish war photojournalist and film director Seamus Murphy to make twelve video adaptations of *Let England Shake* songs, Harvey steered the album towards art rock, with its emphasis on aesthetic fluidity and inter-artistic expression. It is noteworthy that Murphy does not make music videos with a visual narrative illustrating the song lyrics, but instead produces art films with elaborately encoded visual streams bearing no literal resemblance with the lyrical theme. Instead, Murphy engages in a form of free-style adaptation. His technique is to render the songs' core emotional content through a collage of snapshots evoking ordinary life.

In line with the album's aesthetics, Murphy's films present an explicitly English anchoring in their footage, which Murphy collected during a purpose-made journey through England. The films intersperse three main strands: the popular, Englishness and the poetic. The first popular strand includes hallmarks of English popular life such as seaside resorts and their

⁵⁷¹ VICKROY. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction. Op.Cit.*, 3.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*

amusement arcades (in “Let England Shake”, “The Words that Maketh Murder”), iconic children’s puppet shows (e.g., *Punch and Judy* in “Let England Shake”), a moshing crowd at a punk concert (“The Words that Maketh Murder”), the British Army (“The Words...” and “In the Dark Places”), and old people ballroom dancing (“The Words that Maketh Murder”). The second category uses Englishness as a scopic mode, chiefly relying on ruralistic evocations of England through a stock imagery of the land and the sea. These naturalistic shots bring to mind other English artistic traditions across the ages, such as the contemplative peacefulness of John Constable’s paintings or the Romantics’ attention to the natural world (e.g., Keats’ “mellow fruitfulness”⁵⁷⁴ of autumn is captured in the shot of a lush autumnal tree in “Glorious Land”). The third “poetic” strand unfolds through evocative vignettes conjuring up the shimmering elation of a drive through the trees or of catching glimpses of sky through the foliage, or the restorative self-reflection of a moonlight drive. Murphy thus introduces a fresh experiential access into the album by adopting an emotive approach that appeals to the viewer’s sensory flows.

Prominent in Murphy’s films is synaesthesia, which aesthetics and music academic Kathleen Marie Higgins defines as “the stimulation of a particular sensory mode occasions stimulation of another”.⁵⁷⁵ In her article “Visual Music and Synaesthesia”, Kathleen Marie Higgins investigates music’s reliance on cross-sensory metaphors, working from the premise that synesthetic experience is inherent in music.⁵⁷⁶ Higgins distinguishes between “idiopathic” and “commonplace” synaesthesia: the former an unconscious subjective process pertaining to idiosyncratic experience,⁵⁷⁷ the latter a widely shared experience inscribed in the musical medium itself.⁵⁷⁸ Extrapolating from Charles Nussbaum’s contention that the tactile and kinaesthetic component is central to musical experience,⁵⁷⁹ Higgins propounds the idea that not only is the experience of music intrinsically synesthetic, but the listener’s entire sensory apparatus is solicited in the act of music-listening.⁵⁸⁰ Consequently, the musical text acts as a

⁵⁷⁴ KEATS, John. “To Autumn”, 1819. The poem conveys the progression of autumn through vivid concrete images of growth and harvest.

⁵⁷⁵ HIGGINS, Kathleen Marie. “Visual Music and Synaesthesia.” *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*. Ed. Theodore GRACYK and Andrew KANIA. London and New York: Routledge, 2014. 482.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 480-491.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.* “The spontaneous association of aurally experienced music with “phantom” percepts normally experienced through another sensory modality.”

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 483. “The appreciation of music through multiple sensory modalities is in fact typical for the human species.”

⁵⁷⁹ NUSBAUM, Charles. *The Musical Representation: Meaning, Ontology, and Emotion*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007. 21. Nussbaum postulates that when listening to music, one mentally “represents virtual layouts and scenarios in an imaginary musical space in which the listener acts (off-line)”.

⁵⁸⁰ HIGGINS. “Visual Music and Synaesthesia.” *Op. Cit.*, 485. “People associate music with the entire sensorium.”

repository of cross-sensory metaphors, and triggers a multi-modal perception whereby sounds conjure up other sensations, notably visual, Higgins argues.⁵⁸¹

In commissioning a visual artist to make film adaptations, Harvey heightens the intrinsic synaesthetic component of music and makes *Let England Shake* an optimally synaesthetic art project soliciting the receiver's entire sensorium. I would argue that Murphy's short films thus operate as cross-sensory cartographies that should be approached as "visual music".

Moreover, Higgins's articulation of music as full sensory engagement points in the same direction as Frith's notion of music's timelessness⁵⁸² as an experiential conduit to an enhanced presence to the world. Through timelessness and synesthetic experience, the music listener thus experiences interconnectedness both instinctively and boundlessly. Consequently, as visual music, Murphy's films present an enhanced anchoring in the here and now, and therefore a highly emotive content.

4.1. Visual Music: The Poetic Structure

Art philosopher Olivia Mollis defines visual music as a wide range of artistic practices underpinned by the idea that "visual art can aspire to the dynamics and non-objective qualities of music",⁵⁸³ notably used in avant-garde films, which "become relatable by exploiting familiar native perceptual capacities."⁵⁸⁴ This drive toward cross modal expression leads to innovative structuring systems such as poetic structure (visual limerick or haiku) and streams of consciousness, notes Paul Taberham in "The Three Dimensions of Visual Music."⁵⁸⁵ The notion of "poetic structure" resonates with the sensory tapestry underlying Murphy's aesthetic: using a kaleidoscopic collection of cultural and experiential hallmarks as emotional triggers, Murphy operates through light stimuli and suggestive juxtapositions, thereby leaving the viewers to their own thought and sensory associations. Therefore, the real content of the films lies not in

⁵⁸¹ HIGGINS. "Visual Music and Synaesthesia." *Op.Cit.*, 488. Because "we relate to the world with our entire sensorium, the powerful impression of connection with the world that we obtain through music enlivens our senses all together, and we are motivated to respond with our entire bodies (as we do in dancing). The intensity of our aural and tactile impressions of the musical signal, by stimulating the rest of the sensorium, encourages us to seek content for the visual sense, which predominates in most of our interactions with the world."

⁵⁸² FRITH. *Performing Rites: On the Value Of Popular Music. Op.Cit.*, 145-157.

⁵⁸³ MATTIS, Olivia. "Scriabin and Gershwin: Color Music from a Musical Perspective." *Visual Music: Synaesthesia in Art and Music since 1900*. Ed. Kerr BROUGHER and Olivia MATTIS. London: Thames & Hudson, 2005. 211.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁵⁸⁵ TABERHAM, Paul. "The Three Dimensions of Visual Music". *Lessons in Perception: the Avant-Garde Film-maker and Practical Psychologist*. Berghahn Books, 2018. 170.

what is in the frame but in what is left out, in the reverberating impressions that arise from the shots. His technique is to conjure up a whole “world in a grain of sand”⁵⁸⁶: according to a pattern of cross-resonance whereby each snapshot conjures up what it leaves out.

For instance, his film adaptation of “The Glorious land” conveys the horror content of the song (i.e., the mutilation of nature) poetically. Murphy suggests death and disfigurement by framing the film between two tree shots: the opening shot features a rusty coloured tree standing in a peacefully lush field, with chirping birds and the wind in the background, a picture of bucolic England; by contrast the closing shot features a barren tree standing alone in the middle of a field, under a grey sky, to the muffled sound of passing cars. This instance exemplifies Murphy’s elliptic style: the mutilation of nature is signified obliquely, through everything that is left out of frame between the first and the last tree shots. Murphy merely intimates that the natural world has been turned upside down, so the sheer atrocity of war and its effect on the landscape is only glimpsed through those two contrasting shots. Likewise, although it deals with war and the destruction of human lives, the film contains no shots of human beings other than Harvey. The only hint of humanity disturbingly occurs in the shape of lifeless mannequin-soldiers in a war museum, which suggests the human devastation of war.

Moreover, in the same song, in order to render the physical carnage depicted in the lyrics, Murphy turns his attention to its counterpart, emotional carnage, by poetically alchemising the prevalent trope of external destruction (of land and humans) into snapshots mirroring subjective collapse. The film thus suggests the emotional dislocation resulting from seeing one’s country and children maimed by war with one explicit shot of missile shooting across a dark sky with bewildered birds scurrying across. Murphy also intersperses contextualised shots of former battlefields (the plains of Northern France, mist scurrying across trench-fields, a war museum) with poetic shots: a hypnotic drive through the trees, the slanted and blurred view of a home office evoking dizziness. The latter shots conjure up a space of stunned perception that simulates the disorientation and subjective dissolution of trauma.

Murphy’s films thus provide an emotive access into Harvey’s songworld whereby the meaning of the elliptic shots can only be grasped intuitively, and is therefore intertwined with the viewer’s emotional maps. Each film functions as a kaleidoscopic collection of collective memories, and each shot acts as an emotional trigger: the puppet show, the carousel or the game arcade in a generic seaside town may issue from the collective cultural reservoir, yet they

⁵⁸⁶ William Blake, “Auguries of Innocence”, 1863.

are the repositories of personal memories and sensory patterns. Murphy thus limns out the historic theme through a combination of ellipsis and subliminal hints such as cultural, and socio-historical and experiential visuals. In the process, fragmented collective and personal memories collide and superimpose, beckoning the viewer into an experiential reconstruction of meaning. In this respect, Murphy's technique could be construed as pointillist,⁵⁸⁷ with each experiential dot contributing to the full painting.

4.2. Mimicking Inner Life and Transcendence

Moreover, in simulating the movements of the inner world, Murphy's technique presents another convergence with visual music in avant-garde films. Taberham identifies a strand of avant-garde films that present the spectator with "visual aural and rhythmical equivalents of expanded states of consciousness",⁵⁸⁸ thereby making it akin to meditation. Taberham argues that, "taking sense as a muse",⁵⁸⁹ these particular films appeal to inner experience by simulating the movements of the inner world and by using an imagery conducive to transcendence. I would argue that not only should Murphy's films be read as perceptual fragments of the inner world and as a visual music that simulates of the non-linear processes of thought associations, but they are also conducive to transcendence. Transcendence is indeed inscribed in the poetic structure of Murphy's visual music, in that the visual reality featuring in the film frame is not perceived as external to the viewer, but as an echo of their inner sensory and emotional flows. In conjoining internal and external realities, this imitative structure blurs the boundaries between subject and object, leading the viewer to seamlessly shift from outer to inner experience, and from the individual to the universal. Therefore, Murphy's films put forward an experience of subjective dissolution, whereby the viewer no longer differentiates between their self and the world, and experiences inner and outer realities as one. This state of oneness with the world mimicks the meditative state, and as such can be read as a form of transcendence.

⁵⁸⁷ Pointillism, also called divisionism and chromo-luminarism, in painting, the practice of applying small strokes or dots of colour to a surface so that from a distance they visually blend together.

"Pointillism." *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018.
< <https://www.britannica.com/art/pointillism> > Accessed 12/07/2018.

⁵⁸⁸ MOLLAGHAN Aimee. *The Visual Music Film*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. 88.

⁵⁸⁹ TABERHAM. "The Three Dimensions of Visual Music." *Op.Cit.*, 177.

5. Harvey, The Painter with Words And Sounds

Murphy stated that Harvey barely gave him any directions and left him free to interpret the music as he pleased, so he single-handedly made the films and delivered them as completed products.⁵⁹⁰ As a result, the twelve films have taken a life of their own and become a side-project, like a visual installation complementing the album. This artistic collaboration partakes of a broader artistic approach at work in Harvey's craft in general, and in *Let England Shake* in particular: a multi-modal stance whereby words, music and visuals meld together to conjure up a synesthetic experience. The three entities work in cross-modal symbiosis so that when the lyrics are fragmented and lacunary, music instills meaning into the interstices and likewise, Murphy's visual collage infuses fresh meaning into the songs.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that Harvey's self-perception points to the same cross-generic hybridity, as she thinks of herself as an artist who "paints with singing and words":

I have never felt like a musician, whenever someone has asked me what I do, I have stumbled on the word. I feel like an artist. I feel like a painter more than a musician. I paint with words and sound. I have always felt like that, always. And that's why it has felt quite strange to me to be associated with any particular movement of music; I don't feel like I am associated with anything apart from painting pictures or painting ideas. I approach it all like that, it's about malleability, it's about sculpture, ramming one thing up to the next, ramming one colour up there to see what happens to the one next to it. That's the way I approach things. Again, it goes back to do with touch and smell and instinct.

.... I throw things at a canvas and see what works, and I do it with music and words.
.... I paint with singing and words.⁵⁹¹

Harvey's "painting with words and sounds" stance testifies to a synesthetic and cross-artistic approach binding together songwriting and visual arts. In their aesthetic article "On some Relationships between Music and Painting", Theodor Adorno and Susan Gillespie posit that music and painting can converge and merge through a process of "pseudomorphosis" to

⁵⁹⁰ MURPHY, Seamus. Interview. "PJ Harvey Found Her Hero." MTV News. *MTV News*, 2 February 2013. "PJ really left it to me to make the films I wanted to make. We discussed ideas and found ourselves mostly in agreement. So I hit the road and went off to shoot the first three ... editing them and sending them through to her as finished. It was the first time she saw them." (Seamus Murphy)

<<http://www.mtv.com/news/2695376/pj-harvey-seamus-murphy-photographer/>> Accessed 6/06/2015

⁵⁹¹ HARVEY, PJ. Interview. "Local rock star PJ Harvey talks to the news." *Op.Cit.*

become “music that paints”.⁵⁹² Articulating music and painting as language, Adorno and Gillespie thus postulate that both art forms are reliant upon a peculiar writing that occurs in a disjunction between the work and its object, according to a principle of “making things of which we know not what they are”.⁵⁹³ In this formulation, the peculiar language of music and painting can only occur by forsaking its communicative dimension. Therefore, music and painting operate as nonsubjective language and indirect writing.

While all songs and their film adaptations operate on this template of indirect writing, “The Words that Maketh Murder” encapsulates the coming together of cross-artistic and synaesthetic stance into a form of indirect writing, and as such is worthy of a case study. The next paragraph will focus on the interplay between the lyrical and musical contents of the song, and the visual narrative of Murphy’s film adaptation. In particular, we will demonstrate that it partakes of a broader inter-artistic conversation with pictorial trauma art.

⁵⁹² ADORNO, Theodor, and Susan GILLESPIE. “On some Relationships between Music and Painting.” *The Musical Quarterly*. (1995): 67.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, 71.

5.1. The Trauma Art Project: A Case Study of “The Words that Maketh Murder”

The Words That Maketh Murder

I have seen and done things I want to forget –
soldiers fell like lumps of meat,
blown and shot out beyond belief.
arms and legs were in the trees.
I have seen and done things I want to forget –
coming from an unearthly place,
longing to see a woman’s face
or hear a piano’s grace,
instead of the words that gather pace,
the words that maketh murder.
I have seen and done things I want to forget –
a Corporal, who’s nerves were shot
climbing behind a fierce, gone sun,
flies swarming everyone,
death lingering, stunk
over the whole summit peak
flesh quivering in the heat.
This was something else again.
I fear it cannot be explained.
The words that maketh murder.

A Musical Adaptation of Francisco Goya’s “Disaster of War”

Harvey’s intuition that she is first and foremost a painter is reflected in the texture of “The Words that Maketh Murder”, which is sustained by a mixture of graphic depictions, unflinching vocals and energising musical lines. The daunting war-torn wastelands, mutilated bodies, and other evocations of the fallen and their traumatised survivors conjure up a horror landscape reminiscent of Francisco Goya’s “Disasters of War” (1810-1820) or of Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937). Harvey mentioned Goya as an inspiration for the album, and indeed, the opening lines of “The Words that Maketh Murder” capture the atrocity of Goya’s etchings with music and words:

Soldiers fell like lumps of meat
Blown and shot out beyond belief.
Arms and legs were in the trees.



Plate 39: Grande hazaña! Con muertos! (An heroic feat! With dead men!) / Los Desastres de la Guerra (The Disasters of War)⁵⁹⁴

The dislocated bodies hanging in the trees seem to transfer from visual into lyrical content, and so does the “unearthly” place Harvey mentions later on. On the etching, the ground under the dead bodies is represented as an island literally made “un-earthly”, as if disconnected from life-giving earth. The sheer horror of Goya’s etching seems to flow seamlessly into the lyrics of “the Words that Maketh Murder” and ripple on into a full-fledged story. Harvey starts her vision from Goya’s dislocated body and frames it within a personal narrative, filtering it through the traumatised mind of a survivor who relentlessly stumbles upon the horror vision. Harvey turns the horror vision into a trauma trigger, thus translating the visual centrality of the dislocated bodies in Goya’s work into the structuring thread of her narrative, and using death and mutilation as the structuring motif of her song. Harvey does indeed paint with words and music: she alchemises Goya’s visuals into a song. The opening “Goya” lines pave the way for more traumatic memories (“a Corporal whose nerves were shot”, “things ... coming from an unearthly place”), and escalate to the final horror of the song, an overwhelming sense of corporeal decay: “flesh quivering in the heat”. The atrocity of the mutilated bodies contaminates the whole song, so that the soldiers’ living bodies are described in decaying

⁵⁹⁴ The British Museum.

<http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?assetId=38003001&objectId=1333636&partId=1>
Accessed 11/09/2017.

undertones as they climb in the sun. The crude physicality of the descriptions (e.g., “flies swarming everyone” and “flesh quivering in the heat”) are uncomfortably ambiguous, as they describe the walking soldiers, but may just as well apply to the dead bodies of the opening lines, whose presence overshadows the song. In the context of a song foregrounding horrific dismemberment, the images of flies and flesh inspire horror and bind together living and dead soldiers, thereby portending the walking soldiers’ forthcoming demise.

However, Harvey’s fresco is more ambivalent than meets the eye, and the sheer horror of the lyrics is counterbalanced by hand-clapped beats, and an ample instrumentation including the guitar, autoharp, and washes of saxophone. It is an incongruously catchy piece that could be mistaken for a party favourite if one did not pay attention to the lyrics. It is one of the most complex of the dissonant songs on the album, and the craftiest in its subtle equilibrium of gruesome horror and enticing music. However, the song not only reads as an ordinary musical piece but it comes to fruition through Murphy’s short film, as a synesthetic piece simultaneously engaging the listeners aurally, mentally and visually.

The Synaesthetic Cartography of Murphy’s Visual Translation of “The Words That Maketh Murder”

In order to gauge the full emotional charge of the song, it is worth analysing Murphy’s film adaptation in greater detail, so as to examine how the lyrics, music and visuals come together to conjure up a synesthetic experience of war trauma. Murphy’s film interweaves four types of vignettes: ordinary English life (e.g., the seaside, a typical letterbox, the tube, ballroom dancing), shots of Harvey singing *a capella* on the auto-harp, horror shots (e.g., a dead body on the road), and poetic snapshots (e.g., driving through the city at night, the moon through the clouds). The film is framed by Harvey’s *a capella* clips: she appears four times in total, in the opening and closing shots, and twice during the film.

A Visual Reinvention of Horror

Other than the one graphic horror shot (a dead soldier on the road), Murphy renders the lyrical carnage obliquely, either through visual translation of the lyrics or through visual dissonance.

Visual translation consists of a snapshot illustrating the lyrics, usually re-contextualised. For instance, the soldier’s line “I have seen and done things I want to forget” is filtered into a shot of a hunter walking through the lush English countryside. Elsewhere, during the chorus, as Harvey sings “muuuurder”, Murphy includes a shot of a war game in a

video arcade. Murphy makes a particularly creative use of visual dissonance in using it to heighten the impact of the lyrics. He includes a shot that is not immediately related to the lyrics, but expands upon the lyrics, reads between their lines, and unlocks their full potential. For instance, he matches the “arms and legs up in the trees” of the lyrics with a swarm of flies against blurred greenery, thereby imprinting a side allusion to putrefaction onto the original image. The viewer is initially immersed in the pleasing aesthetic of the shot, which captures the transience of natural beauty in the fluttering flies, until its full meaning stares at them in the face, and the clips deliver a fresh blow surpassing the content of the lyrics.

Visual dissonance reaches its most horrific climax with the line “soldiers fell like lumps of meat/blown and shot out beyond belief”, which Murphy translates into two antithetical shots: one a visual translation, the other a dissonant shot. The line “soldiers fell like lumps of meat” is illustrated by the partial and distant shot of a dead soldier on a road, the soldier’s outfit and the surrounding desert suggest the scene takes place in Afghanistan or the Middle-East. This is upfront translation, yet the fact that the footage is blurred tones down its effect. This is followed by a dissonant visual on the line “blown and shot out beyond belief”, which includes very young British soldiers, solemn in their full official attire, getting ready for what looks like a military funeral cortege. In their late teens and with stern faces, they briskly preen each other’s uniforms. The juxtaposition of these fresh-faced soldiers, seen at close range, with the disfigurement featured in the lyrics is repulsive, and brutally conjures up battlefield carnage. The horror lies in the unbearable tension between what we see (youthful soldiers full of life) and what we are made to imagine by the lyrics (these same soldiers mutilated beyond recognition). Murphy uses the explosive force of visual dissonance to superimpose two antithetical images and bring the viewer-listener to experience the full shock of war carnage. The experience forces the viewer to imagine the unimaginable; worse, it gives a face to the unimaginable, and an explicit roadmap to it. As a result, the unimaginable becomes all too relatable, indeed manifest. Murphy’s technique is very much based on thought association, it operates between the lines, in a manner analogous to Lyotard’s notion that trauma art’s most effective tool is to say that that it cannot say trauma,⁵⁹⁵ leaving the receiver to gauge the interstices for meaning.

Throughout the film, Murphy affords gaps for the viewer to let the images sink in, in the form of “poetic snapshots” shots, which are disconnected from the lyrics. They occur either

⁵⁹⁵ LYOTARD. *Heidegger and “the Jews”*. *Op. Cit.*, 47.

as reflective interludes (e.g., driving through the city at night, the moon in the sky), snapshots of ordinary life in Britain (e.g., a seaside resort, concerts, game arcade, a letter box), or as visual puns. One poetic puzzle is the longest shot of the song, old white people engaged in ball-room dancing to the the chorus lines “these are the words that maketh murder”. At first sight, it is rather incongruous. The impassive dancers are in their late seventies, and dance meticulously, almost robotically. The scene jars with the horrific lyrics, and seems rather cryptic at first sight, and yet... There is an uneasy feeling arising from watching British life carry on regardless (or careless?) of past and present brutalities. Or does it suggest that in time we become so accustomed to pain and horror that we are desensitised and live on numbly? Either way, it is a fraught shot.

The song ends with the comic relief of a visual pun, with young people somersaulting in a park at night, to the lyrics “What if I take my problems to the United Nations?” The juxtaposition of the United Nations with drunken antics elicits bitter laughter, whilst highlighting the uselessness of international peacekeeping organisations in the face of conflict.

Murphy’s Poetic Touch

The film “The Words that Maketh Murder” typifies the subtle interplay between lyrics, music and visuals, and bears testament to the complex texture and malleability of Harvey’s songs. In this respect, they can be compared to art installations: they are multi-dimensional, and as such can be approached and reinvented from different angles (musical, visual, aesthetic, emotional, and lyrical). Murphy’s film adaptations expand upon the songs’ intrinsic multi-dimensionality to blaze further synaesthetic trails. What his films bring to Harvey’s songworld is an enhanced awareness of the passing of time and the fragility of human existence, which he captures in the shimmering movement of ordinary life. His focus is mostly on the antinomic correlative of death and atrocities: life in its wavering equilibrium. Murphy scans the seemingly innocuous anodynes that sustain the human psyche to evoke the delicate flow of inner experience: glimpses of sunshine through foliage, wavelets rippling on the shore, or the rustle of dead leaves signify the subtle interplay between external and internal realities. Murphy’s visual music is a vivid illustration that life is made up of small things, small things that go deep nonetheless. In zooming in on these depths of being, Murphy evokes death paradoxically, not in its brutal actuality but in the delicate living ecosystem it shatters: a shot of English countryside thus brings to mind battlefield waste-land, the vibrancy of a moshing crowd out at a concert brings to mind the lifeless bodies lying on the battlefield, and so on and so forth. The death and mutilation of the lyrics are suggested through antithetical means, with life-affirming

shots. Murphy's play on light and shadows echoes Harvey's music-lyrics dissonance. Murphy's technique is essentially elliptical: he unlocks the full poetic potential of Harvey's songs by igniting a sensory constellation of human interiority.

The multisensory artistry at work on "The Words that Maketh Murder" reflects a broader cross-sensory synergy at play in the whole album.

Conclusion

As Harvey's first piece of life-songwriting *Let England Shake* exemplifies her changed artistic stance. Positioning herself as a "war songwriter" merely bearing witness to war, Harvey removes her persona from the song's drama and relocates herself outside the song-world, as an external narrator and an onlooker, rather than an active participant. In the process, Harvey's persona becomes peripheral, and no longer the signifying stage persona of the rock performer. All of these undermine the centrality of the rock performer and bring the text and music to the fore. Frith argues that the singing performance draws as much attention to the singer as to the lyrics, and that consequently the popular music performer conducts a double enactment: the "star personality" and the "song personality".⁵⁹⁶ Building upon Frith's argument, I conclude that until 2011, Harvey's "star personality" merged with her "song personalities", as her performance persona was also a protagonist of her song-world. However, with *Let England Shake*, Harvey blots out her star personality so as to bring the song personality to the fore. Effectively, she slips out of character and focus.

Harvey's strategic self-effacement goes along with an intensified inter-artistic expansion of her work, as her aesthetic resonates with musical (e.g., reggae, novelty songs, WWI soldier songs) and generic (e.g., WWI war poetry) cross-references. Above all, *Let England Shake* is the album of Harvey's artistic revolution, when not only does she forsake fiction for life-songwriting, but she also enters into inter-artistic conversations about war trauma, heralding a fresh inter-artistic approach to her music, turning it into a contact zone between the musical, visual and lyrical crafts. As an album on which Harvey "paints with sounds and words", *Let England Shakes* is an emotive art project in which Harvey's lyrics and music combine with Murphy's art films to convey a multimodal cartography of war trauma.

⁵⁹⁶ FRITH. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music. Op. Cit.* 158-183 and 212.

Therefore, *Let England Shake* takes the audience through the looking-glass: they end up in what looks like Harvey's familiar dark songworld, but it is transposed into a new operative framework, as it raises awareness about the battlefield carnage, the transience of human life, and the cultural legacy of war.

Whereas the effects of Harvey's songwriting of war-trauma are encoded in the multi-layered texture of her songs and their visual adaptations, the full meaning of Cave's *Skeleton Tree* lies not as much in its lacunary aesthetic as in its ripple effect. Therefore, we are going to analyse Cave's live performance of *Skeleton Tree* in his 2017-2018 Tour in order to probe its impact and position in his wider repertoire.

CHAPTER 13. Cave and the Redemptive Poetics of Trauma Song-Writing

*Teach me now to listen,
To strike it rich behind the linear black.*
“Clearances”, Seamus Heaney.

The wound is the place where the Light enters you.
Rumi.

These streams within us are of an alarming plasticity.
Georges Bataille.⁵⁹⁷

Whereas *Let England Shake* is a matured art project, due to its immediate autobiographical content, Cave’s *Skeleton Tree* is aesthetically stripped and does not enter into a conversation with trauma art, but conveys an experience of trauma in real time. As a result of the lack of psychological distance, Cave has restricted artistic agency and is unable to engage in aesthetic experimentation, hence a fragmented and minimalist album aesthetic that eludes interpretation. In fact, it is not within the lacunary songs that insightful readings can be conducted, but at the periphery of the album, in the documentary film *One More Time with Feeling*,⁵⁹⁸ and in the subsequent live performances of the songs. Therefore, much like the texture of the album itself is elliptical and elusive, its analysis requires a non-linear approach encompassing its gestation and subsequent positioning in Cave’s repertoire and artistic trajectory. Firstly, we are going to scan *One more Time with Feeling* for an insight into Cave’s creative process, and secondly we will investigate how his trauma songs entail a reconfiguration of Cave’s erotics of performance and stage dynamics, and a fresh interplay between Cave and his audience. In particular, this chapter will focus on how the Cavian song space becomes a space for transformation and post-traumatic growth.

⁵⁹⁷ BATAILLE, Georges. *Inner Experience*. Trans. Stuart Kendall. Albany: State University Press of New York, 2014. 127.

⁵⁹⁸ *One More Time with Feeling*. Dir. Andrew Dominik. *Op. Cit.*

1. *One More Time with Feeling* and the Redemptive Poetry of Disaster: “Steve Mc Queen”

Because someone’s gotta sing the stars

And someone’s gotta sing the rain

And someone’s gotta sing the blood

*And someone’s gotta sing the pain.*⁵⁹⁹

Nick Cave, 2016.

In the documentary *One More Time with Feeling*, Cave provides an insight into his unyielding quest for creative healing and sublimation against the backdrop of his subjective disintegration:

Most of us don’t want to change really, I mean why should we? What we want to do is modify, most of us don’t want to change, what we do want is slight modifications on the original. We keep on being ourselves but just hopefully better versions of ourselves. But what happens when an event occurs that is so catastrophic that you just change from one day to the next? You change from the known person to the unknown person, so that when you look at yourself in the mirror, you recognise the person but you know the person inside the skin is a different person. So that when you go outside, the world is the same but now you are a different person so you have to renegotiate your position in the world.⁶⁰⁰

Whilst contemplating his grief and self-alienation in bewildered numbness, Cave also articulates an attempt to “renegotiate his position in the world” and redefine his subjective boundaries. In this respect, *Skeleton Tree* is an album of transformation, imposed by disastrous external circumstances, but transformation all the same. Cave’s perception of self-dislocation echoes the tone and music of the album: his changed vocals are expressive of the inner fracture and defamiliarisation that he describes (i.e., “when you look at yourself in the mirror, you recognise the person but you know the person inside the skin is a different person”). *One more Time with Feeling*⁶⁰¹ thus documents the dimensions of post-traumatic shock: the feeling of being shattered from within, and of being stranded in existential limbo, as one’s self-narrative is blown to pieces by the intrusion of the unthinkable.⁶⁰² The film captures Cave’s grappling

⁵⁹⁹ CAVE, Nick. *One More Time with Feeling*, *Op.Cit.*

⁶⁰⁰ CAVE, Nick. *Ibid.*

⁶⁰¹ *One More Time with Feeling*. Dir. Andrew Dominik. *Op. Cit.*

⁶⁰² HERMAN. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. *Op. Cit.* See also VAN DER KOLK, Bessel, and Onno VAN DER HART, “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma.” *Op.Cit.* CARUTH. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory Op.Cit.*

with the unspeakability of trauma, and his groping for his own voice and plot, in an incipient form of real time life-songwriting. In contrast to his customary upfront attitude and banter, Cave is tentative, edgy, candidly self-observing and processing his inability to function socially or creatively, and to interact spontaneously (i.e., “I must remember to be kind”). Cave’s voice-over ruminations and conversations on *One more Time with Feeling* can be read as his personal and artistic attempt to return to creativity – and life.

The documentary is two-fold: whilst primarily documenting the nitty-gritty of the album’s studio recording, it also enables Cave to ponder the impact of trauma on his creativity. The intermingled personal and musical strands thus sustain a general reflection on the impact of trauma both on the individual and their ability to function as an artist.

The most illuminating part of the film lies in the poetic potency and vivid imagery of Cave’s voice-over readings. He alchemises the maelstrom of his emotions into evocative verse that not only delves into the psychological dimensions of grief, but also ignites fresh creative flights of fancy. Effectively, the poetic charge of his spoken words fills in the gaps of the album’s lacunary lyrics, and articulates Cave’s impulse to reach out from despair to defiant survival.

An epitome of the creative pool at the heart of disaster, Cave’s poem “Steve McQueen”⁶⁰³ stands out as a beacon of poetic light in the film. First read out as a voice-over, the poem was subsequently used in the promotional video for the DVD release in 2017.⁶⁰⁴ An epic narrative brimming with the double awareness of traumatic loss and of the fierce necessity to overcome it, the piece poetically encapsulates Cave’s urgent quest for a creative outcome to his trauma, whilst resuming some of his pre- *Skeleton Tree* idiom. Through a close reading of the poem, we are going to probe the scope for a new form of Cavian defiant verse of disaster.

⁶⁰³ CAVE, Nick. *Spoken poetry. One More Time with Feeling. Op. Cit.*

⁶⁰⁴ CAVE, Nick. “Steve McQueen.” *One More Time with Feeling*. Dir. Andrew Dominik. Iconocast/JW Films/Pulse Films, 2017. Official promotional Video, 30 March 2017. <<https://youtu.be/uWjZ85m1BKg>> Accessed 8/08/2017.

“Steve Mc Queen” and the Defiant Verse of Disaster

STEVE MC QUEEN

Here I am the Moonlight Man with a six-shooter
Call me a cab
I'm that kinda guy, I have a dream
Sometimes I get the elevator to the top of the Burj Al Arab
And shoot my guns across Dubai
Bang, bang, bang, I'm that kinda guy

But mostly I curl up inside my typewriter
Curl up inside my typewriter and wish that I could die

Your legs are so long they should come with their own elevator
Don't worry darling I'll be coming around to see you later
Because between you and me and my best friend the housefly
I'm a Steve McQueen with a big, beautiful dream

I am God
I am God thinking about God thinking about Steve McQueen

It's for me the sirens and the sylphs do their twilight pining
On Saturday night I walk on someone else's stomach lining

Up and down the street, call me a cab, call me a cab
No I'm a housefly called God and I don't give a fuck

Here I come up the elevator
Sixty floors hoping I don't get stuck
And everyone out here does mean
And everyone out here does pain
But someone's gotta sing the stars
And someone's gotta sing the rain

I'm the atomizer
I'm the vaporizer
I turn everything to crud
I like it here in your flesh and blood
I'm the elevator man don't you see?
You're a spider lashed, long-legged lovely young thing [1'59]
Call me a cab, I'll drive to the top of the Burj Al Arab and fire my guns across your stomach

Because someone's gotta sing the stars
And someone's gotta sing the rain
And someone's gotta sing the blood
And someone's gotta sing the pain

Watch out you fuckers
I've got my six shooter and my housefly on a lead
I'm Burj al-McQueen and I'm coming to make every last one of you bleed

God is great, chances are
God is good, well I wouldn't go that far

I'm Steve McQueen the atrocity man
With my strap-on blood porn dream

But mostly I curl up inside my typewriter with my housefly and cry
I tell my housefly not to cry
My housefly tells me not to die

Because someone's gotta sing the stars
And someone's gotta sing the rain
And someone's gotta sing the blood
And someone's gotta sing the pain

The reference to the 1963 iconic film *The Great Escape*⁶⁰⁵ and its script of resourceful perseverance in the face of one's enemy transposes Cave's autobiographical trauma into a fictional and allegorical framework of war imprisonment. Breaking away from the shackles of rationality, Cave expresses himself poetically and reinvents himself as irreverent rebel Steve McQueen/Hill, thereby reclaiming agency over his own narrative.

"Steve Mc Queen" is a paradoxical piece: whilst Cave's low-key delivery and strained voice convey the corporeal toll of his trauma, the text itself is a manic statement of vitriolic survival. Featuring a surreal flight of fancy to the sixtieth floor of the Burj El Arab, the poem wavers between the depths of despair ("But mostly I curl up inside my typewriter with my housefly and cry."), and retaliatory self-affirmation ("I like it here in your flesh and blood / ...call me a cab, I'll drive to the top of the Burj El Arab/And fire my guns across your stomach"). This oscillation between crippling despair and the urge to hit back falls into two figurative clusters: recoiling into his typewriter with his housefly and wanting to cry (or die), and running up the Burj El Arab all guns blazing to shoot across Dubai. The two antithetical movements instill a dynamic tension that underpins the whole poem: whilst the "all guns blazing" fantasy ignites surreal fantasies of almighty bravado ("I am God thinking about God thinking about Steve Mc Queen"/"No I'm a housefly called God and I don't give a fuck"), the downbeat typewriter theme sobers down to a poetic acceptance of defeat ("Because someone's gotta sing the stars/And someone's gotta sing the rain/And someone's gotta sing the blood. And someone's gotta sing the pain").

⁶⁰⁵ *The Great Escape*. Dir. John Sturges. Perf. Steve McQueen. 1963. John Sturges.

In the *Skeleton Tree* and *One More Time With Feeling* diptych, “Steve Mc Queen” is the only piece containing overt traces of Cave’s old comic grotesque repertoire in its hyperbolic provocation and megalomania (e.g., “I am God”/“It’s for me the sirens and the sylphs do their twilight pining”), aggressive self-affirmation (“On Saturday night I walk on someone else’s stomach lining”), and abusive language (e.g., “watch out you fuckers”/ “I don’t give a fuck”) which are reminiscent of such defiant epics as “O’Malley’s Bar” or “Stagger Lee”. Like the protagonists of his tall tales, Cave the narrator casts himself as the hero of his own epic, as explicit in the mythopoeic self-characterisation (i.e., “Moonlight Man” with his six-shooter, “Elevator Man” going up the Burj El Arab, and “Atrocity Man” with his “strap-on porn blood dream”), and in the emblematic attributes that morph him into a folklore hero (e.g., a six-shooter and a housefly). Moreover, much like other Cavian tall tales, the narrator’s propensity for self-aggrandising surfaces in the exaggeration of their feats (e.g., “I am God”, “I am the atomiser/ I am the vaporiser”) and a fascination with abjection (“I turn everything to crud”). As he finally spits out his bile defiantly (“Watch out you fuckers/I’ve got my six shooter and my housefly on a lead/ I’m Burj al-McQueen and I’m coming to make every last one of you bleed”), “Comeback Cave” resurrects the macho bravado of his tall tale heroes, mingling comic grotesque extravagance and self-affirmative aggression.

However, contrary to other Cavian epics, the hyperbolic fantasy of “Steve Mc Queen” does not blossom into a final murder extravaganza, but instead the violent build-up systematically collapses back into the downbeat theme of crushing grief. Thus every time Cave hits back at life’s atrocity (e.g., by getting his six-shooter out and going up the elevator), he is cut short in his impetus by the lines “But mostly I curl up inside my typewriter/Curl up inside my typewriter and wish that I could die” and “But mostly I curl up inside my typewriter with my housefly and cry”, which trap the narrative into a circular structure.

The final flight of fancy spectacularly illustrates this build-up and crash pattern, as it culminates with a fierce anti-climax:

I am Steve McQueen the atrocity man
 With my strap-on blood porn dream
 But mostly I curl up inside my typewriter with my housefly and cry.

A grotesque piece of self-mythologising and transgression, the “atrocity-man” with “a strap-on blood porn dream” conflates transgressive violence (“blood porn dream”) and the ludicrous (“a strap-on dream”), thereby instilling hints of barbaric delight. However, the anti-climax of “mostly I curl up ...” is all the more searing as the self-affirmative fantasy peaks with an

obscene image, only to come crashing down with an admission of powerlessness. The striking contrast between Cave's defiant McQueen stance and the acknowledgement of defeat is a vivid encapsulation of a paradoxical response to atrocity: although the individual may retaliate by affirming the resilience of the human spirit, they also remain painfully aware of their limitations and of the futility of their rebellion.

Like Steve McQueen breaking away from his war prison in "The Great Escape", Cave stages his own "great escape" from the constraints of rationality and linearity, and produces a piece of astounding trauma poetry. The emancipatory move enables him to reconnect with his transgressive songwriting of excess, and to craft a grotesque epic that relieves the burden of grief with an imaginary flight. Thanks to this return to a fictional creative space and its enhanced psychical distance towards trauma, Cave can simultaneously express the entrapment of trauma whilst breaking through it by artistic means.

Somewhere between dejection and rebellion against the cruelty of fate, Cave lyrically suggests a redemptive outlet to trauma through creativity, thus delineating the purpose of art as an expression of shared human experience and a path to sublimation:

My housefly tells me not to die
Because someone's gotta sing the stars
And someone's gotta sing the rain
And someone's gotta sing the blood
and someone's got to sing the pain.

The passage signifies the necessity of resilience and survival ("my housefly tells me *not to die*", italics mine) so as to convey the experience of existential atrocity through artistic expression (i.e., "sing the pain"). Indeed, the repeated obligation of "someone's gotta sing" points to the imperious necessity of self-expression not only for subjective but also for collective survival, implicitly pointing to a poetic duty to turn suffering into shared human experience. The use of the indefinite pronoun "someone" points to the universality of the experience and shifts the focus away from the individual to the anonymous collective as a conduit to transformation.

The use of the definite article "the" in the enumeration "the stars...the rain... the blood... the pain" hints at the generic quality of suffering (i.e., "rain", "blood" and "pain") whilst affirming the need for artistic transcendence (i.e., the "stars") in the face of existential atrocity. The inclusion of the cosmic element with the word "stars" bears testament to the redemptive potential of art as conducive to cosmic transcendence. The poem highlights the universal trajectory of senseless disaster and suggests that the purpose of art is to alchemise

painful individual experience into existential meaning. In this particular passage, Cave articulates the paradoxical effect of trauma: whilst its full force crushes the human spirit, it is the subjective disintegration that leads to spiritual epiphany (“the stars”) and a heightened sense of universality.

The paradoxical mechanisms whereby traumatic experience spurs on renewed spiritual and vital vigour is only incipient in the *Skeleton Tree – One more time With Feeling* diptych, but it surfaces in Cave’s 2017 retrospective comments:

I’ve never felt life wasn’t worth living.

If anything, those dark times, where the tragedy lies, tell you just as much

- in fact even more - that life is worth living.⁶⁰⁶

The urge to live life to the full in spite of tragedy and to find redemption through music came to fruition with his *Skeleton Tree* 2017 Tour, which became a moment of communal catharsis and life affirmation.

While analysing the texture of the album and film sheds partial light on the aesthetic and intersubjective ramifications of *Skeleton Tree*, it is in the post-album effects that the most insightful interpretative paths are to be found. In order to gauge the impact of *Skeleton Tree* on Cave’s artistic trajectory and interaction with his audience, the new material should be examined through its live performance, which unlocks its transformative potential.

2. Sublimating Trauma: Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds 2017 Tour

2.1. Post-Traumatic Growth: Transformation and Sublimation

As discussed in Chapter 10, trauma theory has established that turning traumatic memory into narrative memory is essential to overcoming trauma,⁶⁰⁷ and that the purpose of trauma writing is to engage the audience in a reflection on individual suffering and communal healing, thereby transforming trauma into shared experience.⁶⁰⁸

Having analysed Cave’s songs of trauma in terms of mechanisms and as a life-writing idiom, we are going to address the question of their artistic impact through the prism of post-traumatic growth. As argued in Chapter 10, trauma theorists have established that trauma

⁶⁰⁶ CAVE, Nick. “The problem most songwriters have in rock music is writing honest songs.” *Op. Cit*

⁶⁰⁷ JANET. *Les Médications psychologiques*. *Op. Cit.*

⁶⁰⁸ VICKROY. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*. *Op. Cit.*, 3-5.

induces a loss of personal narrative and bearings, and thus throws the subject into an abyss of incomprehension and unspeakability. Trauma is therefore an “experience which causes changes to one’s world view and elicits a feeling of helplessness and lost agency”.⁶⁰⁹ Moreover, tragedy also offers an opportunity for fresh personal development and can lead to a form of redemptive learning that arises concomitantly with pain, which psychologists call “post-traumatic growth”.

Psychologists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun coined the term “post-traumatic growth” (PTG) in reference to observable positive changes occurring in an individual after they experienced a major life crisis.⁶¹⁰ Traumatic experience, whether due to an act of God or man, profoundly challenges agency and predictability, and according to Tedeschi and Calhoun’s model, as the person processes the meaning of their loss and makes sense of traumatic chaos, they come to find unexpected value in the experience. Tedeschi and Calhoun’s growth typology includes a changed sense of self (i.e., enhanced inner strength), changed relationships, a new sense of connectedness with other people, an ability to better relate emotionally and empathically with other people, and a changed philosophy of life (i.e., a greater sense of one’s life priorities). Post-traumatic growth is conditioned by the subject’s capacity to accept trauma and the limitations of human life.

Before being formulated in psychological terms, post-traumatic growth has always been a primary focus of spiritual learning, and world religions have articulated it in terms of brokenness and healing, light and darkness, thereby acknowledging the potential for trauma to prompt an existential or spiritual quest, and to lead to self-learning and acceptance of the limitations of the human condition.

Whereas trauma itself is intimate, post-traumatic growth is not, it occurs through a greater sense of interconnectedness with other human beings and the world in general. Post-traumatic growth requires the individual to reach out from the depths of despair and loneliness and reconnect with the common ground of humanity, so that the very experience of suffering enables them to be hoisted back into the fold of humanity.

As argued in Chapter 12, Harvey’s songwriting of trauma contains in-built patterns of intersubjective and cultural interconnectedness to turn collective trauma into shared experience

⁶⁰⁹ GORDON, Abigail, and Kate SZYMANSKI. “Breaking the Silence: Reevaluation What Makes An Experience A Trauma.” *The Unspeakable: Narratives of Trauma*. Ed. Magda STROIŃSKA, Vikki CECCHETTO, and Kate SZYMANSKI. Frankfurt am Main: PL Academic research, 2014. 249-260. 258.

⁶¹⁰ TEDESCHI, Richard, and Lawrence, CALHOUN. *Trauma and Transformation Growing in the Aftermath of Suffering*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995.

(e.g., cross-references to other trauma art forms, to popular soldiers' songs, musical quotes from Kurdish and Anglo-Jamaican culture, synaesthetic experience...). *Let England Shake* thus incorporates post-traumatic growth pathways within its fabric. Conversely, being trapped in the mental corridors of trauma, *Skeleton Tree* offers no such post-traumatic growth outlet, no broader collective or cultural perspective, it is immersed in the movements of Cave's psyche. Whereas Harvey self-effaces behind her album and lets it run its course, Cave thus ends up centre stage. The album's temporality is a black hole locked away from ordinary life, poised in a liminal space where the rules of linearity and emotionality are suspended. Consequently, post-traumatic growth does not occur within the scope of the album, but it in its wake, during its live performance.

2.2. Performing *Skeleton Tree* Live

In view of the gaping abyss separating *Skeleton Tree* from Cave's prior songbook, the question that came to mind when Cave's 2017 live Tour was announced was its performance. How would Cave perform *Skeleton Tree*'s raw autobiographical material side by side with his previous boisterous gothic grotesque numbers? Cave's signature performance style had hitherto been mostly hyperbolic, playful, and confrontational, which was not suitable for the dark content of *Skeleton Tree*. How would Cave combine the two antithetical bodies of work, and how would he perform them? In order to appraise the impact of *Skeleton Tree* and its interaction with former scripts of monstrosity, I am going to analyse the staple 2017 concert format based on online footage of the Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds 2017 Tour and on my personal experience of The O2 Arena concert in London in September 2017.

The 2017 Cave and The Bad Seeds Tour, which was announced shortly after the release of *Skeleton Tree* in September 2016, included twelve dates in Australia and New Zealand (January 2017), nineteen dates in North America (May and June 2017), and thirty dates in Europe (September to November 2017). The tour set the fan social media astir, as indeed there was much speculation about what the show would be like. As soon as the show hit the road in Australia and New Zealand, there was intense social media posting of footage documenting the performance of the new and old material. Most shows unfolded according to one set-list template interspersing dark pieces from *Skeleton Tree* with classic raging stampedes such as "Red Right Hand", "From Her to Eternity", "Tupelo", and "The Mercy Seat". The set-list establishes an unlikely continuity between the raucous old tracks and the more recent material with its dark introspective pieces (e.g., "Anthrocene", "Jesus Alone", "Magneto" ...)

Significantly, the shows were framed by *Skeleton Tree* tracks, which opened and closed the shows.

Staple Set-list for the 2017 Tour:

| TRACKS | Album, (Year) |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Anthrocene | <i>Skeleton Tree</i> (2016) |
| Jesus Alone | <i>Skeleton Tree</i> (2016) |
| Magneto | <i>Skeleton Tree</i> (2016) |
| Higgs Boson Blues | <i>Push the Sky Away</i> (2013) |
| From Her to Eternity | <i>From Her to Eternity</i> (1984) |
| Tupelo | <i>The First Born is Dead</i> (1985) |
| Jubilee Street | <i>Push the Sky Away</i> (2013) |
| The Ship Song | <i>The Good Son</i> (1990) |
| Into My Arms | <i>Boatman's Call</i> (1997) |
| Girl in Amber | <i>Skeleton Tree</i> (2016) |
| I Need You | <i>Skeleton Tree</i> (2016) |
| Red Right Hand | <i>Let Love In</i> (1994) |
| The Mercy Seat | <i>Tender Prey</i> (1988) |
| Distant Sky | <i>Skeleton Tree</i> (2016) |
| Skeleton Tree | <i>Skeleton Tree</i> (2016) |

Encore:

| | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| The Weeping Song | <i>The Good Son</i> (1990) |
| Stagger Lee | <i>Murder Ballads</i> (1996) |
| Push the Sky Away | <i>Push the Sky Away</i> (2013) |

The opening of the concert is significant of a new performance dynamic, and establishes a blueprint for the whole concert dynamic. Indeed, the initial transition between the three dark *Skeleton Tree* songs and Cave's older material establishes a staple interplay between darkness and light, interiority and externality, introspection and communality.

Introspection and Darkness

Due their sombre introspective content, the *Skeleton Tree* opening tracks "Anthrocene", "Jesus alone", and "Magneto" compel a sober stage performance. Cave thus delivers them at some physical distance from the audience, sitting mid-stage on a high stool. Whilst sombre in tone, the songs also shimmer with a liminal electronic sound that opens onto more expansive atmospheric fields, and provides a potential escape route out of the pervasive desolation. Cave captured this potential in his rendition of the opening *Skeleton Tree* triptych, and performing with a subtle balance of introspective restraint and poetic quiver, he coaxed out their ethereal tentativeness. Emphasising flux rather than regularity, his sung-spoken delivery mingled with the ambient instrumentation to tiptoe on the edge of the confessional and poetic modes. The songs thus segued into a hypnotic flow, and the audience stood still in silent concentration, engrossed in the movement. But then, just when the show could have tipped into downright

communal grief, Cave steers abruptly away from the tense build-up by engaging in a spectacularly exuberant performance of “Higgs Boson Blues”: enter “Comeback Cave”.

A Pulse-Feeling Epic: “Higgs Boson Blues”⁶¹¹

Starting out as a bluesy ambient rumination, the song bursts into an unexpectedly life-affirming hymn, as Cave leaps from the distant introspection of the previous songs into full-on frontstage physicality. The song becomes a pulse-feeling epic, with Cave surfing the crowd, feeling for his audience’s hands to prop himself up and be propped up. Cave consistently solicits the audience to feel his pulse (“Can you feel my heart beat?” he repeats), while the “boom-boom” of the lyrics provides a vocal mantra to the intermingling of bodies and heartbeats. Cave’s new stage presence is more physical than ever, and pulsates with a raw life force that compels physical and emotional bonding. The song stands out as a tipping-point in the concert’s dynamic: it steers the audience and performer into organic communality and defiant life affirmation, sublimating the darker opening songs with jubilant emotional and corporeal effusion.

Cave thus uses the black hole of subjective dissolution as a conduit from loneliness to togetherness, from the intimate to the universal, and from crushing grief to exulting liberation. Tellingly, in his subsequent interviews, Cave was also keen to draw a line between his private grief and the live dynamics of his concert:

[...] one thing I don’t want is people having to come along and involve themselves in someone else’s drama. I don’t want the shows to be like that. I want the shows to be uplifting and inspiring and for people to walk away feeling better than when they came, not some sort of empathetic contagion that goes through the crowd and people walk out feeling like shit. I don’t want that. Because I’m not feeling that way. On stage I feel great. It just sort of feels beautiful and inspiring. The songs are strange things, you know. They’re patient, and wait for the meaning and then meaning changes through the years.⁶¹²

Cave’s determination to keep the live experience vibrant transpires in the sheer energy and synergy of the 2017 Tour concerts: Cave and his public just rave through them, energising each other throughout. Although the autobiographical source material was gruesome, the concerts

⁶¹¹ *Push the Sky Away*, 2013.

⁶¹²CAVE, Nick. Interview. “I have turned a corner and wandered into a vast landscape.” *The Guardian online*. *The Guardian*, 4 May 2017. Accessed 15/05/2017.

< <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/may/04/nick-cave-death-son-struggle-write-tragedy> >

stood out as potent life-affirming events. Cave thus effected a strange *tour de force*: after releasing a highly personal album that elicited a wave of compassion on the part of his fans, he steered the boat back into exuberant performance and unbridled physicality. Namely, he stopped his fans from over-identifying with his grief, and from associating him with his grief only. In this respect, Cave uses the concert as a site for emotional renewal and creative re-empowerment.

3. Cave's New Erotics of Performance

3.1. From Confrontational to Communal: The Place of Physicality

The most striking element in Cave's 2017 Tour is the new erotics of performance arising from his unprecedented level of corporeal proximity with his audience. His 2017 Tour has become known for its record instances of crowd-surfing and mutual pulse-feeling, with Cave repeatedly lying atop the crowd. Cave's demand for his physical existence to be acknowledged is a peculiar form of life affirmation that is new to his stage dynamic. This new physicality surfaces in the constant pulse-feeling between Cave and his audience, whether it is Cave feeling for his audience's pulse or the other way around, and the touching weaves itself in and around the performance of the songs. This life-affirming physical bond between Cave and his audience is new, since in Cave's former concert template, life affirmation would occur either through joint transgression (murder songs) or mutual fictional empathy (love songs), but not through touching, or at least not on such a momentous scale.

This new physical proximity reshuffles the interaction between Cave and his public, and signifies a profound shift in Cave's performing strategy: it is no longer oppositional but communal, relying on fusion and intimacy, rather than taunting and confrontation, as Cave subsequently noted:

I come from a different school of frontmen. Full-on attack. It's an attack on your audience of some sort. It's just the way it's always been."

That has changed. "Even though the finger comes out, it doesn't feel like that in the same ways it used to feel. It feels much more that there's something coming back. Something different has been happening with the audience—a kind of dynamic, emotional exchange—that is quite beautiful. There's just some kind of communal feeling. Maybe this is what it's like to be in Coldplay or something."⁶¹³

⁶¹³ CAVE, Nick. Interview. "The Love and Terror of Nick Cave." *GQ online*. GQ, 27 April 2017.

In acknowledging his move from confrontational frontmanship (i.e., the shock tactics of his “full-on attack”) to “an emotional exchange” with his audience, Cave points to a significant shift in his performance dynamic. The “something coming back” from the audience occurs in reaction to his altered performance: whereas formerly, Cave would playfully confront his audience with his stage antics and perform *at* them, in his 2017 Tour, he engages in call and response, thereby prompting optimal interaction with his audience. Therefore, the audience are not positioned as mere spectators of his show, but indeed as active participants. As a result, whether Cave beckons the audience for intimacy or buoyancy, the audience respond in kind. Cave thus initiates a new stage formula whereby his performance is as much about embodying his songs as about engaging in interactive communion with his audience.

For the purpose, the set-list is crafted as a fine balance of fraught introspective songs and vibrant pieces compelling tension release. It systematically counterbalances *Skeleton Tree* songs with more boisterous numbers from the former repertoire such as “Tupelo”, “From Her to Eternity”, or “Red Right Hand”. These songs provide a fictional respite from the existential weight of the *Skeleton Tree* songs and enable Cave and his audience to tread their common ground, and communicate in a known transgressive idiom again. The eruption of the older Cavian classics jolts the audience out of their restrained response to the *Skeleton Tree* songs and into a boisterous merry-go-round.

In between the raucous classics and the *Skeleton Tree* songs, there are also other intermediate pieces such as love songs (i.e. “Into My Arms”, “Ship Song”) and new life-affirming pieces such as “Jubilee Street” or “Higgs Boson Blues”. The love songs bring soothing musical harmony, whilst “Jubilee Street” and “Higgs Boson Blues” stand out as the two most transformative songs of the concert. The latter two are not intrinsically transformative but Cave’s performance renders them so: “Higgs Boson Blues” morphs into a pulse-feeling epic, and “Jubilee Street” into a hymn of exultation. The “Jubilee Street” finale flares up into a three-minute hypnotic trance with a fast and furious rock stampede to the lyrical loop:

I am transforming
I am vibrating
I am glowing
Look at me now

<<https://www.gq.com/story/the-love-and-terror-of-nick-cave>> Accessed 15/05/2019.

I am flying.

Cave's performance is electrifying, trance-like, with manic accelerations, as Cave indefatigably goes crowd-swimming, leaping mid-stage, front-stage, or pounding out on his piano. It is a moment of classic communal stampede and of redemptive life affirmation that epitomises the individual and collective re-empowerment achieved through the concerts.

3.2. Live Shows as Communal Post-Traumatic Growth

In its reliance upon such a delicate balance of moods, the show unfolds like an emotional epic towards post-traumatic growth. It goes from the abysses of despair, through the boisterous exhilaration of gothic-grotesque mayhem, through to jubilant life affirmation. There is a redemptive quality to the journey, an all-abiding feeling of communal catharsis. Cave aptly embraces the concert's tonal contradictions for all their transformative potential, and alchemises them into a potent creative vortex that drives audience and performers into collective re-empowerment. This trajectory relies on the components of post-traumatic growth as defined by Tedeschi and Calhoun, notably in the new sense of interconnectedness with other people, and an enhanced appreciation of the present moment.⁶¹⁴

The shifting moods are reflected in Cave's fluctuating personae in the show: "Cave the gothic grotesque Lord of misrule" who impersonates and enacts horror, "Cave the Human Being" in existential rumination, and the more recent pulse-feeling "Life force Cave". Where his interplay used to be mostly stage persona's taunting and intimidation, Cave now engages in unmediated contact with his public, slipping in and out of his character impersonations, dipping in and out of open-heartedness and theatricality, thereby further blurring the boundaries between the masks of his stage personae and the man behind the masks.

What is the place of monstrosity in this new balance? And what is the place of monstrosity in the new performance format?

4. New Performance Dynamics

We are going to study how Cave's new performance strategy affects alters stage dynamics and his interaction with his audience.

⁶¹⁴ TEDESCHI and CALHOUN. *Trauma and Transformation Growing in the Aftermath of Suffering*. *Op. Cit.*

4.1. Cave's Fictional Stage Persona(e) and Co-performance

Prior to his 2017 Tour, when performing his monstrous songs, Cave would position himself as a gothic-grotesque narrator and impersonator: he enacted the monstrosity of his songworld, and was the proxy monster inflicting violence on his audience or for their vicarious benefit. His performance strategy reflected the primacy of monstrosity in his music, and it was accordingly confrontational, with much finger-wagging at and terrorising of the front rows.⁶¹⁵ In embodying the monstrous protagonists of his stories, Cave acted as a conduit to horror, which had an impact on his artistic persona. And indeed his persona retained residual traces of his monstrous performance, witness Cave's nickname in the popular music press: "the Prince of Darkness". The phrase, rumoured to have been originally bestowed on Cave by Johnny Cash, encapsulates a public perception of Cave's persona as sombre and diabolical, in keeping with the under-worldly quality of his music. If we apply Simon Frith's theory of the rock star's double-enactment⁶¹⁶ to Cave's persona; Cave enacts his "song personality" by embodying gross corporeality and the psychic edge, whilst he simultaneously fleshes out his "star personality" in the process. As the two enactments rub off on each other, Cave's persona is imbued with the monstrosity of his songworld.

The blurred boundaries between Cave's artistic persona and his real person are also inherent in musical performance, as demonstrated by Philip Auslander.⁶¹⁷ Auslander approaches musicians as social beings performing "an identity in as social realm",⁶¹⁸ and analyses the performer in terms "personage", that is "the character's presence in the actor's performance".⁶¹⁹ Positing musical performance as the artist performing their self within the discursive site of music,⁶²⁰ Auslander theorises musical performance as "a form of self-expression that can be perceived as personally expressive while others may not."⁶²¹ Auslander thus pinpoints a potent overlap between the musician's being and their personage. Cave has

⁶¹⁵ CAVE, *Nick. 20 000 Days on Earth*. Dir. Ian Forsyth and Jane Pollard. Corniche Films/BFI/ Film 4/ Pulse Films, 2014. Film.

⁶¹⁶ FRITH, *Simon. Performing Rites. Op.Cit.* Chapter 10: Performance. Frith contends that, through performance, the pop star carries out a double enactment: that of the "song personality" (embodying the essential meaning of the song) and that of the "star personality", namely the projected stage persona of the singer.

⁶¹⁷ AUSLANDER Philip. "Musical Personae." *The Drama Review* 50.1 (Spring 2006): 100-119.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.* Auslander's argument is based on David Graver's analysis of actors and their impersonations, and his formulation of "personage" as a way of "representing oneself in a particular discursive domain". Graver [1997], 2003:164. Qtd. in Auslander 102.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, 101-102.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

abundantly played on this personal ambiguity of embodied performance in order to conjure up a “cruel intellectual” aura about him.

Pre-2017, “Cruel Cave” was engaged in a double movement: on the one hand, he would terrorise his audience, and on the other hand, he created a jubilantly transgressive bond with them, whereby both parties derived barbaric delight from the spectacle and fictional co-enactment of violence. At the time, Cave would get teasingly close to touching the audience and then step back before any physical contact could take place. In that taunting performance, the interplay with his audience was clearly polarised: on the one hand, there was Cave the performer, and on the other hand, the listeners. However, the new stage template has changed. Along with his new erotics of performance, Cave’s drafts in new stage dynamics that further foreground interpersonal contact by bringing co-performance to the fore.

4.2. From Co-Narration to Co-Performance: Fluctuating Stage Boundaries

Building upon Frith’s formulation of artistic personae, Allan Moore puts forward three levels of personae: the performer level, the persona as a construction, and the protagonist, namely the assumed identity of the performer within the span of a song.⁶²² Moore further distinguishes between a realistic persona (interpreted as coming directly from the singer) and a fictional persona (when a performer explicitly impersonates a character). Moore’s typology of personae is a useful filter to examine Cave’s stage dynamics by.

By engaging in physical closeness and reducing the interpersonal distance with his audience, Cave merges all three constitutive levels of his persona (i.e., performer, persona, protagonist), hence the audience feel they have unmediated access to Cave the human being, stripped of his performer’s frills. This impression of authenticity and direct access to Cave’s subjectivity opens a sensual and emotional flow with his audience, thereby creating optimal kinship between the performer and his audience. This new proximity not only overhauls Cave’s performance of monstrosity, but also the listener’s experience of monstrosity, as the immediate physical bond effectively upstages the fictional “torturer to willing victim” or “complicit monster” dynamic. Indeed, in momentarily stepping out of his monstrous protagonist/persona attire, Cave recontextualises the monstrous game: the S&M interplay whereby Cave inflicts the

⁶²² MOORE, Allan. *Song Means: Analysing and Interpreting Popular Songs*. Farnham, Great Britain; and Burlington, US: Ashgate, 2012.

violence of his songworld on his audience is reframed as a *joint* performance of monstrosity. In an unprecedented move, Cave draws his audience into co-performance and co-ownership of the stage in his “Stagger Lee” concert finales: instead of being a *vicarious* co-enactor of Cave’s performance of monstrosity, the audience becomes an *active* co-performer.

The “Stagger Lee” Finale: Cave’s New Normal

Co-performance is a highlight of the 2017 concert finales, notably with the new stage dynamic of the “Stagger Lee” finale. The comic grotesque stampede, with its outrageous language and outsize murder drama, affords a classic moment of jubilant joint transgression that has made it a finale favourite for the last twenty years. However, during the 2017 Tour, Cave introduced a twist in its live performance.

Until then, Cave would perform “Stagger Lee” in comic grotesque narrative mode, as a barbaric narrator/monstrous impersonator thrilling his audience with the foul language and gruesome content of his song. In the 2017 tour however, Cave overhauled his performance strategy: he no longer performed it onstage by himself but instead invited forty to fifty audience members onstage. In this new routine, the audience continued to dance onstage, while Cave returned front-stage, and later on sang on while wading away into the crowd. In this performance format, the audience provides a visual anchoring in the midst of Cave’s otherwise moveable performance (as Cave disappears into the crowd and unpredictably emerges again in the hall). This new dynamic also introduces an unprecedented level of unpredictability to the shows, since in the course of his roaming, Cave randomly picks out audience members as stage props to his song narratives. For instance, in his London show, he picked out a long-haired Jesus look-alike to come and perform front-stage next to him; elsewhere, he hugs a girl or sits on a spectator’s lap somewhere in the concert hall. Those spontaneous occurrences make each show unique and fill the audience with excited anticipation. In the process, the stage becomes the backdrop to a double narrative: the narrative of the song, and the narrative of the concert itself. Narration becomes split between two temporalities: the other-timely songworld, and the here and now of the concert. These two dimensions collide and superimpose, thereby intensifying the experiential charge of the concert: the concert thus becomes a third interactive space where the audience not only mentally and affectively experience the music, but physically take on the performance of the song. This co-performance blurs the boundaries between performer and spectator, and it becomes unclear who performs what and for whom. What are the audience performing and for whom? How do these multiple embodied selves in

performance affect the reception of the songworld? How do the two concurrent narratives (that of the songworld and that of the live performance) interact?

What emerges from this new performance dynamic is that stage performance is no longer the sole prerogative of the band and singer: it becomes a fluid contact zone, where the boundaries between performer and spectator are porous. Indeed, even the geographical boundaries of the stage are in flux: when Cave wanders off into the crowd and leaves forty audience members to dance onstage by themselves, where is the stage? Offstage blends into onstage in the same manner the roles of spectator and performer become interchangeable.

As the stage boundaries dissolve, and the performing roles are reshuffled, the enactment of monstrosity is reframed: the pattern is no longer that of Cave the narrator-impersonator versus the watching crowd, but rather the monstrous songworld is conveyed as a co-performance. Namely, Cave's murder tales become *physical* role-plays for him and his audience to act out jointly, and in the process, the monster-drama is reframed as a backdrop to his live interaction with his audience. The new moveable stage with the audience as stage props and co-performers invites optimal intimacy between Cave and his audience: combined with the sustained pulse-feeling, it foregrounds togetherness rather than opposition and friction, as had hitherto been the case. In this reconfiguration, comic grotesque transgression and barbaric delight become expressive of defiant togetherness in the face of shattering disaster.

The texture of this new synergy is more complex than straightforward communality, and it is not exempt from Cave's customary hallmarks of ambivalence and disruption.

5. Live Performance as a Gateway to Inner Experience

5.1. Self-disruptive Performance and Reversal of Expectations

Perhaps, the most striking element of Cave's 2017 stage reinvention is that he introduces disruption and tension into his own performance, as if subverting his own stage tactics, thereby confounding his audience's expectations.

Although Cave's musical style has greatly varied in texture and tone over the years, his live sets presented permanent features in terms of interpersonal distance with the audience, and stage ownership. Whether performing contemplative material (e.g., the love songs from *Boatman's Call* [1997] or *No More Shall we Part* [2001]), boisterous pieces (e.g., from *Henry's Dream* [1992], *Grinderman* [2007 and 2009]), or his more recent ambient ruminations (*Push*

the Sky Away, 2013), Cave consistently retained full ownership of both the stage and performance, and positioned himself apart from his audience (either as dark romantic brooder, confrontational frontman or as a meditator on the human condition). Therefore, when attending a Cave concert, the fan-base expects those two key constitutive components, irrespective of the tonal fabric of the performed material, but the 2017 Tour changed the status quo.

The 2017 Tour baffled all expectations: where the audience expected Cave to keep some interpersonal distance and restraint (due to the grief-laden set-list), they were met with effusive physicality. Where they expected the Cavian concert canon with Cave as the sole master of the show, they encountered a role-reversal whereby they were not only invited to co-perform the songs, but also entrusted with the continuity of the performance (when the audience members keep dancing onstage whilst Cave wanders around the concert hall, the stage performance is visually maintained by the dancing audience members.)

With Cave's unprecedented performance strategy, the framework of Cave's performance is rendered unstable, and the familiar unfamiliar. The audience thus experience defamiliarisation: they find themselves in uncharted territory whilst roaming the familiar grounds of a Cave concert. This reinvention challenges assumptions and habitual patterns in favour of the thrills of the unexpected.

The fact that Cave engages in self-disruption points to a subversive component running counter to the semantics of his relationship with his audience. This subversive component is very much akin to Barthes's third meaning,⁶²³ as a subversive principle that counteracts the main flow of aesthetic experience. Cave's stage reinvention causes the fans' knowledge to slip, introducing a counternarrative that reshuffles the modalities and semantics of their interaction. Therefore, notwithstanding the optimal intimacy between Cave and his audience, Cave's new performance style becomes the site of radical instability and unpredictability, the place where prior assumptions get jostled up and become obsolete.

What does this ruptural performance style bring about in terms of live experience?

⁶²³ BARTHES. "Third Meaning." *Image, Music, Text. Op. Cit.* 52-67. Barthes formulates the semiotic lines of aesthetic experience according to three levels of meaning: informational, symbolic, and obtuse meaning (or third meaning). Whereas informational and symbolic meanings entail semiotic decoding, the third meaning is conversely elusive, "a signifier without a signified" (61) reliant on "elliptical emphasis" and "signifying accidents" rather than signs, and as such operates as a counternarrative to the obvious meaning of an artwork, causing interpretation to slip.

5.2. The Place of Ecstatic Unknowing

As a result of intense fan coverage of the concerts on social media, by the end of the 2017 Tour, the audience eagerly anticipated Cave's stage quirks. The unpredictability of the shows led to extensive online speculation as to what new tricks Cave would pull, and what impromptu concert narrative he would thus create. It is in the transience and the whimsicality of the live narrative that the excitement lies: in not knowing in advance, not abiding by any rules, not even insiders' rules. The fact that Cave's strategy of unpredictability still operates in his altered 2017 dynamics testifies to the all-abiding prevalence of the disruptive component in his works and performance alike.

Cave's 2017 concerts brim with a palpable sense of jubilation, as the enhanced intimacy combined with the extreme unpredictability create a sort of experiential vortex that intensifies the experience of the here and now of the event. It is perceptible in Cave's trance-like performance, and in the public's unbridled response to his puns and prompts. I would argue that this new ecstatic exuberance of the concerts issues from the very instability of Cave's performance strategy, from the loss of all previous being and knowledge. Insofar as the shows trigger a form of ecstasy that is correlated to subjective dissolution and loss of bearings, the live experience is related to Barthes's state of *jouissance*,⁶²⁴ a disruptive pleasure arising from the thrilling loss of previous being, which Barthes posits at the heart of the text. Applied to Cave's performance, Barthes's notion of *jouissance* fruitfully establishes the structural correlation between radical experiential instability, subjective dissolution, and ecstasy. While all concerts are potentially conducive to ecstasy due to their emotional charge, Cave inscribes subjective dissolution and *jouissance* at the core of his 2017 shows by turning them into *radically* unpredictable events of emotional and physical intimacy.

Within a known affective bond with his audience, Cave has thus created a place where interpersonal patterns are forever playfully reinvented and reconfigured, and enjoyment is derived from destroying the shackles of habit and linearity in favour of the spontaneous and the new. This conception of bliss issuing from a place of "unknowing" resonates with the Bataillean experience of "the impossible".⁶²⁵ Georges Bataille conceptualises "the impossible" as a reality

⁶²⁴ BARTHES. *The Pleasure of Text*. *Op.Cit.*

⁶²⁵ BATAILLE. "Inner Experience." *The Bataille Reader*. *Op.Cit.* 35-113.

that entails an “abyss of unknowing”⁶²⁶ and subjective dissolution that is conducive to inner experience, which he formulates as:

... a communication, through death, with our beyond (essentially in sacrifice) - not with nothingness, still less with a supernatural being, but with an indefinite reality (which I sometimes call *the impossible*, that is: what can't be grasped [*begreift*] in any way, what we can't reach without dissolving ourselves, what's slavishly called God). If we need to, we can define this reality (provisionally associating it with a finite element) at a higher (higher than the individual on the scale of composition of beings) social level as the sacred, God or created reality. Or else it can remain in an undefined state (in ordinary laughter, infinite laughter, or ecstasy in which the divine form melts like sugar in water).⁶²⁷

Effectively, Cave uses his concerts as gateways to inner experience, as the site of a jubilant discarding of self and an encounter with *the impossible*, and profane transcendence. This disrobing is also conducive to a new state of being, for Cave and his audience alike.

5.3. The “Vivid Present”⁶²⁸ and a New State of Being

In order to shed further light on the inner mechanisms and effects of the new Cavian concert intensity, we are going to use the conceptual filters of “inner time” and the “vivid present”.

Frith⁶²⁹ argues that what music brings to both listeners and performers is a way of being present in the moment, in an extrapolation from Alfred Schultz’s phenomenology of music⁶³⁰ which formulates musical experience as “inner time”. Schultz theorises “inner time” as a peculiar experience of time, a tonal “arrangement meaningful to both the composer and the beholder” because its “stream of consciousness” evokes “an interplay of recollections, retentions, protentions, and anticipations which interrelate the successive elements.”⁶³¹

In articulating “inner time” as a perceptual disjunction with real time, Schultz locates musical experience in a temporal warp binding together performer and listener in one and the same time continuum, which he calls “the vivid present”.⁶³² This altered “stream of consciousness” elicits a polymorphic listening experience whereby “the hearer listens to the ongoing flux of music...not only in the direction from the first to the last bar but simultaneously

⁶²⁶ BOTTING, Fred. Introduction. *The Bataille Reader. Ibid.*, 8.

⁶²⁷ BATAILLE. “Inner Experience.”. *Op. Cit.*, 59.

⁶²⁸ SCHULTZ, Alfred. “Making Music Together.” *Collected Papers*, Volume 2. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964. 171-172; 175.

⁶²⁹ FRITH. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music. Op. Cit.*, 145-157.

⁶³⁰ SCHULTZ. “Making Music Together.” *Op.Cit.*

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, 179-171.

⁶³² *Ibid.*,175.

in a reverse direction back to the first one”.⁶³³ As such, musical experience can be construed as a rupture with linearity and logical sequencing.

Applying Schultz’s chamber music template to popular music, Frith postulates that “the common experience of music is timeless” and the “common use of music is to achieve the state of timelessness”.⁶³⁴ Frith further articulates timelessness as a general dissolution of all perceived contradictions and perceptual boundaries:

Music ...offers us... experience, and for a moment - for moments – that experience involves ideal time, an ideal defined by the integration of what is routinely kept separate- the individual and the social, the mind and the body, change and stillness, the different and the same, the already past and the still to come, desire and fulfilment. Music is in this respect like sex, and rhythm is crucial to this - rhythm not as ‘releasing physical urges’ but as expanding the time in which we can, as it were, live in the present tense.⁶³⁵

According to Frith, the main thrust of music-listening lies in its ability to transport the audience to a timeless site and dissolve established conceptual binaries. Insofar as Frith’s conception of musical timelessness hinges on subjective dissolution into a “vivid present” that tears a hole through rationality, it bears a structural resemblance to Bataille’s conception of “inner experience”.⁶³⁶ Positing inner experience as profane transcendence, Bataille contends that it can only occur through a radical rupture with the linearity of intellectual knowledge, possibility and time, within an ecstatic collapse into an atemporal black hole of un-knowing, “the Impossible”.⁶³⁷ “The Impossible”, Bataille argues, can only be grasped through experience and non-meaning (or non-sense), and by engaging in an ecstatic process interconnecting death, subjective dissolution, laughter, and poetic intoxication.

Bataille’s notion that the sacrifice of selfhood conditions the flight of ecstasy implies that the ecstatic subject is in a state of boundless openness not only within, but also without. Consequently, through inner experience, disrobed (ecstatic) subjects can potentially engage in optimal interpersonal intimacy, since their communication flow is unbridled by subjective and rational boundaries. In this respect, inner experience can potentially be the site of merging, and thus conducive to another state of being together.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, 170-171.

⁶³⁴ FRITH. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music. Op.Cit.*, 153.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁶³⁶ BATAILLE, Georges. *Inner Experience*. Trans. Stuart Kendall. Albany: State University Press of New York, 2014.

⁶³⁷ BATAILLE, Georges. “Laughter”. *The Bataille Reader. Op.Cit.*, 59.

Positing live performance as the site of inner time and subjective dissolution, it is therefore intrinsically about inner experience, and as such opens fusional flows between the performer and his audience. I contend that in Cave’s 2017 Tour, his new performance strategies of effusive physicality and co-performance intensified the “vivid present”⁶³⁸ of his shows, and therefore led to an enhanced experience of temporal and subjective dissolution for himself and his audience. In particular, his performance jolts rationality and selfhood into the here and now of the concert, thereby causing an expansion and suspension of time (i.e., Frith’s timelessness of music), and a collapse of subjective boundaries. Upon reading fan and press reviews of the tour, the words “trance”, “communality”, and “fusion” stand out, reflecting this collective experience of enhanced “vivid present”⁶³⁹ as a temporal and perceptual warp binding together audience and performer through musical experience. This boundless openness came to fruition as effusive communality in his 2017 tour, and has since expanded into actual reality with Cave’s recent Q&A initiative. “*So What do You Want to Know? Conversations with Nick Cave*” was launched with four dates in the US in April and May 2018 and continued with a string of other dates globally. They consist of live encounters between Cave and his audience during which the audience can ask him questions. The format itself signals Cave’s intention to drop his performer’s mask and encounter his audience directly, without artifice or theatricality. Coming from an artist whose stylised persona was notoriously reluctant to interviews, the news came as a surprise, and set social media astir. Part of the excitement lay in the *impromptu* nature of the nights, and in their oscillation between questions to Cave the singer-songwriter and Cave the Human Being. Cave responds with a mixture of earnestness and black humour, and the general feeling is that no question is out of bound. He himself explained that he had decided to organise these off-the grid encounters after experiencing something “communal” and “intimate” with his public during his 2017 tour. He also candidly discussed how redemptive returning to the stage had been in the wake of his son’s death, and commented on the impact that the documentary *One more Time With Feeling* had on his relationship with his audience:

I had no idea of the effect that film had on other people. [There were] so many people in a similar situation... We are all connected in some way by our sense of suffering.⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁸ SCHULTZ. “Making Music Together.” *Op. Cit.*, 175.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁰ CAVE, Nick. “Nick Cave at the Abbey: A funny, strange and beautiful evening. The audience asks the questions in this raw, intimate and revealing show.” *The Irish Times*. The Irish Times, 6 June 2018. <<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/music/nick-cave-at-the-abbey-a-funny-strange-and-beautiful-evening-1.3521061>> Accessed 6/06/2018.

Cave's words denote a new awareness of the interconnectedness of human existence, and an altered self-perception as an artist whose personal tragedy merely reflects the shared human experience of mortality, and as such it is expressive of humanity at large. Therefore, in Cave's self-mythology as a rock performer, the emphasis is no longer on the unicity of his life, but on its universality. Since *Skeleton Tree*, Cave's persona has thus morphed into an epitome of lived experience, and as such a figure of interconnectedness with a twist: concomitantly with the Lord of misrule of his monstrous scripts, there is now "Cave the Human Being" dwelling on the threshold of dark comedy, life writing, and inner time.

Conclusion

The fact that Cave's songworld has been the site of traumatic testimony has had a profound bearing on the listening experience itself. As *Skeleton Tree* has drafted in a new life awareness and prompted a more urgent need for communal life affirmation. In the concerts, the new function of the monstrous songbook is to provide tension release through an immersion in the "vivid present" of the live experience. The monstrous classics provide playful interludes and an outlet to the tension build-up of the new material, thereby acting as a redemptive third space where the limitations of the human condition are not only acknowledged but also spur on a heightened musical experience. When the audience and Cave engage in sacrificial kinship again by co-performing "Stagger Lee", "Red Right Hand" or "Tupelo", they play out those scripts of monstrosity against an existentially fraught backdrop, whilst affirming the primacy of the restorative temporality of the concert. Insofar as monstrous scripts now sit alongside trauma songs, live performances rest on a subtle balance of liberating drama and meditations on the human condition.

The concert thus acts as a third interactive space where playfulness and human agency are restored through fictionality. Whilst Cave's trauma songwriting highlights human helplessness, the monstrous scripts afford a redemptive playground by re-empowering performer and audience alike. Indeed, contrary to acts of fate that elude the human grasp, whatever happens in the third interactive space is initiated and orchestrated by human imagination, where Cave acts as the conductor of mayhem. Cave is thus re-empowered on two counts: as a performer, because onstage he is the master of his own show, and more importantly, as a human being, he is reinstated into the fold of humanity through the experience of communality. The emancipatory power of monstrous songs no longer lies in the fact that they break the shackles of common decency and rationality, but in the fact that they enable life

affirmation and re-empowerment. Gone are the days when Cave's monstrous scripts were mere conduits to grotesque mayhem and misrule, when it was all about the forbidden pleasures of play-killing, play-terrifying and play-impersonating monsters. In Cave's newly "life-aware" songworld, Cave's songwriting of trauma has moved the experiential goalposts. The monstrous experience is now played out against the broader frame of existential awareness, and as such, it is embedded in reality: it is no longer a mere escape route from reality, but indeed by providing comic relief, it enables gritty conversations about life. And perhaps, this is what has so significantly revolutionised Cave's performance of monstrosity: it has become subsumed to life-songwriting, and the monstrous experience is thus reframed as a means to a restorative end.

Auslander contends that aesthetic performance is "bracketed", that is "set apart from the flow of ordinary life, by means of signs that indicate its special status."⁶⁴¹ In his post-*Skeleton Tree* era, Cave uses his performance as a bracket where post-traumatic growth can not only be glimpsed, but alchemised into life fuel, thereby creating a hub of heightened interconnectedness and urgent life affirmation. In this respect, Cave's song-writing of trauma acts a gateway to inner experience, and not only embraces the escapist delights of fictionality, but also the vicissitudes and joys of real life, thereby shaping a more visceral performer-listener bond.

⁶⁴¹ AUSLANDER. "Musical Personae." *Op. Cit.*, 105.

CONCLUSION TO PART III

In ushering in a form of life writing, *Skeleton Tree* and *Let England Shake* outwardly depart from Cave's and Harvey's prior Gothic songwriting of excess, with its focus on transgression and monstrous fictionality. Both albums indeed display new songwriting techniques analogous to trauma fiction in their reliance upon "affective and unconscious associations rather than structured plots",⁶⁴² instead of the two musicians' mythopoeic extravagance and transgressive monster-mongering. And yet, these new life writing scripts issue from the same creative source from and share a formal lineage with the monstrous songs.

Firstly, horror remains central to both songwriting styles, it only differs in treatment: in the monstrous scripts, it is used as an agent of grotesque disruption and extravagant fictionality, whereas in the life writing scripts, it is either used as an empathy trigger (Harvey) or suggested obliquely (Cave). Horror is no longer a grotesque device leading to transgressive mayhem, but a realistic tool to convey human suffering with.

Secondly, the realistic concerns have not cancelled out grotesque misrule and transgression, but merely reframed them. Indeed, looking at the new performance dynamics of Cave's concerts, the grotesque songbook remains central to the live event and provides comic relief and transgressive bonding between Cave and his audience. If anything, the two songwritings have become mutually constitutive: whereas the *Skeleton Tree* songbook conjures up gravity and contemplation, the old monstrous classics re-affirm the cathartic potency of carnivalesque mayhem and the riotous jubilation of the here and now. It is precisely in the oscillation between these two tonal poles that a fresh impetus is found: the darkness of the realistic scripts is sublimated communally, through the performance of the monstrous repertoire.

Harvey redeploys grotesque devices in her life-songwriting according to her pre-existing pattern of shock tactics and graphic horror. As argued in Chapter 12, on *Let England Shake* her song-writing remains essentially transgressive through its use of dissonance as an agent of contradiction and disruption, and as a means to saturate the songs with horror. Moreover, sarcasm and black humour are still present, but like dissonance and shock tactics,

⁶⁴² VICKROY. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction. Op. Cit.*,3.

their purpose is reassigned: they raise awareness about the reality of human suffering, whereas in monstrous scripts, they were conducive to grotesque theatricality.

Therefore, in the new economy of Harvey's and Cave's enlarged songwriting scope, monster-mongering remains a necessity and the centrepiece to a fresh balance of extremes. Indeed, the two song-writing styles do not exist separately from each other, but feed off each other: what makes *Let England Shake* remarkable is that it uses transgressive devices to realistic ends, and what makes Cave's laden songs bearable is that they are counterbalanced by a broader backdrop of transgressive misrule. In both instances, monstrous scripts and devices are reframed as cathartic transgression enabling sublimation and renewal.

This mutually constitutive relationship of the two songwriting styles testifies to the potency of grotesque's non-dual polymorphism, which in embracing and conflating contradictions, enables not only rupture and tonal revolutions, but also renewal. Harvey's and Cave's life-songwriting actually rejuvenates their monstrous scripts: it re-ignites the old material with fresh meaning and purpose, by incorporating it into a broader dynamic than the sacrificial kinship bond would allow. Now that the songspace is conducive to both wishfulfilment drama and actual reality, it is transformative not only imaginatively (through a flight of fancy) but also realistically, because its bracketed temporality leaks into actual reality and relocates the "vivid present" into daily reality.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

*Perhaps rock music needs to die for a while,
so that something powerful and subversive
and truly monumental can rise up out of it.*⁶⁴³

Nick Cave

Harvey's and Cave's treatment of monstrosity reflects the profoundly mutable quality of their music, and its core spectrality. Theirs is a liminal songwriting that exceeds stylistic boundaries and crosses over into other genres and aesthetics, hybridising itself inter-musically, inter-textually, and inter-artistically. Matching their spectral musical explorations, the forms and manifestations of monstrosity are multiple, from raucous comic grotesque to cautionary folktales, and romantic perversities. They affect all dimensions of the work (i.e., lyrics, music, performance, and the performer-listener bond).

Positing monstrosity as the centrepiece of transgressive wishfulfilment drama, this thesis has demonstrated that the strategy of grotesque disruption and contradiction underpinning Harvey's and Cave's music inscribes a "civil war of attraction and repulsion"⁶⁴⁴ not only structurally and thematically (i.e., by problematising human identity through extreme hybridising and exaggeration), but also at the heart of the listening experience. Through shock tactics, the listener is drawn into monstrous mind-games and sacrificial role-plays with the performer, and is thereby jolted into an epistemological abyss wherein their assumptions about humanity and the world are invalidated. In alternately soliciting and rebuffing their audience, the monstrous songs are a dual source of angst and barbaric delight, and their radically unpredictable thrills and spills constitute the transgressive lure of Harvey's and Cave's monster-mongering.

Using hybridity as an aesthetic source, the two musicians slide down the Anglo-American intertextual and intermusical traditions to craft an idiosyncratic form of art rock conversant with both popular and high art aesthetics. In intermingling high and low cultures and using parodic filters to convey violence, horror, and monstrosity, Harvey and Cave have

⁶⁴³ CAVE, Nick. "What are your thoughts of modern rock music?" *The Red Hand Files*, issue # 50. Web. April 2019.

<<https://www.theredhandfiles.com/thoughts-on-modern-rock-music/>>

⁶⁴⁴ HARPHAM. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*. Op.Cit. 9.

developed a distinctive “sadistic rock intellectual”⁶⁴⁵ aura which has become one of their personal hallmarks - at least until their recent life-songwriting endeavours. Although their shift from fictional drama to life writing is in line with their fluctuating aesthetics, it profoundly alters their tonal palette in that it ushers in a new structural line of authenticity that jars with their customary irony and grotesque excess and extravagance. Consequently, in *Skeleton Tree* and *Let England Shake*, horror is reconfigured as an empathy trigger instead of a vector of monstrous mayhem and sadomasochistic interplay.

As demonstrated in Part III, Harvey’s and Cave’s songwritings of monstrosity and real life are not antithetical but mutually constitutive: issuing from the same grotesque aesthetic of ambivalence and unpredictability, they symbiotically relate to each other. The poetic swathes of Cave’s *Skeleton Tree* thus echo the unsparing introspections of his *Boatman’s Call* love songs, and Harvey’s *Let England Shake* retains the transgressive dissonance and graphic horror of her monstrous scripts. The two musicians have thus developed a fresh idiom by reconfiguring the semantics of their gothic-grotesque language, notably by altering their use of ambivalence. In their monstrous scripts of old, ambivalence is a source of either carnivalesque grotesque (e.g., the human-animal and male-female freaks) or macabre grotesque (e.g., the psychopath). Ambivalence thus takes flesh in the non-binary polymorphism of monsters, thereby sustaining an aesthetic of hybridity and liminality to comic and/or terrifying effect. However, on *Let England Shake* and *Skeleton Tree* ambivalence no longer serves the purpose of grotesque disruption, but a more universalistic awareness of interconnectedness. What does this joint trajectory from monstrous drama to existential writing say about the two artists’ work and what future musical horizons does it herald for them?

Foregrounding the primacy of intersubjective and aesthetic experience in rock music, Frith articulates rock as “a coming together of the sensual, the emotional, and the social as performance” that brings about “experience and collusion”.⁶⁴⁶ Moreover, Frith postulates that this aesthetic encounter is transformative in that it alters our “way of being in the world”.⁶⁴⁷ Extrapolating from Frith, I would argue that it is the breadth of this transformative flow and the extent of the “being in the world” that have radically changed with Harvey’s and Cave’s life-songs. Firstly, the transformative charge of their songs is noticeably heightened, and its scope widened. In monstrous songs, the transformational impact of the music is chiefly contained

⁶⁴⁵ BANNISTER. *Op.Cit.*, 139-40.

⁶⁴⁶ FRITH. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music. Op.Cit.*, 272.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

within the temporality of performance: when listening to such monstrous classics as Harvey's "50ft Queenie" or Cave's "Stagger Lee", the listener is transformed into a complicit monster or victim for the span of the song. Indeed, as an experience of inner time⁶⁴⁸ occurring through an escapist flight of fancy, the transformation is conditioned by and bracketed within the performance of the song. Therefore, the modalities of this transformation are dichotomous: on the one hand there is reality, and on the other, the wishfulfilling transformation of the fictional bracket; when the song ends, reality resumes its course. Conversely, in dealing with real life issues, the song format of *Let England Shake* and *Skeleton Tree* does not put forward a bracketed experience but one that overlaps with the listener's *actual* as well as affective reality. When the life-song ends, its ripple effect continues to resonate with the listener's daily life and thus challenges it. Therefore, the song is experienced twice: once by listening immersion, and subsequently as a delayed response bringing into interaction the listener's imaginative journey and their actual life. For instance, Harvey's WWI war horrors can retrospectively echo current war horrors routinely broadcast on TV and directly interrogate the listener. As such, the life-songs not only feed into a fictional identity that the listener temporarily inhabits, but also into their core subjectivity, and therefore enduringly reshape the listener's wider interactions with the world, thereby inducing a new state of being that embraces human interconnectedness. Therefore, in Harvey's and Cave's life-songwriting, the transformation occurs as much within as without the song, as an after-effect that reveals itself by resonance. This new structural salience of transformation and resonance brings to mind postcolonial theory which posits hybridity as an aesthetic source, and text as essentially transformative.

Whereas Harvey and Cave have always exhibited aesthetic-mingling tendencies, I would argue that their fictional songbooks are *incidentally* transcultural (namely partaking of a self-conscious *bricolage* of cultural, artistic, and corporeal signifiers), their life-songs are *essentially* transcultural insofar as transformation is their chief purpose and enduring impact. In this respect, the new scripts can be construed as informed by the transcultural aesthetics formulated by postcolonial critic Bill Ashcroft.⁶⁴⁹ Building upon the notion that transcultural texts occur at a "transcultural moment" and in a "contact zone",⁶⁵⁰ Ashcroft argues that the postcolonial

⁶⁴⁸ FRITH. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Op. Cit., 145-157.

⁶⁴⁹ ASHCROFT, Bill. "Toward a postcolonial aesthetics." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 51:4 (2015): 410 - 421.

⁶⁵⁰ Ashcroft builds upon ethnographer Mary-Louise Pratt's notion of "contact zone" in reference to disparate and outwardly incompatible cultures meeting, clashing, and occasionally merging by an operation of "transculturation". PRATT, Mary-Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992. 4.

aesthetic is located in a space of intersubjective contact and exchange, “a mutually transformative *affective space*”⁶⁵¹ where subjective boundaries become porous and “writer and reader are changed in constitutive collusion”.⁶⁵² This formulation can be applied to the rock performer and their audience insofar as through performance they get into close intersubjective contact and share an experience of inner time conducive to jubilant subjective dissolution. Moreover, Ashcroft puts forward the notion that music carries “material resonance”, namely immediate knowledge imparted by the medium, a form of “knowing before interpretation” and an “apprehension of the ‘otherness’ of the other”⁶⁵³ which conjures up an aesthetic moment. Ashcroft also formulates the transcultural aesthetic as “a confluence of reception and production”,⁶⁵⁴ because the “transcultural space of the post-colonial text is a contact zone in which an aesthetic transformation occurs”.⁶⁵⁵

Ashcroft’s articulation of the post-colonial aesthetic as a transformative space is especially resonant with Harvey’s and Cave’s recent songwriting. Firstly, their music is hybrid: partaking of an aesthetic essentially marked by non-binary polymorphism, their songwriting is in constant becoming, hybridising itself with other genres, texts and cultures, and always re-emerging from its constant transaction with the outside of itself. Secondly, with the emergence of their new realistic concerns, the transformative component has become the structuring force of their songs. Finally, the salient thread of ‘the other’ has radically changed: whereas otherness is a central device of grotesque freakery in their monstrous fiction, in their life-songs it has become a vector of empathy for a fresh understanding of the world. This new mode profoundly reshapes the musicians’ artistic stances and transforms their “way of being in the world”⁶⁵⁶ – and ours.

So if Harvey and Cave are no longer sadistic intellectuals (or not only), what have they become?

⁶⁵¹ ASHCROFT. “Toward a postcolonial aesthetics.” *Op.Cit.*, 411.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.* 419.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 414.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁶ FRITH. *Performing Rites: On the Value Of Popular Music. Op.Cit.*, 272.

Activism

The policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change.⁶⁵⁷

A cursory glance at Harvey's latest album *Hope 6 Demolition Project*, released in 2016, confirms her realistic focus on contemporary history: a foray into war and poverty, the album continues in the war-songwriting mode whilst widening its intercultural scope to Afghanistan, Kosovo, and the US, thus bringing the goalposts uncomfortably closer to our current times and politics. Like with *Let England Shake*, Harvey collaborated closely with Seamus Murphy by commissioning him to make film adaptations of her songs and by travelling with him to the US, Kosovo, and Afghanistan for the inception of the album. Most tunes are underpinned by the same pattern of dissonance between gruesome lyrics and perky tunes as on *Let England Shake*, however Harvey's tone is more earnest on *Hope 6 Demolition Project* than on *Let England Shake*, hence a less ironic style and very few traces of black humour and monstrous dissonance (which is why *Hope 6 Demolition Project* does not feature in the primary corpus of this dissertation). On *Hope 6 Demolition Project*, Harvey's tone has also become more political. In particular, Harvey's scathing critique of the Hope VI Demolition Project, a social rehabilitation scheme aimed at tackling urban poverty in Washington DC, drew criticism from local US politicians.⁶⁵⁸ "Community of Hope" ironically refers to the failure of the scheme, with a newsreader-like running description of a "well-known pathway of death" peopled by "the zombies of drug-town". The song ends with a note of ironic optimism with the line "they're gonna put a Walmart here" sung on a loop by a negro-spiritual choir and Harvey. Mass consumerism has never sounded so soulful (or sarcastic). If anything, the song encapsulates Harvey's shift toward a more polemical stance, closer to activism in its concern with social and political change, and in its acerbic look at Western countries' failed peace-keeping within their borders and beyond. Whether in time Harvey will become the new Patti Smith protest-singing for the power of the people and vilifying her political foes remains to be seen,⁶⁵⁹ but she has nonetheless veered towards a more vocal form of social and political awareness and a graver tone.

⁶⁵⁷< <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/activism>>

⁶⁵⁸ KURZIUS, Rachel. "Ward 7 Council Candidates Respond To PJ Harvey's New Song". *DCist*, 15 March 2016. <https://web.archive.org/web/20160318181039/http://dcist.com/2016/03/ward_7_council_candidates_respond_t.php>

⁶⁵⁹ Patti Smith has adopted a more and more overt political stance over the years, whether on the Palestinian issue or on the current US government. For instance, at a concert in London in 2005, there was an anti-Israel petition stand next to her merchandise stall in the foyer. This blurs the boundaries between artist and activist: where does activism start? Is it just ground action for social change, or can assertive artistic expression be considered as a form of activism too?

As for Cave, his transformative flow far exceeds the scope of his latest album: in the wake of *Skeleton Tree*, he has been in an ongoing conversation with his fans, a new prolific trend evident in both his live Q&A events “Conversations with Nick Cave” (since May 2018) and its online counterpart “The Red Hand Files” (since October 2018).⁶⁶⁰ His new stance could be aptly described as “life-ism”: a jostling together of emotional and existential flows into a productive affective hub intermingling metaphysical questioning, artistic meandering, spirituality, and trivial banter. “The Red Hand Files” testifies to the sheer potency of this transformative space: with 60 issues (Cave’s replies to his fans’ questions) over 11 months, addressing such topics as songwriting and creativity, love, friendship, meditation, rock music, grieving, forgiveness, vegetarianism, Cave is unstoppable. The exchanges retain a rare lightness of tone and depth of insight as Cave deals with real life issues with the same impertinence and zest as in his songwriting. In his post-traumatic age, Cave has not mellowed, he is as witty and raw as ever, albeit with a new compassionate gaze on life.

What may have prompted this transformation from theatrical personae and fictional material to life writing ?

As mutable artists, Harvey and Cave refrain from repeating themselves and transmute into a new skin with every new album, hence the longevity: theirs is a music in perpetual becoming, constantly integrating new aesthetics and morphing into something new, in an idiom mixing the known and the unknown. Did they veer into life-songwriting because worldly matters become more pressing with age? Or is it also in reaction to the age of social media and its constant flood of exchanges?

One noteworthy element is that in the age of social media and Twitter restlessness, the artist is optimally enmeshed with the world, regardless of their willingness to engage with it. For instance, unbeknown to Harvey, Seamus Murphy’s short film adaptation of *Let England Shake* was posted on an English Far Right website, under the cross of St George (the symbol of England), alongside white supremacist posts for eight months.⁶⁶¹ The post was subsequently removed upon Harvey’s injunction, however, the fact that her song was misused online for months testifies to the very real hazard of seeing one’s artistic content distorted and spread in

⁶⁶⁰ CAVE, Nick. *The Red Hand Files*. Website. < <https://www.theredhandfiles.com/>>

⁶⁶¹ GARDNER, Abigail. “PJ Harvey and Remembering England.” *Mad Dogs and Englishness: Popular Music and English Identities*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2017.

the virtual world. Along the same lines of interpretative zeal and distortion, Cave and The Bad Seeds' 2017 Tour was smeared by heavy online criticism when the band performed in Israel, thus not taking part in the current cultural boycott of Israel. Cave was the target of an open letter from Brian Eno, and recently defended his stance in the *Red Hand Files*.⁶⁶²

Perhaps, in the wake of these anecdotal misunderstandings, Cave and Harvey have become acutely aware that in a perpetually chattering virtual world, silence and non-commitment are no longer an option: they no longer leave the audience space to reflect, but instead create a vacuum for the incessant noise of social media to take over. This alters the status of the artist: if they stay on the margins, they run the risk of becoming the subjects of online comments and blame campaigns. Indeed, as Cave recently commented, whilst outwardly the locus of free expression and exchange, the world of social media has paradoxically become ultra-normative and sanctimonious in the name of "woke-ness".⁶⁶³ Faced with the double-bind of being either drowned out or vilified by social media chatter, what choice does today's artist have but to actively engage with the world?

Moreover, Cave notes that rock music may have reached the end of its subversive road, at least temporarily:

Perhaps a painful reckoning is needed – a great crushing of creativity that descends and lays its self-righteous ice across art – so that in time, a wild, dangerous and radical form of music can tear its way through the ice, teeth bared, and rock'n'roll can get back to the business of transgression.

[...] However, in the world of ideas the sanctimonious have little or no place. Art must be wrestled from the hands of the pious, in whatever form they may come – and they are always coming, knives out, intent on murdering creativity. At this depressing time in rock'n'roll though, perhaps they can serve a purpose, perhaps rock music needs to die for a while, so that something powerful and subversive and truly monumental can rise up out of it.⁶⁶⁴

With their recent experimentations off the rock grid, perhaps Harvey and Cave are letting rock music "die for a while", and they are currently "cutting through the ice" of reality with their "teeth bared", proceeding with the same poetic voice of transgressive non-alignment, but with fresh existential grit.

⁶⁶²CAVE, Nick. "What are your thoughts on Brian Eno's stance on Israel?" *The Red Hand Files*, Issue #13. Web. December 2018. <<https://www.theredhandfiles.com/what-are-your-thoughts-on-brian-enos-stance-on-israel/>>

⁶⁶³CAVE, Nick. *Ibid*.

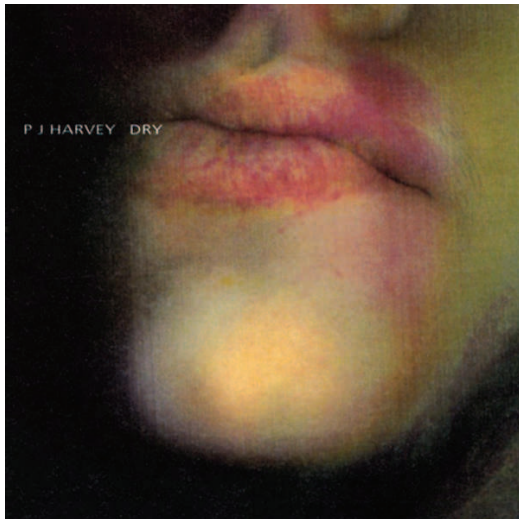
⁶⁶⁴CAVE, Nick. "What are your thoughts of modern rock music?" *The Red Hand Files*, issue # 50. Web. April 2019.

<<https://www.theredhandfiles.com/thoughts-on-modern-rock-music/>>

APPENDIX: Tracklisting of primary corpus albums

PJ HARVEY 1

DRY, 1992.



Front cover



Back cover

1. Oh My Lover
2. O Stella
3. Dress
4. Victory
5. Happy And Bleeding
6. Sheela-Na-Gig
7. Hair
8. Joe
9. Plants And Rags
10. Fountain
11. Water

PJ HARVEY 2
RID OF ME, 1993.



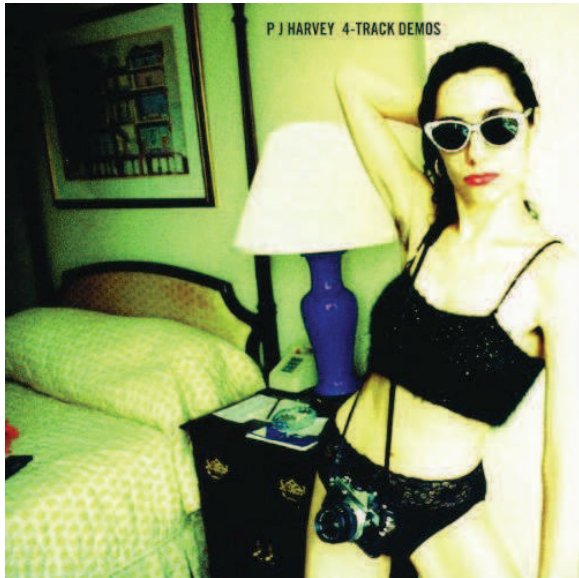
Front cover



Back cover

1. Rid of Me
2. Missed
3. Legs
4. Rub til' it Bleeds
5. Hook
6. Man-size Sextet
7. Highway '61 Revisited
8. 50ft Queenie
9. Yuri-G
10. Man-Size
11. Dry
12. Me Jane

PJ HARVEY 3
4-TRACK DEMOS, 1994



Front cover



Back cover

1. Rid Of Me
2. Legs
3. Reeling
4. Snake
5. Hook
6. 50ft Queenie
7. Driving
8. Ecstasy
9. Hardly Wait
10. Rub Til' It Bleeds
11. Easy
12. M-Bike
13. Yuri-G
14. Goodnight

PJ HARVEY 4

TO BRING YOU MY LOVE, 1995



Front cover



Back cover

1. To Bring You My Love
2. Meet Ze Monsta
3. Working For The Man
4. C'mon Billy
5. Tecló
6. Long Snake Moan
7. Down By The Water
8. I Think I am A Mother
9. Send His Love To Me
10. The Dancer

PJ HARVEY 5
IS THIS DESIRE? 1998



Front cover



Back cover

1. Angelene
2. The Sky Lit Up
3. The Wind
4. My Beautiful Leah
5. A Perfect Day Elise
6. Catherine
7. Electric Light
8. The Garden
9. Joy
10. The River
11. No Girl So Sweet
12. Is This Desire?

PJ HARVEY 6
LET ENGLAND SHAKE, 2011



Front cover



Back cover

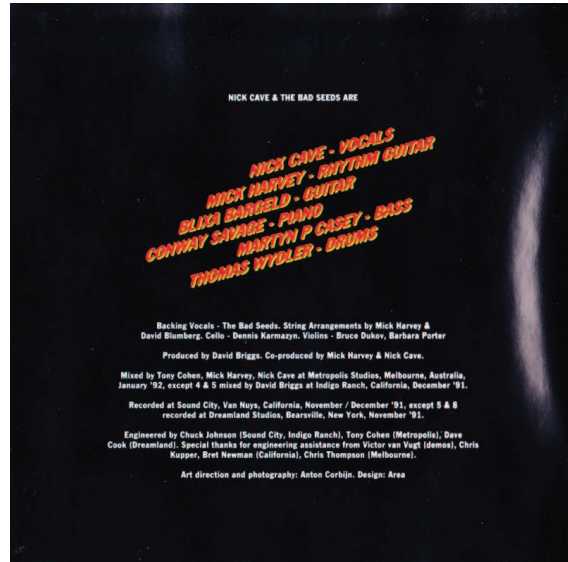
1. Let England Shake
2. The Last Living Rose
3. Glorious Land
4. The Words That Macbeth Murder
5. All And Everyone
6. On Battleship Hill
7. England
8. In The Dark Places
9. Bitter Branches
10. Hanging In The Wire
11. Written On The Forehead
12. The Colour Of The Earth

NICK CAVE 1

HENRY'S DREAM, 1992 [with The Bad Seeds]



Front cover

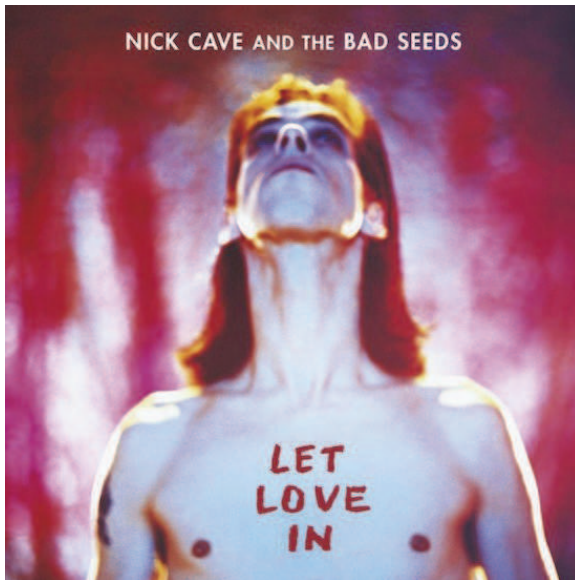


Back cover

1. Papa Won't Leave You Henry
2. I Had A Dream, Joe
3. Straight To You
4. Brother, My Cup Is Empty
5. Christina The Astonishing
6. When I First Came To Town
7. John Finn's Wife
8. Loom Of The Land
9. Jack The Ripper

NICK CAVE 2, [with The Bad Seeds]

LET LOVE IN, 1994



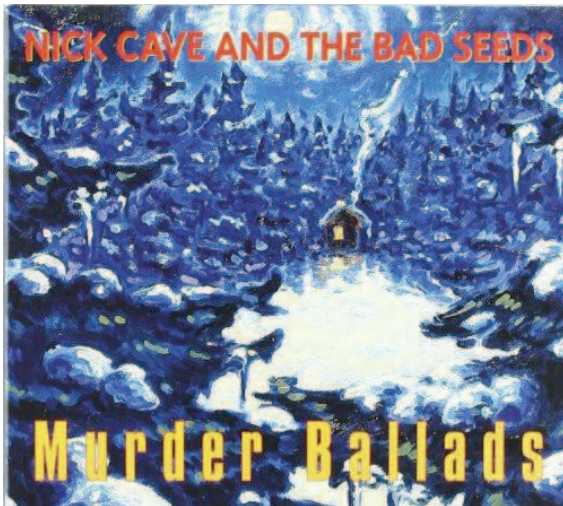
Front cover



Back cover

1. Do You Love Me?
2. Nobody's Baby Now
3. Loverman
4. Jangling Jack
5. Red Right Hand
6. I Let Love In
7. Thirsty Dog
8. Ain't Gonna Rain Anymore
9. Lay Me Low
10. Do You Love Me? (Part 2)

NICK CAVE 3 [with The Bad Seeds]
MURDER BALLADS, 1996.



Front cover



Back cover

1. Song Of Joy
2. Stagger Lee
3. Henry Lee (feat. PJ Harvey)
4. Lovely Creature
5. Where The Wild Roses Grow (feat. Kylie Minogue)
6. The Curse of Millhaven
7. The Kindness Of Strangers
8. Crow Jane
9. O'Malley's Bar
10. Death Is Not The End (feat. Anita Lane, PJ Harvey, Shane McGowan, Kylie Minogue) – (Bob Dylan cover)

NICK CAVE 4 [with Grinderman band]

GRINDERMAN 1, 2007



Front cover

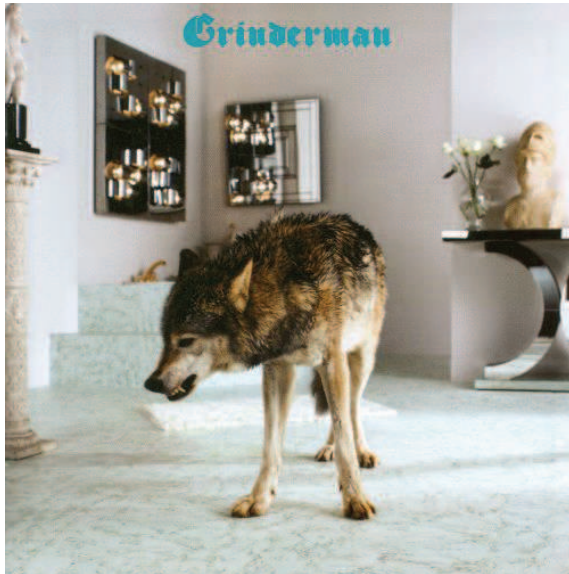


Back cover

1. Get It On
2. No Pussy Blues
3. Electric Alice
4. Grinderman
5. Depth Charge Ethel
6. Go Tell the Women
7. (I Don't Need You To) Set Me Free
8. Honey Bee (Let's Fly To Mars)
9. Man In The Moon
10. When My Love Comes Down
11. Love Bomb

NICK CAVE 5 [with Grinderman band]

GRINDERMAN 2, 2010



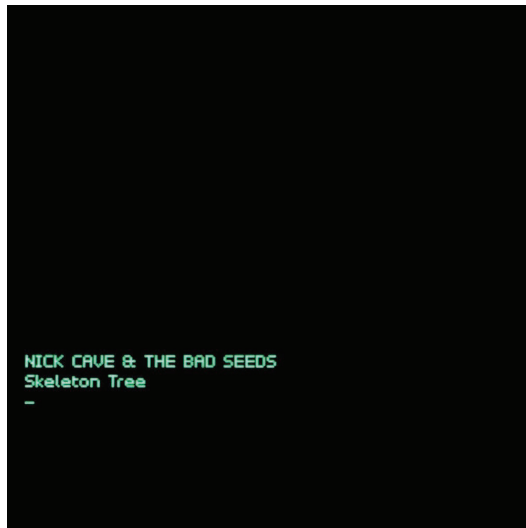
Front cover



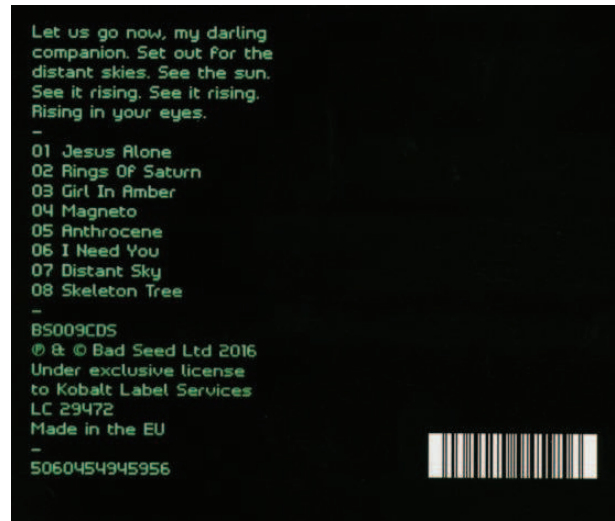
Back cover

1. Mickey Mouse And The Goodbye Man
2. Worm Tamer
3. Heathen Child
4. When My Baby Comes
5. What I Know
6. Evil
7. Kitchenette
8. Palaces of Montezuma
9. Bellringer Blues

NICK CAVE 6 [with The Bad Seeds]
SKELETON TREE, 2016.



Front cover



Back cover

1. Jesus Alone
2. Rings Of Saturn
3. Girl In Amber
4. Magneto
5. Anthrocene
6. I Need You
7. Distant Sky
8. Skeleton Tree

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RESUME EN FRANCAIS

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RESUME DE THESE

Introduction: hypothèses, approche, méthodologie.

La critique musicale du rock indépendant des années 1990 a souvent comparé les auteurs-compositeurs-interprètes PJ Harvey et Nick Cave en raison de leur esthétique des extrêmes et de leur prédilection pour des thématiques gothiques-romantiques. Au-delà de leur convergence temporelle et géographique sur la scène londonienne depuis le début des années 1990, les deux musiciens partagent un certain nombre de caractéristiques stylistiques et musicales.

Tout d'abord, leur musique progresse par rupture, passant de la cacophonie post-punk à des paysages sonores plus rock et des morceaux plus épurés, d'où un style protéiforme et expérimentaliste. Cette effervescence musicale s'épanouit au sein d'une hybridation culturelle et générique tout aussi fluctuante, Harvey et Cave puisant dans les traditions musicales, picturales et littéraires anglo-américaines afin d'explorer la face obscure de la réalité. Leur musique du début des années 1990 conjugue horreur et monstruosité par le biais d'un répertoire de contes scabreux : fantômes de vengeance violente, meurtres opportunistes, amoureux, en série ou infanticides. Les deux musiciens construisent ainsi un imaginaire violent et aliénant dans lequel l'être humain erre sur le fil du rasoir psychique.

En mettant en scène les vicissitudes de la formation subjective, les œuvres de Harvey et Cave témoignent d'une conscience postmoderne que le sujet n'est pas entier et fixe, mais fragmenté et contradictoire, en proie à une menace non seulement extérieure mais intérieure. Dans leurs imaginaires musicaux, la menace monstrueuse surgit donc à la fois d'un environnement hostile et du cœur même de la psyché humaine, agressant les sens et la santé mentale des protagonistes et les laissant déchirés entre leur surface civilisée et leurs pulsions barbares. Ce monstre intérieur, dessous inavouable de la conscience, est suggéré en termes de corporalité brutale (extrême violence physique et représentations abjectes), et de grotesquerie psychique (terreur, répulsion, pulsions sadiques, distorsion perceptuelle...).

Si leurs chansons monstrueuses peuvent être considérées comme gothiques du fait de la centralité de la barbarie, de la paranoïa et du tabou⁶⁶⁵, elles présentent également une sensibilité grotesque dans leur propension à la discordance, l'exagération et l'ambivalence⁶⁶⁶. En particulier, l'horreur y est traitée de manière incongrue (fusion du comique et de l'horreur) et selon une stratégie d'extrême hybridation (humain/animal, homme/femme). Le répertoire monstrueux de Cave et Harvey est donc profondément ambivalent, en constante tension entre l'attraction trouble qu'exercent sa violence compensatoire et son humour noir et la répulsion de son agressivité sonore et psychique.

Hypothèses

Cette thèse part du constat que dans les deux œuvres, le thème monstrueux se décline au gré d'une esthétique gothique aux modalités grotesques: tour à tour vecteur d'horreur ou de rire, de terreur ou de jubilation, et souvent des deux à la fois. Les chansons monstrueuses de Harvey et Cave sont envisagées comme une « écriture gothique de l'excès »⁶⁶⁷ dont les trois piliers sont la monstruosité, la transgression et l'extravagance.

Dans sa dimension incarnée, la monstruosité s'immisce jusque dans la relation que les deux musiciens entretiennent avec leur public: il s'agit là d'un lien marqué par une incertitude radicale car sans cesse mis à mal par une performance et des scénarios de chansons qui enjôlent autant qu'ils brutalisent l'auditeur. La monstruosité prend donc la forme d'un jeu participatif autour de l'interdit et du tabou et se déploie selon une dynamique d'attraction-répulsion.

Par conséquent, la monstruosité ne serait pas uniquement un outil thématique et esthétique reflétant une fascination gothique pour la peur, mais plutôt la clef de voûte d'une dynamique grotesque de rupture et de contradiction⁶⁶⁸ qui sous-tend toute l'œuvre de Harvey et Cave et permet aux deux musiciens de glisser d'un registre d'horreur macabre à la parodie du comique-grotesque, en passant par la veine du romantisme noir. La monstruosité s'impose donc comme un principe perturbateur qui en problématisant l'identité humaine et brouillant toutes les catégories conceptuelles ouvre un gouffre épistémologique au centre de l'expérience d'écoute.

⁶⁶⁵ David Punter, *The Literature of Terror, a History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, London and New York: Longman, 1980.

⁶⁶⁶ Philip Thomson, *The Grotesque*, London: Methuen, 1972.

⁶⁶⁷ Fred Botting, *Gothic*, London and New York: Routledge, 2014.

⁶⁶⁸ Geoffrey Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

Problématique

Le propos de cette thèse est de sonder le trope monstrueux en tant que vecteur d'ambivalence et de contradiction, et d'interroger la dynamique grotesque qu'il inscrit au centre des deux œuvres. En particulier, il s'agit d'explorer les implications esthétiques et culturelles de la musique monstrueuse en l'envisageant comme un objet expérientiel et polymorphe convoquant comme source esthétique intertextualité, intermusicalité et interculturalité. Enfin, à la lumière des derniers albums de Harvey et Cave qui traitent non plus de mondes imaginaires mais du monde réel, il s'agit d'interroger ce passage d'une fiction compensatoire à une écriture en prise direct avec le réel, afin d'éclairer le corpus monstrueux par décrochage. Comment les mécanismes grotesques survivent-ils au passage à l'horreur réaliste ? Que reste-t-il de l'horreur et du monstrueux dans les récents albums ? Quelle place occupent les scénarios monstrueux au sein des deux œuvres ?

Définition du corpus

Le corpus primaire est sélectionné selon un axe chronologique allant de 1992 à 2016, alors que les deux musiciens évoluaient sur la scène du rock indépendant britannique. 1992 correspond aux débuts de PJ Harvey et au passage pour Cave à une esthétique moins cacophonique et une plus grande cohérence musicale et lyrique. Leurs productions des années 90 partagent une sensibilité gothique et une progression par rupture stylistique qu'il semble pertinent d'interroger et de mettre en dialogue. Par ailleurs, la durée chronologique de vingt-quatre ans permet d'observer la trajectoire des deux oeuvres et de les contextualiser culturellement et musicalement dans le temps.

De plus, vu le nombre important d'albums et leur diversité, corpus comprend un bornage thématique retenant les albums contenant horreur et monstruosité, de manière à pouvoir effectuer des études de cas plus fines et les enrichir d'analyses iconographiques, photographiques et scéniques.

Enfin, le corpus s'articule aussi autour d'une stratégie de rupture en cela qu'il inclut deux albums récents en décrochage avec le corpus de chansons monstrueuses, *Let England Shake* (2011) de Harvey et *Skeleton Tree* (2016) de Cave. L'inclusion de ces deux albums permet de rendre compte de l'évolution récente de Harvey et Cave vers une musique aux thématiques réalistes, et d'interroger ce décrochage.

Méthodologie

Etant donné que les chansons de Harvey et Cave sont des objets culturels invoquant intermusicalité, intertextualité et interculturalité, la méthodologie de cette thèse consiste à mettre en résonance cette hybridité structurelle afin de la rendre parlante, de manière à créer de nouvelles pistes interprétatives. Aussi, cette thèse s'inscrit dans une approche interdisciplinaire qui multiplie et croise les prismes de lecture, ce qui permet de mettre en dialogue différents champs de recherche. Ainsi les apports théoriques de la musique populaire, des *cultural studies*, des études gothiques et grotesques ainsi que de la *Monster Theory*⁶⁶⁹ anglophones ont permis de poser les jalons de notre réflexion, tout en convoquant d'autres appareils théoriques tels que la critique littéraire et culturelle anglo-américaine, celle du récit de vie traumatique, ainsi que les critiques filmique, picturale et féministe.

En décloisonnant les champs de recherche, l'approche interdisciplinaire permet d'examiner la démarche d'expérimentation transgressive de Harvey et Cave et la manière dont ils mettent de multiples empreintes culturelles et esthétiques au service d'une dynamique grotesque. En particulier, il s'agit de mettre en dialogue des théories du monstrueux et du grotesque afin d'identifier les procédés déployés à la fois dans la représentation de la monstruosité et dans les mécanismes utilisés par Harvey et Cave. Le plan s'articule en deux parties cohérentes portant sur le motif monstrueux dans un corpus d'œuvres de 1992 à 2011, et en une troisième partie qui éclaire ce corpus monstrueux par contraste et rétrospection (œuvres post-2011).

Le plan retenu fait coïncider concepts et thématiques, de façon à inscrire en filigrane la dynamique grotesque que nous posons comme principe structurant de la monstruosité harveyenne et cavienne. Ainsi, les procédés grotesques tels que l'extrême hybridation, le mode hyperbolique, la parodie et la contradiction se déclinent en spirale dès la première partie, et reviennent sous la forme d'un prisme de lecture appliqué à la fois aux thématiques (la représentation de l'humain et du genre), à l'interaction musicale, lyrique et scénique entre les deux musiciens et leur audience, et aux espaces culturels anglo-américains. Ainsi, la superposition du prisme grotesque à l'espace culturel anglo-américain permet de mettre au jour les glissements et fluctuations esthétiques qui s'opèrent entre la matrice musicale et culturelle

⁶⁶⁹ Jerome Cohen (dir.), *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, Minneapolis, Min. et Londres: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

du Deep South nord-américain, « *la poétique américaine du désordre* ⁶⁷⁰ », et le concept esthétique de « souffrance romantique⁶⁷¹ ».

⁶⁷⁰ Richard Chase, *The American Novel and its Tradition*, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957.

⁶⁷¹ Hugo Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1970.

I. LE MONSTRUEUX COMME PROBLEMATISATION DE L'IDENTITE HUMAINE ET STRATEGIE DE CONTRADICTION

La partie I s'attache à démontrer que Harvey et Cave utilisent la monstrosité pour problématiser l'identité humaine en déployant une double stratégie d'incertitude radicale.

D'une part, ils mettent à mal la conception essentialiste de l'humanité en représentant la monstrosité comme une composante intrinsèque de la nature humaine. Cette « *in-humanité* » fait l'objet d'une caractérisation hyperbolique qui tour à tour renverse les stéréotypes humains (d'où les figures du monstrueux féminin et du prédateur masculin impuissant) et les exagère jusqu'au ridicule outrancier (hypermasculinité, hyperféminité). L'humain en proie à ses pulsions sadiques et à son irrationalité y est donc représenté comme repoussant, ridicule et grotesque.

D'autre part, par le biais d'une stratégie d'extrême hybridation (animal/humain, homme/femme), Harvey et Cave mettent à mal la connaissance scientifique en pulvérisant les catégorisations conceptuelles. Ainsi, au gré d'une esthétique liminale, les deux musiciens créent des monstres hybrides tels que la femme *double-drag* de Harvey qui singe sa propre identité genrée et l'homme-animal de Cave qui invoque un bestiaire humain. Ces contre-représentations humaines se retrouvent à la fois dans les personnages de chansons, l'iconographie des albums, et dans les auto-représentations des deux musiciens, ce qui déstabilise l'auditeur. Cette stratégie de brouillage biologique et ontologique provoque une crise épistémologique au cœur de l'expérience d'écoute. Chez Harvey, cette crise s'articule notamment autour d'une déconstruction radicale des stéréotypes de genre, le corps féminin devenant lieu d'insurrection charnelle et de friction (hypersexualité, asexualité, frigidité, frustration sexuelle) alors que la psyché féminine est représentée comme violente voire sadique. Pour sa part, Cave surjoue les stéréotypes masculins pour les rendre inhumains (agressifs, narcissiques, violents, sadiques...) ou les représente comme nostalgiques de leur animalité perdue. Ces contre-représentations de l'humain imposent un troisième système non-dualiste permettant le polymorphisme, l'ambivalence, et l'hybridité.

Cette déconstruction de l'identité humaine est utilisée à des fins à la fois sadiques et ludiques : en établissant un terrain de jeu transgressif, elle permet à l'auditeur et au musicien de co-interpréter l'intrigue de la chanson, et de prendre ainsi part à un jeu de rôle monstrueux. Par ailleurs, Harvey et Cave se livrent à un brouillage de leurs propres frontières subjectives :

non seulement ils incarnent des personnages monstrueux, mais leurs personnages artistiques sont tellement polymorphes qu'ils finissent par se dissoudre eux-mêmes dans l'hybridité et l'incertitude radicale. Par conséquent, le lien qui se tisse entre les musiciens et leur public repose lui aussi sur une dynamique monstrueuse : les scénarios monstrueux invitent public et musiciens à entrer dans des jeux de complicité sacrificielle dans laquelle on alterne les rôles de victimes et de bourreaux. Ainsi l'écoute permet à l'auditeur de faire l'expérience d'une immersion monstrueuse multifocale en tant que spectateur, bourreau virtuel, et victime sensorielle et imaginaire. D'une part, Harvey et Cave brutalisent l'auditeur avec leurs salves soniques et lyriques, et d'autre part, ils les invitent à partager une intimité transgressive dans laquelle l'auditeur se délecte par procuration des horreurs commises par les musiciens-interprètes. Cette complicité monstrueuse induit un plaisir trouble de nature à la fois compensatoire et sadique, et participe d'une dynamique sado-masochiste entremêlant plaisir et douleur. Le trope monstrueux opère ainsi comme un principe de contradiction grotesque qui s'épanouit au sein d'une complicité sacrificielle entre l'auditeur et l'artiste. Par conséquent, le texte monstrueux et sa co-interprétation par les deux musiciens et leur public agissent comme une zone de contact où la monstruosité est mise en scène à plusieurs niveaux : comme spectacle abject, comme jeu de rôle monstrueux mais aussi comme lieu de complicité sacrificielle avec l'interprète.

Ainsi, les chansons monstrueuses sont comparables au « théâtre de la cruauté » de Antonin Artaud⁶⁷², dans la mesure où elles transposent l'horreur et le monstrueux au niveau sensoriel et participent d'une tactique de choc qui précipite l'auditeur dans une compréhension viscérale et expérientielle (et non pas rationnelle) de la monstruosité.

⁶⁷² Antonin Artaud, *Le théâtre de la cruauté*, Fontenay-au-Roses : Bellenand et fils, 1933. Le dramaturge Artaud affirme la primauté de l'expérience sensorielle sur le texte au théâtre, et milite pour un théâtre qui s'adresse directement aux émotions du spectateur et court-circuite la démarche intellectuelle.

II. LE MONDE EST UNE SCENE HYBRIDE

La partie II s'intéresse à l'utilisation de l'hybridation culturelle et générique comme source esthétique et champ d'exploration de l'identité et de l'expérience monstrueuses. Par le biais d'une étude comparée des albums de Harvey *To Bring You my Love* (1995) et *Is this Desire ?* (1998) avec les productions musicales de 1992-1996 de Cave, il s'agit de mettre au jour les procédés d'hybridation qui permettent aux deux artistes de créer des formes monstrueuses composites et inédites.

Dans un premier temps, il s'agit d'observer comment Harvey et Cave puisent dans la matrice culturelle du Deep South américain et du répertoire balladique anglo-américain comme source d'intertextualité et d'intermusicalité. Ainsi, leur musique peut être approchée comme une zone de confluence entre le rock, la tradition folk-blues nord-américaine, et la topographie culturelle du Gothique du Sud. En cela qu'elles sont hantées par d'autres textes, musiques, et cultures, les chansons monstrueuses sont marquées par une forme de spectralité⁶⁷³ gothique. Cette pollinisation nord-américaine conduit Harvey et Cave à une forme de monstruosité comique-grotesque qui provoque un plaisir sadique face au spectacle d'une violence hyperbolique et incongrue. La monstruosité mélodramatique de ces ballades repose sur des mécanismes grotesques (l'excès, l'extravagance et la juxtaposition d'éléments incompatibles) et se déploie selon une poétique du désordre.

Dans un deuxième temps, il s'agit d'observer les glissements esthétiques par lesquels Harvey et Cave mettent en résonance les traditions musicales et culturelles Nord-Américaines (ballade folk-blues, *tall tale*, folklore du sud et Southern Gothic) avec des motifs du Romantisme anglais (notamment la dimension sadomasochiste de la souffrance romantique) afin de créer de nouvelles formes esthétiques. Nous démontrons que par un principe grotesque de fusion d'éléments disparates, les deux musiciens glissent d'une poétique nord-américaine du désordre et de l'excès vers une souffrance romantique d'origine anglaise (« *Romantic Agony* »⁶⁷⁴) et produisent ainsi une forme de monstruosité protéiforme qui englobe plusieurs registres antithétiques : le comique-grotesque, le gothique macabre, et une forme de sadomasochisme romantique. Ainsi, il s'agit de démontrer qu'en esthétisant et érotisant la mort et

⁶⁷³ Isabella Van Elferen, « Nick Cave and Gothic: Ghost Stories, Fucked Organs, Spectral Liturgy. » *The Art of Nick Cave*, John Baker (dir.). Bristol et Chicago: Intellect, 2013. 175-188.

⁶⁷⁴ Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, Op. Cit.

la souffrance, Harvey et Cave produisent une forme de perversité romantique qui se déploie sur un mode transmodal, transgénérique, et transculturel.

La dynamique d'hybridation à l'œuvre dans le corpus monstrueux témoigne de l'usage idiosyncratique que Harvey et Cave font de l'espace culturel Anglo-Américain : par glissement esthétique, ils le transforment en un site d'exploration de l'identité monstrueuse et d'expérimentation stylistique, générique et culturelle. Cette démarche d'hybridation esthétique se déploie dans une fluctuation où les signifiants stylistiques, musicaux, et culturels fusionnent momentanément pour produire un sous-genre idiosyncratique en constant devenir. En ouvrant une conversation entre le médium du rock et les arts populaires et savants, cette hybridation interculturelle et interartistique inscrit la musique de Harvey et Cave dans la catégorie de *Art Rock* (au moins partiellement) avec ses emprunts et collages entremêlant art savant, corporalité abjecte et mode parodique.

III. DU DESORDRE GROTESQUE A L'ATROCITE EXISTENTIELLE : TRANSCENDANCE DE LA MONSTRUOSITE

La partie III éclaire le traitement du monstrueux par décrochage et fait l'objet d'un agencement différent des deux précédentes, notamment parce que les disparités esthétiques des albums étudiés étaient trop importantes pour se prêter à une analyse comparée de leurs thématiques. Avec *Let England Shake* (Harvey, 2011) et *Skeleton Tree* (Cave, 2015) les deux artistes abandonnent brutalement les mondes imaginaires pour le monde réel. Bien que les deux albums divergent esthétiquement et thématiquement, tous deux se démarquent de leurs prédécesseurs par le traitement de l'horreur qui ne sert plus de ressort grotesque mais existentiel. Ainsi, en s'intéressant au carnage de la guerre (Harvey) et à celui de la perte d'un proche (Cave), les deux musiciens transposent l'horreur dans le réel et modifient la portée de leur art.

Au premier abord, les deux albums sont esthétiquement opposés: alors que *Let England Shake* déploie une subtile synergie entre le dynamisme musical et la crudité lyrique, *Skeleton Tree* est traversé par des bribes sonores et lyriques évoquant le dépouillement et la fragmentation. *Let England Shake* repose sur une dissonance entre l'horreur explicite des paroles et des mélodies harmonieuses voire entraînantes qui contredisent les descriptions de carnage. Il s'agit d'un album paradoxal: alors que ses paroles brutalisent l'auditeur avec les atrocités de la guerre, sa ligne musicale est dynamisante. Par ailleurs, *Let England Shake* témoigne d'une volonté de dialogue inter-artistique au sujet de la guerre, ainsi Harvey ponctue son album d'emprunts musicaux, littéraires, picturaux qui ouvrent une conversation sur l'art de guerre (populaire ou savant). Harvey met en résonance les "Désastres de la Guerre" de Francisco Goya, le rockabilly, la musique reggae, et les musiques folk anglaise et kurde ainsi que les chansons de soldats et la poésie de la première guerre mondiale. L'éclectisme et la richesse stylistiques et culturelles des empreintes esthétiques utilisées par Harvey inscrivent l'album dans la lignée esthétique du « Gothique de Guerre » (« *War Gothic*⁶⁷⁵ ») et en font une zone de confluence inter-artistique autour de l'art de guerre.

A l'inverse, l'esthétique de *Skeleton Tree* est minimaliste, dépouillée, comme figée dans une prostration musicale, lyrique et culturelle. L'album est plombé par la tragédie personnelle de Cave puisque la production de l'album a été endeuillé par le décès accidentel de son fils. Compte tenu du sujet autobiographique et traumatique, la texture musicale et tonale de l'album est lacunaire, comme en sourdine, et l'horreur y est suggérée elliptiquement dans des fragments d'un monde intérieur en désintégration. Alors que Harvey a peaufiné son album et sa réflexion artistique à l'extrême (d'où la

⁶⁷⁵ Agnieszka Soltysik-Monnet et Steffen Hantke (dir.), *War Gothic in Literature and Culture*, New York and London: Routledge, 2016.

sophistication esthétique et culturelle de l'album), Cave ne se livre pas à une réflexion inter-artistique sur le traumatisme, mais tente de formuler sa réaction personnelle depuis la zone traumatique, d'où une esthétique nécessairement minimaliste et en suspens.

Dans les deux albums, le prisme du traumatisme transforme l'horreur en indicible épicode du désastre, et la souffrance humaine est rendue au moyen de l'expérience vécue : *Let England Shake* revisite les guerres du 20^e siècle à travers des témoignages de soldats, et *Skeleton Tree* sonde les effets de la perte brutale à travers les errances post-traumatiques de Cave. Les deux albums témoignent d'une révolution artistique qui transforme la musique de Harvey et Cave en un médium existentiel, une zone de contact avec la réalité de la condition humaine.

Le propos de la partie III est d'examiner les implications de ce passage à l'horreur réelle plutôt que fantasmée dans *Let England Shake* et *Skeleton Tree*, en termes d'esthétique, d'expérience d'écoute et de relation public-interprète. Il s'agit d'interroger la rupture artistique entre le répertoire monstrueux et celui du trauma : cette nouvelle écriture répudie-t-elle les anciennes modalités monstrueuses ou les recontextualise-t-elle seulement ? Cela signifie-t-il la fin d'une écriture gothique de l'excès avec son accent sur la transgression et la monstruosité ?

En formulant l'hypothèse que la centralité thématique du traumatisme individuel et collectif fait des deux albums des « récits hantés » (« *haunted narratives*⁶⁷⁶ ») du trauma qui participent d'une conversation existentielle sur la condition humaine. Par conséquent, nous interprétons ce nouveau répertoire comme une traduction musicale du récit de vie (« *life writing* ») en tant que forme narrative qui prend la vie pour objet d'écriture.⁶⁷⁷ Tout en prenant en compte la multimodalité de la musique rock, cette analyse met au jour les stratégies multimodales (musicale, lyrique, visuelle et incarnées) que Harvey et Cave déploient dans leur représentation du trauma.

A partir de la théorie du trauma et de la critique littéraire du trauma, il s'agit de démontrer que dans *Let England Shake* et *Skeleton Tree*, Harvey et Cave représentent le trauma par mimétisme structurel, en inscrivant la désorientation et la désintégration subjective au sein même de leur écriture, ce qui crée un schéma expérientiel du trauma qui immerge l'auditeur dans la psyché traumatisée.

En mettant en résonance les deux albums entre eux mais aussi avec d'autres formes artistiques du traumatisme (picturales, musicales et littéraires), cette partie interroge la fonction artistique de ce nouvel idiome de l'horreur, et son interaction avec l'écriture de l'excès et de la transgression monstrueuse de Harvey et Cave.

⁶⁷⁶ Gabriele Rippl, Philipp Schweighauser, Tiina Kirss, Margit Sutrop, and Therese Steffen. *Haunted Narratives: Life-Writing In An Age Of Trauma*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2003. 3.

⁶⁷⁷ Sidonie Smith, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: a Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. 3.