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# “Mad-Speak” and Manic Prose: Nick Cave’s Presentation of Insanity in *And the Ass Saw the Angel*

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ENG 390 A

Dr. Magee

“Mad-Speak” and Manic Prose: Nick Cave’s Presentation of Insanity in *And the Ass*

*Saw the Angel*

Language and narrative style have the capacity to both obscure and illuminate, bringing readers deep within the world of a piece or isolating them from it, providing insight into a character’s mind or presenting a false impression that may or may not be dismantled by novel’s end. Generally, texts whose purpose is to craft a coherent story generally elect control and functionality of language over the oblique and confounding – but dense, muddled, and confusing phrasings are not necessarily negative qualities for a narrative to have. If used correctly, the most bizarre and puzzling choices in language and narrative structure can actually be a boon for a given text, adding a sort of depth and richness that may not have been present otherwise.

Nick Cave’s novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel* attempts to exist firmly within the Southern Gothic tradition, pulling direct inspiration from canonized authors such as William Faulkner, Cormac McCarthy, and Flannery O’Connor. However, Cave’s novel seems to lack the careful construction and purposefulness of these writers, with its graphic violence, constantly shifting tone, style, narrative voice, and

employing an utterly bizarre and arcane vocabulary. Although this may make the work seem poorly composed and somewhat slipshod, the manic prose of Cave's novel is actually rather purposeful, presenting the mute Euchrid Eucrow's descent into madness in an evocative manner. As the narrator's mind splits and crumbles, so too does the text, in a more literal sense: constantly changing from poetic and lofty to more direct and graphic prose, distinctions between first and third person narrations becoming all but absent by novel's end, and imagined and chimeric words often replacing those that are genuine. Nick Cave's seemingly frenzied and random choices with regard to language and narrative structure may at first blush seem inferior to the writers he draws inspiration from, but actually illustrate his competence and creativity as a novelist in the Southern Gothic tradition, resulting in a work that both exists within and seems to defy genre conventions, especially in regard to stylistic choice.

Rather than choose to tell his story with one type of narrative style, Cave elects to present Euchrid's story through a variety of means, which add to the overall affect. Shifting constantly from the first person to third person narration and back, with little consistency in how each of these are stylistically composed, the prose is essentially "split", creating a sense of schizophrenia, which, while seemingly out of place at first, comes to reflect (in literal terms, as well as within the narrative itself) the sinister doubling taking place within Euchrid's mind as his story unfolds. The choice to alternate between these two narrative styles, on a basic level, makes logical sense – scenes that Euchrid could not have been present for are narrated by a "neutral" third party, providing needed information for the reader. However, in Cave's

writing, this need not be the case. Often, third person narration recounts a scene that Euchrid has taken part in, and has spoken of in his own voice. This use of repetition is particularly evident in the final third of the novel, when the protagonist is in his most debased mental state. The tone and content of the first person sections versus those composed in the third person vary considerably as the novel progresses, changing along with Euchrid's mental state. Soon, the lines between one sort of narration and the other break down completely. Are there really separate first and third person narrators, or has everything that occurs in the story taken place in Euchrid's mind? Though the portions written in his voice are far from trustworthy, can the reader place trust in portions taken from the point of view of a supposed outside narrator? Are narrative events recounted in the third person simply a product of a diseased mind? These questions take hold in the reader's mind early on in the text, as doubt is sown throughout about the speaker's credibility within Euchrid's personal accounts and the omniscient narrator's observations.

Cave's overall style, regardless of its position with a section narrated by Euchrid or an outside speaker, seems to take on the air of a Biblical text, composed in grand and lofty tones that evoke an air of the religious. Even when describing the most gruesome and cruel acts imaginable, or the most mundane or disgusting of imagery, the prose constantly retains this heightened quality that creates a sense of the sacred about the everyday or debased. This style actually adds credence to the idea that the "delusions" of the protagonist and his neighbors have grounding in some sort of truth: that they are among those appointed by God in some capacity or another – a truth that is later exposed

as an utter falsehood. However, this style is not the only one employed throughout the novel. The tone and prosaic style of *And the Ass Saw the Angel* swings like a pendulum from high, lofty phrasing and lengthy poetic lines to a more direct language (especially in more violent sequences) that does away with flowery pretext and describes events and images with gut-wrenching honesty, removing any sort of “romance” that was otherwise present. This constant shifting of style also creates a sort of narrative doubling, much like the switch from first person to third person narration, and is perhaps even more “disconcerting” and jarring than simple change of voice. Where the changes in narrative voice are clearly demarcated (which a new chapter heading, break between paragraphs, or difference in the manner that the font is set), preparing the reader for the change that is to follow, the shifts in style that occur take place without warning, suddenly descending from the sacred to the profane and ascending once more. These alternations illustrate the two “sides” of Euchrid: one, the figure “Chosen By God” to do “great things”, reflective of his madness, and one that is disposed and violently psychotic, reflective of the truth.

Nick Cave’s word choice and use of language and dialogue contribute to the overall impact of his novel. Taking place in a secluded, backwoods, and fictional section of the American South called Ukulore Valley (similar to Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County), the vast majority of the characters are written as speaking in a “debased” and low-class tongue that mimics local-color dialect as well as accent, with “ah” taking the place of “I”, “mah” taking the place of “my”, as well as other accented phrasing such as “unner” for “under”. Because of Cave’s Australian and British heritage, and lack of

knowledge of true speech affectations of this area of the United States, much of the phrasing he elects to use does not ring as “true” to the South, and many a piece of slang used are actually British in nature (such as “buggering”, meaning sodomy). Though these particular word choices are certainly inauthentic, they do not take away from the novel as a whole, and actually help to contribute to the strangeness that surrounds the imaginary settlement that Cave has created, which seems to function in a vacuum separate from all surrounding society. The narration, whether it be Euchrid’s or that belonging to the outside narrative voice, consists almost entirely of an arcane and middle English vocabulary that seems far too highbrow for the time and the area that the story takes place (being the American South between the 1930’s and 1950’s). In addition, Cave creates an almost separate vocabulary that consists of chimeric combinations of two or more words – these do not actually exist, and were seemingly composed in the hopes of creating impressions and images that would have been difficult to evoke with more normalized language. In fact, the same argument could be said of the decision to use arcane words as well. Though there is this constant use of “high” language, the narrative voice (either Euchrid or the outside speaker) often “slips” into words (“fucken”, “cunt”) that sharply contrasts earlier word choice in their vulgarity and ugliness. Again, this contrast creates the idea of a sort of doubling taking place. Euchrid is a mute, and has learned to “speak” within his head not only through listening to the speech of others, but through the reading of the family Bible as well. Though this would seemingly account for his “schizophrenic” vocabulary, it could also be argued that as a mute, Euchrid has developed an entirely new style of language, unique to himself and his condition,

created out of necessity and the lack of a “real” voice. Ironically, though Euchrid does not have the ability to speak, his narration is far more eloquent and poetic than the speech of those who have the ability to use their voices. Characters who can speak do so in a “debased” and dialect-heavy tongue, while Euchrid produces prose with the soul of a mad poet. However, many Ukulites who feel themselves pious and dutiful to God also speak in a heightened, verbose manner – a stylistic choice that seems to reflect the patterns of dialogue in the works of Flannery O’Connor, where those who are truly enlightened speak in a simplistic manner, and those who are “lost” in some way express thought in haughty tones – in fact, Cave’s presentation of this seems almost a reversal, until one realizes that Euchrid is actually mad, and many of the townspeople that he encounters and interacts with are simply fanatical and delusional<sup>1</sup>.

Though Nick Cave’s novel clearly takes on tropes of the Southern Gothic in order to tell its story, it seemingly does not hold permanent residence within the genre due to his strange stylistic and plot-related decisions in writing. Despite this, *And the Ass Saw the Angel* owes its existence to the Southern Gothic, as well as other literatures of terror and fear. The Gothic, in a general sense, was a term used as a catchall for dark literature penned in excessive prose that focused on the supernatural and the more unsettling side of human nature. According to David Punter, related themes of “the exploration of paranoia, the fear of the intrusion of the barbaric, and the alienation accompanying divisions between social groups”

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<sup>1</sup> Only two characters in the novel speak in the pure, direct, and simple manner that O’Connor gifts to “enlightened” characters – and, in truth, these are the only two truly “sane” and innocent characters in the novel.

(Punter 118) are common and often used in works of Gothic fiction. A more “popular” and less literary genre of terror developed out of the Gothic, to be known as horror. Though most critical texts attempt to separate the Gothic from horror fiction, the two are essentially two sides of the same coin, with little difference separating them. Though horror has the reputation of using more direct and graphic prose to produce a strong emotion on the part of the reader, a trait that Cave seems to have taken much influence from for his own writing, Gothic and horror function within the same sort of settings, feature the same sort of characters, and espouse similar cultural ideals. According to Clive Bloom, in his definition of the Gothic, despite their gory nature and often a focus on the occult, these sort of novels tend to be among the most conservative, “restoring things to the status quo and dedicated to the ultimate return to normalcy” (Bloom 13): a supernatural force or evil individual is treated as a deviant that must be stopped and “corrected”, and by story’s end, good conquers all (there are few exceptions to this pattern).

When the Southern Gothic was developed as a new and unique offshoot of the older tradition of the Gothic novel, it seemed to share little in common with its ancestor and predecessor. This uniquely American take on the genre did away with all the supernatural trappings of the Gothic, placing its narratives firmly within a world that could conceivably be looked upon as existing in the “real world”. Gone were the decrepit castles and mansions serving as housing for a myriad of ghosts and creatures of the night, sent to torture a largely respectable cast of characters. Instead, the locations and terror seemed closer to home: small towns, farms and backwoods hovels were the setting for unimaginable atrocities perpetrated not by

monsters, but by humans who had fallen into the deepest possible depths of depravity. Often, the characters “fighting against” these villains were just as questionable or morally reprehensible as those they hunted, grotesque in their own ways. Ugliness came not from imaginary beasts, but from the deformed appearances or moral character of the denizens that populated these worlds. Though not explicitly stated, it is often implied that for a work to be characterized as Gothic, it need have a connection to the occult or supernatural. However, Terry Heller suggests that this need not be the case – if a “tale is completely free of supernatural occurrences, it gains the advantages of using such occurrences in the narrator’s hallucinations.” (Heller 28) This is often the path taken by writers of the Southern Gothic, Cave included. Unlike the more “conservative” Gothic and horror traditions that they pulled inspiration from, writers of the Southern Gothic introduced ambiguity into their work that lead to questions of ethics and justice – the villain was not always reprimanded for his crimes, the innocent were often unfairly punished, and life would never “go back to as it had been” before whatever calamity took place. If the Gothic and horror explored the darkest aspects of human nature in a manner that reassured the reading public, the Southern Gothic illustrated the possibility for true darkness in every human heart, and that said darkness might never be extinguished.

It is this brand of the Gothic that most fascinated Nick Cave, who took its themes, setting, and stylistic tropes to use for his own devices in his novel. The musician Nick Cave, known best for his work with the seminal post-punk outfit the Birthday Party and later the Bad Seeds, held a fascination with the Southern Gothic

that flooded his compositions both sonically and lyrically. Having no academic “training” in this literature and drawing inspiration primarily from blues recordings, murder ballad broadsides and the novels of Faulkner, McCarthy, and O’Connor, Cave constructed an image of the South that was uniquely his own: one that did not accurately reflect the realities of this area of the United States as it currently was (or had ever been). These obsessions peaked in 1988 with his writing and publication of a novel that attempts to firmly situate itself within the Southern Gothic tradition, *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. *And the Ass Saw the Angel* is rife with violence, depravity, and the grotesque – but is not filtered in a manner that washes the blood and raw emotional impact from the prose that as many “traditional” Southern Gothic novels do. Rather, Cave combines the poetic, “high art” qualities of canonized Southern Gothic novelists with the graphic and emotionally driven writing of a popular horror writer. This “mixing” of seemingly disparate styles was nothing new for Cave, as his lyrics tend to mirror this combination of “high” and “low” cultural references, themes, and styles. Instead of simply recycling the ideas found in the literatures of terror that he pulled inspiration from, Cave adds his own voice to the mix, creating a new brand of the Southern Gothic that is completely unique – a kind of postmodern pastiche rather than a direct and derivative genre writing exercise on his part.

The order of the presentation of scenes and narration of the novel is crucial to understanding how Cave was able to present a decent into madness. In his definition of the Gothic, Allan Lloyd Smith suggests that this exercise “whereby the protagonist’s madness destabilizes narrative” (Smith 4) is often used in classical tales the Gothic to great effect, and in Cave’s hands it is no exception. *And the Ass*

*Saw the Angel* is divided into four sections: a prologue, and three separate “books”, entitled “The Rain”, “Beth”, and “Doghead”, respectively. In her analysis of the novel as a work of “fragmentation and excess”, Carol Hart refers to these divisions that separate the narrative as evoking notions of a “careful assemblage of parts...whereby the act of describing entails a disassembling of parts before [they] are reassembled into something constituting a whole” (Hart 98), bringing to mind the myriad narrative choices that Cave exercises may appear disjointed, but contribute greatly to the end result. The prologue and first two “books” appear and function “normally”, divided into chapters with clear demarcations between sections narrated in the first person and sections narrated in the third person. Though there are indications throughout the first three sections (present in the actual narrative in terms of actions taken and thoughts harbored by the narrator, as well as the language used to describe these) that the narrator may not be trustworthy and is a victim of slowly slipping sanity, this fact does not become truly apparent until the final section of the novel, where the prose becomes its most “mad” (along with the character’s actions in the plot), breaking down completely and splintering in conjunction with the narrator’s fragile psyche.

Euchrid’s speech generally consists of arcane language and poetically structured phrases and sentences. When it becomes clear that Euchrid has grown truly psychotic, the once fluid and essentially “beautiful” (despite dialectical affectations and curse words) language disappears, the sentences becoming clipped and shorter, sometimes consisting of only one word, or growing much longer, occasionally taking up to a page. Words and phrases are repeated in small

groupings, usually three times. The use of exclamations becomes more marked and increased, and direct address of the reader becomes constant, rather than a stylistic choice that creeps in every so often (almost as though the narrator is “hallucinating” the existence of his listeners, which would make sense, given his status as a mute). During the prologue, Euchrid’s language consists almost entirely of what shall be referred to heretofore as “mad-speak”, most likely due to the fact that chronologically, his place in the narrative during the prologue would be at the literal end of his story arch – by this point, he has fallen completely into insanity. He begins to recount his life story, which makes up the narrative of *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, beginning with his birth and infancy. Euchrid speaks of these events as though he had a direct recollection of them, which is, of course, impossible. It is not as though he could “remember” these events through his parents’ eyes, by way of their recollections to him of the specifics of the events – it is clearly established that they were abusive and paid little attention to him, so why would they take the time to tell him of his birth and early childhood? Because of this, these “memories”, in all likelihood, are either entirely false or creations based on pure conjecture. The manner in which Euchrid recounts these events is of the same harried and chopped style that characterizes his “mad-speak” – they are only products of his imagination, though he thinks of them as reflective of reality, and the narrative style used to speak of these falsehoods accurately reflects his deranged state as he brings them to mind.

The recollections themselves are occasionally coherent, painting a sad and brutal picture of abused infancy, but more often than not, they become almost

dream-like and surreal in their strange reflection of somewhat naturalistic speech and thought patterns. Even in his most deranged musings (more so than in his more sane narrative passages from the novel), Euchrid's style of narration clearly mimics the manner in which the thoughts and speech affected by most people seem to be produced. This does not read as "stream of conscious", but rather almost as a careful study of "proper" and "natural-sounding" dialogue, seemingly only able to be acquired by one who is fated to spend his life listening, never responding. When Euchrid recounts his discovery of his muteness as an infant, his narration seems to mimic the simplistic, rushing thoughts of an infant concerned with only finding warmth and sustenance, and the sudden shock of confusion and numbness afterward when he finds that he cannot call out to his parents:

Rather ah decided to make a bit of a ruckus – ... so ah filled mah lungs with air and howled and howled and screamed and raged and gnashed and yelled...and, of course, my embrangement of words – O how they rolled off mah tongue – O how they gushed from mah mouth – great bloody words torn from the pit of mah belly – in spite of all mah whoop and holler...in spite of it *all*...

Not a peep of sound did ah make...

No, not a peep of sound did ah make (Cave 13-14).

These run-on lines, fevered listing of words and phrases, and most of all, the dashes that insert sudden and violent pauses into lines that run headlong to their conclusions are indicative of Euchrid's "mad-speak" at all points in the novel, and seem to call out for the reader's attention – grabbing hold of the eye and inner ear and "screaming" in a manner that his absence of a voice never allowed him to.

Juxtaposed with this, in alternating chapters, is a narration in the third person that is at once flowery and poetic as well as clinical and detached, presenting the history of the fictional Ukulore Valley and Euchrid's family history. These descriptions help to situate the reader in the purely imaginary locale of the story, giving anecdotes of the antics of certain citizens, vivid depictions of the landscape, and cementing the common beliefs of Ukulore Valley's denizens, fleshing this world out in a manner that makes its existence seem more plausible and genuine. The language often takes on the style of a considerably older text, addressing the reader directly and often "instructing" said reader to visualize certain images: "As we pass above, we see a line of torches winking beneath the dark canopy, moving inward...in a thin ribbon of light." (Cave 7) Occasionally, arcane narrative devices such as the inclusion of fictional "historical writings", newspaper accounts, and religious documents in order to create a sense of "realism" are given large sections of a chapter or entire chapters unto themselves. Often written in a more clinical, distant manner than the third person sections that purely serve to provide relevant character background and further the plot, these "collected clippings" of Ukulite history seem to create another layer of narration, one that is only present in the prologue. The inclusion of these sections begins to create a profound sense of division and schizophrenia in the text that will only increase as the book continues. The narration of an outside speaker during these sections of the text is almost consistently lofty and somewhat cold, bringing to mind the style used by Faulkner. This is in extreme and sharp contrast to Euchrid's direct, feverish style of narration that surrounds it. The prologue's clear divisions between the fluid, detached

elegance of the third person and manic, verbal violence of the first are the only place in the text where these clear stylistic divisions exist. Once the novel begins in earnest, these metaphorical partitions that separate style and narrative voice begin to corrode and combine.

As Euchrid's narration of his "life story" continues into the first and second "books" of the novel, events that occur throughout the section would have taken place during moments of his life that he could feasibly remember with relative ease, ranging from late childhood through adolescence and his teenage years. Though he is narrating from the perspective of his "diseased" mind at the end of his life, the events he speaks of are written about in a more poetic and controlled manner that does not reflect the "mad-speak" produced at the end of his life, and reads more like an emotional rendering of the flowery third person narration found in the prologue. Presumably, this more "measured" form of speech is more in keeping with what would have been his linguistic thought patterns during his late childhood and adolescence, up into his early teen years. Euchrid's memories are at their most vivid during this section, recounting even the most mundane of events with weight and carefully observed detail. This choice seems to reflect the writing of Cormac McCarthy, in his similar heavy and sinister treatment of events that are essentially commonplace. Much like McCarthy, through Euchrid's narration, Cave imbues the unsettling into the average. When the rain that is to be the scourge of the Ukulites for several years begins to fall, Euchrid's narration describes the coming of clouds and a change in the atmosphere with the severity and import of a Biblical catastrophe:

The air had turned tactile and tinted red...there was an electricness about it...It kinda oozed – this air – oozed into mah lungs, soupy and reeking of evilness...There in the very blood of the air ah could sense the most hell-born forecast, hear the murky rhymes beneath...hear the beat of its breath...feel its plodding pulse, now fuller still, its pounding! This special evil...and this special air tensed to receive it. (Cave 59)

The air itself becomes an object of flesh and blood to Euchrid, seemingly possessed and controlled by an unknown and malevolent force. Thunder takes on the role of this new, sinister creature's heartbeat and steady, measured breath. An average thunderstorm becomes an image of hell and terror in Euchrid's young eyes. Though the passage seems to have the same hallmarks of his "mad-speak", with the exclamations and dashes that break up his phrasing, this account is more controlled and poetic than his earlier, messier remembrance. There is a purposeful rhythm and repetition, a slowness that reflects the menacing approach of what would prove to be a disastrous natural event. Euchrid's narrative voice is of this nature when he describes his most innocent and "sane" years, hinting at the madness to come with certain elements of his distinctive manner of "speech", but the language and phrasing are bizarrely lyrical and pleasant, contrasting the fractured and jarring state it would fall into as his mind succumbs to madness.

The only times during these "books" when a more fevered style that is anything like his true "mad-speak" emerges is when Euchrid finds himself in situations of intense fear or when he is consumed by anger, hinting that he may have had mental instabilities from an early age, and injustices in his childhood that spurred these emotional outbursts perhaps led to his insanity. During these miniature flights into madness, Euchrid's thoughts tend to devolve to self-

deprecating in the extreme, convinced that he has “bad blood” in him that is destined to brand him as a monster, leading to his self-mutilation to “rid himself” of it:

Ah picked at the evil black crusts that capped each wound with a dead and ghastly crown...new blood would bubble...bright and red at first but darking blackly at the heart to a grim crimson curd finally to clot and harden, sick and black. Yes, *sick and black*. (Cave 112)

Though this remembrance affects the harried, fevered tone of his more deranged recollections through lack of punctuation, the alliteration used (crusts, capped, crown; blood, bubble, bright) indicates a greater sense of control over the narration than in passages that consist of Euchrid’s true “mad-speak”. As the novel continues, these sorts of self-loathing reflections increase in frequency, until Euchrid’s mind eventually snaps, causing him to believe that just the opposite is true. Rather than believe the unkind and abusive words of those around him, Euchrid comes to think that his difference has offered him a position as “chosen by God to carry out His work”, much like O’Connor’s Enoch Emery in her novel *Wise Blood*.

On the whole, the sections of narration told in the third person retain the elevated and somewhat distant quality that they held during the prologue, but the extreme definition between the two narrative patterns begins to slip. A more direct and graphic style (as well as a marked tendency to list in one or two word sentences) that is generally a defining characteristic of Euchrid’s first person narration worms its way into the third person narration, and vice versa. When a chapter narrated by an outside speaker describes the sanctuary from society that Euchrid has found in a fetid swampland, it is done so with the characteristic qualities of Euchrid’s narration:

He heard...the harping song of the tarantula, crouched in a corner, plucking each dew-dipped string of his web. Nor did the crackle of leaves in a stump's hollow heart go unnoticed. Or the bones and beaks of dead birds. The mad scrabble of a trapped wing. Eggs opening. Nests burning....A squall. A trickle. A shrill. (Cave 153)

Beginning poetically and flowery, then taking a sharp turn for the more direct and succinct, by the end of this passage composed in third person narration, patterns from Euchrid's "mad-speak" have taken root. The lines descend from long and flowing to clipped and terse, consisting of at most two words. The language has lost its lofty style, devolving from descriptions of "dew-dripped strings" on spider webs to clipped and incomplete images of nature at its most horrific, with dead birds and burning nests. In this passage, the image of the swamp as an unlikely place of beauty quickly becomes something sinister and unsettling, almost reflective of the change in overall tone that the third person narration would undergo as the first and second "books" of the novel proceed. As the style that characterized Euchrid's first person narration begins to seep into the third, the voice of the outside speaker never regains its former qualities of the pure and lyrical, at least in the capacity that it held at the start of the novel. As the second "book" winds to a close, the barriers holding Euchrid's madness at bay decay completely and eventually snap with the destruction of his swampland "sanctum" at the hands of the violent and misunderstanding townsfolk.

The third and final "book" of the novel, "Doghead", illustrates the final months in the life of Euchrid the mute. Consumed by a rage that cannot be quelled and an uncontrollable madness, Euchrid's narration grows steadily in its manic nature, devolving from the fevered yet controlled state of his angry or frightened

musings in the second and third “books” to the completely unfettered, true “mad-speak” that characterized his remembrances during the prologue. Euchrid’s now completely disturbed mental state is reflected in the structure of this section as a whole: the chapter divisions of the previous sections that generally demarcated a shift in narrator from first to third and back again (though these shifts also took place within chapters, marked by separate paragraphs split from the whole) are gone. The section functions as a single “chapter”, and is referred to by Cave as “Euchrid’s monologue”<sup>2</sup>. It is this section of the book that details how Euchrid came to be in the sorry and hunted state that he had found himself in at the start of the novel. In terms of narrative, Euchrid’s actions and tendencies at their most morbid and disturbed. His delusions and hallucinations have gone from mild to full-blown and constant, and compose the vast majority of his musings and thoughts. Euchrid’s newfound and firm belief in the reality of said delusions and hallucinations is essentially what prompts him to commit the atrocities that lead to his eventual “execution” at the hands of an angry mob that opens the novel.

The vast majority of the third “book” is written in the first person, with only an occasional shift to the third. When this happens, it is usually for narrative convenience and clarity, describing information and scenes that Euchrid could not have possibly witnessed, but are essential for the reader to know in order to understand the plot at this point in the novel. At this juncture in the narrative, Euchrid is convinced that he has been appointed by God to carry out some rather heinous crimes ranging from the torture of animals and humans, to the rape of a

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<sup>2</sup> Cave, Nick. Interview by Lindzee Smith. “Nick Cave.” *BOMB Magazine*. 1990. New Art Publications. 1990. Web. 22 Nov 2013.

young girl, to murder. Though he has a high opinion of himself, the “mad-speak” that almost entirely composes this section (it becomes more fevered and like the opening passages as the narration continues) does not reflect this, as his earlier, more controlled narrations would have. Rather than speak about his “divine appointment” with the lofty and poetic tones of his earlier narration, Euchrid describes his position as a sort of “King” with directness and in terms that make his deeds seem as horrific as they actually are. Euchrid also seems to be aware that he may be afflicted by mental failings, and discusses them in detail for the first time in the text. His reflections on his perception of his madness are composed in an even more fevered and muddled manner than ever before:

Have ah told you about the hellish fright of Deadtime? ... Sun serves, moon returns, searing time’s cope with their mad flight, back and forth, to and fro, dark and light...An hour! A day! Gone! Snuck past! Deadtime! Deadtime! Where do you go? Who uses you, if not me? The killers and the killed. Murdering of mah lifetime – mah living time...the insufferable stretch of Time. Time lived. But what of deadtime, of all the days unaccounted for? Where do they go?  
(Cave 291-292)

When describing his inability to account for several hours or even days at a time (a phenomenon he calls “deadtime”), Euchrid’s narration reflects the confusion he feels at this phenomenon, and openly questions its purpose and existence. He does not so much muse as shout angrily with confusion and frustration about this disturbing trend that he has noticed in his days. His sentences are short and clipped as they always have been during periods of “mad-speak”, but the vast majority consists of only one or two words – differing from the more varied sentence structure of his narration earlier in the novel. The direct address of the reader in this passage is

common for this portion of the novel, and becomes a hallmark of his “mad-speak” – Euchrid constantly “speaks” to the reader, which could be viewed as essentially hallucinating the existence of person who has the ability to hear him and listen to his tale, silently pleading in vain for the kindness and understanding that he has never received (and never will, due to his actions). The tone of his narration shifts from the pained and sorrowful (“Who uses you, if not me?”) to the angry and confused (“An hour! A day! Gone!”) to the numb and accepting (“...the insufferable stretch of time. Time lived”), illustrating a frantic mixture of powerful emotion in simple and direct language. Euchrid’s “mad-speak” behaves much in this way for the remainder of the novel – a harried and angry sort of prose, expressing confusion and dismay at his fate.

Sections of the third “book” that are composed in the third person are few and far between, and at first, stand in stark contrast to Euchrid’s “mad-speak” that makes up most of this section. These sections appear in italics, and are at first easily distinguished as separate from Euchrid’s principle first person narration that dominates the third “book” of the novel. Though they generally recount events that Euchrid was not present for, serving a simple and direct narrative-driven purpose, strangely, many italicized third person sections simply reiterate scenes that Euchrid has just described. However, the third person narration differs strongly from the first in terms of content and overall tone. Where Euchrid tends to describe his own thoughts and occasionally progress the narrative through descriptions of his environment and actions in this section, the third person actually moves the plot along. This narration will “take up” the description of situations and scenes that

Euchrid has “failed” to describe (as he had favored a recounting of his inner turmoil over progressing the plot of the novel). It is almost as though the outside speaker seems to recognize that Euchrid is too far gone to speak coherently and be a voice that the reader can trust, and therefore narrates events and details vignettes that Euchrid is essentially now incapable of articulating. Though Euchrid identifies himself as a “King” and an individual who has been appointed and inspired by the divine, his narration suggests that he may not actually see himself this way, refraining from the more lofty and poetic phrasing that made up earlier musings in favor of more direct phrasing that seems to ignore his inflated sense of self. Instead of the sense of detachment and ambivalence towards Euchrid that had been present in most earlier third person narrations, the outside narrator paints an image of Euchrid and his deeds, no matter how vile, which matches the image in his head of his divine appointment, as in this passage when he paces about his home, where he now keeps a menagerie of tortured animals that he considers his “subjects” and “servants”:

*It was only then that the King deemed it appropriate to stand...He paced a slow, thoughtful circle around the room...He circled...and he seemed to be the focus of a thousand beaded eyes that closed or gazed or crossed, each according to its nature, as their King circumnavigated the room one final time. He drew to a halt and considered his surrounds. The animals, soothed, now slept. (Cave 293-294)*

Euchrid is not referred to by his name, but by the title that he has given himself.

Though his actions are nothing of grand “importance” in this passage, the narrator describes his walking about the room as though it were a task of extreme goodwill

and grandiosity, detailed with a sort of reverence and respect, as though awed by his “majesty”.

As the novel comes towards its conclusion, the differences between Euchrid’s first person narrative voice and that of the third person narrator become all but absent. As Euchrid’s mind has crumbled and decayed, destroying the barriers that prevented his more psychotic tendencies from seeing the light of day, so too do the barriers that separate one sort of narrative style from the other. Aspects of Euchrid’s more direct and manic form of narration make their way into the third person, to the extent where it becomes doubtful if there was ever an outside narrator at all:

*For some a mere glance at the sky served to alert them to the oncoming threat, and no sooner had they looked up than they were looking down again, their fury rekindled – for ah brought the rain, ah brought the rain –*

...

Oh now ah know. Oh now ah know what’s happening. (Cave 396)

As the novel comes to end where it began, with Euchrid waiting to meet his fate, the third person narration alternates with the first person narration, paragraph for paragraph, describing the same sequence of events from two slightly differing perspectives. As the mob looks upon Euchrid one final time before dousing him in gasoline and setting him alight, it begins to rain. As the crowd recognizes this atmospheric change, the first person voice breaks into the clearly marked third person narration – “*for ah brought the rain, ah brought the rain*” even maintaining the same style of font that had come to mark it as separate. With its intrusion into the third person, it becomes easy

to doubt if there had ever been a separate narrative voice at all. Has the novel truly been the product of a single narrative voice, not two separate ones? Was the “third person narration” simply the more controlled side of Eucharid’s personality, manifesting itself as a separate entity within the prose? As the psyche of the protagonist has destroyed itself, so too has the physical, literal structure of the prose that tells his story.

Nick Cave’s novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel* may seem like a disjointed work, stitched together from a variety of stylistic and narrative choices that call attention to one another and do not seem to create a controlled and coherent whole. However, Cave’s choices are far from random. His bizarre and unique use of narrative style, language, and tone help to present for the reader a harrowing and evocative account of the crumbling of a fragile mind, one that is mirrored in the very text that describes this disintegration.

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