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Genre and Language in Nick Cave's *And the Ass Saw the Angel*

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1. Introduction

In 1988 Nick Cave published his first book, *King Ink*, which is a collection of lyrics and plays. One year later Cave's first novel, *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, was published, followed by another collection of poems, essays and lyrics, *King Ink II*, in 1997 and his second novel, *The Death of Bunny Munro* in 2009. Whereas Nick Cave's musical work is widely acknowledged, his literary oeuvre is mostly ignored by critics and the scholarly community. Nevertheless, being an important part of contemporary popular culture and having a wide interest in non-mainstream cultural phenomena, Nick Cave reflects both the *zeitgeist*, cultural and literal movements, and introduces his audience to his own reading of the Bible. *Cultural Seeds*, edited by Karen Welberry and Tanya Dalziell, as the lengthiest study of Cave's work to date, focuses mainly on his lyrics, while his other literary work continues to be ignored. This thesis seeks to present the first study of Nick Cave's novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel*.

And the Ass Saw the Angel tells the story of Euchrid, a mute outcast boy in the American South. His village is inhabited by a religious sect, the Ukulites, whose mission it is to purge their hometown of evil and annihilate everything that diverts from the norms they set up. Euchrid is not able to find help or support his family and thus the story develops into a dark narrative, haunted by Gothic themes and features which are emphasised by postmodernist fragmentation and scepticism towards representation. Euchrid's mental illness becomes more and more apparent, leading to hallucinations, frequent blackouts and the conviction that he is God's missionary. The foundling Beth is regarded by the Ukulites as a saintly figure, as after her appearance in Ukulore Valley the rain stops for the first time after five years. Euchrid has visions of an angel, who conveys God's task for Euchrid, which supposedly is killing Beth. Thus, he sets up a plan to take revenge on the Ukulites and tries to kill Beth. After failing to do so, he commits suicide.

The focus of this thesis is on two major issues: generic hybridity and a poststructural reading with an emphasis on language and culture. It is hardly possible to draw clear-cut lines between genres or modes, especially in the case of the Gothic and postmodernism. The Gothic, which has its origin in the eighteenth century, underwent many stylistic and topical changes, incorporating trends or events from the times in which the respective texts were actually written. Despite the diversity of Gothic literature, there are certain

features which define the reader's affiliation to this genre. Similarly, postmodernism is excessively presenting plurality and intertextuality, and turning them into dogmas. Therefore, due to their versatility, the Gothic and postmodernism appear to be ideal modes for the formation of a hybrid. In *And the Ass Saw the Angel* the mood and the main topics are unquestionably Gothic, as are certain themes and motifs, while the style is both Gothic and postmodernist. The generic analysis is divided into two chapters, however, the features presented are frequently found in both modes. The most obvious parallel is the presence of absence, i.e. the absence of an apparent source of fear, which is presented by Gothic features such as the Uncanny or the doppelgänger, the absence of closure, the absence of certainty and reliability, which are evoked by narrative techniques, and the absence of individual identity, which is again reflected in the form of the doppelgänger motif and the poststructuralist notion that both human perception and expression are framed and shaped by the closed linguistic system. Regarding the Gothic a historical overview is presented, discussing some tendencies of Gothic literature from its first appearance until today and features which are traditionally attributed to the Gothic are analysed in detail. In Chapter 3, postmodernism and especially intertextuality are emphasised, as *And the Ass Saw the Angel* is marked by a large number of intertextual references to the Bible and Nick Cave's own lyrics. Chapter 4 presents an introduction to the main topics of poststructuralist literary theory. As linguistics is a major issue in poststructuralism, the focus of this chapter is language. A psychoanalytic approach based on Lacan's theory of identity formation and the use of language of mentally challenged people is employed. The analysis of power structures and the relationship between language and mental illness in a societal context is based on accounts by Michel Foucault.

2. The Horror, the Horror!

2.1 The Gothic Tradition

As Gothic literature has been popular since its first appearance in the 18th century and as the Gothic mode can be found in different types of texts with different settings and multiple plot lines, one can speak of a tradition which has been carried on in both a conservative and a progressive way, adopting cultural and societal changes and literary movements. Therefore, the focus of this chapter lies on the historical development of the genre and on single features, which seem to be present in different texts throughout different epochs.

The genre of the Gothic emerged in the eighteenth century. Frequently Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), bearing the subtitle "A Gothic Story" since its third edition, is said to be the first novel of the genre. The most prominent feature of Gothic literature is the depiction of protagonists' great and acute fear and hence the evoking of anxiety in the readers. In *The Castle of Otranto* the protagonists appear to be victims of their surroundings, particularly the castle. Although Manfred, Lord of the castle, presents malevolence, and the striving for power and adultery, he and the other characters in the novel appear helpless when events take place which are beyond their control, for instance visions of monsters, sudden deaths, i.e. the death of Conrad, Manfred's son, or dislocations of parts of the castle. However, the settings and sources of fear change throughout the centuries and novels set in the times they were written adopt the prevailing social circumstances, shaping the nature of the Gothic.

Early Gothic novels, including *The Castle of Otranto*, are mostly set in castles, fortresses and monasteries, which symbolize the irrational and uncontrollable, opposed to the rational world outside. Remote countries of which there was little knowledge are also popular at the time, e.g. Italy, Spain or the Balkans. In these novels terror is evoked through the unknown and foreign, imprisonment and the impossibility of escape, visions of ghosts and spectres, and the fear of trespasses in earthly life caused by the wish to earn a pleasant afterlife based on Christian beliefs. In Christian dogmatism, gender roles are subverted and one finds compulsory celibacy, adultery, cross-dressing, witchcraft and rape. Sexual frustration is often a trigger for moral and legal transgressions and thus a vital source for scandals, or stories about immorality and violence. Another cause of fear is that which one cannot see and classify, but only sense

the presence of *something*. Thus, the sound of the blowing wind or the creaking of the floor evoke terror, as one cannot define the source of the noise and the nature of the thing or person that has caused it. Here Gothic writers use the indeterminacy of language to cause unease, as everything that cannot be described by words is usually not part of our world and therefore the unknown may disturb peace and order. A mixture of these features is mostly predominant in Gothic literature. For example, Jonathan Harker in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* has to undertake a business trip to Romania, a foreign country with strange manners and supposedly a low standard of education and hence a strong sense of superstition. He is imprisoned by Dracula, does not know whether his visions of Dracula climbing walls or the three women wanting to seduce him are true or false. Another example combining the most popular features of Gothic literature is Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*. Here, a man who is supposed to lead a life in chastity and asceticism, devoted to religion and the mental support of others, commits multiple crimes. He uses magic in order to seduce a young girl, rapes and imprisons her, kills her mother and has a vision of the devil shortly before he dies. Thus, he violates all social rules and those imposed on him by the Catholic Church.

In the 19th century, a shift of settings can be observed, reflecting the Victorian society and its morals and worldview. Now terror takes place on the domestic terrain and the focus lies on the psychological states and processes of the protagonists. *The Turn Of The Screw* (1898) by Henry James, for instance, takes place solely in a private residence, while the horror in *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is evoked through one single closed room. These locations, like the castles in monasteries mentioned previously, also create a sense of isolation, from which the characters cannot escape. However, as home is supposed to be a shelter and retreat, the distortion of safety one expects, triggers claustrophobic fear. Further, protagonists are often portrayed as unreliable or mentally ill, which creates the same mental state for characters and readers, as both cannot distinguish fact from lies or delusion.

Another frequently found location in Gothic literature is the American South, which is presented as a remote area inhabited by extremely conservative and religious people. One of the first and most popular authors of Southern Gothic literature is William Faulkner. He introduces stereotypes of this specific genre, which will remain present in a large number of Southern Gothic texts. In novels like *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) or *As I Lay Dying* (1930), the Southern population is presented as obsessively religious,

conservative and often having at least one mentally ill member in the family or community. Flannery O'Connor presents the South in her novels and short stories, published between 1949 and 1988. She focuses on religiosity, morality and madness. Another renowned author of the Southern Gothic is Cormac McCarthy, who depicts the relationship between mental illness and religious obsession in *Child of God* (1973). The combination of madness and religiosity often results in conflicts between the individual and society or even in violent crime scenes. Especially in modernist text as written by Faulkner, the psyches of the protagonists are a major issue, emphasised by the use of the stream of consciousness. A different trend in Gothic literature are stories about vampires located in the American South, mostly around New Orleans. Here, the flamboyance of the city contributes to the vampires' hedonism and thus sheltering them from being discovered, as debauchery is part of every-day life. Another example of vampires living in the South is Charlaine Harris' *Sookie Stackhouse Series*, and its TV series adaptation *True Blood*. The story is set around Shreveport, Louisiana, and the fictional town of Bon Temps. In these narratives vampires seek for acceptance and a peaceful co-existence with humans.

Gothic novels written since the 1970s, like *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, return either to older Gothic traditions, or they are set in a modern world, adopting and incorporating only a few of the traditional features of the Gothic. Especially vampire novels like Anne Rice's *The Vampire Lestat* or Poppy Brite's *Lost Souls* take place in the 1980s and incorporate recent trends in music or fashion. Furthermore, vampires like Lestat get the chance to tell their own story. The seductive element has not changed since the beginning of vampire stories, but they are not portrayed as animalistic and cruel. Instead, they obtain more "human" features, for instance a high sense of emotionality and hatred for their own nature, despising their craving for blood. This tendency reaches its peak, as mentioned above, in the *Sookie Stackhouse Series*, *True Blood* and Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*, where vampires also fight for their place in contemporary American society.

Recently, terms like postmodern Gothic or Gothic postmodernism have appeared in studies about Gothic literature. Nevertheless, it appears that critics' opinions about the terminology are diverging. Theo D'haen, for instance suggests that "in postmodernism we witness the reintroduction of the 'unreal' as a meaningful category or element" (D'haen 284). The plurality of postmodernism enables the incorporation and

coexistence of features of different genres. Novelists like Patrick McGrath employ, for instance, claustrophobic domestic terror or the portrayal of a city as a place of unnoticed crimes.

And the Ass Saw the Angel can be classified as a Southern Gothic novel, as it is set in the American South and contains many features of the genre, for instance a closed community having no contact with the outside world, strongly conservative morals and obsessive religious belief, as well as murder, sadism, torture and rape.

Religion plays an important role in the novel, as in most early Gothic novels and traditional Southern Gothic novels. *And the Ass Saw the Angel* starts with a passage from the “Book of Numbers” in the Bible, telling the tale of Balaam, who beat his Ass for stopping in the middle of the road. What he realised afterwards is that the Ass had acted in this way because it had seen the angel of the Lord, while Balaam himself was blind to this epiphany. The dominant religious community in *And the Ass Saw the Angel* are called “Ukulites” after Jonas Ukulore, who is referred to as “Prophet and Saint”, “Prophet and Patriarch” and “Prophet and Martyr” (*Ass* 14). It can be assumed that the belief of the Ukulites is based on Christianity, as they often refer to one God, to the Bible and to the Messiah. Furthermore, there are masses, during which prophets or priests preach to the believers. Every inhabitant of Ukulore Valley, except Euchrid and his family, is a practicing Ukulite, goes to mass regularly and leads a religious and conservative life, trying to eliminate all evil. However, Euchrid is also obsessed with religion. He is convinced that he has been chosen by God to fulfil a mission. Although the mission’s aim is never explicitly mentioned in the novel, Euchrid wants to kill Beth, the girl who is supposed to give birth to the Messiah and thinks that Euchrid is Jesus. Furthermore, Euchrid has multiple visions of an angel.

The Gothic and sinister aspects of *And the Ass Saw the Angel* is emphasised from the beginning. The atmosphere is dark and uncanny, and the reader finds images foreshadowing negative events or death, for instance “these sly corbies are birds of death.” (*Ass* 3), “worried roots rising from the hillside soil as they suffer the creeping burden” (*Ass* 4) or “women mourn as at a wake, bullying their grief with breasts bruised black and knuckles bleeding” (*Ass* 5). Then it starts to rain for the next five years and statistics are given in order to illustrate changes happening in these five years. Gradually the number of deaths rises from 5 in 1940, the year before the rain, to 16 in 1943. However, the number of births rises from 3 in 1940 to 16 in 1944. Thus, darkness

seems on the one hand to have a depressing effect, quickening the progress of diseases and shortening life expectancy, but on the other hand the birth rate increases. Slowly, the reader gets to know the villagers' dark psyches. In traditional Gothic literature, characters often face their own psychic darkness, for instance Ambrosio in *The Monk*, who is aware of his wrong-doing. Thus, he regards supernatural powers as guilty for luring him into sin. In *And the Ass Saw the Angel* people are not aware of their own darkness, as they see their deeds and crimes as justified for the sake of the village and their belief.

In the Ukulite community nobody who holds differing opinions or beliefs is accepted. Instead of oppressing what could be regarded as the Other and keeping it as a normative reference in order to define their own identity, the Ukulites want to get rid of everything that does not fit into the community. Domestic terror is also present in *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. Euchrid is being abused verbally and physically by his mother, who is permanently drunk, while his father sets up traps for animals and engages in animal fights. Already at the beginning of the story death is introduced, as Euchrid's younger twin brother dies in the shoebox next to him. Euchrid's father has a collection of animals which got caught in his traps and which have to fight each other in the backyard. Later Euchrid's father even kills their only mule, which bears a resemblance to the biblical anecdote and gave the novel its title. Although the mule was always working hard, Euchrid's father is suddenly in a frenzy, which makes him kill the innocent animal. In the course of the story his hatred for his wife is also growing until he finally kills her.

2.2 Victorian Society and Gender Roles

And the Ass Saw the Angel is set around the Fin de Siècle and the beginning of the 20th, which, despite all artistic effort and striving for changes, is marked by Victorian values that played a major role both in Europe and the American South. One important feature is religion, and especially Protestantism, which marked the role of the Bible in daily life and popular culture (see Wilson 186). The New South was dominated by social conservatism and "fell heavily upon women, whose status remained subordinate and dependent" (Newby 320). Victorian society was determined by strict rules and moral values, which was also reflected in sexuality:

Southern sexual attitudes and mores reflected the deep ambivalence also found in English Victorian responses to sexuality. [...] Sexual expression before and

outside of marriage for males, although never fully accepted as a norm, was nonetheless tacitly tolerated. (Wilson 186)

Wives and mothers were glorified for their virtue and purity, while “allowing certain concessions to the animal nature of males” (Wilson 186) and chastity before marriage was regarded as compulsory. Nevertheless, not only women had a hard time keeping up with society’s expectations. Many men suffered from nervous disorders, as striving for success and keeping a mask became unbearable (see Showalter 9). At the same time a movement towards female liberation regarding sexuality, politics and labour could be observed. This led to a rethinking of what it meant to be masculine, and a crisis of masculinity, as well as a sense of misogyny arose. Freud’s famous reading of the Medusa myth also contributed to a vision of women as powerful and devouring. Freud regards Medusa’s hair as a phallic symbol, which, belonging to a woman who is supposed to be lacking a penis and hence phallic imagery and power, poses a threat to male sexuality. The serpentine hair is associated with the Other, which one wants to explore and dominate. This notion can be compared to the vision of woman as a dark continent, needing the conquest and reign of man. Another binary opposition inherent in the concept of Medusa is that her hair can embrace and kill at the same time, which makes her both interesting and fatal. This notion is developed further in the concept of the vagina dentata, which, being more ostensibly able to devour male genitals, again represents the dangerous nature of femininity. Thus, on a more private level, men suddenly encountered the horror of a castrating potential in women, while on the other hand the liberation of women caused an obsession with male power and the fear of the loss of virility. Many men tried to display their power and their superiority over women in all respects. However, as women slowly became independent and started to earn their own living, they were able to choose their husbands more freely and could also be divorced, if they wished. During the Fin de Siècle patriarchies came under attack, mostly by women and male artists. However, women were and often still are regarded as the Other. The definition of woman is depending on the privileged man. Those binary oppositions are also reflected in Gothic literature of Victorian times. The notion of two types of women arose. The first takes care of children and the household and enters marriage as a virgin and the second who assumingly gives in to hedonistic pleasures is regarded as a fallen woman.

In the field of arts, the depiction of narcissism, femmes fatales, autoeroticism and gynecidal female sexuality (see Showalter 10) is contrasted with portraits of childlike,

innocent women. An example of the portrayal of the angel in the house is George Elgar Hicks' *Woman's Mission: Companion to Manhood* (1863).



Illustration 1: George Elgar Hick's - *Woman's Mission: Companion to Manhood* (1863)

Here the woman is represented as gentle support for her husband, obeying and serving him. Sexuality is completely absent in this picture. The woman wears a high-necked dress, which does not reveal any bodily charms and thus bears no obvious cause for arousal or voyeurism. Her hair is tied back and she looks up to her husband, neglecting her own feelings and wellbeing.

Mythical figures are popular subjects for paintings and often serve as models for literary characters, for instance Salome and Judith from the Bible in Oscar Wilde's *Salome* or Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. All these women are famous for their dangerous power over men, resulting from their sexual attraction, even though they often act for good causes or social welfare. Apart from the above mentioned portrayals of Medusa, there is another woman worth mentioning in this account. Lady Godiva was a noblewoman living in the early eleventh century: Her husband imposed massive taxation on the people, which Lady Godiva sought to stop. He offered to reduce taxation if she rode naked on a horse through the city, which she actually did after forbidding people to walk outside their houses. One man, however, did not obey this command, and according to the legend, after seeing Lady Godiva he turned blind. On the one hand, this

is one of the most famous cases of voyeurism and, on the other hand, this myth can be compared to that of Medusa. Both women are sexually attractive and dangerous, as looking upon them leads to blindness, and both have often been depicted in the history of art. One of the most famous paintings is John Collier's *Lady Godiva*, displaying a young woman, solely covered by her long hair. Her head is lowered, which makes her appear shy or embarrassed, hiding the dangerous nature of her sexual attraction.



Illustration 2: Collier - *Lady Godiva*

These two examples illustrate the notion that it is not possible to unite strength and sexual attraction on the one hand and motherhood and piety on the other hand in one person.

Regarding gender, there are stereotypical roles and constellations which can be compared to those in Victorian and Southern Gothic literature. All women in *And The Ass Saw The Angel* are represented as either struggling to keep up a mask of good and caring wives and mothers, or as fallen women. However, their duties turn out to be hardly bearable. Sardus Swift and his wife, Rebecca, do not have any children, although they wish to have a stereotypical family. When Rebecca learns that she is unable to bear children, she commits suicide. As she cannot fit into the social role, she prefers not to live at all rather than live as a potential outcast. In contrast to this stands Cosey Mo. She is the only prostitute in the village and it turns out that almost every man in the village makes use of the services she offers. She lives in a trailer on the outskirts of the village, which makes it easier for her clients to visit her unseen. However, after several years of permanent rain, the inhabitants of the village start to blame Cosey Mo for their bad luck

and want to purge their village of evil. On a Sunday afternoon, the villagers assemble in front of her caravan. The first accusation is made by Abie Poe, who says,

Behold, brethren! Behold the scarlet sloven! Discovered! Hear this, whore! *Dirtiness is next to anti-Godliness!* Yea! Painted seductress, your den is upturned! *Temptress!* Whore! Speak not, for your tongue is cloven! *As is your gender!* *Cloven as the viper's tongue! Cloven as the hoof of Satan!* (*Ass* 104)

This example illustrates the notion of fallen women. “Painted seductress” refers to the fact that Cosey Mo uses make-up in order to look appealing to her clients. Her sexual attraction is being regarded as sinful, with which she lures men into the claws of evil. Abie Poe compares her gender to a viper’s tongue, which evokes multiple parallels. Firstly, a viper’s bite is toxic which means that a touch of Cosey Mo’s gender is also toxic and harms her victims. Secondly, there is a parallel to the serpent in the book of Genesis. The serpent leads her into sin and therefore God curses Adam and Eve with labour and painful childbirth. In the course of the attack on Cosey Mo, her long blonde locks are cut. In the eyes of the villagers her hair is part of her seductive potential and therefore she is being deprived of her hair and her beauty. Her body is also being violated, and thus destroyed and unable to commit sin and lure others to do evil.

At the end of this passage, Euchrid feels a certain unity with Cosey Mo:

ah experienced an overwhelming sensation of incomparable shame – her shame – and for a moment in time the signals of mah heart and those of the harlot crossed paths, and ah knew that at that very moment, wherever she might be, Cosey Mo was experiencing a hell fully different to what she had known before – *mah* hell, just as ah was living hers. (*Ass* 108-109)

What Euchrid might refer to with “mah hell” is the fact that he could never be accepted by the society they live in, not even his own family. Until that moment Cosey Mo led an unhappy life and injected drugs before she received her clients. However, she had never been confronted with the hatred of the whole community, men and women alike. Now people want to get rid of her. Here another Gothic feature becomes apparent: silence and the lack of closure. Many things are not said and thus many questions are left unanswered. The reader has to put the puzzle pieces together and try to make sense of the information given.

2.3 Kill Beth Boom: The Unaesthetic Aesthetic

In order to spot the unaesthetic in Gothic literature, the concept of aesthetic must be outlined. The term comes from the Greek word “aisthestai”, which simply means to feel” (Slade 19). Nevertheless, most accounts about the aesthetic refer to it as something in connection with beauty or appeal. The first treatise of aesthetic as beauty can be found in Plato’s *Symposium*, in which one finds the conclusion that beauty is simply the object of love (Dickie 6). He makes a distinction between beautiful things we can see, hear or touch, in which he tries to find parallels and similarities, and beauty itself “which exists apart from the world of sights and sounds in what Plato calls ‘the intelligible world’” (Dickie 7). The Christian philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas defines beauty as everything which pleases when being seen, which emphasizes the subjective aspect of beauty. In the eighteenth century the notion of aesthetic was split up into concepts like the sublime, novelty, the picturesque, etc. (Dickie 11). Some philosophers, for instance David Hume, employ lists of beautiful qualities, like uniformity or exactness of imitation. In the nineteenth century philosophers like Arthur Schopenhauer emphasize the subjective aspect of aesthetics, as aesthetic objects are objects of our contemplation and do not have to possess any outstanding features themselves.

What all these accounts have in common is that they position aesthetics in opposition to reason, which makes any objective evaluation or discussion of the aesthetic value of works of art difficult. Nevertheless, it seems as if an unspoken agreement concerning the beautiful value of art exists. Regarding horror literature or movies the use of the term unaesthetic seems to be appropriate, as it evokes different oppositional feelings in the audience. What one part of readers or spectators would regard as frightening and repulsive, the other part may regard as entertaining or a means for relaxation. Thus, Schopenhauer’s account of aesthetic, as something which takes places individually in the minds of people is the most fitting definition of aesthetic as well as unaesthetic. Nevertheless, as the appeal of horror literature and movies seems to be a frequent topic for dispute, a possible explanation is sought in the following chapter.

2.3.1 The Lure of the Unaesthetic

When reading Gothic novels or watching horror movies, the audience knows what to expect. These genres gain their popularity from evoking negative feelings like fear, pity or sadness. However, the question remains why people gain pleasure from such kinds of art and why they enjoy situations in art, which they normally would avoid in real life.

The history of European art and philosophy shows that unaesthetic art has always been popular or has even been regarded as necessary for the functioning of societies. Ancient Greek writers like Plato and Aristotle see a political significance in tragedies. Through watching tragic scenes and not running away from them, the mind and emotions are strengthened and the audience is purged through these intense feelings (Eagleton 153). In the 17th century the French classical critic René Rapin was concerned with the unaesthetic aesthetic and comes to a similar conclusion. He states that through watching or reading tragedies we encounter great intensity of danger or grief, which sets up a benchmark for the audience. Thus, after leaving tragedy, the audience responds accordingly in real-life situations (Eagleton 154). In contrast to these critics, who rather focus on the political than the psychological aspect of painful emotions, religious art pursues a different goal. In Western culture the depiction of the suffering of Christ and the martyrdom of saints can be observed, which became considerably popular in the middle ages.

The Flagellation of Christ by Peter Paul Rubens shows a violent scene from Christ's way of the cross.

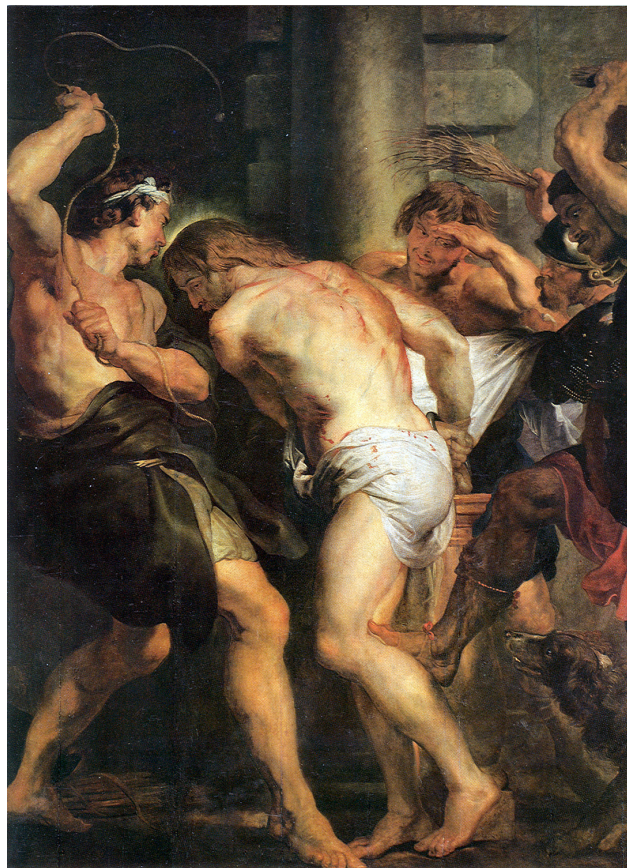


Illustration 3: Peter Paul Rubens - *The Flagellation of Christ* (1607)

The smiling faces of the men who humiliate Jesus illustrate hateful sadism, while Jesus' helplessness evokes pity. One could argue that this painting solely aims at arousing negative emotions, as it clearly bears the message that those who led Jesus on his way of the cross are malicious and sadistic. In modern times depictions of the same scene, for instance Mel Gibson's box-office success, *The Passion of the Christ*, which was badly received by critics, are solely designed to shock the audience (see Smuts 61). While Rubens' painting displays a violent scene, which emphasises the psychological state of the men who humiliate Jesus, there are more shocking details in *The Passion of the Christ*, as shown in the following screenshots:

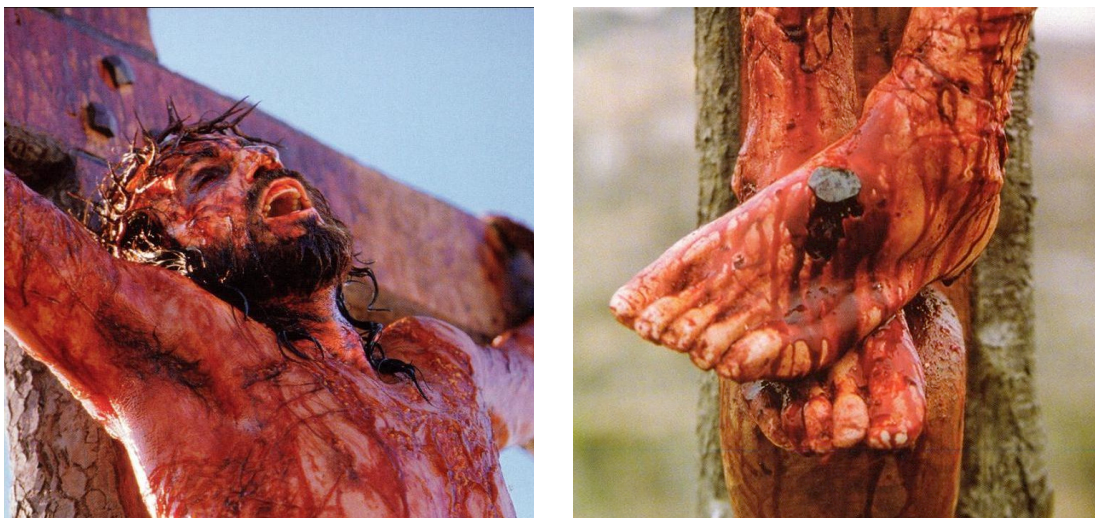


Illustration 4: The Passion of the Christ

There are different theories which aim at explaining why people enjoy horror fiction. According to Smuts there are two basic concepts: the conversion theory and the compensation theory. Conversion theorists are convinced that people actually derive pleasure from unaesthetic or violent art, as physical pain cannot be evoked by consuming art. The major reason for the consumption of painful art is therefore pleasure. According to this theory, positive feelings can be evoked as the situations depicted or narrated are fundamentally different from those which people encounter in their daily lives and the pain can be controlled by the audience, in contrast to real life, where people often are victims of other people or of unpleasant or even threatening circumstances. However, due to today's information distribution through mass media, the audience knows what to expect from different forms of art and is able to select what it wants to read or watch. If the choice is horror literature or horror movies, the audience is still in control of the amount of violence consumed, as it can stop reading or leave the

cinema. Another reason might be that there are more significant emotions which overshadow the unpleasant feelings, or that the entire experience of the work of art was joyful, and therefore the painful aspect is disregarded. David Hume is of the opinion that negative feelings evoked by art are converted into pleasure through the beauty of their artificiality, for instance an “eloquent narrative” (Smuts 64). When looking at features which classify a work of art as pleasant or terrifying, the way stories are narrated is disregarded by critics and the audience. Instead, solely the emotional effect those stories have on the audience is taken into account.

Compensation theorists acknowledge the existence of pain evoked through works of art and hold the belief that the audience enjoys “meta-response[s], intellectual pleasure, or the dispelling of worries” (Smuts 62). As mentioned before, the compensation theory states that by watching or reading a work of art belonging to a specific genre, the audience expects to experience an emotion which will be greater and better than the explicit unpleasantness encountered in the work of art. Another explanation in connection with compensation are meta-responses. This means that the audience enjoys the feelings it has, being happy about the fact that one is able to feel pity or disgust when confronted with certain scenes (Smuts 67).

Eagleton has a different theory concerning the pleasurable aspects of painful art: In *Sweet Violence* he states that people usually want to have a first-hand experience of most things in the world. Choosing art instead of real experience may be caused by cowardice or the fact that people want to protect themselves from traumatic experiences. Art provides protection as one does not have to come too close to potential dangers and one can control the amount of danger or the time of exposure to unpleasant images or texts. People can experience situations they usually would not experience without endangering their own lives or the lives of other people. Furthermore, he thinks that we can “rehearse and disarm our own deaths through art” (Eagleton 169). Death and the act of dying are unique experiences in human lives, which cause both threat and curiosity. Through art one can either read about people’s visions of death, their surviving of dangerous or difficult situations or watch scenes of death or dying. This does not necessarily have to ease the fear, one gains an insight into what death might feel or look like.

Further, apart from the political impact of drama, Aristotle employed the idea of *Schadenfreude* in *Poetics* as a reason for reading or watching painful art. He thinks that

watching the suffering of other people pleases the spectators as they become aware of their own well-being. Accordingly, pity can turn into fear when the audience is so familiar with the pain displayed that it empathises with the persons displayed in the work of art (*Poetics* 40-42). Thus, pity and fear can hardly be kept apart in extreme cases. Both feelings are created by human imagination, either fantasising what might happen to others or creating visions of what might happen to oneself. Nevertheless, this theory disregards the fact that the audience may feel pity for characters that are responsible for their own fate. A plausible explanation is that we can feel pity for characters who experience tragic situations or misfortunes, no matter if they are self-inflicted or how characters respond. Eagleton remarks that “Emma [Bovary] is tragic whether we like her or not” (Eagleton 11), which means that we can pity her, although her tragedy might never be our own, even if we do not find her sympathetic.

The concepts of pity and *Schadenfreude* present an ambivalent attitude towards the pain of others. Philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Matthew Arnold give profoundly different explanations for the consumption of painful art. Arnold thinks that the greater the tragedy we watch, the more we are able to enjoy it, while Nietzsche is of the opinion that watching pain is pleasant, but causing pain is even more enjoyable. The long tradition of depicting sadistic scenes in different literary genres underlines this theory. Especially in contemporary literature and movies political, educational and psychological aspects are replaced by mere acts of sadism and violence, as outlined in the next chapter.

2.3.2 The Unaesthetic in Horror Novels and Movies

When horror stories, and later also motion pictures, emerged, often didactic intentions and moral values were present. Negative feelings are evoked through mysteries, around which stories are constructed. In novels like *The Castle of Otranto* or *The Turn of the Screw* a large part of the tension is built on the imagination of both characters and audience, as there are only hints at the possible presence of supernatural beings. Slowly, however, these innocent stories which gain their power through their readers' imagination are replaced by the display of sadism. This is especially apparent in horror movies, or rather slasher movies, originating in the mid-1970s, in which terror is caused by mindless slashers who kill innocent virgins. The only psychological aspect in connection with these killers is bad experiences in childhood or adolescence, for which they seek revenge over and over again. The plot structures are similar and thus the

audience knows what to expect. From their beginning the stories of slasher movies had a strong connection with the previously directed horror movies (Jones 114f), which results in intertextual references on different levels. *Halloween*, for instance, stars Jamie Lee Curtis as protagonist; She is the daughter of Janet Leigh, who played the protagonist in *Psycho*. Furthermore, movies like *Scream* are based on the knowledge of the audience, reworking either scenes from famous horror movies or referring to former parts of the tetralogy. Another frequent feature is that mostly sexually active teenagers are killed by slashers, whereas innocent virgins are often the only potential victims who are able to escape. Due to the subjective perspectives in novels or subjective camerawork in slasher movies, the audience has to identify with the killer to a certain extent. In *The Monk*, for instance, the reader knows every detail of Ambrosio's deeds and thoughts. Even if one does not approve of or even condone his deeds, the relationship between the readers and the protagonist is very close. In *Halloween* the identification with the killer is even stronger, as the audience gets the chance to see the world with Michael Myer's eyes. The camera is placed behind Michael's famous mask and films the chasing of a victim through two small holes.

In *And the Ass Saw the Angel* one finds both features of classic horror tales and of modern sadistic violence. The subjective perspective of the first person narrator Euchrid and the closeness of the third-person omniscient narrator establish a close relationship between readers and Euchrid. Similar to stories in slasher movies, he has an unfortunate childhood. His infant brother dies next to him, Euchrid is handicapped as he cannot speak and he is abused verbally and physically by his mother. These traumatic experiences might have led to his hallucinations and his schizoid behaviour. He tries to kill the virgin Beth, who survives this attack. In contrast to this, the prostitute Cosey Mo did not survive the attack of the Ukulites.

If one regards the Bible as a compilation of religious horror stories, the intertextuality is as dominant in *And the Ass Saw the Angel* as it is in *Scream*. As the title of the novel hints at the underlying intertextuality, the reader knows what he or she can expect from the novel, at least on the thematic level. Thus, we find the mule, which is killed by its master, there are appearances, or rather hallucinations of angels and, most importantly, religion plays an important role for most characters in the story. The name of the village and of the religious sect are the same. Furthermore, the head of the village is also the only preacher whose services almost all villagers attend. Beth, the foundling, is

supposed to give birth to the Messiah and due to this assumption Beth believes that Euchrid visits and observes her, because he is Jesus.

2.3.3 Peeping Euchrid

A frequent topic for myths, philosophers, psychoanalysts and authors alike is the act of looking and everything that can be associated with it. On the one hand, looking often stands for power and, on the other hand, it is related to something forbidden, from which one can gain pleasure but also suffer severe punishment. Thus, looking is a frequent source of power, terror and mysteries in the Gothic. In this connection the concept of scopophilia has to be taken into account. It was developed by Sigmund Freud and refers to the mere pleasure of looking in general. Voyeurism describes the pleasure of looking while not being seen and exhibitionism stands for the pleasure of displaying oneself to others. These terms are often used in connection with film theory, as the camera is regarded as an instrument of power, which controls and disempowers those before its gaze.

Laura Mulvey draws on the concept of scopophilia in her theory of cinematography. She distinguishes between two types of scopophilia. The first one is active scopophilia, by which one takes other people as objects and subjects them to one's gaze. The second kind is narcissistic scopophilia, which is based on the wish for likeness and recognition, while watching a movie. This can be compared to Lacan's mirror theory, in which a child recognizes itself in a mirror and sees itself as a unified being.

Another point Mulvey mentions is the fact that looking has been split into the passive female and the active male part. Women have always been displayed as sexual objects and were styled according to what male spectators wanted to see. In films women function as sexual objects for both the characters in the movie and for the spectators. However, the fact that women lack a penis poses a threat of castration. Thus, there are two possible ways of escaping this fear: sadistic and fetishistic scopophilia. Sadistic scopophilia is based on re-enacting the threat and devaluating the guilty person, which in this case is the woman. It is accompanied by some kind of narrative as sadism demands a story, the process of accusing, subjecting or devaluating another person. Fetishistic scopophilia is based on the Freudian concept of the fetish, which means that a child, realising that its mother does not have a penis, seeks a substitution for the penis in the form of a fetish object. In this case no narrative is necessary, as pleasure is derived from merely looking at an image.

Although Mulvey's theory refers to motion pictures, she addresses many points, which are useful for the analysis of the gaze in *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. As Euchrid is unable to speak and therefore to participate in social events or even mere conversation, he starts to observe other people and thus gains power through voyeurism and his gaze. The recollections of his childhood and youth are very detailed, which hints at the fact that he is an attentive observer. Euchrid is aware of being a voyeur and even sees a higher purpose in observing other people:

All mah life ah have lurked about the periphery and watched – kept tabs on the hapless concatenations, the contretemps and the downright calamities of the people within mah dominion – Ukulore Valley. Ah was, you might say, a Voyeur to the Lord. All mah days ah have served as an informer – planted in the ranks of the enemy – gleaning what ah could from what ah happened to see or hear or sniff out. (*Ass* 71)

As is always the case when Euchrid speaks of the Lord and the mission he has to fulfil for higher purposes, the reader does not learn why Euchrid thinks that he has to tell the Lord what he observes. When he starts to watch the prostitute Cosey Mo and her clients, a sense of danger is conveyed, as no client would want to be observed while visiting Cosey Mo's caravan. While watching, Euchrid "lost sense of things" (*Ass* 72) and is discovered by Cosey Mo's client, who consequently abuses Euchrid. After this violent scene, Euchrid wakes up being attended by Cosey Mo. To Euchrid's surprise she has been aware of being watched several times before this scene: "'Sooo, you're the peep...so, you're the watcher,' she said with a peculiar smile on her lips. 'That ain't the first time, is it sweetheart? You've been here before.'" (*Ass* 74) When Cosey Mo is attacked by the villagers, Euchrid is also present and watches the violent scene. After Cosey Mo's death he finds a new object for his voyeurism. He starts to watch Beth through her window. The girl is not afraid, as she has been told that Jesus will visit her some day. Seeing a long-haired youth, she thinks that it is Jesus.

Through voyeurism Euchrid is not only able to come near the objects of his gaze, but he also gains power over them. Cosey Mo only presumes that she is being watched by somebody, but as she is not sure who the peeping tom is, she is in the role of a helpless object. Following Mulvey's theory this scene can be described as active scopophilia, as Euchrid is watching other people actively and does not seek any resemblance with himself. Furthermore, Cosey Mo can be seen as both a fetish object and a patient and caring person, whom he could not find in his mother. In the case of Beth there is active

scopophilia, as Euchrid lurks in front of the girl's windows. In contrast to the observing of Cosey Mo, Euchrid's scopophilia is in this case sadistic. He is amused by the fact that she mistakes him for Jesus. When the girl starts writing letters for him and leaving them on the windowsill, he writes a "G" with blood on her window every time he collects a letter. Several days later he visits Beth holding a sickle, intending to kill her. The light of a lamp is reflected in the sickle, which Beth mistakes for a halo above her own head. Observing this scene, Euchrid makes fun of the girl's mistake and his wish to kill her becomes even greater. Euchrid enjoys watching Beth because he knows what will happen to her. Nevertheless, in both cases of voyeurism, he cannot maintain the position of a typical voyeur. Regarding Cosey Mo he is being caught while watching her and then the object of his assumingly powerful gaze takes care of him. The second object of his voyeurism, Beth, does not regard him as an intrusive voyeur, but as a benevolent friend. The eventual failure of Euchrid to position himself as powerful subject consequently leads a more violent deed, namely the attempt to kill Beth.

2.3.4 The Uncanny

The concept of the Uncanny, "das Unheimliche" in German, is based on a theory developed by Sigmund Freud. The Uncanny is supposed to be the contrary of "heimlich", which refers to something homely and familiar. The prefix "un" implies the contrary meaning, which would be something foreign or new. However, not everything that is new, is frightening. As "unheimlich" bears an unpleasant or even terrifying connotation, new objects or events turn "unheimlich" through certain processes or under certain circumstances.

Freud sees a connection between the Uncanny and visual deception. According to him, one easily thinks of something as uncanny, if there is uncertainty concerning the shape or nature of the object perceived. In *Das Unheimliche* he mentions dolls as an example for the Uncanny. It is often the case that one mistakes dolls for human beings. The moment of uncertainty caused by visual deception, in which one tries to make up one's mind about the nature of the doll, is uncanny (*Das Unheimliche* 245) Furthermore, he mentions the anxiety of general loss of sight and the following inability to distinguish between certain objects, between what is "heimlich" and what is "unheimlich". Nevertheless, children are not afraid of dolls. On the contrary, they even sometimes wish their dolls to come alive. Thus, he concludes that there must be another source of the Uncanny. He recalls a scene from his past, in which he got lost in a foreign city.

While he tried to find his way home, he accidentally got back to a street he wanted to get away from. This unwilling repetition of a scene from past times was the source of Freud's uncanny feeling (*Das Unheimliche* 249). In scenes, where one encounters a familiar place or situation, an unintentional repetition evokes bad feelings. Although the subject has experienced the scene before, one nevertheless does not have power over his or her situation. This reflects the notion of a certain determination and inability to escape one's fate, which in turn evokes the Uncanny (*Das Unheimliche* 246-247). This can be compared to situations in dreams, over which one does not have control.

And the Ass Saw the Angel bears traces and features of the Uncanny in large parts. This starts with Euchrid's visions of an angel. This scene is taken from a story in the Bible, where it is presented as an actual occurrence. Thus, it is unclear for the reader whether Euchrid does indeed see an angel or suffers from hallucinations. This lack of clarity evokes an uncanny feeling for the reader, who does not know which natural circumstances to assumed. Another instance of the Uncanny can be found in the whole narration presented by Euchrid. As he is in most parts the first-person narrator and thus the only source of information, the reader is tempted to believe him. However, Euchrid's mental state and his subjective point of view speak in favour of unreliability. This discrepancy again evokes a feeling of the Uncanny, as something which should be trustworthy, namely the narration of facts, gains a strange aspect.

2.3.5 The Sublime

Generally speaking the sublime stands for things or events which evoke feelings of grandeur, for instance fascination or terror. As the sublime is mediated or evoked by language, many philosophers are particularly concerned with the ways in which language works in order to cause sublime feelings.

One of the first philosophers treating the subject of the sublime was Longinus, a Greek writer, whose sole literary work is *On the Sublime*. According to Longinus, there are two types of the sublime, the natural and the rhetorical. The rhetorical sublime describes the way in which language moves the reader or the audience to higher mental states (see Smith 13), while the natural sublime refers to appearances in nature, which evoke certain feelings. Furthermore, he mentions the link between mental states and language. As psychic frenzy is being reflected in language, excess in language can in turn evoke, as it were, an excess of mind. The most important aspect of his account is that, according to Longinus, the "sublime overpowers and dominates the self" (Ryan 266),

and thus takes its freedom. He also discusses the relationship between nature and art and is of the opinion that “art is perfect when it seems to be nature, and nature, again is most effective when pervaded by the unseen presence of art” (Longinus, qtd. in Smith 14). In his view God is present both in nature and in art, which means that feelings of the sublime are close to divinity.

Edmund Burke discusses the sublime in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Although he states that sublime feelings are caused by external objects, his focus lies on the perceiving subject. He thinks that the sublime paralyses the mind, disables it from thinking about the object and thus eliminates reason. He is of the opinion that the sublime is always a “modification of power” (Burke, qtd. in Ryan 273). Furthermore, Burke is concerned with the relationship between pleasure and pain. He does not see any dependence between those two concepts and thinks that both have positive aspects. He introduces the term “delight” and defines it as being caused by the remission of pain and thus imposed on us, while pleasure cannot be imposed. The sublime is always connected to terror, which is always accompanied by delight, if it does not come too close to the subject. Artistic terror is more powerful if it is close to reality. Burke distinguishes between the beautiful and the sublime. The former is capable of affecting a whole society, while the latter causes terror or delight due to self-preservation (see Ryan 274-277). Similar to Longinus, Burke states that language does not represent the world as it is. He compares the power of language to that of paintings and concludes that rhetoric is more powerful, as illustrated in the following example:

To represent an angel in a picture, you can only draw a beautiful young man winged; but what painting can furnish out any thing so grand as the addition of one word, ‘The angel of the Lord?’ It is true, I have here no clear idea, but these words affect the mind more than the sensible image did. (Burke, qtd. In Smith 21)

Nevertheless, as discussed in chapter 4.1, language cannot accurately express what it seeks to represent and thus there is the danger of deception. This lack of uncertainty and unreliability regarding language is used by authors of Gothic novels in order to evoke a feeling of the sublime.

Another philosopher concerned with the subject of the sublime is Immanuel Kant. In his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790) he contrasts the beautiful with the sublime and is of the opinion that beauty can be found in the form of an object, whereas the sublime can be

also perceived in anything infinite. Furthermore, the beautiful is mostly found in nature and naturalistic or realistic works of art, whose appearance seems to be determined to please the spectator. In contrast to this the sublime is a product of imagination and subject to endless change and is of indefinite extent. Nevertheless, a heavy storm is terrifying and ugly and despite its infiniteness it cannot be described as sublime. However, a storm can cause sublime feelings in the subject which perceives it, as the subject is tempted to think about metaphysical instances. Thus, he concludes that the forms and shapes of nature, which can be objectively determined and described, are not sublime. Only when there is chaos or destruction, magnitude or power, is the *idea* of the sublime evoked (*Judgement* 130).

All these accounts have in common that the sublime is contrasted with the beautiful. In connection with this there is another opposition: Objects found in nature, can be regarded or classified as beautiful. The sublime refers to mental processes while or after a subject perceived something of infinite extent. These objects or instances are terrible or evoke terror, which is perceived at the same time as delightful. In Gothic fiction many terrifying or supernatural appearances, which evoke sublime feelings, are nameless. Either there are nameless monsters, ghosts or spectres, or one is unable to define the source of the threat or horror. Although literature cannot move beyond the bonds of language, only infinite, nameless or other instances, of whose existence we only have partial knowledge, are capable of evoking the sublime.

2.3.6 The Abject

Julia Kristeva developed a theory, which is often applied to both Gothic and postmodern literature. In her book *The Powers of Horror* she discusses the concept of the abject on different levels. The first aspect she mentions is the ex-centricity of the abject. It is

beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. (*Powers of Horror* 1)

The abject, although it is beyond subject and object, shares one quality with the object, which is the opposition to the *I*. The abject cannot be defined and thus it also cannot serve as a correlative or an antagonism, against which one can define oneself or from which one can free oneself. In order to illustrate this, Kristeva employs examples in connection with the human body. Bodily fluids, for instance, are part of the body, but

one survives by getting rid of them, which makes them both I and not-I. They can be seen as a border between life and death, subject and object, etc. Furthermore, the abject disturbs orders and rules. Nevertheless, Kristeva solely regards criminals who claim to be good as abjects of society. Amoral and the disrespecting of laws can be grand if one defends one's point, intention and actions.

Abjection also takes place on the level on birth and death. Every body is marked by decay, even if it gives life like the maternal body. Nevertheless, childbirth is regarded "as a violent act of expulsion through which the nascent body tears itself away from the matter of maternal insides" (*Powers of Horror* 101). In connection with childbirth the process of abjection also takes place when the child separates itself from the mother in order to enter the Symbolic Order of the father. As the child wants to find its own identity, it has to push the mother away and therefore the mother is regarded as abject (Kutzbach 8). Thus, an ambivalent relationship with the mother evolves, as the mother and child were first one and their relationship was harmonic. Abjection, however, establishes a boundary between mother and child, but in order to keep this boundary intact, the abject has to be kept close to the child, and at the same time outside. The boundary can collapse at any time and therefore the abject or mother is seen as attractive and a threat to the self (Kutzbach 9). This theory can be applied to individuals and whole societies. Social groups, like homosexuals or coloured people are often regarded as abject, as a strong connection between them and the aesthetic of their bodies is established. The positioning of oneself as abject can be regarded as resistance to patriarchal norms, which leads to anti-social lifestyle, from which these individuals gain pleasure (Kutzbach 9).

In *And the Ass Saw the Angel* there is abjection on different levels. Euchrid's story starts with a process of abjection, namely his own birth. Birth as a violent act and abjection as such are emphasised, as the mother, who is supposed to be a caring shelter, is too drunk to realise that she is giving birth to twins. Due to the missing relationship between the mother and her children, the abjection can be regarded as "getting rid" of the children, similarly to Kristeva's concept about the reactions to bad food (*Powers of Horror* 2-3). The entrance into the Symbolic Order of the father (see Chapter 4.2) through the act of birth is disturbed, as it would require the acquisition of language, which Euchrid does not fulfil. Blood is the body fluid which can be regarded as being on the border between life and death, as blood and its circulation means life and the loss of blood can lead to

death. Euchrid often is the victim of physical violence, which leads to bleeding wounds. However, during or after his fits he always has nosebleeds, which, following Kristeva, may be a hint at the approaching death of his family, the villagers or his own. Furthermore, Euchrid can be regarded as an abject of society. He is on the border between being dangerous and fascinating. Beth, for instance, is thrilled by his appearance, while it is his intention to kill her. As he openly admits his deeds and intentions, there is grandeur in his actions. According to Kristeva, Euchrid, as abject, is opposed to arbitrary, but oppressing instances like religion, morality and law. Euchrid seems to be a religious person because of his visions of angels. Nevertheless, he evades the oppressive rules and rites of the Ukulites and is therefore a threat to their structures. He does not participate in any social events, does not go to church and, being an outcast, represents the amoral and sinful. He is the only person in the village who has sympathy for Cosey Mo, which again puts him on the border between wrong and right in the minds of the Ukulites. Euchrid has his own definition of morality, and law does not exist for him. In Ukulore Valley people practice vigilantism, which Euchrid, however, seems to condemn. He does not argue against vigilantism, but neither does he approve of the attack on Cosey Mo, nor does he want to punish all other inhabitants of the village or introduce new moral values.

2.3.7 Doppelgänger Motif

The doppelgänger motif is a frequent source of horror and can be found in both Gothic and postmodern narratives. A doppelgänger is the Other and the Self at the same time. Thus, it is also equally familiar and strange, which causes an uncanny effect (see Chapter 2.3.4). As the doppelgänger poses a threat to the self, ontological issues and questions have to be taken into account. A doubled presence, which resembles, but does not equal the self, “reduce[s] the subject to mere presence” (Vardoulakis 1). Nevertheless, a doppelgänger does not mark the subject as absent. Instead, it questions the boundary between presence and absence. Depending on whether the doppelgänger is real or fictional, it is an individual. Some critics argue that the doppelgänger is a cultural norm or instance, a role model, which is always in and with us. The idea of what we are according to certain criteria, like race, sex or gender, shapes our perception of ourselves, although a doppelgänger is fictional and absent (Vardoulakis 3).

Lacan explains the creation of subjectivity through his mirror theory. He proposes that the moment in which an infant recognises itself in a mirror is crucial for the formation

of the “I”. At first, the mirror image is Self and Other at the same time, as the image could possibly be another child. The child realises that the other is not another being, but only an image of itself, and thus it finds its own subjectivity through the vision of the Other. Before this point the child has perceived its body as fragmented and incomplete. The complete mirror image leads to the perception of the child as a unified being. However, this image is solely an ideal image and thus the “I” is fictional. According to Lacan’s terminology (as further outlined in Chapter 4.2), the mirror stage belongs to the realm of the Imaginary. The infant has an imaginary vision of itself and then perceives the actual image of itself in the mirror. Thus, the child has a fictional and ideological concept of itself in its mind and is capable of comparing its idea with the mirror image it is confronted with. Before self-recognition, the child imagines objects, with which it can identify. When the child sees its own image for the first time, it also realises its autonomy and independence of the mother. The realm of the Symbolic is that of language and it is dominated by rules and restrictions, which are subject to the law of the father.

Lacan in “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function” notes that “psychical realities manifest themselves” (*Écrits* 77) in doubles. However, whereas the child recognises itself as an individual unified being in the mirror image, the vision of a doppelgänger has the reverse effect on the subject. It suddenly realises that it is not individual and that it has no power over this non-fictional mirror image. Thus, the doppelgänger poses a threat to the psychic stability of the subject, as it is in danger to return to the psychical state of the infant. The lapsing into the state of the Imaginary would mean the evading of the Law of the Father and the Symbolic Order, but also the leaving of language and society. Furthermore, regression would be accompanied by the perception of the subject as being incomplete and fragmented.

Euchrid and his father Ezra in *And the Ass Saw the Angel* have doppelgängers. The history of Euchrid’s family is presented to the reader, introduced as “a few words concerning Euchrid’s ancestral stock” (*Ass* 23). Ezra’s siblings, and especially his brother Toad, are presented as cannibalistic and incestuous. Furthermore, the most frequent symptoms of schizophrenia are described in this passage:

Since his early teens Ezra had suffered beneath the yoke of his kinfolk’s incestuous practices. His family tree was as twisted and tangled as the briars that tortured the hills. Eye-blinding headaches, catatonia, seizures, trances and

frequent outbursts of violence were the order of the day. Whether or not this was due to the consanguineous union of his ancestors, he knew not. (*Ass* 24-25)

The reason for his uncertainty concerning the source of the physical and mental state of his family is that Ezra does not have any seizures and is the only one of the family's children whom the mother successfully taught to read. Ezra's favourite book is the Bible, which is also the only one his mother allows him to read. When a sheriff decided to sort things out in the valley where his family lived, Ezra decided to leave them. He only took a mule, a Bible, a gun and liquor with him. Wandering around and drinking heavily, he one day woke up in the house of the widow Jane Eucrow. Her husband, who had been forced by her into marriage, had killed himself and no one of Jane's family had been willing to tell her about this event. Jane also was drinking heavily and kept asking strangers if they had seen her husband. Thus, she became an object of ridicule in the village. However, as the mule led Jane to Ezra, who had accidentally shot his ear off, she was convinced that she had found her missing husband after twelve lonely years. As years passed, the "image of her truant partner began, in time, to fade into obscurity, becoming eventually a vague and abstract notion" (*Ass* 28). Thus, Ezra can be regarded as a doppelgänger of Jane's dead husband. Through her idealistic vision Jane turns Ezra into somebody he is not. Nevertheless, he accepts the existence and fate of his doppelgänger. He gives up his autonomy and individualism, leaves the Symbolic order and enters the Imaginary realm of Jane's consciousness. He gives up social life and instead accepts Jane's matriarchal rule.

Euchrid and Sardus Swift are presented as autonomous figures throughout the novel. The ending, in which both men die in the same way, hints at the possibility that Euchrid and Sardus are one and the same person, or individual doppelgängers sharing the same fate. As Sardus and other men from the village seek Euchrid's shelter, the fortress Doghead he built, Sardus is forced to face his other self, Euchrid. As Sardus' task is to find and kill Euchrid, he realises that actually he and his fellows want to kill him, Sardus. In this moment of acute fear, Sardus panics and runs into the swampland. However, Euchrid is the first to walk into the middle of the swamp. He waits for the others to find him, although he knows that he probably will be dead before the others can lay their hands on him. In this case the doppelgänger motif does not have any influence on the characters in the novel, who are persecuted by a doppelgänger. Instead, the reader perceives Euchrid and Sardus as doppelgängers, which causes an uncanny

feeling. As the reader assumes Euchrid and Sardus to be autonomous subjects, the doubling of the ending seems irritating.

2.3.8 Nature

An outstanding feature of Gothic literature is the frequent description of landscape and weather. The tradition of nature constantly meaning something beyond itself (Kullmann 99) can be traced back to Romanticism. The transcendental order of the universe and nature as a sign system to reflect the psychology of characters reflects the idea that natural phenomena can mean something beyond the visible.

In *And the Ass Saw the Angel* the natural aspect is emphasised from the beginning. In the preface, which is a foreshadowing of the ending, nature appears to forecast and to accompany Euchrid's death. Above him is a "troubled sky" and he watches "birds of death. They've shadowed me all mah life" (*Ass* 3). Euchrid emphasises the fact that these animals, the crows, have played the role of prophets of death all his life and that his life was determined from the beginning to be accompanied by death. As becomes evident later, he witnesses several murders, becomes a murderer himself and puts an end to his own life through suicide. While the crows are wheeling above Euchrid, the surrounding landscape is described as an adequate place for eternal rest: "Ah think ah could almost remember how to sleep on this soft, warm circle of mud, for mah rhythms differ" (*Ass* 3). However, in the next sentence his perception of the swamp changes before the crows come down on Euchrid: "Sucked by the gums of this toothless grave, ah go – into this fen, this pit, though ah fear to get mah kill-hand wet. In truth and as ah speak, the two crows have staked out mah eyes" (*Ass* 3).

In the second part of the prologue the omniscient narrator starts his account with a description of the landscape:

There below! O little valley! [...] Down the bitten inner flank we go, where trees laden with thick vines grow upon the trembling slopes. Some hang out into the valley at dangerous angles, their worried roots rising from the hillside soil as they suffer the creeping burden that trusses and binds and weighs like the world across their limbs. This knitted creeper, these trees, all strung one to one and chained to the ground by vine. (*Ass* 4).

This account does not only convey an uncanny feeling, as nature is described as being wild and dangerous, but it also represents the inhabitants of the village nearby. The relationships between the people in the community are very close and they cannot be

separated from one another. However, at the same time they are “chained to the ground” and cannot escape even if they wanted to. The narrator moves from the wilderness to the village and suddenly the crows of which Euchrid has spoken in the previous part of the prologue appear again: “Travelling the length of the valley, south to north, as the crow flies, we follow its main road as it weaves its way along the flat of the valley’s belly” (*Ass* 4). According to Euchrid’s account of the crows, they are a sign of death, which in this case means that the village is a place of death or home of murderers. The swampland which surrounds the village is regarded by its inhabitants as a dangerous place:

The Ukulites believed the swampland to be an abomination. They believed that it would erupt and smite the valley should their God become displeased. At the school the Ukulite elders would hammer the heads of their children, with a fervour wrought of utter conviction telling them that it was a diabolic macula on Zion and that within its bounds roamed all the infernal evils of the world. The children, so frightened were they, rarely ventured past the northern city limit. The workers from the fields were not so superstitious, but still they referred to it with a certain reticence. (*Ass* 39)

In contrast to these dark visions of nature and the villagers’ fear of the swampland, Euchrid for the first time describes the swampland in which he is later going to die as his sanctum:

For it seems to me that ah had always been drawn to this grim and murky place where ordinary souls would not dare to venture [...] where the tall, thin trees all seem to bend toward me in attitudes of worship. [...] At the time it seemed to me – being little more than a decade old – that ah had spent a lifetime in this place. [...] And just as the swampland became, day by day, mah sanctuary and mah comfort, so too the angel did ease herself into mah world. (*Ass* 40)

The main reason for Euchrid’s affection for this place seems to be the fact that no other inhabitants of the village come close to that place. It is the only place in which Euchrid can be alone, away from his family and where he does not have to be afraid of the villagers’ anger and aggression. Furthermore, he feels a deep connection with the swampland. It almost seems as if he already knows at this point that he will die there and become part of the swamp. The third reason he mentions is that his mad visions of angels start in this place. From this one can conclude that the swampland indeed has aroused a dark and hidden side of Euchrid’s psyche.

Animals also play an important role in the novel. Shortly before it begins to rain in Ukulore Valley, Euchrid states that he often has observed ants and notices: “Ah know

ants. Ah know them well. Well enough, that is, to know that something was gravely amiss – for in all mah years of studying ants ah have never known them to begin hoarding food so early in the summer months, never!” (*Ass* 46). Not only the ants sensed that something bad was going to happen. The crows and mule were restless too, even before the thunder had started. In this account of nature the invisible connection between animals, the weather, humans and the landscape is emphasised and becomes even stronger when Euchrid starts comparing himself to his natural surrounding or to animals, for instance “the sky [is] like mah scalp” (*Ass* 46) or “[a]h was diabolical, deadlier than a rattlesnake, and while the sow slept, the snake – it struck!” (*Ass* 56). While Euchrid refers to nature mostly in a positive way, the swampland and the wilderness being his shelter and animals resembling his power, the inhabitants of Ukulore Valley seem to be victims of natural circumstances, especially the period of rain: “The men and women seemed older, dogged and haggard with want of sleep, their faces like the countenance of the valley itself, grizzled with new lines and gutters born overnight and longaniously worn” (*Ass* 50). The natural conditions do not only affect the moods of the superstitious inhabitants who regard sin as the reason for the rain, the rain even leaves traces in their faces.

After the death of his father Euchrid perceives the inanimate surroundings he lives in as uncomfortable and escapes into the nature:

The sweet and gravid earth, once flattened by the whack and the slap of mah spade’s back, now bore across its length the crooked imprint of mah body. [...] Ah was unable to resist that sweet, cool place upon the mound [...] The junk-pile, the backyard, the burnt-out Chevy, the porch, the goddamn shack and its three rooms, the front yard, the gallows tree, the track leading into the town, the cane, those acres on rotation – ah can’t go on. [...] The animate and the inanimate appeared to me in sinister collusion. (*Ass* 213)

Before Euchrid chooses the swamp as his final retreat, he builds his own shelter around his house, which rather resembles the chaos of wilderness than the structure of conceptualised architecture and with which he seems to manage to connect the wilderness of nature and the artificiality and safety of culture. He calls his fortress “Doghead”. Although the wall around his kingdom is built from the remains of his house, Euchrid compares it to a snake, emphasising its natural aspect (*Ass* 215). Furthermore, he breeds animals which are supposed to save him from potential intruders and enemies.

2.3.9 Taboo

Gothic literature, because of its intention to shock, or at least to arouse emotions, is marked by taboo topics to a large extent, which is why it was regarded as a means of communicating dangerous ideas. Thus, for instance, in *The Castle of Otranto* Manfred's intentions to divorce his wife and to marry a young girl, who previously was supposed to marry his son, is an immoral act and thus close to a taboo. An even more obvious example can be found in *The Monk*, where almost all clerical taboos are transgressed and Ambrosio, although a monk, rapes a young girl and kills her mother.

As Sigmund Freud states in *Totem und Tabu*, the word "taboo" means on the one hand holy and spiritual and, on the other hand, dangerous, forbidden, uncanny and filthy (*Totem und Tabu* 25). Freud states that the German term "heilige Scheu", meaning "holy awe" adequately sums up the meaning of taboos, as it stands both for the holy and dangerous aspect of the concept.

In order to explain the meaning of taboo in contemporary Western cultures, Freud analyses the concept in aboriginal tribes in Australia. Here, taboos serve different functions: they protect the weak members of the tribe, they protect the whole tribe from dangers, gods, demons and they protect important events and rituals in human life, for instance marriage or childbirth. According to Freud, taboos are different from religious or moral prohibitions and restrictions, as they cannot be traced back to any divine will or intention. Instead, they are independent of any system and their existence is justified through themselves. In order to function taboos do not require any explanation. People who transgress taboos become tabooed themselves, as others may follow them or may be jealous of their courage, as they dared to do something others cannot do or do not have the courage for. In some cases the transgressing of a taboo is not even necessary, as luring others into doing tabooed things is already a sufficiently subversive and eccentric action.

In *And the Ass Saw the Angel* there are many tabooed issues and topics, which the Ukulites freely and consciously chose as such. In Freud's opinion the individual creation of taboos can be regarded as a neurosis, from which can be concluded that all inhabitants of the village are neurotics (*Totem und Tabu* 36). The most prominent taboo topic is sexuality. Cosey Mo, the only prostitute in the village, is being visited by all adult male members of the community. Nevertheless, they want to get rid of her as the primary seed of evil. When they ambush her trailer, the former visits of the men are

silenced. Cosey tells Franklin Eldridge, one of her clients “Why Franklin! For shame! You know your day is Friday and here you are again and it’s only Sunday!” (*Ass* 104). His wife Wilma ignores this statement and solely tells her husband to “shut her up” (*Ass* 105). Apart from prostitution another taboo topic is infertility. Rebecca, the wife of Sardus Swift, learns that she is unable to bear children. The tabooing of this topic is illustrated in the following passage:

She asked two questions and the doctor replied with two words.

‘Can we have a child?’

‘No.’

‘Who?’

‘You.’

Nothing more was said. (*Ass* 61)

After this scene indeed nothing more is said, as Rebecca is even unable to talk about her situation with her husband. In the same night she commits suicide. It is unclear whether she survives this attempt.

Euchrid, being unable to express tabooed topics through spoken language, witnesses many taboos, for instance prostitution. He even incorporates the two meanings of the word “taboo” in his person. Beth sees him as a saint, while the rest of the community regards him as a dangerous villain. Euchrid is not part of the Ukulite community and does not participate in communal meetings or services, which is already the transgression of a taboo. As he is an outlaw, the villagers are afraid of what he might do. Furthermore, he intrudes into the private sphere of the Ukulites through his voyeurism, which can be regarded as another trespassing of rules and laws.

3. Postmodernism

3.1 An Attempt at a Definition

Definitions regarding postmodernism are as versatile as the concept of postmodernism as such. The most problematic aspect is that postmodernism cannot be regarded as a genre. Disregarding the main features of postmodernism, which vary from critic to critic, the phenomenon is present in literature, architecture, performative arts, films and the visual arts. Focusing on postmodernist literature, one can label it a style, mode or attitude. Although postmodernism is said to have evolved after the second World War, certain features can be found in works from other decades. Thus, the approach to postmodernism will be similar to the analysis of the Gothic as a genre (see Chapter 2) and the focus will be on recurring features.

The first approach to postmodernism is what most theorists agree upon. As the prefix “post” suggests, postmodernism can be seen as a response to modernism. However, it is neither a break with modernism, nor the continuation of it. When analysing modernism, it is important to take a look at what lurks behind the word ‘modern’. Literally, it stands for something new and at the same time for a break with the old and the traditional and the development of an avant-garde. With the rise of psychoanalysis in the early 20th century, the focus was on the subject’s perspective and his or her subjective perception of events, feelings and emotions. Thus, new formal and narrative structures evolved, for instance the stream of consciousness, the collective consciousness as narrative instance and narration from multiple perspectives, which often cannot be separated from one another. This avant-garde style made modernism elitist and difficult to understand. It can be seen as the counterpart of realism, as features and dogmas of realism are questioned or subverted, for instance linear chronology, reliable omniscient narrators, closures and moral conclusions. Although modernism seeks a break with the past and its conventions, it nevertheless employs systems of values and order. Characters in modernist literature pursue idealistic goals or romantic phantasies, for instance love, family, harmony with nature or personal freedom. Self-reflexivity and the exposure of the artificiality of texts have been used long before the emergence of modernism, but they have become dominant features of postmodernism.

Postmodernism adopts many features of modernism and questions or dissolves normative boundaries in many respects. Narrative techniques used in postmodern

literature are similar to those in modernism. Realist dogmas are subverted and replaced by unreliable narrators, multiple perspectives, streams of consciousness and missing closures. As mentioned before, postmodern texts are self-reflexive, expose their own artificiality and emphasise the artificiality of social structures, social orders, institutions and hierarchies. This does not mean that postmodernism questions the use of rules or that it tries to erase them, but only shows that rules are created by humans. In Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, postmodernism is defined as the questioning of master narratives. These are universal truths, on which our knowledge and culture are based, for instance the Bible or ancient mythology. Many postmodern and poststructuralist critics favour this theory, as *grand récits* are products of power structures and ignore the heterogeneity of cultures and societies. Hegemonic concepts are replaced by plurality in every possible respect.

The most prominent dogma of postmodernism, on which most other features are based, is that postmodernism constantly questions what it represents. This notion is based on the fact articulated by many linguists that humans are entrapped in the system of language and cannot move beyond its representative capabilities. While Linda Hutcheon calls it a basic paradox of postmodernism, it is a basic paradigm or idea for linguists and philosophers like Saussure, Derrida or Barthes (as will be outlined in Chapter 4). Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* states that it is impossible to represent reality, past, present or future. One can only create one's own versions of reality. In this way the representative potential and reliability of language mentioned above are questioned again. The instability of representation and meaning is also mirrored in the instability of postmodern characters. Gutleben summarises the development of characterisation from realism to postmodernism:

In realism, characters are distinguished by psychological motivation, coherence with their environments and a series of human traits which make them recipients of the reader's emotions. The modernist text, argues Fokkema, gives up the coherence of character and the influence of a specific social context to concentrate on the irrational working of the mind, on the dark subjective drives of the inner life. Postmodernism amplifies the modernist objection to the coherence of character and insists instead on the textual nature. [...] Because of the free interplay of signs which excludes stable identities or fixed meanings, postmodern characters have multiple, fragmentary and dispersed selves where discourse has replaced the convention of psychological depth. (Gutleben 159)

The artificiality of systems and order, which postmodernism seeks to emphasise and criticise, is further reflected in narrative techniques of postmodern literature and in the

concepts of genre. Boundaries between genres are often challenged or dissolved in postmodern texts and different genres are often merged into ironic postmodern collages (as discussed further in Chapter 3.2). These texts, incorporating different themes, having different structures, are united by a postmodern ideology, which is being reflected by, as mentioned above, attitudes towards normative institutions, representation, intertextuality, etc. However, Hutcheon notices that “the conventions of [...] genres are played off against each other; there is no simple, unproblematic merging” (Hutcheon 9). One reason for this might be the ironic and critical approach of postmodernism, which cannot simply add features of one genre to another genre without subverting its features.

Another prominent narrative technique is the lack of closure. Whereas in most 19th literature one finds closures as death, marriage or intelligent and clear-cut conclusions, in postmodernist literature the reader is left with many unanswered questions. As is the case with many other features of postmodernist literature, there is an explanation to be gained from the field of linguistics. According to Derrida closure is not possible, as meaning is endlessly deferred in linguistic systems (see Chapter 4). Postmodernism further challenges the omnipresence and omniscience of third-person narrators. Instead, one finds subjective accounts of unreliable first-person narrators or unreliable limited third-person narrators. Similar to modernism, postmodernism shifts its focus to marginal figures, which are often positioned in texts as the Other. However, these figures obtain a voice and are permitted to tell their own stories from a subjective point of view. In modernism as a rule there is only one single alienated other and the main concern of the texts is the portrayal of the subject and his or her relation to the outside world. In postmodernism, on the other hand, one finds emphasis on difference and multiplicity, which does not necessarily have to be negative. Hutcheon notes that “to be ex-centric, on the border or margin, inside yet outside is to have a different perspective, one that Virginia Woolf once called ‘alien and critical’, one that is ‘always altering its focus’, since it has no centring force.” (Hutcheon 67). As there is no single normative institution, the hierarchy in which the (normative) self would be put above the (opposed) Other and the inherent binary opposition are dissolved.

In *And the Ass Saw the Angel* one finds the traditional distinction between self and Other. While the community of the Ukulites regards themselves as the norm, there is the alienated Other, which is manifested in Euchrid, Cosey Mo and the hobos. Realist narrative techniques and hierarchies concerning narrative voices are subverted in the

novel. There is no single, reliable and omniscient narrator, whom we would usually associate with realism. Instead, there are two narrators. The first is indeed the omniscient realist narrator, but the second is the unreliable first-person narrator Euchrid. In this way the reader's attention is drawn to marginalised figures, who nevertheless are given a voice in this novel. Furthermore, in this way the binary opposition between narrative voices is questioned. It becomes obvious that there is neither a hierarchical order, nor a competitive tension between them. In *And The Ass Saw The Angel* the two narrators complete one another. The alternation of narrative instances can be regarded as subversion of narrative power structures, as the focus is not laid on a normative centre, but on marginal figures and views.

3.2 Postmodernism and Historical Discourse

Although the prefix “post” marks a break with the past, it does not mean that postmodernism closes itself to history. In most cases, when history is employed in modernist literature, the goal is to “deploy its ‘presentness’” (Hutcheon 88) and position modernism as a counter-movement to tradition. In postmodernism two simultaneous effects are achieved by employing historical references. On the one hand, postmodernism presents the significance of historical contexts and, on the other hand, postmodernism questions historical knowledge as such, as our knowledge of the past is solely based on historical discourse, which consists of texts, and therefore postmodernism regards history as both historical facts and literary fiction.

And the Ass Saw the Angel makes use of different historical periods, i.e. hundreds of years before the birth of Christ and the Fin de Siècle in the American South. As the Bible supposedly is a composition of accounts of eye-witnesses and other stories which are presented as being true, these intertextual references are also regarded as factual. The account of the American South is marked by fictional and non-fictional historicity. On the one hand, the Bible Belt is generally known for its religious fanaticism, and, on the other hand, fictional data, for instance the numbers of births and deaths during the period of rain in Ukulore Valley are portrayed as actual facts supported by tables. This mixture of fact and fiction subverts features of historical narratives: “objectivity, neutrality, impersonality, and transparency of representation” (Hutcheon 92). However, due to the amount of actual or supposed facts, a blurring between fact and fiction occurs, which in turn leads to postmodernism's concern with the differences between historical and fictional discourses.

For the analysis of the historical discourse in *And the Ass Saw the Angel* it is important to note that Cave was not a witness of the times he writes about. In order to create this picture of the South, he has to draw on historical documents, fictional accounts, rumours or certain remains of these times. Taking into account that history is framed and shaped by narratives and historians, the amount of factual historical data is again minimised. Thus, Cave reinscribes the fictional and factual discourses into his own picture and view of the past.

3.3 Baudrillard, Hyperreality and the Simulacrum

Jean Baudrillard argues in “The Precession of Simulacra” that in the contemporary mass and consumer culture the real has been replaced by simulation. The real is produced from a set of unreal instances and elements: miniaturized cells, matrices, memory banks and models of control. The result is hyperreality, which comes into being when the real world is replaced by technology and self-referential signs (Baudrillard 5-7). Thus, reality as such cannot be represented any longer. This notion is emphasised by the fact that language, with its floating meaning, lost its function as representative medium. An example given by Baudrillard is that during the Gulf War a completely different reality was created by media like television. The war was presented as a fight between good and evil, and bombs were praised for their precision, while in reality targets were often missed. Nevertheless, the representation on television had a greater impact on society than what had been kept secret. In this way, simulation becomes hyperreal. Furthermore, the simulacrum is often put in place of memories which we can lose, for instance in the form of videotaping and photographing of important events in our lives (Geyh 21). As we can adjust the simulacra and look at them for an infinite number of times, they offer us a possibility real life does not.

Baudrillard’s concept is regarded as one of the numerous manifestoes of postmodernism, as it underlines multiplicity and reproduction, questions the possibility of representation and deconstructs binary oppositions through the dissolution of the distinction between reality and simulation. Hyperreality thus becomes a closed system of meaning, reference and truth, to which other postmodernist dogmas are incorporated.

In *And the Ass Saw the Angel* Euchrid creates his own simulation of reality through the collection of relicts he has found or stolen. His first collection consists of cicada shells (*Ass* 67). When he starts to harm himself, he collects the bandages used for his wounds

in a box he labels “strips”. Furthermore, he even keeps parts of his hair and nails in another box he labels “clippings” (*Ass* 87). In the next paragraph Euchrid mentions that it is hard for him to remember. Nevertheless, he does not mention what exactly his memory is missing. Thus, things like his bandages or parts of his nails contribute to the preserving of his memory. Another explanation is that these relicts remind Euchrid of himself in cases of dissociation, which might occur in connection with his mental illness. The fact that he uses things collected to keep a memory alive or even to create a reality which has not existed as such in his mind, is also apparent in the case of Cosey Mo. After the attack on Cosey Mo and the devastation of her trailer, Euchrid visits the trailer one more time and collects the remains of her beauty case, such as lavender perfume, cotton balls, a syringe, a photograph, a lock and a nightgown. As he already did with his other collections, he puts the remains of Cosey Mo’s possession into a shoebox, which he labels “Cosey Mo, 1943” (*Ass* 107). This scene illustrates the fact that these things are not only a reproduction of Euchrid’s memory, as they evoke certain images or feelings when he sees, touches or smells them. The access to other parts of Cosey Mo’s life through relicts of passages from her life Euchrid did not witness, a memory is created which has never existed. This memory, however, is shaped by Euchrid himself, as he selects and stores the simulacra which then contribute to his memories.

3.4 Intertextually

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full-stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network.

Michel Foucault (The Archaeology of Knowledge)

The term “intertextuality” was coined by the critic Julia Kristeva and is now widely applied – not only to literature, but also to cinematography or photography. It is based on the structuralist and poststructuralist notion of language as a closed system. Intertextuality stands for the assumptions that no independent meaning is inherent in texts, as all texts are based on other texts, which have gone before (Allen 1). Thus, meaning can only exist between texts and textual interpretation and is therefore often regarded as tracing relations between texts (Allen 1). The concept discussed in this chapter can be traced back to Saussure’s linguistic theories (as outlined in Chapter 4.1.1), which was then taken up by critics like Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin focuses his

discussion on the concept of *utterances*, which he regards as the “human-centred aspect of language” (Allen 17). Utterances emphasise social communication among specific individuals or groups in a specific context. He criticises Saussure’s static system and concept of language, as language is constantly in motion and is shaped by social communities and institutions. Although the system of language is closed, human interaction changes linguistic features, as language is always being made to fit social and cultural circumstances, i.e. the same event may be described differently according to the recipient:

In point of fact, word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee. Each and every word expresses ‘one’ in relation to the ‘other’. (Bakhtin/Volosinov 95)

Furthermore, Bakhtin employs a theory of polyphony and dialogue. Texts are made up by dialogues. This term, however, must not be taken literally. Bakhtin does not have spoken dialogues between character in mind, but rather entire discourses, such as characters’ world-views, their language or their consciousness, which exist in a dialogic relation with the discourses associated with other characters. Another term which can be used in this context is polyphony: “The polyphonic novel presents a world in which no individual discourse can stand objectively above any other discourse; all discourses are interpretations of the world” (Allen 23). Thus, there is no objective narrative voice in polyphonic texts or novels. In contrast to other, mostly poststructuralist, critics, Bakhtin does not employ a theory of the death of the author. Bakhtin holds the opinion, that there is an author behind every text, but he or she does not intrude as a guiding agent. Turning back to the characters within texts, Bakhtin sees double-voiced discourses, which are often presented by one speaker, who addresses different addressees, talks about different related or unrelated topics or clichés, holds different, sometimes even contrary, opinions. This narrative mode is especially popular in the modernist stream of consciousness. In postmodernism one mostly finds heteroglossia and polyphony, a clash of different discourses within or among different characters, which emphasises the “anything goes” dogma of postmodernity. According to Bakhtin, epic and lyric texts are, in contrast to this, rather monologic, as there is only one voice which speaks and enforces its opinions.

This vision of intertextuality can be contrasted with the poststructuralist view, which attributes authority to language, rather than to authors as creative instances. The stable

relationship between signifier and signified is regarded as a means to maintain power and repress revolutionary thought for dominant ideologies. Allen employs the signifier “god” as an example (Allen 32). This signifier always refers to itself and not to any signified. When one asks what “god” stands for, religions give only other signifiers as answers, which leads to an endless chain of signifiers.

In *Desire in Language* Kristeva states that authors do not write out of their original minds, but rather compile already existing texts (Allen 35). In contrast to Bakhtin, who focuses on people and language use, Kristeva solely uses the terms text and textuality, acknowledging that texts are bound up with cultural and social contexts. According to Kristeva there are two intertextual dimensions: in the horizontal dimension words written or found in texts belong to the writing subject and its addressee. In the vertical dimension the words written or found in texts belong to an anterior or synchronic literary corpus (*Desire in Language* 66). Thus, texts communicate on two levels: They communicate with readers and they communicate with the past and texts written in the past. The writing subject, however, is lost in his writing, as immediate presence can solely be achieved through spoken language. In contrast to critics like John L. Austin, who emphasise the performative power of language, Kristeva states that speaking subjects are not important for actions evoked through language, as performative instances can be uttered by anyone. Similar to Bakhtin, Kristeva is of the opinion that Western literature began to break free from its semiotic bonds when modernism arose. Modernist texts are self-consciously intertextual and open to more and wider discourses.

One of the best-known contributions to the theory of intertextuality has been made by Roland Barthes in his essay “The Death of the Author” (see *Rauschen der Sprache* 57-63). The author figure is a modern invention. French rationalism and the centring on individual subjects also caused a shift of focus to the author as writing instance. The author figure is present in literary anthologies, journals, interviews and predominantly in the minds of the writers. In his opinion Mallarmé was the first who sought to put language in the place of the author and acknowledge the fact that only language speaks and performs, not the author. During the height of surrealism, the author was dethroned by the performance of automatic writing, in which the mind as a selective and arranging instance is being excluded from the act of writing. Like Kristeva, Barthes also uses Austin’s theory on performative units of language as a means to dethrone the author, as these speech acts do not have any other purpose than the speech act itself. From this he

derives that not even the genius of an author has any other origin than language. The modern *writer* comes into existence together with the text he writes. There is no author subject preceding the text. Barthes describes texts as multidimensional rooms, which have their origins in different cultures and consist of different quotations, whose source cannot be defined. The writer does not have any feelings or emotions, but solely a “dictionary”, from which he or she draws textual elements. These fragments, which often contradict, parody or complete each other, do not assemble in the author figure, but are kept together by the reader. In his memoir *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* he refers to himself in the third person, emphasizing that the speaking and writing person are never the same. The subject represented is linguistically not the same subject that performs the act of representation (Allen 41). Thus, the subject in writing is always double, as words are always intertextual and already written and pronominal signifiers, which refer to the subject, are never stable.

Another essay written by Barthes which deals with the subject of authorship and intertextuality is “Theory of the Text”. Here he argues that texts can be regarded as labour, as producer and reader meet in a text and a text is never finished, due to the fact that it unfolds itself further in the readers’ minds. Thus, the text cannot be controlled by any instance. Furthermore, Barthes distinguishes between consumers who only look for one meaning of the text, and readers, who are productive and who, in Barthes’ terms, co-write the text. This productivity is caused by the nature of the text. He mentions word-play as an example, which, when being discovered by a reader-figure, may enfold meaning which the author has not intended. Texts are places in which different meanings and interpretations intersect, which makes the monological concept of signification inappropriate. This aspect emphasises the dialogic aspect of texts.

In Bakhtinian terms, the dialogic and polyphonic nature of the textuality in *And the Ass Saw the Angel* is reflected in two ways: the co-existence of two narrators, and the large amount of ellipses and the lack of closure. The accounts of the two narrators contain different parts of the story and have to be assembled by the reader like pieces of a puzzle. Thus, not only the world-views of different characters collide on an abstract level, but they are literally juxtaposed, as the two narrators present their accounts alternately.

According to Kristeva, Cave as the writing and creating subject makes use of intertextuality in a horizontal and vertical level, as he draws both on his personal

lexicon, which is then received by the reader, and an anterior literary corpus and literary and especially generic traditions. As outlined in Chapter 3.2 Cave incorporates themes and settings of Gothic and postmodernist literature into his own novel and draws both on historical and fictional accounts regarding the temporal and geographical setting of a time in which Cave himself was not yet born. The result is therefore marked by intertextuality to a large extent.

3.4.1 Transtextuality

The term intertextuality cannot only be applied to the poststructuralist notion that there is no author figure writing a text, creating its definite meaning and the view of the linguistic system as communicating instance. Intertextuality can refer to reworkings of texts which are transpositions of texts into other circumstances, genres, styles or moods. One of the most important critics who are concerned with the topic of literary transcendence and transformation is Gérard Genette. In his theory of transtextuality, he distinguishes between five transtextual phenomena. He regards Kristeva's concept of intertextuality as part of transtextuality. Thus, intertextuality solely stands for the "relationship of co-presence between two texts or among several texts" (Genette 1), such as quoting, plagiarism or allusion. The paratext describes the relationship between a text and the totality of the literary work, for instance title, subtitle, forewords, illustrations or covers. Metatextuality is the employing of commentaries which talk about the text, but do not necessarily mention it. Architextuality is the assigning of a text to a certain text type or genre. Genette describes the last type of transtextuality, hypertextuality, as follows: "any relationship uniting a text (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of a commentary" (Genette 5). In this context, there are further nuances in hypertextuality. Thus, a direct transformation is for instance that of *Odyssey* to *Ulysses*. It solely transposes the action of the *Odyssey* to a different century. In contrast, the transformation from the *Odyssey* to the *Aeneid* is indirect (Genette 6), as only formal and generic features are imitated. Thus, Joyce "tells the story of Ulysses in a manner other than Homer's, and Virgil tells the story of Aeneas in the manner of Homer" (Genette 6). Furthermore, Genette distinguishes between simple transformations, which he calls transformations, and indirect transformations, which he labels imitations. Among the transformations we find parody, which literally means singing off the key or in another key or voice and transposing the melody (Genette 10). The contemporary use of the word stems from the tradition of mock-heroic poetry, in

which heroic poetry, an established genre or style, is transposed to non-heroic protagonists or circumstances. Although parody originally stood for simple transformations, for instance the exchange of a few words, it thus acquired a comic meaning and can also be labelled satirical pastiche. Pastiche, on the other hand, belongs to the group of imitations and is non-satirical. Genette labels parody and pastiche as playful, and travesty and caricature as satirical. In this context Genette also often refers to travesty as a transformation and caricature as imitation. Table 1 depicts these classifications:

	Register		
Relationship with Text	Satirical	Playful	Serious
Transformation	Travesty	Parody	Transposition
Imitation	Caricature	Pastiche	Reproduction

Table 1: Transtextuality according to Genette

Although Genette makes more and finer distinctions in his study, only parody, pastiche and travesty are important for the analysis of *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, as the following paragraphs show.

The title of the novel is a quotation from the Book of Numbers in the Bible. The story from the Bible does not reoccur in Cave's novel, however because of the title the reader is tempted to draw parallels between both stories. Some of the similarities are the occurrence of a mule, which represents the ass, and the appearances of an angel, which nobody except one person seems to see. However, another reading of this intertextual reference could be that Euchrid resembles the ass, as he is the only one in his narration who is able to see the angel and he is punished and abused throughout his life, as nobody else can see the same appearance. Then there is an instance of pastiche. When the founder of Ukulore Valley is introduced (*Ass* 15-17), the style of myth or legend is maintained, while the subject of the narrative is changed. The result can be described as a neutral imitation. A case of parody can be found when Ezra's arrival in the Ukulore Valley is described. The style and form of the Bible are maintained and the topic is changed. In contrast to pastiche, this instance of parody has a comical effect, as the subject of the narrative is trivial. The third occurrence of transtextuality which can be found in *And the Ass Saw the Angel* is travesty. Here, the genre of the Bildungsroman is transformed into a travesty. The Bildungsroman or novel of education usually follows the protagonist from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. Despite various and

multiple obstacles and challenges, the protagonist manages to find his proper and meaningful place in society. The most important aspect of that education is the growth of the protagonist's personality. One of the most famous novels of education is Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in which the education of Stephen Dedalus is pursued and portrayed. Dedalus starts his narrative while still a child. He reflects on his relationship with his surroundings and society. However, he must leave the circumstances in which he lives in order to become an artist. Thus, the successful development from child to artist is presented, which is parodied in *And the Ass Saw the Angel*.

According to Genette, travesty transforms a text into a vulgar version. In this context vulgarity refers to the lack of sophistication regarding the use of language, explicitness concerning sex, bodily functions and violence. In *And the Ass Saw the Angel* the structure and the general topic of the novel of education is maintained, which is the development of the protagonist from childhood to maturity and the achieving of goals and fulfilment of dreams. However, the style is vulgar, as the language is marked by slang expressions and swear words to a large extent and the protagonist does not develop in a positive way. Even before Euchrid starts telling his story, the narrative presents a negative attitude reflecting that no happy events or a happy ending will follow:

It was his brother who tore the caul on that, the morning of their birth, and as if that sole act of assertion was to set an inverted precedent for inertia in his life to come, Euchrid, then unnamed, clutched ahold of his brother's heels and slopped into the world with all the glory of an uninvited guest. (*Ass* 7)

In the next paragraph the reader learns that Euchrid's mother is drunk while she is giving birth to the twins and as Ezra tells Euchrid later "too pissed to push" (*Ass* 7). After their birth, Euchrid's brother dies, and Euchrid's account reflects his deep sorrow: "Goodbye, brother,' ah said to mahself as he slipped away, and for a full minute ah thought that ah too was going unner, so fucken cold was his dying." (*Ass* 8) His profound contempt for his mother is already expressed in the following line:

Then sailing through the still night came the raucous fray of her bitchship, mah mother, Ma, screeching hoarse malediction through the very anus of obscenity whilst banging on the side of the Chevy and going, 'Wha-ars mah boddle!' (*Ass* 8)

This hate for his mother will continue throughout Euchrid's narration. He describes this day as The Day of Judgement (*Ass* 10), as the day of his birth was the worst that could possibly happen to him, reflecting the notion that he will be doomed until his death and the "real" Day of Judgement. Shortly after the next negative experience follows. Wanting to cry because he is hungry, Euchrid realises that no matter how hard he tries, he cannot produce a single sound. Whereas the discovery of their body may be an exciting experience for other children, Euchrid has to face a handicap, which will haunt him his whole life. As nobody takes care of him, Euchrid eats a ball of paper to still his hunger. In the next chapter, the founding of the Ukulore Valley is described and in the next chapter, in which Euchrid takes over the narration, he talks about his muteness as if it were a conscious decision. Another interesting aspect is that at the same time he addresses his approaching death:

Ah never cried as a baby. That is to say, throughout mah babyhood never once did ah cry – no, not a peep. Not did ah bawl away mah childhood either, and during mah youthhood ah resolved to contain all mah emotions within and never to allow one sob without – for to do otherwise surely laid one open to all manner of abuse. And now, as ah count away the final seconds of mah manhood – as ah don the death-hood – ah will not crack. No. In all mah lifehood ah have never once cried. Not out loud. No, not out loud. (*Ass* 18)

Another foreshadowing of Euchrid's death can be found on the first page of the narration, where he already lies in the swampland, watching crows. These passages hint at the possibility that the protagonist will not reach the final stage of his process of maturing, as is the case with traditional novels of education. Instead, the reader has to witness Euchrid's social and mental disintegration. This already starts in this own home, in which he does not find a loving and caring family. The mother is an alcoholic, brewing her own spirits, abusing her son and the father alternately builds houses of cards, sets traps for animals and watches animal fights. There is hardly any communication between the members of the family and if it comes to verbal exchanges they are vulgar and hateful. He describes the situation at home as worse than what he has to cope with in the world outside:

O sure, the workers in the fields did hammer me down and those from the town chased me away and in the schools the children pelted me with stones and those at the mill kicked me and kicked me, but ah did brave all of the blows that rained down on me. Indeed, these afflictions seemed almost small when set up against the unending outrage suffered *within* the bounds of mah home. (*Ass* 153)

At the age of seven Euchrid mentions that he is observing trucks for the first time. Later he turns his attention to animals, especially ants, and to vehicles which drive up the hill on which Cosey Mo's caravan is positioned and subsequently he observes the inhabitants of Ukulore Valley. According to his own account, Euchrid has been watching the Ukulites and his "dominion" all his life (*Ass* 71). His favourite object of voyeurism is the prostitute Cosey Mo, for which he is beaten up by a client. He also made peeping holes in his own house in order to be able to observe his mother and father. Euchrid's alarming mental state becomes obvious after his first vision of an angel and after his mentioning that he started "playing with [his] blood" (*Ass* 87). Another hint at his mental illness can be found in the following passage:

Then the grim phantom stepped slowly into the square – at least, ah guess that's what happened – ah mean, well – what ah mean is that ah mahself had been temporarily arrested by the increasingly swollen tides of terror, and, well, ah don't know exactly, but ah lost some minutes to deadtime – have ah told you about *deadtime*? Yes? No? Well ah *did* lose time to mah other sel ... shit, forget it – suddenly ah took control of mah consciousness again, alerted by the smashing of glass, and ah found mahself crouching behind the drinking fountain with Death, the wraith in the dirty blanket still in mah sight. (*Ass* 114)

The fact that he lost himself hints at the possibility of schizophrenia and the description of his temporal state as being arrested may hint at a state of catatonia, which is one of the frequent symptoms of schizophrenia. Such states in which he loses control over himself and cannot remember what he has done occur several times throughout the novel.

In contrast to the beginning of the novel, in which he regarded himself as a strong survivor after his brother's death, his self-esteem diminishes, as he writes in the "Lamentations of Euchrid the Mute No. 2":

Ah am one luckless bastard. God knows. Dumber than a hat full of earholes. A vile thing. Unworthy. Worthless. O yes! Grotesque in form. Misshapen. Yes! Misshapen and vile of mind. O hideous deed. (*Ass* 142)

An obvious reason for this self-perception might be that Euchrid adapts to the views and opinions others have of him. However, his mental state becomes worse throughout his narration. Apart from his visual delusions and his loss of consciousness, he also hears voices: "Sometimes ah heard thousands of voices, for God is many tongued, whispering things to me as ah lay there alone" (*Ass* 145). The next tragedy, which Euchrid seems to have foreseen, occurs when Ezra is building a house of cards and Jane is bemoaning

her lost youth and beauty. As she is heavily drunk and carelessly touches the table, the house of card collapses and Ezra goes into a frenzy in which he kills Euchrid's mother in a most brutal way (*Ass* 188). Although he states that he does not regret anything, Ezra, like the real husband of Jane Crowley, commits suicide, leaving Euchrid as an orphan (*Ass* 202-203 to kill Beth).

Apart from the change of style, which can be regarded as a travesty of the Bildungsroman, parts of the typical topic or developments in the Bildungsroman have been changed as well. This can be interpreted as parody, which is the modification of the subject, without any change of the style. Thus, *And the Ass Saw the Angel* can be described as a mixture of travesty and parody. The result is a story with the narrative structure of a Bildungsroman, presenting the development of the protagonist from birth to death. The vulgarity of style turns the Bildungsroman into a travesty, while the negative development of Euchrid, who does not manage to lead a happy life and fulfil his dreams, but commit suicide instead, constitutes the parodying element of the story.

3.4.2 Collage

Apart from Genette's paradigms, there are other intertextual phenomena which can be found in postmodernist literature. Bricolage and collage can be defined as the most neutral ways of compiling different parts into a new whole. This technique was originally used in visual arts and reached the peak of its popularity in the twentieth century. Thus, in postmodern literature one can find hidden and marked quotations and references.

Collage is a dominant feature in *And The Ass Saw The Angel*. The novel consists of two separate stories told by two different narrators, arranged alternately like a visual collage. This results in a collage of language use. Euchrid mixes slang expressions and neologisms with archaic language, which, as mentioned before, bears strong resemblance to the language used in the Bible, and the language of the omniscient narrator is neutral. Furthermore, there is a stylistic collage, as postmodernism and Gothic are merged into a hybrid form. Spooner notes that

postmodernism [...] with its embrace of genre fiction, pastiche, sensationalism and spectacle, provided a much more sympathetic climate for Gothic's revival. [...] Gothic becomes, rather than the determining feature of the texts, one tool among many employed in the service of conjuring up interior terrors. These texts contain Gothic incidents, episodes, imagery, moments, traces: Gothic, we might say, haunts them. (Spooner 38-40)

The essence of this quote can be applied to *And The Ass Saw The Angel*. Gothic features are represented by postmodern narrative techniques, like multiple narrators and intertextual references. When looking closely at features of postmodernism and Gothic, overlaps and similarities become apparent. Gothic and postmodernism are concerned with de-centred, marginal figures, who despite the circumstances they live in, gain a voice and are able to tell their story. Furthermore, both modes seek to criticise and subvert existing hierarchies, norms and rules. Gothic stories tend to show the evil side of what we believe is good, while postmodernism conveys the notion that we cannot trust anything, as all rules are artificially set up by others. Another common feature is the scepticism towards representation. The unspeakable or unnamed are often the most terrifying instances in Gothic stories. Readers notice the emotional arousal of characters in texts, but the source of their terror is not always explicitly mentioned or described. Thus, the text allows readers to project their own fears onto the text. Postmodernism questions the mimetic power of language and, according to poststructuralist concepts, meaning is endlessly deferred in linguistic systems. Lack of closure is also a common feature of postmodernism and the Gothic. Readers are either confronted with multiple endings or open endings. In either case they have to decide themselves what they regard as truth or solution, as the author does not make any suggestion. In *And The Ass Saw The Angel* many questions are left open. There are hints at the possibility of Euchrid being schizophrenic, as he has seizures after which he cannot remember what he has done. At the end of the novel we find a repetition of scenes. In the first scene, Euchrid escapes into the swampland from the mob that wants to kill him. He goes into the middle of the swamp and is slowly absorbed into the ground. In the epilogue there is a dialogue between Wilma Eldridge and Doc Morrow, who assists at birth of a child whose mother dies in labour. It becomes evident that Sardus Swift died in the same way as Euchrid, and thus the reader is left with the question whether Euchrid was an alter ego of the schizophrenic Sardus Swift.

3.4.3 And Balaam's Ass Saw the Angel - The Biblical Intertext

I found that through the use of language I was writing God into existence. Language became the blanket that I threw over the invisible man, which gave him shape and form.
(Nick Cave, Lyrics 6)

The Biblical intertext is emphasised throughout *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, as the title is directly taken from the *Book of Numbers 22:27* from the Bible and there are multiple allusions and quotes from the Bible. On the cover, of the 2001 and 2009 Penguin

editions of the novel, which was created by the British artist Banksy, one finds a paratextual graphic allusion, opening the text up to further interpretation from the moment the book is seen by a reader:



Illustration 5: *And the Ass Saw the Angel* - 2001 Penguin Edition

Being familiar with the story from the Bible, the reader can make sense of this cover in two ways. The mule's head may stand for the stubbornness and blindness of the Ukulites, who disguise themselves as faithful and innocent people, praying to God and living according to his will, while they commit sins and spread evil, as symbolized by the bombs which are assembled in the form of a halo. A different interpretation would be that the mule is the only one who truly believes in God. The mule on the cover might represent Euchrid, as he is being abused by his fellows, while he is the only one who perceives God and his Angels.

Two of the women killed in the novel, the prostitute Cosey Mo and Euchrid's mother Janer, are referred to as the Whore of Babylon, which originally is an allegory from the Book of Revelation in the Bible. The most important passage is the following:

And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. (*Revelation 17:4 – 17:6*)

The first part of this description resembles the lure of Cosey Mo's beauty, with which she can impress even the most faithful and pious men. When the Ukulites plan and conduct the attack on Cosey Mo in her caravan, they position her according to the account of the Whore of Babylon. With her beauty, her costumes and evil inside her the Ukulites blame her for leading them into sin.

Another reference to the Whore of Babylon is made by Ezra when he is talking about his wife Jane: "She was the original Whore of Babylon – and now she is no more" (Ass 192). In this case the name on the forehead of the Whore is more fitting: "The mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" (*Revelation 17:5*). Indeed, Jane regularly abuses her family verbally and physically. She has not lured Ezra into marriage with her beautiful appearance, but rather through a mistake. Nevertheless, Ezra might regard himself as a good and innocent man who has been trapped into living with evil. Furthermore, while the Whore of Babylon is "drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (*Revelation 17:6*), Jane drinks her self-brewed liquors, of which one is called "White Jesus".

When Euchrid visits the church in which the hobos live, he opens a Bible and reads a few lines:

*They have corrupted themselves
Their spot is not the spot of his children
They are a perverse and crooked generation.*
Mah scalp crawled and ah closed the book. A chilly thing. The Bible. Sometimes.
(Ass 162)

This passage reflects the explicitness of violence in large parts of the Old Testament, which is dominated by the "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" credo, in which the Ukulites seem to believe. In their vigilantism they believe that their sins, or rather purging the valley of evil, will be forgiven by God, but they do not consider the possibility that God might also forgive the sinners they want to punish. Several pages

later Euchrid again talks about God as represented in the Bible and realises that God has changed:

These days God deals in a specialized commodity – people now are less inclined to part with their precious creature comforts and earthly pleasures for the promise of a celestial kingdom after death. God’s clientele is small and select. The Devil has a shovel. God has matured. He is not the impulsive, boweless being of the Testaments – the vehement glorymonger, with His bag of cheap carny tricks and His booming voice – the fiery huckster with His burning bushes and wonderwands. Nowadays God knows what he wants and He knows *who* He wants. If in His majesty He has seen fit to select you as an instrument in His Greater Plan, then, ah tell you, you must be ready to receive, comprehend and act upon His instructions, without question or debate. Ah was His sword, sharp and keen and poised to strike. (*Ass* 180)

Euchrid realises that the number of people who believe in God has diminished, which leads to the assumption that the Ukulites are in a minority. However, one has to keep in mind that the American South is known for its religious fanaticism, which makes the Ukulites as a religious group less outstanding in this geographical context. Furthermore, Euchrid is convinced that the portrait of God in the Bible is not up to date anymore. He justifies this assumption with the fact that he sees himself as a missionary chosen by God in order to fulfil an important task. He describes the Biblical image of God as an impostor or magician who focused on unimportant things in the past. In contrast to this Euchrid thinks that God has a plan now and that he chose the right person to conduct it successfully.

As mentioned above, the Ukulites interpret certain passages from the Bible in such a way that it excuses or justifies their crimes. The most prominent example is the attack on Cosey Mo, but also Euchrid’s father seeks an explanation for killing his wife in the Bible (see Chapter 3.4.4). Passages from the Bible which explicitly condemn sins and present God’s wrath as a response to sin are taken literally by the Ukulites and even those who are not an integral part of the community, for instance Ezra Eucrow. These passages can mostly be found in the Old Testament, while the New Testament, narrating the story of Jesus, presents a more merciful picture, propagating charity. This example shows that a versatile book like the Bible can be interpreted in many ways. As it poses the main foundation of the belief of many religious groups, their actual beliefs can vary according to their individual readings or interpretations of the Bible. Furthermore, Beth, who achieved the status of a saint as the rain stopped when she appeared in Ukulore Valley, is told by the women who attend her that God will come to her (*Ass* 185). After

hearing this and being watched by Euchrid, she is convinced that Euchrid is God who visits her. Some time later, Beth is examined by a nurse, as her tutors want a testimony, saying that Beth is still in possession of her virginity at the time of the examination. It is unclear why this report is needed, but one may suspect that Beth is pregnant and the Ukulites are convinced that there was an Immaculate Conception or that they expect a pregnancy. When Beth sees Euchrid for the first time, she says a prayer aloud, which illustrates that she believes in the prophecies told by the women, as presented in the following passage:

I am Beth.
 The affirmation of your mercy.
 Only Chastity and Purity have known me.
 Regard me in the humble estate of handmaiden to the Lord.
 I await the exacting of Thy Word.
 I am prepared.
 May the Holy Ghost come upon me
 and the Highest overshadow me,
 that I may bear blessed fruit
 from which all generations shall spring. (Ass 235)

Here it seems as if Beth is not pregnant yet, but awaiting the Holy Ghost and Immaculate Conception, emphasising her chastity and purity. As “all generations shall spring” from the child she would bear, she assumes that she would not bear a normal child. She seems to have accepted her faith as proposed by her tutors, only awaiting the moment of execution.

In the last scene of the novel Doc Morrow is fighting for Beth’s life and “another’s” (Ass 311). It is not explicitly mentioned that Beth is the mother whose life is in danger. Nevertheless, he has to decide between the mother and the child. While Beth’s attendants are convinced that Beth will survive, as she has gone through many difficulties in her life, the doctor knows that he is unable to save both lives. The child which survives is assumed to be the Messiah:

‘He is born,’ said Wilma Eldridge, her arms outstretched to receive the infant, ‘As the prophet predicted, He is born.’ And with the babe in her arms and the rest of the women huddling around, the cripple folded back the swaddling rug with one finger. A thunderbolt leapt from the teeming night sky and the craning sisters ruckled and clucked at the tiny infant face that stared up at them with shivering, pale blue eyes. (Ass 312)

The prophecy Wilma refers to can be found at the beginning of the novel, in which the story of the prophet is narrated. Jonas Ukulore was convinced that the second coming of Christ was nigh. Thus, the Ukulites believe that Beth has given birth to Jesus and caused his second coming. Nevertheless, the thunderbolt and the following downpour hint at a possible misfortune, like another long period of permanent rain. Both the fact that the Ukulites seem to believe in the portrait of God as an unforgiving avenger and that they believe that Beth is going to give birth to Christ reflect the notion that they ignore the New Testament, in which Jesus is portrayed as a merciful person, preaching against hate and revenge.

3.4.4 Parallels with Cave's Musical Work

In *And The Ass Saw The Angel* there is a large number of intertextual references to Cave's other work. Recurring themes and images from his lyrics can also be encountered in his novel. An interesting aspect is that most of these references can be found on the first five albums with Nick Cave's band The Bad Seeds, which were released before the novel was published: *From Her to Eternity* (1984), *The Firstborn Is Dead* (1985), *Kicking Against the Pricks* (1986), *Your Funeral... My Trial* (1986) and *Tender Prey* (1988), and the album *Mutiny* (1989) which was released with Cave's band *The Birthday Party*. Starting with the album *From Her to Eternity*, one finds the song "Well of Misery". In this song a lover apparently sings about his or her lost love, which resembles the scene from *And The Ass Saw The Angel* in which Rebecca Swift hangs herself in the well:

O the same God that abandon'd her
 Has in turn abandon'd me
 And softenin' the turf with with my tears
 I dug a Well of Misery (*Lyrics* 83)

The statement that God abandoned the woman might stand for the fact Rebecca, too, can be regarded as being abandoned by God, as she is not able to bear children. After her death, her man, supposedly Sardus Swift, also feels abandoned, as he is now left without a wife and without children. The digging of a "Well of Misery" hints at the fact that Rebecca kills herself in a well, in which Sardus has to find her. This is emphasised in the following verse:

Down that well lies the long-lost dress
 of my lil floatin girl

That muffles a tear that you let fall
All down that Well of Misery (*Lyrics* 83)

When Rebecca jumps into the well, she also loses her dress and is hauled up naked from the well. These lyrics add another dimension to the scene in *And The Ass Saw The Angel*, as the mental state of Sardus Swift is never described after this incidence. The reader only learns that he hardly leaves his house and is not regarded as an adequate leader of the Ukulites anymore. Regarding this text, however, as a completion of the narrative presented in the novel, Sardus' feelings are revealed.

The next parallel between *And The Ass Saw The Angel* and Cave's musical work is the title of his album *The Firstborn Is Dead*. In the novel the firstborn, Euchrid's brother, also survives only the first few hours of his life. This image reappears in the first song on the album, which is "Tupelo":

Well Saturday gives what Sunday steals.
And a child is born on his brothers heels.
Come Sunday morn the first-born dead.
In a shoebox tied with a ribbon of red. (*Lyrics* 102)

Here, the parallel becomes even more obvious, as Euchrid states that in the course of his own birth he "clutched ahold of his brother's heels and slopped into the world with all the glory of an uninvited guest" (*Ass* 7). Furthermore, Euchrid's father puts the dead firstborn in a shoebox: "In his hands he held a shoe box bound in string. On its lid was written '#1'" (*Ass* 13). The five years of rain and their effects on humans and animals are also described in other verses of the same song:

Women at their windows
Rain crashing on the pane
Writing in the frost
Tupelos' shame. Tupelo's shame.
[...]
And the black rain come down.
Water water everywhere.
Where no bird can fly no fish can swim.
[...]
No fish can swim
Until The King is born!
Until The King is born!
In Tupelo! Tupelo-o-o!
'Til the King is born in Tupelo!
In a clap-board shack with a roof of tin.
Where the rain came down and leaked within.

A young mother frozen on a concrete floor.
With a bottle and a box and a cradle of straw. (*Lyrics* 101-102)

Tupelo is a village, which represents Ukulore Valley and which is plagued by heavy rain. “Tupelo’s shame” hints at the fact that the inhabitants of Tupelo may see their own guilt or sin as cause for the rain, as is also the case in Ukulore Valley. Another prominent parallel is that it seems to rain in Tupelo “until the King is born”, while in *And The Ass Saw The Angel* it is the birth of Beth which stops the rain. The last four lines of the passage quoted above indicate the circumstances of the “King’s” birth or, if transferred to *And The Ass Saw The Angel*, of Beth’s birth. While critics like Nathan Wiseman-Trowse (Wiseman-Trowse 160) see Cosey Mo as the mother of Beth, there is no such hint in the novel. Rather, the scene described in “Tupelo” seems more plausible. Here the mother stays unidentified, but it is obvious that she is dead. As the town is waiting to be rescued by the King or Beth, the child in the “cradle of straw” is most likely alive and, in the case of Beth, brought to Sardus Swift by a stranger.

On the same album there is a song called “Black Crow King”. Crows are of great importance to Euchrid, mostly as messengers of bad news. In this song, however, the narrator sees himself as the king of the crows:

And the rain it raineth daily.
Lord
And wash away my clothes
I surrender up my arms
To a company of crows
I am the black crow king (*Lyrics* 110)

This scene bears a striking resemblance to Euchrid’s dying scene in which he is surrounded by crows, while the daily rain stands for five years of rain. Assuming that the narrator in this song and Euchrid are the same person, Euchrid finally surrenders to the crows which have shadowed him all his life, thus becoming not only one of them, but even the “black crow king”.

On the album *Kicking Against the Pricks* there is the song “I’m Gonna Kill That Woman”, originally written by John Lee Hooker, which literally resembles Ezra’s thoughts in the novel, before he kills Jane:

You know she was nothing but trouble, trouble
She keep me worried all the time
God knows her movements are killing me

[...]
 Yeah, I lay down last night I was thinking
 Must I kill that woman? Must I kill that woman?
 Oh Lord I get down on my knees
 They tell me God forgivin' everything you do¹

The motif of turning to God in cases of severe crimes recurs in *And The Ass Saw The Angel* when Ezra, after killing Jane, reads Psalm 58 to Euchrid:

1. Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation?
Do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men?
2. Yea, in heart ye work wickedness; ye weigh the violence of your hands in the earth.
3. The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.
4. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear;
5. Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely.
6. Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O LORD.
7. Let them melt away as waters which run continually: when he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces.
8. As a snail which melteth, let every one of them pass away: like the untimely birth of a woman, that they may not see the sun.
9. Before your pots can feel the thorns, he shall take them away as with a whirlwind, both living, and in his wrath.
10. The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.
11. So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth. (*Psalm 58: 1-11*)

Whereas in “I’m Gonna Kill That Woman” the narrator hopes for forgiveness of his sins, Ezra is convinced that God, supposedly loathing “wicked” people, approves of his deed. Furthermore, this resembles the predominant notion in the Old Testament that vigilantism is a valid means of justice, as reflected in what is probably the most famous saying in the Old Testament: “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”. The same attitude can be found in the scene when Cosey Mo is attacked by the Ukulites, who justify their deed as acting according to God’s will, freeing themselves and their village from evil.

¹ Hooker, John Lee. *I’m Gonna Kill That Woman*.

http://lyrics.wikia.com/John_Lee_Hooker:I'm_Gonna_Kill_That_Woman, 01.05.2011.

The album *Your Funeral... My Trial* features a song of the same title. The title resembles the recurring theme of murder in Nick Cave's lyrics and novel. The following lines hint at the fact that, again, a man killed his woman or wife:

Let all the bells in whoredom ring
All the crooked bitches that she was
[...]
Your funeral, my trial (*Lyrics* 126)

In *And The Ass Saw The Angel* both Ezra and Euchrid refer to Jane mostly as “bitch” or “whore”, emphasising that it was almost a necessity to kill her.

In “The Mercy Seat” from the album *Tender Prey* themes can be found, which do not bear literal resemblance to *And The Ass Saw The Angel*, but which are nevertheless both prominent and important.

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(1) MERCY SEAT by N. CAVE BERLIN/LONDON/MELBOURNE 88

(Spoken) Um, it began when they come took me from my home
And put me here in Dead Row
Of which I am ~~what~~ nearly wholly innocent, you know
And I'll say it again
I .. am .. not .. afraid .. to .. die ..

~~Spoken~~ I began to warm and chill
to objects + their fields
a ragged cup, a twisted mop
the face of Jesus in my soup
these sister dinner deals
the meal trolley's wicked wheels
a hooked bone rising from my food
all things either good or ungod

(Sung)
~~Spoken~~ And the mercy seat is waiting
And I think my head is burning
And in a way I'm yearning
to be done with all this measuring of truth
An eye for an eye
And a tooth for a tooth
And anyway I told the truth
And I'm not afraid to die

(Spoken) Interpret signs and catalogue
A blackened tooth, a scarlet fog
the walls are bad, black, bottom kind
they are^{the} sick breath at my hind
they are^{the} sick breath at my hind
they are^{the} sick breath at my hind
they are the sick breath gathering at my hind

(Sung) In heaven his throne is made of gold
The ark of his testament is stoned
A throne from which I'm told
All history does unfold
Down here it's made of wood and wire
And my body is on fire
And God is never far away

This verse is at the * sign

Illustration 6: Handwritten lyrics for "The Mercy Seat", Nick Cave Collection, The Arts Centre, Melbourne²

² See: <http://www.nickcaveandthebadseeds.com/lyrics/mercy-seat>, 05.04.2011.

The song narrates the story of a person who is convicted and waiting for his execution on the electric chair. Similarly to *And The Ass Saw The Angel* there are many intertextual references to the Bible. The man repeats several times throughout the song

An eye for an eye
 And a truth for a truth
 And anyway I told the truth
 And I'm not afraid to die. (*Lyrics* 137)

The first part of this passage reflects the predominant dogma “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” in the Old Testament, which is present throughout the novel, as the Ukulites believe in vigilantism, justifying it as the execution of God’s will. The man’s deed is not mentioned explicitly in the song, but he refers to his right hand as “My kill-hand is called E.V.I.L.” (*Lyrics* 138). Furthermore, he emphasises that he always told the truth, which in connection with the fact that he is not afraid to die hints at the possibility that he admitted to being a murderer. Whereas, in “The Mercy Seat” the narrator is prepared to die on an electric chair and seems to have accepted his fate, Euchrid is prepared for his own suicide, which is part of his greater plan. Nevertheless, while telling their stories both men are awaiting their death and neither of them is afraid. Euchrid even seems to look forward to end his existence on earth and to be with God and his dead brother, while he eagerly arranges a plan: “Ah love you, little brother! And ah’m coming home! *All fear did subside*” (*Ass* 169). The imagery used in both texts in connection with the theme of death and dying is also similar. In “The Mercy Seat” one finds:

And the mercy seat is glowing
 And I think my head is smoking
 [...]
 And the mercy seat is smoking
 And I think my head is melting
 [...]
 And the mercy seat is melting
 And I think my blood is boiling
 [...]
 And the mercy seat is waiting
 And I think my head is burning (*Lyrics* 139)

In *And the Ass Saw the Angel* Euchrid describes a seizure, which resembles death in an electric chair:

Mah body was seized by a delicious trembling. Shudders of glory. Mah whole being surged with power . with *the* power. Mah blood smoked in mah veins and kept coming – humming. Singing. Mah blood sang. Pounding through me. Mah heart pulsing, drumming up the blood. The pumps of pleasure berserk and sounding. Mah flesh like warm mud. *All fear did subside.* (*Ass* 169)

Euchrid’s blood and body are set in motion, as if hit by electricity, until finally his fear disappears, as if death had come. Another parallel between these two accounts is that both men believe in God, which makes the dying scene more bearable for them. While Euchrid is convinced that his sole purpose on earth is to fulfil God’s mission, the narrator in “The Mercy Seat” also believes that he is attended by God:

In Heaven His throne is made of gold
 The ark of his Testament is stowed
 A throne from which I'm told
 All history does unfold.
 Down here it's made of wood and wire
 And my body is on fire
 And God is never far away. (*Lyrics* 138)

To sum up, the most prominent parallels between both texts are that two men await their death after having committed murder. In the case of Euchrid it is suicide, while in “The Mercy Seat” the man is sentenced to death by legal instances. Both refer to the “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” principle from the Bible, both believe that they are accompanied by God in their last hours. Euchrid is convinced that his Angel attends him at all times and the man in “The Mercy Seat” realizes that “God is never far away”. Thus, it appears as if the fear of death of both men is eased by their continuous or final belief in God. Furthermore, their belief enables them to hope for forgiveness of their sins. Although Euchrid is aware of the negative representation of God in the Old Testament as irascible and vengeful, the fact that he regards himself as a missionary justifies his deeds and thus also sins. There are similar images and choice of words in the accounts of both men, for instance the image of smoking blood in *And the Ass Saw the Angel* and boiling blood in “The Mercy Seat”.

The album *Mutiny* contains the song “Swampland”, which portrays the last scene of *And the Ass Saw the Angel*:

Sinken in the mud
 Patron-saint of the Bog.
 They cum with boots of blud
 Wit pitchfawk and with club

Chantin out mah name
 Got doggies strainin onna chain
 Lucy, ah'll love ya till the end!
 They hunt me like a dog
 Down in Sw-a-a-a-amp Land!

So cum mah executioners!
 Cum bounty hunters!
 Cum mah county killers--for ah cannot run no more
 Ah cannot run no more
 Ah cannot run no more
 No I can't!
 Lucy, ya won't see this face agin
 Wheb ya caught ya swing and burn...
 Down in Sw-a-a-a-amp Land!

The trees are veiled in fog
 The trees are veiled in fog
 Like so many jilted brides
 Now they're all breakin down and cry
 Cryin tears upon mah face
 Cryin tears upon mah face
 And they smell of gasoline³

The equivalent passage in *Ass The Ass Saw the Angel* is the following:

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 – for it was, after all, HE who brought the rain.

O now ah know, now ah know what's happening.

Here she is descending. The shifts of breeze tell me. The blue effluxion, the flutter of wings. O mah winged protector! Mah guardian angel! Is it you? Is it you, come to carry me through the gates? Can you tell me? Can you tell me what's happening?

They pour gasoline from canisters.

O weeping angel, do you cry?

Euchrid strains his dripping chin upward.

³ Cave, Nick. „Swampland“: http://www.nick-cave.com/lyrics/songs/1983_Swampland.html (15.06.2011)

Will they sound the trumpets? Roll the drum?

The empty canisters crash about him.

Ah, here they are! Death's lights! (*Ass* 108)

In both passages the narrator flees from his persecutors into the swampland. As in *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, the “executioners” in “Swampland” carry gasoline and are accompanied by dogs. Both men realise that they cannot run anymore from those who want to kill them and thus they commit suicide in the swampland. The narrator in “Swampland” addresses his beloved, Lucy, whom he will not see again. The counterpart in the novel is Cosey Mo, who, however, is already dead when Euchrid commits suicide. A stylistic similarity can be found in the use of “ah” and “mah”, which Euchrid uses constantly throughout the novel.

4. From Mutiny to Mutilation – Euchrid’s Use of Language

4.1 Language and the Problem of Representation

4.1.1 A Structuralist Perspective on Referentiality

The question whether language is capable of representing the world adequately seems to be omnipresent. Nevertheless, it seems as if structural linguists have given this question the most thought. Claude Lévi-Strauss, an anthropologist who sought to show that the mental structures of all humans are alike, was the first to use the term structuralism. The search for underlying structures was adopted by other theorists in the fields of philosophy, sociology and literary studies. In the field of linguistics there were three schools devoted to structuralism. However, the linguistic circle around Ferdinand de Saussure, founded in 1926, can be regarded as the most important school. Saussure is often referred to as the founder of modern linguistics. His most important semiotic concept has been adopted by both structuralists and poststructuralists. Saussure makes a distinction between “langue”, language as a set of rules, which is inherent in the minds of its users, “langage”, which describes speaking in general, and “parole”, which refers to individual speech. Saussure assigns greater significance to langue than to parole. Furthermore, he analyses the differences between languages (synchronic analysis) and the formation of languages (diachronic analyses). Individual subjects are subordinated to a higher linguistic structure and are not able to change its system. However, Saussure

states that changes on the level of speech may cause changes in the whole system (see Bossinade 27).

The most radical and also most famous of Saussure's theories is the split of the linguistic sign. According to Saussure a sign consists of the signifier (*signifiant*) and the signified (*signifié*). The signifier stands for the written word, which is a chain of phonemes. The signified is solely an idea in our minds, a shared concept, which is valid and commonly accepted in societies having the same linguistic and cultural background. Thus, the linguistic sign is arbitrary, as it does not bear any iconic connection with the represented idea or concept. The meaning of these arbitrary signs is based on collective agreement and conventional use (see *Sprachwissenschaft* 80). Signs do not possess a positive meaning. Instead, their meaning is established through the relationship and differences between signs and not through their relation to the world outside. The concept that the linguistic system is closed and meaning is generated solely within this system questions the representative potential of language.

The creation of linguistic utterances takes place on two levels: relations of signs *in praesentia*, which is called syntagma, and relations of signs *in absentia*, which is called paradigma (Currie 22). The former category refers to instances and their relationship with each other within one linguistic sequence, for instance a sentence. The latter category denotes the whole system of linguistic signs one can choose from in order to create an utterance. The process of selection and combination is complex, as the user of language has to be familiar with the whole set of linguistic signs and their relations, with grammatical rules, synonyms and antonyms, etc. The active use of language takes places without much conscious thinking about the linguistic system and only disorders on the level of language use reveal underlying structures. Structural linguistics became important in literary studies, as the creation of literary texts demands a conscious knowledge of the linguistic system. On the paradigmatic level one finds words, which can be substituted for each other. These *significant others*, like "man" and "woman" are binary oppositions. Although Currie states that language users do not always prefer one opposition above another, postmodern writers seek to deconstruct the binary system of signs. Another important point for the production and subsequently also analysis of literature is the fact that linguistic signs are arbitrary. There is no iconic relationship between the signifier and the signified, as there is, for instance, in ancient hieroglyphs. Thus, the arbitrariness and relative value of signs are transposed to the relationship

between words and the universe (Currie 26). Another point of interest for literary analysis is the distinction between opaque and transparent language. Opaque language draws attention to itself and therefore form is placed above content. Transparent language merely conveys messages and ideas. In this case form is subordinate to content. Nevertheless, the opacity of language is not caused by the opacity of linguistic signs, as their value is always equal. Thus, the question whether language is opaque or transparent depends on the analysis (Currie 31). Nevertheless, the structural analysis of texts helps to answer the question whether texts do represent reality or not. The formalist critic Vladimir Propp argues that all fairy tales are similar in terms of structure. Every character fulfils a certain function and can be assigned only specific features from a limited set (Currie 33). Thus, the character adopts a solely grammatical function within a text and therefore does not resemble a real person or reference to the world outside. Furthermore, some critics argue that in every narrative there is only a limited number of plot structures from which one can choose. Structuralist theorists regard the beginning and end of a narrative as oppositional, as there mostly is a transition from one state or condition to an opposite state or condition, for instance happy to sad or young to old. However, form and content cannot be separated from each other, as only instances from the same category or those which have the same connotations can be mutually exchanged. This notion again leads to the conclusion that due to the limitations of language and structure narratives cannot represent the world as it is.

4.1.2 Poststructural Theory

Poststructuralism can be regarded as an answer to structuralism or a continuation of its ideas and concepts. However, the most crucial difference between both theories is that poststructuralist critics do not accept the predominance of binary oppositions, as they argue that there are many nuances between black and white. Furthermore, binary oppositions are arranged hierarchically, as they are based on power structures. Poststructuralists propose that meaning is never stable. Furthermore, poststructuralism holds that structuralist theories are culturally conditioned and are thus biased. The aim of poststructuralist theory is to take cultural circumstances into account and to explain from what or where our knowledge is derived.

Derrida's concept of *différance* deconstructs binary oppositions and denotes the instability of meaning. Deconstruction as such contains three basic steps or phases. In

the first phase one finds a hierarchical binary opposition, in which one term is favoured over another. In the next step the hierarchy is reversed and the inferior term is attributed superiority. In the third phase the opposition is reinscribed, which causes the disruption between the oppositions (Currie 49f). Nevertheless, this instruction can by no means be employed deliberately. Derrida does not state that one opposition is more dominant than the other. Instead, his aim is to find text passages in which this deconstruction is already inherent. The “inversion of the hierarchy [...] is located within the argument that exactly seeks to establish that hierarchy” (Currie 50). While the existence of binary opposition was crucial for structuralist theory in the establishing of the linguistic sign and therefore also meaning-making, this assumption is annihilated in poststructuralist theory. According to Derrida’s model of *différance*, the meaning of signs is always shifting and it depends on the signs preceding and following, whose meaning, in turn, is also depending on each other. He calls this the *trace* structure, as “any sign is embedded in a context, and [...] its meaning bears the trace of the signs that surround it, that have preceded it, and that will follow it” (Currie 54). Whereas the structuralist model of signs is spatial, as all signs coexist and gain their meaning through the references between them, the poststructuralist model is temporal. There are signs, which are already gone and there are signs, which are yet to come. Thus, the meaning of a sign is, from a temporal point of view, never actually present. Saussure claimed that signs can convey meaning through difference, but Derrida goes further and states that signs are constituted by difference. Thus, the sign is never complete and autonomous, but rather “internally divided, different from itself” (Currie 57). The fugitive existence of the sign is often compared to that of the moment, which also cannot be described without reference to past and future. One can define a moment by trying to ignore the elements, which constitute the moment, but this would imply to force something upon the concept, which is not inherent in its nature. Derrida’s concern with the present is based on the fact that presence is hard to define and to isolate. In his theory of the metaphysics of history he regards history as a “sequence of present moments” (Currie 59), which can be isolated from the whole context. In order to illustrate this notion Derrida employs the concept of the origin. There is nothing that precedes the origin and at the exact moment of the origin it is distant from the future. The origin is the only moment of full presence and therefore a useful starting point for explanations. In the case of the sign, the origin is the moment when the sign and the thing are still unified (Currie 59). Writing is regarded as nostalgia for the origin of the sign, when it was first thought and spoken and

these written signs are marked by the absence of the once present author. When one tries to detect the origin of a sign or to assign a unique and stable meaning to it, the concept of *différance* reminds us that this undertaking is impossible, as one cannot identify the origin of the sign. Furthermore, the meaning of linguistic signs is always shifting, as they are influenced by difference and temporality.

4.2 Language and Identity

The modern concept of identity is based on the notion “Cogito ergo sum” by René Descartes, who was one of the first philosophers to entirely separate body and mind. This notion turned into a manifesto of contemporary philosophy, and the human being and the Self become the centre of the universe and the main focus of attention. In this connection, however, it is not only the act of thinking that is a major criterion for the formation of the Self, but apparently also the use of language. Lacan is concerned with the subject’s alienation in language. As the linguistic system exists already before the birth of the subject (Chiesa 37), language is seen as the Other. In his Mirror Theory the formation of the I takes place through the entrance into the Symbolic Order and the acceptance of The Law of the Father, which can be equalled with the entrance into the linguistic system:

He [Lacan] believes that there could not be a human subject without language but that the subject cannot be reduced to language. [...] It is the ability to speak that distinguishes the subject. It is this feature that separates the social from the natural world. There is no subject independent of language. (Sarup 12)

When a baby is born, the linguistic systems already exists as an enigmatic code. Thus, the child has to get to know the structural relations and to use the system actively. Children are already able to speak before they enter the Symbolic Order, which usually takes place at the age of five. This means that the child enters the Other through language and not through the Symbolic Order (*Écrits* 75-81). Only through the entrance into the Symbolic Order is language graspable and fully structured for the child, which also means that the Oedipus complex is resolved. This process has three stages and each stage is marked by lack. The first stage is the pre-Oedipal dual relation with the mother, which is initiated by the lack of the breast and is marked by the triad of child-mother-imaginary phallus. This stage is initiated by the missing of the breast. In the second stage the child realises that the mother lacks a symbolic object, namely the symbolic phallus. Now the child is in a rivalry with the father in order to control the mother. In

the third stage the father shows the child that he is in possession of what the mother lacks and the child realises that it cannot compete with the father, which stands for the child's castration. The Oedipus complex is resolved when the child identifies symbolically with the father and internalises the Law of the Father, thus entering the realm of language. Lacan underlines that the subject has to become part of the universal field of language (Chiesa 37).

Furthermore, language is not an adequate means of communication, as the subject's counterpart is never able to grasp fully what the subject wants to say. At the same time, however, the counterpart receives more than the subject intends to say. Lacan regards this as the foundation of the psychoanalytic talking cure, because the subject is not always fully aware of what is being said and thus the unconscious is revealed. Therefore, intention and the transmitted spoken message are not equal. It is often the case that more is said than the subject originally intended to reveal, while parts of the message can get lost in the course of communication. Despite the indeterminacy of the linguistic system, the ability to speak is regarded as the most important feature of humanity, differentiating it from animals. In connection with this the ability to memorise and to narrate is mentioned, as stated by Colin Davis: "The ability to recount one's life, and to live life as recountable, is what lifts humankind above pure animal existence" (Davis 133). Narration prevents events from being forgotten and it opens them up to interpretation. Davis mentions other critics who regard narratives as an important part of human life. Alasdair MacIntyre, for instance, is of the opinion that stories which are passed on in our culture help humans to make them what they are, while Richard Kearney regards storytelling as a natural medium, as stories inhabit humans, just like humans inhabit stories (Davis 134). Thus, it can be summarised that identity is not only expressed and formed by narration, but that identity *is* narration. As language constitutes the subject and his or her identity, there are two aspects to be looked at: How is Euchrid's identity expressed through language and through his narration and how does his inability to speak affect his identity.

As a baby Euchrid feels weak and handicapped because of his inability to speak. He cannot communicate his needs and is alone from the beginning of his life. Several years later he realises that without his muteness God would not have chosen him and that his inability to speak is important for his being God's missionary, as nobody is able to keep a secret so well as a mute.

In his narration Euchrid mixes archaic language, neologisms and slang, which Nick Cave describes as follows:

The story, set in the American South and told through the voice or non-voice of Euchrid Eucrow, was written in a kind of hyper-poetic thought-speak, not mean to be spoken – a mongrel language that was part-Biblical, part-Deep South dialect, part-gutter slang, at times obscenely reverent and at others reverently obscene. (*King Ink II* 141)

According to Kristeva, slang communicates more than messages in a vulgar form:

The vocabulary of slang, because of its strangeness, its very violence, and especially because the reader does not always understand it, is of course a radical instrument of separation, of rejection, and, at the limit, of hatred. Slang produces fuzziness, if not interruption, within the utterances that it punctuates and rhythmicizes. (*Power of Horror* 191)

Thus, although not always intentionally or consciously, Euchrid conveys the violence he encounters and separates himself from the community of Ukulites. Their language is different from Euchrid's, as they never use slang or swear words. Instead, they use a huge number of metaphors, referring to tabooed topics (see Chapter 2.3.9) simply as "sin". Euchrid consciously poses a counterpart to their use of speech, emphasising that he does not belong to their community and that he is not even interested in adopting their rules and habits. Consequently, this also has an effect on the reader. The mixture of archaic language and slang is often completely or at least hardly intelligible for the reader. Thus, not the stories narrated, but rather the emotions involved and conveyed play an important role and dominate the narration. The only social group in the novel which uses a form of language comparable to that of Euchrid are the hobos. Furthermore, they are the only group with which Euchrid has some sort of a relationship and the only group which he sees frequently when not being forced to hide. Euchrid gets in touch with the hobos when one of them, who later turns out to be Abie Po, accidentally gets hurt by one of Ezra's traps and Euchrid frees him from the trap and takes care of him in a church nearby. For the first time in his life Euchrid is not afraid, as he is aware of his power over the hobo, who is injured and whom Euchrid is supplying with his mother's liquor (*Ass* 165). After another homeless man joins them, Euchrid starts to provide them with liquor regularly. As in the case with Euchrid's language, the hobos also mix vulgar slang with quotations from the Bible, emphasising similarities between Euchrid and the hobos. The reader learns about an intrigue, in which a written note, supposedly written by Abie Poe, caused the death of Kike's friend

Queenie. Kike first suspects that it might have been Euchrid, but then he thinks that Euchrid is illiterate and gives him the name of “Speak-no-evil” (*Ass* 354). Among these outcasts Euchrid is accepted because of his muteness. He cannot tell anybody about the deeds of the hobos and he also cannot set up any intrigues. In other scenes, for instance when Euchrid is spying on an underage girl having sexual intercourse with two men, the girl wants Euchrid to be beaten up, as she is afraid that he will tell somebody about her secret (*Ass* 148-149). Thus, Euchrid’s inability to speak creates and reduces tensions between him and his surroundings. Nevertheless, there is one scene which raises doubts concerning the question of whether Euchrid is completely mute all the time. Euchrid talks about one of the many times he has been abused by strangers, noting the following:

Ah went unner, blacked out, and when ah awoke ah could smell the piss all over me. Another thrashing weight crushed me now – the big one ah guessed – and ah could hear him hot at mah ear going, ‘God ain’t listeing to ya, punk. Ain’t no sense in calling on God.’ It took me second or two to realize that at some point they had stuffed a sock in mah mouth and gagged me. Even then that struck me as strange. (*Ass* 136)

As Euchrid blacked out once again and is not aware of what he was doing or what was done to him that time, he is both surprised to find a sock in his mouth and to hear the man tell him that calling on God will not save Euchrid. Thus, there is the possibility that Euchrid was talking during his blackout, which would explain both the sock in his mouth and the man’s statement.

Apart from the fact that Euchrid is unable to speak with his fellows, he seems to have many secrets he does not want the reader to know about. There are several instances in which Euchrid starts a sentence which he does not complete, adding that the reader should forget about this, as illustrated in the following passage:

Human sounding, it was, and in great pain – not like the other voices at all, for it seemed that ah could locate the source of this agonizing with little trouble, whereas with the special voices there is a totality about the presence that makes is damn near impossible to ... shit, forget it. (*Ass* 160)

In another passage Euchrid seems too uncertain how he should formulate his sentence in order to make it intelligible and comprehensible for the reader:

[A]nd, well, let me say right now that the sight of those numb, blue feet and the sense of calm they maintained in the face of such crying evil somehow touched

me – and, well, shit, you know what ah mean – ah mean, hell, ah ... ah dunno – look, it just touched me ... *all right?* (*Ass* 92)

Here Euchrid talks about the baptism of the whole town in a pond, during which Euchrid finds himself standing behind Wilma Eldridge's wheelchair. Being pushed by the mass of people, Euchrid unintentionally pushes the wheelchair, which falls over. Regarding this as part of the baptism, the other people also throw themselves into the water. Seeing Wilma, whom Euchrid usually loathes as much as he loathes the rest of the townfolk, drowning, he pities her for a moment. However, he seems to be embarrassed for feeling in this way and he does not want to admit this to the reader.

Furthermore, Euchrid leaves out facts which the reader might be interested in or reveals them unexpectedly in other parts of his story. One such case can be found in connection with the note which supposedly led to Queenie's death. After proving to Kike that he is not illiterate, he steals the note from Kike's pocket:

Ah removed the Bible from Kike's hands and quickly extracted the incriminating pages, then ah reached into the pocket of his greatcoat and retrieved the first letter ah had written – the one ah had left for the field workers – the letter inviting the cane-men up to the church. (*Ass* 259)

As the cane men arrived at the church, they met half-witted Queenie and beat her to death. There are also ellipses of minor importance, for instance in the following passage in which he does not reveal who the hobo reminds him of: "Ah loathed that 'bo. Hated him. He was vile and filthy and he stank – and there was something familiar about him. He reminded me of ... of ... he reminded me of ... but ah did nothing to harm him" (*Ass* 166). There are two possibilities who the person Euchrid is reminded of might be. As it turns out later, this hobo is Abie Poe. Thus, this passage might be a foreshadowing of the information which is revealed later or the man simply reminds Euchrid of his alcoholic mother, whose mental, physical and hygienic state is similar. In other parts of the novel Euchrid reveals his incoherent thoughts to the reader:

Ah find it hard to recall ... all this ... for want of details ... all lost in the impossible tangle of thorny gore and crimson briar ... dark mutterings ... sticky pools ... trembling palms and little thickened wellings ... dimly ... filling ... these days of fear. (*Ass* 87)

This passage stands out from the rest of Euchrid's narration in so far as the story is not presented as a stream of consciousness. Euchrid consciously selects the parts he wants

to reveal to his audience and although he sometimes starts sentences he does not finish, incoherent sentences like the one quoted above are rather rare.

These gaps and incoherencies do not only present an insight into Euchrid's mental state, but they also fit into the Gothic tradition of narrating, or rather concealing, as Cavallaro notes about Gothic storytelling:

Since Gothic vision is primarily concerned with evoking a sense of uncertainty and indeterminateness, the structure it recursively utilizes tends to be unclosed. The open-endedness of dark experience is mirrored by the inconclusiveness of textual weave. (Cavallaro 97)

This creates an uncanny effect on the reader, who becomes part of Euchrid's confused mind. The connection between Euchrid's mental illness and his use of language will be further elaborated in Chapter 4.5.

4.4 Language and Power

Foucault regards power as an important source for the formation of the subject. He distinguishes between three types of struggles for power: "against forms of domination (ethnic, social, and religious); against forms of exploitation that separate individuals from what they produce or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection)" (*Subject and Power* 331), of which now the struggle against the submission of subjectivity is the most important (*Subject and Power* 332). This leads to the question of how power is executed. The most important means of imposing and circulating power are communication and power relations, for instance distribution of labour, specific tasks, etc. (*Subject and Power* 338). The execution of power has its own language, for instance questions and answers, orders or coded signs of obedience (*Subject and Power* 339) and power relations are manifested in language. The most primitive power relation is violence. Furthermore, power can only be imposed on free people, as slavery cannot be described as a power relationship.

In *And the Ass Saw the Angel* there are power struggles executed through language on different levels. Thus, power is executed through the silencing of certain members of the community, through disclosure of facts, even if they are related to or important for the people who are not told the truth and through tabooing. Those inhabitants of the valley who are not part of the religious community are deprived of their voice and thus

also of their power. The most prominent examples are Jane Crowley and Cosey Mo. When Jane's former husband kills himself without her knowledge, nobody is willing to tell her the truth, although the whole village is aware of what happened. Hoping for her husband's return, Jane becomes an object of ridicule and as this is seen as evidence for her insanity, she completely loses her right to speak and is not taken seriously anymore. In the case of Cosey Mo the Ukulites believe that she is the incorporation of evil and must be driven out of the village in order to restore peace. All her former clients participate in the ambush and when Cosey Mo addresses the fact that many of the men were visiting her and taking advantage of her services, the people do not listen. Both the men and their wives ignore the truth that is being revealed by Cosey Mo and her speech is regarded as the unintelligible blabber of the devil himself.

Beth, even though she represents a very important part of the community, is also deprived of her right to speak. Having no mother and a father who is hardly able to cope with the suicide of his wife, the women in Ukulore Valley regard it as their duty to help Sardus Swift and to take care of the child. Nevertheless, they project their fixed idea of Beth as a saintly figure on her and, although not always consciously, force her into the role they created for her. Her interaction with other people is so restrained that Beth is afraid of the other children when she goes to school. She is not used to conversation or to play with children of her age:

Having spent her early years smothered beneath a scrum of fussing mothers, she had never known the companionship of other children, and when Sardus Swift entered his daughter at Ukulore Valley School fears that had previously lain hidden became manifest in the child. Beth was simply unable to feel at ease with children of her own age. (*Ass* 158)

Furthermore, Beth is dependent on the women and, deprived of all responsibilities, she is unable to make decisions herself. It almost seems as if she was handicapped and in need of guardians in all every-day matters. Thus, Beth learns to obey and does not develop a will of her own. As she is told that Jesus will come to her one day, she spends her short life waiting for that moment. When Euchrid starts spying on her, which she notices quite soon, she writes letters to him, saying that she is ready for his coming or his appearance and that she will continue waiting for him. This again underlines Beth's passivity and lack of will-power and voice, as illustrated in the following example:

DEAREST GOD,

The wise old ladies scare me but You do not. They grow impatient I think. They say if I am not good the rain will come. But I know it will be soon when You are ready. I am not afraid of You, God, no matter what. But please make it soon. For them. Make it soon, no matter what.

I love you.

Beth

P.S. Why are you waiting? What is wrong? Have I done a wrong thing? Please tell me so I can stop. (*Ass* 243-244)

This letter shows that Beth is not only intimidated by the women's expectations, but that they also articulate explicit threats. Beth is so scared of them and of the fact that her wrong deeds might have bad consequences that she does not consider what she wants herself. Therefore, she cannot wait for God to come to her, although it is not her own wish, but rather because she wants to satisfy the women. While in the first letters to God she articulated her wish for his coming as if it was dictated by the women, here she seems to be desperate, trying to convince God to come to her out of her own will.

Sardus Swift also seems to be deprived of his voice and power by the women in the town. When it comes to Beth he is not allowed to make any decisions without consulting the women. An example which illustrates this can be found when Beth feels unwell at school and a decision concerning her education and future has to be made:

In a gesture that was more than a mere courtesy, for the decision could not be made alone, Sardus met with a handful of the foremost among the adherents, and together they discussed Beth's future. Her welfare was, said Sardus, 'as much a community concern as a parental one'. (*Ass* 158)

In this passage it becomes evident that Sardus, like Beth, accepts the fact that he cannot make any decisions alone and that his life has become a public matter and concern. However, he also knows that he depends on the women, as he might not be able to take care of Beth alone, while the women are obsessed with Beth's well-being:

Sardus would reply coldly, secretly tired of the do-gooders who plagued his home to coddle the child and fatten the man, tired in particular of the Molly Barlows who saw him not as Sardus the father but as Sardus the eligible. But these feelings were never allowed to surface, for Sardus only needed to look to his daughter to know that he would continue to eat whatever the women dished in front of him,

would listen to their incessant chatter and return their oily compliments, for it was all a small price to pay for the continued health and well-being of his child, Beth, his single and superlative joy. (*Ass* 146)

Thus, Sardus is not allowed to freely say what he thinks. The power the women have over him is reflected in his language, which does not reflect his thoughts. Like Beth he can only say and do what the women expect.

Euchrid, who is not part of the Ukulite community and even threatens the peace in the village, is deprived of his voice from the beginning. Due to his muteness it is obvious that Euchrid will never be in a powerful position among the Ukulites, who, as mentioned above, execute power through language. Nevertheless, he is not in a totally powerless position. Only a few hours after his birth it becomes evident that he is a strong child and person, as he manages to survive while his older twin brother dies. Although he is unable to articulate his needs, he manages to take care of himself. He regards his muteness as a handicap and is fully aware of his disadvantages and he knows that he will be an outcast his whole life. As he is unable to express himself, the Ukulites think that he is retarded and the preacher Abie Poe even believes that Euchrid is possessed by an evil spirit:

‘Behold, a child which hath a dumb spirit. How long hath this futile spirit been within? I say life-long! I say possibly ten long years hath his spirit lain dumb.’ [...] ‘If thou canst believe, then anything is possible. Dost thou truly believe?’ asked the preacher [...] ‘Then dumb spirit, I charge thee! Come out of this child and enter no more’ Poe cried out. (*Ass* 94-95)

The labelling of Euchrid as possessed by an evil spirit or as mentally ill deprives him as a sick person of his right to speak and puts the ‘sane’ people in a powerful position. Euchrid, however, who is saner than people suppose, carefully plans his revenge on the Ukulites, which makes him less a victim. Nevertheless, the most severe oppression Euchrid has to face is found at his own home and as in the other power structures presented in this chapter, language again plays an important role. When she has not passed out because of her heavy drinking, Jane Crowley talks all the time. She either complains about her life, gives commands to Euchrid’s father or tries to educate Euchrid and abuses him verbally and physically:

If the answer was ‘yes’, ah was to raise mah right hand, and if the answer was ‘no’, ah was to raise mah left. If ah answered incorrectly and raised the wrong hand, she would deliver a stinging blow to the top of mah scalp with the fly-swat. If ah did not answer at all, which was often, as both mah hands had been tied to

the front legs of the chair, she would swat me across the right ear or the left ear depending on which she thought was the correct answer. Sometimes, towards the end of the bottle, she would find she had forgotten the answer herself and then ah would receive a blow to both ears. When at last she couldn't remember the question, or, for that matter, even the topic of the lesson, or eventually why ah was tied to a chair and she had a fly-swat in her hand at all, she would fly into a frenzy of slaps, swats, strikes, back-handers, flying tackles and stomps, until at last she would collapse exhausted in her armchair. Ah would then have to wait until Pa decided it was safe to enter the room and untie me. (*Ass* 75-76)

This quotation illustrates that a large part of Jane's power lies in the fact that she is able to speak and he is not. In situations like the one presented above, she uses his muteness as a reason for abusing him. Euchrid's father, who would physically be capable of talking, remains silent and only secretly helps his son. Jane is convinced that it is not only Euchrid who is 'dumb', but that his father is also retarded:

Your family tree, baw, on y'Pa's side, is one very shady tree, and ah don't mean it's gotta lotta leaves growin' on it neither. Ya Pa's side is just one big fucken black twisty knot planted in the backest backwoods – I'm talking hill-stock, baw, and there ain't no lower ass-ended inborn breed than that. That's why ya Pa's a half-wit – that's why you're not all there either, not countin' y dumbness. (*Ass* 76)

By 'dumbness' Jane refers to Euchrid's muteness, but she is convinced that this is not Euchrid's only handicap. Although she is an alcoholic and is of unsound mind most of the time, Jane positions her family members as insane and thus gains power over them. Furthermore, she is the only one in the family who articulates her needs and wishes:

Ma spent and increasing amount of time in her bed, but she continued to tyrannize the household, bawling orders from her room. Pa obeyed her without complaint, as did Euchrid, but as the years passed and the matriarch persisted in testing to the limit her husband's resilience. (*Ass* 138)

Despite the fact that both Euchrid and Ezra are physically stronger than Jane they do not dare to contradict her and obey all her orders. From this it can be concluded that Jane has established her powerful position solely through her use of language. Euchrid mentions repeatedly that the worst aspect or part of his life is not the fact that he is mute or that he is being abused by the inhabitants of the village, but that he is being tormented by his mother (*Ass* 152-153). However, Euchrid and his father have solutions for their situations which they look forward to and which apparently enable them to endure the tyranny of Jane and the Ukulites. While Ezra kills his wife when she unintentionally destroys his house of cards while complaining about the misery of her life, Euchrid plans to take revenge on the whole village by killing Beth. However,

neither of the two men succeeds to lead a happy life without the bonds of oppressive power. Ezra commits suicide shortly after the murder of Jane, and Euchrid fails to kill Beth and subsequently also commits suicide.

Turning back to Foucault's theory about struggles for power, we find two of three types of power struggles in *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. The struggle against domination and against subjection are equally prominent. Although Foucault formulates his theory of power structures as fighting against oppressive power, the struggle against domination reasserts one's own power. Thus, fighting against power can be seen as equal to the struggle for power. While Cosey Mo, Beth and Sardus Swift do not try to resist the oppression forced upon them, Euchrid and Ezra fight against tyranny and thus try to execute power themselves. The fact that both fail to ascertain their own powerful positions can be attributed to the means they used for the execution of power. Thus, physical violence appears to be a less effective means than language, as language effectively creates, regulates and maintains power structures on a long-term basis. Furthermore, language is acknowledged by powerful institutions as a valid and legal means of power distribution. Although it seems as if vigilantism is the only form of legal justice in Ukulore Valley, all members of the community are of the same opinion and discuss the necessary actions for the sustaining of peaceful communal life. As the community forms the only pseudo-legal institution, the use of the term vigilantism would be inappropriate regarding the closed community. Through language and to a certain extent also physical violence the Ukulites regulate who belongs to their society and all members of this society agree with the power structures and the means and targets of power execution.

The only power struggle not to be found in the novel is the fight against exploitation. On the contrary, even Jane Crowley who produces liquor is paid for it by the Ukulites and Cosey Mo also seems to be paid by her customers.

4.5 Language and Mental Illness

4.5.1 The Psychotic Individual

In *Über die paranoische Psychose in ihren Beziehungen zur Persönlichkeit und frühe Schriften über die Paranoia* Lacan is concerned with paranoid psychosis. According to him paranoid psychosis is marked by the following features: overestimation of one's own capabilities, distrust, false judgements, lack of social integration, arrogance, vanity,

excessive sensibility, passionate idealism, love for nature, etc. (*Psychose* 79). As the sick person can only use common language in order to speak, language is not adequate for the representation and differentiation of subtle nuances in the clinical picture and the expression of personal perceptions is problematic (*Psychose* 107). Furthermore, he classifies a similar mental disorder, namely schizophrenia, as a language disorder. According to him “[s]chizophrenia emerges from the failure of the infant to enter fully into the realm of speech and language. For Lacan the experience of temporality, human time, past, present, memory, the persistence of personal identity is an effect of language” (Sarup 134). This results from the temporal aspect of language, as language is capable to express past, present and future. The schizophrenic, however, does not experience temporal continuity, but only single and isolated moments. As he or she is unable to connect his present experience with past experiences or future expectations, the schizophrenic “experiences a fragmentation of time, a series of perpetual presents” (Sarup 134). However, this fact enables more intense focussing on specific moments. In connection with this, Luce Irigaray also poses the question of how schizophrenia can be diagnosed on the basis of evidence provided through the language of the patient and she concludes that manifestations of mental illness in language can only be found or defined as digressions of the norm (*Speak* 26).

Lacan’s statement that people who suffer from schizophrenia, which is a form of psychosis, are unable to experience past and future and are therefore not able to give accounts about any other temporal experience than what happens in the present contradicts the assumption that Euchrid is schizophrenic, as he tells his story in a chronological way, providing an account of the past and sometimes unintentionally revealing what will happen at a later point of his narration. However, there is one passage in the novel, in which it becomes evident that Euchrid experiences gaps in time and suffers from loss of memory:

Have ah said all this before? Have ah told you about the hellish fright of Deadtime? Do you know about the Bloodings [sic!]? The Chills? Mere fragments of rushing life retained ... like handfuls of wind. Time gone haywire. Night and day, the following and the followed, pitch their shining sky-globes from horizon to horizon. Sun serves, moon returns, searing time’s cope with their mad flight, back and forth, to and fro, dark and light, like a hypnotist’s watch swinging in the fob of heaven – O yes, like the pendular action of a naked bulb, hung and set aswing in an empty room. An hour! A day! Gone! Snuck past! Escaped unsullied, unsalvageable, never to be lived. All in a blinking of an eye. Deadtime! Deadtime! Where do you go? Who uses you, if not me?! (Ass 226)

With “deadtime” Euchrid refers to the frequent loss of memory he experiences. It is possible that this is caused by epilepsy or schizophrenia. Thus, Euchrid might not be able to experience the time continuum as mentally healthy people do, but he is able to compile a narration from what he remembers. Nevertheless, the symptoms of paranoid psychosis presented by Lacan speak in favour of this type of psychosis. The fragmentation of Euchrid’s psyche is reflected through the text, both in terms of content and structure. There are two narrators who tell different fragments of one story. As there is mostly no temporal continuity between the two narrations, this can be regarded as a means of reflecting the possibility that Euchrid is schizophrenic after all. Apart from the prologue, in which the ending is already given away, Euchrid begins his narration with his own birth and ends it with his death, while the omniscient narrator adds further details in between, for instance on the historical background of the village and the belief of the Ukulites or about the history of Euchrid’s family. These parts of the narrative are independent of each other and there are often considerable time differences, especially in Book I, between the story told by Euchrid and the omniscient narrator, which become smaller towards the end of the novel. In Book III there are no chapters and Euchrid is the main narrator. The insertions made by the omniscient narrator are italicised. While there are only a few parts narrated by the third-person narrator at the beginning of Book III, their frequency of alternations rises throughout this part of novel and at the end of Book III Euchrid and the omniscient narrator say only a few sentences or words before the other narrator takes over again:

And lo! Ah can see Mule. Ah can! Watch how proudly he high-steps across the heavens. Now there’s your dignity in death, sir! There’s your just reward! Spine straight, coat brushed, head high – O long-suffering life, there’s your fucking prize! And there, look, coming up behind, mah loyal subjects, mah beasts! See the parade of innocents, winged brute creation, marching across the firmament to await the advent of their King. See them all falling into their ranks.

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 – for it was, after all, HE who brought the rain.

O now ah know, now ah know what’s happening.

Here she is descending. The shifts of breeze tell me. The blue effluxion, the flutter of wings. O mah winged protector! Mah guardian angel! Is it you? Is it you, come to carry me through the gates? Can you tell me? Can you tell me what’s happening?

They pour gasoline from canisters.

O weeping angel, do you cry?

Euchrid strains his dripping chin upward.

Will they sound the trumpets? Roll the drum?

The empty canisters crash about him.

Ah, here they are! Death's lights! (*Ass* 108)

The fact that the omniscient narrator gains a more and more important role at the end of the novel hints at the fact that Euchrid becomes more insane and therefore also helpless. However, in the second paragraph of the quotation given above the omniscient narrator uses the word “ah” for the first time, which was up to this moment an important marker of Euchrid’s idiolect. Thus, as both narrators are getting closer, the omniscient narrator might use Euchrid’s language in order to emphasise this. After Euchrid’s death, the omniscient narrator tells the Epilogue alone and as there is no other narrator, his account is again un-italicised. Here the reader learns that a baby is born, while the mother dies in labour. It can be assumed that the mother is Beth, as the child is said to be the Messiah. Furthermore, there are rumours that Sardus Swift committed suicide in the swamp, as he thought that Beth is dead. The fact that Euchrid dies in the same way, namely committing suicide in the swamp, opens the novel up for different interpretations, especially concerning the mental state of Euchrid. As outlined in Chapter 2.3.7, disregarding any symptoms of mental illness, Euchrid and Sardus seem to be doppelgänger. Taking into account the symptoms of schizophrenia and the fact that Euchrid and Sardus never appear in the same scene or face each other, it could be claimed that Sardus is Euchrid’s alter ego. Another explanation for the similarity of their deaths is that Sardus wanted to take revenge on Euchrid, saw him in the swamp and walked after him, not knowing how dangerous it was. However, Lacan’s analysis of both psychosis and schizophrenia speaks in favour of psychosis, which means that Euchrid and Sardus are solely presented as doppelgänger and that, as Euchrid – following this theory is not schizophrenic, they are not one and the same person. This theory is supported by another critic; Bergande notes in *Lacans Psychoanalyse und die Dekonstruktion* that the language of psychotics contains phenomena of automatism

(Bergande 41), which, for instance, can be found in the following passage in *And the Ass Saw the Angel*:

Anyway, later that day – yesterday – mah chanters were working mah thoughts, sending them to me in irritating sing-song couplets – get some rope – string and twine – wool and wool – fencing wire – electrical cords – fishing line – gather them up – all you can find – tie them together – in a long line – ain’t much time – ain’t much time – fucken brains! Idiot rhyme ... it’s enough to make you lose your ... Shit! Fuck! Shit! Shit! Shut up. Shut up. *Shut up!* (*Ass* 290-291)

Here Euchrid presents a part of his narration in the form of an enumeration of things and actions, which makes his actions appear isolated and conducted automatically. It seems as if Euchrid does not think about what he is doing, which is reflected in his language. Euchrid is aware of his mental illness; in this passage he refers to his mind with “fucken brains”. A similar case can be found in the following passage:

O shit. What? O no. Ah drifted off, ah guess. Yes, ah did. Ah awoke, panick-stricken and ah said, ‘This is the last day! This is the last day!’ But it is not. No, it is not. There are some yet to go. We still have got some to go. Past time catching up on present. Time to go. Time to go...

O shit. What? O no. Ah drifted off, ah guess. Yes, ah did. Ah awoke, panick-stricken and ah said, ‘This is the last day! This is the last day!’ But it is not. No, it is not. There are some yet to go. We sti... Past time catch... Time to go. Yes, it’s time to go. (*Ass* 236)

The repetition of this passage reflects the automatic aspect of Euchrid’s language, while the ellipses in the second part hint at the possibility that Euchrid suffers from amnesia or that he is going to pass out. The content and structure, which mirror Euchrid’s mental state, also influence the reader, as Cavallaro notes:

Narrative and the self are interdependent insofar as the pivotal features of texts and those of their characters mirror one another. [...] [W]hile a patchwork text reflects its characters’ mixed emotions and sense of confusion, it also has the effect of producing feelings of dislocations in its readers. (Cavallaro 114)

The fragmentation of Euchrid’s psyche is reflected, as mentioned above, in the alternating accounts by himself and the omniscient narrator and the frequency of alternations becomes higher towards the end where changes of perspective already occur after every sentence. Furthermore, Euchrid’s conviction that he has to conduct the mission ordered by God grows stronger and his hallucinations become more explicit, until finally in the last scene he sees “his” angel in the moment he dies. This climax is

simultaneously the end. Thus, at the peak of Euchrid's madness and tension for the reader, the story ends abruptly, which is surprising for the reader. Only the Epilogue presents some possible answers to the question what happened after Euchrid's death.

4.5.2 The Madman and His Relation to Society

An account of the language of people with mental diseases is given by Michel Foucault in "The Order of Discourse" and is closely related to his theories concerning power. He starts his account with his theory of discourse. Discourse comes into being through constraint and control (*Order of Discourse* 49), as rules are forced upon it, in order to make it function. These rules are generated and held up by powerful institutions. Nevertheless, discourse wants to be free of any restrictions. Power is generated in society and thus also in language through certain procedures, of which the following three are the most important for Foucault: the first are procedures of exclusion, prohibition and the division into binary oppositions, for instance reason and madness, truth and falsehood, etc. The second are procedures of rarefaction and the third and last procedures for mastery are those which determine speaking subjects and restrict access to discourse, for instance systems of education (*Order of Discourse* 49). Regarding mental illness and *And the Ass Saw the Angel* the first procedure and especially the division into reason and madness is important. Since the middle ages the "madman has been the one whose discourse cannot have the same currency as others. His words can be considered as having no significance" (*Order of Discourse* 53). Mentally ill people cannot conduct any actions through their speech, cannot make contracts, cannot be used as evidence in law and they even would not be able to turn bread into body at a religious service. At the same time the speech of mad people may be possessed by other powers, they may be capable of uttering hidden truths or looking into the future. In the history of Europe the speech of mentally ill was either ignored at all or taken for a revelation of truth. As it is speech which reveals madness, there must be a dividing line in speech or discourses, which separates reason from insanity. Despite this fact, doctors and psychologists mostly did not listen or analyse what mentally ill people had to say. Sigmund Freud was one of the first to analyse the psyches of his patients on the basis on what they were saying. According to him, symptoms of which the patients are not conscious of, are revealed through their speech.

Another account given by Foucault in connection with mental health, power and language can be found in his essay "About the Concept of the 'Dangerous Individual' In

Nineteenth-Century Legal Psychiatry”. He states that in legal procedures before the court the admission of the crime is not enough: “Beyond admission, there must be confession, self-examination, explanation of oneself, revelation of what one is” (*Dangerous Individual* 177). While in the nineteenth-century a large number of crimes occurred, which were solely committed out of insanity, nineteenth century psychiatry invented an entirely new form of crime which was insanity itself (*Dangerous Individual* 182). Although the authorities regarded people who trespassed the law as mere criminals, psychiatrists were eager to be heard and to supply their research in order to prove that a certain number of these criminals were madmen (*Dangerous Individual* 183). Psychiatry advanced to a form of social hygiene as insanity was regarded as a source of danger, either in the form of criminal deeds or endangering the “living conditions (overpopulation, overcrowding, urban life, alcoholism, debauchery)” (*Dangerous Individual* 184). Nevertheless, the question arises whether the committing of crimes, on the other hand, can be regarded as illness.

In *And the Ass Saw the Angel* mental illness is regarded as a crime. The Ukulites are afraid that Euchrid might commit a crime because of his mental state. What the inhabitants regard as the trespassing of social rules, for instance Euchrid’s recurring voyeurism, cannot be labelled as a crime, but rather as a trespassing of social norms or the private sphere of the persons observed. Nevertheless, there are also other people living in the village whose mental health can be questioned and who nevertheless are not regarded as a danger to the society. One possible explanation can be found in the lack of a legal system within the community. Due to the social system and the hierarchy in the community, power structures evolved, which are independent of the legal system outside of the village. Thus, those who belong to the community are evaluated differently than those who are not part of this closed society. However, the criminal aspect of madness is based on the assumption that the mad person is possessed by evil powers. As the Ukulites regard themselves as faithful and pious, they cannot be possessed by evil and subsequently also do not commit crimes. Those who are not faithful bring evil to the village and are therefore criminals who have to be punished or removed from Ukulore Valley.

4.6 Presence and Absence

Both Gothic and postmodernism are concerned with the un-representable and the unspeakable, which is explained by poststructuralist critics in terms of the

indeterminacy of language. In the case of Gothic the un-representable is used as a means for creating an uncanny atmosphere or evoking terror in the reader. Thus, Gothic novels are often marked by an absence or vagueness in the description of the source of terror, by ellipses caused, for instance, by the unreliability of the narrator or lack of closure. Furthermore, “story lines are ruptured, fragmented, suppressed, misplaced, even forgotten” (Haggerty 20). Thus, the involvement and imagination of the reader are required in order to fill the gaps. Myths, for instance that of Medusa, which contains parallels to Gothic narratives, are also marked by absence:

We could say it is perhaps not her own destiny that the head of the Medusa sees. Instead her fright relates to a frightening reality which cannot be named at all. Precisely for this reason, according to the logic of the painting, the object of the fright has to remain outside of the represented (representable) world. It is formless. (Lehmann 143)

This notion of the unrepresentable fright can be found in *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. People believe that after their death, or in the case of the Ukulites already during their life on earth, they will receive a punishment for their sins. However, there are only speculations about what the punishment might look like. Similarly, Euchrid’s plan for his revenge on the Ukulites is never explicitly mentioned or described. Following several hints and actions the reader can only assume that he plans to kill Beth. Furthermore, at the beginning of the story the reader finds a passage in which Euchrid is dying, but comes to this conclusion only at the end of the novel, because the passage alone does not reveal a sufficient number of clues in order to make this interpretation plausible. Nevertheless, the scene creates an uncanny atmosphere and the reader might be waiting for an explanation.

Regarding the presence of absence there is a significant parallel between Gothic and postmodernism. As discussed in Chapter 3, in postmodernism the reader is attributed an important role, as the general attitude of doubt, especially towards institutions and norms, causes the predominance of unreliable first-person narrators over omniscient narrators. However, unreliable narrators are not the only reason for uncertainties concerning interpretations or lack of closure. The question whether language is able to represent reality adequately is another major concern of postmodernism:

How can the genre of the novel proper, in other words, possibly tell it like it is if the way that things are now is so utterly improper and, according to standard codes of sensemaking, so absolutely unrepresentable? In a word, the answer to

these questions – the romantic solution – is to write *unreadable* literature. (Lucy 55)

“Unreadable” refers in this case to the fact that postmodernist narratives are not easily understandable. The means used in order to achieve this effect are the same which are mentioned above regarding Gothic, however, the goal and intention are different.

Euchrid can be regarded as a symbol of absence. His muteness represents the unspeakable and subsequently also the silencing of the Other. His mental state, or rather his mental illness, his consciousness, perception and memory are partly absent. This prevents him from creating a whole and coherent picture of his life and his reality and this is being reflected through the structure of the novel. Furthermore, it is unclear whether Euchrid exists as a person in the story or whether he is, like his delusional visions of the angel, another personality or hallucination of the schizophrenic Sardus Swift. Especially the ending leaves many questions open, and thus the reader cannot arrive at a definitive interpretation and is confronted with the absence of meaning instead.

5. Conclusion

Nick Cave has shown his ability to tell dark and sinister stories which are speckled with Biblical images since the 1980s, when he released his early albums with his band *The Birthday Party* and later as *Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds*. In his first novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel* he presents many themes and images which already dominate his lyrics, and elaborates them further. The result reflects the versatility and fragmentation of contemporary popular culture. Furthermore, it is a hybrid of Gothic mood and postmodernist attitude, of grotesque romance and insanity.

The first aim of this thesis was to show how the Gothic and postmodernism form a hybrid genre or mode. There are more similarities between the Gothic and postmodernism than appears at first sight, for instance unreliable narrators, lack of closure, fragmentation of narrative and identity, or doppelgängers. While the goal of Gothic narratives is to create an uncanny atmosphere and lure the reader with tales of horror and terror, postmodernism, by employing similar narrative techniques, intends to question authorities and norms, leading the reader into uncertainty about what they can trust or believe in. Furthermore, the main concern of the Gothic and postmodernism is the unrepresentable, which is explained in terms of poststructuralist theory and the indeterminacy of language. Drawing on the tradition of Gothic literature and specific literary works like the Bible or his own lyrics, Nick Cave presents a conglomerate of intertextual references and thereby presents his own reading of the Old Testament and creates an atmosphere of the Gothic American South, which is based on both historical and fictional accounts.

The aim of the second part of this thesis was to present a close analysis of the role of language in *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. The fact that the protagonist Euchrid is mute adds to his role as an outcast and reveals power structures within the Ukulite community, which silences those who do not fit into the community and speaks for those who do not dare to speak their minds openly. Furthermore, the inability to speak influences the development of Euchrid's identity, which was analysed by applying the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan. Thus, due to his muteness, Euchrid is unable to enter fully the realm of the Symbolic and become an integrated part of society. The role of mentally ill outcasts in certain societies and power structures were further investigated by applying theories of Michel Foucault.

Returning to the claim in the introduction that *And the Ass Saw the Angel* represents the *zeitgeist* of contemporary popular culture, finally an explanation or elaboration is possible: the postmodernist “anything goes” attitude is still widespread and thus poses an ideal frame or foundation for texts like *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, which is a collage of different cultural fragments, intertextual references and worldviews, while not appearing to be incoherent. The co-existence of two narrators, two literary styles, archaic language and slang, religious fanaticism and hypocrisy or murder and the search for love show that a dissolution of binary oppositions is possible.

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9. Abstract

9.1 English

Despite the fact that his literary work has widely remained unacknowledged by critics and the scholarly community, Nick Cave is indicative of important cultural phenomena, which this thesis seeks to identify and analyse. In his first novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, he tells the story of a mute outcast boy in the American South, presenting a collage of different genres, themes and intertextual references.

Employing poststructuralist theories and analytical concepts and notions for the respective generic modes, this thesis focuses on generic hybridity and the power of language, emphasising the similarities between supposedly different genres or styles and presenting a close analysis of the major themes and features of *And the Ass Saw the Angel*.

The focus of this thesis is on the generic interplay between Gothic and postmodernism. Due to its setting, the novel is unmistakably Gothic in terms of motifs and predominant ethic and moral values. The temporal setting, which is the Fin de Siècle, in connection with the geographical setting results in the world-views, especially regarding sexuality, and gender roles of the Victorian Era. The thesis provides a detailed analysis of features like the Uncanny or the doppelgänger motif, which draw on the Gothic tradition, emphasising the dark and grotesque aspect of the story. This notion is further underlined by intertextual references to the Bible, which also reflects postmodernist aspects. This thesis shows that the narrative structure, featuring two narrators, one of whom is unreliable and mentally ill, lacking closure and leaving many instances to the reader's imagination, resembles the sceptical and playful "anything goes" attitude of postmodernism. The language of the novel, especially of the protagonist Euchrid, maintains this notion, mixing archaic expressions and slang. Great importance is also attributed to language, as it is used as means for creating and sustaining of power relations.

9.2 German

Obwohl Nick Caves literarisches Werk von Kritikern und Wissenschaftlern weitgehend ignoriert wurde, ist er indikativ für wichtige kulturelle Phänomene, welche in der vorliegenden Arbeit identifiziert und analysiert werden. In seinem ersten Roman *And the Ass Saw the Angel* erzählt er die Geschichte eines stummen Jungen im Amerikanischen Süden und präsentiert eine Collage aus unterschiedlichen Genres, Themen und intertextuellen Referenzen.

Der Fokus dieser Arbeit liegt auf der generischen Hybridität und der Macht der Sprache, wobei poststrukturalistische Theorien und analytische Konzepte für die jeweiligen Genres herangezogen werden. Die Ähnlichkeiten zwischen den vermeintlich unterschiedlichen Genres und Stilen werden betont und eine genaue Analyse der Hauptthemen und Charakteristika von *And the Ass Saw the Angel* wird präsentiert.

Das generische Zusammenspiel zwischen Gothic Literatur und Postmoderne bildet den Schwerpunkt dieser Magisterarbeit. Der Schauplatz der Erzählung macht sie hinsichtlich der Motive und der ethischen und moralischen Werte zu einem Schauerroman. Der geschichtliche Kontext, welcher vom Fin de Siècle gebildet wird, resultiert in Zusammenhang mit dem geographischen Kontext in einem viktorianischen Weltbild hinsichtlich Sexualität und Geschlechterrollen. Eine detaillierte Analyse von Motiven wie dem Doppelgänger oder dem Unheimlichen, welche an der Tradition des Schauerromans Anleihen nehmen, wird vorgelegt und konzentriert sich auf düstere und groteske Aspekte der Erzählung. Dieser Gedanke wird durch biblische intertextuelle Referenzen unterstrichen, was ebenfalls die postmodernen Aspekte widerspiegelt. Die Erzählstruktur bildet durch die Anwesenheit von zwei Erzählern, von welchen einer unglaubwürdig ist, durch das Fehlen einer Auflösung am Ende der Geschichte und durch die Involvierung der Vorstellungskraft des Lesers die skeptische und spielerische „anything goes“ Haltung der Postmoderne. Die Sprache im Roman, besonders jene des Protagonisten Euchrid, hält an dieser Auffassung fest, da archaische Ausdrücke mit Umgangssprache gemischt werden. Der Sprache wird große Bedeutung beigemessen, da sie eingesetzt wird, um Machtverhältnisse zu kreieren und aufrecht zu halten.

10. Curriculum Vitae

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Ausbildung

- **Studium der Anglistik (Magistra der Philosophie) und der Theater-, Film- und Medienwissenschaft** an der Universität Wien 2006 – 2011, Studienschwerpunkte: Postmoderne Kunst und Literatur, Gothic Literatur und Poststrukturalistische Literaturtheorie, Wahlfächer aus Vergleichender Literaturwissenschaft
- **Gymnasium:** 1998-2006, Bundesgymnasium Geblergasse, 1170 Wien, Abschluss mit Auszeichnung
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Berufliche Erfahrung

- **Selbständige Arbeit als Texterin und Übersetzerin:** 2009 – heute
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Stipendien

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