

Being 'In Tune with the Workings of Society': Violence, Maleness, and Two 'Touching Little Ballads'¹

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'I have a talent for writing that really touching little ballad.'
Alice Cooper²

'Basically, I just get a real kick out of writing about violence.'
Nick Cave³

'[The ballad gives] that possibility to take some space from the
song [...] I feel I have very little control of where my songs are
going.'
Nick Cave⁴

According to statistics released by the *Population Report* in 1999, 'Around the world, at least one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused during her lifetime'.⁵ Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer in *The Lust to Kill* draw our attention

to the ways in which violence against women is covertly condoned: rape victims find their own morals on trial, battered women cannot trust police to protect them, social workers respond to incest with a concern for 'the family' which may entail a girl risking further abuse within it, men who bludgeon their wives to death are praised for their 'devotion'... Is the violence really aberrant, or is it somehow in tune with the workings of our society?⁶

As recently as 1993 in a case involving five charges of rape in marriage, Australian judge Justice Derek Bollen in his summing-up declared: 'There is, of course, nothing wrong with a husband, faced with his wife's initial refusal to engage in intercourse, in attempting, in an acceptable way, to persuade her to change her mind and that may involve a measure of rougher than usual handling'.⁷ These incendiary remarks demonstrate a schism between modern, feminist views of female rights in the home and opposing attitudes perhaps reflected in the greater 'workings of our society'.⁸

As popular music often directly seeks to engage with the world around it – whether from a critical or unproblematizing standpoint – the great number of popular songs across all sub-genres over the twentieth century that address domestic violence is not unexpected, from 'Hey Joe' (1962) to many

instances in present-day rap.⁹ This paper addresses two popsongs, 'Only Women Bleed', by Americans Alice Cooper¹⁰ (lyrics) and Dick Wagner (music), from Cooper's album, *Welcome to My Nightmare* (1975), and Australian ex-patriot Nick Cave's 'The Mercy Seat', from the EP of the same name (1988).¹¹ The particular type of brutality depicted in these songs is male-perpetrated bloodshed. In the Cooper, violence is carried out explicitly against the female spouse, while Cave's protagonist, on Death Row, hosts an unashamed misogyny that preoccupies much of his thoughts and identity-construction.¹² Rather than choosing to write about songs that blatantly extol the pleasures of *killing* women, I have selected two that do not do this directly. My reasons for choosing these particular songs is to view them as occupying a position along a continuum of violent standpoints, and it is their very insidiousness that makes my interest in these songs all the more acute. I will elucidate this by stepping both inside the songs, looking at their lyrics and music, and outside them, attending to the mechanisms of the artists in a wider perspective that includes their greater oeuvre and reception.

Each song would actually appear to be 'neo-feminist' or at least anti-violence 3 in its subtext: Cooper's song is a lament on behalf of battered wives, and Cave's protagonist is suffering incarceration for the murder he has committed. There is sufficient space in Cave's lyrics to allow the implication, or interpretation, that the crime could be spouse-killing. But even more concretely, a definite persona is presented, the type with sufficient lack of empathy to be able to beat or kill. Each song *is* preoccupied with presenting its respective male protagonist as the hero figure, irrefutably masculine, a 'tough guy' supreme. I explore the fine line that exists between critique and inscription of violence against women in an investigation of the extent to which, regarding both lyrics and musical treatment, each projects any sense of empathy with their victims. My findings show how the aestheticisation of violence is implicated in the 'workings of our society' – not least in the construction of male identity.

Two 'touching little ballads', 'in tune with' society's 'workings'

'Only Women Bleed'

Man got his woman / To take his seed
He got the power, oh / She got the need
She spends her life thru' / Pleasin' up her man
She feeds him dinner, oh / Anythin' she can
She cries alone at night too often
He smokes and drinks and don't come home at all
Only women bleed [X3]
Man makes your hair grey / He's your life's mistake
All you're really looking for's / An even break
He lies right at you / You know you hate this game
Slaps you once in a while / And you live and love in pain

She cries alone at night too often [etc]

Man got his woman / To take his seed
He got the power, oh / She got the need
She spends her life thru' / Pleasin' up her man
She feeds him dinner, oh / Anythin' she can

She cries alone at night too often [etc]

Black eyes all of the time / Don't spend a dime
Clean up this grime / And you, there, down on your knees
Begging me please / 'Come watch me bleed'

Only women bleed [X7]

[Example 1: Lyrics to Alice Cooper's 'Only Women Bleed'. Written by Alice Cooper and Dick Wagner. Permission to reprint lyrics requested.](#)

'The Mercy Seat'

It began when they come took me from my home/ And put me in Dead
Row
Of which I am nearly wholly innocent you know / And I'll say it again
I... am... not... afraid... to... die

I began to warm and chill / To objects and their fields
A ragged cup, a twisted mop / The face of Jesus in my soup
Those sinister dinner deals / The meal trolley's wicked wheels
A hooked bone rising from my food / All things either good or ungood

And the Mercy Seat is waitin' / And I think my head is burnin'
And in a way I'm yearnin' / To be done with all this measurin' of proof
An eye for an eye / And a tooth for a tooth
And anyway I told the truth / And I'm not afraid to die

Interpret signs and catalogues / A blackened tooth, a scarlet fog
The walls are bad, black, bottom kind / They are the sick breath at my hi
They are the sick breath gathering at my hind

I hear stories from the chamber / How Christ was born into a manger
And like some ragged stranger / Died upon the cross
And might I say it seems so fitting in its way / He was a carpenter by
trade
Or at least that's what I'm told
My good hand tattooed E.V.I.L. / Across its brother's fist
That filthy five! They did nothing to challenge or resist

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

Into the Mercy Seat I climb / My head is shaved, my head is wired
And like a moth that tries / To enter the bright eye
So I go shufflin' out of life / Just to hide in death awhile
And anyway I never lied

My kill-hand is called E.V.I.L. / Wears a wedding band that's G.O.O.D.
'Tis a long-sufferin' shackle / Collarin' all that rebel blood

And the Mercy Seat is burnin' / And I think my head is glowin'
And in a way I'm hopin' / To be done with all this weighin' up of truth
An eye for an eye / And a tooth for a tooth
And I've got nothin' left to lose / And I'm not afraid to die

And the Mercy Seat is waitin' / And I think my head is burnin'
And in a way I'm yearnin' / To be done with all this measurin' of proof
An eye for an eye / And a tooth for a tooth
And anyway there was no proof / And nor a motive why
And the Mercy Seat is waitin' / And I think my head is burnin'
And in a way I'm yearnin' / To be done with all this measurin' of proof
A life for a life / And a tooth for a tooth
And anyway there was no proof / And I'm not afraid to die

And the Mercy Seat is waitin' / And I think my head is smokin'
And in a way I'm hopin' / To be done with all these looks of disbelief
An eye for an eye / And a tooth for a tooth
And anyway I told the truth / And I'm not afraid to die
And the Mercy Seat is waitin' / And I think my head is burnin'
And in a way I'm yearnin' / To be done with all this measurin' of proof
An eye for an eye / And a tooth for a tooth
And anyway I told the truth / And I'm not afraid to die
And the Mercy Seat is waitin' / And I think my head is burnin'
And in a way I'm yearnin' / To be done with all this measurin' of proof
An eye for an eye / And a tooth for a tooth
And anyway I told the truth / And I'm not afraid to lie
[repeat this verse until]: And I'm afraid I told a lie

[Example 2: Lyrics to Nick Cave's 'The Mercy Seat'. Written by Nick Cave \(Mushroom Music/Mute Song\). Reprinted with permission.](#)

Cave notes the formal freedom in the ballad genre, with its strong narrative emphasis, that allows his song-writing to develop from its own creative momentum. When asked, 'What appeals to you so much in a ballad, as a form of song?', he replies: 'Maybe it's that possibility to take some space from the song. When you work in a format, the songs tend to write themselves. You need to go with the story, to let the characters turn into whatever they turn into. I feel I have very little control of where my songs are going'.¹³ Cooper describes 'Only Women Bleed' as 'a touching little ballad'.¹⁴ If 'touching' is not a word that might spring to mind regarding 'The Mercy Seat', nevertheless both songs are powerful, highly affecting, anthemic. They are

also stand-outs in the oeuvre of each artist. First, the gentle, balladic nature of 'Only Women Bleed' is unusual in Cooper's output: his songs are predominantly hard-rock and otherwise steer clear of overtly gender-related issues;¹⁵ here, however, is a touted 'neo-feminist subtext'.¹⁶ Second, 'Only Women Bleed' was a big commercial hit and has also been covered by such artists as Tori Amos, Julie Covington and Guns 'n' Roses. The post-balladic 'The Mercy Seat', too – a song with *that* wall of sound cannot be unproblematically termed a 'ballad' – was a highly successful release and was subsequently followed by other versions by Cave, as well as a release by Johnny Cash. Rock critic Simon Reynolds goes into raptures about the song, describing it as

superb. It's a gigantic, near illegible swirl-surge, a horizontal, disciplined avalanche. With its maddened strings, echo-chamber vocal and the odd filigree of lonesome country whistling, it is vaguely suggestive of the sixties pop-melodrama of Wichita Lineman or Something's Gotten Hold of My Heart. But a sense of the epic driven to such histrionic pitch that it verges on Velvet's [*sic*] white noise and viola hysteria.¹⁷

To date, however, neither 'The Mercy Seat' nor 'Only Women Bleed' has been examined in a sustained manner.¹⁸

In 'Only Women Bleed', the domestic violence is clear enough; but the other songs on the 'concept album'¹⁹ from which it comes spell out the actual magnitude of the crime committed against the woman (and will be outlined below). 'The Mercy Seat's male narrator is on Death Row, so he has obviously committed murder. I will tease out below my speculations as to who the victim might be, and, more importantly, the construction of such a mindset that could contemplate murder. 5

Heading Cooper's website is a declaration that implicitly answers Cameron and Frazer's semi-rhetorical question (above):²⁰ 'The sicker our fans get, the sicker we'll get'.²¹ It is not only Cooper who is 'in tune with the workings of our society'. Femicide has been the subject of many songs by Cave; his 1998 album *Murder Ballads*, for example, almost solely comprises songs about murdered women. Cave avers in 1986, 'I've always enjoyed writing songs about dead women. It's something that crops up that still holds some mystery, even to me'.²² 6

Other commonalities between the songs include their fascinating use of multiple 'speaking' modes of address; the notion of violence against women in support of constructions of masculinity; the preoccupation with different 'types' of blood; the depiction of the domestic situation from the male point of view; and various states of retribution.²³ Musically, each song deploys an audacious use of harmony, instrumentation, vocal delivery and sound-treatment in its respective treatment of the violent cosmos it conjures and in the ways in which it works to draw the listener into its sound-world. The music will be found not only to support much of the extra-musical components of the songs but also to work against the text at significant narrative points. As the 7

effects of the songs on the listener are complex and multifaceted, I draw upon a range of theoretical perspectives through which to view them.

Shackled, and true, he-men

The most important aspect of maleness of the two songs' protagonists is that it is integral to a sense of hard-bitten, American working-class, poorly-educated masculinity – one with misogynistic overlay. Alice Cooper's 'official website' is entitled: 'Alcohol and Razor Blades, Poison and Needles: The Glorious Wretched Excess of Alice Cooper, All-American'.²⁴ And indeed, there is strong American vernacular in the Cooper song, exemplified in the following phrases: 'Man got his woman', omitting (or substituting) the word, 'has'; 'pleasin'-up her man'; '[he] don't come home at all'; '[he] don't spend a dime. (See [Example 1](#) above.)

While 'Only Women Bleed' is concerned to bemoan woman's lot, it is equally important to assert a strong masculinity on the part of the male narrator – and for its creator. The American vernacular gives the impression of a true he-man. Significantly, as recently as 2005 on an episode of the Australian television chat-show, *Enough Rope with Andrew Denton*, referring to 'Only Women Bleed', Denton feels the need to enquire of Cooper, 'I've always been curious. Here you were, Mr Hard Rock Alice Cooper. How did you write a wussy song like that?' Cooper replies:

I know. At the time, it was part of the nightmare. It was in my 'Welcome to My Nightmare' show and I had all these nightmares going on all over the place, and I said, 'You can't just have all nightmare, you have to have that moment, to play it against a really soft romantic touching moment'. How do you do that? Well, you have to write a song, and I include this in every album to this day. They always have a ballad that women are going to just love. I have a talent for writing that really touching little ballad. 'Only Women Bleed' was not talking about a menstrual cycle at all. It was talking about women bleed emotionally, whereas men don't.²⁵

Cooper's response here is somewhat disingenuous: men do bleed emotionally – but that is not something to which a true he-man admits, certainly not one whose masculinity is under threat, having written a 'wussy' song and calling himself 'Alice'.²⁶ He justifies its emasculated sound-world by asserting a purposefully cynical appeal to his female fans. But more importantly for present purposes, women do not only bleed emotionally – after all, as reported in *this* particular 'touching little ballad', 'He slaps you once in a while / And you live and love in pain[...] / Black eyes all of the time / "Come watch me bleed"'.²⁷

Just as Cooper shies away from the essence of the subject matter of his song, Cave is similarly coy about his own in an interview about 'The Mercy Seat' with Simon Reynolds:

[Reynolds]: Pardon the ignorance, but what exactly is 'The Mercy

Seat'?

[Cave]: It's the throne of God, in the Bible, where he sits and throws his lightning bolts and so forth. But it's also about this guy sitting on Death Row, waiting to be electrocuted or whatever. It's juxtaposing those two things. A person in his final days, thinking about good and evil and all the usual fare.

[Reynolds]: So the fallibility and the arrogance of human justice is something that obsesses you?

[Cave]: It's something that interests me a lot. My social conscience is fairly limited in a lot of ways; there's not much I'm angry about that doesn't affect me quite directly. But the prison system – not particularly capital punishment – but the penal system as it is, and the whole apparatus of judgement, people deciding on other people's fates... That does irritate, and upset me quite a lot.²⁷

Cave prefers to focus on the vagaries of the penal system rather than the reason for why his perpetrator is on Death Row in the first place. The two artists thereby reflect their masculine – and sanctified – position in society. (It must also be noted that neither interviewer pushed his interviewee on the matter.)

Cave's protagonist describes himself as 'nearly wholly innocent': this bespeaks either a trouble with reality *or* perhaps he really believes it because he has only killed someone who 'deserved' it – who could well be a woman, could be his wife – so he should not be punished so severely. In turn, Cooper's wife-beater has a certain amount of freedom within his domestic existence – freedom to go out, drink, smoke, stay out, order her around, and when it all just gets too much, when he is reminded of his bottom-line shackled state, he can beat her, or he can beat her just because he can. 11

'The Mercy Seat' uses a similar tactic to that of 'Only Women Bleed' at the start to portray *its* masculinised tough-guy persona, just as axiomatic to this song as Cooper's. It is strongly asserted here by the syntax in 'when they come took me', but from then on the male identity is further nuanced: the lyrics are much more poetic, then increasingly insane, with the religious overtones (detailed later) conjuring a warped, typical gaolhouse-conversion Protestant type of male anti-hero, tough, tattooed, 'not afraid to die'. (See [Example 2](#) above.) 12

Cave's prisoner is in denial about his crime, right up to the last line; he is also in denial, as a true he-man, about his feelings while on Death Row. He enters a realm of unreality, talking about his hands as separate entities. His derangement is manifest when he feels that he has the true, Godlike vision to see inanimate objects as either good or evil. He then sees Jesus' face in his soup (which must be his own reflection), and extrapolates to his own position: Jesus was *meant* to die: just like him... each is crucified for H/his own rightness;²⁸ he finally identifies with Jesus' resurrection (he's only going to 'hide in death a while'). 13

But why is Cave's protagonist insane?²⁹ He has been driven to it by society's 14

wrongful accusations and consequent impending death sentence, after *first* being driven to this state by the (undetailed) wrongful actions of another – possibly his wife, whom he naturally had to kill, hence his present incarceration, so it is really all his/her fault. Cooper's song, on the other hand, presents on paper (but I will look more closely at this below) as a lamentation on domestic violence; his woman is stuck at home 'cleaning up the grime', not permitted to 'spend a dime', has to 'feed her man dinner or anything she can' to ameliorate his violence. While in the Cave song, man has rebel blood and necessarily causes others to spill theirs at times, 'blood' in the phrase 'only women bleed' not only conjures that experienced by women biologically but also refers to its spilling at the hand of men. Cooper's song correlates with Cave's in the implied 'shackling' of the domestic situation, wherein when the man *does* grace the home with his presence after 'smoking' and 'drinking' elsewhere, he punishes the woman, his 'gaoler'.

As feminist scholars such as Susan Bordo have shown,³⁰ throughout Western philosophy matters of the flesh (which include man's need for woman) have been perceived to distract man from his higher purpose(s), whatever they may be. Cave's protagonist's higher purpose is to rebel. He sees his ring finger as 'shackled' and himself as a 'long-suffering rebel'. He posits himself as 'E.V.I.L.' against the 'G.O.O.D.'-ness represented by his wedding-band hand – which connotes marriage, which in turn intimates that the man's 'kill-hand' has been raised, if not directly against the other party in the marriage, then metaphorically against the institution of domesticity, which in this context and in this mindset equates with 'woman'. The woman shackled him, against his higher will – there is no sense of his own responsibility in allowing himself to *be* shackled!; she 'collar[ed] all that rebel blood' of his. 15

And what is it to take a wife? As Richard Leppert's investigations into paintings on early harpsichord lids reveal – and here, the boundaries across geography, time and class disintegrate for the women in the plight depicted in these songs – to take a wife is 'to sell one's freedom [...]; Woman's very being is articulated as the product of a deferential masochism in response to sadistic revenge (for the loss of the man's freedom)'.³¹ The deferential nature of woman comes through strongly in the Cooper song: she 'lives and loves in pain', she has 'need' to 'take his seed'. The loss of freedom for the 'shackled' man is a focus in the Cave song. He also sees the ring as being like a 'collar' on the finger: collar someone, you catch and hold 'em down; hence his *crime passionel* – whether it was directly against his wife or resulted in a cathartic killing of someone else. But this man's rebelliousness is written on his hand for the world to behold and stand in awe of: he has 'E.V.I.L.' tattooed on it. He says it is his E.V.I.L. -tattooed hand – synonymous with his 'kill-hand' – that is the 'good' one. All this is highly suggestive of the notion that, if it is not female spouse murder that has been committed, then it is the female, or the category 'woman', against whom the rebel needs to vent his ire. Society's strictures stymie the rebel in realising his true nature, his true calling, and its edifices are sustained by shackling marriage and laws against killing; the desire *not* to kill needs a 'soft' compassion in the makeup of the character. The rebel's might, therefore, is right – to the point where again Cave's murderer loses 16

distinction between himself and Jesus.

Modes of address and vocal delivery

In Cooper's song, the use of the third-person is *about* 'him', *about* 'her', it reflects neutrally on their situation. But then it addresses the woman, 'man makes your hair grey / he's your life's mistake [etc.]', and 'you, there, down on your knees'. The song appears to empathise directly with the woman. This is, however, followed immediately by 'begging *me* please' [emphasis added], and then reporting, "come watch me bleed", which gives a sense of immediacy. Furthermore, disturbingly, it rather calls into question Cooper's own position on the matter: who is 'me', all of a sudden; who is 'you'?!. Cave's appeal to the audience as fellow-minded: 'I am nearly wholly innocent, you know', articulates the prevalence in the world of domestic violence and its acceptance in the minds of many, thus indeed 'in tune with the workings of our society'.³² 17

Cave uses voice timbre as a weapon to bully listeners into believing him, or at least not questioning or challenging him on his dubious claims: he sneers on 'I'd never lie'. When delivering the spoken rants, he pitches his voice far higher than his natural register, and places it back in the throat, causing the sensation of a liar's strain and unreality; it is inflected with a slight whine, too, adding to the self-absorbed nature of the man whose perspective is the only one he will countenance, a mindset necessary for the bully and/or the murderer. 18

During third-person address, Cooper sings in a balladic style, with a poignant catch in the throat, and with a bluesy lowered-third melodic inflection throughout. The timbre of his voice changes sinisterly, however, into rasping, nasty-Alice, sneering, near-gloating at the climax, in first- and second-person mode. The effect is: 'I (the male protagonist) am revelling in your (the woman victim's) pain', and in turn questions the sincerity of the previous style's affect. The unbridled passion in the voice at this point, coupled with the change of mode of address, suggests that Cooper himself cannot avoid declaring his own accountability or all-too-easy identification – or desired identification – with the protagonist. 19

Feminist Catherine Clément contends that with regard to nineteenth-century opera, distinguished by its number of heroine deaths, most traditional opera-going audiences 'pay less attention to the action *per se* than to the beauty of the music. They can [therefore] leave the hall feeling edified – not as though they had just witnessed a snuff film'.³³ While the genre to which Clément refers is opera, nevertheless the point can be applied to popsongs constituted by both harrowing subject matter and transporting music. One of 'The Mercy Seat's distinguishing features is a consistent alteration of spoken and sung utterances. The sung parts reiterate the murderer's bravado denial of his crime. The spoken-word mode in the verses intensifies their impact, so there is no potentially transcending melody to distract from the actual scenario. 20

Laura Mulvey argues that the representations of women in visual art, as in 21

film, are 'coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*',³⁴ which is 'a negative, a position of powerlessness'.³⁵ When Cooper's victimised woman 'begs' her attacker, at the musical money-shot moment, to 'please, come watch me bleed', does she turn the usual 'gaze' trope on its head or feed it? Does exhorting the man (and the listener) to really see what is happening to her, to reckon with the spilling of blood, offer voyeurism or a poignant, conscience-alerting, reality-check?

Musical procedures

To address further the extent to which these songs assert a position of sympathy for their women, I turn to musical procedures. Does the musical treatment reinforce, question or conflict with the textual narrative? Feminist musicologist Susan McClary notes: 'in the case of popular music, which usually avoids the narrative schema of Other keys, all that is needed to turn the music into this narrative is for a musical detail to be construed as Other; in this way [...], climax and resolution are achieved in many popular songs'³⁶ – and, it can be argued, positioning of gendered 'norm' and 'Other'. Each song here is exceptional because of the amount of tonal excursions it contains. The songs also play out schemas of 'Otherness' in further musical parameters. 22

While McClary recognises that music *itself* can contain its own norm and Other, a highly influential strand of psychoanalytically-based philosophy developed by French feminists, from Julia Kristeva to Catherine Clément and Hélène Cixous, relegates music *in toto* to the realm of Other and perceives it as a metaphor for the feminine.³⁷ In Kristeva's construction of personality formation, the Semiotic Order occurs from pre-birth at the pre-Oedipal (pre-Symbolic) phase of development until the acquisition of (patriarchal) language (at around two years of age). Prior to this, the child is bound-up with the mother's body, communicating with her through gestures, rhythms and non-representational sounds. The Semiotic Order is thus, for Kristeva, analogous to music.³⁸ Music is ineffable, untouchable, sublime, and utopian, by being outside patriarchy.³⁹ But critics of this construction, such as Carol Flinn, warn that to pretend that either or both music and woman can 'escape' patriarchy risks losing both to 'imaginary obscurity, meaninglessness and social ineffectivity'.⁴⁰ Indeed; I would further contend that a Semiotic state, recognisable (even if only subconsciously) as a lived experience by both women *and* men, can be used for patriarchal and/or misogynist causes. 23

In the case of 'Only Women Bleed', a feminine Semiotic state could well be argued to have been conjured, especially in the verses and choruses. It presents from the outset a very strongly 'Other' – read, 'feminised' – sound-world. It includes prominent French horn and strings (both plucked and bowed); also featured are acoustic guitar, a highly melodic bass and Fender Rhodes, clavinet and other keyboards. The texture of the first section of the song is light, delicate, drums-free, a prominent high-register clavinet punctuating the texture with arpeggiated chords with a slow, disquieting vibrato. Drums appear in the second verse but here they are relatively 24

understated; and they drop in and out again from the first middle-section break, again asserting femaleness, or at least in keeping with a sympathetic, reserved affect.

There is no semblance of female presence, which can also be extrapolated to encompass the quality of compassion, however, in the 'The Mercy Seat'. The short, stuttering, glitchy, raw introduction sounds as though the character of the protagonist is only resolved and 'polished' when his crime is articulated, and as though this rebel is not going to conform to musical niceties and clean up the mess of his studio-recording-process for us. And then comes the whirling, ecstatic, frenzied, 'histrionic pitch'.⁴¹ This 'evolved from a series of looped tapes of a bass guitar being hit with a pair of drumsticks, recorded during the previous sessions at Hansa', resulting in the 'circular cacophonous noise',⁴² the wall of searing sound that runs consistently throughout, that is so vital to the affective qualities of the song. Biting, spooky harpsichord is deployed to cut through the dense texture, on the two minim chords, which comprise the sole harmonic scheme for the verse (E minor and B minor, over a tonic pedal). This distinctive sound-world is indeed 'circular', and also trance-like, reflecting the repetition of the lines, 'the mercy seat is waiting' etcetera. A high-pitched saw (or simulation of one) cuts through the background cacophony, and conjures the vernacular.⁴³ The sound-world is so 'complete' and unruffled that it borders on the Kristevan womblike Semiotic order, drawing us in, delivering something nice and sure and safe and resolved, so we are attracted to its seductive invitation to wallow in this world. 25

'Only Women Bleed' is in a major modality (of G): is this appropriate, given the subject matter? At least 'The Mercy Seat' has the grace to be cast in a minor key (of E). But what thence? Charles Ford puts forward the theory that modulations to dominant-key areas represent masculine striving, progress in the world, it taking more energy to sharpen, whereas modulations the opposite way round the cycle of fifths are a 'yielding', feminine move.⁴⁴ The notion of 'yielding' is not unproblematic for feminist agency, of course. But in this context, the possibility that a feminine-seeming subjectivity is conjured can be construed as a position of agency or at least audible *presence*. This is perhaps particularly so regarding a popsong by an artist such as 'Mr Hard Rock Alice Cooper',⁴⁵ and in 1975, moreover. 26

The harmonic treatment in the reprises in 'Only Women Bleed' – 'she cries alone at night too often' – asserts a feminine presence. Via a dominant seventh chord, the harmony tonicises (albeit briefly) the subdominant (albeit over a tonic pedal, so it is in the 'weaker' 6/4 position) – so, C major, preceded by a G7 chord. There is no home-key dominant to this point. The music thus conforms solidly enough to Ford's theory of female presence. 27

In the middle, there are significant modulations to flat keys (bVI (E-flat Major) and bIII (B-flat Major)), again representing feminine sensibility according to Ford's theory (with the caveat in mind that, of course, other readings of these harmonic gestures are possible). The modulation to the flattened submediant in the song is abrupt – straight from the tonic: as though the woman has ruptured the tonal proceedings and taken over. In this E-flat Major section 28

there is a further modulation to B-flat Major, the dominant of E-flat Major: this could be interpreted as *woman* striving, as it is in the realm of her 'Other' key. Yet this impression is undone by the lack of tonal surety between B-flat Major and E-flat Major as the over-riding key for much of the section, so it is unclear whether she is striving or yielding, and by the immediate, harmonically surprising tonal slippage back to the tonic (G Major), the reporting (wife-beating?) man's home key. This occurs via the dominant of the flattened submediant (E-flat major – in other words, proceeding stepwise from E-flat major, B-flat major 6/4 to G major). While the move around the circle of fifths has been sharp-wards, the tonic destination was not achieved via its dominant, so the 'strength' of this move is absent.

So far, then, Cooper's song appears on balance to empathise with the woman. But the text at this point has the man conveying his impression of the woman's demeanour, which seems to implore him, 'come watch me bleed', and it forms the climax of the song. The harmonies here, bVI (E-flat major): bIII6/4 (F major)| (G major), may avoid reinstating the tonic with its dominant, but immediately afterwards, a strong cadential formula in the home key of G Major (I–V–I, IV–V–I) strongly reasserts the tonic and is repeated no less than four times in a row, with a searing, triumphant guitar glissando, descending and then ascending. It is enunciated, furthermore, through thick, traditionally masculine, highly energised rock texture. This all serves seemingly to *mock* the previous excursions to the 'Other' key areas and the 'Other' non-rock-genre sound-world. Further still, the melody, from 'black eyes all of the time' to 'watch me bleed', comprises a completely step-wise scale traversing a major tenth from E-flat below middle C up to G above. The contour and melodic range are remarkable, and seem in context with the lyrics to reinforce the feeling of masculine might-is-right. It is one great, uninterrupted striving, the harmonies progressing inexorably, virilely, through ever-sharpening keys. The solidity of the man's position is reinforced when compared with the melodic range (mostly only a third, with one instance covering a fifth) of the chorus, the section of the song which centres most unproblematically on the woman's plight, 'only women bleed', and does not mention 'man', thereby asserting solely female presence. Theo van Leeuwen has pointed out that a small melodic range is often equated with restricted social position:⁴⁶ the contrast between Cooper's man, with his extraordinarily wide melodic range, and woman, is palpable.

The climax is musically most robust and celebrates the most descriptively violent dimension of the lyrics. Significantly, the first instrumental section is quoted in the song, 'The Awakening', from the same album. It is in this song that we learn explicitly that he has committed murder: the wife-beating in 'Only Women Bleed' is revealed to be more than 'just' that, and the nature of *Welcome to My Nightmare's* 'nightmare' is elucidated.⁴⁷ That the song's essential position is 'in tune with the workings of society' is echoed both in the direct simplicity of the lyrics and their implication of an intractable pre-determination, and also in the inclusion of a male choir singing a heartfelt 'ah' falsetto backing throughout the verses (from the second verse onwards) and choruses.

Not only is 'The Mercy Seat's sound-world highly masculinised, but its victim is also not given any direct *voice*; in fact, s/he is not even referred to (unlike in 'Only Women Bleed'). Paradoxically, however, it is 'The Mercy Seat' which gives the stronger musical critique of the perpetrator of violence. Harmonically, there is not a pure, 'virile' dominant harmony in sight, let alone any modulation to the dominant – there is no able-bodied striving or proper resolution for this man; there are, however, plenty of excursions to the flat side of the circle. The verse merely oscillates between tonic (E Minor) and minor dominant over tonic pedal, giving the sense of a kind of hopeless *stuckness* through the symbolism of not being able to achieve a 'proper' dominant; this is supported by the largely static, repeated-note melodic line in the chorus which works against the restless harmonies, giving the impression of a deranged rant. 31

The harmonic procedure of 'The Mercy Seat's chorus presents a most unsettled harmonic unfolding, which plays out as follows: i (E Minor)–i sus 2nd–vi6/^1 pedal. It then breaks out of the bind of the tonic pedal point and slips to bVII – the major sonority and pure (D major) triad affording a moment of hope – which is lost by the immediate subsequent move to bII, then proceeds, via a subdominant motion, to VI (so, F major to C major). The 'yielding' movement here is mitigated by the solidity, robustness and positivity of C major, only to be dumped immediately and unceremoniously back to the tonic: our emasculated anti-hero cannot transcend his situation. 32

In the last line of 'The Mercy Seat' all three systems of judgment – society, himself, and God (well, we presume) – finally concur about his fate when he admits he is lying. Here, the violin enters. Cave does not give it a melody, *per se*, just as he affords no vocal melody to the verses' spoken lines; the violin's pitches are minimal, stutteringly presented in a dotted, syncopated rhythm, highly restrained in their sparse melodic range, and hover around the bass note, fifth and sometimes the seventh of the harmonies they support; they do not transcend first position on the fingerboard. This gives the impression he is going to the electric chair and thence perhaps to some purgatory that he is sure, from his religious mindset, exists; his conscience will out. This insists to the listener that what he did *was* wrong, he is *not* 'nearly wholly innocent' – now we 'know'. With no melody, there is no invitation to wallow in sympathy for this murderer who indeed deserves no soaring, transcendent violin melody as his swansong.⁴⁸ 'Only Women' rests firmly at the end on the tonic and has a 'clean', self-satisfied, definite finish; 'Mercy' fades into nothing, the throttled violin stuttering away in purgatory forever. 33

Violence, masculinity and 'society's workings' in the songs

Welcome to My Nightmare's over-riding narrative is the 'nightmare' of the wife-killing. But this nightmare affords its kicks – and moments of self-justification – along the way. Many of the songs directly reach out to Cooper's audience; he is confident that the nightmare can happily be a shared one. The opening song, 'Welcome to My Nightmare', assures us, 'you know inside you feel right at home, here'.⁴⁹ Justification for the killing is found in the *vagina dentata* song, 'Black Widow', 34

Isn't she lovely? ... And so deadly. Her kiss is fifteen times as poisonous as that of the rattlesnake [...] [She has an] inborn need to dominate, to possess. In fact, immediately after the consummation of her marriage to the smaller and weaker male of the species she kills and eats him...⁵⁰

The track after 'Only Women' is 'The Department of Youth', where the murderer celebrates his own youth and identifies with a whole [rebellious] youthful contingent, without 'manners or couth' who have 'never heard of [...] justice or truth'. He indulges in very upbeat rock'n'roll necrophilia in 'Cold Ethyl', two tracks after 'Only Women' – he has had time during 'Department of Youth', out in the public sphere celebrating his rebellion, to wait for his wife's body to freeze. Here, he trots home again to '[make] love to [his] refrigerator wife' (which could also pun on her having been frigid, a fair enough reason for his bringing about her demise; and indeed, he also states, 'One thing / No lie / Ethyl's frigid as an Eskimo pie').⁵¹ That the wife-beater is actually a wife-killer is further suggested in this song which reads, with jaunty rendition: 'She's cool in bed / Well she oughta be 'cuz Ethyl's dead!'. In the song that directly explores his guilt, 'Steven', he sings: 'I don't like to hear you cry / You just don't know how deep that cuts me' – to the point where he has to kill her to alleviate his pain.

But perhaps the most chilling line in the whole of the *Welcome to My Nightmare* album is in 'The Awakening', when the man realises that, half-demented (from the experience of murder) and in a semi-dreamlike state, upon 35

getting up from my easy chair / looking for my wife / following a trail of crimson spots / that lead into the night / suddenly I realise / I see it all through real eyes / these crimson spots are / dripping from my hand / and ahh ooooohhhhhhhhh –

he then exclaims, in the final line of the song: '*it makes me feel like a man*' (my emphasis).

The autobiographical creeps in again in the last track on the album, 'The Escape', which talks of him 'get[ting] to the show', as well as 'I'm crying in my beer'. He also 'put[s] on [his] make-up' (Alice's visage is distinguished by its preponderance of horror-show make-up) and steals his doctor's mascara, implying that 'respectable', professional men are also prone to ex-social predilections, which can range from harmless make-up dabbling to wife-beating and murder. 36

It must be noted that Cooper's wife-beater/killer does not get off scot-free. In *Welcome* he is plagued by guilt in the songs of the latter part of the album, and the sequel album, also a concept album, is *Alice Cooper Goes to Hell*.⁵² But it proves to be an ironic, not-all-bad take on 'hell', further underlying the male-as-rebel-hero-through-domestic-violence trope. The final track, after all, is 'I'm Going Home', an exultant song with no hint of remorse.⁵³ 37

Neither of the Cooper albums entirely mitigates the effects and standpoint of 'Only Women Bleed'. His guilty conscience is temporary; Cooper's man's subjectivity and being-in-the-world remain intact: man can still 'happily' beat his wife despite social or self-induced come-uppance. He is now about to resume normal operations. We are aware that for Cave's murderer, however, his hell is vivid and enduring. He does not get away with 'feeling like a man', despite the posturing of the un-contrite, self-righteous dissenter. 38

The two songs under consideration here present their male characters compellingly, as strong he-men, who do not show their feelings,⁵⁴ wilful rebels who position themselves against and outside society's mores, who lack true empathy. Neither track states outright that their man killed a woman. But a few tracks along the concept-album, *Welcome to My Nightmare*, where 'Only Women Bleed' resides, we find the full picture of Cooper's wife-beating scenario, and a few albums along in Cave's career we find a whole album called *Murder Ballads* (not to mention the many singular instances of femicide in his output, before and after *The Mercy Seat*). Wife-killing is a step away from wife-beating. Wife-beating is a step away from railing against the confines of the domestic. Thus is erected a continuum of violence, along which these songs occupy a precarious yet compelling position. Up for a bit of 'rougher than usual'⁵⁵ treatment of their women when necessary, it is *this* that forms the baseline of these men's social positioning, and the construction of their identity: one wherein a man can posture that it is heinous to beat a woman but shows his true nature in the musically-infused elation when such bashing takes place; and one that can justify the killing of the entity who would curtail his true heroic nature. In this way the songs carefully position themselves, not allowing us to lose sight of the essential masculinity on the part of the protagonists; it would have also been possible *not* to assert maleness so avowedly to deliver their respective messages. But each song is concerned to present a strong male subject position against any purported compassion for the victims of the disturbing issue they depict: in a sinister circular twist, the very essence of the maleness of the protagonists is given flesh, substance and *raison d'être* by the violence against his victim. 39

'The Mercy Seat' asserts the unassailable heroism of its protagonist through his tough-guy, rebel-male posturing, even while the rationale of his world is simultaneously undercut by his obvious mental derangement. Nevertheless, the highly poetic writing and ecstatic musical treatment engender a willing identification on the part of the listener with the murderer. Insanity looks not quite so bad in its euphoric state here with such a unique and powerful sound-world; even if this accord is qualified, particularly through aspects of the melodic and harmonic procedures of the song. 'Only Women Bleed' does its violent-male job through Cooper's mode of address at the climax; his change of address to first-person; his harmonic and melodic procedures, clearly distinct when dealing with empathising with the woman's position and the man's; and his vernacular, unadorned speech, which presents woman's plight as pre-ordained. The effect of the climax is particularly powerful, sweeping the listener off his/her feet, inviting us *all* to 'watch' her and thrill to the musico-visual spectacle. 40

And on this point, it is not only men who respond viscerally to the aestheticisation of violence against women, as can be gleaned from the following remarks by Cave in interview: 41

'In the past, some of what you've written has seemed incredibly contemptuous of women', I say carefully. There's no hesitation in his reply. '[...] Well, a lot of women responded to it, strangely – very positively,' Nick counters. 'Or maybe not positively', he smiles a little. 'But they were attracted to it in some way'.

And, as the (female) interviewer points out at this juncture: 'Women write letters to serial killers, too.'⁵⁶

It is instructive to examine the artists' self-positioning in the broader world. Cooper's website's title directs the audience how to feel about his manhood.⁵⁷ His anxieties of emasculation because of writing a 'wussy' ballad are palpable in the Denton interview (above). Denton's own question supports the reason *why* Cooper should be so squeamish. In 'Only Women Bleed', Cooper's man is a drinker. With regard to ingesting mind-altering substances, Cooper has been at pains to counteract any non-he-man image that might have arisen from his glam-rock cross-dressing; he emphasises that unlike the declared (at the time) supposedly bisexual personalities such as Lou Reed and David Bowie, he and his band eschewed illegal drugs and restricted themselves to the far more masculine – in this particular social and geographical sub-stratum – beer.⁵⁸ Cave, too, is at pains to assert the maleness of his rebellious stance. This can be gleaned from the names of most of the bands he has led, from the darkly ironic Boys Next Door to the lock-up-your-daughters Bad Seeds to the current high-grunge, hard-edge Grinderman; his predilection at the time of 'The Mercy Seat' through the following decade for writing about murdered women has already been noted above.⁵⁹ 42

Speaking in 1996 about his *Murder Ballads*, Cave described the album as 'relentlessly gruesome', declaring that it will be his 'last thing of this nature'.⁶⁰ Indeed, it must also be noted that, in recent years, Cave has largely moved on from this subject matter.⁶¹ Yet some six years after this assertion, Cave is still able to state: 43

Basically, I just get a real kick out of writing about violence. A real physical, elated feeling. When I wrote *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, my novel which leads up to the murder of a girl, I wrote the final scene twenty times. Over and over again. Different ways to kill the girl, different movements of the sickle. It was incredibly, innately enjoyable.⁶²

It must also be noted that Cave went on to write 'Little Water Song', a song about a woman who is being drowned by her lover, for Ute Lemper, as recently as 2000...⁶³

Reynolds and Press, in the 'Ladykillers' chapter of *The Sex Revolts*, report: 44
'Rationalising his fascination in an interview around the time of the *Mercy Seat*, Cave proposed a kind of ethics of violence. Defining himself against "a certain kind of numbness in the world today", he proclaimed his belief in the nobility of the *crime passionnel* as opposed to "sadism, or violence thru greed". They comment, 'Cave's baroque imagery ennobles passionate murder'.⁶⁴ Thus is art implicated in violence. Cave's own remarks in a *Melody Maker* interview support this assertion:

Asked if there was any connection between the writer and the monstrous characters and scenarios he has created on *Murder Ballads*, he replied: 'I would say that there is. [...] What I do as an artist I think is a very spiritual thing. It's a way of elevating my life beyond normality and tawdriness, and I think that's basically what a lot of killers do. It's a kind of spiritual act, to kill, it adds a bit of meaning, a bit of quality to their lives'.⁶⁵

When 'The Mercy Seat's spoken words devolve into a religious rant, they stop just short of speaking in tongues and conjuring an utterly illusory alternative reality. Rather, the man's true fear is palpable in the repetition of the lines about the 'mercy seat', as he cannot avoid obsessing about his fate. But the all-encompassing, wall-of-sound music provides an altered state, a cocooned world, where things are known and safe so long as your faith is intact – to the extent that, at the point of death, he will only 'hide [there] a while'. The nature of faith for this murderer is not only of the warped-religious kind: it also embodies that of the rebel male, answering to his higher calling, unshackling himself from woman's/domesticity's insidious clutches. The world of 'Only Women Bleed' is also safe and known, with its deceptively gentle domestic lulling quality, and its transcending climax. Lyrically, man has 'got his woman' who will 'take his seed' as she has 'the need' and he has 'the power' even if she is not feeling her need on a particular night; he can come and go and drink and beat her as he pleases, so long as his faith in his maleness remains intact.

The foregoing has traced the ways in which popular songs can bring to the foreground, and provide at many levels a compelling critique of, a heinous scenario, while undertaking brave forays into 'wussy' musical genres and structures. Each 'touching little ballad'⁶⁶ achieves a highly affective and effective position within the gamut of the aestheticisation of violence – and masculinity – to invite us all, audience *and* creators, to enjoy the spectacle presented here, one that has been delivered in artworks for repeated contemplation at least since the days of the early harpsichord,⁶⁷ and to be thereby complicit in the often deplorable, violent 'workings of our society' when it comes to woman's lot. 45

Notes

¹ A version of this paper, entitled “‘Only Women Bleed’: Representations of (Extreme States of) Male Identity in Two Popular Songs: ‘Only Women Bleed’ and ‘The Mercy Seat’”, was given at the Symposium of the International Musicological Society, 11–16 July, 2004, Melbourne. I wish to thank Richard Ward, Elizabeth Wood, Jennifer Hill, Sally Macarthur, Emily Wilbourne and my undergraduate class, Sex Death and the Ecstatic in Music, at the University of Melbourne, for their various and invaluable contributions to the preparation of this article. This project was funded by a Discovery Project Grant through the Australian Research Council.

² Andrew Denton, ‘Enough Rope: Interview with Alice Cooper’ (2005), available at *ABC.net*, <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/enoughrope/transcripts/s1396692.htm> (March 2007).

³ Ian Gittens, ‘Nick Cave: A Man Called Hearse’, *Melody Maker* (28 Mar 1992), 45.

⁴ Ohad Pishof, ‘Nick Cave: Interview from Israeli Newspaper’, *Yediot Ahronot* (6 April 2001, sec. Weekend edition), 84.

⁵ L. Heise, M. Ellsberg and M. Ending Gottemoeller, ‘Violence Against Women’, *Population Reports Series L*, No. 11 (December 1999), available at *Endabuse.org*, <http://www.endabuse.org/resources/facts/> (February 2003). The authors quote from the Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief, *Intimate Partner Violence, 1993-2001*.

⁶ Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer, *The Lust to Kill: A Feminist Investigation of Sexual Murder* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 32.

⁷ Justice Derek Bollen, quoted in *Director of Public Prosecutions v. Respondent*, unreported, Supreme Court of South Australia, 20 April 1993.

⁸ The remarks caused considerable outrage. See, for example, Jocelyn Scutt, ‘The Voice of the Rapist’, in Duncan Chappell and Sandra J Egger (eds.), *Australian Violence: Contemporary Perspectives II* (Canberra: Institute of Criminology, 1995), 299-323.

⁹ ‘In typical classic murder ballads, a man kills his lover, often over jealousy and sometimes because she was pregnant. This particular story line is so consistent that scholars sometimes refer to these early tales specifically as “murdered-girl ballads”’. Hillary Rhodes, ‘From 18th Century to Today, Songs About Killings Live On’ *The Seattle Times* (2006), available at http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/artsentertainment/2003328195_murderballads30.html (July 2007). Interestingly, Cave has also covered ‘Hey Joe’ on his album *Kicking Against the Pricks* (Mute Records, 1986). Also see Ken Cox, ‘Killing Them Harshly with Their Song: Modern Country Murder Songs’ (2003), available at *Perfect Sound Forever*, <http://www.furious.com/perfect/countrymurdersongs.html> (July 2007); Robert Burke, ‘Music Playlist: Killing Women’ (2005), available at *Blogcritics*, <http://blogcritics.org/archives/2005/02/27/124356.php> (July 2007); Edward G. Armstrong, ‘Gangsta Misogyny: A Content Analysis of the Portrayals of Violence against Women in Rap Music, 1987–1993’, *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* Vol. 8, No. 2 (2001), 96-126.

¹⁰ A.k.a. Vincent Furnier: ‘Cooper, the man (Vince Furnier), separates himself from Alice Cooper, the character’. NA., ‘City Newspaper Archives: Alice Cooper’s Favorite Rock Star’, available at *Rochestercitynewspaper.com*, <http://www.rochestercitynewspaper.com/archives/2003/10/Alice+Cooper+s+Favorite+Rock+Star> (June 2007). Here I subsume all the creative entities on the Cooper albums into ‘Alice Cooper’, as he is the driving creative force.

¹¹ Alice Cooper, ‘Only Women Bleed’, *Welcome to My Nightmare* (Atlantic Records: R2 74383, 2002 (1975)); Nick Cave, ‘The Mercy Seat’, *The Mercy Seat* (Mute Records: CD Mute 52, 1988). Also see Nick Cave, ‘The Mercy Seat’, in *The Complete Lyrics 1978-2001* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), 135-8.

¹² Of course it must be noted that domestic violence does not always mean male violence against female. But according to Heise et al.’s statistics, ‘Intimate partner violence is primarily a crime against women. In 2001, women accounted for 85 percent of the victims of intimate partner violence (588,490 total) and men accounted for approximately 15 percent of the victims (103,220 total).’ Heise, Ellsberg and Gottemoeller, ‘Violence Against Women’.

¹³ Pishof, ‘Interview from Israeli Newspaper’.

¹⁴ Denton, ‘Enough Rope’.

¹⁵ Although his ode to necrophilia, ‘Cold Ethyl’ (two tracks after ‘Only Women Bleed’) caused umbrage to be taken by feminist advice columnist Ann Landers. See Jeffrey Morgan, *Alcohol and Razor Blades, Poison and Needles: The Glorious Wretched Excess of Alice Cooper, All-*

American (Alice Cooper Official Website, 2006), <http://www.alicecooper.com/bio.html> (June 2007) and NA, 'City Newspaper Archives: Alice Cooper's Favorite Rock Star'.

¹⁶ Morgan, *Alcohol and Razor Blades*. Robert Christgau declares that "'Only Women Bleed" [is] the most explicitly feminist song to hit the top forty since *I Am Woman*. Alice's nose for what the kids want to hear is as discriminating as it is impervious to moral suasion, so perhaps this means that the more obvious feminist truisms have become conventional wisdom among at least half our adolescents. Encouraging.' Robert Christgau, 'Review of Welcome to My Nightmare: Christgau's Record Guide, 1981' (1981), available at *Superseventies.com*, <http://www.superseventies.com/spcooperalice4.html> (June 2007).

¹⁷ Simon Reynolds, *Blissed Out: The Raptures of Rock* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1990). Excerpted at *Nickcave.com*, http://www.nickcave.com/interviews/index.php?subaction=showfull&id=1051657416&archive=&cns=hdlines&start_from= (February 2005).

¹⁸ Introducing the website 'bite' from *Blissed Out* is the statement 'Nick Cave and his work can quite easily absorb and reward academic analysis'. Anonymous introduction to Simon Reynolds *Nick Cave Interview from Blissed Out: The Raptures of Rock*, 1988, Available: http://www.nickcave.com/interviews/index.php?subaction=showfull&id=1051657416&archive=&cns=hdlines&start_from=. Feb 2005. Reynolds and Press provide some acutely enlightening insights into 'The Mercy Seat' in their book *The Sex Revolts* but these are fleeting and do not discuss the music. Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock'n'Roll* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). Their remarks are addressed here. I have discussed Cave's *Little Water Song* in Linda Kouvaras, 'Taking Her Breath Away: A Study of Two Popsongs', in Linda Kouvaras et al. (eds.), *Proceedings from the 2001 National Festival of Women's Music* (Canberra: Southern Voices, 2004), 3-10. Otherwise, I have not found any musicological discussion of Cave's work. I have not found any academic writings on 'Only Women Bleed'.

¹⁹ Cooper's website boasts that *Nightmare* was 'the world's first full-length video concept album'. See Morgan, *Alcohol and Razor Blades*.

²⁰ See n. 5.

²¹ Morgan, *Alcohol and Razor Blades*.

²² The Stud Brothers, 'Solitary Confinement: Interview with Nick Cave', *Melody Maker* (23 August 1986), 30. The sensuous attractiveness for so many creators of the scenario of the murdered woman is summed up in Edgar Allan Poe's words: 'The death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world'. Quoted in Reynolds and Press, *The Sex Revolts*, 27.

²³ The role of religion and religious imagery in Cave's work and how this connects with the gender issues being explored here would be fascinating to develop. Cooper, too, has deployed religious imagery at numerous points in his career and, again, the connections between maleness, misogyny, femicide, religion and anti-religion would be worth considering in another 'take' on these songs.

²⁴ Morgan, *Alcohol and Razor Blades*.

²⁵ Denton, 'Enough Rope'. It is interesting to note the cryptic summation of 'Only Women Bleed' on the part of Cooper's biographer, Jeffrey Morgan, as Cooper's 'most deceptive song yet'— and this was 'not just because it was a ballad' but it was 'also because of its neo-feminist subtext'. Morgan, *Alcohol and Razor Blades*. He does not elucidate why he calls it 'deceptive'.

²⁶ For Cooper's reason for his choice of name, see Morgan, *Alcohol and Razor Blades*. Cooper is not the only one to shy away from the confronting aspects of the song. An internet blogger writes: "'Only Women Bleed" is a heartfelt ballad, probably written to his poor wife for putting up with him'. Matt Cummings, 'Satan Stole My Teddy Bear: Review of Only Women Bleed' (2000), available at *SSMTRreviews.com*, <http://www.ssmtrreviews.com/db/searchrev.php?artistID=228&showReview=true> (June 2007).

²⁷ Reynolds, 'Nick Cave Interview from Blissed Out'.

²⁸ Indeed, 'The Mercy Seat' has here several meanings: one is the electric chair, the others are the golden covering of the Ark of the Covenant, regarded as the resting place of God, and the throne of God. Reynolds, 'Nick Cave Interview from Blissed Out'. Also see <http://www.answers.com/topic/mercy-seat>. For further discussion of religious delusion and its associations with sexual murder, see Cameron and Frazer, *The Lust to Kill*, 131.

²⁹ Reynolds and Press place Cave in the Rebel/Outlaw category, as well as one who 'plays with madness': 'The male artist who *plays with madness*—from Artaud and Van Gogh to Iggy Pop and Nick Cave – is impressive, a voyager into the dark underworld or outer-worlds of consciousness'. Reynolds and Press, *The Sex Revolts*, 269.

³⁰ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

³¹ Richard Leppert, "Sexual Identity, Death, and the Family Piano," *19th-Century Music* 16.2 (Fall 1992). 109.

³² See n. 5.

³³ Catherine Clément, *Opera, or, the Undoing of Women*, tr. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), xiv.

³⁴ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* Vol. 16 (1975), 11. Cited in Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Bodily Charm: Living Opera*, The Abraham Lincoln Lecture Series (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 218.

³⁵ Hutcheon and Hutcheon, *Bodily Charm*, 218.

³⁶ Susan McClary, quoted in Lucy Green, *Music, Gender, Education* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 119.

³⁷ Carol Flinn, 'The "Problem" of Femininity in Theories of Film Music', *Screen* Vol. 27, No. 6 (1986), 58.

³⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, tr. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980); Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, tr. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). I have discussed Kristeva's theories in connection with *Little Water Song* in Kouvaras, 'Taking Her Breath Away'.

³⁹ McClary depicts a psychoanalytical model which explains why, in Western culture, it is denied on the one hand that music has social meaning and, on the other, it is ascribed transcendental significance. McClary, afterword, *Noise: The Political Economy of Noise*, by Jacques Attali, tr. Brian Massumi, with foreword by Fredric Jameson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), xv.

⁴⁰ Flinn, 'The "Problem" of Femininity', 62. I have also critiqued this construction of music in Linda Kouvaras, 'The Semiotic and the Symbolic in Two Sweets-Smearing Scenes', *Australasian Music Research* Vol. 6 (2001), Linda Kouvaras, 'Sweet Death: Strategies of the Feminine Grotesque in a Contemporary Australian Chamber Opera', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1996.

⁴¹ See n. 16.

⁴² Ian Johnston, *Bad Seed: The Biography of Nick Cave* (London: Abacus, 1996), 222. The sound-world is due in no small part to sound engineer Tony Cohen.

⁴³ Reynolds describes it similarly as 'the odd filigree of lonesome country whistling'. See n. 16.

⁴⁴ Green, *Music, Gender, Education*, 120-121.

⁴⁵ See n. 23.

⁴⁶ Theo van Leeuwen, *Speech, Music, Sound* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

⁴⁷ I remember vividly my own thrill when, aged fifteen, my best friend and I, sitting on her bed and listening over and over to *Welcome to My Nightmare* at its release, realised that indeed the songs were narratively connected. Swept away by the music, I didn't question the moral stance of that narrative. But at that time, the 'workings of society' had not yet been as prominently interrogated by feminists as they were to become.

⁴⁸ Normally, in this situation one might associate this instrument with redemptive humanity and strong affective response – perhaps even especially in the context of a non-classical song. I am thinking, for example, of Naomi Cumming's piece on its use in Bach's 'Erbaume Dich'. See Naomi Cumming, *The Sonic Self: Musical Subjectivity and Signification* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

⁴⁹ Alice Cooper, *Welcome to My Nightmare* (Atlantic Records: R2 74383, 2002 (1975)). All quotations from the lyrics are from the album.

⁵⁰ Karen Horney, a pupil of Freud, recommended that 'analysts turn their attention to *Angst für Frau* – the dread of woman – and suggests that its roots lie in the little boy's fear that his penis is too small for the mother's vagina'. Cited in Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 173–4.

⁵¹ The 'Ethyl' reference could also denote the chemist's appellation for alcohol, that is, ethyl alcohol, Cooper's 'drug of choice'. NA, 'Alcohol/Ethanol/Ethyl Alcohol: Drug Toxicity Details', available at *medindia.net*, http://www.medindia.net/drugs/drug_toxicity/Alcohol.htm (June 2007).

⁵² Alice Cooper, *Alice Cooper Goes to Hell* (Warner Bros Records: 2896, 1990 (1976)).

⁵³ Other jubilant songs are 'You Gotta Dance' and even 'Guilty'; he gets to argue with the Devil on 'I'm the Coolest' and with society on 'Give the Kid A Break'; and the more reflective numbers, 'I Never Cry', 'Didn't We Meet', 'Wake Me Gently', 'Wish You Were Here', and the cover-song 'I'm Always Chasing Rainbows', do not purport any sense of rue.

⁵⁴ Significantly, one of the songs on *Goes to Hell* is (the ironic) 'I Never Cry'.

⁵⁵ See n. 6.

⁵⁶ Jennifer Nine, 'From Here to Maturity: Interview with Nick Cave', *Melody Maker* (17 May 1997), 30-1.

⁵⁷ See n. 14.

⁵⁸ Morgan, *Alcohol and Razor Blades*. Also see the 1995 BBC documentary series *Dancing in the Street* about the history of rock and roll. Now, of course, both former-heroin-addict Cave and Cooper have embraced sobriety... See Morgan, *Alcohol and Razor Blades*; Ekstra Bladet, 'Nick Cave: Dark and Sad' (2006), available at *Nickcave.com*, http://www.nickcave.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=55&Itemid=29 (June 2007); Gavin Martin, 'From Beer to Paternity', *NME* (2 April 1994).

⁵⁹ See n. 21.

⁶⁰ NA, 'Nick Cave: Murder in Mind, but Not for Long', *Melody Maker* (3 Feb 1996).

⁶¹ See, for example, Brian Bowe, 'God Is in the House: An Interview with Nick Cave' (2003), available at *Creemmagazine.com*, <http://www.creemmagazine.com/BeatGoesOn/NickCave/GodIsInTheHouse001.html> (April 2006); NA, 'Nick Cave: Murder in Mind'; Bradley Bamberger, 'Nick Cave: Back with a Vengeance' (1996), available at *Nickcave.net* (April 2005).

⁶² Gittens, 'Nick Cave: A Man Called Hearse', 45.

⁶³ See Kouvaras, 'Taking Her Breath Away'.

⁶⁴ Reynolds and Press, *The Sex Revolts*, 29-30.

⁶⁵ NA, 'Nick Cave: Murder in Mind, but Not for Long', *Melody Maker* (3 Feb 1996).

⁶⁶ See n. 1.

⁶⁷ See n. 30.

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