

TUNE INTO ENGLISH

Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds' Red Right Hand

Reso popolare da *Peaky Blinders*, questo brano, che ha appena festeggiato 30 anni, riassume l'immaginario ricco e al contempo oscuro del poliedrico artista australiano.

A dark and brooding¹ gothic rock track by Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds, 1994's *Red Right Hand* has become one of the Australian rock band's more recognisable songs. Opening with a menacing tubular bell, a creepy² bassline and organ riff accompany the listener on an uneasy³ walk across town to meet a shadowy⁴ stranger. This ominous figure with his vengeful red right hand was inspired by a line from John Milton's 17th-century epic poem *Paradise Lost*.

Perhaps songwriter Nick Cave sought⁵ to justify his lifestyle just as Milton attempted to justify God's ways: struggling with drug abuse at the time, yet regularly attending church, he filled an

entire notebook with ideas for lyrics. The first two verses of the song set the foreboding⁶ scene and introduce the protagonist, described by guitarist Mick Harvey as "seemingly⁷ part deity, part demon, striking⁸ a combination of fear and awe⁹ everywhere he goes." The next two verses reveal his intention to strip¹⁰ the listener of self-respect in exchange for material wealth.

The track is perhaps best-known as the theme song to the BBC's hit series *Peaky Blinders*. The series' creator Steven Knight explained "There is a swagger¹¹, poetry, fallibility, flawed¹² masculinity to that song that we aspire to in the show." ☒



SCAN, READ & LISTEN
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UPPER INTERMEDIATE B2

GLOSSARY

- 1 **brooding:** minaccioso
- 2 **creepy:** raccapricciante
- 3 **uneasy:** inquieto
- 4 **shadowy:** in ombra
- 5 **to seek:** cercare
- 6 **foreboding:** inquietudine
- 7 **seemingly:** apparentemente
- 8 **to strike:** dare
- 9 **awe:** stupore
- 10 **to strip:** spogliare
- 11 **swagger:** spavalderia
- 12 **flawed:** avere dei difetti
- 13 **to loom:** incombere su
- 14 **as it shifts and cracks:** mentre si sposta e si incrina
- 15 **humming wires:** ronzio dei cavi
- 16 **mills:** fabbriche
- 17 **stacks:** ciminiere
- 18 **gathering storm:** tempesta in arrivo
- 19 **dusty:** impolverato
- 20 **to wrap:** impacchettare
- 21 **to rekindle:** rialimentare
- 22 **to heal:** curare
- 23 **shrinking:** che si ritira
- 24 **to whisper:** bisbigliare
- 25 **buddy:** amico
- 26 **slum:** bassifondi
- 27 **to cast a shadow:** proiettare un'ombra
- 28 **cog:** ingranaggio
- 29 **doom:** sorte avversa
- 30 **crows and ravens:** corvi
- 31 **bearers:** portatori

across the tracks: towns with railway lines often have poorer areas beyond the station, so this is a metaphor for going somewhere less safe.

bird of doom²⁹: crows and ravens³⁰ are considered bearers³¹ of bad luck.

you don't have no money? / you don't have no car?: the incorrect double negative is often used in songs.

Take a little walk to the edge of town
And go **across the tracks**

Where the viaduct looms¹³

Like a **bird of doom**

As it shifts and cracks¹⁴

Where secrets lie in the border fires

In the **humming wires**¹⁵

Hey man, you know

You're never coming back

Past the square, past the bridge

Past the mills¹⁶, past the stacks¹⁷

On a **gathering storm**¹⁸ comes

A tall handsome man

In a **dusty**¹⁹ black coat with

A red right hand

He'll **wrap**²⁰ you in his arms

Tell you that you've been a good boy

He'll **rekindle**²¹ all the dreams

It took you a lifetime to destroy

He'll reach deep into the hole

Heal²² your **shrinking**²³ soul

But there won't be a single thing

That you can do

He's a god, he's a man

He's a ghost, he's a guru

They're **whispering**²⁴ his name

Through this disappearing land

But hidden in his coat

Is a red right hand

You don't have no money?

He'll get you some

You don't have no car?

He'll get you one

You don't have no self-respect

You feel like an insect

Well don't you worry **buddy**²⁵

'cause here he comes

Through the ghettos and the barrio

And the **Bowery** and the **slum**²⁶

A shadow is **cast**²⁷ wherever he stands

Stacks of green paper in his

Red right hand

You'll see him in your nightmares

You'll see him in your dreams

He'll appear out of nowhere but

He **ain't** what he seems

You'll see him in your head

On the TV screen

And hey buddy, I'm warning

You to turn it off

He's a ghost, he's a god

He's a man, he's a guru

You're one microscopic **cog**²⁸

In his catastrophic plan

Designed and directed by

His red right hand

he's a god, he's a man, he's a ghost: this is a clear reference to the Holy Trinity, the three aspects of God (The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit).

stacks of green paper: this means 'cash' —American dollars are green and are often referred to as 'greenbacks'.

Bowery: aneighbourhood in Lower Manhattan, New York City.

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