

**“Outlaw Pete”:
Bruce Springsteen and the Dream-Work of Cosmic
American Music**

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Abstract

During the 2006 Seeger Sessions tour, Springsteen shared his deep identification with the internal struggle implied by old spirituals like “Jacob’s Ladder.” While the *Magic* album seemed to veer wide of the Seeger Sessions ethos, *Working on a Dream* re-engages mythically with what Greil Marcus would call “old, weird America” and Gram Parsons deemed “cosmic American music.” *Working* suggests the universe operates according to “cosmic” principles of justice, judgment, and salvation, but is best understood from the standpoint of what Freud would call “dream work” and “dream thoughts.” As unfolded in Frank Caruso’s illustrations for the picturebook alter ego of *Working*’s “Outlaw Pete,” these dynamics may allude to Springsteen’s conflicted relationship with his father.

The occasion of the publication in December 2014 of a picturebook version of Bruce Springsteen’s “Outlaw Pete,” the first and longest song on the album *Working on a Dream* (2009), offers Springsteen scholars and fans alike a good reason to revisit material that, as biographer Peter Ames Carlin remarks, failed in the spring American tour of that year to “light up the arenas.”¹ When the *Working on a Dream* tour opened in April 2009 in San Jose, at least

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¹ Peter Ames Carlin, *Bruce* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 439.

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half of the new record's songs were featured in the show, with the lengthy "Outlaw Pete" enjoying a prominent position near the beginning of the line-up. But only "Working on a Dream" (briefly heard during Springsteen's 2009 Super Bowl performance) would survive in the tour's set list, much to Jon Landau's chagrin: "On the *Magic* [2007] tour, he was doing seven or eight *Magic* songs a night. And on the *Working* tour [the new songs] weren't making a connection to the live audience that we would like them to make. Not for lack of trying, though."² For the London Hyde Park concert in the summer of 2009, Springsteen donned a black cowboy hat for the E Street Band's rendition of "Outlaw Pete," bringing it down over his eyes in a way that anticipates the picturebook's cover illustration of the toddler whose eyes are well-hidden by his oversized hat. However, a jostling YouTube video of the performance records people talking, only vaguely interested, and perhaps just not getting what's going on, though a documentary camera man is right in front of them, and Springsteen is obviously all but acting out Pete's cliff-side drama.³

Marc Dolan's *Bruce Springsteen and the Promise of Rock'n'Roll* (2012) suggests that despite the usual marketing gimmicks for a legendary performer—in this case, Guitar Hero tie-ins and a greatest hits album exclusive to Wal-Mart—the problem was the plummeting economy, which made "one of his happiest albums" a hard sell.⁴ Dolan also points out that Springsteen had come ready

² Carlin, *Bruce*, 439.

³ Tailschao123, "Bruce Springsteen - Outlaw Pete (London Hyde Park 28th June 2009)," July 6, 2009, accessed May 28, 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tap78FAjRfE>.

⁴ Marc Dolan, *Bruce Springsteen and the Promise of Rock 'N' Roll* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 433

with a musical line-up less reminiscent of *Born in the U.S.A.* (1985) and more like the Seeger Sessions tour, including back-up vocals by Curtis King and Cindy Mizelle, recently of the Sessions Band: “At times, it seemed as if Springsteen was trying to combine those two bands to make this his ultimate tour.”⁵ Eventually, Springsteen’s receptiveness to song requests on hand-scrawled signs hoisted by fans suggests that “stump-the-band” quickly became the best and surest route to re-accommodating Springsteen’s rock audience. Casualties of this new feature included not only the Seeger-inspired material but also the *Working on a Dream* songs in general and “Outlaw Pete” in particular. But analyzing “Outlaw Pete” and *Working on a Dream* in light of Frank Caruso’s picturebook affords an ideal opportunity to revisit what seemed to be a foregone conclusion by the *Magic* tour of 2007: that Bruce Springsteen had been cured of whatever preoccupation had driven him to the Seeger Sessions and was once again back in the saddle of the E Street Band as a way-back machine for his fan-base and the ideal platform from which to propound his political grievances.

A serious re-examination of “Outlaw Pete” suggests that the real legacy of the Seeger Sessions was delayed by an album: more than on *Magic*, the legacy of the Seeger Sessions seems to have dynamically informed *Working on a Dream*, whose allusive production values of aural dreaming, faraway voices, and twinkling grace notes highlight and underscore motifs and themes that do not lend themselves to any one candidate’s election. The thematic territory of *Working on a Dream* is a mythic American experience rather than a partisan one. A thoughtful analysis of the

⁵ Dolan, *Bruce Springsteen*, 432.

album also reveals that Springsteen may have injected something profound about his own psyche into the mythic mystery of the narrative in “Outlaw Pete,” obliquely plumbing the depths of *dream-thoughts* that banished an archetypal father-figure only to bring him back as all in all. *Working on a Dream* is the delayed, but now effusive, recollection of the dream-*work* of the Seeger Sessions’ recordings and tour.

The terms “dream-work” and “dream-thoughts” are featured in Sigmund Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Dream-*work* refers to the content – characters and plot-line – of the dream. Dream-*thoughts* comprise the seething repository of unconscious fears and wishes we would rather not confront in waking life. When Freud was seven or eight and relapsed into the bedwetting of his toddlerhood, his father impatiently declared, “This boy will come to nothing.”⁶ Years later, as an adult, Freud was dozing in his train seat before the train pulled out of the station. He dreamed of an old man who had trouble seeing at the train station. Freud intervened on the old man’s behalf by helping him avoid the embarrassment of public incontinence. When Freud awoke, he immediately connected the old man in the dream with his actual glaucoma-afflicted father who was incontinent and dependent like a child upon the son who performed the role of “sick-nurse” until the father passed away.⁷ Arguably, the dream was compensatory “revenge” because “the roles,” as Freud put it, “were interchanged.”⁸ But the dreamer had mercy on the dream-father,

⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Trans. James Strachey; Ed. James Strachey, Alan Tyson, and Angela Richards; Vol. 4 (London and New York: Penguin, 1991), 309.

⁷ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 302.

⁸ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 309.

and the waking son took no satisfaction in recalling the father's infantile regression. In *Interpretation*, Freud adds a rueful thought: the dream-work had put him in mind of a play "in which God the Father is ignominiously treated as a paralytic old man."⁹

The song "Independence Day" on *The River* opens with this kind of father-son reversal, as the son tells the father when bedtime is, not the other way around. But the son-as-father eventually falters at the end, taking on the guilt of an entire generation—a whole society—which has effectively robbed the father of his proper place of honor and authority in the world. The son describes this nation as groping in the darkness, victims, not culprits, of a social structure that no longer works or makes sense now that the father-figure has been deposed, marginalized, and forgotten. The people may have wandered away from the father-figure, but the blame for the father's shameful displacement rests with the son. The son takes upon himself the guilt for the people's loss of their law-giver and judge.

The continuity between the Seeger Sessions and the *Working* album is Springsteen's version of what Gram Parsons—briefly a member of The Byrds and a founding member of The Flying Burrito Brothers—must have meant by "Cosmic American Music" and what Greil Marcus meant by "invisible republic," or, even better, "the old, weird America."¹⁰ The purposeful improvisation of the Seeger Sessions delivers on the conditions necessary for cosmic dream-work, a form of storytelling that must proceed by the

⁹ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 310n.

¹⁰ Jessica Hundley with Polly Parsons, *Grievous Angels: An Intimate Biography of Gram Parsons* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005), 113; Greil Marcus, *The Old, Weird America: The World of Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes* (New York: Picador, 2011).

indirection of distortion, condensation, and outright reversal as in those dream-thoughts that when we awake make us cry out, “If only it had been the other way around!”¹¹ Gram Parsons never precisely defined Cosmic American Music, but Sid Griffin argues that his “vivid images of sin, revenge, and redemption” make Parsons the “Edgar Allan Poe of Rock.”¹² In his work on Parsons, Bob Kealing affirms the necessary ingredients of “sin and redemption.” Certainly, Cosmic American Music “can be traced to hymns and sacred spirituals.”¹³ A sense of place is crucial as well. Stars have to come out, and the difference between this world and the next should be tenuous and unreliable: “In the spellbinding din of silence at twilight, constellations come into view. Generations of southern grandmas have told their babies all those twinkling stars are just holes in the bottom of heaven.”¹⁴ The American West is just as viable. For Parsons, the desert nighttime above Joshua Tree, California, offered an “endless starscape” and a “cosmic setting.”¹⁵

However, Cosmic American Music is not spacey or new age regarding good, evil, and the depravity of the human heart; it *is* uncompromising about the wages of sin. Specifically, Parsons rejected the “peaceful, easy” ethos of the pre-*Hotel California* Eagles. In Peter Doggett’s *Are You Ready for the Country*, Robert Christgau makes this relevant point: “It’s no accident [...] that the Eagles’ hip country music excises precisely what is deepest and most gripping

¹¹ Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 441.

¹² Sid Griffin, *Gram Parsons: A Music Biography* (Pasadena: Sierra Books, 1985), 24.

¹³ Bob Kealing, *Calling Me Home: Gram Parsons and the Roots of Country Rock* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 2, 3.

¹⁴ Kealing, *Calling Me Home*, 11.

¹⁵ Kealing, *Calling Me Home*, 196.

about country music—its adult working-class pain [and] its paradoxically rigid ethics.”¹⁶ The vice-like moral economy of Cosmic American Music is Old Testament in regard to its ordeals and testing. Salvation is hard work, akin to the Israelites taking a generation to reach the Promised Land and Jacob wrestling with the angel of the Lord (Genesis 32:23-33), the same Jacob who dreamed of angels descending from and ascending to heaven on a ladder (Genesis 28:10-22). “That means we’re getting to that place rung by rung by rung,” said Springsteen at the Datch Forum in Milan in May 2006, just before launching into “Jacob’s Ladder”: “You can’t wish your way to heaven.”¹⁷ The difficulty of salvation lies in the irreducible status of sin, as Springsteen remarks in an afterword to the picturebook: “*Outlaw Pete* is essentially the story of a man trying to outlive and outlast his sins. He’s challenging fate by trying to outrun his poisons, his toxicity. Of course, you can’t do that. *Where we go, they go.*”¹⁸ The song “The Price You Pay” on the single record version of *The River* features a long-lost verse that reinforces the indelible nature of our actions. The universe never forgets a debt owed:

Some say forget the past, and some say don’t look back.
 But for every breath you take, you leave a track.
 And though it don’t seem fair, for every smile that breaks,
 A tear must fall somewhere for the price you pay.

¹⁶ Peter Doggett, *Are You Ready for the Country: Elvis, Dylan, Parsons, and the Roots of Country Rock* (New York and London: Penguin, 2000), 157.

¹⁷ Springsteenfan, “Bruce Springsteen w/ the Seeger Sessions Band, Full Live Concert, Datch Forum, Milan, 2006-05-12,” June 11, 2015, accessed May 14, 2016: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FvV-DaSalQ>.

¹⁸ Emphasis added; Bruce Springsteen, “Afterword,” in Bruce Springsteen and Frank Caruso *Outlaw Pete* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

The airy ease in “The Price You Pay” of long *i* and *a* vowel sounds almost lulls the listener into reverie, but the effect is pulled up short by the hard *k* consonants of words like “back,” “take,” “track,” and especially “breaks.” We rack up a tab in our swath through the universe, and we must settle our accounts.

Significantly, both the single album and officially-released versions of *The River* retain the verse in “The Price You Pay” that alludes to Moses the law-giver. Ironically and tragically, the law-giver pays the ultimate price, which is to be left behind by his own people. Moses became angry with the people he was leading out of Egypt, whose attitude never failed to become peevish and ungrateful: “Listen to me, you rebels!” he said, standing next to a rock God promised would provide water if Moses spoke to it, “Are we to bring water for you out of this rock?” (Numbers 20:11). Instead of speaking to it as directed by God, Moses struck the rock angrily, as if he did not really want the rock to give water to the faithless people. The rock did burst forth with water, but God punished Moses. The last thing Moses does is write God’s law on a scroll and put it inside the Ark of the Covenant. Afterwards, God takes him to an impossibly high mountain from whose ledge he can see the Promised Land spread out before him from “all the circuit of the Jordan” stretching “as far as the western sea” (Deuteronomy 34:2). God tells Moses he cannot enter that Promised Land with the people. They will cross the Jordan into the land of milk and honey without their spiritual father, prophet, and law-giver. “Outlaw Pete” roars back with the son-as-father who will take the law-giver’s place on the high mountain ledge and remain there in his stead.

“Outlaw Pete” introduces Bounty Hunter *Dad* in the person of his single-minded alter ego, Bounty Hunter *Dan*, who proceeds along an impossibly unerring trajectory that gives him the drop on Outlaw Pete, also a single-minded figure who once upon a time proceeded around heaven’s wheel, succeeding against all odds, as if fate itself were aiding and abetting his crime spree. Still cursed by success, the indefatigable son undoes the showdown of the unswerving, unstinting father and reflexively puts a knife through the bounty-hunter’s heart. But *Dad’s* prophetic voice still speaks, defying death at the hands of the outlaw *son*. The defeat has been reversed. *Dad* now reigns in spirit though he lost in the flesh. His authority speaks in a soft voice directly into Pete’s ear, and his judgment thunders above in a chorus that intones over and over the accusatory, damning refrain, “*You’re* Outlaw Pete! Can you hear me?” Outlaw Pete’s killing of the father-figure has elevated and multiplied the father’s voice into a vast cloud of witnesses, a many-voiced heavenly jury filling up the universe with a verdict the son feels as keenly as if handed down by God. He has avoided human arrest, but he has been found guilty in the *cosmic* sense. His remaining mission is to vindicate the father and to make the father’s plight his own.

In the 2006 BBC concert at London’s St. Luke’s, Springsteen and the Sessions Band kicked off with “John Henry,” the first verse of which features the infant John Henry on his father’s lap, wielding a hammer and little piece of steel and prophesying (accurately) to his father that these two things would someday be the death of his son. The traditional song has the son prophesy from his mama’s lap. Springsteen’s change to his father’s knee – inspired no doubt by Pete Seeger’s version, which has “papa’s knee” – has

the effect of implying that the father passes on his way of life to the son. The “Lord, Lord” of the toddler-son’s mournful acknowledgement that the hammer will bring his death seems to be reverential of the father. John Henry competes admirably against the steam-powered hammer, but he perishes immediately after the contest, a martyr to what feels like a commission of suffering on behalf of his father. The song that follows at St. Luke’s – heralded by piano flourish, a riff on the violin, and finally a slow barrage of New Orleans styled horns – is “Oh, Mary Don’t You Weep.” Springsteen’s version is different from the traditional spiritual. Aretha Franklin’s famous 1972 rendition, for instance, features Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, telling Jesus that if he had not delayed his coming, her brother would still be alive (John 11:32). The Springsteen version of “Oh, Mary Don’t You Weep” borrows the first verse of another spiritual, “Mary Wore Three Links of Chain”: “Mary wore three links of chain, each link bearing Jesus’s name.” This Mary is ambiguous, perhaps a slave, or Mary, mother of Jesus, or somehow both. Springsteen sings the most prophetic part without instrumental backing. With only the accompaniment of backup vocalists, he becomes Bounty Hunter *Bruce* as oracle, telling of a rainbow promise laced with dire warning: God gave Noah the sign of the rainbow, but the next such sign will bring fire, not water. The mash-up of Old and New Testament, biblical and American history, is vintage cosmic American music.¹⁹

¹⁹ Graat1962, “Bruce Springsteen & Seeger Sessions Band – St. Luke’s Church, London 2006,” December 25, 2012, accessed May 16, 2016: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_pqJrtQECo.

The next song, “How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live?,” begins with Springsteen’s patter about President Bystander, the failure of the Katrina rescue, and builds in new verses Springsteen wrote for New Orleans. The paradigm of the new lyric reinforces the suspense of “Oh, Mary Don’t You Weep”: the poor man of the flooded neighborhood suffers the neglect of a false father-figure whose pep talk is no different from the doctor’s cop-out pill. The unnamed leader talks of fun times with school friends and takes a short walk but seems oblivious to the suffering around him. The true *cosmic* father—the real father, prophet, and law-giver—can no more be deterred from his righteous judgment than the train can forget to follow the track. For a moment in “How Can a Poor Man,” the drummer is the only musician who accompanies the voices. In that gap, just before the horns, pedal steel guitar, and keyboards rush back in, Bounty Hunter *Bruce* and the back-up singers intone prophetic words like a fired-up church choir that a judgement—a reckoning—is coming.

If Bounty Hunter *Bruce* is the prophet of retribution, then Pete is the retribution itself, a juggernaut of devastation, albeit in diapers. The cover-art of the picturebook *Outlaw Pete* features a white light that shines upon what looks like red-speckled yellow plaster. In the center of the light is the toddler hoodlum, his legs splayed and bowlegged, his feet bare, and his face masked by a white handkerchief. His hands hover by his side as if about to draw nonexistent six-guns. On his head, its brim pulled low upon his brow and covering his eyes, his cowboy hat is huge, many times too big for a small child, but nonetheless it fits his head perfectly. Behind the hat and toddler is the shadow the white light creates: a gigantic, dark alter ego magnifying the cowboy hat to colossal size

and driving home the mystery of Outlaw Pete. Why is this child able to commit adult-sized crimes and remain at large? The key line in the lyrics is suggestive but not expansive: "He robbed a bank in his diapers and his little bare baby feet." The illustration piles on the unlikely effect of the toddler's self-declaration that his name is Outlaw Pete. The bank teller hands over bags of money that must weigh more than the toddler himself. The weapon is merely the left hand of the child, his thumb up and forefinger out in the shape of a pistol. The teller's eyes are round and frightened, both hands up and extended through the bars of his cashier's window as if he were begging for his life. Earlier, we see an illustration of the disconsolate Pete (still wearing his hat down low over his eyes) languishing for months in a jail, marking off the days on a wall. The obvious implication is that Pete does not learn from punishment — nor does the universe.

Marc Dolan argues that the secret thread Springsteen was following through the Seeger Sessions was the same he had been tracing back for more than two decades, perhaps the most obvious moment being a birthday party in September of 1997 that Springsteen threw for himself featuring the Gotham Playboys. The group would return to Springsteen's farmhouse some weeks later to record "We Shall Overcome" for *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?*, the first volume of *The Songs of Pete Seeger*, released the following year. All the while, Springsteen's participation in the experience is drawing on a mysterious, improvised dynamic that Dolan argues is akin to what we find in *The Basement Tapes*: that is, what Bob Dylan and The Band were doing at Big Pink in 1967 while the rest of popular culture was centered on the Beatles and their forays into psychedelic music. Springsteen took the end of this

string and followed traditional American music back to Smithville, the capital of old, weird America, so named by Marcus in honor of Harry Smith and his seminal 1952 compendium *Anthology of American Folk Music*. "As Greil Marcus showed," Dolan explains, "in his book *Invisible Republic* (released a little earlier in 1997), that was essentially what Dylan did after his 1966 motorcycle accident. Seeking to refill his well of inspiration, he dove with Levon Helm and the Hawks into the basement of a rambling house in Woodstock, New York, and played the 'old, weird' rural blues and country songs from the 1920s."²⁰

In Dolan's view, the Seeger Sessions offered Springsteen refuge from the disappointments and stress of political stumping: "Despite what some commentators would erroneously assume, 'the Seeger Sessions,' as the farmhouse recordings would soon be called, did not begin life as a political project. In fact, the most fruitful sessions, just after the presidential election in 2004, probably stemmed from a desire to get away from politics for a while and just have fun making music."²¹ Springsteen, according to Dolan, dutifully threw in with Democratic Party presidential candidate John Kerry in 2004, but after the election he became politically diffident and eluded obvious opportunities to make a big political statement. Prodded, for instance, by a radio DJ in January 2006 to say something profound and politically-charged about *Nebraska's* ideology, Springsteen jarringly said the songs were just "to get women to pull their pants down."²² This inexplicable remark would continue to serve Springsteen for the purpose of

²⁰ Dolan, *Bruce Springsteen*, 339-342.

²¹ Dolan, *Bruce Springsteen*, 397.

²² Emphasis in the original; Dolan, *Bruce Springsteen*, 395.

derailing his own inclination to get on a soapbox. The dream-work of the *Working* period eschews self-righteousness. Just before “Jacob’s Ladder” at St. Luke’s, Springsteen identifies with the spiritual struggle of Jacob: “He was sort of somebody who was always doing it wrong in God’s eyes, and God kept giving him things to do to work back into grace. He’d get step-by-step-by-step, screw up, keep going step-by-step-by-step, screw up again until finally I guess he got there. He got there sort of *close*. We’re all climbing Jacob’s Ladder, rung-by-rung-by-rung; you can ask my wife.” In *Working*’s “Good Eye,” the narrator confesses that he is *completely* blind, morally-speaking. “Good Eye” is reminiscent of Outlaw Pete who will only give up his evil ways when he has defeated the cosmic father-figure, not intentionally, but like Oedipus at the far end of a path of blind destruction.

In *Outlaw Pete*, an inexplicable, mysterious order of things facilitates the child’s crimes and sends him back out to top himself. After his post-jail bank heist—accomplished, as previously mentioned, in only diapers, his eye-obscuring ten-gallon hat, and with no weapon but his fingers pointing like a gun—he climbs to a cliff’s edge and with wide-open mouth and cupped hands yells three times in a row to the open blue sky, “I’m Outlaw Pete!” The illustration, not the song itself, offers the cliff’s edge for the first occasion of the refrain. In so doing, Frank Caruso, the book’s illustrator, anticipates the song’s much later, penultimate scene where an adult Outlaw Pete and his mustang pony arrive at the edge of an icy cliff in winter. Caruso makes the cliff the recurring locus of the song’s “Can You Hear Me?” refrain, except for when Bounty Hunter Dan dies, and his disembodied voice leads an invisible choir that rails at Pete from above.

On the page after the first cliff-side refrain, Caruso drenches the page with a dark blue wash coursed by bleary white streaks as the now 25-year-old Pete steals a mustang pony. Despite the book's emblematic toddler in ten-gallon hat, we are reminded that, early on, the song abandons the innocent-seeming fun of an outlaw baby in diapers. Most of the song is adult and tragically ironic in its story of an outlaw youth who is condemned to fulfill a crime spree to the last drop of innocent blood. He rides the mustang repeatedly along "heaven's wheel," the effect being a soul-numbing "round and round" repetition of pillage and death, all of it inflicted by an outrageously, impossibly successful outlaw. According to James Hillman, the circular motion of never learning one's lesson is a form of infernal punishment, even if in Pete's case the circuit is heaven's wheel: "To be put on the wheel in punishment (as Ixion) is to be put into an archetypal place ... and the endless repetitions of coming eternally back to the same experiences without release."²³ Caruso renders a disconsolate Outlaw Pete on his knees, smeared head-to-foot with red splotches inside a dark chapel with white votive candles. The red-yellow candle light is blotched with bloody smears like those covering Outlaw Pete's body and even his hat, which for now is carefully removed and lying by his knees. He is praying and confessing: "Father Jesus, I'm an outlaw, killer and a thief." On the next page, no one stops him as he gallops on his pony out of the churchyard back to that cliff's edge, where as a toddler he had shouted his mantra "I'm Outlaw Pete" so confidently. Here, now older and apparently feeling cursed, he calls to heaven plaintively and helplessly, "I'm Outlaw Pete! Can You Hear Me?"

²³ James Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 161

In keeping with the third essay of his *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Northrop Frye would probably assign the picturebook *Outlaw Pete* to the sixth (the deepest, most final) phase of the Mythos of Winter (Irony and Satire), where the realm of eternal punishment is not infernal heat, but rather infernal *cold*, which is precisely what we find in the ninth circle of Dante's *Inferno*. The "erudite irony" of this "demonic epiphany" is that we are delivered to the heart of the heart of darkness and it's a miserably —hellishly— cold frozen lake and river.²⁴ Trapped in the center of the innermost ring—named *Caina* after Cain in Genesis—is the gigantic form of Satan himself, imprisoned in the ice "up from his midchest."²⁵ According to Hillman, the therapeutic goal is to see ourselves imprisoned in the Dantean ice: "that there is a piece of the soul that would live forever cast out from both human and heavenly company."²⁶ *Working's* "Outlaw Pete" assigns this ironic type of infernal punishment to the son, whose crime wave comes to an end when it takes the life of Bounty Hunter *Dad*. The son willingly makes himself the damned figure frozen in the abysmal ice. The picturebook makes this place of punishment the icy ledge where the son once seemed to boast to heaven, daring it to try to stop him. However, now Pete stops himself on behalf of the father-figure/law-giver Bounty Hunter *Dad*, whom he never meant to kill. Pete never accepted the verdict upon him until the words were whispered by the Bounty Hunter into his ear.

²⁴ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 238, 239.

²⁵ Allen Mandelbaum (trans.) *Inferno: The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980), 311, Canto 34, line 29.

²⁶ Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld*, 169.

The song's bridge drives home the slaughter by Outlaw Pete and his attendant guilt: "He cut his trail of tears across the countryside / And where he went, women wept and men died." In Caruso's picturebook, the illustration is especially telling. The reader is placed just behind the women-folk weeping in their handkerchiefs, while their men are caught in mid-crumple and mid-totter, dropping their rifles and pistols, each recoiling in his own way from the full brunt of Pete's deadly accuracy. The men never stood a chance. They were armed, but fate would only smile upon Outlaw Pete—God's ironic favorite, like Cain in Genesis.

Caruso's illustration for the third verse of "Outlaw Pete" seems to unfurl a banner of death above the outlaw's head. Pete stirs awake beside the red coals of his campfire. The reader sees the image of his dream: a skull with vast red and black eyes still hovering above Pete as he covers his eyes with his hand and hat brim. He then flees on his horse across a blood-red swatch into the sunbaked desolation of the American West. The blue darkness of the next four pages repeats the visual motif of the initial theft of the mustang pony at the age of 25, but now Caruso makes the indigo world a montage of winter on the "res" where Pete takes a Navajo girl as his wife on one page and on the other cradles their baby daughter in his arms, the threesome nestled together in the dark. The white blur above the theft of the mustang pony is now transmuted into the white streaks of winter snow across the blue-swathed family hunkered down in a teepee. Turn the page and the inevitable "Can You Hear Me?" refrain on the cliff-side is equally drenched in blue, and the white smear becomes the circle of a vast moon behind three figures wrapped in the same blanket. Pete's little family seems to be crying out from the cliff to be left alone.

Pete will quit his crime wave if the world would just leave him alone. He wants and expects a separate peace. But out of the past comes Bounty Hunter *Dad*, his horse exploding out of giant smoky bellows of gray and white paint strokes. He comes from the opposite direction of the cliff-side appeal to be left alone, as if to say, not so fast: now a price must be paid for all that suffering Pete has caused.

Perhaps surprising to anyone comparing *Magic* and *Working on a Dream* would be Springsteen's explanation of "Outlaw Pete" in his interview with Mark Hagen of the *Guardian* in January, 2009. According to Springsteen, "Outlaw Pete" makes the allegorical connection between a cock-sure America at the inception of the Iraq War and the rampaging young sure-shot Outlaw Pete who learns too late that he cannot avoid paying for the mistakes he made under the influence of his heady, cannot-lose confidence: "We had a historically blind administration," Springsteen argues, "who didn't take consideration of the past; thousands and thousands of people died, lives were ruined, and terrible, terrible things occurred because there was no sense of history, no sense that the past is living and real."²⁷ Springsteen then describes the basic plotline of "Outlaw Pete," with an emphasis on the indefatigable Bounty Hunter Dan as righting the balance upset by Outlaw Pete – whom Springsteen equates with American over-reach. According to Springsteen, Pete and Dan are both "possessed characters," a protagonist and antagonist equally infused by and representing

²⁷ Mark Hagen, Interview with Bruce Springsteen, *The Guardian*. January 18, 2009 in *Talk About a Dream: The Essential Interview of Bruce Springsteen*, eds. Christopher Phillips and Louis P. Masur, (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 357.

larger spiritual dynamics. Their respective fates are as inexorable as those of characters in a Greek tragedy. "In other words," Springsteen explains, "your past is your past. You carry it with you always. These are your sins. You carry them with you always. You better learn how to live with them, learn the story that they're telling you."²⁸ Bounty Hunter Dan/Dad is the *righteous* force. Pete is the one whose round-and-round perimeter is both symbolic of sin and of the curse upon the sin.

In the same interview, Springsteen keeps several related ideas going, but all of them speak to something about who we are in the relational sense that never changes and never passes away. Sometimes this irreducible quality is good news, as in what he says about "Kingdom of Days": "The normal markers of the day, the month, the year – as you get older those very fearsome markers . . . in the presence of love – they lose some of their power." To the degree that we are available to someone else, we endure – that part of us that belongs to someone else – as everything else is borne off into the past: "And at certain moments, time is obliterated in the presence of somebody you love; there seems to be a transcendence of time in love. Or I believe that there is." Still talking about "Kingdom of Days," he says, "I carry a lot of people with me that aren't there any more." When Hagen observes that Springsteen has had to deal with the death of people close to him and his own age, Springsteen cries out "Oh, there's something else, my friend!" His friendships in the band remain what they were, perfectly and everlastingly a "group effort." The thing that "we did together" is the "surviving part."²⁹

²⁸ Hagen, Interview with Bruce Springsteen, 357.

²⁹ Hagen, Interview with Bruce Springsteen, 361-362, 364.

However, in the same interview Springsteen argues that this same irreducible dynamic implies that the part of us that belongs to others, if we fail or are stymied in some respect, is not going to disappear. That failed self at whatever age it was sticks around, making a nuisance of itself. We are, so to speak, driving a car filled with ourselves at different stages of our lives, all jostling each other with different levels of maturity: "That's never going to change," Springsteen insists. "Nobody's leaving. Nobody's getting thrown out by the roadside." What he means is that he can never discard the sum total of what he has been (or failed to be) in his life: "The doors are shut, locked and sealed, until you go into your box." What Springsteen calls our "inner geography" for most of us is "quite firmly set pretty early on" as in the case of the protagonist in the album's bonus song, "The Wrestler." The Wrestler is only available to the universe as someone who takes a beating and otherwise absorbs punishment: "And that was a song about damage," Springsteen observes, "about what it does to somebody with the inability to get into normal life. The inability to stand the things that nurture you. Because much of our life is spent running. We're running, we're on the run; one of my specialties."³⁰

Returning to *Working on a Dream*, we find Springsteen's take on cosmic American music. At every turn is a moral economy that will not forgive without a price being paid. The song "Life Itself" expresses the temptation that feels and tastes like life itself – hence our inability to resist it. But the consequence in "What Love Can Do" is a whole world under the curse of Cain. The price tag for sin in cosmic American music is never piecemeal, never forgetful, but basically the destruction of everything imaginable, including the

³⁰ Hagen, Interview with Bruce Springsteen, 363-364.

world itself, which lies in desolate ruin beneath a dead sun. In a sense, we have come to the center of Dante's innermost circle of the ninth ring, the desolate realm of *Caina*. The desolation is not so much Cain's as it is his father's. In *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, "Adam Raised a Cain" seems to give us the outlaw son in ascendance. But the son destroys on behalf of the father. However, we are only a moment from a complete reversal, as *Working's* "What Love Can Do" asserts that love can overcome the disaster of the father's dark vengeance, because these two people are irreducible in regard to their connection. According to Carl Jung's *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, the best word for such mythic reversal is *enantiodromia*, when, at the most extreme end of one direction, the dreamer experiences a "conversion into its opposite," and "one must now realize the other side of one's being."³¹ When all hope is buried in cold, dark sunless debris, love digs out.

In the next song, "This Life," the love carved into the previous song's temple column seems to explode out into the beginning of the universe. Just as profound are the moments at rest, the still-points and holding in place that may seem final, even death-like, but in the spirit of *enantiodromian* reversal, just when the beloved seems the most tied down, dormant, and otherwise fixed in place, eternity volcanically erupts, unfolding new universes from the dead center as a multitude of suns arise, cresting at the same point. The still-points are only lulls in the creative action, starting points for a creative urgency that cycles through the

³¹ C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Volume 9, Part 1 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*. Trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 239n, 272.

universe “at rest” when the singer touches the hem of the woman’s dress. This “hem” motif may allude to the gospel story about the “hem of his garment”: “A woman suffering hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him [Christ] and touched the tassel on his cloak [or “hem of his garment” in the King James]. She said to herself, ‘If only I can touch his cloak, I shall be cured.’ Jesus turned around and saw her, and said ‘Courage, daughter! Your faith has saved you.’ And from that hour the woman was cured” (Matthew 9:20-22; cf. Luke 8:48). Where she touches the hem is not only a still-point—a clutching of Christ’s cloak by a dying hand—but also a connection from which new worlds are born.

In “This Life,” we can hear the “est” sound of the “universe at rest” and “hem of your dress” resonate throughout the song, as in “With you I have been blessed” and “This emptiness I’ve roamed.” Most importantly, the “rest” of “dress” chimes with “this life and then the next,” making the point again that something irreducible between people can never be lost. The singer speaks of his telescope, himself the lonely stargazer looking for a “home,” the lonesome sound of “alone” perpetuated by “I’ve roamed.” The song can be rearranged and still make the same circulating point of long “o” loneliness giving way to nested bliss in the “rest/dress” sound, which connotes arriving home. Even the “cresting” suns reinforce the motif with the “blessed” sound and rhyme. The arching sound of “charms,” “arms” and the “drifting dark” lets the sound of “stars” linger and repeat. They are the explosive result of their love, as a creation of worlds on and on, “Rushing in red out of our arms.” The repeating “r” sounds are literally arcs, arches being hung in space, making their two sets of human arms (when they’re holding each other) the beginning of all things and coming before

all time. In truth, "Surprise, Surprise" is probably the real last song of the album and appropriately the singer is telling the beloved to open her eyes and gaze out upon the universe which love has created. The image of trying to crown the beloved figure upon the breast seems strained when the head would seem the logical choice, but "breast" will keep the "rest/dress" rhyme and sound going from "This Life" (and then the *next*). Naturally, the sun must "caress" and "bless" the beloved figure. Creative motion always comes back to the sounds of "rest" and "blessed" still-points.

"Queen of the Supermarket" is producer Brendan O'Brien's masterpiece of longing and desire, layered in faraway sounding voices, as if Homer's Odysseus were once again tied to his mast and his ship floating past the seductive sirens. But the dream that enchants him is ever elusive, receding before the dreamer with his shopping cart. Yes, he can see the beauty others have overlooked or taken for granted standing at the cash register. But something more profound happens when the eyes of the dreamer finally connect with the woman behind the counter. The song has found its thematic center, which is explosive and creative in the same motion. The temple exists only ephemerally, evanescently – temporarily. It has no real being but for the two sets of eyes that meet. When she acknowledges that connection, the temple is blown apart – it no longer exists on its former terms.

In September of 2009 and again in January of 2010, Elvis Costello interviewed Springsteen for his UK/Canadian TV show *Spectacle*. Springsteen introduced another element of dream-work: the riding "round and round" of trying to escape Catholic guilt. "But at the same time," Springsteen says of St. Rose of Lima parochial school, where he attended as a child, "it was epic canvas

and it gave you a sense of revelation, retribution, perdition, bliss, ecstasy. When you think that that was presented to you as a five- or six-year-old child ... I think I've been trying to write my way out of it ever since" – then he adds, "And it ain't going to happen." Here the idea of a youngster, and later a young man, trying to write, or ride, his way out of guilt is reminiscent of Outlaw Pete, who always comes back to the same cliff's edge, never able to escape the round of heaven's wheel. However, what stands out the most to Springsteen about religion is strikingly ironic: "There is the religious element of, I need to be transformed – that for some reason you need to be transformed into something other than what you are." If the changeless sameness of guilt is the implication of religion for Springsteen, then its spiritual goal is paradoxical – to become something else. Springsteen adds that "Catholicism is good for shooting at you, straight into you."³² The picturebook foregrounds an enormous, imposing revolver, cocked and leveled at Pete, who has no realistic avenue of escape. But, once again, against all odds Pete undoes the "drop," throwing a knife from his boot straight into Dan/*Dad's* heart.

Somehow fate seems satisfied – as does Bounty Hunter Dan, who lies dying in the sun with a smile on his face. His last words require Pete – as in the illustration – to lean in and cup his ear just above Dan's still small voice that says, "We cannot undo these things we've done." Guilt-stricken, Pete flees deep into the West for forty days and nights, the same period of time the rain fell while Noah was in the ark (Genesis 7:4) and the same amount of time

³² Elvis Costello, Interview with Bruce Springsteen, *Spectacle*, September 25, 2009 and January 27, 2010, in Phillips and Masur eds., *Talk About a Dream*, 379-380.

Christ was tempted in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-2). In the picturebook, the one time the “Can You Hear Me?” refrain does *not* occur on the cliff-side is precisely here by the river where Dan momentarily had the drop and lost it to Pete’s uncanny luck. The Bounty Hunter may have succumbed to a knife through the heart, but his authority is now immortal. His eternal verdict upon Pete – “You” are the guilty party – reverberates in big broadside letters across the picturebook’s page. If the infant John Henry on his father’s lap is the forbear of the outlaw toddler in “Outlaw Pete,” we can better understand the tragic irony Springsteen has built into his variation on the theme. The son in “Adam Raised a Cain” plies his unstoppable tragic fate on behalf of the father. He would not be able to live with himself if he were responsible for the death of the father-figure. Outlaw Pete has flung his last deadly-accurate knife.

In the album’s requiem song, “The Last Carnival,” Billy is transparently a “Dan” himself – Danny Federici, the keyboardist who was especially notable for his accordion playing. The female speaker’s aching love belies who Billy was for the carnival: the man who pinned her all around with knives. The pinning of Billy’s knife just above her heart, the still-point of the erupting creation, and the touching of the Lord’s hem – all are places of rest and action, death and new creation. The woman in “The Last Carnival” asks a forlorn question, inquiring where handsome Billy has gone. In the last verse she speaks of a sky with millions of stars that she imagines as the living and the dead singing to her. In Caruso’s picturebook, the Navajo daughter mourns by herself on the edge of the cliff, but like the speaker of “The Last Carnival,” her lament rises and joins a company of voices above her head. In Caruso’s illustration, the last “Can You Hear Me” has no question mark and hovers in the midst

of an indigo sky speckled with glimmering star-like snowflakes, reminiscent of the “million stars” of “The Last Carnival.” Both *Outlaw Pete* and “The Last Carnival” presume the big, looming sky to be a repository of unseen singers who lend their voices to the lone person below, turning the solitary grief into a choir of many voices.

In the eulogy included in the lyric booklet, Springsteen reiterates his changeless model based on the permanence of how we connect with people: “Life does not separate you. Time does not separate you. Animosities do not separate you. Death does not separate you.” We all inevitably follow and fulfill the circuit, or wheel, of the ecliptic. The cliff’s edge hangs above the center, or axis, where the updraft rises; the center seems like empty void, but the abyss is filled with the force of the Spirit, bearing up the souls who ascend and descend, who can hover on (and in) the Spirit—like the hawks riding the thermals in Caruso’s illustration for the line, “He watched a hawk on a desert updraft slip and slide.” We turn the page and we have a choice: on the left side, the white icy form of Pete seems to go over the ledge into the abyss; on the right, Pete seems be frozen in place on the ledge, where some say he remains to this day. If we keep to the right, Pete has become like Satan in the lowest well of Dante’s *Inferno*: he is forever imprisoned—frozen in the ice—at the very center of the picturebook’s universe. Condemning himself for the death of the father-figure/law-giver, Outlaw Pete consigns himself to the edge of the precipice and pays the price set by the strict moral economy of cosmic American music. He fulfills the role of Moses the law-giver God kept behind on the impossibly high mountain ledge. The son punishes himself with the fate reserved for the father.

Biographer Dave Marsh documents Springsteen's on-stage description of how his father sat up late at night with all the lights in the house off, smoking in the kitchen. When Bruce got in trouble, he would be brought home by his mother. He would then have to walk the gauntlet of the kitchen: "And I'd stand there in the driveway, afraid to go in the house, and I could see the screen door, I could see the light of my pop's cigarette. And I remember I just couldn't wait until I was old enough to take him out once." If Springsteen's teenage self tried to bypass the kitchen, his father would hail him, and insist that his son share the impenetrable darkness with him: "And I can remember just sittin' there in the dark, him tellin' me . . . tellin' me, tellin' me, tellin' me. And I could always hear that voice, no matter how long I sat there. But I could never, ever see his face."³³ Ironically, the elder Springsteen would suffer a stroke and become completely different in personality. In the 1980s, all the emotional availability he had buried in "charred" despair came bubbling to the top, and wherever he went, Douglas charmed complete strangers with his affability and warm interest in everyone's life.³⁴ This *enantiodromian* reversal could not have been more remarkable, as recalled by Pam, the younger Springsteen sister: "Now he couldn't hide anything. . . . You could mention any of his kids' names to him and he'd burst into tears. You could see what meant the most to him. He was just a very real person. No pretense, no persona. And everyone loved him." One night after a concert by Springsteen, Douglas asked the superstar to sit in his lap: "So Bruce lowered himself, and all the years of hurt,

³³ Dave Marsh, *Bruce Springsteen: Two Hearts: The Definitive Biography 1972-2003* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 25.

³⁴ Carlin, *Bruce*, 32.

anger, and misunderstanding into his father's lap."³⁵ Cain is shocked by the Adam who is no longer driven to unleash a vengeful monster-son to wreak havoc on his behalf.

The *Working* album seems to return to Douglas as luckless loser in "My Lucky Day," where the singer speaks of losing "all the other bets I've made." Only that smile – which we saw in "Queen of the Supermarket" as well – offers the perennial loser any hope, any "grace." He admits he is deeply aware of the woman's grief: "I've counted the tears you've cried." He admits that the "dark of this exile" is all that is left for him and her both. Crucial to rehabilitating the father is imputing to him a full realization that we cannot undo what we have done, and that we must pay the wages of sin: Winning, the singer says, paraphrasing Bounty Hunter Dan, involves paying – most of it in the form of penitential ordeal. Dream-work is just that in the aptly titled "Working on a Dream." That which is irreducible is *not* peaceful and easy. The song "Tomorrow Never Knows" would seem to be care-free, not worrying about tomorrow, just focusing on today. But the song unfolds as more testimony to hard work. Whoever decides to just let tomorrow come is not redeeming the time.

On the lyric pamphlet page for "Tomorrow Never Knows," Springsteen lies sprawled on billows of white-yellow grass or hay, his guitar loosely held in his lap. His eyes are closed as if he were lost in reverie, dreamily recalling the way his beloved's "long hair flowed / Down by the Tildenberry tracks." The flat short "a" rhymes and hard "k" endings – as in *track* and *back* – not only tie together "Tildenberry tracks" and "you on my back" thematically, but they also remind us of the same cracking sounds of *fact, that,*

³⁵ Carlin, *Bruce*, 358.

and *back* in *Nebraska's* "Atlantic City." The Seeger Sessions' "How can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live?" features the same clicking and clacking of short 'a' and hard "k," and the performance builds and gathers momentum until we are certain that the train, which has momentarily disappeared around the bend along the far rim of its circuit, must necessarily return, hurtling back down the track with a special vengeance: "*Going to be a judgment that's a fact! A righteous train rolling down the track!*"

In Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, what comes back is the father. His sons overthrow him, but their regret for killing him leads to the reconstruction of society in the father's image: "They undid their deed by declaring that the killing of the father substitute, the totem, was not allowed, and renounced the fruits of their deed by denying themselves the liberated women." Outlaw Pete denies himself the two women in his life, his Navajo wife and their "fair" daughter, except *in memoriam*, as indicated in the song by the twining of buckskin cord in the latter's hair, and in the picturebook as the daughter kneels pleadingly on the cliff-side, calling out over and over for Outlaw Pete in the song's last refrain. The crucial dynamic behind the ushering back of the father is the "*sense of guilt of the son.*"³⁶ The passion to displace the father is now matched by an equal conviction that the father was irreplaceable: "They [the sons] hated the father who stood so powerfully in the way of their sexual demands and their desire for power, but they also loved and admired him."³⁷ Outlaw *Bruce* disappears over the edge of the cliff—that is, descends into "the lower regions of the earth"

³⁶ Emphasis in the original; Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* Trans. A. A. Brill (New York: Random House, 1946), 185.

³⁷ Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 184.

(Ephesians 4:9)—because he is guilt-ridden over the impulsive killing of Bounty Hunter *Dad*, who, in the words of the Apostle, is the rightful “Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (4:6). “Outlaw Pete” expresses the son’s deferral to the father. His voice resounds from the cosmic deep, multiplied over-and-over until as numerous as the snowflakes in the winter or the stars in the nighttime sky. *Everyone* lives again in that heavenly chorus. Outlaw Pete presides on the edge of the precipice, content it seems that the law-giving father-figure has back the world he lost. Now the debt is made good by the son. People are restored to each other. The great divide between the living and dead is overcome.

Springsteen’s descent into the dream-work of redeeming the father began many years before with the 1988 Folkways album, *A Vision Shared: A Tribute to Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly*. Springsteen contributed a solo version of Guthrie’s “I Ain’t Got No Home” and a modified E Street Band version of Guthrie’s “Vigilante Man.” In the official video for the latter, the camera fastens on the youthful Springsteen’s face, his lips occasionally quivering like Elvis and his eyebrows rising, but each time the lips and eyes slip back into a steady, unfeeling — *unsympathetic* — gaze. The gaze is reminiscent of that in the official video for “Brilliant Disguise,” which seems to recall the kitchen gauntlet of Douglas Springsteen. The camera closes in slowly on the even gaze of the acoustic guitar-strumming Springsteen, dressed in a work-shirt with rolled up sleeves and sitting in a shadowy 1950s-styled kitchen. His knowing-but-not-saying face seems to epitomize what Greil Marcus calls the classic American “mask,” a face and intonation that swallows emotion and belies a song’s drama with an almost expressionless flatness: “Such a way of speaking, or not speaking,” Marcus argues, “gives rise to

a belief that something is being left unsaid – or denied.”³⁸ But we sense the truth.

The face-behind-the-mask is the tormented father the world rejected, as Springsteen seems to inadvertently reveal in some unusual spectator-shot footage of a performance of “Outlaw Pete,” May 23, 2014, at the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall in Pittsburgh, wherein Springsteen’s teeth-gritting grin is strained to the point of apparent torture, as if he were being licked from behind by hell-fire. In the amateur YouTube footage, Springsteen seems to be offering his usual pre-song patter for “Outlaw Pete,” a speech about his mother, Adele, and her reciting lines from the Little Golden Book, *Brave Cowboy Bill*, every night before he went to sleep: “All the bad men,” she would say from memory “put their hands up. And they all stood still. Because NO one ever argued with the daring Cowboy Bill.” *Brave Cowboy Bill* has no father-figure because the son is sufficient to meet all needs. But that night in Pittsburgh, Springsteen is barely comprehensible as he reveals the father’s face behind the son’s, and we need an interpreter, a service Matt Orel performs in his set-list commentary for *Backstreets*:

Bruce explained that he had an anxiety attack that day and had taken an Ativan—perhaps too much Ativan. Did he say ‘chugged’? ... He carried on, introducing an acoustic ‘Outlaw Pete’ by saying ‘This next song is an hallucination’ and relating his childhood memories that launched the song.³⁹

³⁸ Marcus, *The Old, Weird America*, 133.

³⁹ Dan French, “2014-05-23 Pittsburgh-Outlaw Pete (solo acoustic),” May 28 2014, accessed May 28, 2015:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGXuPFhviRw>; Matt Orel, “May 23, Pittsburgh: Riding Round Heaven’s Wheel,” accessed May 28, 2015: <http://www.backstreets.com/newsarchive69.html>.

If Brave Cowboy Bruce thought he could replace his father, the older Bruce of “Outlaw Pete” seems to say otherwise. “Outlaw Pete” as song—and as performance that night at Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall—rejects any notion of the son triumphing in the father’s place. Brave Cowboy Bruce seems punished with the agony of the rejected father even as he tells the world of his mother’s privileging of the son over the father.

Cosmic American music gives the world back to the father who lost it. The son takes on the guilt of the world that robbed the father or made him obsolete. The son pays the cosmic price the world owes the father, and the world lives again in unison as so many voices helping the disembodied father reaffirm his rightful place, irrespective of the dead body lying beside the river. The dream-work of *Working on a Dream* gives shape to the dream-thoughts inspired by the Seeger Sessions, cosmic American music that asserts the unbreakable laws of cosmic justice. This dream-work is revelatory of what Springsteen believes is irreducible, never changing, and generative of new worlds.