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# BOSS

The Biannual  
Online-Journal of  
Springsteen Studies

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Volume 2 • Number 1 • 2016



Published by McGill University

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## **Mission Statement**

*BOSS: The Biannual Online-Journal of Springsteen Studies* aims to publish scholarly, peer-reviewed essays pertaining to Bruce Springsteen. This open-access journal seeks to encourage consideration of Springsteen's body of work primarily through the political, economic, and socio-cultural factors that have influenced his music and shaped its reception. *BOSS* welcomes broad interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches to Springsteen's songwriting and performance. The journal aims to secure a place for Springsteen Studies in the contemporary academy.

## **Submission Guidelines**

The editors of *BOSS* welcome submissions of articles that are rigorously researched and provide original, analytical approaches to Springsteen's songwriting, performance, and fan community. Inter- and cross-disciplinary works, as well as studies that conform to specific disciplinary perspectives, are welcome. Suggested length of submission is between 15 and 25 pages.

## **Contact**

To access *BOSS*, please visit <http://boss.mcgill.ca/>

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# Introduction

Welcome to the second issue of *BOSS: The Biannual Online-Journal of Springsteen Studies*, an open-access journal devoted to the study of the music, writing, and performance of Bruce Springsteen. In August 2014, McGill University published the inaugural edition of *BOSS*. We have been thrilled with the response. Thousands of scholars and fans from all over the world read the first issue, which received coverage in the *New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, *Harper's*, and numerous online outlets.

As with our first issue, published amidst Springsteen's *High Hopes* tour, we are delighted to release our latest issue at an exciting juncture for Springsteen Studies. Springsteen recently released *The Ties that Bind: The River Collection* (2015), a 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary re-visitation of his 1980 album, and has embarked on a corresponding world tour. Additionally, in a number of recent interviews, Springsteen has spoken extensively about his career and his legacy, a trend that anticipates his forthcoming autobiography, *Born to Run* (Simon & Schuster, 2016).

This issue presents three articles that examine various dimensions of Springsteen's music and career, with a particular emphasis on his most recent albums. In our lead article, Peter Fields offers a psycho-theological reading of Springsteen's "Outlaw Pete," both as song and as published lyric alongside Frank Caruso's illustrations in the picturebook *Outlaw Pete* (reviewed in this issue). Fields contends that Springsteen "injected something profound about his own psyche into the mythic mystery of the song's narrative." The multi-faceted argument that follows aligns "Outlaw Pete" with what the late country-rock artist Gram Parsons labeled "cosmic American music"—songs that address religious doctrines of sin and redemption and judgment. Invoking Freud's notion of "dream-work," Fields concludes that "Outlaw Pete" is a song about the need to reconcile with the Father—both biological and spiritual.

Michael Neiberg and Rob Citino's article, "A Long Walk Home: The Role of Class and the Military in the Springsteen Catalogue," places Springsteen's music and biography in the context of twentieth and twenty-first century American military policy. They contend that the soldiers who populate Springsteen lyrics "bear unmistakable marks of the essentially working-class military experience of the Vietnam era." Neiberg and Citino demonstrate the classed dynamics of Springsteen's own experience during the Vietnam era and how this experience made an impression on Springsteen's canon in the decades that followed. They argue that a class-based mistreatment of veterans has long sat at the center of the "meanness" Springsteen locates throughout American politics and society.

Finally, in "The Theological Virtues According to Bruce Springsteen," Andrew Gardner analyzes Springsteen's understanding of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Through a case study of *Wrecking Ball* (2012), Gardner compares Springsteen's view of these virtues with that of Thomas Aquinas, arguing that Springsteen "builds upon" Aquinas's theology "by emphasizing the virtue of hope as a mediator between faith and love." Whereas Aquinas considers God the only proper object for all three virtues, Springsteen takes a more open-minded view, one that Gardner locates within Springsteen's class-conscious response to the Great Recession and its aftermath.

Additionally, this issue offers reviews of three recent works of interest to Springsteen fans and scholars. Jim Cullen reviews Jeff Burger's edited collection, *Springsteen on Springsteen: Interviews, Speeches, and Encounters* (Chicago Review Press, 2013), a compendium of some of Springsteen's public addresses and conversations with members of the media. Roxanne Harde assesses the picturebook *Outlaw Pete* (Simon & Schuster, 2014), a collaboration between Springsteen and illustrator Frank Caruso based on the song of the same name. William M. Foster examines Stewart D. Friedman's *Leading the Life You Want: Skills for Integrating Work and Life* (Harvard Business Review, 2014), focusing particularly on a chapter examining the lessons business leaders and others hoping to improve their

lives can learn from examining Springsteen's life. In addition, we continue our "Special Collections" feature, in which we introduce a resource available to Springsteen scholars. In this issue, we highlight the Bruce Springsteen Special Collection at Monmouth University, the only archive devoted solely to collecting material pertaining to Springsteen.

In readying this issue for publication we accrued debts no honest editors can pay. Thanks go out to McGill University, in particular Amy Buckland, Joel Natanblut, and Jessica Lange of the McGill Library as well as Leonard Moore of the History Department. Our gratitude, too, to Mona Okada and Springsteen's legal team for allowing us to quote liberally from Springsteen's lyrics. For their input on this issue as well as their interest in the future of *BOSS*, we would like to thank the members of our editorial advisory board: Eric Alterman, Jim Cullen, Steven Fein, Bryan Garman, Stephen Hazan Arnoff, Donna Luff, Lorraine Mangione, Lauren Onkey, June Skinner Sawyers, Bryant Simon, and Jerry Zolten.

As Springsteen continues to excite audiences all over the world, he figures as a contemporary musical icon as well as an important literary, philosophical, and historical voice. With this in mind, *BOSS* provides peer-reviewed articles from multiple academic disciplines that will appeal to both scholars and fans. We hope this issue will contribute to conversations about Springsteen's career, his music, and his legacy, and will invite further interest in Springsteen Studies for years to come.

Jonathan Cohen, University of Virginia

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Irwin Streight, Royal Military College of Canada

## Contributors

**Robert M. Citino** is the Senior Historian at the National World War II Museum. He has published widely on modern military history, World War II, and the German Wehrmacht. His next book will complete a trilogy on German military operations in World War II.

**Peter J. Fields** finished his Ph.D. in 1994 at the University of Denver where he met his wife, Jacqueline. He teaches early English Literature at Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas. He presents every year at the Rocky Mountain MLA convention, including sessions for Old English, Shakespeare, and Bruce Springsteen.

**Andrew Gardner** is a doctoral student in American Religious History at Florida State University. He is the author of *Reimagining Zion: A History of the Alliance of Baptists* (2015).

**Michael S. Neiberg** teaches in the Department of National Security and Strategy at the United States Army War College. His published work specializes on the First and Second World Wars, notably the American and French experiences. His next book is a history of American responses to the Great War, 1914-1917.



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

Peter J. Fields  
Midwestern State University

**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.”<sup>1</sup> When the *Working on a Dream* tour opened in April 2009 in San Jose, at least

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Copyright © Peter Fields, 2016. I want to express my deep gratitude to Irwin Streight who read the 50 page version of this essay over a year ago. He has seen every new draft and provided close readings and valuable feedback. I also want to thank Roxanne Harde and Jonathan Cohen for their steady patience with this project, as well as two reviewers for their comments. Address correspondence to [peter.fields@mwsu.edu](mailto:peter.fields@mwsu.edu).

<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> Dolan also points out that Springsteen had come ready

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<sup>2</sup> Carlin, *Bruce*, 439.

<sup>3</sup> 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>.

<sup>4</sup> 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.”<sup>5</sup> 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

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<sup>5</sup> 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.”<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> Arguably, the dream was compensatory “revenge” because “the roles,” as Freud put it, “were interchanged.”<sup>8</sup> But the dreamer had mercy on the dream-father,

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<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 302.

<sup>8</sup> 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."<sup>9</sup>

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."<sup>10</sup> 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

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<sup>9</sup> Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 310n.

<sup>10</sup> 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!”<sup>11</sup> 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.”<sup>12</sup> 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.”<sup>13</sup> 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.”<sup>14</sup> The American West is just as viable. For Parsons, the desert nighttime above Joshua Tree, California, offered an “endless starscape” and a “cosmic setting.”<sup>15</sup>

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

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<sup>11</sup> Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 441.

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

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

<sup>14</sup> Kealing, *Calling Me Home*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Kealing, *Calling Me Home*, 196.

about country music—its adult working-class pain [and] its paradoxically rigid ethics.”<sup>16</sup> 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.”<sup>17</sup> 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.*”<sup>18</sup> 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.

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

<sup>17</sup> 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>.

<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> 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\\_pqJrtQEC0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_pqJrtQEC0).

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."<sup>20</sup>

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."<sup>21</sup> 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."<sup>22</sup> This inexplicable remark would continue to serve Springsteen for the purpose of

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<sup>20</sup> Dolan, *Bruce Springsteen*, 339-342.

<sup>21</sup> Dolan, *Bruce Springsteen*, 397.

<sup>22</sup> 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."<sup>23</sup> 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?"

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<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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."<sup>25</sup> 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."<sup>26</sup> *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.

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

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

<sup>26</sup> 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."<sup>27</sup> 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 larger spiritual dynamics. Their respective fates are as inexorable

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<sup>27</sup> 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.

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."<sup>28</sup> 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."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Hagen, Interview with Bruce Springsteen, 357.

<sup>29</sup> 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."<sup>30</sup>

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

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<sup>30</sup> 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."<sup>31</sup> 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

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<sup>31</sup> 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."<sup>32</sup> 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

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<sup>32</sup> 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. Animosity does 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 to 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."<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> 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,

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

<sup>34</sup> Carlin, *Bruce*, 32.

anger, and misunderstanding into his father's lap."<sup>35</sup> 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,*

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<sup>35</sup> 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.*"<sup>36</sup> 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."<sup>37</sup> Outlaw *Bruce* disappears over the edge of the cliff—that is, descends into "the lower regions of the earth"

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

<sup>37</sup> 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.”<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Marcus, *The Old, Weird America*, 133.

<sup>39</sup> 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.



# **A Long Walk Home: The Role of Class and the Military in the Springsteen Catalogue**

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## **Abstract**

This article analyzes the themes of class and military service in the Springsteen canon. As a member of the baby boom generation who narrowly missed service in Vietnam, Springsteen's reflection on these heretofore unappreciated themes should not be surprising. Springsteen's emergence as a musician and American icon coincide with the end of conscription and the introduction of the All-Volunteer Force in 1973. He became an international superstar as Americans were debating the meaning of the post-Vietnam era and the patriotic resurgence of the Reagan era. Because of this context, Springsteen himself became involved in veterans issues and was a voice of protest against the 2003 Iraq War.

In a well-known monologue from his *Live 1975-85* box set (1986), Bruce Springsteen recalls arguing with his father Douglas about the younger Springsteen's plans for his future. Whenever Bruce provided inadequate explanations for his life goals, Douglas responded that he could not wait for the Army to "make a man" out of his long-haired, seemingly aimless son. Springsteen

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<sup>1</sup> Copyright © Michael S. Neiberg and Robert M. Citino, 2016. Michael Neiberg would like to thank Derek Varble, with whom he saw Springsteen in concert in Denver in 2005, for his helpful comments on a draft of this article. Address correspondence to [neiberg102@gmail.com](mailto:neiberg102@gmail.com) or [rcitino@gmail.com](mailto:rcitino@gmail.com).

describes his fear as he departed for an Army induction physical in 1968, at the height of domestic discord over the Vietnam War. He returned home terrified of the reaction to what he assumed his father would receive as bad news: Bruce had failed his physical. The Army had rejected him. Douglas replied simply, "That's good."

Listeners might have expected Springsteen to follow this monologue with an anti-war song such as "Born in the U.S.A." or his cover of Edwin Starr's "War," which receives its own powerful introduction on the album. The story of his rejection by the Army also could have served as an opening for one of Springsteen's songs about fathers and sons such as "My Father's House," "Independence Day," or "Adam Raised A Cain." Instead, Springsteen follows with the plaintive wail on the harmonica that introduces "The River," and the audience bursts into applause. That song describes the tribulations of working-class life in a struggling industrial northeastern city. The narrator lives his life not as he chooses but as the events and social expectations around him dictate. The free-falling economy has robbed him of access to the well-paying working-class jobs his father's generation had once enjoyed almost as a birthright, and his girlfriend's pregnancy denies him a consequence-free youth and a happy wedding day. Instead, the narrator lives a life of intermittent employment as empty as the dry riverbed that calls him down in the hopes of recovering some of the joy of his young life. "Is a dream a lie if it don't come true," the narrator asks in the song's emotional climax, "or is it something worse?"

"The River" and its introduction on *Live* highlight the connection between class and military service that sits at the center

of Springsteen's canon. Taken together, "The River" and Springsteen's monologue illustrate the limited choices available to young working-class men in a rapidly deindustrializing America at the end of the twentieth century. Many working-class men in the 1960s and early 1970s faced two options: risk life and limb in the military or suffer the vagaries of financial insecurity in a declining domestic economy. As historians and economists have observed, and as Springsteen later bemoaned in "Youngstown," deindustrialization marked the end of high-paying, seemingly secure factory jobs in the United States, and the closure of factories rapidly removed the most common life path for young men without college educations.<sup>2</sup> At age 19, the narrator of "The River" receives "a union card and a wedding coat," symbolic of the two institutions likely to confine his life choices even further. Though "The River" is based on circumstances in the lives of Springsteen's sister and brother-in-law, Springsteen was also 19 when he failed his Army physical. Though he had successfully avoided military service, the pairing of this song and the monologue implies that had Springsteen not made it as a musician an equally restrictive and dangerous fate might have awaited him.

This article considers the overlooked intersection of class and the military in Springsteen's canon and biography since the 1970s. In particular, we analyze the military figures who populate Springsteen's lyrics. We argue that Springsteen's soldiers bear

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<sup>2</sup> Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); on the deindustrialization of Youngstown, Ohio, and Springsteen's musical response, see Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

unmistakable marks of the essentially working-class military experience of the Vietnam era. Analysis of Springsteen's responses to the Vietnam War and the military figures who appear in his songs highlights a previously overlooked element of Springsteen's class politics.<sup>3</sup> Though often silent on the propriety of American wars, Springsteen has demonstrated a deep concern for American soldiers and has frequently highlighted their mistreatment as evidence of an unfulfilled American promise, one borne disproportionately by the working-class. In their essay, Jefferson Cowie and Lauren Boehm read "Born in the U.S.A." as the particular expression of a post-Vietnam white working-class whose military experience remains inextricable from class identity.<sup>4</sup> This notion extends further to Springsteen's other songs that deal with military characters. The American working class faced a particular experience of Vietnam that Springsteen narrowly avoided and which his friends were exposed to. This classed vision of war and military service has proven a staple of Springsteen's canon for decades, including his reflections on the Gulf War, the Iraq War, and the fate of American veterans in the twenty-first century.

By 1982, the year he wrote "Born in the U.S.A.," Springsteen had come to a critical understanding about the military in general and the Vietnam War in particular. Unlike the men in many of Springsteen's early songs who flee entrapping towns and lifestyles, working-class men of the Vietnam generation, like Springsteen

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<sup>3</sup> On Springsteen's notion of politics, see Roxanne Harde, "Living in Your American Skin': Bruce Springsteen and the Possibility of Politics," *Canadian Review of American Studies*, Vol. 43 No. 1 (Spring 2013): 125-144.

<sup>4</sup> Jefferson Cowie and Lauren Boehm, "Dead Man's Town: 'Born in the U.S.A.,' Social History, and Working-Class Identity," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 58 No. 2 (June 2006): 353-378.

himself, had little control over their fates. Military service had always come with a certain level of caprice, but, in the Vietnam era, policy decisions linked that caprice directly to social class. Because America had far more men than it could conscript with any semblance of equality, and because Vietnam was a limited war in scope and aims, “chance and circumstance,” in the words of Lawrence Baskir and William Strauss, played an outsized role in a draft process badly biased against working-class men.<sup>5</sup> For example, Springsteen’s failed induction physical kept him out of Vietnam. While a concussion and leg injury sustained in a motorcycle accident may have contributed to his rejection, Springsteen believes the Army decline to enlist him because, in a wild act of teenage rebellion and desperation, he checked all of the boxes on the induction form, including the one asking if he were gay.<sup>6</sup> By so doing, he used one of the few available tools to manipulate a system rigged against him. Of course, there is no way to know for certain if Springsteen’s behavior at his physical was the definitive cause of his rejection, or if some unforeseen factor in the induction process kept him out of the Army. Yet, it remains clear that the draft system afforded Springsteen, as well as young, working-class men like him, little agency in determining whether they would serve their country in the military.

Historian Christian Appy takes Baskir and Strauss’s argument one step further. He argues that working-class men like Springsteen had far fewer options for avoiding the military in the

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<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Baskir and William Strauss, *Chance and Circumstance: The Draft, the War, and the Vietnam Generation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> Dave Marsh, *Bruce Springsteen: Two Hearts: The Definitive Biography, 1972-2003* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 232; Clinton Heylin, *E Street Shuffle: The Glory Days of Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band* (New York: Viking, 2013), 20-21.

Vietnam era than did middle-class men because of the way that the American government designed the system of military service. For instance, working-class men did not have the same access to recourses such as college deferment and doctors' letters, many of which were written by family friends to excuse healthy middle-class men from the military. Working-class men also had fewer social connections that might have led to an appointment in the Reserves or National Guard, which allowed eligible draftees to perform military service knowing that they were likely safe from being sent to the killing fields of Southeast Asia.<sup>7</sup>

On the cultural level, elements of working-class life predisposed young men from backgrounds such as Springsteen's to accept military life. Working-class men understood a military career as a normal and routine way of escaping the drudgery and poverty of a community in decline. To them, the military might even represent an escape valve from chronic unemployment in a place like Freehold, New Jersey, whose major factory, the A. & M. Karagheusian rug mill, closed in the early 1960s. For middle-class men, by contrast, the Army threatened a career trajectory that promised a college degree, high-paying jobs, and professional success. Moreover, while middle-class men saw the military as a place of demeaning discipline and physically demanding work, working-class men often understood it as no less dangerous and no less taxing than the factory jobs performed by their fathers and brothers.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Christian Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 15, 42, 52.

<sup>8</sup> Appy, *Working-Class War*, 86-88.

Furthermore, working-class men often used the military in ways similar to the ways that middle-class men used college, as a way to get away from tense family situations like that between Bruce Springsteen and his father. Appy argues that for many working-class men, sadistic drill sergeants represented capricious authority figures. Yet, for those with cold and confrontational parents like Douglas Springsteen, military superiors imparted little real fear. By contrast, drill sergeants sometimes often showed more concern and compassion for their troops than many working-class fathers, themselves brutalized by a life of limited employment.<sup>9</sup>

The military offered an important cultural expression for working-class men in three ways. First, it provided them with an opportunity to express their masculinity. For instance, Douglas Springsteen saw the military's main value as making a "man" out of his disappointing, long-haired – and thus implicitly-feminine – son.<sup>10</sup> Second, the military provided economic and material security. For many men, service in the Armed Forces had little to do with political ideology and everything to do with the circumstances of communities that offered men few alternatives for economic survival. If nothing else, Appy argues, the military could provide food, housing, medical care, and – perhaps most importantly – get them thousands of miles away from home.<sup>11</sup> The 1981 film *Stripes* successfully lampoons the disconnect between patriotism and military service. In a discussion in the barracks, one soldier humorously claims he joined the military because it offered

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<sup>9</sup> Appy, *Working-Class War*, 70, 88.

<sup>10</sup> On the relationship between military service and the politics of Vietnam-era working-class manhood, see Robert Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 47-74.

<sup>11</sup> Appy, *Working-Class War*, 49.

an inexpensive weight-loss program. Finally, avoiding military service in working-class communities carried with it a stigma of anti-patriotism that it no longer carried in most middle-class communities after the 1960s. The satirical humor of *Stripes* notwithstanding, white working-class men emerged as Vietnam War's most vocal home-front supporters. The so-called hard hat riot in Manhattan in 1970, which pitted pro-war construction workers against mostly middle-class protestors demanding an end to the war, revealed these tensions clearly and violently.<sup>12</sup>

These cultural associations could have accompanied Springsteen as he approached his impending Army physical in the late 1960s. Yet, despite his upbringing in financially precarious conditions and the threats from his father, Springsteen did not carry such positive associations with military life as did many of his working-class contemporaries. However much a young Bruce may have wanted to escape the confines of 1960s Freehold, he did not see the military as the way to do it. By 1982, moreover, he understood the ways that the system pressed working-class young men like himself into making choices that often led them into the military. The narrator of "Born in the U.S.A." joins the military because he finds himself in a "hometown jam," most likely due to a minor crime such as simple drug possession or petty theft. Like many young men who committed such crimes, the judicial system offers him the choice of the Army or jail, itself a damning commentary on the value and meaning the system ascribed to military service for working-class men. Springsteen's protagonist chooses the Army, putting his life at risk, but also wiping away the

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<sup>12</sup> On the 1970 "hard hat rally," see Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 135-137, 347.



legal charges against him and offering him the chance to put his life back together should he survive the war and obtain an honorable discharge. Thus he goes “off to a foreign land / To go and kill the yellow man.” At the end of the song, the narrator clings to his birthright despite finding himself “in the shadow of the penitentiary,” an ironic fate for a character who served his country not out of a sense of patriotic duty, but in what Springsteen implies may be an ultimately failed attempt to avoid incarceration.<sup>13</sup>

The chance and circumstance that dictated working-class involvement in the Vietnam War era directly affected Springsteen’s circle of friends and fellow musicians. Bart Haynes, the drummer in Springsteen’s first band, The Castilles, joined the Marine Corps knowing that he would likely end up in Vietnam because he lacked the skills to find an assignment away from combat. Like many men of his generation, Haynes enlisted in the Marines to avoid the inevitable draft notice.<sup>14</sup> Lacking means of avoiding conscription, Haynes and men like him could volunteer in order to, at the very least, control the timing of the military service they believed to be

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<sup>13</sup> Cowie and Boehm, “Dead Man’s Town,” 373. Similarly, the protagonist of Ben Fountain’s novel *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk*—which examines the class politics of the twenty-first century military—joins the military to avoid going to jail for vandalizing his sister’s fiancé’s car; Ben Fountain, *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> *Chance and Circumstance* discusses the ways that men “volunteered” for services like the Air Force and the Navy in the hopes of avoiding being drafted into the Army. A popular Vietnam-era saying, “there ain’t no Viet Cong submarines,” captured the sentiment of what the military called “draft-motivated volunteers.” For the same reason, thousands of middle-class men volunteered for ROTC training not because of any desire for a military career, but because ROTC came with a draft deferment. If a man stayed in school, he could avoid being sent to Vietnam for at least a few months or years. See Michael S. Neiberg, *Making Citizen-Soldiers: ROTC and the Ideology of American Military Service* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

unavoidable. Volunteering for the Armed Forces also struck some men as a more patriotic and honorable route than going into the military under coercion or using a disingenuous doctor's note to avoid military service. Politics played secondary roles in their decision making. As Springsteen notes in his monologue before "The River," Haynes could not even locate Vietnam on a map, let alone Quang Tri, where he died on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1967.<sup>15</sup>

Like many men from his generation, Haynes joined the military not because of any agreement with the goals of American foreign policy but because of a lack of other viable options. Perhaps with Haynes and other friends as inspiration, Springsteen wrote a number of songs about men who joined the Army out of economic necessity. The soldier who returns home in "Lost in the Flood" does not seem to exhibit any pride in his service, nor does Frank, the "no good" brother in "Highway Patrolman," for whom the military served as either a temporary respite from economic problems or, more probably, a burden to be borne when his number came due. Springsteen does not clarify whether military service had anything to do with Frank's violent nature, but he cleverly lets his listeners know that Frank served from 1965 to 1968, the years of escalation in Vietnam. Notably, the honorable and honest brother avoids military service using a farm deferment, one of the few options open to men from the rural heartland.

Thus, in Springsteen's pre-9/11 songs, the military is less a source of heroism and patriotism than a place where men go when other options fail them. This vision remains in line with the class-determined opportunities inherent in modern military service. Sociologists Charles Moskos and Martin Binkin have described

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Ames Carlin, *Bruce* (New York: Touchstone, 2012), 35.

military service as a tradeoff of what Binkin deems “benefits versus burdens.”<sup>16</sup> The benefits include technical training of use to civilian employers, a chance to acquire a college education at government expense, and the possibility of a long military career with lifetime benefits. The burdens most obviously include risking one’s life, but they also include time away from the civilian job market while one’s peers begin their careers. Thus, while a twenty-year military career might place a working-class man or woman ahead of his or her peers economically, a brief stint might, by contrast, place that person at an economic disadvantage relative to those same peers. Contrary to the recruiter’s pitch, three years spent as a draftee normally reinforced the economic patterns that kept men intermittently employed or, at least, employed below the level of their peers.<sup>17</sup>

Springsteen’s soldiers suffer burdens of military service much more than they enjoy its benefits. None of the characters in Springsteen’s songs makes the military a career or describes it as a haven from the cyclical unemployment of post-industrial America. Furthermore, Springsteen’s working-class characters find even their limited benefits inaccessible. The protagonist of “Born in the U.S.A.,” for instance, is unable to claim benefits from his Veterans Affairs representative. Springsteen’s other military characters serve in some of the Army’s worst jobs. Lieutenant Jimmy Bly from

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<sup>16</sup> Martin Binkin and Mark J. Eitelberg with Alvin J. Schexnider and Marvin M. Smith, *Blacks and the Military*, (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1982), 62.

<sup>17</sup> See Martin Binkin and John Johnson, *All-Volunteer Armed Forces: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 1973) and Charles Moskos and Frank R. Wood, *The Military: More Than Just a Job?* (Dulles, VA.: Brassey’s, 1988).

1992's "Souls of the Departed" is a rare officer in Springsteen's catalogue, but he has the awful task of going through the belongings of soldiers killed on their way to Basra in the First Gulf War. While he has trained to be a platoon leader, Lieutenant Bly's unit is no band of brothers. Rather, his comrades have become smoky wraiths rising "like dark geese into the Oklahoma skies." His low-skill and low-prestige job will provide few marketable or transferable skills in demand by civilian employers after he leaves the Army. Indeed, most of Lieutenant Bly's family and friends will not want to hear about his service, and one suspects that Bly himself will keep it bottled inside for the rest of his life.

Springsteen's military characters are not cowards. Nor are they naturally violent people, Frank from "Highway Patrolman" notwithstanding. Like the downtrodden steel workers in Michael Cimino's film *The Deer Hunter* (1978), Springsteen's soldiers have merely moved from one desperate situation to another. Military service to them is simply another rite of passage, much like marriage or entry into the dangerous world of the steel mills. Frank would have fit in well with the characters in Cimino's film, brutalized as they all are by their wartime service. He also would have fit well, however, with characters from the genre of films showing Vietnam veterans as unstable, violent, and desperate, for instance Sonny Wortzik in *Dog Day Afternoon* (1978) and Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver* (1976).

Springsteen's music between the release of *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.* (1972) and *Magic* (2007) evidences far less overt war-related themes than does the music of contemporaries like Bob Dylan, Jackson Browne, Neil Young, and John Fogerty. Yet, when Springsteen does address military matters, he peers through a

particular class-oriented lens. Most prominently, in 1995's "Youngstown," Springsteen speaks on behalf of an industrial community in the wake of deindustrialization: "we gave our sons to Korea and Vietnam / Now we're wondering what they were dying for." Springsteen's narrator angrily decries the waste and senselessness of these wars. Yet, the song is not a political tirade against interventionist American foreign policy. Rather, the narrator focuses his anger on the injuries suffered by the American working-class. In previous decades, the workers of Youngstown "built the tanks and bombs that won this country's wars," yet the city's factories—which provided the site of both gainful employment and national service—have been taken away from them. Springsteen draws a parallel between the abandonment of the town and the abandonment of the veterans of the Korean and Vietnam wars, aiming his critique at the way these conflicts turned working-class men into angry, bitter, and forgotten veterans.

The themes of individual suffering for mistakes of American foreign policy emerge most clearly on "The Wall," a song released on *High Hopes* (2014) that Springsteen co-wrote with Joe Grushecky after a visit to the Vietnam War Memorial in 1997. Springsteen played the song four times before its release, twice at benefit concerts and, tellingly, twice on the *Devils & Dust* (2005) tour at the height of the Iraq War. During one of those live performances, Springsteen told the audience that he wrote the song for a friend who joined the Marine Corps and was killed in Vietnam.<sup>18</sup> On the *High Hopes* tour, an acoustic version preceded a fully-electric "Born

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<sup>18</sup> Stan Goldstein, "Are These the 12 Songs on a New Bruce Springsteen Album?," November 23, 2013, accessed July 18, 2016: [http://www.nj.com/springsteen/index.ssf/2013/11/are\\_these\\_the\\_12\\_songs\\_are\\_a\\_n.html](http://www.nj.com/springsteen/index.ssf/2013/11/are_these_the_12_songs_are_a_n.html).

in the U.S.A.," underscoring the enduring importance of military themes to Springsteen's canon, both old and new.

"The Wall" begins with the narrator recalling an unnamed soldier in his Marine Corps uniform nervously laughing and joking about his upcoming deployment to Vietnam. The song is delivered as a monologue directed at this figure, who is clearly deceased and was therefore most likely inspired by Haynes. The narrator's anger is tinged with class-consciousness, particularly against "the men who put you here" who "eat with their families in rich dining halls." Unusually for Springsteen, this song names individual political actors, ending the first stanza with the line "I read Robert McNamara say he's sorry," a reference to the Vietnam-era Secretary of Defense's apologia published in 1996, the year before Springsteen's visit to the memorial.<sup>19</sup> "The Wall" presents an angry treatment of the sacrifices of a generation and the suffering loved ones left behind. It also provides a scathing indictment of a system that allowed some to get rich from military contracts while working-class men reluctantly risked their lives for unclear causes in far-away places. As the narrator of "The Wall" watches limousines ride down Pennsylvania Avenue, he takes aim at McNamara with the final line, "apology and forgiveness have no place here at all."

The narrator of "The Wall" is not the only Springsteen character who copes with class-tinged anger following death of a loved one in combat. "Gypsy Biker," from *Magic*, captures the

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<sup>19</sup> Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage, 1996). McNamara claims in the book that he knew early on that America would likely fail in Vietnam but he did too little to stop the war's escalation. See also Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

anger of a community following the death halfway around the world of an enlisted loved-one. The song illustrates that the system has not just failed the men coming home from the war, but has also exploited them while profiteers and speculators have grown rich off the same war where soldiers shed their blood. Seeking relief from their grief, the dead man's friends and family turn to alcohol, drugs, and eventually a ritualistic burning of the dead man's prized motorcycle.

Like the community members of "Gypsy Biker" and the narrator of "The Wall," Springsteen also experienced the events of the Vietnam War from a comfortable-if-disorienting distance. As his class-consciousness emerged more fully on *Darkness on the Edge of Town* (1978), he began to understand in broader, political terms what the war had done to the men of his generation who had fought it. Springsteen read Ron Kovic's *Born on the Fourth of July* (1976) and, by a remarkable coincidence, met Kovic at a southwestern roadside motel shortly thereafter. After getting to know Kovic and becoming more interested in the cause of Vietnam veterans, Springsteen dedicated a song to Kovic during two shows in San Francisco in 1978. As in his choice of "The River" a few years later, however, the song he dedicated to Kovic had nothing directly to do with war. Springsteen performed "Darkness on the Edge of Town," a song normally introduced with a story about his father. By mentioning Kovic and his book instead in his introduction, Springsteen connected a song replete with class-laden despair to Kovic's story of an abandoned Vietnam veteran. Springsteen's performance thus suggested that Douglas Springsteen and Ron Kovic were both men trapped by their circumstances beyond their control. Douglas may have let his failures drag him down, but

Kovic cut loose from his demons and bravely fought against the darkness he saw around him after he returned from Vietnam.

In a 1998 interview, Springsteen tied Kovic's writing to that of American Gothic writers Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy, who could reach "the heart of some part of meanness" in the American experience.<sup>20</sup> Springsteen saw the impact of the military and war—as well as the nation's willingness to toss aside its veterans—as central parts of that meanness. Instead of providing an indictment of war itself, Springsteen's songs that deal with the military protest the way the burdens of these wars are borne disproportionately by the working-class. The immorality of war appears as a theme far less often in the Springsteen discography than the meanness with which American society has treated the men it has sent to fight wars it later repudiated. Just as American industry used blue collar men before tossing them aside once they were no longer needed, so, too, did the government toss aside working-class soldiers once the war that required their sacrifice had ended. Both themes appear intertwined in songs like "Highway Patrolman," "Born in the U.S.A.," and "Youngstown." In these songs, the military is viewed as just another greedy industry, robbing working-class men of their youthful idealism and then throwing them away once they are no longer needed.

To Springsteen, the lack of recognition of the struggle of Vietnam veterans reveals American "meanness" at its worst. In a telling statement, Springsteen noted at a 1981 benefit concert for Vietnam Veterans of America that the treatment of Vietnam veterans like Kovic was analogous to "walking down a dark street

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Will Percy in Jeff Burger, ed. *Springsteen on Springsteen: Interviews, Speeches, and Encounters* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013), 247.



at night, and out of the corner of your eye you see somebody getting hurt ... but you keep walking on.”<sup>21</sup> The injuries of Vietnam had not struck Springsteen directly, but he easily linked the experiences of veterans with those of the working-class men and women who so deeply informed his own vision of America and its limitations.

Thus, like many Americans in the 1980s, Springsteen was able to disassociate Vietnam veterans from the highly divisive war they fought and from the damaging stereotypes of them that had been prevalent in the 1970s. He had come to see Vietnam veterans not as perpetrators of a mistaken conflict or psychologically broken symbols of a national humiliation but as working-class victims of a war they had not wanted to get involved with in the first place. In doing so, he followed a general American trend that restored the Vietnam veteran from the symbol of a failed war and converted him—it was invariably a “him”—into one of its central victims. In contrast to cultural depictions of veterans in the 1970s, 1980’s television shows like *Magnum PI* (1980-1988) presented well-adjusted and successful Vietnam veterans who had managed to put the war behind them. Even those veterans badly damaged psychologically by the war, like Frank from “Highway Patrolman,” became sympathetic figures because of their suffering. Thus, most viewers cheered for intensely violent characters like Sylvester Stallone’s John Rambo from *First Blood* (1982) and Mel Gibson’s Martin Riggs from *Lethal Weapon* (1987). These characters appear not as sociopaths—like Travis Bickle does in *Taxi Driver*—but as products of a distant war. Their violent tendencies do not prove

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Marc Dolan, *Bruce Springsteen and the Promise of Rock ‘n’ Roll* (New York: Norton, 2013), 186.

intrinsic to them – or, by extension to the American people more generally – but instead present the consequences of the terrible war in which they fought against their will but also to the best of their abilities.<sup>22</sup>

While much of Springsteen’s music turned introspective and personal in the late 1980s and 1990s, the tragic events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 brought war and the military back to the forefront of American consciousness. Springsteen, whose New Jersey community was directly impacted by the terrorism of that day, produced *The Rising* (2002), one of the most powerful cultural products in response to the events of 9/11. The focus of that album, however, has little to do with soldiers. Instead it re-contextualizes existing songs like “My City of Ruins” to meet the needs of the day and focuses on the working-class first responders like the men in the title track, “Nothing Man,” and “Into the Fire.” Brendan O’Brien, who produced the album, noted that they did not work with an explicit 9/11 theme in mind, although one emerged organically from the songs eventually featured on the album.<sup>23</sup>

Like most Americans, Springsteen supported military action in Afghanistan to remove the threat posed by Al Qaeda and the Taliban, going so far as to place a note on his web site in favor of the war in Afghanistan. Yet, as the *Rising* tour went on, Springsteen began to play “Born in the U.S.A.” more often, an admonition that

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<sup>22</sup> Think also of the characters in the TV drama “The A-Team” (1983), who met one another during the Vietnam War but had to go into hiding after being framed for a crime “they did not commit” by a corrupt government. As is the case with *First Blood*, the audience blames the government, not the soldiers.

<sup>23</sup> Carlin, *Bruce*, 415.

the country could not risk abandoning its Afghanistan veterans as it had once abandoned its Vietnam veterans.<sup>24</sup>

Springsteen's political activism and concerns over interventionism emerged more fully following the passage of the Patriot Act and the George W. Bush Administration's decision to invade Iraq in 2003. Springsteen's shows began to feature longer and more politically-charged monologues and his cover of Edwin Starr's "War" appeared on set lists more often, a far more explicit statement about Springsteen's views on the folly of the war in Iraq. The Iraq War also brought Springsteen front and center into the realm of partisan politics when he began to campaign first for Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry in 2004 and then for Barack Obama in 2008. As Springsteen told an interviewer, "sitting on the sidelines would be a betrayal of the ideas I'd written about for a long time." Perhaps with Vietnam in mind, he noted, "Not getting involved, just sort of maintaining my silence ... wasn't going to work out this time."<sup>25</sup>

Springsteen's turn to direct political activism—and the consequences of the new American foreign interventionism on the working-class—was strongly reflected in his next two studio albums, *Devils & Dust* (2005) and *Magic* (2007). The title track of the former returned Springsteen to one of those ideas he had written about for decades: the impact of war on the individual soldier. In the song's opening line, a soldier narrator states that he has his finger resting on the trigger of his assault rifle. Though listeners are not told where the soldier is located the narrator appears prepared to defend the ideals for which the United States invaded Iraq in

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<sup>24</sup> Dolan, Bruce *Springsteen*, 376.

<sup>25</sup> Carlin, *Bruce*, 418.

2003. Yet, like Springsteen himself, the soldier doubts those ideals and wonders if they are instead built on a deadly façade of misguided religion and blind patriotism. Unlike Springsteen, however, the character in the song lacks the freedom to publicly protest the war. Instead, he turns to his comrades for redemption, a tactic also taken by Springsteen's characters in songs such as "Gypsy Biker" and "Brothers Under the Bridge." Although "Devils and Dust" is the most avowedly political song on the album, it does not directly target the Bush administration or mention the word "Iraq." Instead, the song presents the kind of moral dilemma that tormented the narrator of "Highway Patrolman." Despite his doubts, the narrator of "Devils & Dust" sees little choice but to bury his uncertainties and fight on, less for the goals of the administration he serves than for his comrades. He knows the war will blacken his heart and he may even suspect that his fellow Americans will reject him once he returns home, but he also sees few other options.

Springsteen's *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions* (2006) invokes the past to speak to the present by including the Irish folk protest song "Mrs. McGrath." Originally written in 1811 in protest of British attempts to recruit Irish soldiers for Britain's wars against Napoleon, the song fits with Springsteen's vision of the interactions of class and military service. In Springsteen's version, a recruiting sergeant has convinced a widow to let her son join the army, though she has no idea what the war is about or how it will affect her. Her son, Ted, returns seven years later having lost both of his legs to a cannonball. In Springsteen's version, the mother cries that foreign wars live on the blood of soldiers and the pain of their

mothers, a sentiment the characters of "Gypsy Biker" understand as well.

The songs on *Magic* followed some of these themes, depicting a nation and another generation of soldiers deceived into a war by a web of lies. In particular, Springsteen draws implicit connections between Iraq and Vietnam, especially in "Last to Die." Released at the height of domestic turmoil over the Iraq War, the song's title was inspired by John Kerry's 1971 testimony before Congress's Fulbright Committee. Kerry, a Vietnam veteran, advocated for immediate withdrawal from Southeast Asia as a representative of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, asking: "How do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?"<sup>26</sup> More than three decades later, after Kerry had risen to become a United States senator and presidential candidate, Springsteen revived the line as well as the sentiment of Kerry's testimony. In "Last to Die," Springsteen deftly transitions from a verse about a military convoy riding toward a burning Iraqi city to an average American family driving with their children asleep in the car's backseat. The civilians no longer consider the distance between themselves and the soldiers they have sent off to war, a damning indication that they will also be willing to forget the men and women of that war once they return home, a common criticism of the relationship of

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<sup>26</sup> *Democracy Now!*, "John Kerry Then: Hear Kerry's Historic 1971 Testimony Against the Vietnam War," February 20, 2004: [http://www.democracynow.org/2004/2/20/john\\_kerry\\_then\\_hear\\_kerrys\\_historic](http://www.democracynow.org/2004/2/20/john_kerry_then_hear_kerrys_historic)

the military and society since the shift from a draft-based system to an All-Volunteer Force (AVF) in 1973.<sup>27</sup>

Springsteen released *Magic* in August 2007, just six months after the scathing *Washington Post* exposé on shoddy care for veterans at Walter Reed Army Medical Center vaulted the issue of veterans' services onto front pages, televisions, and internet sites across the country.<sup>28</sup> As the scandals in the military health care system began to multiply, Springsteen saw echoes of the way that the Vietnam era system had failed a previous generation of veterans. Thus, Springsteen performed at the 2012 and 2013 *Stand Up for Heroes* benefit concerts for wounded warriors despite—or perhaps precisely because of—his opposition to the war in Iraq.<sup>29</sup> For Springsteen and for most of the performers, the benefit, which aids the Bob Woodruff Foundation, is less a statement of opposition to a misguided foreign policy decision than a statement about the need to help veterans who fought that war and now face the same lack of support from their own society faced by the soldier in “Born in the U.S.A.” To Springsteen, there is no contradiction in opposing a war but helping the men and women who fought it, especially those victimized both by the war and the failures of the American system. Thirty years later, with the Americans wars in Iraq and Afghanistan burned out but constantly threatening to reignite, with

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<sup>27</sup> On the transition to the AVF, see Beth Bailey, *America's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>28</sup> Dana Priest and Anne Hull, “Soldiers Face Neglect, Frustration At Army's Top Medical Facility,” *Washington Post*, February 18, 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Tris McCall, “Bruce Springsteen to sing at Stand Up For Heroes,” September 9, 2013, accessed July 18, 2016  
[http://www.nj.com/entertainment/music/index.ssf/2013/09/bruce\\_springsteen\\_to\\_sing\\_at\\_stand\\_up\\_for\\_heroes.html](http://www.nj.com/entertainment/music/index.ssf/2013/09/bruce_springsteen_to_sing_at_stand_up_for_heroes.html)

the Veterans Administration hospital system still in disarray, and with military suicides occurring with sickening frequency, the problem tragically remains, as does the need to speak – and sing – about it.

# The Theological Virtues According to Bruce Springsteen

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## Abstract

Bruce Springsteen's relationship to his Roman Catholic background is complex and multifaceted. This paper seeks to analyze the artist's understanding of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love as seen in the album *Wrecking Ball* (2012). By juxtaposing Springsteen's understanding of these virtues with Catholicism's Thomistic tradition, scholars can see how he draws upon this tradition while creating a more robust role for the virtue of hope. This analysis of Springsteen's engagement in a theological discourse around the virtues of faith, hope, and love offers a fuller understanding of the artist's commitment to visions of the American Dream.

At a concert in Vancouver on his *Wrecking Ball* tour, Bruce Springsteen described "My City of Ruins" as a song "from our ghosts to your ghosts." After introducing each member of the E Street Band, Springsteen exclaimed: "We'd like to take a moment to feel those who are missing; those ghosts standing alongside us." As a pastor would, he guided the crowd with his hand into a moment of silence as the music stood still and the lights dimmed.<sup>1</sup> His voice, with a sermon tone, seemingly began to transcend the

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Copyright © Andrew Gardner, 2016. I would like to thank Katharine Shaner and G. Andrew Tooze for their helpful feedback and support as I worked through this paper. I would also like to thank my mother for sharing her love of Springsteen with me many years ago. Address correspondence to [abg15@my.fsu.edu](mailto:abg15@my.fsu.edu).

<sup>1</sup> Magmazing Music, "Bruce Springsteen in Vancouver: My City of Ruins," December 6, 2012, accessed August 10, 2015  
<https://youtu.be/T4pPBGYWVNI?list=RDT4pPBGYWVNI>.

*BOSS: The Biannual Online-Journal of Springsteen Studies* 2.1 (2016)  
<http://boss.mcgill.ca/>



physicality of Rogers Arena. The instruments and music, now endowed with a sort of spiritual quality, began to form a liminal space between the realm of what was thought to be physically present and the realm of what was thought to be spiritually present.

This paper analyzes the ways in which Bruce Springsteen's *Wrecking Ball* (2012) articulates a religious understanding of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love as they relate to the theology of the Roman Catholic Thomistic tradition. Specifically, I argue that Springsteen's music builds upon the intellectualized medieval scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas by emphasizing the virtue of hope as a mediator between faith and love. In so doing, Springsteen appeals less to an ivory-tower medieval scholasticism and more to a working-class notion of an American Dream that is hoped for but not yet realized. Such a comparison demonstrates how a Christian and a specifically Roman Catholic imagination offers a framework for theological discourse that not only appeals to, but also functions for, individuals across various faiths, backgrounds, and nationalities.

Bruce Springsteen's childhood instilled him with a Roman Catholic imagination that offers a helpful guide to decipher the religious language and imagery found in his music. Springsteen was born in 1949 to Adele and Douglas Springsteen – a family with Irish-Italian ancestry and strong Roman Catholic faith and practice.<sup>2</sup> He attended parochial schools for the first eight years of his education, yet, as Springsteen biographer Dave Marsh notes, parochial schools were “not the best environment for a headstrong, idealistic kid who refused to learn his place.” Marsh explains that

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<sup>2</sup> Dave Marsh, *Bruce Springsteen: Two Hearts: The Definitive Biography, 1972-2003* (New York: Routledge Press, 2004), 21.

Springsteen was often singled out for his misbehavior; as Springsteen later explained:

I was there eight years. That's a long time. I still remember a lot of things about it. But I don't remember anything nice about it, so I guess I didn't enjoy it. It has nothing to do with me. I'm not involved in it. I'm here to play music; I'm in a rock band. Some people pray, some people play music.<sup>3</sup>

Springsteen's experience in parochial schools left an indelible mark on his perception of the Roman Catholic Church specifically as well as religion generally. His harsh reaction against involvement in organized religion illustrates some of the ways in which religion has influenced his life. Music is what he does instead of praying – instead of religion. Music is Springsteen's religion broadly construed.

Despite this less-than-positive experience with Roman Catholicism as a child, Springsteen has maintained a sense of Catholic identity, but not without a sense of humor. *Wrecking Ball* sparked a number of articles about the artist's spiritual life. Jim DeRogatis claimed that despite Springsteen's avowed agnosticism he finds the artist is "becoming increasingly religious as he grows older."<sup>4</sup> In the wake of the album's release, Springsteen jokingly admitted he was "brainwashed as a child with Catholicism.... It's like Al Pacino in the Godfather: I try to get out but they pull you back in! Once a Catholic, always a Catholic."<sup>5</sup> Based on these and

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<sup>3</sup> Marsh, *Two Hearts*, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Jim DeRogatis, "Album Review: Bruce Springsteen, 'Wrecking Ball,'" WBEZ 91.5, February 28, 2012 accessed April 25, 2015 <http://www.wbez.org/blog/jim-derogatis/2012-02-28/album-review-bruce-springsteen-%E2%80%98wrecking-ball%E2%80%99-columbia-96817>

<sup>5</sup> Neil McCormick, "Bruce Springsteen: I enjoy artists who take on the world," *The Telegraph*, February 16, 2012 accessed April 25, 2015

other statements, it remains possible that Springsteen feels more drawn back to Roman Catholicism than pulled. In either case, he continues to find the Catholic faith an influential force in his life.

A number of scholars have attempted to articulate the religious dimensions of Springsteen's music and lyrics. Perhaps the most comprehensive analysis is Jeffrey Symynkywicz's *The Gospel According to Bruce Springsteen: Rock and Redemption, from Asbury Park to Magic*. A graduate of Harvard Divinity School and a Unitarian Universalist minister, Symynkywicz addresses each album and song in chronological order, analyzing the spiritual dimensions that flow in and out Springsteen's life and music. Symynkwicz concludes his work with a list of "Bruce's Ten Commandments Suggestions for Spiritual Living":

1. The world has gone awry
2. There is a power within the souls of men and women to transcend the world, and to achieve real victories in spite of the world
3. The world is as it is
4. Life without connections is empty and dangerous
5. Our stories symbolize something deeper
6. Life is embodied
7. It's all about change
8. There is no guarantee of success
9. Hope is resilient
10. There is always something more<sup>6</sup>

Symynkwicz's work effectively analyzes the religious and spiritual dimensions of Springsteen's artistry beyond mere discussions of God. Religious and spiritual tendencies are pervasive and found in

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<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/rockandpopmusic/9087360/Bruce-Springsteen-I-enjoy-artists-who-take-on-the-world.html>

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey B. Symynkywicz, *The Gospel According to Bruce Springsteen: Rock and Redemption, from Asbury Park to Magic* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 180-185.

all people, not simply individuals who claim a specific religious tradition. For Symynkwicz, the essence of the Gospel of Springsteen is found within an ultimate power that seeks to work within ordinary and flawed people as it strives for their wellbeing.<sup>7</sup> From this perspective, Springsteen's religious sentiments are offered as a universal truth for all people.

Other scholars have identified key images or ideas that highlight the religious attitudes of Springsteen's music. Kate McCarthy suggests the Hebrew Scriptures' idea of the Promised Land serves as the central religious image in Springsteen's canon. McCarthy draws upon ethnographic responses to Springsteen's music as well as the increasing complexity of the image of "the Promised Land" with regards to a religious imagination that continually negotiates spaces and boundaries of the sacred.<sup>8</sup> Jerry Gill argues that the crux of Springsteen's religious inclinations derive from the thematic image of bondage. Whether bound by time, memories, or romantic love, Gill suggests, "in the midst of all these images of bondage, Springsteen still expresses hope and affirms redemptive values."<sup>9</sup> From this framework, Springsteen's religious tendencies focus on a singular dimension of release from bondage.

However, both McCarthy's and Gill's analysis of Springsteen's religious tendencies fail to inspect the theology

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<sup>7</sup> Symynkwicz, *The Gospel According to Bruce Springsteen*, 185.

<sup>8</sup> Kate McCarthy, "Deliver Me From Nowhere: Bruce Springsteen and the Myth of the American Dream," in *God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture*, eds. Eric Michael Mazur and Kate McCarthy, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), 23-43.

<sup>9</sup> Jerry Gill, "The Gospel According to Bruce," *Theology Today* Vol. 45 No. 1 (April 1988): 90.

inherent within Springsteen's music. The images of the Promised Land and of bondage only provide singular facets of the religious expression found throughout Springsteen's canon. Conversely, while Symynkywicz addresses Springsteen's music from a theological perspective, he defines Springsteen's theological enterprise quite broadly. Such a methodological framework functions within the religious sociological category H. Richard Niebuhr defines as "Christ of Culture." Within this category there is "no great tension between church and world."<sup>10</sup> As Niebuhr explains, "This Christ of religion does not call upon men to leave homes and kindred for his sake; he enters into their homes and all of their associations as the gracious presence which adds an aura of infinite meaning to all temporal tasks" – even rock music.<sup>11</sup> Within this Christ of Culture model, Niebuhr suggests, religion can be found in everything on the basis of Christ's expansive and universal nature.

While Symynkywicz understands the theological enterprise as one in which universal questions are addressed within a broader culture, Kathryn Tanner suggests theology may take place within culture particularly. According to Tanner, "an anthropological idea of culture encourages theologians to develop a primary interest in the particular."<sup>12</sup> Rather than interpreting cultural phenomenon in search of its universal religious and spiritual dimensions, the theologian must analyze the particular way religion functions within the context of cultural phenomenon. From this understanding of cultural particularity, the theological enterprise

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<sup>10</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951), 83.

<sup>11</sup> Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 93.

<sup>12</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 67.

is not positioned above the categories of everyday life; rather, it is positioned within them. As Tanner suggests:

As a matter of day-to-day practice, the beliefs, values, and orienting symbols of Christian life can, of course, also be directly expressed. They do not remain a merely implicit dimension of social action. Christian social practice essentially involves making theological affirmations about God and Jesus and about human life in their light. One does that, for example when one prays, confesses one's beliefs, exhorts oneself or others to properly Christian forms of behavior, preaches, or laments the injustices of life before God.<sup>13</sup>

From Tanner's perspective, theology is not confined to explicit discussion about God, nor even a general discussion of the universal "ultimate." Instead, theology is embedded in the behaviors and thoughts that relate to a specific contextual understanding of the ultimate. Within this framework, theology is not constrained solely to the work of ivory tower intellectuals. Instead, all people participate in producing theological thought, even rock music icons like Bruce Springsteen.

Within Tanner's view of theological anthropology, the theological enterprise does not require the theologian to be cognizant of the religious ideas they are producing. Father Andrew Greeley sums this idea up when he described Springsteen as engaging in "'minstrel ministry' without ever being explicit about it, or even necessarily aware of it, precisely because his imagination was shaped as Catholic."<sup>14</sup> While anyone can produce and engage

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<sup>13</sup> Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 70.

<sup>14</sup> Fr. Andrew Greeley, "The Catholic Imagination of Bruce Springsteen," *America: The National Catholic Review*, February 6, 1988, accessed August 10, 2015: <http://americamagazine.org/issue/100/catholic-imagination-bruce-springsteen>.

in such types of ministries and theological inquiries, the production and engagement always takes place within a specific imaginative framework, or what Jim Cullen calls an “inherited imagination” – in Springsteen’s case that of Roman Catholicism.<sup>15</sup>

The songs on *Wrecking Ball* reflect the ways in which Springsteen’s Roman Catholic background inform his music and lyrics. The theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, found within the Pauline epistle to the Corinthians and addressed by medieval Roman Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas serve as one example of this language. Aquinas not only specifically wrote about these virtues in his seminal work *Summa Theologica* (written 1265-1274), he also serves as one of the foremost orthodox Roman Catholic thinkers. In addition, his highly intellectualized scholasticism juxtaposes the sensory and experiential nature of Springsteen’s artistic enterprise. A focus specifically on *Wrecking Ball*, which one reviewer described as “chock full of religious imagery,” facilitates the examination of Springsteen’s approach to the virtues of faith, hope, and love.<sup>16</sup> Even so, the ideas presented on *Wrecking Ball* cannot be removed from the larger context of Springsteen’s life and career, as other songs and albums contribute to and help shed light on the ways in which Springsteen’s theological sentiments operate within this singular album. Nonetheless, incorporating the Thomistic tradition’s understanding of the theological virtues into

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<sup>15</sup> Jim Cullen, *Born in the U.S.A.: Bruce Springsteen and the American Tradition* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 157.

<sup>16</sup> Katherine Weber, “Bruce Springsteen’s New Album of ‘Near-Biblical Significance,’ Critics Say,” *Christian Post*, March 23, 2012, accessed August 10, 2015: <http://www.christianpost.com/news/bruce-springsteens-new-album-of-near-biblical-significance-critics-say-71941/>.

a discussion of *Wrecking Ball* reveals both commonality and dissimilarity within Springsteen's theological perspective.

### Faith

Faith proves to be the most challenging of the three theological virtues to identify within Springsteen's canon. This elusiveness stems in part from the lack of a concrete understanding of the nature of faith. Many Christians derive definitions of faith from the Book of Hebrews which suggests "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (11:1).<sup>17</sup> Within the Roman Catholic tradition, Thomas Aquinas argues, faith precedes hope and love because "it is by faith that the intellect apprehends the object of hope and charity."<sup>18</sup> In essence, one cannot hope for something or love something that they do not first have faith in. For Aquinas, the theological virtues begin with faith.

Unlike Aquinas, Springsteen does not systematize the proper ordering of the virtues. Yet, for both Springsteen and Aquinas, understanding the proper "object" of faith remains crucial. Throughout *Wrecking Ball*, Springsteen wrestles with defining the proper object of faith. In the Roman Catholic tradition, Aquinas maintains that all three of the theological virtues must be directed towards one particular object—God.<sup>19</sup> Springsteen's music, however, does not so narrowly define God as the sole object of faith, hope, and love. Instead, faith may be directed towards a number of objects. Much of *Wrecking Ball* focuses on the dangers of this theological openness by discussing the misappropriation of faith toward an undeserving object. However, as he laments this

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<sup>17</sup> All biblical translations from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2.62.4; Aquinas utilizes charity as a synonym for love.

<sup>19</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2.62.1.



misplaced faith, Springsteen also affirms the existence of objects deserving of faith, most prominently the community, the self, and God.

Government serves as the most prominent example of an improper object of faith. Throughout *Wrecking Ball*, Springsteen roundly rejects government as an institution deserving of either confidence or devotion. The album was released in an election year following both the emergence of Occupy Wall Street as well as a prolonged congressional threat of governmental shutdown. These events highlighted America's massive wealth disparity as well as the overwhelming gridlock between President Barack Obama and the Republican-controlled Congress. According to David Fricke of *Rolling Stone*: "*Wrecking Ball* is a boldly apolitical record. The basic premise is that the true business of politics—responsible governing, a commerce of shared rewards—is broken, with plenty of guilt to go around."<sup>20</sup> Fricke provides valid commentary, but he may have been better suited to use the word "nonpartisan" rather than "apolitical." The album is overwhelmingly political, as numerous songs address the misappropriation of faith placed in the established elites of power, politics, and money.

From the opening song, "We Take Care of Our Own," Springsteen places his rejection of faith in the political establishment as a central theme of the album. Reminiscent of "Born in the U.S.A.," *Wrecking Ball*'s inaugural track proclaims with measured irony: "Wherever this flag's flown / we take care of our own." While "Born in the U.S.A." presents a scathing critique of the

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<sup>20</sup> David Fricke, "Wrecking Ball," *Rolling Stone*, March 6 2012, accessed April 12 2015, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/wrecking-ball-20120306>.

United States' treatment of Vietnam War veterans, this song criticizes the American political and financial establishment for failing to fulfill its promise to take care of its citizens. In so doing, the song attempts to redirect America's faith towards the community and the American people rather than the politicians of the United States government. After four years under the presidency of Barack Obama, "The road of good intentions has gone dry as a bone." Recalling further failures of the George W. Bush administration, especially Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Springsteen remembers that for those displaced in the Superdome, "There ain't no help, the cavalry stayed home; There ain't no one hearing the bugle blowin." The phrase "We take care of our own" rings out as a protest from the local community to a government filled with "good hearts turned to stone."

Throughout the album, Springsteen makes reference to the governmental and financial establishment in a variety of ways, each of which declares that these institutions have become too consumed with power and money. "Easy Money," "Shackled and Drawn," "Jack of All Trades," and "Death to My Hometown" all make disparaging comments regarding institutional elites and portray them as Gilded Age robber barons. These predatory individuals have perpetuated a system where middle-class Americans are bound to debt and trapped in emotional and financial uncertainty. On *Wrecking Ball*, Springsteen argues that his faith in the operatives of this societal arrangement has expired because the institutions and individuals who have perpetuated this system are no longer deserving of the American people's faith.

Instead of simply condemning government as an improper object of faith, Springsteen offers alternative possibilities for

redirecting faith into the suitable, deserving outlets such as the community, the self, and God. *Wrecking Ball* presents the sentiments of a community of people whose faith in the political and financial establishment has been depleted. Both Aquinas and Springsteen recognize that such establishments do not constitute a proper object of faith. Thomistic thought offers a redirection of that faith toward spiritual ends through faith in God. Yet, rather than rely solely on faith in the divine, Springsteen's emphasis on faith in community allows for faith to manifest itself in the physical realm.

The album trumpets the redirection of faith into communities of resistance, especially through acts of violence against the established order. For example, despite the singular pronoun in its title, "Death to My Hometown" serves as a rallying call for a community ravaged by political maneuvering that brought economic death without the use of any conventional weapons. Vengeance has become the response of the community. Their faith, whether secular or religious, in these institutions has been betrayed and the community is no longer willing to sit idly by while more wealth is accrued by the wealthy. Beyond this track, the protest raised from the beginning of the album – "We take care of our own" – weaves throughout each song. These communities of resistance and communities of care serve as a proper object of faith in order to combat the power brokers in Washington or on Wall Street. Though they may try to assuage faith toward their own ends, the "we" of Springsteen's communities proclaim that, despite the failures of others, they will continue to take care of their own.

In addition to the community, the self also serves as a proper object of faith for Springsteen. The album's title song is first and

foremost a eulogy for the old Giants Stadium.<sup>21</sup> On the surface, “Wrecking Ball” reminisces about the arena, but underneath the lyrics recount a tale of perseverance in the face of adversity characterized in the form of a wrecking ball. Commentators on the album have cited the song’s phrase, “Hold tight to your anger / And don’t fall to your fears” as the album’s central thesis.<sup>22</sup> This theme functions both in order to critically question faith in the American establishment while at the same time to encourage individuals to not abandon faith entirely.

“Wrecking Ball” serves as an inspiring mantra for human resilience. The song’s repeated challenge to the institutional establishment—“Bring on your wrecking ball”—becomes increasingly convincing as the song progresses. As the lyrics build to a climax, Springsteen reminds listeners that “hard times come, and hard times go.” Building in intensity and emotional passion as he sings these words, Springsteen breaks through the human barrier of self-doubt and uncertainty as he shouts, “Yeah just to come again / Bring on your wrecking ball.” The song welcomes the coming of difficult times with an assuring tone that positions faith in the possibility of perseverance. The singer maintains faith not

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<sup>21</sup> “50 Best Albums of 2012,” *Rolling Stone*, December 5 2012, accessed April 12, 2015, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/50-best-albums-of-2012-20121205/bruce-springsteen-wrecking-ball-19691231>.

<sup>22</sup> Neil McCormick, “Bruce Springsteen’s new album Wrecking Ball: track by track review,” *The Telegraph*, February 16 2012, accessed April 12, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/cdreviews/9087107/Bruce-Springsteens-new-album-Wrecking-Ball-track-by-track-review.html>; Fiachra Gibbons, “Bruce Springsteen: ‘What was done to my country was un-American,’” *The Guardian*, February 17 2012, accessed April 12, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/feb/17/bruce-springsteen-wrecking-ball>.

only in his individual ability to weather any storm or hardship but also the ability of his community to do the same.

While Springsteen establishes faith in community and the self, Springsteen's *Wrecking Ball*, like Aquinas, also identifies a spiritual deity as a proper object of faith. Through the fusion of gospel and hip-hop on "Rocky Ground," Springsteen offers up a plea-filled prayer for guidance, and wherever prayers are present, faith in a divine hearer functions. The track begins with a chorus softly singing the refrain: "We've been traveling over rocky ground, rocky ground." Springsteen interrupts this refrain by reverently singing "Rise up shepherd, rise up. / Your flock has roamed far from the hills." Rather than a demand, his tone is more akin to a supplication. The image of the shepherd has both significance in the Prophetic literature of the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament as it often identifies important characters that are servants of God. In addition, angels' cries of "Glory Hallelujah" remind listeners of the birth of Jesus. Both of these illustrations evoke a desire for an intimate God—Emmanuel, meaning "God with us"—to come and lead God's people.

As with most of the songs on *Wrecking Ball*, "Rocky Ground" does not merely identify the divine as a proper object of faith but also comments on society's misappropriation of this faith. The second verse reminds listeners: "Jesus said the money changers in this temple will not stand." Much of the song utilizes general biblical imagery, but this line references a specific story in the Gospel texts in which Jesus turns over the tables of the money exchangers in the temple in Jerusalem (Mark 11:15-19; Matthew 21:12-17; Luke 19:45-48; John 3:13-16). In the minds of many Christians, this story highlights Jesus's response to corruption

within the religious establishment. Springsteen invokes this narrative to symbolize the political, financial, and perhaps even religious corruption in the United States, and the need for the shepherd, who could be anyone from simply a prophet to God incarnate, to gather his or her flock and bring them to higher – safer – terrain.

In the middle of “Rocky Ground,” a rap interlude disrupts Springsteen’s gospel-like prayer. The break illustrates the difficulty of faith, suggesting that despite trying one’s hardest, one’s best is never good enough. These are the moments when the divine takes over and finishes the task that we cannot. Faith in God serves to take one beyond his or her individual capacities – beyond his or her “best.” And while the hard times keep coming, Springsteen shows that doubt and silence are just as faithful as assurance and outspokenness. The interlude ends and the chorus swells in its repetition of the phrase “We’ve been traveling over rocky ground,” but Springsteen’s prayer has been silenced. He only intermittently sings the simple phrase, “a new day’s coming.” By this point, the choral refrain has become the prayer and the act of faith itself. The claim of what we have been through – the “rocky ground” – becomes the very ground of faith. Rather than ending, the song fades into silence suggesting the travels continue ever faithfully over this rocky ground.

The struggle of everyday life makes the prospect of having faith difficult in and of itself, and this struggle is only exacerbated by the reality that certain institutions and ideas are not worthy objects of our faith. Both Thomas Aquinas and Springsteen remain concerned with the question of what constitutes the proper object of faith. Neither believes wealth, greed, power, Congress, Wall

Street, or the Office of the President qualify as proper objects of faith. Whereas Aquinas suggests any faith directed to someone or something other than God is a misappropriation of faith, Springsteen suggests that, in addition to God, community and the self operate as proper objects of faith within the temporal world. Instead of solely legitimizing faith when directed toward the spiritual, Springsteen understands faith to operate on both spiritual and physical levels.

### Hope

Hope is the most identifiable of the theological virtues within Springsteen's canon. As shown above, much of the scholarship focused on Springsteen and religion highlights the presence of hope illustrated through images of the Promised Land or an escape from bondage. However, this scholarship does not identify the ways in which Springsteen's understanding of hope operates in relation to faith. Deviating sharply from the Thomistic understanding, Springsteen understands hope as the virtue that sustains and carries faith through the dire straits of life.

Aquinas's intellectual framework places an overriding importance on understanding the proper order of the theological virtues. Faith precedes both hope and love within the order of the intellect. Conversely, love – also labeled charity – precedes both faith and hope in the order of perfection because “faith and hope are quickened by charity.”<sup>23</sup> For Aquinas, hope does not have a distinct role. Hope only precedes love when what is hoped for remains unknown. If the individual knows what they hope for, “love precedes hope: for good is never hoped for unless it be [first]

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<sup>23</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.62.4.

desired and loved.”<sup>24</sup> In the ordering of the virtues, Aquinas emphasizes the role of faith and love, utilizing hope as a supplementary virtue. Faith and love inform what should be hoped for, implying that hope apart from faith and love may yield inappropriate or even dangerous desires.

This ordering of faith, hope, and love results from Aquinas’s inability to properly intellectualize the virtue of hope. For Aquinas, the role of hope remains undefined. If someone believes in an object or ideal, it naturally follows that they would love that object or ideal before they hope for or desire it. Within this framework, hope remains static. The degree to which someone loves something becomes the impetus for moving toward the object or ideal that they in turn hope for. According to Springsteen, however, hope is constantly in motion. Hope carries faith toward love, sustaining faith along the journey. As he sings in “This Depression,” while faith may be disrupted, hope has never expired. Faith and hope are intrinsically linked. Without hope, faith is stagnant and dead.

Jeffrey Symynkywicz provides a good illustration of Springsteen’s peripatetic understanding of hope in his chapter on *The Rising* (2002), entitled “From Good Friday to Easter.” Symynkywicz describes the album’s title song as “an Easter-like anthem arising out of the darkness and despair of September 11, a national Good Friday experience if there ever was one.”<sup>25</sup> “The Rising” takes the viewpoint of a New York City firefighter on the day of September 11<sup>th</sup>, but, whether consciously or unconsciously, the narrator overlays this perspective with that of Christ on Easter morning from within the tomb:

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<sup>24</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.62.4.

<sup>25</sup> Symynkywicz, *The Gospel According to Springsteen*, 150.



Can't see nothin' in front of me  
 Can't see nothin' coming up behind  
 I make my way through this darkness  
 I can't feel nothing but this chain that binds me

Read through the lens of Easter morning, the listener visualizes a risen Christ fumbling through the darkness. Unwrapping the burial garments that bind him, Jesus reflects on where hope is taking him as he rolls the stone away. Later on in the song, the singer bears the “cross” of his “calling” and sees “Mary in the garden” – an allusion to the Resurrection story found in the Gospel of John. Symynkywicz suggests the “li, li, li’s” of the chorus might be heard as abbreviated “alleluias” bursting forth on Easter Sunday as the season of Lent completes.<sup>26</sup> While “The Rising” serves as an anthem for a post-September 11<sup>th</sup> New York City, the title track of *Wrecking Ball* resonates with similar themes of hope and the assurance of resurrection throughout life’s hardships. The similarities between the themes of both songs provide one reason the *Wrecking Ball* tour featured “The Rising” so prominently throughout Springsteen’s 2012-13 live performances.<sup>27</sup>

Hope carries both “The Rising” and “Wrecking Ball.” In the midst of utter despair, doubt, and waning faith, hope moves faith from the Good Friday of September 11<sup>th</sup> to the Easter Sunday of resurrection. Such a resurrection, however, cannot be expressed monolithically. The resurrection is embodied in the hope and knowledge that hard times *will* come and hard times *will* go, yet such an embodied resurrection manifests physically in different ways for different people as they experience hardship. In any case,

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<sup>26</sup> Symynkywicz, *The Gospel According to Springsteen*, 150.

<sup>27</sup> “The Rising,” *Brucebase*, accessed August 17, 2015:  
<https://brucebase.wikispaces.com/The+Rising>.

hope remains transient and constantly moving through highs and lows of life in anticipation of resurrection at each of life's turns.

This understanding of hope arises both explicitly and implicitly throughout *Wrecking Ball*. In the midst of the album's dystopian landscape, hope persists. "Jack of All Trades" and "Rocky Ground" present an understanding that change, new worlds, and new days are persistently approaching. While faith may be difficult to hold on to, for Springsteen, a new reality and life is actively coming. The hope for its arrival can thus bolster waning faith in the present. Hope is therefore linked with change and movement across time and space.

Implicitly, hope takes the form of continuing the struggle of everyday life. In these situations, hope is found in actions. "Shackled and Drawn" highlights the monotony of the working man's life. Yet while the title and lyrics paint a portrait of slavery, work serves as an embodiment not of suffering but of hope. In the song, the only way the protagonist knows how to continue living in such a dystopian world is to maintain his voice through song – to keep working and moving through life. Implicit hope endures through the protagonist's plea to keep trekking through life's seemingly bleak outlook.

In concert at the Hard Rock Calling Festival in 2012, Springsteen's performance evokes the centrality of hope in "Shackled and Drawn." The song begins with Springsteen leading a call and response with the audience. At the song's conclusion, Cindy Mizelle calls to the crowd saying,

I want everybody to stand up  
I want everybody to stand up and be counted tonight  
You know we got to pray together  
Cuz it's all about love. Love.

Love is the only way.<sup>28</sup>

Mizelle utilizes a revivalist tone in her voice evoking images of a Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting. Both the call and response as well as Mizelle's fleeting sermon surround the difficult and life-draining work featured in the song. Hope sustains the listener through the toils of a hard day's work to reach the final destination of the song epitomized by Mizelle's call: an affirmation of the need for prayer, as well as the need to be recognized and counted.

*Wrecking Ball* also shows hope manifest as an eschatological reality in "Land of Hopes and Dreams" – a song first performed in 1999 but officially released on the 2012 album. While some critics have criticized the song as riddled with clichés, "Land of Hopes and Dreams" nonetheless illustrates Springsteen's conception of hope as based on motion. The song depicts a train that carries people of all walks of life to the land of hopes and dreams. The lyrics describe a typical train. Two travelers have their tickets and luggage, but as the song progresses, more and more people are carried on the train. By the end of the song, Springsteen explains that the train does not even require ticket, just a willingness to climb aboard. All people have a stake in the destination of this train regardless of financial resources or past sins. In the final lines of the version released on *Wrecking Ball*, a chorus of voices antiphonally repeats a refrain of thankfulness to the Lord, reminding the listener that this train is carrying both a grateful and a faithful people.

It is significant that the images of hope within the music of Springsteen are transient and active. In "Land of Hopes and

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<sup>28</sup> Lars Helden, "Bruce Springsteen – Shackled and Drawn – London 2012 HD," July 21, 2013, accessed August 10, 2015  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wpPfvR39E8>.

Dreams," this image is a train. Elsewhere the image of a person continuing to work through tough times or caring for neighbors or looking towards a new day serves as the image of hope. Earlier in Springsteen's career, in songs such as "Thunder Road," cars served this function. In all of these situations hope is can be found by crossing from one reality into another across space and time. Faith remains a passive reality within these circumstances. Hope serves as the active agent in sustaining and journeying with faith.

The relationship between faith and hope depicted in Springsteen's music thus rejects the Thomistic importance placed upon the ordering of the theological virtues. Aquinas focuses his attention on each virtue as a self-contained whole within a proper order. Springsteen, however, demonstrates the connectivity and relationality between the virtues. Faith and hope do not operate independently of one another nor in a pre-determined succession. Instead, Springsteen illustrates an understanding of hope that sustains and carries faith. Within this relationship between faith and hope, love becomes the currency and the perfecting characteristic of the new, hoped-for reality.

### **Love**

For Springsteen and Aquinas, the virtue of love operates on different levels. Whereas Aquinas maintains that the virtue of love functions on a singularly theological level between an individual and God, Springsteen illustrates love functioning between individuals in relationship with one another. On *Wrecking Ball*, "You've Got It" serves as the album's "love song," which music critic Neil McCormick described as "light relief" from the rest of

the album's weighty themes.<sup>29</sup> However, a look at the entirety of *Wrecking Ball* – as well as the rest of Springsteen's canon – reveals a conception of love as built around solidarity. For Springsteen, love is both a theological and a social virtue whose perfect embodiment marks an eschatological, hoped for reality. Hope carries one's faith towards this perfection of love.

Alternatively, according to Aquinas, love precedes hope and faith in the order of perfection. He explains: "both faith and hope are quickened by charity, and receive from charity their full complement as virtues. For thus charity is the mother and the root of all the virtues."<sup>30</sup> Springsteen would not necessarily agree or disagree with Aquinas on this point because Springsteen is less concerned with intellectualizing each virtue as a discrete agent within an ordered chain. Instead, within Springsteen's music, love might better be characterized as providing direction for both faith and hope. Love is more of a goal than the starting place. For example, "We Take Care of Our Own" mourns our failure to care for one another while "Jack of All Trades" elicits a hope that society will finally start following Jesus's example to begin caring for one another. For Springsteen, humanity is striving toward this fuller understanding love.

However, theological ethicist Meghan Clark explains: "As both the classic virtue theory of Aquinas and Aristotle and contemporary virtue ethics show, all virtues must have clear

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<sup>29</sup> Neil McCormick, "Bruce Springsteen's new album *Wrecking Ball*: track by track review," *The Telegraph*, February 16 2012, accessed April 12 2015: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/cdreviews/9087107/Bruce-Springsteens-new-album-Wrecking-Ball-track-by-track-review.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.62.4.

objects and ends.”<sup>31</sup> If love functions as humanity’s desired end for Springsteen, the precise object of this love bears investigation. As explained above, for Aquinas, the theological virtues are clearly directed toward God. Much like his understanding of faith, Springsteen’s conception of love is more capacious. Love is social, built around either companionship or romantic love, rather than a specific love of God. “This Depression,” for example, showcases the need for another’s love in the face of depression. The only proposed remedy for such sorrow in this song is the heart—the love—of another human being, seemingly regardless of the particular nature of that affection.

Because Springsteen’s sense of love includes this social dimension, the idea of solidarity contributes to his understanding of this virtue. Clark understands solidarity to be a social virtue whose “formal object is our common humanity.”<sup>32</sup> For Clark, solidarity strikes a balance between excessive individualism and excessive collectivism. For Springsteen, solidarity and love are collapsed into one virtue. Many Springsteen songs exhibit a balancing of these two ideas. For instance, “Shackled and Drawn” encourages listeners to “stand up and be counted” as individuals while at the same time exhorting them to take part in communal prayer.

*Wrecking Ball* concludes with “We Are Alive,” an expression of Springsteen’s eschatological vision of the perfection of love. According to McCormick, the album ends with this track providing a “campfire song for ghosts of the oppressed, martyred strikers,

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<sup>31</sup> Meghan Clark, “Anatomy of a Social Virtue: Solidarity and Corresponding Vices,” in *Political Theology* 15 no. 1, 2014, 29-30.

<sup>32</sup> Clark, “Anatomy of a Social Virtue,” 30.

protesters and immigrant workers, with Springsteen strumming and whistling while a Mariachi band kicks in to celebrate the eternal possibility of good triumphing over bad as an idea, if not a reality.”<sup>33</sup> The song, however, is more particular than McCormick acknowledges. The song encompasses specific voices come from the American past: a striking railroad worker, a girl killed in the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church Bombing, and a migrant crossing the American border with Mexico. The voices of these deceased, however, return to their loved ones and all those living in order to proclaim that “We are alive.” Death has not conquered their love for those who left their bodies to rot. Love returns at the end of each of the song’s three verses through the deceased’s claim that “Our souls and spirits rise / to carry the fire and light the spark / to fight shoulder to shoulder and heart to heart.”<sup>34</sup> The listeners are provided with the image of a railroad worker next to a black girl from Birmingham next to an immigrant from Central America. Death has not quenched their ability to stand in solidarity with one another despite varying levels of oppression, identity, and privilege. In this instance, love is not only social, but love is also destructive, breaking down the barriers of class, gender, and race that separate humans—both living and dead—from one another. The song expresses an undeniable religious and spiritual understanding of love and solidarity rising above the powers of death. These religious overtones are made all the more powerful by the song’s opening line: “There’s a cross up yonder up on Calvary

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<sup>33</sup> Neil McCormick, “Bruce Springsteen’s new album Wrecking Ball: track by track review,” *The Telegraph*, February 16 2012, accessed April 12 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/cdreviews/9087107/Bruce-Springsteens-new-album-Wrecking-Ball-track-by-track-review.html>.

<sup>34</sup> McCormick, “Bruce Springsteen’s new album.”

Hill.” Evoking the image of Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection, Springsteen sets the entire song up beneath the shadow of the cross.

New Testament scholar Gail O’Day has suggested Jesus’s death, as recorded in the Gospel of John, serves as the “full expression of his love.”<sup>35</sup> As the fourth Gospel transitions into chapter 13, beginning the Passover Meal and Farewell Discourse, the Gospel writer explains: “Having loved his own who were in the world, [Jesus] loved them to the end” (John 13:1). O’Day suggests readers must understand “the end” as being not only the end of Jesus’s time on earth, but also signifying the fullest extent of Jesus’s love – literally, extending to the end of love itself.<sup>36</sup>

The image of the cross in “We Are Alive” functions similarly as emblematic of the ultimate form of God’s love and solidarity. As the embodiment and incarnation of the divine, Jesus comes to stand with humanity and die with humanity. The song, however, recognizes that death does not have the final word over love. For just as the listener hears the allusion to Jesus’s death and resurrection, so too the promise of that reality for all people is realized—specifically for the marginalized and oppressed. The promise of resurrection, however, is not the end in and of itself. The purpose of resurrection serves only to further love and solidarity in hopes of this eschatological vision of deceased railroad workers, black children, and Hispanic immigrants standing together, proclaiming that their life entails a triumph over and against the powers of death.

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<sup>35</sup> Gail O’Day, “The Gospel of John,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 9, (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1995), 497;

<sup>36</sup> O’Day, “John 13:1-38, The Farewell Meal,” 721.



### Conclusion

The analysis of faith, hope, and love highlighted in this article helps to offer a fuller understanding of Bruce Springsteen as an artist committed to visions of the American Dream. Thomas Aquinas understood the theological virtues as discrete agents operating in a logical, well-conceived order. Faith functioned first in the order of the intellect whereas love operated first in the order of perfection. Within such an arrangement, hope served to supplement the roles of faith and love. Through this rigid and cerebral understanding of the virtues, Aquinas maintained that faith, hope, and love might only be properly understood as they are directed to the divine.

Rather than perpetuating an intellectualized understanding of religion and spirituality as found within the thought of Thomas Aquinas and other medieval scholastics, Springsteen's canon creates a more integral role for hope. In so doing, Springsteen inverts the Thomistic idea that love operates first in the order of perfection. Instead, the perfection of love becomes the hoped-for goal in which there is faith operating on both a spiritual and physical level. Springsteen emphasizes the virtue of hope as that which sustains an individual's faith through times in which the perfection of love might seem unreachable.

This articulation of hope speaks to an American context that consistently looks toward the Promised Land and toward the prospect of the American Dream. For working-class Americans, such a dream often feels unreachable. Rather than relying on a systematized, Thomistic understanding of the theological virtues that privileges faith and love, Springsteen utilizes hope in order to maintain faith in the idea that a new world is, in fact, coming. For

Springsteen, hope “carries the spark” – the faith – that we may reach that eschatological reality in which love and solidarity prevail as humanity stands “shoulder to shoulder and heart to heart” in a triumph over death. Although Aquinas and Springsteen write for radically different purposes and audiences, juxtaposing these thinkers reveals that the theological enterprise is not solely an ivory-tower endeavor. With only the slightest imaginative lens, even a songwriter from New Jersey can produce a sophisticated understanding of the theological virtues that can resonate with people across faiths and nationalities.

## Reviews

*Springsteen on Springsteen: Interviews, Speeches, and Encounters*, edited by Jeff Burger (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2014. 432 pages).

The published interview was not invented by music journalists—it was a staple of *Paris Review* and *Playboy*, to cite two antecedents before *Rolling Stone* came along in 1967—but this somewhat peculiar literary subgenre has always had a special significance in rock & roll. It emerged as a culturally distinctive magazine feature in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which is to say the moment when rock & roll became *rock*, when it shifted from a largely unselfconscious form of musical expression to a more cerebral, avowedly artistic, one. As in so many other ways, we mark our years AD: After Dylan. In its inaugural issue, *Rolling Stone's* first interview subject was Donovan. But the patron saint (or, perhaps more accurately, sinner) of the form was Dylan: charismatic, elliptical, endlessly quotable. For musicians, journalists, and readers, the interview became an arena wherein the intellectual seriousness and philosophical ramifications of rock could be staked out and elaborated—generally free from the scrutiny of those (academics and other old people) who might regard the enterprise with amusement or ridicule.

By the time Bruce Springsteen came along in the mid-seventies, the rock interview had already become a fixture not only of *Rolling Stone*, but also sister publications *Creem* and *Circus*, which were eagerly received by adolescents like myself as bulletins from faraway worlds that were simultaneously the locus of our inner lives. A not-quite-modest pronouncement from a reigning superstar would become a proposition we would ponder, test, and adopt as our own. We could learn to talk like the heroes we—for a season, at least—had wanted to be.

What made Springsteen different at the tail end of this formative moment in the mid-seventies was his striking unpretentiousness, even

*BOSS: The Biannual Online-Journal of Springsteen Studies* 2.1 (2016)  
<http://boss.mcgill.ca/>

innocence. For journalists schooled in such matters—and many of them were—he seemed to embody the very ideal of Antonio Gramsci’s instinctively Marxist “organic intellectual,” an uncorrupted voice of the working-class articulating the agenda for a better day. Journalists flocked to Springsteen, many of them finding their own ideals validated in an industry that had long since mastered the art of commodifying dissent. Forty years later, even as the market for dissent has gotten noticeably smaller, they continue to do so.

Jeff Burger’s edited anthology *Springsteen on Springsteen: Interviews, Speeches, and Encounters* is the latest in a string of books that have collected interviews with Springsteen. In 1993, John Duffy published *In His Own Words*, largely a set of quotations rather than actual interviews, which was reissued in 2000. In 1996, Parke Puterbaugh published *Bruce Springsteen: The Rolling Stone Files*, a collection of pieces that had appeared in the magazine. Both of these books belonged to larger series that included volumes on other musicians. More recently, Christopher Phillips and Louis P. Masur—the former the editor of the highly regarded *Backstreets* fanzine, the latter a historian and the author of a fine book on the making of *Born to Run*—issued the 2013 anthology *Talk about a Dream*, which is likely to become a canonical text, as it features the work of well-established writers such as Springsteen’s biographer Dave Marsh, *L.A. Times* critic Robert Hilburn, and Phillips himself, all of whom played a major role in establishing what might be termed the legendary Springsteen.

Burger’s volume is a somewhat alternative collection, befitting the status of its Chicago Review Press imprint. There’s some overlap between *Springsteen on Springsteen* and *Talk about a Dream*; for example, both books include Springsteen’s 1996 conversation with Judy Wieder of *The Advocate*, a gay magazine, in which Springsteen acquits himself well, even ahead of his time in some respects, coming out strongly in favor of same-sex marriage. Many of Burger’s pieces come from smaller magazines, especially from the United Kingdom, where Springsteen says many of the same things

he does for more mainstream publications. What makes Burger's book distinctive and valuable is that it includes a number of Springsteen's own writings. Selections include Springsteen's 1999 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction speech, his hilarious 2005 speech inducting U2, and his strikingly candid and intimate 2011 eulogy for Clarence Clemons, among others. As such examples indicate, the weight of the book leans toward conversations in the last 20 years, which makes this often less familiar material for serious Springsteen scholars. Burger is also an assiduous editor who usefully and unobtrusively corrects the misstatements of his subjects and adds welcome brief contextual remarks in brackets.

The question this and the other books pose is whether it is possible to say something new about a man whose life has been as exhaustively documented as any in the last half-century. By now, the master narrative of Springsteen's life seems set in cement: a prodigy emerges from the mist, breaks through to mass success, gets enmeshed in star-making legal machinery (every savior must have his trial), ascends to the very summit of celebrity, and not only lives to tell the tale, but takes his place as a beloved global village elder whose counsel is sought by presidents and sages, all while never losing his common touch.

There are a few novel accents to be found in Burger's volume. One is the depth of Springsteen's familiarity with the prevailing music of any given time: the bands, many of them now obscure, which he references in discussions. It is also striking that, despite a struggle with his manager Mike Appel that always seemed relatively bitter to me (an idea I probably absorbed from Dave Marsh's 1979 biography *Born to Run*), Springsteen repeatedly affirms that he was never all that discouraged about the outcome, believing he would prevail. His affirmations of Appel's dedication in the late seventies, and at Springsteen's Hall of Fame induction ceremony two decades later, are notable for their sense of fairness, even generosity.

The solidity of the narrative of Springsteen's life is of course due in no small measure to Springsteen himself. His early ingenuousness aside, he quickly mastered the rules of this game, and plays it with consummate skill. And there are times when one wonders if he plays it a little *too* well. Pronouncements like "Your chances of having a violent altercation are relatively small, unless you watch television, in which case you'll be brutalized everyday" (interview with Neil Strauss, 1995, 197) or "I believe that the war on poverty is a more American idea than the war on the war on poverty" (interview with David Corn, 1996, 216) do not have the ring of spontaneous conversation that these conversations are supposed to represent. An air of calculation hovers over Springsteen's remarks, less as a matter of commerce or an effort to inflate his celebrity than evidence of a hammered-out, consistent ideological vision that might be termed communitarian big-government liberalism.

Perhaps because of the demographics involved—most of Springsteen's interlocutors have been white men of the same age as he was at the time of the interview—the tensions, even contradictions, in this vision have gone under-explored. To his credit, it's Springsteen, not an interviewer, who observes that for all his charitable work and talk about community in the eighties, the fact remained that as an artist on tour he was merely passing through the places he visited (Springsteen also makes parallel observations about his relationships until his marriages). One waits in vain for a question about the overwhelmingly white character of his audience, notwithstanding the fact that a string of African-American artists, among them the Pointer Sisters, Donna Summer, and Aretha Franklin, have performed his songs. Or how he thinks women relate to the preoccupations about autonomy that characterize so much of his music. These are not 'gotcha' queries; one imagines Springsteen might have had interesting things to say about these issues.

But all this is probably beside the point. For the dedicated fan, reading an interview with Springsteen will always be an exercise in

irresistible frustration: the reader cannot help but turn to it in the hope of meeting an invisible man who only materializes on a stage, playing the role of the everyman rock star. The second-hand fragments I pick up from these collected interviews are of a Springsteen who procrastinates over things he doesn't want to do, who forms intense but temporary attachments, whose standards can be punishingly difficult to meet if you happen to work for him. Yet I crave these fragments to further my efforts to piece together a complex human being, one who has mastered the art of revealing himself through both song and speech.

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*Outlaw Pete* by Bruce Springsteen, illustrated by Frank Caruso (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014, 56 pages).

Long before *Outlaw Pete* appeared in print, Simon & Schuster's advance notice styled it as both a picturebook for children and an illustrated text for adults, comparing it to *Go the F\*\*k to Sleep* and *Goodnight iPad*. Newspapers similarly hailed the book, sight unseen, as one for children and adults, with the *Los Angeles Times* (August 28, 2014) likening it to Keith Richards's *Gus & Me*, also forthcoming, as another children's book by a rock star. Although the author of *Outlaw Pete*, Bruce Springsteen, and its illustrator, Frank Caruso, equivocate when they describe the book's genre, you can't have it both ways. Either a picturebook is appropriate for young children or it must be consigned to that deservedly maligned category of the "coffee-table book." In *Outlaw Pete's* Afterword, for example, Springsteen writes that he's "not sure this is a children's book." He goes on to say, however, that "a six-month-old, bank-robbing baby is a pretty good protagonist," which is true and goes some distance in explaining why Caruso, who illustrates books for children and produces and designs children's television shows, came up with the idea to turn a song from *Working on a Dream* (2009) into a picturebook. Primarily a cartoonist/graphic novelist, Caruso uses mixed media techniques to illustrate *Outlaw Pete*, backgrounding fairly cartoonish figures with everything from acrylic on canvas to sepia-toned drawings. While the illustrations suit the text in the main, they quite often look like someone has propped images from a graphic novel in front of the walls of an art gallery. The text is, of course, the lyrics to Springsteen's song "Outlaw Pete," and therein rests the problem.

Caruso told the *Los Angeles Times*, "When Bruce wrote 'Outlaw Pete' he didn't just write a great song, he created a great character," a sentiment Caruso repeated in his rather simpering interview with *The Daily Show's* Jon Stewart. A six-month-old bank-robbing baby does make a great character,



and the first eight images in the book feature a rather adorable diapered child in a 10-gallon hat and kerchief (no gun in sight). Springsteen was notably quiet during that segment on Stewart's show, but he has gone on record as saying that the song was inspired by a picturebook his mother read to him: *Brave Cowboy Bill* (Kathryn and Byron Jackson; illustrated by Richard Scarry [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1950]). Like Caruso's young Outlaw Pete, Scarry's Cowboy Bill is a child, but Bill stays a child throughout, whereas Pete turns into a jaded twenty-five-year-old horse thief and murderer by the end of the first quarter of the book. Whereas Bill's adventures are lively but childishly benign, Pete stabs bounty hunter Dan and the story wraps around an image of his impaled body for several pages.

However, Springsteen's "great character" and the Jacksons' "brave Bill" have one important feature in common: they inhabit two of the most insidiously exploitive texts about First Nations peoples now in print. Both give the heinous *Little House on the Prairie* series a run for its money in terms of racism and offensiveness. Consider this page from *Brave Cowboy Bill*:

After lunch that cowboy looked for a band of painted Indians who were after scalps and loot.

BANG! He shot away their bowstrings, so they couldn't even shoot.

He took all their feathered arrows, and their tomahawks and bows.

And he made them smoke a peace pipe, sitting down in rows.

"We'll be friends," he told them firmly.

All the Indians said, "We will." Because no one EVER argues with the daring Cowboy Bill.

Like the series by Laura Ingalls Wilder, this book needs to be removed from children's hands; this sort of stereotyping needs to be put to rest. The question those of us who work with children and their books must ask ourselves is 'Can a Native child see herself or himself in positive and realistic ways in these texts?' In the case of *Brave Cowboy Bill*, the answer is clearly no.

In the case of *Outlaw Pete*, I agree with Dave Marsh, who writes in the liner notes that this is not a book for children. The illustrations of Dan's death were enough to make my four-year-old granddaughter comment: "Grandma, I don't think this book is for little girls." Well, I don't think it's for grown-up girls either, especially if they're Indigenous. Bruce Springsteen is one of the most socially-conscious writers and thinkers I've come across, therefore I was shocked when I first heard the song, wondering how on earth he could justify his commodification of the "young Navajo girl" and her sovereign lands. I was horrified when I saw the words joined to Caruso's illustrations, in which a grizzled old outlaw attempts to redeem himself by appropriating what looks to be a teenage girl before settling "down on the res." I'm aware that the song's chorus offers an existential questioning about the nature of one man, and I believe that Caruso did well in giving the chorus double-page spreads that make that questioning quite compelling. But at the end of the day, given the sexism and racism that underpins this song and book, when he asks over and over "I'm Outlaw Pete! I'm Outlaw Pete! I'm Outlaw Pete! Can you hear me?" I have to wonder why anyone would listen or care.

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*Leading the Life You Want: Skills for Integrating Work and Life* by Stewart D. Friedman (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review, 2014. 256 pages).

Stewart C. Friedman's *Leading the Life You Want: Skills for Integrating Work and Life* presents a new volume in a long-running genre of management-focused, self-help books. Friedman begins with the premise that modern life is challenging and time consuming. People struggle to find ways to meet the demands placed on them by their jobs, families, and other commitments. Moreover, most people are unable to prioritize and manage all these areas of their lives. To be successful, Friedman argues, modern people need to develop skills that lead to "4-way wins." These 4-way wins are achieved when people find success in the areas of "work or school; home or family; community or society; and the private realm of mind, body and spirit" (4) and are built upon the principles of being real (knowing one's authentic self), being whole (acting with integrity) and being innovative (acting with creativity). Friedman's argument is that to achieve wins in each of these four areas, individuals need to develop skills to reinforce these three main principles. His book is dedicated to identifying, building, and using these skills. Friedman presents an accessible work that shows readers what they are doing wrong in their lives while affirming that they do have the ability to find success and happiness. The book is replete with the requisite management aphorisms, sayings, tag lines, and other mantras that, though tedious at times, succinctly summarize many of his main arguments.

Where Friedman's work differs from management self-help books is in his use of exemplars to illustrate his points. Rather than rely solely on theory, he profiles six people as examples of how readers can best organize and manage their lives so that they can achieve 4-way wins. Most relevant to this review is Friedman's profile of Bruce Springsteen. Friedman draws on Springsteen's life to illustrate tips and lessons about how to be a better person. Specifically, Friedman notes that Springsteen has unwittingly

followed the steps to personal happiness and success that his book expounds.

The discussion of Springsteen's life is short but effective. Friedman is a good writer and storyteller and, as someone not well familiar with Springsteen's background, family life, or working relationships, I found Friedman's selected vignettes entertaining and readable. Over the course of the chapter, he uses Springsteen's successes and failures throughout his career and family life to showcase that his methods will lead to the successful integration of one's work, family, spiritual, and community life.

For Springsteen aficionados, I suspect this book will be somewhat of a disappointment. Friedman condenses a 40-year career into a mere twenty pages. And, after stripping away the management jargon, readers are left with a fairly straightforward summary of Springsteen's life and a collection of generic, self-affirming stories peppered with interesting tidbits. Readers seeking new information about the Boss should turn elsewhere. Those looking to gain personal insight from Springsteen's hard-won life lessons will find this book of value. Overall, Friedman succeeds in crafting a straight-forward, sometimes schmaltzy, chapter about a working-class boy made good. His chapter serves as an appropriate introduction for those interested in integrating Springsteen's life and art into the world of management studies.

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## Special Collections

*The Bruce Springsteen Special Collection, Monmouth University.*

“The truly essential works by biographers, critics, scholars, journalists, and fans are together in one place. The Collection documents all phases of Springsteen’s career and should be an indispensable tool for researchers and fans alike.”

– Christopher Phillips, Editor, *Backstreets*

What makes The Bruce Springsteen Special Collection unique is the way in which it was compiled—somewhat like Ridley Scott’s crowd-sourced video montage, *Springsteen and I* (2013). The creation of this culturally-important archive was given impetus by *Backstreets* editor Christopher Phillips. Concerned over the dwindling availability of magazine and newspaper articles on Springsteen’s early career, *Backstreets* initiated a fan-to-fan campaign in the summer of 2001 with the purpose of gathering donations world-wide of the significant documents and artifacts from each phase of Springsteen’s career. The intent was to develop a repository of Springsteeniana that would be publicly accessible and of interest to both fans and scholars. The result is a collection of documents, recordings, and memorabilia that reflects the international scope of Springsteen’s art and influence: donations have come from fans in 48 countries, from Argentina to Zimbabwe.

Housed on the campus of Monmouth University in West Long Branch, New Jersey—just 20 miles from Springsteen’s childhood home in Freehold—The Bruce Springsteen Special Collection contains over 17,000 items. Along with books and articles in journals and magazines, print materials include songbooks, tour books, comic books, and newspaper clippings. The Collection houses an extensive resource of vinyl and CD recordings, both official and unofficial releases. One intriguing oddment is an interview with Springsteen recorded on a motorcycle-shaped 45 rpm

*BOSS: The Biannual Online-Journal of Springsteen Studies* 2.1 (2016)

<http://boss.mcgill.ca/>

disc pressed in the United Kingdom. Though extensive, the Collection is far from complete: a link on the homepage presents a lengthy wish-list of hard-to-find items—by title, genre, country, and state—that should be preserved and would be happily catalogued and archived. Donators to the Collection are acknowledged and thanked on the Collection’s website.

The attractive, well-developed website offers a thorough catalogue of holdings and a list of straightforward answers to frequently asked questions about the Collection and its policies. Browsing the site one discovers a smattering of obscure biographical facts. Interested to read about Springsteen’s youthful adventures in Little League baseball, or to learn that instances of his often-misspelled surname include his birth announcement in the *Asbury Park Press* on September 24, 1949? Other nuggets of interest on the website pages include snippets from early reviews in college newspapers of fledgling performances by Springsteen and the E Street Band and references to rare juvenilia—teasers to the “hidden gems” housed in hard copy at the Collection.

And here’s a notable fact not listed on the website: Bruce Springsteen visited the Collection in 2015.

The Bruce Springsteen Special Collection is not a fan shrine nor a museum, but a research center, located in Archives House on the Monmouth University campus. On average, the Collection hosts 50 visitors annually from all parts of the globe, making brief visits or extended research stints. Roughly 30 per cent of these are scholars, graduate students, or writers conducting research, according to Eileen Chapman, Associate Director for the Center for the Arts at Monmouth University and Director of the Special Collection. Visitors must make an appointment: complete details on how to do so are available at the “FAQ” tab on the Collection’s website. Scholars and fans wishing to visit this research center must also come prepared. Items in the Collection are filed in special archival folders and stored in archival boxes. Reference numbers to

individual archival boxes are available via the Collection's website, and visitors are required to provide appropriate box numbers for items they wish to view. According to Chapman, the most frequently accessed items relate to Springsteen's high school days and his brief stint at Ocean County College – at which time he published his first poem, an item of considerable interest in the Collection.

None of the Collection's materials is available in an online format. Limited copying of print resources – including photographs – is possible for research purposes. No audio or video resources may be copied.

The custodians and financial supporters of the Special Collection have a separate website under the moniker "The Friends of the Bruce Springsteen Collection." A three-year membership costs \$50 (US) and is tax deductible in the United States. Members' fees help to fund the "state-of-the-art archival techniques" used to ensure that items in the Collection are well preserved and accessible for future generations of fans and researchers.

The Bruce Springsteen Special Collection website can be accessed at the following link:

<http://brucespringsteenspecialcollection.nexxtblog.com/>

Readers interested in learning more about The Friends of the Bruce Springsteen Collection can find information and details regarding membership at the following link:

<http://friendsofthespringsteencollection.nexxtblog.com/>

This website also includes links to 13 fan sites as well as to the Bruce Springsteen Official Website – and, of course, to *BOSS*.