

Reviews

American Lonesome: The Work of Bruce Springsteen, written by Gavin Cologne-Brookes (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018, 228 pages).

Gavin Cologne-Brookes' *American Lonesome: The Work of Bruce Springsteen* does not attempt to present traditional literary analysis of Springsteen's work, although it contains numerous allusions to primary American texts to demonstrate common themes among these works. Cologne-Brookes guides us through his personal considerations of Springsteen, both as an artist and a presenter of personae, and at the same time offers both autobiographical and associative insights as he considers perceived kindred thought between Springsteen and both American and European creators. As a result, this unconventional volume provides something different than the focused literary analysis one might expect.

Cologne-Brookes often needs to complete his argument, in that he frequently presents an assertion, offers a reference, and then moves on to his next point when the reader needs for him to draw his connections and offer a more definitive, convincing indication of his line of thought. For example, he states that "Perhaps the best evidence of Springsteen's dialogue with his era is in the patterns that interconnect his work with Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country*"¹. Mason has gone on record as saying that *Born in the USA* "belonged in the novel" (see her interview with Hillary Devries for *The Christian Science Monitor*), but Cologne-Brookes does not offer a

convincing demonstration that this influence has been reciprocated. After offering a brief summary of Mason's novel, particularly where surviving members of a family go to visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Cologne-Brookes notes that Springsteen's "The Wall" (High Hopes, 2014) depicts a surviving family of a veteran as they consider the memorial "small recompense It's a long way from the record that saw Springsteen become a household name as a pop icon. . . . [I]t nods to Mason's 1985 novel," Cologne-Brookes concludes, offering a citation to an interview where Springsteen says of Mason only, "I like her work."²

Cologne-Brookes leads us to expect that he will trace those "patterns that interconnect," but he does not do so, merely rephrasing his vague assertion "'The Wall' shows how his work came to participate in a conversation" and leaving us either to accept that assertion or find the evidence to substantiate this open-ended assertion for ourselves.³

At the close of *American Lonesome*, Cologne-Brookes offers a reverie where he is a twenty-something fan surprised when Springsteen halts a concert, leans from the stage, and asks Cologne-Brookes to autograph the book we have just finished reading, handing it back to the young author with the admonition, "I'm a mere catalyst. It's your life. Make something of it."⁴ The dust jacket of the book asserts that *American Lonesome* "dissolves any imagined

barriers between the study of a songwriter, literary criticism, and personal testimony,” and this closing passage confirms that focus.

¹ Gavin Colonge-Brookes, *American Lonesome: The Work of Bruce Springsteen* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 180.

² *Ibid.*, 200 n. 25.

³ *Ibid.*, 162-63.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.