BOSS

The Biannual Online-Journal of Springsteen Studies

Volume 1 • Number 1 • 2014

Published by McGill University

BOSS
The Biannual Online-Journal of Springsteen Studies

Volume 1 • Number 1 • 2014

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/
Please address all queries and submissions to Jonathan D. Cohen (Managing Editor) at Springsteenstudies@gmail.com or to
Corcoran Department of History, University of Virginia
C/O Jonathan Cohen
Nau Hall - South Lawn
Charlottesville, VA
22904

Cover Image

By Jo Lopez. Used with kind permission from Shore Fire Media (http://shorefire.com/).

Contents

Introduction to *BOSS*
The Editors 5

Contributors 8

Articles

Another Side of "Born in the U.S.A.": Form, Paradox, and Rhetorical Indirection
Jason Schneider 9

Springsteen, Tradition, and the Purpose of the Artist
William I. Wolff 36

Whose Hometown? Reception of Bruce Springsteen as an Index of Australian National Identities
Brad Warren and Patrick West 74

Springsteen as Developmental Therapist: An Autoethnography
Rodney Dieser 96

Reviews

***Bruce Springsteen: American Poet and Prophet* by Donald L. Deardorff II**
Jonathan D. Cohen 121

***Springsteen & I* directed by Baillie Walsh**
Donna Luff and Lorraine Mangione 124

Special Collections

Library of Hope and Dreams compiled by Denise Green 129

Introduction to BOSS

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *BOSS: The Biannual Online-Journal of Springsteen Studies*, the first periodic, peer-reviewed publication devoted exclusively to scholarly work on the music, writing, and performance of Bruce Springsteen. Given his enduring global popularity, his diverse oeuvre, as well as his self-conscious engagement with the American past and the American storytelling and songwriting traditions, Springsteen represents a key cultural figure of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. *BOSS* aims to secure a place in the contemporary academy for what can now be called Springsteen Studies, thereby providing scholars the opportunity to engage with Springsteen and his work, analyze his cultural significance, as well as explore the meaning of his music.

Some of the earliest published scholarly work on Springsteen dates back to articles in 1983 editions of *Popular Music and Society* and *Social Text*. Since then, and especially since the mid-2000s, Springsteen's work has garnered considerable attention from scholars across a range of disciplines. The "Special Collections" note at the end of this first issue of *BOSS* showcases Denise Green's "Library of Hope and Dreams," a comprehensive, annotated, online bibliography of scholarly publications on Springsteen that currently lists nearly 300 items, including multiple journal articles and book chapters, several scholarly monographs, and a number of edited collections of interdisciplinary essays. Green has also identified 31 PhD and masters' theses focused on Springsteen's life and art. As the focus of wide academic interest, both in published scholarship and in college and university classrooms, Springsteen's cultural production is a worthy addition to those scholarly journals dedicated to a single subject.

BOSS seeks not only to inspire further scholarly investigation of Springsteen but also to bridge a gap between fans and academics. Springsteen Studies has already demonstrated its popular appeal. Most of the academic publications on Springsteen have been published by popular—rather than university—presses, indicating an audience outside of academic institutions interested in reading scholarly work on Springsteen. While we hope articles published in *BOSS* will receive serious consideration by fellow scholars, we also hope to engage a broader public interested in Springsteen. In order to garner popular readership, we will strive to publish readable academic articles that provide original scholarly analysis but are not brimming with scholarly jargon. *BOSS* is an open access online journal aimed at a wide readership in the United States, Canada, and abroad.

In keeping with the recent thirtieth anniversary of the release of *Born in the U.S.A.*, our lead article by Jason Schneider, "Another Side of 'Born in the U.S.A.': Form, Paradox, and Rhetorical Indirection," addresses the confusion and controversy that have surrounded one of Springsteen's best known and most historically significant songs. Drawing on the theories of Kenneth Burke and others, Schneider argues for a nuanced reading of the song that reconciles its seeming dissonance between musical form and lyrical content. Recognizing the song's "rhetorical indirection," argues Schneider, helps us to better comprehend the paradoxical socio-political complexities that Springsteen addresses in his lyrics and to better understand "the relationship that all national subjects must negotiate with their governments and communities."

Inspired by Springsteen's South By Southwest Music Conference and Festival (SXSW) keynote address, William Wolff discusses the folk characteristics of Springsteen's songwriting approach in "Springsteen, Tradition, and the Purpose of the Artist." Arguing that these folk influences result in traditional music built on the past and speaking to the concerns of the present, Wolff places Springsteen in conversation with William Wordsworth and T.S. Eliot, tracing various influences that ground Springsteen "in an evolving understanding of history, everyday life, and contemporary culture." Wolff further weighs the ramifications of Springsteen's discussion of his influences and the "authenticity" of modern music, illuminating the consequences and significance of Springsteen's emerging role as a cultural ambassador for the arts.

Brad Warren and Patrick West also focus on the title track of Springsteen's 1984 album in their article "Whose Hometown? Reception of Bruce Springsteen as an Index of Australian National Identities." The authors take up "Born in the U.S.A." as well as a short story collection by Australian author Peter Carey and the 1986 blockbuster *Crocodile Dundee*, using cultural productions to examine the dual forces shaping Australian identity in the mid-1980s. Warren and West also trace the rise of the "individualized listening practices" that have allowed for more fluid correlations between music and national identity, a change reflected in the ambiguous pronouns of Springsteen's "We Take Care of Our Own."

The final article of our inaugural issue combines scholarship and personal history to "underscore how listening to Springsteen's music can facilitate moral development." Rodney Dieser's "Springsteen as Developmental Therapist: An Autoethnography" uses the author's adolescent experience in authoritarian home and school settings to illustrate how Springsteen's songs helped foster emotional maturation for one individual who was not taught moral development in other social contexts. Drawing on theories from developmental psychology as well as memories of his adolescence, Dieser points to

specific examples of how Springsteen's music assisted his progression through what scholars have identified as distinct stages of moral development.

BOSS will also provide a space for the assessment and discussion of the latest works about Springsteen that have analytical depth and are rigorously researched, whether published by scholarly or popular presses. In this issue, we include reviews of the 2013 documentary *Springsteen & I*, composed of fan-made videos that testify to Springsteen's transformative effect on some listeners, as well as *Bruce Springsteen: American Poet and Prophet* (Scarecrow Press, 2014), a new analysis of Springsteen's canon and career that attempts to understand the popularity of Springsteen's music in the cultural, social, and political context of the late twentieth-century United States.

The editors of *BOSS* express our gratitude to Mona Okada and Springsteen's legal team for allowing us to quote generously from Springsteen's work. For helping craft the course of the journal's future with their invaluable insight, we would like to thank the members of *BOSS*'s 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. Our thanks as well to McGill University, specifically Amy Buckland and Joel Natanblut of the McGill Library, as well as Leonard Moore in the Department of History, for giving *BOSS* a home.

BOSS seeks to create a place for scholars and fans to engage in academic dialogue about Springsteen's music and performance as well as the cultural and historical significance of his work. We therefore encourage submissions that consider any and all aspects of Springsteen's cultural capital, those that are inter- and multi-disciplinary, and those that bring his work into conversation with the writers and performers that have influenced his oeuvre and those that he, in turn, has influenced. As with this inaugural issue, we intend *BOSS* as a forum for scholarly and accessible discourse that demonstrates why Bruce Springsteen matters as a historical and cultural figure and illuminates what engaged interdisciplinary scholarly analysis about Springsteen has to offer fans and scholars alike.

Jonathan Cohen, University of Virginia
Roxanne Harde, University of Alberta, Augustana
Irwin Streight, Royal Military College of Canada

Contributors

Rodney B. Dieser is Professor of Leisure, Youth, and Human Services at the University of Northern Iowa and graduate coordinator of the master's degree in philanthropy and nonprofit management. He also works as a mental health therapist in community practice.

Jason Schneider is Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, & Discourse at DePaul University, where he also coordinates the Graduate Certificate in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). His teaching and scholarship cover a range of topics, including applied linguistics/TESOL, writing instruction for multilingual students, and issues connected to transnationalism and immigration.

Brad Warren is a Methodological Consultant to Deakin University's School of Communication and Creative Arts. He has worked as a lecturer in Media and Communication/Sociology and taught extensively at secondary and tertiary levels, both in Australia and China.

Patrick West is a Senior Lecturer in Professional and Creative Writing at Deakin University, Melbourne. His short-story collection, *The World Swimmers*, was published by The International Centre for Landscape and Language, Edith Cowan University, Perth, in 2011. In 2012, Patrick wrote and co-produced the 27-minute fictional-documentary film *Sisters of the Sun* (directed by Simon Wilmot).

William I. Wolff is Associate Professor of Writing Arts at Rowan University. He is in the middle of a multi-year mixed-methods study investigating how people are writing on Twitter by focusing on Springsteen fans. Articles based on his findings will appear in 2015 in *Kairos* and *Transformative Works and Cultures*.

Another Side of "Born in the U.S.A.": Form, Paradox, and Rhetorical Indirection

Jason Schneider
DePaul University

Abstract

"Born in the U.S.A." has been one of the most important and controversial songs of Bruce Springsteen's career. For some listeners, the song is a pro-America anthem; for others, it is a scathing commentary on American government and society. This paper challenges both of those views, arguing that the song's apparently contradictory musical form and lyrical content interact to produce a collective rhetorical effect. In this view, "Born in the U.S.A." is not an argument for a specific political ideology but rather a multilayered and multidirectional interrogation of the paradoxes of national belonging.

"Patriotism tends toward a paradox…"
—Steve Johnston[1]

"Born in the U.S.A." is in some ways the most important song of Bruce Springsteen's career. It dominated the airwaves throughout the mid-1980s; it was the driving force behind the *Born in the U.S.A.* album, which vaulted Springsteen into mega-stardom; and it is the song that most listeners in the United States and around the world associate with the artist. Additionally, even though "Born in the U.S.A." is probably not the favorite song of many Springsteen fans, it is the song that has aroused the most controversy and discord among devoted fans, casual listeners,

 The author would like to thank the reviewers for their thoughtful comments and the editors for their strong commitment to furthering the scholarly discourse around the work of Bruce Springsteen. Please address correspondence to jschne12@depaul.edu.

[1] Steve Johnston, *The Truth About Patriotism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 227.

music writers, and even politicians. Because of these debates and the strong feelings attached to them, "Born in the U.S.A." has become a touchstone that fans use to define themselves and other listeners in relation to Springsteen and his music: Do you know what the song is really about? Do you know about the various misinterpretations and misuses? How do you assess the *Born in the U.S.A.* period in the context of Springsteen's career? To borrow a bit of Bourdieuian social theory, answers to these questions serve as a kind of cultural capital that places listeners in Springsteenian social space; the right answers earn cultural capital, while the wrong ones diminish worth. Examining some of the competing discourses around "Born in the U.S.A.," including varying interpretations of the song, is one of the goals of this paper. By analyzing these arguments, I aim to identify and problematize assumptions behind some of the key positions. Beyond this meta-analysis, though, I want to propose a way of thinking about "Born in the U.S.A." that draws on assumptions from my own academic field, rhetorical studies, but which has broader reach. Rather than another interpretation of the song's specific meaning, my perspective focuses on *how* the song means whatever it means—or in more rhetorical terms, how the song argues whatever it argues. To this extent, I am most interested in illuminating some of the mechanisms through which the song creates a rhetorical effect for listeners. The argument I will develop is that "Born in the U.S.A." functions according to a paradoxical juxtaposition of form (musical delivery) and content (lyrics) to create "rhetorical indirection," a term I borrow from Jason Ingram.[2] Furthermore, I argue that this

[2] Jason Ingram, "Plato's Rhetoric of Indirection: Paradox as Site and Agency of Transformation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 40:3 (2007): 293-310. The term was also

structure and the accompanying rhetorical paradox it produces are precisely what make the song one of the most enigmatic recordings from Springsteen's catalog. Beyond this, I propose that the paradoxical structure of "Born in the U.S.A." offers a generative heuristic for thinking about Springsteen's larger artistic output and public persona, both of which have been marked by paradoxes since at least the mid-1980s, when *Born in the U.S.A.* was released, and perhaps even since the mid-1970s, when he first began developing some of the key themes that continue to define his work.

Arguing "Born in the U.S.A.": Right, Left, and Neither

Arguments around "Born in the U.S.A." and *Born in the U.S.A.* began in the summer of 1984, shortly after the album's release. Historical narratives of the song and album typically focus on a September 1984 newspaper piece by conservative columnist George Will, who wrote about attending a Springsteen concert at the invitation of members of Springsteen's entourage. In the piece, Will made the following claims: "I have not got a clue about Springsteen's politics, if any, but flags get waved at his concerts when he sings songs about hard times. … [T]he recitation of closed factories and other problems always seems punctuated by a grand, cheerful affirmation: Born in the U.S.A.!"[3] These and other

used by Maurice Natanson in, for example, "The Arts of Indirection," in *Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature*, ed. Don M. Burks (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1978), 35-47. More recently, Gerard Hauser employs the term extensively in a chapter of *Prisoners of Conscience: Moral Vernaculars of Political Agency* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012), 99-121.

[3] George Will, "A Yankee-Doodle Springsteen,'" *New York Daily News*, September 13, 1984.

comments in Will's piece constituted what Jefferson Cowie and Lauren Boehm describe as the "first shot in the Springsteen wars."[4] Will's ignorance of Springsteen's politics was, in itself, enough to incense fans, many of whom identified strongly with the songwriter's increasingly pointed critiques of American social structure, particularly through his depictions of working-class characters who could not find a place for themselves in post-industrial America. The end result of Will's positive assessment of Springsteen, however, was much greater. He encouraged Ronald Reagan's reelection team to refer to Springsteen on the campaign trail, so on September 19, 1984, Reagan made the following comments during a stump speech in Hammonton, New Jersey: "America's future rests in a thousand dreams inside your hearts. It rests in the message of hope in songs of a man so many young Americans admire—New Jersey's own Bruce Springsteen. And helping you make those dreams come true is what this job of mine is all about."[5] Reagan's use of Springsteen's name was by no means sanctioned, as Springsteen was anything but a Reagan supporter; indeed, in 1980, the day after Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter, Springsteen had gone on stage and called the results of the election "pretty frightening."[6] However, Springsteen did not react publicly

---

[4] Jefferson R. Cowie, and Lauren Boehm, "Dead Man's Town: 'Born in the U.S.A.,' Social History, and Working-Class Identity," *American Quarterly* 58:2 (2006): 359.

[5] Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a Reagan-Bush Rally in Hammonton, New Jersey, September 19, 1984," *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan,* Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, accessed June 2014, http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/91984c.htm

[6] Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band, Live in Tempe, Arizona, November, 5, 1980, bootleg recording; "Badlands" recording accessed June 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGoBcNXa3mM

for a few days to Reagan's use of his name in 1984. Then, during a concert on September 22, after finishing a performance of "Atlantic City," he said this: "The President was mentioning my name the other day, and I kinda got to wondering what his favorite album musta been. I don't think it was the *Nebraska* album. I don't think he's been listening to this one," and then he launched into "Johnny 99," a folk tale about a laid-off auto-plant worker whose frustration leads to a drunken robbery, during which he murders a store clerk.[7]

If Will's comments were indeed "the first shot in the Springsteen wars" that resulted in Reagan's New Jersey speech, then Springsteen's observation that the president had not "been listening to this one" can be understood as his own direct contribution to the conversation. Clearly, the assumption behind his claim was that Reagan did not appreciate the extent to which he, through his lyrics, had been critiquing the American socioeconomic situation—one which presumably had resulted, at least to some degree or another, from Reagan's own policies. To this extent, the debate at that moment was about the profound socioeconomic changes that were taking place in America and Reagan's and Springsteen's competing assessments of those changes. Was the new America—Reagan's America—a place where individuals' dreams could flourish, or was it a place of profound desperation, as experienced by alienated workers, such as the protagonist of "Johnny 99"?

This ideological question about the state of America, however, did not remain central to the debates around "Born in the U.S.A."; rather, Springsteen's initial public response served as an

[7] Dave Marsh, *Glory Days: Bruce Springsteen in the 1980s* (New York: Pantheon, 1987), 263.

unambiguous gesture to Reagan and his people, and to any confused listeners, that they should not presume an association between him and the president's politics, regardless of how many American flags were being waved at his concerts. What developed in the months and years following was an effort by Springsteen fans and some music critics to emphasize what they heard as the true meaning of the song and album in response to the apparent misunderstandings. To this extent, the story about Reagan became a moralizing-aggrandizing tale for Springsteen fans in 1984-85, years of true Springsteen-mania, because it highlighted the extent to which listeners, including presumably many of the 13 million who bought *Born in the U.S.A.*, did not understand the album or the song, which Dave Marsh describes variously as "misinterpreted," "misconstrued," and "misappropriated."[8] Some years later, Eric Alterman offered a similar view on widespread perceptions of "Born in the U.S.A.," claiming that the song offered a prime example of the whole album's "lyric-melodic confusion" and that "millions of people heard exactly the opposite message of what Springsteen intended."[9] The general position that both Marsh and Alterman take here, that many listeners did not understand "Born in the U.S.A." or *Born in the U.S.A.*, is echoed in the commentaries of myriad writers. A few examples from the academic literature are illustrative: Bryan Garman argues that the "political intentions" of *Born in the U.S.A.* were "largely misunderstood," and claims that the musical form of "Born in the U.S.A." in its full rock version "removed some of the sting from the lyrics and opened the door for

[8] Marsh, *Glory Days*, 200; 258.
[9] Eric Alterman, *It Ain't No Sin to be Glad You're Alive: The Promise of Bruce Springsteen* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1999), 156; 158.

manipulation"; Alan Rauch observes that "Born in the U.S.A." was not "the patriotic anthem that many in Springsteen's audience conceived it to be" and, similarly, that "[w]hile there is no question that the song was written to represent the voice of Vietnam veterans who are unemployed or who have been alienated, it is by no means an anthem"; Jason Stonerook calls the song "[h]orrendously misinterpreted by the masses as a patriotic anthem," arguing instead that the song constitutes "a scathing condemnation of an America that has left some citizens behind and alone."[10]

The shared, underlying thesis of these and other commentators has become *doxa* among Springsteen fans and writers, and, as noted earlier, it partly serves the function of determining whether or not one truly understands the artist.[11] However, the argument that "Born in the U.S.A." has been largely misunderstood or misinterpreted operates according to at least two problematic assumptions that I want to highlight here, even if I admit to being sympathetic to the argument as a response to a

[10] Bryan Garman, "The Ghost of History: Bruce Springsteen, Woody Guthrie, and the Hurt Song," *Popular Music and Society* 20 (1996): 92; Alan Rauch, "Bruce Springsteen and the Dramatic Monologue," *American Studies* 29:1 (1988): 39; Jason P. Stonerook, "Springsteen's Search for Individuality and Community," in *Bruce Springsteen, Cultural Studies, and the Runaway American Dream*, eds. Kenneth Womack, Jerry Zolten, and Mark Bernhard (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2012), 222.

[11] Additional examples of similar perspectives can be found, among other places, in the following: Peter Ames Carlin, *Bruce* (Touchstone: New York, 2012), 316; Jason M. Bell and Jessica Bell, "Socrates the Sculptor, Springsteen the Singer," in *Bruce Springsteen and Philosophy,* eds. Randall E. Auxier and Doug Anderson (Open Court: Chicago and LaSalle, Illinois, 2008), 241-242; and from a fan's point of view in Daniel Cavicchi's ethnography, *Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning among Springsteen Fans* (New York: Oxford University Press), 92, 116.

certain rhetorical situation—namely, Will's and Reagan's uses of Springsteen's name and the explosion of Springsteen-mania in the mid-1980s. First, to call any piece of art *misinterpreted* is to assume that there might be right or wrong understandings of artworks; or, more pointedly, it is to assume that artworks hold specific meanings and that the role of an audience is to decipher or find those meanings. This is a popular and widespread belief about art, and lyric art in particular, but it is a position that has become theoretically tenuous in the wake of more than four decades of postmodern thought. Similarly, the notion that the meanings of artworks are somehow reflective of their creators' intentions is specious if we accept the basic tenet that the ideological, discursive, and aesthetic expectations of audiences affect their interpretations of texts. Second, and more important for the argument I want to develop later in this paper, the ways of thinking about "Born in the U.S.A." favored by many fans and writers clearly privilege the song's lyrics over its music. In fact, in most versions of the argument, the music itself is never addressed, or, in the case of Alterman's and Garman's arguments, the music is described as a feature that distracts from the true meaning of the song. In this view, the earlier acoustic version of the song, which was recorded during the *Nebraska* sessions and appears on the 1998 *Tracks* collection, offers a truer, or perhaps purer, rendering of the song's meaning, since there is no distraction of a rock band or the nearly screamed refrain of "Born in the U.S.A." that might be misinterpreted as anthemic or as a "grand, cheerful affirmation" of America, as Will put it. Rather, on the acoustic version, Springsteen's vocal delivery seems rough and muted, suggesting anger, frustration, and desolation—all of which dovetail with the

favored interpretation of the song's lyrics as a scathing critique of American state policies and socioeconomic structure.

In the second half of this paper, I will offer a more detailed response to the assumption that we might be able to divide a song's lyrics, or what I will call its *content*, from its musical delivery, or its *form*, grounding my position in assumptions from both rhetorical theory and discourses on popular music.[12] For now, though, I only want to emphasize that the idea that "Born in the U.S.A." has been misunderstood is a commonplace among Springsteen fans and many commentators. Furthermore, I want to propose that this argument has primarily served the rhetorical purpose of claiming, or perhaps re-claiming, Springsteen for those who have listened to him the most or the longest; or perhaps even more, for those who share his specific political convictions. As Steve Johnston puts it in a similar critique of Marsh's and Alterman's writing about *Born in the U.S.A.*: "[They] excoriate Will, of course, to exonerate Springsteen."[13] As Johnston suggests, though, and as I will argue later, the song opens itself to a range of more or less persuasive interpretations, including the one proposed by Will. To be clear, I am not claiming that Will's interpretation is fully convincing, but I do believe it accurately recognizes a particular rhetorical dimension of "Born in the U.S.A.," even if it strategically overlooks other dimensions. To this extent, Will's commentary can be

[12] I acknowledge that creating a direct correspondence between the notions of form and content, and music and lyrics, respectively, is somewhat slippery. Lyrics themselves have form, and music can have content (or, at least this was the position of Liszt, Wagner, and other proponents of so-called "program music" in the second half of the nineteenth century). However, the basic distinction seems productive, and it does help highlight a limitation in many other analyses of Springsteen's work.

[13] Johnston, *The Truth About Patriotism,* 216.

understood as limited and one-dimensional. However, the favored reading among Springsteen fans and writers is equally limited and one-dimensional if from a different ideological perspective, because it, too, highlights only one aspect of the song, namely its lyrics or content.[14]

While the positions described above are the most prominent in the controversy over "Born in the U.S.A." and *Born in the U.S.A.*, a handful of writers have offered more nuanced and theoretically complex positions, all of which treat the song and album as multi-dimensional. In Jim Cullen's analysis, for example, "Born in the U.S.A." can indeed be considered a patriotic song, even a "conservative" song, but its patriotism and conservatism are not those of Will and Reagan; rather, they harken back to earlier American ideals, and most pointedly to those of the 1930s, a period

[14] A couple of clarifications are in order here. First, to be fair to George Will, his interpretation of "Born in the U.S.A." emerged from what apparently was a single listening at a concert, during which he claims to have had cotton stuffed in his ears. Presumably, if he had delved deeper into the lyrics, he would have qualified some of the observations he made in his newspaper piece. Nonetheless, I do not know of a robust presentation of his argument—that the song is a powerful celebration of "the U.S.A."—even though this conviction surely circulates in mainstream perception. Second, within the interpretation of "Born in the U.S.A." as a uniformly critical song, there is often an effort to explain away the thundering refrain of the rock version as angry or ironic. For example, Carlin describes this version as displaying "shades of fury" (Carlin, *Bruce*, 294), while Eric Branscomb highlights the "irony" of the song, which he sees as "the mistreated veterans' lament" (Eric Branscomb, "Literacy and a Popular Medium: the Lyrics of Bruce Springsteen," *Journal of Popular Culture,* 27 [1993]: 39). Rauch, meanwhile, comments that the song's protagonist is "[l]ost in his own America," and that his "insistent repetition that he was 'born in the U.S.A.' is full of the ironic bitterness inherent in the fact that he has to say it at all." (Rauch, "Springsteen and the Dramatic Monologue," 39). As I will explore more closely later, describing the rock version's refrain as ironic does not strike me as a well-supported position.

which Cullen calls Springsteen's "spiritual home," not least of all because of that era's celebration of "the common man."[15] In Elizabeth Bird's analysis of "Born in the U.S.A." and the period of Springsteen's career surrounding it, she notes that in the 1980s "Springsteen was becoming all things to everyone. Politically, his image was increasingly unclear."[16] She does not see this as a misunderstanding of some true message in his work; rather, she argues that the "potent, swirling brew of images and emotions" that were connected to *Born in the U.S.A.*, and not just the lyrics of the songs, meant that "people could inscribe any meaning they liked, or no meaning at all," which is exactly what they did.[17] In her final analysis, the apparently divergent messages that Springsteen presented to the public, including Springsteen's extensive use of the American flag and other iconography, allowed the artist to become a kind of postmodern floating signifier that circulated in the public sphere to be appropriated for a range of ideologies. Cowie and Boehm also offer a theoretically sophisticated reading of "Born in the U.S.A.," as they graft its competing "anthemic" and "desperate" qualities, or its "series of dualities," onto the developing story of working-class alienation in 1970s and 1980s America.[18] In short, they analyze the song as addressing both foreign and domestic "wars"—one in Vietnam, the other on the socioeconomic landscape in the United States, and perhaps most emblematically in the Rust Belt. For them, the song offers insight

[15] Jim Cullen, *Bruce Springsteen: Born in the U.S.A. and the American Tradition* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 5-13.
[16] Elizabeth Bird, "'Is that Me, Baby?' Image, Authenticity, and the Career of Bruce Springsteen," *American Studies* 35 (1994): 44.
[17] Bird, "Is that Me, Baby?," 49.
[18] Cowie and Boehm, "Dead Man's Town," 356, 359.

into "[t]he withering of the economic dimensions of class, the destruction and demoralization of the politics of place, the betrayal of institutions designed to protect workers, and the amplification and mobilization of cultural nationalism…"[19] Also, importantly, they see the full rock version of the song as the one that "manages to transcend simple partisanship in its use of art and history."[20] In all, they claim that "[t]he artistic decision to juxtapose the song's two contrasting dimensions ought to be central to any approach to understanding the essence of 'Born in the U.S.A.' The heart of the song rests at the intersection, not the selection, of its internal oppositions."[21]

I concur with this claim, and following Cowie and Boehm—as well as, to some extent, Cullen, Bird, and Johnston—I see the song's "two contrasting dimensions" as inherent to its structure and its effect as a rhetorical performance. Thus, rather than treating the rock version's musical form as a distraction from the true meaning, I will use it, in conjunction with the lyrical content, as a way into understanding how "Born in the U.S.A." employs an apparently paradoxical structure to create a particular rhetorical effect, one that I will describe as *rhetorical indirection*. To clarify, rhetorical indirection does not mean rhetorical confusion, because I do not see "Born in the U.S.A." as a confused song; rather, the term describes a textual pedagogy through which a rhetor—that is, an orator or speaker, or even a writer—presents audiences with a range of possibilities "with no fixed answer nor a clear set of propositions to be applied dogmatically."[22] This is not exactly a

[19] Cowie and Boehm, "Dead Man's Town," 361-369; 373.
[20] Cowie and Boehm, "Dead Man's Town," 376.
[21] Cowie and Boehm, "Dead Man's Town," 361.
[22] Ingram, "Plato's Rhetoric," 294.

postmodern position, as the one proposed by Bird, according to which Springsteen and his work can take on nearly any meaning for anyone; rather, it is a position that highlights the way in which texts can strategically propose apparently divergent meanings in order to produce a particular kind of rhetorical effect.[23]

Rock as Rhetoric, Music as Form

To treat popular music as rhetoric is not unique. Since at least the middle of the twentieth century, it has become commonplace to treat all kinds of texts as inherently rhetorical. One assumption of this approach is that all texts necessarily imply viewpoints on issues in the world; or, as rhetorical and literary theorist Kenneth Burke put it, all uses of language and symbols entail a "striking of attitudes."[24] This orientation also requires accepting the premise that texts function as arguments, whether or not their creators imagine them as such. This last point is crucial for rhetorical analyses of popular culture, because to claim that a song by Bruce Springsteen, for instance, is an example of argument is not to suggest that Springsteen conceptualized it as such; rather, it is to say that when his creations enter the realm of public discourse, they necessarily function as arguments in relation to other public arguments and ideologies. For this reason, Springsteen's supposed intentions for his art, which are key to many analyses of his work,

[23] It is important to keep in mind that all works of art can be polysemous and, to this extent "Born in the U.S.A." is not unique. However, through its apparent mismatch of form and content, the song seems to invite starkly divergent interpretations, which is evidenced by the wide range of discourses around the song. Furthermore, many of these interpretations seem convincing, in that they do rely on textual/musical evidence.

[24] Kenneth Burke, *Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 289.

are not relevant to my method here; instead, the question of *how* "Born in the U.S.A." functions as a public text is what matters most.[25] In the case of Springsteen, in particular, there are already examples of explicitly rhetorical treatments of his work, including a chapter by Michael Hemphill and Larry David Smith, who describe how the narratives in Springsteen's story-telling songs provide listeners with what Burke calls "equipment for living," as well as an article by Lisa Foster, who has explored the populist argumentation style in songs from *The Rising*.[26] Moreover, commentaries on Springsteen by other critics—including Johnston and Bird, as well as Simon Frith, Lawrence Grossberg, and Stuart Hall—have implicitly rhetorical dimensions to them.[27]

Thinking about art, and verbal art in particular, as rhetorical is a practice that reaches back much further than the twentieth century. In his book on rhetoric and poetics in ancient Greece and

[25] The same would be true of a rhetorical analysis of a politician's speech, for example. What the politician intends is largely irrelevant to understanding how the speech functions when it enters the realm of public discourse and ideology.
[26] Michael R. Hemphill and Larry David Smith, "The Working American's Elegy: The Rhetoric of Bruce Springsteen," in *Politics in Familiar Contexts: Projecting Politics through Popular Media*, eds. Robert L. Savage and Dan Nimmo (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex, 1990), 199-214; Lisa Foster, "Populist Argumentation in Bruce Springsteen's *The Rising*," *Argumentation and Advocacy: The Journal of the American Forensic Association* 48:2 (2011): 61-80.
[27] Johnston, *The Truth about Patriotism*; Bird, "Is that Me, Baby?"; Simon Frith, "The Real Thing: Bruce Springsteen," in *Music for Pleasure: Essays in the Sociology of Pop* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 94-104; Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 165-166; Lawrence Grossberg, "Rockin' with Reagan, or the Mainstreaming of Postmodernity," *Cultural Critique* 10 (1988): 123-149; Stuart Hall's comments on Springsteen are included in an interview with Grossberg in Lawrence Grossberg, "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10 (1986): 45-60.

Rome, Jeffrey Walker describes how lyric poetry was a form of public discourse in the ancient world, much like legal and political oratory, and, to this extent, it also functioned as a medium for public argumentation. As he explains, treating poetry as rhetoric entails some of the following assumptions: poetry is persuasive; the audience is expected to exercise judgment in response; this kind of response implies ethical positionings; and, not least, "poetry may have direct and indirect effects on social and civic life through the shaping of communally shared judgments and ethical commitments with regard to both particular and general kinds of questions."[28] Although the contexts of contemporary popular music and ancient lyric poetry are different in important ways, Walker's observations provide a basis for treating rock music as rhetoric. Even more to the point, in the case of Springsteen, there is no question that his art has "direct and indirect effects on social and civic life" and interacts with a range of "ethical commitments." To this extent, Springsteen is clearly a rock and roll rhetor.

Analyzing Springsteen as a rhetor could entail a range of specific orientations, but one unifying feature would be an interest in how his songs produce public arguments, rather than just individual experiences of entertainment or pleasure. To this extent, any features of his songs that contribute to those arguments merit attention, including both the lyrics, or content, and the musical delivery, or form. As Kenneth Burke and others have theorized, textual analysis demands attention to both form and content because both contribute to what Burke calls "function," according

[28] Jeffery Walker, *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 154.

to which texts "do something" for a rhetor and the audience.[29] Writing about popular music, Frith echoes this view, emphasizing that "the issue in lyrical analysis is not words, but words in performance," and that "a song doesn't exist to convey the meaning of the words; rather, the words exist to convey the meaning of the song."[30] Bird assumes the same perspective on Springsteen's art in particular when she critiques many interpreters of his work for their assumption that "we can understand Springsteen's mass appeal by understanding and interpreting his lyrical message—his 'meaning' can, in effect, be read off his narrative texts."[31] An effort to account for the overall effect (or "function") of a song's form and content would be, thus, one key aspect of a rhetorical orientation to popular music. Additionally, and relatedly, an appreciation for how musical arguments interact with audience expectations constitutes a necessary consideration. To borrow some of Burke's language again, textual forms have rhetorical effects by enacting "an arousing and fulfillment of desires" for the audience, as they create "an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite."[32] Applied to popular song, this perspective highlights the extent to which meanings are not located strictly within musical artifacts themselves but emerge through interaction between musical form and listeners' own aesthetic, rhetorical, and ideological frameworks—or what Burke calls "the

[29] Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 89.
[30] Frith, *Performing Rites*, 166.
[31] Bird, "Is that Me Baby?," 42.
[32] Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 31, 124.

psychology of the audience."[33] Frith makes a similar observation when he describes how each music listener operates according to a "scheme of interpretation," which is based partially on one's previous experience of a specific "musical culture," such as the genre of rock music. As he explains, "[f]or sounds to be music, we need to know how to hear them…"[34] In the case of "Born in the U.S.A.," the wide range of audience assumptions and expectations seems to be a driving force behind the divergent interpretations of the song's supposed meanings.

The Order of "Confusion": Paradox and Rhetorical Indirection

As described, the claim that there is an apparent mismatch, or what Alterman calls "confusion," between the lyrics of "Born in the U.S.A." and their delivery in the full rock version is accepted as a truism by many of Springsteen's fans and critics. Drawing on the ideas of Burke and Frith, we might also say that there seems to be a mismatch between some listeners' genre-based desires and appetites and the degree to which they do or do not get fulfilled by the song. Generally, this should not be surprising, since interpretations of artworks often vary, at least partly, due to differing audience expectations or "scheme[s] of interpretation." If we accept, though, that both form and content are constitutive rhetorical elements of "Born in the U.S.A.," then some of the dominant perspectives on the song's supposed meaning are not grounded in comprehensive analysis. That is, they have not addressed the question of how both the lyrics *and* the music contribute to a collective rhetorical effect for listeners. As noted,

[33] Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 31.
[34] Frith, *Performing Rites*, 249.

Cowie and Boehm offer one answer to this question that resonates with the story of American labor. For them, the apparent form-content "dualities" of the song encapsulate the increasing struggle of American workers in the 1970s and 1980s to situate themselves amidst the wars they were fighting abroad and at home. My own analysis is less focused on the unique historical realities of the early 1980s—even though that period did provide the specific rhetorical exigency for the song—and more on the abstract question that the song seems to address, which is the struggle of an individual to negotiate a relationship among him- or herself, the state, and a national community.[35]

On the one hand, the song's content seems to argue for a critical analysis of both American government and society, specifically in response to the way that Vietnam veterans were treated upon their return home, and perhaps more generally in reaction to growing class inequity (which helps explain why the song's protagonist was in Vietnam in the first place); that is, it seems to articulate one individual's feelings of complete alienation from the political and social communities into which he was born. On the other hand, the form of the song, with its positive musical

[35] In making this move, I do not mean to devalue the importance of the unique history and socioeconomic situation that surrounded the invention of this particular rhetorical artifact, or of context more generally, which has always been key to rhetorical analysis. Rather, in my view there has already been a great deal of astute interpretation of Springsteen's music in relation to the specific reality of the 1980s—from Cullen, Alterman, Johnston, and Cowie and Boehm, to name a few—and thus, I am consciously working to offer a different view on Springsteen's work. My perspective, coming 30 years after the release of *Born in the U.S.A.*, allows a chance to consider not just what the song seemed to mean in its immediate discursive context, but rather what it might be coming to mean in an increasingly distant aesthetic and sociopolitical reality.

timbre—the major key, the simple two-chord structure, the bright synthesizer, the steady drum beat, the anthemic refrain—seems to argue for an impassioned celebration of "the U.S.A.," whatever that might mean to the protagonist. Or, as Frith puts it in his description of the song, the chorus, through "its texture, its rhythmic relentlessness, its lift" comes off as "triumphant."[36] These are only interpretations of the recording's musical form, of course, but the claim that the song offers something like a triumphant celebration of "the U.S.A." is grounded in the conventions of musical grammar (that is, listeners' shared "schemes of interpretation"), according to which major keys and bright sounds are *happy*, and perhaps even more specifically in the rock music grammar that Springsteen has employed throughout his career. This was clearly the argument that George Will heard, and this was surely the argument that millions of listeners heard in the 1980s. Undoubtedly, Springsteen-mania had a great deal to do with this understanding of "Born in the U.S.A." and the American iconography that adorned the album, the concerts, and several of the music videos.[37] Nonetheless, the response of many to these interpretations has been to describe the thundering proclamation of "I was born in the U.S.A.!" as angry or ironic. In my view, however, there is no solid basis for this analysis, except through an interpretation of the lyrical content of "Born in the U.S.A.," which is not actually an interpretation of the musical

[36] Frith, *Performing Rites*, 165.

[37] Greil Marcus is reported to have made a similar observation in the 1980s, noting that this particular interpretation of "Born in the U.S.A." was "the key to the enormous explosion of [Springsteen's] popularity" in 1984-1985. Quoted in: Mikal Gilmore, "Bruce Springsteen: What Does it Mean, Springsteen Asked, to Be an American?" *Rolling Stone*, November 15, 1990, in *Bruce Springsteen: The Rolling Stone Files*, ed. the Editors of Rolling Stone (New York: Hyperion, 1996), 298.

form itself; rather, calling the form ironic merely extends an interpretation of the content to the form, without engaging with the context of rhetorical delivery. Furthermore, like Johnston, I believe that the interpretation of the song proposed by Will and millions of others actually has firm grounding in the musical form and confirms the breadth of what Johnston calls "Springsteen's impact," especially if we accept that musical meanings operate according to generic conventions (for example, the major key), and, more specifically, that Springsteen has typically been conservative in his employment of the grammar of rock music.[38] Nonetheless, I see the interpretation of Will and others as one-dimensional, since it does not respond to the full rhetorical force of "Born in the U.S.A." and *Born in the U.S.A*.

If we treat both the song's form and content as constitutive elements of a larger argument, then at least one way of understanding the overall effect may be to posit that what the song offers is essentially a rhetorical paradox, specifically in relation to one protagonist's efforts to find a place for himself within the complex interplay of political, socioeconomic, and ideological forces that constitute his surroundings. That is, by juxtaposing the song's apparently critical content with its conventionally understood celebratory music, Springsteen forces listeners to engage with seemingly divergent perspectives on questions of patriotism, identity, and national belonging; in short, the narrator seems simultaneously to love and to hate the polity into which he was born. To this extent, "Born in the U.S.A." completely eludes efforts to align it with conventionally understood American left-right political ideologies; instead, it intermingles and embraces

[38] Johnston, *The Truth About Patriotism*, 217.

conflicting perspectives in unexpected and beguiling ways. This effect can be understood as an example of what Jason Ingram calls "rhetorical indirection." In an analysis of Plato's writing about rhetoric, Ingram argues that Plato's manner of situating Socrates, the "foil," in complex dialogues is used "to provoke readers" into considering multiple points of view.[39] In short, rhetorical indirection is a method by which a rhetor presents the audience with a range of possible answers or outcomes without explicitly endorsing any one as correct. Ingram further explains Plato's use of rhetorical indirection this way: "Challenging texts to determine whether or not we agree with them is an integral part of conventional interpretation. Plato provides a somewhat unconventional supplement, a rhetorical form purposively designed to bring readers to a particular experience, one of extreme doubt or *aporia*…"[40]

While there are clear formal and contextual differences between Platonic dialogues and rock songs, the notion of rhetorical indirection seems applicable to "Born in the U.S.A.," not least of all because the song has a deeply dialogic structure. Essentially, by juxtaposing paradoxical arguments about being "born in the U.S.A.," and one particular narrator's feelings of belonging (or not) to "the U.S.A.," Springsteen's song "provokes" listeners to consider multiple ideological stances and "forces reflection about heuristics and fundamental assumptions…"[41] Moreover, like Ingram's Plato, Springsteen "uses indirection to create another level of meaning, one whose value lies more in performance or process than in

[39] Ingram, "Plato's Rhetoric," 294.
[40] Ingram, "Plato's Rhetoric," 294.
[41] Ingram, "Plato's Rhetoric," 301.

memorizing discrete concepts or propositions."[42] In this way, it is the entire rhetorical structure, or performance/process, of "Born in the U.S.A."—not simply the lyrics or the music—that produces an overall effect. Certainly, this is true of many popular songs and rhetorical artifacts. However, "Born in the U.S.A." seems unique in the starkness of its indirections, as well as in its thematic depth. Thus, if there is a unified argument in the song, it may be that the narrator's feelings of connection to his own political state and national community are, above all, profoundly paradoxical.

One assumption behind this understanding of "Born in the U.S.A." is that a paradoxical argument on questions of patriotism and national belonging might serve as a satisfying rhetorical outcome for a rock song, or as an acceptable fulfillment of rock listeners' desires and appetites. Indeed, in my view, it is precisely this aspect of "Born in the U.S.A." that makes it one of Springsteen's most intriguing and captivating songs. However, if the most pervasive interpretations of the song are indicative, this is a very different assumption than the one that drives most listeners' expectations, which are based on the premise that "Born in the U.S.A." should be a logically coherent political statement; that it must be either for or against certain politics. This is precisely why listeners from various ideological vantage points have subsumed the form into the content or the content into the form, or simply ignored uncooperative dimensions of the song altogether. However, while an assumption of logical coherence may be useful for analyzing certain genres of rhetorical performance—such as political speeches, academic articles, and probably many works of art, including some of Springsteen's songs—it is not well-suited to

[42] Ingram, "Plato's Rhetoric," 301.

the rock version of "Born in the U.S.A."[43] The song is an exercise in paradox and incoherence—and perhaps this should not be surprising, given the song's themes. To imagine that the relationship between an individual and his or her nation-state might be logical or coherent does not seem very convincing, and, likewise, any song that makes this argument may not be very intellectually persuasive. More to the point, in the case of a Vietnam veteran in 1970s-1980s America, the observation seems particularly acute: Why should the audience expect this narrator's feelings about his government and national community to be anything but conflicted and multidimensional?

In writing about Springsteen's art in relation to the idea of patriotism, Johnston offers a series of questions with which he believes Springsteen's songs engage:

> What do you do when you realize that love is misplaced when it comes to country or homeland? What do you do when you realize that America, the object of your love, does not and could not deserve it? That patriotism cannot justify itself? That patriotism is dangerous and potentially deadly to what it claims to serve in light of its love affairs with enmity and death?[44]

Through its rhetorical indirection, "Born in the U.S.A." forces listeners to engage with precisely these kinds of questions, and even to immerse themselves in the complexity of the issues. In this

[43] The original acoustic version, however, seems to be a much more coherent work of art—in terms of its use of standard form-content conventions—which may be why it is the favored version of many fans and writers. For me, however, while the acoustic version has an engaging dark mood about it, as do many of the songs recorded during the *Nebraska* sessions, it does not achieve the kind of rhetorical and ideological complexity found in the rock version.

[44] Johnston, *The Truth about Patriotism*, 211.

way, the effect of "Born in the U.S.A." is very much in line with Burke's notion of rhetorical "order." According to Burke, one of rhetoric's many functions is offering interpretations of situations, or giving "order to an otherwise unclarified complexity."[45] Moreover, he describes how artistic texts can provide "a terminology of thoughts, actions, emotions, attitudes, for codifying a pattern of experience. The artist, through experiencing intensively or extensively a certain pattern, becomes as it were an expert, a specialist, in this pattern. And his skill in articulation is extended upon the schematizing of his subject."[46] This, in the end, seems an apt description of "Born in the U.S.A." as rhetorical artifact: It offers a potential order, via the structure of paradox, to an "unclarified complexity" and a certain "pattern of experience," which is the relationship that all national subjects must negotiate with their governments and communities. Thus, the argument of the song is not an articulation of a singular version of this relationship; rather, it is an artistic ordering of the multiple anxieties, pains, joys, and perhaps even impossibilities that define the relationship itself. In this way, "Born in the U.S.A." suggests that there can be no easy answers to questions of patriotism and national belonging, that these are paradoxical human experiences.

Thirty Years Down the Road: The Paradoxes of Bruce Springsteen

As I have described them, the notions of paradox and rhetorical indirection offer a particular way of thinking about "Born in the U.S.A.," and, by extension, *Born in the U.S.A.* I have

[45] Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 154.
[46] Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 154.

not given the album explicit attention, but variations on the arguments I have made easily apply to other songs on the album (for example "Darlington County," "Working on the Highway," and "Dancing in the Dark"), and to all of the American visual rhetorics that accompanied the *Born in the U.S.A.* period. Indeed, a larger analysis of the myriad symbolic aspects of Springsteen's performances in the mid-1980s would be fruitful. Additionally, the idea of the paradox, in particular, provides a heuristic for gaining broader insights into Springsteen's entire career. Although it is certainly easy to pinpoint cohesive themes, trends, interests, and beliefs across the span of Springsteen's work—this is a familiar type of cultural analysis—there are also ways in which his artistic output is defined by paradoxes. For example, since at least the mid- to late-1970s, there has been a central tension in Springsteen's work around the notions of the individual and society. As John Sheinbaum observes, Springsteen's work seems to embody, on the one hand, a deep engagement with the theme of isolation, particularly through its exploration of "the plight of the individual"; however, at the same time, there is a way in which this very exploration "results instead in the formation of a community."[47] Sheinbaum quotes Parke Puterbaugh's comments on this topic in relation to the *Darkness on the Edge of Town* tour: "[I]t was a strange phenomenon. The more Springsteen sang about alienation, the more people turned out to listen."[48] This paradox also plays out in "Born in the U.S.A." and other songs in an

[47] John J. Sheinbaum, "'I'll Work for your Love': Springsteen and the Struggle for Authenticity," in *Reading the Boss: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Works of Bruce Springsteen*, eds. Roxanne Harde and Irwin Streight (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2010), 233.
[48] Sheinbaum, "'I'll Work For Your Love'," 233.

interesting way, as noted by Stonerook: The "big, sing-along choruses on buoyant songs"—including "Born in the U.S.A.," "Hungry Heart," and "Glory Days"—all help to create a sense of community.[49] At the same time, however, the lyrics of all of these songs seem to explore particular dimensions of isolation.

Another example of a paradox in Springsteen's work is the tension between *the local* and *the national*—or perhaps even *the global*—especially in relation to political subjectivity. Lawrence Grossberg made the following observations about Springsteen during the *Born in the U.S.A.* period:

> Springsteen empowers his fans, energizes them, within their affective commonality by invoking personal and local images . . . But even as he recognizes that one must do more (recreated in his political raps during the concert and in his support for local groups and struggles), even as he appeals to national imagery, his commitment to the local and the image prevents him from engaging in larger issues. America, such a powerful image in his current success, is always invoked as one's "hometown," and Springsteen deals with national history by reducing it to the level of individual lives.[50]

In a sense, Grossberg's observation highlights a feature of all art that attempts to engage with national or even global sociopolitical themes through storytelling: The individual plight serves as a synecdoche for commonly shared experiences. However, as Grossberg notes, it is at the level of engagement that the paradox comes into stark relief: Do songs about individuals' hometown experiences provide a rhetorical foundation for "engaging in larger

[49] Stonerook, "Springsteen's Search for Individuality and Community," 215.
[50] Grossberg, "Rockin' with Reagan," 134.

issues" or do they, instead, reify a pervasive American ideology of the individual, which is, arguably, antithetical to progressive community processes?

Both of these paradoxes merit more careful exposition, and certainly additional paradoxes could emerge from more extensive reflection on Springsteen's music. I hope that others will take up this work. In my view, pursuing these types of critical questions offers the best chance for generating new and interesting insights from Springsteen's rich oeuvre. It may be that the passage of years makes inquiries like mine easier, to the extent that time allows critics to distance themselves from the immediate sociopolitical and rhetorical pressures that surround the creation of particular artworks. Certainly, we must always attend to those specific exigencies. But, at the same time, it is worth considering how new meanings and implications can emerge over time. Indeed, if Springsteen's music has any chance of remaining relevant in the decades ahead—and I think it does—it will depend on the willingness of listeners and critics to reimagine his art in new contexts.

Springsteen, Tradition, and the Purpose of the Artist

William I. Wolff
Rowan University

Abstract

In 2012, Bruce Springsteen delivered the keynote address at the South By Southwest Music Conference and Festival. His task was daunting: reconnect authenticity to a traditional approach to creating art. By bringing together ideas on authenticity, creativity, and culture, Springsteen's talk joins a lineage of essays that defend poetry, creativity, and culture, including famous works by William Wordsworth and T.S. Eliot. In this article, I connect Springsteen's ideas to the "folk process," which leads to considering Wordsworth's ideas on the voice of the common citizen and Eliot's ideas on historical tradition. In the end, I consider Springsteen's legacy as cultural ambassador for the arts.

"[Springsteen] wears his influences on his sleeve."
—Peter Knobler[1]

In March 1973, in the first major article about Bruce Springsteen, Peter Knobler of *Crawdaddy!* immediately locates Springsteen's influences as Bob Dylan and Van Morrison. Much of Springsteen's 1974 interview with Paul Williams is about his musical influences, ranging from Dylan to The Yardbirds. In a 1975 edition of *Rolling Stone*, Dave Marsh describes Springsteen as "the

 The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and journal editors for their considerable time and for pushing him to make his article more thorough and nuanced. Please address correspondence to wolffw@rowan.edu.

[1] Peter Knobler, "Who Is Bruce Springsteen and Why Are We Saying All These Wonderful Things About Him?," *Crawdaddy!*, March 1973, found in: *Racing in the Street: The Bruce Springsteen Reader*, ed. June Skinner Sawyers (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 32.

living culmination of 20 years of rock & roll tradition."[2] Scholars have taken that tradition back even further. Alan Rauch, for example, considers Springsteen's work in terms of nineteenth-century poetic dramatic monologues.[3] Jim Cullen locates his discussion of Springsteen's influences in the (lowercase "r") "republican artistic tradition that was articulated by Emerson, received its first clear expression in Whitman, and was carried through a lineage that includes Twain, Dylan, and [others]."[4] Building on Cullen, Bryan K. Garman notes that Guthrie's influence "has gradually placed [Springsteen] in the lineage of Whitman's working-class hero."[5] Roxanne Harde and Irwin Streight locate Springsteen's themes within those of Shakespeare, and Larry David Smith, Streight, Brent Bellamy, Lisa Foster, and Harde also discuss Springsteen's work within a similar lineage of American authors and singers who have articulated the continuing plight of the working class. [6]

---

[2] Knobler, "Who is Bruce Springsteen"; Paul Williams, "Lost in the Flood," *Backstreets: Springsteen, The Man and His Music* by Charles R. Cross and the editors of *Backstreets* magazine, in *Racing in the Street*, 40-42; Dave Marsh, "Bruce Springsteen: A Rock 'Star Is Born,'" *Rolling Stone*, September 25, 1975, in *Racing in the Street,* 51.

[3] Alan Rauch, "Bruce Springsteen and the Dramatic Monologue," *American Studies* 29:1 (1988): 29-49.

[4] Jim Cullen, *Born in the USA: Bruce Springsteen and the American Tradition* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998), xvi.

[5] Bryan K. Garman, *A Race of Singers: Whitman's Working-Class Hero from Guthrie to Springsteen* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 196.

[6] Irwin Streight and Roxanne Harde, "Introduction: The Bard of Asbury Park," in *Reading the Boss: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Works of Bruce Springsteen*, eds. Roxanne Harde and Irwin Streight (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2010), 1-20; Larry David Smith, *Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, and American Song* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2002); Irwin Streight, "The Flannery O'Connor of American Rock," in *Reading the Boss,* 53-75; Brent Bellamy, "Tear into the Guts:

Missing from these discussions is an exploration of Springsteen's traditional approach to writing. That is, how his approach to composing exists within a history of artists discussing composing processes. The impetus for my discussion is Springsteen's South By Southwest Music Conference and Festival (SXSW) keynote address, delivered on March 15, 2012, in Austin, Texas. In his address Springsteen discusses "the genesis and power of creativity, the power of the songwriter, or let's say composer, or just creator" in an age he describes as "post-authentic," in which "authenticity is a house of mirrors."[7] While many in the media called his keynote a "history lesson," Springsteen's task is larger and the implications of his ideas more far-reaching.[8] A keynote address can be considered what sociologists Jaber F. Gubrium and

---

Whitman, Steinbeck, Springsteen, and the Durability of Lost Souls on the Road," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 41:2 (2011): 223–43; Lisa Foster, "Populist Argumentation in Bruce Springsteen's *The Rising*," *Argumentation & Advocacy* 48:2 (2011): 61–80; Roxanne Harde, "'Living in Your American Skin': Bruce Springsteen and the Possibility of Politics," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 43:1 (2013): 125–44.

[7] "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech," *NPR.org*, March 18, 2012, Austin, Texas; accessed June 2014, http://www.npr.org/2012/03/16/148778665/bruce-springsteens-sxsw-2012-keynote-speech

[8] Thomas Connor, "SXSW Keynote: Bruce Springsteen Gives Musical History Lesson, Celebrates Woody Guthrie Centennial," *Chicago Sun-Times*, March 15, 2012, accessed June 2014, http://blogs.suntimes.com/music/2012/03/sxsw_keynote_bruce_springsteen.html; Brandon Griggs, "Professor Springsteen's Rock 'N' Roll History Lesson at SXSW," *CNN*, March 16, 2012, accessed June 2014, http://www.cnn.com/2012/03/15/showbiz/springsteen-keynote-sxsw/index.html; Chris Talbott, "Springsteen Gives Music History Lesson at SXSW," *Yahoo! News*, March 16, 2012, accessed June 2014, http://news.yahoo.com/springsteen-gives-music-history-lesson-sxsw-191801096.html.

James A. Holstein call a "discursive environment," a space that "provide[s] choices for how we articulate our lives and selves. Discursive environments are interactional domains characterized by distinctive ways of interpreting and representing everyday life, of speaking about who and what we are."[9] In this discursive environment, Springsteen adopts the role of a literary critic to interpret and defend a particular approach to the creation of art grounded in "your teachers, your influences, your personal history."[10] By bringing together ideas on authenticity and creativity under one heading within the context of a time when popular music has become "a new language, cultural force, [and] social movement," Springsteen's talk joins a lineage of essays that defend poetry, creativity, and culture, dating back to Aristotle's "The Art of Poetry" and including work by Philip Sidney, William Wordsworth, Percy Shelley, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot, Flannery O'Connor, Adrienne Rich, Susan Sontag, Jonathan Latham, and others.[11]

In this article, I locate Springsteen's discussion of the creation of art within a lineage of artists discussing the processes of composing. First, I connect Springsteen's discussions on influence to country and folk music. Proponents of these two genres have employed similar claims about the authenticity of common language and what Pete Seeger has described as "links in a chain.

[9] Jaber F. Gubrium and James Holstein, "From the Individual Interview to the Interview Society," in *Postmodern Interviewing*, ed. Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2003), 44.
[10] Springsteen, "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech."
[11] Springsteen, "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech."

All of us [musicians], we're links in a chain."[12] I then contextualize Springsteen's observations within an extended discussion of Wordsworth's Romantic theme of the authentic voice of the common citizen and Eliot's Modern theme of the importance of literary tradition, focusing on Springsteen's *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions*. Wordsworth's 1802 "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" and Eliot's 1921 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" are instructive for contextualizing Springsteen's approach to writing and his ideas on the composing process as articulated in his SXSW address and elsewhere. Bringing Wordsworth and Eliot together may surprise some, especially because of Eliot's rejection of Romanticism and his admonitions against emotion and personality, which are two of Wordsworth's main approaches. Springsteen, however, coalesces Wordsworth's call for the poet "to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men" with Eliot's call for the poet to "procure a consciousness of the past and [to] continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career."[13] Building on the themes of tradition and authenticity, I conclude by considering Springsteen as heir of Guthrie's and Seeger's legacies. In the end, I challenge Springsteen to more fully embrace practices that separate him from corporate labels if he is to embody fully what is becoming his developing role as cultural ambassador for the arts.

---

[12] Paul Zollo, *Songwriters On Songwriting: Revised And Expanded* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2003), 12.

[13] William Wordsworth, *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 446; T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Selected Prose*, ed. John Hayward (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1955), 25.

Springsteen's SXSW Keynote and the Folk Process

In his SXSW keynote, Springsteen uses his podium to argue in defense of a process of creating meaningful work:

> I'd like to talk about the one thing that's been consistent over the years: the genesis and power of creativity, the power of the songwriter, or let's say composer, or just creator. So whether you're making dance music, Americana, rap music, electronica; it's all about how you are putting what you do together. The elements you're using don't matter. Purity of human expression and experience is not confined to guitars, to tubes, to turntables, to microchips. …
>
> We live in a post-authentic world. And today authenticity is a house of mirrors. It's all just what you're bringing when the lights go down. It's your teachers, your influences, your personal history. And at the end of the day, it's the power and purpose of your music that still matters.[14]

Springsteen chooses a daunting task for any orator: to reconnect authenticity to a traditional approach to creating art. His concerns are similar to those of Philip Sidney in 1595: to defend his art to a society that openly questioned the authenticity of poetry. In "The Defense of Poesy," Sidney advocates for poetry and poets against charges that writing poetry is a waste of time, that poems are full of lies and "infect us with pestilent desires."[15] In response, Sidney argues for the importance of poetry in terms of how poets interpret and represent the worlds around them: "Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, into another nature, in making

[14] Springsteen, "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech."
[15] Philip Sidney, "The Defense of Poesy," in *The North Anthology of English Literature Vol. 1,* ed. M. H. Abrams, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), 492-493.

things . . . better than nature bringeth forth…"[16] For Sidney, "Poesy is of all human learnings the most ancient and of most fatherly antiquity, as from whence other learnings have taken their beginnings…"[17] Springsteen similarly approaches his defense by locating popular music within a history of contemporary music before asserting that "[p]op's become . . . a series of new languages, cultural forces, and social movements that have inspired and enlivened the second half of the twentieth century, and the dawning years of this one."[18] It is, however, also a time that has seen the fragmentation of music in dozens of genres and sub-genres (which Springsteen relishes listing) and the erosion of personal and public authenticity. Springsteen opens his talk by expressing ambivalence over the word "keynote"; he fears it means there is a singular view of contemporary music. He strives to overcome genre and philosophical divides by focusing on the one thing that might unite all artists: the process of creating. His address implies that understanding the creative process, rather than the technologies of production or genre distinctions, is of primary importance for instilling a level of authenticity in what artists do and how they are perceived.

Springsteen's goal is to defend an approach to creativity that depends heavily on influence: "its your teachers, your influences, your personal history" that will make an artist authentic in a post-authentic world. To do that, Springsteen structures his artistic development as a journey of discovery of the rock, soul, pop, country, and folk influences that have helped him to evaluate his

[16] Sidney, "The Defense of Poesy," 482-483.
[17] Sidney, "The Defense of Poesy," 492.
[18] Springsteen, "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech."

personal history of growing up poor in small town New Jersey and the socio-economic values he considers sedimented in America. He then presents an image of that America back to the audience as a way of working through his questions about what he is coming to understand. Springsteen begins his narrative with Elvis, whom Springsteen remembers seeing on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1956. A week later, Springsteen's six-year-old fingers were wrapped around the neck of a rented guitar. But even before Elvis changed the world of young Bruce, Springsteen brings the audience further back, back to a time when he was too young to realize the influence music was having on his life, while eating breakfast, listening to doo-wop coming from his mother's radio:

> the most sensual music ever made, the sound of raw sex, of silk stockings rustling on backseat upholstery, the sound of the snaps of bras popping across the [U.S.A.], of wonderful lies being whispered into Tabu-perfumed ears, the sound of smeared lipstick, untucked shirts, running mascara, tears on your pillow, secrets whispered in the still of the night, the high school bleachers and the dark at the YMCA canteen.[19]

Doo-wop was the stuff of 1950's teen-agers' dreams and desires. And those dreams and desires "dripped from radios" in the rustic spaces in which he found himself: "the gas stations, factories, streets and pool halls — the temples of life and mystery in my little hometown."[20] On stage Springsteen begins strumming his guitar and singing, "Ooooo whooo. Whooo. Whooo." He says, "Don't that make you want to kiss somebody?" and segues into strumming and singing the opening lines of "Backstreets." Then, commenting on the two rhythms he just strummed, Springsteen concludes, "It all

[19] Springsteen, "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech."
[20] Springsteen, "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech."

comes from the same place." And that musical place for Springsteen has been with him since he was a child. Elsewhere, Springsteen told Will Percy, "I didn't grow up in a community of ideas—a place where you can sit down and talk about books, and how you read them, and how they affect you."[21] In Springsteen's household there were no books, nor appreciation for books or the development of ideas.[22] In this formative vacuum, as Springsteen has stated, "the importance of rock & roll was just incredible. It reached down into all those homes where there was no music or books or any kind of creative sense, and it infiltrated the whole thing."[23] In 1981, he told an audience in England that the voices coming out of the radio "held out a promise, and it was a promise that every man has a right to live his life with some decency and respect."[24] Springsteen's education came in the form of records, a form of rebellion he later described in "No Surrender."

After leading the SXSW audience through his early rock education, from Roy Orbison to Johnny Cash to Phil Spector's wall of sound, Springsteen comes to The Animals, who were to him "a revelation … the first records with full blown class consciousness."[25] He then starts to play The Animals' "We Gotta Get Out of this Place," ending with

---

[21] Will Percy, "Rock and Read: Will Percy Interviews Bruce Springsteen," *DoubleTake*, 1998, in *Talk About A Dream: The Essential Interviews of Bruce Springsteen*, ed. Christopher Phillips and Louis P Masur (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 221.
[22] Dave Marsh, *Glory Days: Bruce Springsteen in the 1980s* (New York: Pantheon, 1987), 35-36.
[23] Paul Nelson, "Springsteen Fever," *Rolling Stone*, 1978, accessed June 2014, http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/springsteen-fever-20120919.
[24] Marsh, *Glory Days*, 36.
[25] Springsteen, "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech."

We gotta get out of this place
If it's the last thing we ever do
We gotta get out of this place
Girl, there's a better life for me and you.
Yes, I know it's true.

Upon finishing, Springsteen confesses, "That's every song I've ever written. Yeah. That's all of them. I'm not kidding, either. That's 'Born to Run,' 'Born in the [U.S.A.],' everything I've done for the past 40 years, including all the new ones. But that struck me so deep. It was the first time I felt I heard something come across the radio that mirrored my home life, my childhood."[26] Later, Springsteen comes back to the influence of The Animals: "'Badlands,' 'Prove it all Night'—*Darkness* was filled with The Animals, you know? Youngsters, watch this one. I'm gonna tell you how it's done, right now." Springsteen plays the beginning of "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood" and segues into the guitar riff from "Badlands" and exclaims, "It's the same fucking riff, man! Listen up, youngsters: this is how successful theft is accomplished, all right?"[27] Springsteen instructs the audience on the multi-genre influences found in his songs that blend the emotional and sexual rawness of 1950s doo-wop with the class consciousness of 1960s rock. He adds to his genre influences by bringing the audience back through the sensuality of soul to the grit of country to the immediacy of Woody Guthrie. He says at one point, "These men and women, they were and they remain my masters."[28] The emotion and the grit coalesce in Springsteen and his open acknowledgement of not just the importance of prior music, but

[26] Springsteen, "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech."
[27] Springsteen, "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech."
[28] Springsteen, "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech."

what he calls "theft"—and we might now call "remix"— leads to the significant intertextuality on display in his work.[29] In "Intertextuality and the Discourse Community," James Porter uses the metaphor of an archaeologist to describe how writers piece together prior texts to create new meaning: "Not infrequently, and perhaps ever and always, texts refer to other texts and in fact rely on them for their meaning. All texts are interdependent: We understand a text only insofar as we understand its precursors. This is the principle we know as intertextuality."[30] Springsteen's music and lyrical themes rely heavily on those of his so-called masters and argue for a composing process that openly acknowledges influences. When Springsteen inherits and incorporates past work, he is also preserving both the music and its lineage.

That is the essence of the "folk process," a term coined by Pete Seeger's father, Charles, to describe "a process which has been going on for thousands of years. Ordinary people changing old things to fit new situations."[31] The folk process is similar to how Porter describes the social life of texts: "Authorial intention is less significant than social context; the writer is simply a part of a discourse tradition, a member of a team, and a participant in a community of discourse that creates its own collective meaning."[32] By employing elements of intertextuality and by adopting a folk

---

[29] Brett Gaylor, *RiP! A Remix Manifesto*, Documentary (EyeSteelFilm, 2008), accessed June 2014, http://www.hulu.com/watch/88782/rip-a-remix-manifesto.

[30] James E. Porter, "Intertextuality and the Discourse Community," *Rhetoric Review* 5:1 (1986): 34,

[31] Pete Seeger, *Where Have All the Flowers Gone: A Singalong Memoir*, ed. Michael Miller and Sarah A. Elisabeth (New York: SingOut!, 2009), 15; 85.

[32] Porter, "Intertextuality and the Discourse Community," 35.

process even before he became so heavily influenced by the work of Hank Williams and Woody Guthrie in the late 1970s and early 1980s and Pete Seeger in the late 1990s, Springsteen shows himself to be an artist with not just a historical *consciousness* but also an overt *praxis* of incorporating the ideas and the work of his forebears. An awareness of the past is a significant part of what he believes makes music authentic; his subjects and characters are grounded in the history of music and literature, the socio-economic struggles of the past, and the traumas of the present. Like his folk teachers, he brings these all together through an awareness of the past in songs that speak the language of ordinary people.

Pete Seeger teaches that European academics coined the phrase "folk song" in the nineteenth century "to mean the music of the peasant class, ancient and anonymous. In the U.S.A., it was used by people like John Lomax, who collected songs of cowboys and lumberjacks, coal miners and prisoners in southern chain gangs."[33] With that definition, one could certainly argue that Springsteen's songs have always been folk; though not peasants, his characters have been those hardworking anonymous people laboring in factories and foundries, carwashes and construction. Indeed, John Hammond signed Springsteen as a folk musician based on his Dylanesque folk lyrical prowess, though it wasn't until Springsteen began listening to Hank Williams, Woody Guthrie, and the Folkways recordings that he began to see himself as part of their lineage.[34] In *Songs*, he describes "The River" as being his "narrative folk voice—just a guy in a bar telling his story to the

[33] Seeger, *Where Have All the Flowers Gone,* 16.
[34] Marsh, *Glory Days*, 112.

stranger on the next stool."[35] Talking about *Nebraska* in 1984 with Roger Scott and Patrick Humphries, Springsteen describes the lyrics as folk: "What made the record work [was] the sound of real conversation … like you were meeting different people, and they just told you what had happened to them, or what was happening to them. So, you kind walked for a little bit in their shoes."[36] As Irwin Streight suggests, the songs on *Nebraska* tell "stories with an attention to small revealing details and with a depth and compression of characterization that matches the masters of the short story genre."[37] Consider the opening lines of "Johnny 99":

> Well they closed down the auto plant in Mahwah late that month
> Ralph went out lookin' for a job but he couldn't find none
> He came home too drunk from mixin' Tanqueray and wine
> He got a gun shot a night clerk now they call'm Johnny 99

In just four lines Springsteen presents Ralph's past, present, and future. The song opens with the closing of the actual Mahwah Ford plant in 1980, providing a historical context that sets the tone for the entire song. Springsteen shows Ralph's despair and, using mostly monosyllabic words, discusses the events that will, just six verses later, lead to Ralph demanding he be executed. Springsteen gives similar levels of personal detail and decay in earlier songs like "Growin' Up," "Thunder Road," and "Racing in the Street."

Springsteen's characters, their stories, their suffering, and their voices are of utmost importance for him. They exist within a lineage of country music, a genre with Hank Williams as its leader

---

[35] Bruce Springsteen, *Songs* (New York: Avon Books, 1998), 100.
[36] Roger Scott and Patrick Humphries, Interview with Bruce Springsteen, from *Hot Press*, November 2, 1984, in *Talk About A Dream,* 132.
[37] Streight, "The Flannery O'Connor of American Rock," 55.

that, as Charles Lindholm writes, became "the music of the new rootless American working class. It articulated a lament of the betrayed wanderer, searching for love and settling for lust, far from home, working hard, drinking hard and fighting hard, wishing for salvation, and without much hope of ever finding it."[38] In his keynote address, Springsteen says,

> In country music, I found the adult blues, the working men's and women's stories I'd been searching for, the grim recognition of the chips that were laid down against you … Country, by its nature, appealed to me. Country was provincial, and so was I. I was not downtown. I wasn't particularly Bohemian or hipster. I was kind of hippy-by-circumstance, when it happened. But I felt I was an average guy, with a slightly above average gift.[39]

The very provinciality of country felt authentic to Springsteen; he identified with what he heard. At first, his endeavor was close to replication. Marsh suggests that the "*Nebraska* demos had the quality and stillness associated with the great Library of Congress folk recordings of the 1930s and 1940s."[40] But that replication remained true to the original recordings, remediating an authenticity that signified rustic roots in stories crafted to depict a singular version of working-class American life. Later, he was able to put folk stories into more formal rock contexts on *Born in the U.S.A.* and *Wrecking Ball*. On *Wrecking Ball*, for example, Springsteen harnesses prior work to suggest that the past and present are inextricably connected. When discussing how he

[38] Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity*, (Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 31.
[39] Springsteen, "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech."
[40] Marsh, *Glory Days*, 112.

composed the songs for *Wrecking Ball* in a wide-ranging interview with the Paris media in 2012, Springsteen revealed

> those are voices from history and other sides of the grave. If you listen to [*Wrecking Ball*], I use a lot of folk music. There's some Civil War music. There's gospel music. There are '30s horns in "Jack of All Trades." That's the way I used the music—the idea was that the music was going to contextualize historically that this has happened before: It happened in the 1970s, it happened in the '30s, it happened in the 1800s . . . it's cyclical. Over, and over, and over, and over again. So I try to pick up some of the continuity and the historical resonance through the music.[41]

For Springsteen, music is an artifact of the time period in which it was created. Springsteen samples prior work in five songs on *Wrecking Ball*, building layers of history into songs about contemporary concerns. "We Are Alive" starts with 20 seconds of a needle tracking through a groove, sonically alerting the listener to the importance of past forms of musical production and simultaneously connecting the song to the rustic audio tracks on *Nebraska* (and by extension the Folkways recordings). The folk connection is reinforced by sampling the mariachi-style horns from Johnny Cash's "Ring of Fire," written by June Carter and Merle Kilgore, and originally released by Anita Carter in 1963 on *Folk Songs Old and New*. The track's "ring" reinforces the conceit of cyclicality found in "We Are Alive," most especially in the song's protagonists' Lazarus-like rising from the dead. The track's "fire" spreads to Springsteen's chorus: "We are alive / And though our bodies lie alone here in the dark / Our spirits rise / To carry the

[41] Bruce Springsteen, "An American in Paris" (interview), March 2, 2012, accessed June 2014, http://backstreets.com/paris.html .

fire and light the spark / To stand shoulder to shoulder and heart to heart." The chorus emphasizes the continuing legacy of past struggles for fair wages and respect. The song challenges the listener to research the historical references and think through the complexity of the samples and sonic layers. In order to fully appreciate many of the songs on *Wrecking Ball,* one must learn about and listen to the songs that Springsteen uses to provide "continuity and historical resonance." *Wrecking Ball* is an album that holds its full meaning through discovering and recovering an ecology of music and histories Springsteen has layered and written into it.

Springsteen, Wordsworth, Eliot, and the Role of the Writer

Music producer Mark Hagen once asked Springsteen how he is able to compose lyrics that Hagen felt deeply and personally connected to. Springsteen responded, "That's the writer's job. The writer collects and creates … moments from out of his own experience and the world that he sees around him. Then you use your imagination and put those things together, and you present that experience to your audience."[42] Springsteen's response unconsciously echoes T.S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent": "The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together."[43] Both Springsteen and Eliot echo William Wordsworth's definition of his own task as a poet in

[42] Mark Hagen, Interview with Bruce Springsteen from *Mojo*, January 1999, in *Talk About a Dream,* 255-256.
[43] Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 27.

"Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*": "The principal object . . . was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible."[44] All three writers describe a composing process situated in the spaces they see and experiences they have. This process is called "situated cognition" and, according to Margaret A. Syverson, "refers to the fact that cognitive processes are always embedded in specific social, cultural, and physical-material situations, which determine not only how cognitive processes unfold but also the meanings they have for participants."[45] Syverson, for example, has shown how the poems of Charles Reznikoff were composed through an evolving ecology of texts: notebooks, letters, personal experiences, the experiences of others, books, and so on.[46] In his poetry, Wordsworth drew heavily on his walks and the emotions he had during them, often looking to his sister Dorothy's journal for inspiration years after an event or encounter. Each of Eliot's *Four Quartets* is inspired by places important to him and his family, and parts of *The Waste Land* describe his exact path through London on the way to work. Similarly, Springsteen has collected spaces around him and represented them, first in his voluminous notebooks and later in songs told through the voices of others—very much as Wordsworth does in his ballads and Eliot does in his dramatic monologues.

Though there may be autobiographical elements in Springsteen's songs (and in Eliot's and Wordsworth's poems), the stories told and the characters created have lives of their own. In a

---

[44] Wordsworth, *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, 446.
[45] Margaret A. Syverson, *The Wealth of Reality: An Ecology of Composition* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 9.
[46] Syverson, *The Wealth of Reality,* 28-74.

1999 interview with Patrick Humphries focusing on *Tracks*, Springsteen elaborates on the complexity of creating character-driven work that is for the most part the product of the artist's imagination:

> I think it calls for the listener to take a step back and realize that they're listening to a creation of some sort, a work of imagination. That what you're doing, part of your craft, is understanding—and you may be singing through the voice of another character to create that understanding.
>
> I've written in many, many different voices—of which a listener will say that's obviously not literally your life…
>
> Occasionally, I write something that's more autobiographical than not, but really it just goes all across the board. And I think that to over-interpret it, to overpersonalize it, is generally a mistake. As a writer you're paid to use your imagination, and your emotions, and your eyes, to create something that is real—in the sense that there's real emotion. And I think that whatever you're writing about, you have to find yourself in there in some fashion. That's what makes the song work.[47]

Springsteen is working through the process of creating work that has a life for itself; it may be informed by his experiences and contain a significant amount of self in the form of a unique perspective, but once it is written down, the work itself becomes the important thing. The writer's history, life, and experiences at that moment of artistic creation are no longer as important as what is happening in the work. Springsteen again echoes Eliot, who argues that when a poet creates art, "[w]hat happens is a continual

[47] Patrick Humphries, Interview with Bruce Springsteen, from *Record Collector*, February 1999 in *Talk About a Dream,* 269.

surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."[48] For Eliot, "[p]oetry is not the turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality. … [S]ignificant emotion [should have] its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet."[49] Springsteen considers "real emotion" and Eliot considers "significant emotion" emerging from the writing itself, not from within the personality—or the history—of the writer. At the time of writing, authors must separate themselves from the subjects they are writing about. Springsteen and Eliot have both channeled emotions into the stories they create and the "many, many different voices" of their protagonists. Like Springsteen, Eliot's most famous poems are character-driven: "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917), "Gerontion" (1920), "The Hollow Men" (1925), "The Journey of the Magi" (1927), the protagonists of *Four Quartets* (1935-1942), even the poems in *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (1939). The original working title of *The Waste Land* was *He Do the Police in Different Voices*, borrowed from a line in Charles Dickens's last novel, *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-1865): "You mightn't think it, but Sloppy is a beautiful reader of a newspaper. He do the Police in different voices."[50] *He Do the Police in Different Voices* was an appropriate early title for *The Waste Land* for at least two reasons that are important for thinking about

[48] Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 26.
[49] Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 30.
[50] T. S Eliot, *The Waste Land; A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound.*, ed. Valerie Eliot, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 4; Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (London: Penguin Classics, 1998), 198.

Springsteen's many voices. First, the poem is rife with voices: the unnamed protagonist, Marie, the hyacinth girl, Madame Sosotris, a couple talking about nerves, women in the pub, and Tiresias, to name a few. Second, the title calls attention to the illiterate and anonymous lower classes of society, those who are normally not represented in high art. Indeed, as David Chinitz notes, for Eliot "popular culture was significant as both influence and subject. … *The Waste Land* would have openly established popular culture as a major intertext of modernist poetry if [Ezra] Pound had not edited out most of Eliot's popular references."[51] In the manuscript of *The Waste Land*, the early draft titled *He Do the Police in Different Voices* starts with the lines "First we had a couple feelers down at Tom's place / There was old Tom, boiled to the eyes, blind," which anticipates the later pub passage that Eliot kept in the final version:

> Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.
> He'll want to know what you done with that money he
> gave you
> To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.
> You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,
> He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.
> And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,
> He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,
> And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.
> Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said.
> Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a
> straight look.[52]

---

[51] David Chinitz, "T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide," *PMLA* 110:2 (March, 1995): 241-42.

[52] Eliot, *The Waste Land; A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound.*, 4; Eliot, *The Waste Land*, ll.139-158; T. S. Eliot, *T. S. Eliot: Collected Poems, 1909-1962*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991), 58.

These are the voices of London's lower-class, sitting in a pub near closing time, anticipating Lil's husband Albert's imminent return from World War I, debating how to tell Albert that the money he left for her to fix her teeth was used for an abortion. Eliot presents the conversation with a tone and diction he considers consistent with those of lower-class London. Gregory S. Jay suggests Eliot's "often affectionate imitation of [lower-class] voices … conveys a respect for … ordinary lives and feelings."[53] Chinitz highlights this affection in a passage from *The Waste Land*:

> O City City, I can sometimes hear
> Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
> The pleasant whining of a mandoline
> And a clatter and a chatter from within
> Where fishmen lounge at noon[54]

The words "pleasant," "clatter," and "chatter" indicate an affection for the working-class people in this public bar. But, like many of Eliot's modernist protagonists, the protagonist of *The Waste Land* is alienated from this interior. There may be affection for the working-class, but there is no connection. Conversely, if this were on *Nebraska* or *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, the protagonists would be in a bar, drinking, and Springsteen would tell their stories rather than describe sounds heard through the walls.

Eliot's use of lower-class voices in *The Waste Land* is similar to Springsteen's adoption of working-class voices and Wordsworth's assertions about the role of the poet and the subjects of poetry. In the 1802 version of his "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*,"

---

[53] Gregory S. Jay, "Postmodernism in *The Waste Land*: Women, Mass Culture, and Others," in *Rereading the New: A Backward Glance at Modernism*, ed. Kevin J. H. Dettmar (University of Michigan Press, 1992), 237.
[54] Eliot, *The Waste Land,* ll. 259 – 263; Eliot, *T. S. Eliot*, 63.

Wordsworth warns against poets who use high diction and elevated language. For Wordsworth, doing so only results in separating authors from their potential audience.[55] Rather, Wordsworth's poems contain, as he claims, "a selection of language really used by men … Humble and rustic life was generally chosen … because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated."[56] Wordsworth uses the language of the common citizen because he believes that common language holds an authenticity and resonance that elevated language or rhetoric cannot. For example, consider the "The Thorn," a poem in which the protagonist (a retired sea captain) is talking to another, speculating about the history of a decrepit thorn tree at the top of a hill. In telling the story of the tree, the sea captain is encouraged to tell the story of Martha, a women engaged to a man named Stephen who, after getting Martha pregnant, marries another woman. Bereft, lost, and seemingly mad, Martha wanders the landscape alone, her fate and the fate of her baby mostly unknown until the interlocutor demands it:

> "But what's the Thorn? and what the pond?
> And what the hill of moss to her?
> And what the creeping breeze that comes
> The little pond to stir?"
> "I cannot tell; but some will say
> She hanged her baby on the tree;
> Some say she drowned it in the pond.
> Which is a little step beyond:

[55] Wordsworth, *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, 447.
[56] Wordsworth, *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, 446-447.

But all and each agree,
The little Babe was buried there,
Beneath that hill of moss so fair."[57]

The language of Wordsworth's protagonist and interlocutor is simple, containing mostly short words, none of which has more than two syllables. The phrases are direct and frank. Though containing "simple and unelaborated expressions," the poem subtly conveys the feelings and psychology of its protagonist and subject.[58] The thorn is much more than a tree; it is a space of mourning, forever entwined with the story of Martha and her dead child.

Springsteen would write similarly frank, predominantly monosyllabic, and deceptively simple lines nearly two hundred years later in dozens of songs, such as "Nebraska," "Johnny 99," and "Galveston Bay." On each of these and many similar tracks the narrative is set in a certain geographical space: Lincoln, Nebraska; Mahwah, New Jersey; Seabrook, Texas. Each geographical location becomes a code for a larger socio-cultural issue. Lincoln, a "town" in "Nebraska" instead of city, rising out of the plains, signifies desolation. Mahwah, which once boasted the largest auto assembly plant in the country, signifies economic downturn. Seabrook, a town of harbors where Clear Lake merges with Galveston Bay, signifies disruption. In Springsteen's more Romantic songs, natural settings carry similar levels of signification as they did to the Romantic poets: a river valley signifies youth ("The River"); a hill top signifies hierarchy ("Mansion on the Hill"); moonlight signifies hope ("Downbound Train"). In 1997, Springsteen told Nicholas

[57] Wordsworth, *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, 73.
[58] Wordsworth, *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, 446-447.

Dawidoff, "I had an interest of writing about the country—all of it. I was creating intimate portraits of individuals that you can draw back from and look at them in the context of the country they live in. You have to find circumstances where those characters resonate with psychological, emotional, and, by implication, political issues."[59] By the mid-1990s, Springsteen had become proficient at writing lyrics that made connections between an environment (context) and the kinds of stories (circumstances) that could be told about people in those spaces. The power in his songs comes in the interplay of these two key lyrical structures: context and circumstance.

Wordsworth was a master at connecting context and circumstance to lead to psychological resonance.[60] In the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*," Wordsworth argues that the poet

> considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this with a certain quantity of immediate knowledge, with certain convictions, intuitions, and deductions, which from habit acquire the quality of intuitions; he considers him as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding everywhere objects that immediately excite in him sympathies.[61]

---

[59] Nicholas Dawidoff, "The Pop Populist," *The New York Times Magazine*, January 26, 1997, accessed June 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/1997/01/26/magazine/the-pop-populist.html.
[60] Jack Stillinger, "Introduction," in *Selected Poems and Prefaces by William Wordsworth*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), xiv.
[61] Wordsworth, *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, 455.

According to Wordsworth, a poet illuminates the nuanced, emotional, and symbiotic relationship between a person and the objects surrounding that person. Context—ordinary context—is of ultimate importance. Only when considering people in their ordinary natural spaces can a poet reveal a person's value system and the immediate emotions emerging from being in a particular space at a particular time. "Once again / Do I behold these step and lofty cliffs, / That on a wild and secluded scene impress / Thoughts of a more deep seclusion," Wordsworth writes at the beginning of "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey."[62] The ordinary context of a view over the River Wye when mixed with the protagonist's psyche results in the emotional response. Garman suggests that Springsteen uses "working-class geographies to illustrate the dissolution of working-class communities" that leads to an inability to "forge a collective working-class identity which provides people with a sense of self-worth."[63] The factories in "Johnny 99," "Factory," and "Youngstown" are not just physical objects. Rather, they are icons of a fragmented American dream. Or, as poet James Wolcott once quipped, "Silent factories are to [Springsteen] what church ruins were to the English Romantics, crumbling theaters of decay which serve as houses of lost faith."[64]

But, rather than the mere presentation of American icons, Springsteen also engages in pointed social commentary. By adopting the voices of ordinary citizens he advocates for those who have been forgotten. During his interview with the Paris media,

---

[62] Wordsworth, *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, 108.
[63] Bryan K. Garman, "The Ghost of History: Bruce Springsteen, Woody Guthrie, and the Hurt Song," *Popular Music & Society* 20 (Summer, 1996): 85.
[64] James Wolcott, "The Hagiography of Bruce Springsteen," *Vanity Fair*, December 1985 in *Racing in the Street,* 126.

Springsteen summarized his oeuvre this way: "My work has always been about judging the distance between American reality and the American dream—how far it is at any given moment." He draws on the debilitating home life of his childhood, looking "toward not just the psychological reasons in [his] house, but the social forces that played upon [his] home and made life more difficult."[65] In his SXSW talk, Springsteen walks the audience through his experience listening to Hank Williams, spin after spin on the turntable, trying to figure out what made Williams's music important for him (and society) at that moment. Finally, his "ears became accustomed to its beautiful simplicity, and its darkness and depth."[66] Springsteen saw himself reflected in the characters populating Williams's songs. He found themes with which he wanted to engage. But country, as he remarks, was "rarely politically angry, and it was rarely politically critical. And I realized that that fatalism had a toxic element."[67] No one in country music was asking why things were the way they were, which was something Springsteen started doing in the early 1980s after reading Henry Steel Commanger and Allen Nevins's *History of the United States*. While reading this book, Springsteen told a Paris audience, he "started to learn about how things got to be the way they are today, how you end up a victim without even knowing it. And how people get old and just die after not having hardly a day's satisfaction or peace of mind in their lives."[68] Springsteen wanted to know what contributes to creating a state of mind that accepts stagnation. Country music depicted stagnation, but never

[65] Springsteen, "An American in Paris."
[66] Springsteen, "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech."
[67] Springsteen, "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech."
[68] Marsh, *Glory Days*, 36.

questioned why, according to Springsteen. Guthrie was asking those questions: "Woody's gaze was set on today's hard times. But also, somewhere over the horizon, there was something. Woody's world was a world where fatalism was tempered by a practical idealism. It was a world where speaking truth to power wasn't futile, whatever its outcome."[69] In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T.S. Eliot argues that artists who wish to remain significant must have an "historical sense[, which] involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence. … This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well of the temporal, is what makes a writer traditional."[70] In *The Waste Land*, Eliot incorporates texts ranging from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* to popular Ziegfeld Follies. By weaving together fragments of the works of antiquity with elements of Modernist popular culture and ideology, Eliot is arguing that all texts, regardless of their time of origin, can—and should—be looked to when considering contemporary concerns. He insists that to be traditional a "poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and … should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career."[71]

As an artist, Springsteen has continued to develop his own consciousness of the past, and at each stage in his education he has attempted to incorporate into his writing and music what he has uncovered. For example, when choosing songs for *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions* Springsteen specifically chose songs that he could "make 'of the moment' . . . so you're connected to this

[69] Springsteen, "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech."
[70] Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 23.
[71] Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 25.

present world."[72] In the liner notes to *The Seeger Sessions,* Springsteen recalls the time in 1997 when he brought home a dozen Seeger records that transformed his understanding of folk music and its musical potential. For *The Seeger Sessions*, Springsteen describes seeking out stories he could "add [his] two cents to as an interpreter," something he suggests he has "done only very rarely in the past."[73] Springsteen's interpretation of songs on *The Seeger Sessions* often includes shifting them to a minor key and adding blues, Cajun, or other rhythms, but his most significant updating comes in his version of "How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live?" Blind Alfred Reed originally recorded the song on December 4, 1929, as a response to the Great Depression. His version ends with the following lines:

> Well, the doctor comes around with a face all bright,
> And he says in a little while you'll be all right.
> All he gives is a humbug pill,
> A dose of dope and a great big bill —
> Tell me how can a poor man stand such times and live?[74]

Springsteen's version takes Reed's last verse and builds from there:

> "Me and my old school pals had some mighty high times down here
> And what happened to you poor black folks, well it just ain't fair"
> He took a look around, gave a little pep talk, said "I'm with you" then he took a little walk
> Tell me how can a poor man stand such times and live?

[72] Dave Marsh, "Will It Go Round in Circles," from *Backstreets*, 2006, in *Talk About a Dream,* 328.
[73] Marsh, "Will It Go Round in Circles," 329.
[74] Blind Alfred Reed, "How Can A Poor Man Stand Such Times And Live" (1929), accessed June 2014, http://archive.org/details/Reed.

Springsteen's version presents an indictment of the George W. Bush administration's handling of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The second and third verses are inspired by news reports of Bush's photo-op filled visit to New Orleans in the days after the devastating flooding in 2005. Along with the power that comes from using common language and emotional description in ways consistent with Wordsworth's approach to writing, the lines allude to the corruption described in Reed's original:

> Most our preachers preach for gold and not for souls
> That's what keeps a poor man always in a hole
> We can hardly get our breath
> Taxed and schooled and preached to death
> Tell me how can a poor man stand such times and live?

By using Reed's last verse as his first, Springsteen signals that the song will be an extension of the original song's decrying of economic conditions and shows his appreciation for what Eliot described as "not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence."[75] In Reed's version, the doctor is an active contributor to the financial inequality discussed in the song, an inequality felt by many of those who were victims of the flooding. In Springsteen's version, "the doctor" is President Bush, whose bright, happy face is that of a shyster promising healing but leaving only bills. The anachronism present in the work succeeds in placing the song on a historical continuum, blending the traumas of the past with those of the present, allowing the listener to understand a lineage of suffering and perceptions of an ineffective government, making it seem like the whole history of blues and suffering, in Eliot's words, "has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order" in the space of just one song.[76]

---

[75] Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 23.
[76] Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 23.

Springsteen, Authenticity, and Legacy

When Springsteen broaches the subject of authenticity in his SXSW keynote, he is likely taking a jab at—or at the very least, refuting—those who have questioned his authenticity. Springsteen has continually challenged the perception that his enormous net worth and celebrity status contradict the messages of his songs. As he told Ed Bradley on *60 Minutes* in 1995, "I believe that your fundamental point of view and politics comes out of some core emotional and psychological picture and is established by your early experience of life."[77] When Springsteen appeared on the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek* in 1975 he was labeled a corporate stooge; when he released *Born in the U.S.A.* he was labeled a sell-out; when he married Julianne Philips he was cast as out of touch with his New Jersey roots; when Sony released the Wal-Mart exclusive version of his greatest hits (which Springsteen agreed was a mistake) he was accused of going against the community-based principles and labor advocacy he has espoused throughout his career.[78] Scholars of popular culture have wrestled with Springsteen's authenticity for decades, noting and/or questioning any or all of the following: his humble roots, slow rise, major breakthroughs, various appropriations, personal decisions, rebirth post-9/11, concert performances, and political and marketing decisions.[79] Indeed, there's hardly an article, interview, or

[77] "Springsteen," *60 Minutes*, January 21, 1996, accessed June 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjXAn_zQHpo&feature=youtube_gdata_player .

[78] On Springsteen's regret of the Walmart release, see: Jon Pareles, "The Rock Laureate," *The New York Times*, February 1, 2009, accessed June 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/01/arts/music/01pare.html .

[79] Simon Frith, *Music for Pleasure: Essays in the Sociology of Pop* (New York: Routledge, 1988); Elizabeth Bird, "'Is That Me, Baby?' Image, Authenticity, and

broadcast that does not adhere to this narrative or, like the *60 Minutes* and Paris interviews, ask Springsteen to reveal his authenticity by discussing how his roots have affected his psyche. In 1984, Springsteen told Kurt Loder, "I realized that I was a rich man, but I felt like a poor man inside."[80] Springsteen echoed that sentiment in "Better Days," confessing, "It's a sad funny ending to find yourself pretending / A rich man in a poor man's shirt."

My goal here, however, is not to rehash these claims; such discussions are important contributions to understanding Springsteen and his work within a post-modern context, but they are beyond my scope. Nor is my goal to question the authenticity of Springsteen as he presents his SXSW address. That is, I am not interested in making an argument about whether or not

---

the Career of Bruce Springsteen," *American Studies* 35:2 (1994): 39–57; Wolcott, "The Hagiography of Bruce Springsteen;" Lawrence Grossberg, "Rockin' with Reagan, or the Mainstreaming of Postmodernity," *Cultural Critique* 10 (October 1, 1988): 123–49; Michael R. Hemphill and Larry David Smith, "The Working American's Elegy: The Rhetoric of Bruce Springsteen," in *Politics in Familiar Contexts: Projecting Politics through Popular Media*, ed. Robert L. Savage and Dan D. Nimmo (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Pub, 1990), 199-214; John J. Sheinbaum, "'I'll Work for Your Love': Springsteen and the Struggle for Authenticity," in *Reading the Boss,* 223-242; Jefferson Cowie and Lauren Boehm, "Dead Man's Town: 'Born in the USA,' Social History, and Working-Class Identity," in *Bruce Springsteen, Cultural Studies and the Runaway American Dream*, ed. Kenneth Womack, J. Jerome Zolten, and Mark Bernhard (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2012), 25-44; Donna M Dolphin, "'Believe Me, Mister': The Tradition of Woody Guthrie's Hurt Song in Springsteen's," in *Bruce Springsteen, Cultural Studies and the Runaway American Dream*, 45-60; Elizabeth M. Seymour, "'Where Dreams Are Found and Lost': Springsteen, Nostalgia, and Identity," in *Bruce Springsteen, Cultural Studies and the Runaway American Dream*, 61-78.

[80] Kurt Loder, "The Rolling Stone Interview: Bruce Springsteen on 'Born in the U.S.A.,'" *Rolling Stone*, December 6, 1984, accessed June 2014, http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/the-rolling-stone-interview-bruce-springsteen-on-born-in-the-u-s-a-19841206?print=true.

Springsteen at the podium is an accurate version of Springsteen-the-artist or one manufactured to maintain a real or imagined narrative of Springsteen as man of the people. And, as is readily apparent, Springsteen's conception of the working class (as is Wordsworth's, for that matter) is an idealized, nostalgic, romanticized, and problematic depiction of a group of people who are significantly more diverse than he suggests. Jefferson Cowie and Lauren Boehm as well as Elizabeth Seymour engage with these ideas thoroughly in their scholarship.[81]

Rather, I am interested in testing the limits of Springsteen's definition of authenticity as it moves from creativity and influence to legacy. Springsteen's definition of authenticity is very much consistent with how we as a society have come to define something as authentic. According to Lindholm, there are "two overlapping modes for characterizing any entity as authentic: genealogical or historical (*origin*) and identity or correspondence (*content*). Authentic objects, persons, and collectives are original, real, pure; they are what they purport to be, their roots are known and verified, their essence and appearance are one."[82] In this setting, Springsteen positions what he calls "the genesis and power of creativity" within a definition of authenticity that exists within a known and verifiable lineage of influence—doing very much what Shumway describes when he writes, "A genealogy of rock authenticity would look at jazz, folk, and pop music as the

[81] Cowie and Boehm, "Dead Man's Town"; Seymour, "Where Dreams Are Found and Lost."
[82] Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity*, 2.

determining elements of its family tree."[83] Yet, how far into the work of and principles espoused by the artists should that lineage extend? Should it stay within the songs themselves or should it bleed into their social and political goals? What impact should Springsteen's definitions of creativity and authenticity have on his legacy? Springsteen has clearly decided to let the social and activist influences of artists like Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger affect the way he positions his work and himself as an artist and a human being. The presence of food banks at concerts, which Springsteen encourages concertgoers to donate to, is just one example of how Springsteen blends his personal beliefs with advocacy. At some point he decided to become the living embodiment of Guthrie's and Seeger's legacies. Robert Santelli suggests that whenever Springsteen sings "This Land is Your Land" he becomes "a part of the ongoing story of American music and its role in enriching American culture."[84] Springsteen maintains that role at the close of his SXSW talk when, in true Pete Seeger fashion, he encourages the audience to sing along with the chorus of "This Land is Your Land." In doing so, he succeeds in making Guthrie's words, and Seeger's efforts at keeping these words alive, meaningful for those in the audience.

More interesting, however, is the verse from "This Land is Your Land" Springsteen chooses to sing: the so-called controversial fourth verse, which argues against the idea of land and resources made private by the rich. The verse was inspired by Guthrie's

---

[83] Springsteen, "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech"; David R. Shumway, "Authenticity: Modernity, Stardom, and Rock & Roll," *Modernism/modernity* 14:3 (2007): 529.

[84] Robert Santelli, *This Land Is Your Land: Woody Guthrie and the Journey of an American Folk Song* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2012), 243.

experiences seeing poor people employed to work at reduced wages on huge swaths of land owned by the wealthy.[85] At Seeger's insistence, Springsteen and Seeger sang the fourth and fifth verses at Obama's first inauguration. That was the first and only other (known) time Springsteen has sung the fourth verse in front of an audience; my research reveals that in concert he has only sung the less controversial first three verses. Springsteen's decision to sing the fourth verse instead of the less controversial verses may have been a nod to the legacy of Guthrie, who was being celebrated that year at SXSW. But, it also leads one to question how fully Springsteen embodies the ideals the verse aspires to promote: the free and open exchange and use of cultural resources. Read metaphorically, the verse is about any property one group of owners withholds from others, be they land owners or, say, the recording industry. When considered within Springsteen's SXSW keynote assertion that successful theft (or influence) as creative inspiration is an important part of what makes one authentic, it is hard not to make a connection between the verse he sings and what Springsteen advocates in his talk. Kirby Ferguson, writer and director of the *Everything's a Remix* documentary series, argues that creativity contains three main elements: copying, transforming, and combining.[86] To borrow Springsteen's terminology, we copy the ideas of our teachers and influences (which he did as a young musician copying Elvis, the Beatles, Joe Cocker, Van Morrison, and Dylan); once we are confident, we transform them into something new (which is how "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood" becomes

[85] Santelli, *This Land Is Your Land*, 81.
[86] Kirby Ferguson, *Everything Is a Remix Part 3*, 2011, accessed June 2014, http://vimeo.com/25380454.

"Badlands"); and then combine multiple ideas to create something new and exciting (such as the blending of genres on *Seeger Sessions* and *Wrecking Ball*). When the creative process is allowed to flourish—that is, when expressions of ideas (such as lyrics) are free to be used by many—culture benefits. When they are not—that is, when owners lock expressions of ideas away—culture suffers. This is in part why Santelli writes that Springsteen is "enriching American culture" when he sings "This Land is Your Land." By passing on the song, Springsteen is also passing on the legacies of Guthrie and Seeger as well as the ideals upon which the song was founded.

Seeger has written, "I have spent a life 'borrowing' others' ideas. I really can't object if people borrow some of mine. I am glad if someone can improve my songs."[87] In the introduction to the second edition of *How to Play the 5-string Banjo*, Seeger gives permission to "reprint, whenever needed."[88] In a 1957 letter to Lynn Riggs, Seeger describes the pride he takes when others sing or reprint his songs, which he gives permission to do. He laments the fact that he was finally persuaded to "copyright the various songs I have either written new words to, or music, or both—in order to keep them from being restricted by the Broadway pirates. But it is one thing to copyright in order to prevent restrictions upon it, and another thing to copyright a song in order to restrict it."[89] Seeger understood when a singer passes a song on from one generation to the next, the singer is giving a gift to that generation's

[87] Seeger, *Where Have All the Flowers Gone,* 15.
[88] Pete Seeger, *How To Play The 5-String Banjo*, (Woodstock, New York: Music Sales America, 1992), 2.
[89] Rob Rosenthal and Sam Rosenthal, eds., *Pete Seeger: In His Own Words* (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 275.

culture. He also understood that copyright, which was designed to protect culture and not corporate interests, was being transformed into an institution that protects corporations at the expense of culture.[90] He embodied the idea that music is a process of change over time, through which musicians build on and transform the work of prior artists, resulting in music that is no longer by just one person; it is music by the people "because so many folks have had a hand (or a throat) in shaping them."[91] He actively sought to reform the International Public Domain to ensure original artists whose work has passed into the public domain, but has been adapted by new artists, receive a percentage of the future royalties. Seeger's goal was to combat a musical colonialism of songs from poorer areas and nations that one day will "be collected and new words put to them in some wealthy city somewhere. The poverty-stricken village will stay poverty stricken."[92] In other words, Seeger was consistent in his approach to folk music and his ideals about preserving a folk process.

Springsteen's legacy as a musician has been solidified. His legacy as a cultural ambassador advocating for the arts is just beginning. In his SXSW talk, Springsteen emphasizes "it's the power and purpose of your music that still matters" for one to be considered authentic.[93] The purpose of one's music extends beyond the lyrics and the score. It extends to how artists position themselves in relation to the social institutions designed to structure the lives of citizens. Springsteen has shown his power and

[90] Siva Vaidhyanathan, *Copyrights and Copywrongs: The Rise of Intellectual Property and How It Threatens Creativity* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).
[91] Seeger, *Where Have All the Flowers Gone*, 146.
[92] Rosenthal and Rosenthal, *Pete Seeger*, 280-282.
[93] Springsteen, "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech."

purpose by advocating for gay marriage as early as 1996, by speaking out against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, by lending his voice to the 2014 Shoah Foundation fundraising gala, to name only a few instances. When Jon Landau supported high prices for concert downloads, he noted they were consistent with what Pearl Jam and Phish have been charging.[94] More purposeful and powerful might have been to offer downloads for free, looking to artists like Radiohead, Nine Inch Nails, and Coldplay, who have bypassed labels and released albums for free or on a pay-what-you-want basis. Nine Inch Nails encourages fans to remix tracks and upload them to the band's web site, cementing a direct connection between fans and artist and making an argument about the anachronism of a label-centric recording industry. Perhaps Springsteen might do that with an upcoming album. Or let fans pay what they can afford for concert audio. As BruceFunds has brought to light, many fans do not have the means to pay for a ticket and many others have the means to donate.[95] I suspect many do not have the means to pay for concert downloads, either. By asking fans to pay and by creating two tiers of audio quality (MP3 and the more expensive FLAC), Springsteen and his management team recreate the social hierarchies Springsteen rails against in his songs.

Springsteen has reached a stage in his career where people actively seek him out as the conscience of society. During his interview with the Paris media, one reporter observed, "so many

---

[94] Andy Green, "The Inside Story of Bruce Springsteen's Official Live Downloads," *Rolling Stone*, accessed June 2014, http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/the-inside-story-of-bruce-springsteens-official-live-downloads-20140207.

[95] "Love & Gratitude," *Bruce Funds*, accessed June 2014, http://brucefunds.org/love--gratitude.html.

people these past couple years look to you for your interpretation of events. … so many people care about what you think, and what you feel about what is happening in the world."[96] Robert Santelli has suggested that "Springsteen *was* America in the eyes of his fans and much of the world."[97] The last decade has seen Springsteen transform from rock and roll singer to social critic. Springsteen's SXSW talk puts him in a lineage that includes some of the most important writers and thinkers to defend traditional or authentic processes for creating art (what Eliot defines as traditional; Springsteen labels authentic). If he made a statement in favor of the free flow of information (as Seeger did in his defense of the public domain and as Springsteen's lawyers' are doing by pointing scholars to the Fair Use Doctrine for quoting his lyrics), people would listen. Something might change. It might put him on a path toward removing himself from the corporate structures that actively attempt to limit the creative processes Springsteen advocates. It would reinforce his commitment to a traditional and authentic approach to composing that encourages artists to borrow from their influences without the fear of repercussion that stagnates artistic growth. It would show Springsteen continuing his journey to embrace fully Guthrie's and Seeger's influences, to adopt fully the traditional, folk-infused creative process he illuminates in his SXSW keynote address, and to emerge fully as a cultural ambassador for the arts.

[96] Springsteen, "An American in Paris."
[97] Santelli, *This Land Is Your Land*, 244.

Whose Hometown? Reception of Bruce Springsteen as an Index of Australian National Identities

Brad Warren and Patrick West
Deakin University

Abstract

Focusing on the cultural landscape of the mid-1980s, this paper explores the Australian experience of Bruce Springsteen. Australian author Peter Carey's short story collection, *The Fat Man in History,* anticipates two phases of Australia's relationship to the United States, phases expressed by responses to Springsteen's *Born in the U.S.A.* (1984) and the 1986 blockbuster *Crocodile Dundee*. Springsteen's album was received by an Australian audience who wanted to be like Americans; *Crocodile Dundee*, on the other hand, provided a representation of what Australians thought Americans wanted Australians to be. This paper argues that the first phase was driven by emergent technologies, in particular the Walkman, which allowed for personal and private listening practices. However, technological changes in the 1990s facilitated a more marked shift in listening space towards individualization, a change reflected in Springsteen's lyrics.

"The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there."
—L.P. Hartley[1]

Looking back on 1984, it proves difficult to fully appreciate the immensity of *Born in the U.S.A.* for Australian music fans. The album bore distinctly American rock music, indicated by the American flag on the cover of the record, and yet the album spent almost two years near the top of the Australian music charts. Then,

 The authors wish to thank the three, anonymous peer-reviewers for their detailed and insightful comments. Please address correspondence to bradpwarren1@gmail.com and patrick.west@deakin.edu.au

[1] L.P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (New York: New York Review of Book, 2002 [1953]), 17.

in 1985 Bruce Springsteen performed eight sell-out stadium shows in *our* hometown. Springsteen still sells out stadiums in Australia, with two highly successful tours over the past twelve months, but the Australian relationship with him and his music has changed. Focusing on the cultural landscape of the mid-1980s, this paper will explore the Australian experience with Springsteen's music, focusing in particular on the fascination with all things American that provided the context for *Born in the U.S.A.*'s release. In a world before the internet, America was a distant and exotic place that Australia, as a nation, aspired to be like and, accordingly, wanted to emulate. It mattered little that the lyrics to *Born in the U.S.A.*'s title track did not promote American life. Singing along with the chorus line was more than enough to make Australian listeners feel connected to the United States. Thus, in this paper we concentrate heavily, but not exclusively, on this song.

Springsteen's enormous impact globally makes it difficult to distinguish the different elements of his cultural reception across places and times. Given his celebration and canonization as an icon of American rock, it proves particularly important to explore the nuances of his reception in other contexts, such as Australia, both in the mid-1980s and a decade into the twenty-first century. Attention to the reception of Springsteen's music helps map the differences of perspective on nationhood and identity between North America and the margins of global American hegemony.

Australians' relationship with Springsteen's music does not only have a spatial aspect, but also a temporal dimension. In the decades since 1984, the relationship between the United States and Australia has evolved and the Australian experience of Springsteen's music has matured. In the twenty-first century, this

experience remains characterized by more personalized responses to popular music, a process facilitated by contemporary technologies. How we listen is as important as what we listen to. In this article, we examine the rise of increasingly individualized listening experiences, traced from the Walkman through to the iPod. Technological and cultural changes exist in symbiotic relation: they mutually constitute political, economic, and social conditions at a global level. Our paper will trace how Australians listened to, and continue to listen to, Springsteen as an index of the changes in the Australian-American cultural relationship.

Throughout this paper, we will draw on our own experiences of growing up in Australia with Springsteen's music, focusing particularly on the 1984 release of *Born in the U.S.A.* and the Australian tour the following year. We will also draw on the work of Australian writer Peter Carey, in particular his short story collection *The Fat Man in History*, as well as the 1986 Paul Hogan film *Crocodile Dundee,* directed by Peter Faiman. These Australian works allow us to unlock the subtleties, shifts, and ironies of Springsteen's reception in this country. This article argues that Carey's text anticipates two phases of Australia's relationship to America in the mid-1980s. These phases are marked by Australians' different responses to *Born in the U.S.A.* (Phase One) and *Crocodile Dundee* (Phase Two). Springsteen's album was well received by Australian audiences who, to a large extent, wanted to be, or at the very least wanted to emulate or mirror, Americans. *Crocodile Dundee*, on the other hand, re-inflected this desire. As a representation by Australians of what Australians thought Americans wanted Australianness to mean, the film constitutes one of the first moments in which Australia, as a nation, engaged

directly with what Americans thought of them. This process would become manifest and manifold in later years with the rise of digital technology, which enabled what we call the "personalization of national imaginaries": every Australian could be American in his or her own way. We further argue that Springsteen's lyrics since *Born in the U.S.A.* respond to the technological opportunities of self-definition opened up by new media. As such, we compare the differences between the specific geographic and cultural signifiers in "Born in the U.S.A." with the more fluid and ambiguous referents to be found in the more recent "We Take Care of Our Own" (2012).[2]

As late as 1988, Peter Carey's *The Fat Man in History* was still being taught in first-year university English courses in Australia as a text that reflected contemporary Australian-American relations, underscoring its relevance to the time period that encompassed

[2] A note on methodology: The methodological approach adopted by this paper is informed by the respective areas of expertise of its authors. West works in the areas of literary and other text-based critical studies. Specifically, he is interested in how *avante garde* or surrealist art, the school to which *The Fat Man in History* belongs, has an established lineage of anticipating developments in mainstream or popular culture. Warren is a sociologist specializing in qualitative method, particularly ethnography and participant observation fieldwork. These areas of expertise underpin this paper's use of personal anecdote on the understanding that the active role played by researcher subjectivity be acknowledged and embraced as a part of the generation of meaning, rather than somehow inhibiting it. As Corrine Glesne and Alan Peshkin write, "Our subjective dispositions may direct us to a variety of different things. This variety reveals the multiple realities of any social phenomenon, which together provide a fuller picture of the people, the times, and the place." (Corrine Glesne and Alan Peshkin, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* [White Plains, New York: Longman, 1992], 50). Both of this article's authors grew up in Australia, are passionate Springsteen fans, and were in their mid-to-late teens when *Born in the U.S.A.* was released. This background facilitates a description of the "foreign country" Hartley refers to through the lenses of personal memories.

Australia's two-year love affair with *Born in the U.S.A.*[3] The Australian preoccupation with American culture in the 1980s recurs in four of *The Fat Man in History*'s twelve stories: "American Dreams," "Report on the Shadow Industry," "A Windmill in the West," and the title story, "The Fat Man in History." Set in a small town in Australia, "American Dreams" associates yearnings for modernization with a yearning for America. This linkage provides an apt example of Phase One of the Australian-American relationship. From the outset, the narrator of the story, a young resident representative of the townspeople's collective will, expresses the townspeople's dissatisfaction with their locale and their possessions:

> My father says we have treated the town [in Australia] badly in our minds. We have used it, this little valley, as nothing more than a stopping place. Somewhere on the way to somewhere else … For years we have watched the films at the Roxy and dreamed … we all have dreams of the big city, of wealth, of modern houses, of big motor cars: American dreams, my father has called them.[4]

As the story progresses, a character named Gleason builds a miniature model of the small Australian town on a bald hill on its outskirts. The narrator's father speculates as to the model's

[3] The University of Melbourne is one such institution. Further, a collection of Carey's work is still on the suggested reading list of the Victorian Year Twelve English syllabus in 2014. It contains three of the four stories from *Fat Man* discussed in this paper. In 2012, Carey was the only Australian author on the recommended list of short story collections for high school-level instruction; see: http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/documents/bulletin/2012/2012febsup3.pdf and http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/documents/vce/literature/vce_literature_text_list.pdf (accessed June 2014)

[4] Peter Carey, *The Fat Man in History*, (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1974), 101, 112.

purpose: "He thought Gleason had built the model of our town just for this moment, to let us see the beauty of our own town, to make us proud of ourselves and to stop the American Dreams we were so prone to."[5] Carey's story serves to criticize the Australian fascination with America through Gleason's seemingly pro-Australian project. However, "American Dreams" is also fatalistic about the possible success of the model town project, since it eventually serves to function as nothing more than an attraction to bring American tourists to town.[6] Traces of our Phase Two can also be found in "American Dreams." The story bears witness to Australians *interacting* with America, rather than just imagining an idyllic version of it and wishing they were there. When the townspeople are told that the model of the town will bring American tourists, they are at first overjoyed; it seems like a dream come true. So set are they in Phase One, they fantasize about what the Americans will be like. When the American tourists do come, it transpires that the relationship is not quite all it might be:

> The Americans would come, [the town minister] said … And we all began, once more, to dream our American dreams … Then we all went home and waited for the Americans … It didn't take long for them to come, although at the time it seemed an eternity … The Americans arrive every day … They spend their time being disappointed and I spend my time feeling guilty, that I have somehow let them down by growing older and sadder.[7]

The narrator describes his disappointment at being unable to live up to American expectations, to be the way they would like him to

[5] Carey, *The Fat Man in History,* 108.
[6] Carey, *The Fat Man in History*, 110-11, 13.
[7] Carey, *The Fat Man in History*, 110-13.

be. This passage, however, illustrates a moment of engagement between nations—in the form of actual, fictionalized, interaction—rather than merely engagement in characters' imaginations.

Carey's critique of Australians as manqué Americans continues in "Report on the Shadow Industry." In addition to the modernization drive identified above, Carey suggests that a fascination with style over substance constitutes part of Australians' longing for Americanness. While no doubt this is a derogatory claim to make about American culture, the view expressed of Australians is even worse. Not only do they actively seek to follow mindlessly behind Americans, but they lag sorely behind those they aspire to become:

> My friend S. went to live in America ten years ago and I still have the letter he wrote me when he first arrived, wherein he describes the shadow factories that were springing up on the west coast … A strange letter ten years ago but it accurately describes scenes that have since become common in this country [Australia] … The shadow factories have huge chimneys that reach far into the sky, chimneys which billow forth smoke of different, brilliant colours. It is said by some of my more cynical friends that the smoke has nothing to do with any manufacturing process and is merely a trick, fake evidence that technological miracles are being performed within the factories.[8]

Similar themes can be found in "The Fat Man in History," wherein Americans are described, *en masse*, as successful and affluent. Yet while Carey's narrator suggests that all Australians long to become Americans, the story again casts these desires in disparaging terms, stating that "most fat men [in Australia] were either Americans,

[8] Carey, *The Fat Man in History*, 91.

stooges for the Americans, or wealthy supporters of the Americans."[9] The final story in Carey's collection, "A Windmill in the West," takes place in a large American military base in the Australian outback where the land belonging to the base is deemed to be American soil. A lone sentry guards an expanse of the fence surrounding the base, but so similar does the terrain on either side appear that the sentry loses track of which side is which. The story presents a grand metaphor: so much do Australians seek to mimic America that the difference in appearances becomes impossible to discern. Once again, Carey's cynicism towards this state of affairs proves abundantly clear, as the story ends in disaster.[10]

Carey's story collection *The Fat Man in History* conveys a sense of what the cultural terrain, the "foreign country" of 1984 was like for Australians. It was a world without the internet, without Google, without Skype, where phones were mostly located in homes, fixed firmly to walls, and international call rates were exorbitant. International postage was certainly well established, but delivery turnaround was measured in weeks, if not months. For Australians in this context, America was a distant, utopian land—surreal, enticing, and relatively unattainable. This backdrop, Phase One of Australian-American relations, provided a setting ripe with potential for popular reception of *Born in the U.S.A.* Chart statistics illustrate that Springsteen's album found fertile ground in Australia: the first single from the album, "Dancing in the Dark," entered the Australian Music Charts on May 28, 1984 and remained there for over a year, peaking at number five. The full album arrived on the charts on June 18, peaked at number one (for seven

[9] Carey, *The Fat Man in History*, 115-16.
[10] Carey, *The Fat Man in History*, 58, 62, 66.

weeks), and remained on the charts for a staggering 97 weeks.[11] Perhaps the greatest evidence of the Phase One we have described came with the release of the title track as a single: the "Born in the U.S.A." seven-inch came out in January 1985, peaked at number two on the Australian Charts, and remained there for almost half a year.[12] In late 1986, sales of Springsteen's *Live 1975-1985* shattered previous records for albums sold in a single day; the *Sydney Morning Herald* commented, "Only one American could generate such enthusiasm—Bruce Springsteen."[13]

Born in the U.S.A. was not successful by accident, nor was it somehow successful despite the title track. Australians were buying that track on its own merits and screaming it at the top of their lungs, claiming that they were, or at least wished they had been, "born in the U.S.A." As late as 2011, Australians retained a deep association between "Born in the U.S.A." and American identity; a Canberra musician noted that he would not play the song at a Springsteen tribute concert because "it's just … such an American song that I'm not comfortable with it."[14] In 1984, however, Australian listeners were caught up in a vicarious or perhaps voyeuristic version of what Laurent Berlant terms the American National Symbolic, "'an explication of ongoing collective practices' … [which] helps to account for the multiple, entangled ways in which United States [in this case, Australian] citizens are

[11] David Kent, *Australian Chart Book 1970 – 1992*, (St. Ives, N.S.W: Australian Chart Book, 1993), 289.
[12] Kent, *Australian Chart Book*, 289.
[13] Paul Sheehan, "The Boss's Record Breaks All Others," *Sydney Morning Herald,* November 12, 1986, 1.
[14] *Canberra Times,* "Paying Tribute to The Boss," October 31, 2011, 14.

constructed and imagine themselves Americans."[15] For Australians, identifying with "Born in the U.S.A." indicated a striving for the modernization that the United States symbolized for Australians at that time.

The authors readily acknowledge that we are treating groups such as *American audiences* and *Australian audiences* with broad strokes, perhaps implying inaccurately that either was somehow a homogeneous whole. Such is not the case. Rather, our argument recognizes that the cultural conditions described here were widespread, but certainly not the only ones that existed. For example, in some ways, there was already a real, material dialogue as a dimension of Australian-American relations. Almost 60,000 Australian soldiers served in the Vietnam War, with 521 casualties, and over 3,000 wounded.[16] Of the survivors and their families, those with discerning ears could easily have moved beyond the chorus line and achieved a different reading altogether of "Born in the U.S.A.," whose narrative tells the story of the homecoming of an American Vietnam War veteran. An anecdote provides evidence of a different possible negotiated engagement: in the course of writing this paper, Warren discussed it in passing with his younger brother, who was ten years old when *Born in the U.S.A.* was released. He remembers hearing "Born in the U.S.A" but recalls trying to subvert the lyrics, singing the chorus as "born in AUS-TRAL-I-A!" Thus, we have three divergent national experiences of "Born in the U.S.A.": that of Australians with dreams of being

[15] Cited in Brenda M. Boyle, *Masculinity in Vietnam War Narratives: A Critical Study of Fiction, Films and Nonfiction Writings* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2009), 7.
[16] *Australian War Memorial* (2013), accessed December 2013, http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/vietnam.asp

American (still the prevalent case, we would argue); that of Australians with shared experiences of Vietnam who may relate to the personal realities expressed in the verse narrative; and that of Australians who liked the music but resisted the chorus line. These three stand in for many other possible interpretations, formed on an individual basis.[17]

Yet, there remains more to be said about the way *Born in the U.S.A.*, as a product, was received and consumed. For a great proportion of its audience, the authors included, the album was not a vinyl record but a cassette tape and the method of reception was via headphones plugged into a Walkman. What we listen to is important, but so is how we listen. The Walkman, released in the late 1970s, revolutionized the way the world listened to music, so much so that in 1981 Cliff Richard dedicated an album to it, *Wired for Sound*. Suddenly, listening to music provided an experience more personal, more private, and at the same time more portable. The following passage from Rey Chow in 1993 now appears quite dated, though it illustrates the immensity of the change:

> What we need … is a history of listening—a history of how listening and how the emotions that are involved in listening change with the apparatuses that make listening possible. Traditionally, listening is, as a rule, public. For a piece of music to be heard—even under the most private

[17] Cultural Studies literature provides some inroads into understanding the process through which meaning is made: "[It is] an ongoing process. It does not just end at a pre-ordained point. While producers attempt to encode products with particular meanings and associations, this is not the end of the story … rather meanings are actively made in consumption, through the use to which people put these products in their everyday lives. Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay, and Keith Negus, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 5.

> circumstances—a certain public accessibility can always be assumed. Such public accessibility continues even when music becomes portable with the transistor radio and the portable cassette tape player. With the intervention of headphones, on the other hand, listening enters an era of interiorization whose effect of "privacy" is made possible by the thoroughly mechanized nature of its operation. But listening through headphones is still attached to relatively large pieces of machinery, which tend to remain stationary … The form of listening that is a decisive break from the past is that made possible by the Walkman.[18]

By 1984, generic Walkmans were affordable and ubiquitous. The device seemed custom-made for allowing Australian listeners to retreat into their minds and pretend they were somewhere and somebody else, which at the time meant primarily living American Dreams. Australians may have had no choice but to *be* in Australia, but that did not mean they had to listen to its sounds. Warren's recollection of experiencing Springsteen in this way came while delivering newspapers, riding a bicycle around quiet suburban streets at dawn. West listened to *Born in the U.S.A*. through headphones while on a train on the way to school. Many Australians, regardless of their background, shared the same dream, listening to the album from beginning to end. To be sure, mixed cassettes, both commercial and home-made, were common, but nothing in comparison to file-sharing and the ease of compiling one's own playlists that the rise of the internet and the iPod would bring. In 1984, one could fiddle about with fast forward and reverse, but listeners were stuck with the album on tape and could

[18] Rey Chow, "Listening Otherwise, Music Miniaturized: A Different Type of Question About Revolution," in *Doing Cultural Studies*, 135-140.

not wholly remove themselves from the album as Springsteen—or any other artist—constructed it. That is to say, the almost simultaneous rise of the Walkman with the release of *Born in the U.S.A.* allowed for a relative mass displacement of Australian minds to American shores as the album was released at the peak moment of Phase One, when Australia was fascinated with all things American.

In 1986, the year following the success of "Born in the U.S.A." as a single, Australian identity became fashionable on American soil. This change was driven, for the most part, by Peter Faiman's popular film *Crocodile Dundee*, featuring Paul Hogan as Mick Dundee, a crocodile hunter from Australia's far north and an overblown stereotype of the easy-going, Australian outback cowboy. *Dundee* sits at the center of Phase Two in which Australians did not assert a character of their own but bought into the image of how they were perceived from abroad. Not only in the film itself but in Australians' widespread embrace of it, Australians were able to actively represent themselves, though this representation did not always come on their own terms. Hogan echoes this sentiment in his description of Dundee:

> I made the character up that, how a lot of us think … our image is overseas, and how the Yanks thought we were. And they thought we're this outback, pioneering, cowboy sort of, bit laid back, and charming and friendly and all that stuff. That's the character.[19]

[19] MMM Melbourne (radio station), *The Hot Breakfast*, Interview with Paul Hogan; broadcast November 13, 2013, accessed December 2013, http://www.triplem.com.au/melbourne/shows/hot-breakfast-eddie-mcguire/video/video-paul-hogan-on-triple-ms-hot-breakfast/

Crocodile Dundee was a worldwide box office hit, grossing almost $48 million in Australia in the year of its release and $104 million in the United States, making it, at the time, the most successful foreign film ever released in the United States.[20] Given the relative populations of the two countries, these figures provide a testament both to the popularity of the so-imagined Australian character in the United States as well as the willingness of Australians to embrace this imagined identity. So successful was the image of Australian identity provided by *Dundee* that as late as 2000 one Australian complained that Americans and others see Mick Dundee as "our bloody international mascot. We're more than *Crocodile Dundee*, though sometimes you'd never know it."[21]

Faiman, an Australian television producer and director who had worked with Hogan previously on Hogan's variety comedy series *The Paul Hogan Show*, created a vehicle that would propel what we have called Phase Two onto the stage of Australian-American international relations. *Dundee* presents a story, conceived by an Australian filmmaker, about an American journalist making a special trip to outback Australia to discover what a *true* Australian is like. In the end, she falls in love with him, embodying America's fascination with a romanticized version of Australianness and appropriately reflecting American audiences' zeal for *Dundee*. Ultimately, whether Faiman was responding to an

---

[20] David Friendly, "No Tears for 'Crocodile'," *Los Angeles Times*, October 2, 1986; Aljean Harmetz, "The Crossover Appeal of 'Crocodile'," *New York Times*, January 12, 1987, C17; *Film Victoria*: "Film Victoria—Australian Films at the Australian Box Office," accessed May 2014, http://www.film.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/967/AA4_Aust_Box_office_report.pdf

[21] Miro Cernetig, "Forget *Crocodile Dundee*, Aussies Plead," *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto, Ontario) September 14, 2000, A1.

observed cultural shift, or orchestrating what amounted to a self-fulfilling prophecy, is a moot point. More important is to note that a step change *was* taking place as the release of *Crocodile Dundee* coincides roughly with the waning of *Born in the U.S.A.*'s time on the Australian charts. This paper stops short of suggesting that a causal relationship is apparent; more likely, *Born in the U.S.A.*, after a run of popularity that was nothing short of astounding, had had its time, and Australians were ready for change (which included Springsteen's live box set). The success of *Crocodile Dundee* in both Australia and the United States constitutes an embrace of an exaggerated and romanticized encapsulation of Australian-American relations, summed up in the interaction between Mick Dundee and the American reporter Sue Charlton, but this relationship between nations would mature and change with time and the rise of new technologies to facilitate interaction.

However, at the risk of further complicating this Phase One/Phase Two relationship, it is worth recalling a point made earlier with regard to the reception of the "Born in the U.S.A." single in Australia: Australians were already, to small and differing degrees, in dialogue with American culture, interpreting and interpolating themselves in light of it. That is to say, it is hard not to see elements of the archetypal American cowboy in Mick Dundee's character: cowboy hat (the string of crocodile teeth that adorn it notwithstanding); leather vest (again, clearly made from crocodile, thus holding on tight to this Australian-American interplay); not to mention the self-reliant, rugged individualism of the hero. After all, since the 1960s Australian audiences had been raised on a diet that included American Western fare such as *Gunsmoke* and *The Lone Ranger* on television as well as the films of

John Wayne in cinemas. Thus, a more nuanced interplay than we have hitherto described in this transnational communication should be noted. The two phases we have identified are not so discrete and absolute, because interactions of various kinds have long existed between Australia and America, in letters and in trade, in fleeting glimpses and glances, and occasional liaisons on a larger scale. After all, if Australians were seeking to be Americans manqué, as we have argued, then Australians' love for the United States did not take place in a vacuum. There was always already some data—a collection of stories, anecdotes, cultural artifacts—upon which Australian fantasies could be built. Indeed, *Born in the U.S.A.* stands as a prime example of this claim. The shift between Phase One and Phase Two, then, is marked by a question of *degree* of interaction taking place and its different forms and uses.

If the Australian uptake of *Born in the U.S.A.* in 1984 was, at least in part, driven by the simultaneous ubiquity of the Walkman, this interaction ultimately proves a mere precursor of what was to come. As we have argued that a degree of technological determinism informed Phase One and, by extension, Phase Two, then the same can certainly be said of Australian-American discourse in the years that followed. In the passage from Chow cited above, she identified an "era of interiorization whose effect … [is] 'privacy'."[22] Though Chow focused her study on the Walkman, the passage resonates strongly in an era when iPods are becoming increasingly smaller, in inverse proportion to their capacity for storing music. Thus, the process Chow describes has expanded. Similar arguments appear in the work of other cultural theorists,

[22] Chow, "Listening Otherwise, Music Miniaturized," in *Doing Cultural Studies,* 139.

such as Paul Hopper, Abhijit Sen, and David Beer, but the phenomena to which they refer are of a different order entirely. Beer, for example, investigates the everyday use of mobile music devices. He concludes that these devices "enable the 'management,' 'reorganization,' and 'negotiation' of everyday experiences and environments. The user … enters a 'privatized,' 'isolated,' and 'mediated' audio or sound 'bubble' that enables [him or her] to gain a sense of 'solitude' as they reclaim urban territories."[23] Yet, while such experiences may be privatized and isolated, they have also taken on a global aspect. Hopper notes that "developments in electronic media and communications technology … may also reflect deterritorialization, providing examples of the ways in which our cultural practices, experiences, and identities are becoming separated from the places we inhabit."[24] This separation, too, was prefigured in the Australian uptake of *Born in the U.S.A.,* but again the differences of scale today are exponential. In an age of globalization, place of national origin may have less bearing on how people perceive themselves, on who they perceive themselves to be. Other markers—occupation, hobbies, and taste in music, to name a few—may assume primacy. Through the use of contemporary technologies, a listener may have more in common with, and feel more connected to, say, an online community of fans of a particular artist or style of music than to people in immediate geographic proximity.

The firm embedding of the internet in everyday life since the mid-to-late 1990s—including YouTube, iTunes, various file-

[23] David Beer, "Mobile Music, Coded Objects and Everyday Spaces," *Mobilities* 5:4 (2010): 469, 469-484.
[24] Paul Hopper, *Living With Globalization.* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 44-45.

sharing platforms, and online shopping for music—has meant a movement beyond the first two phases of Australian-American interaction. What follows is Phase Three, insofar as what was once a mass displacement—as per the Australian experience of *Born in the U.S.A.*—has now become myriad singular and individual displacements, as individuals, as they wish, can choose a number of ways to engage with the American persona Springsteen represents. Given the changes in how music can be accessed, Australian listeners can more easily pick and choose their favorite songs, combine them with other songs from other places and times to create new and individualized narratives, and so create an experience of Springsteen's music that is truly their own. Sen elaborates on this process as follows:

> The convergence of music production, creation, distribution, exhibition and presentation enabled by the new communications technology has swept through and shaken the music industry as never before … Music has been the force which could cut across cultures and transcend borders … This has happened not just at the national level but transcended borders to become a global phenomenon.[25]

Springsteen's more recent work has embedded within it an awareness that it will be taken and used in myriad different contexts, places, and times. This awareness has been reflected in subtle shifts occurring at the lyrical level. A comparison of "Born in the U.S.A." with a single from 2012's *Wrecking Ball*, "We Take Care of Our Own," seems to bear this hypothesis out. Unlike "Born in the U.S.A," with its strident and repetitive chorus all but

[25] Abhijit Sen, "Music in the Digital Age: Musicians and Fans 'Come Together' on the Net," *Global Media Journal,* 9:16 (Spring 2010), 1-25, 2-3.

demanding attention to the American nation, the few overt references to America in the latter song (one mention each of Chicago, New Orleans, and the Superdome) occur singularly in the second verse. The pronouns "we" and "our" in the chorus remain relatively undefined, leaving scope for audiences to fill the signifiers with whomever they want "we" and "our" to be. In all fairness, there can be little doubt amongst Springsteen's fan base that "we" means Americans and when his narrator sings "wherever this flag's flown," the flag in question is the Stars and Stripes. Nonetheless, "We Take Care of Our Own," with the exception of its second stanza, does not contain the decidedly American lyrical content of "Born in the U.S.A." As it is, if different audiences want to sing along and identify differently, they can. This idea is supported in Emily Edwards's contribution to Jonathon Epstein's *Adolescents and their Music: If It's Too Loud, You're Too Old*: "Research … indicates that the meaning of lyrics may be idiosyncratically created by listeners from words and phrases that are vague enough to allow listeners to construct the message from their own physical and metaphysical experience."[26] Similar ideas are also explored by Julia Kristeva in her discussion of pronouns in "The True-Real," in which she argues that "demonstratives (this, that, this one, that one) mark the passage of discourse within the system of language: they are essentially defined by the use to which they are put by the subject of enunciation … Through the use of the many forms of enunciation which this linguistic category

[26] Tim Murphey, "The When, Where, and Who of Pop Lyrics: The Listener's Prerogative" *Popular Music* 8:2 (May, 1989): 185-193 cited in Emily Edwards, "Does Love Really Stink? The 'Mean World' of Love and Sex in Popular Music of the 1980s," in *Adolescents and Their Music: If It's Too Loud, You're Too Old* ed. Jonathon S. Epstein (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1994), 230.

possesses, the subject can straddle several enunciative spaces."[27] Such words are, as Toril Moi states, characterized by "their intrinsic instability and ambiguity."[28] This discussion of undefined pronouns is equally applicable in both American and Australian contexts, insofar as the flag that is flown does not need to be a national one. The song has the potential to be co-opted as an anthem for any sports team or social club, in the United States or anywhere else. The potential uptake of "We Take Care of Our Own" in Australia and elsewhere in 2014 and beyond is increased by "we" and "our own" being non-specific enough to be applied to both non-American and non-national settings.

A specific example of an Australian appropriation of "We Take Care of Our Own" proves instructive in highlighting the differences between the first single released from *Wrecking Ball* and the title track of Springsteen's 1984 blockbuster album. Wayne Swan, Labor Party leader and national treasurer, united his love for Springsteen's music with his political vision for Australia's future. In an August 2012 address fittingly titled "Land of Hope and Dreams," Swan spoke of his love for Springsteen's music as well as his own working-class upbringing, discussing himself and his compatriots as part of what he called the "Springsteen Generation." Swan spoke of the politics of Springsteen's music, telling his fellow citizens that Australia could learn from Springsteen, especially from his then-most recent album and, specifically, its first track: "the warning [of the album] is that if we don't include everyone and don't listen to everyone, the social discord which could follow

[27] Julia Kristeva, "The True-Real," in *The Kristeva Reader* ed. and comp. Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 232.
[28] Kristeva, "The True-Real," 216.

will put our growth and prosperity at risk. This is what Springsteen is speaking out against. 'Whenever [sic] this flag is flown,' he sings on *Wrecking Ball*, 'we take care of our own.'"[29] However, while Swan held up the inequality of the American economy as a negative model which Australians should *not* emulate, he did not merely use the song to compare the United States and Australia. Rather, he claimed the song's principles as an intrinsic part of a certain Australian political perspective: "We take care of our own. It's a powerful message which has enormous relevance here in Australia. It's the same egalitarian version of patriotism that gets us out of bed in the labour movement, that cuts us to the quick and stirs us into action when we see attempts to diminish it in the name of unashamed self-interest."[30] While one Australian journalist in 2014 declared "We Take Care of Our Own" one of the "unofficial American anthems of 2012," Swan read his own character and his own nation into the song.[31] Unlike "Born in the U.S.A.," which, while lyrically espousing a similar set of political principles, cannot be easily applied to other national contexts, "We Take Care of Our Own," with a balder political message and vaguer set of lyrics—with the exception of the second stanza—can. In 2013, Swan claimed the track from *Wrecking Ball* as one of his favorite Springsteen songs, one of many from which, as an Australian, he

[29] Wayne Swan, "Land of Hope and Dreams," August 1, 2012, accessed July, 2014, http://australianpolitics.com/2012/08/01/land-of-hope-and-dreams-swan-button-oration.html
[30] Swan, "Land of Hope and Dreams."
[31] Sam Kelton, "Boss Cranks Up the Heat," *The Advertiser* (Adelaide, South Australia), February 12, 2014.

could "get a lot of inspiration from during tough political times."[32] Noticeably absent from Swan's list is "Born in the U.S.A."

Bruce Springsteen has retained a place in the Australian cultural imagination for over four decades. The Australian appreciation of Springsteen may have altered over time, from American Dreams of the 1970s and early 1980s to more recent, increasingly nuanced engagements that allow for specifically Australian identifications with a living American music icon. These engagements, which now are largely facilitated by technologies such as the iPod, take place in a globalized space, where nations are no longer so far apart and borders are not always so important. In some ways, the reception of Springsteen's music is a case study of Australians' relationship with American music. After all, other American artists such as Michael Jackson, Lionel Richie, and Prince all topped the Australian music charts in the same year as *Born in the U.S.A.*, and there is certainly no shortage of American fare on the Australian charts in today's globalized environment.[33] However, other artists do not challenge the argument we make in this paper. Neither does their work resonate within the same space that Springsteen occupies, simply because the music they presented in 1984 was not so flagrantly tied to America or ideas of American identity as was that of the man who sang of being "born in the U.S.A."

---

[32] Colin Brinsden, "Swan Quits as Rudd Returns," Australian Associated Press, June 26, 2013, accessed June 2014, http://www.usanews.com/article/349164/swan-quits-as-rudd-returns/

[33] With *Thriller*, *Can't Slow Down*, and *Purple Rain*, for eleven, three, and one week(s), respectively: Kent, *Australian Chart Book 1970 – 1992*.

Springsteen as Developmental Therapist: An Autoethnography

Rodney Dieser
University of Northern Iowa

Abstract

Based on differing theories of moral development proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg, Martin Hoffman, and John Gibbs, this paper posits that listening to Bruce Springsteen's music can increase moral growth. Scores of Springsteen songs parallel psychological techniques used to increase moral development, such as being exposed to two or more beliefs that are contradictory, social perspective-taking by listening to moral dilemmas, gaining empathy with the distress that another person experiences, hypothetical contemplation, and meta-ethical reflection. Through qualitative-based autoethnographical storytelling, the author outlines how his moral development was enabled through such Springsteen songs as "Factory," "Highway Patrolman," "Independence Day," "Johnny 99," and "Used Cars," as well as two self-disclosures from Springsteen's *Live 1975-85* album.

Since the mid-1980s, Bruce Springsteen has outlined in his interviews that a prominent purpose of his music is to create a space for reflection which he hopes will foster compassion, empathy, understanding, and care on a societal and individual level. In a 2010 interview, for example, Springsteen told NBC's Brian Williams that at its core his music should be "thought-provoking" and "make you recognize yourself and recognize the world around you."[1] This theme of "thought-provoking" music

 The author would like to thank the reviewers and editors for their outstanding assistance and work in developing this manuscript. Please address correspondence to rodney.dieser@uni.edu.

[1] Brian Williams, "TV Interview," October 7, 2010 in *Springsteen on Springsteen: Interviews, Speeches, and Encounters*, ed. Jeff Burger (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013), 360.

had also arisen in an interview with David Corn in 1996 when Springsteen responded to a question regarding political issues in his music:

> I never start with a political point of view … My memory is of my father trying to find work, what that does to you, and how that affects your image of your manhood, as a provider. The loss of that role is devastating. I write coming from that spot—the spot of disaffection, of loners, outsiders. But no outlaws. It's about people trying to find their way in, but somebody won't let them in. Or they can't find their way in. And what are the actions that leads to? That pretty much obsesses me to this day—and probably will the rest of my life … I don't set out to make a point, I set out to create understanding and compassion and present something that feels like the world. I set out to make sure something is revealed at the end of the song, some knowledge gained.[2]

In a 1984 interview about *Nebraska,* Springsteen focused on the idea of empathy; discussing "Johnny 99," a song that outlines how social factors like unemployment contribute to crime, he remarked, "[the song] needed that really kinda austere, echoey sound, just one guitar—one guy telling his story … like you were just meeting different people, and they just told you what had happened to them, or what was happening to them. *So, you kinda walked for a little bit in somebody's else's shoes.*"[3] Furthermore, in the keynote address Springsteen delivered at the South by Southwest Music Festival in Austin, Texas in March 2012, he underscored how many of his

---

[2] David Corn, "Bruce Springsteen Tells the Story of the Secret America," from *Mother Jones* (March/April 1996) in *Springsteen on Springsteen,* 214-215.

[3] Italics not in the original; Roger Scott and Patrick Humphries, "American Heartbeat" from *Hot Press* (November 1984) in *Springsteen on Springsteen*, 145.

songs, and the music that influenced him, offered opportunities for reflection, and, in the process, the opportunity to broaden the listener's sense of empathy.[4]

The purpose of this autoethnography is to use the example of my upbringing to underscore how listening to Springsteen's music assisted my moral development.[5] As an adolescent in a lower-class family with an illiterate mother battling cancer and close-to illiterate father who was emotionally detached, I did not realize at the time how much Springsteen's music mattered to my moral growth.[6] All I knew as an adolescent was that I loved his music because I felt a deep connection to it. Clifford Geertz's claim that small facts—such as listening to Springsteen's music—speak to larger issues—the process of moral development—is an ontological and epistemological assumption that lies at the

[4] "Bruce Springsteen's SXSW 2012 Keynote Speech," *NPR.org*, March 18, 2012, Austin, Texas; accessed June 2014, http://www.npr.org/2012/03/16/148778665/bruce-springsteens-sxsw-2012-keynote-speech.

[5] Much of the school structure, environment, and school experiences detailed below appeared in another autoethnography I published in 2008 regarding the ecology of schooling. However, nothing is mentioned about moral development, and scant attention is dedicated to Bruce Springsteen, in the previous study. The only overlap in these two autoethnographies pertains to my school environment as these same school experiences provide the framework for explaining how to improve the ecology of school (in the 2008 article) and how Springsteen's music fostered moral development in this manuscript. Although the names of the schools and teachers have been changed in order to maintain confidentiality, I use the same changed names and schools in both studies. See Rodney Dieser, "Tales from Grade 1 Through 12: Understanding the Complex Web of Multiple Life Forces Located in Schools," *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 54 (Fall, 2008): 293-308.

[6] The primary reason my parents were illiterate is that both were European immigrants to Canada and learned English as a second language. Secondary reasons rest with poverty and the lack of educational resources.

foundation of this paper.[7] This autoethnographical study is told with two different, yet coinciding, voices: my present-day academic perspective drawing from theories of moral and ego development as well as my adolescent thoughts of long ago.[8]

Related Literature: Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a qualitative methodology linked to ethnographical research and narrative inquiry that results in highly personalized narratives of the researcher's engagement with specific sociocultural contexts in the pursuit of knowing more about a phenomenon.[9] Autoethnography, Stacey Jones writes, involves "setting a scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation … hoping for readers who will bring the same

[7] Clifford, Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

[8] Readers are to be mindful that my long-ago adolescent voice is represented as just that—what I believe I thought like as an adolescent located somewhere in the developmental transition between immature and mature moral development. As such, parts of this autoethnography are purposefully written from an adolescent-based superficial thinking perspective that is then blended into an academic voice.

[9] To understand the overlap and distinction of autoethnography and narrative inquiry, see Sheila Traher, "Beyond the Story Itself: Narrative Inquiry and Autoethnography in Intercultural Research in Higher Education," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung /Forum: Qualitative Social Research,* 10:1 (2009). In short, the overlap occurs in the storytelling aspects of research. In autoethnography, the author tells a personal story of his or her experience that describes a culture (family or school, for example) in the pursuit of understanding more about a phenomenon. Narrative inquiry is focused on collecting stories as data for understanding other people; Tami Spry, "Performative Autoethnography: Critical Embodiments and Possibilities" in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), 213-244.

careful attention to your words in the context of their own lives."[10] That is, authoethnography uses academic theorization in storytelling to unpack or make sense of past personal experiences linked to understanding specific phenomenon. Although autoethnography can produce fragmented writing that parallels real-life experience, its greatest strength lies in bringing clarity to how academic theories and concepts function in real-world experiences, such as how listening to Springsteen's music can foster moral development.[11] A well-constructed autoethnographical study should develop emotional involvement which moves the reader to deal with or reflect on similarly complex moral and ethical issues.[12] In this kind of writing, emotional intelligence is equally as important as academic analysis.

Autoethnography has been employed in diverse academic settings such as gaining insights into female high-performance sport; understanding the lives of Jewish Holocaust survivors; exploring the male experience of having a stillborn baby; outlining the relationship between deep emotion and masculine identity in male barbershop quartets; and highlighting the complexities of

[10] Stacy Jones, "*Autoethnography:* Making the Personal Political" in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials,* eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008), 208.
[11] Carol Ellis, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004); Rodney Dieser, "Qualitative Research," in *Conducting and Reading Research in Health and Human Performance*, ed. Ted A. Baumgartner and Larry D. Hensley (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 199-219.
[12] Carol Ellis and Arthur Bochner, "Authoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject," in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials,* eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003), 199-258.

gender, family, and race in examining a childhood experience of a family trip to Yellowstone National Park.[13]

Related Literature: Moral and Ego Development

Moral development is the emergence and understanding of morality that changes over one's lifespan (infancy through late adulthood). Morality is defined as an interplay between what is "right" (justice, reciprocity, equality) and what is "good" (welfare, beneficences, empathy). As explained in the theories of Lawrence Kohlberg, Martin Hoffman, and John Gibbs, moral development has three basic stages.[14] First, in the immature or superficial stage, morality is based on momentary egocentric desires. Further,

[13] Tosha Tsang, "Let Me Tell You a Story: A Narrative Exploration of Identity in High-Performance Sport," *Sociology of Sports Journal,* 17:1 (2000): 44-59; Sarah Carney, "Transcendent Stories and Counter Narratives in Holocaust Survivors Life Histories: Searching for Meaning in Video-Testimony Archives," in *Narrative Analysis: Studying the Development on Individuals in Society,* ed. Colette Daiute and Cynthia Lightfoot (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2004), 201-222; Marcus Weaver-Highwater, "Waltzing Matilda: An Autoethnography of a Father's Stillbirth," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 41:4 (August 2012): 462-491; Jeffery Nash, "Ringing the Chord: Sentimentality and Nostalgia Among Male Singers." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 41:5 (October 2012): 581-606; Norman Denzin, *Searching for Yellowstone: Race, Gender, Family, and Memory in the Postmodern West* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2008).

[14] Regarding moral development, see Martin Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Martin Hoffman, "Empathy and Prosocial Behavior," in *Handbook of Emotions*, eds. Michael Lewis, Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones and Lisa F. Bartlett (New York: The Guildford Press, 2008); Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development: The Philosophy of Moral Development* Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper & Row 1981); Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development: The Psychology of Moral Development* Vol. 2 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984); John Gibbs, *Moral Development and Reality: Beyond the Theories of Kohlberg, Hoffman, and Haidt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

morality follows a rigid conformity to society's rules, where a person internalizes a law-and-order mentality and does not challenge or question social authority. In the second mature or profound stage, morality is based on reciprocity, mutual trust, and intimacy as the basis for a care ethic and interpersonal relationships. The role of social systems and context related to moral judgment begins to grow and the person gains empathy and social-perspective-taking skills. The third existential stage regards morality as an ethic of interconnectedness across humanity resulting in a deep commitment to a moral life. The principle of justice requires that the claims of all people be treated in an impartial manner, respecting the basic dignity of all people.

Of particular importance to mature moral development are empathy and social perspective-taking. Empathy is the ability to understand a person from his or her frame of reference rather than one's own and is an attempt to think within, rather than for or about, the person.[15] According to Frans de Waal, in empathy we "connect to and understand others and make their situation our own."[16] As a result, empathy can produce altruistic motivation to care for others.[17] According to Mark Davis, *social perspective-taking* means adopting, understanding, or considering another person's life condition: their thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, desires,

[15] Sherry Cormier, Paula S. Nurius, and Cynthia J. Osborn, *Interviewing and Change Strategies for Helpers* (Belmont, California: Brooks/Cole, 2013).
[16] Frans de Waal, *The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society* (New York: Broadway Books, 2009), 225
[17] C. Daniel Batson, "The Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis: Issues and Implications," in *Empathy: From Bench to Bedside*, ed. Jean Decety (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 41-54.

preferences, points of view, goals, and intentions.[18] In order to take social perspective and gain empathy, it is paramount to imagine another person's position and to be able to re-frame one's thinking.[19] Reframing requires restructuring perceptions of a difficult situation or behavior with an aim toward searching for differing or useful ways to understand a life circumstance and learning alternative ways to view a problematic situation or other people's life condition.[20]

Scores of Springsteen songs and albums are based on empathy and social perspective-taking. Marc Dolan's thoughts about "American Skin (41 Shots)" provide a good example of how Springsteen uses the moral skills of empathy and social-perspective taking:

> Springsteen's song ["American Skin"] begins and ends where any ordinary human being's reaction to the Diallo shooting would, simply repeating *41 shots* over and over again, stunned at the sheer number of bullets that had hailed down on the victim in a matter of seconds … [a] cry of a numbed brain trying to absorb what should be an extraordinary fact … Springsteen's gift in "American Skin" [is] an extension of the way that he had treated such social problems in the past. He made the larger question in this case more immediate by putting himself inside the head of a participant. He had been doing this for over twenty years … The genius of this song, however, was that it was simultaneously individual and collective … One verse views the situation from the perspective of one of the

[18] Mark H. Davis, "A Constituent Approach to the Study of Perspective-Taking," in *Other Minds: How Humans Bridge the Divide between Self and Others*, eds. Bertram F. Malle and Sarah D. Hodges (New York: Guildford Press, 2005), 44-55.
[19] Gibbs, *Moral development and Reality*.
[20] Cormier, Nurius, and Osborn, *Interviewing and Change Strategies*.

> shooters, who instantly knows, despite his training, that he has made a tragic mistake. A second verse adopts the perspective of an African American mother instructing her young son how to act in front of the police. All his life, Springsteen [has] believed in and preached a biracial America. This song, however, [makes] that biracial reality palpable, as a white police officer and a black mother are gathered into the same collective, frightening *we* … Springsteen simply utter[s] a basic fact: we are all in this together, *baptized in these waters and in each others' blood*.[21]

"American Skin (41 Shots)" provides empathetic insights into the behaviors of white police officers and an African-American mother (mature stage of moral development), while outlining an ethic of interconnectedness (existential stage of moral developmental).

Building on moral development theory, Stuart Hauser outlines a four-phase model of adolescent ego development that occurs within the family and school context.[22] First, the impulsive

---

[21] Emphasis in original; Marc Dolan, *Bruce Springsteen and the Promise of Rock'n'Roll* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 357; "American Skin (41 Shots)" is based on the events surrounding the death of 22-year-old West African immigrant Amadou Diallo who worked at a convenience store and lived in the poor section of the Bronx. Just after midnight on February 4, 1999, four New York City plainclothes police officers mistakenly thought Diallo was an armed serial rapist. When Diallo reached for his wallet to show the police his legal identification, the police officers thought he was reaching for a gun, and shot the unarmed Diallo 41 times. For more details, see June Sawyers and Christopher Phillips, *Tougher Than the Rest, 100 Best Bruce Springsteen Songs* (New York: Omnibus Press, 2006).

[22] Stuart Hauser, *Adolescents and Their Families: Paths of Ego Development* (New York: Free Press, 1991). More recent academic labor related to Hauser's four phase model of adolescent ego development include Stuart Hauser, Joseph Allen, and Eve Golden, *Out of the Woods: Tales of Resilient Teens* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) and Joseph Allen "Experience, Development, and Resilience: The Legacy of Stuart Hauser's Explorations of the Transition from

stage is characterized by an adolescent who cannot control impulses in which behaviors are based on self-gratification. The adolescent is manipulative and the concept of right and wrong is based on external reasons such as avoiding punishment. Within the family and school context, conversations and interactions are marked by distracting remarks wherein parents and teachers ignore or talk around serious issues and often ridicule other people. There is scant or no bi-directional communication, with little empathy, social perspective-taking, curiosity, or patience, along with combative relationships. Second, the conformist stage is characterized by an adolescent who has conventional thoughts with some self-involvement, along with some acknowledgement of other points of view or social perspective-taking. Within the family and school context, conversations and interactions are marked by the expression of feelings, but more as clichés. Parents and teachers often reflect standards of the community, such as unquestioningly following school or community policies. Teenagers show empathy toward parents and siblings but parents and teachers may not be empathetic toward children and students. Parents and teachers usually have little patience for ambiguity and have firm and inflexible rules. Third, the consciousness stage is characterized by an adolescent who has self-evaluating responses and not only accepts criticism, but views criticism as being linked to personal growth. The adolescent will act within an internal and developing value system. Fourth, the autonomous stage is characterized by an adolescent who thinks in complex ways and copes with inner conflict as they are aware of behaviors linked to competing or

---

Adolescence into Early Adulthood" *Research in Human Development,* 7:4 (November 2010): 241-256.

differing values. Such adolescents have empathy and understand the concept of interdependence (the need for others) and social perspective-taking. Within the family and school context, and in relation to both the consciousness and autonomous stages, interactions are based on welcoming differences of opinions, rich conversations, and parents or teachers willing to enter into a social perspective-taking dialog and willing to change opinions based on what they hear and learn during a conversation. Families and teachers enjoy conversations and there is a level of communication about communication. Adolescents do not ridicule or demean parents or teachers.

My Social Context of Home and School and Early Connection to Springsteen's Music

Social context is a paramount factor in the development of morality. In general, families and schools that exhibit immature moral development tend to generate children who are equally superficial as moral thinkers. When I think back on my adolescence from a moral development perspective, I believe my family acted out of a superficial law-and-order mentality marked by rigid conformity to rules. My father was authoritarian and emotionally detached. From an ego development perspective, my family acted from an impulsive stage. Family members did not talk about serious issues and there was no bi-directional communication as well as little empathy, curiosity, or social perspective-taking. My parents dealt with my mother's incurable cancer in an unhealthy and disconnected way—by not talking about it—and my parents asked me to promise to keep this dark secret to myself. Due to my parents' trauma-oriented childhoods (which included war,

physical abuse, hunger, and extreme poverty/homelessness) they did not have childhood experiences in environments that fostered moral development. Due to the fact that my mother battled cancer for six years and my family struggled financially, my parents did not have the physical or emotional energy, the educational background, or the financial resources that are helpful in fostering moral development.[23]

Likewise, when I look back at the junior and high school system I interacted in, I see the same pattern: an impulsive school environment marked by teachers who had little empathy or patience and classes based on a top-down rote learning and a test-based approach with little bi-directional communication or group processing. Most of the students and teachers at Harry Junior High School (HJHS) and Central High School (CHS) had immature moral development. It was, using the title of a Springsteen song, a "Jungleland" and a prison sentence. Some of the teachers were also bullies. For example, Mr. Alvord, the French teacher, enjoyed bullying students and used intimidation and fear strategies to control his classroom. He would give the strap to students within the classroom as a public spectacle, a practice similar to prison rituals.[24] He would occasionally grab male students by the neck

[23] My parents never enrolled any of their children into any type of youth or community programs, whether educational, recreational, musical, writing, sports, or nature-based. They simply did not have any extra money. Survival issues are a principal obstacle to both critical and moral thinking; see Wanda Teays, *Second Thoughts: Critical Thinking for a Diverse Society* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2010).

[24] See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977) and James, Marshall, "Foucault and Education," *Australian Journal of Education,* 33:2 (1989): 99-113 regarding how school and

and ram them against the cement wall while holding them up by their neck so that their feet would dangle in the air. Another teacher, Mr. Mitchell, killed himself with a gun. After his suicide, I always felt strange and uncomfortable when I was in his classroom, and the fear of death was real to me, as I feared my mother's death.

In regard to the actual day-to-day life of my junior high school, group-gender bullying proved widespread. In keeping with hegemonic masculine norms, boys were expected to be aggressive, competitive, and to have identities related to physical strength and sport and to view girls as sexual objects.[25] Boys would "gang-bang" girls in the classroom or hallways by reaching down their pants or inside their blouses and the ubiquitous physical intimidation, profanity, harassment, and name-calling was widespread throughout the junior high school community. Teachers were intellectually dead and emotionally lifeless; they seemed to be in the classroom just to collect a paycheck. There was no care-ethic (a sign of possible profound moral development), and teachers themselves seemed to be located in the immature stages of moral and ego development due to their propensity for role obligations, rigid conformity to rules, stereotypical conceptions of good people, and, perhaps most widespread, an internalized law-and-order mentality. My reflection on HJHS aligns with Kohlberg's and Higgins's thoughts that too many American schools are based

prison settings have great overlap. To learn more about the prison-like systems of HJHS and CHS see Dieser, "Tales from Grade 1 Through 12."

[25] To learn more about hegemonic masculinity see Michael Messner, "Boyhood, Organized Sports, and the Construction of Masculinities" in *Men's Lives* eds. Michael S. Kimmel and Michael A. Messner (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 161-176.

on immature moral development in school structure, teaching pedagogy, and student self-centeredness.[26]

I understand why I connected to the themes of death, fear, and loneliness in Springsteen's *The River* album when I was an adolescent. As Rob Kirkpatrick posits, "[a] sense of fear pervades the album. If *The River* is Springsteen's most playful album, it's also his most depressing. . . . Songs throughout the album ponder the sense of loss when dreams are lost."[27] Knowing in junior high that my mother had cancer and eventually in high school that her breast cancer had become a terminal bone cancer presented me with the dichotomy of dreams and reality and caused me to ponder how dreams are lost. For example, the concluding song on *The River*, "Wreck on the Highway," tells the story of lost dreams via death as the narrator, while driving on a desolate highway in the rain, comes upon a wreck in which the driver asks him for help but eventually dies. The narrator imagines "a girlfriend or a young wife" informed by a state trooper of the death of her loved one in a car wreck. Likewise, "Stolen Car" provides the chilly feeling of emotional isolation. Springsteen sings with only a gentle acoustic guitar and piano accompaniment about a car thief who has sunk into self-destructive sadness and loneness after the dream of his marriage ends. In the concluding verse, the narrator tries to convince himself that he will "be alright," but he is overwhelmed with the fear that "in this darkness I will disappear." Although not moved by

[26] Lawrence Kohlberg and Ann Higgins, "School Democracy and Social Interaction," in *Moral Development through Social Interaction*, eds. William Kurtines and Jacob Gewirtz (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1987), 102-128.
[27] Rob Kirkpatrick, *The Words and Music of Bruce Springsteen* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2007), 74.

witnessing a wreck on the highway or being involved in stealing cars, I empathized with the depressive notions in these songs.

During junior high and high school, I began listening to music as a means to cope with the stresses of my life. Although I enjoyed Springsteen's playful songs such as "Out in the Street" and "Sherry Darling," at a deeper level certain Springsteen songs allowed me to reflect and process life's struggles. I identified with the lyrics of the second verse of "Darkness on the Edge of Town" whose narrator claims that "Everybody's got a "secret … / Something that they just can't face." While some bear the weight of that secret every day, others "cut it loose," releasing themselves from the burdens of the past. I did not relate to the actual events of the song—the narrator's desire to reunite with an ex-lover on the edge of town; rather, I connected to the higher-order feelings of darkness when someone has a secret that they must carry with them. I could only let out the secret of my mother's cancer or think about her death in the privacy of my bedroom listening to Springsteen's songs. In addition, "Darkness on the Edge of Town" was even more relevant to my adolescent mind as our house was literally on the edge of town.

Developing Empathy and Social Perspective Through Springsteen's Songs

Psychological intervention to increase moral development can include story-telling whereby the reader is exposed to two or more beliefs that are contradictory, is challenged to see things from another person's point of view, or is engaged in problem-solving

moral dilemmas.[28] Moral dilemmas cause hypothetical contemplation, meta-ethical reflection, empathy, and social perspective-taking.[29] Moreover, moral dilemmas as interventions will often result in the development of re-framing skills.[30]

My early connection to Springsteen's music helped me cope with life by providing periods of escapism ("Sherry Darling") along with music and stories to help me process death ("Wreck on the Highway") and fear ("Stolen Car"). However, Springsteen's songs and stories—especially from *Darkness on the Edge of Town* (1978), *The River* (1980), *Nebraska* (1982), and *Live/1975-1985* (1986)—helped foster my overall moral development by specifically developing hypothetical contemplation, empathetic understanding, and social perspective-taking. Due to the fact that I was not experiencing the family or school environments that foster this type of moral and adolescent development, Springsteen's music was the stimulus for

---

[28] This type of treatment is strongly advocated by Kohlberg and Gibbs. See Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development,* Vol. I and Vol. 2. A contemporary example of treatment to increase moral development is the Equipping Youth to Help One Another (EQUIP). EQUIP specifically helps youth to learn empathy and social perspective taking by reading age-appropriate complex moral stories/dilemmas and leading discussion groups so that youth can learn how to take the perspective of another person, which leads to greater care and compassion. See Ann-Marie DiBiase, John Gibbs, Grandville Bud Potter, and Mathew R. Blount, *Teaching Adolescents to Think and Act Responsibly: The EQUIP Approach* (Champaign, Illinois: Research Press, 2012) and Gibbs, *Moral Development and Reality.*

[29] Gibbs, *Moral Development and Reality.*

[30] See Judith Beck, *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: Basics and Beyond* (New York: Guilford Press, 2011). For specific treatment of examples of cognitive-based re-framing therapy for youth, see DiBiase, et al., *Teaching Adolescents* and Martin E. P. Seligman, Karen Reivich, Lisa Jaycox, and Jane Gillham, *The Optimistic Child: A Proven Program to Safeguard Children Against Depression and Build Lifelong Resilience* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2007).

such learning. In regard to Hauser's stages of ego development, Springsteen's music was the vehicle that helped my ego develop from the impulsive stage to the conformist stage and even planted the seeds of the consciousness stage: some degree of value clarification and complexity in thought. In regard to moral development, Springsteen's songs helped me gain a social system perspective, a sign of movement between the immature and mature stages. For example, the song "Johnny 99" presents the narrative of a character, Ralph, who, after he loses his job in an automobile plant, kills a night clerk in a drunken rage. Ralph pleads to the judge that he has "debts no honest man could pay" as he is facing a bank foreclosure on his home. When Ralph is sentenced to 99 years in jail and gains the nickname "Johnny 99," his loved ones protest the verdict while Ralph requests to be executed. Listening to this narrative, and to other songs with similar themes (such as "Atlantic City") helped me realize how social systems and factors such as poverty, hunger, a sluggish economy, unemployment and accompanying feelings of hopelessness, and a lack of community resources can serve as antecedent factors in causing criminal acts.[31] The moral framework of *Nebraska*—which aligns to Kohlberg's and Gibbs's profound stage of moral development—underscores the importance of a care-ethic and gaining perspective on what happens to people when they lose any sense of community and

[31] In regard to how social systems/variables can be antecedent factors in the development of crime and juvenile delinquency, see William Barton, "Juvenile Justice Policies and Programs," in *Social Policy for Children and Families: A Risk and Resilience Perspective,* eds. Jeffrey Jenson and Mark Fraser (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2011), 306-352; in addition, see William Cockerham, *Sociology of Mental Disorder* (Boston: Pearson, 2011) regarding how social systems/variables can be antecedent factors in the development of mental illness.

have no one to turn to for help.[32] Many Springsteen songs present moral dilemmas that cause hypothetical contemplation, meta-ethical reflection, empathy, and social perspective taking; the same activities that Kohlberg and Gibbs suggest advance moral development.

While listening to these songs as an adolescent, I was gaining the moral developmental skills of empathy and social perspective-taking from Springsteen's characters in these stories. Listening to "Johnny 99," I was exposed to contradictory beliefs and the emotions of the title character and his loved ones, but I also considered the family members of the dead night clerk. In both "Johnny 99" and "Atlantic City" I learned how social factors can propel people toward crime as both main characters had "debts that no honest man can pay" due to unemployment and broader economic problems. While listening to "Used Cars" I thought of the sadness that an entire family must experience when a mother has to sell her wedding ring in order to come up with enough money to purchase a used car. I could also relate to the feelings of poverty-induced shame the boy or young adolescent felt regarding the used car that the neighbors come to ogle.

"Highway Patrolman" also proved formative as it presented me with a further moral dilemma. In this song, Joe, a patrolman, is constantly looking the other way to help his "no good" brother Frankie. The climax of "Highway Patrolman" occurs when Joe has to pursue his fleeing brother after Frankie commits a serious crime (leaving a man for dead after a bar fight) and chases him within five miles of the Canadian border. When he realizes that Frankie intends to flee the country, Joe pulls his patrol car to the side of the

[32] Peter Carlin, *Bruce* (New York: Touchstone, 2012), 297.

road to "watch his taillights disappear." As Joe watches Frank escape, his mind wanders back, and he imagines better times with his brother. While taking a high school psychology/sociology class I learned about Kohlberg's stages of moral development and connected the "Highway Patrolman" narrative to the druggist dilemma that my teacher read to the class, taken directly from Kohlberg's academic labor and research studies.[33] I wondered if I would let my brother escape if he had killed someone and I was a highway patrolman. I was learning and applying the moral skills of empathetic social perspective-taking through Springsteen's song narratives.[34]

Sometime during my senior year of high school, I began to develop empathy toward my father, and Springsteen's music provided the scaffolding of social-perspective taking. That is, Springsteen's music helped me re-frame my thinking. In particular,

---

[33] The following is the druggist dilemma present by Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development,* Vol. I: "A woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to produce. He paid $200 for the radium and charged $2,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about $1,000, which is half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said, "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it." So Heinz got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife. Should Heinz have broken into the laboratory to steal the drug for his wife? Why or why not?"

[34] Replacing "you" statements with "I" statements are more likely to induce empathy because "you" statements often provoke defensive responses (Gibbs, *Moral Development and Reality*). In "Highway Patrolman" Springsteen uses "I" statements as the song/story is told from the point of view of a State Patrolman named Joe Roberts.

the song "Factory" helped me re-conceptualize how I thought of my father. Told from an adolescent's perspective, "Factory" illuminates how blue-collar labor sucks the life out of his hard-working father: not only does the "working life" debilitate his father's hearing but, at each day's end the "Men walk through [the factory] gates with death in their eyes." When listening to this song, I thought about my own father, how he would come home, day-after-day, during the long and cold Canadian prairie winters as a construction worker with a mustache literally frozen, take off his work boots and thick wool socks, exposing feet that were bright red from the cold. I began to understand how the social factors that surrounded my father—his lower social class, past childhood traumas due to World War II, emotional strain of watching my mother die a slow and painful death, grueling and abusive work that created "death in his eyes"—contributed to his emotional lifelessness, as Springsteen describes the working men in "Factory." He would come home from work, eat, and disengage by watching TV in a comatose manner.

In addition, and perhaps most importantly to my adolescent mind, two stories that Springsteen shared with the audience from his *Live 1975-85* album, along with a conversation with my father's sister, Aunt Rose, caused me to engage in social perspective-taking and re-frame my father's emotionally-detached behaviors and authoritarian parenting style. My aunt shared with me something that no one else ever told me: that my father was affected, as an adolescent, by World War II, and by how his family had been homeless in Europe. Under these circumstances, my father had to be emotionally detached and authoritarian in order to take care of his younger brothers and sisters. I learned that my father

erroneously believed he was responsible for the death of his brother David when David became separated from the rest of the family as they fled from the Nazis. My father lived with this guilt throughout his life and never talked about it. I also learned that my father was in charge of scouring through garbage cans and would bring home potato peelings so that his mother could boil them in order to make soup. As I grew older and learned more about mental health, I realized that my father's authoritarian disposition and emotional detachment stemmed from the events of his youth, coupled with deadening and physically grueling work, and I wondered if he lived with depression or post-traumatic stress disorder. I also learned why both my mother and father asked me not to tell anyone about my mother's terminal cancer: my parents had learned from the trauma in their lives to hide dark secrets, which is a common, but unhealthy, way to deal with trauma.[35] Silence is often used to hide shame.

In the middle of a performance of "Growin' Up" featured on *Live 1975-85*, Springsteen tells a story about his upbringing, of the constant verbal fighting and emotional distance that occurred between his father and himself and of his father's lack of support for Springsteen's passion for playing music. Dolan underscores that in the 1960s, "The one overwhelming, often reiterated event of Bruce's life … was his never-ending arguments with his father … Doug and Bruce Springsteen appear to have fought long, loud, and constantly during the late 1960s. The arguments always seemed to start the same way, with the father asking his son '*what did I think I*

[35] In regard to unhealthy coping with trauma, see Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence–From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

was doing with myself.'"[36] Bruce Springsteen's family life sounded an awful lot like mine.

Another story serves as the introduction to "The River," wherein Springsteen tells the audience about a more emotionally abusive interaction with his father. In these two confessionals, Springsteen shares how his father repeatedly told him during his adolescent years that he was wasting his life wanting to be involved in music and that the Army would "make a man" out of him. Springsteen further reveals that when he was in a motorcycle accident as a seventeen-year-old, the attorney representing the Springsteen family told Bruce that he should be guilty of causing the accident simply because he looked like a punk with his long hair. His authoritarian father, who sounded like my father, had a barber cut Springsteen's hair against his wishes while he lay in a hospital bed. This incident led to Springsteen shouting that he hated his father and led to him spending as much time away from his home as possible. Later, when Springsteen failed his Army draft medical examination due to the health consequences of the motorcycle accident, he informed his father, who responded affirmingly, "That's good," thus demonstrating how an authoritarian and emotionally-isolated father shows love.

After listening to Springsteen's self-disclosures over and over again, and hearing reflections of my own home life in these two confessionals, I began to gain empathy for my father.[37] That is

[36] Dolan, *Bruce Springsteen and the Promise of Rock 'n' Roll*, 21.

[37] In mental health counseling, a self-disclosure is when a therapist shares personal information about himself/herself to the client in order to help the client share more about their presenting problem. Self-disclosures have many beneficial aspects, such as normalizing problems and developing trust as the

to say, I was using Springsteen's self-disclosures as a reflective space so I could apply social perspective-taking and re-frame my thoughts about my father. I connected the latter Springsteen self-disclosure to experiences with my authoritarian father, who would tell (not ask) me to drink buttermilk with him. Instead of asking me how my life was going and expressing some degree of encouragement, my father would call me into the garage when he took a break from tinkering and have me drink buttermilk in relative silence. I never liked the taste of it, but I drank it because he told me to. However, after we both shared a drink, he gave me a head nod, which, in an emotionally-detached hegemonic masculine manner, was a way of showing me love. After listening to Springsteen talk about re-framing his father's behaviors and seeing signs of love, I began to restructure my father's behaviors and could see glimpses of his love, and began to understand why he was emotionally detached. I began to understand that due to my father's painful life experiences, he was unable to share his love. Although this switch in thinking may seem simplistic, from a youth development perspective, this is a profound cognitive change toward mature moral development.[38] I was unknowingly applying cognitive behavioral therapy interventions by challenging and changing my automatic irrational thoughts to reality-based rational thoughts through Springsteen's music.[39] Although this may sound

client interprets a therapist as a "real human being." See Cormier, Nurius, and Osborn, *Interviewing and Change Strategies*.

[38] See Gibbs, *Moral Development and Reality.*

[39] The basic tenet of personality from a cognitive behavioral therapy point of view is that emotions (or emotional disturbances) are largely the product of irrational thinking or hot thoughts (quick automatic thoughts that enter a person's mind with little supportive evidence). Cognitive therapy helps people identify automatic thoughts to evaluate if such thoughts are reality

corny, when I would hear the lyric from "Mansion on the Hill" about a father and son riding "through the streets of a town so silent and still," I would think about the early morning car rides I shared with my father. During the extreme cold of winter, my father would drive me to school between 6:30-7:00 a.m.[40] Apart from the custodian, I would be the only other person at the school, and I began to re-frame my automatic thought of hating those early morning rides to school to a nostalgic reflection of driving with my father in silence, similar to the events of this song. As an adolescent, I was romanticizing Springsteen's songs, while changing automatic thoughts, as I sought to develop a better relationship with my father.

Conclusion

Psychological treatment to increase moral development can include story-telling whereby the reader is exposed to two or more beliefs that are contradictory, a moral dilemma that stretches moral thinking or whereby a person is challenged to see things from another person's point of view. It can also include the cognitive-behavioral approach of re-framing. As I listened to Springsteen's songs as an adolescent, these psychological techniques were being actualized. But instead of a mental health counselor, Springsteen

based/rational (there is solid supportive evidence for a thought). If the automatic thought is deemed irrational, mental health therapists will help a client dispute and replace irrational thoughts with rational thoughts based on the ability to marshal evidence for such thoughts. See Beck, *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.*

[40] Most days, before I could drive a car, I would walk the 2.5 kilometers to school. When the temperature was extremely cold, my father would drive me to school, well before school started due to his inability to start work later. My mother never learned to drive.

served as my developmental therapist. I located in his canon "thought-provoking" music that taught me the moral development skills of empathy and social perspective-taking. I applied moral and ego development psychological techniques to the dilemma in "Highway Patrolman" and developed general empathy by listening to songs such as "Johnny 99" and "Used Cars." I learned social perspective-taking skills—specifically toward my father—through Springsteen's self-disclosures from his *Live 1975-85* album and from songs such as "Independence Day" and "Factory." Lacking traditional sources to facilitate moral development, I turned to Springsteen's music and stories of his upbringing in order to help me through mine.

Reviews

Bruce Springsteen: American Poet and Prophet by Donald L. Deardorff II. (Lanham, Maryland; Toronto; Plymouth, U.K.: The Scarecrow Press, 2014. 216 pages).

Donald L. Deardorff II's *Bruce Springsteen: American Poet and Prophet* presents the latest survey of the work of Bruce Springsteen. Deardorff offers the newest volume in Scarecrow Press' series of introductory works on "rock, pop, and culture" that explore music and musicians within their social and cultural contexts. Given the introductory nature of the series, readers should not approach *Bruce Springsteen: American Poet and Prophet* expecting major scholarly interventions in the field of Springsteen Studies. Rather, Deardorff's work should be assessed as an introductory text, one which scholars should judge based on whether it effectively provides undergraduate students and readers outside the academy with a suitable introduction to Springsteen's music and the reasons for its popularity. Yet, in this task Deardorff definitively falls short. His methodology does not successfully answer his guiding question, and he demonstrates a troubling lack of familiarity with Springsteen's canon. Those hoping for an introduction to Springsteen from an academic perspective should look elsewhere for a guided foray into his music, biography, and career history.

In his introduction, Deardorff addresses the question of how to organize a book about Springsteen, a figure whose length of career and range of musical styles belies simple explanation. Deardorff elects to organize his book thematically. Unlike, for instance, Rob Kirkpatrick's *Magic in the Night: The Words and Music of Bruce Springsteen* (2009), Deardorff does not chronologically progress through Springsteen's albums and the biographical and historical context of their conception, release, and reception. Rather, following a chapter on Springsteen's upbringing and musical influences, as well as one on Springsteen's burgeoning career in the

context of the politically tumultuous 1970s, subsequent chapters focus on major themes that have endured throughout Springsteen's canon: working-class life, masculinity, patriotism, social justice, and redemption. Thus, Deardorff hopes to answer "why" Springsteen "became such a pervasive, resonant voice in his culture" (xxxv). In each chapter, Deardorff elucidates the historical context in which Springsteen's music was released in an effort to illustrate why it would have so widely resonated with fans at that time. For example, Chapter Three, "Streets of Fire: Working-Class Heroes," begins by detailing the effects of inflation, unemployment, and the recessions of the 1970s on working-class Americans, thereafter assessing Springsteen's treatment of blue-collar characters on *Darkness on the Edge of Town* (1978). Deardorff then surveys changes to the American economy in the 1980s, the 1990s, and the 2000s elucidating, accordingly, Springsteen's songs in those periods that deal with class issues.

However, Deardorff's methodology does not allow for a clear assessment of Springsteen's canon. Deardorff improperly assumes that Springsteen's music was popular because it tapped into contemporary fears or insecurities, that fans embraced his music because it provided a means of dealing with cultural, economic, social, and political changes. He paints with overly broad brushstrokes: rather than citing specific evidence—such as polling data—he oversimplifies the ways "many listeners" (54) or "many people" (131) reacted to cultural changes. Based on his selective telling of history, Deardorff portrays Springsteen's music as a direct translation of the post-war American zeitgeist. He intimates, in fact, that Springsteen wrote his music "for" specific people to help them deal with their struggles, that the discussion of African-American or Hispanic characters presents, for instance, a political act, an attempt to include these people in a community of listeners and fans. While parts of Springsteen's canon were certainly written as commentary on contemporary American life, Deardorff anachronistically assumes this to be a trait of Springsteen's entire body of work. Though he acknowledges the development of Springsteen's political

consciousness around 1980, he nonetheless tries to read author-intentioned political significance into Springsteen's earliest albums. For example, he improbably claims "Blinded by the Light" as expressing the sentiments of American youths in the early 1970s. Because of its compatibility with Deardorff's assessment of the cultural sentiment in this period, the author deems the track "the perfect tune for understanding [Springsteen's] early popularity" (39), ignoring Springsteen's highly limited audience in 1973 as well as his lack of a socially and historically grounded political consciousness at that time.

While Deardorff mishandles the contextual interpretation of Springsteen's canon, he excludes other aspects of Springsteen's career entirely. Shockingly, he almost completely ignores Springsteen's live performance though it presents a defining feature of Springsteen's long career. Fans, too, are entirely absent, though even a brief examination of fans' interactions with Springsteen and his music could have assisted Deardorff's attempt to explain Springsteen's popularity. Nor does Deardorff discuss the actual music. He focuses singularly on Springsteen's lyrics, ignoring the important contrast between dark lyrical themes and upbeat instrumentation in many songs, for example "Ramrod," "Glory Days," and "Tunnel of Love." When he does take up the music, Deardorff does not always do so accurately; he deems "Youngstown," for example, "a loud, powerful tune" (62), though he fails to specify that only the full band, live iteration, rather than the album version, can appropriately be described as "loud." The emphasis on lyrics rather than the music would be excusable, however Deardorff rarely engages with the lyrics. He quotes snippets of lyrics but often does so without a full explanation of a song's meaning. As a result, the out-of-context quoted lines frequently make little sense. Such mistakes prove indicative of Deardorff's less than fluent familiarity with Springsteen's canon. In a series of egregious but revealing errors, he mistitles a number of songs, referring to tracks such as

"Philadelphia" (xxxix), "Just Across the Border" (15-16), "Little Girl I Wanna Marry You" (16), and "Beautiful Reward" (140).

Deardorff's most effective analysis comes in his final chapter wherein he illustrates the contemporary pop, indie, rock, country, and punk artists who have claimed Springsteen as an artistic influence. Though Deardorff reads too closely into the work of some of these artists in search for evidence of Springsteen's influence, he provides some definitive proof of Springsteen's importance for successive generations of musicians. This chapter adds a piece to Springsteen Studies that has until now been largely unattended. While *Bruce Springsteen: American Poet and Prophet* is not an ideal introduction for curious students to learn about Springsteen, this chapter helps those new to Springsteen understand the breadth of his cultural significance. Though Deardorff proves unable to explain Springsteen's popularity, the shortcomings of his book illustrate the difficulty of encapsulating and explaining a musical career that has spanned nearly half a century of tumultuous social, political, economic, and cultural changes.

—Jonathan D. Cohen, University of Virginia

Springsteen & I, DVD and Blu-Ray, directed by Baillie Walsh. 2013.

In late 2012, through marketing emails and calls for submission on fan websites such as Backstreets.com, Sony Music solicited videos from fans about their experiences with the music of Bruce Springsteen. Over 2,000 clips were submitted from around the world, amounting to over 300 hours of footage. The edited result is *Springsteen & I* (2013), a 77-minute documentary produced by Ridley Scott—whose 2011 film *Life in a Day* presents a similar montage of crowd-sourced video clips—and directed by

Baillie Walsh, who had not previously worked with Springsteen and thereby promised a fresh perspective. The documentary is an inspiring, funny, poignant, and creative array of videos showing fans discussing their feelings for Springsteen, their encounters with him, as well as his place in their lives. Longer video clips are interspersed with shorter segments of fans stating the three words that best describe Springsteen ("passion" is a common choice). The film also features high quality footage of Springsteen's live performances, and these clips punctuate the endearingly amateurish short testimonials. The individuals featured in the movie hail mostly from the United States and Europe and represent a lively cross-section of Springsteen fans, including one decidedly non-fan.

The central theme of the documentary is fans' deep connection with Springsteen and his music. A connection between fans and an artist is hardly unique to Springsteen, though his work has been noted for its particular emphasis on the values of community, friendship, and connection. The fan-made videos that comprise *Springsteen & I* offer insight into the uniqueness of the connection between Springsteen and his fans, as the film presents two main paradigms for fans' relationship with Springsteen: as a friend and as a guide of both emotional and spiritual development.

In their videos, many fans speak about Springsteen casually, as they would an intimate companion. A Danish fan, Jane, poignantly states that she and Springsteen have "been friends since 1985, though he doesn't know me." A male Danish fan talks of taking his girlfriend to see Springsteen and how, at the end of the show, she marveled at feeling as if Springsteen had played for her alone. In a concert clip toward the end of the film, Springsteen echoes this intimacy, telling a crowd as he leaves the stage: "nice to be alone with you tonight."

Others fans describe the ways Springsteen's music has provided them with hope and emotional support. One young fan says that Springsteen's music sustains her even at times when she knows things may

not get better, and another states that she cannot get through a day without his music. *Springsteen & I* depicts the Springsteen fan experience as a journey of finding oneself through his music. Springsteen is the facilitator of self-development, from the sexual–the woman who speaks intensely of her sexual awakening as a teenager at her first Springsteen concert—to the political—the young truck driver with a master's degree who sees her work differently because of his music.

At times Springsteen's role as an emotional guide has spiritual implications. The quasi-religious relationship between Springsteen and his fans has been noted before, for example in the work of Jim Cullen, Daniel Cavicchi, and Linda Randall. This spiritual dimension is evidenced to some degree in *Springsteen & I*. Many fans, for example, open their video segments by mentioning the moment of their "conversion," the date or year when they first became fans. Springsteen has staged his concerts as rock and roll revivals and, in various clips, the documentary confirms Springsteen performances as part a journey out of the everyday and into a more spiritual realm.

The documentary also includes a number of special features. The first bonus section showcases 35 minutes of the Hard Rock Calling concert in London in 2012, with a special appearance by Sir Paul McCartney in a memorable duet with Springsteen on "Twist and Shout." Other bonus selections include four short video tributes to Springsteen made by fans, including fans from Asia and South America, which were not shown in the theater version. Another segment shows a number of fans featured in the documentary meeting Springsteen in Copenhagen.

Yet for all the life, love, and faith that exudes from this documentary, some omissions feel critical. As two scholars whose fields are sociology and psychology, we had hoped to see more of the hallmark darkness that is thematic across much of Springsteen's work. The tragedy of human existence and the lingering presence of death and destruction that so frequently appear in Springsteen's canon are absent from the film. Elements

of this darkness appear in some of the fans' comments about how Springsteen's music provides support through hard times, but references to Springsteen's unflinching honesty in the face of personal and societal disaster and his capacity to transform those who are suffering remain absent.

Another piece missing from the documentary is Springsteen's band. While the E Street Band is present for most musical sequences, they are never mentioned explicitly. The relationship discussed by the fans is with Springsteen himself, hence the film's title. Yet, the E Street Band is obviously central to fans' experiences with Springsteen's music. Indeed, a pivotal moment of the film comes in a segment of concert footage of Springsteen performing "Blood Brothers" during The Reunion Tour. The clip shows Springsteen tearing up and joining hands with the E Street Band members as he sings of the endurance of their love and friendship despite the rocky roads they have traveled together.

This omission felt most significant given that the movie was made a little over a year after Clarence Clemons's death and four years after the death of Danny Federici. The movie left these reviewers to wonder how their recent deaths affected fan responses to the film. Seeing these band members in almost every archival concert clip, but not discussed explicitly in the movie at a time when Springsteen was still publicly mourning and honoring them in concert, felt awkward and a missed opportunity to further examine the role of the band in developing and maintaining the sense of connection shown in the movie.

Finally, the film leaves viewers to draw their own conclusions on the strikingly international dimension of the documentary. The number of videos featuring non-American fans underscores the effect of Springsteen's music on audiences around the globe—that despite its American genesis, Springsteen's music taps into emotions that are universal. Though failing to comment on this intriguing proposition, *Springsteen & I* nonetheless provides a unique and compelling narrative about Springsteen and his fans.

The film can assist scholars interested in testimonials by Springsteen's fans, and provides an overview of Springsteen's career for all those interested in the effects his music has had on listeners around the world over the past forty years.

—Donna Luff, Harvard Medical School
—Lorraine Mangione, Antioch University New England

Special Collections

Denise Green's *Library of Hope and Dreams*

Denise Green is a Springsteen fan and a research librarian at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois. In the summer of 2009, Green set out to discover what scholars had published about Bruce Springsteen and began compiling an online annotated bibliography. She combed electronic databases and indexing services to locate scholarly publications, and found other items by consulting bibliographies in published articles and monographs on Springsteen.

Apart from peer-reviewed articles and publications in academic journals and books, Green identified works of scholarship on Springsteen according to Ernest Boyer's definition: effectively researched publications with clear goals, defined methods, significant results, appropriate rhetorical form, and argumentative critique.[1] At the time of this publication, Green's *Library of Hope and Dreams* resource includes 293 entries: 130 journal articles, 149 book chapters, 6 conference proceedings, 5 monographs, and 3 web publications.

The *Library of Hope and Dreams* bibliography is presented in spreadsheet format that includes standard bibliographic data along with concise annotations. Green has included a number of index fields that will be of particular interest to Springsteen scholars. For each publication, she has listed up to four songs and/or albums that are referenced and provided Library of Congress subject keywords and headings. Informative and occasionally qualitative comments appear in her "Misc" column.

Green intends to further develop her website by creating a separate listing of Springsteen biographies. She has also identified 31 PhD dissertations and master's theses focused on Springsteen, which will also soon be added to her annotated bibliography. Moreover, Green is working in partnership with the Friends of Springsteen Special Collection at Monmouth University (featured in this space in the next issue of *BOSS*) to ensure that all the

[1] See Charles E. Glassick, et al., *Scholarship Assessed* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 25.

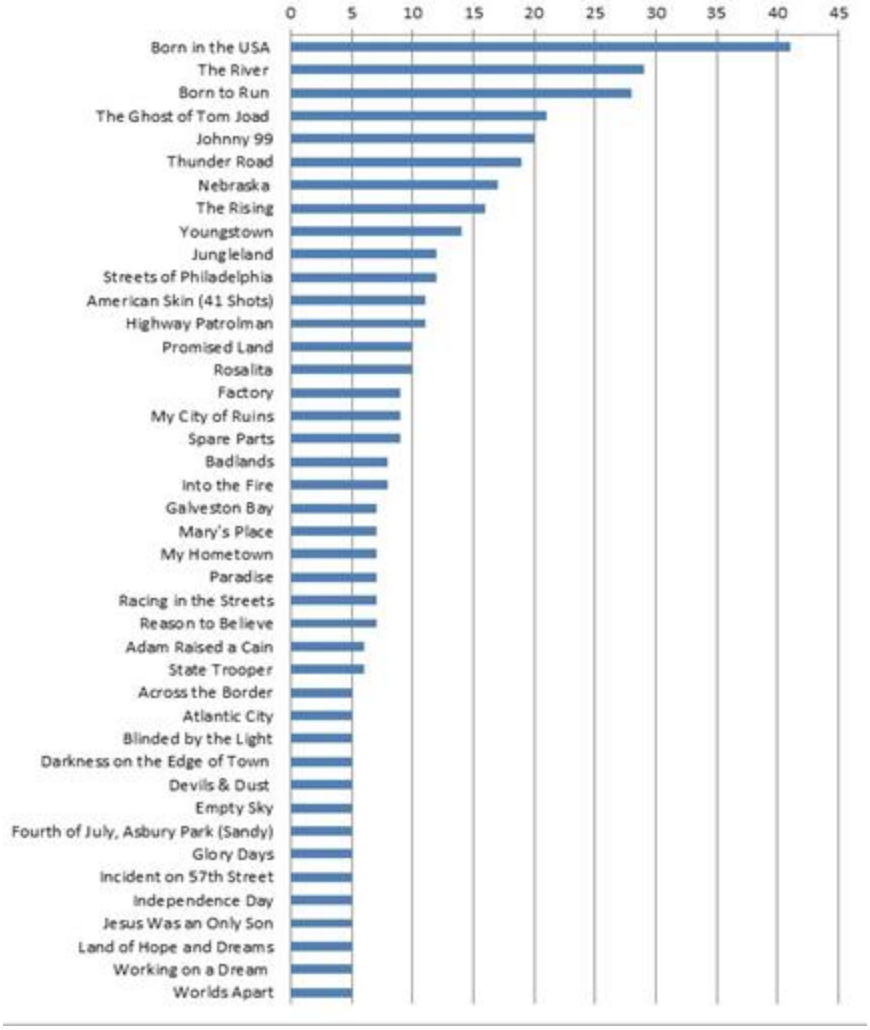
scholarly publications on Springsteen she has identified and listed are available in hard copy for researchers.

The bar and pie graphs below, produced by Denise Green, show the loci of scholarly attention to Springsteen's works and may be of interest to critics. For example, Green's tabulation in the bar graph reveals that the songs most frequently treated by scholars are largely the title songs of Springsteen's best-selling albums. While the reasons for extensive scholarly interest in the top three songs in particular—"Born in the U.S.A.," "The River," and "Born to Run"—are complex and varied (not the least of which is their early chronology in Springsteen's canon and the fact that they are from his three best-selling studio albums), the fact that six of the top eight songs that have attracted scholarly interest are Springsteen's title songs nonetheless raises some critical questions that are worth exploring. So, too, does the scholarly attention given to the much less commercially successful *Nebraska* and *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, arguably the most literary-influenced of Springsteen's albums and largely solo recordings.

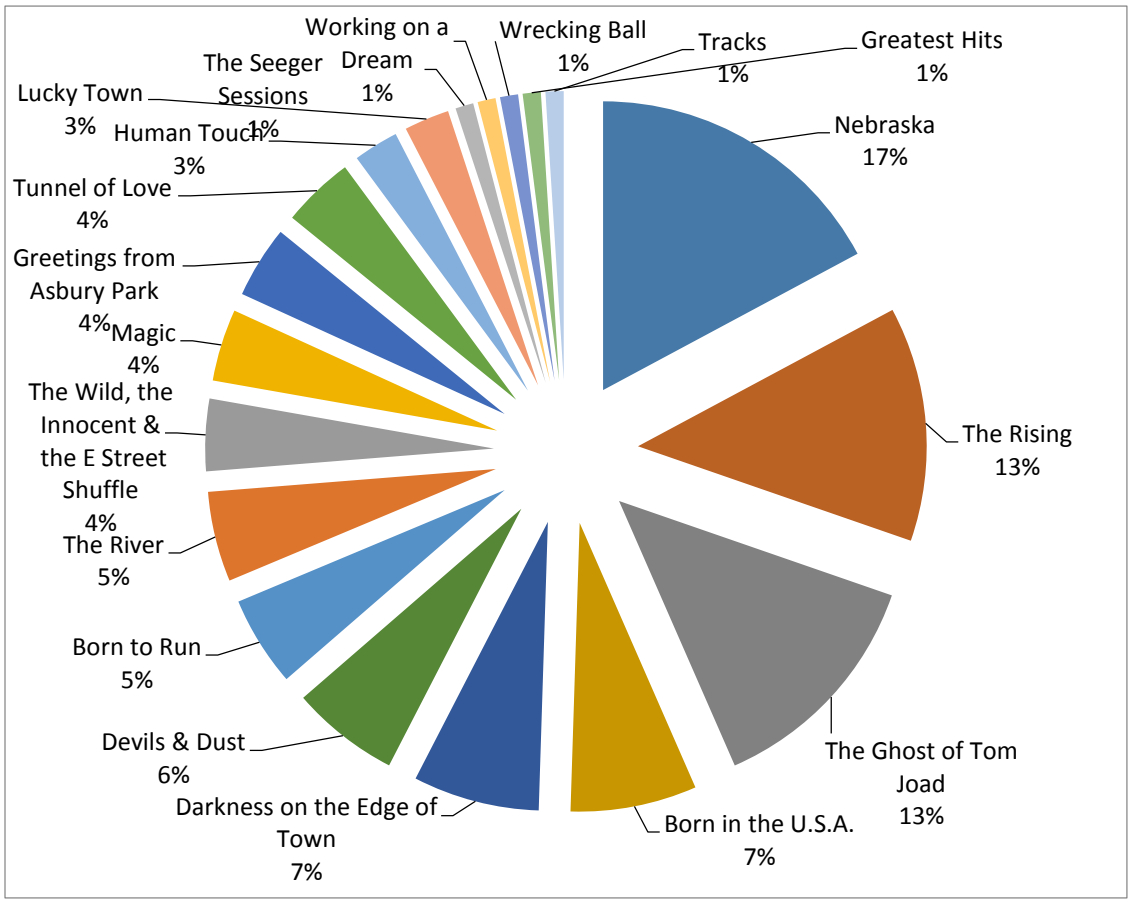
Green's comprehensive and generous bibliographic resource will greatly assist scholars in the growing field of Springsteen Studies. We all owe her a debt of gratitude.

Link to *Library of Hope and Dreams*:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AryS8VV6AntTdEM0VV9pb1JKaWZfT0syWk1wVmFoRkE#gid=0

Graph 1: 40 Most Popular Songs Among Scholars



Graph 2: Albums by Percentage of Album Studies



Graphs compiled and created by Denise Green.