Bruce Springsteen's Perspective Of A Maturing American Dream: A Study Of The Development Of Desire And Conflict Through Greetings From Asbury Park, The Wild, The Innocent And The E Street Shuffle, Born To Run, Darkness On The Edge Of Town, And The River

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BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN'S PERSPECTIVE OF A MATURING AMERICAN DREAM:
A STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF DESIRE
AND CONFLICT THROUGH
GREETINGS FROM ASBURY PARK,
THE WILD, THE INNOCENT AND THE E STREET SHUFFLE,
BORN TO RUN, DARKNESS ON THE EDGE OF TOWN, AND THE RIVER

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Graduation with Honors to the Department of English
at Carroll College, Helena, Montana

by

John Ignatius Constantine Ramirez

March 23, 1982
This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the
Department of ______________________________________

______________________________
Director

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Reader

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Reader

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### Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springsteen's Brief Biographical Information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why a Thesis On Springsteen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing the Matter at Hand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springsteen's Version of the American Dream</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dream Gains an American Form in History</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudimentary Notions of the Origin of American Dreams</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dream in Early America</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dream Grows With America</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 20th Century American Dream</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. SETTING THE STAGE</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springsteen's Preliminaries: Background for</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His Dream</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Views: Greetings From Asbury Park</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Scenery: The Wild, The Innocent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and the E Street Shuffle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THEMES, IMAGES, AND FRAMEWORK OF THE TRILOGY</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. BORN TO RUN OR BORN TO FIGHT?</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running on Thunder Road</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springsteen's Women: Fun Versus Responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backstreets Versus Reality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants Versus Achievable Goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Homecoming to Reality: Jungleland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. DARKNESS ON THE EDGE OF TOWN BY CANDLELIGHT</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fight For Control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Keep Pushin Till It's Understood&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Overlapping Theme in Darkness and The River:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Working Life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Value of Mistakes: Learning the Hard Way
Central Themes

V. THE RIVER: FINDING WAYS TO EASE LIFE'S CHAINS .. 52

Struggling With Communion, Rejecting Disunion
Refusing Inherited Dreams and Their
Limitations
Dreams and Reality Singly-Woven: The Use of
Cars in The River
Naming the Conflicts to Desire and Paying the
Price
Master the River He Who Is Able

VI. CONCLUSION .................. 66
END NOTES .................. 71
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY .................. 73
This Thesis is dedicated
to my parents Alfredo and Barbara
to my sister Louise
to Mary Angwin
inspirations of undefinable magnitude
Once I spent my time playing tough guy scenes
But I was living in a world of childish dreams
Someday these childish dreams must end
To become a man and grow up to dream again

--Bruce Springsteen
BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Bruce Springsteen was born September 23, 1949, in Freehold, New Jersey. His father, despite the Dutch surname, is mostly Irish. His mother's ancestry is Italian. In Freehold, Bruce spent the first eighteen years of his life rebelling against everyone from parents to nuns. Never very popular in school, he recalls parochial grade school as a series of conflicts. "I was there eight years," Bruce says. "That's a long time. I still remember a lot of things about it. But I don't remember anything nice about it, so I guess I didn't enjoy it." His family, which came to include two younger sisters, was lower middle class. Since his dad was frequently out of work, the family would live with Bruce's maternal grandmother from time to time.1

Bruce played in a half-dozen bands through high school and one semester of college. When, in 1969, the Springsteens decided to move to California, Bruce stayed in New Jersey. Along the Jersey shore he gained a reputation as a fast and versatile guitar player. Sleeping in friends' houses and playing at bars and clubs along Jersey coast Highway 35, Bruce was eventually discovered by John Hammond of Columbia Records and signed to a record contract in 1972. His first album, Greetings From Asbury Park, was issued later that year.
In the next eight years, Springsteen issued four more albums and grew from a local cult hero to a nationally popular figure, even appearing on covers of Newsweek and Time the same week in 1975. His albums, which began by presenting characters from his Atlantic Coast youth, grew in popularity and sales from a couple hundred thousand albums locally to several million albums nationwide. His themes and characters—as well as his fusion of musical styles— influenced other writers and performers and helped to form a new chapter in American popular music. For countless millions of listeners, Bruce Springsteen brought new dimensions, new perspectives, and new hopes to the way Americans look at themselves.

WHY A THESIS ON BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

I was born and raised in the suburbs of Chicago, and have more recently been enjoying four years of college in Montana. I've never been to the Boardwalks of Asbury Park. I'm not an insider on Springsteen's Jersey talk, nor am I privy to the locations of "Greasy Lake" or "Bellevue." The interest in Springsteen developed from an admiration of his music and the emotive manner of his performances.

My literary background gives me an appreciation of lyrics. I especially enjoy Springsteen's creative stories and characters. I know of no other contemporary lyricist who blends Old Testament allusion into a song about American futility. He creates lives and worlds in single lines. His phraseology is usually brief, always insightful, and often inspirational. His words can reach inside a heart by relating incidents common to many people. Though he continues to compose,
I feel that his completed works will stand independently of his future works. (Dwelling, at first, on solo characters facing the world, Springsteen builds toward an acceptance of society as a whole which will culminate in his characters' acceptance of marriage and related responsibilities.) I am certain that Springsteen's lyrics, unlike too many contemporary composers works, can stand up to a great deal of inspection, criticism and analysis.

I originally heard of Bruce Springsteen in the autumn of 1975, when I met a guy known as "Tommy the Dude." I was working in a restaurant in the Chicago suburbs where he was a waiter. He loaned me an album entitled _Born to Run_ which, I later learned, was the third of Mr. Springsteen's efforts. Like numerous other "Rock 'n Rollers" I had known, Springsteen had his share of memorable lines and upbeat songs. After returning "Tommy the Dude's" album, I went out and bought my own copy. I played it every now and then and didn't think too much more about it.

In September of 1978 Springsteen issued what critics termed a follow-up album to _Born to Run_. Entitled _Darkness on the Edge of Town_, the album was written in a narrow range of emotion centering around life's complexities. I had just graduated from high school and thought I knew everything. Moving far away from home to attend college, I carried many notions of tackling life and wrestling dreams from the unrelenting clutches of reality. _Darkness on the Edge of Town_ tells about people desiring the good things in life, trying to make dreams come true, and encountering difficulties. I thought about working the
rest of my life for someone else and also about having the freedom
to do as I pleased when work was done. I wanted something more imme-
diate and continuous than a pensioned retirement. I wanted every
ounce of freedom I could wring from every day. It seemed that Spring-
steen put the desire to continually push on the limits of life in
words and images that embodied many of my own demands for life. In
addition, his demands for achievement in his own life (more than the
freedom symbolized in racing cars) went beyond any goal I had ima-
gined for myself. In a real way, this inspired me to believe I
could have as full a life as I would be willing to work for.

In his semi-autobiographical manner, Springsteen dwells on those
places and peoples with whom he has grown-up. The working class Amer-
icans he writes about live in fixed environments. Springsteen relates
seeing those around him fight and sometimes lose control of their bat-
tles to gain freedom from their mundane existence. He does not really
advocate escapism; rather, the message pushes his belief that even the
hardest conditions of life can be met head-on and triumphed over.

When Springsteen's fifth album, The River, was issued in 1980, I
was waiting for it. By that time I was paying particular attention
to newspaper and magazine articles and reviews of the capstone album
of his Rock 'n Roll trilogy. I bought his first two albums and the
popular biography of Springsteen written by Dave Marsh. I saw that a
development of theme had occurred since Born to Run: people trying to
come to grips with essences in their lives were now coming to find des-
perately needed answers. The River speaks of increasingly complex
ties that bind, people's associations with their environments, families, and backgrounds that cannot be ignored.

All of the first two albums (Greetings From Asbury Park and The Wild, The Innocent and The E Street Shuffle) present the world from which Springsteen develops his ideas and they form an essential introductory unit. As Faulkner paints Yoknapatawpha county and its characters in his early works, Springsteen sketches the roads and haunts of the world of Asbury Park, New York City, and the northern New Jersey Coast. It is there where his characters are born and will live; there they will love and hate; there they will dream and fight; there they will triumph or die.

Each line of each song does not carry the central theme of maturing and developing desires and conflicts. Through the trilogy, several songs exist outside of the thesis format. Songs superfluous to the thesis occur once on Born to Run ("Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out") and seven times in The River. The seven songs in The River which form a commercially-directed set of up-beat rock 'n roll songs ("Sherry Darlin," "Hungry Heart," "Crush on You," "You Can Look (But You Better Not Touch)," "Cadillac Ranch," "I'm a Rocker," and "Ramrod") exist in a holding pattern where rock 'n rollers aim only to sanctify adolescent fixations on cars, sex, and music and to beatify participants. Rationalizing them to a producers' weakness for record-chart popularity, the eight songs take a deserved place on a back burner for airing only during the sultry summer afternoons and late-night parties they were intended for.

In writing this thesis I want to explore the continuity of theme
in Bruce Springsteen's first five albums. I want to establish, for myself, whether or not his themes progress and mature or remain the same. I want to determine if Springsteen's expressions are as solid and meaningful as I have believed them to be. I want to glean the meanings from any of his expressions so that I might avoid prat-falls that have threatened or caught him at one time or another. At twenty-two years old, I want to understand the workings and development of this thirty-two-year-old artist that I might be that much more knowledgeable and that much further ahead in my own development.

I realize that I did not start my life as a greaser, nor are my teenage stomping grounds vaguely similar to the streets and bars so familiar to Springsteen. The only knowledge I have of Springsteen's adolescent and early-adult world comes from books and articles I have read and talks with Bryan Costigan, a New Jersey resident. When I speak of Springsteen as a greaser I work from the definition given by Fred Schruers in his Rolling Stone article of February, 1981:

... they lived and played along the boardwalked Jersey shore. They wore those shoulder-strap undershirts ... drove muscle cars and worked in garages and metal shops. They ate meatball subs made of cat parts for lunch, and after work they shouted at their moms, cruised the drive-ins, punched each other out and balled their girlfriends in backseats.  

The article goes on to explain that Springsteen's world was populated by many such greasers, persons with no real hope for a future.

INTRODUCING THE MATTER AT HAND

This thesis spreads an entire story before the reader much the same as theatergoers would experience a story through an evening at
a playhouse. Interest in a play grows through the scattered reports which both introduce the subject of the play and create some interest in the action to occur on stage, just as this preface provides a brief account of the basic events to transpire. Whereas the theater patron receives a playbill which briefly sets forth the main emphases along with any incidental background information, the reader of the thesis receives such emphases and background through the Introduction section. As the playgoer is able to observe the scenery and decorative layout of the stage on which the actors and story will emerge, readers are able to absorb the world in which Springsteen's dream will form and progress by reading through the presentations of his early songs in the second major section. When the stage lights go up and the action begins, an informative process from the actors to the audience occurs: themes and conflicts arise, are identified, and either worked through or left unresolved; therein lies the raison d'être of the play's writing and performance. Like a play at the theater, this thesis is a coherent and unified informative process which provides for the identification of themes and conflicts, resolves or indecisions from the writer to the reader. The play concludes as the lights dim and the curtain falls; all actions completed, its story is told and the crowd leaves. The workings of this thesis do not end in quite the same way: a conclusion follows the end of the last major section in order that all the events lead more clearly to the interpretation dictated by this author. The desired interpretation is presented as a succinct reiteration of emphases.
My hope for all who peruse these pages is singular: I hope you enjoy the reading as much as I have enjoyed the writing of this thesis.
INTRODUCTION

SPRINGSTEEN'S VERSION OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

This thesis seeks to establish that the lyric works of Bruce Springsteen form a consistent body which develop a contemporary perspective of a maturing American Dream, as presented by the son of an Eastern working class suburban man.

As the rise of the novel paralleled the rise of the middle class in England and reflected the morals, attitudes, and lifestyles of that group of people, the rise of a popular grass-roots movement in modern music (originally termed "punk") parallels the rise of the lower classes in the United States even as it reflects the morals, attitudes, and lifestyles of those people. As Bruce Springsteen champions the lifestyles and hopes of the working class, he becomes a watershed of ideals. For thousands—perhaps millions—of America's next generation of working class men and women, Springsteen has become a symbol of a realized American Dream. He has worked responsibly to rise from humble beginnings to gain financial independence and security through his music but, ultimately more significant to his cause, Springsteen has gained control over his life.

Springsteen's dream, simply stated, is possessing the freedom to control all aspects of one's own life. It is a dream from man's secret heart, a dream through man's history, an American dream.

To survey the activity in the drama of the human dream preceding
Springsteen is to establish his deserved place in the company of fellow examiners of man's ongoing preoccupation: how does man go about defining and then making his world more like his own idealized vision?

THE DREAM GAINS AN AMERICAN FORM IN HISTORY

American Dreams have been in state of evolution longer than the Western Hemisphere has been called "America." Long before persistent rumours led wealthy European powers to finance ships exploring possible west-ward routes to new sources of commerce, the myth of a "Promised Land" existed in many cultures. Still further remote, prehistorical legends (eventually transcribed) grew into accounts of a place on earth called Eden, where man lived in complete harmony with his world, but, because he committed "wrong," he was forced to leave. Perhaps an outgrowth of the legends of the Old Testament or perhaps an innate yearning of civilized men and societies, the quest for somewhere on earth where idyllic life can be realized has been a part of man's ongoing search for heaven on earth. Bruce Springsteen inherits the dream and seeks to define ways to achieve it despite difficulties.

RUDIMENTARY NOTIONS OF THE ORIGINS OF AMERICAN DREAMS

An acceleration of the quest for an actual perfected human condition occurred on a large scale during the time of the Renaissance. In that age, Humanism (that is, concentration on the study of all aspects of man's predicament) championed the search for basic elements of a drive for perfection. It nurtured an awareness that knowledge of all the primary facets of man's existence would lead to a more successful
construction of an earthly paradise. The "rebirth" of that age extended beyond the resurrection of classical examples of perfect thought and form; it meant far more than Platonic and Aristotelian concepts, more than the emulation of the dramas of Aristophanes and Sophocles or the plays of Terence and Horace, more than the advancement of classical characteristics of sculpture, architecture, and painting. Assessing the importance of the revelations of the Renaissance in terms of their ramifications through history, the spotlight illumines a central characteristic: the search for perfection. Men used every available means—and invented quite a few—attempting to find more productive commercial venues, more universal scientific assertions, more efficient governments and more palatable natural definitions of the world's creation and of man's existence (as opposed to those of the polytheistic ancients and monotheistic Christians).

Countless volumes dealing with the nature of man's civilized condition, including works by Rousseau, Hobbes, and Locke, detail versions of man's preoccupation with identifying the origins, workings and goals of his civilized life in terms of what they view as the necessity for an organized state. Whether unrealistic dreams or observant distillations of reality, the social tracts of the Renaissance and ensuing ages forge views of men's desires and societal conflicts that are more 'society of man' than 'man in society' approaches to the relationship therein. Springsteen follows the latter approach in presenting his perspective of desires and conflicts. Men's lives and the ambitions they pursue do necessarily exist within the confines of ordered society, yet the expli-
cit dreams and demands of individual men are more often specifically expressed in poetry and literature than in such exhaustive theorizations.

Societies then, as today, were composed of the particular aspirations of each individual person in addition to unifying nationalistic concerns. The particular, personal ambitions have been most often recounted by literists and poets of the ages. Before the advent of social sciences and cultural studies, literature most often provided the best—and in many cases the only—clue to societies and people long dead. Unlike philosophical, political, or theological tracts—which, in many cases, transcend particular times—literature dwells specifically on people captured in specific times: events and emotions are trapped in time by virtue of their causes and reactions. Of course, the best literature offers universal emotional and intellectual expression as well as entertainment.

Much of the dominant Western European literature of the past four hundred years concerned discovering the dimensions and mysteries of the "New World." Stories ranging from tales of fountains promising everlasting youth to fables of fantastic cities built of gold fascinated Europeans and whetted their appetites for adventure and riches. At that point, this New World was devoid of civilization (by European standards) and seemed valuable only for the resources that might be pillaged from it.

THE AMERICAN DREAM IN EARLY AMERICAN LIFE

Colonization followed soon on the heels of exploration. The early colonization occurred for many reasons. Most of the reasons reflected
a search for freedom of one sort or another (economic, social, religious). America’s earliest writers included John Winthrop, John Cotton, William Penn, and John Woolman who maintained a sober and highly religious belief that God’s supporting love called forth people to establish His New Israel. The emphasis in their writings on an overriding religious concept was soon supplanted by legislated separation of church and state, but the idea of an America blessed and protected by a beneficent God was perpetuated in the United States’ government through the efforts of Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and many others. From the Pledge of Allegiance taught in grade school, to the Declaration of Independence, to the final verse of the national anthem, to the motto of the United States of America, the forefathers of this country infused most of the early expressions of America’s sovereignty with allusions to an all-powerful Creator who watches over all Americans and grants them this "Promised Land" in which to find fortunes and forge futures.

In that early America, founded predominantly by the leadership of the wealthy aristocrat and the blood of the working man, there grew lines of rich and poor, ‘haves’ and ‘have nots.’ The pursuit of happiness (and national harmony) became further remote when a definition of “all men are created equal” popularly came to mean white males are created equal . . . mostly. There is little doubt that when Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “there is a crack in everything God has made,” he must have had America in mind. Yet in America, the cracks have become as accepted as the optimism that allows the cracks to be mended; therein
lies the essence of the ongoing hope in America that it can be the "Promised Land." America continues as the "Land of Opportunity" and with each new opportunity grows a new hope.

THE DREAM GROWS WITH AMERICA

The basic germ of the American Dream was carried to new heights by the life of Abraham Lincoln. In addressing a group of soldiers in 1864, Lincoln said, "I happen to temporarily occupy this big White House. I am a living witness that any one of your children may look to come here as my father's child has." These words of Lincoln echo to every corner of the nation even today: "only in America" may something like this happen. On Lincoln's words Springsteen's words find a resurgent truth and hope: Lincoln's Kentucky Log Cabin or Springsteen's run-down Freehold house, either serves as an appropriate 'bottom of the barrel' from which to rise up. Springsteen does not aspire to the political offices that marked Lincoln's best years, but he does seek to free himself from the same confinements too often associated with growing up poor.

With a twenty-year background in that world, Springsteen speaks with vehemence about the ability to live free in the same manner begun over a century before by men like slave-turned Abolitionist, Frederick Douglass. The hope of being free burns as a hunger in the hearts of all men. Without that hope, Douglass says, "I should have killed myself, or done something for which I should have been killed." Both Douglass and Springsteen have seen themselves as prisoners against their wills. The writings of both men explore the reasons for--and
ways to deal with—the confinements they were born in. In fact, Springsteen has been indirectly influenced by the black styles of Negro spiritual and blues music; its recurrent themes involve exile, strife, poverty, flight, freedom, and death.

Contrary to one-time Harvard professor George Santayana's assertion that the American "is not a revolutionist; he believes he is already on the right track and moving toward an excellent destiny," Springsteen maintains that Americans—especially the young—are in a constant state of revolution and rebellion. He feels that the "excellent destiny" cannot be achieved without constant struggle. Life, for him, becomes a continual fight, a constant rebellion against the ongoing limitations placed on him. That America provides an atmosphere which allows for a constant revolutionizing process has become an accepted fact. Despite conservatism in national politics, the United States possesses more single possibilities for rapid development that perhaps any nation in the history of the world.

THE AMERICAN DREAM IN THE LATE 20th CENTURY

In his work, American Dreams, John Roth, a professor at Claremont Men's College, reflects an optimism he sees in the United States. "Each day," he says, "really is new; the burden of freedom has to be taken up with every dawning. . . we must keep challenging each other, calling attention to our problems, prodding ourselves to care and trust." He continues, stating further that the optimism,

. . . is not based on simple assumptions of progress growth and success. . . . Whether concerned with self, community, or humankind, it refuses to make light of failure, crisis, and guilt. Rather, this self-reliance
lives where failure is recognized as real and frequent but still is not allowed to create panic. It exists where intelligence and determination stand up to crisis without flinching, where commitment to high ideals runs deep in spite of, because of, powers that could lay us low. The trust we need—in ourselves individually, in each other, and in God—holds firm when we find honest and healing ways to reaffirm dignity in the face of guilt and death.10

Springsteen carries on the optimism, the intelligence, and the determinism, the commitment to high ideals, the confidence, and the honesty which form the arsenal of weapons with which men have fought for freedom as long as they have been in chains. In his two introductory albums and especially in his trilogy, Springsteen will put forth his spirited optimism in the form of songs which speak continually of the need to believe in one's self and the need to continually challenge all limitations that "could lay us low" while fighting to resolve all conflicts prohibiting the realization of one's dreams.

The direction Springsteen travels is determined in Greetings From Asbury Park and especially in The Wild, The Innocent and the E Street Shuffle. The direction does not necessarily reflect the Westward movement championed by Horace Greeley's cry11 but instead indicates that this generation of Americans will find their dreams by asserting themselves to fashion dreams from their present environments. The vignettes from New York City and the northern New Jersey area on Greetings From Asbury Park are the work of a street-smart poet. The album's brief production period is reflected by the stark amateurism within its songs. Greetings, perhaps no more than a young man's impressions of his environment, forms a rough antecedent step to the
somewhat clumsily-produced second album, The Wild, The Innocent and The E Street Shuffle. The second album also attempts to focus a foggy lense on some basic elements of the initial Springsteen dream presented in its songs. Wild and Innocent is rife with desire and conflict and, together with Greetings, froms a springboard from which subsequent characters dive into the deep, swift-moving waters of the trilogy.
I. SETTING THE STAGE

SPRINGSTEEN'S PRELIMINARIES: BACKGROUND FOR HIS DREAM

Greetings From Asbury Park and The Wild, The Innocent and the E Street Shuffle are an introductory set which decorate the stage for Springsteen's trilogy, Born to Run, Darkness on the Edge of Town, and The River. Detailing various characters in the context of their North Atlantic Coastal demi-suburban environment, Greetings and Wild and Innocent possess essential elements Springsteen will develop from their rough, unpolished, and, in a sense, immature condition. All of the ingredients of the trilogy are in this first pair but an order and direction are lacking.

Through five albums Springsteen develops his dream for each person's control of his own world; the vestiges of this dream in the first two albums build around the same idea that Rousseau put forth long ago that, "Man was born free, but is everywhere in bondage." Springsteen also concludes that all men are subjected in one way or another. The poet writes specifically of those who live trapped in their environments. The stories of those trapped characters are the living illustrations of Asbury Parks that lock in hopes and aspirations and make desperate fighters of the innocent children who live there. (In truth, many of the songs occur outside Asbury Park, but that name comes to represent the Universal condition of entrapment.)

In the September, 1978, Atlantic Magazine, Benjamin DeMott described Bruce Springsteen as a "useful corrective to overintellectualized versions of caste and class. Saying that his gift is "his ability to
make his audience care about people whom most of us--I'm afraid this may even include the sociologists--can't even see," DeMott introduces the idea that Springsteen's view could be equated with James Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men if that book were written by a poetic member of the sharecropping Gudger family instead of a Harvard poet. In Greetings and Wild and Innocent, Springsteen scrapes the streets of New York City and the beaches of the Jersey shore. The characters he dredges up are lifesize and real.

FIRST VIEWS: GREETINGS FROM ASBURY PARK

On Greetings the majority of the songs deal with people looking for excitement. The lyrics conjure up completely colorful pictures of teenage city-scapes.

The color is a brilliant neon in the opening song. The speaker in "Blinded by the Light" spins a rhyming rant about more than two dozen characters lost in temptations which virtually punches the reader with images. Seeing the string of characters fall victim to the lure of everything from alcohol to sex, the speaker can't decide between acceptance of the values instilled in him by his Catholic parents and an affinity for gratification of desires. He leans toward gratification though he knows its joys are temporary:

Mama always told me
Not to look into the sights of the sun
Oh, but mama, that's where the fun is

These lines typify the yearnings of each character on this debut album. The contrasts between the things that will bring happiness and the forces that forbid acquisition frame each album and echo in each song.
that Bruce Springsteen has ever produced.

"Does this Bus Stop at 82nd Street" follows a street-smart punk on a bus ride through New York's inner city. He sees and relates passing scenes in a cryptic, quick-tempoed manner:

... tainted women in vista vision
perform for out-of-state kids at the late show.
Wizard imps and sweatsock pimps
Interstellar mongrel nymphs
Ah, Rat said that lady left him limp

The song could go on forever, but ends in the middle. Right after the narrator asserts that he has found the one article he was looking for ("man, the dope is that there's still hope"), he fades off into another street, another neighborhood, another day. Immediately following the assertion of hope, the narrator swings into a story tracing two incidents of punks without hope.

"Lost in the Flood" tells the tale of several young toughs desperately seeking to escape the urban jungle. "Jimmy the Saint" tries to drive his way out:

Well, that blaze and noise boy
He's gunnin' that bitch
Loaded to blastin' point
He rides headfirst into a hurricane
and disappears into a point

The natural elements of the hurricane and the flood combine as symbols of man's subjection to his environment. The second attempted escape is a group venture. The "whiz-bang gang" is armed with guns and follows the lead of the "Bronx's best apostle" and together they go "shootin' up the street." But the apostle, supposedly well-versed in the ways to survive the city, gets "blown right off his feet." A member of the
whiz-bang gang goes blasting around a corner but gets shot and "lays on the street holding his leg, screaming something in Spanish." The song ends as the narrator wonders, ironically, if these desperate attempts to escape the city are caused by the same natural force that makes escape impossible. The essential struggle between the desire to escape and factors prohibiting freedom results in several casualties.

In the songs "Mary Queen of Arkansas" and "For You," Springsteen writes of two young men's attempts to convince the girls they love to forge futures at their sides. In the first, Mary is a prostitute with illusions of royal grandeur. Her lover tries to convince her that he seriously wants to help her "start all over again clean." He asserts that

\[ ab\ldots I was not born to live to die \\
\\text{and you were not born for queenin} \]

He begs her to come away with him to a place where they can be free of all pretensions. His desire does not consider Mary's own dreams and their lack of communication results in uncertainty. In "For You," the girl has broken with the speaker and he tries to get her back by trying to discover and reconcile their differences. Even though they once shared dreams, he senses that she can no longer hear his pleas, that he is no longer real to her:

\[ ab\text{We were both hitchhikers} \\
\text{But you had your ear tuned to the roar} \\
\text{Of some metal-tempered engine} \\
\text{On an alien, distant shore} \\
\text{So you left to find a better reason than} \\
\text{The one we were livin for} \]

As with "Mary Queen of Arkansas," "For You" ends without any response.
being given to the questions of the conflict. Again, uncertainty results from an unclear communication between the two people.

A short sketch called "The Angel" fits smoothly into the "Blinded by the Light" mold. It tells the story of a young girl who meets and becomes infatuated with a motorcycle gang member who rides with Hell's Angels. Glossy-eyed, she dreams of his romantic, free life wandering the interstates of America. The young girl ("Madison Avenue's claim to fame/ in a trainer bra, with eyes like rain") substitutes his temporary physical closeness for the free life she can never hope to live.

"Growin' Up" is the classical tale of the rebellious spirit of the tough young greaser (as described in the Preface, page xi) who rejects all the values piled on him in return for a fast car, a girl, and music.

The flag of piracy flew from my mast
My sails were set wing to wing
I had a jukebox graduate for first mate
She couldn't sail but she sure could sing
I pushed B-52 and bombed 'em with the blues
With my gears set stubborn on standin'
I broke all the rules strafed my old high school
Never once gave thought to landin'

Through the song's spirit of devil-may-care freedom, Springsteen portrays pivotal times in a boy's development. Springsteen speaks to the heart of misunderstood and struggling adolescents everywhere. The imagery of the car comes through clearly as the speaker equates the key to understanding his world with understanding the automobile's implications to one seeking speed, power, and self-determined destinations:
And I swear I found the key
To the universe
In the engine of an old, parked car

Springsteen constantly and consistently sees the car as a dream-turned real. Through all of his albums, the car is an incarnation and symbol of reality and dream singly-woven.

As an expression of toughness, "It's hard to be a Saint in the City" excels in depicting the self-important street "punk-king." The good Catholic boy walks the main drags of the city with a force like a tornado in a phone booth. He struts like the smartest and the coolest. He is the bad-ass street son and in control of every situation:

I had skin like leather
and the diamond-hard look of a cobra
I was born blue and weathered
and I burst just like a supernova
I could walk like Brando
right into the sun
Dance just like a Casanova
With my blackjack and jacket
And hair slicked sweet
Silver star studs on my duds
Just like a Harley in heat
When I strut down the street
I could feel its heart beat

In the grand tradition of Mark Twain's riverboatmen and Bo Diddley's whip-the-world toughness, Springsteen, here, is pure brag:

I was the king of the alley
Mama I could talk some trash
I was the prince of the paupers
Crowned downtown at the beggar's bash
I was the pimp's main prophet
I kept everything cool

The crisis arises when "the devil appeared like Jesus through the steam in the street" and offers him "a hand I knew even the cops couldn't beat."
He accepts the offer but, as soon as he tries to take control of the subway (the devil's gift), he realizes his mistake. He loses his lordly control in the subway and quickly escapes back up to street to regain his respect and control.

The speaker in the final song from Greetings narrates a lyric nocturne of city kids escaping the blacktop for a night-time frolic at an inland lake. "Spirits in the Night" tells the story of how Crazy Janey, Wild Billy, G-Man, Hazy Davey, Killer Joe, and the narrator get drunk, get sick, drive to Greasy Lake, and sport in and out of the water. Crazy Janey and the narrator end up "makin love in the dirt/singin' our birthday songs" while the others pass-out or get into a mud fight. When the time comes to start back to the city, they all regretfully say goodbye to Greasy Lake. The "Spirits in the Night"--as embodied in each of the characters--are the spirits of escape. Those spirits diminish as the group moves together from the life waters of the Lake back to the sobering city.


The title track, "The E Street Shuffle," celebrates a weekend street-life jubilation. The freedom of the weekend explodes in a weekly ritualistic parading of fast cars, and flashy clothes. The E Street dance is symbolic of teenage spirits busting loose from the work and school of the weekdays:

School boy bops pull out all the stops on a friday night
And teenage tramps in skintight pants
Do the E Street dance and everything's alright
Them kids down there are either dancin
or hooked up in a scuffle
Dressed in snakeskin suits
backed with Detroit muscle
doin the E Street shuffle

"Sandy (Fourth of July in Asbury Park)" points out a clear
change of direction in Springsteen's characters and themes. It is
reminiscent of "Mary Queen of Arkansas" insofar as it involves a boy
who wants to go away with his girlfriend, away from their present
senseless life. The boy in this song sits with Sandy near a small
amusement arcade on the shore. The arcade is small and run-down.
Evening draws on and reflections appear on the water; they are formed
by fireworks and--more importantly--by a larger amusement arcade
(including carnival rides) which attract the speaker with their sym-
bullic value. He speaks of leaving their place near the decrepit
pier and venturing together to the bigger, brighter arcade even as he
speaks of leaving their present existence for a brighter future to-
gether. His reference to "Little Eden" bespeaks his strong yearning
to reach his own Promised Land where things will be better:

Sandy, the fireworks are hailing
over Little Eden tonight
Forcing a light into all those stoned-out faces
left stranded on this fourth of July
In the town the circuits are full
of switchblade lovers so fast, so shiny, so sharp
And the wizards play down on Pinball way
on the Boardwalks way past dark
And the boys from the casino dance
with their shirts open, like latin lovers on the shore
Chasin all them silly New York virgins by the score
Sandy, the Aurora is risin behind us
Those pier lights, our carnival life forever
Oh, love me tonight for I may never see you again
Hey, Sandy girl
Now the greasers, they tramp the streets
or get busted for sleepin on the beach all night
And boys in their high heels, ah Sandy,
their skins are so white
And me? I just got tired of hangin in them
dusty arcades
bangin them pleasure machines
Chasin the factory girls underneath the Boardwalk
where they all promise to unsnap their jeans
And y'know that tilt-a-whirl
down on the south beach drag?
I got on it last night and my shirt got caught
Man, they kept me spinnin
didn't think I'd ever get off
Sandy, that waitress I was seein
has lost her desire for me
I spoke with her just last night
she said she won't set herself on fire for me anymore
She worked that joint underneath
the Boardwalk
She was always the one you saw
boppin down the beach with the radio
The kids say last night she was dressed like a star
in one of them cheap little seaside bars
And I saw her parked with loverboy
out on the Kokomo
Did you hear the cops finally busted Madame Marie
for tellin fortunes better than they do?
For me this Boardwalk life is through, babe
Y'know ya oughta quit this scene too
Sandy, the aurora is rising behind us
its pier lights and carnival life forever
Oh, love me tonight and I promise
I'll love you forever
Oh, I mean it Sandy girl
Yeah, I promise Sandy girl, my baby . . .

Though his love for Sandy seems a second choice (after the waitress)--
and his desire to escape might only be the reaction of a snubbed lover--
the song cuts a clearly new direction. A boy has become tired of the
dusty arcades and the all-too-familiar Boardwalk attractions. The
"tilt-a'whirl" becomes a short allegorical allusion to the whole life-
style of the arcades; getting on a joy ride for a thrill, the boy spins
on it too long and becomes sick of it. The third stanza relates how he lost his love and his favorite hang-out, Madame Marie's. So now, for him, "this Boardwalk life's through." "Sandy" points down the road Springsteen will travel in the throes of restlessness and searching throughout his trilogy. It presents the desire to discover something new. The innocence of the narrator in "Sandy" is evident, for he believes--without knowing for certain--that the 'grass will be greener' on the other shore.

"Kitty's Back" hints that greasers aren't really so hard on the inside. "Cat" loves "Kitty" and appears to have lost his spirit when Kitty "left to marry some top cat." But, instead of fighting to get her back, "Cat shrugs his shoulders, sits back and sighs/ 'oh, what can I do?'' He drags around day after day after lifeless day until, one day, from down at the end of the alley, "here she comes, here she comes, here she comes, here she comes! / Kitty's back in town!" Cat knows that she's been untrue but "she's so soft, she's so blue when he looks into her eyes / he just sits back and sighs, /'Oh, what can I do? What can I do?'' Cat takes her back again.

"Wild Billy's Circus Story" tells of the allure of the circus life to a young boy. Excitement races in his heart as the circus comes to town, sets up tents and rides, and sets his heart dreaming:

Well, the runway lies ahead
   like a great false dawn
Whoah, fat lady, big mama, Missy Bimbo
   sits in her chair and yawns
And the man-beast lies in his cage
   sniffing popcorn
And the midget licks his fingers
   and suffers Missy Bimbo's scorn
A circus town's been born
The boy's hopes are raised when the Circus Boss, in need of help, asks him, "Hey, son, ya wanna try the Big Top?" As the circus life rolls ever onward along an endless road, members join and leave in a circling world where the faces change but the people never do.

The second side of Wild and Innocent depicts people searching for happiness and, for some reason or other, not quite reaching it. The "Incident on 57th Street" narrative is fife with very human characters placed in tough surroundings and forced to respond. "Spanish Johnny" wants to find a steady lover but is torn between his world of small-time crime and the allure of "Puerto Rican Jane." The meeting of the two lovers and their subsequent story reflects two city kids caught in their world with no exhibited knowledge of a world any bigger than the one they can see from the top of their tenement building.

Spanish Johnny drove in from the Underworld last night With bruised arms and broken rhythm In a beat-up old Buick but dressed just like dynamite He tried sellin his heart to the hard girls over on Easy Street But they sighed, "Johnny, it falls apart so easy, and y'know hearts these days are cheap."
And the pimps swung their axes and said, "Johnny, you're a cheater!"
Oh, the pimps swung their axes and said, "Johnny, you're a liar!"
But from out of the shadows came a young girl's voice that said, "Johnny, don't cry."
"Puerto Rican Jane? Oh, won't you tell me what's your name? I wanna drive you down to the other side of town where paradise ain't so crowded, there'll be action goin down on Shanty Lane tonight, all them golden-heeled fairies in a real bitch-fight pull .38's and kiss their girls goodnight Well, like a cool Romeo he made his moves, oh, she looked so fine And like a late Juliet, she knew he's never be true but then, she didn't really mind
Upstairs the band was playin, the singer was sayin somethin about goin home She whispered, "Spanish Johnny, you can leave me tonight, but just don't leave me alone."
And Johnny cried, "Puerto Rican Jane! Word is down, the cops have found the vein
All them barefoot boys they left their homes for the woods
Them little barefoot boys they said, 'homes ain't no good!'
They left their corners, threw away all their switchblade knives
and kissed each other goodbye.

Johnny was sittin' on the fire escape watchin' the kids
play down in the street
He called down, "Hey! Little Heroes, summer's long,
but I guess it ain't very sweet around here anymore!"

Jane sleeps in sheets wet with sweat
Johnny sits up alone and watches her dream on
As the sister prays for lost souls, then breaks down in the
chapel after everyone's gone
Jane moves over to share her pillow but opens her eyes
to see Johnny up and puttin' his clothes on
She says, "Those Romantic young boys, all they ever wanna do
is fight!"
It's those romantic young boys callin' through the window,
'Hey, Spanish Johnny! Ya wanna make a little easy money tonight?''

And Johnny whispers, "Goodnight, it's all right Jane
I'll meet you tomorrow night on lovers' lane
We may find it out on the street tonight, baby
Or we may have to walk until the morning light, maybe... . . .

The barefoot boys say homes aren't any good; perhaps they see the futility
of their city existence. They leave town while Johnny will stay
and walk the city streets night after night looking for his elusive
"big score." Maybe he'll find it and maybe he never will.

"Rosalita (Come Out Tonight)" is semi-autobiographical search for
a dream girl. The song parallels his growing success in the recording industry, as he sings:

But now you're sad, your mama's mad
and your papa says he knows
that I don't have any money
Tell him this is his last chance
to get his daughter in a fine romance
Cause the record company, Rosie
just gave me a big advance

Springsteen calls her to "come out tonight" where all the kids are
gathered: Jack the Rabbit, Weak Knee Willie, Sloppy Sue, and Big Bones
Billy join with the narrator to "play some pool, skip some school, act real cool, stay out all night." He wants to spirit her away to "a pretty little place in Southern California / down San Diego way" where he can play his music and be with her always.

"New York City Serenade" is a song about self-discovery. As Dave Marsh describes in his book, "New York City Serenade" is about a "fool's paradise and the rules by which one lives within it." He continues describing it as the "celebration of a junkman, whose singing, singing, singing becomes a triumph of life itself. For in this place /New York/, beauty is everywhere balanced by something sinister."^13

It's midnight in Manhattan
This is no time to be cute
It's a mad dog's promenade
So walk tall, or baby, don't walk at all

Life on the streets, as presented in Greetings and Wild and Innocent, is a search for excitement, good times, and love. Underlying each of those searches is a more basic theme of control: possessing control over environmental elements (sometimes people) is the way for the characters in these first two albums to achieve self-respect and self-importance. The triumph that is essential is not always attained. As characters mature in the trilogy, the importance of being personally omnipotent will be replaced by the importance of being interpersonally responsible. It moves from a 'dominance at all costs' mindset to a more agreeable 'unity at all costs' mindset; the theme matures.

Wild and Innocent and Greetings quarry an immense block of stone. Taken from an immeasurable bedrock that is all of life, this rough,
unshaped block contains within it all of the elements of an artistic masterwork; the setting, the conflicts, the desires, the dreams, all are here. In Born to Run, Darkness on the Edge of Town, and The River, Springsteen will put his hands to the hammer and chisel and attempt to sculpt his expression of an American Dream from the rock.
II. THEMES, IMAGES, AND FRAMEWORKS IN THE TRILOGY

There are two powerful forces . . . in convergence—
"the promise of life that is made to young Americans
by all of our affluence, technology, liberation, and
ideals, and the threat to that promise posed by every-
thing from neon ugliness and boring jobs to . . . the
shadow of nuclear holocaust."

--Charles A. Reich 14

The hopes and dreams of young Americans have been converging
with threats longer than America has been a nation. Springsteen’s
continuance of the dreams against opposing forces presents no new
themes or symbols, but, rather, manipulates fully the symbollic ve-
hicles of past generations in achieving recurrent themes of freedom
from limitations. Infused with his personal perspectives of the
youthful struggle against limitations, Springsteen’s message arrives
at new artistic presentations of old conclusions. In the trilogy,
the elements of the Springsteen version of the American Dream con-
stantly overlap and recur.

Through his third, fourth, and fifth albums, Bruce Springsteen
loosely traces his own maturing awareness of his potential and pos-
sibilities. His reflections, in the framework of lyric works de-
picting young people straining against uncertainties, limitations,
and fears, form a statement of outlooks, expectations, and anticipa-
tions of progress in their lives.

Springsteen employs the same imagery through all five albums:
night, cars, streetlife, girls, and music. Comparing this continued
use to John Ford and Sergio Leone’s western movies, Springsteen says,
"they're all about cowboys, but they're all different." He tries to achieve the same result with genre by manipulating his own greaser world:

I'm a genre kind of writer. There are certain basic concerns my characters have—the conflict between a community kind of thing versus the I-stand-alone approach. They're trying to live the right way. . . .

--Bruce Springsteen 15

His music at once both dwells on and cuts through the lives of his characters to a deeper, universal dream that transcends his albums, transcends the young, transcends the American people, and carries through time as inevitably as history itself. Springsteen's music speaks of the human struggle:

. . . it's about distractions and all the bad stuff . . .
If you've got your heart and fender on what your dream is, and your dream is true, bound up in people and relationships and communicating and community, then you're gonna make it through no matter what. But if you get bent, and all of a sudden you think the cars and the house and the things are what's important, that's poison.

--Bruce Springsteen 16

The basic shift from the introductory albums through Born to Run follows a change from contentment with being a "king of the alley" or being able to "play some pool, skip some school, act real cool, stay out all night" to being "tired of hanging in them dusty arcades, bangin' them pleasure machines." Now, in the first song on Born to Run, "Thunder Road," Springsteen asserts, "It's a town full of losers/ but I'm pullin' out of here to win." In "Thunder Road" he calls a girl to take his hand and discover the magic in the night:*  

*Night is consistently referred to as a nebulous place of endless possibility, promise, and opportunity.
What else can we do now?
--except roll down the windows
and let the wind blow back your hair!
The night's bustin open
These two lane will take us anywhere

The possibilities in the night and on the road explode as endlessly
as the boundless American opportunities: the chances lay open and,
for now, cost no more than the effort--or the gasoline. With all
the innocence that believes in a total victory, Springsteen stam-
pedes out to "case the Promised Land," certain that "heaven's waitin
on down the track."
III. BORN TO RUN OR BORN TO FIGHT?

RUNNING ON THUNDER ROAD

In the days we sweat it out
On the streets of a runaway American Dream
At night we ride to mansions of glory
in suicide machines
Sprung from cages on highway Nine
Chrome-wheeled, fuel-injected
And steppin' out over the line
Baby, this town rips the bones from your back
It's a death-trap. It's a suicide rap.
We gotta get out while we're young
Cause tramps like us
Baby, we were born to run

--from "Born to Run"

The characters in "Born to Run" and "Thunder Road" don't quite know where they are going, and, traveling in suicide machines, don't know if they will live until they decide. They know they must escape the "death-trap" of the town they are in or risk becoming old without ever having attempted to reach their own Promised Lands or to catch their own runaway American Dreams. An urgency floods the lyrics of both songs. The mark of a man becomes his willingness to challenge the world head-on:

(from "Thunder Road")
I know it's late
But we can make it if we run
Oh, Thunder Road!
Sit tight, take hold, Thunder Road!

(from "Born to Run")
But I gotta know how it feels
I wanna know if love is wild
Babe, I gotta know if love is real

In both songs the enchantment with the road develops as fast as the enchantment with the girl. "Thunder Road" calls Mary to join with the singer, who "ain't no hero" and states plainly, "all the redemption
I can offer, girl /is beneath this dirty hood." The singer in
"Born to Run" offers Wendy friendship and protection for her dreams
and visions. The essential man-woman relationship becomes a corner-
stone of the foundation for Springsteen's house of the American Dream.
More in "Born to Run" than in "Thunder Road," the union of the girl
and the singer seems an essential prerequisite to working through
conceptual dreams to concrete reality. In "Thunder Road" though the
singer says "we got one last chance to make it real" and "we can make
it if we run", in the final line he says "I'm pulling out of here to
win." In "Born to Run" the emphasis continually falls on a joint ef-
sort to break free: "We gotta get out while we're young;" "We were
born to run;" "together we can break this trap;" "I wanna die with you
Wendy on the streets at night;" "together, Wendy, we can live with the
sadness;" "we're gonna get to that place where we really wanna go, and
we'll walk in the sun." (Here Springsteen again toys with the innocent
notion that he can achieve complete success without compromise. When
he is at his idyllic best, attainment of victory, triumph, and control
over all opposition seems to be in his sights.)

SPRINGSTEEN'S WOMEN: FUN VERSUS RESPONSIBILITY

Ironically for Springsteen, when he writes of moving into a
relationship to which he commits himself, he automatically loses the
singular control of his life: dedicating his life to another is never
taken lightly. Though all of the women in all of his songs are not
meant to be lasting relationships, when a dream woman is found the
male character will be found either rejecting all the self-centered
goals in exchange for a responsible acceptance of the other person or being torn apart by his inability to do so.

Springsteen's male characters (quite naturally) are attracted to the soft and beautiful girls of his world. Mary Queen of Arkansas, Carzy Janey, Rosalita, and Puerto Rican Jane were some of the female characters from the first two albums. Mary and Rosalita evaded the men that chased them. Crazy Janey was just a passing fancy, an escape. Puerto Rican Jane (from *Wild and Innocent*, "Incident on 57th Street") begins to point out the direction Springsteen travels through *Born to Run* and *Darkness on the Edge of Town*: when Spanish Johnny was faced with a choice between Jane in bed or crime in the street, Johnny opts for the life of crime. It had been a part of him longer than any feeling for Jane. In the same way, Springsteen's male characters in *Born to Run* and *Darkness* will sacrifice love for the chance to live out their selfish dreams. Only in *The River* will the decisions begin to take on a more mature tone as the men will no longer see themselves as "rough enough to whip this world alone."

"Mary Queen of Arkansas"(*Greetings*), "Incident on 57th Street" (*Wild and Innocent*), "She's the One"(*Born to Run*), and "Candy's Room" (*Darkness*), form a trail of relationships in which the male contemplates ending other pursuits in deference to his love for a woman. Mary refuses to leave with the singer in "Mary Queen of Arkansas." Puerto Rican Jane will wait for Spanish Johnny, relying on his promise to meet her on lovers' lane: it seems that she is content to allow him to pursue his own solo dreams while she contents herself
with the time he spends with her. "She's the One" resolves the point that "she can take you, but if she wanna break you, she gonna find out that ain't so easy to do." In other words, the man will follow the woman if she allows him to maintain his two separate worlds (like Spanish Johnny might decide if faced with a liberated Jane who gives him the ultimatum, "choose crime or me; you can't have both"). "Candy's Room" reflects a less-than-certain decision: when the girl from "She's the One" inspires a "thunder in your heart at night" that says "you're never gonna leave her," she forces a decision by trying to break the man's selfish side; Candy promises hidden worlds in the darkness and then she delivers them with no stated demands. Candy has got her man wrapped around her finger: all he can think about is holding her. As a foreshadowing of the final decisions between men and women characters in The River, "She's the One" speaks more decisively than "Candy's Room" in saying that the man will have to sacrifice something dear to him in order to be with her.

In later songs ("Adam Raised a Cain," "Darkness on the Edge of Town," "Independence Day") Springsteen will harshly label commitments of marriage and parenthood as deterrents to personal fulfillment when entered into without complete awareness of all related responsibilities. The desire to attain all of their dreams leads Springsteen's male characters to conflicts within themselves.

BACKSTREETS VERSUS REALITY

One of the most dramatic man-woman conflicts arises in the song "Backstreets." Springsteen uses the term "Backstreets" to indicate a
person with a misguided mindset who lives in a world of unreality, a contrived existence of make-believe. Make believe was fine for two kids in love during the summertime, but when it was time to face the necessity of walking a main street (reality), the Backstreet fixation caused confusion, anger, frustration, division, and very deep emotional pain.

The singer loves Terry in a way so personal and strong that the story grows as Springsteen's most vehement of the conflicts between a person who wants to take a dream and make it real and that person's love(\(r\)) who would rather continue living a dream. "Backstreets" tells the same story as "Mary Queen of Arkansas:" a man desperately loves a woman who refuses to accept his attempts to bring her to reality that they might share "mainstreet" dreams together. "Backstreets," however, is far more poignant than the earlier song:

One soft infested summer  
Me and Terry became friends  
Tryin in vain to breathe the fire we were born in  
Catchin rides to the outskirts  
Tyin faith between our teeth  
Sleepin in that old abandoned beachhouse  
Gettin wasted in the heat  
And hiding on the backstreets  
Hiding on the backstreets  
With a love so hard and filled with defeat  
Runnin for our lives at night on them backstreets  

Slow dancin in the dark  
On the beach at Stockton's wing  
Where desperate lovers park  
We sat with the last of the Duke Street Kings  
Huddled in our cars  
Waitin for the \(\sim\)wedding\(\sim\) bells that ring  
In the deep heart of the night  
They set us loose from everything \(\sim\)all responsibility\(\sim\)  
To go running on the backstreets  
Running on the Backstreets
Terry, you swore we'd live forever
Takin' it on them backstreets together

Endless juke joints and Valentino drag
Where famous dancers scraped the tears
Up off the streets dressed down in rags
Running into the darkness
Some hurt bad, some really dying
At night sometimes it seemed
You could hear that whole damn city crying
Blame it on the lies that killed us
Blame it on the truth that ran us down
You can blame it all on me, Terry,
It don't matter to me now
When the breakdown hit at midnight
There was nothin' left to say
But I hated him
And I hated you when you went away . . .

Laying here in the dark
You're like an angel on my chest
Just another tramp of hearts
Crying tears of faithlessness
Remember all the movies, Terry, we'd go to see
Trying to learn how to walk like the heroes
We thought we had to be
And after all this time to find
We're just like all the rest
Stranded in the park
And forced to confess to
Hiding on the Backstreets
Hiding on the Backstreets
Where we swore forever friends
On the Backstreets until the end
Hiding on the backstreets
Hiding on the backstreets . . .

Perhaps the hardest realization to accept for Terry is that "we're just like all the rest:" lovers can live in a hundred make-believe backstreet worlds but, sooner or later, they are called to reality. They dreamed of marriage someday. The heroes he and Terry imitated from the movies were celluloid fictions; to emulate them emphasized their illusory approach to life. He came to realize that they could never be heroes but she breaks away from him convinced that she will never be "stranded in the [Asbury] park/ And forced to confess to/
Hiding on the backstreets." Springsteen emphasizes the necessity to base dreams, loves, and relationships in reality.

"Meeting Across the River" could very well be the continuation of "Incident on 57th Street," with the names changed. The man in the song compulsively gambles against the law. His girlfriend's love hangs in the balance as he goes in search of the "big score" that will allow their escape from the city. He asks his friend, Eddy, to borrow "a few bucks" and to get him a ride across the (Hudson) river to meet a guy who is "the real thing." The guy will help him land "two grand" which is practically sittin' here in my pocket."

He confides to Eddy that his girlfriend, Cherry, is "gonna walk/cause she found I took her radio and hocked it," but risks her love for his obsession. He hopes that "she'll see this time I wasn't just talkin." Springsteen draws a pitiable character caught in the only world he knows.

A character with a more legitimate line of work is obsessed with a different excitement. In "Night" the main character suffers through the work day to drive the streets at night to find an escape from the city—or a love to make it worth remaining there. Springsteen's preoccupation with the mystery and hope of the night is incarnate in this man:

You get up every morning at the sound of the bell
You get to work late and the boss man's givin' you hell
Till you're out on a midnight run
Losin your heart to a beautiful one
And it feels right
As you lock up the house, turn out the light
And step out into the night
And the world's bustin' at its seams
And you're just a prisoner or your dreams
Holdin' on for your life
Cause you work all day
To blow 'em away in the night

The rat-traps filled with soul crusaders
The circuits lined with chromed invaders
And she's so pretty that you're lost in the stars
As you jockey your way through the cars
To sit at the light
As it changes to green, with your faith in your machine
Off you scream into the night
And you're in love with all the wonder it brings
And every muscle in your body sings
As the highway ignites
You work nine to five
And somehow you survive till the night

Hell, all day they're bustin' you up on the outside
But tonight you're gonna break on through to the inside
And it'll be right. It'll be right.
And it will be tonight
And you know she will be waiting there
And you'll find her somehow you swear
Somewhere tonight
You run sad and free
Until all you can see is the night

"Night" is Springsteen's first look at the problems of "victory in confinement." The triumph of attaining a large measure of sought-after freedom while also bowing to the necessities of the work-a-day world almost comes to the character in "Night." Attempts to view compromise as triumph in confinement occur steadily through Darkness on the Edge of Town (the title track, "Racing in the Streets," "Something in the Night," "Prove it all Night") and The River ("Jackson Cage," "Out in the Street," "Point Blank," "Crush on You," "Cadillac Ranch," "Stolen Car," "Ramrod," "Wreck on the Highway"). The degree of victory varies but the ongoing attempts take precedence over ongoing successes. Springsteen's emphasis and care revolves more around the losers than the winners. He determinedly infuses his characters with two attitudes:
1) "pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again;"
and 2) "never say 'die'."

A HOMECOMING TO REALITY: JUNGLELAND

"Jungleland" message concerns a person who is experienced in living his life under the glow of streetlights as well as in the shadow of the music world. "Jungleland" is a monumental fusion of music, the commitments of love, dreams, and city life. Narrated by an omniscient observer, "Jungleland" tells the story of the Magic Rat, who drives into the midst of a Harlem populated by kids who "flash guitars just like switchblades, hustlin' for the record machine." Lonely-hearted-lovers—epitomized by the Magic Rat—risk their hearts in a real "death-waltz between what's flesh and what's fantasy," just as the poets (aspiring songwriters) risk their music futures as they "face off against each other out in the street, down in Jungleland."

The essential difference between them is that the lovers—especially the Magic Rat—are really risking a vital part of themselves and expose themselves to deadly dangers of reality (symbolized by the "local cops, cherry-topped"); whereas, the poets, who "don't write nothin' at all (—they just stand back and let it all be—)," risk nothing that they can't afford to lose (record contracts). The Magic Rat and the barefoot girl take off together down Flamingo Lane pursued by the police; the two end up alone together and, unlike the other lovers in the night—who are turned away by their girls—the Rat breaks the barefoot girl's defenses:
Beneath the city two hearts beat  
Soul engines runnin through a night so tender  
In a bedroom, locked  
In whispers of soft refusal  
and then surrender

Springsteen infuses a cruel twist and, as the song continues, the Rat's fate becomes all-too-evident:

In the tunnels uptown  
The Rat's own dream guns him down  
As shots echo down them hallways in the night

It seems as though the Rat's freedom was surrendered to the girl when she surrendered to him. The Rat, in making the noble offering of his heart, sacrificed all else in his attainment of the girl. Either the policemen caught up with him and shot him dead or the realization of the responsibility entailed by fulfillment of his dream with the girl (love?) dived on him and symbolically shot through him, ending his free gallivanting life. At any rate, the Rat earned the right to die (and escape from Jungleland) for having the courage to place his true heart on the street. Meanwhile, the poets and aspiring musicians see the life and death of the Rat and "try to make an honest stand." Perhaps because they were unwilling to risk the level of sacrifice achieved by the Rat, the poets "wind up wounded, not even dead." They are deprived of the right to die and escape Jungleland because they followed no dream with their true heart.

"Jungleland" marks a turn in Springsteen's view of his own dream: it possesses all of the "total victory" ideals of "Born to Run," but introduces a new slant on the dream that dictates the heaviest price must be paid for complete fulfillment of a dream (the barefoot girl's
surrender and the Rat's subsequent death). From this point onward (through *Darkness on the Edge of Town* and *The River*), Springsteen's exciting and idealistic "total victory or total defeat" concepts will bridge into a new land where the more sober concept of compromise and partial victory will take seed and grow.

"Jungleland" is the final song from *Born to Run* and marks the final time Springsteen will champion the cause of the completely romantic hero. Soon his heroes will begin showing more visible scars (like the man in "Backstreets") of battles fought either against unrelenting reality or obsessive delusions. Innocent dreams return, but they will be altered by a constant awareness of reality and responsibility.
IV. **DARKNESS ON THE EDGE OF TOWN BY CANDLES LIGHT**

**THE FIGHT FOR CONTROL**

An old Quaker saying pledges "to light the candle rather than curse the darkness." It is the same when viewing the transition before us: we will either believe in our ability to make it, believe that our greatness lies always before us, that our potential still is infinite, or we will join the chorus of doom orchestrated by those who are willing to destroy humanity if necessary to protect their investment in yesteryear.

--Tom Hayden

For Bruce Springsteen, fighting into the darkness with every ounce of life in himself means the same as lighting the candle. Especially as evidenced in the title track from *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, he still sees himself alone against the uncertainty of the future--but, for now, he prefers it that way. He believes each person is solely responsible for his or her own future. Well aware of his own strengths and weaknesses, in his development as an artist, Springsteen views the struggle to light the candle and avoid despair as a life-affirming action. The triumph lies not so much in success as in effort. Enveloped in a perpetual self-confirming process, Springsteen seems to champion the Protestant work ethic but stops short of agreeing with Thoreau that the majority of working men lead lives of quiet desperation. The general setting of *Darkness* is bleak; it often directly refers to the desert as a symbol of the stark conflicts between desire and reality. Though the characters who populate *Darkness* are primarily concerned with working (often to the point of seeing little else in life), all but one of the songs ("Factory") includes an essential
manifestation of Springsteen's continuing message (from Greetings' "Does This Bus Stop at 82nd Street"): "Man, the dope is that there's still hope!"

In Darkness, the conflict in and among the characters emerges not as the primal battle between good and evil or right and wrong, but as an even more fundamental conflict between action and inaction, between complacency and rebellion, between indifferent acceptance and indefatigable resistance. Springsteen takes meticulous care to be explicit, in these last two albums, about the action he takes and the actions he will not take: he allows anger, emotion, and resolution to flood through but refuses to consider cynicism or despair. "Cynicism," Springsteen tells Fred Schruers in a Rolling Stone interview, "is what people have adopted as a necessary defense against having tire tracks up and down their front and back every day." Despair has no place in Springsteen's dream.

"KEEP PUSHIN TILL IT'S UNDERSTOOD"

Undying hope for control appears in "Badlands," the first song on Darkness, and continues through the album even as it permeates all of the five albums:

I believe in the love that you gave me
I believe in the hope that can save me
I believe in the faith
and I pray that someday it may raise me
Above these badlands

"Badlands" bursts forth immediately with all the vibrant energy, determination, and realism that mark this as perhaps Springsteen's best album for clarity and statement. Not flinching in the face of
a tough world, the singer continually grabs for the essence of the
working man's dreams. Many critics and admirers agree that he has
found the essence:

Lights out tonight
Trouble in the heartland
Got a head-on collision
Smashin' in my guts, man
I'm caught in a cross-fire
That I don't understand
But there's one thing I know for sure, girl
I don't give a damn for the same old played-out scenes
I don't give a damn for just the in-betweens
Honey, I want the heart I want the soul
I want control right now

With all the explicitness of a poet, Springsteen says he's getting
torn apart inside, but will be relentless in his effort:

Badlands, you gotta live it every day
Let the broken heart stand
As the price you gotta pay
Keep pushin' till it's understood
And these badlands start treatin' us good

The fighter may be knocked down but he will always stand up. As re-
flexed in the major motion picture, Rocky, a spirit pervades much of
working-class America. The spirit is a fighting push for respect in
the face of defeat: the main character in the film didn't have much
of a chance to win against a superior boxer but he entered the ring
determined to complete the match. Springsteen's spirit is no less
fierce as he fights against all the forces that would try to deny men
their deserved respect.

Talk about a dream, try to make it real
You wake up in the night
With a fear so real
You spend your life waitin' for a moment
that just don't come
Well, don't waste your time waiting
The verse above is reminiscent of a character from Henry James' story of "The Beast in the Jungle," in which John Marcher waits and waits for something to happen to him; nothing ever does. After realizing his fate, Marcher throws himself symbolically on a tombstone. If Springsteen had his way, each person would take up the challenge to face life instead of standing on the sidelines a passive, waiting observer. Sideline observers, those who stand by, relegate themselves to monotonous existence, a subtle shade above death. Emotion and passion never crossed John Marcher's heart but a constant flood of love and hurt and happiness cascades through Springsteen's characters to keep them constantly aware of how necessary feelings are to a human being.

"Badlands" is a song from the heart of America, a song from the working-class backbone of this nation so often given credit but never given a voice. It is a song of victory—not for the winners (those who gauge success by material acquisition and don't feel the struggle for control and respect), but a victory for the losers (those with no bankrolls and no controls but with continual struggle):

Workin in the fields  
  till you get your back burned  
Workin neath the wheel  
  till you get your facts learned  
Baby, I got my facts learned real good right now  
(You better listen to me baby)  
Poor man wanna be rich  
Rich man wanna be king  
And a king ain't satisfied till he rules everything  
I wanna go out tonight  
I wanna find out what I got

When he looks to find out what he's got, he finds that he has only faith, hope and love, but prays that that will be enough to raise him
out of the badlands. The singer maintains a deep, strong faith in
a saving Power. He believes that he will be judged, not according
to wealth, but rather, for the degree of struggle, stamina, and fight
he exhibits in the face of adversity. On a larger scale, despite his
allusions to the resurrective powers of faith, hope, and love, Spring-
steen has, by this time, almost dispensed with any notion of finding
a completed heaven in New Jersey, in America, or in the world. That
does not mean he will stop pushing to find or create a Promised Land.

The theme of fighting for dreams even after all strength is stripped
away shoots through "Something in the Night" stronger than most of
Springsteen's songs. In it a man tells of trying to overcome his
fears and come to grips with something in the night: the "something"
offers the contentment and happiness he desires so much. Saying that
"I got stuff runnin round my head/ that I just can't live down," the
man drives all night each night unable to rest until he finds his
dream. He never succeeds but, like those who are beaten back but
never defeated and feel the commitment to find their dreams, he never
quits as long as there is life in him:

When we found the things we loved
They were crushed and dying in the dirt
We tried to pick up the pieces and get away
without getting hurt
But they caught us at the state line
And burned our cars in one last fight
And left us runnin burned and blind
Chasin something in the night

The imagery of the car (dream) and the state line (limitation) run
together in a paradigmatic expression of conflict. The people run-
nning burned and blind are running still, despite their handicaps, yet
unable to rest until their dreams are reconstructed and realized.

AN OVERLAPPING THEME IN DARKNESS AND THE RIVER: THE WORKING LIFE

Most of the songs from Darkness on the Edge of Town ("Badlands," "Adam Raised a Cain," "Racing in the Streets," "The Promised Land," "Factory," "Prove it all Night") and several from The River ("Jackson Cage," "Out in the Street," "The River") speak of the trials of the working man as well as the need to bust free of the onerous confinements of work in a non-destructive way. All of these songs at once carry a message, converted from "New York City Serenade (Wild and Innocent)," dividing the working people into those who "walk tall" and those who "don't walk at all." Only in two songs, "Adam Raised a Cain" and "Factory," do the working men (a father in both cases not walk at all. They are unable to break free or walk away from their responsibilities (wife, family) to challenge the dreams of their youths. They no longer work toward those dreams and yet the dreams burn them from the inside-out causing bitterness and anger. They seek to vent their anger as the rage from unrealized dreams grows to uncontrollable proportions:

Daddy worked his whole life  
for nothin but the pain  
Now he walks these empty rooms  
lookin for somethin to blame  
--"Adam Raised a Cain"

End of the day factory whistle cries  
Men walk through these gates  
with death in their eyes  
And you just better believe, boy  
Somebody's gonna get hurt tonight  
--"Factory"

The maturation of Springsteen's view of the working man's life can best
be seen in a cross-cut of songs from "Night" (Born to Run) through the title track on The River. In "Night," Springsteen asserts that freedom and adventure attainable at night are escapes from a dull, working world. The song leaves the man's character undeveloped, dwelling instead on his obsession with the freedom of the night. He runs headlong into a black uncertainty with nothing but a hope that he will find a person he can be happy and satisfied with. Not knowing why, not knowing his direction he runs and runs.

Darkness speaks of work six separate times, with six separate meanings for the dreams of working people.

1) "Badlands" maintains that (in line with the popular belief that you work to get rich) with richness comes the control that every man desires. The singer does not agree or disagree with the notion he puts forward. He does embrace faith, hope, and love in lieu of the control that he so desperately seeks.

2) On the surface, "Adam Raised a Cain" speaks of the inescapable, inevitable inheritance of sin, from which the necessity for work derives. In the exile from Eden, Adam's sin became all men's sin from which, the Catholic Church says, men are freed in baptism. When people in the song try to fit the son into the same mold as his father, the young man refuses. Standing in the rain while his father stands trapped in (or perhaps blocking) the doorway of the house ("a prisoner of love/ a love in chains") the son undergoes a second baptism and is freed from any duty to inherit his father's life or livelihood. (For a further study of the father-son relationship, see chap-
3) "Racing in the Street" concentrates on the themes of challenge, relationship, despair, and renewal, mentioning work only in passing. Relegated to a position less than essential to the story, work is taken for granted. It serves only as a source of money which makes possible the night life of racing in the streets.

4) The narrator in the "Promised Land" grows angry at the monotony of his two worlds of work and racing. He feels that "working all day in my daddy's garage" and "driving all night chasing some mirage" are only temporary and that he will some day "take charge." Perhaps because work means a continual confinement and driving means a temporary freedom to him, he rages against work in favor of pursuing the freedom element in driving:

I've done my best to live the right way
I get up each morning and go to work each day
But your eyes go blind and your blood runs cold
Sometimes I feel so weak I just wanna explode
Explode and tear this whole town apart
Take a knife and cut this pain from my heart

His rage leads him to quit his job, pack his bags, and head into a symbolic storm, similar to the hurricane in "Lost in the Flood:"

Gonna be a twister to blow everything down
That ain't got the faith to stand its ground
Blow away the dreams that tear you apart
Blow away the dreams that break your heart
Blow away the lies that leave you nothing
but lost and brokenhearted

Life would be far easier if such unpleasantries could be eliminated in a single decisive onslaught. Springsteen intimates that, for some people, life does come down to a single challenge in which a person
stands or falls, lives or dies.

5) "Factory" depicts the endless monotony of the assembly worker. With no commentary and only stark imagery, Springsteen sketches a dismal vignette of unrelenting reality. Day by day by unvarying day, "it's the working, the working, just the working life."

6) Springsteen's "greaser" background really shines through "Prove it All Night." Like an insecure adolescent challenging everything from parents to the new kid in town to prove how tough he is, Springsteen relishes the constant oppositions to his dreams, as illustrated in the male character in "Prove it All Night." He calls to a girl and tries to lure her with the promise of dreams and dresses and a ring—but, more importantly, he lures her to accept his desire to challenge life. Believing that to "prove it all night" will make her tough enough to face anything life can throw at her, he does not want to let her have anything easy or free. What he wants most is for her to feel the same sense of triumph he experiences as he discovers what it means "to steal, to cheat, to lie/ what it's like to live and die." He hopes the challenging will make them grow strong together. As in "The Promised Land," he presses ever forward, taking life on its own terms and standing up to it. Work is simply one of the things to be stood up to without losing spirit.

Four songs in The River portray elements continuing the working theme. To keep the "working" theme coherent, they are here presented back-to-back with the treatments from Darkness. The characters of the four songs tally one ongoing victory, two haunting defeats, and one
indecisive questioning.

The indecisive questioning occurs in "Jackson Cage," as a man observes a woman pacing through her life, day by day by day:

Baby, there's nights when I dream
of a better world
But I wake up so downhearted girl
I wonder what it's worth to me or you
Just waiting to see some sun
Never knowing if that day will ever come

He wonders if it is really possible to realize dreams or if all the hoping and struggling is just wasted motion. He questions his own strength to continue the fight for a better world, and he questions her strength:

And it don't matter just what you say
Are you tough enough to play the games they play
Or will you just do your time and fade away
Down into the Jackson Cage?

The ongoing victory occurs in "Out in the Street." Springsteen comes full-circle from "It's Hard to be a Saint in the City," where he was a solitary kid revelling in the command he holds over his street-home. Now, in "Out in the Street," the kid has grown up and has a steady job, a steady girlfriend, and yet found that his control of his street world has not diminished:

But there ain't no doubt, girl, down here
We ain't gonna take what they're handin out
When I'm out in the street
I walk the way I wanna walk
When I'm out in the street
I talk the way I wanna talk

The haunting defeats are "The River" and "Point Blank," in which dreams are lost, opportunities disappear, and recurring dreams serve only to haunt and torture those unable to make them true. The river,
a universal symbol of life, takes on a related significance: it becomes the life-source for dreams. When the river dries up, dreams evaporated too. "The River" becomes a desolate, lifeless gulley and it seems that hopes, too, disappear with the water and the job opportunities. With all the bleakness of "Factory," "The River" conjures images of futility and meaninglessness:

Now all them things that seemed so important
Well, mister, they vanished right into the air
Now I just act like I don't remember
Mary acts like she don't care
But I remember us driving in my brother's car
Her body tan and wet down at the reservoir
At night on them banks I'd lie awake
And hold her close just to feel each breath she'd take
Now those memories come back to haunt me
They haunt me like a curse
Is a dream a lie if it don't come true
Or is it something worse
That sends me down to the river
Though I know the river is dry . . .

"The River" is the inside view of a person who has lost sight of dreams and lost all hope and willingness to fight for them.

"Point Blank" asks the same question that dominates Darkness and The River: are you tough enough to fight for your dreams? Unlike the preceding song, "Point Blank" only has one casualty (the girl)--but the man is left heavily wounded (as in "Backstreets"). The song relates the story of a man's love for a woman who is no longer able to fight the forces that prohibit the realization of her dreams. He believes that they might still be together if she were able to stop believing the lies that mislead her:

Do you still say your prayers, little darlin?
Do you still go to bed at night
Prayin' that tomorrow everything will be alright?
But tomorrows fall in number
In number one by one
You wake up and you're dyin
You don't even know what from
Well, they shot you point blank
You been shot in the back
Baby, point blank, you been fooled this time
Little girl, that's a fact
Right between the eyes, baby, point blank
Right between the pretty lies that they tell
Little girl, you fell

"Point Blank" is a unidirectional song: there are no changes of heart by the man or the woman. The singer asks, "did you forget how to to love?/ girl, did you forget how to fight?" but already knows the answer: he no longer attempts to revive her for he realizes that her dreams are dead.

THE VALUE OF MISTAKES: LEARNING THE HARD WAY

Returning to Darkness on the Edge of Town to determine an alternative to acceptance of work and family at the cost of dreams, an examination of two songs with successive themes (that point out a direction for similar conflicts in the final album) will bring additional insights to Springsteen's view of the ongoing conflicts between dreams and work.

The two songs are "Darkness on the Edge of Town" and "Streets of Fire."

Through "Darkness on the Edge of Town," Springsteen tells of a man absolutely obsessed with finding his dream no matter what the cost:

Some folks are born into a good life
Other folks get it any way, any how
I lost my money and I lost my wife
Them things don't seem to matter much to me now
Tonight I'll be on that hill
Cause I can't stop
I'll be on that hill with everything I got
Where lives on the line
Where dreams are found and lost
I'll be there on time and I'll pay the cost
For wanting things that can only be found
In the darkness on the edge of town

Springsteen, here, seems to indicate that there is a force in some men's dreams that is stronger than law (a broken marriage) and reason (sacrifice of security (money and wife) for an uncertain, undefined, and very costly dream). The darkness on the edge of town becomes synonymous with an extremely attractive force that is both life and death—and savagely paradoxical. This is the song of a man torn in two. Contrary to the external impression made by his apparent lack of care for a wife, the singer loves her deeply, but acceptance of the settled life she represents will tear him away from possibilities, opportunities, and dreams attainable only by a single person. And yet, his wife is a major dream come true; to reject her would be to rip an equally large part of his life from his heart. Here, in the title track of *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, the singer makes the mistake of leaving his wife. There is a progressive maturation process of dreams occurring through the five albums; in the next album, the final stage will be reached but this same decision will not be reached. One reason may be what happens to men like the one in "Darkness on the Edge of Town" after they make the decision to abandon wives and dreams that mean so much to them. One such conjectured result is explored in "Streets of Fire."

"Streets of Fire" presents a character who has sacrificed everything to chase a dream, a voice that calls his name in the darkness. At the point when he sings this song, he has yet to catch the dream...
he left his home to find. Constantly denied any dream (after
forfeiting a dream he already possessed) this man pushes ever onward,
trapped in his nomadic, solitary travel:

I'm wandering, a loser down these tracks
I'm dying, but girl I can't go back
Cause in the darkness I hear somebody call me name

I live now only with strangers
I talk to only strangers
I walk with angels that have no place

The streets of fire indicated in the title become alive with all of
the meanings that "fire" conjures up: the streets are alluring,
arming (with ragged remnants of hope), lighting (illuminating pre-
dicaments more than directions), and destructively dangerous (he
cannot walk on fire without being burned). Just as fire consumes,
the man in the song risks a fiery death. The paradox is that the man
hopes to attain the secrets of the darkness but travels on streets
of fire. If this man is the same one who left his wife, he is
learning a painful lesson about discarding love; however, there is
no indication of his intended direction: it is uncertain whether he
will go to her or further into the darkness.

CENTRAL THEMES

Darkness on the Edge of Town explores the obscure, shadowed por-
tion of the working man's dreams in songs meshing desperation and ec-
stasy, defeated men and resurgent hopes. As a continuation of Spring-
steen's ongoing perspectives of an American Dream, it traces some themes
from Born to Run and earlier albums, ending some (about total victory)
while beginning others (about partial victory). It creates conflicts
and paradoxes between ideals and actualities which, if not resolved here, carry into the final album, The River. Darkness on the Edge of Town is, by far, the most concentrated of the trilogy albums. Its single-minded exploration of working Americans and their lives and dreams is musically, lyrically, socially, and personally innovative and revelatory. The fight for dreams that presents itself in so many characters is evident in Springsteen himself as he continually seeks to define the conflicts that prevent men from realizing their desires. His fight sparks a light that begins to illumine the reasons why Americans of the 20th century are increasingly disillusioned by America's promise of greatness and infinite possibility that seem to grow ever distant, ever nebulous as the world grows ever more complex.
V. THE RIVER: FINDING WAYS TO EASE LIFE'S CHAINS

We cannot hope to escape the great law of compensation which exacts some loss for every gain. Let us not imagine ourselves in a fool's paradise where the golden apples will drop into our mouths; let us not think that after the stormy seas and head gales of all the ages our ship has at last struck the trade winds of time.

--Robert Louis Stevenson

Bruce Springsteen's perspective of the American Dream heads into the final chapter. In Greetings From Asbury Park and The Wild, The Innocent and the E Street Shuffle, he presents adventuresome, youthful characters in city backgrounds in a rough, verbose, often cryptic style. The cryptic quality of his lyrics is refined gradually through Born to Run and Darkness on the Edge of Town to become more concise in presenting finely-crafted images and lives of reactive characters in broadly understandable language. In The River, Springsteen achieves his highest degree of both articulation and maturity. Characters, allusions, and ironies so difficult to understand in previous albums now flow more smoothly. The desolation of the title track (see chapter IV) does not triumph but instead, fades in significance as the realization is reached that the river of life will always flow; this American dream continues to make people realize that the hardest thing to face is not death, it is life. The challenge to gain control of dreams against the odds of the world continues to be the motivating theme.

In The River Springsteen finally defines a solution to the ongoing conflicts between "what's flesh and what's fantasy," between dream and reality. Like the romantic holdout he is, Springsteen
finally, and perhaps reluctantly, breathes the word "Compromise" in an emotionally diplomatic manner. Judge not too hastily: Springsteen quickly qualifies the compromise. It is not surrender. In "Point Blank" he emphasizes the need for continuing the fight for dreams. In "I Wanna Marry You," "The River," and "Two Hearts," he emphasizes that the dreams must mature with the times and be constantly revised and updated. In "Stolen Car" he emphasizes that dreams must be a personal possession and can only be Stolen at the risk of losing all self-identification and self-respect. In "Wreck on the Highway" he emphasizes that all dreams have the potential to be deadly.

All-in-all, The River emphasizes acquisition of dreams through the possession of objectivity in outlook and maturity in action. Alternatives are disunion, unhappiness, and death (not necessarily physical, but more often emotional). Stevenson's great law of compensation indicates that Rousseau's chains are a reality and Springsteen's great law of perduration indicates that those chains can be made light and bearable.

STRUGGLING WITH COMMUNION, REJECTING DISUNION

Springsteen consistently and observably believes that people cannot escape the influence of their environments. The working class men and women of the songs submit to, or react against, their worlds. But they can never completely escape. The first song on The River attempts to explain to a heart-broken girl why she must try to love again. "The Ties That Bind" advocates communion rather than disunion:

You been hurt and you're all cried-out you say
You walk down the street pushin people outta your way
Your bags are packed and all alone you wanna ride
You don't want nothin' don't want no one by your side
You're walkin' tough, baby, but you're walkin' blind
To the ties that bind

The ties are symbolized by recountings of cheap-romance-gone-sour and
the entire United States' highway system, through which Springsteen
universalizes his belief that all people are tied together. The re-
sounding line from "Backstreets" echoes through The River: "and after
all this time to find we're just like all the rest." But here, in "The
Ties That Bind," the message is held up in a stark and lean version
for all people to see and recognize. Springsteen sees that people have
forgotten the message stamped on our currency: "e pluribus unum."
Recognition of the inescapable ties that hold men and women, states and
nations together automatically implicates all of those who are a part
of the human family with the responsibility of its progression and
perpetuation. The only way to realize complete individual dreams is
to work toward universal dreams. We really are all in this together.
But Springsteen is quick to point out that the challenge to put the
world closer to a realized dream falls on mature and responsible shoul-
ders; he himself is not ready to take up the fight yet:

We're runnin' now
But, darlin', we will stand in time
To face the ties that bind

Of course, the irony is that through his music he has become a popular
spokesman advocating a mature acceptance of responsibility.

On a more personal level, Springsteen addresses the ties that
bind two hearts together. In "Two Hearts" and "I Wanna Marry You,"
he speaks of accepting the responsibilities of a communion of hearts
and dreams. He equates the macrocosmic communion of human responsibility in "The Ties That Bind" with a microcosmic communion of two hearts (in these two songs) to explore more realistically the reciprocating demands and benefits of both. "Two Hearts" and "I Wanna Marry You" create a face-off between self-seeking goals versus united goals; clearly, a compromise is necessary:

Now, honey, I don't want to clip your wings
But a time comes when two people should think of these things
Having a home and a family
Facing up to their responsibilities
They say that in the end true love prevails
But in the end true love can't be no fairytale
To say I'll make your dream come true would be wrong
But maybe, darlin', I could help them along

"I Wanna Marry You"

In "Two Hearts" Springsteen admonishes a man with similar advice, that to work toward a union should ever be his foremost goal:

Sometimes it might seem like it was planned
For you to roam empty-hearted through this land
Though the world turns you hard and cold
There's one thing, mister, that I know
That's if you think your heart is stone
And that you're rough enough to whip this world alone
Alone, buddy, there ain't no peace of mind
And that's why I keep searching 'til I find
My special one
Cause two hearts are better than one

"Two Hearts"

The face-off is resolved when acceptance of another human being occurs. The compromise of two selves (dreams) so that a single self (dream) -- or, in a sense, a third person (dream) -- results is the goal of these first two songs. They develop from Born to Run and Darkness insofar as they champion a compromise. Here, the ability to compromise between a self-centered dream and another person's self-centered dream repre-
sents a growing confidence in self and a maturity of outlook.

REFUSING INHERITED DREAMS AND THEIR LIMITATIONS

Continuing from "Adam Raised a Cain," The River moves toward a clean separation of paternal and filial dreams in "Independence Day." Both songs are a united testimonial of a son's undying love for his father, but, at the same time, they form a resolute decision to reject emulation in favor of self-defining assertiveness. In them, the narrators must follow their own living dreams and not be tied to their fathers' unrealized dreams.

In "Adam Raised a Cain" the son powerfully relates his father's bottled-up dreams. With swelling passion, the son views the horrible hurt building within his father. The young man commits himself to reject any part of the suppressed dreams of his father—even to the point of alienating himself—as he recounts his own upbringing:

In the summer that I was baptized
My father held me to his side
As they put me into the water
He said how on that day I cried
We were prisoners of love, a love in chains
He was standin in the door
I was standin in the rain
With the same hot blood burnin' in our veins
Adam raised a Cain. Adam raised a Cain.

All of the old faces
Ask you why you're back
They fit you with position
and the keys to your daddy's Cadillac

In the Bible Cain slew Abel
And East of Eden he was cast
You're born into this life payin
For the sins of somebody else's past
Daddy worked his whole life
For nothin but the pain
Now he walks these empty rooms lookin
For someone to blame
You inherit the sins, you inherit the flames
Adam raised a Cain. Adam raise a Cain.

The emphasis falls on the son's realization that the same hot blood
burned in both their veins. With all the dreams, potential, and
vigor or youth, he is a new picture of his old father. As Spring-
steen recalled on seeing a picture of his father just returned from
World War II, ready to start a new life and family:

He looked just like John Garfield, in this great suit
he looked like he was gonna eat the photographer's head
off. And I couldn't remember him looking that proud, or
that defiant, when I was growing up. I used to wonder
what happened to all that pride, how it turned into so
much bitterness. He'd been so disappointed, had so much
stuff beaten out of him that he couldn't accept the idea
that I had a dream and I had possibilities.

Both Springsteen's father and the father in the song overflow with
an innate desire to break free of chains that restrict their indi-
vidual dreams. A father's preventive chains might include his wife,
his family, his work, payments and bills, in short, any binding respon-
sibility. A son is unencumbered by and of those responsibilities and
is determined to remain so.

"Independence Day" reaffirms the son's resolve to forge his
future world apart from the inherited world of his father:

Well, papa go to bed now, it's getting late
Nothin we can say is gonna change anything now
I'll be leavin in the mornin from St. Mary's Gate
We wouldn't change this thing
even if we could somehow
Cause the darkness of this house
has got the best of us
There's a darkness in this town
that's got us too
But they can't touch me now
And you can't touch me now
They ain't gonna do to me what I watched em do to you
The darkness in the town and in the house represents the chased but unrealized dreams of both men. Seeing that his life is just beginning, the son opts for freedom from the threat of becoming like his father, whose decisions were made long ago and haunt him continually. The story might be quite different in an upper middle class home, but here, the son watches as a nebulous "they" crush his father's spirit and wants no part of that. He watches as his father fades into bitterness and the living death of bland existence.

The son observes that the highway is deserted on the way out of town: that no cars are on the road suggests that no dreams live in town anymore—and certainly none are leaving. In fact, he also notes that all the people leaving town are not driving but walking the dark and dusty highway all alone. Each person walking has realized that if no dreams come true in town, they will have to leave it to escape the fate of a living death, a life with no dreams, no opportunities, no future.

The song concludes in a verse of empathetic understanding. Perhaps it even offers an apologetic, unwarranted, cry for forgiveness:

So say goodbye it's Independence Day
Papa, now I know the things you wanted
That you could not say
But won't you just say goodbye
It's Independence Day
I swear I never meant to take those things away

"Independence Day," a heartfelt call from son to father, is rife with love. With none of the hardness of working class men, "Independence Day" speaks tenderly, but firmly, saying,
I don't know what it always was with us  
We chose the words, and yeah, we drew the lines  
There was just no way this house  
could hold the two of us  
I guess that we were just  
too much of the same kind

whether because they were "just too much of the same kind" or because they had "the same hot blood" burning in their veins, the father and son are not compatible. The father represents all that is old, sedentary, expended, hopeless, and dreamless. The son represents the vitality of the waking American Dream: he leaves limitation behind and heads out to take the bull by the horns. He will wrestle until his strength and life are gone or until he has won control of his world. DREAMS AND REALITY SINGLY-WOVEN: THE USE OF CARS IN THE RIVER

In over half the songs on The River Springsteen uses the image of the car. In these songs in particular, he uses the automobile to make a specific point concerning the connection between reality and dream. With the car often being mistaken for a dream in and of itself, Springsteen quickly points out that it merely provides a good way to get to dreams; cars are dream machines.

In "Drive All Night" the singer uses a car to get back to a love he lost. She may very well be the wife he left behind in "Darkness on the Edge of Town" or in "Hungry Heart." Here, the man calls her, telling her that he lost a major part of himself when he lost her. Realizing his mistake, he begs to have her back in his arms, going so far as to pledge that he will drive all night through wind, rain, or snow. When he is back with her, he tells her of the strength of the temptations that tore him away. He tells also of his reformation and
insures her that he will never leave again:

There's machines and there's fire
Waitin on the edge of town
They're out there for hire
But, baby, they can't hurt us now
Cause you've got my love . . .

Tonight there's fallen angels
And they're waitin for us down in the street
Tonight there's callin strangers
Hear them cryin in defeat
Let them go, let them go, let them go
Do their dances of the dead (let em go right ahead)

He says over and over that he will stay with her. He alludes to the same angels and strangers who befriended the homeless man in "Streets of Fire." If this is the same man who left home in "Darkness on the Edge of Town," he has come a long way. This man asks God to give him something he is afraid to lose, sure that he is now ready to accept the responsibility. For too long he has fixed his eyes on a dream that grew more cloudy and distant with every passing day, passing or casting off anything he considered a hindrance to the dream. Here, this man decides that running every highway in the nation and cruising in all the fastest cars wouldn't be as good as lying in her arms.

Through "Wreck on the Highway" Springsteen witnesses a sobering car wreck:

Last Night I was out driving
Coming home at the end of a working day
I was riding along in the drizzling rain
On a deserted stretch of a county two-lane
When I came upon a wreck on the highway
Now there was blood and glass all over
And there was nobody there but me
As the rain tumbled down hard and cold
I seen a young man lyin by the side of the road
Cryin, "Mister, won't you help me please."

An ambulance finally came and took him to Riverside
I watched as they drove him away
And I thought of a girlfriend or a young wife
And a state trooper knockin in the middle of the night
To say, "Your baby died in a wreck on the highway."

Sometimes I sit up in the darkness
And watch my baby as she sleeps
Then I climb in bed and I hold her tight
I just lay there awake in the middle of the night
Thinkin bout the wreck on the highway

The emphasis falls on the final two stanzas as the man holds tight
to the woman he loves and thinks, "that could have been me." On a dif-
erent level, he becomes a witness to a dream-turned-sour: the car
that symbolizes a way to achieve dreams kills a young man. This speaks
loudly as a warning that, just as accidents happen, so, too, are dreams
subject to indifferent circumstances.

"Stolen Car" tells the story of a man attempting to realize a
dream not his own. The singer tells of a crushing, crumbling dream:

I met a little girl and I settled down
In a little house on the edge of town
We got married and swore we'd never part
Then, little by little, we drifted from each other's heart

At first, I thought it was just restlessness
That would fade as time went by
and our love grew deep
In the end it was something more I guess
That tore us apart and made us weep

Unable to remedy the destruction of the dream that is his marriage,
the man symbolically steals a car (a dream not his own). He drives
down Elridge Avenue and waits to get caught but he never does. The
message emerges that this problem is his own to face. He fears that
he will disappear: either he will be the next wreck on the highway
or he will lose total sight of the dream he had with his wife.

Throughout Springsteen's songs, when a character drives a car
not his own he is not living his own dream (if, in fact he has one). If he borrows a car (the man in "The River" borrows his brother's car) or steals one (the man in "Stolen Car") there is something wrong. The more a character takes care of his car the stronger the character will become (the man in "Racing in the Streets" has the best and fastest car, and his strength is enough to help himself and others). The strongest of Springsteen's characters have both a car and a girl.

NAMING THE CONFLICTS TO DESIRE AND PAYING THE PRICE

In forming his own version of the American Dream, Springsteen comes to many realizations about the limitations placed on him. Eager to break free of the restrictions of his world that he might more fully experiences freedom (most of Born to Run), Springsteen discovers he is unable to do so in Darkness and The River. The ties that bind him to his past are defined in as manyexpressions as there are songs. Put together in a single word, all the ties from all five albums are a Price. They are chains, limitations, and concessions, of one sort or other, that must be made in order to have a desired dream. The compromise made to pay the bill to a character's world must be taken from the substance of his dream. Many characters are crushed and killed by the hurting price they must pay. In Springsteen's world there is no deficit spending: those who cannot pay, die (not a physical death, but a living death without dreams). The cynical and bitter characters are the ones who have paid out all the dreams they have and, unwilling to dream new dreams, live without them.

Springsteen reminds, in "The Price You Pay," that spent dreams
can be renewed by continuous struggle. The struggle to resurrect, resuscitate, or maintain dreams is the primary struggle through each album, the life-affirming struggle so necessary to each human being. The belief that something better lies ahead must infuse men with a desire to pay the price and never back down from a challenge. Springsteen's characters hate to pay the price but realize that there is no other way for a working class man to achieve dreams in this world.

In "The Price You Pay" Springsteen speaks to the peregrine people who wander endlessly searching for a dream to come at them complete and ideal. He speaks to the characters of his first four albums and says that if the dream is desired very much, a person must stand and fight for it; one will not fall out of the sky and hit a person on the head. No dream is really free; a person must work for it and pay for it. The only dreams worth having are those for which one must stand and fight:

You make up your minde, you choose the chance you take
You ride out to where the highway ends
   and the desert breaks
Out on to an open road you ride until the day
You learn to sleep at night with the Price you pay

Now with their hands held high
They reached out for the open sky
And in one last breath
They built the roads they'd ride to their deaths
Driving on through the night
Unable to break away
From the restless pull of the price you pay

... Now they've come so far and they've waited so long
Just to end up caught in a dream
Where everything goes wrong
Where the dark of the night
Holds back the light of the day
And you've gotta stand and fight
For the price you pay

The narrator thinks that everyone who rides the roads will eventually come to the realization that, for them, night is holding back day. Night, still symbolic of the endless land where possibilities and dreams are waiting to be grabbed, does not yield to the light of the day, which is symbolic of the land where work is undertaken to make the dreams already chosen a reality. The narrator points out that there is a cut-off point; though the dreams go on from generation to generation ad infinitum, each generation has to settle on some dreams they will commit themselves to work to build and leave the rest of the dreams for others. A person cannot eternally wander the roads everywhere and really accomplish anything lasting anywhere. Wandering is for the young and irresponsible, but people must grow up and mature:

So let the games start
You better run you little wild heart
You can run through all the nights and all the days
But just across the county line
A stranger passin through put up a sign
That counts the men fallen away to the price you pay
And, girl, before the end of the day
I'm gonna tear it down and throw it away

The sign that counts men who have not realized their dreams may be torn down by the narrator before his day (life) is done, but such defeats will inevitably continue. The "county line" serves as a demarkation line between those out on the highway and those settled in the town. His reason for tearing down the sign is to remove any deterrent to people who want to come into the day (town) from the night (road) and set themselves to working on a dream. On a larger scale, he wants to help hesitant people to accept the responsibilities
of life; responsibilities that will enable all struggling people to come a step closer to realizing their own American Dreams. He can't guarantee success, but he offers his insight that acceptance of responsibilities makes far more lasting dreams than irresponsible rejection ever will.

MASTER THE RIVER HE WHO IS ABLE

As if addressing all of the young Americans who have so many dreams and so much potential to change this world, Springsteen says go ahead and try. If a person believes in a dream and is determined enough to work for it, he can make the dream come true. The River never runs dry for those mature and strong enough to understand and accept compromise for the sake of unselfish dreams.

Two predominant maturation processes have occurred in the triology: the first is a realization that solitary and selfish dreams have little chance of coming true in a social context. Dreams of communion (primarily man-woman—which immediately implies man-society) have no guarantee of success but have a far better chance of actualization ("two hearts are better than one"). The second maturation process that occurs is a realization that the necessary price paid in compromising a solitary dream for a dream of union is an excellent investment.

Springsteen does not imagine that he has escaped the great law of compensation. He relishes the challenge of life and reinforces his resilient spirit with every effort. Though his characters emerge less than victorious, the majority of them emerge increasingly aware of the need to keep trying. As the narrator observes in "Racing in the Street":
Some guys they just give up livin
And start dyin little by little, piece by piece
Some guys come home from work and wash up
And go racing in the streets

Some men will always fight to achieve their desires despite any con-
flicts and some men will never even try.
VI. CONCLUSION

"It's a complex fate, being an American. . . ."

--Henry James

The American Dream embodies a quest as diverse as the American nation. Our land is a magnificent mixture of two hundred and fifty million people's different dreams--dreams of farmers and fishermen, policemen and politicians, teachers and steelworkers, dreams of the Irish and Indian, Austrians and Australians, Germans and Italians, English and Hispanic, dreams of high school students and high school drop-outs, housewives and working mothers, businessmen and unemployed fathers, divorced spouses and orphaned children, dreams of generations of Americans who heard--and still listen to--a call to accept no less than freedom from domination, whether international or intranational, freedom from limitation, whether interpersonal or intrapersonal.

Springsteen's works carry an expression of changes, hopes, and possibilities that are quick becoming the dream of America's newest generation. Not quite the herald of an age, Springsteen carries on the fight to gain respect and a self-determined future for America's working class that popularly began in John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* with the struggles of men like Tom Joad. It is a fight of the common, working man who once dreamed of the fullness of freedom everytime he heard the word "America," but has now settled for something less. Living in America and meeting with nothing but hardships, hypocrisy, and hierarchical prejudice, the Springsteen man will no longer accept America's walls. "Only in America" everyman has a shot at the top. Trading-in
dream wings for real wheels, this man resolves to play by the rules of society but states clearly he will abide by them only as long as he is afforded a deserved and reciprocal respect.

Springsteen redefines the American Dream for the working man. No longer speaking of material or financial acquisition, the dream speaks of more fundamental assertions of human dignity. Spoken by one of Springsteen's characters, the dream might be, "I will reach for everything I can realistically attain through work and determination; no one will deny me my right to dream nor my right to make my dreams real."

Each of Springsteen's albums provide a battleground for divergent dreams on convergent courses. Until The River, the essential control to master or accept limitations has Springsteen's characters in a quandary. There, with total control foregone, the dream emerges as a maturing compromise between the I-stand-alone versus the community concepts of Springsteen's characters. No longer espousing any pretensions of being "rough enough to whip this world alone," Springsteen says time and time again that no one can escape the ties that bind. Where he once viewed any compromise as a complete sell-out to the very forces he committed himself to defeat, Springsteen now works toward a positive acceptance of responsibility.

Bruce Springsteen comes to a realization that the innate yearning for complete control and freedom from domination by any internal or external force is but an early stage in the development of an innate desire for relationships. The realization, in "Jungleland" and "Darkness
on the Edge of Town," that no one can simultaneously achieve both
total personal freedom and total interpersonal relationships shattered
Springsteen's passionately romantic notions of total victory. The irony
is savage indeed, but where "Darkness" and "Jungleland" could not offer
resolutions to the conflict of absolutes (self versus communion), se-
quel songs in The River name and explore solutions to the problem.

All Springsteen's works show the conflict of man as a singular
self-hood determined totally by inner factors (e.g. parents, religion,
girlfriends, societal situation, economic environment), versus man as a
multiply-related social creature bounded and perpetually influenced by
external factors (e.g. parents, religion, girlfriends, music, societal
situation, economic environment) of which he becomes a mere processing
unit. Springsteen realizes that the best way to live is to fully inte-
grate the two sides of himself. He wants nothing more than to be a real
contributing member of his world and, at the same time, demands that
the world accept him as a singular individual with dreams of his own.
Through responsibility, he respects and calls for respect.

Springsteen's observable progress, over the five albums, lies
within his increasing degree of articulation in expanding exactly what
he is and what he wants to become. Clearly, his dream never varies
throughout the albums (he consistently wants everything) but his reali-
zations of the possibilities for fulfillment to vary.

In the first three albums the realization that he can't have
everything leads, first, to attempted escape from limitations (Born to
Run), second, to a fight with limitations (Darkness on the Edge of Town),
to, third, a definition and acceptance of the limitations (The River).
The themes plainly overlap with the trilogy albums. By The River, Springsteen decides the best way to triumph over the limitations of life is to play within the guidelines of society. Coming from a person who formerly championed rebellion as the way to respect and self-definition, this evolves as a sobering surprise.

Rebel Without a Cause, perhaps one of the most popular and influential 1950's movie about rebellion among young Americans, drove toward conclusions similar to Springsteen's. James Dean starred as the tough kid, "Jimmy," whose desire to gain enough control to attain respect formed the main plot line. The conflict arose when Jimmy was constantly faced by the challenge to prove himself a man by persons who refused to show him any respect. Unable to model himself after a less-than-assertive father, Jimmy turned to violence to reinforce his worth in his own doubting mind. Eventually trapped by his short-sighted actions, his conflicts are resolved by open communication and union with the same forces he once hated and fought so much. While other characters die in the semi-reality of a "me-against-the-world" attitude, Jimmy matures to an acceptance of compromise in return for respect.

In much the same way, Springsteen advocates a communion with—rather than rejection of—others. Those who refuse compromise die. Compromise does not mean surrender. Surrender means death to individuality; a slow death of life without hopes and dreams; an existence in which control has been foolishly relinquished; a monotony of empty, hollow actions; an ignominious death without fighting.

Springsteen struggles with limitations men have endured and fought
for centuries. It is a fight between the man with desires to freely control all aspects of his life and the man caught in a social predicament demanding continuous responsible community action. The fight goes on and will never end as long as resilient human spirits are denied the opportunity to act independently responsible. Impositions and limitations invariably cause resentment and rebellion.

Springsteen's quest is an inherited challenge from time in memoriam. He arrives at conclusions probably reached hundreds of times for thousands of years—and doubtlessly to be reached a thousand years hence. American Dreams, human dreams, for people and for nations, paradoxically exist both independently and jointly and must be approached with complete communication and universal responsibility in order that they both be lasting. By the time he writes The River, Springsteen knows no person's dream exists independently of other people. Springsteen's American Dream matures from rejection of all limitations for the sake of solitary dreams to acceptance of limiting responsibilities in return for achievement of dreams of communion. Strength from union, Springsteen brings the key to real success in finding dreams down to a single, simple formula that he has found once:

...and you'll find once again
Two hearts are better than one
Two hearts, girl, get the job done
Two hearts are better than one
END NOTES


6 Roth, pp 54-79.

7 Roth, p 82.

8 Roth, p 97.

9 Roth, p 85.

10 Roth, p 189.

11 Rousseau, p 2.


13 Marsh, p 66.

14 Roth, p 160.


18 Schruers, p 23.

19 Schruers, p 21.

20 Roth, p xlii.
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