

**ZÁPADOČESKÁ UNIVERZITA V PLZNI**

**FAKULTA PEDAGOGICKÁ  
KATEDRA ANGLICKÉHO JAZYKA**

**ODKAZ AMERICKÉ TRADIČNÍ HUDBY V PÍSNÍCH  
BRUCE SPRINGSTEENA  
BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE**

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**AMERICAN ROOTS MUSIC LEGACY IN THE SONGS  
OF BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN  
UNDERGRADUATE THESIS**

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**Plzeň 2014**

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracoval samostatně s použitím uvedené literatury a zdrojů informací.

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vlastnoruční podpis

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis deals with Bruce Springsteen's use of American roots music. It shows how exactly he fits in the framework of this tradition, and what are the main connections. Springsteen's life is briefly outlined prior to the release of his break-through album *Born to Run* to provide a personal context.

This thesis is divided into two chapters. The first one is concerned with the mentioned biography. The second one is further divided into two subchapters that shortly discuss what exactly the term "American roots music" means, and then there are analysis of the two selected trilogies. The first trilogy is his formative one where he had explored the distance between American Dream and reality. The second one is his more politically charged where he has started addressing social injustice. Also, a brief historical context is provided for the politically charged trilogy.

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## Introduction

If one were to ask any New Jersey citizen who is the most famous person from the state, number one answer would undoubtedly be Bruce Springsteen. His fame has spread beyond the borders a long time ago for Springsteen is a representative of what it is to be a self-made man and the American Dream. The concept of self-made man is present throughout American culture. John Frost (1848) wrote “self-made man means one who has rendered himself accomplished, eminent, rich, or great by his own unaided efforts”. Abraham Lincoln, Henry Ford, or even Walt Disney, they all were self-made men. Ford’s father wanted him to become a farmer. Disney’s father was without a work, and their relationship was not the happiest one. Lincoln was famously born to a one room cabin with only three walls, and he became president (McKay, B., & McKay, K, 2008). Then there is Springsteen – a man who came from a family haunted by mental illnesses probably never seemed “bound for glory”, yet glory is what he has achieved. His great success truly started after releasing the 1973 *Born to Run* album and was even strengthened later with the 1984 *Born in the U.S.A.*, which is considered to be one of the best rock albums in rock history. *Rolling Stone*, the renowned music magazine, placed the first one on 18<sup>th</sup> and the second one on 86<sup>th</sup> position in their “500 Greatest Albums of All Time” (“500 Greatest Albums of All Time,” 2009). Their other list, “100 Greatest Artists”, featured Springsteen on the 23<sup>rd</sup> position (“100 Greatest Artists,” 2011).

Springsteen’s fans The Tramps as they call themselves (following the lyrics of *Born to Run*: “Tramps like us, baby, we were born to run”) would disagree with the Rolling Stone placements for they would put the albums on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> place. Whether they are right or not is a matter of subjective discussions all over the Internet. The fact is that Springsteen, according to Billboard.com (n.d.), an American music magazine; with 403 shows (and 248 sell-outs) in the last ten years, was the fourth top touring artists of the decade. To put some more numbers in the context – the total gross was over 688 million dollars, but more importantly, more than 8 million people attended his shows. Thanks to that, Springsteen was more successful than Bon Jovi or Madonna. The list continues – Springsteen has had eleven number one hit albums in the US. The last one is his latest 2014 album *High Hopes*, made purely of songs previously unreleased, rerecorded, or covers.

After a career spanning more than forty years, Springsteen still has been drawing new listeners and audience members, and continues to maintain his position of one of the leaders of modern rock music. The question that immediately comes to mind is: “What is it that makes Springsteen special?” The answer is not simple for there are many reasons that could be listed. In the documentary film “Springsteen & I,” consisting of fan-filmed contributions, one of the fans said, “He is a working-class hero” (Scott & Walsh, 2013). Yes, Springsteen is considered to be the voice of blue collar workers, yet by observing the fans in the film, one can tell white collar workers listen to him as well. Yes, of course Springsteen is a working-class hero, but that would not be enough to make him a top rock star and one of the most important American icons. What makes Springsteen special is his ability to evolve without losing his consistency. During the 1987 Harry Chapin tribute, Springsteen said that one of Chapin’s songs (“Remember When the Music”) was about unity. Music during 60s was a uniting element, but it has lost much of its power in more recent times, to quote him precisely, Springsteen (1987) said:

I tried to think what the song was about and I guess there was a time when people felt that music provided you with a greater... oh, a greater sense of unity, a greater sense of shared vision and purpose that it does today, and my generation we were the generation that was gonna change the world... somehow we were gonna make it a little less lonely, a little less hungry, a little more just place, but it seems that when... when that promise slipped through our hands we didn’t replace it with nothing but... but lost faith, and now we live in, uh... times are pretty shattered, I got my music, you’ve got yours, the guy on the street, he’s got his.

Bringing people back together, that is what is considered to be one of the main Springsteen’s achievements. He himself expressed this idea one more time during his address to American’s most important multi-genre art festival South by Southwest:

In 1977, rock critic Lester Bangs said Elvis was probably the last thing we were all going to agree on /.../.

From here on in, you would have your heroes and I would have mine. The center of your world may be Iggy Pop, or Joni Mitchell, or maybe Dylan. Mine might be KISS, or Pearl Jam, but we would never see eye-to-eye again,



and be brought together by one music again. And his final quote in the article was: "So, instead of saying goodbye to Elvis, I'm gonna say goodbye to you."

While that's been proven a thousand times over, still here we are in a town with thousands of bands, each with a style, and a philosophy, and a song of their own. And I think the best of them believe that they have the power to turn Lester's prophecy inside out, and to beat his odds. (Springsteen, 2013)

For Springsteen, this has been his mission – to turn Lester's prophecy inside out, in a way. Springsteen skilfully combines Woody Guthrie's social activism and Bob Dylan's poeticism and vivid imagery with the psychological need of today. Folk music is music that once people used to cope with their troubles and celebrate their happiness. Springsteen, in this way, can be considered as the inheritor of folk music, or more, of American roots music, a term that embraces larger scale of musical genres (the distinction is further explained later in the thesis). Just one illustrative example: After the 9/11 attacks, American society was shocked. At that point, Springsteen's album *The Rising* came out. Berings (2012) says that:

The traumatic experience of the 9/11 attacks ironically inspired him to bring a new message of hope and faith. The belief in a better world, through collective salvation – ... – is restored in these new songs and a concert tour that would function almost as a communal healing process.

Springsteen's reaction to the 9/11 events led him to reinvent himself as an artist in order to provide people with a sense of community. However, Springsteen was not always such an important figure. This thesis outlines Springsteen's lyrical as well as personal development. For that reason, this thesis is divided into two chapters depicting Springsteen's evolution.

The first chapter is concerned with Springsteen's earliest steps towards becoming a musician. I believe music should be perceived not only in historical context but in personal as well and this chapter should serve as a starting point for understanding Springsteen's works.

The second one consists of two subchapters. The first subchapter deals with distinction between folk music and American roots music. The second one discusses two selected trilogies (the concept of trilogies is explained at the beginning of the second chapter). This subchapter focuses on showing how Springsteen has changed the perception of road as a metaphor in

the American culture. While the first trilogy is closely related to Whitman's "Song of Myself" and its egoism, the second one is similar to Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath" and its futility that awaits us on the end of the road.

In general, this thesis deals with the journey Springsteen has travelled from the "American Dream and its counterparts" trilogy, through which he has realized in which way the dream is being shattered, to the politically charged one, where he has started addressing the social injustice. The point is to illustrate that Springsteen has not abandoned his previous beliefs but merely transformed them into something bigger.

## Springsteen and His Life

Bruce Springsteen was born in 1949, and only twenty-six years later, he was recognized as one of the rising stars of the American rock music. But before he released his first album, the critically acclaimed but low-selling *Greetings from the Asbury Park*, he had to travel a long road. Even though Springsteen spent his childhood in Freehold, his career, however, started in the city of Asbury Park, in the Upstage Club where Springsteen made one of his early live appearances. The club was the centre of the local music scene where young and aspiring musicians often gathered to jam during the nights (Carlin, 2012, p. 25). Springsteen then became a regular visitor to the club where “he had his pick of bandmates,“(Marsh, 2003, p. 29). This was the very beginning of the Springsteen’s first more widely recognized band Steel Mill.

Springsteen’s family ancestors came to the United States from Ireland (from the father’s side) and from Italy (from the mother’s side). His childhood was affected by the tragedies that struck both his family branches. The death of his father’s sister Virginia (died at the age of five), made Alice, Springsteen’s grandmother, love Bruce excessively while almost ignoring his younger sibling, Virginia Springsteen (named after the deceased relative). Springsteen’s grandparents were not in favour of education as they would live in the moment which is why Fred Springsteen’s dropped of college. They simply did not believe higher education was a way to achieve a better life. Springsteen’s mother, Adele, came from a divorced family of Italian immigrants, Anthony and Adelina Zerilli. That is one of the reasons why Springsteen was raised as a Roman Catholic, which is perhaps why his lyrics are often connected to religion (and as Danton (2013) reported, there were even seminars about Springsteen’s biblical motifs in his lyrics at the college in New Brunswick, NJ).

During Springsteen’s adolescence, his mother often encouraged him to pursue his dream even though her idea of his future career had been different. According to Springsteen (1986, track 7), his mother often said to him "You know, it's not too late, you can still go back to college". His father on the other hand, wanted him to become a lawyer and was not as supportive of Springsteen’s dream to become a professional musician as was his mother. His parents, as shown in Marsh’s (2003) depiction of the 1978 live rendition of “Growin’ Up”, tried to convince him that he should consult his future career decision with a priest but at all costs should omit his desire to make a living as a musician. Springsteen went to a priest

and told him both of his dreams and of his parents' dreams. The priest replied the boy that he should ask God for advice. Springsteen went to Clarence Clemons, one of the E Street Band founding members, who told him he knew where to find God and drove him out to woods. There he met a man claiming that Moses left out an Eleventh Commandment which said "Let it rock!" (pp. 157 – 158). This very well illustrates Springsteen's aspiration to tell epic stories, no matter how true they really are.

Generally, Springsteen's parents were the ones who influenced his lyrical themes and motifs. The relationship with his mother can be described as loving one (during his live performances, he often dances on the stage with her), while the one with his father is somewhat ambivalent. Springsteen (Marsh, 2003, p. 158) described their relationship in one of his speeches:

When I was growing up, there were two things that were unpopular in my house. One was me and the other was my guitar. We had this grate, like the heat was supposed to come through, except it wasn't hooked up to any heating ducts; it was just open straight down to the kitchen, and there was a gas stove right underneath it. When I used to start playing, my pop used to turn on the gas jets and try to smoke me outta my room. And I had to go hide out on the roof or something.

On the other hand, Springsteen talks about his father in a lot of different ways: "My old man is the softest-hearted guy in the world." (Marsh, 1978), but the stories Springsteen used to tell about his father during his early performances are often contradicted with what he said about him later in his career.

But his father still remains important for Springsteen's music. His career would have never been the same if it were not for his small town upbringing with all its pros and cons. The sense of community, or more likely the feeling of losing it, later shaped his *Nebraska* album. The same can be said about the troubles of his parents. His father, due to his depressions, was unemployed most of the time, so it was Springsteen's mother who had to provide her family with money. This New Jersey experience is important, because Springsteen usually writes about things he knows about, or at least has had some experience with the themes he puts in his lyrics.

The family background truly shaped Springsteen's approach to all the aspects that later arose in his music. Adele's little radio set on the top of their fridge was Bruce's first step

toward music. The second step was seeing Elvis Presley for the very first time in 1956. Adele Springsteen recalls that he came to her and asked her to buy him a guitar. She enrolled him in a course in the Mike Diehl's music store. Diehl's teaching, however, did not suit Springsteen well for it was rather theory oriented, and he did not want to be tied up by other rules (Carlin, 2012, p. 11). This resulted in Springsteen's loss of interest in playing the instrument since he was unable to produce any music on his own. But young Springsteen remained interested in music, especially in Elvis.

For once, Freehold's location proved to be useful as it is right between New York City and Philadelphia. Thanks to this, Springsteen's radio was able to tune in a high amount of different radio stations which were Springsteen's musical playground. On the waves of those radio stations, Springsteen could explore his early influences. But it was not until 1964, when Springsteen first heard The Beatles' song "I Want to Hold Your Hand", when he bought a cheap acoustic guitar and devoted himself to mastering the instrument (Carlin, 2012, p. 21). He realized that "They're a lot cooler than me, but they're still kids. There must be a way to get there from here" (Springsteen, 2012). From that point, it was a short way to forming his first band. Even though some of them were partly successful (like his high-school band The Castilles), the break-through really came with the Steel Mill which consisted of some of the founding members of his current band, the E Street Band.

Steel Mill evolved, little by little, into something much bigger. Later it became Bruce Springsteen's Band, and it even later transformed to the famous E Street Band. But before that, in 1972, (by that time, Steel Mill had disbanded because of Springsteen's lack of money) Bruce Springsteen got the copy of Bob Dylan's biography where he had found out how Dylan got signed up by the Columbia Records. His manager, Mike Appel, managed to arrange a meeting with the same man that discovered Dylan, John Hammond. Marsh (2003) says about the meeting that "Springsteen got out his guitar and did either "It's Hard To Be A Saint In The City" or "Growing Up," depending on who's telling the tale. Longer and less rocking than his usual style, it was almost a folk song." Nevertheless, Springsteen got offered a contract and began soon working on his first record, *Greetings from the Asbury Park*.

The record company itself thought of Springsteen as of a new Bob Dylan (who was by that time only in his thirties) which might have caused by previously mentioned reasons. Springsteen is often linked with Dylan who is frequently cited as one of his major influences. Even Springsteen himself admitted that "Bob is the father of my musical country, now and forever. And I thank him" (Springsteen, 2012). On the other hand, Springsteen was

aware that he “was a wolf in sheep's clothing“, (Springsteen, 2012) but brought a full rock band to the recording anyway.

Springsteen is connected with Dylan in some aspects, too. Just like Dylan, Springsteen has had a deep admiration for Woody Guthrie. But his career started with the previously mentioned album and followed with similarly shaped *The Wild, The Innocent & The E Street Shuffle* about which Daniel Cavicchi (1998) wrote “his first recordings included two albums of densely lyrical, streetwise songs in the vein of Bob Dylan” (p. 13). Springsteen’s two albums were acclaimed by the critics, yet their sales numbers were not as high as the recording company had expected. The success came shortly after his break-through album *Born to Run* where Springsteen really let go off the Dylan-like approach:

So now I'm in my late twenties, and I'm concerned, of course – getting older. I want to write music that I can imagine myself singing on stage at the advanced old age, perhaps, of 40? I wanted to grow up. I wanted to twist the form I loved into something that could address my adult concerns. And so I found my way to country music. (Springsteen, 2012)

Nowadays, Springsteen and Dylan offer much more different experience, and even though Springsteen remained a big fan, and is possibly in debt to Dylan, the road they have travelled now differ more than ever. It may even be possible to ask the same question Steve Turner did in his 1973 article called simply “Was Bob Dylan the previous Bruce Springsteen?” (Turner, 1973)

## Springsteen and Roots Music

### American Roots Music Definition

American roots music is a term that covers a wide range of music genres. The term folk music, previously used for the music played by the settlers of European origin, soon began to be unsuitable as it did not cover the music made by the black people. For that reason, the roots music was created to embrace new music styles, such as blues, the Native American music, gospel, or even swing (“Historical Background”, n.d.).

Peter Seeger, a famous folk singer and political activist, defined folk music as “the music of the peasantry class, ancient and anonymous” (Thurmaier, 2006). Thurmaier adds that “most folk music shares some common thematic threads. The lyrics often draw from experiences of everyday people, including those who may be subjugated in society“. As mentioned in the Introduction, Springsteen follows these words very much, especially when it comes to his lyrical themes. For example, *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions* album (2006) consists purely of folk songs of various origin, some of them traditional. It is a tribute to Seeger, and as such it can be seen as a tribute to roots music in general, proving Springsteen’s deep admiration for this tradition.

Generally, what Thurmaier and Seeger said is true, but perhaps may seem a little rigid and out-dated. Perhaps the best explanation was offered by David Burke. He thinks of folk music as of something that is revolving around the lives of “folk” and brings the context to the large story of our world (Burke, 2011, pp.7-8). But eventually, a need to narrow down this broad definition would arise. If folk music revolves around folk’s live, is there anything that is not folk music? Without a closer definition, the answer would be no. The ultimate answer lies closer than we might think – it can be found by simply combining both these approaches. Folk music, and thus the American roots music as well, is music expressing the story of ordinary people, and the story evolves, just as much as the life itself evolves. The important part is the word “folk”, which means it is based on beliefs and traditions of common people. It may have started with Seeger’s anonymity, being passed on by oral traditions, but has since moved on. It still is the music of the anonymous, the music of people that do not get that much publicity. It is the music that provides sense of shared experience and belonging to a larger community. Music, that brings people together over a shared pain or shared happiness.

Perhaps another question comes to mind after the last paragraph: “If it is the music of the anonymous, how come Springsteen is considered to be the American roots music heir?” Even Springsteen asked himself this question when he suffered with depression for singing about something he is no longer a part of (illustrated by two verses from lyrics of his “Better Days” song, “It’s sad funny ending to find yourself pretending / A rich man in a poor man’s shirt). To be honest, whether he is or is not detached from the reality does not matter. Springsteen’s songs are partially works of fiction and partially of his own experience. As was shown in the “Springsteen and his life” section, he came from a family struck by quite a high amount of misfortunes. As such, he knows what he writes about, not to forget the fact that Hemingway was never a soldier, he was an artist. The same course of thinking can be applied on Springsteen (John, 2012).

In conclusion, the four decades of Springsteen’s work offer a large space to explore how he has combined what American art soil has offered since the times of the First Settlers. The connection between Springsteen and the American traditional folk does not mean only Woody Guthrie or Bob Dylan. Springsteen successfully utilizes, mainly on the lyrical level, the cultural heritage of the United States. Alan Lomax, a famous musicologist, can serve as a great example – Springsteen sampled several of his recordings on his 2012 album *Wrecking Ball* to emphasize and complete the mood it expresses. John Steinbeck, the author of *The Grapes of Wrath* and other classics, is another example. His depiction of the Dust Bowl America and The Great Depression was, along with the John Ford’s film adaptation of Steinbeck’s *Grapes*, the driving force behind *The Ghost of Tom Joad* (Carlin, 2012, p. 137). For that reasons, I believe, it is worth exploring Springsteen’s works and point out the connection between him and the roots music with all its inspiration.



## Springsteen and His Trilogies

The winding road of Springsteen's recording career demonstrates all that shaped his music. As was said, Springsteen is often praised for keeping his consistency; on the other hand, the albums like the previously mentioned *Greetings from the Asbury Park* and *The Wild, The Innocent & The E Street Shuffle*, along with the *Tunnel of Love*, *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town* do not fit in his discography well. "The ... (latter) ... three mostly deal with the subject of love, and are deeply inspired by the events taking place in Springsteen's own private life (from his divorce from his first wife to the marriage with his second one)" (Berings, 2012, p. 7). Even though the "divorce trilogy" carries his unique lyrics, it is in a considerably smaller amount.

The divorce trilogy is along with the acoustic one (consisting of *Nebraska – The Ghost of Tom Joad - Devils and Dust*, albums recorded with acoustic instruments only) one of those built upon a looser connection. It is the *Born to Run – Darkness on the Edge of Town – The River* trilogy and *Nebraska – The Ghost of Tom Joad – Wrecking Ball* that are the most interesting ones. Springsteen's fans often discuss his works in terms of trilogy which is the reason why I chose this division. As was stated before, the main point is to show the formative years of the first trilogy and the shift towards the songs addressing different kinds of social injustice as well as the progression of the road metaphor in the American culture.

**Born to Run – Darkness on the Edge of Town – The River.** Perhaps the most recognized and best known trilogy is the one consisting of 1975 *Born to Run*, 1978 *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, and 1980 double album *The River*. Masur (2010) wrote:

*Born to Run*, *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, and *The River* are best treated as a trilogy that offers an ongoing meditation on dreams and darkness, escape and entrapment, freedom versus fate. *Born to Run* launched Springsteen's exploration of those dreams. We may die chasing them. Or perhaps they chase us and track us down.

Masur gives a hint on how the road changed as a metaphor on these three albums. While *Born to Run* could be perceived as an album where road meant a way to freedom, *Darkness on the Edge of Town* was about acceptance of its futility. *The River* then portrayed

reconciliation with the adult world and its ways. The middle part, *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, is widely recognized as his truest work. Springsteen (2010) himself said:

It's a reckoning with the adult world, you know... with the life of limitations and compromises, but also a life of kind of... uh... of just resilience and commitment to life, to the breath in your lungs, you know. How do I keep faith with those things? How do I honour those things? *Darkness* was a record where I sat out to try to understand how to do that...

Springsteen has always been a productive writer, and a lot of songs written for one album were often left unused. This trilogy in particular uses songs that were written for the previous albums, for example "Point Blank" was meant for *Darkness on the Edge of Town* but Springsteen felt it did not fit in the idea he wanted to express or in the feeling he wanted to create (Heylin, 2012, p. 207). That is why it was used later on *The River*. I am convinced this is the reason why listening to this trilogy feels like listening to one album. Of course the years, that separates them, changed the sound of the band, but the story line remained the same, only the characters are little older. *Darkness on the Edge of Town* even foreshadowed Springsteen's development towards more class-conscious music. As Springsteen said:

I'd been really involved with country music right prior to the album *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, and that had a lot of effect on my writing because I think country is a very class-conscious music. And then that interest slowly led me into Woody Guthrie and folk music.

Guthrie was one of the few songwriters at the time who was aware of the political implications of the music he was writing—a real part of his consciousness. He set out intentionally to address a wide variety of issues, to have some effect, to have some impact, to be writing as a way to have some impact on things: playing his part in the way things are moving and things change. (Percy (as cited in Burger, 2013, pp. 314-315))

This is the point where Springsteen was reflecting his previous success and, at the same time, thinking of how he can speak to people and address their issues. As stated before, roots music is the music concerned with problems that ordinary people may encounter in their lives. Seeger's anonymity and Thurmaier's subjugation are reflected in this trilogy

as well, but these three albums were more formative ones. Nevertheless, it is an outstanding example of how Springsteen's lyrics speak on multiple levels. *Born to Run's* opening track "Thunder Road" starts with almost filmic verses: "The screen door slams, Mary's dress sways / Like a vision she dances across the porch / As the radio plays / Roy Orbison singing for the lonely / Hey that's me and I want you only".

Let us put Orbison, another of Springsteen's influences, aside this time (it will be explained later), and focus more on the 'door slam' part. Tyler (as cited in Burger, 2013) noted Springsteen's own words in his article, "When the screen door slams on 'Thunder Road,' you're not necessarily on the Jersey Shore anymore. You could be anywhere in America" (p.69). It is not only "Thunder Road" that creates this film-like image. "Backstreets", another song from *Born To Run*, was described as a "mini-movie" (Heylin, 2012, p. 125):

One soft infested summer me and Terry became friends  
Trying in vain to breathe the fire we was born in  
Catching rides to the outskirts tying faith between our teeth  
Sleeping in that old abandoned beach house getting wasted in the heat  
And hiding on the backstreets, hiding on the backstreets  
With a love so hard and filled with defeat

The young couple experiencing summer love and "catching rides to the outskirts" is one of the best examples of Springsteen's perception of the road. The fire is possibly an image of a town during summer. They both try to escape the heat by sleeping in an abandoned beach house. I am convinced this image Springsteen creates is a metaphor for small town upbringing. The characters are trying to hide from the everyday life which they find so hard. It is the feeling of defeat caused by everyday routine that bound them together as they both know what it means to live in a small town. The song continues as follows:

Slow dancing 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 waiting for the bells that ring

In the deep heart of the night to set us loose from everything

to go running on the backstreets, running on the backstreets

We swore we'd live forever on the backstreets we take it together

I believe “the last of the Duke Street Kings” refers to a member of a street gang. The street gang member is the last one and presumably he still clings to the past when the gang was powerful. Terry and her friends are waiting for the bell to ring midnight, so they can forget everything and especially the fact that nothing lasts forever, just as it was with the Duke Street Kings, now a rare kind. The song concludes with the following verses:

Remember all the movies, Terry, we'd go see

Trying to learn how to walk like 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

It is the sudden disillusionment which creates a feeling that can surpass Springsteen's words about being anywhere in America. I am convinced that especially the youth not only in the United States but all over the world understand how it feels to suddenly realize that life is not a film. It is a realization that the American Dream is not within reach but is shattered and distant. The characters of “Backstreets” were forced to acknowledge the harsh reality and Terry ended just like the Duke Street Kings, she adapted to the city life. The fact is that the main protagonist perceived the road as a way towards freedom, but the point is that Springsteen himself saw the road as the only way to escape the fate of ending like his parents – employed in a dead-end job and living in a small town.

The trilogy often feels like Springsteen is having a dialogue with his younger version. “Backstreets” can be easily connected to *Darkness*'s “Badlands”. Where “Backstreets” left the narrator disappointed, “Badlands” reflect his anger and determination to “make the dream real” this time:

I want control right now

You better listen to me baby  
Talk about a dream  
Try to make it real  
you wake up in the night  
With a fear so real  
Spend your life waiting  
for a moment that just won't come  
Well don't waste your time waiting

Heylin (2012) suggests it is “a natural progression from the “search” songs on *Born To Run*” (pp.151-152). In the previously mentioned “Thunder Road”, the main protagonist invites Mary to join him on his journey and continues as follows:

Well now I'm no hero, that's understood  
All the redemption I can offer, girl, is beneath this dirty hood  
With a chance to make it good somehow  
Hey what else can we do now?  
Except roll down the window and let the wind blow back your hair  
Well the night's busting open  
This two lanes will take us anywhere

Similarly to “Backstreets”, in Springsteen’s vision, the road can take the couple anywhere they desire. “Thunder Road” and “Darkness on the Edge of Town” shows the development of this perception. In the first one, Springsteen invites Mary to go run away with him concluding the song with: “It's a town full of losers and I'm pulling out of here to win”, which proves that Springsteen saw the road as a way towards freedom and escapement out of the small town life. “Darkness on the Edge of Town”, on the other hand, seems like contemplation about the previous actions:

Well if she wants to see me

You can tell her that I'm easily found

Tell her there's a spot out 'neath Abram's Bridge

And tell her there's a darkness on the edge of town

It was Mary's scepticism, as suggested in "Thunder Road's" verses, "So you're scared and you're thinking / That maybe we ain't that young anymore", that may have resulted in the disappointment, and the character is now waiting for her to surpass her fears and eventually follow him. It feels like the protagonists failed to pursue the freedom, but still believes that with Mary by his side it might be possible to escape.

Michale McGuire (as cited in Medhurst and Benson, 1984) has a certain comment about the universality in Springsteen's songs stating that:

The images of American scenes may trigger sweeping meanings for listeners familiar with the movie *Thunder Road* or Roy Orbison's "Only the Lonely," but they are not Springsteen's focus. Springsteen's rhetoric is not centered around fast cars and street life; those are elements of the background in which people find themselves. They do lend a sense of concrete reality to the lyrics /.../ but they are setting, not action.

This one is particularly true, Springsteen's details are what they are – just details. I am convinced that Springsteen knows it, once again proving his mother may have been right – if he weren't a singer-songwriter, he could have easily been a writer or a novelist. *Born to Run* was an optimistic album and some people even thought it was too optimistic, but perhaps it was better explained by Dimartino (as cited in Burger, 2013), who puts it in the context of what had followed the release of *Born to Run*:

*Darkness* was as depressing as its name, and what made it even more interesting was that it followed *Born to Run* and the whole success-story thing. In retrospect, *Darkness* seems like the only sane reaction to the same story—and, thankfully, a very human one. (p. 157)

I consider the reaction as a human one, after an album filled with hopes and plans of escaping (though ending with what Springsteen (2013) considers to be "kind of my great

story about rock'n'roll and a hard life deals to us in general”, with “Jungleland”, a song about gangs clashing in the night resulting in destruction and despair (Basham, 2005, p. 31)), Springsteen, by that time a true rock star, managed to record album about feelings that usually lingers for much longer – pain and despair.

*Darkness on the Edge of Town* contains what could be considered a first step in Guthrie’s way of social activism. It is closely related to what Richie Havens (1997), a famous American guitarist, once wrote:

I have always loved the depth of Bruce's writing. He has a special ability few writers have. He’s a 'Great Writer' — having the ability to chronicle our life and times, in an incredibly clear and accessible way — I call him the Carl Sandburg of our generation... each song an entire novel.

Havens struck the right note, Springsteen truly is a reminiscence of Carl Sandburg, an American poet who accompanied himself on a guitar or banjo, playing folk songs and reciting his poems. Even some of Springsteen’s songs are surprisingly related to Sandburg poems. Perhaps the most notable relation is between Sandburg’s “Mill-Doors” and Springsteen’s “Factory”. They both deal with what hard labour brings back to workers, or to be more precise, what it takes from them. In Sandburg poem, the work takes the possibility to enjoy the life while they still can, which can be seen in the verse “And you are old before you are young”. Springsteen expressed the same idea in a different way “Factory takes his hearing, factory gives him life, / The working, the working, just the working life.” Both versions are gloomy, leaving no way out of the misery. Even the physical damaged inflicted is shared in both these poems. In Springsteen’s, the factory takes the man’s hearing, in Sandburg’s it gives back nothing but sleepy eyes.

Sandburg, in a way, was one of the first ethnomusicologists and his “stage persona” was similar to Springsteen’s:

He interspersed his songs with poems and commentary, and audiences across the country so loved Sandburg the showman that until the end of his life he was in great demand as a consummate platform entertainer. He had collected folk songs since his hobo days, interviewing people in his travels across the country over many years and setting down the lyrics and the notations in his pocket

notebooks. He gave many of these songs their first publication in *The American Songbag* in 1927. (Niven, n.d.)

(Sandburg's *The American Songbag* is a collection of more than two hundred songs from all over the United States. ("Great Anthology: The American Songbag", n.d.)

Springsteen's shift on *Darkness* was not only "Factory". For example "Something in the Night" addresses both to some extent – losing the American Dream and facing a certain social injustice:

I'm riding down Kingsley,  
figuring I'll get a drink  
Turn the radio up loud,  
so I don't have to think,  
I take her to the floor,  
looking for a moment when the world  
seems right,  
And I tear into the guts,  
of something in the night.

Springsteen uses car and a road as a metaphor once more, but this time they seemingly lead to oblivion. The protagonist is trying to find his inner peace on the road, but the subtle hint where he "turns the radio up so he does not have to think" shows us that this time road is not meant for escapement. It is the other way around and it only brings him pain and misery (Bellamy, 2011):

You're born with nothing,  
and better off that way,  
Soon as you've got something they send  
someone to try and take it away,



You can ride this road 'till dawn,  
without another human being in sight,  
Just kids wasted on  
something in the night.

He realizes that once one has something, someone else may try to take it away. It is Springsteen's address towards the society that is not living as Springsteen think it should be. What later became a main theme of "Land of Hope and Dreams" (mentioned later in the thesis) is in this case a subtle message which, on the other hand, illustrates that Springsteen has always been thinking of how he can unify people.

While "Thunder Road" pictured car as a vehicle of freedom, in "Something in the Night" Springsteen changed that. Car now no longer means freedom, and the metaphor is utterly destroyed by the end of the song:

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 running burned and blind,  
Chasing something in the night

Springsteen's realization that individualism is not the best way to salvation foreshadows the shift from Whitman's "Song of Myself" to Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath". (Bellamy, 2011) The rejection of the car which is eventually burned can be seen as a bridge to *The River*. Springsteen (as cited in Marsh, 2003) said:

That guy at the end of Darkness has reached a point where you just have to strip yourself of everything to get yourself together. For a minute sometimes

you just have to get rid of everything, just to get yourself together inside, be able to push everything away. I think that's what happens at the end of the record.... And then there's the thing where the guy comes back.

The hero comes back on *The River* and it was *The River* that ultimately faced the ambiguity of life and closed the trilogy with the acceptance of what life brings. The true rock songs such as "You Can Look (But You Better Not Touch)," "Ramrod," or even the mentioned "Sherry Darling" are right next to the gloomy ballads such as "The River" or "Independence Day" (Scott and Humphries as cited in Burger, 2013, pp. 189-190). It is worth mentioning that Springsteen's *The River* was, perhaps surprisingly, his first number one album in the US, despite its dramatic mood shifts.

"Independence Day" and "The River" are one of the best examples on the album concerned with the previously mentioned themes. The first one is about a father-son relationship. What needs to be noticed is that there are no purely negative emotions towards the father – no remorse, no anger. The son is leaving the house, starting a life of his own.

Well Papa go to bed now it's getting late  
Nothing we can say is gonna change anything now  
I'll be leaving in the morning 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

Perhaps the most interesting part is the first verse. The son sending his father to bed is the kind of imagery that suggests the movement in his life. It feels like the roles turned around, the son, now a grown man, takes place of his father. The second verse, on the other hand, gives a hint about the feeling of acceptance and, along with the fourth verse, completes that.

But they can't touch me now  
And you can't touch me now  
They ain't gonna do to me

What I watched them do to you

The song creates a feeling the song is talking about the man from *Darkness's* "Factory", and these verses imply that the son is perhaps grateful for what he has learned about his father's mistakes and is willing to avoid repeating them.

Now 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

The father-son relationship was not easy (as was not Springsteen's with his father), they both were simply the same. Despite this, the character realizes that the world is changing ("Because there's just different people coming down here now and they see things in different ways / And soon everything we've known will just be swept away") and he has to go, too (McGuire (as cited in Medhurst and Benson, 1984)). Just as the character of this song is worried of being brought to what his father did, the character in "The River" is eventually trapped in such a life. The only thing left is the memories of better times that are haunting him like a curse. The verse "we'd ride out of that valley down to where the fields were green" is an allusion to *Born to Run*, yet this time, the outcome is different. The "baptism" in the river does not bring better days, the character's girlfriend gets pregnant, and he becomes trapped in the cage he had feared the most – in the cage of his father's life (Shellhouse, n.d., p. 6).

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

/.../

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  
That sends me down to the river tonight  
Down to the river  
my baby and I  
Oh down to the river we ride

The previous verses lead to confirmation that the river was purely metaphorical, perhaps a metaphor for love, perhaps a biblical metaphor. Though these two do not exclude each other, this matter is a subject of discussion among the fans and the researchers. Shellhouse (n.d.) Springsteen's character is seeking redemption through love, implying the omnipresent motif, and concluding that even love is not enough sometimes.

*The River* ends with a haunting song "Wreck on the Highway". It is a story of a man who witnesses a car accident. He finds "young man lying by the side of the road" and later thinks if he had "a girlfriend or a younger wife" and if a state trooper will knock on her door to inform her that her "baby died in a wreck on the highway". The narrator then watches his own girlfriend sleep and holds her tight while he thinks about the wreck on the highway (Shellhouse, n.d., p. 8). This track might be the ultimate denial since Springsteen has used the road in different senses, and it no longer was a metaphor for freedom or escapement.

Springsteen started his "American Dream" exploration journey when he was twenty-six years old and it ended with him being five years older. I am confident this part of his career allowed him to realize how distant the American Dream was when compared to the reality. Thanks to this part of his career he could move on and start addressing different issues. With *Nebraska*, discussed in the next chapter, the new ways of song-writing opened in front of him. Even though *Nebraska*'s message was not as conscious, it still is the album where Springsteen surpassed his own shadow.

**Nebraska – The Ghost of Tom Joad – Wrecking Ball.** This trilogy is different from the previous one, especially if we consider the years when the albums were released. Nebraska came out two years after *The River*, in 1982. *The Ghost of Tom Joad* dates to 1995. *Wrecking Ball*, the most recent one, is from 2012. Previous trilogy spanned over five years; this one took thirty years to finally become complete. I think it is no less interesting. Springsteen grew older and it is just as if he listened to Woody Guthrie’s words “He took it easy, but he took it.” (Wo

Unlike the last trilogy based on the story and its development, this one is different. As stated before, the *Nebraska – The Ghost of Tom Joad – Wrecking Ball* trilogy offers a space to explore more politically focused experience. Though one may think the roots music could not be politically charged, I believe that the opposite was suggested with the definition of the roots music. We may perceive the word “politics” differently today, yet the concerns of people struggling to make ends meet during crisis, for example during the period of Dust Bowl America, are very closely related to politics. It is often the inflexibility of politicians that is responsible for inability to respond to the needs of those struggling to survive. To stay with the 1930’s in America (the choice of the period is deliberate - it was the period of folk uprising (Burke, 2011), even Roosevelt’s New Deal, as seen by historians, was far from being a success (though it is not my point to deny the accomplishments it had). During one of his concerts, Springsteen himself said:

The roots of rock roll all the way back through Bob Dylan, through Hank Williams, through Pete Seeger, through Woody Guthrie, through Lead Belly, through the fathers of folk music, and people who were engaged in, and who wrote about, what was going on in the world around them. All of us here tonight are fortunate to be in this room. If you pick up the newspapers, you see millions of people out of work, you see a blood fight over decent health care for our citizens, and you see people struggling to hold onto their homes. If Woody Guthrie were alive today, he’d have a lot to write about, high times on Wall Street and hard times on Main Street.

**Nebraska.** Nebraska, an album opening with the song about a serial killer, was a nightmare for the recording company. The album features Springsteen solo with a guitar and harmonica, which is similar to young Bob Dylan, as he felt that this way the songs are the best. Even the way it was recorded is interesting – Springsteen used a four track cassette recorder and all the work was done in his own house (Burke, 2011). Though this fact creates a certain folk-related feeling, the lyrics and the themes are the most important part of it. Nebraska was released during Ronald Reagan’s presidency, the era most known for the term “Reaganomics”, which was a set of economic policies (one was meant to decrease social spending) similar in extent to New Deal. By that time, Springsteen was fighting more with himself (as he felt more and more detached and isolated), yet his ability to write songs talking to the audience on multiple levels made Nebraska a record which deals with the impact that Reaganomics had on the people.

The eponymous song deals with a rather controversial topic – it depicts a story of a serial killer. The fact that it was written in the first person narrative made it controversial. Springsteen wrote the song about Charles Starkweather, a nineteen-year old serial killer. He and Caril Fugate, his fourteen-year old girlfriend, came from Lincoln, Nebraska where they killed eleven people in 1958. Starkweather was raised in a poor family during an era of protests against the 1950s conformity. James Dean and Elvis Presley were the icons of youth rebellion back then. While Dean had cigarettes, sunglasses, and fast cars; and Elvis had his guitar and rock’n’roll, Starkweather decided to protest by killing people (Bardsley, n.d.). The death penalty for Starkweather might have made him a martyr of its own kind. The character in the songs explains his killing spree as follows:

I can't say that I'm sorry for the things that we done

At least for a little while sir me and her we had us some fun

/.../

They wanted to know why I did what I did

Well sir I guess there's just a meanness in this world

Along with Springsteen’s emotionless voice, the lack of explanation creates a feeling of alienation. There are no clues what lead him to do what he did. I am convinced that Springsteen tried to make his listeners think. He offers two possibilities – either the society turned the killer that way; or there is just an unexplainable evil which he talks about in the last

verse. In the first case, the criticism is obvious. In no way do I want to advocate the killer, but we should just think whether the evil caused by the others does not come from us. I think Springsteen chose the first person narration deliberately. It may be connected more to the second possibility than to the first one, but is worth taking it from both points of view. The choice was made to show a certain evil in every one of us, Springsteen being no exception. The evil may be there since the first days of manhood (noticeably similar to the Original sin), or it was sown there by society. In the context of the album, it is possible that Springsteen wanted to show that there are always two sides to any story.

*Nebraska* is, in the context of Springsteen's discography, tipping point of its own kind. Roxanne Harde (2013) suggested that it directly follows *Darkness on the Edge of Town* and *The River*, which would then create another trilogy (p. 129). In opposition to Harde, I believe *The River* ended what could be called "American Dream and its dark counterpoint" period of Springsteen, and *Nebraska*, on the other hand, started a new phase of his career. This phase focused more on what happens when economics collapse. While with the first trilogy, Springsteen usually did not address any specific reasons of losing the American Dream; with *Nebraska* he claimed the Woody Guthrie mantle by singing about people that are pushed over the line. It is no coincidence that Springsteen was reading Guthrie's biography at that time. After Reagan's election, Springsteen decided that he "needs to address the election on stage immediately" (Burke, 2011). Less than two months later, he introduced Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land," a song that shares the same fate of being misunderstood as was Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone" or Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A.". Guthrie's song is often perceived as a fire-side song (Carlin, 2012, p. 160) and even though almost everyone in the U.S.A. knows the lyrics, nearly nobody knows that Guthrie's song was more of a criticism towards capitalism ("This Land Is Your Land by Woody Guthrie", n.d.).

Where Guthrie laments that "this land was made for you and me," Springsteen adds the details of how it no longer belongs to the people. The perfect example is "Johnny 99", song about a man losing his job. Springsteen refers to 1980 closing of Mahwah Ford auto plant:

Well they closed down the auto plant in Mahwah late that month

Ralph went out lookin' for a job but he couldn't find none

He came home too drunk from mixin' Tanqueray and wine

He got a gun shot a night clerk now they call'm Johnny 99

Though introduced as Ralph, he is later referred to by his nickname Johnny 99. Johnny is in a hopeless situation and desperate times create desperate men. There is almost no possibility of him finding a job. In reality, two years after the closing, the majority of the workers was still out of work (“Majority from Ford’s Mahwah Plan Still Jobless“, 1982). Even though Johnny tried, and possibly very hard, he could not find any other way out of the situation he got into. I am convinced his drinking is experience which Springsteen had had with his father, who often “eased his pain with cigarettes and a six-pack” (Carlin, 2012, p. 26). Johnny eventually broke down and having shot a night clerk sent a message. This message might have been a cry for help for the jobless workers community. By that time, it was too late to save Johnny, but there was still time to help the others.

Down in the part of town where when you hit a red light you don't stop

Johnny's wavin' his gun around and threatenin' to blow his top

When an off duty cop snuck up on him from behind

Out in front of the Club Tip Top they slapped the cuffs on Johnny 99

The first verse describes in which conditions Johnny lives. He now resides in the part of a town that is not considered to be safe and as such it is detached from others. Johnny threatens to kill himself, but is stopped by an “off duty cop”. Though this information might seem irrelevant, I think this explains why Johnny did not pull the trigger on himself or the police officer. He wanted it to be seen by the police, the closest he could ever get to any representative of the government. Being arrested by the off duty cop is just another example of how “unlucky” he was. The “Club Tip Top” reference is more difficult to explain. The name sounds either like a strip club, or simply like another detail that speaks to the American audience (just as it was with the “Thunder Road”). Both make sense with Springsteen. The strip club could refer to the previous belief in redemption through love. Love, which was also twisted, now works as another way of expressing estrangement.

Johnny is eventually sentenced to “ninety-eight and a year”. The sentence causes Johnny’s girlfriend and his mother to protest, which shows that not only Johnny’s life has been destroyed, but the damage spreads further. The judge gives Johnny last chance to make his final statement:



Now judge judge I had debts no honest man could pay

The bank was holdin' my mortgage and they was takin' my house away

Now I ain't sayin' that makes me an innocent man

But it was more 'n all this that put that gun in my hand

Well your honor I do believe I'd be better off dead

And if you can take a man's life for the thoughts that's in his head

Then won't you sit back in that chair and think it over judge one more time

And let 'em shave off my hair and put me on that execution line

Harde (2013) in her analysis suggests that Johnny's decision to beg for the death penalty may be a gesture to the society that has excluded him and now deserves a punishment which he would seek if he were ever released from the prison (p. 130). I agree with her statement, though I am not as convinced as she is that Johnny would want to revenge on the society. To me, his asking for death is a question of acceptance. Ninety-nine years in New Jersey prison are equal to death, but death in prison comes slow. Perhaps Johnny does not want to spend the rest of his days thinking about why he was punished. In "Nebraska" the killer was "declared unfit to live," but Johnny's imprisonment is possibly a worse kind of punishment. In comparison with Starkweather, Johnny perhaps wanted to die for a cause, but while Starkweather will sooner or later be forgotten, Johnny's death would have a greater impact. "Nebraska" and "Johnny 99", they both can be considered as songs of alienation only with a different outcome.

"Johnny 99" and "Atlantic City," are Springsteen's best known songs from Nebraska and are the ones played the most with his E Street Band in more rock arrangements. "Atlantic City" even shares "I got debts that no honest man can pay" verse with "Johnny 99". The hopeless debt is what causes crime:

Now, I been lookin' for a job, but it's hard to find

Down here it's just winners and losers and don't get caught on the wrong side  
of that line

Well, I'm tired of comin' out on the losin' end

So, honey, last night I met this guy and I'm gonna do a little favor for him

The song starts with a death of mafia figure (“Well they blew up the chicken man”), so we can only assume what kind of a favour, but the rest of the song creates the feeling it was nowhere near legal. His girlfriend and he went to Atlantic City, known for its casinos, which at that time was controlled by the mafia (Sifakis, 1987). The song creates image of both parts – on one side there are the poor, on the other there are capitalists. The protagonist of the song stands somewhere in between.

*Nebraska* is full of such images, but not only of this kind. Songs like “Highway Patrolman” foreshadowed Springsteen’s hit “Born in the U.S.A.” as it introduced new aspect of Springsteen’s song-writing. The story of two brothers, one drafted for the Vietnam War, the other left at home, deals with what the war did to the whole generation of American citizens. Frankie, Vietnam War veteran, is watched over by his brother Joe who is a police officer. Frankie possibly kills a young man, but Joe lets him escape, because if “a man turns his back on his family he ain't no friend of mine” (Harde, 2013, p. 130).

Though a lot of songs on the record end with some kind of crime, Springsteen is not trying to defend these crimes, he merely shows what happens when “the working person is pushed past the point of reason“ (Harde, 2013, p. 130). *Nebraska* ends with “Reason to Believe”, the song that may seem to bring a message of hope, but perhaps is more about blind faith. In his opinion people desperately struggle to believe in something. “When the president says he’s gonna do something about arms-control, that’s blind faith” (Heylin, 2013, p. 277).

*The Ghost of Tom Joad*. Mikal Gilmore (1995) in his review of *The Ghost of Tom Joad* wrote: "I'm convinced it's Springsteen's best album in ten years, and I also think it's among the bravest work that anyone has given us this decade." He was perfectly right, though it is important to mention that the ten years Gilmore speaks about were the period of Springsteen's divorce trilogy. I strongly believe that it is not only the bravest work of the decade but also the bravest record ever released. It is more open than *Nebraska* and less "polished" than *Wrecking Ball*. Thanks to *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, Springsteen was the first person to earn "John Steinbeck Award: 'in the souls of the people'". The thing is that Tom Joad is a main character in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. He is best known for his morale approach and solutions which he preferred over the compliance with the law. Woody Guthrie even recorded "The Ballad of Tom Joad", which retells the story of Steinbeck's book. This is the album where the legacy of Guthrie and Steinbeck meet and is introduced to a younger audience.

*The Ghost of Tom Joad* is a permanent shift from the albums where cars and highway became a metaphor for freedom. As Brent Bellamy (2011) pointed out, the road metaphor in the American culture evolved from Whitman's "Song for the Open Road", through Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, to Springsteen's *The Ghost of Tom Joad*. Each of these works offer different portrait of what a road means in its own particular context. For Whitman it might be the opportunity to unite with strangers and one's own past and future and thus gaining freedom through shared experience. Where Whitman had hope for starting life new and fresh, Steinbeck pretty much destroyed this. The Joads are free while they are on the road, though there are plenty difficulties which they meet, but the image of Promised Land is destroyed right after their arrival to California. Springsteen followed Steinbeck, especially on the previously mentioned albums. Even the shift and realization of the futility of the road is present, yet *The Ghost of Tom Joad* takes it further. The road is now no longer an image of freedom; it is a prison (pp.224-225).

What was said in the last paragraph can be fully understood thanks to the lyrics of "The Ghost of Tom Joad". What needs to be noticed is the fact that Springsteen is not retelling the story of Tom Joad, he is trying to update it and as was stated before – to push the metaphor a little further. The song opens with the following lines:

Men walkin' 'long the railroad tracks

Goin' someplace, there's no goin' back

Highway Patrol choppers comin' up over the ridge

Hot soup on a campfire under the bridge

Shelter line stretchin' 'round the corner

Welcome to the new world order

Families sleepin' in their cars in the southwest

No home, no job, no peace, no rest

Springsteen creates the setting. The road from the very first verses does not offer any hope, it is a way leading to the point of no return. The image of police creates the feeling of being watched or perhaps it serves as a device used to create a notion of fear. The sixth verse has been often cited by conspiracy fans, but I believe that Springsteen is perhaps trying to warn from purely right-winged government. What is more, it shows when the song takes place. Just a mere Internet search shows that this phrase has been used during different times in the last seventy years. Considering the release date of the album, year 1995, perhaps the closest is the 1990 speech of President George H. W. Bush (2009, p. 130):

Today that new world is struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we've known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice. A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak.

I think this fairly well illustrates Springsteen's shift to Guthrie's vision of word. I would like to leave this for a while and get back to the road metaphor. The changes in the chorus are interesting:

Well the highway is alive tonight

But nobody's kiddin' nobody about where it goes

I'm sittin' down here in the campfire light

Searchin' for the ghost of Tom Joad.

At first, the main protagonist of Springsteen's song searches for the ghost of Tom Joad, which, in my opinion, is closely connected to the road metaphor. It is a very strongly related to what Springsteen did on his previous albums where the road was a way used to get to the point of some kind of self-awareness. This time the highway is alive but not for the protagonist. He is sitting and slowly realizing he has to be the source of change. He has to find the strength to make things change. That is the reason why he is at first searching, then waiting, and later sitting with "the ghost of old Tom Joad". The subtle change from simply "Tom Joad" to "old Tom Joad" is crucial for understanding this development. It was not young Tom Joad who stood up and decided to fight; it was old Tom Joad who, after witnessing the murder of his friend Jim Casy, decided the injustice needs to be stopped. Steinbeck's Tom Joad delivers a speech at the end of the book which is very close to the verses preceding the chorus:

Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an'—I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry n' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build—why, I'll be there.

Springsteen's verses for comparison:

Now Tom said, "Mom, wherever there's a cop beatin' a guy

Wherever a hungry new born baby cries

Where there's a fight 'gainst the blood and hatred in the air

Look for me mom I'll be there.

Wherever somebody's fightin' for a place to stand

Or a decent job or a helpin' hand.

Wherever somebody's strugglin' to be free,

Look in their eyes ma you'll see me."

"The Ghost of Tom Joad" creates what could be considered as a framework of the record. The rest of the record feels like a crossing between *Nebraska* and the songs on

the first trilogy albums. "Straight Times" is a story of a released prisoner who tries to make his stand in society, yet is often a victim of prejudices. Even his wife watches him "out of the corner of her eye". The ex-convict realizes that "you can't get any more than half free" and eventually he ends up similarly as the characters on *Nebraska*, though it is not explicitly stated in the song. The last two stanzas are as follow:

In the basement, huntin' gun and a hacksaw

Sip a beer, and thirteen inches of barrel drop to the floor.

Come home in the evening, can't get the smell from my hands

Lay my head down on the pillow

And, go driftin' off into foreign lands.

Considering the lines "My uncles at the evenin' table makes his living runnin' hot cars / Slips me a hundred dollar bill, says / "Charlie, you best remember who your friend are" one can only guess whether he commits a crime or kills himself. Both endings are possible and both are more than a reminder of *Nebraska*. Yet in the context, I would say that the suicide may be more probable, creating an image of deeper desperation.

Gilmore (1995) in his review wrote: "The most affecting stories here /.../ are the ones about a handful of undocumented immigrants and their passage into Southern California's promised land." "Sinaloa Cowboys", "Balboa Park", "The Line", and "Galveston Bay" are the stories of those nameless thousands who thought perhaps similarly as once the Joads thought of California. "Sinaloa Cowboys" is a story of two brothers who came from Mexico in hope for better life but one of them wound up dead after working for drug lords. "Galveston Bay" is about a Vietnamese soldier who fought along Americans and returned with them to start a new life, but eventually is a victim of "America to Americans" movement. Those are the stories that are closely related to the opening song, but what is more, they moved Springsteen in a new direction. It is almost as if he realized that he was important enough to give voice to the voiceless.

***Wrecking Ball***. *Wrecking Ball*, according to Rolling Stone, was the number one album of 2012. It is Springsteen's reaction to the Great Recession. *Wrecking Ball* is a fascinating example of Springsteen's roots music exploration. This thesis did not mention the musical aspect, the genre diversity, in the previous chapters, but it is difficult for a non-musician to judge which songs incorporate which elements from which genre. *Wrecking Ball* is different. Its musical diversity is astonishing. For example "Rocky Ground" is pure gospel, "We Take Care of Our Own" is a protest song, and "Death to My Hometown" sounds like an Irish pub song, except for being again a song addressed to the economic situation.

This album is a return to big-sound albums like *Born to Run* or *Born in the U.S.A.*, but it still carries the message of *Nebraska*. One of the most interesting moments is the opening line of "Rocky Ground". The "I'm a soldier!" shout could be easily mistaken for Springsteen's voice, but the truth is that it is one of the Alan Lomax's samples. This one had been recorded in Clarksdale, Mississippi seven years before Springsteen was born (John, 2012). This is no coincidence; other samples were used on this record – "Death to my Hometown" contains parts of "The Last Words of Copernicus", an old poem dating back to 1755. In 1869 it was accompanied by music and in 1959 recorded by Lomax. As can be found on one of the Springsteen's fan sites, [springsteenlyrics.com](http://springsteenlyrics.com) (2012), "it was Springsteen who had the idea to use the Alan Lomax recordings on the album".

*Wrecking Ball* in my opinion wonderfully illustrates how Springsteen has had moved in his lyrical and musical development. The album is almost anthemic, which would make it the first album since *Born in the U.S.A.*. It is the continuity offered there, which makes it yet another of Springsteen's outstanding albums, not the stadium sized songs. The character in "Jack of All Trades" proclaiming that "If I had me a gun, I'd find the bastards and shoot 'em on sight" could easily be Johnny 99 or one of his friends (John, 2012). Even he, a Jack of All Trades, is not convinced that he can make it through the hard times, when he assures his wife that "we'll be alright".

"Land of Hope and Dreams" is without any doubts the highlight of the roots connection on this album. Springsteen's fans have known this one for a long time. It was written in the 1990s and was often featured during his concerts, but this is the first time Springsteen decided to record it and eventually include it on the album. "Land of Hope and Dreams" was inspired by a traditional gospel song from 1922 "This Train Is Bound for Glory", which later served as an inspiration for the title of Guthrie's autobiography

“Bound for Glory”. Guthrie adapted the song and wrote new lyrics which are similar to the version sung by Sister Rosetta Tharp, but perhaps less religious.

Guthrie with his version makes a certain exception on who can ride the train: “This train don't carry no gamblers, / Liars, thieves, nor big shot rambles /.../ no smokers, / Two bit liars, small time jokers /.../ no con men, / No wheeler dealers, here and gone men /.../ no rustlers, Sidestreet walkers, two bit hustlers”. Springsteen’s train is different; in fact, he invites everyone to join him on the ride:

Well, this train carries saints and sinners

This train carries losers and winners

This train carries whores and gamblers

This train carries lost souls.

I said, this train, dreams will not be thwarted

This train, faith will be rewarded

This train, hear the steel wheels singing

This train, bells of freedom ringing.

/.../

I said, this train carries broken-hearted

This train, thieves and sweet souls departed

This train carries fools and kings thrown

This train, all aboard.

Springsteen once said that his music is “about the distance between the American dream and American reality”. Perhaps it is possible to overcome this distance by this “train” about which Springsteen sings. The train represents the United States and all the losers and winners are just people who reside there. It can be even perceived as previously mentioned “Atlantic City”, only from different perspective. “Land of Hope and Dreams” is



presumably one of the most positive songs Springsteen has ever written and quite surprisingly it is included on album filled with anger and rage. In its core, it still is the same Springsteen calling once more for unification. It may be a metaphor for Springsteen's vision of the United States as they should be. After all, the song still remains a gospel song, and as such, it carries a message of hope: "All must be saved if there is to be any hope for any of us." (Symykywicz, 2008, p. 137). Johnny 99 from *Nebraska* and the main protagonist of "Straight Time," they both would agree. Springsteen's *Wrecking Ball* adds stories that fit in the framework of his previously released albums. If we look at the song from the road metaphor point of view, it is possible to assume Springsteen's taking it further once again. Where *The Ghost of Tom Joad* ended with the road metaphor in the role of prison, *Wrecking Ball* with its "Land of Hope and Dreams" is trying to show that only when everyone realizes that the road is shared, and does not necessarily need to be connected with any kind of physical movement, it will be possible to overcome any social injustice.

"American Land" has a similar story to "Land of Hopes and Dreams". It has been played a hundred times live and is very popular amongst Springsteen fans for its quick tempo. "American Land" is not a regular part of the album; it was released only as a bonus. Nevertheless, the song provides an interesting view on American Dream, similar to the one expressed on *The Ghost of Tom Joad*:

The McNicholas, the Posalski's, the Smiths, Zerillis, too  
The Blacks, the Irish, Italians, the Germans and the Jews  
Come across the water a thousand miles from home  
With nothin' in their bellies but the fire down below.

They died building the railroads worked to bones and skin  
They died in the fields and factories names scattered in the wind  
They died to get here a hundred years ago they're still dyin' now  
The hands that built the country were always trying to keep down.

What needs to be noticed is Springsteen's mention of his mother's name – Zerilli. He is more than aware of the fact that even he – an American icon – is in fact a descendant of immigrants. I am convinced that Springsteen tries to point out that the history of the United States was rather complicated and people should not forget that there are no true Americans. Springsteen's view is almost whitmanesque – in his vision of America, he is very close to Whitman's view expressed on "Song of Myself". For Whitman, everything that dies comes back and lives figuratively from the past. Every single person's achievement is the fertile soil for the future generations and we live through them merged into one big I. That is not that different from what is Springsteen trying to express by these two songs. Even the lyrics from *Nebraska* "Atlantic City" are suggesting this possibility: "Well now, ev'rything dies, baby, that's a fact / But maybe ev'rything that dies someday comes back."

## Conclusion

Springsteen has travelled far since his beginnings. He changed from a boy desperately trying to escape the small town to an American icon encouraging the others to join him on his way to collective salvation. Experiencing the distance between the reality and the American Dream led him to the path he travels now. He might have started similarly to Whitman's "Song of Myself" and its egoism, but ended as a unique blend of Steinbeck, Guthrie, and Whitman again, only this time Springsteen was close to his effort to live from the past. The whitmanesque approach of the first trilogy helped him to become an important part of the American culture, and it was this position that set him free and allowed him to further evolve. Only then he realized that the individualism is not a way towards salvation. He still had to go a long way.

After denying the road as a way to freedom, he started addressing more noble issues, but the road still was not a positive metaphor. Suddenly, all his characters were sentenced to its futility and were trapped travelling from nowhere to nowhere. Springsteen recognized that the Joads from Steinbeck's were very similar to the protagonists of his first trilogy. They truly believed that the road will lead them to a better life. Springsteen knew this was wrong but saw Tom Joad as an ultimate hero who defied fate. Springsteen realized Tom's approach, to put morale above the law, is the only way in shaping America (and subsequently the whole world) to be a better place.

Springsteen's interest in Tom Joad is closely related to Whitman again, this time to his transcendentalism. Whitman's "Song of Myself" evolved and showed that it is not about egoism but about being a part of a larger whole. Where Whitman was perhaps overly optimistic in his views on democracy, Springsteen remains sceptical. Similarly as Guthrie, Whitman rejects the upper class and is more concerned about the working class. This is where Springsteen takes it little further. He is a realist and is aware of the fact that the class differences will endure, but for him it does not mean we should not help each other in order to achieve a decent life for everyone. "The Land of Hope and Dreams" invites everyone to join Springsteen on his way. He does not care whether one is rich or poor since he has understood the road is shared and only by helping each other it is possible to achieve the change Tom Joad was striving for.

Springsteen's career can be described using the words of his friend Steven Van Zandt,

The basic idea is to keep the river flowing. So if you're fourth or fifth or sixth generation rocker and you're only going back as far as the 90s or the 80s, you don't qualify. If you want to be great then compare yourself with something that is great. What will emerge from you is your own identity (Vanity Fair, 2014).

Springsteen compares himself all the time. He compares himself with Bob Dylan, Woody Guthrie, and hundreds of anonymous singers from the last century. Through this comparison, his unique identity arises while it still carries the resemblance of the times past. Springsteen, just as any good artists, knows this comparison must not stop with music. To improve himself, he takes inspiration from literature, history, or from his own experience. Van Zandt's words about the river are a fine metaphor. It is not only about being able to see back, but to see forward as well. That is why Springsteen often plays with much younger bands - to keep the river of roots music flowing.

Finally, I came to conclusion that Springsteen's artistic contributions to the world are one of the most valuable ones. His devotion and hard work has inspired people all over the world. Thanks to his music, people are rediscovering the American cultural heritage of Guthrie, Steinbeck, Whitman, and many others. Without him, these great works of art would be known by only a few.

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## Appendices

### *Used Song Lyrics*

#### “Thunder Road”

The screen door slams	Well now I'm no hero
Mary's dress waves	That's understood
Like a vision she dances across the porch	All the redemption I can offer, girl
As the radio plays	Is beneath this dirty hood
Roy Orbison singing for the lonely	With a chance to make it good somehow
Hey that's me and I want you only	Hey what else can we do now
Don't turn me home again	Except roll down the window
I just can't face myself alone again	And let the wind blow back your hair
Don't run back inside	Well the night's busting open
darling you know just what I'm here for	These two lanes will take us anywhere
So you're scared and you're thinking	We got one last chance to make it real
That maybe we ain't that young anymore	To trade in these wings on some wheels
Show a little faith, there's magic in the night	Climb in back, heaven's waiting on down the tracks
You ain't a beauty but hey you're all right	Oh come take my hand
Oh and that's all right with me	We're riding out tonight to case the promised land
You can hide 'neath your covers	Oh Thunder Road, oh Thunder Road
And study your pain	oh Thunder Road
Make crosses from your lovers	Lying out there like a killer in the sun
Throw roses in the rain	Hey I know it's late we can make it if we run
Waste your summer praying in vain	Oh Thunder Road, sit tight, take hold
For a savior to rise from these streets	Thunder Road

Well I got this guitar  
And I learned how to make it talk  
And my car's out back  
If you're ready to take that long walk  
From your front porch to my front seat  
The door's open but the ride ain't free  
And I know you're lonely  
For words that I ain't spoken  
But tonight we'll be free  
All the promises'll be broken  
There were ghosts in the eyes  
Of all the boys you sent away

They haunt this dusty beach road  
In the skeleton frames of burned-out  
Chevrolets  
They scream your name at night in the  
street  
Your graduation gown lies in rags at their  
feet  
And in the lonely cool before dawn  
You hear their engines roaring on  
But when you get to the porch they're  
gone on the wind  
So Mary climb in  
It's a town full of losers  
And I'm pulling out of here to win.

“Backstreets”

One soft infested summer me and Terry became friends

Trying in vain to breathe the fire we was born in

Catching rides to the outskirts tying faith between our teeth

Sleeping in that old abandoned beach house getting wasted in the heat

And hiding on the backstreets, hiding on the backstreets

With a love so hard and filled with defeat

Running for our lives at night on them backstreets

Slow dancing 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 waiting for the bells that ring

In the deep heart of the night to set us loose from everything

to go running on the backstreets, running on the backstreets

We swore we'd live forever on the backstreets we take it together

Endless juke joints and Valentino drag where dancers scraped the tears

Up off the street dressed down in rags running into the darkness

Some hurt bad some really dying at night sometimes it seemed

You could hear the 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 nothing 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 see

Trying to learn how to walk like 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

We swore forever friends on the backstreets until the end

Hiding on the backstreets, hiding on the backstreets

“Badlands”

Lights out tonight  
trouble in the heartland  
Got a head-on collision  
smashin' in my guts, man  
I'm caught in a crossfire  
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  
You better listen to me baby  
Talk about a dream  
Try to make it real  
you wake up in the night  
With a fear so real  
Spend your life waiting  
for a moment that just won't come  
Well don't waste your time waiting  
Badlands, you gotta live it everyday  
Let the broken hearts stand  
As the price you've gotta pay  
We'll keep pushin' till it's understood  
and these badlands start treating us good

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 get it straight, darling,  
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  
I believe in the love that you gave me  
I believe in the faith that can save me  
I believe in the hope and I pray  
That some day it may raise me  
Above these badlands  
For the ones who had a notion  
A notion deep inside  
That it ain't no sin to be glad you're alive  
I wanna find one face that ain't looking  
through me  
I wanna find one place  
I wanna spit in the face of these badlands

“Darkness on the Edge of Town”

They're still racing out at the Trestles	Cut it loose or let it drag 'em down
But that blood it never burned in her veins	Where no one asks any questions
Now I hear she's got a house up in Fairview	Or looks too long in your face
And a style she's trying to maintain	In the darkness on the edge of town
Well if she wants to see me	Some folks are born into a good life
You can tell her that I'm easily found	Other folks get it anyway anyhow
Tell her there's a spot out 'neath Abram's Bridge	I lost my money and I lost my wife
And tell her there's a darkness on the edge of town	Them things don't seem to matter much to me now
Everybody's got a secret Sonny	Tonight I'll be on that hill 'cause I can't stop
Something that they just can't face	I'll be on that hill with everything I got
Some folks spend their whole lives trying to keep it	Lives on the line where dreams are found and lost
They carry it with them every step that they take	I'll be there on time and I'll pay the cost
Till some day they just cut it loose	For wanting things that can only be found
	In the darkness on the edge of town

“Factory”

Early in the morning factory whistle blows,  
Man rises from bed and puts on his clothes,  
Man takes his lunch, walks out in the morning light,  
It's the working, the working, just the working life.

Through the mansions of fear, through the mansions of pain,  
I see my daddy walking through them factory gates in the rain,  
Factory takes his hearing, factory gives him life,  
The working, the working, just the working life.

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,  
It's the working, the working, just the working life.

“Something in the Night”

I'm riding down Kingsley,  
figuring I'll get a drink  
Turn the radio up loud,  
so I don't have to think,  
I take her to the floor,  
looking for a moment when the world  
seems right,  
And I tear into the guts,  
of something in the night.  
You're born with nothing,  
and better off that way,  
Soon as you've got something they send  
someone to try and take it away,  
You can ride this road 'till dawn,  
without another human being in sight,  
Just kids wasted on

something in the night.  
Nothing is forgotten or forgiven,  
when it's your last time around,  
I got stuff running 'round my head  
That I just can't live down  
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 running burned and blind,  
Chasing something in the night.



“Independence Day”

Well Papa go to bed now it's getting late  
Nothing we can say is gonna change anything now  
I'll be leaving in the morning 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 them do to you

So say goodbye it's Independence Day  
It's Independence Day  
All down the line  
Just say goodbye it's Independence Day  
It's Independence Day this time

Now 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

Well say goodbye it's Independence Day  
It's Independence Day all boys must run away  
So say goodbye it's Independence Day  
All men must make their way come Independence Day

Now the rooms are all empty down at Frankie's joint  
And the highway she's deserted down to Breaker's Point  
There's a lot of people leaving town now  
Leaving their friends, their homes  
At night they walk that dark and dusty highway all alone

Well Papa go to bed now it's getting late  
Nothing we can say can change anything now  
Because there's just different people coming down here now  
and they see things in different ways  
And soon everything we've known will just be swept away

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

“The River”

I come from down in the valley  
where mister when you're young  
They bring you up to do like your daddy  
done  
Me and Mary we met in high school  
when she was just seventeen  
We'd ride out of that valley down to where  
the fields were green  
  
We'd go down to the river  
And into the river we'd dive  
Oh down to the river we'd ride  
  
Then I got Mary pregnant  
and man that was all she wrote  
And for my nineteenth birthday I got a  
union card and a wedding coat  
We went down to the courthouse  
and the judge put it all to rest  
No wedding day smiles no walk down the  
aisle  
No flowers no wedding dress  
  
That night we went down to the river  
And into the river we'd dive  
Oh down to the river we did ride

I got a job working construction for the  
Johnstown Company  
But lately there ain't been much work on  
account of the economy  
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 riding in my brother's  
car  
Her body tan and wet down at the  
reservoir  
At night on them banks I'd lie awake  
And pull 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  
That sends me down to the river tonight  
Down to the river  
my baby and I  
Oh down to the river we ride

“Wreck on the Highway”

Last night I was out driving  
Coming home at the end of the working day  
I was riding alone through the drizzling rain  
On a deserted stretch of a county two-lane  
When I came upon a wreck on the highway

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 lying by the side of the road  
He cried 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 knocking 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 I 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  
Thinking 'bout the wreck on the highway

“Nebraska”

I saw her standin' on her front lawn just twirlin' her baton  
Me and her went for a ride sir and ten innocent people died

From the town of Lincoln Nebraska with a sawed off .410 on my lap  
Through to the badlands of Wyoming I killed everything in my path

I can't say that I'm sorry for the things that we done  
At least for a little while sir me and her we had us some fun

The jury brought in a guilty verdict and the judge he sentenced me to death  
Midnight in a prison storeroom with leather straps across my chest

Sheriff when the man pulls that switch sir and snaps my poor head back  
You make sure my pretty baby is sittin' right there on my lap

They declared me unfit to live said into that great void my soul'd be hurled  
They wanted to know why I did what I did  
Well sir I guess there's just a meanness in this world

“Johnny 99”

Well they closed down the auto plant in  
Mahwah late that month

Ralph went out lookin' for a job but he  
couldn't find none

He came home too drunk from  
mixin' Tanqueray and wine

He got a gun shot a night clerk now they  
call'm Johnny 99

Down in the part of town where when you  
hit a red light you don't stop

Johnny's wavin' his gun around and  
threatenin' to blow his top

When an off duty cop snuck up on him  
from behind

Out in front of the Club Tip Top they  
slapped the cuffs on Johnny 99

Well the city supplied a public defender  
but the judge was Mean John Brown

He came into the courtroom and stared  
young Johnny down

Well the evidence is clear gonna let the  
sentence son fit the crime

Prison for 98 and a year and we'll call it  
even Johnny 99

A fistfight broke out in the courtroom they  
had to drag Johnny's girl away

His mama stood up and shouted "Judge  
don't take my boy this way"

Well son you got a statement you'd like to  
make

Before the bailiff comes to forever take  
you away

Now judge judge I had debts no honest  
man could pay

The bank was holdin' my mortgage and  
they was takin' my house away

Now I ain't sayin' that makes me an  
innocent man

But it was more 'n all this that put that gun  
in my hand

Well your honor I do believe I'd be better  
off dead

And if you can take a man's life for the  
thoughts that's in his head

Then won't you sit back in that chair and  
think it over judge one more time

And let 'em shave off my hair and put me  
on that execution line

“Atlantic City”

Well they blew up the chicken man in  
Philly last night now they blew up his  
house too

Down on the boardwalk they're gettin'  
ready for a fight gonna see what them  
racket boys can do

Now there's trouble busin' in from outta  
state and the D.A. can't get no relief

Gonna be a rumble out on the promenade  
and the gamblin' commission's hangin' on  
by the skin of its teeth

CHORUS

Well now everything dies baby that's a  
fact

But maybe everything that dies someday  
comes back

Put your makeup on fix your hair up pretty

And meet me tonight in Atlantic City

Well I got a job and tried to put my money  
away

But I got debts that no honest man can pay

So I drew what I had from the Central  
Trust

And I bought us two tickets on that Coast  
City bus

Now our luck may have died and our love  
may be cold but with you forever I'll stay

We're goin' out where the sand's turnin' to  
gold so put on your stockin's baby 'cause  
the night's getting cold

And everything dies baby that's a fact

But maybe everything that dies someday  
comes back

Now I been lookin' for a job but it's hard  
to find

Down here it's just winners and losers and  
don't get caught on the wrong side of that  
line

Well I'm tired of comin' out on the losin'  
end

So honey last night I met this guy and I'm  
gonna do a little favor for him

Well I guess everything dies baby that's a  
fact

But maybe everything that dies someday  
comes back

Put your hair up nice and set up pretty

and meet me tonight in Atlantic City

Meet me tonight in Atlantic City

Meet me tonight in Atlantic City

“Highway Patrolman”

My name is Joe Roberts I work for the state	But them wheat prices kept on droppin' till it was like we were gettin' robbed
I'm a sergeant out of Perrineville barracks number 8	Franky came home in '68, and me, I took this job
I always done an honest job as honest as I could	Yea we're laughin' and drinkin' nothin' feels better than blood on blood
I got a brother named Franky and Franky ain't no good	Takin' turns dancin' with Maria as the band played "Night of the Johnstown Flood"
Now ever since we was young kids it's been the same come down	I catch him when he's strayin', teach him how to walk that line
I get a call over the radio Franky's in trouble downtown	Man turns his back on his family he ain't no friend of mine
Well if it was any other man, I'd put him straight away	Well the night was like any other, I got a call 'bout quarter to nine
But when it's your brother sometimes you look the other way	There was trouble in a roadhouse out on the Michigan line
Me and Franky laughin' and drinkin' nothin' feels better than blood on blood	There was a kid lyin' on the floor lookin' bad bleedin' hard from his head there was a girl cryin' at a table and it was Frank, they said
Takin' turns dancin' with Maria as the band played "Night of the Johnstown Flood"	Well I went out and I jumped in my car and I hit the lights
I catch him when he's strayin' like any brother would	Well I must of done one hundred and ten through Michigan county that night
Man turns his back on his family well he just ain't no good	It was out at the crossroads, down round Willow bank
Well Franky went in the army back in 1965 I got a farm deferment, settled down, took Maria for my wife	Seen a Buick with Ohio plates behind the wheel was Frank



Well I chased him through them county  
roads till a sign said Canadian border five  
miles from here

I pulled over the side of the highway and  
watched his taillights disappear

Me and Franky laughin' and drinkin'

Nothin' feels better than blood on blood

Takin' turns dancin' with Maria as the  
band played "Night of the Johnstown  
Flood"

I catch him when he's strayin' like any  
brother would

Man turns his back on his family well he  
just ain't no good

“Reason to Believe”

Seen a man standin' over a dead dog lyin'  
by the highway in a ditch

He's lookin' down kinda puzzled pokin'  
that dog with a stick

Got his car door flung open he's standin'  
out on highway 31

Like if he stood there long enough that  
dog'd get up and run

Struck me kinda funny seem kinda funny  
sir to me

Still at the end of every hard earned day  
people find some reason to believe

Now Mary Lou loved Johnny with a love  
mean and true

She said "Baby I'll work for you every day  
and bring my money home to you"

One day he up and left her and ever since  
that

She waits down at the end of that dirt road  
for young Johnny to come back

Struck me kinda funny seemed kind of  
funny sir to me

How at the end of every hard earned day  
people find some reason to believe

Take a baby to the river Kyle William  
they called him

Wash the baby in the water take away  
little Kyle's sin

In a whitewash shotgun shack an old man  
passes away take his body to the graveyard  
and over him they pray Lord won't you tell  
us

tell us what does it mean

Still at the end of every hard earned day  
people find some reason to believe

Congregation gathers down by the  
riverside

Preacher stands with his Bible groom  
stands waitin' for his bride

Congregation gone and the sun sets behind  
a weepin' willow tree

Groom stands alone and watches the river  
rush on so effortlessly

Wonderin' where can his baby be still at  
the end of every hard earned day people  
find some reason to believe

“The Ghost of Tom Joad”

Men walkin’ ‘long the railroad tracks

Goin’ someplace, there’s no goin’ back

Highway Patrol choppers comin’ up over  
the ridge

Hot soup on a campfire under the bridge

Shelter line stretchin’ ‘round the corner

Welcome to the new world order

Families sleepin’ in their cars in the  
southwest

No home, no job, no peace, no rest

Well the highway is alive tonight

But nobody’s kiddin’ nobody about where  
it goes

I’m sittin’ down here in the campfire light

Searchin’ for the ghost of Tom Joad

He pulls a prayer book out of his sleepin’  
bag

Preacher lights up a butt and takes a drag

Waitin’ for when the last shall be first and  
the first shall be last

In a cardboard box ‘neath the underpass

You got a one way ticket to the promised  
land

You got a hole in your belly and a gun in  
your hand

Sleeping on a pillow of solid rock

Bathin’ in the city’s aqueduct

The highway is alive tonight

But where it’s headed everybody knows

I’m sittin’ down here in the campfire light

Waitin’ on the ghost of Tom Joad

Now Tom said, “Mom, wherever there’s a  
cop beatin’ a guy

Wherever a hungry new born baby cries

Where there’s a fight ‘gainst the blood and  
hatred in the air

Look for me mom I’ll be there.

Wherever somebody’s fightin’ for a place  
to stand

Or a decent job or a helpin’ hand.

Wherever somebody’s strugglin’ to be  
free,

Look in their eyes ma you’ll see me.”

Well the highway is alive tonight

Where it’s headed everybody knows

I’m sittin’ down here in the campfire light

With the ghost of old Tom Joad

Well the highway is alive tonight

But nobody’s kiddin’ nobody about where  
it goes

I’m sittin’ down here in the campfire light

With the ghost of old Tom Joad

With the ghost of old Tom Joad

With the ghost of old Tom Joad

“Jack of All Trades”

I'll mow your lawn, clean the leaves out'  
your drain

I'll mend your roof, to keep out the rain

I take the work that God provides

I'm a jack of all trades, honey we'll be all  
right

I'll hammer the nails, I'll set the stone

I'll harvest your crops, when they're ripe  
and grown

I'll pull that engine apart, and patch'er up  
'til she's running right

I'm a jack of all trades, we'll be all right

The hurricane blows, brings the hard rain

When the blue sky breaks

It feels like the world's gonna change

And we'll start caring for each other

Like Jesus said that we might

I'm a jack of all trades, we'll be all right

The banker man grows fat, working man  
grows thin

It's all happened before and it'll happen  
again

It'll happen again, yeah they'll bet your  
life

I'm a jack of all trades, darling we'll be all  
right

Now sometimes tomorrow comes soaked  
in treasure and blood

We stood the drought, now we'll stand the  
flood

There's a new world coming, I can see the  
light

I'm a jack of all trades, we'll be all right

So you use what you've got and you learn  
to make do

You take the old, you make it new

If I had me a gun, I'd find the bastards and  
shoot 'em on sight

I'm a jack of all trades, we'll be all right

I'm a jack of all trades, we'll be all right

“Land of Hope and Dreams”

Grab your ticket and your suitcase  
Thunder’s rollin’ down this track  
Well, you don’t know where you’re goin’  
now

But you know you won’t be back

Well, darlin’ if you’re weary

Lay your head upon my chest

We’ll take what we can carry

Yeah, and we’ll leave the rest

Big wheels roll through fields

Where sunlight streams

Meet me in a land of hope and dreams

Well, I will provide for you

And I’ll stand by your side

You’ll need a good companion now

For this part of the ride

Leave behind your sorrows

Let this day be the last

Tomorrow there’ll be sunshine

And all this darkness past

Big wheels roll through fields

Where sunlight streams

Oh meet me in a land of hope and dreams

This train...

Carries saints and sinners

This train...

Carries losers and winners

This train...

Carries whores and gamblers

This train...

Carries lost souls

I said this train...

Dreams will not be thwarted

This train...

Faith will be rewarded

“American Land”

What is this land America so many travel there  
I'm going now while I'm still young my darling meet me there  
Wish me luck my lovely I'll send for you when I can  
And we'll make our home in the American land

Over there all the woman wear silk and satin to their knees  
And children dear, the sweets, I hear, are growing on the trees  
Gold comes rushing out the rivers straight into your hands  
When you make your home in the American Land

There's diamonds in the sidewalk the's gutters lined in song  
Dear I hear that beer flows through the faucets all night long  
There's treasure for the taking, for any hard working man  
Who will make his home in the American Land

I docked at Ellis Island in a city of light and spires  
She met me in the valley of red-hot steel and fire  
We made the steel that built the cities with our sweat and two hands  
And we made our home in the American Land

There's diamonds in the sidewalk the's gutters lined in song  
Dear I hear that beer flows through the faucets all night long  
There's treasure for the taking, for any hard working man  
Who will make his home in the American Land

The McNicholas, the Posalski's, the Smiths, Zerillis, too  
The Blacks, the Irish, Italians, the Germans and the Jews  
Come across the water a thousand miles from home  
With nothin in their bellies but the fire down below

They died building the railroads worked to bones and skin  
They died in the fields and factories names scattered in the wind  
They died to get here a hundred years ago they're still dyin now  
The hands that built the country were always trying to keep down

There's diamonds in the sidewalk the gutters lined in song  
Dear I hear that beer flows through the faucets all night long  
There's treasure for the taking, for any hard working man  
Who will make his home in the American Land  
Who will make his home in the American Land  
Who will make his home in the American Land

All the lyrics were taken from Bruce Springsteen's official homepage:  
<http://www.brucespringsteen.net/> (Date of access: 13.04.2014)



*Used Poems*

“Mill-Doors” by Carl Sandburg

You never come back.

I say good-by when I see you going in the doors,

The hopeless open doors that call and wait

And take you then for—how many cents a day?

How many cents for the sleepy eyes and fingers?

I say good-by because I know they tap your wrists,

In the dark, in the silence, day by day,

And all the blood of you drop by drop,

And you are old before you are young.

You never come back.

The poem was taken from: <http://www.bartleby.com/165/7.html> (Date of access: 13.04.2014)

## Summary in Czech

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá spojením mezi hudbou Bruce Springsteena a americkou tradiční hudbou. Nastihuje, co přesně tento termín zahrnuje i jak ho vnímat optikou dnešní doby. Zároveň tato práce ukazuje proměny cesty jako metafory v různých obdobích Springsteenovy tvorby.

Tato práce je dělena do dvou hlavních kapitol. Pro lepší pochopení Springsteenových textů je v první kapitole poskytnut základní biografický náhled dovedený až do doby vydání jeho přelomové desky Born To Run. Druhá kapitola, dále dělena na dvě podkapitoly, poskytuje právě vysvětlení termínu „American roots music“. Další podkapitola se také dělí na dvě části, které se každá věnují jedné ze zvolených trilogií. První trilogie je složena ze Springsteenových desek zabývajících se americkým snem a jeho vzdáleností od reality a zároveň mapuje, jak Springsteen opustil whitmanovské vnímání cesty jako metafory. Druhá trilogie pak ukazuje Springsteenovu politicky motivovanou tvůrčí činnost a zabývá se příklonem k sociální kritice a aktivismu ve stylu Woodyho Guthrieho a Johna Steinbecka. V závěru jsou pak shrnuty proměny cesty jako metafory ve Springsteenových textech.