
Correspondence

Dear TR:

Thanks very much for sending along the issue of *Theoretical Review* with your Springsteen piece. It is probably the only lucid piece of marxist rock criticism I have read. (Unless Simon Frith is a marxist, which I sort of doubt.) It is also one of the most intriguing reviews of *The River* and Springsteen's music that I've come across lately. Let me know if you'd like me to forward a copy to Bruce; I think he'd very much like to read it.

Although, on the other hand, I'm not sure how much he would understand it. One thing that's necessary to remember about his work and its progressive tendencies is that he makes it up as he goes along: Springsteen has only a high school education, and not a terribly good one of those; and his encounters with *any* serious discussions of issues and values outside the popular mainstream as limited. I, too, cringe at some of Springsteen's sexual stereotyping, the most egregious example of which actually comes in the live show, when he describes Clarence Clemons as "able to leap tall women at a single bound." But in a very real sense, he simply doesn't know any better, and that's one reason I think that he ought to see your piece. (He took heat from all sides for the female pronouns on *The River*, and I'm curious to see what the reaction in his new batch of songs will be. Not too much, I fear, since he probably sees such pronouns—not totally incorrectly—as part of rock's idiomatic expression; this is possibly one reason why the Clemons line strikes me as more gratuitous than any of the rest.)

I do think that you misread one aspect of *The River*; as I thought he's made clear in the *Musician* interview, Bruce is not always writing from his own perspective on that record. "Jackson Cage," particularly the lines from it that you have cited, has very little to do with the way that he sees the world, and a great deal to do with the way that he sees others seeing it. (The lines that do reflect his beliefs are near the end: "Are you tough enough to play/ The game they play/ Or will you just do your time/ And fade away . . .") While I've admittedly been shocked at Bruce's utter misreading of capitalism—he seems to think that it's exactly the opposite of its true nature—it seems to me that *The River* represents a strong step toward a much more politically involved and progressive performance style. He will never be as overtly political as Gang of Four, for a variety of reasons, having to do with his own instincts for glamour and show biz razzle dazzle and his instinctive distrust of highbrow ideas, but I think that you will be pleasantly surprised by what he does next.

I base this to a great extent on what Springsteen did on his European tour (just now being completed). It was a strange experience to see him performing in Paris, in a hall owned by the CP, singing "This Land Is Your Land" with a new verse that incorporated into Woody Guthrie's vision, the streets of Brixton. And to hear him pose the song as a *question*, rather than the usual easy answer. I know also that in England, the single thing Bruce was most curious about was the Trade Union Council's (TUC) Unemployment March. Lastly, there is the set of new lyrics he wrote for the Elvis song,

"Follow That Dream." While they are still imbued with a good deal of romanticism, I think that in many ways, the verse I'll quote captures both the despair one can't avoid feeling in the face of the current economic and political climate and the hope you're looking for:

Now every man has the right to live
The right to a chance to give what he
has to give
The right to fight for the things he
believes
For the things that come to him in dreams
I walk in dreams, I live in dreams

Given the way that he sings it, there's little doubt that the "I" is meant to be universal—that is, that the last line is as inclusive as the first. (On the subject of Elvis songs, it might interest you to know that the lines you quote from "Badlands" on page 26 are lifted wholesale (except the last one) from Presley's "King of the Whole Wide World.")

Best,
Dave Marsh

Dave Marsh is a contributing Editor of Rolling Stone magazine and is the author of Bruce Springsteen's biography—Born to Run: The Bruce Springsteen Story. He also writes for the magazine Musician: Player & Listener.

Dear TR:

To make some comments and criticisms: *TR* is the best written journal in the trend. The writing style is clear and concise. The introductions are complete; each point made is developed in turn and summarized. The articles are summarized and the conclusions drawn. This varies from much of what is written on the left where the effort seems to be to convince the reader by the sheer volume of the presentation. I believe it is because of this clarity that the underdeveloped cadre are taking up the arguments of *TR* and not because of "puerile literary tricks" (I looked up the definition). I will add here, the *Line of March* house must be made of tempered glass. If I had not read Louis Althusser's *Essays in Self-Criticism* I might have been swayed by: "The whole point of the Althusser school is to attack the materialist foundation of Marxism-Leninism. . ." Having done so however, I am clear that Althusser's whole point is to defend materialism, even the materialism of Stalin, against all non-materialist attacks particularly economism and humanism.

But I would like to make a criticism of *TR*'s quotes. When quoting the classics, few of "us" have the collected works of anybody, but many of "us" have the classics published by Foreign Language Press etc. So I think it preferable to quote these when possible. Any city with a RCP bookstore has the "collected pamphlets" of just about everybody. The "us" I refer to are the aspiring Marxist-Leninists trying to honestly work our way through the seemingly endless line of assertions and counter assertions coming from the trend. Also an appeal should be made to the reader to read the more contemporary work to which you refer because they are not just for the scholars.

So I would like to thank you for your help. I certainly have some reading to catch up on. I am sure *TR* will become more widely read here in the Seattle area. And I am just as sure it will continue to improve as it has in the past.

R. E., Seattle