

Argumentative essay about college education

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Born to Drive? The Role of Cars in the Works of Bruce Springsteen

What do cars mean to you? Are they just a mere form of transportation from point a to point b, are you emotionally attached to them for personal reasons, or do you admire the way they look? For Bruce Springsteen, cars and automobiles represented much more than just a mode of transportation to and from places. Bruce used cars as a method of escape in his songs. From an early age, Bruce became infatuated with cars due to a series of influences including his father (who becomes an essential factor on Bruce's mental state), other family members, friends, etc. The amount of stories that Bruce provides about cars in his 2016 autobiography, *Born to Run* allows the reader to fully comprehend how important and influential cars were in his life. In his book, Springsteen credits "Someone made the mistake of telling me the safest place in a lightning storm was in a car because of the grounding of the rubber tires. After that, at the first sound of thunder, I caterwauled until my parents would take me in the car until the storm subsided" as one of the major reasons as to why he writes about cars. In the next sentence, Springsteen professes his lifelong fascination behind cars when he continues with "I then proceeded to write about cars for the rest of my life". As a reader or listener it is essential to take heed into Springsteen's early interest in cars as they play a monumental role in symbolizing his need for escape in arguably his three most famous albums, *Born to Run*, *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, and *The River*.

Analysis of the author's work

Due to a slew of reasons, Springsteen depicted his need for escape from a very young age and this carried over into his songs. Between a seemingly unstable childhood, an abusive father, and a deadbeat town, Bruce made it clear he wanted out. With his lyrics constantly up for interpretation, it is not always clear as to why he wanted to leave so badly, but we always knew how he wanted to leave, automobiles. In the opening lines to one of his most prolific songs, *Born to Run*, Bruce writes:

“ In the day we sweat it out in the streets of a runaway American dream / At night we ride through mansions of glory in suicide machines / Sprung from cages out on highway 9 / Chrome wheeled, fuel injected, and steppin’ out over the line / Baby this town rips the bones from your back / It’s a death trap, it’s a suicide rap / We gotta get out while we’re young. The famous opening lyrics express Bruce’s current situation in his hometown and how he wants to get out. The town “ rips the bones from his back” and it is a “ death trap” and “ suicide rap” providing his reasons for wanting to leave. Not only does he give the reasons as to why he wants to leave, but he also talks about how he wants to leave, through cars. Bruce rides in “ suicide machines” that are “ chrome wheeled” and “ fuel injected”, “ out on highway nine.” The presence of cars is unquestionable in the song as those lines occur within the first 40 seconds. Overall, the song is about escaping somewhere, most likely towards adulthood, while escaping the constraints of adolescence. On the same album, in his song “ *Thunder Road*” Bruce sings “ We got one last chance to make it real / To trade in these wings on some wheels.” Although this line might not be as abundant as the opening to “

Born to Run”, Bruce is still singing about using a car as an escape from adolescence. Through “ trading (angel) wings for wheels” Bruce is inviting Mary (the girl in the song) to leave her youthful innocence behind and drive out into the night and finally taste the excitement of the adult world.

Throughout the album, cars are mentioned constantly and the beauty of teenage innocence is in the air. Although it seems harmless, the escape from their youth in the album Born to Run only transitions into something much more serious in the next album, Darkness on the Edge of Town.

Undoubtedly, the influence of cars, along with the need for escape carries into his next album Darkness on the Edge of Town. However, the songs and theme of escape are not packed with youthful innocence anymore, it is more of a wakeup call from life. In his song “ Racing in the Street”, Bruce reflects on how the washed up American Dream that he escaped to in Born to Run is catching up to him and his peers. During one of the middle verses, Bruce sings “ Some guys they just give up living/And start dying little by little piece by piece/Some guys come home from work and wash up/Then go racin’ in the street.” Here, street racing seems to serve as a getaway from a typical, grueling “ 9-5” American job. Bruce and his friends slave away all day only to find themselves in the streets at night, racing their pain away. Although this seems like a harmless action, racing becomes an addiction that is invasive on his personal life. Near the end of the song, Bruce seems as though he realizes the state his life is in, as he comes home to a girlfriend who cries herself to sleep, a constantly “ dark house”, and a deteriorating relationship. Through this moment of epiphany, Springsteen begins to realize that his girl is more meaningful to this life than his addiction to racing. After the

realization, Bruce hops in his car to 'ride to sea and wash these sins off our hands' but succumbs to the pressure of the highway atmosphere as he sings "Tonight, tonight the highway's bright"... "Cause summer's here and the time is right/For racin' in the street." Even as he makes a true effort to escape his addiction with his girl, the need of escape from his daily life overcomes him and pulls him back in. Much like a drug or alcohol, racing his car becomes Bruce's way out of a poor daily life in the remains of the dying "American Dream'. Similar to the transition from Born to Run into Darkness on the Edge of Town, the need for escape through cars shifts one last time on the third album, The River. However, in The River, the need for escape has gradually escalated and reached its peak. From wanting to leave town in a youthful and innocent way, to needing a way to cope with a grueling nine to five day job, Springsteen finds himself writing about more life issues that come with adulthood such as infidelity, realization of death, etc. The last song, "Wreck on the Highway", is considered one of his saddest as Bruce sings about death in the near future. The lyrics are about a man who questions his mortality when he witnesses a car accident out on the road late at night. Springsteen explains the situation in his book called Bruce Springsteen: Songs: 'On a rainy highway the character witnesses a fatal accident. He drives home, and lying awake that night next to his lover, he realizes you have a limited number of opportunities to love someone, to do your work, to be a part of something, to parent your children, to do something good" This self realization is represented in the lyrics as Bruce sings "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." Witnessing a car accident

made him appreciate the little things in life more as he watched a man nearly lose everything in a heartbeat. In a different song called "The River", Bruce uses a car for imagery when he sings "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." This song is about how the relationship between the narrator and Mary was ruined by an early and rushed marriage. As time progressed the couple, had nearly become strangers, but he still reminisces about the good times. They were so optimistic about their future, and now the narrator is trapped because he loved someone so much so many years ago and now he has to deal with that sadness and regret every day. Now the narrator needs to get out of the relationship because nothing is the same as it once was. This theme leads perfectly into the song "Stolen Car" as Bruce sings about infidelity and wanting to escape his current marriage through riding around in a metaphorical "Stolen Car". The 'stolen car' is a possible metaphor for another lover in his life that he hopes to get caught with ('Each night I wait to get caught but I never do'). It is sometimes unclear about exactly what Bruce wants to say in his songs, but there seems to be a relative underlying theme in this album. Perhaps the two songs are connected and about the same woman, but it is a fact that Bruce utilizes cars to provide an alternative world for both people in the songs.

Conclusion

After analyzing and listening to his music, it would be hard for anyone to argue against two main ideas. The fact that Bruce Springsteen never seems

content with his current life and is constantly longing for a way out, and that cars serve as a major symbol in his work from beginning to end. Often these ideas go hand in hand as cars seem to be Bruce's main source of escape from life. Past life experiences drove Bruce to want a way out and allowed him to have a good foundation to write lyrics from, which ultimately led him into becoming an artist that was found relatable by many different groups of people. During an interview with a Swedish reporter, Bruce was asked "How much personal experience went into your songs?" and he responded: "There ain't a word or a note played that didn't come from something that happened to me somewhere along the line. It depends how literally how you want to take the whole situation, but it's all based on personal experience directly or indirectly".

Clearly, cars were a part of his childhood and inspired him throughout his career as he wrote about them constantly and used them to make hit songs like Born to Run and many others. This level of relatability can be accredited as one of the main reasons for Springsteen's immortality.