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**'Girls in their Summer Clothes': transgressive liminality and outsiderhood in Bruce Springsteen's and Philip Levine's female protagonists**

Abstract:

Philip Levine and Bruce Springsteen have regularly been credited for their delineations of 'familiar' and 'authentic' (Rauch 1988: 33) characters, whose individual struggles to negotiate their identities are exacerbated by the pressures arising from workplaces, social and familial expectations, and notions of cultural propriety. Nevertheless, in asserting that Levine and Springsteen render naturalistic characters who conform to their respective social structures, current scholarship has neglected the multitudes of liminal characters in their narratives, particularly their marginalised female protagonists. By undertaking an analysis of their songs and poems from the framework of liminality discourse, this paper demonstrates how Springsteen's and Levine's females are routinely situated outside of dominant, male-oriented structures, and enact the transgressive and inversive attributes of liminal identity. Extending the liminality paradigm established by anthropologists Victor Turner (1967; 1969; 1974; 1978) and Arnold van Gennep (1960) to contemporary scholars exploring liminal identities from manifold disciplines, including social anthropologist Mary Douglas (1970) and spatial scholar Doreen Massey (1994), this paper contests the evaluation that either Levine or Springsteen articulate female experience in ways material or verisimilar. Instead, it applies theoretical concepts of liminal identities, outsiders, and relationality to a close comparative reading of Levine's verse and Springsteen's lyrics, positing that their female characters denote an infraction of dominant male structures. While occupying a peripheral position that promotes the definition and delimiting of normative masculine identities, their stories are both told by and for the male protagonists whose centrality is reaffirmed by these women's outsider status.

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## Introduction

In a 1984 interview with *Ploughshares*, Philip Levine alluded to the centrality of masculine subjectivity in his work by describing the female psyche as 'a private world I couldn't fully perceive' (Norman 1984, 22). While he occasionally acknowledges female autonomy in external dialogues (see Amen 2003) his poems routinely neglect a perspective that doesn't accentuate the delineation of orthodox male identity. Levine's tendency towards deploying female characters as a mechanism for delimiting masculine selfhood is further elucidated by critic Dave Smith, who assesses that his 'poems always begin and remain grounded in a single, highly receptive consciousness which is a man's alone' (1979, 37). In much the same way, Springsteen's oeuvre presents a composite landscape abounding with females whose prominence arises from little more than the regularity of their perfunctory presence. Rather than substantiating the value of women to his narratives, the profusion of archetypal and inexplicitly drawn female characters therein exposes his narratological preoccupation with dominant male identities, and the ways they might be reaffirmed and reinforced by the female outsiders circling their centers. As critic Jim Cullen notes in his discussion of *Born to Run*, the narrative 'wouldn't sound right without the girl, but the girl somehow wasn't the core issue' (2005, 139; see also Riley 2004).

Nevertheless, when discussing Levine's and Springsteen's characters, many critics have encouraged the interpretation of their protagonists as uniformly authentic (see Astley 2006; Ulin 2015, n.p.; Bird 1994, 42; Palmer 2009, 146; Rauch 1988, 33) and have correlated this sense of authenticity to structural normativity. In so doing, these commentaries have overlooked the prominence of threshold or transgressive identities in Levine's and Springsteen's work, particularly the scores of female characters whose distinct absence of identity (Parkin 2011) reflects their outsiderhood alongside their place in the ongoing process of male identity formation. This paper moves to diversify that commentary. Taking up Turner's assertion that in 'male-dominated politico-legal systems, social links through women, and by abstraction, femininity itself' tends to become associated with liminality (1978, 289), it contends that Levine's and Springsteen's female characters manifest a marginal position within their narratives, reaffirming the centrality of their male protagonists through inscribed acts of redemption, relational gender definition, and masculine bonding rites; their stories told by and for the male protagonists who occupy the central position of Levine's and Springsteen's texts.

## Liminal identities, outsiders, and the definition of boundaries

As this paper proposes, Springsteen's and Levine's female characters exist permanently outside structure. While scholars have largely classified *liminal personae* as 'ambiguous...entities in transition' (Turner 1969, 103) who typify either 'the destruction of identity' (Thomassen 2014, 92) or 'a shift of identity from the usual sense of self' (Hall 1991, 41), the term has also been used continuously with various aberrant or outsider identities who invoke normative structure by violating its codes. These include the "trickster" archetype (see Jung 2002; Gates 1988; Radin 1972), the "eternal boy" (Doty 1993) and the "man-child" (Neville 1992), all of which might be defined by their normlessness. Nevertheless, what emerges in these particular examples and their denotations is that liminal identity, when viewed through the lens of aberration, often

involves the impression that calculable divergence applies primarily to male members of a society. Given feminist scholars have propounded the long-standing association between the 'other sex, the feminine,' and an abjection which 'becomes synonymous with a radical evil' (Kristeva 1982: 70; see also Grosz 1995; Creed 1993), this androcentric focus might seem counterintuitive. However, it might also be viewed as a recapitulation of feminist discourses' underlying sentiment: that having been 'kept at the margins of the world' women cannot be 'defined objectively through this world' (de Beauvoir 2011: 271). This is best exemplified by Turner's "outsider," which advances scholarship presupposing marginals as 'both/and person[s]' (Lee 1995: 72), and mimics the dichotomies embodied by archetypal "strangers" whose relationship to structure is 'composed of distance and nearness, indifference and involve' (Simmel 1950: 404). As such, Turner's outsider demonstrates the necessity of boundary maintenance for social cohesion (see Erikson 1966) because 'marginal simultaneously defines what is not marginal' (Cresswell 2001: 11; see also Barany 2002: 49).

The notion that women's outsiderhood is as sufficiently institutionalised that it does not denote aberration has profound implications for understanding their place within liminality studies. As Turner asserts, females are inherently ascribed as outsiders because 'in male-dominated societies *communitas* may wear a skirt, or appear as nature, Mother Nature, versus culture, Father culture' (1978: 289). While feminist liminality critic Barbara Babcock infers from Turner's framework<sup>1</sup> a 'desire to subvert and critique ... primal oppositions' which instate gendered 'power relations' (2008: 300), Medieval scholar Caroline Bynum suggest his model perpetuates a masculinist view that perceives and subsequently inscribes women as anomic (1991: 33). Whether Turner's pronouncement of female difference does in fact reify his claim, or merely acknowledges the nature/culture divide undergirding patriarchal societies, it is undeniable that his methodology and framework both evaluate structural divergence from a centric and spectatorial perspective, in which he 'stands with the dominant group (men)' and 'looks at women' (Bynum 1991: 33). It is unsurprising, then, that Bynum should expatiate on Turner's perceived willingness to essentialise female outsiderhood and, despite his univocally positive (Horvath 2013) descriptions of liminality and women, by association, critique his theory for its phallogocentric bias.

In some ways, Turner's work—especially given its emphasis upon margins and marginality—betrays its context; that is, a linguistic history where the partiality of 'masculinist vision' (Hartsock 2013: 363) renders women 'the invisible and unheard sex' (Jones 1985: 83). Feminist theory has often imputed the patriarchal definitions of literary authority (Gilbert & Gubar 1979) as a 'locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated' (Cixous 2000: 164) and pilloried the rhetorical violence (Spivak 1983) of androcentric critique (Lutz 1995). Accordingly, this paper opines that the dominant role of Levine's and Springsteen's transgressive female characters is one of boundary definition. Remaining unarticulated, their outsider perspective is necessarily communicated through their opposites: the male narrators who, in enunciating stable female archetypes and consolidating their difference, expose how 'the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society' (Douglas 1970: 72).

### **Saviours and Little Girls: Springsteen's non-existent women**

When Springsteen croons, 'Cuddle up angel cuddle up my little dove / We'll ride down baby into this tunnel of love' ("Tunnel of Love"), he allegorises the relationship as liminal passage in the 'dark' while typifying the essentialist depiction of women in his songs. Reinvigorating tropes of masculine dominance ['Takes the money from my hand while his eyes take a walk all over you'] and female fragility ['dove,' 'soft silk'] common to his narratives of courtship, the lover remains amorphous as his many other female characters who rarely 'get to speak or make claims about themselves' (Moss 2014, 233). Her role is to aid Springsteen's narrator as he navigates the subterranean of his anxieties concerning courtship. Yet in what proffered a fruitful dialectic to consider the reciprocal complexities of heterosexual relationships, "Tunnel of Love" fails to advance beyond male interiority and instead reaffirms Springsteen's 'fairly limited conception of them [women] as independent actors' (Parkin 2011: 139).

While his female characters occasionally demonstrate personal agency,<sup>2</sup> most arise as vessels for masculine salvation. That 'redemption is nearly always served up through women' (Moss 2014: 233) and Springsteen explicates their function through such unequivocal demands as 'Hello beautiful thing, maybe you could save my life' ("Girls in their Summer Clothes") or 'Baby you're my last chance' ("Cadillac Ranch"). This role ascribed to the female outsider is most patently established through his ecclesiastical imagery, tropes of salvation, and allusions to the honorifics Mary/Maria 'leading me through the dark' ("Mary's Place"). These motifs and hagiolatry depersonalise his female characters whose 'plurality the Mary character has come to embody' (Pardini 2012, 151) and cultivate an amalgam whose primary structural function is to repress the volatility of male identity while reaffirming its dominance.

In "Maria's Bed," Springsteen's narrator takes his 'blessings at the riverhead / I'm living in the light of Maria's bed,' apotheosising his lover for the benediction her body provides yet leaving her identity unexplored. As Zitelli argues, 'Springsteen often associates salvation with the female body ... as if his characters can, or at least believe they can, be redeemed through a meaningful intimate encounter with a female' (2012, 124). This is evident in "Leap of Faith," where the female form is deified with the lines 'Now your legs were heaven, your breasts were the altar.' In accentuating the pleasure his narrator derives from the figure, Springsteen's solipsistic rendering of female identity prioritises male subjectivity above any notion of equivalent sacrifice. Although Springsteen's allegories of female salvation are largely benevolent (Pardini 2012, 151), his coalescing of heterogeneous individuals into an archetypal female outsider presents neither a veracious nor defensible portrait of contemporary identity. As critic Tim Riley states, his 'male-oriented' texts are 'less about women and more about the men who worshipped them' (2004, 149-50), a claim evidenced by Springsteen's depiction of women as chimerical entities 'endowed with magico-religious powers' (van Gennep 1960, 26). More than ten of Springsteen's songs<sup>3</sup> denominate women as angels, including the 'lonely angel' in "Spirit in the Night," she who 'falls like an angel beneath him' in "New York City Serenade," and 'Little Angel' 'keepin' those crazy boys out of trouble' ("The E Street Shuffle"). Furthermore, in harnessing apocryphal biblical tropes<sup>4</sup> to construct parables of heterosexual romance, Springsteen transforms the female subject to a fiction bestowing of male salvation: selfless, servile, and thoroughly unpossessed of character. In "Cross My Heart," Springsteen remembers

First time I crossed my heart  
I was beggin' baby please  
At your bedside down on my knees

...

I crossed my heart pretty baby over you

Demonstrating women's binary function as entities to coerce (Cullen 2005: 136) and worship, Springsteen's narrator lauds a savior whose fullest expression of self amounts to the vague epithet 'baby'. However peculiar it might be that a woman inciting such devotion should also inspire this impersonal narrative, Springsteen's oeuvre abounds with female saints who bolster male existence while remaining innominate. Demonstrated by his love interest in "Preacher's Daughter" who 'give[s] me life, she bring[s] me water / Every Sunday I watch her work / Pretty little self in a pretty little church,' parsing these lines to glean the source of her magnetism reveals "prettiness," the sole descriptor Springsteen affords her. Although Zitelli argues 'Springsteen's project explores females in this way—that is, as a means to salvation—in order to critique the stratifying patriarchal structure to which our society adheres' (2012: 124), the marked lack of variegation in his depictions of women begets the question of precisely how he interrogates this arrangement. As Turner notes, male-dominated societies inherently relegate women to the margins of structure (1978: 289), and Springsteen's narratives most often concretise this claim. As the narrator in "Drive All Night" who laments 'When I lost you honey, sometimes I think I lost my guts too' makes known, Springsteen's female characters are relied upon to furnish masculine identity in ways both spiritual and material. Hence, bravery—ergo manhood—arrives in a woman's shape; a formless figura who reinforces Springsteen's vision of gender as 'girls primping their hair, boys trying on hard faces' (Marsh 2004: 101).

This superabundance of female character's in Springsteen's work should infer their magnitude within realms both private and public; however, rather than emulating contemporary social dynamics his narratives propagate a majority view of women's minority status. Thus, to suggest his work delineates gender with verisimilitude would mean disregarding 'Springsteen's humanism, where man is taken to be the bodied norm around which all other subjects are defined' (Moss 2014, 233). This arrangement is elicited in numerous ways, the most apparent being Springsteen's diminution of female characters through appellations such as "little girls"<sup>5</sup> (Robinson 1994: 229), which minimise their value and agency. Likewise, by interlacing adult women with infantile imagery of dresses,<sup>6</sup> ribbons and bows,<sup>7</sup> and reinforcing the paternal 'Daddy' figure as all-encompassing lover and protector, his narratives reaffirm the centrality of male perspectives while overlooking their 'domination—a damaging domination—of the women around them' (Anderson 2008: 94). This structural binary—men as dominant/normative, women as nugatory/liminal—often coexists in Springsteen's songs, where the identity of female outsiders proves inextricable from the men they define. In "County Fair," his narrator adopts an ambivalent paternal-inamorato position, demanding: 'Hey little girl with the long blond hair / Come win your daddy one of them stuffed bears.'

The female is herein subjected to a twofold sexualisation and infantilisation, statuses which reaffirm the male as lover/father.

That dominance, which Robinson articulates as 'a powerfully misogynist—or at the very least sexist—strain in his music' (1994: 221), finds its fullest expression in "I'm On Fire," which opens with the lines: 'Hey little girl, is your Daddy home? / Did he go and leave you all alone? / I got a bad desire.' Although succeeding verses establish the narrator as an admissible love interest, the predatory opening which perceives the woman as under the guardianship of her partner and reinvigorates the trope of lascivious stranger exploiting her lack of supervision, renders a bleak portrait of female liberty. In this narrative, men—be they fathers or lovers—preside over women, hoarding them in homes like possessions and measuring them against the inanimate: implying 'a big diamond watch' or 'a fancy foreign car' as being equivalent to the unobtainable female, 'the only thing I ain't got' ("Ain't Got You"). Indeed, when the voyeur in "You Can Look (But You Better Not Touch)" sneers, 'she didn't get me excited, she just made me feel mean,' he demonstrates the fraught divide between desire and acquisition. His inability to purchase or purloin the woman he covets attracts rapacious overtones because females are herein perceived as entities both vital to and devoid of independent agency.

This consignment of women 'to the margins' (Pardini 2012: 139) of domiciliary-spheres, reflects the normative 'social division of labour [that] involves women less deeply' and tethers them 'to the domestic range' (Douglas 1970: 96). Perhaps unsurprising—given Springsteen's narrator's recurring crises necessitates their need to be defined, and redefined, by female outsiders—is the fact that women in his texts tend to be characterised according to the domain they occupy. His female characters are regularly divided by the statuses of wife/sex object (Palmer 2009: 149) and this polarity is likewise paralleled by domestic/public realms, reinforcing of both the limited archetypes they are permitted and the cardinal demands of their male counterparts. Where Springsteen's streets abound with unrealised conquests, his narrator's chasing 'girls underneath the boardwalk where they all promise to unsnap their jeans' ("4<sup>th</sup> of July, Asbury Park") or assuring the 'little girl standing on the corner / Today's your lucky day' ("Darlington County"), his uxorial characters are mostly confined to the thresholds of domestic spaces.

These 'angels whose beauty is worn down' (Palmer 2009: 141) surface in characters such as Mary, who 'aint a beauty' and remains on the somewhat purgatorial porch of "Thunder Road," later reappearing on 'the kitchen floor' in "Straight Time" to embody a harridan who watches her husband 'out of the corner of her eye.' In "Racing in the Street" an unnamed paramour with 'wrinkles' 'sits on the porch' with 'her pretty dreams' torn. Juxtaposing the domiciliary threshold with women who are 'signifiers of domesticity and commitment' (Palmer 2009, 149), Springsteen implies women's place is in the shadows of the men they support, while simultaneously constructing them as boundaries for men who 'can't get any more than half free' ("Straight Time") to quantify their entrapment. Springsteen herein evinces the cruciality of female outsiders to maintaining the boundaries of dominant male identity; in transforming liberating conquests into symbols of institutional entrapment, both female archetypes are constructed to satiate the equally imperative demands of male sustenance: virility and comfort. Perhaps the most unnerving illustration of this dynamic is when abandoned 'Mary Lou waits down at the end of that dirt road for young Johnny to come back' ("Reason to Believe"). The end of the road, beyond symbolic resonance, is a model liminal threshold and, for Mary Lou, an

impassable intersection. Having earlier promised Johnny 'I'll work for you every day,' it's difficult to perceive her patience as anything less than servile, or her credulousness—remaining faithful despite exploitation—not unlike canine obedience. In Johnny's absence she is stranded characterless, awaiting his return and with it the redelivery of her purpose.

### **Mothers or lovers: Levine's divided female archetypes**

While Levine has been celebrated for his incisive portrayals of 'the alienation experienced by factory workers through his presentation of family relationships' (Rumiano 2007, 132), scant attention has been paid to the nominal female characters peopling his workplaces and domestic environments. These women arise as outsiders within their male-dominated factory settings and—in their consignment to spheres of subsistence labour—dominant society at large. As Douglas notes, 'the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived' (1970: 72) and in Levine's poems, women who contravene their predetermined roles are often rendered with either ambiguous or ambivalent femininity. In "Coming Close" Levine interrogates the place of women within an industrial labour milieu by projecting masculine codes onto a female co-worker's body:

Is she a woman?

Consider the arms as they press

the long brass tube against the buffer,

they are striated along the triceps (1998: 30)

Levine does not distinguish whether the protagonist's manliness arises as corollary of her labour or from her participation in a male-centric realm, but inviting his reader to 'consider' her as case study inherently suggests her abnormality. Interweaving her body with mechanical processes—a 'long brass tube' evoking both machine and arm—renders her indivisible from the work problematising her identity. While 'buffer' evidently denotes the process of polishing, it also carries interesting semantic applications for her medial position between opposing identity states. Indeed, in disputing her gender because of her muscularity, Levine depicts this character as interstructural, as 'the symbolism both of androgyny and sexlessness' blur 'sex distinctions [which] are important components of structural status' (Turner 1967: 98).

Granted Levine's rhetorical question might aim to challenge limited definitions of gender vis-à-vis labour; however, this obfuscation of unorthodox female identity is reinforced by his many poems that perpetuate gendered labour and mask female characters with motifs of normative femininity. These portrayals, while promoting stable archetypes, accentuate women's outsider position to dominant male structure. For instance, "Then" (1985: 51) a narrative told from third-person subjective perspective, observes a seamstress overlooking a boulevard swarming with lovers, awaiting her lover's arrival. Patently inverting the mechanics of "Coming Close," Levine's protagonist 'loves her work, / the unspooling of the wide burgundy ribbons / that tumble across her lap, the delicate laces' (1998: 30). In jocund descriptions of her tasks, the sonorous 'unspooling' and 'tumbling' interwoven with opulent 'wide burgundy,' Levine implies broad acceptance of her feminine vocation while inferring from her predilection a gender-based quiddity. Moreover, because this recapitulation occurs while she awaits 'a particular young man,' her labour of love is both directly and indirectly correlated to romance. In bracketing descriptions of her occupation

with ruminations on coupledom, Levine suggests her foray into the workplace is an intervening period preceding her predestined role as a wife.

Just as their denotations trivialise Springsteen's women, Levine's locution regularly minimises female agency and authority. In "My Poets," he closes 'eyes, girl-like' (1991, 6), gendering anatomical difference and weakness, while in "On My Own" he infantilises female teachers' who 'were soft-spoken women / smelling like washed babies' (1991, 231). Reducing a woman to the miniscule proportions of 'a little brown mouse' in "A Poem with No Ending" (1985, 27), Levine denotes their negligible importance within his male-centric narratives, while implying their fragile constitution as befitting of subsistence work. This naturally unfolds within marginal domestic-spheres, replete with women tending 'basket[s] / of dried white laundry' ("Hold Me" 1991, 123), a mother who 'dreams by the open window' ("Burned" 1990, 314), or those who deferentially 'bow as they slap / the life out / of sheets and pants' ("Noon" 1991, 44). This confinement of women to threshold domestic spaces is also evinced by the regularity with which they occur in public domains attending domestic duties like 'carrying a loaf of fresh bread' ("Black Stone on Top of Nothing" 1999, 60) or asking men 'to help her carry her shopping bags home' ("Reinventing America" 1999, 17). Signaling their 'consignment/confinement to particular places on the one hand, and the limitation on identity on the other' (Massey 1994, 179), Levine's female outsiders reinforce the boundaries of his male protagonists who define themselves in contradistinction to their ascribed spaces and roles.

This referential function is most evident in Levine's partitioning of antithetical feminal stereotypes; his women often imagined as maternalistic—nurturing of male identity—or as scolding termagants who erode masculinity. The recurring presence of Levine's wife Fran denotes the former: she who is both defined by and committed to the security of men around her. In "1933" 'she goes to the kitchen before we waken / she picks up a skillet, an egg' (1991, 121), eschewing rest to undertake subsistence duties replete with procreative symbolism. Likewise, in "Words," Levine reinvigorates Springsteen's trope of female saintdom, describing how:

My wife will say nothing  
of the helplessness  
she feels seeing her  
men rocking on  
their separate seas.  
We are three people  
bowing our heads to  
all she has given us,  
to bread and wine and meat (1991: 195)

As the possessive determiner 'her' exposes, helplessness arises from an inherent sense of duty to the men she is expected to succour, wherein her failed actualisation of male security diminishes agency and resonance. Her bestowals of 'bread and wine and meat' evoke nutriment alongside Eucharistic rites with their symbolic reenactment of corporeal sacrifice for the redemption of others. Herein, 'Woman stands as metaphor for Nature' (Massey 1994: 10) and her material gifts are intrinsically connected to male sustenance; a



role that expels her from the centric sphere and strands her on its agrestic margins. Levine's ode "For Fran," in its tender description of how 'she packs the flower beds with leaves' (1961, 214), is but one of many examples that his 'wife almost always appears tending her plants' (Yenser 1991, 93; see also Gunn 1991, 11) and comes to embody a wholesome and alimentary 'Mother Nature' (Turner 1978, 289).

"The Wife of the Foundry Worker," on the other hand, paints an ambivalent view of maternal caring. Levine's possessive title accentuates the wife as subject, yet her absence within the narrative topicalises the foundry worker and his perspective when, arriving home to:

no cat, no bitch, no yellowed bar  
of laundry soap, no rag-on draining voice  
of daytime radio, no one  
no one no one masterfully  
looking up from frying bread (1971: 31)

Levine's anaphoric 'no' personifies these domestic artefacts; by attributing their disappearance to his wife's own departure, she becomes referential of the inventoried objects defining her roles: cleaning, cooking, nagging. Another signification effected by Levine's diaphora is the absolute erasure of the spouse, in which the anthemic 'no one' correlates her effacement to his freedom. This marital ambivalence is furthermore intimated by the homonymic verb 'masterfully.' Because 'looking up' itself requires minimal skill, 'masterfully' suggests both adroitness and oppression, an allusion furthered by the phrases 'bitch' and 'rag-on draining voice' which endow Levine's female character with nurturing and deleterious qualities both. Like the woman who 'shook a finger at me and damned me in her tongue' ("A Poem with No Ending" 1985, 32), the 'bland wife' in "Northern Motive" (1999, 71), and the commiserative ode to a 'half-blind uncle / married to a woman who cried all day long' ("Reinventing America" 1999, 17), Levine's male narrators regularly indict women who fail to comply with prevailing archetypes. "Red Dust" demonstrates this most clearly in its dramatic castigation of a woman whose desires supplant those of the men around her:

This harpie with dry red curls  
talked openly of her husband,  
his impotence, his death, the death  
of her lover, the birth and death  
of her own beauty (1991: 51)

Earning the pejorative title 'harpie' for her willingness to 'openly' voice dissatisfaction, Levine attributes her subversion to the violation of marital sanctity and sexual agency. In framing the denigration of her appearance with recurring moribund allusions, the poem equates her deviance to a structural death; she can no longer be apprehended as a woman and must instead be understood as a monster, a manifestation of abjection.

Most notable to Levine's negative portrayals of female agency is his reluctance to censure male behavior. In "Reinventing America" (1999, 17), he warmly describes an uncle whose fondness for 'whores / in the little Western towns' sees him 'hold his hands out to

approximate / their perfect breasts.' In condemning women who subvert prescribed roles but acceding to machismo, Levine establishes this masculine archetype as fundamentally normative. Being one that perceives female outsiders as serving the sole purposes of 'exciting sexual and proprietorial desires' and 'binding others through alliance' (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 496), this subjective perspective essentialises female identity, vilifies their 'suspensions of normative role-playing' (Turner 1979, 83), and is wholly incapable of reconciling ambiguity. This is best illustrated by Levine's coming-of-age narrative "Gin," in which fraternity is established through the boy's communal objectification of cursorily rendered females circling the outskirts of their dominant narrative:

the way we had to have  
the women we never got near.  
(Actually they were girls, but  
never mind, the important fact  
was their impenetrability.) (1995: 54)

Centralising the demands of male subjectivity in verbs 'had' and 'have,' Levine flattens female autonomy under the titular 'girls' and universalises their outsiderhood with the double entendre 'impenetrability.' "Gin" pinpoints these females' most 'important' attribute as their willingness to acquiesce to male desire; their very intelligibility connected to their status as sexual objects evincing how Levine's poems 'remain grounded in a single, highly receptive consciousness which is a man's alone' (Smith 1979, 37). Insofar as Levine's female character's precipitate these rites by inspiring 'elaborate lies / of conquest' ("Gin" 1995, 57), their observance of prevailing stereotypes proves crucial to his many men who, singing 'about a woman they love / merely for her name' ("An Extraordinary Morning" 2011, 22), define their positions in relation to women, whether or not they exist as definable entities in their own right.

Relegated to symbolic threshold spaces (Pardini, 2012) and largely predetermined by functions of subsistence or masculine desire (Seymour 2012, 65), Levine's and Springsteen's female characters regularly incarnate Turner's outsider in their primary roles of boundary definition and the demarcation of male selfhood. As eminent cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas argues, women's 'place in the public structure of roles is clearly defined in relation...to husbands and fathers' (1970, 96). As this chapter has argued, in affinities both romantic and platonic, Levine's and Springsteen's female outsiders enact this referential process, exposing how relationships illustrate 'the formative power of liminality' (Szokolczi 2015, 30; see also Illouz 1997). Assigned the pivotal role of actualising those transitions which restore identity (Palmer 2009, 149) to their male counterparts, they are nevertheless granted minimal space to act or speak as independent agents.

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Turner himself is later critical of both the Western and androcentric biases of anthropological study. In *The Anthropology of Performance* (1988) Turner critiques the prejudices 'that have become distinctive features of the literary genre known as "anthropological works"' which include 'a systematic dehumanizing of the human subjects of study, regarding them as the bearers of an impersonal "culture," or wax to be imprinted with "cultural patterns"' (1988, 72).

<sup>2</sup> By way of example, "Spare Parts" and "Candy's Room" present somewhat more assertive and self-directed female protagonists.

<sup>3</sup> See also, the 'angel on my chest' in "Backstreets", the 'hotrod angels' of "Racing in the Street," the 'little angel' in "Frankie," the 'angel from the Innerlake' who gives 'all the loving that a good man can take' ("Thundercrack), and 'Angel' in "Don't Look Back" who 'writes her name in lipstick on my dash.'

<sup>4</sup> The likening of human relationships to religious narratives emerges in many songs, including: "I'll Work for Your Love," "Soul Driver," "Rocky Ground," "Racing in the Street," "No Need," "Happy," "Harry's Place," "Linda Let Me Be the One," "Seven Angels," "With Every Wish" and "Iceman".

<sup>5</sup> A rough count reveals upwards of thirty-six songs referring to adult women as 'little girls' in Springsteen's published discography.

<sup>6</sup> More than ten of Springsteen's songs demand that women 'put on your [black, red, best, party] dress' including, but not limited to: "Come on (Let's Go Out Tonight)," "Easy Money," "Take 'Em as They Come" and "Real World".

<sup>7</sup> See "Sad Eyes," "Prove It All Night," "I Wanna Marry You" as examples.