

“when the word is made flesh”:
Leonard Cohen Live in / and Performance

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
University of Manitoba
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Nathan Dueck

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ABSTRACT

“‘when the word is made flesh’: Leonard Cohen Live in / and Performance” plays both sides of the slash in its title; just as Cohen conceives of his ‘life in art,’ I will read him into his works by using three tropes he often returns to, as a “scar,” “mist,” and “death.” To me, Leonard Cohen is a performer and I consider the lines of his poetry, prose, and song lyrics as I would lines of theatrical script and along the lines of linguistic and poststructural theories of performativity.

To read the beginning of the sentence fragmented for my title, the narrator of Cohen’s novel The Favorite Game says, “A scar is what happens . . .” and, if I believe in this persona, becomes a speech-actor who makes things happen the moment words are said.

‘A scar’ not only happens when Cohen’s rhetoric speaks for him, but when he reads “AS THE MIST LEAVES NO SCAR,” a poem from his collection The Spice Box of Earth, on the documentary Ladies and Gentlemen . . . Mr. Leonard Cohen, he figuratively makes his words into his own flesh.

Though in his book of prose-poems Death of a Lady’s Man Cohen writes “*There is the mist but there is no death*,” he plays the songs of the similarly-titled album Death of a Ladies’ Man live, playing on ‘death’ to mean a *style of being*.

My study of performance in Cohen’s work becomes a dialogue between his voices and my own. Whether written, spoken, or sung, Cohen’s turns of phrase, at turns religious and romantic, breathe life into his corpus.

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INTRODUCTION

a. Lie

we do lie too much. We also know too little and we are bad learners; so we simply have to lie.

Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Poets"ⁱ

The truth is that Leonard Cohen is dead to me. I am no longer playing his music or reading his liner notes and books of his prose and poetry while writing this introduction (the last words I will write of my thesis). Though I tend toward self-indulgent wordplay, here I am only half-heartedly punning on 'dead.' I am not suggesting that everything Cohen generates is autobiographical or that he somehow lives in his work. I mean to say that Cohen's poor singing voice is truly exasperating. And he knows that. Hearing the sound of his own voice is likely why Cohen became a writer; as a young man, he wanted to be a singer when he grew up but heard he did not have the chops. So, Leonard worked on his (literally silent) writing voice until he had the confidence to raise it in song. In terms of 'voice,' silence is as good as death. As Cohen's song "A Singer Must Die" advocates, 'a singer' must be silenced "for the lie in his voice" (Stranger 208). It is too easy to misunderstand what Cohen means by 'his voice' for he shares his voice with the words he has written. A singer himself, Cohen lives apart from the very texts of which he plays a part. To me, Cohen is a performer who makes the words he writes, speaks, or sings into flesh. A poet-cum-pop musician, Cohen enacts the words he has written like an actor who has learned his lines. Just as I am, Cohen is *off-book*.

ⁱ "Thus Spoke Zarathustra: Second Part." Trans. Walter Kaufmann. The Portable Nietzsche. 239.

If he is a performer, Cohen plays a character whose resemblance to him is skin deep. Cohen may be acting as ‘a singer’ whose lying voice evokes notions of Ancient Greek lyrics performed to the lyre. By saying so, I am not only listening to “A Singer,” I am playing with the very words that Cohen does. (Please note the verb ‘play’). But, having shelved his books, having pressed the *power* button (instead of *play*) on my stereo, I should have his death on my conscience. Whether or not I am listening to Cohen’s songs or reading his lyrics, the death I spoke of above is also a lie. Since he did not write himself into his words, he cannot write himself out of them. He has simply written himself the best lines.

Though I know it is a sign of poor writing, I am writing my first-person ‘I’ into this piece. Consequently, I can identify with the pronouns Nietzsche uses in the accusation following from my epigraph: “who among us poets has not adulterated his wine?” (Nietzsche 239). Just as no ‘liar’ can properly violate the marriage bed on his own, it takes at least two ‘poets’ to commit adultery. I am counting myself among these ‘bad learners,’ because I cannot stop composing my own whiney poetry in the pages that follow when I should be illuminating Cohen’s works. (Aside: Truth be told, what passes for commentary below is not composed of formulaic comparisons, examples, and transitions but creative horseplay. This does not preclude my piece the rigor of any other critical essay. Regarding my poetics, I must confess a preoccupation with *voice* – not the sound of my own – while I am awaiting academic maturity).

That said, when ‘a singer’ asks, in the second person voice, “who will confess?” it is as though he is inviting me to answer (Stranger 208). No one can hear me though, for “The courtroom is quiet” (Stranger 208). When ‘a singer’ asks “Is it true you betrayed

us?” he speaks to himself; “The answer is Yes” (Stranger 208). Such testimony illustrates the way in which Cohen breathes life into his body of works. To understand what happens “when the word is made flesh,” a phrase Cohen has written and rewritten throughout his works, I will trace three incarnations of this trope of performance – as “scar,” as “mist,” and not surprisingly, as “death.”

I take my title from the first paragraph of Cohen’s first novel, The Favorite Game (1963) wherein “A scar is what happens when the word is made flesh” (3). I read this line as an allegory for Cohen’s personae, seen in poses and portraits written on the page and embodied onstage. To be clear, I am repeating my thesis as it is for now: Leonard Cohen is a performer and by repeating a trope for performance in a novel, a book of poetry, and an album, his metaphors become him. Cohen attributes several poems from his second book of poetry, The Spice Box of Earth (1961), to the lead character of the narrative of Game. Four lines of “AS THE MIST LEAVES NO SCAR” from The Spice Box are the epigraph to the text. Cohen plays with this conceit and figuratively reprises this role in other works. In my second chapter, I will discuss how Cohen extends the ‘scar’ metaphor to represent his speaking or singing voice. The moment I perceive his voice it is, in a sense, dead, and my third chapter will consider whether this is a logical end or an un-dead creation of Cohen’s performance.

I will forever see Cohen as his autobiographic note to The Spice Box would have me: a man aged “27” who “spent last year on the shores of the Aegean Sea, writing as a result of that experience.” He adds:

I shouldn’t be in Canada at all. Winter is wrong for me. I belong beside the Mediterranean. My ancestors made a terrible mistake. But I have to keep coming back to Montreal to renew my neurotic affiliations . . .

Director Donald Brittain reads the above in a voice over of his National Film Board documentary Ladies and Gentlemen . . . Mr. Leonard Cohen (1965). Brittain adds that when in Canada, Cohen “picks up a prize, or pushes a book, or travels to public appearances with other poets.” In the black and white presentation of a printed page, Ladies and Gentlemen documents Cohen’s 1965 reading tour in promotion of The Spice Box and portrays a man who is “deeply concerned with the style of his soul.” I do not use ‘style’ to simply mean the ‘voice’ of Cohen’s writing, but the being he becomes when acting, or lying. Perhaps the silence of the written word is the ‘lie in his voice.’ Cohen, then, bares the soul of his words in performance. “I had a very Messianic childhood,” Cohen confesses in an interview. “I was told I was descendant of Aaron, the high priest. My parents actually thought we were Cohenism – the real thing. I was expected to grow into manhood leading other men” (Goldstein 43).

In the third part this thesis I will consider how Cohen’s voice developed when he became one of these ‘men.’ By the time he recorded the songs of his record Death of a Ladies’ Man (1977) and wrote its prose-poetry counterpart Death of a Ladies’ Man (1978), not only his voice, but also his performance changed. I will begin with Cohen’s writing voice, regardless of his singing voice. Cohen extends the ‘scar’ metaphor from “AS THE MIST” to read, “*There is the mist but there is no death*” and he rewrites the poem as a musical lyric “True Love Leaves No Traces” (“*SHE HAS GIVEN ME THE BULLET*” 113). This last quotation is in italics to signify it is from the “*COMMENTARY*” Cohen has written opposite the conventional-looking poetry from Lady’s Man. Much of this *COMMENTARY* is the text of an unpublished manuscript called “My Life in Art” that runs parallel to the plain text and is similar in mood to the commentary Cohen

provides at the end of Ladies and Gentlemen. As the film's coda, Brittain shoots Cohen watching Ladies and Gentlemen and insinuates, "this might affect your whole life." Cohen responds by repeating, "I'm a different style," a different "style of a man," than "I thought I was." I read these variations on Ladies as commentary on each other, though I am wary of, as Cohen says on Ladies and Gentlemen, creating a "very [nervous stutter] very mistaken conception" of him.

Despite the temptation to read Cohen's life into his art, I refuse to marry him to his text. I prefer to read him as a text. By doing so, I am making Cohen "as fictional as the text," according to Stephen Scobie, because "the writer's public image, whether deliberately created or not, *is* a text and must be read as such" ("Modernism" 61). For Scobie, the most prolific of Cohen's critics, any life in art is fictional. I will leave life writing to Ira Nadel, whose unauthorized biography, Various Positions: A Life of Leonard Cohen (1996), provides a useful context (1). Nadel reports, for instance, "[w]hen the interviewer asked Cohen what occupation he would list when filling out an application, he replied, 'Sinner'" (241).

Though I do not know what sin Cohen has committed, I have heard that 'a singer' did bear false witness. Having read the fourteenth chapter and fifth verse of the Book of Proverbs, I know such an act is one of the seven deadly sins since "a false witness will utter lies"; but lie also means crouches ("sin lieth at the door," Genesis 4:7), or "lie with," (usually to "preserve the seed," Genesis 19:32). I will often return to the book of Genesis to exemplify theories of performance and performativity, sexual or otherwise. When God speaks the (W)ords He utters do the very thing He says. I share this fascination for King James' English with Cohen, especially that of the last example. Take the double entendre

of the last song of New Skin for the Old Ceremony (the very album from 1974 that features “A Singer”) for instance: “I sang my songs, I told my lies, / to lie between your matchless thighs” (“Leaving Green Sleeves”). ‘A singer’ perform his song to make a lady hot “in the hinge of her thighs” (Stranger 208). The very ‘singer’ who lied for love sings: “I will ask for the mercy that you love to decline. *And all the ladies go moist, and the judge has no choice: a singer must die for the lie in his voice*” (Stranger 208).

In the first chapter, I will consider the voice of Cohen’s rhetoric, not speaking or singing. To consider Cohen a performer, I feel I must first consider his performance as a linguistic act. I read linguist J.L. Austin’s thesis in How to Do Things with Words (1962), to learn how dramatic acts differ from “speech acts” or everyday words spoken in utmost seriousness made deed. The ‘word’ is only a word until it is spoken. Austin is not concerned for words made poetry or prose, but for “everyday speech.” Yet, he does so in writing, which causes me a kind of crisis of faith. Cohen believes, given to the “high religious mood” he speaks of in the song “Death of a Ladies’ Man,” that speech is a religious experience because he sacrifices his life for it, his art (Stranger 227).

Though I know the sin ‘a singer’ must die for, I do not know what he sings. “‘Anything I tell you is an alibi’ for something else’,” says Lawrence Breavman, the protagonist of Game and another of Cohen’s characters (18). Cohen does not ascribe to such an alibi. As Michael Ondaatje’s critical commentary Leonard Cohen (1970) suggests, the “[o]ne thing that bothered him was the reference to his novel The Favourite Game as autobiographical” (3). It is tempting to characterize Game with the “warm blanket of biography” and to take Breavman’s as Cohen’s own performative utterances (4). Believing in his ‘lies,’ Cohen becomes, in Ondaatje’s words, “the twentieth century

troubadour lover” whose writing inspires “a religion of faith” (22). In Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche writes that “*faith is needed*” to take fiction as truth, or the “so-called *pia fraus*” (“Holy Lie”) among “the truths” to live by (Nietzsche 546; 505). In “A Singer,” Cohen sings of such a belief: “I thank you, I thank you for doing your duty, you keepers of Truth, you guardians of Beauty” (Stranger 208). Elsewhere in Idols, Nietzsche speaks of those who, like Cohen, enter “into any skin, into any affect: he constantly transforms himself” (Nietzsche 520).

Austin finds such a performance to be parasitic upon language. An actor takes language and makes it unreal, fictive (Words 22). Austin’s theory of performative utterance simply ignores the actor who sheds a meaningful skin for a hollow one. Mary Louise Pratt argues with Austin’s notion of parasitic language, saying fiction constitutes “indirect speech acts” dependent on an “implied author” or *persona* (“Ideology” 61, 64). To Linda Hutcheon, Cohen lives “his ‘life in art,’” by creating a persona “[f]rom his songs to his books” that “evolves around his own personality as artist” (“Fiction” 25). Rather than mistake Cohen’s persona for his personality, I read Cohen’s ‘life in art’ the way Hutcheon does elsewhere, as a “personal engagement with the reader that would later become familiar in Cohen’s intimate appeal as a stage performer” (“Poetry” 26). Supposing that all narration is theatrical, I will read, as Ondaatje writes, that Breavman “watches himself take part in a play,” since “the poet watching himself [. . .] becomes one of the most important characteristics in this novel” (24). I think of Cohen’s personae to be characters he plays or masks he wears.

Part two of my study will look at The Spice Box, not as literature but as Cohen’s literal voice as I hear it on Ladies and Gentlemen. With performance theories and

practitioners in mind, I will consider how Cohen's voice acts. Beginning with Constantin Stanislavski, who thinks of each performance as an expression of the performer, I will consider Jerzy Grotowski, whose disciplined and rigorous theatre unseats Stanislavski's spectator, and will conclude with Antonin Artaud, whose theatre means to replace the signifier (performer, in this case) with the sign (performance). Live, in the flesh on Ladies and Gentlemen, Cohen acts as a representation of my 'flesh' metaphor. Writing the poems as a persona, reading these lines aloud, Cohen becomes an actor.

In Milton Wilson's less than favourable review of Cohen's third book of poetry, he speculates "it is useful to think of Flowers for Hitler as the author auditioning himself for all the parts in an unwritten play" ("Poetry" 20). What Wilson calls Cohen's "sense of role," I apply The Spice Box wherein Cohen tries "to find a convincing part in a cosmic melodrama of inept miscasting and dropped cues, of letting the second-rate play down in almost exact proportion to one's will to live up to it" ("Poetry" 21). Wilson's use of the word 'will' is significant. If I willingly suspend my disbelief, Cohen not only acts, but also becomes the characters he plays. Cohen becomes Scobie's fear: "Cohen is in some danger of disappearing altogether" ("Counterfeiter" 13). Scobie goes on in his own Leonard Cohen to say, "as a writer, Cohen has always been too self-centred to operate outside his own milieu, or to write in depth about any character who is not, in some aspect, himself" (87). Conceivably, Cohen is what he writes or what I read.

I call my perception of his actions Cohen's 'con.' My third chapter will focus on Judith Butler's theory of performativity – that identity, like gender, is an appearance realized through "*the stylized repetition of acts*" ("Performative" 270, Trouble 179, Bodies 244). "Do not act out words. Never act out words," writes Cohen in "HOW TO

SPEAK POETRY” from Death of a Lady’s Man (197). Perhaps Cohen identifies himself, his ‘style’ of being through his works. Hutcheon calls Cohen a “writer of metafiction” whose appearance is deceiving for he “wants to lure the reader into the act of text-making, to tantalize us, to tease us with our own expectations” (“Fiction” 51).ⁱ Nowhere does Cohen play with texts to greater effect than “the dual poem-commentary” of Ladies’ and Lady’s Man, says Hutcheon (“Fiction” 30). Ladies’ Man, however, does not sound the same as Cohen’s “earlier poems set-to-music in form and tone” even though he has rewritten “AS THE MIST” into a “less ironic and complex pop tune” and sang the lines of “True Love Leaves No Traces” (“Poetry” 31).ⁱⁱ Against a banal melody, Cohen leads me on by droning, “If you and I are one” . . . (Stranger 216)

I, for one, play a large part in Cohen’s ‘con’ game. The game for which Raymond Filip knows the (damned if you do, damned if you do not) rules: “If you attack Leonard Cohen, then you are jealous. If you fill his ears with praise, then you are a servile flatterer” (73). Cohen, though, often means the ironic opposite of what he says, so with my hands full of ‘con’ words and ‘a singer’’s voices dying in my ears I never know if I am attacking or serving. What Hutcheon writes about Beautiful Losers, Cohen’s second novel, applies to all three Ladies: “It is as if he is deliberately trying to prevent the reader from creating a system of interpretation,” that leaves the reader “caught between

ⁱ Earlier in this bio-biblio-critical essay, Hutcheon clarifies what she means by “metafiction.” Obviously, it is “fiction about fiction, fiction that contains within itself a first critical commentary on its own narrative or linguistic identity” (“Fiction” 32). “Cohen’s metafictional texts themselves are as self-aware as are Cohen and his artist personae,” which is to say, as Hutcheon does, Cohen asks me to be “self-consciously aware of the artist in relation to the process of creation” (“Fiction” 32).

ⁱⁱ Hutcheon is indirectly referring to Scobie, who said, “[t]here is a subtle yet decisive distinction between a true song and a poem set to music” (Cohen 127). Even though I can hum along with any text, I may not be making music because “[i]n certain works the words could stand, without too great a loss, separated from the music, whereas in a true song this separation is unthinkable” (Scobie Cohen 127).

unresolved dualities: the serious the con” (“Polarities” 331). Unable as I am to distinguish between the two, I must take Cohen at his word.

b. Truth

What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people . . .

Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lie”ⁱ

Believe it or not, this quotation, an oft-quoted fragment of Nietzsche’s, was published posthumously. Nietzsche died long before his definition of truth was, as he predicted it would be, itself “worn out”: “truths are illusions” caused by the repetition of “metaphors” until no one remembers from where the truth came (Nietzsche 47). Done to death, these metaphors confuse fiction and truth just as Cohen’s ‘scar,’ ‘mist,’ or ‘death’ make up little more than acts of a con artist. Cohen’s favourite game is to quote, or cite (which is to say re-iterate) himself out of context. He takes lines of his poetry and words he had written for his characters and by reading or singing incorporates his corpus into himself. His ‘life in art,’ Cohen’s ‘scar’ is a mark of death. His ‘death’ is also ‘in art,’ as he expires the ‘mist’ in performance.

If Cohen is a performer, do his words need them to survive, to breathe? While reading three metaphors through a selection of Cohen’s works, I am not confident I will come to any conclusion. I doubt I will come to know where or who Cohen is apart from the works in which he plays an uncertain part.ⁱⁱ It is even indeterminate where I am in all

ⁱ “from ‘On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense’.” The Portable Nietzsche. 46-47.

ⁱⁱ This is to say I am asking for grace from my reader, something about which Cohen spoke to Pierre Burton on Ladies and Gentlemen:

Leonard Cohen: “N-no, I do the poetry, you do the commentary.”

Pierre Burton: “. . . how can you write poetry if you’re not bothered by something? . . .”

these sweeping generalizations and oversimplifications. Nevertheless, before I get lost, I should repeat that Leonard Cohen is a performer *to me*. I assuage my conscience by saying that; I am not assuming I will flesh out Cohen's words. Whatever it is that follows is not a biography, transcription, or a treatise of Cohen's lies it is more a performance piece and less a thesis.

Which is to say I side "[w]ith the academic tribe" who, according to Michael Gnarowski's "Introduction" to Leonard Cohen: The Artist and His Critics (1976), are "waging a 'we-stick-our-tongues-out-at-you-because-our-man-is-popular' kind of contest" against those people who, in Breavman's words are "sitting around tables in small classrooms, their hands bloody with commas" (Game 8; 107). As I have likely recited "A Singer" against Cohen's will, I will take 'the lie in his voice' literally, be it the lie of a poet or pop singer or not. It is possible that Cohen is not dead after all!¹

LC: "Well, I, [nervous stutter] I'm bothered when I get up in the morning. My real concern is to discover whether or not I'm in a state of grace. And if I make that investigation and if I discover that if I'm not in a state of grace I try to go to bed"

PB: "What do you mean by 'a state of grace'? That's a phrase I've never understood."

LC: "... a state of grace is a kind of balance with which you ride the chaos that you see around you. It's not a matter of resolving the chaos, because there's something arrogant and warlike about putting the world in order ..."

PB: "Whoa, you have lost me."

Talking about poetry is an art that will lose the unsympathetic.

¹ This is a parody of "Thus Spoke Zarathustra: First Part" by replacing "God" with Cohen. The Portable Nietzsche. 124.

CHAPTER ONE

Leonard Cohen must know the first chapter and fourteenth verse of the Gospel According to John, when “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” by heart. On the first page of his first novel The Favorite Game (1963), he recites it nearly word for word (King James Bible; abbr. Game 3). He does so to make something of its passive construction, rewording the scripture to read: “A scar is what happens when the word is made flesh.” Doing so, he keeps the verb ‘made,’ but changes the tense from the past (‘was’) to the present (‘is’) with the adverb ‘when,’ and supplements ‘word’ and ‘flesh’ with a seam, ‘A scar.’ Still, Cohen’s account of the holy transubstantiation remains passive. Since I do not know the subject of the verb, I do not know who performs the action in either telling of the Word made flesh. By the end of John’s verse, I read that the Logos was “the only begotten of the Father” and it was He who made the Word flesh, through a process I am willing to believe was, in the final words of the verse, “full of grace and truth.” Cohen’s metaphor is less graceful; it remains unclear whether or not ‘A scar’ is the subject of his fiction. Accordingly, given the hole in his grammar, I am less willing to believe in Cohen’s gospel.ⁱ In this chapter, I will look at some ways to read ‘A scar’: as a performative verb in Game, as a trope for Cohen’s persona throughout his works, and as an allegory of performance. I will make much of this play of words to discuss whether his words are autobiographical, or enacted like “Words, words, words” of Hamlet’s theatrical performance.ⁱⁱ In truth, ‘A scar’ is neither wholly word nor flesh.

ⁱ Such a statement reminds me of an aphorism from Nietzsche’s Twilight of the Idols: “I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar” (Nietzsche 483). Grammar, then, is teleological system given a belief that every sentence comes to a proper end.

ⁱⁱ The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, 2.2.192.

I. Scar

Not surprisingly, 'A scar' is a part of speech. In How to Do Things with Words, J.L. Austin considers how speech *acts*, how "ordinary language" makes things happen. To do so, Austin divides language into two types of utterances: constative, or true and false statements; and performative, statements that either are "or" a "part of the doing of an action" (Words 5). To be performative, the action spoken of happens the moment it is said.

'A scar' proves performative, even though Cohen would not appreciate the accusation that he writes with 'ordinary' or spoken language. In The Spice Box of Earth, a collection of poems I cover in the next chapter, Cohen begs "Let me never speak casually" ("LINES FROM MY GRANDFATHER'S JOURNAL" abbr. Spice 86). And, in the last chapter I will apply the words of the first-person speaker in the book of prose-poetry Death of a Lady's Man to Cohen to say that he "*will*" not let "*this book dissolve into ordinary conversation*" ("THE HOUSE" abbr. Lady's 53). Oddly, or appropriately, words become performative by an act of such a speaker's *will*. Cohen, however, prides himself on writing with heightened language. For instance, just one sentence before the quotation from The Spice Box he writes: "I imagine the scar in a thousand crowned letters" (86). Against Cohen's will, I read 'A scar' as the utterance of a fictive speaker who reads this script and believes what he says to be true. 'A scar' does not just 'happen,' someone 'made' it.

In the beginning of Words, Austin defines performative words as "verbs in the first person singular present indicative active" when spoken (60). In order for these performative verbs to be *explicit*, "the utterer must be the performer," or, the author must

be the speaker (Austin Words 60). Were Cohen his own speaker, he would have written: "A scar is what happens when I make the word flesh." Reading Cohen's passive construction, I am unsure if I authorize him to tell me the story of his life or perform this line like an actor in a play or to tell me the story of his life.

Laurence Breavman, the protagonist of Game would accuse everyone telling their life story of being behind the "donnish conspiracy against Life and Art" (142). Those two states of being – of Life as written in an autobiography or Art wherein I can read Cohen like a book – follow each other throughout every word he has ever written. By 'donnish,' Cohen may mean that such academic pedantry is more absent-minded than erudite. In her essay "Caveat Lector: The Early Postmodernism of Leonard Cohen," Hutcheon parodies Cohen's quotation, calling Lady's "a grand ironic reversal of the Word made flesh" (27). She proves that she knows the working title of Lady's was "My Life in Art," but does not read John's gospel carefully. Though she claims that Cohen reverses, for ironic effect, 'flesh' for 'Word' she fails to swap capital letters. Were she to do so, 'Flesh' becomes a proper noun and maybe even another name for Cohen. Hutcheon explains away Cohen's passive construction by reading him into his work; paradoxically, he performs the action of making the word into himself.

Yet, Hutcheon does not mention the scar. 'A scar is what happens when' Cohen performs himself and becomes the word in the flesh. His life imitating art, Cohen's works are a script Hutcheon would have me read and play the "role of the artist" ("Caveat" 26-27).ⁱ To do so, I must pretend that Cohen embodies his conceit in

ⁱ In her essay about Cohen's fiction, Hutcheon sees a pattern in his "poetry and song" ("Fiction" 31). Lumping his prose with his poetry, Cohen's writing appears to "grow out of farewells" (Hutcheon "Fiction" 31). Once such parting, for instance, occurs when Cohen leaves "a fictional persona" behind as a

performance. Moreover, I must willingly confuse the written word with the act of speech.

This is to say that 'A scar' is metaphor for performance, not a performative verb. Austin does not write of stage actors, but of speech-actors who use language to make things happen. "Literature itself is a speech context," Mary Louise Pratt writes in the first chapter of A Speech-Act Theory of Literary Discourse, "On being an audience" (86). Pratt sees language, ordinary or not, as a speech-act, spoken or written. As a member of Cohen's audience, I must fill in the context and attest to the presence of the speech-actor. A speech-actor, then, performs with the gestures and intonation whether on the stage or page (Pratt Discourse 5). To play his part of the 'role of the artist,' the speaker uses literary devices of "metrics, rhythm, syllabification, metaphor, rhyme, and parallelism of every kind to say something" according to Pratt (Discourse 5).

That said, Austin would likely disagree with Pratt's oversimplification of what he calls a "doctrine of illocution." Austin repeats that his 'doctrine' is never as straightforward as "just saying something" to get the said thing done; a performative utterance is not 'just' an "act of saying something" (Words 7, 99). In a work of literature, a speaker or narrator is a fiction that does nothing for Austin because such speech is untrue. Austin has no use for literature. A speaker is a figure of speech, so Austin uses the word *locutor*. For instance, when it is "spoken" or performed "by an actor on a stage, or introduced in a poem," language becomes fiction. It sounds "*in a peculiar way* hollow or void" to Austin (Words 22). Performance is fictive, not performative. When

"result of his growing comfort in a performing role" (Hutcheon "Fiction" 31). This reflects on the role of the audience, for watching him perform his songs or poems I am to take Cohen at face value.

performed, words become “*parasitic upon [language’s] normal use*” (Austin Words 22). Like an imaginary scar on flesh, performance is a parasite upon language.

Were Cohen to say the word ‘scar’ aloud, he would echo the (third person present tense) voice with which he writes Game. Though his voice would no longer sound passive, when playing the locutor, Cohen’s performance would still not be performative. Austin consciously changes his mind about what makes words performative. On second thought, says Austin, “person and voice are not essential” to performative utterances and decides to include those utterances spoken “in the *second or third person* (singular or plural) the verb in the *passive voice*” (Words 57). Since it is ‘what happens’ when Cohen writes in the passive voice, I imagine ‘A scar’ to be a performance without a performer. J. Hillis Miller speaks to such a contradiction, since “careful readers of Austin [. . .] have seen that he already conclusively demonstrated the impossibility of establishing a clear and complete doctrine of speech acts” (13). Like Miller’s, Austin’s use of ‘doctrine’ is odd. Doctrine is a word that belongs to the religious, one that describes rules or principles to live by as written in a particular canon or body of work. Without a doctrine I cannot delineate how speech acts, I just need to have faith that it does. Similarly, I must believe that I will know a performative utterance when I hear it.

I will speak of performance later on; for now, I will assume that performative utterances sound like speech. Following Pratt’s view of performative language, I read with my eyes and ears to hear Cohen represent, in Austin’s opinion, “[p]rimitive devices in speech” (Words 73). Austin argues that, when an author writes in the first person, he or she can simulate “features of spoken language” such as “*tone of voice, cadence, emphasis,*” the way a playwright indicates “stage directions” for theatrical performance

(Words 75). Though such figurative language does not make speech act, Austin would likely agree that utterances only become performative through an almost-Nietzschian act of will. Not only I, but also a speech-actor must believe in an utterance, be it the truth or fiction, for it to be performative.

Though Cohen does not use 'A scar' like a verb in his version of the word made flesh, the word becomes performative for I see its mark all over Game. Earlier in the paragraph that ends with Cohen's 'word is made flesh' trope, he makes 'A scar' in two similes: "like medals" that "Children show" to each other and like "secrets" that "Lovers [. . .] reveal" (Game 3). Cohen commonly uses 'A scar' as a turn of phrase to describe bodies. In the first sentence of Game, Cohen writes of Shell, a woman whose scarred earlobes are all that remains of the "punctures" of an infected piercing (3). The first word of Game is "BREAVMAN," the name of Cohen's protagonist, a man who calls himself "the original archaeologist of earlobes" (3). Obviously a play on bereavement, Breavman's own name represents the scar of loss. Later on in the novel, Breavman is the one "telling all this" in his journal written "[m]any years later" (Game 18). He whispers the very story I am reading, a portrait of himself as a young man, into the scarred ears of his girlfriend Shell.

Still on the first page of Game, Cohen's bemused narrator speaks of scars as a pageant of painful memories. First, Breavman "has a scar" on "the right temple" "bestowed" upon him by his best friend Krantz in a childhood skirmish over a snowman (Game 3). Unlike Krantz, Breavman likes his snowmen senseless, without "clinkers as eyes," and his jack-o'-lanterns without "carrots in the mouths" or "cucumber ears" (Game 3). He would rather spare these effigies the burden of having feelings, like his

father, who was proud of being a war casualty, or like his mother, a woman who sees “her whole body as a scar grown over some earlier perfection” (Game 3). Compared to the scars of his parents, the scar on Breavman’s temple is a mere flaw upon what he learned as a boy to call “the temple of the human body” (Game 26). Breavman’s fear is that this scar will overtake his whole body.

There is a story behind every scar. Cohen opens Game describing the scarring experiences that the rest of the story will narrate. Like the “proud scars” that Breavman’s father wears and the scarred-over chrysalis Breavman’s mother believes she has become, ‘A scar’ represents a stage of character development (Game 3). ‘A scar’ is the seam left by the process of maturation – almost as though ‘the word is made flesh’ by way of puberty. It is a kind of still photograph of its host at the point of being hurt. What is more, Cohen writes that it is “hard to show a pimple,” an adolescent’s embarrassment, but it “is easy” to “display a wound” of survival (Game 3). In this way, I am reading ‘A scar’ like a body, the way I would the body of a text, between the lines.

Though he was not the one who pierced her ears, Breavman scars Shell with his stories. Shell speaks to Breavman and herself as though she is disembodied: “‘It’s so hard,’ said Shell’s voice, ‘Everybody has a body’” (Game 204). It is hard for Shell to grow into a relationship with Breavman, to be a character in his story and to be scarred in the process. Just as everybody has a body, each actor embodies a character in the theatre. A play is a story told with bodies of actors and audiences who share the same time, space, and breathe the same air. Cohen introduces his cast of characters, his *dramatis personae* with the same breath he begins his story with the trope of ‘A scar.’ Confiding in his journal, composing a short story or a poem, Breavman is also a writer, but not one

working from page to the stage. The story of Breavman's life is written on his flesh, which he translates to the page. As he says, "I want to write the word" (Game 217).

Between the journal Breavman wrote in the first person and the story told in the third person by Cohen's locutor, Breavman is not only a word; he writes himself into Game. I, like Shell, read excerpts of his journal to, in the words of the locutor, "take a closer look at" Breavman (Game 217 and 240). Breavman writes to himself about his body as a type of scar grown over the very hurt that "makes your body into stone" (Game 217). Breavman inflicts pain and risks turning Shell's body 'hard.' Breavman's journal is the scarred body of text, a story of his break up with Shell: "He had enough for a fat book but he didn't need a book. That would come later when he needed to convince himself that he had lived such a life of work and love" (Game 185).

To clarify, the narrator speaks for Cohen of Breavman, often in Breavman's voice. To Austin, Cohen's narrator is a fictive or parasitic performance within a literary work. Attempting a "Definition of Literature," Richard Ohmann offers a way "[t]o pursue this supposition: perhaps the whole poem" or fiction "is encased in invisible quotation marks" (13). Mindful of Ohmann's working definition, I am free to pretend that Breavman is a character and characteristic of a story told by the narrator following in the theatrical convention of a soliloquy. Given his distrust of all things theatrical, Austin chooses to ignore how soliloquy works. Austin suggests, "[a] soliloquy is like a private language" not a public performance ("Performative" 135). To a character, a soliloquy is a private language, but to an audience member willing to believe he or she is hearing a character's innermost thoughts and feelings it is a very public confession. While an actor (dishonest, according to Austin) is performing, his character speaks "*sotto voce*"

("Performative" 35). Therefore, when the actor performs, the character becomes a speech-actor. Thinking of Ohmann in terms of soliloquy, the quotation mark is a scar, (the very mark on flesh), and a trope for an author. About the writing voice, Pratt says, "[t]he traditional speaker may be merely the fictional counterpart (*persona*) of the author" (Discourse 208).

A persona is the voice of a locutor. Years after writing Game, in an interview Cohen speaks of his "need to jot everything down," like Breavman. Cohen says it best: "I don't feel that I am a singer, or a writer, I'm just the voice, a living diary" (qtd. in Nadel Positions 272). Cohen does not see any differences between his voices, claiming everything he writes to be part of his real-life body. He is a songwriter and writes mindful of performing live. Because, as Cohen writes in a poem from Lady's: "I am not speaking to myself" ("THE HOUSE" 52).

When Cohen speaks with Breavman's voice, however, he "can make things happen" (Game 10). For instance, the narrative of Game tells of something Breavman has long forgotten: the moment in his childhood Breavman "heard his voice so pure" and he told Krantz "there's something special about my voice" (10). Believing "[t]he air is a microphone," Breavman is a speech-actor (Game 10). For instance, young Breavman learned he could take the most holy name in vain, "FUCK GOD!," three times without damnation or any repercussion (Game 10). Much later in life, Breavman forgets that his voice could once "make things happen" and must remind himself that "he could intrude into the action" around him (Game 87, 89). Breavman, Cohen's persona, is also a writer, one who finds it magical when "reading one's first poems" to hear his own voice written

down (Game 205). Similarly, Cohen is a ventriloquist when I hear his voice in Breavman's mouth.

Persona is a voice spoken through such a dummy, or mask. According to Jolande Jacobi's chapter in Carl Jung's Man and His Symbols, persona is a "protective cover or mask" worn to keep the wearer from harm when presenting his or her self "to the world" (350). Such a persona "has two purposes: first to make a specific impression on other people: second, to conceal the individual's inner self from their prying eyes" (Jacobi 350). In Michael Ondaatje's book-length study Leonard Cohen, Cohen, "not his poems, [has] become the end product of his art" (60). Ondaatje continues, "the author and the action and the chief actor," Cohen himself "gives meaning to all the ephemera [sic]" (Ondaatje 14, 60). Though I am not sure if Ondaatje misspelled *ephemera* for emphasis, I am even less sure if he means to say Cohen or his persona possesses all those attributes. For instance, having read Breavman's confession – "The whole enterprise of art was a calculated display of suffering" – I would side with Jung to say that the 'calculated display' is the work of Cohen's persona (Game 108). Strangely, Cohen wears Breavman's persona 'of suffering' to save himself from such suffering. If Cohen, 'the author . . .' 'gives meaning to' his body of work, his personality is no less fictive than Breavman's in Game.

By persona, I mean character. More specifically, Breavman is inspired by but emptied of Cohen's personality. Whatever character remains in this exchange is a fiction with which Cohen can easily play. Cohen's partially omniscient narrator plays with Breavman's thoughts to say "[a]ll the world was being hoaxed by a disciplined melancholy" (Game 108). Breavman's 'disciplined melancholy' is as 'calculated' a

'display' as his 'suffering'; "All that was necessary to be loved," by onlookers like myself "was to publish one's anxieties" (Game 108). That this narration refers to 'one,' indicates that Breavman is not being honest with himself. He projects his feelings onto someone else to distance himself from them with an epigrammatic wit.

To wit, on the opposite page Breavman admits, "I blur everyone" (Game 107). Presumably, Breavman is referring to the same pronoun ('one') of the locutor on the last page. If so, he means to say he is the only one in the world who is in focus. Though Cohen sees Breavman as a kind of mask, Ondaatje's intention, to "translate or represent Cohen by what I find in his writing," seems opaque (2). Ondaatje finds that Cohen hides his "dramatic mind" under a "mask, egotistical and flamboyant" (12; 8). Later, Ondaatje says Cohen "has put on and taken off his mask, [. . .] (in order to laugh at his pose) so often that the mask has become a part of him" (61). In his own Leonard Cohen, Stephen Scobie suggests, "Cohen has built up for himself a public persona [. . .] which was in many ways outrageously egotistic" (12). If Breavman is Cohen's mask, then both Ondaatje and Scobie are staring back at him through his eyeholes.

Eyes, it seems, are indicative of where Cohen's ego goes. Cohen's persona is only egotistical if I believe he is explicitly referring to himself when writing the pronoun 'I.' (I cannot forget that when it is spoken 'I' sounds like a pun on 'eye'). Hence, I can accuse Cohen of egotism rather than read his work for allegorical meaning. Yet, as Scobie notes, "[p]ersonal pronouns have no security or consistency" (Cohen 10). In the mouth of his persona, Cohen can utter 'I' and it can become a performative utterance. This is not to say Cohen has written Game under the pseudonym Lawrence Breavman. Breavman is a character Cohen plays convincingly. Reading "Cohen [. . .] at the centre

of the story,” Ondaatje mingles Cohen’s persona with his personality. This way, Cohen’s “ego takes over and he writes a million autobiographies, real or imagined” (8).

In his autobiography, Roland Barthes acknowledges that he does not have the faith it takes to make the leap from persona to personality. He too uses metaphors of the theatre like an actor’s mask to write of persona. Such a mask is an image commonly associated with persona and for good reason – actors and audience make eye contact through it. Like the makeup of an audience, persona is a legion. For that reason Barthes sees “several masks” where it would appear there is only one (Barthes 120). Any notion of a single persona is “totally fictive” for “no one – *personne*, as we say in French – is behind them” (120). I wonder what he means by ‘behind’ these masks. Presumably, someone hides behind as many masks as he or she wishes to. To use the plural of persona, as Barthes would have me, there is no single, central Cohen throughout his oeuvre. Ondaatje and Barthes might see eye-to-eye, saying Cohen composes “a totally mythic world where the personae (no matter how much they still sound like Cohen) are part of another era” (13). Ondaatje, though, crosses what he believes to be the ‘I’ of Cohen’s personality with his lyric poetry (some of which I consider in the next chapter).

If Game is an “autobiography told in the third person” (24), as Ondaatje quips, whose is it? If it is Cohen’s autobiography, Breavman stands in as what Hutcheon calls a “coy autobiographical indicator” (“Fiction” 37-39). If it is Breavman’s autobiography, Cohen does not, as per Hutcheon, “dissolve in the fascinating dialectic” with the other “[p]aradoxes, bafflements, problems” of authoring an autobiography (“Fiction” 39). To clarify what Hutcheon means by “paradox,” as countless critics before her have indicated, Cohen’s “art demands distancing from the very experience that feeds it” (“Fiction” 33).

Believing he is exposing “a central conflict in all of Cohen’s work,” his biographer Ira B. Nadel repeats Hutcheon (whether he knows it or not): “his art demands distancing from the very sources that feed it” (Art 59).

Answering these critics, he poses a question to himself: “You ask me how I write,” in “I BURY MY GIRLFRIEND,” a poem from Lady’s; he answers: “This is how I write [. . .] I remove my personality from the line so that I am permitted to use the first person as often as I wish without offending my appetite for modesty” (74). If these are the lines of a speech-actor, Cohen may be delivering them ironically. I mean irony the way Paul DeMan does; performative irony is to be taken literally. Having written “Cohen is seldom allegorical,” Ondaatje would agree with a literal reading: “When he talks of bones, he means bones” (19). And, feeling exposed, Cohen excises himself from his words. That is not to say that when he writes of flesh – as Breavman does in his journal, “I have no taste for flesh but my own” – he *eats* his words (Game 218). I wonder, though, if I can read personality into his works or these stories, or experiences. From what he calls an “objective” point-of-view, Ondaatje says Cohen’s personality will not survive the writing process, for “Flesh, a favourite word of Cohen’s, drowns out personality” (13).

“Personalities are charted by naming objects,” Ondaatje says elsewhere (Anthology 15). I am not about to name names, or call Cohen Breavman because, as the narrative of Game puts it, Breavman experiences “flesh-loneliness” (90). By setting this trope (of ‘A scar’ made Breavman) against Cohen himself as ‘what happens when the word is made flesh,’ Breavman begins to sound a great deal like his creator. Breavman is Cohen’s persona and speaks in his voice until, falling silent, the character is *non grata*.

For instance, Breavman “told himself that he should just open his mouth and speak” to Shell, but will not, nor cannot stop their relationship from breaking up for their communication is breaking down (Game 97). It should be “[s]imple,” but Breavman has no voice to “[j]ust say the words. Break up the silence with any remark” (Game 97). So he concedes, rather than make a noise, “[a]ny noise [. . .] any noise, any noise,” he says he will, in his own words: “force open my teeth, operate the hinges of my jaw, vibrate vocal chords” (Game 98).

Breavman’s silence illustrates the difference between performative utterances and performance. Breavman must muster the will to make a noise. To be a speech-actor, Breavman’s noise must be what Austin calls *felicitous* – “a speaker and a hearer must be present, also a third, *terstis*, testifier, unbiased witness” (“Performative” 35). Within Game, Breavman is such a speaker, Shell his hearer, and presumably, I am a (admittedly biased) testifier. I must hear such noise from a speaker and recognize it as meaningful for it to be performative. Still, if Breavman is Cohen’s voice and speaks for him, Cohen hears himself speak. “One word will do it,” says Breavman, but that one word is in Cohen’s voice written in Game. Breavman is a character Cohen plays and an imposition of his will. Either that, or, as Susan Macfarlane broods in “The Voice of Trust in Leonard Cohen,” “the book itself as a character, perhaps?” (81).

Whether he is speech-actor (performativity, then, an act of will on his part) or performer (relying on the willful suspension of disbelief of his audience), Cohen is always rehearsing. It is almost as though he is learning the lines he wrote for his locutor and Breavman in Game: “He merely quoted himself” (107-108). Shortly after publishing his first novel, Cohen gave an interview where he said if Game “is still read three years

after it is published, or maybe even five years, it will have become less and less fictional” (qtd. in Nadel Positions 134). Answering a similar question in another interview, Cohen adds, “I read my own work as personal prophecy” (Goldstein 53). Tellingly, when learning his part Cohen not only must believe in his words, he must embody his counterpart in fiction. Ondaatje says, ““nothing is more irritating than to have your work translated by your life”” (3). That said, Ondaatje seems to translate Cohen’s life by his work by allowing fiction to act the same way speech does. To extend from Austin, life, like performance, is parasitic.

If so, ‘A scar’ that happens when the word is made flesh is a skin graft upon Cohen. “The graft, by definition,” writes Jacques Derrida in his treatise on performative utterances, is “no different from the parasite” which “is never *simply* alien to and separable from the body to which it has been translated or which it already haunts [*haunte*]” (Limited 82). Derrida’s diction is frustrating since ‘haunte’ also translates as a verb, to *boo*. Bowing to the play of his language, like ghosts, audiences ‘boo’ to voice their displeasure. Performers similarly possess their characters. Cohen similarly haunts his work like a script he wrote in the passive voice. Cohen often quotes his own hero, who also quoted himself.

Responding to speech-act theorist John Searle, who said that Derrida’s essay “Signature Event Context” (abbr. Sec) mistakes quotation for citation, the accused writes: I “never said in Sec that the novelist, poet and actor are ‘in general quoting’” performances “(fiction, literature, or theater)” (Limited 98). To be of any use, speech must be as quotable as lines of a play script. Derrida’s graft is *iterable*, that is to say obeying “*both* the ‘normal’ rule or convention and its transgression, transformation,

simulation, or imitation” (Limited 98). Cohen’s skin graft is, as Carmen Ellison argues in the essay “Corporeal Grammar in The Favourite Game,” one of many “attempts to conflate body and text” (70). Cohen “play[s] the game” with “pronouns, tenses, and an overall generic structure” (Ellison 71). That is, pronouns are the “mark[s],” or citations of nouns, “both present and absent” (Ellison 71). To be performative, a word must be recited and resuscitated by speech-actors. To be a pronoun for himself, Cohen must perform Breavman.

What does Cohen have to say about this? “Breavman isn’t me but we did many of the same things” (qtd. in Nadel Positions 88). Reading Game in retrospect, it would seem Cohen has done many things with Breavman’s words. Not only does Cohen crib from Breavman, he echoes E.M. Forster’s Howards End (“Only Connect . . .”) and lines 301-2 in T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” (“I can connect / Nothing with nothing”), when I read “the only way a man and a woman can be connected” is “in bed” (Game 119). In an article dated 28 January 1968, Cohen references Game word for word: “When I see a woman’s face transformed by the orgasm we had reached together, then I know we’ve met. Anything else is fiction. That’s the vocabulary we speak in today. It’s the only language left” (Game 119, qtd. in Nadel Positions 158). In the same article, years after Game, Cohen adds: “Everybody I meet wipes me out. It knocks me out, all I can do is get on my knees” (qtd. in Nadel Positions 158). Whether he is literally on his knees or not, this is an iterative connection.

“Wipe out” also means erasure.ⁱ Often in interviews Cohen refers to the feeling “when you get wiped out,” as in his reply to the traditional age of “the suicide of the poet” (Goldstein 42). If by “thirty or thirty-five” you have not put an end to your own suffering, “the natural assumption is the things you are doing is right” (Harris 48). In the pages of Cohen’s next novel Beautiful Losers (1966) (written well before his self-imposed deadline) a character named F. “said: Connect nothing” (17). While writing this, Cohen was so wiped he said, I “vowed I would fill the pages with black or kill myself” (Goldstein 43). “I said to myself [. . .] if I can’t blacken these pages[, Cohen continues,] then I really can’t do anything” (Harris 52). Cohen took these words, “I blackened my page” from the mouth of Breavman in Game (177). Stanzas of a poem (“Beneath my hands”) he has blackened on the page appear between paragraphs of narrative of Game and of The Spice Box in the name of Cohen. Bear his, or their, sooty sheets in mind when reading Scobie’s argument that Cohen’s “characters [. . .] merge together and become indistinguishable partly because they are all, in essence, projections or aspects of his own personality or of his Black Romantic self-image” (Cohen 11).

To write down just what, or who, is Romantic is a cross to bear. This “is the romantic sermon” that Isaiah Berlin preaches from in The Roots of Romanticism (121).

To speak of Romanticism is to speak of movement:

A man in the view of absolute goodness, adores, with total humility. Every step downward is a step upward. The man who renounces himself, comes to himself. (Emerson 74)

Taken from “The Divinity School Address,” Ralph Waldo Emerson’s romantic ‘man’ is *absolutely* resolute. Humbled, possibly humiliated, ‘he’ comes to know what is up by

ⁱ Breavman also wipes his nose with the very tissue upon which he has written poetry: “He lowered his head and dug his pen into napkin poems” (Game 169). On the last page of the novel Breavman writes about the favourite game as a child on such a napkin (Game 244).

feeling down. Bi-polar, 'he' must *act* in order to come into "private epiphanies" as Walter J. Ong would have it (Presence 258). No matter what absolute means, in Ong's The Presence of the Word it is a presence, something seen, a "visually conceived romantic image" (258). Ong's Romantic has vision, almost as though he is watching a silent movie featuring himself – he sees himself in the light cast from his projected image. Either absolute is identical, so in the end all that matters is the effort or the breakdown.

Berlin's 'he' is the "subject" who is continually "thrusting himself forward," not towards an understanding of reality but of an "inexhaustible" being (120). "So long as" you or I try for "once and for all to write down, to describe, to give any finality to the process which they [romantic writers] are trying to nail down, unreality and fantasy will result" (Berlin 121). Thus, "wherever you try to nail it [the structure of things] down, new abysses open, and these abysses open yet to other abysses" (Berlin 120, 119). 'He' who means "to catch light by means of darkness" may as well be Cohen (Berlin 121). Regarding such 'darkness,' Sandra Djwa reads Cohen in the tradition of the "Black Romantic" (104). To Scobie, Cohen's high calling is that of "the loss of self" ("Magic" 107). "Renounces" is the descriptor Emerson uses to describe his 'man' who loses himself. By describing blackness with words equally applicable to Berlin's romantic – "irrational, evil and grotesque, an evil and an ugliness" – it seems Djwa misunderstands blackness that the romantic "shares because he is human, with only a momentary hope of vision" (97). 'He' has hope because every act of creation is also an act of what Dwja calls "destruction" (97). Djwa's Cohen is a "modern anti-hero accepts evil as part of existence and immerses himself within it" to find it within himself (97). Like Emerson's

'man,' Cohen attempts to "find a new answer to the human predicament by going down instead of up" (Djwa 97). To accept Djwa's darkness on blind faith is to turn a blind eye away from Cohen's romanticism.

Scobie takes Djwa's "Black Romantic" and reads it as one of the ironic "poses" about which Cohen pretends he is not aware (Cohen 5). Maybe Cohen's response to an interview question about Black Romanticism is what Scobie has in mind: "I don't even know what that means" (Twigg 58). If "the originality and uniqueness of an individual's perception" is the highest value to the Romantic, Scobie writes that his Black foil seeks "highest value in the destruction of these qualities" (Cohen 11). And here the Romantic emerges from blackness – through he does not know the source of his work, Cohen is most romantic when he is not wiped out by his own words. "Deprivation is the mother of poetry," Cohen's narrator writes from the perspective of a full romantic in Game, a mother who leaves her progeny hungry (26). Cohen plays with his Black Romantic persona, and as Djwa says in spite of herself, he "does play the game very well" (103).

Breavman plays the game on a white sheet. While "darling Shell" wraps herself "tight" in such a "white sheet," Breavman would like to tear this sheet into strips with which he could "embalm her for easy reference" to take "care of [her] flesh like a drunk scholar" would (Game 186). The white sheet is also a "white and unbroken" "expanse of snow" upon which Breavman, as a child made angels in wherever or "whatever position you landed" (Game 243). (Coincidentally, by the end of the novel, playing snow angels is the favourite game mentioned in the title). Or, as Nadel points out, the white sheet may also be the challenge of Stéphane Mallarmé's white page, upon which I can read "the trace of the presence of an individual or experience left through art or possibly memory"

(Art 60). Rather than an act of reading, Scobie suggests that by “acting *on* this blankness, violently imposing your will upon it, you create an image” (Cohen 75). Breavman, though, is through with playing these games: either in the bed, on the snow, or on the page. White space is no less a sign than blackened pages.

To his “darling Shell,” Breavman writes, “there is someone lost in me whom I drowned stupidly in risky games a while ago” – himself (Game 186). He is played out: “That’s all I can write,” Breavman concludes. “I would have liked to bring him to you – not this page, not this regret” (Game 186). That Breavman’s writing has enwrapped him is romantic, he is a mummy with a childhood self gestating inside. This is to say, it seems Cohen is wrapped inside Breavman, inside his Black Romantic persona, especially when quoting himself. For example, “[b]lack lines, like an ink drawing of a storm plunged over the sky to help him over, he could have sworn” is a fine illustration of Emerson’s submission (Game 38). George Woodcock authorizes such a “romantic vision” of Cohen, seeing his self-renunciation as self-indulgence resulting in the writing of a “solipsist” who “creates beauty within the mind that is his only real world; he loses because the actual world outside the mind does not correspond to his visionary world and yet impinges on his life” (104).

Whereas Dwja’s Black Romantic pours ink to express himself, Woodcock’s Cohen is a “young writer persona” who clumsily spills ink onto himself (97). Writing about the possibility of Cohen having a “future as a serious writer” provided “he wants one,” Dwja counters Woodcock by arguing Cohen’s best work is “back in the writing of The Favourite Game before Cohen, persona, solidified” (105). I suppose Scobie might find this ironic; Cohen’s persona solidifies when he makes art his experience, whereas

Djwa sees “only the value of experience made art” (97). “People don’t take me seriously in this country,” is Cohen’s complaint – so he feels forced to adopt a rigid persona.

Whether he wants to be taken seriously or not, Cohen is what he writes. Hutcheon reads “[t]he ubiquitous scar imagery [. . .] of both The Favourite Game and the early poems,” as both a mark of “a healed wound” and “an engraving” (“Poetry” 33). Cohen’s trope is Romantic for “the poet must love, then leave his lover, in order to write of love” and by writing enact another persona (Hutcheon “Poetry” 33). Hutcheon unknowingly writes about Cohen’s romanticism when speaking of his “obsession with creation – and its failure” (Postmodern 42).

Breavman, playing the lover opposite Cohen’s Black Romantic, is an example of Hutcheon’s writer. Regarding The Spice Box, Eli Mandel believes “the context” for Cohen’s second book “is love; the persona, the lover” (“Slave” 127). Scobie agrees, calling “Breavman’s alternative persona ‘the lover’” (Cohen 93). Sounding much like Cohen, the lover speaks with Breavman’s ‘I’: “The lover, being planned so well, had a life of his own and often left Breavman behind” (Game 176). “The Breavman eye,” Cohen’s locutor suggests, has “trained” his vision to “work on the landscape of Shell’s body” (Game 182). “More and more the lover had Shell to himself,” the narrative continues; “These are the times Breavman does not remember too well because he was so happy” (Game 182). The lover is an apostrophic creation and a character in a story Breavman writes and then forgets he has written. Before asking his then-girlfriend Tamara to read, Breavman sets the stage: “The characters in it were named Tamara and Lawrence and it took place in a room” (Game 93). Within the story, Breavman describes

that the character of Tamara “said theatrically: ‘Tonight you are my ardent lover’,” and names the Breavman-character the lover (Game 93).

The lover is a name and an identity since, as Tamara’s character says, “[t]heir sexual identities become more and more vague until they are lost together” (Game 94). “[T]he love of the character for his creation, the love of the creator for himself” is “the only kind of sexual love,” Breavman’s character counters (Game 95). Love is performative, and in Austin’s words, felicitous. To Breavman’s character, lover is a noun, to Tamara’s, a verb. “‘You don’t know the difference between creation and masturbation’,” she replies; “‘And there is a difference’.” Indeed there is a difference – these are two characters talking about a deed. Tamara reads these words “carefully,” and her response recalls her character (“‘You didn’t understand a thing I said’”), insisting, “‘I don’t talk that way’” (Game 95). “‘You talk like both characters’,” Tamara counters (Game 97). Breavman acquiesces; “The act of writing had been completed when” Breavman lets Tamara read, before she reads into it. The lover is a character and a performer who becomes “a part of Shell’s heart” like Breavman’s letters where “she was the major character in them” (Game 145).

Breavman, though, “didn’t think of himself as a lover” (Game 168). Then again, as a writer, Breavman “was a professional, he knew how to build a lover to court her” (Game 176). By ‘her,’ he means Shell, not Tamara, the lover he wrote into a story. A courtly lover, Breavman writes the blazon or catalogue to love Shell, both a woman and a character he divides into parts for his poetry. Michael Greenstein mentions that Breavman’s “cataloguing characters and events comes to distance and objectify these differences” (126). “The alternation between past and present tenses,” between

Breavman's journal and Game, "underscores anatomical lesions as well as distances between lovers; Cohen is an anatomist bent on inflicting wounds and healing them" (Greenstein 127). Greenstein intentionally commits a fallacy, whereby Cohen does not simply play the parts of Breavman (the lover) and his locutor – they become parts of him. Supposedly, Breavman does not write so much as single-handedly put on a burlesque show:

He felt as though he had masturbated on television. He was bereft of privacy, restraint, discretion.

"Do you know what I am, Krantz?"

"Yes, and don't recite the catalogue" (Game 89).

"Try to see the poem, Breavman, the beautiful catalogue," Cohen's locutor says to his character (Game 66). (Breavman composes "the catalogue of magnificence," a piece of work like that of John Donne's "The Extasie," a poem that worships every part of a lover, written in parts by "hands" "engraft[ed]" and read by "twisted" "eye-beams" [Game 126; 1.5, 7]).¹ At Krantz's behest, Breavman composes such a "lovely catalogue!" while maintaining a dialogue with the childhood friend who bestowed the scar upon his temple (Game 113). With the learned ease of early-Modern *sprezzatura*, Breavman and Krantz style "the arms, the bosoms, the buttocks," of a lover (Game 113). A love so beautiful that "No real corporeal woman can give him the pleasure of his own creations" (Game 31).

I suppose Breavman is an act of speech, either a name, or a character, and not a sexual act. "I winced at the word sexual'," the lover says; "There is no word more inappropriate to lovers" (Game 94). Nor is loving an act of intimacy: "Intimate. That

¹ I am not the first to cross-reference Cohen with Donne. Hutcheon wrote about "[t]he intertextual references to John Donne's verse" in passing; these "are references the reader learns *not* to invert. In Donne, as in Eliot, Cohen seems to have found a poet of polarities, of ironic reversals of convention" ("Poetry" 40). Which is to say, we should read Cohen's Donne-like conceits straight.

was another one of those words” (Game 94). Breavman, like Cohen, uses theatrical metaphors: Tamara’s character speaks “theatrically,” Breavman “staged a theatrical swoon,” and later “performed the act of love” (Game 194, 123). I will further suppose, as Ondaatje does, that “with Tamara’s appearance, Breavman breaks into two, his social life and his sex become separate. [. . .] Breavman, like the lover in the poem, starts to worship flesh” (29). I suppose Cohen worships the same flesh of a scar. He holds himself, but that “was not the kind of embrace he wanted.” In the words he gives to Breavman: “There was nothing of flesh in it, only hurt” (Game 88). ‘A scar’ grows over such hurt, one Cohen makes of himself.

II. Flesh

some momentary inattention at prayer, a movement of trivial anger in his soul or a subtle willfulness in speech or act, he was bidden by his confessor to name some sin of his past life before absolution was given him.

James Joyce, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Manⁱ

Earlier in the Game, under “[t]he evening mist [. . .] piling along the opposite shores like dunes of sand,” Breavman and Shell speak of Jean Jacques Rousseau, who pleased himself “right to the end of his life” (Game 31). As Joyce’s young Stephen Dedalus knows, and Breavman learns in Cohen’s *künstlerroman*, confession is an art, of naming, almost reliving past sins. Rousseau’s Confessions is a portrayal of “that dangerous supplement,” a euphemism that Derrida cannot separate from “real life of these existences ‘of flesh and bone’” and those “beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau’s text” (Grammatology 159). “[T]here has never been anything but writing” for Derrida;

ⁱ The Portable Joyce. 412.

there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the 'real' supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. (Grammatology 159)

The *supplement* is the thing that adds to and replaces what is present in the “*game*” of language (Derrida Grammatology 7). Put crudely, to Derrida, Rousseau’s condemnation of writing as the supplement to speech recalls the danger of a self-identical sexual identity.

Despite never defining what the masturbatory ‘it’ means, Breavman writes of the lover, the flesh beneath his own hands. Masturbating, his fist blurs the difference between flesh and word. The scar becomes mist and flesh spills on the page like “the male sperm[,] 1000 times smaller than this” period (Game 26). To Shell, the danger is if *it* will ““separate us completely?”” (Game 31). To Scobie, “Cohen is [. . .] carrying a total destruction – or, more accurately (in a word I could not have used in 1974), a deconstruction – of the figure of the poet as a unified source of utterance and meaning” (“Forgiveness” 14). Though he masturbates, Breavman does not destroy himself. Is this persona the supplement, the character a part of and apart from Cohen? To answer, I refer to Tamara, who replies when asked whether the language of sexual congress is better than silence: “No.”

Breavman rejoins, “‘I’ve never heard that word spoken better’” (Game 119).

CHAPTER TWO

Though ‘A scar’ ‘is made’ by a passive construction, Leonard Cohen’s voice still rings true in the poem “AS THE MIST LEAVES NO SCAR.” Even though I cannot read either verb (‘made’ or ‘leaves’) as performative, I will use this poem, from Cohen’s second book of poetry, The Spice Box of Earth (1961), the very poem he read aloud for a National Film Board documentary Ladies and Gentlemen . . . Mr. Leonard Cohen (1964) in my consideration of his voice. As I have read ‘A scar’ to be a trope for Cohen embodying his words in the flesh, ‘the mist’ is a metaphor for the voice that reverberates in such performance. Then again, ‘the mist’ does not leave ‘A scar,’ because it is ephemeral, like the intimate sweat between lovers or the suspension of disbelief between actorⁱ and spectator in the theatre. I am this spectator when watching Ladies and Gentlemen, listening to Cohen’s voice over – “As the mist leaves no scar / On the dark green hill” – while he lay prone on a chesterfield, his feet up, baring the soles of his shoes toward the camera – “So my body leaves no scar / On you nor ever will” (Spice 56). As recorded on a reading tour in support of The Spice Box, when Cohen uses the first person possessive adjective (‘my’), it seems he takes ‘the mist’ personally, making his simile refer to his ‘body.’ Whether Cohen means to compare these words to himself or not, when he reads them I imagine they are real. The tone Cohen takes and the gestures he uses betray my belief that he, as they say in the theatre, *plays* the verb – rather than act, he intones his poems with the reverence of a holy man. That said, I take ‘the mist’ to be a

ⁱ Turning again to Twilight, Nietzsche asks a “question of conscience” Cohen may ask himself: “Are you genuine? Or merely an actor? A representative? Or that which is represented?” Nietzsche is concerned with an absolute origin, with an actor having no claim to it. “In the end,” Nietzsche continues, “perhaps you are merely a copy of an actor,” a spectator without any conception of the truth (Nietzsche 476).

metaphor for Cohen's voice: neither performed like dialogue in a script, nor perceived to be anything other than an act of a con man.

III. Mist

Given that Cohen has written of it in the present tense, 'the mist' seems to happen every time Cohen or I read or speak of it. When Cohen speaks these words I mistake 'my body' for his, and 'the mist' for the soul he bares during the "encounter" of the second stanza before "you and I [. . .] turn, then fall to sleep" (Spice 56). Such use of 'the mist' suggests Cohen is being euphemistic. His play on words suggests that 'the mist' is a pun on 'missed.' If a pun, Cohen's language sounds performative, yet he divorces the spoken from the written meaning of words. In Biblical terms, the King James English of the sixth and seventh verses of the second chapter of the Book of Genesis contains the myth of the 'mist' that "went up [. . .] from the earth" at the creation of 'man,' when "the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Whereas Cohen writes his account of 'the mist' as though he is 'I' who procreates, whoever wrote Genesis (once thought to be Moses) believed that God inspired his words and that by His Word everything happened – in the past tense. Though no one was there to hear Him, in the twenty-sixth verse of the chapter before, He created "man in" His "image" with the words "Let us."

Meanwhile, I cannot get Cohen's voice out of my head, having engaged in the drama of "I" who speaks to "you" in The Spice Box. For instance, Cohen's "ABSURD PRAYER" begins, "I disdain God's suffering" before he neutralizes the "hole" of the final stanza with a pun ('holy') by the end of the first stanza: "I'll keep to my tomb /

Though the Messiah come" (Spice 73). As slang for orgasm, 'come' is about as ephemeral as every word spoken in the theatre, coming and going in a single moment. But, since I cannot forget the words Cohen says and the way he says them, his poems defy death. (Krantz may as well be speaking to me when he scolds Breavman: "Dirty tongue!" [Game 10]). Cohen serves a Mosaic role, writing vaporous, porous, and even pornographic poems caught up in 'the mist.' A sheet that covers a landscaped plain at dawn and dusk, 'the mist' is also post-coital cold sweat on bed sheets already damp with other bodily fluids. Like 'the mist,' sweat exposes the lover who secretly wonders if he was any good at all. Sweat is a euphemism for performance anxiety and a cover for stage fright.

Still, Cohen may not try to be as decent as it first appears. Having written the third stanza of "AS THE MIST" in the future tense (whereas the first was in the present), Cohen means his euphemisms to wear on me like bed sheets worn after 'encounter' after 'encounter':

When wind and hawk encounter,
 What remains to keep?
 So you and I encounter,
 Then turn, then fall to sleep. (Spice 56)

Here, Cohen's locutor uses the first person singular 'I' to compare 'you' with the 'wind' upon which the 'hawk' flies, leaving no 'remains' in its wake (Spice 56). Neither "you" nor "I" awaken from any of these "many nights":

As many nights endure
 Without a moon or star,
 So we will endure
 When one is gone and far. (Spice 56)

In his youth, Cohen kept a journal of these enduring nights while working at a summer camp for Jewish children. Cohen often connects journals, in which he tells true stories of past hurts, with scars. As in the poem “LINES FROM MY GRANDFATHER’S JOURNAL,” Cohen can tell “every word the pin went through” (Spice 80).

Nadel relates one such “encounter,” both porno- and biographical with “[a]nother woman, the camp nurse [. . .] the muse for one of his earlier poems, ‘As the Mist Leaves No Scar’” (qtd. in Positions 64). Apparently, “[a] camper who ran the darkroom at [the summer camp named] Pripsteins recalls printing a roll of film for Cohen,” which “turned out to be a series of photos of nude females” (Positions 64). Since Cohen based much of Game upon the journal he kept when working at this camp, these photos may have been useful in the creation of the character of Wanda. While “a light mist” descends “on the mountain,” Breavman shares “the ambition of our generation”ⁱ with her (Game 210). Or, the photos may have become Krantz’s girlfriend Anne, about whom Breavman speaks, “carefully omitting any sexual information,” while “[t]he mist along the shore began to weave itself thick out of shaky wisps” (Game 214). Longing for Anne, Breavman feels as though “he was manufacturing the mist. It was steaming out of his pores” (Game 219). “AS THE MIST” is the epigraph of Game and the first thing I read once I open the cover (Spice 56). Thus, the last line of “AS THE MIST” – “When one is gone and far” – lingers in the novel (Spice 56). Either ‘I’ or ‘you’ of “AS THE MIST” assumes sex to mean reproduction.

ⁱ Please note the word Wanda uses in response to Breavman:

“We all want to be Chinese mystics living in thatched huts, but getting laid frequently.”
 “Can’t you say anything that isn’t cruel?” she squeaked as she ran from him.” (Game 210)

Or, someone has taken Breavman to be Cohen's replica, or his persona. In their article "Leonard Cohen Live" Lori Emerson and Joe Hooper read Cohen's musical concerts with famed-turn-of-the-century director Constantin Stanislavski in mind. For Emerson and Hooper Stanislavski's 'method' asserts "the stage persona is an extension of the self that stems from the unconscious" (166). In My Life in Art Stanislavski relates how, "having masked," an actor "could never afford to do" without it (188). Stanislavski knows life, or consciousness, through re-creation in art. Thus, in Emerson and Hooper's abridgement, Stanislavski's "performer draws on emotions (based on personal-experience) analogous to those of her or his stage persona or those to be produced in performance" (166).

To apply such a method to Breavman, Cohen imparts a part of his consciousness to Breavman, his creation.ⁱ Peter Cohen, book reviewer for the (appropriately titled) Spectator disliked Game and took personal offence that the poems therein are word-for-word reproductions from The Spice Box: "If I were Breavman I should feel insulted [. . .]" (538).ⁱⁱ Peter Cohen's reading of these poems, however, bear as close a resemblance to Breavman's feelings as is Peter's relation to Leonard – none. Though he empathizes with Breavman, Peter Cohen does not sound anything like Leonard's character to me. This is a peculiar thing to say given my bent toward reading performance into these poems. For instance, very seldom do theatre conventions invite the spectator to

ⁱ Thus, Cohen falls in line with a central "principle" of Stanislavskian thought: Love art in yourself and not yourself in art" (Character 242).

ⁱⁱ In Britain and the United States, these poems were oddly for all intents and purposes Breavman's for, as Hutcheon points out:

Viking, his American publisher, did not release [Spice Box of Earth] until 1965, that is, until it had discovered Leonard Cohen the novelist. In 1963 The Favourite Game appeared in London and New York; in Canada, however, Cohen was presumably still only a poet, since the Canadian edition came out only four years after Cohen's second novel Beautiful Losers (1968). ("Fiction" 26)

scrutinize an actor's resemblance to the character he or she plays. It is no less an assumption that each character looks and sounds like the actor playing him or her. Peter Cohen ascribes false thoughts and feelings to Breavman and criticizes Leonard Cohen on their behalf. Doing so, Peter Cohen is acting Breavman out.

Strangely, Peter Cohen engages with Breavman, the written word, rather than the mythos of the writer. Renowned twentieth-century English director Peter Brook shares this faith. "[A]cting is a life's work," he writes in The Empty Space, reciting theatre practitioner Jerzy Grotowski, who said:

the actor is step by step extending his knowledge of himself through the painful, everchanging circumstances of rehearsal and the tremendous punctuation points of performance. (66)

If I presume that performance is in the punctuation, or that I can get into Cohen's head by memorizing his words, I am an actor and he is a character I play.¹ Yet I cannot play his persona as convincingly as he can – I do not look anything like him.

I chose to study Cohen because he is open to being vulnerable but never fails to make it look easy; though I see him bathing in Ladies and Gentlemen, I never see him sweat. When asked to comment upon the National Film Board documentary I watch him watching, Cohen says, "still, regardless of the reason, here, in 1964, a man has invited a group of strangers to observe him cleaning his body." Yet, Cohen only appears to come clean. With Linda Hutcheon's definition of "postmodernist" performance in mind, Cohen tends toward the postmodern for his very appearance directs attention to his "art itself" (Postmodern 26). Elsewhere, writing about Cohen's fiction Hutcheon confuses his "power as a performer" with his "personality" since both are "[]entertainingly)

¹ Were he a punctuation mark, Cohen would be an apostrophe: in both senses, an address to an imaginary person and a sign of possession in lieu of absent letters.

documentable” (“Fiction” 23). Ostensibly, Ladies and Gentlemen is a documentary, but Cohen is fully aware he is being documented. It is all too easy to mistake his performance with his personality. “I knew I was being filmed,” Cohen says regarding his on-camera commentary; this epilogue “was a clever device of Don Brittain, the director” (Goldstein 51).

Just when I expect credits to roll I hear Brittain’s voice: “At the completion of the shooting of this film [Ladies and Gentlemen] Cohen was invited to the screening room to take a look at himself.” While adding his commentary, the camera rolls on Cohen in the dark watching himself take a bath. “Now it’s true tha . . . —” Cohen reveals — “we’re making a film about my life and that the film purports to examine my life closely and the bath is part of my life.” Cohen adds, “I find it sinister,” while acting unaware of the camera — adding “and of course I find it flattering. ‘Cause there’s a point where every man shares the Kublai Khan’s delight in selling his bathwater —.” Meanwhile, in the tub Cohen is writing CAVEAT EMPTOR on the bathroom tiles, as if to warn himself and his spectators to be wary. Brittain catches wise, “What did you mean —”; “. . . to the faithful,” a stichomythic Cohen interrupts to finish his thought; Brittain continues, “. . . by that inscription . . . message to the audience?” Cohen counters that “the men watching me know that this is not entirely devoid of the con.”

I have no clear conception of what Cohen means by ‘the con’: either a convict, an argument against something, or a preposition that means ‘with’ on music sheets. More suggestively, Cohen is turning the trick of the confidence man (and all of the above meanings). Still, I can tell how he performs his poems, with a “pleasant voice, a warm baritone . . . sometimes broke[n] into gravel in despair” as Susan Lumsden puts it after

interviewing Cohen. Lumsden concludes that he “recites rather than sings” his poems so “his words are not blurred” (70). Nadel quotes Cohen’s words when speculating about his “Creative Process”: “most of the poems don’t get written down. The poets are specifically anal characters who like to collect it all” (Positions 124). Cohen writes the words he will have to speak to set them down before suspending them in the air. I do not perceive Cohen in performance so much as I see ‘the con.’

Studying Ladies and Gentlemen, am I also understudying the con? To answer, I read Grotowski’s Towards a Poor Theatre, a manifesto of sorts wherein he shears from the theatre of any remaining vestige of Realism to find a space for laboratory experiments. To understand “what is indispensable to theatre,” Grotowski urges that I “eliminate, not add” to the theatre until I am left with “what takes place between spectator and actor. All other things are supplementary – perhaps necessary, but nevertheless supplementary” (32-33). Character and script, for example, are supplemental to ‘A Poor Theatre.’ Under Grotowski’s rigorous restraints, I, a spectator, engage a “relationship of perceptual, direct, ‘live’ communication” with the actor (9, 21). It sounds as though only the organs of oration, his tongue and my ear, matter, but Grotowski contradicts himself, writes Brook. What I am really doing is studying the actor’s “hand, his eye, his ear and his heart” (Brook 66). Then again, a supplement replaces or stands in place of the thing it supplements.

In the words of Susan Macfarlane’s “The Voice of Trust in Leonard Cohen,” when in the theatre I breathe the same air as a live performer, silently filling in the dead spaces with an intangible “verisimilitude,” no matter how “difficult, very difficult”

Cohen makes it “to suspend disbelief” (76). Whether or not Cohen takes me into his confidence, I believe in his ability to be possessed by lines of dialogue.

Must I see Cohen in person to understand his poetry? At poetry readings, Cohen drones on as though he is speaking his words for their own sake. It is almost as though Cohen is in love with the sound of his own voice, rather than the ears of his spectators. He intones his poems and savors each syllable. Intoning, Cohen, like Grotowski’s “actor must act in a state of trance” (37). Cohen does not read, he chants. In the words of Antonin Artaud, whom Grotowski heralded “a great theatre-poet, which means a poet of the possibilities of theatre and not dramatic literature,” the actor’s “language [is a] form of *Incantation*” (125). Though not a treatise by any stretch of my imagination, Artaud’s “Theatre and its Double” asserts there is a rupture between things and their arbitrarily assigned words. Artaud offers *cruelty* in return – a

whole active, poetic way of visualizing stage expression leads us to turn away from present-day theatre’s human, psychological meaning and to rediscover a religious, mystical meaning our theatre has forgotten. (32-33)

Notice that Artaud’s name for an actor is artist, one who not only suspends his disbelief like an audience, but also oozes visceral passion. Artaud eliminates the paper-thin space between the actor and the spectator, by replacing what he perceived to be artificial signs of life with poetry, “solid, material words” that “can be shown and materially expressed on stage” (26). Artaud would rather show than tell poetry.

In “Leonard Cohen in Performance,” Scobie mentions the “phenomenon [. . .] of the poetry reading” that “flourished” in Canada “in the late sixties and early seventies, under the auspices of such organizations as the Canada Council and the League of Canadian poets” (59). On the cusp of this trend, seen by Scobie “as bringing the artist

into direct personal contact with his or her audience,” Cohen shared the stage with Earle Birney, Phyllis Gotlieb, and close friend Irving Layton in 1964 (“Performance” 59). As early as February 1958, Layton reported that his chum was “currently reading poetry while a jazz overture fills in with strophes of its own” (qtd. in Nadel Positions 62). Importing “a new Beat style from New York and San Francisco to Montreal,” Cohen played gigs at downtown clubs (Nadel Positions 62). By March of that year, Layton was playing along, and by April “Cohen gave his first professional poetry recital [. . .] starting at midnight” (Nadel Positions 62). Not desirous of becoming a “nightclub celebrity,” Nadel recounts that Cohen claimed to be “bringing poetry to where it belongs” (Positions 63). Though his poetry belongs to his spectators, Cohen does not remain faithful to any single listener.

I accuse Cohen of infidelity for he cannot possibly be *intimate* with everyone, so I have created my very own con-Cohen. By 1964, after Brittain edited the poetry by Layton and others out of Ladies and Gentlemen, Cohen was quoted:

‘The reading tour made me an enemy of the whole country and ruined my Canadian life. This was not due solely to my obnoxious personality. It also resulted in the minimum attention for the book it proposed to promote.’ (Nadel Positions 130)

By now, Cohen’s persona completely engulfed his poetry since he has already made his personality meaningless. When I read Brook on Shakespeare, I understand meaninglessness differently:

Poetry had become a meaningless term and its association with word-music, with sweet sounds, is a hangover of a Tennysonian tradition that somehow wrapped itself around Shakespeare, so that we are conditioned by the idea that a verse play is halfway between prose and the opera, neither spoken nor sung, yet with a higher charge than prose – higher in context, higher somehow in moral value. (54)

Following Emerson and Hooper's reasoning that "concerts are staged events that fall under the rubric of performance (and thus belong to the same lineage as theatre)," were Brook to direct Cohen the resulting performance would be an con game similarly caught "between prose and the opera" (162).

Suspicious of any ethereal context, to Brook the theatre relies on *performance* text to make an impression on an audience. Grotowski would argue that there are many texts in performance, "the text per se is not theatre, it becomes theatre only through the actors' use of it" (21). For instance, whether temporal, theatrical, or moral, the simile of the last stanza of "AS THE MIST," is written in the future conditional, 'when' compares 'we' to the union of 'my body' with 'you' through an 'encounter' that 'Never will' be missed (Spice 56). All this is 'the mist' I wring from thin air, for the word only appears two more times in The Spice Box and never again in Ladies and Gentlemen.

I have alluded to Cohen's puns above as the preoccupation of a performer. (How, for instance, does one act a homonym? With a straight face?). If the theatre exposes euphemisms, Jacques Derrida's passive sentence construction in "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representations," an essay I will return to, would seem to let me do so:

Theatricality must traverse and restore 'existence' and 'flesh' in each of their aspects. Thus, whatever can be said of the body can be said of the theatre. (232)

Accordingly, theatre embodies the bawdy and sweat evaporates into 'the mist.'

Grotowski would likely recommend that Cohen "bare" his soul, "laying" down his secrets to commit the "total act":

It is the act of [. . .] tearing off the mask of everyday life, of exteriorizing oneself. Not in order to 'show oneself off,' for that would be exhibitionism. It is a serious and solemn act of revelation. The actor must be absolutely sincere. (210)

Grotowski's answer is not as simple as he makes it, because I do not know if I would even recognize Cohen were he to 'tear off the mask of' his persona. To Grotowski, a persona is not 'absolutely sincere'; still, any *absolute* act is a romantic's *raison d'être*. Cohen must be wholly committed to his wordplay because I, an audience member, will not laugh until I understand the pun.

Early in his career Cohen plays with language like those who read the scrawling about doing 'it' on the underside of playground jungle gyms. Cohen's "IT SWINGS, JOCKO" may either be about foreplay, the art of delay, or about making fun of coitus interruptus, not of making love:

It swings, Jocko
but we do not want too much flesh in it.
Make it like fifteenth-century prayers,
love with no climax,
constant love,
and passion without flesh. (Spice 23)

Saying "Come back, Jocko," Cohen speaks again of *coming* (Spice 24). '[L]ike fifteenth-century prayers,' *it* is the death of 'too much flesh'; *death* is, of course, Donne-esque archaism, again, for orgasm (Spice 23).ⁱ The poem's form even simulates such an unsatisfactory encounter, seemingly done after the above six-line spurt.

Turning the page, I find that Cohen is not done:

(Draw those out, Jocko,
like the long snake from Moses' arm;

ⁱ Speaking of 'flesh,' Cohen is up to his old tricks. From "It Swings, Jocko" to the last poem in The Spice Box, "Lines from My Grandfather's Journal" "flesh" marked by "my own whip" (81). Between these dust covers, "[y]ou climb into bed and recover the flesh," in "You Have The Lovers" where, "[l]oving you, flesh to flesh," in "Travel" "[t]here is no flesh so perfect / As on my lady's bone," in "I Long to Hold Some Lady" thought "[a]ll her flesh is like a mouth," again in "You Have" (Spice 30, 52, 59, 30). Having "read what men have written / Of flesh forbid but fair," Cohen gives himself ample reason to self-flagellate thinking "Of flesh on flesh in the dark" in "Song" (Spice 62). By the end, Cohen wants to "[e]rase from my flesh," the scars he has inflicted in the cyclical conflict of sacrilege and sanctification in "Now of Sleeping" (Spice 81).

how he must have screamed
 to see a snake come out of him;
 no wonder he never felt holy:
 We want that scream tonight.) (Spice 24)

Within parentheses 'I,' still speaks to Jocko about Moses who felt unholy when his rod turned into a serpent. By the poem's end, like a secular Messiah, 'I' writes about the pricks of "gold thorns being drawn from my temples" (Spice 24). Like Breavman's scarred temple, 'Jocko' leaves a scar that threatens to overtake 'I,' a man talking to his penis. Foreplay may be too generous a term for the form of the "Jocko" poem. Perhaps Cohen's 'I' masturbates to mock Moses' creator by wasting the seed God has given him.

When I "speak of 'holiness'," I am quoting Grotowski's "'secular holiness'" or "profanation and outrageous sacrilege" (34). Grotowski's actor, a liar by trade, "reveals himself by casting off his everyday mask, he makes it possible for the spectator to undertake a similar process of self-penetration" (34). Grotowski does not account for the spectator who wants to take such a 'mask' at face value. His actor makes up "his own psycho-analytic language of sounds and gestures in the same way that a great poet creates his own language of words" (35). What "language" means is hazy, as poet-playwright Bertolt Brecht wrote in "On Gestic Music," "when it is grounded in a gest and conveys particular attitudes adopted by the spectator towards other men" (104). By 'gest,' Brecht means a semiotic sign of the times or signal sent by a signifier, an actor who does not imitate, but point to the signified, a society outside the theatre rather than imitate it. A spectator, I am to watch an actor's (not necessarily a character's) attitude and body language and see reality in a representation of Nietzsche's genuine origin.

I treasure The Spice Box, but only as much as I read Cohen into it. In a "letter of acceptance" to publisher Jack McClelland, Cohen writes to forthcoming "critics that he

was the author only ‘for a brief period. Soon it will be the book that *you* have written, and you will treasure it. The book I hold is absolutely empty, it contains not a trace of anyone, especially me’” (qtd. in Nadel Positions 136).ⁱ That ‘the mist leaves’ nothing behind does not mean that it was not there. If Cohen was ever in these poems, I have missed him. He is in his poems as fully (or as little) as when he wrote them.

Cohen is not contained by ‘the mist,’ be it wind, river, or sun in “AS THE MIST” anymore than as in “A KITE IS A VICTIM”:

like a desperate trained falcon
in the high sweet air,
and you can always haul it down
to tame it in your drawer. (Spice 1)

After reading “AS THE MIST,” nothing of Cohen ‘remains to keep’ in the drawer of “A KITE” (Spice 56). Nor does anything remain of the ‘kite’ Cohen personified after “you” dipped it into “the river and the wind” (Spice 1). “A kite is a contract of glory / that must be made with the sun” that very way ‘the mist’ is made, with another passive construction (Spice 1). Any ‘you’ will do, as the chorus to “TWELVE O’CLOCK CHANT” goes:

Hold me hard light, soft light hold me,
Moonlight in your mountains fold me,
Sunlight in your tall waves scald me,
Ironlight in your wires shield me,
Deathlight in your darkness wield me. (Spice 20)

It would seem Cohen makes ‘the mist’ with the tone of a mixed metaphor.

Cohen’s contemporary Al Purdy wrote that the “‘tone’” of The Spice Box “seems a mixture of the Old Testament and, probably, other Jewish religious writings” (11).

ⁱ Which is to say, as Scobie has in his essay “Performance” and a multitude of others have (to death), that Cohen questions “the ideal of the Author – independent, original, inspired – constructed by post-Romantic ideology” (55). Or, as he says in “Forgiveness,” “in some Barthesian sense, the author is indeed ‘dead.’ But if he is dead as authority, as source, then he is very much alive as text [. . .] read ‘Leonard Cohen’” (12). Does the post- prefix expose Cohen behind the mask, or after it? I have seen a post, a metal stem passed through the pierced ear, and pinned behind. I heard performative words spoken loud. I am no more in touch with Cohen’s personality than is he. (For all I know, he has no personality, only persona).

Cohen often admits to knowing no more Hebrew than that of the liturgy, but embraces what he calls “the living tradition,” which is “not specifically Jewish” but “has a Jewish element” (qtd. in Nadel Positions 19; Benazon 51, 46). Ladies and Gentlemen serves as what Ondaatje calls “a useful biographical and social introduction” to Cohen and his family as Brittain says Cohen “was not born into this life . . . only his grandfather was a writer” who followed in the family business (5).ⁱ “I had the feeling that he was especially happy that I had become a writer,” Cohen says while framed by the Ladies and Gentlemen camera like a bust on a piano:

We were both writing at the time. He was becoming senile. But in his senility there were great lapses of poetry. For instance, he’d encounter me in the hallway, not recognize me, and say, ‘ah, you’re the writer.’ As though he’d found the guarantee of the extension of his own soul –

I will never know the tone of God’s voice when, covered in mist, He breathed into dust. Nor will I know the tone Cohen takes when reading “A POEM TO DETAIN ME,” for he does not read it on Ladies and Gentlemen. Before considering the implication of the title of The Spice Box, I read the “box of flesh” that Cohen writes is “bound to my temples” (39). “Well-to-do,” as Brittain puts it, the Cohens likely had a box filled with family heirlooms that they called a spice box. A spice box contains the family tree upon which the surnames of grandfathers and first-born sons are written. Like Breavman, who bore thorns on his temples, Cohen’s ‘I’ bears him like a scar: “bound to my temples a box of flesh / filled with holy letters & captured poems – / & I am probably wrong” (Spice 39). Not only does Cohen preserve his family name from becoming dust with the sheets in the spice box, he reads it with his voice. To turn a phrase, a spice box may be filled

ⁱ ‘Cohen’ means ‘priest,’ about which Michael Benazon asked, “I think I notice a great deal of punning on ‘priest’ and ‘Cohen’ in your work, am I correct?” “Probably, yes,” Cohen replied; “I don’t know if it’s punning, but there are references. I took it seriously, probably still do” (44).

with the dust of a corpse in a pine box or the dust of a library stacked with Cohen's corpus or oeuvre.

I am making Cohen's words to be metaphysical, governed by wispy laws like those of the science of harmonics (concerned with the physical properties of sound). Soul is harmonious with tone for neither make much sense; it is a sensation that recalls Artaud's "poetry for the senses" ("Double" 25). To use a word from "Suzanne Takes You Down," no single sense can perceive the "wavelength" of Artaud's theatre (Stranger 95). But those in touch with the living word are subjected to Ong's "highly auditory sensorium" (Presence 12). While Cohen was writing what would become The Spice Box, his grandfather worked on a commentary upon the sacred Law without reference books. His memory slipping, grandfather Cohen dictated his text and serves as an example of what his grandson wrote in Game, "[e]ach man speaks with his father's tongue" (125). In Ong's words, the "Hebrew feeling for the word [. . .] means primarily the spoken word" which is "living something like sound, something going on" (Presence 12). Nadel hypothesizes that "the Oral Law is sometimes interpreted as the soul of the Written Law" (Positions 4). Having bequeathed his soul to his grandson, the name of Cohen is the possession of anyone who hears his words. Grandson Cohen, then, stands in for grandfather, assuring he lives on after death (until he is forgotten).ⁱ

Cohen ponders this 'living tradition' when pouring over the poem "LINES FROM MY GRANDFATHER'S JOURNAL." This poem, the last in the collection, wipes up all that spilled in the 'swing' and soulless swagger of "JOCKO." According to grandfather, death is an "insult to our human flesh, / worse than scars" (Spice 83). A family name (i.e.

ⁱ Unlike a friend of Cohen's who died without a "book, son, or lover to mourn," leaving him the duty of "naming . . . this mountain / on which I walk [. . .] under the pale of mist . . . after him" in "There are Some Men" (Spice 8).

Breavman) is a type of scar (resulting from the pain of loss). After repeating the refrain, “I imagine a scar,” Cohen’s “I” takes a monastic vow to “never speak casually” (Spice 86). Nurtured by the “fruit of ignorance” – not the knowledge of good and evil – flesh gives way to passion like that of Christ’s nail scarred hands and feet with thorny temples, leaving nothing more than the “mist and fragrance of dying” (Spice 83). In “LINES,” ‘the mist’ is a form of sensory deprivation given that “Desolation means no comparisons” (Spice 85).

In “LINES,” Cohen finds such “dumfounded”-ness as the “inspiration for the family spice-box” (Spice 86). In the final poem of The Spice Box Cohen’s ‘I’ breathes “where the air is sweet” like the “high sweet air” of “A KITE IS A VICTIM,” the first poem in the collection (86, 1). Reading this, I must be tone deaf for I still cannot say what tone is. Clenched muscles have it, as do family recipes (made ‘to taste’). The tone of “A KITE” develops like a photograph ‘you’ are pondering, from a negative.

At first, the dressing down Cohen gives the dust jacket of Game appeals only to the sense of sight:

The photograph is of a first novelist I never wanted to be: over-shaven, pale, collector of fellowships, self-indulgent, not mad enough for an insane asylum, not tough enough for alcoholism, the face that haunts Hadassah meetings. But I swear to you I am cruel-eyed, hard, brown. In the mountains they call me Leonardos the Skull. (qtd. in Nadel Positions 117)

In hindsight, however, this rejoinder reminds me of Barthes’ notion of the “*punctum*” (a “sting, speck, cut, little hole”) from Camera Lucida (27). Cohen does not see himself with acculturated or trained eyes, but from a personal point of view – through eyes that pierce a “pricked photograph” (Barthes Camera 49). Cohen is the reference for this and every photograph with which he is artificially, artistically, or metonymically linked.

Since his face is on the cover of all his early books, such words recoil from not from, as Barthes says, “*what is no longer*,” his past self, but “*what has been*,” a present self (Camera 85). Knowing that Jack “McClelland agree[d]” to Cohen’s “supplying biographical copy and [. . .] jacket copy for the novel,” this pose was and is a set-up (Nadel Positions 137).

Overcompensating for the embarrassingly “tender reviews” The Spice Box received, Cohen displays a self-deprecating sense of humour by calling himself the “golden boy of Canadian poetry” on the back cover of his next work, Flowers for Hitler. In his own words, Cohen sees himself alternately as a “persona,” “speaker,” or “author” atop the “dung pile of the front-line writer.” He sees an ‘I,’ similar to the one Scobie sees in

what we call lyric poetry[,] based upon a similar equivocation, normally performed around the ‘I.’ Literary critics have used the term persona to account for, or to evade, the problem of sincerity: our sense that the so-called speaker of the poem is both the author and, to whatever degree, a fictional pose of the author. (Cohen 147)

An inner purpose animates Cohen’s pose, just as whatever I see in each picture moves me.

Stanislavski is a master of such rhetorical posing, whose “plan,” Grotowski wrote, “was to realize all the intentions of the dramatists, to create a literary theatre” (56). Writing behind the trembling voice of his naïve persona Kostya, Stanislavski has hidden behind a curtain of pseudonyms, urging his reader to do as he says, not as he does. Kostya’s director Tortsov espouses Stanislavski’s ‘method’ of acting over several books. In An Actor Prepares, Tortsov rails against “any posing on stage,” for it is a stage convention without conviction or “inner purpose” (Stanislavski 99). Tortsov extols what

he calls “*live objective*,” whereby Kostya is to ask himself what he wants in order to take “*real action*” on stage (Stanislavski Prepares 116, 119). To Torstov, “[t]here should never be any posing on stage that has no basis”; then, speaking out of the other side of his mouth, he instructs that “[y]ou must play yourself” (Stanislavski Prepares 167). Though he asks actors to play themselves, he never asks them to touch themselves. Actors are not to strike a *touchy-feely* tone, for “feelings cannot be fixed. They run through your fingers like water,” making it “necessary to find a more substantial means of affecting and establishing your emotion” (Stanislavski Prepares 144). An inner purpose animates Cohen’s pose, just as a picture punctured him.

In “HOW TO READ POETRY” from Death of a Lady’s Man, the book I am saving for last, Cohen would have me believe he does not act out: “Do not act out words. Never act out words” (abbr. Lady’s 197). Cohen may just be a bad actor who does theatre poorly. Cohen’s manifesto goes on – “Speak the words, convey the data, step aside” – to say very little about acting (Lady’s 197). Why am I tempted to read this literally, turning a stone ear to Cohen’s ironic voice? Because his passion is almost palpable on Ladies and Gentlemen. For instance, when Cohen reads from “THE GENIUS,” I believe ‘I’ who promises he will not simply *perform* before but: “For your / I will *be* a Broadway jew / and cry in theatres” (Spice 78; italics mine).

That said, the sound engineer who records Cohen’s reading of “A KITE IS A VICTIM” on phonograph need not say: “Okay Leonard, just remember this is a performance –.” Cohen agrees, “I’ve got to do something with them. I know they’re kind of flat.” Shot a generation before “HOW TO READ POETRY,” Brittain is concerned with how he is making Cohen sound. Brittain reads this voice over: “He feels

he is the voice of his generation” – as though I am seeing Cohen’s ‘voice’ before my eyes – and “he loves to hear what they [the youth] have to say.” Ondaatje writes: “Cohen has already turned inward, and has started to use his mind and the body as guinea pig of his age” (7).

Cohen may speak for me, but my relationship with him is decidedly one-way.

Ladies and Gentlemen looks less like a documentary than a stage show taped from a single camera, for Cohen does not carry himself like a screen actor. If Brittain’s camera represents me in his live audience, Cohen cannot see or hear me. Such sensory deprivation is not unlike that which Cohen must have felt when he heard that a clerk unpacking copies

at the McGill Bookstore [. . .] discovered to his shock that [the copies] were blind, that is, bound with blank leaves, by mistake. Cohen later remarked that had he been there to witness the event, he would not have been able to continue writing poetry. (Nadel Life 51)

Cohen may not be any more present to himself on these misprinted pages than he, on Ladies and Gentlemen and in The Spice Box is to me. Just as he had to have faith his poems survive this event, I am his witness to him in the words I read and the movie I watch.

IV. Word

“Okay Leonard,” the sound engineer says between drags of smoke, “we’re starting on The Spice Box and anywhere you come across a dirty word you have to delete it.” “Yeah, well, there are no dirty words – ever” is Cohen’s retort. Having already addressed euphemism on the page, the dirtiest word on the stage is *doubt*. Cohen writes in “LINES,” however, “Doubting is where every word began” (Spice 84). Doubting, I

cannot believe that Cohen means what he says every time he opens his mouth. He no longer lives in the moment – the perpetual present. Knowing that I am in a theatre, not to watch a staged show but a movie, I cannot let myself doubt that who I am seeing is Cohen, even though he is often shot from the waist up. Reduced to a walking and talking torso, Cohen's speech is a type of positive evidence of his speech.

With Stanislavski's blessing, I have "full freedom to mimetics, to the eyes, to the voice" to let art represent life. If such faith "is not the most naïve form of representation" it is close, given Derrida's opinion of "*mimesis*" as he articulates in one of two essays he has written on Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty" ("Theatre" 234). Mimesis is the disease of anyone onstage foolish enough to think he or she is being faithful to an original text. For Artaud, such "foolish adherence to texts, to written poetry" must end and these texts "ought to be torn up":

Let dead poets make way for the living [. . .] Poetry plain and simple, unformed and unwritten, underlies textual poetry. And just as masks, once used in magic rituals, are no longer fit for anything but to be put in museums – in the same way, the poetic effectiveness of a text is exhausted – theatre's effectiveness and poetry is exhausted least quickly of all, since it permits the action of the movement and spoken things never reproduced twice. ("Double" 59)

After reading Derrida's reading of Artaud, I am convinced I will never know Cohen apart from 'the con.' Imagine Cohen staring blankly at the pages of his misprinted first book, shaking his head in disbelief – whatever impassioned thing he would say may well constitute Artaud's true and living poetry.

Still, no 'Theatre,' not even Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty' can make sense of the free play of an arbitrary system without the presence of Truth. "Whatever their importance," Derrida resumes:

all the pictorial, musical and even gesticular forms introduced into Western theatre can only in the best of cases, illustrate, accompany, serve, or decorate a text, a verbal fabric, a logos which is *said* in the beginning. ("Theatre" 236)

Whatever the mysterious influence God had on Western theatre, 'man' did not hear 'logos,' the orgasmic bellow of Creation, for we were mouth to mouth with Him. Cohen believes he has a notion about Genesis. When a student at a reading not featured on Ladies and Gentlemen "demanded to know what makes a poem," Nadel tells that Cohen replied under his breath, "God. It's the same kind of operation as the creation of the world" (Positions 129).

Whether or not he knows anything about creation, Cohen has spent time pondering God's breath, His voice. While living on the Greek island of Hydra, Cohen's friend Steve Sanfield offered him this Zen *koan*: "Show me the voice of God" (qtd. in Nadel Positions 171). Sanfield sent Cohen out to mull over such a paradox and awaken to the way in which, as Sanfield's friend Roger Green wrote, "Zen works – by mortifying the flesh and leaving the spirit to take care of itself" (52). Nadel would agree, "see[ing Cohen's] early use of poetry as a form of prayer and the role of the poet as a sacred voice" (Positions 47). Ong reads "[t]he spirit" etymologically, from the "Latin, *spiritus*" that, "we remember, meant the breath" or 'a sacred voice,' arguably, "the vehicle for the living word in time" (Presence 38). Cohen breathes in life and lends his voice, his soul, to art. Cohen speaks of his music or poetry, imposing his sense of hearing onto his sense of sight: "They should look as if they were meant to be chatted aloud, which is exactly why I wrote them" (Nadel Positions 74). To write sound down takes an act of religious faith akin to seeing the voice of God. At the same reading where a student asked where Cohen's ideas came from, "Time reported that 'Leonard Cohen in a black leather jacket,

Caesar haircut and expertly mismatched shirt and tie looked around and asked, 'Is this a Church?'" (qtd. in Nadel Positions 129).

Still wearing his church clothes on Ladies and Gentlemen, Cohen introduces his friends to his audience by passing his harmonica around and describing each partygoer who plays it and helps in "keeping the party going." I am arbitrarily playing on the word organ, turning from Cohen's mouth organ to "the organ" of the "classical Western stage" Derrida writes of in "La Parole soufflée" (185). Traditionally, "a theatre of the organ, a theatre of words" is a theatre bound to "interpretation, enregistrement, and translation, a theatre of deviation from the ground work of a preestablished text [. . .] written by God-Author who is the sole wielder of the primal word" ("Parole" 185). Cohen is not a god, for he cannot simply say or think something and expect it to happen. Cohen tries to reaffirm my faith in He, the subject of Derrida's ridicule, an

author-creator who, absent from afar, is armed with a text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the time or the meaning of representation, letting the latter *represent* him as concerns what is called the content of his thoughts, his intentions, his ideas. ("Theatre" 235)

God, Derrida's proselytizing author-creator, is the only one who assures the presence of anything. I am breathing His breath of life and I can only hope to represent myself in His image. Having read Artaud's "Double," Derrida differentiates His primary breath from his own, for theatre cruelly "expulses God from the stage" (235). Doubtless, Derrida's is a question of representation. I question whether Cohen is only *present* in 're' words, like repetition. For Derrida, everything I have said or will ever say is "originally *repeated*" because "I have to hear myself," my voice as it sounds to me (which is nothing like the way I sound to anyone else) to "know I have" spoken ("Parole" 177). With his 'Theatre of Cruelty' Artaud does not pretend to represent life, but live it. In the very

words Derrida uses to describe the “theatre of cruelty,” each performative utterance is a performance that “is life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable. Life is the non-representable origin of representation” (“Theatre” 234).

“Theatre,” to Artaud, “which is nothing, but uses all languages (gestures, words, sound, fire and screams) is to be found precisely at the point where the mind needs a language to bring about its manifestations” (5). Cohen is a perfectly cruel, even passionate artist for he does not act so much as sweat. (I am using ‘sweat’ here to, a) compare the performer who, in performance, perspires like the lover in the act of love, and b) make a tenuous link with ‘the mist’). Whether his passion is misguided or not, I cannot deny the intensity of his poetry readings every time I view or review Ladies and Gentlemen. Not a documentary, the film is a document of his readings, interviews, and footage both candid and coy – and a reading of them. Scobie urges me to remember that “every ‘reading’ is a further act of (re-)writing, on part of both the author and the listener. ‘Immediacy’ is always mediated. The performing self is always a text” (“Performance” 59).

Reading Cohen like a text, in light of Grotowski, I am “left with a ‘holy’ actor in a poor theatre” (41). Brook calls Artaud’s ‘Cruelty’ a “Holy Theatre,” for “only in the theatre” do I make pilgrimage to “a holy place in which a greater reality can be found” (60). What Brook does not say is that ‘The Holy Theatre’ depends (indirectly) on the term exhalation, for “theatre is always a self-destructive act, and it is always written on the wind” (18). As in the beginning, when God breathed out and ‘man’ in, exhalation is a stage of expiration. Brook writes,

if one starts from the premise that a stage is a stage – not a staged poem or a staged lecture or a staged story – then the word that is spoken on this stage

exists, or fails to exist, only in relation to the tensions it creates on that stage within the given stage circumstances. (42)

Saying theatre is tension sounds much like Derrida's vaporous writing on performative utterances – that force makes a word act. "Poetry," to Derrida can become "theatre" when "scenic representation" overtakes "verbal representation" ("Theatre" 238). Present is the only tense for Derrida's poet to write with in order "to make a scene" ("Theatre" 238). Having said "I'm glad the book is out of my hands," Cohen makes a performative statement: "Poetry is so *damn* self-indulgent" (qtd. in Nadel Positions 74).

Cohen may be a 'holy' actor, but he has damned himself. In the diction of performative utterances he prefers, Austin would classify such damnation "*verdictive*," or a word that delivers a verdict or judgement in the telling (Words 43). Though this 'verdictive' is not necessarily a conviction, Cohen would likely think it is. Cohen, as Britain's Ladies and Gentlemen voice over would have it, "insists that poetry is not an occupation, but a verdict." I am unsure who is citing whom, but much later in his life, when "Asked if he writes poetry himself anymore," Cohen more or less repeats this judgement, saying: "I still blacken pages, and some of the lines don't come to the end of the page. But I always thought that poetry was a verdict rather than an intention" (Johnson 63). Remember, Breavman also 'blackened pages,' and though "[h]e never described himself as a poet or his work as poetry," it would seem that Cohen is reciting these words from Game: "The fact that the lines do not come to the edge of the page is no guarantee. Poetry is a verdict, not an occupation" (175). Whether or not I find Breavman 'guilty' (of plagiarism, for instance), he already has a life sentence – to write and rewrite "AS THE MIST" every time I crack The Favorite Game open. Cohen is no less a

convict, of our con, like Breavman, who is wont to repeat, “The verdict is poetry” (Game 175).

There is a resemblance in “Mists and Rains” by Charles Baudelaire:

O ends of autumn, winters, springtimes deep in mud,
 Seasons of drowsiness, – my love and gratitude
 I give you, that have wrapped with mist my heart and brain
 As with a shroud, and shut them in a tomb of rain.¹

In a 1961 interview with CBC Radio’s Jed Adams, Cohen again delivers this verdict, calling himself a writer rather than a poet, for the latter “title is awarded me by a very good and long performance.” Cohen is forever ‘wrapped with mist,’ shrouded, entombed by the juxtaposition of a living death; or rather, he plays himself, along the lines of this script-like interview transcription, when “[Two young fans come to the table]”:

FAN: Are you Leonard Cohen?

LEONARD COHEN: Yes, I am. How are you?

OTHER FAN: Are you really Leonard Cohen?

LC: Yes. I have been for a long, long time. (Siemerling “Interview” 164)

¹ Les Fleurs du mal. 195.

CHAPTER THREE

It is not proper writing style to hang an argument on an adjective even though I intend to study Leonard Cohen's style. Still, my *literal* reading of the "death" metaphor in Cohen's 1977 record Death of a Ladies' Man and ensuing collection of prose-poems Death of a Lady's Man will do just that: trace its use until an end, however illogical. Needless to say, I do not mean "death" any more literally than does Cohen. Even now, Cohen is not dead. But, in 1970, Ondaatje wrote that he foresaw a "need" for either a "physical death or the death of a relationship" for Cohen and his work to "thrive" (8). Ondaatje proved oddly prognostic, for he could not have possibly known that Cohen and his wife Suzanne (no, not *that* "Suzanne") Elrod would part ways in the time between the composition of the album and the book. Hutcheon believes Elrod to be "the 'Lady' celebrated, lost, mourned, scorned in his later Death of a Lady's Man (1978)" ("Poetry" 22). I cannot settle for such a 'based upon a true story' explanation. If I did, I would be obliged to distinguish truth from fallacy in either Death. On the one hand, I am tempted to read a narrative connecting the eponymous "Man" to Cohen: swearing off other women to make wedding vows in Ladies', yet not waiting until death to part in the pages of Lady's Man.

On the other hand, as Ken Norris suggests about Lady's Man, if there is a "story" in "the discontinuous, non-linear book" it would be "the process of a marriage, and its eventual failure," its death (53). The logic of Ondaatje's model is no less circular: death is the beginning and the "central theme" of Cohen's writing "because the artist has made it part of a legend, has given death style" (8, 17). "Death" leads to Death? How inspiring. I would prefer to think of death as a style of story that lives on regardless of its

truth. Similarly, I do not use the word “literal” to validate any particular story but to say, as Nietzsche does, that repeated often enough any lie will sound like the truth. Cohen makes the distinction, saying: “There is no death in this book and therefore it is a lie” (Lady’s 113). This quotation is from “*SHE HAS GIVEN ME THE BULLET*,” a prose piece that opens – “*There is the mist but there is no death*” – with the same “mist” that in the last chapter I called the breath of life (Lady’s 113). Seventy-one pages earlier, Cohen declares, “My work is alive” (42).

Though ‘there is no death’ in Lady’s Man, Ondaatje’s theory that something must die for Cohen’s writing to live may not be wrong. Death is a style because Cohen ‘plays’ dead. This is not as illogical as it seems if you are willing to take a part of the Book of Genesis out of context. Picture Cohen as the second-person pronoun “thou” to whom chapter three verse twenty is addressed: “for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.” Dust is the stuff of death that God breathed into when he “created man in his own image” two chapters before (1:27). In the same piece that ends “*In all the scriptures of the West, has God ever spoken so gently?*,” Cohen opens with another rhetorical question: “*Is there a modern reader that can measure up to this page?*” (Lady’s 45). Ondaatje, like Hutcheon, would answer by reading both Deaths as he would an autobiography or eulogy (i.e. “dust to dust”). This is to say they believe Cohen is dying to be creative.

In other words, whatever I think about Cohen’s death – apart from its being purely fictional – depends partly on how he tells it. It also depends in part on whether or not I believe Cohen is a ladies’ man when he sings or a lady’s man when writing. For instance, “True Love Leaves No Traces,” the first track on Ladies’ Man, may ring a bell.

It is "AS THE MIST" with two additional verses, a woman's harmony and a horn section rewritten into what Scobie calls a "catchy" tune (Cohen 17). Producer Phil "wall-of-sound" Spector mixed Cohen's vocals well behind such accompaniment; Cohen and his words almost become counterpoint to the bubblegum-pop production. "As the mist leaves no scar" remains the first line, but Cohen and his co-writer Spector repeat their chorus to emphasize a comparison of lovers' "embraces" to "stars against the sun" (Stranger 216). A lover leaving is like the dead of "nights [. . .] without a moon, without a star" (Stranger 216).

Though Cohen exchanges the "mist" from "AS THE MIST" for "snow" in "True Love," he retains the theme of suspension from The Spice Box:

As a falling leaf may rest
A moment in the air
So your head upon my breast
So my hand upon your hair (Stranger 216)

Again, Cohen suspends such moments in the air like words spoken or sung. To play on the word suspense, there was much of it at the recording of Ladies¹. Many years later Spector wrote a tribute to Cohen in order to expose "how profound[ly . . .] the Partridge Family influenced every facet of his personal and professional life" (176). A nice sentiment, but Spector fails to reveal whether or not Cohen favours "I Think I Love You," the lyrics of which continue, "so what am I so afraid of"¹ ("con game" 52; Positions 215). Spector is "notorious," as Mandel puts it, "for his wall-of-sound method and his guns," one of which he put to Cohen's jugular and whispered, "I love you, Leonard" ("con game" 52). "I hope you love me," Cohen choked out, lowering Spector's

¹ Lyric from Partridge Family lyrics online: <<http://partridge-family.lyrics-songs.com/>>

muzzle from his own – proving Cohen’s death may have been more truthful than I have led on (Positions 215).

Until I read of this one-sided standoff, I used ‘performance’ as more of a trope than a reality. “Dust,” the matter of life and death, only appears once in either Ladies’ or Lady’s Man, as an adjective in “HOW TO SPEAK POETRY.” In this piece, once called “Advice to Some Actors,” Cohen describes “small dusty wings” to articulate the difference between a butterfly and “the word butterfly” (Cohen 156; Lady’s 196). Whereas Hamlet advises his players to “Speak the speech” but not to “saw the air too much with your hand,”ⁱ in “HOW TO SPEAK” Cohen differs: “Do not act out words” (Lady’s 196). Cohen’s deadpan style delivers this epigram: “Speak the words, convey the data, step aside” (Lady’s 196). If Cohen’s life is art, it is like the butterfly – taken literally or like a literary text. By saying “My life in art continues” between the same covers as “This is the end of my life in art,” Cohen writes himself into and out of Lady’s Man (118, 191, 192).ⁱⁱ

My perception of Cohen – what I have elsewhere called his ‘con’ – is also a metamorphosis of the word made death. As I have said, a) death cannot be a performative utterance, b) Cohen performs, or ‘plays’ dead, and c) Cohen’s ‘death’ metaphor is a *style* of performativity. I will add d), Cohen is a text he kills off, literally. Cohen makes the word “death” performative.

In semi-scientific terms, I regard performativity to be any given action multiplied by any number of onlookers divided by the illusion of style. “HOW TO SPEAK”

ⁱ The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, 3.2.1-4.

ⁱⁱ Whether Cohen knows this or not, Stanislavski wrote a book “MY LIFE IN ART” in the “last act” of his “artistic career” (Life 563). Stanislavski ends his book comparing himself “to a gold-seeker” who searches “in order to find at least several grains of the noble metal” that he might “will” to his “heirs,” a poor facsimile of his “labours,” “quests,” “joys” and “disappointments” (Life 572).

illustrates Cohen's dependency on "you" by dividing "you" by two: half a performative actor and half delivering the same lines night after night. To the latter, Cohen says: "There is no more stage. There are no more footlights. You are among the people," but then contradicts himself, urging you to "Be by yourself" (Lady's 197). First, concerning "The courage" and "the discipline of the play," Cohen urges the actor not to forget that "These pieces were written in silence" while forgetting the silence when "words die" (Lady's 197-198).

I appropriate the word "performative" from Judith Butler, who repeatedly defines it as the "*stylized repetitions of acts*" ("Performative" 270, Trouble 179, Bodies 244). Such syntax stresses the word '*stylized*'; were Butler to say 'repetitions of acts' she would be writing about performance, a verb that means 'to play' somebody rather than performativity, meaning 'to be' somebody. In Butler's Bodies that Matter, "the body" becomes the theatre where the trope of "'performing' and that theatrical sense of performance" is put on (237). Here, Butler discusses the "discourse" of "drag," a discourse where a body "cannot be read without" attention to whom he or she appears to look like (237). To Butler, theatre is a metaphor through which she discusses gender as something someone is at any given moment. I return the word 'performative' to the theatre and use it as a verb in the present tense – likely against Butler's will. I use "performative" the way Butler does in Gender Trouble when alluding to Existentialist philosopher Jean Paul Sartre who "would perhaps have called this act 'a style of being'" (177).

"Style" is a key word that Cohen associates with essence or spirit (i.e. "in the style of the Holy Spirit descending," the "style made popular by Saint Francis," or "the

style of the Church” [Lady's 116, 124, 125]). To Cohen, ‘style’ is often in ironic opposition to form. Nowhere is this disparity more clear than “YOU HAVE NO FORM,” an Elizabethan sonnet, the third quatrain of which goes:

And here, not your essence, not your absence
weds the emptiness which is never me,
though these motions and these formless events
are preparation for humanity. (Lady's 100)

Ever the romantic, Cohen prefers to write of ‘motions’ and ‘formless events’ than provide positive proof of who “you” are (“YOU HAVE NO FORM” Lady's 100). Cohen writes of form through contradictions – “You have no form, you move among, yet do not move” – and double negatives – “you, who are of nothing made, nothing wrought” (“YOU HAVE NO FORM” Lady's 100). Cohen’s ‘I’ learns of form from “you,” a lady. ‘You’ can be any lady, but more often than not ‘you’ are seemingly who ‘you’ are not. Form is the feeling of a body, even ‘I’'s own: “*I touched myself un- / til your form appeared*” (“*TRADITIONAL TRAINING AND SERVICE*” 155). As Butler’s theory of performativity would have it, form is an imposition upon a body, and ‘style’ is how ‘I’ expresses it.

Then again, Cohen’s relation to performance theory or theory of performativity resists simple explanation. Although critic after critic terms what he does “poetry reading-cum-performance,” Cohen maintains that he does not act when reading poems (Sheppard 10). Saying “the pose of having no style is itself a style,” Scobie calls him on this spurious claim (Cohen 45). I agree more or less with this attribution of *anti-style* to Cohen because such a pose is an act. Accordingly, in Lady's Man Cohen lends form to the very poetry he alleges he does not. Cohen creates the words and the words create him.

V. Body

Performative, a body is made of words. Since Butler hesitates to call her theory of performativity a model, I must make my own model from her preoccupation with bodies and embodiment. Considering performativity against “theatrical or phenomenological models” in her essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” Butler points out the presumption of “*belief*” in the “compelling illusion” of an actor whose “identity” exists “prior to the acts,” of embodying a character (271). That said, I can leave the theatre and say, as Butler encourages, “‘this is just an act’ and de-realize the act, making acting into something quite distinct from what is real” (“Performative” 278). Seeing as I cannot jump out of my skin so easily, I must be real. For Butler, however, I would only be as real as I am or as others perceive me to be. Which is why “Philosophers rarely think about acting in the theatrical sense” though “they do have a discourse of ‘acts’ [. . .] with themes of performance and acting” (“Performative” 270).

Butler is seldom this pithy: the word “‘*performative*’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (Trouble 177). Is she suggesting that “All the world’s a stage,”ⁱ as Shakespeare’s Jacques would like it? Likely not, for the end of these mere players is “mere oblivion.” Cohen’s titular poem, a Dear John letter of sorts, “*DEATH OF A LADY’S MAN*” does not end much more happily:

Darling, I’m afraid we have to go to the end of live.
or
 O Darling, I’m afraid that we will have to go to the end of love. (Lady’s 33)

ⁱ As You Like It, 2.7.138; 164-165.

A few pages later, Cohen describes “*the end of love*” as “*a process*” whereby one learns “*how to breathe*” (*Lady’s* 43). The end or death of love can teach the unafraid how, or how not to breathe. Not to say that Cohen gets all breathy in performance, but breathing does come into play when he sings “Death of a Ladies’ Man” on the record. Having read Butler, I see Cohen to be what he performs in his body and the body of his work.

Like any word made a performative utterance, the theatre defies death by an *act of* ‘will’ – to use the word Cohen uses in the second line of “*DEATH*” (*Lady’s* 33). The theatrical model is sound for my argument since theatregoers and practitioners alike believe in the ‘perpetual present.’ The show on any given night is a repetition of the last (and for the next). Following Butler’s phenomenological model, the curtain falling is the only ‘real’ thing about the theatre. The show is over after the curtain call, but an actor can rest assured it will rise again. As above, Cohen’s love-loss “*DEATH*” poems, though, are iterable: the primary difference between the two is a verb (‘will’). Similarly, adding ‘ity’ to the end of the verb ‘performative’ makes it more than an adjective. Strictly speaking, to be ‘performative’ a word must be spoken in the future imperfect tense. Death, being final, cannot be performative. To apply what I call Butler’s model of performativity to “*DEATH*,” it seems by writing to his ‘darling’ Cohen confirms to himself that he is who he says he is. Cohen speaks directly to this ‘darling’ about “*many variations*” of “*DEATH*,” a poem-in-process, “*some signed, some unsigned, obviously meant for someone’s eyes, written in the margin of this and other pages*” (*Lady’s* 33).

I have yet to read a commentator who has written about performativity and does not feign an answer to the question – “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” – that William Butler Yeats posed in “Among School Children” (103). Suffice it to say

'we' cannot know; does the dancer supplement the dance, or the song, or 'we' the audience? Yeats' use of this plural pronoun gives to me a certain responsibility. Unless I play a role, the dancer only dances for an imaginary audience, alone and in silence. In Signature Event Context, Scobie reads Lady's Man as a series of "supplementary assaults," "the most spectacular" of which "occurs in 'How to Speak Poetry,'" a prose piece written from me to "you" (65). Doing so, he comes close to asking a Yeatsian question – how can I know Cohen from his supplement?

Years after writing Leonard Cohen Scobie presented the paper "The Counterfeiter Begs Forgiveness," in apology for not using the jargon words "supplementarity" and "double voicing" to discuss "HOW TO SPEAK" (14). Still, Scobie ends up making Cohen little more than an example of poststructuralist theory. Scobie's use of "supplementarity" is ambiguous. He likely means to say that Cohen's voices add and threaten to replace him. Cohen ceaselessly revises his poetry over many years and has published his process in the pages of Lady's Man. On the pages opposite the main text of prose-poetry, he adds his own commentary. Often the plain difference between these texts is typographical. *COMMENTARY* is italicized for the most part.

Still, either I do not know who is talking or Cohen is talking to himself. I prefer the "theoretical model" in Barbara Freedman's words, "ideally suited" for "postmodernism insofar as it is always setting into play" the "insights" of a theatre patron (73). Since "theatre alone has always staged identity as unstable," my analysis depends on the "self-reflexivity" innate in acting.ⁱ To introduce Cohen to my model of

ⁱ To do Freedman justice, here is the quotation in full:

Why is it that theatre alone has always staged identity as unstable, exposing gender and class as a masquerade? Why is it that theatre – so associated with self-reflexivity as to become a means of describing it – manages to avoid the *en abyme* structure, evade its own closure, and refuse its own

performativity, his identity only *seems* stable. At any moment he *is* as he acts, or at least appears to me. At first, it looks as though Cohen did not write his *COMMENTARY*. The text's dual structure permits "*The Good Guy*" to duel with he who would "*shoot off his fucking Sunday School mouth*" (Lady's 199). No matter how conflicted, Cohen is also a text for my ever-changing perception of him. My response to Cohen-as-text is supplemental.

Hutcheon reads the *COMMENTARY* as an example of the "subtle play between the attacking first-person plural voice of the commentaries and the attacked first-person singular of the poems" ("Poetry" 47). But Hutcheon mistakes antagonistic rapport for playful invective; their relationship is more like that of a kidnapped man being held against his will. For instance, as the commentator of "*HOW TO SPEAK*" says, "*I did not want to appear again except to say good bye*" (Lady's 199). Even though the commentator acts out of spite, I wonder from whom he wishes to take leave. For instance, if I cast myself in the second-person role of "you" in "*YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE*," I witness another of his disappearances: "Nothing that's been made or born / separates you from / the fiction of my absence" (Lady's 210). The word "fiction" is deceptive – it means either an untruth or a story lacking its lead. But it is a presence, even though Cohen may not be the author of his fiction, "that's been made" by a passive construction. Cohen may not be the genesis of the text or even revealed within it, but he is saying goodbye in either case.

frame? Could it be that insofar as theatre cannot rest in the *abyme*, but stages the displacing gaze, the bursting of the container by its contents, theatre offers a way of disclosing the current critical stand still whereby we must use language to describe a place outside it? (73)

This brings me back to the beginning, to the 'Death' of the poems' title. The man who says 'I' is not supposed to be present, yet here 'I' is. Similarly, I have lost myself when reading Cohen and his texts, unable as I am to divorce my last experience of Lady's Man from my first. Nor can I determine whom the 'Man,' or 'Lady' of the title is, never mind who the 'Ladies' are. If I take the end of his marriage to Elrod as my context, I can fill in the blanks with biography. But such context is deceptive since it can be either the reason for or the product of an action. Cohen's biography is supplemental, either an end or a new beginning, like an image of God breathing into dust.

I am unsure that there is death in this book and despite its title Cohen's "DEATH TO THIS BOOK" does not clarify things: "fuck this book and fuck this marriage" (Lady's 20). (A word Cohen uses until it has nearly lost all meaning, fuck is from an unusual nomenclature. Does he mean copulation or conclusion? Both?). Perhaps death operates like a book that I reread – the text never changes, but the context I bring to it does. A stagy sense of Cohen's poetic style is all I have left to critique. I suspect Cohen is taking the words out of the mouths of his critics by writing with their voices. "What," asks Ken Norris "is this critic doing in the midst of this text?" (52). He answers: "Pulling his own weight in the hall of mirrors, in the concert of voices that is Death of a Lady's Man" (52). His own worst critic, Cohen not only pulls his own weight, he throws it around.

In "Leonard Cohen's brilliant con game," Eli Mandel calls Lady's Man "a witty, moving, despairing book, lyrical, dramatic, musical, endlessly entertaining, often boring, even terribly self-indulgent" (52). Strangely, Mandel does not add 'critical' to the list. Elsewhere, he cites Lady's Man as an example of a "development in Canadian writing [.

] that art has the capacity to contain its own contradiction" ("Slave" 135). It is significant that Mandel chooses a word that begins with "con" rather than say 'negation.' Death is not negation. For, in "*DEATH TO THIS BOOK*" Cohen asks himself: "Does he really wish to negate his life and his work?" (*Lady's* 21). Not likely, he would rather rewrite it. In accordance with what I hope are 'his' wishes, I rewrite Mandel's criticism: Cohen's life in art has the capacity to contain his own 'death.' Cohen incorporates much of an aborted manuscript called "My Life in Art" in the *COMMENTARY* to *Lady's*:

There hasn't been a book like this for a long time. [. . .] It will become clear that I am the stylist of my era and the only honest man in town. I did not quarrel with my voices. . . (21)

While listening to *Ladies' Man*, I repeatedly wonder 'what is Cohen singing?' He does not print his lyrics in the liner notes, but he has previously published two of the songs, in *The Spice Box* ("AS THE MIST"), and *Parasites of Heaven* (1966; "Fingerprints"), and will publish the title track in *Lady's Man*. Cohen is constantly quoting himself. In addition to "The Final Revision of My Life in Art," *Lady's COMMENTARY* incorporates previous drafts, alternate takes, and rewrites of another unpublished work called "The Woman Being Born," an alternate title for the book. In a letter addressed to Scobie, that Cohen reports that he delayed the publication of *Lady's* to rewrite it and add the *COMMENTARY*. These bibliographic facts so impressed Scobie, when discussing "the Cohen of the 1970s" he has repeated this: "the withdrawing of a manuscript from publication had become 'a more significant gesture than publishing it'" (*Cohen* 155-156 and qtd. in "Forgiveness" 8). Scobie prefers to think of *Lady's* as a commentary upon *Ladies' Man*, yet he fails to consider Cohen's tendency towards self-quotation and contradiction.

Cohen even lends voice to his inner dialogue. For instance, biographer Ira Nadel tells of the time Cohen met a “tall and striking woman” and he “heard an interior voice saying, ‘You will only sing again if you give up lechery,’” while “Another voice countered, ‘But I want her . . . Please let me have her’” (*Positions* 197). Writing, Cohen expresses this ‘inner voice’ in *Lady’s*: “Throw yourself upon your stiffness and take up your pen” (“ANOTHER ROOM” 22). Cohen answers, “I took up my pen, my sacred pen, my pen of intricate love, my pen of longing” to write of poetry about lusty behaviour (“THE NIGHT I JOINED” *Lady’s* 194).

I will return to lechery, for now is the time for “visions and revisions” like those T.S. Eliot knew something about.”¹ Nadel reads “revision itself” as “a metaphor for the process of interpretations” of “postmodern self-awareness” that “tangled” Cohen in “the work, the adjunction and extension of the album *Death of a Ladies’ Man*” (*Life* 177). In so many words, Nadel’s marriage of ‘adjunction and extension’ weds Cohen’s singing voice with the voices he has written. “I haven’t been really interested in writing verse that is designed to sit on the page,” Cohen said in an interview from 1994:

I do not really know why that is. Writing music and making records and doing concerts involves me in the world in a way I like, which writing, especially writing verse, doesn’t. It is a matter of loneliness. The writing of the material is solitary, it involves a great deal of solitude. (Siemerling “Exist” 155)

While silence is not the same as solitude, they are not mutually exclusive to Cohen.

In fact, Cohen speaks of silence so often it becomes as cliché as trees falling in the forest. That was not just a deep thought turned bad joke; if Cohen writes in silence, what is the sound of his solitude? The song “Death of a Ladies’” or “LADY’S MAN,”

¹ “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” l. 31-34.

perhaps? It was not until I read along while listening to Cohen's sluggish singing, sparse piano, and strained string refrains on the record that I heard 'solitude':

She beckoned to the sentry
of his high religious mood.
She said, "I'll make a space between my legs,
I'll teach you solitude. ("Lady's Man" Lady's 30)

The droning drums and woman's harmony in the background fades while Cohen drags a metric foot for a beat – which recalls Breavman pleading "let the last syllable endure" – before singing 'solitu-*u*-de' (Game 103).ⁱ 'He' of whom Cohen is singing is such a quick study he remains lonesome even when inside "you." (This is to take the letter 'u' as a pun).

Vis-à-vis Cohen's lechery, 'he' may only know 'solitude' while silently performing cunnilingus – his lips kissing hers.ⁱⁱ (An act no less "holy" than the "palmer's kiss" Romeo knows to give Juliet's "lips."ⁱⁱⁱ Cohen's lewd lips are hardly "two blushing pilgrims," mind you). 'His' skill at oration may have been what won 'her' over, though as Cohen's "I" narrates, "his style was obsolete" ("DEATH OF A LADY'S MAN" Lady's 31). Compensating for his distasteful style:

He offered her an orgy
in a many mirrored room;
he promised her protection

ⁱ To think outside the box, it seems the only thing keeping Cohen company is the sound of his own voice. Not that he can even hear his own thoughts in the pop cacophony Spector recorded while in hiding. "Solitude" may also mean the single "scratch vocal" (a.k.a. working take) Spector let Cohen record before spiriting the tape away.

ⁱⁱ My reading of what "she" teaches "you" does not depend on one euphemistic reference. Please note the frequency with which Cohen refers to legs and what lurks between them. "You can't open your legs in here" Cohen writes in "*IT WOULD BE CRUEL*," the title of "THE REBELLION" refers to "I" who "rebelled against a sentence / between her legs;" "Look how he is formal in his thought of her" Cohen writes in the sonnet of the same name, before speaking of "His stunning polaroids" that "demagnitize and blur – That could be anyone between her knees;" Cohen sings "You are The Naked Angel In My Heart / You are the Woman With Her Legs Apart" on Ladies, later printing the lyrics as "You are The Angel / With Her Legs Apart" – cutting "the Woman" out altogether.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, 1.5.97-98; 92.

for the issue of her womb. (Cohen Lady's 30)

"She" takes up his offer of sterile sex, and

moved her body hard
 against a sharpened metal spoon,
 she stopped the bloody rituals
 of passage to the moon. (Cohen Lady's 31)

Pregnancy also stops menstruation, though I doubt 'he' is interested in procreation. This is a kind of death, I suppose, which allows 'his' spirit to flee his form:

It's like our visit to the moon
 or to that other star:
 I guess you go for nothing
 if you really want to go that far. (Cohen Lady's 31)¹

Strangely, 'solitude' is anthropomorphized by Cohen in "*YOUR MOMENT NOW*," a "piece" that

begins at the centre, somewhat unified and calm, [. . .] then it makes a break for the surface which it achieves at the cost of fragmenting the original psychic thrust, and is last seen evaporating among some half-uttered confessions of self-abuse" (Lady's 15).

Breavman knows such 'self-abuse' well, since Game is a collection of 'half-uttered confessions' (Lady's 15). One confession, that Breavman "hardly sang the words, he spoke them," sounds like the "noise" Cohen makes (Game 120). Doing so, Breavman claims he "rediscovered the poetry" in what looks like a love song:

*I'd rather be in some dark valley
 Where the sun don't ever shine,
 Than to see my true love love another
 When I know that she should be mine.* (Cohen Game 121; plain text mine)

The repetition of 'love,' at turns a noun, then verb, may have influenced "True Love Leaves No Traces," a song from Ladies':

¹ As Scobie says, "Sex, in Cohen's writing, never seems to have a procreative function" (Cohen 37). "Also," Cohen knows about solitary sex, or onanism and "what happens when you fuck yourself" – "nothing" ("*THE GOOD FLIGHT*" Lady's 114). Cohen's heroes tend to be engrossed by their own palms.

True love leaves no traces
 If you and I are one
 It's lost in our embraces
 Like stars against the sun. (Cohen Stranger 216)

An appropriate simile, since sunshine encircling another star must make it appear to be 'one' despite the light years between. Not quite celestial, the bodies of these lovers cannot endure the way

many nights endure
 Without a moon, without a star
 So we will endure
 When one is gone and far. (Cohen Stranger 21)

With one having left, 'you' and 'I' may feel as though they are "left with nothing," like the lovers of "LADY'S MAN" (Cohen Stranger 21; Lady's 32).ⁱ

Maybe the question should not be how solitude sounds, but why it is difficult to pick Cohen's single, solitary voice from the backup singers on Ladies' Man. Cohen likes it that way, as he says:

I never wanted to be in the world of letters. I wanted to be in the marketplace on a different level. I suppose I always wanted to be a pop singer.
 When I say pop singer I mean somehow that the things I put down would have music and lots of people would sing them. (Harris 55)

I am sure in his mind Cohen can sing melody with The Righteous Brothers, another of Spector's creations. Besides, as Susan Lumsden reminds me, Cohen "was a singer before he was a published poet" (72). He played guitar for a country and western band called The Buckskin Boys and maintains "'there was always an invisible guitar'" playing in his head, accompanying his writing (Lumsden 72). Accompanying his first published poetry,

ⁱ How far is too far?

According to Nadel, Cohen "was fond of citing" Ezra Pound's axiom: "'When poetry strays *too far* from music, it atrophies. When music strays *too far* from the dance, it atrophies'" (qtd. in Positions 175; italics mine). Cohen atrophies when he strays too far from solitude by getting too close to something, or someone.

an author's note reported "Leonard N. Cohen" "composes poetry to the guitar" (qtd. in Nadel Positions 37). Time magazine from 13 April 1969 quotes Cohen as saying, "[a]ll of my writing has guitars behind it, even the novels" (qtd. in Nadel Positions 175).

Then again, Cohen has always wanted others to sing along with him and his air guitar. Nadel relates that Cohen was as "insecure about his guitar playing" as he was unsure "that his voice was commercial enough" (Positions 152). Which is why he has toured for the "Europeans" who "appreciated 'people who can't sing but whose voices are connected to the heart'" (qtd. in Nadel Positions 239). "*I want to be in a song,*" Cohen writes in "*I'M GLAD I'M DRUNK*" before elaborating, "*I want to be singing my heart away*" (Lady's 179). I suspect Cohen cannot reproduce the invisible guitar in his head or the singing in his heart so he makes a distinction. "In the secret chambers of my heart," he says: "I consider myself a singer, on good days, I consider myself a stylist" (qtd. in Nadel Positions 239).

To tell the singer apart from the stylist I read the Lady's Man selectively and listen carefully to the "radio" image. I cannot say Cohen is the stylist when he writes and speaks a particular style and the singer when he is singing; he would never make it that easy on me. Because, in the words Charlene Diehl-Jones uses to describe a song from later in Cohen's career, "he sings as he speaks, speaks as he sings" and whatever he orates "remains at once a song and a poem: a song that won't be beautifully sung and poem that refuses to be beautifully spoken" (80). Cohen never just orates, his every word is

language with body attached. And this is part of the wonderful gravity that song can insist on: Barthes writes that "as soon as it is musical, speech . . . is no longer linguistic but corporeal" (The Responsibility of Forms 306). (Diehl-Jones 80-81)

Such 'musical' speech is like dialogue spoken by a 'body' in a stage play. In "A Personal Look," Al Purdy sees Cohen "adopt, for the poem's purposes, a particular way of thinking or feeling," similar to an actor in the tradition of Stanislavski:

And if you believe this suspension of personal identity and belief is possible and desirable, then the poet is in a large degree an actor who plays many parts; but an actor so skillful you can't always tell the difference between acting and fakery.
(9)

If Cohen is not Purdy's actor, he 'plays' that actor convincingly, and therein lies the difference between Cohen the stylist and the singer. Cohen the stylist lies and acts as if his lies are the truth. For example, the stylist emerges in "*THE RADIO*" to taunt his audience: "This is not my voice. This is my voice. This isn't" (133).

The singer has already convinced himself that he knows the truth. In "HOW TO SPEAK," Cohen writes with the voice of the singer when he says, "Do not put yourself on" (*Lady's* 197). But the singer, the ladies' man, has already put one over on himself. He thinks himself quite the pop star so he is always 'on,' or 'in character.' If, as Walter Ong would have it, "the live human voice [. . .] creates a sense of presence," the singer waits with an ear to the radio to hear himself (*Presence* 298). To the singer, this "Voice is 'real.' And voice is on the air more than ever before" (Ong *Presence* 298). With *Ladies' Man*, Cohen is very obviously trying to be radio-friendly to prove himself 'real.' Yet, the record never hit the airwaves and died, in Cohen's words, a commercial and critical "catastrophe" (qtd. in Scobie *Cohen* 168).

A failure, the death of *Ladies' Man* is parallel to the 'death' of which it speaks. "There's nothing I like about it'," Cohen told *The New York Times* before disowning all but "four seconds of the record" that count as "music" (qtd. in Scobie *Cohen* 168). Scobie blames the poor reception of *Ladies' Man* on the album's "suicidal Phil Spector

production" ("Forgiveness" 16). Not to deny Scobie the drama of his diction, I would prefer he use 'homicidal.' With Spector's help, Cohen puts the singer to 'death' in Ladies' Man, and replaces him with the stylist who makes art of his failure. This is the death of the radio, 'dead' air, or silence. By the time he sits to write Lady's, Cohen has found there is life after radio. It is imperative his reader does as well: "Turn off the radio. Sit and wait for me. Wait for my voice" ("ORION" 46). Again, Cohen confuses presence with absence, life and death.

Scobie writes well about the dangers of mistaking "recording" for presence by aligning it with Derrida's "conditions of writing: absence, iterability, death" because "recording [. . .] always takes place in the absence of the singer" ("Forgiveness" 20). When playing his record I enjoy "his present absence" (Scobie "Forgiveness" 20). This eerily sounds like "I am your dead voice" from "HURRY TO DINNER" (Lady's 181). Though the stylist and the singer are effects of Cohen's voice, his silence does not necessarily mean their death. If the singer is sincere, I suppose the stylist is ironic. Even if it is too banal for the radio, I can either play Ladies' Man for myself or attend a concert to hear him, as Scobie offers, "Live. On Stage. In Person".ⁱ

Cohen's life contrasts with his live performance in "PETITIONS":

My official life
 has become extensive
 First of all
 I only sing official songs
 at official concerts. (Lady's 141)

ⁱ Scobie "invoke[s] the whole Derridean argument from Of Grammatology," or, better the argument that "voice" is not "the philosophical sign of [. . .] presence of the performer" ("Forgiveness" 19). Scobie goes on to say that no radio or album performance can fully represent Cohen. Voice is insufficient, the performer must also be present.

Am I to make of this that Cohen lives a life away from the 'official life' he lives at 'official concerts'? Perhaps his private life is dead and performance is life. To Scobie, live performance is effectively the same process as a recording of it. If Scobie is right and every "live' performance is also a performance of death," is this death unofficial ("Performance" 62)? Cohen does not sing to any single listener but to all who will hear and identify with his song, with or without him. In "*PETITIONS*" Cohen adds to his "official" record, including getting "gonoreahia" from a "female official" "In Stockholm" that took a "monstrous / needle in Berlin" to "cured" of (Lady's 141). To say the least, such testimony is disconcerting; at the worst, Cohen's body is akin to his larger-than-life concerts, always dying.

Of course, Cohen's legendary live performances are seldom short lived. Cohen's concerts are "part of the legend" according to J.A. Wainwright. If so, his legend, or illusion is divided: he either walks onstage, tunes his guitar, and sulks off in shame because he forgot the words to "Suzanne" or in sorrow because, just this once, "his guitar didn't feel right"; or he makes a pompous entrance atop a wild stallion, saluting Germans with a "Seig Heil," seducing French people to the stage, or luring a crowd through the streets of Copenhagen back to his hotel (773). But I am taking these diverse stories on faith, that is to say I do not know if any of the above actually happened. Seeing Cohen light up the stage at New York's Town Hall, moonlight for troops in Tel Aviv, or lit by flashlights held by solders in Cuba – the very place he says on Ladies and Gentlemen he visited to "kill or be killed" – is not too difficult to imagine. Since his concerts are a thing of absence, I believe either whatever I hear or make up whatever I fancy.

The superlative *flamboyant* must be the most frequent in descriptions of Cohen's concerts. Whether he chooses the pose of an extra- or introvert, he repeatedly strikes critics as showy. "Overt posturing can have only one serious purpose," says Sam Ajzenstat in his review of Lady's Man "– to expose its own dishonesty" (11). Unlike God's honest truth, dishonesty wears many guises. So does Cohen, in the words Ajzenstat uses to review Lady's Man, "dishonesty is not merely its own but everyone else's as well" (11). No matter how 'flamboyant' Cohen is, however, his performance is an effect of his voice. For example, in concert Cohen cannot survive technical difficulties:

“. . . Ladies and Gentlemen, we regret that the Leonard Cohen concert will not be starting on time as there are still a few problems with the *sound* . . . we hope it will not be too long before the start of the concert and we do apologize for this delay. . . ." The P.A. clicked off. (Devlin 40; italics mine)

Cohen's voices supplement the lyrics he sings and the words he speaks. When I listen to Ladies' Man, I never know whether it is song or speech coming from Cohen's mouth. All I know is that, as Jim Devlin relates above, Cohen has a few problems with the sound of his live performance. When asked, "[d]o you consider yourself a folk singer," Cohen replied:

When I'm not actually singing, I don't believe that I'm a singer at all. It's like I have amnesia, when I put that guitar down and I start speaking prose, it seems miraculous to me that I could actually get a song out. (Harris 54)

Suffice it to say, Cohen makes *sound*. Sound causes confusion like that of the supplement since his sound can replace him. He makes and means sound in at least two ways: speaking about his first album Songs of, Cohen says "I have no idea of the sound I'm looking for"; on the back cover of Flowers for Hitler he confesses "My sounds are too new" (Harris 46; qtd. on Nadel Positions 119). Apparently, Cohen opens his mouth

and decides what to do with the sound he made once he has made it. If amnesiac, Cohen only knows he is making sound while making it, when he is translating the sound in the head. Conceivably, he cannot remember having made the sound.

Al Purdy responds with an obvious question: “are Cohen’s sounds new?” (“Personal” 14). Purdy defines his terms (“[b]y sounds I take it he means his idioms, tone, and contemporary speech-rhythms)” before asking: has Cohen “effected a revolution in prosody, written in something so startling that time is required before his innovations are recognized?” (“Personal” 14). “No,” Purdy answers (“Personal” 14). Mandel questions Cohen’s “marvelously ironic voice” (“con game” 52-53). Mandel’s criticism applies as well to Ladies’ as it does to Lady’s Man, concluding “[t]oo often,” Cohen “is content to substitute tonal modulation,” by which I believe he means to experiment with form and arrangement, rather than writing words I “yearn” for after I have heard them; “That, I suppose, for a poet like Leonard Cohen, is a kind of death” (“con game” 52-53). I wonder which ‘kind of death’ Cohen would take me up on: Mandel’s preferred method of playing a sound over and over to death, or death by drowning in a sound.

I am unsure why I chose to use “sound” as a noun; but, having done so, I return to Butler for a quote about the grammar of performativity. “Performativity is thus not a singular ‘act,’” or sound, character, or signature style, “for it is always a reiteration of a noun or a set of nouns” (Butler Bodies 12). To show that Leonard Cohen has a performative identity I must repeat his name, a proper noun, ad infinitum. To that I will be faithful, but Butler carries on: “to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated

(and, conversely, its theatricality gains a certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of its historicity)" (Bodies 12-13).

I will never know Cohen as anything more than a noun. That will not do, for 'Man' is also a noun that Cohen reiterates in punning titles. Ladies' Man and Lady's Man sound the same to Cohen, an amnesiac who cannot recall whether he is a manservant or ever was a lady-killer. Cohen never mentions the ladies' man by name on the album, and only rarely does the lady's man appear in the book. Cohen does drop the name in "HOW TO SPEAK POETRY" – "You are not a killer lady" – but stops short of indicating which 'Man' he is (Lady's 198). Entering into my model of performativity, he was and is both. If so, Butler's historicity helps to explain his memory loss. Time is no longer linear, allowing the Cohen of 1964 to stand diagonal to his 1979 self, with a chorus of Cohens between. In "*this little drama*," to use a phrase from Cohen's *COMMENTARY* for "*YOUR DEATH*," each Cohen is a part of and apart from the previous (or next) (Lady's 139). At any given moment, any literal Cohen is killing or being killed.

VI. Death

*Even
though your perception of my death is imperfect, I am
happy that you like my face, and that you appreciate this
little drama at the table.¹*

To a degree, Cohen's "*YOUR DEATH*" is an act of premeditated murder. The literal meaning of the piece differs dramatically from any meaning I apply to Cohen. If his '*death*' depends on my '*imperfect*' '*perception*' of it, it is a con. Cohen chose his

¹ Cohen "*YOUR DEATH*" Lady's 139.

adjective carefully, a word that also glosses as a flower without the organs, stamen or pistil, necessary for reproduction. Not to say that Cohen is a wall-of-sound-flower, but, a Black Romantic, he grows “among the garbage and the flowers” (Stranger 95). This is a lyric from “Suzanne,” Cohen’s signature song and likely the song he has in mind when describing his live show as though “[t]here was a whole *string* of Cohens standing up there in the front line and singing our hearts out. (*Laughter*). Of course getting bored, and talking, and gossiping, and called to attention” (Benazon 51). His selves are as confused as my perception of them and their deaths. Cohen’s death is literally imperfect. (*Imperfect*, meaning the grammatical tense in which performative utterances are spoken or written). When enacted, any performative action is similarly incomplete.

Concerning “[t]he publication of Death of a Lady’s Man,” Hutcheon thinks the work “ought to have provoked some reconsideration of the formal relationship between prose and poetry in Cohen’s earlier fiction” (“Fiction” 30). Hutcheon is specifically referring to The Favorite Game; later she says Lady’s Man “could almost be the book a Lawrence Breavman would write upon the breakup of a major love relationship in his ‘life in art’” (“Fiction” 51). I cannot break up such a relationship, between Cohen and Breavman any more than I can his life and art. Comparing Game to Cohen’s early poetry, Ondaatje finds “Cohen is always more effective when he turns to precise portraits” (6). Breavman is the artist as a young man in such a portrait. He was scarred and representative of the process of scarring. Breavman was a portrait of Cohen at one time.

“‘You shatter versions of the self,’” Cohen explained in an interview; “‘until you get down to a lie, a word, that you defend, that you wrap your voice around without

choking” (Johnson 63). That word is ‘a scar,’ Cohen’s metaphor for a shard of flesh carried around by a later self. ‘A scar’ is a string through time that ties a body to a story. Cohen uses the word once in “YOUR DEATH” from Lady’s, the *COMMENTARY* from which I took for the quotation to preface this section, as “a scar / in the palm of your hand / like an invitation to the next ordeal” (137). The poem begins “You are a dead man / writing me a letter,” like the correspondence of “*the husks of thought*” Cohen writes to “*the union of your mother and father*” in “*BESIDE MY SON*” (Lady’s 137, 111). Each line of this poem begins “*May you,*” a performative invocation to his offspring to “*stand on my dead body*” (Lady’s 111). If Cohen’s biography resembles his works at all, these words will live on. Every word, every scar Cohen writes is a mark of death on the body of his work until his last word, his own death. Patricia Morley says it best: “*Death is the body’s final scar*” (83).

CONCLUSION

It begins as a kind of make-believe
And the make-believing makes it real.

T. S. Eliot, The Confidential Clerkⁱ

I wonder if Leonard Cohen is the only poet, novelist, or songwriter I have quoted in the previous pages who is still living. Which would come as a surprise to those who, when talking to me about Cohen, wonder (aloud) “he’s dead, right?” Not that I am above making things up, as I have for three chapters and an introduction, but as I write this conclusion I am beginning to gain confidence that Cohen is as *real* to me as his death is to the ill-informed. I cannot simply say that this erstwhile ladies’ or lady’s man does not know he is dead, because, to me, the personae he created in his own image all died eighty-three pages ago. In the end, ‘death’ is the metaphor Cohen plays with – as though he is preternaturally aware that his works will one day go unread and unheard in an unkempt library under the detritus of shed skin and dewy humidity. From such stacks I resuscitated a verse play by Eliot, I have taken the lines SIR CLAUDE speaks to COLBY, a clerk who may be his son, for my epigraph. Therein make-believe is not only a noun and a performative verb, it is “an agonizing ecstasy / Which makes life bearable” (Clerk 42). If I believe Cohen is a text, and I do, I make his flesh into my own words. Cohen may live a real life, but I am more interested in his make-believe ‘life in art.’ If anyone who has prematurely called Cohen’s time of death so much as remembers how one of his songs goes, he or she would know something of his life sentences.

To those generations immediately before my own, Cohen never was a poet or novelist. He was a sex symbol who strummed Spanish chords and still-taut heartstrings

ⁱ 40.

with that *voice*. That voice is the genesis of my thesis. Inspired by the songs of his that are always on my mind – like “Hallelujah”: “I’ve heard there was a secret chord” – I began my composing, or meditating on the lyrics I know by heart (Stranger 347). Like Cohen’s David, I have “played to please the Lord,” or in my case the Academy, with many quotations from theorists and critics’ erudition that I might tickle the chords of my own writing voice and spew Cohen’s secrets like hymns from church pews (Stranger 347). I have likely plucked many strings when I had best played a chord. It seemed to me, though, that I had to play with Cohen if I wanted to write about him. What I end up with is a commentary (oddly appropriate given Cohen’s constant self-consciousness) that fails to provide much more than a textual pastiche of strained quotations loosely woven together by strained transitions. Though I have discussed the body of the performer in terms of the body of a text, I have also read myself into Cohen’s oeuvre. Though I have been concerned for my own academic well being, this piece is not a definitive reading of Leonard Cohen but a reading of myself reading Cohen, I guess.

What do I mean in all this? It may be too late, but here goes: performance is idiosyncratic to Cohen for most everything he writes lives on his tongue. (Or his words live in my ears, working its way inward to that logocentric place between them). Having memorized his lyrics as I would any other pop song, only much later, when covering Cohen in my own voice, does it occur to me what the words I am singing might mean. Such an experience is the only thing that comes to mind when I think whether Cohen’s guitar performs a different function for his society than Sappho’s lyre did for hers. Cohen is the inspiration for these words, but I cannot claim a pound of his flesh. These words recall those that Cohen wrote to Layton regarding his second novel: “I’ve been

working on my novel with a scalpel. I won't be able to save it, but it's one of the most interesting corpses I've ever seen" (qtd. in Nadel Positions 109). My greatest assumption is that Cohen is the 'con' man I believe him to be, though if there is anything of worth in this cadaver of a thesis, it is his.

In summary, a 'scar' is the metaphor for Cohen's body in performance, 'mist' a metaphor for his voice, and 'death' a metaphor for his act. These are the best tropes I can find for Cohen's masks, voices, and acts, but it has limitations. Because his speaking voice is ephemeral, I must assume that Cohen reads the words either for his audience or for their own sake. Though I have never looked into his eyes in person, I somehow try to take Cohen at face value. Which is a peculiar thing to say; just because Cohen is alive, it seems to me that I should have a first hand knowledge of which to tell. No one would think to ask such a thing of a scholar who has no more than his or her subject's words to read. But I have chosen performance to be as important a subject as Cohen is, so I make him the one-man of his own show.

By considering Cohen's con, I have only accounted for what his work, not his play, means to me. In his liner notes to a Cohen tribute album, "novelist" Tom Robbins speaks of my dilemma: "the actual persona of their creator may be said to haunt these songs, although the details of his private lifestyle can be only surmised." I will never know the private Cohen, nor do I expect to. In an article he wrote for the Globe and Mail, David Layton says that, like his father Irving, Cohen (the best man at his father's wedding) is adept at "taking his private dramas and shaping them into poems and songs for public consumption." David wrote that his father left the house one day after excusing himself by saying, "Poets don't make good husbands." Regardless of his

marital infidelity, Irving remained faithful to the audience of his poetry. To David, Irving is like Cohen because he “too is a performer although in his case he performs non-stop.” Cohen’s famous kiss-off line follows in Irving’s vein: “Gotta go. Poet. Wandering man” (Pearson 78).

As a lover and a leaver, Cohen is preoccupied with his performance. The aforementioned middle-aged ladies and gentlemen who only know Cohen as a dead singer are not wrong. If he is the ‘singer’ of his song “A Singer Must Die,” I may as well make a “list of the crimes” – clichéd imagery, repetitive similes, and a predilection towards euphemistic wordplay (208). Though he speaks with many voices, his singing voice was the last one ringing in the populace’s ears. Since he has not published a novel since the mid-sixties and no collection of poems (excluding liner notes), since the early eighties, Cohen chose to be a singer until he was no longer popular. Having silenced his characteristic tone deafness, Cohen deceives the generation of which he is to be the voice. Given the perspective Cohen forced upon me, it remains that the only way to study Cohen’s performance is through his songs. With my headphones on and eyelids clenched, I believe I am making Cohen come to me.

For the record, Scobie beat me to any conclusion about and the “intimacy of performance” by quoting Cohen at the Canadian Music Hall of Fame, when he, an inductee thanked

those of you who have welcomed your tunes into your lives, into your kitchens when you’re doing the dishes, into your bedrooms when you are courting and conceiving, into these nights of loss and to bewilderment, into those aimless places of the heart, which only a song seems to be able to enter. (“Performance” 60)

In performance, Cohen sings a lie I can live with.

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