THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

No Fixed Address: Locating Leonard Cohen in Western Religious/Spiritual Culture

by

Sappho M. Balfour

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN

PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

CALGARY, ALBERTA

JUNE, 1998

National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

0-612-34875-X

Canada

ABSTRACT

This thesis will explore how religious acclamations in late twentieth-century Western culture have evolved from their traditional understandings. Using the works of Leonard Cohen (1934 -), poet and songwriter, I demonstrate how traditional religious labels have been applied to describe both the man and his work. I employ several different aesthetic approaches for understanding the effect of poetry and its possible spiritual value, beginning with Classical notions on aesthetics and concluding with modern theories expressed by Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. I explore the traditional understanding of those religious labels that Cohen has received and then examine some of Cohen's poetry and songs for justification of these religious labels. The context of popular culture is presented as the medium through which such unconventional labelling may take place. The growing movement known as New Age Spirituality may be the most suitable location for those individuals claiming Cohen as an authoritative religious voice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have come to its fruition without the assistance of the following people. Thank you to Dr. Morny Joy for her patience and ability to 'see' the intellectual links in this thesis. Many thanks to Laura Adamo for her attentive and insightful editing of this work. My appreciation to Klaus Ohlhoff for introducing me to many great poets in these last few years. For Dr. Andrew Rippin, my gratitude for serving as my interim advisor and pointing me in the direction of popular culture. And finally, thank you to Dr. Ron Glasberg for his exquisite classes in Western culture.

DEDICATION

For my mother and father who have always encouraged the exploration of the spirit.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This thesis will explore how concepts of traditional religious labels--such as saint, mystic, and prophet--have evolved and continue to evolve in Western culture. Religious qualifiers no longer appear to be reserved strictly for the more pious members of formal religious organizations. Those terms traditionally used to describe religious exemplars of a faith now seem a common part of the vernacular. This thesis will therefore examine several different avenues that help to explain the more secular use of religious qualifiers. The poet Leonard Cohen is one such example of an individual who, though not formally aligned with a religious institution, is regarded by many as an exemplar of religious faith.

In chapter one, I employ an aesthetic strategy to explain how poetry may be claimed as a site for religious meaning. Poetry, or poetic language, shares some important similarities with religious language. Essentially, both forms of language are attempts to describe what has been experienced, or that which does not lend itself well to a linguistic construct; that is, both the (skillful) poet and the religious figure attempt to describe the ineffable. Another similarity between poets and religious figures are the general subject matters explored: truth, reality, and love. I look to Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus, the Classical Greek thinkers, for insight into how contemporary ideas on aesthetics have evolved. In the case of poetry, Plato's adherence to rationalism nearly eclipses his appreciation for this aesthetic form. By contrast, Aristotle and Plotinus engage in the aesthetic ideal and develop some of the basic tenets of contemporary aesthetic theory and an understanding of the spiritual. In the twentieth-century, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer revisited Classical ideas on aesthetics and developed theories that incorporate some of these contemporary ideas. For Heidegger, it was essential that aesthetic explanation be

taken beyond both subjectivity and traditional linguistic constructs. To do this, Heidegger looks to the pre-Socratics for his notion of *Sein* or Being. Like Heidegger, Gadamer agrees that linguistic constructs present some serious limitations and obstructions of experience. Gadamer, however, sees subjectivity as an essential part in understanding the aesthetic equation. Both thinkers cite poetic language as a promising location for aesthetic and/or spiritual experience.

In chapter two, I examine the conventional understandings of several religious labels in the Jewish context--namely *saint*, *mystic* and *prophet*. Each of these terms has its own unique connotations and those religious figures from each category contribute to their religious tradition in specific ways. Briefly, the saint is an exemplar of the religion, the mystic experiences ultimate union with the divine of the religion, and the prophet expresses a call to renew one's faith in the religion. However, while in the Jewish tradition these definitions are essentially accurate, there are some subtle differences. For instance, there are no 'saints' *per se*, but there are *tsaddiqs* who function as personal living embodiments of the Torah or divine law. Another subtle difference in the Jewish tradition is the conflation, in some instances, of mysticism and prophecy. 'Mystical prophets' are both recipients and transmitters of divine messages. In essence, the 'mystical prophet' uses the personal gift of divine knowledge to enlighten others.

An understanding of Cohen as religious figure may be illustrated in the context and content of his poetry. I suggest that throughout his career, Cohen has explored different religious themes that coincide with different phases of his life. That is, as a young man, he seemed interested in sainthood and attempts to emulate certain saintly characteristics. Later, in middle-age, Cohen explores more mystical themes in his verse. In his most recent recordings, however, Cohen employs a prophetic

voice in his poetry. By understanding the traditional understanding of these labels, and then looking for examples of religious qualification in Cohen's poetry, one may appreciate how an individual like Cohen may be given these religious qualifiers.

In the concluding chapter, I discuss how the reception of Leonard Cohen, for the most part, takes place within the context of popular culture. Popular culture itself is a complex term to explicate. At its least desirable, it encourages materialism and breeds alienation of individuals. However, it also has the capacity to reach a wide audience and allows a forum for some more valuable and engaging forms. Cohen's poetry is one such form; its value is reflected in its ability to present aesthetic forms which may then be experienced as spiritual by his audience.

Cohen's own spiritual exploration and growth took place in the milieu of the counterculture movement--a time of upheaval in North American culture. Religious institutions and their leaders were under evaluation and many individuals increasingly began to search for other religious and/or spiritual forms of expression. Experimentation in Eastern forms of religion became popular, and in the early 1970's, Cohen began his own informal study of Zen Buddhism. This experimentation or exploration of 'alternative' religious forms has coalesced into an identifiable form that has attracted attention in this last decade. This movement is known as New Age Spirituality. New Agers express a particular interest in exploring several different religious avenues. While Cohen also explores various religious avenues, he is not necessarily a New Age adherent, but perhaps a religious/spiritual icon constructed by New Agers.

There are implications involved for individuals exploring spirituality, particularly when there is no code of ethics in place encouraging a concern for

others. One question this chapter explores, then, is whether the adherents of New Age Spirituality are solely 'using' elements from different traditions for personal fulfilment, or are concerned with an ethical code that includes other individuals. This thesis, then, will discuss why perhaps Leonard Cohen may be best understood as a 'religious' or 'spiritual' leader, but within a New Age context.

CHAPTER ONE

It is difficult for the student of literary theory and religious studies to determine the differences between religious experience and aesthetic experience. Those who claim a religious experience provide descriptions of the truth being revealed, or a comprehension of truth, or an understanding of the whole. In other words, the religious experience or understanding of the divinity is an experience that better enhances and alters the individual's consciousness. In aesthetic theory, the same kind of descriptions can be found.

Prior to an explanation of "religious experience," and the way that might or might not be conflated with aesthetic philosophical constructs, I explore the shifts from traditional to more contemporary aesthetic philosophy in Western culture. I begin with an overview of the inception of aesthetic philosophy, with a focus on the contributions of Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus. In turn, a discussion of the later Romantic philosophers' attempt to recover Classical thought will serve to demonstrate a demarcation between aesthetic and religious experience. Finally, I will consider the more recent innovations of the hermeneutics school, with a focus on the philosophical considerations of Heidegger and Gadamer, to illustrate further the ways in which aesthetics and religion are both connected to and yet separate from one another. In other words, a discussion of the changes that have occurred in the philosophy or theory of the aesthetic will demonstrate how Western philosophical thought has oscillated between discounting and revering the poetic word.

While the role of the poet in Western society is addressed by several classical thinkers, it is necessary to begin with Plato's considerations. Plato (circa 429-347

BCE) developed his philosophy within the context of a polytheistic culture -- a culture in which, generally speaking, the Greek populace paid regular tribute to a pantheon of gods and goddesses. A popular way by which the Greeks became familiar with the deities was through the interpretation and subsequent presentation of the works of Homer and Hesiod. When Greek audiences gathered to hear presentations of these works, the presentations functioned not only as entertainment, but as necessary performative acts by which the gods and goddesses were pacified and by which their favours might be elicited. As a qualified interpreter and performer of a classical text, the 'poet' was frequently cast in the role of actor -- even if he was not the creator of the text. Indeed, those who wrote poetic verse were, in classical Greece, the equivalent to what we might think of as the contemporary priest: the role of interlocutor for the divine message.

Contrary to the concept of a polytheistic tradition, however, is Plato's concept of the demiurge, or the divine maker. In his notion of the demiurge, Plato does not completely negate the polytheistic tradition; rather, he locates the demiurge at the uppermost position within a metaphysical hierarchy. In his discussion on classical Greek culture, E.R. Dodds suggests that Plato recognized that the predominant and popular sacrificial cults of his time could not be easily replaced with a new and somewhat abstract system.[1] While acknowledging those anthropomorphic forms of the divine to be simplistic and ultimately self-serving, Plato understood the Greeks' steadfast devotion to the gods and goddesses. Yet, it is also worth noting that while the majority of the populace struggled with the more immediate concerns of physical labour, Plato and his colleagues constituted an elite whose works were intellectual.

---

[1]E.R.Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), 222.

Thus, the labourers, unlike the elite, and understandably so, had a vested interest in securing the favours of the gods.

Plato nonetheless credits the demiurge for creating the realm in which the deities or demi-gods reside, as well as for constructing the universe as we know it. According to Plato, all that comes forth from the demiurge's creation is based on the concept of Ideal Forms. Unlike the representation of forms that we encounter in our daily existence, Plato's Ideal Forms are neither tangible nor subject to temporality. According him intrinsic perfection, Plato makes it clear that the divine maker is devoid of malevolence. Introducing a more somber note to religious practices, then, Plato would have the citizens honour the demiurge and his corresponding deities rather than assume a more familiar relationship to them. Thus, because the poets regularly mocked the gods and in doing so pointed to the fallibility of the demiurge, Plato criticized their performances and advocated censorship of such performances:

> And that God is the author of their misery -- the poet is not to be permitted to say; though he may say that the wicked are miserable because they require to be punished, and are benefited by receiving punishment from God; but that God being good is the author of evil to any one is to be strenuously denied, and not to be said or sung or heard in verse or prose by any one whether old or young in any well-ordered commonwealth. Such a fiction is suicidal, ruinous, impious.[2]

Plato argues that the demiurge constitutes the source of truth and that the poet's play with or on words is a possible assault on, or insult to, this truth. Since the content of the works of Homer and Hesiod include several instances of the gods'

---

[2] Plato, "The Republic/Book II," *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger*, Eds. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns, Trans. Benjamin Jowett (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 12.

follies, as well as episodes in which seemingly unjust punishment is inflicted upon innocent mortals, the popularized work of the poets were posed as a potential threat to the ideal of the State order. In order to protect the concept of the demiurge, Plato himself interpreted the poetic text and situated the infallible divine maker in a location impervious to critical speculation. This exclusive positioning of the demiurge required reverence of him only and clearly discouraged any kind of interrogation on the part of a "mere mortal". Furthermore, the average citizen could not, according to Plato, possibly comprehend the nature or design of the transcendent and thus unattainable demiurge.

In *The Republic*, Plato goes as far to pronounce that the fundamental nature of the poet is that of a liar.[3] While the poets in Greek society had previously enjoyed recognition for their achievements, Plato advocated the censorship of their works, and declared the works of poets menacing in their potential to delude an audience. More specifically, the poet, according to Plato, celebrates the "irrational" or "irrational behaviour". Indeed, for Plato, the ordinary individual was not capable of making choices based on his/her knowledge of (prescribed) forms and rules within the body politic. According to Plato, because the average individual lacks this ability, he or she is frequently governed by his/her senses, and anything detected by the senses is merely an imitation of an Ideal Form. In other words, although Plato posited the apprehension of a form and its truth as derived from the senses, only the more discerning or intellectual individual could differentiate between what is real

---

[3]Dodds, *The Greeks*, 83. Plato envisions a scale explicating the character of those in the different professions. For example, the philosopher was understood to possess the highest character because his capabilities included the discernment of the forms, while the poet was merely imitating the imitations of the true forms and hence was prone to whimsical thinking or deception.

and what is an imitation. Indeed, according to Plato, the more discerning individual exercises her or his rational powers in the Ideal Form of a disciplined intellect and is thus able to appreciate what is "real". Those with undeveloped intellects are limited to experiencing imitations of the real through their senses.

In his attempt to distinguish between what is real and what is not real, Plato designates the "real" as that which is not dispatched to the category of imitation. Yet, for Plato, the role of the poet is chiefly that of imitator, who is limited in his role since (s)he merely presents his own interpretation of appearances -- a role which in and of itself is two steps removed from a comprehension of Plato's ultimate reality or Ideal Forms.[4] In other words, the poet, the poetic work and the presentation of the work are imitations of the Ideal Forms, and imitations have far-reaching consequences. The poet, as master of imitation, appeals to the senses of the audience, and the irrational tendencies of the population are glorified and perpetuated. However, implicit in Plato's thought is the notion that, aside from the means of rationality or an understanding of Ideal Forms, the real *might* be comprehended through aesthetic means.

While deviations from the rational and thus imitations of Ideal Forms were understood to be irrational, in Greek society these behavioural deviations were construed as forms of 'possession'. That is, the errant individual was seen to be under the influence of a specific god. Nonetheless, as Plato indicates in his discussion on madness, there were polytheistic ideals in place. Rather than attributing madness to the work of the demiurge, Plato indicates the source of mental illness as that of the

---

[4] Ibid., 82. Dodds notes that it was Democritus and not Plato who postulates the poet as a man set apart from ordinary humanity by an abnormal inner experience, and of poetry as "a revelation apart from reason and above reason".

will of the well-known Greek gods. That is, the human attributes of emotions like rationality and passion were attributed to the influence by one or more of the gods/goddesses. Plato concedes that madness is indeed the work of the gods, and that the different gods are responsible for different forms of madness: prophetic, ritual, poetic, and erotic. While the prophetic and ritual forms of madness are within the realms of the patron gods, Apollo and Dionysus respectively, erotic madness falls under the influence of Aphrodite or Eros. Finally, poetic madness is the work of the Muses. To clarify, the poet's talent with words was not understood as an innate gift of the poet. Poetic inspiration, or, more specifically, the content of a poem, was considered to be a gift from or indicative of a favour from the Muses. While the Epic tradition characterized the poet as a receptacle for the supra-normal knowledge of the Muses, (s)he was not possessed by them.[5] In the Classical texts, *Odyssey, Iliad* and *Agamemnon*, the theme of madness is repeatedly explored. For example, in the case of Apolline mediumship, the goal of the medium was to acquire knowledge of the future or of the hidden present: Apollo knew the "rules of the games" that the gods played with humanity.[6]

For the modern student, Plato's categories of madness may seem restrictive, particularly when 'poetic' madness is in a category of its own and not analyzed in terms of its erotic and prophetic content. Nonetheless, it is useful to consider Plato's analysis of 'erotic madness' as he implies that there are means other than rationality for discovering the real. Plato suggests that within an erotic encounter lies the potential for a transportive experience. For a brief moment, the soul is able to take leave of earthly experience. Plato implies that it is Eros who conjoins the two

---

[5]Ibid., 80.
[6]Ibid., 82.

natures of the individual, these being the divine self and the tethered beast, where the divine is considered rational and the beast irrational. For Plato, this love of beauty includes both the physical and the visual experience; one's soul could transcend the earthly world during a pleasurable sexual encounter or when one beholds a particularly beautiful work of art. In either of these types of encounters, the soul travels briefly into the celestial realm before it once again descends to the mundane world.

The Platonic view of the soul suggests an indestructibility and continuity. According to Plato, our souls have existed in other forms and in other realms prior to their human form.[7] Moreover, the human soul possesses a kind of "memory" of perfection, or those Ideal Forms. Within the erotic encounter, one's soul may experience this previously known realm before it once again makes its descent to the mundane world. For Plato, the erotic is presented as a potential location for transformative experience. The erotically engaged individual may briefly experience the realm of Ideal Forms before returning to his/her ordinary life. Indeed, knowing one's inherent perfection or true being is constantly sabotaged in this earthly existence. However, the individual's self-restraint and pursuit of righteousness will assist that person in reclaiming this previous knowledge of the soul. This understanding of *true* being is the point of origin of every soul, the point where we are intimate with the Ideal Forms prior to being relegated to our material bodies.

Clearly there is a difference between the comprehension or apprehension of the real by way of erotic means and the notion that the real is apprehended by the

---

[7]Plato, "Phaedrus," *Philosophies*, 61.

disciplined intellect that relies on the rational. Later, Plotinus conflates the aesthetic and erotic, at least to some degree; the lover and the lover of aesthetic beauty experience a similar transportive state. Plato suggests that the apprehension of *truth* occurs naturally as part of a continuum, whereby contact with the beloved and the transport it provides is a stepping stone to the apprehension of greater truths:

> And when he perceives this (the beauty of one form is akin to the beauty of another) he will abate his violent love of the one, which he will despise and deem a small thing, and will become a lover of all beautiful forms; in the next stage he will consider that the beauty of the mind is more honourable than the beauty of the outward form. So that if a virtuous soul have but a little comeliness, he will be content to love and tend him, and will search out and bring to the birth thoughts which may improve the young, until he is compelled to contemplate and see the beauty of institutions and laws.[8]

For Plato, philosophers were the most adept at exercising their rational capacities and were therefore the most insightful, and the poets the least.[9] These qualifications ensured that the philosophers were also the most capable for governing the affairs of the state. That is, the state represented a microcosm of the cosmos, wherein the philosopher could attempt to assemble or imitate the perfect "ideals" that emerge from the demiurge. This self-appointed rule meant that the philosopher enjoyed a special status and was excused for his occasional invention of the truth, so long as these "inventions" preserved the interests of the body politic. The poet, on the other hand, assumed to be well versed in the "irrational," utters

---

[8]Plato, "The Love of Beauty," *Philosophies*, 75-76.
[9]Plato, "Phaedrus", *Philosophies,* 59. Plato suggests that those born as philosphers, artists, or musicians are manifestations of those beings who have most recently emerged from the celestial realm of "true forms" and are therefore most qualified to advise individuals in all matters.

untruths that may be pandemic in their ability to excite the masses. For Plato, the rational mind included the exercise of moral judgments, and the "emotional" and thus "irrational" were negated because of their complicated and incomprehensible nature.

Rational thinking and the subsequent judgments that emerge out of this thought is appealing insofar as a theory or philosophical construct might be immediately understood or apprehended on the basis that it "makes sense". Any consideration of the emotional only served to confound matters further by introducing factors that cannot be easily measured or applied. Morality only values emotions when they are succeeded by an action. In the realm of art, however, art is appreciated in and for itself.

Thus, Plato's concern with the poet was his tendency to evoke emotional responses from his audience, and to encourage in his listeners an infantile, if not impressionable, state of mind. As the philosopher increasingly became the steward of the state, whose primary concern was the advancement of rationality, a corresponding decline in the acceptance of the emotional took place. The decline in the poet's popularity is just one such side-effect of this phenomenon, and, we might also keep in mind that while Plato was suspicious about and worked to negate the poet's ability to lead the masses astray, he also allowed that a poet's gift could be rehabilitated for singing the praises of the state. Nonetheless, it is in the state where the philosopher sets the tone or truth to the words. There must be true imitation and not false imitation. The assessment of what is fit or unfit imitation - including poetics - depends upon the moral ends of the masses.[10]

---

[10] Hofstadter and Kuhns, "Introduction to Plato," *Philosophies,* 4.

Platonic ideals continued to gather strength and validity in the works of certain philosophers who followed. Aristotle, however, took exception to Plato's ideas about poetry, particularly to its ostensible lack of worth and to what Plato posited as its potentially destructive function. Indeed, Aristotle developed several treatises in which he praises the enigmatic virtues of artistic works, while maintaining that the artistic work might simultaneously function as a vehicle by which "reason" might be pursued or embraced.[11] His works include a detailed analysis of imitation or *mimesis* and the appropriate *techne* or technique, and demonstrate how the more adept artist, through his or her careful observance of method and the perfection of form, approaches the ideal or that essence of the whole:

> The products of art, however, require the pre-existence of an efficient cause homogeneous with themselves, such as the statuary's art, which must necessarily precede the statue; for this cannot possibly be produced spontaneously. Art indeed consists in the conception of the result to be produced before its realization in the material.[12]

Thus, poetry contains its own truth and validity as it is foremost an imitation of nature or a form of knowledge. Poetry, according to Aristotle, is not an frivolous enterprise, but rather the function of the poet who was to instruct and inform the masses. An audience could benefit from the poet's message because, as Aristotle implies, imitation was one method for furthering one's rational capabilities:

---

[11] Hofstadter and Kuhns, "Introduction to Aristotle," *Philosophies*, 78. To produce art is to display one's ability to formulate the "coming-into-being of ends determined by reason."

[12] William Ogle, R.P. Hardie, and R.K. Gaye Eds., "Aristotle's Coming-To-Be and Artistic Production," *Philosophies*, 86.

> To be learning something is the greatest of pleasures not only to the philosopher but also to the rest of mankind, however small their capacity for it; the reason of the delight in seeing the picture is that it is at the same time learning. [13]

Here, the method of learning focuses on emphasizing the experience of the artist since the artist's work may be informative and therefore morally valuable. In the case of poetry, one may become receptive to those instances of joy or tragedy as demonstrated by the poet, and might therefore understand the range and moral repercussions of these emotions more fully.

Aristotle's work also differed from Plato's in that he developed some rather complex literary concepts which would become theoretical building blocks for later theorists. One important ontological concept that Aristotle formulates is the concept of human nature as an active part of a *process of becoming*. Again, this concept differs from the Platonic understanding in which the material world is only an imitation of the real or perfect ideal. Aristotle's position creates a space for the artist who succeeds in capturing the essence of being and at shaping it into a form which signifies unified meaning.[14]

Aristotle further extols the inherent power found in Greek art, and its capacity for *psychagogia*, or the conveyance of the soul.[15] This is not unlike Plato's treatment of erotic madness whereby the soul returns to its point of origin; however,

---

[13] Aristotle, "The Imitative Art of Poetry," from *Poetics*, Trans. Ingram Bywater and W. Rhys Roberts, *Philosophies*, 100.

[14] W.D.Ross, "Introduction to Aristotle," *Criticism: The Major Texts*, Ed. W.J. Bate (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), 14. Ross cautions that Aristotelian "form" is not a synonym for "technique", but applies to "the direction which something would take if it were permitted to carry itself out to its final culmination."

[15] Ibid., 13. This transportive quality of art later becomes a given characteristic of the aesthetic experience.

the difference lies in Aristotle's transformation of madness into inspiration and in his expansion of the inspirational source. For Aristotle, great art speaks to the soul of the individual, and we are indebted to the artisan for acting as the intermediary of the "real". Indeed, great poetry is a particularly valuable form of artistic expression as it conveys the universal experience of both human and physical nature.[16] In contrast to Plato's ideal of the rational and its accompanying judicious perspective, Aristotle commends the emotional, extolling its modes of inspiration and expression as valuable entities in a flourishing society. Thus, the most marked difference between these two Greek philosophers is the value that they assign to the emotional: Plato is at best disapproving, and Aristotle concedes that the emotional has instructional value.

Plotinus (204-270) is another Greek philosopher whose ideas contribute significantly to contemporary conceptions of aesthetics. His texts were adapted and revised by both early Christian philosophers and later by German Romantic Idealism. Plotinus took exception to the Stoic claim regarding beauty: namely that symmetry is a precondition for beauty, an idea developed in some detail by Aristotle. The Stoics believed that the symmetrical, natural object conforms to a proper sense of measure and proportion, whereby the object reflects both the thought and calculation of its creator.[17] Taking exception to this explanation that the presence of symmetry alone determines whether or not something is beautiful, Plotinus writes:

---

[16] Aristotle, "Poetics Ch. IX," *Criticism*, 25.

[17] Joseph K. Kockelmans, *Heidegger on Art and Art Works* (Hingham, MA.: Martinus Nijoff Publishers/ Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1985), 13. The Stoics assigned aesthetic beauty on a low place on the scale of values, implying that the pursuit of beauty alone can never be the ultimate goal.

> Only a compound can be beautiful, never anything devoid of parts; and only a whole; the several parts will have beauty, not in themselves, but only as working together to give a comely total. Yet beauty in aggregate demands beauty in details; it cannot be constructed out of ugliness; its law must run throughout.[18]

Rather than dissect and analyze an object's individual constituents in order to establish its qualifications for the status of "beauty", Plotinus suggests that we consider the whole and its overall proposition. In contrast to Plato's "steps of beauty" and the culmination in the realization that all is beautiful, Plotinus argues that to dismantle these steps is to undermine beauty. According to Plotinus, the potential locations of beauty not only constitute the conventional art forms like painting and literature, but also the more theoretical schools of law and philosophy. Moreover, Plotinus propounds that Beauty and Reality are essentially linked and that to consider one independently of the other is to detract from the essence of both. As he notes, "Being is desirable because it is identical with beauty; and beauty is loved because it is being."[19]

Nonetheless, according to Plotinus, there are degrees of perfection specific to a material form or idea, degrees of which that are dependent upon the assembly of its aggregate parts. The more desirable an object or concept appears, the greater proportions of beauty enhance its being. However, the overall nature of Beauty is that of formlessness. In other words, it is not something that can be fashioned by average individuals but something that can only recognized by the Soul. Plotinus's theory here suggests a combination of both Plato's and Aristotle's ideas. It is

---

[18]Plotinus, "Ennead I/ Sixth Tractate/ Beauty," *Philosophies*, 142.
[19]Plotinus, "On the Intellectual Beauty from The Enneads," Trans. Stephen Mackenna revised by B.S. Page, *Critical Theory Since Plato,* Ed. Hazard Adams (1956; reprint, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc, 1992), 104.

Platonic to the degree that Beauty itself has no form but is instead an imitation of the real, and Aristotelian to the extent that the imitation, or that which is a manifestation of beauty, is valuable in and of itself. Further, Plotinus expands Plato's notion of the sensitive lover to include the experience of those who are assumed to be more sensitive to Beauty and, to some degree, conflates the two:

> This is the spirit that Beauty must ever induce, wonderment and a delicious trouble, longing and love and a trembling that is all delight. For the unseen all this may be felt as for the seen; and this the Souls feel for it, every Soul in some degree, but those the more deeply that are the more apt to this higher love -- just as all take delight in the beauty of the body but all are not stung as sharply, and those only that feel the keener wound are known as Lovers.[20]

Once again, however, Plotinus returns to the idea that there are a select few who are capable of such a transcendent experience. While he does not state that the rational being is more predisposed to the experience of the beautiful, or real, implicit in his thought is the idea that only a unique individual can recognize Beauty's features. Potential sites in which Beauty or the beautiful is experienced are expanded to include one's experience with art and nature. By increasing the number of possible locations for the experience of Beauty, then, Plotinus is simultaneously creating a space for an emotional realm, in which great works of art and poetry might initiate an emotional response. A good example of this is found in Plotinus's description of the Lover. Clearly, the Lover experiences an altered emotional and physical state; his or her natural reaction is one of wonderment and awe. Plotinus does not discount this emotional experience, and thus relegates the Lover to an

---

[20] Plotinus, "Ennead I/ Sixth Tractate/ Beauty," *Philosophies*, 145.

exalted status. Plotinus thus extends Plato's ideas on aesthetics by conflating the aesthetic with the erotic. The figure of the Lover is now presented as someone who appreciates the aesthetic form however this form has now been expanded to include the human body.

Another important contribution from Plotinus is the idea of the symbolic. The symbolic points to something beyond itself, or in effect, encourages the realization of connections between two separate and distinct ideas or objects. For example, in his appreciation of beauty and being, he recognizes that although they are two very distinct concepts, when they are operating simultaneously, they present an instance of (symbolic) cosmic harmony. It is symbolic because the nature of cosmic harmony cannot be concretely grasped, but rather can only be identified in symbolic terms. Plotinus states that:

> [F]or each manifestation of knowledge and wisdom is a distinct image, an object in itself, an immediate unity, not an aggregate of discursive reasoning and detailed willing. Later from this wisdom in unity there appears, in another form of being, an image, already less compact, which announces the original in terms of discourse and seeks the causes by which things are such that the wonder rises how a generated world can be so excellent.[21]

Contrary to Plato's ideas on original form, Plotinus theorized that a distinct image is not a creation of reason. Language is what gives "form" or is, to some extent, the vehicle for imitation of that original. Clearly, then, while Plotinus pays heed to the rational, he does not attempt to confine human understanding of wisdom within a rational framework alone. He grants that the rational is effective in its

---

[21]Plotinus, "Ennead I/ Eighth Tractate/ On the Intellectual Beauty," *Philosophies*, 157.

thoroughness and ability to attend to details; however, it is inadequate in its ability to address the enigmatic. Moreover, while the realm of discourse remains the central site for assessment of knowledge and wisdom, Plotinus asserts that the ideal form of discourse is that of the poetic, in which metaphors in particular act as containers for symbols thus expressed. Poetic language is valuable not only for its ability to relay truth, then, but also for its potential to incite emotional pleasure.

This overview of some of the more renowned Greek thinkers only briefly addresses their extensive work on aesthetic theory. My discussion thus far has centred on the aesthetic and its treatment by these influential philosophers. Plato's assessment of aesthetics is limited and it would seem that he purposely pays little attention to those subject matters concerning the emotional and irrational as they could potentially detract from his arguments on the rational. For Plato, the rational is paramount and takes on monumental status as a panacea for society's ills while simultaneously dispatching the emotional to an oppositional position -- a position that threatens the work of the rational. In his discussion on madness in which the soul takes an erotic flight, moreover, Plato briefly acknowledges that a different place exists for the attainment of truth. Yet he does not explore the idea at length. Plotinus expands on Plato's idea of the soul's transport, suggesting that great art and poetry are equally effective vehicles for ecstasy and/or exstasis, and that this kind of knowledge is just as important as that which can be grasped by the rational mind. Finally, to Aristotle we owe the recognition of the poetry as valuable in and of itself, and the recognition of poets as unique artists with a special gift or connection to the Absolute.

An overview of the works of Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus is important insofar as it allows us to grasp the ways in which contemporary thinkers interpret and revise

these classical concepts. An understanding of their ideas is particularly relevant for a discussion on the works of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, two figures whose work is fundamental for understanding contemporary aesthetic theory. Both scholars have been influenced by the "Romantic Movement" in literature: the goal of which was to revise certain aspects of the classical theories of aesthetics.

The "Romantic Movement" emerged in the eighteenth century was a reaction to Kantian philosophy. To replace the notion that it is the power of reason which characterizes the human being, Romantic philosophers began to theorize that the inherent or natural distinguishing feature that characterizes the human being is her or his *emotional responses*.[22] Art and artistic expression were recognized by the Romantics as "self-expression"; the self is fed information through the senses and, by extension, through the combination of these sensations. One of the most prevailing ideas that emerged at this time was the question of concreteness. Through their observations of the natural world, philosophers began to question the assumptions of the *universal* and responded with ideas pertaining more to the particular and the specific. Corresponding to or complementing this new thought was the change in the content and structure of the literature of the time: individuality and assertiveness of the authenticity of one's sensual experience became popular themes. While the Classical school focused on the total structure and framework of the poem (including the language therein), the Romantics shifted the focus towards the concrete elements that bring a poem into being. The Romantics did not eschew form and structure altogether. Rather, character portrayal, the role of the persona, imagery, language, and form all became deserving of analysis.

---

[22]Bate, "The Development of Modern Criticism: Romanticism and After," *Criticism,* 270.

The Romantic movement encouraged the formation of what is now referred to as "aesthetic theory," and is readily linked to some of the basic tenets of theology. Indeed, although there were many over-lapping principles in both aesthetics and theology (i.e. searches for beauty, truth, the real), aesthetics was given its own category as a means to maintain the coherency and integrity of religious systems. Roger Lundin suggests that the thinking that emerged out of England and Germany in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries contributed greatly to contemporary conceptions of the aesthetic or aesthetics; indeed, as Lundin writes, a new theory of aesthetics was formed in the desire to:

> ...overcome the isolation and subsequent exaltation of the aesthetic category, the sharp distinction between poetic discourse and all other forms of discourse, the granting of primacy to formal criteria in the evaluation of the work of art, the denial of art's didactic functions and the concomitant celebration of its ability to give pleasure, and the emphasis upon the self-contained, non-referential, sacred nature of the work itself.[23]

In the early Christian era and later, particularly with the Renaissance painters, art was considered primarily to hold value if it had the capacity to instruct the viewer or to convey religious messages. This agenda was not unlike Plato's; he, too, proposed that poetry be written and read solely for didactic purposes. During the Renaissance, the Church was governed by this principle and thus determined the form and content of an artisan's work -- not on the basis of whether the work itself was acknowledged as sacred, but on the basis of how it conveyed the sacred. The decline of the Church's influence and the growing trend towards individualism

---

[23] Roger Lundin, "Hermeneutics and the Romantic Tradition," *Christian Scholar's Review* 13/1 (1984), 4.

allowed for a new appreciation of art for its own sake, and for the recognition of the artisan as designer and conveyor of personal experience. Aesthetic theory thus embodied both the theoretical expression and the appreciation of these ideals.

In the early twentieth-century, the contribution of hermeneutic philosophers -- those who deal with interpretations of Biblical and literary texts -- were applied to the aesthetic theories of the Romantic Movement. Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), a German philosopher, developed a complex new system for talking about aesthetics when aesthetic quality is no longer simply subjectively rooted in the subjective or emotional realm. Heidegger's main contention is that previous aesthetic theories were too limited and did not address the work of art itself. For Heidegger, the prevailing theories did not contain any practical points of reference, and were therefore constructed solely by the subjective response of the participant. In that sense, Heidegger was reacting in a critical manner to the pure subjectivism that he felt had resulted from the Romantic movement. Heidegger objects to the lack of consideration for any existential or historical factors in these "experiences".[24]

Thus, Heidegger does not refer to art in terms of matter and content, nor does he use the criteria of "emotion" in assessing the value of a work. Rather, he attempts to venture beyond subjectivism and to fashion a new way of considering aesthetic experience. What he questions is the tendency to designate art as a dimension of "aesthetic experience" which is abstractly considered, the sense of which is "nothing more than the concretization of a given social taste, and which, moreover, appreciates beauty as a sort of fetish."[25] Indeed, Heidegger assesses and ultimately

---

[24]Gianni Vattimo, "Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy," *Hermeneutics and Nihilism: An Apology for Aesthetic Consciousness*, Ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), 454.
[25]Ibid., 454.

rejects the western philosophical tradition and develops an alternative ontology which includes comprehensive commentaries on art and aesthetics. His analysis of the poet and poetry receives special attention, particularly in his later work. In order to understand why Heidegger rejected conventional aesthetic ideas, however, it is imperative to examine first his ideas on philosophy and history.

In 1927, Heidegger published *Being and Time*, his first major work. Here, Heidegger lays the foundation for his later works, all of which relate, to some extent, to his ideas on the meaning of human existence. A pupil of Husserl, Martin Heidegger was well versed in the western philosophical tradition, particularly in the field of phenomenology--the study of phenomena as distinct from that of being or ontology. In accord with Friedrich Nietzsche's observations of a growing alienation in western culture, and the waning desire for religious meaning on the part of the people, he began to construct or imagine a world in which God is absent. Heidegger finds fault with the blind and unquestioning adherence to both the metaphysical and scientific-technological conventions which took root beginning with Plato and Aristotle. He specifically rejects Plato's notion of unchanging matrices of Ideal Forms as well as Aristotle's concept of the *energeia*, or that "unfolding actuality that realizes itself in substances."[26] Instead, Heidegger looks to the works of those thinkers prior to Plato who were more in alignment with the overall source of all existence, or with what Heidegger refers to as *Being*.[27]

---

[26] George Steiner, *Heidegger* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1978), 32-33.

[27] William Barret, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1962), 211-212. The two terms 'Sein' and 'Dasein' are essential to understanding Heidegger's work. Unfortunately the word 'being' in English is ambiguous as it has at once the qualities of both noun and verb. Heidegger's suggestion for the English translation would be: "*beings*, where we mean the things that are, and *Being*, where we mean the to-be of whatever is"

According to Heidegger, the flaw in philosophical discussion occurred when, among others, Plato and Aristotle began to analyze Being, beginning with the separation of being and matter. Heidegger refers to the pre-Socratics as thinkers who were aware of, or "answerable to," the question of Being, and had the ability to recognize its whole and fulfilling nature as the existence of truth. For Heidegger, the philosophers from Plato onwards actively attempted to disassemble Being through a process of fragmentation, and then attempted to "solidify" these parts into concretized concepts. These concepts gain a kind of status that comes to be understood as truth; yet, in essence, they are mere figments of an over-arching whole. In order to revise this problem of fragmentation, Heidegger proposed a relationship between *Dasein* and *Sein* - which incorporates a distinct approach to language.

Language was problematic for Heidegger as it represents a closed system of making and transmitting summaries in a predictable and limiting form of correspondence.[28] That is, in anticipation of a truth, whenever we engage in dialogues with an other person or with a text, our exchange is taking place within a pre-fabricated context which consists of familiar questions and answers. For Heidegger, the notion that truth is revealed in contemporary discourse is an impossibility; truth consists of little more than sophisticated tautological claims -- particularly philosophical and scientific languages:

> Still in another way in which truth becomes is the thinker's questioning, which, as the thinking of Being, names Being in its question-worthiness. By contrast, science is not an original happening of truth, but always the cultivation of a domain of

---

[28]Steiner, *Heidegger*, 34.

> truth already opened, specifically by apprehending and confirming that which shows itself to be possibly and necessarily correct within that field. When and insofar as a science passes beyond correctness and goes on to a truth, which means that it arrives at the essential disclosure of what is as such, it is philosophy.[29]

If truth cannot be attained within a tautological framework, how might the thinker avoid these old but familiar logistic traps? Heidegger suggests that we begin with an etymological examination of our concepts. In doing so, he claims, we find that the Greek language is rich in suppositions which point to the existence of Being. For example, the word *phenomenon* in Greek means "that which reveals itself". As William Barret further states, "phenomenology for Heidegger means the attempt to let the thing speak for itself. It will reveal to us, he says, only if we do not attempt to coerce it into one of our ready-made conceptual strait jackets."[30] As Heidegger notes, with the Greek word *phainomenon*, there is a connection between the word *phaos*, or light, and the word *apophansis*, or statement or speech. A string of ideas thus emerges: revelation-light-language. As Barret explains:

> The light is the light of revelation, and language itself is in this light. These may look like mere metaphors, but perhaps they are so only for us, whose understanding is darkened; for early man, at the very dawn of the Greek language, this inner link between light and statement (language) was a simple and profound fact, and it is our sophistication and abstractness that makes it seem to us merely metaphorical.[31]

Hence the one ideal of the hermeneutic quest is to begin to formulate new questions which, in turn, will provoke original discourse.

---

[29]Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" *Philosophies,* 686-687.
[30]Barret, *Irrational Man*, 214.
[31]Ibid., 214.

Art, then, is potentially a great source for the disclosure of truth as it demonstrates a sublime role in human experience. Heidegger cites art's essential characteristic as its unique ability to take the familiar and change it into something unfamiliar, thus introducing a whole new world. In addition, art is granted the feature of being a source of the historical existence of human beings insofar as it "has the fundamental historical function of revealing to man the being which is entrusted to him in the fulfilment of his human destiny as an individual and as a people."[32] For the meaning of truth, Heidegger salvages from Greek its original meaning *a-letheia*, which literally means un-hiddenness or revelation.[33] The word's meaning is no longer connected to propositions and the corresponding proofs of fact, hence, the approach to attaining truth will be different as well. Barret writes that Heidegger's assessment of the nature of truth is radical in that truth does not reside primarily in the intellect, but rather that intellectual truth is a derivative of a more basic sense of truth.[34]

Because we are so entrenched in constructed systems of thought, the pathway to Being is both an arduous and complicated one. For Heidegger, the process involves a re-membering; yet, like memory itself, the response to this remembering is fleeting and elusive:

> Thinking that eludes metaphysical forgetting is not, then, a thinking that has access directly to Being, re-presenting it, making and remaking it present. This is, if anything, exactly what constitutes the metaphysical thinking of objectivity; Being is never quite thought of as presence. The thinking that doesn't

---

[32]Ibid., 649.
[33]Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Philosophies*, 682.
[34]Barret, *Irrational Man*, 217.

> forget Being is the thinking that *recalls* Being, that is to say, think it as always already gone, disappeared, absent.[35]

Being is such that it cannot be isolated in a moment of present time, but instead relies on the individual's power to recollect that experience of Being in a particular historical horizon.[36] However, Heidegger suggests that there is much in Being that the individual cannot possibly master much less understand; for Heidegger, it is impossible to ever know or understand completely the nature of Being. Heidegger thus speaks in terms of that which needs to be illuminated and that it is the experience of Being which begins to initiate this illumination. Every disclosure is at the same time a concealment, as nothing can ever be revealed in its entirety. Further, there is always the interference from the concealment of another sort, a succession of concealments insofar as "when a being appears, it presents itself as other than it is."[37]

How does Being manifest itself, then, and how do we recognize its unique manifestation? Heidegger introduces what is known as The Field Theory of Humanity (or the Field Theory of Being), the theory by which one is no longer identified in a corporeal way so much as she or he is a field or region of Being, otherwise known as *Dasein*.[38] *Dasein*, or Being-there, is the substitute descriptive for relaying the meaning of human existence where there is no longer the dichotomy between subject and object, or mind and body. There is no longer differentiation or

---

[35]Vattimo, "Hermeneutics", 452.
[36]Ibid., 453. Heidegger's meaning of Being does not rely on a notion of relativism concerning the epochs, but rather a dispersement of historical horizons, where the meaning of being is re-collected.
[37]Ibid., 680.
[38]Barret, *Irrational Man*, 218. An important exclusion in Heidegger's field theory is that there is no soul or ego substance at the centre from which a given field radiates.

specification of the corporeal body in relation to something other. Heidegger suggests that *Dasein* is known when one is experiencing an aesthetic work, or, the art of poetry:

> The word for existence, *Dasein*, is used here in the traditional sense of presence and as a synonym of Being. To sing, truly to say worldly existence, to stay out of the haleness of the whole pure draft and to say only this, means: to belong to the precinct of beings themselves. This precinct, as the very nature of language, is Being itself. To sing the song means to be present in what is present itself. It means: *Dasein*, existence.[39]

Since the disclosure of Being takes place through language, and since language is passed on from generation to generation, the content and meaning of language inevitably changes. In order to respond to this inevitable change, Heidegger presents a three-fold manner of interpretation[40]: (1) interpretation as an art of understanding the religious language of the Bible; (2) the comprehension of any kind of work whether written, visual, or auditory; and (3), "the bearing of message and tidings", that is with respect to bringing tidings, with respect to preserving a message."[41] This last form of interpretation falls within the domain of the poet, where (s)he reveals or brings to the audience considerations or glimpses of the whole project of Being. Heidegger advocates a high status to poetry, indicating its nature as the most

---

[39] Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1971), 138.

[40]Peter McCormick, "Interpretation in Aesthetics: Theories and Practices," *The Monist* 73 (April 1990): 177. Heidegger denies the effectiveness of conceptual representations that rely on the premise of language as accurate statement and representation. Instead he suggests a meditative response where language is used in a referential manner to allude to what has elapsed.

[41] Ibid., 176. This originary sense of interpretation is the most important for Heidegger, as he links it with non-objectifying thinking.

effective location for the communication of Being. Reminiscent of Plato's idea of the poet as intermediary, Heidegger places the poet between Sein and Dasein.[42] Veronique Foti applies Heidegger's theory to the works of several well-known poets in order to illustrate how the poet may play a crucial role in recognizing subtle historical shifts or epochs. According to Foti, the poet is:

> ...one who listens after "the departed one," the figure of spiritual transition. In following the steps of the departed one, the poet himself becomes a wandering stranger. Since apartness, as the locality of his wandering, "is in the manner of its flaming itself spirit, and as such that which gathers," he is able to let apartness exert its draw through poetic articulation. Others are thus enabled to enter into the draw, and the poet becomes, as already noted, a guide who repudiates the sort of leadership characteristic of the configuration of *Fortriss* [the State].[43]

If "the departed one" is read as Being, then the poet's detection of Being comes only after Being has passed. As a wandering stranger and creator with words, the poet by his very nature is more acquainted with Dasein. Her or his poetry, then, provides the means by which others may vicariously enter into the attraction of Being.

While for Heidegger there is still the Platonic split between thinker and poet, the roles now are as follows: the poet names the holy, whereas the thinker thinks Being. And contrary to the Aristotelian idea, the thinker is no longer expected to "institute" what the poet has "founded", but is required to follow the poet's example of eternal wandering. Heidegger's emphasis on the conventional meaning of the

---

[42]Ibid., 196. In this "between" there is the opportunity for man to discover who he is and how he views his life. This "between" is the domain of the holy.

[43] Veronique M. Foti, *Heidegger and the Poets: Poiesis/Sophia/Techne* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1992), 20.

poet as wanderer emphasizes the conception of the poet's (and the thinker's) guidance as neither goal-oriented nor practically influential in anticipated ways.[44] Every individual should be free to discern Being and to reinvent the language/discourse. From this perspective, he thinks of such direction as an attempt at transition to a new intellectual and spiritual position or place of observation. The poets, then, are those who initially question and subsequently break the established rule, and their work is indicative of a place of rupture. Because the traces they leave may necessarily involve a certain element of silence, they may be difficult to interpret because, as Heidegger describes them, they are, "dislocated into the essential unsaid." He believes, therefore, that these traces must be deciphered and that such deciphering is the task of the thinker's "elucidations."

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-), a student of Heidegger's, combines some of Heidegger's pre-Socratic principles with ideas that are clearly and deeply rooted in the Romantic tradition of the humanities. Gadamer agrees with his teacher that there can be no universal methodology of human development, since the hermeneutic approach does not support such a detached system of knowledge, nor does it allow for the unquestioned acceptance of conclusive statements. For Gadamer, hermeneutics becomes a philosophical approach to the phenomenon of understanding that is not limited to the humanities alone, but is extended to an understanding of how humanity experiences the whole world.[45] Agreeing with Heidegger's analysis of the inherent flaws in our systems of thought, Gadamer adds that a large part of the problem with Western philosophical tradition lies in its

---

[44]Ibid., 23.

[45]Richard E. Palmer, "Gadamer's Critique of Modern Aesthetic and Historical Consciousness," in *Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969),163.

subject-object thinking, where whole systems are dismembered into numerous parts for analysis. To examine this problem, his work includes discussion in the following areas: (1) the study of historical perspectives; (2) an examination of subjectivity; and (3) the analysis of language as a medium for interpretation. Combined, these three subjects contribute to a larger aesthetic theory, for each is not only interrelated but interfused.[46] His ideas are a unique amalgamation of both classical and modern ideas on aesthetics.

The consideration of history in particular, as a location for interpretation, was an expansion on Heidegger's idea that one's experience of anything is dependent upon the historical epoch in which s/he finds her or himself. While Gadamer pays tribute to Heidegger's idea of the historical epoch, he suggests that it is limited insofar as Heidegger posits it as the sole site for both philosophical and artistic analysis. As Gadamer states:

> Historical consciousness is not a particularly scholarly method of approach, nor one that is determined by a particular world-view. It is simply the fact that our senses are spiritually organized in such a way as to determine in advance our perception and experience of art.[47]

For Gadamer, the issue of temporality enters into the discussion of historical consciousness, as it is not just the past that is to be considered, but how that past informs our present understanding. So long as the past is merely interpreted as a

---

[46]Ibid., 177. By 'interfusion', Palmer suggests that in examining Gadamer's work we cannot strictly examine one topic without considering the other factors, or topics at work. History, language, and being are far more connected with one another than we have, so far, truly understood.

[47] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Art as Play, Symbol, and Festival," *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, Ed. Robert Bernasconi, Trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 11.

sequence of facts, then it too becomes an object of consciousness that recounts, rather than suggests. If the hermeneutic strategy is to move beyond prescribed methodologies, then it must be careful to avoid the regular traps of preconceived notions. History cannot be understood objectively, as there is no one standpoint from which history may be fully apprehended. There will never be one analysis of history which will effectively state all there is to know. For Gadamer, history or tradition is something in which we presently stand and through which we exist. [48] History's nature is more fluid than static. Furthermore, in any linguistic expression, it is clear that tradition has played an significant role in informing the contents of the language. As Richard Palmer notes, then, there is nothing to ensure that everything transcribed through the linguistic tradition is meaningful or accurate. He states, "Tradition furnishes the stream of conceptions within which we stand, and we must be prepared to distinguish between fruitful presuppositions and those that imprison and prevent us from thinking and seeing."[49]

Of course, this sifting through productive and restrictive assumptions requires, to some degree, a certain amount of self-consciousness or self-understanding. Heidegger dismisses self-consciousness as an indulgent form of subjective thinking, because it is too abstract, if not impossible, to measure. However, for Gadamer, self-understanding entails a dialectical process whereby one becomes aware of how one's self-understanding has shifted in the interaction with that which is encountered. These interactions may entail involvement in a dialogue, a reading, or in the exposure to a work of art. And alteration does not imply a total displacement of the self-consciousness, as that self-consciousness is firmly embedded in a

---

[48]Palmer, "Gadamer's Critique,"177.
[49]Ibid.,183.

tradition. For Gadamer, then, the experience of Dasein is the hermeneutic totality. "Being" is found setting itself to work where there is an element of "breaking-through"; when the experience of encountering a work of art actually opens up a world and the participant is not merely encountering a pleasant form.[50] Art is defined as the truth of Being and has an active role in keeping the tension between earth and world alive.[51] This tension exists because Being both finds a world and simultaneously reveals it is without a foundation. If the work of art is not treated as an object, but rather as a means of entry through which we may glimpse another world, we can grow to appreciate art not only through and as sense perception, but through and as a form of knowledge (but not of the objective variety).

Gadamer's essential criticism of modern aesthetic theory is that aesthetic consciousness has been viewed as an atemporal moment.[52] He suggests that it is impossible to stand outside of time and ignore those references both of the subject's self-understanding and of the historicity of that subject. Where Heidegger's work on aesthetic consciousness relies upon abstract descriptions that no longer have anything to do with the work itself, Gadamer agrees that this tendency towards "aesthetic differentiation" as an exercise in creating obstacles that interfere with reception of the work itself.[53] When we dismantle art into form and content and base aesthetic pleasure on form alone, then we fail to recognize those instances where religious or secular functions are present and lend the work its significance.

---

[50]Ibid.,167.
[51]Vattimo, "Hermeneutics," 458.
[52]Ibid.,167. Part of the problem that Western philosophy has had in considering the aesthetic experience, is that it is not measured in terms of "content", since it is a response to form.
[53] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Editor's Introduction," *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, xv.

By invoking a rational analysis, we disqualify or dilute those instances where the mysterious is present, thus treating the work of art as a hollow and ultimately meaningless representation. This type of analysis suggests that art cannot possibly fit into contrived systems of measurement.

For Gadamer it is essential that we acknowledge the variety of human experiences and their expression in art, and not oversimplify the experiences or reduce them so that they will fit within the confines of a theory. In Gianni Vattimo's work on Gadamer's aesthetic theory, he suggests that a philosophical analysis cannot quite capture what Gadamer is trying to open up. Instead, Vattimo suggests we engage with aesthetics in a three-fold way. Gadamer presents us not with an aesthetic philosophy but with a challenge to reconcile three ways of experiencing works of art: the work as something created within a particular context; the work as something that transcends time; and the work as something that is recreated everytime that it is experienced afresh.[54]

In *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, Gadamer locates the work of art as its own centre, or origin. Art is not the product of an artisan. Gadamer's ideas of beginning and Heidegger's corresponding notion of the epoch are clearly different. Where Heidegger locates the "horizon" as a point in the succession of artistic change and creation, Gadamer says that we cannot clearly know the ending of one phenomenon and the beginning of another. Instead what happens is a "fusion of horizons", whereby several separate horizons enter into one another, thus altering the impression of the initial components. In the following quote, Gadamer indicates a reader's potential experience with a text:

---

[54]Vattimo, "Hermeneutics," 371.

> Like the different standpoints, the separate horizons enter into one another. Therefore, the understanding of a text tends to interest the reader in what the text says, which is precisely the point at which the reader vanishes. The sense in which the literary text does not vanish, the sense in which its comprehension is a communicative event, and the role that falls to the interpreter in this case poses a new theme: the theme of the 'eminent text'.[55]

The idea that a reader 'vanishes' is a concept Gadamer borrows from Hegel, which posits that the exposure to art has the potential to transform the individual who is truly appreciative of the art form, or in this instance, the literary text. This does not mean that the reader's self-knowledge disappears, but rather is enhanced or edified in the encounter. Gadamer rejects the notion of truth as conformity of a proposition, and counters with a more expansive notion of truth that the individual's own personal modification (upon the exposure to art) has real relevance for her/him.[56] Therefore, art *is* our experience of truth if the experience is authentic. In other words, the true artistic encounter has the capacity to affect its audience. And what of the 'eminent text'? How do we recognize such a distinguished source of truth? For Gadamer:

> A genuine text is exactly what the word literally says: a woven texture that holds together. Such language, if it really is a proper text, holds together in such a way that it "stands" in its own right and no longer refers back to an original, more authentic saying, nor points beyond itself to a more authentic experience of reality.[57]

---

[55] Hans-Georg Gadamer,"Text and Interpretation," *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 396.
[56]Vattimo, "Hermeneutics," 455.
[57] Gadamer, "Aesthetic and Religious Experience," *The Relevance*, 142-143.

Thus, the same text may be read repeatedly and gains more richness with each reading. The gathering of more meaning would correspond to an increase or expansion of the reader's consciousness. And those elements in the eminent text that were not detected in previous readings would be elucidated. Furthermore, the reception and experience of a work of art can only subsist if the recipient is an active participant. The work issues a challenge which requires an answer--an answer that is unique to the individual.[58]

For Gadamer, then, it follows that the work of art may also bring the intellect into play, whereby preconceptions as well as the anticipation of meaning are elements the reader brings to text.[59] The task of interpretation always poses itself when the meaning of the printed work's content is open and invites a dynamic understanding of the 'information'. However, this 'information' should not be viewed as the definitive explanation for what the speaker or writer had originally intended. Instead the reader or listener may assume the role of the original audience, and pose questions to the writer.[60]

As an example of this model of interpretation, I point to Gadamer's suggestion that we look to transmitted texts and how they have been variously interpreted in different contexts. For instance, both legal and theological texts have a long tradition of being applied to issues concerning justice and read for their role in rendering justice. The contents of a text may reflect a certain amount of wisdom which withstand the test of time and continue to inspire their audiences. However,

---

[58]Gadamer, "Art as Play, Symbol, and Festival," *The Relevance*, 26. There is a mutual interchange going on between art and its audience where not only is the art made available to the participant, but the participant belongs to the play.
[59]Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics*, 390.
[60]Ibid., 393.

Gadamer qualifies the interpretative process so that external standards from the present are not projected carelessly onto the past to justify a text's irrelevance.[61] Because a great work of art reveals the truth of Being, we may suppose that its essential truth resonates with that which originally brought it into being--without declaring the idea of a truth-in-itself or an eternally right interpretation.

The work of Hans-Georg Gadamer is useful for opening up the relationship between aesthetic and religious experience, as the two types of experience are closely connected insofar as each is a system for apprehending and articulating reality. While the focus of this chapter has been on aesthetic theory beginning with the Greeks and concluding with contemporary German thought, it is clear that the works of these philosophers were never bound by the aesthetic alone. Each thinker, in his attempt to elucidate on the transportive effects of the aesthetic experience, cannot help but incorporate that same language and freedom from the conceptual known in religious discussion of the 'mystical'. While Plato went as far to address erotic transport as a 'mystical' experience, his followers, Aristotle and Plotinus, acknowledged the value of artistic expression and its role in pleasing the gods and goddesses. Heidegger conceived that artists, and most notably poets, are closer to participating in Being than the average rational person, and we should therefore look to artists for guidance and insight. Finally, Gadamer views great art as a potential disclosure of Being where truth is experienced by the individual.

To explore the lines of connection between the aesthetic and religious experience is to appreciate the inherent value of both. According to David

---

[61]Palmer, "Gadamer's Critique", 184. Palmer states: ""Meaning" is not like a changeless property of an object but is always "for us". Meaning is present-related, arising in the hermeneutical situation."

Chidester, the assessment of religious and/or aesthetic experience is treated in ways which only serve to negate the merit and/or our experience of both.[62] Indeed, there is a tendency to insist either that the aesthetic and religious experience are qualitatively different, or aesthetics and religion tend to be conflated into one nebulous category. One essential difference between the two types of experience may be that traditional religious experience is understood to be transformative, whereas the aesthetic experience might be a more evocative sensation. Upon a religious experience, the individual's own consciousness may expand and (s)he may be prompted to change his/her ideas and/or actions. Whereas with the aesthetic experience, the exposure to a great work of art is more likely to arouse feelings of familiarity, but not necessarily motivate the individual to change. The final chapter of this thesis will discuss aesthetics and religion in the context of popular culture. Citing the work of Leonard Cohen, I will also show how ideas on aesthetics, and to some extent erotics, have evolved and may inform an interpretation of Cohen as a religious or spiritual leader.

---

[62] David Chidester, "Aesthetic Strategies in Western Thought," *Journal of the Academy of Religion* 51 (March 1983): 56.

CHAPTER TWO

Leonard's always had yearnings for sainthood. And at the same time, there's certainly a strong streak of hedonism in him, as there is in almost every poet and every artist. It's because the artist is dedicated to pleasure and bringing pleasure to others particularly. And if he takes a little bit himself in giving pleasure to others, so much the better.[1]

But then, Cohen has always been something of an otherworldly figure in the pop milieu, a musician with a touch of the mystic whose haunting sound, sonorous meditative voice and lyric imagery of love, death and salvation make him seem not so jarringly out of place in the monastery.[2]

The Book of Isaiah, with its combination of poetry and prose, punishment and redemption, remained a lasting influence on Cohen's work and forms one of several core texts for his literary and theological logical development. His reliance on images of fire for judgement and the metaphor of the path as the way to redemption derive from the central text. The prophetic tone of destruction in Isaiah, "the Lord is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it" (24:1), manifests itself repeatedly throughout Cohen's work in personal and political terms. Isaiah also sets out an edict Cohen has followed: dispense with illusions, reject oppression, eliminate deceit.[3]

Is the appearance of religious language in an artist's work or lyrics enough to determine the religiosity of the artistic work? The preceding quotes are from individuals who have studied the works of Leonard Cohen. By positing him as an "aspiring saint," an "otherworldly figure with a touch of the mystic," or a "self-made prophet," each suggests that both Cohen's messages and his person convey an experience of the divine. But do these features granted to Cohen retain any kind of

[1]Irving Layton, quoted in "Growing Old Disgracefully," Ian Pearson in *Saturday Night* (March 1993): 79.
[2]Steve Dougherty & Robert Masello, "A Poet's Retreat" in *People Weekly*. (March 25,1996) http://pathfinder.com/people/960325/features/cohen.html, 1.
[3]Ira B. Nadel, *Various Positions: A Life of Leonard Cohen* (Toronto: Random House, 1996), 13.

religious value? Or are they merely flattering accolades? I would like to suggest that throughout his prolific career, Cohen has modelled himself after the "ideas", or conceptions of saint, mystic and most recently a prophet, but that these ideas may have more spiritual rather than traditionally religious connotations.

In her statement that Cohen's lyrics are "true" and "great," Jennifer Warnes, Cohen's former back-up singer, suggests that Cohen and his works are unique because of his ability to convey the complexities of human experience.[4] Yet, we might ask if there *is* a universal truth to be found in what he has to say. Moreover, we might wonder if Cohen's mark of "greatness"--as some of his fans or followers have acclaimed him--suggests a longevity for his lyrics. In other words, do Cohen's words speak of a universal, and timeless experience? Irving Layton, a well-known and often controversial Canadian poet, proposes that Cohen has consciously worked towards constructing for himself the image of a saint. However, Layton further observes that Cohen's attempts occasionally fall short. According to Layton, Cohen is as attracted to the pleasures of the body as he is to the exploration of the spirit. In the assumption that Cohen consciously attempts to cultivate sainthood, then, and subsequently falters from his path because of hedonistic tendencies, is it still appropriate to acknowledge him as a saint? Or, are we able at present to look at religious experience as a state which does not rigidly divide the body from the spirit? Further, in critical descriptions that describe Cohen as possessing a "touch of the mystic", are we to assume that both his person and work are to be contextualized in this way. Finally, is a contemporary individual capable of cultivating prophetic skills?

[4]Jennifer Warnes, quoted in *Leonard Cohen on BBC Radio* (July 8,1994).

For the remainder of this chapter, then, I explore the controversial messages implicit in the various labels that define Cohen: "saint," "mystic," and "prophet." Although I provide a brief overview of how these terms have been traditionally applied, my focus is necessarily limited to the Judaic tradition with an emphasis on prophecy and the Hebrew prophets of the Hebrew Bible. Cohen's own religious roots are in the Jewish tradition. However, it is also worth noting that his formative years in Montreal, a predominantly Catholic city, have also influenced Cohen's work. My analysis includes a discussion of those traditional definitions of saints, mystics, and prophets. Within the discussion of prophecy, it becomes clear that the prophet, (like the poet) is most concerned with conveying a message. Within the Judaic tradition, who precisely has been defined or labelled as prophet, and can we extend this label or definition to poets of the late twentieth century? If there are any prophets in our midst, might Cohen be one of them?

SAINTHOOD

To begin, I will consider the application of "saint". In "Sainthood on the Periphery," Robert Cohn defines the Judaic notion of sainthood as follows:

> A saint is a type of religious authority who is both a model for imitation and an object of veneration. A saint so perfectly enfleshes the ideals and values of a religion that he or she becomes holy in a distinctive way. The life of a saint acts as a parable for others, a beacon leading to fullness of life. The sanctity of the saints inspires other people to follow them, usually by dwelling piously on their stories (hagiography) and cultically revering their memory (hagiolatry).[5]

[5]Robert L. Cohn, "Sainthood on the Periphery," *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions,* Eds. Richard Kieckhefer and George D. Bond (Berkeley: University of

However, because neither subjects nor objects are normally venerated within the classical rabbinic Jewish tradition, the idea of homage to an individual is problematic. Intrinsic to the Jewish faith is the focus on community and not the individual -- wherein salvation is not a personal but a collective endeavour. Cohn's notion of the saint as exemplar or religious model is more conducive to forms of individualistic piety,[6] like those found in Christianity. In fact, there are elements of saintliness that are essentially reprehensible in Jewish law, most notably the idea of revering a dead body and/or its parts and recognizing burial sites as destinations of pilgrimages. Further, in their stringent cleanliness laws, Jews are sensitive to the potential contaminating properties of corpses and therefore avoid the consecration of human remains. Moreover, Cohn explains that sainthood is usually a posthumous phenomenon; the saint's superlative behavior and authority transcends his or her death and continues to be accessible to those who did not know him or her in the flesh.[7] The attraction to and reverence for saints lies not only in their accessibility, but, and more importantly, in the ways in which they assist the worshipers with earthly problems. For the Jew, however, this notion of an intermediary is contrary to her or his understanding of the covenant and Yahweh's personal interest in their lives.

In general, those individuals defined as saints are exemplars of their religious traditions. Further, exercising the mind to know oneself deeply, as well as ultimate

California Press, 1988), 43-44.
[6]Robert L. Cohn, "The Case of Judaism," in *Saints and Virtues*, Ed. John Stratton Hawley (Berkeley: University of Califiornia Press, 1987), 89.
[7]Robert L. Cohn, "Sainthood" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion,* Ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985, Vol. 13), 1.

reality, has often been deemed a saintly vocation.[8] Judaism and Islam, in particular, emphasize the authority of the written divine law as the essential foundation for further spiritual pursuits. However, an intellectual education alone does not allow one access to sainthood. In the Judaic tradition, the pathway to knowledge is three-fold: it includes a comprehensive knowledge of the Torah, and, based on one's understanding of the covenant, the integration of this knowledge into one's moral and emotional actions. It is not enough to merely grasp the tradition's teachings; one must exercise discipline in his/her mindfulness of others throughout one's daily life. According to Jewish law, one's accountability to others becomes paramount in both the growth and harmony of the Jewish community.

To complicate matters, most religions typically emphasize qualities such as intuition and clairvoyant powers as not necessarily intellectual but as supernatural. Cohn cites an example of religious figures within the Judaic tradition, whose qualities may be understood in this way:

> *They* functioned for their followers as living, personal embodiments of Torah (law). In the "court" of the *tsaddiq* the hasid (disciple) found a warm and fervent piety and a man who understood his innermost thoughts and needs. The *tsaddiq* could intercede with God on behalf of his followers and raise them to higher spiritual achievement. Thus the *tsaddiq* represents the clearest specimen of contemporary Jewish sainthood.[9]

Contrary to the idea that saints usually imitate an ideal founding figure and consciously construct their lives to model that individual, Cohn's focus here is on the emulation of the concept of holy law and not of a human being. It is not clear how the *tsaddiq* intercedes with God on behalf of his followers, but perhaps it means that

[8]Ibid., 5.
[9]Ibid., 4.

he interprets the divine word for the *hasid*. If indeed the *tsaddiq* is a mediator for God, the most likely container for this mediation would be in the words or language that serve to clarify the divine word. Cohn notes that in those instances in which one is proclaimed a saint, the category of religious status is superseded somewhat by the personal charisma of the alleged saint. This is interesting because it implies that the saint is not so much an exemplar of the tradition, but a promoter or essentially a reminder of the Jewish tradition. This less-than-perfect status is an important distinction when entertaining the idea of Leonard Cohen as saint, for his biographers reveal his character to be, at any one time, *both* self-indulgent and pious.

In this brief overview of saints in the Jewish tradition, it can be seen that the label "saint" for Leonard Cohen is not without its problems. The label is more evocative of Christian figures and especially of the holidays and festivals that celebrate saints. To posit Cohen as a saint may be straining the definition. First, Cohen is still alive, and while very much involved in his own spiritual discipline, he is not acting as a *formal* religious mentor for any recognizable group -- at least not in a self-proclaimed manner. By formal, I mean to say that he is not, like the *tsaddiq*, holding court and interceding with God on the behalf of others. He is, however, reciting messages that his fans do hear and classify in a religious context. Moreover, it may seem premature to dismiss Cohen on this point alone. In being selective of the various characteristics that constitute a saint within the Judaic tradition, and in conceding that Cohen possesses charisma and his work a proclamation of the word, perhaps Cohen is a worthy recipient of some kind of a religious title. However, it would not appear that "saint," in the traditional understanding of the word, is appropriate.

MYSTICISM

I now turn to an examination of mysticism within the Judaic tradition. In "The Jewish Mystical Tradition," Ben Zion Bokser makes a distinction between the mystic and the "mystically inclined":

> The gravest problem posed by mysticism has been the apotheosizing of the master. Mystically inclined people usually rally around a central figure, a charismatic individual, who experienced the divine illumination, and by whose light they see light. Sometimes they idolize the master as a semi-divine figure, and his teachings are invested with absolute authority.[10]

As noted earlier, Leonard Cohen has also been described by some of his critics and/or followers as a mystic. Yet Bokser's distinction here raises an interesting question. Could it be that Cohen's fans who posit him as a mystic recognize his gift and are therefore attempting to partake in this gift through their idolization of the poet and his work? This notion will be discussed in further detail in the later chapter on popular culture.

For my purposes here, I suggest first that the nature of good poetry is instructive and might therefore be considered a teaching. However, as explored in the previous chapter, there lies a significant difference between conventional teachings and the instructive nature of poetry. While most teachings posit a systematic approach to learning, and require the use of our rational faculties, poetry does not lend itself to rational analysis. As the contemporary German thinkers, such as Heidegger and Gadamer, argue, the engaged reader of poetry has his or her aesthetic experience

[10]Ben Zion Bokser, *The Jewish Mystical Tradition* (New York: The Pilgrim Press,1981), 5.

illuminated by the poem, not in an established and systematic way, but in a creative, dynamic and original way. Indeed, as I will show, both the poet and the mystic are familiar with metaphors of light or of the illumination of experience that, by extension, become vehicles of instructions. This is not unlike the connections Heidegger makes in his considerations of the Greek word *phainomenon*, and its conveyance of revelation-light-language.

The question remains, however: how are we to define the mystical experience and if we can do this, how can we come to identify the mystic? Generally speaking, the path of the mystic entails both pleasure and pain. In order to gain a clear sense of true reality which indeed might differ from the established sense of "reality", within any sociopolitical and cultural realm, the mystic experiences the proverbial "dark night of the soul". In keeping with the metaphors of light inherent in mysticism and poetry, the "darkness" encountered is a stark contrast to the clarity, meaning, or light yearned for. While the stages of this quest for clarity are common to all religious systems, there is no one common body of knowledge that defines or explicates "mysticism." Indeed, each mystic's quest will involve the use of those images and symbols that are fundamental to her or his religious tradition and sociopolitical culture, thus differentiating one mystical experience from another. This is not unlike Plotinus's ideas of symbols and metaphors whereby the language itself gives form to the experience, and, with regard to the more enigmatic mystical experience, only symbols and metaphors may suggest a kind of clarity. There is, then, no general mysticism or mystical experience to speak of, but rather particular mystical systems and individuals, and their accompanying linguistic traditions.[11]

[11]Louis Dupre, "Mysticism," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985, Vol. 10), 246. Bokser suggests that the

Mysticism, and mystics in particular, have been controversial subjects for academics and religious leaders alike.[12] What constitutes a mystical experience spawns a debate which is both complicated and unresolvable. This is mostly due to the *nature* of the mystical experience and its resistance to formulation in language. Its earliest etymological roots locates *muein* ("to remain silent") as a key component of the secret initiation rites in the Greek mystery cults. [13] It is not clear whether this silence was necessary for the protection of the rites, or because the discoveries from the performances of the rites were indescribable. In later writings there is a distinction made between a willingness to disclose and the inability to impart the experience because of the limited constructs of the human language and its failure to "capture" the mystical experience. Indeed, the modern formulation of mysticism, in general, implies a state of consciousness that surpasses ordinary experience through union with a transcendent reality. In "Varieties of Religious Experience", William James explains that while the mystical experience remains for the most part an emotional experience, there is also a noetic quality to it, indicating that the mystic is exposed to a unique knowledge:

> They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain;

imagination of the individual plays a key role in the mystic's ability to transport herself/himself. Those with a rich imagination utilize the tradition's symbols and metaphors to explore the depths of the unknown. Ben Zion Bokser, *The Jewish Mystical Tradition* (New York: The Pilgrim Press,1981), 8.

[12]Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995),157. In this text, Jantzen suggests that those individuals who are acknowledged as mystics in their time are accepted, as such, according to existing sociopolitical structures.

[13]Dupre, "Mysticism", 245.

> and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time.[14]

In contrast to the discernment of the intellect, the mystical occurrence does not lend itself to a rational analysis. Instead, those rational constructs that humans rely on for understanding their environment dissolve and a form of revelation occurs. This is not unlike the aesthetic experience that poets, artists as well as their audiences describe. The moment that terminology or linguistic constructs are imposed upon the reception of art, the exercise becomes an intellectual one, where it is analysis, and not experience, that matters. The experiential whole no longer matters; instead it is deconstructed into parts for easier comprehension.

According to James, the child's mental state is most conducive to the mystical experience as it is yet unclouded by rigid intellectual constructs. Because children's minds tend more towards the irrational, or are less adept at applying mental constructs to explain their experiences, their imaginations allow them to travel to unknown places. For someone like Plato, this tendency to 'travel' was not only a waste of the individual's time, but, more importantly, a waste of the state's time. It is also noteworthy that with the Romantic movement came a kind of idealization of children and childhood. Children and, in particular, their innocence, were seen to be not only a valuable sources of insight, but whose ideas should be noted. Thus it is that Heidegger also, in contrast to the Greeks, encourages us to reclaim this ability to experience things anew, as do children on a regular basis. As James notes, story-telling and the arts are typical sites for the exercise of the imagination, and as adults "we are alive or dead to the inner message of the arts accordingly as we have kept or

---

[14]William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1985), 302.

lost this mystical susceptibility."[15] This ability to "hear" an artistic message would seem to apply not only to one who experiences art, but also to the artist. The mystical susceptibility on the part of the artist may be considered an intrinsic part of the creative experience whereby a sensitive nature, as well as a more accomplished understanding of the 'whole', lends itself well to the creative process. In turn, the participant of an art form may be regarded as receiving a message of the whole through that particular medium. In other words, meaningful art is attractive and accessible to its audience because it conveys a sense of the whole. The hearing and experience of this message, then, is comparable to the mystical experience.

In Judaism, however, there does not seem to be this emphasis on aesthetic experience. Instead, a common theme within the Jewish mystical tradition is the eschatological theme, whereby death, judgement, heaven and hell become the primary subjects of focus in the mystic's pursuit. The Hasidic tradition, in particular, not only embraces the eschatological, it incorporates themes of simplicity, humility, and indifference.[16] One's demonstration of these qualities would seem to predispose them to mystical experiences, as she/he would appear to possess the ability to practice detachment in their daily lives. Yet another common characteristic within the Judaic mystical tradition is the emphasis on the divine word, by which the invocation of the Divine takes place in the utterance of the word. The following passage, although referring to a Christian theologian, expounds on the

---

[15]Ibid., 304.

[16]Adrienne Clarkson, "Leonard Cohen: A Monster of Love," in *Take this Waltz: A Celebration of Leonard Cohen*, Eds. Michael Fournier & Ken Norris (Ste Anne de Bellevue, Quebec: The Muses' Company, 1994), 25. In relaying a story of Cohen appearing on one of her shows in the 1960's, Clarkson refers to Cohen as displaying "extreme politeness and sorrowful elegance which still marks his comportment."

Jewish mystical tradition of describing the union that takes place between soul and God as originally exemplified in the Song of Songs:

> In his commentary on the Song of Songs, Origen initiated a long tradition of mystical interpretations that see in the erotic biblical poem just such a divine union. His commentary also presents the first developed theology of the image: the soul is an image of God because she houses the primal image of God that is the divine Word. The entire mystical process thus comes to consist in a conversion to the image. That is, to ever greater identity with the indwelling Word.[17]

The Word now means more than a mere utterance or a recognizable grouping of letters; it is a representation of divine presence. The soul acts as a receptacle for the divine Word, and just as the definition of the soul is obscure so are its words of description. It would seem here that the mystics who struggle to find the words to "capture" their experience will always be limited in their efforts, for it seems that the Word is not pliable to mere words.

Perhaps then, the label of mystic is more appropriate for Leonard Cohen as there tend to be fewer social expectations of the mystic compared with those of the saint. In other words, the mystical individual is harder to identify conclusively as the definition of the mystic changes both within the epochs as well as within each religious tradition. Could Leonard Cohen be considered a late twentieth-century mystic of secular society, or is there no room in a secular framework to entertain such figures? What we do know is that the religious labels are not altogether disappearing, but seem to be taking on rather interesting connotations. Perhaps, however, this is due to the fact that people are aligning themselves more with the idea of personal spirituality than with religion in its traditional forms.

---

[17] Dupre, "Mysticism", 252.

PROPHECY

It is worth noting that in the Jewish tradition, mysticism and prophecy are periodically conflated in the term "mystical prophecy".[18] With the experience of illumination, the seeker begins as a mystic but then becomes prophet when s/he attempts an oral account of that illumination. According to some scholars, this aptitude or willingness to convey in words the experience of the divine positions the prophet in a more auspicious light than the mystic. This is because those who are conduits for the divine are sharing this knowledge with others, rather than focusing solely on themselves. By outwardly expressing their experience of the divine, the prophets remind us and encourage us to do the same -- in effect, to heed the Word.

While there are many different examples and definitions of prophets, I have limited my focus to the prophets of the Hebrew Bible as the images of Cohen's works periodically coincide with images of the Hebrew Bible.[19] Further, my discussion of the history of prophets and prophecy is more in-depth, since it is my conviction that Cohen's most recent recorded works are contextualized best within a prophetic category, because of their complex nature. Necessarily, then, I will also compare the differences between prophecy and poetry, and explore whether or not prophecy and poetry can be to some extent conflated, and/or whether the prophetic message differs from that of the poetic.

In general terms, the prophet listens to and then acts on behalf of God. The prophet acts as spokesperson for God, who professes through his prophets the

---

[18]Bokser, *The Jewish Mystical Tradition*,12.
[19]Nadel, "Various Positions,"13.

ultimate power He wields over a community.[20] One fundamental idea of the prophet's message is that God is sovereign of both nature and history,[21] which differs from the pagan notion that there are different deities responsible for different forces in nature. This concentration of power in a sole deity is one of the fundamental tenets of monotheistic religions, and the prophets act as the interlocutors for the divine in this tradition. It is worth noting here that God in the monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam is always referred to in the male gender. Further, the tenets of each religion indicate that this attribution of gender is not to be taken literally, but as merely allowing the Divine to be more accessible to the worshiper. However, it is worth noting that a number of feminist scholars persuasively argue that identification with a male deity speaks more to men than to women.[22] Furthermore, there is an overt correlation between the prophet's gender and that of God; God speaks through man and man relays His message.

The male prophets of ancient Israel were thus instrumental in reminding the people of Israel not only of their obligations to Yahweh, but of their transgressions. In contrast to the relationship between the pagan worshippers and their gods, where sacrifice played a large role in extrapolating favors from the gods, the prophets of Israel advised against this kind of exchange between the worshipper and Yahweh. Indeed, one of the central features that differentiated Yahweh from the pagan deities was His active involvement and His ongoing interest in the lives of the Israelites. If

---

[20]Bernhard W. Anderson. "Prophetic Troublers of Israel," *Understanding the Old Testament. 4th Edition* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc.,1986), 253.
[21]C.F. Whitley, *The Prophetic Achievement* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1963), 93.
[22] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and Godtalk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (London, SCM ,1983).

there *was* a sense of displeasure on the part of Yahweh, manifested in the misfortune that befell the people of Israel, the Israelites believed this misfortune to be the result of their failure to observe His expectations. Ritual sacrifices, however, were still observed in the temple cult. One explicit example illustrating this is Abraham's sacrificial gesture of Isaac. Anger, disappointment, repentance, and forgiveness are recurring themes in the messages of the prophets. However, despite His occasional severe treatment of the Israelites, His anger and disappointment were also understood as the evidence of care and concern that He had for Israel and her people. And it was the prophets who communicated His concern.

Nonetheless, the religious roles of Israel were divided amongst the priests and the prophets. While the prophet was the conduit for Yahweh, the priests of Israel officiated at sacred rites, instructing the people to follow tradition. While the priests concerned themselves with rituals and securing Yahweh's blessings, the prophets were occupied with much more complex and thus more difficult issues, one of which was social justice. Because the prophets felt that they were more directly involved with Yahweh, they mistrusted the priests and equated the priestly role with that of the pagan ritualists. In the following quote, the tension between the two religious representatives is noted:

> The prophet knew that religion could distort what the Lord demanded of man, that priests themselves had committed perjury by bearing false witness, condoning violence, tolerating hatred, calling for ceremonies instead of bursting forth with wrath and indignation at cruelty, deceit, idolatry, and violence.[23]

---

[23] Abraham Heschel, "What Manner of Man is the Prophet?" *The Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962), 16.

According to the prophets, the priests were ineffectual at addressing the real problems of society. In a relatively short time, instead of acting to correct what ailed society, the organized religion of Judaism had become complicit in the perpetuation of society's ills. The prophets emphasized that, because of their indifference to societal ills, the priests were instrumental in helping the Israelite religion to become as superficial and self-indulgent as those pagan traditions that they had originally intended to eclipse.

It is interesting to note that while the priests were perceived as actively soliciting the favors of Yahweh, the prophets themselves were perceived as passive recipients of the divine message. The question of this passivity is complicated when we attempt to determine the authenticity of the prophet and/or his message, or when we attempt to provide an analysis of the "prophetic call." Indeed, determining whether a prophet received a message or constructed it himself was fundamental to the process of separating the true prophet from the false one. Yet one of the fundamental tenets of prophecy is that the prophetic call is unsolicited, [24] hence reinforcing the idea that God ultimately chooses His messengers. That is, God sets for the prophet a task: the prophet is to deliver His message. In *Deuteronomy* 18:10, prophecy is proposed to be the single method for the accessibility of the divine will, and any other method for contacting the divine is considered a heathen practice. The pagan attempt to "invade and coerce the world of spirits" is inimical to the Israelite understanding of the prophet as the direct interlocutor of Yahweh.[25] Thus, while the prophet is the medium for the divine voice, poets have been defined

---

[24]Gene Tucker, "Prophetic Speech," *Interpreting the Prophets*, Eds. James Luther Mays and Paul J. Achtemeier (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 30.
[25]R.B.Y. Scott, *The Relevance of the Prophets* (London: The Macmillan Company Collier-Macmillan Ltd, 1968), 42.

as pagan insofar as they are touch with the pagan spirit world instead of the Divine world. The primary difference between the prophet and the poet, then, is that the poet brings to his or her message both an aesthetic and personal interpretation, and thus his interest in the aesthetic. Unlike the prophet, whose personality is subsumed by divine intervention, the poet exercises the aesthetic within a personal realm.

With these ambiguities in mind, I turn to the ongoing debate of what constitutes prophetic inspiration and how this "inspiration" differs from poetic inspiration. James Kugel summarizes the debate as follows:

> If one considers the corpus of classical rabbinic writings about the Bible, stretching from the second century C.E. on to the sixth and beyond, one might well conclude that although the Rabbis held what might be called the phenomenon of song and singing in high esteem, any association of the Divine Word (all of it being, in the sense seen above, prophecy) with mere song was generally offensive to them. As a consequence, connecting the words revealed to prophets with those created by mere poets was bound to encounter rabbinic disapproval.[26]

The conflict here revolves around issues of revelation versus creation. Prophets are ostensibly receptacles of God's Word whereas poets are crafters of the language. Intention is a factor in this conflict; while the prophet ostensibly lacks such intention (the Word is passed to him by God), the poet uses her or his own words for her or his own designs. For the Israelite prophet to admit he was a poet was an exercise in self-condemnation.

Inherent to the Greek view is an understanding that inspiration is located in a transcendent realm that may be contacted by a very select few. Indeed, Dan Pagis

---

[26]James L. Kugel, "Poets and Prophets: An Overview," *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition,* Ed. James Kugel (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 10.

comments on how the poet is accredited with divine inspiration. Pagis refers to a process where the self, through its recognition of its limitations and inadequacies, rearranges itself to incorporate this knowledge:

> [This process] transforms human identity through self-diminishment and through a reliance on grace that parallels the Homeric poet's dependence on divine inspiration. It is not the poet who speaks, but God who speaks through him and sponsors the grander claims that the all-too-human author makes upon his audience.[27]

This theme of the poet exposing the limitations and inadequacies of the self is similar to the Hebrew Bible's prophetic proclamation that the Israelites were neglectful of God's convenant. Hence, while it was once the prophet who spoke of the people's transgressions, the messenger was now the poet. In contrast to this idea of a higher status being conferred upon the poet, Robert Carroll suggests that the poetic message is diluted when it is equated with the prophetic message:

> The original poets were free spirits, poets of the imagination, denouncing the social structures of their own time, but through redactional transformation have become conventional 'prophets', a fixed form of institutional activity, and thereby made to serve purposes which they themselves might very well have despised (even denounced on occasions)! Such a process deprives them of much of their force because it serves ends other than their own.[28]

Carroll suggests the idea that a poetic or personal message may be co-opted to serve more political means. For Carroll, the poetic message loses its intensity

---

[27]Dan Pagis, "The Poet as Prophet in Medieval Hebrew Literature," *Poetry and Prophecy*, 165.

[28] Robert Carroll, "Poets Not Prophets: A Response to 'Prophets Through the Looking-Glass,'" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27 (1983): 18.

because it has been adopted by the imposing "institution" (i.e. religious, cultural or sociopolitical) in order to serve the interests of those who determine the agenda of the institution. However, Carroll's reference to the "conventional prophet" is unclear, if not out of place. While he attempts to make the point that the prophet speaks from within the context of an organized religion, the 'conventional (biblical) prophets' frequently criticized those structures in which they actively took part. Insofar as the prophets were limited to "fixed forms" of protest, I would argue that they themselves attempted to disrupt those static forms that the religious institutions imposed. The prophet's main vehicle by which to attack these structures was her or his use of semantics or rhetoric. Therefore, the poet and the prophet utilize language in a similar fashion.

By the eighteenth-century, literary academics sought to conflate poetic and prophetic works into the single category of biblical poetry. It is not surprising that scholarship would seek to associate poets and prophets, as they both rely on the same linguistic devices of symbol and metaphor. Clearly, both poet and prophet employ symbols and metaphors and use them to address the human experience. In his analysis of the prophet's use of symbols, Walter Brueggeman suggests that they typically reactivate symbols from of our past. These symbols are familiar instruments that encourage redemptive honesty; they encourage one to get beyond the self-deception that human beings regularly employ.[29] Further, metaphoric language is rich in its ability to offer a description which can be accessible to many at any given time. Brueggemann conveys the power of the prophetic metaphor in the following passage. He states that the prophet has the ability:

---

[29] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 49.

> [T]o speak metaphorically but concretely about the real deathliness that hovers over us and gnaws within us, and to speak neither in rage nor in cheap grace, but with the candour born of anguish and passion. That death is manifested in alienation, loss of patrimony, and questing for new satiations that can never satisfy, and we are driven to the ultimate consumerism of consuming each other. [30]

According to Brueggemann, it is not enough to simply string a number of words together in a clever and evocative way--indeed, the prophet goes one step further by reciting words with "the candour born of anguish and passion." Can the same be said of the poet's message and is the emotional investment on behalf of its orator a necessary quality of a worthwhile message?

Those prophetic postures that re-emerged in twentieth-century Hebrew poetry are now seen to have their roots in European Romanticism. In his cross-cultural study of prophets and prophecy, Thomas Overholt relates that the prophetic word is a response to a collectively perceived threat within the social order:

> Religion thus establishes a prestige system in which the criteria of one's integrity within the social order are well-known and consistent with everyday experience. The crisis of the prophetic situation resides in the fact that events have taken place (usually involving contact with another culture) which have posed a serious challenge to these assumptions. The result is that the experience of a loss of prestige and integrity and the need for regeneration are widely felt among the populace.[31]

The prophet, then, voices the collective unrest of the people. Social circumstances have changed and the lines that delineate a social order are no longer

---

[30]Ibid., 50.

[31] Thomas W. Overholt, "Prophecy: The Problem of Cross-Cultural Comparison," *Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism* 21 (1981): 70.

clear. Frequently this unrest is something that is felt by the general populace, but it ultimately finds its articulation in the prophet's words--words that compel individuals to examine the shift in the ways in which human behavior has been socially constructed. Overholt attributes the shift of the "rule structure" as an impetus for social change; the "old rules" of a society now become scrutinized, a scrutiny which leads to an interim time of "no rules" which ultimately gives way to a set of "new rules."[32] Of course there is a vested interest in keeping the rules intact, especially since they maintain the status quo and, in particular, suit the needs of those in power. Yet the prophet, unlike the general populace, is especially sensitive to the exploitative tactics of the powerful and sees the misuse of power as a sign of the impending destruction of society:

> To us a single act of injustice--cheating in business, exploitation of the poor--is a slight, to the prophets, a disaster. To us injustice is injurious to the welfare of the people, to the prophets a deathblow to existence: to us, an episode; to them a catastrophe, a threat to the world.[33]

According to Abraham Heschel, this extraordinary sensitivity on the part of the prophet is a result of the prophet's fundamental communion with the feelings of God, or the prophet's "sympathy with the divine pathos." This sense of suffering, Heschel says, is felt by the prophet as a response to a transcendent sensibility. God is suffering because of humanity's dissension, and its failure to respect His authority. There is a temporal differentiation between the prophet and the worshiper; while

---

[32]Ibid., 72.
[33]Heschel, "What Manner," 37.

most individuals are consumed with the present, the prophet has a vision of the future as well as the end.[34]

This preoccupation with the immediate moment on the part of the worshiper should not be understood as the ability to experience the moment for what it is, but rather as how much one is able, in the moment, to fulfil him or herself. Provisions are no longer made for the future, and there is no reference to the past. For the prophets in the Hebrew Bible, their words were grounded in Israel's history and specifically in her covenant with God. When Israel strayed from her promise, she could no longer expect God to fulfil His end of the covenant. The prophet's message, or what the prophets preached, consisted in large part of what was perceived as God's wrath toward Israel. In contrast to the poet, the prophet is not egotistically attracted to the divine, but because of his gifts, is simply infused with the divine. An emotional assimilation takes place whereby the prophet's emotional response is interpreted as a function of the divine consciousness.

By exploring prophecy, then, we find ourselves in the nebulous territory of 'divine consciousness' with the task of assessing the authenticity of those individuals who claim the experience of divine revelation. Clearly, then, we will inevitably be presented with strict, and in many ways limiting criteria, when attempting to assess the emotional urgency of the prophetic experience within a rational framework. These difficulties quickly emerge in an analysis of Leonard Cohen as potential prophet and/or his works as potentially prophetic. However, I believe that of the three religious labels that we have examined here, the term "prophet" may best capture how it is that Cohen reaches his reader(s)/listener(s).

---

[34]Ibid., 38.

In constituting Cohen as a religious figure, and in attempting to locate him within a religious and poetic tradition, the earlier stages of his career and work suggest more affinities with sainthood and mysticism, rather than with prophecy. Indeed, it would seem that in the earlier stages of his life, Cohen strove to cultivate the image of a "saint," and yet found this quest to be inappropriate since, unlike himself, the saint is able to overcome self-indulgent tendencies. In turning to mysticism, however, it would seem that Cohen felt his work might be better contextualized here since the mystic desires the attainment of divine knowledge, but at the same time neither desires nor is able to live up to the rigid and moral expectations placed on a saint. However, Cohen's most recently recorded messages and the nature of these messages are decidedly prophetic. Yet, it is not a simple exercise to determine whether Cohen is a true or a false prophet. It is clearly a difficult task to determine whether one is *acting* as or *is* a channel for some kind of divine -- or, in biblical terms, for God. I suggest, then, that we examine the validity of the message and its resonance of truth, rather than the source or the messenger. Throughout his recent work, Cohen moves from the realm of the personal and/or his personal interest in the aesthetic to the realm of the public. This is not to suggest that Cohen has lost interest in the aesthetic. Indeed, an analysis of his recent works shows that Cohen's use of the aesthetic or poetics is the vehicle by which he demonstrates his ideas about love, sexuality, politics and alienation in late twentieth-century Western culture.

The contemporary understanding of prophecy has shifted from that of biblical times. The term not only indicates a religious warning, but has also come to indicate a forecast of events, in general. As Western culture becomes exceedingly complex in its technology and increasingly more vague in its moral codes, experts from all

disciplines are offering predictions about the state of the future. It would seem that the almost frantic pace of humanity's inventions induce changes in the Western culture at incredible rates. Cohen's prophetic works are in keeping with this attempt to understand the socio-political climate, but it is also to keep in mind that the over-arching philosophical concern in the West is that of personal identity. The final chapter of this thesis will address the cultural climate in more detail, and specifically the growing movement of (New Age) spirituality.

CHAPTER THREE

My purpose in this chapter is to explore some of the poetry and/or lyrics of Leonard Cohen in an attempt to discern the accuracy of his reputation as a poet and religious phenomenon. An analysis of some of his works in chronological order will serve to demonstrate what appears to be a shift in Cohen's identification with sainthood, mysticism and prophecy. I will, with a few exceptions, limit my source of Leonard Cohen's work to the 1993 composite text titled *Stranger Music: Selected Poems and Songs*, which Cohen himself describes as a collection of his most meaningful works.[1] I will also adhere to the most recent biography of Leonard Cohen by Ira Nadel entitled *Various Positions*: *A Life of Leonard Cohen*, which contains information that I consider to be insightful and illuminating. In my discussion of Leonard Cohen, I will develop my central themes of sainthood, mysticism and prophecy in a chronological fashion. That is to say, I read Cohen as a young man who constructs himself as a saint, then later a mystic, and most recently, a prophet.

For my method of literary criticism, I look to Stephen Scobie who himself has provided analyses of both Leonard Cohen's and Bob Dylan's work. Scobie is reluctant to read any text as strictly autobiographical proof of the author's original intentions, and instead breaks down the method of interpretation into two separate, but interrelated, components. These components, simply stated, are the author's life and the author's intentions:

---

[1] Ira Nadel, *Various Positions: A Life of Leonard Cohen* (Toronto: Random House, 1996), 266-267.

> What one can know about an author's life is thus a text, made up of all formal biographies or newspaper stories or just plain gossip that has entered public circulation. Similarly, what one can know about his intentions is another text, derived from diaries, letters, interviews, discarded drafts, etc. None of these texts can be taken simply; none can be accepted as reliable or unmediated statements of autobiography. All such texts take their place within the larger 'text' to which we may attach, for the sake of convenience, an author's name.[2]

Throughout this analytical section on Cohen's work, I refer to the speaker in the poems as the 'persona'. This term, I believe, lends both familiarity and a respectable distance to the author and his work. Although the intentions of the author are essentially impossible to prove, it would seem that, at times, Cohen's text seems to follow and reflect the personal events in his life. The exercise in this chapter is to examine Cohen's work for religious indicators, or for those images and descriptions traditionally associated with the different religious titles.

The reader may notice that my interpretation takes on considerably more volume as I move from sainthood to mysticism and then to prophecy. This is, I believe, because the attempt to address a notion such as sainthood in a text is difficult; as such there is very little 'saintly' language or terminology available for application. The label of 'saint' is far more likely to be believed and accepted if it has come from another's observation(s), otherwise self-proclamations may be read as utterances from a self-promoter. For my purposes in reading sainthood into Cohen's life, I rely more on biographical reflections rather than evidence in Cohen's text.[3]

---

[2]Stephen Scobie, *Alias Bob Dylan* (Red Deer: Red Deer College Press, 1991), 19.
[3] Loranne Dorman and Clive Rawlins, *Leonard Cohen: Prophet of the Heart* (London:

SAINTHOOD

As a young writer and poet, Leonard Cohen seems quite fascinated with different religious qualities and, I would suggest, with how to cultivate them. In "Song", printed initially in *The Spice Box of the Earth* (1961), Cohen alludes to a persona of a saint and his understanding of sainthood:

> When with lust I am smitten
> To my books I then repair
> And read what man have written
> Of flesh forbid but fair
>
> But in these saintly stories
> Of gleaming thigh and breast
> Of sainthood and its glories
> Alas I find no rest
>
> For at each body rare
> The saintly man disdains
> I stare O God I stare
> My heart is stained with stains
> And casting down the holy tomes
> I lead my eyes to where
> The naked girls with silver combs
> Are combing out their hair
>
> Then each pain my hermits sing
> Flies upward like a spark
> I live with the mortal ring
> Of flesh on flesh in dark.[4]

The male persona is situated between an ideal for which he strives, and the real which resonates through his flesh. In order to adhere to saintly notions of

---

Omnibus Press, 1990), 13. In their biography of Cohen, these authors indicate that Cohen's work is informed by the Catholic culture in Montreal. This is most evident in his text, *Beautiful Losers* where he tells the story of Saint Catherine Tekakwitha.

[4]Leonard Cohen, "Song" in *Leonard Cohen: Selected Poems 1956-1968* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart Ltd. [1964] 1968), 67.

renunciation, he acknowledges his temptations of the female body. For it appears that if the persona can express his desire and admit his physical weakness, then he has begun to address and lessen his temptation. In traditional Catholic religious terms, the saint is ostensibly beyond fleshly temptation; his desires are satiated by religious teachings and/or texts. 'Lust', according to the persona is a preoccupation and one that may be redressed with religious discipline. However, in an ironic gesture, the persona recounts that his attempt to identify or relate to the attitudes of the saint provides instead more fodder for his desire. In my own reading, it seems that the persona's observation of "flesh forbid but fair" does not serve to mollify his desire, but instead fuels it. In other words, rather than treating the saintly stories as a warning, the persona becomes even more intrigued and attracted to the female body. In acknowledging the sight of "naked girls", the sight of a woman's breast and thigh, he situates himself as appreciative lover or voyeur, rather than prudent saint.

Finally, the persona refers to the pain he has routinely experienced as a recluse and how this suffering dissipates quickly, when... "flying upward like a spark". This is not, however, a progression of his actions but rather an admission of his ordinary appetite for the flesh, as he finds himself bound to that mortal coil of the flesh. The carnal state, for the persona, represents an unenlightened site, "as flesh on flesh in dark".

This tension, with regard to renunciation of the flesh, appears to be one of the fundamental and inherent struggles of Cohen's early work. "The Song" introduces some of the major conflicts between the aesthetic and religious experience, and Cohen's use of sexual imagery, metaphors or themes serve as vehicles by which to track these conflicts. In order to follow Cohen's tracking of these conflicts, however, it is necessary to explore some of his own personal journey.

Renunciation of the feminine is a repeated theme in Cohen's early work. I would propose that the Jewish instruction he assimilated in his young life, is somewhat responsible for prompting him to question his attraction to women. In order to alleviate the desire for women, the mortification of the flesh takes place -- so long as he is sensuous, he will never be a saint. What I find in Cohen's work is that while the saintly voice and the sexual voice are two opposing forces within a poem, his personae often grapple with issues of desire and renunciation. This dualistic understanding of spirit and body would then preclude Plato's and Plotinus's understanding of the erotic as a potential site for transport. Instead the physical body must be renounced altogether before the comprehension of the holy may occur. And so while the state of sainthood is more sought after on an ideological level, the male personae are literally more engaged on the sexual level. Thus, while in this early work Cohen explores the idea of consciously moulding oneself as a saint, his focus on sexuality indicates the futility of attempting to negotiate body and spirit within such a rigid construction of sainthood.

In the following passage, Ira Nadel describes Cohen's own ascetic practices in the late 1960's, and his attempt to control his bodily appetites:

> Cohen had continued his practice of fasting. He felt that it helped focus the mind on creation and also produced a physical manifestation of the holiness of his calling. The absence of food, the denial of pleasure, revivified the importance of his task, following the Judaic tradition of sanctifying the self through exerting control over the appetites. The sanctity was somewhat compromised by the aid of amphetamines, however, which kept him awake and killed his appetite. . . . His spiritual sustenance

> diminished his physical hunger, [Cohen] explains, and he rejoices in the emptiness of his body.[5]

For Cohen, who strove to imitate the Christian saint's practices of self-denial, the method he employed was aided by the artificial accessories of drugs which both stimulated his mind and controlled his appetite. One only has to think of the famous religious saints and their rigid ascetic practices. These were individuals who endured tremendous mental and physical challenges, but who were noted as being ostensibly indifferent to these ordeals as they pursued a holy life. Indeed, it is understood that Christian saints, in particular, received their nourishment from their godhead and did not perceive their practices of abstinence or self-denial as conditions to be artificially cultivated or endured.

In the late 1950's through the 1960's, Cohen regularly engaged in self-imposed isolation and dabbled in various forms of religious teachings. After these years of exploration, however, Cohen realized that it was necessary to rejoin the world and participate in its activities. The following quote illustrates how some of the new teachings may have influenced him to abdicate what he describes as a form of self-imposed state of exile:

> I decided I couldn't live as a coward. I had to sing or I was nothing. I also started to accept guidance and to allow people to love me. . . . I knew all about solitude and nothing about cohesion and unity. . . . The book [the *I-Ching*] has been a sort of teacher for me, [and it was] time now for me and others to get together. I feel there's a great getting together in the world again . . . I want to lead the world to a new sensibility.[6]

---

[5]Nadel, *Various Positions*, 135. Unless otherwise stated, all biographical material is quoted from *Various Positions*.
[6]Ibid., 179.

Nadel suggests that Cohen's realization comes in the recognition that his separation from the world was, in effect, depriving the world of a valuable voice. This is not unlike the idea of saintly vocation where one may lead the world to a fresh consciousness.

The themes of deprivation, suffering and virtue are evident in Cohen's 1978 collection titled *Death of a Lady's Man*. In these works, themes of sexuality and religiosity frequently overlap. Throughout these works, the male personae testify to sexual prowess and promiscuity as distracting forces -- ones that ultimately keep them from knowing the divine. Moreover, frequently in this collection of poems, an almost palpable sentiment of anger is expressed by the personae towards the female subjects. The predominant themes here -- woman as temptress, woman as a distraction from the pursuit of the spiritual -- serve to illustrate the tension of saintly vocation. I would like to suggest that, throughout these poems, the personae blame their estrangement from God on their involvement with women. For instance, woman-as-temptress is the theme in the following passage from "Death of A Lady's Man" (1978):

> 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.[7]

It would seem the woman is conscious of her lover's esteem for the holy, and, knowing this, invites him to have sex with her. But for the speaker, sex with the woman distracts him from his holy pursuits. If indeed he is attempting to practice

---

[7]Leonard Cohen, "Death of A Lady's Man," *Stranger Music: Selected Poems and Songs*.
(Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1993), 227. Henceforth, all poetry quoted will have originated from this text unless otherwise stated.

the saintly vocation of celibacy, then the woman's offer is disrespectful and indifferent to his practice. For the persona, physical love and its expression is not a celebration of the union between the man and woman, but rather a source of alienation.

In the short poem, "The Dream"(1978), the persona regards the theme of love-making with a similar tone of disdain:

> O I had such a wonderful dream, she said.
> I dreamed you had made love to me.
> At last, he said to himself, the spirit
> has taken up the heavy work.[8]

While the joy seems to have left this relationship altogether for the man, the woman continues to dream of their shared intimacy. He seems reluctant to inform her of his diminished love, and is relieved to have found that "the spirit" has taken up the burden. Once more, the poet attempts to negotiate the sexual with religious in the poem "O Wife Unmasked" (1978):

> O wife unmasked
> O body of my plunder
> foundation of my waiting
> unforgivable
> and continually alluring
> Some witness loves you
> as you blunder through
> the webs of my sleeping spirit.[9]

The unmasking or revelation of the persona's wife occurs only inasmuch as it relates to him. This preoccupation and, in turn, denigration of the female body indicates that the woman is strictly identified with her body, but a body not entirely her own. Her body is a means for his own transgression, a physical temptation that

---

[8]Ibid., 256.
[9]Ibid., 268.

distracts the speaker from his religious calling. He describes the woman's attempts to understand him as awkward because she cannot appreciate the complexities of his inner life. This is a poem highlighting the contradictions of the persona's experiences. He renounces the female body, condemning it for contending with his ideas of being a holy man or saint, and yet it appears he continues to engage with the body. It is also interesting to note his lack of punctuation in this particular piece. The absence of commas or periods suggests a continuing spiralling of thoughts and the inability to make a decision -- it is insight into the mind of a man struggling with temptation and his ongoing attraction and repulsion to an object or idea. According to Nadel, this sense of frustration and lack of meaning was something that Leonard Cohen himself experienced in his early forties; perhaps this collection of poems was the means through which the poet worked out his anger. Moreover, Nadel explains the tension in these poems as a product of the poet's own contemplations:

> [Cohen] represents the unholy union between renunciation and longing and the difficulty in divorcing one from the other. For Cohen, they do not cancel but complement each other. Intensifying the need for denial is the determination to possess by pleasure what cannot be attained by sacrifice. The two forces interact rather than collide creating desperate synergy that drives his work.[10]

It would seem, then, that Cohen attempts to articulate the internal struggles of a man seeking a holy vocation. Frequently, the poet's personae relate narratives that refer to their own paths and the inevitable obstacles that appear on their journeys. The theme of renunciation of the female body is present throughout "Death of a

---

[10]Nadel, *Various Positions*, 202. Nadel also indicates that "Cohen now believes that love has brought death, not life, to his creativity. The desire for women no longer satisfied him; the reality of their humanity tarnishes his idolatry of them." (202).

Lady's Man" and a common feature in these poems is the female body positioned as an obstacle to a holy or religious life.

The last poem I would like to look at with reference to the theme of sainthood is "Came So Far For Beauty", located in the original recording called *Recent Songs* (1979). This piece, as well as the others in this compilation, are considerably more gentle, if not more careful than those found in *Death of a Lady's Man.* It is in *Recent Songs* where I believe Cohen's interest was slowly beginning to shift from sainthood to mysticism. As he writes:

> I thought I'd be rewarded
> for such a lonely choice,
> and surely she would answer
> to such a hopeless voice
> I practiced on my sainthood
> I gave to one and all
> but the rumors of my virtue
> they moved her not at all.[11]

The unidentified woman in the poem is now looked to by the persona for approval. If only she would address him, and acknowledge his benevolence. But she is now out of his reach; she is untouched by his altruism. Further in the poem:

> But no I could not touch her
> with such a heavy hand; her star beyond my order,
> her nakedness unmanned.

The woman is desirable because her attention and affection are not easily gained. The favors of women are presented as worthy and redemptive if they are not given freely. This is in rather stark contrast to the convenient and often reprehensible female body that the personae describe in Cohen's earlier works. To conclude, Cohen's understanding of sainthood as depicted by his personae, seem to

---

[11]Cohen, *Stranger Music*, 297.

position women as temptations and a barrier to a saintly vocation. A more positive view of male-female relationships becomes apparent as he moves towards his more "mystical" poems.

MYSTICISM

While themes of sainthood, mysticism, and prophecy are always overlapping in Cohen's work, he begins to utilize more mystical language in his work of the late 1970's and early 1980's. In this section I will examine Cohen's work in the context of mysticism, emphasizing how his descriptions of sex with women are indicative of a spiritual-sexual dimension of the divine. Cohen's attempt to reconcile these themes, I would suggest, is to situate the spirit or the exploration thereof within the sexual realm. In my reading, his exploration of the sexual as a location for the divine, or his use of sexual imagery and symbols, resemble those mystical encounters described by the traditional religious mystics and their union with the divine or godhead. Indeed, much literature and poetry produced by mystics has an erotic tone. My purpose is to examine in this context whether this is an accurate portrayal of the mystical encounter, or if Cohen is merely an adept craftsman at applying mystical terminology to an ordinary erotic encounter?

As noted in the earlier chapter on mysticism, within the Judaic tradition there is emphasis on how the word contains an element of the divine. The following stanza, taken from "The Window" (*Recent Songs* 1978), describes how the physical flesh and the spiritual word are intertwined:

> Then lay your rose on the fire;
> the fire give up to the sun;
> the sun give over to splendor
> in the arms of the High Holy One;
> for the Holy One dreams of a letter,
> dreams of a letter's death--

oh bless the continuous stutter
of the word being made into flesh.[12]

The potential for the flesh to become word exists in much of Cohen's poetry and it is here where he is the most 'mystical'. In this poem, the metaphorical use of 'light' and its relation to holy contact is the focal point. Moreover, both the poet and the mystic are familiar with metaphors of light or the illuminative experience that, by extension, become vehicles of instruction.

The song "Our Lady of Solitude" is suggestive of the Blessed Virgin Mary. While the lyrics suggest that the figure Mary was both protective of and instructive towards the speaker, their relationship went beyond the abstract religious ideal of worshiper and divine:

All summer long she touched me
She gathered in my soul
From many a thorn, from many a thicket
Her finger's like a weaver's, quick and cool
And the light came from her body
And the night went through her grace
All summer long she touched me
And I knew her, I knew her face to face.[13]

While it seems he is celebrating the woman herself, a closer reading reveals that he is more likely celebrating the intimate time spent with a woman. His lover becomes the source of his salvation. Through her continuous summer long touches, she helps the speaker heal his ailing soul by offering him protection and physical comfort. The light emanating from her body is a source of both guidance and solace; the mystic moves towards this light, as this light represents a form of divine beckoning. And when this light is removed, the woman is able to offer her devotion

---

[12]Ibid., 299.
[13]Ibid., 301.

or divine grace. The poet presents the female as a metaphor for divine grace, and by extension, sexuality and sensuality also become metaphors for divine grace.

The 1984 recording, titled *Various Positions*, connotes the idea that numerous stances may be assumed in both the physical and the linguistic dialogue. In such a space, one cannot help but encounter different outlooks, attitudes and poses. In "The Night Comes On", a story unfolds about the speaker's familial relationships -- with his mother, father, wife and children. I have chosen to concentrate on the relationship with the female/feminine and the conflation that occurs between the female and the holy spirit:

> We were locked in this kitchen; I took to religion,
> and I wondered how long she would stay.
> I needed so much to have nothing to touch:
> I've always been greedy that way.[14]

The persona feels constrained by his domestic situation ("We were locked in this kitchen"); he is locked in a position as such that the material and moral implications that a family life imposed were felt to be suffocating. When he speaks of his turning to religion, the implication is that this choice may be immaterial ("I wondered how long she would stay"). Is the "she" the woman/wife or is it the religious inspiration/aspiration? In the case of the former, the persona implies that the woman may not accept his religious leanings; and with the latter, that the religious pursuits would not last in an inhospitable household. For the persona, the holy life is rich in its simplicity, in its seeming indifference to that of the material; in contrast to this is the complex dynamic of family where several individuals are attempting to meet their needs.

---

[14]Ibid., 345.

But in the next stanza, the persona's sentiments lean more towards the mystical and an appreciation of the woman:

> Now I look for her always; I'm lost in this calling;
> I'm tied to the threads of some prayer.
> Saying, "When will she summon me, when will she come to me,
> what must I do to prepare?" -
> Then she bends to my longing like a willow, like a fountain,
> she stands in the luminous air.
> And the night comes on, and it's very calm,
> I lie in her arms, she says, "When I'm gone
> I'll be yours, yours for a song.[15]

The feminine reference may be read as either a specific woman or more likely, the *'eternal feminine,'* which romantic male poets celebrated, beginning in the Romantic era (18th-century), and who poets, to this day, continue to invoke. The persona's exploration of the eternal feminine is a study of its sexual nature -- one who readily bends to his longing. The threat of the "dark night" or the loss of *her* is lessened as the persona hears the magical words from his lover's lips, which will bring her back to him: *"I'll be yours for a song"*. It would seem that the end of the union with this version of the eternal feminine was not as intensely felt because the eternal feminine (i.e. in the appearance of yet another woman) could be attracted with the persona's song. As Nadel comments, the feminine and the creative were, for Cohen, intertwined: "But the same pattern began to emerge. Cohen, uncomfortable in a stable relationship, found it necessary to wander as his creativity appeared to become restricted."[16] This would imply that the poet himself requires a change of female figure in order to fuel his creativity. And his life is a testimony to this formula of having been involved with many women. For Cohen, then, perhaps

---

[15]Ibid., 346.
[16]Nadel, *Various Positions*, 234.

mysticism is not focused on a single relationship, as are traditional mystic's relations with God, but on many relationships.

In contrast to the 'saintly' phase of Cohen's earlier persona, in which he felt sabotaged in his holy pursuits, as a mystic he sometimes feels misunderstood and ultimately alone. Although a small step, this might be read as representing a small progression on the journey to mystic. As a 'mystic', he does not criticize his intimates for the difficulties of this particular spiritual path. Ultimately, however, this more 'careful' treatment of the feminine (i.e. the reverence of the female body) does not go so far as to recognize woman as subject. Instead, the woman is celebrated because of her ability to assist the persona in his own personal journey. The personas remain somewhat objective, if not detached from the female subjects and their concentration is directed more towards the powerful nature of the holy.

As noted in Chapter Two, there is a tendency within the Jewish tradition to conflate mysticism and prophecy. As stated, the mystical prophet is gifted with having access to the light, and is also willing and able to convey a message from the divine in the form of the spoken or written word. Conduits for the divine are sharing this knowledge with others, rather than focusing solely on themselves. The tone of the message is frequently political and contains moral overtones insofar as the mystical prophet scrutinizes the actions and motivations of his community. While the tone of the language may, at times, be accusatory and condemning, there is also an element of hope woven into the message. The prophet delivers a message that, in turn, invites the listener to make her/his own connections. That is, upon hearing the prophetic message, the listener believes that the message resonates with what (s)he holds to be true. The following stanza from Cohen's, "If It Be Your

Will" (1984) is a good example of the transition from the mystical to the prophetic voice:

> And draw us near
> and bind us tight,
> all your children here
> in their rags of light;
> in our rags of light,
> all dressed to kill;
> and end this night,
> if it be your will.[17]

The persona expresses a desire to connect with the divine in a meaningful way. In this work, there is a recognizable tone of inclusiveness where the speaker asks for a relationship with the divine for himself as well as others. While all God's children in their "rags of light" possess those qualities reflecting the Divine's image, their exile from the godhead is understood. The plea to "end this night" suggests a removal of the 'dark night of the soul' so that true communion may commence -- both amongst our collective selves, as well as with the Divine. In Jewish teachings, our divine constitution is abused when we do not honour its original source. The persona beseeches God to remove the ignorance prevalent amidst humanity so that humanity, in turn, will honour the Divine.

This shift in Cohen's work from the 'erotic' mystical to the more socially conscious 'political' mystical, or what is known as 'prophetic mysticism,' in my opinion, reflects the poet's increasing sophistication. Cohen's lyrics/poetry indicate that he has attained a certain degree of maturity -- as the poet moves beyond his own sensual experiences to consider the experience of a larger culture. The 'mystical' voice for Cohen continues to appear in his work and this, I believe, is one source of

---

[17]Ibid., 344.

his aesthetic appeal. Where traditionally prophetic messages may sometimes appear abrupt and strict, or a condemnation, metaphors employing love and light may serve to make the prophet's message more palatable for those within a Jewish-Christian culture.

PROPHECY

In the early 1980's, the themes of Leonard Cohen's messages began to noticeably shift from the sensuous to the political. The messages became more inclusive as Cohen begins to address modern society's increasing alienation of the individual. While there are still references to the man-woman relationship, Cohen's tone is not so much celebratory, nor decrying of the relationship between the sexes, but demonstrate the ways in which the man and woman are now positioned as political players with the potential for intimate convergence. In my reading, Cohen cultivates a prophetic voice and, in doing so, is able to generate a critical and effective message that goes beyond his personal experiences. Hence, in this sense, Cohen's works become decidedly more prophetic.

In "The Tower of Song" (1988), the persona locates himself in a tower where he is able to monitor the events in society and offer a commentary. His venture into the tower occurs only after having spent a great deal of time engaged in the activities of the world. In this song, the persona recounts several different phases of his life. One is the burned-out poet who, while once in love with women, now wants distance from them. Another is the prophet whose distant position grants him the opportunity to survey the situation and identify the ill-fated trends in humanity. With this particular song, Cohen adopts a sardonic tone where he is self-castigating about past sexual exploits but is also assured of his own abilities to prophesize.

The arena of love has become an area of expertise for the retired poet. Those 'playing grounds' of the body now ache with what could be considered excessive use or, perhaps, neglect in later years. Regardless of which alternative, the speaker here suggests that the focus of his love, his objective, has shifted from the woman to something higher:

> My friends are gone and my hair is grey.
> I ache in the places where I used to play.
> And I'm crazy for love, but I'm not coming on.
> I'm just paying my rent every day in the tower of song.
> . . . . . .
>
> So you can stick your little pins in that voodoo doll
> - I'm very sorry, baby, doesn't look like me at all.
> I'm standing by the window where the light is strong.
> They don't let a woman kill you, not in the tower of song.[18]

In the tower, the speaker is exempt from the power women once yielded over him. Her use of the doll made in his image is suggestive of the magical power she maintains over him; this kind of craft is effective if both parties believe in its power. The poet's interpretation of the doll and its power are somewhat facetious, noting that the puppet does not resemble him in the least. And besides, he is safe in the tower with God watching over him. The strong light from the window acts as both the source that at once reveals and protects him. It is not unlike a holy flood of light from which a message is heard and by which protection is granted.

In the final stanza of this song, the strung-out speaker/poet positions himself as tentative prophet:

> Now you can say that I've grown bitter, but of this you may be sure:
> The rich have got their channels in the bedrooms of the poor,

---

[18]Ibid., 363.

> and there's a mighty judgment coming, but I may be wrong.
> You see, you hear these funny voices in the tower of song.[19]

In keeping with the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, the speaker becomes a channel for the voices he hears. And while he is able to clearly state the forecast for the future, he then attempts to distil what he has claimed by questioning the validity of his message. Just as the Hebrew prophets occasionally questioned their contact with God, and worried about whether their audience would consider them to be true messengers, this modern prophet mistrusts the source of the message and infers that it may, in fact, be a form of psychosis. He 'sees' a powerful judgement arriving soon, but then again, he may have his information confused.

In the song "Everybody Knows" from *I'm Your Man* (1988), the prophet offers a commentary that is bleak in its conveyance of uniformity, and more importantly, in its ominous tone. The first stanza is as follows:

> Everybody knows that the dice are loaded. Everybody rolls with their fingers crossed. Everybody knows the war is over. Everybody knows the good guys lost. Everybody knows the fight was fixed: the poor stay poor, the rich get rich. That's how it goes. Everybody knows.[20]

Themes of conspiracy, triumph of evil over good, injustice and infidelity are all present in this poem. In fact, they appear to all be inter-related in their effect upon humanity; that is the problems seem to escalate and gain momentum instead of happening piece-meal. To hope for the best in dire circumstances is understandable; however, it is also an idle form of acceptance. The wars fought in anticipation of distributing the resources more evenly are ultimately controlled by the powerful. And those in power continuously demonstrate their reluctance to concede that others

---

[19]Ibid., 363-364.
[20]Ibid., 361.

are entitled to share in this power: the poor continue to get trampled as the wealthy profit from the impoverished.

As this type of tension in a culture begins to increasingly manifest, the opportunity for further disarray becomes apparent:

> Everybody knows that the Plague is coming. Everybody knows that it's moving fast. Everybody knows that the naked man and woman -- just a shining artifact of the past. Everybody knows the scene is dead, but there's going to be a metre on your bed that will disclose what everybody knows.[21]

A plague is the equalizer of humanity; it may strike any individual no matter what socio-economic position she/he may occupy. The sexual relationship between the man and the woman has been reduced to the status of a curious relic: love and intimacy are no longer attainable. *"The scene is dead,"* suggests that the man-woman relationship is an outmoded artifact as well as indicating that this same "scene" is a site for alienation.

What is interesting about the structure of this poem is how Cohen positions *"Everybody knows"* at the beginning of almost every sentence in the poem, as well as at the end of every stanza. The idea that everyone is aware of the corrupt nature of society is a commentary of how people witness depravity, but are ultimately unwilling to acknowledge the lax state of morality. Replacing God and His unique way of knowing, humanity is seen as ostensibly omniscient and yet frequently exercising corrupt judgements and actions based upon its knowledge. This is reminiscent of the Hebrew prophets warning against the notion of false gods. The prophet reminds us that there is only one all-knowing God. The song "First We

---

[21]Ibid., 361-362.

Take Manhattan" from *I'm Your Man* (1988), examines the growing tension in Western politics and the prevalence of these problems throughout the Western world:

> They sentenced me to twenty years of boredom for trying to
> change the system from within.
> I'm coming now, I'm coming
> to reward them. First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin.
> I'm guided by a signal in the heavens. I'm guided by the
> birthmark on my skin. I'm guided by the beauty of our
> weapons. First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin.[22]

The tone of this piece is essentially fundamentalist and the persona is prepared to exercise extremist actions based upon his cursory, if not simplistic, interpretation of cultural signs. The persona is no longer content to adhere to existing rules, and chooses instead an exceedingly aggressive posture to initiate change. The words of the combatant reveal someone who has hoped for political change. However, because the expectation has not been met, his attitude has now become self-righteous. This righteousness is located in the religious voice, an unyielding, dogmatic voice that does not lend itself to dialogue. The speaker sees himself as being chosen to initiate or force a change.

Commenting upon this song, Cohen notes that it "speaks of longing for change, impatience with the way things are, a longing for significance; we deal in the purest burning logic of longing."[23] He implies that no matter how much life becomes organized and manageable, there will always remain the desire for a meaningful existence. This 'meaning' cannot simply be extracted from what he understands is already in place; the meaning arises from releasing what he already understands in

---

[22]Ibid., 351.
[23]Nadel, *Various Positions*, 248.

order to make room for ambiguities that may include a divine order. The last stanza in the song illustrates the speaker's recently changed priorities:

> Remember me? I used to live for music
> Remember me? I
> brought your groceries in. It's Father's Day, and everybody's
> wounded. First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin.[24]

No longer does he live for the mere enjoyment of music, nor does he live for a domestic life which he experienced in the past. The reference to 'Father's Day' and the overall trauma felt by all is, in one way, referring to the dissolution of the nuclear family and the frequent absence of the father. On the other hand, 'Father's Day' is when we will witness the return of the Patriarch or God and acknowledge that we, as His children, have been injured by our own neglect of our Father. The criticism of societal structures and the message of God's judgement and return is, in essence, the prophetic agenda. To return to these old structures, however, is to reclaim a patriarchal society or sexist agenda where men control that society's resources.

In *The Future* (1993), Cohen's next major work, the speaker's prophetic voice becomes more confident and his statements are delivered with less invective. Cohen's work in the 1990's also becomes more sophisticated in its multilayeredness or ability to convey many messages at a given time. In the concluding portion of this chapter, we will see how many themes unfold at once in his songs. Not surprisingly, moreover, it is after the release of this last recording that Cohen is frequently cited as a religious figure.

---

[24]Cohen, *Stranger Music*, 351.

The title track from the recording "The Future" is decidedly prophetic in its language and apocalyptic in its tone. The speaker recounts those patterns of behavior once considered subversive and destructive as now commonplace and permissible. However, this 'permission' is delivered in an ominous tone, whereby he implies that those very freedoms many venerate are ultimately the same sources contributing to society's moral dissolution. The following stanza cites those provinces of sex and drugs as sites that have taken a destructive turn:

> Give me crack and anal sex
> Take the only tree that's left
> and stuff it up the hole
> in your culture
> Give me back the Berlin Wall
> give me Stalin and St. Paul
> I've seen the future, brother:
> it is murder.[25]

Where more liberal-minded individuals advocated the exploration of sexuality and narcotics, the speaker presents modern examples of how these two themes have become toxic in the self-serving pursuit of them. The highly addictive substance and the religiously condemned form of intercourse are, to some degree, forms of self-indulgence which not only affect the individual but the entire cultural make-up as well. The speaker cites the void in the Western world where cultural values are no longer clearly demarcated and therefore impossible to recognize in any absolute form. This collective sense of no longer knowing what is acceptable becomes treacherous to the individual and a sense of overwhelming alienation ensues. The growing sense of division and confusion is indicated in the song's refrain:

> Things are going to slide in all direction

---

[25]Ibid., 370.

Won't be nothing
Nothing you can measure any more
The blizzard of the world
has crossed the threshold
and it has overturned
the order of the soul
When they said REPENT
I wonder what they meant.[26]

The stormy state of the world now clouds any attempt to comprehend the underpinnings of society and, in particular, the actions of the western world have created a plethora of inexplicable occurrences, upsetting the initial plans a divine force may have had for the universe. In the past, repentance may have been considered a plausible solution for such transgression. The prophet finds such a solution confusing if not hopeless. Since he sees culture as devoid of an over-arching religious system, to consider the act of repentance or the asking of forgiveness is in effect little more than a plea directed to nothing or to no god in particular. If we no longer believe that a divine creator is responsible for the constitution of the physical world, then even the most eloquent pleas for intervention seem inappropriate.

In the following stanza, Cohen positions the speaker as a servant of God or prophet and states how he is required to deliver a message:

Your servant here, he has been told
to say it clear, to say it cold:
It's over, it ain't going
any further
And now the wheels of heaven stop
you feel the devil's riding crop
Get ready for the future;
it is murder.[27]

---

[26]Ibid., 370.
[27]Ibid., 371.

The gravity of the message necessitates that it be delivered in a concise and deliberate manner. In other words, the tone of the message from the prophet must be succinct in its call for change; there can be no room for any other kind of interpretation. This sense of urgency is reminiscent of Isaiah's warnings to the Israelites about the impending demise of their nation and inescapable slavery. A judgement has been rendered on humanity's actions and the possibility for forgiveness does not exist. Those pleasures once taken for granted, and those presumed boons from heaven will cease to exist. In its place will come evil and misfortune taking the place of propitious times. An example of the impending dread is conveyed in the following stanza:

> You'll see your woman
> hanging upside down
> her features covered by her fallen gown
> and all the lousy little poets
> coming round
> trying to sound like Charlie Manson.[28]

No one is safe now and those who were vulnerable to begin with become more pronounced targets for aggression. The woman, who was once mere property, hangs upside-down, hiding her facial features while her feminine features are left exposed. Moreover, the atrocity of this act will be ignored (even by the poets), as those who report on the incident will celebrate the woman's situation as a means to turn the circumstance into an opportunity for self-aggrandizement. The evocation of Charles Manson, and his terrifying ability to convince others that their merciless acts were indeed beneficial, is an acrimonious way of conveying the overall sense of indifference in a predominantly Jewish-Christian society.

---

[28]Ibid., 371.

"Democracy" (1993), from *The Future* is yet another song containing explicit prophetic utterances. To a large extent, the persona concentrates on present day and recently past episodes that deserve divine intervention. However, the persona recognizes the difficulties faced by the secular mind in entertaining something as abstract as divine intervention. In place of divine intervention, we see "democracy" as the saving force and the arrival of democracy as the secular equivalent of the biblical coming of the Lord. Throughout this song, the persona weaves together themes of equality, desperation, persecution, and resurrection.

Where once western humanity placed its faith in the 'Holy Spirit', democracy has become that source for hope and for freedom from injustice. Like a divine visitation, democracy is also a mysterious force that cannot be understood in its entirety. Democracy becomes an *ideal* in its fabrication. Ironically, in humanity's imagination democracy becomes a desire for something powerful and external -- a symbol that justifies who we are and what we are doing. The political propaganda of the western world holds its democratic ideals high. So long as we cling to the idea of a democratic state, then, justification for societal ills can only be placed upon the unfortunate individual. There is a freedom-granting system in place, a system within which all individuals ostensibly have the opportunity to extract justice.

However, as the persona points out, democracy has not yet taken its place in society. And more to the point, humanity seems incapable of constructing such an ideal as its very nature is more like a divine scheme. It is not unlike how the Israelites from the Hebrew Bible called upon Yahweh to eradicate the injustices suffered. Humanity's tendency is to locate the suffering, and then to identify the godhead that is powerful enough to eliminate the suffering, most popularly seen in the myth of the godhead's visitation. Democracy becomes this elusive force evoked

by the collective 'prayer' of the people. In the following stanza, the Western world is described as anticipating democracy's arrival and its ordering of society in a peaceful and just manner:

> It's coming from a hole in the air,
> from those nights in Tiananmen Square.
> it's coming from the feel
> that it ain't exactly real,
> or it's real, but it ain't exactly there.
> From the wars against disorder,
> from the sirens night and day;
> from the fires of the homeless,
> from the ashes of the gay:
> Democracy is coming to the U.S.A[29]

The pervasive feeling that evil exists and is amongst us is an idea that many resist: *"it's coming from the feel that this ain't exactly real, or it's real but it ain't exactly there"* Denial is chronic and democracy becomes the panacea for this ailment. Cohen, in the prophetic voice, insists that we consider carefully that which we deny, otherwise the problem(s) only become(s) more pronounced and the resulting wrath more fearsome.

To the Western mind, the Tiananmen Square demonstration and subsequent slaying of the protesters was an outright attack on the democratic principle. In the Western world, the invalidation of the democratic ideal is likened to destroying good and imposing evil. Therefore, those states where democracy is not established as *the* saving force, become, to some extent, demonized to those who live in more 'democratic' parts. According to the prophet, such an idealization is, once more, a false god and only reinforces the difficulties in getting to know the real God. The

---

[29]Ibid., 367.

prophet demands that we examine our own social issues and act to correct the injustices, for in such a state, there are people who lack homes while others enjoy an excess of material wealth. And the principle of equality is once again tarnished when one thinks of the condemnation of homosexuals demonstrated in the hideous act of 'gay bashing'. The persona's hope is conveyed in the idea that democracy is an impending force -- one that is infiltrating the United States. And there remains the hope that these injustices may too be eradicated.

This concludes my analysis of Cohen's poetry and songs. I have looked at his work spanning from the 1960's up until the early 1990's and have suggested that an analysis of Cohen's works is readily linked to the religious categories of saint, mystic and prophet throughout his career. That is, Cohen's early poetry demonstrates an admiration of the self-discipline and denial required of a saint, in which his male personae struggle with the ideal that they too can live the life of a saint. The problems that arise constellate around carnal desire, with female figures representing constant sources of temptation. At this point, the poems lament the weakness of the personae's inability to remain sexually abstinent, and demonstrate how this disappointment is displaced onto the denigration of the female (body), rather than assessed as demonstrating the individual's own inherent weaknesses.

Moving to considerations of the mystic and mysticism, there is a canon of erotic mystical poetry that can be drawn upon, as well as poems that attempt to recount the union with the godhead. However, the mystics of the Western religious traditions are, in general, considered to have lived austere lives, which were devoted to knowing their godhead and not a fleshly beloved. Cohen's mystical body of works celebrates the union with the divine; however the divine here is feminine and the union is a sexual and/or metaphorically sexual one. Yet, while sex becomes a

potential location for divine consecration, the worshipper no longer pursues the divine realm, but rather the divine itself appears to bless the worshipper(s). Furthermore, in contrast to the saintly phase in which the female body was reviled, Cohen now celebrates the female body as potentially allowing the poet to transcend his mundane life. But this is not to be confused nor conflated with traditional understandings of mystical practice. Although Cohen is quite adept at describing sexual unions in a mystical tone, his descriptions do not quite fit into a conventional understanding of who constitutes a mystic.

His last album, *The Future*, is especially prophetic as it offers an illuminating and rather complicated interpretation of the western world in the late twentieth-century. Cohen seems to have moved from the personal realm into the public forum in the content of his music and poetry, thus conveying a certain degree of maturity on the poet's part. He no longer seems as consumed with the male/female relationship and, instead, is examining societal ills in a profound and serious manner. What is interesting about Cohen's prophetic voice is that it has evolved in the context of a heavy discipline of Zen meditational practice. In 1996, Cohen became an ordained Zen monk and now resides in Mount Baldy Zen centre, in the mountains 50 miles south of Los Angeles. He has studied Zen with master Joshu Sasaki Roshi for over twenty-five years and attributes this relationship and a steady Zen practice as key factors in his personal development and emotional stability. The form of teaching Cohen observes is Rinzai Zen, an undoubtedly stringent form of Buddhism. When Cohen speaks of his observance of Buddhism, his respect for this eastern tradition seems both careful and genuine:

> When one asks him of the seeming spread of soft Buddhism throughout he showbiz world, Leonard Cohen laughs softly: "This sort of practice will never become trendy. It's too hard.

> It's not exactly religion. Men need religion, because man needs something to hang on to. So if you consider the canon of the sutras or the image of God as a separate, objective thing, so much the better if it works for you. In any event, I feel that the great religions have reached their capacity of believers and that a great many people are searching for alternate forms of worship. Here, there's no worship. Even though I've been living like this for sometime, I have never considered myself a Buddhist. Two years ago Roshi told me, 'In the twenty years that I've known you, Leonard, I've never tried to convert you. I've been content to serve you sake.'"[30]

Cohen has found a formula that seems to work: he combines his Jewish heritage and Jewish-Christian experience with the discipline of Zen meditation and the result has been a prophetic insight into the state of affairs. But as Nadel suggests, one of Cohen's talents has been the ability to adapt different positions, different voices. Thus, will the continued exploration of Leonard Cohen reveal yet another incarnation of yet another *holy figure?* The following excerpt from an (officially) unreleased poem by Cohen in recent years, called "A Thousand Kisses Deep" indicates some fundamental Buddhist observations, particularly the subject of immateriality:

> No matter if the road is long
> No matter if it's steep
> No matter if the moon is gone
> and the darkness is complete
> No matter if we lose our way,
> it's written that we'll meet.
> At least that's what I heard you say
> a thousand kisses deep.[31]

---

[30] Gilles Tordjmann, "Story With No Moral - Cohen Between Earth and Sky," trans. Keith Campbell *Les Inrockuptibles, France,* March 15, 1995, 2. http://www.netsonic.fi/~ja/cohen/

[31] Jon Pareles, "At Lunch with Leonard Cohen," *The New York Times,* Wednesday, October 11, 1995, 1. http://www.netsonic.fi/~ja/cohen/

"No matter" or the Buddhist creed of essential 'nothingness' winds its way through the poem and links together themes of 'mystical' loss and scriptural authority. This time, however, the persona is not afraid that the "darkness is complete"; the persona is essentially detached now from life's inevitable swings. This is not to suggest that he is indifferent, but rather that his position, and his point of view have changed. There will always be elements of struggle and loss in the human experience, but these are spliced with moments of profound meaning and connection. The assurance of the change from bleakness to joy is conveyed in the words, "it's written that we'll meet". And the source from which the persona receives his insight -- is characteristically Cohen in its commingling of the sensual and the spiritual -- it is *"a thousand kisses deep."*

CHAPTER FOUR

Thus far I have examined theoretical considerations of aesthetics, religious labels and the work Cohen has produced over the last three decades. While there is a slight overlapping of these topics, I suggest that the connections between them may be understood best in the context of an analysis of popular culture. Cohen's own place in popular culture is significant since he is associated with several, yet different, important religious titles. A cursory examination of his poetry reveals only glimpses of those characteristics that constitute saint, mystic and prophet. The purpose of this chapter is to look at that medium known as popular culture and understand how it seems to work in both an oppositional and complementary way to religious organization or, more specifically, to religious qualifications, and the implications of this for the work of Leonard Cohen. This chapter is complicated in that the consideration of pop culture necessitates the consideration of other factors such as identity, alienation, and New Age Spirituality. While these themes will be interwoven throughout the chapter, I use Cohen's life and work as both an illustration and a back-drop to these ideas.

The definition of 'culture' is complex when notions of identity are considered. First, when looking at any one culture, there are several factors to consider: art, technology, educational, political, and, religious institutions, and media structures. In a healthy and thriving culture, the individual has the opportunity to cull his/her conscious identity from the traditional structures that constitute that culture. However, a culture possesses the ability to "form us in its own image and likeness rather than in the image and likeness of personhood from which culture has its

derivation."[1] If a culture is left to its own dynamic, if it goes unquestioned and is not scrutinized, then it risks becoming the dominant force informing our consciousness, or lack thereof. And, of course, any ideology or structure embraced in its totality, without the benefit of reflection, is indeed suspect.

It would seem that the way to discern the validity or worthiness of any one culture would be to dissect that culture into its constituent parts and examine each of the parts on their own merit. To some degree this form of analysis is already in place in our academic tradition. In his 1996 study of the Canadian culture, Tom Henighan states that contemporary Western culture has been divided into two camps: high culture and low culture, the former known as elite culture and the latter as popular culture. Elite culture speaks to very few. The elite, in general, tend to enjoy more privileges such as higher education and economic security, while those located in the popular category do not enjoy these privileges as consistently.[2] Moreover, pop culture is suspect in some academic circles insofar as the very quality of its subject is assumed to be less worthy of serious consideration. Henighan finds these categories limiting and, as a means to remedy this, fashions new categories or lenses for viewing the Canadian cultural scene. I find Henighan's as well as other scholars' recent works on different approaches to the analysis of pop culture useful - - particularly for the analysis of pop culture, as well as for its affiliation to religion and aesthetics.

Henighan cites the new categories of culture as 'aesthetic culture' and 'entertainment culture,' the first referring to 'high' culture and the second to 'low'

---

[1]John Kavanaugh, "Capitalist Culture as a Religious and Educational Formation System," *Religious Education* 78 (Winter 1983): 52.
[2]Tom Henighan, *The Presumption of Culture: Structure, Strategy and Survival in the Canadian Landscape* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 1996) 3.

culture. While both types of culture are respected in terms of their complexities, Henighan's definitions allow for the overlapping of the categories. For instance, when Henighan discusses a 'blending' of the two, he describes how aesthetic culture may sometimes include parts of entertainment culture. An example of the intersection of both types of culture at work may be found in the poetry of Leonard Cohen. I assert that the predominant reason for his success as an entertainer is his ability to make aesthetic forms accessible.

The following anecdote relayed by an English professor helps to illustrate this point about Cohen's appeal. In the mid 1960's, a highly politicized time in our culture, Professor Birk Sproxton attempted to involve his undergraduate students in a discussion of one of Leonard Cohen's most famous poems/songs "Suzanne". The lines in the poem that were under scrutiny are as follows: "And just when you mean to tell her / that you have no love to give her / she gets you on her wavelength / and she lets the river answer / that you've always been her lover."[3] The dialogue between instructor and students unfolds as follows:

> Sproxton: "What is her wavelength?"
> A student: (disbelieving) "Well, you know, she turns him on."
> Sproxton: (parroting) "How do we know the speaker is male? Is there evidence *in* the poem? Is the speaker a radio or TV or some kind of device that she can turn on?"
> Another student: "Can't we just like the poem?"
> Sproxton: "But don't you like to understand what you like? Don't you get pleasure from thinking?"[4]

---

[3] Leonard Cohen, *Stranger Music* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1993), 95.
[4] Birk Sproxton, "Reading Leonard Cohen: Reprise," *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* Vol.33 (Fall-Winter 1993): 122. Sproxton recounts how some students in this particular class heard their professor's urging and later presented what they considered to be an 'befitting' gift to their cerebral professor. As Sproxton describes: " I walked into class to find a red and yellow beanie ringed with a border of fuzzy antenna-like appendages, a shimmering array of pipe-cleaners. Beside the be-

To find that Cohen's work is being studied in a university literature class is not surprising; after all, Cohen was a published poet for several years before becoming a singer-songwriter. What I find interesting are the students' responses to their literature professor who encourages intellectual analysis of Cohen's work. In short, they would rather not engage on this level. Their resistance to intellectualize Cohen's work, I would suggest, is tied up to a preference to experience Cohen in a different context; they enjoy Cohen's aesthetic and they do not wish to 'understand' it more by dissecting it. The students, apparently, would rather enjoy Cohen's work as a whole.

This resistance to analyze the aesthetic experience is not unlike Plotinus's ideas on aesthetics and his call to allow the work of art its integrity. For, as Plotinus advised, "Only a compound can be beautiful, never anything devoid of parts; and only a whole..."[5] Moreover, the student's reluctance towards applying a rational analysis to this poem may indicate their resistance to analysing the erotic content as well. It is interesting to note, however, that in his examination of recent Canadian statistics on the correlation between higher education and sensitivity to the arts, Henighan recounts that in recent years, higher education has less to do with an increase in sensitivity to the arts.[6] In contrast, Henighan suggests that the aesthetic experience is comparable to a lesson in wisdom:

> Art at its greatest suggests an intrinsic order in the universe, a higher reality, a beauty and goodness that take us as close to the infinite as does the wisdom of the greatest spiritual teachers and

---

decked beanie was a note: "Thinking Cap, Complete with Wavelengths."

[5] *Plotinus,* "Ennead I/Sixth Tractate/Beauty," *Philosophies,* 142.

[6] Ibid., 12. Henighan states that during the sixties, seventies and eighties, Canadian culture experienced a surge in growth. This was due to factors such as economic prosperity, increasing urbanization, and population diversity.

> mystics. True art is intrinsically "anti-evil," because it refuses to simplify life, to override it in the name of slogans, of mechanism, because it refuses to accept superficial categories of morality.[7]

Since popular culture is often associated with 'slogans' and 'superficiality', my claim that a personality such as Leonard Cohen is a source of great art, whose works provide or offer vehicles for aesthetic/spiritual experience, becomes complicated. Cohen himself conveys an awareness of these complexities: "I usually rewrite songs for a long time, sometimes for years, I keep trying to uncover what it is I am trying to say, I know that if I stop too soon I'll end up with 'slogans'."[8] I would suggest, then, that Cohen's lyrics may be presented as exceptions to the superficial forms generally associated with popular culture. This is to say that aesthetic forms are in and of themselves valuable and are not insignificant.

I have already argued that Cohen does not quite constitute a mystic. Yet, might he be positioned as a spiritual teacher? The new category of 'spiritual teacher' is in keeping with recent testimony to the New Age Movement, or what has come to be known as New Age Spirituality. In her article titled, "New Age Spirituality", Ruth Tucker observes how the Movement is essentially eclectic in nature with its roots in the Christian tradition and its incorporation of elements from Eastern mysticism.[9] Curiously, the term *New Age* is ambiguous in itself, and Tucker demonstrates this ambiguity by citing one journalist's use of the term from a 1987 Time magazine article:

---

[7] Henighan, *Presumption*, 72.
[8] Leonard Cohen, quoted in Robert Hillburn, "Robert Hillburn Interviews Leonard Cohen: A Master's Reflections on His Music," *The Times Mirror Company Los Angeles Times,* Sunday, September 24,1995, http://www.seas.upenn.edu/~cpage/cohen/hilburn.html.
[9] Ruth A.Tucker, "New Age Spirituality," *Reformed Review* 45 (Aut.1991): 22.

> All in all, the New Age does express a cloudy sort of religion, claiming vague connections with both Christianity and the major faiths of the East, plus an occasional dab of pantheism and sorcery. The underlying faith is a lack of faith in the orthodoxies of rationalism, high technology, routine living, spiritual law-and-order. Somehow, the New Agers believe, there must be some secret and mysterious shortcut or alternative path to happiness and health. And nobody really dies.[10]

This underlying current of impatience on the part of New Agers with the religious process and the desire for a quick fix for happiness and health would seem to play into a preoccupation with issues of identity and wholeness. As Tucker further notes, "the lay mentality is one of the chief characteristics of New Age spirituality."[11] In other words, religious authorities are no ionger relied upon nor are religious canons strictly observed. In fact, Tucker notes that traditional authoritative texts like the Bible are reinterpreted to fit the New Age ideology that incorporate eastern ideas on reincarnation.[12] While New Age philosophy advocates instant enlightenment in contrast to the slow and often painstaking process that traditional religions describe, it also tends to be available to more than a small group of elite. That is, while New Age philosophy advocates community and belonging, as traditional religions do, it also allows the individual spiritual autonomy.

Cohen himself acknowledges that he has dabbled in different religious forms throughout his life.[13] Indeed, he would probably not be considered as interesting to

---

[10] Ibid., 24. (Originally taken from) Otto Friedrich, "New Age Harmonies," *Time,* December 7, 1987, 64.
[11] Tucker, *New Age*, 25.
[12] Ibid., 27.
[13]Leonard Cohen quoted in Arthur Kurzweil, Pamela Roth, "Leonard Cohen Stranger Music: Selected Poems and Songs," *The Jewish Book News Interview,* Oct 31, 1994, 4. http://www.serve.com/cpage/LCohen/interview.html. Cohen is quoted as saying that he has, "[N]ever been interested in a new religion. When I was young I investigated

pop culture's adherents had he just remained within the Jewish tradition. What I find interesting in Cohen's reflections on his religious experimentations, however, is his claim of ongoing allegiance to his Jewish tradition:

> There was something in it [Judaism] for me. I still had to go whoring after false gods, and maybe I'm still in the bed of one, but there was something about what I saw. I grew up in a Catholic city, and my Catholic friends have horror stories about what Catholicism is, and my Jewish friends have horror stories about what Judaism is...I never had them. I never rebelled against my parents. Even when I was taking acid and living at the Chelsea Hotel and feeling miserable about myself, it never occurred to me once to blame my situation on my family, my city, my religion, or my tribe. So, I always thought it was great -- what they were practicing -- and I've tried to keep it up in my own half-assed way.[14]

Cohen's own form of alienation was not, then, a rejection of Judaism's symbols and a lack of meaning. His own brand of alienation is likely to have stemmed more from an inability or unwillingness to buy into his culture's values. It is interesting that the aficionado of Cohen's work is essentially revering a Jewish man well grounded in his faith, an adept with religious language who has been attributed a religious persona by the popular culture.

Clint Burnham suggests that modern society is no longer concerned with issues of survival so much as it is preoccupied with technology and technological advancement.[15] Ironically, the main sentiment of this preoccupation, according to Burnham, is fear of technology and media. Karl Marx's own observations on the

---

various forms that were around, you know, stuff, because it was there. You know, you'd meet a girl or someone and go on their trip" 3.

[14] Ibid., 4.

[15] Clint Burnham, "How Postmodern is Cohen's Poetry?" *Canadian Poetry* 33 (Fall-Winter 1993): 69.

growing abundance of material goods coincided with a growing sense of alienation within Western culture:

> In capitalism with its emphasis on private exchange and market economy, alienation inverts the subject-object relationship and as a result, man is ruled by the objects he produces. Instead of leading man to self-realization, objectification in a capital-dominated society causes alienation.[16]

Although Marxist theory is a commentary on the alienation of workers in a capitalist economy, his invention of the term 'alienation' is now applied liberally in many different academic disciplines. In the book, "Alienation and Charisma", Nicholas Churchich suggests that Marx's definition of alienation may be characterized by one or several of the following: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, value isolation, self-estrangement, and social isolation.[17] For my purposes, I will concentrate on a lack of meaning, whereby an individual senses a 'void' specifically in the religious or philosophical context pertaining to his/her own identity.

In North American culture, individuals continuously generate new symbols through which they come to terms with the problematic character of alienation or of life in a universe whose pattern and meaning seemed to be continually elusive and shifting.[18] According to Ched Myers, "popular culture has arisen from the alienation of people displaced specifically by capitalism. Most of us have had our populist culture taken from us; we no longer know our tribal language, dance, or

---

[16] Nicholas Churchich, *Marxism and Alienation* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990), 36.
[17] Benjamin D. Zablocki, *Alienation and Charisma*: A Study of Contemporary American Communes (New York: The Free Press, 1980), 8-9.
[18] Williams, *Popular*, 4.

dress."[19] Further, Myers suggests that we re-invent these cultural components in what might become recognized as subcultural codes, or variations on earlier forms. In the instance of traditional religious institutions, then, it would follow that new forms of religious signifiers (although still recognizable) would evolve even in an alienated culture. Hence the phenomenon that contemporary religious figures may evolve from our traditional notions to something more palatable to those individuals seeking meaning in familiar forms.

One question in the study of the products of popular culture is whether its products create social attitudes and beliefs, or, merely give expression to existing ones.[20] Myers makes his own important distinctions in the area of pop culture with his divisions that include the categories of 'mass' (consumerist) and 'populist' (folk) culture.[21] It is within these categories that he hopes to address the *quality* of a cultural item. This task of assessing the 'quality' of anything will prove to be somewhat of a subjective task. However, if the criterion of personal engagement is introduced (i.e. that the individual is enhanced somehow), I would suggest a cultural item contains some significance. One modern criticism of mass culture is its demands of passivity by its audience. The participants of mass culture, then, are reduced to mere spectators or consumers. On the other hand, populist, or folk culture begs that we 'play along,' and by taking part, one has the opportunity to learn

---

[19]Ched Myers, "A People's Culture of the United States," *Sojourners* No. 23 (June 1994): 26. Generally speaking, pop culture is associated with those artistic creations which are produced for commercial use by the standardizing, duplicating mass media.
[20]Forshey, "Studies", 24. There is no empirical theory of social psychology that purports to predict individual behavior even from a full biography, much less from how one reacts to a given artistic stimulus. (See Forshey, "Studies", 25)
[21]Myers, *Sojourners*, 26. According to Myers, there is an emphasis on consumption and enjoyment in our culture rather than production and discipline.

one's Jewish-Christian historical traditions by participating in its ritual expressions.[22] The following lyrics of Cohen's serve to illustrate this point:

> The wars they will
> be fought again
> The holy dove
> be caught again
> bought and sold
> and bought again;
> the dove is never free.[23]

The evocation of the holy spirit with the mention of the dove and its continuous bondage appeals to the Biblical imagination. That is, it elicits many tales of servitude through humanity's exploitations and freedom via holy grace. One way in which the knowledge of the Biblical myths become apparent to us is in the attendance of Church / Synagogue since their recounting becomes a part of the ritual of the service. That is, through the repetition of the myths, these become familiar stories; and we become aligned with our Jewish-Christian historical tradition as we hear those same stories that our ancestors heard. To some degree, these stories help us to understand who we are, as contemporary social codes and mores evolved out of the Biblical tradition.

This experience of the new which summons up the old and remote is not unlike Gadamer's ideas on 'play' -- where a work of art may be experienced anew with each visitation. Firmly grounded in a tradition, the work both transcends time and locates itself in the exact moment of its historical positioning. That is to say, the work becomes something that is recreated with each new experience, no matter what the

---

[22] Ibid., 25.
[23] Cohen, *Stranger Music.*, 373.

epoch. To further illustrate Gadamer's notions on 'play', I will use the example of a Leonard Cohen concert. The milieu of the concert provides a possible forum for an audience's shared perceptions. The poetry and music have the potential to draw the individuals' experience together into a familiar order that not only relates them to their histories, but also plays upon their memories. The audience may respond to the lyric and the music at the same moment and discover that their individual joy has become magnified.[24] This, as Tom Henighan suggests, is where joy becomes magnified and echoed back to them from other souls. Therefore, a collective aesthetic experience may be taking place in the context of the concert. Contrary to the passive experience where participants do not engage with the 'play' or performance, this concert experience reveals a shared and therefore heightened encounter.

This framework for the appreciation of art would seem to arise from a consideration of the historical context and the individual's self-consciousness, a position that is in keeping with Heidegger's and Gadamer's ideas on aesthetics. This suggests that the notion of history is crucial for an understanding of art -- the subject/object must be examined in its historical positioning. The following quote by Henighan locates the aesthetic experience:

> The aesthetic experience works to evoke valuable strands of complex memories while simultaneously revealing our historicity as members of our society and as participants in our unique epoch. Even in the event where the experience of the art has failed to provide that transcendent experience, the glimpse at the possibility and diversity of experience confirms the open nature of our experience.[25]

---

[24]Henighan, *Presumption of Culture*, 40
[25]Ibid., 39-40.

For Henighan, then, every aesthetic experience constitutes a possible avenue for a transcendent experience; and, every aesthetic encounter reminds us that our ability to experience art in and of itself is powerful. What he describes is not unlike Heidegger's 'primal sense of wonder' which Heidegger sees as the great casualty of our culture. For Heidegger, this primal sense has been over-shadowed by the glorification of rationality to the near exclusion of the mysterious. Moreover, this excessive concern with rationalism has contributed to the growing alienation of the individual, as the worship of reason seems to have effectively eclipsed any regard for emotion. Henighan also reiterates Heidegger's ideas on art as a source of truth. For both men:

> Great art speaks to and affirms the human condition, and though it can be understood as part of history and as the expression of a certain individual in a certain place, it transcends its origins and touches the universal -- otherwise it remains a mere document, a historical artifact of limited usefulness and interest. [26]

In the article "Inward Muse", Donald Hall suggests that the secularizing process generally results in the 'desacralization' of the world and 'overdetermination', or that the continuous application of rational constructs has become the norm in modern society.[27] This identification of 'overdetermination' is suggestive of Heidegger's and Gadamer's ideas on the crippling nature of our intellectual constructs. Using the example of the word 'snow', Hall suggests that the very life, the very *essence* of snow has been rendered innocuous through its treatment in the language. One

---

[26] Henighan, *Presumption of Culture*, 4-5. According to Henighan, there is a canon of great artworks that rises above the interests of any class or group, and if we fail to sustain contact with that canon, we destroy our culture.

[27] Donald Hall, "The Inward Muse," in *The Poet as Critic* ed. Frederick McDowell (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 86.

solution, according to Hall, for the poet to combat overdetermination is by assuming that his/her subject is, as of yet, unrecognized. This calls to mind the long and arduous process that Cohen claims for himself when constructing his poems. In returning to his works again and again, Cohen begins to peel back or reveal the hidden essence of his topic(s). This potential state of recognition is suggestive of Heidegger's *Being*: a location from which things unfold naturally. Here we see how the literary and the philosophical or religious may, in a sense, blend into one another as each attempts to describe a mysterious source that, in turn, helps to articulate both the mysterious and the mundane in life. For as M.L. Rosenthal relates in his definition of effective poetry: "All real poetry, even when difficult or complex, has much to say that comes from the depths of normal life."[28]

In the article "Alienation and Apostasy", Wade Clark Roof discusses the societal trends in the 1970's in the United States involving religious defection or the collective 'dropping out' of religious institutions. Andrew Greely also identifies this same phenomena as 'religious disidentification'. But does the instance of withdrawal from their religious roots suggest that individuals may essentially forget their religious past? Or do these individuals harbour a memory of the religious symbols and text, which they cannot help but retrieve, and which influence their future philosophical attractions? Heidegger and Gadamer insist that we are products of our historical context and cannot easily opt out. If religion presents some ideological problems for some, and if they choose to no longer identify with it, despite a desire to discard that past framework, it will inevitably inform the choice(s) of their next ideological commitment.

---

[28] M.L. Rosenthal, *Poetry and the Common Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1974), 16.

There are several reasons cited as to why these people might be abandoning their religious identities, one which Roof cites as being a growing climate of apathy. As he notes, individuals became increasingly disapproving of the present political, religious and moral structures. The countercultural movement of the 1960's questioned and discarded many of those notions previously taken for granted by American culture. Youth in the 1960's were questioning their culture's ideologies and they became suspicious of existing systems as sentiments since lies, intolerance and hatred were increasingly exposed. The Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal were two of the more obvious examples of attempts at the blatant deception of the American public. The countercultural reaction to this deception was the emergence of new philosophical stances where existing institutional truths were carefully scrutinized for their use and integrity. As values and attitudes were shifting and changing, the doctrine of the religious institutions and their religious leaders were also being considered in a different light. Individuals in the countercultural movement, in general, mistrusted any one person or institution claiming sole knowledge of any subject. In those instances where the clergy failed to respond to the cultural climate, the reaction for some of these questioners was to drop out of their churches or synagogues. This is perhaps why Leonard Cohen's work would be considered appealing. Cohen's use of religious imagery may invoke some of those stories and/or experiences of the former religious adherent. In the early 1980's, Roof indicated that religious defection would taper off in the near future since, as he claims, it was unlikely that a new morality could ever replace the old.[29] Roof apparently did not recognize the growing New Age Spirituality Movement, although

---

[29]Wade Clark Roof, *Alienation and Apostasy*, in "In Gods We Trust" Eds. Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1981), 98.

there may be some validity to the idea that a new morality has not evolved. In fact, in consideration of New Age Spirituality, this lack of a moral code may be its greatest short-coming.

John Kavanaugh presents an alternative model for those coming out of the counter-cultural movement who claim alienation from their religious traditions. Kavanaugh cites that the problem with the countercultural movement is the stress on individual's identity at the expense of a cohesion that is a given in the religious traditions. The role that religion has traditionally assumed in shaping the individual's and community's sense of identity has been referred to by Bryan Wilson as the latent function of religion. In contrast to the standard, longstanding question that religion has posed: "What must I/we do to be saved?", the more recent New Age query is: "Who am I or Who are we?"[30] In the case of Leonard Cohen, the poet, perhaps, indicates an individual's search for identity. The fact that Cohen utilizes religious language to describe this modern quest may help to explain why he is described by traditional religious labels.

Religion and religiosity, however, cannot be analyzed in a vacuum. Although they may possess their own unique structures and distinctions, particular manifestations of religion/religiosity reflect and in turn influence all other aspects of culture. Returning to Ched Myer's discussion on popular culture, particularly his distinctions between mass and populist culture, this may provide a location for a discussion of religion and the evolution of New Age Spirituality. Meyers suggests that populist culture has especially dissipated in this last century, in effect dissolving those traditional forms of language, dance and dress - - or those elements that make

---

[30] Gregor T. Goethals, "Ritual and Representation of Power in High and Popular Art," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 4 (Sum 1990): 172.

a group unique. I would suggest that the traditional religious forms also fit into this populist category, as the traditional religious institutions have always clearly delineated their activities (i.e. language, dance and dress). According to Myers, when this populist culture is no longer in place, it is not that the cultural components disappear altogether, but rather the components will appear in a new context. This new context, or mass culture, allows for a degree of complacency of its participants. Those individuals in mass culture are not encouraged to truly engage with the medium, but instead become attracted to the medium for its variety and its apparent willingness to break with convention. Mass culture does not offer new forms, but instead 'borrows' the existing forms from populist culture and divests the populist forms of their integrity. In other words, those forms of populist culture are frequently exposed to the appropriation of the mass culture. An example of this appropriation, I suggest, occurs to some extent with New Age Spirituality. The adherents of New Age practices are, in effect, borrowing practices from many different traditions. New Agers may be seen as more eclectic and without any rigorous stipulations for conformity to any one tradition. This may be illustrated by the lack of a common moral understanding or teaching, in general, amongst New Age Adherents.

Peter Williams defines popular religion as those religious activities which are not directly provided by the formally organized bodies to which they belong.[31] This means that although an activity may be clearly religious, that activity is not necessarily carried out in a traditional religious context. In order to exist, popular

---

[31]Peter W. Williams, *Popular Religion in America: Symbolic Change and the Modernization Process in Historical Perspective*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall. (1989): 3. "Extra-ecclesiastical" is also terminology used to describe what happens to religion outside the churches, or, more specifically, outside its organized social forms.

religion needs to appeal to the element of continuity -- the religious images, symbols, myths, rituals, behavioral patterns -- which people in a specific community share. In a more theoretical vein, Catherine Albanese suggests that the study of popular religion, becomes the study of the enduring religious forms that appeal to a constituency which may include both the common and the elite community.[32] In other words, religion becomes popularized to the extent that it is available to everyone and knows no such social/economic/political distinction. This would mean that neither the priest nor the rabbi would be the exclusive interpreter of the tradition and its scriptures. Traditional religious insitutions would open up to embrace not only other interpretations but other sources for religious inspiration and meaning as well. The notion with this form of popular religion was a shift towards a more egalitarian practice, however, the basic structures of Christian and Jewish religious institutions would be left intact.

While Albanese and other writers in the 1980's were tracking the shifts in Western religious practices, the current form of New Age Spirituality seems to have manifested beyond the traditional religious confines. Furthermore, 'popular religion', I would suggest, has evolved into that form which we now recognize as New Age Spirituality, and claims the potential to address both the popular and elitist cultures. However, the New Age Movement is yet in its infancy and it is indeed difficult to track who its practitioners are. Ruth Tucker notes that while many Americans now practice 'alternative' forms of religious activities, very few will identify themselves as 'New Agers.'[33] Simply speaking, the medium of pop culture,

---

[32]Catherine L. Albanese, "The Study of American Popular Religion: Retrospect and Prospect," *Explor* 7: 9 -15 (1984): 12-13.
[33] Tucker, *New Age*, 68.

and in particular its consumerist side may be supporting New Age ideology and the exploration/exploitation of alternative religious forms. There would appear to be an element of superficiality when spiritual pursuits are advocated through the material means of pop culture.

It would seem that in both popular religion and its off-shoots of spirituality, 'privatization' is one of its marked characteristics. For many people, the experience of the integration of the self with the universe, or the achievement of a sense of internal harmony has been achieved (or approximated) not in the context of formal institutions, but rather by oneself or in a small group.[34] This is not unlike the individualistic mystical experience wherein the practitioner experiences a solitary sense of transport or insight, or a momentary glimpse into the nature of Being.

When adventures of the spirit, once associated with institutionalized forms of faith and practice, were transferred to artistic activity, the expression of the religious imagination became private rather than communal. Goethals claims that during the nineteenth and especially the twentieth centuries, spiritually inclined artists have altered not only the content and form of religious symbols but also their function and location.[35] As a result, both the aesthetic creation and aesthetic appreciation have become for many an experience of personal salvation.[36] The question of a 'private experience', one that also resists conceptualization within linguistic frameworks, will always be reminiscent of the academic's and theologian's lament of mysticism. How are we to prove that these individuals who claim a mystical experience are truly having one? Moreover, do these 'experiences' themselves really amount to

---

[34]Williams, *Popular*, 16.
[35] Goethals, *Ritual*, 156.
[36] Ibid.,156.

anything of value that might be considered useful for the public as well as the individual? This evokes a longstanding concern of academics and theologians in their analyses of mystics: can the mystical experience be considered anything other than a self-serving, escapist route which rarely considers humanitarian issues? Or does the very nature of mysticism necessitate that the mystic live in solitude and therefore never involve him/herself in a religious community? I would suggest that the countercultural movement found its religious niche in the mystical tradition. By 'mystical' I am implying that this is a diluted version of a more 'authentic' mystical experience that is presented in traditional mystical writings. Perhaps individuals in the countercultural movement, in their attempts to free themselves from the bonds of the Churches and Synagogues by embracing 'popular religion', were merely choosing those elements, or appropriating components of their own traditions to suit their own, individualistic tastes. Or, on the other hand, perhaps the individual's recovery of those religious elements that contain personal meaning suggest a reclaiming of that dimension in an aesthetic mode, thereby allowing an individual to experience Heidegger's 'primal sense of wonder'.

For the lover of poetry, then, as Heidegger and Gadamer would claim, this individual has the desire and the medium (through the poetic word) to experience a deeper meaning; he/she attempts to grasp at the elusive by entering into the language of poetry. Cohen himself admits:

> I don't think poetry is for everybody. In its pure form it's like bee pollen. I feel that way about poetry. The honey of poetry is all over the place. It is in the writing of the National Geographic, when an idea is absolutely clear and beautiful; it's in the movies: it's all over because the taste of significance is that which we call poetry, when something resonates with a particular kind of significance. We may not call it poetry but we've experienced

> poetry. It's got something to do with truth and rhythm and authority and music.[37]

In the case of Leonard Cohen then, perhaps the religious labels ascribed to him are misplaced. Having said that the religious or spiritual experience of late twentieth-century tends towards the 'private', and Cohen has certainly demonstrated an appreciation for privacy in his life, then perhaps his leadership consists of using the poetic voice to encourage his audience to see beyond the mundane. But this leads me back to the question of whether Cohen's nature could be described as 'religious' *per se*, or whether it is more accurate to describe him as a spiritual guide; one who may direct the spirit by providing the vehicle of his poetry. And more importantly, could Leonard Cohen's works be considered transformative whereby his readers/listeners are essentially prompted to change their actions or belief systems? It would seem that an essential characteristic of any religious leader would be the quality of his/her teachings. It is within the instruction or teachings of an individual where issues of morality and compassion are most obviously offered. I would not consider Leonard Cohen's poetry as instructive. I would however, suggest that it is essentially evocative. Cohen is a skillful and gifted poet who has captured the imaginations of many in his use of familiar religious imagery and symbols. However, I would suggest that the reader/listener of Cohen (unlike the disciple of Jesus), is not likely to experience a religious transformation and feel compelled to change. The themes and content in Cohen's poetry are predominantly about personal accounts. By comparison, the teachings of Jesus are more reflections on humanity. Herein lies the essential difference, Jesus speaks to the masses about the plight of the masses; Leonard Cohen speaks to the masses about the plight of the

---

[37] Cohen, *Jewish Book News*, 4.

individual. When questioned about the pervasive religious content within his work, Cohen says the following:

> I had a lot of versions of myself that I had used religion to support. If you deal with this material you can't put God on. I thought I could spread light and I could enlighten my world and those around me and I thought I could, but I was unable to. This is a landscape in which men far stronger than you, far braver, nobler, kinder, more generous, men of extremely high achievements have burnt to a crisp on this road. Once you start dealing with the sacred material you're gonna get creamed.[38]

What are the implications if we allow Cohen the title of 'spiritual leader' instead of 'religious leader'? In this age of 'individualism' and its accompanying shadow of alienation, the tendency may be to look to those leading their lives outside of religious institutions, who remind us that these institutions are rich in their imagery and stories. If we no longer embrace the Jewish or Christian religion in their entirety, their scriptures, their leaders, or their moral codes -- then is it justifiable to take components out of these traditions piecemeal? Ruth Tucker argues that the imagery and stories are not lost completely and are now revisited in what is now New Age Spirituality. In his different 'manifestations' or self constructions of 'saint', 'mystic' and 'prophet', Leonard Cohen is an example of how one may adopt a position, experiment with that position, and then discard it for another. In other words, Cohen presents Western culture, through the medium of pop culture, with glimpses of different possible religious personae. Although I would not identify Cohen himself as a New Ager, there may be an element or elements to the poet and/or his personae that resonate with some New Agers.

---

[38] Leonard Cohen, http://www,music.sony.com/Music/ArtistInfo/LeonardCohen.html.

I do not mean to imply that Cohen is not treating these religious forms seriously, nor that he would acknowledge himself as any kind of religious or spiritual leader -- he has as much said that he has tried this and did not succeed. However, in contrast to many New Agers who may believe in explicitly non Jewish-Christian ideas (like reincarnation and past lives), Cohen, up until recently has, most often, located his self constructions and lyrics within the Judaic tradition. Moreover, he expresses the different voices of the saint, mystic and prophet in the aesthetic form of poetry. Those New Agers who are looking for instant enlightenment may experience 'something' when they hear Cohen's music and poetry; they are, I would argue, being treated to a complex and evocative aesthetic form. It may be, however, that these experiences are not religious (i.e. transformative) in the conventional sense of the term.

It is fascinating to observe that despite the attempts to convey religion and religious ideas as constant, they too are inevitably affected by the changes within culture. In some ways, the (Jewish-Christian) Western culture may be coming full circle with its ideas on aesthetics and religion, only with somewhat of a twist. In Plato's time, the poets were revered by the masses; they were appreciated within the context of popular culture while the elite (mainly Plato) mistrusted the poets and were somewhat disdainful of the affairs of popular culture. The philosophical response was to create a single entity, the Demiurge, that only a few Greek thinkers could talk about in their abstract, erudite ways. In comparison to classical Greek society where individuals gathered to see and hear the poets perfom, today's poetry lovers may gather at a Leonard Cohen concert and listen to stories about his individual journey and his attempts to come to terms with love, sexuality and morality.

The contemporary audience is not looking to gods/goddesses for answers to their worldly concerns. Today's audience appears to want to sit back and remain somewhat detached as the poet reveals his/her story. The communion or realization for the participant happens when the individual is able to identify with what the poet is saying. One's own experiences gain authenticity when (s)he hears them being delivered from a 'personality'. I would like to suggest that the enthusiast for Leonard Cohen most likely approaches Cohen's lyrics with a knowledge or appreciation for poetry and/or religion. While the contemporary spiritual quests of the New Agers certainly do not always involve an experience with poetry, there are some distinctly traditional religious forms being used. New Agers may enlighten their friends with descriptions of their 'mystical' experiences had through crystals and past life readings, but there is, I believe, a sense of inauthenticity to these claims. I realize that there is a great struggle to find meaning in this world and the desire to locate meaning in something as predominant as popular culture. And I would suggest that some may look to someone like Leonard Cohen to articulate feelings of alienation that they themselves experience in their ongoing struggles with love, identity and meaning that seem to be the casualties of late twentieth-century Western culture.

Leonard Cohen may be both a symbol and a product of his age. While continuing to be fascinated with traditional religion, he has nonetheless forged a unique path that has reflected the desire for transcendence as well as the achievement of clarity and insight into spiritual matters. Like others of his age, Cohen has been unable to discover complete peace or resolution in his traditional religious practice alone. This quest for alternative forms and avenues of meaning, then, perhaps resonates and explains why the poet has been acclaimed as a religious leader in a spiritually hungry, yet religiously alienated age.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, Hazard. *Critical Theory Since Plato*. New York: Harcourt Bruce Jovanovich Inc.,1992.

Albanese, Catherine L. "The Study of American Popular Religion: Retrospect and Prospect." *Explor* 7 (1984): 9-15.

Anderson, Bernhard W. *Understanding the Old Testament.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1986.

Barret, William. *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy*. New York: Doubleday Press, 1962.

Bate, W.J., ed. *Criticism: The Major Texts*. New York: Harcourt Bruce Jovanovich Inc., 1970.

Batstone, David & Bill Smith. "What's Faith Got to Do With It?" *Sojourners* 23 (June 1994): 14-28.

Beckley, Robert E., et al., eds. *Religion in Contemporary Society*. Palo Alto, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1984.

Bokser, Ben Zion. *The Jewish Mystical Tradition*. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1981.

Brown, Frank Burch. "Transfiguration: Poetic Metaphor and Theological Reflection." *Journal of Religion* 62 (Jan. 1982): 39-56.

Browne, Ray B. "Redefining Literature." *Journal of Popular Culture* 23:3 (Winter 1989):11-21.

Broz, Ludek. "Symbols, Culture and Mythopoetic Thought." *Communio Viatorum* 25:4 (1982): 181-202.

Brueggemann, Walter. "Poetry in a Prose-Flattened World." *Preaching* 6 (March-April 1991): 28-34.

_____. *The Prophetic Imagination*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press: 1978.

Burnham, Clint. "How Postmodern is Cohen's Poetry?" *Canadian Poetry: Sudies, Documents, Reviews* 33 (Fall-Winter 1993): 68-72.

Caplovitz, David & Fred Sharrow. *The Religious Drop-Outs: Apostasy Among College Graduates.* Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications Inc., 1977.

Carroll, Robert. "Poets Not Prophets: A Response to 'Prophets Through the Looking Glass.'" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27 (1983): 25-31.

Chidestor, David. "Aesthetic Strategies in Western Religious Thought." *Journal of the Academy of Religion* 51 (March 1983): 55-66.

Churchich, Nicolas. *Marxism and Alienation* Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990.

Clarkson, Adrienne. "Leonard Cohen: A Monster of Love." *Take This Waltz: A Celebration of Leonard Cohen.* Ed. M. Fournier and K. Norris. Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec: The Muses' Company, 1994: 23-25.

Clements, R.E. *Prophecy and Tradition.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975.

Cohen, Leonard. *Death of a Lady's Man.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978.
_____. *Leonard Cohen: Selected Poems.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1956.
_____. *The Spice Box of the Earth.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972.
_____. *Stranger Music: Selected Poems and Songs.* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993.
_____. *Leonard Cohen on BBC Radio.* (July 8): 1994. http://www.serve.com/cpage/LCohen/BBCshow.html.

Cohen, Stanley. "Messianic Motifs, American Popular Culture and the Judeo-Christian Tradition." *Journal of Religious Studies* 8 (Spring 1980): 24-34.

Detweiler, Robert. "Apocalyptic Fiction and the End(s) of Realism." *European Literature and Theology in the Twentieth Century.* Ed. David Jaspar. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.

Diehl-Jones, Charlene. "Re-membering the Love Song: Ambivalence and Cohen's 'Take This Waltz.'" *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 33 (Fall-Winter 1993): 74-87.

Dodds, E.R. *The Greeks and the Irrational.* Los Angeles: University of California Press Ltd., 1951.

Dorman, Loranne & Clive Rawlins. *Leonard Cohen: Prophet of the Heart.* London: Omnibus Press, 1990.

Dougherty, Steve & Robert Masello. "A Poet's Retreat." *People Weekly* (March 25, 1996): 1. http://pathfinder.com/people/960325/features/cohen.html.

Eliade, Mircea. "History of Religions and 'Popular' Cultures." *History of Religions* 20:1-2 (August-November 1980): 1-26.

Falck, Colin. "The Identity of Poetry and Religion." *Religion and Literature* 20 (Summer 1988): 41-56.

Forshey, Gerald E. "Studies in Religion and Popular Culture." *Explor* 7 (1984): 17-27.

Foti, Veronique M. *Heidegger and the Poets.* England: Humanities Press International Inc., 1992.

Friedman, Norman L. "Jewish Popular Culture in Contemporary America." *Judaism* 24 (Summer 1975): 263-277.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Religious and Poetical Speaking." *Myth, Symbol and Reality,* Ed. Alan M. Olson. Notre Dame, France: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980. 144-156.

_____. *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays.* Trans. Nicholas Walker. Ed. Robert Bernasconi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Gardner, Helen. *Religion and Literature.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Geller, Stephen A. "Were the Poets Prophets?" *Prooftexts* 3 (Spring 1983): 211-221.

Gnarowski, Michael. *Leonard Cohen: The Artist and His Critics.* Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1976.

Goethals, Gregor T. "Ritual and the Representation of Power in High and Popular Art." *Journal of Ritual Studies* 4 (Summer 1990): 149-177.

Greeley, Andrew M. *Religion as Poetry.* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1995.

Hall, Donald. "The Inward Muse." *The Poet as Critic*. Ed. Frederick McDowell. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967.

Hawley, John Stratton. *Saints and Virtues*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

Henighan, Tom. *The Presumption of Culture: Structure, Strategy and Survival in the Canadian Landscape*. Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 1996.

Heschel, Abraham. "What Manner of Man is the Prophet?" *The Prophets*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962.

Hillburn, Robert. "Robert Hillburn Interviews Leonard Cohen: A Master's Reflections on His Music." *The Times Mirror Co. Los Angeles Times* (Sept. 24,1995):3-6. http://www.seas.upenn.edu/~cpage/cohen/hilburn.

Hofstadter, Albert. *Poetry, Language, Thought: Martin Heidegger*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers Inc., 1971.

Hofstadter, Albert & Richard Kuhns, Eds. *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics From Plato to Heidegger*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.

Horne, Brian. "Seeing With A Different Eye: Literature and Religion." *Heaven and Earth: Essex Essays In Theology and Ethics*. Ed. Andrew Linzey & Peter J. Wexler. West Sussex: Churchman Publishing Limited, 1986.

James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1985.

Jantzen, Grace. *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Kavanaugh, John. "Capitalist Culture as a Religious and Educational Formation System." *Religious Education* 78 (Winter 1983): 50-60.

Kenel, Sally A. "The Birth and Death of Religious Leaders." *Journal of Religion and Health* 26 (Summer 1987): 97-105.

Keickhefer, Richard & George D. Bond, Eds. *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Kockelmans, Joseph J. *Heidegger on Art and Art Works*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1985.

Kugel, James L., Ed. *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition.* Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990.

Kurzweil, Arthur & Roth, Pamela."Leonard Cohen Stranger Music: Selected Poems and Songs." *The Jewish Book News Interviews*. (October 31, 1994): 1-5. http://www.serve.com/cpage/LCohen/interview.html.

Laeyendecker, L. "Once Again: Religion in Everyday Life." *Experiences and Explanations: Historical and Sociological Essays on Religion in Everyday Life.* Ed. Laeyendecker, L.G., et al. Ljouwert / Leeuwarden: Fryske Akademy, 1990.

Layton, David. "Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen and Other Recurring Nightmares." *Saturday Night* (March 1996): 32-43.

Levertov, Denise. "A Poets' View: Relation Between Religious and Intellectual Position." *Religion and Intellectual Life* 1: 4 (Summer 1984): 46-53.

Lundin, Roger "Hermeneutics and the Romantic Tradition." *Christian Scholar's Review* 13/1 (1984): 3-10.

Mahan, Jeffrey H., ed. "Religion and Popular Culture" *Explor* 7 (1984): 85-93.

Mark James, "Gadamer and the Consensus of Experience." *Theology* 92 (Summer 1989): 366-374.

Martland, Thomas. "To Glorify: The Essence of Poetry and Religion." *Religious Studies* 16 (December 1980): 413-423.

Mays, James Luther & Paul J. Achtemeier, Eds. *Interpreting the Prophets.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

McCormick, Peter. "Interpretation in Aesthetics: Theories and Practices." *Monist* 73 (April 1990): 167-180.

Meserve, Harry C. "Religion as Prose and Poetry." *Journal of Religion and Health* 28(Summer 1989): 91-96.

Morse, J. Mitchell. "The Prophetic Mode and Challenge in Literature." *Drew Gateway* 55: 2-3 (Winter 1984-Spring 1985): 74-93.

Myers, Ched. "A People's Culture of the United States." *Sojourners* 23 (June 1994): 25-26.

Nadel, Ira. *Leonard Cohen: A Life in Art.* Toronto: ECW Press, 1994.

_____. "Ten or More Questions I Should Have Asked Leonard Cohen." *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews.* 33 (Fall-Winter 1993): 108-121.

Neuhaus, Richard John. "Pop Goes the Culture." *First Things* 14 (June-July 1991): 58-68.

Overholt, Thomas W. "Prophecy: The Problem of Cross-Cultural Comparison." *Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism* 21 (1981): 55-77.

Palmer, Richard E. *Gadamer's Critique of Modern Aesthetic and Historical Consciousness.* Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969.

Pareles, Jon. "At Lunch With Leonard Cohen." The New York Times (Wednesday, October 11, 1995): 1-5. http://www.netsonic.fi/ja/cohen/

Pearson, Ian. "Growing Old Disgracefully." *Saturday Night* (March 1993): 78-81,101-103.

Preston, David L. *The Social Organization of Zen Practice: Constructing Transcultural Reality.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Roof, Wade Clark. "Alienation and Apostasy." *In Gods We Trust.* Eds. Thomas Robbins & Dick Anthony. New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1981.

Rosenthal, M.L. *Poetry and the Common Life.* New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1974.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology.* London: SCM, 1983.

Scobie, Stephen. *Alias Bob Dylan.* Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer College Press, 1991.

_____. "The Counterfeiter Begs Forgiveness: Leonard Cohen and Leonard Cohen." *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 33 (Fall-Winter 1993): 7-21.

Scott, R.B.Y. *The Relevance of the Prophets.* London: The Macmillan Company, 1968.

Shizuteru, Ueda. "The Zen Buddhism Experience of the Truly Beautiful." *Eastern Buddhist* 22 (Spring 1989): 1-36.

Siemerling, Winfried. "Interior Landscapes and the Public Realm: Contingent Meditations in a Speech and a Song by Leonard Cohen." *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 33 (Fall-Winter 1993): 88-99.

Snyder, Gary. "Just One Breath: The Practice of Meditation and Poetry." *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* (Fall 1991): 55-61.

Sproxton, Birk. "Reading Leonard Cohen: Reprise." *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews*. 33 (Fall-Winter 1993): 122-30.

Starkey, Lycurgus Monroe. "Preaching in a Pop Culture." *Religion in Life* 41: 2 (Summer 1972): 196-204.

Steiner, George. *Heidegger*. Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1978.

Streng, F., Lloyd, C., and J. Allen, Eds. *Ways of Being Religious: Readings for a New Approach to Religion*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1973.

Tordjmann, Gilles. "Story With No Moral - Cohen Between Earth and Sky." Trans. Keith Campbell Les Inrockuptibles, France, (March 15, 1995): 1-14. http://www.netsonic.fi/ja/cohen/

Tucker, Ruth A. "New Age Spirituality." *Reformed Review* 45 (Autumn 1991): 22-34.

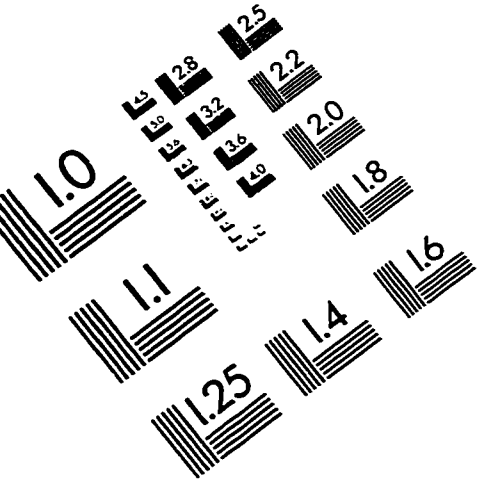
Vattimo, Gianni. "Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy." *Hermeneutics and Nihilism: An Apology for Aesthetic Consciousness*. Ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. 1986.

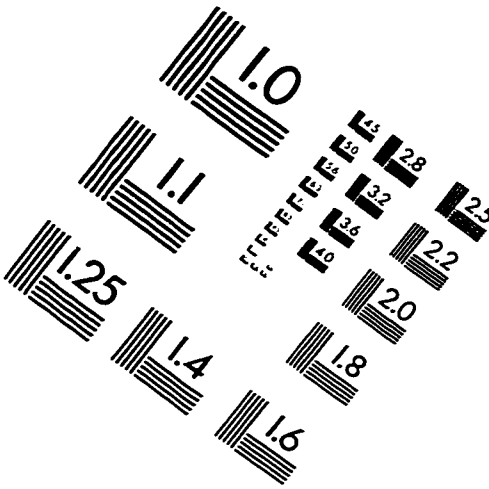
Walker, Peter. "Religion and the Arts." *The Weight of Glory*. Ed. D.W. Hardy and P.H. Sedgwick. New York: T&T Clark, 1991: 55-67.

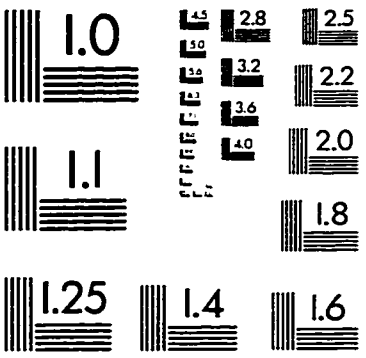
Wellek, Rene. "The Poet as Critic, the Critic as Poet, the Poet-Critic." *The Poet as Critic*. Ed. Frederick McDowell. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967.

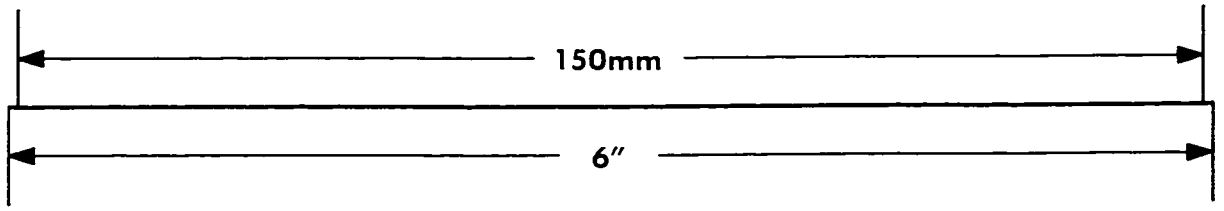
Whiteman, Bruce. *Leonard Cohen: An Annotated Bibliography*. Downsview, Ontario: ECW Press, 1980.

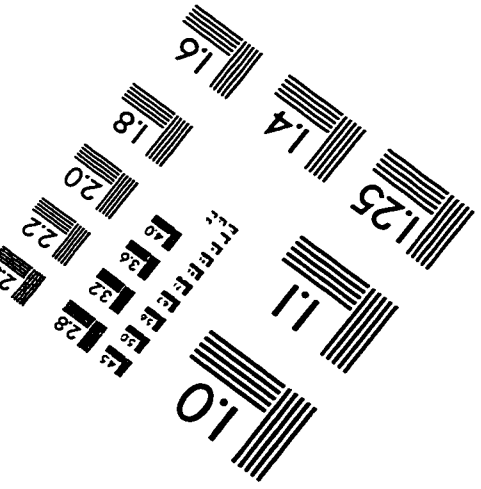
IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)

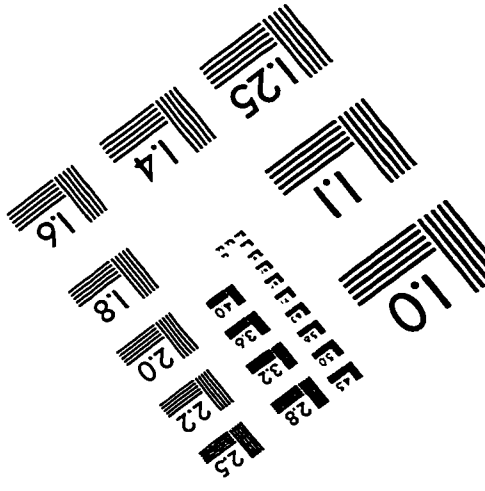












APPLIED IMAGE, Inc
1653 East Main Street
Rochester, NY 14609 USA
Phone: 716/482-0300
Fax: 716/288-5989