I. FIRST, WE TAKE MONTREAL

"I've been to too many countries
I died when I left Montreal"

I am writing from coffee shop in Lowestoft where men in beige uniforms compare techniques concerning syrup and milk. One has a tattoo embracing the side of his arm saying "I'm not sad at all". I'm half expecting him to burst into tears, but Leonard Cohen says to never act out words: if the word butterfly makes you lift your feet from the ground and shake your arms, people have the right to laugh at you. Well, it still appears to have the Clingfilm bandaging it, a preservation of its freshness like a butterfly waiting to flower from its cocoon. On one side of the coffee shop, the arched Rococo windows look out to a shaded alleyway; the glass veranda opposite peers over the aisles of a bookshop, where streets of crime fiction run alongside travel guides, where middle-aged women give away their disorganisation by procuring half-year calendars. I was told incorrectly by a friend that Cohen had come here once.

Montreal is 3,000 miles away. On the Southern Peak of Mount Royal stands the old town Côte-Saint-Antoine, now Westmount, since its antiquity as a French colony endured dilution into an Anglophonic settlement. The summit of the little mountain overlooks excited children climbing the benches of Murray Hill Park, down through the Jewish neighbourhood at the Boulevard St. Laurent and Napoléon Street where Yiddish corner-shops curate poetic encounters of Downtown and Old Montreal. Talmud Torahs and Yiddish folk schools line up next to well-heeled French businessmen and upside-down jazz clubs. Over the ever-changing Downtown to the Port at St. Lawrence where cargo ships load their Lego-coloured freight, Montreal appears as a well-lit circus.

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OBSERVING the streets of Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center, Michel de Certeau translates the commercial city as a "texturology," (91) existing through an arrangement of logos and components; doctrines and knowledge. In 1956, however, on the publication of Leonard Cohen's first collection of poetry, *Let Us Compare Mythologies,* Montreal was neither a city that had or had not learned the art of growing old by playing on its pasts; it was neither a New York or a Rome. Cohen's Montreal was a city that had found a level of sustenance through careful and conservative documentation, alongside a jumble of cultural homilies. Several worlds away from the homogenised discourse of the Manhattan city streets, de Certeau's assumption, of course, is that a city exists within one social discourse, and that a cartographic examination of commercial space from city to city siphons the end of one culture at the start of another's border.

Hugh MacLennan's iconic Canadian novel *Two Solitudes* identified Montreal as a city in competition with itself, where French culture was pitted against English commerce. (Avishai) Yet Cohen's Montreal is more complex. It is a city that provides "the definitive experience of modernity," (Simon 16) where the synchronic linguistic existence of French English creates a "third solitude," Yiddish, complimenting an architectural history that owes to Art Deco and Gothic revivals. As a literary culture, it is no surprise that poetic tradition in Montreal has struggled to coherently navigate a place within discourse "where neighbours live in distant cultural worlds." (Simon 16) The analogous cultural landscape of Cohen's Montreal goes further to offset nationalised autonomy against resilient cosmopolitan spirit, epitomised not wholly through conflict, but a compassionate attempt to historicise. Harry Rasky's documentary *The Song of Leonard Cohen* greets Cohen

returning to his Montreal home in 1979, where he reflects "The whole history of Quebec is based on the past, and what we see right now in Quebec politics is just the past claiming victories." The motto of Quebec, he says, is "Je me souviens,"[1] only that "maybe it's a writer's memory." (*The Song of Leonard Cohen*)

Cohen's poetics were literary métissage – methods of writing oneself into the corridors that exist between the different languages and cultures of the city. (Lionnet 1) In the West is the English-speaking commercial sector; the East holds the predominant French populace; running between the two is a small Jewish passage, the result of post-colonial diaspora and an unsystematic configuration of English, French and Yiddish dialects. Jewish community life began at the Port of Montreal before moving to the Great Lakes, where thick Jewish tongues existed with varying thickness, and the redolence of post-war Yiddishkeit reverted its Hasidic mind back to Hebrew scripture: in Montreal, Jewish culture existed without "a neutral civil space to melt into." (Avishai) Cohen's Westmount was idiosyncratic in its character. The city streets lived outside of de Certeau's tactical commerce, inhabiting a complex mix of old-world types. A.M. Klein's mother, for instance, spoke little other than Yiddish, and early Jewish immigrant life was then met with "a variety of assimilating, Canadianizing families, and then Canadian-born Jews," identifies how it was "a very Canadian phenomenon" (Ravvin, 2016) for Montreal Jewish neighbourhoods to fill up with varying ethnic and religious identities.

Cohen's first novel, *The Favourite Game,* ratified a decisive interrogation of Montreal's inbuilt separation through his protagonist, Lawrence Breavman: ""you're the only Jew from Wellgreen Avenue at the Palais d'Or."/ "Distinctions are important."" (45) Montreal

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[1] "I remember"

undergoes a form of simulacrum, becoming created from the nostalgia of its own past. As a city created from the writer's imagination, which thereafter acts as a reproductive and cyclical entity, the interregional conflicts that establishing the "little magazine culture" (Ravvin 127) in turn gave birth to Canadian poets with a heritage of spatial division. Montreal's magazine culture is intermingled with a poetic tradition that cannot escape its spectrum of French and English, with Breavman's poetic bursts formatted as parallel headlines of a newspaper: *"PAUVRE GRANDE BEAUTÉ! / POOR PERFECT BEAUTY!"* (238) and *"QUEL MAL MYSTÉRIEUX RONGE SON FLANC D'ATHLÈTE? / WHAT UNKNOWN EVIL HARROWS HER LITTLE SIDE?"* (239)

Cohen's writing is constantly aware of another language behind the mother tongue – a configuration of Montreal's deep-seated linguistic system, which Alexis Nouss terms the "outre-langue," (Laplantine and Nouss 470) and Simon translates to be "a ghostly reminder of what is always lost or imaginary in language." (16) Cohen adheres this mode of thinking; the only form of accurate linguistics in Montreal is a correlative assessment of French and English. The resulting polyglot landscape, in which everyday texts exist with one language on the left page and its translation on the right, becomes disconcerting when wandering around Montreal finds "a world of right-hand pages." (Simon 15) The inter-regional city conflict is dichotomised by Breavman, an English-speaking Jew from Westmount, whose identity becomes founded on a geocentric dialogue. His physical appearance and stature become pieced together through facilitating a discourse about his family's history: his father is only capable of walking with a cane following injuries in the trenches, though "It comforts a man with coronary thrombosis to bear a wound taken in combat." (3) His mother says that the wrinkles on her face are a false representation of her selfhood, autonomously un-creating herself through her own construction, prompting

Breavman to ask "Where is it, where's your real face?" (4) By replying that she had left her appearance "in Russia, when I was a girl," (4) Cohen initiates the binding relationship between femininity and cartography that will continue to dominate his work. His text not only accesses the capricious cultural and linguistic dialogues of Montreal, but becomes an aspect of "the panorama-city," (de Certeau 93) a theoretical simulacrum edited by a personal account of experiencing the city from below.

At the close of the first book, Breavman crosses Montreal to attend a dance with his friend Krantz. Immediately embedded in their route is the linguistic métissage and conflict between the place names of Montreal and recognition of active space. Where de Certeau identifies the Heideggerian philosophy of "daesin," to "be there" or to "exist," (109) Breavman understands the directions to the dancehall "out to the lake shore and circle the black water," (41) but does not realise daesin, nor activate his journey as a spatial practise, without confronting the outre-langue of its place name "Lac St. Louis." (41) The verbal relics that – for de Certeau – constitute a place's existence within a strategy (107) are destabilised by the obstinacy of Montreal identity. Throughout the evening, the girls with whom Breavman and Krantz dance are defined as a subset of Montreal identity. A French-speaking girl is identified only by her mother tongue and that her "brothers work for Jew people," (46) Krantz's dance was unsatisfying as "she couldn't speak English," (46) and later, Breavman muses that Hitler and Mussolini's identities are marinated with the marble balconies on which they deliver their speeches. (50) As they return for a second dance, the linguistic tension between the French and English fragments of Montreal are resolved in a physical brawl with a group of Francophones – a symbolic gestation of the difficulties to traverse the linguistic culture of Montreal – as Breavman becomes translated as a

stereotype of his regions and ethnicity: "Reste là, maudit juif."[2] (48) The necessary dual-language needed to decode the spatial practises of Breavman's Montreal cannot exist within de Certeau's one dimensional palimpsest of the city.

Read as semi-autobiographical, the adolescent brawl calls upon the first of Montreal's major districts in Cohen's life, where he was raised in Westmount: "a collection of large stone houses and lush trees arranged on the top of the mountain especially to humiliate the underprivileged." (48) Both in narrative and symbolism, the geographical contoured hierarchy in place in Westmount platforms Cohen as the spokesperson for the panoptic city: he is at a symbolic and hierarchical elevation from which he can view Montreal as a whole, and see the systems of commerce. Murray Hill Park sat directly below his bedroom window, which held the nucleus for the strategic practise of everyday life:

> It gave the children dangerous bushes and heroic landscapes so they could imagine bravery. It gave the nurses and maids winding walks so they could imagine beauty. It gave the young merchant-princes leaf-hid necking benches, views of factories so they could imagine power. It gave the retired brokers vignettes of Scottish lanes where loving couples walked, so they could lean on their canes and imagine poetry. (68-9)

It gave Cohen a place where he could meet girls, so he could imagine love (*Ladies and Gentlemen… Mr Leonard Cohen).* His romance, however, becomes as much an infatuation with with its ideals as it reveals itself to be a product of the commercial city: "He wanted to know everything about her… was she allowed to listen to *The Shadow*, could she get

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[2] "Stay there, cursed Jew!"

Gang Busters, had she ever been called a dirty Jew?" (88) The questioning denigrates

Breavman's ethnical identity to corroborate eager and agitated trepidations about police

and detective radio programmes. This alignment between space and childhood experience

of the ethnic divide of Montreal lays its foundations in an externalised source. The park in

everyday transaction for Breavman becomes a localised retaliation to the stereotypes of

religion and the city's alternating cultural spaces, where "The dispersion of stories points

to the dispersion of the memorable." (de Certeau 108)

Externalised images, for Breavman, become the only source of understanding his world,

functioning in T.S. Eliot's terminology as "object correlatives," defined by a situation or

chain of events that simulate an element of nostalgia or memory. (48) The problem with

this internalised narrative, however, is that it places a reliance upon the retention of

sensory memorabilia, externalising the role of the reader. Natalia Vesselova understands

Breavman's object correlative to work in the opposite fashion to Eliot's, where the

triggered emotion evokes the initial imagery of the object. (252) Yet the narrative goes one

further than Vesselova's theory, in that it evokes the commercial role and tactic of the city.

The cathartic memories, which Breavman lists in the form of materialised objects, his

"girlfriend's earrings, a pet rat, a father's bow-tie, a viciously killed bull-frog, the

mountain, the moon, an (objectified) woman's body" (Vesselova 253) only coincide with

critics' shortcomings and desperation to identify a hidden misogynistic dialogue in

Cohen's writing. Instead, each material object becomes a synecdoche of simulacrum: "The

early-morning buildings filled him with nostalgia and he couldn't understand it until he

realized that they were exactly the colour of old tennis shoes." (85) Within the "strange

toponymy that is detached from actual places and flies high over the city like a foggy

geography of "meanings" held in suspension," (de Certeau 104) Cohen's work again

works in the opposite manner, where the "meanings" call the definition of the city into its place. This geographical topos, serving to permit existence within the city's literature for Breavman, can only be observed by de Certeau from his view of the panoptic city, symbolically aligning him with Cohen's protagonist from his elevated position on Westmount.

Structurally, Michael Ondaatje summarises "We are not reading a formal novel but are looking at various episodes in the life of Breavman." (24) Ondaatje is correct – temporally *The Favourite Game* reads like an episodic prose poem – but we should analyse to understand each episode as a symbolic representation of Montreal; the uncomfortable separation between chapters mimic the barriers between language, structure and flows of city commerce. Where de Certeau says the city reads like a poem, Cohen identifies Montreal to read like many different poems, curtailed into four short books, inside one novel. While this practise of space for Freud is the trampling underfoot of the mother-land, (110) Cohen understands no preordained regard in need of being paid to the geocentricism of linguistics, or to the terms of exchange between French and English dialects. Curtailing the obscure Westmount streets, Krantz and Breavman "sat one night on someone's lawn, two Talmudists, delighting in their dialectic, which was a disguise for love. It was furious talk, the talk of a boy discovering how good it was not to be alone." (40) Here, when the "myths of his past" meet with the opus of his "childhood heroism," (Ondaatje 29) Breavman is able to write himself and his Jewish history into Westmount. Breavman's experimentation with language bestows meaning onto his city, instead of the city being directly referential to Breavman's language.

Without a clear novelistic structure, the episodes in Breavman's life rely on a cinematic portrayal of the city. The tableau format adapts into Cohen's obsession with romance, as a romance author, with what Ira Nadel stresses is "a firm belief" (2016) that the poet will be able to transcend the real. Ondaatje describes the need for a "perfect photographic image" (26) in *The Favourite Game,* "concerning the bodies that Breavman lost. No detective will find them. He lost them in the condition of their highest beauty… You and I have our bodies, mutilated by time and memory. Breavman lost them in fire where they persist whole and perfect." (176) While Cohen fantasises writing-in a lyric where everyone is seen in the circumstance of their highest beauty – continuing the filmic narrative of Montreal – Breavman's internalised dialogue is projected externally: "They held hands tightly and watched the stars in the dark part of the sky; where the moon was bright they were obliterated. She told him she loved him. A loon went insane in the middle of the lake." (33) Ondaatje notes how Breavman's silent emotion, his mind's "collapse, chaos and cynicism," is silenced further and finds an "external expression in the loon's crazy laugh." (26) Later, he realises that the nostalgia he feels for the buildings surrounding Westmount is due to them being the colour of his old tennis shoes. Breavman's narrative position is externalised as the narration doubles up as a self-observation of his first sexual encounter: "An inner eye flying away from the boat house like a slow, high star gave him the view of a tiny plywood box in which two miniscule figures (mating insects?) made inevitable ballet movements to each other." (192) The episodic dialogue of *The Favourite Game* becomes a linguistic enactment of Hitchcock's dolly zoom, where Montreal, Westmount and Downtown are undermined by visual perception, augmenting aspects of the city's spatial commerce, with Breavman's repeated sexualised and intellectual understandings of space as the continual subject.

Ondaatje's reading of *The Favourite Game* is affectionately sincere: "one returns to it several times as one returns to a photograph album." (34) This sincerity, however, leads him to translate the close of Cohen's novel in a situation where he thinks "the beauty of the scene is more important than what it may be a symbol of." (35) Cohen's ending – and Breavman's final act of dialogue – is anomalous in the context of Cohen's narrative style. It enacts a direct address to the reader:

> I just remembered what Lisa's favourite game was… After a heavy snow we would go into a back yard with a few of our friends. Bertha was the spinner. You held her hands while she turned on her heels… then she let go and you flew over the snow. You remained still in whatever position you landed. When everyone had been flung in this fashion into the fresh snow, the beautiful part of the game began. You stood up carefully, taking great pains not to disturb the impression you had made. Of course you would have done your best to land in some crazy position, arms and legs sticking out. Then we walked away, leaving a lovely white field of blossom-like shapes with footprint stems. (244)

The beauty of the scene is an extension of Cohen's episodic structure. Critical acceptance of the novel's exploration of Montreal, however, has is never taken beyond face value. Breavman's geocentric dialogue makes him question his Jewish identity when navigating the enormity between its different cultural enterprises; it makes him unable to look at a small black hill on Murray Hill Park as it "seemed so connected to his father;" (198) and it makes him centralise Westmount as the sociopolitical summit from which to observe the panoptic city. Where de Certeau avers that space is "actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it" (117) – including vectors of direction, velocity and time

variables – Breavman remembers their favourite game, and continues to navigate the mythology of Montreal's spatial practise as an exercise of nostalgia, *je me souviens* and the writer's memory. With the quixotically enduring image of the snow melting around his body – imprinted into a young Montreal – Cohen builds the city on his own memory. A year later in his collection of poems, *Flowers For Hitler*, he uses the same symbolism of blossom and snow to critique the conservatism and historical documentation of Canadian formalism in a direct address to the progenitor of Canadian English-language poetry, E.J. Pratt.

II. CANADIAN FORMALISM

"I once believed a single line
in a Chinese poem could change
forever how blossoms fell"

In a world where "the nation is rapidly ceasing to be the real defining unit of society," (Frye 18) the national poetic concern in 1960s Canada remained heavily localised; the tides of Canadian poetry were still lapping up to the port of Montreal, but rarely breaking with enough force to dapple a passer-by's foot in saltwater. But for Cohen, Montreal was a city, just as he was a poet, "on the threshold of greatness, like Athens, like New Orleans." (Nadel 62) His criticisms of the prophetic rise of structuralism were dependent on crucifying the view that "literature, like any other domain of external reality, can be approached with objective methods." (Pavel 593) Where the poetic content of formalism on an international stage – acting as an obstinate antithesis of new historicism – rejected a nationalised narrative, Canadian formalism married the theory's allegiance to meter and syntax with a defiant emphasis on the historical documentation that Europe rejected. The idea of historicising a unified Canada seduced the poets caught within the higgledy-piggledy past of Montreal – a city unable to discern its own regional histories – and constructed an isolated revolution, where the Canadian poetic tradition confronted a distinct "longing for history." (Mandel 175)

Poetic development was thus: the work of Crawford, Lampman, D.C. Scott, E.J. Pratt and Birney to name a few led Dorothy Livesay to coin the phrase "The Documentary Poem," which she called "the most enduring tradition in Canadian poetry." (267) However, the whim to write a narrative poem in Canadian rhetoric rarely adhered to Chaucerian or American patterns of the epic poem, as length and subject matter might have suggested,

with a respective emphasis on either the development of an individualised character or historical perspective to create a national myth. (New 267) This rejection of a continental past was Livesay's basis for defining the prevalent poetic tradition in Canada to be *documentary*, characterised by "the dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poet." (269)

While Livesay's classification works to an extent, her admittance of language's subjectivity becomes self-defeating; an analogy to documentary caters for the poetic, the expository, the observational, the reflexive and the performative. One would struggle, for instance, to structurally compare the cinéma vérité documentaries of Jean Rouch with the didactic nature of Capra's *Prelude to War,* aside from their one word-in-common: documentary. Instead, there is a structural binding of the poetic form in Canada, which works alongside the narrative documentation. "Only with the validity of fact, and the form of the natural object," Frank Davey writes in a letter to Peter Miller, "can a poem hope to survive in a world that admits only the real." (8) I wish to suggest, then, that the concurrent poetic dialogue in Cohen's Montreal should be referred to as a patently Canadian formalism.

Where Cohen is stereotypically known as the bard of the bedsit, E.J. Pratt could be considered the father of formalism. Pratt's chef-d'oeuvre, "Towards the Last Spike," documented the creation of the transcontinental railroad line across Canada. Regular interjections pepper Pratt's historical dialogue, appearing as stage directions and prosaic contextual interludes: "In 1880 Tupper lets contract to Onderdonk for survey and construction through the Pacific Section of the mountains." (360) The considerable directness of the documentary poem led to a distinctly unpoetic mode of Canadian writing.

Pratt's selection of detail, however – in a context where to poeticise historical accounts was to actively *write-in* history – led to criticisms far beyond poetic form. F.R. Scott's response poem, for instance, "All Spikes but the Last," shamed Pratt's exclusion of the Chinese immigrant work force, and precedence of documentation over humanity. Despite the enormity Pratt's poem, Scott is still able to question "Where are the coolies in your poem, Ned?/ ... Is all Canada has to say to them/ written in the Chinese Immigration Act?" (64) A minute-long documentary on the railway's construction later professed that "they say there is one dead Chinese man for every mile of that track." (*Nitro*)

Still, to take Pratt's poem as a synecdoche for Canadian poetic tradition would not be far wrong; the interplay of mythology and history focused as much on documentation as it did curating a voice through which to unite Canada. Pratt's execution of the documentary poem was dogmatic in its inaccuracies, presenting a "false impression of confident omniscience." (New 271) In an essay calling Pratt the "Rationalist Technician," Davey agrees, suggesting that "Pratt's rule seems to be that if an event is not totally knowable (and no event is), one must fake total knowledge." (71) Within the need to create a Canadian poetic past amid its vast cultural and ethnic milieu, the citations of objective fact and historical reality left as many "queasy philosophical foundations" (New 272) as the internal logic of Montreal found a lust to later remove itself from the documented tradition.

Cohen becomes the intermediate figure in this poetic narrative; he is the transition between the old and new; the accepted and the radical; and he is coming out of a world shaped by poets like A.J.M. Smith, F.R. Scott and E.J. Pratt. Cohen writes directly to Pratt, signalling his youthful faith in poetry and the didacticism of the poetic voice, "For E.J.P.": "I once

believed a single line/ in a Chinese poem could change/ forever how blossoms fell." (1-3)

The moon, in Cohen's poem, travelled on the grief of concise weeping men; his soul was

floated in cherry wine, and becomes the barge for "Lords of Memory to languish on." (24)

These same men evoked formalism within the Canadian poetic tradition, which led Cohen

to choose a lonely country, break from love and scorn the fraternity of war; symbolising

his soul elicits Charonic mythology, mimicking Canadian tradition to be an embellishment

of its past, Cohen embodies a gaunt old man "who rules the dreary coast," (Virgil 413)

wayfaring the nomadic passage from formalism to a devout focus on the individual.

The shift in poetic tradition came as a result of questioning how Canadian literature could

inform and extend a unified perception of national identity within a city that enacted a

small microcosm of the world; poetic change "is based ultimately in [the writings of]

individuals." (Chorny 428) The premise of Linda Hutcheon's essay "Caveat Lector: The

Early Postmodernism of Leonard Cohen" is conducted with the right sentiment: Cohen is

extremely aware of his position as the writer, in *Beautiful Losers* he addresses the temporal

distance between writing and consumption: "O Reader, do you know that a man is writing

this? A man like you." (102) Reverting again to de Certeau, Linda Hutcheon – strangely –

misinterprets the main thesis of her essay. *Ladies and Gentlemen* concludes by filming

Cohen watching a first screening of the documentary, where he can be seen watching

himself take a bath. Hutcheon notes how Cohen "writes on the tiles beside the tub: 'Caveat

Lector'. Ever self-conscious." (37) Her analysis understands Cohen to delight as much in

complicity as he does in critique; in writing 'Caveat Lector,' she says, Cohen is alerting

the reader that the scene is not entirely devoid of the con. (42) Hutcheon is not far wrong,

yet where she rests her theory on 'Caveat Lector,' that is to say, "let the reader beware,"

Cohen is actually shown in the film to write "Caveat Emptor," translated as "let the buyer beware." (*Ladies and Gentlemen*)

The emphasis of Cohen's work rests on the consumer, rather than the historian. Refusing to be detained by the confines of Montreal, despite his neurotic affiliations. The influence of A.M. Klein, for instance, was not stylistic but within a context as "a Jewish writer in Montreal writing in English, who was not totally writing from a Jewish position." He allowed Cohen to understand that contemplating religion and cartography could be done without documentation: "[he] came out of the Jewish community of Montreal, but had a perspective on it and on the country, and on the province. He made a step outside of the community. He was no longer protected by it." (Nadel 67) When Eli Mandel paraphrases what Northrop Frye calls a Freudain proletarianism, therefore, it becomes reasonable to assume Cohen's experimentation with the impulse of poetic radicalism, to overthrow the repressive anxiety-structure of geopolitical space "through pornography or sexual assault." (175)

As Cohen began to echo the Beat Generation, performing poetry with accompaniment at Dunn's Progressive Jazz Parlour in the heart of Montreal Downtown, the flourishes of formalism that dominated decades of Canadian history and the rewriting thereof were becoming less pronounced. His success at recitals was not the early formation of a celebrity, says Cohen, rather "bringing poetry [back] to where it belongs… To the hipsters, to the boozers… back to music and back to an informality, away from the classroom." (Nadel 63) From this point forward, Cohen became the forerunner of the poetic revolution in Montreal. Margaret Atwood notes his role in the revival of Canadian poetry in an interview: "That [the decline of Canadian poets] began to change around 1965 or 1966 for

some reason. I think it might have started a bit earlier with a couple of poets, namely Irving Leighton [*sic*] and Leonard Cohen." (105) Indeed, in *Flowers For Hitler,* Cohen claims that "Now more than ever I want enemies." (69) He displaced a conscious effort to write outside of tradition, confirming in a conversation with Adrienne Clarkson, that he would "feel pretty lousy if I were praised by a lot of the people that have come down heavy on me." (Burger 8)

Cohen's aforementioned address to E.J. Pratt paralleled his ending to *The Favourite Game*, saying the Montreal landscape holds no allegiance to the poet in order to make it a point of aesthetic and spatial fascination. As the snow melts around Breavman's body in Winter, Cohen writes in the Fall that "Layer after layer of autumn leaves/ are swept away/ Something forgets us perfectly." (37-9) Beforehand, generations of cattle are shown to have carved their paths up the Montreal mountainsides, as generations of Jewish and Canadian poets had carved their documentary into dialogue. Cohen's spatial practise of Montreal, however, was with an entire neglect to this culture: "As the mist leaves no scar/ On the dark green hill/ So my body leaves no scar/ On you and never will."[3] (Rae 61) Allowing space for his writing to be configured by future generations, he denies Montreal its tradition to play with his past, leading Eli Mandel to declare that, finally, "modern [Canadian] poetry is international in style." (180)

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[3] When the American editor of *The Favourite Game* suggested "As The Mist Leaves No Scar" be replaced with a Yeats quotation, Cohen responds: "No, no, I refuse, I resist, must we be forever blackmailed by the Irish… the book will be bare."

III. SONGS OF LEONARD COHEN

"It's hard to hold the hand of anyone
who is reaching for the sky just to surrender."

By 1967, Cohen had moved to the Greek island of Hydra and had written his first collection of songs, which came to be magnanimously titled *Songs of Leonard Cohen.* It is curious, perhaps, but as the Parisian Lost Generation turned their thoughts homewards to America, the added distance from Montreal appeared to focus Cohen's work on renewing his "neurotic affiliations" to the city. Six years previously, he had found himself in Cuba, a day before the Bay of Pigs invasion, where he was "fighting for both sides." (*Ladies and Gentlemen*) The resulting poem, "The Only Tourist in Havana Turns His Thoughts Homeward," foreshadows a prominent theme in his music over the concerns of his nation's autonomous language and culture, and a desire to rectify it: "Let us find our serious heads," (3) he says, "Let us dump asbestos on the White House,/ Let us make the French talk English,/ Not only here but everywhere." (4-6) He concludes that they should search harder for their serious heads, which "are waiting for us somewhere/ Like Gladstone bags abandoned/ After a coup d'état," (39-41) before ushering an ending on aberrantly solemn terms: "Let us maintain a stony silence/ On the St. Lawrence Seaway." (42-3)

Cohen's music becomes an acolyte of Montreal, particularly its Jewish sector, recalling when David "combined in his person the gift of the professional prophet with that of the born poet and musician." (Werner 1298) Roy Allan's essay, too, while dismissive of "oral-electronic" music as a mode of art, realises the Jewish tradition of song as an integral part of Jewish religious ceremonies, and to Cohen's development as an artist, who "in his youth

would certainly have been exposed to the simple psalmody sung by a synagogue cantor and to the response in which the cantor sings one line and the congregation replies with another." (120) While the comparisons are better harmonised with the early folk revival scene in Britain – the call and response method driving the civic and joyous revolution as celebrated in Pete Seeger's Bowdoin College Concert – Cohen relates his experimentation with medium to Jewish spatial practise in Montreal with regards to the Yiddish word "ngin," meaning "singer of the people":

> Everybody has a sense that they are in their own capsule and the one that I have always been in, for want of a better word, is that of cantor – a priest of a catacomb religion that is underground, just beginning, and I am one of the many singers, one of the many, many priests. Not by any means a high priest, but one of the creators of the liturgy that will create the church. (Djwa 8)

In breaking from the Montreal poetic traditions, Cohen cites McLuhanism – the message's dependence upon its medium – to pledge the significance of the singer: "I've always wanted to be created just like the priest creates the prayer for the mass for the congregation." (Burger 12) While Allan calls Cohen's songs "sung poems," (123) and Marshall McLuhan identifies "song is the slowing down of speech in order to savour nuance," (143) Cohen says that "some people call it a priestly function, some people see it as a revolutionary activity, acidheads see it as psychedelic revolution and poets see it as the popularisation of poetry. I stand in with all these people." (Djwa 8) However it became seen, *Songs of Leonard Cohen* became a rejection of Montreal poetic tradition, dramatized to a much greater audience.

"Suzanne" opens on the St. Lawrence Seaway as it comes into the port of Montreal in Old Town: "Suzanne takes you down/ to her place near the river,/ You can hear the boats go by/ and you can spend the night beside her." (1-4) It is a recording of an earlier poem from *Parasites of Heaven* that traces the true events of Leonard's platonic relationship with Suzanne Vallaincourt in Montreal, (Ratcliffe 16) where Suzanne becomes an archetype of the virgin and the vehicle through which Cohen is able to articulate the city, its intersections and vast cultural divides. Using a beautiful woman to find coherency in the city emphasises a further break from tradition; he doesn't use history or a famous Canadian. Ira Nadel in interview commented, for instance, how if E.J. Pratt were to have written a poem about about the port of Montreal, it would have been very long, it would have been repetitive in narrative, and about the early fur traders who arrived in the city.

The area that is now Old Montreal was undergoing reconstruction as Cohen was writing "Suzanne." He recalls how he had been spending a lot of time on the waterfront and the harbour of Montreal: "There was a sailor's church that has the statue of the Virgin, gilded so that the sun comes down on her, and I knew there was a song." (Zollo) From the heterogeneous densities of the Montreal cityscape to the ability to reconfigure spatial practises in Old Montreal, paraphrasing the potentials of the mapped city existed where "Everything on earth was alluringly present… or else at the end of a subway ride into the umbilical magic of hyper-connectivity." (Soja 13) Where the Chapelle-Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours and its gilded figurehead heralded modernisation, Cohen found potential to express the city through a beautiful woman. Far from the song being about Suzanne Verdal – who, while lending her name to the piece and its circumstantial narrative, is purely circumstantial – the name, even for Cohen, was "reportage":

> She was one of the first people to have a loft on the St. Lawrence. I knew that
>
> ["Suzanne"] was about that church and I knew that it was about the river. I didn't
>
> know I had anything to crystallize the song. And then her name entered into the
>
> song and then it was a matter of reportage, of really just being as accurate as I
>
> could about what she did. (Zollo)

Within the poem, "the sun pours down like honey/ on our lady of the harbour," (37-8) and the gilded lady's reflection presents the sunlight's glow as a guide to the ephemeral city. Cohen takes on de Certeau's construct of the blind man, escaping the "imaginary totalizations" (93) produced by the eye, being shown instead the beauty of the city "among the garbage and the flowers." Cohen, then, is transformed from the voyeur God in *The Favourite Game* to a *Wandersmänner* – a walker – whose body and movement follows the undulation of the urban text: "These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms." (de Certeau 93) Allan's praises of "Suzanne" culminate to the knowledge that Cohen is both singer and writer, or in de Certeau's terms, visionary and walker: "the emotion excited by merely reading the poem is heightened upon hearing the words vocalized by the poet." (123) Cohen aligns himself to the French chansonnier – Brel, Brassons – where the medium of song is the migrational forging of space to the metaphorical city.

While a recent publication by Julia Brauch bypasses the extent of Cohen's cartography in announcing the Internet as a place of topographical real estate, she is correct in identifying that "material presence is always shifting and quested" for diasporic journeys. (285) The confines and vast cultural worlds created from the post-colonial diaspora in Montreal made *Songs of Leonard Cohen* represent a significant conceptualisation and reclamation of

Jewish space in the city. Cohen's work is mesmerised with imagery of suffering and, specifically, the Holocaust; in "Stories of the Street" he asks: "where do all these highways go, now that we are free?/ Why are the armies marching still that were coming home to me?" (9-10) To introduce "One Of Us Cannot Be Wrong" in 1970, Cohen recalls:

> I wrote this in a peeling room in the Chelsea Hotel, before I was rich and famous and they gave me well painted rooms. I was coming off of Amphetamine, I was pursuing a blonde lady whom I met in a Nazi poster, and I was doing many things to attract her attention: I was lighting wax candles in the form of men and women, I was marrying the smoke of two cones of sandalwood. (*Live at the Isle of Wight*)

Cohen's presentation, however, elicits this imagery as the invisible presence; aside from the "poison gas," (2) Cohen's references to war are sporadic and unquantified. As de Certeau describes "memory is a sort of anti-museum: it is not localizable," he is able to recall the city's invisible representation – where places are physically recreated through discourse and recollection of past events – "the masterword of an anonymous law… [where] objects and words have hollow places in which a past sleeps." (108) The experience of Montreal poetic tradition that caused the reactionary scorning of "the fraternity of war" ("For E.J.P.") is equally his silent admonition of war's fascination; choosing not to scorn Nazi Germany – instead, he falls in love with it.

Reading "Teachers" as an assessment of cartography alongside "Suzanne" leads to assertions of the Jewish antecedence within his recreation narrative. Where Cohen imagines the new Montreal in "Suzanne" by virtue of a light directed by G-d, in "Teachers," Cohen addresses the creator directly, asking "Have I carved enough my

Lord?" (26) Using Soja's theory of *Postmodern Geography*, connecting the socio-spatial dialectic of "Teachers" to its philosophical twin, the mutually constructive interplay of history and geography, leads to some interesting reconsiderations of spatial turn in *Songs of Leonard Cohen*. "Teachers" narrates Cohen's search for his teacher, whom he remains in constant dialogue with despite conversely attempting to seek out their identity. It is, as Dorman and Rawlins say, about "the spurious gurus who take everything, negate everything, disrupt and ruin others' lives – and leave their victims puzzled and empty." (120) As Cohen walks the city in search of the teachers, the only images he can find are of Montreal's history, leaving him bewildered by the nature of the city, where the asymptotic relationship between language and meaning exists increasingly through the outre-langue. Where we assume cartographic clarity in locating Cohen at the Verdun Mental Hospital, where he liked to perform to ensure an honest reaction to his music, (Burger 324) these socio-spatial identities are offset by Montreal's unwillingness to offer historical clarity, resulting in the haunting end to Cohen's song: "Teachers are my lessons done?/ I cannot do another one./ They laughed and laughed and said, "well child,/ are your lessons done?" (48-51)

Thematically, the song mirrors the second piece, "Master Song," which tells of a philosophically complicated ménage à trois between the singer, his woman and her "master." (Ratcliffe 17) Indeed, Cohen introduced the song in 1968 by saying "It's about the Trinity. Leave that for the scholars: It's about three people." (*BBC Sessions*) To assimilate their identities, then, we must assume that the master is the first part of the trinity, with it standing to reason that "the master equally represents its inverse since, by the conclusion, [he] has become the prisoner of longing." (Fitzgerald) Contextually, Cohen's desire to become a musician was as much economic as it pertained to be a

fulfilment of Lorca's unsatisfied longing for a career as a concert pianist[4]. To analyse

Cohen as one would Lorca uncovers spatio-religious readings of the metaphors in absence.

Allusions are made to Mary Magdalen as she dries Jesus' feet with her hair: "You wrap up

his tired face in your hair/ And he hands you the apple core." (13-4) Cohen's treatment of

the Eucharist, asking the master to seduce his prisoner with "wine and bread," (72)

refigures the early allusions to the Holocaust, as Cohen walks the German Shepherd to his

cell "with a collar of leather and nails." (18)

The frantic strumming patterns of "Master Song" and "Teachers" recall the tune, urgency

and loose structure of the first song Cohen wrote, known as "Twelve O'Clock Chant." The

similarities in tune between "Teachers" and "Chant" turn Cohen's songs into an internal

contrafact, defined by Werner as "the use of a familiar melody for a new text." (1290) By

emphasising mantra, Cohen's repetitive monotone recalls what Northrop Frye terms "the

organising rhythm in epos," (Anatomy 251) where "the literary genre in which the radical

presentation *is* the author or minstrel as oral reciter, with a listening audience in front of

him." (365) Frye's designation of "epos" elicits the early Jewish ceremonies and song

tradition which Cohen satirises for contrafact, alongside folk, country and western idioms,

introducing Cohen's new spatio-political templates of Montreal to a pre-established

political and religious harmony.

Cohen's language within which this spatial harmony is achieved, however, is reliant upon

a dominant image of a woman as a translation of cartographic space, increasingly

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[4] Lorca's influence to Cohen was immeasurable: at a live show in Austin, TX, 1988,
Cohen says Lorca entered him into a "universe I understood thoroughly." Cohen translates
Lorca's poem "Little Viennese Waltz" in ode to the Spanish poet, becoming his 1988
song, "Take This Waltz." He later named his daughter Lorca.

identified within a dishonest narrative, as in "The Stranger Song." Where the omniscient narrator recounts critiques of Canadian poetic tradition in *The Favourite Game*, that no man can claim their physical right to inhabit a geographical space, "The Stranger Song" echoes: "I told you when I came I was a stranger." (21) Spatial dishonesty is characterised as a secularisation of religion, acting as a quasi-justification for the narrator's gambling, womanising and deception, that he was in search for panoptic meaning: "He was just some Joseph looking for a manger." (14) The word "stranger" exists within the pre-established dualism and outre-langue contexts of Montreal, where Cohen's collection of poetry *Stranger Music* had been translated in Paris as *Music d'ailleurs.* Quebec poet and playwright Michel Garneau does a separate translation in what Simon refers to as "a gesture of friendship" to Cohen, (17) with his new version *Etrange Musique étrangère* "accentuating the double strangeness of the original title rather than referring to the vague "elsewhere" that the Parisian title gives." (Simon 17) Cohen's linguistic dishonesty, in refusing to establish its dual-existence, directly recalls its Montreal context, reconfirming the need for a new poetic voice.

By the time the listener hears Cohen's final song, "One of Us Cannot Be Wrong," the clarity of Cohen's spatial practise has vanished within the surrealist dichotomies between strangeness and sexuality, secularisation and devout religious tradition. In "Suzanne," for instance, "the lonely wooden tower" (20) can be physically mapped to the sailor's church on the port of Montreal; Cohen's attachment of fear to Christian philosophy, however, – "when he knew for certain/ Only drowning men could see him/ He said "All men will be sailors then/ Until the sea shall free them" (21-4) – becomes a by-product of spatial practise, where physical relics are abandoned for impermanent examinations of Jewish antiquity.

The final track of Cohen's album is importantly his most exploratory use of music as a medium, in what manifests an unsettlingly collected narrative of jealousy, and the internal mêlées to appropriate passion's quota between religion and sex: "And then I confess that I tortured the dress/ That you wore for the world to look through." (6-7) Cohen describes in 1968 how he "plays hands" at the end of the song, (*BBC Sessions*) imitating Ginsberg's famously transplanted "oms" of Eastern religions, and creating what Allan calls a "wordless verse." (129) The preceding verse narrates how an Eskimo showed Cohen a movie he had taken of his lover:

> The poor man could hardly stop shivering,
>
> his lips and his fingers were blue.
>
> I suppose that he froze when the wind took your clothes
>
> and I guess he just never got warm.
>
> But you stand there so nice, in your blizzard of ice,
>
> please let me come into the storm. (24-9)

The wordless verse that follows the ruminating sexuality of Cohen's lyrics acts as a logical continuation and space for the poet to process the eroticised image. Allan describes the sound to be "the direct verbal expression of kinetic emotion," (130) but it goes further in completing Cohen's desired "state of grace," (Frere-Jones) and concept of a secular-religious unity. Werner notes how Niggun, the chanting of single words of praise, became "a means to attain the highest method of transport" (1299) among the Hasidim. As Cohen's wordless tribute ceases, one hears only shrieks as the record fades to an end. As *The Favourite Game* proved to be an act of untying Canadian tradition and identity, that

had been constructed around documentation and conservative navigation of cultural identities, *Songs of Leonard Cohen* should be seen as the spatial and poetic reconstruction of a Montreal that is increasingly sexualised, feminised and splendored to write its own tradition instead of forging one from a non-existent past.

IV. ISLE OF WIGHT, 1970

"As for the political situation, they locked up a man who wanted to rule the world…"

So, "Where are Leonard Cohen's pyjamas?" you ask. And you have every right to ask; having traced Montreal's poetic tradition and Leonard Cohen's place within it, we are left with a distinct lack of nightwear. *The Favourite Game* processed Cohen's own city, its diversities and his establishment within la métissage de la société. *Songs of Leonard Cohen* was his act of mutiny against the institution of English-language poets in Montreal, and their documentation of a historically and topologically unified super-narrative of Canada; it was his medium with which to rewrite its archaic cartography through intimacy, religion and human experience. Yet, for Frye's theory of epos to be relevant and stand alongside McLuhan's assessment of song as a nuanced poetical form, it is not enough to assume a recording's ability to become a fully secularised text when the medium is reliant upon the "minstrel as oral reciter, with a listening audience in front of him." (Frye 365)

Following the decline of the free festival and Isle of Wight's growing reputation from its procurement of Bob Dylan a year earlier, promoters were forced to change location to Afton Down, surrounded by climbing hills on which an estimated 600,000 spectators free-loaded the island, considered to be the largest event of its time. (*Live at the Isle of Wight*) It was, as Murray Lerner recounts, "an unusual place for a counterculture festival." (*Blue Wild Angel*) As the fences were torn down, Kris Kristofferson jeered off the stage, and the island flooded in protest for free music, the festival became a frenzied political arena. For some it was the final time music was communal before becoming a business, and for others it was the place of an epiphany; current festival producer John Giddings describes it

as "the most incredible moment in my career. I walked over the hill and that was when I discovered there were 600,000 other people who liked the same music as me." Five days of chaos and riot went ahead, Jimi Hendrix set fire to the stage, and on the last day, Leonard Cohen was woken from his trailer at 2 a.m., and took to the stage in his pyjamas.

The performance that followed was his admonition that the troubadour can have a secularised resonance, both politically and geographically. In a preface to the performance, he evokes the Cartesian invocation of the blind man as the purveyor of geographical truth and tactile knowledge; at the same time, he calls on the object correlative to associate the circus with his father:

> When I was seven years-old my father used to take me to the circus. He had a black moustache, a great vest and a pansy in his lapel, and he liked the circus better than I did. But there was one thing at the circus that happened that I always used to wait for. I don't want to impose on you, this isn't like a sing-a-long with Mitch, but there was one moment when a man would stand up and he would say "would everybody light a match, so we could locate one another? And could I ask you, each person, to light a match, so that I can see where you all are? Could each of you light a match, so that you'll sparkle like fireflies each at your different heights? I would love to see those matches flare." ("Introduction")

As the spotlight suspended on the political rigidity between spectator and musician, Cohen isolated himself: "It's good to be here alone in front of 600,000 people." ("Introduction") His following performance amplified a complete – and final – break from the rigidity of Canadian tradition, echoing Beat spontaneity and his foundations as a poet in the Jazz

parlours of Downtown Montreal. His new Canadian philosophy was given an international stage where he could intersperse songs and poetry. Nadel notes its importance retrospectively, that "he was given an audience that he had to convince to listen, and he was able to do it." (2016)

Cohen's set enacted a musical ceasefire: "The Partisan" formulates Soja's triple dialectic, peripheralising a socio-historical pairing in favour of the socio-spatial and spatio-temporal that internalises Cohen's outre-langue: "J'ai change' cent fois de nom/ J'ai perdu femme et enfants/ Mais j'ai tant d'amis;/ J'ai la France entière"[5] (25-8); that echoed the politicisation of their surroundings: "When they poured across the border/ I was cautioned to surrender" (1-2); and that silenced the spectator's political protests, contextualising French resistance to Nazi Germany: "Oh, the wind, the wind is blowing/ Through the graves the wind is blowing/ Freedom soon will come;/ Then we'll come from the shadows." (17-20) Cohen ends his set by transplanting his extradiegetic Montreal narrative to the international acclaim of Clinton Street, NY. His closing song, "Famous Blue Raincoat," became the situation in which the audience were the text in epos: "It's four in the morning…/ I'm writing you now just to see if you're better." (1-2) The last words were spoken, translating a conclusive sincerity of poetic expression from poet to audience: "Sincerely, L. Cohen." (33)

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[5] Previously in "The Partisan," Cohen sings an English translation: "I have changed my name so often,/ I have lost my wife and children,/ but I have many friends, and some of them are with me." (5-8) At Isle of Wight, he adds a note of comradery: "they're with me right here tonight." (*Live at the Isle of Wight 1970*)

3,000 miles away, Montreal Downtown approaches early evening, the jaunts of Cohen and Breavman's adolescence are a vibrant display of jazz parlours, and Bistros with frantic scrawls on the wall: "Marita, find me, I'm almost 30." (*Ladies and Gentlemen*) Old student art galleries flake paint down the sides of neighbouring coffee houses on Sherbrooke Street, and Cohen is almost 36. His narrative and poetic insurrections had shocked the Canadian literary establishment, but where its tradition had become a nationalised product of Adorno's injunction that there can exist "no poetry after Auschwitz," Cohen wrote upon the spatial practises of Montreal and its diasporic landcape to reclaim a narrative that savoured individual experience. Adorno's literary *huis clos* is easily defeated: "The difficulty is to find language for this world without values ... Perhaps the most convincing way is that by which dreams express anguish: by displacement, disguise, and indirection." (Greenstein 35) Montreal had spent decades of literary misrepresentation through documentary poems and historical narratives; now confronted by a poetic and musical reconstruction, one man in his pyjamas had externalised a new spatial practise of the city to an international audience.

> *"As for the political situation, they locked up a man who wanted to rule the world. The fools. They locked up the wrong man."*

"Hey, That's No Way To Say Goodbye"

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