

International Conference

LEONARD COHEN 2026

Global Perspectives on
a Multi-disciplinary Artist

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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Leonard Cohen 2026

Global Perspectives on a Multi-disciplinary Artist

The ten-year anniversary of Leonard Cohen's death in November 2026 invites renewed critical reflection on his life, work, and significance today. The past decade has witnessed a surge in publications on Cohen for both academic and general audiences, posthumous releases of music and the publication of an early novel, as well as his appearance in the works of other artists as both inspiration and antagonist. A singer-songwriter, poet, novelist, and visual artist, Cohen was both an icon of his home city, Montreal, and a citizen of the world. Now, as in his lifetime, his art resists divisions between nations and audiences, media and genres, philosophies and religions, academic disciplines and styles of fandom.

Despite Cohen's own efforts to overcome such divisions, writing on his work often reiterates them, separating literature and music, global and national influences, and academic and general audiences. Moreover, commemoration itself risks settling into a fixed narrative, smoothing over the contradictions and productive tensions that animated Cohen's work when he was alive and was continually recontextualizing his creations. A decade after Cohen's passing, the challenge is to resist this tendency toward stabilization and instead to rekindle the dynamism and ongoing evolution that characterized his artistic practice.

Focused on re-evaluating Cohen's work and legacy in ways that attend to the multiple dimensions of his art and its reception, this conference brings together scholars from across disciplines and around the world. The papers address almost every aspect of Cohen's poetry, fiction, music, visual art, and performances, as well as his life and enduring legacy. In keeping with the international scope of the conference and the interdisciplinary nature of Cohen's own artistic practices, we are particularly pleased to see critical approaches that cross disciplinary boundaries and push Cohen scholarship in new directions, including:

Reception/Translation:

Who cares about Leonard Cohen, and what do they care about? How is Cohen's work reshaped or reimagined as it circulates transnationally, across diverse contexts and audiences, whether in translation or not? How might recent developments in translation studies illuminate the implicit translations embedded within Cohen's literary oeuvre (e.g., the conversations between F. and the narrator in *Beautiful Losers*), the multilingual dimensions of his musical compositions (e.g., the Hebrew chanting in "You Want It Darker"), or the interactions between music, language, and other multimodal elements?

Adaptation/Collaboration/Remediation:

How have Cohen's works been revived, revised, and repurposed by other artists, including by artists working in different media? How should we understand Cohen's own practices of remediating himself, from poetry to song, from word to image? How did Cohen collaborate with other artists, for example through his own adaptations of works and traditions as well as his translation of ideas across different media? In what ways have technological innovations, changes in the music industry, and Cohen's collaborations with musicians, producers, and technicians shaped the creation, development, and reception of his musical works?

Local and Global Settings:

While Montreal, Hydra, and L.A. remain the places most associated with Cohen, he travelled widely and for different reasons, to Cuba to witness a revolution in 1961, for example, or to Fredericton, New Brunswick, to launch his comeback tour in 2008. How did specific places inspire Cohen and where do they show up in his work? How can we read the details of place within Cohen's art, despite his attempts at universality and his habit of editing locations out of his music (with prominent exceptions, such as Manhattan and Berlin)?

Interdisciplinary Approaches and Critical Methods:

What areas of study and theoretical lenses are best for analyzing the variety of Cohen's art as well as the nuances of his performances and career? How should contemporary scholars grapple with questions of gender, sexuality, race, colonialism, oppression, and power, which appear throughout Cohen's *oeuvre*? How do critical methods and interdisciplinary approaches to individual texts or moments in Cohen's career alter understandings of his legacy?

Material Culture:

From the Kleenexes stuffing shoes and bras in *The Favourite Game* to the memorabilia sold during Cohen's final tour, how does material culture situate Cohen's art within specific times and places as well as modes of signification and networks of circulation? How is Cohen's legacy constructed in and through physical objects? What role do his graphic works play in this context? Material analyses may also consider how Cohen's art was made and circulated, the materiality of his archive.

Religion and Philosophy:

Cohen's life and work were shaped by diverse religious and philosophical traditions, from the Catholic milieu of his native Montreal and his Jewish heritage to the Buddhist and Advaita Vedanta practices he explored through encounters with Kyozen Joshu Sasaki Roshi and Ramesh Balsekar. How can the intersections of spirituality,

religious practice, and artistic creation be understood in Cohen's oeuvre, and how do these traditions inform his poetry, songwriting, and public persona?

Main organisers

Francis Mus (Ghent University), Kait Pinder (Acadia University),
Joel Deshayé (Memorial University)

Other members of the organising committee

Frederik Dhaenens (Ghent University), France Schils (Ghent University), Tessa Vannieuwenhuyze (Ghent University), Dirk Van Hulle (University of Antwerp), Michel Delville (Liège University)

This conference is an interuniversity collaboration between Ghent University (Belgium), Acadia University (Canada), Memorial University (Canada), the University of Strasbourg (France), the University of Antwerp (Belgium), and the University of Liège (Belgium).

Scientific committee

Colin Hill (University of Toronto), Christophe Lebold (Université de Strasbourg), Elly McCausland (Ghent University), Anneleen Masschelein (KU Leuven), Tom Toremans (KU Leuven), Andrew Bricker (Ghent University), Birgit Van Puymbroeck (VU Brussel)

This conference was made possible through the financial support of FWO, Ghent University, Liège University (CIPA - Traverses), University of Antwerp, Université de Strasbourg, Memorial University, Acadia University, research groups TRACE and CLIV.

We also wish to extend our gratitude to the TRACE research group for their insights and practical contributions to the organization of our conference, as well as all colleagues who generously agreed to chair our panels.

"Leonard Cohen, Lorca, and the Virtues in a poem"

José Miguel Arias

The year 2011 marked a decisive moment in the career of Leonard Cohen, as he received the Prince of Asturias Award for Literature in recognition of his influential literary and musical work. That same year, Howard Gardner was also awarded the prize for his significant contributions to the field of social sciences. During the press conference prior to the ceremony, Gardner reflected on his recently published book *Truth, Beauty, and Goodness Reframed*, in which he reconsiders these classical values in a contemporary context.

These three concepts, truth, beauty, and goodness, are central to Cohen's life and work, as evidenced in his acceptance speech: "...and if one is to express the great inevitable defeat that awaits us all, it must be done within the strict confines of dignity and beauty." This statement encapsulates a poetics grounded in ethical and aesthetic responsibility.

This paper analyzes the presence and articulation of these three values, following Gardner's framework, in the poem "Homage to Morente", included in his posthumous collection *The Flame* (2019). The poem was written in 2014, when Cohen, profoundly influenced from his youth by the poetry of Federico García Lorca, was invited to participate in a memorial dedicated to Enrique Morente, the groundbreaking flamenco singer from Granada and a key figure in the renewal of the genre. Although he was unable to attend the event, held in Madrid, he composed this poem as a tribute to Morente's artistic legacy and his role in bringing together flamenco and Lorquian poetics, most notably in their collaboration on the album *Omega*.

Ultimately, the poem constitutes a synthesis of these virtues, especially humility and simplicity, which consistently characterized Cohen's artistic and personal ethos until the final moments of his life.

José Miguel Arias holds a degree in Education, specializing in Foreign Language Teaching, and a degree in Business Studies, both from the University of Salamanca. He also completed an Official Master's Degree in Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language at the Camilo José Cela University.

He is currently a bilingual teacher at "La Vaguada" Public Secondary School (Zamora, Spain) and has undertaken doctoral studies in Advanced English Studies: Languages and Cultures in Contact at the University of Salamanca, focusing on Leonard Cohen

and Claudio Rodríguez. As a specialist in Leonard Cohen, he has published scholarly work and delivered lectures at various universities in Spain and Portugal. He has also organized cultural events related to Cohen's legacy, including concerts, lectures, and the poetic-musical recital "*Lorca and Cohen: A One-Way Journey*."

He has been a member of the "Claudio Rodríguez Permanent Seminar" since 2017.

Leonard Cohen's Public Spirituality: Lyrics, Survival, and the Canadian Aporetic Condition

John W. Bessai

This paper reads selected Leonard Cohen lyrics as a public poetics of survival. It approaches Cohen's songwriting through the Canadian aporetic condition, a framework for understanding recurring tensions in Canadian public life around belonging, spirituality, intimacy, historical memory, and civic responsibility. The paper focuses on four songs: "Suzanne," "Bird on the Wire," "Democracy," and "You Want It Darker." Taken together, these lyrics trace a movement from Montreal's riverine and religious imaginaries to wider transnational scenes of judgment, endurance, and democratic uncertainty. They show how Cohen compresses theological language, erotic address, civic disappointment, and ethical vulnerability into a lyric voice that remains rooted in place and audible across global settings.

Methodologically, the paper uses close reading informed by political theory, literary criticism, and scholarship on public culture. It attends to imagery, address, tonal shifts, and the relation between lyric voice and public world. This approach treats Cohen's songs as crafted verbal forms that carry philosophical pressure while sustaining musical and affective force. Cohen's lyric practice stylizes contradiction. It gives shape to damaged solidarities, fragile hope, and the persistence of spiritual longing within disenchanted settings. Montreal remains crucial here as a matrix of Jewish inheritance, Catholic atmosphere, bilingual modernity, and urban memory, while the songs themselves circulate through broader North American and global reception.

The paper contributes to Leonard Cohen studies by centring lyrics as a dense site of philosophical and civic expression. It also brings Cohen scholarship into conversation with contemporary Canadian political thought through the concept of the Canadian aporetic condition. The argument presents Cohen's lyrics as a sustained art of survival, transforming pressure, fracture, and public unease into language that remains singable, meditative, and enduring.

John W. Bessai, PhD, is an independent scholar, media producer, and educator whose research examines public institutions, public culture, media, and democratic life in Canada and beyond. He completed his PhD in Canadian Studies at Trent University with a dissertation on the National Film Board of Canada and art as a public service. His current work develops the concepts of public code, counter-policy, the Canadian aporetic condition, and public spirituality across political theory, cultural policy, media studies, and literary analysis. He has published on Canadian public culture, environmental media, digital storytelling, and institutional design in journals and edited collections. His broader research interests include state theory, survival, cultural memory, aesthetic form, and the role of art in public life. Recent and forthcoming work appears in *Études canadiennes / Canadian Studies*, *PORTAL*, the *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, and the *British Journal of Canadian Studies*. Website: www.johnbessai.com.

Queering Cohen: Toward a Queer Poetics of Leonard Cohen

Carla Billon

This thesis proposes a queer reading of the poetry of Leonard Cohen, arguing that queerness is not merely latent in his work but constitutive of his poetic vision. Drawing on queer theory, particularly the work of Eve Sedgwick, Jack Halberstam, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Michael Warner, it contends that Cohen's poetry fundamentally embodies queerness through its celebration of multiplicity, its resistance to resolution, and its refusal of normative categories of desire, gender, and spirituality.

Through close readings of four poems – “Suzanne,” “I See You on a Greek Mattress,” “How To Speak Poetry,” and “Happens to the Heart” – this study identifies three overlapping dimensions of queerness in Cohen's poetics: the interplay of desire, failure, and religious ambiguity; the presence of homoeroticism and gender-blind intimacy; and the productive dissolution of stable selfhood. It argues that Cohen not only represents queer desire but also develops a queer aesthetic grounded in contradiction, paradox, and indeterminacy.

By queering religion, Cohen collapses the binary between the sacred and the profane; by destabilizing identity, he challenges the coherence of the lyrical subject; and by embracing failure, he transforms negativity into a site of creative and ethical possibility. Queerness thus emerges not solely as a theme, but as a method of reading and a mode of being that reshapes poetic form and meaning.

Positioning Cohen within a tradition of queer poetics rather than reducing his work to the persona of the heterosexual “ladies’ man,” this thesis addresses a critical blind spot in Cohen studies. It ultimately demonstrates that a queer theoretical lens offers indispensable insight into the complexity, ambiguity, and enduring significance of Cohen's poetry.

Carla Billon is an MPhil student in Modern and Contemporary Literary Studies at Trinity College Dublin. They hold a BA (Honours) in English Literature from McGill University, with a minor in Gender, Sexuality, Feminist, and Social Justice. Their work is grounded in queer theory and disability studies, with a focus on twentieth-century literature and the ethical, formal, and epistemological questions that arise in the representation of marginalized bodies and identities. Her broader research interrogates the ways disability is mobilized as metaphor, narrative prosthesis, or aesthetic resource, often at the expense of lived experience. They are particularly interested in how critical reading practices can resist reductive interpretive frameworks and destabilize normative assumptions about embodiment, agency, and subjectivity in literary texts. She plans to pursue doctoral research in English literature, focusing on disability and queer studies, with the aim of contributing to theoretical conversations about narrative form, representation, and responsibility.

Translating Leonard Cohen: Hallelujah as a Translator's Poethics

Emilio Rodríguez Blackburn

This article addresses the theoretical and technical considerations taken in order to produce a Spanish translation of the world-famous song “Hallelujah” by Leonard Cohen. It ultimately posits that, vis a vis, translation offers a possibility for reinterpreting Leonard Cohen's work and that translation theories can find answers for achieving its complex goal particularly in Cohen's own views on poetic creation. “Hallelujah”, through the song's self-referentiality and the reflection of the singer on David's story, is studied here as Cohen's poethics; it states that songs are composed and performed as a tool for a singer to achieve spiritual reconciliation, for which the ‘hallelujah’ exclamation is metonymical; that particular effect is essential to the poetic text. Literary translation, unlike academic work, relates to the poetic texts it deals with more profoundly, since it is considered to inhabit and reproduce the aesthetical effects, in another language, exclusive to the original. If for Cohen the song is essentially produced for a desired spiritual effect, its translation then can and must render it too.

“Hallelujah” must serve as a poethics, equally, for the singer as for the translator: as “there’s a blaze of light in everyword”, the merely lyrical and linguistical dimensions of the song are enlightened by something beyond them, common to the multiplicity of languages: their musical quality. Music sublimates words into spiritual means. To translate under the same spirit as Cohen composed, and to give translations the same effect as Cohen’s songs, the translator must become a singer too. Through the secret chord is the Lord pleased, the translator must reach out for it too. A careful and relentless technical process was set about for a Spanish “Hallelujah” to be sang.

Emilio Rodríguez Blackburn (2002) is a graduate from the Bachelor’s degree in Literature of the Universidad de los Andes, in Bogotá, Colombia, and studied one term abroad in the University of Bristol’s BA English programme. He finished the major’s course recently and obtained the title this year. His academic background focuses on artistic and literary practices as vehicle of spiritual explorations, and as pursuit of novel ways of aesthetical expresion, in dialogue with critical theory and cultural studies. His Bachelor’s Thesis addressed translation’s theoretical and technical problems for translating into spanish Leonard Cohen’s “Hallelujah”. He has translated many more of Cohen’s poems as part of the degree’s Translation Seminar. His paper on colombian experimental writer Albalucía Ángel will soon be published by the Universidad de los Andes as part of Peregrina y viajera: Nuevos ensayos sobre la obra de Albalucía Ángel, a homage book-dossier on her work.

A Cross-Cultural Connection: Cohen, a Canadian, brings Creative Clarity to an HBCU Campus

Mary-Lynn Chambers

Leonard Cohen’s marginalized Jewish heritage laid the foundation for a cross-cultural connection with first-generation African American college students who attend an Historic Black College and University (HBCU) in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. As a Canadian literature professor teaching in the American South, I wondered how my students would respond to the disillusionment within Cohen’s literature. It was the exposure to Cohen’s struggles and his disillusionment with relationships, society, and religion that motivated the students to consider how Cohen’s stories, poetry, and lyrics could be an impetus for their own personal reflection.

Cohen is famous for his song Hallelujah where he tells his audience that “I’ve told the truth, I didn’t come to fool ya.” Yet, it took Cohen’s writing to demonstrate his

raw truth to these HBCU students. In a CBC interview, Cohen explained the purity of poetry, helping the budding poet to understand that “When you want to polish parts of yourself, you do it with poetry” (“Leonard Cohen Talks....”). As a Canadian teaching at a Black college in North Carolina, I wanted to help the students engage in a cross-cultural learning experience through the poetry and writing of Leonard Cohen. During the initial introduction to Cohen, many of the young, black, lower-middle class, American students wondered what they could learn from an older, white, upper-class Canadian artist.

The researcher from Sound of History explains that Cohen knew he needed to write “something to do with the truth” (“A Brief Look...”). But what is truth? Can we – humanity – whittle away the differences that separate us to find a shared global perspective that we can call truth – a perspective that can be owned by a Canadian artist while inspiring African American students? This presentation will share how research into Leonard Cohen’s life provided a critical lens through which underprivilege African American students were able to discover the relatability of Cohen’s disillusionment and the voice to make that connection heard.

Works Cited

- “A Brief Look at the Life and Legacy of Leonard Cohen.” Sound of History, YouTube, 2026
- “Leonard Cohen Talks About the Poetic Mind.” Canadian Broadcast Corporation, 1966, YouTube, 2000.

Dr. **Mary-Lynn Chambers** has her Ph.D. in Technical and Professional Communication from East Carolina University. As the author of *Pedagogy and Practice: A Multi-Modal Approach for a Multi-Ethnic Online Classroom*, this professor continues to pursue research in the field of cross-cultural communication. She also presents and publishes on the feminist voice in literature including her recent article “The New African Woman: Author and Protagonist in Mariama Bâ’s *So Long a Letter*.” Dr. Chambers loves to inspire students to develop a global perspective in the classroom. Reading and travel are two of her great joys. She has taught English in Virginia and North Carolina at community colleges and universities. Her instructional focus is composition, communication, and literature. She enjoys interacting with her students and inspiring them to write better, communicate effectively, think critically, and love literature.

Jesus, the Madonna, and Much More: Christian Imagery in the Work of Leonard Cohen

Doron B. Cohen

It is well known that while maintaining his commitment to his Jewish heritage throughout his life, Leonard Cohen was interested in a wide range of religious phenomena, and was particularly fascinated with the figure of Jesus Christ. Still, it may prove worthwhile to reexamine Cohen's Christology from his earliest to his latest writings, and try to decipher the appeal and the meaning Jesus held for him. Simultaneously, the figure of the Madonna also stands out in Cohen's work, expressed through various images. And as Cohen was a poet rather than a theologian, my intention is to examine the imagery of both figures in Cohen's poetry and analyze the ways by which they informed his creativity.

Dr. **Doron B. Cohen**, lecturer at the Graduate School of Theology, Doshisha University, Kyoto. I have written and lectured widely on Leonard Cohen's work. My publications include an annotated translation of *Book of Mercy* in Hebrew (*Sefer Rachamim*, Jerusalem: Carmel, 2016), and *Leonard Cohen's Book of Mercy: An Interpretation*, Portland, Oregon: WIPF and Stock (2026).

Opportunities for Young People to Learn from Iconic Song- Writers such as Leonard Cohen through Educational Practices

John Currie

English Language and Music classes are a common feature of post-primary school education globally, and the study of English Literature and Religious Education (RE) are also widely available. This paper examines the need for research exploring the development of young peoples' (ages 11-18) lyrical literacy (LL), particularly the work of famous song writers such as Leonard Cohen. LL in this paper refers to three components: knowledge and understanding of a range of musical artists; skills in thinking critically about lyrics; and active participation in group activities concerning the songs' themes, narratives and relevance.

I will suggest that lyrically-literate students will be conscious of the wisdom often inherent in these lyrics and thus would be able to critically reflect and call upon that knowledge.

My paper will examine pedagogical approaches in schools for developing LL in respect of Leonard Cohen's lyrics. I will first define lyrical literacy and then discuss the potential learning opportunities presented by Cohen's lyrics. Finally, reference will be made to opportunities for advancing LL through extra-curricular activities.

A review of curriculum documents was unable to locate any formal reference to Cohen's lyrical works, or indeed more broadly to the concept of lyrical literacy, within the post-primary curriculums of the UK and Ireland. Given the wide-ranging and enriching educational opportunities that Cohen – and other's – works can provide, research exploring this issue appears to be timely.

John Currie recently graduated from Queen's University, Belfast with a PhD in Education. His research examined 'the role of education in providing opportunities for young people to develop political literacy through teaching and learning practices in Northern Ireland'. Experienced in teaching Government and Politics and History to A-level, John has also covered music lessons in numerous second-level schools during his teaching career. John noticed the lack of familiarity amongst many students of the music and lyrics of some of the canonical popular songwriters of our time including Leonard Cohen, Joni Mitchell, and Van Morrison. John is currently developing a range of resources for running multidisciplinary educational workshops.

Presenting Leonard Cohen: A Pedagogical Experience with Life-long Learners

Daniel S. Fogel

What happens when a course on Leonard Cohen is designed for older, college-educated adults who bring decades of life experience to the table? This conference session will offer practical insights for educators presenting cultural figures to lifelong learners, as well as reflections on how shared inquiry becomes a space for personal meaning-making and community-building. This information is based on a ten-hour, five-session noncredit course offered through DavidsonLearns, a lifelong learning organization in Davidson, North Carolina, USA. Among other critical material, I used Christophe Lebold's *Leonard Cohen: The Man Who Saw the Angels Fall* as the course's structural backbone. Supplemental information included Cohen's work samples (e.g., poems from Cohen's *Stranger Music* and his song recordings), documentaries, video interviews, academic articles, books (e.g., David Shumway's *The World of Leonard Cohen* and Daniel J. Levitin's *I Heard There Was a Secret Cord*), and a heavy dose of participant comments from their encounters with Cohen's work.

Learning outcomes focused on Cohen's transformation from poet to performer, the universal themes in his work, his place in cultural history and relevance today, and interpretive skills in reading and listening.

Several features distinguished this offering from a typical college course:

- The depth of participant knowledge, which became a shared resource for collective learning;
- Two participants' first-hand report on an interview they conducted with Professor Lebold;
- Analysis of distinctive features of Cohen's performances as compared to the covers of his songs, many of which the participants heard in concerts;
- Reading of Federico García Lorca's poems, especially from *Diván del Tamarit*, to show the forms and styles (Qasidas and Ghazals) appropriated by Cohen;
- Comparative analysis of Cohen alongside his contemporaries such as Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Prince, and Kris Kristofferson; and
- A guitarist's demonstration of Cohen's musical techniques.

After outlining the activities, distinctive characteristics, and ideas developed in the course, I'll assess how this study of Leonard Cohen's work is instructive for courses geared toward adult learners.

Participant feedback captured the course's impact. For example:

"Grateful for the experience, and the abundance of information you left to ponder and peruse in the future. Love how you engaged the participants, a true community of learning... Leonard Cohen has a different place in my vocabulary now, and synthesizing what we learned did not end on our last day...."

"Best course I have ever taken, and I have a PhD!"

Dan Fogel received his B.S. and M.A. from the Pennsylvania State University and his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. He has held various academic and administrative positions and worked in the fossil fuel and healthcare industries. Dan has published in behavioral studies, education, healthcare, psychology, sociology, economics, and management journals, and has written several book chapters, books, cases, and articles for the popular press. His recent article in the Huffington Post influenced the design of this course. His forthcoming book, *Near Enemies*, asks, "Do we ever know another person?"

Leonard Cohen & Nick Cave - The Art of Interpreting a Leonard Cohen-song or how to do a "good" Leonard Cohen-Cover-Song

Christof Graf

There are many cover versions of Leonard Cohen songs. In 1984, Australian singer/songwriter Nick Cave was one of the first musicians to interpret the song "Avalanche" from Leonard Cohen's 1971 album "Songs of Love and Hate" on the 1984 debut album "From Her To Eternity" by Nick Cave's band "The Bad Seeds".

His interpretation is characterized by a dark, melancholic and dramatic mood. Nick Cave interprets the song with an intense, almost spoken voice, accompanied by a dark, atmospheric instrumentation. The original text by Leonard Cohen deals with topics such as pain, submission and spiritual/emotional isolation.

The art of covering a Leonard Cohen song lies in understanding the lyrical core, but radically destroying and recreating the musical shell – a process that Nick Cave has exemplified with his interpretation of "Avalanche". Cave transformed Cohen's rather reverent, guitar-based original into a menacing, intense post-punk masterpiece.

Leonard Cohen was indirectly positive and humorous about Nick Cave's cover version of his song "Avalanche". He said that many who cover his songs are downright butchering his songs, but the way Nick Cave did it was a true "butcher's art". This was tantamount to great recognition.

This "individual paper" deals with the question: How to cover a Leonard Cohen Song?

To answer this question, Christof Graf cites conversations with Nick Cave and with other popular music artists who have interpreted songs by Leonard Cohen.

The contents of the presentation are the comparison between the original and the cover version as well as the description of the "path" from the original to the new interpretation. It's also about an artist's approach to covering a Leonard Cohen song. Stylistic features in the procedure are also discussed: Cave, for example, retains the poetic text, but adds an "agitated" and "threatening" mood. It is not just a "tribute" or a "homage", but a "dissection" of the original in the sense of Arthur Rimbaud, which makes the pain of the text palpable anew. The presentation concludes with audio samples and a conclusion.

Prof. Dr. **Christof Graf** (1963), professor of Economics, Marketing & Management at the University of Applied Sciences "htw saar" in Saarbrücken/ Germany. He works

as professor, journalist, radio, print and online media contributor. He has authored several books and articles on Leonhard Cohen and did many interviews with Leonard Cohen since 1988 (Books: *So long, Leonard* (1990), *Partisan Of Love* (1996), *Titan der Worte* (2010)). Graf also published books on Bob Dylan (*Man On The Road – The Never Ending Tour* (1999), *America* (2012), *Bob Dylan – On The Road – The Neverending Tour 1988 – 2021*, (2022) and *Joe Jocker* (2014) an “The Rock At The Ring-Festival (2015).

Graf is author of “The Cohenpedia Series Vol. I – VI” (2018-2026), which includes six books on Leonard Cohen. – Blogger, Podcaster & Webmaster of www.cohenpedia.de and www.leonardcohen.de and blog.leonardcohen.de (1996-2026).

Contact: drgrafs@b@aol.com / www.cohenpedia.de / blog.leonardcohen.de

A Crack in Everything: Leonard Cohen and North American Neo-Sabbatianism

Mark Gunnery

This paper explores the underexamined influence of Sabbatianism on Leonard Cohen’s life and work. Cohen’s engagement with other spiritual traditions—including Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Zen—has been widely studied. However, Cohen’s interest in Sabbatianism, an early modern Kabbalistic messianic movement characterized by radical theology, antinomian practices, and religious hybridity, has received very little academic attention. By closely reading Cohen’s poetry, novels, song lyrics, and interviews for Sabbatian themes, including messianism, the crossing of religious boundaries, and the conflation of brokenness with holiness, this paper demonstrates that Cohen creatively engaged with Sabbatianism throughout his career.

This thesis also examines the relationship between Cohen and Reb Yakov Leib HaKohain, also known as Lawrence Corey, a self-styled Neo-Sabbatian teacher and the founder of Donmeh West. Donmeh West was a “digital yeshiva” through which Yakov Leib taught his idiosyncratic brand of theology from the late 1990s until his death in 2017. Cohen was a student and supporter of Donmeh West, and imagery from Yakov Leib’s teachings appear in Cohen’s final creative works. Using textual analysis of Cohen’s late poetry and songs, as well as archival and digital sources related to Cohen and Yakov Leib, this study traces the subtle yet pervasive influence of Yakov Leib’s Neo-Sabbatian thought on Cohen’s creative and spiritual journey.

Sabbatianism provided Cohen with a historical model of religious hybridity that mirrored his own heterodox spirituality. Examining Cohen’s engagement with Sabbatian themes provides new ways to interpret his work. This study also situates Cohen in the Neo-Sabbatian digital revival led by Reb Yakov Leib, expanding the history of Sabbatianism into contemporary North America.

Mark Gunnery is a historian and public radio producer from Baltimore, USA. He is a graduate student at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), where his research focuses on 20th and 21st-century discourses about Sabbatianism. He was a Dresher Center for the Humanities Fellow at UMBC and recently won the Joseph D. Reese Memorial Prize for best essay on a historical topic. Gunnery is the Senior Podcast Producer at Baltimore Public Media and is the Executive Producer of *Maryland Unfolded*, a history podcast. Before working at Baltimore Public Media, he was Director of Communications and Content at the Jewish Museum of Maryland, where he developed, produced, and co-hosted the *Disloyal* podcast.

“I have tried, in my way, to be free”: Performativity and Authenticity in Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s Uses of “Bird on a Wire”

Helena Gurfinkel

In January 2026, *Senses of Cinema* published an article by Bleart Thaçi that provides a comprehensive list of Cohen songs on Fassbinder’s soundtracks. “Bird on a Wire” appears to be Fassbinder’s consistent favorite. Thaçi omits or intentionally avoids *World on a Wire* (*Welt am Draht*), a 1973 television series based on the novel *Simulacron-3* by Daniel F. Galouye, which Fassbinder clearly named with his favorite Cohen tune in mind. The omission may have to do with the song’s absence from the soundtrack. To me, it is a reminder that Fassbinder refers to the song in films/series that explore, either centrally or peripherally, tensions between sexuality, performance, and authenticity.

Cohen’s 1969 song conveys a clash between social expectations and freedom. It features multiple similes (“like”), thus creating a distance between the “authentic” and its “likeness,” as well as imagery that contrasts raw animality with artistry. In *Fox and His Friends* (its German title, *Faustrecht der Freiheit*, resonating with Cohen’s lyrics), the protagonist, played by the director, is slowly dying to “Bird on a Wire” on a car radio), unable to express sexuality that is authentic, emotionally and corporeally. The film itself was not free from the LGBTQ activists’ critique of its representation of gay men. In *Like a Bird on a Wire*, Brigitte Mira is a cabaret singer and minor gay icon, with her campy barb-trading with a fellow singer and a knowing performance in a

“man’s club” in which there are no women. Fassbinder and his star, Kurt Raab, clad in leather, enjoy the performance. Queerness and undoing of heteronormative values happen via art/artifice. The outcome is similar in the subplot of *World on a Wire* that involves the death of a likely transgender Dietrich impersonator and the queering of a child who imitates her, or is her as a child.

Helena Gurfinkel became a devoted Leonard Cohen fan when she heard “First, We Take Manhattan” circa 1988. In the intervening years, she has become Professor of English at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and Editor-in-Chief of *PLL: Papers on Language and Literature*. Originally a Victorianist, she has explored various research avenues and published extensively on Victorian-to-contemporary British literature, gender, queer studies, theory, pedagogy, and film. She is the author of *Queering Patriarchy in Victorian and Modern British Literature: Outlaw Fathers* (Fairleigh Dickinson UP/Bloomsbury) and editor of *ReFocus: The Films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder* (forthcoming from Edinburgh UP in 2027). She is now writing a monograph titled *Cinematic Beasts: Adapting Henry James in the Age of AI and Hetero-Pessimism* for Cambridge Core/Anthem Press. Her favorite Cohen albums are “Death of a Ladies’ Man,” “Recent Songs,” and “I’m Your Man.” Controversially, she prefers *The Favorite Game* to *Beautiful Losers*.

Primitivism, Ancestry, and the Postmodern in Leonard Cohen’s “A Ballet of Lepers”

Nico Hernando

Published posthumously in 2022, Leonard Cohen’s novella, *A Ballet of Lepers*, engages with many themes typical of the writer’s early fiction: alienation, identity, language, and, notably, violence. This paper reads Cohen’s deliberate conflation of primitivism with European ancestry in *A Ballet of Lepers* as the author’s attempt to “interrogate the present as history,” a questioning that Michael D’Arcy and Mathias Nilges identify as characteristic of the contemporary.¹ A close reading of the novel illustrates how Cohen structures the *fictional* narrative to challenge embedded *historical* and racially-encoded narratives about primitivism and violence. In doing so, the paper reveals a burgeoning inclination towards the postmodern in one of Cohen’s earliest works of

fiction – prefiguring Linda Hutcheon’s evaluation of his later novel, *Beautiful Losers*, as a quintessential work of Canadian postmodernism.

Nico Hernando is a Master of Arts student in the Department of English and Theatre at Acadia University in Nova Scotia, Canada. His ongoing thesis examines the utopian impulse in and reception of James Baldwin’s fiction.

Leonard Cohen Is: A Tale of Two Solitudes

Susan Ingram

So far there have been two major exhibitions dedicated to Leonard Cohen. “[T]he first to be entirely devoted to the imagination and legacy of this great singer/songwriter, man of letters and global icon from Montréal” was *Leonard Cohen: Une brèche en toute chose/ A Crack in Everything*, which was designed as part of the official program for Montréal’s 375th anniversary celebrations in 2017 and which received Cohen’s blessing before his death. It was on display at the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal (MAC) from November 9, 2017 to April 12, 2018 before setting off on an international tour, with stops at New York’s Jewish Museum (April 12 to September 8, 2019), Kunstforeningen GL STRAND and Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen, Denmark (October 23, 2019 – April 13, 2020), and the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco (September 17, 2020 – January 24, 2021). The second, *Leonard Cohen: Everybody Knows*, also marketed itself as a first, namely “the first museum exhibition to present the holdings of the Leonard Cohen Family Trust.” It ran from December 7, 2022 to April 10, 2023 at Toronto’s Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), which a decade earlier had served as the first stop on the *David Bowie Is* international tour.

Building on Erin MacLeod’s recent work on Cohen and Montréal, this comparative paper situates the two Cohen exhibitions in the aftermath of Bowie’s blockbuster archival efforts and analyzes how their contrasting approaches to fashioning Cohen are sustained by the strength of Cohen’s locational history with them – as hometown and publishing centre, respectively. How the exhibitions reflect each city’s global aspirations emerges as part of an ongoing history of deep divisions, which Cohen’s international success, like that of many of Canada’s other national cultural icons, serves to mask.

¹ D’Arcy, Michael, and Mathias Nilges. “Introduction: *The Contemporaneity of Modernism*.” *The Contemporaneity of Modernism: Literature, Media, Culture*, edited by Michael D’Arcy and Mathias Nilges, Routledge, 2016, pp. 1-14.

Susan Ingram is Professor in the Department of Humanities at York University, Toronto, where she coordinates the Graduate Diploma in Comparative Literature. She is the general editor of Intellect Book's recently rebranded "Worlds of Chic" series and co-author of the volumes on Berlin, Vienna, Los Angeles, and the forthcoming *Worlds of Silicon Chic*. A past president of the Canadian Comparative Literature Association and its current web systems administrator, her research interests revolve around the institutions of European cultural modernity and their legacies.

The Journey of Song and Verse: Leonard Cohen's Artistic Path

Katarzyna Anna Jaworska

This paper draws from my M2 dissertation (viva voce 20.06.2025), *Song Lyrics vs. Poetry: Leonard Cohen Writing Both Poetry and Song Lyrics*, and proposes a tripartite framework to condense Cohen's creative universe. Organized around journey, song and verse, and artistic path, it explores the permeable threshold between poetry and song lyrics and how Cohen challenges distinctions between literary and musical expression.

Journey functions as both thematic and analytical lens, referring to motifs of spiritual seeking, desire, exile, faith, and return, while situating Cohen within the Beatnik legacy, folk revival, bohemian communities, and contemporaries such as Bob Dylan. This highlights the cultural trajectory that enabled the singer-songwriter as a literary figure bridging oral and written traditions.

Song and Verse examines duality between poetry and lyrics without rigid boundaries through close readings of poems and songs, focusing on metaphor, symbolism, rhythm, and voice, and how musical performance transforms poetic meaning via melody and vocal delivery, shaping affective bonds with audiences.

Artistic Path explores Cohen's creative identity via interviews, autobiographical material, and intertextual references, addressing influences, muses, and cultural dialogue, as well as his negotiation of fame, discipline, and dual status as poet and songwriter, including connection to Dylan. Ultimately, the paper argues that Cohen's oeuvre exemplifies reciprocity between poetry and song, modeling lyric expression as a continuum rather than division. Meaning emerges through a triadic relationship between messenger, message, and receiver, where musical poetic "frequency" mediates transmission across voice, text, and performance.

Katarzyna Anna Jaworska is an English studies scholar holding an MA in English Studies (Research Program) from the Catholic University of Paris (ICP). Her research focuses on the intersections of poetry, spirituality, and cultural expression in literature and song lyrics, with particular emphasis on the work of Leonard Cohen and related themes such as desire, faith, and death-rebirth archetypes. She also holds a BA in English Philology, where she examined the frequency and cultural interpretation of biblical phrases in English and Polish. Her academic work bridges literary analysis, linguistic comparison, and cultural studies. Alongside her research, she is a creative writer of poetry and short stories, with an upcoming online publication. She has experience in teaching English, translation, and academic writing. Her interests include contemporary creative writing, the female gaze, and interdisciplinary approaches to literature and music.

Cohen variously embodied – the Polish texts and contexts

Marta Kaźmierczak

The aim of the presentation is to discuss selected performances of Cohen's texts in Polish, focusing on how the stage presence and translation shape different representations of the lyrical persona.

Cohen has been an important presence in Polish culture since 1970s. Maciej Zembaty, the maker or co-maker of all early translations, went on to record his renditions, becoming not only Cohen's main ambassador in Poland, but also his voice and a recognisable embodiment. However, in 1978, in the first Polish television show compiled of the Canadian bard's texts, the part of Cohen's persona was given to a charismatic theatre and cinema actor, Roman Wilhelmi, with Zembaty's role limited to co-writing the script and a place among other performers. Despite involving mainly musicians, this show apparently established Cohen's oeuvre in Polish as something pertaining to theatre stage rather than just music, and made it actors' domain. This is evidenced by two later festival gala concerts recorded for television in 2003 and 2008, featuring actors who had been or were to become known for performing 'literary songs'. Although Zembaty remains the single person to have recorded the greatest number of his covers, over the years the Polish Cohen has been sung by jazz vocalists, performers of sung poetry, and, importantly, actors.

These various voices and stage presences are often very different from Cohen's usually impassive delivery. (Indeed, the Polish concept *piosenka aktorska*, 'actorly song', entails

applying specifically acting skills and turning a musical piece into a minidrama). They also differ from each other, with e.g. Bogusław Linda, the emblematic ‘tough guy’ of the Polish cinema on the one hand, and on the other, Cohen’s lyrical ‘I’ not infrequently embodied by women. Obvious physical differences aside, particular stage presences are influenced by directors’ concepts, performers’ acting profiles or singers’ manner(ism), as well as by the texts. I am particularly interested in the interlock between the shape of performances and the translations: does a more expressive delivery stem from a shift of expressiveness in translation? Does performance by an actress necessitate changes in the text (Polish is a strongly gendered language) – or is the assignment to female voices limited to what may uncontroversially be sung by a woman? Furthermore, the translation-to-performance trajectory of Zembaty is surprisingly reversed in the case of the eminent *singing* actor Marian Opania.

Marta Kaźmierczak, Dr habil. (post-doctoral degree), associate professor at the Institute of Applied Linguistics, University of Warsaw, translation scholar with degrees in English and Russian, author of a monograph and over 70 papers on translation, reception and intersemiotic relations/transformations. The online encyclopedia *The Senses in Polish Culture* includes her entry on translating musical-verbal works and *The Palgrave Handbook of Intermediality*, 2023, the chapter ‘Intermediality and/in Translation’. She has published e.g. on translators in a concert hall and on Polish and English retranslations of a song by Jacques Brel (also in the context of somatic experiences). Her most recent conference papers concerned the Polish rendition of Purcell’s opera *Dido and Aeneas* and the complex intercultural and intersemiotic trajectories of a ballet.

Various Positions and Double-Breasted Suits: Formality in Leonard Cohen’s Art and Persona / For and Ethics and an Erotics of Form

Christophe Lebold

Caught as he was between the throes of relentless desire, an acute thirst for freedom and an equally deep thirst for structure, Leonard Cohen was obsessed with a fundamental brokenness of the heart & life. As an artist, he was also driven by a deep urge to reunify the heart and repair the world and God.

It seems logical therefore that both his artistic pursuits and the conduct of his life displayed a strong commitment to a poetics of form and formality. Cohen the man loved repetitive patterns, fixed rules and monastic régimes; Cohen the poet was, to a great extent (and in strong contrast to Dylan), the artist of a return to classical forms.

Evident in his writing strategies (where form helped shape content), his art as a musician (based on a few key formulas), his ritualistic performing style or his persona (which reclaimed a glorious formality in dress, manners and speaking style), that love of and commitment to formality was based on the belief that dynamic well-ordered forms (like the rhymed stanza or the *zazen* posture) had quasi thaumaturgic properties, and could heal the heart/soul (and temporarily repair) the world.

Drawing on spiritual models that influenced the poet (among which the Zen dialectics of form & emptiness in the Heart Sutra, and the *tikkun* of Lurianic Kabbalah), but also on the Kantian & Baudelairean aesthetics of form (as well as on Murielle Macé’s “stylistics of existence”), we will examine some of Cohen’s favorite forms — the song form, the double-breasted suit, the ballad meter or his signature symbol of intertwined hearts— to explore the roles that form & structure came to play in his art, life and spiritual imagination.

Cohen’s constant games with forms will thus simultaneously appear

- As an ethical proposition: a bold Sisyphean attempt at the impossible reparation of a world threatened by chaos and entropy, that affirms the dignity of man as a creator of forms
- As a mystical act of creating provisional sacred spaces/temporalities governed by “order and beauty”, that artist and audience could experience as sanctuaries, premonitions of paradise, and spaces of transcendence and spiritual transformation;
- As a playful Kamasutra of shifting forms, where structure— like chords in a flamenco song— like an erotic embrace was constantly made & unmade in a dance that reconciled order & chaos, masculine & feminine, the celestial & earthly in a harmonious and blissful *dicordia* concors.

We will thus attempt to approach the metaphysical, ethical and erotic implications of Cohen’s games with forms, and see that for him form was a game played with life, with his audience, and with God.

Dr. Christophe Lebold is associate professor at the University of Strasbourg (France), where he teaches literature, performance studies & rock culture. He is interested in literature as lived experience and in all forms of lyricism & spiritual poetry. After a PHD on the songs, masks and voices of Leonard Cohen & Bob Dylan he has abundantly published on both poets, including the award winning biography/monography *Leonard Cohen, The Man Who Saw the Angels Fall* (ECW Press, 2024) originally published in french and soon available in six languages. An admirer and friend of Leonard Cohen, he has traveled extensively on the poet’s tracks. Also a

theatre actor and long-time student of Zen Buddhism, he likes poets and cats and— in case of good mood— all sentient beings.

Leonard Cohen's Bodies

Robert Lecker

Leonard Cohen's art begins and ends with the body. The body that prays, performs, hungers, and decays; the body that seeks transcendence and finds instead the limits of flesh. Across six decades of short stories, poems, novels, and songs, Cohen transforms the human frame into a theatre of longing where spirit and matter negotiate an uneasy truce. His bodies are plural—sacred and profane, erotic and ascetic, broken and luminous—bearing the imprint of religious ritual alongside the energy of secular desire. Cohen's work presents the body not as a stable entity but as the primary site where desire, belief, discipline, and ethical responsibility are enacted, tested, and often brought into conflict.

This paper takes a chronological approach to Cohen's representations of the body and his evolving metaphors of embodiment, beginning with the short stories he wrote as a student at McGill University, moving through the early poetry collections and *The Favourite Game* and *Beautiful Losers*, and continuing across the later poetry and song lyrics. Rather than treating these works as discrete phases, the paper traces a sustained inquiry into how physical presence becomes the medium through which desire, belief, discipline, and doubt are repeatedly tested and reconfigured over time.

Drawing on Sara Ahmed's work on orientation and Rosi Braidotti's thinking on embodied subjectivity and corporeal instability, the paper situates Cohen's writing within broader conversations about movement, vulnerability, and ethical attention. Leonard Cohen's representations of the human body register shifting relations between eros and restraint, devotion and scepticism, vitality and decline. The paper argues that Cohen persistently locates whatever remains of meaning, grace, or ethical clarity not beyond the body, but within its exposed, unstable, and time-bound forms.

Robert Lecker is Greenshields Professor of English at McGill University, where he specializes in Canadian literature. He co-edited the journal *Essays on Canadian Writing* from 1975 to 2004 and was co-publisher of ECW Press from 1977 to 2003, where he helped develop reference series such as *The Annotated Bibliography of Canada's Major Authors and Canadian Writers and Their Works*.

His books include *On the Line: Readings in the Short Fiction of Clark Blaise, John Metcalf, and Hugh Hood*; *Robert Kroetsch*; *Another I: The Fictions of Clark Blaise*; *Making It Real: The Canonization of English-Canadian Literature*; *Dr Delicious: Memoirs of a Life in CanLit*; *The Cadence of Civil Elegies*; *Keepers of the Code: English-Canadian Literary Anthologies and the Representation of Nation*; and *Who Was Doris Hedges? The Search for Canada's First Literary Agent*. He is the editor of *Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value*; *Canadian Writers and Their Works*; and *Do You Want To Be Happy and Write?: Critical Essays on Michael Ondaatje*.

He received the H. Noel Fieldhouse Award for Distinguished Teaching at McGill and was elected to the Royal Society of Canada in 2012. He was awarded the Lorne Pierce Medal by the Royal Society of Canada in 2022.

'I Have Seen the Future, Brother: It Is Murder': The Priestly and the Prophetic in the Work of Leonard Cohen and Lionel Blue

Daniel Lichman

In 1964 Leonard Cohen famously criticised the institutional Jewish community by drawing on the Jewish prophetic condemnation of idolatry when he suggested that there is more spirituality in a junky's kitchen than in a synagogue. Though this moment marked a break between Cohen and the organised Jewish community, Cohen continued to affirm his Jewishness and draw on Jewish imagery; notable examples of this are the *Book of Mercy* (1984) and the album 'You Want It Darker' (2016). Similarly, Lionel Blue (1930 - 2016), the most well-known rabbi in the UK in the 1980s due to his prolific radio broadcasts on the BBC, criticised the British Jewish community in 1968 for the idolatry of its turn to Jewish nationalism in the wake of the 1967 Six-Day-War. The similarities between the two figures - at best viewed ambivalently by the institutional Jewish community, and occasionally criticised as heretical - continue: they were both drawn to Christian imagery; they both wrote about the religious dimensions of sexuality; they both spent significant amounts of times in monasteries; they both developed their own idiosyncratic mysticisms. Yet, in contrast to Cohen, Blue's contribution to British society and culture was explicitly as a rabbi embedded within the Jewish community. This paper will historicise Cohen and Blue at a very particular moment in Jewish history: their childhoods preceded the Holocaust, yet their adult lives were lived in its wake with the Canadian and British Jewish communities thoroughly traumatised and not receptive to their commitment to a direct ('prophetic') revelatory relationship with the Divine. In part as a consequence of this, this paper will argue, both of them pursued other artistic ('priestly') strategies

which might, more creatively, hold the prophetic task. By comparing Cohen to Blue, within a specific post-Holocaust moment and by using the classic dichotomy in Jewish thought between the 'prophetic' and the 'priestly', surprising perspectives on Cohen's literary output will come to the fore.

Daniel Lichman is an academic, storyteller and a rabbi. His doctoral studies at the Leo Baeck Institute London based at Birkbeck College, University of London, explore the turn to storytelling in the work of Rabbi Lionel Blue (1930 - 2016), a liturgist, religious writer and broadcaster best known for his regular 'God slots' on BBC radio from the 1970s through to the 2000s. Daniel has taught religious studies at Chester University, theology at the Leo Baeck College and has spoken at a debate at the Cambridge Union. He has taught a course on the poetry and the idiosyncratic mysticism of Leonard Cohen. He wrote and performed a one man play, 'Witness to the Ends', an attempt to use an idiosyncratic approach to storytelling to sidestep the political vitriol and respond to the post-7 October crisis through exploring the relationship with the dead.

The Voice of Intimacy: Leonard Cohen, 'Master of the Smallest Link'

Stefano Lombardi Vallauri

On the physiological and technical level—regarding range, power, agility, precision, and versatility—Leonard Cohen's voice has always been limited, and became even more so over time, from his first album (1967) to his last (posthumous) one (2019).

In the regime of technologically (re)produced popular music, vocal delivery is highly personal and singular, whereas other structural levels—formal sectioning, metre and rhythm, harmony, melody—tend to be more standardised. For this reason, vocal delivery and interpretation are often the most distinctive aspect of a song, the element that best differentiates one song from another (or, for example, a cover version from the original or from another cover).

Because distinctive differences within the song genre are generally small, and Cohen's own range of variation particularly limited, it is important to stress that within these limits his singing is anything but monotonous or uninflected. The differences he introduces are extremely small—probably among the smallest in the history of popular music, and therefore, paradoxically, the level of differentiation in his singing remains very high within an extremely narrow range.

Typical of what I define as Cohen's micro-inflectional vocal style—especially in his later recordings—are microrhythmic divergences from the metre, dynamic micro-inflections, micro-intervallic deviations from exact intonation, and timbral (including phonetic) inflections. Together, these features enhance the expressivity of the performance, also through the synergistic interaction between music and lyrics.

By analyzing several samples, also employing technological tools, I interpret Cohen's micro-inflectional vocal style in light of the key category—both material and psychological—of intimacy. Intimacy is a practical condition in which the voice does not require macroscopic actions, since sensory concentration allows the perception of minimal nuances. Cohen's work is consistent in this respect, since intimacy is also a recurring theme in his song lyrics.

Stefano Lombardi Vallauri is Associate Professor of Musicology at IULM University of Milan, General Editor of the scientific journal *Nuove Musiche*, President (2024–2026) of the cultural association *Athena Musica*, and Coordinator of the IULM unit for the NextGenerationEU project *Sounding Images – Screening Sounds (SISS)* funded by the EU. His research focuses on the aesthetics and analysis of contemporary music, both classical and popular, with particular attention to the relationships between music and other arts, as well as broader cultural and experiential domains. Among his publications are the monograph *Dodecafonica postseriale*. Gilberto Cappelli e Federico Incardona (2013); the co-edited volumes *L'adattamento musicale* (2024), *L'arte orale. Poesia, musica, performance* (2020), and *La voce mediatizzata* (2019); as well as essays and book chapters on topics such as song covers, the experience of intimacy in technologically mediated song, the female vocal counter-order, and studies focusing on the voice in individual authors (e.g., Diamanda Galás).

Little People, WHOSE Dreams? Constructing (musical) celebrity in children's books

Elly McCausland

This paper examines the globally successful *Little People, BIG DREAMS* series (Frances Lincoln Children's Books), paying particular attention to its volumes focusing on musicians. Promising to 'develop children's empathy and their understanding of the world', the series' interlinked construction and reproduction of both empathy and celebrity raises ethical and methodological questions about didacticism, authenticity, and narrativisation in children's culture.

Through textual and visual analysis of selected titles (including Leonard Cohen, Taylor Swift, and Beyoncé), this paper explores how complex celebrity figures are reframed and simplified for a child readership through narrative streamlining, affective emphasis, and moral framing. I argue that the series produces a distinctive model of 'child-friendly celebrity', in which artistic achievement is consistently aligned with perseverance, resilience, and self-belief, thereby foregrounding exemplary and generic life lessons over biographical nuance and complexity. Musical and aesthetic creative practices that we might associate with rebellion, experimentation, or controversy are selectively curated into narratives of determination and authenticity that frequently follow a narrative trajectory of early passion, hard work, and eventual recognition, while potentially contentious aspects are minimized or omitted. This process reflects a broader didactic imperative within children's publishing: to present role models who are relatable yet still aspirational, and to eschew the complexity and arbitrariness of biography in favour of monomythic narratives that emphasise simplified goals. Drawing on theories of celebrity culture and children's literature, I propose that the series participates in a pedagogical economy of inspiration, where fame itself becomes secondary to the cultivation of desirable (by adults) character traits, and where the vicissitudes of life in the spotlight are retroactively reworked into a clear teleology of effort and progress ('limitless potential') inflected by the priorities of neoliberal capitalism.

Little People, BIG DREAMS reconfigures celebrity biography as a form of soft didacticism, using familiar figures to mediate values such as inclusivity, perseverance, and creativity. In doing so, it raises important questions about the balance between inspiration and simplification, and about how contemporary children's culture negotiates the tension between authenticity and exemplarity in its construction and dissemination of role models.

Elly McCausland is Associate Professor of English Literature at Ghent University, where she specialises in children's literature and the environmental humanities. She also teaches an MA course on English literature and the music and lyrics of Taylor Swift, and has published four books on Swift.

Leonard Cohen and his relationship to death

Kristin Arneson & Colin McCullough

Colin McCullough's presentation will be delivered by his colleague Kristin Arneson.

"This paper examines Leonard Cohen's relationship to death by reading his late songs through the aesthetic theory of "late style." It argues that Cohen's most honest confrontation with mortality is not an intellectual explanation or a settled theology, but a commitment to sustaining contradiction—between faith and doubt, human and divine love, longing and surrender—without demanding resolution. The essay first sketches Cohen's wider landscape of loneliness, relationships, Judaism, and Zen meditation, noting his respect for organized religion's capacity to console while also rejecting reliance on inherited certainties.

Building on Theodor Adorno's description of late works as sparse, severe, and conflictual, and Edward Said's account of lateness as an oppositional refusal to "settle" into coherence, the analysis treats Cohen's minimal arrangements, near-whisper vocals, stripped lyrics, and interwoven silences as deliberate formal decisions. Late-style contradiction is shown to be central rather than incidental: tensions are allowed to remain unresolved, and that non-resolution becomes an aesthetic stance.

Close readings of five songs develop the claim. "Leaving the Table" confronts imminent death with cool factuality and unforced resignation, relinquishing identity and attachment without bargaining. "Going Home" frames dying as a humble return "behind the curtain," laying down burdens before something greater than the self. "Treaty" stages an impossible accord between two "utterly impenetrable" loves, mixing longing, disillusionment, and remorse; its concluding wordless string reprise converts the singer's disappearance into musical stillness. "Come Healing" turns toward a prayer for wholeness that welcomes death as mercy rather than punishment. "Steer Your Way," informed by Kabbalistic imagery, offers navigation through the ruins of altar and mall without promising a final destination, insisting on movement even when certainty fails.

Overall, the paper claims that Cohen's late work makes form into philosophy: wisdom lies in carrying irreconcilable tensions to the end with dignity, honesty, and gentle release at life's end."

Colin McCullough is a graduate of European Studies from a Northern Irish university. Following his initial studies he gained a scholarship in 1976 for postgraduate studies at the Humboldt University in what was the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). He worked for 33 years for the European Commission in Luxembourg, Berlin and Thessaloniki, Greece. Beginning in 1972 and a Cohen conference in Dublin he has had an avid interest in the songs of Cohen throughout the years. He has authored several papers on Cohen, including “The Poetics of Paradox: Multiplicity of Meaning and the Transience of Truth as elements of dissociation in the later songs of Leonard Cohen”. He retired from his duties with the European Commission in 2017 and lives in Berlin.

El torero Leonard Cohen: The Impact of His Work on Spanish Music and Poetry

Jiří Měšic

There has been considerable scholarship on the Spanish influences on Leonard Cohen, particularly the poetry of Federico García Lorca and the mystical Kabbalistic tradition of the Zohar. One might also note the Spanish-made guitars Cohen played and his close friendship with the Spanish translator, biographer, music critic, and producer Alberto Manzano. Far less attention has been paid to the reverse process: the impact Cohen had on Spanish music and poetry. This influence is particularly visible in flamenco and experimental music, most notably in the album *Omega* by Enrique Morente and Lagartija Nick, which incorporates Spanish interpretations of Cohen's songs. In poetry, Manzano's own work has been described as strongly inspired by Cohen. His five poetry collections reveal a distinctive synthesis of Lorca's surrealism and the mystical and erotic dimensions characteristic of Cohen's writing. Cohen also influenced Manzano's approach to translating his works into Spanish, producing versions that often move beyond strictly literary. Through Manzano's mediation, Cohen's songs were further adapted into *flamenco* on several occasions, for example on the albums *Acordes de Leonard Cohen* (2007) and *Como un corazón* (2015). There were even attempts to have Cohen sing in Spanish. Indeed, Spain has embraced Leonard Cohen to an exceptional degree. Numerous Spanish folk and rock musicians have performed covers of his songs and acknowledged his influence, including Nacho Vegas, Christina Rosenvinge, Joaquín Sabina, Kiko Veneno, Enrique Bunbury, Carlos Ann, Luis Eduardo Aute, Joan Manuel Serrat, and Silvia Pérez Cruz. This presentation will examine Cohen's reception in Spain and the ways in which Spanish musicians and poets reinterpreted his work within their own cultural traditions, demonstrating how

his artistic dialogue with Spain extended far beyond influence in a single direction. This reception was reflected even in the symbolic language of audiences, who addressed Cohen as a “torero.”

Jiří Měšic, is an Assistant professor and researcher in the Department of English and German Philology at the University of Granada. His main interest lies in the mystical branches of the Abrahamic religions (Christian mysticism, Kabbalah, Sufism) and their echoes in literature, popular music and culture. Among his most recent publications are the monograph *Leonard Cohen, the Modern Troubadour* (Palacký University, 2020); the critical editions of Alberto Manzano's poetry, *Mandle a citróny* [Almonds and Lemons] (Protimluv, 2025), John Pass's poetry, *Větrná zvonkohra* [Windchime] (Protimluv, 2020), Gertrude Stein's selected work, *Mluvit a naslouchat* [To Speak and Listen] (Éditions Fra, 2019 & 2021), as well as several book chapters and academic articles addressing religious sources in popular music and in *corrida de toros*.

“No one knows where the night is going”: constellations of Cohen in Iran

Tem Mirkazemiyan

This paper examines the reception of Leonard Cohen in moments of historical crisis, specifically within an Iranian sociopolitical context. In 2014, Jon Stewart's directorial debut *Rosewater* hit theatres, adapted from Iranian journalist Maziar Bahari's memoir *Then They Came for Me*. *Rosewater* is a modest, informative, and, as much as it can be, humorous exploration of freedom under censorship and constraint.

Hopeful, like many Iranians, that the 2009 elections might bring change, Bahari returns to Tehran to capture the moment. What follows is colossal disillusionment – a dream deferred too soon – as he is arrested for covering the post-election protests of the Iranian Green Movement. In between bars, Cohen emerges as the guard of a fantastical universe Bahari envisages as protection against the despair of reality. In both film and memoir, Cohen appears in fragments: a childhood memory, a dream, a passing reference. These fragments are as personal as they are political, and Cohen's music soundtracks this duality: “It is fascinating that this older Jewish guy from Montreal saved me in the Islamic Republic,” Bahari recalls.

This paper reads these fragments, and Cohen's wider circulation in Iran, as constellations through which his influence in the sociopolitical imagination comes into view. Situating this reception around the moment of the Iranian Green Movement, the

paper further explores how Cohen's presence, recontextualized and adapted, can be understood in relation to a historical experience marked by the proximity of hope to its collapse, and the inevitable sense of uncertainty. This is a tension Cohen himself refers to as he sketches the influence of the Persian poet Rumi on *The Guests*: "[...] no one knows where the night is going, no one knows why the wine is flowing. No one actually understands the mechanics of this grace except that we experience it from time to time." Bahari's account exemplifies that, just as the grip of disillusionment tightens, hope may be realized in a curious moment. Can Cohen be a catalyst of hope in a crisis of despair?

Tem Mirkazemiyān is a doctoral researcher at Vrije Universiteit Brussel. She holds a BA in English Language and Literature from the University of Tehran and an MA in Western Literature from KU Leuven. Her research examines absurdist theatre adaptations in Iran, focusing on how these reinterpreted works navigate socio-political complexities through allegory. By analysing key absurdist adaptations, she explores the interplay between formal techniques and absurdist aesthetics, revealing how allegory functions as both a vehicle for critique and a source of hope in the context of censorship and evolving cultural identities.

"I'm Happy to Be in Catalonia": A Survey of Leonard Cohen's Songs in Catalan Translation

Adrià Martín Mor

Despite Leonard Cohen's enduring popularity in the Catalan Countries, the reception and translation of his work within the Catalan linguistic sphere remains an under-examined area in academic discourse. This paper explores the special relationship between Cohen and Catalonia—a bond likely strengthened by his own Québécois background and familiarity with minoritized linguistic contexts.

Cohen's presence in the Catalan imaginary is anchored by seven major concerts between 1974 and 2012, most notably the 1993 televised special *Una nit a Barcelona*. His influence extends from high-culture tributes to popular media, such as the use of his music in the true-crime series *Crims*. However, the most profound evidence of this cultural integration lies in the body of Catalan song translations spanning five decades.

This paper provides an exploratory overview of Cohen's repertoire in Catalan, beginning with the first adaptation of "Suzanne" by Josep M. Andreu for Toti Soler in 1972.

It tracks the evolution of these translations through the Nova Cançó movement—highlighted by Joan Manuel Serrat—to contemporary interpretations by independent artists like Espaldamaceta, Maria Rodés and El Fill del Mestre. Special focus is given to "Suzanne" and "Hallelujah" as the most frequently adapted pieces.

By compiling a catalogue of published versions, this communication will examine:

- The historical periods of peak translation activity and their socio-political contexts.
- The profiles of the translators and performers involved, from the Nova Cançó to the indie scene.
- The linguistic and cultural motivations behind the selection of specific songs.

Ultimately, this paper seeks to explore how these Catalan translations recontextualize Cohen's poetic legacy, identifying the ways in which his work has been integrated into a specific Mediterranean cultural identity.

Adrià Martín-Mor is associate professor in the Departament de Traducció i d'Interpretació i d'Estudis de l'Àsia Oriental at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Catalan Countries). His research interests center on minoritized languages, especially Catalan and Sardinian, as well as translation technologies, with particular attention to free and open-source software and to the role of technology in the preservation of linguistic diversity. He is a member of the language technology activist associations Softcatalà and Sardware. As a literary translator, he has published the Catalan translation of Sergio Atzeni's *Passàvem per la terra lleugers* (Lleonard Muntaner, 2023) and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Els Turcs al Friül* (Lleonard Muntaner, 2025), translated from Friulian, as well as *Volgar'eloquio*, translated from Italian (Edicions del 1979, forthcoming). He is the author and presenter of "Beni cun me," a program broadcast by RAI, the Italian public television, and devoted to the languages of Sardinia. He also composed the program's soundtrack, which he later released on his website, www.adriamusic.cat, as two albums.

From Public Persona to Private Voice: Leonard Cohen and the Politics of Translation

Francis Mus

Questions of nationalism and identity politics are never far from the work of Leonard Cohen. Born in Montreal, the writer and singer songwriter Leonard Cohen (1934-

2016) built a literary career largely through Canadian literary institutions. He later expanded his reach as a musician through the United States, where his first album was produced, and through Europe, where he performed frequently and enjoyed lasting popularity. One consequence of the musician's international recognition was that his literary work was also discovered abroad. Cohen's novels and poetry collections were translated in several European countries.

In my paper I examine the particular value of private correspondence between authors and translators. Drawing on the unpublished exchange of letters between Cohen and his Italian translator Amleto Lorenzini, I show how the author expresses himself here in a distinctive way. Throughout his long career Cohen often spoke publicly about his work in countless interviews. From the outset he was known for playing a game with interviewers, creating different public personae and engaging in what Eli Mandel in 1978 called a "brilliant con game". In the correspondence with Lorenzini a different Cohen emerges. The bantering tone gives way to a serious stance in which Cohen addresses specific issues in his poetic work. In this paper I demonstrate the view of his own work that Cohen develops through this correspondence.

Francis Mus is Assistant Professor at Ghent University, where he teaches courses in French culture and literature and in literary translation theory. His research focuses on the transnational reception of twentieth century and contemporary French and Belgian literatures, drawing on approaches from world literature, multimodality, and translation studies. In addition to this research, he has a longstanding interest in the work of Leonard Cohen, on which he has published extensively, including the award-winning monograph *The Demons of Leonard Cohen* (2020) and a recent chapter in *The World of Leonard Cohen* (Cambridge University Press, 2026). His work has appeared in leading journals, including *TTR*, *JoSTrans*, *Orbis Litterarum*, *The Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, *Babel*, and *Perspectives*.

**Project KOAN:
A Biometric Ecosystem and the End of the Passive Spectator**

Michael Nault

The tenth anniversary of Leonard Cohen's passing invites an evolution of his work that resists stabilization and fixed narratives. Project KOAN answers this challenge by entirely dismantling the boundary between performer and audience, translating Cohen's canonical works into a living, biometric ecosystem. This creative presentation demonstrates a live performance architecture—the 4-Genre Matrix—where Cohen's

compositions dynamically intersect with original musical frameworks. Utilizing Ultra-Wideband (UWB) spatial tracking and wearable biometric sensors, the aggregate heart rate and synchronized physical movements of the audience directly dictate the energy, genre, and instrumentation of the performance in real time.

By shifting a piece like "You Want It Darker" from an ambient meditation to a peak industrial pulse based entirely on the room's collective "Sweat Equity," Project KOAN physically manifests Cohen's own habit of continually re-contextualizing his creations. Furthermore, a localized "Consensus Multiplier" requires audience members to physically group together to lock a rhythm into the master track, creating a communal language out of Cohen's solitary poetry.

The presentation will detail the technological bridge (Max for Live, OSC, and dynamic spatial clustering) that enables this zero-latency interaction. It will include a demonstration of the functional prototype developed during a rigorous 90-day isolation sprint in the Mojave Desert. By turning the audience into a decentralized, living instrument, this project radically repurposes Cohen's legacy for an interactive era, officially ending the passive spectator.

Michael Nault is a musician and interactive performance architect whose work synthesizes classical piano orchestration, extensive collaborative performance, and biometric system design. With a creative foundation built over decades of live performance, studio recording, and technological integration, his current focus is Project KOAN, an initiative designed to redefine live music through physiological audience participation. Bridging deep lyrical interpretation with advanced spatial tracking and edge computing, Michael constructs environments where human movement directly manipulates musical composition. The development and stress-testing of Project KOAN's interactive 4-Genre Matrix will come to fruition during an intensive 90-day isolation sprint in Joshua Tree, California.

**"A Good Place to Look at the Moon":
Cohen, Cavafy, and Modern Greece**

Kutay Onaylı

Much has been said of the connection between Leonard Cohen and Greece, little of it analytical. My proposed contribution seeks to critically re-evaluate Cohen's highly deliberate engagement with modern Greek culture, which has proven central to both his literary oeuvre and his self-fashioning as an artist and public figure. I adopt a two-

pronged approach, first examining Cohen's activity as a translator/adaptor of modern Greek poetry, and then turning to Cohen's own 'Greece poems' to delineate, in proper historical context, his reception and construction of Greece for a global audience.

The first part of my contribution is a comparative close reading of Constantine Cavafy's *Apoleipein o Theos Antonios* ["The God Abandons Anthony"] (1911), one of the most celebrated works of modern Greek poetry, and its adaptation by Leonard Cohen, *Alexandra Leaving* (2001). Cohen had some command of Greek, and he worked closely with native speakers in refashioning Cavafy's account of Marcus Antonius' loss of Alexandria to Augustus into a lyric about male romantic loss, namely of a woman called Alexandra. In comparing the two texts with reference to Cavafy's Greek original, I underline the creative translation strategies Cohen undertook to refashion a historical poem of epic scale into a narrative of everyday romantic loss and dignity. These strategies, I argue, allow Cohen to go beyond a mere textual translation replacing "Alexandria" with "Alexandra" — that is, city with woman. Instead, Cohen "translates" and elaborates on the connection between the epic and the erotic, and between historical and personal experience, that are crucial to Cavafy's own oeuvre.

The second part of my proposed contribution investigates Cohen's reception and construction of Greece itself as a literary and emotional topos in his own poetic oeuvre. The aim here is to go beyond the biographical details and the cult of personality around Cohen's years as a Western expat on the island of Hydra in evaluating his engagement with modern Greece: I refer to a number of his 'Greece poems' and other texts to outline the specific ways in which Cohen narrativized Greece for a Western audience, and turned his engagement with the country and its culture into a critical part of his own artistic image. Of interest are how Cohen's literary construction of Greece (i) was in interplay with earlier conceptualisations by Romantic poets from Byron to Shelley; (ii) corresponded to emergent cultural discourses on Greece and Greekness in an era of nascent international tourism; and (iii) engaged with —or elided— the lived realities of modern Greek life and politics in a turbulent era leading to the Greek military junta of 1967-74.

Kutay Onaylı acquired his PhD in Near Eastern Studies and Interdisciplinary Humanities, with a certificate in Hellenic Studies, from Princeton University in 2025. He is currently a Fellow by Examination (JRF) at Magdalen College, University of Oxford, where he works at the intersection of modern Greek, Turkish, and Ottoman literature and history.

"Help Thou my unbelief": a linguistic reassessment of Leonard Cohen's "biblical landscape"

Jorge Onecha

In its effort to confer the highest degree of literary dignity upon the author, Cohenian scholarship (cf. Cerbelaud, Manzano, Leibovitz) has commonly assumed that the primary textual source underlying the frequent biblical quotations and adaptations in his work is the Authorised Version, an English translation completed in 1611 under the patronage of King James VI of Scotland and I of England, intended to rival the Geneva Bible (1560), whose Calvinist-oriented marginalia were deemed excessive.

This communication examines Cohen's language of literary expression as it structures the "biblical landscape" central to his poetics. Through close reading and a comparative lexical and orthographic analysis of his work —from the early short narratives included in *A Ballet of Lepers: A Novel and Stories* (McClelland & Stewart, 2022) to *You Want It Darker* (Columbia Records, 2016), and beyond— it seeks to situate Cohen's use of biblical material within a transatlantic linguistic and cultural framework.

Preliminary findings —such as the recontextualisation of Mark 9:24 ("Help Thou my unbelief") in "The Jukebox Heart"— call for a reconsideration of the prevailing view: the principal English language biblical source informing Cohen's intertextual practices can be more accurately identified as the Webster Bible, a revision of the King James Version produced by Noah Webster in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1833. Webster —also the author of the influential *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828, 1841)— played a decisive role in shaping American English and its orthographic conventions, some of which were adopted into Canadian English. At a broader sociolinguistic level, this analysis indicates that, despite the significant geographic and linguistic mobility characterising his life, Cohen's literary expression remained firmly anchored in the Canadian English isolect of his native Montreal.

Jorge Onecha (Valladolid, Spain, 1984) is a PhD candidate in Religious Studies at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and in Comparative Literature at Sorbonne Université, within the framework of an international joint supervision agreement currently in progress. His doctoral research, under the direction of Professors Francisco Javier Fernández Vallina and Jean-Yves Masson, examines the figure of Christ in the early work of Leonard Cohen, at the intersection of literature, religion, and cultural studies. He holds degrees in Journalism (Universidad Europea Miguel de Cervantes) and in Literary Theory and Comparative Literature (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), as well as Master's degrees in Teaching Spanish as a Foreign

Language (Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo and Instituto Cervantes) and in Comparative Literature (Sorbonne Université). He has taught at several higher education institutions, including Université de Lorraine, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Universidad Nebrija, Université Rennes 2, and SciencesPo Rennes. In the 2026-2027 academic year, he will pursue a long-term research mobility fellowship at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris.

Dance Me to the End of Songs: Leonard Cohen's Choreographic Imagination and Its Afterlives

Marie-Lise Paoli

*Thanks for the dance
It was hell, it was swell, it was fun
Thanks for all the dances
One two three, one two three one*
Leonard Cohen, "Thanks for the Dance"

While text and music loom large in Leonard Cohen's legacy, dance appears to be a latent yet structuring element of his imaginative universe. It can be argued that dance functions in Cohen's œuvre as a transmedial dispositif through which his work is continually reactivated across its multiple afterlives.

A close reading of Cohen's texts and songs reveals a poietic dimension in which rhythm, imagery, and vocal materiality already imply choreographic potential beyond medial boundaries. They exemplify contemporary processes of reception and reappraisal (Deshaye and Pinder 2023), undergoing intersemiotic translation whereby verbal and musical signifiers are re-encoded into kinesthetic form. The analysis focuses on posthumous and reconfigurative examples, including *Thanks for the Dance* (2019), *The Ballet of Lepers* (2022), and *Dance Me* (Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal, 2017). The latter offers a paradigmatic case of choreographic remediation in which verbal and musical signs are fully reconfigured into kinesthetic, multisensory dramaturgy.

Extending the multi-perspectivist approach of Cohen's work beyond the literature-music nexus (Mus 2021), and drawing on performance and movement studies alongside theories of the imaginary to explore the legacy of "the man who saw the angels fall" (Lebold 2013, 2026), this paper theorizes the dancing body as the site of a hermeneutic shift: from interpretation grounded in textual and sonic regimes toward

an embodied epistemology of movement. Within this framework, dance emerges as a meta-metaphorical operator reorganizing meaning across perceptual and semiotic regimes.

Cohen's œuvre thus appears as a field of intensities increasingly legible through choreographic activation. It persists across its afterlives as a dynamic constellation continually reconfigured through text, voice, and performance, among which dance is not least in significance.

Dr. **Marie-Lise Paoli** is an Associate Professor of English Literature at Bordeaux Montaigne University, France, and director of the research centre on women's creativity (ERCIF-UR Plurielles). She was awarded the Margaret Atwood Society Prize for her article "Fertility and Sterility in *The Handmaid's Tale*: The Waste Land of Gilead." She has published numerous articles and book chapters on musicalized fiction, opera, dance, intertextuality and intermediality, gender, and the rewriting of myth in contemporary British and Canadian literature. She serves as the director of the Canadian Studies research centre (CECIB) in Bordeaux, where she oversees interdisciplinary projects on Canadian literature, culture, and society.

2009-on-going: Michael Rakowitz's Critical Collaboration with Leonard Cohen

Kait Pinder

This paper analyzes the Iraqi-American artist Michael Rakowitz's appropriations of Cohen's voice and image in his installation *I'm good at love, I'm good at hate, it's in between I freeze* (2009-ongoing). Rakowitz imaginatively returns Cohen to the Sinai Desert, where in 1973 he bolstered Israeli soldiers during the Yom Kippur War, reinterpreting this moment from his own Arab-Jewish perspective and against the backdrop of Israel's occupation of Palestine. Recent showings of the installation have addressed the war in Gaza by layering passages by Edward Said over images evoking Cohen's presence in Israel. The presentation applies a theory of "critical collaboration," first presented at the Cohen workshop at McGill in 2025, to analyze the ongoing temporality of Rakowitz's installation and the conflicts to which it responds, contributing to the understanding of Cohen as a global and politicized figure, while also examining the significance of his work in contemporary contexts.

Kait Pinder is an Associate Professor in the Department of English and Theatre at Acadia University. She is the co-editor, with Joel Deshayé, of *The Contemporary*

Leonard Cohen. She has published on Leonard Cohen and Nietzsche, Sheila Watson and Simone Weil, and Margaret Laurence and the Vietnam War, among other topics. Currently, she is writing a literary and cultural history of the impostor syndrome.

Leonard Cohen: The Poet Laureate of Irregular Metre

Ian Rae

In the published notebooks of Leonard Cohen's final book, *The Flame* (2018), the multi-disciplinary artist asks plaintively, "whatever happened to my place / in the Anthology of English Literature[?]" Cohen's crestfallen tone derives from the fact that he earned a reputation as the "golden boy" of Canadian poetry for the mixture of ballads and free verse in *The Spice-Box of Earth* (1961) and he won the Governor General's Award for poetry, the highest accolade for a poet in Canada, for his *Selected Poems* in 1968. By this time, Cohen had also cemented his critical reputation as a pioneer of the poet's novel in Canada with *The Favourite Game* (1963; see Rae) and of the postmodern novel in Canada with *Beautiful Losers* (1966; see Hutcheon). As late as 1983, the *Norton Anthology of Poetry* included three Cohen poems ("As the Mist Leaves No Scar," "For E.J.P.," and "Suzanne"), but over the ensuing decades Cohen's literary reputation went into steep decline. Critics variously dismissed the LA-based Cohen as insufficiently Canadian for Canadian anthologies, insufficiently experimental for postmodern anthologies, insufficiently pious for religious anthologies, and generally too populist for serious literary consideration. However, one little-discussed aspect of Cohen's literary versatility—indeed, one that should be a pillar in his critical claim to fame—is the way in which, at the very height of his reputation as an experimental postmodernist, and in the heyday of "free love" and free verse, Cohen revived the popular audience for metrical verse through one-of-a-kind song structures in irregular metre. Although many Cohen songs follow fixed metrical forms, some of his most celebrated works tend to be idiosyncratic concoctions of shifting metrical patterns, applying the "make it new" logic of modernist free verse to metrical patterning. To overlook the impact of this scansion is to underestimate the craft of Cohen's songwriting and the aural impact of its sonic architecture. My presentation will underscore this point through the analysis of an early, a mid-career, and a late-career song, namely "Suzanne," "Hallelujah," and "You Want It Darker."

Ian Rae is Chair of the Department of English, French, and Writing at King's University College at Western University in Canada. He completed studies at

Queen's University in Canada, the University of Oslo, the University of British Columbia (Governor General's Gold Medal for M.A. Thesis), and McGill University (SSHRC and Max Bell Postdoctoral Fellowships) before accepting Visiting Assistant Professorships at the University of Bonn and the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada. He is the author of the monograph *From Cohen to Carson: The Poet's Novel in Canada* (2008) and editor of *George Bowering: Bridges to Elsewhere* (2010), a special issue of *Open Letter*. His proposed presentation on Leonard Cohen draws from his SSHRC-funded doctoral research on poet-novelists.

Cohen Looking at Cuba Looking at Cohen: Beyond the Tourist and the Field Commander

Alexandra Sanchez

This paper examines how Leonard Cohen stages, revisits, and reframes his 1961 experience of revolutionary Cuba in poetry and song, and how that episode is later reinterpreted in posthumous reception. Focusing on the poem "*The Only Tourist in Havana Turns His Thoughts Homeward*" it situates Cohen's stay during the Bay of Pigs Invasion within a tension between revolutionary desire and ironic distance. Drawing on biographical accounts and textual analysis, it argues that the figure of the "tourist" functions as a staged position that exposes Cohen's ambivalent engagement with political upheaval, oscillating between attraction, detachment, and self-conscious performance. Read through the Lacanian gaze, the poem destabilizes Cohen's attempt to "see" the revolution, as the scene appears to "look back," exposing the gap between his desire for experience and his position as an outsider.

The paper then traces how this "Cohenian gaze" reappears in the later song "*Field Commander Cohen*," where lived experience is recast as ironic self-mythology. This shift is read as a form of self-translation through which Cohen revisits the same episode across genres, complicating distinctions between poetry, song, and persona. It also considers how this perspective is taken up in posthumous reception, especially around Cohen's death in 2016, which coincided with that of Fidel Castro and with shifting geopolitical narratives during the final phase of U.S.–Cuba rapprochement under Barack Obama.

By tracing how this Cuban episode moves from poetic staging to musical reworking and later reception, the paper highlights Cohen's role in reshaping his own experience across different genres and (historical) moments in his career. It contributes to Cohen scholarship by bringing together psychoanalytic and translational perspectives to

show how his work remains in motion across texts and contexts.

Alexandra Sanchez is an Assistant Professor affiliated with the Spanish section of the Department of Translation, Interpreting and Communication at Ghent University. Her most recent publications address mediation, representation, and inclusion across audio/visual media, with a focus on audio description, queer representation in animation, media accessibility on streaming platforms, and participatory media as spaces for countering anti-migration discourses. She currently supervises the ATLAM project, which investigates transnational identity construction and digital self-representation among Latin American migrants in transit through Mexico. Her research broadly explores how narratives circulate across media and contexts, with a particular interest in processes of mediation, (self-)translation, and reinterpretation.

**'Listen to the Butterfly':
Leonard Cohen, the Blues Sensibility, and Human Finitude**

Mark Santow

Leonard Cohen's music and poetry have often been described as dark, depressive, detached, and death-haunted – 'music to slit your wrists by,' as the saying goes. While Cohen's physical decline and impending demise did provide a thematic grounding for his final albums, his seven decades of "blackening pages" produced a body of work that demands a more sophisticated reading. Rather than dark and depressing, in his emphasis on human imperfection as 'holy,' Cohen's willingness to speak truth about and affirm our common frailties can be seen as life affirming. Similarly, his songs and poems – typified by the lovely "Listen to the Hummingbird," on his posthumous album – seem much more connected to the meaning our relationships and our projects acquire through our mortal finitude, than to a morbid fascination with sadness or death.

In Judaism, one way to honor the dead is to contemplate a text in their memory – a tribute someone with a Talmudic sensibility, like Cohen, would no doubt appreciate. In that spirit, in my conference paper I will place Cohen's works alongside those of philosopher Martin Hagglund, and the writers Cornel West and Toni Morrison. Hagglund, in his magisterial book *This Life*, argues that our finitude – our mortality – is what makes our lives meaningful. Time is all that we have, and because that time is inherently limited, it is precious. We grieve the loss of another – to death, to heartbreak, to our own mistakes – because that person, that relationship, is finite and irreplaceable. "Our time together," Hagglund argues, "is illuminated by the sense that

it will not last forever and we need to take care of one another because our lives are fragile." Cohen echoes this, when he exhorts us to "listen to the butterfly, whose days but number three."

West and Morrison make use of the African-American experience to contemplate the idea of a 'blues sensibility,' which responds to catastrophe and pain with compassion, grace and a dash of absurd humor, by giving lyrical voice to suffering. "We die," Morrison once said. "That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives." Cohen, in his drive to 'blacken pages,' reveals a search for the story-telling alchemy that turns suffering into community, and allows "the heart to open in a fundamental way." Held in creative tension, these writers and their ideas reveal Leonard Cohen as a kind of Jewish 'blues griot,' who found beauty and meaning in the broken, frail finitude of our all-too-human lives.

Dr. Mark Santow is Professor of History at University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, focusing on 20th century American politics and political thought. As a humanist he brings Literature, Moral Philosophy, Art and History to vulnerable populations, directing the New Bedford Clemente Course in the Humanities for low-income adults 2005-19, and a similar Rhode Island-based program for military veterans since 2019. He also seeks to bring his scholarly work into the larger public sphere, writing on school segregation, racism, inequality, American foreign policy, and student activism. Long appreciative of Leonard Cohen's work, he journeyed to Hydra a few summers ago, to soak up a little practical wisdom, and sun.

Can active analysis help us analyse Leonard Cohen?

Mickaël Savchenko

Popularized by such Hollywood greats as Al Pacino, Dustin Hoffman or Meryl Streep, Method acting is based on a system developed in the early 20th century by Russian actor Konstantin Stanislavski. One of its pillars, helping actors in their work on a play in general or on their part in particular, is the so-called active analysis, notably conceptualized by Stanislavsky's disciple Maria Knebel. This approach consists in breaking down the text into smaller segments and finding the objective and the action characterising them, thus making acting rely on physical movement and emotion rather than on simply voicing the lines.

In his novel *Beautiful Losers* (part I, chapter 30) Leonard Cohen dissects a Marvin Gaye

song, looking into the sung lyrics and the musical effects much the way Method actors would analyse their text. The performance achieves a ritualistic, almost sacral status, with the backing vocalists being called ‘goddesses’. Cohen was probably not familiar with the nuances of acting, but came up with this breakdown intuitively, creating a way of transcribing what is originally heard by the ear (if the song is broadcast on the radio or heard on a record) or seen by the eye (in the case of watching a concert or a music video).

Many of Cohen’s lyrics start with an action verb. The song’s character may be the main actant, the subject of an action (‘I stepped into an avalanche’, ‘I finally broke into the prison’, ‘I stumbled out of bed’) or the object of an action (‘They sentenced me to twenty years of boredom’) or even someone asking for an action to be performed on them (‘Dance me to the end of love’). Analysing his lyrics in terms of physical actions and obstacles allows us to gain insight into how Leonard Cohen may have achieved accuracy in conveying emotions (singers dying for the lie in their voice being a non-ironical threat in the Tower of Song). This approach combines performance studies, literary studies and song studies.

Mickaël Savchenko (Paris, France) received a PhD from the Paris 8 University for a thesis on the poetics of the French song, *Lyrics: where language meets music (a study of the French chanson d’auteur, 1950s–1980s)*. He has authored a chapter for the collective work *Serge G.: An International Perspective on Serge Gainsbourg* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024), and an article on Leonard Cohen’s musical and writing careers for the online scholarly journal *Miranda* (forthcoming). He has also published numerous literary translations. A frequent speaker at international conferences on a variety of subjects related to theatre, song and translation, he is also an actor and practitioner of Method acting.

Songs of Leonard Cohen in its Moment

David R. Shumway

Leonard Cohen’s first album was released on December 27, 1967, so it wasn’t until 1968 that it had any impact. This paper will examine Songs of Leonard Cohen in its musical context. In 1968, Laura Nyro, Randy Newman, Joni Mitchell, and James Taylor all released records, all debuts except for Nyro’s. In addition, folk singer Tom Rush released *Circle Game* in that year, which included songs by Mitchell, Taylor, and Jackson Browne. Therefore, 1968 is the year of the emergence of the singer-

songwriter as a genre of music distinct from folk, and more aligned with rock. The broader musical context of this moment is eclectic, with chart-topping albums from The Beatles (2), Simon and Garfunkel (2), the Doors, Cream, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Jimi Hendrix, the Rascals, Glen Campbell, Herb Alpert, and Paul Mauriat. Of these, only Simon and Garfunkel would seem to be clear precursors to the singer-songwriters, and the differences among them illustrates the still inchoate character of the new form, which would solidify around a confessionalism that became more evident in later albums by Taylor and Mitchell, and in those of Browne, Carole King, and Carly Simon. The 1968 albums exhibit a range of influences, from pop and jazz, to rock and folk. Their eclecticism distinguished them, but it also made them harder for audiences to grasp. None of these of albums were big commercial successes in the U.S., but most of them have had a lasting impact. Songs of Leonard Cohen is in most respects distinct from all of them, though Columbia’s production bears some similarities to those of Nyro, Newman, and Taylor. Generically, Cohen’s album remains closer to folk than all but perhaps Mitchell’s.

David R. Shumway is Professor of English, and Literary and Cultural Studies at Carnegie Mellon University, where he teaches courses on literary and cultural theory, and on American literature, film, and culture. He is the editor of *The World of Leonard Cohen* and the author of *Rock Star: The Making of Musical Icons from Elvis to Springsteen*, (2014), as well as numerous articles on popular music. His book *American Narrative Realism: The Novel, Film, Television, Theater* was just published by Cambridge University Press. He has also written *Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy, and the Marriage Crisis* (2003), and *John Sayles* (2012). His current projects include a history of Theory in literary studies in the U.S., a book about the various meanings and uses nostalgia, and one on detective heroes in print and on film.

Cohen’s Montreal: Home and The World

Sherry Simon

It has long been understood that the milieu that shaped Cohen was a rich mixture of influences: literary, religious, cultural. I will revisit the Montreal of the 1940s to the 1960s, emphasizing the uniqueness of an artistic/ literary scene shaped by three strong modernist movements in three languages (English, French, Yiddish)—each of which had some influence on Cohen. I will mostly focus on Cohen’s two novels, *The Favourite Game* and *Beautiful Losers*.

Sherry Simon is Distinguished University Research Professor Emerita in the French Department at Concordia University. Born and brought up in Leonard Cohen's Montreal, she has made that city the matrix of her writing on language and memory in linguistically divided cities —among them Montreal, Barcelona, Trieste and Prague. Her books, including *Translating Montreal*, *Cities in Translation* and most recently *Translation Sites: A Field Guide* have been translated into several languages. She is a member of the Royal Society of Canada as well as the Academie des lettres du Québec.

"Thanks for the Dance": Anjani and Leonard Creating Together

Jeffrey Spear

I'm always thinking of a song
For Anjani to sing. LC

They had been lovers for a time, but the key moment came while working on "Undertow," for *Dear Heather* (2001). Anjani's "voice dropped from her throat to her heart," Leonard said, and it was as if he heard his anima sing. He gave her unique access to his archive and together they created the songs on *Blue Alert* (2006). Cohen had extended an androcentric notion of sexual freedom to women ("many satisfying one-night stands"), but "Innermost Door" is a feminist song. The woman does not leave to find another man, but to find herself. Anjani's music rescued "The Mist" from the Phil Spector *Death of a Lady's Man* disaster. Writing for someone else to sing had Cohen creating with uncharacteristic rapidity.

The relationship ended in 2008 when Cohen began to tour again. Anjani wanted to continue as co-creator, but it was a comeback based on nostalgia. When Cohen's music director Rosco Beck said "either she goes or I go," that was it.* But Anjani continued with the next album, *I Came to Love* (2014). It includes three Cohen lyrics, but the rest, words and music were written by Anjani on a Cohen scaffolding. The tentative feminism of "Innermost Door" gives way to the confident "Clean Slate": "My choice, my dime / My name on the dotted line." The lovely abstraction of "The Mist," becomes the embodied mystical union of "Holy Ground." If this song goes to a place Cohen only aspired to, it extended what she learned about lyrics from him.

The full paper will detail the permutations of the Cohen style in both albums, their

structure, and the aspiration to an ideal union of body and spirit that cannot be sustained.

*Quotation from a conversation with Robert Faggen (04/24/2026)

Prof. **Jeffrey L. Spear** retired from New York University, where he taught Victorian literature and culture, in 2018. His articles "The Fractured World of Leonard Cohen" (2019) and "Leonard Cohen and the Art of Betrayal" (2023) are both available at www.academia.edu. He has given Popular Culture conference papers on the lyricists Lorraine Feather and Dory Previn. Other recent publications: "Elizabeth Gwillim: The Lady as Proto-Ethnographer" in *Women, Environment and Networks of Empire* (2023), "Does Nature Have Rights?" Institute for New Economic Thinking (www.inetdconomics.org, 2022), "Was She This Name: Literature, Law and the Devadasi" in *The Letter of the Law: Literature, Justice and the Other* (2013), "A South Kensington Gate from Gwalior to Nowhere," (SEL, 2008). "Old Curiosity About Jews: From Ante- to Antisemitism" is under consideration, *Dickens Quarterly*.

How Was Leonard Cohen Interested in Politics?

Peter Stone

Leonard Cohen clearly ranks among the greatest singer-songwriters to come out of the 1960s, alongside the likes of Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and Joni Mitchell. Cohen, however, was never identified as a political songwriter in the way that these other musical luminaries were. Cohen never produced a major "protest" song—against the Vietnam War or racial segregation, for example—and his few songs with a political bent are unconnected to contemporary struggles (e.g., "The Partisan," a song associated with Cohen but not written by him) approached political activism with a bit of self-deprecation (e.g., "Field Commander Cohen"), expressed no clear political message (e.g., "Samson in New Orleans"), or had political angles from which Cohen could and did distance himself (e.g., "Lover Lover Lover"). Taking inspiration from Michel Foucault, this paper asks, not *whether* Cohen was interested in politics (which he undoubtedly was, despite his lack of obviously political songs), but *how* he was interested in politics. Framing the question in this way narrows the distance between Cohen and other singer-songwriters of his era. In answering this question, the paper compares Cohen's to one of the most clearly political singer-songwriters of the 1960s, Phil Ochs. The comparison yields some surprising similarities between their respective

oeuvres. While Cohen never produced anything comparable to Ochs' "Here's to the State of Mississippi" or "Cops of the World," both he and Ochs also called out the moral failings in interpersonal relations that transcended political divides. In Cohen's case, this meant that while his work lacked overt political statements, it was pervaded by both a call for moral and/or spiritual regeneration and a sense that only through such regeneration can the many ills of contemporary society be rectified.

Peter Stone is an Associate Professor in Political Science at Trinity College Dublin. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Rochester in 2000, and has previously taught at Stanford University and held a Faculty Fellowship at the Center for Ethics and Public Affairs at Tulane University. He is the author of *The Luck of the Draw: The Role of Lotteries in Decision Making* (Oxford University Press, 2011) and the editor of several books, including *Bertrand Russell, Public Intellectual* (co-edited with Tim Madigan, rev. ed. Tiger Bark Press, 2021). He has served as President, Vice president, and Secretary of the Political Studies Association of Ireland (PSAI) and held numerous leadership positions in the Bertrand Russell Society (BRS). His paper "The Happy Memes of 'Hallelujah'" was published in *Leonard Cohen and Philosophy* (ed. Jason Holt, Open Court, 2014).

'Chelsea Hotel #2' – a modern elegy with Romantic resonance?

Janneke van der Leest

The artistic imagination of artistry, as manifested in pop culture, has its origins in the 'cultural revolution' of Romanticism. Romantic poetry – particularly certain elegies for poets who died young, like Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats, author of Endymion, Hyperion, etc.' and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Monody on the death of Chatterton' – continues to define the image of a popular, iconic and immortal artistry to the present day.

My research focusses on elegies for the mythic 'members of the 27 Club' – artists who all died at the age of 27 – including Janis Joplin. The odes to them build on an age-old (classical) genre, the elegy, which was modernized by Shelley in the Romantic period. My project demonstrates that there are stylistic and other parallels between the Romantic reception of the ancient elegy and how this is continued in the way modern popular culture commemorates and mourns its deceased poets/singers.

I want to use 'Chelsea Hotel #2' as a case study. Leonard Cohen started to write the

song – of which there is also an unreleased #1 – in Miami in 1971, quite shortly after Joplin's death, and did not finish it until 1974 in Asmara (then Ethiopia). I want to find answers to questions like: What makes this song a modern, popular elegy? What are the similarities with the tradition of the genre? Is romantic mourning involved? Why was Cohen explicit in interviews that it is about Joplin? In 1983 the song is one of the five songs that forms the 'soundtrack' for the short movie *I am a Hotel* (in which Cohen acts and that he wrote together with Mark Shekter). Is this with a purpose? And if so, what does it tell us? In what sense is this song a modern version of Romantic elegy?

Janneke van der Leest obtained a M.A. in Comparative Arts with a specialization in music and literature and a M.A. in Theology, both at Radboud University (RU), Nijmegen (the Netherlands). She is currently an external PhD candidate at KU Leuven (Belgium), writing a dissertation on 'Rock and Romantic mourning. Representation and remembrance of young deceased rock artists.' She works as programme coordinator at Radboud Reflects (RU). Relevant publications: "The Concept of the Romantic Artist in the Footsteps of the Mystical Passions. Case Study: Coleridge and Chatterton", in: *Studies in Spirituality*, vol. 34 (2025), pp 272-289; "Rock Obits: Patti Smith and the Deceased", in: *Ink on the Tracks. Rock and Roll Writing*, Andrew McKeown & Adrian Grafe (eds.). London: Bloomsbury, 2024, pp 133-145.

To The End of Love and Beyond: Leonard Cohen as an Object of Art

Natalia Vesselova

Since his passing, Leonard Cohen has become the object of artistic exploration across multiple genres and artistic fields, mainly in Canada, but also in other countries, particularly in Europe. Famously, at least three murals were painted on the walls of Montreal buildings. The largest of them, on Crescent Street, highlighted by its visibility from the main building of Le Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, became one of Montreal's calling cards. In 2017, Ballet Jazz Montréal premiered a highly popular and still-performed show, *Dance Me* (an apparent reference to Cohen's song "Dance me to the end of love"). Most importantly, the ground-breaking exhibition *Une brèche en toute chose/A Crack in Everything* was held at the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art in 2017 as part of the official program for Montréal's 375th-anniversary celebrations and later toured other cities and museums. George A. Walker designed *Leonard Cohen: A Woodcut Biography* (2020), an artistic tribute to Cohen's life.

Philippe Girard produced a bande dessinée titled *Leonard Cohen Sur un fi* (the English translation *Leonard Cohen: On the Wire*); Agathe Bray-Bourret and Maria Isabel Sanchez-Vegara composed their *Leonard Cohen*, an illustrated book related to Cohen's Spanish inspirations. In 2024, a limited-series TV production *So Long, Marianne* was released, focusing on young Cohen's time on the island of Hydra and his relationship with Marianne Ihlen. This list is hardly exhaustive. Additionally, there are hand-made pins and brooches featuring Cohen's likeness, as well as multiple posters and figurines created by fans or artisans seeking fan customers. Arguably, Leonard Cohen's after-life stardom has been meteoric, as his life and lore have been mythologized through various artistic means. The paper seeks to analyze how Leonard Cohen, as the poet, singer, and author, has been appended to, if not supplanted by, Leonard Cohen as a posthumous cultural icon, with inevitable idealizations, misrepresentations, and distortions.

Natalia Vesselova holds a Ph.D. equivalent in Literary Theory from Tver State University (Russia), 1998, and a Ph.D. in English from the University of Ottawa (Canada), 2014. While her first dissertation was dedicated to the phenomenon of the literary title, her Canadian doctoral thesis was focused on Leonard Cohen's philosophy of time. Natalia is the Coordinator of the Vered Jewish Canadian Studies Program at the Department of Classics and Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa. She teaches Yiddish culture, literature, and film, as well as a course on Jewish Canadian writers, with an emphasis on the Montreal school of poetry. Her primary research field is Jewish Canadian literature and expressions of Jewishness in poetry and prose. She has published on comparative literatures, Central and Eastern European literatures and cultural studies, and Canadian literature. Her current interests include contemporary Jewish Canadian poetry and theatre, as well as the problems of identity and translation.

**"New York is cold / but I like where I'm living":
Leonard Cohen in New York, 1967**

Robert de Young

After residing on the Greek island of Hydra during most of the 1960s, as documented in Sylvie Simmons' biography *I'm Your Man*, Leonard Cohen first arrived in New York in the summer of 1966. Describing this in an interview for the 1988 BBC documentary *Songs From the Life of Leonard Cohen*, Cohen declares he was on his way to Nashville to "cut a country record" but was "highjacked" in New York by the

folk scene. Almost immediately, Cohen started to move in influential circles meeting the talent agent Mary Martin, who had previously worked with Dylan's manager Albert Grossman, and perhaps most importantly Mary Martin's friend Judy Collins who was already an established recording artist, always on the lookout for new songs. Cohen came to her house and played her a number of his songs, and when Collins' album *In My Life* was released in November of 1966 it included covers of both "Dress Rehearsal Rag" and "Suzanne." Her 1967 album, *Wildflowers*, released in October of 1967 contained covers of a further three Cohen songs. Shelving his initial plan to go to Nashville, Cohen remained in New York until December of 1966 before returning to Montreal to further hone his songwriting skills.

By February of 1967 Leonard had relocated to New York, attending a mesmerizing performance by Nico at Andy Warhol's new art space the Dom in the East Village. Nico took Cohen to the club Max's Kansas City, where he met Warhol, Lou Reed and other members of the Factory crowd, including Elektra records' Danny Fields and another Warhol muse Edie Sedgwick. The chart success of Judy Collins' "Suzanne" had brought Cohen to the attention of Columbia's John Hammond who'd already signed and produced albums for Billie Holliday, Pete Seeger, Aretha Franklin and Bob Dylan. Mary Martin arranged a meeting.

By now Leonard had taken up residence on the fourth floor in Room 424 at the Chelsea Hotel and after a lunch with Hammond they went back to Leonard's room where Cohen played him several songs. Hammond declared "You've got it," and started pressuring Columbia executives to sign him. Leonard was still unsigned when on 22 February at Judy Collins' invitation, he did his first public performance at a benefit concert for WBAI. In a letter to Marianne the next day, Cohen claimed he was overjoyed that his performance was a complete disaster: "Everybody backstage was very sorry for me and they couldn't believe how happy I was, how relieved I was that it had all come to nothing, that I had never been so free." Nonetheless, by 26 April Hammond signed him to Columbia and back in his room in the Chelsea, Cohen began frantically preparing for the recording sessions for his first album.

These recording sessions ran from May through to early November of 1967 and Leonard's first album *Songs of Leonard Cohen* was released on December 27, 1967. The author has access to these entire recording sessions which shed light on Cohen's recording practices in the studio and his creative process in developing a group of songs for his debut album, now central to Cohen's canon. When the sessions commenced with legendary producer John Hammond Leonard had no experience of being in a recording studio, as evidenced in these recordings. Leonard was nervous and requested a large mirror and candles were brought into the studio because he felt more comfortable singing in front of a mirror. Later in the process, at the urging of

Joni Mitchell, David Crosby produced a few tracks introducing very different musical arrangements for the songs. The sessions were finally taken over by producer John Simon who had worked with Simon and Garfunkel, and who is credited as producer on the album. Examples from the recording sessions will be played for the conference.

But as detailed in the 157 pages of the 1967 Notebook 11-15, Leonard's time at the Chelsea and in New York was a highly creative period that had a lasting impact on both his songs and his poetry. For example, the Notebook contains a handwritten draft of the poem "How we used to approach *The Book of Changes*: 1966," not published until 1972 in the volume *The Energy of Slaves*. What's significant about the handwritten version is that, unlike the published version, it identifies (by naming her) that the poem was written for Nico, the chanteuse who worked with the Velvet Underground. Leonard remained very smitten with Nico for some time. In the studio sessions on 5 June, Leonard would record a song called "Jewels on Your Shoulder," arguably written for Nico, which both musically and lyrically would become "Take This Longing" on the 1974 album *New Skin For The Old Ceremony*. The Chelsea Notebook also name checks other residents such as Jim Morrison who told Leonard "You wrote one of the most beautiful songs I've ever heard," claiming he "knows a girl called Suzanne that is exactly like her."

The echoes of Cohen's first period of residence in New York in 1967 continued to resonate through much of his work – "First We Take Manhattan" as Cohen would declare twenty years later. But this paper also gives voice to the tragedy of access to Cohen's digitized archives (and the original assets) currently lying dormant in offices on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles. To inform the research for this paper, the author – who had worked as a creative producer and archivist of Cohen's work for more than six years – requested access to the full Notebook 11-15, but this request was denied with no reason being provided. Due to the ongoing acrimonious litigation in the Probate Court since March of 2022, scholars, filmmakers, music journalists, and the general public have no access to the archives. The final section of this paper documents the current state of play regarding access to Leonard's archives, ongoing litigation, and the difficulty of scholarship and projects that seek to explore and further Cohen's incredible legacy, both currently and possibly for some time to come.

Robert de Young worked in broadcasting with ABC Radio and ABC TV (Australia) for over a decade before writing, directing and producing independent documentaries. These films have screened in international film festivals (including TIFF, DOC NYC, London, Rome, Telluride, Busan, Burbank, Oxford, Sydney and Melbourne) and been broadcast throughout the UK, Europe, Australia, Asia and North America (full credits on IMDb). Robert holds a Master of Arts and a Doctorate in literature and has taught widely in literary and media studies. From March 2017 until November 2023

Robert worked as a creative producer and archivist for the Leonard Cohen Family Trust in Los Angeles. Robert has published numerous scholarly articles on Cohen and worked closely with the curatorial team for the *Leonard Cohen: Everybody Knows* exhibition and catalogue at the Art Gallery of Ontario 2022/23. Robert contributed two chapters to *The World of Leonard Cohen*, edited by David Shumway (Cambridge University Press, 2026).

Leonard Cohen: Master of the Table

Corey J. Zwikstra

Two caricatures of Cohen are too common: the man of masks and the restless wanderer. The real Cohen, rather, was a man and writer stationed at the table. The table stabilized his life and focused his work. Wherever Cohen was, at home in Montreal or Hydra or L.A., or away in a hotel or rented room, he was at the table writing. Cohen made a table definite, so that any table could become *the* table, a place where much could happen. The tables in Cohen's poetry, fiction, and songs are objects, sites of activity, and symbols. The different encounters there reveal much about his work, his relationships, his religious identity, and his domestic aspirations. Indeed, as an object of stability in his life, the table, especially the kitchen table, served as his lifelong domestic partner. Only in death did Cohen leave the table. During his life, however, Cohen became master of the table, the place where the masks dissolved and the restless wanderer found a home.

Corey J. Zwikstra is currently chair of the English Department at Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas, USA, where he specializes in early English language and literature. Though his PhD is in medieval literature, with a specialization in Old English poetry, on which he has published, his current research interests concern Leonard Cohen. A Canadian, he has been thinking about and researching Cohen's work since his undergraduate days. He has done research in the Cohen archives in Toronto, visited Cohen's stomping grounds in Montreal, and walked the narrow streets around Cohen's home in Hydra. If it is true that no matter where he lived Cohen never left Montreal, no matter what Zwikstra has done he has never left Leonard Cohen.

