Leonard Cohen between Literature and Music: A Multi-Perspectivist Approach

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> Perhaps a time is coming which will be more favourable to your kind of talent than the present or the last twenty years. I do have a feeling that a brighter day, a singing day, must come if there is to be any future at all, and then a poet will want to make his work resemble music instead of an equation enclosed in a cryptogram.
> (Hugh MacLennan to Leonard Cohen, February 13, 1955; *Cohen Papers* 10A-55)

The Flame (2018) as the Discursive (Re-) Construction of Leonard Cohen as a Poet[1]

Why did Leonard Cohen switch from literature to music in 1967? This question regularly surfaces among fans, biographers, and specialists. Why is it that, one year after the publication of *Beautiful Losers*, Cohen exchanged a fairly successful career as a writer for that of a singer-songwriter? Many journalists asked him this question over the years. His answers varied: it was easier for him as a singer to seduce women, or the switch could be explained by financial motives (see e.g. Cohen, "The Portuguese Interview"). As a writer, Cohen was already known for his eloquence in interviews, and literary critics such as Eli Mandel regularly warned that he was playing games with his interlocutors and often fell back on easy one-liners. At other times, his tone was more serious, and Cohen used the metaphor of the "invisible guitar" (see Adria), which was always hidden behind his poetry. The truth is that literature and music were constantly interwoven throughout Cohen's career, and what appears at first glance to be a turning point was in reality not a clean break. Most biographers have mentioned the fixed place of music in his life from an early age (cf. Nadel and Simmons). In his literary work, Cohen also regularly refers to popular music,

Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée
CRCL SEPTEMBER 2021 SEPTEMBRE RCLC
0319–051x/21/48.3/368

and when he took his first steps in the literary field in the mid-1950s, the boundary between literature and music in certain milieux, such as the Beat Poets, was already blurred. For example, Doug Beardsley (qtd. in Scobie 7) describes how he witnessed Cohen's very first poetry readings, where he was accompanied by jazz musicians. Cohen continued to write and make music until the end of his life, and if one looks at the images from his final multi-year concert tour (2008-13), poetry was clearly never far away, as he occasionally recited poems in between songs. If both literature and music are constants in Cohen's oeuvre, then the question arises how the two relate to each other. Various researchers have already addressed this issue, mainly within the context of Canadian scholarship. This article demonstrates that Translation Studies and Genetic Criticism also provide interesting perspectives for conceptualizing the complex relationship between music and literature.

I would also argue that this question should be tackled not only through a study of the work, but also through reception-oriented research that considers the different contexts—geographical, sociocultural, etc.—within which Cohen's oeuvre was and is read and listened to. For instance, there is a considerable difference between how Cohen's early musical work was received in Canada and North America on the one hand, and in Europe on the other. After all, in Europe, the chronology worked the other way around, since Cohen was considered from the very beginning a singer who, as it turned out afterwards, also wrote literature. "Le chanteur est aussi un romancier," the leading art magazine *La Quinzaine littéraire* headlined in 1971, when Cohen's first novel, *The Favourite Game*, was published in French translation. Viewed from a Canadian perspective, any translation of Cohen's work was something of a confirmation and consolidation of the *writer's* domestic consecration, whereas internationally it was more of a tribute to the *singer*. The distinction made by Ruth Amossy between the "ethos prédiscursif" (the artist's pre existing public image), the "ethos institutionnel" (the institution within which the artist works and creates his oeuvre), and the "ethos discursif" (the self-image created through discourse) may be interesting in this case. Although Cohen was active in two or more different institutional circuits, his "ethos prédiscursif" remains primarily that of a musician, and this image did not change after his death, certainly not for the general public.

Cohen's very last publication, the posthumous collection *The Flame: Poems | Notebooks | Lyrics | Drawings* (2018), can be read as an attempt to adjust that image: from the preface, written by Cohen's son Adam, an "ethos discursif" of a poet emerges: "My father, before he was anything else, was a poet" (v). *The Flame* is a heterogeneous book including different types of text. In this regard, the volume shows a number of similarities with *Stranger Music: Selected Poems and Songs* (1993), which also contains a collection of existing texts and some unpublished poems. In contrast to *Stranger Music, The Flame* highlights two other dimensions of Cohen's artistry. On the one hand, drawings, which are printed alongside the texts, have a prominent place. This aspect of Cohen's work was not entirely new, as the poems in *Book of Longing* (2006) were also accompanied by illustrations (cf. Pleshoyano, "Leonard Cohen: 'Mon art,

mon éternité'"). On the other hand, for the first time, a wide selection of notebook fragments was included in *The Flame*. The notebooks had been mentioned in earlier works, with poems from *Parasites of Heaven* and especially *Death of a Ladies' Man*, but only in passing reference where they supported the works' literary themes (cf. Norris). In *The Flame*, however, readers are for the first time given access to parts of these notebooks, which are also included in a separate section. Because of the limited selection of notebook fragments, the value of these images lies not so much in mapping out Cohen's literary creative process as in the simple but clear suggestion that Cohen was not only *first* but also, I would add, *foremost* a writer.

Literary and Musical Effectiveness: From an Artistic Ambition to Its Effects on the Audience

Although artistic multitalents are no rarity and the field of popular music has seen its fair share of artists who have written literary works,[2] the relationship between literature and music in the life and work of Leonard Cohen is an issue that has never ceased to intrigue researchers. George Bowering captures the relationship with his pithy statement "Cohen lives in the DMZ [demilitarized zone] where genres meet" (qtd. in Lacroix 30), while Ian Rae (41-90) pays extensive attention to the intertwining of Cohen's artistic modes of expression. Rae particularly elaborates on the continuing importance of poetry in Cohen's two novels, *The Favourite Game* (1963) and *Beautiful Losers* (1966). In *The Favourite Game*, poetry is still ubiquitous: the novel is structured around the poems of *The Spice-Box of Earth* and it "has the effectiveness of a long prose poem" (62). In doing so, Rae joins Michael Ondaatje, who had already stated in 1970 that "as in a poem, the silences and spaces, what is left unsaid, are essential to the mood of the book" (Rae 62). For both novels, Rae also mentions two well-known examples that show the role of music even before Cohen released his first studio album in 1967. The first example is the opening poem of *The Spice-Box of Earth*, which was used as an epigram for *The Favourite Game* and would later be set to music, albeit in an adapted version, for the album *Death of a Ladies' Man* (1977). This should not be surprising, Rae writes, because "the musical cadence of the rhyming quatrains in this poem is unmistakable" (53). The second example, *Beautiful Losers*, contains a reference to the afterlife of the famous "Magic is afoot" passage, which has subsequently been anthologized as poetry and reissued as a separate, illustrated long poem. Indeed,

> [t]he ecstatic cadences of this chant prompted the Cree musician Buffy Sainte-Marie to improvise (after a visit from Cohen) a musical adaptation on *Illuminations* (1969), and she re-recorded the poem with more elaborate orchestration on her retrospective *Up Where We Belong* (1996). (80)

As early as the 1960s, Cohen's artistic versatility stood out to journalists, critics, and

researchers alike. In 1969, Juan Rodriguez wrote:

> Cohen is one of the new breed of artists who seem to be reluctant to the thought of enclosing themselves within boundaries. Thus, they remain intransient [sic] and formless, always on the lookout for new methods of expressing themselves. The story of Cohen's career, then, is one of a search for identity. (qtd. in Gnarowski 63)

In the same year, Frank Davey published an article dealing specifically with the relationship between poetry and popular song in Leonard Cohen's and Bob Dylan's oeuvres. In a stilted manner, Davey argues that "the most important prerequisite for both a significant poem and significant lyrics in a popular song is that the writer be faithful to his own personal vision or to the vision of the poem he is writing" (qtd. in Gnarowski 111).

The unpublished quotation used as the epigraph for this article illustrates that in his private correspondence, Cohen addressed the difference between literary and musical communication. In a letter from 13 February 1955, Hugh MacLennan elaborates on the role that music(ality) for him should play in poetry. MacLennan suggests that poetry as it was lived in the mid-1950s was too sought after and too self-absorbed, disconnected from reality and readers. One cannot avoid the observation that this idea(l) of the most direct and efficient artistic communication possible, in both the literary and the musical works, recurs in various of Cohen's later statements, through which he shaped his poetics. In the early 1960s, when *The Favourite Game* was published, Cohen stated his ambition: "I want to challenge the reader's honesty. I want him to say: 'I was that man. I was there'" (*Cohen Papers* 10a-34).[3] In a recently published monograph on Leonard Cohen, Silvia Albertazzi suggests that Cohen succeeded in his aim:

> From the Canadian academics of the seventies to the biographers (sometimes more akin to hagiographers) of subsequent decades, to the exegetes, admirers, journalists, colleagues, and enthusiastic writers of the new millennium [...], *all, at a certain point, start speaking in the first person*. (8; translation and emphasis mine)

In both his work and interviews, Cohen regularly revisited the importance of the audience that, moreover, changed over the years from a fairly homogeneous Canadian readership in the 1960s to a heterogeneous, international, and anonymous crowd once Cohen became popular as a singer. In 1990, for example, Cohen confided to journalist Marco Adria that music has the power to move easily: "Somehow, the nature of a popular song is that it moves swiftly from lip to lip and from heart to heart." A similar concept can be seen in the poem "All my news" from Cohen's *Book of Longing*, which talks about "my song" and once again distinguishes between a cerebral and an emotional experience of art: "Do not decode / these cries of mine / they are the road / and not the sign" (*Book of Longing* 42).

With these statements, Cohen reformulates several widespread ideas about the relationship between literature and music. They are elegantly phrased, but can always be traced back to a binary distinction that leaves little room for nuance and says

nothing about the possible connections between music and literature. For example, it is possible that some literary texts and lyrics are identical (word for word), but that, as a result of migration from one medium to another, they acquire a different status and are listened to or read differently. The most common example is that of lyrics appearing separately, sometimes rechristened as poetry, either in book form, completely separate from the music, or in liner notes, the "epitext" of music albums.[4] The intention seems clear: highlighting the importance of the text to the now-reader, who was first a listener.[5] Consequently, the lyrics are given an "ambivalent" status. The term *ambivalence* has been used by, among others, Rakefet Sheffy;[6] however, it has fallen into disuse today, probably also because it seems to refer to topics such as "tone" in modernist writing. The term *crossover literature* is more contemporary, but is, according to Rachel Falconer, "a slippery term" (557) that, in the field of literature alone, can refer to various different practices.[7] Falconer, who, like Rakefet Sheffy, uses the term in the context of the study of children's literature, makes an interesting distinction between cross-*writing*, from the author's perspective, and cross-*reading*, from the reader's. In doing so, she notes that the phenomenon of cross-reading has been understudied, although the reading perspective is, "in many ways, the better indicator of a significant shift in cultural attitudes and, arguably, the more interesting for specialists in narrative theory" (559). Therefore, she notes that "a good starting point would be to adopt a dialogic approach to crossover literature, an approach which would resist universalising statements about the range of texts this appellation signifies" (560).

In the case of Leonard Cohen, this changing status of texts may lead to different interpretations and, consequently, to different translation strategies in the international distribution of his work. For example, of the ten tracks on the album *Ten New Songs* (2001), seven sets of lyrics were subsequently published as poems in *Book of Longing* (2006). The texts are each, more or less, identical, but the musical and/or literary production contexts led to considerable differences between the French translations of the music album (as an appendix to the liner notes of *Ten New Songs*) and the poetry collection *Le livre du désir* (2008). In 2016, Tanasescu and Alberti showed that the literary translation results in a more elevated version, which is reflected in a higher register but also manifests itself in formal choices. Another similar example is the poetry collection *Parasites of Heaven* (1966), which contains five poems that later appear as the songs "Suzanne," "Master Song," and "Teachers" on *Songs of Leonard Cohen* (1967), "Avalanche" on *Songs of Love and Hate* (1971), and "Fingerprints" on *Death of a Ladies' Man* (1977). In the book *Stranger Music*, in which Cohen categorizes the texts by book or album, these five texts are reproduced in their entirety, but only "Fingerprints" is categorized as a poem from *Parasites of Heaven*, while the other four pieces appear as lyrics from the two albums mentioned above. In other words, Cohen had to decide under which heading he wanted these texts to appear, and whether he considered them poems or lyrics.

To conceptualize the continuity between the literature and the music in a more

detailed manner, the next section of this article, using a number of concepts borrowed from Translation Studies, defines Cohen's role as both a writer and a translator. The subsequent sections concentrate on the specific case of poems that evolved into songs, with "Suzanne" as an elaborated case study, and show that Genetic Criticism can be a useful approach to map out this continuity, referring mainly to Cohen's notebooks. Although a significant portion of these documents are currently unavailable, based on the archival records already made public at the University of Toronto and on the statements made by biographers (e.g. Simmons 42, 63, 261) and from the Leonard Cohen Estate and Archive (cf. Pleshoyano, "Steering Our Way"), we know that these notebooks played a crucial role in Cohen's writing process.

From Poems to Songs: A Process of Intersemiotic Self-Translation

When two different semiotic practices such as making music and writing literature function as "equivalent" means to realize one common artistic goal, the evolution of poems into songs can, from a Translation Studies perspective, also be considered a form of intersemiotic self-translation. At first, this may seem like a surprising choice. After all, both Cohen and other writer-musicians did not describe their hybrid artistic practice in these terms. However, this is also the case with many traditional self-translators, who regularly refuse to label their "translations" as such. By making this comparison, I also move beyond the traditional concept of translation, but here too, I am no exception. In terms of self-translation, Grutman and Van Bolderen state that "[l]ike translation itself, self-translation can be viewed both in a narrow sense and from a much broader, even metaphorical, perspective" (323). In more general terms, scholars such as Edwin Gentzler and Lucile Desblache openly advocate a stretching and outspoken metaphorical use of the concept of translation, precisely because such flexibility allows atypical "translation products" to be studied in ways that can generate new insights. This is also the case for poems that evolved into songs. For analyses of hybrid artistic practices, the Translation Studies frame of reference offers two main heuristic advantages: one product is no longer considered an inferior, derivative product of the other, and the interaction between both products can be described more accurately on a continuum of "equality"/"equivalence" and "difference." I will elaborate on this below.

A Positive View of Translation

Both Cohen's fame as a musician and his much greater musical output have often overshadowed his literary work, as for example, the quotation from *La Quinzaine littéraire* cited above demonstrates. This hierarchy shares commonalities with translations, which are often still regarded as derived, inferior products. Ever since the

early years of academic Translation Studies, researchers from different traditions have resisted this idea; for instance, Gideon Toury openly argued against a prescriptive approach in favour of a descriptive one. Others, such as André Lefevere, preferred to see translation as a particular but privileged form of "rewriting." In this interpretation, the seemingly monolithic character of the source text is eroded and the hierarchy between source text and target text becomes less explicit. Still others, such as Antoine Berman, invoke a more hermeneutical approach. In a text that has become rather famous, Berman reveals a "deforming system" (243) in the translation process, which he describes on the basis of twelve "deforming tendencies" (244). Partly as a result of the title, the reader is wrongly given the impression that Berman has a distinctly negative view of translation. However, in one of these tendencies, "clarification," he clearly distinguishes between a negative and positive interpretation of this concept. In the negative interpretation, the polysemy of the source text is reduced to monosemy, but in the positive interpretation, Berman considers the "clarification" (or "explicitation") a positive principle. He regards it as

> the manifestation of something that is not apparent, but concealed or repressed, in the original. Translation, by virtue of its own movement, puts into play this element. […] The power of illumination, of *manifestation*, as I incidated apropos Hölderlin, is *the supreme power of translation*. (245; emphasis mine)

Applied to the oeuvre of writer-musicians, this principle means that one form of expression can be a means of articulating the whole artistic practice in a "clarifying" way, although, of course, this is not always the case. Such an approach is completely at odds with a reductionist reading such as Berman's negative interpretation of clarification, in which one art form is considered only from the one-sided, dominant frame of reference of the other art form. In Cohen's case, the confluence of the musical and literary work can show to what extent he tried to maximize the effectiveness of his art. I will revisit this topic in the discussion of "Suzanne" below.

Writing as Author and as Translator

Given that in self-translations, author and translator are one and the same, this specific form of translation is usually characterized by a tension between commitment to and freedom from the source text. In the role of translator, one will usually postulate, either explicitly or implicitly, a certain "equivalence" between the two works. Additionally, the shifts between source text (poetry) and target text (song) can be explained by genre-specific characteristics when one translates from one semiotic sign system into the other.[8] When Cohen made his own interlingual (Spanish/English) and intersemiotic (poem/song) translation of "Pequeño vals vienes," a poem by Federico García Lorca,[9] he stated:

> "Take this Waltz" was written deep into the nervous breakdown. It took me 150 hours to do the translation of the poem. It was hard to adapt so you could sing it in 3/4. The official translation—well you couldn't sing that. So I had the permission from the [Lorca] estate

to do my own translation. (qtd. in Rowland)

In the role of author, however, one has more leeway.[10] Of course, much depends on the self-translator's motives. If (self-)translation is only a way of introducing the work to another wider public, self-translators will act as translators rather than authors, according to Tanquiero (58-59). But if the ambition goes further, as in the case of André Brink, who considered his English self-translation of *Kennis van die aand* a "rethinking in a framework of a new language" (45), the differences will be more substantial. In that case, the "translation" is often given another name. Simona Anselmi (1) lists a number of alternatives: recomposition, recreation, rediscovering, rendition, revision, rewriting, transactions, transcreation, or writing in two languages. These concepts can also be useful to understand the intriguing mix of ruptures and continuities in Cohen's oeuvre. I will illustrate this with "Suzanne" and subsequently highlight how Cohen continually rewrote his texts throughout his entire career and how Genetic Criticism can help to map and understand this artistic practice.

Case Study: "Suzanne" as a Poem and a Song

The very genesis of "Suzanne" is a good illustration of the rewriting principle. The text was first published as a poem, "Suzanne takes you down," in the collection *Parasites of Heaven* (1966, also included in *Selected Poems*, 1968), then recorded in the same year by Judy Collins,[11] and only subsequently, at the end of 1967, released by Leonard Cohen on his first musical album *Songs of Leonard Cohen*. In the following years, other recordings of the song appeared on live albums, and, in 1993, the lyrics were finally included in the collection *Stranger Music*. "Suzanne" is also a typical example of a crossover text. Brian Laidlaw explains this "dual life" through not only its genesis but also its formal characteristics:

> [I]t is fascinating to observe how the traces of page-based poetic rhyming decorum persist in the musical setting of the text. Reminiscent of the way in which [Irving] Layton's poem "Newsboy" employs the [er] rhyme of "murder" and "letter", the lyrics of "Suzanne" are built around the same sonic theme of [r] sounds rather than vowel sounds. What is exceptionally "poetic" (as opposed to "songwriterly") about the text of "Suzanne" is that, like Layton's word pair above, Cohen's unstressed [r] sounds do *not* follow rhymes on stressed syllables. (Laidlaw, unpublished manuscript)

A comparison of the *Parasites of Heaven* version with the lyrics sung on *Songs of Leonard Cohen* reveals some interesting facts.[12] This is arguably an example of an intersemiotic process in which a poem on paper is converted into a song on record. At first glance, the two texts do not appear to differ enormously. However, that is an illusion. Below, I will first provide an overview of the changes and, subsequently, formulate some hypotheses about Cohen's artistic practice as a whole.

The first set of changes are subtle and appear related, with an adjustment of the

number of syllables, which changes the rhythm slightly. Although rhythm is, of course, also meaningful in poetry—especially if it is read aloud, although there are no known recordings of Cohen reciting this poem to an audience—this criterion becomes particularly important in the song version. "*Because* you've touched her perfect body" is replaced with "*For* you've touched..." and in the line "Suzanne she holds the mirror," the pronoun "she" is omitted from the song version.

Second, the poem contains many more punctuation marks—specifically, periods and commas, which are, of course, not audible, but published in the liner notes and later in *Stranger Music*—than the song version. In addition, small words such as "now" or "and" have been added to the lyrics. Thus, the last verse begins with "*Now* Suzanne takes your hand," and the period at the end of the fourth line of the last verse is omitted and replaced in the fifth line with "*and* the sun pours down like honey." In this way, the strophes of the song version become more distinct from each other, and the unity within each strophe is strengthened. The addition of "Now" especially makes the step-by-step, narrative character more apparent. Nevertheless, these are also minor changes.

The third and final category of changes contains two shifts, which significantly change the meaning of the text and indicate Cohen's intervention as author rather than translator. These shifts are observed in two key passages in the text. The first passage is situated in the first strophe: whereas the poet writes "you have no *gifts* to give her," the version in the song becomes "you have no *love* to give her." Then, in the third refrain, there is a remarkable double shift. In the three refrains,[13] Cohen plays a subtle game with pronouns. In the poem, this is successively "you've touched her perfect body with your mind," "he touched your perfect body with his mind," and "she's touched her perfect body with her mind." This variation is the same in the song version, except in the last line, where "*her* perfect body" is replaced with "*your* perfect body." It goes without saying that this can change the interpretation of the text considerably. Moreover, the line is also completely rewritten for this purpose. The poem states "and you're sure that she can find you / because she's touched her perfect body / with her mind," while Cohen sings "and you know that you can trust her / for she's touched your perfect body / with her mind."

In short, this kind of fundamental intervention is clearly the work of Cohen-as-author and not Cohen-as-translator. The questions are then whether these changes are meaningful, and if so, how. Perhaps they are nothing more than "corrections" made by the author in his text: the elimination of a disruptive repetition of *gifts/give*; and the completion of the symmetry in the play between the different pronouns. However, they could also be carefully selected changes and additions that reveal something of Cohen's artistic vision. A broader analysis, in which different texts are studied, falls outside the scope of this article. However, based on these two changes, two hypotheses can already be formulated. First, with the replacement of "gifts" with "love," the central theme of the song becomes more prominent and the material gives way to the spiritual. All in all, it is not necessarily helpful in interpreting the text's

meaning, unless we consider the general evolution of Cohen's oeuvre, in which concrete, referential language in the early texts is gradually replaced with more abstract, universal formulations (cf. Mus, *The Demons of Leonard Cohen* 85-119). As far as the example here is concerned, it is worth noting that in *Parasites of Heaven*, the Suzanne character is also mentioned in another poem, "Suzanne wears a leather coat," which interestingly comes *before* the better-known poem "Suzanne takes you down." More culture-specific items and material references have been incorporated into "Suzanne wears a leather coat," whereas the second text portrays a spiritual rather than material personality. Second, with the replacement of "her" with "you," the addressed "you" figure becomes much more involved in the text. This cannot possibly be a coincidence. A biographical reading makes it immediately clear that this was a deliberate choice to frame the song lyrics as an encounter between a *you* (and not an *I*) and a *she*. Indeed, although the content of the song/poem is largely based on a true encounter between Leonard Cohen and Suzanne Vaillancourt, an *I/you* story would have been more logical in this respect. More important, the addressing of the "you" figure is ubiquitous in Cohen's entire oeuvre and is a feature that would remain present up to and including *You Want It Darker*.[14]

Leonard Cohen's Artistic Practice as a *Work in Progress*: Genetic Criticism

The interpretation of "Suzanne" as an intersemiotic self-translation could also be applied to Leonard Cohen's writing practice as a whole. After all, it is not only poems that evolve into songs. More generally speaking, Cohen continually rewrote and reworked many of his texts—both poems and lyrics—and the repercussions are visible in his published oeuvre. The best-known example is probably "Chelsea Hotel," as the addition of "#2" explicitly alludes to the existence of an earlier version, which was never released on an album, but there are unofficial live performances available on *YouTube*, in which Cohen sings the first version of this song. His best-known song, "Hallelujah," was also released in two versions—in 1984, on the studio album *Various Positions*; and in 1994, on the live album *Cohen Live*, from a performance in 1988—with considerable differences in lyrics. Another example is the evolution of "Lover, lover, lover." Cohen wrote the song in the Sinai desert and sang it for the Israeli solders, but once it was officially released, a number of lines that referred explicitly to the situation on the battlefield were removed, and rediscovered in 2021 (cf. "Rediscovered"). One could also think of *Death of a Ladies' Man* (1978), where 83 (prose) poems are paired with "commentaries." Ken Norris explains that "[t]he commentaries respond to the poems or prose poems that immediately precede them. The responses are registered from a variety of standpoints, and alternately criticize, canonize, deconstruct, reconstruct, explicate, obscure or enhance the piece to which they are wedded". Norris goes on to explain that

> [i]n a number of the commentaries we are referred to an unpublished manuscript entitled *My Life in Art*, "from which many of the pieces of this present volume are excerpted or reworked" (p. 21). In a letter to Stephen Scobie, Cohen explained the relationship between *Death of a Ladies' Man, My Life in Art*, and another unpublished work, *The Woman Being Born:* "*Death of a Ladies' Man* derives from a longer work, called *My Life in Art*, which I finished […] and decided not to publish. *The Woman Being Born* was the title of another manuscript and also an alternative working title for both *My Life in Art* and *Death of a Ladies' Man*."

"Joan of Arc" is another intriguing example: The track is a compilation of overlapping voices, all of them Cohen's, with the lyrics simultaneously recited and sung. "It was my idea," Cohen said, "and I had, as the model, manuscripts that you'd see with lines written over lines. I just thought it was appropriate at that moment. It's like the line of a Larry Rivers painting, you see the variations" (qtd. in Ruhlmann 17).

This writing technique is also reflected in Cohen's notebooks. As mentioned earlier in this article, the notebook fragments included in *The Flame* are simply a suggestion of this. In a lecture delivered at the University of Antwerp in November 2019, Alexandra Pleshoyano, the academic ambassador for the Leonard Cohen Estate and Archive, provided more insight into Leonard Cohen's still largely uninventoried archive. The amount of material is extremely large, and contains many documents with notes, draft versions, and manuscripts of lyrics that may or may not have eventually become published poems and songs. The Leonard Cohen Family Trust's hope is that the "placement of the Archive, in the near future, will provide an anchor for the study of Leonard Cohen's work in Canada and around the world for generations to come" (Pleshoyano, "Steering Our Way").

These archival documents already show that, according to Siegfried Scheide's well-known distinction, Cohen was not a "Kopfarbeiter," someone whose creative thinking process takes place mainly mentally, but a "Papierarbeiter," someone whose creative thinking process takes place mainly on paper. This characteristic of Cohen's artistic practice, together with his tendency to preserve all these documents,[15] makes the archives particularly promising for gaining a better understanding of how his writing process took shape. Based on manuscript research of the writings of Samuel Beckett and James Joyce, scholars such as Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon have already convincingly demonstrated the added value of a Genetic Criticism approach. Traditionally, the field of Genetic Criticism is limited to everything that comes *before* the publication of a text. This is Pierre-Marc de Biaisi's position, which Dirk Van Hulle summarizes as follows:

> les transformations après ce moment [de publication] s'accomplissent dans un environnement public. Les modifications peuvent être considérables, mais les relations entre les versions différentes publiées ne correspondent pas à "la logique d'un processus comparable à celui de l'avant-texte." ("Essai de critique épigénétique" 416)

Van Hulle himself, however, takes a different view and argues that the distinction between pre- and post-publication should not be made too absolute, and that all

possible variants of published texts should be considered part of the more broadly conceived genetic process, which he calls the "epigenesis." Along those lines, the published works can be put into a broader framework and generate new interpretations. Although this kind of genetic criticism relies on concrete, material traces to map out an artistic process, many issues still remain up for interpretation. For example, a crucial question is on what basis one can decide whether one work is a *continuation* of another work or has become a *different* product. Peter Shillingsburg notes that "sometimes there will be disagreement about whether a variant form is in fact a variant version or a separate work" (qtd. in Van Hulle, "Essai de critique épigénétique" 420), and Van Hulle adds that "le phénomène selon lequel une œuvre peut en cacher une autre est bien connu" ("Essai de critique épigénétique 420). Applied to the case above, to what extent, for example, can the first poem "Suzanne wears a leather coat" be regarded as a previous version of "Suzanne takes you down"? Is the sung "Suzanne" a *continuation* of the written "Suzanne," an *equivalent* of it, or a radically *different* work? Can we distinguish between changes that have to do with literary composition on the one hand, and interventions that are more translation-technical on the other?

Conclusion: Future Perspectives on the Study of Leonard Cohen's Oeuvre

I have tried to answer the question of how the literary and the musical works in Leonard Cohen's oeuvre relate to each other, focusing on how change and continuity can be conceptualized. In doing so, I have distinguished between the standpoints of reception and production. To date, scant attention has been paid to the diverse ways in which Cohen's oeuvre has been received and translated worldwide and the extent of the roles institutional, sociological, and geographical factors play in this. By implying the reader and listener in what Rachel Falconer calls a "dialogic approach," we can gain a better understanding of the relationship between literature and music, and of the impact of words and sounds. Considering the relationship between literature and music from the standpoint of production, it is possible to consider Cohen as not only an author but also a self-translator, making it easier to interpret the differences between individual productions in terms of equivalence. In addition, Genetic Criticism can also be useful in conceptualizing the evolution in and of the oeuvre. The case study of "Suzanne" has offered a modest blueprint of the type of research that can be conducted for the rest of Cohen's oeuvre. Translation Studies and Genetic Criticism can be complementary: several translation scholars consider translation a particular form of rewriting, while some text geneticists consider translation part of the epigenesis, and thus upgrade the status of translations, aligning with current views in Translation Studies. However, there is also a possible difference between the two approaches, depending on whether the relationship between texts is expressed in

terms of "evolution" or "equality"/"equivalence."

Finally, a number of questions remain unanswered. One might wonder, as Dirk Van Hulle does, about the status of early, never-published versions or variants of texts: should they be excluded when we interpret a work, since the author has left them out, or can (and should) they be considered? Van Hulle argues for the second option and uses the term "pentimenti" to describe the function of these texts. The term stems from the field of art history and refers to earlier versions of a painting:

> […] the situation in literary studies is quite different from art history, where the study of pentimenti has always been evidently inherent to the study of paintings. The term is derived from the Italian pentirsi. A painter may regret that, at an early stage, he painted something that turned out to be not that great after all; he may correct it by painting something else on top of this early layer. But all these phases of regret are still part of the painting. They contribute to the colour and texture of the final result, even if they are no longer visible with the naked eye. ("The Pentimenti Principle" 39)

In that respect, it is intriguing that Cohen too, in describing the creation of a song like "Joan of Arc," refers to a painter, Larry Rivers—known for his bold, gestural painting style—and uses a pictorial metaphor. Whatever the case may be, for the time being we must wait for the archives to be opened up to formulate more concrete hypotheses. The current available oeuvre and the many statements made by Cohen himself are already promising and suggest that the rewriting technique is not limited to isolated "works in progress," but rather is a constant in Cohen's writing practice, which can then be regarded as a great "oeuvre in progress." In that sense, the use of the singular form in the title of the documentary *The Song of Leonard Cohen* was extremely apt. Filmmaker Harry Rasky wanted to highlight that Cohen's career is one sustained attempt at creating one (ultimate) song. On *Popular Problems* (2014), Cohen indicated that, despite everything, he had succeeded, and like a major, cathartic confession, sang: "You got me singing / The only song I ever had."

Notes

1. This article quotes from the Leonard Cohen archive of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto. Special thanks to Jennifer Toews for making these documents available.

2. Between 2018 and 2020, I worked with Michel Delville and Denis Saint-Amand at the University of Liège on a research project dealing with the literary production of pop musicians. The project culminated in a symposium (*Cultural Ambivalence, Intersemiotic Translation and Artistic Identities: The Literary Production of Musician Writers*) and a book publication (Mus, *Grondtonen*).

3. Quoted in an unpublished article for the *Montreal Star*, dated 17 April 1963, included in a letter from Morris Fish to Leonard Cohen.

4. Lucile Desblache notes that the opposite phenomenon also exists; pop musicians, such as the Pet Shop Boys, who categorically refuse to include lyrics in their music albums: "when asked why, Neil Tennant [...] does not give a reason other than wanting their songs to be identified with pop music rather than rock or any other genre" (186).

5. This technique is not limited to Leonard Cohen's work. For example, rapper Jay-Z published a work with the meaningful title *Decoded*. Other musicians, such as Alicia Keys or Florence Welch, published collections of "poetry and lyrics" in which the subtitle makes a clearer distinction between the two types of text.

6. Rakefet Sheffy defines it as follows: "a certain corpus which [is] [...] generated in one system is also interpreted accordingly to models of another system, so that it functions simultaneously, though differently, in both" (179). Sheffy uses the concept in the study of children's and youth literature that is also read by adults, but it can also serve here to read texts simultaneously as poetry and lyrics.

7. "In postcolonial studies, for example, crossover is the critical term for texts that cross cultures or […] represent such cultural shifts in the narrative. In gender studies, crossover is used to signify shifts in gender perspective […]. In children's literature criticism, however, the boundaries […] themselves being subject to constant redefinition. Even in this field, 'crossover' can refer to different aspects of the narrative communication act: the relation between authors and texts, the internal attributes of texts, or the relation between texts and readers, for example" (Falconer 557-58).

8. For example, Peter Löw developed his "pentathlon principle" for the translation of musical texts, taking into account five criteria: "singability," "sense," "naturalness," "rhyme," and "rhythm."

9. There are two editions of the poem "Pequeño vals vienés" (from the collection *Poeta en Nueva York*). The best-known edition was published in Spain by José Bergamín. Although widely recognized as the standard text, it came out later than the version by Rolfe Humphries, in May and June 1940, respectively. For his adaptation, Cohen was inspired by the Humphries edition, perhaps because it was published alongside an English translation.

10. Grutman and Van Bolderen (323) point out that, in practice, this freedom is usually claimed only to a small extent.

11. Although the song will forever remain connected with Leonard Cohen, one could question this on the basis of the chronology and the copyrights, which Cohen missed for years due to a blindly signed copyright contract.

12. Note that *Songs of Leonard Cohen* has been circulating in distinct American and European versions since its release. The back of all US pressings from 1967 onwards feature a large colour image of an "anima sola" next to the tracklist, while the European pressings, also from 1967 onwards, have song lyrics on the back. In later editions, the album was released in other variants, such as one with the image in black and white. Thanks to Maarten Massa and Peter Torbijn for this information.

13. Incidentally, the poem also contains a kind of refrain: this is evident not only from the repetition of a, more or less, identical text, but also from the typography: the recurring part is printed with an indentation. It is also striking that, quantitatively speaking, relatively few changes have been made. This suggests that Cohen had intended the text as a song from the outset.

14. This linguistic technique of involving the reader or listener as much as possible in the universe of the song is not innocent. Elsewhere, I have shown that the place of the reader and listener is a fundamental element in Leonard Cohen's artistic practice (see Mus, "Hoe Leonard Cohen zijn werk maximale zeggingskracht wilde geven").

15. In Armelle Brusq's documentary *Leonard Cohen: Portrait Intime*, Cohen gave a tour of his house in Los Angeles, and showed the documentary maker several filing boxes. "These boxes are manuscripts that have never been published," he explains. "This is the real work. All of this is my real work. So I keep adding to this heap of blackened pages." Today, only a fraction of Cohen's archives is available in the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto. Manuscripts, draft versions, letters, notes, absolutely everything has been saved and neatly organized, often by Cohen himself: "He sorts and labels his own material before he sends it to us," says librarian Jennifer Toews. The rest of the archive material is now being inventoried by Alexandra Pleshoyano in close collaboration with Robert Kory, sole Trustee of the Leonard Cohen Family Trust.

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