Speaking Sweetly from "The Window": Reading Leonard Cohen's Song

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To the memory of Amnon Amir
My first partner in reading LC

Leonard Cohen is famous for two themes that are the mutual foci of his work, from his earliest poems to his most recent songs: love and spirituality. Through Cohen's poems, novels and songs readers and listeners have been offered a candid view of both his sexuality and faith. However, his work can not be divided accurately by this dichotomy; first because there are other aspects to it, such as political concerns in the widest sense, and second because it is sometimes difficult to separate between those various concerns, which are often intertwined. It might therefore be difficult to offer an unequivocal interpretation to a Leonard Cohen poem or song, as they can often be interpreted in more than one way, and they also mean different things to different people.

In this reading of "The Window",[1] I do not wish to impose an interpretation from outside, according to one common theory or the other, but to try, as far as possible, to work from inside Cohen's poetry, from his familiar world of imagery, and while referring to his own words when talking about his work. My aim here is to try to come as near as possible to what Cohen might have had in mind when composing this song. I will also introduce external material of various kinds, but such that must have been familiar to Cohen, and could have had an impact on the song.

"The Window" is a complex song, containing some poetic symbols that do not yield their meaning easily. A poet may use symbols to express a richness of meaning that cannot be adequately expressed otherwise, or to relate a vision that cannot be related directly. This is especially true with romantic and religious writers, and Cohen can be described as both. But what exactly does the symbol mean to the poet? And to what extent may we interpret it according to the vast catalogue of familiar symbols and their meanings? We may even ask: to what extent is the poet himself conscious of the various meanings of an archetypal symbol he might use? The answers are not always clear, and therefore we may not be confident in our interpretation, but an attempt must be made, and it must follow closely the contents and language of the song.

The contents of "The Window" are spiritual. Cohen's songs and poems are sometimes written from the point of view of a soul feeling lost and wishing to come in contact with an ultimate reality. In his quest and his imagery Cohen does not adhere faithfully to one specific tradition; nor is he a "professional" mystic by any means. He absorbed much from the Jewish tradition in which he was raised, and he did some studies in the Kabbalah, or Jewish mysticism, later in life. He also absorbed a great deal of imagery from the Catholic culture in the midst of which he grew up in Montreal, and for many years has been studying various religious and mystical traditions, and particularly Zen Buddhism. All these have influenced his thinking and writing, but we should also bear in mind that at different times Cohen must have felt a closer affinity with one or other tradition, and I will also relate to this premise in my following discussion.

[1] First released as a song on Cohen's *Recent Songs* album in 1979, and later printed in a somewhat different version in Cohen's book of selected poetry *Stranger Music* in 1993.

THE WINDOW [2]

Why do you stand by the window
abandoned to beauty and pride?
the thorn of the night in your bosom,
the spear of the age in your side;
lost in the rages of fragrance,
lost in the rags of remorse,
lost in the waves of a sickness
that loosens the high silver nerves.

O chosen love, O frozen love
O tangle of matter and ghost.
Oh darling of angels, demons and saints
and the whole broken-hearted host -
Gentle this soul.

And come forth from the cloud of unknowing
and kiss the cheek of the moon;
the New Jerusalem glowing, [the code of solitude broken,]
why tarry all night in the ruin? [why tarry confused and alone?]
And leave no word of discomfort,
and leave no observer to mourn,
but climb on your tears and be silent
like a rose on its ladder of thorn.

O chosen love, O frozen love… {missing in the printed version}

Then lay your rose on the fire;
the fire give up to the sun;
the sun give over to splendour
in the arms of the High Holy One;
for the Holy One dreams of a letter,
dreams of a letter's death -
oh bless the continuous stutter
of the word being made into flesh.

O chosen love, O frozen love
O tangle of matter and ghost.
Oh darling of angels, demons and saints

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[2] Text and punctuation as in the book *Stranger Music* (1993), except for two lines in the second stanza, as in the album *Recent Songs* (1979), with the book's alternative lines in square brackets.

and the whole broken-hearted host -
Gentle this soul,
gentle this soul.

The Window

The image of the window, as well as images that have to do with light, are very common in Cohen's writing. In this case it seems that "image" is more appropriate than "symbol", although the symbolic value of the window cannot be denied; but in Cohen's case the window seems to be a very concrete object, although filled with meaning. "Window" is a word that holds a special place in Cohen's private mythology ("room" is another one), and it often plays an important part in his poems and songs. For example, it appears in the first line of "So Long, Marianne" (*Songs of Leonard Cohen*, 1968), where it obviously serves as a source of light:

Come over to the window, my little darling
I'd like to try to read your palm

In the first stanza of "Stories Of The Street" (*ibid*) the speaker is situated in the strategic position of the observer, leaning on the window-sill and looking at the street below ("the rose", which has an important place in "The Window", as we shall later see, also appears here):

The stories of the street are mine, the Spanish voices laugh.
The Cadillacs go creeping now through the night and the poison gas,
and I lean from my window-sill in this old hotel I chose,
yes one hand on my suicide, one hand on the rose.

Leaning on the window-sill, or lying by the window, also means being in a state of indecision and confusion. In the above lines the speaker cannot make up his mind between his suicide and the rose. Another example is in "The Stranger Song" (*ibid*):

And then leaning on your window-sill
He'll say one day you caused his will
To weaken…

The situation in "Master Song" (*ibid*) is somewhat similar, although the atmosphere here is of loneliness and despair, rather than indecision:

I've lain by this window long enough
You get used to an empty room

From a much later period and the album *Ten New Songs* (2001) there's "Love Itself", again bringing together the window and the light, as well as love (which is capitalized here, perhaps also hinting at the religious meaning):

The light came through the window,
Straight from the sun above,
And so inside my little room
There plunged the rays of Love.

Other examples include "Tonight Will Be Fine" (*Songs From A Room*, 1969) ("I choose the rooms that I live in with care, / the windows are small and the walls almost bare"), and "Tower Of Song" (*I'm Your Man*, 1988) ("I'm standing by the window where the light is strong"; the song ends with the line: "I'll be speaking to you sweetly from my window in the tower of song"). These and several other songs include the window as an important image with an impressive consistency. Incidentally, in some of the documentary films made about him, Cohen can be seen looking through the window of his room, or sitting on the window-sill.[3] It is no wonder that he eventually wrote a song entitled "The Window".

The same images also appear frequently in Cohen's printed poems. Of special significance is the early poem "Brighter Than Our Sun" from *The Spice-Box of Earth* (1961), which reads:

Brighter than our sun,
Bright as the window beyond death,
The light in the universe
Cleans the eyes to stone.

They prayed for lives without visions,
Free from visions but not blind.
They could only drone the prayer,
They could not set it down.

And windows persisted,
And the eyes turned stone.
They all had faces like statue Greeks,
Marble and calm.

And what happened to love
In the gleaming universe?
It froze in the heart of God,
Froze on a spear of light.

The window in this poem is open to a reality beyond this world, beyond death, bringing light for those willing to see it. In the second stanza the poet criticizes those who pray dutifully but meaninglessly, afraid of an unexpected vision that might rattle their secure world. The light, when coming through the window to such people, rather than uplift them, turns them into stone, killing love, causing even the heart of God to freeze. But the unstated meaning of the poem is

[3] In *Ladies and Gentlemen… Mr. Leonard Cohen* (1965) Cohen is seen standing at the window; *The Song of Leonard Cohen* (1980) ends with Cohen sitting on a window-sill, looking out.

that there *is* another way: there is a thirst for vision, for another kind of love, and for a true communion with God.

The window, then, is a multi-faceted image for Cohen: it is a source of various kinds of light, both earthly and divine, and it is also a liminal position for looking both into the world outside and back into the room, which also means looking both at the ultimate reality beyond, as well as into one's own soul. It also signifies a state of indecision, confusion or hesitation; it is a dare, a risk, offering an opportunity which could be dangerous, but which may lead the speaker (or the listener), if they dare take it, beyond the mundane reality.

The window has been discussed so far as a concrete image in Cohen's poetry and songs, but it should also be mentioned that it is a well-known symbol of the soul. One example would suffice to illustrate this point. The poet, mystic and Christian saint, Juan de la Cruz (1542-1591), known to English readers as John of the Cross, says in Chapter V ("Wherein is described what is meant by union of the soul with God") of his theological work *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (in E. Allison Peers' translation):

> […] the soul is like this window, whereupon is ever beating (or, to express it better, wherein is ever dwelling) this Divine light of the Being of God […]

Still, when read carefully, it seems that the weight of one of Cohen's most favorite images, that of the window as a border and a place of indecision, is heavier in "The Window" than the weight of the traditional symbol. The window is not the soul itself, but the place where the soul, the addressee in the song, is standing. The song begins with a question: "Why do you stand by the window…?" The poet's soul is found in a state of indecision, but also in a state of multiple opportunities. It is "abandoned to beauty and pride", which is perhaps the natural state for the soul of an artist to be in: craving beauty and admiring it, while taking pride in its own uniqueness or creations. However, this position is criticized by the poet ("Why do you…"), who believes that the soul must shed these trappings in order to reach higher levels, as he urges it to do in the following stanza. It is also clear that beauty and pride do not save the soul from its suffering: it has a thorn in its bosom and a spear in its side. It is overwhelmed by fragrance (beauty), and crushed by remorse (the opposite, or perhaps the outcome, of pride). Three times it is repeated that this soul is "lost". The last two lines of the first stanza read:

> lost in the waves of a sickness
> that loosens the high silver nerves.

Perhaps the image of "high silver nerves" can allude to the light of moon-beams, coming in waves through the window. This would create a connection with the second stanza, where the moon is mentioned in the second line; a similar connection occurs between the end of the second stanza and the beginning of the third, in this case through the rose.[4] In this context we may quote the last stanza of Cohen's poem "Before The Story" from *The Spice-Box of Earth*, where the connection of "silver", "moon" (a female figure here, as often depicted in various cultures) and "light" can also be found:

[4] I will discuss prosody only incidentally in this essay, but it should be indicated how well-crafted and polished the poetry of "The Window" is. Note the alliteration of "rages" and "rags", and of "lost" and "loosens", for example.

O far from any roof,
we are lying beneath the castles,
among deep branches of silver,
and the wilderness moon
lives above the whole world,
and in her light
holds us, holds us,
cold and splendid,
in her vast and cloudless night.[5]

The Rose

While the window can be regarded as a concrete image in the song, the rose must be regarded as a symbol. It is present in all three stanzas, as a symbol of the soul or of its offering. In the first stanza the rose is not mentioned literally, but its existence is tangibly felt: in the third line it is represented by the thorn, and in the fifth line by the fragrance. Also, the two lines in the first stanza:

lost in the rages of fragrance,
lost in the rags of remorse,

have their chiastic parallels in the second one (remorse-tears, fragrance-rose):

but climb on your tears and be silent
like a rose on its ladder of thorn.

The soul is asked to come out of its depressive state of remorse and climb through its own suffering, like the symbolic rose climbing on its thorns. In the third stanza, once the climbing has been fulfilled, the rose turns into an offering, and is placed on the fire.

The rose is one of the commonest, yet most complex, symbols in various cultures, from ancient times to this day. As Barbara Seward writes:

> It is, in fact, almost impossible to imagine an entity more evocative than the rose. Not only do its roots extend at least to the beginnings of recorded time, but its petals embrace the deepest positive values ever held by man.[6]

The rose is an important symbol in many cultures, and in particular in Catholic Christianity.[7] The red rose was supposed to have grown out of drops of Christ's blood, and combined with its thorns symbolizes the passion. The white rose is a symbol of purity, so in

[5] This poem can also be said to be in the background of Cohen's much later song "Hallelujah" (from the 1985 album *Various Positions*), as both mention King David watching Bathsheba bathing from his roof.
[6] Barbara Seward, *The Symbolic Rose*, p. 1. Seward died at the age of 30 in 1958; her excellent book was first published in 1960. I quote from the Spring Publication reprint, 1989.
[7] Miranda Bruce-Mitford, *The Illustrated Book of Signs and Symbols* (1996), p. 51.

Christian iconography it was identified with Mary (with whom several other white flowers were associated), and the thorns alluded to her suffering as the mother of Christ. The rose and the cross were famously united in Rosicrucianism, the esoteric teaching of European mystic societies, to which we will have reason to return later on, and of which Cohen was certainly aware.[8] Simultaneously, roses are also well-known symbols of earthly passion and not only of heavenly perfection, and are common as an offering of love. The rose, therefore, is simultaneously a symbol of love, fertility, life, beauty and eternity (being, originally, a flower of spring), as well as of sorrow and even death, because it is surrounded by thorns and it fades so quickly.

Incidentally, the rose also has a special connection with windows, through the stained-glass "rosette windows", common in Catholic cathedrals. In the center of the rosette there is often a depiction of Mary as queen ("The Madonna in Majesty", in Laon Cathedral, or "The Rose of France" in Chartres Cathedral, and so on).

Muslims also consider the rose sacred, believing that it sprang from the drops of perspiration that fell from the Prophet during his heavenly journey.[9] Roses, both mystical and tangible, are very common in Persian poetry (which was another source of influence on Western imagery), to which we shall return later on.

Of the many famous poetical roses, at least two, possessors of special mystical fragrance, should be mentioned here briefly. The poetic vision of Dante Alighieri (c. 1265-1321) includes one of the most famous of all roses in Western culture. In *Paradiso*, the third part of the *Divina Commedia*, his beloved Beatrice leads the poet through a tour of the heavens, which culminates in a region where the souls of the saints are enthroned on the petals of a gigantic white rose (*canto* XXX). *Canto* XXXI opens with the lines (in Charles Eliot Norton's translation):

> In form then of a pure white rose
> the holy host was shown to me,
> which, in His own blood, Christ made His bride.

Following an ardent prayer to Mary, who is also crowned on the rose, and in a scene bathed in the light and splendor of the sun, Dante comes face to face with God, viewed as three circles of light. Moreover, Barbara Seward argued that this rose "embraces Mary, Paradise, grace and Divine Love, and at the same time reconciles these spiritual concepts with the hitherto opposing concept of terrestrial courtly love."[10]

Although the scene in Cohen's song is not similar, some of Dante's imagery may have had its imprint on his song, as it had on so many other expressions of Western mysticism. The fact that a host appears in the song (although a "broken hearted" rather than a "holy" one) may also be significant. The idea of combining – in his case, did it ever need "reconciling"? – divine and earthly love is, of course, very common in Cohen's work.

The other rose that should be mentioned here is that of William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), a poet and a mystic who must have had considerable effect on Cohen.[11] The rose was a most

[8] Cohen's song "Dress Rehearsal Rag" (from his 1971 album *Songs of Love and Hate*) has the lines: "Why don't you join the Rosicrucians, / they will give you back your hope".
[9] Pamela R. Frese, "Flowers", *Encyclopedia of Religion, Second Edition* (2005), p. 3135.
[10] Seward, *op. cit*., p. 3; see also pp. 37-38.
[11] Cohen mentioned Yeats' influence on him on several occasions, for example in an interview with Kathleen Kendel for Pacifica Radio in 1974; http://www.leonardcohencroatia.com/wbai1974.php.

potent symbol for Yeats, from the many poems in his early collection *The Rose* (1893) (beginning "Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days…"), through his collection of stories *The Secret Rose* (1897), including a poem by the same name, which also appeared in *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899). The Rose "is imagined variously as a symbol of eternal beauty, a bringer of apocalypse, an actual beloved, the priestess of an occult shrine, a figure for Ireland, a force for peace, and an incitement to war."[12] It is also significant that Yeats, among his many spiritual activities, was for a time a member of the Rosicrucian Order of the Golden Dawn, in London. In 1893 he underwent an initiation ceremony, which took place in a vault; to symbolize his death to material things and rebirth in the spirit, the initiated would lie on the floor upon a Rose Cross surrounded with blackness, facing a rose painted on the ceiling, surrounded with whiteness. The impact of this ceremony can be felt in Yeats' work of the following years.[13] The cover design for *The Secret Rose* shows "the conjunction of Rose and Cross, and of man and woman, in the midst of the serpentine folds of the Tree of Life."[14]

The potency of the rose as a reach source of religious, mystical and sexual symbolism is clear, and Cohen must have been aware of it all, but what did the rose mean to him personally?

Unlike the meaning of the window itself, which becomes clear through the comparison with its use in many other Cohen poems and songs, the specific meaning which the rose conveyed to him is not that clear. "Rose" is not used as often or as distinctly by Cohen as certain other words, although it does appear in several of his poems and songs. In the above quote from "Stories Of The Street" we found "the rose" as the opposite of "my suicide", meaning that it symbolizes life, and perhaps this is its meaning here as well: life, or the offering of life, not as a suicide but for the sake of spiritual attainment. However, by its nature as a symbol there can be a variety of meanings associated with it. We shall encounter some more roses in the following.

The Sun

Cohen often talked in interviews about the intention and meaning of some of his songs, and he would also offer some introduction to songs during his concerts. However, he hardly ever said anything about "The Window". In a rare comment about this song made during a show on the German television channel ZDF (October 31, 1979) when he said: "It's a kind of prayer to bring the two parts of the soul together", demonstrating this by putting the palms of his hands flat against each other.[15]

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[12] M. Howes, "Introduction", in Marjorie Howes and John Kelly, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to W. B. Yeats* (2006), p. 2.

[13] Seward, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-101; Margaret Mills Harper, "Yeats and the occult", in Howes and Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

[14] See in Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats* (1964), p. 65. See also Yeats' note (written 1925) for his *Collected Poems*, reprinted in W. B. Yeats, *The Poems: A New Edition*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (1984), p. 589, and his elaboration (written 1899) on the Rose and the Tree of Life, *ibid.*, pp. 628-629.

[15] L. S. Dorman & C. L. Rawlin, *Leonard Cohen: Prophet of the Heart* (1990), p. 303, say: "As Leonard explained to Manzano, 'The song is a sort of oration which allows both parts of the soul (sic) to unite, as in joining your hands in prayer'" (no reference is given). However, on checking Manzano's book it turns out that Cohen did not "explain" it to him, for there is no indication of an interview here. Manzano relied on the same ZDF concert, as he kindly confirmed to me. See Alberto Manzano, *Canciones y nuevos poemas* vol. 2 (1986), pp. 62-63.

Apart from those few words when introducing the song on the television show, Cohen also gave a hint concerning the background to "The Window" on the jacket of the album *Recent Songs*:

> I owe my thanks […] to the late Robert Hernshorn, who, many years ago, put into my hands the books of the old Persian poets Attar and Rumi, whose imagery influenced several songs, especially The Guests and The Window [...]

Cohen made a similar reference when interviewed by Harry Rasky for the latter's film *The Song of Leonard Cohen* (1980), which was filmed the same year that *Recent Songs* was being recorded. Cohen said concerning "The Guests":

> I think that kind of imagery can be discovered all through the literature. The Persian poet Rumi uses the idea of the guests a lot, the festival, the feast and the guests. It's almost impossible to talk about that seed moment of when a song begins. It could be the soul comes into world. There is some notion that the soul has that there is a feast, that there is a festival, that there is a banquet. It strives to experience the hospitality of the world. It doesn't achieve it. It feels lonely, this is everybody's experience. It feels lost. It stumbles around on the outskirts of the party. If the striving is deep enough or if the grace of the host is turned towards the seeking guest, then suddenly the inner door flies open and he finds himself or the soul finds himself at that banquet table. Although no one knows where the night is going, and 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.

In the film Cohen is seen playing "The Window" from a tape recorder to his friend Irving Layton and his companion, but he doesn't say a word about it. All we have from him, apart from the one sentence on the ZDF show, is the tantalizing hint about the influence of the Persian poets, but while giving some explanation concerning "The Guests", the song that opens the album *Recent Songs*, nothing is said about the other song which was apparently influenced by Persian poetry.[16] However, what Cohen says about the searching of the soul, and its possible communion – "If the striving is deep enough or if the grace of the host is turned towards the seeking guest" – is relevant to both songs, and to several others on the album.

Jalal Al-Din Rumi (1207-1273), was one of the greatest Sufi mystics and poets. He was born in Balkh, in today's Afghanistan, but emigrated to Turkey and lived most of his life in Konya, where he initiated the tradition of the *Mevlevi*, or "dancing dervishes". It is interesting to note that like some other Sufi greats, Rumi was rather liberal in his views, and befriended Christians and Jews, who lamented his death together with the Muslims. He was a very prolific poet, mostly in the Persian language. His main theme was love, which is ultimately the love of God, but for which he also embraced earthly expressions. His greatest experience of such love was a wandering dervish named Shams al-Din ("Sun of Religion"), with whom he experienced the Sufi principle of complete annihilation (*fana'*), and after their separation he expressed his love in a stream of poetry. According to Rumi's son, for some time Rumi continued to search in

[16] During a concert in Hannover in 1979, which was preserved in a bootleg recording, Cohen says while introducing "The Window": "…it's a song that is based on an old Persian poem…".

vain for Shams, but eventually he "found him in himself, radiant as the moon". It should also be noted that in his poems, although the beloved is known as "Sun", he is often referred to as "the moon", or both sun and moon.

It is significant for our purpose that for Rumi the sun was the favorite symbol for expressing the beautiful and destructive, but always transforming, power of love. While it is difficult to ascertain how much of Rumi's work was familiar to Cohen, and in what edition or translation, it is safe to assume that this principle was familiar to him, and found its expression in this song. Rumi also regarded prayer as the language of the soul, a notion that would be appealing to Cohen. He may have also found inspiration in the *Mevlevi* ritual of the dance:[17]

> In this ritual, the true mystery of love, namely "to die before dying," of sacrificing oneself in order to acquire a new spiritual life, is symbolized by the dervishes casting off their black gowns to emerge in their white dancing dresses, symbols of the luminous "body of resurrection." For the idea of suffering and dying for the sake of transformation permeates all of Rumi's work, and he expresses it in ever-new images […][18]

Another poet mentioned by Cohen is Attar. Farid Al-Din 'Attar (c. 1158-1229) was a predecessor of Rumi, and also a great poet and Sufi teacher who lived in Nishapur, in northern Iran. Like Rumi, he is famous for his provocative and radical theology of love, including his main object of love, the Prophet Muhammad. He praised the Prophet in symbols such as "light", "the rose", and "soul".[19] Again, those images may have found their way into this song.

There are many lines in Rumi and Attar that could have been in the back of Cohen's mind while writing "The Window". For example, the following two couplets, out of a longer poem by Rumi:

> The rose, she is kind to the thorn
> And she protects him from fire –
> Look, you are the rose, I'm the thorn!
> Don't go to your home without me![20]

This is but one example of the very numerous occurrences of both the rose and the thorn in Rumi's poetry, as well as that of other Persian poets. As we have seen before, the combination of the sun and the rose, symbolizing fertility and eternal love, can also be found in Dante.

It is also possible to find the image of the window in Rumi's poems, for example:

> From the body thou art far, but in my heart, fronting thy face, is a window;
> Thro' that secret window, like the moon, I am sending thee a message.[21]

[17] Dancing holds an important meaning for Cohen, as can be seen in many of his poems, as well as in the song "Dance Me To The End Of Love".
[18] Annemarie Schimmel, "Rumi, Jalal Al-Din", *Encyclopedia of Religion, Second Edition* (2005), p. 7937.
[19] Leonard Lewisohn, "'Attar, Farid Al-Din", *Encyclopedia of Religion, Second Edition* (2005), p. 602.
[20] *Look! This Is Love: Poems of Rumi*, Translated by Annemarie Schimmel (2003), p. 35.
[21] Reynold A. Nicholson, *Selected Poems from the Divani Shamsi Tabriz* (1898; reprinted 2003), p. 283.

Even the combination of "moon" and "cheek" can be found in Rumi's poems, although this may be a pure coincidence:

By his cheek the moon was split: she endured not the sight of him.[22]

Some images from Rumi's and Attar's poems have no doubt filtered into Cohen's song, as he himself has stated, but even beyond the imagery, there is an affinity in themes and concerns, such as the soul's quest for reaffirmation, its suffering and sacrifices for the sake of a spiritual goal, and the focus on the language of love.

The Soul

What are the "two parts of the soul" that should be brought together, according to Cohen? It is common in modern culture to speak of "body and soul" as two separate entities that ideally function as one. In the song we find a similar dichotomy in expressions such as "matter and ghost", but in introducing the song Cohen specifically spoke of two parts of the *soul*. What might these two parts be?

Several traditions speak of *three* parts of the soul (or of that part of the individual which is not the body). According to Plato the soul (or *psyche*) is comprised of the *logos* (mind, or reason), the *thymos* (spiritedness, connected with the breath of life, sometimes also with emotion, and usually with masculinity), and the *eros* (desire, the feminine). In Jewish tradition, and especially in the Kabbalah, the division into three parts is also common: *nefesh* (the sustaining power, which animals also share), *ruach* (the middle soul, which also contains the moral part for distinguishing between right and wrong), and *neshama* (the higher soul, which allows human beings to know God, and returns to him after death). However, Judaism also recognizes the dichotomy of two inclinations in the human psyche, a good one (*yetzer hatov*) and an evil one (*yetzer har'a*). Both are necessary for human existence, because ambition, sexual drive and even the creative drive are parts of the evil inclination, and without it there can be no human life. However, according to this belief, the evil inclination constantly pushes us towards sin, and our duty is to use the good inclination to subdue the evil one, and not allow it to get out of control (this is somewhat like Freud's concepts of the "id" versus the "super-ego", with the "ego" mediating between them). Combining these two inclinations successfully, brings about peace of mind, and this could be what Cohen was aiming at.

Another possible reference is the Taoist concept known in the West as "yin and yang", the opposite forces in nature which are interrelated, rising and falling alternatively. The principle of "yin" is connected with the female, the passive, earth, moon and silence, among other things; that of "yang" is connected, therefore, with the masculine, the active, heaven, fire, sun and so on. The yin also contains the potential of the yang, and vice-versa. In the song we find the couples moon-sun and rose-fire. However, in Taoism the soul is not divided into two (except after death), unless we consider the dualistic aspect itself as part of each human soul, a concept reminiscent of the psychological ideas of C. G. Jung.

It is hard to tell to what extent Cohen is familiar with the work of Jung, but it would certainly appeal to him more than that of Freud. In his younger years Cohen used to refer to the *I Ching*, or *The Book of Changes*, the classical Chinese text which was often used for divination,

[22] *ibid*, p. 35.

and he may have known it in the translation which included Jung's introduction.[23] A song already quoted above, "Stories Of The Street", which opens with a scene of indecision, also ends the same way, and includes a reference to the *I Ching* and its hexagrams:

> With one hand on the hexagram and one hand on the girl
> I balance on a wishing well that all men call the world.
> We are so small between the stars, so large against the sky,
> and lost among the subway crowds I try to catch your eye.

Jung's conviction – and Cohen's is very much similar – was that life must have a spiritual purpose, beyond the basic material goals. Jung looked into many religious traditions, absorbing their symbols and using them in his work (again, Cohen has done the same thing all his life). Jung coined the term "individuation", which, according to him, is the process by which, when successful, the self is transformed, through the harmonious balance of the conscious with the unconscious, fulfilling the individual's potential. Jung also spoke of a dichotomy: the "self", or the totality of the whole psyche, as distinguished from the "ego", which constitutes only a small part of the psyche.[24] Another famous idea of Jung's is the existence of the "animus" (male) and the "anima" (female) forms; the individuation process includes the coming to terms of the man with the anima in him, and of the woman with the animus in her.[25]

Jung also ascribed special importance to the Sanskrit term *mandala*, which brings us back to the rose, one of its manifestations. The circle is a symbol of the self, expressing the totality of the psyche in all its aspects, and it is represented in various pictographic variations, including the rose, as well as the rosette windows (in Eastern cultures it is the lotus).[26]

This brings us back to Yeats' poetry, mentioned earlier in connection with the rose. Yeats has a long poem titled "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" (published 1933), in which these two are depicted as rivals. In this poem the soul seems at first to have the upper hand, basking in heavenly glory, but the self then realizes that it also enjoys a blessedness, albeit a secular one.[27] Self and soul are not reconciled in Yeats' poem, and Cohen must have often experienced such inner struggles himself, and for that he offers a prayer of reconciliation.

Cohen's short sentence about this song being a prayer probably referred to the song as a whole, but its part that sounds most like a prayer is the chorus. The chorus in this song is repeated three times in the album version, but only twice in the book (with the last line doubled at the end of the song in both versions). In the book version it is printed in italics, as if to say that in it we don't hear the same voice as in the three stanzas (and incidentally, in the album version,

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[23] R. Wilhelm & C. Baynes, *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, With foreword by Carl Jung (1950). Cohen is seen consulting the *I Ching* in the company of his friends in the above-mentioned film *Ladies and Gentlemen… Mr. Leonard Cohen* (1965).

[24] M.-L. von Franz, "The process of individuation", in Carl G. Jung, *Man and his Symbols* (1964), pp. 160 f.

[25] *Ibid*, pp. 177-195. See also C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1968), p. 187, where the rose is mentioned as one of the symbols of the self.

[26] Aniela Jaffe, "Symbolism in the visual arts", in Carl G. Jung, *Man and his Symbols* (1964), pp. 240 f.; C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1968), p. 329; p. 363 (where the rose of the Rosicrucians and the mystic rose in Dante are also mentioned); p. 367 (Mary as the "mystic rose", and Christ as a symbol of the self).

[27] Ellmann, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

Cohen is accompanied by female back-singers only in the chorus, and himself singing it in a higher key). It seems that while in the three stanzas the speaker addresses his soul, in the chorus he addresses another entity, asking it to "Gentle this soul". Who is the addressee in these lines? It is not clear (we venture an interpretation later on), but it does become clear here that the main figure in this song is the soul, to whom the poet speaks in the three main stanzas.

The Splendour

The specific word "light" is not mentioned in "The Window", as it is in many other songs and poems by Cohen, but there is "glowing" (in the original version), and also "splendour". The last word brings to mind *The Book of Splendour* (*Sefer Hazohar*), the main book of the Kabbalah. According to his own words, Cohen has not studied the Kabbalah systematically, but gleaned some basic notions of it through reading and oral contacts, and traces of its teaching can be found occasionally in his writing.

In an Internet chat with fans which took place in October 2001, Cohen had this to say in response to a question by Prof. Elliot Wolfson on whether he studied Kabbalah or Hasidism and their influence on his work:

> […] I have a very superficial knowledge of the matter but even by dipping into the many books, I have been deeply touched by what I read, and by my conversations with living Hasidic masters. The model of the Tree of Life and the activities and interactions of the sephirot has been especially influential. The idea of the in-breath to clear a space for the whole manifestation and the out-breath as the place of the manifestation, has of course been illumined by my studies with Roshi and his instructions in zen meditation. […]

Wolfson published a long article in which he reads Cohen "in a Kabbalistic key", commenting also on "The Window".[28] He sees in the song an expression of Kabbalistic piety, expressed through intermingling of Jewish and Christian symbols. The window is regarded by him as symbolic of the soul. Suffering below triggers a reaction above, and the soul's mystical ascent culminates with the annihilation of the self. Wolfson discovers in Cohen's song some deep Kabbalistic inspiration, perhaps going too far in attributing to Cohen insight into Jewish esoteric belief; according to Wolfson, Cohen had reached this insight "unwittingly". Wolfson's interpretation is daring and intriguing but also concise, and he ignores the chorus in the song and other aspects of it, including Cohen's allusions to Rumi.

However, it is certainly true that the song can be interpreted in terms of the soul's mystical ascent. The ascent of the soul would begin in the second stanza, and reach its peak in the third. It takes place in stages: first comes the recognition of its being lost, and the need to climb out and away, perhaps even on beams of moonlight. After bypassing the cloud of unknowing, the ascent indeed reaches the moon with a kiss to its cheek. Suffering has not ended yet, and the soul needs to climb on its very tears, like the rose climbing on its thorns. The ascent comes nearer to its goal when the rose – which is not the soul itself ("lay your rose") but perhaps its life – is put on the fire; the simple fire gives way to the blazing sun – the next step in the climb - and the sun itself gives way to the splendor in the arms of the High Holy One. What

[28] See Elliot R. Wolfson, "New Jerusalem Glowing: Songs and Poems of Leonard Cohen in a Kabbalistic Key", *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 15 (2006), pp. 103-153. On pp. 141-144 of his article Wolfson analyzes "The Window".

looked like a physical climb in space turns into a mystical one when the target is reached. However, the physical aspect of the climb brings us back to Dante and his *Paradiso*. In ancient and medieval cosmology the earth was surrounded by nine concentric spheres, with the moon, sun, planets and fixed stars embedded in each one (the Ptolemaic System). Dante describes his ascent from sphere to sphere, until reaching his ultimate goal beyond them. While Dante's influence cannot be proved unequivocally, it is tempting to think of his journey as one of the sources for Cohen's song.[29]

The mystical allusions in the second stanza include "the cloud of unknowing". This refers to the 14th century English book of Christian mysticism by the same name. The book recommends not to seek God through knowledge, but rather through "naked intent" and "true love".[30] It would seem that since the seeking of pure knowledge is a hindrance rather than aid in the climb of the soul up to the true mystical union, "the cloud of unknowing" is an obstacle that has to be bypassed. For that reason the soul is urged here to "Come forth from the cloud of unknowing" and seek direct experience, reaching its climax in the third stanza.

The Word

The last line of the song mentions "the word being made into flesh", clearly an allusion to Jesus Christ. Jesus was always an important figure for Cohen, although not from the perspective of a Christian believer, but from a more universal point of view, and has often figured prominently in his work, in poetry, prose and songs. In the above-mentioned Internet chat of October 2001, Cohen had this to say in response to questions on Christ and Christianity:

> **Christ**
> […] Last year I tried to put it this way: Was looking at the crucifix. Got something in my eye. A Light that doesn't need to live and doesn't need to die. What's written in the Book of Love is strangely incomplete, 'til witnessed here in time and blood a thousand kisses deep.[31]
>
> **Christianity**
> […] As I understand it, into the heart of every Christian, Christ comes, and Christ goes. When, by his Grace, the landscape of the heart becomes vast and deep and limitless, then Christ makes His abode in that graceful heart, and His Will prevails. The experience is recognized as Peace. In the absence of this experience much activity arises, divisions of every sort. Outside of the organizational enterprise, which some applaud and some mistrust, stands the figure of Jesus, nailed to a human predicament, summoning the heart to comprehend its own suffering by dissolving itself in a radical confession of hospitality.

[29] Judith Fitzgerald argued that the narrative of Cohen's album *Ten New Songs* (2001) was modeled on the *Divina Commedia*; see her article: "Notes Towards a Definition of a Masterpiece: Ten New Songs", in: http://www.judithfitzgerald.ca/masterpiece.html.

[30] Rumi, and other Sufi masters, shared a similar perception; see Sara Sviri, *The Taste of Hidden Things: Images on the Sufi Path* (1997), p. 202.

[31] This is one of many verses written by Cohen for his song "A Thousand Kisses Deep", but only four were eventually included in the recorded song (on the 2001 album *Ten New Songs*). Several other verses – but not the one quoted above - appear in his *Book of Longing* (2006), p. 56.

What Cohen says in this last paragraph is in many ways similar to what he said years earlier when speaking about "The Guests": then he was speaking about the "grace of the host", and here about "hospitality" in the context of grace. He also mentions here the many divisions, presumably the divisions in the soul, which are the opposite of peace. All this brings to focus once again "The Window" as a prayer for overcoming division, and finding peace. Cohen also explains delicately that for him Jesus stands outside the specific realm of organized religion, belonging to human experience generally.

Although Jesus is not mentioned in it by name, when read closely, the song seems to revolve around his figure. In the first stanza he is evoked through several images: "the thorn" (alluding to the crown of thorns, John 19:2); also, "the thorn of the night" may allude to the night of the passion (or "the agony in the garden", Matthew 26); and "the spear […] in the side" alludes to the crucifixion (John 19:34). The chorus in the song refers to Jesus even more obviously, and it can even be regarded as a prayer directed at him:

O chosen love, O frozen love – "chosen love" is clearer, but why "frozen love"? Cohen's poem "Brighter Than Our Sun", quoted earlier in connection with the image of the window, comes to mind again, with the lines:

> And what happened to love
> In the gleaming universe?
> It froze in the heart of God,
> Froze on a spear of light.

Love is always in danger of freezing up when not handled with care. Cohen seems to be praying to be saved from this anguish (and notice also the occurrence of "spear" in both poems).

O tangle of matter and ghost - this too seems an obvious reference to Jesus, although it may also refer to the duality of human existence discussed earlier.

Oh darling of angels, demons and saints / and the whole broken-hearted host - Jesus is the focal point for the angels' adoration, the demons' temptations, the saints' prayers, and the suffering multitudes' hopes.

Gentle this soul – a prayer for being granted peace of mind.

In the second stanza of the song, as it was sung in the original album version, we find "the New Jerusalem", of which more will be said below. Also, "the rose on its ladder of thorn" may also be an allusion to Jesus on the cross.[32] The third stanza ends with the lines:

> for the Holy One dreams of a letter,
> dreams of a letter's death -
> oh bless the continuous stutter
> of the word being made into flesh.

[32] Cohen has his own unexpected images of the cross; in his famous song "Suzanne", Jesus is depicted on "his lonely wooden tower".

The "word" is a well-known synonym for Jesus since the New Testament ("In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God", John 1:1). The "letter" here, of which the Holy One dreams, is probably also a synonym for "word", especially since the "letter's death" is also mentioned. Confusingly, perhaps, "the Holy One", with the "High" added for emphasis, sounds very much like the Jewish way of referring to God: *hakadosh baruch hu* ("the holy one, blessed be he"). But the speaker in the song does not find this death tragic; he regards the "continuous stutter" of spirit turning into flesh and back again, the cycle of birth and death, as blessed.[33] If indeed the focus of the song is Jesus Christ, his suffering serves as the supreme example to follow on the road for attaining grace and peace of mind, throughout the circle of human existence.

The New Jerusalem

Why have two lines been changed by Cohen between the album and the book? In the album version, the third and forth lines of the second stanza were:

> the New Jerusalem glowing,
> why tarry all night in the ruin?

But in the version printed in the book *Stranger Music* (1993) these lines were changed to:

> the code of solitude broken,
> why tarry confused and alone?

In the original version the New Jerusalem is glowing, beckoning to the soul to come and join it, and pull itself out of the ruin. This fits well with the symbolism of light in the song, but in the corrected version the whole second stanza becomes much darker, with only the unreliable light of the moon remaining in it. In the next stanza, the presence of light bursts out with a vengeance: "fire", "sun", and, especially, "splendour". So perhaps one reason for the change was that Cohen felt that from the imagistic point of view the change would make the song more poignant, with a clear contrast between the second and the third stanzas. Also, with the changed lines the stanza becomes more consistent in its sounds, in which hard c's and k's are dominant: come, cloud, kiss, cheek, [added: code, broken, confused], discomfort, climb, like. This hard sound is almost totally absent in the first stanza (which is dominated by soft s's), sounded only once in "sickness", as well as in the third one (which is dominated by soft r's), where it also occurs only once, in "continuous".

But there could also be another reason for the change. "New Jerusalem" is a distinctly Christian image. It appears in chapter 21 of the *Book of Revelation*, where the city is called "the bride, the Lamb's wife" (v. 9), and it descends out of heaven (v. 10). "Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal" (v. 11). Indeed, it glows so much by itself that "The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light" (v. 23). This heavenly city of the apocalypse became an important focus of Christian theology and mysticism, as well as a utopian term for paradise on

[33] The refrain in a much later song, "Here It Is" (*Ten New Songs*, 2001), is: "May every one live, / May everyone die. / Hello, my love, / And my love, Goodbye".

earth. It is also significant that there was "no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (v. 22).

This Christian vision is markedly different from Jewish messianic expectations. Traditionally Jews expected to rebuild the *old* Jerusalem, in which the temple will be situated once again, and everything will be just as it was in the glorious past. For centuries Christians have chided Jews – and sometimes persecuted and killed them – for adhering to their past and refusing to accept the new gospel of Christ. It could be that Cohen himself felt at some point that these lines, and especially the juxtaposition of the New Jerusalem with the ruin, might sound almost like Christian proselytizing, and decided to change them into a more neutral expression.[34]

Although Cohen was always open to all and every religious tradition (he even tried Scientology for a while), there were periods in his life when one religion was more dominant than others, and this was reflected in his work. The book *Stranger Music* was edited during the 1980's (although it appeared, after many delays, only in 1993).[35] The decade of the 1980's was marked with Jewish expression in Cohen's work, following the more Christian expression in *Recent Songs*.

The Album

Cohen's albums are not exactly thematic, but some underlying common ground of ideas and imagery can be found in each one of them, making them distinct from each other. Listening to *Recent Songs* we may find images familiar from "The Window", such as the rose, thorn, silver and light, repeated in several other songs, and a certain thematic unity also emerges. The songs on the album are as follows:

1. "The Guests" – The song is set around a somewhat ghostly feast, with the images of the garden and of dancing probably included under the influence of Rumi's poetry, and with the pleading refrain: "O love, I need you, I need you…".

2. "Humbled In Love" – a song of bitter love, but incorporating religious images such as the merciful virgin as a source of redemption, and the pivotal question: "Why trade this vision for desire / When you may have them both" – a classic Cohen expression of inseparable divine and human love.

3. "The Window".

4. "Came So Far For Beauty" - a song incorporating themes of love, religion and the destiny of the artist. This is one of four songs in the album in which the image of "silver" is used.

5. "Un Canadien Errant (The Lost Canadian)" – thematically this song is an exception on this album, and is one of the rare cases of Cohen recording a song not written by himself. It is a song that was written in French by Antoine Gerin-Lajoi in 1842, speaking about a Canadian's longing for his country.

[34] This is also the view of Wolfson, *op. cit.*, p. 143 n. 149.
[35] See Ira B. Nadel, *Various Positions: A Life of Leonard Cohen* (1996), pp. 264-266.

6. “The Traitor” - in this song, just as in “The Window”, the rose is a major symbol. I did not mention it before, because this rose seems very different from the other one, and is named in the song “the rose of high romance”. The song seems to be almost a parody on romanticism, taking the rose, the swan and other such symbols to the extreme, and the lover in it is turned eventually into a lifeless doll.

7. “Our Lady Of Solitude” – once again, an obvious combination of love and religion, with a lover in the image of the Madonna, including the mention of soul, thorn, light and silver – almost a sister-song to “The Window”.

8. “The Gypsy’s Wife” – basically a song about lost love, but also with lines such as “She says, ‘My body is the light,/ my body is the way.’”, and “silver” is used again.

9. “The Smoky Life” – another ghostly love song. Here “light” is used in the other meaning (opposite of “heavy”).

10. “Ballad Of The Absent Mare” – apparently a song about a cowboy looking for his mare, but in fact about the soul’s journey, although from a different perspective than “The Window”. The song is based upon the twelfth-century Chinese work of poetry and pictures in the Zen tradition, *Ten Bulls* or *Ten Ox-Herding Pictures*, to which Cohen was introduced by his Zen master, Joshu Sasaski Roshi. “Light” appears here too.

Cohen ends his list of thanks on the album’s jacket with a thank you to “my mother, Masha Cohen, who reminded me shortly before she died, of the kind of music she liked”.[36] And indeed, Cohen uses some types of musical accompaniment in this album that he has never used before: a violin with a distinctly Eastern European sound (played by Armenian violinist Raffi Hakopian), the Middle Eastern sound of the oud (played by John Bilezikjan), and even a Mariachi band in two songs. However, there is no direct reference to his mother’s death in the album;[37] such reference would come six years later in the song “Night Comes On” on the album *Various Positions*. Yet in spite of his mother’s death, the Persian mystical poets’ influence, and the Middle Eastern flavored music, the above concise review of the songs reveals that, by intention or accident, the album has a distinct – although as always with Cohen, not exclusive - Christian undertone (and also that, as often with Cohen, themes of religion and love are closely knit).

For a certain period following *Recent Songs* Cohen’s creativity adopted more consistently Jewish themes and expressions. In 1984 he published *Book of Mercy*, containing fifty prayers or psalms, and although a wide range of religious imagery can be found in it, it was arguably his most Jewish book since *The Spice-Box of Earth* (1961), with the biblical Psalms and the Jewish prayer book as constant models. It was followed closely by the album *Various Positions* (issued February 1985), which almost forms two halves of a diptych with the book, each one echoing images and ideas of the other. Themes of judgment and orphanhood underlie many songs on this

[36] Masha Cohen died in February 1978; *Recent Songs* was issued in September 1979.

[37] Unless we go along with Jung, according to whom, “things representing the goal of our longing for redemption, such as […] the Heavenly Jerusalem”, and “vessel-shaped flowers like the rose”, are symbols of the mother archetype; C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1968), p. 81.

album, and Jewish motifs or concerns can be found in almost every song. This short comparison of the two consecutive albums serves to illuminate the constant evolvement and change in Cohen's modes of expression and spiritual development, while maintaining his loyalty to the basic concerns he has followed since the earliest steps of his creative work.

The Interpretations

Unlike trivial poems or songs, which usually have only one, transparent meaning, good poems may sometimes be interpreted in more than one way. This is often the case with Leonard Cohen's poems and songs, in which more than one interpretation seems valid and consistent with the poetic materials. In the above pages I've tried to demonstrate that at least two interpretations of "The Window" can be validly presented.

The more readily acceptable interpretation concerns the soul and its affliction. The soul is urged to overcome its indecision and emerge out of its suffering. The beauty that the artist's soul discovers in this world, and the pride the soul gains by the artist's achievement, are not enough. There is a painful split that must be overcome in order to gain peace. Overcoming ignorance and finding companionship ("the code of solitude broken" in the second version), overcoming pain and finding peace ("climb on your tears and be silent"), the soul, now symbolized by the rose, continues its risky journey towards its ultimate goal. However, the outcome of the soul's journey, even of the rose going through the fire, is not a total consummation in the splendour of the High Holy One, but rather the affirmation of the circle of life ("bless the continuous stutter…"). This revelation reflects a very conspicuous aspect of Cohen's life and work: although he may venture occasionally into mystical heights, he remains down-to-earth; although he puts great emphasis on spirituality, he never ignores the flesh; he may hold a view of eternity, but he does not forget the here-and-now. Even in such a spiritual, perhaps mystical, song like "The Window", Cohen does not turn his back on the crowd.

A somewhat less evident interpretation shows that the focus of the song may be Jesus Christ, a figure of great significance for Cohen. Although not mentioned by name, Jesus may be the subject of every line in the song, as specified above, as well as the target for the prayer it includes. Why is that so? Perhaps for Cohen Jesus is the ultimate model of spirituality and sacrifice, a model for the soul to imitate, but also a model for the ambiguity of spirit and flesh, matter and ghost, and the whole broken-hearted human existence. In this sense the two interpretations are in fact not dissimilar, but rather identical in their intention.[38]

But what about love? Some readers and listeners tend to regard "The Window" as a love song, feeling, perhaps, that the "you" who stands by the window, "abandoned to beauty and pride", must be a female figure whom the poet addresses. But as presented in the previous pages, this interpretation cannot be supported when examined along the song. The spiritual content is simply too evident, while it would be hard to read a love story even between the lines. True, love is never far away for Cohen, and if Dante could reconcile heavenly with earthly love, Cohen

[38] After having sent this article for print, it has been brought to my attention that Cohen did indeed make an assertion confirming my interpretation: "So, 'darling of angels, demons and saints, and the whole broken hearted host' means that one which is beloved and cherished by the whole, all the inhabitants of the whole cosmos, that is the arisen one. That is the Christ, or that is the Messiah, or that is the Redeemer, that is that highest aspect of one's own being that has the regenerative capacity." Cohen is quoted in Harry Rasky, *The Song of Leonard Cohen* (2001), p. 94. The book was published twenty years after the film by the same title directed by Rasky was released. On the whole, here too Cohen remains quite allusive about this song.

certainly can. However, "The Window", in my view, was not written by Cohen as a reflection of one of his loves (as were some other songs on the album *Recent Songs*), but of his spiritual quest. Still, "love" may be found in it, in its widest, deepest meaning.

As we have seen above, the subject matter of this song is gleaned from various religious traditions. Its main themes reflect the Christian tradition, but Jewish and Sufi influences are unmistakably there. The song also hails from various poetical and symbolic traditions, both Western and Eastern. In a typical expression of his views, which stands as a neat summing up of this article, Cohen once said:

> We're complex creatures, we can hold a number of views. Temperamentally, I've always resisted the claim for the unique truth of one particular model. My orthodoxy is this thing where you can hold various positions.[39]

"The Window" is one of Cohen's most compelling songs, but for some reason, it seems no longer to be one of its author's favorites. It was not included in later collections such as *More Best Of Leonard Cohen* (1997), or the two-disc set *The Essential Leonard Cohen* (2002). And when in 2008, at the age of 73, Cohen embarked on a phenomenally successful and very long world tour, "The Window" was not one of the many songs he chose to perform.[40] Still, like many other relatively neglected Leonard Cohen songs, it is greatly loved by many, who find various meanings in it. Some of those meanings were presented above, but the gates of interpretation have not been sealed yet.[41]

Kyoto, August-September 2009

[39] Quoted in: Robert Enright, "Face Value: The Arts of Leonard Cohen", http://leonardcohen.drabinskygallery.com/Enright_Article.pdf.

[40] It has been suggested that one reason for this exclusion may have been the absence of a violinist among the tours' musicians, since the violin solo has been an inseparable part of "The Window" from its first recording.

[41] This article could not have been written without the insight and information gained through my contacts with the international community of Leonard Cohen's admirers that has gathered in the *Leonard Cohen Forum* on the Internet. Many members of the *Forum* have inspired me in more ways than I could possibly describe, and several of them have become my truly good friends. The Forum is part of the *Leonard Cohen Files*, created by Jarkko Arjatsalo, to the dedication and kindness of whom no words of thanks would be sufficient. Deepest gratitude is also due to two other most valuable Internet sites: *Speaking Cohen*, created and managed by Mary Mazur, and *A Thousand Kisses Deep*, created and managed by Tomislav Sakic, whose friendly assistance and vast knowledge have been immensely valuable to me this time as always. I am also grateful for their useful suggestions to Joe Way, Judy Remy, Mathew James, Tineke van der Does and Judith Fitzgerald, among others. Thanks are also due to Toni Molist, for searching through Alberto Manzano's books and sending me a copy of the relevant pages, and to Alberto Manzano himself for answering my question. Also to Prof. Elliot R. Wolfson, for kindly sending me some years ago a PDF file of his article on Cohen. This article is dedicated to the memory of my dear brother-in-law, Dr. Amnon Amir, who, several decades ago, introduced me to the work of Leonard Cohen, and with whom I spent many happy hours analyzing Cohen's songs.