

The Song of Initiation by Leonard Cohen

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Abstract

This paper aims at examining spiritual contexts in the work of the Canadian singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen. Its structure resembles a web, or a grid which tries to reconcile the division between the secular and spiritual realms with regard to Cohen's oeuvre. The intersection of these two concepts is understood to be the climax of an initiatory experience triggered by longing for self-knowledge and love. It accepts the idea that the esoteric teachings in the singer's output contain strong reflections of the mystical aspects of Sūfism and Kabbalah.

Keywords: song, knowledge, individuation, initiation, esotericism, religion, sexuality

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Introduction

The question of what is secular and what is sacred, in essence what relates to the human and what to the divine sphere, is often too difficult to answer in a clear-cut way. Rather it is the tension abiding between these two concepts that matters; this tension is documented here in relation to the songs of Leonard Cohen.

Song, which is the main focus of this paper, is seen here as the carrier of knowledge that contains, if freed from any traits of the flesh, a spark of divine light that could be traced right back to the creation of the world. This supposition draws an interesting parallel with

Cohen's musical expression, as it seems to be his main goal to reach the *centre* of all creation through his songs.

Cohen strives to reach this centre via *logos*. This concept is described as a form of linking device, or bridge, in two mystical streams that are close to Cohen – Kabbalah and Sûfism. Reaching this concept is understood in this paper to be the result of an initiation phenomenon, described as the point of intersection between the physical and divine.

To work with the concept of a *bridge* is not a matter of personal choice; it is Cohen's Jewish background and his references to Sûfism that caused me to focus on this concept more closely. Moreover, what joins the two mystical Sûfi and Kabbalah schools of thought are G-d's feminine aspects, which might be traced back to the worship of the Mother Goddess in primitive societies, and which may also be seen in the work of the Canadian singer.

This essay does not place Leonard Cohen in the foreground. Rather, it describes how his songs come into existence, what generates them, and of what nature the communicated knowledge is. For this reason I have decided in section I to map a distinction, nowadays often blurred, between so-called factual and intuitive *knowledge* from the Sûfi perspective, in order to highlight what song and other artistic expressions might transmit.

Section II on *individuation* outlines the source of man's longing and suffering from the psychological point of view, and what actually makes him write about the *knowledge* previously discussed. Here the approach of Carl Gustav Jung and Richard Caldwell helps us to understand that the process of *individuation* is a necessary precursor to *initiation*, which is dealt with in section III. Initiation here is described as the connection with *logos*, which serves as a means of gratification of longing. It is from this place of fulfilment that the poet draws his material.

Section IV reflects on the *knowledge* channelled by *logos*, which in the process of *initiation* becomes an inherent part of one's artistic expression. This knowledge could be described as the supreme *knowledge* one can attain. The singer is portrayed as its possible carrier in his songs.

Section V aims to focus on the inherent concepts of Cohen's name, which according to the Jewish tradition suggests priesthood. By this I try to relate his upbringing to the concepts I have already outlined, and to suggest that priesthood and the act of ordination causes one to don "garments" of purity, which one periodically desecrates. By this I attempt to highlight the connection between Cohen's faith and his role as a singer and transmitter of *logos*.

The final chapter of this paper deals with a concept in Medieval Occitania similar to *initiation* – that of *initiative love*, which ties Cohen to troubadour literature and at the same time distances him from it.

This paper does not aim to completely clarify all the influences and invisible workings in Cohen's songs. Its purpose is to provide a perspective for further studies.

I. Knowledge

*The knowledge of God cannot be obtained by seeking,
but only those who seek it find it.*

Abu Yazid Bistami

Mystics, or those who are not satisfied with the common knowledge of the world,¹ will agree with the notion of two kinds of understanding: while factual knowledge provides us with the base necessary to link together an infinite amount of logical inference, the other kind is of a different character: it deals with the *arcane*, which requires something more than a written text and its logical decoding. It deals with the direct and intense experience that is indescribable in words: a spiritual insight².

It is Sûfism, the esoteric teaching of Islam, which sets its objective on blurring the division between our physical and the other world, wherein we encounter the description of these two kinds of understanding:

While ordinary knowledge is denoted by the term *'ilm*, the mystic knowledge peculiar to the Sûfis is called *ma'rifat* or *'irfân*. [...] *mârifat* is fundamentally different from *'ilm*, and a different word must be used to translate it. We need not look far for a suitable equivalent. The *ma'rifat* of the Sûfis is the 'gnosis' of Hellenistic theosophy, *i.e.* direct knowledge of God based on revelation or apocalyptic vision. (Nicholson 51)

Mârifat is the terminus for a spiritual poet who thence tries to convey the idea of an experienced *paradise*. Any time we use ordinary language to describe such a world we avail ourselves of *logos* (λόγος), which is, according to its Greek etymology, something said, or expressed (Liddell and Scott 477). In relation to the Sûfi tradition, *logos* is a bridge between the "Word of God," with the Prophet as its representative, and man (Stoddart 26–27); or in different words it is the bond between G-d as an uncreated substance and man as a created one (Stoddart 71–72).

As the *immanent* power which might be expressed through words, it frequently shows how far we are from the *centre*. The distance we put between this *centre* and ourselves is always tangible in one's words and is especially noticeable in poetry and art generally. Poetry, if freed from egocentrism, might become something similar to the Word of G-d.

According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a contemporary Islamic philosopher, poetry is "the expression of a truly intellectual knowledge" that might be only "reduced to sentimentalism" or the expression of "individual idiosyncracies" when an author fails to reach the immanent power lying dormant in him (Nasr 91). This means that if poetry wants to be universal and all-encompassing, the poet's secular persona must be abandoned. Such a mode of conduct might be seen in the work of authors of the biblical Psalms addressed to the Hebrew G-d. With reference to Leonard Cohen's work, this is, actually, what is felt when we listen to his songs. For illustration a poem "I Bury My Girl Friend" might clarify this better:

You ask me how I write. This is how I write. I get rid of the lizard [hippie slang for penis?]. I eschew the philosopher's stone. I bury my girlfriend. I remove my personality from the line so that I am permitted to use the first person as often as I wish without offending my appetite for modesty. Then I resign. I do errands for my mother, or someone like her. I eat too much. I blame the closest to me for ruining my talent. Then you come to me. The joyous news is mine. (Cohen, *Death of a Lady's Man* 74)

“The joyous news” is, according to the Bible, the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:10). Cohen means that he awakens *love* in himself by the annihilation of his conscious self. Therefore, by distancing himself from the “I” persona he draws power from the other I, which stems from the *centre*, or immanent power. The result of these alterations is “the joyous news” of *love* and proximity.

In many traditions, the *centre* is defined as *heart*. One of the acts based on *it* is language as it reflects *sight*, which is of two kinds; one is the perception affected by the sensory organs while the other is the spiritual vision reached by the inner eye. The more a man distances himself from his spiritual vision, the more prominent become sensory perception and analogies made through it. At the same time they prevail upon the inner eye and constrain it in creation. Hence the quote “Nothing is as it seems”, mapping our use of rational judgement based on appearances and not on an inner insight. Languages, which respond directly to our *vision*, are also affected, and here we might find a difference between contemporary poetry and spiritual poetry:

In all spiritual traditions, we find the idea that language was originally much richer and more synthetic than it is today. Language has tended to become reduced to its practical and communicative dimension – be it purely social or idiosyncratic – whereas its essence is actually symbolic. In other words, poetry is not only a means of communication with others and an expression of oneself; it is also – and above all – a way for transcendent Reality to manifest itself in and through words, images and music. (Laude, *Music of the Sky* 6)

A listener of Cohen's music might find here an answer to his open-ended question raised in connection with the elusiveness of meaning. The language stemming from the centre is highly symbolic and is to be deciphered in a different way than to which we are habituated by our practically oriented thinking. Thus Laude's transcendent reality, brought into focus by poetry, denies analogical modes of interpretation derived from sensory perception.

According to the Sûfis, every language is connected to the *heart*, or *intellect*, which is the seat of *Divine Logos* (Stoddart 29). It is a sacred place, a centre of the world that must be protected and venerated so that one can base one's language and also acts on it. It is more than a weak, emotionally unbalanced thing characterizing our modern era. When we ask what poetry is, the Sûfi poet Jāmī will reply that it is the echo emanating from this place:

What is poetry? The song of the bird of the Intellect.
What is poetry? The similitude of the world of eternity.
The value of the bird becomes evident through it.
And one discovers whether it comes from the oven of a

bath house or a rose garden.
 It composes poetry from the Divine rose garden;
 It draws its power and sustenance from that sacred precinct.
 (qtd. in Nasr 91)

Poetry as a means of creation – *poiesis* – tries to convey something more than a nugget of information that people usually look for. Above all, it conveys the knowledge of G-d through worship and thus gives a form to the formless (Wolfson, “New Jerusalem” 149). Words, if drawn from the *centre*, stand as the prototypes and direct representations of the formless. At the same time they perfect man to such an extent that he also may become divine:

the Word might best be defined as the perfection and prototype of Creation in God – the Model for all things, so to speak – while being also, from another standpoint, the perfection and culmination of Creation in man. (Laude, *Music of the Sky* 3)

Moreover, Laude says that “God is ‘no different’ from His Word since the Word is, so to speak, the irradiation of God” (Laude, *Music of the Sky* 4). Because man does not differ from his Creator,³ or as Muslims believe, He is an immanent part of every individual⁴, we are also the creators and our role is to name things⁵ - and therefore to imbue forms with meanings, because we are the representatives of G-d and mirror his ways on the lower plane. This doctrine is aptly summarized in the hermetic saying: “As above, so below”. Therefore the human poet becomes an imitator of the Divine Poet:

The human poet is but an imitator of the Divine Poet; in nontheistic parlance, it could be said that he is “attuned” to the productive Way of the Principle, since his “logical” (stemming from the *logos*) utterance is simultaneously a “poetical” work (referring here to *poiesis* as creation or “making”). In their original root, “poetry” and “logic” are one and the same. (Laude, *Music of the Sky* 5–6)

These suppositions lead us to believe that an interpreter of the Divine Word is at the same time a direct representative of G-d. Sûfis believe that they are not different from the Creator. Although this sounds like a heretical statement, we should realize that it is not so. It has nothing in common with one’s superiority but rather signifies the submission to the Lord. It is plunging / drowning in the divine when the Divine becomes the master of man, as Rûmî says in one of his poems:

Every moment the robber Beauty rises in a different
 shape, ravishes the soul, and disappears.
 Every instant that Loved One assumes a new garment,
 now of old, now of youth.
 Now He plunged into the heart of the substance of the
 potter’s clay—the Spirit plunged, like a diver.
 Anon He rose from the depths of mud that is molded
 and baked, then He appeared in the world.
 He became Noah, and at His prayer the world was
 flooded while He went into the Ark.

He became Abraham and appeared in the midst of the
fire, which turned to roses for His sake.
For a while He was roaming on the earth to pleasure
Himself,
Then He became Jesus and ascended to the dome of
Heaven and began to glorify God.
In brief, it was He that was coming and going in every
generation thou hast seen,
Until at last He appeared in the form of an Arab and
gained the empire of the world.
(qtd. in Nicholson 108–109)

Yet to be able to emanate such a power one must go through several stages of development. The command to climb the ladder towards the One has been here since the dawn of time. It starts with birth, when we are severed from the “abyss” and come into the light. The first moment we become aware of our self and of the first feelings of sadness and anxiety is the moment of *individuation*. It is the striving for the primordial union with the vital force. Without this stage, we would not be able to initiate ourselves into the Great Mysteries and thus approach the “abyss” again. The following chapter claims that individuation is a necessary step on the way to the *centre*.

II. Individuation

I'm broken down from a recent fall.

Leonard Cohen

Individuation, as defined by Carl G. Jung, is the phenomenon which occurs when “we are confronted with pre-conscious processes which, in the form of more or less concretely shaped fantasies, gradually pass over into the conscious mind, or become conscious as dreams, or [...] are made conscious through the method of *active imagination*” (Jung and Kerényi 108). This theory could be developed further and linked with the ideas of Richard Caldwell, who claims that individuation is the process aiming to reach a definite stage of our life journey, which happens when one starts to be aware of one’s own self, or one’s “individual identity” (Caldwell 23). It is a state in which an individual has cut the bond with his mother, or a lover who represents the safety of the womb, which rightly epitomises *symbiosis*, or Paradise, wherein an individual does not feel physical desire, or anxiety. When *individuation* takes place, this desire is essentially “modelled on the memories of the lost symbiotic state” (Caldwell 25). It is a starting point which must be reached in order for one to be able to experience further spiritual growth. At this phase, the man strives to return back: he is pinning for the woman who represents the original Eden.⁶

It might be supposed that Cohen’s bond with his mother, which, according to one of his friends, was the cause of all his unfortunate relationships,⁷ represents the link with the archetypal Mother. This link is by Jung described as the “primary form of *religio* (‘linking up’)” which is “the essence, the working basis of all religious life” (Jung and Kerényi 110). We could assume that a man’s mother provides the *image* of the Great Mother of ancient

times from whom he is unable to distance himself and who remains an inherent part of him that must be rediscovered. Therefore, she might be understood to represent a vestige of the *symbiotic state* once experienced and highly desired:

Mother, traditionally regarded by analysts as the irreducible object from which other, substitute objects of desire will be derived, may herself [...] be seen as the first symbol, the first separate entity whose loss signifies for the infant the lost symbiotic state. Strictly speaking, the desire to return to symbiosis is not the same as desire for the mother, since what has been lost is not a separate being but rather a part of the self, which becomes known as the mother. The goal of symbiotic desire is not an object but a state, an undifferentiated state without subject or object. (Caldwell 25)

The extent to which we as men are able to dissociate ourselves from our mothers and search for the missing part in ourselves will help us to establish a new bond with a female partner. Every time a man truly falls in love, his unconscious desires “based on these [symbiotic] memories, will aim at regaining the lost part of the once all-inclusive self” (Caldwell 24).

Joni Mitchell, who was a short-lived muse of Leonard from 1967 to 1968, presents a few interesting views that touch upon such a motherhood in her song “Rainy Night House⁸”, in which she describes a trip to Cohen’s parental house in Montreal and in which both partners re-enact the union of Cohen’s parents:

It was a rainy night
 We took a taxi to your mother’s home
 She went to Florida and left you
 With your father’s gun alone
 Upon her small white bed I fell into a dream
 You sat up all the night and watched me
 To see who in the world I might be

The “father’s gun,” when taken metaphorically, links Cohen with the death of his father. We know that he died at the age of fifty-two and that Cohen was obsessed with his weapon (Nadel 17). If we take into account the sexual symbolism of the gun, we are very close to the myth of Oedipus. But the symbolism of Mitchell’s falling asleep on the mother’s bed is more significant as she, in reality, supplants Cohen’s female parent. However, the man is portrayed as being unable to sustain such a relationship and makes an escape from the parental bond:

You called me beautiful
 You called your mother, she was very tanned
 So you packed your tent and you went
 To live out in the Arizona sand
 You are a refugee From a wealthy family
 You gave up all the golden factories
 To see who in the world you might be

In other songs written about Leonard Cohen, such as “A Case of You,” “That Song About the Midway” and “The Gallery” (Johnson), the male partner is portrayed as a saint, which links the male person in the songs to Jesus Christ, the Son of the Virgin Mary.

However, Cohen’s escape might have also other psychological reasons. Caldwell claims that the modern mass industrial society is caught in the schism of two desires: one “to escape separateness and loss and to return to the symbiotic state” and the other to “maintain separate identity:”

The first desire is [often] countered by the fear of loss of identity, of being swallowed up or engulfed by a larger entity, of being a faceless, nameless part of an enormous whole, while the second desire is countered by the fear of alienation and estrangement, of losing the ability or opportunity to have emotional bonds or meaningful relationships with other people. (Caldwell 24–25)

If this hypothesis is true, a man is caught in a state somewhere between wanting and not wanting as he wants to fall in love but at the same time cannot endure it. One can imagine that this limbo is not pleasurable. The singer’s method aims at dissolution of this state. By his song he somehow replaces the human love for the Divine One, thus he joins the universal *logos* and works in agreement with *its* principles. According to Caldwell, the same idea appears in Eastern mysticism:

The goal of much Eastern mystical religion, for example, is virtually identical to a recovery of the symbiotic state: the overcoming of individuality through merger or dissolution into a cosmic whole, the attainment of a state of zero desire and perfect equilibrium, the absolute loss of the self. (Caldwell 26)

This is Cohen’s way of writing: he merges with the Song of the Creator through words, music and breath as in an initiatory ritual. After establishing the contact, the resulting power is channelled through words.

III. The Song of Initiation

*The song of the spheres in their revolutions
Is what men sing with lute and voice.
As we all are members of Adam,
We have heard these melodies in Paradise.
Though earth and water have cast their veil upon us,
We retain faint reminiscences of these heavenly songs;
But while we are thus shrouded by gross earthly veils,
How can the tones of the dancing spheres reach us?*

Rūmī

Rūmī’s poem touches upon the dichotomy between the two worlds. The Ancient Greeks and (generally speaking) the Eastern traditions believed that it is music that possesses divine qualities. The same idea has reappeared throughout history and made its appearance in the thoughts of many medieval and Renaissance scholars.⁹ More recently, for instance,

Rudolf Steiner, quoted in a book by Joscelyn Godwin, claims that “music provides one of the closest images of that world; hence its values for reawakening the soul’s prenatal knowledge of spiritual realities” (Godwin 31). It is music that serves as a means of connection with the Divine and which possesses healing and enlightening qualities. When a spiritually gifted singer translates such music into his words and metre, it is “like the imprint of the One”, Laude says (*Singing the Way* 10) – hinting at the fact that the singer is in the hands of something that transcends his sensory perception but is at the same time an immanent part of him. This fact legitimizes Leonard Cohen to speak in G-d’s voice:

I greet you from the other side
Of sorrow and despair
With a love so vast and shattered
It will reach you everywhere

(Cohen, “Heart with No Companion,” *Various Positions*)

In addition to channelling such a divine power, he takes it upon himself as a duty to warn against everything that could dissociate “the younger soldiers” from *Him*¹⁰. In the song “The Traitor” he apologizes for being paralyzed and unable to “warn all the younger soldiers that they had been deserted from above” (*Stranger Music* 304). This is probably on account of the woman who in this song disassociates the man from the Spiritual power as soon as she defeats him, either during the climax, or for her want to preside over the hearth. The increasing dominance of the woman is demonstrated when Cohen sings: “I lingered on her thighs a fatal moment, / I kissed her lips as though I thirsted still. / My falsity, it stung me like a hornet; / the poison sank and it paralyzed my will.” Being dishonest with himself and to his partner, he confesses his sin, and, like an apostle, exhorts others, by means of the example, to be aware of this trap. With respect to his origins, this is one of the pivotal principles which Hasidic Jews should follow:

to every Hasidic Jew [...] belongs in addition the task of redeeming the Universe: aiding the return not only of his own inner spark to its Origin but of all the other myriad sparks imprisoned in the manifested world. In Hasidic life this is done, constantly, by the intentional performance of every thought, word, and act. (Godwin 56)

Therefore, Cohen’s conduct might be described as a duty, as he is the transmitter of *knowledge*. On his last album *Old Ideas* (2012), he humbly sings that he is only “the brief elaboration of a tune.¹¹” To put it another way, his work is the manifestation of *love*, or the expression of one’s experience, which is far more important than religious doctrines.

Cohen seems to possess all the necessary qualifications required to undergo the rite of initiation from the point of view of the Sûfi tradition. Nicholson specifies them as follows: “(1) repentance, (2) abstinence, (3) renunciation, (4) poverty, (5) patience, (6) trust in God [and] (7) satisfaction” (21). The discipline to which these attributes refer helps to prepare an adept for the means of connection: initiation, of which the result is the final Song, which stands as the interpretation of God’s message and *logos* itself: “He who knows the secret melody that bears the inner into the outer, who knows the holy song that merges the lonely, shy letters onto the singing of the spheres, he is full of the power of God ‘and it is as if he created heaven and earth and all worlds anew’” (Godwin 56–57). This

transmitted knowledge could be well described as prophecy¹². Moreover, such a person is, in the ancient myths, often portrayed as a musician accompanied by an instrument that serves as a carrier of the divine word¹³. But, in order for this to happen, one must be able to experience a phenomenon commonly termed *initiation*.

Initiation means the acquisition of an experience which has some revelatory character. But this definition should be broadened and its etymology taken into consideration. The Latin word *initiare*, which is a late Hellenistic translation of the Greek verb *myein* meaning *to close*, presupposes an idea of an inner insight attained and retained during an initiatory experience.

In Ancient Greece, they also used the word *telete*, which represented the climax of the sacred experience. Moreover, this word is further accompanied by *teletai* (to die) and *telestai* (to be initiated), all derived from *telos* meaning the end, or perfection. This perfection cannot be acquired without a necessary pre-condition: *epopteia*, which could be translated as the final purified vision experienced when attaining the union via *logos*. This is often called the second birth and seen as the attainment of *knowledge*.

This closure suggests plunging into the Divine; Merging; or beholding the Sacred. We might even say that it is the only time a man understands the Tetragrammaton. The final song that springs up out of this union with *logos* might be understood as the emanation of G-d's light. In Cohen's case, I must repeat, this happens every time the intersection of the secular and the sacred occurs.

Therefore, in this light the songs can be viewed as the records of experience and also as the means of channelling the power of *logos*. This *theia dynamis*¹⁴ bestows sparks of grace which may lead to a state of trance, or deep contemplation, to which Cohen's attentive listeners are prone. Both the singer himself and the listeners thus reach a condition to which Sûfis are subjected when performing their ecstatic dance. When they enter such a frame of mind, they are literally possessed by the power that has complete control over them. Plato's comment on this force taken from the dialogue *Ion* is well known: "[T]he lyric poets are not in their right mind when they are composing their beautiful strains: but when falling under the power of music and metre they are inspired and possessed" (Jowett, Plato 502). Later on, he explains the role of such a poet: "the poets are only the interpreters of the Gods by whom they are severally possessed. Was not this the lesson which the God intended to teach when by the mouth of the worst of poets he sang the best of songs?" (Jowett, Plato 503). This occurrence should not be explained on the basis that the poet lapses into the state of "ecstatic inebriation," or "dismemberment of reality"; rather, his inner eye experiences such a sway that he is commanded to bring order into it. Madness is the means of opening the door; one's self-control keeps the door ajar. This is similar to being in a state between the physical and spiritual, or in a state when one is in touch with *logos*. However, the door shuts soon or later.

Lorca, in his essay "Theory and Play of the Duende", described the Muse (I understand this notion as a means of "opening the door") as a channel of transcendence and also as the beast making "her meal" out of the poets who lose control over their "madness." The Muse is basically a facilitator that helps to establish the connection with *logos* and empowers the spiritual poet with the aura of dark *Duende*, which is believed to be a little elf or goblin taking possession of the soul. Unsurprisingly, it is often called "the master of the house." – Is it the Lord? – His coming restores everything into its primordial state. Lorca says that

“the arrival of the *duende* presupposes a radical change to all the old kinds of form, brings totally unknown and fresh sensations, with the qualities of a newly created rose, miraculous, generating an almost religious enthusiasm” (Lorca). It might be supposed that it is a sudden beatitude or blessedness that comes from within and remains until fading away. Its coming is celebrated in Spain by a loud shouting. It resembles the call “Brimo!”¹⁵ in the Eleusinian Mystery rites:

In all Arab music, dance, song or elegy, the arrival of *duende* is greeted with vigorous cries of ‘Allah! Allah’ so close to the ‘Olé!’ of the bullfight, and who knows whether they are not the same? And in all the songs of Southern Spain, the appearance of the *duende* is followed by sincere cries of: ‘Viva Dios!’ deep, human, tender cries of communication with God through the five senses, thanks to the *duende* that shakes the voice and body of the dancer, a real, poetic escape from this world. (Lorca)

This is very similar to madness and the total loss of consciousness. Laude describes it as a form of grace. “One could also speak of death, or the presence of death, as a similar catalytic element for the coming on of *duende*” (Laude, *Singing the Way* 158–159). This is the second birth that takes place after death. It is the entrance to eternity: *initiation*. What follows is the understanding, silence:

The coming forth of *duende* is an opportunity for a contemplative glimpse into the creative act of God, an act that is synthesized by the name of God. It is pure act emerging from emptiness, destruction, or disarray. Such is the reason why it cannot be followed by anything else than a prolonged and profound silence. In a sense this silence is that of extinction: nothing can compare, and therefore follow, what is pure affirmation of Reality. *Duende* lives between two deaths: the death of man to his own individuality, and the death of the world that is as if burnt down by lightning. *Duende* is that which appears when man cannot rely on anything else and accepts his emptiness and his utter helplessness before the abyss of death. (Laude, *Singing the Way* 159)

In this way the song might be understood to be a duct channelling the power of *logos*. It is not in the scope of this paper to analyse what makes the poet subject to this force. Ancient cultures used various means to induce such a state of bliss. Drugs are well-known and still accessible, and sexuality also plays a part. Inspiration, which has connotations of inbreathing God’s Word/Power, according to its etymology, and *entheos* meaning “god within,” or “god’s inspired” (influencing the English word *enthusiasm*), are quite accurate in their portrayals of such a phenomenon.

The story admits of being told up to this point,
 But what follows is hidden, and inexpressible in words.
 If you should speak and try a hundred ways to express it,
 ’Tis useless; the mystery becomes no clearer.
 You can ride on saddle and horse to the sea-coast,
 But then you must use a horse of wood (i.e. a boat).
 A horse of wood is useless on dry land,
 It is the special vehicle of voyagers by sea.

Silence is this horse of wood,
Silence is the guide and support of men at sea.
(Rūmī, Masnavi i Ma'navi 326)

IV. The World

*my father's hand was trembling
with the beauty of the Word.*

Leonard Cohen

Various creation myths teach that the Word, or sound, originated in a watery substance.¹⁶ It stemmed from the primordial depth and created the world through cry and light. But this Word is different to the one a human singer voices. It is true that they are to some extent parallel, but while the first one is an outer form of creation, the human voice is the flow of the Word from within, which leads us to presume that a spiritually gifted singer voices the Word of G-d through his song. In order for one to “pipe it up”, one must work hard at sustaining the connection with *logos*. To this effect a *prayer* is an effective means.

Prayer is an abstract song with diverse words leading up to the “Great Mystery,” a means of linking up with the divine; it is a song of praise and joy and also of willingness to serve the One. Moreover, it is one’s personal gift; a sacrifice aiming at the abandonment of one’s earthly presence; the desire to come into “anthropocosmic unity” with the Lord. It is not selfish begging but rather the resignation from want in the form of a dialogue. One of the prerequisites that helps to sustain the bond is faith and willingness to capitulate before the Supreme.

Those who get drowned in *logos* become divine figures themselves in the Bible – like Moses when he was given instructions what to do in Egypt¹⁷ and who subsequently worked under the hand of “I AM WHO I AM.” G-d’s code name indirectly says that either He is nameless, or His name is unutterable and secret.

In the poem by Rūmī quoted in the above section on knowledge, G-d is believed to be incarnated into various persons whom He masters. We could suppose that those are the initiated disciples who are transformed through the radical change of perception, or the *second birth*. They lose, or renounce, their earthly name and thus prove that they belong to the Lord. That is why the initiates of various spiritual groups acquire another name¹⁸. Leonard Cohen’s song “You Know Who I Am” draws us to a similar conclusion:

You know who I am,
you’ve stared at the sun,
well I am the one who loves
changing from nothing to one.

It is difficult to avoid the supposition that these are words uttered by G-d himself who is speaking through Cohen, although the first lines of the song “I cannot follow you, my love, / you cannot follow me” lead us to believe that it is a woman who cannot follow and

be followed. This should not be misleading as the Sûfi literature often calls the Lord by feminine epithets. The word *Lover* is not rare. In Cohen's body of work we find frequent references hinting at the inability to fall into the union with the Creator, as in the last lines of the song "Hallelujah" where he sings: "You say I took the Name in vain / I don't even know the name."¹⁹ This is the proof of his modesty and one of the Sûfi requirements for initiation. Yet Cohen searches for the Name. "It is in pronouncing Thy Name that I must die and live" says the Prophet Mohammad (Burckhardt 81). Or Jesus who declares that the Kingdom of God comes within "behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (*KJV* Luke 17:21).

What is the Name like? Leo Schaya claims that G-d has concealed it/Himself due to the transgression of His laws when the First and Second Temples were destroyed (Schaya 92). However, there exists an "esoteric chain of tradition" *shalsheth hakabbalah*, which aims at the Name's transmission through initiation (88), which is actually the purpose of Kabbalah as it means *receiving*.

G-d's name is described as *shem hameforash* – meaning the explicit, or complete name. They also call it "synthesis of syntheses" as it contains all the names and letters of the Torah (Schaya 87).

As we know, YHWH is regarded as the best "explicit" name of the Lord; nonetheless, no one knows how to pronounce it. If we transcribe it into Yahweh and pronounce it as such, we are far away from its authentic rendition, according to Schaya (89). What we can articulate with a high degree of certainty is the word *Yah*, a "means of grace," which is the only remaining part of the original Name²⁰. It is closely linked to *Yobel* (Jubilee), which stands for restoration, and it is exactly through this word that we are able to re-establish the union with the Lord²¹. For this reason, it must be invoked!

Yah is a "transcendent aspect of God"; it is a "direct influx of living God" (91) containing in Itself *Shekhinah* as the uncreated and infinite light and the sound of a revelatory, creative and redemptive Word (97). Every sound on Earth echoes this Word, according to one Psalm.²² The complete Name remains hidden as it represents G-d's power over Creation. Yet it is the goal of initiation to be glimpsed and inevitably lost again after the Union has been consummated.

As much as Christ is the symbol of the "uncreated Word of God" (Stoddard 12) and purity, destined to be the anchor for the "wanderers," also Cohen slaves in this role for those who want to experience deeper spiritual depths. Especially women, for whom he symbolises a spiritual support: "You held onto me like I was a crucifix" ("So Long Marianne").

Such a man is constantly described as a womaniser by those who do not realize that he is an *initiator* doing his personal duty. His mission is military; he must convert as many people as possible. It is exactly this role which reminds us of the radicalism of Jesus Christ:

and if you are a man
on the same road
you will hear women's voices
exactly as I heard them
coming from the water
coming from boats
and from in between the boats

and then surely
you will understand my life
and do a kindness to my soul
by forgiving me

(Cohen, "The Cross," *Book of Longing* 123)

Moreover, Cohen says about himself: "I am the Voice of Suffering and I cannot be comforted... I have remained the Absolute Creator, life itself to whatever I touched, as immediate, as irresistible, as wild and undeniable as a woman's hand on the adolescent groin... It can be quickly divined I am no friend of the age" ("Something From the Early Seventies", *Book of Longing* 125–127).

Jesus, who was compelled to die for *His* love and enacted as a fallen monument for those who are unable to foster such a feeling of *agape*²³, is the perfect symbol of Cohen's strivings. Their love is inevitably also sexual²⁴. This enemy of the age is in reality the person who strives for perfection but realizes the cruelty inherent to it. This idea makes a clearer picture in the song "Avalanche" from the album *Songs of Love and Hate*. The protagonist dealt with is a hunchback, an (im)perfect being who seems to be a direct representation of the word made flesh²⁵, as there are several references confirming this – but, unlike the Christian Saviour, he is the embodiment of ugliness:

I stepped into an avalanche
it covered up my soul
When I am not this hunchback
I sleep beneath a golden hill
You who wish to conquer pain
you must learn to serve me well

The world "avalanche" invokes all-encompassing mass. It might be understood to be a physical body, or even the world itself. Before he was personified, he slept "beneath a golden hill", and now he appeals to humanity to notice its own reflection.

You strike my side by accident
as you go down for your gold
The cripple here that you clothe and feed
is neither starved nor cold
He does not ask for your company,
not at the centre, the centre of the world

People around strike him by accident, and because of being down-trodden they want to offer him clothes and food. Instead of being seen as a saviour and the centre of the world around which humanity revolves, he is to be cared for.

When I am on a pedestal,
you did not raise me there.
Your laws do not compel me
to kneel grotesque and bare.
I myself am the pedestal

for this ugly hump at which you stare

Human laws do not compel him to do anything. He is even invisible in our ignorance. The singer wants us to realise that we must acknowledge our own ugly existence in order to become complete, in a similar way to how sin must be acknowledged to awaken Christ in our hearts. Cohen bids us to be sincere in his worship:

You who wish to conquer pain
you must learn what makes me kind
The crumbs of love that your offer me
are the crumbs I've left behind
Your cross is no credential here
it's just the shadow of my wound

The cross as a symbol is already surpassed by the very existence of this individual. The following stanza looks as if it were spoken by G-d, or Jesus who longs for compassion among people, even among those who claim to be nonbelievers. They complement him and his life is also in dependence on them.

I have begun to long for you
I who have no need
I have begun to wait for you
I who have no greed
You say you've gone away from me
but I can feel when you breathe

In the following stanza, the hunchback acknowledges that he is a mere representation of the world. While Jesus is the representation of the Word and Love, the hunchback represents the ugliness of the secular world:

Do not dress in rags for me
I know you are not poor
And don't love me quite so fiercely
when you know you are not sure
It is your world beloved
it is your flesh that I wear

V. Cohen the Priest

Since hardly anyone ever lives without carnal sin, and since the life of the clergy is, because of the continual idleness and the great abundance of food, naturally more liable to temptations of the body than that of any other men, if any clerk should wish to enter into the lists of Love let him speak and apply himself to Love's service.

Andreas Capellanus

We know that the name Cohen, Kohen, Kohanim (כֹּהֲנִים) in Judaism denotes the highest caste of people: priests, who are believed to be direct descendants of Moses' brother Aaron. This title is inherited, even if the denoted individuals do not perform the function.

The priest differs from the prophet. Both are intermediaries between G-d and his people but while the prophet interprets G-d's will, the priest interprets the wishes of people and offers oblations. His role in Judaism started with Adam, when he and Eve were given garments²⁶. Judaism elaborated on this story and defined Adam as the first priest who passed his priestly garments to his third son Seth (Schwartz 101). A similar legend is offered in Numbers 20:23–28, where Moses strips Aaron of his garments and passes them on to his son Eleazar.

In an interview from 1994, Cohen acknowledges his role in his youthful years: "When they told me I was a Kohen, I believed it. I didn't think it was some auxiliary information. I wanted to wear white clothes and go into the Holy of Holies and negotiate with the deepest resources of my soul"²⁷ (Kurzweil). Jesus Christ was a paradigm of a prophet during his life and a priest after his "death." As a Jew he inherited "the garments", but tried to, if we believe in his teachings, undermine the old religion of the Jewish fathers and supplant it with the idea of *love*. We might suppose that he became a personified *logos*, and, unfortunately, "the enemy of the age" – who is actually vitally important as a means of ascent. Stoddart comes to a similar conclusion when he writes: "[T]he Prophet's role is indispensable for man, as it is only through the Prophet, God's representative, that man may come to God Himself. The Prophet is the personification of the 'Word of God' (*Logos*), and it is only through the Logos that man can come to God" (Stoddart 26). The Jesus figure shows some parallels with the musical persona of Leonard Cohen. This similarity resides in the idea of inherent Law dating back to their predecessors, which they both acknowledge, but, unlike the Orthodox branch of Judaism, intensively question to unburden themselves of the weight that prevents them from ascending. The need to be spiritually cleansed before they put on their garments – to establish a connection – is indispensable for them (in the case of Jesus this was fulfilled by his baptism in the Jordan River).

The word *kohen* is also interchangeably used in the Bible with the word *kahan*, meaning a bridegroom who is going to be decked with ornaments. The Prophet Isaiah, who attained the prerogative of priesthood, described himself as follows: "I am overwhelmed with joy in the Lord my God! For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation and draped me in a robe of righteousness. I am like a *bridegroom* in his wedding suit or a bride with her jewels" (*NLT*, Isaiah 61:10).

The period that had preceded the joyful moment was probably characterised by a long period of loneliness and refusal. The idea of Cohen's hunchback now comes back to the fore. Similar "hunchbacks" appeared in the Middle Ages in Occitania – knights who, through longing and loneliness, underwent the preparatory ritual followed by the outburst of joy when the goal of their longing, a noble lady, acquiesced to their lustful wishes.

VI. Cohen the Troubadour

*Though I love your company, your instructions are wasted here.
I will always choose the woman who carries me off.*

Leonard Cohen

What links Cohen to the Occitan troubadours is the fact that in their literature from the Middle Ages, woman is very often depicted as an apotheosized lady possessing divine qualities. The paradigms of women she has been often compared to are, among many others, Helen of Troy, Iseult, Cresseid and the Virgin Mary, who retain in themselves aspects of the primordial Mother Goddess: ferocity, whorishness and virginity, which also appear in the mythological characters of Neith, Innana, Ishtar, Astarte, Aphrodite and others in various cultures.

But Cohen, the singer at least, does not seem to devote his lifetime to pursuing one female. He worships an ideal that seems to be both human and divine²⁸. This makes its full appearance in song such as "Our Lady of Solitude", where he depicts the woman's fingers as resembling those of a weaver and speaks about the light emanating from her body while at the same time knowing that she is the "Mistress, oh mistress, of us all." The other songs still refer to this idea, such as "Winter Lady", in which the woman character is invoked but incapable of being reached. "The Stranger Song" should also be included in this list, among many others including "Suzanne", as a strong example of this syncretism.

An interesting fact is that Cohen often avails himself of the chance to profane a woman in order to prepare her for the *hieros gamo* ritual during which he consummates the marriage with his partner and also with the Divine ideal. Therefore sexuality, playing a violating part, facilitates the ignition of divine love. The loss of physical virginity paves the way to progeny: *logos*. In this way, the singer becomes an initiator of the woman and also initiates himself into the order of purified beings. The climax of the union is the begetting of a "divine child," or Christ, who might be described as the result of the earthly and divine intersection.

G-d is to be reached in two ways in Cohen's work. One is through repentance and asceticism, but the other one is through the climax of this experience: a sexual act in which everything culminates. Here the division between Cohen and the Occitan troubadours, generally, makes its full appearance. While Cohen needs a sexual act to end a cycle of loneliness, the troubadours honour the tension of unconsummated longing until it becomes unbearable.

Cohen exchanges spirituality for carnality almost routinely. Statements such as the following usually predate the sexual union:

Blessed are you who has given each man a shield of loneliness so that he cannot forget you. You are the truth of loneliness, and only your name addresses it. Strengthen my loneliness that I may be healed in your name, which is beyond all consolations that are uttered on this earth. Only in your name can I stand in the rush of time, only when this loneliness is yours can I lift my sins toward your mercy.

(Cohen, *Book of Mercy*, Psalm no. 9)

In the song “Night Comes On” from the album *Various Positions*, Cohen sings that he needs nothing to touch and has been always greedy that way. Nevertheless, he is at the same time aware of the fact that it is love for a woman that causes some form of initiatory awakening. If this form of love depletes itself without progeny – *logos* – Cohen returns to loneliness and desire for the *Supreme*²⁹:

We were locked in this kitchen
I took to religion
And I wondered how long she would stay
I needed so much
To have nothing to touch
I’ve always been greedy that way.

(“The Night Comes On,” *Various Positions* 1984)

He seems to be afraid that woman will cut him off from the Lord. It is she who in another song, “Death of a Ladies’ Man”, says that “the art of longing’s over and it’s never coming back” and who binds him to her by any means possible. She is the person who robs him of his “prophet’s mantle”, loneliness and memory. This might be also illustrated by the poem from the collection *The Energy of Slaves* (1972):

You want me at all times
without my prophet’s mantle
without my loneliness
without the jelly girls
You want me without my agony
without the risk
that my health insults you
without my love of trees
without my ocean hut
You want me to lose the thread
in my friend’s conversation
without my memory
without my promise to animals
and come here and come here
and come here and come here

blessing of the male and female together” (Patai 252). This theme is recalled by Cohen’s song “So Long, Marianne” and verses in which he recalls living with a beautiful woman that made him forget, or not to pay attention to his spiritual needs. This is the reason why he had to abandon her:

Well you know that I love to live with you,
but you make me forget so very much.
I forget to pray for the angels
and then the angels forget to pray for us.

This phenomenon is not present in the troubadour literature. While they worshipped the Queen as an infinite source of Light, for Cohen, woman is the source of light only temporarily. Initiation involving sexual *coniunctio* was not their main goal; rather one was put to the test in order to prove one’s merit. We can recall this motif in Launcelot walking on the sharp blade across the river to save Guinevere.³² The woman to be conquered sometimes took up a knight’s whole life without succumbing.³³

Cohen regards lovemaking as necessary and often likens the “best” to the Divine Woman present in his songs. We might recall Edie Sedgwick who gave inspiration for the song “One of Us Cannot Be Wrong,” or Nico hiding behind the song “Joan of Arc”, Marianne Ihlen appearing in “So Long, Marianne,” and ultimately Suzanne Verdal who is in the background of the eponymous song. The list could be longer, but the names are not as important as the fact that those women are the paradigms of beauty (if we count their physical appearance) and it was through them Cohen drew the power of the ideal woman, or Mother Goddess.

As stated before, Cohen is being prepared for the initiation while in the state of loneliness and longing. This is so-called pre-initiation. If suddenly the light appears, it is the acquisition, illumination, revelation of the mystery. Cohen’s unreleased song “Do I Have to Dance All Night?” expounds on the idea:

I waited half my life for you, you know,
I didn’t even think that you’d accept.
And here you are before me in the flesh
Saying “Yes, yes, yes!”

But the reward is only temporary; its excessive use precipitates its sudden end:

But do I have to dance all night? ...
I learned this step a while ago ...
But do I have to dance all night? ...

Being aware of her potential to make him lose all she stands for, he questions her, or rather beseeches her not to force him to *dance* all night as it will lead to the unfortunate end of their encounter.

We might conclude that Cohen does not want to regard woman as holding the absolute power. He seems to be more afraid of her rather than complying to her desires. At the same time he is irresistibly attracted by the unattainable Queen represented by his original

mother and lover. His strivings are periodically interrupted and re-established, while he is condemned to remain an eternal seeker always slaving for the One.

Notes

¹ By this I want to point out a dichotomy between rational and intuitive knowledge that is prevalent in the modern era. Rūmī describes this as the “Eyesight [...] in conflict with inner knowing” (Barks 59).

² Even this denomination does not encompass the full extent of the experience. Whether it is insight, merging with, or plunging into G-d’s hands is difficult to express, but those initiated will agree that it is the annihilation of one’s ego. We can say, as René Guénon does, that our ordinary existence bound to the sensory perception of the world must cease in order to give way to another form of being that is the result of the awakening of one’s inner centre. Guénon describes it as the “[s]econd birth’ because it opens to the being a world other than that in which the activity of its corporeal modality is exercised, a world that will provide the field for the development of its higher possibilities; and a ‘regeneration’ because it re-establishes for this being the prerogatives that were natural and normal in the first ages of humanity, when man had not yet fallen away from his original spirituality, as he would do in later ages, to sink ever deeper into materiality, and because, as the first step in his realization, it will lead to the restoration in him of the ‘primordial state,’ which is the fullness and perfection of human individuality lying at the unique and invariable center from which the being can thereafter rise to higher states” (28).

³ “And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth’” (*KJV*, Genesis 1:26).

⁴ “If My servants ask thee about Me, lo, I am near” (*Kor.* 2.186).

⁵ “And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof” (*KJV*, Genesis 2:19).

⁶ A poem by Leonard Cohen called “Other Writers” could not illustrate it better: “Steve Sanfield is a great haiku master. / He lives in the country with Sarah, / his beautiful wife, / and he writes about the small things / which stand for all things. / Kyozan Joshu Roshi, / who has brought hundreds of monks / to a full awakening, / addresses the simultaneous / expansion and contraction / of the cosmos. / I go on and on / about a noble young woman / who unfastened her jeans / in the front seat of my jeep / and let me touch / the source of life / because I was so far from it. / I’ve got to tell you, friends, / I prefer my stuff to theirs” (*Book of Longing* 15).

⁷ “A female friend attributed his inability to sustain a long-term relationship to his basic mistrust of and deep anger at women, originating, perhaps, with his mother, who tried to control him with tears and guilt and food” (Nadel 253).

⁸ The lyrics were taken from the official website of Joni Mitchell. Mitchell, Joni. “Rainy Night House.” N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Mar. 2013. <<http://jonimitchell.com/music/song.cfm?id=4>>.

⁹ For instance, Robert Fludd in his *Tractatus Apologeticus* (1607) writes “The Sun or Apollo [...] showers down each year the ‘notes and harmonious sounds of his lyre into aetheral matter

concealed in earth and sea'. These 'tones' remain concealed in creatures, as fire lies hidden wood, whence whoever can strike a light or apply another fire can bring it forth" (qtd. in Godwin 16).

¹⁰ Cohen's meaning of the word *soldier* is the one who is still uninitiated and lives in a state of tension. It is the fighter; the conqueror who distances himself from the Divine for a woman. Woman is the prize for the soldier who "gives her soul an empty room and gives her body joy" ("Death of a Ladies' Man"). However, he will resign himself to the Creator one day.

¹¹ Even though people claim that the word is not *tune* but *tube*, and bring varying opinions ranging from the Fallopian tube to the cathode ray tube, I will stick with *tune* as it is more in tune with Cohen's musical expression.

¹² *προφοητεία* "the word of a deity" (Liddell and Scott 309).

¹³ For instance, David's playing to the king Saul in order to soothe his strained nerves (Samuel 16:14–23). Or, in the Greek mythology, the transformation of the nymph Syrinx into the reed and the subsequent making of a reed flute by the god Pan. Apollo's invention of the Lyre, or in Egypt, Osiris' gift of the trumpet, and many more examples could be quoted. In each case, it is a divine gift producing the music of the Spheres.

¹⁴ Divine power.

¹⁵ An epithet for a new strong Being born in the climax of the Eleusinian Mysteries. This denoted Dionysus primarily, but it could also denote a force born within an individual. There was also a call "Brimos" following the sudden flash of light (Wasson 204). The whole ritual took place underground, which mirrored the primordial darkness out of which all creation arose.

¹⁶ Genesis 1:1 "the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light." Also the Egyptian myth of creation teaches about a "bottomless abyss" out of which Amun was created through a piercing cry. Slavic mythology teaches about Bielobog who was flying above the dark waters, and many more myths could be found.

¹⁷ Exodus 3:1–22

¹⁸ As far as Cohen's Zen-Buddhist teachings are considered, he acquired the Dharma name Jikan (Silent One).

¹⁹ We should notice the capital letter *N* in the first verse and the lower case letter *n* in the second one. See Leonard Cohen. *Stranger Music: Selected Poems and Songs*. New York: Vintage, 1994. 347–348.

²⁰ Leonard Cohen showed the similar understanding in the poem "Isaiah:" "the Holy Name, half-spoken, is lost on the cantor's tongue; their pages barren, congregations blink, agonized and dumb" (Cohen, *Stranger Music* 41).

²¹ Psalm 135 "Praise *Yah*, for he is good! YHVH, sing praises to his name, for it is pleasant! For *Yah* has chosen Jakob unto himself, and Israel for his costly possession" (Laude, *Pray Without Ceasing* 90). We might suppose that to invoke *Yah* is to reach threshold between the profane and sacred worlds.

²² Psalm 19:3 "There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard" (*NLT*). *Their* meaning the voice of the Heavens and firmament.

²³ Seen by the Christians as a spiritual and selfless form of love.

²⁴ It is not in the scope of this work to delve into this problem. Those interested in it could study James M. Robinson, and Richard Smith. *The Nag Hammadi Library* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), which contains many pertinent sayings such as: "Mary Magdalene. [...] loved her more than all the disciples, and used to kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples [...]. They said to him 'Why do you love her more than all of us?' The Savior answered and said to them, 'Why

do I not love you like her? When a blind man and one who sees are both together in darkness, they are no different from one another. When the light comes, then he who sees will see the light, and he who is blind will remain in darkness” (Robinson 105).

²⁵ “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (*KJV*, John 1:14).

²⁶ Genesis 3:21

²⁷ “The comments of Cohen indicate that he is well acquainted with the rabbinic tradition that the high priest was clad in white garments (*bigdei lavan*) when he entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement” (Wolfson 147).

²⁸ “Worship, understood kabbalistically, is an expression of poiesis, the art of form-making” (Wolfson 149).

²⁹ Also psalm no. 37 from the *Book of Mercy* speaks about the dead love that is only cured by the Name. “It is all around me, the darkness. You are my only shield. Your name is my only light. What love I have, your law is the source, this dead love that remembers only its name, yet the name is enough to open itself like a mouth, to call down the dew, and drink. O dead name that through your mercy speaks to the living name, mercy harkening to the will that is bent toward it, the will whose strength is its pledge to you – O name of love, draw down the blessing of completion on the man whom you have cut in half to know you.”

³⁰ When she did not want to be submissive in matters concerning copulation, Adam was forced to ask G-d to get rid of her. See for instance Howard Schwartz, and Caren Loebel-Fried. Introduction. *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004): Lxxvi.

³¹ *Midon* is “a strange composite word containing the feminine version of ‘my’ (*mia*) and the masculine noun for ‘lord’ (*domnus*)” (Kehew 5). It is a word by which the troubadours often addressed their ladies. This hints at the woman’s transcendental aspects.

³² “Lancelot reaches the castle on his adventure by going over a bridge as thin as a sword’s blade. It is a theme known to several traditions, especially the Iranian and Persian-Islamic tradition, which refers to both postmortem experiences (the other world) and to those of the initiatory path: the *Katha Upanishad* compares the ascent toward wisdom to walking on a razor’s edge” (Evola, *the Mystery of the Grail* 106). For the whole story see Chrétien de Troyes and his *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*.

³³ Jaufre Rudel and his pining for the Countess of Tripoli is well-known throughout troubadour studies. The *vida* of his life tells of the unhappy Rudel who, after having heard of the Countess’ kindness, fell in love with her. Subsequently, he dedicated many a fine poem and melody to her so as to go on a crusade and find this elusive goddess. However, he fell ill during the voyage and was cured only later when the Countess embraced him. “All at once [he] recovered his sense of sight and smell, and praised God for having sustained his life. ... Then he died in her arms” (Bonner 61).

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