

Metaphors of Identity Crisis in the Era of Celebrity in Canadian Poetry

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The fault of any error or omission is mine alone.

### A Note on the Text

Because the Modern Languages Association has yet to provide a guideline for documenting short poems in volumes that also contain prose poems, and because I want to remain consistent in documenting both forms of poetry, I have resorted to using only page numbers in my citations in the following chapters. Many academic journals that publish poetry use page numbers rather than line numbers. Very few of the poems quoted in this dissertation are much longer than a page, so the reader will not have difficulty finding the lines in question if only a page number is provided.

Contrary to the suggestion of the recent edition of the MLA's handbook, I have continued to use ellipses in square brackets to show where I have elided quotations (except at the beginning of lines, where square-bracketed changes to capitalization indicate a truncation; at the ends of lines, some truncations occur when the sense of the quotation's source can remain unaltered); this is partly to distinguish them from ellipses in the original, though such ellipses rarely occur. Square brackets also indicate changes to capitalization, and using square brackets around ellipses allows me to be consistent with my other editorial alterations to quotations. Other small, consistent differences from MLA format might also appear in the following chapters.

### Abstract

This dissertation is about representations of celebrity in poetry written in English by Canadian authors from around 1955 to 1980. These years span what I call the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry. During that era, four poets who experienced celebrity also wrote about it in their poetry: Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen, Michael Ondaatje, and Gwendolyn MacEwen. Although the degree of celebrity differed for each poet, they all wrote seriously about its consequences. For Layton, celebrity threatened his freedoms of expression and self-definition. Cohen was also concerned about freedom but implied that celebrity was slavery to which masochists submitted themselves. Ondaatje's interest was in both celebrities and legendary figures who tried to resist the public's judgement of their sexuality and race. MacEwen extended this criticism of celebrity by commenting implicitly on the general exclusion of women from celebrity in Canadian poetry.

In addition to analysis of poetry and historical argument, this dissertation claims that celebrity is literary, because the invasion of privacy that celebrities often experience is the enactment of a metaphor: *the private is public*. Celebrity depends on a system of media and various aspects of culture, but it also often involves variations on this metaphor, as in the identity formation of celebrities who create personas to help manage their publicity. Through these personas, they sometimes engage in performances of masculinity and religiosity that help to establish the exclusivity of celebrity. This exclusivity is an aspect of the category of "the literary," but celebrity is not only literary in that sense; it also involves metaphor, and writers are therefore some of its best critics.

## Résumé

Cette thèse se préoccupe des représentations de la célébrité dans la poésie canadienne anglaise d'environ 1955 à 1980—ce que j'appelle l'ère de la célébrité dans la poésie canadienne. Au cours de cette ère, quatre poètes ont également vécu et écrit à propos de la célébrité dans leurs poèmes: Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen, Michael Ondaatje, et Gwendolyn MacEwen. Bien que le degré de célébrité soit différent pour chaque poète, ils ont tous écrit à propos des conséquences sérieuses de celle-ci. Pour Layton, le coût de la célébrité était la liberté d'expression et d'auto-définition. Cohen était également préoccupé par la liberté mais insinuait que la célébrité était un esclavage auquel les masochistes se soumettaient. Ondaatje a représenté la légende afin de détourner le regard du public et de résister au jugement public de la sexualité et la race des vedettes. MacEwen a étendu cette critique en commentant implicitement sur l'exclusion générale des femmes de la célébrité dans la poésie canadienne.

En outre à l'analyse de la poésie et d'un argument historique, cette thèse affirme que la célébrité est littéraire parce que l'invasion de la vie privée que les vedettes peuvent vivre est elle-même une métaphore: *le privé est public*. La célébrité dépend d'un système de médias et divers aspects de la culture, mais la formation de l'identité des vedettes dépend aussi de la métaphore. Ils créent des personnages ou masques et s'engagent dans des performances de la masculinité et de la religiosité qui les aident à établir l'exclusivité de la célébrité. Cette exclusivité est un aspect de la catégorie du 'littéraire,' mais la célébrité n'est pas seulement littéraire dans ce sens; elle implique aussi la métaphore, et les écrivains sont, par conséquent, certains de ses meilleurs critiques.

## Introduction

I am ashamed to ask for your money. Not that you have not paid more for less. You have. You do. But I need it to keep my different lives apart. Otherwise I will be crushed when they join, and I will end my life in art, which a terror will not let me do.

—Leonard Cohen

The focus of this study is on poetic texts written by celebrities during what I call the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry—around 1955 to 1980. This era, though relatively brief, was in the course of Canadian literature in English a dramatic change. By the beginning of the 1960s, poetry was extraordinarily popular; favourable conditions in the publishing industry, recent convergences of other media, and Irving Layton's example and selective encouragement helped to make celebrity available to poets. Canadian poets experienced celebrity and wrote about it; eventually, however, as the interests of writers, the publishing industry, and the public changed, Canadian poetry lost prominence relative to novels. Except for Margaret Atwood, who tended not to write about celebrity in her poetry, the four poets who either exemplified celebrity during this era or had enough experience of it to be especially astute critics in their poetry were Layton, Leonard Cohen, Michael Ondaatje, and Gwendolyn MacEwen. They wrote about their status not only to promote themselves and sometimes each other but also to critique celebrity, which they almost always represented negatively—despite their successes and their status. The resulting works form an unofficial collection that can be understood as a historical commentary on the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry.

More than on history, however, the poets focussed in these works on being celebrities and on representing that experience. In the scholarship surveyed in the first

chapter and in the histories and representations of celebrity examined in chapters III to VI, celebrity results in an identity crisis. As celebrities attempt to manage the public's desire to know them, they become confused about the difference between their private selves and various personas—what Cohen calls his “different lives” in the epigraph, above, from *Death of a Lady's Man* (1978). The metaphors of identity crisis in the poetry in the following chapters almost always involve the risky interaction of these different lives, or selves, with the public. When the public causes those selves to fuse—or “join,” as Cohen writes above—celebrities experience what I call the metaphor of celebrity: *the private is public*. Because of this metaphor, celebrity is, among other things, literary. It is an experience that people familiar with metaphor can understand with insight.

Layton, Cohen, Ondaatje, and MacEwen indulged in celebrity but also critiqued two of its features that have been identified in recent studies: its pretence of religious significance and, in the field of poetry, its problematic masculinity. Layton and Cohen exaggerated these two features but not always as obvious parody; on occasion, they were simply grandstanding. One of my arguments, however, is that such grandstanding can initiate or be the catalyst for subsequent expressions and experiences of the metaphor of celebrity—a metaphor that makes the identities of these poets difficult to separate from pseudo-religious and parodically masculine personas. Because Ondaatje and MacEwen experienced celebrity of lesser degree than Layton and Cohen during the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, their critique is somewhat more objective and less implicated in religiosity and masculinity. Layton's critique was lacking because of his enthusiasm for the potential of celebrity in the field of poetry, but it was original; he was the first. Cohen, having experienced a higher degree of celebrity than the rest, defined its extreme

possibilities by representing celebrity as slavery; Ondaatje and MacEwen later responded to both men by representing themselves as celebrities who had ambiguous sexual orientations and were sometimes secular—or flawed as religious characters—whereas Layton and Cohen, as social critics, questioned masculinity much less obviously and maintained religious interests despite their generally secular attitudes.

Layton and Cohen were the first Canadian poets to promote themselves through television and film, though they differed in their tactics and successes. Layton had been known outside of the poetry community in the mid-1950s because of his presence on CBC-TV's *Fighting Words* program (and, later, in the editorial pages of newspapers, such as *The Globe and Mail*). If Layton had been younger—he was already in his mid-forties when he became a celebrity—he might have been considerably more successful in exploiting these media. Cohen was only in his twenties and, largely because of his youth, he became the focus of a film produced by the National Film Board that was initially planned to feature his mentor Layton, too, along with Earle Birney and Phyllis Gotlieb—writers who were similarly much older than Cohen. With a strategy of self-promotion that differed from Layton's, Cohen was reluctant to appear frequently in print but excelled in performances of his poetry at poetry readings, on film, and with musical accompaniment. When he determined that the limit of celebrity in Canadian poetry had been reached, and for other reasons (e.g. his interest in other forms of art), in the late 1960s he began a career in music and greatly increased the degree of his celebrity in general. His *Selected Poems* (1968) sold 200,000 copies in its first three months. Cohen's success would not have been possible if he had not learned from Layton's promotional activities and developed more timely strategies of his own.

As the 1960s elapsed, the publishing industry in Canada was rapidly changing—to the detriment of poetry’s popularity relative to novels. Initially, publishers seemed to have used their new funding (resulting from the recommendations of the Massey Commission in 1951) to print books by a wide range of authors. Poetry was cheap simply because there were so few pages in each book compared to the many pages in a novel. When some poets emerged as more successful than others, and when a sufficient market had developed for publishers to take bigger risks, many poets began writing novels and publishers accepted them. Although the total market increased, poetry became much less prominent than novels by the mid-1970s. By the end of the 1970s, no new poets who could be called celebrities were emerging in Canada. Poets who wanted to maintain their celebrity needed to become known as novelists, as Atwood and Ondaatje did, or musicians—though Cohen is the only Canadian author-turned-musician to have enjoyed such mainstream success. Cohen had the option of music when his novels did not satisfy his ambition; MacEwen’s two novels appeared too soon (the second, *King of Egypt, King of Dreams*, was published in 1971) to win her further recognition. She did not continue her attempts to write novels when novels were evidently more popular than poetry—a case, perhaps, of bad luck in the timing. The realization that poetry had lost its status was disappointing to many poets, Layton and MacEwen arguably among them.

Loosely book-ending the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry were Layton’s *A Red Carpet for the Sun* in 1959 and Cohen’s *Death of a Lady’s Man* in 1978; the first book can be understood as an introduction and the second as a conclusion to an era when poets exploited masculinity and religiosity to define their celebrity. Among other meanings, the “red carpet” in Layton’s title refers to what might be called the royal treatment that he

received upon being published by a commercial press for the first time. The title also boldly and rather vaingloriously implies that Layton is not only the “sun” but also the *son* of God, which he suggests more explicitly in his memoir *Waiting for the Messiah* (1985). Layton’s religious pretence was closely related to the problematic masculinity of his public persona, though Cohen seemed to announce the end of that masculinity—along with the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry—by calling his book *Death of a Lady’s Man* and symbolically retiring from celebrity, temporarily, into the practice of Buddhism. As the definitive figures in that era, Layton and Cohen became known, and notorious, for their masculinity and religious pretence. Although they were often parodying themselves, other poets articulated the critique more clearly and from new perspectives.

Ondaatje and MacEwen expressed their opinions about celebrity by writing ostensibly about others, not themselves, and thereby gained a critical distance from celebrity. They were celebrities of lesser degree than Layton and Cohen during the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, though Ondaatje later became more widely recognized than Layton. Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970) exposes the violence of traditional masculine roles and the bias toward heterosexual men in the culture of literary celebrity. His representation of Billy as a ghost shows him to be distancing himself from celebrity’s religious pretence by depicting secular paranormality rather than orthodox religiosity. He also clarifies the differences between celebrity and other types of recognition, such as legend. MacEwen’s interest was especially in myth, but she also exposed the heteronormativity of literary celebrity (at least in Canada) and the violence of masculinity in *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* (1982). Like Ondaatje’s Billy, her Lawrence is less dogmatically religious; he is, rather, more mystical—but also problematically

colonial. Nevertheless, her Lawrence's mysticism allows him to distance himself from customs and traditions that give religion and celebrity power. MacEwen's own experience of celebrity was similar to Ondaatje's until his success in the 1980s and 1990s, but she chose not to continue writing novels and for that reason, among others, her celebrity was considerably restricted. Another reason for the limit of her celebrity was that she was a woman in a field dominated by men; her critique of celebrity is especially personal because of this discrimination, yet it is especially objective because *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* appeared after the end of the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry.

My method of studying celebrity in the following six chapters is not solely historical; it develops from methods already common to the emerging field of literary celebrity studies. My research into literary celebrity is also cultural-material and media-based, as are many canonicity studies, but with an emphasis on the analysis of poetic texts. While acknowledging that what authors have written about a subject can be critically meaningful despite problems such as the biographical and intentional fallacies, I try to balance an examination of culture and media in their historical contexts with textual and biographical interpretations. By examining celebrity through metaphor, and by considering metaphor with unusual specificity and seriousness, my research also demonstrates that poetry written about celebrity can help to explain celebrity and give us—as critics, fans, and general spectators—new insights into its significance.

The first chapter begins with my argument about the metaphor of celebrity and what catalyses it: a sequence comprised of the would-be celebrity's grandstanding, his or her creation of various personas to negotiate with the public's demands, and the public's invasion of the celebrity's privacy. The chapter also surveys the relevant scholarship on

celebrity, particularly literary celebrity, to differentiate the terms *celebrity* and *fame* in the historical context of the twentieth century. The chapter then explains the connections between the metaphor of celebrity, the problematic masculinity that other scholars have noticed in poets who are celebrities, and the pretence of religious significance that has also been noticed in celebrity more generally. Ultimately, it surveys the scholarship on metaphor to explain in greater detail how the metaphor of celebrity works.

The second chapter establishes that celebrity was, indeed, a factor in the development of Canadian literature; celebrity characterized an era in Canadian poetry that began around 1955, peaked in the mid-to-late 1960s, and ended around 1980. As my statistical research into the topicality of these poets in some magazines and newspapers suggests, the celebrity experienced by most poets in Canada did not always reach beyond communities that were already interested in literature. Nevertheless, within those communities, celebrity was involved in the changing relationship between the popular literary forms of poetry and the novel. Poetry became less prominent relative to the novel for reasons such as the over-exposure of some poets and the opportunities that poetry created for novelists (who were often also poets) and their publishers. As an era, it was brief and coherent enough for representations of celebrity by Layton, Ondaatje, Cohen, and MacEwen to form a historical commentary about the experience of celebrity.

In chapter III, my argument is that Layton was Canada's first celebrity poet, one whose recognition was established through his notorious persona in the spectacular medium of television, in public discourse, and in poetry from the mid-1950s until the 1970s. Layton established the terms of reference (namely masculinity and religiosity) for the next generation of celebrities who were poets. He did so by adopting and adapting

Friedrich Nietzsche's prophetic character Zarathustra, who supplied some of the ideology and symbolism related to Layton's religious pretension. Although Layton was enthusiastic about the potential of celebrity, his initial ambition was for fame; celebrity distracted him, led to his typecasting, and partly ruined his potential—consequences that he anticipated remarkably early in his career. He eventually realized that the typecasting that celebrities sometimes experience tends to limit a celebrity's freedoms of expression and self-definition, yet he compulsively promoted himself until his celebrity faded as a result of his over-exposure and the changing values of the 1960s and 1970s.

Cohen, the subject of chapter IV, was Layton's protégé and began to exceed his mentor's celebrity around the time that *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen* introduced him to national audiences in 1965; by 1968, he was the unsurpassed celebrity poet in the history of Canadian literature, thanks to the international success of his music, which had a spin-off effect on his literary career until the early 1970s (and sporadically after the mid-1980s). Although Cohen won accolades for his early love poetry, he began writing increasingly negative poetry as his literary celebrity neared its peak. Cohen represented his extreme success by suggesting that celebrity is slavery—an interpretation supported by his fascination with martyrdom and his subtle, ironic critique of masculinity. Extending psychoanalytic and psychological theories of masochism and sadomasochism, this chapter argues that Cohen's metaphor of celebrity as slavery is a response to Layton's idealization of freedom, which was not sustainable under the circumstances of a high degree of celebrity. At the conclusion of this chapter, I show how Cohen turned from representations of sadomasochism and began to rethink masculinity and religiosity in the context of the historical fade of celebrity in Canadian poetry at the end of the 1970s.

One of the most insightful studies of Cohen's work continues to be Ondaatje's *Leonard Cohen* (1970), which is the first major sign of Ondaatje's interest in celebrity. Chapter V argues that Ondaatje first became widely known for *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970), though his literary celebrity was not comparable to that of Layton or Cohen during the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry. Ondaatje represents the Wild West's infamous gunslinger Billy the Kid as a celebrity and as a ghost. Focussing (as much as possible) on the uncanniness of Billy's ghostliness and invisibility, I show how various symbols in the book suggest that Billy wants to avoid the public's gaze and its normative influence on sexuality and masculinity. He wants to be a legend to avoid that influence of celebrity. By questioning heterosexual masculinity and offering a secular alternative to the comparatively traditional religiosity of Layton and Cohen, and by often choosing non-Canadian characters (in addition to Billy) to represent as celebrities, Ondaatje initiates a commentary on the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry that has greater critical distance than the parodies by Layton and Cohen.

Perhaps the least suspect and the most tragic of the four critiques of celebrity comes from MacEwen, who was not as widely known as Layton or Cohen, though her recognition in Canada was similar to that of Ondaatje prior to his success with *The English Patient* (1992). By the time she wrote *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*, the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry had passed, and women had tended not to experience a high degree of celebrity in poetry. *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* is an apt, sophisticated rejoinder to that exclusion. MacEwen's impersonation of Lawrence is her most significant attempt at grandstanding, which can be better understood in her context as *passing*, given the postcolonial strategies of that book. Following theories from postcolonial and gender

studies, I argue that MacEwen concludes her various observations about celebrity by attempting to pass as Lawrence so that she can expose the public's expectations about the sexuality of male celebrities. She also sympathizes with Lawrence by imagining his struggles with postcolonial guilt, masculinity, and his difficult quest for spiritual enlightenment. This chapter includes the most biographical and potentially controversial of my interpretations of the aforementioned poets, but they are justified in part by evidence that suggests MacEwen was thinking not only personally but also fatalistically about the consequences of celebrity for identity.

The conclusion of this study partly responds to this question: if the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry was relatively brief and somewhat restricted to the field of literature, why did Canadian poets represent it so negatively? To answer this question, I return to my previous arguments about masculinity and religiosity, identity formation, and the metaphor of celebrity. Because of the small number of poets who could be called celebrities in the Canadian context, and because of the brevity of their historical presence as celebrities, I can offer a fairly thorough historical account and interpretation of literary celebrity in Canada, and I include the perspectives of some of those who knew it best. In this study, I also offer new arguments, based on various metaphors of identity crisis, about how celebrities can be changed by their status.

## Chapter I

### The Metaphor of Celebrity

There are ways of going  
 physically mad, physically  
 mad when you perfect the mind  
 where you sacrifice yourself for the race  
 when you are the representative when you allow  
 yourself to be paraded in the cages  
 celebrity a razor in the body

—Michael Ondaatje

In these lines from “Heron Rex,” Michael Ondaatje shares some of his bleakly fatalistic thinking about celebrity. He represents it as “a razor” that gives the speaker the means of conducting a suicidal “sacrifice” of mind and body. Coming from his book *Rat Jelly* (1973), these lines imply that the “race” exalted by the sacrifice is also a “rat race” for celebrity—a competition for wealth, power, and prestige that reduces individuals to the status of rodents in “cages.” With other Canadian writers who experienced celebrity, he shares a willingness to criticize what he also calls “the twentieth century game of fame” (Ondaatje, *Coming* 136). He implies that the meaning of “fame” is not what it once was; in “the twentieth century,” it began to have the lesser status of a “game.” Especially after the World Wars, celebrity developed along with increasingly available mass-media, especially television, which even writers in Canada were able to use for their self-promotion. As some writers of fiction and poetry became celebrities and experienced a new, higher degree of public exposure, they had to cope with an identity crisis. Ondaatje suggests that celebrity—a razor—cuts through the public-private interface of “the body” into “the mind,” threatening to reveal the private self to the public (e.g. the media of

publicity and the audience, including readers). When exposed, the formerly private self can be redefined by the public. From the new perspective of that self, *the private is public*, which is a metaphor according to the formula “this *is* that” (Frye 11, his emphasis). Although celebrity depends on a complex system of media and various aspects of culture, it also often involves variations on this metaphor. It is literary, and writers are therefore some of its best “representative[s]” and its best critics.

Celebrity and “the literary” are similarly privileged categories, but my main argument about celebrity’s literary status is that celebrity cannot be adequately understood without consideration of its metaphoric, and thus literary, function. Most of the poets in this study wrote about themselves as if they were more widely recognized than they were in reality, or they wrote as if they were other celebrities of higher degree. I call this self-aggrandizement “grandstanding” to suggest that their self-promotion and identity formation depend on metaphor: “a process [...] by means of which one thing is made to *stand in* for another thing” (Punter 2, my emphasis). When Ondaatje displays a photograph of himself as a boy in a cowboy costume at the end of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970), to some extent he “stand[s] in” for Billy, whom he depicts as a man of celebrity greater than his own emerging reputation in 1970. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the verb *grandstanding* as “perform[ing] with an eye to the applause of the spectators in the grandstand,” but I also mean it as standing in for someone more grand—a bigger man or even a god (someone “larger than life”). My supplementary definition of grandstanding helps to explain the pretence of religious significance, the exaggerated masculinity, the narcissism, the delusions of grandeur, and even the likely disappointment that often seem to constitute the identities of celebrities, but it also helps

to explain their sometimes enthusiastic sense of potential identity formation as they experiment with different personas, different selves.<sup>1</sup>

The adoption of a public persona is in itself metaphoric; in doing so, a person in effect says, “I am someone else” (a syntax equivalent to Frye’s “this *is* that”). As I will explain in more detail midway through this chapter, a celebrity has multiple selves on a continuum between privacy and publicity: first, the real, private self (the person), who cannot be known through literature; second, various personas, including the private persona, which is a decoy offered to the audience to appease its demand for access to the celebrity’s private life; third, the public persona,<sup>2</sup> which is the obvious performer—the bigger man—whose allegiance is ultimately with the audience, a guarantor of celebrity. Grandstanding is especially the role of the public persona, but the private persona engages in it, too, whenever celebrities exaggerate their own status by referring to their private lives as evidence, real or imagined, of being widely recognized. When the public’s interest in the celebrity’s private life overcomes the decoy of the private persona, the metaphor of celebrity—the *private is public*—has a detrimental effect: the public asserts control over the celebrity all along the continuum of his or her identity.

The following chapters include many examples of poets engaging in grandstanding as they promote themselves and sometimes enact metaphors that risk making themselves too public, both as celebrities and as audiences of more widely

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1 The various uses of the personas examined in the following chapters suggest that a persona is an imagined self; it might also be understood as a performed self—a self auditioned and sometimes considered to be worth integrating into the behaviour of the self assumed to be real. The debate about the term *persona* itself is explained in *The Literary Persona* (1982) by Robert C. Elliott.

2 Rita Wright also uses the term *public persona* in relation to the private self, but her book *The Curse of Celebrity: How and Why Our Favourite Stars Go Off the Rails* (2006) is too sensational and not scholarly enough to warrant further consideration in this context.

recognized celebrities. These poets anticipate what I call the fusion of selves and the disappointment of later being deprived of the status that interests them, whether it is celebrity or more lasting types of recognition, such as fame, legend, and myth. The remainder of this chapter, however, will focus on the metaphor of celebrity as an experience of the fusion of selves that is often a consequence of grandstanding. It will also consider how that fusion can affect fans and celebrities acting as fans. It will define celebrity as an exceptional type of recognition, different from fame, that poses great risks and yet offers exclusive benefits to celebrities. It will suggest, too, that authors have no advantage over other types of celebrities in coping with the fusion of selves—except the ability to critique celebrity by perceiving and expressing its psychological effects and its ironies. The chapter will conclude by showing how the metaphor of celebrity overrides self-promotional performances of masculinity and religiosity that might otherwise empower celebrities to define themselves in contrast with the public.

Because the metaphor of celebrity essentially involves *the public* and *the private*, these terms need further consideration. They are conceptual but real in their effects on individuals and society. Michael Warner, in *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), shows that feminist scholars have tended to decry the effects of accepting the public as a singular, dominant category; the public-private dichotomy was historically gendered to exclude women from the public sphere and to restrict their influence to the comparative privacy, and marginality, of the domestic sphere (32-3). Warner argues that the public is “an imaginary convergence point” (55) in society, though in reality that “point” is not singular; it is composed of many groups of people who are not always united. He claims, however, that we should recognize the importance of imagining the public: “People do

not always distinguish even between *the* public and *a* public, though in certain contexts the difference can matter a great deal. *The* public [...] is thought to include everyone within the field in question” (Warner, *Publics* 65, his emphasis). Warner further argues that “[w]hen we understand images and texts as public, we do not gesture to a statistically measurable series of others. We make a necessarily imaginary reference to the public as opposed to other individuals” (*Publics* 165). Poets who create such “images and texts” for their promotion to celebrity are imagining the public, which does not exist only as it is represented by such poets (as in the following chapters)—as a homogeneously negative social entity interested in using the media to affirm cultural ideals as norms. Nevertheless, that public, imagined as “the,” is also expected to enforce certain “norms” and “deep and unwritten rules” (Warner, *Publics* 25) that can impinge upon privacy.

The private self is imagined, too, and its relationship with the public is a concern for celebrities. The private self might not exist before social relationships are formed (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 3), and it might simply not even exist—but an individual has a sense of self, regardless, that affects motivation, cognition, and quality of life. The poets in the following chapters imagine the private self as an ideal worth guarding from the public. Not long after the peak of his celebrity in the late 1960s, Leonard Cohen wrote: “This is a threat / Do you know what a threat is / I have no private life” (*Energy* 62). Despite the potential critical or philosophical objections to the private self as a model of subjectivity, celebrities often perform as if they need recourse to such an ideal because of the “threat,” experienced as the metaphor of celebrity, of the public’s interest in them.

Understanding metaphor can help us to understand celebrities as they negotiate through their personas with the public. In *Irving Layton* (1969), Eli Mandel states that

metaphor “is not only identity, but analogy; not only the fusion of opposites, but particularization” (26). In *The Rule of Metaphor* (1975), Paul Ricoeur makes a similar statement, that metaphor is “a trope of resemblance” (1) and that “resemblance itself must be understood as a tension between identity and difference” (4). The common term for Ricoeur and Mandel is “identity.” Canadian poets represent celebrity negatively—as in the epigraph from Ondaatje—partly because the celebrity has a potentially harmful effect on identity: “the fusion of opposites” such as a celebrity’s private and public selves. In that context, grandstanding is a risk, entailed when celebrities willingly expose some of their private lives to the public, that has a worse than expected consequence: the “fusion” of the private and the public selves that is effectively synonymous with the identity crisis elsewhere called “identity confusion” (Rojek 11). When this fusion occurs, the celebrity can no longer rely on the decoy that prevented the audience from coming too close. Grandstanding is a performance of metaphor as “analogy” that retains “difference” from other celebrities, whereas the fusion of selves is a metaphor as transformation resulting in shared “identity” with the audience.<sup>3</sup> These two metaphors underlie the metaphor of celebrity. Neither of these metaphors is intrinsically good or bad; however, the poets in the following chapters represent an identity crisis—the fusion of selves—that they express, consciously or not, as the metaphor of celebrity.

My intention is not to complicate celebrity unnecessarily with my argument about

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3 A celebrity does not have to be the same as the audience to share an identity with it. Ricoeur uses the terms *identity* and *sameness* in *Oneself as Another* (1992) and suggests that they are not interchangeable. He claims that identity or “[s]elfhood [...] is not sameness” (116). Ricoeur means, I think, to account for the “*permanence in time*” (116, his emphasis) or “*uninterrupted continuity*” (117, his emphasis) of identity. His example: an acorn that grows into an oak tree is the same organism without being the same (size, for example, or shape) in one year as in another. A celebrity’s fusion of selves is not a problem of sameness but of identity or selfhood.

metaphor. The aforementioned metaphoric processes and effects—grandstanding and the fusion of selves—might seem to describe a *conceit*; however, my intention is not to create metaphoricity but to explain what is already metaphoric. Indeed, “[a]ny statement concerning anything whatsoever that goes on, metaphor included, will have been produced *not without* metaphor” (Derrida 50, his emphasis). More than simply exaggerating the metaphoricity of language, however, my argument about grandstanding accounts for the literariness of identity formation and self-promotion as both begin to go wrong for celebrities, and it joins the three main parts of my argument about celebrity: that it involves metaphor, that it is problematically masculine (especially for poets, but for other writers, too), and that it also involves a pretence of religious significance. My argument about the metaphor of celebrity explains conditions of identity that the poets in the following chapters variously imagined and experienced. Their knowledge of metaphor helps them to question both celebrity in general and their own indulgence in it.

Of course, these poets have something to gain—such as further recognition—in critique. Their self-reflection and self-reflexivity tend to be involved in publicity as they repeat their own names and call attention to themselves, as Irving Layton and Cohen sometimes did in their work. Even when not using their own names, as when Ondaatje engaged in grandstanding as Billy the Kid, or when Gwendolyn MacEwen did the same with Lawrence of Arabia, these poets were associating themselves with celebrities of higher degree (sometimes more widely recognized, imaginary or symbolic versions of themselves), partly for self-promotion. They cannot be altogether trusted as critics, but they can question their own activities with the benefit of experience and additional insight assuming that they understand metaphor, which underlies some of their strategies of self-

promotion and some of the consequences of their success.

They can—and did—question the power of celebrity. At least for twentieth-century poets, that power seems to derive not only from capitalist media and charisma but also from the problematic masculinity (Glass 18; Jaffe 165) of literary celebrity and what I argue is the closely associated pretence of religious significance (Frow 201, 204; Turner 6-7) of celebrity in general. Literary celebrities often adopt and sometimes criticize such religious pretension and masculinity when promoting themselves through grandstanding. Their sometimes insufficient criticism was supplemented by feminist challenges to men's power during a coincidental movement toward a more secular society after the World Wars. The histories of twentieth-century feminism and secularism are not my focus but are concurrent with what I call the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, defined as approximately 1955 to 1980 and assessed in the next chapter.<sup>4</sup> Poets who were celebrities then, such as Layton and Cohen, could not have missed the irony of having a popular status that partly depended on masculinity and religious pretension during a time of increasing opposition to those same features of their celebrity.

Layton and Cohen questioned their own status by elevating their masculinity and religiosity to parodic heights while writing about each other and themselves (and, occasionally, other celebrities); in contrast, Ondaatje and Gwendolyn MacEwen commented on their lesser celebrity during that era: they wrote about themselves as if they were ambiguously non-heterosexual and unconventionally spiritual historical celebrities who were more widely known than any Canadian poet. Ondaatje's Billy the

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4 Any reader needing immediate reassurance that there was, indeed, an era of celebrity in Canadian poetry should skip to chapter II now, read about what caused it and what its scope was, and return here later.

Kid and MacEwen's *Lawrence of Arabia* were important developments, as metaphors of their authors, in the critique of celebrity that Layton and Cohen had started. Ondaatje and MacEwen approached their characters as if they were fans. As members of the public, and because the historical Billy Bonney and T.E. Lawrence were dead and beyond being harmed by invasions of their privacy, Ondaatje and MacEwen were willing to function as *the public* that could fuse with *the private* selves of Bonney and Lawrence; that fusion would help them connect with the subjects of their writing. It would also expose and promote them, through metaphor, as celebrities. They were thereby risking serious changes to their identities that can be understood more fully through metaphor. Their poetry suggests that they were wondering how their identities would be affected by the intensifying public demands on their private lives.<sup>5</sup>

A certain narcissism is involved in such wondering, and poets who engage in grandstanding because of their egotism might deserve the derogatory connotation of the term; however, it is not merely self-promotional. It can express criticism motivated by the unlikelihood of ever becoming truly grand. The example of Ondaatje writing about himself as if he were Billy the Kid calls attention to their similarities, but they are

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5 Already in this chapter I have mentioned "writ[ing] from experience" and the "private lives" of poets, and I have suggested that the aforementioned poets are critical of celebrity, including their own. In the following chapters I constantly try to answer some of what Elliott, in *The Literary Persona*, calls "the most difficult questions" raised by "[a]mbiguously self-referential works" (49). Explaining that self-referentiality is always complicated by the question of sincerity, Elliott offers many examples that demonstrate why readers can never presume to know the experience of an author. My subsequent references to experience will be, I hope, nuanced enough that they will not seem flawed by overly biographical interpretation. Sincerity is often an author's attempt "to make the public and the private man coincide" (Elliott 42); however, the public (e.g. the reader) can make the same attempt. The poets in the following chapters sometimes attempt to safeguard their privacy by being insincere. Irony is everywhere. Nevertheless, their biographical and historical contexts suggest that they are also writing—however metaphorically—about what they experienced, witnessed in others, or imagined. By writing poetically, they elicit the reader's sympathy and thereby compensate for the reality lost to strictly empirical and rational epistemologies, which can never sufficiently explain either life or art.

obviously not the same, regardless of whether readers or Ondaatje himself can believe that he *is* Billy the Kid. Their important difference in the context of this chapter is not their separation in time and space or their incommensurable ethnic heritage; it is that one of them was more widely known than the other. This difference suggests that the poet engaged in grandstanding is living vicariously or feels inferior to the celebrity of higher degree. Louis Dudek argued that Layton was “[a]s a celebrity [...] a purely typical Canadian product, a blow-up of our national inferiority complex” (“Layton” 92), and Desmond Pacey wrote in his review of Layton’s *The Swinging Flesh* (1961) that “[Layton’s] arrogance is so arrogant that it becomes a form of humility [...] as if he were saying, ‘You know that I know that I couldn’t possibly be as good as I pretend to be’” (119). The awareness of difference helps some celebrities to retain a critical faculty and know themselves well enough to avoid being redefined through the fusion of selves.

MacEwen’s grandstanding is special partly because her celebrity was of lesser degree than that of Layton and Cohen (and obviously the historical Lawrence) during the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry. Her grandstanding raises the question, “Why is she *not* a celebrity of higher degree?” She could have chosen any number of other personas (Margaret Atwood chose the comparatively obscure Susanna Moodie) but selected one of the most widely recognized men of the twentieth century. With that decision alone, she draws attention to the conspicuous scarcity, which other critics have noticed (Atwood xxix; Hammill 21; Jaffe 165), of female poets in the cliques established by men during that era. She is critical of the differing degrees of celebrity that were available to male and female poets, and her grandstanding reveals that difference.<sup>6</sup>

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6 She and Ondaatje, having chosen non-Canadian celebrities as their personas, also indirectly confirm

The poets considered in the following chapters identify with celebrities of more widespread recognition (sometimes each other) and both criticize and idolize them to some extent, though they might be disappointed or relieved not to become them. Ondaatje's Billy and MacEwen's Lawrence are victims of their celebrity. MacEwen, Ondaatje, Cohen, and Layton—all poets who experienced some degree of celebrity—usually represent celebrity as an experience of unwanted scrutiny and restriction on freedoms of expression, self-definition, movement, and sexual behaviour. The celebrities they write about are alienated, trapped, broken-down, assaulted, and disillusioned, largely because they have experienced the worst of the metaphor of celebrity; they are not appealing in the sense that someone might want to be one of them. Calling them “grand” is ironic; their religious pretension and the advantages of their masculinity do little to make them magnificent, imposing, or powerful.

The irony of grandstanding for Canadian poets—which Mordecai Richler once indirectly described through a character in *The Incomparable Atuk* (1963) who claims to be “world-famous [...] all over Canada” (40)—reflects some of the other ironies of literary celebrity that some scholars have begun to notice. In recent studies, however, literary celebrity has not been adequately defined except as a biographical category for authors who are also celebrities, and scholars have not yet agreed on a general definition of celebrity (Turner 4) or how it could ever be specifically literary. In *Literary Celebrity*

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Dudek's criticism about Layton magnifying “our national inferiority complex.” Indeed, their choice of non-Canadians raises another question: “Why are Canadians not good enough?” Being “good enough,” of course, is irrelevant when cultural and economic powers mitigate against the recognition of some people—even nations—and not others. Lorraine York, in *Literary Celebrity in Canada* (2007), “casts doubt upon the notion of a specifically Canadian approach” (3) to celebrity, but the grandstanding of these poets reveals that nationality is an aspect of their criticism of celebrity, which they promote—but skeptically, to say the least—according to models adapted from other countries.

in *Canada* (2007), Lorraine York refers to “the ideological ironies of the very concept of literary celebrity” (13) and concludes that it remains “a contradiction in terms” (170). Celebrity in general is used for the hawking of everything from kitsch to glitz and things much more serious; it helps to motivate a fan’s desire for information about the private lives of those relative few that embody it. Literary celebrities usually seem unprepared, however, to make the sacrifice of privacy that Ondaatje alludes to in the epigraph above; so do many actors, but their work is somewhat more public. Although culture, materials, and economy enable the production of a text and its transfer into the public realm, that text is usually written in private by the author—though collaboration and editing can also involve other people. Glamour and charismatic facilitation of the promotion of the text are not often among the author’s social graces; promotion tends to be scorned as a detriment to art. Because of these “contradiction[s],” York argues that “we need a theory of literary celebrity that does not need to divide the celebrity author into the high-culture personality artist and the crass-minded potboiling best-seller hack” (21). We might then understand more accurately the impression of the discrepancy between the private affair of writing something literary and the text’s public role in helping to enable celebrity.<sup>7</sup> York and other scholars, such as Joe Moran in *Star Authors* (2000), have attempted to deconstruct these “ironies” and contradictions.

The contradiction of most interest to me here is the separation between the literary-private and the celebrity-public. By arguing that the private and public can fuse, I accept the mingling of supposedly high (literary) and low (popular) cultures and agree

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<sup>7</sup> Warner, in *Publics and Counterpublics*, claims that the circulation of texts is a necessary aspect of making publics: “Anything that addresses a public is meant to undergo circulation. This helps us to understand why print, and the organization of markets for print, were historically so central in the development of the public sphere” (91).

with York and Moran—but my argument also diverges from theirs. The central irony of literary celebrity, being not only literary but specifically metaphoric (*the private is public*), is one that literary celebrities are especially capable of expressing because writing metaphors is often important to what they do. They can explain some of these contradictions with an authority that a star baseball player is not likely to have.

The ideological debate about literary celebrity might be usefully simplified if we better understood how celebrity and “the literary” are similarly exclusive. Celebrity is “[t]he condition of being much extolled or talked about” but not in the “good sense” of *fame* (*OED*). Resisting that pejorative connotation, Moran attempts “to challenge the way the emergence of literary celebrity is most commonly explained” (1), which is that the “commercial mass media” (1) that supports the system of celebrity have conspired to debase the literary. His opinion seems to be not that celebrity is especially bad but that the literary has never been especially good. Celebrity is as problematically exclusive as the literary. Distinguished by “the characteristics of that kind of written composition which has value on account of its qualities of form” (*OED*), the literary is associated in the *OED* with the artistic refinement, elegance, and taste of “polite learning.” It is exclusive in the same way that celebrity can make a person known as “the.”

Scholars such as Moran and York have argued that such elite assumptions about exclusivity, taste, and quality codified in many texts besides the *OED* must be tested. Under analysis, however, literary celebrity does not become any simpler. It is revealed as a category produced and negotiated by media, class, individuality, creativity, sexuality, audience, commerce, nationality, and many other aspects of culture. It is so complicated that it sometimes elicits “ambivalence” (Moran 7) and “uneas[e]” (York 4) not only in

scholars but also in authors who embody celebrity, invest in it, question it, and make it literary (in another way) through representations in their texts. York also shows, however, that literary celebrities represent their status with persistent negativity (42). One of this dissertation's main questions, which I will return to especially in the concluding chapter, is why literary celebrities might advance such a comparatively negative opinion when they have the privilege of enjoying such exclusivity.

One answer is that authors who become celebrities are actually hoping and working for a type of recognition that retains an elite status (such as legend, which is considered in chapter V, or fame, which is considered in the next few pages of this chapter and especially in chapter III). Most people, including many scholars, use the terms *fame* and *celebrity* interchangeably. Although they are almost synonymous in the *OED*, their difference is significant. Understanding the debate about literary celebrity, therefore, requires considerably more attention to the distinctions between celebrity and fame.

Fame, for example, is “[r]eputation derived from great achievements” (*OED*), whereas celebrity need not derive from any achievement whatsoever. In the widely quoted early study *The Image* (1961), Daniel J. Boorstin insists that “[t]he celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness” (57). Boorstin’s admitted tautology is meant to suggest that the popular media can produce celebrities simply by reproducing images of people or characters: “the most familiar is the most familiar” (61). Perhaps the best proof that celebrities are not necessarily known for their “great achievements” is that their names are “worth more than [their] services. For an endorsement the use of a name is frequently all that is wanted” (Boorstin 220). Granted, the possibility exists that celebrity can be the product of someone’s “apprenticeship” and other “work” (York 40),

but celebrity is not made by such work alone—and sometimes not at all. An individual's deeds are an optional aspect of celebrity, which depends first and foremost on the popular media and, for authors, a related network of mentors, cliques, agents, editors, publishers, marketers, granting agencies, patrons and their awards, readers, and academics. Although famous people are also involved in this system, the critical acclaim for what they have done will not soon be withdrawn—though they sometimes have no way of knowing, initially, whether they are celebrities or famous.

The duration of widespread recognition is another important difference, though not all critics bother with it, between fame and celebrity. Boorstin argues that “[celebrities] can be produced and displaced in rapid succession” (74). Celebrity is quick to come and quick to go. The etymological evidence for this claim is the Latin word *celere*, which is associated with the English *celerity*, meaning “swiftness,” and *celebrity* (Rojek 9). York is the only critic whom I recall to have argued explicitly that duration is “slightly beside the point” (26) and that the “effects” (26) of fame or celebrity are more important—but what if the effects depend on the duration? Some authors who seek fame get celebrity instead. Some of them never know the difference, but some of them have to deal with disappointment after the comparatively intense experience of celebrity. What Andy Warhol calls “fifteen minutes of fame” is celebrity. Time is relative in that distinction, of course, and in *What Price Fame?* (2000) Tyler Cowen argues that “Warhol did not recognize that short-term celebrity and long-run fame are largely complements rather than substitutes” (77). I agree; fame complements celebrity as an enticement for the ambitious, and celebrity complements fame by making spectacles of those who fail to accomplish a feat worth remembering after their deaths.

In *The Frenzy of Renown* (1986), Leo Braudy refers to “our current urge to distinguish fame from celebrity” (281). Cowen refers to critics who feel such an urge as “gatekeeper critics” (77) who attempt to reserve fame for those who presumably deserve to be remembered for a deed or something made. These are the critics who establish canons in literature and other fields. My own work is not intended to help canonize or sustain the canonicity of celebrities who are authors. Part of my argument, instead, is that having no clear definition helps celebrity to do its work of quickly raising and suddenly letting fall its stars according to whatever standards of topicality are in fashion; we would do better if we insisted on being more specific. Many canonized writers never were celebrities and might have been selected for many reasons besides their work, but maintaining and surviving celebrity long enough to be selected by “gatekeeper critics” might, in itself, be an achievement (of endurance) worthy of fame.

Partly because celebrity can become fame in rare cases, some critics argue that the reverse is happening or has happened. Implying that, over time, fame has been becoming celebrity, Boorstin argues that “[w]e come closer and closer to degrading all fame into notoriety” (48), which he associates with celebrity as the *OED* does. If the meaning of fame has indeed changed, then we have an explanation for the confusion of the terms now. Boorstin would probably agree with me that preserving the distinctions between the terms is valuable, and considering them in different historical contexts can help with that preservation. Although some critics have suggested that even eighteenth-century authors such as Samuel Johnson, Laurence Sterne, and Frances Burney had careers that were affected by celebrity (English and Frow 40), Boorstin suggests that the terminological change began in the nineteenth century as the popular media developed in technical

sophistication, from the inventions of dry-plate photography in 1873 and the phonograph in 1877, through Thomas Edison's refinement of radio leading to his patent in 1891, to widespread radio broadcasts in the 1920s and the establishment of commercial television by 1941 (13). Tom Mole, in *Byron's Romantic Celebrity* (2007), demonstrates that celebrity is as old as the first inexpensive newspapers and cheap books: "[By around 1850] [c]elebrity was no longer something you had, but something you were. By the end of the Romantic period, one could meaningfully speak of a celebrity or a star [a term first recorded in the *OED* in 1824] as a special kind of person with a distinct kind of public profile" (xii). Mole also states that "[i]t was also in the Romantic period that celebrity first came to be understood as a distinctively inferior variety of fame" (xii).

When Boorstin first published *The Image* in 1961, he was already arguing—perhaps too insistently—that the distinction Mole observes was on the verge of collapse; the popular media of the twentieth century were to blame. Despite convincing evidence from Mole and York that celebrity as we know it originated in the nineteenth century, “overwhelmingly the standard view” (Turner 10) is that celebrity fits most snugly in the twentieth century. York reasonably cautions other critics about thinking that “the costs of sudden fame [...] increase the closer one approaches the present historical moment” (24), but the “standard view” gains credibility because of questions about the state of meaning itself in the twentieth century. If the cultural phenomenon of celebrity can be measured in part by the replication of names, voices, and images, then the convergence of media made possible by cinema and television greatly increased the potential scope of celebrity. “There had been nothing to compare with [television]” (Cashmore 259), writes Ellis Cashmore in *Celebrity / Culture* (2006). Not until the internet became available did the

mass multi-media gain a new dimension of equal significance.

In *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981, trans. 1994), Jean Baudrillard calls the era beginning between the World Wars “the age of simulation” (43) because cinema and television produced such an excess of information (80) that “the real” was “lost” (47). In that context of alienation and modernity, Baudrillard seemingly responds to Marshall McLuhan’s aphorism about the medium being the message by suggesting that “[t]he medium itself is no longer identifiable as such” (30). Baudrillard did not mean that we could no longer distinguish a television from a newspaper but that we were confused, more than ever, about to what extent the “medium” could be “real.” Media are not exactly real; they represent reality, and the newly accelerated proliferation of media led to what Baudrillard calls “the vertigo of interpretation” (16). The “degrading” of fame into celebrity is an example of such “vertigo,” especially because *fame* historically referred to achievements that were real. In my opinion, celebrity is still far less real than fame, largely because celebrity seldom refers to anything but its own image; it tends to produce an excess of itself. After Mole asks what “cultural problems” (xiv) celebrity might solve, he answers that celebrity has been not solving but “palliat[ing]” “information overload and alienation caused by celebrity culture” (155). This tautology (celebrity “palliat[ing]” the result of celebrity) and the one proposed by Boorstin (being “known for [...] well-knownness”) suggest that celebrity is related to the proliferation of meaningless information, which is one way to define tautology.<sup>8</sup> The “information overload” unquestionably became more intense during and after the World Wars; it did not

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<sup>8</sup> In *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967, trans. 1994), Guy Debord claims, similarly, that “[t]he spectacle is essentially tautological, for the simple reason that its means and its ends are identical” (15).

necessarily change celebrity in kind, but it certainly changed it in degree.

Who would notice such a change, and who would consider it to be negative?

Besides scholars, one answer is certainly authors who are celebrities. Writers are purveyors of information and meaning. Although information is abundant, its abundance has contributed to a crisis of meaning. Authors in cultures of celebrity might perceive themselves to be threatened by that culture, and those who are celebrities are likely to be affected more directly. More than other types of celebrities (such as musicians, politicians, and athletes—though there are many exceptions among them), authors are generally not averse to self-reflection. They often write about what they know through experience, observation, or study. In doing so, literary celebrities—at least in Canada—have created a stereotype of celebrity as a “destroyer” (York 42) that the poets in the following chapters almost constantly affirm when celebrity is their topic.

Despite the commercial success of many authors—Mazo de la Roche sold more than 11 million books from her *Jalna* series in her lifetime (York 64); John Grisham sold 60 million books in the 1990s (“Grisham” par. 1-2, 4); J.K. Rowling is a billionaire because of her *Harry Potter* series and has more money than the Queen of England (English and Frow 41)—many of them persist in slandering the same cultural phenomenon that could make them rich or richer. Moran argues that “literary celebrities cannot simply be reduced to their exchange value—they are complex cultural signifiers who are repositories for all kinds of meanings, the most significant of which is perhaps the nostalgia for some kind of transcendent, anti-economic, creative element in a secular, debased, commercialized culture” (9). York has criticized Boorstin for indulging in the nostalgia that Moran mentions (8). Maybe unintentionally, Moran’s Boorstinian emphasis

here is on “signifiers,” “meanings,” and “significan[ce]”—aspects of language and knowledge that are seriously complicated by popular media in the twentieth century and the foreseeable twenty-first century future. Moran rather vividly argues that “the contemporary star system, far from being a closed shop populated by mutual log-rollers and backscratchers and number-crunching accountants, is an evolving organism which is not immune to intense self-scrutiny and soul-searching about its more malign aspects” (35). Literary celebrities tend to represent celebrity negatively because they understand, experientially, the problems that affect what they do.

Celebrity is a problem of special importance to authors as people, but the general trend has been to study its system; one reason for this trend is that names and images can promote celebrity regardless of what celebrities actually do (as Boorstin argues in the aforementioned quotation about “services” and “the use of a name”). Another reason is that scholars are supposedly cautious about allowing their work to reinforce uncritically the elitism of celebrity. Most recent studies of celebrity—such as P. David Marshall’s *Celebrity and Power* (1997), Graeme Turner’s *Understanding Celebrity* (2004), and Aaron Jaffe’s *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005)—expose the relations of power, commerce, and media that construct celebrity, countering the popular but tenuous assumption that it is an indication of artistic excellence, personal greatness, or legitimate cultural leadership. Jaffe, in particular, argues throughout his book that authors are complicit in promoting that assumption, though my research on Canadian poets suggests otherwise, while also corroborating Jaffe’s argument about cliques maintaining the exclusivity of celebrity (e.g. by restricting the number of literary celebrities).

Some recent studies, such as Loren Glass’s *Authors Inc.* (2004) and those of

Moran and York, have also begun to examine individual experiences of literary celebrity in particular. Examining these individual experiences has been a tentative and self-reflective process in some cases; the fear of inadvertently contributing to *auteurism* or indulging in the biographical fallacy is evident and understandable. Jaffe and Glass are especially astute in recognizing that many scholars have done very little to avoid those problems. In his work on Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and other modernist writers who implicitly demanded to be explained by suitably erudite members of academia, Jaffe argues that “academic professionals supplied modernist discourse with a secure place in emerging institutions—a ‘market shelter’ in universities, specialized academic presses, and high culture canons” (20). Glass quotes Seán Burke from *The Death and Return of the Author* (1998): “the most flagrant abuses of critical *auteurism* in recent times [...] [can be witnessed in] the secondary literature on [Roland] Barthes, [Michel] Foucault, and [Jacques] Derrida, which is for the most part given over to scrupulously faithful and almost timorous reconstitutions of their thought” (qtd. in Glass 5). Despite the problem of worshipping such authors, Glass elaborates that “the personal biography of the literary artist [...] remains significant for the exclusive social world [...] in which the work of art circulates” (6). Critics need to understand the “personal” if they intend to understand the “exclusive.” Glass even cautiously chooses to examine autobiography to help explain the relationship between the public and the private, as I do in chapters III to VI.

One reason to be cautious is that a celebrity’s private self and the public realm are mediated by various personas. A persona is “[a]n assumed character or role, *esp.* one adopted by an author in his or her writing, or by a performer” and is also “[t]he aspect of a person’s character that is displayed to or perceived by others” (*OED*); in other words, it

is the person's public self, though it can include aspects of his or her otherwise private self. There is no private self that can be known through literature or other arts because private information, once divulged, becomes public. That information serves what I define as *the private persona*, which mediates between the real but publicly unknowable private self and the public. *The public persona* is the self obviously performed for an audience. The public persona of a celebrity "plays up" what the *OED* calls the "public character" of celebrity. Initially, the public persona is an agent of the private self. The public persona later becomes a double agent and acts in the interests of the public (in chapter V, this appears as Pat Garrett's betrayal of Billy the Kid); usually, celebrities can act in their own interests only if they can still distinguish the private self from the personas that have been created for both protection and promotion.

Ultimately, this indistinguishability serves the fans, because fans want a personal connection with celebrities rather than the "public character" defined by the *OED*. They want what Richard Dyer calls, in *Stars* (1979), the "unmediated personality" (17) that seems to be revealed in close-ups in films. Following Dyer's *Heavenly Bodies* (1986), Moran explains that "the audience's relation with the star is a compulsive search for the 'real'—an attempt to distinguish between the 'authentic' and the 'superficial' in the star's personality" (62). Given what little bearing the "real" usually has on celebrity, Moran also states that "any attempt to distinguish between the 'public' author and the 'private' self [is] a deeply problematic exercise" (23).<sup>9</sup> Occasionally, a celebrity seems to succeed.

"'Everybody wants to be Cary Grant,' said Cary Grant. 'Even I want to be Cary Grant'"

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9 Nevertheless, in the following chapters I am attentive to the signs of different personas operating in poems. I admit that this is "problematic" to the extent that it only helps me to refine our understanding of how inaccessible authors are in their texts; however, knowing the difference between the personas help us to notice the author's ways of thinking about himself or herself in relation to the audience.

(Cowen 4). His irony in recognizing the difference probably means that he was coping well enough with his celebrity. Not everyone is so lucky.

According to Chris Rojek in *Celebrity* (2001), the crisis occurs because celebrity provokes “identity confusion” caused by the public’s “colonization” (11) or what might be called “an invasive reconfiguration” (Latham 110) of the private self. This “confusion” is, in other words, the fusion of selves in the metaphor of celebrity: *the private is public*. The private self is associated in the *OED* with one’s “being” rather than one’s acting; this association leads me to think that the “reconfiguration” calls one’s authentic being into question. Celebrities who are aware of this risk and confident in their identities might be able to use the destabilization to their advantage, widening their range of self-expression based on the assumption that selfhood is multiple (as Cohen is shown to do in chapter IV). Conversely, typecast celebrities (or those paralysed by the range of options available for the performance of the self) might begin to judge their private selves based on the narrowly defined personas by which they are recognized (a possibility considered especially in Layton’s case in chapter III). The fusion of selves is the breakdown of the coping mechanism, the private persona, in someone dealing with celebrity.

My choice of *fusion* as a term implies *meltdown*; it therefore also implies psychological crisis and the typecasting that can limit celebrities to the narrow range of expression expected by the public. As their audiences demand to come closer, and the more success depends on the revelation of biography, the closer the personas must come to the private life—especially if celebrities resort to looking for knowledge of themselves in the audience that seems to know them, as if they were saying, “Tell me who I am because I don’t know.” The French actor Jean Gabin once said, “People say [...] I’m the

same in real life as I am in my movies, and that's why they like me'" (qtd. in Boorstin 159); A.D. Hope wrote of Layton that "[n]o poet I have met is so like his books" (102). Although the biographical fallacy is not usually considered to be the author's problem, it can harmfully affect how celebrities understand themselves. The "confusion" of their identities, when it becomes fusion in the metaphor of celebrity, is the ultimate transfer of power to the public that defines them.

Depending on the point of view, the metaphor of celebrity can be seen as either the destruction or the recuperation of the individual. The term *individual* means, in part, that the person cannot be divided; this definition suggests that a person's sense of identity can be coherent, unitary, and consistent. Initially, an author's use of a persona seems to confirm postmodern theories of multiple selfhood, e.g. that the self has been "dissol[ved] and dispers[ed]" (Westley 7), creating multiple selves, none of which is more authentic than the other. In contrast, the fusion of selves eliminates multiplicity and forms a new subject; however, that subject's individuality is compromised by a disappointing lack of autonomy. The *OED* defines *individualism* as "a mode of life in which the individual pursues his own ends or follows out his own ideas; free and independent individual action or thought; egoism." The metaphor of celebrity creates a single subject but not an individual in the aforementioned sense. Moran suggests that

[t]here is a danger, then, that the anti-individualizing effects of the literary marketplace—the creation of the author as a 'personality' by a vast network of cultural and economic practices—will actually threaten the whole notion of authorship as an individualistic activity, taking away agency from the author at the same time as it apparently celebrates that

author's autonomy as a 'star author.' (Moran 61)

In other words, individuality and authorship are compromised by literary celebrity, which—as a contrivance of various “cultural and economic practices”—is a reason for Foucault's relegation of the author to a merely functional status in the production of texts. Following Braudy and Dwight Macdonald, Moran explains that, ironically, the more we realize that literature is contrived by innumerable entities and identities beyond the author, the more we want to be guided by an individual (32, 61). If individualism is so closely related to “free and independent individual action or thought,” then—at its worst—celebrity hampers the author's freedom to express ideas. In yet another irony, the public looks upon the post-fusion celebrity and sees itself in the mirror of the individual. If the celebrity's power “stems from the *individual*” (Marshall 20, his emphasis), it stems from an illusion of the individual that is as familiar to the public as the public is to itself. Celebrities who believe in their individuality as a source of power will always be disappointed to realize that such power is “precarious” (Marshall 21); it is subject to the whim of the audience that admires and then spurns that same individuality.

Unfortunately, the audience of literary celebrities—often composed of fans—has not been explicitly theorized, though sociological research into fans and theories of readership and the gaze can be combined to offer some tentative explanations about the audience's power. Dyer suggests that “how one conceptualises the audience—and the empirical adequacy of one's conceptualisations—is fundamental to every assumption one can make” (182) about how celebrities and their films, music, and books work. In “The Revenge of the Author” (1991), however, Colin MacCabe asserts that the “audience cannot be theorized” (41); “[s]o varied are the possibilities of such readings and so

infinite the determinations that enter into such a calculation that it is an impossible task” (41). Furthermore, audiences are probably more suitably understood by social scientists and psychologists, as in Lynn E. McCutcheon et al.’s *Celebrity Worshipers* (2004). My argument about grandstanding, to some extent, presupposes that literary celebrities, themselves, are often audiences of more widely recognized celebrities, and so my “conceptuali[sation]” of the audience usually reveals as much about authors as audiences; I will not show many alternatives to the negative stereotypes of audiences that Layton, Cohen, Ondaatje, and MacEwen perpetuate. As my survey of poetry written by celebrities shows in the following chapters, audiences are almost always represented as intrusive or unappealing, which implies that literary celebrities resent audiences, are displeased with themselves, or want to be understood as self-reflectively critical. All three of these possibilities suggest that audiences have considerable power over the object of their devotion, but that suggestion might also be a contrivance of the literary celebrity’s false humility functioning as marketable authenticity.<sup>10</sup>

Although the balance of power between celebrities and the public constantly shifts (Marshall 183)—which is to be expected, given the fusion and confusion of the terms *public* and *private*—the metaphor of celebrity ensures that power eventually reverts to the public. Fans are usually understood to be the public because as a multitude they cannot be the singular, private self that a given celebrity represents; however, from the perspective of the fan, the celebrity reinforces social norms, *public* norms.<sup>11</sup> Rarely does anyone seem

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<sup>10</sup> I owe the concision and the phrasing in this clause to Michael Lee.

<sup>11</sup> Rojek argues that celebrities enjoy freedom from “moral restraint” (73) and the freedom to “transgres[s]” (148) social norms, but I would argue that those freedoms are compromised by the fusion of selves, which partly results in typecasting. Audiences know what to expect from celebrities; thus, celebrities usually cannot surprise audiences or unsettle their assumptions. Furthermore, most supposed transgressions by celebrities are much less radical than they were initially made to appear, e.g. Elvis

to represent the private, and, lacking representation, the private lacks power. Although the private self can be made public, rarely can anything public be made private; the public does not need to negotiate with the outside influences (except from other cultures) that make the private self vulnerable. The representations of celebrity in the poetry examined in the following chapters almost always focus on the celebrity as an individual beholden to the public's normative influences. Thus, Ondaatje writes in this chapter's epigraph that as a celebrity "you sacrifice yourself for the race / when you are the representative when you allow / yourself to be paraded in the cages." He suggests that celebrities "allow" themselves "to be paraded in the cages" where the public can see them, control them, and exploit them. The celebrity is willing—despite the consequences—to be vulnerable to an audience that seems to have much more power.

Nevertheless, literary celebrities can exploit that impression to manipulate the feelings of their audiences, eliciting sympathy because being a celebrity is supposedly distressing. This negotiation of power can be explained by a provisional theory about the audience of literary celebrity adapted from "The Death of the Author" (1977) by Barthes. In that essay, Barthes argues that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (224). What he means is that readers should play the role of the author to subvert the "capitalist ideology" that "has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author" (Barthes 221). Readers should stand in for the author, becoming active producers of meaning instead of passive recipients. Barthes encourages readers to feel as if their readings are at least as meaningful as the author's writings. My argument about

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Presley gyrating his hips while dancing in the 1950s or Janet Jackson's "wardrobe malfunction" at the Super Bowl halftime show in 2004. When John Lennon and Yoko Ono staged their "bed-in" in Amsterdam and Montreal in 1969, they probably succeeded in the most radical transgression simply because it was pacifist.

the metaphor of celebrity grants a similar power to the celebrity's public—not only the media but also fans. In audiences of celebrity, fans are incorrectly understood as passive because they are “understood to be, at least implicitly, the result of celebrity” (Jenson 10). Contrary to that understanding, my argument is that fans can be as active as the readers that Barthes theorizes. Barthes, however, proposes the figurative death of the author to critique authorship (and literary celebrity by extension), whereas some literary celebrities have written about their actual, impending deaths to “enhanc[e] their literary celebrity” by “elicit[ing] feeling” (Kane 410) in the reader. Combining and literalizing two ideas from Barthes, Thomas H. Kane suggests that readers get more pleasure from a text if they know it is about the death of its author. Ironically, that pleasure helps to advertise the author (a suggestion examined in my chapter on MacEwen). The reader-audience's power and that of the celebrity are interdependent, but perhaps the affective cost is more acute for the celebrity than for the audience, partly because even the deterrent of the celebrity's morbid thoughts cannot relieve the compulsion of self-promotion.

The interdependence of the celebrity and the audience is not only an exchange of money for services; it is an exchange of expressions for feeling and is therefore potentially very personal—psychological, even spiritual, and more closely associated to death than is immediately apparent. Dyer argues that celebrities “compensat[e] people for qualities lacking in their lives” (32): pleasure, romance, success, beauty, transcendence, even tragedy (my examples, not his). Boorstin, however, claims that celebrity mainly offers an image, not a tangible benefit, to offset this lack. The image creates a reciprocal, visual relationship between the audience and the celebrity. In his seminars on psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan talks about the gaze as an awareness of “the presence of

others” (*Four* 84) who might be looking at the subject; it is, in that sense, social—not only a function of the eye (*Four* 74). As the “underside of consciousness” (Lacan, *Four* 83), the gaze also consists of the subject’s nascent awareness of being a viewer. When the gaze is returned, it is returned, at least in part, by the viewer looking at himself or herself. Lacan seems to associate this narcissism with death<sup>12</sup> as a solipsistic disregard for futurity; however, being released from narcissism into society is also a kind of death. As in the example from Barthes, this is not necessarily or usually a real death; instead, it is a figurative destruction of the private self, which is thereby redefined in relation to others.

From the audience’s perspective, this fusion with the celebrity can be described—beyond psychological terms—as spiritual communion; thus, McCutcheon et al. can refer to fans as “celebrity worshippers” (*passim*). Some of the most enthusiastic of those worshippers might respond to an encounter with a celebrity by saying, as they sometimes do, “I thought I’d died.” Such a claim is an obvious exaggeration, but it suggests an out-of-body experience or a similar separation from the private self. As the narcissist “dies,” he or she is reborn into a community—of worshippers, for example. Members of the audience are involved, with celebrities, in stepping outside of their usual roles and their usual selves, sometimes at the cost of their individuality but with the benefit of seeming to be one with a social group that shares moments of intense feeling.

From the perspective of celebrities, the presence of a devoted audience both justifies their delusions of grandeur and startles them from their navel-gazing. When all eyes are on the celebrity, and each gaze is directed at the celebrity, a celebrity’s narcissism

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<sup>12</sup> The association with death is made tangentially in Lacan’s subsequent explanation of a painting by Hans Holbein called *The Ambassadors* (1533), which has a distorted skull in the foreground. I look at this painting more closely in chapter V.

—including the feeling of being grand—can be intensified. Simultaneously, however, the celebrity can also realize how small he or she is compared to the audience. The socializing function of the gaze can “cut” the celebrity “down to size” (which is another way of interpreting the razor in this chapter’s epigraph from Ondaatje). Unconsciously, the celebrity becomes the audience of a much more impressive entity: the audience. The private and the public fuse, here demonstrating the psychological aspect of the metaphor of celebrity. An example of this phenomenon is when poets who are celebrities write about themselves as if they were celebrities of higher degree—the process I have described as grandstanding. Literary celebrities are almost always known much less widely than celebrities who are primarily known through film, television, sports, or politics. These literary celebrities can be understood as audiences of the celebrities of higher degree. MacEwen, writing in the voice of Lawrence of Arabia, becomes the fan who assumes control over Lawrence through the power of her singular but total gaze as the author. As she imagines Lawrence, however, and then stands in for him, she too “dies.” She integrates into herself a much more public figure than she is, and she thereby creates a social world for herself and Lawrence—a world of the imagination that figuratively destroys her narcissistic, private self.

Even if the lives of literary celebrities (or other such artists) are not often or actually threatened by their celebrity, the fusion of public and private has critical consequences for their identities and their art; fatalistic representations by authors and theorists are therefore appropriate responses to those consequences. We have already read about Baudrillard’s view of life and experience—the real—being lost in the artifice of our overly mediated culture. Richard Shiff, in “Art and Life: a Metaphorical Relationship”

(1978), argues that “[a]rt seems to depend upon its distinction from life, and vice versa” (118). What happens when this “distinction” disappears, as it does, in theory, when the public and the private fuse? Shiff explains that “public representation of private experience must depend on a medium or *metaphor*” (116, my emphasis):

As the medium which separates art from life experience is perfected, it becomes transparent: we see through it as if it were not there; we pass immediately from life to art, art to life. The ultimately successful work of art would employ a metaphor not recognizable as such; the passage from the world of life to the world of art would seem to occupy neither space nor time, and the two realms would coalesce. (116)

Shiff means the “medium” of painting and the achievement of technical “perfect[ion],” but his argument might also apply to the metaphor of celebrity that helps to define the “public representation of private experience.” In the context of my argument about the fusion of selves, these quotations from Shiff are already beginning to suggest that the experience of celebrity can be transcendent and figuratively deadly; Shiff suggests that “we may say that the experience of life, expressed or given public meaning through works of art, leads ultimately to complete comprehension or the death of the individual, the same ‘death’ that would be brought about by the experience of the ultimate, perfected work of art” (109). Shiff appreciates this “death” for its transcendence without considering its potentially traumatic consequences; what I mean to suggest is that the experience of celebrity is the enactment of a metaphor that is not altogether desirable despite the feeling of transcendence that it might elicit.

How compelling could this feeling be, and how real could it seem? My answer in

this chapter is theoretical and cautiously speculative, though the poetry quoted in later chapters is more emotive. Here, I consider in greater detail what metaphor does that coincides with what celebrity does. At its most basic, a metaphor is the sharing of a thought through a medium such as language. In “Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy” (1978), Ted Cohen argues that the user of a metaphor and his or her audience become “an intimate pair” (9); they have to come together to decipher and deal with (he calls it “coping” with) language. The idea that metaphor cultivates “intima[cy]” is related to what happens when the public invades the privacy of celebrities. *The private becomes public*; suddenly, what was once secret is now shared, and the distinctions between self and other become less obvious and might even seem to disappear.

Although part of my argument is that celebrities can actually experience the fusion of selves and can be confused about how to distinguish them, Cohen argues that metaphors do not express reality: “you aren’t transmitting a fact because there is no fact, and everyone knows that and knows that everyone else knows that” (8). His example is from William Shakespeare: “It requires little beyond the most elementary linguistic competence to detect and comprehend the metaphor in ‘Juliet is the sun,’ but the more you know about the sun, the more you will make of the metaphor” (Cohen, “Metaphor” 10). In the strictest terms, *the private is public* is as obviously untrue as the statement about Juliet being the sun; even if celebrities are videotaped having sex in their bedrooms, or have their garbage stolen, or are exposed as drug addicts, there is much that remains private in their lives—even if the public has learned the history of their sexual affairs, knows their blood types, and has samples of their hair that could be used for DNA analysis. They still have their thoughts. Literary celebrities, however, (and others, such as

actors) make their thoughts and feelings public whenever they are at work. What happens to the identities of celebrities when what they do at work and in their minds is reflected upon them by a public that assumes those works and thoughts are authentic? Many celebrities—such as Grant, above—manage to keep their distance. Others, however, became writers or actors to learn about themselves and perhaps to express their most intimate thoughts and feelings. In those cases, the private can become public, and metaphor can seem so convincingly real that, from the celebrity's perspective, it *is* real.

When scholarly interest in metaphor revived in the 1960s and 1970s, a debate emerged as scholars tried to determine how much of the real could be communicated by the figurative rather than the literal. Remarkably, this technical question about metaphor can help to answer some of the questions about celebrity in relation to identity, representation, and experience that this chapter has already raised. On one side of the debate are those who argue that metaphors are only slightly less banal than similes, which assert memorable but sometimes obvious similarities between real things. As Wayne Booth observes, “classical theorists [...] have seen the choice between simile and metaphor as minor, as depending simply on whether the speaker profits from seeming more or less daring” (55). In “What Metaphors Mean” (1978), Donald Davidson agrees with those theorists and argues that metaphor is simply a more emphatic simile that remains trivial “because everything is like everything, and in endless ways” (39). Arguing further that metaphor can only be literal and not figurative on the unstated assumption that language cannot work illogically, Davidson states that metaphors have no special meaning (no tenors for their vehicles). If a special meaning exists, it is in “the *effects* metaphors have on us. The common error is to fasten on the contents of the thoughts a

metaphor provokes and to read these contents into the metaphor itself” (Davidson, “What” 45, his emphasis). Davidson would probably disagree with my arguments about grandstanding and the fusion of selves because they suggest that the figurativeness of metaphor can become not only literal but even actual—and in ways that might not seem logical to the celebrities who are involved in enactments of those metaphors.

On the other side of the debate, Northrop Frye argues in “The Motive for Metaphor” (1963) that in making a metaphoric statement “you’re really saying ‘this *is* that,’ [and] you’re turning your back on logic and reason completely, because logically two things can never be the same thing and still remain two things” (11, his emphasis). Similarly, Ricoeur claims that beyond “the informative kernel of metaphor” (“Metaphorical” 144) is significance created by the imagination and by feeling. He explains that “poetic language is no less *about* reality than any other use of language but refers to [reality] by the means of a complex strategy which implies, as an essential component, a suspension and seemingly an abolition of the ordinary reference attached to descriptive language” (Ricoeur, “Metaphorical” 153, his emphasis). The “suspension” to which Ricoeur refers is akin to what Samuel Taylor Coleridge calls the “willing suspension of disbelief” and “poetic faith” (6) in chapter XIV of his *Biographia Literaria* (1817). The question, of course, is how this debate about metaphor is relevant to celebrity and not simply everything else that can be literary. My answer depends on my previous argument, that literary celebrity makes demands of authors that are intimately connected with what they do and how they define themselves; it affects them not logically but at the level of imagination and feeling—the two neglected aspects of metaphor of interest to Ricoeur—to a degree probably not matched even by the experience of actors and

musicians, unless they are also writers. By privileging some authors as especially critical, I realize that I might be accused of endorsing the cult of the author; however, because celebrity enacts a metaphor, authors might know best what it means.

To be cautious, however, no one should forget that my claims about metaphor, like the claims made by Rojek and Sean Latham and the poets I am studying, serve the rhetorical purpose of persuading readers that celebrity is worth writing about, in poetry or scholarship, because of its potentially negative effects on individuals regardless of the degree of its realness. In fact, celebrity is predisposed to be successfully persuasive; it has the rhetorical advantages of significant emotive potential and a logical circularity that is not easily detected. In his contribution to *The Social Use of Metaphor* (1977), J.

Christopher Crocker examines metaphor as rhetoric and suggests that its function is partly to elicit feeling (39). Following the anthropological work of Kenneth Burke, Crocker states that “figurative language [particularly metaphor] does not just *express* the pertinence of certain cultural axioms to given social conditions, it *provides the semantic conditions through which* actors deal with that reality, and these conditions are general to all social contexts and all actors within that society” (46, his emphasis). As this statement applies to the metaphor of celebrity, it suggests that poets might express celebrity through metaphor to cope with the enactment of that same metaphor. Crocker anticipates the circularity of this logic; he argues that “rhetorical devices” used to express social values can “too easily become tautological self-fulfilling prophecies” (66). Indirectly or otherwise, Boorstin, Mole, and Crocker all provide evidence that a major problem of celebrity is its tautological tendency (e.g. being known for well-knownness), which also corroborates my argument about its metaphoricity. When poets write about celebrity as a

fusion of selves, they might convince their readers of their total exposure to the public but might also convince themselves, however erroneously, that they are now defined by the public (or that they understand celebrity well enough to avoid being so defined).

Crocker suggests that the confusing result of such rhetoric is, indeed, a risk involved in the interaction between public speakers and their audiences. He argues that the problem is partly caused by confusion about the meaning of the term *identification*, which Aristotle held to be that basic process whereby a speaker attempts through metaphors, other tropes, and the whole bag of rhetorical tricks to cause [members of] an audience to align their goals with his objectives, and ultimately to merge their selves with his self. Now, the need to be lucid on this topic is very great, since recently there has been a good deal of anthropological discussion of what ‘identification’ might be [...], much of it muddled and at cross-purposes. The basic problem [...] comes from a confusion involving two different but interrelated meanings of the term ‘identify.’ The first, a technical term employed in psychoanalysis, involves the psychological process whereby an actor fails to differentiate the boundaries of his own self from that of another person, so that two states of being become affectually merged. The second sense of ‘identify’ is that of ‘to name, specify, or characterize’ the uniqueness of some entity. As used in the analysis of rhetoric the two meanings tend to overlap. (Crocker 61)

He also suggests that the “mystical sense of union” (Crocker 62) involved in the speaker’s identification with the audience is—or ought to be—nonexistent. He explains that “metaphors [used in rhetoric] make simplifying, felt identifications which attempt to

overcome quite real differences of substance or interest through modes which are not subject to empirical confirmation” (Crocker 62). He is generally correct to remark that *identification* as a term from “psychoanalysis” is “not subject to empirical confirmation.”<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, I appreciate Ricoeur’s aforementioned argument about not disregarding imagination and feeling—especially when art is in question. The metaphor of celebrity—*the private is public*—helps to elicit a “mystical sense of union.” Celebrities depend on this feeling, whether it is their own or that of their audience, and regardless of who is responsible for the errors of logic and terminology that can produce it.

Although Crocker is not arguing about celebrity, he indirectly provides a summary of my argument about the metaphor of celebrity. When Crocker refers to speakers who not only “express” but also “deal with” the consequences of that expression, his comments can also apply to a celebrity struggling to maintain the ability “to differentiate the boundaries of his own self from that of another person.” Our terms are very similar: he refers to this lack of differentiation between selves as a psychological “identification,” and I refer to it as an identity crisis that is equally the fault of grandstanding and of the celebrity’s related belief (which might be true) in the private becoming public. If the speaker and the audience “become affectually merged,” they are at least potentially

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13 Crocker’s cautionary remarks about the psychoanalytic connotations of *identification* relate to my initial argument, from the first pages of this chapter, about identity formation depending on metaphor. Referring to metaphor and identity formation in the context of psychoanalysis in *Écrits* (1966), Lacan asks this rhetorical question: “how—[...] [in] dedicating myself to becoming what I am, to coming into being—can I doubt that, even if I were to lose myself there, I am there?” (*Écrits* 157). Such a question, unfortunately, does little to clarify Lacan’s argument or mine. Furthermore, Lacan seems to confuse two terms related to metaphor: *metonymy* and *synecdoche* (*Écrits* 148). My focus is not on metonymy because, although *the public* and *the private* are contiguous and therefore metonymic, when *the private is public*, their relationship is metaphoric—and only metaphor can have a transformative effect on identity. Lacan otherwise seems to agree with Frye: “One word for another: this is the formula for metaphor” (*Écrits* 148, his emphasis). See Jane Headly’s *Power in Verse: Metaphor and Metonymy in the Renaissance Lyric* (1988) for other terminological arguments.

feeling a fusion of selves or the sense that *the private is public*. His focus is on feelings that overcome logic, and I argue that the metaphor of celebrity can be felt and experienced as real though it might be illusory. Awareness of this metaphor is necessary for any understanding of celebrity's psychological consequences—not only for the celebrity, but also for the audience, because the fusion of selves affects them both.

As my brief analysis of metaphor in general suggests, the metaphor of celebrity has not only psychological but also spiritual aspects. What Crocker calls “identification” and the related “mystical sense of union” help to elicit the celebrity's sense of being religiously significant. Furthermore, the metaphor of celebrity sanctifies and sanctions the religious pretence, approving but also limiting it—sanctifying it partly because celebrity has a pseudo-religious social function (Turner 6-7) that metaphors also have. Although that function is not actually religious, it is socially relevant. As I quoted earlier, Dyer explains that celebrities “compensat[e] people for qualities lacking in their lives.” One of those “qualities” is the feeling of belonging that Crocker mentions indirectly; a related feeling is of sanctuary for people who lack faith.

On that topic in “Metaphor and Transcendence” (1978), following Jean-Paul Sartre's claim that “man is the being whose project is to be God” (qtd. in Harries 82), Karsten Harries states that, “lacking faith, modern man seeks refuge in an unreal, aesthetic environment of his own making” (82). Harries then argues:

Metaphors speak of what remains absent. All metaphor that is more than an abbreviation for more proper [i.e. literal] speech gestures toward what transcends language. Thus metaphor implies lack. God knows neither transcendence nor metaphor—nor would man, if he were truly godlike.

The refusal of metaphor is inseparably connected with the project of [what Sartre would have called] pride, the dream of an unmediated vision, a vision that is not marred by lack, that does not refer to something beyond itself that would fulfill it. (84)

If my reading of Harries is correct, he means that the people who “refus[e]” metaphor are those who have faith that God is immanent in their lives; they have no need for transcendence or metaphor because God is there, unspoken, not needing to be proposed or simulated in language. In contrast with these faithful people are those “modern” people who “lac[k] faith” and need metaphor to compensate for an “absent” god. When the argument from Harries is applied to my own, it suggests that celebrity is compelling because its metaphor fulfills the social function of creating a feeling of belonging (a mystical sense of union) and compensating for an absent god. It suggests that people need others to engage in grandstanding and thereby supply the culture with the bigger men or gods that are lacking: the heroes of politics, sports, music, or literature.

Most celebrities, however, and literary celebrities especially, probably understand that they are not religiously significant, despite the public’s supposed devotion to them. Any adequately self-reflective poets engaged in grandstanding—pretending “to be God” or a god or merely someone more grand—must understand themselves to be fundamentally insufficient as people and as writers. Language, constantly “marred by lack” partly because the word is not the thing, cannot give them the power to transform beyond certain limits common to all human beings. Furthermore, if the religious pretence has a sanction, in the sense of a limit, it is that hardly anyone really believes the pretence. Harries’ argument depends partly on the assumption that religious belief weakened during

the general trend toward a secular society in the north-western hemisphere in the latter half of the twentieth century. Although John Frow argues that “the secularization thesis [...] is plainly wrong” (207) because religion thrives in many places of the world—including later twentieth-century North America—he claims that it sometimes exists in “mutant religious forms” (208), such as the worship of celebrity.

Thus, some film stars, popular musicians, and authors are treated with reverence akin to worship. The “truth status” (Frow 198) of their divinity is moot; what matters is their social function as religious figures. Because celebrities are not literally considered sacred in most cases (Frow 201, 204), the granting of celebrity is profane and ironic, and—as I wrote in “Celebrity and the Poetic Dialogue of Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen” (2009)—“the ‘cult of personality’ is sometimes as much a sardonic indulgence in spiritual kitsch as it is an uncritical deification of celebrities and their ways of life” (80). The irony of this religious function is often reflected in texts written by literary celebrities who had pseudo-religious personas such as Layton’s prophet and Cohen’s saint. Sometimes, the literary celebrities avoid the irony by representing religiosity as generic paranormality, as in Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. In more complicated cases, such as that of MacEwen, the literary celebrity seems so fully committed to literature that it is traumatic for her to accept the religious function as only a pretence.<sup>14</sup>

At the beginning of this chapter, I proposed that religiosity and masculinity are

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14 Whether or not a given celebrity’s identity crisis can be called “traumatic” is somewhat beyond the scope of this study, partly because trauma is usually “inaccessib[le]” (Caruth 10) to researchers, and partly because other psychoanalytic concepts—the gaze, narcissism, repression, the uncanny—serve me just as well in explaining celebrity. Glass cautions against trying to reveal “the private traumas of biographical individuals” (18) who are celebrities, and my focus therefore tends to be on how the normative influences of culture are *portrayed*, by poets who were celebrities, as affecting the psyche. It is a literary more than psychoanalytic focus.

related as aspects of grandstanding. Although the religious pretence is only a pretence, it is nevertheless influential, and literary celebrities have used it, along with its associated masculinity, to regulate membership in their cliques. Celebrity now seems evenly distributed among the sexes, but literary celebrity has not always been a currency freely available to women, especially poets. In *Women, Celebrity, & Literary Culture Between the Wars* (2007), Faye Hammill argues that many women in the 1920s and 1930s became celebrities despite “various forms of hostility toward women’s writing” (21); notably, with the exception of Dorothy Parker, none of them was popular as a poet. Jaffe states that “[t]he literary reputations of women modernists were poorly served by the restrictive promotional system of introducing, editing, and anthologizing, for which men like Eliot, Pound, [Edward] Marsh, et al. served as gatekeepers” (165). Rarely were women seen to have “muscle in” (Jaffe 165) to cliques formed by men and for men. Glass explains this exclusivity partly in terms of a “hypermasculine public posturing” that “can be understood as a symptomatic response to the feminized, and feminizing, literary marketplace” (18). Although female writers of prose (rarely of poetry) were unusually successful in “the mass cultural public sphere” (Glass 18), some male writers had contempt for that success even as they established their own brands of it.

Surveying a different group of authors—Mark Twain, Jack London, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, and Norman Mailer—Glass argues that “a virile masculinity bordering on caricature became central to the public image of celebrity authors in modern America” (18). In the case of grandstanding celebrities, who write about and seem to define themselves through other celebrities who are more widely recognized, variations on Sigmund Freud’s Oedipus complex are impossible not to notice. Harold Bloom’s

theory of Oedipal relationships between famous poets in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) has not yet been considered as a way of explaining the ambitions of celebrities, but it, too, seems to be “bordering on caricature”; even Bloom’s problematic assumptions about the masculinity of what he calls “strong poets” (*passim*) help to explain the exclusivity of literary celebrity, which Jaffe has also associated with masculinity. Bloom argues that “the covert subject of most poetry” (148) is an anxiety that compels poets to internalize their precursors, begin a rivalry with them, differentiate themselves from them, abandon them, abandon themselves, and—having surpassed their precursors—allow the renewal of influence. His emphasis on rivalry and strength demonstrates the problematic masculinity of his theory, but for that reason it helps to explain literary celebrity, which has been historically associated with masculinity by Jaffe, Glass, and, indirectly, Hammill. Glass argues that “authorial machismo, like genius for Stein, was both a marketing strategy and a way of configuring resistance to the market” (18). The mass market could make authors rich and give them financial independence, but it could “feminiz[e]” a male author by invasively reconfiguring (in Latham’s terms again) their identities or by circulating their texts and images too easily. Furthermore, “the public personae of celebrity authors are symptomatic of psychosexual anxieties in the culture at large” (Glass 18). These anxieties are not only those that Bloom identifies but are also the anxieties of dealing with gendered biases about writers in the mainstream.

What I have been trying to suggest is that masculinity, religiosity, and the metaphor of celebrity sometimes conflict but are sometimes mutually supportive and must be negotiated between celebrities and the public for the power of identity formation. The metaphor of celebrity gives some support to the religious pretence because *the*

*private becoming public* can be understood as a transcendental change. Metaphors in general are expressions that join the private and public in an intimate relationship that is the next best thing to having contact with God. The metaphor of celebrity is therefore an extreme enactment of what all metaphor has the potential for doing, and its intensity is the result of the high degree of scrutiny from the public. In contrast with other types of celebrities, authors might be expected to have command over metaphor and to use its transformative power for their own identity formation as they try to do in grandstanding; however, when they experience celebrity, authors are not exempt from losing that power to the public. That loss is one reason why they invoke traditional sources of power such as religion and masculinity when they adopt their public personas and engage in grandstanding; however, grandstanding not only helps to catalyse the metaphor of celebrity as individuals make appeals to the public for recognition, but it is also a counteractive effect—a vicious cycle of self-promotion, publicity, and defence against the public. Thus, the metaphor of celebrity indirectly perpetuates the related problem of literary celebrity's masculinity because patriarchy and religion are historically so interdependent; the metaphor of celebrity assimilates religiosity and masculinity so that they cannot be made to serve individuals rather than the public. Grandstanding can be understood not only as a self-aggrandizing performance, but also as a performance of masculinity and religiosity—an ironic one, given its paradoxical result.

Besides race, sex, class, and upbringing, and possibly excepting the ways of thinking that lead to enlightenment, suicide, or marriage, nothing has more influence on the identity of a celebrity than celebrity itself. The religious pretence of celebrity gains new significance in relation to the metaphor of celebrity, which helps to articulate

psychoanalytic theories of the private self in relation to the public, and which is especially understandable by writers who know both metaphor and celebrity first-hand. Although celebrity is not inherently masculine, it is associated historically with practices of exclusion that tended to restrict literary celebrity to small groups of men, especially in the case of poets. It is also historically specific—a result of twentieth-century modernity’s crisis of meaning that writers felt keenly. As it is expressed in language, celebrity is an opportunity for writers to test the limits of what feelings they can communicate and how close they can come to others and themselves. As it is experienced through metaphor, celebrity is a threat to identity that elicits confusion and misgivings about the coherence—even sanity—of the individual. In the epigraph that began this chapter, Ondaatje imagines the experience of going “physically / mad when you perfect the mind” by representing celebrity. The final four chapters will begin to explain how celebrities who were poets were also coping with the challenge of understanding celebrity. The next chapter is both a brief history of the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry and a test of some of the theoretical claims about celebrity made here and elsewhere.

## Chapter II

### The Era of Celebrity in Canadian Poetry

Many people have difficulty believing that celebrity could ever be relevant to Canadian poetry or its history. Their incredulity is mostly due to the obscurity of Canadian poetry today and to legitimate, unanswered skepticism about the type and scope of recognition that Canadian poets have experienced. Information that can help to explain that recognition is not easy to find or validate, but in this chapter I work toward a better understanding of the extent to which some Canadian poets were widely recognized around the years 1955 to 1980, which span what I call the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry. Existing scholarship and new evidence from various magazines and a national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, suggest that the celebrity of poets in Canada, despite its narrow scope and historical brevity, was significant. It was significant enough, as the following chapters will show, that Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen, Michael Ondaatje, and Gwendolyn MacEwen all wrote about it, symbolically or otherwise.

My argument in this chapter has three purposes: first, to establish that there *was* an era of celebrity in Canadian poetry and, through an overview of that era, to establish approximately its beginning (1955), peak (1964 to 1968), and ending (1980); second, to consider data that help to determine, however incompletely, the scope of the celebrity experienced by poets in Canada during that era; and third, to contend that the scope of their celebrity was affected by the changing relationship between poetry and the novel, which were themselves affected by celebrity in the 1960s and 1970s. The era of celebrity in Canadian poetry defined twentieth-century post-war Canadian literary celebrity until

novelists regained their historical prominence as celebrities (not necessarily in the canon, where novelists have not been as consistently recognized) compared to poets starting in the 1970s. Some of these novelists were poets first and had become novelists partly because their celebrity and the era in general were opportunities for themselves and their publishers. Considering the relationship between forms—mainly novels and poetry, but also music—and degrees of celebrity, I compare the relative status of six different poets who could be described as celebrities: Layton, Cohen, Ondaatje, MacEwen, and, for additional comparison, Margaret Atwood and Al Purdy, who have been otherwise excluded from this study because they did not write about celebrity in their poetry.

Measured by appearances on television, book sales, and topicality in magazines, the successes of each of these writers were different for many reasons, including the timing of their publications, the degree of their commitments to poetry, their conformity to the public's expectations of them, and their multiple talents, though as poets they were in my opinion equal at their best. Layton's mastery of prose should be evident to anyone reading his prefaces and letters, but his short stories and plays were less eloquent, and he did not persist with his attempts to supplement his poetry, and even expand his celebrity, by writing in other forms; Cohen became a novelist but achieved his highest degree of celebrity as a popular musician; Ondaatje directed short films in the early 1970s and, after the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, became internationally successful as a novelist; MacEwen experienced celebrity that was limited partly because she was a woman and a writer who remained mostly committed to poetry when the novel was becoming a more fashionable literary form. The story of their celebrity begins here, with an overview of the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry.

Celebrity was not unknown to Canadian literature before the mid-1950s, though it was different then from what it became after the mid-1950s, when Layton became the first Canadian poet to exploit television. In *Literary Celebrity in Canada* (2007), Lorraine York shows that the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mass-market of books, newspapers, and public readings was sufficient for the creation of celebrity, or at least its unmistakable prototype, for writers such as Pauline Johnson, Stephen Leacock, Mazo de la Roche, and Lucy Maud Montgomery. These writers were internationally recognized, their books often sold in great numbers, and they generally needed to be shrewd negotiators when dealing with their publishers and the public. Using the term *fame* but probably also meaning celebrity,<sup>1</sup> York argues that “[f]ame [...] is a much more powerful force in the history of Canadian literature than has been suspected, and its possessors have not been blasé about or unaffected by its workings in their careers and lives” (34). Notably, of the four writers in York’s chapter on turn-of-the-century celebrity, only one (Johnson) was recognized mainly as a poet. The other three were successful mainly as writers of prose, especially fiction and often novels.

Similarly, in *The Confederation Group of Canadian Poets, 1880-1897* (2004), D.M.R. Bentley explains that poets such as Bliss Carman, Charles G.D. Roberts, Archibald Lampman, and Johnson had their photographs in magazines and were widely known—even notorious—in the newspapers (273, 276). They were unable to sustain their status, however, because of competition from prose fiction (Bentley 282-3). Although celebrity usually makes “literary and dramatic form [...] irrelevant” (Boorstin 158) by drawing attention to the celebrity’s image—thereby enabling cross-marketing and spin-

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1 The difference between these two terms was explained in the previous chapter.

offs regardless of the commodity's form—literary celebrity in Canada from at least as early as the end of the nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century tended to include writers of prose fiction but few poets.

In the mid-1950s, this situation changed, rapidly and temporarily; until then, poetry only rarely emerged from literary circles and academia into the public realm. The “national tours” (Solecki xv) of Carman in the 1920s and E.J. Pratt in the 1940s were precursors to, and not inaugurations of, the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry. In 1954, Robert A. Currie wrote that “[e]very Canadian knows Bliss Carman, or at least *of* him” but rather sardonically explained that Carman was known because “captive schoolchildren” (149) were forced to read his work. Also in 1954, Dudek could claim that “[p]oetry today is not a popular art; Canadian poetry is even less known than English poetry in general” (“State” 153). From a considerably more retrospective position in 1993, Dudek said that “[t]here was no competition for recognition, nobody wanted to be known more than anyone else [...] there was no ambition of that kind among poets because no recognition was possible. This was from 1940 to 1955, let's say [...]. There was no audience for poetry and there were no prizes and no success” (“Committed” 7). Although he predicted that “poetry, not prose, [...] will in the end prove to be the successful literary medium of this century,” Dudek called poetry immediately prior to 1954 an “almost secret activity (so far as the public is concerned)” (“State” 153). Poets and their works tended to remain out of sight.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Ways of seeing Canadian literature were, however, beginning to change in the mid-1950s. A collection of poetry and fiction called *Canadian Anthology* (1955), edited by Carl F. Klinck and R.E. Watters, was the first to organize its contents according to “major” and “minor” authors. T.S. Eliot discussed those categories in “What Is Minor Poetry?” (1944); Canadian anthologists had rarely inquired about such categories. Robert Lecker, in the manuscript for the critical history of Canadian anthologies that will be his next book, argues that *Canadian Anthology* was the first to prefer biography and theme to technical

Even as Currie and Dudek were writing, celebrity suddenly became a factor in Canadian poetry—partly because of Layton’s appearances on television and partly because of a culture of youth that wanted to use poetry to effect various “social changes” (Davey, *Canadian* 12). Layton was often seen on CBC-TV’s *Fighting Words* program; he was debating with others, not reading his poetry, but his presence introduced television audiences to him as a poet and indicated that television producers could accept a poet as a commentator on society.<sup>3</sup> By appearing on television, Layton was also introducing himself to younger audiences. “Irving Layton converted a whole generation to poetry,” said Cohen (qtd. in Cameron 367). Dudek said, with little of Cohen’s enthusiasm and some disdain for celebrity, that for Canadian poets in the mid-1950s to the 1960s

[s]uccess came only with a kind of youth that created hero-celebrities who were idolized. They were screaming for Frankie—Frank Sinatra—and for Elvis and for Leonard Cohen, which is really an offshoot of the same idea, isn’t it? It’s a minor whirlpool of the main sociological wave in which people are going nuts about some particular individual entertainer. It’s a very harmful business that has nothing to do with poetry in the long run [...] It’s the culture of entertainment that came with television.<sup>4</sup> (“Committed” 7-8)

Although celebrity in poetry was perhaps only “a minor whirlpool of the main

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merit and other values. With this anthology, “[t]he history of Canadian literature became a history of personality” (Lecker 53). Lecker notes that the anthology contains 47 authors but only 15 writers of prose fiction; “[m]ajor’ seems to involve poetry more than prose” (55). *Canadian Anthology* helped to open the canon to celebrities—defined by “personality”—after the mid-1950s.

- 3 Today, interviewers on television and in other media ask celebrities about national politics, religion, evolution, and many other topics without any concern for the expertise of the celebrity. Layton’s status as a poet might have been relevant to his celebrity, but celebrity often needs no such justification.
- 4 Dudek’s remarks about television and the culture of youth are biased by his feud with Layton, which began when Layton gained recognition from various American poets in the early 1950s (Cameron 273) and which culminated with a printed exchange of insults in the late 1950s (Cameron 287) when Layton’s celebrity itself was peaking.

sociological wave,” it was remarkable that celebrity had become a factor in poetry even to that extent. Poets in general were not regularly on television, but television and the culture of youth (in which Cohen was becoming iconic) had emerged simultaneously with an enthusiasm that, for several years at least, did not spare poetry.

In the two decades after World War II, national Canadian television and film agencies (the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Film Board) documented and helped to produce a Canadian model of literary celebrity; however, in his contribution to the third volume of *Literary History of Canada* (1976), George Woodcock argues that very few poets were able or lucky enough to be successfully promoted by these media (288-9). Instead, poets were brought to the attention of the public through a combination of other media and venues: film and television helped, but only rarely; more common were radio broadcasts by the CBC, audio recordings available for purchase and borrowing from libraries on record and cassette tape, and frequent public readings (Woodcock 287-9). New poets began appearing “in almost uncountable numbers” (Pacey, “Writer” 494) as the 1950s turned into the 1960s. Woodcock makes note of some remarkable statistics: “[i]n 1959, 24 books of English verse were published in Canada,” but “[r]ound about 1963 the growth in publication was sharply evident, and in 1970 more than 120 books of verse were published, a five-fold increase” (284). This increase was the result of little magazines and small presses adding their influence to the publishing industry. Partly because audiences had so many options for reading, listening to, and seeing poetry, Canadian literature was suddenly changed by what Dudek called “[t]he great boom of young poets” (“Poetry” 117). The single most obvious sign of the change was the NFB’s *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen* (1965), which suggested—

even before the official start of Cohen's career as a singer-songwriter—that Cohen would be the pre-eminent poet of his generation; he was becoming a celebrity.

In the same retrospective essay on the 1960s, however, Dudek was already predicting—less than a decade after the boom began—that poetry's popular foundation would soon “collapse” (“Poetry” 117). He was correct. Relative to other arts and diversions, the prominence of poetry was in decline by the early 1970s, a decade that marked the end of “star-making” (Messenger 944) in Canadian poetry. Remarkably, medium-sized<sup>5</sup> Canadian publishers had nothing but poetry on their lists in 1964, yet poetry represented only 32.7% of their output in 1972 (Broten 36) because they were beginning to publish prose fiction and other forms.<sup>6</sup> In *The Lumber Jack Report* (1975), Delores Broten shows that large Canadian publishers reserved about 19% of their output for poetry during the years 1963 to 1972, while prose fiction grew from 39.2% to 45% (36). By that measure, the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry peaked around 1964, barely a decade after it started, and then—with the exception of the fervent enthusiasm in 1968 for Cohen's *Selected Poems*, which sold in unsurpassed quantity because it followed his first album by only a year—gradually faded until the end of the 1970s.

The span of years that seems to qualify as the historical peak of celebrity in

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5 Broten defines a medium-sized publisher as “[a] firm producing 5 to 19 titles per year, 1970 to 1972 [...] [c]orresponding to sales of \$100,000 to \$500,000 per year” (3); a large publisher would have published an average of “20 or more new titles per year in 1970 to 1972 [...] [c]orresponding to sales of over \$500,000 per year” (3). I presume that McClelland and Stewart, Macmillan, Oxford University Press, and Ryerson were large. During the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, the writers under consideration in this chapter tended to publish their novels with the first three of these publishers. Their poetry tended to be published by what I presume were small or medium-sized publishers, such as Contact Press and Coach House Press. With the exception of his first book, Cohen has always published with large publishers.

6 “By the end of the 1980s, among the large publishers only McClelland and Stewart regularly published poetry; among the smaller nationalist presses House of Anansi had become a literary division of General Publishing, and Press Porcepic had discontinued poetry publication” (Davey, *Canadian* 85).

Canadian poetry is a compromise between statistics and other factors. Partly because these statistics are from a limited range of media, they should not be the only indication of when the era might have peaked. A cultural event, such as the extraordinary success of Cohen's *Selected Poems* in 1968, can sometimes define an era as statistics do not.<sup>7</sup> Unlike some other Canadian poets who were celebrities, Cohen succeeded in switching from one form to the other (from poetry to the novel to music); his literary celebrity cannot be discounted merely because it peaked because of his music—though York justifies her exclusion of Cohen from her book with that reason (York 7). A compromise between statistics and the cultural event of Cohen's *Selected Poems* would establish the peak of the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry as a four-year period between 1964 and 1968.

Although Layton's name recognition in the newspapers increased as the 1970s elapsed (with consequences I will explain below), his celebrity was becoming increasingly dissociated from poetry in general and more dependent on his engagement with popular politics. As a defining feature (possibly *the* defining feature) of an era in Canadian poetry, celebrity never shone as brightly after the mid-1960s.

The fade was possible because, during the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, the market and industry had sufficiently developed so that medium-sized publishers could risk printing longer books—novels—by authors who had established themselves as successful poets. Notably, throughout the middle years of the era, large publishers were releasing more novels than books of poetry. The boom was somewhat counter-cultural:

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<sup>7</sup> Admittedly, the significance of this cultural event is suggested partly by the book's sales figures, but the interplay between Cohen's music, poetry, and novels cannot be entirely measured in numbers. Celebrity's spin-off effect is ultimately incalculable because of the relativity of cultural values. In Cohen's case, the significance of his *Selected Poems* depends on various factors, such as its reception in the emerging youth culture, its relationship to his music, and its association with the controversies surrounding the sexuality of his other writing.

smaller companies and lesser-known authors profited—not only big companies and big names;<sup>8</sup> it was helped by the medium-sized publishers until they began following the model of the large publishers and thereby boosted the novel's relative popularity. Atwood and Ondaatje profited from that transition much more than Cohen and MacEwen, whose novels appeared a little too early. Broten shows that the total numbers of books of poetry, however, increased at the same rate as prose fiction (17), meaning that the number of books of poetry in print was still rising despite its relative decline. Poetry was doing well in absolute terms but not in comparison with other forms.

Poets and academics alike noticed the implicit competition between poets and writers who wrote in other forms or not mainly in poetry. The competition seemed so overwhelming that Rosemary Sullivan claimed that, by the 1980s, “poetry was dying” (385); at that time, no new poets who could be called “celebrities” were emerging in Canada (Hošek 939-40). Similarly, in 1984, James Reaney said that “as poets, we’ve fought the novel and lost” (qtd. in Rae 5). Frank Davey, paraphrasing David Solway, stated that poetry had “entered into a direct and suicidal competition with prose fiction” (*Canadian* 79). Furthermore, Laurie Ricou argued that, in the early 1980s, “[p]oetry continued to suffer, in comparison with prose fiction, by the very slight amount of criticism devoted to it” (7); he also implied that poetry became difficult to understand because its writers had been newly influenced by postmodernist theory and, I would add, were often established in academia and promoted canons more than celebrity.<sup>9</sup>

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8 Celebrity itself is not necessarily counter-cultural. Most of the representations of celebrity in Canadian poetry are of the public's use of it to affirm social norms. In contrast, most of the representations of celebrities themselves—such as Ondaatje's Billy the Kid or MacEwen's Lawrence of Arabia—are of men who question their widespread recognition and the values of the public.

9 My suspicions about a backlash against celebrity poetry are slightly beyond the scope of this study, though I hope to return to this topic in the future or see it investigated by others. The backlash, if there

What is missing from this overview of the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry is information that would explain how the degree of celebrity differed from poet to poet during that era. In his review of York's *Literary Celebrity in Canada*, Gerald Lynch argues that more needs to be said about "the extent of [each writer's] celebrity" (88) in comparative studies such as hers and mine. Unfortunately, celebrity is not easy to measure. Considering one possible measurement, Daniel J. Boorstin argues in *The Image* (1961) that "[t]he factual basis for calling any book a best seller is not so much a statistic as an amalgam including a small ingredient of fact along with much larger ingredients of hope, intention, frustration, ballyhoo, and pure hokum" (165). He explains that publishers rarely reveal the sales figures that support the claim that a given book is a "best seller" (Boorstin 166). My suspicion is that publishers release sales figures when such figures are impressive enough to be promotional; the absence of sales figures for a given author implies that the publisher did not expect to promote or sustain anyone's celebrity by releasing them. Regardless, such figures do not accurately reflect "sales to readers" (Boorstin 166), partly because books are often sold to stores and later returned to the publishers. Furthermore, some of the best-selling authors in the world are "more read than read about" (Moran 6); they are not necessarily celebrities, in the same way that literary celebrities are often more "read about" than "read." Nevertheless, studies of celebrity are not aided by this lack of information; they are only made more general.

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was one, was certainly associated with what Davey called the collapse of the Canadian poetry canon. Davey suggested that cultural diversity, literary regionalism, and the growth of smaller publishers divided the national canon into canons. The so-called "death" of Canadian poetry was "more a cry that the lyric poem [and its ideology of humanism and individualism] is in difficulty" (*Canadian* 98) and that "Canadian poetry may only be in crisis to the extent that the national federation is in crisis" (*Canadian* 99). Because nationalism is not my focus, I have rarely raised it as an issue, but Davey's remark clarifies the focus of this chapter; the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry coincides with the rise and fall of nationalism in Canadian culture in general. The peak of Cohen's literary celebrity in the late 1960s was not only the result of his music and his *Selected Poems* but also the Canadian centennial year in 1967.

Some sales figures for Layton, Cohen, Ondaatje, and MacEwen are readily available, but comparing them cannot be entirely accurate because markets change over time, and not all of these reports are from the same era. They do, however, provide an indication of the relative success of these writers, and I will include some figures for Purdy and Atwood for further comparison. Although MacEwen's biographer provides various information about MacEwen's income at different times in her life—it was never high—there seems to be little information about the sales of her books. In 1961, MacEwen wrote to Milton Acorn to claim that, at a reading from her chapbooks, she had the “best reception ever—sold 50 books!! Am being treated like a national celebrity by these people” (Sullivan 126). Although Sullivan offers anecdotes that suggest MacEwen later earned a lot of money from her publishers (261)—but died broke (404)—she also quotes MacEwen, who correctly anticipated that her second novel would be consigned to “oblivion” (qtd. in Sullivan 288) despite favourable reviews. In terms of sales, MacEwen was probably the least successful of these six writers. For reasons that I will explain below, Cohen was hardly comparable; his *Selected Poems: 1956-1968* (1968) was notable for selling 200,000 copies in the first three months (Ondaatje, *Leonard* 5) and for selling 700,000 copies by 1978 in the United States alone (Amiel, “Leonard” 56).

In contrast, this is what Purdy said about his own *Selected Poems* (1972): “I think I once got \$500 as an advance on a book of poetry and it has taken six years for my *Selected Poems* to sell 10,000 copies” (qtd. in Amiel, “Poetry” 50). He wryly noted in the same interview that his A-frame house in Ameliasburgh still did not have plumbing. Layton, meanwhile, “had sold 7,500 copies” (Cameron 369) of *A Red Carpet for the Sun* by 1964. By that measure, Purdy's book was more popular than Layton's.

None of these sales figures, however, compares with what Atwood and Ondaatje later achieved with their fiction in prose. York's research suggests that, at some bookstores, Atwood's novels had been selling in the same range as those of Danielle Steel and John Grisham<sup>10</sup> (111); York also puts Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) in that range. *The English Patient*, promoted by the film based on it, sold 1.3 million copies "in paperback alone" (York 124) in the decade following its publication. Compared with their novels and the work of lesser-known poets, "[a] good book of poems [in the 1980s] would sell five hundred copies" (Sullivan 385). All these writers were more successful than average but in very different degree; they cannot be ranked precisely because comprehensive sales figures are not available, though Atwood and Cohen were almost certainly the most successful overall, followed by Ondaatje. Notably, they were the writers to switch, substantially, from poetry to other forms.

Somewhat more valid and detailed sets of data about the relative success of these writers are available through *The Globe and Mail* and the *Canadian Periodical Index*, which I have surveyed to glean insights into the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry. *The Globe and Mail* now offers a website—*The Globe and Mail: Canada's Heritage from 1844* (<http://heritage.theglobeandmail.com>)—that allows users to search for an exact phrase, such as "Irving Layton," in every page of its newspaper in any range of years.<sup>11</sup> The actual pages can then be viewed as scanned images. *The Globe and Mail* began declaring itself a national newspaper shortly after the beginning of the twentieth century

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<sup>10</sup> I seriously doubt, however, that Atwood could have sold, overall and in a comparable amount of time, what Grisham sold in the 1990s: the 60 million books that I reported in the previous chapter.

<sup>11</sup> On rare occasions, the website's optical character recognition software misrecognizes a character. For this reason, and because the software does not count names that are hyphenated at the end of a line, the statistics I report from *The Globe and Mail* are probably not exact. As with my other statistics, they are useful mainly as an indication of the relative name recognition of the poets in this chapter.

(“Globe”) but has a reputation for favouring the Toronto area; nevertheless, it is adequate as an indication of celebrity of relatively high degree.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the standard prefatory remark from the editors of the *CPI* is that it is an “adequate” indication of who published what and about whom in a sample of Canadian periodicals—little magazines, popular magazines, and scholarly journals. The *CPI*’s omissions can be partly compensated for with the use of other indices, but because a thorough accounting of other indices, newspapers, and media could be a book-length study in itself, my argument is partly restricted to the *CPI* on the assumptions that “adequate” is still useful and that its editors in the Canadian Library Association and the National Library of Canada were fair in deciding what to include. Because American publications are not included, the *CPI* restricts me—acceptably, given the scope of my argument—to Canadian literary celebrity.

My method of surveying *The Globe and Mail* and the *CPI* comes from “Time and Literary Fame” (1985), in which Karl Erik Rosengren develops an argument about what he calls the “mentions technique,” which entails counting how often an author is mentioned in reviews as a way of determining the “topicality” (159) of authors in comparison with each other. Applying such a technique to a given historical period in the *CPI* allows me to compare the name recognition of four poets corresponding to my next four chapters—Layton, Cohen, Ondaatje, and MacEwen—with others whom I have otherwise excluded, such as Atwood and Purdy. Although the *CPI* is not the *Celebrity Register* (1959) to which Boorstin refers, it can be used for a similar purpose. The *Celebrity Register*’s compilers claim that “it’s impossible to list accurately the success or

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12 In fact, despite its reputation, *The Globe and Mail* does not provide much information about lesser (e.g. local) degrees of celebrity. MacEwen appears in *The Globe and Mail* only 11 times between 1955 and 1980, whereas a box in her archives at the University of Toronto (Box 32 OVS) contains a little more than 80 newspaper clippings from various Toronto newspapers throughout her career.

value of men; but you *can* judge a man as a celebrity—all you have to do is weigh his press clippings” (qtd. in Boorstin 58). By counting the number of publications *by* each author (mainly poems, stories, reviews, and articles) and the number of publications *about* each author (including portraits of them) in the *CPI*, I am offering one way of measuring the “mentions” and “press clippings” of Canadian literary celebrity. When applicable, I remark upon the different promotional value of a publication being *by* or *about* an author (not only in the *CPI* but in *The Globe and Mail*, too), and upon the qualitative differences between individual publications (e.g. the popular *Saturday Night* compared to the scholarly *Canadian Literature*) as vehicles of celebrity.<sup>13</sup>

*The Globe and Mail* was widely circulated and well-read, and Layton often appeared in it. During the historical period in this survey—the years 1955 to 1980, which correspond with the general range established as the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry earlier in this chapter—the pages of *The Globe and Mail* contained the name Irving Layton more often than any of the other poets from this chapter. Each page was counted as one mention regardless of how many times the name was repeated on that page.<sup>14</sup> In those 25 years, Layton was mentioned 271 times, compared with 262 mentions of Atwood (who was recognized in the 1970s more often and more consistently than either

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13 An index of newspapers might be a better measure of celebrity than the *CPI*, which includes literary magazines that are academic in orientation. Future studies should consider a wider range of indices and media than are surveyed in this chapter. Such studies could also offer a more thorough comparison of the relative popularity of writers depending on their academic and / or popular readership.

14 When a name appeared more than once per article, letter, or advertisement, I counted that name only once. In the cases of Atwood and Purdy, I did not confirm the count by viewing every page on which one of their names appeared. In the cases of the other four poets, whom I am studying closely, I viewed every page; thus, for them I can remark upon the type of mention—such as a passing reference, an article about the poet, a letter to the editor by or about the poet, an advertisement for a book, reading, play, or film—and consider how those types complicate my assessment of the relative celebrity of the poets in this chapter. I did not count the frequency of their photographs appearing, but that would obviously be another indication of celebrity.

Layton or Cohen), 206 of Cohen, 42 of Purdy, 28 of Ondaatje, and 11 of MacEwen. Of the poets considered in the next four chapters, Layton and Cohen were the only ones who had any significant degree of celebrity in *The Globe and Mail*.

Layton, however, was not simply being mentioned by journalists. After a spike in his topicality in *The Globe and Mail* in the mid-1960s, his name appeared in the paper much more often in the 1970s—partly because he began to write controversial letters to the editor (around 11 of them from 1970 to 1980) on topics such as premarital sex, sexual or violent movies—such as *Last Tango in Paris* (1973) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979)—religion, and politics. His letters provoked responses from the public and, occasionally, a further letter from him. His books and readings were advertised more often than those of other poets, too. His name recognition was not always the result of spontaneous interest in him; he promoted himself in public. Despite his efforts, his book sales began to decline in the early 1970s (Cameron 425). The commercial value of even Layton's poetry was affected by the changing trends in literature. Even into the late 1970s when the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry was coming to an end, he was gaining name recognition—a possibility only for authors whose celebrity was already established—but without improving his profitability or that of the field of poetry in general.

The data from *The Globe and Mail* also offer some insights into the development of Layton's celebrity in relation to where he lived. Layton first attracted attention when he was living in Montreal. Although my overall argument is that the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry began in the mid-1950s and that Layton's celebrity peaked shortly before Cohen symbolically inherited Layton's celebrity in the mid-1960s, *The Globe and Mail* only mentioned Layton three times in 1959 (the year that he won the Governor

General's Award), never in 1960, and only 29 times between 1961 and 1965. The newspaper's lesser interest in him before the 1960s suggests that his celebrity was not populist in the 1950s, despite his appearances on television; however, *The Globe and Mail* might simply have been slow to recognize an emerging celebrity from Montreal who had not yet moved to Toronto. He moved there in 1969 and immediately raised his profile in that city. Because *The Globe and Mail* was and is published in Toronto, no one should be surprised that Layton and Atwood appeared so often in that newspaper; they both lived there, Atwood most of her life. The lack of corresponding attention to MacEwen—who also lived in Toronto—suggests that journalists did not readily understand her as politically engaged and as worthy of national attention as Atwood and Layton were.<sup>15</sup> Despite *The Globe and Mail's* supposedly national scope, in Layton's case his celebrity in that newspaper seemed to be partly determined by a combination of his local residency and his political engagements in the editorial pages.

Similarly, the appearance of Cohen's name in *The Globe and Mail* would have been much less frequent if his poetry and novels had been his only way of drawing attention to himself. Despite his early popularity, Cohen was almost entirely ignored until 1966, when he was mentioned seven times; as chapter IV will explain, Cohen's national celebrity was confirmed in that year by his successful readings and performances in Alberta. After 1969, there were three years in which Cohen was mentioned more than twenty times in *The Globe and Mail*. In 1969, he was mentioned 23 times; his recent album and his *Selected Poems* account for some of that attention. In 1970, he was

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<sup>15</sup> An article in *The Globe and Mail's* "Report on Business" on August 19, 1969, refers to MacEwen, in addition to Layton and Cohen, as "an international figure" (B3), but she is rarely acknowledged as such in that newspaper.

mentioned 25 times, and in 1973, his name recognition peaked in *The Globe and Mail* at 33 mentions. Only Atwood ever exceeded that number (with 40) in a single year (1980) during the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry. As with Layton, Cohen's presence in *The Globe and Mail* depended relatively little on his poetry. In the early 1970s, Cohen's name often appeared in the newspaper because of a musical, *Sisters of Mercy*, and a ballet, *The Shining People of Leonard Cohen*, which were based on his music. Ondaatje's mentions in the newspaper were often related to spinoffs (adaptations for the stage) of his books, too, but the sexual content of Cohen's spinoffs attracted much more attention.

Ondaatje was mentioned in *The Globe and Mail* one-tenth as often as Layton and MacEwen one-tenth as often as Cohen. Ondaatje and MacEwen were topical mainly in the early to mid-1970s. Their lesser degree of celebrity compared to Layton and Cohen can be partly explained by their later start; Layton and Cohen were one and two generations older, respectively, and had been nationally recognized before the 1970s. Although many other factors contributed to the varying celebrity of these poets, even half a decade seems to have made a difference in the lesser degree of celebrity experienced by Ondaatje and MacEwen. The timing of the careers of these four writers was a factor, as I will argue with other evidence later in this chapter.

*The Globe and Mail* is only one indication of celebrity, and it reveals that Layton, Atwood, and Cohen were being mentioned relatively often in that newspaper in their peak years; another, broader indication is the *CPI*, which shows, as is to be expected from an index of periodicals rather than dailies, that these writers were not as commonly written about in magazines and journals. First, some remarks on the coverage of the *CPI*. From the years 1948 to 1959, the *CPI* indexed 99 periodicals without stating whether or not all

99 periodicals were indexed in all of those years, though they were probably not.<sup>16</sup>

Starting in 1960, the *CPI* indexed 71 periodicals. In 1965, the number was 85 and, after minor fluctuation, it remained at 85 in 1970. In 1975, the number had increased by only two, but in the next five years the number increased to 131. This relatively sudden change after 1975 partly accounts for the semblance of increasing topicality of these literary celebrities. Their topicality *was* increasing, in some cases, after 1975 (as it was for Layton and Atwood in *The Globe and Mail*), but only Purdy and Atwood were evidently searching for a broader range of magazines that would accept their work, and only one—*Quill & Quire*—made enough mentions of any one writer to be significant in her promotion after 1975.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, the most reliable and significant information from the *CPI* generally pertains to before 1975 and to the magazines that mentioned these writers more than a few times—the general trends, not the outliers.

The 34 periodicals that included work by and about Layton, Purdy, Cohen, Atwood, MacEwen, and Ondaatje were not only literary magazines and journals; however, only 11 of the 34 periodicals made frequent mention of those writers and all of them were literary magazines except *Saturday Night*, *Maclean's*, and *Chatelaine*. These three magazines had a less academic audience and provide indications of popularity beyond the realm of “the literary” (a term that I considered in the previous chapter). Because they were not literary magazines for which poetry was a priority, my initial focus

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16 That lack of information is not a problem because Layton was the only poet under consideration besides Purdy who was publishing in some of those periodicals in those years (and not often). If he published a poem in 1956 in a magazine that was not counted that year, the omission from the statistics would have little effect on the comparisons between the four main writers in this study.

17 Of the many periodicals that had not appeared in association with these six writers before 1971, *Quill & Quire* is the only one to have represented one writer dramatically more than the others between 1971 and 1980; that writer is Atwood, who was written about 11 times, compared with four publications about MacEwen and three each about Layton, Purdy, Cohen, and one about Ondaatje.

here is on publications *about* the authors. Until and including 1970, Cohen was mentioned the most: four times in *Maclean's*, three times in *Saturday Night*, and once in *Chatelaine*. These numbers are low, given his phenomenal success as a popular musician in the late 1960s; Cohen was probably of more interest to international music magazines than to popular Canadian magazines.<sup>18</sup> None of the other writers appeared in all three of these magazines before 1971. After 1970, Atwood was mentioned the most: eight times in *Maclean's* and six times in both *Saturday Night* and *Chatelaine*. In general, these writers were not being mentioned often, though they were being featured in the popular magazines more often than in the literary magazines (where they tended to publish their own works instead of being written about by others). Even in the popular magazines, their celebrity barely registered—but their celebrity registered in other ways.<sup>19</sup>

Although *Saturday Night*, *Maclean's*, and *Chatelaine* were not literary magazines, publications *by* these authors were actually more common than publications *about* them in those magazines. Ondaatje, MacEwen, and Cohen hardly ever appeared as authors in these magazines during the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry. In contrast, these magazines published 29 works by Purdy (especially in *Saturday Night* and to a lesser extent *Maclean's*), 21 by Atwood (with several appearances in all three), and 11 by

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18 The useful website *The Leonard Cohen Files* (<http://www.leonardcohenfiles.com>) includes interviews with Cohen conducted during the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry from *Melody Maker*, *New Musical Express*, and *Sounds*, which were published in the United Kingdom. In 1967 and for at least a few years thereafter, his songs would have been broadcast often on the radio, thereby making him much more widely recognized than any other Canadian writer in those years, including Atwood.

19 For instance, *The Globe and Mail* shows that in some years Layton and Cohen were being mentioned in that newspaper two or three times per month, which is relatively often. Furthermore, Layton was the recipient of nearly 600 fan letters, which survive in the Concordia University archives (Camlot); Cohen had phenomenal book and album sales (see above); Ondaatje felt he had to protect his privacy by asking York University (his employer) to withhold information about him (Jewinski 134) and by denying my requests (and those of others) to see his archival materials; and MacEwen was mentioned a little over 80 times in Toronto newspapers during her career, as clippings in her archives reveal. They all experienced celebrity, but not in the same ways or to the same extent.

Layton.<sup>20</sup> Their works appeared in these popular magazines far less frequently, of course, than they appeared in literary magazines such as *Canadian Forum*, the *Tamarack Review*, *Queen's Quarterly*, *Alphabet*, *Fiddlehead*, *Delta*, and *Canadian Poetry*. With the exception of Cohen, these writers were more successful and maybe more interested in promoting themselves *as writers* in literary rather than popular magazines; nevertheless, Purdy, Atwood, and Layton were also surprisingly effective in placing their work in *Saturday Night*, *Maclean's*, and *Chatelaine*, thereby bringing themselves to the public as both creative writers and social critics—not merely as “arts and culture” news.

*Canadian Forum*, the *Tamarack Review*, *Queen's Quarterly*, *Alphabet*, *Fiddlehead*, *Delta*, and *Canadian Poetry* often contained works by and about these writers. The single most important vehicle for the work of all these writers—except Cohen, who rarely published in periodicals (at least in Canada)—was *Canadian Forum*. It published over a hundred poems by Layton and slightly more by Purdy. Between 1955 and 1980, Atwood published 48 works in *Canadian Forum*; there were 26 from Ondaatje and 22 from MacEwen, but none from Cohen. The *Tamarack Review* was the next best vehicle for their work: it published 51 works by Layton, 38 by Purdy, 23 by Atwood, eight by MacEwen, five by Cohen, and one by Ondaatje. These literary magazines were, of course, more likely than the popular magazines to publish works by these writers.

If my aforementioned estimate is correct and the era of celebrity in Canadian

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20 These numbers, especially those recorded in the literary magazines in the next paragraph, often refer to more than one poem or other work appearing in a single issue of a magazine. For example, Purdy's 100-plus publications in *Canadian Forum* included several occasions when he published more than one poem in a single issue. Although such a case would increase his public exposure compared to other writers featured in that issue, it does not increase his public exposure in general any more than if he had published a single poem in that issue. These numbers, therefore, are only indications of celebrity; Purdy had around twice the number of publications than Atwood had in *Canadian Forum*, but that does not qualify him as having generated twice the celebrity.

poetry peaked in the years from 1964 to 1968, then no one should be surprised to learn that Cohen was written about more than any of the others until 1970 (though in *The Globe and Mail*, Layton outpaced him slightly, 84 to 78, because Layton was mentioned several times in the 1950s when Cohen had barely started publishing); Cohen was the definitive figure at the peak of the boom, partly because of *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen* and his *Selected Poems*. Before 1971, Cohen was written about 14 times compared to eight for Layton, five for Purdy, two for MacEwen, and one for each of Atwood and Ondaatje. According to the *CPI*, he attracted the most attention between 1965 and 1970, largely in *Maclean's* and *Canadian Literature*—both popular and scholarly periodicals, which indicated his cross-over appeal.

The *CPI's* accounting of popular and literary periodicals suggests that, as the subjects of writing by others, Atwood and Layton were the most popular overall of the six writers considered in this chapter. Whereas Cohen was written about more than any of the others until 1970, Atwood got more attention than him after 1970, when the possibility of celebrity in Canadian poetry was fading. She was written about 69 times, compared to 23 for Layton, 16 for Purdy and Ondaatje, 14 for Cohen, and seven for MacEwen. Much of the increased interest in Atwood came from academic articles in *Canadian Literature* and others in *Maclean's*, *Quill & Quire*, *Saturday Night*, and *Chatelaine*. These were the periodicals whose editors seemed most interested in promoting Canadian writers, especially Atwood—whose talent as a poet, novelist, and critic, along with her savvy feminism, helped to make her appealing.

If being written about were the only indication of celebrity, Atwood would be unmatched in this group, followed in descending order by Layton, Purdy, Cohen,

MacEwen, and Ondaatje; if a writer's sheer volume of publication in periodicals were the only indication, Purdy would be unmatched, followed by Layton, Atwood, MacEwen, Ondaatje, and Cohen. When *The Globe and Mail* is also considered, the two clear winners are always Layton and Atwood. Purdy was rarely mentioned in the newspaper, and Cohen rarely published in the periodicals, but they occupy the middle of the rank. Ondaatje and MacEwen alternate in the rankings and are therefore about equal.<sup>21</sup> According to the *CPI* during the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, Atwood and Purdy were among the most popular of these literary celebrities, yet I have generally excluded them from this study. Obviously, their exclusion must be explained.

Although Atwood is Canada's most consistently and widely recognized author, there are reasons to focus elsewhere in a study about celebrity in Canadian poetry. Mainly, celebrity is not *in* her poetry; she writes about it elsewhere. York effectively locates Atwood's "meta-commentary on her own celebrity" (100) in her fiction, interviews, and on her website. Although she writes about subjects of photography and about people with audiences in *The Circle Game* (1966), her point is to argue that her subjects are unnoticeable. In contrast, Layton and Cohen wrote about each other as celebrities, Ondaatje wrote about Cohen and Billy the Kid, and MacEwen wrote about Lawrence of Arabia; Atwood wrote about Susanna Moodie, who was comparatively obscure despite being the "best known of Canada's early pioneers" (Staines x). Furthermore, Atwood became "a 'known' poet" (Cooke 142) with the poems of *The*

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21 Ideally, these approximate rankings would also account for appearances on television and radio, but my queries to librarians and others at the CBC (about the representativeness of the sampling of clips from those media posted on its Digital Archives website (<http://archives.cbc.ca>) and the NFB (about the frequency of screenings of poetry-related films on television and in theatres) have not yet been—and seem unlikely to be—answered.

*Circle Game*, but her fame or celebrity came not from poetry but from the fiction and scholarship of *Surfacing* (1972) and *Survival* (1972) (Cooke 200, 214). Although *The Circle Game* won the Governor General's Award, it did not gain her a mention in the *CPI*, at least not in the subsequent three years; she did not attract significant attention until 1972, when her prose became popular. Although Ondaatje's peak of celebrity is the result of his novel *The English Patient* and the film based on it, he represented celebrity in his poetry of the 1970s. For whatever reason, Atwood did not.

It was never a topic of Purdy's poetry, either, nor of his only novel, *A Splinter in the Heart* (1990). As Purdy implies in his memoir *Reaching for the Beaufort Sea* (1993), one reason that he ignored the topic is that he did not feel affected by celebrity: "Prizes and flattery don't have much effect on me, or so I think" (281), though he also claims that he felt "inhibit[ed]" (279) by the presence of the camera when he was filmed at the ceremony for his Governor General's Award in 1986. In the 1960s and afterward, Purdy became a mentor to many poets who reflected on being welcomed into his home in Ameliasburgh, but he did not welcome the cameras in the same way. The NFB film *Al Purdy: "A Sensitive Man"* (1988) shows that he only indulged in clowning for the cameras at a distance, never in close-up, and he is occasionally defensive and irritable in response to direct questions about his poetry. Except when on stage, his manner is awkward and partly confirms Sam Solecki's observation that he is "wholly indifferent to fashion" (*Last* 217). Notwithstanding his determination to publish a lot of poetry, he never aspired to fame through celebrity as Layton, Cohen, Ondaatje, and MacEwen seemed to do. He stated that "[s]ome writers—and I think of Irving Layton especially—yearn to have their work live on into the future. That kind of immortality, which probably

amounts to fifty or a hundred years at most, is not attractive to me. I shall not be around then to enjoy such possible fame” (Purdy, *Reaching* 281). His public persona is an interesting topic for further research, but because he was not self-promotional in the same way as these other writers—mainly because he did not write poems about celebrity—I have not included him in the next chapters.

The *CPI* reveals that some of the six aforementioned writers were highly popular as writers in literary magazines and were of interest in popular magazines; nevertheless, the *CPI* corroborates Dudek’s aforementioned observation that literary celebrity in Canada during the 1960s and 1970s was “a minor whirlpool.” In a recent interview with Jian Ghomeshi on CBC-Radio, Cohen said this of having a career as a poet in Canada in the mid-1960s: “That [the term *career*] hardly begins to describe the modesty of the enterprise in Canada at that time.” During the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, the peak of Cohen’s topicality in the *CPI* was in 1978 and 1979, when he was written about five times in both years; Atwood’s peak was when she was written about 16 times in 1977, which is an average of 1.3 mentions per month—hardly what might be called a media frenzy (though a survey that included more newspapers would undoubtedly increase these numbers). The era of celebrity in Canadian poetry was important to Canadian literature, but its whirlpool might not have been pulling in much of the general public—except indirectly, when Layton was generating editorial controversies unrelated to poetry or when Cohen was appealing to audiences through music.

Cohen’s celebrity as a poet reached its peak during that era immediately after he released his first album, *Songs of Leonard Cohen* (1967); the remarkable boost that the album gave his *Selected Poems* is a perfect example of celebrity’s spinning-off between

forms. Cohen used one medium to promote another. After his relative lack of success with his first novel *The Favourite Game* (1963), his first opportunity for cross-marketing was with the aforementioned *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen*, which was filmed in 1964 when he was on tour with Layton, Earle Birney, and Phyllis Gotlieb. Its timing was convenient; it immediately followed *The Favourite Game* and his third book of poetry, *Flowers for Hitler* (1964), though it was probably initially conceived to promote or record McClelland and Stewart's book-promotion strategy.<sup>22</sup> When Cohen reached the peak of his literary celebrity with his phenomenally best-selling *Selected Poems*, his success was not owing strictly to his poems—and not mainly to his controversial second novel, *Beautiful Losers* (1966)—but to his music, in which he made his debut in 1967 at the Newport Folk Festival and on CBC-TV's *Camera Three* (Hutcheon 21-2). In 1978, Barbara Amiel wrote in *Maclean's*: “In 1967 Cohen released his first album, *Songs of Leonard Cohen*, and a cult of international dimensions was established” (“Leonard” 56). She states that by 1978 his books had been translated into 11 languages; he had sold over two million books (not only poetry but also his two novels) and over nine million albums. With the exception of his mid-1970s slump (when he was not publishing new books anyway), his career in music was the main reason that he could sell so much poetry.

Cohen's success in the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry and its aftermath is not the same as that of most other writers, and this discrepancy raises the question of how celebrity might have been involved in promoting one literary form at the relative expense of another. This question is important because, in theory, celebrity is formally neutral.

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22 In 1964, the company had arranged for Layton, Cohen, Earle Birney and Phyllis Gotlieb to tour from place to place, together, to promote their recent books.

The earlier quotation from Boorstin (that celebrity makes “literary and dramatic form [...] irrelevant”) suggests that celebrity exists outside of form in the realm of images. Partly because images are nearly ubiquitous in society, celebrity is transferable and therefore useful in cross-marketing; it functions as what Aaron Jaffe calls, in *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005), an *imprimatur*—a literary brand signified by a “textual signature” (3) or “stylistic stamp” (20). Initially, Cohen’s example seems to prove Boorstin and Jaffe correct; because of Cohen’s success as a singer-songwriter, he could have sold suits, sunglasses, bananas, or anything else remotely related to his image.<sup>23</sup> He sold poetry, novels, and music, but his celebrity was theoretically transferable to products not associated with the activities in which he was engaged.

Why did the imprimaturs of Layton, Ondaatje, and MacEwen function differently? Why did these three writers have less success than Cohen during the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry? Obviously, the main reason is that they were not popular musicians, as Cohen was. Other possibilities should be mentioned but cannot be proven here, given this chapter’s scope: Layton was too old to compete as a celebrity with younger poets and yet promoted himself until he was over-exposed, thereby contributing to his celebrity’s fade; Ondaatje was especially private and less willing than Cohen to negotiate with the public when he was younger (and often enough since then); MacEwen remained mostly committed to poetry, and she might have been limited in her celebrity because she was a woman working in a field that was traditionally more welcoming to men. The next chapters consider some of these possibilities.

This chapter is focussed partly on the relative cost to poetry after the rise of the

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23 Anachronistically, I am referring to Cohen’s photograph on the cover of his album *I’m Your Man* (1988).

novel in Canada, but that relative cost is greater to the poets who chose to remain committed mostly to poetry; some of them resented the novel. The form associated with a given writer is an aspect of how that writer defines himself or herself, as the aforementioned quotation from Reaney suggested: “as poets, we’ve fought the novel and lost.” Layton briefly tried to follow Cohen into other forms by collaborating with him on plays that were never produced (Cameron 313-4) and intending to write a novel as Cohen had (Layton, *Wild* 181), but he admitted that “[s]ome poets there are who can switch from one form to the other [...] but I’m simply not one of them” (qtd. in Cameron 400). Although MacEwen said, “I don’t call myself a poet, I call myself a writer” (qtd. in Sullivan 193), she remained mostly committed to poetry partly because her novel *King of Egypt, King of Dreams* (1971) did not bring her financial security; she subsisted on a small income from poetry readings and verse plays she wrote for Robert Weaver (who had also been the editor of the *Tamarack Review*), who broadcast them on CBC-Radio (Sullivan 191, 324). Layton is the only one of them to admit, eventually, a commitment to a single form. MacEwen wrote in several but did not return to the most popular. Whether or not Layton and MacEwen resented the novel is a matter for speculation.

Unlike Layton and MacEwen, Cohen and Ondaatje deftly mixed these forms and others. Cohen has said, “All of my writing has guitars behind it, even the novels” (qtd. in Nadel 175), and Ondaatje has said that he prefers the term *artisan* (Rae 93) to *poet*—presumably also to *novelist* and *filmmaker*, which is the least-known of his occupations despite or because of the unassuming ingenuity of *The Sons of Captain Poetry* (1970) and *The Clinton Special* (1974). In *From Cohen to Carson* (2008), Ian Rae examines similarities in the works of Cohen and Ondaatje; their experimentation helped to develop

what Rae refers to as the poet's novel in Canada. Calling *genre* what I call *form*, Rae argues that "[w]orking within this cross-genre context has allowed me to dispel the notion that poets who turn to the novel betray their allegiance to poetry" (5). Rae suggests that the impression of conflict between forms is unnecessary: "the strength of the novel in Canada, in particular the critical acclaim brought to it by poets, is also evidence of the vitality of the long poem" (6). If poetry survived its "dying" days reborn as the novel—or, more accurately, if poetry and novels were both used to question the distinctness of forms—then two problems that have concerned me lose their salience: what one form can do for celebrity that another cannot; what celebrity can do for a form.

The reception of a work of art depends so much on its form, however (i.e. on what one form can do well that another cannot), that the distinctness of forms remains an important premise of my argument in this chapter. Even if an artist or a critic believes that formal distinctions are unimportant compared to the value of the creative process or of art in general, form matters to the public—as does genre. Historically, the realist novel was more popular than the lyric poem (except as lyrics become music), and both of these types of art are usually more popular than formal experiments. Regardless, my intention here is to contend that, in given historical periods, some forms were more conducive to celebrity than others, and celebrity had effects on the development of some forms. Celebrity was sought (not necessarily for itself); it had value and was not easily achieved, and a writer's commitment to a form evidently affected his or her success. I therefore doubt that Rae can entirely "dispel the notion that poets who turn to the novel betray their allegiance to poetry," though I mostly agree with his other arguments. I simply want to suggest that the development of the poet's novel in Canada had additional causes.

Notably, the presence of celebrities in the field of poetry in Canada in the 1960s was another reason for the rise of the poet's novel. The small number of writers that I have identified as potential celebrities in this chapter—only six—could not be expanded much. Jaffe's argument throughout his book is that modernist poets who were celebrities worked together to maintain a small and exclusive group. In *What Price Fame?* (2000), Tyler Cowen argues that having such a small coterie of potentially over-exposed celebrities can be worse for a genre (or form, I would add) than having many celebrities. Cowen calls this potential abundance the "superstars model" (107) of fame—a flawed model that predicts that having more superstars (i.e. the over-exposed) in a genre (e.g. tennis on television) results in more popularity for that genre. Layton experienced the consequences of this model; he realized that he was over-exposed and said, in 1965, that "[t]he last thing I want to see happen to me is to be taken captive by my own image" (qtd. in Cameron 373). His celebrity subsequently faded. My suspicion is that some poets who were celebrities in Canada—especially Cohen and Ondaatje—intuitively understood that, to solve the problem of over-exposure and survive the historical see-sawing of the relative popularity of poetry and the novel, they wanted to broaden the field of celebrity by complicating the distinctions between forms.

Although the poet's novel in Canada is the result of creative experimentation, it is arguably also the result of the over-exposure that led some poets who were celebrities in the 1960s and 1970s to seek lasting recognition in other ways. Dudek accurately predicted that celebrity in Canadian poetry would be a fad; others might have been equally astute, or were listening to Dudek, and wanted alternatives. Cohen obviously wanted alternatives. He not only helped Layton to define the beginning of the era of

celebrity of Canadian poetry, but he also led the change that ended it, at least symbolically,<sup>24</sup> as Rae implies by starting *From Cohen to Carson* with him.

Cohen would probably disagree with my theory about the over-exposure of poetry in Canada, and his experience in the 1960s helps to explain what was happening. His first novel “*The Favourite Game* had sold approximately two hundred copies in Canada and one thousand in the United States” (Nadel 142). His second novel, *Beautiful Losers*, also had “marginal sales, selling only one thousand copies in Canada and three hundred in the U.S.” (Nadel 142). In *Various Positions* (1996), Ira Nadel argues that Cohen turned to music because “he couldn’t earn a decent, or even an indecent, living as a writer” (141). The publication of his novels in the mid-1960s was too early for them to profit fully from the growth of the Canadian prose fiction market. Although Cohen’s timing was impeccable at the beginning of his career as a musician, he was too early in becoming a novelist. He had made almost the same suggestion in a letter to his sister after he did not win the Governor General’s Award for his poems in *The Spice-Box of Earth* (1961): “I’m now running three and a half years ahead of enlightened poetic taste and the time-lag is increasing daily” (qtd. in Nadel 109). Ironically, the cliché about being ahead of his time might have been more accurate than he could have realized at that time. MacEwen’s first novel, *Julian the Magician* (1963), seems to have suffered from the same problem of arriving precociously early; even *King of Egypt, King of Dreams* might have appeared too soon in 1971. Although I have no sales figures for the novels by Atwood and Ondaatje in the 1970s, I would not be surprised if they were generally higher than those of earlier

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24 As I will argue in chapter IV, Cohen symbolically ended the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry by killing (or committing the suicide of) his public persona in *Death of a Lady’s Man* (1978).

examples of the poet's novel. Regardless, Ondaatje and Atwood are unquestionably more canonical than Cohen and MacEwen as novelists, and one reason for their recognition is that they were lucky to have come later (c. 1975), when novels were more popular in relation to poetry than they had been ten years earlier.

The timing was, proverbially, everything: the changing popularity of literary forms coincided with emerging and mutually supportive popular media that made celebrity temporarily possible for ambitious poets. The era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, which I have defined as approximately 1955 to 1980, started partly because Layton so vigorously promoted himself, including on television, and thereby helped to attract attention to poetry. Canada's publishers also helped; its medium-sized companies focused until (and including) 1964 only on poetry, and even one of the large companies, McClelland and Stewart, was promoting poetry with unusual abandon (as with Cohen, Layton, Birney, and Gotlieb's tour). Many other new poets were emerging in this era, and though they were not celebrities, they helped to generate an excitement about poetry that has not since been apparent in Canada.

The era was brief: only 25 years, and only for around half a decade in the middle of the 1960s was poetry truly a *cause célèbre*. The presence of Layton, Cohen, Ondaatje, MacEwen, Atwood, and Purdy in the popular magazines was not common, though some of them were publishing many poems in literary magazines and were appearing fairly often in *The Globe and Mail*. As the data from the *CPI* suggest, Layton, Cohen, Atwood, and Purdy were the most popular. Because Ondaatje and MacEwen were less recognized, their commentary on celebrity is especially objective (and especially interesting, given that they imagined high degrees of celebrity as so invasive and destructive). Their

markedly lesser celebrity during the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry reveals that either the limited Canadian resources for the promotion of literary celebrity or cultural factors restricted the celebrity of poets in Canada to an exclusive group. There were few poets who were celebrities in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s—and they were not widely recognized outside of the field of literature—but that was their era, and they began immediately to imagine its opportunities, consequences, and how they—and their field by extension—would be changed by the celebrity that was now available to them.

### Chapter III

#### Becoming “Too Public” in the Poetry of Irving Layton

Celebrity for Irving Layton was a serious problem; how to get it, what to do with it, and how to avoid its typecasting effect were questions that he raised in his poetry from the mid-1950s at least until the end of the 1970s. In those years, which I defined in chapter II as the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, Layton emerged as the first celebrity poet<sup>1</sup> in Canada. According to his biographer Elspeth Cameron, “[p]artly because of Irving Layton, poets and poetry in Canada became ‘news’” (368). Later poets variously modified and rejected his model of celebrity but tacitly accepted the terms of reference that he had helped to establish. Problematic masculinity in poets (Glass 18; Jaffe 165) and religious pretension in general (Frow 201, 204; Turner 6-7) were historical tendencies of literary celebrity; Layton accepted them too readily, and inflicted too many abuses with them (e.g. sexist poems), but he also resisted their detrimental effect on his identity. He wondered about the uses and limitations of celebrity and ultimately decided that becoming too public would endanger what he valued most about himself as a poet.

Of the highest importance to Layton were his freedoms of expression and self-definition, which are closely related because poets can to some extent define themselves through their expression; when Layton felt that celebrity was limiting those freedoms, he reacted against the public. Brian Trehearne has remarked in “‘Scanned and Scorned’:

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1 I use the term *celebrity poet* reluctantly. I prefer not to use nouns as adjectives, but there is no alternative in this case. To say “celebrated poet” would be misleading because *to celebrate* someone is to pay tribute, which is usually done at a late stage in someone’s career or posthumously—often after the person has ceased to be widely recognized in a culture of celebrity. To say “famous poet” would also be inaccurate, as the first chapter explains, because *fame* implies long-term recognition that celebrities do not consistently achieve (hence the phenomenon of the comeback).

Freedom and Fame in Layton” (1992) that “[i]n the same decade [the 1950s] that saw him develop the figure of the ‘murdered selves’ as a response to his own earlier poetry, Layton began the assault on his Canadian readership that reverberates in his reputation to this day” (142). Layton’s emphasis on multiple “selves” instead of one self was a response to celebrity’s typecasting effect; he seemed interested in defining and redefining himself through multiple artistic rebirths, even if the audience would kill him every time.

Following some of Layton’s prefaces and essays, Trehearne states that Layton began “to conceive literary reputation—that is, wide audience approval [e.g. celebrity]—as a kind of death knell for true creativity” (142). Consequently, Layton almost always represented his audience negatively and had to “shock” (Trehearne 143) his audience more and more as it became less sensitive to his offences. His situation became less conducive to “true creativity” as his audience began to expect the (gradually less electric) “shock.” Contrary to the likely intention of his tactics, he was typecast. A crucial theme in Layton’s poetry is his struggle to maintain his freedoms of expression and self-definition in spite of his celebrity—a struggle against typecasting that, because of his celebrity, he could not win.<sup>2</sup>

A paradox of my argument about Layton’s celebrity is that he wanted to know how to transform it into *fame* (a term I distinguished from *celebrity* in the first chapter), and yet fame, to some extent, is fixity. Whereas celebrity is quick to come and quick to go (Rojek 9), fame lasts longer (Cowen 77) partly because it is “[r]eputation derived from great achievements” (*OED*); celebrity need not derive from any achievement whatsoever. Layton wanted achievement; he claimed that he hoped some of his poems would be

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2 The fusion of selves that I explained in the first chapter as an aspect of the metaphor of celebrity is the culmination of internalized typecasting: the sense that one’s identity is limited in the same way that one’s performances conform to a familiar role expected by the public.

granted “a permanent place” (*Tall Man*) in literature, but “permanen[ce]” is contrary to his desire for flux, which he expresses in poems considered below. Given celebrity’s ephemerality, Layton should have expected celebrity to grant him freedom in flux but not permanence through greatness. Much of Layton’s trouble with celebrity was probably the result of his confusion about what he might gain and lose from it. Layton wanted fame but was tempted by and embroiled in celebrity, which not only seemed to motivate him but also to frustrate, worry, and otherwise preoccupy him for several years.

No one would be surprised, then, to learn that Layton’s “assault” on his public became more intense as his celebrity became more widespread. Not only was his career definitive for the next generation of poets who were interested in celebrity, but it was also partly defined by his celebrity. It had three phases that this chapter examines: first, his early anticipation and experience of celebrity, in the mid-1950s, when he was writing his major poems and imagining how his ideal poet would fare in the context of celebrity; second, the peak of his celebrity and its immediate aftermath, from 1959 to the culmination of his desperation in *The Laughing Rooster* (1964), when he rarely published major poems because he was attempting various strategies that might sustain his already fading celebrity; and third, his gradual acceptance of being overexposed and *passé* after 1965, when he could write poems such as “Shakespeare” (1971), which represents his celebrity and his potential fame with much less angst. From the mid-1970s onward, Layton’s poetry finally mellowed and matured in tone—a change arguably made possible not only because he was in his sixties but also because he was relieved to be out of the spotlight as his celebrity faded, the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry neared its end, and he achieved some recognition as a famous poet. He changed only when he felt reasonably

secure in his reputation after the difficult dénouement of his celebrity.

The arc of Layton's career during the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry cannot be adequately understood separately from the coincident histories of masculinity and faith. The increasing secularity of North American society after World War II is debatable (Frow 207) but nevertheless helps to explain celebrity's social function as religion (Frow 208) and Layton's prophetic persona, which is also problematically masculine. After World War II, men's confidence in their autonomy and control over their lives was shaken (Cuordileone 14; Faludi 9), and they sometimes felt objectified and feminized because they seemingly had to be in movies to be heroes (Faludi 35, 39). Partly to deal with a concern of some male poets at the time, that writing poetry was a feminine activity (Davidson, *Guys* 47-8), they bonded and formed cliques to promote themselves and each other as writers (Jaffe 165), which was almost certainly also a response to the gradually intensifying feminism of the twentieth century's third quarter. Layton's exaggerated masculinity reveals his sensitivity to these historical aspects of men's culture; they are not excuses for his demeaning representations of women or other men, but they help to explain the masculinity and religiosity of the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry—and the decline in Layton's celebrity (and thus his contemporaneity) at the rise of feminism.

Layton was not averse to making masculinity and religiosity the terms of reference for celebrity in Canadian poetry. His various performances—whether they were of, in, or separate from his poetry—were enthusiastic and to some extent parodic representations of himself as a man big enough to challenge or seduce anyone. All of the celebrities who were poets in the next generation responded, directly or otherwise, to Layton himself or to the terms of reference that he noticed in contemporary politics and used to define his

public persona. His grandstanding<sup>3</sup> entertained some and offended others, but it also helped him to determine, through experience, whether or not his freedoms of expression and self-definition would be compromised by his celebrity. The effect of his poetry so often depends on his celebrity, which was not only an excuse for writing throw-away lines but also an aspect of his life and culture that makes even his worst poetry more meaningful. Some of his best poetry, too, can be interpreted with his emerging, peaking, or declining celebrity in mind; his celebrity could not easily be ignored by poets in the 1950s and 1960s, and partly for that reason it should not be underestimated now.

Although Layton had been writing poetry throughout the 1940s, the first phase of his career began in the mid-1950s, when radio, film, and television helped make literary celebrity possible beyond its previous confinement to books, newspapers, and poetry readings. Layton was the first Canadian poet, and one of the few, to be known through television. His appearances on CBC-TV's *Fighting Words* debate show from 1956 to 1958 and again during its 1982 revival (Allan) were important instances of his celebrity extending to the general public. The 1950s and 1960s were a time when Canadian television was dominated by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), whose programming was indirectly paid for by a federal government increasingly committed to supporting the arts, following the recommendations of the Massey Commission in 1951. From 1952 to 1962, the CBC had a monopoly on network broadcasting and, by 1962, was broadcasting into over 85% of Canadian homes ("Television"). Wynne Francis's claim that Layton "became a public figure known to millions of Canadians whether or not they

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3 *Grandstanding* has an additional meaning, as the first chapter explains: standing in for someone more grand—a bigger man or even a god. It is the hyperbolically masculine, religiously pretentious performance that helps to catalyse the fusion of selves.

had ever read his poems” (*Irving* 4) therefore deserves some credence. The historical circumstances in Canada were conducive to literary celebrity’s emergence from print into the other media that would define post-war celebrity.

Besides his television appearances, Layton was a highly prolific writer whose 100-plus journal publications, typically annual or biannual book publications, frequent readings, numerous editorials in newspapers, and several teaching jobs—including many years at Sir George Williams (through its transition from college to university) in Montreal and York University in Toronto—helped to make him widely recognized. Sam Solecki argues that Layton was “the most popular and controversial poet in Canada” from the “early 1950s to the mid-1970s” (xv); I would adjust the scope of this claim to suggest that Layton was no longer the most popular by the mid-to-late 1960s when Leonard Cohen surpassed his celebrity and Al Purdy equalled his popularity though not his controversy.<sup>4</sup> Solecki otherwise accurately explains Layton’s early-to-mid-career:

A critical buzz and often hostile reviews accompanied the publication of each of his collections of poetry, while his public readings attracted capacity audiences often in the hundreds. He was a star attraction [...] Though his popularity was based on the fact that he was writing original poems of remarkable profundity and power [...] he also had a reputation beyond poetry circles as an often abrasive and polemical commentator on culture and society. Thus even if you knew nothing else about Layton, you probably knew from his combative letters to newspapers and from the

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4 In chapter II, I compared Layton and Purdy’s sales figures and how often their writing or stories about them appeared in various Canadian periodicals. My conclusion was that Purdy was more popular than Layton; celebrities tend to be popular, but popular writers are not necessarily celebrities, and Purdy was not a celebrity as Layton epitomized it.

television program *Fighting Words* that he was the *enfant terrible* of Canadian literature. (xv)

Solecki and Francis seem to concur that Layton was a celebrity in the 1950s and 1960s because he was better known for his personality than his poetry. Their observation corroborates Daniel J. Boorstin's claim in *The Image* (1961) that "[t]he great significance of the star system for literary and dramatic form was simply that the star came to dominate the form and make it irrelevant" (158). My suspicion is that Layton's performance as an "*enfant terrible*" was tenacious into his fifties because he was frustrated that his poetry was "irrelevant" to his celebrity. Nevertheless, he had accepted that his celebrity would involve self-promotion beyond poetry.

Until then (c. 1955)—for ten years after his first book—Layton had to cope with writing in obscurity despite improvements in the arts market in Canada. After a "renaissance" (Pacey, "Writer" 493) in Canadian literature in the 1940s, post-war cultural nationalism lost no ground; it encouraged the establishment of new magazines even before the recommendations in the report of the Massey Commission were acted upon by the federal government later in the 1950s. Nevertheless, the earlier "renaissance" did not mean that Layton could easily publish his work. *Here and Now* (1945) appeared thanks to his affiliations with *First Statement* magazine, where he was on the editorial board; he helped to finance *Here and Now* himself, as he did with his next fourteen books (Francis, *Irving* 4). In the eleven years after *Here and Now*, he published ten new titles that attest more to his determination as a writer than to opportunities in the market. Eli Mandel observed that "Layton, in a burst of somewhat bitter enthusiasm, had stood in a park handing out free (and unsalable) copies of his *The Long Pea-Shooter* [1954]" (*Irving* 13).

Between 1952 and the end of the 1950s, his books sustained “an average loss of \$200 apiece” (Callwood 109). He persisted, and when the market and his audience grew, he ignored what has been called “the archly modernist preoccupation with undersupply” (Jaffe 106) and gained a temporary advantage over less prolific poets.

Layton suggests in *The Long Pea-Shooter* that he had been recently thinking about the relationship between sales figures and celebrity or fame. His “bitter enthusiasm” in giving his books to passersby implies not only resentment but also disdain for markets in general—a sign of his Marxism when it was just beginning to fade (Cameron 207). He was beginning to realize that widespread recognition was not likely to be the result of poetry on its own. In the “Prologue to the Long Pea-Shooter” from 1954, he sardonically advises poets,

[r]esolve before ink you try  
That your books may not remaindered lie;  
Think only of kudos and a name  
And failing greatness, acquire fame [....] (10)

Each line here is a syllable short of making each pair into a heroic couplet. Their shortness accentuates Layton’s disillusionment, which is evident in his ironic advice about establishing “a name” even “before [putting] ink” to paper. In other words, he thinks that if he had “fame” his reputation would precede him and even make his poetry unnecessary. His use of the word *fame* really means *celebrity*—a status that needs no “greatness,” as I explained in the first chapter. If Layton’s ideal in this poem is greatness despite what appears to be his cynicism, he suggests that he actually wanted fame: lasting recognition derived from his accomplishments as a poet, not as a huckster. Impatient for

fame, however, he accepted celebrity and its capitalist economics.

He would soon be admired for his poetry but would also immediately exploit that admiration to sell more books, which suggests that he understood celebrity as a means to some other end, such as fame—or financial gain. Layton achieved recognition when *In the Midst of My Fever* (1954) garnered “his first major and favorable critical reviews” (Mandel, *Irving* 13), notably from Northrop Frye. The next year was even more important for him; although he seems to have published no more than two poems outside of his books (as indicated in the *Canadian Periodical Index*), his *The Blue Propellor* (1955) had been successful enough to warrant a second edition in the same year. In October, 1955, only around a year after being unable to sell *The Long Pea-Shooter*, he wrote to Jonathan Williams, an American publisher:

At the moment, in this country at least, there’s a BOOM IN LAYTON;  
how long it will last I don’t know. But I really think that such a book [as  
the one he had proposed to Williams] will find an interested public waiting  
for it. [...] Now suppose I could give you a lump sum of \$200.00 wd [*sic*]  
you be interested in turning out such a book for me before the end of  
March? (*Wild* 63; his emphasis)

He also guaranteed Williams against any financial loss incurred by the publication of the book (*Wild* 64). The so-called “BOOM” was an example of his grandstanding: an exaggeration of his celebrity for the purpose of self-promotion; Layton later wrote to Desmond Pacey that publishing with Williams “meant sinking over \$600 which not only we hadn’t got but which we couldn’t even borrow. Madness!” (*Wild* 84). Williams accepted the book and it became *The Improved Binoculars* (1956), which also had a

second edition. Its success was somewhat owing to a scandal—the likes of which Layton later made a habit of exploiting as promotion.

A tendency to publish controversial material was already evident in Layton's career. *The Blue Propellor* was demeaning to women, other poets, academics, puritans, and Canada itself, among other targets. According to Francis Mansbridge, the editor of Layton's selected letters, "[i]nitially Ryerson Press in Toronto was to co-publish [*The Improved Binoculars*] along with Jonathan Williams' American Jargon Press. When William Carlos Williams agreed to write the introduction, success seemed assured, but Ryerson's last-minute refusal to distribute the book because of alleged obscenity was only an apparent defeat" (*Wild* 4). He states that Layton "was not surprised when Ryerson decided not to distribute his book, but was in fact delighted when their withdrawal occasioned a controversy that he saw as potentially beneficial to the book's success" (*Wild* x); "he was not far wrong in his assessment of its effects" (*Wild* 80). Mandel argues that Ryerson's refusal occasioned "a minor *cause célèbre* [...]. Whether it was the scandal or the enthusiastic blurb by William Carlos Williams or the poems themselves, the book went into a second edition with some 30 new poems added to the original 87, and the Layton phenomenon had truly begun" (*Irving* 13). Like most instances of celebrity in Canadian poetry, it was "minor" compared to celebrity in other fields, but it helped Layton to profit from the growing market for poetry. His poems began appearing more and more frequently in magazines and journals: eight times in 1956, 18 times in 1958, and peaking at 22 times in 1960 (according to the *CPI*; see chapter II). The serendipity of the distribution scandal was never really repeated during the era of celebrity in Canadian

poetry, but Layton got the message: lacking controversy, create it.<sup>5</sup>

Even some of his first published poems indirectly suggest that Layton foresaw himself as a salesman of scandal—perhaps news—as when the analogous character of the “Newsboy” introduces *Here and Now* (1945). A short poem, it arguably represents the newsboy as a poet selling headlines to the public. “Newsboy” is written in the third person and does not refer to the biographical Layton, who had, however, been a pedlar and a delivery boy as a teenager (Cameron 41, 55). Instead, the newsboy is associated with celebrity through the headlines, and the speaker perceives in him the masculinity and religiosity that would soon become associated with Layton’s performance as a celebrity. The newsboy has “last-edition omniscience” (n.p.) that gives him the knowledge that he can sell, in newspapers, “to the gods and geldings” (n.p.). Layton, here, associates godly knowledge with virility that the marketplace can supply. Not only is the newsboy associated with celebrities, but he also has social relevance as a purveyor of information. He is like a writer—one who is unafraid to comment brashly on society:

Intrusive as a collision, he is

The Zeitgeist’s too public interpreter,

A voice multiplex and democratic,

The people’s voice or the monopolists’ [...] (n.p.)

As a “too public interpreter” he is a symbol of literary celebrity as Layton later envisages

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5 Notably, his American publisher did not share the Canadian publisher’s qualms about his material. Ryerson Press was associated with the United Church and had religious reasons for objecting to Layton’s poetry. Layton might have speculated that the bigger, diverse American market was much more conducive to literary celebrity than the Canadian market because of the religious beliefs at Ryerson, which was one of Canada’s only major publishers. He exploited what might have been a national difference, using the same conditions that made celebrity unlikely for Canadian poets to establish post-war literary celebrity in Canada; he was also lucky that Jack McClelland, in Toronto, was willing to take risks for Layton and in general, even when the censorship of his publications was a possibility—as in the case of Cohen’s *Beautiful Losers* (1966).

it, though here Layton seems to approve of the newsboy being “too public.” In the newsboy’s “multiplex” voice, one that speaks for both the “people” and the “monopolists,” Layton anticipates his many future poems that appreciate contradiction and attempt to avoid being restricted to a monotone. Layton was already thinking about the limitations that celebrity—being “too public” and vulnerable to monopoly—might impose on his conception of the poet.

Being too public is a result of what I defined in the first chapter as the metaphor of celebrity: *the private is public*. Celebrity’s effect on the private self and the identity crisis resulting from that effect have been acknowledged in studies of both celebrity and Layton. In *Celebrity* (2001), Chris Rojek argues that celebrities are “coloniz[ed]” (11) by the public realm—an act that might also be called “an invasive reconfiguration” (Latham 110) of the private self—and they thereby suffer “identity confusion” (Rojek 11). This identity crisis was explained in the first chapter, where I argued that a celebrity’s selfhood is on a continuum between privacy and publicity: first, the real, private self (the person), who cannot be known through literature; second, various personas (or other selves), including the private persona, which is a decoy offered to the audience to appease its demand for access to the celebrity’s private life; third, the public persona, which is the performer that engages in grandstanding and hucksterism to appeal to the audience. When the public persona fuses with the private persona, the decoy fails and the audience comes too close to the celebrity. This insidious *rapprochement* elicits the celebrity’s fear of being exposed, followed by the identity crisis, which is experienced as the fusion of selves involved in the metaphor of celebrity: *the private is public*—a proposition that suggests that its two terms are indistinguishable from each other. Their indistinguishability does

not mean that the selves have equal power. Although it is technically two personas that initially fuse, it is the private self and not the public realm that is ultimately vulnerable to the fusion that redefines identity.<sup>6</sup> The private self can survive this fusion, of course, but usually in a diminished condition.

Layton suggests as much in another early poem that establishes that he was thinking about the public's effect on the private self from the beginning of his career. In "To the Lawyer Handling My Divorce Case" from *Now Is the Place* (1948), Layton begins to realize some of the potential consequences of being too public. In early 1948, Layton divorced his first wife after having a child out of wedlock (Cameron 170). The fact that he was willing to publicize that event in "To the Lawyer Handling My Divorce Case" implies that his personal life, in his opinion, was almost sensational enough for the tabloids,<sup>7</sup> though the poem discloses nothing sordid. Instead, Layton uses the opportunity to consider his private persona's limited ability to protect his private self from the public. Previously, I explained that the private self offers the private persona to the audience as a decoy. When the audience's demands lead the private persona to fuse with the public persona (and the public in general), the public gains power over the celebrity. In "To the

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6 Celebrity can, however, change the public realm by making a difference to history, as Layton's celebrity did by affecting the development of poetry in Canada. If an individual can significantly change the public realm and, in effect, act publicly, the resulting question is whether or not the public realm can act privately, i.e. whether or not a culture has privacy. A culture surely has identity; perhaps its "private life" is its ideology: its unspoken assumptions and values, its collective unconscious. The four poets in this study write about celebrity partly to expose their culture's ideology, which can often be discovered in celebrity. I claim that "it is the private self and not the public realm that is ultimately vulnerable to the fusion that redefines identity" because cultures themselves do not experience vulnerability or crisis; individuals do. For example, a crisis of masculinity is, at its simplest, a crisis among men.

7 Layton gives the poem a less sensational title, "Existentialist," in *The Black Huntsmen* (1951), surely not knowing that he would eventually have had five wives and a reputation not so incongruous with the tabloids. Attesting to the media's later interest in his personal life, his marriage to Harriet Bernstein was announced in *The Globe and Mail* on November 24, 1978, with the headline "Poet Layton marries movie publicist" (Cherry 11). The story included a large photograph of Bernstein and Layton.

Lawyer Handling My Divorce Case,” Layton describes a similar fusion of otherwise separate selves in the context of dealing with the public realm represented by the law and the lawyer. Alluding to George Herbert Mead’s concepts of “I” and “Me” and his theory of socialization in *Mind, Self and Society* (1934), Layton conceives of himself in two ways: “I” as the subject, the private persona; and “Me” as the object acted upon by the public realm (i.e. the law and the lawyer). When the speaker reflects upon the lawyer peering at him, he says,

In that instant I have plummeted the infinite distance  
Between I and Me—  
Me is always question-begging, diffident, undersized;  
I am Me  
When my lawyer addresses me. (34)

Compared to the aforementioned letter to Williams in which Layton seems to separate himself from “LAYTON” the commodity, here he suggests that the contemptuous scrutiny of the lawyer fuses “I and Me”—in a mere “instant” eliminating an “infinite distance” between personas—so that both selves become “undersized.” Contrary to the expectations of a poet engaged in grandstanding, the speaker in this poem becomes smaller, not bigger. While anticipating—and subtly promoting—his celebrity in this poem, Layton acknowledges that celebrity could assimilate his private persona, leaving his private self unprotected and possibly feeling correspondingly uncertain, less confident, and small.

In the late 1940s, perhaps a man could suggest without recrimination that his divorce proceedings were hurting his self esteem; as the second wave of feminism gained

momentum in the 1960s and 1970s, however, such proceedings became negotiations of more obvious moral and ethical complexity. Now that “To the Lawyer Handling My Divorce Case” has established that Layton was thinking about his identity, possibly in relation to celebrity and masculinity, I want to explain some of the historical context necessary to any understanding of Layton’s celebrity. Many of Layton’s poems and some of his behaviour in person were allegedly misogynistic, and the historical context that helps to explain the uses of celebrity in relation to male identity also helps to explain why he indirectly threatened so many women—and men, I would add—in his poems. History cannot excuse him but it can help to explain him.

Layton’s sexism responded partly to a historical crisis of masculinity relevant to celebrity in the aftermath of World War II. In *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (2000), Susan Faludi explains that men began to feel less control over their lives after the war and that they manifested their frustration with violence against women (9). She argues that men were implicitly promised that “wartime masculinity, with its common mission, common enemy, and clear frontier, would continue in peacetime” (19); however, “World War II [...] would prove not the coronation of this sort of masculinity but its last gasp” (20). Although K.A. Cuordileone, in *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (2005), admits that describing the condition of masculinity as a “crisis” “might not be a useful historical designation” (15), he states that the various expressions of malaise, doubt, and discontent in society “tended to coalesce around a central theme: the passing of the autonomous male self” (14). Men’s control over their lives and their autonomy were felt to be in need of recuperation, and, when men felt that women were interfering with this recuperation, they sometimes reacted with male chauvinism, sexism,

or violence. Layton's concern for his freedom was associated with the expression of the sometimes divergent historical desires of men and women.

The second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s was a much-needed challenge to patriarchy, inequality, and women's dependence on men, but it was also one factor—among several—in the postwar crisis of masculinity. In an era when America's war in Vietnam was unpopular and when heroism only seemed possible on screen, men had fewer ways to prove their value as members of society. The culture of celebrity based in film and television suggested to men that, as images, they could regain their value, but this suggestion resulted in men being newly objectified and thereby feminized by the media. According to Faludi, in “an age of celebrity” (35) men's “public ‘femininity’” (39) required them to accept their own objectification, passivity, infantilization, and vanity, which she claims are the same problems “that women have in modern times denounced as trivializing and humiliating qualities imposed on them by a misogynist culture” (39). Citing Faludi's *Stiffed* and books by Barbara Ehrenreich, Kaja Silverman, and David Savran in *Authors Inc.: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880-1980* (2004), Loren Glass states that “[h]istorians of sexuality tend to agree that the postwar era [...] is characterized by the increasing fragility of patriarchal authority, which generates the sorts of strident masculine response we see in writers like [Norman] Mailer” (182). Layton is another such writer.<sup>8</sup> His “strident masculine response” to the condition of postwar masculinity was partly to insult, sexually exploit, or abuse women—unjustifiably, though in a way that should be explained with more nuance—in his writing,

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8 He is, in fact, uncannily similar to Mailer, but they have not been studied together, probably because the study of literature is usually delimited by a country's borders. Later in this chapter, I consider a poem that Layton wrote for or about Mailer: “The Dazed Steer.”

as Joanne Lewis shows in “Irving’s Women” (1988), and to some extent in person, as Cameron occasionally reports in her biography of Layton.

Another of men’s responses was to bond with other men, and recent studies of poets who experienced some degree of widespread recognition have shown that men form homosocial groups that consolidate their power and help to counter the supposed feminizing of male poets. In *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005), Aaron Jaffe explains that women were rarely able to “muscl[e] in” (Jaffe 165) to cliques that men formed to promote themselves and each other. In the context of Jack Spicer’s North Beach group and Charles Olson’s Black Mountain school in *Guys Like Us: Citing Masculinity in Cold War Poetics* (2004), Michael Davidson argues that “even within the most progressive communities—whether homosexual or heterosexual—forms of misogyny and homophobia are often necessary to their continuation” (48). He suggests that “only male community could serve as protection” against “reciprocal objectification—and feminization” (Davidson, *Guys* 48) potentially resulting from men’s expression of supposedly feminine interiority in their lyric poems. To counter such stereotypes, male poets not only bonded but also asserted that they were too dynamic and strong to be fixed. Davidson suggests that “[p]oets of the late 1950s thought of their work as capable of effecting change—of doing rather than representing—by the sheer authority vested in the speaker” (*Guys* 29). He is referring to the Beats, but his statement could also apply to Layton, whose problematically masculine performance of that “sheer authority” for the sake of “change” was partly in response to his potential fear of being feminized because he was a poet. Layton’s mentorship of other poets—usually younger men, such as David Solway and especially Cohen—confirmed his authority as paternal, and it also helped to

validate and strengthen a community of men who felt the need to respond to social changes that were seemingly not in their interests.

Layton's relationship with Cohen, as a relationship significantly among men, is worth consideration partly because they were the two Canadian poets who can most accurately be described as celebrities. My article "Celebrity and the Poetic Dialogue of Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen" (2009) explains how they began writing poems for and about each other, often with reference to each other's works.<sup>9</sup> Initiated with Cohen's *Let Us Compare Mythologies* (1956), this poetic dialogue was also a debate to determine which of them was the more free. The freedoms under consideration were those of expression and self-definition, which Layton represented as under threat from the public. Their poetic dialogue was, in many cases, a series of reflections about each other's personas and the consequences of celebrity.

It was also a series of gestures of community among men and corresponded with poetry being written by the Beats in America. Davidson argues that "[w]hat makes 1950s counterpoetries like that of the Beats so significant as a cultural movement is that they complicated the division between mass culture and aesthetic culture as it was being discussed in 1950s intellectual forums. [...] The Beats [...] neither sold out to the mainstream nor rejected it; rather, they worked strategically *within* it to develop an immanent critique" (*Guys* 52, his emphasis). The Beats disapproved of conformity but not the general homosocial uniformity of their groups; when Layton and Cohen established their poetic dialogue, they reinforced each other's masculine authority, but the irony of that masculinity—given that their audiences almost certainly expected it to be a

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9 Some of the arguments in this chapter also appear, usually with different emphasis, in that article.

prominent aspect of their public personas—was likely evident to them, especially Cohen. His self-deprecation as a man was almost relentless, whereas Layton’s self-deprecation has not always been easily noticed behind his machismo.

To call Layton’s work merely “sexist,” however, as Lewis does, or to argue that he is beyond definition and beyond reproach, as Solway does—“it is inadvisable to condemn ‘Layton’” (224)—is to ignore how Layton’s sexism was motivated in part by a concern for freedom from socially and historically determined ways of thinking and behaving. Although freedom is a problematic concept associated with property and power—in effect, capitalism and all the gross inequity of that system—it is also a goal of selfhood as defined in the individualistic West. In the film *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen* (1965), Layton said that poets must “preserve the self in a world that is rapidly steamrolling the selves out of existence and establishing a uniform world.” In contrast with what Solway claims and what Layton sometimes affirms, Trehearne suggests that Layton also feared that his “transformative model of selfhood” (“Scanned” 141) would not function in practice because of the influence of his audience. Trehearne’s argument is mainly based on his analysis of Layton’s “Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom” (1958). In that poem, Layton represents the poet as a celebrity—a clown on stilts grandstanding (rather literally standing tall) before an audience that threatens to “render him a fixed fact and deny him further freedom to change” (Trehearne, “Scanned” 146). Layton’s poems of the 1950s reflect his concerns about his present society and his celebrity, which was emerging into and being formed by that society; those poems gain new relevance when considered alongside the historical development of his own celebrity.

When Layton’s celebrity was emerging in the mid-1950s, one of his major

influences was Friedrich Nietzsche (Cameron 231). Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-85) adapts the prophet of the Zoroastrian religion to his own purposes. Although Patricia Keeney Smith suggests that the "creative giant" (189) who appears in Layton's poetry is the "over-man" (*Übermensch*) introduced by Nietzsche's Zarathustra, I would argue, more specifically, that Zarathustra himself is the model for Layton's ideal poet. Significantly, that ideal of the poet developed as Layton became a celebrity poet, and Layton seems to have been thinking about how his ideals would fare in the context of his celebrity. Indeed, these two conceptions of the poet are impossible to separate; Layton constantly wrote of this "creative giant" or ideal poet in relation to audiences, symbols of celebrity (e.g. stars such as the sun), and features of celebrity—such as ironic masculinity but especially religiosity—that Zarathustra seems to embody.

Layton had read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* no later than 1958 (likely much earlier<sup>10</sup>), when he quoted from it on the back cover of *A Laughter in the Mind*. Although there is no evidence that Layton consciously decided that Zarathustra would be the model of his celebrity poet, he probably intuitively thought that Zarathustra was an apt pseudo-religious figure, a prophet who ironically claims that "*God is dead!*" (Nietzsche 5, his emphasis). Michael Q. Abraham calls Layton "by turns spontaneous visionary and inflammatory cynic, nihilist-prophet and satirist-clown" (90); these last two roles (prophet and clown) are amply evident in the ironically religious persona that I consider to be Zarathustrian and wherein Trehearne perceives "full-blown ironic egoism, the doubled sense of selfhood's limitlessness and mistakenness" (*Montreal* 213). Solway's otherwise acceptable emphasis on the self's "limitlessness" needs to be qualified with the irony that

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10 Nietzsche appears in the M.A. thesis that Layton wrote at McGill University in 1946 (Cameron 158-60).

Trehearne observes, and Zarathustra is an ironic figure—arguably a prophet whose ideas of the *Übermensch* and will to power are theories that he fails to practise exactly.

Zarathustra descends from his mountain to become a teacher after ten years of hermitic solitude: “One morning he arose with the dawn, stepped before the sun and spoke thus to it: ‘You great star! What would your happiness be if you had not those for whom you shine?’” (Nietzsche 3). Ironically, Zarathustra’s rhetorical question for the sun implies that stars need an audience “for whom [they] shine,” thereby helping to define—because he mainly attracts an audience of animals other than people—his religious pretension.

Layton followed Nietzsche by using celestial symbolism (Francis, “Layton” 47) to suggest that his celebrity poet is favoured as a mouthpiece of the gods. Zarathustra’s association with the sun, a star, is another reason why he might have seemed intuitively correct as a model for Layton’s celebrity poet. Rojek argues that “[c]elebrity culture is secular. Because the roots of secular society lie in Christianity, many of the symbols of success and failure in celebrity draw on myths and rites of religious ascent and descent” (74). Regardless of the accuracy of the claim that secularism arose from Christianity, I agree that, obviously, one of the “symbols” of celebrity is the star, which has been cemented into the sidewalks of Hollywood to enshrine celebrity as fame. Many of Layton’s poems, such as “Anacreon” (1952), are suffused with sun imagery that also alludes to the Greek god Dionysus. Francis calls Zarathustra a “sunworshipper” and remarks that “hundreds of [Layton’s] poems containing sun and flame imagery can be read with deeper insight as the tributes of a Dionysian to his God” (“Layton” 47).<sup>11</sup> Not

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11 The sun-god of Greek myth is actually Helios (Hamilton 31), and Apollo, not Dionysus, is the god of light whose other name, Phoebus, means “brilliant” (Hamilton 30). Nietzsche thought that Apollo and Dionysus created inspirational tension when brought together; he eventually focussed on Dionysus, and the symbol of the sun became associated with him, which partly accounts for Layton’s use of it (Francis

coincidentally, Layton chose *A Red Carpet for the Sun* (1959) as the title of the book that he might have reasonably assumed would confirm his celebrity. Layton dedicated the book to his mother: in that context, the title also announced that the “son” had earned his “red carpet” treatment as a celebrity.<sup>12</sup> It also announced him, subtly and ironically, as the New Messiah (the “Son” of God), because it was Layton’s mother who had told him that he was born circumcised (Flynn 10) as a sign of his divinity (which Cameron thinks was a genital defect called minor hypospadias [467, 7n])—a conceit that Layton retroactively extended when he explicitly and ironically characterized himself as Messianic in his 1985 memoir *Waiting for the Messiah*.

Layton’s interest in Zarathustra’s religiosity is relevant to his conception of freedom. By evoking Zarathustra, Layton also evokes Dionysus, who was Nietzsche’s “favorite deity” (Del Caro and Pippin 124n). Dionysus embodies the two ideas “of freedom and ecstatic joy and of savage brutality” (Hamilton 57), a paradox of temperament that Layton exploited. Dionysus, like Jesus, is known for his resurrection (Hamilton 61-2), and Zarathustra is known for his will to power, an “irrefutable urge to become which is forever forming and dissolving and reforming—giving birth to itself, dying and being reborn” (Francis 47). Mandel observes that the coexistence of such opposites in Layton’s work (*Irving* 32-3) is an indication of his commitment to “paradoxical” (*Irving* 31) freedom. Layton’s concept of freedom is one that “includes everything, which could only mean the manifestation of a god” (Mandel, *Irving* 33). The

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46-7).

12 As Cameron suggests, the title also refers to his “revolutionary past” (294) as an advocate of “red” communism, and it comes directly from his 1958 poem “For Mao Tse-Tung: A Meditation on Flies and Kings.” In “For Mao Tse-Tung,” Layton aligns himself with the dictator Mao and dismisses the forgiving attitude of Jesus; nevertheless, he says that he “pit[ies] the meek” (42) and appears less stereotypically Nietzschean (i.e. pitiless) than the figure of Mao would suggest.

coincidental fusion of opposites other than “dying” and “being reborn”—such as public and private—suggests that Layton was attempting to use his pseudo-religious persona to control the metaphor of celebrity, which is, otherwise, a fusion of opposites that is largely influenced by the public. In other words, the Dionysian aspect of Layton’s religious pretence offered him a way to fight fire with fire.

The poems in the first phase of Layton’s career as a celebrity—the mid- to late 1950s—were ambitious, not only in their formal and symbolic complexity but also in their anticipation of higher degrees of celebrity or fame. Using Nietzsche’s Zarathustra as a model, Layton imagined the celebrity poet’s relationship with his popular audience and concluded—as my upcoming analysis of his major poems suggests—that masculine and pseudo-religious authority would not be enough protection from the public. The celebrity poet’s freedoms of expression and self-definition would be compromised, and the achievement of fame—poetic immortality earned with the greatness of his poems—would not be likely. Unable to think of a plausible solution to this problem, especially given that he was already in his forties and maybe not as sexy as his protégé Cohen, Layton became more and more pessimistic about celebrity.

Nevertheless, at the start of this first phase Layton was usually optimistic about his anticipated celebrity and seemed to think that his pseudo-religious persona would help him avoid the typecasting effect of celebrity. Preparing the way for Layton’s highly acclaimed *A Red Carpet for the Sun, In the Midst of My Fever* (1954) featured a poem that prominently announced his debt to Nietzsche and foretold his success. “The Birth of Tragedy,” named after Nietzsche’s book translated with the same title, is a remarkable

instance of Layton's grandstanding; by choosing that title, he stands in for Nietzsche,<sup>13</sup> whose name was much more widely known than his. "The Birth of Tragedy" proposes that the ideal poet would be a unifier of "nature's divided things" (n.p.). The poet, "happiest when [he] compose[s] poems" (n.p.), gleefully synthesizes the Dionysus / Apollo binary, merging the wild and the rational. According to Mandel, "the poem tells of Dionysius who dreamed the mad dream of perfection and so was slain and became Apollo" (*Irving* 25). The poet says that in himself "nature's divided things" "have their fruition" (n.p.) and that "I am their core. Let them swap, / bandy, like a flame swerve. / I am their mouth; as a mouth I serve" (n.p.). With this poem, Layton introduces himself as a conduit for Nietzsche's "mad dream," as embodied in Dionysus, and predicts the "fruition" of his career.

The end of the poem, though cryptic and surreal, gestures in a way that would later be recognizably Laytonic; it represents his figure of the poet as not only sacrificial but also godly, which means that the poem is significant in Layton's understanding of celebrity, even though the poem is not obviously about celebrity. The poet announces that he is a "quiet madman" (n.p.) and that he "lie[s] like a slain thing" (n.p.): not dead, but seemingly so, and possibly lying in the sense of deceiving. As a "quiet madman," he seems like Zarathustra in his hermitic phase; indeed, he lives outside time, as mythic figures do. He watches the seasons pass, sees "living things arrange their death, / while someone from afar off / blows birthday candles for the world" (n.p.). Mandel thinks that the poet's death, which might only be the appearance of death, is a birthday for the world

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13 Layton's decision to associate himself with Nietzsche, who was by then unfairly associated with Nazi ideology, is surprising because Layton was a Jew. His decision attests to his determined appreciation for the good in Nietzsche's ideas and suggests that he was thinking of using controversy for self-promotion at an early stage in his career.

(*Irving* 25); the apparent sacrifice of the poet's life might have enabled the world to reach another birthday. Thus, his death is cause for celebration. The celebrity implied in such a celebration can only come at great cost: the sacrifice of life, the end of flux and freedom.<sup>14</sup>

A Nietzschean death, however, is not permanent. Francis explains that in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), "the cosmic will-to-power is no longer a frenzied undirected striving but rather the irrefutable urge to become which is forever forming and dissolving and reforming—giving birth to itself, dying and being reborn" ("Layton" 47). Thus, in Layton's poem, even if the snuffed "birthday candles" mean that the poet's "flame" (n.p.) of life and flux is extinguished, his Nietzschean will-to-power will enable him to be "reborn," resurrected—not unlike Dionysus or Jesus. Unlike Jesus, however, the poet in "The Birth of Tragedy" has no following. Despite Layton's future popularity and his constant engagement with contemporary politics, in this early phase he separates his figure of the poet from society (moths and robins are the only other social beings in the poem) to elevate and isolate the poet on a higher plane. Although celebrity depends on the pretence—however ironic—of such a transcendental plane, Layton had not yet imagined his prophetic and godly poet in the public life of celebrity, except in the comparatively mundane "Newsboy." He is a poet without an audience other than the "perfect gods" (n.p.) whom he serves.

Layton made the implicit religiosity of "The Birth of Tragedy" considerably more obvious in "The Cold Green Element," from the 1955 book of the same name, which builds on his understanding of the celebrity as a figure of ridicule, with added emphasis

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<sup>14</sup> In contrast, death (not life) is freedom in a later poem, considered below, called "The Predator" (1963), which was published during the peak of Layton's celebrity when his pessimism was most acute.

on the effect of social rejection on the self and, ultimately, on freedom of expression. The poem introduces a “dead poet” (n.p.) whose identity soon becomes indistinct from that of the speaker. Immediately after mentioning the “dead poet,” the speaker remarks that his own “heart [is] beating in the grass” (n.p.); he will soon be dead, like the dead poet. Celebrity becomes an implicit topic of the poem because of the “heart.” The image of the heart temporarily living outside the body describes the exposure, to the outside world, of something that should remain internal and private. The source of the threat to the speaker’s private self (represented synecdochally by his heart) can only be understood indirectly, through his similarity to the dead poet. Arguably, among what the speaker calls his “murdered selves” (n.p.) is the dead poet, who represents the speaker’s private persona: the failed decoy for the public. In the second stanza, the speaker states that “[c]rowds depart daily to see” (n.p.) the dead poet. After staring at the body—sadistically waiting for it to twitch while casually eating their oranges (n.p.)—the crowds “return / with grimaces and incomprehension” (n.p.) to the city. Because he is a public attraction, likely to be quickly forgotten as a novelty, and possibly an identity in crisis because of his fusion with the speaker, the dead poet satisfies some of the criteria of celebrity.<sup>15</sup>

Initially, the speaker and the dead poet are separate, so that the speaker can refer to him in the third person: as an undertaker passes him, the speaker nonchalantly says, “Hi [...] / a great squall in the Pacific blew a dead poet / out of the water / who now hangs from the city’s gates” (n.p.). Later, however, the speaker and the dead poet seem to fuse when the speaker mentions his “murdered selves” “hanging from ancient twigs” (n.p.) like the dead poet hanging in a pseudo-crucifixion on the gates. The ultimate evidence of

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<sup>15</sup> These requirements and the associated definitions were explained more thoroughly in the first chapter.

the fusion is in the final lines, when the speaker says, “I am *again* / a breathless swimmer in that cold green element” (n.p., my emphasis). Also like the dead poet, the speaker drowns in the Pacific ocean, and not for the first time. The speaker and the dead poet are indeterminate versions of the same self that has reverted to oneness after the death of the celebrity; their sameness means that the fusion of selves is in effect and that celebrity is a sacrifice akin to the one in “The Birth of Tragedy.”

The poet’s weakness in “The Cold Green Element” helps to counter the later stereotype of Layton as a poet who relied, without reflection, on machismo and a seemingly delusional confidence in his sexuality. “The Cold Green Element” depicts the poet’s masculinity and sexuality with a subtle playfulness that complicates its general seriousness:

I’ve seen myself lately in the eyes  
                                     of old women,  
 spent streams mourning my manhood,  
  
 in whose old pupils the sun became  
 a bloodsmear on broad catalpa leaves  
 and, hanging from ancient twigs,  
                                     my murdered selves  
 sparked the air like the muted collisions  
  
 of fruit. [...] (n.p.)

Like the dead poet, the speaker is the object of the public gaze; in this case, he is stared at

by “the eyes / of old women” (n.p.), who have various powers over him.<sup>16</sup> The ironic humour and self-mockery here are subtle. The syntax implies that “lately” (i.e. since his latest resurrection) the speaker “spent streams” (cried) grieving for the masculine virility that he lost; alternatively, his streams might be seminal fluid that he “spent” (wasted) proving his manhood to an unreceptive audience of old women, not the young ones whom we usually see as the objects of desire in Layton’s poems. Either way, the speaker implies that he, too, is old, so old that “the labels / of [his] medicine bottles” (n.p.) seem to have been worn off; his frequent rebirths might have gone on indefinitely without actually renewing his body.

Although his attitude toward his sexuality and his age are ambiguous (because it is also possible that his “ailments escaped” [n.p.] and he is again youthfully healthy), the speaker emphasizes in the first line that his story is set “at the end of the garden walk” (n.p.), at the passing of the Edenic world in which sexuality is a transgression. The speaker becomes an embodiment of sexuality and its fecundity by suggesting that his selves are “fruit” on Eden’s tree of carnal knowledge. He insinuates that as a celebrity (or someone similar) he is the object of sexual desire, and he also profanes religion by associating himself with the Hebrew scriptures of the Old Testament and with Dionysus and Jesus, whose power of resurrection he cheapens.

The narrative of this poem ends without recourse to a happier rebirth, even though

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16 Kaja Silverman, in her chapter on the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (1992), “differentiate[s] the gaze from the look, and hence from masculinity” (125). According to Silverman, the gaze is phallic, but the phallus is a symbolic power that women can also have; in contrast, the look is merely the use of the eyes in seeing. Although Layton’s poem only refers explicitly to “the eyes / of old women,” the women emasculate (and age) the poet and therefore direct the gaze; they are both looking and gazing. More specifically, in their eyes the poet sees his own reflection, which suggests the irony and self-deprecation here.

it does return the speaker to the ocean, an archetypal figure of the womb (as in other poems by Layton such as “The Swimmer” [1945] and “Thoughts in the Water” [1956]). Layton concludes the poem by putting it in the context of the mythic Furies, born of the blood of Uranus, whose son Cronus wounded him for mistreating his wife (Gaea) and children. The Furies had “writhing snakes for hair and eyes that wept tears of blood” (Hamilton 65); they are (or are analogous to) Layton’s old women “in whose old pupils the sun became / a bloodsmear.” Their job was to pursue sinners into the underworld for their just punishment:

But the Furies clear a path for me to the worm  
 who sang for an hour in the throat of a robin,  
 and misled by the cries of young boys  
 I am again  
 a breathless swimmer in that cold green element. (n.p.)

In Greek myth, the Furies usher sinners into the underworld of Hades, but here they “clear a path to the worm.” The Furies seem to realize that the worm will punish the speaker in their stead, so if he feels any resentment, it should be directed at the worm. Given the sexual innuendo in the likely allusion to William Blake’s “The Sick Rose” (1794), the worm might be a symbol of decay and a phallic symbol (combined: phallic decay). The worm punishes the speaker by aging and emasculating him, so that even “the cries of young boys” can “misle[a]d” him. His sins, whatever they are, give him no power over an audience of “old women” (the Furies) and “young boys,” and there is no evidence that he would have better success with middle-aged people of either sex. In the end, Layton implies that the speaker’s audience will exhaust his masculine vitality, confuse

him, and never welcome him in from “the city’s gates.” The worm can sing, the boys can cry, but the speaker is “breathless” and therefore silent in comparison. In effect, he fears that his aging will cost him his freedom of expression as a version of the dead poet.

The much less abstract poem “Poetic Fame,” from *A Laughter in the Mind* (1958), reiterates some of the concerns of “The Cold Green Element” and helps to support my claim that “The Cold Green Element” has new meaning in the context of celebrity. In “Poetic Fame,” Layton is not referring to fame but celebrity, which is often associated with the notoriety that he implies is an aspect of his reputation.<sup>17</sup> Layton sardonically announces that he appreciates “the supporters / who now reach me their hands to put money in, / their collateral being their good opinion of me” (36); he then reveals why he is being sardonic about “their good opinion”:

At my approach  
the ladies, unsubtle and ugly,  
rush their adolescent daughters upstairs;  
insert a table between themselves and me  
and leer sensuously across the waxed surface.  
  
I do not understand their discordant hints and maneuvers.  
  
Do they expect me to sire tables? (36)

As in “The Cold Green Element,” the women he attracts are not young but are obviously older than their “adolescent daughters,” and here his reputation suggests that he will not refrain from seducing even “adolescent[s].” Also as in “The Cold Green Element,” he is

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<sup>17</sup> As I explained in the first chapter, Boorstin and the *OED* both imply that celebrities are usually notorious while famous people enjoy a comparatively positive reception.

confused by his audience; the mixed signals of “the ladies” lead him to his joke about his reputed desire to fornicate with anyone or anything, including “tables.” He therefore concludes the relevant part of the poem by stating that “in this unroyal kingdom a child knows / all poets are dead or they’re Englishmen” (36).<sup>18</sup> In other words, he is not even known as a “poe[t]”—only as a lecher, which is, of course, highly reductive and quite possibly inaccurate. According to “Poetic Fame,” he has none of the pleasures of sex that celebrities are supposed to enjoy; his celebrity is also reductive, making him well-known but not known well—not honoured or understood.

In “Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom,” *A Laughter in the Mind* returns to the problem of celebrity’s effect on poetic expression—here represented as musical performance—in relation to the poet’s masculinity. As Trehearne argues, the poet expresses a will to be unfixed in the public context of fame; “Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom” focusses explicitly on the problem of being recognized—and the problem of *not* being recognized. Rather than rely solely on mythological, religious, or Nietzschean models of individuation, the poet attempts to seek individuation and inspiration through the performance of gender (specifically masculinity) but often finds that his performance is not flexible enough to bring him the freedom and individuation that he desires. The poet asserts, “Whatever else poetry is freedom. / Forget the rhetoric, the trick of lying / All poets pick up sooner or later” (7). He likens this lying rhetoric to “the thin voice of grey castratos” (7) and thereby implicates gender in the performance of poetry. Age,

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18 Layton implies that poets outside of England are not respected but are teased and stereotyped by their audiences. Trehearne paraphrases Layton’s “Poets: the Conscience of Mankind” (1963): “in the United States and Canada poetry is rewarded with public reputation because it is considered a harmless and irrelevant art form by which the mass sensibility cannot be stirred” (143). Although the speaker himself does not seem “harmless” in “Poetic Fame,” his audience certainly has no concerns about his poetry.

again, is an issue, because he also likens the “grey” castrati to the “mist” (7) that “lies inside one like a destiny” (7). Punning on the verb *to lie* recurs throughout the poem to suggest that the poet, the women, and destiny (7) are all deceptive, which generally complicates interpretations of the poem. Indeed, this pun reinforces the motif of performance, which reminds readers to question the sincerity of what they read.

The musical performance, which includes a dance, simultaneously raises questions about masculinity and celebrity in the context of the poem’s titular concern with freedom.

And I who gave my Kate a blackened eye  
 Did to its vivid changing colours  
 Make up an incredible musical scale;  
 And now I balance on wooden stilts and dance  
 And thereby sing to the loftiest casements.  
 See how with polish I bow from the waist.  
 Space for these stilts! More space or I fail! (7)

Machismo permeates this stanza until the last line, the first indication of what the singing poet fears. As someone who “sing[s],” he seems to fear becoming a castrato, a man whose testicles were surgically removed to maintain his boyish voice. Despite Layton’s insistence on poetry being freedom, and on poetry enabling the transformation of the self, he implies some limits on what he wants to become. He does not want the ambiguous gender of the castrati. Although ambiguity is non-fixity, his fear of being fixed—in its veterinary connotation—is a fear of losing his masculinity, which (according to the gender stereotype) brings him power to define himself. He expects his gender and his identity to be destabilized eventually through performance; he represents this

destabilization in the poet's unbalanced posture above the crowd. The poet desperately needs to differentiate himself from the crowd; otherwise, he fears the loss of his balance and his freedom, including the freedom to control his own transformations.

The poet's relation to his audience is based on his transformation of the bodily result of his violent performance of gender—Kate's bruised eye (a brutal cosmetic “[m]ake up”)—into a musical performance that raises him on stilts above his audience. His work is “incredible” but he is vulnerable; if the crowd comes too near and interferes with his stilts, he will fall and “fail.” The stilts raise the poet above the danger of his audience, which never encroaches as he might have expected. They also imply that the poet is only figuratively on a higher ground, indicating perhaps his sense of righteousness after having hit Kate (though that act itself was a performance, as the possible reference to Kate in William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* suggests), or the implied desire to transcend gender and the violence of its performance. The stilts also imply that the poet's performance is inauthentic clowning, a sublimation of other fears that are never simply explained. He alludes to his ultimate fear when he says, “I smell the odour of mortality. // And Time flames like a paraffin stove / And what it burns are the minutes I live” (8). Falling from his precarious stance on the stilts would mean his death.

The central image of the stilts is allusive. On one hand, the stilts seem to refer to William Butler Yeats's “The Circus Animals' Desertion” (1939) (Mandel, *Irving* 26), which equates poetry with circus performances. The speaker in “The Circus Animals' Desertion” associates the circus with his youth and with the boys on stilts who performed in its troupe; for Yeats, innovative poetry comes from youth, because in “old age” (782) the poet is restricted to “old themes” (783). He longs to return to performance. The circus

animals, absent from the poem except in the title, have deserted the poet. They are not only the beasts that circus performers use to accentuate their shows; they are also the only spectators who remain after the human audiences have left. Zarathustra experienced the same failure in not really attracting a human audience, though his animal audience seemed to like him. The image of stilts also refers to Zarathustra, who ironically considered wearing stilts so that people would overlook his long legs (Nietzsche 139); he hoped to seem normal by exaggerating his abnormality, his circus-freakishness. In both Yeats and Nietzsche, the stilts are performative crutches that help to separate the figure of the misfit artist from an absent audience associated with age and death.

Trehearne notes that the audience in the poem is only implied: “This invisible audience, unnamed and unportrayed, is the first indication that ‘Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom’ is an articulation of the disturbing relation between the falsely elevated poet and the uncomprehending crowd he addresses” (“Scanned” 145). Indeed, the crowd’s absence suggests that the poet is focussed so narcissistically on himself that he is his own audience. Is he singing, or speaking, for anyone when he projects “to the loftiest casements”? Layton might be suggesting that his poet sings only to God (as in “The Birth of Tragedy”) through those windows, or, if God (like the audience) is absent, then he sings to himself as an alienated, falsely elevated divinity. These possibilities suggest that the poet must be alone and godless to be free, and that the freedom will last only as long as youth, which is the main attraction in an increasingly sexualized culture of celebrity. The implications are bleak: spend your youth alone, achieve celebrity but not freedom, and lose it all with age. Layton’s highly sexualized, masculine, pseudo-religious persona attempts to resist such an eventuality, especially in the final stanza: “Swivel, / O hero, in

the fleshy groves, skin and glycerine, / And sing of lust” (8).<sup>19</sup> Layton surely believed that poetry is freedom, but he was aware of the limitations of both.<sup>20</sup>

These poems from the late 1950s that implicitly or explicitly express Layton’s concerns about celebrity represent the celebrity poet as an ironically religious, masculine but emasculated figure. Zarathustra was his model—Dionysian, prophetic, clownish, and associated through the image of the sun with celestial, celebrity symbolism. Layton’s Nietzschean poems defined freedom as a paradox that poetry could demonstrate, but he anticipated that celebrity would reduce his multiplicity to the singular—fuse his private and public personas—thereby narrowing the range of his options for self-definition and expression. Although the celebrity poet is a paradox, too—unable to achieve promotion to fame while also preserving flux—and to some extent derives from that paradox a pseudo-religious authority, the audience eventually emasculates him; the public’s control over the celebrity’s sexuality is greater than the celebrity’s power as a pseudo-religious figure. Layton thereby suggests that having a popular audience inevitably means losing control—despite the power that masculinity and religiosity are expected to bring—and losing an audience is a sign of age, of being a has-been, and of having little hope of achieving fame—poetic immortality—after death.

The skepticism and apprehension of these early poems contrasts starkly with Layton’s eager optimism, which he expressed in letters to friends, as the star of his celebrity rose at the end of the 1950s (leading eventually to many more poems that concern themselves explicitly with celebrity and celebrities). Making the transition to the

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19 The absence of the final stanza from the poem’s first publication in the *Canadian Forum* is evidence that Layton could not easily believe his own optimistic claims at the end of the poem.

20 Cohen, as I explain in my aforementioned article and in the next chapter, was far more suspicious; he thought that Layton’s style of freedom was a fantasy that had to be reimagined.

second phase in his career with *A Red Carpet for the Sun*, Layton enjoyed three particularly significant experiences of public acclaim in 1957, 1958, and 1959. The first was a 1957 reading at Queen's University. According to Layton in a letter to Pacey, "The students' response—well, it was glory, glory all the way.... Unblushingly I confess this was a proud moment for me; for this was the acid test, and by all the rules of the game, I had passed it" (qtd. in Cameron 281). The second was, in 1958, a "taste of glory riding on the coattails of Leonard Cohen, the younger *CIV/n* poet" (qtd. in Cameron 282): Layton wrote that he "descended on Leonard Cohen's nest in Birdland, where he gives poetry readings to the accompaniment of a jazz orchestra" (qtd. in Cameron 282); Layton admitted that Cohen was the "staple goods" (qtd. in Cameron 282) and did not seem jealous. He was probably thrilled to realize that he would not be alone as a celebrity among poets of that era, and he felt himself at the centre of a "groundswell" (Cameron 281) in Canadian poetry.

The third experience was especially important to Layton: the book launch for *A Red Carpet for the Sun* in September, 1959. According to Layton, "[e]veryone in TV or Radio, in the Newspaper or Bookselling game was present when I made my great entry [...] I was flanked by Aviva [his third wife] on one side, and by Leonard Cohen on the other, and I needed both of these to run interference for me as the mob bore down" (qtd. in Cameron 289). Jaffe makes an instructive claim to help explain the significance of this account of the launch of *A Red Carpet for the Sun*: "despite relentlessly advancing the cult of the singular artist [...] modernism's existence is repeatedly marked by the need for the unpaid work of others, others who were frequently women" (96). By "flank[ing]" himself with Cohen and Aviva, Layton not only grants them the power to protect him but

also feminizes them as lesser accomplices to his singular celebrity (figured here as a quarterback or running back—a metaphor of masculine sports also seen in poems such as “Poetry as the Fine Art of Pugilism” [1973]). In these three moments in the development of Layton’s celebrity, however, Layton is secondary to Cohen in at least one of them. These examples suggest that Layton himself thought that his celebrity was brightened by the presence of Cohen, who was, after all, two decades younger. Layton was proud of being connected to Cohen, and Cohen, in exchange, benefited from his association with Layton at the maturity of his poetic power. Although Cohen was in attendance, Layton remained the centre of attention—and would for around four more years.

Francis argues that the publication of *A Red Carpet for the Sun* was a significant event “not only for Layton’s career and for McClelland and Stewart, but also for Canadian poetry in general. Jack McClelland audaciously printed 5,000 copies of *Red Carpet of the Sun*. Within a few weeks more than 2,000 copies had been sold in both paperback and cloth editions, and 5,000 copies were sold within the year” (“Adjusting” 81). For that book, he won the Governor General’s Award and reportedly spent hours bowing in preparation for the ceremony (Cameron 296-7). He was gleeful because of the prize, no doubt, but also ironically amused to be celebrated by the public that he so often insulted. After 13 years of constant toil, Layton had proven himself, and by 1964, *A Red Carpet for the Sun* had sold 7,500 copies (Cameron 369). Probably no other Canadian poet had ever before enjoyed such success, not until Purdy and Cohen achieved higher sales for their respective *Selected Poems* in the mid- and late 1960s. Neither Layton nor his critics refer to him as such a sensation after any other event in his career; arguably, his celebrity peaked with *A Red Carpet for the Sun* and its aftermath.

Layton was still the unsurpassed celebrity in Canadian poetry in 1963, when he published *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler*, which contained “A Tall Man Executes a Jig.” He had written the poem in 1961 (Cameron 329) but chose, uncharacteristically, not to publish it immediately. Although Layton explains “A Tall Man Executes a Jig” as a poem about the poet’s transformation of pain, suffering, and evil into art (*Tall Man*), it also shares themes of poetic self-referentiality, of sexuality, of resurrection, of animosity toward the crowd (represented in this case as gnats), and of Zarathustrian religiosity with earlier poems such as “Birth of Tragedy,” “The Cold Green Element,” and “Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom.” It is distinct from these poems, however, because it shows that the poet—instead of trying to avoid being held captive by the crowd—*envies* the people in the crowd for *their* lack of freedom. The crowd then withdraws its gift of sexual love because his masculinity is not procreative. The audience that he accepts in their stead (a snake) represents his poetic sublimation of sexual desire left unfulfilled by the audience that initially accepted him as a celebrity. Like the highly abstract poems from the 1950s that have already been considered in this chapter, “A Tall Man Executes a Jig” is not obviously about celebrity; however, not only is it distinct from them, but it also stands out during a time when Layton was writing much more often than previously about celebrities themselves (such as movie stars, politicians, and other literary celebrities).

“A Tall Man Executes a Jig” reprises the Nietzschean themes related to celebrity in Layton’s earlier poems. The tall man is Layton’s most Zarathustrian character: as in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the tall man is in a mountainous landscape where the “ruddied peaks [...] pierced the sun” (112) and he cannot attract a human audience. Zarathustra initially attracted animals that substituted for disciples instead of “the proper human

beings” (Nietzsche 265). Both the tall man and Zarathustra are unhappy because of their relationships with their audiences; their art, their teaching becomes their recourse: “Do I strive for *happiness*?” asks Zarathustra (Nietzsche 266). “I strive for my *work*!” Similarly, in “The Birth of Tragedy,” Layton’s poet says that he is “happiest when I compose poems.” Furthermore, Zarathustra claims that God is dead and tries to replace him as a prophet; similarly, the tall man witnesses “the sun s[i]nk down, / A dying god” (112) and eventually succeeds (as I will show) in an ultimate creative act that supplants God’s jiggling, which is analogous to the writing of poems and to performances such as dance. As Keeney Smith observes, “[the tall man’s] story turns out to be about man as poet, and ultimately, of course, about Layton himself” (195).<sup>21</sup>

The tall man represents the poet of compromised creativity, similar to the unflattering version of the poet seen in “The Cold Green Element.” In “The Cold Green Element,” the silent and emasculated poet’s “murdered selves” are represented by blasted fruit; similarly, the speaker here insinuates that the tall man is the spoiled fruit wherein the gnats will hatch their eggs. He sees a swarm of gnats approach and realizes that they will “assault” (111) him: “Fruitflies he’d call them except there was no fruit / About, spoiling to hatch these glitterings” (10-1). By being their host, he will contribute to their creativity without necessarily being independently creative. Like Zarathustra, he seems to want to be a great teacher, but he only attracts animals (in this case, insects) that cling to his skin like parasitic students clinging to a celebrated teacher.

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21 Indeed, in Donald Winkler’s NFB film *A Tall Man Executes a Jig by Irving Layton* (1986), “he, the man, me, [and] I” are the pronouns that Layton uses to talk about the tall man. Although that is not enough to prove that the poem is self-referential, the use of the first person indicates a more personal, psychological imagining of the tall man. The fact that Layton decided against the first person suggests that he wanted an epic poem that would be open to many interpretations, which is also implied by the fact that he gives the tall man no other name.

The gnats are a symbol through which Layton adjusts his view of freedom and celebrity in “A Tall Man Executes a Jig.” The gnats, tiny but nevertheless more visible than the audience in “Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom,” represent the public that the poet both desires and fears. Unlike the tall man, the gnats have no concept of freedom, but only experience varying degrees of captivity as if they were on a chain gang: “Jig jig, jig, jig. Like minuscule black links / Of a chain played with by some playful / Unapparent hand” (111). The “hand” is that of God, who enslaves the gnats on a “chain” that he dangles from heaven. The tall man watches the gnats “drop upon his sleeveless arm” (111) and begin to sting him until he becomes a “maddened speck” (111) among them. (Cohen seems to have adapted this scene with Martin Stark’s mosquito bites in his 1963 novel *The Favourite Game*.) Their assaults threaten to make him gnat-like: chained by them, to them, and to a higher power—and indistinguishable from his audience. Although the threat to his freedom makes him mad (crazed), he is also, temporarily, happy:

Still the assaults of the small flies made him  
 Glad at last, until he saw purest joy  
 In their frantic jiggings under a hair,  
 So changed from those in the unrestraining air. (111)

He is “glad” because he is so tall compared to the bugs that he easily ensnares them; however, when his arm hairs trap the flies, he interprets their “frantic jiggings” as “purest joy,” a joy greater than the masochistic gladness that he feels when they assault his exposed skin. Their joy ends his. A figure of celebrity, he fears that the crowd’s parasitic verve might restrict his freedom and absorb his individuality, but he envies the crowd that can be happy without being free.

The tall man's general unhappiness brings him a temporary feeling of great status: "He stood up and felt himself enormous" (112). Motivated by unhappiness, in the third stanza he feels a creative power akin to Donatello's mastery of stone. Although he temporarily "feels his forehead touch the emptied sky" (112) that the "dying god" has now vacated, the gnat-audience's jig continues in godless chaos, in "[m]otion without meaning, disquietude / Without sense or purpose" (112). He has been unable to bring meaning to the multitude that worships him so sadistically. Possibly because the gnats were impressed with the tall man's presence, they return (after being scattered by the wind) with "a bee, who, seeing / But a tall man, left him for a marigold" (112). Bees seek flowers for their sustaining pollen, which also contains the male gametes that fertilize other flowers when the bee moves from plant to plant. The bee, therefore, potentially symbolizes a woman who finds neither sustenance nor sexual potency in the tall man. She has an individuality that the gnats do not; perhaps for that reason, she "see[s] / But [or only] a tall man." In other words, the bee is not compelled by what the tall man feels to be his "enormous" stature or status; she sees the tall man as the performer that he is. In contrast with the bee, the gnats seem to represent an audience composed of parasitic men, not women. The tall man might have "held / A loved and lovely woman in his arms" (112), but that relationship was in the past. Extending his suggestions in earlier poems about the celebrity poet's impotence, Layton suggests that his masculinity—represented here as a tolerance and even enjoyment of physical pain—turns away his potential audience of comparably independent women.

Dejected, the tall man "drop[s] his head and let[s] fall the halo / Of mountains" (113); in his humility, he seems to attract the snake, his third and most genuine audience.

The snake appears as “temptation coiled before his feet: / A violated grass-snake that lug[s] / Its intestine like a small red valise” (113). Although he was prepared to stop thinking of himself as a Zarathustrian surrogate for a divine, “halo[ed],” creative power (i.e. a celebrity poet), the tall man rekindles the godly creativity that he had sought from “the wheeling fire of the sun” (112) when he sees the mortally wounded serpent. As a “temptation,” the snake might represent Satan, but in its “violated” condition, it also represents all the animals mutilated by people in Layton’s many cruelty-to-animals poems. Rather than be tempted to either sadism or mercy, the tall man “wept because pity was useless” (113). He warns the snake, “Your jig’s up; the flies come like kites” (113). He initially does nothing but wait for the second return of the gnats, which herald the end of the snake’s life and “jig.” His declarative authority over the jig, and the prophetic announcement about the coming “flies”—with their connotation of Beelzebub—restores the impression of religious significance that he had abandoned earlier.

Three details in the poem suggest that Layton meant the snake’s jig and that of the tall man to be acts of writing or performing a text. First, the poem invokes the figure of the author; on its own, the “hand” does not necessarily imply writing or performance, but its jiggling (“Jig jig, jig, jig”) has the rhythm of a scannable line of poetry, a dance, or a hand’s motion as it writes. Second, the jiggling seems to have manipulated the gnats, which are described on their aforementioned “chain” as “black jots” (112) akin to ink marks. Third, when the gnats and the bee leave the tall man (as the next paragraphs explain), in his solitude he supplants God through his great act of imaginative creation. Writing or performing a poem, as the tall man implicitly does, satisfies the sense of *execute* as a skillful artistic performance (*OED*).

To *execute* can also mean “[t]o perform or carry out the provisions of (a will)” (*OED*). When the snake dies, the tall man acts as the executor of the snake’s last will. We can infer the terms of that will based on what we know of the tall man and of the other audiences in the poem. The tall man might know the snake’s will because their minds are melded in a “fellowship of death” (114). Indeed, when the snake dies, the speaker reveals that the tall man’s “mind” (114) has a “flicking tongue” (114); thus, the snake is a symbol of his imagination, which revives, becoming a dragon, a flying snake that might spout the “green flame of life” (114) and the “thin wreaths of cloud” (114) that “coiled above his head, transforming all” (114). By reanimating the snake and reviving the dying sky (a symbol of the mind and of God), the tall man asserts the creativity of the imagination over that of the body. Furthermore, he seems to channel the snake-audience’s desire for *freedom*—because the snake was possibly heading for the tall man to escape its killer, which is associated with the enslaved gnats that herald its death.

By insinuating Layton’s preoccupation with freedom in the context of *execution*, which also means the infliction of death (*OED*), the poem implies that Layton is marking the end of a major phase of his life in art, his jig. The tall man—a symbol of Layton that, like the clown on stilts in “Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom,” puts him in the shoes of a bigger man in an act of grandstanding—does not literally die, but his life does transform. The tall man’s union with a disturbingly mutilated phallic symbol (the snake) suggests that he has been emasculated by an audience that rejected him. The transformation might demonstrate the power of resurrection known to us as Dionysian vitality, Christian redemption, and Nietzschean flux, but it also poignantly implies that Layton lost hope of achieving freedom through celebrity. The tall man, like Layton, seems to anticipate the

fading of his celebrity and the resignation of being his own audience in solitude. We saw similar symbolism in “The Cold Green Element” and “Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom,” but there is much here that we did *not* see in those earlier poems: first, the poet’s temporary envy of the audience’s pain and lack of freedom; second, the preference for an audience of one rather than an audience of many; and third, the bittersweet but remarkably positive closing image. The end of “A Tall Man Executes a Jig” suggests that the tall man overcomes his masochism<sup>22</sup> and begins to value himself without the attentions of an audience; thus, he crowns himself with the snake after having “doffed his aureole of gnats” (112) and “let fall the halo / Of mountains.” The poet affirms his self-esteem in a gesture of freedom that also seems like a grand finale, a flourish. Layton was compelled to reassure himself that even after losing or rejecting his audience, he could jig a poem of hard-won joy.

Few of Layton’s later poems continued to imply that the celebrity poet has religious significance, but they continued to suggest that masculinity was essential for self-promotion. Although some of Layton’s most important poems from the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s can be interpreted as commentary on celebrity, he produced fewer long and complex poems after that time—nothing to compare with “A Tall Man Executes a Jig” as a grand gesture of concern that gains relevance in the context of celebrity. He was, however, representing celebrity much more explicitly, beginning more and more to use his poetry in a self-reflexive strategy of his own promotion. In the second phase in his career, the obviousness of his poetry about celebrity and the relative lack of poems such

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22 As the next chapter explains, Cohen’s “How To Speak Poetry” (1978) breaks with Cohen’s history of masochistic poems about celebrity when the poem’s poet is taught how to live without a popular audience.

as “A Tall Man Executes a Jig” were signs not only of the peak of his celebrity, but also of the stress of maintaining his status when his celebrity could only fade.

Perhaps because he sensed his celebrity had reached its peak in Canada, Layton redoubled his efforts and cast his eye to the bigger markets—and some of the bigger celebrities—of America and Europe. In the same year that he was writing “A Tall Man Executes a Jig,” he published *The Swinging Flesh* (1961) and imagined himself in contrast with widely recognized foreigners. His use of his own name in many of these poems (and that of his wife in some cases) shows that he is involving his private persona, but the self-promotion in these poems means that his public persona is also in use, and their simultaneous, fused presence is the metaphor of celebrity at work. So soon after the peak of Layton’s celebrity, no one should be surprised to notice this fusion in *The Swinging Flesh*. Disregarding “Prizes” and its outrageous claim that the poet would have won not another “prize” (169) but “[i]mmortal fame” (169) if he had “praised” (169) a woman’s vagina, I will focus on two other poems in the book that involve foreign women who are represented as, or are assumed to be, more widely recognized than Layton himself. The first is “The Day Aviva Came to Paris,” which was written for his wife (an Australian), and the second is “Why I Don’t Make Love to the First Lady,” which was written for Jacqueline Kennedy, later Onassis, whose husband was then president of the United States.<sup>23</sup> In these poems, Layton exaggerates the scope of his celebrity by association with women from other countries—much as he later does with Mailer but with predictable differences in his treatment of him because of his sex (i.e. violent

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23 Layton later compared these two women directly, in “No Cause for Jealousy” (1963), which claims that Aviva has the more attractive body and the more impressive husband.

confrontation rather than implied seduction).

In “The Day Aviva Came to Paris,” Layton describes “the Frenchmen” (150) who set down books by “their famous writers” (150) to gaze at Aviva’s nude body. He offers Aviva compliments (seeming not to realize that they are sexist), but he mainly seems interested in indirectly congratulating himself for having a beautiful wife who is as well-known in France as he imagines he is. He imagines “the Frenchmen” cheering, “‘Vive l’Australienne! / Vive Layton who brought her among us!’” (151). Although he temporarily worries that the Frenchmen will “bury [him and Aviva, alive,] in the Panthéon” (151), the poem ends as Aviva is “raised up / into [his] hairy arms by the raving emotional crowds” (152). Layton was not actually well-known in France, though he was, many years after he wrote this poem, recognized in other countries outside of North America.<sup>24</sup> The importance of this poem is its ironic fantasy of his worldwide celebrity, which he continues to understand in problematically masculine ways.

The irony of that fantasy is not apparent in the compliments to Aviva as much as it is in his representations of the French. Whereas “the Frenchmen” say that they are in awe of Aviva’s “blaze of pubic hair” (150) and her “adorable ass” (151), Layton calls her “an undraped Jewish Venus” (151)—a description less coarse but no less objectifying because “undraped” usually refers to models posing for sculptors and painters. He focuses on his wife’s attractiveness and what that means to him; “The day you came naked to Paris” (150), Layton writes, “The tourists returned home without their guidebooks, / The hunger in their cameras finally appeased” (150). She is the object not only of the touristic gaze

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<sup>24</sup> Donald Winkler’s main NFB film about Layton, *Poet: Irving Layton Observed* (1986), suggests that Layton was recognized in Greece in the 1980s, and in “Irving Layton in Italy” (1993), Alfredo Rizzardi claims that Layton enjoyed “the kind of reception usually reserved for rock stars” (42) when he visited Sardinia in 1992—both much later than the publication of “The Day Aviva Came to Paris.”

but also that of an audience of “millions of Frenchmen” (151). The Frenchmen fare not much better than Aviva in Layton’s representation of them as foolishly humble (having “learned [...] to think of themselves / As not excessively subtle or witty” [150] despite the example of Voltaire, whom he mentions) but also excitable (their “applaudissements and bravos / Bombinating along the Boulevard Saint-Germain” [152]). Layton indirectly disparages both Aviva and the Frenchmen. Like most of Layton’s sensational or controversial poems, “The Day Aviva Came to Paris” is curiously flawed and only partly ironic; as a strategy of promoting himself abroad, it is so unlikely to succeed that it seems parodic. Although the poem seems to promote Layton by association with Aviva, it also demeans or mocks everyone in the poem—Layton included, but Layton less obviously.

In “The Day Aviva Came to Paris,” Layton is mocking himself and his own celebrity by exposing the ridiculousness of the notion that he would be recognized anywhere else but in Canada—a ridiculousness evident in the hyperbolic representations of the effusive appreciation that the Frenchmen show for his wife and him. His awareness of his relatively inferior celebrity suggests that, despite evidence of the fusion of selves in this poem, he retained a critical faculty for assessing his celebrity even at the historical peak of his actual celebrity. “The Day Aviva Came to Paris” reveals not only Layton’s cynical opinion about the potential of his celebrity but also his willingness to subject himself, and his wife, to comic and demeaning appraisals.

He is almost as insulting toward Kennedy as he is to Aviva in the first lines of “Why I Don’t Make Love to the First Lady”: “Of course I could have her! // In a flash, with a snap of my fingers” (173). He admits that he is “arrogant” (173) and “degenerate” (173), but he also states that he has “a sense of honour” (173) that prevents him from

competing for women with men, such as “President Kennedy” (173), who do “not write verse” (25). As in “Poetry as the Fine Art of Pugilism” but less obviously, Layton implies that poetry is a way of proving one’s manhood. While the president loses sleep because of a tense “international situation” (174) that involves actual wars and threats of bigger wars, Layton imagines that his status as a writer of “verse” gives him a power that is greater than the president’s ability to make war: power over women. Making love, then, is the higher power. As usual, however, Layton undermines his own manhood. Although his pretext for not “running off” (174) with “[m]y lovely, unlucky Jacqueline” (174) is “honour,” he plans to “wait until / the international situation has cleared. / After that it’s every poet for himself” (174). The free-for-all implied in this last line is a playful suggestion about what Layton really seems to want: the freedom to pursue even the most unrealistic of goals, such as having the “First Lady” as the object of his attention. Of course, he would also be wise not to aggravate America’s commander-in-chief during the escalation of the Cold War. Rather audaciously, Layton sent a copy of the poem to the president and his wife (Cameron 315), which indicates a remarkable lack of judgement and—more important—a mischievously, unrealistically ambitious strategy of self-promotion to audiences beyond Canada’s borders.

His tone soon returned to its previous seriousness in *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* (1963), which contains a remarkably high concentration of poems that refer to other non-Canadian celebrities. As I quoted in the first chapter, Layton was “[a]s a celebrity [...] a purely typical Canadian product, a blow-up of our national inferiority complex” (Dudek, “Layton” 92), which is rarely more evident than in these poems. Many of Layton’s past and future references were to Cohen, but the surprising number in *Balls*

*for a One-Armed Juggler*—not much more than a year before Cohen began to surpass Layton’s celebrity—is suggestive. *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* contains poems about Marilyn Monroe (“Elegy for Marilyn Monroe”), Ernest Hemingway (“Silence,” another elegy<sup>25</sup>), Alexander Trocchi (“For Alexander Trocchi, Novelist,” who was also a notorious drug user), and Mailer. “The Dazed Steer,” dedicated “for Norman Mailer,” is also explained in my aforementioned article because Cohen later responded to that poem; it has a somewhat different role here. Cohen excepted, not one of the mentioned celebrities is Canadian; Trocchi was Scottish, but along with the others his celebrity was established in the United States. Arguably, with *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* in 1963, Layton began to consider his own celebrity more seriously than he had only a couple of years earlier with *The Swinging Flesh* in 1961—with less self-deprecation and more desperation. Compared to “The Day Aviva Came to Paris” and “Why I Don’t Make Love to the First Lady,” Layton’s poems for Monroe, Hemingway, Trocchi, and Mailer are sober, even grave. His solemnity was probably the result of thinking that celebrity was a factor in the deaths of Monroe and Hemingway, and that Cohen needed to be cautioned about seeking inspiration through drug use as Trocchi did. Layton’s concern for himself as a celebrity, too, was now emerging with less abstraction than it did in poems such as “The Cold Green Element” from the 1950s.

Before examining some of his poems about other people in *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler*, I want to consider one that he wrote with relevance to himself in the same book; “There Were No Signs” is comparatively abstract in its representation of what is

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25 In *The Shattered Plinths* in 1968, Layton published another conspicuous elegy for a writer: “Dorothy Parker (1893-1967).” In Faye Hammill’s *Women, Celebrity, & Literary Culture Between the Wars* (2007), Parker is the only female poet to be considered as a celebrity; she is a rare example among female writers, who tend to become recognized for their novels.

presumably his identity. In the context of Layton's increasingly rancorous public persona in the early 1960s, Mandel contends in *Irving Layton* (1969) that the error of tending "to identify the poet with his ironic vision turns him into the very object he attacks, a mistake he sometimes makes himself" (50). Mandel also acknowledges the identity crisis and the uncertainty it can cause readers: "we can never be certain whether he writes the poems or whether the poems write him. That is less fanciful than it might sound. 'By walking,' Layton writes [in "There Were No Signs" (1963)], 'I found out where I was going'" (*Irving* 67). Mandel seems to think, optimistically, that Layton overcomes his confusion, but despite the confidence of "There Were No Signs," there is also uncertainty: "Almost now I know who I am. / Almost I have the boldness to be that man" (1). The poem ends by indicating that Layton is going "where [he] started from" (1), i.e. "walking" to discover where he is going. Without noticing the poem's circularity and its title, Mandel arrives at his own conclusion—one that is too positive—about Layton's identity. If he had considered that poem in its historical context—the height of Layton's celebrity in the early 1960s—he might have been able to extend his otherwise useful observations, and though he had the benefit of temporal proximity (writing in the late 1960s), he was perhaps too close in time to have the benefit of retrospection. "There Were No Signs" represents an identity in limbo and a man who thought his only hope of determining his own identity was through "boldness."

"The Dazed Steer," therefore, boldly puts Layton into a contest with another celebrity: Mailer. "The Dazed Steer" describes a presumably fictional encounter between the speaker (i.e. Layton) and Mailer: "He greeted me by saying: / 'What if I hit you in the belly?' // We squared off" (84). They stare at each other, and after a minute Mailer "turned

his head / like a dazed steer” (84). The confrontation is unexpected, almost random, though Mailer and Layton are very similar, both being anti-establishmentarian Jewish celebrities with high ambitions for their writing. In “The Dazed Steer,” Layton invokes Mailer to show what company he keeps, even if they had never met, and he proposes a celebrity face-off. Despite the implication of “Poetry as the Fine Art of Pugilism,” never in Layton’s poems does he, as speaker, actually engage in a fist-fight with anyone—though he mentions, retrospectively, “[giving his] Kate a blackened eye” in “Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom.” Instead, he shows remarkable sympathy for Mailer by suggesting he knows “that someone or something / had dealt him a blow / from which he’d never recover” (84). The “blow” might have been Layton’s indomitable gaze, but it might also have been something else that had compelled Mailer to seek in Layton an outlet for his frustration.

Although Cohen later chides Layton for his macho bluster in this poem in “Dear Mailer” from *The Energy of Slaves* (1972), “The Dazed Steer” subtly implies that Layton might have also anticipated or even experienced a blow like the one he says Mailer received. They stare at each other as if they were mirror images, almost alike enough to come to a “draw” (84). Because “The Dazed Steer” is in the context of other poems (see below) that seem to recognize the negative consequences of celebrity, its conclusion suggests that Mailer’s problem might be reflected upon Layton. The unspecified blow to Mailer is intelligible to Layton because he experienced a similar blow: the experience of rapidly rising celebrity and its consequences.

The problem occurs, as Layton articulates in “The Predator,” when one’s “fame’s against / him” (50) and one’s reputation precedes him. Although “The Predator” makes no

other direct reference to “fame” or celebrity, it describes a “little fox / [that] was lying in a pool of blood, / having gnawed his way out to freedom” (50). In this chapter, my argument has been that Layton’s concern for “freedom” is often a response to the typecasting effect of celebrity. Here, the fox died because of its self-amputating attempt to escape a trap. The speaker says that it is “[h]ard to believe / a fox is ever dead, that he isn’t / just lying there pretending with eyes shut” (50). The fox’s fame is such that “one suspects him of anything” (50), even faking his own death. “His evident / self-enjoyment is against him also: / no creature so wild and gleeful can ever be done for” (50). The speaker’s appreciation for these Nietzschean qualities of freedom, joyfulness, and determination is obvious, but rebirth and transformation no longer seem to be as effective as they were in “The Cold Green Element” and “A Tall Man Executes a Jig.” Layton asserts, “But this fox was [“done for”]; / there’s no place in the world any more / for free and gallant predators like him” (51). For animals such as the fox, “their freedom is their death” (51). When the speaker claims that “[m]an sets even / more terrible traps for his own kind” (51), he might be suggesting that there is no “freedom,” not even in “death,” from “fame” turned “against” the fox—or against Layton. The speaker’s empathy for the fox suggests that he is also considering his own fame and, as usual, its consequences.

It seems inevitable that Layton’s well-known poems about animals and insects victimized by cruel humans would be a conceit that he would eventually associate with celebrity; his representation of Mailer as a “dazed steer” is only the most obvious example. In “The Cage,” also from *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler*, the speaker is trapped as if he were an animal such as the fox in “The Predator”: “me / Blinded and raging in this huge cage” (14). The imprisoned speaker in “The Cage,” however, concentrates more

on his audience than on himself. His audience tends to be from the working class —“janitors, whores” (14), a “blacksmith” (14), “stonemasons” (14), and “ironmongers” (14)—with the exception of the “bank presidents” (14); notably, there are no presidents of countries or their spouses: no Kennedys. This is the general public. The speaker says that the audience’s members almost “panic” (14) in their desire to treat each other better and better, with “[a]ltruism” (14), “grace” (14), “fine courtesies” (14), and, he imagines, “tenderness in bed” (14). In fact, the “cage” itself is what makes possible their “display [of] love / To one another” (14). Their caging and wounding of the speaker is sublimation. “The Cage” does not mention celebrity directly, but Layton implies that some highly visible men are sacrificed by the public so that its violent, animalistic urges are not manifested among its members.

The only violence that the public does is to the imprisoned speaker, who is not only caged but is also wounded in such a way that his masculinity is compromised. When the blacksmith offers, to the other members of the audience, “to blind” (14) the speaker, he is offering to destroy the speaker’s phallic power of the gaze.<sup>26</sup> The effect of imprisonment and injury on the speaker is to elicit various emotions of shame, fear, and powerlessness: “I turn away to hide my terror / Lest my unmanliness displease them” (14). His “unmanliness” recalls the emasculated speakers from earlier poems by Layton, such as “The Cold Green Element.” If there is any equivalence between the “[b]linded and raging” speaker and Layton, he is clearly neither happy about the effect of scrutiny on

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26 As I explained in an earlier footnote, the gaze, in contrast with the look, is phallic (Silverman 125). The thought of being blinded might have been especially frightening for Layton; in the film *Poet: Irving Layton Observed*, he says, “I’m a very visual poet [...] My strongest sense is the sense of sight.” Unconsciously, his fear of being blinded might be associated with a fear of being castrated, which Layton also implied in “Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom,” as I explained midway through this chapter.

masculinity nor happy about the social usefulness of scrutinized men; if they serve a religious function, it is sacrificial, not prophetic—except in the sense that Layton seemed to be intuitively correct about the fate of so many celebrities (the list is long) after the deaths of Monroe and Hemingway.

The paradoxical combination of Layton's fear of celebrity's consequences and his frustration at not achieving even greater celebrity was evident in 1964's *The Laughing Rooster*, which revealed Layton at the extremes of his outrageousness, anger, and misogyny. Robin Skelton's review of *The Laughing Rooster* was negative but perceptive, arguing that Layton's poems depend on "an egocentricity which assumes that the poet's personality is more important than the poems, that any expression of personal idiosyncrasy has poetic potential, and that self-dramatization is an adequate substitute for structural control" (63).<sup>27</sup> In other words, Layton was attempting to rely on his celebrity instead of his poems for his success. Specifically, he was attempting to generate controversy by indulging his abusive public persona. In "An Imperfect Devotion" (1993), Gary Geddes mentions an occasion when Layton insulted Margaret Atwood, who had been invited to read from her work at York University sometime between 1969, when Layton began teaching there, and 1976, when Atwood described the incident (Cameron 372, 496n). Geddes explains: "The gifted but insecure poet, trying to gain control of a public situation where he feels at a slight disadvantage, resorts to verbal pugilism" (20). The "slight disadvantage" is an understatement; Atwood was a rising star in Canadian literature and posed a threat to Layton because of her feminism. Furthermore, Layton's

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27 Although I agree with Skelton, I would also note—in case it is not yet obvious—that Layton's over-emphasis on his "personality" is a result not only of his "egocentricity" but also of the metaphor of celebrity and its effect on his poetry and performances.

celebrity had peaked,<sup>28</sup> and his strategy of relying on his celebrity was no longer effective. A more determined than innovative self-promoter, Layton in the mid-1960s resorted to strategies that had worked in the past—and continued to write bad poems.

Some reviewers would continue to think of Layton as “probably the least dispensable Canadian poet now living” (Ross 22), but by 1964, Canadian poetry had developed beyond Layton’s influence (Cameron 364, 371), and Cohen was eclipsing his celebrity. The clearest sign was that the National Film Board documentary, which had begun as a project about Layton, Cohen, Earle Birney and Phyllis Gotlieb in 1964, became in 1965 simply *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen*. Rather than squabble over the film’s emphasis, Layton tried to find the cause of his fading celebrity and, in a letter to Pacey, “explained the puzzling centrality of Leonard Cohen in the filmed tour of 1964 as the result of Layton’s too-frequent appearances before the public” (Cameron 371). His over-exposure was one reason that his celebrity waned; the next big thing was Cohen, and Atwood and feminism were beginning to show that Layton and his “*chutzpah*, vituperation [and] exuberance” were unfashionable (Cameron 371-2).

By the mid-1960s, Layton was over-exposed and felt threatened by the effects of celebrity and his own compulsion to promote it. Layton himself had contrasted what Trehearne calls his “transformative model of selfhood” with his fear of being captured or captivated by his own public self. In 1965, Layton said, “The last thing I want to see happen to me is to be taken captive by my own image. I want freedom and blessed

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28 He was later nominated for the Nobel Prize by Rizzardi, whose name Cameron mistakenly spells “Rizziardi” (Cameron 442), but despite Rizzardi’s enthusiastic claims about the “tumultuous applause” and “whistling and hollering” (42) that greeted Layton in Italy, this reception was by Rizzardi’s own admission a “resounding tribute” (42); I suspect that it was more honorific than the attention that celebrities tend to receive, but that distinction is presently beyond the scope of my research.

independence—even from myself. Perhaps mostly from myself” (qtd. in Cameron 373). Despite hinting that he was the cause of his own “captiv[ity],” he did not stop promoting himself. Cameron devotes two chapters in *Irving Layton: A Portrait* to showing that Layton redoubled his effort to maintain recognition while his reputation was waning. In 1961, his charisma and opportunistic controversiality were still affording him “media coverage [...] no other poet could compete with” (Cameron 367-8), but in the 1960s *Fighting Words* was off the air in Canada (Allan) and Layton’s style “seemed too grand, too forced, too confident of right and wrong to express the more muted anxieties of the next generation” (Cameron 368). Layton continued to enjoy strong book sales until the early 1970s (Cameron 425) and generated controversies with letters to the editor in *The Globe and Mail* throughout the 1970s, but Marian Engel wrote, in 1973, that “[t]he man who took the underpants off Canadian poetry [now] sings an unfashionable tune” (31).

In the third phase of Layton’s career as a celebrity, he wrote with considerably less angst about his status, which preoccupied him less than when he was younger. The tone of his later poetry is more reflective and generous (especially to women), and the voice is quieter and more directed outward—toward social problems that he no longer tended to think that poetry needed to solve. His representations of himself were sometimes playful, as in “Shakespeare,” which appeared in *Nail Polish* (1971). Most of the poem is a comic exaggeration of the frustration that poets feel because of Shakespeare’s “forever unapproachable star” (19), a degree of celebrity that Michael D. Bristol has called, to describe Shakespeare, the “big-time” (10). In my argument, the “big-time” is the equivalent to fame or poetic immortality.<sup>29</sup> The poem begins:

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29 See also the aforementioned reference to “[i]mmortal fame” in “Prizes.”

My young son asks me:  
 “who’s the greatest poet?”  
 Without any fuss I say, Shakespeare.  
 “Is he greater than you?”  
 I ho-ho around that one  
 and finally give him a hard “yes.” (18)

His son then asks if he would ever be greater than Shakespeare, and the speaker firmly says no. He also says, but not to his son, that he is

hoping my fair-minded admission  
 won’t immediately blot out  
 the my-father-can-lick-anyone image  
 in his happy ignorant mind  
 and take the shine away  
 that’s presently all around my head. (18)

The halo resulting from the “image” of the father who can beat other men is a sign of religious pretension and problematic masculinity that Layton wears more lightly here than in the past (as when he removed “the halo / Of mountains” in “A Tall Man Executes a Jig”). “Shakespeare” is not seriously pretentious. The poem ends with a good-humoured joke about still having a chance to be greater than Shakespeare—mainly because Layton’s “six-year-old son” (20) has a promising imagination that might enable him to extend the patriarchal lineage of celebrity that, as I explain in my aforementioned article, Layton and his symbolic son Cohen had drawn between each other—but Layton’s tone remains mellow despite the subtle competitive zest. Layton was capable of adjusting his attitude to

celebrity after it had sufficiently waned.

Layton's emphasis on Shakespeare's "greatness" (20) is a sign that, by 1971, Layton had regained some of his focus and began to recover his original ambition: fame. He admits that "there's nothing to be done / about that bastard's unsurpassable / greatness" (20) but concludes by saying that he and his son have "got our bid in, Old Bard" (21). Some evidence suggests that he was, indeed, becoming famous as his celebrity ended. Although 1971 was perhaps too early for Layton to predict the extent of his future recognition, he had been mentioned in the *CPI* three times that year, compared to his previous record of two in 1966. Although the *CPI* cannot be described as more than an adequate record of the attention gained by writers and paid to them in Canada, it does offer a suggestive approximation and can indicate the trends in a writer's career. In seven different years between 1978 and 1989, Layton was mentioned at least five times per year in the *CPI*.<sup>30</sup> Without question, this degree of fame is low compared to that of Shakespeare, but because the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry ended in the 1970s, Layton's later status cannot be understood exactly as celebrity (unless as an afterimage), partly because celebrity tends not to last long. His major poems of the 1950s can be considered accomplishments, even instances of "greatness," but they did not earn him fame until he stopped promoting his celebrity so fiercely that it cast doubt on them by association. He became somewhat famous after the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry,

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30 These are not phenomenal numbers. As I quoted in the previous chapter, Cohen said this of having a career as a poet in Canada in the mid-1960s: "That [the term *career*] hardly begins to describe the modesty of the enterprise in Canada at that time" ("Leonard"). Cohen, of course, speaks from an extraordinary position; his claim must be understood in the context of his success as a musician. The *CPI* is only a sample of sources and is more valuable as a relative accounting of the popularity of Canadian poets than as an indication of overall popularity. Notably, many of the stories about Layton registered in the *CPI* were, at this time, honorific; they were tributes to his past achievements rather than inquiries into his current affairs—another sign of *fame*.

which he helped to define, had ended; tragically, if he had concentrated less on his celebrity—and had written more poems such as “A Tall Man Executes a Jig” and fewer poems such as “Prizes”—he probably would have achieved a higher degree of fame, though almost certainly not that of Shakespeare.

Layton’s experience with celebrity might have convinced him that he would always be Canada’s most widely recognized poet, but he was already 47 when *A Red Carpet for the Sun* arrived in 1959, and in the next decade the burgeoning culture of youth, feminism, and civil rights became less hospitable to Layton’s pedantic tirades, misogyny, and megalomania. Later comments on his work (even the positive ones) blamed not only shifting cultural values for Layton’s gradual displacement, but also his stubborn style. Arguably, the restrictiveness of his celebrity outlasted his actual celebrity and led Purdy to write, in a 1979 review, that “Layton has been imitating himself for years, in a perfect parody of his own style, and has written nearly all of his poems before, some many times” (qtd. in Cameron 422). Similarly, in 1983, Cohen commented—with admiration, it seems—that Layton “will never grow, his work or himself. His sense of the urgency of the poetic identity is unparalleled” (qtd. in Cameron 359). In spite of Layton’s theories about the poet’s flexibility and innovation, other poets were already noticing that Layton’s work seemed fixed and repetitive by the late 1960s, and he was never relieved of this stigma in his lifetime. He laboured to have his poetry and its various satirical messages recognized not simply because he was a celebrity but also to prove that his celebrity’s typecasting effect would not ruin his poetry. Although in that respect he often failed, he crafted several poems, especially in the 1950s, that proved him imaginative, perceptive, and critical in his anticipation of celebrity.

By appearing on television and increasingly in other popular media in the 1950s, Layton helped to make celebrity possible for Canadian poets after World War II and helped to define the terms of reference for the public personas of later celebrity poets. His problematic masculinity and religious pretension were later re-enacted and then rejected by Cohen, Michael Ondaatje, and Gwendolyn MacEwen, who also wrote poems about their celebrity—and, sometimes indirectly, about how it differed from that of Layton. Unlike Cohen and Ondaatje, Layton maintained his celebrity for several years despite his lack of success in writing in other forms. He admitted, “I’m simply not one of [the poets who seem easily to switch from form to form]” (qtd. in Cameron 400). He accepted, to some extent, his typecasting; he committed himself to his public persona until the end of the 1960s. He wanted fame but understood his celebrity to be a threat to his freedoms of expression and self-definition; for someone of such devotion to Dionysian and Nietzschean values of vitality and flux, the typecasting effect, which seems to have been internalized enough to affect his identity, was an artistic and even existential problem.

## Chapter IV

### “I like that line because it’s got my name in it”: Celebrity and Masochism in Poems and Songs by Leonard Cohen

Leonard Cohen sang in “Bird on the Wire” (1969), “I have tried in my way to be free.” Cohen’s concern for freedom was motivated not only by his mentor Irving Layton’s poetic manifestos but also his close observation of Layton’s mid-career. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Cohen watched Layton experience a degree of celebrity never before achieved in Canadian poetry, and yet his own celebrity soon reached heights that were far beyond Layton’s grasp. In the previous chapter, I argued that Layton understood that celebrity constrained his freedoms of expression and self-definition despite his insistent individualism. Cohen realized that Layton’s ideal of freedom was a fantasy and then accepted, more willingly than Layton, that his identity would be redefined by his celebrity. Cohen’s “way” of being “free” was ironic; it involved renouncing Layton’s individualistic style of freedom and accepting the consequences of celebrity. What I interpret as Cohen’s metaphor of celebrity<sup>1</sup> as slavery—especially as implied in *The Energy of Slaves* (1972)—was his way of describing, and then exploiting, an initially voluntary loss of control over one’s identity that results from celebrity.

Cohen’s experience of celebrity was also implicitly masochistic, given that he

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1 Cohen’s metaphor of celebrity as slavery needs to be explained in the context of *the* metaphor of celebrity that the first chapter introduced. Any number of metaphors of celebrity could be created—Michael Ondaatje’s is that “celebrity [is] a razor in the body” in the poem “Heron Rex” (1973)—but the metaphor of celebrity, as I have defined it, refers specifically to the fusion of selves (the private and public personas) that results in the celebrity’s identity crisis. This metaphor of celebrity is the inspiration for other metaphors. To suggest that celebrity is slavery is to seem aware of celebrity’s potential for transforming identity; Cohen is perhaps more explicit in that suggestion than any of the other poets in this study.

associated celebrity with slavery. Among its other uses, masochism is a performance of slavery (Baumeister 14). Many of Cohen's poems and some of his songs imply that celebrity's oppressiveness can be psychologically internalized and thereby affect identity and selfhood. In the first chapter, I explained how celebrities create personas that not only attract attention but also initially draw it away from their private selves; however, they then experience what I call *the metaphor of celebrity—the private is public*—a consequence of their self-promotion that occurs when the fusion of the private and public personas leaves the private self without a decoy for the audience. The result has been explained as “identity confusion” (Rojek 11) and the public's “invasive reconfiguration” (Latham 110) of the private self. As Cohen implies, when the public persona threatens to dominate the private self, the character of celebrity becomes sadomasochistic.<sup>2</sup>

Cohen's painfully negative representations of celebrity helped to dramatize and criticize what I call the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, whose peak was defined by his career. As I argued in chapters II and III, the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry began around 1955, when Layton emerged as the first poet to be widely recognized in post-war media such as television. Layton's celebrity peaked in the late 1950s when he published his award-winning *A Red Carpet for the Sun* (1959); in 1965, the film *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen* began to introduce Cohen to a national audience and signalled that Layton was already becoming *passé*. A year after Cohen started his career as a popular musician in New York City, the phenomenal success of his *Selected Poems: 1956-1968* (1968) won him the status of the celebrity poet of highest degree in Canada.

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2 This chapter remains focussed on masochism, though it includes sadomasochism, simply because my interest is less in the power of the public or of celebrity and more in the poet's representations of being dominated by that power, even if such domination did not occur in reality, or did not occur as it is represented.

As his celebrity intensified, his representations of his various selves—private and public—became increasingly negative. His sadomasochistic poems help to explain the oft-noted confusion between his personas and his private self.<sup>3</sup> One of my later arguments in this chapter is that Cohen then symbolically killed his public persona (or committed its suicide) in *Death of a Lady's Man* (1978) and rejected his celebrity;<sup>4</sup> that symbolic death at the end of the 1970s coincided with the end of “star-making” (Messenger 944) in Canadian poetry, leaving Layton and Cohen as that era’s definitive figures.

As in Layton’s case, Cohen’s early ideas about freedom—which his metaphor of celebrity as slavery later critiqued—developed as he anticipated and began to achieve celebrity. His interest in slavery was an extension and inversion of Layton’s interest in freedom.<sup>5</sup> In *Leonard Cohen* (1978), Stephen Scobie notices that the concern with freedom begins to appear in Cohen’s *The Spice-Box of Earth* (1961), especially in “A Kite Is a Victim” and “You Have the Lovers.” Referring to “A Kite Is a Victim,” Scobie observes that “[s]omehow the beauty of the poem tends to gloss over the unpleasantness” (26) of its titular focus on a victim. Even that early in Cohen’s career, however, his ideas about freedom were explained in terms of masters and slaves who often switch positions;

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3 For a summary of the debate among Desmond Pacey, Linda Hutcheon, Stephen Scobie, and Dennis Lee about Cohen’s selves, see Winfried Siemerling’s “Hailed by Koan: Leonard Cohen and the Aesthetics of Loss” (1994).

4 In *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (1992), Kaja Silverman argues that T.E. Lawrence—whose celebrity is considered in chapter VI—submitted to “feminine masochism, and [...] it is only through an examination of this shift that we can explain his subsequent retreat from leadership” (10). Her remark about “leadership” is similar to a remark in P. David Marshall’s *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (1997), which examines celebrity with a Weberian focus on the “prophet[ic]” and “charismatic leader” (20); my argument about Cohen’s symbolic abdication of his role as a leading celebrity poet—and some of its associated masculinity and religiosity—is partly indebted to both Silverman and Marshall.

5 My article “Celebrity and the Poetic Dialogue of Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen” (forthcoming) deals with the majority of the poems that they wrote for and about each other. In that poetic dialogue, they demonstrated reciprocal influence and debated which of them was the more free.

even earlier, in *Let Us Compare Mythologies* (1956), he was beginning to think of how his public persona would dominate his private persona. Linda Hutcheon has argued that these “inversions” of masters and slaves “recur in all Cohen’s work” ([Poetry] 42); the difference between his two earliest books and *The Energy of Slaves* is that the mood of the former still seemed romantic. Around the time of *Flowers for Hitler* (1964), especially in “Style” and its thematically related poems in *Parasites of Heaven* (1966), Cohen rejected Layton’s ideal of freedom. *The Energy of Slaves* made that rejection extremely obvious, partly because it is the first of Cohen’s books to deal with celebrity directly (though his earlier poems become newly relevant in the context of his developing celebrity); it suggested that artistic “energy” could be gained from the figurative slavery resulting from celebrity. His last book during the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, *Death of a Lady’s Man* was a new beginning as much as an ending; it tended to question and adjust (for Cohen) the features of the public personas of literary celebrities, especially poets, that Layton had hoped would help to ensure his freedom: namely, problematic masculinity and a pretence of religious significance.

Layton attempted to ensure his freedoms of expression and self-definition in part by exploiting these two features of the celebrity of poets. Most celebrities, consciously or not, accept that their personas will play roles that scholars have now understood to be pseudo-religious (Frow 201, 204; Turner 6-7). Furthermore, poets who are celebrities have recently been criticized for indulging in and perpetuating masculinity’s exclusive, aggressive, and sexist tendencies (Glass 18; Jaffe 165). In the first chapter, I defined such exaggerated performances of masculinity and religiosity as *grandstanding*: standing in for someone more grand—a bigger man or even a god. Cohen toys with such performances

but eventually seems to choose less problematic ways of imagining himself. My explanation of *Death of a Lady's Man*, below, is that by the late 1970s Cohen was attempting to rebuild his ego with genuine religion—Buddhism<sup>6</sup> and, later, the Judaism of his heritage—and a less sadomasochistic conception of masculinity than that which appears in his earlier books, especially *The Energy of Slaves*.

Whereas Layton's ideal of freedom was especially individualistic, Cohen's was relatively communal—or, more accurately, multiple; his emphasis is on brothers and brotherhood in “Style” and in *Parasites of Heaven* (which makes various claims about freedom that seem relevant in the context of “Style”). Beyond his emphasis on multiplicity, Cohen's ideal of freedom is not easy to define; it is being “like a bird on the wire” and “like a drunk in a midnight choir.” These lyrics evoke balancing acts, easy targets ready to fly away, and both revelry at the opportune moment (a party) and disruption at the wrong time (“midnight” mass)—contradictions that are Laytonic (i.e. Dionysian, as the previous chapter explained) and seemingly impossible for Cohen to resolve. In *Parasites of Heaven*, Cohen writes: “So long I've tried to give a name to freedom, today my freedom lost its name [...]. Every act has its own style of freedom, whatever that means” (23). I will explain these lines later, in their historical context, but in general they are evasive, much more than Layton's claims in “Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom” (1958). The lack of easily interpretable claims by Cohen about freedom suggests that he would not or could not define it; this lack also implicitly explains his later focus on slavery, for which he could and would suggest a definition: celebrity.<sup>7</sup>

6 He confirmed his interest in actual religious roles by becoming a Buddhist monk in the late 1990s (Eder par. 10).

7 A likely counter-argument is that Cohen's metaphor of celebrity as slavery is no more obvious than his definition of freedom. I argue later in this chapter that his ability to be free requires him not to define

In “Cohen’s Life as a Slave” (1978), Eli Mandel provides an alternate definition, but it, too, associates this figurative slavery with celebrity. According to Mandel, the dichotomy of “seduction/repulsion” in Cohen’s poetry reveals the influence of “two conflicting demands, the demands of audience, the demands of art” (212). Mandel’s mention of the “audience” develops into a claim about the questions raised by Cohen’s poetry, such as “the meaning of the poet’s involvement in mass art and popular culture” (214). Cohen partly answered one of his own implied questions by “turn[ing] from high to low culture in response to the demands of audience” (Mandel, “Cohen’s Life” 218). Reading Cohen’s poem “Alexander Trocchi, Public Junkie, Priez Pour Nous” from *Flowers for Hitler*, Mandel states that in Cohen’s work “slavery is defined simply as art and addiction. Art is opposed to work; it is habit, need, no longer the romanticized purity, focus, and concentration of the Trocchi poem, but the routine dreariness of meaningless necessary repetition” (221).

Mandel’s remark is perceptive but oversimplifies Cohen’s implied definition of slavery. It is not “simply [...] art and addiction.” Indeed, its “meaningless necessary repetition” also describes the tautological aspect of celebrity’s excessively replicated images (and imprimaturs), which I explained in the first chapter as one of the threats that celebrity poses to authors as purveyors of meaning. In response not only to this threat but also to what Mandel calls a “history of horror” (213) that is implicitly the Holocaust, Cohen seems to indulge in “sado-masochism” and extends his own trauma into “a public nightmare,” mounting a “bitter attack on both audience and art” (213). With literature in

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freedom. There is no such restriction on his implicit definition of slavery. In a different context in *After Theory* (2003), Terry Eagleton states: “To define [freedom] is to destroy it” (195).

jeopardy, Mandel suggests that Cohen's "anti-literary" (215) persona in the early 1970s is an acknowledgment of poetry's status: "*The Energy of Slaves* remains valuable because it elucidates with the precision we used to call poetry the failure of contemporary poetry" (224). Cohen realized that poetry could no longer serve its traditional function as what Mandel calls "high art" (213). Determined to work within the limits of what poetry could still do, Cohen sought inspiration in the so-called "low culture" and found it by imagining himself both as an "attack[er]" and as a slave (even a sacrifice) to a popular audience.

Cohen's thinking about slavery developed from his oft-noted interest in martyrdom, which was an early sign of his religious pretence. The interest in martyrs revealed in his poems, novels, and songs leads Michael Ondaatje to claim that Cohen is "the scapegoat of success" who "shift[s] from scapegoat to martyr" (*Leonard* 59). Especially in the 1960s, Cohen was devoted to his own "pop-sainthood" (Ondaatje, *Leonard* 59). His "sainthood" was related to his being a "pop" star and martyrdom was implicated in that success. Cohen anticipated the aforementioned "invasi[on]" by the public and understood it to be the price of his celebrity—a sacrifice, more accurately, to his audience. Scobie might not accept this; he argues in *Leonard Cohen* that the martyrs and saints in Cohen's poetry are "not [selves] sacrificed to some higher cause; the sacrifice of the self *is* the higher cause" (10, his emphasis).<sup>8</sup> Celebrity, however, is rarely so selfless; it is inescapably relational, and every celebrity depends on an audience. Especially in *Parasites of Heaven*, Cohen implied that his ambivalent relationship with his audience had been psychologically internalized. His martyrdom, however pretentious

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<sup>8</sup> Scobie's argument more accurately describes Cohen's thinking about selfhood in the late 1970s, when Cohen's interest in Buddhism was becoming more influential on his poetry, than his thinking from the mid-1960s until *The Energy of Slaves*, when his literary celebrity was at its peak. See my analysis of *Death of a Lady's Man* near the end of this chapter.

it might be, can be interpreted as the result of the public persona demanding the submission and sacrifice of the private persona. Because of this sacrifice or martyrdom, the masochism of his private persona is implicitly religious.

Before considering some of the historical contexts of Cohen's representations of sadomasochism, I want to summarize, briefly, the theories of masochism and sadomasochism upon which this chapter depends. There are and have been numerous "working models of masochism" (Finke 2) in psychoanalysis, yet the "models" that tend to be used in literary studies are those of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Gilles Deleuze, despite more recent developments in the practice of psychoanalysis (Balázs 166). In "Recognizing Masochism" (2002), Thomas P. Balázs argues that "contemporary literary studies is significantly out of step with contemporary psychoanalysis, a state of affairs that ought to be addressed if we are to attempt any true 'interdisciplinary' work" (169). My intention in this chapter, however, is not to contribute directly to psychoanalytic literary studies but to studies of Cohen, his poetry, and celebrity. Of the three types of masochism (Finke 6), my focus is not on "erotogenic masochism," whose commonly accepted definition is misleading,<sup>9</sup> but on the masochism that Freud called "feminine" (Finke 6) and Deleuze "passive" (Deleuze 110). The Freudian usage means "the full-blown sexual perversion in which a man adopts what is assumed to be the naturally passive position of a woman" (Finke 6; Silverman 10, 189). I call this *feminine masochism* to maintain the emphasis of Cohen's attempted rejection of the masculinity that celebrity poets assert along with their pretended religious significance.<sup>10</sup>

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9 Erotogenic masochism is "pleasure [...] derived from pain" (Finke 6). Freud and others revised his theory of erotogenic masochism by acknowledging that pain is not actually pleasant (Baumeister 64-5).

10 In Cohen's work, the most prominent martyrs are women—Catherine Tekakwitha in his novel *Beautiful Losers* (1966) and Joan of Arc on his album *Songs of Love and Hate* (1971)—who are admired by male

The different types of masochism are not mutually exclusive; feminine masochism is similar to the third type, what Freud called “moral masochism,” which refers to the social ramifications of the relationship between the punitive superego and the guilty ego (Finke 6). The superego is likely to be sadistic, and the ego masochistic, because the superego dominates the ego (Deleuze *passim*). Deleuze argues that sadism and masochism cannot fuse in an individual as sadomasochism, which is a faulty category (13); in his analogy, “a genuine sadist could never tolerate a masochistic victim [....]. Neither would the masochist tolerate a truly sadistic torturer” (41), mainly because the masochist would need to teach and tell the sadist what to do, and the sadist, wanting to control all the pain, would refuse. Cohen might disagree; he actually mentions sadism as a tendency of what seems to be his public persona in some of his poems, and yet they often also describe masochistic feelings and fantasies of the private persona. Notably, these personas are sometimes almost indistinguishable.

When my argument about the celebrity’s fusion of selves is considered in the psychoanalytic terms that Cohen proposes, a new possibility emerges: that, contrary to Deleuze’s reasoning, a celebrity can have both sadistic and masochistic tendencies. In *Masochism and the Self* (1989), Roy F. Baumeister admits that sadomasochism is an “open question” (25) but claims that most sadists have had masochistic experiences, but not *vice versa*, and not many masochists become sadists (25). Baumeister’s argument is that masochists relinquish control according to predetermined arrangements, thereby

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narrators and speakers. Such admiration of women’s pain can be interpreted as sadistic and misogynistic, but it also suggests that Cohen was thinking in gendered terms about celebrity and the sadomasochism it potentially elicits. By also portraying himself as a martyr and masochist, he suggests that celebrity dominated and emasculated him—in contrast with what often appears to be his easy manipulation of celebrity and, possibly, women.

helping them to “deconstruc[t]” (30) the self and ease the “burden of selfhood” (88) associated with the demands, responsibilities, and failures they experience at work.<sup>11</sup> He also argues that “[s]ubmissives [i.e. masochists] define their roles as slavery” and that “[s]lavery nullifies identity. The masochist’s wish to be a slave is a desire for the removal of the social self” (Baumeister 85). Questioning a competing theory—“that masochism is a way of building up, repairing, or restoring this [damaged or deficient] sense of self” (Baumeister 195)—Baumeister suggests that sadism, which is partly the tendency to want and take control, would be more likely than masochism to restore someone’s sense of self (197).<sup>12</sup> His theory and its alternative do not necessarily differ when they are applied to celebrity, or at least to Cohen’s representations of it. Cohen’s celebrity can be understood as a sadomasochistic “reconfiguration” of the self—both the private self’s “deconstruction” and the “building up” of the public persona.

Cohen’s metaphor of celebrity as slavery, which becomes evident at last in *The Energy of Slaves*, implies that he took masochistic pleasure and gained artistic “energy” from his celebrity despite its ramifications for his freedom and his identity. Although Francesco Alberoni once called celebrities “The Powerless Elite” (1972), celebrity itself is powerful, and for Cohen the challenge of surviving its “invasive reconfiguration” of his identity was as inspirational as dangerous. His performance of masochism was tactical. In

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11 Baumeister also states that “masochism appeals selectively to the most powerful and responsible men” (78) because their work is so demanding; they need to escape into fantasy—and, ironically, they escape into slavery. Celebrity poets might be such “men,” even though their representations of themselves suggests that they are hardly “powerful.” Instead, their public personas are powerful. Celebrities are both agents of the audience (and, to some extent, representatives of their industry) and people who want relief from that power.

12 He then speculates that “mentally ill” (Baumeister 197) people might be capable of sadomasochism, whereas masochists tend to be “mentally well and healthy” (Baumeister 195). Mental illness and the identity crisis resulting from celebrity are not necessarily related, and Cohen’s recurrent depression (Nadel *passim*)—which he recently described as “clinical” (“Leonard”)—need not be an issue here, but his poems do imply that celebrities tend to be both sadistic and masochistic.

“Masochism and Identity” (2000), Robert Tobin argues that some masochists pretend to be subordinate to subvert the identities imposed on them by institutions that are otherwise assumed to do good for them (33, 37).<sup>13</sup> On the topic of subversive performances in *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler argues that gender is obviously a contrivance because it must be performed repeatedly to induce the belief that it is natural (140-1); it can therefore be subverted through parody (138-9).<sup>14</sup> Following her argument, Tobin implies that masochistic practices can parodically subvert hierarchies—such as master and slave or man and woman—that help to determine identity. By creating what Tobin calls “only the appearance of subordination” (40), “the slave can demonstrate a masochistic power” (49). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Cohen allowed celebrity to make him appear inherently sick—a masochist—so that he could criticize celebrity. Regardless of its actual effect on his mental health, his celebrity appeared to dominate him—an appearance that elicited the sympathy of his fans.<sup>15</sup>

Cohen’s tactical representations of “feminine” or “passive” masochism are especially relevant in the post-war contexts that reveal what might be called a crisis of

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13 Tobin’s examples are from Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s book *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886). In one case, for example, Tobin refers to a woman who insisted that doctors administer potentially painful gynecological exams, which stimulated her orgasm (33). “In turning to medicine for the satisfaction, rather than the treatment, of masochistic urges, Miss X and her fellow masochists suggest that by subjecting themselves to medicine—one of those public cultural institutions that healthy law abiding citizens obey, according to Krafft-Ebing—they are actually sick. [...] Subjecting herself to medicine, which is supposed to prevent and cure disease, Miss X turns herself into a sick person, casting an ambivalent light on medicine” (Tobin 37).

14 Butler cautions, however, that “[p]arody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions [of gender] effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony” (139). Cohen’s performance of masochism is not easy to explain as either subversive or hegemonic. It is both, but the tendency toward masochism rather than sadism in his poetry of the 1970s suggests that his sympathy is with the victim.

15 In *The Globe and Mail* on March 29, 1977, Scott Symons states that Cohen was “a distant, if glamorous moan (and making millions for it)” (qtd. in French, “Female” 14). Cohen’s implicit masochism was an aspect of what his fans were buying; it was worth money.

masculinity. In the previous chapter, I addressed three issues related to the historical manifestation of that crisis after World War II: men's shaken confidence in their autonomy and control over their lives (Cuordileone 14; Faludi 9); their objectification and feminization in "an age of celebrity" (Faludi 35); and their strategic bonding, which enabled them to promote themselves and each other as writers (Jaffe 165) and to counter assumptions about the femininity of writing poetry (Davidson, *Guys* 48). Feminine masochism's supposed perversion is that it involves men performing roles that are contrary to what is stereotypically expected of their gender. After 1945, men could not easily fulfill the expectations of their gender; rather than change their behaviour, though, they often tended to perform their masculinity more stubbornly. Loren Glass states that "[h]istorians of sexuality tend to agree that the postwar era [...] is characterized by the increasing fragility of patriarchal authority, which generates the sorts of strident masculine response we see in writers like [Norman] Mailer" (182). The representations of sadism in Cohen's poetry can usually be understood as "strident[ly] masculine."

Cohen's representations of masochism in the 1960s and 1970s, however, suggest that he is not only willingly out of sync with much of post-war men's history but also perceptive in its diagnosis. According to Baumeister, "[i]f masochism is an attempt to escape from the burden of selfhood, then masochism should show up most where that burden is most severe" (39), and he associates that "burden of selfhood" with the individualism of "modern Western culture" (56). Indeed, men's post-war feeling of having lost control—and, by extension, having lost freedom, which helps to define individuality—partly explains why Cohen would portray himself as a masochist and slave in the context of his celebrity. Rather than resort to the same problematic masculinity that

traditionally helped to secure men's power, Cohen represented himself in the supposedly feminine position of lacking power and individuality. The title of his somewhat later album *Various Positions* (1984), which Ira Nadel interprets as a motto for Cohen's entire life by adopting the same title for his biography of Cohen, suggests that Cohen wanted to occupy both masculine and feminine positions—to play “various” roles (as Layton tried to do with less success): sadist, masochist, and others.

Cohen learned to be a public poet more from Layton than his other influences. Cohen had several poetic models during his education: first was the inspiring figure of Federico García Lorca (Nadel 23), followed by many others, including Louis Dudek, who encouraged and promoted him by helping to publish *Let Us Compare Mythologies* (in 1956, when Layton had only recently inaugurated the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry); A.M. Klein, from whom Cohen learned “aestheticism, with its emphasis on poetic formalism and religious imagery” (Abraham 90); and Layton. Of these influences, Layton was the most compelling in the long term because he was willing to do what Klein and Dudek were not: Layton sought celebrity, which would have seemed vulgar, undignified, and anti-modernist to Klein and Dudek. Cohen sought to learn from, rival, and excel Layton as a celebrity poet. Nadel states that “Layton's ego was relentlessly public [...] From Layton, Cohen learned to value the excesses of the Dionysian style, to accept the power of prophetic visions, and to extend the poetic to include the Judaic” (41). The “Dionysian style” was Layton's style of freedom, but it was partly incompatible with his desire for poetic immortality. From the beginning of his career, Cohen imitated Layton, challenged him, and established a friendship and poetic dialogue with him.

Cohen addresses Layton and questions his adoption of a masculine and pseudo-

religious public persona in “To I.P.L.” from *Let Us Compare Mythologies*. “To I.P.L.” deifies Layton but also critiques him, though more meekly than “For My Old Layton” (1964) does eight years later. The speaker of “To I.P.L.” is dissatisfied with Layton’s “zarathustrian tales” (61) because they do not explain how God could be unseated by a poet. The speaker wants to know why “the streets and alleys of heaven / were not safe for holy girls” (61) and why God “raged, depraved, / hanging around street corners, / entertaining hags in public places” (61). In other words, the speaker wants to know, first, how God lost his power to protect “holy girls” and then went mad “in public” and, second, how Layton “finished” (61) the job started by God by arriving, “more furious than any Canadian poet, / [to] find Him gasping against a cloud” (61). For the apprentice to Layton, these questions express apt reservations about a model of celebrity that demands that the poet supplant God in the role of a clown performing for an undesirable audience of “hags” and “stray children” (61) in “public places” (61).

The speaker insinuates the answer to the first question: Layton—already well-known for his sexual bravado—succeeded in deflowering the holy girls and dominating “the streets and alleys” of God’s otherwise protected heaven because God’s “seraphim” (61) were “indoors” (61) repressing sexuality in a still somewhat Victorian “century of curfew” (61). Because of Layton’s transgression, the angels (Layton’s other, more critical and desirable audience) “rattled their fists / and chanted odes” (61); their approval of their new God is ambivalent. The implied answer to the poem’s second question—how Layton “finished up the job” (61)—is that the poet was more “furious” than God and thereby replaced “Him,” but because he had no better “answers,” an audience of critics might soon denounce his assumptions about sexuality. Partly because of these misgivings,

Cohen would, by the early 1960s, begin to separate himself from Layton and his home city of Montreal and to seek differentiation from his mentor.

Before that separation began, Cohen was considering a different separation—the splitting of his self into various personas—in anticipation of his own celebrity. When Cohen published *Let Us Compare Mythologies* in 1956, Layton had recently announced a “BOOM IN LAYTON” (*Wild* 63, his emphasis) because of the success of *In the Midst of My Fever* (1954). Because of Layton’s precedent, literary celebrity of a higher degree than before the war was now possible for Canadian poets. In “Poem,” Cohen implies that he understands the separation of himself into the private self and both the private and public personas, a separation that is typical of celebrities before the fusion of selves that I described in more detail in the first chapter. Here is “Poem,” brief but in full:

I heard of a man  
 who says words so beautifully  
 that if he only speaks their name  
 women give themselves to him.

If I am dumb beside your body  
 while silence blossoms like tumours on our lips  
 it is because I hear a man climb stairs  
 and clear his throat outside our door. (64)

Although “Elegy” was the first poem in his first book, “Poem” announces (ambivalently) Cohen’s presence on the scene. The context is indoors, in the ostensibly private life of the poet, but the public realm—as Cohen’s anticipated celebrity—is about to intrude.

Most critics (such as Nadel and Michael Q. Abraham) think that the poem describes a rivalry between two men for one woman, but the poem also suggests that Cohen understands himself as a split subject (“I” and “a man”), one who is “dumb” but also poised to appear as a celebrity poet or singer by joining the other in the bedroom. “Poem” is therefore an early example of Cohen’s grandstanding: a metaphoric self-promotion that involves standing in for someone more grand.<sup>16</sup> Here, the poet is beginning to think of how to stand in for the celebrity or singer; he is almost certainly thinking of how he might also “clear his throat” and use his voice to seduce women. “Poem” anticipates Cohen’s actual success as a singer while foreshadowing his difficult experience with celebrity that becomes explicit in *The Energy of Slaves* and *Death of a Lady’s Man*: the public persona, skilled at the seduction of women with words, arrives at the bedroom door of the private persona and causes him pain; it is the subtle introduction of the central theme of sexual guilt and masochism in Cohen’s poetry and songs such as “Famous Blue Raincoat” (1971), which can be interpreted, like “Poem,” not as a love

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<sup>16</sup> Cohen had, in fact, on one strange occasion actually rehearsed such grandstanding with Layton as the (ironically) bigger man. In late 1957 and early 1958, Layton was blundering through a series of marital problems. In all, Layton had five wives, but the transition from Betty Sutherland to Aviva Cantor was particularly troublesome for him. According to his biographer Elspeth Cameron, “Layton would not ask Betty for a divorce, but he agreed to buy Aviva a wedding ring” (276). They went to a boutique in Montreal with Cohen, “who was to be the ‘best man’ on this lark” (Cameron 276). As the accounts by Cameron and Layton’s son David suggest, Cohen was symbolically much more than the best man: he became a substitute for his friend and mentor. In both accounts, Layton finds a bracelet for Betty and leaves the store, and Cohen placates Aviva by buying her a ring and declaring her married. By putting the ring on Aviva’s finger, Cohen substitutes himself for the priest *and* for the intended groom. Cohen’s fascination with the priesthood and with similar roles, such as sainthood and monkhood, were important almost from the beginning of his career, but this anecdote suggests that his sense of himself as a replacement for Layton began even before Layton “attained full stature ‘officially’ as a major Canadian poet” (Cameron 279) with the publication of *A Red Carpet for the Sun*. At its most extreme, by becoming Layton’s surrogate as Aviva’s symbolic husband, Cohen engaged in grandstanding; he was standing in for Layton (who was already a celebrity), helping to establish his own persona, and insinuating himself into the position of a celebrity. He was also rehearsing the separation and fusion of a celebrity’s selves; in effect, he ensured that he and Layton were married to each other, in the sense of “[a]n intimate union; a merging or blending of two things” (*OED*). This impromptu ceremony was also the one and only celebrity wedding in the history of Canadian poetry.

triangle but as two sides of the same self vying for another's love. The multiple selves and their potential fusion—their joining each other in the room—indicate that Cohen, even at the age of 22, was anticipating celebrity and accurately predicting its consequences.

In *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, Cohen also seems intuitively aware of the difference between celebrity and fame; “Song,” for example, represents aspects of both types of recognition, but its speaker eventually seems to prefer celebrity. As I explained in the first chapter, fame tends to derive from achievements, such as heroism, whereas celebrity does not. In “Song,” Cohen imagines himself as a heroic “general” (34) who “driv[es] the great horses / dressed in gold cloth / wind on my breastplate” (34). Although the speaker expresses his desire for his “bronze name” (34) to be permanently recognized,<sup>17</sup> he also wants that recognition to be personal and therefore temporary. He contemplates his imagined lover and implores,

may my bronze name  
touch always her thousand fingers  
grow brighter with her weeping  
until I am fixed like a galaxy  
and memorized  
in her secret and fragile skies. (35)

Layton was worried that being immortal as a poet might mean being “fixed,” trapped, and typecast, but Cohen is asking to be “fixed like a galaxy”—a sign of his later willingness to be a figurative slave to stardom. The speaker of “Song” also wants his bronze name to

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<sup>17</sup> Much later, Cohen revised this suggestion; he said in a recent interview that he is not interested, as Layton was, in “immortality and posterity” (“Leonard”).

“grow brighter with her weeping.” In other words, he wants his reputation to depend on her pain. “Song” therefore implies his theme of sadomasochism, which Cohen later associates with celebrity more than fame. The speaker wants his reputation to be exalted to the starry “skies” and “memorized,” but only in “secret” and in skies that are “fragile.” His emphasis on memory and secrecy suggests that he wants only “her” to recognize him, and his emphasis on fragility suggests that he is comfortable with a seemingly intimate type of recognition that is only as permanent as she is.

Another example of Cohen’s distinction between celebrity and fame in *Let Us Compare Mythologies* is in “These Heroics,” but in this poem, the speaker prefers fame to celebrity. The speaker asks a rhetorical question about heroism—indicated initially by the “shining head” (33) that evokes someone haloed or wearing a shiny helmet (as the speaker probably did in “Song”)—and whether or not it can exist in an age of celebrity indicated by the modern “street cars” (33):

If I had a shining head  
and people turned to stare at me  
in the street cars [...]  
do you think that I would remain in this room,  
reciting poems to you,  
and making outrageous dreams  
with the smallest movements of your mouth? (33)

In other words, if the speaker were a hero with an audience of the public, he would not be reading poetry aloud to a woman “in this room.” Fame is his preferred type of recognition, even though he alludes to heroes who ultimately fail: the man who could

“stretch [his] body / through the bright water / and keep abreast of fish and water snakes” (33) could be Beowulf,<sup>18</sup> who defeated a sea serpent but is eventually killed by a dragon; the man who could “ruin [his] feathers / in flight before the sun” (33) is obviously Icarus, who escaped from prison but then fell from the sky. Cohen suggests that “reciting poems” is a poor substitute for heroism; reading poems aloud is not as risky as behaving heroically and risking failures that could become known by the public. Perhaps both heroism and fame were his “outrageous dreams” in 1956, but he later became a celebrity, not a *hero* except in the loosest sense of the term. By suggesting in *The Energy of Slaves* that celebrity is also a threat, he imagined a scenario wherein celebrity can motivate heroic acts of resistance to itself; in the anti-heroic 1970s, however, Cohen’s attitude would be considerably bleaker than it was in *Let Us Compare Mythologies*.

Regardless, Cohen was not yet a celebrity poet; he had not even published the book, his first, that would contain the aforementioned poems. Rosemary Sullivan claims that “everyone [in the literary circles of Montreal and Toronto] had read Leonard Cohen’s *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, published in 1956, aware that he had broken the pattern and rocketed to fame at the green age of twenty-two” (106), but to call him “fam[ous]” in 1956 is somewhat inaccurate. He was ambitious, however—even over-confident—and suggested in “These Heroics” that he knew that he was living in an era of celebrity, not heroism or fame. The only Canadian celebrity poet in 1956 was Layton, who was already becoming a mentor to Cohen, and Cohen was also writing about Layton’s celebrity, as in “To I.P.L.” By associating with Layton and observing him, Cohen was able to recognize

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18 Other possibilities are that Cohen is alluding to Leander in Greek myth or to Layton’s poem “The Swimmer” (1945), in which ambiguous “snake heads strike / Quickly and are silent” (4-5) in the water. The subsequent reference to Icarus in “These Heroics” might also refer to Layton and the sun imagery that is so common in his poetry.

the relative benefits and costs of celebrity while preparing himself for that status. The different implied attitudes toward celebrity in “These Heroics” and “Song” suggest that he had not yet decided whether or not it would be beneficial for him, though he was already thinking that it would be detrimental to Layton.

In contrast with Layton’s prolificacy, Cohen was not quick to publish a second book; it would be five years until *The Spice-Box of Earth* appeared in 1961. Abraham accounts for the gap between books by explaining that “Cohen was unwilling to engage himself any further in the adolescent angst which characterized his first book. Such displays of suffering, no matter how well-intentioned, had become so popular that they had lost all meaning” (108). There remain, however, numerous “displays of suffering” in Cohen’s later poems. Although he did downplay his “adolescent angst” after *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, he also established masochistic and sadistic personas. These personas appeared before he actually was a celebrity—which suggests that he was imagining how to dramatize celebrity that he could reasonably assume would be his, thanks to his relationship with Layton.<sup>19</sup> In the five years after *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, Cohen probably wondered how to renew the “meaning” of “suffering” in the “popular” context, how to validate the experience of celebrity that he had seen Layton deal with in the late 1950s, and—by doing so—how to promote himself.<sup>20</sup>

Cohen himself would begin to experience unsurpassed popularity—and then celebrity—as a Canadian poet not long after the publication of *The Spice-Box of Earth*.

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19 In my aforementioned article, I argue that, by 1961, Layton and Cohen were imagining themselves as family: specifically, father and son, as various poems suggest. Cohen could have assumed that he would symbolically inherit Layton’s celebrity.

20 On at least one occasion in the late 1950s, Cohen also appeared on television—a program called *Doubletalk*, which generated interest in Cohen’s late-night performances of poetry with jazz accompaniment (Cahill 7).

He introduced that book with “A Kite Is a Victim,” which expresses his thoughts about freedom and slavery—and his prototypical sadomasochism—at an important transition in his own career. Abraham explains that, “[i]n contrast to the uncertainty so prevalent in *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, the kite is a clear metaphor for the tension between limitation and freedom” (109). “A Kite Is a Victim” includes several elements that might have been borrowed from Layton, but the most prominent is the theme of restricted freedom related to the implication that the speaker is both a teacher (a “master”) and a clown (a “fool”): “You love it because it pulls / gentle enough to call you master, / strong enough to call you fool” (1), and “you can always haul it down / to tame it in your drawer” (1). The kite, as Cohen later makes clear, represents “the last poem you’ve written” (1) and is “a contract of glory / that must be made with the sun” (1). Emphasizing the intermittent tug of the kite in the poet’s hand through the half-rhyme of “pull” and “call,” Cohen suggests that his “calling” of poetry—with its vocational, religious connotation—is not free of restrictions; slavery is implied, and the contrast between the “master” and the poet reveals the masochistic dynamic of domination and submission.

In *Leonard Cohen*, Scobie makes a similar argument: because the kite is also “a victim you are sure of” (1), the poem has “sadistic implications” (26). Because “the personalities are interchangeable” (Scobie 27), the poet strong enough to “haul [...] down” and “tame” the kite becomes the one who is weak “under the travelling cordless moon” (1). In the end of the poem, he is submissive, praying that he will be “worthy and lyric and pure” (1), but these are the same qualities that Cohen begins to rebel against in his next book, *Flowers for Hitler*, by concentrating on worthlessness, victimization, and depravity in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the destructiveness of World War II.

Cohen's fascination with evil and pain was obvious, however, even in *The Spice-Box of Earth* (and earlier, as in "Lovers" and "Letter" from *Let Us Compare Mythologies*). The sadomasochistic tendencies did not mean that he was always writing about physical or symbolic pain; humiliation was also prominent. In "The Cuckold's Song," the representation of his own humiliation promotes Cohen because it is funny and self-reflexive. The poem's speaker is a poet who writes about having been cuckolded and says, "I wonder if I give a damn at all" (47). This potential apathy is characteristic of sadism, not masochism, according to Deleuze (117, 124), but Deleuze also argues that irony is sadistic (125) and humour is masochistic (126) without accounting for ironic humour such as that in "The Cuckold's Song." The masochism that coexists with this sadism appears not only in the lengthy descriptions of how the speaker was cuckolded but also in his indirect self-promotion: "I repeat: the important thing was to cuckold Leonard Cohen. / I like that line because it's got my name in it" (47).<sup>21</sup> Cohen's use of his own name does not guarantee that any actual cuckolding occurred, but it reveals that he was willing to establish a private persona that would invite intrusive speculation about his private life. Cohen was not yet a celebrity, but his use of his own name is self-promotional, if the adage about any publicity being good publicity has any truth. In "The Cuckold's Song," he was therefore speaking through both his public and his private personas—an instance of grandstanding that anticipates, as in "Poem," the fusion of personas. Being cuckolded gives the speaker an opportunity to write a poem that will be provocative enough to promote "Leonard Cohen," and yet by appearing sadomasochistic,

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21 Balázs, referring to the "masochistic cuckoldry" of Leopold Bloom in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), says that Bloom indulges in "hyperbolic rationalization" (173) to comfort himself after being cuckolded. Cohen's persona does the same by stating, "I like that line because it's got my name in it."

he can indirectly criticize celebrity (as in Tobin's aforementioned argument).

In *Flowers for Hitler*, however, Cohen also wrote explicitly about celebrity—and with considerable appreciation for it. Now Cohen was writing about celebrities other than Layton, as Layton was also doing. In fact, they sometimes wrote about the same other celebrities (whose representations are compared, for insights about the authors, in my aforementioned article). One was Mailer and another was Trocchi,<sup>22</sup> a Scottish novelist and painter who moved to the United States in 1956 and became a notorious heroin addict and promoter of drug use. In 1961, Trocchi was charged with giving drugs to a minor and, if convicted, might have faced the death penalty (Scott 88). He later escaped to Montreal and met Cohen there (Scott 92). Cohen wrote “Alexander Trocchi, Public Junkie, Priez Pour Nous” to commemorate that meeting and generally to acknowledge Trocchi's “[p]ublic” status as a celebrity—and “[j]unkie.”

Trocchi appears in that poem as a saint to whom Montrealers such as Cohen might pray for prayers in return. By representing Trocchi as a religious figure, Cohen acknowledges and affirms the religious pretence of celebrity. He also suggests that Trocchi is a martyr; Cohen admires him for his “purity” (45) but also describes the effect of Trocchi's heroin addiction on his body and mind. In an aforementioned quotation, Mandel argued that art and addiction are “slavery” in this poem. I agree; Cohen implies that he wants and even masochistically needs—and needs to share—that slavery. Otherwise, his career might become like that of other poets, who “work bankers' hours / retire to wives and fame-reports” (45). To avoid the tedium of knowing “fame” only

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22 Mailer and Trocchi knew each other (Waters 12), which suggests that cliques of literary celebrities were small, even in the United States. Notably, besides Layton, the other celebrities to whom Cohen refers are non-Canadian, which is evidence of his ambition to broaden his appeal outside of Canada. Layton, Ondaatje, and Gwendolyn MacEwen were similarly attracted to non-Canadian celebrities.

through “reports,” Cohen looks to Trocchi for inspiration and in thanks. Cohen refers to himself in the poem’s newspaper headlines as “Famous Local Love Scribe” (47) because he has been “[i]mplicated” (47) in Trocchi’s escape from the United States and Canada; the poem is a thank-you to Trocchi for having made Cohen notorious, “a fanatic” (47)—with the religious connotation of that term—who has to answer questions from the police but is now part of a brotherhood (with its religious connotation, too) of celebrities.

The popularity that Cohen achieved with *The Spice-Box of Earth* became celebrity with the publication of *Flowers for Hitler* in 1964 and the NFB documentary of the promotional tour that followed. Cohen attracted attention away from other poets who might have experienced celebrity because of the film—notably, Layton. The documentary had been conceived to include Layton, Earle Birney and Phyllis Gotlieb—who were all much older than Cohen—but it finally purported to introduce only Cohen to a national audience as *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen*. Cohen wryly said that “[f]or some technical reason only the parts of the film that dealt with me seemed to have been good” (qtd. in Harris 28). The “technical reason” was Cohen’s wider appeal in the context of the media’s new focus on the burgeoning youth culture, a culture that contributed to “[t]he great boom of young poets [that] began in 1964” (Dudek, “Poetry” 117). The filming of *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen* and this “boom” are significantly coincidental milestones of that year.

Although Cohen had already anticipated celebrity, *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen* was the first instance of his national celebrity. The filmmakers helped to promote him not only by focusing on him but also by presuming to reveal his private life. In *Understanding Celebrity* (2004), Graeme Turner explains: “We can map the precise

moment a public figure becomes a celebrity. It occurs [when] media interest in [one's] activities is transferred from reporting on [one's] public role [...] to investigating the details of [one's] private [life]" (8). Most of the film concentrates on what we are supposed to assume is Cohen's private life: he walks around Montreal, shops for food, sleeps in a hotel room, plays guitar with his friends, bathes, talks with his mother, and writes poems; we also see pictures of his lover Marianne living in Greece. Nowhere is his private persona more evident than in these scenes.<sup>23</sup> Their supposedly private details are aspects of his performance in the film, which seems to erase the distinction between his private affairs and his life in public. Cohen seemed prepared to exploit this lack of distinction and his heightened exposure in the popular media.

In the aforementioned scenes in the film, Cohen's public persona is not evident; he is not obviously performing until, in the bath, he writes "*caveat emptor*" on the marble wall. Viewing himself later in a screening room (and aware by then that he had become the star of the film), he explains to one of the directors that he "had to for a moment act as a double agent for both the filmmakers and the public; I had to warn the public [...] that this is not entirely devoid of the con." Notably, he writes "*caveat emptor*" and not "*caveat lector*," warning the *buyer* in the commercial realm of celebrity and not the *reader* in the supposedly separate realm of the book. As a "double agent," he not only speaks on the public's behalf and dispels the illusion of public access to his private life, but he also endears himself to the public and thereby promotes himself. In most of the film, Cohen appears comfortable with the closeness—even the fusion—of his private and public

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23 A viewer might be tempted to think that Cohen's *private self* is on display, but any private self exposed to the public is, by definition, no longer private. The term *private persona* is therefore necessary.

personas; he encourages the metaphor of celebrity because it helps the public to feel intimately connected to him as the star of the film, and this intimacy promotes him.

Cohen is not so comfortable, however, when the public begins to ask about what he really thinks and feels. *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen* has a clip from an interview conducted by Pierre Berton, who represents the public. In the clip, Berton talks with Cohen and Layton. Under the pressure of Berton's questions during the interview, Cohen responds cagily.

BERTON (to Layton). Alright, we've got your concern; your concern is Irving Layton and his survival, even more than the survival of the—

LAYTON (interrupting). And Cohen's concern is my renunciation of the Canadian public. (Layton and Cohen chuckle.)

BERTON. Is this true or do you have some other concern, Mr. Cohen, that you'd like to get off your chest right now?

COHEN (glibly). I haven't a single concern.

BERTON. Come on now, what do you care about, really? Don't you care about anything? How can you be a good poet and not care about something?

COHEN (demure but firm). No, no. I do the poetry; you do the commentary.

BERTON (slightly irritated). No, but... I'm... let's get this straight: are you saying that there's nothing that worries you, there's nothing that bothers you? How can you write poetry if you're not bothered by something?

COHEN. Well, I'm... I'm... I'm bothered when I get up in the morning.... My real concern is to discover whether or not I'm in a state of grace. And if I

make that investigation and if I discover that I'm not in a state of grace, I try to go to bed.

BERTON. What do you mean by a state of grace? That's... I've never understood.

COHEN (appearing earnest). A state of grace is that kind of balance with which you ride the chaos that you find around you. It's not a matter of resolving the chaos, because there's something arrogant and warlike about putting the world in order, but having that kind of... like an escaped ski going over a hill, just going through the contours of—

BERTON (exasperated). Oh, you have lost me!

LAYTON (impatiently). What Cohen is trying to do right now is to preserve the self, that's his real concern, and I think that is the concern of every poet: to preserve the self in a world that is rapidly steamrolling the selves out of existence and establishing a uniform world.

He refuses to answer Berton's personal questions about his "concern[s]" and values except in "poetry," and his poetic explanations reveal only abstractions, nothing private. Whereas Berton insists on defining Cohen's preoccupations, Cohen talks indirectly about celebrity and freedom, which are implied in his emphasis on "grace" and the "escaped ski," terms that come from *Beautiful Losers* (1966, p. 99), his then-unpublished novel about a historian's fascination with the trials of a Mohawk woman who later became a saint. As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, Cohen wanted to define celebrity in metaphor, not in ordinary language. Although he avoided metaphor in defining freedom (as I will explain below), he similarly avoided ordinary language. Here, Cohen's

metaphoric language is both impersonal and enthusiastically performative. He seems to revel in protecting his privacy while irritating Berton and even Layton—who were both first-generation celebrities of Canadian television who might have understood Cohen’s explanation if he had not insisted on expressing it “[his] way.”

Having seen Layton formulate, express, and test on his career a theory of poetic freedom with mixed results, Cohen ostensibly abandoned his mentor’s influence. Asked in 1969 if he had styled himself after anybody, Cohen replied: “No, I wish there was someone I could style myself after. But when I came of age there were very few models around” (Harris 27). Notably, he omits Layton from this reflection about his “[coming] of age,” which I would locate historically in the years between *The Spice-Box of Earth* and *Flowers for Hitler*. *Flowers for Hitler* was “a revolution of style for Cohen” (Ondaatje 39) and “Style” is at its centre. “Style” remarks upon what Cohen calls his “slavery” (27) and is closely associated with the poems about freedom in *Parasites of Heaven* (1966); it therefore needs to be examined for what it might reveal about celebrity by extension. “Style” refers not to *style* in the sense of “the manner of expression characteristic of a particular writer” (*OED*); rather, Cohen suggests that he has internalized what he later calls a “style of freedom”—arguably Layton’s style of freedom—and that he must now substitute for it his own ironic assertion of poetic freedom: to be free, at least for the young, is to accept “slavery.” As contrary to the spirit of the 1960s as that might seem, it is what Cohen was proposing; “Style” implies that Cohen had no other option after he rejected the style of freedom and, with it, the power of Layton and his generation.

Layton provided the terms of reference for “Style.” Whereas Layton wrote *In the Midst of My Fever*, Cohen wrote “in the midst of my slavery” (27), probably as a

complaint about the oppressive influence of Layton's generation, which had been in command when the nuclear bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 and which had started and escalated the Cold War. "Style" alludes to Layton when "a rooster with a razor" (27)—later described as "the giant rooster" (28)—"plants the haemophilia gash across / the soft black sky" (27); although "Style" is situated in 1962 (see below), Layton released *The Laughing Rooster* (1964) in the same year that "Style" was published. The rooster's potential suicide with a "razor" at dawn confirms the speaker's prediction about his own style: "now I know for certain / I will forget my style" (27). Assuming that the rooster represents Layton,<sup>24</sup> then it is in response to the self-destructiveness of Layton's style of freedom (and the general destructiveness of his generation) that Cohen "forget[s]" or rejects his own "style."<sup>25</sup>

The speaker insists: "I will forget my style / I will have no style" (27). What is significant about forgetting or rejecting one's style? According to Dick Hebdige in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), style is a mark of distinction that provokes or disfigures a culture's established power (3); it is not merely fashion or "the manner of expression." Because until the mid-1960s in North America the culture's power belonged to established adults, style belonged to the youth. Although Layton's poetry was often counter-cultural in its Marxist politics, he was too old to be hip beyond the early 1960s,

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24 Layton's representations of celebrity were never suicidal, though the selves that were "murdered" in "The Cold Green Element" (1955) can be interpreted as his own. In "Style," Cohen seems to project the suicidal tendencies of his later imagined self onto Layton.

25 Coincidentally, the character known only as F. in *Beautiful Losers*, which was published in the same year as "Here we are at the window," writes a letter to the novel's other, unnamed narrator and concentrates initially on style: "I imagine you have already appropriated my style. I wonder where my style has led you. [...] I wonder where my style has led me" (153). He later writes, "My dear friend, go beyond my style" (158). The mentor-protégé relationship between F. and the other narrator, if it reflects upon the similar relationship between Layton and Cohen, suggests that Cohen might have wanted Layton to tell him to "go beyond [his] style."

and his celebrity had confirmed him as part of the establishment even if he was often critical of both. If Hebdige is correct, what Cohen inherited from Layton was not style anymore, not in a culture whose values had shifted so that Layton's counter-cultural stance was outdated. Indeed, Cohen's concern was that "his" style was not really his, and that it was not a new style but an old influence that had to be rejected.

"Style" is situated in 1962, if we believe its speaker is Cohen (born in 1934) and he is in his "twenty eighth year" (27). The speaker does not "believe the radio stations / of Russia and America" (27) because the recent propaganda of Stalinism and McCarthyism had corrupted public trust in the media. The immediate source of disbelief, however, was the Cuban missile crisis of October, 1962.<sup>26</sup> John F. Kennedy's televised address (certainly echoed on radio) stated that if the Soviets attacked the western hemisphere from Cuba with nuclear weapons, America would retaliate, leading to the "abyss of destruction" ("Forty"). Kennedy (born 1917) was only five years younger than Layton, who supported him (Cameron 315) because, despite his age, he represented "youth, energy, power, [and] freedom" (Cameron 318), which were Layton's ideals. For Cohen, however, the potential apocalypse seemed to be the fault of the older generation; "freedom" as promoted by Kennedy and Layton was an arms race.

Cohen did not outright reject the older generation; in "Style," his numerous reminders of his prediction about forgetting reveal his ambivalence. The speaker knows he will forget (27). Initially, what he expects to forget seems superficial: the grass on his mother's lawn, her telephone number, his style (27); however, these memories connect

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26 This political context is important to "Style" and to Cohen's interest in freedom. In *The Globe and Mail* on July 23, 1966, Cohen reflected on his recent thinking about love and other issues: "all my notions of freedom were political, even the ones I thought were spiritual" (qtd. in Lawson 13).

him to his childhood and the older generation, which are of nostalgic importance to him. At the age of only 27, he begins to feel the erosion of his memory, which mimics the sound of “a thousand miles of hungry static / and the old clear water eating rocks” (27). Signals fade, or they are actively destroyed. Nuclear holocaust, operating metonymically through radio, functions as the technology of forgetting. In “Style,” the “early morning greedy radio eats / the governments one by one the languages / the poppy fields one by one” (28) without pausing to punctuate its gorging. The radio records the disappearance or the mutation of culture as it is “eat[en]” by war.

Radio is prominent in “Style” not only as a technology of forgetting but also as a technology of celebrity. Given Layton (“the giant rooster”) and Kennedy’s invisible presence as celebrities in the poem’s historical subtext, it is significant that the poem mentions radio and not television. Cohen’s focus is not on image but on sound. When the speaker says that he does not “believe the radio stations / of Russia and America,” he adds, “but I like the music” (27). Although the radio is “greedy,” its greed threatens “governments,” “languages,” and “poppy fields,” not “music.” The lyrics (“the language”) of Cohen’s later music are at least as important as its purely musical elements, but here Cohen’s “anti-poetic” (Ondaatje 43) voice is speaking against words—speaking as if words could be survived by music or poetic celebrity could be survived by musical celebrity, which would diminish the emphasis on language.

The poem’s ultimate sense of weary paranoia, however, is the result of Cohen’s understanding that “the style [he] laboured on” (28)—regardless of whether or not it was really his (or whether or not it was poetic or musical)—could be “silenc[ed]” (28), possibly by one of the nuclear bombs that are unmentioned but threatening in the poem’s

historical context.

Beyond the numbered band  
 a silence develops for every style  
 for the style I laboured on  
 an external silence like the space  
 between insects in a swarm  
 electric unremembering  
 and it is aimed at us  
 (I am sleepy and frightened)  
 it makes toward me brothers (44-52)

“Beyond the numbered band” is beyond the radio, where the “silence” is even deadlier than the “greedy radio.” The potential of his celebrity is linked to music on the radio, and the speaker is “frightened” to think of what might be “[b]eyond” that radio. The “space / between insects in a swarm” is a space of silence and isolation amidst the furious activity of fissioning atoms. The enjambment between these two lines implies this space and accentuates the fearful, claustrophobic sense of the bomb nearing the speaker and his “brothers” in these final lines.

The brotherhood motif that Cohen introduces in “Style” (and extends in *Parasites of Heaven*, as I will show) is another sign of his rejection of Layton’s style of freedom, which was for Cohen too individualistic. Cohen’s desire for inclusion was ironic, given that he really was living in isolation on a Greek “Argolic island” (27). The individualism of Layton and “America” seemingly left Cohen disoriented, lonely, and—perhaps worst of all—afraid that he might also forget “the style [he] laboured on,” which might have

been Layton's but might yet have become his own. Thus, "I" appears 16 times in the first half of "Style," and only five times in the last half. The movement toward the relative collectivity of the "brothers" is ambivalent. Cohen wrote a poem in his journal in 1967 that read, "I want to live alone / in fellowship with men" (qtd. in Nadel 146). Partly because of this ambivalence, the movement toward fellowship or brotherhood reveals a personal crisis—a crisis of freedom described here as slavery.

For Cohen, style is not merely fashion; on one hand, it is the freedom to differentiate oneself from one's mentor, but on the other hand the desire for such freedom shows the influence of the mentor and the older generation that must be actively forgotten. Furthermore, in "Style," Cohen's individuation and freedom are in crisis because at the birth of his stylistic originality (his achievement of partial freedom), he is at an apocalyptic historical junction—the crisis in the Cold War—that threatens to make individuation meaningless. In *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), Harold Bloom did not anticipate a scenario that would serve the ephebe such a Catch-22.

The ambivalence in Cohen's view of style in relation to freedom becomes the impatience of youth in the prose poem "Here we are at the window" from *Parasites of Heaven* two years later: "So long I've tried to give a name to freedom, today my freedom lost its name, like a student's room travelling into the morning with the lights on. Every act has its own style of freedom, whatever that means" (23). While Layton's most famous "whatever" in "Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom" was a confident declaration of one "style of freedom," Cohen's "whatever" is indifferent to that style and implies that he had ceased to trust Layton's belief in the poet's freedom. When the speaker states that "[f]reedom lost its name to the style with which things happen" (*Parasites* 23), he might

be implying that the old style of freedom did not “[make] things happen.” Perhaps it imprisoned him in the “student’s room” that seems like a prison cell. Regardless, Cohen remains unwilling to define freedom. He dwells on the loss of “its name” and suggests that its “style” might be reclaimed by “[b]rothers” (*Parasites* 23), thereby implying a preference for brotherhood over individuality.

As Scobie argues, “[t]his is the terrible force of Cohen’s destruction of individuality: that he endorses [that destruction]” (9); Cohen offsets the loss of individuality by resolving to join, on equal terms, the rebellious community of student-prisoners: “Brothers, each at your window, we are the style of so much passion, we are the order of style, we are pure style called to delight a fold of the sky” (*Parasites* 23). This cryptic declaration implies that the speaker is trying to convince his “[b]rothers” that they have a “call[ing]”: to rebel and, if necessary, to sacrifice themselves to “a fold of the sky,” i.e. to heaven. Although Layton’s public persona was rebellious, it was not usually so communal. Cohen began to realize that Layton’s influential style and preoccupations were too idealistic; freedom could be theorized, but it was a fantasy. Conceding the impossibility of achieving freedom (at least in Layton’s way), Cohen would later find inspiration in figurative slavery and imagined community in *The Energy of Slaves*.

The faith that Cohen seemed to put in brotherhood in *Parasites of Heaven* did not mean, however, that he wanted only one alternative to Layton’s style of freedom. Rather, he suggests elsewhere in *Flowers for Hitler* that he simply wanted many alternatives (and perhaps Layton could be included among them, on equal terms). “Why I Happen To Be Free” begins with the least ambiguous of its suggestions about the speaker’s freedom:

They all conspire to make me free

I tried to join their arguments  
 but there were so few sides  
 and I needed several (59)

Perhaps, therefore, Cohen later imagined the brotherhood in *Parasites of Heaven* as a way of multiplying the “sides” that he could “join.” Here, he implies that his freedom is associated with having “several,” not “few,” sides—“various positions” again. “Why I Happen To Be Free” is more than a page longer than the quotation that I have included here, but its own “arguments” reappear much more obviously in “Bird on the Wire,” which I will consider in its historical context below.

Cohen appraised and eventually rejected Layton’s style of freedom, choosing a less individualistic and more communal approach to both freedom and celebrity (a necessity for anyone thinking about being a musician and playing in bands), but he refused to define freedom in “Style” or in *Parasites of Heaven*. This decision might have been a strategy that partly ensured that his freedom would not be co-opted or redefined by others. What he implied about slavery in “Style” eventually became more obviously related to celebrity after the late-1960s start of his career in music, when his representations of martyrdom, slavery, and masochism became more overt and harsher.

Cohen’s national celebrity was confirmed in late 1966 during a visit to the University of Alberta in Edmonton. He was there for five weeks shortly after the publication of *Beautiful Losers*.<sup>27</sup> Cohen’s first novel, *The Favourite Game* (1963), “had

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27 There are reasons to include *Beautiful Losers* in this chapter: it is a poetic novel—akin in some ways to Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976), which I consider in the next chapter; it has Ray Charles light up the sky as a godly apparition at the end; and its “God is alive. Magic is afoot” section (164-5) has been adapted to music by the popular musician Buffy Sainte-Marie on her album *Illuminations* (1970)—but I have excluded it so that I could concentrate more fully on lyric poems that seem to be personal yet are mediated by the persona of a celebrity.

sold approximately two hundred copies in Canada and one thousand in the United States” (Nadel 142). *Beautiful Losers* also had “marginal sales, selling only one thousand copies in Canada and three hundred in the U.S.” (Nadel 142). Nevertheless, according to Gilbert A. Bouchard in *The Globe and Mail*, “Cohen started to get a taste of what real fame was like during his western Canadian sojourn, having just published his infamous novel *Beautiful Losers* [in 1966] but before he began working on his first album” (R3). Possibly because of the controversy of what is sometimes assumed to be its pornographic content, *Beautiful Losers* promoted Cohen’s celebrity without selling many copies. Bouchard quotes Kim Solez, the president of one of Cohen’s fan clubs, who recently discussed the 1966 visit: “The start of his feeling famous started [*sic*] here in Edmonton, attention that was still brand-new to him” (qtd. in Bouchard R3). Although Solez’s statement about Cohen’s feelings would need to be corroborated, there is other evidence that Cohen’s visit to Edmonton was important to his emerging national celebrity. According to Patricia Hughes-Fuller, who was an undergraduate student in Edmonton at the time, “Leonard Cohen wasn’t yet Leonard Cohen” (qtd. in Bouchard R3) in 1966. Regardless, if she is correct that Cohen “‘packed’ the 500-seat Tory Turtle Hall” (qtd. in Bouchard R3) and sold out a concert at a local jazz-blues club, then Cohen’s national celebrity seems to have been confirmed before he released his first album.

1966 was a watershed year for Cohen in other ways. It was the year Cohen decided to become a singer (Nadel 141), the year he began living occasionally at the Chelsea Hotel in New York City, the year he wrote “Suzanne” for Judy Collins to record, and the year he said that popular music would be the future of poetry (Nadel 150) and that “the time is over when poets should sit on marble stairs with black capes” (qtd. in Nadel

156). He also published *Parasites of Heaven*. Although he dedicated the book to Layton, Cohen was no longer following Layton and other modernists by making obscure references to literary history, religion, or mythology in his poems. Popular culture was his new reference point. Cohen revised Layton's Dionysian and Messianic personas with "pop-sainthood" based in youth culture. With *Parasites of Heaven*, Cohen also began to question his celebrity's consequences—possibly based on experience he now had, rather than anticipation based, in part, on what he knew of Layton's experience.

In "Nancy lies in London grass," Cohen uses his own name again (as in "The Cuckold's Song") and implies that, with *Parasites of Heaven* and his higher degree of celebrity, his identity was changing. The speaker implies that difference when he says, "Leonard hasn't been the same / since he wandered from his name" (33). Although Cohen's reference only to his first name suggests that the other "name" is probably "Leonard Cohen" the public persona, Cohen also refers to himself in the third person—not as "I" but as "Leonard"—thereby suggesting that the speaker is different from both his private persona ("Leonard") and his public persona ("Leonard Cohen"). The speaker might be a third party, someone entirely unconnected to the real Cohen; however, another possibility is that "Leonard Cohen" might be speaking incognito (the equivalent of wearing sunglasses and a false moustache) so that he does not draw attention to his celebrity. (The issue of secrecy is relevant in the next poem that I consider: "He was beautiful when he sat alone.") Regardless, the situation becomes somewhat less ambiguous when Cohen's themes related to celebrity appear after he includes "Leonard" in a list of other names: "Nancy," "George," "Michael," and "Robert" (33)—who are presumably his "friends" (33):

And all my friends are fast asleep  
 in places that are high and steep  
 their bodies torn on crosses  
 that their visions meant to leap  
 And in between their dreams they hate  
 the company they keep (33)

His “friends” are martyrs, crucified, and “Leonard” seems to be among them. Although not all martyrs are celebrities in Cohen’s poetry, his own celebrity is associated with martyrdom. These martyrs in particular are not masochists, because they seemingly attempted “to leap” over the “crosses” and avoid pain. Nor are they sadists, though “they hate” each other even as they suffer; they are not inflicting pain on each other, and they are not noticeably enjoying each other’s pain. Nevertheless, the poem brings together most of the themes familiar to readers of his work and to observers of his rising star: religiosity and pain—even masculinity, given that male names outnumber female names four to one. Cohen’s celebrity was not really an issue of his biography yet, given that it was just becoming national in scope, but his references to his own name demonstrate that he was working on his identity. Deliberately or not, he was representing himself with increasing ambiguity and with a greater sense of consequence (e.g. crucifixion).

The confusion about the speaker in “Nancy lies in London grass” is also evident in *Parasites of Heaven*’s “He was beautiful when he sat alone,” which is more direct in suggesting that sadism and masochism could both characterize celebrities. In this prose poem, the speaker claims outright: “I’ll tell you why I like to sit alone, because I’m a sadist, that’s why we like to sit alone, because we’re the sadists who like to sit alone”

(66). He uses the third-person plural to include another man, who is uncannily similar to the speaker: “He was beautiful when he sat alone, he was like me, [...] he was holding the mug in the hardest possible way so that his fingers were all twisted” (66).<sup>28</sup> The painfully “twisted” fingers imply that “he” is a masochist<sup>29</sup> and, because he is “like” the speaker, the speaker might also be a masochist; however, the speaker also calls himself “a sadist.” Furthermore, the intended hearer of his monologue is “Miss Blood” (66), whose name suggests that the speaker is sadistically interested in hurting her—drawing “[b]lood.”<sup>30</sup> His tendencies are both sadistic and masochistic, which is relevant because both Cohen’s private and public personas are there, seemingly, in “He was beautiful when he sat alone.”

The identity crisis associated with celebrity is evident in the confusion and fusion, as “we,” of Cohen’s private and public personas. The speaker reveals that the other man is writing a song but only has the last line: “*Don’t call yourself a secret unless you mean to keep it*” (67, his emphasis). The songwriter (later called a “singer”) is remonstrating with either himself or the speaker (or the audience of his music) for complaining about privacy (the “secret”) without actually protecting it.<sup>31</sup> The question of whether or not the

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28 References to prose poems are documented with page numbers and not line numbers.

29 The fact that he is declared “beautiful” is not relevant; masochism involves pain, true, but pain is not inherently ugly and, regardless, Cohen is a poet who seems to find freedom in slavery; he appreciates such paradoxes, as the title of *Beautiful Losers* suggests.

30 The speaker also seems sadistic when he wonders about his apathy (which Deleuze associates with sadism, as I stated previously): “Maybe he doesn’t mean a thing to me anymore but I think he was like me” (66).

31 On the topic of secrets, Cohen said in *The Globe and Mail*, around the time that this poem was published, “I think what’s happening is that people have now decided to share their secrets. In the recent past, they’ve kept their secrets” (qtd. in Lawson 13). He is probably referring to confessional poetry even as he is commenting on his emerging celebrity and the public’s desire to learn about his private life. After the peak of his literary celebrity several years later, in 1973, he returned to the topic of secrets in an interview: “Everything I do from now on will be completely secret. Whatever motors or furnaces are working within me refuse exhibition of any kind” (qtd. in Martin 15). Asked if he would therefore withdraw into privacy, Cohen responded: “I never left my private life. Whatever adventures I had were to satisfy the demands of my private life at the time, not to abandon it” (qtd. in Martin 15). Despite evidence of identity confusion in his poetry, Cohen insisted that he could recognize his private life as different from the “adventures” he had in public.

songwriter really is a songwriter is never answered; in fact, it is only complicated when the speaker says, “He thought he knew, or he actually did know too much about singing to be a singer, and if there actually is such a condition, is anybody in it, and are sadists born there?” (67). He then responds to his own question, however, and hints at his own identity: “It is not a question mark, it is not an exclamation mark, it is a full stop by the man who wrote *Parasites of Heaven*” (67). The speaker assumes that everyone knows his name: “Leonard Cohen,” the public persona. The fusion of the personas is evident because the speaker is not merely “like” the potential singer; he is implicitly the writer of “*Parasites of Heaven*” who decided, in that same year, to become “Leonard Cohen” the singer. Cohen is writing about the moment when the private and public personas fuse, which, for him, is also the moment when the poet becomes the singer. This identity crisis is worse than usual, perhaps, because Cohen was partly rejecting the poetry of his apprenticeship—“the style [he] laboured on.”

*Parasites of Heaven* is also concerned with the popular culture that supports celebrity in music and film more than in poetry. The poem “A cross didn’t fall on me” revises the nostalgia but disaffection of “Style” with the bored, ironic attitude of youth.

A cross didn’t fall on me  
when I went for hot-dogs  
and the all-night Greek  
slave in the Silver Gameland  
didn’t think I was his brother  
Love me because nothing happens (14)

The poem dismantles or negates both religion and mythology. It insinuates that

Christianity is fading by suggesting that crosses are tumbling down as if the sky were falling. (During the Quiet Revolution in Quebec in the mid-1960s, this would have been an especially apt image.) It also exploits an enjambment to transform what I expected to be a reference to Greek myth into a reference to the popular culture of video arcades and movies. The “Greek slave” did not recognize him as a “brother,” so their shared slavery might be only a pretence of Cohen’s newly embittered view of celebrity; perhaps the Greek man thought that this celebrity poet was slumming, which some critics alleged of Cohen (Filip 74). Even so, “nothing happens,” regardless of the speaker’s status. Leading to “[I]ove” by dwelling on negation (e.g. “didn’t,” “nothing,” “not” [14]), the speaker also dismantles romance. Instead of having intrinsic or traditional value, love is what one feels or does to alleviate boredom, like going to the movies, which provide the template for hopelessly unrealistic relationships:

Do you have any idea how  
many movies I had to watch  
before I knew surely  
that I would love you  
when the lights woke up (14)

Poetry is not the issue, but popular culture—and celebrity by extension—is questioned.

When the poem ends, Cohen reveals his growing understanding of celebrity as violence done to the private self. The speaker notes that the plentiful “stars” (15), which are common symbols of celebrity, try to “keep” (15) privacy, but he cynically counters, “Have you ever noticed how private / a wet tree is / a curtain of razor blades” (15). In other words, the stars only have the privacy provided by a curtain of razor blades. With so

many blades, they have so many opportunities to kill themselves—a conceit Cohen later makes explicit with the small razor blade icon at the start of every poem in *The Energy of Slaves*. Beyond masochism, suicide is the ultimate solution, if it can be called that, to the lack of privacy suffered by celebrities.

Both in his poetry and interviews, Cohen associates these suicidal tendencies in celebrities with memory loss and historical change. In “A cross didn’t fall on me,” the speaker wants to “grow / wings and lose [his] mind” (15)—in other words, become an angel and end his human consciousness through suicide, but he cannot even remember why: “I confess that I’ve / forgotten what for / Why wings and a lost mind” (15). Cohen might not have been serious about killing himself, but following his two-month recovery after his binge-writing of *Beautiful Losers* on amphetamines, he said: “I would like to say that it made me saintly” (qtd. in Ruddy 18), i.e. like a martyr, though his statement hardly reveals any conviction of his really being a martyr. Nevertheless, he claimed that the binge left him with partial memory loss and a dwindling sense of personal freedom. Seemingly in a state of disillusionment, he said, “There will be no more history anyway.... We won’t have the old historical sense. People will live in a state of amnesia” (qtd. in Ruddy 18). Cohen was beginning to suggest that the concerns demonstrably related to celebrity in his poems were not only speculative but also personal.

Cohen did not appear to be entirely hopeless. “A cross didn’t fall on me” projects into the future: “I mean to find / a passage or forge a passport” (15). The speaker wants the new identity that a forged passport would provide. He wants “a new language” (15), a new way of knowing the world and himself. Perhaps the only reason he does not actually kill himself is that he has inadvertently succeeded in thinking of a future in which he has

a new identity; he means to avoid being fixed in the perpetual present of celebrity and has maintained a subtle separation between his personas and himself—even if he is suffering “alone” (15) from the alienation of rapid forgetfulness caused by the twin pressures of celebrity and a modernity that, according to my argument in the first chapter, intensified celebrity and threatened meaning itself.

In contrast with some of the other poems in *Parasites of Heaven*, “Give me back my fingerprints” treats solitude, celebrity, and the identity crisis with some levity. The speaker rubs off his fingerprints by touching his lover too often, and she takes his fingerprints hostage so that he will love her mind instead of her body (an idea he “[doesn’t] pretend to understand” [73]). He takes advantage of the protection offered by the replacement of his personal, bodily identity—which the law can trace and use to apply the justice of the public to him—with an intangible image suitable to loving a mind:

Sure I’d like to marry  
But I won’t face the dawn  
With any girl who knew me  
When my fingerprints were on (73)

He refuses to marry someone who knew him when he had a personal identity. For his own protection, to protect the remnants of his private self, there will be no marriage (not until *Death of a Lady’s Man*); he has come to accept the necessity of his own disappearance.

Until many years later, Cohen would not again accept celebrity’s effect on him so easily; the peak of his celebrity was soon upon him. With the release of his *Selected Poems: 1956-1968*, Cohen arrived at a level of poetic celebrity that has probably never been matched since. The peak of his celebrity, of course, was not owing strictly to his

poems, but to his music, in which he made his debut in 1967 at the Newport Folk Festival and on CBC-TV's *Camera Three* (Hutcheon 21-2). In 1978, Barbara Amiel wrote in *Maclean's*: "In 1967 Cohen released his first album, *Songs of Leonard Cohen*, and a cult of international dimensions was established" ("Leonard" 56). She states that by 1978 his books had been translated into 11 languages; he had sold over two million books and over nine million albums. Of his books, *Selected Poems* was notable for selling 700,000 copies in the United States alone ("Leonard" 56); Ondaatje states that it sold 200,000 in the first three months (*Leonard* 5). As my comparisons between the sales figures of different poets in chapter II show, Cohen's celebrity was of a vastly higher degree than any of them, with the eventual exception of Ondaatje and especially Margaret Atwood.

While the film *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen* was the first instance of his celebrity,<sup>32</sup> the popular magazines *Saturday Night* and *Maclean's* did not begin to publish stories about Cohen's private life and personality until 1968, when he had just begun seriously to exploit celebrity's imprimatur—its transferability, as a "textual signature" (Jaffe 3) or "stylistic stamp" (Jaffe 20), between forms and genres. Although I argued in chapter II that literary celebrity in Canada is meaningfully contextual, celebrity in general can focus on the celebrity's image and thereby enable cross-marketing and spin-offs regardless of the commodity's form, making "literary and dramatic form [...] irrelevant" (Boorstin 158). Cohen understood this about celebrity in general and exploited it. He succeeded in achieving the flexibility that Layton wanted for himself, whereas

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32 The final instance of his celebrity on film in the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry was Harry Rasky's *Song of Leonard Cohen* (1980), which a letter to the editor of *The Globe and Mail* on September 13, 1980, described as "curiously ignored by [the] press" (Warren 7). Cohen had recently been ignored as a poet—*Death of a Lady's Man* had attracted little attention—and his recent album produced by Phil Spector (*Death of a Ladies' Man*) was, in my opinion, the worst of his career. The media's lack of attention to *Song of Leonard Cohen* indicated that Cohen's career was in a proverbial slump.

Layton recognized that “[s]ome poets there are who can switch from one form to the other [...] but I’m simply not one of them” (qtd. in Cameron 400). Cohen’s transformation from poet, through novelist, to singer was not without growing pains—which, symbolic or otherwise, appear in his metaphor of celebrity as slavery. Paradoxically, however, the scope of his celebrity was largely the result of his freedom to take “various positions.”

Undoubtedly, the success of his first album boosted the success of his *Selected Poems*, but Cohen argued in 1969 that his poems and his songs were the same thing: “Some were songs first and some were poems first and some were situations. All of my writing has guitars behind it, even the novels” (qtd. in Nadel 175). By cross-marketing himself—with retroactive effects on the popularity of his two novels, especially *Beautiful Losers*—Cohen took full advantage of his imprimatur. Historically, an imprimatur was a license to print (*OED*); it is therefore a freedom to act through print. By collaborating with Layton and engaging in mutual promotion with him, Cohen inherited an imprimatur whose freedoms expanded when he became a successful musician. Theoretically, the imprimatur applies its authority arbitrarily because the license and what is licensed are not necessarily connected (e.g. a retired boxer can sell electric griddles). It is transferable between people as shared or inherited authority and between forms and genres as a spin-off. Cohen could have used his imprimatur to sell Armani suits but sold books—books that tended to criticize the same tactics he used to become successful.

He thereby alienated some of his readers and some other poets (Nadel 175), who tried to brand him differently: as a sell-out, or as someone who had never been authentic—neither as a figure of popular culture because of his roots in Montreal’s wealthy Westmount neighbourhood, nor, I would add, as a figurative slave. According to Aaron

Jaffe in *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005), however, the imprimatur functions not only to regulate the market but also to enable elite artists to retain high cultural value despite popular success (26). Jaffe implies that the authority of the imprimatur sufficiently complicates critical evaluations and substitutes for traditional criteria of merit (31-3). Thus, Cohen's high cultural value might have been beset by allegations of inauthenticity motivated by his popular success, but his facility for adapting into different forms and genres was a sign of talent that no one could reasonably deny. Layton's high cultural value declined because he was repeating himself within a narrow range of acknowledged outlets: only poetry, television, and a handful of short stories. In contrast, Cohen had poetry, television or film, novels, and musical recordings and performances. Cohen's status solely as a poet probably declined as quickly as Layton's had, but his status as a celebrity in general lasted longer because of his multiple roles and his talent for performing them entertainingly.

Recorded so soon after his celebrity became international, "Bird on the Wire," from his second album *Songs from a Room* (1969), associates Cohen's multiple roles with his freedom—as he did earlier in the aforementioned "Why I Happen To Be Free" from *Flowers for Hitler*. Cohen sings about himself in six different roles: "a bird," "a drunk," "the worm," "a knight," "a baby," and "a beast." The bird and the drunk are explicitly related to his freedom: "Like a bird on the wire / Like a drunk in a midnight choir / I have tried in my way to be free." The sadomasochism related to Cohen's celebrity is evident in his representation of himself as a "worm on a hook" and when he sings, "Like a baby stillborn / Like a beast with his horn / I have torn everyone who reached out for me." The pain that he has inflicted on his audience makes him feel guilty; the singer then

“swear[s]” that he will use “this song” to atone for what he has “done wrong,” but the end of the song is skeptical of his atonement: a “beggar” tells him “not [to] ask for so much” while a “pretty woman” “crie[s]” to him, “Hey, why not ask for more?”

What he really seems to ask for is the freedom to have so many roles. In a rare acknowledgment by a celebrity poet in Canada that the audience is not a homogeneous threat, Cohen suggests that his comparatively appealing audience, the “pretty woman,” encourages him to ask for “more” atonement. She is recommending greed, however, which will only exacerbate his feeling of guilt. In response to her recommendation, the song ends as it began: “Like a bird on the wire / Like a drunk in a midnight choir / I have tried in my way to be free.” The repetition of diverse similes is protection from the metaphor of celebrity; Cohen seems to want neither one audience nor one role for himself that the audience could command. His multiplicity is freedom.

Cohen also played multiple roles in “Famous Blue Raincoat” for his next album, in 1971, *Songs of Love and Hate*. His self-referentiality was evident not only in his signature at the end of the song—“Sincerely, L. Cohen”—but also in the raincoat itself, which Cohen bought in London in 1959 and which was stolen in 1968 (Nadel 73). In “Famous Blue Raincoat: A Symposium” in *Intricate Preparations* (2000), Judith Fitzgerald claims that the signature “smacks of an almost self-flagellating zeal” (106), which I would characterize as masochistic. At the same symposium, Bill van Dyk observes that the song’s narrator “is living on Clinton Street, in New York, as Cohen was at the time he wrote the song, but he is addressing someone who owns a ‘famous blue raincoat,’ which is also obviously Cohen [...]. So the physical facts suggest that both men are Cohen” (“Famous” 103). Van Dyk also wonders if Cohen is “addressing a duality

within himself” (“Famous” 103), as in these lines:

And what can I tell you my brother my killer?

What can I possibly say?

I guess that I miss you. I guess I forgive you.

I’m glad that you stood in my way.

Van Dyk concludes by stating that the narrator “is his own brother, his own killer; he stands in his own way” (104). In his contribution to the symposium, Scobie quotes from his *Signature Event Context* (1989) to argue that when writers sign their own names in their texts, they abandon “the property-rights of their (as)signed station in order to invade the text, to appear in poems in their own name [....] The effect is always equivocal: to detach the name from its position of power [...] and to set it free in the text [...] is to risk losing control altogether of the logocentric presence of the author, and of his author-ity” (qtd. in “Famous” 114). I would extend these arguments by noting that “L. Cohen” and not “Leonard Cohen” is identified as the man who has been or might be killed. Celebrities tend to be referred to with both of their names (except in academic contexts such as this study), so Cohen’s public persona is probably the “killer” who has torn his “famous blue raincoat.” He has killed Cohen’s private persona, the “L. Cohen” who sings about a private life with “Jane” that the public persona has disrupted; celebrity destroys both his multiplicity and his freedom.

Cohen’s multiplicity of selves had been evident on the cover of his *Selected Poems*, which represents him as a three-headed man—as if talented enough to supplant Layton, Dudek, and Raymond Souster from their role as *Cerberus* (1952), and as if trying to satisfy competing expectations of him. Each of Cohen’s faces has a different

expression: contemplative and serious; righteously stern, almost angry; winsome and confident. The replication of a single face invokes Andy Warhol's portraits of famous people or celebrities (e.g. of Marilyn Monroe) and illustrates the replication of Cohen's personas. His photograph on *Selected Poems* does not suggest that he was suffering a fusion of personas. Rather, it suggests that he was multi-talented. Conversely, by 1972, when Cohen published *The Energy of Slaves*, his photograph on the verso of the book shows him with buzzed hair. He seemed to be bristling with frustration. He appeared lean, steely-eyed, wary, even militant.

In the years between 1968 and 1972, Cohen's celebrity had lifted Canadian poetry to the height of its popular status; simultaneously, however, Cohen went on "hiatus" (Nadel 175) as a poet, recorded two albums, went on tour, "committed himself to Zen" (Nadel 175), and ostensibly suffered through a depression. His concert before "ten thousand fans" (Nadel 177) at the Royal Albert Hall in London was reviewed as a display of "captivating self abasement leaving deep impressions of a sad and tortured wasteland" (qtd. in Nadel 177). He reflected later upon the recording of *Songs of Love and Hate* (1970) and said, "absolutely everything was beginning to fall apart around me: my spirit, my intentions, my will. So I went into a deep and long depression" (qtd. in Nadel 180). He told a journalist, "now I'm thirty-six and greedy. I'm willing to be this. [...] My greatest need is to be interesting to myself" (qtd. in Nadel 180). He also said that suffering "has led me to wherever I am. Suffering has made me rebel against my own weakness" (qtd. in Nadel 180)—presumably his egotism. The private persona in these interviews—if that is what it is—offers some of Cohen's reasons for representing celebrity as a status that only masochists could appreciate. His next book, *The Energy of*

*Slaves*, was the most obvious of his responses, in art, to his status as a celebrity. Despite his previous assertion of the equivalence of his poems and his songs, in *The Energy of Slaves* he was beginning to wonder how poetry would fare in the context of celebrity.

The book repeatedly suggests that a new historical age has begun, one which debases poets and poetry by supplanting love poems with grotesque anti-poems. In “The poems don’t love us anymore,” the speaker says that he sees poems “half-rotten half-born [...] / lying down in their jelly / to make love with the tooth of a saw” (117). The poems, he suggests, are aborted fetuses that were discarded by their unloving parents (authors), fetuses that “don’t want to love us [and] / [...] don’t want to be poems” (117). Apparently disgusted with “all the flabby liars / of the Aquarian Age” (115) in “How we loved you,” Cohen suggests that the Aquarian Age culture of peace and love had been (or is) naïve. Thus, in “You tore your shirt,” the speaker stares at someone’s injured breast or exposed heart, and says,

I put my hand  
on what I saw  
I drew it back  
It was a claw (89)

The speaker’s basic diction, primitive rhythm, and limited awareness of himself is animalistic; it seems associated with the sadistic impulse to cause injury by “claw[ing]” at someone else. The poem concludes by suggesting that the speaker is a dangerous animal and symbolic slave kept in a cage by whomever he had wounded: “You throw me food / and change my dirt” (89). Status loss—from free person to slave or to animal—is another aspect of some performances of masochism (Baumeister 158-9), such as this poem. *The*

*Energy of Slaves* reveals Cohen's fascination with pain and his opinion of the end of poetry as he once knew it.

*The Energy of Slaves* therefore returns more seriously to the topic of suicide that *Parasites of Heaven* implied with "A cross didn't fall on me." In "This is a threat" (reproduced here in full) Cohen clearly links self-hatred or self-pity with celebrity:

This is a threat  
 Do you know what a threat is  
 I have no private life  
 You will commit suicide  
 or become like me (62)

The speaker's relationship with "You" is similar to the relationship between the speaker of "Nancy lies in London grass" and the other man—the private persona—whom the speaker says is "like me." Here, "[y]ou" might become, he says, "like me." Nevertheless, the "threat" is not that the speaker will sadistically hurt the reader; nor is it the prediction of the speaker's suicide, because that suicide already happened—perhaps accidentally—when he sacrificed his "private life." Instead, the threat is a classic Catch-22: kill yourself or become "like" the speaker whose private persona has killed himself. Hypothetically, these are cases of accidental suicide (not sadistic murder at the hands—or claws—of the public persona or the public) because the private persona and even the private self are usually complicit in some of the decisions that make the fusion of selves possible for celebrities. For people like Layton and Cohen who anticipated some of the negative results of celebrity, some loss of their privacy was a known risk. In this case, the threat is a warning to would-be celebrities—fans, including the readers—about the mockery of

fulsomeness that suffices for the private life of a celebrity.

Even more explicitly, “His suicide was simply not a puzzle” suggests that celebrity is a cause of suicide. The plural speaker of the poem addresses “Leonard” (94) and sadistically commands him to “[s]ing for” (94) the suicide case. The cause of death is obvious to “those of us / who photographed him” (94) but is cryptic to the reader. In brief, the suicide case appears to have shot himself in the head while lacing a random girl’s “huge new boot / with a boa constrictor” (94); the paparazzi (the poem’s narrators) spied on the scene from above “on the rim / of a bullet hole looking down” (94). The girl, her boot, and the snake are hard to explain except as a dominatrix and her fetishes, which puts emphasis on the suicide case’s masochism, and he seems to have been a celebrity, someone “photographed.” Furthermore, he seems to be someone similar enough to “Leonard” that “Leonard” could “wear his raincoat” (94). The raincoat is more evidence that the private persona has died as a result of celebrity, because it might be the one in “Famous Blue Raincoat.” “Leonard” refers not to Cohen himself but to the private persona, who might live on to elegize the suicide case but is also uncomfortably like him.

Although Cohen himself was rumoured to be suicidal around this time, Nadel states that in 1974 he admitted, “I’m too old to commit suicide. It would be unbecoming” (qtd. in Nadel 194). Tragically, however, a fan whom Cohen had met during his 1972 tour had killed herself while he was finalizing *The Energy of Slaves*. “Cohen was mentioned in her suicide note” (Nadel 194), and she had reported in an earlier letter to him that “your soul entered mine then and some union took place that almost killed me with its INTENSITY” (qtd. in Nadel 193, her emphasis). In the first chapter, I suggested that the metaphor of celebrity—*the private is public*—could also apply to fans, for whom the

celebrity is the public that invades or is welcomed into their private lives. The diction of this fan—“some *union* took place” (my emphasis)—supports my argument about the metaphor of celebrity, which is potentially implicated in this death.

Despite such seriousness, no one should ignore the possibility that Cohen’s especially disturbing representations of celebrity in *The Energy of Slaves* are the result of the bitter realization that his celebrity in poetry had reached its highest degree and would begin to fade (a realization, I argued in the previous chapter, that prompted Layton to attempt various desperate strategies to maintain his own celebrity). Another possibility is that these representations were intended to promote Cohen by eliciting the sympathy of his audience, and in some especially shocking examples, his representations of celebrity might be intended solely for self-promotion through controversy. The epitome is almost certainly this darkly comic, problematic short poem:

the 15-year old girls  
I wanted when I was 15  
I have them now  
it is very pleasant  
it is never too late  
I advise you all  
to become rich and famous (97)

The insinuations of paedophilia and transgressive hedonism are outrageous but also emphasize the unusual mixture of sardonic and deadpan comedy in the poem. The poem does not really encourage men to seek sexual, possibly sadistic pleasure from “15-year old girls”; its implied advice is to avoid riches, fame, and the humiliation of seeking girls

instead of women. Nevertheless, when Cohen's relationship with Suzanne Elrod deteriorated later in the 1970s, he reportedly did have a fling with a 15-year old (Nadel 210). Without seeking to confirm or deny those reports, I interpret the irony of this poem in the context of the book's other poems about loneliness that criticize celebrity and that depend on the reader's prior awareness of Cohen's celebrity. Because the central metaphor in *The Energy of Slaves* is that literary celebrities and other artists are slaves, "the 15-year old girls" is concerned with the speaker's lack of genuine power and his feelings of being emasculated and trapped because he is "rich and famous."

Remarkably, "the 15-year old girls" might be the only poem by Cohen that explicitly refers to pleasure in the context of celebrity. It is therefore one of the only poems that could help to explain the paradox of erotogenic masochism. Unfortunately, that paradox cannot be resolved here—first, because Cohen is not providing a case study about the "pleas[ure]" of "hav[ing]" girls of that age; second, because Cohen does not give voice to the girls and their experience of pleasure, pain, or any combination of both. Even if they were real and he did give them voice, their words would be suspect because he wrote the poem. The gross, patriarchal abuse of sexual power (Cohen was 38 when this poem was published) implied in "the 15-year old girls" might be sadistic, but we, as readers, are only privy to representations—certainly ironic and possibly false—of the private persona's experience of being rich and famous.<sup>33</sup>

33 Tobin argues that the masochistic women (various Miss Xs) studied by Krafft-Ebing in *Psychopathia Sexualis* "have, at the very least, gilded their cages, making a source of pleasure out of the societal structures and restrictions (at least the medical ones) into which they were born. More importantly, the X-women have attained a new identity, by accepting the power of medical discourse and using that power to gain satisfaction" (38). Tobin's remark can also partly explain the motivation of the speaker in "The 15-year old girls." This poem might be his private persona's wishful thinking, a fantasy associated with his implicit masochism that helps him to "gild the cage" of his celebrity. My application of Tobin's quotation about women to my argument about a man is cautious. There might not be any truth to Cohen's suggestion that celebrity dominated him and pushed him to the brink of suicide. Furthermore,

An example that helps to explain the problematic masculinity and sadomasochistic complexity of “the 15-year old girls” is “Dear Mailer,” which was a delayed response (by nine years) to Layton’s “The Dazed Steer” (1963). In “Dear Mailer,” Cohen addresses Mailer, another celebrity who happened to be Jewish and anti-establishment. Cohen’s commentary on that masculinity needs to be considered in relation to Layton’s earlier representation of his imaginary defeat of Mailer. Here, defending Layton—whether or not that is needed—on the assumption that Mailer is “The Dazed Steer,” Cohen brusquely steps forward in *The Energy of Slaves*:

Dear Mailer  
  
don’t ever fuck with me  
  
or come up to me  
  
and punch my gut (103)

—which was the threat in “The Dazed Steer.” Cohen declares that he is “armed and mad” (103) and that if Mailer were to make him suffer, the retaliation would be harsh: “I will k--l you / and your entire family” (103). By implying that Layton needs someone to defend him, Cohen asserts that he is more powerful than his mentor but not Mailer (despite Cohen’s success as a musician in America). Because the poem begins in epistolary form, Cohen also suggests that he is not in the vicinity—and is nine years too late to help! Cohen’s over-reaction is less shocking than parodic of Layton’s machismo; it corroborates the assertion by Glass that “a virile masculinity bordering on caricature became central to the public image of celebrity authors” (18) in America (a claim I would

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an emasculated, feminine, or passive man is still likely to have more power than a woman who partly subverts a system that dominates her.

extend to Canada, though mainly in relation to poets, as I explained in chapter II). As if suggesting that Layton's caricature of himself in "The Dazed Steer" did not go far enough in characterizing celebrity, Cohen acknowledges that Mailer might "humiliat[e]" (103) him; he expresses more weakness than aggression—a subtle masochism that partly subverts the more obvious, potentially sadistic impulses of the poem. "The masochist is insolent in his obsequiousness, rebellious in his submission; in short, he is a humorist" (Deleuze 89), as Cohen seems to be in "Dear Mailer." Here, Cohen treats violence as if it were holy or unspeakable by eliding the word *kill*, but the elision and his distance from Mailer also imply that he is not bold enough to kill someone.

Interpreted together, "Dear Mailer" and "the 15-year old girls" suggest that Cohen's private persona is seeking humiliation (another sign of masochism) because he cannot compete with other men, either in physical contests or in sexual conquests of women, though his public persona asserts otherwise. The problematic sense of humour in these poems reveals itself in what Balázs calls "masochistic play" (13). According to Balázs, "masochistic play relies primarily upon the manipulation of symbolic pain" (Balázs 186). According to Baumeister, masochists tend to "seek pain without injury. In a sense masochists *fictionalize* pain [...]. Masochists do not want to be harmed. They want *safe* pain" (Baumeister 14, his emphasis). Cohen's "Dear Mailer" is an obvious example of a scenario of "safe pain" or "symbolic pain," and "the 15-year old girls" possibly refers to symbolic pleasure. Cohen's sense of "play" is also a reminder that he might be falsely representing himself—using what Scobie calls a "mask" in a "dazzling gam[e]" (12)—as a slave of celebrity and that, through such play, he takes some control over his celebrity and what it means to other people. Paul Milton, in "Beyond Agonistics: Vertiginous

Games in the Fiction of Leonard Cohen” (2000), suggests that Cohen is not only “playing to lose” (236) but also to “subver[t] the status quo” (235) in his novels. Similarly, in both “Dear Mailer” and “the 15-year old girls,” the speaker is implicitly a loser; his “masochistic play” suggests that Cohen is attempting to parody and thereby subvert stereotypes of male celebrities and men in general.

In “Chelsea Hotel #2” from his album *New Skin for the Old Ceremony* (1974), Cohen’s representation of celebrity is—again—problematically masculine but ultimately critical. In this song, he invokes yet another celebrity—Janis Joplin (Nadel 144-5)—by singing, “I remember you well in the Chelsea Hotel / you were famous, your heart was a legend.” He later regretted the indiscretion of identifying Joplin at concerts (Nadel 145) because of the first stanza, though what it reveals is not so transgressive in the culture of the 1960s and afterward:

I remember you well in the Chelsea Hotel,  
 you were talking so brave and so sweet;  
 giving me head on the unmade bed,  
 while the limousines wait in the street.

The line about fellatio here is potentially sexist because it reduces the power of a woman’s voice, her “talking,” to a subservient act that gives pleasure to a man. Such an image is somewhat more provocative than Layton’s less specific claims about not having sex with Jacqueline Kennedy in “Why I Don’t Make Love to the First Lady” (1961). Cohen’s timing is rather insensitive because Joplin had died only four years earlier, in 1970, of an accidental overdose of heroin (Gaar par. 2). The potential for this song to function as a tribute to Joplin is partly squandered by the line about fellatio and by the

dismissive, anticlimactic ending: “that’s all, I don’t even think of you that often.”

Elsewhere in the song, however, Cohen adjusts the disrespectful attitude of the evidently fused private-public persona with his wistful and yet regretful admiration of Joplin’s struggle to cope with celebrity; perhaps those sentiments are why the “limousines wait” respectfully for the celebrities to finish their intercourse in private.

What occasionally seems to be Cohen’s resentment of Joplin can also be understood as his admiration of her. The only line that seems to give him reason to resent her is this one: “You told me again you preferred handsome men, / but for me you would make an exception,” but most listeners would simply hear that as comic self-deprecation. Quite differently, in the chorus the singer seems to admire her ability to escape the slavery of her celebrity: “But you got away, didn’t you, baby, / you just turned your back on the crowd.” Cohen was probably thinking of her death as the reason that she “got away,” and he might have wondered if the only way to “tur[n] your back on the crowd” is to die, as Joplin did in 1970. The singer does not explain whether he admired her for escaping celebrity through death (not necessarily suicide) or for knowing what she wanted; the singer also says, “I never once heard you say [presumably to the crowd]: / ‘I need you, I don’t need you, / I need you, I don’t need you.’” In other words, Joplin did not express ambivalence about the crowd, whereas Cohen did—as in this song. In “Chelsea Hotel #2,” the singer admires Joplin because she escaped from her celebrity one way or the other; his bitterness is directed at himself because he could not kill himself and thereby escape his own celebrity. He resents his celebrity and his ambivalence about it.

Much of this resentment was related to his musical career and his impression of its effect on his freedom. In 1973, the year before “Chelsea Hotel #2” was released, Cohen

announced that he intended “to quit the music business” (Pirrie 66). In an issue of the magazine *New Musical Express*, Alastair Pirrie stated that “[a]mong his friends, [Cohen] would often claim that he hated the business of selling his songs to people, and he hated the society that made this necessary” (66). Cohen reportedly said to Pirrie, “I’m no longer a free man; I’m an exploited man. Once, long ago, my songs were not sold; they found their way to people anyway. Then people saw that profit could be made from them; then the profit interested me also” (qtd. in Pirrie 66). His complaint was that his celebrity not only “exploited” him but also tempted him to be greedy. Cohen was making statements about his figurative slavery not only in his poems.

Given Cohen’s concern about not being “a free man” and the subtle but extraordinary despair of “Chelsea Hotel #2,” no one should be surprised that *Death of a Lady’s Man* would be Cohen’s next—and final—comment on his status during the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry. *Death of a Lady’s Man* can be interpreted as the suicide of the public persona or his natural death. Cohen had lived through a phase of his celebrity that was unlike anything other Canadian poets had previously experienced. As the pressure of his own celebrity eased, however, the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry was nearing its end. There is no evidence to suggest that Cohen expected celebrity to become unavailable to writers who remained mostly committed to poetry, but as one of the two defining figures of the era, Cohen might have intuitively known that his career would reflect or even continue to influence changes in the field. *Death of a Lady’s Man* can be understood as a comment on the end of both a personal and cultural era.<sup>34</sup>

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34 MacEwen’s *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* (1982), similarly, can be interpreted as an epilogue to the same era that *Death of a Lady’s Man* book-ended, as I will explain in chapter VI.

His new book made relevant changes to Cohen's masculine persona and to his religious pretence. Although he had somewhat abandoned the religious pretence of his earlier books by shifting his reference point to secular, popular culture in *Parasites of Heaven* and *The Energy of Slaves*, Cohen returned to it in *Death of a Lady's Man*, which he envisioned as another version of the *I Ching* (Hutcheon 51). For many years, Cohen had been increasingly interested in the counsel of his master Roshi (Nadel 201), whose Buddhist teachings seem to have influenced Cohen's opinion of celebrity in his later career—whereas Layton's didacticism had done so in the past. “With its emphasis on suffering, Zen remained a constant attraction for Cohen” (Nadel 201), and that “emphasis on suffering” was compatible with Cohen's masochistic tendencies. The aim of Buddhism, however, is to end personal suffering by helping people realize that the self is an illusion. Buddhism shares with celebrity the principle that the self can be negated; the difference is that Buddhists tend to seek that negation, whereas celebrities tend to promote but not negate themselves, at least initially. Cohen's attempt to deconstruct himself through performances of masochism (seemingly motivated by his celebrity) could be attempted again through the practice of Buddhism. Scobie's aforementioned argument—that “[t]he self is not sacrificed to some higher cause; the sacrifice of the self *is* the higher cause”—is more valid in the context of Buddhism than it was in *The Energy of Slaves*, when Cohen understood that he had to sacrifice himself to popular culture, if for no other reason (besides self-promotion) than to expose celebrity's power. Nevertheless, part of my argument in this closing section is that Cohen was still thinking about celebrity; his Buddhist training helped him to deconstruct not his private self as much as his tenacious public persona and rebuild his ego with genuine religion and a healthier, less

sadomasochistic conception of masculinity.

Cohen's new way of thinking about religion and masculinity is evident in the prominent metaphor of marriage in *Death of a Lady's Man*. The book was written when Cohen was feeling "trapped" in his actual marriage (Nadel 203); he imagined himself a slave not only to celebrity but also to his wife. Cohen explains: "This book is the mind of marriage" (qtd. in Nadel 203). This book is also meaningful in the context of his celebrity. In *Death of a Lady's Man*, Cohen symbolically kills (or commits the suicide of) his public persona—"a lady's man" who could seemingly woo "The 15-year old girls" and Joplin. He thereby rejects celebrity while deconstructing the book-as-marriage, effectively ending his actual marriage, and undertaking the similar act of separating the fused selves (not only husband and wife but also private and public personas) to heal the ego.

*Death of a Lady's Man* was dismissed by Canadian reviewers and was not reviewed in the United States, probably because "among the literati Cohen had been largely forgotten; he had been identified as a singer and songwriter rather than a poet for too long" (Nadel 223). Possibly trying to offset the neglect of a literary readership, Cohen produced a work of metatextual complexity that would appeal to an academic audience; he fictionalized himself as an editor-reviewer who culls the poems (mostly prose poems) for *Death of a Lady's Man* from the unpublished manuscript of "My Life in Art" (*Death* 21), which was the initial title of *Death of a Lady's Man* (Nadel 219). After most pieces, the editor-reviewer offers a commentary (increasingly antagonistic) and occasional fragments from the author's notebooks. Whether or not the audience is academic, *Death of a Lady's Man* invites readers—though reluctantly—into the discourse of the text rather than threatening them as in *The Energy of Slaves*. Ken Norris argues that the conflicted

commentaries “violat[e] [...] the reader’s right to confer interpretation” (55), but the text’s inconsistency is actually a hermeneutic opportunity for the reader. Cohen seemed to understand that in some ways the author and the reader coexist: they fulfill their functions together, in the same way that celebrities need an audience.

By reconsidering his relationship with the audience, Cohen reconfigured his approach to celebrity and selfhood. In the middle of his breakup with Suzanne during the composition of *Death of a Lady’s Man*, Cohen chose to use marriage literally and as a metaphor with three different tenors: first, the union of author and art; second, the union of author and audience; and third, the union—and yes, fusion—of the author’s different selves. Although the end of *Death of a Lady’s Man* gestures toward reconciliation, it begins with “Death to This Book” by damning the author’s marriage to his art and to his reader: “Death to this book or fuck this book and fuck this marriage. Fuck the twenty-six letters of my cowardice. Fuck you for breaking the mirror and throwing the eyebrow tweezers out the window” (20). By emphasizing the breaking of the mirror as an attack on his narcissism, the author angrily and defensively suggests that “you”—possibly the author’s wife, the editor-reviewer, or the reader—forced him to focus less on himself and on his “coward[ly]” use of poetry as a barrier between himself and the audience.

In “The Price of This Book,” too, the author appears to be trying to check his celebrity-fed narcissism and to accept the humility that “you” (probably the reader, but wife and editor-reviewer are other options) proposed (but not too convincingly; he still focusses on his appearance): “I had high hopes for this book. I used to be thin, too” (168). The editor-reviewer contradicts the author’s implied humility, however, based on an earlier draft of “The Price of This Book,” in which the author had “made [his] way to the

Meditation Hall” (169) instead of “[making his] way through the lambs” (168). The editor interprets the reference to the lambs in the context of “Easter” (169) and therefore the resurrection of Jesus. The editor-reviewer suggests that if the author sees himself as a Messianic shepherd of lambs instead of an equally selfless but less superior Buddhist en route to “[m]editation,” then he fails to “*negate his life and his work*” (21, his emphasis) and only serves “Mental Pride” (169) with a resurgence of religiosity. According to the editor-reviewer, the author’s narcissism and celebrity have not, in fact, been checked.

The author’s persistent egotism—or perhaps it is now his healthier *egoism*—prevents at least two of the three metaphoric marriages and the literal one from succeeding. In “The Price of This Book,” he implies that *Death of a Lady’s Man* was intended to “work [...] out” (168) the problems in his relationship with “the woman [he] loved” (168) and that by ending his “life in art” (168) he could repair his relationship with her. Although he fails to kill his problematic self (surely the public persona), he hopes he might still prevent the fusion of his public and private selves by appealing to the reader: “I am ashamed to ask for your money. Not that you have not paid more for less. You have. You do. But I need it to keep my different lives apart. Otherwise I will be crushed when they join, and I will end my life in art, which a terror will not let me do” (168). Nowhere in Cohen’s poetry is his concern about the metaphor of celebrity expressed so explicitly. If the “terror” is the same one that Layton’s “Portrait of a Genius” (1964) predicted Cohen would face, it is a fear of death combined here with the suggestion that the fusion of selves occasioned by celebrity would “crush” his literary longevity. Hutcheon<sup>35</sup> argues

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35 The remaining references to Hutcheon will be to her 1989 contribution to the Fiction Series of *Canadian Writers and Their Works*, rather than to the Poetry Series where her previous quotations can be located.

instead that Cohen's public and private selves had long been "inseparable" (51) and that "only through the cooperation of the reader [can the writer make] himself and his text both live and live on" (55), but the author remains ambivalent about the fusion. Hutcheon is correct about the reader's cooperation, however. To achieve immortality the author needs to sell *books*, not albums. He depends on something more permanent than records, turntables, and images in the media; therefore, his role as *Death of a Lady's Man's* author—"This Book[']s" *poet*, not celebrity or singer (or husband)—becomes paramount. Tragically, the "price" of attempting to unite with his audience while fantasizing about keeping separate selves is the failure of his literal, actual marriage.

Regardless, the editor-reviewer in *Death of a Lady's Man* does not seem to believe that the public-private fusion is real; he calls it a "false marriage" (169) likely to produce a failed text: "Abominations are born from this union. This kind of thought [e.g. the marriage metaphor] permits anything to appear, but it does not require the thinker to appear with it" (169). A possible reason for the editor-reviewer's pessimism is that the "union" is commercial: the author has admitted that he needs money from his readers to protect him from some of the effects of celebrity and to support his "life in art." Although the editor-reviewer might not realize that the author could sacrifice his personal happiness by betraying his integrity to a paying audience, the editor-reviewer implies that the author *should* "appear" to his readers. The author might remain absent, however, because he is "ashamed to ask for [...] money," ashamed to have written a failed text, or because he still wants his privacy. Thus, the marriage probably fails—for the good of the author's private self—in all three aspects of the metaphor.

Money and celebrity, however, are not necessarily such repellent prospects for the

editor-reviewer. The author does show his willingness to sell books, and he accepts that he and his work will remain commodities; “The Price of This Book” is not an outright rejection of the capitalism associated with celebrity. The editor-reviewer’s seemingly academic work, however, would be threatened if the author actually stopped producing the books and making the appearances that sell books and provide a library for the editor-reviewer’s study. The editor-reviewer is irascible because he is afraid that, without the author’s celebrity, his own livelihood would be threatened. He therefore wants to minimize the impression of a threat to the author by claiming that the fusion is a “false marriage” so that the author will continue his work. The editor-reviewer’s motive seems clearer when he indulges in his own egotism at the end of the book: “*I am well read. I am well served*” (212, his emphasis); he thereby inherits, or scavenges, the public persona that the author has killed, suicided, or otherwise rejected.

“How to Speak Poetry” implicitly replies to the problem of the author’s absence, though *Death of a Lady’s Man* is not a book in which early poems necessarily develop into later ones. “How to Speak Poetry” proposes that the poet’s celebrity has ended and that he has “nothing to teach [the audience]” (197). The context is explicitly a mediatized world in which the celebrity’s lifestyle starkly contrasts with that of other people: “We have seen newsreels of humans in the extremities of pain and dislocation. Everyone knows you are eating well and are even being paid to stand up there [on stage]. [...] This should make you very quiet” (196-7). The “quiet” (humble) state should change the celebrity poet’s way of life: “Do not pretend that you are a beloved singer with a vast loyal audience [...] The bombs, flame-throwers, and all the shit have destroyed more than just the trees and villages. They have also destroyed the stage. Did you think that your

profession would escape the general destruction? There is no more stage. There are no more footlights. You are among the people” (197). Thus, the poet is not a “beloved” celebrity musician or even an immortal poet, but a simple and present speaker unmediated by the stage or the television. The hypothetical relationship is post-celebrity.

The disappearance of the public persona, however, does not result in total exposure of the poet’s private self to the audience. The speaker explains: “Respect the privacy of the material. These pieces were written in silence. The courage of the play is to speak them. The discipline of the play is not to violate them. Let the audience feel your love of privacy even though there is no privacy” (197). In other words, the speaker advocates communication without commercial betrayal or “violat[ion]” of the poet’s privacy, and he seems to expect that the audience would respect the poet’s “love of privacy” and presumably allow him to retire from the life of celebrity into the life of a self-effacing Buddhist monk. The poet might be able to “[s]tep aside” (197) as the speaker recommends. The speaker advises the poet that he has “nothing to teach” because of the poet’s and the audience’s mutual respect and knowledge.

Ironically, the speaker eventually suggests that he is both a teacher and a version of the poet; hence, the poet *is* a teacher. In *Death of a Lady’s Man*, “How to Speak Poetry” describes Cohen as he instructs himself not to be a celebrity. The speaker embraces the poet: “come into my arms. You are the image of my beauty” (199). The sense of heredity in the shared “image” and some of the final advice—“Do not be afraid to be weak” (199)—recall Layton and his advice in his inscription to Cohen’s *The Energy of Slaves*: “what alone matters are the memorable words you leave behind. For power in these one must have the strength to be weak.... One must somehow—for talent, for

immortality—name the strength (courage?) to be weak in one’s own way” (qtd. in Nadel 188, 304). Layton, however, is not the speaker here; instead, several details in the poem suggest that the speaker is a Buddhist teacher, perhaps a version of Roshi but with more eloquent English than Cohen grants him in “Formal in His Thought of Her.” The second paragraph-stanza of “How to Speak Poetry” begins with a koan and its tricky answer: “What is the expression which the age demands? The age demands no expression whatever” (196). The answer confirms Cohen’s anti-poetic stance but also affirms the Buddhist tradition of meditative silence and privacy. Furthermore, the speaker’s mention of “the word butterfly” (196) and “a sunny day or a field of daffodils” (196) probably alludes to a haiku by Soseki Natsume translated by Harry Behn in *Cricket Songs* (1964): “Butterfly, these words / From my brush are not flowers, / Only their shadows” (1-3). In this haiku, the reader is the naïve butterfly and the poet is a source of light, a teacher. Cohen might have chosen to allude to this haiku for its Japanese connotations and because it envisions the poet as the sun or its replacement, as Layton did in so many of his poems. Cohen seems to transfer that celestial symbolism to Roshi—thereby changing its tenor from celebrity to religion—or a version of himself as Roshi’s student.

Because the author continues to insinuate that he is a teacher, the commentary to “How to Speak Poetry” lambastes the speaker-poet’s hypocrisy: “*How dare he break his vow of silence to lecture, in the name of The People, from the shit-stained marble balcony of his obscene cultural delusions! I hate him for this. He will pay for this religious advertisement*” (199, his emphasis). The unusual degree of the editor’s outrage suggests that the speaker-poet’s apparent hypocrisy is an especially bad affront. Monkish humility was the poet’s newest pretence, but the editor notices pride and pedantry—two Laytonic

influences—hidden in the poet’s language. Cohen thus admits that the ideology of individualism (and, by extension, freedom) is a pervasive and recurring aspect of his writing that will remain in any new vision of its purpose. Such knowledge of one’s own assumptions is rare, but Cohen is willing to recognize and scrutinize his values even as he seemingly tries to adjust them.

In all this writing about marriage in *Death of a Lady’s Man*, Cohen’s masculine persona is predictably humiliated on the basis of his lack of power in the relationship. “I Knelt Beside a Stream” begins with a question: “How had I ever thought of mastering her? With a hand of chrome and an immense Gauloise cigarette she suggested that I give up and worship her, which I did for ten years. Thus began the obscene silence of my career as a lady’s man” (11). From a feminist perspective, to “worship her” is only slightly less problematic than trying to “maste[r] her,” but the “hand of chrome” reminiscent of an iron fist and the phallic, “immense Gauloise cigarette” give the woman symbolic power over the comparatively feminine man. Although a version of the same statement from the possibly fictional manuscript appears on the next page and states that the man did master the woman, he also describes being “torture[d]” and “divided” (12).

In response, he seems to use religion to appease or sublimate his frustrations; the “silence of [his] career” seems to imply a devotion to Buddhism rather than celebrity (a devotion that might appear “obscene,” as the editor suggests, only to a celebrity—or to the editor-reviewer who depends on someone else’s success for his livelihood). Having replaced martyrdom and pop-sainthood with Buddhism (a better alternative) and abandoned the pretence that he is “a lady’s man,” he divides and refuses the two main pretences of celebrity for poets and thereby conquers his celebrity. Quite possibly, by

doing so, he is also able to salvage the better aspects of masculinity and religion. With the pressures on Cohen's private life seemingly eased, the editor-reviewer is able to end the book optimistically: *"I see in the insignificance of these pages a shadow of the coming modesty. His death belongs to the future. I am well read. I am well served. I am satisfied and I give in. Long live the marriage of men and women. Love live the one heart"* (212, his emphasis). The "modesty" and the "one[ness]" are signs that the self has become whole again—as the private self, not as the fused personas. Healthier marriages, real or not, might now be possible; indeed, before the editor-reviewer's final comments, Cohen describes himself as being stiff with age or injury but still determined to live and love: "Leonard / He can still be seen / hobbling with his love" (212).

By the late 1970s, Cohen was thinking beyond celebrity. He learned from Buddhism that an inflated sense of self could be negated, though he did not learn the lesson without seeming to make sacrifices of his marriage and career. Nevertheless, he had found a more constructive outlet for his performances of masochism than celebrity, or he had succeeded in making that outlet unnecessary by symbolically ending his celebrity (which he would resurrect later). While *Death of a Lady's Man* showed that Cohen was less defensive toward his readership than he was in *The Energy of Slaves*, partly because it textually resolved their conflict as author *versus* editor-reviewer, it also showed that he was becoming less willing to exploit commerce in the service of his reputation: "The poem is not a slogan. It cannot advertise you. It cannot promote your reputation for sensitivity. You are not a stud. You are not a killer lady" (197-8); thus, the speaker in "How to Speak Poetry" surreptitiously attempts to counter many of the routine criticisms of Cohen's public persona (e.g. that he was a recluse posing as a public poet, an

undisciplined sloganeer, a flagrant self-promoter, a chauvinistic lady's man).

Cohen's relentless deconstruction of himself in *Death of a Lady's Man* was an implicit rejection of the problematic masculinity (e.g. the role of the "lady's man") and the patriarchal lineage of celebrity that he had accepted largely because of Layton. In both senses of the phrase, Cohen *grew out of* the masculinity and the religious pretence of literary celebrity: he was raised through that tradition, arguably matured, and then saw that it did not fit—not exactly. His next book—*Book of Mercy* (1984)—was profoundly religious and masculine, but the strain of celebrity was not in it. When *Book of Longing* (2006) finally appeared, the strain was age.

*Death of a Lady's Man* was, symbolically, the closing bookend to the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry. Leading to that milestone, Cohen also defined the highest degree of celebrity available to poets of that era, an achievement that was possible because he was also a popular musician with an international following in America and Europe. Not everyone who started as a poet and became a literary celebrity in Canada was successful in his way. Although his celebrity seems to have been a serious detriment to his private life, the problem with his style of freedom was that it was initially defined for him by an earlier celebrity—Layton—and was unrealistically individualistic. By re-imagining Layton's freedom as a fantasy and his own freedom as the assuming of "various positions," Cohen developed the metaphor of celebrity as slavery. He found creative "energy" or inspiration in that slavery; as masochists do, he submitted himself to humiliation and pain inflicted upon him by a seemingly greater power: celebrity, which might even be understood as a sadomasochistic state of being.

By performing as a victim of celebrity—a sadomasochist, with the emphasis on

*masochist*—Cohen was able to be critical of it even while he exploited its effect on his identity for the purpose of his self-promotion and the writing of poems. In particular, he was critical of the masculinity associated with celebrity poets and, in general, of the religious pretence of celebrity. The eventual symbolic suicide or natural death of his public persona in 1978 coincided with his living as a Buddhist rather than as a self-described martyr. It was the end of a ten-year process of recovering his ego, redefining his private life, and re-imagining his poetry without celebrity as either an aspect of his identity or a significant inspiration. Cohen later said, in a 1993 interview, “There’s ten years of my life I don’t remember and I don’t want to remember” (qtd. in Sullivan 179). If those ten years are the decade between the peak of his literary celebrity in 1968 and the symbolic death of his celebrity in 1978, he did much worth remembering.



## Chapter V

### The “Razor” and the “Jungle Sleep”: Celebrity and Legend

#### in Michael Ondaatje’s Poetry and *Coming Through Slaughter*

Balancing the integrity of his privacy with an interest in the public—and the public’s interest in him—has been a concern of Michael Ondaatje almost since the beginning of his career. The relationship between privacy, which he seems to crave (Jewinski 10), and publicity, which he seems to disdain (Marchand, par. 5), is not only germane to his life but also to the representation of celebrity in his work. Ondaatje published his first book around ten years into the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry; as I explained in the previous chapters, this era began with Irving Layton’s appearances on television in the mid-1950s and ended not long after the symbolic death of the era’s most popular celebrity, Leonard Cohen, in *Death of a Lady’s Man* (1978). Ondaatje’s poetic texts during this period focussed intensely on the subject of public recognition. He extended Layton and Cohen’s critiques of celebrity by writing, in much more literal detail, about the experience of losing freedom to celebrity. He imagines the effect of celebrity on the sexual and racial identities of historical figures who later became legends; ultimately, he suggests that celebrities are disciplined by the public when their sexual orientations or racial identities do not reflect social norms.

Perhaps the most evident development in Ondaatje’s critique of celebrity is that he tended to write about other celebrities, not explicitly himself, whereas Layton and Cohen sometimes named themselves (and each other) in their poems. What I called “grandstanding” in the first chapter is not the same for Ondaatje as it is for Layton and

Cohen, whose self-aggrandizement was focussed explicitly on themselves. Ondaatje wrote about himself as if he were Billy the Kid, for example, but his standing in for someone else not only implicated him in self-promotion but also removed him to a more critical distance. Paradoxically, Ondaatje's descriptions of the effect of celebrity are more intimate than those of his precursors. Ondaatje did not imagine his immersion in the lives of other celebrities as totally as Gwendolyn MacEwen did in that of Lawrence of Arabia, but he risked the emotional involvement that method actors have with their characters. He both imagines himself as another (e.g. Billy the Kid) and an Other—someone for whom celebrity might entail the exposure of his difference from the society around him.

Early signs of his fascination with celebrity and legend appear in his scholarly book entitled simply *Leonard Cohen* (1970) and especially in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970). These texts established him as a writer, poet, and emerging celebrity who was familiar with his contemporaries and with the *Zeitgeist* during the “boom” of Canadian poetry. Ondaatje later revealed recognition to be among his grave concerns in *Rat Jelly* (1973) and *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976). As the celebrity of Canadian poets who had not committed themselves to writing mostly novels waned in the 1970s, he began focussing less on the recognition of others, such as Cohen or Billy the Kid, and more on his own. *Running in the Family* (1982), his memoir, and the poems of *Secular Love* (1984) are especially personal; they also seem intended for a popular audience, an impression arising from his evident familiarity with popular art forms such as the movies. The preoccupation with movie stars in *Secular Love* is a fitting conclusion to his consideration of celebrity in poetry, though he continued to write about it in his novels. *The English Patient* (1992), and the internationally successful film based on it, made him

a celebrity comparable only to Margaret Atwood and Cohen among all the other twentieth-century Canadian novelists who began their careers as poets.

The focus of this chapter is on the representation of celebrity in Ondaatje's poetry, not in his novels, but because he blends forms—possibly as a strategic way of making the transition from one popular form to an emerging other—some books occasionally called “novels” are included. Despite being composed mostly of poems, prose poems, and poetic sketches, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* is sometimes listed among his novels, as in the author's biography in the Penguin edition of *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987); usually, however, *Billy the Kid* is listed among his books of poetry. Smaro Kamboureli has already considered *In the Skin of a Lion* in the context of Canadian literary celebrity; its precursor, *Coming Through Slaughter*, is a similar but more interesting novel in that context. In its compression, fragmentation, and lyricism, *Coming Through Slaughter* is Ondaatje's most poetic novel; it is prominent in this chapter because of its explicit treatment of celebrity and because of its uncannily symmetrical relationship with *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. A more conventional book of poetry, *Secular Love* concludes this chapter because it was published immediately after the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry; as I suggested in chapter II, around 1980 was the end of that era. Although Ondaatje is known today for his novels, he started as a poet.

The conditions that supported poetic celebrity in Canada did not last; Ondaatje often writes about celebrity, yet the status that he would seem to want for his characters is not *celebrity*—an overly intense, fleeting state of recognition that can lead to an identity crisis—but is, instead, *legend*: a near synonym of *fame* in popular usage but, more accurately, a status similar to *myth* that is based on a “traditional” (*OED*), long-lived,

popularly repeated set of “unauthenticated tales” (*OED*). It is different from fame because it is a narrative that is both popular (often associated with show business) and intriguingly incomplete. Whereas celebrity seems to promise access to every detail of the lives of the stars that audiences covet, legend refuses such access; it prefers a certain obscurity.

Ondaatje’s balancing of the public and the private in the context of celebrity is a question of how much he can divulge about his characters without over-informing the audience and undermining their legend. Ondaatje has said that he is drawn to “unfinished stories” (qtd. in Witten 10). He is drawn, in fact, to characters who are already legends—Billy the Kid, infamous outlaw; Charles “Buddy” Bolden, jazz innovator (in *Coming Through Slaughter*); and, to a lesser extent, Humphrey Bogart, film star (in part of *Secular Love*). By imagining their lives when they were not yet legends he must focus on their initial celebrity and on the conditions that would allow them to become legends.

In *Big-Time Shakespeare* (1996), Michael D. Bristol states that “celebrity requires neither extraordinary competence nor exceptional virtue” (4), but he also argues that the transition from the anonymity of small-time celebrity to the enduring recognition of the “big-time” (10)<sup>1</sup> depends on the creation of texts that are dialogic or complex enough to be “answerable to unforeseen social and cultural circumstances” (11) in the future. It depends, in other words, on what will be interesting and relevant to a later audience. Ondaatje—himself a future audience of celebrities such as Billy the Kid—bets that this interest and relevance is generated by the dialogic relationships (i.e. the tension and negotiation) between the public and private, between the ephemeral and the durable, and

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<sup>1</sup> Bristol is referring to William Shakespeare, who is more famous than legendary, but the lack of information about his life—combined with his widespread recognition—means that he is also a legend.

between the explained and the unexplained. Unquestionably, Ondaatje reinforces the problematic assumptions about the value of celebrity by extolling the reputed accomplishments of his characters—Billy is a crack shot, Buddy is a musical genius, and Bogart (in character) is a self-sacrificing role model for his nation—but he seems equally interested in the perennial concerns of the artist in relation to an audience.

In Ondaatje's poetic texts, the celebrity's private self and the public have a symmetrical relationship. In the first chapter, I argued that the metaphor of celebrity—*the private is public*—involves (often in reaction to grandstanding) a fusion of selves; when the public invades the celebrity's privacy, the celebrity's private and public personas fuse, thereby exposing the private self to the public and sometimes resulting in an identity crisis. In choosing to describe the relationship between *the private* and *the public* as one of symmetry in this chapter, I draw attention to the uncanniness of Ondaatje's representations of the public and private—an uncanniness that is never as evident in the poetry of Layton or Cohen, and rarely in that of MacEwen. The most obvious examples of Ondaatje's use of symmetry and his invocations of the uncanny are in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, both in its two main characters and in its form, including its double narrative of life and death and its weird, symmetrical poems.

The symmetry reappears in the relationship between *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and *Coming Through Slaughter*, which locate and symbolize the effect of celebrity in either white or dark rooms that the characters inhabit or visit. These rooms are sometimes uncanny (e.g. the dark room where Billy is killed) and sometimes complicate the racial identification of a character (e.g. the white room in Robin's house, where Buddy, who is black, stays). Race as colour was never an issue related to celebrity for

Layton and Cohen, but, in Ondaatje's poetic texts, the symmetry of the public and the private is a sign of Ondaatje working to complicate sexuality and race, which the public tries to simplify and force into compliance with social norms.

Ondaatje also complicates the pretence of religious significance—and related issues of life and death—assumed by celebrity. By now it should be clear that secularism tends to be an aspect of celebrity, which functions in society as if it were religion (Turner 6-7) without ever really being considered sacred (Frow 201, 204). When Ondaatje writes about celebrities, he sometimes elevates them not to God's status but to a ghost's status; he identifies them through secular metaphors (insofar as a metaphor can be secular, given defining examples such as the transubstantiation of Jesus Christ) and associates them with images of stars and suns that represent the intense public scrutiny that can cause the meltdown of the celebrity and the fusion of private and public. Ondaatje is aware of the gaze that passes between the celebrity and the audience; like Jacques Lacan, he associates this gaze with death. The suicidal tendencies of his characters are both a cause and a symptom of the loss of self involved in the metaphor of celebrity.

Ondaatje's celebrities, especially Billy the Kid and Buddy Bolden from *Coming Through Slaughter*, seem to want to manage their visibility in society in order to preserve unspoken values or aspects of identity that are contrary to the norms that the public finally reinforces. Loren Glass argues that masculinity, for instance, is “central to the public image” (18) of male authors who are celebrities. Performing their gender is an especially public act for them. As I argue below, Billy the Kid cannot perform his bi- or homosexuality and masculinity together without being subject to punishment; he represses his sexuality, ultimately becoming an invisible ghost so that he can reverse the

heteronormative gaze that led to his death. Following the theory that gender is inextricable from the concepts of race and class,<sup>2</sup> I hardly need to argue that celebrity also has racial and economic meanings. Thus, the celebrity of Buddy Bolden assimilates him into a commercial culture associated with racial whiteness. He attempts to become invisible by disappearing into the slums and by vanishing into crowds. The public threatens to expose Billy and Buddy; in both cases, crucial acts of potential transgression occur in dark rooms, which Sigmund Freud identified as sites of the uncanny (Royle 108). Ondaatje's emphasis on the gaze, visibility, and invisibility—major themes of psychoanalysis in Freud and Lacan—suggests that he is preoccupied with the effects of celebrity on the psyche, not only on the body or on society.

Cautiously, I assume that Ondaatje is also writing about himself when he writes about the celebrity of others; he leaves many indications in his poetic texts that his concerns are as autobiographical as they are social or even national: he appears in cowboy attire in a photograph in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and he reaches for Buddy through a mirror in *Coming Through Slaughter*. His personal interest in celebrity is not surprising; he immigrated to Canada in 1962, when the “boom” in Canadian poetry was nearing its *éclat* (c. 1968), and he declares in *Secular Love* that he was “brought up on movies and song!” (40). Born in Ceylon (known since 1972 as Sri Lanka), educated in England (in the last half of the 1950s), and first published in Canada (in the mid-1960s),

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2 An early, important explanation of this theory is in Angela Y. Davis's *Women, Race & Class* (1981). Davis argues, for example, that “the ideology of femininity” is “a by-product of industrialization” (12) that exempted or displaced some white women from “productive work” (12), at a significant cost to their equality. Black women remained as labourers, so male-female relationships among black people were not affected as they were in the middle or upper class of white society (Davis 12). Davis uses this example and others to show how the gender of black women tended to differ from that of white women because of race and class.

Ondaatje has an international heritage that appears in his writing; however, his celebrities are almost always American. Because of his personal history and the autobiographical insinuations in his texts about American celebrities, his national identity is the subject of debate, even though all of his writing is a Canadian product (involving, of course, American and other foreign characters, locales, and preoccupations). Wolfgang Hochbruck interprets *Coming Through Slaughter* and its American characters as a “mockingly defiant [comment] on the CanLit hysteria rampant in the 1970s” (462), a time when rising nationalism meant writers living in Canada were expected to write stories about Canadians set in their country.

Ondaatje, however, tends to focus on characters who are, like himself, outsiders in their own country. In his poetry and fiction, that country is rarely Canada. In *Rat Jelly*, Ondaatje admires “heroes” (70) who go into isolation to find an alternative to what he calls “social fuel” (70). His characters, despite being perennially out of place, rarely seek the promising comfort of a celebrity’s entourage or a secure nationalism.

Although Ondaatje seems to be aware of the pitfalls of Canadian nationalism, some of his critics have argued that, nevertheless, his style of literary celebrity matches the style of Canadian nationalism that was prevalent between the 1960s and 1980s. Because the “boom” in Canadian poetry was partly the result of the government’s Massey commission (1951) and subsequent funding for the arts, and because the Canadian market for literature was not big enough to sustain literary celebrity without such funding, literary celebrity was synchronized with nationalism during the “boom” years. (Cohen, who declined a Governor General’s Award for his *Selected Poems* [1968], is a partial exception, because he had found a bigger market—for his music—in the United States.)

In an article on how Ondaatje's literary celebrity subtly promotes Canadian nationalism with *In the Skin of a Lion*, which is set in Canada, Kamboureli argues that the narrator of that novel appropriates the figurative invisibility of the immigrants in his society.

Unnoticed, the narrator (like the ghost of Billy the Kid) occupies "a spectatorial position" (50) from which he "constructs their image" (50). Kamboureli argues that "the politics that characterizes this gaze, a politics that constantly shifts from being that of the spectral to being that of the spectacle, is what aligns the culture of celebrity to national pedagogy" (50). She seems to mean that literary celebrity in Canada is both on the sidelines but poised to "teach" nationalism because of its affiliation with (and its debt to) government. Although Billy and Buddy are American and celebrities, the public drives them to seek refuge on the margins of society, and in that sense they, too, comment upon the Canadian situation in which literary celebrities attract plenty of attention but prefer to remain isolated—especially compared with American celebrities who often appear comfortable in the spotlight and natural among the false fronts of Hollywood.

Rather than attempt to settle the debate that I set up between Hochbruck (who argues that Ondaatje resists Canadian nationalism) and Kamboureli (who argues that he is complicit with it), I want to turn to Ondaatje's poetic texts and consider his strategies of both promoting celebrity and questioning it. In 1967, five years after arriving in Canada, Ondaatje published his first book of poetry, *The Dainty Monsters*. Immediately, he began to express ideas about the relationship of the poet and the audience.

That relationship is imagined through the theme of performance in "Signature," in which the speaker ironically thinks of himself as a celebrity. The speaker admits that it is "[d]ifficult" (24) to write a poem about the surgical removal of his appendix (he is sexed

male, as I will show below); the topic is too mundane to “sing” (24) about. Because such a minor emergency is not likely to produce a great performance or poem, he has no audience that would bestow accolades; instead, “rain fell like applause as [he] approached the hospital” (24). The comparison of the rain and the “applause” indicates that he has been thinking about a form of recognition and approval such as celebrity. His performance, however, is a joke; an appendectomy might be big news to fans of a celebrity, but the speaker sardonically realizes that he has no such fans.

The poem invokes that classic sign of authorship—the signature—to suggest the surrogate presence of an author who has not yet “arrived on the scene.” Ondaatje implies that the authority vested in the signature comes from the sacrifice of the body. Because the speaker seems to have so little agency in the poem—he only observes what others do to him—he is not an author of himself, not until he outlives the event and writes the poem. Instead, he is the object of someone else’s authorship (or art): he calls himself a statue, “a sweating marble saint” (24). He is a body given over to the invasion of the public, such as it is: in this case, an anaesthetist who “enter[s]” (24) him with a needle and a man in a cast, “in the armour of shining plaster” (24), who peers into the room as he passes the door. The “marble saint” and the figurative knight in “shining” “armour” are ironically romantic images almost certainly borrowed from Cohen’s *Let Us Compare Mythologies* (1956) and *The Spice-Box of Earth* (1961). The “saint” in “Signature” is Cohenesque: a martyr who surgically sacrifices the wholeness of his body. When he mentions his dubious honour of being the “first appendix in [his] family” (24), he means that he is the first person in his family to undergo an appendectomy; the synecdoche here (the substitution of the appendix for the whole person) adds to the poem’s comic effect

but more importantly reveals that the speaker is identifying himself as a sick organ or a broken object. His signature, then, might also be his appendix, the thing that makes him recognizable when his body is neither whole nor present. He is also bookishly punning that he is merely an appendix, not the main text—or main attraction.

Whether his signature is better understood as the poem itself (the word *signature* appears nowhere else but in the title) or as his appendix, in this case (and as usual) readers are not in the presence of the poet but only, in a sense, a part of him. Imagining the disposal of his excised organ, he laments, “O world, I shall be buried all over Ontario” (25). This ending to the poem is funny because of its affectation, its exaggerated drama: he wants to address the “world” (as he does in his apostrophic remark) and not only “Ontario.” Because of this ambition, he must realize that one body is simply not big enough (in an ironic comment on the grandstanding that I explained in the first chapter) to supply parts for the whole world. Conversely, his poems—as his echo or disembodied voice recorded in print—can be reproduced in any number and can substitute for him anywhere. The speaker seems to think (or hope) that his poems will provide the signature by which he will be recognized; they will be, if not the vehicle of, then at least an accessory to his imagined celebrity, which he hopes will not have to depend on his body.

Providing a gory contrast to the clever comedy of “Signature,” “For John, Falling” might be the first of Ondaatje’s entirely serious poems to relate celebrity to the body and death. The cues in the poem that alert us to the topic of celebrity are the sun and the journalists who come to the scene after John fell and impaled himself through the lung on a piece of construction machinery. In my chapter on Layton, I showed how the sun (a star) can be a symbol of celebrity; it can promote the celebrity’s prophetic brilliance. Here

and especially in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, Ondaatje alters the sun's symbolism so that it can also refer to the public's unwanted scrutiny of (or the spotlight on) someone's privacy. Here, in "the heel of sun" (48), John falls to his death and, befitting the impersonal gaze of "the press in bright shirts" (48), Ondaatje initially describes the accident in clinical terms: "his tensed muscles curled unusually" (48), his "jaws collected blood" (48), "the hole in his chest [was] the size of fists" (48). These phrases emphasize that John is only a body; they also produce an effect of objectification.

Seemingly attempting to counteract this objectification—to describe the keenly felt loss of a person and not only a body—Ondaatje juxtaposes these visceral yet clinical descriptions with a metaphor. At the end of the poem, the machine that impaled John also "shield[ed] out the sun / while he drowned / in the dark orgasm of his mouth" (48). Despite the group of onlookers who have crowded around his body, in his death he is "shield[ed]" from the scrutiny of the sun and retains a measure of privacy; however, John's death is sexualized as a spectacle, even though we usually assume that an "orgasm" is a private or intimately shared experience. The implication is that even the highly personal and poetic is vulnerable to objectification related to celebrity.

John's death is significantly not only private but also silent, and his silence is the most important limit on the media's potential exploitation of him; the "press" will not get a statement from the victim of the accident. Silence: the "hum of engines [has] evaporated" (2) and the only noise seems to be his "ridiculous requests for air" (48), which are presumably not articulated in words but only in futile attempts to breathe. When he "drown[s]" in the "dark" blood from his lung, he is unable to speak of his own death. This detail—his condition of silence—is particularly important for Ondaatje, who

has usually refused to speak (or speak honestly) to the media about his own private life (Jewinski 10, 82, 134-5). Because John's momentary celebrity is the effect of his dying, Ondaatje seems to be suggesting that the two states (celebrity and death) are related and that both are problematically sexualized. The consolation is that John cannot and maybe would not speak; perhaps because his voice is more vulnerable to appropriation than his body, it is more protected in the circumstances of the poem. Ondaatje gives the crowd the spectacle that it might want, but he prevents John's voice from being fixed in print in the same way that his body has been impaled.

These poems in *The Dainty Monsters* show that Ondaatje was beginning to think about whether he wanted celebrity and at what cost to his body, his poetic voice, and his private life. He acknowledges that celebrity has an appeal, but he suggests that the promise of a large audience depends on the problematic objectification of the person and the unwanted scrutiny of the private life. His future emphasis on legend (which needs no corporeality) would be one way of counteracting the emphasis on the body that he relates to celebrity in *The Dainty Monsters*. These preoccupations do not appear in Ondaatje's *the man with seven toes* (1969), a series of short narrative poems about a woman who meets an escaped convict while she is lost in the Australian outback, but they reappear in his next two books, including his one scholarly monograph.

Ondaatje was beginning to make statements in his poetry about the effects of celebrity, but he was also making statements, as a poet in academia, about the public's interest in the private lives of celebrities. After graduating with his master's degree from Queen's University, he taught at the University of Western Ontario, where he seemed to hope that his creative writing would help him to get a tenured job even though he did not

have a Ph.D. According to Ondaatje's unofficial biographer Ed Jewinski, "[b]y 1970, Ondaatje's reputation [for poetry] was well established, and he was often invited to read [his poems] at universities" (59). Jewinski states that during the question period at one such reading, Ondaatje argued that "readers should pay attention to the poem, not the poet" (59). Ondaatje mainly followed his own advice in the writing of *Leonard Cohen*, his only academic book, and felt that "nothing is more irritating than to have your work translated by your life" (3). Seeming to understand, even before he became a celebrity, that his reputation would generate interest in his private life, in academic contexts he warned scholars and general readers not to pry.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately for Ondaatje, resisting one's celebrity tends to intensify it (Moran 54), and associating oneself with celebrities sometimes leads to becoming one. Even when seeming to be critical of celebrity in *Leonard Cohen*, Ondaatje was making his own more likely. Ondaatje's readings at universities were different, in number and degree of publicity, from what he calls the "circus" (35) of Cohen's 1964 reading tour, but to some extent he was doing what he said Cohen was doing: "following a public rather than a private rhetoric" (35). Furthermore, by writing his monograph around the peak of Cohen's celebrity at the end of the 1960s, Ondaatje was probably seeking not only academic credentials that would lead to a tenured job, but also attention—though he might have preferred to see such attention directed not at himself but at his poetry.

To do unto Cohen as he ostensibly would have done unto himself, Ondaatje uses the introduction to *Leonard Cohen* to reject the cult of personality that supports celebrity: "I have intentionally avoided Cohen the recent public personality," he writes, "and

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3 Ondaatje has, for example, twice refused to grant me access to his archives at the National Library.

ignored detailed biography” to try to “be objective about his novels and poetry” (3).

Unsure of whether fans of Canadian poetry were sincere in their appreciation, he quotes Lawrence Breavman from Cohen’s *The Favourite Game* (1963): “in this country writers are interviewed on T.V. for one reason only: to give the rest of the nation a good laugh” (qtd. in *Leonard* 3). He argues that literature should be defensible without recourse to the questionable status of the author. When he later considers Cohen’s *Parasites of Heaven* (1966), he criticizes it because “[t]he poems are only valid when they go hand in hand with the author, [and] they cannot survive by themselves” (56). Ondaatje seems to prefer the earlier poetry, especially *The Spice-Box of Earth* (1961), which made Cohen very popular but which appeared before his reading tour and the film *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen* (1965) that documented it. The general impression of Ondaatje’s study is that Cohen’s poetry worsened as his popularity became celebrity.

In *Leonard Cohen*, Ondaatje seems averse to celebrity—at least to Cohen’s celebrity—but when he comments on some of Cohen’s highly self-reflexive poems, he also seems impressed that his subject could “cleverly” exploit “the prostitution of personality that comes with success” (4). Eventually, he even argues that “Cohen himself” emerges from his poems as the “mental and social cripple” (14), “the wounded man yearning for the glorious death which will mean sainthood” (13). Ondaatje defines Cohen’s saints as “perverted” (37), as “beautiful losers” (53), and as representations of the author—“Saint Leonard” (60)—in the role of “the sacrificial guinea pig” (36). His sainthood becomes “pop-sainthood” (4, 59) in the context of his celebrity, which is also evident because it seems to affect “Cohen himself” and not only a persona. Because pop-sainthood is related to “glorious death,” it partly falls into the heroic category of celebrity

(Marshall 7) and gets implicit approval. The emphasis on “wound[s]” and “sacrific[e]” reinforces the negative stereotype of celebrity that Lorraine York has noticed in Canadian literature (York 42), but because this martyrdom is part of what Ondaatje admires in Cohen, *Leonard Cohen* contains a subtle though ambivalent endorsement of celebrity.

Some of this ambivalence might be resolved if we consider, more carefully, what types of recognition are really of interest to Ondaatje. *Leonard Cohen* contains what appears to be a tentative suggestion about how celebrity relates to or interacts with other forms of recognition. In an approving but simultaneously critical remark, Ondaatje suggests that Cohen is “brave [...] to present himself (his fears, his tricks) to the public like a legend, even when he knows he is falling far short of it” (56). Ondaatje is distinguishing between *legend* and some other status Cohen has achieved. Because the form of recognition he describes in *The Dainty Monsters* and *Leonard Cohen* is too brief, too easily mocked, too sexual, too dependent on the popular media, and too pretentiously religious to be *fame*, it is probably *celebrity* (in the degree that Bristol calls the “small-time” [4-6]), which also seems to be the state of “falling far short” of *legend*.

In *Leonard Cohen* and Ondaatje’s books from the 1970s, Ondaatje endorses the celebrity of some people because it is a potential transition to their legend or, in the case of people who are already legends, it is a necessary precursor. A legend is “[a] person of such fame or distinction as to become the subject of popularly repeated (true or fictitious) stories; esp. in phr. *a legend in one’s (own) lifetime*” (*OED*). Akin to fame, celebrity is a “distinction” that can “become” legend. Corresponding with Ondaatje’s emphasis on Cohen’s pretence of sainthood, a legend can have religious connotations; it can be “[t]he story of the life of a Saint” (*OED*). It can also be much more mundane, as in the phrase “a

legend in one's (own) lifetime," even though that phrase is usually meant to distinguish someone from all the others who became legends *after* death. More strictly, to be called a legend a person must have inspired "unauthentic or non-historical stor[ies], esp. one handed down by tradition from early times and popularly regarded as historical" (*OED*). The subjects that most closely fit that definition in Ondaatje's poetic works are Billy the Kid and Charles "Buddy" Bolden, who have been dead long enough for legends to develop. In contrast, in *Leonard Cohen*, the subject is still (or not even) "halfway through his career" (3). Ondaatje's refusal to consider Cohen's "detailed biography" increases the likelihood that "unauthentic or non-historical stor[ies]" would develop in place of biography after Cohen's death—though other biographers might dispel them. In all three cases (Billy, Buddy, and Cohen), Ondaatje promotes legend by writing about "unfinished stories," which is how he described, in an interview, his interest in Buddy (Witten 10).

In *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, which appeared immediately after *Leonard Cohen* in the same year (1970), the only terms used to describe the type of recognition appropriate for Billy are "legendary" (82) and "legend" (97).<sup>4</sup> Billy's legend, however, is based on the historical fragments of his celebrity. *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* contains many kinds of texts, which all contribute to the impression of a "collection" of found documents that can only partly represent Billy's history—his "unfinished stor[y]"—despite the inclusion of fictionally autobiographical poems. Photographs, sensational paintings, interviews with people who knew him, an excerpt from the "comic book legend" (as described in the book's credits) of *Billy the Kid and the*

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<sup>4</sup> In accordance with my practice throughout this study, I will use page numbers instead of line numbers to simplify references to the mixture of prose and poetry in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*.

*Princess*, an “EXCLUSIVE JAIL INTERVIEW” promising that “THE KID TELLS ALL” (81)—these texts are more a part of the popular media than they are staid historical documents; indeed, as Dennis Cooley convincingly argues, even Billy’s way of seeing is photographic (217) and cinematic (223). Ondaatje includes texts about Billy that have the gossipy flair of the movies and the tabloids, but—despite the replication of tales, anecdotes, and illustrations that describe him—they also convey a sense of having failed to provide a total picture of Billy; this incompleteness is conducive to legend.

Much more significant to my explanation of the subtext of celebrity in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* are its symbols and metaphors, which often coincide with figurative representations of celebrity that I have already revealed in the poetic texts of Layton and Cohen and in *The Dainty Monsters*. Billy’s religious pretension is not as prophetic or saintly as it is in Layton and Cohen; his religiosity is comparatively secular, even paranormal: I argue that he is a ghost whose invisibility is significant in the context of Ondaatje’s representation of him as a celebrity. While he was alive, however, he was highly visible; as in “For John, Falling,” the sun exposes him to the public. Partly because of that sun’s heat, Billy the Kid suffers a meltdown related to his fusion with his alter ego, the sheriff Pat Garrett, who represents the public. Writing about his relationship with Garrett after his own death, Billy insinuates that Garrett, by dragging him out of hiding and into the media—and later killing him—betrayed him.

More specifically, I argue that Garrett betrayed the affection that Billy had for him and that they might have had for each other. He kills Billy to keep a secret (which might also be his own) about the extent of homosocial desire among cowboys (a term I use to include lawmen and outlaws, who are, like cowboys, men who know the terrain of the

Wild West). Various critics have noted Billy's sexual ambiguity (Denisoff 52-3). Although Billy has literal sex with women in his book, he also has figurative sex with men. Billy has a homosexual desire that he could not express as an outlaw in the macho Wild West. As a ghost, Billy becomes invisible to the public that made him a reluctant celebrity and escapes public expectations about the heterosexuality of cowboys. His ghostly invisibility enables him to appropriate the multiple angles of the public gaze and haunt his own book. As a ghost, he can pass through celebrity and into the legend that functions in a secular society as spiritual immortality.

One of the blurbs on the back cover of the 1970 printing of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* states that, in writing the book, Ondaatje saved Billy from "superficial pop immortality" (and made him "more human," whatever that means). In saving him, Ondaatje gives him "immortality" of the supernatural kind to complement his status as an icon of "pop" culture. In the first poem of the book, a list of "the killed" (n.p.) refers to Billy's death even though he is speaking the poem. Claiming to have killed 20 people, Billy also names those who have been killed or maimed by his enemies:

Charlie, Tom O'Folliard

Angela D's split arm,

and Pat Garrett

sliced off my head.

Blood a necklace on me all my life. (n.p.)

The extreme indentation on the line that names "Pat Garrett" helps to make the next line startling by forcing the reader's eyes to "slice" left. The next line is also startling because readers who already know that Garrett is Billy's nemesis would not expect him on a list of

those killed by Billy's enemies; furthermore, it reveals that Billy is either already dead or might be able to predict how he will die. If he is dead but conscious and able to write poems, then we might assume that he is a ghost. If he is not dead and is capable of predicting the future, then he is a prophet; of course, if he is an accurate prophet, then he will soon be dead anyway—and evidence suggests that he is *not* accurate, because Garrett kills him by gunfire and not decapitation. Adding to these contradictions is the later suggestion that Garrett “killed the wrong man” (103), but most of the evidence suggests that Billy died and is now an invisible ghost.

Asked in his “EXCLUSIVE JAIL INTERVIEW” about what happens after death, Billy says, “There’ll be nothing else. The only thing I wish is that I could hear what people say afterwards. I’d really like that. You know, I’d like to be invisible watching what happens to people when I am not around” (83). Although he does not seem to expect to have a life after death, he seems to want one, not for religious reasons, but mainly to “watch” events and to “hear what people say” after he dies. Later in the interview, he is asked a related question: “do you think you will last in people’s memories?” He answers, “I’ll be with the world till she dies” (84). He wants to hear what people say about him; he expects to be remembered until the end of the “world”—these desires are associated with his state of recognition. Because he thinks that “[t]here’ll be nothing else” after death, he cannot expect to become a ghost, but he can expect to be immortalized some other way: he expects to be famous, maybe legendary—known, as he says, throughout the world. His declaration about wanting to be invisible suggests, however, that he dislikes the visibility associated with a life of celebrity and having “Wanted” signs posted everywhere; his ghostliness is a symbol of his posthumous legend.

Although he does not expect his desire “to be invisible” to be satisfied, Billy is introduced to us as an invisible man: the first page of the book shows an empty square that represents “a picture [or a photograph, to be precise] of Billy” (n.p.). Because the title of the book suggests that Billy is the author of at least some of the “collected works,” Ondaatje implies that Billy is trying to influence how readers will see him; the blank photograph reveals Billy as he would like to be shown: as a ghost. In this initial instance of Billy’s representation, Ondaatje suggests that Billy wants *not* to be shown—or known—except in the poems that he has supposedly written; he wants, especially, not to be shot by the camera, that crucial and gun-like tool of celebrity.

The blank photograph is a significant challenge to its viewers; it encourages them to “see” Billy in their imaginations and to “shoot” him with their gaze. In his seminars on psychoanalysis, Lacan talks about the gaze as an awareness of “the presence of others” (84) who might be looking at the subject; it is, in that sense, social—not only a function of the eye (74). As the “underside of consciousness” (Lacan 83), the gaze consists of the subject’s nascent awareness of being a viewer and being viewed (an obvious concern for any celebrity). It is not only a threat to Billy.

When the gaze is returned, it is returned, at least in part, by the viewer looking at himself or herself. If the blank photograph can be interpreted as a mirror, Dennis Denisoff’s argument about Billy being a vampire (55) gains credibility because vampires are often thought to be invisible in mirrors; however, vampirism is not really Denisoff’s focus, and the mirror relevant to my argument is the figurative mirror in psychoanalysis. Like Billy, the viewer tries “to adapt” to the gaze by “vanishing” (Lacan 83), by trying to avoid being the object of someone else’s desire.

Lacan seems to associate this desire with death, an idea he introduces with his example of Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533)—a painting that presents two ambassadors, surrounded by instruments of navigation, mathematics, and music, who stare coldly at the viewer. Their gaze objectifies—and figuratively kills—the viewer by association with their lifeless instruments. They seem unaware of an oblong and unrecognizable object that appears to be floating at their feet. Only when the viewer moves sideways and above the painting to see it from a different perspective does the strange object take the shape of a human skull in its normal proportions. The ambassadors are too confident to notice this sign of their mortality; however, escaping the gaze of the ambassadors, the viewer confronts that sign. The double bind is that, while the gaze kills, so does the absence of the gaze, which has an essential social function.

Thus, the viewer of Billy's non-image will see on the following page (with its list of "the killed") that the blankness of his photograph is related to his death. His image is not fixed in a gaze, nor is he bound to a society, but his words are recorded and represent him. If words could be said to enable a verbal gaze, Billy's poems would prevent him from entirely leaving the social world of readers who pursue him into the book. He is confronted with a paradox of celebrity: in avoiding the gaze and its social implications, he dies, but in being "shot" by the gaze, he also dies. As readers go looking for Billy, they threaten him—and themselves, indirectly—with the fixed stare of the ambassadors and the ramifications of celebrity; his readers compel him to dodge into a death associated with both the fixity of a representation and the absence of society.

My formulation of this paradox is somewhat of a straw man because it assumes that celebrities cannot live without society, but Billy is rarely solitary enough to test that

assumption; furthermore, he is represented by several people (his society) in the book and thereby avoids being monologically fixed by a single voice—even his own or that of Ondaatje, whose inclusion of *Billy the Kid and the Princess* proves that he is willing to invite other voices into his work. Ondaatje functions as the editor as much as the author of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. He is to some extent a handler who manages Billy's publicity. His decision to include other voices in a book supposedly authored only by Billy is necessary for his representation of Billy's celebrity; he needs them to show the tensions between Billy's privacy and his public. The implied editor includes prominent accounts about Billy by Paulita Maxwell (29, 96), Sallie Chisum (52, 87, 89), and to a lesser extent Sallie's husband John, who tells the story of Livingstone's alcoholic dogs (59-62); these accounts are introduced with their names.

Conversely, the prose works of Pat Garrett (42-5, 86, 90) are not introduced by name, except in his first piece, which begins by announcing "MISTUH... PATRICK... GARRETT!!!" (42). Among the others in Billy's society, Garrett is special. The fanfare of this introduction is never repeated; subsequently, Billy's voice seems to become Garrett's, and *vice versa*, without remark, as if the editor included Garrett's views and then Billy unauthorized them (stripped them of their name) posthumously. For reasons I will consider below, either Billy or the editor is interested in relegating Garrett to anonymity after what might be called his highly acclaimed, or exclaimed ("!!!"), initial appearance. Now, however, I would only like to suggest that the editor manages not only Billy's visibility but also that of the other authorial figures in the text; the voice of the editor himself, for instance, appears first in parenthesis on p. 88, and then without remark on pp. 92-3, 97, and 105. Together Billy and the editor monitor Billy's polyphonic

representation, haunting the collection as only the author can.

The significance of Billy the Kid's ghostliness in relation to his celebrity cannot be understood except through his relationship with Pat Garrett. Prior to Garrett's first narration, he is introduced to readers by either Billy or the editor—probably the editor, given the seemingly editorial inclusion of Paulita Maxwell's first recollection (29). Garrett is described as an "ideal assassin. Public figure" (28), which immediately implies a connection between "assassin[ation]" and the "[p]ublic." Assassinations are secretive plots until they are executed, and they are not normally undertaken by sheriffs such as Garrett, but Garrett's pursuit of Billy is no secret. It is even sensational. The vaudevillian announcement of "MISTUH... PATRICK... GARRETT" reinforces this argument about him: he is the most direct symbol of the "public['s]" jurisdiction over celebrity, which even the editor associates negatively with murder. The murder can be called an "assassination" because Garrett betrayed his friendship with Billy by killing him, thereby losing the already questionable moral authority to execute him legally; this lack of moral authority is one reason why Garrett has been "unauthorized," as I suggested above, by Billy or the editor. Readers can plausibly interpret Garrett as Billy's "unauthorized" biographer: the man—in fact, the lawman—whose control over Billy's life and death is inextricably associated with publicizing them.

Unlike Billy, Garrett knows how to live in public, how to maintain the necessary detachment from it. Billy, however, represents the private life of the celebrity. Although the editor and Garrett offer substantial insights into Garrett's way of thinking, readers have no access to the most intimate aspects of Garrett's private life, such as his marriage: when his wife died, "[w]hat happened in Garrett's mind no one knows" (29). Conversely,

Billy's thoughts are constantly on display in his poems, which Ondaatje once referred to as Billy's "mental shorthand" (qtd. in Solecki 188). Because of Billy's notoriety as a gunslinger and outlaw—"I'd of course heard of him" (42-3), Garrett says—for most of the book Billy is running from the law and trying to avoid detection by hiding at the Chisum ranch and elsewhere in the desert. He seems to want privacy; in one scene, he is relieved to stay in a barn "for a week" (17), alone except for animals and insects that did not bother him: "The fly who sat on my arm, after his inquiry, just went away, ate his disease and kept it in him" (17).<sup>5</sup> If he did indeed prefer privacy to publicity, he might not have been willing to publish his poems in *The Collected Works*; his unwillingness might account for the editor's inclusion of other texts to supplement Billy's poems—a possibility that suggests that the editor and Billy might also be in conflict.

What I have been suggesting so far is that Billy haunts the text in a posthumous attempt to manage his representation and his reputation; his tense negotiation between what can be made public and what should be kept private was, when he was alive, one reason for his conflict with Garrett—and so it remains. Their conflict begins almost immediately in the book with descriptions of how Garrett kills Tom O'Folliard and Charlie Bowdre in his pursuit of Billy. At the end of the chronology, he kills Billy in a dark room without giving Billy a chance to draw a gun. In the narrative, however, Billy does have a chance to confront Garrett: he responds to "MISTUH" Garrett's first and only authorized narration, the one that describes how Garrett met Billy and came to admire him. Garrett's depiction of Billy seems fair and positive. He says that Billy's "rather cruel

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5 I remarked, in chapter III, that Layton's tall man, and Friedrich Nietzsche's somewhat similar Zarathustra, tended to attract audiences of animals and sometimes insects rather than people. Here, Billy's harmless non-human audience is in contrast with Garrett and his other hunters.

smile, when seen close, turned out to be intricate and witty” (43). Billy was “charming” (43). When Billy subconsciously exercised his fingers, Garrett says, “I noticed his left hand churning within itself, each finger circling alternately like a train wheel. Curling into balls, pouring like waves across a tablecloth. It was the most hypnotising beautiful thing I ever saw” (43). Garrett’s appreciation grows: when Billy, at Sallie’s request, pinpoints the exact location of a sick cat hiding under the floorboards and kills it with two gunshots in quick succession, Garrett says, “I had a look I suppose of incredible admiration for him” (45). Only Angie appeared “terrified. Simply terrified” (45). By countering some of the rumours about Billy’s “cruel[ty]” by mentioning his “wit” and his arguably merciful killing of the cat, Garrett presents himself as someone who is attracted to Billy and as a fair judge (though he might not be a *good* judge) of Billy’s character.

Perhaps this impression of fairness and the representation of Angie’s reaction bothers Billy enough that he would want to object to them with a competing narrative: his response—a short, repetitive, enigmatic account on the following page—makes half an argument about Garrett, not Billy, taking cruel pleasure in killing. It is only half an argument because Billy’s response initially seems strangely pointless; it merely describes (twice on the same page, with only a slight variation) a dog, Garrett, and two of Garrett’s friends approaching the house where Billy is.

Down the street was a dog. Some mut [*sic*] spaniel, black and white. One dog, Garrett and two friends, stud looking, came down the street to the house, to me.

Again.

Down the street was a dog. Some mut [*sic*] spaniel, black and white. One dog, Garrett and two friends came down the street to the house, to me. (46)

Later in the book, however, readers might notice *again* the “the dog” (92) and Garrett with his two friends, “deputies Poe and Mackinnon” (92), approaching a house. The scene is described more fully this time: the house is Pete Maxwell’s, and Garrett will enter it to murder Billy in the dark. The dogs and the two friends are the details that link these separate accounts of the same event. In the first account—Billy’s response to Garrett’s fair judgement of him—Garrett “smiles” (46) and “[t]he others laugh” (46) when he enters the house, gun in hand. Rather cryptically, Billy adds, “All this I would have seen if I was on the roof looking” (46). Because he was not on the roof, his vision of the moments before his death is strange. Cooley argues that Billy has taken “the camera’s position” (225) and that the repetitions are the “takes” in his film. The repetition is also an uncanny moment of repression: Billy omits “stud looking” from the second description, as if he wanted either to retract a compliment paid to the men who hunted him (i.e. they look like “stud[s]”), or to erase the suggestion that they were coming to him for sex (i.e. *he* is the “stud”). I agree with Cooley that Billy has appropriated the perspective of the technology that helps to produce celebrity, but my interpretation emphasizes perspective over technology: Billy is a ghost who has risen out of his body (above “the roof”). Like the viewer of *The Ambassadors*, he must try to move out of sight and *above* the scene to see his death in its undistorted proportions.

Who gets the power of “looking,” and then telling, is the question. Because Billy is the underdog in his conflict with Garrett, his statements about his power of sight can be

interpreted as hypothetical: “All this I would have seen *if* I was on the roof looking” (my emphasis), though in this case I think that he means he was not on the roof and saw “[a]ll this” because he has a ghost’s floating perspective. In a similarly hypothetical statement earlier in the book, Billy wonders what he would “say” “if [he] had a newsman’s brain” (11). Other critics have argued that either he does (Lee 170) or does not (Barbour 47) have such a brain, but this debate seems to assume that Billy cannot change or learn; obviously, his tendency to rely on his senses fails when Garrett murders him in the dark, and so, as a ghost, he learns how to *see* as if he had “a newsman’s brain”; such detached, disembodied (“brain” only) sight might help him. Billy might benefit from trading places with journalists rather than remaining the object of their celebrity-producing gaze. When he begins to apply his newly acquired clairvoyance and objectifying power to the process of reinterpreting and representing his past, he imagines “[his] eyes / magnifying the bones across a room / shifting in a wrist” (39). He seems to combine this power of sight with an ability to “feel” (8) that Garrett, in his perpetually drunken state (28-9), could probably not match. In such passages, Billy reveals that he is learning to integrate his past life of the body with his ability to see as a disembodied ghost sees. Although Garrett does not have such insight, he does have an analogous detachment, “the ability to kill someone on the street walk back and finish a joke” (28), an aptitude for “study[ing]” (43) and “theoriz[ing]” (44), a clinical objectivity akin to that of a “newsman” or Holbein’s ambassadors. Billy intends, perhaps, to surpass Garrett by fusing their strengths.

An important example of this fusion is in the second narration of Billy’s death; this is the aforementioned third-person narration on p. 92 that names the “deputies Poe and Mackinnon” and specifies that the house is Maxwell’s. The narrator initially appears to be

neither Billy nor Garrett, because both are mentioned: “On some vague tip Garrett has come to ask Maxwell where he thinks Billy is hiding out” (92). Unlike the first version of the story, in which Billy makes Garrett appear cruel when he “smiles” in anticipation of the murder, in this second version Garrett discovers Billy by accident. He only knows that Billy is with him in the dark room because he “recognizes the voice” (92) when Billy, not suspecting Garrett’s presence, asks Maxwell in Spanish why there are men outside. In contrast, readers might have difficulty in “recogniz[ing] the voice” of the narrator in this passage. The narrator’s claim that he has written “a diagram” (92) of the scene indicates the “academic” (28) voice of Garrett; however, the strange “MMMmmmmmm” (92) that introduces the narration indicates the voice of Billy, because in an earlier poem Billy wrote “MMMMMMMM mm” (11) to represent the characteristically sensual sound of his own “thinking” (11). The styles of the two men seem to add up—and in an uncanny coincidence in the arrangement of the death scenes, p. 92 is exactly the double of p. 46 in its page numbers:  $46 \times 2 = 92$ .<sup>6</sup> Corroborating Ian Rae, who argues that Billy gets revenge on Garrett “by absorbing Garrett’s voice and narrative strategies” (115), I contend that the second narrative of the death scene in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* is narrated by a fused Billy-Garrett, whom we might also think of as Garrett possessed by the ghost of Billy, who has returned from the scene of his future murder to ensure that Garrett, alone, does not have the privilege of the last word.

The darkness of the room where the murder occurs helps to make this fusion possible; it also hides—ineffectively—Billy’s homosexual tendency. Nicholas Royle, in

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6 The operative word here is “coincidence.” In the recent Vintage Canada edition (2008) of the text, the pagination is different from that of the previous Anansi editions, and the second narration of Billy’s death does not begin with the sound of his thinking.

his analysis of Freud's essay on "The Uncanny" (1919), states that "[r]epeatedly [Freud] evokes the uncanniness of moving about in the dark" (108); the effect of darkness on vision is uncanny because it both frightens and raises questions about what cannot be seen—in particular, about sexuality and identity (assuming, in the context of celebrity, that identity is usually determined by a visible image). Cooley observes that earlier in the narrative, Sallie put Billy in a dark room to protect him from the sun (214-5); on the occasion of Billy's death, "the dark room" (92) seems to be safe, but it becomes a place for questions that precede violence: Garrett enters the room to awaken Pete Maxwell and ask him about Billy's whereabouts; Billy enters the room to ask Maxwell about the two men outside: "Quienes son esos hombres afuera Pete?" (92). When Billy speaks, Garrett recognizes him (despite the Spanish) and crawls into bed with Maxwell, who is afraid of Garrett's gun and does not answer. When Billy realizes that *two* people are in the bed, he first assumes that Maxwell is sleeping with his sister Paulita (one of the other narrators in the book), but then he "feels a man's boots," is shocked by the implication that Maxwell would be in bed with a man (other than him), and asks, "O my god Pete quien es?" "Garrett is about to burst out laughing so he fires" (93) and Billy is fatally wounded. The darkness accounts for Billy's confusion (in his list of "the killed," above) about what killed him; it also makes both Garrett and Billy into ghostly, "invisible" presences, but it also insinuates a very worldly, sordid affair. In Maxwell's bed, Garrett's gun is a phallic symbol. By shooting Billy, he penetrates him sexually, uniting himself with his nemesis in a symbolically homosexual bond while also "laughing" at (and punishing) Billy's homosexuality. Billy is emasculated by the penetration, becoming even more like the impaled man in "For John, Falling"; in the flash of gunfire, the couple's identities fuse.

The public and private come together in the dark room, but not equally; Billy, who elsewhere seemed to possess Garrett, is forced to abide by the other's norms or die.

The question of who and what are exposed by Garrett's killing of Billy continues to preoccupy me. Initially, having noticed what Denisoff calls the "numerous descriptions" that confirm "[t]he homoerotic potential of a predominantly male society" (53), I assumed that Billy was a gay cowboy whose sex with women in the book was not an authentic sign of his desire; the homoerotic symbolism overwhelmed the literal descriptions. Denisoff argues further that no one should interpret the book's "decentring of heteronormative sexuality [...] as the dominance of one version of social interaction over another or others" (63). This further argument remains in partial contrast with my own: although the situation is complex, Garrett dominates Billy's life as a celebrity; in death, Billy gains some power. Garrett, as the representative of the public, is not acting to expose Billy's sexuality, but he *is* acting to eliminate the celebrity who would draw attention to their homosocial desire. Garrett's symbolic acknowledgment and satisfaction of Billy's desire in the dark room is murder; he kills Billy because homosexuality contravenes the "law" of compulsory heterosexuality among cowboys. Garrett thereby keeps the secret of cowboy culture; in fact, he protects his own privacy.

The dark room in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* has its symbolic counterpoint in the book's "white rooms" (69) (which echo, differently, in *Coming Through Slaughter*). No one would be surprised to realize that the homosexual implications of "the dark room" are negative in connotation, given the heterosexual imperative of cowboy culture. Thus, "the white rooms of Texas after a bad night must be like heaven" (69). Billy associates the "bad night" (69, 71; see also 105) with alcohol

sickness (69) and with his memory of being captured by Garrett (he later escaped) long before Garrett found him again and killed him. On that earlier occasion, Garrett was transporting his prisoner to trial and decided to stop for a night at a hotel (79). Billy was at this point unable to walk “after the week on horses” (79) and after his sunstroke, so he was carried into the hotel where he would “share a room with Garrett and Emory” (79).

Billy describes what Garrett said to him:

Your last good bed Billy, he said, pick your position. I did, face and stomach down. He chained me to the bed. He taped my fingers so thick I couldnt get them through a trigger guard even if they gave me a gun. (79)

Billy nostalgically calls this his “last white room” (79), which is a comfortable place compared to where he has been and where he is going. It continues to imply the “heaven” he mentioned on p. 69. When offered a choice (however ironic it is), he takes the most sexually submissive “position” that a man can choose, re-enacting the “extreme physical passivity” (Owens 125) that he demonstrated in an earlier sex scene with Angie. His “taped [...] fingers” mean that he cannot wield his “gun,” a remarkable repetition of when his “fingers [were] paralysed” (16) by Angie’s vaginal secretions and he became “a crippled witch” (16): in neither case can he use his penis, nor does he have the “fingers” to use the gun that might symbolize his penis. Because the “white room” is a pleasant contrast to the disturbed safety of “the dark room,” which is associated symbolically with the “bad night[s],” Billy is suggesting that he wants his homosexuality to come out of the “dark”—for it to be known and pleasant. He seems to want sexual relationships with men, but without Garrett’s ridicule (his laughing), and without having to feel jealous or jilted (“O my god Pete quien es?”). When Douglas Barbour indirectly supported my earlier

argument by stating that Billy is outside the “law” of mortality (42), he could also have mentioned that Billy is also outside the “law” of masculinity—and in contempt of the public’s expectations (until recently) regarding the heterosexuality of male celebrity.<sup>7</sup>

My argument about Billy and Garrett fusing in a symbolic and punitive homosexual union might surprise or even rankle other critics, but some of them have already shown how Billy and Garrett have close similarities and important differences. In the postscript to his article in *Spider Blues* (1985), Stephen Scobie reflects on criticism that developed after his article was initially published and argues that “to pass over the differences between Billy and Garrett is seriously to distort the book that Ondaatje actually wrote” (209). Although Barbour disagrees with Scobie on other issues, here he takes a similar position, arguing that too many critics assume that *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* is “a form of realism” (46) in which Billy and Garrett are “alike” (46). He states that the two characters are “complementary” and “necessary to each other [but] they are not inseparable” (Barbour 46). My argument is obviously not based in “realism,” nor does it “pass over the differences,” but it does propose that they become “inseparable.” The metaphor of celebrity and its fusion of selves is meant to describe a process in which the public invades the private—in this case, the public of heterosexual norms and the private of homosexual deviance. Although Garrett dominates Billy through this fusion, the sound of Billy’s thinking (“MMMmmmmmm”) and the evidence of his

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7 In *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), Michael Warner argues that, in some cases, “being in public is a privilege that requires filtering or repressing something that is seen as private” (23). Furthermore, Warner argues that “to challenge male domination in public is to change both femininity and the norms of public behavior, lesbians and gay men have found that to challenge the norms of straight culture in public is to disturb deep and unwritten rules about the kinds of behavior and eroticism that are appropriate to the public” (*Publics* 24-5).

ghostliness suggests that he resists Garrett from within the bond formed by the gun.

Garrett's decision to shoot Billy from the bed is an ironic punishment, given the phallic symbolism, but it also hints that Garrett might also have homosexual desires; no fusion would be possible without the potential confusion of public and private and the resulting challenge to the dominant values involved.

Billy is fascinated with symmetry, such as the hetero / homo relationship, and his associated social anxiety or fear seems to be reflected in his poetic forms, which are in some cases uncannily symmetrical or repetitive in their depiction of authorial sight and insight. My quotation of Billy's initial description of his death scene has already shown that he repeats himself, probably because he needs to reassert and reiterate his narrative authority in his contest with Garrett. In other cases, the repetition foreshadows the fusion of Billy and Garrett in the death scene. When Billy reflects on the death of Charlie Bowdre, who was shot in the stomach (22), the effect of his poem is uncanny:

His stomach was warm  
remembered this when I put my hand into  
a pot of luke warm tea to wash it out  
dragging out the stomach to get the bullet  
he wanted to see when taking tea  
with Sallie Chisum in Paris Texas

With Sallie Chisum in Paris Texas  
he wanted to see when taking tea  
dragging out the stomach to get the bullet

a pot of luke warm tea to wash it out  
 remembered this when I put my hand into  
 his stomach was warm (27)

In this chiasmus (or a palindrome read line by line instead of word for word), when Billy washes “a pot of luke warm tea” at Sallie Chisum’s, he remembers the feeling of putting his hand in his fatally wounded friend’s stomach “to get the bullet.” Even more than the juxtaposition of the gruesome and the quotidian, the symmetrical form of Billy’s poem simulates the uncanniness of this mnemonic association.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the second stanza, in its backward progression to what we have already seen, produces a feeling of *déjà vu*. We usually think of *déjà vu* as the uncanny feeling of having seen something before, but perhaps even more disquieting is the possibility that what is *déjà vu* might also be an image of what will come. Billy, revisiting his past as a ghost, has insight into the future in which he, too, dies from a gunshot wound. His fusion with Garrett is foreshadowed, even foretold, in this symmetrical poem: as Garrett did with a bullet, Billy reaches into another man’s gut, enacting a fantasy or confronting a fear of being penetrated; Billy seems to be unconsciously and compulsively suggesting—this scene is reflected on p. 48—that bodily intimacy between men has deadly consequences in a heteronormative society.

Billy’s self-reflective poem about Charlie is the first of two symmetrical poems in *The Collected Works*; in the second, the perspective changes and the symmetry is less exact—it is partly symmetrical and partly repetition—but it is nevertheless another case of ghostly *déjà vu*. Royle tentatively argues that in addition to its usual meanings, *déjà vu*

8 Royle quotes Sarah Kofman: “[Freud’s] aim being to prove the existence of themes capable of producing a universal feeling of uncanniness, he makes a strictly thematic reading of the [literary fictional] texts he cites as proof of his hypothesis.’ But ‘it is really the form of the narrative and not the theme in itself which plays the decisive role in the production of [uncanny] effects’” (44, my emphasis).

is “to be oneself *already seen*, watched (over)” (183). If he is trying to imply that the feeling of *déjà vu* is akin to the paranoia of being watched, then this new approach to *déjà vu* applies directly to my study of Ondaatje’s representations of celebrity. If Billy is paranoid about being watched, he is probably justified, because his experiences of being exposed to the eyes of others tend to be painful or deadly. In the second (partly) symmetrical poem—what Royle might call the “ghost or double” (183) of the first—other narrators (“We” and “I”) observe Billy’s corpse after he has been shot. They are busy “clean[ing] him up” (104). Because of their higher perspective and their sense of responsibility for him—however insincere it is—they are “watch[ing] (over)” him. Significantly, their view of him coincides with his inability to see now that he is dead:

Poor young William’s dead  
 with a fish stare, with a giggle  
 with blood planets in his head.  
 .....  
 Poor young William’s dead  
 with blood planets in his head  
 with a fish stare, with a giggle  
 like he said. (104)

The narrators who refer to themselves in the lines between these ones (which begin and end the poem) could be any combination of Garrett, Poe, Mackinnon, Maxwell, and Celsa Gutterrez, who are all mentioned nearby on p. 92-3. The imperfect symmetry of their poem might be the best that they can accomplish because they are too heterogeneous and too public to speak in a singular private voice like that of Billy the Kid. They represent

the public because they “sold” (13) the bullets—taken from Billy’s corpse, I presume —“to the Texas Star” (13), where the newsmen “took pictures with a camera” (15). In contrast, Billy can write a perfectly symmetrical poem in a private moment of recollection; his symmetry is the result of his singular voice. The other, partial reflections of scenes in the book suggest that his paranoia has driven him to break the narrative into fragments that *we* have “already seen”; these fragments, these broken symmetries, help him to avoid being “fixed” (Barbour 42) or focussed on by our gaze, which is complicit with that of Garrett (assuming that we as readers have also hunted for Billy, hoping to see the man who escaped the photograph).

When Billy is under scrutiny, the sun almost always appears as a symbol of the public gaze directed at him; even the “blood planets” in the imperfectly symmetrical poem (above) are related by colour and by celestial position to the “lovely perfect sun balls” (95) that “com[e] up everywhere” (95) and obscure Billy’s sight in his dying moments. When Billy’s vision is obscured, it is because his line of sight has been repelled by a stronger, public gaze. The sun does not exactly symbolize Garrett, but it is associated with what Cooley calls the “outside intrusions” (213) into Billy’s privacy; thus, it is associated with Garrett when Billy describes the sunstroke he suffered during his arrest. On their way to jail, Garrett chains Billy to a horse and forces him to ride through the desert without a hat. Alluding to the counting of days in the Book of Genesis to invoke the religious pretence associated with the sun, Billy writes that “[o]n the fifth day the sun turned into a pair of hands and began to pull out the hairs in my head” (76). Shortly thereafter, he writes that “with very thin careful fingers [the sun] began to unfold my head drawing back each layer of skin and letting it flap over my ears” (76). He describes the

sun in terms of its figurative hands, not its eyes, but my argument about the public gaze still applies because the sun makes sight possible and because for Billy, with his legendary hand-eye coordination, the two sense organs are inseparable.

Another organ is included in this metonymy when the sun reaches down through Billy's head and body to yank his most private parts: "so there I was, my cock standing out of my head" (77). Not only symbols of the gaze, the sun's fingers operate (as Billy's did earlier) as phallic symbols, so that when Billy says that the sun "went in and came out" (77), the innuendo is not easily missed. Billy (now completely blinded by the sun) then says to Garrett, "I've been fuckd I've been fucked by Christ almighty god I've been good and fucked by Christ. And I rolled off the horse's back [...] [and hanged] in between his four trotting legs at last thank the fucking christ, in the shade of his stomach [*sic*]" (78). Hanging in that position, Billy ensures that the horse is "well-hung," an ironic image because we have already seen how Garrett emasculates Billy, making him a not very potent phallic symbol for the horse. If not for the lengthy description of his excruciating pain (which I omit here) and the blasphemous insinuations about Jesus Christ, this scene would be hilarious (frankly, I think it still is). When Billy associates the sun with Christ, the son ("sun") of God, he is indirectly complaining that he has been "fucked" by the pseudo-religious celebrity that the "[p]ublic figure" of Garrett has forced upon him by totally exposing him to the world. The sun's focussed rays are a starbeam and a figurative spotlight that does not point to Bethlehem.

The sun, a medium-sized star, is the symbol of celebrity that Ondaatje develops in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. Billy also writes a poem about "great stars" (41), which I presume to be the type that is larger than our sun and capable of becoming a

supernova (exploding star). Billy, presumably having seen an artist's rendering of some of these "great stars," writes that he has seen "drawings [not photographs] which show them straining to the centre / that would explode their white" (41). Although the "white[ness]" of these stars might incline us to think of the type of star known as a white dwarf, which Ondaatje writes about in *Rat Jelly*, the laws of physics explain that a supernova burns out and becomes a neutron star or a black hole, not a white dwarf ("Supernova"). I would not argue for too fine a distinction between the physics of stars that are in use as symbols, but I will suggest that Billy is writing about a different degree of celebrity from what later appears in *Rat Jelly*'s "White Dwarfs." He thinks of potentially explosive stars, and the sun is surely hot enough to feel explosive in the desert on earth. Regardless, his stars are under "stress" (41) and on edge: they would explode "if temperature and the speed they moved at / shifted one degree" (41) or if they made "the one altered move" (41). If any of these stars or the sun can be understood to represent the public's gaze or celebrity in general, then for Billy celebrity is the status that might destroy him.

*The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* is so negative in its depiction of celebrity that Billy is almost in essence a victim of captivity and torture. The public scrutinizes him so intensely and thereby captures him so decisively that his only escape is through death, and even then "they buried him in leg irons" (97) because they still feared his escape. His death-wish is to vanish as a ghost and reverse the public gaze that was used against him. He haunts his *Collected Works* to reveal that celebrity dominates people and enforces problematic codes of conduct related to privacy and sexuality. If he is not only a ghost but also a poet, he is probably one of those poets Patrick Lane was thinking about when he stated, in his essay called "To the Outlaw" (1971), that "[n]o poetry born in the bondage

of experience was ever written within the law” (211). Lane’s manifesto argues that poets must disregard the law to do justice to experience; Billy the Kid (and Ondaatje as his creator in this case) is one such poet, but Ondaatje seemed to understand that the social conventions (“laws”) that governed his own emerging celebrity would compel him to hide his subversive interpretation of Billy the Kid. Billy’s privacy is sacrificed to his public when his symmetrical relationship with Garrett becomes one of fusion equated with death; however, Ondaatje leaves the facts of Billy’s life open to question and open to legend. To save Billy from the law and from the “superficial pop immortality” of celebrity—which by definition would be too brief to be “immortality” anyway—Ondaatje assembles a collection of poetic texts that are not intended to produce the full picture of Billy the Kid. Instead, they sustain the conditions that brought Billy through celebrity and into the “jungle sleep” (97) of legend—a death from which Billy might awaken into a more significant immortality.

Until *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* arrived shortly after *Leonard Cohen*, Ondaatje’s publications were “known only to the few people who kept up with the Canadian poetry scene” (Jewinski 77). His book about Billy the Kid increased his recognition to the national level: “Ondaatje, who hated being in the public eye, suddenly could not seem to keep out of the newspapers” (Jewinski 82). The back cover blurb for its 2003 edition relates a now-familiar story about the book’s reception: “When Michael Ondaatje won the Governor General’s Award for Poetry in 1970 for [the book], [former] Prime Minister John Diefenbaker was publicly outraged [...] and stated that it wasn’t even about a Canadian.”<sup>9</sup> Despite the book’s American content, Ondaatje’s celebrity remained

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9 *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* actually won in 1971 (Barbour 3) in a specially created “Prose and

“merely a Canadian affair” (Jewinski 130) after he won the award (until his international success with *The English Patient* in the 1990s), and he only considered himself “semi-known” (qtd. in York 129). His first experience of celebrity brought him to a national but not international level of recognition.

By the time of *Rat Jelly* in 1973, then, Ondaatje was visible enough in the media to be a national celebrity; he also seemed to be learning to accept his own public visibility, just as he had learned to accept “the poet as a public person” (qtd. in Sullivan 288) when he saw and heard Gwendolyn MacEwen read in 1972. In *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, the author’s photograph is not much bigger than a postage stamp and shows Ondaatje (though he is not named) dressed as a cowboy when he was a child (Jewinski 67). In contrast, the back cover of *Rat Jelly* features a photographic portrait of Ondaatje that is almost half a page in height. The blurb states that he is so talented that the “power source [of his poems] is almost invisible.” This statement suggests that, at least until the success of *The English Patient* on film, Ondaatje’s celebrity was not an example of what Tom Mole calls “hypertrophic” (par. 3, 4), which is celebrity so overgrown that its system becomes as visible and as spectacular as the people it promotes. Calling Ondaatje’s power “almost invisible” adds to his mystique and assumes, to some extent, that his audience is naïve. Surely, some members of that audience would realize that part of the “power” of *Rat Jelly* is the celebrity that Ondaatje helped to generate with *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. Ondaatje’s “almost invisible” power is also his subtlety, which by now should be amply in evidence, but with his photograph on *Rat Jelly*, he

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Poetry” (Harvey and Berg 313) category because, in addition to nationality, it was difficult to classify by form.

abandons the pretence of invisibility that was so important to his younger self and to Billy the Kid; the pretence of invisibility (though not necessarily the theme) shifts, substantially, to his novels—the form that would replace poetry as the accessory of Canadian literary celebrity after the 1970s.

What remains in Ondaatje's poetry is a less-disguised strategy of self-promotion but also a more direct appraisal of celebrity, often from the perspective of the fan; accordingly, *Rat Jelly* is the first of Ondaatje's creative publications to name *fame* and *celebrity* as forms of recognition that interest him in addition to *legend*. The opening section in *Rat Jelly* (entitled "Families") contains significant contributions from speakers who seem to be fans in imaginary dialogues with celebrities. Because of my detailed interpretations of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and other individual poems (see below) that are obviously about celebrity, this chapter has little room for thorough analyses of the topical but less symbolically interesting poems in *Rat Jelly*, though I will mention them: "War Machine," which seems to be from the perspective of a fan or a has-been celebrity who refers to "30 jayne mansfield stories" (11) and "stories too bout vivien leigh princess margaret / frank sinatra the night he beat up mia farrow" (11); "Letter to Ann Landers," which suggests that people who think constantly about celebrities might not be emotionally secure or altogether rational; and "Postcard from Piccadilly Street," which describes the speaker having sex with someone while their dog "jumps on the bed and watches" (19)—a practice of inviting voyeurism that encourages them to "open the curtains" (19), shut the light, "and imagine the tree outside / full of sparrows / with infra red eyes" (19). Ondaatje was imagining celebrity from the perspective of fans, thereby reflecting indirectly on being the public, which is the other half of the role that he adopted

by grandstanding as Billy the Kid (and, later, Buddy Bolden).

The poem that ends the “Families” section echoes throughout Ondaatje’s work; “Letters & Other Worlds” is an autobiographical elegy about his alcoholic father, whose compulsion to drink was related to his celebrity. The poem introduces Ondaatje’s private persona, which is evident in his reference to events that correspond with Ondaatje’s biography and national heritage. Significantly, at the moment when Ondaatje’s work becomes unprecedentedly personal, it also begins to imply that celebrity is a Catch-22 that cannot be resolved by someone who seems unconsciously to encourage and even need his celebrity. “Letters & Other Worlds” also implicates Ondaatje’s ethnicity in his own celebrity by describing his father’s alcoholism as a response to an invasion of privacy, which—in a vicious cycle—occurred partly because his alcoholic behaviour was a public disturbance that led the public to notice his ethnic difference.

The speaker of “Letters & Other Worlds” explains that “two bottles of gin” (24) helped an aneurysm to kill his father, and he then tells some of the stories about what happened while his father was alive. In a scene that echoes in *Running in the Family*, the speaker’s father gained “instant fame” (24) in Ceylon simply “by falling / dead drunk onto the street” (24) and stopping a ceremonial procession in a national religious festival.<sup>10</sup> If fame is both “instant” and likely to pass quickly, it is more accurately described as celebrity (Rojek 9). The only unusual aspect of this alcoholism is that it is not a result of someone trying to forget the stress of celebrity; instead, it is one of the reasons his father becomes a celebrity. In this poem, celebrity is the result of his involving

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<sup>10</sup> Ondaatje refers to that festival as a “Perahara” (23), which a footnote in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry: Shorter Fifth Edition* (2005) defines as “an annual religious festival... commemorating the birth of Vishnu, one of the three primary Hindu gods” (1202n).

himself in public events such as “ceremonial procession[s]” and drawing attention to his status as an outsider at events of national and religious significance.

Ondaatje’s private persona implies that his father’s alcoholism and resulting celebrity have domestic and even national repercussions. The poem initially jokes that the speaker’s father’s “instant fame” was the “turning point” (25) that “led to Ceylon’s independence in 1948” (25)—as when his father appears again in “the papers” (25), drunk but described as “broken hearted” (25), and his mother insists that the editors print a correction. These jokes might distract readers from the implied divorce of his parents after their “14 years of marriage” (25); 1948 was also the year that Ondaatje’s parents separated (Barbour 2). In the poem, the implied divorce is allegorical: Ceylon’s “independence,” its rejection of the “semi-official” and “semi-white” (25) colonial government that his father partly represents, is also a divorce. Indirectly, therefore, Ondaatje assigns responsibility for both domestic and national breakups to his father’s celebrity and, parenthetically, to his mother’s:

(My mother had done her share too—  
her driving so bad  
she was stoned by villagers  
whenever her car was recognized) (25)

In both the literal and figurative senses of this divorce, celebrity exacerbates the reasons—such as nationalism or racism—that motivate people to separate from each other.

The private persona describes this separation in “Letters & Other Worlds” as his father’s increasing physical and emotional isolation, which was motivated in part by fear. Initially, the speaker says, “My father’s body was a globe of fear” (24). Shortly thereafter,

he says, “My father’s body was a town of fear” (24). Eventually, his father is hiding in “a room” (24, 26) where he stayed “until he was drunk / and until he was sober” (26). The progression from “globe” to “town” to “room” implies that his father increasingly withdrew from society (not that the fear was shrinking). This withdrawal into solitude appears to have been voluntary but under psychological duress: he had “edged / into the terrible acute hatred of his own privacy” (26). As in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and “Postcard from Piccadilly Street” the pleasures of privacy are destroyed by the fear of threats from outside: in this case, the danger of embarrassing the family in public and of being known as an outsider. He might also have been afraid of revealing a secret: the speaker claims that “[his father] hid that he had been where we were going” (24). The semblance of clairvoyance or prophecy here is the wisdom of having already imagined the downfall of his family. Having felt isolated or separated as a “semi-white” person in a South Asian country, he did not want to spoil the joy of life by predicting that his family or his nation would also separate. His letters to his family had “the most complete empathy” (26) and ignored his emotional turmoil because he wanted to spare them his pain. This flawed solution shows “the logic of his love” (24) but also the circular logic of self-fulfilling prophecy. His separation from society incites the “hatred of his own privacy” and of his own private self; that hatred encourages his alcoholism, which, in turn, helps to cause the separation that he wanted to prevent.

Being a celebrity does not help him; it makes him into a symbol of colonial vices, such as alcoholism, and gives his society a reason to reject him and his “semi-white[ness].” Chris Rojek’s argument about celebrity causing a crisis of “identity confusion” because of the “colonization” (11) of the private self by the public applies

keenly to Ondaatje's father (as he is described), but in his case, his celebrity counter-colonizes him to identify him as an outsider and expel him. He seems to hate his own privacy because even in solitude he cannot change the public's attention to national and racial difference that constitutes part of his identity.

In reflecting on (and contributing to) the formation of this identity, Ondaatje invokes the religious pretence associated with a patriarchal lineage of celebrity, seemingly to absolve his father of the postcolonial guilt that might have motivated his self-destruction. The epigraph to "Letters & Other Worlds" insinuates that his father was "like Adam before the fall"; thus, the epigraph implies that Ceylon was Edenic and that his father, despite being "like Adam," was not guilty of ruining paradise. (This implied assumption, that pre-colonial Ceylon was like paradise, is probably inaccurate and itself colonial.) If the epigraph indirectly suggests that Ondaatje's mother was like Eve, then she was to blame for their expulsion from paradise; indeed, Ondaatje left Ceylon in 1952 to follow his mother to England (Barbour 2). Although Ondaatje seems to be symbolically absolving his father and blaming his mother in the poem's epigraph, the majority of the poem suggests that he recognizes his father's problems, including his celebrity.

The next poem in *Rat Jelly* that considers celebrity explicitly is "Heron Rex" which, like "Letters & Other Worlds," also engages in a figurative dialogue with a father-figure—or, more precisely, at least two father-figures: "Mad kings" (52) and their "blood lines" (52). Even more than referring to lineage, these "blood lines" refer to the "introverted" (52) veins that reverse the sanity of "the brain" (52) and cause madness. The potential father of this poem is one of the "kings" in the "heritage of suicides" (52), one of "the ones who went mad / balancing on that goddamn leg" (52). Balancing on one leg

is the heron's distinctive way of standing, but this image also seems to refer to Layton's "Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom" (1958) and its poet, who assesses whether or not he is a mad "fool" (7), compares himself to "King Canute" (7), and "balance[s] on wooden stilts and dance[s]" (7). The poet in "Heron Rex," however, is not "proud" (52) of the kings who succeed in balancing; instead, he or she is proud of those "whose eyes turned off / the sun and imagined it" (52). The emphasis on "the sun" and "imagin[ation]" is Laytonic, but other details point toward Cohen, another potential father-figure. Ondaatje seems to allude to Cohen by declaring "celebrity a razor in the body" (53). Although I cannot be sure of the timing because the poems in *Rat Jelly* were written "between 1966 [...] and the summer of 1972" (see the unnumbered final page), the image of the razor might have been borrowed from Cohen's *The Energy of Slaves* (1972),<sup>11</sup> which has a small razor icon at the beginning of every poem—and Sam Solecki hears echoes of *The Energy of Slaves* elsewhere in *Rat Jelly* ("Nets" 106). The mention of "suicides" and "sacrifice" (53) also reminds me of Ondaatje's preoccupation with the figure of the saint in *Leonard Cohen* and suggests that the heron itself is a religious symbol. Whether or not Ondaatje was imagining Layton and Cohen while writing "Heron Rex," he is invoking some of the symbols of celebrity that they use in their poetry.

Ondaatje seems to prefer Cohen over Layton as a model of celebrity; arguably, Cohen was the better representative of the culture of alienated youth that was significant in supporting celebrity in Canadian poetry in the 1960s and early 1970s. In "Heron Rex," the "suicides" that "they are proud of" are transgressions perpetrated by masochistic,

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11 In *The Annotated Bibliography of Canada's Major Authors* (1985), Judith Brady notes that "Heron Rex" was first published in *White Pelican* 3:1 (1973) (142). Unless there was a previous publication of "Heron Rex" not recorded in the bibliography, Cohen's *The Energy of Slaves* seems to have preceded that poem.

alienated, enslaved, violent, insane people—the same kind of people who interest Cohen. Ondaatje simultaneously insinuates his sympathy for such people and his leadership of them by using the second-person “you,” which is sometimes considered an indirect way of saying “I” in the first person:

[you go mad] when you perfect the mind  
 where you sacrifice yourself for the race  
 when you are the representative when you allow  
 yourself to be paraded in the cages  
 celebrity a razor in the body (53)

The book’s title—*Rat Jelly*—suggests that the “race” might be the proverbial “rat race” that the 1960s culture of youth resisted, but the “race” is also the lineage of “kings.” Because they are “small birds” (53), they seem to be young kings. To remain willingly the “representative[s]” of this “race” is not to choose wisely. The “kings” ironically become slaves: “you allow / yourself to be paraded in the cages” (another echo of *The Energy of Slaves*). Despite its consequences, some people—typically young people—accept celebrity, even though this acceptance might be suicidal, “a razor in the body.” The poem closes with an image of the frailty of these “small birds,” these heron kings: like “neon” (53) and “glass” (53), “they are royalty melted down” (53). This meltdown means, in my terms, that the metaphor of celebrity (a fusion of private and public) has occurred; the balance of separation has not been maintained, and the culture of youth has been exposed and exploited (“paraded”) to the point of its self-destruction.

The motif of balancing appears alongside figurative edges in Billy the Kid’s poem about “great stars,” in Ondaatje’s father’s “edging” into the “hatred of his own privacy,”

and in the “balancing” of the herons above; with “White Dwarfs,” Ondaatje concludes *Rat Jelly* with an homage to those “among [his] heroes” (70) “who sail to that perfect edge / where there is no social fuel” (70). In the earlier poems, he honoured those whose balance dramatically failed, those who went *over* that edge. “White Dwarfs” is different: passing over the edge is not done with an explosive meltdown but with a slow cooling. The “perfect edge” is associated with “the perfect white between the words” (71), and this whiteness, in turn, is associated with the interior of the “room [made into] a fridge for Superman” (70). This “white room” is not the “heaven” that it was for Billy, but it is a similarly cool place of relief from the heat of scrutiny.<sup>12</sup> Although a refrigerator is ideally a place of stasis, food in it will eventually spoil; thus, the fridge is a metonym for the white dwarf, a star that is gradually cooling to become a stellar remnant known as a black dwarf (“White dwarf star”). Because the whiteness of the fridge also refers to the page on which “the words” are written, “White Dwarfs” ultimately describes the writer—such as “Dashiehl Hammett” (71)—who resorts to “mouthing the silence” (70) after gradually retreating into seclusion and running out of inspiration in the form of “social fuel.”

The imagery in this poem insists that literary celebrity is the cause of this eventual “silence.” The reference to “Superman” puts this writer in the context of comic-book heroes, the pop-culture of youth, and the Nietzschean *Übermensch* that inspired Layton in his poems about celebrity. This “Superman” is “burned out” (71): he has “exhaust[ed] costume and bones that could perform flight” (70). The mention of “costume” and “perform[ance]” also places the writer in the theatre of public situations that focus on the

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<sup>12</sup> *Rat Jelly* also has a less remarkable poem called “White Room” (p. 22) in which sex is the crash of an aircraft into a desert of flesh described both as “cool fruit” (3) and “sand” (5); pleasure and pain meet in the private “collapse” (10) of two people.

persona or the “costume.” Because “flight” is not possible, the writer is trapped on that stage. The consolation is that, in making privacy impossible, the public elevates the literary celebrity above his peers. In the usual irony, this presumption of greatness and of “success” (71) is torture to the writer, and this torture is implied in the allusion to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ:

that silence of the third cross  
3rd man hung so high and lonely  
we dont hear him say  
say his pain, his unbrotherhood (70)

The emphasis on martyrdom and the yearning for brotherhood recalls major themes of Cohen’s work from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s. The classic symbol of celebrity concludes the poem:

there are those burned out stars  
who implode into silence  
after parading in the sky  
after such choreography what would they wish to speak of anyway (71)

The final line conveys the speaker’s admiration for this ultimately expressive “choreography,” which translates from the Greek *khoreia* and *graphia* as the writing of dance (or the dance of writing); however, “parading in the sky” is akin to being “paraded in the cages” as in “Heron Rex.” The final line, therefore, is bitterly sympathetic about the limitations imposed on the free will of the literary celebrity. All of these details of the poem—allusions to a patriarchal lineage of celebrity, to performance, and to pop-culture, in addition to a terribly ironic religious pretence—make “White Dwarfs” an almost

perfect stereotype of representations of literary celebrity.

“White Dwarfs” is distinctive, however, because it proposes that the flash and fade of literary celebrity can have a long dénouement. In theory, a white dwarf might cool for trillions of years before it becomes a black dwarf (“Star”). Instead of simply describing the rapid disappearance and forgetting of most celebrities, Ondaatje implies that some of them might live long enough in memory to become legendary. What makes this transition possible? The “social fuel” might be depleted, but another kind of fuel might be available. Growth is still possible:

This white that can grow  
is fridge, bed,  
is an egg—most beautiful  
when unbroken, where  
what we cannot see is growing  
in all the colours we cannot see (71)

In “White Dwarfs,” Ondaatje implies that legendary writers pass through a phase of celebrity that might lead them “to die in the ether peripheries” (70); the isolation related to celebrity in “Letters & Other Worlds” is also a problem in “White Dwarfs,” which ends with optimism for “what... is growing.” Whatever it is, the speaker repeats “[what] we cannot see” to suggest that invisibility, as in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, can thwart the gaze of the public.

The crisis and aftermath of celebrity is a serious concern in *Rat Jelly*. The fans in the book seek to communicate with celebrities to alleviate their own sorrows; in turn, celebrities sometimes indulge in the performance that seems to open their private lives to

the view of the fans. Instead of bringing people together, however, celebrity separates them. In poems such as “Letters & Other Worlds,” it provides an excuse that seems to legitimize an audience’s rejection of a prominent but unwelcome person, such as Ondaatje’s father in Ceylon. The imperial lineage of celebrity in “Heron Rex” has status, but Ondaatje seems to prefer those “whose eyes turned off / the sun and imagined it,” as he did by partly rejecting celebrity and choosing to “imagin[e]” it instead. That “sun,” becoming a “White Dwarf,” casts no vital light; the only recourse that Ondaatje proposes is to be invisible and outside the realm of the public despite the isolation.

Ondaatje’s next book happened to be his first novel, or at least a much more novelistic narrative than *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. In 1976, Ondaatje published *Coming Through Slaughter* and retained many elements of his poetry despite the change in forms. While I excluded Atwood from my study partly because her representations of celebrity are in her novels and not in her poetry, *Coming Through Slaughter* is necessary to my argument; it is closely tied to Ondaatje’s earlier poems about celebrity and is a highly poetic novel, not only at the level of the sentence where a calibrated phrase can make prose sound like poetry, but in form: it is compressed, fragmented, imagistic, and contains songs and lists that sometimes function as poetry. Furthermore, *Coming Through Slaughter* is explicitly concerned with what its narrator calls “the twentieth century game of fame” (136). As Lorraine York proposes, it is “Ondaatje’s definitive treatment of fame the destroyer” (140).

As in Ondaatje’s other treatments of public recognition, I argue that in *Coming Through Slaughter* the term *celebrity* is more accurate than *fame*—in this case, because the novel’s main character is a popular musician and pulp magazine editor whose brief

time in the spotlight was intense enough to cause an identity crisis. I have already shown that this crisis is considered in earlier poems, such as “Heron Rex” and “White Dwarfs”; York observes that Solecki and Scobie “have convincingly related [the symbols of celebrity in those poems] to the pervasive imagery of stars and fans [in *Coming Through Slaughter*]” (140) and, for that reason, this chapter will not extensively demonstrate the connections between those works. It will, however, explain *Coming Through Slaughter*’s extension from *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. For *Coming Through Slaughter*, Ondaatje chose a main character who represents—better than Billy the Kid—the racial and spatial aspects of his own celebrity and his own potential transition into legend. This man is the historical jazz musician Charles “Buddy” Bolden, whose 30 years of imprisonment in an asylum were not only the long dénouement to his celebrity but also the required silence (of a “black dwarf,” perhaps) that made his legend possible.

*Coming Through Slaughter* is a loosely historical novel set in New Orleans. Based on Bolden’s career, it ends with the onset of his mental illness and the rapid fading of his celebrity. The narrative begins with the disappearance (c. 1906) of Bolden, “the best and the loudest and most loved jazzman of his time” (8). His wife Nora asks their mutual friend Webb, a police detective, to search for him. With help from the photographer Bellocq, Webb finds Bolden with another woman, Robin. The process of finding Bolden and convincing him to return to his life of celebrity takes “two [...] years” (15). Bolden returns—but soon, while playing jazz in a parade, he loses his sanity. He is committed to an asylum and lives there in almost total obscurity, solitude, and musical silence until he dies. His insanity is usually interpreted as the result of his obsessive need to be spontaneous and unhindered in his music, though I argued in “Parading the Underworld

of New Orleans in Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter*" (2008) that the racially segregated urban geography of New Orleans—a political situation that is never explicitly acknowledged in the novel—must also be considered. However suppressed it might be, race largely determines the narrative of celebrity in *Coming Through Slaughter*. In this chapter, I return to my prior examination of the spatial and racial reasons for Bolden's insanity, but with a new emphasis on what the novel's public and private locations—including its white rooms and dark rooms—suggest about his celebrity.

In *Coming Through Slaughter*, the public spaces are where Buddy performs, such as the parade routes throughout New Orleans. Its private spaces are more numerous. There are the vice districts of the city, where Buddy roams alone, and there is the asylum at Jackson (not far from Slaughter, Louisiana) where Buddy is eventually committed. More often, the spaces are associated with his friends: Bellocq has his darkroom, Webb has his cottage, and Robin and Jaelin have their house. Buddy has none of these spaces, though he goes into each of them, and in each of them he has to cope with his conflicted feelings about his status as a celebrity.

The room he inhabits at Robin and Jaelin's house, for instance, is a place that begins to induce claustrophobia because of his "reputation" (83) as a celebrity. He wants to be with Robin to alleviate the pressure of his celebrity and to forget his irrational suspicion about the fidelity of his wife Nora. Despite having disrupted Robin's life by having an affair with her when he had stayed there as a billet on an earlier occasion, he is allowed into Robin and Jaelin's home again. He soon remarks on her "white room" (83), which Rae claims is "Webb's cabin" (132) and which could also be the asylum. Although the location is ambiguous because of the narrative's chronological disorder, the room's

whiteness is related to the cream and milk scene (65) that unquestionably involves Robin, so I locate it at her house, where he seems to feel partial relief from celebrity. He also feels, however, disappointed that his sense of agency and creativity has not been renewed:

Here. Where I am anonymous and alone in a white room with no history and no parading. So I can make something unknown in the shape of this room. Where I am King of Corners. And Robin who drained my body of its fame when I wanted to find that fear of certainties I had when I first began to play, back when I was unaware that reputation made the room narrower and narrower. (83)

When the verb tense in this passage shifts to the past with his recollection of his first visit to Robin, he seems to reveal why he returned to her: she had “drained” his body of its celebrity. He implies that he continues to embody some of the regality of celebrity by saying, “I am King of Corners,” which ironically echoes “Heron Rex” and the birds that are kings of skies without corners. His later reference to the four corners of his room in the asylum (148) adds emphasis to the irony. “Here” and now, he is relieved to be “anonymous” and “alone” again, but the room feels uncomfortably “narrower” because of his “reputation.” He seems to have expected Robin to help him recover the “fear of certainties” that inspired the spontaneous style that defined his music. Instead, his celebrity ruined his spontaneity and locked him into “certainties.” Worse, he does not even seem to feel “fear.” To some extent, he has already accepted the negative effect of celebrity on his freedom; this “white room” foreshadows the room that later imprisons him in the asylum at Jackson, where he would eventually die.

Never again the shelter from celebrity that Buddy hoped to rediscover, Robin’s

“white room” is associated with other ambivalent images of whiteness in the novel. These images suggest, by association with the “white room,” that Ondaatje is thinking of celebrity especially in relation to race in *Coming Through Slaughter*, whereas he thought of it especially in relation to sexuality in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. For instance, in an argument with Buddy, Robin “flick[s] some cream” (65) onto his face and he automatically reacts by “grabbing the first thing, a jug of milk” (65) and splashing it “all over her” (65). Whiteness is associated with the “chaos” (65) of his unpredictable behaviour. His reaction initially seems to be disproportional to her provocation, but the whiteness of the milk and cream is crucial.

Kamboureli and Glen Lowry, for instance, have noted that whiteness is sometimes a symbol of race in Ondaatje’s work (Lowry 169). Lowry argues that *In the Skin of a Lion* treats whiteness as a sign of race that is “in no way stable” (163). Like other racial signifiers, whiteness is a problematic classification, but it can help us to understand social conflicts causally related to the perception of racial difference. Given the suppressed narrative of racism in the prominent geographic metaphor in the novel,<sup>13</sup> the cream and milk might mean that Robin and Buddy are trying to mark each other with signs of another race—assuming that Robin is also black. Barbour has implied that racial arguments about *Coming Through Slaughter* are not helpful because everyone in the novel is at least symbolically black (102), but I would argue that these characters are not secure in their blackness. Maybe Buddy reacts so dramatically to Robin’s flicking of cream because he resents the implication that his celebrity makes him complicit with

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13 In “Parading the Underworld of New Orleans in Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter*,” I argue that *Coming Through Slaughter* uses geography to draw attention to its otherwise cryptic racial subtext; the novel reveals that Bolden’s identity is harmfully affected by the segregated geography of New Orleans. Racism is an implicit catalyst for his madness.

white people in the exploitation of black people in New Orleans.

The difficulty in locating whiteness in the novel is in itself meaningful. Because white people are generally not part of the segregated black communities in turn-of-the-century New Orleans, they mainly exist in them symbolically. Dealing with a similar situation—the general absence of black people in film noir—Julian Murphet assembles a theory of the “racial unconscious” (22) to explain what is not present and to deal with his lack of evidence. He concludes that, in film noir, American ideology suppresses blackness, which returns out of repression in the figure of the *femme fatale* (27). In the case of the argument between Robin and Buddy in *Coming Through Slaughter*, the whiteness of Robin’s room and her cream and milk might predict the return of symbolic whiteness—associated with the soon-to-re-emerge celebrity that he had once rejected—to Buddy’s life. Significantly, the whiteness is embodied in the most symbolically feminine liquids: she is also marking him with femininity. Like the cream and milk, whiteness can be consumed; in fact, the commercialization of black communities by the “brand names” (2) that eventually invade Buddy’s “geography” (2) is one of the factors that make black people consumers of whiteness.<sup>14</sup> When Buddy says, “I am full of the white privacy” (65), he implies that he has internalized the whiteness associated with celebrity, which has driven him to seek refuge in an ambivalent “privacy” that prevents him from mingling even with “Robin and her friends” (65). Like the sun that rapes Billy the Kid, whiteness has penetrated him and feminized him. Perhaps the only person who has noticed is Robin. By flicking the cream, she is also imitating a male ejaculation; Buddy responds by

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14 Elsewhere in the novel, on p. 43, Buddy remarks that the soap that he lathers onto his customers at his shaving parlor—his day job—gives him a white skin, implying, too, that this role of providing a service assimilates him into the whiteness of an economy that is as cultural as it is commercial.

soaking her with milk, as if to insist on traditional gender roles—as he does by associating her with water (in her bathtub and when they go swimming together), an archetype of femininity. At Robin’s house, whiteness is the symbol that reveals how Buddy’s lack of power is associated with gender, race, and celebrity.

When Webb tracks Buddy to Robin’s house, he disrupts Buddy’s already compromised “heaven” by intervening in the love affair and by reminding Buddy of the public life that he had abandoned. With this reminder, Webb makes a “puppet” (83) of Buddy and erects “the wall of wire barrier glass” (83) between Buddy and Robin. His influence on Buddy derives from their long friendship and from Buddy’s attraction to Webb and his public life. Describing their late teenage years and young adulthood, the narrator states: “They [...] gradually paste their characters onto each other. [...] Their friendship is a public act of repartee [...] They live together for two years” (30). Their overlaying of “their characters” in a public contest (“repartee”) is somewhat like the relationship between Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid.

Although Buddy and Webb spent “all their money on girls, and sometimes on women” (30), their relationship is subtly homoerotic: Buddy spent all his time practising his cornet (an instrument that is both phallic and yonic) while Webb was in the other room playing with his collection of magnets. Like the magnets, they are drawn to each other, “[d]rawn to opposites” (94), as Buddy says of himself and other musicians. Surely it was Webb who helped Buddy become “a social dog” (52). Akin to Garrett and Billy, “it was Webb who was the public figure, Bolden the side-kick” (30); Billy, also known as Billy Bonney, even shares the same initials with Buddy Bolden. *Coming Through Slaughter* does not have a scene that is quite as symbolically obvious as the scene of fusion on the

occasion of Billy's death, but Webb and Buddy otherwise do seem to be roughly symmetrical (public / private), and Webb is clearly the man who returns Buddy to the public and influences his decision to attempt a comeback.

The separation between public and private begins to break down when Webb upsets Buddy's sense of time and space. When Webb comes to Robin's house, Buddy says, "He came here and placed my past and future on this table like a road" (83). Webb not only makes Buddy think of time, but he also makes him think of time in spatial terms ("like a road"). He "point[s]" (86) Buddy to "Webb's cottage on Lake Pontchartrain" (85). Having suggested that Buddy was "wasting" (80) his life by avoiding the spotlight, Webb sends him there to "train" (80) for his comeback. It becomes Buddy's most seemingly private place: he is there for "three weeks [or] four weeks" (100) alone, reminiscing. Narrating his thoughts to Webb, he says, "I'm scared Webb, don't think I will find one person who will be the right audience. All you've done is cut me in half, pointing me here. Where I don't want these answers" (86). The "one person" to be his other "half" might have been Robin, but he left her without much fuss when Webb arrived. Another option would have been Bellocq, but when Webb arrived he told Buddy that Bellocq "killed himself in a fire" (80). Buddy's wife Nora is hardly mentioned in these scenes, despite the fact that she and Buddy had gone to Webb's cottage on their honeymoon (19). Nora, Bellocq, and Robin mainly exist in Buddy's past. In contrast, Webb seems able to propose that Buddy has a "future." By believing (to some extent) that Webb determines the physical and temporal spaces he would inhabit (Webb's cottage, not Robin's house), Buddy personifies Webb as his future: Buddy will be (overly) attached to his public "half," the "right audience" of his celebrity.

Webb's cottage is also the place where Buddy discovers Webb's strange radio. Because Webb went looking for Buddy in the spring of 1906 (15) and Buddy needed "two more years" (15) before coming home, his visit to the cottage happens around 1908, many years before the mid-1920s when radio broadcasts became common and receivers became widely available. Buddy makes note of its condition: "The wiring old" (91). The presence of an old radio in 1908 is simply an anachronism, but it is also a sign of Webb's uncanny control over Buddy's "past and future" and over the balance of public and private in Buddy's life. Marshall McLuhan argues that radio is experienced "with person-to-person directness that is private and intimate" (302) but that it is, actually, a public medium capable of instigating an "almost instant reversal of individualism into collectivism" (304). Buddy has just spent two years in relative solitude trying to recover the "individualism" that his celebrity had started to distort. Because Buddy is preoccupied by nostalgia, he does not realize that Webb's radio is conditioning him for his re-entry into the public life. Buddy describes the radio broadcast: "For two hours I've been listening. People talking about a crisis I missed that has been questionably solved. Couldn't understand it. They were not being clear, they were not giving me the history of it all, and I didn't know who was supposed to be the hero of the story" (91).<sup>15</sup> Buddy does not know who is supposed to be "the hero of the story," but Webb does. Unable to understand the value of privacy, Webb wants Buddy to be the same hero that he was when his celebrity was at its peak. Buddy is confused because "the history of it all" has not yet happened. The anachronistic radio transmits a message from the "future" that only Webb can

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15 The phrase "the history of it all" might be an allusion to Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966). Book I of that novel is entitled "The History of Them All."

decipher: Buddy will train for his heroic comeback, return to central New Orleans, resume his life of celebrity, and very likely be recorded for playback and broadcast (though this latter event never occurs).

He would thereby experience the “crisis” of being stuck in a box, such as the radio—a figurative “room.” The presence of the radio from the future emphasizes the threat of Webb’s control over Buddy, or at least Buddy’s unconscious perception (if that is possible) of such control. By sending Buddy to the cottage (a false shelter) and exposing him to the radio, Webb makes Buddy’s private rooms public.

Buddy is unquestionably “[d]rawn” to the appealingly “public” Webb, but he is also drawn to Bellocq, the person whose crippling hydrocephaly makes him an outcast and an especially private character.<sup>16</sup> Recalling the “perfect edge” beyond “social fuel” in “White Dwarfs,” the narrator states that Buddy and Bellocq “had talked for hours moving gradually off the edge of the social world” (61). Bellocq likes Buddy because “[h]e didn’t treat you like a crip or anything” (47). Buddy appreciates Bellocq for not fawning over him as fans do. “You don’t think much of this music do you?” asks Buddy. “Not yet” (88), says Bellocq. Buddy remarks, “[Bellocq was] watching me waste myself and wanting me to step back into my body as if into a black room and stumble against whatever was there. Unable then to be watched by others. More and more I said he was wrong and more and more I spent whole evenings with him” (88). Buddy seems to think that Bellocq, in opposition to Webb, thinks that a life of celebrity is a “waste.” Bellocq’s point of view is disturbing because it dismisses the importance of Buddy’s music, but it is

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<sup>16</sup> Actually, Webb and Bellocq are more symmetrical than Webb and Buddy, whose split allegiances between celebrity and privacy make him the dividing line in the Rorschach inkblot, which I used as an analogy for the relationship of Billy the Kid and Pat Garrett.

appealing because it proposes that in blackness Buddy could recover his privacy, in the same way that Billy the Kid could recover it through his invisibility.

Significantly, Bellocq seems to want Buddy to retreat into a “black room,” which initially seems to be the exact opposite of Robin’s “white room,” but which raises similar questions about race in relation to how Buddy is known. The “black room” is tentatively (“as if”) associated with Buddy’s “body” and possibly his skin colour, but it also relates to Bellocq’s job in portrait photography. The “black room” is Bellocq’s darkroom, the place where he develops film negatives and makes photographs. When Webb convinces Bellocq to develop an image of Buddy and his band to help in the search for him, the narrator describes the process of Bellocq and Webb making Buddy into an image: “Watching their friend float into the page smiling at them, the friend who in reality had reversed the process and gone back into white, who in this bad film seemed to have already half-receded with that smile which may not have been a smile at all, which may have been his mad dignity” (48). The narrator professes to know “reality,” seems to assume that “reality” is a situation prior (or alternative) to the replication of images, and implies that Bellocq and Webb only know Buddy as an image, as a seemingly happy (“smiling”) black man. According to the narrator, “reality” relates to going “back into white”: reversing the “process” of becoming an image, but also reverting to a film negative or an opposite. The historical Bolden was black, and his photo appears in the editions of the novel that I have seen, but the scene in the darkroom suggests that Buddy is whitened by the process of photography, one of the arts and technologies that support celebrity, just as the aforementioned “brand names” might have whitened the traditionally black neighbourhoods of New Orleans.

I doubt that Ondaatje is suggesting that, prior to the white flash of the camera, black people lived in an ideally private world, but I would argue that Ondaatje is deliberately mystifying Buddy's racial identity. On a film negative, a black man would appear white, just as a white man would appear black, suggesting, first, that racial signifiers in *Coming Through Slaughter* cannot be fixed to a certain and unchanging meaning; and second, that racial signifiers can be manipulated by acts of representation such as photography. The process of developing Buddy in the darkroom is also an acknowledgment that Charles "Buddy" Bolden is only known to Ondaatje through a legend based in part on a single image and on mere celebrity; thus, Buddy is not really known, and Ondaatje ultimately undermines the narrator's assumptions about the "reality" of Buddy's feelings or identity by deconstructing the "reality" of race.

As in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, the darkroom in *Coming Through Slaughter* is a site of potential transgression. In the darkroom, conventions that determine identity based on race break down (as conventions of gender and sexuality did in Billy's case). It is a space in which one face, or one race, seems to transform into a different colour, becoming what Homi Bhabha might call a "menace" (132) to the authority of dominant races and sexes. It is also a less governed space, which is another reason for Buddy's appreciation of Bellocq and his freedom from the spotlight. The darkroom, however, is also the site of significant betrayals. It is where Billy is murdered by a man who was once his friend. It is also the place where Bellocq gives the photograph of Buddy to Webb, thereby removing Buddy from a potentially wholesome privacy and making his self-destructive comeback possible. The transgressions in the darkroom contravene not only social codes, but also personal trust.

Bellocq is not the only character in *Coming Through Slaughter* to take advantage of Buddy, but he is the only one whom Buddy eventually seems to blame for promising relief from celebrity while delivering something altogether different. Because Bellocq is the only historically white character in the novel (Barbour 101)—though he is described, in terms that evoke both the whiteness of the sun and the blackness of shade, as “a small noon shadow” (89)—one of the few generalizations I can make about Ondaatje’s opinion of whiteness in *Coming Through Slaughter* is that it is related to broken promises. Webb was always public and made no excuses about what he wanted for Buddy. In contrast, according to Buddy, Bellocq “tempted” (89) him and “decei[ved]” (89) him with a hope of privacy. Buddy says, “He had tempted me out of the world of audiences where I had tried to catch everything thrown at me. He offered mole comfort, mole deceit” (89). For Buddy, escaping “audiences” means going underground, into “mole” territory and into darkness, which harbours a reassuring “comfort.” Webb found him because Bellocq supplied a photograph of him (in conjunction with a tip from Crawley on p. 28), so Buddy realizes that the darkness also harbours a threat of “deceit” that he might not have noticed when he was spending time with Bellocq.

Indeed, Buddy is remarkably naïve about Bellocq’s potentially exploitative uses of photography. Why does Buddy introduce Bellocq to the prostitutes and convince them to pose for him (especially when his future wife Nora is among them and is the first he convinces)? One answer is that Buddy might have thought he could help Bellocq by introducing him to whores. Bellocq, naïve in different ways, assumes that the women at the brothel “let [Buddy] in” because he was “famous” (47) and, of course, simply because “[h]e used to screw a lot” (47). Bellocq “thought his friend to be [...] patronising” (61)—a

legitimate complaint if Buddy assumed that Bellocq's disability made him not only unwanted as a sexual partner but also made him "a harmless man" (125). Perhaps neither of them understood that photography was Bellocq's way of exercising power over his subjects by subordinating their images as surrogate victims of his seemingly unconscious desire to inflict sexual violence. What I am suggesting appears in the narrator's description of Bellocq's procedure for getting a satisfactory image:

One snap to quickly catch her scorning him and then waiting, waiting for minutes so she would become self-conscious towards him and the camera and her status, embarrassed at just her naked arms and neck and remembers for the first time in a long while the roads she imagined she could take as a child. And he photographed that. (50)

As she forgets the presence of the camera while she is remembering her childhood, Bellocq gets the image he wants. He captures her nostalgia and child-like vulnerability. He captures her privacy. By later marrying his photographs with "knife slashes across the bodies" (51) while leaving the actual women otherwise unharmed, he reveals a desire that he can only satisfy through sublimation. Again, Ondaatje reverses typical expectations about racial identity by making the only historically white character into the most marginalized and therefore the most symbolically black of his characters. Furthermore, whereas Buddy attacks Pickett with a razor (which is the only actual weapon to suit the novel's critique of celebrity, given that celebrity is "a razor in the body"), Bellocq's camera is a symbolic weapon that lets him vent his frustration without actually attacking anyone. Ondaatje seems to assume that Bellocq's frustration in being alone and private is less likely than is the frustration of celebrity to motivate real violence against others.

Bellocq's violence against women is not "real" in the sense of being directed at people's bodies rather than at images of people's bodies, but, in different ways, both his photography and the influence of his privacy lead Buddy to real harm. Bellocq kills himself before Buddy goes crazy, so he never becomes aware of Buddy's final parade and his subsequent imprisonment in the asylum; however, Bellocq eventually becomes "[a]ware" that *he* was "the patronising one" because he "tempted" Buddy into making a "fetish" of "mystic privacy" (61). Buddy had been "enviably public" (61) until then. Although nothing in the novel explicitly claims that Bellocq was also aware that giving his photograph of Buddy to Webb might harm its subject, its association with the slashed photographs of the prostitutes is significant. Ondaatje seems to be suggesting that Bellocq's photography had helped to feminize Buddy by objectifying him through an unconsciously sexual, masculine, and violent gaze. The connection between the photographs suggests an additional possibility: Bellocq might have realized that, just as he exposes the privacy of his female models, he exposes Buddy to Webb and makes him vulnerable to the "knife slashes" (or razor slashes) of the public life. If he reaches this awareness, it is through his sympathy for Buddy, not for the women he has objectified.

The exact motive for Bellocq's suicide remains ambiguous, but his ironically performative suicide implies that he intuitively knew Buddy would be destroyed by returning out of privacy to a life of celebrity. He chooses to start the fire in his room from halfway up the walls, lining chairs around the room so that he can reach that higher mark. The surrounding chairs make the room seem to have "a balcony running all the way around it" (64); in effect, he creates for himself a theatre, though it is empty except for him. Although he does not seem to be in his darkroom, he is probably in the room that

Webb found him in, which was also dark (46). Like Billy the Kid, he dies in a dark room made suddenly bright. The fire traps him in the sudden “whiteness” (64) of the room, and “he crashes finally into the wall, only there is no wall any more only a fire curtain and he disappears into and through it” (64). The curtain, too, is a sign of the theatre. Like the window that Buddy broke without putting his hand through (10) and the window that he asked Webb to put his hands through (89), the curtain of fire represents the “edge” that separates publicity and the total experience of privacy that is death; Buddy delays his crossing of this boundary, but Bellocq hastens to breach it. In effect, Bellocq’s death is the curtain call after the performance of his lifetime. Ironically, Bellocq was never a celebrity—a fact that implies, on the one hand, that Ondaatje is not seriously warning anyone about the fatal effects of celebrity, or, on the other hand, that he thinks the people who serve (however unwittingly) as “stage managers” for exploited celebrities might deserve a certain poetic justice, such as Bellocq’s fate.

Bellocq’s final performance is more fatal than, but not as bleak as, some of Buddy’s performances. In spite of their desperation, Buddy’s actual performances are ebullient musical improvisations; however, his symbolic performances are grievously strained by limits on his freedom associated with his celebrity. The threat of celebrity to his freedom is implied early in the novel when Buddy strikes a window in an argument: it “starred and crumpled slowly two floors down. His hand miraculously uncut. It had acted exactly like a whip violating the target and still free, retreating from the outline of a star” (10). By appropriating the whip, the weapon of a slave driver, Buddy’s hand reacts against his heritage of slavery: the historical Bolden was the grandson of a slave (Ward 21). Buddy’s hand must be perfectly controlled, otherwise the shattering glass would

lacerate his fingers and make him unable to perform as a cornet player; indeed, the narrator calls the striking of the glass a “performance” (10). “Suicide of the hands” is Buddy’s “ultimate nightmare” (44); safeguarding his hands and using them so precisely protects his career, but then he must also cope with celebrity. His hand both creates and recoils from the outline of a star, approaching but also “retreating” from the symbol of his celebrity. He wants to be on that “edge” where he is “still free.” Eventually, however, his celebrity fades; his “star” “crumple[s]” as the window belatedly shatters. “White Dwarfs” foreshadowed Buddy’s star-like burn-out and his solitary life after he exhausted his “social fuel.” As in that poem, which refers to “those burned out stars / who implode into silence / after parading in the sky,” the “crumpl[ing]” of Buddy’s celebrity happens in the final moments of his “parading” through the streets of New Orleans.

Buddy’s final parade is literal, but it is preceded by a crucially symbolic “parade” that implies that even his literal parades are exploitative, commercially and sexually, and that they emasculate him (as the scene with the dancer later suggests). On an occasion that he ironically calls “[p]arading around alone” (116) through part of the vice district known as “black Storyville” (Ward 26; Marquis 49-50), he notices “mattress whores” (116)—so called because they carried mattresses so they could have sex anywhere at the opportune moment—who “walk up and down [...] moving like sentries to show they haven’t got broken ankles” (116). Pimps, he says, would resort to violence to prevent their girls from leaving the neighbourhood. After his walk, Buddy decides that “my brain tonight has a mattress strapped to its back” (117). He identifies with the “mattress whores” of black Storyville because of what they are selling and how; he becomes a symbolic prostitute, a role that is arguably related to his celebrity. He says, on a different

occasion, “All my life I seemed to be a parcel on a bus. I am the famous fucker. I am the famous barber. I am the famous cornet player” (104). He believes that being “famous” is like being “parcel[led]” or commodified as a “fucker” in the same way that prostitutes are valued for their bodies and services. We usually imagine that celebrities have wealth, status, and power, but Buddy does not. Not only does his celebrity occasionally seem to reverse his racial identity, it has a similar effect on his gender (though perhaps not to the same degree as in Billy’s case). To some scholars, celebrity is the public’s “colonization” (Rojek 11) or “invasive reconfiguration” (Latham 110) of someone’s privacy. Such penetration is made literal in the example of the “mattress whores” who are receptacles for the whiteness of semen. Assuming that these whores are women, we might interpret Buddy’s emasculation as a subversion of the masculinity associated with jazz musicians; however, we might also realize that it reinforces sexist gender roles by suggesting that being feminized is one of Buddy’s worst nightmares (and so his dreams of cutting off his fingers or hands reveal castration anxiety). In his figurative “parade” through black Storyville, Buddy comes to understand his social position, which is at the bottom of the mainstream hierarchy not despite but *because* of his celebrity.

His struggle, and the limited extent of his power in light of his celebrity, is revealed in his musical performances on the streets. From Buddy’s “famous entrance” (33) onto the music scene to his dramatic exit, the most public moments in his life happen in parades. In turn-of-the-century New Orleans, parades were political events. Some Mardi Gras parades would not allow blacks, women, Jews, or Italians to participate (Gill 7). In response, jazz musicians would organize funeral processions to honor recently deceased people in their community; these “freedom celebrations” (Regis 45) were ways

of resisting cultural assimilation and prescribed invisibility. In the context of such social constraints, Buddy's performances in parades are tactical, what Michel de Certeau might call "the art of the weak" (de Certeau 37). De Certeau explains that in places that are dominated by mainstream culture, people outside of that culture might rely on their resourcefulness to manipulate the spaces to their advantage (xxi, 35-7). The way Buddy is described by Frank Lewis illustrates de Certeau's argument:

He walks out of the crowd, struggles through onto the street and begins playing, too loud but real and strong you couldn't deny him, and then he went back into the crowd. Then fifteen minutes later, 300 yards down the street, he jumps through the crowd onto the street again, plays, and then goes off. After two or three times we were waiting for him and he came.  
(33)

Most notably, Buddy is constantly interacting with the "crowd" in attempts to assert himself ("you couldn't deny him"). Whether or not he accepts or rejects assimilation and invisibility, he seems to be "struggl[ing]" to be seen. His musical restlessness, his testing and teasing of the crowd—he tries to show that he cannot be constrained. The crowd, however, learns to anticipate him. Lewis says that "we were waiting for him and he came." They are patient and demanding enough that Buddy exhausts his resourcefulness and returns to the crowd, seemingly accepting its power over him while accepting his desire (and Webb's desire for him) to be visible to an audience.

In the third and final parade in the novel, Buddy "[goes] berserk" (135)—demonstrating in a "[p]arade of ego" (129) that the fulfillment of his desire is closely related to meltdown and fusion. The dramatic culmination of his celebrity seems to be

instigated by a woman who dances to the music of his band. He says that “she moves free of the crowd and travels at our speed between us and the crowd” (129). He begins to pay less attention to playing the song because she has emerged as an individual from the crowd, in much the same way as he does in the block quotation above. She becomes his competitor. He reacts accordingly: “Warning slide over to her and hug and squawk over her and shoulder her into the crowd” (129); he seems to be trying to dominate her—to make her less “free”—which is exactly what he disliked about the musical style of his rival Robichaux (91). Ironically, her competition motivates him to reduce his freestyling music to something restrictive. He allows the performance to become a contest, a clash of “ego.” While interacting with the dancer on his descent into madness, he says he “go[es] round and round in the centre of the Liberty-Iberville connect. Then silent. For something’s fallen in my body and I can’t hear the music as I play it. The notes more often now. She hitting each note with her body before it is even out so I know what I do through her” (130). She begins to outperform him; as a symbol of his public, she begins to take control of him, and his madness becomes circular (“round and round” he goes). She also represents what he has become: an egomaniac driven to seek all the attention and incapable of seeing beyond himself. “God,” he says, “this is what I wanted to play for, if no one else I always guessed there would be this, this mirror somewhere, she closer to me now [...]. Never seen her before but testing me taunting me to make it past her, old hero, old ego tested against one as cold and pure as himself” (130). He imagines the fusion of private and public in the single image of “this mirror.” By becoming one with his audience, he breaks down, and ironically “[removes] himself from the twentieth century game of fame” (136); celebrity has no further use for him.

Buddy's "mirror" in the parade returns five pages later as the mirror that Ondaatje reaches through; this latter scene is the most prominently intrusive of Ondaatje's authorial appearances in the text, and it helps to suggest the extent of Ondaatje's desire for his own celebrity. He appears as a character to reveal what initially attracted him to the mostly forgotten story of Charles "Buddy" Bolden: "There was the sentence, 'Buddy Bolden who became a legend when he went berserk in a parade...' What was there in that, before I knew your nation your colour your age, that made me push my arm forward and spill it through the front of your mirror and clutch myself? Did not want to pose in your accent but think in your brain and body" (135). What was there? He mentions legend, insanity, and public activities such as parades; these topics of major interest to Ondaatje inspire him to begin the investigation of Bolden's life. "Nation," "colour," and "age" inspire him to continue that investigation because of their similarity to his own (see below); this similarity leads him to claim that he wants not to "pose" but to "think in [Bolden's] brain and body." He wants to stand in for Bolden—to some extent, to *be* him.

The historical Bolden was an American of African ancestry whose meltdown happened when he was 31 years old (133), around the same age as Ondaatje during the writing of *Coming Through Slaughter*, but their national and racial similarities are not as close: Ondaatje had the privilege of being able to leave Ceylon and be educated in England before moving to Canada; Bolden could not escape New Orleans. As Ondaatje notes in *Running in the Family*, he is of both Dutch and Tamil descent (119), but his "colour[ed]" heritage is often unnoticeable, unlike Bolden's, regardless of how much Bolden might have internalized whiteness. Because of these differences (and seventy years of separation), Ondaatje can only "clutch [him]self" and cannot reach Bolden

except through a legend (an incomplete story sparked by celebrity). Although the superimposition of Ondaatje's image on that of Bolden when he reaches through the "mirror" is an example of the metaphor of celebrity (the public—Ondaatje as fan—fusing with Bolden), and contrary to that implied promise of celebrity (total access to the private life of the celebrity), Ondaatje refuses to (and actually cannot) give us Charles "Buddy" Bolden in full; he makes a similar refusal concerning himself.

At the end of *Coming Through Slaughter*, Ondaatje again acknowledges that he was unable to fuse (to merge through the mirror) with the historical Bolden: "I sit with this room. With the grey walls that darken into corner. And one window with teeth in it. Sit so still that you can hear your hair rustle in your shirt. Look away from the window when clouds and other things go by. Thirty-one years old. There are no prizes" (160). Because the sentence about "prizes" is associated with the approximate age of both Bolden and Ondaatje, he seems to be suggesting that neither of them won those "prizes." In other words, there is no recognition for either of them—at least, not the kind that supports celebrity. Emerging from these last sentences are some very mixed feelings: grief, because Bolden's life ended tragically; regret, because Ondaatje did not live through the same crisis of celebrity (or at least not to the same degree); and, for the same reason as his regret, relief. Ondaatje's "grey" room reflects these mixed feelings. Neither a white room nor a darkroom, it is a space where black and white mix, where past and future converge, and where gender bends—but where, despite the disintegration of these polarities, the author ultimately fails to bridge the extremes. The window with "teeth" is symbolically the same as the one that Buddy "starred and crumpled," and violence expresses both the frustration and relief of incomplete fusion. Ondaatje imagines going

“into and through” but does not actually pass over that “edge” himself.

From his own imagined room, to the rooms of Bellocq, Webb, and Robin, Ondaatje creates private spaces whose windows into public spaces are in a condition of ongoing breakdown. The imagined geography in *Coming Through Slaughter* is not only an indirect sign of historical segregation and limits imposed on Buddy because of racism; the locations in the novel also symbolize Buddy’s inability to escape celebrity, which he probably thought would take on the qualities of his freestyling music. Instead, his celebrity takes on the qualities of the asylum where he lived as a “black dwarf” for the last 24 years of his life. His celebrity counteracts his tactical manipulation of space and forces him to parade along a determined route that ends in figurative slavery. It casts him in the role of a prostitute. It corrupts the blackness of his racial heritage and his privacy by colonizing that blackness with whiteness and with heteronormative expectations.

*Coming Through Slaughter* is a more total indictment of celebrity than *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* because of its more balanced view; it acknowledges the appeal of celebrity through Webb’s influence on Buddy, but then it shows that the negative consequences of celebrity outweigh the appeal. In *Coming Through Slaughter*, celebrity ultimately restricts passage through space, marks people with racial and national colours, demands sexual subservience while prescribing gender, and predicts a loss of freedom; Ondaatje then breaks apart the fused self of the celebrity so that the fragments cannot be found by history, only by legend. Indeed, the fragmentation of the novel ultimately preserves Bolden’s status as a legend and thereby helps to preserve some of Bolden’s freedom from being defined from outside, which is what often happens to celebrities.

Worth considering briefly is Ondaatje’s negotiation of celebrity and legend in the

context of his own family. Ondaatje's next book composed almost fully of new material was his novelistic memoir *Running in the Family*, which is the "centre of the rumour" (64) about the Faulknerian downfall of his family. It begins with his relatives comprising one of "the best known and wealthiest" (172) dynasties in Ceylon and ends with his parents toiling among the working class. *Running in the Family* goes beyond using artist-figures such as Billy the Kid and Buddy Bolden and claims celebrity for Ondaatje's actual lineage and, by extension, for himself. Asked years later if he had ever had any "celebrity" experiences," Ondaatje said, "At an airport a guy looked at my name and said, 'Oh, Mr. Ondondangie, I'm your biggest fan.' That's now a running joke in my family" (Schneller R5)—but even in 1981, celebrity was "running" in his "family." To publish a book about the celebrity of one's own family—or to publish any autobiographical book, really—an author (and a publisher) must believe that the degree of his or her own celebrity will be enough to intrigue readers and other buyers; otherwise, the author must make the content especially appealing or sensational. *Running in the Family* does both. It relies partly on the recognizability of Ondaatje's own name and partly on a mythic tale based on adventures associated with his father's alcoholism. In its magic realism, it is much more fabulous and somewhat less elegiac than "Letters & Other Worlds" from *Rat Jelly*, but it nevertheless continues to imagine the personal consequences of celebrity. By extending the theme of alcoholism related to the celebrity of Pat Garrett in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and Buddy Bolden (who might also have been alcoholic) in *Coming Through Slaughter*, Ondaatje makes the self-destructive aspect of celebrity into an aspect of his own private life. By also insisting that the memoir is composed of "rumour," he promotes his own transition from celebrity to legend.

Despite the risk of exposing his private life by indirectly admitting to rumours about his family in Canada, in 1984 Ondaatje published *Secular Love*, which is partly about the breakup of his first marriage and the beginning of the relationship that would lead to his second (Jewinski 107-12). Although the collection's emphasis is on relationships and not on celebrity, one of its long poems invokes celebrity as a way of expressing a difficult personal transition. In the epigraph to "Tin Roof" (which was published separately in 1982), one of Elmore Leonard's characters says, "I'm trying to tell you how I feel without exposing myself" (n.p.). Solecki, reviewing *Secular Love*, claims that "[t]he speaker in most of the lyrics seems to be Ondaatje but he's rarely interested in enacting or describing his darkest and most problematic emotions and situations" (126). Instead, Solecki explains, Ondaatje's laconic attitude and highly controlled style "hint at repressed or displaced experiences and aspects of the self the writer is unwilling or unable to deal with" (126). In the beginning of "Tin Roof" the speaker says, "This last year I was sure / I was going to die" (24), but this is probably the most direct personal statement in the book. Indeed, Ondaatje avoids "exposing [him]self" by indirectly expressing his feelings, though in some moments his private persona seems to be threatened by celebrity.

Nevertheless, his feelings are nostalgically redirected at the culture of celebrity in general. *Secular Love* contains over a dozen references to people of considerable fame or celebrity, mostly American movie stars and popular musicians of the 1940s and 1950s, when Ondaatje was a boy. The speaker exclaims, in "Tin Roof," "I was brought up on movies and song!" (40). This statement and the references to celebrities contribute to a feeling of nostalgia for the end of an era, such as the Golden Age of Hollywood.

*Secular Love's* conspicuous smattering of celebrities is never Canadian, but Ondaatje's interest in celebrity exists alongside his meditative reflections about being unhappy and writing poetry. In "Tin Roof," which is otherwise a monologue, someone identified as "X" (37) asks, in parenthesis, "Do you want / to be happy and write?" (27) and says later, "Ah you should be happy and write" (37). The speaker answers, "No I am not happy // lucky though" (37). Already having said, "This last year I was sure / I was going to die," he now states that he is "not happy" but "lucky"—lucky, I would argue, to be alive. The implied marital crisis might have almost killed him, but so might have the undertow of poetry itself. In "Tin Roof," poetry is described as a "sea" (43) that "we" (27) allow ourselves to drown in after being launched into it "by giant catapults / of pain loneliness deceit and vanity" (43). These four motives ("pain loneliness deceit and vanity") come together most clearly when the speaker identifies with Humphrey Bogart near the end of the poem.

Bogart is one of many famous people and celebrities in *Secular Love*. Authors such as Rilke, Yeats, Lorca, Cervantes, Neruda, and Shakespeare mingle with celebrities such as Bogart, John Wayne, Frank Sinatra, Burt Lancaster, Tony Curtis, Billy Holiday, Billy Graham, and Bessie Smith. Although none of the authors is American, all the performers are—a fact that shows Ondaatje's affinity for American pop culture and his interest in relating to an American audience. As usual in the discourses of famous literature and American fandom, the authors need only a single name, whereas the celebrities are usually referred to by both first and last names.

The exception is Bogart, who is granted an authorial status that brings him closer to Ondaatje's own status as an author—even though Ondaatje had not yet been, like

Bogart, a celebrity in full sun. In “Tin Roof,” Ondaatje imagines what could have happened to Bogart after the film *Casablanca* (1942). The speaker states, “I could write my suite of poems / for Bogart drunk / six months after the departure at Casablanca” (40). Ondaatje’s private persona has conflated Bogart with his character, Rick, as fans often do to celebrities. In the film, Bogart plays Rick, an apolitical businessman who finally makes a decision to choose a side in World War II by sending his former lover, Ilsa, to safety with her husband in America. The speaker of the poem could easily have imagined the “pain loneliness deceit and vanity” that Rick might have felt after sending away Ilsa without telling her in advance about his plan. In “Late Movies with Skyler” from *There’s a Trick with a Knife I’m Learning To Do* (1979), Ondaatje writes that

In the movies of my childhood the heroes  
after skilled swordplay and moral victories  
leave with absolutely nothing  
to do for the rest of their lives. (97)

In the case of *Casablanca*, having “nothing / to do” also means having no one to love. Because the speaker has conflated Rick and Bogart, readers are implicitly asked to imagine what Ondaatje might have perceived in himself to justify the comparison with the unhappy hero Rick as played by Bogart. The obvious answer is the “pain loneliness deceit and vanity” of having lost the girl—motives that also inspired *Secular Love*.

The less obvious answer comes from Ondaatje’s perception of himself as Bogart’s audience. Ondaatje was only a year old when *Casablanca* was released. He draws attention to his age at the end of the Bogart passage, when the speaker asks, “What about Burt Lancaster / limping away at the end of *Trapeze*? / Born in 1943. And I saw that six

times” (40). *Trapeze* was released in 1956 when Ondaatje, born “in 1943,” was 13.<sup>17</sup> He seems to have negatively reinterpreted Rick’s heroic actions and now associates Rick with “Lancaster / limping away” and with himself, a fan of *Trapeze*. My suspicion is that these associations also relate to the end of the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry; the weariness and sense of pause in “Tin Roof” suggest that Ondaatje, like Lancaster and Bogart as he imagines them, barely survived a time of intense strain, such as a personal crisis or the frenzy of activity in Canadian poetry in the 1960s and 1970s. The themes and mood—the sense of an ending—of “Tin Roof” are as ambivalent and uncertain as in Cohen’s *Death of a Lady’s Man* (1978), which marked, as I argued in previous chapters, the approximate end of that era. Ondaatje’s perception of himself in other celebrities in *Secular Love* suggests that he was an audience—and a celebrity—who had gone along for the exhausting ride and was trying to imagine what “to do” next, and how.

The crisis of *Secular Love*—or at least of “Tin Roof”—is that the solitude gained by having lost the girl enables poetry to be written but “brings no wisdom” (42); it is not a crisis of life and death but of understanding. The problem is that the speaker’s vocation seems to insist on interfering in his life and changing him (into his own audience) in ways that he did not anticipate; the rain—an extension of the “sea,” which symbolizes poetry in the passage I have already considered above—rattles the shelter of his cabin at Honolulu in almost the same way that Buddy’s vocation came to get him in the solitude of Webb’s cottage. “Tin Roof” seems to be set in Honolulu, as its references to “the Pacific Rim” (24) suggest. Honolulu’s distance from the mainland makes it an appropriate setting for

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17 Ondaatje might have seen *Trapeze* in the theatres, but he must have seen *Casablanca* on television—probably in the late 1950s or 1960s.

the remembering of other places. The speaker says that he knows his “small cabin” (24) on that tropical island so well that he “could rise in the dark / sit at the table and write without light” (24). This image recalls dark rooms from *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and *Coming Through Slaughter*; however, because writing in the dark is hypothetical (he “could” write that way), the speaker is not actually in the same dark rooms as those in earlier works. He seems to have retreated from sites of celebrity, as Buddy did when he went to Webb’s cabin and heard the mysterious radio broadcast.

Accordingly, in *Secular Love*, the cabin’s “tin roof [is] a wind run radio [that] catches the noises of the world” (28). Webb’s radio manipulated Buddy into returning to his life of music and celebrity. In the Honolulu of “Tin Roof,” even the weather seems to conspire to expose the speaker—surely someone positioned in relation to celebrity (such as Ondaatje)—to a “world” that could manipulate him into returning from isolation to society and audiences for his poetry.

In “Tin Roof,” the celebrity and the audience form a relationship by watching each other—as when the fan (the ventilation device that symbolizes the audience) “see[s]” (40) Bogart and Bogart “see[s]” (40) the fan. In “Tin Roof,” the speaker’s audience is also represented by geckoes (small tropical lizards that can climb smooth surfaces). The geckoes are an audience akin to the sparrows with “infra red eyes” in “Postcard from Piccadilly Street,” which I mentioned near the beginning of this chapter. The speaker notes that “[g]eckoes climb / the window to peer in” (24); they prevent him from being totally secluded. He seems to be worthy of some attention, and the geckoes are not unlike fans or members of the paparazzi “peer[ing] in.” Thinking later about the geckoes looking in through the window, the speaker states, “There are those who are in / and there are

those who look in” (29). Initially, the speaker is in, looking out. Solecki argues that Ondaatje is both in and out (“Coming Through” 128). One sign that Solecki is correct is that the speaker is sometimes in the same position as the geckoes. For example, in a nested poem in “Tin Roof” called “Rainy Night Talk,” the speaker wonders what faraway women living in “a city of suicides” (38) were thinking while he

put [his] hands  
sweating  
on the cold  
window  
on the edge  
of the trough of this city [...] (39)

The speaker is still inside, looking out, but his posture is like that of the geckoes and suggests that, regardless of the degree of his celebrity, he is also an audience remembering these female performers—cheerleaders and Miss America contestants—one of whom is “from Kansas” (38), whence came Ondaatje’s second wife (Jewinski 107-8).

In one scene in “Tin Roof,” the speaker and the gecko are so similar that he is evidently at the symbolic “edge” between the private and the public—or, in this case, between being “in” and “looking in.” Talking about himself on one occasion, he says that

He focuses on the gecko  
almost transparent body  
how he feels now  
everything passing through him like light. (28)

At one point, he “gazes / through gecko / [...] / into sea” (25); symbolically, then, he

seems to stare through both his audience and himself into his poetry (which was represented, earlier, as the “sea”). Notably, he is not staring through his poetry into himself, and a part of him remains out of sight and private. His poetry has taken precedence as the object of his attention. His gaze differs from that of the gecko, which is focussed on the speaker as if it were an audience. The gecko is, however, also a sign of the speaker’s merely partial visibility to himself and to his audience; it is a sign of the difficulty in knowing oneself and another. The speaker later reveals that “[i]n certain mirrors / he cannot see himself at all. / He is joyous and breaking down. The tug over the cliff” (28). Although he is “not happy” elsewhere, here he is “joyous,” possibly because he *wants* the “[break] down” of his visible self and the compulsion to go over the “edge” of the “cliff.” His invisibility and his implied desire for it make him similar to Billy the Kid, who achieved invisibility through death. The use of the third person reinforces this intertextual connection by suggesting an out-of-body experience akin to that of a ghost looking upon his body from a disembodied perspective.

The difference, however, is that the speaker of “Tin Roof” is definitely and significantly alive, even if the “certain mirrors” hint that celebrity might be vampiric. He was “sure [he] was going to die” but he did not, and for that reason, “Tin Roof” is more concerned with life than with death; he is not concerned with legend because he knows that his death is not yet imminent. Given Ondaatje’s prior use of characters who symbolize him to some extent and the especially autobiographical content of *Secular Love*, the speaker’s visibility only in *some* mirrors probably means that Ondaatje understood that he was still in a state of liminal or incomplete celebrity—and ambivalent about a closeness to the public that made him feel the ironic “joy” of breakdown.

Like *Running in the Family*, “Tin Roof” is set in an exotic locale where the celebrity seems not entirely comfortable and where self-reflection seems to be a function of the place. Throughout the poem, the process of self-reflection encourages the celebrity to think not only of himself but also of others—particularly his audience.<sup>18</sup> Because they are symbolically visible to each other, a reversal of positions or a fusion of identities becomes possible: the speaker almost becomes the gecko; Rick becomes Bogart, and the speaker, to some extent, becomes Bogart, too. As a fan, Ondaatje suggests that the social function of celebrity as religion depends on this illusion of mutual identification—a “secular love” between the musician or movie star and the fan. Understanding that his own celebrity is not yet fully realized, Ondaatje ponders his own willingness to develop such love, especially when it might drive him into isolation and away from the romantic and familial relationships that are becoming more important to his poetry.

In his own life, and not only in his creative writing, Ondaatje continued to think about celebrity. He even helped to edit *Brushes with Greatness: An Anthology of Chance Encounters with Celebrities* (1989). He could occasionally treat celebrity lightly and see its positive aspects, even when his own recognition became international with the success of *The English Patient* as a novel (it won the Booker Prize and the Governor General’s Award) and a film (it won nine Academy Awards) in the 1990s. Despite insisting on his privacy, he admitted that his celebrity did have some perks. In her interview in 2007 with

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18 Ondaatje had reflected on this tension between self-reflection and outreach to the audience in the introduction to *The Long Poem Anthology* (1979), which he edited. He wrote: “Something did happen in the 70’s that has gone unrecognized by most academic readers of poetry. Some writers became public personalities; but at the same time some poets—from the generation of [Raymond] Souster’s *New Wave Canada*—turned inward, away from the individual occasional poem, to explore, to take a longer look at themselves and their landscape, to hold onto something frail—whether the memory or discovery of a place, or a way of speaking” (12). Ondaatje seemingly wanted to “tur[n] inward” while imagining a more “outward” life—even in his long poems, such as *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*.

Ondaatje in *The Globe and Mail*, Johanna Schneller asked him if the “movie-level fame” generated by *The English Patient* is different from “novel-writing fame,” and he responded, “Oh yeah, a lot of people have seen the film. It helps me going across the borders. If you want to get to someone [for research], that can be a way in. [...] But I tend to keep a low profile when I’m talking to someone” (Schneller R5). He responds in terms of quantity (“a lot”) and not quality, but his remarks are nevertheless interesting. In contrast with the English patient in his novel, Ondaatje can cross borders more easily *because* he is recognized. Contrary to his representations of celebrity in his poems, in his life, celebrity has occasionally extended his freedoms of mobility and association.

The prominent image of being on the edge in Ondaatje’s poetic texts is his way of expressing a desire for *some* celebrity—neither total exposure nor total privacy, because both would be fatal, as the experiences of Billy and Bellocq suggest. Ondaatje consents to being interviewed, but according to predetermined rules. He promotes his novel and its film, but refuses access to materials that are now in a public archive. He writes about himself, but usually with characters who mediate between his privacy and the public.

In his poetic texts—which express far more about his thinking than he is willing to divulge in interviews—Ondaatje is extremely critical of celebrity. Having identified with Billy and perhaps more fully with Buddy, Ondaatje ultimately realized that to call celebrity disappointing would be a dramatic understatement: “There are no prizes.” He represents celebrity as a convergence of crises: of the body undergoing a transformation into an image; of the fusion of public and private (and their uncanny symmetry); of the imposition of national, racial, and gendered values on individual artists; of the compulsion to continue to write even when his writing makes him vulnerable to the

public; of the transition from the pretended religious roles of Layton's prophet and Cohen's saint to the secular spirit of the ghostly Billy the Kid. In *The Dainty Monsters*, the potential celebrities are associated, however slightly, with religiosity, but he is already beginning to hint at the cost of celebrity to his person—to his body and his privacy. In *Leonard Cohen*, he focusses on the irony of pop-sainthood, but pushes for an even more secular vision of celebrity in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. Unlike Ondaatje, whose celebrity helps him in "going across borders," Billy is scrutinized and shackled by his celebrity, which also functions as surveillance that monitors his behaviour for signs of resistance to norms of masculinity. His homosexual desires repressed, he comes to wish that he could die and haunt his past as an invisible ghost, thereby reversing the gaze and recovering some of the power of seeing that his public used against him.

In *Rat Jelly*, Ondaatje began to depict celebrity far more literally, naming it and considering relationships between fans and those they adore. This relationship, he suggests, persists because of an illusion of closeness. As it was for Ondaatje's father, this closeness is evidently problematic when celebrity calls attention to difference and results in stars being exiled from their own culture. As with his father and with Buddy Bolden in *Coming Through Slaughter*, this problem is related to the racial biases of celebrity and its false promise of inclusiveness. Buddy's celebrity whitens him, distorting the perception of race, while also reminding him that he is constantly on the "edge" of being a sell-out to a commercial culture. His celebrity is slavery and prostitution—two terrors that he realizes the future will hold for him (and hold him to) if he were to continue to listen to Webb. Himself critical of celebrity and willing to question his racial position and national origin, Ondaatje nevertheless promotes his exotic persona in *Running in the Family* and

*Secular Love*. His exoticism, however, becomes a way for him to reflect upon himself.

Like his more and more frequent allusions to the popular culture of movies and music, his willingness to be an outsider in his own country helps him to promote and to prepare for his “movie-level fame,” while his general unwillingness to expose his own privacy might prepare him, eventually, for legend—when he is ready for it.

## Chapter VI

## The Passing as / of Celebrity in Gwendolyn MacEwen's

*The T.E. Lawrence Poems* and Other Works

In 1993, Michael Ondaatje said that watching Gwendolyn MacEwen read to an audience “was the first time [he] had a sense of the poet as a public person. [...] She was giving herself to the public. She was [...] the poet who took all risks for poetry” (qtd. in Sullivan 288). The reading in question was around twenty years earlier; she was promoting *Armies of the Moon* (1972), and her celebrity would never again be as intense. Although her celebrity never reached a height comparable to that of Irving Layton and especially Leonard Cohen, she was known about as widely as Ondaatje during what I call the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry (defined in chapter II as around 1955 to 1980). Her sensitivity to her own limited celebrity became more acute as that era faded to the end of the 1970s, when her experiences seemed to prepare her for her most dramatic commentary on herself as a celebrity: *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* (1982).

Ondaatje's wording—that she was taking “all risks” by “giving herself to the public”—also applies to her later representation of herself as a “public person.” Even by the time of *Armies of the Moon*, the attention given to poetry in Canadian literature had noticeably shifted to the novel. As the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry ended in the late 1970s, MacEwen's enduring commitment to poetry became one of the “risks” she took. To continue representing herself as a “public poet” was to make a seriously ironic statement about the difficulty of being a poet in Canada; by representing herself through the celebrity of Lawrence of Arabia—her symbolic “twin” (Sullivan 338)—in *The T.E.*

*Lawrence Poems*, MacEwen commented on the popular shift away from poetry. Her impersonation and ventriloquism of Lawrence also raises questions about the identity crisis that results from celebrity. By speaking in his voice and saying, in effect, “I am Lawrence,” she engages in grandstanding: standing in for someone more grand, which is an inherently metaphoric process of self-promotion and identity formation that I explained in the first chapter. The many terms of identification in this chapter—grandstanding, impersonation, ventriloquism, and (below) mimicry and passing—are intended to demonstrate the nuance of MacEwen’s critical and yet empathetic relationship with the historical Lawrence. Her critical empathy not only makes her difference from him more evident, but it also often implies their closeness, which was unsettling given Lawrence’s self-destructive tendencies.

The scene of Lawrence’s death at the end of *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* is in close proximity to poems that reveal his hatred of his celebrity; MacEwen’s decision to identify with him is, ironically, both alarming and self-promotional. As explained in the first chapter, self-promotion through grandstanding can catalyse the public’s invasion of a celebrity’s privacy; this invasion can occur when celebrities fuse their private and public personas and expose their private selves to the public. Identity crises sometimes follow as the celebrities lose control over who they are. MacEwen’s earlier characters represented as celebrities, namely Julian the magician and Manzini the escape artist, attempt to reclaim their freedom from audiences whose expectations compromised it. Similarly, her Lawrence struggles to define himself against the normative values of celebrity that were more readily accepted by many other poets of her era, such as narcissism, heterosexuality, masculinity, and religiosity. Nevertheless, MacEwen criticizes his celebrity’s debt to his

colonial presence in the Middle East, and she thereby critiques her own appropriation of Middle Eastern fashion, language, myth, and religion—aspects of her own identity that helped her to appear distinctive and be recognizable as a celebrity.

Needing a way to explain the complex identity politics—personal, racial, and national—of *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*, I have chosen to adapt from postcolonial studies the concept of passing (as an admittedly approximate but usefully political term to encompass grandstanding, impersonation, and ventriloquism). MacEwen speaks in Lawrence’s voice, passing as Lawrence to counter-colonize him and appropriate his celebrity; that passing is her symbolic death and a potentially mystical experience of self-knowledge that also comments on the end of the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry. The end of this era had serious consequences for MacEwen’s career as a poet. Her representations of celebrity in her poetic texts suggest that she was thinking personally and fatalistically about its ramifications. All the celebrities in her works die. Their “passing” is crucial to their meaning, especially in the case of Lawrence.

In her foreword to *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*, MacEwen states that she was aware of Lawrence as early as 1962 but that she did not write about him until “some twenty years later” (n.p.); her statement implies that she had him in mind even as she invented other characters to represent celebrity prior to *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*. Her earlier celebrity characters fit into categories that accord with the titles of some of her works. The first is the magician, a prominent and explicitly Christian figure in *The Rising Fire* (1963) and *Julian the Magician* (1963), the first two of her books to follow her chapbooks. The second is the escape artist, who extends from the magician in *A Breakfast for Barbarians* (1966). The third could be the king, who egotistically reduces a

polytheistic society to monotheism in *King of Egypt, King of Dreams* (1971), but I will only mention him to note his narrow view of religion and the fact that his disfigurement led him to a life of solitude that made him unrecognized by his people. In *Invocations* (1983), Jan Bartley brings the characters of the magician and the king together under the rubric of MacEwen's "Muse" (8). Akhenaton "is a king who is, quite literally, blinded by the sun" (Bartley 25). For MacEwen, the sun is a symbol of celebrity that she uses, as Layton did, to represent not only spirituality (the sun-god) but also megalomaniacal egotism. In my chapter on Ondaatje, I argued that the sun often represents the scrutiny of the public upon the private life of the celebrity; because Julian the magician is similarly "blinded" by his public, I propose, with Bartley, that the magician is a general equivalent of the king. Unlike the magician, however, the king appears as a symbol of celebrity in one of her novels without also appearing as such in a poem.

The third character of celebrity relevant to my study of MacEwen's poetry, therefore, is not the king but the mirage that represents Lawrence. The mirage, being liminal and intangible, is a symbol of spiritual transformation and transcendence. It is also a symbol of the complex identity politics involved in the development of MacEwen's representations of celebrity. These three characters demonstrate her interest in what celebrity can do to body and soul. They imply an arc—from scrutinized magician, through hopeful escape artist, to ironically disillusioned mirage—that also roughly describes the arc of her tragically shortened career.

In previous chapters I argued that poetry was losing prominence relative to other arts and diversions by the 1970s; no new Canadian poets would become celebrities—not while remaining mostly committed to poetry as a form—beyond the end of the 1970s

(Messenger 944; Hošek 939-40). Some of those who had already established their celebrity extended it, as Cohen did, by committing themselves to forms other than poetry. MacEwen did not develop into a career novelist; her two novels were both published relatively early and did little to extend her celebrity. Her biographer Rosemary Sullivan states that MacEwen hoped *King of Egypt*, *King of Dreams* would establish her in “the international élite of historical novelists—she could write novels and make enough money to sustain the poetry. MacEwen had once said: ‘I don’t call myself a poet, I call myself a writer’” (qtd. in Sullivan 193). Sullivan insists, however, that MacEwen “had a poet’s vision” (385) and that, by the 1980s, “poetry was dying” (385). Sullivan would be more accurate to claim that MacEwen chose to remain generally a poet during the “dying” of *celebrity* in Canadian poetry, a decision that had a major effect on the content and tone of her later work. There is no direct evidence that MacEwen knew the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry had ended (though she probably knew she was living through it), but *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*—modelled partly on the historical Lawrence’s highly linear *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926)—is uniquely teleological among her poetry and is implicitly concerned with being at the end of a line.

The figurative death of celebrity in Canadian poetry had a closing bookend in Cohen’s *Death of a Lady’s Man* (1978), but MacEwen added an epilogue—an additional commentary—in *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*. Layton, Cohen, and Ondaatje wrote about celebrities partly as self-promotion, but MacEwen’s poems in the voice of Lawrence were too late to serve that exact purpose. Ondaatje wrote about celebrity as a transition into legend, and MacEwen—often cited as having said “I want to construct a myth” (qtd. in Reid 38)—arguably intended to build her myth on a foundation of celebrity. Whether or

not she had been hoping for a last chance to extend her celebrity into myth, her passing as Lawrence in a narrative leading to his death (when her own health was in decline) is an extension of Ondaatje's project. He wrote about himself as Billy the Kid and Buddy Bolden; he chose characters who were destroyed indirectly, from outside, by social forces deriving from their celebrity. MacEwen ultimately chose to represent herself—a woman who died of alcoholism—as a man who recklessly destroyed himself. Suffering from a broken wrist that might have been the result of one of the motorcycle accidents that culminated in his ambiguously suicidal death, her Lawrence writes a “sad, left-handed poem” (*Lawrence* 64); the allusion to *Left Handed Poems*, the subtitle of Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970), suggests that she was commenting on at least one previous representation of celebrity in Canadian poetry.

MacEwen's experience of celebrity began, in her somewhat distorted youthful impression, when she was barely out of her teenage years. MacEwen was a precocious autodidact who published her first poem in a journal (*The Canadian Forum*) at the age of seventeen in 1958 (Sullivan 59). Inspired by this success but frustrated because it was not immediately extended in that journal or elsewhere, she self-published two chapbooks of her own under the imprint of Aleph Press (Sullivan 123) in 1961. Sullivan observes that such a recourse was not unusual: “Most people wrote poetry—you could count on one hand the novels published in Canada in 1960 and 1961—because poetry was cheap to publish and you could do it yourself” (107). She also notes that “self-publications were even accorded review space in journals like *The University of Toronto Quarterly*, so small was the total number of Canadian books published each year” (Sullivan 123). After MacEwen travelled from Toronto to Montreal to read to the public from her chapbooks in

1961, she exclaimed in a letter: “best reception ever—sold 50 books!! Am being treated like a national celebrity by these people [....] Maybe I’m God” (qtd. in Sullivan 126-7). The recipient of the letter was Milton Acorn, whom she married the next year, but she was not trying to impress him except as a poet—she declined his first proposal of marriage (Sullivan 118-22)—and specifically as a competitive poet who might have better prospects of “national celebrity” than he did. Her letter is breathlessly enthusiastic, bearing no trace of anxiety or even irony until the joke about being “God,” which is the earliest sign of her willingness to associate celebrity with religiosity.

MacEwen’s prospects rapidly improved. In 1963, Canadian poetic celebrity was only around five years from its reaching its zenith and MacEwen, 22, was poised to make her name known—and not only in Canada. She published two books that year: *Julian the Magician*, her first novel; and *The Rising Fire*, her third collection of poetry but the first that was not self-published. *Julian the Magician* appeared in New York with Corinth Books, a publisher of Beat poets such as Allen Ginsberg and later Jack Kerouac and Charles Olson. Corinth Books “was becoming a ‘cult’ press” (Sullivan 98). Shortly thereafter, *The Rising Fire* appeared with Contact Press, which Raymond Souster, Louis Dudek, and Layton had founded in Toronto in 1952. Contact Press “was by 1962 the most influential literary press in the country” (Sullivan 164). Although both Corinth and Contact were small presses, they were crucial sources for poetry in prominent cities. Knowing MacEwen’s confidence in her own potential, Sullivan suggests that “she must have felt she was on the edge of fame” (98).

As with others writing during the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, however, MacEwen’s excitement disguised a suspicion that such an “edge” was the precipice of

celebrity, a fate worse than fame. The negative connotations of celebrity are impossible not to notice in her representations of the magician. MacEwen's first novel, as its title suggests, is about a nineteenth-century magician, whom MacEwen represents as a celebrity, as a pseudo-religious entertainer, and possibly as a writer confused by the effect of celebrity on his spirituality and on other aspects of his identity, such as his sexuality. Whereas the homosexual inclinations of Ondaatje's Billy the Kid are repressed by the normative heterosexuality of the Wild West (and possibly celebrity during its era in Canadian poetry), Julian the magician openly declares his bi-sexuality. Similarly but without an explicit statement, Manzini the escape artist—an extension of the magician—rejects his masculinity in a performance that promotes his celebrity. Their freedom of self-definition, however, partly results in their real and symbolic deaths.

Although death is not always negative, *Julian the Magician's* arresting and highly poetic opening line describes the sound of applause in terms that seem to threaten death: "Bulls up out of their rushes, bats' wings, bulls up out of rushes, bats' wings, bull's blood" (3). The sound of a crowd cheering "like a skipping-rope chant of devils" (3) reinforces the depiction of celebrity as deadly and hellish (also childish). Julian's sleight of hand inspires the crowd to "hideous worship" (3) of him. He assumes that they think he is "divine" (3), thereby initiating the ensuing contrast between the fearsomely hellish crowd of batty, bloody "devils" and his explicitly "christlike" (40) representation. As in representations of celebrity by Layton, Cohen, and Ondaatje, he is a pseudo-religious martyr sacrificing himself to an audience that is, in this case, terrible.

The religious pretence that surrounds Julian is never really more than pretence, but his actions lead one or two people to put faith in his divinity. He does, for a while,

insist that he is “a simple trickster” (40) and a faker of miracles, yet he constantly acts to convince others of his candidacy for the role of the New Messiah. He seemingly makes clay into sparrows (8) and cures a blind man (55). He later fails to resurrect the formerly blind (and formerly living) man, whom he calls “Lazarus” (65), but he invokes the transubstantiation of his body and blood when offering a cup of deer’s blood to his apprentices (73). Finally, the townsfolk crucify him (102-6), and “three days later the sun rose” (106)—though Julian’s second coming is not described until *Noman* (1972), which features a short story about him returning to earth in 1970. As with the image of the doffed halo in Layton’s “A Tall Man Executes a Jig” (1963), “[Julian’s apprentice] Peter noticed that the moon was directly behind Julian’s head. Julian’s head was haloed; a silver aura. When he moved on ahead the halo slipped” (69). Peter’s view of Julian is shared with few people, but to one of the elders of the nineteenth-century town, Julian says, “My audience creates *me*, sir—over and over—[...] I do not force belief, I *let* them believe what they will” (49-50, his emphasis). No “force” is necessary. According to Julian, his “audience” simply believes in him.

MacEwen’s eventual emphasis, however, is that Julian becomes a believer in his own religious significance. The townspeople only endorse Julian’s divinity so that they can later reveal him to be a fraud and use him as a scapegoat for their latent violence. Before healing a man and also seeming to cause the man’s death, Julian “himself began to wonder” (8) about whether or not he was a religious figure. He later says, “I don’t want to be divine... I don’t want them to make me divine... they force it, they force it” (29-30). He “[does] not force belief”; the *audience* does, and its members “force” it upon him, not each other. He lights the fire of his celebrity, but the audience raises it to heights that

expose his charlatanism to almost everyone but him; ironically, the disbelieving audience makes him believe in his own access to God.

Julian's confusion about what to believe leads him to articulate—though not always clearly—the identity crisis related to his status as a “celebrity” (21). He writes in his journal: “A secondary logic has overtaken me. An enclosed genius has come out of my skin and rules me, a genius and a will so sharp, so complete I cannot recognize it as my own. It is not my own. Things I know, deeds I do, miracles I perform, all stem from this foreign genius who is not me” (140). The mysterious “foreign genius” is partly a confirmation of the “invasive reconfiguration” (Latham 110) of identity caused by celebrity. “Genius” is not necessarily the positive condition that we are accustomed to admire; it can be a spirit that can possess a person to do evil (*OED*). Given my argument in this chapter, that MacEwen's critique of celebrity is partly postcolonial, the “foreign” quality of Julian's genius is surprising to me; MacEwen never feared the foreign but invited it into her life instead. *Julian the Magician*, however, has much less to say about nationality than *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* does. In the context of *Julian the Magician*, the foreign genius is the audience that forces its “will so sharp” upon Julian. It makes him question what is “[his] own.” He defines it in opposition to himself; it is, he says, “not me.” Bartley argues that MacEwen seeks “self-knowledge” made possible by “the integration of opposites” (17) such as the ones that Julian observes. If those opposites—what Northrop Frye called “this” and “that” (11) in his definition of metaphor explained in the first chapter—are “me” and “not me,” native and foreign, self and other, private and public, then MacEwen might have intended to discover herself through the insight of her audience. If the members of that audience are indeed the “devils” that the narrator of

*Julian the Magician* describes, then trusting the audience for insight is a dangerous mistake—or a risk MacEwen is willing to take—in the search for self-knowledge. The audience creates a new but less self-determined identity for the celebrity, who accepts it because of the promise of self-knowledge—only to find it inflexible.

The character of the magician reappears in *précis* in MacEwen's immediately subsequent publication, *The Rising Fire*, to reflect on her criticism of being possessed or owned by the audience. "The Magician: Three Themes" (30) is a three-stanza poem subtitled at each division. The first stanza ("One: The Magician") begins: "odd that the people want to own you / and produce you like a black poodle / at fatal teaparties" (30). The speaker's musing about the audience's desire to "own" and "produce" is a musing about what aspect of the self can be grasped and controlled. In the second stanza ("Two: The Magician as Man"), this aspect is the body, not the mind. The speaker, speaking as the magician, complains about needing to do basic sleight-of-hand "when my real love is the mind / moving as sailboat through the days, / the whiteness and the freedom of it" (30). Unlike Julian, whose mind was impressionable and easily muddled by the ironic devotion of his audience, the magician here is at least thinking clearly about how "mind" and body interact. The body, not the mind, gives the audience something to possess; however, the work the body must do constrains the "freedom" of his mind simply by requiring his attention to the coordination of his performances.

In the final stanza ("Three: The Magician as Christ"), the poem's argument concludes by showing a surprising interest in the well-being of minds other than that of the magician. Julian was never more than self-centred, even in his actions that seemed helpful. In contrast here, the magician is concerned about members of his audience and

about what or in whom they believe:

yet like penicillin from a mould  
 his pretence breeds wonder  
 at the throat of their belief  
 like fingers or a strange bacteria [*sic*]  
 holds the hard mind screaming [...] (31)

This “pretence” that “breeds wonder” is religious, as the titular reference to “Christ” and the later reference to “churches” (31) suggest. The poem does not resolve the question of whether the religious pretence is helpful (“like penicillin”) or harmful (like strangling “fingers”) to the “hard mind,” but the emphasis on the hard mind is what makes this stanza important to MacEwen’s view of celebrity. The hardness of the mind means, first, that it is unsympathetic or overly rational; second, that it is embodied and not wholly intangible. The magician “as Christ” overcomes the hardness of the mind and inspires it, through wonder, to a strong emotional and bodily reaction (the scream). It is screaming because it can be affected and even controlled. Although some scenes in *Julian the Magician* raise questions about the goodness of Julian’s influence on his audience, “The Magician: Three Themes” is the first of MacEwen’s texts to represent the audience as an embodied mind—a being capable of “wonder,” of being healed, hurt, and “[held] screaming.” Although MacEwen, here, invokes the usual religious pretence of celebrity, she also seems to be thinking about the audience as if its members were worthy of attention and compassion, and not the devils that they were in *Julian the Magician*.

Compared to Julian’s didactic and even condescending view of his audience (“I let them believe what they will”), the magician here seems genuinely worried that his

audience might not be fulfilled by living only in a body or in a “hard mind” without benefit of the soul. He is not, however, only worried about the members of his audience. He wonders

[...] how  
 much of him is theirs, how much of him  
 do they re-create in the vast thunderous churches  
 of their need [...] (31)

The enjambment after the initial “how” creates the following declaration: “much of him is theirs”; in other words, they substantially own him. The enjambment does not wholly break the integrity of the question, however. The speaker’s only certainty seems to be that the audience has a “need” for “churches.” As superficial as the “crust and context of his act” (31) might be, it has the effect of “hypnosis” (31) on the audience. The magician’s power over the audience here is stronger than in *Julian the Magician* because the audience needs not a scapegoat but a freeing of the mind or spirit. MacEwen suggests that, illusory or otherwise, the magician’s “act” is what the audience needs, but she recognizes that the act also gives the audience the means of eventually using the performance against the performer.

As a representation of celebrity, the magician did not disappear but did change between *The Rising Fire* in 1963 and *A Breakfast for Barbarians* in 1966, when MacEwen’s nascent celebrity became much more intensely realized. Since 1963, she had been doing “occasional broadcasts” (Sullivan 191) of her verse plays and poetry on CBC Radio’s *Anthology* program at Robert Weaver’s request. In 1964, MacEwen supposedly “was sent on a poetry tour with Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen” (Sullivan 179). That

same year, Layton and Cohen toured with Earle Birney and Phyllis Gotlieb under the aegis of McClelland and Stewart, a publisher that never represented MacEwen. If she had indeed joined Layton and Cohen on tour,<sup>1</sup> it was a coup for her and the Macmillan company, which had published *Julian the Magician* in Canada. MacEwen had only two books, but youth in that era was newly fascinating to the media, and she had already established an exotic mystique that made her seem ageless, both girlish and wise.

Sullivan argues that, by 1965, the two leading players of Toronto's poetry scene were Margaret Atwood and MacEwen (185). Ondaatje had not yet published his first book, though he was on the scene as a spectator; Sullivan relates that "Ondaatje remembered how important it had been to the young writing community at Queen's University when [MacEwen] came to read in 1965. She was the poet people most wanted to hear" (190). Also in 1965, she began "using her sister's address for most of her professional correspondence, because, she said, she needed to guard her private life very closely" (Sullivan 188). Known through radio, readings, and her books, MacEwen had become a

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1 None of my sources is entirely clear about who was involved with the tour, and perhaps more than one tour happened. A full-page story in *The Woman's Globe and Mail* in 1965 on MacEwen, Gotlieb, Cecile Cloutier, and Miriam Waddington ambiguously suggested that these women were on tour together. Linda Munk's preface to the story states: "Last Fall, a Toronto publisher arranged a poetry tour... four poets reading their latest work at Canadian universities. The tour created a controversy... some critics called it a *circus*... others described it as a show of the artistic ego. In the following interviews, four of Canada's leading women poets talk about their work, the poetry tour and discuss the current literary scene" (W1, my emphasis). Five years later, Ondaatje called the tour that featured Cohen a "circus" (35), which suggests that he had read Munk or that he and Munk had heard the same "critics" referring to the tour that featured Cohen. Munk implies, however, by interviewing MacEwen, Gotlieb, Cloutier, and Waddington, that *these* four poets were on tour; perhaps Munk only intended to promote three alternative poets (only three because Gotlieb certainly was on tour with Layton, Cohen, and Birney). Sullivan might have read this story in MacEwen's archives, where I found it in Box 32 OVS, and she might have assumed that MacEwen had toured with Cohen. MacEwen did mention him and Layton: "The tour was frightening, it was too much. Either [...] Layton or Leonard alone could have drawn the audience. I think they should each have had individual readings" (qtd. in Munk W1). If MacEwen was describing her participation with them on the tour, she also seems to be suggesting that she was intimidated by their higher degree of celebrity; however, she might have been describing the tour from an outsider's perspective.

wary celebrity in the company of the country's best-known post-war writers.

These were exciting times for Canadian poetry, and the cliques understood by Aaron Jaffe to be a defining aspect of literary celebrity had not yet fully formed. Sullivan, after listing many up-and-coming writers of the early 1960s, states that “[n]o one knew who would last” (106). In 1993, Atwood explained: “You found yourself at the centre very fast in those days. The writing community was so small, beleaguered, and desirous of reinforcement, that it was welcoming to any newcomer with talent, including women” (qtd. in Sullivan 109). Atwood also noted, however, that “[c]reativity in those days was seen as ejaculatory” (qtd. in Sullivan 111). Thus, Layton supposedly discouraged women from writing (Sullivan 110), and his biographer Elspeth Cameron relates an anecdote about Layton's outrageous contempt for Atwood specifically (441). Indeed, female writers who became celebrities often contended with “various forms of hostility toward women's writing” (Hammill 21) including a “restrictive promotional system” (Jaffe 165) that excluded women. The *Zeitgeist* did not treat everyone equally.

Atwood has partly explained this discrimination. In her introduction to *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* (1982), she observes that her anthology contains fewer women than men, one reason being that “men dominate poetry publishing and tend to exclude women” (xxix). A better reason is that “there are more male poets in this book because there are more in Canada. [...] *Why* there are more male poets is a matter for fascinating speculation. (In Canadian fiction, for instance, there is a little more balance.)” (Atwood xxix). She speculates that “socialization” (Atwood xxix) skews the balance of the sexes: men are more likely than women to be encouraged to write poetry. I would add that the history of oratory associated both with poetry and politics has tended to be

dominated by men. Although the canon includes many writers who are not and never were celebrities, discrimination against women in the canon of Canadian poetry almost certainly constrained the degree of MacEwen's celebrity.

In 1966, MacEwen returned to the magician to extend her thinking about poetry in the context of her celebrity and its limits. In *A Breakfast for Barbarians*, "The Magician" (not to be confused with "The Magician: Three Themes") is set "on stage" (36) during a magic act that involves both the magician and the poet. Although allusions to performance often accompany poems about celebrity, the audience is conspicuously absent in "The Magician," thereby suggesting that the magician's celebrity either has not begun or has come to an end. The only spectator seems to be the poet, who watches the magic act and then responds to it with her own poems; this representation of the poet as a fan later becomes a crucial aspect of the politics of writing *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*. In "The Magician," MacEwen states that her art is "more a lie anyway / than the lie of these illusions" (36), but she later asserts that "to believe or not believe / is not the question" (36). This assertion helps put to rest the debate about celebrities believing in their own divinity in *Julian the Magician* or the audience believing in the divinity of celebrities in "The Magician: Three Themes." Instead of "belie[f]," the new concern, which concludes "The Magician," is a different question posed as an archaic declarative statement:

finally then do all my poems become as crazy scarves  
 issuing from the fingers in a coloured mesh  
 and you, magician, stand as they fly around you  
 silent as Houdini who could escape from anything  
 except the prison of his own flesh. (36)

The poet wonders whether or not her poems “become” superior to the magic act by making the “magician” realize that he is trapped in “the prison of his own flesh” as Houdini was and as poetry is not. Magic acts need the presence of a performing magician, but poetry does not require the author to read it aloud. Both forms, however, need some kind of audience. Here, the magician’s general lack of an audience is associated with his need to “escape [...] his own flesh.” In *Julian the Magician*, Julian had stated: “Poets, I think, are simply magicians without quick wrists” (128) and, in “The Magician,” poets are magicians without the need to perform with their bodies. Poets can escape their flesh by disseminating their work in writing. MacEwen seems to be thinking that the requirement of presence is a limit to celebrity that poets can surpass.

Implicitly commenting on “The Magician” on the next page in *A Breakfast for Barbarians* is “Manzini: Escape Artist,”<sup>2</sup> which suggests that the escape from the flesh means abandoning one’s “sex” (37) and thereby freeing oneself from the expectations about sexuality associated with celebrity. Gender and sexuality were not new topics for MacEwen; Julian had declared: “It is possible I am a woman—I have long debated it. However, my gender is no matter—my mind is decidedly bi-sexual; thus I can navigate in both female and male territory as freely as grass” (121). His comment suggests that MacEwen was not distinguishing between sex and gender, which are now commonly understood by scholars to be distinct but related concepts. Julian means that, although his body is presumably male, he sometimes thinks of himself as a woman and is not worried about such categories. In contrast, “this boy, Manzini” (37) is defined by “his sex” (37)

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2 An actual escape artist named Mario Manzini has been active in the United States since as early as 1974 [Walljasper], though there is no evidence, besides this poem, that MacEwen knew of him in 1966 or afterward.

and “struggled” (37) to escape it. Manzini’s sexuality, however, is not clearly defined. He stands “with black tights and a turquoise / leaf across his sex” (37); the “tights” and “turquoise” are campy and suggest a degree of gender-bending that might discomfit the speaker, who repeats three times that he is a “boy” (37). The speaker—a spectator as in “The Magician”—is obviously impressed, however, by Manzini’s ability to escape the “bonds” of the “flesh” (37), which are made literal in the “drenched / muscular ropes” (37) that appeared

as though his tendons were worn  
on the outside-

as though his own guts were the ropes  
encircling him. (37)

These gut-ropes are “muscular” and, because of their shape, seem phallic. The “boy, Manzini” appears to be struggling to escape pre-emptively from his future manhood.

Fascinated by this struggle for freedom, the speaker imagines what Manzini might be thinking, and also makes an implicit link between Manzini’s gendering and people who might be better known than he is. The speaker imagines Manzini “inwardly / wondering if Houdini would take as long” (37) to escape similar bonds. Houdini, the most famous escape artist in history, is represented not only as Manzini’s precursor but also as the male model against which he defines himself. This representation reinforces Harold Bloom’s concept of a competitive and masculine lineage between poets (or performers, in this case). Bloom’s theory, articulated in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), problematically excludes women almost completely—it is about men—and has become

unfashionable for this and other reasons; however, it should be mentioned in the context of Houdini and Manzini because Manzini's performance is a factor in his freedom from both Houdini's precedent and his own masculinity. Imagining Manzini as "inwardly / wondering," the speaker presumes to have knowledge of Manzini's interiority; perhaps the speaker is problematically assuming that whatever is external (phallic guts) simply represents what is internal (the self-concept, including gender), but MacEwen is arguably engaged in a critique that, to some extent, pre-empts Bloom's argument. She suggests that Manzini is purging himself of internalized concepts of masculinity while retaining his outwardly male body. He partly rejects his precursor and assumptions about his sexuality; contrary to the example of Cohen symbolically inheriting Layton's celebrity, the unexpected result is that Manzini does not inherit Houdini's celebrity or fame.

Instead, Manzini performs only for the speaker of the poem and for "the big / brute [who] tied his neck arms legs" (37)—an obviously male observer whose job involves restricting Manzini's movements, whereas the speaker (whose sex is never specified) is interested in seeing Manzini return to freedom. As in "The Magician," the escape artist is not much of a celebrity and the speaker is, in effect, the only promoter, enthusiastically and repeatedly insisting that readers "listen" (37) to tales of the performer's exploits. The need to repeat so insistently suggests that the speaker, too, has not much of an audience that would listen. The general suggestion is that the typical audience of celebrity is not interested in performances that question the status quo; performers who make a priority of freedom, such as freedoms of expression or sexuality, risk being ignored by those who could grant them widespread recognition.

Thus, Manzini's eventual "victory" (37) is ambiguous and ambivalent. The

speaker explains that Manzini, “finally free, slid as snake from / his own sweet agonized skin, to throw his entrails / white upon the floor” (37). His ensuing “cry” (37) might be victorious but it is also tortured; Manzini might be like a molting “snake,” but he also seems to be in the act of gutting himself, which would surely mean his very painful death. MacEwen’s use of the “snake” as a symbol of transformation and possibly death is much like Layton’s use of the snake at the end of “A Tall Man Executes a Jig.” In that poem and in “Manzini: Escape Artist,” the celebrity is tortured to the point of accepting self-destruction as an escape. Freedom, therefore, is bitter-sweet. When MacEwen’s poem ends—“*now there are no bonds except the flesh*, / but listen, it was thursday, there was this boy, / Manzini” (37, her emphasis)—the crucial “but” confirms that Manzini did escape the “flesh” and surpass Houdini (though not as a celebrity) as the poet did in “The Magician.” As an extension of the magician, the escape artist is also a symbol of the poet and of celebrity, and so the speaker of this poem believes “it was beautiful” (37) to see someone convert even the worst of experiences—such as death—into something artistically meaningful and into an important freedom from social norms.

The transition from the magician to the escape artist was a critical development in MacEwen’s representation of celebrity in the first half-decade of her career. In *Julian the Magician*, she suggests that celebrities are charlatans but that the impression of approval from an audience might lead celebrities to believe in their own religious pretence. The celebrity’s belief in the religious pretence might also be a way of coping with an intimidating audience such as the “devils” that Julian faces. The question of belief leads MacEwen to suggest, in “The Magician: Three Themes,” that celebrities *do* respond to an audience’s religious “need,” but a few years later she revises her suggestion in “The

Magician” by arguing that belief is not the issue.

Instead, she stops worrying about audiences and—coincident with the emergence of her anticipated celebrity—begins to propose that the challenge of celebrity is to “escape” the “flesh” and remain free. Manzini, her escape artist, struggles against the limitations of his body; in a similar way, celebrities struggle against the expectations that their bodies produce, particularly those that associate literary celebrity with men instead of women in that era. MacEwen’s contact with Layton and Cohen—she had supposedly participated with them on tour and had certainly corresponded with Layton (Sullivan 95-6) and dined with him and Cohen at Layton’s house (Sullivan 332-3)—probably suggested to her that celebrity among poets in Canada was going to be patriarchal; Atwood had the same rueful suspicion. MacEwen’s substantial focus on gender-bending in these texts is the necessary beginning of her eventual adoption and adaptation of Lawrence’s voice—her ultimate critique of the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry.

When that era was reaching its peak intensity around 1968 (the year Cohen’s *Selected Poems* proved that celebrity poetry in Canada had a maximum altitude that could only be increased in the slipstream of other popular forms, such as music), MacEwen “was giving a great number of poetry readings all over the country” (Sullivan 232). Nevertheless, Macmillan initially would not publish her *King of Egypt, King of Dreams* until a “foreign co-publisher” (Sullivan 240) for the novel could be found. Three companies in New York and one in London had rejected it, an outcome that moderated MacEwen’s hopes of becoming “financially independent” (Sullivan 241) as a writer. Despite her having been originally published by Corinth Books in New York, MacEwen’s Canadian celebrity did not have an international currency. This disappointment did not

seem to be eased by the coming peak of her literary celebrity in Canada.

Instead, MacEwen began to have personal problems that sometimes manifested themselves when her celebrity put her in stressful situations. Although they had only lived together for five months, she divorced Acorn in 1966 (Sullivan 198); after breaking up her subsequent relationship in 1968 (Sullivan 222), she began—usually in secret (Sullivan 321)—to drink alcohol, a drug that she had avoided because of her father’s addiction (Sullivan 250). Coincidentally, she developed a fear of travelling by airplane. Atwood, who was then teaching at the University of Alberta, invited her to do a reading in 1969, but on short notice MacEwen decided against the trip, blaming her phobia and exhaustion after her “eighth or ninth poetry reading of the month” (Sullivan 252). When her celebrity peaked with her winning of the Governor General’s Award for *The Shadow-Maker* (1969) in 1970, she discreetly asked Weaver to ensure that if Acorn was also a winner her prize would be given to someone else; she feared “even slight publicity” (qtd. in Sullivan 269) that might bring her and Acorn into the same room again. Sullivan suggests that, by 1973, MacEwen’s alcoholism was interfering with her poetry readings, which she often missed (293-4). To insist on a causal relationship between her alcoholism and her poetry readings would be impossible and an oversimplification. More generally, however, MacEwen’s personal problems and her celebrity were emerging around the same time in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Paradoxically, another strain on MacEwen might have been the realization that celebrity and its associated wealth were becoming less likely for poets in the 1970s. In 1975, separated from her current husband Nikos Tsingos, MacEwen soon realized that she could not afford to live alone without help. She was drinking “a half-bottle of vodka a

day” (Sullivan 296) and, on one occasion, had a nightmare so vivid that she panicked. On the recommendation of a psychiatric nurse who was also her friend, MacEwen admitted herself into the addiction research programme at the Clark Institute, a psychiatric hospital. In the short autobiography that she supplied her doctors, she says of herself that “she became quite well-known in the literary circle in this country” (qtd. in Sullivan 298). She mentions only one “circle,” suggesting that the community of writers was small and, indirectly, that poets who were celebrities in Canada were still the proverbial big fish in a small pond. The trend in that pond, however, was that many of the big fish were looking for bigger meals. After publishing *King of Egypt, King of Dreams* in 1971, MacEwen chose not to join her contemporaries Atwood and Ondaatje in supporting their poetry with the comparatively lucrative work of writing novels. By 1978, “her books weren’t making any money” (Sullivan 312).<sup>3</sup> She had a “severe bout” (Sullivan 322) of psychological stress and alcoholism that put her in hospital in December of 1980 and again in February, 1981 (Sullivan 321-2). Precisely at this point, she began the writing of *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*, which was interrupted at least once by treatment and which she finished after temporarily eliminating her intake of alcohol (Sullivan 337-8). Regardless of the extent of its reflection upon her life, it is the poetry written in the aftermath of—and during—some of her worst personal crises.

More than that, however, *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* is the book that reconciles her decision not to write another novel with her conclusions about both her career and her quest for mystical emptiness or transcendence. Brent Wood states that numerous critics

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3 Leading to the 1980s, *The Armies of the Moon* and *The Fire-Eaters* (1976) were—for reasons (or no reason) unknown to me—simply not involved in representing or questioning celebrity. In the early 1970s, her novel *King of Egypt, King of Dreams* represented celebrity, but it is not as essential as *Coming Through Slaughter* was in the previous chapter in extending ideas about celebrity.

have remarked on the spirituality of MacEwen and her poetry (“Visionary” 3n)<sup>4</sup> but that “MacEwen herself belonged to no specific community of belief” (“Mythic” 147); she was a curious but not devoted student of actual religion who was self-taught in mysticism from a wide range of Judeo-Christian, Islamic, and Hindu sources in addition to her knowledge of Greek myth (as Sullivan shows throughout her biography). Wood—who has not enough evidence to suggest that MacEwen had actual “visionary experience” (“Visionary” 41)—competently argues that her poetry (in individual books and in her *oeuvre*) tended to develop not as a line but as a circle; thus *Afterworlds* (1987) and *The Rising Fire* are in dialogue across the 24 years of her career as an author of books. Mary Reid makes a related argument: “MacEwen’s understanding of history is neither linear nor teleological” (40) but is, instead, “simultaneous” or “coeval” (36); past and present exist “as a totality” (41). *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* is the exception to this non-linear tendency. Its narrative arc is biographically linear; it begins with Lawrence’s parents, progresses through the most important moments of his military career, and ends with his death. What I am suggesting is that the linear narrative of *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* allows it to substitute in MacEwen’s *oeuvre* for an autobiographical novel.

Simultaneously, the line of that narrative unfurls and straightens what Wood calls the “visionary circle” to acknowledge two contrasts between MacEwen and Lawrence: that

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4 Wood summarizes these numerous critics: “Potvin, for example, saw [MacEwen’s] work as an emblem of ‘female spiritual desire’; Penn Kemp wrote of feeling MacEwen’s spirit visiting her after her death, and of joining Anima, the energy of inspiration (Kemp 1988). Thomas Gerry sees her as inheriting a tradition of mystical poetry dating back to eighteenth century Baptist and Quaker leaders and writers Henry Alline and David Willson (Gerry 1991). Jan Bartley (1983) sees MacEwen as a mystic explorer, and Gillian Harding-Russell locates her as a maker of ‘creative myth’ (1984, 1988)” (67). I would add that Frank Davey claims MacEwen had a “belief in transcendence” (*Canadian* 13) and that some of her work is “within the tradition of the mystic quest” (*Surviving* 48). I agree with Wood that mysticism seems to be MacEwen’s main interest in religion, and (above) I use “emptiness” and “transcendence” as synonyms; both terms suggest, to me, what might be called the dissolution of the self—an experience or awareness not limited by the ego.

she never succeeded in fully experiencing the mystical emptiness that her Lawrence seeks partly through Islam, and that she never became the celebrity in Canadian literature that the historical Lawrence was in the public imagination.

The uncanny array of similarities between MacEwen and the historical Lawrence has been noted by Sullivan and Wood but, unlike MacEwen, Lawrence was an international celebrity. Much like Billy the Kid, he was well-known very superficially, and he had already “puzzled two generations” (Aldington 12) by the 1950s. One of the most sensible of his several biographers, Richard Aldington describes Lawrence—a British soldier in the Middle East—as “at least half a fraud” (12); Lawrence’s epic memoir of the Arab Revolt against the Turks during World War I, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, “is rather a work of quasi-fiction than of history” (13). Lawrence was a literary celebrity and gained what Aldington calls “world notoriety” (24); he was a “national hero” (Aldington 12), partly because he distorted the facts about himself in the biographies that made him widely recognized (Aldington 18-9), the first being Lowell Thomas’s *With Lawrence in Arabia* (1924) (Aldington 107). Lawrence eventually changed his name (Aldington 12) to distance himself from his public persona. His international celebrity was resurrected in 1962 with David Lean’s film *Lawrence of Arabia*, which MacEwen had evidently watched because she mentions a scene from the film in the title story of *Noman*. She had also read *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (Sullivan 340-1) and chose phrases from it for *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*. In much the same way as that book is her substitute for another novel, her impersonation of Lawrence is her way of substituting his higher degree of celebrity for hers.

Her passing as Lawrence is a historical commentary on the limit seemingly

imposed on women's celebrity as poets—at least it can seem to be in retrospect—and it is also a critique, even subversion, of celebrity. The personal and the social, the private and the public ready to fuse—these aspects of celebrity become newly relevant because MacEwen juxtaposes the “invasive reconfiguration” of celebrity with the historical Lawrence's military interventions and colonial meddling in the Middle East. In MacEwen's representation of him, he is both invaded and an invader. As an invader, he works toward the assimilation of Arabs into a global military culture that defends and promotes Western ideology. Homi Bhabha calls this assimilation “colonial mimicry” (126): “the [colonizer's] desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (126, his emphasis). Because Lawrence is a colonial presence, he is not exactly a colonial mimic, though he attempts to acculturate himself into Arab society; regardless, the question of Arabs mimicking their colonizers is not the issue here. As I will explain, MacEwen can be understood as a fan engaged in mimicry who overcomes her subordination to the celebrity and begins to pass as him. The similarity between the colonized subject (MacEwen the fan) and the colonizer (Lawrence the celebrity) can become too close for comfort and even a “menace” (Bhabha 127, 132) to the colonizer. She becomes the public that invades him.<sup>5</sup>

The difference between mimicry and passing should be explained briefly in the context of MacEwen and Lawrence. “Although the term *passing* is increasingly used to denote a wide range of performative practices, from its origins it referred most commonly to ‘passing as white’” (Moynihan 810). Passing is racial; it is an appearance of racial

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5 Because Lawrence was dead, she was obviously not a “menace” to him, though her research into his life and her subsequent representation of him could affect his posthumous reputation.

sameness that often goes undetected. In contrast, mimicry is a noticeable imitation of cultural behaviours that elicits anxiety in the colonizers when it is done too well. MacEwen can be said to have mimicked Lawrence or his colonial tradition in her fashion: Lawrence was a British soldier in the Middle East who was often seen wearing the garb of an Arab prince (Aldington 169); MacEwen was a Canadian traveller to the Middle East who was often seen wearing the kohl eyeliner of an Egyptian icon (Sullivan 107). She is not visibly identical to Lawrence; she does not pass as him in that sense.<sup>6</sup>

By imitating his voice, however, MacEwen begins to pass as Lawrence. Without their images in mind, a reader could easily be persuaded that the historical Lawrence wrote *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*. In fact, MacEwen annotated and corrected a copy of her book, which is now stored in the archives at the University of Toronto, and she underlined phrases that she had copied directly from various texts by the historical Lawrence. There is underlining in 45 of the poems. She describes four of them as “found poem[s]” that are composed mostly of the historical Lawrence’s phrases. These inclusions are not remarked upon in the published book. One might say that she speaks Lawrence’s voice invisibly or that she silently *incorporates* his voice into the book. His voice becomes his body. In that sense, she passes as Lawrence.

Following Anna Camaiti Hostert in her assertion that passing as another race (or person) is “transgression” (15), I would add that passing can be practised tactically to gain access or to pass into the circles of power in the newly dominant culture.

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6 The concept of passing is more applicable in its strictest sense to Ondaatje and his celebrity; being of both Dutch and Tamil descent (*Running* 119), he actually can pass for white, especially now that he is older. He does not, however, transcribe the voices of Billy the Kid or Buddy Bolden as MacEwen does: with another celebrity’s own words. As I explained at the end of chapter V, Ondaatje seems to maintain a distance from his subjects; his reaching through the mirror for Buddy shatters the illusion of their sameness, whereas MacEwen seems to risk immersing herself in her imagined life of Lawrence.

MacEwen's passing as Lawrence complicates the politics of assimilation. It enables her, a celebrity of low degree compared to Layton and Cohen (though similar to Ondaatje until his success in the 1990s), to appropriate the power of a celebrity who was more widely recognized than any Canadian poet. Partly because she is too late to use that power self-promotionally, she uses it against itself, interrogating the colonialism that was essential to Lawrence's celebrity and, to a lesser extent, her own. She arguably became critical of the spiritual affectation that Arab robes or Egyptian eyeliner on Westerners might indicate. Disillusioned, perhaps, by the limitations of both her celebrity and the spiritual development that she had sought in Eastern mysticism, she criticizes Lawrence's colonialism as a failure of personal ambition and self-improvement in addition to its ethical problems. MacEwen passes as Lawrence to make a postcolonial critique of their mutual attempts to pass as Middle Easterners, and her judgement is less about the inimitability of the Middle East than the failures and contradictions of the West—especially Western versions of religiosity and masculinity related to literary celebrity.

If the most obvious difference between MacEwen and Lawrence is sex, perhaps the most obvious of her implicit goals in re-imagining him is to critique masculinity and, symbolically, to take from Lawrence some of the power that men, and not women, often have. She accomplishes this by questioning gender and how it is determined; thus Julian, Manzini, and Lawrence are men whose celebrity, like their gender, is partly the result of performance. Following Friedrich Nietzsche's claim that "'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed" (qtd. in Butler 25) and Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman" (Butler 33, her emphasis), Judith Butler argues that "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is

performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (25). MacEwen makes this concept literal by representing two of her celebrities, Julian and Manzini, as actual performers: a magician and an escape artist. Lawrence, too, plays a role; in “The Desirability of El Auren” he is “all dressed up” and “posing” (66) for his audience. Not coincidentally, all her celebrities are androgynous men, and Lawrence is a soldier and celebrity of ambiguous sexual orientation.

MacEwen’s passing as Lawrence raises questions not only about race and gender but also about identity in general and hers in specific. Hostert argues that passing—as the historical activity of black people posing as white people for “social promotion” (11)—is too often assumed to be only the recourse of victims of oppression who have learned to hate themselves (12). Although passing is a sign of a “crisis of identity” (Hostert 33), it is also a tactic for overcoming the crisis by redefining identity. Noting the “common theme” of *Passing and Fictions of Identity* (1996), edited by Elaine Ginsberg, Hostert states that the concept of passing has been extended “beyond the context of race” (15): “Passing is a subversive form of counter-power, unseen and invisible” (Hostert 87). It enables what Hostert calls *disidentification*, “a free fluctuation of identity” (91). It can apply to aspects of identity such as race but also gender and class. MacEwen’s passing as Lawrence means that she creates a new identity, possibly by destroying her old one and certainly by adopting and adapting that of the historical Lawrence.

Although MacEwen reveals some of Lawrence’s flaws through his contrast with what we know of her, her attitude to Lawrence is certainly not a total condemnation of him as a person. Instead, she treats him partly as a victim of celebrity who would rather be at war than be photographed (as in “Their Deaths”). Occasionally, she suggests that his

celebrity caused a identity crisis that he adapted for his own use in his quest for mystical emptiness and the dissolution of his externally constructed identity; however, in “Notes from the Dead Land,” he finally accepts that “the world can have me any way it pleases” (69). Despite their differences, she expresses considerable empathy for him, particularly when he seems to be weary of how “the world” determines his life. In these cases, the Lawrence that she represents is arguably more similar to herself than to the historical Lawrence. She represents his dislike of scrutiny from the media, his discomfort with heterosexual masculinity, and his desire for authentic spiritual development through mysticism and Islam; however, the historical Lawrence was inconsistent in his modesty (to say the least) and was not as openly discomfited by heterosexual masculinity or as interested in Islam as MacEwen portrays him to be. This difference suggests that MacEwen modified her Lawrence from the historical Lawrence so that she could more accurately use his character as an expression of her own identity.

MacEwen gains a freedom to define her identity, in her poems about Lawrence, according to her own preferences. She grants him the ambiguity of identity symbolized by a mirage (in “The Mirage”) and thereby refuses to define him—or herself—completely. Instead, she comments on the historical Lawrence’s Orientalist presumption of defining the Middle East; she suggests that he failed to understand that the freedom he promised the Arabs was not a freedom he could give. He himself was not adequately free; his celebrity depended in part on complying with norms of masculinity and a pretence of religious significance. It also depended on his colonial power and what seemed to be his attempts to acculturate himself into Arab society. These criticisms of the historical Lawrence in her poetry eventually reflect upon her, suggesting that MacEwen’s passing is

a promising tactic that ultimately cannot give her everything that she might want in real life—such as celebrity of a higher degree.

Nevertheless, her imagining herself as Lawrence was risky. Although taking a new identity might simply add to the array that each of us has or performs, fully committing to a new identity might require the destruction of the old one. Such destruction or imagined “reconfiguration” could approximate the identity crisis that celebrity can cause. Whether or not MacEwen was entirely aware of the potential success of such approximation, by passing as Lawrence, she could experience, or at least imagine, keenly, the crisis that celebrities of higher degree might have felt. Few people would want such an experience except the most devoted artists (often method actors)—those willing to take, in Ondaatje’s words, “all risks.”

MacEwen’s passing as Lawrence is not necessarily self-destructive, but it implies that she assessed herself with both a self-effacing humility and a self-aggrandizing presumption. Selfhood depends on a comparison with someone else—a comparison that can be metaphor. Paul Ricoeur argues that “the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other” (*Oneself* 3). The extent of MacEwen’s success in “pass[ing] into” or identifying with Lawrence can never be determined, and, logically, no one can actually become another person. The illogical fusion of public and private, which is basically the same fusion that MacEwen proposes in seeking to understand her private self by identifying with a very public man, is a metaphor. In the only book-length study of MacEwen’s work, Bartley argues that the “central concern” of MacEwen’s poetry is “self-knowledge” (17). MacEwen’s passing as Lawrence is an attempt to realize a

metaphor and seek self-transformation through art. Although self-destruction is not the inevitable outcome, the inevitable change is always a risk.

MacEwen can be partly understood as a fan who identifies too closely with a celebrity. Surveying other scholarship (i.e. Fraser and Brown, 2002; Maltby, 2004; McCutcheon, 2004), Ellis Cashmore in *Celebrity / Culture* (2006) explains that fans can develop imaginary relationships with celebrities and, seeing them as role models, might adopt their attributes, values, and behaviours (81). This is sometimes called “over-identification” (Cashmore 80, 89). I would extend that explanation by suggesting that, in rare cases, fans might imitate dangerous “behaviours.” Among other reasons for her untimely death is the possibility that MacEwen was imitating, consciously or not, Lawrence’s reckless endangerment of himself.

My suspicion is that MacEwen’s readers and critics often wonder about that possibility and others,<sup>7</sup> but no one makes explicit claims; they are reluctant to speculate because speculation might be not only false but also an invasion of MacEwen’s privacy—the very invasion that fans indulge in when they begin to assume they know the celebrity. The individual fan is usually characterized as an “obsessed loner” (Jenson 11), but a critic’s persistent work in solitude often verges on obsession. Fans and critics are not always that different from each other: Ondaatje, who wrote a critical book about Cohen, was late for the launch of his own *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976) because he was

<sup>7</sup> For example, in “From *The Rising Fire* to *Afterworlds*: The Visionary Circle in the Poetry of Gwendolyn MacEwen” (2000), Wood begins by stating that Sullivan and Liza Potvin both “wonder[ed]” (40) about MacEwen’s death. Wood states: “As her biographer Rosemary Sullivan discovered, there were many reasons why her life lasted just as long as it did, and no longer” (40). He then immediately claims that MacEwen’s life “was the life of the visionary who, in the words of her visionary predecessor Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘cannot choose but hear’” (Wood 40). Although Wood is not referring to MacEwen’s connection to Lawrence, he uses the fatalism of Coleridge’s phrase to imply that MacEwen’s death had a somehow spiritual logic, which should surprise no one who is now convinced of the religiosity of celebrities such as Lawrence.

delayed by the many encores at a Cohen concert (Rae 133). Although critical reservations about biographical speculation are serious and worth constant reiteration, such reservations did not overly influence MacEwen, who engaged in very personal speculation while remaining critical about Lawrence's flaws and the limits of what she could know about him. She was able to produce a book that comments on Lawrence and herself from the perspective of both a fan and a critic. Arguably, *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* has value as criticism that would be reduced almost to nothing if it were disconnected from the life of its author. Knowing that it was written by MacEwen—a woman, a poet who had been a celebrity, a student of the Middle East, at a time of crisis in her life—is nearly essential. Almost as important is the self-reflexivity of the critic who reads *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* to inquire about celebrity and its fusion of the public and private; in complicating the distinction between herself as a fan and as a critic, MacEwen demands that critics think about their status as potential fans.

Studies of celebrity should account for biography because celebrities have learned to use their private lives to promote their careers. Sometimes, this accounting will seem to cheapen the work of the celebrity by too cynically identifying potential moments of “selling out.”<sup>8</sup> Sometimes, it means that the critic's work will appear to be the irrational or invasive inquiry expected (sometimes with little justice) of fans; however, fans and critics both might draw attention to the fact that MacEwen was composing *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* when she knew that alcoholism could lead to her own death as it had led to that of her father (Sullivan 250, 321). Fans and critics both might also observe that the

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8 One such moment is Cohen's provocative reference to a potentially biographical sexual encounter in “the 15-year old girls,” which was considered in chapter IV.

historical Lawrence died at 47, MacEwen at 46. He died in a fatal crash after a series of increasingly injurious motorcycle accidents (Aldington 387). She died of metabolic acidosis caused by a complete refusal of alcohol and food after a period of binge drinking (Sullivan 408-10). This coincidence raises the admittedly disturbing question of whether or not MacEwen was writing explicitly about Lawrence's death while implicitly—and even self-promotionally—foreshadowing her own.

Not all critics have shied away from similar possibilities. Thomas H. Kane introduces the concept of “automortography” in his essay on the celebrity of four authors who wrote about their own deaths while they were dying of cancer. Referring particularly to Raymond Carver and Charles Bukowski, Kane argues that their “scripting and directing” (410) of their own deaths “enhances their literary celebrity” (410), partly because their automortography “elicits feeling” (410) in the reader. Combining and literalizing two ideas from Roland Barthes, Kane implies that readers get more pleasure from a text if they know it is about the death of its author. Kane is not as specific about pleasure as Barthes is in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), and to clarify what Kane might mean would result in a too tangential digression into theory, so I will simply suggest that the pleasure derived from such a reading is that of morbid fascination. There is usually a revival of interest (popular *and* scholarly) in an author's work following his or her death. In some cases, death boosts an author's celebrity. In other cases, the threat of death is enough to do so, as when the *fatwa* was issued against Salman Rushdie, whose subsequent reclusiveness boosted his celebrity even further. Indeed, MacEwen's death occasioned reports in *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star* (reproduced in *The Selected Gwendolyn MacEwen* [2007]). Whether or not she expected or would have been

satisfied with such attention might never be known, but critics need to consider tactfully the possibility that MacEwen wrote *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* and conceived of her own death in them as the ultimately ironic promotion: his passing as her passing.

In addition to the previous introductory historical and biographical arguments about the relevance of *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* in MacEwen's career, the following section on that book makes several other proposals. The book's wide range of themes includes war, colonialism, religion, celebrity, sexuality, death, and identity. In it, MacEwen self-reflexively acknowledges her impersonation of Lawrence. She imagines an intimacy with him that is not unlike a fan's adulation of a celebrity. He is in some ways a religious figure whom she may worship. Ironically, her imaginative immersion in—or fusion with—Lawrence's identity can function, in theory, as a religious experience. She is not, however, naïve about his celebrity, which she represents as a cause of Lawrence's narcissistic and suicidal madness. Her Lawrence's problems reflect her own, and he becomes a figure through which she can seek self-knowledge. Her postcolonial critique of Lawrence therefore applies to her, too, as someone who mimics or even passes as Lawrence and who fashioned a mystique, as the historical Lawrence did, based partly on an ostensible connection to Middle Eastern cultures. Her critique also applies to the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, which came to the end of a line just as MacEwen's Lawrence does, along with the culture that he represents. Ultimately, my argument is about the identity crisis that celebrities often experience and how MacEwen passes as Lawrence as a substitute for a degree of celebrity and for an identity crisis that she seemed both to want and to denounce.

Two poems near the end of the book explicitly demonstrate that Lawrence's

celebrity was significant to MacEwen. In “The Desirability of El Aurens,” Lawrence is ostensibly frustrated that he was accorded the respect due to a sherif (a Muslim ruler, often a religious authority). He is therefore a public figure, and he complains that he was

all dressed up in [his] Sherifian regalia,  
 looking like a perfect idiot, posing  
 for the cameras, and hating it<sup>9</sup>  
 all the way to Damascus. (66)

The potentially inauthentic performance of Lawrence’s celebrity appears again in the next poem, “There Is No Place To Hide,” whose title attests to Lawrence’s impression of the public’s invasion of his private life. He says, “Here is a famous world; I’m standing on a stage / With ten spotlights on me, talking about how I detest / publicity” (67).

Ironically, MacEwen’s Lawrence is openly critical of his celebrity in this way only when he is in public, and his self-reflection also applies to MacEwen, who also expressed some frustration with “publicity.” MacEwen’s connection with Lawrence is partly their celebrity, though they experienced it in different degrees. Sullivan claims that MacEwen “found in Lawrence precisely the persona she needed to explore what she herself had been through” (341). In “The Desirability of El Aurens,” MacEwen implies the self-reflexivity of her passing as Lawrence when he says, “A discharged mental patient / with the face of a wrinkled monkey / is reported to be impersonating me” (66). MacEwen was not seeking to flatter herself but to identify with Lawrence (or at least imitate him) as a “discharged mental patient” who could understand his secret madness.

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<sup>9</sup> In contrast, a scene midway through the Lean film shows Lawrence to be very pleased, even childishly overjoyed, with his “regalia.”

At the end of “There Is No Place To Hide” (which has the staggered indentation that is common to the book), Lawrence says,

Outside my window, a small tit bird bashes itself  
 against the glass. At first I thought  
 it was admiring itself in the window.  
 Now I know it’s mad. (67)

Wood interprets the bird “as MacEwen the poet looking through her imaginary window at the imaginary Lawrence inside” (“Mythic” 158), but the bird initially symbolizes Lawrence who is “talking about” himself; the bird behaves with the same narcissistic self-reflexivity as Lawrence in looking at its own reflection and going crazy by “bash[ing] itself” against its own image.

I would add that this symbol is very similar to that of the gecko on the window in Ondaatje’s “Tin Roof,” which was published the same year as *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*. Like the semi-transparent gecko, Lawrence thinks that “everything shows through / and yet no one can see me” (67). He feels exposed (“everything show[ing] through”), and by saying that “no one can see [him]” he means that no one really understands him, even though his audience has the advantage of “ten spotlights” that shine light “through” him as if he were being x-rayed. He is symbolically invisible; he cannot see through himself but others can—a problem that arguably underlies his ultimately failed quest for self-knowledge. At the same time, the notion that he is invisible is a sign of his wishful thinking. He wants *not* to be seen, but his image is reflected back at him by the nearby window, which—as the surface that produces his reflection—is another symbol of his celebrity. The window restricts his freedom of mobility; he mistakes his celebrity as a

passage when it is an impediment that reinforces his narcissism and “mad[ness].” The tit bird’s behaviour at the window suggests that Lawrence’s celebrity makes him as vulnerable to his audience as an emperor is in new clothes.

MacEwen, as Lawrence’s audience and his impersonator, appropriates some of the power of Lawrence’s greater celebrity; she insists that she has the authority to write in his voice about his life—an insistence that is less problematic because she was arguably also writing in her own voice about her own life. As someone who might be considered a fan of Lawrence and a seeker of intimacy with him, MacEwen’s impersonation of him is akin to what Sean Latham calls (and what I have already referred to as) the “invasive reconfiguration” inflicted by the public on the identity of the celebrity. Latham’s description aptly connotes colonization, which is often the goal of countries or people who engage in what is called Orientalism (the study and problematically romantic representation of the East, its people, and its cultures). Referring to *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* in *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said writes that the Orientalist (such as Lawrence) “surveys [...] the Orient from above, with the aim of getting hold of the whole sprawling panorama before him—culture, religion, mind, history, society” (239) and that the “coherence and force” (239) of the resulting view depends on the tradition of Orientalism in epics such as *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

I would add that Lawrence’s celebrity is based partly on that tradition but that his charisma as a celebrity reinforces the “coherence and force” of his Orientalist view. In that context, MacEwen’s impersonation of Lawrence has many effects: it gives coherence to the legend that developed from the historical Lawrence’s celebrity; it colonizes Lawrence, making him the object of study and representation in contrast to his historical

role as the subject; and it comments on her own study and representation of the Middle East, which had also been evident in earlier poems, in *King of Egypt, King of Dreams*, and later in *The Honey Drum* (1983), her translation and invention of Arab tales. Her impersonation of Lawrence raises many questions: what is the source of her power over him? To what extent could she be blamed for redoubling the problems of colonialism by reinforcing Lawrence's view?<sup>10</sup> Does she have the right to represent Lawrence's experiences as analogies of her own? Ondaatje's representation of Bolden in *Coming Through Slaughter* raises similar questions, but the multiple perspectives of that novel function partly as a disclaimer. MacEwen takes greater risks by writing almost completely in Lawrence's voice.

The right to represent is a serious question, if not a problem, of *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*, and postcolonial theory is especially appropriate in proposing an answer or solution. In *Orientalism*, Said states: "There were—and are—cultures and nations whose location is in the East, and their lives, histories, and customs have a brute reality obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West" (5). The logical conclusion of Said's argument is that people should not talk or write about (or otherwise represent) what is not properly theirs by right of experience, heritage, and culture—especially when they have the advantage of colonial power. Said is correct to inform his method of interrogating Orientalists, their texts, and their practices with an

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10 The difficult question of her own complicity in Orientalist misrepresentations of the Middle East might be one reason why no one has published any postcolonial studies of her poetry. Another reason might be that postcolonial views of Canadian literature have focussed mainly on writers whose heritage is nominally other than anglophone. Ondaatje, Rohinton Mistry, and Joy Kogawa have been studied postcolonially, even though (or because) they were all mainly educated in English. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, wondering about how seriously postcolonial voices will be considered, says, "For me, the question 'Who should speak?' is less crucial than 'Who will listen?'" (59). The latter question might be necessary because the former is not easy to answer.

analysis of the author's "*strategic location*, which is a way of describing the author's position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about" (*Orientalism* 20, his emphasis). The historical Lawrence's "position" was that of a secular but culturally Christian military leader whose presence in the Middle East was at the service of British interests. To what extent his developing celebrity gave him power during the Arab Revolt is not an issue here—though it gave him the power of widely communicating his representations of the Arab Revolt (as in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*) after it happened.

Instead, the issue here is MacEwen's "strategic location" and how it is different from that of Lawrence. Besides her actual location and place in history, the main difference is that MacEwen comes to the Middle East not as a man in an army but as a woman, alone. A secondary but potentially corresponding difference is her lower degree of celebrity. These two differences raise an interesting question: to what extent will a celebrity adopt the role of a fan in relation to a more widely recognized celebrity? Joli Jenson's argument about fans is that, unlike celebrities, they are seen as passive (10), socially dysfunctional (9-11), emotional (24-5), and marginal (25)—traits that correspond with traditionally sexist views of women. A celebrity might therefore be feminized into fandom in comparison with a celebrity of higher degree.

In MacEwen's case, to avoid occupying a woman's place in the hierarchy of celebrity, she complicates the distinctions between celebrity and fan, man and woman, and colonist and colonized. To be considered different is not usually cited as a source of power; instead, difference tends to be used as a poor excuse for all sorts of violence: "us" against "them." In response, Bhabha suggests that a "menace" (132) to colonialism occurs when the colonized people mimic their colonizers so uncannily that difference

ceases to be a justifiable reason for oppression. MacEwen's passing as Lawrence, which she does convincingly in her impersonation of his voice, is essential to her critique of the historical Lawrence's power. She reverses the application of power so that the female fan colonizes the male celebrity. She had pursued a similar investigation from the perspectives of fans in "The Magician" and "Manzini: Escape Artist," but in *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* she also tries to know herself from the perspective of someone else's celebrity. The critical distance that she needs in this quest for self-knowledge is supplied by the difference of sex that she exploits and critiques as the main reason why she could "not quite" (as Bhabha might say) be known as Lawrence was.

The ambiguity of identity that results from MacEwen's impersonation of Lawrence has its epitome in "The Mirage." Following the metaphors of the magician and the escape artist, the mirage is the final major metaphor of celebrity in MacEwen's career. In the other poems in the book, the speaker is obviously Lawrence and clearly acknowledges any quotation of others. Placed before "The Meeting," which simply identifies several Arab leaders by name, "The Mirage" reveals even less about anyone's identity, even though the poem is in the first person. Its abstraction and referential haziness are essential to its examination of identity.

"The Mirage" ironically sabotages this examination by suggesting that it is, itself, impossible to observe. Alluding with comparative caution to Lawrence's tragically incorrect confidence in being "invisible" in the film *Lawrence of Arabia*, the speaker of "The Mirage" asks, "Am I as invisible to you / As you always were to me, fellow traveller?" (37). Although the speaker later claims, "I am an eye" (37), he or she (or it) acknowledges the poem's paradox of perspective: "There are no easy ways of seeing"

(37). Finally, the poem ends with a riddle that implies the speaker is the sun:

I need tons of yellow space, and nothing  
in the spectrum is unknown to me.

I am the living center of your sight; I draw for you  
this thin and dangerous horizon. (37)

Questions abound: who is speaking? Lawrence? An eye? The sun? The mirage? Sand?

One interpretation is that MacEwen ends the poem with a symbol of celebrity (the sun, a star—"the living center"). If Lawrence is the sun or another star, and is in that sense like the poem's speaker, he gains the power of scrutiny that the sun had over Ondaatje's Billy the Kid; however, the title of the poem overrides the final image to suggest that

Lawrence, as a celebrity known as a star, can only be known to the same extent as a mirage. Like the ghostly Billy the Kid, he is potentially invisible or transparent and unknowable. As a mirage, he contradicts any assumption about identity being stable and easy to define; in that sense, his quest for self-knowledge can never be certainly and fully accomplished. If identity is as much in flux as heat waves rising from sand, then

Lawrence does, however, gain the advantage of being able to fashion his identity however he pleases. The most accurate way to describe his identity is probably as a flux within partly negotiable limits imposed from outside. "The Mirage" serves to reinforce all the other poems in which Lawrence suggests that he is widely recognized but unknown or misunderstood because of his celebrity. In general, he is not as ambiguous as "The Mirage" because he is defined by forces beyond his control, such as his nationality, his job, his sex and sexual orientation, and MacEwen as his impersonator. MacEwen seems to think that Lawrence's freedom to define his own identity is limited, especially

because he is the object of such scrutiny (“the center of your sight”).

The ambiguous image of the sun in “The Mirage” appears with comparative precision in the star imagery of “Auda,” which raises questions about the problem of what might be described as a patriarchal lineage common to literary celebrity. “Auda,” which is part of a series that depicts several of Lawrence’s Arab friends, contains a conversation between Lawrence and the titular Arab. Lawrence writes:

I remember him musing: *Why do Westerners want everything?*

*Behind our few stars we can see God*

*who is not behind your millions.*

I said: *We want the world’s end, Auda.* (33)

Auda is asking why Lawrence and his countrymen are so greedy, and he implies an answer: the Arabs can see God and want nothing else; however, Lawrence might also be implying, as the person who tells us what Auda supposedly said, that the absence of God in the culture of “Westerners” is the reason for their greed. Auda’s question-and-answer here is the only instance in the book of an Arab making a significant comment. I would have guessed that this singular moment of Arab speech indicated that MacEwen was reluctant to speak for Arabs, but she is not so cautious in *The Honey Drum*. Instead, MacEwen’s Lawrence is almost entirely focussed on himself. Thus, his recollection of Auda’s comment is an interpretation of him, and the meaning of the “stars” can be considered from Lawrence’s perspective. The “stars” can symbolize celebrities, thereby implying that the West has “millions” of celebrities that pretend to satisfy a religious need but actually interfere with access to God because of their sheer numbers.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The poem “Auda” is not obviously about celebrity, but its “stars” are not merely stars. Auda’s comment

Lawrence's response to Auda acknowledges what might be called total greed: a desire to consume the world and thereby cause "the world's end." He is admitting, in effect, what Tomson Highway identifies as the logical outcome of a needlessly fatalistic, linear, and not coincidentally Christian worldview: to go straight toward the apocalypse of Revelation (Goldman 22). Reflecting on his teleological conversation with Auda, Lawrence mentions that Auda had "twenty-eight wives, and only one son alive" (33); "he wanted sons" (33). After Lawrence unpleasantly surprises himself by coming into Auda's tent and seeing him have sex with "one of his new wives" (33), Lawrence comments: "I knew / that he knew something I didn't know / and have never known" (34): Lawrence is not only talking about the experience of sex with a woman but also the desire for a son, for a lineage. The biographical linearity of *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* is related to that patrilineal desire. The related implication in this poem is that the masculinity of literary celebrity is at the end of a line. Auda's daughters are never mentioned; his wives are anonymous women used only for sexual purposes. MacEwen is subtly criticizing this state of affairs and might even be suggesting, on a much broader scale, that for celebrity to be sustainable—without coming to an end—it needs participation from both sexes.

Not only is Lawrence repulsed by the idea of a pseudo-religious patriarchal lineage, but he is also critical of the idea that celebrities should be heroes—especially heroes who are manly invaders with religious justification for their deeds. In *Celebrity and Power* (1997), P. David Marshall identifies the star, the leader, and the hero as types

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about "our few stars" cannot be describing the real world; the night sky over the Middle East has no fewer stars than over countries farther West. Obviously, the stars have a symbolic meaning for Auda. One possibility, besides celebrity, is that they are symbols of jewels and of money by extension, and the reference to greed would support such an interpretation. Money is not a theme of the book, however; celebrity is far more important to the significance of *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*.



his self-loathing would be relieved only in death. As a postcolonial commentary, “In Bed” suggests that Lawrence understands his colonial project to be as futile as Auda’s relentless copulation. Given the masculine and heterosexual context of literary celebrity that was evident in the previous chapters, Lawrence realizes that his homosexuality makes him a “ridiculous hero,” a mockery of celebrity’s normative values.

Poems such as “Auda” and “In Bed” suggest that one of the restrictions that celebrity imposed on Lawrence was sexual, and MacEwen’s sympathy for him—despite the problem of his celebrity’s colonial provenance—is largely the result of the similarity that she perceived between them. Her interest in Lawrence’s sexuality is like the interest that she had in her character Julian, who is “bi-sexual,” just as she once declared her own “mind” to be “bi-sexual” (qtd. in Sullivan 95). Lawrence seemed not to be bi-sexual, but in being different from the heterosexual norm, he was familiar and symbolically useful to MacEwen as a comment on literary celebrity’s restrictive sexual preference. The historical Lawrence had no interest in women; one of the rumours was that “the great love of Lawrence’s life” (Aldington 80) was a boy of fifteen known as both Dahoum and Sheik Ahmed (the “S.A.” to whom *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is dedicated). Some accounts suggest that Lawrence’s Arab acquaintances thought him to be a “pederast” (Aldington 80). These rumours were not repeated in the discourse of his celebrity because his celebrity derived from stories that were often “invented” (Aldington 107)—often by him—and that were never told “against” (Aldington 107) him.<sup>12</sup> His celebrity required his sexual preferences to remain secret; no one in the West could be allowed to know of his

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<sup>12</sup> The historical Lawrence’s celebrity was not—at least not initially—also notoriety, which can be the result of scandal or slander, i.e. stories told “against” someone in public.

love for an Arab boy because (probably even if that love were asexual or platonic) such a revelation would corrupt his heroic status.

Because the celebrity of both the historical Lawrence and MacEwen's Lawrence is the direct outcome of his colonial actions, his celebrity is irrevocably tainted by the problems of his colonialism. As her Lawrence's efforts to acculturate himself into an Arab way of life fail, he is forced to acknowledge the sham of his celebrity. He tries to be critical of himself, though his later apologies for this complicity are somewhat tainted by excuses and continuing assumptions about English superiority over Arabs. He begins "Apologies" with a disclaimer about his presence in the Middle East but also pronounces himself the chosen saviour of the Arabs: "I did not choose Arabia; it chose me" (29). He asks what his readers—his public—might think of him, but then he gives them no time to answer: "What was I, that soiled Outsider, doing / Among them? I was not becoming one of them, no matter / What you think" (29). His tone is condescending because, in theory, his celebrity should elevate him above his readers (his fans), just as his nationality should elevate him above the Arabs; however, he also realizes that he is "soiled."

Both postcolonially apologetic and defensively Orientalist, his ambivalence about his actions and identity is obvious. He claims that his "mind's twin kingdoms fought an everlasting war" (29), but he does not treat these "twins" equally: the Bedouin are "reckless" (29) and he is "civilized" (29); furthermore, his presumed ability to have assimilated an Arab way of life into his "mind" is itself colonial. So, too, is the "invasive reconfiguration" of identity associated with the religious pretence of celebrity: "I, whatever I was, / Fell into a dumb void that even a false god could not fill, / could not inhabit" (29). Reconfigured by his celebrity, he cannot describe himself except as

“whatever”—or as the aforementioned mirage. Whereas he suggested in “Water” that he would be able to transform to fit into Arab culture, here he is a “false god” who could neither “fill” nor “inhabit” (i.e. fit into) that culture. With the emphasis on the “false[ness]” of his religiosity, MacEwen’s Lawrence sees himself as an “Outsider” who should be respected but who is reviled and reviles himself.

Paradoxically, the historical Lawrence’s religious pretence and his failure at acculturation might have led him, and MacEwen in identifying with him, to some degree of mystical experience. MacEwen states, in an undated letter written to her father to explain why she quit high school (evidently before her first trip abroad in 1962), that she would, one day, be “ready to go to the East and find my true purpose—fulfill what I was meant to do” (qtd. in Sullivan 74). Sullivan interprets this letter to mean that MacEwen “intended to train herself to be a visionary” (74). MacEwen’s voyages to Israel, Egypt, and Greece reinforced her interest in the cultures of those places. The historical Lawrence was also interested in religion, though he “resented his mother’s repeated attempts to make him religious [specifically Christian]” (Aldington 53); the fascination with Christianity from his student days partly turned to Islam, as in the third chapter of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.<sup>13</sup> MacEwen, in an interview, said, “Lawrence was constantly in awe of this [the Muslims’ relationship to Allah] but he could never achieve it in himself and I feel the same way” (qtd. in “Mythic” 150). MacEwen was similarly interested in Christianity without being a believer and could be viewed as an outcast from Christianity seeking a religious alternative in Islam, though mainly in its myths and not its dogma.

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13 Lawrence did not actually convert, partly because he had not been especially Christian and partly because his interest in other religions was not especially orthodox. The third chapter of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is a brief survey of the commonalities in Semitic religions, mainly in the context of Arabs such as the Bedouin.

Her Lawrence uses Islam to cancel the influence of his Christian heritage on him, but the historical Lawrence wrote that his acculturation into Arabia was “an affectation only” (30): “I had dropped one form [of faith and of appearance] and not taken on the other” (30). Lawrence, in his own words and in those of MacEwen, went to the Middle East and found in himself a “void” (Lawrence 30; *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* 64). Although his condition might be nihilistic, to have an internal “void” is to be empty, which is, in effect, the transcendental condition of selflessness that some mystics experience.<sup>14</sup>

Although “Apologies” concludes with Lawrence claiming to want nothing more than mystical emptiness, the void is less spiritually satisfying than it might seem, partly because MacEwen interprets Lawrence’s religiosity as politically corrupt. Lawrence’s religiosity is associated with colonial assumptions that also relate to his celebrity: he wants the freedom to define himself that his celebrity denies him, but to gain freedom he must give away freedom to the Arabs; he presumes that they need it. Quoting the historical Lawrence’s claim that Arabs are “children of the idea” (Lawrence 41), MacEwen writes in his voice:

The Arabs are children of the idea; dangle an idea

In front of them, and you can swing them wherever.

I was also a child of the idea; I wanted

no liberty for myself, but to bestow it

Upon them. I wanted to present them with a gift so fine

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<sup>14</sup> In *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (1911), Evelyn Underhill explains that some mystics experience “a nothingness, a pure passivity, an emptiness” (318), which “entails suspension” (318) of some faculties of consciousness while preserving other aspects of the self. When MacEwen’s Lawrence, in “Apologies,” claims to want to be “[e]mpty” (29) (see below), he seems to be seeking “passivity” that would, in effect, be contrition and absolution.

it would outshine all other gifts in their eyes;

it would be *worthy*. Then at last I could be

Empty. (29, her emphasis)

The historical Lawrence's paternalistic attitude of "racial superiority" (Aldington 106) is moderated here by the enjambment after "wanted," which suggests that he wanted for "idea[s]"; he had only colonial assumptions about bringing "liberty" to Arabs. He assumes that they would value liberty brought to them on his terms. By giving them *his* liberty, he becomes "Empty," as if he had been previously full of the liberty accorded to him by his country, England, the putative leader of the free world at the time of World War I. Later, in "The Death of Dahoum," he hears from Dahoum's ghost that his "gift" was "wasted" (51); his freedom is incompatible with Arabia, mainly because Lawrence's gift of freeing the Arabs from the Turks would oblige them to the Britons. MacEwen's interest in Lawrence and freedom is not necessarily (and not only) a comment on celebrity, but Lawrence's success as a negotiator and military leader in Arabia partly depended on his widespread recognition. MacEwen sees celebrity as a status that grants, at best, a compromised freedom resulting from morally questionable means.

The guilt that leads Lawrence to make "Apologies" is related to the breakdown of his masculinity in the context of war. In the same way that Lawrence's realization about being a false god exposes the religious pretence of his celebrity, his reaction to the war reveals the faults in the masculinity of his celebrity. The rest of the section that "Apologies" introduces in *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* is a horrific depiction of Lawrence's wartime experiences at Akaba, Deraa, Carcemish, and Damascus. In "Nitroglycerine Tulips," Lawrence describes how he was involved in bombing Turkish trains. Trying to

“make it / a neat war” (41), he writes that he “straightened out the bodies of dead Turks / placing them in rows to look better” (41). Eventually, his guilt as a killer and the futility of his reparative actions overwhelm him:

[....] Once there were three hundred  
 of them, with their clothes stripped off,  
 And I wanted nothing more than to lie down with them,

And die, of course— [....] (41)

The stanza break before he admits that he wants to “die” is a sign of repression that substitutes his homosexual desire with his death-wish. As in the poem “In Bed,” his desire to “lie down” with dead men hints at his homosexuality, his necrophilia, and his death-wish. None of this is a breakdown of masculinity except in dominant modes of culture such as war and celebrity.

Lawrence’s implicit homosexual desire, death wish, and necrophilia in “Nitroglycerine Tulips” are generally in contrast with the masculinity associated with war and celebrity. His implied desires are partly incompatible with what Loren Glass calls the “virile masculinity bordering on caricature [that] became central to the public image of celebrity authors” (18) in the twentieth century. Homosexuality is not contrary to virility; in fact, in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (1992), Kaja Silverman argues that the historical “Lawrence’s masochistic homosexuality assumes forms which are surprisingly compatible with the delusions of leadership, and which underwrite rather than challenge his virility” (300); however, homosexuality is deviant according to the norms of hegemonic masculinity that are prescribed in traditional armies. MacEwen’s Lawrence’s

behaviour in scenes of war is closer to a caricature of femininity: by “straighten[ing] out the bodies of dead Turks” as if to remind himself of their presumed heterosexuality or straightness, he arranges the battlefield as if it were a domestic space that he is responsible for making “neat.” By representing Lawrence as a symbolic woman in this instance, MacEwen brings him closer to her own position, inasmuch as her position is or seems to be traditionally feminine; she thereby helps her audience to accept that his celebrity is accessible to her, while also acknowledging that celebrity demands those who embody it to perpetuate an illusion that suppresses their comparatively real desires.

Ironically, Lawrence’s transgressive desires expose the contradiction of the masculinity that helps to make his celebrity possible: although his homosexuality is contrary to the hegemonic masculinity at work in the army, he is an excellent military leader.<sup>15</sup> One reason for his excellence is that his sexuality is repressed. In theory, such repression should happen regardless of whether a soldier is homosexual or heterosexual. The army’s homosocial and heteronormative rules create unsatisfied desire—what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls “homosocial desire” (1)<sup>16</sup> in *Between Men* (1985)—in its

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15 Using Freudian terms similar to those that I applied in chapter IV to explain Cohen’s representation of celebrity as slavery, Silverman argues that, during the worst of the historical Lawrence’s personal experiences during the war, “Lawrence’s reflexive masochism ultimately [gave] way to feminine masochism, and [...] it is only through an examination of this shift that we can explain his subsequent retreat from leadership” (10). I would also apply this claim to Lawrence’s “retreat from” celebrity. “Feminine masochism” has been defined as “the full-blown sexual perversion in which a man adopts what is assumed to be the naturally passive position of a woman” (Finke 6; Silverman 10, 189). In the poem “Deraa,” which I will examine below, MacEwen literalizes this masochism and Silverman therefore seems to agree with her about Lawrence: despite his success as a military leader and as a celebrity, his personal experiences of those roles motivated him to think of his sexuality as the perversion it is assumed to be in classic psychoanalysis and in public opinion. The result is that he hates himself.

16 Sedgwick explains: “‘Homosocial desire,’ to begin with, is a kind of oxymoron. ‘Homosocial’ is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with ‘homosexual,’ and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from ‘homosexual.’ In fact, it is applied to such activities as ‘male bonding,’ which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality. To draw the ‘homosocial’ back into the orbit of ‘desire,’ of the potentially erotic, is to hypothesize the

soldiers whether they are straight or gay; the army then sublimates sexual desire with deadly violence (suggesting necrophilia) and depends on its soldiers to risk their lives (suggesting the death-wish) for the nation. Lawrence's unstated desires are not so perverse when the army's goals are revealed to be surprisingly similar, though national defence—or war—is never his own goal. Lawrence wants to die, “of course,” not have sex with men, alive or dead. His willingness to dismiss his desires and to be known as a sacrificial figure is potentially promotional of his celebrity (as a manifestation of the religious pretence); however, he probably would not have wanted to die if his desires had been satisfied. His necrophilia and his death-wish suggest that he would rather not continue to promote himself or the lineage (suggested in “Auda”) of his celebrity. He is an excellent military leader partly because his masculinity is forced toward a dead end (e.g. a death-wish or necrophilia); the contradiction is that both his masculinity and his celebrity are self-defeating and self-destructive—a dilemma he cannot solve.

The suggestion that Lawrence is a victim of celebrity is especially provocative because MacEwen implies that his celebrity-grade narcissism made him vulnerable. She also implies a connection between his narcissism and the development of his masochism, which Silverman affirms in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (10, 332). Layton's pronouncement that Cohen was “a narcissist who hates himself” (Flynn 11) also applies to MacEwen's Lawrence, who not only hates himself but enjoys some of his own pain. He suffers the worst of that pain when the Turks are seemingly avenged on him in “Deraa.” Following two evasive digressions into abstraction, Latin, and childhood recollection, Lawrence bluntly admits: “What happened of course was that I was raped at

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potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual” (1).

Deraa, / beaten and whipped and reduced to shreds / by Turks” (46).<sup>17</sup> Regardless of the historical accuracy of this claim, for MacEwen’s purposes, “of course” he was “raped.” Years later in England, after hiring a man to beat him (“In the Ranks”), her Lawrence wonders: “When I began to enjoy the whippings Bruce bestowed on me, / I do not know; probably right from the start” (61). The only other instance of Lawrence being beaten in *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* is when he is “raped [...] beaten and whipped.” Together, “In the Ranks” and “Deraa” suggest to me that Lawrence begins to cope with being raped by approximately reliving the experience in ways that he can “enjoy.” Such coping is evidence of his masochism, which is associated with the violence of his narcissism in an aforementioned scene: the tit bird bashing itself against its reflection in “There Is No Place To Hide.” The tit bird’s precedent from Greek myth, Narcissus was similarly enamoured by his reflection, which captivated his gaze until he transformed into a flower. When Lawrence says, “part of me lusted after death” (47) in “Deraa,” MacEwen is implying connections between his sexuality, his narcissism, his vulnerability to celebrity, and his eventual victimization in war and, later, his abuse at his own request.

“Deraa” exists as a manuscript entitled “Flagellation” (with “Deraa” as an alternative title) in MacEwen’s archives, and in that earlier version of the poem MacEwen was evidently associating Lawrence’s homosexuality (one aspect of his “lus[t]”) and eventual suicide (his “death”). These three lines are struck through: “Do I want to be raped? Of course / I want to be raped, I want my soul / to be raped along with everything

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17 In *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Lawrence recounts how he was arrested and then viciously beaten as punishment for resisting the Turkish governor’s sexual proposition; after being whipped and kicked, he had a physical response to the pain that was “probably sexual” (454), though whether or not he was raped remains ambiguous. Sullivan notes, furthermore, that one of his recent biographers believes that the “incident [was] invented” (349).



his victimization are highly problematic if they are expressed too bluntly—for example, as if Lawrence had a rape fantasy and that he wanted to be violated and punished to satisfy his homosexual desire and his need for the attention also generated by celebrity. One of the worst consequences of his rape is that it emasculates him and punishes him for being different (from the Turks, obviously, but also—following the circular logic of his punishment—from heterosexual men in general); he internalizes his punishment, teaching himself to make it pleasant, so that he even invites and enjoys similar violence done to him. His masochism could be explained—again, rather bluntly—as autoerotic because he hired “Bruce” to beat him. To avoid insensitive simplifications of Lawrence’s situation, other ways of interpreting it should be considered; in fact, MacEwen’s representation of his masochism relates to the identity politics and psychology of her passing as Lawrence, which is a performance of grandstanding essential to her critique of celebrity.

Her Lawrence’s masochism (and even his autoeroticism) can be understood as a tactic of resistance, as it was in my chapter on Cohen. In an essay that criticizes the Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory of homosexuality developing from narcissism, Michael Warner claims that, in the West, “homosexualities is [assumed to be] an unrecognized version of autoerotics, or more precisely of narcissism” (“Homo-Narcissism” 625). The Freudian theory is that people who do not develop sexual desire for members of the opposite sex are still childish in love with themselves, leading to sexual desire for members of the same sex. Warner argues that such a theory assumes that homosexuality is a developmental disorder or a symptom of disease (“Homo-Narcissism” 629). He argues that to avoid oversimplifying homosexuality, it must be shown to be “dialectical and interactive” (“Homo-Narcissism” 629), which presumably means that

homosexuality should be partly understood as an adjustable tactic of resisting heterosexual norms. If that understanding is sometimes correct, then MacEwen's representation of Lawrence's submission to Bruce can be interpreted as Lawrence's display of passive (or non-violent) resistance—however sadly ineffectual it might be—that comments both on his earlier abuse from the Turks and on the problem of assuming that homosexuality is a “disease” that should be punished. MacEwen does not place this commentary at the end of the book and after the war, which is when the historical Lawrence is rumoured to have subjected himself to flagellation; instead, her Lawrence is thinking back to a recent event, which makes his commentary more timely (though no more realistic, unfortunately) as resistance.

MacEwen's implicit opinions on sexuality, sex, and gender are complex, but her metafictional poems offer more evidence that her thinking was critically self-reflective. Her passing as Lawrence, which is detectable when her Lawrence refers to his own work as poetry (in “Tall Tales” or “The Void,” for example), complicates the issue of his sexuality. A seemingly heterosexual woman claiming to be bi-sexual writes poems in the voice of a gay or asexual man at work in the most traditionally masculine of fields: the field of war. Few scenarios could be as complicated, which is why the mirage is such an apt metaphor of identity. We could extrapolate various theories from this scenario, such as these: if MacEwen wants what a gay man wants (men), she might be reinforcing her heterosexuality; or, if MacEwen identifies with a gay man, she might be reinforcing her homosexuality; or, if MacEwen really is bi-sexual, she might be using Lawrence to demonstrate the instability of categories of gender that help to produce categories of desire. Reid's argument about MacEwen thinking of time “as a totality” might also apply

to MacEwen's way of thinking about gender and sex; it tends toward the holistic and the androgynous. MacEwen's interest in what is beyond categorization or naming appears in the highly self-reflexive "Tall Tales":

Poets and men like me who fight for something  
contained in words, but not words.

What if the whole show was a lie, and it bloody well was—  
would I still lie to you? Of course I would. (60)

Saying also that "[p]oets only play with words, you know" (60), Lawrence provides the standard disclaimer of postmodern poetry. He frankly admits the "lie" of the "show." He also takes pride in it, while also indirectly acknowledging that it was "bloody." Given that MacEwen is passing as Lawrence and imagining him as a poet like herself, she is also admitting to the artifice of her passing and all it entails. Such self-reflection is sometimes too easy. Poems such as "Tall Tales" can lead readers overly inclined to postmodernist assumptions to think that categories of sexuality can be broken down simply through the "play" of language—but further tactics are usually necessary.

To believe Lawrence's easy disclaimers would be a serious mistake, because MacEwen's passing as Lawrence ultimately signifies her unwillingness to surrender the message of her book entirely to playfully subjective interpretations. In "Tafas," the description of violence against women is more graphic than Lawrence's account of his rape. Her self-reflection is less evident here than in her metafictional poems, but it is more critical; it helps to deliver the book's feminist message. Liza Potvin argues that "MacEwen may not be interpreted as a feminist poet in the typical application of the



*Persona and Poetic Voice* (2004), what I call “passing” is what Maija Bell Samei would call “*non-ventriloquistic cross-dressing or transvestism*” (31), which is evident when the persona is “apparently [...] unitary” (31). In almost all of *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*, MacEwen’s voice passes as the historical Lawrence’s voice; as I remarked earlier in this chapter, she even uses the historical Lawrence’s actual phrases without citing them. Although “Tafas” has four such phrases, it is an exception to MacEwen’s usual passing as Lawrence. For the aforementioned political reasons, her difference from the historical Lawrence can be detected in “Tafas.” Samei “use[s] *ventriloquism* [as the term] for those cases in which the persona of the poet is allowed to surface alongside that of [the poem’s speaker]” (31). Following Plato, Samei argues that any “entering into the persona of another, this impersonation, need not be so permanent nor so well-concealed; a ventriloquist, for example, allows the props of his impersonation to be displayed before his audience and moves in and out of the persona of the puppet, returning to his own character in the interim” (29-30). In “Tafas,” MacEwen finally exposes “the props.” She reveals herself behind Lawrence, her puppet, and figuratively speaks with him—not only through him—in a voice that is more her own than his. She partly withdraws from her fusion with him<sup>19</sup> and denies metaphor its theoretical potential. Although MacEwen might be grandstanding by speaking in Lawrence’s voice, she does not believe him to be the bigger man; his complicity in war crimes means that he, too, is an agent of death, and

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19 Ondaatje distances himself from his subjects somewhat more obviously, through authorial intrusions, in various scenes in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and *Coming Through Slaughter*

“Death’s [...] silver cock” is “little.”<sup>20</sup>

Although MacEwen is writing in the voice of a man who seemingly had no knowledge of feminism, her Lawrence writes “Tafas” in a style of reportage that seems to anticipate a broad audience that might want him to tell the truth about his complicity in the war. The massacre in “Tafas” was perpetrated by the Turks, but Lawrence and his men “went after the Turks / and killed them” (52) and their animals, and the girl’s blood “ran out and out / and on and on / All the way to Damascus” (52). He concludes the poem by saying, “All this happened as I have said, and / The next day was Friday” (52). The banality of his reportage implies indifference but also shock and even shame at having participated in the cycle of violence that makes blood run “on and on.” He seems unsure of how to respond to seeing the women’s mutilated bodies. Visually, “Tafas” gives the distinct impression of being double-spaced (the result of breaks midway or near the end of each line), as if the act of speaking it or writing it was fitful and reluctant. He is more uncomfortable than he was when he saw Auda having sex with his wife; in different degrees and very different ways, both “Auda” and “Tafas” show women to be used and abused by men. Lawrence does not seem to censor himself, however, possibly because he wants to admit the blame that he deserves as a man contributing to war. MacEwen makes

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20 The phrase “Death’s little silver cock,” which is not among those in “Tafas” that were previously Lawrence’s, is partly an accident. In MacEwen’s annotated and corrected copy of *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*, she drew a square around “little” and noted in the margin: “accidental misprint. leave in.” MacEwen’s editorial decision here is a perfect example of her intervention—exploiting, in this case, someone else’s contribution, intentional or otherwise—in the text as an author whose decisions are political. She belittles not only “Death” but also Lawrence, a soldier who causes death, to criticize masculinity for its traditionally direct involvement in war. This editorial decision also reveals that MacEwen was willing to improvise in her performance of gender. Samei also states that “for many transvestites [...], the transparency of their gendered disguise is itself part of the performance” (30). By criticizing masculinity, acknowledging the performativity of her ventriloquism or passing, and withdrawing from her fusion with Lawrence, MacEwen complicates her identification with him.

him blameworthy and obedient to his audience's desire for information, though in this case he hardly says a word about himself; his narcissism is disrupted by the realization that others suffer, too. He therefore says what happened while generally denying his audience insight into his own feelings.

In "Deraa," Lawrence expresses his shame much more personally but with the same impression of being expected to divulge the most personal of details. He writes:

But everything is shameful, you know; to have a body  
                                   is a cruel joke. It is shameful to be under  
                                   an obligation to anything, even an animal;  
                                   life is shameful; I am shameful. There. (46)

His earlier offhanded dismissal of the trauma of his rape leads him to a surprising admission of shame, one that might also reflect misguided feelings about his homosexuality. His "body," as a significant part of his homosexuality, becomes the locus of his shame. Finally abandoning generalities ("everything," "anything"), he admits, in the first person, "I am shameful. There." His last word implies that he was pressed for the admission by the "you" of the audience that he addresses. He does not feel free to preserve his secrets from his audience. Lacking freedom, he lacks the ability to express himself or transform himself as he would prefer. Following Kathleen Woodward's explanation of traumatic shame, Jill Locke argues that "self-transformation" (149) becomes impossible when feelings of shortcoming or failure are imposed from outside through trauma. Lawrence's rape is one such trauma; so, perhaps, is his audience's demand for insight into his private life (i.e. his feelings of shame). His implied admission to the audience is that he is ashamed of his homosexuality, which is contrary to the

heterosexual masculinity that the public expects of male celebrities.

In effect, the public has helped to catalyse an identity crisis that is associated with his rape. In addition to the literal meaning of the rape, it is also the “invasive reconfiguration” that threatens to redefine him according to the values of the comparatively dominant public—not only the Turks but also the audience, above, that has pressed him to admit his shame. In that sense, it is like the murder of Billy the Kid at the hands of Pat Garrett in Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*—a murder which, seen through the lens of *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*, is more obviously a symbolic case of sexual assault. Lawrence’s rape and his audience’s shaming of him intensify his narcissism. According to Locke, “[o]ne of shame’s most poisonous consequences is the way in which it overwhelms the subject so that she is unable to think beyond herself” (151). This consequence is analogous to the fusion of selves that, in effect, prevents the celebrity from distinguishing between herself and the public. She cannot “think beyond herself” because her self has lost its sense of definition. MacEwen’s Lawrence is “overwhelm[ed]” by his own narcissism and in recognition of his celebrity, which is ultimately among the reasons for his death.

Shame is not only associated with Lawrence’s celebrity but also his religiosity in “The Desirability of El Aurens” when he receives sexual propositions from his fans. He states that “[m]any women are in love with someone called El Aurens [namely, Lawrence]; / They think they know me, but my name is Legion” (66). “[M]y name is Legion” was a demonically possessed man’s answer to Jesus’s inquiry about his identity in Mark 5:9. Jesus released the man’s demons, which transferred to a herd of pigs that then drowned themselves. These demons seem to be what Lawrence is referring to when,

in the third person, he remarks on his own “several selves” (66)—though MacEwen might also be thinking of Layton’s “murdered selves” in “The Cold Green Element” (1955).<sup>21</sup> Regardless, here Lawrence reacts to the “hideous, / carnal love letters” (15-6) from his fans by insisting that they do not “know” him—at least in the sense of carnal knowledge; he implies that he is possessed because he wants desperately to prevent the fusion of selves that celebrity can cause when the public knows the private self. He would rather be possessed because the aforementioned fusion is the public’s invasion of the private self,<sup>22</sup> and for Lawrence it is shameful: “Intimacy is shameful unless it’s perfect” (66). By mentioning “sham[e]” again, he is obviously associating his rape and his celebrity. He also seems to be yearning, however, for a “perfect” intimacy—an intimacy with his audience or with a less demonic spirit that would not involve his body.

MacEwen is that spirit and that audience; she is not interested in a “carnal” relationship with Lawrence but wants a spiritual “[i]ntimacy” with him, and her passing as Lawrence—as a voice and not a body—can accomplish their perfect intimacy partly because of their shared experience of different degrees of violence and celebrity. In Israel, MacEwen had been what she called “half-raped” (qtd. in Sullivan 138) by an Arab boy on the beach at Jaffa, and she survived a head-wound during a stoning by several Arab boys at Lifta in 1962 (Sullivan 142). The severity of the maliciousness of these attacks is not known, though MacEwen wrote of them in her diary with offhanded cool. Her ability to be dismissive or secretive about aspects of her life that might cause her shame finally resulted in an intervention from her friend Judith Merrill, who wrote to her in 1986: “if

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21 Both MacEwen’s and Layton’s poems associate drowning with the fusion of selves.

22 Recall that, above, Julian the magician seemed to perceive his audience as “devils”; here it is demons.

you drink enough to kill yourself, I lose a friend who matters a lot to me” (qtd. in Sullivan 389-90). MacEwen had been coy in *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* in alluding to alcoholism; talking in “Water” about that titular element, Lawrence mentions that “there are other drinks” (3). In “Deraa,” Lawrence declares that “to have a body / is a cruel joke. It is shameful to be under / an obligation to anything,” which could refer to alcohol or any other substance that is addictive (sometimes shamefully) to a body. Regardless of whether or not MacEwen’s alcoholism was shameful to her, she did have other experiences—the two assaults and her own celebrity—that inclined her to feel empathy for Lawrence.

My speculation here is not intended to be scandalous but to suggest that MacEwen’s passing as Lawrence is not only an expression or enactment of an identity crisis but also a demonstration of empathy that transmits an understanding of suffering. Said, writing about victimhood in “The Politics of Knowledge” (1998), argues: “To testify to a history of oppression is necessary, but it is not sufficient unless that history is redirected into intellectual process and universalized to include all sufferers” (165). By describing the aftermath of rape perpetrated against women in “Tafas” and a homosexual man in “Deraa,” and by impersonating that man to imply that such crimes can affect men and women regardless of their sexual orientation or gender, MacEwen “universalize[s]” the history of a war and includes herself among the suffering victims. Her point of access to that universality is through celebrity and analogous violence and violation. Furthermore, given the precedent of Cohen’s implicit representation of celebrity as martyrdom and sadomasochism, MacEwen might also have been thinking of associating her suffering and that of Lawrence with the religious significance attributed—however profanely or ironically—to celebrities. Such thinking would not necessarily diminish the

gravity of the suffering involved; for MacEwen, celebrity was a grave concern that she often represented through religious symbolism, as when Julian the magician is crucified and at the end of *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*.

MacEwen's empathy for Lawrence is in itself almost saintly; it is ultimately forgiving. Although her Lawrence would rather think of himself as possessed by demons than by his audience, MacEwen possesses him—not to ruin his reputation but to humanize him as the Lean film tends to do. Her passing as Lawrence might be not only a critique of celebrity but also a beneficial act of spiritual intimacy between a celebrity and a fan. In the first chapter, I explained that in an increasingly secular twentieth century, religion took on “mutant religious forms” (Frow 208), such as the worship of celebrity. I also explained how artists enact metaphors and thereby elicit a “mystical sense of union” (Crocker 62) with their audiences. These “forms” and this “union” are often dismissed as falsehood or fantasy, yet MacEwen approaches Lawrence as if he were a religious figure, not only to associate herself with a celebrity of higher degree but to approximate or catalyse the fusion of selves as a transcendental experience—both an identity crisis and a quest for self-knowledge. The intensity of their experiences of violence helped to make MacEwen more fully committed than other celebrity poets to grandstanding and to the transformative potential of her art. Although I do not claim, as Wood does, that MacEwen was a “visionary,” she is implicitly a religious figure because of these spiritual aspects of her passing as Lawrence.

The potential benefit of transcendent experience in MacEwen's passing as Lawrence is, however, balanced by its potential harm, which is related to MacEwen's suggestion that Lawrence's celebrity is a motivation for suicide. After the war, the

historical Lawrence declared that he wanted “mind-suicide” (qtd. in Aldington 359) to alleviate the endless toil of his life in the army, and his reckless motorcycle riding and his series of accidents suggest that he might have been serious and not merely seeking attention. MacEwen’s Lawrence wonders about the appropriate way to die in a cluster of poems at the end of the book that are explicitly concerned with either celebrity or death; by placing those poems in such close proximity, one after the other, MacEwen reinforces the relationship between celebrity and death—and religious experience. “The Desirability of El Aurens” and “No Place To Hide,” the two poems most obviously concerned with celebrity in the book, are preceded by “Boanerges”—about the risk of motorcycling—and are followed by three poems: the aforementioned “Departures”; “Hot Baths,” about jumping into a well at Mecca that is said to lead to heaven; and “Notes from the Dead Land,” about Lawrence’s death in a motorcycling accident after his return to England. These poems are set after the war, and MacEwen compresses time so that the immediately post-war height of the historical Lawrence’s celebrity coincides with his risk-taking, his spiritual reflections on death, and his death itself.

MacEwen ultimately suggests that Lawrence could not entirely control his death, suicide or not. In “Boanerges,” her Lawrence admits that “[s]omeone warned me I’d break my neck” (65) in an accident, but he prefers that possibility to “dying in bed” (65). Refusing to fall “into someone else’s death” (65), Lawrence says, “At the very least I want my death to be my own” (65). He means that heroes are not supposed to die “in bed,” which is a death reserved for “someone else.” He also means that, previously, there was little of himself that he could “own” because of what he had relinquished to his audience. At the moment of death in “Notes from the Dead Land,” however, he becomes

aware that he did not die gloriously at the scene of the accident but after “five days” on a “hospital bed” (69). Unable to control even his own death, he learns to accept it and even gain strength from almost sacrificially relinquishing control: “the world can have me any way it pleases. / I will celebrate my perfect death here. *Maktub*: / It is written” (69). His decision to relinquish control to “the world” is less a decision than deference to fate, which is implied in the phrase “It is written”; however, these are his “Notes,” and they suggest that he has written his own fate. MacEwen grants her Lawrence the status of poet to give him the last word on his life; regardless of his death-wish, he is not his own victim, only his own chronicler.

The way that he accepts his death suggests that he, too, is a religious figure. One of Lawrence’s final poems is “Notes from the Dead Land,” which explains that “[t]he Arabs say that when you pray, two angels stand / On either side of you, recording good and bad deeds, / and you should acknowledge them” (69). He finally declares, “I salute both of the angels” (69). The religious imagery reappears as Lawrence concludes the following poem, “Departures,” and the book with an image of

Feisal’s sword, flashing. The air  
Is silk with locusts;  
then the drawn sword breaks the silk  
And the sky heaves  
open.

Night comes and the stars are out. Salaam. (70)

In “Feisal,” Lawrence had previously acknowledged Feisal as “[m]y lord” (31), on whom

“the light / slant[ed] down [...] / a heavenly weapon” (31). His name meant “[t]he sword flashing downward in the stroke” (31, her emphasis). Now “Feisal’s sword” has opened the way through “the sky” to heaven, and Lawrence says farewell (as Arabs often do) with the Arabic word “Salaam,” which means “God be with you.” Lawrence dies assuming that he is Feisal’s chosen one, but he also accepts that his “deeds” will be judged by “the angels.” MacEwen understands that Lawrence’s religious pretence is associated with male violence (Feisal’s sword), but she also inflects his voice with a sense of peace and closure that is, at the end of the book, spiritual.

Regardless of the extent of MacEwen’s thinking about herself as a victim equal to Lawrence, and despite the possibility that her passing as Lawrence was a beneficial spiritual experience, her representation of his celebrity is unrelentingly negative—the only other exception being a cryptic epilogue in *Afterworlds* (published in 1987, the year she died). In “Famous Secrets,” she returns to the subject of “The Mirage” to offer an affirmation of secrecy (though probably not only as a response to celebrity), seemingly by casting a retrospective and appreciative glance at Lawrence. Because of an ambiguity that surpasses even “The Mirage,” here is “Famous Secrets” in full:

All night those fabulous rocks fell from heaven  
And the garden is full of jewels and meteorites.

I love you;  
You have become the living centre of my sight.

My secrets pour from the silver faucet

When I fill the kettle to make tea (I am with you) —

When I clothe myself and unclothe the dawning

(I am with you) —

All things are reproduced in me;

My name is morning. (119)

“Famous Secrets” shares wording with “The Mirage” in two places, but first in its title. The speaker of “The Mirage” had said, “I have come to discover the famous secrets / of earth and water, air and fire” (37). “Famous Secrets” also refers to “the living centre of my sight,” a phrase that occurs in both poems with only two small changes. In “The Mirage,” the speaker is “the living center”; in “Famous Secrets,” “you” are “the living centre.” The change from the American to the British and Canadian spelling of “centre” is probably insignificant, but the change in subject is not. The speaker of “Famous Secrets” simply says, “I love you” to that “living centre.” Bartley argues in relation to a much earlier poem by MacEwen that the “‘you’ can be interpreted as including both the reader and the [poetic] persona. The act of looking inward can be achieved by both the reader and the persona, but MacEwen does not use the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’ because looking inward is essentially a private act” (56).

The same insight applies to “Famous Secrets”; when the speaker says, “I love you,” she means not only her reader but also herself in the guise of a persona. Because of the reference in “Famous Secrets” to “The Mirage” in *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*, the love expressed by the speaker seems to be partly for Lawrence, who was one of her personas.<sup>23</sup>

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23 Her Lawrence was not exactly her public, her private, or her poetic persona, but part of each.

It is also probably for herself—a gesture not of narcissism but of self-affirmation in difficult circumstances. “Famous Secrets” ends with an optimistic image of rebirth: “All things are reproduced in me; / My name is morning.”<sup>24</sup> MacEwen thereby suggests that a positive rebirth is possible even for celebrities who embody the oxymoronic “famous secrets”; attempting to reconsider the negativity of the fusion of public and private that I have commented on in the previous chapters, MacEwen suggests that celebrities can remain “secrets” despite being “famous.”

Despite the evidence of hopefulness in her final poem to allude, potentially, to celebrity, *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* tends to be bleak as the main conclusion to the development of that theme in MacEwen’s poetry. Sullivan elsewhere observes that “*Afterworlds* seems to offer an uncanny sense of looking back and summing up,” but she realizes that such an interpretation would be “a delusion simply because we know it was [MacEwen’s] last [book]” (qtd. in Reid 40). Instead, that feeling of the “uncanny” is my response to *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*, which comments, as I have argued, on aspects of its author’s life in addition to “summing up” the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry. Reid states that *Afterworlds* is “an affirmation that history as it is conventionally understood in Western thought—linear and progressive—is to be replaced by the fluid conception of time and space [...], thus enabling new ways of thinking about history and human relations to emerge” (45). I would add that MacEwen’s frustration with the linearity of history in the West helps her to critique Lawrence and his celebrity; she represents him at the historical dead end of colonialism and traditional masculinity (which did not, of

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24 *Afterworlds* in general has signs of being a rebirth or new beginning despite its titular focus on what happens “after”; the subtitles for all of its six sections begin with the first letter of the alphabet: “Ancient Slang,” “Anarchy,” “Apocalypse,” “Afterimages,” “After-thoughts,” and “Avatars.”

course, actually die or end).<sup>25</sup> Her ultimate critique of celebrity—and its associated problematic masculinity and pseudo-religious leadership—also applies to her own dead end, the one created when celebrity was no longer likely for poets in Canada and when she confronted the inevitable tragedy of identifying too closely with Lawrence.

Nevertheless, her passing as Lawrence helps to reveal that the self is a mirage, which is as close as she could come (and it seems impressively close) to a mystic's understanding of herself. Ultimately, her passing as Lawrence is a death of the self that is followed by rebirth. If the positive outlook of *Afterworlds* can be found in *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*, it is in what MacEwen's impersonation of Lawrence reveals about gender and spirituality—not Lawrence's, but her own. MacEwen represented the potential threat of celebrity in the magician, the escape artist, and the mirage. Symbolically escaping the flesh most completely by passing as Lawrence, she impersonates a man, shows that gender can be fluid, but ultimately avoids a complete fusion with Lawrence by insisting on her political differences from him. Warner, paraphrasing Simone de Beauvoir, states that “[f]emininity is learned as a way of constructing oneself as object, a way of attributing full subjectivity only to the masculine” (625). MacEwen unlearned this lesson while enacting the irony of passing as a celebrity at the passing of her celebrity. She sought to achieve agency, “full subjectivity,” by enacting a transformation of the self through her personas and through what Atwood called her “transforming power of the Word” (“Canadian” 118). Whether or

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25 From the perspective of the early 1980s, the recent failure of the American war in Vietnam might have been interpreted as a sign that the era of American imperialism was ending, as British imperialism seemed to have ended with World War II and the growth of American power. Although men reaffirmed traditional masculinity after both wars, feminism became more acceptable during the ensuing civil rights movement; some men and women also convinced more and more of the public to be tolerant of alternative masculinity.

not self-knowledge or transcendence were her goals, she created the conditions for such effects of her performances, which were about her personal ambitions as much as they were about her desire for recognition in public. She took some of the problems of celebrity and made constructive use of them in her poems—not by solving them, but by developing them to the extreme limits of her art and life.



## Conclusion

The collective representation of celebrity that emerges from the poetry in the previous chapters is complex but ultimately negative, even distressing. Suicide, murder, slavery, oppression, and repression are all variously and symbolically blamed upon celebrity. The public—represented by photographers, interviewers, lawmen, mythic punishers, variously unwholesome crowds—seems constantly ready to invade the privacy of the celebrity, to influence him or her from within, and to assimilate or reconfigure the identity of that private self. The identity crisis resulting from the fusion of selves that underlies the metaphor of celebrity—*the private is public*—is the celebrity's nearly total confusion in looking at the mirror's image and recognizing the public. Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen, Michael Ondaatje, and Gwendolyn MacEwen were celebrities in poetry whose work reveals an awareness of this metaphor and whose lives were variously affected by it. Celebrity, understood and even enacted through this metaphor of the private becoming public, can be a threat realized.

In specific, the threat involves the public's influence on the celebrity's identity, which can be reconfigured, often according to social norms, through the metaphor of celebrity. Among other things, the metaphor of celebrity demonstrates that celebrity is literary and that people familiar with metaphor are likely to be knowledgeable critics, if they have also worked and lived significantly in public or have seen others do so—and yet the metaphor of celebrity is not simply *literary* in the sense of being related to literature. It is neither simply descriptive nor confined to figurative language. It is crucially experiential and potentially real for any celebrity, and it is one of the reasons

why so many celebrities appear to worsen their own identity crises: their strategies of self-promotion, such as grandstanding, are also processes of identity formation that depend on metaphor. The exaggeration inherent in grandstanding helps to magnify public scrutiny and catalyse the identity crisis, which is often experienced as a fusion of selves that exposes the private self to the public.

Although the aforementioned poets do not usually represent the public realistically, its threat is real, and they were variously negative about it, despite its essential support of the system of celebrity. For MacEwen to represent Julian the magician's audience as a horde of demons, however, or for Ondaatje to represent Billy the Kid's audience as led by an assassin, is to overstate the physical threat to account for the psychological risk. Someone might reasonably ask why celebrity in Canadian poetry would inspire Layton, Cohen, Ondaatje, and MacEwen to respond to it—perhaps disproportionately—and reinforce the longstanding stereotype, in Canadian literature, of celebrity as a “destroyer” (York 42). My answer is, in part, that celebrity in Canadian poetry was highly significant to the individuals involved. Even though such celebrity has been described as “minor” (Dudek, “Committed” 8), it inspired the aforementioned poets to consider celebrity a major concern. The evidence of that concern is in their representation of an audience so thoroughly intrusive that their individuality itself was threatened. Real audiences are neither so homogeneous nor so cruel, so it is ironic that the demonization of the public in the previous chapters is partly the result of celebrities thinking and acting similarly, as crowds are assumed to do.

Despite the inaccuracy of this assumption, the aforementioned celebrities continued a tradition of thinking of celebrity as a “destroyer,” and their association with

each other reinforced the problematic exclusivity of celebrity. This exclusivity meant that the celebrities in Canadian poetry were often acquainted with each other; they developed a generally consistent, negative or at least critical outlook. Read together, their books produce a narrative of celebrity arguably book-ended by Layton's introductory *A Red Carpet for the Sun* (1959) and Cohen's terminal *Death of a Lady's Man* (1978), plus the epilogue of MacEwen's *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* (1982). The various representations of celebrity from these books, and others, in the previous chapters can be interpreted as a collective response to the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry. In *Poets Thinking* (2004), Helen Vendler argues that "though any author is of course a child of an era, it is probably impossible to illustrate (with any credibility) an era by a lyric, or a lyric by an era: the grid is too small in the first case, too large in the second" (5). The "grid" of the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, however, was not especially "large." Not many poets were celebrities, but some of those who wrote a surprising amount of poetry—not merely one "lyric" but several books and many individual poems—that dealt with issues of privacy, publicity, and related questions of identity. They were reflecting upon their own circumstances, whether these were personal or social.

Celebrities in post-war Canadian poetry were not numerous, and they stood out from the "almost uncountable numbers" (Pacey, "Writer" 494) who began publishing in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Louis Dudek could refer to the same era as both "a minor whirlpool" ("Committed" 8) and a "boom" ("Poetry" 117) because the emergence of celebrity in poetry and the growing numbers of new poets were different, though related, phenomena. Many of the new poets knew each other, and most of the celebrities were acquainted with each other: Layton and Cohen were friends, as were Layton and Al

Purdy; Purdy was an acquaintance of Margaret Atwood and Cohen; Ondaatje knew Purdy and had written a book about Cohen's work; Atwood and MacEwen were friends; Ondaatje knew MacEwen at least by reputation; MacEwen was a fan of Layton and had met him and Cohen. Although they did not all know each other well enough to be described as a close-knit group, the small size of Canada's literary community did nothing to counteract the tendency of literary celebrities to establish cliques and to regulate membership in general accordance with the values of the senior poets. Aaron Jaffe's *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005) explains this tendency with Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot as the definitive figures. During the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, Layton was the first of two definitive figures (Cohen being the second); he had established the terms of reference to which Cohen, Ondaatje, and MacEwen responded in various combinations of affirmation and critique.

Those terms of reference were masculinity and religiosity, which are other problems of celebrity. In the field of literature, celebrity's masculinity, which was most evident in Canada among poets, tended to reduce the number of women who were publishing poetry (Atwood xxix). Speculating that men are more likely than women to be encouraged to write poetry, Atwood identifies an issue—exclusive masculinity—that scholars such as Jaffe, Loren Glass, and Faye Hammill have also observed in the textual record of the culture of celebrity in poetry. The representations of women in poems by Layton and Cohen were occasionally sexist; those men, as the definitive figures in the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, made problematic masculinity a visible feature of celebrity in poetry. It was so visible that Layton and Cohen seem likely to have been engaged in parody to some extent, and chapters III and IV reveal many examples of

critique. Nevertheless, in comparison, Ondaatje and especially MacEwen responded with keen, empathetic criticism of normative heterosexual masculinity by representing some of their characters, namely Billy the Kid and Lawrence of Arabia, as celebrities with ambiguous sexual orientations. MacEwen, Cohen, Ondaatje, and Layton reveal celebrity to be a status bestowed, sometimes almost coercively, by the public and for the public—not only for the celebrity’s reward, reputation, or authority. Their critique of the public’s various normative influences is not simple; their grandstanding exaggerates masculinity and is not always as obviously parodic as it is self-promotional.

Their grandstanding, which I define as standing in for someone more grand, positions them sometimes ironically as bigger men or religious figures. Celebrity in general has a pretence of religious significance and even a social function as religion (Turner 6-7) in an increasingly secular society. This religiosity is a problem insofar as it can reinforce patriarchy, bestow an undue authority upon celebrities, and lead them to overconfidence. Religiosity can also be promotional. Layton imagined his ideal poet as a Nietzschean prophet and characterized his public persona with similar religiosity. Cohen’s interest in saints became the implication that he had his own “pop-sainthood” (Ondaatje, *Leonard* 59; Ruddy 18). Ondaatje and MacEwen, however, were comparatively disapproving of celebrity’s religiosity. Ondaatje’s Billy the Kid is a secular legend who becomes a ghost. Billy is not religious; he is paranormal. Similarly, MacEwen’s representation of Lawrence questions his celebrity and its associated religiosity. Although MacEwen’s impersonation of Lawrence was ultimately less self-promotional than it was a potentially spiritual experience of shared suffering, her Lawrence is a mystic whose quest for self-knowledge through Eastern religion is difficult because of his celebrity and his

Christian, imperial role in promoting Western freedom in Arab lands.

Freedom—the loss of it—is a problem for celebrities more than a problem, like masculinity and religiosity, *of* celebrity. Although all four poets in this study wrote about freedom at least thematically, Layton and Cohen were far more explicit than Ondaatje and MacEwen in associating celebrity with a lack of freedom. “Whatever else poetry is freedom,” wrote Layton in 1958, but already in that poem he was worried about how the public might limit his freedoms of expression and self-definition, which were essential to his vision of the ideal poet but which were threatened because he was typecast as needlessly controversial, misogynistic, and combative.

His anticipation of being typecast might have been initially unrealistic; later, he seemed to relish the thought of antagonizing the actually quite reticent public so that he could imagine, and create, a more dynamic situation for public poetry. Layton implied in “The Cold Green Element” (1955) that some especially public poets (such as celebrities) would be chased into hell by their audience—a fantastic outcome that simply cannot be the result of his mild and generally encouraging experience of celebrity prior to *A Red Carpet for the Sun* in 1959. Layton literally demonized his audience even before he was at the peak of his celebrity. The threat changed after that peak, however, and by the mid-1960s he was afraid that he might be “taken captive by [his] own image.” He said, “I want freedom and blessed independence—even from myself. Perhaps mostly from myself” (qtd. in Cameron 373). He was known nationally, his readings drew crowds, and he was as enthusiastically defended as he was reviled, but the threat of his celebrity was ultimately more personal than public, even if the public was somewhat responsible for the “image” that he feared would capture him. His celebrity thwarted his ambition of

embodying the ideal poet. Layton wanted permanent standing in the canon for accomplishments such as “A Tall Man Executes a Jig,” but he was distracted from fame as he became excited by the Nietzschean challenge of overcoming—even while sustaining—his own public persona.

Cohen, too, was inspired by his own celebrity: it was energy, but also slavery, as he implied in *The Energy of Slaves* (1972). The prospect of defining freedom was contrary to his values, which were individualistic but not Nietzschean in the style of Layton and his generation. Cohen sang, in “Bird on the Wire” (1969), “I have tried in my way to be free.” His “way” involved adopting “various positions” so that he could not easily be defined. He suggested instead a definition (though not necessarily his only definition) of slavery: celebrity. Cohen’s proposal in metaphor—that celebrity is slavery—was no more literally experiential than Layton’s imagined descent into hell, but his celebrity certainly cannot be described as “minor.” Obviously, he never really was a slave to anything, not even poetry, though he suggested he was in “A Kite Is a Victim” (1961) when he was popular but not yet a celebrity. By 1972, however, he had sold hundreds of thousands of books and albums; he had been the subject of the first of three films; he had toured extensively through the English-speaking world; and his concerts, which drew thousands of spectators, focused on his music but also featured his poems.

Cohen’s celebrity as a musician and poet was more intense than that which any other Canadian writer had previously experienced. He claimed in “This is a threat” from *The Energy of Slaves*: “I have no private life” (62). The exposure of the private self to the public meant that the term *private* could no longer apply; that was the “threat.” Actual experience of the metaphor of celebrity was possible. Although that metaphor is not

necessarily permanent in effect, it can be real. Cohen never admitted, in public, that the threat of suicide in every razor icon in *The Energy of Slaves* was real, but in “Famous Blue Raincoat” he imagined his public persona as the murderer of his private self, and the multiple selves that enabled him to be free were at risk of fusing into a singular public persona—an image without a deeper self.

By focussing on slavery, Cohen implicitly argued that celebrities have sadistic public personas that dominate their masochistic private selves. This duality becomes sadomasochism with the fusion of selves. By using the term *sadist* to describe his public persona, he began to apply terms of mental and social maladaptation to the representation of celebrity. Although Layton occasionally seemed to wonder who had scripted his life for him to perform—himself or the public—Cohen began to explain such confusion as a psychological effect of celebrity. The other effects were worse: a loss of privacy bad enough almost to provoke suicide, and an identity crisis that seemed to require a religious conversion, such as Cohen’s practice of Buddhism, to resolve.

Ondaatje and especially MacEwen extended Cohen’s investigation by concentrating on celebrity’s potential effects on identity and identity politics. Ondaatje’s focus was on race and sexuality. Celebrity, as Ondaatje implies, asserts racial and gendered values on individual artists. As a result, his celebrities attempt to flee into alienated solitude and silence to avoid the scrutiny and judgement of the public on their bodies and lifestyles. His creation of uncanny scenes of *déjà vu* and darkness in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970) invites psychoanalysis of the doubled narrative and its symbols. The celebrity that affects Billy the Kid and Buddy Bolden (in *Coming Through Slaughter* [1976]) is not only “a razor in the body” as in “Heron Rex” (1973); it

also cuts through the public-private interface of “the body” into the mind, where it threatens to redefine identity according to social norms of heterosexuality and whiteness. In the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry, celebrity is fatal to all of Ondaatje’s characters who become widely recognized but want to maintain their privacy.

Similarly, all of MacEwen’s celebrities die, at least figuratively. Julian the magician is crucified. Manzini the escape artist does not actually die but escapes his flesh in a performance. In *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* (1982), her Lawrence dies in a reckless motorcycling accident after beginning to associate celebrity with death. Her passing as Lawrence is not only the impersonation of his voice but also her own symbolic death, which she uses to imply the rebirth of herself in a spiritual quest for what Jan Bartley called “self-knowledge” (17). MacEwen learns about Lawrence to learn about herself—her sexuality, her spirituality, and how these aspects of her identity are political in the context of her celebrity. MacEwen implies not only that celebrity is destructive but also that it is an opportunity to become someone else—an opportunity that she engaged in with both serious devotion to Lawrence and serious criticism of him and herself.

Cohen and MacEwen are the two Canadian poets who risked total commitment to celebrity, whether in reality or in moments of intense imagination. Whereas Cohen experienced the most celebrity of these four poets, MacEwen experienced the least; however, she chose to represent a historical figure whose celebrity was of higher degree than that of any of the other people or characters relevant to the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry. Furthermore, unlike in the poetry of Layton and Cohen, in which various personas speak, *The T.E. Lawrence Poems* is almost entirely spoken in Lawrence’s voice. MacEwen’s immersion in the imagined life of her subject often seems

to enact the metaphor of celebrity—to expose her private life to the public—even though the public was less fascinated with poets as the 1980s began. To dismiss her representation of celebrity as a disproportionate response to her own experience would be to ignore her historical commentary and her insight into the intimacy that celebrities and fans can share. The metaphor of celebrity was in effect because she was a devoted fan as much as a celebrity. She understood the religious function of the metaphor of celebrity: its “mystical sense of union” (Crocker 62) of the celebrity and audience or the private and the public. As a fan—the public—she stood in for Lawrence to invade and colonize his identity and thereby partially redefine him according to her values. Although her impersonation of Lawrence ultimately commented on the impossibility of her becoming an equivalent celebrity as a female Canadian poet in the 1980s, it enabled her to imagine an extreme experience of celebrity that only Cohen really lived.

In contrast, Ondaatje often approached what he described as the edge, but he rarely if ever went over that edge to imagine or experience the metaphor of celebrity as fully as MacEwen or Cohen. His actual experience of celebrity was much less intense than that of Cohen and even Layton, but, like MacEwen, he had a keen imagination for exaggerating it and living it figuratively. Also like MacEwen, Ondaatje chose celebrities of higher degree as representatives of himself, but he separated himself from those celebrities at crucial moments when the identity of his narrator was about to fuse with theirs. In addition to the voices of Billy the Kid and others who were interviewed about him, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* has an authorial or editorial figure who appears at the end and “smell[s] the smoke still in [his] shirt” (105). *Coming Through Slaughter* has a similar figure who asks about why he wanted to “push [his] arm forward and spill it

through the front of [Buddy Bolden's] mirror and clutch [himself]" (135). Although MacEwen subtly reveals her impersonation to be ventriloquism in one instance in *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*, Ondaatje is more overt—and more cautious. He said that MacEwen “was giving herself to the public. She was [...] the poet who took all risks for poetry” (qtd. in Sullivan 288); however, he was not willing to take “all risks” as she was. He surprised some of his readers by promoting *The English Patient* and his celebrity in the 1990s, but he understood the threat of too much celebrity. He was perhaps the most astute in recognizing at what point he would tip and plunge into its gravity.

The work of these poets reflected their real and imagined experiences of celebrity, and those experiences seem no less keenly felt for having been imagined and then transformed from the literal into the figurative. Celebrity is a special topic for writers; it is literary, and it has ramifications for identity and privacy, which are recurring thematic and practical concerns for authors. Writing begins in privacy, and then often involves the creation of various personas that help to define the author in relation to the public. Their identity formation—indeed anyone's—depends on metaphor; metaphor is an implied comparison and “identity results from a comparison” (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 129). Metaphor is also “the fusion of opposites” (Mandel 26), as in *the private is public*, and it is this function of metaphor that explains, as literary, the identity crisis associated with celebrity. It is also this function that celebrities catalyse by engaging self-promotionally in grandstanding—saying, in effect, “I am someone else,” someone more grand. Emerging from the previous chapters is a sense of the seriousness of the authors as they perform these metaphors and report their experiences of conveying their texts, and themselves, from privacy to the public realm.

An author or a celebrity—any performing artist—tends to create personas to manage the degree and personal effect of being recognized, but such artists do not have full control over the degree or the effects. Although they can offer their private personas as decoys to distract the public from their private selves, their own public personas (which perform their ambition for fame and their desire to please) eventually betray them, turning upon their private personas to give the public what it seems to want. In other words—because an identity includes all of these selves—they betray themselves. This is not the identity crisis *per se*, which is, rather, the fusion of selves that occurs when celebrities can no longer distinguish between their personas and feel exposed to the public. Although Ondaatje and especially MacEwen seem to have catalysed the identity crisis in a quest for self-knowledge, all four poets ultimately associate it with feelings of being hunted, enslaved, or violated. Their understanding of metaphors such as *the private is public* helps them to explain the identity crisis, but they seem to have little control over the public or the metaphor of celebrity even though they are authors.

Their appearance of lacking control might be an exaggeration, but no one should be surprised; the metaphor of celebrity is partly a consequence of grandstanding, which, as self-aggrandizement, is necessarily exaggerated. Standing in for someone more grand, which is what celebrities metaphorically do to become “larger than life,” draws attention to the unreasonable confidence of the performance. It also draws attention, however, to the difference between the performance and reality. The most obvious examples in the previous chapters are Ondaatje standing in for Billy the Kid and MacEwen standing in for Lawrence of Arabia. The exaggeration inherent to grandstanding creates an evident difference between the status of the figures involved. Billy and Lawrence will probably

outlive Ondaatje and MacEwen in the public's imagination. Grandstanding can therefore be parody and critique, and it can be the bitter expression of disillusionment, which for MacEwen and Layton it sometimes was—especially for Layton when he realized that his celebrity would not be the equal of his ambition.

There are advantages to thinking of celebrity as literary—not only as a simultaneously privileged and popular category of “the literary” but also as an enactment of metaphor. Thinking of celebrity as literary adjusts the focus of celebrity studies onto authors, whereas until recently most studies of celebrity have been concerned with the system of media and capitalism that produces celebrity. By adjusting the focus onto the celebrities again—but critically—we as members of the audience can discover that the celebrities are not merely narcissists. Their self-reflection is not only in a mirror; some of them are, in fact, evidently concerned with major philosophical issues such as identity, freedom, spirituality, and how these issues are related to their celebrity and to the public. In some cases, celebrity is of secondary importance to these issues. The metaphor of celebrity is not only the proposition that *the private is public* and its underlying metaphors of grandstanding and the fusion of selves; it is also the result of authors using celebrity to explain their other, ultimately more important concerns. Identity, freedom, and spirituality are not essentially literary issues, nor are they limited to celebrity, but they are essentially involved in celebrity and the consequences it can have for celebrities, fans, and the culture in which it is so prevalent.

Furthermore, celebrity itself was not always the ambition of these poets; they were also seeking other types of recognition: fame, legend, and myth. Celebrity had the potential to be a transition into a more lasting status—a status more grand—though the

public tends to bestow legend and myth when a person's accomplishments are tallied near or after death. Remarkably, in that sense, celebrity is about life, which partly accounts for what Layton and Cohen implied was the energy it could generate. Untimely death, however, has shadowed celebrities far more than it has haunted the simply rich and famous—or at least that is the impression to be expected when celebrities are so scrutinized, as they are in America. Indeed, the ambition of Layton, Cohen, Ondaatje, and MacEwen won each of them a degree of success in America—Cohen as a musician in New York, Nashville, and Los Angeles; Ondaatje as the novelist whose *The English Patient* won so many Academy Awards in Hollywood; and Layton and MacEwen as poets who published some of their early work at American presses—though none of them was seeking only a diversionary success in a temporary career. They wanted more than celebrity, though America might not confer fame, legend, or myth as readily.

In the public imagination, Canada remains an unlikely place to find literary celebrity. Ondaatje and MacEwen's choice of representing non-Canadians as celebrities was, as I quoted in chapter V (referring then only to Ondaatje), a “mockingly defiant [comment] on the CanLit hysteria rampant in the 1970s” (Hochbruck 462). Nevertheless, the commentary by these poets was not intended to criticize only Canadian celebrity. Layton and Cohen both implicated America in their critique. Although they both worked to be recognized outside Canada, and although Ondaatje and MacEwen were evidently fascinated by the greater potential for celebrity elsewhere, they are ultimately critical. Layton seemed to intuit that Norman Mailer's (American) celebrity had dealt him “a blow / from which he'd never recover” (“The Dazed Steer”); Cohen explicitly criticized celebrity only after he had experienced American celebrity as a musician living in New

York and Nashville; Ondaatje represented Billy the Kid but especially Buddy Bolden (both American) as men killed or driven mad by celebrity; MacEwen focussed intently upon Lawrence (British) and suggested that his celebrity drove him to reckless endangerment of his own life. Although Lorraine York in *Literary Celebrity in Canada* (2007) claims that there is no “specifically Canadian approach” (3) to celebrity, these poets suggest otherwise often by choosing conspicuously non-Canadian celebrities as subjects. Perhaps the historical commentary by these poets can be described, as Layton’s celebrity was, as “a blow-up of our national inferiority complex” (Dudek, “Layton” 92); it also demonstrates a skeptical and maybe quite Canadian resistance to foreign celebrity.

Perhaps for this reason, Ondaatje and MacEwen emphasized the invisibility of the celebrities through whom they speak. As a ghost, Billy the Kid returns from the dead to observe and relive his life: “I’d like to be invisible” (Ondaatje, *Collected* 83), he says, because he seems to intuit that he might thereby have the means to resist the public symbolized by Pat Garrett and his sheriff’s star. MacEwen’s Lawrence also imagines himself as invisible: “everything shows through / and yet no one can see me” (*T.E.* 67); he only questions his invisibility when his identity is equally uncertain: “Am I as invisible to you / As you always were to me, fellow traveller?” (*T.E.* 37). With both Billy and Lawrence, Canadian poets invade their legends and work to make them invisible, as if to suggest that Canadian celebrity itself is—or ought to be—invisible on the world stage. Perhaps it is accurate to suggest that the Canadian identity in general is invisible, or at least inconspicuous. Being unnoticed elsewhere, Canadian poets who are celebrities at home—“world-famous [...] all over Canada” (Richler, *The Incomparable Atuk* 40)—are at a critical distance, a valuable position for anyone trying to understand celebrity.

From a broadly cultural vantage point, the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry was a ripple in history, whereas from the perspective of that era's whirlpool—regardless of its actual size—it was a ride both heady and disorienting. If that era was a “destroyer,” it was not a social but a personal destroyer. There is some evidence that for MacEwen it was, and that for Cohen it almost was. It had its costs for all concerned. For MacEwen, Ondaatje, Cohen, and Layton, the era of celebrity in Canadian poetry was a time of crisis, but it was also a time of opportunity for their art and for their reflection upon themselves. They waded into that history as it moved. It was—and the shock of it remained until the collective celebrity of poets faded—inspiring.

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